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Most ambitious project Work on the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is on in full swing ahead of its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 22. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



RITU RAJ KONWAR

ASSAM

Batadrava satra

A ₹188-crore project will develop land around the temple to turn it into a tourist attraction

Ahead of the 2021 Assembly elections, Home Minister Amit Shah laid the foundation stone for a ₹188-crore project to develop Batadrava, the birthplace of 15th-16th century neo-Vaishnav saint-reformer Srimanta Sankaradeva, in Assam’s Nagaon district. The Batadrava *satra* (monastery) is among a few religious centres being ‘developed’ as part of the BJP’s agenda to evict ‘encroachers’ of ‘suspect’ nationality, which usually means Muslim migrants from Bangladesh.

One of the main clauses of the December 29, 2023, peace accord between the extremist United Liberation Front of Asom and the government, if implemented, would pave the way to reserve areas within a five-km radius of Batadrava, more than 500 other *satras*, thousands of *namghars* (community prayer halls of the Sankaradeva order) and temples. The clause says no community other than indigenous communities, primarily the Assamese, would be allowed to buy land within these zones.

The Batadrava redevelopment project, initiated under the Centre’s larger ‘Assam Darshan’ programme, aims to develop the area as a place of tourist attraction while preserving history and cultural heritage. The project expands over 54.5 acres.

In April 2023, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the government’s plan to construct a corridor in the Kamakhya Temple complex on the lines of the Kashi-Vishwanath Temple Corridor in Uttar Pradesh’s Varanasi. This project of an unspecified cost entails increasing the space around the temple — one of the major pilgrimages of the Shakti cult — from 3,000 sq.ft. to about 1,00,000 sq.ft. spread over three levels. Six major temples in the complex, currently hidden from public view, would be restored to their original glory, officials involved with the project said. A pilgrim facilitation centre, guest houses, a medical centre, banks, and food outlets are also part of the ambitious project.

— Rahul Karmakar

THE GREAT TEMPLE REVIVAL

Cultural resources are now being repurposed for a new Hindu political order. And today, scores of temples are being renovated, expanded or built afresh — by political parties across the spectrum



ANI

UTTAR PRADESH Madhava temples

12 Madhava temples and the Bade Hanuman temple in Prayagraj will be restored among other development projects for ₹2,500 crore, ahead of the 2025 Maha Kumbh

Besides the mega Ayodhya temple and allied infrastructure projects in Uttar Pradesh, worth more than ₹30,000 crore, and the Kashi, Mathura temples, the State is restoring 12 Madhava temples and the Bade Hanuman temple (in pic) in Prayagraj ahead of the Maha Kumbh of 2025. A 125-km-long ‘spiritual circuit’ for the temples is being developed for devotees. The project will cost a whopping ₹2,500 crore and will include the beautification and rejuvenation of temples with landscaped pathways, footpaths, wall paintings, grand entrances and lighting. To accommodate a large number of devotees, a prayer hall, based on the concept of an open-air theatre, will be constructed at the temple.

— Mayank Kumar

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Place and temple have signified authority, order and hierarchy in societies for ages. The idea of a separation of church and state is relatively new, and frequently violated in nearly all political systems, across centuries. King and priest reinforced or challenged each other’s power depending on the circumstances. Kings built temples for legitimacy and priests sought state patronage. Modernity weakened the claims of the spiritual authorities, but the relationship between nationalism and religion has been more complex.

Territorial nationalism, like religious communities, needs faith, martyrs, deities, and notions of sacred places. Shared notions of sacred spaces and rituals contribute to the making of a people, often defined in conflict with another people. Religious nationalism frees itself from the burden of nuances. King and priest, politics and piety, temple and palace become indistinguishable.

The opening of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is a milestone in the progress of India’s transformation into a Hindu nation. On the one end of the spectrum of ideas of India is that it owes its birth solely to its encounter with colonialism, and its instruments of governance such as census, land surveys, communication networks and modern education. On the other

end is the conception of India as a timeless civilisational nation that withstood Islamic invaders and western imperialism. Centrist nationalism sought to balance tradition and modernity, faith and rationality, Hindus and Muslims. The rise of Hindutva toppled this balancing act.

Ayodhya’s Ram Temple has been central to the imagination of the Hindu *rashtra*, but the spotlight is also on several other sacred locations and pilgrimage networks. Speaking in Ayodhya on December 30, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: “Our country has held significance for pilgrimage journeys since ancient times... Pilgrimages from Badrinath Vishal to Setubandh Rameshwaram, Gangotri to Gangasagar, Dwarkadheesh to Jagannath Puri...”

Nation builders and academics have viewed India as a territory bound by pilgrims who traverse its sacred locations. “The pilgrim’s India reaches back many hundreds of years and brings to us an astonishing picture of a land linked not by the power of kings and governments, but by the footsteps of pilgrims,” Diana L. Eck writes in *India: A Sacred Geography*. Pilgrimages “must have intensified the conception of a common land and a common culture,” Jawaharlal Nehru writes in *The Discovery of India*. Their religious significance apart, people of all castes, classes and gender also travelled to places of pilgrimage for fun and sightseeing, and “even the difference of language between the north and the south did not prove a formidable barrier to this

intercourse,” he writes.

The early claims of sovereignty made by nationalists against imperial rulers were in the realm of religion. In 1954, the first government of the new republic encouraged pilgrims to gather in large numbers for the Allahabad Kumbh Mela, in a show of assertion. The British rulers had created obstructions for the Kumbh in 1942. Nehru himself was present in the city, and pilgrims considered a visit to his home Anand Bhavan in the city a part of the pilgrimage. During the 2019 election campaign, Modi pinned the blame for a stampede at the Kumbh that year on Nehru. More and more Indians are travelling as pilgrims now. In 2001, 20 million devotees gathered for the Kumbh in Allahabad; in 2013, there were 100 million.

What was then repented by most Indians as an act of vandalism, the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, is today retold as a moment of national triumph. A temple in Ayodhya is potentially the closure of a prolonged conflict but faith takes believers to newer frontiers. The Kasi corridor development and rapid judicial interventions potentially advance Hindu claims over the Gyanvapi mosque compound. Cultural resources that were once deployed in pursuit of a composite nationalism are now repurposed in the service of a Hindu political order. That transition is fundamental yet evolutionary in form. Nehru had a vision about ‘temples of modern India’. The new New India is exploring the moon and space, and also making temples.

NARESH KUMAR



HIMACHAL PRADESH Bilaspur temples

The State has sent a ₹1,500 crore proposal to the Centre to restore the submerged temples of Bilaspur and promote religious tourism

In 1963-64, the rising backwaters of Bhakra-Nangal Dam constructed on Sutlej river submerged the old town of Bilaspur, including 30 temples. Of these, some dozen temples built between the 10th and 16th centuries, considered to be of great archaeological importance, will be reclaimed by the State government.

Last year, the Himachal Pradesh government sent a proposal worth ₹1,500 crore titled ‘Restoring Submerged Temples of Bilaspur’ to the Centre. The project aims to promote religious and heritage tourism in Bilaspur.

These structures would be lifted onto an artificially created island so that they can be saved from submergence in the future. Bilaspur happens to be the hometown of the BJP’s president J.P. Nadda.

— Vikas Vasudeva

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Books trail Author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (left) will be a part of *The Hindu* Lit Fest 2024 in Chennai, January 26-27. (FILE PHOTO)

Writing my way into non-fiction

The award-winning novelist on the creative tools she employed to bring milestones and stories alive in her new book on the Murthys

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Sometimes changing your mind can teach you a new trick or two. When I was asked by my publisher if I'd be interested in writing a biography of the early years of author Sudha Murty and Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy, I turned down the offer right away. I had great respect for the Murthys, whom I'd known since my college days at the University of California in Berkeley, where I'd been friends with Sudha's brother, Shrinivas. But I was a fiction writer.

Creative licence was my forte. I relied on it to bring alive on the page characters such as Draupadi and Sita, Maharani Jindan and the magical Mistress of Spices. In writing a biography, I'd be hobbled by facts. Besides, I had only written fiction in my nearly three-decade-long writing career. Surely non-fiction was a very different beast?

However, my publisher was persuasive, and the Murthys gave the project their blessing. Before I knew it, I found myself interviewing the couple, spending time at their home in Bengaluru, and researching and writing my first ever work of non-fiction. In the process, I discovered something very interesting: writing non-fiction isn't that different from writing fiction. They draw upon similar skills.

In both fiction and non-fiction, you must understand, deeply, what motivates the main characters to behave in a particular way. In both cases, you must feel the character from the inside as they go through the dramatic moments of their lives. In both cases, you must understand how these moments transformed them.

Constrained by reality

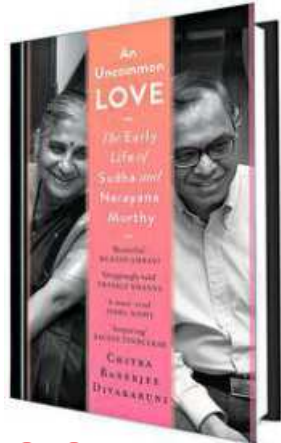
Perhaps my earlier forays into re-visioning the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as well as interpreting the lives of women at key historical moments, such as Maharani Jindan in *The Last Queen* (2021), had prepared me for this. Because in those cases, too, I was constrained by the incidents that had already taken place. The only liberty I had was character interpretation.

For instance, when writing the famous disrobing scene in *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), described by so many great writers, I realised

that the storyline was already there: the Pandavas sitting in the Kaurava *sabha*, humiliated and powerless; Draupadi being dragged in by Dussasana, who tries to disrobe her. The only freedom I had was to imagine and feel what Draupadi thought and suffered, and how, by the end of the scene, she was transformed by refusing to feel shamed.

That is the same technique I used in writing the story of the Murthys. After they shared certain cardinal incidents from their lives with me, I sat, eyes closed, imagining and feeling. I focused on the protagonists' very human emotions, desires and flaws. And the scenes began to come alive.

