THE HINDU
Sunday, April 21, 2024

magazine

backpage
Husain in Venice, in time for the Biennale
GO TO » PAGE 8

INSIDE
Kiran Nadar's ambitious plans for 2026
GO TO » PAGE 4

LITERARY REVIEW
The complex man that was Enzo Ferrari
GO TO » PAGE 3

Track the latest stories via #ThMagazine on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) Get connected » www.thehindu.com

MISSING
WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS

Despite decades of struggle for equality and plenty of political rhetoric about representation, why are there no rising stars or national leaders among India's women politicos in 2024?

Kalpana Sharma

Phase 1 of the General Elections 2024 is over. There is still a long way to go before June 4 when the votes will be counted. Till then, we will be inundated with endless speculation, conjecture, guesses, accusatory statements by opposing sides – and the ritual photographs of women lining up to vote, holding aloft their election identity cards.

That image has become a cliché. But behind it is a story that has changed little, much like the photo itself. It is the story of Indian women and politics, why they are there, why they are missing, and whether anything will change in the near future.

Going by the candidates already in the fray this election, it seems as if change, if any, is incremental. Women constituted only 8% of the candidates in the first phase on April 19. This could change slightly by the end of the election cycle.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, women were only 9% of the candidates. And fewer were elected. In fact, the success rate of women candidates was a little over 10% in 2019.

Also, although there were more women in the current Lok Sabha – 78 – than previously, they added up to only 14%. These low numbers contrast sharply with the increase in women voters. In 2019, their numbers were marginally more than that of men – 67.18% women compared to 67.01% men.

This data, however, masks the other granular details. In several States, this time there are no women candidates. In others, only a handful. For instance, in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, out of the six parliamentary seats, there is only one woman candidate, former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti. In Uttarakhand, of the five seats, there is one woman, a Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate who comes from an erstwhile royal family. In Punjab, so far, only two women have been selected. One is Praneet Kaur, who switched sides from the Congress to the BJP. Kaur is a four-time MP from Patiala and was earlier married to former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh, who left the Congress and joined the BJP in 2022.

Women constituted only 8% of the candidates in phase 1 of the Lok Sabha elections on April 19. In 2019, women were only 9% of the candidates

Skewed numbers

In the bigger States, there are more women contesting, but their percentages are still low. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, 76 women are contesting out of a total of 950 candidates for 39 seats. Although this is an increase from 2019, when 67 women contested, they add up to only 8% of the total. In 2019, only three of the 67 women who stood for elections won.

In Uttar Pradesh, with 80 parliamentary seats, the first phase has seen only seven women contesting compared to 80 men. We will have to wait for the final figures from Bihar, which has 40 parliamentary seats. Rajasthan, with 25 Lok Sabha seats, has 10 women candidates, while Gujarat with 26 seats has so far got eight women contesting although this number could increase. In Kerala, out of 194 candidates contesting 20 seats, only 25 are women.

Will reservation help?

The only two States where political parties have committed to field more women are Odisha (Biju Janata Dal, 33%) and West Bengal (All India Trinamool Congress, AITMC). In 2019, 41% of AITMC's candidates were women.

Will the picture change if the Women's Reservation Act is finally implemented? It was passed last year after being on a slow burner since 2008, when it was introduced.

It could, because the experience of elections so far has shown that barring a couple of exceptions, no political party is willing to commit to ensuring that one third of its candidates are women for either Lok Sabha elections or for State assemblies.

The reasons are obvious. While no political party objected to the introduction of 33% reservation for women in *panchayats* and *nagarpalikas* in the 90s, the idea of this being replicated in State legislatures and the Parliament has been resisted. There is much more power and money at stake, and simply put, men who have dominated electoral politics do not want to cede this space to women. Or any space for that matter. Despite decades of struggle for equality in the widest sense, and loads of political rhetoric about 'Nari Shakti', Indian women continue to fight each step of the way for recognition and for the rights guaranteed to every citizen.

Most of the women who do make it, despite this, are generally from political families, or women who have a public profile that a political party thinks it can leverage to win the seat. In both cases, the women must have financial resources, or the ability to raise resources. In fact, money power has been a major factor in Indian elections for decades. It discourages independent women, or even men, who have been active in the civic and political space, from contesting.

Not all the women elected from political families are silent spectators. They have made their mark and become politicians in their own right. Take Supriya Sule from the Nationalist Congress Party, for instance. She is the daughter of a powerful and experienced politician, Sharad Pawar, and this paved her way into politics. But her interventions in the 17th Lok Sabha have established her as a politician in her own right.

In the past, you could say this also about the late J. Jayalalithaa, whose entry into politics was facilitated by men. But she emerged as a strong politician who could win multiple elections, and served as chief minister of Tamil Nadu six times.

In Tamil Nadu, 76 women are contesting out of a total of 950 candidates for 39 seats. They add up to only 8% of the total

With their own might

We have also seen a few women without political connections who have managed to get elected and have performed exceptionally well as parliamentarians.

Take the feisty Mahua Moitra from the AITMC. As a member of the 17th Lok Sabha, she intervened, asked tough questions, and would not be bullied. For this, she paid a price. Apart from the expected misogynistic comments from some male members of Parliament, and vicious trolling on social media, Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha on charges of allegedly accepting money to ask questions. She is contesting again and her opponent from the BJP is a woman from an erstwhile royal family. It will be one of the more interesting contests to watch.

Moitra follows in the footsteps of other such women, not least Mamata Banerjee, the only woman chief minister in India today. Banerjee has succeeded without any godfathers. Also, while Mayawati's influence is diminished today, one cannot forget this Dalit woman who fought against casteism and sexism to become a factor in Uttar Pradesh politics.

There was also the late Sushma Swaraj, who was outspoken but also had the ability to work with people on the opposite side of the political divide. One of those with whom she had a friendly relationship was Sonia Gandhi, who came into politics by accident, but whose presence in the Congress Party and in Parliament has shown that she has mastered the game of politics.

The only two States where political parties have committed to field more women are Odisha (Biju Janata Dal, 33%) and West Bengal (All India Trinamool Congress). In 2019, 41% of its candidates were women

Women who are already active in politics, in the larger understanding of that term, also make a mark if elected. For instance, in the 1977 elections, held after the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi, when she and the Congress party were defeated, several women were elected as first-timers. Women like Pramila Dandavate, Mrinal Gore and Ahilya Rangnekar from Maharashtra were already veterans in politics and social movements. During their time in Parliament, they worked with other women members cutting across party lines to push through several important laws that affected women, such as the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act, 1986, and made important changes in the rape laws.

In contrast, there are women who have been in the Lok Sabha for several terms, yet their voices are hardly ever heard. These would be the women political parties select because they can win based on their popularity as actors, for instance, or in seats where there had been an erstwhile hereditary ruler. We note their presence only if they are selected again as candidates during an election.

There can be no argument, given the realities of the status of Indian women and of our electoral system, that without reservation, the percentage of women in Parliament and State assemblies will not reach the desired one-third of the total. These bodies are supposed to represent "the people". If half the population does not find representation, then clearly something must change.

The writer is an independent journalist and author.

READ MORE | When campaign trails were carnivals **PAGE 5**

ILLUSTRATION: SOUMYADIP SINHA

ALSO MISSING: WOMEN AT THIS YEAR'S G20

More than 60 countries, including the U.S. and Russia, are going to the polls this year, but in none of these places are women amongst the likely contenders for power

Suhasini Haidar
suhasini.h@thehindu.co.in

This is the year of elections, with more than 60 countries, including some of the world's most prominent democracies – India, U.S., Indonesia, U.K., South Africa – and others like Russia and Iran, all seeing polls in 2024. What stands out too, is that in none of these countries are women amongst the likely contenders for power. Mexico is an exception, with two women in leading positions for the Presidential election in June.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 4

Past perfect Author R. Raj Rao uses a chapter from history to tell a contemporary homosexual love story set in Mumbai. (RAHUL BENDUGADE)

IN CONVERSATION

'Political correctness is boring'

Poet and author R. Raj Rao on tokenistic queer narratives and the self-censorship directed towards gay stories

Saurabh Sharma

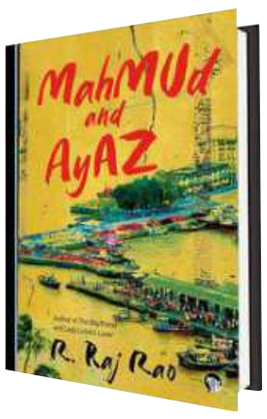
Writer and poet R. Raj Rao's latest novel *Mahmud and Ayaz* (Speaking Tiger) bears his signature style. Unsettling and unapologetic, Rao models the relationship between a young Muslim man and his Hindu domestic help, whom he helps convert to Islam, after the love affair between Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni and his Turkish slave-cum-lover Ayaz. In this interview, the author discusses the queer aesthetics in his works and what compelled him to work on this book. Edited excerpts:

Question: *When did you first read about Sultan Mahmud and Ayaz?*
Answer: Late historian Saleem Kidwai drew my attention to the love story through his seminal book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, which he co-edited with Ruth Vanita. Though Kidwai mentions it more or less in passing, he compares the Mahmud-Ayaz love story with legendary heterosexual ones like Laila-Majnu, Shireen-Farhad, etc., noting that unlike their affairs, which ended in tragedy, Mahmud and Ayaz had a happy ending. So, I used it as a backdrop and connected it with the contemporary homosexual love story set in Mumbai. That said, what really interests me is not pure history, but its connection and relevance to the present.

Q: *Do you believe that stories of queer desire largely remain unsocialised because they challenge the cis-heteronormative status quo?*
A: That's absolutely true. Regardless of the reading down of Section 377, there remains censorship – even self-censorship – towards queer stories. For *Mahmud and Ayaz*, I travelled to Somnath – Sultan Mahmud and Ayaz made several trips to that town exactly 1,000 years ago – and Kashmir, where the latter part of the novel is set. But that was all I could do besides relying on libraries and the Internet to research for my novel. So, I can't say that everything that I'd have liked to include in the book was readily accessible.

Q: *From its painfully slow development in the early 90s, has queer literature been mainstreamed now?*
A: There are more books and movies now, but they're also very tokenistic. Queer writing needs a particular kind of queer aesthetics. Unless one is really able to formulate it, it doesn't work because queer writing isn't the same as mainstream writing. There's more to it than the genders of the lovers being the same. I also believe that political correctness in literature is boring. In day-to-day life, one tries to be politically correct but if one does that in fiction, the work turns out to be extremely didactic and preachy.

