THE HINDU
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Delhi's rich are descending on Goa, bringing in big-ticket real estate and other socio-cultural changes. The State's residents, however, call it a takeover that walls out the heritage and ecology of their land

BUTTER CHICKEN IN GOA

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In Sector 85, one of Gurugram's burgeoning sectors, Hans Kumar's real estate agency, Master Realty, is easy to find. Located next to a petrol bunk – appropriate, because land and gas drive everything in this part of the National Capital Region – Kumar, 44, advertises himself as someone who sells property in "Gurgaon and Goa". His largest deals run into crores in Gurugram, with one transaction amounting to ₹60 crore last year. In Goa, he has only been able to crack the ₹3-₹5 crore 'market'.

"In Gurugram, I know every single thing about the land, because I am from a farming family," says Kumar, who is from Janola *gaon* (village), near Pataudi town, one of the four sub-divisions of Gurugram district. He has been in real estate for 18 years, having started right after high school. His dream, though, is to move to Goa.

"I won't be able to buy something on the beach, but I want a clean, peaceful life. It's just a matter of convincing my wife," says Kumar. Goa's only drawback: "*Wahan pe acchi chai nahi milti* [You don't get good tea there]." Besides land, and the money he can make off it, he sees nothing in Haryana except dust.

Across Delhi-NCR, from Defence Colony's drawing rooms to Haryana's hinterland, Goa is now a haven from the pollution of India's capital. Increasingly though, the agrarian state is seen as an 'investment', because as much as Delhi-ites like the sound of the sea, they also like the smell of money.

Lording it over land

Earlier this year, The House of Abhinandan Lodha, a major real estate player, released an advertisement that said, 'Delhi, rulers of India, now conquer Goa'. This angered people so much the Goa government asked for it to be retracted, which it was. Abhinandan is the son of Mumbai's six-time Malabar Hill MLA Mangal Prabhat Lodha, who Forbes called a "politician and property magnate".

Abhinandan says that Goa, with its blend of Indian and Portuguese influences, is unique in its combination of an Indian and international environment. He says the real estate developments "offer the ability to build very close to nature". Of the group's three projects (land parcels that buyers build on), 47% of the buyers are from Delhi-NCR. They are in the 40-50 age group, with 43% being business owners and 39% salaried people, the company says. "Delhi-ites are interested in property-focused amenities, while people from other states look for external amenities, like what is around the area," he says, adding that the realisation that people from other Indian states could live here really hit in 2022.

Activists in Goa are alarmed at the real-estate 'boom' because of environmental concerns. Architect Dean D'Cruz and industrial designer Reboni Saha say the interest in 'development' began around 2018, when the Goa Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act, 1974, was amended. "This allowed individuals to 'purchase zone changes' against the Regional Plan 2021 in force. This has been exacerbated post-pandemic," says Saha. D'Cruz is president of the Goa Foundation, and Saha is secretary of the Goa Bachao Abhiyan, both environmental action groups.

"Three sections of the TCP Act – 16B, 17(2), and 39A (all challenged in court) – were amendments made in quick succession, enabling easy land-use conversion from ecologically sensitive zones, where construction was previously not allowed, to land that could be 'developed'," explains Saha. The ecologically sensitive zones were forests, wetlands, paddy fields, orchards, river banks, certain types of hill slopes, and more.

Vishwajit P. Rane, TCP minister, who is also the minister for urban development, health, and women and child development, says, "Everything is as per law and debated well in the Assembly. The government is following all rules and regulations, and everything is open to the scrutiny of the law."

On October 1 last year, people protested outside the Town and Country Planning office in Panaji. They held placards saying, 'Don't let Delhi-*kars* conquer Goa'. In March, the Chief Town Planner Rajesh Naik got a six-month service extension, despite having reached retirement age.

Activist-environmentalist Claude Alvarez wrote in *O Heraldo*, Goa's 124-year-old newspaper: "During the week preceding the extension on retirement, Rajesh Naik approved the conversion of 8,25,648 sq. metres of lands in Goa for real estate. This was the single biggest week of conversions ever seen in the state. The extension order came as a reward." The article said 95% of the zone changes had resulted in conversion of land use from eco-sensitive zones to settlement zones.

DLF, responsible for the Gurugram boom, and Bhutani Infra from Noida are also investing in Goa. Vianaar has its head office in Delhi and has apartments, villas, and 'manors' in Goa, with prices starting at ₹2.3 crore as per a sales enquiry by *The Hindu* – the cost of an apartment in certain parts of NCR.

In a rich man's world

This influx of people is bringing changes of many kinds to India's only state where a Uniform Civil Code has governed people across religions in Goa's two districts, North and South. On the streets, Hindi is the loudest language; at hotel breakfasts, *chhola bhatura* is a staple; and there are many DL number plates on the roads.

The changes though, are layered – it's not just Delhi-ites who are coming in, but also people from across North India and Telangana. Wealthy Delhi-ites are simply the most visible, because of their money power. Goans fear that with the land, their lifestyle too is being taken away and village identities – of people knowing each other, speaking Konkani on the streets, and Mangalore-tiled single-storey houses – are getting erased.

There is a lot of talk, including among other North Indians, in Goa about Delhi-ites "throwing money" around. Satirical cartoonist Angela Ferrao, who grew up in Mumbai and now lives among other Goan friends and relatives here, puts it graphically: "They arrive with money, throw it around, then say, 'Here's the money, thank you; now get out of the way' – that's how it comes across. We don't want your money."

Around her village of Siolim though, the number of single bungalows holding out is diminishing, with the iron-rich red earth being raked up for construction. Along the Chapora river, where she remembers going to collect shellfish as a child, there are now restaurants. "The riverbanks are barred to regular people who may have got a meal out of it," she says.

In a shack on Candolim beach, a middle-aged owner who has run the shop for 37 years now and who does not want to be named, says, "Delhi people have come and bought small plots of land and built oversized houses and hotels. The Europeans have been driven away. They say it no longer has the Portuguese feel. Goa is dead."

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ILLUSTRATIONS: ANGELA FERRAO

M.T. VASUDEVAN NAIR [1933-2024]

Voice of the lone swimmer

The writer was 'obsessed' with the theme of the wronged individual and spotlighted it in his stories and films

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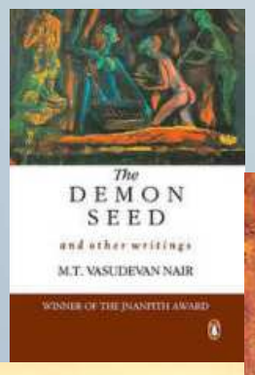
Years ago, I made a call to writer M.T. Vasudevan Nair, as I had done on a few occasions earlier too, to seek his views on the adaptation of literary works for the screen.

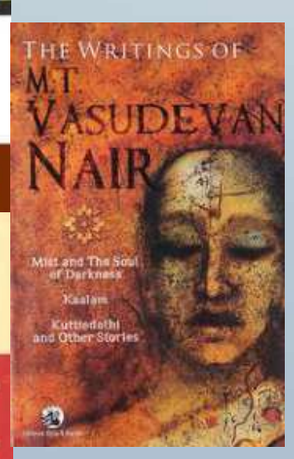
It surprised me when he said, "I'm sorry, I'm not competent to talk about films."

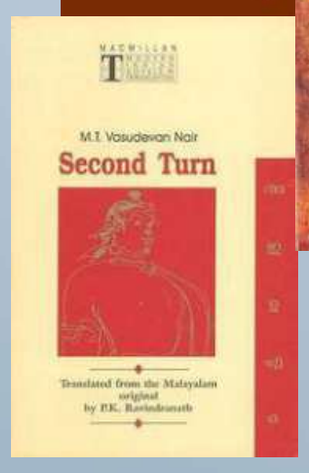
After a pause, he reasoned: "I'm a writer first and foremost, not a filmmaker."

This was from someone who had won the National Award for his directorial debut, *Nirmalyam* in 1973 – based on a 1950s story of his, 'Pallivalum Kalchilambum' – and made, commendably, six more films, including a documentary on writer Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. He had established himself as a screenwriter of note well before that, lending an earthy literary quality to screenplays in Malayalam – a trail followed by several successive scenarists.

And here he was, proclaiming that he wasn't qualified to comment about screen adaptations of literary works. There was a rare intellectual honesty about the statement, as I came to know later, when I read an interview where he admitted that he found some of his films inferior to his own stories or the novels they drew from. "Cinema is part technology, part creativity. Writing is far superior," he affirmed. In another interview, he said he often felt that some of his film scripts would've been a lot better as stories or novels.







M.T. Vasudevan Nair (bottom) and some of his works in translation.

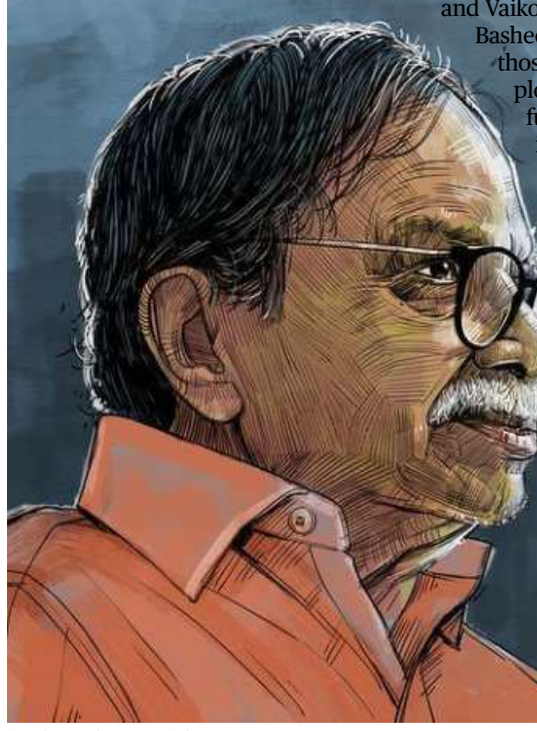
Focus on the young male reader

Come to think of it, he was probably signalling that his films, particularly the screenplays written by him, were detours from his mainstream literary activity that began in his early 20s.

Kerala in the 1950s and 60s was witnessing a unique structural transformation of society, and the young individual – specifically, the young upper caste man – haplessly caught in the morass of a fast-disintegrating feudal system caught M.T.'s attention. His early protagonists were all lonely, confused and full of self-doubt – something that the youth of the day easily identified with. From Appunni (*Nalukettu*) to Govindankutty (*Asuravithu*) and Sethu (*Kaalam*), they struck a chord with the young male reader, their quotidian crises immediately becoming his.

