

magazine



backpage

Recipes from author Sunita Kohli's dinner table

GO TO » PAGE 8

WIDE ANGLE

Sidin Vadukut | Do you know a videshbhakt?

GO TO » PAGE 6

LITERARY REVIEW

The Hindu's best fiction and non-fiction list 2024

GO TO » PAGE 2-3

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Jaydeep Sarkar

Recently, during an interaction with some law students, I was asked: where have all the rom-coms gone? I have heard this before – at family lunches, in writers' rooms and at school reunions. Each time, instead of answers, we are left with a dull lament for "simpler" times. But nostalgia is often overrated. Were those "simpler" times really that simple?

While people flocked to see rom-coms, mesmerised by the promise of a soulmate, stories of spouse-swapping farmhouse parties did the rounds at get-togethers. Cinema never spoke of those stories, lest the carefully curated structure of morality came undone. And when movies did speak of them, they were framed within the construct of 'sin and punishment'. As Alankrita Shrivastava, who made the compelling film on female desire *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, says, "The 'happily ever after' serves the patriarchy really well."

It's possible that there are no simplistic rom-coms today because the very idea of a 'happily ever after' has changed. The idea of the family unit is evolving; finding a partner and settling down is not the obvious answer anymore; many people in committed relationships would prefer not to co-habit; and many more are choosing to not have children. Few people court today – we are mostly just swiping right and left. Many people I know are polyamorous, thriving in polycules. How do you sell simplistic stories of patriarchal bliss to such a bunch?

In the pursuit of pleasure

Rom-coms worked for decades, until they suddenly didn't. In 2024, something new happened. Individual pursuit of pleasure slowly came to the centre of the discourse. Film after film, show after show started asking uncomfortable questions of us: about who we loved, how we loved, and how we wanted to be loved back. Many filmmakers told stories that moved the lens right back to our unspoken loves and forbidden desires united by one motif – it always lacked judgement.

From Richard Gadd's breakthrough hit *Baby Reindeer*, about the complex relationship of an abuser and her victim, to Puneet Krishna's hit series *Tribhuvan Mishra CA Topper*, about a married woman who employs the services of a male sex worker, people are shedding shame to tell stories unapologetically.

Konkona Sen Sharma, who made the seminal thriller about a voyeur and an

2024 AND ITS CINEMA OF DESIRE

There are no simplistic rom-coms today because the very idea of a 'happily ever after' has changed. Instead, movies and shows are increasingly exploring desire, sexuality and gender

exhibitionist, *Mirror*, in the 2023 Netflix anthology *Lust Stories*, tells me, "It was ground-breaking that *Baby Reindeer* blurred the victim-perpetrator line, showing how, in this case at least, the victim may participate in their own abuse. The storyteller refused to keep the author figure 'clean', exposing both the victim's and the perpetrator's vulnerabilities."

Watching Shuchi Talati's poignant coming-of-age thriller *Girls will be Girls*, I was absolutely disarmed by the raw, genuine and vivid telling of a complicated family dynamic. And yet, I was unprepared for where it took me: the healing and happy destiny of a complex protagonist. The author accepts her proclivities, and you would be petty not to.

Sean Baker's extraordinary *Anora* opens with Mikey Madison's Ani, a sex worker, in the act, fully confronting the realities often sanitised in mainstream

cinema. For example, the 1990 hit *Pretty Woman* keeps Julia Roberts' Vivian's professional life at a distance, preserving the fairytale romance while ignoring the grit beneath.

And then there's Halina Reijn's ground-breaking *Babygirl*, about a CEO who begins a torrid affair with her much younger intern. It wasn't the raw exploration of the dominance-submission fetish of BDSM that was shocking, but how Nicole Kidman's Romy 'owned' her kink – a watershed moment in studio-backed star-studded cinema. Romy is not Sharon Stone's Catherine from *Basic Instinct*, a 'femme fatale' who is only sexy so that she can wreak havoc. Romy is just a girl kneeling in front of a boy begging him to feed her grapes. Only because it turns her on!

Shifting the lens

Have films not tried to shed shame

before? Of course, they have. But not so frequently, and not with such elan. In 2024, desirous characters were rewarded with compassion, empathy and power. And every time I've encountered it, it's added up to a feeling: are we on the cusp of a new wave? The 'Cinema of Desire', where desire doesn't need to be punished – where, by attempting to redefine the destiny of desire, cinema could possibly be changing the lens on how we see love and, thus, life itself.

Friends caution me about being such an optimist, but I can't help noticing desire triumph in cinema everywhere. Watching one of this year's finest Hindi films, Imtiaz Ali's *Amar Singh Chamkila*, I learnt that the singer of risqué songs in the 80s earned the title 'Breaker of Terraces' because hordes of women would gather on rooftops to see Chamkila perform, eventually bringing the terrace down with their dancing. The biggest fanbase of his 'lewd' songs were women, who had never heard their desire sung about. Chamkila was punished with a brutal death, and those songs and stories taken away from the women.

Many filmmakers have attempted telling this story before. Kabir Singh Chowdhry's avant-garde 2018 piece *Mehsampur*, an investigation of Chamkila's death, struggled to be seen. But in 2024, the Punjabi singer's martyrdom is finally being commemorated.

Desire isn't a 'crime of passion' now. It's a valid life force. To film critic Mayank Shekhar, Talati's tour de force *Girls will be Girls* offers a perspective on women's desire that he was never privy to before. "What is striking to me is the unadulterated telling of the tale, without the titillation that was once employed to serve a primarily male audience, like in *The Graduate*," he says. "Once movies about women were made for men. No one's bothering with that anymore."

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 4

Is Bollywood low on love?

Much of Bollywood's contract with its audience is being rewritten; the industry isn't going in for straightforward romances any longer. The highest-grossing Hindi films of 2024, for instance, are *Stree 2* (₹874.58 crore approx), *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3* (₹417.51 crore), *Singham Again* (₹389.64 crore), *Fighter* (₹344.46 crore), *Shaitaan* (₹211.06 crore), *Crew* (₹157.08 crore), *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya* (₹133.64 crore), *Munjya* (₹132.13 crore) and *Bad Newz* (₹132.13 crore).

Two are action blockbusters, the rest comedies or horror films (or that propitious combination of both). The only unambiguous 'love story' on the list is *Teri Baaton*, although the film's heroine, quite representatively, is a robot. The exception proves the rule.

There are several reasons for this shortfall. The contemporary theatre-going audience is perceived to have grown awfully impatient – it needs its genres punched within genres, like a mixed-spirit cocktail. Hindi movie-watchers, it is believed, do not have the stamina to sit through a three-hour epic predicated on the breaking and mending of hearts. Personally, I disagree with this analysis: one of the most successful re-releases of the year was *Veer Zaara*, a two-decade-old grief-kissed romance, starring Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta, and directed by Yash Chopra. The runtime? A brisk 192 minutes. Clearly, a mix of nostalgia and melodrama isn't lost on a contemporary Hindi film audience.

A more tenable explanation may be the lack of original love stories being sought out and greenlit by studios. Even a film like *Do Aur Do Pyaar*, an otherwise charming rom-com featuring Vidya Balan and Pratik Gandhi, was remade from the 2017 American film *The Lovers*. But if studios were feeling a little adventurous, are our filmmakers and technicians up to the task? Popular Hindi film music and choreography of late hinges on virality – reels and hook steps superseded emotional uplift.

Going into 2025, the road looks uncertain for plain old romance in Hindi films. Its paradoxical future – where it must vie for space with more strident cinematic emotions – is echoed by the title of the forthcoming Sanjay Leela Bhansali film: *Love and War*.

— Shilajit Mitra

Who read what this year

From revisting *Animal Farm* to taking a deep dive into history, politics and finance, here are some of the titles these newsmakers spent time on in 2024



I must confess to having spent a large part of 2024 immersed in writing my own book, *2024: The Election That Surprised India*, so I had less time to read as many books as I would have liked. A book I enjoyed reading was *An Uncommon Love: The Early Life of Sudha and Narayana Murthy* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It stood out for me in the manner in which it wove a real-life love story onto the wider canvas of the making of an iconic start-up company. It is a feel-good middle class success story that is easily relatable for those who might have grown up in a pre-liberalisation India.

Rajdeep Sardesai, journalist and author (as told to Swati Daftuar)



As I browsed through my collection, I instinctively picked up Amartya Sen's *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2008). My concern about India's narrowing visions prompted me to re-read this excellent analysis of an India, and a world, gone amok with religious identity. Sen addresses these issues with the facility of logic and rationality that comes naturally to him. It is a book all young people should read to counter the confusions that exist in public discourse today.

Aruna Roy, activist (as told to S.D.)



How the World Made the West (Josephine Quinn) is one of the most fascinating works of global history to appear for many years. Incredibly wide-ranging, it completely reframes our conception of the western classical world and its influences and inspirations. *The Great Flap of 1942* is another brilliant read. Mukund Padmanabhan, long regarded as one of India's most admired journalists and editors, has now emerged from that chrysalis to reveal himself as the new superstar of Indian narrative non-fiction.

William Dalrymple, author and historian (as told to S.D.)



My book of the year is Akhteruzzaman Elias's *Chilekothar Sepai*. It's a Bengali book. And it's a political book. The author writes it with a strange political apathy, which is quite remarkable. And he's got this brilliant commentary — funny, distant, and also sort of not cynical. I've noticed that Bangladeshi writers, and also Pakistani writers, have a light touch when it comes to politics. Authors like Elias or Syed Shamshul Haq have a fantastic ability to tell stories with politics in the background. It's very nice to read something like that in an ultra-woke society where people are constantly walking on eggshells.

Sarnath Banerjee, graphic novelist (as told to S.D.)

Nandini Bhatia

Fiction is a reflection of life. It allows writers the liberty to speak the truth — about themselves, about their countries and the world. 2024 has been no different. Authors have written personal stories, new and old, by means of metaphors or alternative realities, with universal meaning and socio-political undercurrents. Some of them have been nominated for multiple awards; some deserved but did not receive enough spotlight. Some, like Hisham Matar's *My Friends* or Swadesh Deepak's rediscovered plays and short stories, may not be on this list but are worth an investment. Here are 10 (of many) works of fiction, across genres, that have made a dent in the literary world this year:

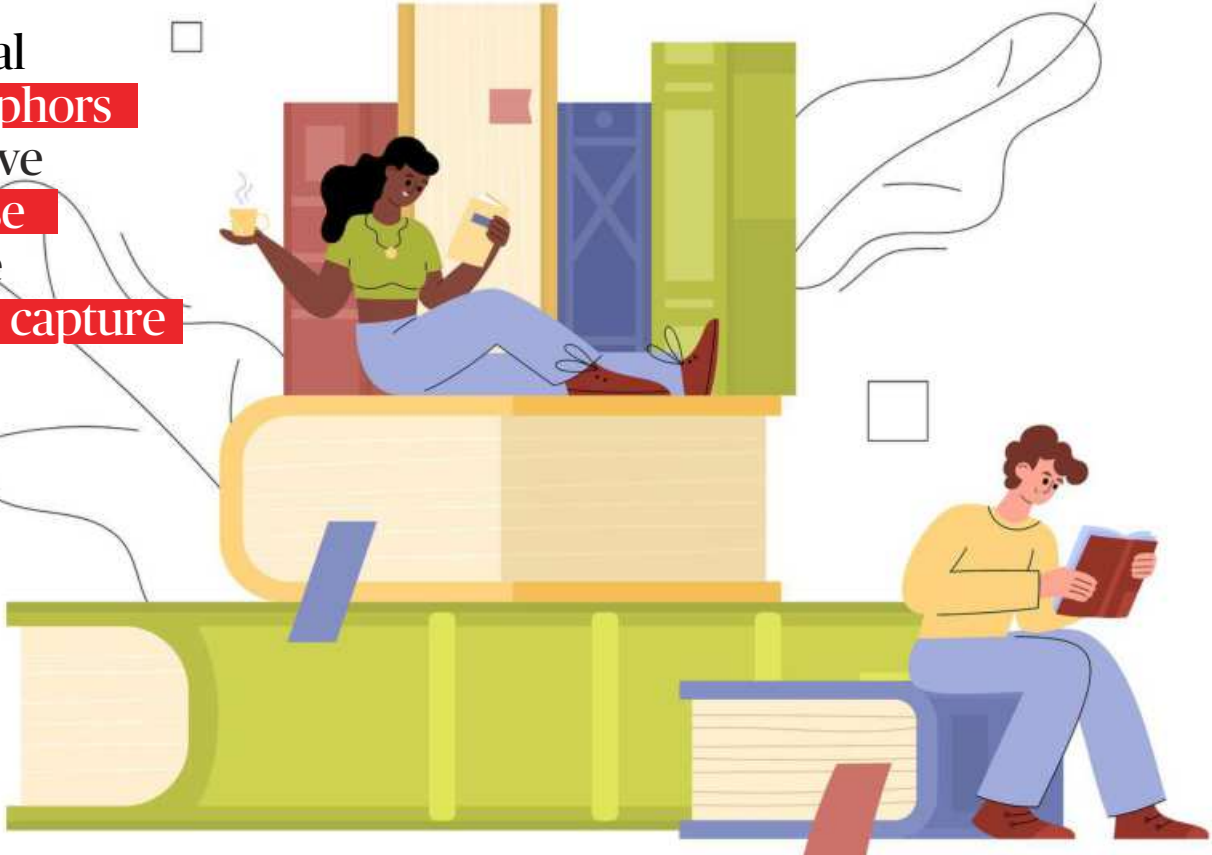
James by Percival Everett
A retelling in the most modern sense, Everett breathes new life (and meaning) into the 140-year-old Mark Twain classic in this Booker-shortlisted novel. Jim, the subdued slave from the original *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, gets a voice and the courage to stand up for others like him, albeit subtly. Everett proves through Jim's political awakening that real freedom lies in equality — of resources and the means to use them. Ever the more reason why his story needed to be retold. (Also: If you like your reading to reflect the current socio-political/economic climate of the world, then this year's Booker Prize winner, *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey, makes for as good a read as *James* does.)

Martyr! by Kaveh Akbar
This debut novel, a National Book Awards finalist, is an ode to love that resembles longing. The protagonist, Cyrus Shams, lost and displaced and with a family legacy of trauma, chooses to write about martyrs, in his search for a lost mother and a lost identity. Akbar's writing reflects his poetic flair, making *Martyr!* a meditative pursuit of the meaning of life.

Sanatan by Sharankumar Limbale
Shortlisted for the JCB Prize for Literature this year, Limbale's

With personal stories, metaphors and alternative realities, these authors have attempted to capture the zeitgeist

BEST FICTION



Sanatan also won him the highest literary award in India, the Saraswati Samman, in 2020. Creating space for the neglected Dalit community of Maharashtra in Indian history, *Sanatan* exposes the foul play of caste inequalities, with or without its label, at a time when British India faced reform and revolution — be it educational, political or religious; giving readers of modern India something to reflect upon, as labels (and their untoward consequences) make their way back to the political nomenclature.

Animals: Eight Studies for Experts by Eva Menasse
Like most short story collections, *Animals* (translated from the original German) is a mixed batch, although these stories reinvent metaphors like no others. Menasse picks unique characteristics of animals such as sharks, bees, caterpillars and so on, and places, if not personifies, them in social context, amplified

by human complexities. Her astute observations coupled with her openness and ability to explore emotional depth make this volume an underrated gem for the English reader.

Small Rain by Garth Greenwell
This novel is a contemplation of how much a person can exist outside their bodies and in their minds. The unnamed narrator in Greenwell's latest novel unexpectedly finds himself in a hospital ward. As he lets literature and memories rescue him, peace eludes him. His mind wanders — his personal crisis is painted in the emerging global health crisis brought on by COVID-19; he wonders not only what it means to be in a hospital but what it means in the current American political climate. Although a recent release, *Small Rain* deserves more attention by readers.

Wobegone's Warehouse of Words by Payal Kapadia
Kapadia's fantasy world is strangely riveting. It ventures into Orwellian territory and has an aftertaste of Mark Dunn's *Ella*

Minnow Pea. Curbed, controlled, and violated freedom (especially freedom of expression) is the common theme here, and an uprising, quiet or not, is the only way out. *Wobegone's Warehouse* offers a fresh take on an age-old problem.

Schrodinger's Wife (and Other Possibilities) by Pippa Goldschmidt
This novel honours the human history of science, rather the history of women in science, in as thorough and empathetic a way as possible. We witness these women not only in the light of the findings they made but the personal costs these discoveries came at — from nuclear physicist Lise Meitner, to biologist Margaret Bastock, and of course, Schrödinger's wife, "Anny" Bertel. These "other possibilities" are worth exploring and would make for a great New Year's gift, if you are still looking for one.

The Sentence by Gautam Bhatia
The body of Jagat R., a convict, lies frozen in a 'cryobox'; he can be revived till a time, if proven innocent, which Nila pursues with all her life. In Bhatia's speculative fiction

of the year, conflict, shared history, tension building, and thrill, are placed masterfully in a legal jigsaw. Fast paced and stirring, *The Sentence* could be squeezed into your reading list just before the year ends.

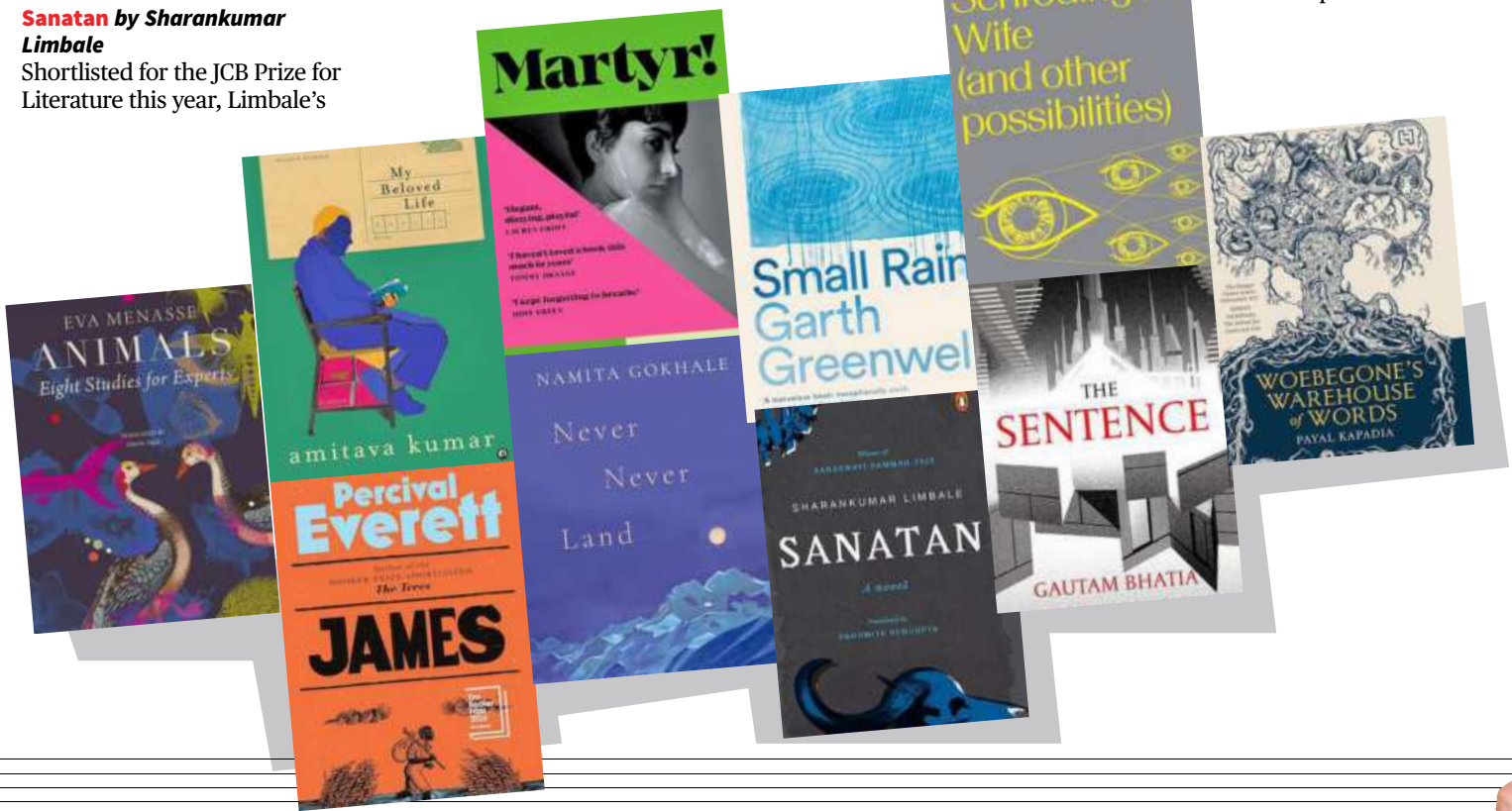
My Beloved Life by Amitava Kumar
The writer and journalist's socio-political conscience is reflected prominently in his writing, more so in the last four to five years — from his notebooks/journals to his fiction. *My Beloved Life* is but an addition to this as Kumar reflects on the pandemic, India's historical lineage, and its future.

Never Never Land by Namita Gokhale
Fuelled by the search for belongingness, *Never Never Land* is a thoughtful and nostalgic remembrance of the past — of places, friends and homes — and a realisation of just how much one is distanced from one's own identity; a distance brought on by time, age, space and a sense of loss. Gokhale's latest is testimony that she never shies away from exposing her characters to the deepest, rawest emotions. A short but impactful read.

The author is a books and culture writer. Instagram @read.dream.repeat



Scan the QR code to watch a video of the top 10 fiction titles.



What I Learned About Investing From Darwin by Pulak Prasad is a fascinating take on how Darwinian theory explains so much about the mindset of the tenacious investor. Then there's *The Money Trap* by Alok Sama, a witty, joyful and gripping behind-the-scenes view of the world's most bold tech investor, through an autobiographical narrative of the firm's CFO. Another book was *Bad Therapy* by Abigail Shrier, a hard-hitting book tracking the state of the mental health of the young generation.

Ankur Warikoo, entrepreneur and content creator (as told to S.D.)



This year, I ended up reading a lot of beautiful books. If I had to choose two, I think no. 1 would be *Last Queen* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. I've loved everything I've read by her before. I remember, very vividly, sitting in my living room when I finished reading the book, and for a good 10 minutes, the tears just wouldn't stop. That book has stayed with me throughout this year. I'm also a huge romance fan, so I think no. 2 would be *Play Along* by Liz Tomforde. I love how she writes the arcs of the women in her books. They are so beautifully relatable but at the same time aspirational, which is a stunning contrast.

Prajakta Koli, actor (as told to S.D.)