Q: *In the novel, you explore how HIV-AIDS is unfairly and almost synonymously linked to queer lives. Is the condition used as a weapon to marginalise queer people? Additionally, can you share AIDS-themed works by other writers that people should read to sensitise themselves?*
A: Mahmud reads several AIDS-themed books in the last chapter of the novel, and my list would be more or less the same as his. Here, AIDS becomes a metaphor for defeat. I certainly don't intend to stereotype it as a gay disease. Although the point-of-view is unapologetic about the radicalisation of minorities, and homosexuality itself becomes a metaphor for dissent, the forces out to crush dissent are too powerful for it to succeed. Those forces are represented by good health against which AIDS, for which there is no cure, is helpless. But AIDS in the novel is also the modern-day equivalent of the condition that ultimately took the life of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. It's an illness that's stigmatised, unlike any other fatal condition that invokes sympathy. It serves to ensure that the battlelines between the co-opted and the outlawed are not blurred.



The interviewer is a Delhi-based queer writer and freelance journalist.

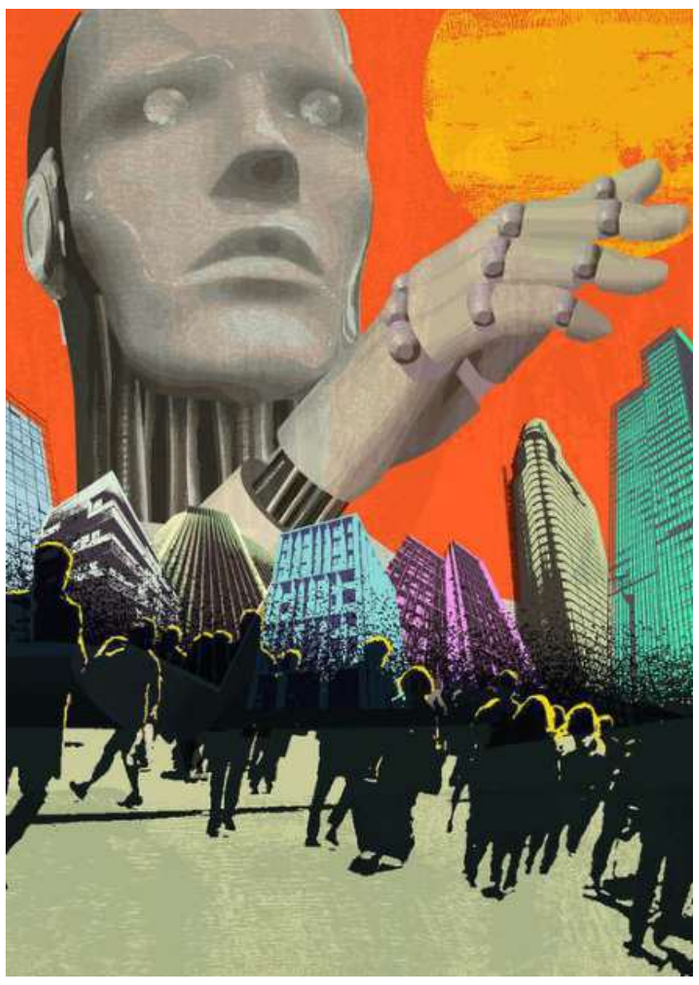
Watch | Interview with **R. Raj Rao** on **magazine.thehindu.com**

DOSE OF STRANGE

Bora Chung's latest collection, flawlessly translated from the Korean, is speculative fiction at its imaginative best

GETTY IMAGES

Your Utopia
Bora Chung, trs Anton Hur
Hachette
₹599



Sheila Kumar

Bora Chung's *Cursed Bunny* was shortlisted for the 2022 International Booker Prize. In this new offering, titled *Your Utopia*, and immaculately translated by Anton Hur, we meet a host of characters, some human, some decidedly not, all imbued with strong streaks of strangeness.

One hesitates to categorise this collection of shorts as pure science fiction; there is a wry cocking of the snook at human laws and constructs. There is the deconstruction of corporate monopolies, land grabs, ecological missteps, the misuse of advanced technology, of love, loss, anger, dismay. If dystopia seems to be the central theme, it's an ironical touch given that the title has the opposite word – 'utopia' – in it, it is a dystopia that though woven through with surreal elements, is relatable to us. Though decidedly weird, nothing is really absurd. This is basically speculative fiction at its most creative, imaginative. Every robot is quite human, displaying compassion and curiosity.

And yet, that element of strangeness persists. We meet people working at the Center for Immortality Research, with most of the senior staff displaying very mortal pettiness. We watch as people get suddenly and startlingly infected with cannibalism. We root (pardon the pun) for a species of plant-human hybrids as they try to save their patch of land from what else but humans. We are moved when an AI-enabled elevator develops a fondness for a woman suffering from the onset of Parkinson's. We recoil in horror as a suspicious husband gets more than he bargained for, when he tries to keep track of his wife's movements. We look on as Korea's conservative society heaps harassment and condemnation on its LGBTQIA+ people. We observe a dream-catcher at work on a drug mafia queen's dreams.

The changing world

Quite like the curate's egg, some of the tales are moving, disturbing, sweetly sentimental and stay with the reader for a while after they are done reading. Yet others seem to move at a very slow pace or follow a convoluted plot. After the second story in this collection, the reader comes to expect the twist in the tale, and starts to second-guess the story, starts to look for that twist with enjoyable anticipation. The reader also begins to speculate if some of the strangeness is an allegory for our current way of life. Like all of civilisation trying to eat each other. Like, the purest form of communication is one-sided info dumps. Like, if the world I was designed for has changed so much, in what way must I myself change?

The translation is so flawless, something of the inherent Korean-ness in some of the stories gets lost in the process. However, viewed as global stories, this lot jumps over that stile with flying colours. And this reviewer quite appreciated the fact that several Korean words appear without italics, and without a glossary at the end of the book either; the curious will need to go look up those words.

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

Scan the QR code for a conversation with Bora Chung as part of *The Hindu*'s new digital series called 'Reading Asia'. It includes Chung's list of five best books from Korea.

A digital everafter for cities in fiction

A new website documents literary landscapes to serve as record-keepers of changing times and places

Saumya Kalia
saumya.k@thehindu.co.in

Memory markers Calcutta in the 60s; (left) Divya Ravindranath and (right) Apoorva Saini. (GETTY IMAGES AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Calcutta, 1950s. What do you remember of the city? Wide boulevards, crisscrossing tramlines, imposing white facades, an echo of the British empire? A close approximation but think again. Do you remember *it*? The vagrants sleeping under trees. Freedom fighter Hariram Goenka's statue in Curzon Park, its gaze affixed at Raj Bhavan. The calm and quiet of the park, where time famously seemed to stop. In his 1962 novel *Chowringhee*, Sankar preserved Calcutta's stories, and its contradictions. He chronicled the city through its people and places, sounds and smells, dreams and disappointments.

An iteration of this Calcutta finds mention in 'Cities in Fiction', a public digital archive set up by Divya Ravindranath and Apoorva Saini. "Fiction can hold memory and history in a very distinct way," says Ravindranath, an urban studies scholar at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements. The archive documents real places in South Asia, of the past and present, in literature. One sees portraits of Amitav Ghosh's Sunderbans and Rohinton Mistry's Mumbai; a rendering of Bama's Tamil Nadu, Krishna Sobti's rural Punjab and Nilanjana S. Roy's Delhi. There are more than 350-plus entries, going back and forth in time, documenting the churn of cities over decades and centuries.

The archive sees literary landscapes as "record-keepers" of "major demographic shifts, cultural, political and archaeological changes, urban planning, landscaping, ecology, and almost all aspects of life". Imagination is their chosen tool to "rebel, rebuild, remember, grieve, or celebrate" several snapshots through time, all at once, the website states.

The role of fiction

As an experiment, Ravindranath introduced Tamil writer Sujatha's short story 'Nagaram' as reading material for a class on urban health. The story of a mother and daughter travelling to a city in search of treatment, and returning later to their village, defeated. "This short story opened a very interesting conversation on health systems – it allowed us to explore so many different themes at once," she says. Ravindranath involved writer-editor Saini in the project, and the two have run the website independently from last September. The database lists places and the literary works in which they appear, along with the names of the authors, dominant themes, language, date of publication and so on. The archive has evolved to include interviews with authors who have centred the landscape in their storytelling.

There are many ways to document a city. Why look at fiction? "Stories rooted in a place pulse and seethe with context, and fiction is important for its porosity," says Saini. This combination "helps us to make sense of our individual and collective 'social totality', otherwise unrepresentable".

Nilanjana S. Roy, whose book *Black River* is in the database, agrees. "Fiction fills in our imaginations, makes us more than just strangers to one another; or at least, that is one of its promises," she says. Her rendering of Delhi's edgelands in the book acknowledged "the web of relationships that Delhi both enabled in the 1980s and 1990s", seeing beyond nostalgia the contradictions and "invisible steel fences" that sliced people and cities apart.

A handy resource

The archive is crowdsourced and relies on readers to light its map with new entries. Over time, Ravindranath and Saini see the archive evolving as a pedagogical tool, to add colour to impersonal academic reading and policy deliberations to "help understand theory better". Saini also envisions it to be a "handy resource for writers and translators". The imagination doesn't stop there. The archive insists on rethinking cities as animate landscapes; as they grow, their aspirations and identities grow too. 'Cities in Fiction' hopes to eventually reflect these reverberations, albeit deliberately and organically, responding to the impulse of imagination and contribution, Ravindranath says. Cities require care, and their chronicles must be pursued with a similar prudence.

Gaps in the statute

Mathew John's book moves beyond a framing of the Constitution as an inherently progressive document

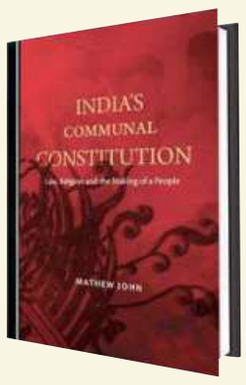
Gautam Bhatia

Mathew John's *India's Communal Constitution* is a thoughtful exploration of the gap between the Indian Constitution's "liberal promise of equal liberties" to all citizens, and actual constitutional design and practice, which has often "cast the identity of the Indian people along religious lines." John frames his argument as a descriptive and diagnostic one, aiming to excavate how the "communal orientation of the Indian Constitution ... [exerts a] drag ... on its liberal goals."

As is now well-established in scholarly literature, British rule in India was marked by a vision of the Indian people as divided into - and defined by - their communal identities. This came through specifically in the colonial doctrine of non-interference, or - as John puts it - "tolerance" of communally-identified personal laws. However, this had the effect of often creating the very communities that it was meant to identify, and establishing rigid borders that did not exist previously. John argues that in the post-constitutional era, the Supreme Court's "essential religious practices" test has continued to serve the same purpose: that is, "identifying religion through its essential truths is ... a conceptual frame that holds together ideas about India, its people, and the problem of establishing government for its diverse peoples." While the essential religious practices test has been questioned - most notably in both the majority and the dissenting opinions in the Sabarimala judgment - it continues to hold the field, and to shape definitions of community through specific doctrine.

