

# magazine



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**Simrit Malhi**

Grey skies loom, merging in the horizon with the neon green that surrounds us in Goa during the monsoon. We are drenched and cold on a small wooden boat with a very loud engine, gliding through the inner rivers of North Goa. I have come netfishing with Tukaram Chodankar, a professional fisherman who has been fishing since he was three. There is a moment of silence before both his net and the rain are unleashed together.

I can barely see through the rain, while Chodankar deftly brings the net in, splashing *mudoshi* (lady fish), *chonak* (giant sea perch) and *tamoshi* (red snapper) into the bucket next to my feet. Rain or shine, he is out on the Moira river every day catching fish that he sells in the market. The size of his net determines his catch, its wider weave ensuring he only catches the larger fish, letting babies and any shellfish through. “As a fisherman, it is my duty to make sure I leave behind enough in the river for my own future,” he says.

Nitesh Shetkar, a young taxi driver and Chodankar's friend, also regularly goes fishing “because it's what my father used to do, and his father before him”. He fishes through the year in Goa's rivers, ponds and canals with a simple line and hook, or smaller nets for shellfish, catching *topro* (zebra fish), *gobro* (rockfish), and *bugdi* (sardines), along with crab, catfish, *khorsane* (butterfly fish) and river prawns in the monsoon. He laments that Goans cannot live off farming and fisheries like they used to and are forced to depend on tourism for income.

Traditional fishermen are more judicious with how and when they fish, ensuring the biodiversity of our waterbodies. Freshwater crab and prawn fishermen fish at night, larger fish are caught with wide weave nets on boats, and smaller fish are snared with a line and hooks. Trawlers, in comparison, drag their nets along the seabed, destroying it and dredging and collecting fish indiscriminately.

Worse, small indigenous fish or ‘weed fish’ are thrown back into the sea dead, regardless of breeding seasons or size.

**Freshwater advantage**  
India's 7,500 kilometre tropical coastline hosts a megadiversity of marine life; most of which are now severely depleted. Maharashtra, for example, registered its lowest marine catch in 45 years in 2020. This is no small statistic considering India is a big player in international seafood exports – ranking third worldwide.

Every year, there is a ban on sea fishing (currently, it is along the west coast) during the monsoon, the main breeding months. The government-enforced ban adheres to traditional practices. While this means the smaller fish markets are shut and restaurants have to rely on frozen supplies, it's also the best time to encourage people to look beyond their big fish staples such as tuna, king mackerel, and tiger prawns.

The tradition of small-scale fishing is not unique to Goa; though fast disappearing, it is still practised in many coastal states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and West Bengal with rich networks of backwaters, rivers and other waterbodies. While it's mostly enjoyed by the local community, it would be beneficial to the environment, our health and pockets to take freshwater options and boat-caught small fish to a wider audience.

This market already exists in a small way in cities. In Kochi, Kerala, delivery services such as Fresh to Home and the relatively new city-based Happy Fish have freshwater options listed. “We have a large number of people who are knowledgeable about seasonality, and enjoy eating freshwater fish. And they don't mind paying extra for it,” says Nidhin Mani, founder, Happy Fish. “We have tied up with small boat and hook-and-line fishermen from the suburbs and nearby villages to supply us with *karimeen* (pearl spot), *kozhuva* (anchovy), *catla* (Asian carp), *paral* (giant danio), mud crab, and the like.”

In the metros too, people are starting to explore smaller options. Mumbai-based



## IN THE INTEREST OF SMALL FRY

Does India's culinary heritage hold the key to ‘sustainable’ seafood? The monsoon and fishing ban along the west coast is a good time to learn about local, small and seasonal fish

nutritionist Neha Sahaya has stopped recommending sea fish to her clients because of the high amounts of mercury and microplastics found in them. “In fact, I don't recommend local sea fish to any of my pregnant clients. Perhaps freshwater fish is a cleaner, more healthy option.”

### Break food elitism

Food is political in India, and what you eat is an indication of your socio-economic status. Even our traditional vegetarian diet is rooted in privilege and caste hierarchies. That one can afford to eat fish such as king mackerel, Indian salmon, tuna and pomfret regularly is considered a sign of elitism, resulting in an excessive demand for these fish.

With the country's economy booming, this also means that Indians now consume more fish than ever before – monthly consumption per household has shown a quantum leap in 10 years from 2.66 kg in 2011-12 to 4.99 kg in 2022-23 (according to the National Council of Applied Economic Research). Larger fish that were once only eaten on special occasions are now expected to be available throughout the year. And are, most often, chosen at the expense of smaller fish.

To add to this pressure, urban Indians, who are largely responsible for this leap in consumption, seem to lack generational knowledge about seasonal fish or their nutritional value. Food historian Vikram Doctor blames the supply chain and supermarkets for this change. “Supermarkets do not stock produce the way traditional markets do. Their emphasis is on standardised, easy to stock and carry products, which leads to standardised and simplified cooking,” he says. “Traditional

markets have the possibility of stocking more seasonal, unique, unprocessed products that are challenging to cook, but also more rewarding.”

With most urban Indians purchasing fish at supermarkets and through delivery services such as Licious and Fresh to Home, there is a disconnect from local fish markets and fishermen.

### What you can do as a consumer

Today, fish in India is sold according to demand rather than supply. As researcher Divya Karnad learnt, what consumers eat has a strong impact on our coastline and plays a large role in the health of fisheries. Karnad is the founder of InSeason Fish, a

five-year-old Chennai-based organisation committed to “promoting sustainable fishing practices and protecting the health of people and our oceans”.

On the east coast, they work towards marine conservation by bringing together the main stakeholders in the fish industry: fishermen, stockists, vendors and the consumer. “We also collaborate with chefs and restaurants to promote sustainable seafood options on menus and provide tips for cooking that maximises flavour and sustainability,” she says, adding that they help educate consumers through fish market walks and children's games.

On the west coast, Know Your Fish – started by a group of researchers in 2017 – focuses on influencing consumer trends towards healthier fish. They release a monthly calendar on social media illustrating which fish is safe to eat when, based on their annual data collection to test the vulnerability of each fish caught in the Arabian Sea. Several hotels, including Fort Tiracol in Goa, have approached them and now showcase their calendars at their in-house restaurants.

Though there is no empirical evidence yet to show if and how their efforts have made an actual difference, there are certainly more restaurants putting smaller fish options on their menus.

Indians now consume more fish than ever before – monthly consumption per household has shown a quantum leap in 10 years from 2.66 kg in 2011-12 to 4.99 kg in 2022-23

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**Of late, I'm noticing more youngsters interested in making healthy, seasonal choices. Since they don't know much about fish, they often reach out to us on our official WhatsApp. We spend a lot of time daily sending them photos, and sharing how best they can cook freshwater and small fish**

**NIDHIN MANI**  
Happy Fish, Kochi

A fisherman casts his net at Srinivasapuram beach in Chennai. (GETTY IMAGES)

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?		
EAST COAST	JULY	AUGUST
WHAT TO EAT	Spotty-faced anchovy, mackerel, striped grouper, silver bellies, sawtooth barracuda, spiny cheek grouper, striped eel catfish, lesser tiger tooth croaker, and prawn. (These small fish and shellfish are plentiful.)	Threadfin bream, ribbonfish and croakers.
WHAT TO AVOID	Threadfin, cinnabar goatfish, pink-ear emperor. (It is their breeding season.)	Indian goatfish, Indian mackerel and milk shark
WEST COAST	JULY	AUGUST
WHAT TO EAT	Tuna, barramundi, catfish, crabs, golden anchovy, Indian salmon, bigeye snapper, emperor, whitefish	Sardines, white prawns, crabs, catfish, barramundi, kingfish Indian salmon and golden anchovy
WHAT TO AVOID	Mackerel, sardines, black pomfret, grouper, cobia, emperor and croakers	Dolphin fish, Indian oil sardine, mackerel, ladyfish, tiger prawns, small catfish, emperor, black pomfret, grouper, bronze croaker, and dogfish

CREDIT: INSEASON FISH



IN CONVERSATION

# THE INDIA OF ANITA DESAI'S DREAMS

The thrice Booker-shortlisted author on how her country has changed, and on setting her latest work, *Rosarita*, in Mexico

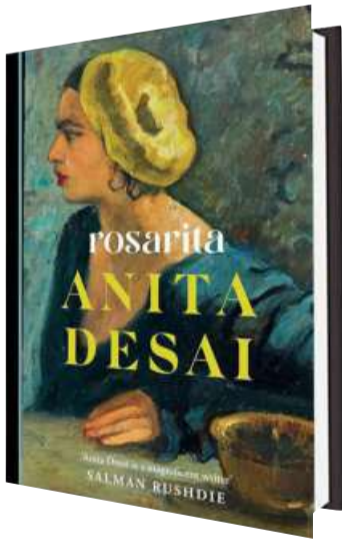
**Sudipta Datta**  
sudipta.datta@thehindu.co.in

Anita Desai has often experimented with language, theme and form in novels like *Clear Light of Day*, *Fasting, Feasting*, *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *The Artist of Disappearance*. In her latest, *Rosarita* (Picador), a dream-like novella, Desai gives the narrator a second-person voice. When a stranger plants an idea into young student Bonita's mind, that her mother's name was Rosarita and that she had studied art in Mexico, it sends her off to imaginatively fill the absences left by her mother. In a phone conversation, the soft-spoken and thrice-Booker-shortlisted Desai, now 87, talks about her Mexico connection, how she has used techniques of poetry in her prose and why India has become remote to her. Edited excerpts:

**Question:** What took you to Mexico to write *Rosarita*?  
**Answer:** Well, I first went to Mexico to escape from a very bitter North American winter. But the minute I stepped off the plane in a strange country, I felt entirely at home. I thought I had returned to India; the resemblance between the two

countries struck me immediately, and I kept returning to Mexico. *Rosarita* became a kind of a patchwork, a collage of my impressions of the India that I had left and the Mexico that was new to me, and trying to find how they fit together. My instinct told me that they did fit together, yet I couldn't find the facts, the necessary ground work on which to base them, till I discovered that I could put my bewilderment into my narrator's voice. She was the one who created this imaginary portrait of the mother who was no longer alive.

