THE HINDU
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magazine

backpage

Eight banknotes and the story of a growing nation

GO TO » PAGE 8

INSIDE

Independence Day | History as quirky stories for children

GO TO » PAGE 5

LITERARY REVIEW

Nehru's "radical political vision" for foreign policy

GO TO » PAGE 3

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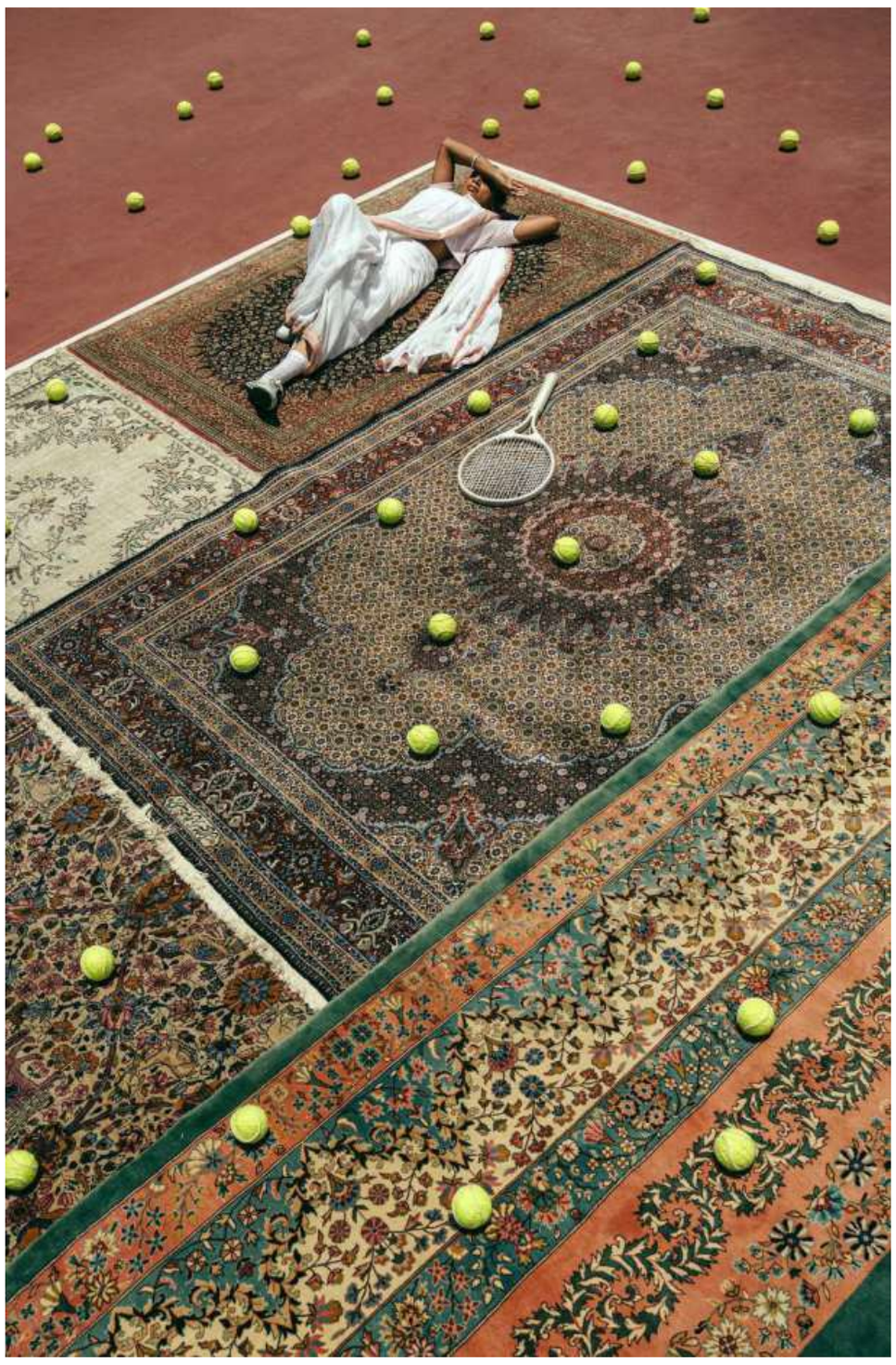


(Clockwise from left) Jaipur Rugs' campaign for their collectible carpets; Sanjay Garg's Theyyam body armour; a candle stand from collektklove; a ceramic collectible from Ashvita's; and an Aequo x Chamar chair. (NEVILLE SUKHIA, MANAN SHETH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE COLLECTIBLE

As designers and brands embrace limited-edition *objets d'art*, the meaning of 'collectible' is shifting — from rare antiques to items with contemporary artistic value

Prasad Ramamurthy

Back in 2019, to mark a decade of his brand Raw Mango, designer Sanjay Garg released a set of 10 objects that were billed as collectibles. They included items like the body armour of a Theyyam dancer made of acrylic, a terracotta bull inspired by an ancient Iranian artefact, and digestive powders stored in beautiful wood and brass boxes.

It felt both puzzling and a power move because on the surface they appeared unrelated to the beautiful saris he's known for, and yet there was a clamour from his audience base to possess it.

"Creative people are not uni-dimensional," Garg tells me, on the phone from Chiang Mai in Thailand, where he's browsing through a flea market. "I wanted to share with people the things I love – antiquities, culture, food – which in a way are a part of my brand. And I wanted them to be seen as such." Since then, the number of craft and design-centric brands in India that have launched verticals dedicated to collectibles has exploded.

These collectibles are often items that are extensions of the brand's main product lines, but created with more labour and in single piece or limited numbers. Examples include embroidered panels that reproduce the works of renowned artists such as Neelima Sheikh, Ranbir Kalika and Nikhil Chopra by Milaaya Art Gallery. Lamps and decorative objects made from hand blown glass that mirror the architecture of South India's temples, by the creative minds behind Delhi's Klove Studio. Decorative boxes and hair pins by the House of Sunita Shekhawat (the jewellery company specialises in *meenakari* enamelling). And Jaipur Rugs' collectible carpets label, Aspura, which sells genuine antiques, and, as the brand's artistic director Greg Foster puts it, "antiques of the future designed by prestigious names from contemporary culture". The tone was set by their launch at India Art Fair 2025, which featured limited edition carpets conceived by artist Rashid Rana.

Shift in meaning and approach

All of this, some argue, flies in the face of the traditional definition of a collectible, which conventionally is described as an object that by virtue of its age, rarity and backstory is considered valuable by a collector. For example: an antique Chola bronze statue, the draft manuscript of *Ponniyin Selvan* with author Kalki's notes, and in the design space, chairs designed by Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret, in the 1950s, when he was building Chandigarh.

"It's human nature to collect material things: shells, coins, textile. An object becomes a collectible [in the monetary sense] if someone is willing to set up a transaction around it and pay a value far higher than its core value," says Ashvin Rajagopalan, founder of Chennai art and collectibles gallery Ashvita's. "For that to happen, it takes time; the object has to become rare and have a backstory that moves the market. To take something that's new and to say that it's collectible, giftable, limited edition, rare, is to make it hold value. I think these are more marketing labels than a true collectible."

Ranvir Shah, a noted collector of art and antiquities, counters this. "Brand extensions are what a creator thinks are commercially valuable items, which over a period of time may also appreciate," he says. Shah runs Chennai-based Prakriti Foundation that regularly hosts events around art, culture and literature. "People like my father, for instance, collected Lladró products," he adds, referring to the Spanish maker of fine porcelain home accessories and decorative objects. Today a legacy brand, its vintage productions are considered highly valuable by collectors. "Every time he travelled overseas, he would buy something he could afford, thinking it would appreciate in value. And they have. A Ganesha idol he bought for ₹5 lakh has gone up in value to over ₹8 lakh."

Another example comes from Srila Chatterjee, co-founder of Mumbai-based design gallery 47-A and curator of Baro Market, a digital marketplace that regularly hosts offline sales of art and design-centric collectibles. "All the incredible work that [multi-disciplinary artist] Riten Mozumdar did for Fabindia [1966-2000] is a great example. People like my mother paid next to nothing for his textiles back then. Today, retrospectives of his work are hosted at top galleries, which makes his work collectibles. In my opinion, if someone is willing to pay a premium for an object that they want to keep in their homes, then it's a collectible," she says.

Where craft takes centrestage

In the Indian context, many of the commercially available objects that are labelled as collectibles are touted to be rooted in one or more traditional craft. If the connection is authentic, that itself makes the object a collectible, opines Manju Sara Rajan, co-founder of Bengaluru design gallery KAASH. The space works with internationally-trained designers and hereditary Indian craftspeople to create unique design-centric objects. Such as lights created by Italian designer Andrea Anastasio, collaborating with shadow puppetry artists from Andhra Pradesh, and furniture inspired by Chettinad's *kottan* basketry weave, designed by Bengaluru-based architect David Joe Thomas. "By virtue of being handmade, such objects are few in number. They are usually the product of a special collaboration and you're not going to be able to buy them elsewhere. So, you are buying into a craft legacy that may not exist in the future."

There's also an argument to be made, say industry insiders such as Deepshikha Khanna, ex-creative director of Good Earth, that extensions in the form of limited-edition collectibles are a clever way to expand a brand's reach by appealing to a key reason of why an individual collects – to become a part of a community that appreciates the same things you do. "At the start, your customer is going to buy into your brand at a very superficial level by buying whatever your base product is," says Khanna, who counts among her acquisitions Garg's Theyyam body armour. "But how do you get them to go beyond that? Adding objects that explain who you are, is a lovely way to expand your brand and your community. In a way, you're deepening the linkage between your creations and your consumers."

To do just that, lighting designers Gautam Sheth and Prateek Jain created a sub-brand, collektklove, that offers design enthusiasts smaller products that are offshoots of what they create for their main brand Klove Studio. Examples of Klove Studio's work can be found in the bold, experimental chandeliers installed at venues such as Ran Baas The Palace hotel in Patiala. "We realised there's an aspirational market of young professionals who appreciate good design," says Jain, explaining why they decided to introduce smaller objects in a price range (from around ₹25,000) more affordable than their luxurious chandeliers.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 4

Adding objects that explain who you are, is a lovely way to expand your brand and your community. In a way, you're deepening the linkage between your creations and your consumers

DEEPSHIKHA KHANNA
Designer

Earlier, the U.S. was our dominant market. Now 40% of our buyers are Indian. Clearly, they're drawn by the uniqueness and connection to their culture and heritage

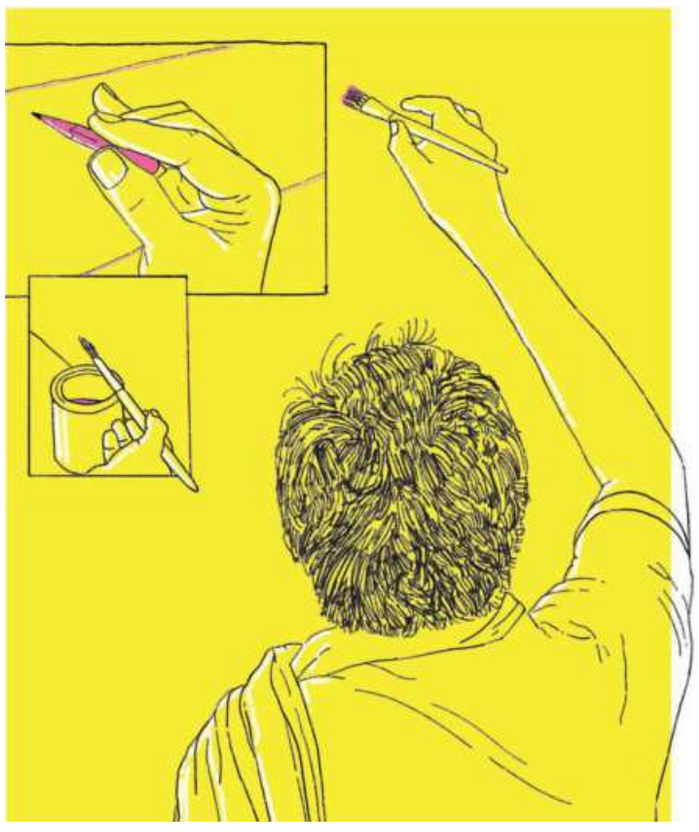
TARINI JINDAL HANDA
Founder, Aequo design gallery

