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literaryreview

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IT'S NOT AN INDIAN SUMMER IN CANNES

With only one film in competition — Neeraj Ghaywan's *Homebound* — and sluggish deal-makings over U.S. tariff concerns, the film festival on the French Riviera proved to be a mixed bag this year

(Clockwise from left) The *Homebound* team comprising producer Karan Johar, director Neeraj Ghaywan, and actors Vishal Jethwa, Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter, on the red carpet; a poster of the film; and businesswoman and fashion icon Natasha Poonawalla at the festival.
(GETTY IMAGES)

Prathap Nair

What the 78th Cannes Film Festival did not expect when it announced a stricter dress code (disallowing nudity and voluminous dresses) was that someone would turn up on the red carpet dressed like a giant bird. The incident occurred on Day 5 at the premiere of the Jennifer Lawrence-Robert Pattinson starrer *Die, My Love*, a psychodrama about a new mother's descent into mental instability.

A few days later, the no-selfie rule imposed by the festival (in 2018) didn't stop *Mission Impossible* star Tom Cruise and his team from taking selfies either, some of them with their tongues out in jest. It's quintessential Cannes – no amount of gatekeeping can take away from the glamour and showmanship at the most prestigious film festival in the world.

This year's edition of the festival, which opened on May 13, came close on the heels of U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement to impose tariffs on movies produced outside the country. What this meant for productions that bank on business in the U.S. market remained unclear, but there was palpable trepidation among film executives.

While industry reports suggested that deal makings were sluggish this year, it remained to be seen if the tariff drama was to blame. That said, several critically well-received movies (Brazilian thriller *The Secret Agent*, multi-generational German drama *Sound of Falling*, and Richard Linklater's Godard biopic *New Wave*, to name a few) played out alongside Hollywood premieres such as Spike Lee's *Highest to Lowest*, Ari Aster's *Eddington* and Kristen Stewart's *The Chronology of Water* – in and outside of the competition sections. European auteurs, including Joachim Trier, the Dardenne brothers and Julia Ducournau, and acclaimed Iranian directors Jafar Panahi and Saeed Roustaee, also showcased their work at the festival.

Smaller Indian attendance

'India at Cannes' made headlines last year, with as many as eight films in participation, and Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* winning the Grand Prix. The Indian presence this year was limited to director Neeraj Ghaywan's *Homebound*, starring Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa and Jhanvi Kapoor. The film, about two childhood friends and their search for dignity via a job in the police force, premiered in the prestigious sidebar section, Un Certain Regard.

Ghaywan was returning to Cannes a decade after his *Masaan* was screened at the festival and won the FIPRESCI Prize (awarded by the International Federation of Film Critics). Talking about *Homebound* before its premiere, the filmmaker said, "I'm hoping to see how the humanity of the film resonates with the rest of the world. I hope people understand and relate with it. I just want people to like it because it took a lot for me to make it – I have taken 10 years for my second film."

Martin Scorsese is an executive producer for the film, a process that involved Zoom calls, script consultations and elaborate notes, Ghaywan revealed.

> **I'm hoping to see how the humanity** of the film resonates with the rest of the world. I hope people understand and relate with it. It might sound like a cliché, but I genuinely do not expect the film to win anything
>
> **NEERAJ GHAYWAN**
> Director of *Homebound*

Additionally, a newly restored version of Satyajit Ray's 1969 classic, *Aranyer Din Ratri*, a Walden-esque tale about a group of friends escaping the mundanity of their lives, was screened in the Cannes Classics section. Hollywood filmmaker Wes Anderson called Ray an "inspiration" in his gushing 10-minute tribute to the filmmaker. He was joined by actors Sharmila Tagore and Simi Garewal, both of whom fondly remembered their work in the film.

Another Indian interaction that got some traction on social media was a video of actor Robert De Niro hugging his *Silver Linings Playbook* co-star Anupam Kher, ahead of the Cannes screening of the latter's musical drama, *Tanvi the Great*.

But perhaps the biggest splash this year was filmmaker Payal Kapadia's new role as a jury member – alongside French actor Juliette Binoche, American actors Halle Berry, Jeremy Strong and others. She was in full agreement that judging films competing for the Palme d'Or was a treat. "I have never had an opportunity to watch all the festival competition films in the past because when you have a movie you are focused on your thing. So, to see this whole curation and discuss it with the jury team has been wonderful," she told *Hollywood Reporter*.

Selective buzz?

At the Bharat Pavilion, it was business as usual, with trailer launches, round table discussions and networking sessions. Upcoming films – including the recent Berlinale hit *Baksho Bondi*, with Tilottama Shome in the lead – were introduced at the venue.

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Dress code shenanigans

The fact that the red carpet has always targeted women — burkini ban, no heels, no lengthy trains — and never men, did not go unnoticed at this year's Cannes either. While 'Bond girl' and jury member Halle Berry admitted that the last-minute dress code resulted in a wardrobe change on the opening night (she had planned to wear an outfit by Indian designer Gaurav Gupta), she insisted that the rules were kosher.

Netizens were not so accommodating, however. 'Women's bodies are constantly policed', screamed a fashion magazine headline. Among those who flouted the rules were Heidi Klum, who brought a long train to the red carpet, and Chinese actor Wan QianHui, whose white dress came with what looked like giant cotton balls. "Sounds like a next-year problem," captioned the popular Insta page Diet Prada under a post about rule-breakers on the carpet.

As for the influencers, who mostly only walk the red carpet and avoid the screenings entirely, they were fewer in number this year. While Netflix-fame Shalini Passi (in pic) dazzled in a Manish Malhotra gown inspired by Paresh Maity's art, actor Urvashi Rautela, with her 72 million followers on Instagram, gave red carpet trackers the entertainment they wanted.

INTERNATIONAL BOOKER PRIZE 2025

A THOUSAND FIREFLIES IN THE SKY

Banu Mushtaq and Deepa Bhasthi take Indian regional literature to the world stage with their stories about women and their messy, yet uplifting, lives

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In winning the International Booker Prize for 2025, Banu Mushtaq has scripted history on several counts. Her book *Heart Lamp*, translated from the Kannada by Deepa Bhasthi, is the first collection of short stories to be awarded the £50,000 prize, and it's the first time Kannada has been honoured. The 12 stories, chosen from works the 77-year-old lawyer and activist had written between 1990 and 2023, delve into the quotidian lives of Muslim girls and women.

In a moving acceptance speech, Mushtaq began by saying that the moment feels like a thousand fireflies lighting up a single sky, brief, brilliant, and utterly collective. "This is more than a personal achievement, it is an affirmation that we as individuals and as a global community can thrive when we embrace diversity, celebrate our differences and uplift one another. Together, we create a world where every voice is heard, every story matters and every person belongs."

In telling their stories, and what they are up against – from patriarchal mindsets, religious oppression to gender inequality, suffocating homes and terrifying lack of choices – Mushtaq universalises the experiences faced by a majority of women, at least in the subcontinent.

We may be in the 21st century, but in many homes, there's still a collective sigh when a girl child is born. Often, a girl does not have equal access to education; there is an unfortunate possibility she will be married off at an early age, with her worth depending only on her ability to bear a male heir. In the poignant title story, a struggling mother of five, Mehrun, is pulled back from the brink by her daughter.

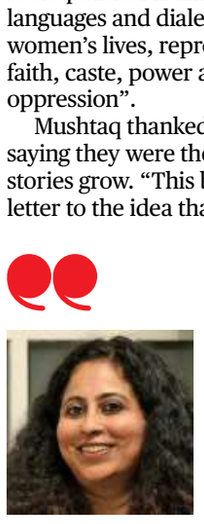
In interviews, Mushtaq has said that she was inspired to chronicle these stories after hearing about the experiences of women who sought help from her as a lawyer.

Literature as bearing witness

Mushtaq becomes the second Indian writer to win the International Booker Prize after Geetanjali Shree bagged it for *Tomb of Sand*, translated by Daisy Rockwell, in 2022.

In her translation of *Heart Lamp*, Deepa Bhasthi retains the flavour of the original. This was acknowledged by Max Porter, Chair of the 2025 Prize jury, who called it a "radical translation which ruffles language, to create new textures in a plurality of Englishes". He said the "beautiful, busy, life-affirming stories rise from Kannada, interspersed with the extraordinary socio-political richness of other languages and dialects. It speaks of women's lives, reproductive rights, faith, caste, power and oppression".

Mushtaq thanked her readers, saying they were the soil where her stories grow. "This book is my love letter to the idea that no story is local or small..." She also showered praises on Kannada – "to write in Kannada is to inherit a legacy of cosmic wonder and earthly wisdom," she said. In a world that often tries to divide us, she said literature remains one of the last sacred spaces where we can live inside each other's minds if only for a few pages.



It is very exciting for someone like me, who can't read Kannada but understands it fairly well, to be able to read work that has been translated from Kannada to English. And I wish there were more books I could read that captures Karnataka's life, culture and social ethos. *Heart Lamp* is definitely on my reading list

ANITA NAIR
Author

Author Banu Mushtaq (left) and translator Deepa Bhasthi. (GETTY IMAGES)

Shout out to translators

Pointing out why the win for a book on women is important, Bhasthi said the story of the world is a history of erasures – and is often characterised by the effacement of women's triumphs and their stories. She gave a shout out to translators, and to Kannada, hoping that the Prize will lead to more translations from Kannada and other South Asian languages.