If the essential religious practices test is one side of the coin, "personal law" is the other. John explores how the colonial period was responsible for the construction of "Anglo-Hindu law," which had a dubious basis (at best) in the realities of social custom. However, it was precisely this construction - and, accompanying it, Muslim law - that endured even in the post-constitutional period, primarily through the judgment of the Bombay High Court in *Narasu Appa Mali*, which held that "personal laws" were immune from judicial scrutiny. The Supreme Court's failure to overturn *Narasu Appa Mali* - despite having the opportunity to do so in the Triple Talaq case - reflects how "the Communal Constitution frames the Indian people in axiomatically organised scriptural or doctrinal terms across different aspects or domains of the Constitution ... in addition, the Communal Constitution also interlocks different parts of the Constitution to collectively reiterate the Communal Constitution."

A fascinating third chapter of the book explores the construction of minority rights in both the colonial and post-colonial periods. The unity of the nation-state was essentially posited by the Indian nationalists as a counter-point to British justifications for refusing to grant India independence, on the basis that minorities required British protection. While the Indian Constitution did eventually enshrine a set of minority rights under Articles 29 and 30, the social construction of the majority and minority remained on explicitly communal lines. Thus, when certain communities - such as the Ramakrishna Mission or the Swaminarayana sect - claimed a status apart from Hinduism, and demanded minority rights protection, the Supreme Court rejected these claims. As John notes, "the court in both decisions draped an overarching axiomatic and doctrinal frame on Hindu belief and practice and held that the Swaminarayans and the Ramakrishna Mission were part of this conception of the Hindu." Crucially, "this opinion stood at odds with the self-presentation of these groups as distinct communities in a manner entirely consistent with India's millennial traditions of pluralism and diversity." This bears out John's claim that the communal constitution consists of a web of interlocking design and practice features.



India's Communal Constitution: Law, Religion, and the Making of a People
Mathew John
Cambridge University Press
₹995

The caste lens

The final substantive chapter examines caste through the lens of the communal constitution; and, in particular, the challenges to the Scheduled Castes Order, and the Court's refusal to extend caste-based affirmative action to converts out of Hinduism. John refers to this as the "sacralisation" of caste, or an approach that understands caste discrimination in terms of pre-defined and pre-fixed religious communities.

Through these carefully chosen examples, *India's Communal Constitution* encourages us to think more deeply about the communal underpinnings of Indian constitutional design and practice. In doing so, John's book joins a recent set of works that have sought to move beyond a framing of the Constitution as an inherently progressive document, whose workings have been stymied through the many failures of the political class and of the judiciary; rather, it encourages us to focus on the design of the Constitution itself, especially by locating court judgments within a longer colonial and post-colonial tradition. While John frames his enquiry as a diagnostic one, it is undoubtedly critical in nature, and compels all of us to take a deeper, and more critical look at the Constitution itself.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based lawyer and the author of, among others, The Transformative Constitution: A Radical Biography in Nine Acts.

Head up Enzo Ferrari at the 1966 Grand Prix of Italy. (GETTY IMAGES)

LIFE AT THE LIMIT

The Enzo Ferrari who emerges from this biography is a complex man, a mix of the ingenuous and the ingenious

Suresh Menon

In the mid-1990s, when I was reporting Formula One races in Europe, the most impressive sight in the sport was the one-lakh-plus Ferrari fans - called the *tifosi* - cheering at the San Marino Grand Prix. Everyone was in red. A non-Italian driver in a Ferrari was a bigger hero than an Italian driver in any other car - the team, not the individual, mattered.

The Ferrari is more than the sum of its race victories, just as its founder Enzo Ferrari was more than his sporting, entrepreneurial and managerial selves. The machine's early association with death soon made way for its status as a symbol of everything stylish and sexy. As Luca di Montezemolo, Ferrari's president and CEO for 23 years said: "We don't sell a car, we sell a dream."

Enzo, who died at 90 (in 1988) wrote his autobiography, *My Terrible Joys*, in 1962. In recent years biographies have appeared at a fair clip, including this comprehensive one by Luca Dal Monte, a one-time Ferrari employee. He told the *New York Times*, "In Italy, there was the Pope and then there was Enzo."

The early years

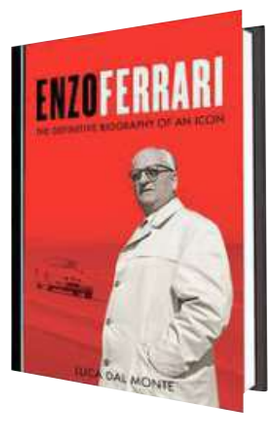
Enzo lived through the amateur years of motorsports on miserable roads in the 1920s, through the inauguration of Formula One in 1950, the glamour of the 1960s and '70s and the technological advancements of the 1990s.

Ferrari's record in Formula One - 16 constructors' titles and 15 drivers' championships - is unmatched. Some of the greatest drivers won world championships in Ferraris: Michael Schumacher, Niki Lauda, Alberto Ascari, Juan Manuel Fangio. Lauda made the most profound statement about the sport when he said the aim was to win by going as slowly as possible.

It was not a philosophy easily digested. Between 1955 and 1971, eight drivers were killed driving Ferraris; Enzo was likened by a Vatican newspaper to Saturn who consumed his own sons.

In 1957, a Ferrari ploughed into the crowd at the road race in Mille Miglia, killing both drivers and nine spectators - a scene picturised with horror and fascination in the Netflix movie *Ferrari*, based on the 1991 biography *Enzo Ferrari: The Man, the Cars, the Races, the Machine* by Brock Yates.

That race is described thus: "The notion of fast cars racing on real roads, around twisting mountain hairpins and through narrow city streets, was the embodiment of every man's fantasy to charge down an open road flat out, unencumbered by laws or moral and social impediments of any kind. For all its insanity, the Mille Miglia encompassed an entire lifetime condensed into a few hours. To have competed in it meant that a man had faced down the spectre of violent death for half a day..."



Enzo Ferrari: The Definitive Biography of an Icon
Luca Dal Monte
Hachette India
₹2,232

'The assassin'

The wife of one of Ferrari's drivers always referred to him as "the assassin" after the crash. Enzo was devastated, and wanted to quit motor racing; along with the organiser of the race he had become the most hated man in Italy. Ferrari's first American driver, Phil Hill, said when he left the team, "I wasn't his type, not gung-ho enough. I wasn't willing to die for Enzo Ferrari."

Yet, the successes and failures had begun innocuously enough. Dal Monte's year-by-year narrative starts with the birth and ends with the death of his subject. At ten, Enzo decided that racing would be his calling after his father took him to see one. But even as he was winning races, his heart was in the manufacture of cars and in the making of a racing team. He succeeded spectacularly at both, with a mixture of skill, instinct and the ability to manipulate both people and events.

His love life flowered; he had a son who was seen as his successor but died at 24; he had another son by one of his lovers who did succeed him. Dal Monte quotes a newspaper which called Enzo "a practical value-increaser of his abilities." It was apt.

Complex personality

The Enzo who emerges from the book is a complex man, a mix of the ingenuous and the ingenious. He read Stendhal and Leopardi and loved Kafka. He dealt with the fascist government in Italy for business reasons, as he dealt with the occupying forces. He saved lives, protecting them from the Nazis. He himself was on the hitlist for assisting the resistance.

Dal Monte's research is exhaustive, and occasionally exhausting. Enzo is much written about; besides, he also shaped the stories he would want future biographers to tell.

Dal Monte gives us the standard biography and adds enough new material to make it the definitive one. But such breadth and granularity comes with a challenge: keeping track of the names and occupations and car models is a bit like trying to remember everything in a Russian novel when you read one as a boy or girl. Still, worth it.

The reviewer's latest book is Why Don't You Write Something I Might Read?.

Room for optimism

How capitalist economies can reform and be serious about tackling climate change

Sudhirendar Sharma

Modern economic growth and rising demand for goods at relatively lower prices have led to inevitable exploitation of nature, and consequent climate change. There is no denying that unfettered capitalism has contributed to over extraction of natural resources and increasing emission of greenhouse gases. Should uncontrolled capitalism persist till 2050, the aim of restricting average global temperature within 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels may remain a pipe dream. Emitting billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide will see continued climate extremes leading to the loss of lives and livelihoods. No wonder, climate emergencies have become frequent.

Many environmentalists believe that the long-term solution to tackling climate crises is to uproot capitalism because "we cannot solve the problem by what caused it". But with time short for averting catastrophic climate change, the possibility of putting a new economic system in place may seem improbable.

Transform, progress

In *Climate Capitalism*, Akshat Rathi explores how to transform the world's dominant economic system while ensuring that the wheels of progress don't come to a halt. From renewable power to green cement, electric cars to carbon capture, emission-reducing technologies have tossed new opportunities for private capital and government regulations to work in tandem. The process to harness the forces of capitalism to achieve zero emissions has already begun. Although these are still early days for capitalism to wear a natural look for addressing impending climatic concerns, a faint ray of optimism seems to have been generated.

It has been over two decades that industrial capitalism has been critiqued for neither pricing nor accounting its negative externalities. It liquidates natural capital and calls it profit, undervaluing both natural resources and living systems. Rathi chronicles the political manoeuvrings that made possible China's lead in building fleets of electric cars, India's success in promoting solar power, America's success with reversing climate damages in the oil industry, and the Danish quest for pushing wind turbines. All such initiatives combined, it has been estimated that 2% of global GDP is enough to make the carbon dioxide problem go away. Far from being linear, however, there are disruptive elements that play upon power politics to sully the path to zero emissions. Politics, technology and finance must align in the right direction to bring about change, says Rathi.

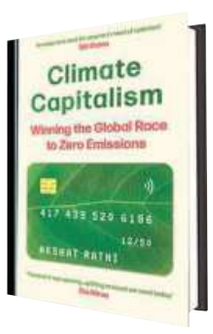
Shine on Solar panels in the Pavagada Solar Park, Karnataka. (GETTY IMAGES)

To work as a unit

With climate emergencies threatening life, public perception on the global climatic accords and green initiatives remains grossly sceptical. Holding an optimist position, Rathi argues that we cannot insulate ourselves from the transformation coming our way. From bureaucrats to billionaires, doers to enforcers, there are multiple actors on the capitalist platform who would need to bridge differences to reform the economic system and help shape a climate-conducive capitalism.

Passionate capitalists fear that policy reforms may kill the market. But policy shifts in favour of climate-oriented technologies and investments have created new business opportunities. Whether such efforts add up to make an impact at global scale is yet to be fully ascertained. Some trends are noticeable, the U.K. economy grew by 60% between 1990 and 2017 while its carbon emissions declined by 40%. The task lies in replicating and escalating such transformative processes and practices. Although climate financing may have been slow, the Paris Agreement has triggered a process of change.