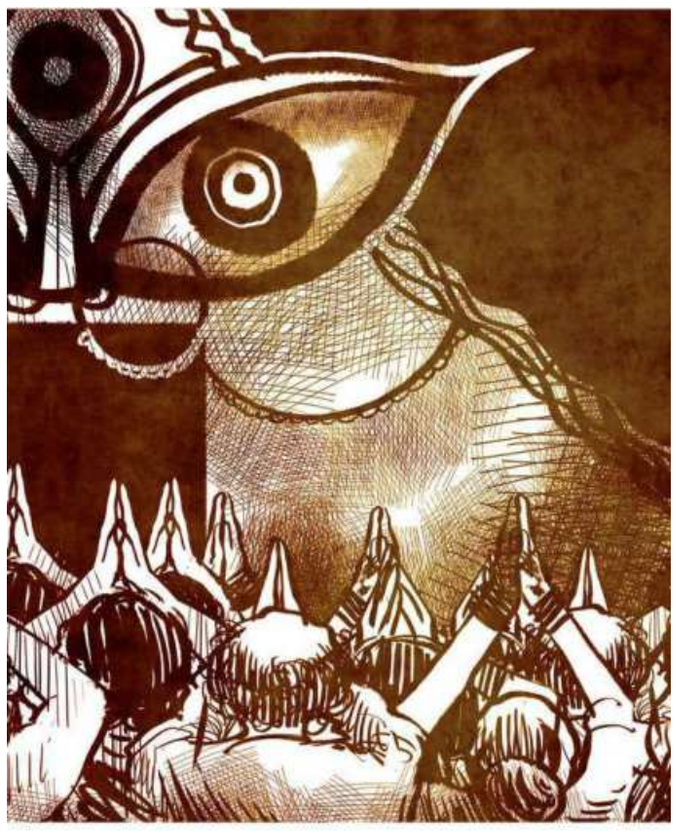
Creative people are not uni-dimensional. I wanted to share with people the things I love — antiquities, culture, food — which in a way are a part of my brand. And I wanted them to be seen as such

SANJAY GARG
Designer

When I first arrived in India 10 years ago, very few people were buying collectible design, and there was a handful of designers creating them. Today, the scene has completely changed

GREG FOSTER
Artistic director, Jaipur Rugs

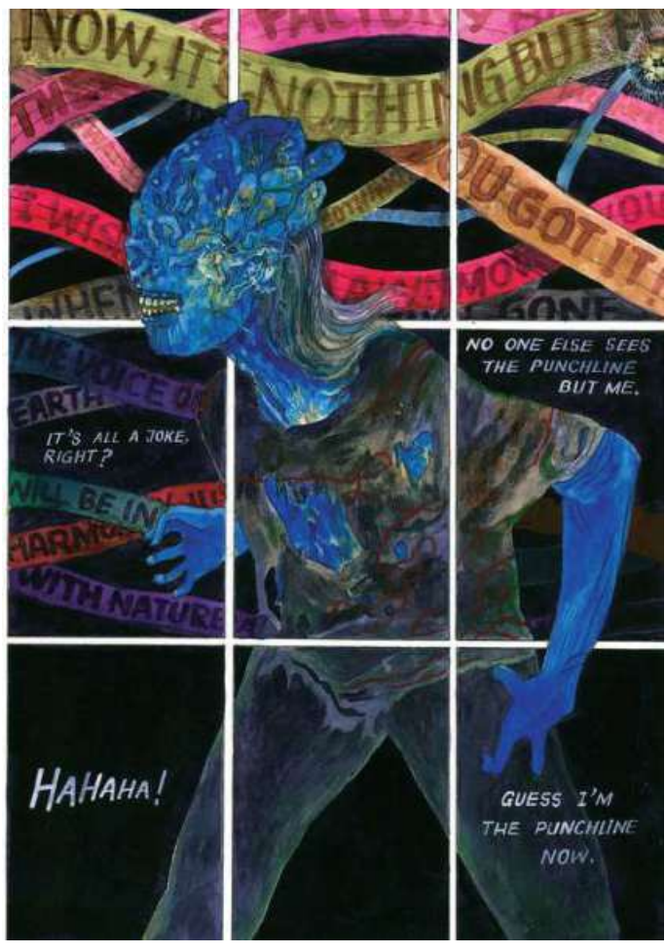


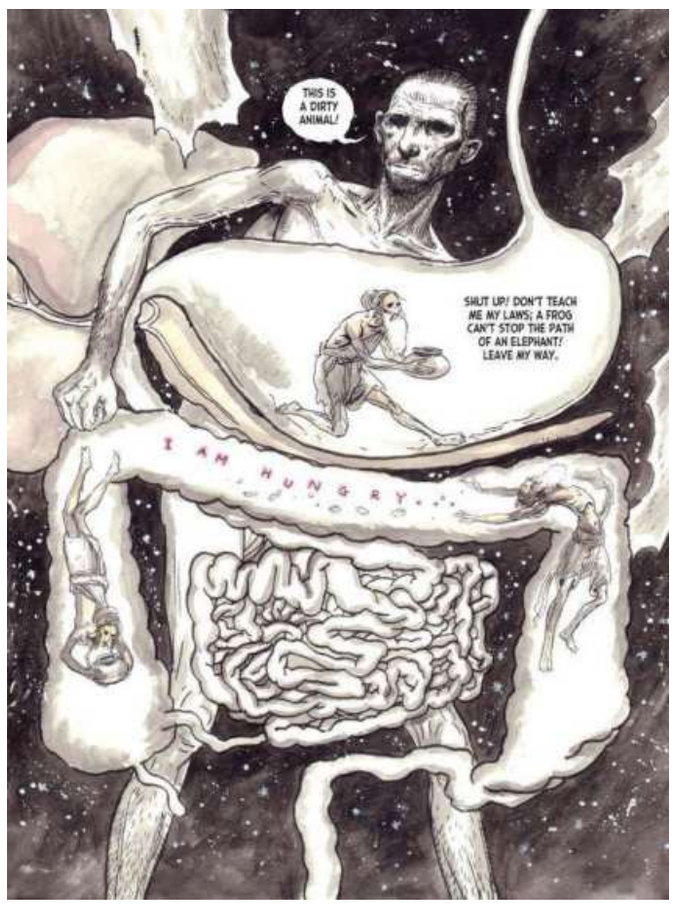


Bold strokes Illustrations from *Longform 2025*.

TIME TRAVEL WITH COMICS

With striking artwork and imaginative storytelling, graphics anthology *Longform 2025* puts together a snapshot of the past, present and future





Jaideep Unudurti

The philosopher Timothy Morton coined the term "hyperobject" to denote processes and objects so enormous in their scale and sweep that it is almost impossible to conceive of them. Think of climate change, for instance, manifested through a million interconnected nodes. You cranking up the AC or a mudslide wiping out a village would be adjacent points in this multidimensional graph.

Depicting such hyperobjects is nearly beyond the bounds of language itself. Yet, one can try, and comics as a medium is perhaps uniquely positioned to do so, to phase-shift between the micro and the macro cosmos, leaping past chasms of time.

For instance, 'Resorts to Ruins', written by David Lo and drawn by Kay Sohini, is the true story of a massive lake in California called the Salton Sea that eventually dried up due to man-made tinkering, leaving behind a legacy of toxic dust and desolate tourist towns. Rendered in gaudy pop art colours, it captures such immense causal chains, stretching across the impersonal centuries with its downstream effects equally reaching into the future.

It is one of the 18 pieces that make up *Longform 2025*, an anthology of graphic narratives. The third in an ongoing series, the first edition came out in 2018. The editors Pinaki De, Debkumar Mitra and Argha Manna in their editorial note mention how the initiative sprang from the idea of "a comics group that works with young, unheard and unseen cartoonists and illustrators". The anthology includes an extended interview with Joe Sacco, a practitioner of comics journalism. In a way this completes the circuit, as the title of the series is "inspired by a Joe Sacco essay on the shrinking space to tell long graphic stories".

According to the editors, the "bulk of the comics are born" in the "workshops we conduct at various academic institutions". Indeed, of the 17 creators, five are from the various IITs and four are from the NIDs. Many are from small towns and villages, a welcome change from the general top-heavy Delhi-Mumbai approach in Indian publishing.

Heritage and absurdity

Sankha Banerjee's 'The Laws of the Ancients' has Yudhishtira talking to Bhishma lying on his bed of arrows, awaiting death. The new king of Hastinapur asks for a tale of a time when "everything has fallen, kings are corrupted and people hate each other". Bhishma paints an apocalyptic landscape, in the gap between the *yugas*, with no one at the controls of the cosmic starship.

Drought and famine scrouge the land. Viswamitra, driven by hunger, enters the hut of Matanga, a *chandala*, and grabs a pot of dog meat. Matanga attempts to dissuade him, and it is their dialogue that Banerjee depicts in a kind of intestinal panel layout.

In comics, letters and speech balloons don't just sit there, passively waiting to be read, but often transform into visual elements in their own right – "the word made image", in the words of semiologist Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle. 'Text Box' by Anantha Sriya features a stream-of-consciousness emanating from a sign painter, and his hopes and fears as he painstakingly hand paints a sign in Telugu.

Many visions

The comic theorist Scott McCloud once came up with the nifty idea of "closure". His contention was that the blank gap between panels, the gutter space, is where the comic is being "read" as the reader's mind assembles the jagged splinters of panels into a coherent whole. In effect, a comic requires the reader's mind to be put together. Almost as if it were parasitising your mind. 'Earworm' by Pratyasha Nath is a psychedelic rhizomatic romp that begins with a fungal ear infection and ends with a planet-spanning parasitic fungal network.

In his interview, Sacco says, "Comics are an amalgamation and a synthesis or a sort of a compound molecule, of writing and drawing." Indeed, this protean nature is reflected in the backgrounds of the contributors.

There are poets, professors, researchers, admen and architects, all pooling together their unique vision, putting together a snapshot of the zeitgeist.

Longform 2025
Ed. Pinaki De, Debkumar Mitra, Argha Manna
Penguin
₹1,499

The reviewer is a freelance journalist and graphic novelist.

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

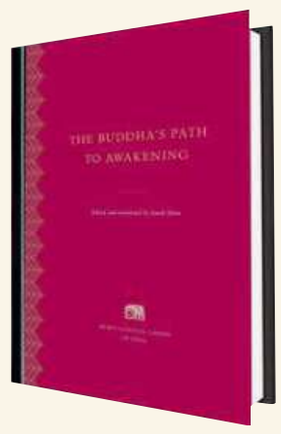
One life, many lifetimes

A new translated volume on the ancient *Jatakas* introduces stories of the Buddha to new audiences

Chintan Girish Modi

The increasing popularity of Buddhism among people who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious has led to a watering down of the life story of the Buddha. The rich narrative literature in Pali that chronicles Siddhattha Gotama's path to awakening does not restrict itself to a single lifetime simply because, according to the Buddhist worldview, it takes countless lifetimes to attain enlightenment. Ideas of *karma* and rebirth are deeply woven into the fabric of early Buddhism. While these seem problematic to contemporary audiences given the implications for social justice, it is also true that discarding these robs us of the truths contained in the language of myth, miracle and metaphor.

The Buddha's Path to Awakening, translated by Sarah Shaw from the *Jatakanidana* in Pali, is a commentary on the 547 birth stories known as the *Jatakas*, which underwent numerous adaptations in the centuries after the historical Buddha's lifetime. Composed by an anonymous monk in the 5th or 6th century CE in the region known as present-day Sri Lanka, this text is significant to seekers and scholars alike because it preserves the oral traditions that have emerged and accumulated around the Bodhisatta, a title that is used to refer to a person who takes a vow to attain Buddhahood after which there is no rebirth. This is not a selfish aspiration. It stems from the motivation to be free of suffering in order to help free others.