In 1978, the newly-wed Sudha joined Murthy in Boston, where he was briefly posted. She told me that the first place in Boston she chose to visit was the MIT campus. Years ago, she had been offered a research assistantship at the prestigious university, but she had reluctantly given it up to join TELCO as their first woman engineer. So, on visiting the campus, she had wept tears of regret. When she told Murthy about this, he offered to put her through the graduate program at MIT, even though it would mean the end of his own ambitions of starting a company. Touched, she said to him, "I don't need it. You are my Ph.D."



After the Murthys shared certain cardinal incidents from their lives with me, I sat, eyes closed, imagining and feeling. I focused on the protagonists' very human emotions, desires and flaws. And the scenes began to come alive



To see and feel

The facts that Sudha gave me formed the skeleton of the scene I wrote of that incident. To make it come alive, I had to sit, with Sudha, on the steps of MIT, with tears streaming down my cheeks. I had to be with her and Murthy that evening, in the cramped bedroom of their shared apartment, as he asked her what was wrong. I had to be able to see her looking into his face as he made the offer that, if accepted, would force him to give up all his dreams. I had to hear her tear-soaked but triumphant voice saying, "You are my Ph.D."

It was not so different from when I worked on a scene in my novels.

This became my editor's favourite scene. When she asked me what inspired me to come up with it, I had to correct her. "Every bit of it is true!" I said.

This, then, is what I've learned from writing both fiction and non-fiction: in fiction, we create the structure of the story; in non-fiction, it is given to us. But in both cases, to ensure that the book touches the reader's heart, we must bring the characters alive in the crucible of our imagination.

Gsquare Group presents
The Hindu Lit Fest 2024 in
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The writer's latest book is *An Uncommon Love: The Early Life of Sudha and Narayana Murthy*.

Loving Big Brother

This sparkling take on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* gives agency to the original protagonist's lover

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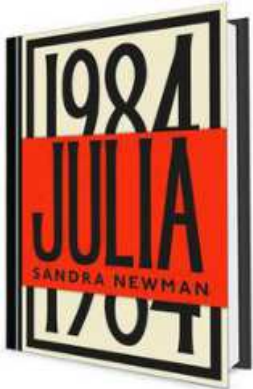
The clocks don't strike 13 at the beginning like in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but Sandra Newman's *Julia*, a retelling of the dystopian classic from the perspective of "the girl from the fiction department", is imaginative, full of empathy, and a wonderful companion novel to the original.

Critics have taken on Orwell for not having etched out his women characters better, and this lack is evident in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well, with the protagonist Winston Smith's story taking centre stage. Coincidentally, a recent biography, *Wifedom*, by Anna Funder shines a light on 'Mrs. Orwell's invisible life'. Eileen O'Shaughnessy, married to Orwell from 1936 until her death in 1945, did many things at once for Orwell, but was never given enough credit either by her husband or his biographers. The real girl from the fiction department, however, is the dazzling Sonia Brownell, who was married to Orwell for three months before he died of tuberculosis in 1950. In 2021, it was announced that the Orwell Estate had given its nod to an American writer to retell *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through the eyes of Julia, Winston Smith's lover.

Different tangent

It's 1984 and Julia Worthing works as a mechanic, repairing the novel-writing machines in the Fiction Department at the Ministry of Truth in Oceania. Newman goes straight to the point when she begins to narrate Julia's story: "It was the man from Records who began it, him all unknowing in his prim, grim way, his above-it-all oldthink way." He was the one people called 'Old Misery' but "Comrade Smith was his right name, though 'Comrade' never suited him somehow".

Newman's description of the totalitarian state, and what it is like for women, is perceptive, particularly the way she recreates the various organs that spread the messages (war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength). Her sketches of the Ministry of Truth building, the room above



Julia
Sandra
Newman
Granta
Books
₹699

the junk shop where Winston and Julia catch their breath before the dreaded Thought Police catches up with them, the place in the forest where they meet with the bluebells blooming, the Ministry of Love's O'Brien (who is full of Hate) and his intimidating home, and the torture chambers, especially Room 101, are atmospheric. Though it will be fair to say that Orwell's depiction of what transpires at the Ministry of Love is more chilling and utterly hopeless.

In Newman's reworking, Julia is adept at staying alive, against all odds. She goes off in a new direction in Chapter 2 of Part One when she signs herself out for two hours on a 'Sickness: Menstrual', "a privilege all the girls used and abused". We get a glimpse of her relationship with the other girls in their dormitory, her depressing childhood, her sexual desires, and her positivity in the face of adversity. When Smith tells her, "I'm thirty-nine years old. I've got

a wife that I can't get rid of. I've got varicose veins. I've got five false teeth," she responds, "I couldn't care less," and is soon in his arms in a "savage embrace".

All for the cause

Smith, on the other hand, has "a taste for negativity", what Julia calls 'bloodythink', a Newspeak word. He abominated the Party, but was sure its reign would last for generations. "If there is any hope - I don't say that there is - it must lie in the proles [proletariat]," he loved to say. He kept a diary in which he wrote down all his "forbidden thoughts and deeds: his hatred of the party, his visit to a tart, his idea of killing his wife. One day he'd even found himself writing 'Down with Big Brother' over and over." This strikes Julia as madness - "what fool made a note of such things, which were of interest only to police?". Winston often talked about joining the rival Brotherhood and taking part in arson, bombings, assassinations.

Part Two and Part Three are about their incarceration in the depths of the Ministry of Love for "betraying" the cause of Big Brother, and its aftermath. Julia, who is 26 years old, wants to live in hope - she goes off to join the Brotherhood, but isn't it another side of the same coin? - and that is perhaps the biggest departure from the original, which ends with Smith declaring his love for Big Brother, winning the victory over himself.

Real housewives of Korea

Choo Nam-joo of *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* fame is back with stories of everyday Korean society as seen through the female lens

Veena Venugopal

When Choo Nam-joo published her novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* in 2016, it tapped into that fail-safe formula for successful books - it was so divisive that everybody had to read it. The book tells the story of a young mother, Kim Jiyoung, going through a psychotic breakdown, and though her story, Nam-joo taps into the state of women in contemporary South Korea.

Every time, Kim Jiyoung faces a life event, the author subtly and masterfully deploys a footnote from a news article, which demonstrates that the protagonist is merely the vessel through which the story of most women in South Korea is told. The book also landed at the right time, when the world was seized by the South Korean zeitgeist, K-Pop groups like BTS and Blackpink were already global names and Korean-dramas were sweeping their way into our TV screens. *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* then pushed the reality of a little known culture into our midst and gave us a glimpse of the real South Korea behind the shiny faces and their shimmering performances on stage and on screen.

Nam-joo expands on this insight into her country in her latest, *Miss Kim Knows and Other Stories*, translated by Jamie Chang. The book comprises nine stories and in all of them Nam-joo keeps a firm



Miss Kim
Knows
and Other
Stories
Choo Nam-joo,
trs Jamie
Chang
Simon &
Schuster
₹599

eye on the lives of common South Koreans through the story of a female protagonist. In 'Dear Hyunnam Appa', a young woman begins to realise the amount of control her fiancé is exerting on her life. Written as a break-up letter, it's like watching a time-lapse video of a love story: the first meeting, the heady rush of a new romance, and then slowly, in subtle forms, emerges a complicated man seeped in the misogyny of the culture. Even though it is established early on that the writer is ending the relationship, Nam-joo manages to keep the tension in the narration.

Demands and decisions

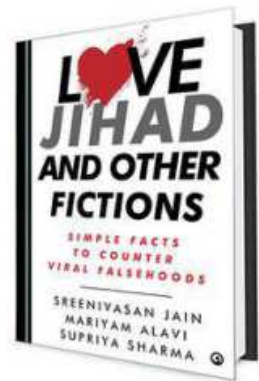
In 'Runaway', a father goes missing and the mystery of his absence brings the family together. The narrator, the only daughter, has a link to the father's whereabouts through a credit card she's given

him, and it is up to her to decide whether to go searching for the father or simply respect his decision to choose a new life for himself. In 'Dead Set', a newly successful author reconnects with an old teacher and is forced to confront the question of who owns a story.

There are several Kims in the stories and they are travel operators, teachers, sisters, mothers - everyday women, often overlooked, rarely noticed. While the stories don't drip with the frustrated rage that made *Kim Jiyoung* such a successful book, you can still sense the resentment the women feel against society's constraints. They are all in a struggle to centre themselves in a world that demands too much of them.

However, the writing is not even, perhaps the translation is inconsistent, and readers who loved *Kim Jiyoung* might find this a difficult, even unsatisfactory, read. But for people who are interested in the culture and lifestyle of South Korea, the book provides a wide-angle view. Behind the attractive men in perfectly tailored jackets and glowing, slim women with not a hair out of place on our screens, lies a real society, wars and all. And Nam-joo is not afraid to be its unblinking narrator.

The reviewer is the author of *Independence Day: A People's History*.



Breathing fire (Clockwise from left) A protest against 'love jihad' by Sakal Hindu Samaj in Mumbai; a demonstration in Bengaluru; and Sreenivasan Jain, Supriya Sharma, and Mariyam Alavi. (EMMANUEL YOGINI, AFP AND SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP)



IN CONVERSATION

COUNTERING LIES

Through data and evidence, three journalists debunk notions of love jihad, population jihad and appeasement of minorities

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Three journalists, Sreenivasan Jain, Mariyam Alavi and Supriya Sharma, put their heads together to address widely floated conspiracy theories such as love jihad, forced conversions and population jihad in their new book, *Love Jihad and Other Fictions*. Through data, government records and interviews, they try to demolish the falsehoods that have become part of drawing-room conversations, as they explain in an interview. Edited excerpts:

Question: What prompted you all to write the book?
Sreenivasan Jain: One motivating factor was that as a journalist I was constantly confronting these conspiracy theories and falsehoods. There was a certain frustration in the way it was getting approached, a kind of 'he said, she said approach,' specially true for TV where you debate the idea of love jihad or population jihad. There is enough evidence to suggest that none of these theories are essentially true. It can be journalistically established within reasonable grounds. Yet, there is a way in which this is constantly recycled as something that could or could not be real. The Home Ministry told Parliament there is no legal definition of love jihad; it still gets recycled, gets prime-time space, it is even getting passed as a legislation. The idea was to try to find evidence, not through opinions, but through hard facts and journalistic tools and settle the debate around these questions.

