

wideangle

How Rosalind Pereira is waging war against waste

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Books that deep dive into India-Pakistan post Pahalgam

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Jishnu Bandyopadhyay

 In an otherwise unremarkable Friday in July 2009, amazon.com executed a digital disappearing act, silently removing two books from every Kindle e-reader across the United States. The rationale offered – improper addition by a publisher – did little to quell the irony that these very texts, *Animal Farm* and *1984* by George Orwell, which explored themes of censorship and control, had themselves vanished into a digital “memory hole”. The incident starkly brought to light a fundamental truth of the digital age: the act of “buying” today is often less about ownership and more about acquiring a license, revocable at the whim of the provider. Amazon’s subsequent pledge against future silent deletions offered some reassurance, yet the e-commerce giant retained the rights to do so anyway.

Filmmaker Kabir Mehta, 34, experienced a similar digital dispossession around 2012. Leveraging a U.S.-based iTunes account through a relative, he had painstakingly uploaded his CD collection, trusting the software to recognise and integrate the tracks into his digital library legally. The launch of iTunes in India a few months later abruptly severed this access, localised contracts rendering his meticulously curated playlists blank. "I didn't bother holding on to the physical versions of many tracks once I had added them to iTunes. I was quite devastated to see my library empty," recounts the Goa-based director and screenwriter.

Mehta's experience foreshadowed a broader trend. The traditional concept of ownership has become increasingly nuanced in the intervening years. Physical media such as DVDs have largely ceded ground to streaming platforms, personal music collections to subscription services, and tangible books to digital thumbnails. Simultaneously, external economic pressures and shifting lifestyles are reshaping our relationship with physical possessions. A 2024 TechSci Research report highlights a surge in renting, from homes and vehicles to electronics and furniture, driven by skyrocketing property prices, increasing mortgage rates, and a growing preference for flexible living arrangements.

"Cost of living has not matched up with salaries in the country, and a minimum living wage for all is still a far-fetched dream," says Hyderabad-based economist Kumar Gautam. "A person with a dependent child finds it difficult to run their household even with a ₹1 lakh monthly paycheck – where does Gen Z even begin to plan for the future?" The economic strain is evident in the rising tide of consumer debt. According to TransUnion CIBIL, India's outstanding credit card debt reached approximately ₹2.92 lakh crore as of last December, a significant jump from the previous year's ₹2.53 lakh crore. In this unstable economic landscape, coupled with the relentless push of consumerism, the prospect of long-term investment feels increasingly distant for younger generations.

The death knell of ownership
For generations, ownership was a key marker of success and stability. But today, it is dying out. Technology, economic stagnation, and consumer options have created an era of access, instead.



**SOMETHING BORROWED,
NEVER OWNED**

And the allure of the access economy, with its promise of instant gratification and boundless options, is undeniably strong. “I have never had an issue with renting or subscribing to things, I don’t really think about what I will own 50 years from now – imagining even two decades into the future feels like an existential crisis,” says Haroon Sharma, 22, a college student from Ahmedabad, adding that he wants to be able to opt out, try new services, move to another city (if that’s better for his career) without the burden of ownership. “But not having the option of owning at all is not something any of us asked for,” he states, highlighting the inherent tension between the convenience of access and the potential loss of agency – think reduced choices, potentially higher prices, and a lack of transparency.

Bengaluru-based Sushmita Bhalariao, a corporate strategy analyst at Goldman Sachs, observes a fundamental shift in generational values, too. “While once owning something was the largest marker of financial security, the digital native generation has got comfortable with not keeping things for good.” She also points to the economic incentives driving

With the access economy promising freedom, flexibility and sustainability, we are consuming without keeping things for posterity. But all is not perfect in this post-ownership world

this shift. “Most corporations have realised how financially beneficial subscription models can be in a capitalist economy. Keeping consumers on the hamster wheel, getting them to buy carelessly and buy more is a sure-shot way to keep making profits.” This corporate philosophy has manifested in eyebrow-raising ways, from BMW’s attempt to charge a subscription heated seats in 2023 – proposal the German car manufacturer abandoned after customers complained about having to pay \$18 a month to use in-built features – to HP’s “Instant Ink” service, where users have to pay a monthly page allowance on their own printers.

The software industry was one of the early adopters of the

Kalyani Saha Chawla.
(GETTY IMAGES)

subscription-based model. While it eliminated the need for upfront purchases, it also came with its own set of 'expensive' problems. "As a graphic design student, it is terrible not to have the option to buy software like Photoshop, Illustrator or InDesign. It costs about ₹734 per month for a single software, and about ₹1,916 per month for the bundle," laments Saniya Kakkar, 23, a Mumbai-based graphic designer. Even user-friendly options such as Canva, which began with affordable subscriptions, have now amped up rates. Its Teams feature, which cost ₹4,000 for three users now charges the same fee for a single user.

We are slowly heading towards a world where “everything can only be borrowed”, warns Gautam. “And these costs never trail off. You keep paying for things consistently if you want them, down to the albums that store your photos,” adds the economist. This perpetual state of borrowing contributes to significant anxiety, particularly among younger demographics. “Even though most older generations assume younger people have it easier, this is adding to major financial anxiety alongside living in a politically volatile world,” notes Delhi-based mental health therapist Ruchi Ruuh.

Moreover, the constant influx of new digital content only fosters a sense of fleeting engagement. “We constantly need the newest thing... [to] signal our ‘status’. With digital purchases, we barely keep count of what we are buying, and we don’t use things to their full potential as much as we used to. We don’t reread a book or listen to the same track because so much more is available at our fingertips. We own so recklessly that nothing holds value,” she adds.

Nostalgia has its place

Delhi-based entrepreneur Kalyani Saha Chawla, 50, TV personality and founder of Rezon Luxury Silverware, has always understood the importance of permanence. “When I look at books from my grandparents, with the little handwritten messages on the opening pages, it speaks to me. With digital purchases, there is a lack of personalisation alongside a lack of control,” she observes. The ephemeral nature of digital ownership also breeds a sense of vulnerability. “We live with this fear that if there is a glitch in our cloud, we might lose all our photos, our memories of cherished moments.”

Shrimoyee Chakraborty, 35, advocates for a balanced approach, emphasising the importance of valuing the analogue world while embracing the benefits of the digital. “I do not have a television at home; I make sure to play the classics – from [Martin] Scorsese to [Satyajit] Ray – on a projector for my four-year-old daughter to grow up and appreciate our cultural inheritance,” says the Mumbai and London-based chef and flimmmaker. “She can have an iPad and still value owning a film or art.”

CONTINUED ON
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It is only normal that we are more interested in
consuming digitally – we have run out of mental and physical space to give tangible things the attention they deserve.

SHWETA KAPUR, 37
Fashion designer and founder of
Delhi-based ready-to-wear brand
431-88, who focuses on launching
mindful capsule collections



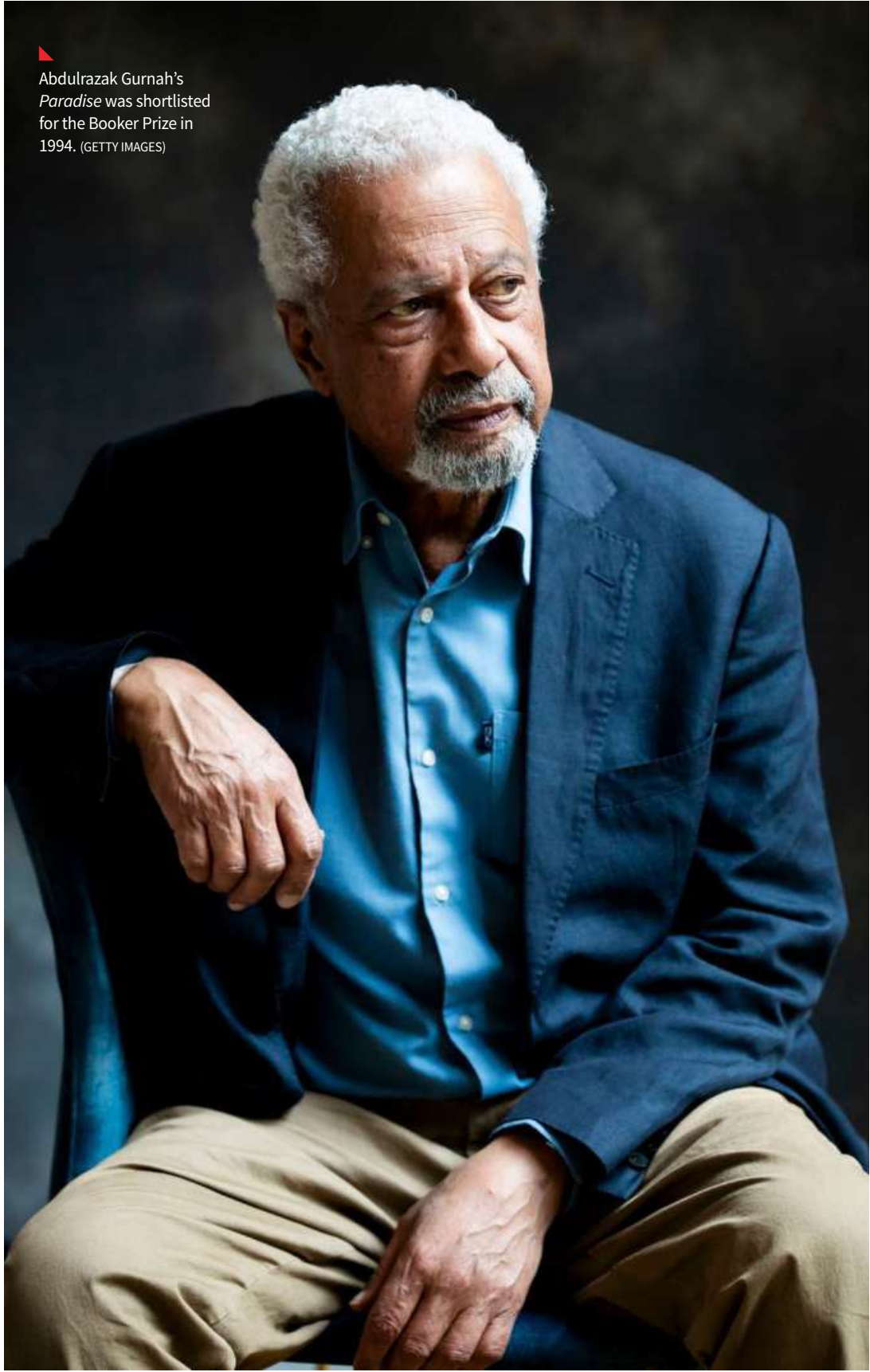
I am a magpie for beauty,
and wherever I find it, I
pick up little pieces of joy,
whether it's clothes, art,
books, jewellery, tchotchkes
— anything that will
physically remind me of the
moments I have lived.