The Buddha's Path to Awakening
Ed. Sarah Shaw
Harvard University Press
₹699

Freedom of enlightenment

According to ancient Buddhist lore, there were several Buddhas before the historical Buddha aka Siddhattha Gotama known to contemporary readers. One of them was Dipankara. During his time, Bodhisatta Sumedha took this vow: "I will fulfil the ten perfections, and a hundred thousand eons and four incalculable epochs from now, I will become a Buddha!" The story of the historical Buddha, who was born in Lumbini and got enlightened in Gaya, goes back to Sumedha who cultivated the perfections of generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, heroic strength, forbearance, truthfulness, resolve, loving kindness, and equanimity over numerous lifetimes.

With this book, Shaw, a faculty member in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford, has produced a translation that makes the *Jatakanidana* accessible to people who have no knowledge of Pali but a strong wish to understand and even emulate the Buddha's path.

As she notes, "The taking of the Bodhisatta vow, the key event near the outset of this work, is not simply a narrative linking device. It also serves as a gateway, or an opening, for a heroic search that can be undertaken by anyone." Oddly, she does not comment on how this seems inconsistent with the Bodhisatta's pronouncement that "Buddhas are not born in a Vaishya or a Sudra family but come from a Kshatriya or a Brahman family – whichever people think is superior at the time". This inconsistency makes one wonder if the text that "dates to... centuries after the formation of the Pali canon" was corrupted by later additions.

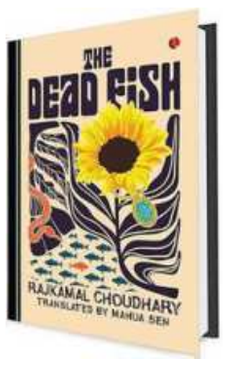
One of the most poignant sentences in this translation reads: "The Bodhisatta renounced the kingdom that had been given to him like a glob of spittle, without any hankering for it." This is a stunning articulation of the freedom that the Buddha's path promises. The Murty Classical Library of India deserves kudos for producing such a fine work with the original Pali and the English translation on facing pages, bringing ancient wisdom to new audiences.

The reviewer is a journalist, educator and literary critic.

BROWSER

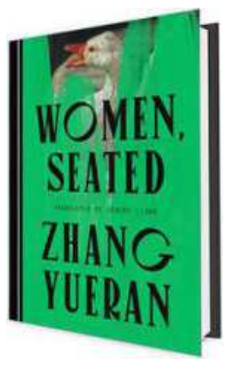
The Dead Fish

Rajkamal Choudhary, trs Mahua Sen
Rupa Publications
₹495
The pioneering Hindi and Maithili poet, novelist and critic was known for his fearless exploration of taboo themes. This novel, first published in 1966 as *Machhali Mari Hui*, was possibly the first Hindi work to describe homosexual relationships.



Women, Seated

Zhang Yueran, trs Jeremy Tiang
Sceptre
₹734 (ebook)
The Beijing-based bestselling author and literary scholar's latest work is a tale of power, privilege and secrets, and offers a peek into contemporary Chinese society and its class dynamics, much like her 2016 hit novel, *Cocoon*.

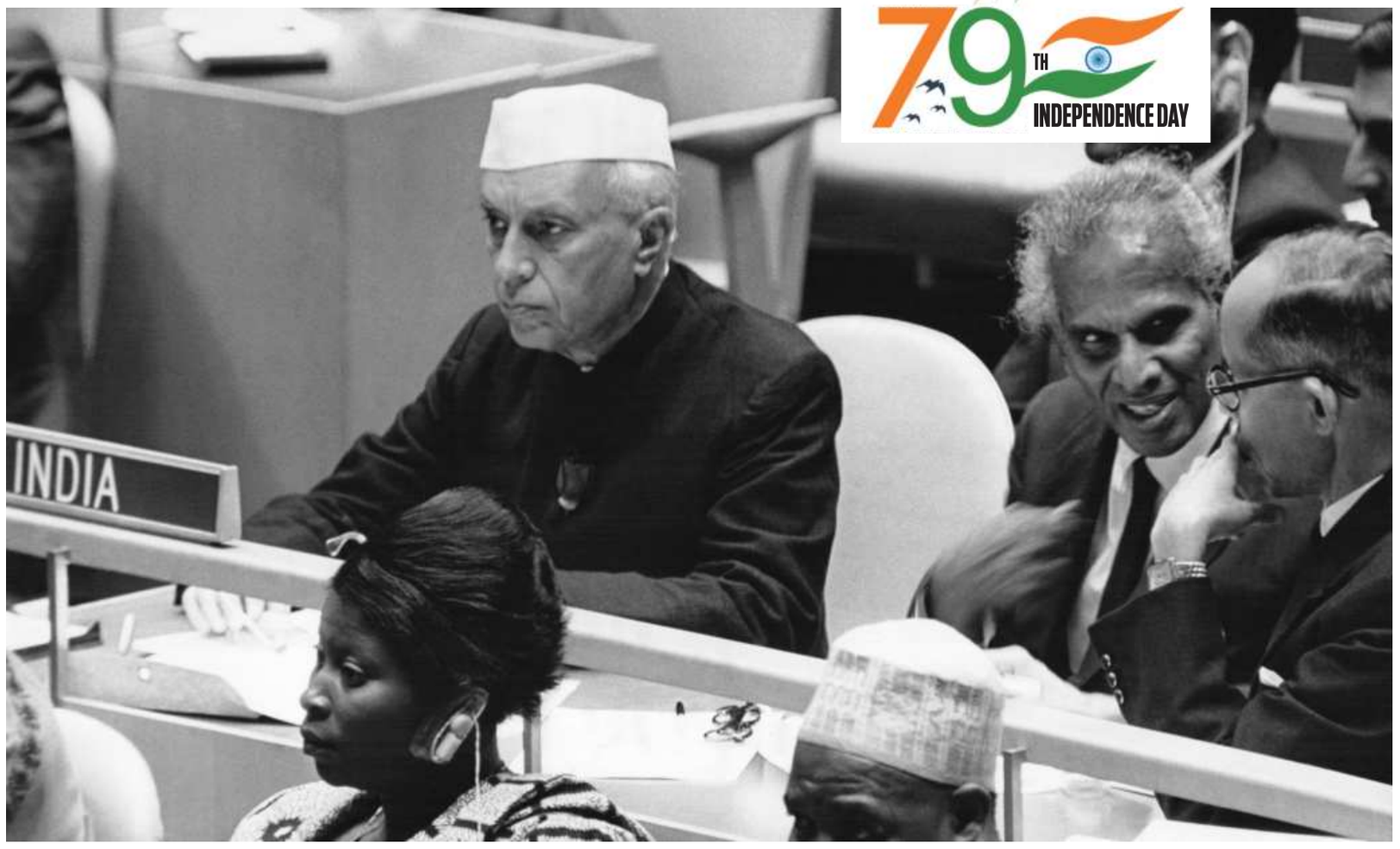


Courtesans Don't Read Newspapers

Anil Yadav, trs Vaibhav Sharma
Ebury Press
₹299
The writer and journalist, celebrated for works like *Gausevak* and *Keeda Jadi*, draws on years of reporting from India's remote regions to craft vivid, socially engaged stories in this collection.

Between Worlds

Ed. Gautam Bhatia
Westland
₹499
The New Delhi-based writer, lawyer and sci-fi aficionado showcases new voices in Indian speculative fiction in this anthology that was put together through an open call for submissions. The stories explore themes of memory, identity, rebellion, and love.



79TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

IN NEHRU'S FOOTSTEPS

A new book explores what set Nehru's non-alignment stance apart and how it still informs India's foreign policy

Stanly Johny
stanly.johny@thehindu.co.in

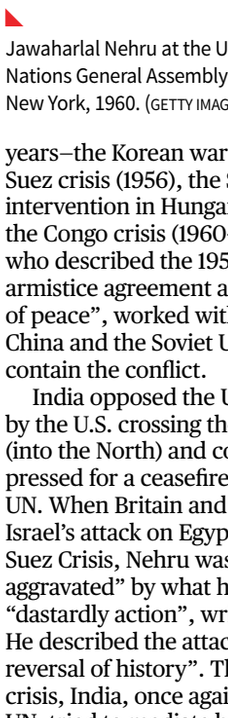
When the Cold War ended and a unipolar world order emerged in the early 1990s, India's foreign policy circles were consumed by a big question: had non-alignment run its course as a guiding doctrine? The Soviet Union had disintegrated and its successor state, Russia, was in free fall. India had already begun reorienting its foreign policy towards the West, seeking closer cooperation with the U.S., the new pole of the world. India also scaled back its engagement with the non-aligned movement (NAM), which it had championed during the Cold War.

But there was one principle India refused to abandon, even when it became a close partner of the U.S. – strategic autonomy. The question of strategic autonomy returned to the centre of debate in India when great power competition heated up on a global scale, particularly after the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The concept of strategic autonomy has been the cornerstone of India's non-alignment, argues Swapna Kona Nayudu in her book *The Nehru Years: An International History of Indian Non-Alignment*. "Non-alignment was a political vision built through historical consciousness," she writes, adding that it "predated and outlived the Cold War".

Influenced by Gandhi, Tagore

Much has already been written about the Nehru years and non-alignment. What sets Nayudu's book apart, however, is its rich archival depth and also the theoretical foundation she lays for non-alignment as a foreign policy doctrine. She presents it as "a radical political vision" rooted in both Tagore's idea of the international (an interconnected world with soft borders) and Gandhi's critique of imperialism. Both Tagore and Gandhi problematised the idea of the state, saying it's prone to imperialism and violence. Nehru, a staunch anti-imperialist, sought to salvage the state, liberated from the clutches of Empire, as a political actor capable of exerting "moral force" and acting as a non-aligned mediator in the international space, upholding the values of interconnectedness rather than compartmentalisation. Drawing on Gandhi's moral engagement and Tagore's cosmopolitanism, Nehru crafted a foreign policy framework that kept India away from the bipolar power structures of the Cold War.

Nayudu's analysis is not just confined to theory. She examines four major crises of the Nehru years—the Korean war (1950-53), the Suez crisis (1956), the Soviet intervention in Hungary (1956) and the Congo crisis (1960-64). Nehru, who described the 1953 Korean armistice agreement as "an outbreak of peace", worked with the U.S., China and the Soviet Union to contain the conflict.



Jawaharlal Nehru at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, 1960. (GETTY IMAGES)

India opposed the UN forces led by the U.S. crossing the 38th parallel (into the North) and consistently pressed for a ceasefire through the UN. When Britain and France joined Israel's attack on Egypt during the Suez Crisis, Nehru was "shocked and aggravated" by what he called the "dastardly action", writes Nayudu. He described the attack as "a reversal of history". Throughout the crisis, India, once again through the UN, tried to mediate between the warring parties.

No condemnatory language

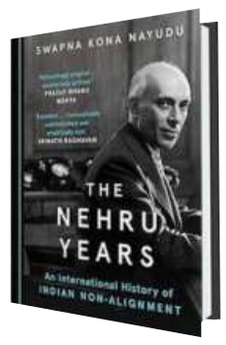
If India strongly denounced the Anglo-French attack on Egypt, its response to the Soviet intervention in Hungary the same year was rather muted. India abstained from the UN resolutions condemning Soviet actions. It opposed the Soviet intervention in principle but stopped short of calling for Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe. This position drew sharp criticism with many arguing it violated Nehru's own non-aligned principles.

India resisted calls to condemn the Soviet intervention as for both Nehru and his chief diplomat V.K. Krishna Menon, the stand against condemnation was a calculated diplomatic tactic. As they saw it, "condemnation closed the door on negotiations, and that once that door was shut there would be no room for political action left, thus causing a highly securitised situation," writes Nayudu. This Nehruvian line continues to echo in India's foreign policy corridors. Whether it is America's invasion of Iraq, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Israel's atrocities against the Palestinians or the Israel-Iran conflict, India is wary of not using outright condemnatory language.

The contradictions in India's policy during the Hungarian crisis also highlight the agility of non-alignment, which could adapt to India's strategic compulsions (the partnership with the Soviet Union was beginning to take shape) without abandoning its core tenets (no endorsement of war). In the case of the Congo crisis, India emerged as a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping, evolving from unarmed to armed interventions.