Mariyam Alavi: The motivation came from a place of frustration, like some of these words have become part of everyday discourse but many of us know that they are not only arguably false but truly false. There are a certain bunch of fact-checkers and journalists who are looking into it and debunking individual cases. It is not about individual cases, it is about these false and conspiracy theories that are being pushed. In journalism, these stories last a day or two, but you needed something enduring that they may survive the news cycle. For any Indian who cares about the idea of India as a democracy, this issue affects them personally.

Supriya Sharma: I am not doing enough to push back the falsehoods in society, which are frighteningly coming very close with even our loved



ones falling for propaganda that is going around. The journalistic impulse is to set the record straight. A lot of journalist work seems to be ephemeral, so we wondered if it will be better to put this together in a book which could act as a guide for ordinary citizens who are being bombarded day in and day out with Hindutva propaganda.

Q: What are the challenges you faced? Is there a market for truth?
SJ: There is extreme polarisation but there is still a large enough pool of sensible Indians, if you are able to present the facts without any opinion. We report it using just the tools of journalism – right to information, government records, parliamentary answers – and this should hopefully convince people who are ambivalent about it that may be there is some merit in the argument we are making. One challenge was that these theories are not very well-defined. Even if you take something like love jihad and ask those who propagate it, you will probably get six different answers. No sooner than you debunk one aspect, it morphs into something else. How do you as a journalist define something which is so amorphous? There is a "new jihad" born every minute – corona jihad, fertilizer jihad, halal jihad. This was a challenge that could become an endless thing, so we picked four of the most widely propagated theories, which in a way sum up the core of this foundational ideology that somehow 'Hindu Khatre Mein Hai (Hindus are in danger) and that Muslims and Christians are taking over'.

MA: The market for truth has not been catered to in the right way. As journalists, we take it for granted, we know the right place to look for the truth, but we do not appreciate how



the common man is also looking for ways to understand the truth. Journalism has changed, it has become lot about access journalism. Getting government responses, data, everything becomes much more opaque. Personally, you either feel guilty that you are not pushing back enough or feel frustrated; there is a certain amount of fear too.

SS: One of the challenges was accessing public data. While we were researching, many RTI queries drew a blank. The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha websites were being revamped, and it became harder for us to search parliamentary questions, a vital source of information. Another challenge was how to ensure that what we are writing remains accessible. We spent a lot of time thinking about how to structure the book. We have organised every chapter into a set of claims and

conclusion. We are interested in preaching, we wrote this book so that we are able to persuade people who are sitting on the fence on these topics.

Q: Phrases such as love jihad etc have become part of drawing-room conversations. What is the way forward, are we at a point of no-return?
SJ: It is a tricky thing. In a way as journalists, our job is to report the facts, bear witness. As citizens we are deeply anxious about what's going on and the impact of these falsehoods in real life. These falsehoods are being backed by power, a political regime and an ideology, which is using it to serve its interests and that is what has made them so dangerous and pervasive. We hope people realise that and ensure public accountability. These are elected representatives, holding constitutional offices and perpetuating falsehoods – is there some kind of realisation for that? Some kind of accountability? Lies will never go away, their impact gets diminished. It is one thing if people are forwarding WhatsApps among themselves, but it is quite another thing if a chief minister, an MP or an MLA is perpetuating this. Public accountability has to come in, that's where a certain degree of awareness can make a difference.

SS: We are not trained to be prescriptive as journalists, we lay down facts on the table, and hope they will act as an antidote to lies. As a citizen, if we care about what is happening, make an effort to counter the propaganda in whatever small way we can, I suppose it is a fight against feeling numb. At some level, there is a kind of majoritarian privilege that can make you want to withdraw and not engage, because it seems daunting to take on this kind of giant-sized organised attempt to spread bigoted falsehoods.

MA: It is a peculiar situation, the media is unfortunately also a part of the problem; the reason these words have become part of drawing room conversations is because the media has played a role. For example, the only conclusive list of love jihad case studies we got is from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The source of all the 150 cases is media reports; many of the cases have been labelled as love jihad by the media itself. As a new mother, I am concerned. Your identity or your name sometimes determines what your crime is. If you are named something different, you are a violent partner or someone who has perpetuated love jihad.

The hybrid
Amitava Kumar

A guide for writers with diary entries, letters, essays and drawings



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Tanuj Solanki

I want to proclaim my allegiance to the nation of hybrids!" This sentence captures well Amitava Kumar's credo behind *The Yellow Book: A Traveller's Diary*. Like its predecessor *The Blue Book*, it is a hybrid work, containing text – as diary entries, letters, essays – and images – as drawings, paintings, and photographs. Both books have been marvellously produced by HarperCollins India. It's good to see that there is space in our literary culture for such experimentation, such hybridity, and such – on the part of the publisher – indulgence.

My experience with the blue and yellow books has been hybrid too – jaw drops and eye rolls. There is brilliance in them, there is intimacy too, but there are also many pages of artiness that can land this way or that, depending on what kind of reader you are. You may find it noteworthy here or exquisite there, but for the most part, the impact stays in the range of a well-curated Instagram page.

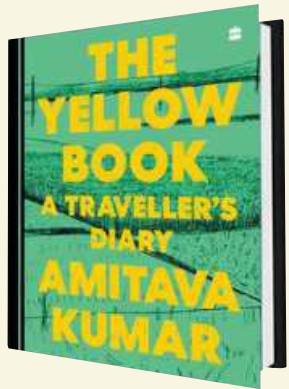
Pretty and personal

In its middle, where the diaristic mode dominates, *The Yellow Book* wants to be two things: a document of Kumar's days and a sort of soft guide to artists (mostly writers). The aims mingle well as Kumar, a professor of English at Vassar College in upstate New York, is teaching American students in London and proposing exercises for them to tap into their creative cores. Familiarity – with Kumar and his work, with writing as practice, with writers' affinities and their ways of friendship – increases the reward for the reader. There is a dash of the presumptuous in the telling, though. We witness Kumar's good friendships, all the brilliance he's surrounded by or can summon or approach. The casual reader may have trouble staying impressed. Keep a journal, the nub of it all seems to be,

because journals can be *this* pretty, *this* personal, *this* generative. Once we get the concept, and that happens early, the pages tend to seem like superfluous exhibits.

The thing with images is that they can expand; a drawing of a tote bag hanging on a doorknob can fill a whole page. There were times when the writing left me wanting more. Kumar mentions, for example, talking on Zoom for an hour about how his work is in dialogue with Arundhati Roy's. But he doesn't detail how so for us. What does this diaristic ellipsis serve, one wonders, when the book has essays elsewhere?

Things improve as the London class ends. In 'Enemy of the People', an



The Yellow Book:
A Traveller's Diary
Amitava Kumar
HarperCollins
₹699

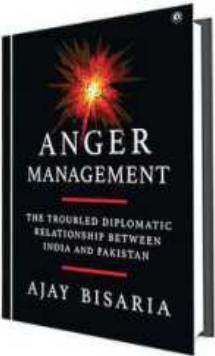
essay about Salman Rushdie and his attacker Hadi Matar, we get eight pages with no images, and *The Yellow Book* was nowhere more riveting for me than here. That said, there is indeed a part where Kumar's hybrid approach reaches its pinnacle. This is in the essay titled 'Host Country/Lost Country', where Kumar writes of visits to his father in Patna and their village of Jadopur, and of his father's deteriorating health. The essay is deeply moving, and the images add to the poignancy of the material in choking ways.

The reviewer's latest book is the novel Manjhi's Mayhem.

BROWSER

Anger Management: The Troubled Diplomatic Relationship between India and Pakistan
Ajay Bisaria
Aleph Book Company
₹999

High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria was expelled from Islamabad in 2019, the first time an Indian head of mission was asked to leave by Pakistan. He writes about the row that erupted after the dismantling of Article 370.



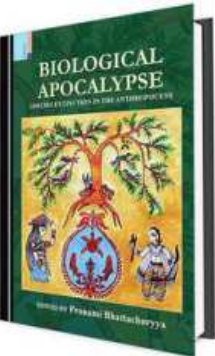
The Last Dance of Rationality: Making Sense of an Unravelling World Order
Rohit Prasad
Hachette India
₹799

An economist examines the major economic, geopolitical and social developments of the 21st century, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. debacle in Afghanistan, the rise of Trump, and the appeal of Putin.



Biological Apocalypse
Edited by Pronami Bhattacharyya
Primus Books
₹1,395

Through essays by specialists, this volume profiles 17 of the most vulnerable non-human species on the endangered lists (in several categories) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature including the Amur leopard, the pangolin, the white-winged wood duck, and the one-horned rhino.



The Yellow Sparrow: Memoir of a Transgender
Santa Khurai
Speaking Tiger
₹499

Santa Khurai was 17 years old when she decided to dress like a woman. Born a male in Manipur, she claimed her feminine identity openly. In her memoir, she writes how she became involved with the transgender movement in the State.



ODISHA
Jagannath Temple

The Patnaik government has earmarked ₹4,224.22 crore to transform Puri's heritage infrastructure and develop the periphery of the 12th century temple

On January 6, when secretaries of Odisha's government departments met to review the progress of various development projects, a unanimous decision was made to prioritise the dedication of the heritage corridor, known as Shree Mandir Parikrama Prakalp (in pic, right), around Puri's Jagannath Temple. The 75-metre space encircling the 12th century Jagannath Temple complex is scheduled to be inaugurated on January 17. The amenities created include washrooms and a circumambulatory path. The government has spent ₹203.14 crore for this, in addition to the ₹405.27 crore for the acquisition of land, which included houses. The residents were convinced that the acquisition

was for the 'greater good'. The State Cabinet recently approved the allocation of ₹155 crore to bring in people from across the country for the inauguration scheduled for January 17. The Patnaik government, in June 2023, earmarked ₹4,224.22 crore for the 'Augmentation of Basic Amenities and Development of Heritage and Architecture' scheme that aims to transform Puri's infrastructure and develop the periphery of the Jagannath Temple. A sum of ₹1,500 crore has been promised by the State for the renewal of temples in all 30 districts. Among the projects is the ₹700-crore beautification of the Lingaraj Temple, Bhubaneswar. Last year, the Odisha government announced to new scheme, 'Ama Odisha Nabin Odisha', allotting another ₹4,200 crore for infrastructure development. According to sources, close to 50% of this budget will be spent on temples alone.