KAUSTAV DEY, 42
VP of marketing for Tommy Hilfiger
and Calvin Klein, based in Bengaluru,
for whom travel experiences
transcend digital documentation



Previous generations did not have someone else constantly
controlling their data.
Nobody could swoop into
my house and take away
my copy of Rushdie's
Satanic Verses when it was
banned for a while, for
instance.

KABIR MEHTA
Filmmaker, highlighting the tangible security that physical ownership can afford



Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1994. (GETTY IMAGES)

BESTILL, HEART

In the first novel after his 2021 Nobel Prize, Abdulrazak Gurnah gives us both hope and despair, showcasing once again his masterly touch

Chintan Girish Modi

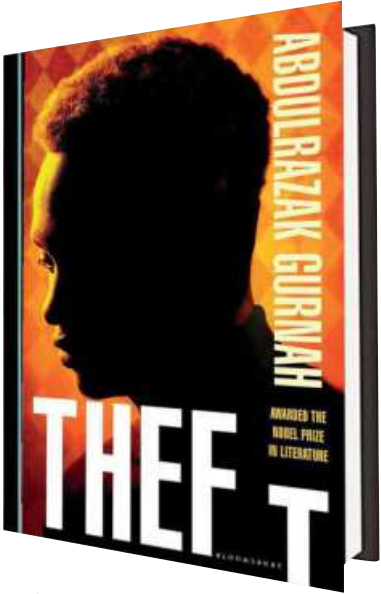
Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah's latest novel *Theft* is beguiling in its construction of a fictional universe where lives are upended or redeemed by the cruelty and kindness that the characters encounter. Their own actions do play a critical role but causality is not straightforward here; there are secrets and silences, revealed only when the novelist deems the timing to be ripe enough for drama and heartbreak. Gurnah shows yet again why he is a master storyteller.

Set in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, the novel revolves around the trio of Karim, Badar and Fauzia as they transition from teenage to early adulthood in the 1990s. What they have in common is a love of books and thirst for knowledge. Their circumstances, however, are vastly different.

Karim, whose world is shattered after his parents' divorce, is nurtured by his half-brother Ali, sister-in-law Jalila, and his mother Raya's second husband, Haji. Badar, a "servant", knows little about his biological parents. He has survived thanks to the generosity of adults who raised him but they too have run out of resources, so he is now employed in the house of Haji's father, Uncle Othman. This is where Karim and Badar meet.

Surprise elements

Through their intersecting lives, Gurnah explores the human heart's wonderful



Theft
Abdulrazak Gurnah
Bloomsbury
₹699

capacity to embrace people beyond the call of duty or obligation. It is moving to witness the genuine pride that Ali takes in Karim's academic accomplishments despite their murky family history. It seems that since Karim can never fully repay the kindness that Ali, Jalila and Haji extend to him, he pays it forward to Badar. When Badar is wrongly accused of a theft, it is Karim who stands by him, welcomes him into his house, and also helps him get a secure job.

Gurnah's genius as a storyteller lies in surprising readers. While Karim is being put on a pedestal, it is difficult to imagine his impending downfall later in the novel. Badar feels indebted for everything that Karim has done for him, so he does not mind the latter's patronising tone. However, some lines cannot be crossed. Karim's bitter outburst at the end of the novel is startling because it challenges almost everything that one is led to believe about the kind of person he is and what he values.

Fauzia's role in the narrative is closely connected to how this transformation plays out, but she is more than just a device to move the plot forward. Gurnah presents her as a woman of profound strength; one who is aware of her intellectual gifts but feels low on self-esteem because of a childhood illness that she fears she might pass on to her child with Karim. The novelist's depiction of their courtship is tender and breezy, so the complications in their marriage come across as alarming.

Social realities

Gurnah is not opposed to giving a love story its happy end, but he is in no hurry. Badar has feelings for Fauzia but he cannot dream of betraying Karim's trust. Karim, however, is drawn to a woman named Jerry, who he meets at Badar's workplace.

Read the novel, the first after Gurnah's Nobel win in 2021, to find out how it ends. It is a journey worth undertaking because the author makes one feel deeply for his characters and root for their happiness. In a patriarchal culture that treats women as dispensable, he celebrates their ambition, sisterhood, and resilience. That said, he does not idealise women characters or overlook their flaws and vulnerabilities.

In addition to the plot and characterisation, what stays with the reader is Gurnah's worldbuilding that looks effortless but is highly sophisticated. It displays his subtle observations about social hierarchies, the rural-urban divide, and the lure of capitalism in a part of the world that he grew up in but had to leave when he arrived in England as a refugee.

The reviewer is a journalist, educator and literary critic.

Sudha G. Tilak

In Tamil: *The Best Stories of Our Times*, editor Perundevi has curated an arresting anthology that captures the pulse of Tamil society – its aspirations, agonies, transitions, and triumphs – over the last 30 years.

This volume gathers 22 stories from some of Tamil literature's most acclaimed voices, including Jeyamohan, Perumal Murugan, Ambai, S. Ramakrishnan, and Charu Nivedita. Brought into English by a team of six skilled translators – N. Kalyan Raman, G.J.V. Prasad, Suchitra Ramachandran, Nandini Krishnan, Janani Kannan, and Yashasvi Arunkumar – the stories unfold with an elegance that preserves the soul of the original while making them accessible to a wider audience.

What's striking is not just the literary strength of each story (some of them are vignettes), but the sheer range of voices and experiences they encapsulate. There is absurdity and anguish, quiet humour and explosive pain, wistfulness and rebellion. The characters, shaped by rural and urban Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka as much as by the dislocations of the diaspora (Canada and Paris), navigate their shifting worlds with a blend of stoicism, defiance, and vulnerability. These are not just stories from Tamil Nadu – they are stories from the Tamil mind, echoing across geographies and generations.

Challenging boundaries

Perundevi, a distinguished poet and academic, brings both rigour and intimacy to this volume. Her editorial vision stems from a deeply felt curiosity about how literature intersects with lived experience. As she states, the stories were chosen to highlight how the modern animates



Festival favourite A man sells traditional dancing dolls in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. (GETTY IMAGES)

rare thing – a collection that is at once deeply local and profoundly universal. Whether it is a woman reflecting on her fractured marriage and rape, a migrant confronting alienation in a foreign land, or a child struggling with inherited humiliation and hunger, these stories feel uncannily familiar, even to readers far removed from Tamil culture. And therein lies their strength: the power to transcend place and dialect, and to map, as Perundevi puts it, "important contours of the human condition".

For readers new to Tamil literature, this book is a generous and exhilarating introduction. For those already familiar with its literary legacy, the volume affirms what they have long known – that some of the finest fiction being written in India today comes from its regional languages, offering respect for India's literary multiplicity.

In the Indian publishing landscape, short stories written originally in Indian English often struggle to find acceptance, despite the form's global resurgence. However, a notable exception emerges when short fiction is translated from regional languages. The *bhasha* counterparts – via translation – are positioned as literary artefacts worthy of preservation and wider dissemination. In the end, *Tamil: The Best Stories of Our Times* reminds us of a fundamental truth: that the best stories, regardless of language, illuminate the shared spaces of our lives.

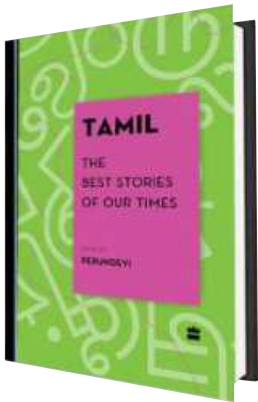
The reviewer is the author of Temple Tales and translator of Hungry Humans.

Deeply Tamil, deeply human

A compelling collection of contemporary Tamil stories highlights how translation brings regional voices to the global literary stage

contemporary Tamil life – how globalisation, technology, urbanisation, and political churn leave their imprints not only on bodies and cities but also on minds, relationships, and language itself.

Indeed, the "modern"



Tamil: The Best Stories of Our Times
Ed. Perundevi
Harper Perennial
₹399

here is not a distant or abstract force but a deeply felt, frequently disruptive presence. In the hands of Jeyamohan, it becomes a question of moral depth and human limitation as an elderly fragile man is sought by a family to offer deliverance from the curse of his incarceration. Perumal Murugan's story, as always, is suffused with emotional intelligence, capturing the embarrassment over the blouse-less breasts of the family's matriarch.

Aravindan's ironical take on the ambivalence of public decency and private desires, and the testicular trauma in Shobasakthi's story as a metaphor for political asylum and erasure of human empathy, are as political as they are poetic. Charu Nivedita's voice remains provocative, challenging the very boundaries of form and

dignity, while S. Ramakrishnan offers stories rooted in landscape.

The translators, each with their own linguistic sensibility, manage the challenging task of staying faithful to tone and cadence while crafting fluent prose in English. N. Kalyan Raman, perhaps the most recognised name in Tamil-to-English translation today, brings a particular deftness to rendering idiom and silence. G.J.V. Prasad and Suchitra Ramachandran lend a literary confidence to their selections, while younger voices like Janani Kannan and Yashasvi Arunkumar ensure that the next generation of Tamil translators is in good hands.