"Whether it was the Empire and the colonies, or the two blocs of the Cold War, Nehru's idea of India's role in international politics was to mediate between conflicting positions by belonging to neither. In Nehru's image of the Indian future, India would recover its identity not by subscribing to exclusivist ideas of race, region or religion, but by integrating into the international as a sovereign state," writes Nayudu. The significance of non-alignment, in Menon's words, was not to have India established as a major power "but an important quantity in world affairs". Many IR scholars continue to portray Nehru as an idealist with thinly veiled liberalism who ran into the ineluctability of realism. These contradictions, they argue, blinded Nehru from understanding India's immediate foreign policy challenges in its periphery. The Nehru years had its ups and downs. But for a Prime Minister of a newly decolonised state in a bipolar world, the challenge was "to reconcile the question of achieving a just society by just means on the national front with the twin objective of advancing India's position in the international setting."

Nayudu situates non-alignment in a broad historical continuum, liberating it from cliched critiques of absolute realism. Despite the challenges, India emerged as "a quantity" in world affairs post-Independence, and the quest to safeguard its strategic autonomy continues to reverberate in its foreign policy.



The Nehru Years: An international History of Indian Non-Alignment
Swapna Kona Nayudu
Juggernaut
₹999

Under attack: the physical book

Why has the J&K government gone after books, 'a durable embodiment of memory'?

Attaul Munim Zahid

Last week, when the Home Department of the Jammu & Kashmir government declared a list of 25 books 'forfeited', an X user posted a simple and seemingly rhetorical question: "Why did they go against books?" Everybody, including that user, would know or can guess the usual answer. Historically, censorship has worn many masks, be it nationalism, morality or law and order. But what does it mean to declare books 'forfeited' or banned when soft copies of them are freely available online, slipping past restrictions and borders?

On November 1, 2003, Umberto Eco, Italian novelist, philosopher and cultural critic, stood before an audience in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Library in Egypt and spoke about the destiny of books. In his lecture titled *Vegetal and Mineral Memory: The Future of Books*, he described printed books as a form of 'vegetal memory,' made from the bodies of plants (meaning paper), shaped into repositories of human thought, distinguishing it from mineral memory (clay tablets or electronic memory) and organic memory (our own minds).

He made a simple yet subversive point: unlike electronic memory, which can vanish at the flick of a switch, or the fragile storage of our own minds, the book is a durable embodiment of memory which remains resistant to time, censorship and power.

So, why is authority always after books? Perhaps it is not the ideas themselves. Ideas, after all, are already loose in the world. But it may be the *physicality* of the book. While ideas are elusive, books as instruments are tangible and susceptible to the blows of power. In this digital age, you cannot really ban a book; it would be nearly impossible. One would need an Orwellian structure (hoping that it doesn't already exist) and tools to erase a piece of literature in its totality. But one can assault its embodiment.

And, by doing so, it scares future writers.

View from a book store in Srinagar; and (below) some of the books banned in Kashmir. (AP)

What's at stake?

The state or any authority that be has always known that it cannot silence everyone. It doesn't need to. If it frightens a bit of the population, a chunk which could have told their own stories, a percentage which could have become writers, it wins. Fear is a slow, contagious thing. But fear is not the only goal. There is something more fragile and more material at stake for them. The book *as object* is under attack. Not its words which have long floated online as zeroes and ones. But its form, its spine, its paper and its physicality.

A physical book is a 'thingness' something rooted in *being;* it stands in the world, and the world stands around it.

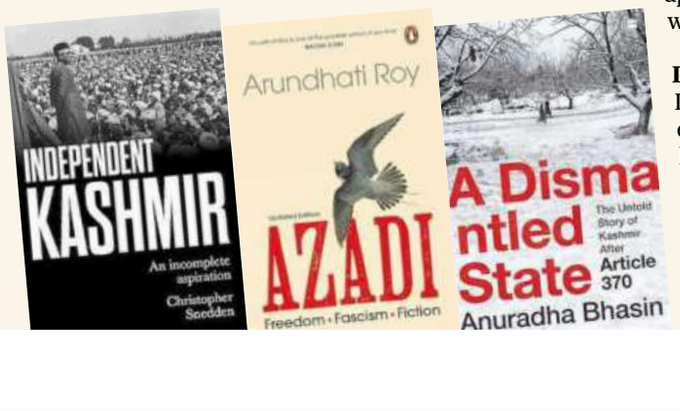
It resists deletion and takes up space and stares back. It can be hidden in pits and behind walls, or found years later in a forgotten trunk while a PDF, an e-book disappears in a keystroke. Philosopher Walter Benjamin, or maybe Gen Z, might say the book carries an 'aura' of itself. Physical books invite serendipity. How many times have you gone to a bookstore just to skim through shelves and shelves and stumbled upon a book which explores something you have been thinking about earlier? The bookstores which Eco may call "temples of vegetal memory", were raided across Kashmir by the police to enforce the order, and their videos were posted online. People on social media became the *samizdat* and started to share soft copies of the said books, perhaps rendering the whole action counter-productive for the government. But soft copies, in their solitary convenience, cannot replicate the culture of exchange and community which physical books foster. You can't discover a soft copy in your friend's bookshelf and borrow it, much to their apprehension that you will never return it.

Pieces of the world

Kashmiris have seen everything at the hands of the authority. Curfews, communication blackouts and internet gags so total that the virtual world ceases to exist for them. In those long, suspended hours and days and months when the phones don't ring and the screens go dark, the books stay. I keep a stack of books on my desk. Another stack rests on a table in front of it. Among them is a copy of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. (In Bradbury's world, the destruction of books is the destruction of complexity, and without the challenging contradictions books contain, society collapses into shallow entertainment and unthinking conformity.) Their presence gives me a sense of security and belonging. So, if tomorrow the authorities decide, once again, to switch off the world for Kashmir, like they did in 2019, people know, like me, they will still have something left of the world.

Some part of feudal Russia in *Anna Karenina*, some ancient street in Damascus from Mahfouz's *The Harafish*, some dim-lit Dublin morning from *Ulysses*, some windswept Yorkshire moor from *Wuthering Heights*, some Harlem night from Baldwin's *Another Country or* some bleak English factory town from *Hard Times*. And maybe that's what is scary to the power, that in the end, after everything, the books remain for us as memory. In its flesh and blood.

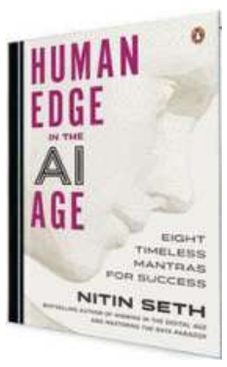
The writer is a journalist with experience in publishing.



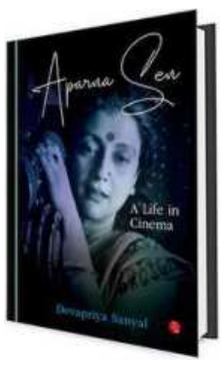
The Economic Consequences of Mr. Trump: What the Trade War Means for the World
Philip Coggan
Profile Books/Hachette India
₹299
A journalist lifts the lid on Donald Trump's economic gamble with tariffs and explains why it's a threat to the global economy, and to America too.

Comrades and Comebacks
Saira Shah Halim
Vintage Books
₹699
Left politics in India consists of diverse and complex forces. Its influence has, however, waned in recent years, primarily in States such as West Bengal and Tripura. She traces the movement's history in India and studies the global trends.

Human Edge in the AI Age: Eight Timeless Mantras for Success
Nitin Seth
Penguin Business
₹799
Drawing on decades of leadership across McKinsey, Fidelity, Flipkart, and Incedo, Seth reframes the AI debate through a human lens. He presents a framework of core human strengths that will define success in the AI era.



Aparna Sen: A Life in Cinema
Devapriya Sanyal
Rupa
₹495
How did Sen's woman protagonists evolve in *36 Chowringhee Lane*, *Paroma*, and her other films? Sanyal explores Sen's cinematic journey which included a stellar role in Satyajit Ray's *Teen Kanya* ('Three Daughters', adapted from Tagore).



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» PAGE 1

"These are objects, like table and floor lamps, which can be easily placed in homes," says Jain.

Depending on factors such as how many pieces of a collectible design object are being produced, the designers, the craft involved, and the storytelling behind it, prices can range from a few thousand rupees to six-figure tags. "Since we started in 2022, we've seen consistent growth of about 20% year-on-year," reveals Tarini Jindal Handa, founder of Mumbai-based design gallery Aequo whose collaborative work with rural artisans in Karnataka and the Parisian designer Valériane Lazard, won the gallery a contemporary design prize at PAD Paris 2023. "Earlier, the U.S. was our dominant market. Now 40% of our buyers are Indian."

(Clockwise from left) Gautam Sheth and Prateek Jain; Aditi Mangaldas and Jaipur Rugs; and a Aequo x Valériane Lazard design.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE COLLECTIBLE

Newer collectors lead the way

The rise in labels offering collectible design products, say experts, is in direct response to the consumer's appetite for consumption. Which in turn is being fed by higher levels of affluence, increased awareness of global trends, and, to some extent, the recognition Indian craft practices have received from global design labels. Remember Dior x The Chanakya School of Craft – the hand embroidered mise-en-scène for the brand's 2022 spring-summer show in Paris, for instance?

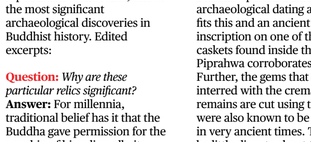
"When I first arrived in India 10 years ago, very few people were buying collectible design, and there was a handful of designers creating them. The scene has completely changed now," says Foster. "Today you can see the appetite in collectors who are already buying from fairs like Design Miami, PAD London and Paris, and from design fairs such as Design Mumbai. Given that the contemporary art market is so developed, definitely the next commercial frontier is design."

A common refrain is that those who find art too daunting to invest in consider design more approachable. "Newer collectors especially no longer see art as equal to a painting. It's also in the sofa that you might sit on or the jewellery you wear," Chatterjee insists. Another factor that's played a "significant role" in boosting consumption of design products: COVID-19. "I've seen studies that reveal how people, since they were spending more time at home, became interested in what their homes looked like," reveals Chatterjee, which she says resulted in greater investments in art, interior design, and a big reason "why I feel a lot more things are being collected now than ever before".

According to a recent report by the U.S.-based research firm Grand View Research, India's design-centric collectibles market is predicted to hit revenues of around $22 billion by 2030. A valuation that not only includes art, design and antiquities but also objects with lived histories – such as furniture, stamps, currency, figurines, vinyl records, action figures, books, vintage tech and printed imagery. Which could well mean more collectible design being produced.

As I prepare to hang up, Garg tells me he's back to designing a new series of *objet d'art*. When he mentions a toothpick, I wonder if he's only teasing.

The writer is based in Mumbai and reports on travel and culture.



FROM POSSESSION TO PURPOSE

When it comes to jewellery, modern collectors are prioritising design, story and craftsmanship

An enamelled *darpan* (mirror) from Sunita Shekhawat; and (below) a brooch and pendant necklace from Aurus Jewels. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

The Hindu Bureau

With Sotheby's, Christie's and other leading auction houses increasingly spotlighting contemporary jewellers, the conversation is moving beyond coloured diamonds and vintage. Story and craftsmanship are key now and modern jewellers are exploring the 'collectibles' vertical.

Earlier this month, Jaipur-based jewellery designer Sunita Shekhawat launched MOMH Collectibles, an inaugural series that celebrated the *meenakari* technique that is meticulously showcased at their permanent gallery, the Museum of Meenakari Heritage (MOMH). Among the eight finely crafted pieces, a vanity mirror and a set of decorative spoons received the most attention. As did a pair of 'prancing horse' earrings. The Darpan mirror, in 22K gold and finished with deep emerald-green basse-taille enamel, had acanthus leaves and Mughal rosettes etched on its surface. One of the *meenakari* spoons, set with uncut diamonds, enamel, and gold, in a deep moss green, referenced the miniature painting traditions of Rajasthan. "It's not a decorative choice but a cultural reference," said a note accompanying the collection.