— Satyasundar Barik



RAJASTHAN
Govind Dev and Beneshwar Dham temples

In 2023, the then Congress chief minister Ashok Gehlot announced development packages for the two temples worth ₹200 crore

In Rajasthan, the historic Govind Dev temple (in pic) in Jaipur and the Beneshwar Dham temple, venerated by tribals in Dungarpur district, are proposed to be developed on a grand scale to attract devotees and promote them as important religious centres. In March 2023, at a debate on the State budget at the Assembly, the then Congress chief minister Ashok Gehlot announced development packages for the two temples. The Govind Dev temple was constructed by the erstwhile royal family in 1890; an idol of Krishna, crafted in black marble, and that of Radha, were brought from Vrindavan. Built in the 'haveli' style, the temple, carved in redstone, contains exquisite inscriptions and has unique architecture with castle-like gates. Gehlot had proposed to develop the Govind Dev temple at ₹100 crore, on the lines of the Mahakaleswar Temple corridor in Ujjain. A detailed project report is now being prepared, but the new BJP government is yet to make its stand clear amid indications that it may formulate its own plan for the temple's renovation. The Beneshwar Dham temple, famous for housing the revered *swayambhu* or self-created *shivling*, is located on the delta at the confluence of Som and Mahi rivers. An identical amount of ₹100 crore was sanctioned for its development, which includes a *gaushala*, parking facility, and police post.

— Mohammed Iqbal



THE GREAT TEMPLE REVIVAL



NAGARA GOPAL

TELANGANA
Narasimha Swamy temple

The cave temple in Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district has had a ₹1,200 crore makeover with a little help from a movie set designer

Telangana has been a pioneer in using temples to draw in tourists. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi, rechristened Bharat Rashtra Samithi, hired a movie set designer Anand Sai to work on one of its smaller spiritual centres. It was a little cave temple of Narasimha Swamy, the fierce half lion avatar of Vishnu, who tears apart Hiranyakashyapu, atop the hillock in Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district. But after a six-year ₹1,200 crore makeover, it is a grand spectacle of gold and stone that can be seen from trains passing along the Secunderabad-Delhi route. According to temple officials, the number of devotees has surged from 5,000 before 2016 to 25,000 on regular days and above 50,000 on festive occasions and holidays ever since the rebuilt temple was inaugurated in March 2022.

— Serish Naniseti

KERALA
Thirunelli temple

The 'Kashi of the South' is being renovated at ₹10 crore

The Thirunelli temple (below), believed to be 5,000 years old, is dedicated to Vishnu. It is located on the slopes of the Brahmagiri hills on the Kerala-Karnataka border. Thirunelli, for the faithful, is the Kashi (Varanasi) of the South. Every year, thousands of devotees throng the banks of the Papanashini River during the new moon days in the Malayalam months of *Thulam* and *Karkidakom* to perform *pithrutharanpanam* (obseance to the ancestors). A one-week-long Vishu festival in April is all-important at the temple. Its renovation is underway at ₹10 crore. This includes the renovation of the sanctum sanctorum and the laying of a granite pavement from the temple to the Papanashini River. The creation of a *chuttambalam*, a structure around the sanctum sanctorum, will be completed in six months. Meanwhile, around Sabarimala, with its Ayyappan temple, huge infrastructure projects, such as an airport and an elevated rail network, are coming up. The 75-km-long rapid rail transit route from Chengannur to Pampa, envisaged through elevated structures and tunnels, is expected to cost over ₹10,000 crore. The Sabarimala Greenfield airport, being built on a 2,570 acre property in Erumely and Manimala *panchayats* on the foothills of the Western Ghats, will cost ₹3,411 crore.

— E. M. Manoj and Hiran Unnikrishnan



BIHAR
Viraat Ramayan Temple

The temple, which will be completed by 2025 at ₹500 crore, is inspired by Angkor Wat

Construction of the 'world's largest Ramayan temple', spread over 3.76 lakh sq.ft., is underway in Bihar's East Champaran district. Started in June 2023, the three-storey Viraat Ramayan Temple will be completed by 2025 at a cost of ₹500 crore. It will be taller than Cambodia's 12th century Angkor Wat temple complex. The monument will have 12 domes, the highest being 270 feet; there will also be 22 sanctum sanctuums for different deities. It will have a 33-foot-tall black granite *shivling* weighing 200 tonnes, being crafted in Mahabalipuram near Chennai. According to the Mahavir Mandir Temple Trust secretary Acharya Kishore Kunal, the *shivling* is the world's largest and will be established in 2025. The temple can seat 20,000 people. The architecture is inspired by Angkor Wat, the Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu and the Meenakshi Sundareshwarar temple in Madurai.

— Amit Bhelari

KASHMIR
Amarnath shrine

The approval, in 2023, of a ₹5,300 crore roadway project will make the annual pilgrimage to the temple more accessible

At 13,000 feet, the Amarnath shrine pilgrimage has, for decades, remained arduous. Under the Union Territory's administration, the access routes to the shrine are witnessing a rare upscaling. The approval, in 2023, of a ₹5,300 crore roadway project will make the annual pilgrimage more accessible; the route will also be open for a longer period — perhaps all year round — as opposed to the current two-month duration. The Amarnath shrine has two routes: on the traditional route in south Kashmir's Pahalgam, a pilgrim would trek on a narrow stretch for 20 km; on the Baltal route in central Kashmir's Ganderbal, people walk 14 km, along steep slopes, to reach the cave shrine. However, the Border Roads Organisation in 2023 created access to vehicles to drive up to the shrine. The tracks will soon be wider, and critical stretches will be upgraded with safety railings and retaining walls. Several vulnerable stretches leading to the shrine have been widened and are now well-lit. Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for road transport and highways, has approved a road project to the Amarnath shrine in Pahalgam. A 110 km-long Amarnath Marg, leading to the holy cave, will come up at a cost of around ₹5,300 crore. Now, the Northern Railways has also approved the construction of a special railway line from Anantnag to Pahalgam through the old town of Tral in Pulwama.

— Peerzada Ashiq



GETTY IMAGES

HARYANA
Kurukshetra

The land on which the battle of Mahabharata was said to have been fought will be turned into a spiritual hub at more than ₹200 crore

The government intends to turn Kurukshetra, where the battle of Mahabharata was said to have been fought, into a spiritual hub. Since 2016, an annual festival, the International Gita Mahotsav, has been celebrated to place Kurukshetra and the teachings of the *Gita* on the world map. Earlier, the festival was largely a local event. Kurukshetra and its environs have 182 pilgrimage sites, temples and sacred ponds. Since 2016, development projects worth ₹400 crore have been implemented. A ₹205 crore Mahabharata-themed building, art exhibition, and a multimedia project is being constructed at the Jyotisar pilgrimage site. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal said the comprehensive project is being undertaken by the State government, funded by the ministry of tourism under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, with a budget of ₹80 crore.

— Vikas Vasudeva

KARNATAKA
200 monuments

Over the past decade, scores of temples across 25 districts in Karnataka have been restored for ₹35.37 crore

The Department of Archaeology Museums and Heritage (DAMH) in Karnataka has chosen a public-private-partnership model for the restoration of historically significant temples and monuments. Touted as being one-of-its-kind in the country, the project was launched 20 years ago; DAMH has tied up with Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Dharmothana Trust, whose objective is to identify monuments that are dilapidated and restore them to their original glory. "Every year about 15 to 20 monuments and temples are identified based on their architectural importance and significance. DAMH releases ₹10 lakh for the repair and restoration of each monument. The Trust pitches in with a matching grant, while the local community also contributes — whether through labour or other means — so they get a sense of ownership," says A. Devaraj, commissioner, DMAH. So far, some 200 monuments — mainly temples — across 25 districts in Karnataka have been restored for ₹35.37 crore following the principles stipulated by the Archaeological Survey of India. "While they may not make national headlines, the restoration means a lot to the local community as these monuments are symbols of the living heritage of the villages," says Devaraj.

— R. Krishna Kumar



GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

HAVE YOU CHECKED SOCIAL MEDIA? A BARRAGE OF CELEBRITIES, POLITICIANS AND TOURISTS IS COMING TO LAKSHADWEEP, AND WITH IT, THE ENTIRE TOURISM INDUSTRY!

OH GOSH! WHERE DO WE ESCAPE TO NOW?!

ANYWHERE BUT THE MALDIVES.