Power of regional literature

What emerges from this confluence of writer, translator, and editor is a

Family most foul

This debut novel combines mystery and horror to explore themes such as patriarchy, female complicity and inherited trauma

Preeti Zachariah

preeti.zachariah@thehindu.co.in

It feels appropriate that the place where Arunima Tenzin Tara's debut novel is set is named Tolstoy House: the visceral misery of the family that resides in a building at the junction of Tolstoy Marg and Barakhamba Road in New Delhi, makes one recall the opening line of the Russian writer's classic, *Anna Karenina*.

This family is undoubtedly unhappy in a unique way, perhaps inevitable when "washing dead bodies used to be a family activity". *The Ex-Daughters of Tolstoy House* begins with the death of one of its primary narrators, Meera. It is her youngest daughter, Naina, the book's other narrator, who finds her "lying on the floor, one hand resting on her stomach, the other casually by her side", in a puddle of blood and is forced to clean it. To do so, she draws on a gift unique to the women of the family, the ability to store spilt blood in their bodies.

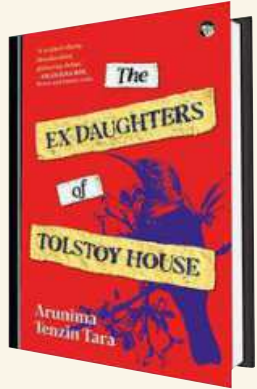
Spoiler alert

The novel, which focuses on this family consisting of a doctor, Ambarish, his wife, Meera, and their daughters, Sujata, Kavita and Naina, skilfully combines the mundane and the macabre to explore themes such as patriarchy, female complicity, inherited trauma and toxic family enmeshment.

It employs a dual-timeline narrative to unearth the darkness beneath the family's outwardly perfect veneer, and often feels like a fever dream,

one likely to leave the reader feeling decidedly unsettled from the get-go. The dread and claustrophobia induced by this decidedly gothic novel are testament to Tara's tight, superbly-constructed prose and mastery over the narrative.

Interestingly, the hints of horror stem less from the sombre secret that the family is hiding and more from the



The Ex-Daughters of Tolstoy House
Arunima Tenzin Tara
Speaking Tiger
₹499

seemingly mundane activities of cooking and bird-watching, which somehow end up portending doom. A hunting cormorant, for instance, which must wait for its feathers to dry before plunging into the water to catch fish, needs "cool down time between kills", notes Naina at one point in the story. At other times, she draws parallels between various cuts of meat and her dead mother.

My only real grouse with the book, therefore, is this: it will likely put you off dinner, especially if there is meat on the table.

BROKEN THREADS

Veterans on how India should deal with Pakistan post Pahalgam



Suhasini Haidar
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In the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attacks, New Delhi has unleashed a raft of measures against Pakistan, both diplomatic and economic. It has followed it up with military strikes on the terrorist infrastructure of groups based in Pakistan, to act as a deterrent against future attacks.

For an informed and grounded view on how to deal with Pakistan and the scourge of terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir in the longer term, there are a number of books that give a view of policy-making with the added advantage of personal experience, archival documents and research.

Diplomatic archiving
At 90 plus, Avtar Singh Bhasin is a one-man institution on diplomatic archiving. He has compiled official documents into volumes on India's relations with a number of countries, including India's neighbours like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, China and Pakistan. His latest work, *Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements*, stands out as a treasure trove of nuggets. According to his list, the five most important agreements India has signed are the

following: the 1954 Panchsheel Agreement between India and China; Indo-Soviet Treaty, 1971; the Simla Pact, 1972; India-Sri Lanka Accord, 1987; and the India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Energy Agreement, 2008.

Those focused on the current situation between India and Pakistan would learn much from Bhasin's painstaking research into how the Simla Accord came about, including the role of the Soviet Union. In a previous book, *India and Pakistan: Neighbours at Odds*, Bhasin analysed the Indus Waters Treaty at length. Pakistan has threatened to suspend the Simla Pact in response to India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty.

The Kashmir angle
Amarjit Singh Dulat, a former Intelligence Bureau officer and adviser to Farooq Abdullah when he was chief minister of J&K, presents a bird's eye view of the policy-making in Delhi and Srinagar during the worst of the Kashmir insurgency in the 1990s and 2000s. *The Chief Minister and the Spy: An Unlikely*

Persistent gaze A boy stands at his gate as an armed soldier sits in a vehicle in Jammu and Kashmir, November 2024. (GETTY IMAGES)

Friendship takes on more importance after the Pahalgam attack, which may portend a new, more brutal turn in the Kashmir insurgency.

Unlike a previous work on the same subject, *Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years*, written with Aditya Sinha, which restricts itself to a few years, the new book goes from Sheikh Abdullah's struggle pre-Partition and stretches to Omar Abdullah's election victory in 2024. Dulat attempts to explain events that moulded Dr. Abdullah's personality and his politics that aligned him closely to the idea of a secular India.

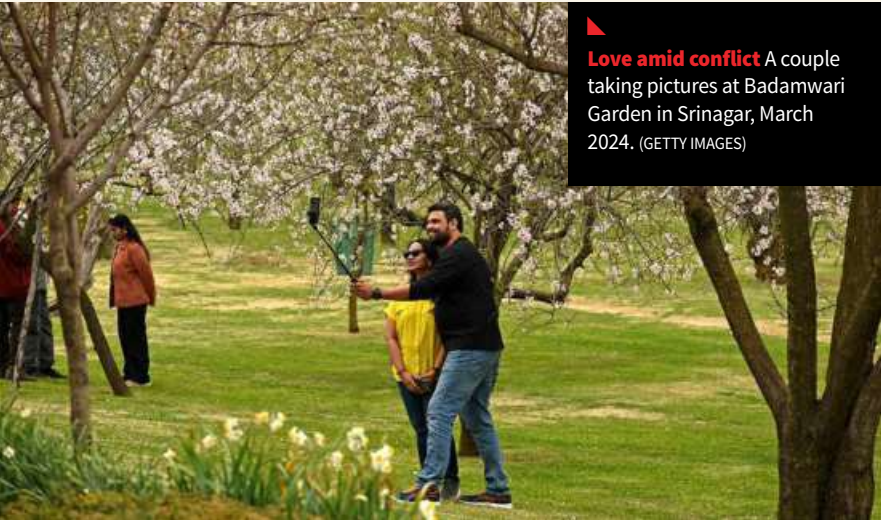
What also comes through is

Dr. Abdullah's hardline position on militant demands, including a detailed account of the kidnapping of the then Home Minister and later Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's daughter, Rubaiyya Sayeed in 1989. He also writes about the hostage-taking aboard IC-814 in 1999. Dulat recounts Dr. Abdullah's strong opposition to New Delhi's decision to release terrorists in exchange for hostages in both cases. History has proved him correct on this as both decisions gave militancy in J&K a fillip.

A controversy
Ironically, the book that is clearly "The Spy's" almost-hagiographic tribute to "The Chief Minister" has led to a controversy for showing Dr. Abdullah in a poor light over his response to the amendments to Article 370. A closer read indicates an unnecessary storm over a few lines, although it does raise questions about the veracity of other quotes in the book, and whether Dulat simply recreated conversations from memory without recourse to more detailed note-taking.

Both Dulat and Bhasin's books remind us that there are very few people left in office with first-hand knowledge of dealing with militancy in Kashmir in the 1990s, and dealing with Pakistan when Delhi and Islamabad still conducted bilateral dialogue. One such person is National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, the man at the centre of today's strategic planning post-Pahalgam.

A number of superbly written accounts from the ground have been penned by diplomats once posted in Islamabad, including Ajay Bisaria's *Anger Management* with a play-by-play account of the 2019 Pulwama attacks and Balakot strikes. Another good book is Sharat Sabharwal's *India's Pakistan Conundrum* that deals with the dividends of bringing international pressure on Pakistan post the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Ruchi Ghanashyam's *An Indian Woman in Islamabad: 1997-2000* goes into the details of how the 1999 IC-814 crisis was managed with Pakistan. General Musharraf had only just taken over in a military coup. The book also includes a riveting first-person account from her husband and fellow diplomat R. Ghanashyam, the first Indian diplomat on the Kandahar tarmac during the crisis.



Love amid conflict A couple taking pictures at Badamwari Garden in Srinagar, March 2024. (GETTY IMAGES)

Love as a paradox

Mehak Jamal's debut collection hopes to ensure love conquers all odds, but is that really possible in conflict-ridden Kashmir?

Pranavi Sharma

In documentary filmmaker Mehak Jamal's debut book, *Lōal Kashmir*, there's a moment when Beena, a bride-to-be, sighs as her fiancé, Sakib, recalls the hardships his parents faced while marrying in the 1980s. He remembers the silent pounding of meat under constant surveillance in a wedding that felt like an act of defiance. Beena then utters a line that exposes the book's cardinal irony: "*Woh waqt koi aur tha.*" That was another time. Except, of course, it wasn't. The temporal space that *Lōal Kashmir* occupies often folds in on itself and makes way for repetition.

"*Lōal*" is the Kashmiri word for love and longing. The idea of this book was born after the abrogation of Article 370 when Kashmir came under a complete communication lockdown. Jamal set out to collect stories of love, longing and loss, and received an overwhelming response. People shared their stories; and as she writes in the Introduction, "They wanted the world to remember how bravely they had fought, but equally how fiercely they had loved."

The book, structured in three sections, *Otru* (day before yesterday), *Rath* (yesterday), and *Az* (today), wants to suggest a time sweep, but the truth is that the stories are caught in an eternal present. The lovers here are driven and desperate. Even love, which might hope to carve out a private refuge, is shaped by conflict.