By M.T.'s own admission, he was rather 'obsessed' with the theme of the wronged individual, one unjustly stifled by society, in this case a society characterised by decadence. Exposure to world literature and the deep influence of writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Albert Camus, William Faulkner and Henrik Ibsen were evident even in his early works. *Pathiravum Pakalvelichavum* (1957), his first novel, carries a reference to Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, with a character explaining why the lone individual swimming against the current is the strongest.

While his works paved the way for modernism in Malayalam literature, it was greatly aided by a society familiar with the trends and mores of world literature. Thakazhi, S.K. Pottekkatt, Uroob and Vaikom Mohammed Basheer were tall names in those days when M.T. ploughed a lonely furrow. In his introduction to Basheer's *Anuragathinte Dinangal* (*The Days of Intimacy*) – it was M.T. who changed the original title, *The Diary of a Lover* – M.T. fondly recalls his long association with Basheer, who he would call *guru*, and other literary greats in Kozhikode and how it enriched his life and works. A particular memory is that of a story by Basheer about a pickpocket who, in a rare display of humanism, comes to his victim's rescue.



Universal humanity

Interestingly, when M.T. talks about his strong bond with the filmmaker Ramu Kariat, whom he affectionately calls a 'savage of my ilk', and with the writer N.P. Mohammed, with whom he wrote the novel *Arabiponnu* (1960), the thrust is on their human side. It would not be wrong to say that 'universal humanism', which marked the Nehruvian era, also entered M.T.'s consciousness.

The question "Moideen, are you human?", by Moideen's mother Fathima in *Pathiravum Pakalvelichavum*, seems to have imbued his works over the years with existential angst and dilemma. Like the man in his story *Neelakkunnukal* (Blue Hills), who is torn between the material indulgence of the modernising world and the serene calm of rural life. Shades of the same permeate the eponymous *Randamoozham* (*Second Turn*) on the plight of the 'humanised' Bheema, an aboriginal, in a brilliant exposition of the 'pauses and silences' left by the poet Vyasa in the *Mahabharata*.

M.T. endeared himself to readers like me by speaking for the loner, the 'superfluous hero' according to critics, and the marginalised and the vilified. It was not their fault, but they were all sinned against, he kept telling us in his stories and films.

A few years ago, I walked into his house, Sithara, in Kozhikode looking for an autographed book for a library being set up by a friend at the college where he teaches. "Do you have any specific book in mind?" M.T. asked me. "Your collection of stories, sir," I told him. "And I want you to sign it," I added.

"All of them bear my signature," he mumbled, before handing me a signed copy.

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

Abraham Verghese
(CHRISTOPHER P. MICHEL)

THE HINDU LIT FOR LIFE 2025

GEOGRAPHY MATTERS TO ABRAHAM VERGHESE

The author and physician on the delicious irony of life that made him a writer and on his love for fiction

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Physician and author Abraham Verghese often says that every change in geography has shaped his destiny. His parents moved from Kerala to Ethiopia, where he was born. Later, as there was civil unrest in Ethiopia, he followed them to the United States, where he practises medicine, teaches, and writes. Verghese's ancestry and his experiences in the two countries where he has lived have formed the basis of his four critically-acclaimed books.

In his fourth and latest work, *The Covenant of Water*, published last year, Verghese narrates an epic story spanning three generations in Kerala. Oprah Winfrey has bought the rights to adapt the book info a film. Ahead of *The Hindu* Lit for Life 2025, which the author will inaugurate in Chennai on January 18, Verghese discusses why he always wanted to write fiction and the difficulty of mining one's own life for material. Edited excerpts from an email interview:

Question: *You have written two memoirs. Why did you feel the need to document your life?*

Answer: In the mid-1980s, when I was living in a small town in Tennessee, working as an infectious diseases specialist, I saw more patients with HIV than was predicted for a rural town of 50,000. I realised I had stumbled onto an American paradigm of migration: young men who had left their small towns because they were gay were now returning decades later, having contracted the virus, and having cared for partners who had passed. At the time, AIDS was considered an urban phenomenon. I wrote a scientific paper describing the paradigm, but I felt it never quite captured the heartache of their journey, or the grief of their parents, or my own grief at seeing this again and again. I became a writer to tell that story – through fiction, or so I thought. But it turns out that non-fiction is much more in demand by publishers than fiction, because non-fiction sells predictably: if something really happened, we all have an inherent interest. So that story became my first book, *My Own Country* (1994). I thought I was telling the story of the small town and HIV, but inevitably, since I was a character, it was also a memoir.

At the time I was writing the book, I was also living through an experience with one of my medical students, another extraordinary true story. Publishers were anxious for me to write another non-fiction book when I finished the first one, and the story that became *The Tennis Partner* (1998) seemed an easy way to do so. However, I really always wanted to write fiction, so after two memoirs I have not gone back to non-fiction. It isn't easy to mine your own life for material.

Q: *Memory is a tricky thing. In memoir writing, how do you ensure that you have got things right, especially when you're writing about emotional episodes from your life?*
A: I think readers understand that memory is unreliable, and that all writing is in a sense a kind of artifice. If you confine yourself not to your memories but to what can be documented to have happened, and only to dialogue exactly what was said... well you have a very dry book, or else it is a newspaper account. Instead, just as when you are sitting with friends and recounting what happened to you, your listeners get your best recollection and they know it comes with all your biases, and with your propensity to exaggerate or else to under-report.

Q: *You often talk of how every change in geography changed your destiny. What other factors do you think changed your destiny? And can destiny be changed at all?*
A: Geography matters greatly. But so do the choices you make at different crossroads in your life. Ultimately, I think life is ironic, and dependent on luck, fate, happenstance, etc. I never intended to be a writer so the fact that we are having this exchange is an example of how life is ironic. I chose infectious diseases as my specialty in medicine before AIDS came along; colleagues in other fields perhaps felt sorry for me. The AIDS experience was the hardest thing I ever did, emotionally and personally; but it made me a writer. So, in short, I think our destinies are shaped by events beyond our control.

Q: *Fiction, you say, stops time. What is the one book of fiction you read this year that truly stopped time for you?*
A: Right now, I am reading *Paradise* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. The book is extraordinary and when I am in its pages, I disappear; time stops.

Abraham Verghese will be at *The Hindu* Lit for Life (January 18-19) in Chennai. **Scan the QR code to register.**

BROWSER

Gardens of the Heart

Bulbul Sharma
Women Unlimited
₹450
The writer and painter known for her sumptuous stories replete with descriptions of food is back with a collection featuring 10 festivals and 10 families. Bonus: recipes to rustle up your own celebratory spread.

Kafka: Selected Stories

Trs & ed Mark Harman
Harvard University Press
₹499
A century after his death, the absurdist author continues to draw the interest of readers everywhere. This new collection of 16 translated stories includes Kafka's famous works 'In the Penal Colony' and 'Metamorphosis'.

Elephant Herd

Zhang Guixing, trs Carlos Rojas
Columbia University Press
₹3,552
The Taiwan-based Malaysian Chinese writer is known for his magical realism stories. This translation of his award-winning 1998 novel examines the complex relations among ethnic Chinese, local Malays, and indigenous peoples.

The Burnings

Himanjali Sankar
Pan Macmillan
₹350
The premise is as haunting as the cover, as the writer-editor sets her second book for adults in a sinister mansion amidst raging wildfires. Known for tackling taboo topics, Sankar's latest is about confronting one's own madness.

INTERVIEW

‘The Chola empire was made by its queens’

Anirudh Kanisetti on his latest book about the Chola empire and why a historian’s job today is to encourage society to reflect on evidence

Anirudh Kanisetti
(SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

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Anirudh Kanisetti is among the new crop of historians who are breaking the staid boring world of Indian history. Using podcasts, articles in newspapers and interviews, Kanisetti, who has a degree in engineering, has carved a niche as a public historian. He made his mark with *Lords of the Deccan*, and we sat down for a chat as he is set to launch a new book, *Lords of Earth and Sea – A History of the Chola Empire*. Edited excerpts from the interview.

Q: *Your last book spanned six centuries of medieval South Indian history and it brought alive a South Indian kingdom. What are you working on now?*
A: I’ve completed work on a new history of the Chola empire where I am trying to understand the dynasty at a deeper level than has been done in English language writing for decades.

The idea is to understand who the Cholas were and how they shaped history, not just of South India, but of the world at large. In a way, the Chola empire was actually made by its queens. There’s this truly extraordinary woman in the late 10th century called Sembiyan Mahadevi and she picks up the icon of the god Nataraja, and she integrates him into temples and builds a dozen temples during her lifetime.

The Cholas represent this astonishing situation where a coastal South Indian kingdom was the dominant power of the subcontinent. Its influence was not restricted primarily to the Tamil region; it also shaped the history of southern Karnataka and of coastal Andhra as well, as well as the broader Indian Ocean region. I bring out all these threads in my new book.

Q: *Is there a resurgence of interest in Indian history now? And South Indian history?*
A: There isn’t enough understanding of South India’s diversity. When we say South India, we tend to think of Tamil Nadu, which is an important part of South India, but Tamil Nadu, for most of its history, has also been defined by its interactions with Karnataka, with Andhra. I find this multi-regional character of South India tremendously fascinating and enjoy exploring it and bringing it to life for new audiences, not just in South India, but also in North India.

Q: *Is there a difference between medieval South Indian food and medieval North Indian food and* prasadam*?*
A: Yes. The idea of this very organised daily *prasadam* that happens at a particular time of day, and a seasonal *prasadam*, of festival *prasadam* and so on are all Tamil innovations.

In the 12th century, it is no longer just the Chola family, but the various generals and magnates in the countryside who are doing patronage and you begin to see the immense diversity in Tamil temple food offerings. A lot of these are recognisable to us today. The brinjal curry that is offered in Chidambaram was actually the recipe of a wealthy woman who gave money to the Chidambaram temple.

So you have this interesting situation where Hinduism in Tamil Nadu in the 12th and 13th centuries is becoming very congregational. The patronage and the food that’s offered in temples is actually reflecting a very diverse group of patrons, but this isn’t the case in North India at the time. You can see that the patrons in North Indian temples tend to be restricted to the royal court rather than the countryside.

Q: *Why do we end up seeing our history in binaries?*
A: I think it’s an outcome of the way that social media engineers us to think. Social media encourages engagement over retention. Social media is interested in what kind of narratives are going to get the most reaction and invariably what gets the most reaction out of people is binaries. It’s Aryan versus Dravidian, North vs. South, Tamil vs. Sanskrit. Why should history fit the simplistic world view of a social media algorithm?