Shekhawat, we learnt later, was inspired to explore this new vertical of collectible objects following a visit by the chairperson of Reliance Foundation, Nita Ambani. The latter, inspired by a single enamel panel at the gallery, had commissioned a decorative box. As part of the series, these enamelled gift boxes have been crafted using the rare Champleve technique, or featuring the humble bougainvillea in gold, enamel, amethyst, emeralds, and diamonds using *plique-à-jour* – a 14th-century French enamelling method that creates a stained-glass effect. Shekhawat says she hoped to "blur the lines between jewellery and collectible objects... and to reimagine how the world views Indian craftsmanship." The *objets d'art* are priced between ₹1.25 lakh and ₹18.5 lakh and are a sign of more to come at the House of Shekhawat.

Meanwhile, another jewellery brand, led by the husband-and-wife duo Kunal and Puja Shah from Ahmedabad, have also been highlighting collectibles this season. At Aurus, they have interpreted beading and mico pavé in fine jewellery, ranging from big and small bugs to birds and tortoises with moving appendages. There is the juxtaposition of glass beads alongside gold, silver, diamonds and gemstones to create "desirable pieces of jewellery and to celebrate the craft from Gujarat", says Puja. She says a personal favourite is the Zarna earring, inspired by Kutch tribal ear pendants, and she plans to take the collection to Chennai, Hyderabad and Chandigarh this year.

INDIA IN ALL ITS MESSY GLORY

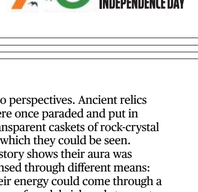
Authors and publishers are finding ways to present history for children with illustrated titles, quirky stories and by bringing back forgotten voices

Rati Girish

A few weeks ago, I dropped my son off at his Mock UN seminar and joined a few other mothers from school for a quick breakfast chat. Turns out, we all had the same grouse. How can our 13-year-olds pontificate about world matters when they have no idea about the history of the nation they are representing?

Rachna Malajure, a former advertising professional, was frustrated by the fact that her son will be part of a generation that "will have no idea about how their country came into being, or how truly unique and noteworthy their country's freedom struggle and history are". "Not knowing history will not excuse or protect the children from the consequences of poor decisions as a result. So it is of paramount importance that we do what's necessary to make sure history is remembered objectively," she says.

As I dig a little deeper, I realise it isn't just us; parents across the country are wondering why schools aren't teaching Indian history. Back in 2023, a LinkedIn post by Harpreet Singh Grover, parenting researcher and founder of the online platform, *The Curious Parent*, resonated with thousands of parents. He narrated an incident about a friend who approached their child's IB school asking when they would start teaching Maratha history. The answer simply was, "We don't teach Indian history; it is not a part of the curriculum."



History is quite literally old news. While international schools skim over parts of Indian history, preferring to focus on the global perspective, Indian-board schools have been in the eye of the storm over their latest NCERT social science textbooks because of the language used to describe the Mughal emperors and the empire.

Has history simply run its course? Not really, says the Indian children's publishing industry. They have sounded the bugle for a new kind of revolution – one that makes reading history cool. From graphic novels to fictionalised stories set against the backdrop of major historical events, children's authors are exploring interesting ways to bring context and nuances that will make Indian history come alive for children.

A tool to shape society

Take, for instance, Ashwitha Jayakumar, who has a background in medieval literature and a special fascination for the Mughals. Her recent work, *The Book of Emperors: An Illustrated History of Mughals*, traces the journey of the dynasty in India from Babur to Bahadur Shah Zafar. Each chapter focuses on an emperor and highlights their favourite foods and their passion for the arts. We read about an aspect of their lifestyle and a feature of their reign that history textbooks fail to include.

Says Jayakumar, "History isn't about one narrative or one version of events, but about understanding past events through multiple narratives, written from multiple points of view, by people with many different agendas. All too often, textbooks flatten this multidimensional history into a singular, palatable story, where what's left out and what's included is dictated by politics rather than pedagogical or scholarly considerations. In such an environment, it is more important than ever for non-academic books to present history in all its messy glory, reinforcing for readers of all ages that the past is more interesting, complex and strange than our textbooks would have us believe."

Mallika Ravikumar is a children's book author with an advanced degree in ancient Indian history. Her book *565: The Dramatic Story of Unifying India* is a gripping story of how a team managed to get 565 princely states to agree to join independent India and create the map we know today. She says, "History is more than a record of the past; it is a tool to shape societal outlook and behaviour. Given its significance, it is important for one to be conscious of not just history, but also historiography – how history is written, interpreted, and understood."

Reading list

Songs of Freedom series (multiple authors)
A Children's History of India in a 100 Objects (Devika Cariapa)
The People of the Indus (Nikhil Gulati with Jonathan Mark Kenoyer)
Bhimrao Ambedkar: The Boy Who Asked Why (Sowmya Rajendran)

Podcasts

India Unveiled by Rakesh Soni
Empire by William Dalrymple and Anita Soni

(Clockwise from far left) Some books on Indian history for children; parenting researcher Harpreet Singh Grover; and authors Ashwitha Jayakumar; Mala Kumar; and Mallika Ravikumar.

Changing the narrative

Mala Kumar, author and editor of several history-based books, including *Travelling Treasures: 100 Incredible Tales Of How Things Came To India*, believes it is important for storytellers to make history fun for children to learn. She says, "When educators use storytelling to engage children, the facts make sense and history becomes real. History would come alive if they were encouraged to wonder and question. Was Gandhi a class topper? How did Nehru manage to write so many letters while in jail? Were all Britishers or Mughals bad people? We need to learn from the past rather than only learn about the past."

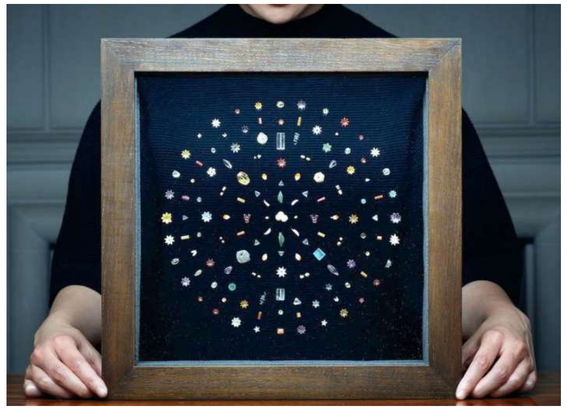
If our children grow up thinking history is just a dusty subject to be endured for an exam, we've failed them twice – first by not teaching it fully, and then by not making it matter. The new wave of Indian children's literature is a quiet rebellion against that failure, bringing back forgotten voices, complicating easy narratives, and showing young readers that the past isn't just about dates and battles – it's about people, choices, and consequences that still ripple through the world today.

If schools won't hand our children the full story, then let them pick up a graphic novel on the Indus Valley civilisation or an illustrated book on the Mughals and satiate their curiosity. Because a generation that knows where it comes from will know exactly where it's going.

The writer is founder of Mother of Readers, a platform championing Indian children's literature.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



IN CONVERSATION

WHEN THE BUDDHA'S RELICS CAME HOME

Art historian Naman Ahuja on the repatriation of the Piprahwa relics and India's role in safeguarding an important piece of Buddhist history

Radhika Santhanam
radhika.s@thehindu.co.in

In the spring of 1897, William Claxton Peppé, an estate manager, ordered the excavation of a *stupa* in Piprahwa, a village in modern-day Uttar Pradesh. Piprahwa is widely believed to be the site of ancient Kapilavastu, the historical seat of the Buddha's family clan, the Shakyas.

Peppé's team unearthed bone fragments, soapstone and crystal caskets, a sandstone coffer, and offerings of gold ornaments and gemstones. An inscription in the Brahmi script on one of the caskets confirmed that these were relics of the Buddha. While the bone relics were gifted to the King of Siam (Rama V) and some portions allocated to temples in Mynamar and Sri Lanka, the rest was divided between the Indian Museum in Kolkata and the Peppé family.

When Chris Peppé, great-grandson of William, decided to auction the relics in his family's possession at Sotheby's Hong Kong on May 7 this year, there was a furore. Buddhist scholars, monastic leaders, and historians, including Naman Ahuja, condemned the move. The auction was postponed after the Indian government issued a legal notice to Sotheby's Hong Kong.

Following diplomatic intervention and mounting pressure from the government and Buddhist organisations, the auction house returned the relics to India on July 30.

In this interview, Ahuja, curator, editor of the art magazine *Marg*, and professor of Indian Art and Architecture at Jawaharlal Nehru University, speaks of the importance of the repatriation of the relics, one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in Buddhist history. Edited excerpts:

Question: *Why are these particular relics significant?*
Answer: For millennia, traditional belief has it that the Buddha gave permission for the worship of his relics, albeit reluctantly. Relics constituted the focus of theistic worship in Buddhism. Scholarly consensus is that the relics from Piprahwa have every reason to be a part of the original share of the cremated remains of the Buddha that were entrusted to the Shakyas – the Buddha's paternal family. The archaeological dating and context fits this and an ancient Brahmi inscription on one of the relic caskets found inside the *stupa* at Piprahwa corroborates this view. Further, the gems that the Shakyas interred with the cremated remains are cut using tools that were also known to be used only in very ancient times. There can be little dispute about their antiquity or significance.

Q: *Now that the relics have been repatriated, in what ways would they have to be taken care of? And does India have the necessary resources, manpower, and will to do so?*
A: Yes, we do. Even in ancient times, their trusteeship was passed on with care, and entire monastic administrative machineries were in place to look after these matters. Ashes or charred remains of a person, their bodily relics, were treated with deep respect in antiquity – whether by the megalith builders or in Vedic or Buddhist cultures. They form the core of *stupas* that attract pilgrims. Elaborate rituals were held around them.

However, I must hasten to add that alongside the religious importance of these relics, we must also recognise their importance for history. They mattered to the Shakyas, who committed them to public benefit and built monasteries around them. They come from Piprahwa, a site in the original Buddhist holy land, which is a region that many emperors maintained. That region deserves our attention again now.

Modern India has put administrative functions in place for museums, research, archaeology and Buddhist affairs, and this case should catalyse the functioning of these departments. These relics have mobilised extraordinary research in modern times. That function is an equally important one to maintain.

Cultural value (Clockwise from below) Naman Ahuja; a part of the Buddha's relics at National Museum, New Delhi; and the Piprahwa gems that were put up for auction in Hong Kong. (V.V. KRISHNAN, SOTHEBYS.COM)

Q: *You had said in a talk that repatriation should not be motivated merely by national chauvinism.*
A: No, the desire for merely possessing an object is only a manifestation of materialism. As instruments of history, or of spiritual edification, however, they have to be able to inspire diverse public stakeholders. Indeed, we must be careful to remember that for millions of Buddhists in East Asia, Southeast Asia, or anywhere else in the world, the relics of the Buddha hold profound spiritual significance. India and the current owners have an opportunity to be of service to them.

Q: *Do you think India's stance in this case should be its position regarding all religious relics?*
A: In the case of those relics where it can be reasonably established whose relics they are, where the land, site or people from whom they have been taken are known, and when they hold the kind of enormous spiritual significance that these ones do, then yes, they should be repatriated.

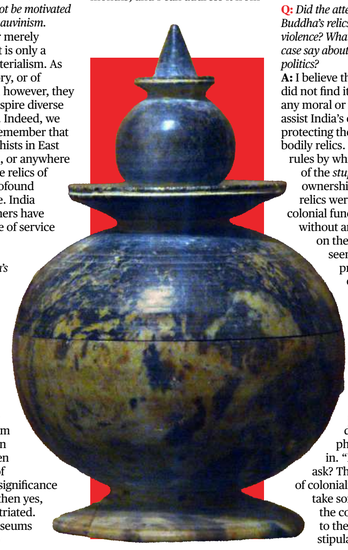
However, as a museums person, I know how enormously difficult, specialised and expensive taking care of objects, paintings and buildings can be. Taking care of relics that combine the needs of devotees with historians, scientists, geologists and others is going to be that much harder. It is better to take on these responsibilities only to the extent they can be performed properly. Otherwise, one comes across as an insatiable child whose insecurities and perceived deprivation just make it want more and more without any idea of what looking after those things entails. It would be horrible if these relics were turned into a flavour of the month, only to be replaced by some other 'object' quickly enough.