Also on the shortlist were Anne Serre's *A Leopard-Skin Hat*, translated by Mark Hutchinson, a touching "memorial" to Serre's sister who died by suicide; *Perfection*, written by Vincenzo Latronico and translated by Sophie Hughes, about empty social media-driven lives; Hiromi Kawakami's sci-fi novel, *Under the Eye of the Big Bird*, translated by Asa Yoneda; *On the Calculation of Volume I* by Solvej Balle, translated by Barbara J. Haveland, about an antiquarian bookseller stuck in a time loop; and Vincent Delecroix's *Small Boat*, translated by Helen Stevenson, on how and why an English Channel crossing by migrants went horribly wrong.

It is a heart-warming moment. Banu Mushtaq's writing all along has been about the simultaneous struggle of an individual for linguistic, gender, and ethnic identities in civil society. It aspires for social domesticity and dignity. World literature has much to gain from this. This will certainly fine-tune and widen the antennae of global readership

JAYANT KAIKINI
Poet and writer

I feel truly happy that a woman has received such a prestigious recognition. Women's writing in Kannada has long been marginalised, but now, people are beginning to see it in a new light

VASUDHENDRA
Author

It is a moment of pride for Kannadigas. Her stories are heart-wrenching. She draws from her experience as a lawyer and activist and brings the plight of women in our society very strongly into her writing

VIVEK SHANBHAG
Author

IN CONVERSATION

Coming up for light

Debut author Bhavika Govil on exploring complex themes and 'normalising the normal' with the help of a child protagonist

Vidhya Anand

In her debut novel *Hot Water* (published by HarperCollins) – a portion of which won the 2021 Pontas & JJ Bola Emerging Writers Prize – author Bhavika Govil tells the story of a single mother and her two young children. By channelling the unrelenting gravity of a story rooted in emotional truth, her aim, says Govil, is to highlight the lived experiences of different characters. Edited excerpts from an interview:

Question: *How did you go about writing a novel that is both heavily themed, and has much innocence and humour?*
Answer: I'm so glad you found parts of the book funny. I do think it's a funny book. A lot of the time the darkness can overpower the reading experience but there's so much going on, so many lived experiences. From the time I started writing it, it was never meant to be a happy book about the summer. It was a story of a family, and even before I knew the shape of the story, I knew very clearly that I was trying to write some sort of emotional truth. I was intrigued as a writer to tell this story because I wanted to unpeel the layers behind the undercurrents and the complexities in the story and the characters.

Q: *Were there parts that were difficult to write?*
A: The only part which was uncomfortable was one scene because it's a strange position to be in as an author who at once knows what's going to happen, but doesn't know how it's going to happen; who is at once the adult writing the book, and at the same time, the child. You are stuck between two places of consciousness and imagination, and the adult part of you wants to protect the characters you are writing.

Q: *Were you hoping to add more to the conversation with gender roles, being queer, and the inner world of children?*
A: I definitely wanted to add to the conversation. I was thinking a lot about gender roles and the norms that we are expected to fit in. For instance, the character of Ma wanting to be a person who breaks the pattern of the family she is born into. Can you be a good mother even if you're not a conventional mother, or how lonely mothers feel, especially single mothers – I wanted to analyse it all.

Masculinity and the ways in which we expect boys to behave is deep-rooted even now. You present a toy car to a boy, expecting them to be more boisterous, and repress their emotions, not teaching them the tools or language to express themselves, or be vulnerable. Those things are frowned upon. I wanted to question it.

Q: *It makes you realise that when children haven't yet been socially conditioned, they never look at things and go, 'Oh, that's not normal'.*
A: Yes. In the novel, Mira, the youngest, is the most open-minded of them all. I have always loved books with child narrators. When I was telling this story, the adult perspective that was going to look back at a childhood dissolved and it became the voice of Mira, who was clear, strong, curious, and imaginative. The emotions she feels are so true. Most of the layers we put on as adults, she doesn't quite understand it. She normalises the normal. I was thinking about this – she looks at everything with the perspective and fascination of a Martian (laughs).

Q: *Speaking about your work in general and* Hot Water *releasing, is there anything else you'd like to share?*
A: One, I think we underestimate the smaller voices in the room, whether they're younger or different. It's been important to me with this book to bring them to the fore. Two, I'm excited about this reaching the right reader, the person who's swimming in the dark and is looking for a little bit of light.

The interviewer is a poet and consulting editor exploring stories on books, culture and art.

A 90s tale for the times

Veteran Tamil littérateur Indira Parthasarathy's political satire goes beyond mere fictionalising of real life

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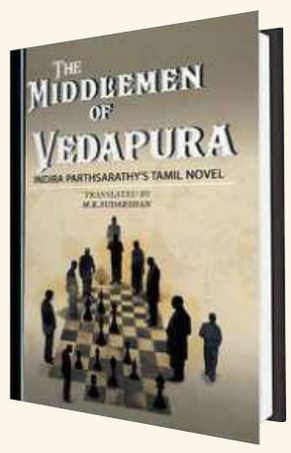
In his long literary career spanning over 60 years, veteran Tamil littérateur Indira Parthasarathy, commonly known as Ee. Paa, has produced many works that reflect social and political events in Tamil Nadu. His novel *Kurithi Punal*, written in the backdrop of the 1968 Keezhvenmani massacre of 44 persons belonging to Scheduled Castes, fetched him the Sahitya Akademi award in 1977.

A novelist-cum- playwright, Prof. Parthasarathy, who turns 95 on July 10, won the Saraswathi Samman in the late 1990s for his play *Ramanujar*, based on the life of the founder of the Vishishtadvaita philosophy, which propagated the concept of social harmony in South India in the 11th century. Another important play of his was *Aurangazeb*, written in the mid-70s, capturing one of the most eventful periods in Indian history.

His 90s novel *Vedhapuratthu Vyaabaarigal*, written at a time when Tamil Nadu experienced the eccentricities of those in political power, has now been translated by M.K. Sudarshan into English as *The Middlemen of Vedapura*.

Essentially a political satire, *The Middlemen of Vedapura* centres around a young woman, Apurva [the name of the granddaughters of Prof. Parthasarathy and his friend-littérateur Ashokamitran], who returns to Vedapura from abroad to rediscover her roots, and becomes a political player in the process, learning the tricks of the trade, and eventually mastering the art of survival in a field where deception and betrayal are the norms.

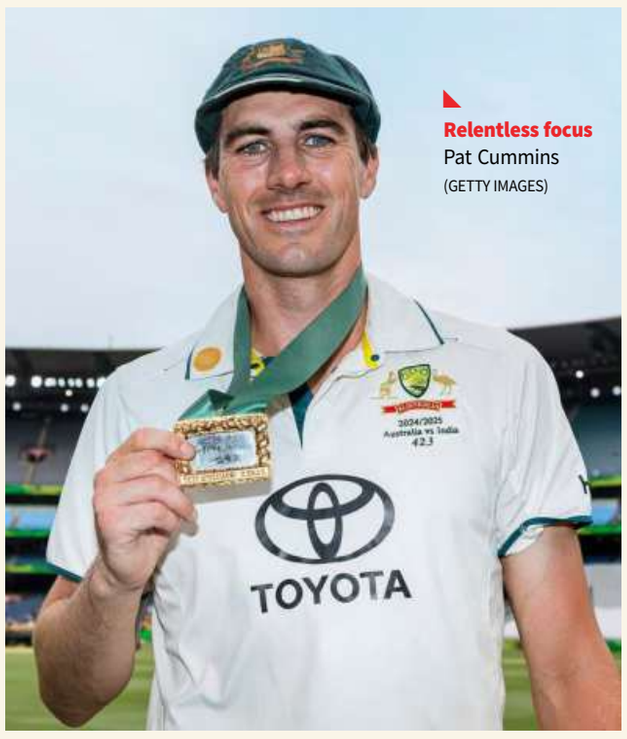
The plot would not be of interest to those who are not enamoured with politics but the narrative style and portrayal are engrossing. Notwithstanding certain striking similarities to political personalities that the country has seen, *The Middlemen of Vedapura* should not be viewed as a work that fictionalises real-life incidents. It goes beyond, and the translator has captured the spirit of the work very well.



The Middlemen of Vedapura
Indira Parthasarathy,
trs M.K. Sudarshan
BlueRose Publishers
₹499

The Cummins resolve

In his new book, the Aussie captain talks to people from diverse fields about life experiences and shares his own philosophy



Relentless focus
Pat Cummins
(GETTY IMAGES)

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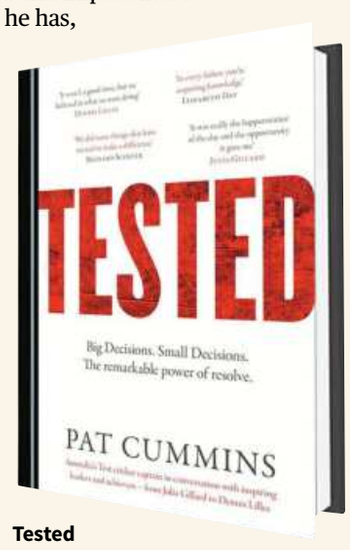
Fast bowlers are often lost in cliches like being fast and furious. There is a truth to these attributes, but often the descriptions tend to overlook their invisible thinking hats.

