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Seema Chowdhry

Four months ago, when Amit Batra, 46, head of operations at a renewable energy company, left his family behind in Gurugram to take up a job in Hyderabad, he knew renting an apartment wasn't worth the hassle. Shibani Marathe, a 28-year-old data analyst at Deloitte, was moving from London to Hyderabad and sought a vibrant community in a new city. Vineet Arora, 39, a Navy veteran and technical manager at Salesforce, lived in a hotel for three months when he moved to Hyderabad and struggled to get homely meals.

All three urban migrants found the answer to their housing needs in co-living spaces — modern, hassle-free homes that are becoming a surprising hit with professionals of all ages. I should know because I am one of them.

Six months ago, when I moved from Delhi to Hyderabad, I looked for apartments close to my workplace but skyrocketing rents and my frequent travels to Delhi often made renting seem like a folly. That's when I heard about a co-living space through my college-going daughter's friend. Her father, Ashish Lal, 48, associate director of process excellence at Novartis, managed his hybrid work situation by renting a co-living space and referred me to Buzz Quarter. For my single room and attached bath, I paid a negligible security deposit, half of what I would have shelled out as rent elsewhere, and got facilities such as Wi-Fi and housekeeping in the deal —urbane living without the attendant headaches.

Hostel or not

Co-living spaces are different from hostels or shared apartments. Often considered a new-age facility for Gen Z or young millennials, these spaces are now finding takers across a more diverse crowd. From 20-somethings navigating their first jobs to seasoned professionals embracing career pivots, these

CO-LIVING: A HIT WITH GEN X-Y-Z

Amid rising rentals and busy lifestyles, more and more Indian professionals across age groups and backgrounds are opting for the ease of co-living facilities, a modern-day solution to the loneliness epidemic

modern habitats redefine urban living for professional migrants.

"I believe co-living spaces epitomise modern, urban, single living. Busy professionals want a functional lifestyle with access to activities and common areas to meet and mingle, to ward off loneliness and the loss of home and family. Co-living somewhat fills that vacuum," explains Sandeep Agarwal, 51, head of design, GMR Group, who has lived in Buzz Quarter, a co-living space in Hyderabad, for over three years. Agarwal could have stayed in a company-provided shared flat when he moved from Bengaluru to Hyderabad. But, "it was just too lonely", he says.

According to a 2021 Statista report, 43% of adults in India often or always feel lonely. In 2023, the WHO declared loneliness a 'global public health concern'. Co-living spaces, rooted in the idea of community via shared spaces and activities, are thus increasingly becoming sought after.

Epicentre Hyderabad

Swarandeep Singh, 45, an NOC delivery lead for Bank of America in Hyderabad, had never heard of co-living spaces when he moved from Bengaluru in 2023. The option



opened when a friend's son, a student intern at Google the previous year, told Singh and his wife about Boston Co-Living. "We looked up a few places online, saw the videos, and made calls. I have been living here at Buzz for over a year," he says.

"Co-living offers a more holistic lifestyle than a hostel, serviced apartment or paying guest accommodation. It is like living in an apartment community without the responsibility of managing a home," explains Srini Moramchettu, founder

of Slep Co-living in Bengaluru, where he runs four co-living centres.

Nehru Babu, CEO and co-founder of Atnest, runs around 15 co-living facilities (2,000 beds) across Hyderabad, and believes affordability and no-responsibility make co-living attractive. "I am 45 now but as a young man I lived in shared apartments and it was tough. Weekends were full of household chores and we were forever chasing the *press-wala*, grocery delivery guy, maids, and so on. Co-living frees you from these responsibilities."



Modern family Moulshree Mittal (in white), Sandeep Agarwal (in green), Amit Batra (in yellow) and Swarandeep Singh (in blue) with other Buzz buddies on a trip to the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger reserve; and (below) residents at a Buzz Quarter in Hyderabad. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & NAGARA GOPAL)

now, with many companies in hybrid or back-to-office mode, Hyderabad has seen a steady influx of tech professionals from other parts of the country. The demand is on an upswing and we are gearing up to open more co-living spaces."

According to a 2024 report by Indeed, job postings in IT have increased in Hyderabad by 41.5% and 24.3% in Bengaluru. This means more urban migrants are on the move to these cities resulting in an increase in housing demand. Babu adds that Hyderabad is seeing an influx and demand rise because of many higher education facilities, too.

Bending biases

One of the common issues migrants face when they move to a new city sans family is finding the right house to suit their needs. Sometimes, it is the distance from the workplace; other times, the high rent or not belonging to the right community become deterrents.

In a country where it can still be challenging to rent homes as a single woman, co-living spaces offer a feasible alternative, especially for female tenants. "I did not want landlords to tell me who I could bring over, what I could eat, or ask which community I belonged to. I did not want to provide a male guarantor in the rent agreement. Why should I? Thank god my friend introduced me to a co-living space. I share a room, that helps with the rent, and can come and go as I please," says Masooma, a software architect.

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THE CHANGING NATURE OF GRIEF

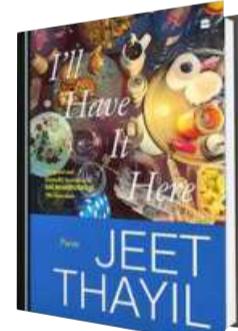
Despite recurring themes, Jeet Thayil's new poems present a shift in their articulation of loss, to encompass larger political ideas



Kinshuk Gupta

Jeet Thayil's necro-poems in *These Errors are Correct* (2008) that lament the premature passing of his wife Shakti Bhatt, and which later went on to win the Sahitya Akademi Award, introduced us to a poet nursing his intimate wounds. That was supposed to be his last book.

But a few years later, a hardbound edition of his new and selected poems with a cover in dulcet brown and striking red and yellow became a sensation. In its preface, however, Thayil proclaimed with his characteristic flamboyance that [These



I'll Have It Here
Jeet Thayil
Fourth Estate
₹599

Errors...]" is the last full-length collection of poems I intend to publish".

Thus, the publication of *I'll Have It Here*, his new poetry collection, comes

as a delectable surprise. Considerably so, as, his ardent followers would agree, the despondent veil of not being able to 'equal or improve on your last book' has lifted – and, oh boy, with such a dazzling comeback.

Grief occupies centrestage again, which, if we were to think of Philip Larkin's *The Trees*, makes sense. This greenness of grief – its ever-returning nature – remains one of the most haunting expressions. However, Thayil's articulation has become more outwardly, immediate, and politically-themed.

Sample these:
*The climate is in crisis, to breathe is to ache in India.
Too cold or too hot, we freeze and bake in India.
They police our thoughts, our posts, our clothes, our food.
The news, and the government, is free in India.*

(February 2020)

Or:
Children crawl backward like crabs to the cradle, no light, no progress, only a cleansing of the unclean. ('Wapsi')

Symbols of imagination

The sudden unmooring effect on a poet, who has a clutch of words and some rules of meter and rhyme to make sense of a nation's decline into intellectual depravity, censorship, xenophobia, and ecological gas chamber, remains the central theme of the book. [We sick bitches lick/ our wounds and try to recuperate/ cow logic, cowed rhetoric, cowardly assassinations replicate – Thayil pointedly locates the political symbol that has gripped popular imagination. The wordplay of 'cow', becoming 'cowed', and finally turning 'cowardly' highlight the country's newfound obsession as well as the violence such an innocuous symbol is capable of unleashing.

In 'The Ghost of Mr. Greatsoul', a speculative poem where Mahatma Gandhi reappears as a *talkative, still slender house gecko*, Thayil bitterly remarks: *The carving knife you used/ like some tiny god/ still drips blood/ on the old floorboard...* The carving knife is the knife of Partition, causing the family to sit down for dinner in India and get up in Pakistan.

While the politics in the above verse might feel less nuanced, that's exactly the point of Thayil's poems. Quite a few of them, in his usual tongue-in-cheek style, turn debates of appropriation and political correctness on their heads: *Why cancel my own pleasure/ and half my bookshelf for good measure/ when all I'm doing in truth/ is shooting myself in the foot?*

The personal elegiac poems, most of them compiled in the third section, that try to grasp the changing nature of grief with respect to time, move the reader the most. These don't have the puerile urgency of a 'small child', as Joan Didion describes in her 2005 memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, but what the American poet Jane Mayhall calls *this complex, heartbreak survival*.

It is harrowing to see a clever poet being outsmarted by grief's perpetual presence. How it wrecks him (*Time moves like a broken mind*) and, in doing so, wrenches out a new human (*opened my eyes/ to the man I am, still alive,/ all matter, never mind*) remain the most illuminating parts.

The reviewer is the author of the Hindi short story collection Yeh Dil Hai Ki Chor Darwaja (2023).

3 book review platforms to track

Engage with the book community, and it won't be long before you stumble upon readers expressing their preference for an up-and-coming app named The StoryGraph, the cataloging platform called Library Thing or even Bookly, which offers readers ambient sounds of a flowing river or fireplace.

While it looks like Amazon's Goodreads, despite last year's review bombing controversies, is here to stay, we might be at the threshold of a slow but steady market shift.

Scan the QR code to read more.