A letter break

In the first story, 'Love Letter' a 17-year-old boy Javed, caught in a crackdown, remembers too late that he has a love letter in his pocket. The reader who is trained by headlines clearly expects the worst. But no, the soldiers instead make him read the letter aloud. The narrator then reveals that this was made possible as the soldiers "wanted a break from the crackdown as much as Javed did". Not to forget, the army in Kashmir is a force of power, and Javed, the boy with the letter, is tyrannised. To collapse their exhaustion into a single experience completely flattens the inherent violence and humiliation associated with these crackdowns.

The stories are potent with cross-border love, cancelled weddings, exiled lovers, migration as an ongoing negotiation with loss. But the telling of these stories is where the book falters. Kashmiri words are inserted not because they are not translatable, but as linguistic decoration which can perhaps work to perform the weight of lived experience.

The internet shutdown is recited, almost rhythmically in every story of *Az* (third section) as if to remind the reader of its importance. There is a documentary impulse at play here, which needs to explain Kashmir to a reader who might otherwise not "get it."

A four-and-a-half page too long Kashmiri history is a part of this

impulse. But the best stories understand this instinctively. For instance, in Sagar's story ('Matador'), arguably the collection's sharpest, a Kashmiri Pandit caught in a minor altercation realises that in Kashmir, everyone is playing a survival game. The majority-minority binary, while so easy to invoke, is blurred in practice. "Out here," the story notes, "they were all Kashmiris first." Yet Sagar had been so focused on his difference that he had missed the larger truth that survival often demands betrayal. The realisation is devastating for him, and the story does not attempt to soften its blow.

Improbable bonds

Elsewhere, though, Jamal's technique is unconvincing. A story about a Kashmiri woman falling in love with a Palestinian man feels oddly voyeuristic. Love in *Lōal Kashmir* is very event-specific, we never quite know why lovers are tethered so fiercely despite the weight of distance, miscommunication, and the sheer improbability of their bond. Where does the resilience come from? At what cost? These questions are not



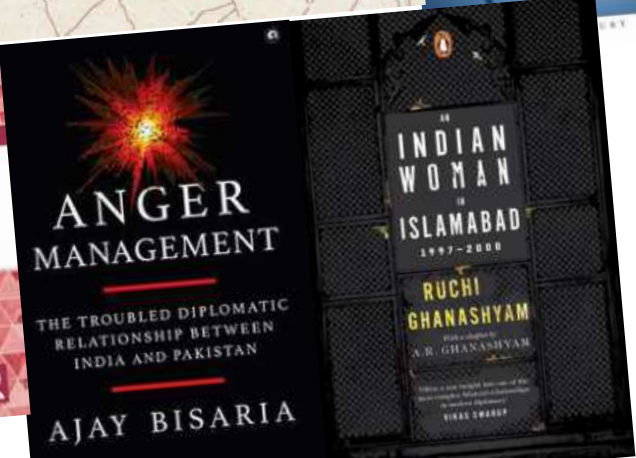
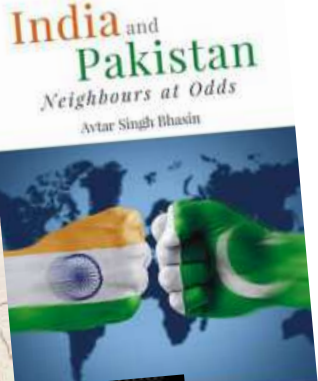
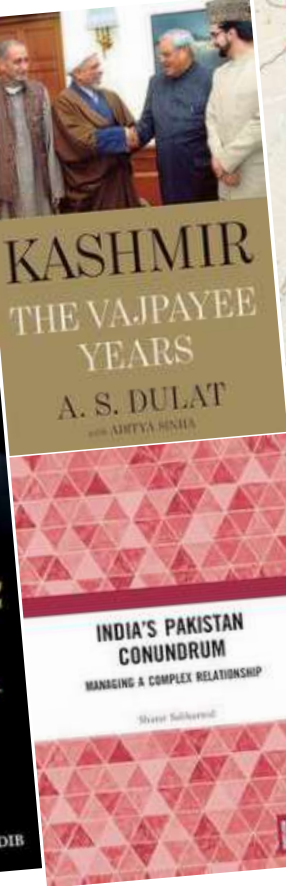
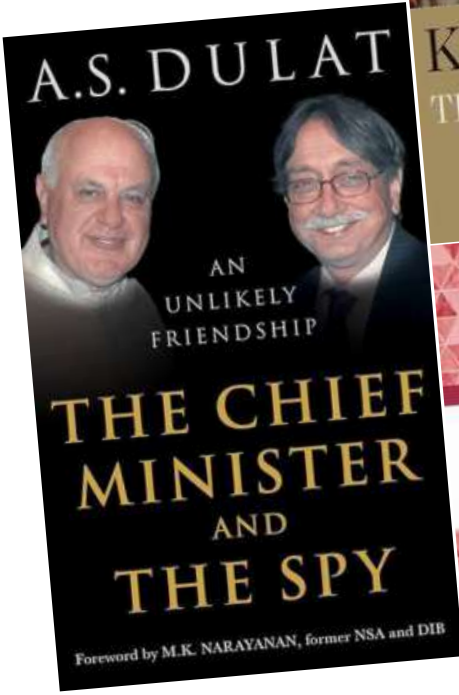
Lōal Kashmir: Love and Longing in a Torn Land
Mehak Jamal
HarperCollins
₹599

probed. Jamal also does something very curious, she adds little notes at the end, updating the reader on where these characters are now, as if to satisfy an audience's curiosity. But who is this audience? And what is the book's obligation to them?

This is the paradox of *Lōal Kashmir*. The book understands that love in Kashmir is never separate from violence. And yet, again and again, the stories tell us that lovers triumph. Love, against all odds. Love, carrying on. But is this truly love in a conflict zone? Love in a place where time itself has been rendered meaningless? The book wants to have it both ways, and in doing so, sometimes doesn't realise that conflict is not backdrop, not setting. It in fact shapes love at the root.

To tell the story of love in a place where love and violence are inseparable is to risk either sentimentalising suffering or diminishing love. Jamal's stories live in this paradox, sometimes they succeed in capturing it, sometimes they evade it. But then, perhaps evasion is also a kind of truth. After all, "in Kashmir, there is always someone in the background playing his own game".

The reviewer is an independent journalist in New Delhi.



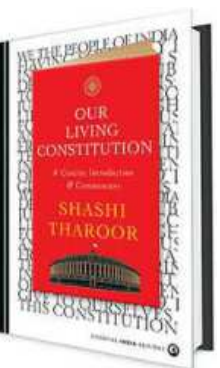
Meet the Savarnas: Indian Millennials Whose Mediocrity Broke Everything
Ravikant Kisana
Ebury Press
₹699

Kisana documents the lives and concerns of India's urban elites, framing the 'savarnas' as a distinct social cohort, oblivious of its own social rules, privileges and systems.



Our Living Constitution: A Concise Introduction & Commentary
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph
₹499

In 128 pages, Tharoor condenses the world's longest written Constitution, beginning with the Preamble and its key features including the fundamental rights.



The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife

Puja Pujara with Namita Kala
HarperCollins
₹599

In 2013, Puja Pabari, not a cricket fan, married batsman Cheteshwar Pujara, and witnessed the life of a player. In her memoir, she reflects on what it means to be a cricketer's wife in India, and the triumphs and struggles to be a player.



The M Factor: Memoirs by Mothers
Edited by Anubha Doshi
Penguin India
₹299

As everyone will agree, every day is Mother's Day. Doshi edits a collection of essays, written by mothers, for mothers. Mallika Sarabhai calls it "a guide, a reminder, a comforter" and how the writers' views ease the way to motherhood.



Cyberpunk reality in Mumbai

At the WAVES summit, a competition around the four-decade-old film *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* offered a lesson in irony

Shilajit Mitra

By the third day of WAVES (World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit), the recent *sarkari* symposium held in Mumbai, I was tucked out. Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered the inaugural address. Sessions upon sessions followed – about cultural soft power, about innovation and the ‘orange economy’, about how Netflix created 20,000 jobs through its local productions in India.

Wandering around the vast Jio World Convention Centre in BKC, what caught my attention was a much simpler item on the agenda: a film poster-making competition. Arranged on easels, outside one of the venues, were 10 handmade paintings. The competition was co-organised by the National Film Archive of India (NFIAD) and ImageNation, a Delhi-based art group specialising in graffiti and murals.

In the age of generative AI, the young participants – hailing from various art and film institutes of India – were given three hours in which to finish their paintings. But what delighted me most was the choice of film they were tossed: Kundan Shah’s corrosive political satire *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*. The irony was unmissable. A



The winning poster by Drishya Ashok.

comic skewering of bureaucracy and crony capitalism from the early 1980s, celebrated, over four decades later, at the heart of corporate Mumbai. The winning entry – a sly evocation of this dystopian imbalance – was by Drishya Ashok, a 25-year-old art direction student from the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). Born in Palakkad but brought up in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, Ashok studied architecture and later assisted in the

art departments of the Tamil films *Demonte Colony* (2015) and *Naane Varuvean* (2022). She watched *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* for the first time in preparation for the competition – “It’s so political and timeless!”

The third eye In Shah’s endlessly entertaining classic, two foppish but penniless still photographers, played by Naseeruddin Shah and Ravi Baswani, stumble upon evidence of a political murder. Their slapstick sleuthing unfolds against the backdrop of a transforming Bombay, the concrete wilderness taking root. In Ashok’s painting, an analogue Pentax camera peers down from a flyover, keenly surveying a city bent out of shape. Seen from a distance, the camera almost resembles a surveillance drone.

“In film school, we are taught that the camera is the third eye,” she says. “It can manipulate you, provoke you. Currently, surveillance is happening everywhere through CCTV... and in the age of AI, the camera can even control itself. It can choose what to watch and where to watch.” While many of the other entries interpreted the film literally, it is this forbidding retrofuturistic quality to Ashok’s painting that puts it in conversation with present times.

