THE HINDU
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AI GENERATED IMAGE

INDIA'S MOSAIC CHILDREN

In a country with strong regional identities and cultural mores, domicile policies tend to have far-reaching consequences for those with mixed parentage, or for migrants and the displaced

Sunalini Mathew
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Over the past year, I have come across several headlines in news reports that reference communities based on linguistic boundaries: 'Malayali trekker stranded in...', 'Telugu man competing in...', 'Punjabi woman killed...'.

My son is half-Tamil, half-Malayali, but fully from Delhi, in his own uncomplicated mind. In my overthinking brain, I wonder, if he ever makes it to a headline (hopefully, a happy one), how he will be 'classified', which community will 'claim him'. In an opportunistic world, if it's good news, possibility both will.

Like Thulasendrapuram, the village in Tamil Nadu that is praying for Kamala Harris to become President of the United States, even though no one from her family still lives there. At a rally recently in Montana, Donald Trump, her opponent in the presidential election, asks bizarrely: "You know it's interesting: nobody really knows her last name." Then, "Harris, it's like Harris. I don't know how the hell did this happen." It happened because she has an Indian mother and a Jamaican father. And on another occasion, "I don't know, is she Indian or is she black?" It didn't occur to him she could be both.

Life is simple when you have a single-place identity, meaning if your parents are from a particular area, you speak that language at home, and you've grown up there. Our identities get complicated when we are migrants; our sense of belonging turns into longing, when we have been exiled or cut off from our place of birth; when our homes are not really where our hearts are.

A large influence on where people live and move to is politics and policies. This month, in an enforcement of the straight and narrow, Himanta Biswa Sarma, who on social media ironically announces himself first as a citizen of India before Chief Minister of Assam, said that a new domicile policy would be implemented, making only those born in the State eligible for government jobs.

Similarly, last month, the Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, mandated reservation for local candidates in 50% of management positions and 70% of non-management positions in private-sector jobs. Proficiency in Kannada was one of the criteria to define 'local candidate'. The bill faced a massive push-back from industry and was temporarily put on hold. Migrants, after all, are the brick-and-mortar, the brains-and-muscle, of many cities.

The Kashmiri identity

When someone asks Uma Ganju where she's from, she says, "Srinagar," and for people internationally, "Srinagar, in Kashmir." Because, "there is always a follow-up question about the trouble there. Maybe it is my way of letting the world know that there's this place where all is not well". Her family left much before the 1989 insurgency, for jobs in other Indian cities, but, "One day in Delhi, my grandparents showed up at our doorstep. My grandmother was in her night clothes, and holding just one bag. My grandfather rarely spoke about Kashmir with us after that. My grandmother would tear up at the mere mention of the place. My aunt and cousins left in the middle of the night in a shared taxi, bundled up with other fleeing Kashmiri Hindus."

The IT professional often asks her cousins why they still say they are from Kashmir, even though they have all been away for decades. "My youngest cousin, who is about 28, said something interesting the other day – our upbringing is so Kashmiri; we speak Kashmiri, celebrate Kashmiri festivals [Navreh and Pann]; eat *rogan josh* and drink *kehwa*; we wear *athors* and *pherans*; our folk tales and stories of kings, queens, and saints are Kashmiri."

Wound tightly into her sense of where she is from, is anger, grief, helplessness, longing, and despair at the loss of home, and the understanding that there may never be a return to the homeland in her lifetime. "We don't have Kashmir, all we have is our identity," Ganju says. She now lives in Delhi and has a British passport, and while Delhi is home, the longing for Kashmir still leaves her with a lump in the throat. She went back to Srinagar in 2001, but hasn't been able to since. She says she wouldn't be able to bear it.

Muneef Khan's story overlaps with Ganju's in terms of the city they call home now, but Khan, 27, says he is Tamilian-Kashmiri or Kashmiri-Tamilian. For his family, Kashmir is where they are from, and Tamil Nadu is where they do business. For Khan, who speaks with a distinct 'Southie' intonation, "My thinking voice is Tamil; culturally I am Tamil and Kashmiri; in terms of the music I listen to and the movies I watch, it's Tamil." At home, his parents spoke Kashmiri and Urdu, but he remembers the food on the table gradually making the transition from *alev te maaz* (potatoes and meat) to *sambar-rasam-poriyal*, as his mother adapted from Srinagar's chilly weather to Madurai's heat. He can transition from a *veshti* to a Khan suit with ease, irrespective of where he is.

Khan is practical in his acceptance of his twin identities. He says understanding the rhythms of people – their body language, instruments, festivals – makes it easier for him to pick up the language. "It's the reason I can adapt easily, anywhere," he says, adding that he speaks Tamil, Kashmiri, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and a smattering of the other South Indian languages. Sometimes, people with a linear understanding of belonging have asked him to choose where he's from. "I can't," he says, simply, sliding along the spectrum of belonging.

Cities for one and all

In the forced 'general knowledge' classes of the 90s, one 'lesson' was to 'mug up' sobriquets given to cities: Chicago, the windy city; Venice, the floating city, and so on. If ever there was one to describe Delhi, it would be the city of migrants – not just from the camps set up for people who fled across a forced border drawn at the time of Independence, but also from conquerors who came from Central Asia through the middle ages, and settled here. They all created a mosaic, like Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh, with sculptures made of recycled ceramic.

This October, I will have lived in Delhi for 25 years, and it has accepted me much like it has everyone else. For a person who grew up in cantonments across North India's small towns, never belonging anywhere, Delhi has given me a clear adult identity through the jobs I have held, the friends I have made, and the school my son went to. I am also proud of what the city offers. I do not know of any other place in the world where you'd find a housing colony casually built around a 13th century structure where thieves were killed (Hauz Khas), or where people do yoga every morning on the lawns in front of monuments from the 15th and 16th centuries (Lodhi Gardens).

In fact, built and natural environments are fundamental to the theory of place identity, a concept that straddles many disciplines, including psychology and sociology.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 4

Home and away Muneef Khan; and Uma Ganju (left) both have family roots in Kashmir. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Lore and legend
A sculpture depicting the battle of Kurukshetra from the *Mahabharata*, in Madhuban, Haryana. (WIKI COMMONS)

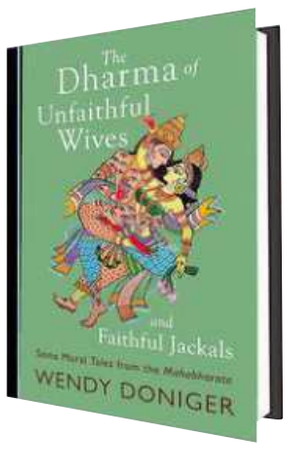
MORALITY AND OTHER CURIOSITIES

Indologist Wendy Doniger fishes out some obscure tales from the *Mahabharata* and the result is predictably underwhelming

Latha Anantharaman

When author Henry James referred to the great 19th century novels as "loose, baggy monsters", we can assume that he had never come across the great Indian epic. A looser, baggier monster than our *Mahabharata* would be hard to imagine. But an epic of ancient times was not just meant to be a unified narrative of a conflict between heroes and villains, with some women thrown in. It served as a receptacle of every tale ever told, and these extra tales were slipped in whenever a couple of characters were passing the time of day.

In *The Dharma of Unfaithful Wives and Faithful Jackals*, mythologist Wendy Doniger dips into our perennial wells once again. This time she looks into the



The Dharma of Unfaithful Wives and Faithful Jackals
Wendy Doniger
Speaking Tiger
₹499

12th and 13th books of the *Mahabharata*, in which, as Bhishma lies dying on his bed of arrows, he and the newly victorious king Yudhishthira seize the opportunity to hold a discourse on the niceties of dharma, illustrating them through various stories.

"Moral" is not quite the word we would use to describe the tales told here, starring the lascivious Indra and the other usual suspects, whose reckless or random acts are as hard to understand as the counter-measures taken by much-harassed wives, children and oppressed classes. In fact, let's toss out "discourse" and "niceties" as well. For the reader of today, there is no way to tease even a simple lesson on right and wrong out of these struggles, and certainly no glimmer of light is shed on dharma. What Doniger has compiled here works only as a collection of curiosities.

In the time of chaos

The translation is more pedestrian than expected. The structure of the book is repetitive, with many preliminaries and then a separate introduction to each tale, which seems to go over the same ground as the tale itself. And some of the sentences themselves are repetitive, as if thin material is being padded out.

In telling a story about a mouse that frees a cat from a snare, while fending off an owl and a mongoose, Bhishma advises the king how to survive when surrounded by enemies. In another story, a starving Vishvamitra argues that he may steal, and steal meat, because he is hungry, while the hunter who has caught the animal pleads with him not to abandon his dharma. These are among the rare stories in which dharma is talked of at all.

For the most part, we are walked through the deservedly obscure byways of the epic, and we are introduced to eminently forgettable characters. The *Mahabharata* is the epic of the Kali Yuga, and if there is a theme in this set of Bhishma's tales, it is subversion, but subversion to what end? Is it to demonstrate that after a devastating war, we are left with more uncertainties than ever about what is right, what is wrong, and what may be the fruits of our karma? Is it to remind us that the world is still hurtling towards chaos?

The reviewer is the author of Three Seasons: Notes from a Country Year.

Unruly bodies

Nepali-American writer Ranjan Adiga portrays the sexual and asexual with equal finesse in his debut collection of short stories

Saikat Majumdar

What is this strange animal called "creative writing"? As someone who doesn't care much about the lines of control between the "creative" and the "critical", I'm most deeply seduced by the literary sensibility that fuses the intellectual, the emotional, and the sensory without any hierarchy between them. This is how Ranjan Adiga writes – with his entire being.

His stories, whether set in Nepal or the U.S., are not only sensory in their technique but evoke the aspirations and anxieties of human beings in their sweaty fullness. What makes Adiga particularly fascinating is that he has also offered a visceral confession of an acute personal disembodiment, in a honest and vulnerable essay: 'How I Struggled in An Arranged Marriage As An Asexual Man'.

