

magazine

wideangle

Can local also be exotic?
Top chefs show you how

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INSIDE

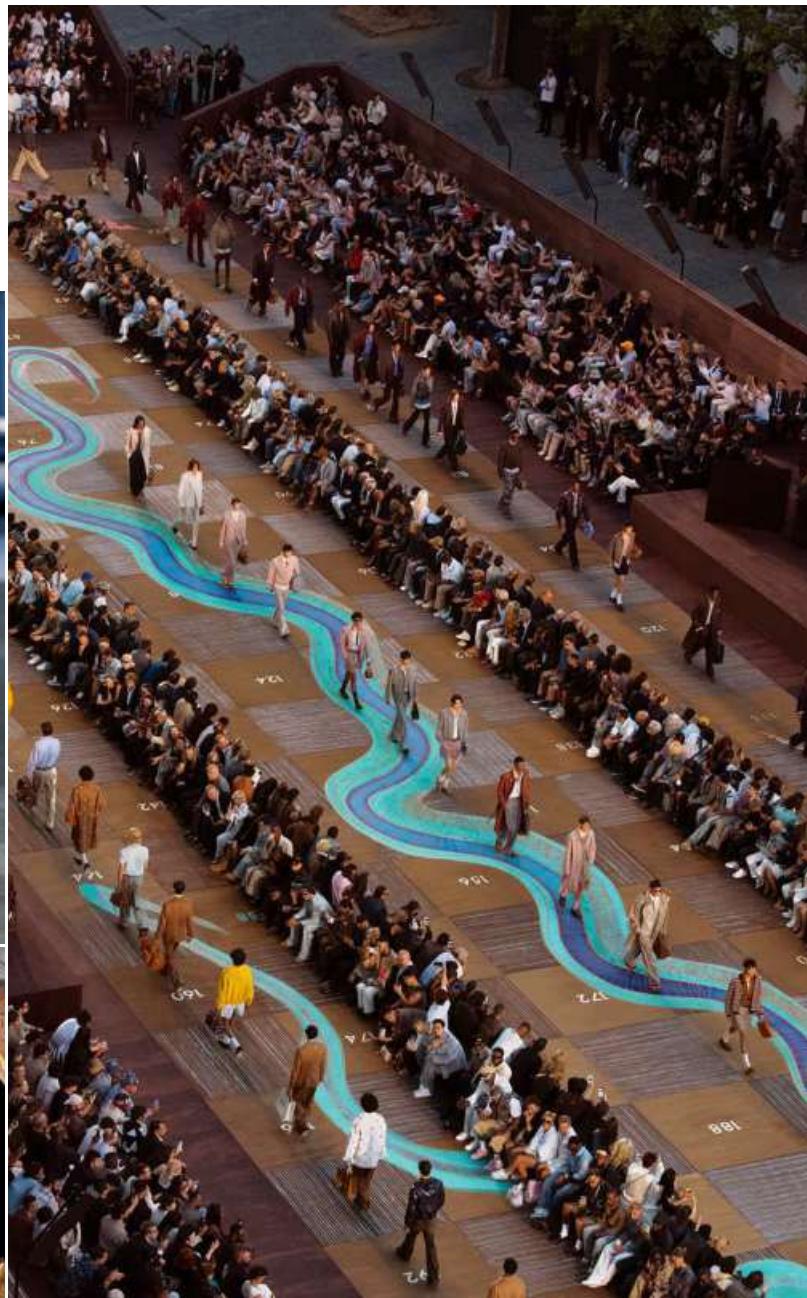
Revivalist Chandra Jain's Banarasi edit in Bengaluru

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LITERARY REVIEW

I write to exorcise my demons: Isabel Allende

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INDIA ON THE GLOBAL MOOD BOARD

From a snakes and ladders set at Louis Vuitton to a landmark Serpentine retrospective, Indian creativity is in high demand. But can this global celebration evolve into a lasting cultural exchange – one led on the subcontinent's terms?

momentary inspiration but a sustained presence in luxury's imagination. The show by creative director Pharrell Williams featured rickshaw-shaped bags, trunks, sneakers and jackets with a smattering of embroideries from India, and a soundtrack by Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman.

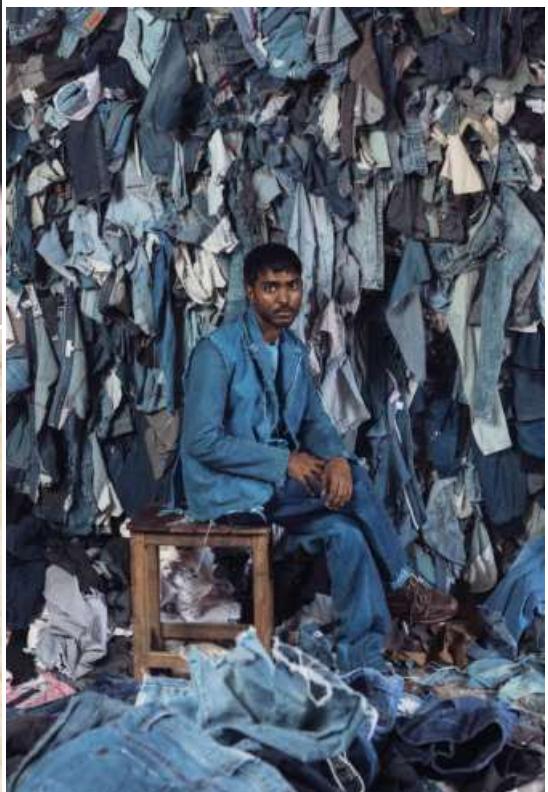
Cultures as trend
Just a week earlier, at Milan Fashion Week, Prada sent models down the runway in Kolhapuris (those hardback quotidian leather sandals local to Maharashtra) paired with shorts and T-shirts, and with design details of the humble footwear also seen on rings, and facings of leather

jackets. What followed was an avalanche of pushback and adoration, in equal measure, from the South Asian corner of the Internet. Who made the Kolhapuris? Why weren't they credited? Why the silence? Why now?

In contrast, the Louis Vuitton show was celebrated: this is how collaboration should be done. Visionary. Complete.

And yet, beyond the headlines and viral takes, the question persists: what now? How can this cultural bridge, tentatively being built between India and the world, move from moment to movement?

"Everybody celebrates that Louis Vuitton has done this, Prada has done that. But sadly, it doesn't have



Fashion forward (Clockwise from far left)
Prada's Kolhapuris; Louis Vuitton's snakes and ladders set designed by Bijoy Jain; a jewelled tiara from V&A's Cartier show; one of Rkive City's campaigns; Nike x NorBlack NorWhite; Dior at the Gateway of India; and (bottom) a design from Kartik Research. (GETTY IMAGES, REUTERS, ARVAA KUMAR, AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Akanksha Kamath

India and its vibrant aesthetic are everywhere right now. From the V&A's nod to Indian royalty in its Cartier show, to design fairs such as PAD (Pavilion of Art and Design), TEFAF (The European Fine Art Foundation) and Frieze, where Indian art, jewellery and design have a stronghold. In department stores – Harrods, Selfridges, Bergdorf Goodman – brands such as Sabyasachi High Jewellery, Kartik Research and Lovebirds sit alongside global names. And on runways, India's presence is no longer peripheral, it's pivotal.

It's no secret that the world wants a slice of the Indian pie. With a luxury market currently valued at \$17 billion and projected to triple by 2030, an affluent Gen Z cohort 377 million strong, and increasing cultural capital, India is drawing global attention. Dior's Fall 2023 show in Mumbai may well have been the tipping point. That moment which was widely Instagrammed, editorialised, and held up as a turning point, set a new template for how the country could be platformed. The set was quite literally India: the Gateway of India as backdrop, the clothes – woven Madras checks and draped lungi-style skirts – were crafted by Chanakya School of Craft (a longtime collaborator, having embroidered the mise-en-scene at most of Dior's shows under Maria Grazia Chiuri's helm), and a musical score that paid homage to Indian classical traditions.