Q: *Do you feel historians have vacated the space which is now being occupied by social media and WhatsApp messages?*
A: I would not say vacated so much as they have been actively purged out of this space. So obviously, the folks who have profited the most are those who were able to create material that did not require much research and that was easily digestible. Then, in India’s case, it turned out to be political parties and cultural parties that had the first mover’s advantage.

Q: *The incentive of the politician is to discourage thinking and to prevent more reflective thought.*
A: The job of the historian in the 21st century is going to be to bring back this ability to reflect on evidence; to really talk about how history is written, what can we know and not know, and who were the people who lived in the past and how were they like us or not like us.

Q: *What are you reading currently?*
A: I have been enjoying A.R. Venkatachalapathy’s *Swadeshi Steam*; I also thoroughly enjoyed William Dalrymple’s *The Golden Road* and I am also reading a bunch of graphic novels that I haven’t had the time for earlier, including an adaptation of the famous Japanese story of the 47 Ronin. Then there’s *Empire of the Summer Moon*, which is a history of the native American wars against white settlers by S.C. Gwynne and also *Tales Things Tell* by Finbarr Barry Flood and Beate Fricke.

Anirudh Kanisetti’s session on The Mighty Cholas is on January 19 at The Hindu *Lit for Life in Chennai.*

In the drift A mural in the West Bank city of Bethlehem; and (below) pro-Palestine supporters at a rally in Bengaluru.
(AP & K. MURALI KUMAR)

EXTRACT

INDIA’S ISRAEL TILT

How two majoritarian forces came together, charting a new friendship

In the 76 years of its existence, Israel has built itself as a powerful entity in a largely hostile region. But, says ***Stanly Johny*** *in his new book,* Original Sin: Israel, Palestine and the Revenge of Old West Asia, *despite all the progress it has made, is a dark reality surrounding the state of Israel – the continuing occupation of Palestinian territories. The foreign affairs editor of* The Hindu *has been on multiple visits to the region, both pre and post the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023. In this edited excerpt, he explains why the two-state solution is practically dead, and traces the changes and continuity in India-Israel relations.*

Original Sin
Stanly Johny
HarperCollins India
₹499

In Jerusalem, I asked an Israeli diplomat about India’s support for the two-state solution (meaning, creation of an independent Palestinian state, as the state of Israel has already been existent). “India has condemned the 7 October [Hamas] attack. We see it. India’s support for UN resolutions doesn’t signal a policy change. India supports a two-state solution. In theory, we also support a two-state solution,” he said.

“Are you saying that Israel supports the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestine state?” I asked.

“We are not against the two-state solution,” he continued. “Details should be reached in negotiations. But who do we talk to? Hamas, which wants to eliminate us? Or Abu Mazen [Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas]? Does he have any powers? We live with the threat of terrorism. So a future Palestine state, whenever it’s formed, should be unarmed.”

Perceived threat

If Israel says a future Palestine state should be unarmed, it would not be a sovereign state. But the diplomat’s views are relatively moderate compared to the mainstream opinion in Israel’s political circles about the two-state solution. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly said there wouldn’t be a Palestinian state on his watch. “I think that anyone who moves to establish a Palestinian state today, and evacuate areas, is giving radical Islam an area from which to attack the State of Israel,” he said in 2015. Naftali Bennett, the former Prime Minister, said in a 2013 interview, before he formed his government, “There is not going to be a Palestinian state within the tiny land of Israel.” By “the tiny land of Israel”, he was referring to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, which was historical Palestine. The Knesset, Israel’s Parliament, has passed resolutions rejecting the Palestinian statehood. “A Palestinian state would pose an existential danger to the State of Israel and its citizens, perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and destabilise the region,” according to a resolution passed in the 120-member Knesset in July 2024, with 69 votes in favour and nine against.

So the two-state solution, which India and a vast majority of the countries support, remains practically dead in Israel. But the diplomat seemed unperturbed about this contradiction

So the two-state solution, which India and a vast majority of the countries support, remains practically dead in Israel. But the diplomat seemed unperturbed about this contradiction. “You may have a position on the two-state solution. I may have my own position,” he said. “But that need not affect [the] India-Israel relationship. From our side, we are clear. We want to further improve our ties with India. India has also de-hyphenated Israel and Palestine so that we can deepen our bilateral partnership irrespective of the Palestine factor.” With his crisp comment, the diplomat was actually laying bare India’s position towards Israel-Palestine, which has seen both changes and continuity over the years.

In the post-Independence years, India remained a steadfast supporter of Palestine, but maintained diplomatic engagements as well as backchannel defence relations with Israel, which was very keen on developing ties with New Delhi.

New fillip

The rise of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in India, first in 1998, also gave a new fillip to relations with Israel. The BJP, free of the Congress’s foreign policy legacy, made it a priority to improve ties with Israel. The party’s rank and file watched Israel’s tough security model with admiration. The majoritarian character of Zionism in Israel-Palestine and the majoritarian ideology of Hindutva of the BJP saw ideological resonance in each other. All these factors expedited India’s gradual tilt towards Israel.

Stanly Johny will discuss his book at The Hindu *Lit for Life on January 18.*

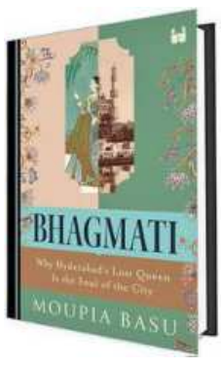
Excerpted with permission from HarperCollins India.

Wild Fictions: Essays
Amitav Ghosh
HarperCollins
₹799
This is a collection of Ghosh’s writings on literature and language; climate change and the environment; human lives, travel and discoveries, over the last 25 years. The essays draw attention to imperial violence and explains why it’s imperative to restore the delicate balance with volatile landscapes.

The Feared: Conversations with Eleven Political Prisoners
Neeta Kolhatkar
Simon & Schuster
₹399
As Kolhatkar began talking to political prisoners, Kobad Gandhy, Sudha Bharadwaj, Kishorechandra Wangkhem and others, she stumbled on a startling observation: civil society leaders are feared by all political parties.

The Public Sector and Privatization in India
Sheela Dubey
Speaking Tiger Books
₹699
The public sector, once seen as the backbone of the economy, has become mired in inefficiency, transforming from a source of pride to a burden on the exchequer. Dubey unravels the complex web of economic and political forces that have shaped its course.

Bhagmati: Why Hyderabad’s Lost Queen is the Soul of the City
Moupia Basu
Westland Books
₹399
A journalist and writer explores the Bhagmati-Muhammad Quli love story and presents it as a “multicultural, multilingual, multi-religious” story. She writes that the relationship between the Muslim sultan and the Hindu dancer symbolises a composite culture.



BUTTER CHICKEN IN GOA

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

A generation of migrants

While there is limited social interaction between the wealthy Delhi-ite and those who have lived in Goan villages for generations, the arts and creator communities – mostly the middle-class – do see an intermingling.

Siddharth Misra, 41, and his wife moved to Goa 10 years ago. "It was a different Goa then," he says, recalling that there was no instant delivery of anything. Misra makes it a point to tell people he is from Lucknow, though he has lived in Gurugram and Mumbai. "You become what your job and city are, and Delhi's trait is never to be satisfied," says the tech start-up entrepreneur, who enjoys large, quiet spaces to meet people, such as the slightly dated Cremeux in Menezes Building in Panjim, Goa's capital. Here, the balcony is large and the cream-and-cookie Portuguese *serradura* is still served.

He feels there's an anti-Delhi feeling in Goa because prices for simple things like coffee in a cafe are pushed up. At Cremeux, the staff is matter-of-fact, not waiting to please; and the 'regular' coffee still costs ₹45.

In G-Shot Coffee Roastery & Café, which markets itself as a wellness brand, a cappuccino is ₹340 and a freshly squeezed orange juice ₹360 – Delhi prices. Naturally, there is gluten-free and vegan on the menu. But G-Shot is in Asaagao village that Goans joke is AssaGurgaon and Delhi-ites joke is GK4 (Greater Kailash), because of the large number of Delhi-ites who have property here.

Misra looks at the big picture: of Goa slowly becoming the capital for creative people to find refuge, away from the rough and tumble of big-city life.

A changing foodscape

Along the Aguada-Siolim road, two villages in North Goa, lies Candolim, another village where tourism is booming. The Hosteller that says it caters to "backpackers" does single rooms and dormitories, charging between ₹3,000 and ₹10,000 a night during peak season.

But Candolim's beach shacks, temporary structures that ran through the six-month 'season' (October-March), are almost empty despite the red-heart lights that call out from a distance. With names like Red Lobster and Flying Fish, they were traditionally places crowded with budget foreign tourists, who lay on the beach, drank beer, and ordered calamari and bombil. One shack even has the Scottish and English flags fluttering in the sea breeze; all have menus in Russian.

In 2018, over 70 lakh domestic tourists visited Goa, while foreign tourists were over 9 lakh, as per Ministry of Tourism data. In 2022, Goa's domestic tourism fell, with inbound tourists accounting for only 1.7 lakh.

Now, the food action has shifted off Candolim beach to the main road, a 200-metre walk from the beach. Down a 2-km stretch are restaurants punctuated with cashew-sellers, alcohol shops, and places to stay.

New views (Clockwise from left) The renovated Old PWD building in Panjim; Betim fish market; a building under construction near Candolim; architect Dean D'Cruz and industrial designer Reboni Saha; and one of the many restaurants with 'Punjab' in their name, in Candolim. (SUNALINI MATHEW)

Here, there are at least 10 eateries with 'Punjabi' on their name boards: Punjabi Kitchen, Great-e-Punjab, Sher-e-Punjab. Naturally *murgh makhani* (butter chicken) is on the menu. There are of course the "pure veg" places, but just a couple of places for a Goan fish *thaali*. The rustic Goan bread, *poi*, that goes well with a gravy is difficult to get.

Journalist Vikram Doctor says that Goa always had a cosmopolitan food culture, reflected in the number of people from outside India who made it their home, adapting to and adopting the land. "What has changed is that restaurants are now open year-long, because it's more expensive to shut and reopen."

Some typically Goan ingredients have disappeared, he feels, like good quality local pork and fish traditionally eaten here. "Pomfret was never a very Goan thing, but now you see it. Dried fish and prawns are very Goan, but you rarely see them on restaurant menus, other than maybe a *kismur* [dried prawn chutney], because they taste and smell too strong [for a palate unused to them]," says Doctor.