– Vidhya Anand



BROWSER

Girls Who Stray

Anisha Lalvani

₹699

This coming-of-age thriller set in Noida took the author eight years to complete. Spurred on by heartbreak, criticism and some tough love, Lalvani decided to not let go of the writer in her, and penned this first novel, which is based on a case that took place in Delhi nearly 20 years ago.

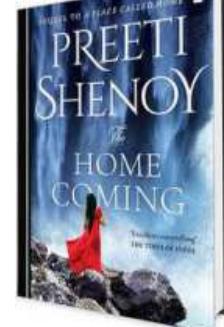


The Homecoming

Preeti Shenoy

₹399

One of India's bestselling contemporary authors, Shenoy is known for her youthful stories that shine a light on modern relationships and society. In this sequel to her 2022 novel *A Place Called Home*, she revisits themes of identity and living up to society's expectations.



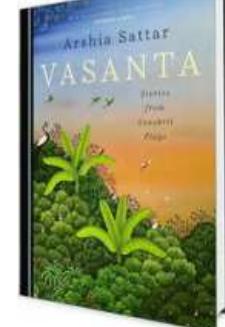
Vasanta: Stories From Sanskrit Plays

Arshia Sattar

Juggernaut

₹599

In her ongoing mission to make Indian mythology and folklore more accessible and mainstream, the author-translator delivers this standout collection of plays by Kalidasa, Vishakhadatta and others, offering a vivid glimpse of life in classical ancient India.



The Girl in the Window

Diana Wilkinson

Boldwood Books

₹265 (ebook)

How does one go from being an international tennis player to bestselling thriller writer? The author whose novels mostly deal with "obsession and relationships" says her inspiration comes from the women she coached tennis to over the years and the confidences they shared over coffee.



Love all A participant at Namma Pride 2024 solidarity march in Bengaluru last month; and (bottom) Hoshang Merchant. (AFP, GETTY IMAGES)

Virodi Andolan around 1989.

There's Pawan Dhall, a queer activist from the early 90s, who had co-organised a Friendship Walk march on July 2, 1999, now dubbed South Asia's first Pride Walk. Sudarshan Chakravorty of Sapphire Creations Dance Company staged *The Alien Flower*, India's first queer-themed dance production in 1996. He continues to organise international dance fests. And there is young performance artist Debasish Paul and designers Nil and Kallol Dutta, both of whom have high visibility. The bibliography in the last pages can be of use.

Lalon by chance

The problem is that famous writers and artists are, in general, treated with a reverential awe, and their work automatically becomes immune to criticism. Merchant "is the author of 25 books of poetry. He was awarded a Lifetime Achievement award at Queer Lit Fest in 2023".

The reader should judge Merchant's verse, in his new collection *Lalon's Book*, for herself. Here is an entire poem titled 'Epilogue': *I traced a whole alphabet/ Finger on thigh/ I created a continent/ That slipped without a sigh*. No invocation of Kali, Ginsberg or Lalon Fakir, Bengal's celebrated philosopher and mystic poet, can redeem this.

And now a couplet that is no better than the others: *No man nor maid be dry/ Lalon has grown up/ Lalon cries...*

There are certain lucid interludes – *I divided my heart/ Into man and woman/ To keep my sanity/ To heal my heart* – but these are few and far between.

The cover of *Lalon's Book* is a painting, presumably of Merchant's profile, his locks worn in a top knot. Poor Lalon in reality was a scrawny old man. His only surviving portrait was sketched by Jyotirindranath Tagore, Rabindranath's elder brother. Merchant appears again on the cover of *Rainbow Warriors* in a black-and-white photograph. This does not become one who has named a book of poems after a bard-philosopher about whom few biographical details are available. The portrait is there only by pure chance.

The reviewer is interested in Kolkata's vanishing heritage and culture.

July's perimenopause fiction

In *All Fours*, filmmaker and author Miranda July presents a 45-year-old writer who, after receiving an unexpected \$20,000 from a licensing deal, decides to treat herself to a trip to New York City. Instead of continuing to New York, however, she decides to stay at a motel just outside her hometown Los Angeles, and transforms her room into a personal sanctuary with the bonus money. As the days pass, she finds herself rediscovering a zest for life and a renewed sense of self while maintaining the facade of her original plan to her family.

What is worse, Merchant never stops bickering about novelist and poet Vikram Seth and playwright Dattani, because, he feels, they never came out early enough, or never at all. Seth's early masterpiece, *The Golden Gate* (1986), made his preferences clear enough. There was a certain ambiguity, but it is foolish to expect everyone to wear one's sexuality on one's

middle-aged, long-partnered women, with whom it struck a chord, not for advocating escape but for redefining intimacy. Such was the book's influence, *The New York Times* reported, that these women began having conversations about sexual freedom on Instagram DMs and even in book clubs.

Scan the QR code to read the full review online.

– Pranavi Sharma



INTERVIEW

A LOYALTY TEST

With years of research and ground reporting, Rahul Bhatia unravels the minority experience in contemporary India

Ziya Us Salam

zia.salam@thehindu.co.in

Writer-journalist Rahul Bhatia's *The Identity Project: The Unmaking of a Democracy* is an investigative memoir, in which he attempts to find the roots of Hindutva. It is an honest yet disturbing account of contemporary India, as he takes readers through the protests around the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the 2020 Delhi riots, and the aftermath. Excerpts from an interview.

Question: This appears to be the age of triumphal majoritarianism. What were the early signs that Indian society was changing?

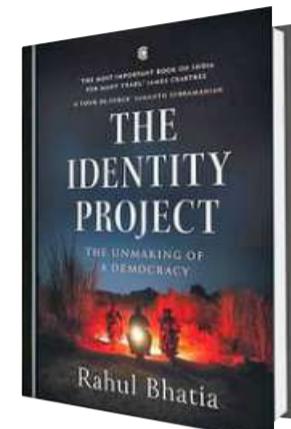
Answer: It was the instances of people being beaten into standing up for the national anthem in cinemas about 20 years ago. The weaponisation of the anthem and its introduction in unexpected contexts largely went unquestioned. The dissent to the coercion in it was somehow seen as traitorous. People were genuinely offended by theatregoers who did not stand when it played. I don't think they considered that the dissent was not against the anthem, but against its very political imposition. I could see the manipulation of public emotion clearly. The fealty to authority, the unwillingness to question, and the submission to force and public pressure have existed for a long time, but in crucial moments like this one you see these societal qualities surface all at once, and when matters cool, society is transformed in some way. In this case, it was a loyalty test that became a part of everyday life. Nationhood is now wound up in an everyday activity.

Q: Hindus comprise about 80% of the population. Yet the BJP and the RSS have instilled a feeling of insecurity in a large section of the community. Can you expand on the tools used for it?

A: It's a question I grappled with while reporting the book. What made people so eager to believe conspiracies, especially when conspiracies had a political aspect? After hundreds of interviews and archival work, I was able to construct a rough framework about the methods and approaches. One method was to blur the line between what is real and what is not by flooding the public sphere with misinformation; this has the effect of tiring people out and making them closed to the truth. I recognised a pattern of communication to the larger public that did not state things clearly. It was suggestive, implying something about a person or a group of people, attributing some moral failing or sinister design to them. By not naming that group, the receiver of the communication was left to take that last step of making the connection. That gives the suggestion of power because making a connection is a proactive act; it comes from you. And if it comes from you, you tend to believe it.

Q: What lessons does Partha Banerjee's RSS experience hold for a foot soldier?

A: Partha is one of the most important people in the book. He grew up within the RSS, and then became deeply sceptical of its methods. He found it incredibly hard to break away, and now that he has, he sees them with immense clarity. When I met him, he was travelling