Last month in Paris, as guests at the Louis Vuitton menswear show took their seats before a 2,700 sq.m. set designed by architect Bijoy Jain and his Studio Mumbai, inspired by the ancient Indian game of snakes and ladders, it felt like a signal of continuity: that India is not just

launched Good Earth Foundation, as key to preserving and promoting heritage. Says Modesti, "In India, you always need private initiative to counterbalance the lack of political will. It's been true of education, healthcare, and now finally, craft and design."

Even so, Modesti's wary of fashion's tendency to cycle through cultures as trends. "One season it's India, the next it could be Africa. It's always India seen through a historical prism. But if you know what's happening now with Indian architects, designers, creatives – the Indian scene is flamboyant."

Fashion photographer Rid Burman agrees. "There's so much more than what gets shown globally. Brands latch onto palaces and Bollywood, but India also has arthouse cinema, a thriving art scene, classical and contemporary music. There's a huge cultural backbone that's being overlooked," he says.

So far, Indian aesthetics have largely been filtered through a western gaze. The opportunity ahead is in letting Indian creators tell the story on their own terms.

Looking beyond the palaces

One promising counterpoint to this historical pattern is the Nike x NorBlack NorWhite collaboration. More than just applying Indian motifs to global streetwear, the campaign was conceived, led and styled locally. Founders Mriga Kapadiya and Amrit Kumar – who returned to India from Toronto to start the label –

cast Indian female athletes, directed the shoot, and shaped the narrative. The result was vibrant, modern, and self-assured.

Designer Kartik Kumra's label Kartik Research – worn by the likes of Kendrick Lamar, Stephen Curry, Brad Pitt and Riz Ahmed – is one of the sharpest expressions of Indian craft meeting contemporary design. Built on techniques such as *bandhani* and *kantha*, the brand has shown in Paris and is stocked by retailers from London to New York. Production is anchored in India, with a strong focus on small-batch making and local material sourcing.

Last year, Kumra published *How to Make it in India* – a zine-meets-manifesto that argues for defining success on one's own terms. His multilingual approach – visually, culturally and commercially – is rewriting the rulebook on how India can show up on the global stage: not by conforming, but by leading with its own terms and textures.

"I'm definitely aware of the connotations [India has], but I think the idea is to not be very on the nose with the referencing," says Kumra. "It's always a tricky balance; leaning into heritage but avoiding being too literal. Hopefully, the conversation around Indian culture globally can pivot from being overly nostalgic or stuck in its ways into something more generative or weirdly futuristic."

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Craft is soft power. If this level of craft were available in a European country, or even China, it would have been used to build a cultural and economic empire by now

MAXIMILIANO MODESTI
Founder, Les Ateliers 2M

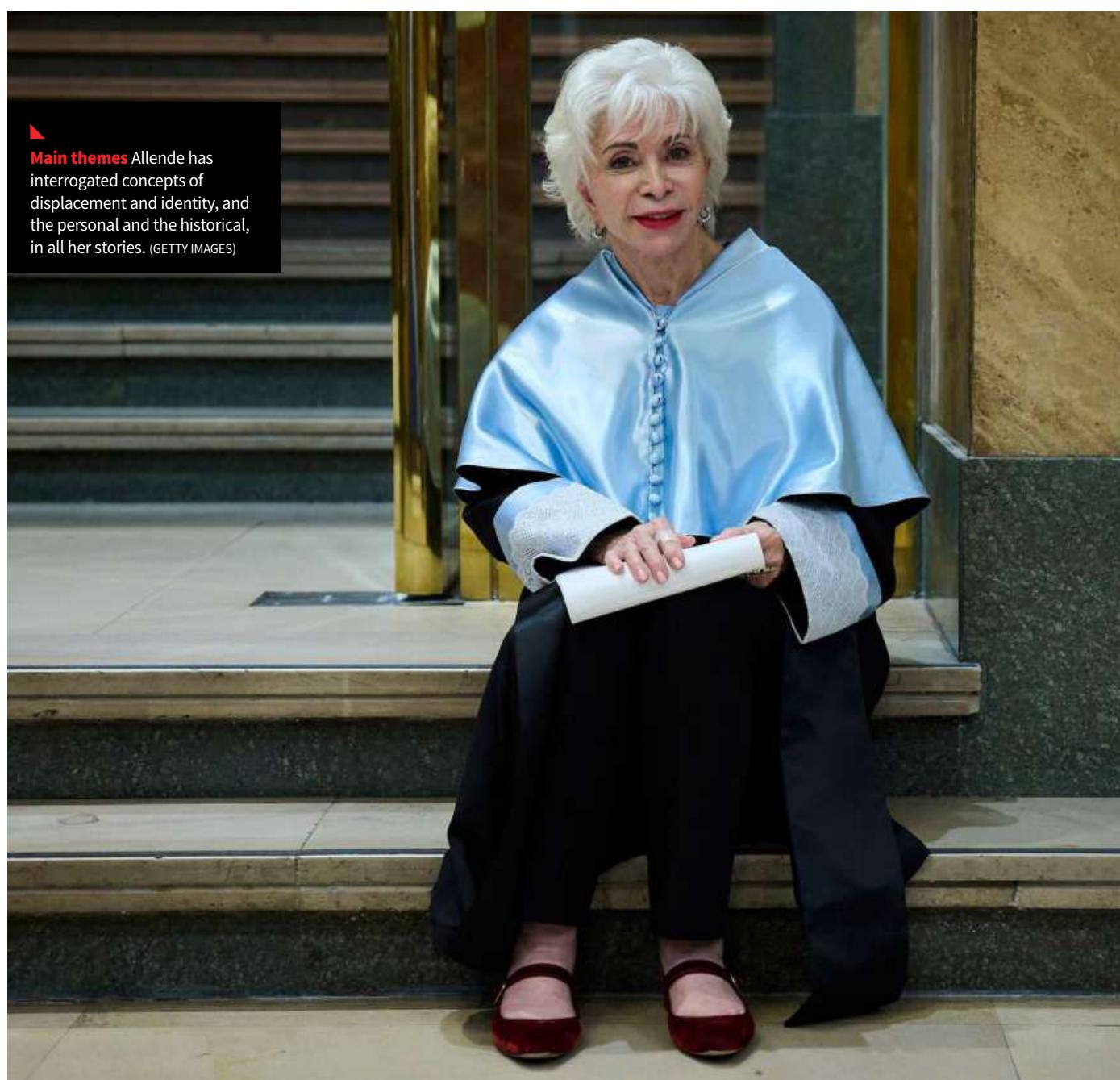
any real impact on the business of fashion," says Maximiliano Modesti, the French-Italian founder of Les Ateliers 2M, an India-based craft and embroidery studio that works with global luxury houses, including Chanel and Hermès. "Craft is soft power," he explains. "If this level of craft were available in a European country, or even China, it would have been used to build a cultural and economic empire by now." But for decades, that power was extracted rather than credited – India's artisans fuelling couture and ready-to-wear from Paris to New York, often without a label, voice or seat at the table.

Still, progress is being made. Modesti credits private players in India such as Sangita Jindal, who launched the Jindal Craft Prize, Nita Ambani's work with Swadesh (a platform for artisans), and artist-entrepreneur Anita Lal's newly



CM YK

WOMEN IN TRANSLATION MONTH



Main themes Allende has interrogated concepts of displacement and identity, and the personal and the historical, in all her stories. (GETTY IMAGES)

IN CONVERSATION

ISABEL ALLENDE'S FEMINIST MANIFESTO

Set during the 1891 Chilean Civil War, this story is told through the eyes of a brave heroine who is way ahead of her time

Anushree Nande

When Isabel Angélica Allende Llona was around nine years old, she travelled with her grandfather to the Argentinian Patagonia, where he had sheep. "We went by train from Santiago as far to the south as the train would go, continued by car, crossed the Andes on horseback, and on the other side, we were picked up by rangers," she writes via email. "That journey is engraved in my memory. That's Chile for me, the country I long for."