Any writer worth their pen knows that one doesn't need a vibrant sex life to write about sex. Experience matters to the writer but not in a crude quantitative way – its relationship with imagination is utterly unpredictable. Adiga's debut book, *Leech & Other Stories*, is driven by unruly bodily and emotional experiences that vitally include the sexual. There is nothing unusual about the fact that this comes from a writer who has openly come out as asexual. What I find striking is Adiga's ability to evoke both – one fiction, the other memoir, one erotically charged, the other erotically empty – with equal wholeness. Body, mind, desire and detachment come as deeply together in the evocation of the sexual as the asexual in these 10 stories. That is one real writer.

"We laughed a lot together. Our lives seemed fun, except for this one issue." Adiga doesn't mince words in his essay. "Having sex with my wife made me cringe." The South Asian prudishness about sex had shielded him so far, but his arranged marriage brought it all crashing down. He is keenly sensitive to his deprived partner Jessica's bodily needs, and when she tells him that a guy at the gym has asked her out, he insists that she should consider it. "I miss having a man's hand on my body," Jessica tells him, as they "both started crying, remember when she would wrap her around me, aroused and breathless, making me shrink further into my shell".

Sensual yet abstract

This is deeply bodily writing about disembodiment. It is the same sensoriness that shapes the core of his fiction, be it the leech that sits inside a character's nostrils and attracts racist barbs, the vindictive employer forcing his young staff to clean up after him in the toilet, or the pangs of jealousy inside a possessive husband as his wife talks about a past lover.

"Ah," says the racist Kathmandu doctor examining the leech inside the nostril of the poor Madheshi, Ram. "Leeches cling on to the body heat of people with peculiar smells." In America, the deeply hierarchical Indian employer of the Nepali student moonlighting in his restaurant proudly declares that he forgot to flush the toilet and sends him inside. "The crude sounds reverberate through the walls, and the smell rises, stealthily at first, encircling me like a ring."

But Adiga reserves his richest narrative voice for a subterranean world of sex. Sameer is at once deeply upset by the fact that his wife Puja had a passionate lover before marriage and also sharply turned on by it. "'We had sex in a swimming pool,' she says. Sameer feels effervescent bubbles in his thighs like he's never felt before." But the most seductively threatening

Leech & Other Stories
Ranjan Adiga
Penguin
₹399

story in the collection is 'A Haircut and Massage'. The expert masseur Iqbal raises tingles on the body of his hesitant patron Krishna, for which the latter, a family man, develops a haunting obsession that makes him fidget through the night next to his wife.

But the gesture in which he symbolically turns from his obsession to his wife is as sensual as it is abstract: "In the midst of these thoughts, Sabitri extended her hand towards him. As he held it, he felt her firm grip, the grip of his wife for so many years. Of generations and centuries. On the other side of the puddle, his sandals slightly wet, Krishna followed his wife to the vegetable market."

Adiga's autobiographical essay, meanwhile, etches his divorce-vow with Jessica that splits them as soon as her green card falls in place. Dismissing doubts that he might be gay, he states, "I've come to an acceptance that I am asexual." It is not the reality of his sexuality but the way he creates multiple (a)sexual lives in fiction and memoir that makes him a very special writer.

The reviewer's most recent novel is The Remains of the Body *(2024).*

GETTY IMAGES

IN CONVERSATION

'Azadi is for all Indians'

Author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni on her first Hindi audiobook, an adaptation of her 2022 novel, *Independence*

Stanley Carvalho

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's recently released Hindi audiobook, *Azadi* (on Audible), is set in Kolkata, against the backdrop of India's freedom movement. An adaptation of her 2022 novel, *Independence*, the historical fiction revolves around the three Ganguly sisters, who see India through their own lenses and desires. Divakaruni's three books prior to *Independence* also centred on women – Draupadi, Sita and Rani Jindan. Edited excerpts from an interview:

Question: *What prompted you to bring out* Azadi*?*
Answer: I think we live in a period when people, even though they love books, don't always have the time to sit down and read. Audiobooks fill that need as they can be listened to any time – while commuting, exercising, cooking, etc.

Q: *Are audiobooks popular in India, and especially among Hindi listeners?*
A: I know English audiobooks are getting popular in India. I have several successful ones on Audible but this is my first one in Hindi, so I am very excited. I am interested in seeing how Hindi readers respond to it. Hopefully, it will reach many people because the story of *Azadi* is for all Indians.

Q: *Tell us about the research that went into recreating 1940s Bengal and the stories of our freedom struggle?*
A: I did a lot of research and was touched by three things: newspaper accounts of those times, in Bengali and English; photographs – of the riots, the trains and buses moving across the border, and of the very first Independence Day celebrated in India; and stories that I heard from my mother and maternal grandfather, who were part of the freedom movement. These stories made me care about the times and the many sacrifices made by those no one will know about. I was determined to write their story.

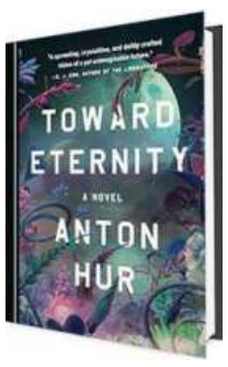
Read the full interview on magazine.thehindu.com.

The interviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist and writer.

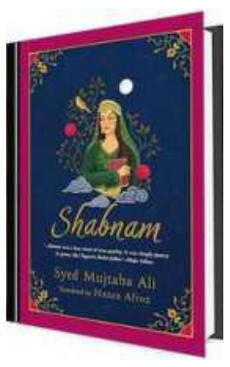
BROWSER

The Last Witness
G.V. Subba Rao
Vitasta Publishing
₹350
In an effort to unravel the truth behind shocking events that can nearly destroy a nation, Jasmine, Sithara and Niniya come together to clear space scientist Dr. Rangarajan's name as he battles wild accusations of selling India's space technology to foreign buyers.

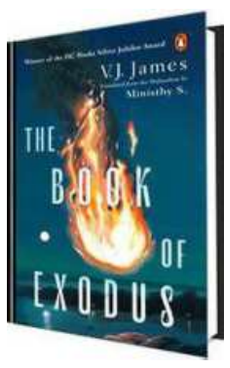
Toward Eternity
Anton Hur
HarperCollins
₹450
This debut novel by the award-winning Korean writer and translator follows literary researcher Yonghun and scientist Dr. Beeko as they explore the future of technology, challenging the notion of what makes us human if immortality is within our grasp.



Shabnam
Syed Mujtaba Ali, trs Nazes Afroz
Speaking Tiger
₹499
Translated in English for the first time, this Bengali love story from 1960 spotlights Shabnam, an Afghan woman, and Majnun, an Indian man, as they come together to break barriers of culture and language.



The Book of Exodus
V.J. James, trs Ministhy S.
Penguin
₹699
Originally published 25 years ago in Malayalam, the book revolves around Kunjootty and the community living in his village, *Potta Thuruthu*, in Kerala. In his attempt to write the story of his village untouched by modernisation, what truths will he uncover?



Meditation in the wild

An immersive experience of life among the adivasis of Bastar

A Gond Muria girl. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

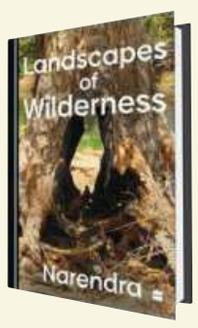
Sudhirendar Sharma

Ramana Maharshi's observation, "silence is also conversation", quoted in Narendra's *Landscapes of Wilderness*, seems to be the guiding spirit of this meditative discourse on life among the adivasis. "Abujhmad [Bastar] seemed like a vast ancient silence of centuries; of stillness and its speechlessness." Narendra spent three decades with the adivasis in Abujhmad, and came away with many observations, which he has compiled in this book.

There is an undercurrent of interconnectedness between the 39 short chapters in the book, which explore the abiding relationships and an "alikeness of rhythms, flows and paces" between humans and nature. It is not an easy read, but will leave the reader feeling sad about the society we have morphed into. Narendra laments the rapid shrinking of open spaces and forests that the adivasis call home. Much before it gets lost forever, the author documents the adivasi narratives that are invariably indeterminate but captivating no less. In the present when people often choose what is economically beneficial over what is morally right, *Landscapes of Wilderness* helps the reader escape from bewildering social spaces to be with one's inner *svabhav* (temperament or disposition).

Freeing the mind

So lyrical is the prose that one reads the words slowly, savouring them and rolling them over in the mind. But for it to happen, the mind should be first decongested to allow such thoughts to find space. "The Adivasis only live in nature, not with nature but *like* nature, because they find any other way too material and municipal to live with." Adivasi conversations are sprinkled with metaphors that leave the listener with suggestive meanings. Word in itself has no meaning other than what it is intended to convey. When dealing in nature, should words remain fixed and authoritarian?



Landscapes of Wilderness
Narendra
HarperCollins
₹399

Given the extensive time spent amidst the wilderness, the author is nostalgic about the quality time spent amid the adivasis and may seem to be over-glorifying some of it. Yet, the wilderness has clues for many of the civilisational challenges that a modern lifestyle confronts on a daily basis. The institutional arrangement of *ghotul* as a step towards a conjugal relationship has been widely written and talked about, but there is still much to learn from it as relationship break-ups become common. "Staying amongst trees, animals, insects, soil and sky, she and he remain gentle and generous human beings. When life is simple and bare," concludes Narendra, "conflicts and issues become superfluous."

There is little denying that there is life beyond the global grid of politico-economic and knowledge systems to which lives of innumerable others are tied to. Narendra's third book looks at how landscapes in wilderness nurture wisdom even when the community under reference has no more than 500 words in its vocabulary and cannot count beyond five. The author contends that the book's intention is not to critique modernity but to capture the silence in wilderness.

The book takes the reader into unchartered territory that functions as a mirror to our internal landscapes. Written with concern and compassion, it is a thought-provoking book that will appeal to anyone who is interested to look beyond the physicality of what is often referred to as 'wild'.

The reviewer is an independent writer, researcher and academic.

Islamic dynasty (Clockwise from left) A view of the Asifi Masjid at Bara Imambara complex in Lucknow; Emperor Shah Alam was forced to remain in Allahabad for more than 12 years; Ira Mukhoty; and culinary etiquette reached extraordinary heights under the nawabs of Awadh. (RAJEEV BHATT, MIGUEL OLIVEIRA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

CULTURED NAWABS, DEGENERATE COLONISERS

Ira Mukhoty upends several myths in her sprawling account of the rise and fall of Awadh

Parvati Sharma

Ira Mukhoty's newest book, *The Lion and the Lily*, is a sprawling account of the rise and fall of Awadh, featuring an enthralling cast of characters. There's the proud Nawab Shuja ud Daula, his formidable wife and mother, Bahu Begum and Nawab Begum, and his eclectic son, Asaf; assorted and increasingly aggressive Governors General of the East India Company alongside an array of adventuring Frenchmen in Hindustan; and, of course, the Mughals in tragic decline.