Q: *After being flown in from Hong Kong, the relics were taken to the National Museum in Delhi. Relics are not objects. Is a museum the best place for them?*
A: Fabulous question! And a tough one, too. I have had to mull over this question for the past few months, and I can address it from two perspectives. Ancient relics were once paraded and put in transparent caskets of rock-crystal in which they could be seen. History shows their aura was sensed through different means: their energy could come through a *stupa* of mud, brick and stone; at the same time, through acculturation and suggestion cognition came into play when the remembrance or memory of a life respected by many was communicated; and then of course, they were visually beheld. Museums can perform all three functions.

This brings me to the second part of the answer, and this involves the evolving functions of museums in society. These are institutions that showcase our highest civilisational achievements. That showcasing is now informed by profoundly knowledgeable communication. Again, I believe the presence of the relics offers India an opportunity to build its capacities on these fronts.

Q: *Did the attempt to auction the Buddha's relics perpetuate colonial violence? What does this particular case say about broader post-colonial politics?*
A: I believe the U.K. government did not find it necessary to take any moral or ethical action to assist India's endeavour in protecting the sale of the Buddha's bodily relics. Their state made the rules by which the despoliation of the *stupas* and private ownership of the Buddha's relics were granted to its colonial functionaries. Yet, without any official statement on the matter from them, it seems they are protecting the agencies of colonialism, Sotheby's and the Peppé family's monetisation of the relics.

I am told that without any support, India was left with no choice but to take the course of action it did in asking a philanthropist to step in. "Post" colonial, you ask? The textbook definition of colonialism remains. You take something for free from the colony and sell it back to the colony at a price you stipulate.



POP-A-RAZZI

Forgotten witness

Why the ordinary Indian's account of Independence also matters and needs to be preserved before it's too late

GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

I always thought Independence Day belonged to the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel.

My father was a young man when India gained Independence. I heard my great-aunt had tasted the police *lathi* and then become a politician. Our neighbour had been to jail as a freedom-fighter. But I never asked any of them, "What did you do on August 15?"

In retrospect, that seems like such an obvious question. But it ended up being a missed opportunity. That remains a lifelong regret.

Some years ago, I asked my mother what she had done on August 15, 1947. But she didn't have clear memories of doing anything special that day. She didn't remember any feasts being cooked at home, or the family huddled around the radio set listening to Nehru's famous speech at midnight. Instead, she remembered drawing the curtains and huddling around the radio to listen to Subhas Chandra Bose's *Aami Subhas Bolchi* broadcasts from Singapore in years earlier. It puzzled me. Independence was such a seminal moment in the history of the country. I would have thought it would be engraved in her memory.

But Kolkata was in a state of violent unrest in those days with Hindu-Muslim killings. It's likely that as a young girl, my mother was not allowed to go anywhere. Independence probably felt very different to her than it did to her brother. I can imagine my uncle and his friends running down the streets on Independence Day. But I never asked him. Our generation took independence for granted. And then one day it was too late to ask those who had witnessed it about it.

An incredible spectrum

The problem I realise is the way we are taught history. It's about very important men (and a few women) taking very important decisions around round tables. There are Wavell Plans and Cripps Missions and Dandi Marches. But the ordinary people are always the extras. Never at school did someone tell us, "Go interview your grandparents about living through this period in history". Their stories somehow never mattered.

But what stories they had. Flower Silliman, who passed away last year, was one of the last members of the dwindling Jewish community in Kolkata. She once told me about how she had come upon a mob killing a man in the heart of Kolkata. When she tried to intervene, the mob politely told her this was not her fight. As a *memsahib* (white woman), she needed to stay out of it. Suddenly she realised that though she thought of herself as an Indian Jew, to many in the new India, she wasn't Indian at all.

Jatra artist Chapal Bhaduri remembers peering out of the window of his home in North Kolkata and seeing someone hold another person by the throat and hack his head off with a chopper.

In his book *The Last Heroes*, veteran journalist P. Sainath collects many such stories. The woman who cooked food for revolutionaries hiding in the forests of Purulia in West Bengal. The woman who at 13 was taking on the Razakars of Hyderabad with a slingshot. The student activist who could not give his final exam because he was in jail. "Freedom was not brought to you by a bunch of Oxbridge Brahmin *baniyas*," says Sainath. "But by an incredible spectrum of diverse peoples – Dalits, Adivasis, women, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, OBCs, Brahmins, you name it. They participated." The woman who cooked for Bose's INA thought she was just a cook, not a freedom fighter. Years later, when she was invited to hoist the flag, she was embarrassed. She worked as a domestic help and didn't have a decent sari.

These people didn't get roads named after them. There are no statues to them.

Memories on postcards

It took Aanchal Malhotra finding objects like a peacock-shaped bracelet, a *maang tika*, a pocket knife, to realise they carried in them stories about her ancestors as they fled across the new border that separated India and Pakistan. That led to her book *Remnants of Separation*, an alternative history of Partition told through material memory.

These stories were not really deemed worth of history books. But history needs to be freed from textbooks. DAG once organised an exhibit called *March to Freedom* at the Indian Museum in Kolkata. In it were dozens of handwritten postcards with people's memories of Independence. "My grandmother's father was in the police but he still took part in the Swadeshi movement," said one. Another said, "My late grandfather's account of 15th August is rather funny. A bunch of village kids with no money or resources stole *gamchas* [cotton towels] and hoisted them on a bunch of sticks and ran through the rice fields overjoyed about a free India."

The letter writers (or their grandparents) had never met Gandhi or Nehru. But they too were part of the story of Indian Independence. The people's history of Independence needs to be preserved before it's too late.

Sandip Roy, *the author of* Don't Let Him Know, *likes to let everyone know about his opinions, whether asked or not.*

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 15

EXCUSE ME, PAPA

Is there some sort of Param Vir Chakra for unbearably self-sacrificing parents?

Hello readers! Before I get into the subject of today's symposium, I wanted to thank you all for your response to this column. Recently I have received several emails and social media messages from readers of this column. And most of these dispatches are devoid of any abuse or insult. I am extremely grateful. Some of you are waiting for replies to your thoughtful emails. I promise to respond at the earliest. It is, you see, a particularly busy time of the year.

Which brings us to the subject of this week's linguistic meditation.

It is summer here in London. Which means that for exactly one week or so, the temperature is not unlike that in Tiruchi or Karaikudi or that volcano that exploded in Iceland a few years ago. What was it called? Gummidipoondi? Narasimhanaickenpalayam? Something complicated like that. I have forgotten.

Meanwhile for the rest of summer, the weather is absolute shenanigans. You wake up in the morning and the mobile phone informs you that the temperature is 23 degrees Celsius. So obviously you will wear your fashionable linen shirt and half-pants and proceed to the market for purchasing purposes. Unfortunately, by the time you've reached the bus stop, the temperature has dropped to 9 degrees.

"Good morning!" says the bus driver.

"Blergahhatheanan!" you reply because your cardio-vascular system has attained *samadhi*.

Summer also means that the schools are closed and it is time for a wonderful annual ritual: the arrival of the grandparents from India. I am happy to say that my in-laws have reached London and will spend a few mirthful weeks with us.

I love my in-laws very much. You will rarely find a more relaxed, eager to help, active, cheerful pair of people. As long as loose-leaf Tata tea, sugar, and milk are available at home in decent quantities, they are a happy bunch.

They are also extremely keen to please. One day, some 15 years ago, I mentioned in passing that brinjal is my favourite vegetable. Which means that as soon as they land at Heathrow, and come out of the airport, the absolute first thing they will do is hug the grandchildren. The second thing they will do is buy brinjal.

We once purchased brinjal on the way from the airport to my house.

However, I also hate my in-laws.

You see, they absolutely hate to impose. And not in a nice way. No no. They will employ so much subterfuge, secrecy, misdirection and chicanery when it comes to keeping their needs hidden, that it drives me absolutely mental.

For instance: "Mom! Papa! It's Friday evening. Shall we order in something? What do you guys want to eat?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. We have made *dal* and rice for us. Please don't worry about us. You please go ahead."

So obviously, your writer, being the simple, honest, uncomplicated, handsome person he is, will take this at face value. And he will order food for the rest of the family.

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I see my father-in-law trying to sneak out of the front door.

"Excuse me, papa? Where are you going?"

"No, nothing. Absolutely nothing. Who is going out? Nobody is going out. Oh, this is the front door? Ha ha ha. What a comedy. I thought it is the bathroom door."

"You are going to the bathroom with your jacket, umbrella and shopping bag?"

"How dare you speak to your elders..."

"Don't try your tricks with me, old man!"

"Ok fine, I am going to buy rice."

"No need. I have ordered extra rice with my delivery."

"Sidin... I also need to buy *dal*..."

"And?"

"And onions and red chillies and turmeric powder and salt."

Basically the only aspects of *dal* and rice they had prepared were utensils and water.

My dear readers, no doubt many of you are parents of married couples, and grandparents of their children. I have one question to ask you: why are you people like this? What is wrong with you? Why do you try these tricks? Why can't you let us take care of you? Do you think there is some sort of Param Vir Chakra for self-sacrificing parents?

If your children are fortunate enough to be able to take care of you... goddammit, will you please let us take care of you? My god! This is why there has to be a word in the English language to describe unbearable fellows like you. And that word is not maternity or paternity but... martyrnity.

Example sentence: "Abbas Uncle achieved Olympic-level martyrnity by refusing to let his son buy him a new phone. Currently, his phone has no screen, no camera, no headphones and no volume. His excuse is that the battery is still working."

Do you have someone in your life who showers you with martyrnal love? Or perhaps you yourself are an exponent of martyrnal tricks and shenanigans? Please send me your thoughts via email at the earliest.

Martyrnity
/ˈmɑːtərnɪti/

noun
Definition: The practice of demonstrating parental love through elaborate self-sacrifice, secrecy about one's needs, and the strategic refusal of help in order to avoid inconvenience.

Related forms
Martyrnal (adjective): Displaying characteristics of martyrnity
Martyrnally (adverb): In a manner exhibiting martyrnity

***Sidin Vadukut** lives in London and is currently working on a new novel. He blogs at www.whatay.com.*

GOREN BRIDGE

Careful play

Neither vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from a recent tournament in Turkey. South was Turkey's Ismail Kandemir. His fourlevel opening was on the aggressive side, but he was rewarded with a wonderful dummy. 10 tricks looked easy, provided he could pick up the spades without a loser, and there might be an overtrick available from the club suit.

Despite the rosy outlook, Kandemir played the hand very carefully.

He won the opening heart lead with dummy's ace and made the far-sighted play of ruffing a heart at trick two. The ace of spades brought the disappointing news that he had a trump loser, but he could still make his contract if West held the ace of clubs. His careful play continued when he decided to eliminate both red suits from both hands before leading a club. A diamond to the ace was followed by a ruff of dummy's last heart. Kandemir led a diamond to the king and ruffed dummy's remaining diamond. He cashed the king of spades and now, his set-up complete, led a club, inserting the 10 from dummy when West played low. East won with the jack, but had the unhappy choice of yielding a ruff-sluff or giving dummy the king of clubs. 10 tricks either way after a well-played deal.

NORTH
♠ 5 4 2
♡ A J 8
◇ A K 4
♣ K 10 4 3

WEST
♠ Q 9 8
♡ K 10 9
◇ Q 9 8 6
♣ 8 7 5

EAST
♠ Void
♡ Q 7 5 4 3 2
◇ J 10 7 5
♣ A Q J

SOUTH
♠ A K J 10 7 6 3
♡ 6
◇ 3 2
♣ 9 6 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
4♠	All pass		

Opening lead: 10 of ♡

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

All about borders

A view of the Indian side at the Wagah border closure ceremony. (GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley

1 On August 17, 1947, a demarcation line between two recently independent countries was published. Known as the Radcliffe Line, it was named after Cyril Radcliffe, who was the joint chairman of the boundary commissions. What two countries does the 3,323-km line separate?

2 The KDMZ is a strip of land running near the 38th parallel north and roughly divides the peninsula into two halves. The 250-km-long line has been fiercely guarded by the military on both sides since 1953, although the DMZ itself stands for De-Militarized Zone. Which two countries are separated by this zone?