This deep longing and loss is present in every single book Allende, now 83, has written – from her bestselling debut *The House of the Spirits* (1982) to her latest, *My Name is Emilia del Valle* (translated by Frances Riddle, published by Bloomsbury), which is set mostly between San Francisco and Chile. From the moment she flew to Venezuela where she would remain for 13 years, Chile stopped being hers in the way it had till then, and everything changed forever. Over the years, Allende would keep interrogating the themes of displacement and identity, of memory and family, as well as the potent links between the personal and the historical, through her stories.

It started with *The House of the Spirits*, featuring the sprawling del Valle clan. A fantastically embellished history

of her family, the book was inspired by Allende's maternal grandmother's family – "they were 12 siblings, all of them quite original, wonderful inspirations for extravagant characters".

Did she know back then that she would keep returning to them, from *Daughter of Fortune* (1999), to *Portrait in Sepia* (2000), and now in *My Name is Emilia del Valle*? "I had no idea if that book was ever going to be published or that I would write other books. Of course, I didn't think that clan would intrude in other books," she says.

Juggling society's mores

Allende explains that Emilia sprung into being because she needed a way to write about the 1891 Chilean Civil War with a neutral voice. "It had to be a foreigner, and I wanted a woman narrator."

Like all of Allende's heroines, Emilia too is rebellious and intrepid, and way ahead of her

time. The illegitimate daughter of a former novice nun, the Irish Molly Walsh, and a Chilean aristocrat, Gonzalo Andres del Valle, who seduced and abandoned her, Emilia is raised in 19th-century San Francisco by her mother Molly and her husband Francisco Claro, the director of a local school, who dotes on her, and will support and encourage her empowerment. He is the reason she grows up with a desire to see the world and "experience everything intensely".

This, coupled with a need to find out the truth about herself, her biological father, and a homeland she's never known, pushes Emilia, a columnist, to request a war correspondent position. But why would the newspaper, where she'd finagled a regular column writing under a male pen name, send Emilia to Chile? That's how she becomes Emilia del Valle, someone who speaks Spanish and has local family connections.

Allende had to juggle the social mores of the time – so Emilia gets assigned the human-interest stories, while her male colleague, Eric Whelan, is given the more "serious" coverage.

Writing as exorcism

Our focus naturally shifts to Allende's feminist manifesto, the veins of which run through all her work, and through her own life, from an age as young as five years old. "I was an angry little girl," shares Allende. "They (the women in her household – her

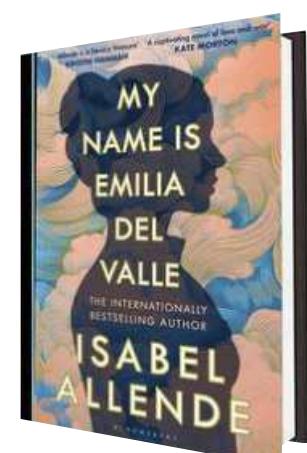
mother and the maids) had no power, no money, no freedom as the men had. That was the beginning of a lifelong feminist struggle, which crystallised during my years at *Paula* (Chile's first feminist magazine co-founded by Allende around the time of the second feminist wave). Those ideals have not changed." Even through great tragedy, admirably.

The Isabel Allende Foundation founded in 1996 is dedicated to the memory of her late daughter, Paula Frias, who died unexpectedly after a year spent in coma following a porphyria attack. Like everything else Allende does on the public stage, it is an extension of her feminism, offering support and empowerment to girls and women through education, knowledge about reproductive rights, protection from domestic and sexual violence.

And the maverick shows no signs of flagging. "For me, writing is not a chore. I write because I love the process. Next year, I will publish a non-fiction book about writing. And I am working on a memoir," she says.

"I write to remember, to understand, to exorcise my demons, to overcome my obsessions. I can only write about something that I care for. I still write with the same enthusiasm and awe as I did 40 years ago."

The writer is a Mumbai-based author and editor.



BROWSER

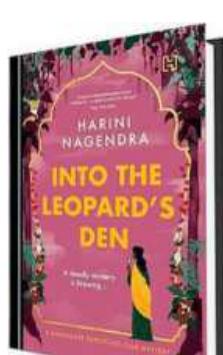
Into the Leopard's Den

Harini Nagendra

Hachette India

₹499

This is the fourth book in the author's bestselling crime thriller series set in 1920s Bangalore, and featuring amateur sleuth Kaveri Murthy. Blending classic whodunit with social insight, the writer brings her passion for nature to her fiction.



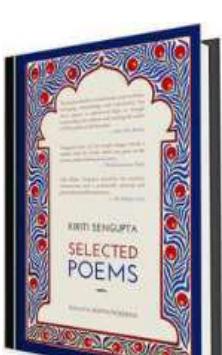
Selected Poems

Kiriti Sengupta

Transcendent Zero Press

₹750

The dentist-turned-bilingual poet and writer is a recipient of the 2018 Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize. These postmodern poems merge the spiritual with the philosophical, encouraging readers to view global realities through an Indian perspective.



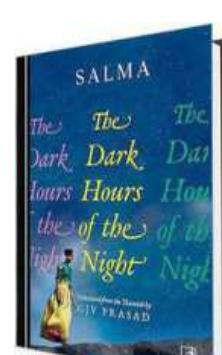
The Dark Hours Of The Night

Salma, trs G.J.V. Prasad

Simon & Schuster

₹599

The poet, novelist and Rajya Sabha MP's fearless writing on women's lives and desire has made her a leading voice in Tamil literature. Her new novel set in a Tamil Muslim household is a translation of her 2004 book, *Irandam Jaamangalin Kathai*.



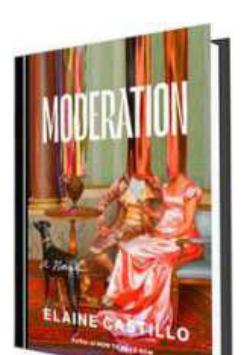
Moderation

Elaine Castillo

Atlantic Books

₹419 (ebook)

The author known for her sharp cultural insight was named one of the '30 Most Exciting Young People on the Planet' by *Financial Times*. Her latest novel explores love, labour and intimacy in a virtual workplace where everything can be controlled – except the human heart.



Dubai in metafiction

A novel within a novel set in the Gold Souk area of the 1950s, where fiction and reality blur

Radhika Oberoi

The fictional world of Sonia Rafeek's *The House of Girls* flickers in the chimerical light of the hurricane lamps that appear frequently in the narrative. The interplay of uncertain light engulfed all too soon by shadows, is perhaps a suitable metaphor for this novel within a novel, this shifting story that cracks open many other stories that are part-history, part-mythology, part-dawn, part-dusk.

But *The House of Girls*, translated from the Malayalam by Minishy S., is impossible to contain within a metaphor; it breaks free from its structure to offer irrepressible metafiction. At the outset, Nazia Hassan, a Malayali woman who works as a receptionist at a hospital in Dubai, receives a parcel that contains a novel. This novel, titled *Bait Al Banat* (*The House of Girls*), has been written by a mysterious namesake: "With a pang, I touched the name of the author: Nazia Hassan! My fingers stilled on my name, and my palm became sweaty again." With thrilling anticipation, she begins to read. The reader follows her into yet another Dubai, into a house in the Gold Souk area built in the 1950s, and into the lives of the three unmarried Arab women who lived there.