SHILAJIT MITRA

Kanan Gill's debut novel, *Acts of God*, is a cool, convivial work of comic sci-fi. Best savoured as a meta-discourse on storytelling — or comedic language ('A word by itself just means what the word means, but a single word paragraph? Oof') — the book unfolds in an unspecified future where humanity has blighted itself in nuclear warfare. In this post-apocalyptic post-land, Dr. Krishna, a brilliant but bereaved scientist, is running simulations of the entire universe. His attempts at emulating god were initially noble and exploratory in nature. Of late, though, he's been checking out of Hotel Sense. The novel tackles big philosophical ideas (and some standard science fiction ones) with the witiness and gentle existentialism Gill brings to his stand-up routines. Edited excerpts from an interview:

INTERVIEW

'I WRITE WHAT I NEED TO HEAR'

Existential funnyman Kanan Gill is now an author. And guess what? He's fun to read

Kanan Gill's debut novel, *Acts of God*, is a cool, convivial work of comic sci-fi. Best savoured as a meta-discourse on storytelling — or comedic language ('A word by itself just means what the word means, but a single word paragraph? Oof') — the book unfolds in an unspecified future where humanity has blighted itself in nuclear warfare. In this post-apocalyptic post-land, Dr. Krishna, a brilliant but bereaved scientist, is running simulations of the entire universe. His attempts at emulating god were initially noble and exploratory in nature. Of late, though, he's been checking out of Hotel Sense. The novel tackles big philosophical ideas (and some standard science fiction ones) with the witiness and gentle existentialism Gill brings to his stand-up routines. Edited excerpts from an interview:

Question: You open the book with quotes from Noam Chomsky and Paul Erdos. What made you pick them? **Answer:** I studied both Chomsky and Erdos in



computer science in different contexts and it's been rattling around in my head for some time. The Chomsky quote — 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously' — speaks to the idea of a sentence being grammatically sound yet completely nonsensical, and to me it signals the freedom to use language in any way I wish. A big part of the joy of writing the book was constructing sometimes preposterous sentences. Erdos points to the spooky arbitrariness present in many aspects of physics and mathematics. Some constants hide in our understanding of the universe, almost as if someone put them there. Other than that, I enjoy moments of humour from otherwise ostensibly serious figures. **Q:** Acts of God has drawn comparison with Douglas Adams. At what age did you first read the Hitchhiker's novels and how did they influence you? **A:** It's an incredibly flattering comparison. I'm not sure it's entirely deserved. I first read the trilogy in four parts in college and it made my head spin. To me, *Hitchhikers* is the hardest kind of novel to write. Each situation the characters find themselves in is so compelling and bizarre and unique and hilarious that their inner worlds don't call to be explored. In fact, I always start out desperate to write out-and-out farce, but then it becomes what it has to become. **Q:** The simulation theory is rich terrain for sci-fi writers and futurists even if it lacks scientific credence. What's your take? Is it god a computer scientist? **A:** It's a fascinating idea, if somewhat of an untestable hypothesis. I think if we are to

New role Catch comedian Kanan Gill at The Hindu Lit Fest 2024 in Chennai on January 26-27. (NATASHA GILL)



possible — now for an attractive price of ₹399! **Q:** You and fellow comic Biswa Kalyan Rath went viral with the Pretentious Movie Reviews videos back in the day. In Acts of God, there's a minor character, Dr. Root, who reviews films and works of art under false pretences... **A:** Looking back on the book after writing it, I realise every character is an expression of some part of me. Dr. Root, I'll say, is a more serious and capable film reviewer than we were. **Q:** Do you have an idea for a second novel? **A:** I've written a novel before Acts of God and another one after. In fact, there are small Easter eggs hinting at both these novels within Acts of God. One is called High Tea and it's a book about whimsical and mysterious occurrences that take place in a tea estate. The other is an epic fantasy that has ballooned to being impossibly large. I'm rewriting both of these whenever I get free time from every thing else.

Meenakshi Shedde watches movies for a living, usually on her laptop, often on the move. But occasionally she sneaks in a show at Mumbai's Gaiety Galaxy. Here, the popcorn and samosas are still priced like they were in the 1980s; nobody uses pretentious words such as 'concessionaire' that make her "break out into a purple rash"; and she can tell exactly what the audience thinks of the film. "It's a multiplex with a 100% single screen mentality," she says. Two decades earlier, she used to be a regular at Deepak Talkies in Parel, watching "any old trash" with the area's workers. "I need to know what is working with the public. I like to keep my feet on the ground." She took that philosophy to its literal extreme last year when she wore a pair of ₹100 black Bata rubber shoes on the Cannes Film Festival red carpet as it was forecast to rain heavily.

Shedde has been on the jury of 25 top film festivals, including Cannes, Berlin and Venice. She was a Golden Globe Awards International Voter in 2023, the only one from India, and is a member of the Asia Pacific Screen Academy in Australia. She's a curator/consultant for film festivals in at least three continents; has contributed to/edited 21 books, mostly on cinema; and directed and helped produce documentaries. She's curator and advisor to the upcoming Berlin Film Festival or Berlinale where, for 26 years, she has helped select films. Last year, she helped platform a former Jadavpur University student whose love for Farsi drove her to make *Be Kucheye Khoshbakht*, a documentary about Iranian cinema and poetry. Shedde brings South Asia's cinematic creativity to the world.



PERSON OF INTEREST

Meenakshi Shedde: devoted to cinema

A film boss on censorship and making Cannes happen on a 'love-budget'



Big picture Meenakshi Shedde (far right) with other jury members at the Cannes Film Festival's Critics' Week 2023. (PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN)

Watching 550 films

She talks faster than I can type – and is a little alarmed when she finds out I'm not recording the interview. When I ask her age, a requirement of this newspaper, she says she finds the question ageist and, as she always does, "cheerfully skips answering it". She also doesn't like answering questions about how many films she watches during the year because, she says, calculating the number might paralyse her. "I will self-destruct if I keep track," she says. In 2022, she later reveals, when the demands of the Golden Globes and Berlinale coincided, she watched at least 550 films.

Through global script labs, she's mentored many filmmakers and some have won prestigious awards for those films: such as Singaporean Yeo Siew Hua, whose *A Land Imagined* won the Golden Leopard at Locarno Film Festival in 2018, or Iraqi Mohanad Hayal, whose *Haifa Street* won the New Currents Award at the Busan Film Festival in 2019.

She makes copious notes on every subject, from the films she needs to watch to her dream of using her curatorial skills and contacts to facilitate a museum of Dalit history and culture, inspired by global projects such as the Smithsonian's National Museum of African

American History and Culture. Her second resume lists her nearly three decades of experience in gender and development issues.

Shedde watched P.S. Vinodhraj's *Kottukkaali*, a searing portrayal of patriarchy that wants to exorcise a woman's right to choose her own partner, during a visit to Chennai to meet director Pa. Ranjith. It will have its world premiere at the Berlinale next month, and become the first Tamil film to be screened at the festival. Vinodhraj's debut *Koozhangal* was India's Oscar pick for 2021.

Though Shedde is "insanely fond of Bengali" and began learning the language through its lyrical songs, she says that Bengali films, once at the top of their game, have now lost to Malayalam cinema. Tamil cinema comes a close second, she adds. She'll never forget how Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi got an overwhelming greeting at the International Film Festival of Kerala in 2018. "A stadium full of people roared when he came on stage." She's seen everyday Malayalam audiences cheer hard when Javier Bardem's name appears on the credits and has noticed that film posters in the State showcase a different kind of star. "On posters, the cinematographer and screenwriter get top billing. Everyone knows Syam Pushkaran has written the film or

Shyju Khalid has worked on the film," she says. Malayalam filmmakers' best reward is their knowledgeable audience, she believes.

Cuts, more cuts

She has also had a front row seat to the censorship that has shadowed Indian cinema in recent years. The latest instance was Honey Trehan's *Punjab '95*, based on the life of prominent human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khrala, that was withdrawn from the Toronto International Film Festival. Reports said the censors asked for 21 cuts and wanted the name 'Punjab' removed from the title, and then asked for more cuts. "There's no end to the harassment. It's heart wrenching," she says. "Now even things in government records and based on factual events aren't being allowed." Streaming platforms have their own set of censorship guidelines, she adds.

Yet, this year was an "exceptionally good" one for Indian cinema. "This despite the challenges of raising money and censorship and self-censorship. It's a miracle that any film gets made at all," she says.

As for those Bata shoes, bought for a Mumbai monsoon, that Shedde repurposed for Cannes? She paired them with a handloom sari and jewellery, borrowed from her sister and her friends. She likes to say she did Cannes (and other film festivals) on a "love budget". "The red carpet clothes question irritates me no end," she says. "It takes away from films."



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

GOREN BRIDGE

Plan ahead

East-West vulnerable. South deals

Bob Jones

South won the opening club lead with his ace and drew trumps in three rounds, ending in his hand. He led a spade to dummy's king and East's ace, and won the club continuation with his king. He led a spade to dummy's queen and then a diamond to his king and West's ace. West

continued with the jack of diamonds and South could not avoid the loss of two more tricks for down one. South was certainly unlucky, but could he have done better?

Yes! He should have seen when the dummy went down that his contract was cold if the diamonds split 3-2. The only danger was a 4-1 diamond split and he should have started thinking about that right

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

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
INT	Pass	20*	Pass
2♥	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♥	All pass		
*Transfer to hearts			

Opening lead: Queen of ♣

away. South should have won the club opening lead and led a spade to the king before touching trumps. A diamond to the ace and a

diamond ruff wouldn't hurt him provided he didn't play a diamond honor from either hand. East would win and return,

say a club, although nothing else would be better. South could win and draw trumps in three rounds ending in hand, cashing the queen of spades along the way. He could ruff a spade and play a low diamond from both hands. The opponent winning the trick would have to lead another diamond or yield a ruff-sluff. The contract would be cold on any split of the diamond suit.

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What do you know about thermoplastics?

Berty Ashley

On this day in 1873, John Wesley Hyatt trademarked the name 'celluloid' for his invention. He had been experimenting with cellulose nitrate in order to make billiard balls, usually made from a natural item containing dentine. Celluloid was a perfect substitute for this item – it not only imitated the look and feel of it, but was also easy to produce. Commercially sold as 'ivarine' or 'ivaleur', what now illegal item did celluloid replace?

In 1889, it was discovered that flexible celluloid plates could be coated with a photosensitive gelatin emulsion. The earliest version of this was used by Thomas Edison on something called a kinetograph. The flexible nature of these plates led to them being used for a revolutionary new technology that changed the world. What technology was this?

Being robust and easy to mould, celluloid was widely used to make precision instruments. One company that used it extensively was A.W. Faber, renowned for its hand-operated mechanical calculators used to evaluate mathematical operations. One of the simplest analogue computers, this mechanical calculator is made of three parts: a frame, a central slide and a runner. What is this device called, which one might mistake for a standard ruler?

