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The tragic incident of an 18-month toddler being mauled to death by street dogs last year led to heightened anti-street dog sentiment in Hyderabad, with increased public concern over dog attacks. In reality, this is an issue across India, with cities that are ever extending, and the growing garbage waste to deal with. Dogs often thrive on this garbage. City suburbs and outskirts need dog management programmes. Instead of reactive services after dog bites take place, it calls for proactive services

AMALA AKKINENI
Blue Cross Hyderabad



(Clockwise from left) Kanan Shah; Ambika Shukla; Randeep Hooda; politician Palanivel Thiaga Rajan; Tanja Fernandes; Priya Chetty Rajagopal; Amala Akkineni; Pallavi Dar; and Madhuri Dixit. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

FIXING INDIA'S STREET DOG PROBLEM

IT'S NOT AS SIMPLE AS ABC

Neha Mehrotra

Last year, before he passed away, Ratan Tata made headlines for ensuring all street dogs got 'free entry' at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Colaba. In Tamil Nadu, former chief minister M. Karunanidhi was a dog lover, and for many years, his regular walk at party headquarters, Anna Arivalayam, wouldn't be complete without the street dog there accompanying him.

The more you look, the more you'll see love for streeties across the country. People spend lakhs of their own money to treat the dog down their street who has a tumour; women take the onus of feeding fresh food to 200 dogs across a city; others quarrel with their families to take in an injured dog – stories like these are increasingly common.

But so are the stories of legions of gated societies, resident welfare associations (RWAs) and market associations at perpetual war with the dogs in their area, to the extent that they pay catchers to, at best, drop off neighbourhood dogs in nearby forests and, at worst, dispose of them. Their reasons are also unassailable: if a dog is biting passersby, maybe even children, what is to be done?

The issue is fraught and tends to ignite high passions on either side. So, what is the solution to the street dog issue and more



Mumbai and Bengaluru are getting it right with WhatsApp groups, collars with QR codes, and a symbiotic relationship between dog lovers and local authorities. But elsewhere, the ABC programme is hampered by bad implementation and a lack of resources

importantly, which cities are getting it right? "In every city, there is a very small minority that says, remove the dogs. There's an equally small pro-animal lobby. And then we have the silent majority of 85%, who just keep quiet," says Chinny Krishna, founder of Blue Cross of India.

Since Independence, India has dealt with street dogs the only way it knew how: catch and kill. Dogs were shot, poisoned with strychnine, clubbed, drowned and electrocuted by municipal corporations across the country. The killing went up from a few dogs in the 1910s to more than 16,000 in the 1960s. In spite of this, the number of dogs showed no sign of reducing, and rabies deaths kept increasing. The reason was simple: existing dogs kept breeding twice a year. As one activist

emphasised, a single unsterilised female dog and her offspring can potentially lead to the birth of 67,000 dogs in six years. That's when corporations, spurred by animal rights NGOs, decided to try something different.

Chennai, in collaboration with the Blue Cross of India, was one of the first cities to experiment with the Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme in 1996. "We called it ABC to show authorities that control of the street dog population was as simple as ABC," recalls Krishna. Mumbai began soon after, and within a few years, the programme had spread to a number of cities. It got its final seal of approval in 2001, when the Indian government, under the guidance of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), formalised the ABC (Dogs) Rules under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

Things have gone astray Cut to the present, and the implementation of the programme has been varied. Though some cities have fared

better than others, a few consistent problems have been plaguing them all.

For starters, most corporation-run ABC centres do sterilisations on a complaint-basis rather than area-basis. So, if they get a complaint from residents of, say, Chennai's Alwarpet, they'll catch dogs in that one lane. Instead, they should be conducting area-wise sweeps, i.e., rounding up all the dogs in an area, sterilising them, before moving on to the next area.

Exacerbating matters is the poor to downright horrific quality of care in many of these government centres. Stories of botched-up surgeries performed by junior staffers and assistants, sometimes without anaesthesia, and with little post-operative care, are now so common that when feeders hear their dog has been picked up by the corporation, they're terrified. "If only we had done everything in a proper, scientific, systematic manner, without any corruption, we would not be in the mess that we are in today," says Shravan Krishnan, who runs Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary in Chennai.

The city, a pioneer of the ABC programme, is not doing too well in its implementation, according to several vets, NGOs and local Animal Welfare Board members. It has five ABC centres run by the corporation. In addition, it partners with NGOs by offering them infrastructure and monetary help to perform sterilisations. Krishnan had the chance to tie-up with the corporation. Theoretically, this would have afforded him the use of corporation-hired dog catchers and a sum of anywhere between ₹500 and ₹1,500 per surgery. "But I didn't want to do it," he says point blank.

For starters, according to Krishnan, there is a lot of corruption in the system. Instead of getting money, he says, he'd have had to pay at least ₹100 per surgery as a bribe to officials who come for inspections. Any money he got after that would be delayed for months. Instead, he has opted for a community-based system, where people who feed street dogs in the area bring them to him for sterilisation. This way, Krishnan manages to do around 3,000 sterilisations a year, all without having to catch a single dog.

Tamil Nadu recently managed to secure an additional ₹20 crore of funding to expedite ABC – which will go towards grants for existing NGOs as well as opening new ABC centres.

They're also planning on opening a training centre where veterinarians across corporations and SPCAs (Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) will be trained in the correct way to perform ABC surgeries.



Bigger cities, more resources Usually, bigger cities have an abundance of people and resources, which translates into street dogs that are better fed and cared for. Delhi currently runs a whopping 21 ABC centres across the city and its outskirts in collaboration with NGOs. With the partnership model, the city provides the space, dog-catching resources, and monetary help of ₹1,450 per surgery. The rest falls on the NGOs.

But according to Ambika Shukla of People for Animals (PFA), which has tied up with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to run the Sanjay Gandhi Animal Care Centre, quality varies from centre to centre.

At the PFA centre, for instance, dogs are brought to them by the MCD. "The first thing we do is tag the dogs. Each tag has a number, with an address, the date the dog was brought in, its condition, description and a photo," says Shukla. If the dog looks weak, a blood test is done to ensure he/she is fit for surgery. This is followed by the operation and post-op care of at least five days. Then the MCD drops off the dog in the same area it was picked up from.

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became a good friend, along with France's top Indian literary scholar, Laetitia Zecchini. For Bruce King, literature, music, academia, family, travel, friendship, and gourmandise, generously shared, came all packaged together.

— Vera Mihailovich-Dickman, scholar and teacher



THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF BRUCE KING

Friends of the writer and critic on how he made himself a
pivot of the story of modern Indian poetry in English



Before any scholar deemed Indian poetry in English to be worthy of interest, before the Bombay poets became a “thing”, before the age of the Internet, Bruce King meticulously and amorously read, recorded or collected everything there was to read and record about Indian poetry in English. His insatiable curiosity, his fierce intelligence and sharp sensitivity, his friendships with the poets he wrote about, his appetite for their words, their stories and idiosyncrasies, led him to recognise the best writers before anyone else, and build a wealth of knowledge and insight that will not be surpassed. Would modern Indian poetry in English ever have existed, as a field of study, without him? It's hard to say. What can be said is that he cleared a space for us all: for long unseen South Asian or African voices, and for all the scholars who have or will come after him. For those who loved him, and we were many, he set an example of human and academic generosity; of scholarship that was precise, rigorous and lively, irreverent, trenchant and witty; of a writing teeming with stories, and absolutely jargon-free. In Bruce King, the gourmet, the dancer, the lover, the friend and the insatiable (and mischievous) storyteller, the love of life and the love of poetry were continuous with each other.