The new novel tells of the fragile dignity of sisters Mariam, Soraiyya, and Shamsa. It delineates their worldly troubles, their charming predicaments, and the dangers they navigate as single women in the Deira region. The reader gleans that their mother died while giving birth to Shamsa, the youngest. Their father, Ahmad Manzuri, a pearl merchant who built *Bait Al Banat*, has remarried and moved out of the house. Mariam, the eldest, is 45 and prone to nostalgic yearnings. Soraiyya, tall, loquacious, and enterprising, runs a taxi business. Shamsa, oval-faced and in her 30s, is a teller of exotic stories: "There was another world inside Shamsa, a secret world without the sand dunes, sky and sea." Each sister forever a 'girl' to the Emiratis, who refer to all unmarried women by that somewhat diminutive noun.

Shared chronicles

While Shamsa's world of ephemeral magic comes alive in her storytelling, it is Deira, the sisters' palpable reality, which bustles with the business of the day. The narrative offers an early morning glimpse of the area through Mariam, who sits on the doorsteps of the house, pounding coffee for the *kahwa*. The souk's sellers have risen, and so have the

children who were asleep in the *barasti*. Young girls in white tops and blue skirts make their way to a school on Al Rigga Street.

As the narrative progresses, it magnifies the mercantile activities of the coastal town – British steamers approaching the coast, Bedouins with guns strapped on the shoulders in the gullies of the souk, the presence of Indian gold merchants in Dubai. The arrival of a British journalist, Rosa, is suggestive of the port city's early cosmopolitanism.

The House of Girls oscillates between the sisters' third-person chronicles, and the receptionist Nazia's first-person account. Her own memories slide into *Bait Al Banat*, the novel she is reading. The house where the sisters lived was converted into a Women's Museum in 2012; she recalls visiting it for the first time in 2017: "Though there was no picture of the trio, I imagined their faces based on the objects they owned."

Another Dubai, a contemporary Dubai in which Nazia's friends make chicken pizza from scratch, a city of lovers who converse through the delirium induced by paracetamol and vodka, is revealed through this narrative. The juxtaposition of the sisters' old city with Nazia's chic

metropolis heightens the sense of time passing by, altering geographies, and reshaping traditions to suit an astonishing modernity.

Too explanatory

While *The House of Girls* is set up to delight with its narrative structure, its stylistic intent, its stories-within-stories that are as intricately stitched into the narrative as Mariam's embroidery, ultimately, it falls short of its early promise. The translation, in an attempt to remain faithful to the original Malayalam, is a bit too earnest and explanatory. Italicised words, strewn across the text, are accompanied by descriptions, even in dialogue: "What about having some *pao-bhaji* – blend of spicy mashed potatoes served with butter-toasted buns..."

Both narratives, the sisters' and Nazia's, feel stilted, and lack the whimsical freedom that could have made this metafiction soar above the heft of historical accuracy. This novel, although thematically fanciful, disappoints in its articulation.

The reviewer is the author of two critically-acclaimed novels.



Image used for representation.
(GETTY IMAGES)



(Clockwise from left) Refugees with their belongings at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab after communal riots during Partition; a deserted Golden Temple after clashes, and scores of refugees fleeing during Partition. (GETTY IMAGES, AP)



Geeta Doctor

There are as many Punjabs as there are its five rivers and their tributaries that course through its rich alluvial plains that have given it its name and fame. The very earth, *mitti*, or soil, brings with it a richness in the poetry of a Bulleh Shah, who spoke of the churning of the many kingdoms that it nurtured within its fold. Or the tragic refrains of Waris Shah's Heer Ranjha, the ill-fated lovers who merged their destinies with the River Sutlej that runs like a forked tongue on the eastern flanks of the Punjab.

Every decade as the waters course down the rivers that merge with the mighty Indus on the west, a thousand Heers are born again. The same rivers that divided the Punjab during Partition continue to provoke the churning that Bulleh Shah predicted. They awaken a longing for the mythical land that some people like to describe as the Punjabiat, an exclusive tract belonging to its people.

Resisting the invader
In Harleen Singh's epic re-telling, *The Lost Heer: Women in Colonial Punjab*, there are a myriad echoes of a storied past that situates the Punjab within the larger frame of the subcontinent's history. An archivist historian born in Delhi but living now in Toronto, Canada, Singh finds his focus in the lives of women in colonial Punjab.

These are the women, mothers of famous sons who ruled and fought over royal fortresses and strongholds that defined the Punjab; their wives, consorts, courtesans and the daughters, who survived what Singh depicts as

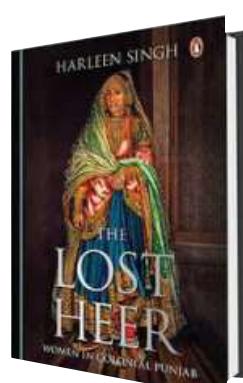
FORGOTTEN VOICES

Harleen Singh situates stories of the women of Punjab within the larger frame of the subcontinent's history

a stridently patriarchal society; and their hangers-on who made such lives possible. There are many references to the widows emerging from behind their veils sword in hand to exhort their subjects to resist the invader.

There are also equally fascinating portrayals of the English women who arrived there either as the wives of missionaries, or of the 'memsahibs' married to the newly installed *administocracy*, if one may coin a word, who arrived often from Bengal, the seat of power. They came bearing the imperial gaze of Empress Victoria, stamped on gold coins that became the status quo of those who could wear it round their necks as jewellery. They introduced their rule books of measurements of land and tenure, of systems of tax collection, with their *babus*, policemen and cantonments for the soldiers required to keep the whole show on the road.

There's a marvellous sequence that describes the arrival of the first railway engine into Lahore; never mind that this is a set piece routinely evoked along with the telegraph and signalling network, to mark the advent of progress within the colonial era.



The Lost Heer: Women in Colonial Punjab
Harleen Singh
Penguin/Viking
₹1,299

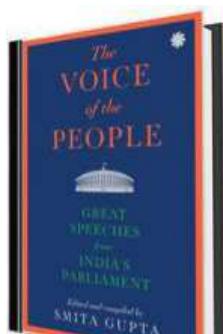
The printing press

While the missionary women brought the *Bible* and founded orphanages for girls, they also brought with them a printing press that would translate the sacred texts of the Sikhs and Muslims using an English script. Singh is most adept at describing how the young women in the Punjab were introduced to reading and writing almost by default, as the more progressive husbands wanted to have partners who could compete with their English counterparts in society.

Singh also mentions how many different languages were on offer in those times – Farsi, the reviewer is a critic and cultural commentator.

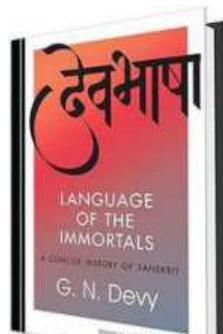
The Voice of the People: Great Speeches from India's Parliament

Smita Gupta
Juggernaut
₹999
A journalist collated some of the great speeches made by MPs and other leaders during times of crises. As India nears 80 years of Independence, the speeches give readers an insight into how lawmakers read a situation.



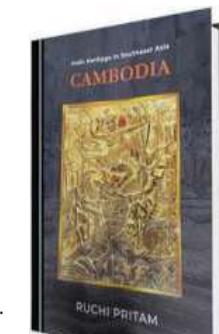
Language of the Immortals: A Concise History of Sanskrit

G.N. Devy
Aleph
₹399
Sanskrit shaped Indian thought, philosophy, and identity for millennia, yet it was never a language of the people, says Devy in this biography. He traces Sanskrit's trajectory, and how it shaped intellectual life via oral traditions.



Cambodia: Indic Heritage in Southeast Asia

Ruchi Pritam
ICT Academy Publications
₹1,100
The Khmer Empire was influenced by India's art and culture, and it is evident in Cambodia's temples and its architecture, mostly built between the 9th and 13th centuries. Pritam narrates the history of India and Cambodia in this volume.



The Art of Decluttering

Bhawana Pingali
Ebury Press
₹399
Can ancient rituals and practices, like making a cloth pad as self-care or drawing to feed ants, work as modern 'tools' to 'declutter' overloaded senses? Pingali takes readers through nine retellings of clothing, home and body, which make aspects of Indian ritualistic life relatable for the times.