Living behind tall walls

Doctor followed his partner to Goa during the pandemic. They have settled into the not-so-streamlined Goa life. He calls himself an "unexpected resident" because he had initially lived between Mumbai and here. In 2022, he had written on Goa's "villa-*chawls*" in *The Economic Times*, calling them spaces where "builders smartly saw potential in a new class of buyers, who liked the idea of a house in a village – 'the real Goa' – but not the reality of rural intrusions like insects, lizards and snakes, and all the signs of the seasons, like mould in the monsoon or the searing heat and dust of summer". Doctor, who lives in a renovated Goan house, says, "It brings the city to the country, just as *chawls* were said to bring the village to the city."

To live in an independent home, as he does, in a village, several things have to be considered, including the lack of a sewage system resulting in a dependence on septic tanks; and the limited central supply of water, resulting in shortages and maintenance of a well. Since Goa is a collection of villages (except for Panaji), roads are usually only six metres wide, sometimes narrower, and there's no readily available public transport. With the large number of apartment blocks, car parking is a challenge. Many Goans also complain of growing road rage from 'outsiders' and the arrogance of the 'big car'.

Reboni Saha talks about the way Delhi-ites have brought in an exclusionary, urban lifestyle, "walling out the culture" with security guards and gated communities, and putting in swimming pools in a place that runs short of water in the summer. "The impact of that falls on the locals," says Dean D'Cruz in their airy climate-responsive office, Mozaic, in Bardez village, where they offer holistic design services. They speak about the *balcão*, a veranda seating space in a Goan home, where the outdoors meet the indoors, from where people can engage with the bread man, a neighbour, or a person passing on the street.

"They parachute in here with no understanding of the materials, building spaces larger than what they need, and focus on finishes like marble and glass, which are wrong for this climate. All this is creating an impact on the environment," says D'Cruz. Many Delhi folk also bring in their own staff, transporting their urban lives to Goa.

Sandra D'Cruz grew up in Kerala and moved to Delhi at 20, where she lived for the next 40 years, teaching at a school for 32. She now volunteers in the Anganwadi in Saligaon, in the northern part of Goa. "I never liked Delhi," she says, recalling that she always felt unsafe. However, D'Cruz, despite her grandparents having been from Goa, is considered an 'outsider'. One reason is that she doesn't speak Konkani; another that she has been here only a couple of years. At the Anganwadi though, the language most spoken is Hindi, because of the large influx of migrant workers. D'Cruz is at first unsure whether she is a Delhi-ite or Goan, but settles on calling herself "a Delhi-ite in Goa".

This non-acceptance of Delhi-ites has many reasons, says Frederick Noronha, a journalist and the publisher of Goa, 1556, an 18-year-old publishing house focused on Goan writing. "Maybe it's the sudden influx of people from Delhi, or the aggressive, know-it-all attitude some come with. It could also be the Goan perception of people from Delhi, or just an attitudinal difference." He feels that given the diversity in India, misunderstandings are a given. "Translating and transcending cultures is tough."

> **The Delhi-ites parachute** in here with no understanding of the materials, building spaces larger than what they need, and focus on finishes like marble and glass, which are wrong for this climate. All this is creating an impact on the environment
>
> **DEAN D'CRUZ**
> Architect

» SPOTLIGHT ON GOA'S HERITAGE STRUCTURES AT THE SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL PAGE 6

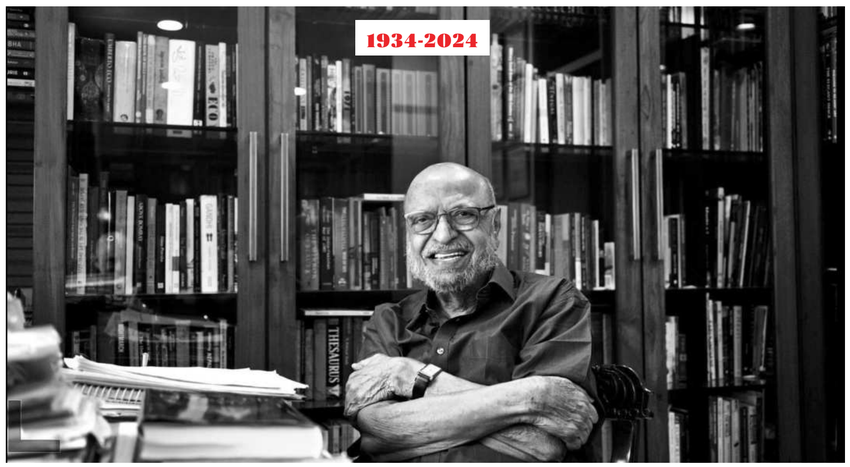
GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

Dev Benegal

A nephew and filmmaker remembers the veteran director as a collaborator who "kept on giving"

SHYAM BENEGAL'S GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT AND TIME



Renaissance man A photo of Shyam Benegal from the film *Still, Life*. (COURTESY DEV BENEGAL)

Forty-four years after having known and worked with Shyam Benegal, I finally turned my camera on him. It was January 2023. I was asking him about his film *Mandi* (1984), which I had also worked on.

One of my jobs back then was to take photographs of the actors' costumes, make-up, and jewellery. *Mandi* was in colour but we didn't have a budget for a Polaroid camera. I was therefore handed a camera with a few rolls of black-and-white film. Those photographs lay in a box for 40 years. After the pandemic, shifting houses, and sorting boxes, I rediscovered them. And thought of making a film about photographs and memory.

"I haven't talked about the film or discussed it for many years now... the memories have faded," Shyam said when we met in January. As my camera rolled, he spoke about its origins, the filming, all the way to its reception. By then, he was already quite unwell. Yet his memory was razor-sharp. "It worked well because of the actors. They were part of the creative side of the film... not just their performance, but they all contributed to the story." The movie starred Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil and Naseeruddin Shah, among others.

Shyam was always the consummate director, never once taking credit for the world and characters he created. There was none of the auteur hubris in him. His filmmaking style was always collaborative. He encouraged his actors' constant questioning.

This openness and collaboration were the greatest lessons for any young filmmaker. I worked on *Kalyug* (1981), *Arohan* (1982), *Mandi* (1983), and *Satyajit Ray* (1984) with him. Working with him and his collaborators was a greater education in every facet of cinema than any formal classroom.

Unveiling another India

What set Shyam apart was his breadth of knowledge. There was almost no subject into which he did not have a deep insight or an original perspective. He truly was a Renaissance man.

He never believed in the industrial way of filmmaking, segmented and compartmentalised. Instead, he encouraged us to work on every aspect of it. He was always walking that tightrope; wanting to engage the audience, while also fearlessly experimenting with form. Cinema, as a medium, was to him almost infinitely malleable.

Through his films, Shyam unveiled another India. His films were not entertainment. They were visceral, raw, and determinedly designed to be uncomfortable. Power, politics, sex, caste – these were his areas of engagement. Film was, for him, part of the process of social re-engineering. You could not deny the discomfiting realities of his filmic world. He bared uncomfortable truths, the harsh realities of contemporary India – particularly an India that seemed to him to have gone off the rails.

Few have understood the language of cinema as well as he. The thread that runs through his body of work is that filmmaking is, above all, an act of social responsibility. We should not forget: he was a young man of 15 at the dawn of India's independence, and the newly fashioned idea of a free, democratic, and secular country was, for him, as it was for others of his generation, as seminal as it was formative.

Unabashedly a Nehruvian optimist, he believed that cinema, more than any art form, could convey the idea of a complex, pluralistic nation. It was, in his understanding, a great leveller, utterly democratic, and uniquely accessible across geographies and cultures. In the darkness of a cinema hall, everyone is equal.

Easy laughter and camaraderie

New York was his and (wife) Nira's favourite city. Our times there were special. We would slip out of a side exit from some insufferable ceremony at a film festival, and I would take them to a small dumpling restaurant in Chinatown. Friends joined in. The conversation went on late into the night. That's what he liked the most: the conversations and the easy laughter and camaraderie of those bound together by art.

The last few years were very intimate. The four of us – Shyam, Nira, his daughter Pia, and I – would get together in the evening. What was planned for an hour would stretch to five. Again, laughter was at the heart of it.

In 1982, the Films Division asked him to make a film on Nehru and another on Satyajit Ray. Shyam asked which film I'd like to work on. Without a moment's hesitation, I chose the latter. The film on Satyajit Ray took longer than expected. I was in London working on Girish Karnad's *Utsav*. Jennifer was ailing, and Shashi Kapoor had asked if I could stay back and work on the subtitles of *36 Chowringhee Lane*. I could not say no. When I finally returned to India, Shyam called to say the Ray film was not complete. He was waiting for me to get back to work.

I dived right in. There were hours of 35mm film rolls to edit. From research, to being on set while we filmed, to looking under the beds of producers to locate the negatives of Ray's films, to the final sound mix, colour-grade, and delivery of the print – it was totally hands on. When we finally got a VHS of the film, Shyam took my copy and wrote a beautiful inscription on the label. It read: "This film is as much yours as it is mine."

I am not alone in this thinking. Filmmakers and filmgoers in India carry a bit of Shyam's world with them, wherever they go. Beyond his art, he showed us the value of making moral choices. In his work, and in the way he chose to work, there are lasting lessons and inspirations to artists everywhere, and yes, activists in need of inspiration to stand firm against the wrongful tide.

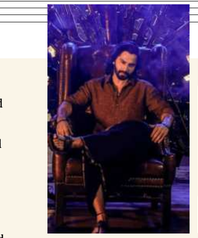
But here's the thing: the mark of a truly great artist is generosity – of spirit, of time, of teaching, of friendship. Shyam was, from first to last, a friend and a mentor who kept on giving. He will be with us for the rest of our days.

The writer is an award-winning filmmaker known for English, August. His film Still, Life on Shyam Benegal and the memory of Mandi will be out in 2025.

BINGE WATCH

A hirsute makeover, dizzyingly-fast action scenes, 'mixed' casts — Mumbai film studios' dependency on the Tamil and Telugu hit film formula continues

Bollywood is South obsessed



Copy paste (Clockwise from far left) Stills from *Baby John*; *Animal*; *Singham Again*; and *Jawan*.

Another day, another underwhelming Bollywood remake of a Tamil/Telugu/Malayalam film – this was the abiding sentiment towards the end of the media show last month, for the Varun Dhawan-starrer *Baby John*, directed by Kalees. The film is the official Hindi remake of the 2016 Tamil action thriller *Theri*, starring Vijay and directed by hit merchant Atlee (who has produced *Baby John*).