— Laetitia Zecchini, scholar

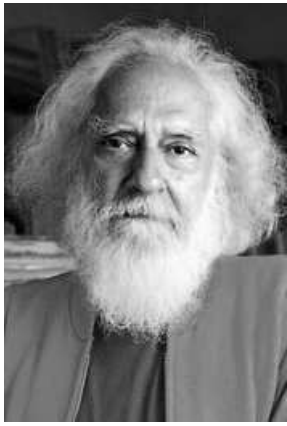


Jeet Thayil

The writer, critic, professor, jazz drummer and world flâneur, Bruce King, died at his home in Paris on December 2, 2024, just a month short of his 92nd birthday. On the basis of *Modern Indian Poetry in English* alone, first published in 1987 and reprinted every year or two since, Bruce made himself a pivot of the story, and history, of Indian poetry. It was a matter of some surprise, though it should not have been, that this visionary study was written by an American. To compile the pages-long charts at the back of the book ('Life and Career Details of Some

Poets', 'Anthologies, Publishers and Awards' and 'Important Anthologized Poems'), Bruce went from door to door, a kind of literary gumshoe, looking to chart the lives of the poets. As a remembrance of his outsize personality, some writers and friends of Bruce have put together this all-too-inadequate tribute.

The writer is a novelist and poet.



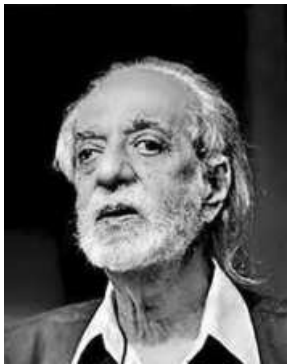
Unlike most academics, it seems from his autobiography *An Interesting Life, So Far* (2017), King lived his life wherever his interests took him. In December 1983, newly arrived in Delhi from the University of North Alabama, Florence, and visiting Keki N. Daruwalla, he asked himself, 'I did not know what I was doing or why but I started taking notes on the titles of the Indian and foreign literary journals and photocopying what I could'. Earlier, in Florence, when he took up the 'supposed distinguished professorship', he 'had no idea at the time' that it 'would end the first half of [his] life and begin a second... more fruitful phase'. He had been just four years into his 'second life' when, in 1987, after seeking out every Indian poet wherever they were hiding, whether in Delhi, Bombay, Allahabad, or Cuttack, he brought out *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, without which the poetry he mapped would still largely be *terra incognita*. Certainly, no Indian academic had been there before, or has mapped it since.

— Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, poet



Like the elephant's child dear to Rudyard Kipling, Bruce King was full of satiable curiosity. That curiosity extended to jazz, ballet and contemporary dance, cooking, joyfully scatological jokes and puns, and to literature. Literatures. Plural. In 1984, decades before literature from Kerala became the byword in award shortlists and media headlines, King was in Trivandrum, working with Ayyappa Paniker — the pioneering Malayalam poet and critic; devouring and documenting post-Independence modernist trends among its writers, and speculating on connections between Christianity, communism, caste reform, and the Malayali proclivity for disruption. That curiosity and passion Bruce retained until the very end: by his deathbed lay a copy of Denis Hirson's *My Thirty-Minute Bar Mitzvah*, a memoir of growing up in apartheid-era South Africa, which Bruce intended to review for the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. If there is an afterlife, Bruce's spirit is probably signing off on that piece before throwing a gargantuan feast for his friends there, with a dish to accommodate every palate and dietary restriction.

— Karthika Naïr, poet, librettist, dance producer



An Indian word for improvised solutions to practical problems is *jugaad*, and King's life, much like the jazz he loved, is *jugaad*. It often takes the form of extended stays in challenging countries, India being one of them. Drawn into dangerous currents — in the works and lives of those countries' cultural players — King manages to keep his head above water, generally to praise what he finds; when necessary, to condemn. His generous in its recall, extraordinary in its scope.

— Adil Jussawalla, poet

Nandini Bhatia

In the literary world, translation is god's work. Translators bring back old stories for new readers, building bridges between languages known and unknown. In her latest, *Vasanta: Stories from Sanskrit Plays* (Juggernaut), translator and writer Arshia Sattar revisits Sanskrit plays and transforms them into short stories, shifting gears not just between languages but also formats. In this interview, she talks about her choice of stories, about retaining the essence of classical literature and the true 'voice' of its characters, and why they continue to be relevant. Edited excerpts:

Question: How do you think history — both cultural and linguistic/ literary — can be made more accessible to modern-day readers?

Answer: I have to say that I truly love reading books, so I'd suggest that people read rather than watch or listen. Having said that, I think podcasts are a good way to access all kinds of books. The real question is not how you access information but the authenticity or factual basis of what you access. And the length of time you're willing to spend with that source of information. So, choose your sources with discretion.

Q. Indian mythology has been retold in many languages and from as many angles. How do you reimagine them? Does English do justice to the stories?

A: We simply cannot pick up a translation to read with the idea, 'O, I wonder if this does justice to the original'. I think as translators, we must not 'reimagine a story', it's our job to present the story as it is.



Arshia Sattar
(SUDHAKARA JAIN)

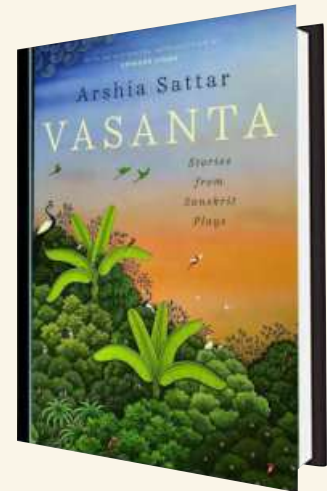
just a shift in language but also in format, adapting Sanskrit plays into English stories. What was it like? Do you think there is something still missing?

A: What's missing is the beautiful poetry in all these plays, that's a great loss. A lot of people have trouble reading plays, so I think the plays have gained a new audience with this transformation; that is some comfort. The whole process was fun because the plays are fun. And very unexpected in terms of how we think about the contents of classical literature. Elephants run amok, a tiger goes on a rampage, there are *tantriks* and *yoginis* who fly through the air and cases of mistaken identities and illicit love affairs and a people's rebellion against a corrupt king. The challenging thing was to not make

Re-tellers can reimagine the story, that's their job.

It is easier to translate from Sanskrit into other Indian languages because there is a shared vocabulary and a shared world-view but one can also become complacent and careless when one makes those translations, you know, slip into apparent cognates. I don't think there's a difference between translating new stories into English and translating classics, and that's because I believe that all translations should be in a contemporary idiom. Classics should be translated anew for each generation: that's the way to keep them interesting and accessible.

Q. The collection in *Vasanta* presents not



the plays so flat without dialogue that they became boring; to make sure that a character still rings true and is fully represented. And of course, with reduced dialogue, to make sure that you retain the 'voice' of each character.

Q. Why these nine plays/ stories out of the lot? Do they have an underlying social or perhaps a moral message?

A: These, because I know them well and like them very much and wanted readers to know them and enjoy them too. I chose these also to show that we are talking about a time of great pluralism and diversity. Buddhists and Jains also wrote plays, their values and aspirations are also in these stories. There are also many kinds of Hinduism depicted here — the fringe sects and practices as well as mainstream rituals and beliefs.

No, the plays do not have an underlying message, that's another misconception about classical or ancient literature that we have to get rid of, that it has a message. People have always written and performed for pleasure, without getting hung up on morality and messages. But I will say that while the plays don't have a message, the book certainly has intent. Which is that the classical period was not dominated by Hinduism and Hindu kingdoms. There was a lot going on in terms of different ideas and practices and it was these oppositional conversations and debates that led to the great flowering of culture and philosophy.