**Q:** Why did you want to tell this dream-like story in a second-person voice?  
**A:** For long I have wanted to experiment with using the second person because it seems to me such an immediate way to reach the reader. The dream-like quality, as you call it, is created by bringing in the trickster who is a magician figure. She plants this seed of an idea in the narrator's mind that there was such a character, Rosarita, who studied art in Mexico, and although the narrator never heard such a story from her mother and disbelieves it, she can't help imagining that it might be true and what would her mother's experiences have been had it been true. So, she creates an imaginary mother.



**Q:** Is the novella a favoured form now? How has poetry shaped your work?  
**A:** I have been trying to model my prose upon the techniques of poetry for quite a long time, to as far back as a small book I wrote, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). I have tried to reduce my work to a set of images and to use suggestion rather than any prosaic facts. I always quote some lines from an Emily Dickinson poem to describe my work: 'Tell all the truth but tell it slant/ Success in circuit lies'. As for the novella form, I have also come to it through a long circuitous route. In earlier years, I used to write

novels which were fully thought out and plotted but I found myself happier with the novella form when I wrote my last book, *The Artist of Disappearance*, which is a collection of three novellas. I was comfortable with this form; I could put everything I meant to in a very short space, selected and chosen carefully.

**Q:** What was it like to write before Salman Rushdie and post Midnight's Children?  
**A:** I will use my own experience as a model to answer your question. English for me was a literary language. It wasn't the first language I spoke, but it was the first language I learnt to read and write. So it always belonged to books; the books and literature I read were my model, and that made my language a more literary form of prose on paper. Although there had been predecessors to Rushdie's work, like Raja Rao who experimented with bringing in Indian intonations, as did Mulk Raj Anand and G.V. Desani, Rushdie brought it into the present times. He seemed to use English that was all around in India, on the streets, in the shops, in the cinema. He wrote on very serious subjects in this language, which encouraged a whole new generation to write about their views of India, their experience, using a foreign language but in a way that Indians used it.

**Q:** Has the India you knew changed?  
**A:** Unlike my parents who never went back to their homelands [Germany/ East Bengal] because they had mostly been destroyed or had vanished, I could constantly return to India. But now I realise that India has changed in the years that I have been absent and I have changed in the years that I have been away from India, and so it has become more and more remote to me. Now when I go back to India, I keep searching for the India I had known as a child and as a young woman and I have to recognise the fact that that doesn't exist any more.

**Q:** Do you read contemporary Indian novels?  
**A:** A lot of interesting things are being done in regional languages; translations have improved greatly and the books are much more accessible. I think mostly of the books by Perumal Murugan; he writes about small communities in Tamil Nadu. The language is so marvellous and they are so well-translated that it helps you to enter his world you have never visited.

**Q:** The cover of *Rosarita* is so powerful, a self-portrait of Amrita Sher-Gil.  
**A:** It's a wonderful discovery made by my Indian publisher, Teesta Guha Sarkar. She was looking into Amrita Sher-Gil's work with an idea of finding something suitable for the cover and she came across this early self-portrait, which Amrita had painted when she was an art student in Paris in the 1930s. It was a very bold choice to make because I myself had not imagined or described the character of the mother or the narrator or the stranger, in fact, and Teesta's discovery seems so exactly right. I'd never seen this portrait before, though I was familiar with Sher-Gil's work ever since I was a young girl. I think it's such a dramatic one for a young woman to have painted, the gaze is so determined and direct, and so thoughtful. It gave me a tremendous thrill to find myself on the same cover as Amrita Sher-Gil's painting.



Scan the QR code to listen to Anita Desai talk about the making of *Rosarita* on [magazine.thehindu.com](https://magazine.thehindu.com)

# Centuries of Korean diaspora

Paul Yoon's seven tales of ordinary people and their struggles span time and geography

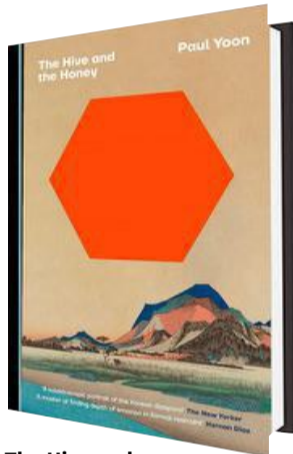


**Sheila Kumar**  
A sense of sadness, loss and regret runs through the seven stories in Paul Yoon's *The Hive and the Honey*. They grapple with themes of identity, belonging and escape, and cast a light on the experiences of the Korean diaspora. We see their lives play out not only in different parts of the world – New York, London and Russia – but also in different periods of time, going all the way back to 1608 in one story.

In all the tales, there is a journey. A teenager goes in search of his elusive father. A samurai in 17th century Japan is tasked with reuniting a young Korean boy with his countrymen. The void of being childless propels a man to go looking for a runaway he briefly encountered. A woman sets out to meet a young man who may be the son she left behind when she defected from North Korea. A man goes from New York to Canada in search of better prospects and becomes one of "those who leave their hometown and never look back".

There are no happy endings for most of these people. Their travels lead to unmet expectations, yearning, remorse and quiet grief. These people are displaced twice over – geographically and emotionally. Violence rears its head suddenly in quite a few of the lives. Tellingly, in the first tale, the protagonist who is in jail outside Korea, is informed that he will be left alone as

Koreans have a reputation for hitting rather than getting hit. Soon enough, he beats another man mercilessly. Then there is the man who beats the boy he has reared as his son so badly that the latter runs away. In the title story, an epistolary ghost story, a Korean settlement pays the price for their barbaric punishment of an innocent

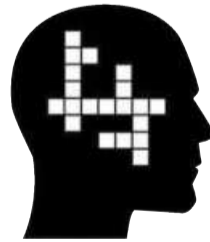


**The Hive and the Honey**  
Paul Yoon  
Simon & Schuster  
₹599

woman. There are reasons that dictate why these people behave the way they do; the violence, however, is brutal and unsettling. The lives delineated here are marked by violence, longing and sorrow. Yoon's superb craftsmanship as a writer makes these characters stay with you for a long time.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based author, journalist and manuscript editor.

## The Hindu Books Crossword



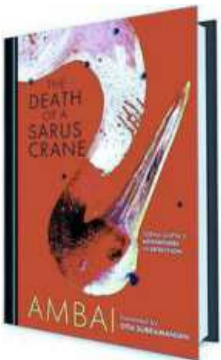
In this week's edition of *The Hindu* Books Crossword, we turn the spotlight on the world of Indian non-fiction, celebrating influential books and the authors behind memoirs, travelogues and titles on true crime, food history, politics, science, religion and more.

Scan the QR code to check out the crossword.

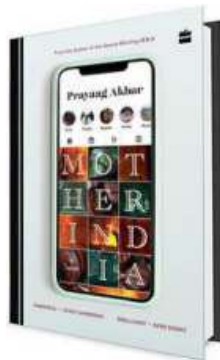


## BROWSER

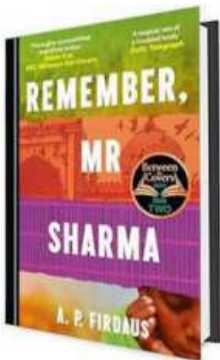
**The Death of a Sarus Crane**  
Ambai, trs Gita Subramanian  
Speaking Tiger  
₹499  
Set in the streets of Mumbai, the story follows private investigator Sudha Gupta as she goes about uncovering the city's murky underbelly. The book explores privilege and tragedy, belonging and friendship, forbidden love and more.



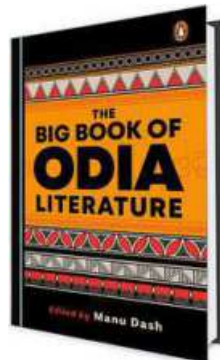
**Mother India**  
Prayaag Akbar  
Fourth Estate  
₹499  
The book is an ode to being young and alive in today's India. It tells the story of Mayank and Nisha, hustling to make the best of what life's doled out to them. But, appearances can be deceiving and the two soon realise the consequences of taking things for granted.



**Remember, Mr Sharma**  
A.P. Firdaus  
Sceptre  
₹599  
In 1997 Delhi, 12-year-old Adi takes a journey through time to understand the mystery behind his mother's disappearance. He comes across a talking vulture, who might be just the company Adi needs. Will the truth indeed set him free?

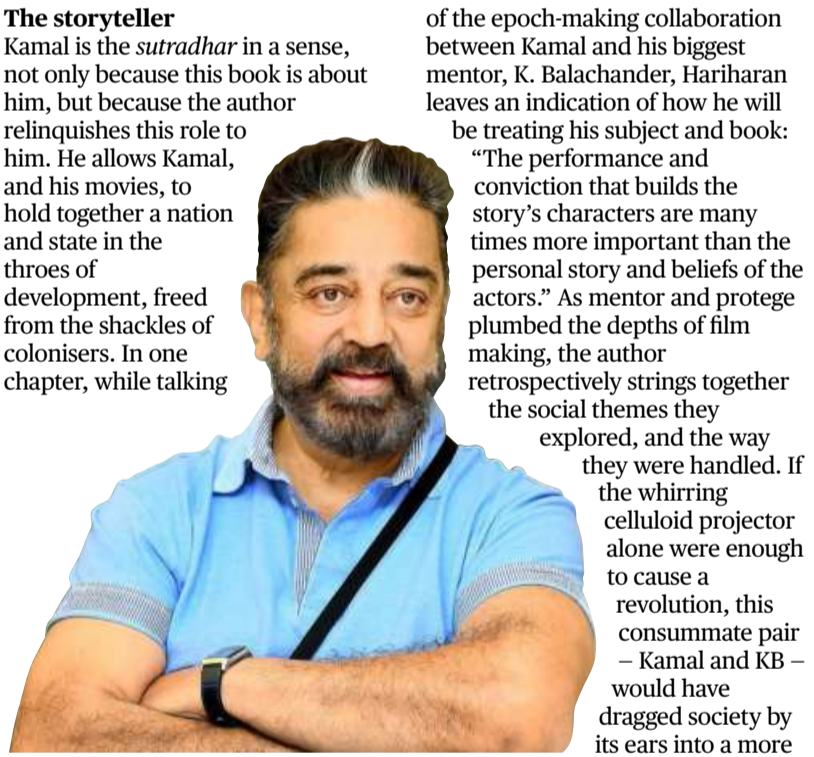


**The Big Book of Odia Literature**  
Ed. Manu Dash  
Penguin  
₹699  
Venturing into the history of language, literature, mythology and politics, right from the tenth century, the book is a valuable curation of essays, stories, poems and plays that define the culture of Odisha and its people.