I reached out to Binod Pradhan, the cinematographer of *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*, for a comment on this painting. “The first thing that struck me was the unique font of the title *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*. It went well with the rather dystopian world created by Drishya,” he shares. “The images look like [they are] from the film, but made in the modern world. The camera that smashed the bridge and the two characters hanging desperately onto celluloid film – as we wish we could in real life as filmmakers. That’s a wonderfully thoughtful layer in the poster!”

Joshua Muiyiva

Heading into the hills of Kodaikanal in the middle of balmy April was already a treat. Then, to sit on the lush grounds of a boutique hotel with nearly 150 people, listening to ‘Music from the Mountains to the Skies’, was simply magical.

The unique concert held at Mountain Retreat Koda against the starry evening sky, kicked off with the sonic stylings of the Dindigul Mavattam Kodaikanal Poombarai Gramiya Kalai Kuzhu. The band of nine musicians of the indigenous Arunthathar community played their traditional percussion and wind instruments, including the *kombu*, an S-shaped brass instrument that looks like an elephant’s raised trunk. They were followed by singer Seema Ramchandani, a Kodaikanal resident and formerly of the pop band Viva.

Finally, lit by spotlight and moonlight, indie artist Suman Sridhar closed off the show with her original songs that blend jazz, Indian classical music, spoken word, opera and Afro-beat. She concluded her set with *Placide*, a track that is Sridhar’s commentary on the increasing plastic pollution around us.

The concert marked the launch of *Sky Islands*, an independent digital platform that “aims to connect communities across the Western Ghats towards engagement, action and storytelling”. Rajni George, its founding editor and publisher, thinks of the hill station in Tamil Nadu “as a special place” having grown up here.

Nearly two decades ago, the widespread protests against the Hindustan Unilever mercury contamination of the area was her first memory of local groups “proactively coming together to stop Kodaikanal going the way of other hill stations around India”. Inspired by this formidable older generation, George started looking around for others to band together “to preserve and protect” their piece of the earth.



(Clockwise from left) Band of indigenous performers; Murgeshwari; Suprabha Seshan; Suman Sridhar; and Rajni George. (AMJAD MAJID, AZAD REESE, AND GAUTAM APPARAO)



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Kodaikanal’s new digital platform, Sky Islands, aims to help locals across the Western Ghats take charge of their many hill stations and engage with conservation initiatives

Speaking from experience George brought her experience and connections from the publishing and media field into play, and since 2021, along with editor-writer Neha Sumitran, “ran a hyperlocal publication called *The Kodai Chronicle* to speak of the environmental degradation as well as the amazing things happening in this region”. Four years on, she wanted to bring other citizen-led conservation and care to the centrestage. So, while the *Chronicle*’s website will remain as “an archive for hyperlocal stories”, the platform, administered by the Kodai Chronicle Trust, will mature this vision.

‘Sky islands’ are geographically isolated high-elevation regions with flora and fauna that are distinct from lower-elevation surroundings. Like islands, “they’re cut-off but still share so much”. For George, the poetry and potential of this name was the reason for adopting it for the platform. With

it, she seeks to bring together stakeholders along the Western Ghats – from the Nilgiris and Anamalais, to Banasura Hills, the Palanis and more – to share and pool ideas on conserving and celebrating the region.

She intends for “local news to be sustainably reported from the perspective of lived experiences”, to bring more *adivasi* voices into the debates on what should be going on in the hills, and become a confluence of the larger community taking on the environmental fight. “Each month, we will publish an audio format and longform story, which speak directly to issues and initiatives that affect the people living here. There will be an ‘engage’ section, which will highlight the various citizen conservation campaigns and map out the opportunities for the people of the Western Ghats to take part,” she explains.

Opening up the mandate to



spotlight the entire region means that the platform can access a larger pool of resources, financially and people-wise. They’ll be networking with independent researchers and environmentalists, private organisations and government bodies and as a node for important information.

Connecting stakeholders

The common-sense learning over these several decades of conservation has been that the fight must be tailored to the region. “It’s important to distinguish between the footprint of the capitalist industrial complex and those of individuals,” says restorationist and rewilder Suprabha Seshan of Wayanad’s Gurukula Periyar Botanical Sanctuary. If people take ownership of the lands around them, mainstream conservation discourse will step outside of the “individual blame game” towards encouraging cooperation and community living.

Adivasi voices

Over the years that Murgeshwari, a daily wage agricultural labourer from the Paliyar *adivasi* community, reported for *The Kodai Chronicle* and now *Sky Islands*, she found herself being able to tell stories that are often missed by the mainstream media. “While previously, I focused on writing about my own community’s challenges with the outside world, the expanded focus of *Sky Islands* allows me to swap the knowledge that the many *adivasi* communities hold about the forest and this land, and present it to one another and the world.”

She believes that involving the *adivasi* stakeholders in protecting these regions is the only way forward. “We’ve absorbed the knowledge about the forests. We can tell things by looking at a leaf or the sky,” she says. “If people know, they will care.” For her, conservation policies are well-meaning and well-intentioned, but aren’t enforced at all. “Each time I see garbage in bins shaped like the Indian Gaur, it breaks my heart. Who thought of this? Does it really translate the message?” she asks.

“First, we need to protect what exists before beginning to restore what has been destroyed,” says Seshan.

Highlighting these local conservation initiatives and compounding their impact are some of the tasks laid out by *Sky Islands*. “We need to understand what it means to cooperate in the long run because the odds against resilience are so high,” she points out. Locally-birthing, participative responses such as these might just be another arrow in the quiver of saving the hills – and a guiding light to inspire other such special geographical regions in the country.

The writer and poet is based in Bengaluru.



Mayyur Girotra xsl

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Meanwhile, Delhi-based fashion designer Mayyur Girotra, 44, is of the mind that in an increasingly digital world, the significance of tangible possessions is amplified. An idea cemented by the stone plate illustrations he sent for his New York Pride show invite recently. “Real luxury lies in permanence. Since we are obsessed with fast access, the things we can hold in our hands and hearts matter deeply,” he asserts.

However, for many among Gen Z, this appreciation for tangible permanence feels increasingly out of reach. Anish Gawande, 28, a national spokesperson for an Indian political party, points to alarming economic indicators. “Savings are at a 50-year low, and most young Indians are borrowing to meet consumption expenditures, not to buy a house or gold.” He believes these are clear markers of an upcoming global recession. “People invest in smaller luxuries when they can’t even plan on investing in a big-ticket purchase.”

Shifting goalsposts

Access economy, as news platform *Medium* put it last year, is “changing our economic incentives, our social behaviors, our family dynamics, and the nature of our communities. Some – most notably those who profit from the shift – argue this transition is creating a new level of freedom, flexibility and sustainability. But the truth is, we’re losing the economic mobility and stability that ownership traditionally provided.”

While the confluence of several factors are shaping this

generational shift, “we must remember that the environment, the world and mainly the goalsposts of life have moved”, says Pooja Dhingra, 38. The patisserie and founder of LeL5 India has witnessed the shift in consumer behaviour first-hand through her business. “Home ownership, financial security, and even building savings have all become much tougher. This impacts how we consume. There’s a focus on access because stability feels out of reach. Flexibility is survival.”

Research from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland, supports this observation, projecting that Gen Z will likely achieve milestones such as first homeownership and starting

families significantly later than previous generations, with a greater reliance on parental support. As 19-year-old IT intern Somaya Khatri says, “I’d like to own things just like my parents – I’d love to leave a record collection for my children. But right now, a Spotify subscription for ₹19 per month seems too good to forgo.”

Ultimately, the tension between ownership and access reflects deeper power dynamics. It’s no coincidence that prevailing forces discourage ownership at its core. The consolidation of land, culture, and even our digital memories in the hands of a few raises a fundamental question: In a post-ownership world, who do we belong to?

The Mumbai-based writer, artist and editor reports on fashion and culture.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



Rohan Chakravarty

What is a bird? Textbook definitions would say

“warm-blooded vertebrates that have feathers, toothless, beaked jaws and lay hard-shelled eggs”. But there is much more to them – their lives have enough drama, adventure, danger and romance to put a movie script to shame. And when you start looking at them closely, you realise there is a lot for you as a human to relate to.

One of the simplest joys of watching birds stems from the fact that they’re as unique and distinct as us. Let me start with food fads. Some birds such as the Oriental Honey Buzzard, well-adapted to prey on bee larvae, have a sweet tooth. Others such as the Hoopoe love some leisurely ‘me-time’, with sun-bathing an indispensable part of their routine. And many such as the Bar-headed Geese and Brahminy Shelducks – some of the highest fliers in the world, who can soar over Himalayan peaks – adhere strictly to a high-fibre diet of grass, putting your go-to fitness influencer to shame.

Daredevils assemble

Speaking of fitness, birds such as the Shaheen Falcon, the fastest bird in a dive, are born athletes. When it spots a target (often a luckless pigeon), it takes position and transforms into a missile, launching into its famed



Feathered tales (Clockwise from above) The Black Drongo; Bearded Vulture; Sarus Cranes; Himalayan Monal; and the Hornbill. (ILLUSTRATIONS: ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY)



WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

BIRDS ARE LIKE US

Curious and patient, chatterboxes and fitness freaks, lazy parents and troublemakers... Sounds familiar?

390-kmph dive. Such is the impact of the dive that a mere touch of the talon is enough to take the life of the prey.

Birds are just as varied when it comes to perceptions of risk. The familiar Black Drongo is a daredevil that loves playing with fire – quite literally – using bushfires to its advantage by preying on insects that are disturbed by it. Ibisbills, however, prefer to play safe,

pretending to be rocks along river rapids.

Are you a hornbill or a rock pigeon?