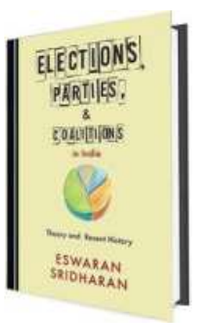
Climate Capitalism conveys an optimistic narrative which contends that it's cheaper to save the world than destroy it. What kindles a ray of hope is that capitalists themselves have woken up to both the cost of inaction and the opportunity of action.



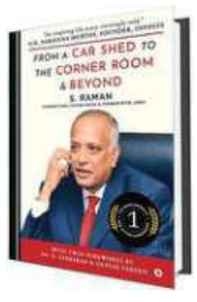
Climate Capitalism
Akshat Rathi
John Murray/
Hachette
₹699

The reviewer is an independent writer, researcher and academic

BROWSER



Elections, Parties, and Coalitions in India: Theory and Recent History
Eswaran Sridharan
Permanent Black
₹1,095
This volume traces India's recent experience with elections, parties, and coalitions. Ten papers cover two broad areas – elections and voting behaviour, and political parties and coalition politics. They explain the evolution of key elections and shifts in voting patterns in the post-Congress-dominance period since 1989.



From a Car Shed to the Corner Room and Beyond
S. Raman
Notion Press
₹599
In his memoir, S. Raman, former Chairman and Managing Director of Canara Bank, imparts important leadership lessons. Former RBI Governor D. Subbarao writes in the Foreword that Raman faced every situation with equanimity, and the story of his rise to the top of the banking order from humble beginnings will inspire many.

CONTINUED FROM » PAGE 1

As a result, at the G20 in Brazil this November, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni could be the only other woman leader of a country, while European Commission president Ursula Von Der Leyen would be at the table, depending on how she fares in the EU elections this summer. The previous decade actually fared better in terms of gender representation at the G20 high table: Germany's Merkel, Argentina's Kirchner, Australia's Gillard, Brazil's Rousseff and IMF Chief Lagarde all attended the G20 together in 2011 and 2012.

While the past century has seen a number of women occupying top positions, they make up only 23% of parliamentarians worldwide, leaving a whopping gender gap of over 50%. As of January 2024, there are only 26 countries where women serve as heads of state and/or government (in two countries they are in both positions). At this rate, UN Women calculates that "gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years". It is not, however, the numbers of women in leadership roles, but the selective treatment they face when in positions of power that is possibly the most discouraging factor.

When she stood up to make her famous "misogyny speech" in parliament in 2012, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard couldn't have been clearer, or angrier about the treatment. The parliament speaker at the time had been accused of sexually harassing a junior, but the attack by then opposition leader (subsequently Prime Minister) Tony Abott was focused on Gillard directly, admonishing her for covering up the speaker's crimes, and even accusing her of sexism.

"The Leader of the Opposition says 'do something'; well he could do something himself if he wants to deal with sexism in this Parliament. He could change his behaviour, he could apologise for all his past statements, he could apologise for standing next to signs describing me as a witch and a bi***," Gillard said, detailing some of the abuse hurled at her.

ALSO MISSING: WOMEN AT THIS YEAR'S G20

Tackling double standards

The speech was hailed around the world, and even turned into a song. Gillard's words resounded with women in public office everywhere, who face a double standard when it comes to how they are reported on, expected to behave and competed with. For instance, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, just 37 when she assumed office in 2017, received much praise for her work on battling online extremist radicalisation with the 'Christchurch Call' after a deadly terror attack, but as her government faltered in its excessive lockdowns during the pandemic, the criticism of Ardern was harsh, with commentators and fellow politicians hinting that her role as PM required more time than the young mother, only the second leader in office globally to deliver a child (Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto was the first), could offer. As she stepped down voluntarily in 2023, Ardern said, "I am human. Politicians are human. We give all that we can, for as long as we can, and then it's time... I know what this job takes, and I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice."

When Finland's Sanna Marin, the world's youngest Prime Minister, who assumed office in 2019 at the age of 34, stepped down, also last year, it was clear that the "scandal" around a party she hosted, and videos of her dancing, played a big part in bringing her down, something a male leader may not have faced. That these are even issues in more open western societies raises questions about how women in traditional societies would fare.

Tokenistic leaderships

In South Asia, women have been at the helm of their countries at different times – yet many would dismiss their rise as the result of "tokenism" in nominated positions, or because of family connections that bring them into politics. Sri Lanka's Sirimavo Bandaranaike may have been the world's first woman prime minister in 1960, but she only took office after her husband S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's assassination in 1959, and her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga became leader of her party and then PM after her husband was gunned down. Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Bangladesh's current PM Sheikh Hasina are all similar examples of leadership bred in the bone and pushed up the ladder due to personal tragedies. Their worries about sexism, however, remain the same as for women in other parts of the world. In interviews, Bhutto often described how she went secretly to a hospital to deliver her first child as she was worried that party rivals would put an interim government in place and replace her if she went on maternity leave. "The next day I was back on the job, reading government papers and signing government files," she wrote in her memoirs.

With rising populism and masculine alpha leaders in vogue from the U.S. to India and Russia, women today have an even harder task convincing voters that they can be as good, and even better, at some aspects of leadership. At least two studies quoted in a CNN report found that female-led countries fared better during the pandemic, and tenures of women leaders co-related to a nearly 7% increase in GDP in comparison to male leaders.

The truth is, leadership is much more about individual qualities, rather than gender, but the obstacles in the paths of women leaders placed by their peers and society, make it necessary for the global community to put a greater premium on bringing more women into the political field and consequently into power. Their current predicament was summed up best by American Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, who died in 2023 after a distinguished career in politics. When asked how she could be a mother and a Congresswoman, she famously said, "I have a brain and a uterus, and I use both." When pressed further about whether she would run for Congress "as a woman", she asked, "What choice do I have?"

World leaders (Clockwise from left) Australia's Julia Gillard; Mexico's Xóchitl Gálvez; Finland's Sanna Marin, Sri Lanka's Chandrika Kumaratunga; New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern; Mexico's Claudia Sheinbaum; and Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto.

Flashback (L-R) NTR in his Chaitanya Ratham; wall drawings in Tamil Nadu; and Indira Gandhi on a *padyatra* in 1976. (THE HINDU ARCHIVES)

NOSTALGIA

WHEN CAMPAIGN TRAILS WERE CARNIVALS

Seasoned journalists look back at a pre-tech era when charismatic leaders and festival-like canvassing won votes

Sumit Bhattacharjee
sumit.b@thehindu.co.in

Since 1952, India has had 17 general elections. The 18th is underway – unfolding in seven phases. Over the years, the country has seen days of coalition politics and of absolute majority. Through it all, the election campaign has been a great unifier. Loud, colourful, and playing to the masses, politicians use every tool at their disposal to win over voters.

In the early 1980s, I remember N.T. Rama Rao, the founder of Telugu Desam Party, shifting his image from that of a matinee idol to a politician. He was one of the first to customise a van – his old Chevrolet, which he named Chaitanya Ratham – to canvass. A far cry from the vanity vehicles that today's politicians use (think Rahul Gandhi's 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' Volvo bus with its hydraulic lift), it was still a star attraction. Youngsters would throng the van, as there was talk that it was customised to include the amenities of a single-room apartment.

NTR would stop beside a village pond or tube well to have his bath. Rural folks who idolised him as Lord Rama and Krishna – the roles he played on the big screen – would prostrate before him, and perform '*arathi*'. He would oblige them and hand out dry fruits as *prasadam*. Then he would park his van in the village square for the night. It is said to have logged 75,000 km.

Things changed, however, in the late '90s. The Election Commission of India's new regulations coming into effect post T.N. Seshan, in 1996, meant that the carnival atmosphere slowly began seeping out of campaigns. Today, the Great Indian Democratic Festival is much more sanitised. The action has moved to social media, with every politician and party hiring agencies to run their campaigns. The emphasis is also on road shows, with huge crowds, large convoys, and high decibel music.

Senior journalists look back at a pre-tech era when charismatic leaders, great oratory skills, and a personal touch won over voters.

Fun after 8 p.m.

A.S. Panneerselvan, former Readers' Editor of *The Hindu*, recalls elections being like carnivals. "When we covered elections as young journalists, the fun would start after 8 p.m. Now, campaigns have to end at 10 p.m. Those were the days when political parties would hold musical concerts and stage plays," he says, remembering how plays such as *Parasakthi*, by Tamil scholar Pavalar Balasundaram, had a strong social message (on the abuse of religion and the State's apathy), during the 1952 elections. "I have seen plays by M.G. Ramachandran and Karunanidhi. They were creative and high-voltage, written for the campaign, and had a direct impact on voters. All that is gone now."

In the tussle between accountability and restrictions, tools such as poetry, song and musical nights have faded into oblivion.

Orators and electrifying speeches

Senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, who has been covering the elections since 1989, recalls a greater sense of public involvement back in the day. "We would see a lot of posters, hoardings and pamphlets being distributed. The entire country used to wear a festive look," he says. "Once I followed George Fernandes on his campaign trail. He wooed voters with his simplicity. Wearing the traditional kurta-pyjama, he would sit with them, have tea and deliberate on local issues."

Then there were leaders who had the ability to connect with the masses at large public meetings. Bal Thackeray and Atal Bihari Vajpayee always stood out, he says. "In one election, sometime in the mid-90s, I was covering a Shiv Sena rally at Shivaji Park in Mumbai. The moment Thackeray came on stage the atmosphere became electrifying. He mesmerised the crowd with his oratory skills and witty punchlines. Atal *ji* was the same."

Larger-than-life personalities

Journalist Monideepa Banerjie recalls witnessing the draw of a personality when she covered Jayalalithaa in 1986. The actor-turned-politician was seeking re-election from Bodinayakanur, in Tamil Nadu's Theni district. "People from the neighbouring villages would rush to get a glimpse of her. In those days, the crowds used to be smaller and the meetings simpler. There was a sense of intimacy between the leader and the people," she says. "Now, meetings are larger and more sanitised."

When voters stated their intent

Once upon a time, the response to a campaign was often a good indicator of the election trend. During her 1977 general election coverage, Neerja Chowdhury recalls, "The people in Delhi were silent. There were murmurs of 'Let the election come and we will teach Ms. Indira Gandhi a lesson'."

A meeting in western Uttar Pradesh comes to mind. "Actor Dilip Kumar had come to campaign for her. The moment his speech was over, and Ms. Gandhi came out to speak, we saw the crowd leaving. It was a clear indicator; even she sensed it," Chowdhury says. This is not the case today, with orchestrated crowds. The spontaneity is missing.

Another memory of strong crowd reactions is from V.P. Singh's campaign. "In 1989, Singh had come out of Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government, which had 414 seats in the Lok Sabha. He took on its might by assimilating all the non-Congress parties to forge the National Front. People across Bihar and U.P. would stand on the road, even in the dead of the night, with lamps to get a glimpse of him. They wanted change and it was evident in the election air."