I had read *Animal Farm* by George Orwell long ago and forgotten most of it, but I re-read it because my daughter had just discovered it. I marvel at writers like Orwell, Isaac Asimov and H.G. Wells, who have written things far ahead of their time. I also read a very interesting book called *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, the toast of the times. It is written in a very original style, realistic, but going beyond the dimensions of reality, representing society and the fragility of human existence. Another book I read was *The Hotel Years* (by Joseph Roth), a remarkable story of a journalist who wrote about Germany during the two World Wars, true accounts of people he met in the in-between years.

Imtiaz Ali, filmmaker (as told to Preeti Zachariah)



Glorious Exploits by Ferdia Lennon has had me in splits at moments and in deep discomfort at others — a rare feat for a novel set in 412 BCE Syracuse, in the aftermath of the Athenian invasion of Sicily. As two local potters stage Euripides’ *Medea* with enslaved soldiers in a quarry, you’re left marvelling at the incredible power of poetry even in the most dire times.

Anish Gawande, national spokesperson, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) (as told to Radhika Santhanam)

BOOKS OF 2024

BEST NON-FICTION

These titles caught the prevalent themes of the times, from majoritarianism to climate change

Sudipta Datta
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Two wars, elections in the world’s oldest and largest democracies, memoirs, biographies and ancient histories dominated the non-fiction titles of 2024. If cartoonist and journalist Joe Sacco’s *Palestine* (and *War on Gaza*), Antony Loewenstein’s *The Palestine Laboratory*, Bob Woodward’s *War*, Rahul Bhatia’s *The Identity Project*, and Dhirendra K. Jha’s *Golwalkar* caught the state of the world in a flux, other books on history, such as Manu S. Pillai’s *Gods, Guns and Missionaries*, artificial intelligence, anthropology and environment put a spotlight on prevalent themes. Here’s *The Hindu*’s top books of the year.

Gujarat Under Modi
by Christophe Jaffrelot
The French political scientist and Indologist, Christophe Jaffrelot, was ready with his book in 2013, but he was asked to delete so many passages he decided not to go ahead with it. He held on to it, till it could reach readers in 2024. “Gujarat was the blueprint for post-2014 India,” he told *The Hindu* in an interview, pointing out that four mainstays of Narendra Modi’s strategy in Gujarat was scaled up to the national level — communal polarisation, the

capture of institutions, crony capitalism, and a specific kind of high-tech communication-based national populism.

The Burning Earth
by Sunil Amrith
Historian Amrith maps 500 years of human neglect of the environment and the huge costs of such acts. “The dream of human freedom from nature’s constraints is under assault by viruses, burned by wildfires, drowned by floods, scorched by extremes of heat,” he writes in the Introduction, and explains through his masterful study how the earth has reached this state of planetary crisis.

The Many Lives of Syeda X: The Story of an Unknown Indian
by Neha Dixit
Dixit chronicles the lives of home-based female workers with a focus on Syeda, a Muslim woman who makes everything from *namkeen* to photo frames, door hangings, cycle brake wires, plastic toy guns, wedding cards, rakhis and faux leather balls, even while she is displaced from her home in a communally-charged north India. In an interview to *The Hindu*, Dixit rued the fact that such stories “are everywhere around us, but not in the media

because the media has structurally stopped talking about the urban poor in the country.”

Why We Die: The New Science of Ageing and the Quest for Immortality
by Venki Ramakrishnan
The molecular biologist and Nobel laureate in Chemistry examines the hype around this question: would we want to live forever? In an interview to *The Hindu*, he said living extremely long lives would lead to a weird and stagnant society. “We are having a much slower turnover between generations than we did before, so it will be a different kind of society. That’s also assuming that your brain stays sharp and aware, and that’s not a solved problem. Regenerating the brain is not in the realm of possibility right now.”

Knife **by Salman Rushdie**
In 27 seconds one August in 2022, Rushdie was viciously stabbed in his eye, neck, chest and thigh by an assassin. Coming over three decades after Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini had issued a fatwa following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, it’s incredible that Rushdie lived to tell this tale in this book. At a personal level, the “angel of life” prevailed over the “angel of death”.

The Incarcerations
by Alpa Shah
Shah narrates the story of each of the 16 accused in the Bhima-Koregaon case, who found themselves thrown into jail between 2018 and 2020, accused of being Maoist terrorists or ‘Urban Naxals’. She writes that they were all “custodians of democracy” and had fought for the social justice of India’s most vulnerable sections.

The Ancient Road
by William Dalrymple
Dalrymple is known for his books on the East India Company, but in

this latest book, he has turned his attention to ancient and early medieval India, mapping its role as an exporter of ideas. In an interview to *The Hindu*, Dalrymple said the book is the story of how India had a much larger footprint in the world than even Indians realise. “This is a story of how Indian trade led Indian ideas to spread around the world.”

Iru: The Remarkable Life of Irawati Karve **by Urmilla Deshpande and Thiago Pinto Barbosa**
Irawati Karve is one of India’s foremost anthropologists, and the first woman to lecture in the social sciences. This book profiles the pioneer, tracing her personal and historical journey by researching archives and places she worked at.

Iconoclast: A Reflective Biography of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
by Anand Teltumbde
Last year, there were at least seven books on Babasaheb Ambedkar, including Ashok Gopal’s *A Part Apart* (Navayana), which won the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Prize for 2024. Ambedkar’s tumultuous life has warranted another look in this book, which is a warning against the deification of Ambedkar by the Hindu Right and by political parties who cynically seek the Dalit vote in his name.

Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI
by Madhumita Murgia
The book, shortlisted for the inaugural Women’s Prize in Non-Fiction, lifts the veil hanging over humans who are building the base for AI’s super structure to stand on, and why they need to be mindful of the lurking dangers. In an essay for *The Hindu*, she wrote about future concerns surrounding AI-led machines like ChatGPT: how will children learn while leaning heavily on these tools? Can they think properly without learning to write well? And, ultimately, who the hell are we if all our ideas and thoughts can be replicated by machines?



The book of the year, for me, undoubtedly is *War* by Bob Woodward. The key takeaway is that the U.S. knew that Russia was going to invade Ukraine a year before it happened. Why did they not head it off is the key question that remains unanswered. Great book, wonderful insights. A masterclass in what journalism should be.

Manish Tewari, Lok Sabha member and Congress leader (as told to Sandeep Phukan)



The passing of author Gabriel Garcia Marquez in 2014 came as a big shock to me because he had been an all-time favourite of mine. Having read all his works, there was little else to look forward to other than re-reading them. I was in for a pleasant surprise this year when his last novel, *Until August*, was published. I kept it aside to read on a long flight to Kolkata. Published posthumously by Marquez’s sons, the book is beautifully written, but it did leave a sadness behind, being the last work of a great storyteller.

Abhilash Tomy, retired Indian Navy officer and solo circumnavigator (as told to S. Anandan)



Open, Andre Agassi’s autobiography which I read earlier this year, comes to my mind for various reasons. One, my daughter has now started playing tennis seriously. I was a huge fan of both Agassi and Steffi Graf, and I loved the way he was World No. 1, slid down the rankings to the 100s and then came back to the top again. Also, the fact that he won the career Slam and the Olympics gold medal (Atlanta 1996) showed that his game was so adaptable to the demands of various surfaces.

Viren Rasquinha, former India men’s hockey captain (as told to N. Sudarshan)



Knife by Salman Rushdie was one of the most anticipated books of 2024, from my point of view. I am a great admirer of Rushdie and what he has survived is something that no one in the world should ever have to go through — to pay such a heavy price for his/ her personal beliefs. I was looking forward to the book. I liked bits of it, the way it started. To me, it felt less of a book about the actual stabbing and more like a medical journal of his time in hospital and a love letter to his current wife. So, there were two books in one, but both were fascinating because nothing that Rushdie writes can ever be boring.

Shobhaa De, columnist and author (as told to Amarjot Kaur)



I really enjoyed Daniel Kahneman’s last book *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment* (he passed away this year). His *Thinking, Fast and Slow* is a real masterpiece, but I also learned a lot from *Noise*. It raises some very important questions. We all make wrong judgements but how difficult is it to make the correct judgement? Why do our ministers and politicians make mistakes? The main lesson I learnt from the book is that all of us have to be very humble and should not jump to conclusions before making the right judgement.

Boris Gelfand, 2012 World chess championship challenger and former Indian team coach (as told to P.K. Ajith Kumar)

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

According to Shrivastava, even something as humble as a selfie is helping people change how they see themselves and how they want to be seen. “Women are stepping out of being someone’s daughter, mother or wife. Be it in a selfie, where she is dressed for a wedding party, or a simple recipe video, she is asserting her individuality outside of the family photo,” she observes.

Where a rom-com would end with someone finding their soulmate, the individual is now stepping into the spotlight. And cinema is finally beginning to tell them: we won’t judge you for feeling what you feel.

‘Liberation is precious’

Five months ago, Tillotama Shome played the lead, Bindi Jain, in *Tribhuvan Mishra Ca Topper*. In the hit Netflix show, Bindi, a woman in an unfulfilling marriage, boldly acts upon her desires. It ruled the ‘Most viewed’ charts for months, but what feels truly precious to Shome is when married women walk up to thank her for telling their story. In many ways, they finally feel seen.

While the actor has received much love for her work around desies in *Sir, Mirror* and even my own film *Nayantara’s* Necklace, this forthrightness from fans feels new to her. “I am often looking closely at them choosing their words carefully, as they utter to me things they haven’t even uttered to themselves yet,” she says. These invisible stories need to come out, for cinema to truly start capturing the human experience outside of outdated moral codes.

When *Rainbow Rishta* hit Amazon Prime Video in late 2023, I was often met with a very surprising remark – that the show was “eye-opening”. My 73-year-old aunt was moved to tears because she discovered that LGBTQIA+ folks were “actually just like us”. Cinema had only cast us as freaks or jokes.

With *Rainbow Rishta*, I wanted to show that while I love differently from you, my heart beats just the same. And it’s time we were seen for all of it.

This liberation is precious, and is something of a cultural milestone. Just look at the number of OnlyFans (the racy subscription-based video on demand service) creators from B and C towns of India. Or even the rise of apps focused on finding partners with similar fetishes and kinks. It’s taking over little circles of sexual subcultures and our cinema is beginning to acknowledge it, without judgement.

Babygirl’s exploration of the dom-sub roleplay points at a shift where taboo desires could be finding validation through cinema. It makes me wonder if this has everything to do with the slow disappearance of the rom-com?



What is striking to me is the unadulterated telling of the tale [in *Girls will be Girls*], without the titillation that was once employed to serve a primarily male audience, like in *The Graduate*. Once movies about women were made for men. No one’s bothering with that anymore

MAYANK SHEKHAR
Film critic



A still from
Girls will be Girls.



Women are stepping out of being someone’s daughter, mother or wife. Be it in a selfie, where she is dressed for a wedding party, or a simple recipe video, she is asserting her individuality outside of the family photo

ALANKRITA SHRIVASTAVA
Filmmaker

Bazmee’s superhit *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3* portrays a transgender character’s primal struggle, with unprecedented empathy and understanding. Even feel-good shows such as the underrated Hulu series *English Teacher* by Brian Jordan Alvarez examines and celebrates ‘open’ relationships within the gay community, without the weight of judgement.