Meet The Savarnas: Indian Millennials Whose Mediocrity Broke Everything
Ravikant Kisana
Ebury Press/Penguin Random
₹699

Looking through glass

Ravikant Kisana combines memoir, social observation, ethnographic insights and cultural exposition to hold a mirror to savarna supremacy

G. Sampath

sampath.g@thehindu.co.in

Baba Ambedkar famously compared the caste system to a tower with no staircase, one that offered no way for occupants of one floor (allotted to one caste) to climb up or down to another. "The floor on which one is born is also the one on which one dies," he said.

In *Meet the Savarnas*, Ravikant Kisana, an academic specialising in cultural studies, forges a new metaphor from Marilyn Lodén's concept of 'glass ceiling' – used to explain how patriarchy and sexism hold women back – to describe savarna supremacy. "Think of south Asia – India especially – as full of people sitting in a cramped and dirty basement... looking up at what is a glass ceiling for them but is, in fact, a floor above which lives a very small group of people," he writes. The group above are the savarnas, who "have access to all the switches in all the rooms of the house, including the basement. They switch on the lights and switch them off at will."

Invisible barriers

A glass floor that's also a glass ceiling is a powerful image. It encapsulates the invisible barriers that kick in to prevent someone from rising above their caste-mandated station while also protecting those above from falling lower, thereby cementing the segregation of the basement dwellers from those above ground. The vantage point of caste discourse in India is typically above the glass floor, looking down.

Kisana, in a startling inversion, points the lens of anthropological scrutiny upwards, from below the glass floor. What emerges is a searing social commentary that unpeels, with wit and precision, layers of congenital hypocrisy, narcissistic entitlement and delusions of grandeur that have propped up a hereditary elite's fantasies about themselves.

What happens when a caste marginalised person realises that their world and opinions is of no consequence in the privileged realm of 'serious' people? In Kisana's case, it launches him on a quest for savarna validation that morphs into a journey of self-discovery, and also, for the purposes of this book, an adventure in 'other'-discovery.

Kisana is good at switching registers from the personal to the social, the economic and the political to ask questions that would seem obvious anywhere except in discourses steeped in the savarna imaginary. He wonders, for instance, how in a country where 90% of the people earn less than ₹25,000 a month, hundreds of 'international' schools get away with charging lakhs of rupees as fees? Why do parents pay such absurd amounts? And who are these parents? "The 'international' school has emerged as a narrow gatekept marker of 'eliteness' masquerading in the guise of academic 'excellence'", argues Kisana. "It is this elusive tag that savarna parents are desperate to bestow upon their children – so desperate that paying lakhs for lower

kindergarten is also tolerable." In his telling, education is a mission-critical domain for servicing the core savarna values of gate-keeping and segregation.

Savarna romance

The chapters on love, sex and marriage explore what happens when an SC/ST or OBC person forms a relationship with an elite savarna, especially those who claim they don't "see caste" in people. They discover, of course, that the world of savarna romance – populated by modern, progressive yet "havan-compliant traditionalists" – rarely defies the norm of endogamy, with the terms of engagement (pun intended) widely disseminated by Bollywood where every love story is a savarna love story.

Kisana's sharpest indictment is reserved for the cohort of millennial savarnas who had anointed themselves the stewards of India's economic lift-off. Today, the Great Indian Dream is dead. No one talks of Make in India or Digital India or 100 smart cities anymore. What went wrong? In Kisana's analysis, the implosion was pre-ordained, given the "universally embedded impulse of exclusion" that manifests in multiple ways including, for instance, in urban planning that rarely respects the rights of low income residents, in delivering a "competition-free monopoly over commerce to the Bania communities", and in the elite savarna "pivot" to a strongman politician who was expected to champion their business interests against "the legitimate concerns of the marginalised".

Flight of the elites

Now, with their dream of 'Shining India' in tatters, lakhs of elite savarnas have fled India for the First World. Despite being in the driver's seat since independence, they failed spectacularly in nation-building – the quintessential project of modernity. According to Kisana, it is this failure that triggered their retreat from woke modernity and pushed them to embrace religion and half-baked history, realms where they can have the last word without fear of being challenged.

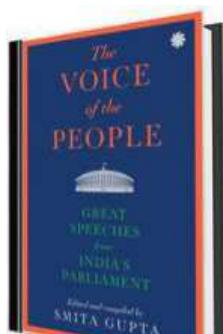
In eight chapters that you can race through in one sitting, Kisana combines memoir, social observation, ethnographic insights and cultural exposition to fashion a mirror for the average – in every sense of the word – savarna. No reader, whether from above or below the glass floor, can get through these pages without multiple moments of discomfiting self-recognition.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

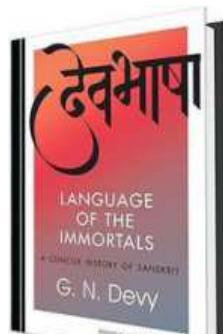
The Voice of the People: Great Speeches from India's Parliament

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₹999
A journalist collated some of the great speeches made by MPs and other leaders during times of crises. As India nears 80 years of Independence, the speeches give readers an insight into how lawmakers read a situation.



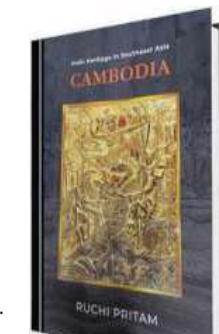
Language of the Immortals: A Concise History of Sanskrit

G.N. Devy
Aleph
₹399
Sanskrit shaped Indian thought, philosophy, and identity for millennia, yet it was never a language of the people, says Devy in this biography. He traces Sanskrit's trajectory, and how it shaped intellectual life via oral traditions.



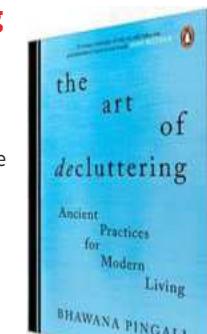
Cambodia: Indic Heritage in Southeast Asia

Ruchi Pritam
ICT Academy Publications
₹1,100
The Khmer Empire was influenced by India's art and culture, and it is evident in Cambodia's temples and its architecture, mostly built between the 9th and 13th centuries. Pritam narrates the history of India and Cambodia in this volume.



The Art of Decluttering

Bhawana Pingali
Ebury Press
₹399
Can ancient rituals and practices, like making a cloth pad as self-care or drawing to feed ants, work as modern 'tools' to 'declutter' overloaded senses? Pingali takes readers through nine retellings of clothing, home and body, which make aspects of Indian ritualistic life relatable for the times.



Fareeda Kanga

In a starry night in the Thar Desert earlier this year, chef Hussain Shahzad of The Bombay Canteen prepared a sumptuous feast for guests at Mihir Garh, a boutique hotel in Jodhpur, one of several properties owned by House of Rohet. His challenge? To showcase the unique flavours of local Rajasthani ingredients, especially gamey meats such as rabbit and quail, with a contemporary twist.

"Chefs are successfully leveraging the ecosystem they grew up in," says Shahzad, whose love of quail was cemented growing up in Chennai, where the bird (harder to come by in the north of India) is a fixture on local menus. At this special dinner, a collaboration between The Bombay Canteen and House of Rohet, he gave the bird a creative spin – slow-cooked with Mathanai chilli, a Rajasthani variety known for its deep red colour and strong flavour. "Instead of the usual curry or roast, we tuck it into a taco, making it a fun, flavourful bite," he says.

Like many creative minds, Shahzad finds inspiration close to home, aiming to build a more sustainable, organic food culture. His cooking is rooted in heritage and family traditions – each dish telling a story, through its ingredients or the way it's prepared. And he's not the only one; today, chefs across India are sourcing lesser-known indigenous meats, grains, herbs and spices to create dishes full of memory, history and provenance. From Kerala's sprouted coconut to Garhwal's *mandua* millet, we track down a few of these beloved but outside the mainstream must try.