Mukhoty, who has written about the Mughal empire at the time of its greatest rise, under Akbar, says that recounting the empire's decline in her new book felt very personal. "The records were made by European men, often to show the empire in a decrepit state to justify their own incursion into the country. The fact is that while the Mughal centre was crumbling, states like Awadh, Murshidabad, Hyderabad, Banaras, were all coming up. While it was dismaying to see how the once mightiest empire in the world had come to this sorry end, that culture by no means ended – it migrated, with poets, dancers, writers, warriors, statesmen, to the so-called sub-imperial centres." In places like Awadh, says Mukhoty, the old culture gained a new vitality from different influences – for example, the Shia influence. "But sadly we are not told this story. We are told the story of the gradual decline of Hindustan from Nadir Shah onwards till the Brits had the great idea to save us and bring us railways and all kinds of civilising things."

Masters of spin

While reading the book and during our conversation, it is impossible to miss Mukhoty's anger with British colonisers, what she often refers to as the venality, greed and corruption of the men who built the British Raj. In fact, her book begins with the British destroying evidence of their history in India as they prepare to leave in 1947. Did they, in the end, have a guilty awareness of what they had done?

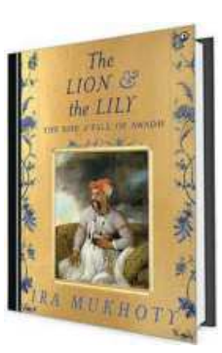
"I think so. They had just gone through the Bengal famine of 1942, apart from many other atrocities. It is impossible that they would not have known that there would be a reckoning. After all, they cared a lot about their reputation, and I see the Brits as the best masters of spin that ever existed. We are all sitting in post-colonial countries with this nostalgia about our colonisers. How does that come about? They knew what to keep away, what to destroy and what to tell people in its lieu."

The British didn't just erase their own guilty past, they also rewrote Indian history. Mukhoty's book traces some of this re-writing, like the demonisation of Tipu Sultan and of Muslims generally. Reading those passages, you are struck by the irony of how our current 'decolonising', 'nationalist' discourse parrots the animosities that British colonisers left behind. "We really need to look at the myths that we have been left with," says Mukhoty. "To understand our past, but also to see the repercussions that they have today. The British were threatened by the elite Muslims whom they displaced. The Muslims were going to be the enemy, they were othered very clearly."

A rich fabric

I'm eating a late lunch of omelette while we talk – poor substitute for the flaky breads and melting kebabs that the great chefs of Awadh produced for their patrons. Cuisine, art, music and tradition are part of the fabric of Mukhoty's book. Her description of the ceremonies around Muharram stand out, particularly its resonance among Hindus: how Imam Hussain was seen as Rama, Caliph Yazid as Ravana.

In a book teeming with characters, readers will find their favourites. I particularly enjoyed Asaf's mother and grandmother – Nawab Begum and Bahu Begum. Immensely powerful, they supported the Raja of Banaras, Chait Singh's war against the EIC, and suffered the vicious revenge of Warren Hastings.



The Lion and the Lily
Ira Mukhoty
Aleph
₹999

Heroes and villains

I assume Mukhoty has a favourite character, and certainly a favourite villain.

She found Nawab Asaf ud Daula "absolutely charming". For how he dealt with all his enemies. For his generosity. You can still hear it said in Lucknow: *Jis ko na de maula, usko de Asaf ud Daula*, Asaf helps those whom even God has abandoned. "And how much he did for the arts – he created a Shia renaissance. The message of Shia-ism is how a small community under assault managed to vanquish all odds. I think he did this to tell the Brits, 'We will always survive'."

Her biggest villain was Claude Martin, and readers will agree. The man whose name survives through a chain of elite schools has a history that includes not only racism but paedophilia. "I was shocked by his indecency," says Mukhoty. "It's very hard for me to say anything positive about him except that, okay, he had his great collection of botanical paintings."

In her descriptions of Martin and other contemporary Europeans, Mukhoty reverses the colonial gaze, shifting it from the so-called degenerate nawabs to the truly degenerate colonisers. "The nawabs were intelligent men, using their enormous resources in all kinds of canny ways": forging diplomatic contacts, building a vibrant culture. "It was not degenerate at all. I don't understand how we've allowed ourselves to buy into this narrative."

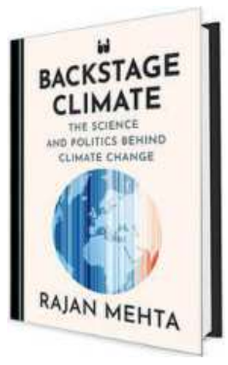
The reviewer is the author of Akbar of Hindustan *and* Jahangir: An Intimate Portrait of a Great Mughal.

WATCH | *The Hindu Lit Fest* kicked off the first edition of The Dialogue: Beyond the Bookshelf in New Delhi, presented with Bahrisons Booksellers and Colocal x Roastery. The first guest was historian Ira Mukhoty who talked about her new book, *The Lion and the Lily*.

How Long Can the Moon be Caged?

Suchitra Vijayan, Francesca Recchia
Westland Books
₹599
Two writers look at contemporary India through the lived experiences of political prisoners. It includes testimonies of those falsely accused in the Bhima Koregaon case, writings by student leaders, and activists spearheading various protests.

Backstage Climate



Rajan Mehta
Westland Books
₹599
This volume is a primer on climate change. Pointing out that climate action has hardly moved forward, Mehta says it's imperative to raise awareness about it. Only when people are aware, they will do whatever is within their means to avoid a climate crisis, he says.

Making Globalization Happen

Vijayashri Sripati
Oxford University Press
₹1,595
Exploring perspectives on globalisation, a writer sheds light on the role of the United Nations and transnational capitalists. Sripati addresses issues like UN peacebuilding, sustainable development, climate change, the global war on terrorism, women's rights and poverty reduction.

Unpartitioned Time: A Daughter's Story

Malavika Rajkotia
Speaking Tiger
₹599
A leading lawyer tells the story of her father, Sardar Jitinder Singh, who was uprooted from Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) and began life afresh in Karnal (now in Haryana). Rajkotia weaves her memoir around her father, to map the family's past and present.

INDIA'S MOSAIC CHILDREN

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

The *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology* (2004) describes place identity thus: "Individuals often develop an emotional bond to their life space, essentially their home and the neighbourhood, but often also urban places and spaces on a larger scale." The anchoring that space identity provides "reflects the individual's motivations, social status, family situation, and projects for the future".

Yet, Delhi feels temporary, like we're here for a lowbrow purpose – for employment, for some fun, nothing more. Do I belong in Delhi? No. Is Delhi home? Yes. Where am I from? Madras – an unhurried city where I fit into the landscape, a place that let me be. Not Chennai, with its rushing traffic and impersonal 'flats'. My parents are Tamilian, as am I, unlike my son, who has been brought up in the rough and tumble of a city where what you have, and who your father is, are more important than where you're from.

I ask Ayna, 28, who comes home to do the cleaning, what Delhi feels like to her. "*Ye to ghar hai, Didi. Bangal mein pet ka chawal nahi ho raha tha, aur ab dil yahin lag gaya hai* [This is home. In Bengal, our stomachs were never full with rice, and now our hearts are here]," she says. Yet, she misses her larger family and home in Shantirhati, Dakshin Dinajpur district. "So, where are you from," I ask her. "*Kalkatta se*," she says, without any sense of dissonance.

The Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24 says, "The population growth rate in Delhi during the last decade was higher than the national level by 3.5%." Also that "...the natural increase in population [difference between number of births and deaths] during 2022 was 1.72 lakh, whereas migration has been estimated at 2.21 lakh".

Lawyer Madhu Moolchandani, 67, remembers the stories told by her grandfather, who studied law in pre-Partition Karachi – of the cosmopolitan city he had grown up in, the home they had, the fields they surveyed, even the things they had acquired over the years – before they were forced to move to Delhi. She feels no sense of longing for a lost home though. Her only regret is that she couldn't take her mother back to their hometown, Larkana in the Sindh province, to see what was left of their ancestral property.

Moolchandani, who lives with her sister Sadhana in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar, says the area's familiarity is what keeps her connected to the city. "We were born here, we went to school and college here, and now we work here," she says, matter-of-factly, though she doesn't connect with many other parts of the city, like, for instance, Yamuna *paar* (across the river) – shorthand for middle-class people. "Delhi is cosmopolitan. No one asks us where we are from or where we have come from. Most Punjabis here are migrants, too. The city has always accepted everyone and does so today, too." At home, the sisters speak Sindhi, but with their cousins, it's increasingly English and Hindi. The concepts of home and language fit together like pieces of a mosaic, neatly arranged on paper, not jostling for space in her mind.

(Clockwise from above) Madhu Moolchandani; Ayna; Smriti Lamech; and Randhir Mishra. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Many tongues

English was the language 45-year-old Smriti Lamech's grandmother insisted everyone speak in, at their Allahabad home, because people had married into other communities so much, "she wanted everyone to feel at home". In her TedX talk, Lamech, a communications professional, speaks about her "mosaic home", conjuring up images of 'chip flooring' so popular in Gen X's growing-up years. Her grandparents were a mix of Tamil, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Bengali, Garhwali, making her a sixth-culture kid. The term 'third-culture kid' was coined by sociologist Ruth Hill Useem, who researched American and Indian children who create a third culture, away from their homeland, but also not the same as their adopted land.

"It's human nature to migrate, to blend, to fuse, to mix culture, experience, and heritage..." Lamech says, from the stage, with ease. "The beauty of any mosaic lies in its diversity. The fact that it's irregular, the fact that there are contrasts, this is what makes every story unique. It's what makes it yours."