The interviewer is a books and culture writer. Instagram @read.dream.repeat

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But not all NGOs are so scrupulous and Shukla highlights how some corporation-funded centres are running on no infrastructure and unqualified staff, leading to shoddy surgeries. “It’s basically a single doctor operation,” says Shukla, a practice which is illegal under the latest iteration of the ABC Rules, 2023. Moreover, there is very little oversight on the part of the MCD – there is no ABC Monitoring Committee, and the Veterinary Services Department at the MCD has had no director since 2023. “There’s an overall lack of accountability,” says Shukla.

Noida too, with its many affluent housing societies, has its fair share of animal lovers. Pallavi Dar, a resident of Sector 17, feeds and cares for 200 dogs every day. Feeders like her often ignite the hatred of people, who think they are exacerbating the dog problem. “RWAs are extremely violent towards them, sometimes even resorting to physical violence. They also make up stories and frame these women,” says Gopalan.

In actuality, it is people like Dar – who feed the dogs every day and have a relationship with them – who help catch and sterilise them. “Just think about it: why would I want an unsterilised dog roaming around in my area? Tomorrow she will give birth to puppies and I will go from feeding 200 to 207 dogs,” says Dar.

Many are struggling

Unsurprisingly, smaller towns and cities have it much worse. In Goa, while the cities are taking some steps, in the interiors, sterilisations aren’t being done, says Atul Sarin, of the NGO Welfare for Animals in Goa. “We need a lot more NGOs if we’re going to succeed, especially in the panchayats and suburbs.” The influx of tourists has also presented a unique problem: the summer and winter months see a rampant breeding of street dogs due to leftover food and bad garbage management,



and come monsoon, the same dogs starve to death due to scarcity of food. As of date, only eight of 14 urban local bodies and 43 of 191 panchayats in the state are conducting sterilisations.

In Kerala, Kochi is the only city with a corporation-run ABC programme. And while they have sterilised around 8,000 dogs in the last seven years, the process has been quite haphazard. For instance, the centre was closed for a few months for renovation, and reopened only last July. “Moreover, the centre doesn’t have many of the facilities that the AWBI has mandated [hygiene, equipment, CCTV cameras, prescribed cages],” says T.K. Sajeew, secretary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

“The reason why we haven’t complained is because if it shuts, then there is no one else.”

A few NGOs such as Daya Foundation and Animal Rescue Kochi are doing a limited number of sterilisations with their own funds – as long as someone brings the dog to them and takes it back home for post-operative care. “But many of these NGOs are in debt, and don’t even have money to pay their vets,” says Tanja Fernandes, a dog-lover who has

IT’S NOT AS SIMPLE AS ABC

rescued multiple dogs over the years.

Stricter licensing requirements

The law around street dogs in India has been consistently evolving. When the government stopped mass culling in the 90s, it passed the ABC (Dogs) Rules, 2001 that mandated corporations across the country to sterilise, not kill, street dogs. The rules were recently updated, culminating in the ABC Rules, 2023. Some of the most significant changes include banning relocation of street dogs from one area to another; mandating all NGOs conducting sterilisations to be registered with the AWBI; and overall, emphasising a more

humane treatment of animals throughout the process.

But there’s still a long way to go when it comes to their implementation. “For any law to be implemented, there has to be a strong acceptance from society,” says Vikram Chandravanshi, legal advisor at AWBI. “What we’re currently lacking is societal acceptance.”

The new ABC rules also have a flip side: they have made it much harder for NGOs to get permission for sterilisations. “A lot of the requirements are unrealistic and difficult to fulfil. NGOs are struggling to begin with, so making it harder for them won’t be



One of the issues with the vet system in India is that often the people who opt for veterinary science appear to be those who have not succeeded in their MBBS ambitions. So we’ve got vets who are not really interested in animal welfare, who are mostly holding out for a government job. So, obviously, the quality of vet care is not the best

KIRAN RAO

Chennai-based entrepreneur and animal activist

productive,” says Goa’s Sarin, whose NGO filled the AWBI-mandated paperwork in 2023, and heard back almost a year later. This complaint was repeated by a number of NGOs in different cities.

In response, AWBI’s Gopalan stresses that it is not difficult to get these permissions if all the documents are in place. “We have a



ILLUSTRATION: SNEETHA R. KUMAR

POP-A-RAZZI

Work on Sundays

About 90-hour weeks and uber wealthy uncles telling everyone to work harder

Even the song tells us ‘Never on a Sunday’. Oh you can kiss me on a Monday... a Tuesday... a Wednesday... a Thursday, a Friday and Saturday is best... But never, never on a Sunday, a Sunday, a Sunday, ‘cause that’s my day of rest...

Well, not if Larsen & Toubro chairman S.N. Subrahmanyan could have his way. Unlike Narayana Murthy, Subrahmanyan was not a household name. But now thanks to an undated video that’s gone viral, he has his 15 minutes of fame. Or at least one Sunday’s worth.

In what appeared to be an internal meeting, Subrahmanyan is seen regretting he cannot make his employees work on Sundays, too. “If I can make you work on Sundays, I will be more happy, because I work on Sundays also.” His logic? “How long can you stare at your wife? How long can the wives stare at their husbands? Get to the office and start working.”

Subrahmanyan has been roundly roasted for his cavalier disregard for work-life balance. It also seems he lives in a world where the men work and the wife stays at home, waiting for her man. Even when said man is home, his only job seems to be to stare at his wife because, god forbid, he should help out with the

housework. One of the stinging ripostes to his statement was a meme that quipped ‘Someone needs to tell the L&T head that if you work 90 hours & don’t stare at your wife, someone else will’.

Also, the poor rich man does not understand that spouses staring at each other is so 1990s anyway. In 2025, they will spend their Sundays staring at individual screens anyway, just on their smartphones rather than the office laptop. Nothing says married life as much as a couple, sitting quietly next to each other, at home or in a cafe, staring into their phones.

Never really out of office Subrahmanyan joins the list of uber wealthy tone-deaf uncles telling everyone to work harder so they can become wealthier. As it is we live in a world where thanks to smartphones we are never really out of office. Murthy had already urged younger employees to work 70-hour weeks. Subrahmanyan just moved the needle up a little bit to 90. Surely, someone else will come along and round it off to 100 soon.

This is not to say the larger message about enhancing productivity is misplaced. Except, Subrahmanyan and Murthy seem

don’t mess with them.” According to Rajagopal’s estimate, approximately 60% of Bengaluru’s dogs are currently sterilised and vaccinated.

The situation is even better in Mumbai, where the dog sterilisation programme has been so successful that a lot of NGOs have shifted focus to cats. “Because the moment the dog population starts going down, cats shoot up,” says Abodh Aras, CEO of Welfare of Street Dogs (WSD), an NGO which works with the local government to sterilise street dogs.

Aras’ is one of three NGOs working with the government. WSD decided a long time back to not accept any money from the corporation as there was a lot of corruption; instead they pay their 40 employees via donations. They are responsible for covering the entire island city, i.e., everything from Colaba in the south to Sion in the north – and they have done such a good job that according to their estimates, 80% of street dogs on the island are sterilised.