THE NEW LOCAL EXOTICS

Indian chefs turn to their roots to introduce a contemporary twist — quail tacos in the Thar, *kokum* cider in Pune

On a flavour hunt

My first stop is Guwahati, the gateway to the Northeast. The food habits here are dramatically different from the rest of India, with pork, pigeon, fish, and seasonal greens cooked in a light broth or fermented to perfection. We are on the hunt for the *thekera* fruit, indigenous to the

evergreen forests in Assam, and used as a souring agent in many of its dishes, including the popular *masor tenga*, a tangy fish curry.

Later, in Uttarakhand, we try ingredients like *bhang* (cannabis seeds), rhododendron, and nettle grass from the Tehri Garhwal

defeated four hearts by two tricks, but North didn't know that. He soldiered on to four spades hoping for the best. Four spades is a poor contract, but with a 2-2 spade split, the ace of clubs onside, and the jack of diamonds dropping, it might make against less than perfect defense.

Sementa led the ace of hearts, seeing the two from partner. What next? It was tempting to lead a safe heart and not break either of the minor suits, but Sementa found the winning

region, which are slowly finding their way onto menus across India. "*Bhang* chutney, made from crushed seeds mixed with green chillies and coriander leaves, has no psychoactive effects," says homestay owner and chef Deepa Pathak. "But

it delivers a sharp hit to the palette." In Garhwal, a variety of grains — *bajra* (pearl millet), *jhangora* (barnyard millet), and *kadra* or *mandua* (kodo millet) — are creatively used in sweet and savoury dishes.

Timur and sprouted coconut

But you don't have to travel far to experience these local ingredients. They are travelling the length and breadth of



NORTH			
♦ A 10 5 4	♦ J 9	♦ K 10 8 7	♦ K 7 6 3
♦ A 10 5 4	♦ J 9	♦ K 10 8 7	♦ K 7 6 3
♦ A 10 5 4	♦ J 9	♦ K 10 8 7	♦ K 7 6 3
♦ A 10 5 4	♦ J 9	♦ K 10 8 7	♦ K 7 6 3

WEST			
EAST			
♦ K J	♦ Q 9	♦ K Q 10 8 6 2	♦ Q 9
♦ A 7 5 3	♦ 9 5 4	♦ A Q 9 8	♦ Q 5
♦ J 6 2	♦ A 7 6 3 2	♦ A Q 3	♦ A 7 6 3 2
♦ A J 9 8	♦ 4	♦ 10 4 2	♦ 4

SOUTH			
♦ A 8 7 6 3 2	♦ 4	♦ A Q 3	♦ 4
♦ A 8 7 6 3 2	♦ 4	♦ A Q 3	♦ 4
♦ A 8 7 6 3 2	♦ 4	♦ A Q 3	♦ 4
♦ A 8 7 6 3 2	♦ 4	♦ A Q 3	♦ 4

the country, thanks to chefs and restaurants proudly showcasing these lesser-known ingredients. For instance, *timur*, a rare and prized wild Himalayan pepper, known for its citrusy aroma, is giving Sichuan peppercorns a run for its money.

"At Loya in Taj West End, Bengaluru, we roast and crush *timur* before marinating fresh prawns," says chef Rajesh Wadhwa. "It adds an unexpected depth to traditional seafood dishes."

In Mumbai, Jérémie Sabbagh, head baker and partner of Suzette Bakery and Kitchen Garden, incorporates Garhwal's grains in his breads for nutritional value. "We use it for most of our sandwiches at the bakery," he says.

Coastal treasures are also making their mark. Thirty-five minutes away at Ekaa, one of their recent menus features rarely seen ingredients such as sprouted coconut — a delicacy from Kerala that forms inside mature coconuts, and prized for its sweetness and airy texture. Indian sea asparagus is another star.

Larder check

East

Northeast: *Bilahi* (tomato), *bogori* (Indian jujube), *thekera*, *outenga* (elephant apple), and *kordoi* (starfruit) are available in fresh and dry forms. There's also *Naga* chillies, *bhut jalokhia* (ghost peppers), fermented bamboo shoots, *khar* (made from the ashes of banana peel), black sesame seeds, and *maan dhania* (wild coriander).

Odisha: *Ambulo* (dried mango) and *badi* (dried lentil).

North and West

Tehri Garhwal and Rajasthan: Cannabis, *timur*, rhododendron, nettle leaves, *mathanai* chilli, and *emmer* (wheat).

South

Kerala: *kodampulli* (Malabar tamarind), sprouted coconut, and sea asparagus.

With its naturally briny, mineral-rich flavour, it brings a subtle taste of the ocean to every dish.

"Each ingredient is chosen not just for its flavour, but for the narrative it holds – the people who cultivate it, the environment that shapes it, and the traditions that have preserved it over generations," says chef Niyati Rao of Ekaa. "These often-overlooked ingredients carry stories of resilience, and the evolving relationship between nature and cuisine."

Adding to cocktails

Indian mixologists are jumping on the bandwagon, too. Souring agents such as *kokum* are being used to add a tart, refreshing twist. In Pune, Kimaya Brewing Company offers a *kokum* cider. In Guwahati, microbrewery Terra Mayaa has crafted Aamras, a mango ale.

Even homegrown spirit brands are getting creative with Indian-inspired cocktails. "Hapusa's Himalayan Negroni features Himalayan Sichuan pepper, a nod to the brand's Himalayan roots," says Vikram Achanta, co-founder of 30BestBarsIndia. At Masque in Mumbai, the team regularly experiments with unusual Indian spices. "Terra, our raw turmeric-infused gin, has been a bestseller since day one," says head mixologist Ankush Gamre. "We've also worked with *tirphal* bitters, *jalpai*, and Bhavnagiri chili."

So, on your next evening out, be sure to check the menu for something you may have never tried before but that holds a special place in local, indigenous cuisine.

The writer is based in Mumbai.

GOREN BRIDGE

What next?

East-West vulnerable, East deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from the Cavendish Invitational Pairs a few years ago. Top players from around the world are invited to play with big cash prizes for the high finishers. West was Antonio Sementa, one of the many fine players coming from Italy.

Sementa's four-heart bid was two-way — it might make, or it might push the opponents too high. Good defense would have

defeated four hearts by two tricks, but North didn't know that. He soldiered on to four spades hoping for the best. Four spades is a poor contract, but with a 2-2 spade split, the ace of clubs onside, and the jack of diamonds dropping, it might make against less than perfect defense.

Sementa led the ace of hearts, seeing the two from partner. What next? It was tempting to lead a safe heart and not break either of the minor suits, but Sementa found the winning

The bidding:			
EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
2♦	2♠	4♦	4♣
All pass			
Opening lead: Ace of ♠			

defense of cashing the ace of clubs and leading another club.

Playing any other suit would allow declarer to play two rounds of trumps. A club shift then would allow declarer to win with the king and lead diamonds. The fall of the jack would allow the

discard of a low club. This play by Sementa set up a second club trick for the defense before the trumps were drawn and Sementa cashed the jack of clubs when with the king of spades. Well judged in the bidding and the play by Sementa.

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Generic trademarks returns

Berty Ashley

1 On August 10, 1897, Felix Hoffmann synthesised acetylsalicylic acid, which was later patented by his company, Bayer, under a different name. In 1918, they lost the trademark. When a Nobel Prize was awarded for the work showing that it suppressed transmitting information about pain to the brain, it became a household name for any product that gave the same result. What is the name coined by Bayer?

2 Born on August 10, 1814, Henri — was a confectioner from Switzerland who started working in a pharmacy. In 1867, he started working with powdered milk for children and introduced 'Milk Flour' under his name. This eventually became the world's largest food company, known by what name that refers to any sweet confection in many countries?