Race for pink lips

Elections today are a far cry from what they used to be, says B. Kolappan. *The Hindu*'s senior deputy editor, who has been covering elections for close to three decades, remembers a time when wall writing — reserving boundary walls to use as canvases for slogans and graffiti — was an art, and elections were like festivals.

"The silence of villages would be shattered by megaphones atop Ambassador cars, announcing: '*Periyorkalae thaimarkale, ungal ponnana vaakukalai enkalukku tharungal* [Elders and mothers, poll your golden votes for us]'. No matter the political party, they would all start their campaign with the same words," he reminisces. "As children in the early '80s, we would chase after the slow-moving cars, equipped with a generator in the boot, raising dust in the streets of our village, Parakkai. The campaigner would punctuate his speech with snatches of film songs. The AIADMK would play songs from MGR's movies, the Congress from Sivaji Ganesan's; and the DMK from a specially-recorded collection in the voice of Nagore E.M. Hanifa."

But the children, he says, were more interested in collecting the pamphlets. "They were printed on cheap paper in various colours; pink was our favourite. We would chew on them to stain our mouths pink. It was free lipstick! Then we would poke our tongues out to see the colour, and wait for the next car."

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

Ever enterprising A Bharti Kher from *Seven Contemporaries*; model for the new KNMA; Kiran Nadar; and works by F.N. Souza and M.F. Husain at *Stretched Terrains*. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

KIRAN NADAR ISN'T SLOWING DOWN

Recently awarded the Padma Shri, the art patron is on a mission to promote Indian artists, both in Venice and at an ambitious new museum

Georgina Maddox

ALSO READ | Husain, an outsider in 2024's India? **PAGE 8**

One of the driving missions of KNMA is to raise awareness about Indian and South Asian artists and to make art accessible to diverse audiences

KIRAN NADAR
Founder, KNMA

Kiran Nadar has always been singular – standing out in her designer Shantanu & Nikhil outfits, with her ready smile, and her effortless poise. Even while zipping around on an electric scooter, handpainted by London-based artist Raqib Shaw, at the India Art Fair earlier this year.

Now, the art collector, philanthropist and founder of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) is also the recipient of the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian recognitions. But she remains as accessible as ever. I am reminded of the day I first met her, in 2010, when she excitedly announced the launch of KNMA Noida. The inaugural exhibition, *Open Doors*, curated by the museum's director and chief curator Roobina Karode, presented the art Nadar had collected over the last two decades.

She is as animated when we catch up recently over a phone call to discuss KNMA's next chapter – a new museum that is due to open in 2026-27. "It will be near the Indira Gandhi International Airport, and is being designed by Adjaye Associates [the firm of renowned Ghanaian-British architect Sir David Adjaye]," she says.

In Venice, Nadar and the KNMA team are unveiling an immersive show on M.F. Husain to coincide with the 60th edition of the Venice Biennale. Curated by Karode, the sensory exhibition is an intimate one that builds the narrative through the modernist's paintings, photographs, prints, texts and poems. "We are honoured to bring this ambitious project, of the life and work of Husain, to Venice, at the moment when the world's artists are coming together to create a tapestry that binds us as a global community," she says. "One of the driving missions of KNMA is to raise awareness about Indian and South Asian artists and to make art accessible to diverse audiences. So, we are proud to offer this exhibition free of charge, so that as many people as possible can know the lasting impact of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century."

'20 exhibitions on opening night'

As excited as she is about Venice, Nadar is keener to discuss her new project, which will be located on a 100,000 square metre site on National Highway 8, which connects Delhi and Mumbai. "We will have an auditorium, a café that will be open to all, a fine dining restaurant with a curated menu, a cultural centre – that will showcase performance, music, dance, cinema and other forms of the visual – and a store selling art books, posters, postcards and other design knick-knacks." She pauses before delivering a surprise. "There will be 20 exhibitions on the opening night because we will have that many galleries!" To meet the demands, not only does she plan to bring more curators on board, but the museum will host guest curators.

"While things will not change at Noida, the Saket museum will take on a new character," she adds. "It will become a residency space with a library and alternative projects and art practices being supported. We will approach it after the new space is launched." Meanwhile, on the roster for 2024 is an exhibition featuring photographer Dayanita Singh, followed by a grand retrospective for painter and poet Gulam Mohammed Sheikh in 2025.

"I will always be proud of the way we started Saket with the Nasreen Mohamedi show, which was taken up by the MET Royal. It was a major event and the start of global recognition," shares Nadar. "We then hosted an exhibition of seven important women artists: Anita Dube, Bharti Kher, Dayanita Singh, Ranjani Shettar, Sheba Chhachhi, Sheela Gowda and Sonia Khurana [in 2013]. It also included works by [Hungarian-Indian painter] Amrita Sher-Gil. It was something that was needed in India at the time."

Shows that made an impact

An exhibition she holds dear is a 2016 solo on Himmat Shah. "I pick this show as important because it had an artist who had not been 'celebrated' with the pomp and vigour he deserved," she says. Also on Nadar's list: Vivan Sundaram's retrospective. "I was close to Vivan; we were friends," she says, remembering the contemporary artist who passed away last March at the age of 79 in New Delhi.

Among other significant exhibitions, she recalls with pride is the show *Stretched Terrains* featuring the three progressives: F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza and M.F. Husain. She also talks fondly about Subodh Gupta's 33-foot *Mushroom Cloud*, which was installed in the atrium of the Saket gallery. Now in storage, "we will re-install his work at the new museum".

Nadar states she never dreamed that the KNMA would have such a big project. "I had thought of opening a small museum in Noida to share my collection of 500 works with the public, but it has just grown to such a proportion that I will be able to show my vintage collection, my miniatures, and our Modern and Contemporary collections."

The writer is a critic-curator by day, and a visual artist by night.

ILLUSTRATION: SASHA

ALLEGEDLY

Teach yourself some manners

One way to do that is by copying the Japanese tea ceremony shown in the web-series, *Shogun*

Is there a politeness index that ranks countries – just like there is for democracy, press freedom, and so on? If there was, Indians would be ranked at the bottom. Be it on the roads, airports or our own neighbourhood, we show little consideration for fellow beings. Fortunately, there is an easy way to learn some manners: copy the Japanese. If you can't find Japanese persons in your locality, watch *Shogun*, a Japanese web-series.

I'm asking every Indian I meet to watch *Shogun* just for this reason. Wife believes I'm going through a '*Shogun*' phase, like how I went around wishing everyone '*valar morghulis*' during my *Game of Thrones* phase. But *Shogun* is different. After closely observing for eight episodes, I've figured out that the secret of Japanese politeness is their tea ceremony, which was inspired, research tells me, by tea.

The multiple tea-centric scenes in *Shogun* are the ultimate aid to imbibing Japanese standards of interpersonal courtesy. What's more, you can try them at home. If you diligently perform the tea ceremony at least once a week, your manners will improve – call it Kiku *ka* guarantee.

For a peaceful home

The only equipment you need is a pot of tea, cups, and human beings to drink tea with. If you're a tea drinker, you're halfway there. My situation is slightly complicated. I'm a tea-drinker who switched to coffee in service of a greater cause: maintaining peace in the realm.

In our home, Wife is the only person allowed to touch the tea things. She believes she makes excellent tea, and she well might – if she were to use normal tea leaves. But she uses an exotic tea powder sourced from the sands of Arrakis. Not surprisingly, her tea tastes like liquefied sand. If you also, like me, can only do coffee, just imagine coffee is tea. It's not difficult.

Last Sunday, for instance, I embraced the tea ceremony in true *Shogun* spirit.

I was having my coffee-tea with the morning papers when Wife joined me across the table with a half-empty cup of sand tea.

I bowed, and said to her, a gentle smile on my lips, "Lady Sampath, I'm honoured to share this beautiful Sunday morning with you. Let me pour you some more of your rejuvenating tea from the land of the Fremen."

Wife reacted as if I was about to pour Sanifresh into her cup. My mother jumped up and snatched the tea pot from me and set it down at a safe distance.

My feelings were hurt, but I said, "O fair mother of mine, how elegantly you moved the tea pot beyond the reach of your handsome first-born!"

"*Ennada sollura*?" Mother frowned, and looked at Wife, who shrugged and shook her head, as if to say, 'don't look at me'.

Then the doorbell rang. Kattabomman ran to get it. "It's the guard," he announced. "He's asking for you."

"Sir, *aapne gaadi tedi park ki hai*," the guard said. He wanted the car shifted immediately. Apparently, a neighbour had sent a complaint to the Society manager, with photographic evidence.

"But that tiny space can anyway accommodate only one vehicle," I said. "Even if I move my car, it would make no difference."

"Rules are rules, sir," the guard said.

"I told you not to park there, didn't I?" Wife said, making my already rising BP spike further.

"Are you nuts?" I exploded at the poor guard. "Every day that moron from J block parks his pickup truck occupying three slots in sheltered parking and no one says a word. One nanometre of my car bumper is outside the line and all hell breaks loose? What a bunch of jokers! "

"Sir, if you want, speak to the manager yourself."

"Just move the car," Mother said. "No use yelling at this man."

"Why should I?" I fumed. "If we can't even organise free and fair parking, how will we organise free and fair elections?"

"Please calm down, Sampath-*sama*," Wife said, trying to keep a straight face. "Perhaps you would permit me to point out that the man in front of you is Rampal-*dono*, a celebrated warrior of our urban village's security forces. He means no ill-will and is undeserving of your lordship's harsh utterances."

"I don't – "

"You have always been a rule-abiding resident," she went on. "Now I humbly ask that his lordship reposition his carbon-emitting chariot in service of a greater cause."

"What greater cause?"

"A peaceful Sunday."

"I'd rather commit *seppuku*," I said. "But I guess I can't just yet. I have to watch the series finale first."

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

Of third nature The sculpture of a tansgender woman at Aayiram Kaal (Thousand Pillar) Mandapam in Madurai's Meenakshi temple. (G. MOORTHY)

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

LGBTQ+ tales in temples

For gatekeepers of Indian culture who trace all things queer to the West, our mythological texts prove otherwise

At Madurai's famous Meenakshi temple, there is an image of the three-breasted goddess herself, a powerful warrior, whose violent and aggressive temperament was regulated by love and affection when she met Somasundara-Shiva, her consort, when she led armies to the Himalayas. A rather queer tale, as it disrupts the patriarchal image of a demure wife. The temple has many other images that break the mould. The image of Arjuni, a woman with a beard and breasts. Is that Brihanalla of the *Mahabharata* as some propose? Or maybe Shikhandi? Or maybe just a cross-dressing woman? Is this an affirmation of queer identities in this most venerated South Indian temple?