A Michael Holding can hold forth beautifully on cricket and the world until his daughter's phone-call interrupts and he becomes a loving dad. An Ian Bishop will stay abreast of the sport's evolution and latest stars. A Dennis Lillee will pen a magnificent treatise called *The Art of Fast Bowling*. In this list of speed merchants revealing intellect, Pat Cummins is the latest entrant.

The Australian spearhead and skipper's *Tested* is a book on decisions, choices, thoughts and instinct, and the way they all combine to shape and impact lives. Cummins, with the aura he has, could have easily written about himself but instead he declares: "I didn't want to focus on myself, as I might with a memoir."



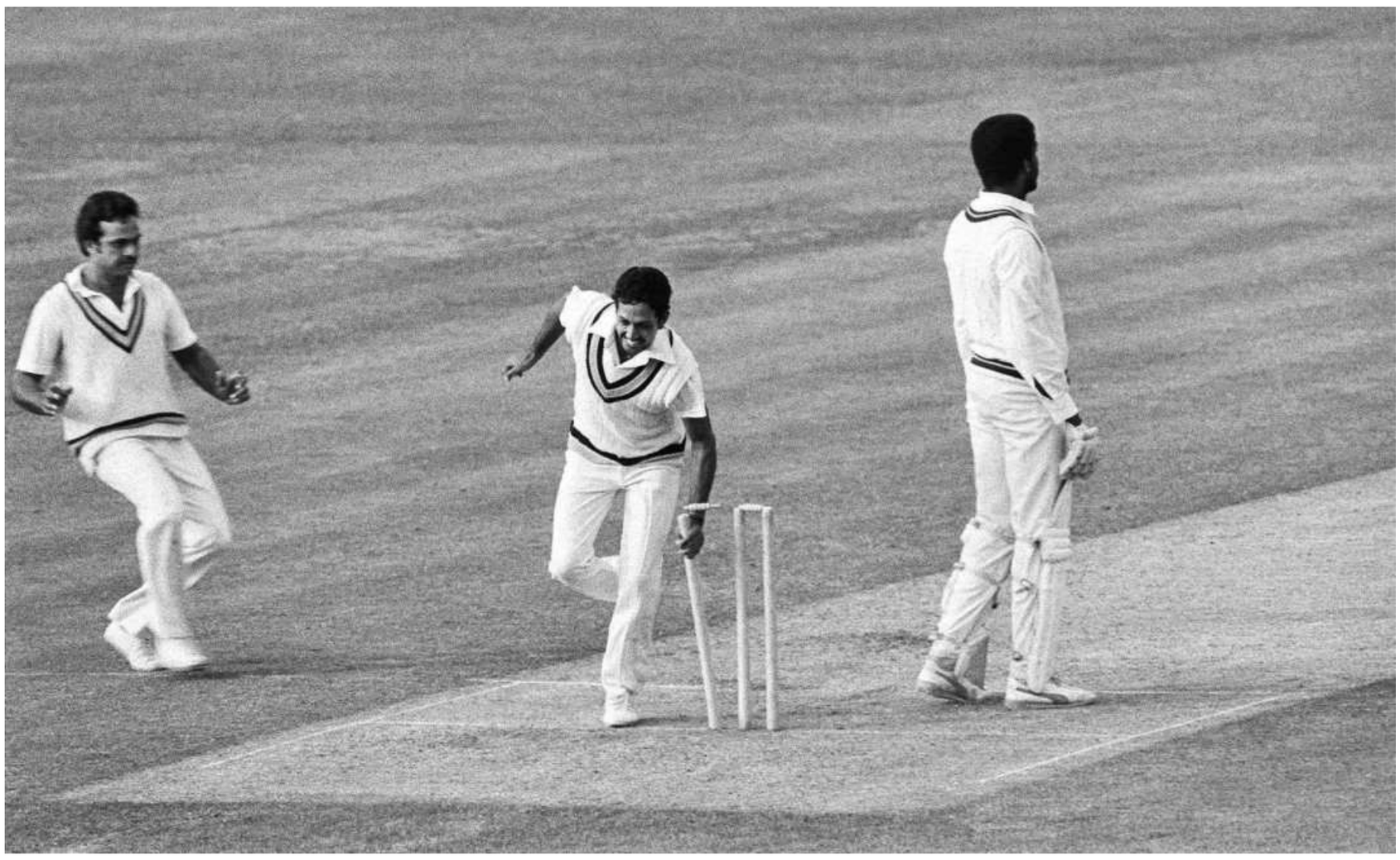
Tested
Pat Cummins
HarperCollins India
₹499

No man is an island

He meets people from diverse fields and probes verbally, and it is similar to what he does with either a red cherry or a white ball on the pitch. The tome is split into 11 chapters and every part is an extended conversation with an expert in their relevant field. In the beginning, Cummins writes: "All problems can be solved." It is a template he follows while leading the Aussie unit and it is also a theme all his interviewees adhere to without realising it consciously.

The assembly of luminaries is eclectic be it former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, cancer researcher Richard Scolyer, producer Ronnie Screwvala, Lillee, or even the author's spouse Becky. The structure is woven around informal questions and the answers are then juxtaposed with how Cummins himself has approached a few critical points, both in his life and in cricket.

Even if it is a book about the can-do-spirit evident in strong individuals, this is not like Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, a work of heavy fiction that celebrated staunch individualism, as Cummins is clear that "no one does anything alone". You could glean a philosophical nugget from any chapter, and therein lies the charm of this book.



NOT TELL-ALLS

The recent memoirs of Mohinder Amarnath and Syed Kirmani are conspicuous by the many silences on the life and times of the stars

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Athletes are image conscious, both during their playing days and long after. Some may want to be remembered for their high skill and art, some for their nature, both pleasing and rebellious, and some for the legacy they leave behind and the many lives they touch and careers they inspire.

And when athletes write memoirs, it is often a careful extension of this very image. They may be honest and forthright in their assessments of their own selves and the eras they played in and lived through, but all of it is bound by the persona that the sportspersons want to project.

Two recent books by Indian cricketing legends – *Fearless* by Mohinder Amarnath (with Rajender Amarnath) and *Stumped* by Syed Kirmani (with Debashish Sengupta and Dakshesh Pathak) – lend credence to this argument.

The stories, in fact, flow from the cover images. Amarnath's is of him executing the pull without the protection of a helmet, a shot synonymous with the batter and considered among the most daring strokes. The overarching theme in the book is of his many pitched battles against deadly fast bowlers like Malcolm Marshall, Michael Holding and Imran Khan, his many selection controversies, the machinations of the higher-ups and his multiple comebacks.

Kirmani's is a rather sedate and inexpressive photograph of him staidly waiting for the red cherry to nestle in his gloves. It seems like an ode to the book title, the tagline (Life Behind and Beyond the Twenty-Two Yards), and the sad fact that the great wicket-keeper's time in Test whites ended two shy of 200 dismissals.

Defining moments

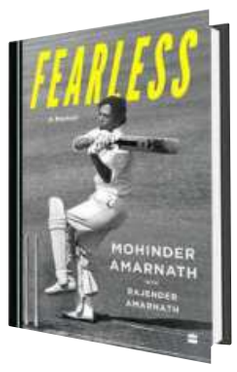
It helps that the defining moment in Amarnath's and Kirmani's careers is also the defining moment in India's cricket history – the 1983 World Cup triumph. Both men capture in rich detail the victory of Kapil Dev and his band of merry men over the marauding and all-conquering West Indian side led by Clive Lloyd.

Syed Kirmani during an India-England test match in Kolkata, January 1982; and (top) Mohinder Amarnath celebrates after taking the final wicket in the 1983 World Cup final in London. (GETTY IMAGES)

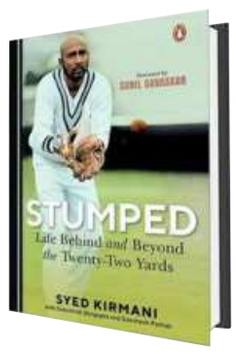
But where the works diverge is in how they lead up to the success. Amarnath, admittedly, had a storied upbringing, for he was the son of independent India's first Test captain Lala Amarnath. *Fearless* recounts vividly the growing up days of Amarnath junior and his two brothers (Surinder, an international cricketer, and Rajender, a First Class player) under the giant shadow of their father and his steadfast goal to make Test cricketers out of all three.

Amarnath's journey is laid out meticulously and chronologically, chapter by chapter, from tour to tour. There are also charming anecdotes from his childhood and school-cricket days that bring more than a chuckle, including the one where he escapes to Delhi from his boarding school in Jalandhar in a crowded train, hungry and with little money.

Kirmani's, in contrast, zooms. Where it takes Amarnath 254 pages to reach the seminal point of his cricketing life (the 1983 win), Kirmani arrives in 35. This is, in fact, the biggest quibble one can have with the book – along with multiple factual inaccuracies, a feature, to a lesser degree, of *Fearless* too – for it limits Kirmani's retelling of his entire career to just 74 pages! The 90-odd sheets that follow are biographical accounts of the man. Surely, someone who played 88 Tests – 19 more than Amarnath – in a short span of just 10 years had more to tell?



Fearless
Mohinder Amarnath with Rajender Amarnath
Harper Collins India
₹799



Stumped
Syed Kirmani with Debashish Sengupta and Dakshesh Pathak
Penguin India
₹499

A glaring miss

But history informs us that as much as memoirs are dressed up and promoted as 'tell-alls', they are also conspicuous by their many silences. What both books lack is a compelling picture of the eras Amarnath and Kirmani played their cricket in. While the volumes are no doubt windows into their respective sporting lives, they could have also shed more light on the culture of the sport back in the day.