Their success, Aras says, can be attributed to three things: one, they did systematic area-wise coverage, ensuring they sterilised at least 90% of the dogs. Two, it was a continuous effort. “You can’t sterilise a large number of dogs in a year or two and then do nothing later. You have to keep at it.” And three, they constantly collaborated with feeders and caregivers in the community. Apart from this, the ABC program falls under the city’s veterinary department, which is quite proactive and responsive to NGOs’ needs. “We still get calls from the interiors like Kamathipura and Mohammed Ali Road, even suburban areas like Ulhasnagar, Dombivli, and Virar,” says Kanan Shah, who runs an animal ambulance service under her NGO, The Zara Animal Project, which funds and ferries dogs and cats to the nearest shelter/ABC centre for sterilisation. “Everyone’s out there, pooling their resources and doing what they can,” says Shah.

It’s obvious that there’s a long way to go before India can achieve 100% sterilisation and meet the goal of a rabies-free country. What we need is cities talking to each other and sharing best practices. The rest will follow.

The writer is based in New Delhi.

DOG DAY AFTERNOONS

Rohit Chawla’s photographs of Goa’s beach dogs during its fierce monsoons and a harrowing pandemic are an expression of freedom and hope



Photos from *Rain Dogs*; (below) Rohit Chawla.



Everyone, it is said, thinks they have the best dog. And none of them are wrong. Rohit Chawla’s stunning, moving photographs of dogs in Goa are a reminder that dogs are indeed poems with paws, and that those paws can leave their imprint on the hardest human heart

SHASHI THAROOR
Politician and writer

Samira Sheth

These images are the quietest, most introspective work I’ve done,” says Rohit Chawla. The award-winning photographer is referring to *Rain Dogs*, an exhibit of photographic prints on paper and linen, from his upcoming eponymously titled book.

Imbued with a haunting quality, Chawla’s photographs of dogs in the rain on the beaches of Goa were taken as lockdown forced the world into isolation. “When I began shooting these pictures, more than turning a pack of neglected dogs into a photographer’s subject, I was trying to form a frame around my own vulnerability, my disparate thoughts,” he explains. “Someone once said that dogs have a way of finding people who need them. I think it’s true. Though I fed them whenever I was able to, the bond that grew between us wasn’t only to do with food.”

10,000 photos and counting Chawla walked the desolate beaches to photograph a combination of his two loves: dogs and Goa’s monsoon, using mostly his iPhone, after losing three cameras to moisture. Beginning in 2021, his photography of dogs grew into an obsession over the next three years, ending in a book only after his wife Saloni Puri insisted he needed “an out” as well as an edit for the 10,000 photographs sitting in his camera.

And so, we have a photographer’s personal story, and a select series of Chawla’s emotionally charged images interspersed with notes from leading contemporary writers, including Vikram Seth, William Dalrymple, Shashi Tharoor, Girish Shahane, and Tishani Doshi.

The sparse images of strays, either solo or with a lone human figure in them, are in keeping with the spare style that defines Chawla’s larger body of work – led by “subtraction and a certain graphic minimalism”. A bare chested migrant worker, the “starting point” of the *Rain Dogs* series, says Chawla, stands looking out towards the vast sea of uncertainty as a stray dog sits beside him, perhaps in kinship or silent understanding. In

another moving portrait, Chawla foregrounds an indie sitting alone, the vast expanse of sand, sky and sea the perfect backdrop for the dog; the master of his own fate.

‘What real freedom looks like’

Used to his subjects, including heads of state, listening to his direction as they pose for his camera, Chawla had to surrender to the agency of his subjects and the vagaries of nature in this case. “Beyond choosing the time of day and the quality of light, nothing was ever in my control. Unlike my human subjects, I couldn’t manipulate or coax the dogs to do my bidding, couldn’t predict the moods of the monsoon, or the sea’s erratic behaviour.” What reaches out from these seemingly quiet yet forceful images are moments of joy and connection, of dignity and compassion and, ironically, of a true sense of freedom of the spirit.

As Santosh Desai writes, “The stray dog is a creature who makes by the scruff of its scruffy neck, roaming the streets and finding sustenance where it can. There is nothing particularly heroic about strays, but in some ways, this is what real freedom looks like. It makes no promises and the rewards that it offers need to be extracted with hard fought grit, but you go where the spirit takes you.”

The photos and words of *Rain Dogs* are poetic reflections on the unspoken bond between humans and nature – placing value on what we need essentially to survive. “The images tell a story bigger than I had intended. In some ways it’s a deeply political story [rain dogs metaphorically refers to people who feel lost or out of place, much like the dogs in the rain], and I shared them with the thought that it might resonate with others. I also hope the work will sensitise people to the plight of stray dogs,” concludes Chawla.

Rain Dogs is on view at The Aquad Port & Jail Complex till February 15 and the Museo Camera, Gurugram, from January 26 to February 14. The book will be launched on February 1 at the Jaipur Literature Festival. All proceeds from the exhibitions will go towards registered animal charities in India.

The independent art writer and curator is based in Goa.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



My encounter with the dream whisperers

Movement is still the leitmotif of Dimpy Menon’s work, but the bronze works at her new show in Bengaluru embody a sense of calm



In motion Dimpy Menon at her exhibition *Dream Whispers*; and (below) one of her sculptures on show. (MURALI KUMAR C.)

Anita Nair

There is something frantic about twilight anywhere in the world. Everything is in a state of flux. The sun. The moon. The tide and skies. Light and shadows. Roads and streetlights. Movement reigns.

As ways Lavell Road in Bengaluru is busy. Impatient drivers tapping on horns, the whoosh of bikes and autorickshaws streaming on the narrow road hemmed in by lit-up shop windows and restaurants cause little explosions in my head. The burgeoning city burgeons even more on a Saturday evening. But within the empty white walls of Gallery Time & Space, there is respite. The empty white walls and the sculptures within stretch a palm towards the frenzied pace of the street below as if to say: leave us, thus.

The show is titled mounted as I enter. Sculptor Dimpy Menon and her team move around assessing the space and its possibilities. The sculptures are still waiting to be assigned their designated space. But it doesn’t seem to chip away at the stillness. Amidst the hammers, pliers, strings and boxes, the dream whisperers have found their own slice of being. It is exactly this I had hoped to witness when I asked to preview the show before the actual opening.

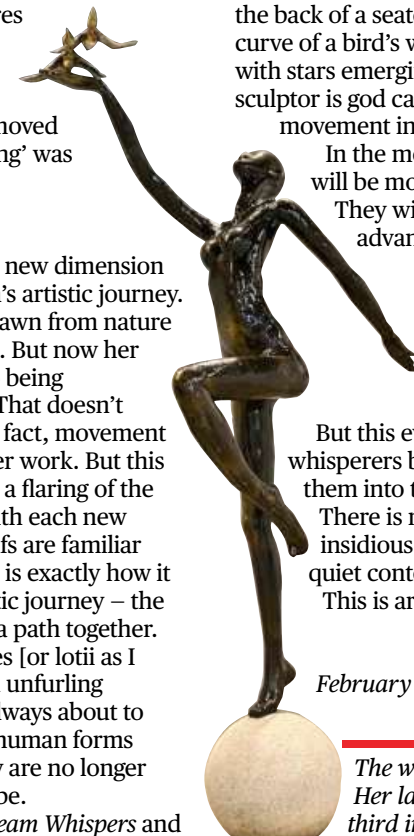
I have been familiar with Menon’s body of work for over two decades now and have witnessed the rising arc of her artistic trajectory.

I think of Menon’s earlier sketches, paintings and bronzes and the sense of waiting they expressed. Each line captured the innate longing that comes with waiting. In the years thereafter, her bronzes became bigger and their energy that much more powerful. Even the aerial sculptures caught in mid-motion exuded a raw tensile strength. The sculptor and her creations had moved into a realm where ‘doing’ was supreme.