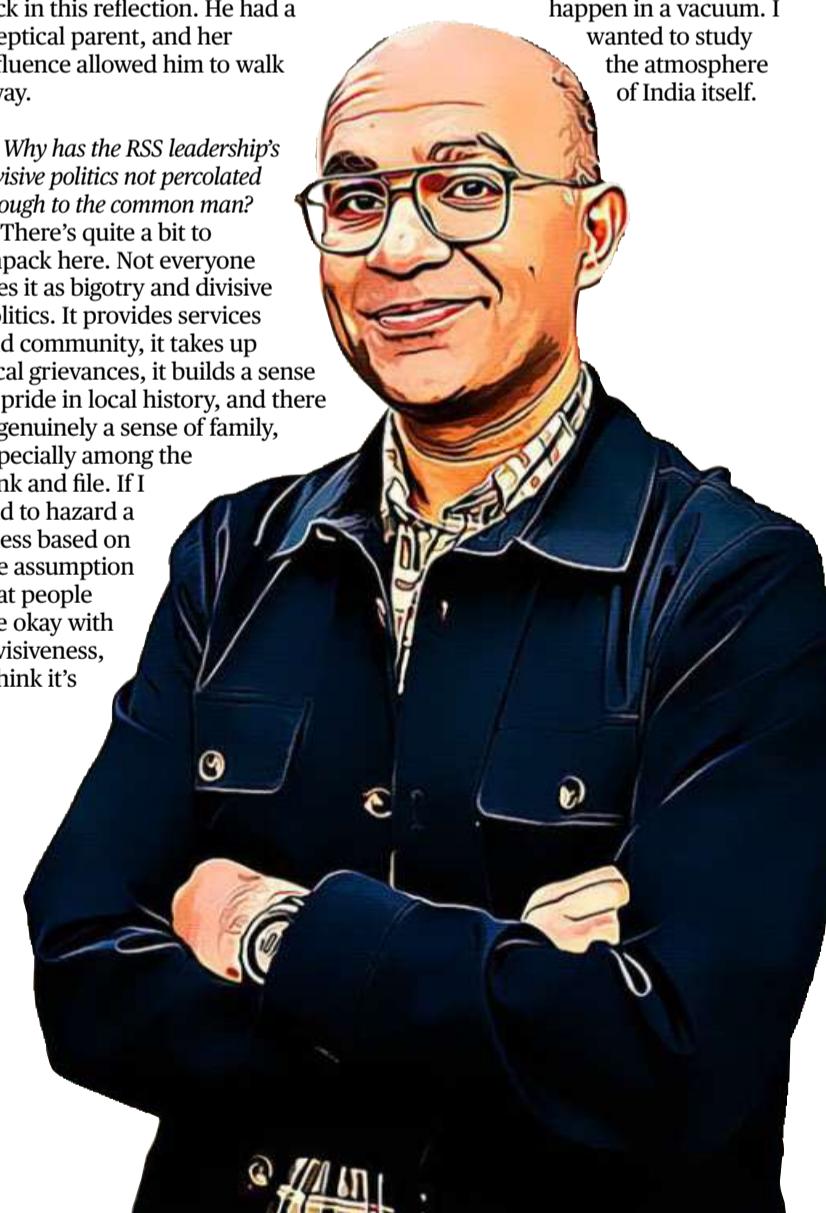


**The Identity Project:
The Unmaking of a Democracy**
Rahul Bhatia
Context/Westland Books
₹899

the country to share what he knew about the organisation, how it recruits people, how it wins trust within communities and families. In our interviews he wanted me to know how betrayed he felt by the abandonment of his father, an RSS loyalist. Partha came away convinced that it abandoned people once they had fulfilled their purpose. But there's an element of luck in this reflection. He had a sceptical parent, and her influence allowed him to walk away.

Q: Why has the RSS leadership's divisive politics not percolated enough to the common man?

A: There's quite a bit to unpack here. Not everyone sees it as bigotry and divisive politics. It provides services and community, it takes up local grievances, it builds a sense of pride in local history, and there is genuinely a sense of family, especially among the rank and file. If I had to hazard a guess based on the assumption that people are okay with divisiveness, I think it's



Seeking justice A protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, at Shaheen Bagh, in New Delhi; and (below) Rahul Bhatia. (SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

because they also see the more humanitarian side of the organisation. That's one part of it. The other is that people see bigotry as just one of those things, a quirk, rather than something that needs correction. I don't know if the percolation of a negative opinion is the issue here. It's more like, why are people okay with this behaviour at all?

Q: You talk of CAA protests and the violence in northeast Delhi. Wasn't the police violence to control the mob a manifestation of state power against dissenters?

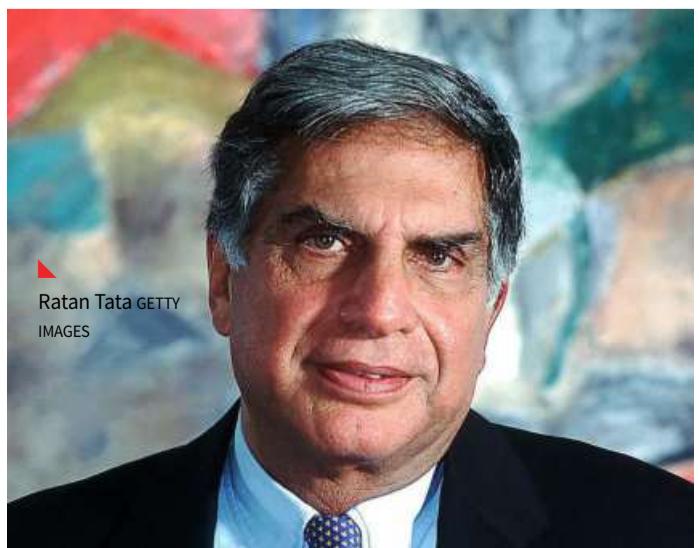
A: I have reported these events by recreating how the protests and the violence unfolded. I interviewed dozens of victims and other participants, and by following a witness as his case wound through court. The people felt the police could have done much, much more. But I wanted to go beyond the moment, because CAA did not happen in a vacuum. I wanted to study the atmosphere of India itself.

Q: What lessons does Partha Banerjee's RSS experience hold for a foot soldier?

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from rare photographs from *The Hindu*'s archives.

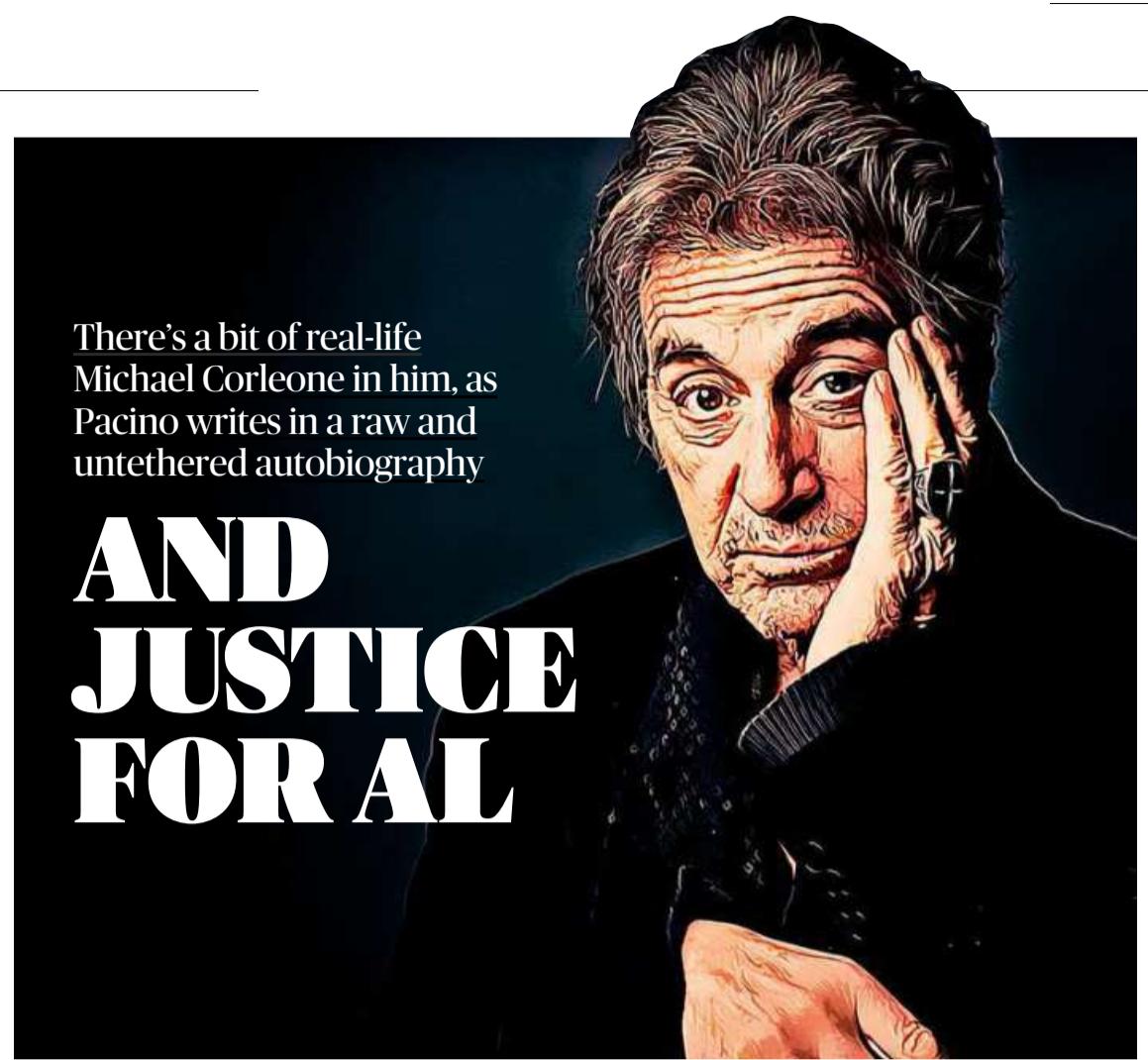
R.N.T., as Ratan Tata was fondly called by his colleagues and peers, was a highly unlikely contender to head the group after Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, or J.R.D., fell ill and stepped down, appointing his nephew Ratan, in his place. But R.N.T., with his background in architecture,



Ratan Tata GETTY IMAGES

There's a bit of real-life Michael Corleone in him, as Pacino writes in a raw and untethered autobiography

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL



Raja Sen

Al Pacino's autobiography, *Sonny Boy*, is not a well-crafted book. The actor, 84, seems aware. While describing an artless biography he once read, he critiques his own: "Let me tell you, it read like this: He does this. Then he does that. Then he goes here. Then he goes there. Like the book I'm writing now... It's like saying, Hamlet comes home. Then he sees his father. Then he goes to his mother."