In the aftermath of India's 1983 World Cup win, the West Indies landed in India and blanked the hosts 3-0 in Tests (six-match series) and 5-0 in One Day Internationals as Marshall and Holding ran riot.

In his six visits to the crease in Tests, Amarnath, a hero of the tour to the West Indies earlier in 1983, bagged five ducks. Lloyd's men were in India for nearly three months. Amarnath has given it the short shrift and dedicated all of four pages out of 428. Another jarring note, quite at odds with the title of the book, is his reluctance to name players and officials whose many acts and deeds he didn't approve of.

Memoirs can also be for reflection and catharsis, and used as a tool to eventually make peace with all that happened. But *Fearless* and *Stumped* don't necessarily offer a sense of closure, both for Amarnath and Kirmani, and the reader.

B is for birder

Unpacking portraits of rare and extinct birds, and the people who observe them

Neha Sinha

Rarity is a magnet," writes ornithologist Aasheesh Pittie in *The Search for India's Rarest Birds*, "for both charlatans and connoisseurs."

What makes a bird rare? Why do we covet the thing that is rare? These are some of the questions this engaging book tries to unpack as it draws portraits of birds that are rare and possibly extinct (such as the bird on the cover, the Jerdon's courser, and the Pink-headed duck), or are rare but relatively abundant in their habitats (Nicobar scops owl, Mrs. Hume's pheasant).

What makes this book, edited by Shashank Dalvi and Anita Mani, different is that it approaches the subject of rarity and vulnerability not through tedium and doom, but through a sense of wonder and exploration.

The 12 chapters have a selection of birds that have been chosen through different forms of observation: the Pink-headed duck chapter by Pittie talks about how the bird was formally described based on a painting of Indian specimens; art led to science. Ornithologist Pamela Rasmussen studied taxidermied forest owlets in the U.K. and the U.S.; she pursued the bird in the forests of Maharashtra; and a strange taxidermied model led to the rediscovery of the real bird.

End is priceless

"Twitchers [birdwatchers who collect sightings of rare birds] are a possessed soul - we act first and think later," writes birder Atul Jain. "Having an understanding partner who gives you a hard time for every single crazy, last-minute trip but always relents in the end is priceless," he writes. Jain's chapter is like a manual for how to set about a network for birding – how to prepare logistically and mentally for finding a rarity.

The Search for India's Rarest Birds
Edited by Shashank Dalvi, Anita Mani
Indian Pitta/Juggernaut
₹499

'Waiting, sweating'

In his chapter on Nicobar scops owl, wildlife biologist Dalvi introduces the reader to a similar premise - a lot of the work for birding starts before the actual fact. "For years I had been chatting about my birding plans with one of my close friends James Eaton, because quite simply, that is what birders do." He adds: one has to do homework, hard work and have a good prediction of habitat and timing.

In another chapter set in the Nicobar islands, journalist Radhika Raj writes evocatively on the Nicobar megapode, an endangered bird that builds huge mounds where it lays eggs.

Found only in India, the megapode has huge feet that check the temperature of the mound. This wasn't an easy bird to see, especially as the group got attacked by sandflies. There was lots of "waiting, sweating and nothing". Things changed though, as she saw it on the very last day of a three-week wait. "The seemingly ordinary *jungli murgi*... won us over."

When I opened this book, I expected to find historical records of white men and their *shikar* in South Asia. It is enriching to find instead a book that is modern. Most importantly, though the birds are coveted, they are not trophies – each piece wraps fondness and field work for the avian object of affection in a manner that suggests care, not conquest.

This gives hope that we are a long way away from the days of hunting birds so they could be stuffed and laid in drawing rooms. You might come away learning some bird and birder idiosyncrasies in this book; you may even come away fledging from a reader to a birder.

The reviewer is a conservation biologist and author of Wild and Wilful-Tales of 15 Iconic Indian Species

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

IT'S NOT AN INDIAN SUMMER IN CANNES

Other films that were screened included Kher's *Tanvi The Great*, Neeraj Churi's queer film *Sabar Bonda*, and *Biriyaani* director Sajin Baabu's *Theater: The Myth of Reality*. While the Pavilion's schedule was packed, one sore point remained that the movies in competition never get enough notice here. An insider observed that the attention reserved for market films (the Marché du Film section) is rarely shared with festival section movies that have earned their entry. In other words, only establishment friendly films were being promoted.

Marché du Film is also where producers pay to have private screening of their films for bragging rights, and as expected, hopeful Indian producers were flitting in and out of meetings to market their work. "It has been back-breaking and intense but also a gorgeously invigorating festival," said Smriti Kiran, founder and director of the newly launched production company Polka Dots LightBox.

"As a fairly new film producer and buyer, I spent my time doing meetings, pitching, attending workshops, conversation sessions, shadowing producers and throwing myself into sidebar events to understand the world of co-productions, film grants, distribution and acquisition avenues, script labs and film professional networks that exist across the world," added Kiran.

Interestingly, any promotion of the only Indian film in competition, *Homebound*, was conspicuously absent from the festival schedule, though the Pavilion hosted an unplanned last-minute session with Ghaywan and producer Karan Johar, just before the film's premiere. "The biggest change for India this year at the festival is that Payal Kapadia broke the glass ceiling, and she made it possible for Indian movies to be noticed," Ghaywan observed.

Selfie time The *Mission: Impossible* team on the red carpet at Cannes 2025. (GETTY IMAGES)

For the film's lead actor, Ishaan Khatter, fresh from the publicity of his new Netflix series *The Royals*, Cannes was a "full circle" moment. "Cannes being the Mecca of film festivals, it was always a dream to go there with a film. It's everything and more I could have hoped for. The energy there was so beautiful, people genuinely care about cinema with a passion," he said.

Another notable appearance at Cannes was by director Honey Trehan, to drum up support for his 2023 film, *Punjab '95*. Trehan's biopic of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, starring Diljit Dosanjh, was announced as a line-up at the 2023 Toronto Film Festival, before being pulled out, and is yet to be released in India over censorship troubles.

Trehan said his urgent need was to not let the buzz around the film die and to clear a path for at least an international release. "It's not just my film," said the filmmaker. "Movies like *Santosh* [which had its world premiere in the Un Certain Regard section at Cannes last year, where it received positive reviews], have also not been released in India because the government feels the subject is controversial. Throttling artistic freedom in the name of censorship is detrimental to good art. Good cinema needs to reflect historical truths and lived realities of our people."

Leading to the Oscar buzz

At Cannes, sometimes contenders that could win the prestigious Palme d'Or take their time to emerge during the two weeks of the festival. At the time of this article going to press, a Ukrainian film called *Two Prosecutors*, about life in the Soviet Union under Stalin's rule, was creating a buzz for the big prize, according to the critics jury grid by *Screen* magazine. The same could be said of Iranian auteur Jafar Panahi's *It Was Just an Accident*, with the director himself travelling to Cannes, a rarity that attracted much attention.

This year there were 22 films in the main competition section dominated by Hollywood and European movies, with two Iranian films, one Japanese film and one Brazilian film in the roster. Several festival goers, however, weren't fully convinced about the output.

"This is a festival about which I am very divided," said Freddy Savalle, a legal executive with a French production company. "The Japanese offered contemplative films that bored me considerably, but there has been a very good selection of French and even Belgian movies. What I regret, and it is often the case every year, is that the festival invites prestigious directors, who have nothing new to say, or who repeat themselves, like Wes Anderson, for example. They are invited only because they are big stars and because they have had success in the past," he said.

> **I have never had an opportunity to watch all the festival** competition films in the past because when you have a movie, you are focused on your thing. So, to see this whole curation and discuss it with the jury team has been wonderful
>
> **PAYAL KAPADIA** whose film *All We Imagine As Light* won the Grand Prix at Cannes last year

Anderson's film, an adventure caper in his typical idiosynchratic fashion, came with gorgeous sets and excellent casting as expected, and a tiresomely familiar narrative. Critics were divided. According to BBC's Nicholas Barber, "The good news is that *The Phoenician Scheme* is one of Anderson's funnier films, with a commitment to knockabout zaniness which lets you smile at the Anderson-ishness rather than simply roll your eyes at it."

Whether the Cannes to Oscar pipeline will come to pass this year like last is too early to tell. There wasn't an *Anora* or *Emilia Perez* yet, but among the promising films premiered was queer drama, *The History of Sound*, by Oliver Hermanus; *Mastermind* by American indie darling Kelly Reichardt; and *Woman and Child* by the Iranian director Saeed Roustaee.

Closer home, will Ghaywan's *Homebound*, for instance, replicate the success of his debut film, *Masaan*? "It might sound like a cliché but I genuinely do not expect the film to win anything," Ghaywan said. "I don't want to put any pressures or expectations on it, I'm just very glad it's here because I think it deserves to be," added Khatter. Even if *Homebound* didn't win anything, Bollywood can be proud it produced these talents.

The writer is a Düsseldorf, Germany-based journalist.