Drawing from nature

But this evening, I see a new dimension that has entered Menon’s artistic journey. So much of her art is drawn from nature and the body in motion. But now her work had progressed to being embodiments of calm. That doesn’t mean they are static. In fact, movement is still the leitmotif of her work. But this is a dynamic ease. I feel a flaring of the spirit as I spend time with each new piece. Some of the motifs are familiar and some are new. This is exactly how it ought to be in any artistic journey – the art and the artist share a path together.

Amidst the tall lotuses [or loti as I prefer to call them] and unfurling ribbons and the birds always about to soar into the skies, the human forms speak a new story. They are no longer who they once used to be. The show is titled *Dream Whispers* and you can see why.



Dream Whispers is on till February 1 at Gallery Time & Space.

The writer is an author. Her last book was *Hot Stage*, third in the *Borel Gowda noir* series.

The Tamil poet-saint Andal is identified by the parrot in her hand. The bird is the symbol of Kama, the god of love, lust and sensuality. The same god who in Buddhist works is called Mara, the enemy of Buddha. The same god who is burnt alive by a glance of Shiva's third eye, earning him the epithet Kamantaka.

Andal's love for her divine lord is expressed in her songs, which are highly erotic. There was no shame in expressing desire so overtly. At least, when Andal lived, 1,200 years ago. This was the time when celibacy was not linked to purity or piety.

The parrot is also depicted in the hand of Kamakshi, the goddess whose eyes are filled with desire, who enlivens the corpse (*shava*) and transforms him into Shiva (the auspicious one), who then, inspired by her presence, becomes Kameshwara, the lord of desire, who composes the *Kama-sutra*, the manual of lovemaking. Through Andal, the parrot is linked to Vishnu. Through Kamakshi, the parrot is linked to Shiva. The women challenge the Buddhist rejection of desire, the Buddha's abandonment of Yashodhara.

On Kama's trail
Vishnu's Garuda, a ferocious eagle with snakes in his talons, came to be depicted in later paintings, after 1600 CE, more as a chirping parrot – as Vishnu came to be increasingly equated with Kama in his Krishna avatar. In art, baby Krishna is often shown playing with parrots. This romantic Krishna-Vishnu is not found in Southeast Asia, where eagle art is popular.
In Krishna, Kama's lust is tamed with affection and romance. Krishna's son Pradyumna is described as Kama



FROM CULT TO CULTURE

THE PARROT'S EROTIC SECRET

How the raucous bird was once inextricably linked to love, lust and desire

reborn. Pradyumna's foster mother Mayavati raises him, falls in love with him and marries him. We are told she is actually Rati, Kama's consort, awaiting the resurrection of her beloved.
Pradyumna's son, Aniruddha, is also linked to Kama. Usha, the demon's daughter, abducts him, unable to resist his beauty. The father, a worshipper of Shiva, tries to stop them from marrying. Krishna and Pradyumna attack Bana's city, riding on the parrot-like Garuda, to unite the lovers. Thus, through Krishna, his son and grandson, Vishnu attained the status of Ranganatha, the lord of material beauty. Radha, with her

Symbolic (Clockwise from far left) An 8th century relief of a woman with a parrot at Virupaksha temple in Hampi, Karnataka; Kama, the god of desire; and a parrot green Ram. (WIKI COMMONS)

Tantrik roots, is described as Raseshwari, a romantic and artistic transformation of the old erotic Rati.

Colour of beauty and corruption
The parrot green colour indicated the beauty of the man as per *Natyashastra*, which is why Kathakali actors in Kerala, portraying Ram and Krishna, paint their faces green. Thanjavur, Mysuru, Bengal and Odisha's miniature paintings also use green to identify the erotic hero, who was irresistible to women.

It was the colour of the mango leaf and the betel leaf, offered to householder gods, a reminder of conjugal bliss. Temples of Andal make parrot dolls using leaves, and place it on her image.

Then came Islam, which preferred the formless god, and isolated desire in the inner harems of aristocrats. And the Victorians, who equated puritanism with holiness. The playful and auspicious eroticism of Hindu temples was misread as moral corruption. It had to be satisfied.

Today, Krishna is no longer connected with his parrot. It is all about cows. And the women are mothers, sisters, daughters, devotees

The parrot is the symbol of Kama, the god of love, lust and sensuality. The same god who in Buddhist works is called Mara, the enemy of Buddha

– not pining lovers, wandering miserably in dark groves.
In new retellings of Andal, she is whitewashed and sanitised. It is emotional, not erotic. She is made a subservient and submissive devotee, the symbol of *jiva-atma*, pining for Krishna, the *param-atma*. Holiness is confused with purity and purity with celibacy.

A forgotten past
Victorian colonisers convinced India's nationalist leaders that its erotic past was an indicator of degeneration. For regeneration, attention was given to Buddha's wheel and Ashoka's lion. Even posters of those who claim to be reviving Hinduism never show Kama's parrot, his sugarcane bow, his bowstring made of bees, and his arrows decorated with fragrant flowers.

Feminists who wonder about the morality of Surpanakha are unfamiliar with the erotic tales of *Śukasaptati*, the 70 tales of the parrot told in Sanskrit, meant to distract housewives who sought company of other men while their husbands were away on business.

India's erotic heritage, with love songs written in Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit, are not part of gender studies or the culture curriculum. Jain poems in Kannada once spoke of queens who secretly left the palace to have fun with the elephant keeper, because they found the king boring in bed. Such queens have been depicted on temple walls with parrots in their hands. But no one recognises what parrots mean anymore.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Unusual ending

East-West vulnerable. South deals

Bob Jones
Today's deal was played recently in Norway. South was Norwegian Trond Wiborg. North knew that Wiborg might only have four hearts, and many would have been happy to defend one spade doubled against vulnerable opponents, but North blasted to game and Wiborg had to try to make it.

East-West vulnerable, South deals

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

The bidding:
SOUTH 1♥
Dbl
WEST Dbl
Pass
NORTH 4♥
EAST 1♠
All pass

Opening lead: five of ♥

Wiborg won the heart lead with dummy's king and led the queen of spades. West took his ace and shifted to the king of clubs, won in hand by Wiborg with the ace. Two

high spades provided a discard for dummy's remaining club. Wiborg led a diamond, taken by West with the ace, and West led a trump to dummy's queen. Wiborg

cached the king of diamonds, ruffed a diamond in hand, and ruffed a club in dummy, giving him eight tricks. This was the position: (GRID 2)

Dummy led a diamond and East could not prevent Wiborg from taking two of the last three tricks. East chose to discard a club, so Wiborg ruffed with his ace of hearts and ruffed his spade in dummy. Beautifully played!

NORTH ♠ Void ♥ 10 ♦ 7 6 ♣ Void	WEST ♠ Void ♥ Void ♦ Q ♣ Q 6	EAST ♠ 10 ♥ J ♦ Void ♣ J	SOUTH ♠ 9 ♥ A ♦ Void ♣ 10
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QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What has January 19 ever given us?



American singer and songwriter Dolly Parton rides a truck at her theme park in Tennessee. What's the name of the park? (GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley
Born this day in 1736, this Scottish engineer is best known for inventing the steam engine that started the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain. His name though lives on as the SI unit of power, as he developed the concept of horsepower. Who is this scientist?

Born this day in 1809, Edgar Allan Poe was an American writer best known for his short stories. His work, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is cited as the first example of what genre of literature, which is extremely popular thanks to authors like Carolyn Keene and A. Christie?

On January 19, 1825, Thomas Kensett and his father-in-law Ezra Daggett obtained a patent, which revolutionised the food storage industry. It had been first suggested by Nicholas Appert to Emperor Napoleon in 1795 to keep food fresh for his huge army. What did they patent?