Today, the audience wants more true, raw and unapologetic stories. And the new year is already looking exciting. Sundance’s 2025 programming, for instance, includes Rachel Fleit’s *Sugar Babies*, about a

fast rising TikTok influencer who’s determined to overcome poverty by launching an online ‘sugar baby’ operation. Mathias Broe’s *Sauna*, about a gay man who falls in love with a transgender man, to the first Marathi film at the festival, Rohan Kanawade’s *Sabar Bonda*, about a gay couple in rural Maharashtra.

Let’s turn hushed whispers of desire into bold stories. People everywhere are fearlessly rewriting their narratives. It’s time cinema catches up.

The writer is a Mumbai-based filmmaker.



It was ground-breaking that *Baby Reindeer* blurred the victim-perpetrator line, showing how, in this case at least, the victim may participate in their own abuse. The storyteller refused to keep the author figure ‘clean’

KONKONA SEN SHARMA
Actor and director, pictured here with actor Tillotama Shome



GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



Suresh Menon

I could have survived without knowing about Al Pacino’s penis or Josh Brolin’s unnatural attraction to his mother. Or that Barbra Streisand took 10 years to write her memoir (it might take that long to read it too, at nearly 1,000 pages). And now I can’t un-know these things. The recent books by these stars continue the trend of over-sharing their under-examined lives, and perhaps say something about those reading them.

Glamour sells. So do trauma and pain. Parental ill-treatment is a path to millions in book advances (especially if you are already a millionaire). We may be in the golden age of the celebrity memoir, where the genre is poised between trash and seriousness, where sometimes honesty is faked and authenticity merely another word for the spurious. The genre can’t slip back into trash without alienating its

new readers, nor can it swing the other way without losing its essentially gossip value. Behind every celebrity is a horrific story, and behind her is a publisher waiting with a cheque book.

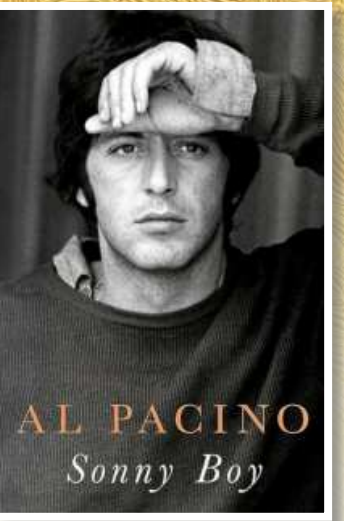
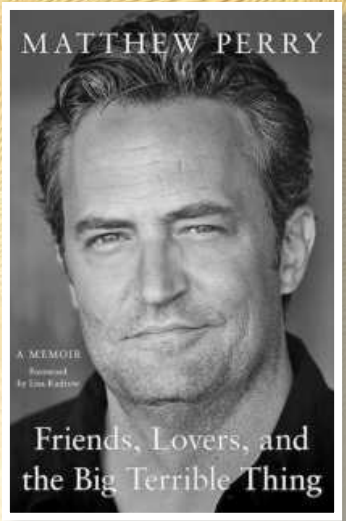
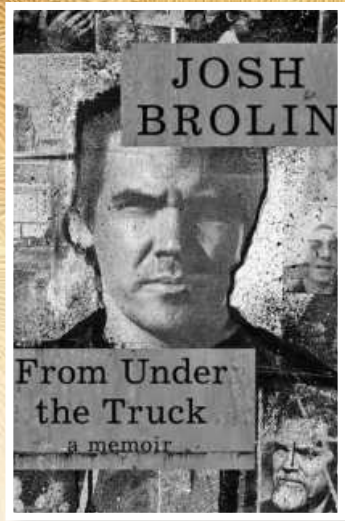
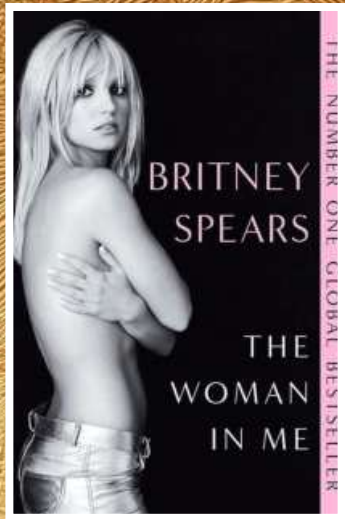
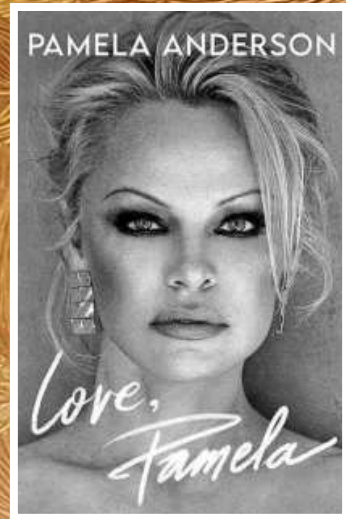
This trauma-spewing signals a cultural change. A generation ago, the best memoirs had gossip, and were humorous light reads. You read, skipping whole pages, laughed at the jokes and passed it on to someone sitting next to you in the aircraft. A good example is Steve Martin’s *Born Standing Up* (2007).

Candid beyond social media

Now, Britney Spears’ *The Woman in Me* abounds in, as *The New York Times* said, “revelations of the kind that send gossip-site algorithms into overdrive: most notably her relationship with Timberlake, with whom she was “pathetically” in love, and the abortion he more or less demanded she get when she became pregnant”. Readers take such admissions as their due.

Behind every star is a horrific story, and behind them is a publisher waiting with a cheque book

GOLDEN AGE OF THE
CELEBRITY
MEMOIR



Letting it all hang out is a sport of the times. Celebrities are saying in effect this is my story, I will tell it the way I want to, I don’t care about your judgement or approval. The reader’s response is to ask for more. Celebrities live their external lives on social media, forcing their memoirs to throw light on their inner lives.

The breathless prose, the calibrated name-dropping and the casual insults of friends and colleagues are all geared towards one objective: to present the celebrity as being both ethereal and ordinary, worthy of worship and million-dollar fees. The celebrity genre is, if we are to believe the endorsements, about difficult childhood, hard work, profound insights. It is a beacon of odds-overcoming, circumstances-fighting and joy-spreading. It is a global press conference determined to go beyond social media posts.

Such celebrity branding is a

win-win situation all around. The celebrity is paid millions, some of which might find their way to the ghostwriter, publishers expect many times that in return, readers are excited about the ‘revelations’, and those who avoid the books still get to read the juicy parts in media interviews and book excerpts.

The first volume of singer Cher’s memoirs begins: “Often when I think of my family history, it sounds like the opening of a Dickens novel.” It took seven years, and plenty of ghostwriters to bring us to the singer and actor’s 30th year. Cher is 78 and her adoring public awaits volume two in the new year. Her life, the publisher has told us, is “too immense for only one book”. Cher herself is less full of it, saying she had to “tell it or give back the money”.

We live in an age where reality can be whatever we want it to be. My struggle is always greater than yours, my trauma deeper and more adhesive. Memoirs by Spears and the late Matthew Perry – the former was paid

an advance of \$15 million – told us more than we wanted to know. Perry’s *Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing* was limping along till his unfortunate death caused it to shoot up in the bestseller list.

You know what to expect when Paris Hilton’s memoir *Paris*, has the subtitle: ‘A true story of resilience in the face of trauma and rising above it all to success’. Ah! The poor little rich girl. More resilient and traumatised than children bombed during wars, maybe?

Selling hope too

Not all celebrity memoirs follow the struggle-success-stardom-sex pattern, of course. Michelle Obama’s *Becoming* – did publishers really pay the Obamas \$65 million for their efforts? – is low on trauma, high on hope, according to one review. Apparently written by a committee headed by a friend, it sold 14 million copies in two years.

Ghostwriters – most prefer

‘collaborators’ – become celebrities in their own right. J.R. Moehringer who wrote Prince Harry’s *Spare* and also ghosted Andre Agassi’s *Open* distilled the essence of the job in a *New Yorker* piece where he talked about advising Prince Harry, “It’s not the story of your life. It’s a story carved from your life, a particular series of events chosen because they have the greatest resonance for the widest range of people...” And, in another place, “...ghostwriters) provide a vital public service, helping to shore up the publishing industry, since most of the titles on this week’s best-seller list were written by someone besides the named author.”

And so back to Pacino’s penis. At 10, he slipped on a fence and an “iron bar hit me directly between the legs”. But no harm done. He became a father last year at 83.

The writer’s latest book is Why Don’t You Write Something I Might Read?



Simrit Malhi

Walking into the AI Minilab at the just-concluded Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa, I was armed with prompts I was dying to ask ChatGPT. The first one: for the chatbot to create a piece of art from its imagination. Very reassuringly, the AI replied that it has no imagination of its own.

It is based, it told me, “on pattern recognition, learned relationships and algorithms... and though AI might be able to produce outcomes that surprise, inspire or resonate, the processes will always be based on human intelligence”.

When trepidation turned into fun

Mathieu Wothke, the founder of Somewhere Global, a Stockholm-based creative agency that focuses on culture and uses AI-generated art, put together the Minilab as a simple set-up – of six iPads equipped with ChatGPT. The role of accessibility clearly stood out. Visitors could engage in an interactive dialogue with the chatbot and share ideas that it transformed into vivid visuals. From ‘high tech Goa in 3025 with flying cars’ to ‘pink horses’.



At the AI Minilab and other programming at Serendipity Arts Festival, visitors learned first-hand that artificial intelligence isn’t the boogeyman

Wothke found that while many walked in with some trepidation, they soon had fun making images, the young often showing the elders how to use it. But he tells me with a laugh that none was art. “There is this very interesting fine line of what’s art and what’s not. AI gives everyone the tools to do it, but that doesn’t mean all can do it.”

It brings to mind Refik Anadol, who is planning to open the world’s first AI arts museum, Dataland, in Los Angeles next year. The new media artist, whose interactive digital canvases showcase creations made from colossal datasets – from weather conditions to

real-time data from the Amazon rainforest – insists that it is important for artists to build their own AI tools, so that they are co-creating with the machine.

At Serendipity, the last room of the installation highlighted this dichotomy, juxtaposing AI-generated visuals from novices with works crafted by seasoned artists. The differences reveal themselves in the intent, message, and emotional resonance. “It’s the vision, storytelling (and technique) that set art apart from mere production,” explains Wothke.

Disruptor, but not the enemy AI-enhanced technologies and solutions are currently more widely available across industries. Concurrently, it is also pushing up AI

Tech forward AI generated images from *Deranged Life*; and (below) Mathieu Wothke. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

anxiety. In the arts, news such as Marvel and Disney deciding to use an AI-generated animated intro for the show *Secret Invasion* earlier this year, is one of the many instances triggering fear among creatives.

Wothke acknowledges this and believes we could be just a couple of years away from AI dismantling the entire entertainment industry. “A few years from now, you could tell AI to create an entire movie according to your mood. For example, a thriller noir about a Swedish artist who comes to India for the first time and his existential journey,” he says. But that’s not to say human creativity will become irrelevant. Getting training and a deeper understanding of the tools available will help mitigate competition.

Of course, questions of ethics come into play when the AI element used in the making of a piece is not disclosed. That wasn’t the case when I left the lab and stepped into another room at the event, saturated with morphing pastel coloured images – from dreamlike sea creatures to fluid, pulsating microscopic images of water – projected in high definition on the four walls. Set to psychomimetic music, *Deranged Life* was a live performance using AI art. Seven visual artists created generative AI creatures in real time.

The performance was not just a celebration of art and technology, but also an exploration of the blurred boundaries between the natural and the synthetic, the human and the machine. It left me with hope that at least for now AI need not be feared as the monster in the room.