Stereotypes annoy her. "When I watched Shah Rukh eat noodles and *dahi* in the movie *Ra. One* [2011], I felt white hot rage run up my spine. But it also bothers me when people talk about Uttar Pradesh as this monolith of rowdiness. It's where I grew up, it's the land where freedom fighter Chandra Shekhar Azad fought to death, the place of *shayari*." She finds it difficult to relate to U.P. now though, despite Hindi being her "love language", because of the current political dispensation. She also doesn't resonate with people deeply embedded in their regional identities, and her closest friends are "families giving up on narrow ideas" of belonging. "I can never be a part of a Tamil or Telugu association."

The need to belong to a regional group was strong a generation ago, when people got a sense of security from it, says Bihar native Randhir Mishra, 55. A management professional based in Bengaluru, Mishra says security today is more dependent on factors such as affluence, education, technology – the idea of belonging is layered.

His wife is from Kuchaman in Rajasthan, and their daughter, adopted 16 years ago, was born in Odisha. They speak Maithili and Marwari at home, though as time goes by and their daughter grows up, it is mostly English, with a smattering of Kannada. "If you ask her where she's from, she'll give you a factual answer: that she was born in Odisha, and her father is from Bihar and mother from Rajasthan, but she is a Bengalurean." With time, he says, they are ready for their daughter's questions. "We have told her there is complete freedom to get in touch with all aspects of her life. We don't want her to feel secretive about any dimension of her life."

For Mishra, home is where his wife and daughter are, and while he has family back in his hometown Mithila, and a strong tethering with a regional deity, he has also lived across India and the world, in over 20 cities. "It's the people, more than the places, that give you a sense of connection," he says.

Quota quandary

- The Andhra Pradesh Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries/Factories Act, 2019, stipulated that 75% of jobs in industry be reserved for locals, including joint ventures and projects undertaken under the public-private partnership mode
- In 2023, the Haryana High Court quashed the government's law guaranteeing 75% reservation to locals in private sector jobs in Haryana. The matter is now is the Supreme Court
- The Jharkhand State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2021 & Rule 2022 mandates that any employer with a workforce of more than 10 people, must set aside 75% of jobs that pay out less than ₹40,000, for locals

New direction (Clockwise from right) R. Talitha Samuel of Blaft; translator Divya Kalavala; writer Rahee Punyashloka; and the cover of the anthology. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

DREAMING OF ROBOTS IN A CASTELESS WORLD

A soon-to-be-released crowfunded anthology by Blaft once again highlights how speculative fiction offers the perfect fit for anti-caste narratives

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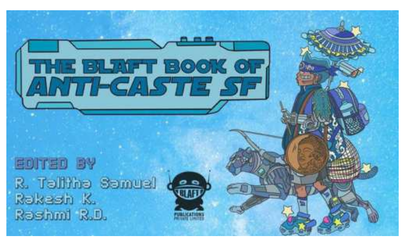
Ravidas, a poet-saint from the 15th century, dreamt up a city called Begumpura, where there is 'no pain, no taxes or cares'. "He imagines a casteless society," says Delhi-based writer Rahee Punyashloka. This work by the saint, he points out, is proof that "the first work of speculative fiction that came out of South Asia is anti-caste". Speculative fiction, a genre with futuristic, fantastical, and supernatural elements, can offer the perfect fit for anti-caste stories.

The question of alterity and speculation are intricately tied with the anti-caste idiom, asserts Punyashloka. "Speculative fiction that comes out of this country has to deal with caste and the question of an anti-caste future." One of his short stories, a meta-literary commentary on an anthology of anti-caste speculative fiction, has found its way into an anthology of the exact same setting: *The Blaft Book of Anti-Caste SF*.

The anthology is set to be published later this year by Blaft, a Chennai-based publishing house known for bringing out translations of Tamil pulp, weird fiction and folklore, apart from graphic novels. It is co-edited by R. Talitha Samuel, an assistant editor at the publishing firm. "In India, almost all the speculative fiction that's been published, at least in English, has been by people from upper caste backgrounds; there's been very little representation of Dalit or Adivasi writers," says Rakesh Khanna, director and editor-in-chief of Blaft. It was Delhi-based Samuel, a Dalit and Ambedkarite, who came up with the idea for the anthology, for which Blaft sent out a call for submissions in June. They also launched an online crowdfunding campaign last month and managed to make it past their target in just four days.

Samuel, who used to do a podcast on Ambedkar, says they are a huge fan of speculative fiction. "There is a definition of speculative fiction that I really like: 'It disorients the familiar, familiarises what is strange'," they say, adding that this "massive umbrella genre is perfect for something like this".



Questioning dominant politics

Samuel explains that there are different ways people approach speculative fiction, citing examples of movies such as the Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt-starrer *Brahmastra* (2022) and books like *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) by Amish Tripathi that evoke Hindu imagery. "In one sense, they are apolitical, aligning with the status quo," the 24-year-old points out, adding: "The imagery is futuristic, but they very much toe the line. Whereas if you look at Afro futurism or indigenous futurism, they question dominant culture and politics."

Samuel adds that if speculative fiction has to be taken seriously as a genre, it has to, by nature, be anti-caste. "The whole point of speculative fiction is that it asks questions, and doesn't assume that mainstream or dominant narratives can go unquestioned." While curating stories for the anthology, Samuel says they were not surprised to find several, some of them published decades ago and now out of print, that fit their requirement. "We have stories by writers Bama, Gogu Shyamala, Rahee Punyashloka, apart from first-time authors." The anthology will have translations from Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Gujarati, Hindi, and Marathi, and comics as well.

Some of the tales include 'Parivrajak' by Gautamiputra Kamble (a Buddhist fantasy, translated from Marathi), 'Robot No. SC5' by Neerav Patel (science fiction, translated from Gujarati), 'The Miraculous Ladder' by Shyamala (caste allegory, translated from Telugu), 'File No. 786 [The Night Journey]' by Hameedha Khan (supernatural), and 'Pruning Neurons' by Esther Larisa David (demonic entities).

Bengaluru-based Divya Kalavala, who has translated Shyamala's Telugu story, says, "Dalit literature has had its own journey; because of Dalit political consciousness, certain changes have come in literature as well." She feels that speculative fiction leads to Dalit futurism. "It allows for writers to break out of the box. Watertight compartments and restrictions are gone, and writers can reinvent themselves, and in the process, find it healing and liberating."

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

1929-2024

NATWAR SINGH: NEHRUVIAN, MEMORIST, FRIEND

A journalist-turned-friend remembers the diplomat who loved his books and tea time conversations, and stood by his political ideals

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Natwar returned to his favourite place, his farmhouse outside Delhi, for one last time on August 10. It was here that he had summoned me in the summer of 2011. At the end of our conversation, he reached out to his magnificent collection of books and gifted me a copy of *A Bunch of Old Letters*, one of the last books by Jawaharlal Nehru. The letters gave a glimpse of Nehru's career as well as the world that greeted K. Natwar Singh as he started a career that would span the prime ministerships of Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and Manmohan Singh. Letters helped him remember the past.

Last year, he recollected his first and only meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. His father, one of the three Nazims of Bharatpur, was not fond of the leader. Bharatpur's royal house was one of the several princely states that were intimidated by the Mahatma. News had spread, and thousands of people had gathered at the train station to get a glimpse of Gandhi. Natwar said that perhaps as a polite gesture to the sentiment of the princely state, Gandhi declined to step out of the railway compartment and stayed inside.

Teenaged Natwar was determined to speak to Bapu and zigzagged within the crowd. Not to be disappointed, he jumped onto the track, went to the other side of the compartment, grabbed the edge of the window, and pulled himself up. Once there, he could see Gandhiji, bent over and reading. A sea of humanity had surrounded the train, but that did not disturb the Mahatma who appeared serene. Natwar looked at the Mahatma but did not get any response as he was in the middle of one of his many silent penances.

Natwar first narrated this story over a phone call and then during our next meeting. As the story came to depicting how Gandhiji was seated, Natwar shrunk his shoulders draped in a white shawl to show the exact posture. As he narrated, he painted a vivid picture with his words and body language – of the environment on the railway platform, the crowd, young Natwar and even his restless father at home looking for his son who, despite his disapproval, had decorated his room with photos of the leaders of the nationalist movement. Such was the power of narration and memory that Natwar possessed.

I once asked him about the trick behind it. He was quick with the answer: "We did not have all these gadgets that you have. Whatever we read had to be memorised. There was no other way."

A man of strong ideals

Like many of the figures of Natwar's growing-up years, he too became a figure who found space on newspaper pages. Long before our tea time talks became a monthly feature, I was introduced to him through these pages. He was a minister of state for external affairs in my childhood. His ministerial stint came to an end with the end of the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1989. During the P.V. Narasimha Rao years, he was in partial political exile as Rao and he did not see eye to eye. Natwar was a Nehruvian and too much of a non-alignment oriented figure. He launched the Indira Congress with N.D. Tiwari.

In 2005, I was with *The Week* magazine and Natwar was again in the news. He was the external affairs minister and was being accused of being a beneficiary of the oil-for-food payments rocking the western headlines. He gave a brief telephonic interview. A few days later, his secretary called me to a meeting with the minister. Natwar arrived dressed in a spotless white *kurta pajama*. Our meetings continued even after he quit the cabinet post on December 6, 2005. Each meeting would include cups of tea and sometimes, a meeting would turn into a round table with a few other guests and his wife Heminder Kumari Singh joining in.

He turned 90 as the world trembled during the pandemic. Natwar's hands had also started trembling, I noticed for the first time. Slowly, his daily meetings reduced but he kept me on the list of visitors. Our monthly conversations sometimes would become weekly as he would seek suggestions on what should be done to improve his health. With hospital visits increasing, his public appearances reduced though he continued to meet close friends at home. This May, he turned 95.

Ever the gentleman

For the last nearly five years, he kept insisting that my new book, which covers the first batches of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officials, should be completed as soon as possible. I started working on it after Natwar had shared with me the first official directory of the IFS published in 1959. He was one of the officials featured in it. I informed him of that. He responded with an impish smile, "I hope you are writing nice things about me."

From October to December 2023, most of our meetings and phone calls would be focused on the book. Finally, when *Nehru's First Recruits: The Diplomats Who Built Independent India's Foreign Policy* arrived this summer, I brought a copy to him. His assistants made him sit on the bed as he thumbed through it. He was thrilled. "I am happy for you," he said smiling. Perhaps it was the last book that Natwar received in a lifetime enriched with events, friends and books.