Bird parenting styles could fill a book (and their love lives are made for the movies, but more on that later). Hornbills make for overly devoted parents, with the mother sequestering herself in a tree hole when nesting, and the male

working overtime to feed his mate and the growing chicks. Cuckoos, on the other hand, would make for embarrassing guests to have on a parenting podcast. Pied Cuckoos are considered harbingers of rain in India. The monsoon is also the time when the Jungle Babbler, the preferred host for this brood parasite, breeds. The cuckoo lays her egg in the babbler’s cup-shaped nest, and bids goodbye to any parental worries.

Rock Pigeons bring the same lazy carelessness to their nests – shabby clusters of twigs put together half-heartedly – which look unworthy of even being called nests. Tailorbirds, in contrast, are skilled embroiderers meticulously stitching leaves together to build their famed nests.

Nature’s Romeos and Don Juans Speaking of feathered love, Sarus Cranes, the avian embodiment of cheesy romance and unwavering marital fidelity, are known to mate for life. Snipes and Phalaropes lead more bohemian lives, where females take multiple mates and leave the clutch in the males’ care, hopping over to her next Bumble date.



Pheasants like Monals and Tragopans come dressed in exquisite regalia and put on elaborate courtship displays of gleaming ornaments to woo females. But Nightjars sport drab plumages and blend perfectly with their surroundings to evade attention, just like me at family weddings.

Right or left brain, pick your side

Not all birds fly undercover though. Malabar Whistling Thrushes are musical prodigies, and are not shy of flaunting their skill. You know you are in the Western Ghats when the melodious whistle of the thrush reverberates through the hills. Such is its human quality that it led ornithologist Saim Ali to nickname the bird ‘whistling schoolboy’.

Art, in the avian world, goes beyond music. Artisans among birds, such as the Baya Weaver, can put even the most diligent traditional media artists to shame, making over 500 trips to complete their pendulous nests. Others, including remorseless thieves such as the Skuas, who happily steal a tern’s hard-earned lunch, evoke the image of wannabe artists on social media using generative AI to make ‘art’.

Other pursuits smack of left brain savants. Bearded Vultures are maths and physics wiz kids – their manoeuvre of carrying bones from a carcass and dropping them from the right height and angulation over rocks to crack them open and feast on the marrow, takes up to seven years to master.

A silent rebellion Social behaviours are just as

varied. Racket-tailed Drongos that mimic other birds and initiate the formation of mixed species feeding flocks, love a good party. Pittas prefer solitude. While some like the Indian Scimitar Babbler can chat incessantly, others like the Yellow-crowned Woodpecker are great listeners, and can often be seen placing their ears against trees to listen for ants inside the bark, before they start hammering it. Herons have probably taught samurais the virtues of patience – they can stand still for hours before striking potential prey.

Birds come with an astonishing variety of features and traits spread across families and genera, making even the most closely related species distinctly unique from one another, thanks to minor evolutionary tweaks. The Brahminy and the Black Kites are close cousins on the evolutionary tree. But a simple tweak in design – the fork in its tail – has made the latter a master of exploiting scavenging opportunities even in densely populated urban settings, while the Brahminy Kite lags.

In an age where gadgets command our constant attention, and when our attention spans, and how we are entertained and informed, are commanded by technocratic corporations, the act of sitting by a lake and observing a reed bird for as long as you wish, feels like a silent rebellion to me. It is this rebellion that I invite you all to participate in with me.

The writer, cartoonist and naturalist’s new book, *Bird Business* (Juggernaut Books) is on shelves now.

Dear Mr Servapalli, I am Don, the boss of Don Lingo, the world’s only language learning app with 100% success rate and 0% dropouts. I am delighted you want to learn Italian. Not only is Italian my mother tongue, it is also the father tongue of all our godfathers. Welcome to the Don Lingo Famiglia! Don

Dear Sarvepillai, Thank you for taking a 7-day trial subscription. You will be automatically charged the annual subscription fee at the end of one week – unless you cancel it. You can cancel at any time but I strongly advise you against it. Our boss Don would take it as a personal insult if you do, and trust me, you don’t want to get on the wrong side of Don. Lorenzo, Senior Capo (Subscriptions) Don Lingo, Inc. Sicily

Hey Servo, This is Isabella Botticelli, Chief of Pedagogy at Don Lingo and current wife of Don. You are on a 3-day learning streak! Well done! My top tip for learning Italian? Get to a 14-day streak! While you’re at it, do ensure adequate account balance for the transfer of your subscription fee that’s due in three days! Isabella

Hey buddy, Your payment didn’t come through. Don doesn’t like it. Whatever the hitch is, make it go away. Lorenzo

Dude, Are you ghosting us? It’s been 9 days since your last lesson! I beseech you – please come back, get on a lesson streak. Personally, I would love to speak to you in Italian. Your amica, Isabella

Hey, It’s been 17 days since your last session! Why are you doing this, man? Nobody asked you to download Don Lingo – we

ALLEGEDLY

Don Lingo, world’s best language app

When ‘practice makes perfect’ turns into ‘practise or perish’



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

didn’t. You did because you wanted to learn a new language. Why don’t you just go through with it? We want to see you sign in by tomorrow evening latest. Lorenzo PS: Don’t forget the subscription fee.

Hey Mister. Where’s my money? You promised to pay me ₹19,500. That’s what a ‘free’ trial subscription is – a promise. Look, I am aware there exist clowns like you who chicken out after signing up. But I can’t let you ruin our 100% conversion record, capiche? It’s a matter of prestige for the Don Lingo Famiglia. So we do it the easy or the hard

Buongiorno! I hear you’re upset we blew up your new SUV. Why are you Indians obsessed with SUVs anyway? They all look so ugly and they’re not even real SUVs – just hatchbacks strutting about in garage jeans and acting like tough guys. Exactly like you politicians. I hope you now understand we are serious about the language

learning business. No fooling around. Only because your name Servapalli sounds Italian – my father-in-law’s name is Botticelli – I’ll give you one more chance. Transfer the fee by 11 sharp, tonight. Don

Mio amico, Yes, we did receive your payment. But we got it 30 seconds after 11 p.m. That wasn’t the deal, pal. I did warn you Don is not a patient man. He hardly even writes to anyone directly – he did, to you, and you humiliated him, making him wait like that. Personally, I am sorry they chopped off your thumb – if it was up to me, I would have settled for your little finger. But look on the bright side! Some of our most brilliant students are those who’ve donated at least a few body parts to the Don Lingo Famiglia. So, chin up, mate! Cheers, Lorenzo

Dear Mrs Amrapalli, Our deepest condolences. We expect our students to have read the Terms and Conditions carefully before subscribing. It says clearly that all those who fail to clear Level-II Certification in six months will be summarily executed. It is this unique feature that drives Don Lingo’s outstanding results. It’s why Don Lingo students are 100 times more motivated than those of Duolingo or any of its pathetic clones. Every single one of our subscribers achieves proficiency at par with native speakers or they die trying. Your husband was a brave language warrior, a martyr the Don Lingo family will remember fondly forever. Don PS: Perhaps the best way for you to honour the memory of your late husband is to sign up for a language course on Don Lingo. Tell me if you are interested – we have a special deal for next of kin.

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

Helping hand: Rosalind Pereira, the co-founder of Project Aamhi. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

People go into the sea to swim, Rosalind Pereira observes. “Then they discard their clothes on the beach and get into new clothes.” For the co-founder of Project Aamhi, a community waste management effort that enables people in 17 coastal Maharashtra villages to keep their neighbourhoods and beaches clean, this peculiar swimming habit sparked an idea.

In addition to 10 tonnes of plastic waste, Aamhi was collecting 800-900 kg of fabric every month from the beaches around Alibaug, a 20 minute speed boat ride from Mumbai’s Gateway of India for those who can afford it.

Now, apart from sending sacks of clothes to recycler Goonj, the fabric is upcycled into colourful, reinforced ‘Potli’ bags that are sold for ₹100 and distributed free to fishing communities.

As I write this, I’m looking at an azure bag with bronze sequinned embroidery and imagining the woman who abandoned her shiny wet *kurta* on the beach.

Pereira, 53, a graduate of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, finds ways to make big change in little things. If you have ever found yourself wondering what you could possibly do as an individual to improve the world around you, her story is inspirational.

In a world where the majority are insular and lazy, Pereira pushes for change with empathy and kindness. Maybe it was her “doer” mother who “always bustled around looking for



commonsensical solutions” or her father who actively contributed to the church community, but Pereira learned early that you can’t wait around for someone else to act.

Aamhi or the ‘we’ club
Whether it’s her co-founders at Aamhi or the supportive residents of

the bungalows that line the coast or the corporate funders for her programmes or the woman *panchayat* head who buys into all her hard work, Pereira draws partners, co-founders and like-minded individuals like moths to her flame. Aamhi, in Marathi, fittingly means ‘we’.

PERSON OF INTEREST

ROSALIND PEREIRA’S QUIET WAR AGAINST WASTE

From bags of Kurkure to a peculiar Indian swimming habit, she sees everything as a way to spark change

Most of her ideas are led by women. “I always feel that when women are included in the economic system, families develop,” she says. “A lot of women’s money is plowed back, they become independent financially and in thought, increasingly bold.”

Since 2022, Aamhi has collected 370 tonnes of waste and recycled 327 tonnes, preventing it from polluting some 750 km of coastline. It’s Pereira’s latest baby, but she has been lighting sparks everywhere for decades now.

It began with Maya Bazaar, her sustainable jewellery venture that now includes in its embrace 400 artisans. An idea can click at any time. When she found the villagers had poisoned 16 dogs during COVID-19 by feeding them *vada pav*s stuffed with phorate, a pesticide, she knew it was because the dogs in the area needed to be sterilised. Two surgeons in Alibaug offered to subsidise the procedure, a company supplied medicines, volunteers looked after the dogs and cleaned up. “Everything came together and worked beautifully in our favour,” she says. Nearly 1,000 dogs have been sterilised so far.