In the film, super-cop Satya Verma (Dhawan) fakes his death and builds a new identity for himself (as John D'Silva) and his little daughter in a sleepy Kerala town, after vindictive mob boss Babbar Sher (Jackie Shroff) kills his wife and mother in an ambush. When his daughter's teacher Tara (Wamiqa Gabbi) tries to speak to John in Malayalam, he says he doesn't know the language. Soon afterwards, when John is confronted by someone who knew him as Satya, he lets loose a stream of stilted Malayalam, surprising Tara and alerting her to the fact that there's something amiss here.

A Hindi-speaking hero in the middle of an identity crisis chooses to masquerade (poorly) as a dyed-in-the-wool Malayali. I can scarcely think of a more fitting moment to encapsulate Bollywood's ongoing creative crisis.

For the last four to five years Bollywood has been increasingly dependent on Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam-language movies. Every major star has remade movies from these industries, with the Hindi-language results ranging from middling (Ajay Devgn's *Bholaa*, a remake of Lokesh Kanagaraj's Tamil film *Kaithi*) to downright awful (*Baaghi 3*, based on N. Linguswamy's *Vettai*) – with the odd notable exception like Pushkar and Gayathri's *Vikram Vedha*, an improvement on their already-polished eponymous Tamil film. Some of the biggest Bollywood hits of recent times have come from Tamil and Telugu writers, such as Atlee's *Jawan* or Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Animal*. Increasingly, directors from these industries are invited to remake their own films in Hindi because Bollywood doesn't even trust their own creators to make commercially successful facsimiles. Kannada filmmaker A. Harsha has been announced as the director of the upcoming Tiger Shroff film *Baaghi 4*, for instance.

Local star for good PR

The commercial/marketing impact of this phenomenon is significant. One tangible development is that almost every big-budget movie, regardless of industry, has a 'mixed' cast these days.

There are representatives from various industries, covering north and south – it's easier to promote a film with a 'local' face, goes the thinking. To cite just two recent examples, *Baby John* has South star Keerthy Suresh as one of the film's female leads, while the recent Rajinikanth action-thriller *Vettaiyan* had Amitabh Bachchan in a key role. Rajini's next film *Coolie* has cameos by Nagarjuna (Telugu), Aamir Khan (Hindi) and Upendra (Kannada). Kannada actor Yash of *KGF*-fame is all set to play Raavan in Nitesh Tiwari's Hindi-language movie *Ramayana*, while Ranbir Kapoor and Sai Pallavi play Rama and Sita, respectively.

And this is hardly the only way in which the nuts and bolts of the Hindi blockbuster are changing. Bollywood action segments have started to resemble scenes one might see in a Prabhas or a Yash movie. Cartoonishly brawny men dispatch legions of attackers while the camera has an aneurysm, deploying dozens of fast-moving cuts in a minute or two. The rapid-fire, over-the-top editing style leaves no room for the scene to breathe, or to even effectively communicate the fight's emotional stakes, and so on. The hero barely raises his fist and villains fly through the air in an outwardly expanding circle.

The third big change is of the hirsute persuasion – Bollywood heroes are going all in on big, shaggy-dog beards *a la* Allu Arjun in the *Pushpa* films or Yash in *KGF*. In the most recent big-budget Bollywood release *Singham Again*, the villain 'Danger Lanka' (Arjun Kapoor) is explicitly modelled on a composite of famous Tamil and Telugu-movie characters. He has a beard so large and thick that you expect birds to fly out during the intermission. When Ranveer Singh's (clean-cut, military-mustachioed) character Sangram sees his foe for the first time, he even remarks: "*Kya danger look hai teraa, Danger! Ekdum South Indian hero maafik* (What a killer look, Danger, you're looking just like a South Indian hero)."

Once upon a beard

Now, I am mindful of the fact that sometimes beards, like all visual markers, are informed by cultural osmosis. And yet, one must protest Bollywood's current one-size-fits-all approach. Under the tutelage of Sandeep Reddy Vanga, first Shahid Kapoor and then Ranbir Kapoor buried their faces underneath layers of Amazonian lip-moss. They are '*South ka* hero' now, visually and spiritually.

And so, regardless of the number of times Dhawan copied Vijay's signature mannerisms in *Baby John* (the stylised wearing of the bracelet, tap dance-on-cocaine choreography), I did not 'buy' the illusion. Bollywood can repeat this gambit over and over again but it's a cynical performance, one guided more by the pressures of the box office than anything else. Even a good imitation needs a kernel of unconditional love for it to *really* work.

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

Revitalised (Clockwise from right) *Indigo Flower* at the Old GMC; one of the gorgeous staircases in the building; Smriti Rajgarhia; and inside the Directorate of Accounts. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

COUNTING PANAJI'S HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Several of the city's heritage structures come alive during the annual Serendipity Arts Festival

Sunalini Mathew
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This year's Serendipity Arts Festival (SAF) was significant in showing people who came from outside the State – 'the outsiders' – what Panaji is, in its best parts. The multi-disciplinary festival, at 14 locations, across a 5-kilometre area, brought together 1,800 visual and performing artists and artisans from across India and some from abroad, to exhibit, perform, workshop, and talk about their work last month.

The best way to get from one festival location to the other was on foot, taking a few moments to sit on the parapet to look at the Mandovi – the water and the floating casinos. The next best was the shuttle car (with poetry readers in some cars).

Marrying the arts and heritage

The centrepiece of SAF was the Old Government Medical College (GMC). The building came up in the 1920s, says Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar, associate professor at the Goa College of Architecture. Designed by Goan architect Ramachondra Mangesh Adwalpalkar and built by local contractor Madevá Sinai Bobó e Calculó, it "was a product of its time", drawing inspiration from hospitals being built in British India. The neoclassical structure, constructed using locally available soft red laterite stone, was lime-plastered and predominantly painted yellow. "There was an unwritten rule in Portuguese-ruled Goa that only churches could be fully white," Khandolkar adds.

The working hospital was shifted out, and in 2007, there were plans to turn it into a shopping mall, "...except for an unlikely activist intervention in the form of *Aparanta*, an art exhibition curated by Ranjit Hoskote", reports Goa's 124-year-old newspaper *O Heraldo*. Then in 2015, there was talk of the Goa government planning to shift the Goa State Museum into the building, but nothing came of it.

"I remember coming to Goa in 2015 [to plan SAF], crossing it, and saying what a beautiful building it was," says Smriti Rajgarhia, the director of SAF, and an architect by education. The following year, the Old GMC became a part of the festival's inaugural edition.

Today, it sees the highest footfalls for SAF. The long verandas open into a series of rooms, and during the recent edition, each exhibited a different artist. On the ground floor was *Multiplay*, curated by the Gurugram-based artist duo Thukral and Tagra. Next door, at an immersive *Indigo Flower* installation, visitors wore over-shoes to walk on a canvas of indigo, taking in its herby smell from vats of dye. They footprint their way to a future project – the marks on the canvas forming unintentional designs. "Indigo is immortal," says textile designer Adheep A.K., who works with Himanshu Shani, of the 11:11 brand of clothes. "Even after 100 years, the pigment can be transferred onto another cloth or garment." It's how the exhibit fit into the GMC: both have long lives, and a colonial history.

A street full of history

Adjoining the Old GMC is the Maquinez Palace, which housed a theatre for performances and a series of galleries in December. Originally built in the early 1700s, it belonged to two brothers before being repurposed in 1842 by the government to establish the Escola Médico-Cirúrgica de Goa, Asia's second-oldest medical school.

Unfortunately, the festival doesn't put out a detailed history of the buildings. "For the 10th year [in 2025] we plan to get researchers on board to do this," says Rajgarhia.

Down this stretch of road along the Mandovi river, extending no more than 800 metres, are several historical structures, including the Adil Shah's Palace, built around the 1500s blending Indian and Islamic architecture – with arches and open spaces. It once housed Goa's Legislative Assembly. The tree-lined promenade also features key Portuguese-era buildings, such as the Collectorate, the Customs House, and the Kala Academy, designed by architect Charles Correa and built in the 1970s.

Every venue of the SAF can take a person in a different direction of exploration. For instance, Samba Square next to the Church of Immaculate Conception, which had an exhibit dedicated to Ladakh's landscape and life, could lead to a wander into the market lanes.

The search for old and new

Each year, there's a hunt for new venues. This year, two significant ones were the Directorate of Accounts, a 19th century structure, and the beach. At the former, another yellow building, much like the GMC, there are long corridors connecting rooms and solid wood banisters, the sides of which have modern wood laminates, showing the passage of time.

Most of the department has shifted to another location, but some staff was still there on the ground floor, surrounded by files. They hadn't been upstairs yet, uncurious about their old office. But Rajgarhia says in the past, 75% of the footfall has been from the residents of Goa.

At the Caranzalem beach, people from the areas around drifted in to watch *Littoral States of Being*, curated by Chennai-based dancer Preeti Athreya. "We come here for a walk every day and we saw them putting the bamboo up," says Anjum Shaikh, as her daughter plays in the sand. "The vision of the festival has been to activate the city. Every time you move from one venue to another, there is an experience of a different side of life," states Athreya.

On a boat, as the sun set over the Mandovi, musicians performed *River Raags*. Singer Vidya Shah, who took everyone on an hour-long journey of Begum Akhtar's lyricism, says this location was her dream come true. On one side are centuries-old Mangalore-tiled Goan homes; on the other, floating casinos. The old and the new, and Goa's syncretic cultures coming together on a boat.

GOREN BRIDGE

Know your agreements

North-South vulnerable, East deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal was played just a few days ago, as we write this, at the National Championships in Louisville, Kentucky. North-South were in hot pursuit of a victory in a National Pair event when they had a mix-up about their bidding agreements.

North intended his two-diamond bid to be natural and that he was placing the contract in the best place for the partnership. North was right about two diamonds being the best contract for his side, but South interpreted the bid as a transfer to hearts and duly bid two hearts. This created an ethical dilemma for North. South had announced the two-diamond bid as a transfer and North knew there had been a misunderstanding. The laws, however, require him to bid as though his partner had explained the two-diamond bid as natural and bid two hearts anyway. In that case, the North hand would be a suitable dummy for a heart contract and there was no reason to bid diamonds again. North did the ethical thing and passed two-hearts doubled, for which he deserves much credit. We are afraid that not all players would have done the same.