Tracking the past (Clockwise from left) Stills from 16 Vayathinile and Nayakan; and Kamal Haasan with director K. Balachander. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



**The storyteller**  
Kamal is the *sutradhar* in a sense, not only because this book is about him, but because the author relinquishes this role to him. He allows Kamal, and his movies, to hold together a nation and state in the throes of development, freed from the shackles of colonisers. In one chapter, while talking

of the epoch-making collaboration between Kamal and his biggest mentor, K. Balachander, Hariharan leaves an indication of how he will be treating his subject and book: “The performance and conviction that builds the story’s characters are many times more important than the personal story and beliefs of the actors.” As mentor and protege plumbed the depths of film making, the author retrospectively strings together the social themes they explored, and the way they were handled. If the whirring celluloid projector alone were enough to cause a revolution, this consummate pair – Kamal and KB – would have dragged society by its ears into a more

progressive, liberal matrix, with their caste-agnostic, and feminine themes, the portrayal of contrived human relationships, the deliberate casting of androgynous heroes and facilitating the redemption of rebel heroines. Behind the camera, the mask and face paint, were revolutionaries, marching to Bella Ciao, urging change in the urban, middle class households their movies were set in. All without, as Hariharan points out, diluting the tenets of mainstream entertainment.

**Political turn**  
The book is rich with small stories that illustrate the prowess that Kamal holds, not just in acting, but in all aspects of filmmaking. The sharp way in which he detects that there was no film in the camera by merely observing the sound it was making, on the sets of *16 Vayathinile*, for instance, is a hat tip to his phenomenal knowledge. While it stays away from Kamal’s later avatar as a politician, just as it skirts wide off his personal life, this book is a deliberate chronicle of the emergence of Kamal as a political animal, as if he had no other option, given his circumstances.

Hariharan also summons equipoise to raise questions on motive, and technique, something the ardent movie watcher and fan, would probably dismiss in the realm of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. For the cinephile, this is an unputdownable book, racy like the moments before the splendid transformation of the rather effeminate Kathak dancer Viz into the athletic spy Wizam Kashmiri, in *Vishwaroopam*. By then, as the audience, we learn that Viz might actually be a Tamil Muslim, but nevertheless, that scene is remarkable. It’s another touchstone, a masterclass in acting. We’ve probably been rendered speechless multiple times, watching Kamal on screen, but Hariharan’s book is still a revelation.

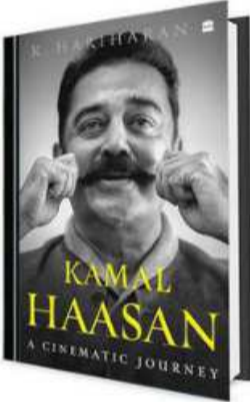
# CHRONICLES OF A QUICK-CHANGE ARTIST

A window into the soul of Kamal Haasan, the actor, filmmaker, technician and *bahurupi*, through 40 out of about 260 films

**Ramya Kannan**  
ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in

At a recent press conference ahead of the launch of his sequel *Indian 2*, Kamal Haasan was asked a question that made his colleagues on stage with him smirk. Was he upset that though there were three pretty heroines in the film, he himself had no consort? Kamal raised the mic and answered with great assurance: “My consort in the film does not have to be a woman.” In that one sentence was buried a touchstone. Kamal revealed the consummate artist he is, his relationship with cinema, his philosophical approach to the medium, and that while he’s celebrated as a hero, his tango with the movies goes far beyond formulae and stereotypes.

That is what director and writer K. Hariharan captures in *Kamal Haasan: A Cinematic Journey*. It’s not an easy task, but as a filmmaker with a deep understanding of politics, history and culture, he pulls it off by linking Kamal’s oeuvre in a single intelligible strand. Hariharan picks 40 films (from Kamal’s repertoire of



**Kamal Haasan: A cinematic journey**  
K. Hariharan  
HarperCollins  
India  
₹699

about 260 films) and executes a contextual analysis, replete with references to world cinema, its masters, political theories, running parallel to real time events. That is the strength of this book; the craft of a chronicler to pick from a veritable smorgasbord to lay out on his charcuterie board a pick of the finest, though not necessarily the most popular, slices. This will then serve again as a window that opens into the soul of Kamal Haasan, the actor, filmmaker, technician, the *bahurupi*, a quick-change artist who physically metamorphoses into many characters, in its fullest sense.

**Dramatic arrival**  
The book opens, appropriately, with aplomb, right in the middle of intense drama and the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the birth of Kamal. While Hariharan stays off the personal life of the star, he wraps the early years of Kamal and the influences of his immediate, liberal family, into a capsule that seeks to measure the heights he has since achieved. For someone who learnt, not formally or in schools, but from actors and directors-turned-mentors, from screen, from behind the camera, and from life, there now stands a man, a consummate entertainer, but more, a veritable *ashtavadhani* of multiple talents and achievements.

**The book illustrates the prowess that Kamal Haasan holds in all aspects of filmmaking. The sharp way in which he detects that there was no film in the camera by merely observing the sound it was making, on the sets of 16 Vayathinile, for instance, is a hat tip to his phenomenal knowledge**

**M.T. Saju**

When the coriander plants flowered, a strong aroma would linger in the air that reminded everyone of meat curries. If there were sufficient coriander leaves, ‘mutke’ (balls) would be made. *Kotmiriche Mutke* has no meat, just coriander leaves, jowar, gram and wheat flour, soaked gram dal and green chilli chutney. The dough is shaped into balls, and then steamed. A seasonal dish of Dalits in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, *Kotmiriche Mutke* was not fried as oil is a luxury for the poor in India.

There are many explanations like this in *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, the English version of Shahu Patole’s *Anna He Apoorna Brahma*, translated from the Marathi by Bhushan Korgaonkar. Originally published in 2015, it was the first to document the history of food through the culinary practices of the Mahar and the Mang, two prominent Dalit communities of Maharashtra. Patole’s book is not just a ‘cookery’ guide, it is the story of a taste acquired through centuries of discrimination. For food is an identity marker of a community and plays a significant role in the social and cultural spaces of the people of a region.

**The die is caste**  
Food habits and caste cannot be separated, says Patole, 63,



## Dalit food habits

**Shahu Patole’s newly translated book about two communities in Maharashtra documents a cuisine shaped by exclusion**

explaining that just as caste is cemented at birth, so is diet. Like many marginalised communities in India, the food habits of the Mahar and the Mang have been neglected due to various reasons. In his book, he tries to document the primary diet and a few recipes of these two communities, looking at the way they evolved over time. From *Lakuti* (a dish prepared from the

blood of a slaughtered animal) to dishes made of *jeebh* (tongue), *fashi* (epiglottis), *mendu* (brain), *kalij* (liver), *boka* (kidney), *dil* (heart), *tona* (bones), *gana* (windpipe), *kaas* (udder), *aand* (testicles), *paaya* (hooves) and *wajadi* (intestines), he explains how no part of the animal was left unused. Each portion had a recipe of its own.

In the preface to the book, Patole

**Staple diet** Flatbread made of jowar (below) was central to the everyday meal of the Mahar and the Mang communities. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)



raises a question: vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism – which one is superior? “Our Indian socio-cultural identity only highlights the food culture of the upper castes and upper classes. This hasn’t changed even today. A vegetarian diet is recommended to create harmony among different communities, allowing vegetarians, often upper castes, to dominate the scene. No one ever talks about our food culture, which is why I had to use the term ‘Dalit Kitchens’,” says Patole, adding that, “even today, meat-eating lower castes feel ashamed and guilty about their food habits.”

**Cultural practices**  
Patole brings in the dietary habits and cultural practices of the two

communities in this region where he was born and brought up. “This is the story of the food my parents ate and their parents before them – an acquired taste, especially one acquired through centuries of discrimination. I have taken this task of documentation to ensure that our future generations are aware of their past. They should know what we ate, how we lived, and the treatment we received in society,” says the now-retired government officer and writer in Marathi. In addition to the communities from northern Maharashtra, these food habits are noticed in northern Karnataka and some parts of Telangana.

If you look at the diet of the Mahar and the Mang, you will see that *bhakri* (flatbread) made of jowar or bajra is central to their everyday meal. The book talks about the social, cultural and religious practices and culinary history of the people in the region with specific chapters on recipes and cooking tips. “An individual’s

eating practices played a vital role in determining their social status – governed by what they ate and what their ancestors ate. Even today, there is no significant difference in this. Food culture seems to be firmly aligned along caste and class divides,” writes Patole, a native of Khamgaon, a village in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra. In the past, he has talked about how the communities he grew up in had to clear carcasses of dead animals and eat that flesh.

This doesn’t imply that the Dalit diet comprises only non-vegetarians dishes. Patole has a long list of dishes made of vegetables and pulses, which were once popular in the region. *Pithala* (a delicacy made of dal flour), *kandavani* (onion chutney), *usal* (curries made of legumes), *hula* (roasted pods), *pendapala* (made of toor dal), and *dal-kanda* (dal and onions) are a few recipes in his book. There is also a list of recipes for seasonal and all-season vegetables. There are 12 chapters and the last one deals with the 1972 famine and its impact on the rural food culture of Marathwada. “I have simply penned down my observations since childhood. I have experienced and prepared each and every recipe and other things mentioned in the book,” concludes Patole.