Cultural stewardship (Clockwise from far left) Artist Paritosh Sen photographed by Bhatt; *The Tree* (etching, 1978); Jyoti Bhatt at work; and *Me, Dreaming Young* etching. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

JYOTI BHATT

THE ART OF CIVIC MEMORY

The retrospective curated by Rekha Rodwittiya underlines why the painter and printmaker's refusal to isolate art from its social contexts is relevant even today

Aastha D.

At 91, Jyoti Bhatt still works from his Baroda studio, engrossed in painting, analogue photography and printmaking. The studio is quiet but alive, filled with etched plates, photographic prints, and the gentle persistence of a lifelong practice.

For over a month, *Through the Line and the Lens*, a landmark retrospective curated by contemporary artist and his student Rekha Rodwittiya (first at Bikaner House and now on exhibit at Latitude 28), has offered more than a tribute to the modernist artist. Featuring decades of work, the exhibition, the largest to date, is a reminder to us that art holds our rituals, resistances, and everyday textures as forms of remembering. And that Bhatt has spent a lifetime recording them.

Knowing the artist

Bhatt's influence runs deep – in how we see pattern, archive the everyday, and build art education in India. He did this not through grand proclamations, but by treating the ordinary as worthy of artistic inquiry. His photographic documentation of rural Indian culture recorded for posterity motifs, mural fragments, and the lives of craftspeople with the same care afforded to fine art.

Born in 1934, he came of age with the nation, studied in Baroda, trained in Naples and New York, and returned to shape a distinctly Indian visual grammar. "I didn't set out to make overt political or social statements, but having grown up in a constantly shifting socio-cultural landscape, those experiences naturally seeped into my visual language," explains Bhatt.

As a founding figure of the Baroda School, he wasn't just an artist – he was an institution-builder, whose teaching and practice gave form to how generations would learn, make, and see. This meant designing curricula that integrated Indian aesthetics with global techniques, encouraging interdisciplinary work, and mentoring students to develop their own voices.

Discrediting systems of elitism

When painting dominated modernist imagination, Bhatt turned to printmaking, then considered minor, and made it affordable, replicable, and subversive. Later, he took to photography with the same care. He spent years building a visual archive – not just of his own work, but of his peers and the communities he admired – quietly preserving traditions that were at risk of vanishing.

"Printmaking and photography enabled me to bridge aesthetics with accessibility," he says. Both mediums became ways of remembering. "Today, with digital technologies, these mediums continue to serve as powerful, democratic tools – challenging hierarchies and expanding the boundaries of contemporary Indian art," he adds.

For Bhatt, art and pedagogy were inseparable. At M.S. University, Baroda, he had a long and formative career as a teacher – building institutions through critical dialogue, collective workshops, and a refusal to isolate art from its social and material contexts. His legacy lives in the questions he posed, the tools he passed on, such as techniques in intaglio printmaking, field-based research, and ways of visually coding memory through symbolic motifs.

He renders them with humour, sharpness, and sometimes irony. In one print, a goddess stands beside a consumer logo; in another, a parrot speaks with near-human mischief.

"In the graphic prints we see how Bhatt often uses subversive inflections as a means by which he positions his politics, and the critique he has of establishments that he views as retrogressive to the ideals of pluralism and liberal thinking," says Rodwittiya. She sees this not as polemic, but as quiet dissent – delivered through linework, wit, and deeply embedded references.

Why he matters

Through his work and teaching, Bhatt reminds us that institutions matter – as ecosystems of exchange, care, and critique. In a time when the formal study of art is undervalued, his life's work is a blueprint for what thoughtful, long-view cultural stewardship can look like. For instance, his collaborative efforts to bring rural and urban practices into the same academic frame helped dismantle narrow hierarchies of knowledge.

Bhatt's prints are more than ink on paper – they are maps of how a country might come to know itself.

'Through the Line and the Lens' *concludes today at Latitude 28.*

The essayist and educator writes on design and culture.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

Saikat Majumdar

DARK SIDE OF HUNGARY'S NATIONALISM

From a proud identity shaped by literature and language to a government that suppresses individual rights, the central European nation's policies spur concerns

As I walked across the iconic Chain Bridge that joins Buda to Pest, the sharply uniformed Hungarian cops brought me to a halt. The lively district of Pest that hosted the clubs and restaurants of Budapest was closed to pedestrians. It was not a scene I imagined in a western country. But it was a reckoning with the dark authority of a nation with a communist past that could close off roads to the public to secure smooth passage for a political VIP.

That VIP was Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, whose visit to Hungary in April coincided with the central European nation exiting the International Criminal Court (ICC). Following the war in Gaza, Netanyahu was labelled a war criminal by most European countries. In Hungary, however, he was welcomed by his old friend, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who had proudly declared, "The new state we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state."

Seven bridges across the Danube river connect Buda, the quieter castle district, with Pest, the happening district for shopping, clubbing, and dining. The very next day, I looked from Pest towards Buda to see another bridge blocked by thousands of protesters demonstrating against the banning of Pride March in Hungary.

Restricting queer rights

My friend Jeroen Maassen van den Brink, who lives in Budapest with his husband René, tells me that in Orban's Hungary, homosexuality has become closely associated with paedophilia, following Act LXXIX that went into effect on July 8, 2021. On March 18, 2025, the Hungarian parliamentpassed a law banning any public demonstration of queer identity, once again aligning it to the government's "child protection" laws.

The future of liberal sexual policy, as Jeroen sees it, is bleak in Hungary. "We know that the government policies are less in favour of queer lifestyles and expressions, but we believe that being a part of the European Union will still safeguard our fundamental rights," he says. "But we see a lack of support in the form of queer-friendly places, or demonstrations for equal rights that are supported by all. We hear queer Hungarians are moving abroad, leaving behind a more conservative population."

The last few niches, therefore, become precious – we go to Aurora in the 8th district for beer and unicum (a Hungarian herbal liqueur), and amidst the haze of smoky substance, I sense chilled out vibes that are now hard to find in the famous coffee shops in Budapest. "With the upcoming 2026 elections, we do not see a change in the political scenery nor a reversal of the anti-LGBTQIA+ laws that have been put in place since 2021," says Jeroen.

Of language lost

How did a nation that formed a brave and unique national identity shaped by heroic literature and a strikingly revived language become Europe's most frightening instance of illiberal democracy? I remember pausing before the cemetery of the family of Sándor Petőfi, Hungary's national poet, at the Kerepesi cemetery in Budapest earlier in April. Killed in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, his body never recovered (the graves hold the rest of his family), Petőfi wrote the famous line, "On your feet, Magyar, the homeland calls." It became the patriotic war cry of the Magyars, Hungary's dominant ethnic group, against the domination of the Habsburg Empire, up to the crushed revolution of 1848. It was indeed a nationalism shaped by language and literature.

Public life Protest scenes across Budapest over the past couple of months, after the Hungarian Parliament passed a series of laws (including one banning public demonstration of queer identity). (GETTY IMAGES)

Song, music, language and literature are often the most prized possessions, instruments or weapons for peoples, nations, and communities drained dry by oppressors. The inescapable irony of such maimed nationalisms is that, in their fury to fight their oppressor, they don't notice the oppression that they inflict on people weaker than them. Anyone familiar with the Francophone nationalism in Canada's Quebec that fought the national dominance of the English language, knows the Quebecois rarely talk about the indigenous people wiped out from the history of the province.

Likewise with the Boers of South Africa, the descendants of Dutch settlers. Blinded by the violence of the 20th century Anglo-Boer War in which the English crushed them, the Boers asserted the only thing left to them, their white skin, to initiate apartheid rule so that they could champion an aggressive nationalism that excluded the black, brown, and coloured people of South Africa.

Forgotten legacy of poets and critics

Uniquely positioned in Central Europe, Hungary had pursued a rare heroic path to turn a marginal, peasant vernacular into a language of literary and scientific prestige. An intelligentsia that spoke and wrote in German eventually turned to Hungarian to create poets like Petőfi, the language reformist Ferenc Kazinczy, and the literary critic György Lukács, who wrote scholarly books in German alongside accounts of his vibrant public intellectual life in Hungarian.

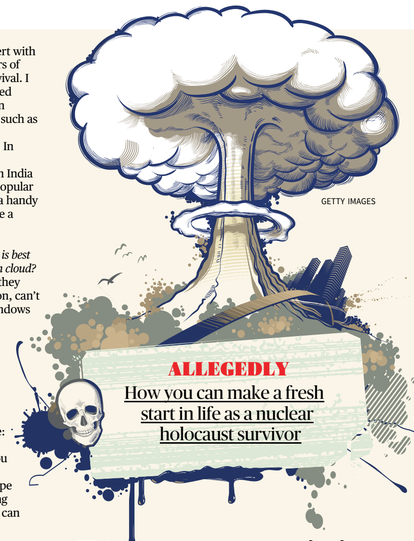
It was a nation that had suffered many times over. Dismemberment into scattered parts – some of it in current Romania – was the price it paid for being on the wrong side of the First World War. After World War II, "liberation" by the Russians cast the country from Hitler to Stalin, with thousands killed by Russian tanks in the counter-revolution of 1956.

But, standing among the Communist-marked graves in the Kerepesi cemetery, the trinity of the hammer-sickle-star reminiscent of my own childhood in Communist Bengal, my heart felt wrenched at the current destiny of this traumatic memory. It now drives the aggressive nationalism of Orbán's Fidesz Party that spews venom at its own Roma gypsy population, tramples on the rights of queer people, and welcomes a war criminal in the ICC to a glorious celebration in its capital that blocks the passage of pedestrians on its spacious streets.