Her waste venture too, began with her roping in husband Siraj to pick up garbage from the beach down the road from their home. It grew from there, but interacting with unresponsive local bodies and working to change people’s behaviour is hard work.

The problem within
“You’ve got me at a time when I’m feeling defeated,” Pereira tells me. For the first two years Aamhi focused on cleaning public spaces and people were happy. “But what comes out comes from inside [homes] and there has been a pushback against our efforts to try to make people segregate at source,” she says. “Nobody is willing to enforce errant *panchayats*, it’s an unpopular move,” she says.

Aamhi collects “low-value waste” after the recyclers have picked out the bottles and other items with resale value. “The most polluting item and the hardest to recycle because it is so thin is single use plastic,” says Pereira, citing the example of a packet of Kurkure, the popular PepsiCo snack. “To collect one kg would be 333 bags of Kurkure.”

“Incentivise the picking up, or make it more expensive to produce and make the producer responsible,” she says, knowing that her unpopular ideas are unlikely to be implemented in a hurry. A study of 10 kg of plastic bags clearly identified the polluting companies, none of which work to clear waste in the area.

Pereira has a wealth of information about how the dozen or so material recovery facilities funded by the Swachh Bharat Mission in Raigad district, where she operates, don’t work, and how no local authority is willing to take on this issue despite the fact that tourism and development in the area is set to rise dramatically. “Nobody’s asking questions about the waste,” she says, adding that no legislative help is forthcoming too.

But she isn’t dissuaded. “I feel a huge sense of responsibility to act, to repair in whatever tiny way possible,” she says. “Change can only happen if one acts and not just observes.” Even if it’s one Kurkure packet at a time.

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



GOREN BRIDGE Unhappy choice Both vulnerable. West deals

Bob Jones

South’s one no trump bid in the pass-out seat showed 11-14 points – a standard variation that allows more competition. North apparently was not aware of that when he drove to game, but South had a maximum and would have accepted an invitation.

South won the opening club lead with dummy’s queen and led a heart to his 10 and West’s jack. West continued with a low

heart. South played low in dummy winning the trick with the nine. South cashed dummy’s king of diamonds, exposing the break, and led a diamond to his jack. A heart to dummy’s ace was followed by a diamond to the 10 and the ace of diamonds. This left a fivecard ending with South holding his three spades and the ace-10 of clubs. What five cards should West keep. Should West keep enough clubs to defeat the contract, he would have to bare his ace of spades. Discarding the 10 and jack of

NORTH
♠ 9 6 5 3
♥ A 9 6
♦ K 8 7 6
♣ Q J

WEST
♠ A J 10
♥ K J 4 3
♦ Void
♣ K 8 7 6 4 3

SOUTH
♠ K 8 7
♥ Q 10 5
♦ A J 10 5
♣ A 10 9

The bidding:
WEST 1♣
NORTH Pass
EAST Pass
SOUTH 1NT
2♦
3NT
All pass
*Stayman

Opening lead: Six of ♣

spades would be a giveaway, and South would surely lead a low spade to West’s singleton ace. The forced club lead would yield an overtrick. The best West could do was to keep two spades

and three clubs. South cashed the ace of clubs and led another club. West won and could cash one additional club, but then had to lead spades and give South the king. Well played.

QUIZ Easy like Sunday morning

What has May 11 ever given us?

Berty Ashley

1 May 11 is celebrated as National Technology Day in India. The date was designated by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to commemorate an event that took place in 1998 on this date. Known as ‘Operation Shakti’, what did the Indian Army do in Pokhran, Rajasthan?

2 Born on May 11, 1918, Richard Feynman was a Nobel Prize winning American physicist. In 1959, he delivered a lecture titled ‘There’s plenty of room at the bottom’, which is about manipulating matter at the atomic level. This led to the development of what technology that works at 10⁹ scale?

3 On May 11, 1947, the company, BF Goodrich, announced the development of a new tire. This was the first major innovation since its invention. Their tire had an airtight seal between the tire and the rim. What was this innovation?

4 On May 11, 1997, an IBM supercomputer called Deep Blue became the first to achieve a milestone event in artificial intelligence. It defeated a world-champion in a classic match format. In what sport did it defeat the then world champion Garry Kasparov?

5 Born on May 11, 1924, Antony Hewish was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1974. He had discovered a type of highly magnetised neutron star that



AI-honoured artist The name is a tribute to the fictional robot ‘WALL-E’ and an iconic artist. (GETTY IMAGES)

emits electromagnetic radiation at regular intervals. What name did he give this star that Bajaj took on for a popular bike model?

6 Born on May 11, 1854, Ottmar Mergenthaler was a German watchmaker who invented the ‘Linotype machine’. It became the mainstay for typesetting, especially for newspapers, before the digital age. The name refers to

the advantage it had over traditional typesetting. What did it do differently?

7 Born on May 11, 1881, Theodore von Kármán was a Hungarian-born American aeronautic engineer. In 1944, he co-founded the JPL, which is now an important part of NASA. It was a laboratory which did R&D on rocketry. What does JPL stand for?

8 Born on May 11, 1946, Robert Jarvik was an inventor who designed a life saving technology. It was a pneumatic device that had two chambers that pumped fluid. Made of plastic and titanium, it was implanted in a patient in 1982 for the first time. What device was this?

9 On May 11, 1979, VisiCorp released their program ‘VisiCalc’ for the new Apple II computers and it revolutionised the use of personal computers for business applications. It was an electronic document in which data could be arranged in rows and columns. What type of program was this of which Excel is the most popular now?

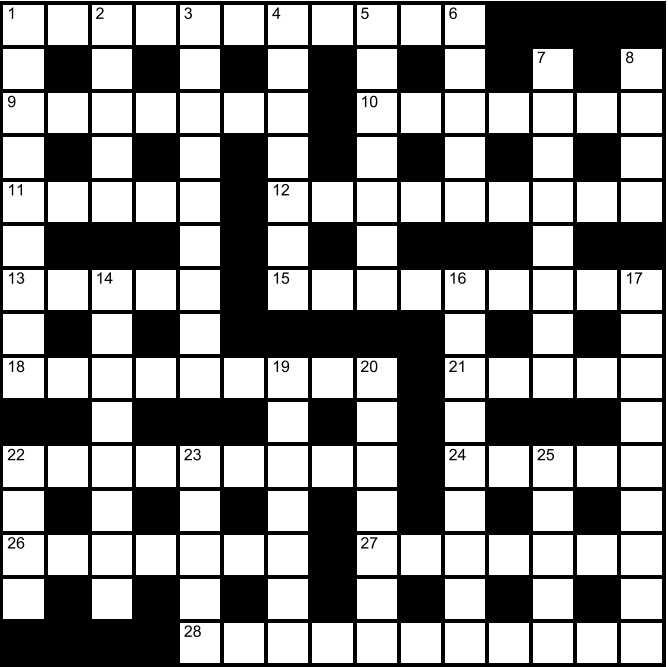
10 In January 2021, OpenAI launched a revolutionary AI system called DALL-E 2. A neural network that can generate an image from any text given by the user. The name is a tribute to the fictional robot ‘WALL-E’ and an iconic artist. Who is the artist whose birthday falls on May 11?

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

- 1. Nuclear Test
- 2. Nanotechnology
- 3. Tubeless Tires
- 4. Chess
- 5. Pulser
- 6. Printed entire lines instead of letter by letter
- 7. Jet Propulsion Laboratory
- 8. Artificial Heart
- 9. Spinal Assist
- 10. Dali (Salvador Dali)

Answers

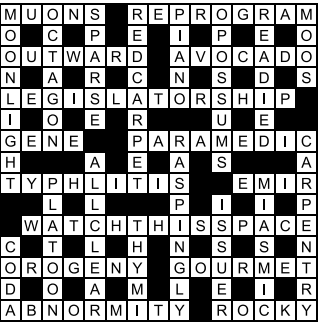
THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3 (Set by Afterdark)



- Across**
- 1 By mistake, diners get in with constituents (11)
 - 9 Would-be kings evaluate head of navy inside along with son (7)
 - 10 Nothing right in Tamil Nadu, commotion in storm (7)
 - 11 Comfort on lady’s stand (5)
 - 12 Club’s new interior is standard (9)
 - 13 Short points provided at last (5)
 - 15 Police officer’s good character gets endorsement (9)
 - 18 Say, NRI can overcome resistance to become popular (9)
 - 21 Few directions before initially taking dessert (5)
 - 22 Authorize to buy AC for individual (9)
 - 24 Song about her? My creation (5)
 - 26 Performance with clarinet! Not new, it is redone (7)
 - 27 Traditions of sect at old city’s eccentric basically (7)
 - 28 Severely delays Peter’s order (11)

- 5 Catching nefarious gent accepting money (7)
- 6 Distribute in function (5)
- 7 Let audit expose indulgence (8)
- 8 Spin on both sides covering two overs shortly (4)
- 14 Demand Indian viewpoint... (8)
- 16 ... as a ritual conducted by another country (9)
- 17 Hector met Rex, really regularly uncommonly (9)
- 19 Conceals lost bet terribly (7)
- 20 Painful condition for listener, a child has basically excruciating pain (7)
- 22 Centre court edge otherwise corner on the 5th (4)
- 23 Worked in a class to educate disciples in the front (5)
- 25 Solvers use you mostly in a wrong way (5)

SOLUTION NO. 2



A grief that refuses to fade

Yet, amid Pahalgam carnage, there flickers a defiant, aching hope: a refusal to let the dead be erased

Shelley Walia
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The morning after the Pahalgam massacre, we remembered the laughter that vanished mid-air. Children looked for faces that will not return, mothers dreamt of voices that the wind had stolen. And still, the men who plot wars draw their maps in silence, remaining unshaken by the wailing. For me this is not just grief, but the death of meaning. Surely, they died for no reason. And we live with no reason.