The writer and sound artist is based in Goa.

Forty-three and fleeting
The world according to oriental magpie-robins



Sunil Rajagopal

Forty-three. I don’t know why I counted this today. Perhaps because sitting out on the balcony and watching birds at leisure is a rare luxury.

A pair of oriental magpie-robins has made their nest in a hole in the wall on our balcony next to the banyan tree. The bold male is a frequent visitor to our birdbath. He sits out on the railing afterwards, cocked tail and glossy pied plumage flashing in the sun. The gentler, greyer female is happier perching closer to the hole, murmuring to herself. They aren’t the only ones raising families in a suddenly mellower human world. A yellow-fronted green pigeon is sitting on her eggs on a neem branch seven feet off the middle of the silent road.

Forty-three. That is how many visits the dutiful male robin has made to his hole in an hour. Each time with a morsel for his brood and mate. Caterpillars, spiders, butterflies, berries, and once, half a Marie biscuit. The eggs have hatched, and the parents are busy. The male sings at dawn, dusk, and in the shade of the banyan at noon. The female ticks

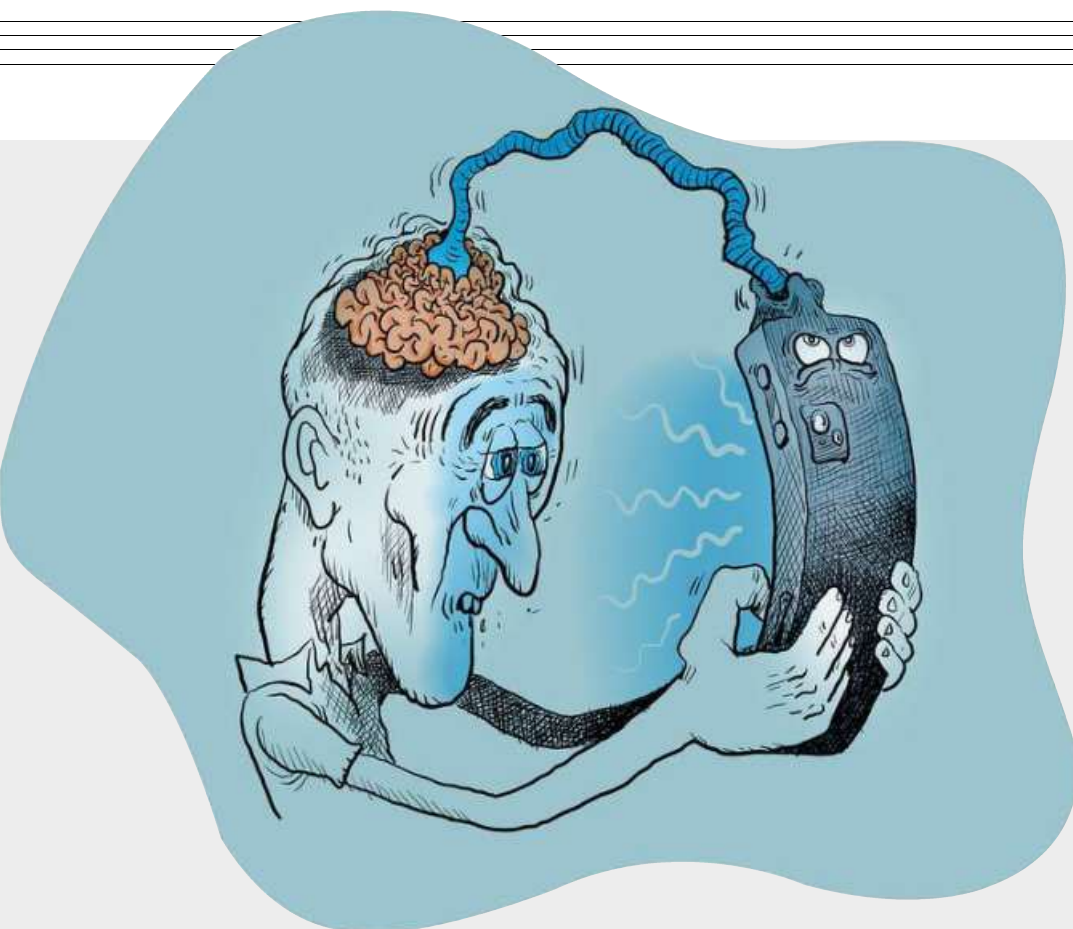
and churrs when mynahs or bulbuls approach.

Forty-three. All that effort, and yet they mean nothing in nature’s relentless way. We awoke this morning to a commotion of alarm calls. White eyes and tailorbirds are shouting from the shadows. The mother robin is crying from her perch on the washing machine while the agitated male is flying in and out of the banyan’s foliage. His song today is tinged with grief. A raider has made off with one chick and left behind a dead sibling on the ground. Probably the spotted owl that roosts amid the drooping leaves of the Ashok next door.

Forty-three. I counted, and now I cannot forget. The robins have, though. They have moved house across the street to an unused letter box. They are building a new home. And they are singing again.

(Writing entry to the Bird Essays contest by Round Glass Sustain & Juggernaut Publishing. Printed with permission.)

The author is a birder and writer based in Chennai.



ALLEGEDLY

How to overcome brain rot

I am amazed no one has yet thought of a solution to this global health emergency

Do you obsessively watch videos of skateboarding dogs till four in the morning – even when you know you have to be up by six, no matter what? And when you do wake up at six, instead of rolling out of bed, do you end up scrolling again? Do you walk purposefully from the living room to the kitchen, open the fridge, pick up a cauliflower, and realise you’ve no clue what’s in your hand or why you came to the kitchen? Do you sometimes read an entire paragraph from a book of moderate difficulty – say, *Well Done, Secret Seven* – and comprehend nothing because your brain is still ‘buffering’? If you answered ‘yes’ to any of the above, then you have ‘brain rot’ – the Oxford University Press’ (OUP) word of the year for 2024. Unfortunately, there is plenty of fake news about brain rot, its causes, symptoms, and cure. In service of public interest, let me set the record straight.

The first symptom of brain rot is trouble remembering basic things, like, for instance, why you became the chief justice of India – is it to talk to god or to uphold the Constitution? If you have brain rot, your brain would be unable to recollect which one it is.

Nobody is at fault

Another key symptom: reduced attention span. Example: have you seen our MPs in action? If yes, have you ever seen them sitting down and quietly listening when somebody is speaking? They never do. They inevitably interrupt and start yelling and screaming. Why? Degraded attention spans. It’s the same reason they can’t listen to your problems. But it’s not their fault – it’s just brain rot. The third major symptom is difficulty organising information. Have you ever filed an RTI requesting some basic information, such as, for

instance, “How many years have passed since Jawaharlal Nehru stopped being the Prime Minister of India?” If you did, you may have received a reply stating, “This information cannot be provided because it would take too much time to collate the data.” That’s a classic brain rot response. Such brains have lost the capacity to organise the past as a linear progression in the direction of the present. Instead, they get stuck in the past, and they stay there, gathering rot.

Now, thanks to the OUP, the rest of the world has woken up to brain rot. But it has been endemic in India for a long time. I would date its onset to the rise of WhatsApp culture in the country, especially the infestation of ‘good morning’ messages, typically adorned with images of flowers, babies, sunsets, or all three.



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

Imagine, if you will, that you are a typical Indian citizen who self-identifies as an extremely middle-class person. Perhaps you run a simple family business such as a petroleum refinery, and you live a simple, and indeed humble, life across your three homes in Delhi, Mumbai and the Amalfi Coast.

One day you wake up in the morning in your house in Delhi, stretch, open the window, inhale the fresh air, and immediately collapse head-first into the aquarium because, due to pollution, your lungs are the consistency of last month's black forest cake.

On the spot, you decide that it is time to go abroad on a holiday with your family.

You book your tickets, pack your bags, and just four or five hours later, you have reached the airport. Immediately, one of your children, Bhagat Singh, named after the Bobby Deol-superhit film *Shaheed*, starts complaining: "What an absolutely nonsense country is India. Look at this traffic. Look at this airport. Look at this aircraft. Look at this person breaking the queue. At least have the decency to bribe the policeman so that other passengers think you are VIP. EXCUSE ME MADAM OUR FLIGHT IS LEAVING IN TEN MINUTES PLEASE UNDERSTAND. Fed up of country fellows. Basic decency is missing in the country."

The next morning you land in your first destination: London. And from that moment onwards, you start sharing every single thing you have done abroad on your Twitter and Facebook and, worst of all, on your LinkedIn.

"Just had the best night of sleep at the Framchester House Hotel in West Crimptonstowe. Finest



GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 4

RETURN OF THE PATRIOT

When the pizzas of Pisa don't compare to the *rajma chawal* of Rajinder Nagar

mattress I have slept in all my life. The English really know the meaning of true hospitality. Perhaps our so-called five-star hotels in India can learn a lesson. During our busy corporate life it is easy to sacrifice sleep. This post is a reminder to all my fellow business executives that

sleep is good. Sleep is a superpower. Hashtag sleep hashtag sleepower hashtag sabkasleepsabkavikas." And then a few days later: "You might be wondering why I am posting this picture from the top of Eiffel Tower in Paris. Is that Champagne in my hand? Yes. Is that

Champagne Dom Perignon? Also, yes. Is that my entire family sitting with me in the VIP section? Absolutely correct. Did we just take this photo after an amazing classical French lunch at 3-Michelin restaurant Le Lepyarlepyarlepyparlele? Am I trying to show off? Never. This photo is a tribute to my father and mother who suffered untold hardships in bringing me up. Not in their wildest dreams could they have imagined that their son would one day be in Paris. Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Dhirubai Singhanian-Parker-Bowles. Your son owes everything to you, and the lack of risk management in Indian public sector banks."

And so it goes. Dinner in Helsinki. Disco in Berlin. Stroopwaffel in Amsterdam. Pizza in Pisa. And throughout your journey, you post a relentless stream of updates online. In each one, you compare the glories

Videshbhakt /ˌvɪdeɪʃˈbʌkθ/

noun
Plural: videshbhakt
Definition: A person who, after enjoying a fabulous trip overseas, and covering the Internet with their adoration of life abroad, suddenly discovers a patriotism that is more than Bose, Gandhi, Patel and Nehru combined...just in time for their return flight.
Related forms:
Videshbhakti (noun): The act of excessively praising one's homeland after a foreign trip, often accompanied by dramatic social media posts and unsolicited advice on how to improve local customs.
Videshbhaktism (noun): The phenomenon of oscillating between foreign admiration and national pride, typically observed in individuals who have recently returned from overseas travel.

of Europe to the absolute shenanigans of India.

But then a few hours before your return flight to India, something happens. You suddenly realise that you have only been complaining about India for two weeks. Oh no. This is very bad. What will other people say when you go back to Delhi and then immediately start sharing WhatsApp forwards such as "INDIA GREATEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD EVEN JOE BIDEN IS JEALOUS HIDDEN STORY REVEALED".

But worst of all, what will all your

friends who are working in the government of India think? It will be a terrible humiliation. So just before boarding your plane, you post your final masterstroke from abroad.