The writer is the author of The Firebird, The Scent of God, *and most recently,* The Remains of the Body.

ALLEGEDLY

How you can make a fresh start in life as a nuclear holocaust survivor



GETTY IMAGES

FAQs on surviving a nuclear attack

I am a survival expert with more than 40 years of experience in survival. I have produced unlimited quantities of content on surviving catastrophes such as earthquake, tsunami, pandemic and fascism. In view of the recent disagreements between India and Pakistan, and on popular demand, I am sharing a handy guide on how to survive a nuclear explosion.

Q: *Which phone camera is best for shooting a mushroom cloud?*
A: Most people, when they hear a nuclear explosion, can't resist opening their windows to make an Insta reel with the legendary mushroom cloud as backdrop. The temptation is understandable, since this is likely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. My advice: don't waste your time on it. Why? Because you can't really see the elegant mushroom shape if you are actually sitting inside that mushroom, can you?

Q: *Reading is my hobby. How many books can I pack in my evacuation trunk?*
A: Ideally, your evacuation bag (not trunk) should only contain your passport, three water bottles, a flashlight, a first aid kit, and half a million dollars in cash (just in case the rupee crashes). It's true that with the Internet down, you'll have time on your hands. But resist the temptation to pack 10-12 books. If you must, there is one classic that should take care of all your reading requirements: *How to Think and Grow Rich in a Country Ruined by War* by Napoleon Hell. It is full of insights, and like war, it never gets old.

Q: *I would like to pack some dosa batter in my emergency suitcase. Which brand can best withstand nuclear radiation?*
A: Sorry, no liquids in the emergency bag (not suitcase). What if your *dosa* batter leaks and ruins your passport? However, you can pack as much Mysore *pak* as you like – it contains micronutrients that insulate the pancreas from electromagnetic waves. That's why doctors tell you not to eat Mysore *pak* for 24 hours before USB ultrasound of abdomen.

Q: *Once the nuclear dust settles down, I want to tell my pro-war friends, 'I told you so! War has no winners. Admit it, you are all morons!' Is that ok?*
A: No! You're making a fresh start in life as a nuclear holocaust survivor, and the first thing you want to do is win a petty argument? Every person is entitled to their opinions, even if they are downright stupid and dangerous ones that would likely kill the person holding those opinions.

Q: *My grandmother says I can protect myself from radiation-induced cancer by regularly drinking a potion made out of ashwagandha, tulsi, brahmi, amla, triphala, turmeric, and licorice root. Will this potion work?*
A: What about adding cardamom, bitter melon, cumin, *gotu kola* and *Boswellia* also to your potion? There may not be any scientific research that says they'll protect you from cancer but that doesn't mean they won't. Make sure not to leave out any Ayurvedic herb sold in the market.

Q: *I searched on Google Maps for 'nuclear shelters near me'. Nothing came up. What should I do?*
A: India has a big population. Just because a large section of it likes war doesn't mean the government is obliged to build nuclear shelters for 1.46 billion people. Please remember we are a market economy. If there is demand, the supply will come, and indeed, India already has world class construction firms that are selling ready-to-move in luxury bunkers (currently available only in Gurugram and Jorbagh). These don't come cheap, but history tells us the richer you are, the higher your chances of surviving catastrophe.

Q: *I am thinking of booking a 5-BHK apartment in an ultra-luxury multipurpose underground shelter. The builder says they have 27 million cubic feet of storage space for stocking essentials and is promising a self-sustained dwelling environment with the "exact feel of your life above ground" for up to five years. They even showed us a 3D rendition of the bunker. I liked everything except for one thing: there is hardly any natural light coming in the living room. Should I still pay the token amount?*
A: There are far better builders in India when it comes to promises. Just look around for one who promises natural light in a shelter that's 70 ft. underground.

Q: *I have an elaborate plan with foolproof protocols and arrangements to survive a nuclear strike. So why am I still feeling stressed out about it?*
A: As Mike Tyson said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." If it was up to me, I would plan on not getting into a fist fight in the first place.

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

ILLUSTRATION: ZAINAB TAMBAWALLA

A LITTLE LIFE

PHUPHEE MAKES GANDHI'S FAVOURITE

And how the humble *alle* was employed to banish a 'demon' and give a woman special powers

Many years ago, on a crisp spring afternoon, I was sitting with Phuphee peeling *alle* (bottle gourd). Whenever she cooked *alle*, in any form, she would never fail to mention Gandhi*ji* and how it was his favourite *syun* (dish).

When Phuphee wasn't present, other family members would often laugh about it, poking fun at how it was something she had made up. To this day, no one has been able to work out if there is any truth in it.

The *alle* we were peeling had been sourced fresh from Phuphee's kitchen garden. She was planning to make *alle yakhni* (chunks of bottle gourd cooked in a velvety mint yogurt sauce). While working, Phuphee asked one of the household help, Aisha, to make some *kahwa* for the guests. Aisha looked confused as there were no guests present at the house.

'They will come,' Phuphee told her.

I looked out of the kitchen window and couldn't see anyone in the garden, but experience had taught me that if Phuphee said guests were coming, they would definitely arrive. Half an hour later, there were people at the gate. They were shown into the guest room and served *kahwa*. After a little while, Phuphee and I went to greet them.

There were two families sitting in the guest room. One of the elderly gentlemen got up and spoke, 'Dear sister, we have come with a very grave matter. You must help us. My enemies have done their best to ruin my family.'

'Tell me what I can do to help you,' Phuphee replied.

'Our daughter-in-law,' he said, pointing to the young woman who sat silently with her head down, 'has been possessed. One of my enemies has cast the most evil of spells on her. A week ago, during dinner, my wife and I complained that the *alle* she had made was quite hard and not cooked properly. The words had not left my lips, sister, that our daughter-in-law got up and started shouting and screaming. She said that we had not taught our son how to pick good quality vegetables from the shop, and that she had only cooked what he had brought home, and that we should complain to him instead. She went as far as to say that we should now teach him these things. She says that we have failed to impart good homemaking knowledge to him, and she refuses to come back unless he is taught to buy vegetables.' He was almost frothing by the end of the story.

Phuphee looked at the young woman and asked her to come forward.

'Is this true?' Phuphee asked her.

'Yes, it is. I will not go back unless he too learns certain things. How to choose vegetables is just one of them,' she replied confidently.

'What else must he learn before you agree to go back home?' Phuphee asked.

'Dear sister, you cannot be serious in asking...,' the father-in-law broke in, but Phuphee raised her hand, silencing him.

'Tell me,' Phuphee asked the young woman again.

She took a deep breath and said, 'He must learn to maintain the washroom in the condition he has found it. When he returns home from work, he must fold his clothes and put them away neatly. There are certain things he has to do around the house – he must remember to do them without me reminding him to do them because I will not be called a nag. Once he has learnt to do all these, I will go back home. Otherwise, I refuse,' she said, pursing her lips.

Phuphee sat silently for a while and said, 'I guess there is only one thing to do.'

The father-in-law got up and asked if they should all stay or leave while she exorcised the demon.

'There will be no exorcism. I need to ask one question, and the answer will solve this problem,' Phuphee replied.

She asked the young man to step forward. 'Tell me, do you think you can learn these things that your wife asks?' Phuphee asked him.

'I think so. I can try,' he stammered, giving his wife a shy glance.

'Have you lost your mind?' his father roared, scaring his son a little.

'I think that is decided then. Once you learn the things that she wants you to learn, you may go to her *maalyun* [maternal home] and bring her back.'

With that Phuphee got up and left the room to return to her cooking. Everyone else sat there, a little stunned, some overwhelmed and some underwhelmed, by what had just happened.

Later that evening, after a delicious meal of hot rice and *alle yakhni*, I asked Phuphee why she hadn't just put a spell on the elderly gentleman since he was clearly the one in the wrong.

'Well, I could have done that, but today I cooked *gandhijiyun syun* [Gandhi*ji*'s dish]. I couldn't possibly use violence in any form,' she said, winking. I couldn't figure out if she was being serious or pulling my leg.

'Also,' she continued, 'if I had done that then I would have lost the opportunity to help them help each other. They just needed a little nudge in the right direction,' she said.

In the village, the news spread like wild fire, about how the young woman had a demon so powerful at her disposal that she could bend her husband's will. A few days later, I would see people – men and women – walk around her, as if the very air around her was poisoned.

But then something slowly changed. A few months later, I saw her in the market, and though the men treated her with the same disdain, the women did not. They treated her with what can only be described as some sort of reverence.

Later at home, I asked Aisha about it and she mentioned how the women from the village would go to the young woman and ask her for the secret words that Phuphee had given to her. They would lean in close, and if you happened to be near enough to witness it, you could sense their hearts beating a little faster at the prospect of having a spouse who would listen, rather than just hear them.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Good inference

East-West vulnerable, East deals

Bob Jones

West found the most effective lead of a diamond, and South captured East's king with the ace. There was no time to lead a spade, or the defense would set up their diamonds before South could go after the clubs. South needed some luck in the club suit. If the club suit provided four tricks, South might be able to get three needed tricks from the heart suit. South led the ace of clubs from his hand, pleased to see the king fall from West. A club to dummy's queen was followed by the jack of hearts, covered with the king and won with the ace. South led a club to dummy's eight and East's jack, and East returned a diamond to declarer's queen.