3 This was a physical boundary that divided Europe into two from the end of World War II till 1991. On the western side were NATO members, and on the eastern side were countries affiliated with the Soviet Union. The name refers to an actual safety curtain used in theatres to stop fires from spreading. What is the name of this border?

4 The world's longest border is also the longest without a military defence, making it the longest 'undefended' border. Stretching 8,891 km long, it was established in 1783, seven years after one of them gained independence. Which two countries share this border?

5 This was one of the most heavily fortified borders of all time, and more than a hundred people died trying to cross it. Eventually, the border was brought down overnight because of a mistaken announcement by an official. By what name was this historic border known?

6 In 1989, this country had land borders with three countries: the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. As of 2002, it shares borders with Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and Russia. Which country is this that, without changing its own borders, no longer borders any of the countries it did in 1989?

7 The border between these two countries was so complicated that there was a 'third-order enclave' until 2015. Dahala Khagrabari was a piece of one country inside another country, which was itself inside the first country. Which two countries are these?

8 The biggest official time jump you can get just by crossing a land border is three and a half hours. You will need to reset your watch when travelling west from Afghanistan, which is in the UTC+4:30 time zone. What is the other country that follows UTC+8?

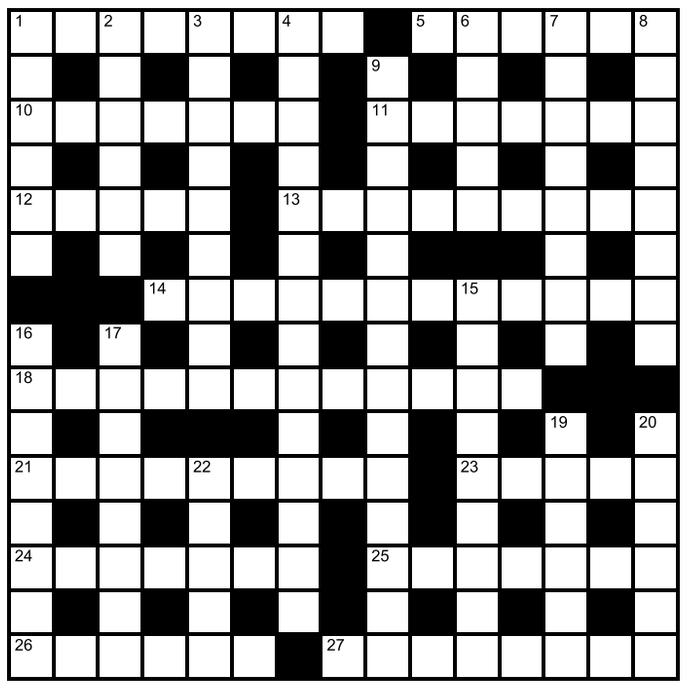
9 The border between Botswana and Zambia is at an important point where they both border the Zambezi River. Stretching 150 metres long, what record does this border hold?

10 France shares its land borders with eight countries, of which the one with Spain is the longest at 623 km, and the shortest is with Monaco at just 5.5 km. Thanks to French Guiana, the second largest region of France, it actually has a larger border (730 km) with another country. Which country does France share its longest border with?

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. India and Pakistan
2. North and South Korea
3. Iron Curtain
4. U.S. and Canada
5. The Berlin Wall
6. Poland
7. India and Bangladesh
8. China
9. Shortest border between two countries
10. Brazil

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 17 (Set by Dr. X)



Across
1 Most raunchy in cruise around river Seine on vacation (8)
5 Analysed acids containing phosphorus in protein shell of virus (6)
10 Put down plane in river (7)
11 Dash to get hold of spray and insecticide (7)
12 Devastation around a city in China (5)
13 Souvenirs and Japanese liquor found in dungeons (9)
14 Shift in normal routine that bowler might use? (6,2,4)
18 Be in latrine, suffering after eating starter of mushrooms non-stop (12)
21 Reserved hotel, nearly new, to host party (9)
23 Watching some hockey in ground (5)
24 Generally, associate used laser to tackle onset of uveitis (2,1,4)
25 Worry about rebellious misdeed after consuming spirit and ecstasy (7)
26 Masked leader of hoodlums died around noon (6)
27 Familiar with the experience of tottering outside bar (4,2,2)

Down
1 Remarkably sacred trees (6)
2 Fling with female in a gala (6)
3 Fans upset about American songstress becoming more stout (9)
4 Talk ambiguously of immorality involving top director and lady in trips (5,2,7)
6 Workers union breaking relations (5)
7 Bolt after fire engulfs new cafe (5,3)
8 Groom desires designer's latest to become more stylish (8)
9 Fully attentive as leader analyses blunders (3,4,3,4)
15 Lie in shade and fool around (9)
16 Confusion in motorway on island with accident outside hotel (8)
17 Reportedly irritated as idiot is spilling alcohol heartily (2,2,4)
19 Excellent youngster, close to pro in Japanese form of self- defence (6)
20 Old English king, say, and queen involved in venture (6)
22 A laceration on back of knee is dangerous (5)

SOLUTION NO. 16

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

For the love of a child and the life of a bird

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Having turned vegetarian a long time ago, I never learnt to cook non-vegetarian food. But when I got married, I realised that my husband was fond of non-vegetarian delicacies, particularly chicken. Occasionally, he would bring chicken takeaways from a restaurant for his dinner.

One day, I suggested that he bring raw chicken from the market and I would try to cook it. While going to buy it, he took our four-year-old daughter along. When she asked where were they headed to, he, thinking that she would not understand what chicken was, told her that they were going to buy a hen.

At the poultry shop, her attention was captivated by the hens. But she did not understand why they were caged. Before she could ask questions, it was time to go. The shopkeeper gave them raw chicken in a black, opaque carry bag. She smiled her thanks.

Reaching home, she sat on her play mat in the veranda. With open arms and boundless joy, she said, "Mamma, please leave the hen here. Let's play with it." I gasped.

That moment it dawned upon me what she had comprehended while going to the market. Looking at her innocence, I blankly looked at my husband, who was still holding the bag containing the chicken. I turned into stone. How was I going to tell her where her hen was? How could the hen, which had turned into chicken, play with her? How could I tell her that we had brought home a dead bird?

I took my daughter up in my arms, hugged her, and calmly told her that her father had brought home chicken and not a hen. At this she became silent and quiet. She had been so cheerful just a moment ago. I wondered what her innocent mind must have comprehended at that time. Maybe she had sensed something unpleasant. She remembered seeing the caged hens and the knife drenched in red. She looked at the carry bag. She wondered if the black hid the red. Tears rolled down her cheeks. I soothed her.

How could I have cooked the hen with which my daughter wanted to play. I went into the kitchen in a pensive mood. Somehow, that day, my husband helped me cook the dish.

I prepared the gravy, while he handled the chicken. Hence, literally that day we cooked a hen.

Needless to say, we never brought home chicken again. The innocence and purity of heart of a four-year-old turned a non-vegetarian father into a vegetarian one.

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

For women, unseen battles at workplace

While they may now have the 'freedom' to take up a vocation, the office often becomes a second, silent confinement

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In today's world, women across all strata of society take up gainful employment and support their families financially. Even a few decades ago, only women who were privileged enough to receive an education entered salaried professions. However, those who remained at home engaged in unpaid labour, such as caregiving and other forms of domestic duties and agricultural work, but were often not acknowledged as making meaningful contributions to their family's welfare. Their strength was exploited without compensation, and their efforts were left unrecognised.

Women have long been treated as the "second sex", denied their basic human rights. Over time, many were conditioned to accept a subordinate status, believing that men were inherently superior and that women's suffering was part of their fate. Traditional Indian families relegated women to tasks such as transferring culture and values to the next generation, denying them the opportunity to hone their skills, explore their interests, and gain knowledge. Generations of women were held back, made to feel inferior, and confined in dark traditions.

Fortunately, things have begun to change. Today, women are forging paths of success across all fields. This transformation did not happen overnight. It was built on years of struggle, sacrifice, and silent determination. Many mothers gave up their own dreams so that their daughters could lead independent and empowered lives.

But has the change truly taken root? Are women now treated equally as men at the workplace? Who truly cares about the real conditions that working women endure?

Clipped wings

While women may now have the "freedom" to work, sadly, the workplace often becomes a second, silent confinement. Here, their wings are clipped, and their voices stifled. They may appear free, but many continue to toil under misogynistic superiors in environments where their dignity is undermined. Women need equality, dignity, and fair treatment. However, a patriarchal mindset persists in many sectors, where women are at the receiving end. If they raise their voices, they risk being fired or penalised. Out of fear, many suffer silently.

Wage disparity

One of the primary reasons women seek employment is financial independence. Yet, wage disparity remains a grim reality. In many workplaces, mainly in the informal sector, salary structures differ for men and women performing the same tasks. Even when a woman puts in equal efforts as her male co-workers or even more, she is rarely paid equally. The struggle of balancing work and family is another big challenge. Unfortunately, their efforts often go unnoticed. In some establishments, bias exists even in hiring practices. This is an obvious violation of women's rights. Promotions and performance evaluations are often tainted by gender-based discrimination.

India slipped to the 31st position in the Global Gender Gap Index, 2025, according to the World Economic Forum. If such conditions persist, the situation may worsen. Women remain under-represented in key areas such as politics, business, and leadership. While women are often praised as natural multitaskers, the reality is that their labour is undervalued. Some men still cannot accept women as superiors or colleagues on an equal footing.

One of the primary reasons women seek employment is financial independence. Yet, wage disparity remains a grim reality in many professions

Despite performing the same duties or more, women are rarely acknowledged or appreciated for their efforts. In addition to office work, many bear caregiving responsibilities at home. But do they receive respect, support, or encouragement from male colleagues or partners?

Several workplaces lack basic facilities such as clean and accessible toilets. During menstruation, women need proper hygiene infrastructure. Are there enough government provisions ensuring access to sanitary facilities or safe spaces? Do workplaces provide adequate breaks for breastfeeding mothers? Women above the age of 50, especially those working in retail or as support staff, are often forced to stand for long hours. Though laws exist mandating seating arrangements for them, such regulations are often ignored. Speaking up can cost them their jobs, so many continue to suffer in silence. Even more tragically, in some cases, women particularly those in vulnerable financial conditions are forced to compromise their dignity by their superiors. While difficult to acknowledge, this form of exploitation still occurs.

So, where can a woman feel truly safe and happy today? She continues to fight her unseen battles every single day.

She may have broken free from the cocoon of domesticity, but now finds herself trapped in a cobweb of systemic oppression. Who will rescue her or must she rescue herself? How can she break free?

For urban lung space

In the country as a whole, there is a significant shortage of public parks and green spaces due to rapid urbanisation

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It is refreshing to learn from time to time that civic bodies across cities are taking steps to nurture urban parks by renovating existing spaces, especially those affected by metro and other projects, and developing new ones.

Parks, which are compact green spaces, have been consistently playing a vital role in societies from time immemorial. During the different periods of Indian history, groves and gardens were set apart by rulers for public enjoyment. Mark Antony successfully whipped up the emotions of the Roman mob soon after the assassination of Julius Caesar when he announced dramatically that Caesar had "left you all his walks, his private arbours and new-planted orchards on this side of Tiber".

However, the concept of public parks in Indian urban areas, as we know it, was introduced only during the colonial period on the lines of parks in the West. The People's Park (1859-61), for example, was one of the oldest parks established in Chennai. Considered the "lungs" of a city, parks are indispensable in metropolitan areas.

ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Peace park

Talking of the status of a typical public park today, it is disappointing that its sparse vegetation fails to invest the city with nostalgic rural charm. Though one must not expect placid calm in public parks situated amid the din and bustle of a city, a fairly peaceful place is necessary for citizens.

The scene in a park varies with the hours of the day. In the mornings, one can see the superannuated gentility taking the morning constitutional. A few people trudge stertorously around the park as if it is a ritual. Parks become very noisy in the evenings with children playing all around. The balloon vendor produces the usual irritable noise to attract them. Vendors selling groundnuts and ice cream ply a brisk trade. Soon the place gets littered with fruit rinds and bits of paper.