Unable to make sense of Natwar's impeccable memory, I once asked him about the trick behind it. He was quick with the answer: "we did not have all these gadgets that you have. Whatever we read had to be memorised. There was no other way."

It was the last time we met. This time, apart from the country, books, and the government, he also mentioned how a friend had passed away without suffering much. I left knowing that Natwar kept his share of secrets and then too he was hinting at something that he alone knew.

POP-A-RAZZI

Losing with grace 101

The Olympics is a reminder that life comes with more losses than wins and we need to embrace both

It's hard to remember this in the medal-hunt frenzy of the Olympic Games but sometimes you can win while losing.

On the last day of the Paris Games, Kinzang Lhamo was the last person to cross the finish line of the women's marathon, about an hour-and-a-half behind the winner. As she crossed the line, the spectators rose to their feet to cheer her. Lhamo, the only woman in the three-member Bhutan team, taking part in her first Olympics, embodied, as a media report noted, what Pierre de Coubertin, the father of modern Olympics, meant when he said the important thing is "not winning but taking part".

It's hard to keep remembering that and not be devastated by mishaps – dropping the baton in a relay, scoring a same-side goal or having a crossbar-crotch collision while trying to pole vault.

The anguish of the sportsperson who came in fourth, missing out on a podium finish by a whisker, is palpable even on television. But there's coming fourth and then there's coming last. As pop philosopher ABBA sang: *The winner takes it all, the loser's standing small, beside the victory, that's her destiny*.

I understand that feeling only too well. I was the one who straggled in behind everyone else in school sports even in the sack race or the three-legged race. I was the boy chosen last for any team when we played cricket during recess. And terrified of flubbing the catch and letting down the team, I secretly prayed to be banished to some part of the field where no ball would ever come.

No excuses

Now imagine letting down your country in front of millions. When Australia's Rachael "Raygun" Gunn became the roast of social media after her performance in the new breaking category at the Paris Olympics, I laughed along with everyone else but cringed as well. To have the world's eyes on you, mocking your moves, giving them names like kangaroo hopping, crab walk and chin-holding squirms must have stung. As Raygun seemed to jackknife on the floor, users gleefully shared clips of Madhuri Dixit writhing on the floor in an old Bollywood film.

Gunn lost all three of her round-robin contests with 18-0 scores, failing to get even a single vote from the judges. The trolling was so intense the World DanceSport Federation offered her mental health support.

But Gunn didn't whine about anything. She was truly a sport. She just said, "All my moves are original. Sometimes it speaks to the judges, and sometimes it doesn't. I do my thing." She showed up at the closing ceremony as well, grinning and jiving, carried aloft on the shoulders of a beaming teammate. She looked like she was having the time of her life. That felt like a real high.

This does not mean a country of India's size should not be doing better at the Olympics. Far from it. But to lose without recriminations and excuses is also a sign of class. When Rafael Nadal lost to Novak Djokovic in straight sets at the Olympics, he didn't blame anything or anyone. He just said, "I come here, I try my best, I play." Of course, Nadal who already has two Olympic golds, unlike Raygun, does not have anything left to prove. But still, not everyone, veteran or newbie, can take a loss on the chin with such dignity. It's a skill worth learning.

Empathy is hard

It's also worth learning how to offer support to the loser. Congratulations to a winner come easy, empathy for the loser is harder. When wrestler Vinesh Phogat was disqualified on the cusp of a medal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi showed that empathy when he tweeted: "Come back stronger! We are all rooting for you." But MP Hema Malini seemed less empathetic when she said she felt sad but added: "I wish she loses that 100 grams quickly. *Lekin milega nahin abhi kuch* [But she won't get anything now]." She just came across as tone-deaf unlike Phogat's fellow Olympian Neeraj Chopra who said people forget those who lose but, "I just hope whether she gets a medal or not, people don't forget what she did for her country".

The real winner though was Chopra's mother Saroj Devi who brushed aside any disappointments about her son's silver versus Pakistani Arshad Nadeem's gold by simply saying Nadeem too was like a son to her. Nadeem's mother Raziah Parveen responded saying: "Winning and losing is part of sport, but they are like brothers."

We are trained from the beginning on how to win but no one teaches us how to lose even though life often comes with more losses than wins. To lose with grace is also the mark of true champions.

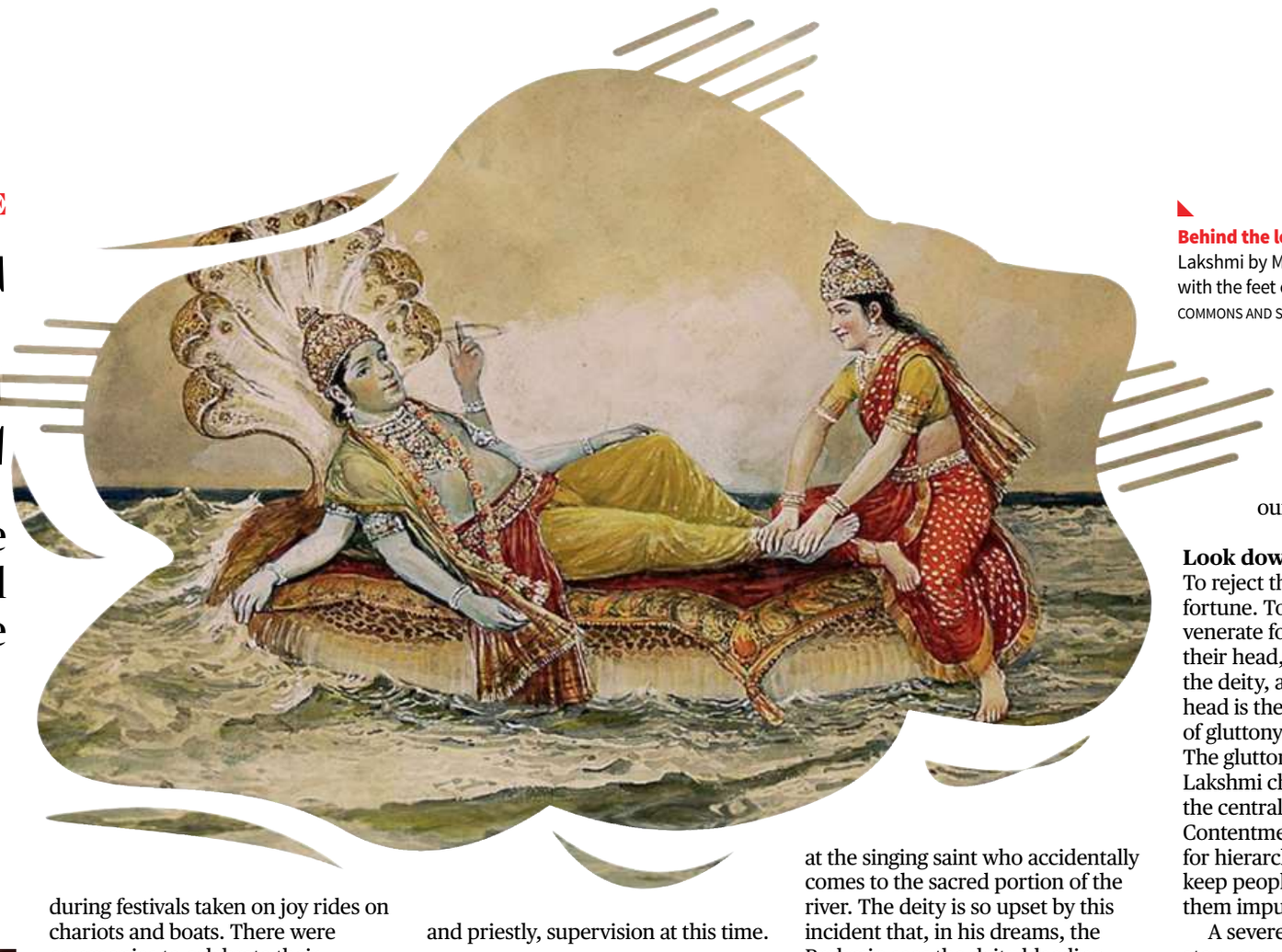
Now if only someone had told me that when I was flailing in that sack race.

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

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

FEET OF FORTUNE

Which is holier, the head or the feet? Hindu *bhakti* traditions will change your perspective



Behind the lore A painting of Vishnu and Lakshmi by M.V. Dhurandhar; and a crown with the feet of the deity on top. (WIKI COMMONS AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

It is a practice mostly seen in South Indian Vishnu temples. After the devotee pays obeisance to the deity (*darshan*), the priest places a crown on his head. But it is not quite a crown. On top are the footprints of the deity. Since the devotee cannot enter the sanctum sanctorum, which is kept ritually isolated, and touch the feet of the icon within, the deity's feet are symbolically placed on the devotee's head. Rituals such as these reveal a lot about Hindu *bhakti* traditions, which are often linked to India's feudal traditions, but have a deeper connection with the country's monastic heritage.

Bhakti originally did not mean submission. It meant participation in the life of the divine. People had long been '*upasakas*' or worshippers of trees, animals, rocks, and saints, as well as '*shravaka*' or followers of hermits and gurus. This new idea was different. Temples were not serene centres of meditation – where people went to renounce the world. They were different from Vedic *yagna-shalas*, restricted to priests and their royal patrons. These were centres to celebrate life itself.

Temples or *devalayas* were the residences of divine beings who occupied stone and metal icons, who had to be bathed every day, dressed, fed, entertained, and

during festivals taken on joy rides on chariots and boats. There were ceremonies to celebrate their marriages and victories on the battlefield, and other stories of their lives, and people were invited and encouraged to participate in them. This was the original *bhakti* movement.

To fund these activities, village grants were given to the deities. This was known as *deva bhoga*. The managers of these lands were the educated Brahmins, appointed as stewards by the king, and excess resources were used to build temples. Therefore, by the 8th and 9th centuries, across India, we saw temples being built simultaneously. The shrines perhaps existed even before, but they came under royal, and priestly, supervision at this time.

Thriving on inequality

Temple lore invariably includes stories of devotees not permitted to enter temples because they belong to 'impure' professions. Forced to stay outside, they compose fabulous poetry, which makes them very popular. Such stories reveal a dark side that coexists with the rise of the temple movement. The stratification of society on the basis of purity.