West had led the five of diamonds and played the three on the second round. This carding made it look like West started with five diamonds. South was planning to lead a heart to his nine, but he cashed dummy's clubs first. West had discarded two spades on clubs already, and now he discarded two more spades. West had to keep his hearts and his established diamonds. South played close attention to the discards and read the position beautifully. Instead of a heart to the nine, South led dummy's last diamond. West cashed his diamonds, but then led a heart into declarer and South made his contract. West could not have shed a diamond and kept a spade, or South could have forced a spade trick.

NORTH
♠ K Q 5
♡ J 7
◇ 10 4 2
♣ Q 10 8 6 4

WEST
♠ 8 7 4 2
♡ 10 8 5
◇ J 7 6 5 3
♣ K

EAST
♠ A J 10
♡ K 6 4 2
◇ K 9 8
♣ J 9 5

SOUTH
♠ 9 6 3
♡ A Q 9 3
◇ A Q
♣ A 7 3 2

The bidding:

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1♣	1NT	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All pass	

Opening lead: Five of ◇

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

All about towels!

The *oshibori* is a special towel that plays an important role in Japan's famed hospitality. (GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley

1 May 25 is celebrated as 'Towel Day' to honour the works of author Douglas Adams. It is a reference to a towel being the most useful thing in the universe for a traveller.

You can wrap yourself in it, lie on it, use it for combat, wrap it around your head to ward of fumes, wave it as a form of distress signal and, of course, dry yourself with it. What form of traveller (whom the book is about) does Adams say needs to carry a towel?

2 Although towels have been around for centuries, the invention of the type of flat, woven piece of cotton for the purpose of drying, started in the 17th century. Known as *peshtamel*, they were used in baths called *hammams* in a particular country. This led to the modern popularity of what type of towel?

3 The *oshibori* is a special towel that plays an important role in the renowned hospitality of Japan. It is typically used to clean the guest's hands before a meal. What is special about this towel, which is quite opposite to its usual use?

4 Linen Technology Tracking is an American company that makes washable RFID chips specifically for use in towels. These can be tracked using an app and, thanks to them, certain places save $16,000 a month. In which places are these towels found?

5 These towels are designed to be extremely soft, highly absorbent and gentle on the skin. They also have a very soft hood, which can cover the head. That's why, though small, they are expensive. What towels are these?

6 These towels have been made since the 1960s and are very effective in capturing dust and dirt. Their name comes from the fact that the synthetic fabric has a diameter of less than 10 micrometres. What towels are these, which do not leave behind lint?

7 The beach towel was first introduced in the late 19th century. Before that, people used to lay down regular towels on the sand. In 1897, Thomas James patented the first beach towel, which was designed to be larger and more comfortable for lounging on the beach. Under which prolific inventor was James working when he came up with this idea?

8 This specific type of towel is made from thin, flattened, and densely woven linen or cotton. It first came into use in the 18th century among upper-class English ladies. Their main purpose is to cover hot, baked products. What towels are these, which painter Van Gogh used as a canvas?

9 The towels made for this particular profession are usually pre-moistened, have some disinfectant, and are then packed tightly into a tiny pouch. They are super-absorbent and designed to be used multiple times. What towels are these that, at any point, about seven people are using in the world?

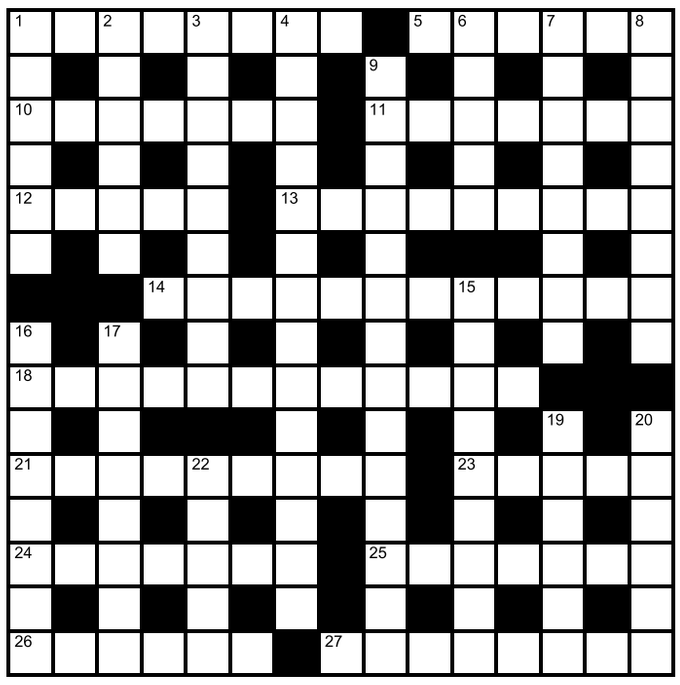
10 This is a modern art form, which is supposed to have been born on board Carnival Cruise Lines in 1990. A Thai housekeeper used this method on the clothes of the guests and then their clean towels. What art form is this, which is now popular in resorts?

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

Answers

1. A hitchhiker
2. Turkey towel
3. It is a wet towel
4. Hotel towels (to stop guests taking them)
5. Baby towels
6. Microfibre
7. Thomas Alva Edison
8. Tea towel
9. Space towels used by astronauts
10. Towel Origami (making towels into animal forms)

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 5 (Set by Arden)



Across

1 Little grebe's no good, returning in weekend (8)
5 Managed the police department that's gone bad (6)
10 Lines crossed filling empty pitcher of beer (7)
11 Faces death, sure shot (7) 12 Wise man takes time to guide (5)
13 Just teach in another language, first of all (9)
14 With weapon criminal scared to follow our money carriers (8,4)
18 Commanding height Patton gave in exchange (7,5)
21 Tend to bottle anger, northern Irish moss? (9)
23 Spare glove let out (5)
24 Left exposed – terrible fiend, this Turkish official (7)
25 Happiness in reviewing the number one story (7)
26 Squeeze both sides briefly – do they produce oil? (6)
27 Aliens catching cold, are heading west among others (2,6)

Down

1 Measure to include record discharge (6)
2 Risk cover for entire Swan Lake, perhaps (6)
3 Payments for American privilege accompanied by a song (9)
4 Can recognise vaguely - is it how the tumor starts? (14)
6 Steps to take the head off the snake (5)
7 Prime number? (8)
8 Show record miss (8)
9 Attack corner building - not vacant to be let out cheaply (10,4)
15 Run down and study before a tiger is shot (9) 1
6 First lady's got a hint about people shifted from danger zones (8)
17 Joins Steffi in nets to play (8)
19 Chill with tailless cat on top of stone (6)
20 Empty street, again zebra lines are in a group (6)
22 Latin year represented in Boolean numbers (5)

SOLUTION NO. 4

	L	O	N	G	S	U	F	F	E	R	I	N	G	
		D		R		P		L		A		U		
S	C	O	R	E		P	R	E	A	M	B	L	E	S
M		R		Y		E		S		P		L		L
A	B	O	N	M	A	R	C	H	E		I	S	L	E
L		U		A				P		S		E		E
L	U	S	T	R	E	S		O	V	E	R	T	O	P
C				K		E		T		V				E
H	A	S	B	E	E	N		S	M	A	C	K	E	R
A		U		T		T				S		N		C
N	O	R	M		M	I	N	E	S	T	R	O	N	E
G		R		H		E		T		O		W		L
E	V	E	R	Y	I	N	C	H		P	E	T	A	L
		A		P		C		I		O		H		
	B	L	U	E	P	E	N	C	I	L	L	E	D	

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

With books for company

For many a youngster, a visit to a library has been a life-changing episode

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Back in the late 1970s, our small town was proud to have a fairly large government-run public library. Nestled in one corner of our school premises, it operated from eight in the morning until eight in the evening, with a four-hour break in between. The library was presided over by a highly respected librarian – a reserved Gandhian in his mid-fifties, always dressed in a neatly pressed white kurta and dhoti.

Whenever he had free time, he would be found deeply engrossed in a book at his desk. Periodically, he would rise and patrol the aisles, as if invigilating an examination. Even the faintest whispers seemed to catch his attention, so we children were compelled to maintain absolute silence – quite an unnatural state for us.

The adults, absorbed in newspapers and magazines, had little inclination for conversation, so the library was naturally quiet. We school-aged boys, often sent by our parents to the library, struggled to keep still and silent. Sometimes, we were tasked with borrowing books on our parents' behalf, armed with a small chit listing the titles to be borrowed or returned.

My friends and I used to feel as though we were being punished whenever our parents insisted that we spend weekends or holidays at the library. They wanted us there for obvious reasons, but at that age, we would have much preferred the playground. Skipping the library was not an option, as we feared the librarian or his assistant would report our absence to our parents – or even to the school headmaster.

At times, it seemed the librarian and his assistant took their roles a bit too seriously; even the slightest noise would earn us a stern glare. Occasionally, we forgot ourselves and spoke a little too loudly, much to their annoyance and that of the other readers. Being young, we were easily distracted, especially when tasked with reading biographies of great men, hand-picked by the librarian.

The library itself was spacious but appeared cramped, with gunny sacks stuffed under the benches – some containing new arrivals, others books destined for disposal. The walls were adorned with portraits of freedom fighters and intellectuals, lending the place an air of sanctity. I sometimes imagined the figures in those portraits would frown upon me if I wasted time there; my innocent mind nurtured its own peculiar fears.