East overtook the queen of clubs lead to play a heart, allowing West to draw trumps. West led the jack of clubs, which East overtook to run his club suit. The defence took all 13 tricks – six hearts, six clubs, and a spade – for a penalty of 2300 points! North-South finished second in this event. An average score on this deal would have seen them finish on top!

NORTH
♠ 10 5 3
♡ 9 6 5
◇ J 10 9 8 5 4
♣ 6

WEST
♠ 9 4
♡ A K J 7 4 2
◇ 7 2
♣ Q J 4

EAST
♠ A Q 8 7
♡ 3
◇ 6 3
♣ A K 10 9 8 5

SOUTH
♠ K J 6 2
♡ Q 10 8
◇ A K Q
♣ 7 3 2

The bidding:

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1♣	1NT	Dbl	2◇
Pass	2♡	Dbl	All pass

Opening lead: Queen of ♣

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What have the Roman gods given our language?

Berty Ashley

1 Janus was an ancient Roman god after whom January is named. He had two faces, each looking in opposite directions, hence giving an opportunity to look back and look forward, which is how one feels at the beginning of the year. What other word, with the meaning someone who usually takes care of gates and buildings, comes from Janus?

2 Ceres was one of the most important goddesses in Roman culture. She was the goddess of fertility, and motherhood. She was also the goddess of a food item, which was eventually named after her. What is this that usually starts your day?

3 Vortumna was the goddess of luck and vengeance, and the mistress of destiny. She was known as the 'turner' because she turned the giant wheel of the year, stopping it at either happiness, sorrow, life, or death. What word do we get from her name, and consequently what phrase from her action?

4 This word actually means "under the influence of the planet Jupiter" as it came from the astrological belief that those born under the sign of Jupiter had a certain disposition. What term is this which comes from the Roman god 'Jove' after whom the planet is named?

'Allegory of Peace' This 1652 painting by Dutch artist Jan Lievens shows the crowning of Pax. The figure in chains under her feet is Mars, the god of war. (GETTY IMAGES)

5 The Roman god, Vulcan, was the god of metalworking and the forge because he had control over one of the basic elements of Earth. This led to his name becoming the origin of a geographical entity most associated with that element. Which element did he have control over and what was named after him?

6 The goddess of dawn and poetry in Roman mythology was someone who renewed herself every morning and flew across the sky to announce the arrival of her brother, the sun. She also gives her name to an atmospheric phenomenon caused by magnetic particles in the night sky?

7 In Roman mythology, Liber Pater was the god of wine, and the ancient festival named after him was held to celebrate the rights one gets when coming of age. What word do we eventually get from his name?

8 Nyx, daughter of Chaos, was the Roman goddess who was also the personification of a particular time period. She lived at the end of the Earth and wore jet-black robes. What word do we eventually get from her name?

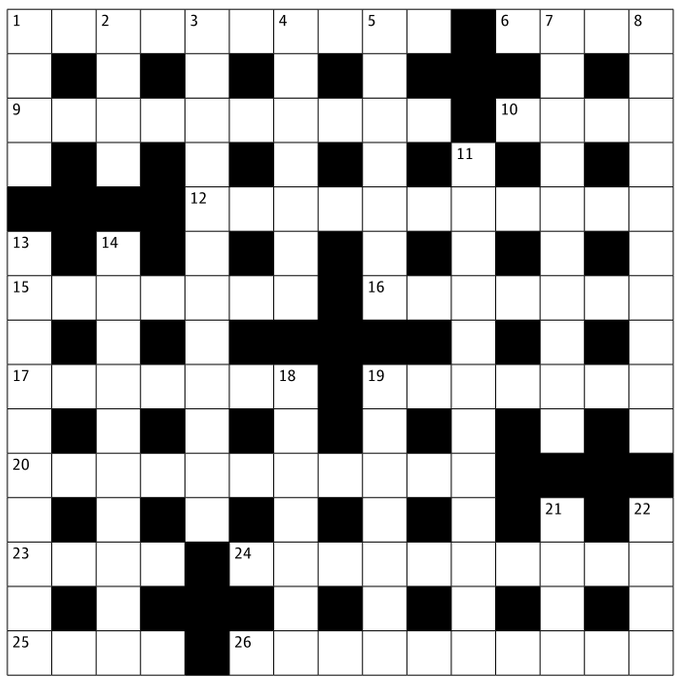
9 Fons was a Roman god who was the son of Janus after whom a certain type of reservoir is named. Originally built to give citizens their basic requirement, they soon became very fancy and decorative landmarks. What are these?

10 Pax was a Roman goddess, the daughter of Jupiter and Justice. She was used by emperor Augustus to help stabilise the Roman empire after years of civil war. What term in English do we get from her, which we wish for all in the new year?

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. Janitor
2. Cereal
3. Fortune, Wheel of Fortune
4. Jovial
5. Fire, Volcano
6. Aurora
7. Liberty
8. Night
9. Fountains
10. Peace

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3339



Across
1 Employment *à la* Ubers — or horsedrawn carriages? (3,7)
6 House detective, part employed (4)
9 Sufferer sedated, calm (10)
10 A sucker rejected some bubbly (4)
12 Grim, noon, dog barking: you can't say this now! (4,7)
15 Exciting under canvas by the sound of it (7)
16 To? (4,3)
17 Twin, having consumed gin, recalled puzzles (7)
19 Harlequin inexhaustibly portraying some characters: that's the tonic (7)
20 Comic interlude – but does it describe a darkness? (5,6)
23 1/28 oz good butter (4)
24 One drawing things out — using this? (10)
25 Cushions in apartments (4)
26 Naughty child is on the loo (but only half) somewhere in Slovakia (10)

Down
1 Drop golf ball that's been lifted high (4)
2 Jerk, English in French holiday home (4)
3 Where youngsters' habits may be unpleasant? (8,4)
4 Mostly unwelcome sound: O, Everyman is most unwelcome! (7)
5 Least brief amount of time? I'm... I'm not sure (7)
7 Horse that provides sustenance in the main (10)
8 More like preliminary version, read aloud and increasingly windy? (10)
11 Learning, fast, to arrange relatives' accommodations (7,5)
13 Grand! I have beer — and dog returning to offer support (4,1,3,2)
14 Spooner's to provide support for violinists etc (6,4)
18 Shepherd who played up front for England? (7)
19 Queen in time to introduce Alien V (7)
21 Volcano where the stake's raised (4)
22 Primarily, oceanic ravenous creature: aargh! (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3338

When biographies become just hagiographies

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All of us are curious about others' lives. This is, in fact, a curiosity about the human condition itself. When this curiosity is not channelled properly, it expresses itself through gossip that is voyeuristic and hurtful. When channelised nobly, it takes us to the classics of biographical literature.

Biographies are especially of value when they explore and shed light on the interiors of their protagonists. Outer life and its achievements are certainly important; but far more important are the storms and calms of inner life. We are, first of all, our emotional selves. Stories that connect with this aspect of our being tend to be the deepest and the most enriching.

Many biographies fall short of this expectation by degenerating into paeans of their protagonists. Such biographies, called hagiographies, diminish the human side of their protagonists and exaggerate their heroic side. As a result, they may appeal to hysterical fans and followers of the person being eulogised, but their relevance to the human heart becomes superficial.

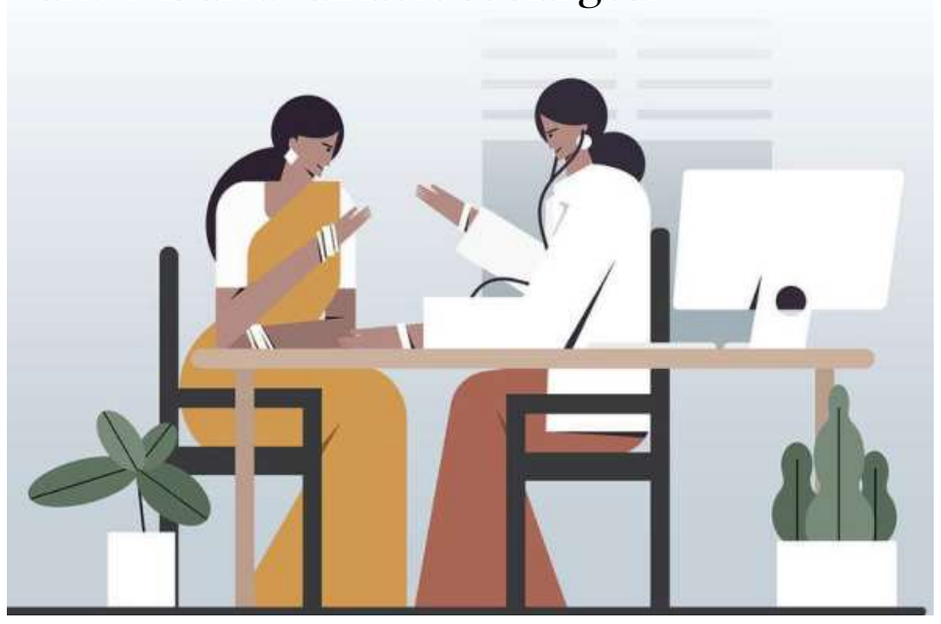
Hagiographies also place an unfair burden on the person being idolised, if he is alive. The hero often becomes compelled to portray the persona that his hagiography projects. Hypocrisy and deceit then become his go-to places. He loses his freedom and the public who revere him become misled. This is the tragedy that ensues when the persona hijacks the person. Hagiographies disguised as biographies thus do a disservice both to the heroes whose paeans they sing and to the readers whose judgments they mislead.

Hero-worship must not usurp the place of empathy. The former is the goal of propagandists and the latter, the goal of true biographical literature.

The human self is worthy of expression in all its nakedness. True heroes are never afraid of such a full expression. As Emerson wrote in his classic essay "Self-reliance", "We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted." One can only hope that such "faithfully imparted" life stories become more available.

A vision for healthcare in India

Good health is a fundamental human right and it is an attainable social goal



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Health development is an integral part of social development. In a vast country such as India, there is a huge need for healthcare. Government alone cannot meet this demand. Therefore, it becomes obligatory on the part of non-governmental, voluntary and private institutions to supplement its efforts.

Looking at the vast canvas, one rightly feels India has come a long way. But still there are miles to go. Health indices since 1947 give us ample reasons to feel happy. At the time of Independence, the average life expectancy was 32 in India; today it is 72. In 1947, infant mortality rate was 160 for every 1,000 babies born. Today it is 24. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) was 2,000 per 1,00,000 live births. Now, it is 97, better than the global average of 158. And since 2005, India has showed a 77% decline in MMR, steeper than the 43% at the world level. We are looking at the glass as half full, instead of saying half empty. Nevertheless, our ultimate goal is to ensure that the glass is full and brimming.