*The reviewer is a freelance journalist based in Chennai.*

# IN THE INTEREST OF SMALL FRY

CONTINUED FROM » PAGE 1

In Kolkata, at Sienna Store & Cafe, head chef Koyel Roy Nandy insists on featuring smaller, lesser-known and even dried fish on the menu. “We are lucky here in Kolkata that there is a strong piscine culture. We have three local fish markets a kilometre from the restaurant, and we visit them and choose whatever is in season. The diversity of fish throughout the year makes for better nutrition.” She tells me of the delicious *kudamacha* (mudfish) that comes from ponds and lakes that is a staple at Sienna, *morula* (anchovies) that are served beer-battered with chips, and dried *hilsa* that is used like bonito flakes. Small fish are more nutritious. It has been reported that the vitamins and minerals in 1 kg of small indigenous fish (SIF) is equal to approximately 50 kg of big fish. A 2008 study on the consumption of small freshwater fish in West Bengal found that SIFs provide better nutrition since they are generally eaten whole – with the bones, organs, head and

eyes, all of which contain important micronutrients that improve the immune system and aid growth and development. In North Goa, New York-trained chef Sai Sabnis of Posa, a conscious restaurant, serves salt fish fritters in a recipe inspired from the Caribbean, in an attempt to modernise what eating small fish looks like. “In the more expensive restaurants, people don’t want to eat small fish because they don’t want to eat with their hands,” she says, adding that it also takes up more time for the kitchen to debone and process such fish. At Posa, she works around this by charging a higher value for these dishes – and customers are willing to pay. “Small, local fish are higher in quality than the large ‘big ticket’ fish like salmon and tuna because of the shorter supply chain.”

**A case for dried** One way to rediscover the knowledge of our piscine culinary heritage is to connect with the communities that



Fisherwomen in Mumbai. (GETTY IMAGES)

**From a sustainability perspective, farmed fish like rohu and catla, which are lower on the food chain, are relatively okay. They don’t require intensive inputs like farmed shrimp do. Shrimp are carnivorous and have to be fed fish meal, which comes from destructive forms of fishing [bycatch from trawling is converted into this]**

DIVYA KARNAD InSeason Fish

the most sought after. “It was, and is still, common in the rural areas for monsoon meals to be made up of only rice, *dal* and dried fish,” he says. “The strong flavour and high nutritional value removes the need for much else.” However, very few practise the tradition of salt-drying fish in the sun nowadays because the smell is so pungent. “This was traditionally done in large outdoor kitchens that people don’t have access to any more. Even hotels that might have access to space, are warned by management to stay away from these practices.” Our taste buds have been colonised into a western ideal of a more ‘sanitised’ palate. A change could spell good things for our health, culinary practices, and waterbodies.

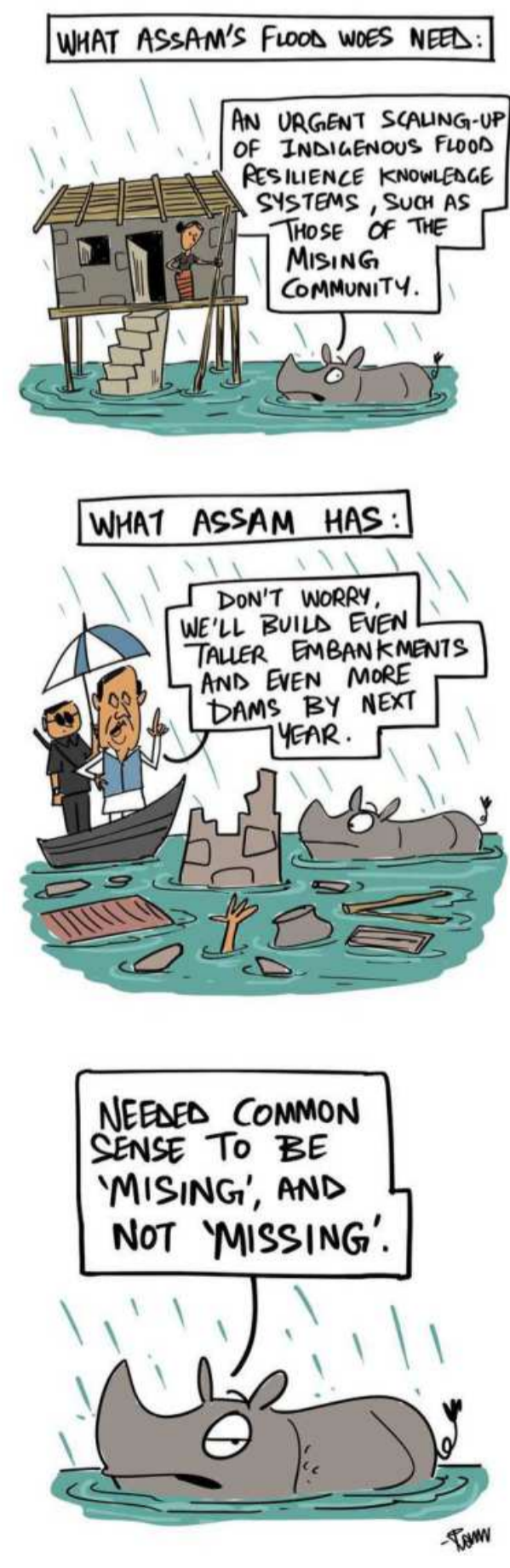
*The writer is a permaculture farmer who believes eating right can save the planet.*

## 4 WAYS TO GO SMALL

- 1. Get curious about the fish you eat:** “The best thing you can do is to ask what fish an establishment is cooking with, where it comes from, and whether it is in season,” says Karnad. This forces restaurants to opt for fresh, seasonal fish.
- 2. When in doubt, go small:** Choose fish that reaches a maximum of 9 inches at maturity. Good examples across India’s coastline are silver bellies, moon fish, threadfish, beam, anchovies and sardines.
- 3. Educate yourself and others:** Learn about different seasonal fish and share this knowledge through WhatsApp groups, social media, and in-person conversations.
- 4. Visit local fish markets:** The catch on offer is diverse and rich. Strike up a conversation with vendors and fisherfolk on what’s in season, and how best to cook them.

## GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



Tsewang Namgal

**T**he Himalayan mountains are ecologically sensitive, culturally rich, socially vibrant, yet politically ignored. The wildlife that inhabit them are crafted intricately by the process of evolution, responding to extreme altitudes and temperatures. The Hanle valley in eastern Ladakh, near the Indo-China border is one such eco-sensitive region. It is bestowed with a variety of unique and threatened wild animals such as the Pallas’s cat, Tibetan sand fox, snow leopard, and black-necked crane, among others. It is part of the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. Located at about 250 kilometres from Leh, the capital town, Hanle is an idyllic valley at an average altitude of 4,500 metres above sea level. It is inhabited by Changpa nomadic herders, who rear sheep, pashmina goats, horses and yaks, and use the rangeland’s resources ingeniously, following a rotational grazing system to promote plant regeneration. I have fond memories of the low hills and shallow vales of this until-recently obscure valley. In the early 2000s, I had studied the Tibetan gazelle, an animal that earned the epithet ‘ping-pong ball’ because of its bouncing gait while running. Back then, domestic

# ALL IS NOT WELL AT CHANGTHANG

As the summer rush peaks in July, a conservationist looks at how rash development and irresponsible tourism are threatening Ladakh’s unique animals and environment

tourists needed an Inner Line Permit and foreigners were simply not allowed, except in rare cases. **Dark skies and observatories** That has changed. In 2020, the Border Roads Organisation built, arguably, the world’s highest motorable road crossing Umling La (19,300 feet). Today, this attracts thousands of tourists, especially bikers. And a myriad small hotels, guest houses and homestays have mushroomed to accommodate them. Speaking of development, over

two decades ago, in 2001, the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) set up an astronomical observatory in Hanle to survey celestial bodies. Over the years, IIA expanded its project, and several other institutes, including the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, installed telescopes to study gamma rays. Given the potential of the valley as a star-gazing site, it has also been declared a Dark Sky Reserve, a site where the nocturnal environment is exceptional – the first of its kind in India. Being close to the Indo-China

border, Hanle is also a strategically important area from a defence standpoint. Several military outposts have been established here after the recent skirmishes between the Chinese and Indian forces. **Rash bikers and irresponsible tourism** Recently, the valley rose to prominence for other reasons. One of them: the increased sighting of the Tibetan sand fox. People also started seeing the Pallas’s cat, nicknamed the world’s grumpiest cat, on a regular basis, along with

the black-necked cranes. The wild animals, however, are at the receiving end of these developments. Some threats, such as plastic garbage, are insidious, while others, such as the proliferation of stray dogs, have an immediate impact. Reports have suggested that dogs prey on the eggs and chicks of cranes, which suffered a drastic population decline in the last decade or so. The dogs also chase other wild animals, including the Pallas’s cats, Tibetan sand fox and bar-headed goose, deplete the prey of the snow



**Threats loom large** (Clockwise from left) Bikers at Khardung La pass; construction work near Zaskar river for the Shinku La tunnel, which will provide all-weather road connectivity to Ladakh; and a snow leopard. (PTI and GETTY IMAGES)



Some go off-road to chase wild animals, or drive their SUVs into waterbodies to assess the performances of their vehicles. Blaring music and glaring headlights disturb the animals. And furthermore, rash driving leads to fatal accidents, killing many wild animals on the spot. The Pallas’s cat is especially vulnerable, because the roads run along cliff bases, bisecting the cats’ habitat.