"Friends, for the last few weeks I have enjoyed the finest luxuries that the western world has to offer. Many people have asked me, Bunty why don't you stay abroad? Because, my friends, at the end of the day, there is no country in the world like India. The pizzas of Pisa are nothing compared to the *rajma chawal* of Rajinder Nagar. There is nothing in the world that can compare to traditional Indian hospitality. And what about the banking infrastructure. Hundreds of people asked me, 'Bunty, why don't you bring UPI to Europe?'. As I run to my plane to come back to India, my heart has grown even fonder for my motherland. If there is a future for the world, it is Indian! My son will be staying in London for the foreseeable future. Hashtag Indiafuture hashtag proudtobeindian hashtag howtogetUKworkvisa."

And that, my friend, is how you become a Videshbhakt.

Example sentence: "After two weeks in Barcelona, last night Anamika did one videshbhakti by saying how public transport in India might be terrible but in reality it gave her the resilience to conquer the world. Hashtag Desidia hashtag blessedtobeIndian hashtag BhayanderBetterThanBarcelona."

Please stop these absolute shenanigans.



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

GOREN BRIDGE

Great lead?

Both vulnerable. North deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from a team match between some of the best players in Europe. The scoring method was Board-A-Match. BAM was a very common scoring method for teams before it was replaced by Swiss Team scoring some 50 years ago. It is an exacting form of the game where every point is crucial. The

tiniest difference in score will award a win on the deal. One win is available on every deal and a tie is worth a halfwin. A competitive auction, featuring a cocktail-hour raise by East, saw North-South end up in an excellent slam. Six spades would have been a playable contract, but it would fail due to the 5-0 spade split. West was David Gold, one of England's best

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

The bidding:			
NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♥	Pass	2♦	3♣
3♦	4♣	4♠	Pass
5♠	Pass	6♦	All pass

Opening lead:?

players. There was no beating this contract, but Gold didn't know that. There were only six missing clubs and his partner had raised, meaning that partner held

at least three clubs. East was a favorite to hold the jack. Gold brilliantly led the seven of clubs! Had partner held the jack he would have had no trouble finding a spade shift to give

Gold a ruff. Alas, dummy's singleton jack won the trick and declarer quickly scooped up all 13 tricks. Gold was distraught thinking that his lead had lost the board for his team. When he compared scores with his teammates, he found that the West player at the other table made the same lead! The board was a tie, and both West players were very happy about it.

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What has science done for us in 2024?



When the trumpet sounds A research at Kenya's Samburu National Reserve has revealed that elephants can identify 469 distinct calls among themselves. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

Berty Ashley

Earlier this year, the company Intuitive Machines's vehicle named 'Odysseus' became the first commercial vehicle to land here. It carried a library, art, the internet archive and portions of Project Gutenberg. Where did it land to provide info for millions of years?

This year, a new species of animal was found in the Caribbean islands. Named *E.akayima*, its DNA proved to be

completely different from the other species we are familiar with. Easily one of the largest in the world, what animal is this, that proves there is still so much to discover on our planet?

In February, astronomers from Carnegie Institution added three new items to a list of 290 already known. What is this a list of, which Saturn has the most and Earth the least?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) has labelled them the 'World's deadliest animal'. They have killed 52 billion people, nearly half of all humans who have lived on Earth. To counter this, billions of genetically engineered versions of the same animals were released in Brazil in March, which will limit the effect of its fatal nature. What animal is this?

In April this year, the University of Maine showcased their 'Factory of the Future 1.0'. It has the ability to produce

items as big as 96 ft. long and 32 ft. wide, made of thermoplastic polymers. This is the world's largest example of what device?

A study done for more than 20 years at the University of Nevada has now proved that 'Retrowalking' is highly beneficial and strengthens the spine. Usually practised by football referees to have a good view of the game, it is also a sport by itself. What do researchers say one has to do 20 minutes every day?

A study that has been going on since 1986 among elephants at Kenya's Samburu National Reserve has concluded. They identified 469 distinct calls, and how certain members of the family responded to each call. What interesting (and almost human) inference did they make?

Since 2003, when the Concorde aircraft was retired, commercial supersonic flight has not been active. The ability to cut down travel time by half is there, but one of the main issues was a physical phenomenon that disturbed those on the ground. This year, the X-59 Quiet Supersonic Transport (QueSST) is ready to fly. What iconic factor will be missing from

this aircraft's supersonic flight?

A devastating fungal disease wiped out entire species of a certain animal in 2023 and researchers were looking at ways to combat its spread. This year they finally found a low-tech immune boost, which helps them fight the fungi. A hot bath or sauna stops the Chytrid disease. What animals are these, which ironically also feature in a story about not perceiving slowly approaching danger?

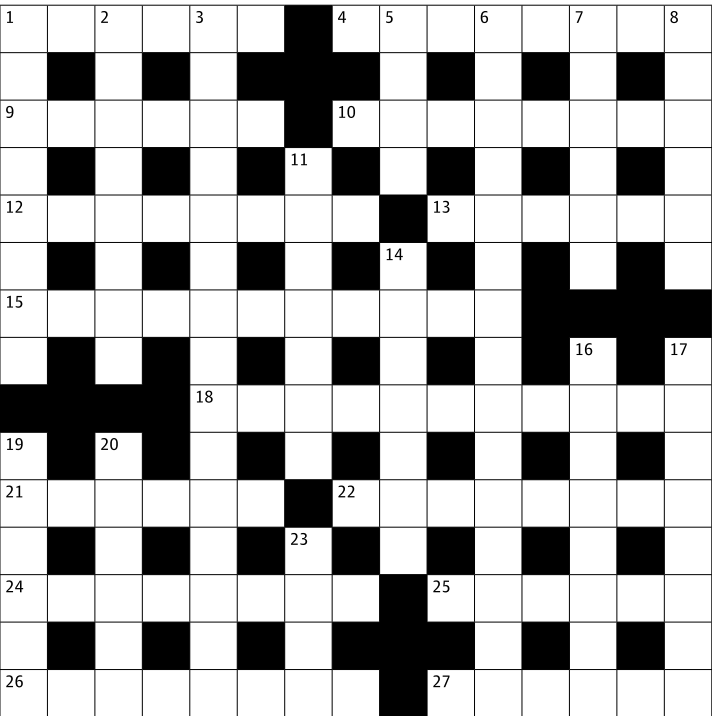
Artemis 2 will be the first mission to carry humans to the moon since 1972 and this year the rocket stacking operations began for the operation scheduled to take off in April 2026. In Greek mythology, Artemis the goddess of the hunt and nature is the twin sister of which god?

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. On the moon (Lunar Library)
2. Anaconda
3. New moons of the Solar system (Z for Neptune, T for Uranus)
4. Mosquitoes
5. 3D printer
6. Walking backwards
7. Elephants call each other by specific names
8. Sonic Boom
9. Frogs (frog in hot water story)
10. Apollo (after whom the first moon mission was named)

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3338

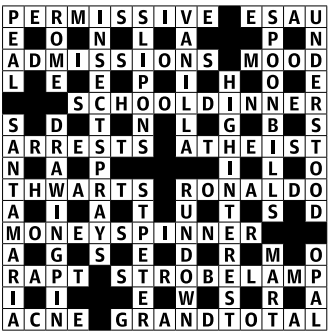


- Across**
- 1 Take two buses back — one interminable, that's about right — to outskirts (6)
 - 4 Envisages crumbly pie crust (8)
 - 9 Object: Everyman has salad (6)
 - 10 Emphasizes anxieties (8)
 - 12 Uncooperative? Quite the opposite! (8)
 - 13 Seaman perhaps on leave, a rest(6)
 - 15 Heartless hello — daggers brandished — daggers drawn (11)
 - 18 Misbehaviour characteristic of the 2000s, you say? (11)
 - 21 A professor is Greek, that's lovely (6)
 - 22 Poinrot's one that's been had, by Jupiter(8)
 - 24 Posh comedian? I won't react (5,3)
 - 25 Act as inspiration for puzzle (6)
 - 26 Perpetual child's play (5,3)
 - 27 Please raise one's *Stein* in toasting, primarily! (6)

- Down**
- 1 Banksy's materials: stone — and pencils? Not principally (8)
 - 2 Bit of hubbub — a din — a geezer offering banter (8)
 - 3 Take apart so as to understand Lenurb? (7-8)
 - 5 Greek character included in audiotape (4)

- 6 It's safe to chase articles needing rewriting (3,5,2,5)
- 7 Whispering sound Bertrand heard (6)
- 8 Framed elite soldiers? That man had (6)
- 11 Classical musician reworked her opus (7)
- 14 Not unknown for Hazel to follow hiphop artist (7)
- 16 You can't buy those who've betrayed their principles (4-4)
- 17 In resort, easiest to be bored by island (in my opinion) (2,1,3,2)
- 19 Tom likes this brief sleep, a becoming one (6)
- 20 The solver: hazard, certainly (3,3)
- 23 Priest raised sick in France? Ace (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3337



Sharing the
sorrow of
fellow
creatures

Teen Maria George
teenmariageorge@gmail.com

Walking into a veterinary hospital, I felt the weight of a different kind of sadness. It's not just a place for healing; it's a gathering of silent struggles, of creatures unable to explain what they feel, and somehow, that makes it so much heavier.

I was there with my little goat kid, Suzy, the last-born of her siblings. She is small and a bit fragile, and I had come hoping to find some way to help her. But the moment I entered, the stillness of so many animals in pain settled on me, deep and unavoidable.

In the corner lay a goat, heavy with pregnancy but unable to give birth, with loud cries that pierced the silence of the hospital. The doctor said her uterus was tangled. She was moved to be operated on. I murmured a little prayer for her.

A sick cat lay curled up in the arms of a girl who had wrapped it in a towel, silent as if accepting whatever came next, while a hen sat quietly in another room after the injection the doctor had given her. A German Shepherd, apparently fine, stood by his owner, watchful. My Suzy, unable to keep her head straight, let out little cries. None of them could speak or tell us where it hurt.

United by grief

There is a quiet understanding that flows among the people there. We may all be strangers, but in those moments, we are bound by the weight of watching the animals we care for struggle. People glance at each other, nodding in silent sympathy. Between the calls and soft murmurs, small conversations start – a simple “What happened to yours?” or “Is the goat feeling better?” Each answer carries its own bit of pain or hope.

One woman spoke quietly about her goat's labour complications, and I shared Suzy's condition, about her being the last-born, a little weak. Somehow, sharing these words is a kind of comfort, an invisible hand on the shoulder.

I saw people finding solace in these small exchanges, a shared experience of waiting, of helplessness, of hope.

As I left, holding Suzy close, I felt like I was carrying the sadness of every life there. It's hard to walk out of a veterinary hospital without feeling sorrowful – knowing the animals can't tell us what hurts, knowing they simply wait in silence, as if hoping someone will understand.

Making TV speak Malayalam

A recap of efforts to launch Malayalam telecast by DD in two months to the New Year in 1985

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January 1, 2025 marks the 40th anniversary of Doordarshan's Malayalam telecast from Thiruvananthapuram. With advancement of technology and proliferation of channels, it may sound ordinary, but in 1985, this was an epochal event for television broadcast in Kerala.

On October 31, 1984, while working at Doordarshan in Madras (now Chennai), I was assigned to assess the facilities in Thiruvananthapuram and report to my bosses in Delhi on possible TV programme productions. A low-power transmitting centre, relaying Delhi station's Hindi programmes, had been functioning in Thiruvananthapuram since the November 1982 Asiad. In the two years since, a new office building was added to the transmitting centre. A new terrestrial transmission tower, standing 120 metres tall and capable of broadcasting up to 80 kilometres in all directions, was under construction. The programme production studio was far from ready. The staff in 1984 were made up of a few producers, production assistants, cameramen, editors, technical staff, sound recordists and graphic artists. At the time, though equipped and ready, there was no work for them. Four low-band video camera units and two 16mm film cameras were available. Doordarshan Jalandhar had sent us a condemned outside broadcast (OB) van and the technical staff were repairing it to make it functional.