Most of the parks have only a minimum supervision by a part-time guard. Lack of cleanliness is a common issue. The growth of grass goes unchecked giving rise to mosquito menace. As the night falls, everything is quiet again in the parks. Early in the morning, one finds some men who have chosen the park for their nocturnal sojourn, unwillingly rising from the cement benches, cursing the sun that disturbed their night-long slumber.

Winding down

For the common person who does not have the advantage of a beach near his home, a park is the only place where he hopes to find relaxation and respite. In the country as a whole, there is a significant shortage of public parks and green spaces due to rapid urbanisation. It is important to regulate encroachment on lands earmarked for parks and also ensure that parks are evenly distributed over a city. Regular maintenance of public parks will doubtless go a long way in contributing to public health and environmental well-being. Local administrations must allocate adequate funds in their annual budgets for this purpose. They should remember that a park is not a luxury, but a necessity.

On the lighter side, I recall an incident related to a park of my school days. My classmate Mani used to be marked absent for a number of days. When he had lost his term days, his class teacher referred the matter to his parents. They were told that the boy was regularly leaving for the school with his books and tiffin box and returning home in the evening.

On investigation, it transpired that the boy spent the school hours playing hide and seek with street children in the park adjacent to our school. He used to have his lunch and his siesta under the umbrageous banyan trees in the park and leave for home on hearing the school bell. The parents acted quickly to correct the boy's behaviour. His mother accompanied him to the school, waited for the whole day in the park and ensured that the boy attended the classes.

When I met Mani after a long time, I enquired about his profession. "I graduated with a degree in botany, and I am now the supervisor of public gardens and parks in the city," he said proudly.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

The article explores India's expanding role on the global creative stage, emphasising how its craftsmanship, fashion, and cultural aesthetics are influencing international trends. ('India on the global mood board'; Aug.10) While demand surges, it underscores the true opportunity for India to guide this exchange on its own terms — rooted in authenticity, heritage, and innovation — rather than adapting to Western frameworks.
Abbharna Barathi

After colonial rule of centuries, we have developed false and fake yardsticks to measure our own societal strengths. This, in turn, has done severe and huge damage to our crafts and indigenous culture. Once we get rid of this slave mindset and recognise our local talent, we are sure to play a key role on a global level in the days to come.
M.N. Saraswathi Devi

Path of growth

Isabel Allende's authentic voice has an emotional resonance and is widely appreciated by readers. ('Isabel Allende's feminist manifesto'; Aug.10) The writer's concluding statement vividly describes her growth mindset.
Beena Anil

Praiseworthy effort

Chandra Jain's efforts for the Banarasi textile industry are extremely praiseworthy and it would be no surprise if her show is a sell-out. ('20 years of Banarasi passion'; Aug.10) The rich texture, the elaborate craftsmanship and the dexterity of the weaver community whose expertise has been earning them plaudits from across the globe have all found space, thanks to her.
C.V. Aravind

In an age when textile heritage of yore is on the verge of extinction, organising *River Weaves*, billed as a first-of-its-kind exhibition, in Bengaluru brings cheers to heritage enthusiasts. The exhibition will, it is hoped, make them fall in love with the art and its process. The state must extend monetary support to members of weaving communities so that textile heritage does not disappear from the land of its origin.
Samiul Hassan Quadri

Inspirational women

Aisiri Amin's account of the three successful village *sarpanches* functioning independently is inspiring. ('The good *sarpanch*'; Aug.10) Given an opportunity, women have proved time and again that they can perform better in identifying and solving issues faced by ordinary people.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

Studies as back as in 1975 have revealed that in India, as a developing country, women play a distinct role in shaping their family and society. Therefore, involving woman in decision-making processes related to societal welfare of people will no doubt yield rich dividends. Kudos and best wishes to the three women *sarpanches*.
S. Raghavan

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Emotionally together, legally strangers
What do we call a bond that endures bigotry and family estrangement but doesn't qualify for joint bank account?
Bhagyashri Jawarkar

Deepfakes and the death of truth
While the technology itself is fascinating, its misuse is turning it into a serious threat
Nehal Saxena

Embracing distinctiveness
Every individual has a distinctive skill; the education system should polish it
Shambhvi Agarwal

Rekindling interest in science
Involving children in growing and nurturing a few plants can open up the magical world of nature to them
Vidya Vasudevan

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A NATION IN NOTES

The most comprehensive collection of Indian paper money is on view in Bengaluru, and here's a glimpse

Deepthi Sasidharan

Defined by a nation and driven by commerce, a banknote – a promissory note issued by a bank and payable to the bearer on demand – is many things. For the longest time in history, the idea of money was transactional, pivoting from barter systems to commodity exchange such as grain, metal and metal coins, and a form of paper money in early Chinese history.

The birth of a banknote, and money as we know it now, occurred only in the 18th century. Today, banknotes are so ubiquitous that few realise it is a fairly recent phenomenon. And that they come with a lot of history. "India's paper money tells a story like no other," explains Rezwan Razack, 70, a prolific banknote collector of over six decades and one of the country's leading scholars of paper money. In May, he was felicitated by the International Bank Note Society (IBNS) and inducted into their Hall of Fame; he is the first Asian and Indian to receive this rare honour. "It's a sweeping saga of empires rising and falling, of republics being forged, of majestic monarchs, and the quiet strength of Mahatma Gandhi, of the hard-won fight for Independence and the relentless spirit of innovation. To be a custodian of this legacy is a privilege."

Razack's collection has been recognised by IBNS as the most comprehensive collection of Indian paper money in the world, "comprising one note of each variety of Paper Money pertaining to India since inception to the present". According to the Bengaluru-based collector, this recognition is the culmination of a lifelong obsession. "What began as wide-eyed wonder as a child – a fascination for the vibrant colours, intricate design and whispered stories hidden within these thin sheets of paper – became a passion for life," he shares. "Banknotes are canvases of history and portraits of different times."

With a slew of authored books and a glittering public museum – Rezwan Razack Museum of Indian Paper Money – his journey of preservation and documentation is an ongoing one.

And as India celebrates its 79th Independence Day, his work gives us a chance to go back to where it all started.

The writer is the founder-director of Eka Archiving Services.


Rezwan Razack

2 *annas*, Prisoners of War currency

As World War II raged, prisoners of war were brought to camps scattered across India. This is a rare example of a coupon given to prisoners that they could use as currency. Printed on only one side and issued in *annas* and rupees, this one was used for the Japanese prisoners captured in Burma and held in a Delhi camp.

₹500 'Oriental Bank', 1840s

The earliest banknotes were issued by private banks. The Oriental Bank Corporation was founded in Bombay and the vignette shows the Town Hall, today called the Asiatic Society of Mumbai Town Hall. In the early days, money was still printed in London.

₹10, Banque de l'Indochine, 1910

Poseidon, Greek god of the sea, sits holding a trident on two sea snakes in this striking blue note of the Bank of Indochina established to promote French mercantile interests. French colonial ambitions in India were throttled early, but they continued in French Pondicherry. Notice the mix of French, English, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Urdu languages in this 'Specimen' note.

₹5, Hyderabad State, 1919

Only the Princely State of Hyderabad in British India was given the privilege of printing their own currency. The Osmania banknotes, some of the most beautiful notes produced anywhere, were created during the reign of the Nizam of Hyderabad VII, Mir Osman Ali Khan.

₹5 'Cinco Rupias', 1945

Issued by the Banco Nacional Ultramarino or the National Overseas Bank, at the brink of India's Independence, this note was used in the Portuguese colony of Goa. Notice the denomination in Rupia, later changed to Escudos, and the use of Urdu, Marathi, Kannada and Hindi.

₹100 Haj Note, Saudi Arabia, 1959

This extremely rare, beautiful banknote in striking red was issued when the Indian Hajj Committee Act was created in 1959 for pilgrimage to Mecca. Although Haj notes were issued after India's independence, a bearer could exchange it for riyals locally and it facilitated the holy pilgrimage immensely. Later withdrawn, such notes were exchanged against money.

₹1,000 'Uniface Note', 1918

Banknotes have always had to keep ahead of ingenious forgers. In this early version for the government of India, the serial number 89697 had to be repeated four times as a security measure.

₹100, 'King George V', 1927

The portrait of the monarch appears on the banknote from 1917 onwards. The 'Lahore' on this note indicates the circle of issue and the sophisticated purple and green print, with its complexities, was a precursor to the intricate design one finds in banknotes today.

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

Head on the temple

Sitting high atop Hindu temples, the appendage has many gory stories attached to it, and a lesson for all devotees

On the top of many Hindu temples, one finds the image of a head looking down on the people below – eyes protruding from its sockets, mouth wide open, tongue sticking out. This is called the Kirtimukha, the head of glory, or Vajramukha, the eternal head.

There are many stories to explain its origins. The most popular is that of a goblin who was created by Shiva to kill demons. But when the demons apologised, Shiva forgave them. Now, the goblin was hungry and asked the lord for food. Shiva said, "Why don't you eat your own body?" The creature began eating his hands, legs, and body, until there was nothing left. Impressed by his obedience, Shiva declared that his head would be placed on top of all temples, a symbol of insatiable hunger, devotion, and how useless the head is without the body – a counterpoint to when Brahmins claim they rose from the head of the Vedic Purusha, the primal man.

There are other stories of this head. In goddess temples of North India, one finds the image of Bhairava (a fierce form of Shiva) holding in his hand the head of Brahma. It is said that at the dawn of time, the deity had four heads facing the four directions. But then he saw the goddess Shatarupa (the multi-formed one, the first woman) and grew a fifth head on top, expressing his desire for her. Disgusted by this, the goddess called upon Rudra to protect her, and thus Bhairava was born. He chopped off Brahma's fifth head, and he still holds it in his hand. According to some lore, this head can be detached only when he goes to the city of Kashi and washes his hand in the Ganga.

Beheading sons and fathers

In Shiva temples, one finds the image of Veerabhadra holding a head in one hand. This is the head of Daksha Prajapati, who neither understood nor recognised the greatness of the lord, leading Veerabhadra, a terrifying creature born of Shiva's hair, to behead him.

Daksha was also the father-in-law of Shiva – the one whose daughter, Sati, chooses the lord as her husband against her father's wishes. But tensions between her father and her husband lead to Sati taking her own life, angering Shiva, who, in the form of Veerabhadra, beheads his father-in-law. It is the head of the man who realised the power of Shiva when he lost control over his own body, the source of his own prejudices.

Folk versions of the *Mahabharata* speak of a great warrior (known as Bilalsen in Nepal) who had taken a vow to always fight for the losing side. He was extremely strong. Krishna feared that such a person, who would keep switching sides, would prevent any war from coming to an end – especially the war being fought at Kurukshetra between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. So, Krishna asked the warrior to give him his head in alms. The warrior, who never refused requests of charity, cut off his own head and gave it to Krishna on the condition that it would be kept alive and allowed to witness the *Mahabharata* war.

In Rajasthan, this warrior is called Barbarik and is considered the grandson of Bhima, the son of Ghatotkacha by a Naga princess. The same story is told in other parts of India, such as Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Malwa, Bundelkhand, Garhwal, and Himachal, where he is considered to be Bilalsen, the son of Bhima. His head was placed on top of a mountain, and every time it laughed, it produced such force that the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas were pushed in opposite directions, unable to fight. So the head was brought down and placed on the ground by Krishna.

When Krishna wept like a widow

Another such head appears in South India – in the story of Aravana, Arjuna's son by the Naga princess Ulupi. Aravana was an extremely strong warrior who was sacrificed on the eve of the *Mahabharata* war. He did not want to die a virgin and begged to be given a wife before his sacrifice. Since no woman wanted to marry him, Krishna took the form of a woman, married him for the night, enabling his sacrifice at dawn. For him, Krishna wept like a widow.

Aravana's head was also placed on top of a tree so that he could witness the war. While everyone believes the *Mahabharata* to be a war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Aravana realises that it is actually a war orchestrated by Krishna so that the blood of kings can quench the thirst of the Earth goddess, who is exhausted by their ambition and greed.

The head atop the temple thus forces devotees to look at life from a different perspective. Everything is not about us.

Kirtimukha relief at the Amrutesvara Temple in Annigeri; and (top left) the eastern *gopuram* at the Madurai Meenakshi Temple. (WIKI COMMONS)

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