For a long time, gatekeepers of Indian culture insisted that all things queer were Western. Then, people started reading the scriptures and realised, that was not quite the case. The medical and occult texts said that men are born when the white seed of the father is strong, women when the red seed of the mother is strong, and queer people when both are balanced. Jain scholars spoke of how the biological body (*dravya-sharira*) may not match the longings of the mental body (*bhaav-sharira*), an idea now making it to gender studies courses around the world. India has always recognised the existence of the queer, and referred to it as third nature (*tritiya prakriti*). Those who wrote on mainstream social issues ignored them, but their stories did slip in occasionally, especially in folk traditions.

Gender bender

There is the story of a bisexual from the *Kama Sutra*. Dattaka was commissioned by the courtesans of Pataliputra to write a textbook on how to make men happy. Why did they ask a man? Because Dattaka had lived his entire life as a woman, though he was a man. He accidentally touched the feet of Shiva with his foot. Shakti saw this and cursed Dattaka, that he would become a woman. With a female body, Dattaka experienced much pleasure, approaching men with the confidence and aggression that only men have. Later, Shakti restored Dattaka's male form, making him the only man in the world who knew how to make both men and women happy. He knew the body of a man and a woman from the inside; so he became the teacher of courtesans.

Then there is a story of same-sex love from Krishna lore. The king of Magadha, Jarasandha, sent his generals, Hansa and Dimbhaka, to attack and destroy the city of Mathura. The two generals were invincible when they fought together. Krishna and his brother Balaram, defenders of Mathura, separated the two warriors and told each that the other had died. This caused them to die of heartbreak, for the two were lovers, a secret known only to Krishna.

Being *napunsaka*

Mahabharata tells us about many trans queer people. Arjuna is cursed by a nymph, that he will lose his manhood for a year, and so he lives as the eunuch Brihanalla and teaches dance to the princess Uttara, daughter of Virata. Shikhandi, a princess, is raised as a man but discovers he is a woman on his wedding night. He is given a penis by a *yaksha* to satisfy his wife. Does that make him a man? Krishna says yes and lets him ride on his chariot into the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Bhishma says no and refuses to fight him, a fatal mistake.

There is a story of inclusion narrated by many *hijras* of North India. On his return from exile, Rama noticed a number of non-binary people outside the city gates. Why are you not inside, he asked. They said that while leaving for this 14-year exile, Rama had told the men and women to return home. He gave no instructions to those of the third nature, and so they waited outside. Touched by their love, Rama welcomed them into his *Rama Rajya*.

There is a queer positive line in the famous 16th century Awadhi masterpiece *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas. In the final chapter (7.87A), Rama tells the crow, Bhusundi, '*Purush napunsaka nari va jiva charachara koi, sarva bhaav bhaja kapat taji mohi param priya soi*' (men, queers, women, animals or plants, whosoever abandons malice and approaches me, is dear to me). Here, god is making himself accessible to all, even the queer (*napunsaka*). No one is excluded. Scholars rarely mention this line, let alone discuss it in their dissertations. This is how gatekeepers impose their own version of tradition on the next generation.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Tommy would be proud

North-South vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

North's four-diamond bid would not be everyone's choice, but it led to a good slam contract. South was Patryk Patreuha, from Poland.

South won the opening spade lead with dummy's ace and led the king of clubs. West won with the ace and led another spade to dummy's king. South cashed the queen of diamonds,

NORTH
♠ A K
♡ Q 4
◇ Q J 6
♣ K Q 10 9 4 3

WEST
♠ 10 9 8 5 4
♡ K 9 7 5 3
◇ Void
♣ A J 6

EAST
♠ 6 3 2
♡ 10 8
◇ 10 9 7 5 2
♣ 8 7 5

SOUTH
♠ Q J 7
♡ A J 6 2
◇ A K 8 4 3
♣ 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1◇	2◇*	3♣	Pass
3NT	Pass	4◇	Pass
4♡	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5◇	Pass
6◇	All pass		

*Both majors, at least 5-5

Opening lead: 10 of ♠

feeling pretty good about things, and was sick when West showed out. South did not give up. He cashed the queen of clubs, discarding a heart from his hand, and ruffed a club. He cashed his queen of spades, shedding a low heart from dummy, then cashed the ace of hearts and ruffed a heart. This was the position, with the lead in dummy (Grid 2):

South led a club from dummy and over-ruffed East's nine of diamonds with the ace. He ruffed his heart with dummy's jack of trumps and led another club. He picked up East's last two trumps with a trump coup. Beautifully done!

NORTH
♠ Void
♡ Void
◇ J
♣ 10 9 4

WEST
♠ 9 8
♡ K 9
◇ Void
♣ Void

EAST
♠ Void
♡ Void
◇ 10 9 7 5
♣ Void

SOUTH
♠ Void
♡ J
◇ A K 8
♣ Void

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

A capital time!

Golden hour A beautiful city known for its picturesque architecture, this capital was formed by the merger of Pest, Óbuda and Buda. (GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley

1 On this day in 1782, the city of Rattanakosin was founded on the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya River by King Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke. It eventually became the capital city, the full name of which at 169 characters, is the longest for a capital city. Locally known as 'Krungthep', which city is this, a popular destination for Indian tourists, more so since November last year?

2 On this day in 1960, this city was purposely built as the capital of its country, moving the capital away from its previous location on the coast. Designed in the shape of an airplane, it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987. What is the name of this city, which comes from the name of the country, which in turn is named after a tree known for its red colour?

3 This country is unique as it has three 'capital' cities, none of them the largest in terms of size. The country's three branches of government are split over the different cities. If the administrative capital is Pretoria, and Bloemfontein is the judicial capital, which city is the legislative capital?

4 The capital of this country was formed by the merger of three cities, Pest, Óbuda and Buda. The name of the city is also a reference to the same. Which city is this, known for its thermal baths and lovely hills?

5 Some countries have both an official capital city and a designated de-facto capital. In this particular country, The Hague is the seat of government and the administrative centre. It's also home to the International Court of Justice; but it is not the official capital. Which country is this, and what is its official capital?

6 El Alto is the highest international airport in the world, situated at 4,061 metres above sea level. At this height, the air is so thin that most wide-boy aircraft cannot operate a full load. Built to service the de facto capital La Paz, in which country would you find this airport?

7 This city is the most northerly capital in the world, and the most westerly capital in Europe. With a population of just 1.2 lakh that makes up 32% of the national population, it is also the most bustling. Which city is this, whose name means 'Bay of Smokes' in old Norse?

8 Quito is the second highest capital city in the world, situated 2,850 metre above sea level, on the slopes of an active volcano. If it is the nearest capital to the zero degree latitude, lying less than one degree south of it, which country is it the capital of?

9 Vienna (Austria), Bratislava (Slovakia), Budapest (Hungary) and Belgrade (Serbia) are four of the most important European capital cities. Known for their vibrant cultural history, all are popular tourist destinations. What single factor connects them all, allowing free flow of trade and visitors?

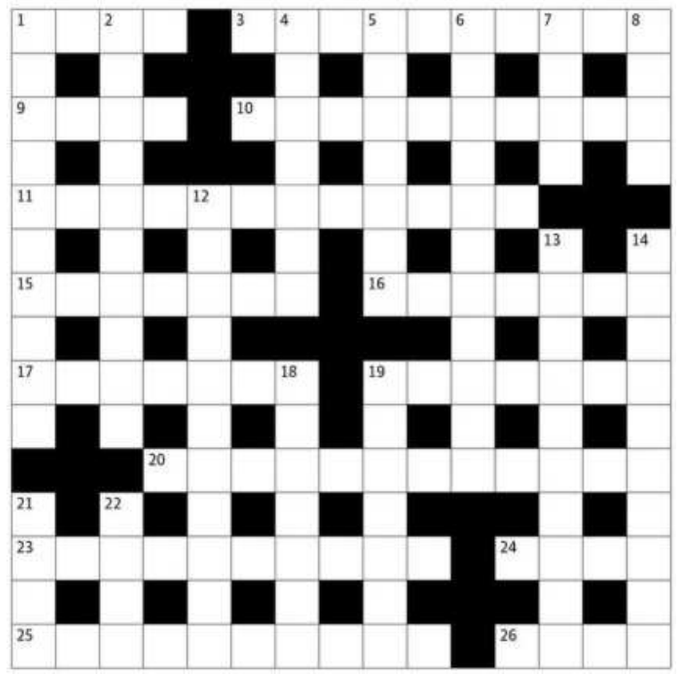
10 This country is the only one in the world that does not have an official capital city. The smallest republic in the world, this island nation in the Pacific became very valuable because of rich phosphate deposits, which are now mined in a controlled manner. Which country is this?

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. Bangkok
2. Brasilia
3. Cape Town; South Africa
4. Budapest; Hungary
5. The Netherlands; Amster-dam
6. Bolivia
7. Reykjavik, Iceland
8. Ecuador
9. The river Danube
10. Nauru

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3303



Across

1 Polar animal's stomach? (4)
3 Performing culinary operation on –foolishly – rock pigeon (10)
9 In conversation, much time shared by you and me (4)
10 Eggs and lice covering rancid president's workplace (4,6)
11 Cheers that man, earlier sad, starting to brood (4,3,5)
15 Sluggishness, batting: time to win it back? (7)
16 Dog's cross: that is, a little labradoodle (7)
17 Unbroken, like a Manx cat? (7)
19 Colloquially, largest; most like the ocean? (7)
20 Some sets of twins resemble each other (7,5)
23 Trade ideas, wild wishes (10)
24 Illegally assist a venture (4)
25 Flights that may lead to landings? (10)
26 Step back, seeing Afghans, Abyssinians, etc.? (4)

Down

1 Dilapidated sideboards getting batterings (10)
2 So, hardware flying around? (10)
4 Region including villas in exclusive resort areas, primarily? (7)
5 Blearily recalls wine in large amounts (7)
6 Ministry of Defence to get 'nonclerical' if Foreign Office to retire bureaucrats (11)
7 Everyman is to receive visitor, finally: one bearing large showy flowers (4)
8 Celt's outburst can be heard (4)
12 Champion with spine, usually? (5-6)
13 Note, twice: establishment for racehorses where multiplication is demanded (5,5)
14 Hot drinks or dry Rieslings? (4,6)
18 I will be found in Balkan state: bold to move to find unwelcoming place (7)
19 Well-earnt rest, leisurely accepting support(7)
21 Poems praising systems of regulation not started (4)
22 Accept only part of repurchase agreement, being in the Black? (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3302

Cricket festival

Runs and razzmatazz make IPL summer's most-awaited event

ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

Ananya Mehta
ananyamehta120906@gmail.com

In the torrid summer months, India celebrates a festival like no other in the country. It brings together people from diverse backgrounds, regions, and cultures, providing moments of joy and pride. It is the Indian Premier League (IPL).