When I arrived at the remote Doordarshan television centre at Kudappanakkunnu in Thiruvananthapuram, I received a call from the Additional Director-General, Shiv Sharma, informing me of unconfirmed reports about the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Prior to receiving the call, my brief had been to meet Chief Minister K. Karunakaran. But the Chief Minister had already left for Delhi, upon hearing the news about Indira Gandhi. Shiv Sharma asked me to stay back to record condolence messages of prominent personalities of Kerala. The available staff were galvanised to make the recordings, and the tapes with cue sheets were flown to Delhi. Our very first assignment was a success, thanks to the experienced cameramen, who



were old colleagues of mine. Upon Karunakaran's return to Thiruvananthapuram, I met him and he was at his cajoling best, promising us the entire State government machinery for any assistance. But he insisted that we start Malayalam television programming in the New Year. Given the ground realities, that was a tall order. Except a few engineering officers from Madras, most of the staff had not even seen a television set. The Relay Station Engineer, P.R.S. Nair, and the Installation Engineer, N.C. Pillai, assured me that we could spring miracles and make the dream of broadcasting Malayalam television in the New Year come true. Recording and transmission could be done in a makeshift studio, and the black-and-white OB van could be turned into the production control panel. We informed the bosses in Delhi about our plans.

On seeing our proposal, Shiv Sharma cautioned me, “Television is a hungry monster. Once you start, there is no going back. Anything wrong, your head will roll!” I humbly conveyed our resolve and again he counselled me to wait till April. Finally, the proposal to produce and broadcast one hour of original programming was permitted. Without a news broadcast, I knew we would not make any impact in Kerala. Later, a 10-minute news bulletin was sanctioned. While shuttling between my two assignments in Madras and

V.N. Gadgil, then I&B Minister, opening a 10-kW transmitter for broadcast over a 80-km radius (above); K. Karunakaran, then Kerala Chief Minister, inaugurating the Malayalam telecast on January 1, 1985. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Thiruvananthapuram, I prepared the fixed-point chart, or the programming timetable.

On December 10, 1984, I was transferred to Thiruvananthapuram as the station's first Director. Just three weeks remained for the first broadcast and the challenges appeared insurmountable. Everything was to be built from scratch, and at breakneck speed. Many tangles had to be untangled. Though budgeted, payments had to come from the pay and accounts office in Madras. We could only spend ₹10,000. Incredible as it may seem now, we purchased two office tables, by splitting quotations for parts from a public agency, and furniture for staff from a State government company. Teleprinter services of the news agencies PTI and UNI were installed after tremendous efforts.

Content was a prime concern. Malayalam titles for timeslots, montages and signature tunes for each were tasks achieved with gusto.

Selecting anchors, announcers, compères and news readers was a demanding task. The queues for application forms were so long that they made headlines on the front pages of local newspapers. From a few thousand applications, it was an uphill task to empanel a few youngsters and then train them to perform with the correct poise, diction and modulation.

The inaugural function on January 1, 1985 was broadcast live. It was applauded and welcomed by the public. For the live telecast, cameras were brought in from Bombay Doordarshan, and for sending the signals, Madras Doordarshan provided the microwave link, evincing the camaraderie in the Doordarshan family.



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

The food, crafts and lifestyle of the Himalayan region should be made known to people south of the Vindhyas. ('In 2025, look to the Himalayas'; Dec. 22) End-to-End connectivity and dedicated tourism will help the cause.

Rohith Varon S.S.

Carpe diem

The review gives an interesting glimpse of Garth Greenwell's *Small Rain*, a novel about relationships. ('View from the hospital bed'; Dec. 22) The author once said in an interview: "For me the great human value is promiscuity, the fact that we love mixture, that we are excited by collisions between cultures, languages, traditions."

Kosaraju Chandramouli

True to self

As a sociology student, I had known of Irawati Karwe's work on the kinship system of India. ('Breaking glass ceilings'; Dec. 22) However, getting an insight into her life through the book review was inspiring. I was particularly impressed by the episode where she would not bandwagon with her supervisor Eugen Fischer and refused to connect race with "intellect and logic".

Rohit Kaushik

To Ustad, with love

The table will never sound the same again. ('Zakir Hussain and the glow of fireflies'; Dec. 22) Zakir Hussain has left behind a vacuum, which will be extremely difficult to fill for any other tabla player.

Deepak Taak

What a fitting tribute to the maestro. His simple manners and immense respect and love for humanity symbolised his greatness Ustad, you will be missed.

Satish Sundar

Merry and meatless

A meatless Christmas is a deliciously compassionate celebration. ('A merry (meatless) Christmas'; Dec. 22) With so many cookbooks on vegan recipes and with the trend catching up in the West, India, with its diverse food traditions and ingredients, is sure to follow suit.

Parimala G. Tadas

A life inspiring

Kavya Mukhija's life is a lesson to many. ('Kavya Mukhija: can do everything'; Dec. 22) Persons with disabilities too deserve equality and social acceptability. A life sans discrimination will inspire them to thrive and survive with confidence.

K. Rajendran

Charming photos

A picture is worth a thousand words. ('A miracle never dies'; Dec. 22) The photo essay by celebrity photographer Dayanita Singh has captured the tabla wizard in his many moods, playful at times, pensive at others, yet charismatic and charming as always.

C.V. Aravind

Through her photographs, Dayanita Singh has made Zakir Hussain immortal. And equally, her words have touched our heart. May god give eternal rest to the maestro's soul.

Tharcius S. Fernando

A culture of hope
and promise

Good deeds lend meaning, purpose and hope that there is optimism and positivity in today's world

Ashok Warrior
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“Sanskar” is a very Indian concept and therefore to translate it into English will always be risking getting into the pitfalls of semantics. However if the word has to be understood in English, it has to be translated as best as possible. Simply put, it refers to the values or impressions one has received from one's ancestors including parents. “Sanskar” also encompasses cultural traits.

One often hears of things like “To help fellow human beings is in his ‘sanskar’” or “To be selfish and think only about oneself is his ‘sanskar’” or “To donate to charities” or “to use others’ resources to further one's own selfish needs or ends” are his “sanskar”.

It is not that people will forever be typecast in a certain “sanskar”. It is said that some learn from observing, some others learn from listening while most others have to personally and necessarily experience a situation before doing any course correction assuming that such an intent is there. Some who are associated with a certain “sanskar” do make an effort to change from a negative “sanskar” to a more positive and robust personality. This change however comes to only those who constantly review their words and deeds and have a desire to self-improve. One comes across people who talk big, promise a lot of things only to renege on every one of them or pretend as if there was nothing mentioned. Such people are not only fooling themselves but also letting themselves be exposed as



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

persons who lack sincerity and dignity in their words and utterances. Good behaviour and mannerisms are noticed as much as negative or insincere behaviour and both can be attributed to a person's “sanskar”.

Very recently, the young World Chess Champion, Gukesh, all of 18 years and a few months, was seen rearranging the pieces on the chessboard not just of himself but also of his opponent (who had left soon after the match) after the championship match was over. He could have been excused in the wake of his memorable victory to leave soon after the match. But no, he made sure

that he put not just the chessboard pieces but also his own chair back in place before demonstrating any form of celebration of his victory. Some would perhaps term this conduct his “sanskar”.

It is not just what one does but how one does it. It matters not what one does for oneself but what one does for someone else. Somebody might give something precious to someone but how one gives it matters a lot. Does he give it with grace or does he give it with an expressed feeling of loss or remorse?

I have seen sportsmen take a loss in their stride with great dignity and forbearance. I recollect the touching note penned by Roger Federer, one of the greatest tennis players to have played the sport, in memory of his arch rival and equally illustrious friend, Rafael Nadal, with whom he had multiple meetings – some of which he won while some others he lost – on the tennis court of various ATP and other tournaments. There is a recognition here that in the field of sports, there are bound to be wins and losses and one needs to take both in one's stride. In the Tokyo Olympics, there

were two athletes, one from Italy and the other from Qatar, who were vying for a gold medal in the high jump finals. Both were on level. It was at this juncture that the Italian got injured and was in no position to better his last jump. The Qatari could have tried for a higher jump and bagged a gold medal all for himself. But what did he do? He decided to forgo another try and instead he opted for a tie with the Italian and the Olympic Committee decided to award a gold medal to both the Qatari and the Italian. This was the “sanskar” of the Qatari which made him opt for this most graceful act.

There are so many anecdotes of people putting aside their own interests and instead focussing on helping their fellow humans. The “sanskar” of these people in such cases can be said to supersede their own interests. The good “sanskars” of life are the ones that shine like an incandescent beacon in this world of complexity, avarice and self-centred behaviour. The good “sanskars” also lend meaning, purpose and hope that there is optimism and positivity in today's world however complex and humanistically hopeless it might appear.



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Forced to comply, silenced by violence

Dowry-related deaths, sexual assaults, honour killings are expressions of a society that prioritises male entitlement

Y. Mercy Famila

The shackles of legacy

Once a woman becomes a mother, the expectations placed upon her grow even heavier

Vandana Verma

A poet to cherish

Edward Thomas' biography reveals a tortured soul struggling to come to terms with itself

P.M. Warrior

Beyond salary and freedom

There are several other factors which attract people to an organisation

S.A. Thameemul Ansari

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The architectural conservationist and designer's *The India Cookbook* has treasured recipes from the country's who's who

HOLIDAY TABLES WITH SUNITA KOHLI'S FRIENDS

Joshua Muiyiwa

I think very architecturally," states Sunita Kohli, over a phone call from her home in New Delhi. The Padma Shri awardee and design maven – who has restored and decorated several Indian landmarks, including the Rashtrapati Bhavan – is speaking to the structure and formatting of her latest publication, *The India Cookbook: From the Tables of My Friends* (Aleph Book Company). Her philosophy for constructing the pages of a cookbook or planning a dinner party aligns with her professional practice, she says. "Like in design, the more you work at it, the more you're prepared for it. In the end, the designed space should look effortless. The same thing goes for a home meal or a dinner party, you've got to think things through and do a little preparation beforehand."

In this follow-up to her popular *The Lucknow Cookbook* (co-authored with her mother Chand Sur), we get to learn about the delicious dishes from the homes of Kohli's friends, new and old, from across the length and breadth of the subcontinent. "This cookbook has recipes from literally my oldest friend Nasima Faridi Aziz – we've been friends

since the age of three-and-a-half in kindergarten at Loretto Convent in Lucknow – to those I've met in the recent past," Kohli, 78, says.

While there's an order to the recipes according to region, and exactitude to the ingredients in the cookbook, the instructions themselves are invitational. They resonate with the casual yet careful manner in which recipes are actually exchanged between friends. There's a nudge to employ our senses in the process of preparing these home-style dishes for our own dinner parties: touch to see if the lotus stem is tender, taste to tell if the sourness has reduced, smell for changes in the masalas, and so on.



Sunita Kohli will be talking about *The India Cookbook* at The Hindu Lit for Life (January 18-19) in Chennai. Scan the QR code to register.