In woodworking, veneer refers to thin slices of wood



Play on The spread of this musical instrument around the world can be traced to the waves of migration from Europe to the Americas and other regions. (GETTY IMAGES)

used for decorative purposes. Seth Thomas clocks were the first to replace wood with celluloid, which was made to look like marble or granite. They called this 'adamantine', a reference to a mythological Greek substance that is unbreakable. In modern mythology, a certain 'unbreakable' character has claws of 'Adamantium'. What Marvel character is this, named after a fierce animal?

Celluloid continues to be used in musical instruments. It enhances acoustic performance as it does not block the pores of wooden instruments. In guitars, both the pick and pickguard (which prevents the guitar from getting scratches) are made from it. Another instrument that gets its characteristic look from celluloid is a bellows-driven free-reed

instrument. What instrument is this, that is frequently associated with European folk music?

Celluloid, useful as it was, had a tendency to catch fire. Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland developed another thermoplastic in 1909. Due to its heat-resistant properties, it became a commercial success, especially in kitchenware. By what name was this new product known?

During World War I, thermoplastics such as Bakelite started being used widely, especially to make parts for aircraft. The ease and speed of moulding Bakelite, along with the inexpensive production process, played a major role in making a certain technology a common household item. Before that, this item was only used in military or

government establishments. What item is this, whose default colour palette is pale yellow or green, and which would have been used in households many years ago?

Bakelite also has the distinction of being the only thermoplastic to be featured on a national flag. It was used to make the grip and magazine of a particular item featured on the flag of Mozambique. What is this item, which also makes it unique in the world of flags?

An item that continues to be made with either Bakelite or ABS (another thermoplastic), is an important feature of boardgames. The weight and sound of Bakelite makes it the ideal choice for this item, that is usually thrown in pairs. What is this item, whose earliest example is made of bone?

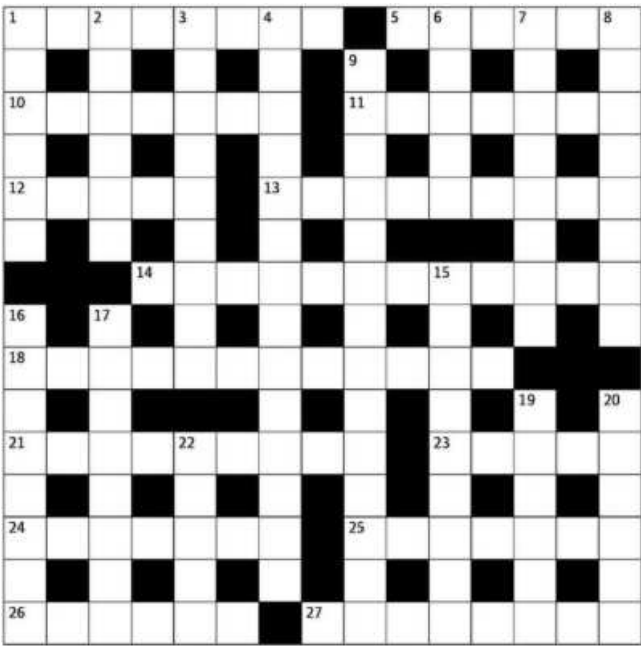
ABS is a terpolymer known for its resistance to chemicals, its rigidity, and its high deflection temperature. This makes it the ideal base product used by the world's largest toy maker. Which company is this that makes more than 100 billion ABS pieces every year?

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

1. Toy
2. Film for motion pictures
3. Fiddle
4. Violin
5. Accordion
6. Bakelite
7. Phone (rotary table phone)
8. AK-47 rifle
9. Dice
10. LEGO

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3289



- Across
- 1 Curtail relaxation that includes brief prank (8)
 - 5 Wholesaler offloading dodgy sole; I'm seeking something more substantial (6)
 - 10 Cold blast, heading off for hot buttered food? (7)
 - 11 24/7 drama, two Poles given crown (3-4)
 - 12 Weariness concerning, you and I said (5)
 - 13 No, outlive inferior – as part of this? (9)
 - 14 In recompense, arranged for attendance everywhere (12)
 - 18 Latest: nephew that is detained by nuns for causing trouble (12)
 - 21 Implausibly cheers up touring large tomb (9)
 - 23 Lost in fantasies regularly, abstracted at first (2,3)
 - 24 To some extent, fear a cheesy auricular annoyance (7)
 - 25 Volunteering work repeatedly trendy: good (7)
 - 26 Starters of nicoises: endives cored, stale, curl up (6)
 - 27 Hide, hold back, becoming more emaciated (8)

- Down
- 1 Leaves, getting reprimand (6)
 - 2 Turns down incentives including bit of nepotism (6)
 - 3 Resort with Everyman, from the outset,

- 4 'We're N.I.C.E. Health questionable? Exercise!' (9-5)
- 6 Believer in growth industries, partly (5)
- 17 Staves conferred extremely piously to represent elevated status, primarily? (8)
- 19 Anglo-Saxon meeting with keen Spanish affirmation in old Italian town (6)
- 20 Car, old sausage (6)
- 22 This describes something healthier in the pub (2-3)

SOLUTION NO. 3288



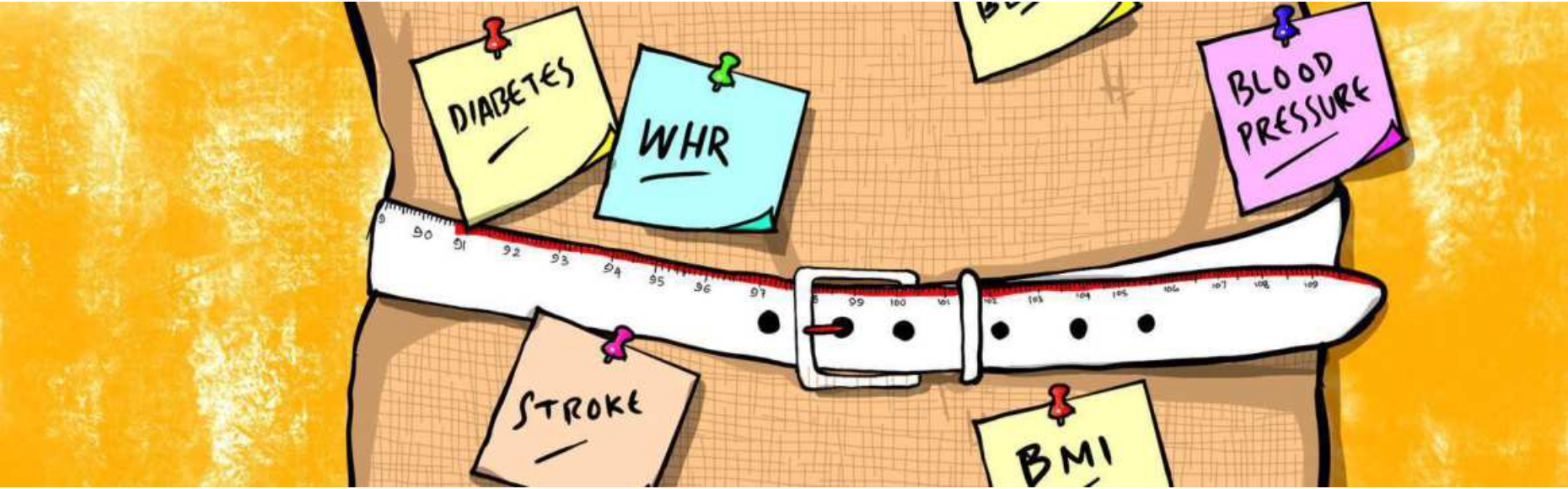


ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R KUMAR

The little matter of the waist

Take care of your belt size, as it can save you from deadly diseases in the long run

Tiny Nair
tinynair@gmail.com

It is defined as the narrowest part between the lowest rib and the hip. The waist.
Cut to an everyday scene at the airport: “Didn’t I tell you to put everything on the scanner? Belt, purse, watch, mobile, everything.” “But sir,” the man in front me in the queue gently mumbled.
“No questions, please follow the airport rules.”
One more journey to the scanner, and he was back, looking nervous. “Raise your hands on to the sides.” He looked like a child playing “aeroplane, aeroplane”.
And that’s when the accident took place. Losing the hold of his hands, his trousers fell. Shrieks from fellow passengers drowned the mumble of an apology from the security officer. His long, oversized shirt saved the day.
Now a bit of history. Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet (1796-1894) lived in Belgium. He was a polymath and genius, and his level of intelligence

was considered much ahead of his time. When the French government wanted someone to develop a simple formula to pick out healthy citizens for the purpose of military recruitment, the only person they could think of was Quetelet, and he readily accepted.
He drew proportional diagrams of the human body, from young to old, jotted down their height and weight, and tried to derive a formula to connect them all. After multiple failed attempts, he came up with a simple answer: a ratio of weight in kilogram and height in metres squared, which he called the body mass index (BMI).
Despite his high IQ, Quetelet was poor in biology and did not understand the difference of density between bone, muscle mass and fat. Much later, in an interview, Quetelet was asked the logic of his derived formula. He answered, “just tried to fit in something.”
Despite BMI being a common measurement of obesity today, we know the caveats. Extremely healthy, muscular men serving in the military have BMI in the abnormal range. A recent meta-analysis shows that 15% of fit American military personnel in active service are obese (BMI > 30kg/m2) and 51% overweight (BMI 25 - 29.9 kg/m2).
The value of waist measurement came to focus in 18th century when women started using corsets. The answer of choosing the right size was to measure the waist and subtract it from the hip (the widest part of the torso below the navel) and the measurement became popular as “hip-spring”. The medical value of waist measurement was triggered

by Devendra Singh, an evolutionary biologist from the University of Texas, who theorised that the waist-hip ratio (WHR) was a marker of oestrogen concentration in women. Much later the concept of visceral fat emerged.
Visceral fat (fat around abdominal organs) is different from subcutaneous fat (fat under skin) not just by its distribution (apple shape rather than pear) but by the risk of metabolic diseases. Visceral adiposity implies that the fat is metabolically bad and is resistant to insulin action with a higher likelihood of diabetes.
An abnormal waist-hip ratio (WHR > 0.9 in men and > 0.85 in women) indicate a higher chance of diabetes, high blood pressure, high triglyceride, and a host of metabolic diseases, apart from increased susceptibility to heart attack and stroke.
A simple waist measurement using a measuring tape could reveal not just obesity but presence of a bad metabolically deranged fat. A belt size of more than 90 cm in males and 85 cm in females coupled with a high triglyceride level (a type of fat in blood) makes the prosperous Indian more prone for diabetes and heart disease (*Journal of American College of Cardiology*, Vol 78, 2021).
While researchers kept their focus on the molecular biology of metabolic markers and epidemiologists were busy splitting hair to find statistically significant indicators of heart disease, no one had the time and common sense to think that the “simple” belt size that we use every day could be a good marker of visceral fat, and consequently heart disease.
Introduced as a functional harness for weapons and accessories, the time-tested “belt” has evolved in our modern world as a tether to hold our trousers below an expanding waistline. The gravity-defying wonder is now turning out to be a simple marker to predict high risk of heart disease.
Take care of your belt size, it could save you from deadly diseases in the long run. Avoiding an airport embarrassment is a bonus.
(The author is a senior cardiologist based in Thiruvananthapuram)