It is not just the dead who suffer. The living too ache with fractured memories and empty hands. Mothers fold clothes that will never be worn, and fathers set an extra plate that they must soon take away. They thought we would forget but we remember. We remember the small shoes left at the door, the songs half-sung, the meals half-eaten. We remember the laughter that vanished mid-air, the goodbyes that never thought they were the last. Our loss is not merely of life, but of time, of continuity, while our political leaders speak in cold numbers. Killing the innocent with no logic is an interruption of the very pulse of existence, the death of meaning.

In the midst of such a tragedy, Yeats' haunting words of growing disintegration of our world come to my mind: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." This collapse is not some abstract vision – it is reality. It is the blood-soaked streets, the empty stares of those left behind, the hearts shattered in an instant. Violence now churns beneath the



Gruesome tragedy Security officers inspect the site of killing in Pahalgam. AP

Rising toll

From the marketplaces of Gaza to the green fields of Pahalgam, from once-vibrant towns now turned to rubble, to villages hollowed out by conflict, the toll of human life rises – silent and appalling, and so deeply expressed by Isaac Rosenberg in his poem *Dead Man's Dump*: "And the dead were no more than/ Empty vessels, and their voices/ Were but a wild cry in the night."

The dust of violence chokes whole generations and erodes human dignity, just as the world is poisoned by the wreckage of conflict and political greed. Violence today is no longer an eruption; it is a grim undercurrent, steady and relentless.

The violence we see today shatters both the living and the dead, tearing down not just bodies, but the very structure of meaning. The mythical sustenance that once tied us to hope, faith, and community is gone: a line from T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* says it all – "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats" – defining a landscape of aridity and devastation, of despair, drought and the belief that nothing can ever be whole again. "These are the fragments that I shore against my ruins," asserts Eliot at the end of his *Wasteland* harking back to the undying monuments of civilisation, the great masterpieces of literature and art that sustain human life.

What is really heart-rending is the suffering of the children inheriting not only the trauma of loss but the trauma of abandonment being thrust into a world where safety is a lie and justice a ghost, where small hands reach for missing hands, and find only air. There is no myth left to guide them, no story to make sense of this brutality, no toys or books or favourite drawers in their writing tables they once found refuge in. They grow up in a world without meaning, in a world filled only with echoes of war.

More than anything, it is Amrita Pritam's anguished cry that echoes in my emptiness, as she laments the violence that eats away at the fabric of human existence: "*Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu*" – Today I call out to Waris Shah,/ Rise from your grave,/ Speak from your pages,/ And witness the pain of Punjab once more." Her words mourn not just a region, but the loss of the sacred, the death of a culture, and the disappearance of the stories that once held meaning. Without them, we are lost in a desert of memory and grief.

Yet, amid all this, there flickers a defiant, aching hope – a refusal to let the dead be erased. While they made widows and orphans, we make songs and prayers. While they made graveyards, we make gardens out of tears. Our hope is not a naive surrender to fate, but a rebellion against the absence of meaning. Even in the face of overwhelming grief, those who remain choose to rebuild and remember. Hope is all that we have.

The ideal mentor

One who works selflessly, deriving meaning and fulfilment in the success of her wards

Tony Augustine
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Recently, I was fortunate to be invited for an Odissi dance performance as part of the Odisha Day celebration. The dance was named *Kalpa Rupa*, an interplay between Sakhi and Radha based on Jayadeva's *Gita Govindam*.

The master of ceremonies eloquently spoke about the relationship between Sakhi and Radha; how Sakhi guides Radha to her goal – the union with Krishna. She elaborated further on the direct and indirect contributions by Sakhi during the course of the journey to the goal and how dispassionately Sakhi withdraws from the scene once the goal is achieved.

Guide, anchor
This made me think if Sakhi was the original modern-day mentor. The concept of Sakhi in *Gita Govindam* and the role of a mentor share significant parallels. This is very evident in their functions as guides, facilitators, and emotional anchors. Here we try to explore some of the aspects for a clearer understanding.

One of the main roles assigned to Sakhi is to serve as an intermediary between Radha and Krishna.

She helps both of them to communicate emotions and resolve misunderstandings, and brings them together. Similarly, in modern management, a mentor plays almost the same role of an intermediary – helping to bridge the gap



between her mentee's current challenges and the goal, offering guidance and strategic advice.

Sakhi, in addition to being a bridge, deeply understands Radha's emotions, encourages her to decide or directs her to a course of action when she is uncertain.

Most important, Sakhi offers comforting advice when she is distressed.

A modern-day mentor is definitely expected to provide emotional intelligence, helping her mentees to sail through the workplace challenges, raise confidence, and manage stress.

Growth push
Sakhi helps Radha and Krishna evolve in their relationship to achieve the goal. She helps by ensuring that they overcome obstacles represented by their personal and spiritual growth. In a similar way, the mentor stimulates the professional and personal growth of those in her care.

The mentor oversees the achievement of the goals by imparting skills, knowledge, and mindset.

Sakhi works to see that Radha and Krishna unite in a way that aligns with the age-old ideals of devotion and love. She does not seek personal rewards for her contributions but derives joy from the achievement of the goal.

The role of a mentor is no different. It is to ensure ethical practices and qualities that align with societal values.

A true mentor also works selflessly, deriving meaning and fulfilment in the success of her wards.

A digital identity crisis

When people out of social media have the opportunity to figure out who they really are

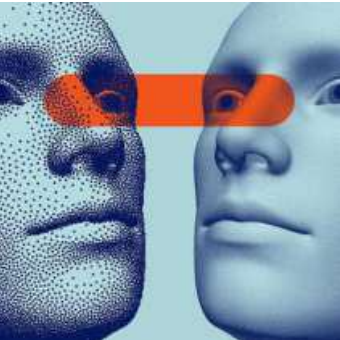
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The social media platforms designed to bring people together often become more oriented towards reflecting back the self rather than serving as a window for common connection and social belonging. Social media's original goal of connecting individuals has shifted toward self-marketing and careful crafting of online personas. This results in a digital narcissism with individuals trying to get likes, shares and comments affirming their self-worth but limited by a contrived rating system.

As a result, they become victims of the vicious cycle where the feeling of self-worth becomes merged with the approval of online members.

The self-presentation theory by Erving Goffman supposes that people develop their behaviour so as to manage impressions in social settings. People nowadays consume one another's lives in the illusion of what they can present by the help of social media and because of that, young people are in a state of malaise and anxiety. The online performers glamorise their lives by choosing which of the segments of their lives to display and which of those to conceal. This image management is in line with Christopher Lasch's idea of the "culture of narcissism" in which self-admiration suppresses virtues, allowing the space for acting, but the sincerity of the connection is compromised.

Professionals, influencers, corporate executives and even academics showcase their success, achievement, expertise and even daily lives on social media through regular posts and status updates. In this social media market of competition,



there are chances for exaggeration, fabrication and deceit. A regular online presence can lead to more networking opportunities. But if that persona is built on exaggeration or deceit, this fragile construct will become vulnerable to ruin.

There are some people who choose not to be part of this digital market. It is a complex matter to deal with the identity crisis of those who do not share their social media status. They are sometimes left out of the virtual reality where they are not seen, but at the same time, they have the opportunity to figure out who they really are apart from the pressure of social comparison. They either don't update their daily lives on social media or avoid the platforms altogether. In a world where online is social, this choice can lead to a unique kind of identity crisis. Being absent from social media status updates can make us feel invisible and disconnected as the world is talking online. Despite these hurdles, a fair number of people who give up or limit their time on social media believe that there is a much stronger connection to the real self. They do not have to worry about getting compliments and can interact with the real world more naturally. Instead of suffering from identity crisis, they might be experiencing a type of self-liberation.



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

Some women struggle emotionally and physically when it comes to menopause. ('Breaking the silence around menopause'; May 4) This is why there must be better support at work. An action plan, as illustrated by Standard Chartered in the article, is required. Educating women, including those in rural areas, ensures better well-being and workplace productivity.

Navin Katyal

With nearly 12% of India's population expected to be affected, it is imperative to treat menopause not just as a health concern but also to raise awareness and strengthen workplace support. There is an urgent need for counselling centers, awareness drives, and free medical support for women experiencing menopause. I hope to see continued coverage and advocacy around women's midlife health.

S. Sujatha

This article breaks the silence around menopause in India, blending personal stories with expert analysis to address an often overlooked issue, particularly in the workplace. Featuring voices such as Mini Mathur and Lisa Ray, it urgently calls for policy change and better support systems.

Rami Peruvallur

Digital dominance

Social media giants have been manipulating public opinion, aligning with authoritarian regimes, even in democracies, to boost profit and power. ('Unfriending Facebook'; May 4) The scale of harm caused by these unscrupulous platforms in today's era of instant communication and AI is truly alarming. But this cannot go on forever and

there will be a day of reckoning.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

Creative resilience

Hanif Kureishi's creative mind remains active despite physical challenges. ('The power of words'; May 4) Writing *Shattered* under such difficult circumstances sends a powerful message of hope to anyone facing despair in life's journey.

N. Vrinda

Fuelled by unwavering determination and a relentless drive to write despite his injury-related immobility, Hanif Kureishi, through his book *Shattered*, sets a powerful example of self-sustenance and offers a moral boost to the disheartened younger generation.

Sitaram Popuri

Generational exchange

As children, we eagerly shared our discoveries with our elders, who pretended to be intrigued. ('Uncle, please spare me'; May 4) Now, the roles have reversed when seniors share their stories with us. Technology helps foster a unique connection and gratitude, often with a touch of humour.

S. Sundareswara Pandiyan



MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Pope who acted against exclusion

His goal was to make the Church more aligned with the world it seeks to serve

Y. Mercy Famila

The highs and lows of a trek

A climb is treacherous but it breaks and rebuilds you

Raman Nair

The relentless march of concrete

Cities need to strike a balance between urban development and environmental preservation


Darsheel Erish Nair

The wedding season

It's a never-ending marathon that tests your patience, wardrobe, and budget


Chanchala Borah

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