Mercifully, Pacino's life vaults over stubby sentences and inconsistent syntax. The clunkiness only makes the voice more authentic, as if readers are sharing a beer with Pacino while he's saying "Actors, man. There's nothing like actors," or labelling himself "as dumb as a donut." Most of the book feels



Sicilian roots A still from *The Godfather*; (above) Al Pacino in New York. (AP)

raw and untethered – like some of Pacino's early masterpieces – and I came away from *Sonny Boy* feeling like I had been on a bender with the great performer.

Greatness, of course, takes time. Pacino started out on infinitely small stages – "as I was smoking, in character, a woman from the audience reached in and gave me an ashtray" – and climbed to Broadway, where Jackie Kennedy came backstage to applaud his Richard III. "After performing one of the greatest plays of all time, you're liable to do anything." In that post-performance delirium, the actor, slumped in his chair, put out his hand for Kennedy to kiss.

Sniffing a rat
Michael Corleone is part of

Pacino. His mother's father actually came from the Sicilian town of Corleone. While the underworld "was there for my grandfather and easy to access," the man instead became an exemplary plasterer. One afternoon his granddad, hearing that Al had tattled on a classmate, said "So you're a rat, huh?" so matter-of-factly that the actor never rattled on anybody again. "Although right now as I write this, I'm rattling on myself."

There is a surprising lack of bluster. Pacino presents his life as a series of fortunate accidents, sidestepping the credit. He is sheepish about his only Oscar-winning role in *Scent Of A Woman* – "I did go overboard sometimes... I would get too out of control. I could do it better now" – and describes the Oscar as something that shifts perception, but only just: "People know that you've



Sonny Boy
Al Pacino
Century/PRH
₹1,399

accomplished something special, and they treat you that way, for about a week."

Names are, invariably, dropped. He shared a flat with Martin Sheen where a young Joan Baez would play guitar cross-legged, acted with his idol Marlon Brando, and fell in love with Diane Keaton – "We go together like two straws and a Coke," he writes, sweetly. The most mentions are saved for Chekhov, and Pacino seems fundamentally shaped by the pocket-sized literature he carried around in his youth.

Uneven filmography

"I'm a man who has more Golden Raspberry nominations than Oscars." There are masterpieces – *The Godfather*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Heat*, *Scarface*, *And Justice For All* – and unbearable clunkers like *SimOne* and *Gigli*. Has any iconic actor done as many awful films? Pacino, unfortunately, kept going broke. "I'll never learn, and that's my problem," he writes. "Or my gift."

More than anything, Pacino loves the stage, romanticising its transcendent, transient glories. "In movie acting, the high wire is on the floor. Stage acting is up thirty feet in the air." He calls playwrights prophets, rhapsodises over performances he's witnessed, and describes shouting iambic pentameter into the night, as he would "walk the streets of Manhattan, bellowing out monologues." Actors, man.

It was his mother who called him 'Sonny Boy.' Pacino calls her "a Tennessee Williams character," and feels the reason he never got married may have been to counterbalance his father's five marriages. His tone is of childlike curiosity – as if he's wondering if he'll ever finish talking, or if we're still listening. Sometimes he repeats himself, dismisses a film too swiftly, veers into nostalgic cliché. In the end, Pacino acquaints us with the kid inside him, excited and impressionable and romantic. This book lets us say hello to his little friend.

The reviewer is a film critic, columnist and screenwriter. He is currently creating an absurd comedy series.

labour unrest at group companies, and allegations of unfair treatment of tribal populations and the environment. But in the final assessment, R.N.T. emerged as an astute businessman, who prioritised ethics, and long-held company values over strategic decisions to maximise profits.



Ratan Tata:
A Life in
Innovation and
Enterprise
The Hindu
Group
₹1,911

steered the group ably in his two decades at the helm, turning it into a multinational, though, along the way, there were several fits and starts, hits and misses.

There were some messy boardroom and legal battles,



Download the e-book here, or get it on Amazon.

Architect of change

Looking back at the life and work of Ratan Tata

Kunal Shankar

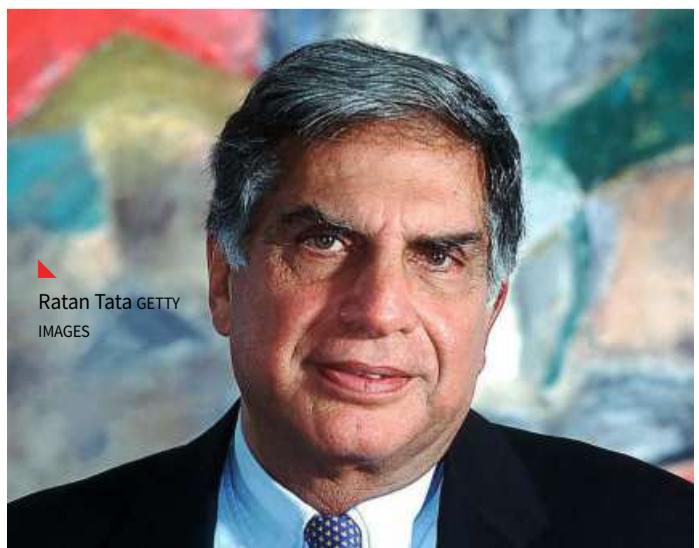
kunal.shankar@thehindu.co.in

Ratan Tata (December 28, 1937 - October 9, 2024) is considered to be the chief architect of the Tata Group's rise to a global salt-to-software conglomerate, valued at more than \$400 billion. An e-book,

Ratan Tata: A Life in Innovation and Enterprise, published by The Hindu Group Publishing Pvt. Ltd., assesses his life and work with essays led by friend and colleague Arun Maira.

Rare photographs

We also have essays by *Businessline*'s Janaki Krishnan and P.T. Jyothi Datta, and *The Hindu*'s D. Suresh Kumar, aside



Ratan Tata GETTY IMAGES

CO-LIVING: A HIT WITH GEN X-Y-Z

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

"It's been two years, and I don't want an apartment any more," adds the 37-year-old, who lives in Bengaluru at a Slep Co-living property. Although the rents and services offered vary, these spaces can cost anywhere between ₹10,000 and ₹25,000 on an average per month. A two-bedroom flat in Hyderabad's Gachibowli area can cost as much as ₹50,000 a month.

At its core, the co-living philosophy is about giving professionals a hospitable environment without the discrimination or biases that landlords can sometimes bring. "Aside from facilities such as furniture, Wi-Fi, television, and cleaning services that any serviced apartment can provide, co-living spaces take it up a notch by focusing on creating a ready-made social community for like-minded people. For example, at Buzz, we seldom take in students unless they come with a reference. We also look through LinkedIn profiles to ensure diversity in our resident pool," says Ali, who experienced difficulty while trying to rent an apartment in Mumbai when he lived there as a young professional 8-10 years ago.

"If I had found a co-living option back then, I may have had a different career today. I want to provide spaces where urban youth can be themselves and belong," he says.

Used to living in dorms in the U.S., sustainability consultant Moushree Mittal, 30, had experienced co-living before, and when she moved from Ghaziabad to Hyderabad, instead of looking for apartments or sharing a flat, she

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



Papa, I want a puppy."

"Nope."
"Why not?"
"You're too small to take charge of another life form."
"Yesterday you said I am a big boy."
"That was in another context."
"I want a puppy."
"But you are afraid to even pat our neighbour's dog."
"That's a very big dog."
"What will you do when your puppy grows into a very big dog?"

"I WANT A PUPPY!"
This demand, much like the Opposition's demand for a debate on Adani, had disrupted normal proceedings in our house. One of Katta's playmates has adopted a stray pup. So he wants to even things out. But I don't relish the added responsibility. Besides, ours is not a pet-friendly household. By 'household', I mean Wife, who cannot tolerate any animal, with the possible exception of Ranbir Kapoor.

"Ask your mother for permission," I said. "If she agrees, you can have a puppy."

Katta went bounding up the stairs to the terrace where Wife was finishing the laundry. Her favourite hobby in winter is to take out various garments from the washing machine and lovingly spread them out on the clothesline so they get a nice coating of the finest particulate matter Delhi can offer.

He was back in two seconds, huffing and puffing. "Mommy has said okay. Let's go get a puppy."

"She agreed? Impossible!"

Dogs are animals, too. I don't enter the terrace – for which I continue to pay 13 units of my blood EMI – as I have this rabid prejudice against polluted air. So I pick up the phone and call her.

Katta is claiming you have given permission for a dog?"

"Yeah, poor child, he is alone when we are at work. A pet will give him some companionship."

"But you told me before we got married that you hate dogs!"

"I never said that," she said. "I said I hate animals, not dogs."

"Have you gone crazy? Dogs are animals! Ask anyone!"

"Can you stop being so

ALLEGEDLY My family and other animals

Katta's puppy demand, much like the Opposition's demand for a debate on Adani, had disrupted normal proceedings in our house

patronising?" she said. "I am aware that dogs are animals. I'm just telling you what I actually said – I said 'animals', not 'dogs'."

"Fine," I said. "I'll make sure to incorporate this important correction in the minutes of the conversation we had 75 years ago. Now can we please address Katta's puppy tantrum?"

"Look," she said, "I personally don't want another dog in the house –"

"Excuse me? Did you say 'another dog'?"