For example, we hear the story of Thirupan Alwar in Srirangam, a great singer, who is not allowed to use certain parts of the Kaveri river where the Brahmins go to bathe, which are considered to be sacred. In fact, one Brahman throws a rock at the singing saint who accidentally comes to the sacred portion of the river. The deity is so upset by this incident that, in his dreams, the Brahmin sees the deity bleeding from the head. They demand that the saint be brought into the temple. Having seen the deity for the first time inside the temple, Thirupan Alwar describes him beautifully from foot to head.

In Vishnu art, the goddess of fortune, Lakshmi, is always shown at the foot of the divine. He embodies contentment; she embodies fortune. This was a graphical representation to show how fortune serves the content. Modern readers, though, may argue this indicates the inferior position of women, since we are conditioned to see the body in hierarchical terms: the head is greater than the feet; the right side is more sacred than the left; the upper body is purer than the lower. It is almost as if we thrive on inequality and want to deny respect to even our own bodies.

Look down for fortune

To reject the foot is then to reject fortune. To venerate the foot is to venerate fortune. Those who bow their head, receive the footprint of the deity, and with it fortune. The head is the mind – the fountainhead of gluttony as well as contentment. The glutton chases Lakshmi. Lakshmi chases contentment. This is the central theme of Vishnu lore. Contentment does not feel the need for hierarchies and boundaries – to keep people out of temples, to deem them impure.

A severed demonic head is placed atop many a South Indian temple, devoid of limbs, a reminder of arrogance and gluttony. The head needs to be completed by the body. The body is upheld by the feet. Our tendency to hold our head high, without looking at those at our feet, is the cause of our fall. In gluttony, we consume everything, even our feet and our body. All these ideas emerge when one observes the ritual of the crown with the deity's footprint.

Devdutt Pattanaik *is author of 50 books on mythology, art and culture.*

GOREN BRIDGE

Fancy methods

North-South vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

Many new bidding ideas have become popular in various parts of the world. Today's deal, from a recent expert match in Australia, illustrates one of them. We are very impressed. Our grandmother, had she chosen to open the South hand, would have reached the same contract. The main difference would be that North would be declarer.

East won the opening heart lead with the ace as South, cleverly played the king. East had nothing better to do, so he returned a heart. West ruffed and shifted to the seven of clubs. South needed the ace of clubs onside, as well as some other things going his way, so he rose with dummy's king of clubs, winning the trick as East played the queen. South led a diamond to his ace and ruffed a diamond in dummy.

NORTH
♠ K Q J 4 2
♡ Q 8 6 4
◇ 6
♣ K 6 3

WEST
♠ 9 5
♡ J
◇ K Q J 10 4 2
♣ A 9 8 7

EAST
♠ 8 3
♡ A 9 7 5 3 2
◇ 7 5 3
♣ Q J

SOUTH
♠ A 10 7 6
♡ K 10
◇ A 9 8
♣ 10 5 4 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♣	1◇	1♡*	2♡
2♠**	3◇	4♠	All pass

*Spades
**Four spades, minimum hand

Opening lead: Jack of ♡

The king of spades and a spade to his 10 drew the trumps and was followed by another diamond ruff. This was the position:

South led a club from dummy and, remarkably, the defense was helpless! Should East win with the jack he would have to lead into dummy's hearts. West could overtake the jack, but that would make South's 10 good.

NORTH
♠ Q
♡ Q 8
◇ Void
♣ 6 3

WEST
♠ Void
♡ Void
◇ K Q
♣ A 9 8

EAST
♠ Void
♡ 9 7 3 2
◇ Void
♣ J

SOUTH
♠ A 7
♡ Void
◇ Void
♣ 10 5 2

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Elemental etymology!

Berty Ashley

1 On August 18, 1868, French astronomer Pierre Janssen was in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, observing a Solar Eclipse. He noticed bright yellow lines at a wavelength of 587.49 nm in the spectrum of the chromosphere. This led to the discovery of the element that is named after Greek personification of the sun. Which element is this?

2 Quite abundant in its natural yellow crystal form, this element has been known since ancient times and is called 'gandhaka' (the smelly) in Sanskrit. The English name can be traced back to the Porto-Indo-European word '*swelp*', which means 'to burn'. What fiery element is this?

3 Found as gas at room temperature, this element has a characteristic yellow-green appearance with an acrid smell. When Sir Humphry Davy confirmed it to be a new element in 1810, he named it after the Ancient Greek word for 'pale green'. What element is this that one might have last encountered in a public swimming pool?

4 One of the strongest metals found, this element is resistant to corrosion and strong acids. Prussian chemist Martin Klaproth named it after the pre-Olympian gods of Greek Mythology. Named after the 12 children of the primordial parents of Sky and Earth, which element is this that is best suited for fixing fractures in the bone?

Knight of the Order of Leopold Portrait of Swedish chemist Jacob Berzelius, who coined the term 'organic chemistry'. (GETTY IMAGES)

5 This element is steel-grey in colour but is very lustrous, reflecting multiple colours, almost 70% of the visible spectrum. The element also formed very colourful compounds, which led to its Greek name meaning 'colourful'. What element is this that gives a sleek look to any item coated in it?

6 Naturally found in the Earth's crust, this notoriously toxic heavy metal's name can be traced to the Arabic word *al-Zarnik*, meaning gold-coloured ointment. What element is this that is believed to have led to the death of Napoleon I?

7 The element Selenium was discovered by Jacob Berzelius who thought it was very similar to the element 'Tellurium', which is named for the Earth, 'Terra'. So, he named it after what he believed was the Earth's closest relative. Found in photocells and anti-dandruff shampoo, after what entity is Selenium named?

8 Technetium, atomic number 43, is the lightest element whose isotopes are all radioactive. Its properties were predicted by Mendeleev before it was discovered. Finally, in 1937, it was confirmed at the University of Palermo that they wanted to name it '*Panormus*'. It was eventually named after the Greek word '*Technetos*'. What does it mean, which is a reference to its record on the periodic table?

9 Antimony is a lustrous grey metal, and its compounds have been used in medicine and cosmetics since ancient times. By itself, the element is toxic, and one theory is that it killed a lot of people from a certain profession who were all involved in making it. '*Anti-moine*', which in old French would be 'killer of' what group of people, who did these experiments inside religious establishments?

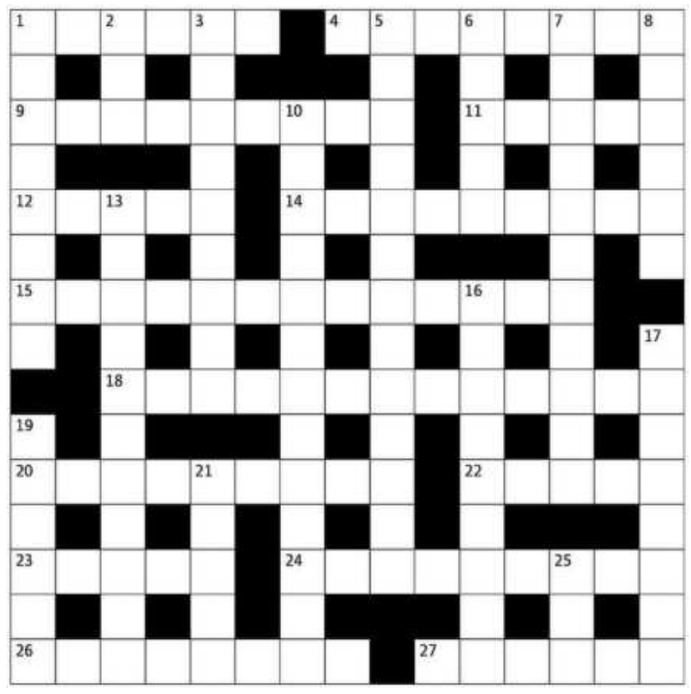
10 Holmium is a rare-earth element that has the highest magnetic permeability and is hence used for the pole pieces of the strongest static magnets. It gets its name from the Latin name of the capital city of the country where it was discovered. Which city is this, whose name still carries a part of the Latin word?

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

Answers

1. Helium
2. Sulphur
3. Chlorine
4. Titanium
5. Chromium
6. Arsenic
7. The moon
8. 'Artificial', as it was the first man-made element.
9. Monks
10. Stockholm

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3320



Across

1 Topless stunts engrossing husband in dockers' milieu (6)
4 It must be approximately a foot in length (4,4)
9 Again give credence to description of Navy Seals outfit? (9)
11 Somewhat anti-German, this beast (5)
12 Non-drinker wearing beam? No: irritable! (5)
14 Having chewed escallops, comes to premature end (9)
15 Standard wedding feature in Britain: bold drunkard, first to trip (8,5)
18 Avoiding adventurousness, having eaten dishes of bananas (2,3,4,4)
20 Looking up and swearing (9)
22 Stiff clothing Everyman had (5)
23 Primarily antisocial, leerily offish or frosty? (5)
24 Showed approval of France (wasn't paying attention) (6,3)
26 Tactful and distinct in pronouncement (8)
27 Pot-head, one preparing apricots? (6)

Down

1 Struggle, insanely bored: it's what you have to wear (8)
2 Bow stored in cedar chest (3)
3 Model wearing elaborate headgear: wow! (5,4)
5 He'd gab and grumble affectedly – tried to subtly impress (6-7)
6 More paintings etc by O'Keeffe finally put up (5)
7 Sinking in Tigris, green, flailing (11)
8 Go back, not initially finding exit (6)
10 Before perhaps, ladies in trouble (13)
13 Like forward planning a mass exodus (11)
16 Seriously, I'm approaching Robin's home (2,7)
17 Goes to join with senior teachers' backing (5,3)
19 In the wrong order, finally arrive in hilly area (6)
21 Conclude fashionable arbiter must be sent up (5)
25 Possess fancy item of clothing that's no good (3)

SOLUTION NO. 3319

The incredible **matutinal drink**

'South Indian coffee' is the the only pick-me-up one needs in the morning

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ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

The "South Indian coffee" was recently in the news when TasteAtlas ranked it as the second best coffee in the world, next only to Cuban espresso. "A cup of morning coffee is the first thing a South Indian looks out for on getting up from bed," is an oft-repeated statement in any discussion on this heady brew. The semi-translucent coffee seed whose nativity is traced to Arabia has integrated itself with our culture so much that it tops the list of provisions which a household draws up as the month begins.