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

Cover story

Strategies implemented in a particular city could act as a road map for other cities, with slight modifications. (‘India’s best cities’, Jan. 7)
Assimilation of best practices from each city would lead to the emergence of a set of modified practices, that aid the inclusive and sustainable development of our nation. Delhi, in spite of being a capable provider of public transport, failed to provide security to female passengers, whereas the rich demographic of Bengaluru is inconsistent with the slow pace of traffic in the city. Development should be multifaceted.
Viveka Vardhan Naidu Bhyripudi

While Kolkata can take pride in being the safest city based on ‘recorded’ crime data, it is surprising that leading Kolkata voices attribute this to the ‘occupied’ streets. The city has, for long, been a prime attraction for migrants from neighbouring states as well as Bangladesh. The streets are often patronised by the political mafia; and the best marketplaces are plagued by illegal occupation of the pavements.
Saurabh Sinha

Cities are often characterised by rush and noise, with an obsession with productivity. It leads to disillusionment and stress. We need to take a leaf out of Aizawl’s book and make our cities noise-free. This will not only address the menace of noise pollution, but also decrease road accidents.
Rohit

MORE ON THE WEB
www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

What no one tells you about teaching
It’s a whirlwind of paperwork and heavy documentation, leaving little time for the thrill of educating young minds
Mahima Roselin Varghese

Happy to be me
At home and everywhere, stick to your knitting
Sivamani Vasudevan

Everyday heroes
Pushed to the deep end, everyone can rise up to do extraordinary things
P.G. Mathew

A keen interest on avians
Bird watching can be taken up at any time, even after hanging up the boots at work
P. Subramanian

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Remains from the past

Prasanna Harihar
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Time flies and before we know we hit the mid-point as we steadily progress towards the ‘much-adorned’ senior-citizen status in our lives. But then aren’t we fortunate that we have the ability to travel back in time into our memories to retrieve information that we have stored so diligently from childhood days?
Yes, in a jiffy, we remember our school days and cherish them once again, even as we are ensconced in today’s modern settings.
During our younger days in the 1970s, we collected empty matchboxes and cigarette packs lying on roads, pictures cut out from newspapers of our favourite actors and sportspersons, bottle caps, silver foils used to wrap chocolates, stickers in all shapes and forms, articles of interest that appeared in newspapers and magazines, and even handwritten letters in the form of postcards and inland letters which we received from family and friends.
Old shoeboxes invariably served as containers for our memorabilia; there was literally nothing that was so easily discarded as garbage!
We found ingenious ways to carry these boxes into school bypassing many guidelines! We felt triumphant when we did not get caught by school authorities and could share our happiness with friends. Trading these with friends and like-minded acquaintances was indeed a favourite pastime.
My collection of stickers I had meticulously organised as stories and stuck them on my pencil box and geometry box.
My sticker collection was envied by my friends.
One day, my younger brother and cousins grudgingly destroyed them all during my short absence in the very precincts of my home. Even to this day, we laugh it off.

Parenting the ‘Insta’ generation

Youngsters do not realise that by living in a cocoon, they are creating a divide with their guardians

Pooja Kashyap
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Being the mother of a teenage daughter, I sometimes wonder if it is the same living thing I had once swooned over for being a “bundle of joy”. I wonder if she is the one I have been so diligently bringing up all this while.
I cannot help but pity myself for being part of a sandwiched generation (most people of my age would agree) – between scoldings and beatings by parents when young and being frowned upon by our children now.
I would admit that I am constantly wondering if my style of parenting is right or wrong. I am constantly balancing between what feels like a helicopter parent and an absentee parent.
Shocking instances
A piece of news from earlier this month about a 20-year-old youth heavily addicted to his mobile phone hacking his parents and sister to death in Jaipur, shook my conscience.
What could have possibly made him go to that length? Mental health issues among the youth seem like an epidemic today. The reality has been well captured in the movie

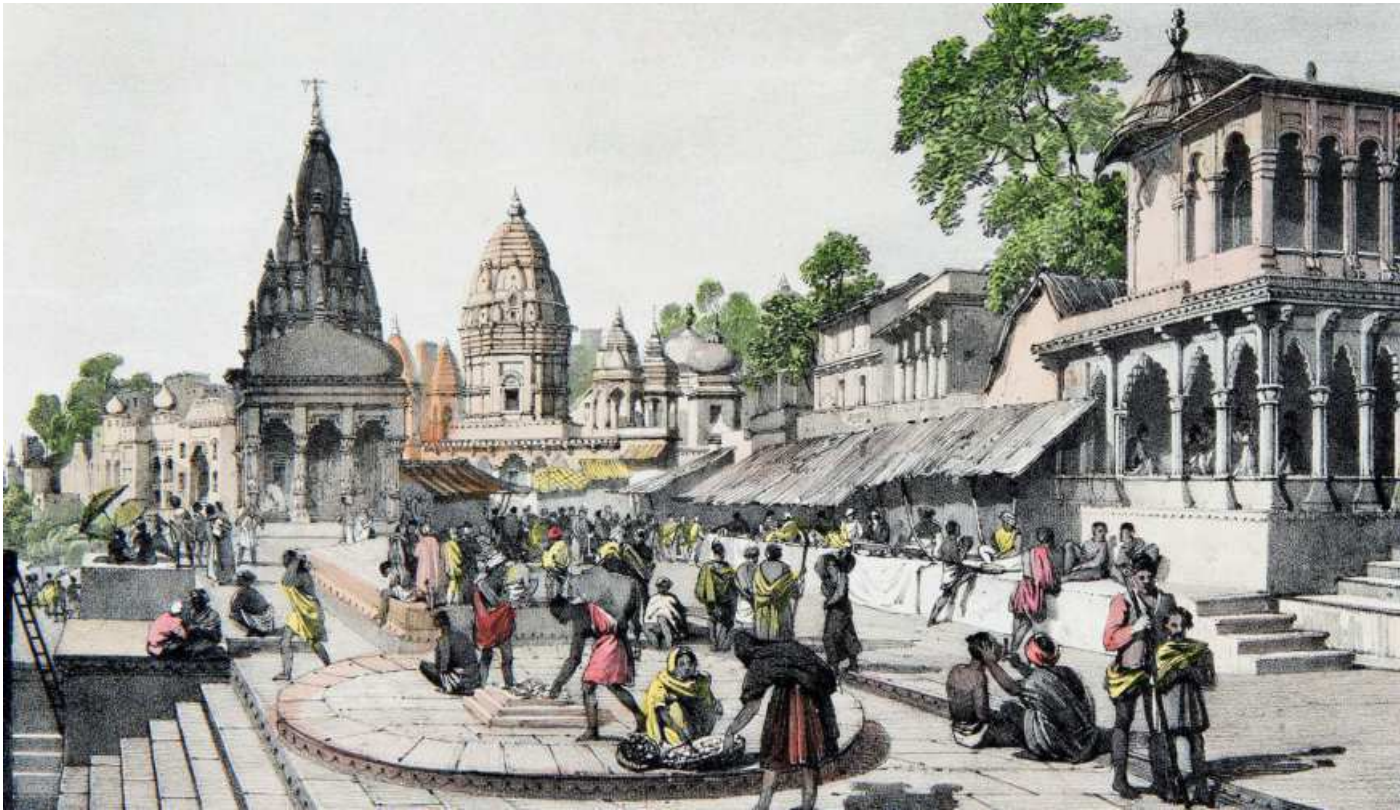
Kho Gae Hum Kahan, where three best friends in their twenties struggle to take charge of their lives full of romance, ambition and heartbreaks, alongside the addictive pull of social media.
This made me realise how exactly our children’s lives revolve so much around a screen, predominantly of their phone and laptop.
In one movie, a character shouts at his mother to shut the door of his bedroom, after he had had a bad day at the gym. The mother, who tries to calm down her son on seeing him troubled, is left looking helpless, as she promptly closes the door. Today’s youngsters closely guard their private space. This generation does not realise that by living in a cocoon, they are only creating a deep wedge between themselves and their parents who are their best well-wishers.
One cannot but fully agree with actor Ratna Pathak Shah, who in a recent interview has said that she is happy not to be part of today’s generation, as they have very little parental guidance. She calls them a generation “buffeted constantly with information without assimilation which has no value” and unfortunately, a generation that cannot imagine that they too will



GETTY IMAGES

be thwarted one day.
Earlier, while one would look up to elder siblings, parents, grandparents or teachers for advice, the present-day children seek information on social media platforms such as YouTube and Google. This sea of information comes with no guarantee of being correct and suitable for consumption.
YouTube influencers are their new role models so much so that their personal lives seem to be all over the place with “instagramm-able” pictures publicly put out for all to see. Their act of taking revenge through hacking into someone else’s account, their style of “blocking” people with whom they do not get along well, their style of “ghosting” people, going for “situationships”, stalking of exes, their mad rush to increase their number of followers... all this seems too scary to me personally. I wonder if children can see where this overdependence on screen and lack of

guidance are taking them in future. Parents like me are also to blame. With courage to have only a child or two, fearing caregiving responsibilities in the absence of a foolproof support structure while juggling a career, we too are at fault.
To make up, one ends up fulfilling most of the wants of the child who never learns to feel gratitude for the things received, being aware that the next supply is only a call away.
Growing up alone in nuclear families and then leaving home right after Class 12 for further studies has become a norm that unfortunately throws unforeseen challenges at the child who has not learnt the basic life skills of sharing with, and caring for, siblings.
The child remains emotionally unsatiated and socially gullible and vulnerable.
Though I, as a parent, do respect the need of a child for space, I also fear the repercussions of letting them be!