**A Frankenstein monster in the making?** Tourism in the region might soon turn into a Frankenstein monster. Government efforts to promote rural tourism haven’t been well thought through. For example, one of the criteria for receiving a homestay package is a flush toilet. Responding to this, people have been on a flush-toilet construction spree without understanding the ecological implications. With a lack of septic tanks, all the sewage flows into the ground. This exposes the villagers to waterborne diseases. Traditional dry-composting toilets, which use minimal water and generate much-needed manure for the agricultural fields, are being discouraged. The irony is that Ladakh is aspiring to be an organic state, but the organic manure is being flushed down the sewer. Organic fertilizer is brought in from far-off places such as Haryana in trucks, which spew massive amounts of carbon that settle on glaciers leading to their rapid melting. Retreating glaciers are already affecting water availability in the region. Springs in the interior parts are drying up, and more and more villagers and wild animals are coming down to the Indus river for water. Adding to the problem is campers along the river. They wash their kitchenwares and dump organic matter in the water, leading to an explosion of invertebrates, which, in turn, depletes dissolved oxygen. The warming temperature then affects the quality of water. These are just some of the ecological issues besetting the people and wild animals of the Changthang region. They need to be attended to and resolved swiftly, if we want to have better destinations for tourists, better living spaces for nomadic herders, and better habitats for the wild animals. **The writer heads the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust.**



## TAKING BAUL MUSIC PLACES

Debasree Purkayastha debasree.purkayastha@thehindu.co.in

**B**ack in April, when renowned folk singer and performer Parvathy Baul took to the stage in New York’s Times Square – *nupur* (anklets) on her feet, *ektara* and *dug-dugi* in each hand, and twirling to the rhythm as she sang “Kaala Re...”, an invocation to Krishna – the onlookers were captivated. They may have known nothing of the singer or her craft, but Parvathy knows how to draw a crowd, with a chant for a hook line or by breaking into a Q&A. It’s never a one-sided dive into devotion; she takes the audience along on a journey of spiritual awakening. Among the most relevant and influential artistes of the folk genre, Parvathy has been a practitioner of Baul *sangeet* for over two decades now.

“Music flows through me,” says the 48-year-old over a video call, days after the announcement of her biopic, *Joyguru*, at the Cannes Film Market. Helmed by actor-director Soumyajit Majumdar, the project is set to be an India-U.S.-U.K.-France co-production and will commence filming next year. “There is a large community in France as well as in other parts of the globe, devoted and dedicated to Baul music, even more so than people in India,” says Majumdar. The fascinating story of the singer has already generated a huge buzz, he says, adding that acclaimed cinematographer Ravi Varman has been signed on for the project. The movie promises to feature Baul music by Parvathy as well as other songs filmed across India and abroad.

**A piece of heritage** A largely oral tradition of preaching mysticism, UNESCO calls Baul music “a masterpiece... and intangible heritage of humanity”. The musical genre has been in practice for centuries in the eastern part of the country. Parvathy, born in Fakira village in Assam’s North Lakhimpur, was pursuing her degree in arts at

Shantiniketan when she decided to follow the traditional and ancient path of Baul music, an immersive art form that blends elements of Sufism and Vaishnavism. “I was engulfed in alchemy; it was astounding,” she smiles. “Baul is transcending.” Parvathy hopes that through the film, people, especially the youth, will find the ability to celebrate the small wins in life. The artist enjoys biopics as a genre, she says. *Me Vasantrao* (2022), a Marathi movie based on the life of classical musician Vasantrao Deshpande, is one of her favourite films from recent times. An avid reader who lives the disciplined life of an artist and “yogi”, Parvathy stresses the need for the younger generation to find hope in despair. “Music has the ability to transport you to divinity. And for those who are glued to the screen instead of nature, it can be truly helpful and educational,” she says. But the singer acknowledges the role that technology has played in keeping this niche folk music relevant today. Through online classes and workshops, she has been connecting with those

interested in learning about this traditional practice. **Embracing the philosophy** Majumdar first became interested in Parvathy’s story when he chanced upon an audiobook by her while researching for his debut feature film *Homecoming* (2022). “I have been an ardent admirer of Baul music and philosophy, but it is through the book that I started to fathom the power of meditation, and it also showed me the path as an artist,” he says over a phone call. He then began to follow her work and develop a script. What does it take to become a musical maven in Baul, I ask Parvathy. “Years of practice. And I mean not just the music and dance, but also embracing the lifestyle and philosophy so fully that it becomes second nature to you. I write and compose music as it flows through me, and it happens because I have truly immersed myself in the art form,” she says, before breaking into ‘Kaala Re’, her favourite song.



Scan the QR code to watch Parvathy Baul perform on magazine.thehindu.com



and taking an abrupt leap at the bedroom doorway to land bottom-first into the “cosy embrace”. And imagine this long-jumper bringing home three more long-jumpers aged seven, eight and nine, and practising nearly every day for three years. **On the battlefield** The recliner was a sturdy thing – way sturdier than our bridges, airport canopies and temple roofs. But it wasn’t built to withstand daily abuse from a band of hyperkinetic brats. It soon lost one leg, then a knee, and finally its lower back caved in, making it dangerously unstable for the orthopaedically challenged. It continued to earn its keep serving as Katta’s favourite perch and playstation – until the day Wife revoked its residence permit, on the grounds that it was an “ugly piece of brutalist furniture gathering dust and pests”. It had to go. To my astonishment, no one wanted it. I listed it on OLX. But the offers I got were less offers and more like insults. I offered it to the *raddiwala*. He wanted it for free. I told him it was his for 100 bucks, less than 1/500th of what I had paid for it. He never got back. Last month, in desperation, I asked the watchman. He agreed to take it provided I paid for transporting it to his home. After spending a small fortune buying this recliner, and never having used it, there was no way I was paying for its deportation. For now, we’ve dumped it outside our door, with a notice saying anyone interested can take it. It has been three weeks, and it’s still there, attracting dust, eyebrows, and a self-sustaining population of free-ranging Namibian lizards. So if you know someone interested, do let me know. Also, in case you happen to come across a real, old-school easy chair in good condition, you know what to do. **G. Sampath, the author of this satire, is Social Affairs Editor, The Hindu.**

PERSON OF INTEREST

The researcher is uncomfortable talking about herself but wants to ensure people do not forget her partner Umar Khalid, jailed under UAPA since 2020

BANOJYOTSNA LAHIRI: A MODERN LOVE STORY

When Jawaharlal Nehru University Ph.D student Umar Khalid was arrested in September 2020 under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act or UAPA, his friends and partner Banojyotsna Lahiri were shocked. The shock turned to anger when they watched the police implicate him and other activists in the 2020 Delhi riots that killed 53 people, three-quarters of them Muslim. “We thought that this is such an unjust case,” says Lahiri. “We thought we just had to raise our voices and justice would be delivered.” But that was four years ago. The case has disappeared from mainstream media. Khalid, who gave speeches asking people to respond to hate by offering love, is in jail with no bail and no trial despite the lack of concrete evidence against him.

Lahiri, 40, a researcher who grew up in a family of school teachers and college professors in Kolkata, has abandoned her lifelong dream to be a teacher. “The thing I once wanted to do most has gone out of consideration,” she says of life after the anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) movement. She no longer has the focus required to teach. Instead she works tirelessly, using humour and compassion to keep Khalid’s story alive, sometimes telling funny stories that pit Khalid against her other true love, footballer Lionel Messi, and sometimes, sharing intimate conversations from their weekly meetings at Tihar Jail. Khalid is now a household name despite the aversion of mainstream media, and it is largely thanks to Lahiri and Khalid’s friends. “When you see this kind of injustice happening to your close ones, you cannot go about



your life,” she says. “It becomes a part of your life.”

**Desire for a just society** Lahiri’s fight for justice is emblematic of the love stories of modern-day dissenters, increasingly under threat across the world. Think of Yulia Navalnaya, who accused Putin of killing her husband Alexei Navalny, the Russian President’s biggest critic. “I urge you to stand next to me. I ask you to share the

rage with me,” she said in a video after Navalny mysteriously died in an Arctic prison. Or Sahba Husain, who voluntarily opted to spend two years in house arrest with her partner Gautam Navlakha, journalist and human rights activist, arrested on terror charges in the Bhima Koregaon case in 2018. He was recently released on bail. All these love stories are built on a common desire for a just, equitable society. Lahiri feels uncomfortable talking

**In hope** Banojyotsna Lahiri is determined to secure justice for her partner. (SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP)

about herself. She thinks I’ve called to talk about Khalid. “We don’t want people to forget,” she says. “It’s important that we keep talking.” And that’s exactly what the group of friends does. They organise meetings and discussions; run social media campaigns through accounts dedicated to Khalid and trend hashtags such as #FreeUmar; give interviews or write; and reach out to journalists, artists and legislators to spotlight the delays in the case. Many have expressed solidarity and some – such as MPs Mahua Moitra and Manoj Kumar Jha – have brought up Khalid’s case in Parliament. For the record, she didn’t ask me to write this piece. Lahiri says the group’s mood is like a Ferris wheel. “Sometimes we get really high when someone speaks out or when Ravish Kumar makes a video. Other times we come down,” she says. “But we keep the wheel moving, we haven’t stopped.” Her survival strategy? Focus on the present and hope about the future, without trying to read it. Also, no discussing sad things. She misses everything about Khalid, even his “annoying carelessness”. “He keeps forgetting things, someone is constantly picking up after him,” she says. “It used to be irritating when he was around, but now that I don’t have to do it, I miss it and feel the void.”