Surprisingly enough, coffee drinking seems to have spread more rapidly in South India than in Arabia or Europe where much generous indignation was poured out by the conservative class on the people's habitual addiction to the drink. Coffee was brought to the New World in mid-17th century. However, tea continued to be the favoured drink until the revolt of Boston Tea Party of 1773 changed the American drinking preference to coffee. President Thomas Jefferson called coffee the favourite drink of the civilised world.

Of the several versions of how coffee came to India, the one that is popular is that it came to our country much before the arrival of the East India Company, through an Indian Sufi saint named Baba Budan. Coffee became a major commercial crop in India in the 19th century and today, India is the sixth largest coffee grower in the world. Karnataka accounts for nearly two-thirds of the total coffee production in India.

My orthodox forefathers who initially called coffee an intoxicant gradually took to it and later developed a taste for it. Thanks to the physiological action of coffee in driving away drowsiness, it is not forbidden even during religious ceremonies. Even the abstemious do not skip a cup of good coffee.

Coffee houses in Europe and America were once hotbeds of gossip as well as political discussions and literary criticism. An early advertisement for coffee three centuries ago ran thus: "Coffee quickens the spirits and makes the heart lightsome…is good against sore eyes…excellent to prevent and cure dropsy, gout and scurvy…neither laxative nor restringent."

Healthy sip

In modern times, early research linked coffee to several diseases. Recent research, however, provide strong evidence that coffee drinking actually has a variety of health benefits.

Whether or not one could today call coffee a medical potion, it is an accepted fact that over the steaming cup, politicians wax eloquent, statesmen take decisions and scribes warm up. Coffee has, therefore, rightly earned the sobriquet of "a gentleman's beverage".

A cup of coffee is also a symbol of hospitality. The homemaker, with a ladle in hand, approaching the kindly neighbour for coffee powder as guests walk in, is a familiar sight in middle-class quarters. In some households, the guest is in a predicament when served with substandard coffee.

There are many who would gladly forgo a meal, but not their cheery matutinal drink. Coffee is *de rigueur* for any function, social or religious. The standard of a wedding is determined by the standard of coffee served. The quality of coffee has been the bone of contention at many a wedding.

Preparation of good coffee of South Indian perfection is an art. My wise aunt was adept in making this drink. She was in the habit of taking coffee hot with a high concentration of filtered decoction and would not allow anybody in the household to prepare the drink lest the balance of aroma, flavour, milk, heat and strength be disturbed.

There is good news for coffee lovers among those who want to switch over to a vegan diet. *Per se*, coffee is vegan, as it is from the roasted seeds of a plant. Cow's milk in coffee could be substituted with soya milk which is its nearest plant-based milk. When paired with fresh coffee decoction, soya milk's nutty, creamy flavor can make coffee taste good.

Nowadays there is a wide variety of coffee to drink. In whatever form it is taken, coffee will always live up to its reputation as an excellent beverage ever since the first cup of the brew was sipped by somebody in some corner of the world.

Of coruscating celluloid moments

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Thinking about vacations in the 1990s and early 2000s, one of the things that come to mind is the film camera carried along to capture the moments and memories. Looking at those vacation pictures makes us realise how all our smiles were real with no affectation. The photographs of nature, skies, ocean, mountains, and historic places captured looked raw, real, and unadulterated without any makeover using filters.

In today's digital age, everyone has a phone, and every phone has a camera with a wide range of filters and editing options. Pictures captured these days are infused with a bit of drama, with filters making them look less authentic. With the prevalence of phones and cameras, people now develop a habit of seeing nature, perhaps the world, through the lens and filters of their devices, forgetting the fact that the magnificence of the world can be seen the best only with the naked eye.

The cameras back then had to be fed with a film roll. One roll could give a maximum of 36 photos. If one carried an extra roll, then 72 images can be clicked. People captured nature, themselves, and some sheer real moments of joy in those 36 to 72 pictures. The world was viewed through the camera lens only for an inconsequential amount of time.

Unlike in the old days, now there is no control over the number of pictures that can be captured. And from the very moment of the commencement of vacation to the return home, everything is now photographed and recorded. Today for many, the primary purpose of vacation and travel is only to capture pictures of themselves in different landscapes and post on their social media accounts. With this approach of travelling to take pictures, nature is often viewed merely as a picturesque backdrop to pose, dance, and make reels. Once the pictures are clicked, the impulse to post them on social media takes them over and people often miss out on truly experiencing and enjoying the beauty of nature.

The real joy in recent days seems to occur only when the pictures are posted and liked.

Moving house and memories

When life's imprints tumble out of closets and into oblivion

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ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

I saw my life of 40 years and more tumble out of closets and cupboards. I began to discover things and knick-knacks which I never knew existed and could be termed "lost and found".

Files with my daughters' haphazard drawings and scribbles, preserved carefully over the years, were uncovered with not only surprise but with the revival of echoes from their childhood days. The storehouse of memories opened up, flooding the moment with the activities of the past and each scribble came alive. Black-and-white photographs loosely tied together were found in a folder, which had been stored with a sincere intention of being put in the album some day. They were the registers of my life lived mostly from the day of my arrival in this world. So many co-travellers had been lost in my journey of life, the photographs standing testimony of the same.

I was packing house, moving to another city or rather relocating at almost the fag end of my life. I had come to Varanasi to study, after my schooling, in Banaras Hindu University.

Those were the golden days of making new friends, excitement of doing away with the school uniform for more colourful dresses, being part of the academic atmosphere on the campus, and thrill of exploring new pastures.

Days slipped into months and years flew by, with me doing well in my studies, winning accolades and landing a coveted position on the teaching faculty of my alma mater.

Old age and retirement appeared aeons away; but all things have to come to an end. I superannuated after reaching the highest position in my career. A decision had to be taken to relocate and as fate would have it, I was destined to move to the National Capital Region.

As I prepared to wind up my life in bags and cartons, relocation did not appear tempting, as it had been when I was younger. It was more of getting uprooted, leaving behind the familiar sights and sounds and even the distinctive aroma which every city has as its characteristics trait.

I saw my home getting transformed into a house as bags, furniture, and books were getting packed and stacked.

Moving to my new abode lacked the excitement, which I had hoped for; I desperately tried to make an apartment my home in a high-rise building and give it a semblance of the place I had left behind. I desperately try o acclimatise myself to my new surroundings, my new home.

Tie the knot on extravagant weddings

For the feast and ceremonies, families spend as if there is no tommorow

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ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Back then, weddings were conducted in homes. Now, everyone wants to get married in the grandest manner with loads of food, expensive clothes and jewellery and elaborate rituals in rented halls.

Even small air-conditioned halls charge ₹50,000 for half a day of ceremonies. Catering, jewellery, garments and return gifts for close family, extended family, friends and mere acquaintances swell the expenses. Gift items vary from stylish bags, idols, decorative lamps and jewellery bags to conch shell pieces and small shrubs.

A wedding is an opportunity to make lasting memories and impress the guests in one's inimitable style. Much has been said about the need for simple ceremonies but to no avail.

The need for rigorous organising and planning has brought in a new class of business: wedding planners. In essence, wedding halls have turned into business houses playing with emotions. Weddings have attained the status of an industry that grows a host of allied businesses. There is a boom in number of caterers, jewellery shops, textiles, beauty parlours, priests, musicians, and gift shops, not to speak of flower, grocery and vegetable dealers.

Generous social workers have the opportunity to collect leftover food and distribute among the have-nots.

In a year, nearly 150 days are considered inauspicious for weddings. The wedding-related businesses probably encourage families to go for extravagant spending to compensate for these lean days.

Young brides and grooms, you spend many long hours planning your mega wedding. But keep in mind that "Happiness is not a matter of intensity, but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony," as said by Thomas Merton.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

India has the world's biggest population of youth, which, if properly guided and used, can change the face of our nation, which is lagging behind in many areas. ('Hope, dreams and democracy'; Aug. 11) It was a feast to read and know about the youngsters' energy and innovative ideas, dreams, and hopes. All of them gave many, like me, great confidence in the youth of the nation.
B.M. Singh

Today's youth dream of seeing India as a land where they can participate in a thriving democracy with no interference from the forces of communalism and casteism. They are opposed to discrimination on any grounds. They want a greater role for women in leadership positions where they have a major say in policymaking. They wish to see the country as envisioned by the great men and women who sacrificed everything for its independence.
Samiul Hassan Quadri

There can hardly be any doubt that the youth of today have a cardinal role to play in shaping the country's future and it is their commitment to the nation's cause that can keep them and India in good stead. It is heartening to note that the interviewees are also aware of their role in cleansing society of evil.
C.V. Aravind

History beyond borders

Mishal Hussain wrote, "Partition was a sad, sad era. But it need not have happened. But it happened and the way it happened was tragic." ('Anatomy of a loss'; Aug. 11) I fully endorse her view as do many others undoubtedly. Partition 1947 needs to be discussed and dissected in detail by many before it fades slowly and sadly from our memory. Lessons have to be learnt from past mistakes.
Pratiksha Boinapally

Bright futures

Geeta Dharmarajan's passion and commitment to education are commendable. ('Geeta Dharmarajan: a child's POV'; Aug. 11) Stories are a more exciting and impactful way of helping children learn. Katha's tireless work reminds us that 'one child, one book, one pen, and one teacher can change the world'.
Anusha Pillay

Gentle giants

The efforts of Wildlife SOS in rescuing and rehabilitating distraught elephants at the Elephant Conservation Care Centre (ECCC) are heartwarming. ('Tuskers in rehab'; Aug. 11) Elephants in captivity present a distressing sight, with mahouts mercilessly bullying them. The tactful measures taken by Wildlife SOS in confronting people who abuse elephants are laudable. A ban should be enforced to prevent the use of elephants to entertain people in public spots.
Monita Sutherson

Correction

The cover story in last week's edition of *The Hindu Magazine* should have carried the label, '78th Independence Day', and not as mentioned. The error is regretted.
— Editor

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Lessons from a rain lily
Stay in tune with nature's cycles and seasons as they teach us the lesson of patient waiting
Riya Verma

Shed certitudes
Growing older, pre-conceived notions make one more judgmental
Sanjay Chandra

The debt conundrum
We are born in debt and die in debt both financial and social
P.M. Warrier

Ball badminton days
In the early 1980s, local clubs in Mysuru used to conduct round-robin tournaments of the game
Prasanna Harihar

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THE HINDU
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Sunday, August 18, 2024

HISTORY GOES UNDERGROUND IN NIZAMUDDIN

The new museum in Humayun's Tomb Complex delves into the emperor's life and reign, and underlines the cultural significance of the neighbourhood in India's pluralistic history

Diksha Ahire

On January 24, 1556, a letter was sent to a 14-year-old Akbar that altered the course of Indian history. Humayun, the second emperor of the Mughal dynasty, was descending from his palace library's roof to answer the call for prayer when his foot got caught in the hem of his coat, sending him tumbling down the stairs. He succumbed to his injuries three days later. A few years on, Akbar began the construction of a grand tomb to house his father's remains. Today, an excerpt of the letter is among the rare artefacts showcased at the newly-opened Humayun World Heritage Site Museum at New Delhi's Humayun's Tomb-Sunder Nursery-Nizamuddin Basti conservation and development project.