3 This item's name is owned by Philips in the European Union, but everywhere else it is used as a generic term. Technically, a countertop convection oven is used to produce crispy food items without using oil. What is the name of the device?

4 This term is the name of a Japanese electronics company that became globally popular for making calculators. In the 1980s, they introduced electronic musical keyboards. They were so successful that in India, keyboards were known by



British entrepreneur Joseph Cyril Bamford founded which iconic company? (GETTY IMAGES)

the company name. What company?

5 Saunders-Roe owns the right to the name of this vehicle, which technically should be called an ACV (Air Cushion Vehicle). By what name is it known, thanks to its ability to move over different surfaces?

6 These were known as plasters and were invented by an

employee of Johnson & Johnson. They marketed it under a name which is now used to refer to any adhesive plaster used as dressing. What item is this?

7 Technically known as 'Inflated Cushioning', this item is trademarked by the Sealed Air Corporation. Originally used to package IBM computers, it is now ubiquitous in the shopping industry. What item that was

originally designed as wallpaper?

8 The name of the safety razor is owned by Procter & Gamble. It has become so popular that in some countries, like Indonesia, it's made its way into the local language. What name is supposed to be the 'best a man can get'?

9 This is the name of a company that was started by an Italian family in California as a medical product. A version of hydrotherapy was used to treat rheumatoid arthritis. By what name do we know this product which now usually denotes luxury in the bathroom?

10 Joseph Cyril Bamford bought second-hand items to make a tipping trailer in a garage and founded this company in England in 1945. It has now become one of the largest manufacturers of construction equipment. By what name is the company famous, and almost all children have a fascination for?

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

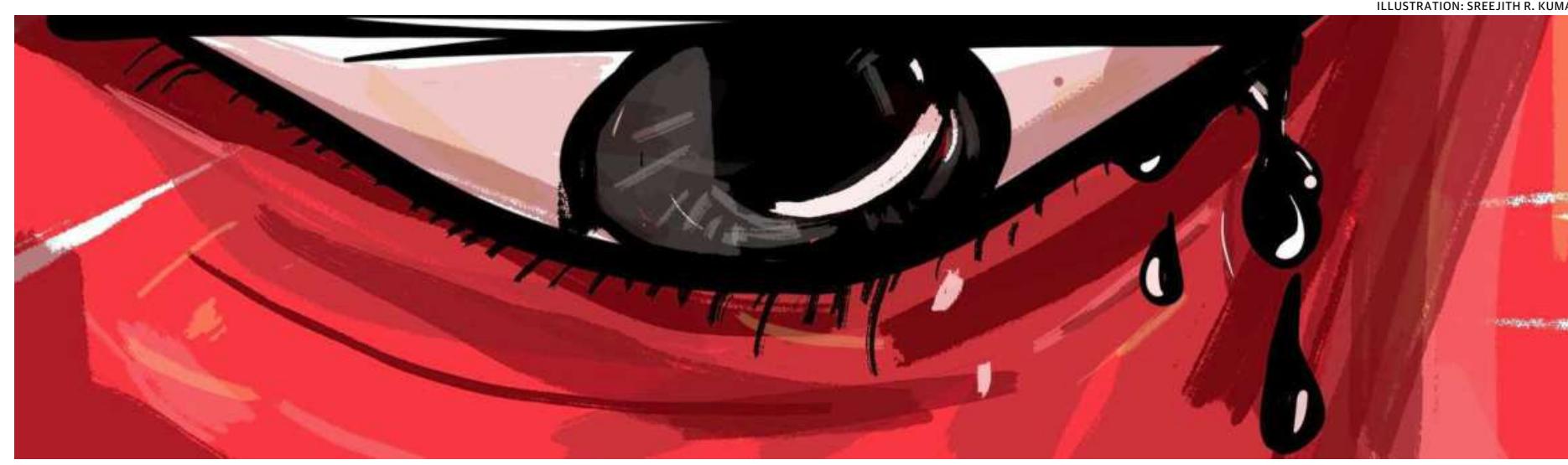
ANSWERS

- 7** Made a pig of oneself in public, devouring a steak heartily (7)
- 8** Not working with unionist, too irritated by disagreement (3,2,6)
- 10** One sampling sandwiches, oats cooked by member for emcee (11)
- 13** Correcting errors in endgame, artfully wins tournament finally (10)
- 15** No doubt captivated by charming old Venetian nobleman (9)
- 18** Headgear and skirt worn by a model on catwalk at premiere (4,3)
- 20** Shouldn't waste time! Ruffian getting trinitrotoluene (7)
- 23** Matter of alien revolutionary crossing border (5)
- 24** Bit of tequila and everyone's high (4)

SOLUTION NO. 15

S	A	T	R	A	P	A	L	M	A	G	E	S

</tbl_r



Duvvuri Subbarao
subbarao@gmail.com

I don't tear up easily. I didn't cry when my parents died. There was sorrow and overwhelming grief, but the tears just never came. I didn't cry when I was publicly humiliated, or deeply hurt, or had a serious setback. I don't cry on occasions when most people do – at cremations, farewells, or after watching a gut-wrenching movie. Does that make me less human?

These questions flashed through my mind as I saw Amanda Anisimova weep profusely on world television after her devastating loss in the Wimbledon final. There was no attempt to hold back or paste on a false smile. She sat there, in full view of the cameras, overwhelmed by emotion. Some thought it awkward or unsportsmanlike. I thought it was honest – and brave. It made me reflect not just on her tears, but on my own absence of them, and what society makes of both.

We have come to equate crying with weakness, oversensitivity, or a loss of control. Especially for men, tears are seen as something to suppress. "Don't cry like a girl" was a line thrown around freely when I was growing up in the macho atmosphere of a boys-only boarding school. Older and hopefully wiser now, I see that it wasn't just a put-down for boys; it was also a quiet insult to girls.

Boys do cry
There is a lot of misogyny baked into our discomfort with crying. From an early age, boys are taught to bottle things up, while girls are shamed for being "too sissy" or emotional. At home and in school, children are brought up to believe that composure equals strength and tears signal weakness or instability.

But crying is far more nuanced than we make it out to be. Grief is, of course, the most common trigger. The loss of someone we love can break us open. But people also cry out of frustration,

An ode to crying

Science tells us that crying is therapeutic; in an age of pretentious appearances, tears are one of the last truly honest acts

anguish, and sheer exhaustion. I know someone who once cried for hours after missing an international flight – not because of the disruption itself, but because it came after months of stress. The missed flight was simply the tipping point.

And then there are tears of joy. I saw my brother, an otherwise stoic father, cry as he gave his daughter away in marriage. A young woman I know cried when she finally saw her name on the list after clearing the IAS exam in her third attempt. "I didn't cry when I failed twice," she told me. "But I cried when I made it." Sometimes, relief can be as overwhelming as sorrow.

We have seen many public figures cry. Barack Obama cried while addressing the nation after the Sandy Hook school shooting. After losing the Australian Open final to Nadal in 2009, Roger Federer, through copious tears, said, "God, this is killing me." Hem Barua choked up in Parliament while recounting the plight of flood victims in Assam. Rahul Dravid teared up during his farewell speech. Those tears didn't diminish them; they made them more relatable, more deeply human.

They elevated them in our eyes. And yet, we continue to judge tears – especially in public and professional life. I once watched a colleague being gently chided by a senior officer after he choked up while recounting a tragic experience. "You shouldn't get emotional in public," the senior said. But why not? Why is authenticity unwelcome in spaces where empathy should matter most?

Science tells us that crying is therapeutic. Emotional tears contain stress hormones. Crying helps release tension, soothes the nervous system, and brings a sense of relief. That's why people often say, "I feel lighter after a good cry." In Japan, there are even "crying clubs" where people gather to let it all out together – a practice called *rui-katsu*, or "tear-seeking". Crying isn't dysfunction. It's the body's way of healing.