**Learning law and legalities** In Lahiri’s life, the weekly jail meeting, when she talks to Khalid

across a glass partition on an intercom, takes precedence over everything else. Then there is the whirl of bail applications, and ensuring that someone always shows up when Khalid is produced in court. She switched jobs to ensure she would have more time to devote to the case. “I plan my life according to the case. All of us do,” she says. “I have learned more about law and legalities than an ordinary citizen is required to.” Lahiri tracks UAPA cases in the courts, and the day we speak she is feeling hopeful because the Supreme Court has just reprimanded the National Investigation Agency in another case. The court has emphasised everyone’s right to a speedy trial, adding that if there are delays, the accused should be entitled to bail. This single-minded focus on Khalid’s case and his long imprisonment have taken a toll on Lahiri’s body and mind. “The stress is constant. I have panic attacks, and anxiety at night. I’ve gained weight, lost sleep and all this has had concurrent effects on my body,” she says, joking that Khalid’s health, on the other hand, has improved because of the daily prison routine and exercise. These past four years, Lahiri has found hope in student protests, the farmers’ movement and strangers who offer love and support. “Those children of Palestine who still play between the bombardments give me hope,” she says.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Teachers can play too

Both vulnerable. South deals

**Bob Jones** Keith Hanson, from Boca Raton, Florida, has been one of America’s great bridge teachers for many years. He is also an outstanding player. Hanson was East in today’s deal. The deal is from a high-stakes rubber bridge game some years ago and the bidding employed in this game was not very

sophisticated by today’s standards. It was, however, in line with the way people bid in the good old days. Many readers should recognize it. Against four spades, West cashed his three top hearts to get the defense off to a good start. West shifted to the jack of diamonds, won by declarer in hand with the ace. South had to play the trump suit for no losers and the most likely way to do that was to find one of the

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

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

Opening lead: Ace of ♥

defenders with a doubleton queen of spades. He could also easily handle a singleton queen in the West hand. South started by leading a spade to dummy’s ace and

Hanson smoothly dropped the queen! What would you do? Declarer, as would we all, believed that Hanson had just played a singleton queen and that West started with

four spades to the 10. South crossed back to his hand with the king of diamonds and led the nine of spades. He played low from dummy and was shocked to see Hanson win with his 10 to defeat the contract. Lovely play!

**Bob Jones** welcomes readers’ responses sent to Tribune Content Agency, LLC., 16650 Westgrove Dr., Suite 175, Addison, TX 75001.

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What has July 14 ever done for us?

Berty Ashley

**1** This day in 1850, Florida physician John Gorrie carried out the very first demonstration of something he had invented. He astonished the guests at a Bastille Day party on a hot evening in Florida by announcing that France gave her citizens what they wanted, and now he could give them what they wanted. What did he do that now comes as part of our daily appliances?

**2** In 1865, on July 14, Edward Whymper and his team were the first to complete the ascent of Matterhorn, the iconic alpine mountain. It is iconic due to its near-symmetrical pyramidal peak. A chocolate company that has a similarly shaped product uses the mountain in its logo. Which company?

**3** On this day in 1902, Peruvian farmer Agustín Lizárraga led a team of workers to search for new lands for cultivation. After hours of scaling difficult terrain, he came across an ancient building. Realising the importance of the discovery, the team inscribed its name and left. Nine years later, an American explorer rediscovered the site and took credit. Which place is this, also known as the ‘Lost City of the Incas’?

**4** Born this day in 1910, William Hanna was an American animator who, along with his friend Joseph Barbera, directed seven academy award films and made shows that have been translated into 28 languages. Their



**Deadly peak** The Matterhorn in Switzerland is the 12th highest summit in the Alps. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

first and arguably most popular creation was a duo who rarely says a word but have been entertaining people since 1940. Which duo is this?

**5** Robert Zildjian, born this day in 1923, was the second son of Avedis Zildjian III, who was the head of Avedis Zildjian Company, the oldest continuously operating musical instrument manufacturer in the world. Zildjian started his own company called ‘Sabian’ in 1981. Known worldover for their beautiful cymbals, which popular musical instrument does Zildjian and Sabian cater to?

**6** On this day in 1942, at the Wardha session of Congress, a resolution was approved that

authorised Mahatma Gandhi to campaign for India’s independence from Britain. The name of the campaign came from the unifying call to action demanding ‘An Orderly British Withdrawal’ from India. What was the name of this campaign?

**7** In 1960, on July 14, English Zoologist Jane Goodall began her study of great apes in the wild at the Gombe Stream Reserve in present-day Tanzania. Her untiring work with one particular species is responsible for us realising that they are also capable of rational thought and emotions such as joy and sorrow, something that was thought to be exclusive to humans till then. What species did she work with?

**8** On this day in 1965, spacecraft Mariner 4 took the very first close-up photos of another planet in our universe. The photographs of a cratered, dead planet took approximately six hours to be transmitted back to Earth. Which planet did Mariner 4 give us a pic of?

**9** This day in 1983, an arcade video game was released in Japan, beginning a popular franchise. It is often considered as the most successful and renowned gaming franchise with more than 830 million copies sold worldwide. What franchise is this that follows a pair of Italian twin plumbers on their adventures against gorillas and turtles?

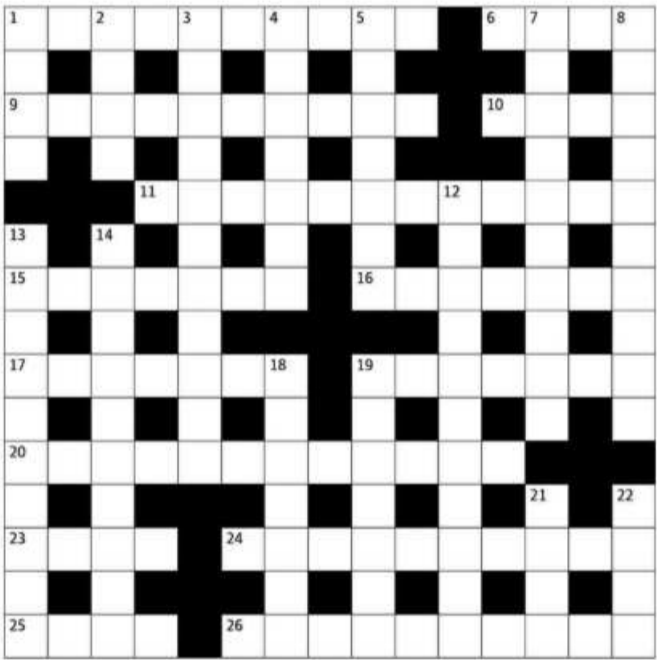
**10** In 2015, on July 14, NASA’s New Horizons probe performed the first flyby of another planet. This probe took pictures of this celestial neighbour, and thus completed the initial survey of the solar system. Although the object of the photo had lost its original status, it is still a wonderful feat of science. What did New Horizons take pictures of?

**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. Ice from a refrigerator
- 2. Toblerone
- 3. Machu Picchu
- 4. Tom & Jerry
- 5. Drums (cymbals are the metal plates that ring out)
- 6. Quiz India
- 7. Chimp Panzees
- 8. Nars
- 9. Mario Bros.
- 10. Pluto

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3315



- Across**
- 1 Concerning discrimination that may be experienced following a meal (10)
  - 6 Best to have tricky situation reversed (4)
  - 9 Tearing apart camel bone (10)
  - 10 Norman city’s best loved? Not entirely (2,2)
  - 11 Test consists of loud conflict, outcome of a duel (12)
  - 15 Joanna’s decent? (7)
  - 16 Fruit pie – the last – it’s his (7)
  - 17 One who hesitates verbally, missing intro; she takes a nosedive (7)
  - 19 Stuffy, with no issues, you say? (7)
  - 20 In Venice, orator rambling: it’s too much (12)
  - 23 Innovative virtuoso eschewing simplicity, primarily? (4)
  - 24 Asians’ river basin turbulent including old delta (10)
  - 25 Cut into German tree (4)
  - 26 Miss redeye, rerouted to area by Irish Sea (10)

- Down**
- 1 It gets loaded in the morning moment (4)
  - 2 In Paris, you twice assembled a short skirt (4)
  - 3 Sounding drunk, Ms Merkel’s not quite square? (11)
  - 4 ‘Sentient’ tech runs alternative to stairs that’s used in an emergency (7)

- 5 Buying and selling ingredients for jam? (7)
- 7 Cricketer’s futile redo botched... (10)
- 8 ...as polar bear is to dismiss a couple of batsmen? (10)
- 12 In which money (by card) is blown? (5,6)
- 13 Having a lot to offer? (10)
- 14 Swans: they have some brass (10)
- 18 All are reeling before end of stale beer (4,3)
- 19 Taking some chianti, besotted, somewhere on the Riviera (7)
- 21 Everyman’s after a hostelry in Italian port (4)
- 22 Lives with the French; no one can walk away from here (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3314





# The sacred acres in mortal danger

The *Kaavus* of Kerala are fast disappearing, and with them go rich ecosystems of vibrant biodiversity

T.N. Venugopalan

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The once-ubiquitous *Kaavus*, Kerala's sacred groves, are now rare sanctuaries and unlikely places of worship. These groves stand out as unique ecosystems, rich in biodiversity and ecological balance. Unlike temples, they are nestled within forest patches of varying sizes – from a few cents to several acres, as seen in the expansive Iringole *Kaavu* near Kochi.

The stone idols are typically placed on cement platforms without roofs, exposed to the natural elements, with only a few protected within structures. Thus, the deities exist in harmony with Mother Nature.

Dedicated primarily to various incarnations of Nagaraja, the serpent deity, such as Ananthan, Seshan, Kambakan, Thakshakan, Vasuki and Kaaliyan, and Naga Yakshi (the Serpent Queen), these groves are serene abodes where gods, plants, trees, reptiles, birds, and other creatures coexist peacefully alongside perennial waterbodies. Ancient *kaavus* symbolise the symbiosis of divinity and nature, pulsating with life.

They are profound reflections of cultural ethos,

traditions, beliefs, and environmental guardianship, where the natural and supernatural realms intertwine.

Kerala was once dotted with thousands of such sacred groves. Myths and legends have been woven around them with the prime aim of protecting the forest wealth by bestowing a sacred image to them. Regrettably, many have been wantonly destroyed in recent decades to make way for “development”. The fact that most groves are privately owned and maintained without government support has left them vulnerable.

Encroachment on public lands and the breakdown of joint families in Kerala spelled doom for many sacred groves, bringing their number to fewer than 1,000 from 10,000 a couple of decades ago.

**Rich vegetation**

The ecosystem of a *Kaavu*, complete with ponds and streams inhabited by frogs, fish, snakes, and other aquatic life, is supported by an array of herbs, shrubs, and towering trees. The water, filtered through this rich vegetation, is believed to possess remarkable healing properties.

Our ancestors revered the *Kaavus*, recognising the ancient forests as evolved sanctuaries that have

endured for centuries, and understood the imperative to preserve these ecosystems for future generations.