On this day in 1915, Georges Claude patented the use of a discharge tube that held a gas for use in advertising. It soon became one of the most successful entities in advertising. What gas did he use in a tube that one can see in any busy city street at night?

On this day in 1935, Coopers Inc. sold the world's first men's briefs in Chicago. Inspired by a postcard with a picture of a

Frenchman on a beach, they gave it a particular name because originally horse riders had a similar strap. By what name were these known?

Born on January 19, 1946, Dolly Parton is an American artist who has been nominated multiple times for Grammy, Oscar, Tony and Emmy awards. In 1961, she opened a theme park in Tennessee, which attracts more than three million visitors. What is the park's name, which is a punny reference to her filmy career?

On this day in 1955, this board game debuted in the United States. Invented by Alfred Butts as a follow up to the word game Lexico, he worked out the points systems by doing a frequency

analysis of letters in the *New York Times*. What game is this that has families arguing about existence of words?

Born this day in 1966, this Swedish tennis player is one of only two players in the world to be ranked world No.1 in both singles and doubles (other than John McEnroe). Who is this player whose iconic serve-and-volley was emulated by Roger Federer who he coached for a year?

Born this day in 1984, Karun Chandhok is only the second ever athlete in a global sport. He took part in II events and after retiring is now a well-loved commentator for the same sport. If the other person is Narain Karthikeyan, which sport that requires almost super-human abilities does Karun bring to us?

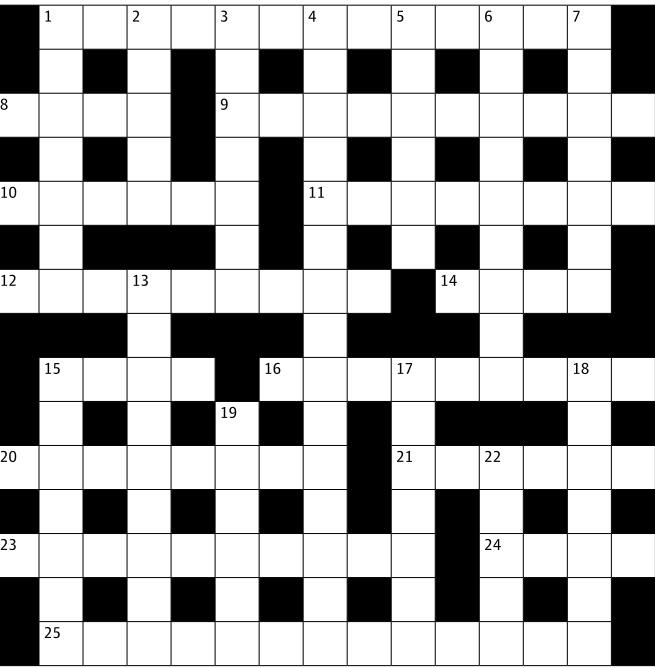
On this day in 1985, this song by Bruce Springsteen reached its highest spot on the Billboard charts. Although the lyrics are about the cruel mistreatment of Vietnam veterans and is a protest song, its pop feel and energetic chorus makes it a favourite at political rallies. What song is this which almost always used ironically?

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. Walt
2. Detective Fiction
3. Tin Cans
4. Neon
5. Jockey
6. Bollywood
7. Scrabble
8. Stefan Edberg
9. Formula 1
10. Born in the USA

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3341



Across
1 Verse collection: Dante's Inferno at beginning, trying to grapple with evil and ending in Paradiso? (6,7)
8 Slug, source of illumination? (4)
9 Dictator books senior businesspeople for help with what to say (5,5)
10 Oats and nuts, never ending: I'll see... um, on reflection... (6)
11 A laundry refitted in approx. 709 hours (5,3)
12 ...diner order — #coffee? (4,5)
14 Purportedly 'everlasting' ringlets, manmade primarily! (4)
15 On the spur of the moment, a simple card game (4)
16 Abstract, see? Yes (9)
20 Baddies at home, inhabiting country houses (8)
21 Donkey attacked by bird, noisily, in side (6)
23 Regressively spoils lad getting AI initially providing support for musician (5,5)
24 Somewhat nouveau, where Iris is found (4)
25 The old ready for 3d info stored digitally? (10,3)

Down
1 Blood count? (7)
2 Victor, denied entrance, opens wide and inhales a cloud of nicotine (5)

3 More likely to inquire about one that's less quiet? (7)
4 You get at least 66 points playing a quiz here (6-4,5)
5 Yorkshireman's ultimately mean (6)
6 Reconsidered when decapitated, would roses suggest this description? (9)
7 Flipping Everyman's installing malfunctioning radar as onboard support (7)
13 Cape with cruise ship following star (9)
15 Way up in the Alps? (3,4)
17 Some sketch a plinth displaying cinematic icon (7)
18 Extremely frilly elastic pants (7)
19 Time to put into circulation paper for those suffering (6)
22 Lead 16 (5)

SOLUTION NO. 3340

S	A	M	O	S	N	E	S	T	
W	I	S	H	I	O	U	O	W	E
I	O	F	D	D	A	M	A		
P	I	C	K	L	E	D			
E	I	O	E						
S	T	A	L	W	A	R	T	S	
L	E								
T	I	M	E	R					
A	E	L	I	T	O				
H	I	D	E	O	U	S			
I	I	A	H	B	C	L	E		
T	H	A	T	S	O	L	A	S	T
I	I	I	F	C	I				
A	S	I	F	K	I	C	K		

A ham-handed approach

Shivani Sharma
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As we strive for inclusivity and equality in education, it's surprising to note that a significant section of students continues to face a peculiar challenge – biased seating arrangements. Classroom designs often reflect the needs of the majority, which, in most cases, means catering to right-handed students. In India, in schools and colleges, it's common for students to share desks, promoting a sense of community and collaboration. However, left-handed and right-handed students sharing the same desk often results in clashing of elbows. Still, that is quite a manageable task, but a recent survey revealed that over 90% of schools and colleges now use right-handed desk chairs, with many institutions not even offering left-handed alternatives.

It inadvertently marginalises left-handed students. As a minority group, these students often find themselves navigating a world designed for right-handed individuals. Left-handed students who are forced to use right-handed desk chairs often find themselves at a disadvantage. This issue is particularly pronounced during exams when students are required to sit for extended periods. Left-handed students who use right-handed desk chairs face a distinct set of difficulties. The chair designed for right-handed individuals can force them to sit at an awkward angle, leading to back and neck strain and causing them to twist their arm and wrist, affecting handwriting quality and comfort.

The struggle to adapt to this biased seating arrangement can have a cumulative effect on left-handed students. The constant discomfort and frustration lead to decreased focus and engagement in class, reduced academic performance due to physical discomfort, and increased stress and anxiety during exams.

Students with physical disabilities face an even more daunting challenge. Inaccessible seating arrangements can exacerbate existing mobility issues, making it difficult for these students to participate fully in academic activities. The inability to sit comfortably for extended periods can lead to increased pain and discomfort, reduced ability to focus and concentrate, decreased participation in class discussions and activities.

It's essential that educational institutions acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by these students. By implementing inclusive seating arrangement, schools and colleges can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed. Some potential solutions include providing left-handed desk chairs with adjustable armrest and ergonomic design or offering modular furniture that can be easily reconfigured to accommodate different writing styles. Ergonomic seating options should be offered to reduce discomfort and fatigue.

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“How are you,” I asked.
“As you see.”
A grimace disappeared on Praful uncle's wrinkled face, which also had a tinge of complaint. “I am so happy to see you. After so many years,” he continued. “I had visited my birthplace in India twice in the past three years, but I fell sick every time after returning.”