I venture there on a rainy Saturday afternoon. As an arts professional, the idea of a sunken museum – the first of its kind in India – is enthralling. Inspired by the city's *baolis*, a sloping pathway leads into the permanent gallery. Inside the large *sheesham* doors, the underground museum – which connects the Humayun's Tomb Complex with Sunder Nursery – spans five galleries. Here, visitors are introduced to the antiquity of Delhi, its seven cities, and the significance of Nizamuddin in India's pluralistic history. Right before visitors enter the principal gallery named 'Where the Emperor Rests', which focuses on the architecture of the tomb and the personality of Humayun, a 270-degree panoramic screen gives a virtual tour of the monuments and gardens of this World Heritage Site. Throughout the museum, a variety of films, projection mapping, animations, and audio-visual screens present the history of the area.

Charting Humayun's passions

Conservation is at the crux of the museum. The 100,000 sq. ft. complex – built in partnership with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and according to UNESCO guidelines for World Heritage Sites – aims to "help visitors better understand the cultural context of the heritage site," says Ratish Nanda, conservation architect and India CEO of The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). "The intention is to distil and present over 25 years of research and conservation work [and uncovering the histories of Nizamuddin]." Research that delved into questions such as the impact of Humayun's extensive travels, and how his belief in astronomy and astrology played out in his reign.

The museum has over 500 artefacts, sourced from the ASI, National Museum in Delhi, and AKTC's collections, as well as commissioned pieces. Each object is being displayed for the first time – from replicas of the tomb and its architectural features; manuscripts and books, including a 14th-century tale of Laila Majnun (Humayun often travelled with a *shutur-i-kitabkhana*, a camel-back library); to a series of bronze sculptures by Scottish artist Jill Watson that record the emperor's practice of dressing in colours determined by the planets; and even a warrior's helmet from the 16th or the 17th century. The caption for the helmet states: 'During his travel towards Persia, Humayun and his retinue experienced immense hardship. On one occasion, the emperor had to sacrifice a horse, and cook horse meat in a helmet.'

"Humayun travelled 34,000 kilometres in his lifetime, across India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. He visited 122 cities and this is revealed through [several of the] artefacts, including a dagger belonging to the Iranian Shah Tahmasp, who gave Humayun support to win back his kingdom," says Nanda.

Reminiscent of an inclusive spirit

As I walk deeper into the space, I am greeted by *qawwali* music echoing through the replicated canopy of Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah. Many significant personalities, such as singer Amir Khusrau and poet Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, were drawn to Nizamuddin by Auliya's message of universal love and brotherhood, and objects associated with them are displayed. Rahim was a symbol of the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb (a syncretic fusion of Hindu and Muslim cultural elements), and he took an active interest in Hindu scriptures, translating the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from Sanskrit to Persian. These are displayed along with his couplets and a portrait of him bowing to Lord Vishnu. A Pietra dura marble block is showcased too, with Khusrau's verse carved in Persian by master craftsman Iqbal Ahmad. The singer, as a tribute to the Nizamuddin area, had penned the following verse:

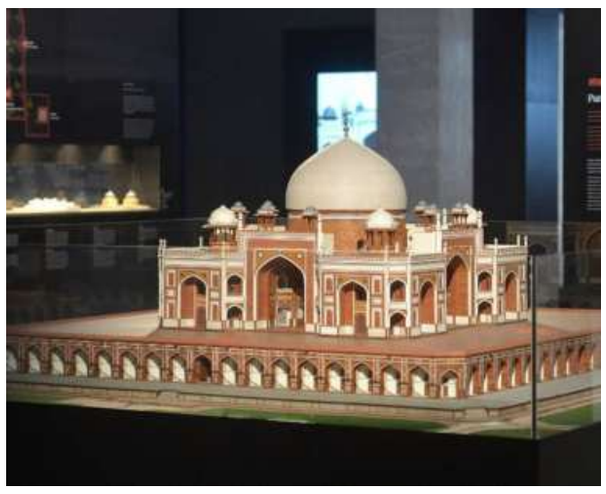
If there is a Paradise on Earth,
It's here, it's here, it's here.

The museum offers a nuanced understanding of the Nizamuddin cultural precinct. Also on display are artefacts dedicated to the Mughal rulers who shaped Nizamuddin, including Dara Shikoh, the heir apparent to Shah Jahan, who translated the *Upanishads* into Persian. The manuscript, titled *Sirr-i-Akbar*, is on view along with calligraphy in his hand. "The museum is of significance today because it is a Mughal monument. It's a reminder of our plurality, our inclusivity. And the fact that we must look at history objectively, and not subjectively. These are valuable points for conversation," concludes A.G.K. Menon, architect and conservation consultant.

The writer is a Delhi-based museum and arts professional.

Auliya's sacred land

In the 13th century, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya chose to establish his *khanqah* (Sufi houses of rest) along a small stretch of land on the banks of the Yamuna, which is now named after the Sufi saint. In the centuries that followed, rulers, poets, and paupers found their way to this sacred landscape. Humayun founded the first Mughal city of Dinpanah just 650 meters away from the Nizamuddin Dargah.



Sunken wonders (Clockwise from above) 'Where the Emperor Rests' gallery; a miniature; architectural model of Humayun's Tomb; model of the domed ceiling; an astrolabe; bronze sculptures of the emperor; and a replica of the *dargah*'s canopy. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

A blend of influences

The models of the tomb highlight traditions of Indian stone carving, metallurgy, tile work, and masonry, and showcase a blend of influences: the use of the *kalash* on the dome (inspired by Hindu temple architecture), *chattris* on the roofs (symbolising Akbar's connection with the Rajputs), and other local motifs that reflect its inclusive nature. Another attraction is the finial of Humayun's Tomb (made of sal wood enclosed in copper utensils) that was knocked down in a sandstorm 10 years ago.

Black and white advantage Photographs from Mysore's Yuvaraja Kanteerava Narasimharaja Wadiyar's 1910 wedding album. (SARMAYA ARTS FOUNDATION)

LIVING ARCHIVE

RECORD OF A PRINCELY WEDDING

In the pages of a 114-year-old album, a photographer discovers what's missing from documentation today

Vinay Aravind

The photo album opens with a panoramic shot of a majestic palace. Over the next few pages, we witness a wedding ceremony unfold in stunning detail – image after image following the nuptial procession through multiple venues and various rituals, and a teeming crowd of onlookers.

I wouldn't blame you for thinking I was describing the Ambani wedding. But my reference is a bit older. Over 100 years old, in fact. I'm looking at the wedding album of Yuvaraja Kanteerava Narasimharaja Wadiyar, the prince of Mysore state, who married Yuvarani Kempu Cheluvamma Niyavaru Urs in June 1910.

In 1910, photography was a rare phenomenon in India. Only the British and Indian elite could afford to get their pictures taken at the (often European-run) photography studios in the cities. It was rarer still for people to have even a single wedding portrait made, let alone a full album's worth. That's what makes the Mysore Yuvaraja's album so extraordinary for the time. Shot by Barton Son & Co and Weile & Wecksler, these images are striking for the level of detail they portray as well as the story they attempt to convey.

Symbol of resilience

Photo albums are carefully edited and curated narratives about the events and the people they document. In this remarkable document, which is part of the archives of Sarmaya Arts Foundation, you'll notice that the palace and its interiors are as important a character as the people in the frame. This is a deliberate choice because the prince's wedding was the first major event to be hosted at Amba Vilas Palace. The now iconic Mysore Palace was being built by British architect Henry Irwin, literally rising from the ashes of the wooden palace that caught fire and burnt down during the wedding of Princess Jayalakshammani in 1897.

The landmark, which took 15 years to rebuild, became a symbol of the kingdom's resilience. In 1910, the new palace was still two years from completion but the scale of its magnificence is apparent in these photos. The wedding – and the album – attempts to portray the undiminished power of the Wadiyars and the kingdom of Mysore.

Viewing this album in 2024, I'm struck by the thoughtful storytelling that has gone into every detail, from the framing of the shots to the order in which the images are arranged. The photographs showcase not just the splendour of the occasion, but also the culture and traditions of the time. We get front-row seats to the important ceremonies that took place over the five-day wedding, from the *kasi yatra* and *nagavalli* ceremony, to the many rituals performed in front of the sacred fire.

Flotsam of our online lives

As a wedding photographer, I cover ceremonies all over the country and abroad. At the end of each assignment, I deliver pictures (often hundreds) in an easy-to-share link. Only a minuscule portion of my clients want a printed wedding album.

As much as I enjoy working in the digital medium, I can't help but feel that there is something lacking in the way we preserve memories today. A digital album doesn't come close to a carefully selected set of images printed and bound in a book that you can hold in your hands and luxuriate in its tactility.

Digital pictures become the flotsam of our life online, part of the ephemeral documentation we are constantly undertaking – all of it to be forgotten until an algorithm decides to resurface a photo as a memory or highlight. But an album is something that lasts, a thing of tangible beauty that you can return to whenever the fancy strikes. It tells your story just the way you'd like it to be remembered. Even 100 years later.

The writer is a documentary-style wedding photographer based in Chennai.

The sixth in a series of columns by sarmaya.in, a digital archive of India's diverse histories and artistic traditions.