"... but this is not about you and me. It's about him and what he wants. Let's give it a shot."

"But he himself is hardly more than

Never a dull moment

- From musical nights to treks, going to the Gurdwara or just eating at the newest place, a buddy is always available to hang out, say residents of Buzz Quarter's co-living spaces. "I have formed walking groups. I get to play badminton regularly here with Buzz buddies, and I even found mates who attended the Diljit Dosanjh concert in Hyderabad with me," says Swarandeep Singh.
- At nests, musical evenings, stand-up shows and festival celebrations are organised at regular intervals.
- Most co-living spaces have table tennis, foosball tables and carrom boards. Some organise movie nights or special dinners during festivals, others plan emcees-led interactive games as ice-breakers every few months.

I am never excluded if I want to join a badminton game or a movie session, or frowned upon if I choose to sit out a music show. There are groups of close buddies but no cliques.

The growth factor

For Shiban Marathe, a co-living place was a stop-gap arrangement to begin with. "I first booked Buzz co-living for a few weeks because a friend had stayed there. I thought it would be just college-goers or very young people, but the variety in age, experience and backgrounds is amazing. I find myself relating to people 20 years older than me. Now I think, why struggle with landlords or live in a shared apartment with just two other people when I can be around 50 people?" she says.

Mittal also shares the same experience. "The three generations, Gen X, Y and Z, have formed a community here. I can learn from them and share my ideas over *chai* at the canteen or at the after-dinner *adda* almost every night. There are always plans for the weekend. I join what I like and skip what I don't, and there is no judgement," she adds.

QQ

I wanted to be a one-suitcase guy who could come and go with ease. I did not want to cook, clean, manage a house, maids, or pay bills. And wherever I stayed, I wanted North Indian food, mainly roti. Buzz gives me all of that.

VINEET ARORA

Navy veteran and technical manager at Salesforce

The writer is a senior professional who moved from Delhi to Hyderabad and has lived in a co-living space for seven months.



Shibani Marathe (centre) celebrating her birthday with Buzz buddies in Hyderabad; and (left) a foosball session at Buzz Quarter, Hyderabad. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & NAGARA GOPAL)



booked herself into a co-living space. "I went to see two co-living places but did not like their vibe. I liked the third space," she recalls. "I was just looking for the right furniture or location; I wanted to be around good people in a safe space."

Home and hearth
With migration comes the search for home, a space where you recreate the life you left behind or build a new lifestyle you always dreamed about. Essentially, it has to be a space that gives comfort, enables social interactions, and provides financial respite. Ashish Lal, who works from the Hyderabad office for two weeks and from home in Delhi for two weeks, says, "When hybrid work came into practice, renting an apartment no longer made financial sense. I had lived in a two-bedroom flat in Hyderabad before COVID-19, and it was just too much work and expensive too, since I hardly used the second bedroom. Besides,

apartment complexes have families, and as a 'single' man, it was hard to find people who could be away from their families on weekends for activities. I used to be bored and had to look for company outside."

For Barra, whose children and wife are not at a point where they can be uprooted, living at Buzz is working out. It's been four months now, and he has no intention of leaving because, simply put, this co-living arrangement caters to all his needs: food, social life and no house management responsibilities. "I am just too busy to run a house with all the travel I have to do," he says. It's a sentiment that Arora echoes.

As a veteran, he and his family were used to moving around, but now his wife, a dentist, has established her career in Delhi. When Arora decided to take on his current role in Hyderabad a year-and-a-half ago, he was clear about three things: "I wanted to be

one-suitcase guy who could come and go with ease. I did not want to cook, clean, manage a house, maids, or pay bills. And wherever I stayed, I wanted North Indian food, mainly roti. Buzz gives me all of that."

Unlike Arora, who dislikes cooking, one of the pitfalls of the co-living space where I live is not having a common pantry to cook, especially when I want to focus on specific dietary options.

Arora adds that at Buzz, there is never an evening when he feels alone or a weekend when he has nothing to do. "I have formed walking groups. I get to play badminton regularly here, and I even found mates who attended the Diljit Dosanjh show in Hyderabad with me," adds Singh. This camaraderie and openness to join whatever activity that suits you without any pressure has been one of the most significant plus points for me. Moving to a new city was lonely and it's hard to make friends.

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For Singh, living like this has helped him realise that there is a way to connect with people outside a defined social circle. "We all have family, two-three friends groups, and a few colleagues, and we tend to be restricted within that community. At Buzz, I have met people with whom I would never have had a chance to interact or engage, let alone be friendly. It's been a positive growth for me at this age and it has influenced my thinking."

Batra agrees, and adds that three months of meeting and interacting with people not in the same line of work as him or having the same experiences or age as him has made him realise he has grown. "I never thought that at this stage of my life I would have to leave home or stay alone. But living here has given me opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and networking. I listen to these young people, interact with them, and always find something new. Living here has been about stepping out of my comfort zone, making me relate better to my children back home."

Batra also shares the same experience. "The three generations, Gen X, Y and Z, have formed a community here. I can learn from them and share my ideas over *chai* at the canteen or at the after-dinner *adda* almost every night. There are always plans for the weekend. I join what I like and skip what I don't, and there is no judgement," she adds.

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As a veteran, he and his family were used to moving around, but now his wife, a dentist, has established her career in Delhi. When Arora decided to take on his current role in Hyderabad a year-and-a-half ago, he was clear about three things: "I wanted to be

minority. It was now me versus mother and son. I had no option but to compromise and seek a negotiated settlement.

So I sat Katta down – making sure to first get him a Harry Potter-wala Kinder Joy – and made a PowerPoint presentation. I explained to him that a puppy is too dramatic a leap for a no-pet household and too big a commitment for a little child with no experience in the matter. He would be better off testing the waters with something smaller, where the stakes – and expenses – are lower. Once he demonstrates the capabilities and maturity level needed for pet care, we

could gradually move up the food chain until we reach the dog.

"I don't understand what you are saying," he said.

"Do you like fish?"
"Yes."
"You like gold?"
"You mean like treasure?"
"Hmm... yeah."
"Yes."
"How about I get you a pet that combines both these things you like – a goldfish?"

"A goldfish?"
I didn't give him time to think. I went online and quickly ordered two goldfish, along with the weird stuff they eat. They were delivered two days later.

Katta has grown attached to them already, wanting to feed them every 10 minutes, checking to see if they're growing bigger after every meal. The puppy demand had been successfully deflected, for now.

"Well played," Wife said. "You should join politics."

"I would," she said, "if voters behaved like easily distracted, emotionally high-strung eight-year-olds."

Being minority
I felt betrayed. She knew I would never agree, and cynically used this knowledge to put me in the most unpopular position in the country today – that of a

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

75 SILENT SENTINELS

From India's loneliest tree, a giant sequoia in Jammu, to a 600-year-old *champaka* tree sacred to Karnataka's Soliga tribe, S. Natesh makes a case for elevating these iconic trees to national consciousness

Harini Nagendra

Somewhere between 359 and 385 million years ago, our world witnessed the birth of the first tree: *Archaeopteryx* is not to be confused with the similarly-named *Archaeopteryx*, a feathered bird-like dinosaur. From this modest beginning, trees have witnessed an evolutionary explosion in diversity and distribution. Scientists now estimate that there are over 73,000 tree species across the world, of which at least 3,708 can be found in India.

Trees are living sentinels of history, witnesses to dramatic transformations of the earth's landscape. Trees are also the way many of us instinctively connect to nature first – as I do, for instance. My childhood memories of climbing trees, playing games with flowers and seeds, and writing fantasy stories inspired by my favourite tree giants drew me to urban ecology as an adult.

And thus it was with special pleasure that I read S. Natesh's *Iconic Trees of India* (Roli Books). In these pages are stories of remarkable trees from across the country – Rajasthan to Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir to Kerala, even covering the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Each of the 75 individual trees covered in this book are special in some way. Most are very old – such as the *Doddapattigere Sampige Mara*, a 600-year-old *champaka* tree from Karnataka's B.R. Hills, sacred to the Soliga tribe.

Then there is India's loneliest tree, a giant sequoia imported from the Sierra Nevada mountains in the U.S. and stranded in Jammu – surrounded by strangers, unable to reproduce, because it is the only one of its kind in the region. And the *pilkhana* tree in Makhal, Manipur stands as the Nagas as

tree under which the primeval Naga mother rested. Evocative sketches by Sagar Bhowmick bring the text to life.

Observing generations
As Natesh points out, many countries have documented their iconic trees, elevating them to national consciousness, part of the identity of the place. A clonal colony of quaking aspen trees from Utah, U.S., with 43,000 stems covering 43 hectares, is estimated to be an astounding 80,000 years old. The oldest individual tree is an alerce in Chile's Alerce Costero National Park – 5,400 years old.

Natesh

poetically describes,

these trees "stand on the sands of time and observe hundreds of generations flow past them like water". Unfortunately, thus far, little attention has been paid to historic or iconic trees in India. In doing so this book fills an

important gap both in popular and scientific literature.