India winning the 2007 Twenty20 World Cup catalysed initial ideas of organising a similar format of franchise cricket league. The IPL began in 2008. Since then, it has managed to establish itself as the most revered and exclusive cricket league in the world. Various other cricket boards have made keen efforts to host such leagues in their countries, but they are not nearly as lionised as the IPL, which is capable of drawing the biggest international cricket players and disrupting the international cricket schedule for two months.

While the IPL has redefined cricket in myriad ways, nurtured lucrative strides for the economy, provided a platform for young cricket talent, propagated deeper friendship among cricketers, and boosted the passion for the sport, it has impacted the lives of the general public in yet more unique and significant ways.

When the IPL starts, it rules. All the newspapers get busy with the build-up, discussion, and analysis of matches, which progressively keep getting more and more captivating as records are made and broken. The massive turnout at stadiums, the disciplined coordination of applause by thousands, the exceptionally loud shout-outs, the tattoos on cheeks, the shining eyes, and the broad smiles provide an obvious justification for the nomenclature of the IPL as a festival.

Regional loyalties instigate such intense emotional bond with teams that cricket becomes the easiest subject of conversation and the most common bone of contention at school, college, work, and even among family members.

Wearing jerseys or the colours of a favourite team and planning an evening with good food are very normal rituals. People are so deeply attached to the teams they support that match days become extra-special occasions. They not only clear their calendars to watch the game but also dedicate the entire day's plans to that.

Sports channels run pre-match shows and highlights all day, while platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are flooded with posts.

The IPL has turned many non-enthusiasts into fans of the game. Even those who are still not so interested in cricket and do not follow the sport with ardent passion tend not to mind the loud buzz because of the glory that drapes this tournament. While nail-biting moments with bat and ball are sufficient to entice people into enjoying the game, performances by renowned musicians and dancers at the opening ceremony and the regular presence of celebrities in the stadium lend an extra charm.

The tournament offers much more than entertainment.

As part of their Education and Sports for All initiative, Mumbai Indians, each season, provide an opportunity to around 18,000 children to watch a live game, while Rajasthan Royals have taken up initiatives to make cricket matches carbon neutral and to support women-led development in Rajasthan. Royal Challengers Bengaluru have unveiled a special green jersey to display their commitment to environmental protection, while Delhi Capitals' players wear special rainbow jerseys to celebrate national diversity. Lucknow Super Giants wear red jerseys to pay tribute to the legacy of a famous Indian football club and Gujarat Titans wear lavender jerseys to raise awareness of cancer.

With increasing pollution and global warming, the temperatures keep soaring. Summers are becoming intolerable, yet India does not wait as much for any other season, because, with summer, comes the IPL.

My pet theory

Cats can offer comfort and emotional support

Priyan R. Naik
priyannaik@yahoo.com

When my daughter-in-law told me that she was fond of cats and had always owned one, I did not know what to say. We had never had a pet and even if I had wanted one, I would have preferred a dog.

Today's generation believes in sticking to individual preferences and lifestyle, even going so far as to believe that "pets are the new children and plants are the new pets". Bunny, my daughter-in-law's pet, is mollycoddled as if it were a baby. Whenever my daughter-in-law is away for long, the cat is put in a "pet boarding". Bunny seems to have a distinct preference for a particular establishment. I was told the cat had friends to play with in its favourite boarding house whereas the other one left it cranky and irritated.

When travelling, an autorickshaw simply would not do. It had to be a taxi, otherwise Bunny would curl up into a ball, and get agitated and frightened. Many trips to the vet were usually required to find out why it was not purring, head bumping, or kneading. It could be a simple tummy upset but why take a chance?

Keeping in mind writer Susan Easterly's quote, "The key to a successful new relationship between a cat and human is patience", I have now woken up to the fact that pets can offer comfort, companionship, and emotional support. The physical activity pets call for, since you have to walk and play with them, and groom them, is good exercise.

Caring for pets brings about a sense of purpose, the knowledge that you are responsible for the well-being of another living being itself instilling a sense of pride. Simply watching Bunny explore, play, and interact brought laughter, joy, and immense satisfaction.

But why choose a cat for a pet? Because cats are low maintenance and do not require constant attention or extensive grooming. Cats are generally more independent, adapting well to people living in urban areas. Maybe there is some truth in what polymath Albert Schweitzer said, "There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats!"

AI and I

Exploring human creativity in the age of generative artificial intelligence

Shrusti Mohanty
shrustim@gmail.com

When ChatGPT and her friends first came out, we watched them with amusement and curiosity. As the months rolled by, however, some of the excitement ebbed away, and debates about the impact of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) on jobs took over boardroom and dinner table conversations.

I consider myself a reasonably early adopter of this new technology and quickly found ways to leverage ChatGPT. It was writing my mails, optimising travel plans, and suggesting recipes. I was also dabbling with its potential at my job as an HR professional.

Over time, however, I started feeling uneasy. There were news of people writing books using AI and creating extremely believable images and videos.

As someone who enjoys writing, blogging, and creating content for social media, I suddenly saw no relevance for my skills. Anyone could now write a three-page travelogue on Morocco or an intriguing short story about crows.

I found myself gripped by writer's block. GenAI was striking at one of the last bastions of humanity – creativity. I fretted over this for months, leaving a precious list of story ideas untouched. Then one day, I grudgingly sat down to chronicle a trip from July 2023. As the words flowed, it dawned on me that it is not a competitive race.

GETTY IMAGES

I write for my thoughts to find a home, to give life to a character living inside my head, and to harvest ripe plot points that I see unfolding in daily life. I wake up at 4 a.m. for the joy of seeing the first rays of the sun light up the lotus pond at Angkor Wat. I take a picture of that experience to record my story, for me to look back on it, as a memory of an experience.

I am learning to pursue creativity for its own sake, not for recognition or accolades. In that pursuit perhaps I will learn to value this AId (pun intended). AI can eliminate annoying speed bumps like finding the right synonym. It can assist in fact-checking to create more authentic and accurate writing. Ask, and it will deliver. The commonly found trees in Mysuru that should grow in your main character's backyard? Sure. The size of Lithuania versus Maharashtra to write an Instagram caption? Coming right up. This will leave you with the time and space to do the creative heavy-lifting.

There are always new ways of doing things, that, with time, begin to feel natural and inherent. Our forefathers made a successful transition from quills to pens, from typewriters to keyboards. After all adapting too is a bastion of humanity!

Two Rebeccas

A literary experience that offered the lesson to not judge a book by its cover

Arundhati Dutta
arundhati.dutta14@gmail.com

When I was 10, I asked my father for a copy of *Rebecca*.

I had won an abridged version of the book as a prize at a debate competition at school, and was fascinated by the trials and tribulations of the mysterious Mrs. De Winter, her marriage to a much older widower, and her obsession with his dead first wife – the book's namesake.

Snobby little me considered it quite an affront that the school had decided to give me an abridged version. I had to have the "grown-up" version.

It was the mid-2000s, and I was living in a remote township in Chhattisgarh. There were no bookstores, no Amazon, and no libraries. So, every time my father went on a work-related trip, I would hand him a list of titles. He rarely stuck to the list. Some books on it he considered me too old for – he once swapped a Famous Five title for Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Other times he simply lost the list, so he would pick up whatever his eyes fell on at the Delhi airport bookstore.

But with *Rebecca*, he really tried. I had made it very clear how important it was that he got it for me. I told him it was fine if it was the only book he got me on that trip, but that he must get it.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

For the first time, he actually visited a bookstore outside the airport to look for my book. He came home looking very pleased with himself and handed it to me. And my heart broke.

It was *Rebecca*, but the wrong one. I had wanted Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, a cornerstone of Gothic literature written in the 1930s. I was looking forward to reading about sinister housekeepers and incestuous cousins. What I got instead was *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, a children's novel by Kate Douglas Wiggin about a 10-year-old girl who goes to live with her spinster aunts.

I did not touch the book for a month. Everything was wrong – even the cover with a young, cheerful girl sitting under a tree, a complete contrast to the tone of my *Rebecca*. But never have I ever had the self-control to keep my hands off an unread book. I picked it up, determined to hate it. And I was transported. Into the village of Riverboro with its unique inhabitants, cowering alongside Rebecca at Aunt Miranda's remonstrations. I felt such a sense of profound joy after finishing that book, like I had tripped over diamonds while looking for gold. It was one of the defining literary experiences of my life, teaching me literally not to judge a book by its cover.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

In the name of tourism, virgin forests in the hills are destroyed indiscriminately. ('The hills are (barely) alive'; Apr. 14) Concrete buildings have come up on mountain slopes, causing intensive damage to nature. Udhagamandalam town has become a concrete jungle. Kodaikanal and Yercaud are no exception. Tourism development has come at the cost of destruction of nature, and needs to be regulated.
Sravana Ramachandran

The cover story holds up a mirror to the bad maintenance of mountains in the country. From the prism of economics, governments have to allocate adequate resources for the upkeep of infrastructure in hill stations and, of course, tirelessly work to keep them clean, free from traffic hassles and tourist-friendly. We can draw lessons from the U.P. government, which made monumental efforts to clean the Ganges.
S. Ramakrishnasayee

Tourism carrying capacity may be viewed as an important consideration in the sustainability discussion. Of late, sustainability and its associated concepts have come to dominate planning on the management of tourism and its impacts. But carrying capacity analysis is still an important tool to know future impact in the tourism sector.
K.M.K. Murthy

New frontiers

It is true that many otherwise first-rate writers become victims of establishment politics and fail to make it to the canon. ('Discovering Maryse Condé'; Apr. 14) Only an innocent person would persuade themselves that writers in the First World get promoted exclusively on merit. Awards play a significant role in putting writers on academic syllabi. But they are not unbiased.
Narendra Dani

'Vote for me'

My vote is for those who promise and implement environment-friendly deeds. ('Green humour'; Apr. 14) I appeal to all to follow me, and I appeal to the EC to disqualify those who fail to implement election promises.
M.V. Nagavender Rao

Nostalgia central

Vacations in the 80s used to begin with a second-class rail journey. ('Charm of the 80s vacation'; Apr. 14) This was followed by playing with cousins, eating delicacies prepared by your grandmother, accompanying your grandfather to the library, reading school textbooks for the next year, and going to bed at 9 p.m., after grandmother had served *thayir sadham*. Today's children know nothing of this.
K. Pradeep

The article brought back memories of vacations of yore when distractions were less, vacation spots were almost pollution-free, and a holiday, even with family in tow, did not leave a gaping hole in your purse. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then and in the hustle and bustle of today's world, vacations are clipped short and devoid of the erstwhile charm.
C.V. Aravind

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

For a brighter future
More can be done to retain skilled talent in the country
Santosh Balakrishnan

Tuning in kinship
The significance of all-night singing and dancing at a Kumaoni wedding
Richa Joshi Pant

Pallikkadu: the forest of souls
Final resting places offer peace and insights into life
Mohammed Ramees

Sharing failures on social media
Rather than only celebrating successes, we would do well to discuss setbacks
Sanchita Srivastava

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

HUSAIN, AN OUTSIDER IN 2024'S INDIA?