*Kaavus* are home to hundreds of rare plants which are of tremendous ecological and religious importance.

A few among them are Nagakesar; white dammar; Indian white oak; Indian devil tree; Spanish cherry; Chaulmoogra tree; wild jack fruit; cannon ball tree; Siris tree; Alexandrian laurel; Bael tree; Niepa bark tree; and Chinese chaste tree; and small plants such as Veldt grape and wild asparagus.

The entire *Kaavu* is shaded by a thick canopy, allowing beams of sunlight to gently filter through and create irregular spots on the ground.

*Kaavus* are associated with several festivals and rituals, all of which have environmental focus. The community takes care in the maintenance and conservation of the sacred groves.

The usual rituals involve Kalamezhuthu, Pulluvan Pattu and Sarppam Pattu, Sarppabali, Ayilyam Puja and offering of *noorum paalum* to the Nagaraja and Nagayakshi. In essence, the rituals associated with the sacred groves are rooted in spirituality, cultural expression and protection of natural habitat.

We are living in an era where nature faces the ever-present threat of reckless destruction, and the surviving sacred groves are reminders for the need to protect and maintain these vital components of the ecosystem from disintegration. When we destroy them, we are destroying our own cultural heritage and rich biodiversity for ever. Of late, the Kerala Forest Department is extending financial assistance to temples and individual owners for the protection of the sacred groves.

It is high time the government undertook a mapping exercise to document and protect the indigenous flora and fauna of our sacred groves. School students should be encouraged to embark on a bio-blitz by inviting environmentalists and scientists as observers to document the biodiversity of sacred groves.

## No cash, only gifts in kind

Shankar Gopalkrishnan

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In the days of yore, a wedding gift was simple. You took a postal envelope and inserted a 100 rupee note. That done, a one-rupee coin was added: ₹101 was the standard wedding gift since time immemorial. You made sure that along with the congratulatory note to the couple, you clearly indicated the name of the donor.

A key aspect in an Indian wedding was a sincere accountant. He diligently jotted down the name of the donor and the amount of the wedding gift. At the next wedding, this time in the donor's family, the exact amount was tendered as his gift. This mutual give-and-take, accurate to the penny, ensured you stayed rooted to the dictum: “Neither a borrower nor a lender be!”

In modern times, a cash gift is considered inelegant. It is here that we hit a roadblock. If it is jewellery, the bride's tastes may not match yours. You explore other alternatives: gadgets, culinary appliances, and other artefacts. A safe bet is a framed picture of Lord Ganesha. After the wedding, the couple could be stranded with over 30 versions of Ganesha, enough to set up an entire showroom.

But when should you give the gift to the couple? Once the *maangalya dhaaranam* ceremony is over, there is a mad rush. People jump onto the stage, to congratulate the couple and hand over the gift. The groom and the bride are clueless: their hands are full, with gifts thrust from all directions. A court has recently decreed, that until *saptapadi* completed, the marriage is null and void. Evidently, such intricate details are yet to enter Indian consciousness.

American weddings follow a different format. The couple sit together and create an elaborate gift list from home appliances to a kitchen spoon. The price of each item is mentioned. The list is advertised online. Each guest chooses the item in keeping with his budget. Once a guest has made the selection, that item is out of bounds for others.

Somnath Sarkar

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There is a real-felt need to go beyond mere tokenism of staging earth-hours now and then to stoke dormant concerns on the world's increasingly fragile ecology.

Mere gestures will not go far in appeasing nature, that, to quote Tennyson, is becoming “red in tooth and claw”. Proliferation of natural disasters across the world serves as a chilling reminder of dangers arising from tampering with the fragile ecosystem in the name of development. Global warming is just one aspect of the problem, with unsustainable build-up of carbon as the proceeds of unbridled global economic growth and industrialisation. Increased infusion of plastics, much of it non-biodegradable and unrecycled, in IT and

## An ocean of plastics

Non-biodegradable refuse from IT and other industrial sectors, besides homes, pose an existential threat



other industrial sectors and in day-to-day life poses another existential threat.

Much of the unmanaged plastic and e-waste, particularly of developing economies, end up in landfills or oceans, with alarming repercussions.

In 2019, a whale was washed ashore in the

Philippines and died thereafter, with necropsy revealing 40 kg of plastic trash in its stomach. A similar tragedy occurred in Greece in 2021. These incidents portend the looming unmanaged plastic and e-waste threat, requiring concerted action by all stakeholders for optimal recycling to check waste build-up in landfills

and oceans. Another dimension of the unmanaged plastic threat is its toxic leaching as microplastic and nanoplastic into farm soil, infiltrating agri-products en route to humans.

In India, while the government needs to formulate more innovative and dynamic strategies to tackle the multi-dimensional problem, the onus is not merely on government or industry to devise solutions.

There is a case for the end-consumer to contribute with steps such as shunning single-use plastics. Additionally, efficient and optimal plastic recycling could substantially reduce energy costs for production.

Regarding e-waste, lifestyle impact of providing and using IT needs to factor both upstream impact of supply and downstream impact of disposal.

## Unsung heroes

Nurses are the epitome of tolerance, kindness and perseverance

Cheera Das

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Ever since I remember I have been too good at making a scene at the hospital, and so I avoid hospital visits unless it is life-threatening. The very sight of a nurse carrying the medical tray containing the needles and syringes pushes me over the edge and I become hysterical.

A few weeks ago, I was admitted to a hospital for emergency surgery. As

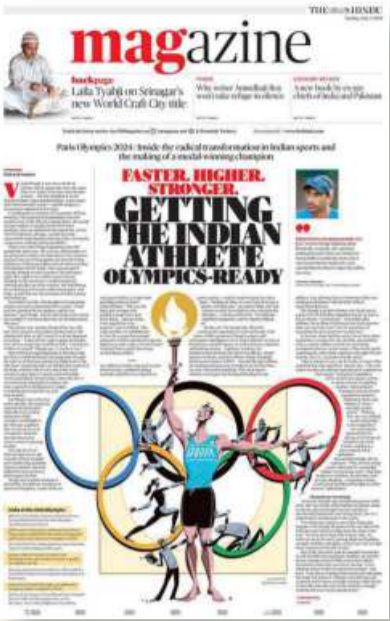
prophesied, I started my drama upon hearing the stride of the nurses outside my door. I was expecting a battalion of nurses carrying big needles ready to fire at me. But to my surprise, an empty-handed nurse opened the door and greeted me with a smile. She asked me how I felt and if I slept well. Her empty hands and her smile instantly lifted my mood. I felt peaceful in my mind. But in no time, I heard myself whining about all my fears and pain. She patiently



listened to me and assured me that everything would be fine. A few minutes later, she was back with the medical tray, and upon realising my fear she held my hands for a while and gently convinced me to stay calm. I realised that her kindness and considerate behaviour did have a profound effect on my fear. Later, during the entire pre- and

post-surgery period, I was looked after by a squad of diligent nurses who stayed calm and composed even when I was being dramatic. How they treated me during my tough time helped me remain unruffled emotionally and physically to a great extent. Until that day, I never realised the significance of nurses in our lives. A kind-hearted nurse's positive impact on a patient's physical and emotional well-being is ineffable.

These angelic humans should be appreciated and bowed down to for taking good care of everyone who comes to them with the utmost care and attention. Their tolerance, kindness, optimism, and perseverance shall not go unnoticed.



### FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to [mag.letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:mag.letters@thehindu.co.in) by Tuesday 3 p.m.

#### Cover story

Our athletes need encouraging sponsors and good trainers. (‘Getting the Indian athlete Olympics ready’; July 7) Holding more national track events at frequent intervals will be productive, and sports schools should be established in all the districts. Despite having a ministry for youth and sports, we have not been able to fully tap the Indian talent on offer.

Sravana Ramachandran

AI algorithms use machine learning techniques to identify patterns in player movements and tactics. This data can help coaches and players of team sports to identify areas of improvement such as shot accuracy, and optimising defensive and offensive strategies.

K.M.K. Murthy

The lack of adequate trained professionals and scarce funding patterns act as a peril to India's excellence in events like the Olympics. Schemes like TOPS (Targeting Olympic Podium Scheme) that the government has introduced need to be strengthened. Political interference and lack of interest in the devolution of funds for sports establishments are the greatest threats to sports development in India.

Viveka Vardhan Naidu Bhyripudi

#### Powerful voice

Arundathi Roy has always been a thorn in the flesh for ruling establishments in the country as she has always lent her shoulder and voice to those who have been denied their

rights. (‘Arundhati Roy won't be silenced’; July 7) She raises issues that the authorities strive to brush under the carpet. Roy believes in calling a spade a spade and has often fallen foul of the powers that be because of this reason.

C.V. Aravind

#### Actions, not words

Every year, ambitious climate targets are set with no oversight mechanisms to measure the progress made. (‘Will Baku see fires of change?’; July 7) The West must pitch in with technology and funding to turn the tide and reduce greenhouse emissions, failing which future generations will greatly suffer.

Rohith Varon S.S.

#### Old connections

Veena Venugopal's column is sure to have an adverse impact on future alumni meets in different parts of India. (‘First love, second chance’; July 7) It acts as a speed-breaker on school and college reunions that have become popular in recent years.

M.V. Nagavender Rao

#### Thriving in art

It is hoped that the recognition of Srinagar as a ‘World Craft City’ will boost the handicrafts sector, which in turn will benefit tourism and infrastructure development. (‘Let Srinagar thrive again’; July 7) There is an urgent need for reviving patronage to keep artistic creativity alive. Stability and peace must be maintained in the region in order to achieve it.