Not everyone cries easily. Some, like me, feel deeply but express emotion differently. I believe that is perfectly okay. People vary in temperament, personality, and hormonal make-up. But we must stop believing that crying – or not crying – tells us anything definitive about a person's character. Some of the strongest people I know cry without hesitation. Some of the most emotionally closed have not cried in decades. What matters is whether we allow ourselves to feel fully.

We need to see tears not as a breakdown of control, but as a breakthrough of honesty. I have learned not to feel awkward when someone cries in front of me. I no longer rush to change the subject or offer sympathy saying, "Oh, don't cry." I let them cry because sometimes that is exactly what they need. We live in an age of pretentious appearances – curated social media, measured speeches, the pretence of always being in control. In such a world, tears are one of the last truly honest acts. They say, "This matters." Whether it's sorrow, pride, frustration, or joy, crying is an anchor to something real. It's a reaffirmation that we are human.

The writer is a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India

Finding magic amid the chaos

Indhuja Nagarajan
indhuja.nagarajan@gmail.com

Well, that was an exhausting day, I had left from work early to cling on to my bed. As it was the peak hour, I had no option but to board an overcrowded train. When about to alight at my destination, my legs stumbled and even before the train entered the station, I landed on the ground. It was a "pause and play" game for about half an hour as I was switching between regaining consciousness and blanking out.

There were about a bunch of people who actively strived to revive my conscious and there was this girl, who held my head on her lap, fanning to get me some air, and sent word to my family.

After a few minutes, I was able to stand up on my own and sip a hot cup of coffee that a man among the crowd had got for me. In the meantime, the girl sent for medical help and I was resting my head on the wall without even realising the tears escaping my eyes. She wiped it off and held my hand.

When I bounced back to normalcy, everyone dispersed and she accompanied me and spoke a few kind words.

As she was about to leave, I asked her name and that left me spellbound. She had the same name as mine. She stayed with me throughout and that was the positivity I was looking for.

I realised the need to embrace each day with happiness amid the chaos. Instead of complaining, I shifted my mind to see circumstances in a different way and find solutions with all the possibilities that come along. This incident prompted me to see the magic behind every fall.

Be it work or life, we consistently complain and gossip. However, when you consciously begin to look for the beyond in every situation or person and restrain your views from the limited information that you are acquainted with, you can undeniably witness the magic in entirety and feel grateful for everything you own and anything that you have been through.

K. Ganapathy
drkganapathy@gmail.com

Sigmund Freud had remarked that humans were convinced of their immortality. Discussing death, therefore, could be considered macabre, ghoulish, grim, and morbid. Ever since technology has made the process of dying protracted and complicated, I have been espousing the cause of good death.

In keeping with the Supreme Court's opinion that the right to die with dignity is a fundamental right, attention to quality of death is critical. In good death, the patient's desires are taken into account for treatment preferences, quality of life and death, and maintenance of dignity.

Today, death is the cessation of life. But for the alpha generation, a perpetual digital life may be an option after conventional life ceases.

Virtual avatar
Griefbots are AI systems simulating personalities, speech patterns, and behaviours of deceased individuals. The virtual humanoid avatar is trained on text messages, emails, social media posts, voice recordings, and videos.

The more the data supplied, the more realistic is the avatar. Users see, hear, and chat with a digital version of their loved ones. Conversational AI utilises image synthesis and voice cloning to create digital twins that respond in real-time with natural language and emotional nuances. Platforms such as Project December, HereAfter AI, and StoryFile offer griefbot experiences.

Griefbots are marketed

Digital life after death

Grief tech companies monetise the dead as a service to help the grieving; the departed are resurrected to comfort the living using AI



avatars of their deceased loved ones. Advanced AI technologies recreate likeness, voice and expressions, allowing bereaved families to "meet" and converse with the deceased in a virtual setting. DeepBrain AI's proprietary technology generates a lifelike digital avatar. The resulting avatar interacts through video, allowing two-way conversations. The experience is similar to a virtual reunion. Users share memories.

"Re;memory" is used in memorial services, family gatherings, weddings and birthdays enabling "live" inclusion of the departed.

Individuals cope with grief by reconnecting with lost loved ones, address unresolved emotions, and preserve cherished memories.

The service is said to offer comfort, facilitate emotional healing, and maintain ongoing connections perpetually.

Ethical issues
Traditionally, Indian culture advocates detachment. We have our own methods of paying homage with dignity and respect, to the departed.

Will our children use the new ways to remember and connect with us, after we have gone. Do we surrender our humanity for an artificial intimacy, divorced from concrete reality?

Where do we draw the line between real and virtual, authentic and counterfeit? Globally accepted principles of protecting dignity of the deceased and respecting the dead, may have to be rewritten.

Grief tech companies monetise the dead as a service to help grieving individuals.

The departed are resurrected to comfort the living using AI.

magazine
THE HINDU



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

I felt overwhelmed reading about the lives of fisherfolk communities in the Sunderbans, in Srinagar and Tamil Nadu. ("Song of the Sunderbans' fisherfolk"; Aug. 3) Their spirited lives, culture and reverence for their profession faces challenges from pollution and climate change. It is the duty of the state and people in power to do everything possible to ensure the sustenance of fisher communities.

Pratiksha Singh

To safeguard the Sunderbans' fisherfolk and their culture, it is essential to introduce sustainable fishing practices and alternative livelihoods. Promoting their traditions through community-based initiatives can reinforce their cultural identity. Additionally, government-backed policies ensuring fishing rights and enhanced disaster preparedness will be crucial in protecting their lives and livelihoods.

N.S. Reddy

The dumping of non-biodegradable wastes like plastic and thermocol from cities and suburbs, the discharge of toxic effluents by industries, and encroachment by land mafia, businesses and citizens have adversely affected the inland fishery resources.

The construction of barrages and dams across many rivers has impeded the natural spawning of several marine fish and shrimp. Traditional knowledge systems of the riverfolk must be documented and utilised for sustainable use of resources.

T.N. Venugopal

Violation of rights

It is downright unethical and outrageous that Joan Didion's private notes addressed to her husband have been published as a book. ("After Joan"; Aug. 3). It is an unscrupulous commercial venture and exploitation of a great writer's name and fame. If she wanted those notes published, she would have edited and refined them and structured them into a book. There cannot be a greater injustice to a writer than publishing such private material posthumously.

Kosaraju Chandramouli

Mark of resilience

The article vividly portrays Tamil Nadu's river fisherfolk – their resilience, spiritual depth, and cultural traditions. ("The river's bounty"; Aug. 3) It has also emphasised the community's harmonious coexistence with nature and a life rooted in heritage and simplicity.

Avinashiappan Mylsami

Beautiful lives

The photographs capture the fisherwomen of Harnai in all their glory. ("Silver fins and a flash of gold"; Aug. 3) How they go about their daily life and are self-reliant amidst all their struggles is indeed inspiring.

S.S. Rohith Varon

Clothing is political

Clothes are not merely vanity, they are also markers of identity and memory. ("Kallol Datta's act of defiance"; Aug. 3) They whisper tales of tradition, resistance, freedom and modernity.

Anusha Pillay



MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

The romance of names

Scattered across India's rail map are lyrical place names that are hidden poetry.

G. Gayatri

Before the final departure

Just the simple fact that we exist, we breathe, we are still alive is enough to pause and reflect to be fully grateful.

Parimala Rani

Reading maketh a human

Though digital media is everywhere now, the value of reading during leisure has not diminished.

A. Mylsami

The hands that build the nation

Daily-wage earners remain unseen in the eyes of a nation built on their labour.

S. Krishna Sai Teja

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.

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The legacy that shaped India

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Delivering goodness nationwide

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Infant nourishment

In 1968, Amul launched India's first locally produced baby food, a milestone that outpaced imports and made the nation self-sufficient by 1975.

Operation Flood success

Amul Milk Powder transformed flush season surplus into a lasting foundation of strength for farmers, securing India as the world's top milk producer.



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