When we are faced with daily reports of tens of thousands of trees being cut down for mining, road expansion, industrial parks and ports – why should we care about 75 individual trees? As Natesh

reminds us in his insightful introduction, the ecological crisis that grips us is a crisis of imagination. We lump trees into an amorphous collective, implicitly assuming that one tree is the same as another. This is the fundamental misconception that is behind

Asiri Amrin

In 2019, the viral #50trees on Twitter (now X) got people across India to begin documenting trees in their cities. Among them was a Delhi-based law officer, Chandan Tiwary, who until then had been 'tree-blind'. The then 40-year-old quickly realised there was a lack of information on trees in Delhi.

"Trees can teach so much about a city's cultural history. I felt this gap had to be addressed," he says. And so, Tiwary started an Instagram page, @delhitrees, to build bridges between people and trees. Today it has become a community of almost 5,000 people.

Down south, digital marketing consultant Ashwathi Jerome, who was back in her hometown, Kochi, in 2020, was always interested in studying the intersections between cultural history and ecology, and using trees to learn about the city's history. She noticed a similar gap as Tiwary. "It was surprising to know that there are no comprehensive books covering the nature of Kochi as a whole," she says. During the lockdown, she started the Instagram page @treesofcochin to build a knowledge base for interested people.

For more than a decade, social media has been used to raise voices against legal and illegal construction projects that harm urban biodiversity. Now, there is an interesting shift, with people turning to social media to talk about the flora and fauna around them. "I have noticed that since COVID-19, more people have been using social media to mobilise citizen awareness about urban biodiversity. During the lockdown, learning about nature provided mental relief and that trend seems to have continued," says researcher and author Harini Nagendra, who leads Azim Premji University's Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability.

She feels that when people engage with public parks and biodiversity, either through book clubs, nature walks or social media, it becomes difficult to use the space for infrastructure projects or land capture. "Policymakers also appreciate the importance of green

spaces. Social media has a very positive amplifying effect, which can be useful," Nagendra adds.

For people such as Tiwary and Jerome, it's not just about sharing a picture or two online but about equipping people with a "tree lens". People pass by trees every day without a second glance. By sharing information, these creators hope to build familiarity through awareness.

The documenters
The lack of familiarity is also what drove author

Buddies in the barracks and beyond

Recollecting the brotherhood in an Army camp in Manipur, and the spirit of sacrifice that prevailed in a prosthetics camp for people in Kuki and Meitei villages

Aditya Madan

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The other day, I got a monthly call from my two civil friends from Manipur, a Kuki and a Meitei. They had struck an emotional chord with me during my two-year command of the Churachandpur-based 27 Sector of the Assam Rifles in the capacity of Deputy Inspector-General from 2013. Both had been beneficiaries of the artificial limb, widely known as the "Jaipur foot". After a brief tete-a-tete with them, a wave of nostalgia washed over me recollecting a free artificial limb camp organised in collaboration with Shree Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti, Jaipur.

I vividly recall my first day in office when my staff took me around the Sector headquarters premises. Though there is no discrimination based on community in the Army or Assam Rifles, I found the bonhomie between Kuki and Meitei soldiers not up to the desired level. I found one barracks Kuki-dominated, while the other was largely of Meiteis. It somehow did not gel with my grooming



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

and ethos of my parent battalion, 27 Punjab, which was the pilot project for a mixed battalion of Sikhs, Dogras and the Other Indian Classes.

As a Commander, I was determined to break the ice between Kukis and Meiteis. I decided to implement the time-tested standing operating procedure of the buddy system, though a hybrid one – the buddy pair to have one Kuki and one Meitei each.

Just to set an example, I set the ball rolling with my Commander's secretariat. I selected a Kuki as my PA and a Meitei as my radio operator. I organised all the soldiers of the Sector HQ into hybrid buddy pairs. Every soldier is supposed to remain with his buddy 24x7 whether during operations or having food. Within a week, I could sense the bonds strengthening between both communities. Witnessing the success of this pilot project at the Sector HQ, I enforced the same SOP in all the six battalions under my command. I recount how in one deadly ambush, a Kuki scout was instrumental in saving the life of his Meitei buddy scout by charging at the militants while firing a fusillade from his AK-47.

This inflection point snowballed into conviviality between the Kuki and Meitei villages. The festivals of Kukis and Meiteis were jointly celebrated with equal gusto and fervour.

Back to the artificial limb camp. Despite catering for some reserve limbs on the last day, we were left with just six artificial limbs while we had 12 beneficiaries – six Kukis and six Meiteis – still on the waiting list. My staff was in a quandary with anxiety writ large on their faces for fear of favouring a particular community. I advised them to keep a cool head and just identify the most needy three Kukis and three Meiteis.

The next morning, we tried to identify the six most deserving cases. Suddenly, I saw an aged Kuki walk up to us with a pensive look. "Sir, let all these six Meitei people take the 'Jaipur foot' as they are quite young. We have already lived our lives," the septuagenarian sporting an off-kilter hat said in a gravelly voice. His words had tugged at my heartstrings which left me utterly dumbfounded. Meiteis who were overhearing politely declined.

I immediately dialled the top man of the Jaipur samiti and made a frantic request for an additional six prosthetic limbs. Thankfully, he sent them on the flight the next day. Finally, all the 12 beneficiaries left the camp happily walking confidently on their own.

The unwavering spirit of both communities to sacrifice for each other remains etched in my mind. Against the backdrop of the now strife-torn Manipur, I pray for those times to come back.

When youngsters migrate abroad

Rinu George

rinugeorge57@yahoo.com

Large sections of the once-authoritative Indian parents of the 1980s and 1990s who were fiercely dedicated to raising children with strict discipline and traditional values now have professional home nurses to take care of them. Children move overseas, leaving ageing parents to negotiate old age without their support.

Deep-rooted cultural values shaped Indian parenting in the 1980s and 1990s. The children were taught responsibility, respect for elders, and social conventions. Parents who prioritised discipline led their children to choose secure, respected occupations, believing it would lead to better futures for their family.

Thus, children from these families excelled academically and earned opportunities in engineering, medicine, and technology, which allowed them to study or work overseas. Parents viewed migration as a sign of social advancement and felt joy in their children's achievement. Pride is often tempered by the fact that elderly parents must adjust to a new caring system based on professional nurses after their children move abroad.

Separation from children hits many parents emotionally. Members of Indian families have traditionally lived together or close by. Children are the family's emotional centre and caregivers for their parents in old age. However, the migration of children has altered this expectation.

As their children succeed far away, parents frequently feel lonely and abandoned. Distance from everyday encounters and infrequent video chats cannot totally bridge the emotional gap. Children can send money or hire home nurses for their elderly parents, but the emotional emptiness is hard to fill. With children overseas, home nurses are a sensible choice for many elderly parents who require support with health, everyday tasks, and personal care. This provides a much-needed safety net, especially for people with chronic illnesses or mobility limitations, but it also presents emotional challenges.

Previous independence and control over family affairs have been replaced with a loss of dignity and privacy for many parents.

Blinkered views

Prejudices about skin tone and weight can leave many traumatised

Shrinidhi Mahadevan

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ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Growing up as a dark-skinned Tamil girl, I quickly learned that comments about appearance were an inevitable part of life. At weddings, family gatherings, or even casual meet-ups, someone always had something to say. "You've gained weight, what happened?" "Stay out of the sun; you'll get darker." And the one that stuck with me the most: "You're pretty for a dark girl." Though such remarks were sometimes framed as compliments, they often left me feeling anything but complimented. For those who might say them, these comments might seem like harmless observations or even "helpful advice".

They think it's just brutal honesty, but I honestly think it's brutal. The truth is they reflect a broader cultural pattern that many Tamil women experience, with their bodies and appearances subjected to relentless scrutiny. The excuses often given, such as "That's just how we were raised", do little to mitigate the lasting impact of these words. For those on the receiving end, the damage to self-esteem and self-worth is real.

In Tamil households, discussions about weight are almost unavoidable. From "Are you eating enough?" to "You've been eating too much",

opinions are freely shared. Food, a source of joy and connection, often becomes a site of judgment instead. Even at family gatherings, the amount of food on your plate can invite unwanted commentary. If you serve yourself generously, someone might warn you about gaining weight. If you take less, questions such as "Are you trying to lose weight?" are inevitable. It's a no-win situation. This fixation on weight is not limited to family conversations. Societal pressures to conform to beauty standards are deeply ingrained, and research confirms their harmful effects. A study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences found that 47% of Indian women in the 18-to-35 age group experience body image issues, with societal expectations playing a significant role. These pressures are particularly pronounced for young women in Tamil communities, where criticism around weight is normalised and pervasive.

Alongside weight, colourism remains a deeply rooted issue in Tamil culture. Growing up, I was frequently reminded to avoid the sun to "stay fair". For many women and girls in India, the fear of spending time in the sun is not about getting sunburned, it's about getting darker. Fairness creams or homemade remedies are heavily promoted in society as if lighter skin is the ultimate key to success. The message is clear: lighter skin is better.

For young Tamil women, seeing themselves judged against these unrealistic standards can deepen feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. The emotional toll of these comments, whether about weight or skin tone, is significant. Often dismissed as harmless, such remarks can erode confidence and lead to long-term mental health challenges. Studies by the World Health Organization reveal that over 25% of women in India report anxiety or depression tied to body image concerns. For Tamil women, who often face these pressures within their families and elsewhere, the effects are even more pronounced.