The tomorrow that never came

This choice in the easy methodology of the dishes is also telling of the many means employed by Kohli to patiently get these recipes out of her friends. "If somebody asks me for a recipe, I would write it out and give it to them immediately," she claims. But, that wasn't the case with compiling these personal recipes for the book. "Dilshad Sheikh, known for her legendary dinners at her Srinagar home, and sister to actors and producers Feroze, Sanjay and Akbar Khan said, 'Oh Sunita, I don't know how to write all this, but if we meet I'll tell you and you can write it'. So, I went to meet her, took down the recipe for *sukhh murg* [page 3], and when she saw the final draft, she boldly pointed out that I've made errors in taking down the recipe and made me re-write it, imagine," she says and bursts out laughing.

And there was the actress Shabana Azmi, who promised to send her recipe for *Hyderabadi biryani* [page 126] "tomorrow" to Kohli. "That tomorrow never came for many tomorrows," she tells me. "Eventually, I said, 'Shabana, please



The Sindhi kadhi and Sai bhaji recipes were my mother's favourites. We make them often in our Punjabi household. So even if I don't speak Sindhi and have never visited Sindhi, it is as close as it gets to celebrating that part of my heritage

PRIYA PAUL Hotelier and art collector, whose mother was a good friend of Kohli's

can you not send the recipe' and then she sent me a badly taken photograph of a handwritten page from a family cookbook, and asked me to transcribe it. While doing it, I realised I couldn't read the end. So I called her and she says, 'You're a good cook, you'll know what to do'. My friends are really crazy!"

'Not afraid to try things out' Kohli hasn't simply eaten each of these dishes at her friends' homes,

'Be an easy hostess' (Far left) Sunita Kohli; a table setting for dinner at Kohli's house; and the book's cover. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



Sunita and I are dear friends, who travel together with a group of women who do historical tours across the country. I contributed the recipe of *podhi kura maasam* [page 114, pictured below] or crispy shredded lamb, which is specific to the homes of the royal families of Vijayanagara, which I belong to. It is a twice-cooked dish, and can be kept outdoors for a long time. It doesn't need refrigeration and therefore was a perfect snack during the hunts. A kind of meaty trail mix

VIDYA GAJAPATHI RAJU Of the erstwhile Vijayanagara royal family



PHOTO: JOHAN SATHYA DAS, JAI

The naarangee pilau was a dish I inherited from my mother-in-law. They migrated to Lahore from Delhi. Food was a big thing at my in-law's home, but it had a more delicate flavouring from food in my own childhood home. I grew up in Lahore, but my mother's family was from Lucknow, so my home food had bolder aromatics. The exciting thing about this recipe is that I feel like I'm returning it to India, the place it was created in by my mother-in-law

NUSRAT JAMIL A former journalist and newspaper editor based in Lahore

she has made some of them part of her own dinner menus, too. And she isn't afraid to try things out with them either. "For a dinner last October, with Frank Wisner, a former American ambassador but also a close family friend, I tried out *naarangee pilau* [page 220], an amazing pilau where everything is made in orange juice. The mutton and rice are cooked in orange juice and it is finished with saffron and caramelised orange rinds. I can't tell you the *khushboo* [fragrance] of it," she says. "Even if it isn't perfect, they are my friends. They won't judge me forever," she adds, offering it as a tip to tackle one's own future experiments with friends. "But also be an easy hostess and have easy-going friends," she quips.

While Kohli thinks "that this is a terrible statement about herself", she admits that "I probably can't think of many of my friends separate from my association of them with a particular food dish". She has the same system with places. "Even on a visit to archaeological sites, I'm more likely to remember a nearby restaurant or *dhaba*. I have an unbelievable memory for these details," she flexes. "For me, Preetha Reddy [chairperson of Apollo Hospitals] will always be associated with spicy pickled *avakkai* biryani [page 115] or Shirin and Priya Paul [who runs the Park Hotels chain] with their soothing Sindhi kadhi [page 38]."

Notes from Pakistan

But if we think Indian hospitality is legendary, then there's nothing to beat the generosity of Pakistan, she says, having just returned from there at the time of this interview. Kohli was born in Lahore, and her parents and husband, Ramesh, were born in areas in and around in Undivided India. She recalls a wonderful dinner with Yousaf Salahuddin, a cultural figure and grandson of the poet Iqbal, during the Lahore Lit Fest at Haveli Barood Khana where she ducked into the kitchens to get the recipe for *dhania murg* (page 223) by interviewing the "cook with a beautiful face". "The first thing she says to me in Punjabi: 'Don't be afraid of these recipes. They are super easy.' I recorded her telling me the recipe, and transcribed and translated it for the book. I also got two more recipes from that night's decadent dinner for myself," she admits, mischievously.

The author is a Bengaluru-based poet and writer.

For most of my life, I have seen Phuphee mark the end of the year with the simplest of celebrations. She would make something uncomplicated and enjoy it on her own or share it with whomever was around. Years ago, I asked her if it even counted as a celebration if it was just her, to which she replied, 'It is a celebration as long as you believe it is, because sometimes you can be at a celebration and yet others might be just pretending to.'

I was a little taken aback by this as I felt it was full of cynicism, which was unusual for Phuphee. Her words really got under my skin, the reason being that a couple of days before I had found out about securing a placement at the hospital of my choice and had excitedly told my friends. I had expected them to be just as excited as I was because they knew how important this was to me. I suggested celebrating, but none of them seemed interested. I felt a little heartbroken. Why would my friends not want to celebrate my little victory?

We had just been about to nod off to sleep when Phuphee delivered this little gem, and I spent the entire night awake. Of course, with time I would come to realise the meaning that lay in the folds of the blanket she had just thrown over me, but at the time I was thinking dark thoughts.

The next day we woke up greeted by a bitter cold chill, which could only be banished by sitting in front of the *daan* on which Phuphee was making *pachhay thool* (guest eggs). This dish was made when guests arrived unannounced and she had nothing to sweeten their mouth

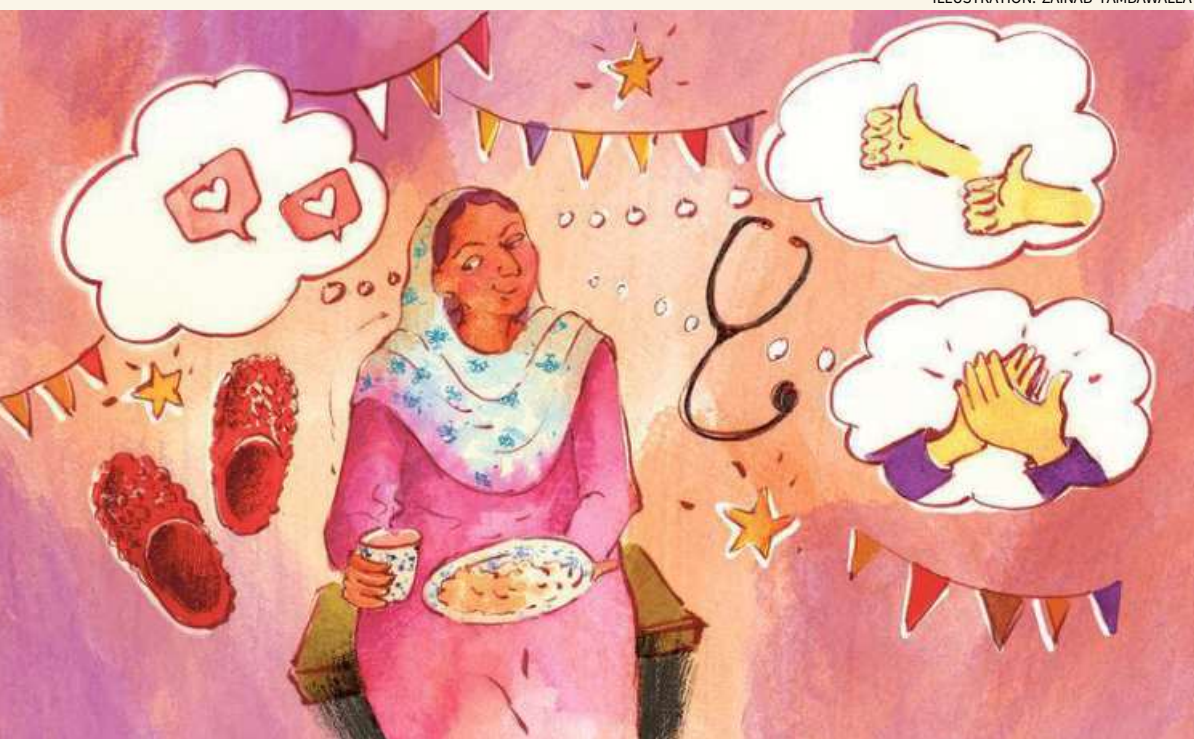


ILLUSTRATION: ZAINAB TAMBAWALLA

A LITTLE LIFE

Sugared eggs and unwanted guests

Phuphee's advice for a new year? Celebrate yourself even if others are slow to do so

with. She would whisk eggs with sugar and fry them in ghee or homemade butter, and serve it with walnuts and wild honey.

"Who has come so early?" I asked, looking around for the

unannounced guests.

"Some guests are invisible," she said.

I should have realised that the unannounced guests were my thoughts. The trouble now was that

I wasn't excited about securing my placement. My friends' reactions seemed far more important than the placement itself, and that left me feeling a little lost and confused.

I sat there trying to warm my

hands and feet in front of the *daan*, and trying to thaw the chill which had taken root somewhere deep inside of me. Phuphee handed me a plate of *pachhay thool* and a cup of steaming *nun chai* (salt tea). As I ate, I could feel the blood making its way back to my peripheries. By the time I was done, I felt mostly like myself but a tiny sliver of the frost remained, staying inaccessible to the warmth that always came with Phuphee's food.

Phuphee sat sipping her umpteenth cup of *nun chai* and smoking her two cigarettes.

'It was not my intention to upset you last night,' she said.

I talked to her about what had happened with my friends and how her words had really brought everything home. She listened patiently, and stubbed out her cigarettes in her *chini pyaale* (a small china cup without a handle used to serve *nun chai*).

'Boaz, myoun jaan [listen, my life], wanting a sprinkling of validation here and there is alright, but seeking validation for everything you achieve is dangerous. The trouble with seeking any form of validation is that it may never come, and even when it does, it may not come in the form you were seeking it. That will lead to heartbreak and confusion.'

'It is also not possible for everyone to always understand what something means to you. Look at these woolly slippers I knit every year. I started doing this when I got married. At the beginning, when I would hand them over to someone, I would expect them to be over the moon. But they would simply say thank you and move on. I would feel a little disheartened. I spoke to

Aapa [her maternal grandmother] about how I felt, and she told me, 'Tahira, not everyone can see what you have had to do to get these done. Nobody knows how you get the yarn, how you sacrifice other things to sit down and knit, and how your fingers ache as you knit. But nobody needs to know or validate, because you know and that has to be enough'.

'At first I didn't understand what she meant,' Phuphee continued, 'but slowly I realised that it is enough to know that I did what I did. That is validation enough.'

She took my face in her soft hands and asked, 'Do you know what the worst thing about seeking validation is? Slowly, we start to mistake the approval we receive, for love. Then, one day when it doesn't happen, instead of feeling a little disappointed [as we should], we feel lost and rejected. You must always remember that the approval you seek for your achievements must come from you.' She then kissed me on the forehead and got up to get more eggs from the hen house.

I sat there looking down at the red woolly slippers on my feet that she had knitted, thinking about what she had just said. I pulled them more snugly around my feet, feeling the last bit of frost melt in the gentle, warm sunlight that Phuphee's presence, her words and her cooking brought into my life. And it was with those that I ushered in another year.



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