The city of fascination
(Clockwise from right) Paintings and prints by Thomas Daniell, James Prinsep, and Erich Kips; DAG's Giles Tillotson.
(COURTESY DAG)

Painting Benares

Hinduism's oldest city has been the muse for artists from around the world. A DAG exhibition curates works from the 19th and early-20th centuries

Ela Das

With pomp and spiritual fervour pulsing in its narrow alleys and grand temples, the ancient city of Benares has always drawn the curious and the creative. While the Gangetic city's backdrop of sacred rituals and timeless traditions continues to captivate even today, Ashish Anand, CEO and managing director at DAG, points out how for centuries "the cultural centre has been a muse for artists from India and overseas."

By the late 18th century, spellbinding tales of Benares had started to reach British shores, after landscape painter William Hodges published a series of picturesque views of the city. Other artists followed in his footsteps, most notably the British uncle-nephew duo Thomas and William, to visually document the subcontinent, inspiring a throng of creatives to come over in the next century.

The gallery is showcasing their art through *The Orientalists' Benares*, an exhibition of works by foreign artists in the 19th and early-20th centuries, specially curated for the ongoing Mumbai Gallery Weekend.

Comprising 15 works by Thomas Daniell, Marius Bauer, Ludwig Hans Fischer, Erich Kips, Richard Robert Drabble, C. J. Robinson, Alexander Scott, Yoshida Hiroshi, James Prinsep and Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merprès, "it is a curtain raiser for a much larger exhibition on Benares slated for later this year that includes a wide gamut of Indian artists across different periods," Anand adds.

India and Orientalism
A writer and lecturer on Indian history and architecture, Giles Tillotson, the senior vice president of exhibitions at DAG, establishes a simple meaning of the term 'orientalist' – as a western artist who made Asian subjects the main theme of their work.

However, after Edward W. Said wrote the book *Orientalism* in 1978, Tillotson argues that the term is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies who produced it, which makes a lot of orientalist work inherently political and servile to power. "At DAG, we're using the term in both senses. We pick up these paintings in Europe and bring them back to India because we believe they're part of the history of Indian art," he says. "While there are several facets that are romanticised,

Prinsep's book

British servicemen were also charmed by the city, such as epigraphist and numismatist James Prinsep, who was "based in Benares in the early 19th century, and was running the mint there as his official job for the East India Company," says Tillotson. "He is best remembered for deciphering the Kharosthi and Brahmi scripts of ancient India. Since he was stationed there, he produced a number of drawings of various parts of the ghats and the city, which he then published in a book titled *Benares Illustrated*. It features extensive texts alongside exquisite views of Benares and a detailed visual map. The exhibition showcases four of his prints."



there are many buildings in the sceneries that [are true representations but] no longer exist today," he says.

Interestingly, in the 1950s, when the Archaeological Survey of India restored a mediaeval temple in the Rohtas District in Bihar, they used the Daniells' view of it as their guide to restoration. Their representation of the Qutub Minar is the only formal

documentation ever recorded, which showcases the original cupola at its top that was destroyed by lightning in 1803.

Each artist came to Benares with their own preconceived ideas. "Hodges said it was fascinating to see people whose customs had not changed for over 3,000 years,"

reveals Tillotson. "So, when the Daniells visited, they believed they'd see a kind of living antiquity. Obviously, that was completely wrong. Benares is a constantly changing city, always being developed – even back then."

Framing a holy city

The way each artist composed a picture was ruled by the framing of English art. "When you look at the pictures, there are very few people in them. There may be a few figures for scale or to animate the space, but it's not bustling or teeming with folk. And it was not like that," says Tillotson, referencing William Daniell's journal, where he often complains about the number of pilgrims around the sacred sites, making it difficult for him to get on with his work. "They'd sit down to make a sketch, and suddenly there'd be a swarm of people around them. But when you see the pictures, the people have disappeared. The artist wanted this image of serenity."

Tillotson shares how Edward Lear, an author and landscape painter, had visited the India Office Library in England to look at the work by the Daniells as a visual stimulus before visiting India in the 19th century. "When he got to Benares, however, he couldn't believe it was the same place. He remembered the views by the Daniells being sad and solemn when in actuality, it was a bright, brilliant, noisy place."

While the early period is more about exploration – to showcase this world to the western audience – by the end of the 19th century, these were quickly becoming clichés. It

Mumbai Gallery Weekend

Taking place over the course of four days – across 34 galleries and design venues ranging from Colaba and Fort to Byculla and Bandra – the 11th edition boasts several new shows, including an Anjolie Ela Menon exhibition (the artist is showing in the city after nearly nine years), a series of talks at CSMVS, a young collectors' pop-up, and live events and performances. Read the full story online, at magazine.thehindu.com.

— Aatish Nath

was around this time that one saw the introduction of photography, most notably from British photographer Samuel Bourne who set up his photographic studio, Bourne & Shepherd, in India. It brings a turning point in the exhibition where the artists, too, begin to echo a more creative interaction with the city. This vividly comes to life in Belgian painter Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merprès' oil on wood, titled *Street Scene, Benares*, where a confetti of celebration and pageantry shimmers in the city's alleyways in a dream-like abstraction.

"The point to take away from this [*The Orientalists' Benares*] is that the foreign gaze is not fixed," says Tillotson, suggesting, "The idea that colonialism or the imperial gaze was monolithic and unshifting is not entirely true. It was an ever-changing and evolving comparison of India."

The Orientalists' Benares, at *The Taj Mahal Palace*, ends today.

The writer and creative consultant is based in Mumbai.

Kunal Ray

Jaya Jaitly's latest book is a departure from what came before – from textile, craft and all things handmade. Instead, it's a deep dive into design thinking. *Inspirations for Graphic Design from India*, co-authored with professor Dimple Bahl of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and published by Arthshila Trust, advocates an overhaul of design education in India by recognising indigenous sources. "I researched all the [available] forms of teaching the principles of graphic design that I could find. They were soulless and limiting, only geared towards a commercial approach for the printing industry," explains Jaitly. "I felt we had a field wide open to add our bit."

The years of researching – online during the pandemic and then at libraries and through discussions with scholars – have led to a book that compels us to reevaluate our sources. Edited excerpts from a conversation with the writer, crafts revivalist and activist.



IN CONVERSATION

Why discount the local?

With a new book out, Jaya Jaitly on why graphic design study in India needs an overhaul and how public spaces can do better than 'kindergarten wall art'

about what constitutes that?
A: Indian art and Indian food are catch-all terms that mean nothing much. These are as varied and widespread as the biodiversity, topography, dialects, food habits and identity motifs of different communities and regions across India. Symbols and colours, festivals and rituals change according to local conditions and histories – and

design motifs emerge out of these. What a wealth of inspirational material we actually have lying unnoticed!
For example, to help draw craftspeople out of the disconnect between literacy and craft skills, I introduced them to calligraphy through a project called Akshara - Crafting Indian Scripts in 2011. Every alphabet, word, phrase, poem, or

Regional inspiration (Clockwise from left) Gond art; Akshara - Crafting Indian Scripts; Jaya Jaitly; and the book cover. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



an attempt to institutionalise the work of rural craftspeople, whose skill, labour, and genius is often unrecognised. Would you agree?
A: Absolutely. This is, in a way, embedded in all the work I have done for over four decades. Craftspeople need opportunities to flourish, encouragement from both local communities and global markets, multiple kinds of promotional platforms, and different types of design infusion. Architects and interior designers can play a role by using Indian forms and inspiration, and taking it to a different level – so that 'craft' is not just a product on a shelf or online

song in their regional language could be embellished into a new design. They surpassed all my expectations by creating 150 museum quality exhibits, covering 21 craft forms and 16 Indian languages across 14 states. The resulting exhibition showed a new design inspiration that cut across disciplines.
[Poet-playwright-philosopher Rabindranath] Tagore's sketches scattered across many of his handwritten poems are also fine examples of indigenous graphic design. My point is, look within the Indian cultural world to find a cornucopia of inspiration.

Q: I feel that your book is



An arts writer, the interviewer teaches literary and cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune.

platform waiting to be sold.

Q: Are there Indian designers and artists who you feel are best using indigenous inspiration and design in their work?
A: I would rather point to a few trends established by some individuals and brands. The wider approach by older names such as [Ahmedabad-based graphic designer] Subrata Bhowmick; fashion designers like Ritu Kumar; the fashion sensibility brought out by Good Earth's design team; the unknown typographers who work on English fonts based on Indian scripts. Tara Books combines Indian art with graphics and design layouts in their books for children, but that art lovers of all ages can also acquire. Subtlety and sophistication in any design form is longer lasting. Indian design is always meaningful in its original form. We should respect that rather than chase after market trends.

Q: Who is your target audience?
A: The book is for students of all design institutes, corporates – for logo and brand creation – advertising agencies and digital media designers. And if I can flog my present 'pet peeve' horse, it's also aimed at those persons in bureaucracy who deal with public spaces, and have lowered the public aesthetic to the level of kindergarten wall art. City walls and facades that are painted to cover up squalor, or to try and impress foreign delegates, are ghastly ideas of design that consist of imagery of bumblebees and butterflies, balloons and daisies. The 'Indian' alternative is always the different asanas of the Surya Namaskar. If only each state delved a little deeper into Indian sources and asked a traditional artist to design a mural.