The word of the year

Logophiles can add 'brain rot' and 'manifest' to their armoury

Ved Vriti

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As the calendar flips toward the end of 2024, the buzz surrounding the Oxford Word of the Year has ended with "brain rot" making the cut. This annual tradition has become more than a mere linguistic exercise – it serves as a cultural barometer, reflecting the collective ethos, moods, and preoccupations of society at a specific moment in time.

Cambridge has named "manifest" as its selection from among brat, eotarian and resilience, and Collins chose "brat" from among brain rot, era, looksmaxxing, anti-tourism, raw dogging, delulu, romantasy, supermajority and yapping.

Usually every year, various organisations across the globe delve into the lexicon of the public sphere to select the Word of the Year (WOTY). This tradition identifies the term or phrase that best captures the essence of societal preoccupations, trends, or events for a specific year. Originating in Germany with the *Wort des Jahres* in 1971, the practice has expanded worldwide, offering



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

unique insights into the cultural and linguistic zeitgeist of various nations.

The American Dialect Society initiated the first English-language version of WOTY in 1990, setting itself apart by relying on independent linguists' votes and eschewing commercial influence. Over time, other

ictionaries and organisations, including Oxford, Merriam-Webster, Cambridge, and Macquarie, as well as national institutions in countries such as Australia, Japan, and Austria, have joined the tradition. Each brings its own criteria and perspective, reflecting local cultures, global issues, or even the quirks of online communities.

From the playful to the profound, these words do more than mirror linguistic trends. They reveal our collective priorities, fears, humour, and resilience. Whether chosen for their emergence in discourse or for embodying pivotal moments, these words spark debates and discussions, reminding us of the power and fluidity of language in framing our world.



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

Thanks to art galleries, Indian artists are being recognised and rewarded for pursuing their passions with missionary zeal. ('Mumbai's 2025 art face-off'; Dec. 1) With the rapid increase in high-wealth individuals in our country, the future of Indian artists looks bright, if our rich can transform into collectors.

Sri Vrinda N.

A vast country like ours needs art fairs in various places, and not just in the metros. These should be organised at regular intervals to foster a sense of artistry in people.

M.N. Saraswathi Devi

In this digital era, when even large publishing houses are facing enormous challenges, the courage and commitment of small publishers is laudable. ('The joy and pain of being small'; Dec. 1)

It needs passion, hard work, and a never-say-die attitude to be a small publisher and survive against all odds. The small publishers in the U.K., for instance, have become the "beating heart" of its publishing industry, with many of their books winning prestigious prizes. I hope the Indian independent publishers will also scale new heights with their tenacious efforts and enterprising outlook.

Kosaraju Chandramouli

Thanks to our politicians, the caste system continues to flourish through vote-mongering politics. ('Navayana is a necessary mistake'; Dec. 1) Navayana is doing a commendable job by publishing books from an

Show the way

Stories of the sufferings of Palestinians must be told. Cinema is larger than us and it should serve as a reminder of the times.

Rohith Varon S.S.

Motherhood and manuscripts

For many mothers, books reflect their own experiences, struggles, and hopes.

Sandra Joseph

Drowning in words

There is verbosity on social media, in the news, in speeches, and in policies.

Aakshansh Vimal

Hot potatoes

Price rise pushes even common vegetables beyond the reach of the common man.

Tejaswini Sugumaran

Non-stop cacophony

Jam-packed apartments provide no aural relief.

C. Deepalakshmi

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



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Motherhood and manuscripts

For many mothers, books reflect their own experiences, struggles, and hopes.

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Aastha D.

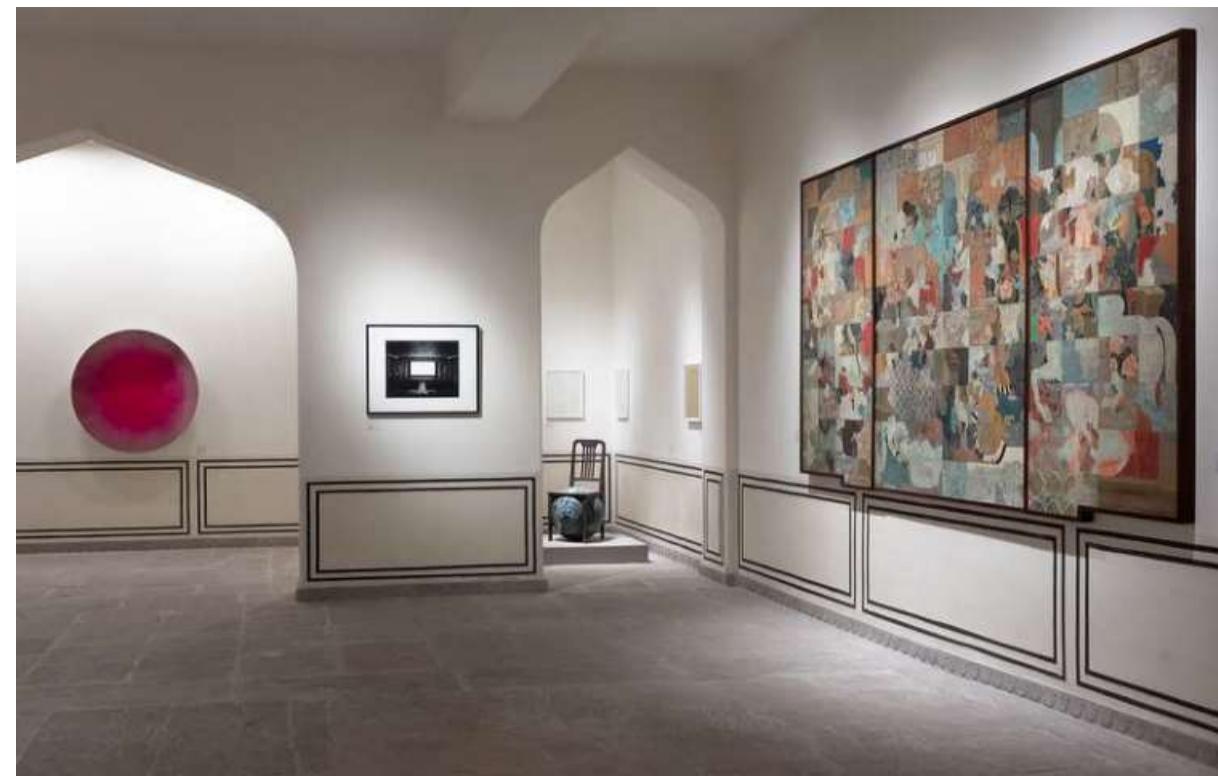
The City Palace is a sprawling complex of grand courtyards, domed pavilions, and intricately designed facades crafted from pink sandstone and marble. Built in 1727, when Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II created Jaipur as the capital of his kingdom, it has of late been shedding its image as a tourist attraction and reclaiming its practice of patronage.

Much of it is thanks to Sawai Padmanabh Singh, 26, the titular maharaja of Jaipur, who has been on a mission to revitalise its spirit. The latest addition is the Jaipur Centre for Art (JCA), a 2,600 sq. ft. contemporary art institution, co-founded with friend and curator Noelle Kadar, which opened last month in the palace. It aims to add another facet to the city's historic core and cultural legacy, which already boasts the successful Jaipur Literature Festival, and the Jaipur Art Week started by art entrepreneur and executive director of Prestige Group, Sana Rezwan's, Public Arts Trust of India. The black-tie launch was a veritable who's who of the art and culture world, with names such as author William Dalrymple, artists Shilo Shiv Suleiman and Subodh Gupta, and designer Thierry Journo.

"Jaipur has always led in image-making, not just for itself but for the subcontinent. It was once a melting pot of ideas, trade, shaping global conversations on art, craft, and leadership. In recent decades, while cities like Paris, New York, and London set the tone for contemporary thought, we have been slow to participate," says Singh. "It took time and education [in heritage conservation and preservation from Italy] for me to truly understand the richness of this land. Our goal at JCA is to reconnect Jaipur with the global contemporary, creating a space where local and international voices can come together meaningfully."

Matter of perspective

To be contemporary is to tap into the present's pulse, feel its



Jaipur's new art space is a nod to the global contemporary art world and royal patronage in the 21st century

ARTISTS IN THE CITY PALACE

immediacy, while fully aware of its inevitable flux. It is this fluidity that JCA embraces with its inaugural exhibition, *A New Way of Seeing*, curated by Peter Nagy of Nature Morte, and Kadar. The show delivers on its title – provoking and promising a fresh perspective. First, by positioning works by artists such as Anish Kapoor and Dayanita Singh, whose works are in stark contrast to each other in terms of their mediums, styles, and ethos, in the same room; it compels us to inhabit their works in a radically different manner. And second, by replacing the white cube with a space that incorporates the palace's mood, with delicate arches and columns, and panel moulding – creating its own drama.

The exhibition showcases an eclectic mix of paintings, sculptures, and photographs, each probing manners of perception. As Peter

Nagy explains, "[The artists] think about the way their worlds will be viewed by an audience, how they can manipulate or subvert what the viewer will encounter... through abstraction, multiplication, reflection, and deception."