“I didn't know. I would have met you. I was also not in India for a few years, so I couldn't get the news,” I said.

He appeared to be understanding. “The health carer told me to prepare to ‘go’ on both occasions. She said I had no one to look after, no insurance to foot bills, and no strength to bear the pain. I told her I didn't desire to go so soon. I like to live, and I have matters to finish. On both occasions, they kept me in the hospital for a few nights and the consultant, with a smile, sent me back home,” he said with a chuckle.

I joined him spontaneously, appreciating his spirit to live.

His mobile alarm went off. He looked at it: “4 p.m. – time for my afternoon tea. Would you care for some tea or coffee,” he asked. “Let me make it. What kind of tea you drink? Red or with milk and sugar?” I offered. “Don't bother. The attendant from the social service will come now and make it. Let us talk. You have come after so many years.” I kept chatting. He asked about my family and work. I wanted to know what unfinished business he still had. He replied with a smirk, “Nothing. I tell them to keep them guessing and not pressure me to go.” I controlled my laughter.

He complained about the dust, traffic, and crowds in India and the massive change happening in the U.K. We talked about spirituality and enlightenment and the possibilities of explaining our civilisational way of living to the people in the West. He was upset that the local community service would soon auction two of his paintings. He complained, “They shouldn't auction living artists' works.”

Praful uncle was sitting on a sofa. A walker on the side and a multipurpose table were conveniently placed before him so he could reach out for water, medicine, and any other needs. I had a look around. One of his beds was very similar to a hospital bed, raised and fitted with vital reading machines, and the other had a regular comfort mattress with a footrest so that he could reach his bed comfortably. I checked his toilet – the commode, the shower, the washbasin all have been modified to cater to his needs.

“So they have provided you with all these facilities,” I asked.

State support

“Yes. The social services and the NHS try to ensure the passing of a lonely senior citizen as painlessly as possible. But I don't want to go.” He laughed after a pause.

The nurse arrived late. She apologised while still panting out of

Living out the silver years

The experience differs from country to country, depending on the services available



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

brisk walking. “Today was a bad day. I was swamped and missed the bus,” she told him. She then performed routine supervision and checked his medications.

“Aa ha, you forgot to take your medication after lunch,” she said.

“How will I know? You should have ensured I took the medicine before you left,” ge blamed her.

“I gave you a glass of water and told you to take it. You said you would take them in a bit. I trusted you,” the nurse explained. I looked at the table: four different-coloured capsules in a small medicine container.

“I am waiting for my afternoon tea and have a visitor. Can you give us some tea, please,” he expressed his impatience. “I am making it in a minute,” the nurse replied.

I felt slightly uneasy during the conversation between them. As I rose to use the washroom, she whispered, “He is a difficult old man.” I didn't know how to respond. She said goodbye after she finished her work. It reminded me of Praful uncle's family members saying the same thing about his angularity when he was not very old. He came to the U.K. after his college in India in the 1960s. He studied town

planning but followed his passion to be an artist and became a painter. He drew abstract paintings with Eastern mysticism. He settled in London after working in a few other cities. He did not marry. His siblings and other family members stayed divided in different cities of the U.K. and India. He loved his village in India and ensured that he visited it regularly, almost annually. I had met him about 20 years ago when I was posted in the Indian High Commission in London. He is 93.

After over two hours, I wanted to take his leave. Despite my discouraging him to walk, he came to the door to see me off. He hugged and kissed me tightly and said, “I was thrilled to see you. I want to live.” I could see his eyes welling up.

I bade him goodbye before I melted. I was relieved to see that he would spend the remainder of his life in safe care. However, it also brought into mind the debate over voluntary and assisted euthanasia in societies that are ageing and where the state does not have the resources to care for its older citizens.

(The writer is the Ambassador of India to Bulgaria.)

The wedding planners

The go-to people in families, who get the ceremonies going without a hitch

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Whether a wedding or a minor function, a certain amount of planning is necessary. Unless we decide beforehand what things are to be bought and how much, we may land ourselves in trouble at the eleventh hour. These days, we have professional event managers or contractors who take care of the A to Z of a wedding, big or small. Yet, for many, appointing an agency at a high cost is a luxury which they could hardly afford.

Family affair

In the olden days, wedding catering and event management were unheard-of. Organising a wedding was a family affair then, when one or more relatives would pitch in to

lend a helping hand to the bride's parents. However, there have been instances when the bride's side found that it had not bought a particular item necessary for the rituals only when the priest asked for it at the top of his voice at the appointed hour. Such a lapse arises since the persons concerned hardly realise that the organisation of a function begins much earlier than its actual celebration. Some practical experience is called for to conduct any social function efficiently and economically.

In our family circle, it is my middle-aged cousin S who is much sought after whenever a function has to be put through. A retired junior Army officer, he is now an absentee landlord living in the city with a few acres of land in his native village. S leads a contented life. He willingly obliges any near



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

relation who wants his assistance in the performance of a wedding.

S is noted for his detailed planning and thoughtful execution of the various stages of a wedding. He can take care of all items from buying sandals for the bridegroom to organising the reception and the rituals. His knowledge of intricate details is something astounding. He can, with effortless ease, select dhoti and even the sari suitable for each occasion. He can say which cook will do his job splendidly and who will shatter your budget to

pieces by wasting things. He will go down to the nitty-gritty, work out the costs and guide the host.

Behind the scenes

When everyone is happily seated in the wedding hall, S can be seen only in the inner recesses supervising the issue of provisions and other articles from the storeroom and checking whether any intruder is around. Endowed with a stentorian voice, he has a good command over the cooks and servants. Recognising that coffee symbolises the standard of a wedding, he would ensure that quality brew is supplied to all, especially the bridegroom's party.

A relative of mine, a man of modest means, celebrated the marriage of his daughter a few years ago. Since everyone in his family thoughtlessly sent out invitations to his or her own circle of friends, a large gathering turned up for the reception which had a music concert. There was more than one full hour to go before dinner could be served. The pandal was chock-a-block with guests,

much to the embarrassment of the host who did not anticipate such a large attendance for dinner. With a woebegone face, he turned to S. After a few minutes, the concert came to a close, the artiste reporting sick. Most of the guests chose to leave, after taking light snacks and coffee or cool drinks which were liberally served, since they felt they could not wait too long for dinner. A manageable number of guests stayed on and the dinner went on very well.” Give a few bucks more to my friend the Vidwan,” S smilingly recommended to the much-relieved host, “since he has obliged me without any hesitation.”

In another instance, S who was in a day-and-night vigil at a wedding house cleverly managed to hand over to the police two strangers who were lurking in a tenebrous corner in the backyard. The police later thanked S for apprehending the men who were known depredators.

S politely declines any gift, cash or kind, offered to him by the host at the conclusion of a wedding or a function. For him, it is a labour of love.



FEEDBACK

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



Cover story

I feel pride in knowing that Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light* is the first Indian film to win the Grand Prix award at Cannes. ('Payal Kapadia's seat at the big table'; Jan. 12) It is a movie loaded with real-life scenarios that easily connect. It sends a strong message of humanity and compassion towards our fellow compatriots in this fast-paced life.

Sajna Hameed



Important read

The author has risen admirably to the challenge of covering everything that merits inclusion in a work of this kind. ('I felt like a messenger'; Jan. 12) All those interested in the hoary history of the Tamils should try to get their hands on the book.

C.V. Aravind



Nirmala Lakshman's interview was a great read but rather short. Questions like the age of Tamil civilisation or issues pertaining to untouchability need detailed answers with additional data. The competition between the Vellala and Brahmin communities over control of temples was another interesting facet.