India's healthcare system has primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The coordination among them is far from satisfactory. There is a strong imbalance in rural India. Unavailable, unaffordable and inaccessible healthcare of quality has put rural India on the back foot.

A well-thought-out, well-coordinated and strongly monitored public private partnership (PPP) model will be the key to success in the sector. Towards a road map, let us zero in on primary and secondary healthcare systems and enumerate the challenges and the solutions. To achieve the vision of quality, affordable and accessible healthcare, particularly for the underprivileged, a multi-pronged approach is needed. There is a need to establish more primary and community health centres in rural areas, upgrade district hospitals to tertiary-care standards, encourage private sector investment in underserved regions through PPPs and persuade and prompt corporates to adopt primary health centres or establish them and monitor them with government guidance.

More colleges

The country needs to enhance the number of medical and nursing colleges, especially in remote areas. It needs to introduce training programmes in basic nursing, advanced medical technologies and emergency care. There is an imminent urgency to retain medical and health talent through better working conditions and incentives. Apart from the regular nursing cadre, a mid-level support system has to be created with students trained in a diploma course after Plus Two. They will become the backbone of the centre.

There is a need to focus on preventive healthcare through health and wellness centres and induce heavy investment in sanitation, nutrition, and immunisation programmes to reduce the disease burden. Universal health coverage is a vital consideration in an impoverished country such as India and expanding the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana to include a broader population base is without doubt a crucial initiative.

India needs to see a significant and sharp increase in government spending on healthcare to at least 2.5% of the GDP by 2025 (as per the National Health Policy, 2017). Health insurance coverage needs to be expanded rapidly to cover the informal sector. Out-of-pocket expenditure needs to be reduced drastically by regulating drug prices and promoting generic medicines.

Promoting awareness campaigns for lifestyle diseases, mental health, and substance abuse are urgent interventions, given the vast scale of problems in these domains. There is no second opinion that accredited social health activists and community health volunteers need to be empowered to act as the first line of care. Initiatives have to be taken to guarantee inter-sectoral collaboration among health, education, and sanitation departments.

Given that it's the digital era, implementing the National Digital Health Mission to create digital health IDs and integrating healthcare systems, and leveraging AI, telemedicine and big data to address the rural-urban divide are vital for equal and easy access to healthcare.

India has great technical and technological competency and hence promoting domestic manufacturing under the "Make in India" initiative to reduce dependence on imports will help make the country self-reliant and self-dependent in healthcare, reducing dramatically sky-rocketing healthcare costs, which rise especially in the wake of imports. This endeavour will further get buttressed by scaling up research and development for vaccines, biotechnology, and indigenous innovations.

India needs to focus on the establishment of innovation hubs for affordable medical solutions that are vital in a country with a huge population, expand telemedicine services to remote regions as people may not be able to travel long distances owing to a variety of factors such as high costs, non-availability of transport infrastructure or broken roads or deep inaccessibility, simply put. And in the era of mass disease, we have to strengthen epidemiological research to prepare for future pandemics.

The National Health Policy, 2017 needs to be effectively strengthened. There has to be greater enforcement of accountability through data-driven decision-making and there is an urgent need to promote decentralised governance to empower local healthcare providers.

While executing initiatives to improve healthcare in the country, India needs to have key performance indicators. What will they be? There has to be further reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates and enhancement in life expectancy, massive upgrade of health infrastructure in underserved regions and enhanced financial protection for the economically weak. If a country can fulfil these objectives and meet these goals, we can surely say that performance on health indicators is positive and that a country will develop well.

A robust and resilient healthcare system is key to India's economic growth and social well-being. By addressing gaps and implementing innovative solutions, India can achieve a healthcare model that is inclusive, sustainable and futuristic.

The author is the founder & managing trustee of Sankara Eye Foundation India

An avian quest for harmony with nature

Birds indicate to us quite clearly if our actions are promoting harmonious coexistence or otherwise

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A recent survey confirmed the disturbing trend of diminishing bird species and numbers in Kerala. I have noticed this phenomenon in Thiruvananthapuram, where I grew up in the 1960s.

The ancestral house was in a compound with many trees and I had seen paradise flycatchers with trailing tails and golden yellow orioles. Once a purple sunbird had built its pendulous nest at the front entrance, unaffected by our frequent movements. Over the past five decades, the compound changed to accommodate more houses with less greenery. A white-breasted kingfisher and a magpie robin became occasional visitors at dusk.

During the COVID pandemic, I spent a lot of time looking at birds from the balcony of my fourth-floor apartment in Jamshedpur. A jamun tree at eye level was a favourite with many starlings, coppersmith barbets, bank mynahs and yellow-footed green pigeons along with the familiar purple sunbirds, golden orioles and magpie robins. The most exciting discovery was a pair of barn owls that would come out from their hideout beneath my balcony.

Once it was holding a recently caught rat and another time it perched a few feet away from me.

Winter spotting

In winter, I spotted small migratory birds, greenish warbler the size of a jamun leaf and a Taiga flycatcher. Last year, I sensed trouble as some men walked around inspecting the old building under the jamun tree. They bought the land, demolished the building and pruned the trees.

Over the next few months, a hotel was built and all that I could see from my balcony was an expansive bright blue metal roof and a few branches

ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

of the jamun tree. The hotel exterior was lit up in the evenings and flashed bright colours. The modification led to the disappearance of birds without any protest except a pair of rose-ringed parakeets. Inept and sad, I missed the barn owls the most.

I sought birds in the peripheries of the city and included birdwatching in all my travels. Though I spotted many species, the serene comfort of bird watching was lost. Recently I got an opportunity to visit Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on a medical mission and looked forward to seeing some African birds.

Citing safety concerns, the hosts forbade us from venturing anywhere beyond the hospital and the hotel. The hotel downtown was amid many high-rise buildings and we were surprised to find weaver birds among the creepers at the entrance and long-tailed speckled mouse birds on a tree nearby. As I reached my room, a Marabou stork flew past the window and I could see a bulky Hadada ibis on a field across the road, its wings glistening in sunlight. The next day, we went to the hospital.

Established in 1922, most of the buildings in the sprawling complex were old, single-storeyed with stone or bare brick exterior and sloping roofs in earthy colours. The abundance of native trees and the typical tall African cacti gave the feeling of a resort. Almost every tree had nests of weaver birds. In between the built structures, there were large patches of mixed indigenous plants. We spotted more than 40 species of birds on the premises of the 500-bed hospital with a daily 1,500 outpatients.

African paradise flycatchers flew around the new emergency building, mynah-like Abyssinian thrushes hopped on the green patches between the wards and cute little birds, red fire finch and turquoise blue-colored red-cheeked cordon-bleu, were busy pecking at crumbs in the waiting areas. Tacazze sunbirds circled around the flowering trees flashing iridescent blue black metallic colours as the afternoon sunlight fell on them. I had a double bill of a successful medical mission and delightful birdwatching. The abundance of birds and coexistence with humans could be attributed to the nurturing of native flora and unobtrusive merging of buildings within the ecosystem.

Building practices that conserve local biodiversity is the need of the hour and birds will indicate to us ēclearly if our actions are promoting harmonious coexistence or otherwise. We have to listen.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

To say that Bollywood fans have lost patience for love, as being shown in these times, would be too naive a statement. ('2024 and its cinema of desire'; Dec. 29) The subtle romance of a movie like *Three of Us* will still be admired for the way it is presented. Crude, formula-driven romance stories being dished out by the very corporate Bollywood of today will always be rejected, as it is bereft of any soul.
Deepak Taak

What is heartening is that a number of woman auteurs have jumped on to the bandwagon and have been making films that have desire and sexuality as the backdrop. Indian filmmakers are also catering to the international market and their oeuvres are being lauded by juries across the world with coveted honours coming their way.
C.V. Aravind

The successful movies of 2024 have ample lessons for all. Instead of blaming cine goers, filmmakers must change their storytelling methodology to suit contemporary tastes.
M.N. Saraswathi Devi

Books for the future

Today's readers are tomorrow's leaders. ('Books of 2024'; Dec. 29) Let's pass on the legacy of reading to our younger generation.
Ratna Naidu

Gossip sells

Everybody loves to gossip. ('Golden age of the celebrity memoir'; Dec. 29) With controversies around celebrities, from Prince Harry to Britney Spears, gaining traction through social media, it's no surprise that their memoirs are huge hits.
Rohith Varon S.S.

Silent epidemic

G. Sampath brilliantly highlights the silently spreading epidemic of brain rot with a touch of sardonic humour. ('How to overcome brain rot'; Dec. 29) More than simply waking up to this phenomenon and acknowledging it, one must avoid taking it to bed in the first place.
Pranati R. Narain

It was an amazing piece to read on the eve of the New Year. The fact that most of the reasons for, or symptoms of brain rot are experienced by nearly all generations is mind-blowing.
K.R. Unnithan

Nuggets of wisdom

The inimitable way in which Saba Mahjoor delivers Phuphee's wisdom through pragmatic conversations and culinary forays never ceases to amaze. ('Sugared eggs and unwanted guests'; Dec. 29) Keeping no expectations from others is the best way to make life's journey fulfilling and happy.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

Delightful edition

What a delight the year-end edition of *Magazine* was. Unintentionally, I started on the back page. Then I could not put it down without finishing the whole issue at one go. From Sunita Kohli and Saba Mahjoor to Sidin, Sampath, books and cinema of 2024 — oh, such a delightful read.
T. Ravi

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

A better understanding of freedom
The frequent misuse of public property demands it
Mohan Das

Life is uncertain
Is it then sensible to continue wars and disharmony?
V. Gopinath

A longing for WFH
A major benefit is the improvement in the work-life balance
Jayashree V.

Colossal waste
The amount of food wasted during wedding feasts poses a serious concern
Chandana S.

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

(Clockwise from below) Dishes with seaweed; Assavri Kulkarni, whose 'Secret Market Walk', underlined the importance of eating seasonal and local; dishes at Maryanne Lobo's session on weeds; and the Climate Controlled Dosa Picnic Basket. (SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL, JOANNA LOBO)

INSIDE THE 'FUTURE FOOD' LAB

Sampling seaweed butter, ant chutney and AI-curated nutritious recipes, the food-curious at Goa's Serendipity Arts Festival were encouraged to ask searching questions

Joanna Lobo

It's a seaweed pickle. An Indian seaweed pickle, made with a weed found off Goa's shores, called Gracilaria. It is springy and briny with some umami notes. The pickle is one of the few unusual items attendees got to try at Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa a few weeks ago, at a session titled Eating Seaweed.