This exploration is brought vividly to life in Hiroshi Sugimoto's ongoing series, *Theatres and Seascapes*, which the Japanese photographer began in 1978. Each black-and-white photograph captures the "same" image – a horizon line splitting the frame or a theatre's vanishing point – yet the illusion of sameness belies the impossibility of repeating time or space. Similarly, Dayanita Singh's stunning *Time Measures* (from 2016) uses 34 colour prints of red muslin bundles, their fading patterns shaped by sunlight, to evoke the distinctiveness of age and memory.

Among the large-scale works, Tanya Goel's abstractions stand out

for their process-oriented approach – crafted from pigments she makes herself. *The Botanicals* series revisits colonial herbarium illustrations, underscoring how art can reinterpret historical narratives. Anish Kapoor's striking discs, *Oriental Blue to Clear* (2023) and *Magenta to Clear* (2024), reflect and dissolve everything that confronts them.

Spirit of collaboration

Kadar describes her approach as inherently collaborative. "Here, we have placed artists from around the world next to each other in a setting that is deeply historical. It made me think of them very differently even though I was familiar with their work. For instance, you see Sugimoto's *Seascapes* here in the middle of a desert, but it will make complete sense – the endlessness of the horizon and its indifference to

Adding more colour to the Pink City (Clockwise from left) Art at JCA; (left to right) artist Shilo Shiv Suleiman, designer Neha Luthra, and jeweller Siddharth Kasliwal; author William Dalrymple, and artist and wife Olivia Fraser; artwork by Ayesha Singh; and Noelle Kadar with Sawai Padmanabh Singh. (LODOVICO COLLI DI FELIZIANO, GOURAB GANGULY)

time and space drawing you in."

A spirit of collaboration also runs through how JCA came about, after years of talking about art with Singh – a project that bridges Singh's more traditional arts background and her own contemporary one.

Why was Jaipur, a city of craft, chosen? "So many people come to the city to take things back – rugs, jewellery, textiles, craft," Kadar muses. "HH [one of Singh's nicknames and short for His Highness] and I thought about why we are doing this. Why something so experimental should make sense in Jaipur. Beyond the physical location, we hope that our exhibitions relate to the land, the city and the history of Jaipur. *A New Way of Seeing* is based on materiality, of the space as well as the streets of Jaipur in all their contradictions and synchronies. [So] in some cases, this will be more obvious, but we will make sure that thread runs through."

Alongside exhibitions, JCA will also launch an artist residency programme. Artists will live in the palace complex, have access to the palace archives and the Pothi Khana, the museum's archive and library, and foster connections through their work with Jaipur's vibrant heritage, materials, and local artisans.

JCA, as Singh and Kadar put it, aspires to be more than a gallery. "It will collaborate and engage with similar institutes across the country and the world to reinvigorate and redefine contemporary art and culture." And, hark back to its origin days while rooting itself in the global contemporary.

A New Way of Seeing is on till March 16, 2025.

The essayist and designer writes on design and culture.



(Clockwise from left) Menezes Bragança; Figueiredo; Ulka Chauhan; D'Sa Condillac; and the book cover.



Inside six Goan homes

Photo book *The Memory Keepers* amplifies the stories of Goa's heritage houses and its families

Nolan Lewis

From their patterned mosaic floors to carved porches, many weighty books have recorded Goa's heritage homes over the years. Yet, *The Memory Keepers & Future Seekers: Portraits of Heritage Homes in Goa* by photographer Ulka Chauhan and art curator Samira Sheth offers a new trajectory.

The photo book's unique quality is the architecture of the narrative – a dialogue that is both emotional and informational. "If you were to read it from front to back, there is a strong emotive arc that flows through the words and visuals, with the personal stories of the families and their fragments of memories, which reveal a deep sense of rootedness to their home and land," says Chauhan. "However, if you were to read the book backwards, beginning at the elaborate glossary at the end, you will be informed of the context – historical, cultural, social, political and religious moments that were instrumental in the making and shaping of Goa and the state's quintessential homes."

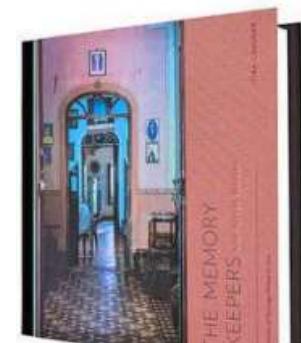
Six historical homes

Chauhan, who is based between Mumbai, Goa and Zurich, started

documenting Goa's homes as part of a photo series, *Beyond The Balcao*, in 2021. And though it was presented at the International Photo Festival in Olten, Switzerland, and featured in the *Leica Fotografie International* journal, the stories of the houses kept pulling her back.

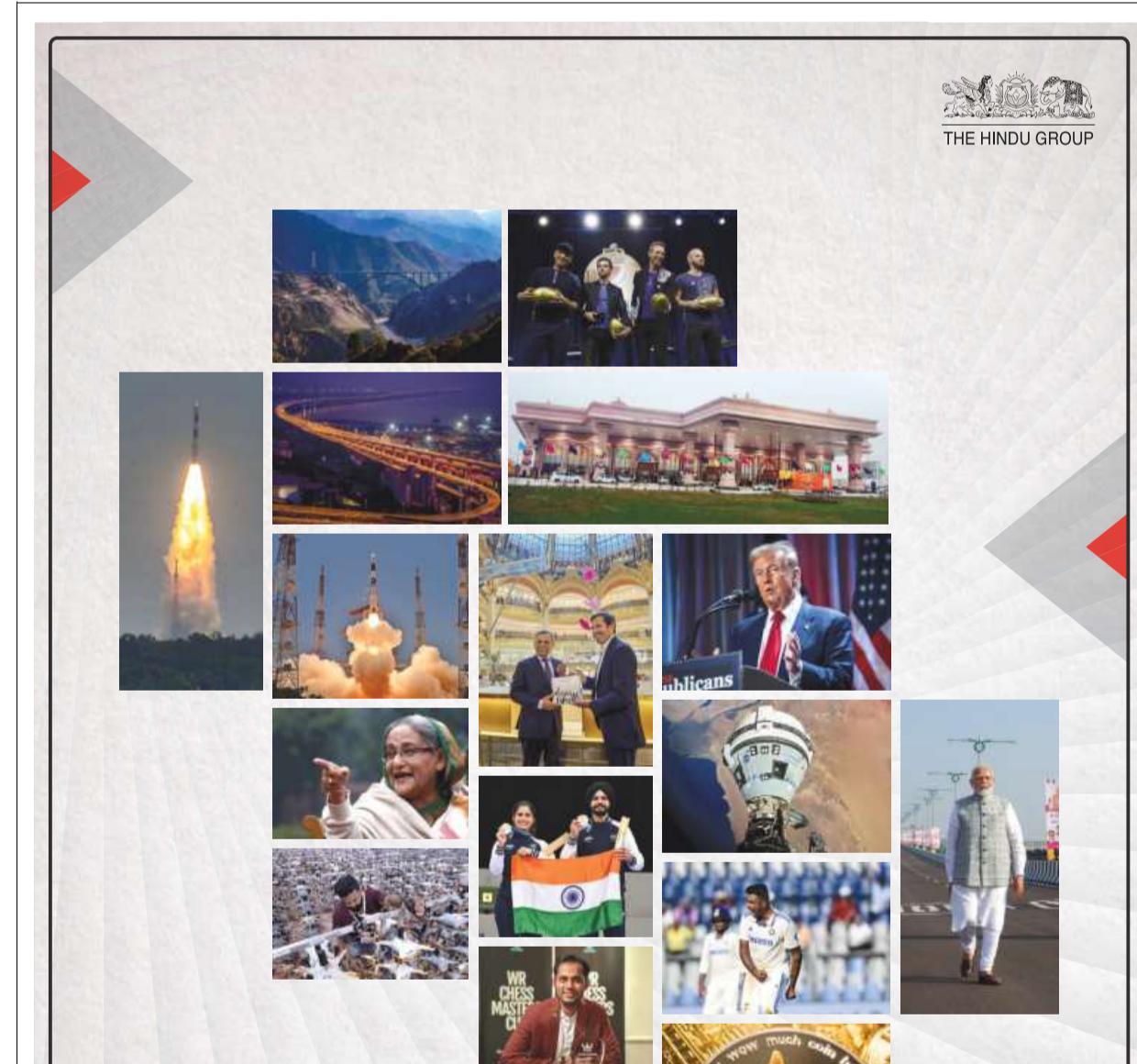
"I visited these homes and families several times over the last four years, capturing countless frames," she says, adding that Sheth often accompanied her. "Samira's words sparked ideas for my images, and vice versa. In that sense, our process was completely collaborative."

The duo decided to focus on six houses whose foundations were laid as early as the 16th century. Through conversations over lunch, cups of coffee and glasses of wine, they pieced together memories and



family histories. "This tiny coastal state was once the capital of the Portuguese empire in the East, and these homes hold the evidence of those cosmopolitan, transcultural and transoceanic histories," says Sheth. Be it Vodlem Ghor and its underground escape routes and bullet hole marks that are a record of Goa's turbulent past, or the sparkling Belgian glass chandeliers, Ming dynasty wash basins and other artefacts that speak to its once flourishing trade, "there is much to appreciate and marvel at in these homes", says Sheth.

The Mumbai-based writer keeps busy with late-night networking events and crazy deadlines.



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