Kaa.Su. Duraiarasu



Wizardry over words

For a person of his stature, Shashi Tharoor is always down to earth, unassuming and speaks from the heart. ('Indians and their love for English'; Jan. 12) Everything from name and fame to memes and trolling sit lightly on his shoulders and he goes about his writings and political life with such

grace and elan, it evokes awe and respect. Tharoor is a rare gem of a person.

Kosaraju Chandramouli



Support our movies

The whole process of making a film visible to the Academy Awards jury eliminates many small wonderful movies. ('Behind Oscar's best picture'; Jan. 12) But are they getting the attention of domestic audiences? I think the Indian government should do its bit to promote quality cinema made in the country.

Rohith Varon S.S.



Shameful trend

The dangerous cult of innestingators initially started with the personal lives of film celebrities, and has now spread to cricket players and their families, mannerisms, lifestyles, all blown out of proportion. ('Absolute cricket shenanigans'; Jan. 12) If unchecked, this trend will have wider repercussions and may lead to exploitation of the people concerned.

Sitaram Popuri



During my school days, we believed that football was by strength, hockey by style (ability to dribble) and cricket by chance, as it started only after the flip of a coin. From that to an innestingigator, cricket has already left behind football and hockey. Not because of obvious improvement on the field, but majority because of its stupendous rise off the field. Huge investments, on and off the field, have turned it into an industry *a la* football in Europe. The purists of the game have been pushed aside by the innestingigators, indeed.

Deepak Taak



MORE ON THE WEB
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From chalkboards to chatbots

How AI is transforming the educational landscape
Snigdha Sethi

Bollywood and food

The screen has a knack for turning ordinary dishes into cultural icons
Chanchala Borah

The clout of group admins

Their growing influence makes them believe they play an essential role in their local communities
Nandini Dutta

An unexpected hospitality

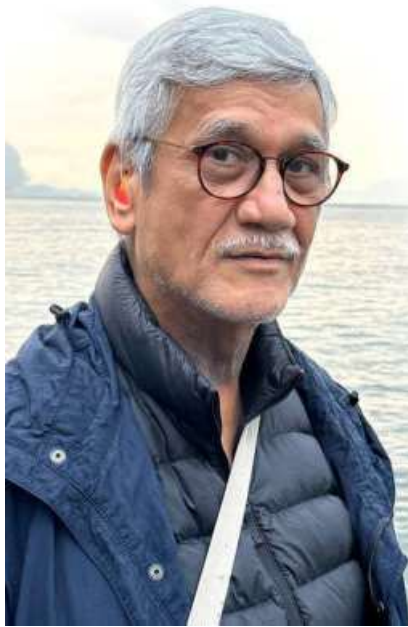
How to be a guest at a police station and be looked after
Buddhadev Nandi

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.

Nishat Fatima

Interviewing artists is like being given a puzzle and trying to figure out which piece, where, created what part of the art. In the case of Sunil Gupta, the internationally renowned photographer makes it easy for us. For almost five decades, he has culled his work from his life, and the membrane between the outside and inside has been thin.

Born in 1953 in New Delhi, Sunil's family moved to Montreal in 1969 when he was 15. From his arrival in Canada, where he embraced his homosexual identity, he became a part of the gay liberation movement, and enlarged his idea of family (*Friends & Lovers: Coming Out in Montréal* in the 1970s); his move to New York following his boyfriend in 1976, and seeing gay men out, proud, and promenading (*Christopher Street*); to his move to London, and subsequent break-up where he used the camera to investigate relationships, making portraits of gay couples (*Lovers: Ten Years On*). He recorded coming to India in the '80s and seeing them married and leading secret lives (*Exiles*), and being diagnosed in the mid-90s as HIV positive and coming to terms with his body and love again (*Love, Undetected*). Sunil has taken to heart the feminist slogan of personal is political.



BEHIND SUNIL GUPTA'S QUEER LENS

The photographer's retrospective at the Chennai Photo Biennale showcases how he brought the gay image into artwork and discourse

As I get on a video call with him and Charan Singh, or husband *ji* as he is affectionately labelled on Instagram – also an artist, and curator of this first Indian retrospective at the Chennai Photo Biennale – I reflect on the sense of familiarity I feel about Sunil. It's an artificial construct that is a combination of having lived in Delhi at around the same time (2005-2015), of having Sunil's name pop up at work in my time as a journalist, and pieced together from

the sense of joy that followed the original repeal of Article 377 in 2009, in which many of my friends were involved, as was Sunil, and maybe at the way *Exiles* has permeated our collective consciousness.

'Indians didn't seem to exist'
I've never met him of course, neither do we live in Delhi any longer. Sunil and Singh have lived in London since 2012, and I'm in Hyderabad and we are talking about how Sunil's work will be shown in Chennai, befittingly,



in one of the city's central monuments, Egmore Museum.

Titled *Love and Light: A Site of Infinite Possibilities*, it presents five decades of the queer rights movement and the queer community at large in Canada, the U.K., and India, says Varun Gupta, director, Chennai Photo Biennale. But the curation by Singh is also a sort of love letter.

Sunil and Singh met in 2009 when Sunil was in India. Singh was working with people with HIV/AIDS. He says he was bemused by Sunil taking photos of his friends and then putting it on a wall and calling it art. "I think that was also the response to his earlier photography. People did not take him seriously, but now they can see the persistence in his approach and fidelity towards that one issue – bringing the [Indian] gay image into artwork, into discourse, dialogue, and museums."

Sunil has spent his career trying to ensure representation, first of gay men in art history, and then of the gay men of Indian origin in the space. He talks about how it was partly driven by the feeling that as an

Indian man, he didn't feel like his body was particularly desirable because there were no photographs of the Indian male body. Western porn was all white or black men with the occasional Chinese thrown in. "But Indians? No, I'd never seen them. They didn't seem to exist."

In the 80s, artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe were moulding public discourse on what it meant to be a gay photographer, with images about bodies and penises. "And I used to say to people, honestly, that part of my biology is not a problem. The problem is in everything else, how we have relationships, how we cannot have them, how we're not allowed to have them," says Sunil.

Ensuring a spotlight on AIDS

Recently Sunil's work has lent force to the movement towards awareness of HIV/AIDS. While it might seem like we live in a post-HIV world, it's hardly the case. "Culturally, it's having a revival," he says. "There's been a strong cultural force, which started in New York in the 2000s, saying, hello, AIDS is still here." Even while governments are

Photographs from the retrospective; (bottom left) Sunil Gupta.

cutting funding for awareness and programmes, the revival of the '80s as a decade in popular culture is ensuring a spotlight on AIDS, one of the decade's defining features. Sunil's show and book, *Ecstatic Antibodies*, from 1990 is now being reinvestigated. "Young people want to know more about it. It's still a current issue," he states.

Sunil has long used his persona to draw in people to queer art, artists, and the issues of the queer community. Roshni Vadehra, director of Vadehra Art Gallery, Sunil's long-standing gallery in India, remembers meeting the photographer early on in her career in 2008 when Sunil co-curated an exhibition for them called *Click! Contemporary Photography in India*. "During that project, I became familiar with his practice and found it to be a unique and important voice in contemporary art given that it drew attention to issues that hadn't been addressed, socially and politically. Even though there was not an active market for his work, there was great engagement and it brought a varied audience to the gallery as Sunil was a popular figure within the art world and the gay community at large." Perhaps we'll be seeing more of this at the upcoming Indian retrospective.

The Chennai Photo Biennale is organised in association with The Hindu.

The author is a photographer and writer.

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