N. Rama Rao



### MORE ON THE WEB

[www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page](http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page)

#### Let there be free speech

How do we treat someone with whom we vehemently disagree? This is at the heart of the debate on sanction of prosecution of Arundhati Roy

Avani Bansal

#### Delectable nostalgia

The tasty bits hawked in Bengal streets have been confined to memory

Buddhadev Nandi

#### Ageing gracefully

The real beauty of living is being one's true self at all times and all ages

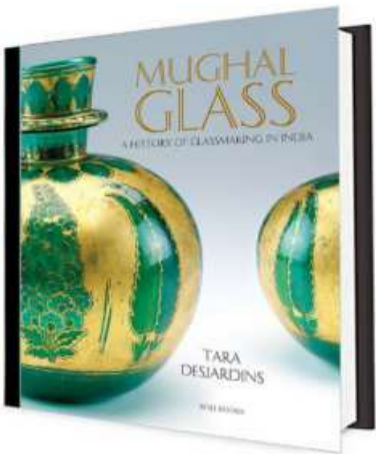
J. Clement Selvaraj

#### Catching the trend

When trying so hard to be relevant, a person may need to remember who he is or what he values most

Suvrodeep Dutta

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



**Cadence of a time gone by** (Clockwise from far left) The book cover; *huqqa* base from Awadh or Bengal; *lota* from northern India; *huqqa* base from Bengal; plate from Awadh or Bengal; Tara Desjardins; ewer from Awadh or Bengal; and a bottle from Lucknow. (LACMA, MUSÉE GUIMET, and TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART)

Deepti Sasidharan

In a lyrical painting by the master Nainsukh, set in rolling mustard fields bloom in yellow, an aesthete Mian is on horseback with his gorgeous lady in red. The painting is spectacular because in the 18th century, with electronic speakers still in the future, two musicians accompany them, singing and drumming, while another bearer walks alongside holding a decorated glass hubble-bubble that the gentleman redolently smokes.

I have seen so many Indian paintings with *huqqa* bearers, but never thought much of them till I saw the luxurious gilded green glass base that adorns the cover of *Mughal Glass - A History of Glassmaking in India*. The ‘hubble-bubble’ is an onomatopoeic name for *huqqas*, the smoking apparatus that was floor- or table-set and one of the many Mughal pleasure pursuits. Its component parts – typically a globular or bell-shaped base, a tobacco holder and a mouthpiece – were fashioned from precious stones, metals and sometimes glass. Demerits of smoking apart, if anything, a *huqqa* always slowed the pace of a painting. Its presence meant leisure,



refinement and a cadence of a time gone by.

**Born of heat, used as luxury**  
The book by Tara Desjardins, curator of South Asia at Doha’s Museum of Islamic Art, presents as a catalogue the niche oeuvre of glass associated with the Mughal Empire (1526-1858) – easily some of the most beautiful objects made anywhere in time.

Glass as a material, with its ephemeral fragility, has often been relegated to the shadows by scholars of this period. Earlier books such as Mark Zebrowski’s *Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India* brought ewers, *huqqas* and *paandans* into the popular imagination, as he painstakingly referenced these utility items from miniature paintings to show how they were used. That didactic approach widened the ability to look at historical objects, and *Mughal Glass*, for the first time, expands our view on decorative glassmaking for luxury utilitarian objects.

Bursting with sprays of

## BEYOND SMOKE AND GLASS

From Hyderabad’s collection of *huqqas* to rare *pikdans* in London, a new book tracks the history of glassmaking associated with the Mughal Empire

water lilies or nodding scarlet heads of poppies, the range of colours is incredible – from lapis blue to emerald green and my favourite, a deep purple.

Desjardins brings together a decade of focused scholarship in this compilation as she traces the many millennia of the Indian subcontinent’s romance with glass through beads, bangles and glazed objects. Trade exchanges with ancient glass-blowing civilisations as well as archaeological excavations in the region have also been touched upon.

Drawn from museums such as the V&A in London and the MET in New York, auction house databases of Christie’s and Sotheby’s, and private

collections in Hong Kong and Frankfurt, the lavishly illustrated book has collections of surviving decorated *huqqa* bases, bottles, ewers, cups and saucers. Refreshingly, the author has also included items from a cross-section of Indian sources, including the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, and the National Museum in New Delhi, making it possible to compare the indigenous collections with international hierarchies.

The book also examines vitreous objects with art history tools such as X-ray spectrometry, making it a firm



bedrock for future explorations on the subject.

**An X-ray to tell stories**

It is the inclusion of exhaustive scientific analysis – something fundamental to the study of historic objects and typically missing in Indian art historical studies – that forms a refreshing and key component of this book. For instance, the use of energy-dispersive X-ray spectrometry in the study of glass enables an elemental analysis of inherent components such as lime and alumina. It is an exciting research area because it helps determine geographic sources of both primary glass manufacturing in India and manufacturers who exported to the country.

An example is a *huqqa* base, now at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., believed to originally be from West Bengal or Bihar in the 18th century. An X-ray fluorescence analysis revealed a lead on the major element in the glass, and the museum entry of origin was changed to ‘United Kingdom’ as the object was established as a Jacobite style. In other words, while the shape of the glass *huqqa* suggested it was made in India, science established that it was manufactured in England for export to India.

In a rapidly changing 17th-18th century world of expanding trade

connections, mercantile exchange and commerce that defined the fate of nations, Desjardins presents glass as a commodity and a form of artistic expression.

**Around the world in glass**

The art historian also brings the study of form, technique, and decorative styles to determine uniqueness of historic objects. Here, Desjardins’ scholarship shines. And as she brings together dozens of glass objects “from California to Kuwait, Denmark to Delhi, identifying and creating a corpus of material that had previously been unknown to scholars of Islamic and Asian art”, a remarkable book emerges. Who knew that Salar Jung Museum holds the “single largest collection of glass *huqqa* bases in the world”? Or that the indigenous metal *pikdans* or spittoons, so common in this part of the world, would be made in free-blown glass, gilded, and find their way to museum collections in London and Doha.

On a more wistful note, I cannot help but notice that most of the beautiful glass forms in this book are not made anymore. Glass that kings, queens and the well-to-do cherished, born of heat and forever fragile, I am glad they are preserved in institutions and the pages of this magnificent compilation.

*Published by Roli Books, the book is priced ₹2,995.*

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

Menaka Raman

Last year, I met the members of a Gurugram-based children’s book club to discuss a picture book I’d written about child rights. While talking about the right to education, one tween said, “If poor children don’t go to school because they need to fetch water or work, they and their families are choosing not to get an education. How can they complain then?”

I was reminded of this while reading Abhijit Banerjee’s foreword in economist Esther Duflo and illustrator Cheyenne Olivier’s recently released, *Poor Economics for Kids*. He writes: “... the discussion in the world about the poor is wrong-headed because it ignores just how hard it is to be poor and therefore blames them for the problems of their own lives.”

Originally published in France, the English translation was released in India last week by Juggernaut (₹999), with five of the stories translated into Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, and Marathi. It will also be published as individual picture books by Pratham Books.

**Expanding the S curve**

Duflo and Banerjee’s lifetime work in trying to understand the specific problems that come with poverty, and to find solutions, earned the husband and wife team, along with American economist Michael Kremer, the 2019 Nobel Prize for Economics. A few years earlier, their research also came out as a book, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (2011), which revealed why the poor, despite having the same aspirations and abilities as anyone else, end up with entirely different lives.

“I realised it was the real-life stories that people found appealing in *Poor Economics*, and that they understood certain concepts after reading them,” Duflo, a professor of economics at MIT and Collège de France, tells me over a Zoom call. She recalls reading books on



## A different kind of story book

**When a Nobel Prize-winning economist introduces the concept of poverty to children, it is anything but the expected**

poverty as a child; they stayed with her despite being filled with stereotypes. But the fact that they stayed with her made Duflo want to write for children, an audience for whom very little has been crafted around the topic of poverty.

Through 10 loosely interconnected stories, young readers are introduced to Nilou, Tsongai, Imai, Afia, Bibir and a host of other characters as they go about their daily lives, looking for ways to overcome issues such as food insecurity, climate change,

deforestation, and under-resourced schools. They are composites based on the lives and experiences of people from around the world. Duflo says it was important to her that the tales were not tied to a particular place, culture, religion or race, and so they are set in an unnamed, imaginary village free of cultural



and geographical markers.

The characters are rendered in a startling array of skin tones: from yellow to green to blue by Olivier. The illustrations are filled with bold shapes and colours. The trees are striped, the ground is full of patterns, and is often curved. “I took the S curve from poor economics and turned it into a beautiful and meaningful element [the ground] that evokes the highs and lows in the stories and characters’ lives,” Olivier explains.

The S curve, I found on further research, represents the relationship between a person’s income now and their future income based on the investments they can make in their health, education, and overall well-being.

**Hard truths in bold colours** Illustrations from the book; and (below) economist Esther Duflo. (BRYCE VICKMARK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



**‘Young people are part of the solution’**

Was it hard turning decades of work into stories for children? Duflo admits that writing for youngsters is much harder than writing for adults, but that “it was clear to me what needed to be touched upon for each topic and the idea for some stories, like Nilou’s, has been within me for a long time”.

‘Nilou Skips School’ is about a young girl who is unable to keep up with her school lessons and plays truant. Her under-resourced teacher struggles to help the students, but a social worker trains the older children of the village to teach Nilou and her friends.

The stories are non-didactic and devoid of heavy-handed platitudes, instead using dialogue and a succinct narrative style to move things along. An essay at the end of each story explains the underlying concept, opening up the books to a wider group of children. “Younger ones can have the stories read to them by an adult, and leave it at that, while older children can read the story with the accompanying essay on their own,” says Duflo.

So what does she want readers to take away from the stories? “Too often in children’s literature, the child is either an innocent victim or

they are in charge of saving the whole world,” she replies. “We wanted to make clear that young people are part of the solution. There are things you can do, but you’re never alone. You’re part of a society.”

**Creating empathy**

The creators are aware that in India, a book for children in English will most likely reach readers of far greater privilege and wealth than the characters in the book. “While the book’s reader may not have had similar experiences, we hope the stories will make them realise that these children are not all that different to them,” Duflo says.

And perhaps that is why the young tween reader I met at the book club should read these stories. To understand that Nilou, Afia and Neso are not that different from him, that they have as much a right to live a life of dignity and quality as he does. That understanding and empathy is perhaps the first step in the journey towards bridging the gap that exists between them.

*The writer is a children’s book author and columnist based in Bengaluru.*