As I graduated from primary to high school, I began visiting the library of my own accord. By then, it had become a joyful habit, thanks to the encouragement of my parents and the librarian. My respect for the librarian and his assistant grew – not out of fear, as before, but from genuine admiration. When I discussed books with them, their passion and insights inspired me. It was there that I learned never to let go of the joy of reading.

The specific books recommended by the librarian that changed my reading habits were primarily biographies of great men. These selections, though challenging at first, gradually drew me into the world of reading and helped me develop a lasting appreciation for literature. The librarian's choices exposed me to stories of resilience, leadership, and moral courage, which not only broadened my perspective but also instilled in me the discipline and curiosity essential for lifelong learning.

The library and its staff played a crucial role in enriching my knowledge and shaping my character. Today, I can say with conviction that I revere a library as much as a place of worship.

The lengths to go to for crisp clothes

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Unlike the current generation, children of the 1970s were not fortunate enough to go to school wearing crisp, ironed uniform. Getting clothes pressed was beyond our means.

Year after year, we would go to school with wrinkled clothes, except on national festivals. We used to await the arrival of August and January, because on Independence Day and Republic Day, we could wear ironed uniform. During other times, the uniform was kept neatly folded under the bed or under a stool with weights placed over it.

Electric iron boxes were unknown then. Instead charcoal-heated iron boxes were used. Even that was unaffordable. In the entire village, one person would offer ironing services weekly. But the majority did not have money to pay him.

We would, therefore, choose a flat-bottomed brass vessel or pail. Putting red-hot charcoal embers into the vessel was a delicate task. It had to be handled with care, lest it burnt our fingers. Charcoal embers used to be available only in the morning after cooking breakfast and in the evening after dinner. In those days, cooking was done with firewood.

As the vessel was without a handle, clothes had to be pressed by holding its rim with a towel or some cloth. It required patience and skill.

One day while pressing, I suffered burns on my hand and on another occasion, a spark from the hot charcoal fell on my newly stitched shirt, making a button-size hole into it. This invited severe wrath from my parents.

Since then, I had not been ironing clothes for two decades till the electric iron box arrived on the scene. Even while ironing with an electric box, I take extra care to avoid getting electric shocks or burns. Such was the fear etched in my memory.

With the passage of time, electric iron boxes made their way into our homes, making our jobs so easy that even schoolchildren could iron clothes effortlessly. We are enjoying the comforts of ironing, but at huge environmental costs.

In praise of solitude

In a world that keeps shouting, 'Do more! Be more!', sitting quietly by oneself is a quiet rebellion

ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

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When I think of stillness, I think of my grandfather sitting quietly on the old sofa. No book in hand, no conversation needed, no restless tapping of fingers. Just sitting. Watching the world move around him with a calm detachment.

He was not bored. He was not lost. He was simply... there. Whole and happy in his own company.

As a child, I did not quite understand it. But I remember how just looking at him made me feel anchored, safe. Years later, in Mumbai, I found that same feeling again – among strangers. If you wandered near the Asiatic Library or along Marine Drive at the right time of the day, you would see them – people just sitting. On the wide stone steps, on the seawall, not talking, not scrolling, not performing. Just watching. The sea, the sky, the endless traffic inching along Marine Drive.

I, too, would sometimes sit there for hours, feeling the salt in the air, letting my thoughts rise and fall like the tides. Those were some of my happiest moments. No rush, no noise inside my head. Just me and the moving world. I also remember the deep pleasure of long drives and train journeys, when there was nothing to do but watch the world go by.

Sitting by the window, letting your gaze drift over fields, houses, trees, faces at nameless stations – lost in random, lazy thoughts. Sometimes daydreaming, sometimes thinking of nothing at all.

There was a quiet magic to that kind of travel, where the journey itself was the experience, not just a race to reach somewhere. Now, somewhere along the way, even journeys have changed. Blaring music, endless selfies, constant chatter – these have become the measures of how "beautiful" the ride is. The old quiet joy of simply being with yourself – and with the passing world – feels rarer with each passing year.

Somewhere between then and now, something shifted. Screens crept into our palms, endless chatter into our pockets. Now, even when we are alone, we are not alone. Our solitude is crowded with notifications, scrolling, and noise. The simple act of sitting by oneself – doing nothing, needing nothing – feels almost like a forgotten art.

And yet, it is exactly what we need. When we sit quietly by ourselves – not distracted, not waiting for something – we return to something ancient and true. At first, the mind chatters. Lists, worries, memories tumble through. But if we stay – if we wait patiently, like watching the sea – something beautiful happens. The mind slows. The heart softens. We begin to notice the small things: the weight of our body, the way the sunlight slants across the floor, the simple rhythm of our breath.

Sitting by oneself teaches a secret kind of strength. It teaches us to be with our own selves – without needing to fix, perform, or escape. It teaches us that we are enough. That this moment, this breath, this heartbeat are enough. In a world that keeps shouting, "Do more! Be more!", sitting quietly by oneself is a quiet rebellion. A return. A remembering. A homecoming.

And maybe – just maybe – it's the beginning of real peace.

Soothing touch

Nurses empathise with patients, stand by them, and listen to their problems

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In the past one year, I have had opportunities to interact closely with nurses. They were talking to people, responding to calls, checking patients, asking questions, making notes, interacting with doctors, executing procedures, and more. Young nurses sleep-deprived and ready to collapse at the end of their night duty, nursing students making mistakes and learning, and experienced nurses looking as fresh and merry at the end of day-long or night-long duties as they were at the beginning.

When my mother passed away, we were numb, unable to process what had happened, and were focussing on what to do next. I remember the compassionate presence of nurses around us: pressing our hands, leading my father to a different room, making sure he was comfortable, asking if there was anything they could do, even as they were taking care of other patients.

We often say that nurses are a bridge between the patient and the doctor. The doctors breeze in, ask a few questions (or not), give some instructions to us or to their team, and then breeze out. But the nurses stay with us, they are in and out of the room throughout the day. They understand our distress or peace; they see the patient's pain and restlessness at night; they empathise; they stand with us and listen when we vent. I sometimes wonder if they are taught these skills, or do they pick them up on the job, or is it a testament to where they come from and what they have endured. Mistakes happen. But when minor and excusable mistakes happen, let us be kind. They are human too.

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Not all nurses are pleasant and friendly – some have cultivated the professional barrier which protects them from getting too emotionally attached. There may be others who are indifferent or even rude. Nobody is perfect. We don't know their stories or where they come from, or what they suppress during duty.

It's not enough that we remember nurses on International Nurses Day, but at least on that day, let's pause to acknowledge, appreciate and thank them.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

The story candidly brings to the fore the pivotal concerns of waging a long-term war with neighbouring Pakistan in the backdrop of the Pahalgam carnage. ('No country for pacifists'; May 18) Surely, embarking on a full-scale war with any country should be a last resort. It must be realised that once a war breaks out, its end cannot be predicted.
G. Ramasubramanyam

Neha Dixit's analysis of Operation Sindoor and its broader implications for public discourse brings to light a crucial and often overlooked perspective in times of heightened nationalism and conflict. The article rightly highlights that, in the current global context, any military action becomes an international issue with far-reaching consequences for the economy and diplomatic relations.
P. Ravichandran

In the eerily convoluted atmosphere where pacifists and peaceniks in the country feel suffocated, the cover story was a whiff of fresh air. Aggressive nationalism pretending to be patriotism is a sign of trouble.
Ayyasseri Raveendranath

Breaking the silence

Women face gender discrimination in Indian society. ('A quiet strength'; May 18) Muslim women, in particular, are compelled to endure additional challenges in silence. This silent suffering finds powerful expression in the Kannada stories of Banu Mushtaq. The efforts of her translator are certain to bring her recognition at the international level in due course.
M.N. Saraswathi Devi

The shortlisting of Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* highlights how literature exposes caste, religious intolerance, gender violence, and misogyny through local dialects and folk traditions. The writer and translator weave women's stories that challenge ingrained gender roles.
Vijay Singh Adhikari

No safe shore

The tragedy of migrant deaths is not just a policy failure, but a failure of humanity — each number hides a life, a dream, a desperation. ('Lost humanity', May 18) Before we shout to expel migrants from our self-declared borders, we must choose compassion over convenience, or risk sinking further into moral blindness.
Adil Minhaj

Beyond the ladder

Rutger Bregman speaks of ambition not as conquest, but as a calling. ('Do-gooders'; May 18) He dares workers to trade prestige for purpose, and titles for truth — to step off the treadmill and walk toward what truly matters. A quiet revolution, wrapped in one bold, necessary idea.
Thaha

Buddha's legacy

Gautama Buddha questioned ritualism and opposed caste and gender discrimination through a path of ethical living. ('A thousand Buddhas'; May 18) Though uncertainty about his origins persists, his sacred path has enlightened spiritual hearts across all religions and races worldwide.
Sitaram Popuri

MORE ON THE WEB

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The English conundrum
The quirks of the language and the etiquette
Elizabeth Alexander

Travellers' difficult choices
Questions that many confront while planning a trip
Binayak Choudhury

The comforting hill cuisine
In Uttarakhand, enjoy the local food while beholding the natural beauty
Aditee Adhikari

Sweet memories of summer vacations
Exploring the sprawling fields, picking the local fruits, and swimming in the local ponds
Buddhadev Nandi

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