The session was a collaboration between marine conservationist Gabriella D'cruz from The Good Ocean, and chef Priyanka Sardessai of Larder & Folk, showcasing the culinary applications of seaweed. On offer: seaweed butter, sugared seaweed on doughnuts, powdered seaweed dusted on chips and that pickled seaweed.

India's rich coastline is home to over 800 species of seaweed, most of which are farmed for use in pharma and cosmetic industries. At The Good Ocean, Gabriella and her partner, Chaitanya Chowgule, are on a mission to prove that Indian seaweed has culinary applications too – it is a delicious marine vegetable, high in protein, fibre and iodine, and quite versatile. Seaweed could certainly be one of our food futures.

Edible theories

The future of food was the overarching culinary theme at Serendipity, curated by food collective, Edible Issues. While past editions of the festivals have had many food sessions, this year felt different. The sessions were priced higher but there was clear vision and variety and the theme was explored through talks, walks, games, performative art, and workshops. The audience, who ranged from aquaponic farmers to senior journalists and tourists, seemed invested too, asking questions, offering points for discussion and unafraid to try something new. Each session had some kind of food (and drink) passed around, adding emphasis to the speaker's words.

Seaweed was just one option. Elsewhere, the Boochi Project's Tansha Vohra brought insects – ant chutney, sweet grasshoppers and dried mealworms – as appetisers to an engaging discussion about the potential of using insects as a protein source. At her daily mock wild picnics, she used AI to curate recipes for a simple meal that was low-waste, nutritious and featured locally sourced ingredients – the food included spent grain crackers, ant chutney, jackfruit jam and whey sodas. Food architect Jashan Sippy of Sugar and Space conducted a workshop highlighting the role of bees in the food system. To showcase how the future could very well include 3D printed food, he served 3D printed rose cookies at the session.

Past as framework

It is impossible to talk about food futures without looking at, and learning from, the past. A past that showcases India's rich diversity in ingredients, cooking techniques and recipes, many of which are being lost to time. It is worrying to learn that over 90% of India's heirloom varieties have died out. "We've lost the stories told about rice and the knowledge of what to do with them," said Shalini Krishnan during the session, Every Grain a Story. Krishnan and chef Anumitra Ghosh Dastidar run the restaurant Edible Archives, while also working on a project documenting heirloom rice. Dastidar herself has spent 15 years looking at India's disappearing grains, and has worked with them in her kitchen. While Krishnan spoke about the medicinal benefits of the rice – some variants given to lactating mothers, some that could help fight cancer, and treat minor ailments – Anumitra served a feast showcasing the diversity of rice with respect to six tastes: salty, bitter, astringent, pungent, sweet and sour. Of note was a fascinating and flavourful rice salt.

Edible Archives is just one of the many passionate outfits keen on documenting India's culinary heritage, from little known dishes and recipes to ingredients. Aditya Mopidevi and Srinivas Mangipudi's Climate Recipes is a project that relies on intergenerational wisdom to build a roadmap for community well-being and the future of our land. Assavri Kulkarni is a Goan fashion photographer currently working on a documentary called Recipes of the River, where she is collating all the wisdom from the fishing community (including her own family) before it gets lost forever.

Plant walks and board games

Another Goan documenting ancient wisdom is Maryanne Lobo, an Ayurvedic doctor who conducts plant walks across Goa (under her company, Plant Walks Goa). "Foraging for food is not an alien concept. Our ancestors were doing it much before it became trendy," she said. On her walks during the festival – short ones around the old Goa Medical College (GMC) in Panaji – she found seven species of edible plants. Her talk focused on how the weeds we ignore in our garden have the potential to be on our plate. "Food is medicine. Nature has an antidote for different ailments. Most edible greens will help keep your blood sugar in check. The easiest ways to consume weeds in food is by including them in dals, soups, and salads." Her feast of wild greens included a kange (sweet potato) kheer, maddi (Colocasia root) fry, bathua pakode, arbi canapes, and a peperomia pellucida omelette. Interestingly, there was also a board game, Map the Wild, about wild edibles and medicinal plants of India.

Perhaps an unexpected highlight of the food lab was the community feeling where, by the end of five days, many attendees had become friends, and there were deep discussions about recipes and food that evoke disgust and delight. There was hope that perhaps the roots of the future of food could be found in collaboration and community.

The writer is a freelance journalist and editor from Goa.

Question hour

Copenhagen-based Priya Mani has been busy creating a visual encyclopaedia of Indian food, documenting ingredients and preparations alphabetically. Her ingredient-led workshops were a solid introduction into little known ingredients like amphora, arrack, teppal and adzuki. But the biggest takeaway here also doubled up as good food-writing advice: "Ask where your food comes from, who grows it, and how does it reach you?" Food writer, Vikram Doctor, took it a step further. "Always look at what is the larger issue behind the questions being asked."

Neeti Mehra

Can *desi oon* take on pashmina?

India's indigenous wool is coming out of obscurity. Activists, a festival, and a handful of brands are trying to help it find its rightful space

Growing up, I swaddled myself in my grandmother's pashmina shawls on cold Delhi winter evenings. I had yet to discover the largely unexplored vocabulary of indigenous wool or *desi oon*.

India has one of the world's largest and culturally diverse pastoralist populations. For centuries, shepherds and their flocks have ambled over difficult terrains, from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the sunbaked lands of Kutch. In the arid stretches of the Deccan, indigenous breeds such as the Black Deccani sheep, with coarse ebony wool, have been herded by the Kurumas, Kurubas, and Dhangars of Telangana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Each region in India has its own distinctive wool and fibre craft culture.

"India is home to between 10 and 20 million pastoralists, 75 million sheep, 145 million goats, 4,00,000 camels, and 60,000 yaks, producing approximately 75 million kilos of wool annually," says Riya Shetty, a wool anchor at the Centre For Pastoralism (CfP), an organisation working to nudge Indian pastoralism – its systems, complexities, contributions, and challenges – into the limelight. But today "pastoralism faces challenges from state policies and societal perceptions that favour sedentarisation [giving up a nomadic lifestyle to settle down in a region], leading to restricted land access, and reduced recognition of its ecological benefits", she adds.

To reverse this decline, in 2020, CfP launched the Desi Oon Hub, a loosely tied-together collaborative organisation to carry out research, innovation and experimentation. It includes over 20 small enterprises such as Miyar Mufflers, Khamir, Earthen Tunes, and Avani Earthcraft that work with the community of shepherds, knitters, felters, spinners, and weavers. The recent Desi Oon exhibition in Delhi was one of its initiatives to rebuild the struggling ecosystem and amplify the fleece-to-fashion conversation. "Many visitors were pleasantly surprised to know that we have such an extensive diversity of wool and sheep breeds in the country that go beyond pashmina," says Shetty.

Stories of resilience

Kutch-based NGO Khamir, a long-term collaborator, has been deeply involved in the revival of native Patanwadi sheep, treasured for its wool and sturdiness. Its numbers have dwindled to less than 5,000 today, impacting the wool ecosystem of pastoralists and artisans.

Paresh Mangaliya, deputy director (trade) at Khamir, has been working with pastoralists across the region for nearly a decade, collaborating with around 160 women artisans across 14 villages, to revive traditional processes such as hand-spinning.

"Increasing industrialisation and development is shrinking the land availability for herding and, in turn, impacting the interlinked production systems," says Mangaliya, of the mounting challenge.

***Oon* top of it** Clothing from Jigmat Couture; Peoli Design; and shepherds sorting wool in Himachal. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, CENTRE FOR PASTORALISM)

With their efforts, the local value chain is seeing a revival, buoyed by an increasing demand for conscious, hand-spun, hand-woven, naturally dyed, handmade winter wear. Signature pieces include Patanwadi sheep wool jackets and *firans*. The garments and fabrics have a strong customer base across metros and are even exported to the U.S. and the U.K.

Up north, in the upper reaches of Almora, Uttarakhand, Peoli Design has woven innovation into its work with Harsil wool, nettle, and hemp. Using natural dyes such as madder, indigo, and pomegranate, the wool, which is softer than its Kutch counterpart, has been fashioned into footwear and cushion covers. They have also introduced design interventions to enhance its softness and drapability, including creating blends by knitting wool into woven fabric. "This blend of hand-knitting and weaving, while being aesthetically unique, reduces the production time – hand-knitting being far more laborious than weaving," says Vasanthi Veluri, co-founder, Peoli Design. Since the pandemic, Peoli has seen a 20% compound annual growth rate, retailing worldwide.

The fleece chronicles

Monisha Ahmed, textile anthropologist and co-founder of the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation, recalls how the fortunes of the pashmina goat, prized for its soft wool, changed almost overnight. Originally, western Tibet was the primary source of pashmina to Kashmir and its shawl-making industry, through Ladakh. After the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the trade gradually fizzled out, and the industry had to find a new source for raw material.

Back then, Ladakh's goats were undervalued and considered inferior to the local sheep. "A kilo of pashmina was languishing around ₹7 per kilo in the 1950s, shooting up to ₹300 in the 70s," says Ahmed, as the industry turned to Ladakh to source it. The locals, incentivised by the government and encouraged by Indian pashmina traders, began breeding goats in the Changthang plateau. This, however, comes with its own problems. Goat herding, in the long run, could lead to desertification. Also, the goat is not as resilient to cold as sheep.

But a deeper shift is taking place in the landscape: the erasure of cultural heritage in a land that's bound to the sheep. "We shouldn't glamourise pashmina at the cost of sheep wool," says Ahmed, cautioning a balanced approach to keep centuries of pastoralism and craftsmanship alive in Ladakh, a land traditionally dominated by sheep and yaks.

A luxury design house looking beyond pashmina is Jigmat Couture. Each year, they drop a single collection – crafted from yak, lamb, merino and cashmere – steeped in Ladakhi culture. "Textile weaving and hand spinning were practised in every Ladakhi household, but over time the craft has started fading. Our mission is to revive and promote it. Working with artisans, we are building an entire ecosystem under one roof, namely 'farm to fashion', eliminating the middleman," says co-founder Jigmat Norbu. Though optimistic about the future of *desi oon*, there's a caveat: "The wool industry is still unorganised and has limited production. Sourcing quality material is difficult."

The writer is a sustainability consultant and founder of Beejliving, a lifestyle platform dedicated to slow living.