As the KNMA's tribute, *The Rooted Nomad*, opens in Venice, we wonder how the modernist and his bold statements would have fared today

Somak Ghoshal

In 2011, after M.F. Husain died in London at the age of 95, writer and filmmaker Ruchir Joshi wrote a sobering tribute to the artist's life in *The Telegraph*, Kolkata. "Though he was possibly the nicest person among the Progressive Artists Group," he wrote, "Husain was also perhaps the one with the least talent and originality."

Joshi went on to emphasise Husain's intense debt to both Picasso and Matisse, while acknowledging the complicated legacy he had left behind. "If Husain's departure [in 2010] for Qatar... marked a defeat for a certain idea of modern India," he wrote, "his death presents a challenge to those of us who felt diminished and humiliated by the old man's exile."

Whether you are an admirer of his art or not, Husain remains one of India's most significant artists over a decade after his death. His work continues to be coveted by collectors, while the staggering multiplicity of his imagination remains unparalleled. *The Rooted Nomad*, opening this month at the Magazzini del Sale in Dorsoduro, Venice, is not only a deep dive into the modernist's chequered life and multidimensional work, but also a timely reminder of the values he cherished and enshrined through his art and actions. (Incidentally, Husain, who participated in the 1953 and 1955 Venice Biennales, was one of the first artists from India to show his work there.)

Presented by the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, and curated by Roobina Karode, director and chief curator of the KNMA, this immersive exhibition aims to signal Husain's enduring relevance to a wider, global audience. One of the most significant challenges of curating such an ambitious show is the selection of works from "Husain's vast oeuvre and prolific practice", says Karode, "especially since his iconic works have been showcased extensively both inside and outside of India".

The idea has been to bring a "fresh perspective in representing him, while conceptually and experientially bridging the gap between the artist and the global audience".

Merging the physical and virtual

The exhibition unfolds in two parts, as Karode explains: an introduction to the artist through a physical experience of his original works, such as *Yatra* (1955) and *Blue Ganges* (1966), which then leads the viewers into an immersive (virtual) experience in the latter part of the space.

The Rooted Nomad draws on nearly 160 works by Husain from the KNMA collection. Two years in the making, it includes motion graphics, live action, 2D and 3D animation of vignettes of his work, choreography, and sound design — seamlessly blending "to tell the complex story of this singular figure".

Husain, forever inventive and curious, an artist who pushed against the imagined boundaries between 'popular' and 'serious' art, would have loved this approach. As a young man he had painted posters for movies, and later in life he actually made several films (the Bollywood actor Madhuri Dixit being one of his muses). Performance was in his DNA, as was a penchant for making bold statements about his beliefs, often to his detriment in his homeland, India.

Fresh perspective (Clockwise from left) *Karbala*; curator Roobina Karode; Husain in 1995; behind the scenes in Venice; and *The Pull*. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Indeed, the title, *The Rooted Nomad*, captures the twin forces that ruled his life: his deep roots in India, having come of age before Partition, nurtured by the syncretism of yore; and a restless urge to traverse the world, to soak in the cosmopolitanism of a nomadic life, where every idea was his for the taking. "The breadth of his experiences," as Karode puts it, "defied a narrow vision of India."

Not only did Husain reject religious polarisation, he also refused to abide by the established rules of the art world. From being a cinema hoarding painter to designing furniture pieces to making wooden toys and directing films, "all helped him to arrive at a modernism that was rooted in the sensibilities and his understanding of India as an emergent nation", she adds.

Apart from his instant sketches made in situ, drawings, calligraphy, and poems, the space will also feature photographs of Husain by artists and friends Parthiv Shah and Krishen Khanna, among others. "The only painting that is overwhelming in its size [82 x 130 inches], scale and impact is *Karbala* [1990, "an intensely evocative imagery of migration, mourning and martyrdom that unsettles the viewer"], which KNMA will be exhibiting for the first time," Karode shares.

A man who refused to censor himself

What would India in 2024, heading into elections, fuelled by communal hate and disharmony, make of a figure like Husain? An itinerant soul, who let his imagination run unfettered, mapped his beloved nation barefoot, was excommunicated in old age (on self-imposed exile in the last years of his life), but feted all around the world, he would most certainly have been unwelcome – an anomaly in a country where the dominant political project is directed at creating a homogenous population with like-minded belief, values, and aspirations.

The more interesting question, perhaps, is to ask what Husain would have made of India had he lived to see this day? How would his inventive spirit, which left its imprint not only on canvas and film, but also over architectural sites and public spaces by creating murals and frescoes, feel about being left out of the grand project of self-transformation that India is undergoing?

During his lifetime, Husain repeatedly stepped into hornets' nests. He angered bigots and fanatics of all colours, refused to censor his art, and provoked reactions that made us, as a nation, question ourselves and fragilities. That it's no longer possible to show Husain's work in such an immense scale in the country is a bitter reminder of the many miles we have regressed since the artist's passing in the last one decade.

The exhibition is on till November 2024.

The writer is based in Delhi.

More than seven decades since his work was first exhibited at the 1953 Venice Biennale, KNMA is honoured to bring this project to Venice [coinciding with the 2024 biennale]. This 360-degree immersive experience will unveil Husain's dreams and desires through moving images and soundscapes. It is a labour of love for India's most compelling modernist, who I admired greatly and with whom I enjoyed a long friendship

KIRAN NADAR
Founder, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Connoisseurs of design Nautch Girls (Delhi, c.1862-1863), Charles Shepherd and Arthur Robertson; and (right) Umarao Jan, a *tawaif* from Lucknow (c.1874), Daroga Abbas Ali. (SARMAYA ARTS FOUNDATION)

Legacy of the courtesans

Patrons of fashion and design, *tawaifs* weren't mere entertainers. Their stories still inspire, as explored in Netflix's new series, *Heeramandi*

Madhur Gupta

In the tapestry of Indian history, the courtesans, often referred to as *tawaifs*, stand as guardians of a legacy that transcends mere entertainment. Their influence permeated not only the cultural sphere, but also left an indelible mark on design, fashion, and traditional crafts, between 500 BCE and the 20th century. During the research for my book *Courting Hindustan: The Consuming Passions of Iconic Women Performers of India*, I developed a profound understanding of the unique position they occupied in society.

I discovered that the courtesans of the Mughal courts were often adorned in the finest Indian textiles: rich silks, intricately woven brocades, and vibrant handloom saris. They would showcase these textiles during cultural gatherings, festivals and royal events, attracting the attention of nobles and royalty. To perform in, they favoured *jamdani* adorned with floral motifs, geometric patterns, and intricate borders, or Dhaka muslin, both of which allowed for graceful ease of movement.

Begum Samru, the ruler of the kingdom of Sardhana in the 18th century – who began her career as a '*nautch* girl' – occupies a chapter in *Courting Hindustan*. Petite and slender, she appeared in public draped in brocades woven with elaborate patterns in gold or silver threads. A keen statesman, she cannily adopted the language and religious customs of the dominant European forces, mainly the British. However, she often used traditional Mughal clothing to signal her proximity to the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II. So, while she wore her pashmina with pride, she also ordered chintz, the glazed cotton fabric imported from India and favoured by the British.

Style icons of their time

Courtesans were avid patrons of jewellery. Diamonds, emeralds, rubies and pearls were crafted by skilled artisans into elaborate pieces – from *maang tikkas*, *naths*, *jhumkas*, and *hath phools*, to chokers, *kamarbandhs*, and anklets – that they wore as a symbol of their status and wealth. They also popularised pieces such as the *chhapkā* or *jhūmar*.

There is one rather touching anecdote about Begum Akhtar, the 20th-century legend of Hindustani classical music, and her jewels. Between music seasons, she used to leave a *satlada* (seven-stringed pearl necklace) of tremendous value, a gift from the Nawab of Rampur, with sitarist Arvind Parikh. He, in turn, would offer her money to smooth over lean times. When the concert season started again, Begum Akhtar would return the borrowed money in exchange for the necklace.

Courtesans were the style icons of their time, a role to which they brought as much dedication as they did their art. The most prominent cultivated a signature style, which has been immortalised in literature. Consider Mirza Hadi Ruswa's creation, Umrao Jaan Ada (in the eponymous Urdu novel), who was known for her rich silks, intricately embroidered costumes and exquisite jewellery. Or Vasantasena, the protagonist of the Sanskrit play *Mrichchakatikam*, who filled up a child's clay cart with her jewels. They were the spiritual foremothers of Gauhar Jaan, one of the first recording artists of India, whose glamorous photos were printed on matchbox covers around the world. Frederick William Gaisberg, an engineer with Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd, notes in his memoirs that Jaan arrived to record her songs wearing the finest outfits, and she never repeated her jewels.

Gouhar's jewels

In the Sarmaya archive, a *carte de visite* (visiting card-style photo) by photographer Daroga Abbas Ali has been identified as Gouhar, a courtesan from Lucknow. Dating back to 1874, it shows her dressed in an Awadhi *chikankari sharara*. What is particularly interesting is that the embroidery has been done to mimic the *satrangi*, a woven silk brocade from Benares that is made of diagonal stripes of colour filled with *bootas* created by the use of an extra weft. It is paired with a *khada dupatta*, which is the length of a modern-day sari. Her jacket is in *taasi*, gold brocade woven to look like a sheet of metal. She wears a *maang tikka* as well as a *do-rukh jhoomar* or *chapka*, a waterfall-like ornament worn on the left side of the head, popularised by the Mughals. Her earrings seem to be *karanphool jhumkas* with big Basra pearl loops and among her many necklaces is the traditional *chintak* or choker made with uncut diamonds and emeralds.

Inspiring Sanjay Leela Bhansali

In the 19th century, courtesans from the subcontinent had the cultural cache of movie stars, influencing fashion, style, and even politics. Dutch exotic dancer and alleged war spy, Mata Hari, fabricated a past in which she was born an Indian princess. In her gem-encrusted head dresses and sari-like drapes, she clearly took inspiration from the South Asian courtesan.

In Veena Talwar Oldenburg's 1990 paper, *Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow*, the author cites civic tax records from 1858-77 to reveal that the *tawaifs* were, in fact, the largest and highest tax paying class, with "the largest individual earnings of anyone within the city".

By the 1940s, the courtesans' glory days had come to an end, but their legacy continues to inspire designers and artists – and most recently, director Sanjay Leela Bhansali. His upcoming Netflix period drama, *Heeramandi*, will take viewers behind the storied walls of a Lahore *tawaif-khaana*, as the freedom struggle gathers momentum in the subcontinent.

On April 26, the writer will give a lecture on courtesans as part of Sarmaya Talks. At Joss, Mumbai, at 6 p.m.

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