THE HINDU
Sunday, January 21, 2024

magazine

backpage
Second edition of Indian Ceramics Triennale starts
GO TO » PAGE 8

INSIDE
Meet the women behind the podcast, *Not Your Aunty*
GO TO » PAGE 4

LITERARY REVIEW
Ramachandra Guha on letters to his editor
GO TO » PAGE 3

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

Getting inventive (Clockwise from left) Protest art by the Fearless Collective; body bags used in a pro-Palestine protest in the U.S.; and Manipur's empty coffin rally.

viscerally visual, designed to catch and hold attention in an age of social media and virality, but also elusive, to circumvent state surveillance and censorship in an authoritarian milieu. Where, exactly, does that leave us: in a world better off, where creativity is flourishing? Or in a darker, more repressive time, where creativity is the only way to survive?

In the last few years, India has seen a rising number of people booked under laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, i.e, the sedition provision, for nothing more than peaceful protesting. Not just that; the use of close-circuit television (CCTV) and facial recognition technology (FRT) has turned vital public spaces into privacy-violating zones, like when these technologies were used against civilians protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act, or to ID over 1,900 people as rioters during the 2020 Delhi riots. "We've reached a phase where protests are criminalised by disregarding the law, by the police, government and courts alike," says Kalpana Kannabiran, 61, a sociologist and author based in Hyderabad. "This tendency to not see the voice of reason, to have an utter disregard for dialogue across disagreements, is the most worrying because it doesn't take long for it to spiral into utter normlessness."

Vinay Sreenivasa, 43, is a Bengaluru-based member of Bahutva Karnataka, a network of organisations working towards a pluralistic future for the State. The software engineer by profession has been trying to organise a protest against the Gaza war ever since it began, but has been curtailed every time. Their first attempt – to distribute pamphlets spreading awareness about what's happening there – was met with an FIR. Their second attempt, asking authorities if they can hold a peaceful demonstration against the war in Freedom Park, the spot designated for protests in Bengaluru, was rejected. "In the run-up to the assembly elections in the five States, the Congress government was very strict about not allowing any protests around Gaza," he says.

Bahutva has since come up with innovative ways of resisting and working on social change. They have organised Preamble readings at roadsides across the city; they've had community food events, where a cross-section of people came to eat and share poetry about food, diversity and discrimination; and every month, they hold a community art event called *koota*.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 4

THE MANY CREATIVE SHADES OF PROTEST

At a time when state surveillance as well as censorship is at a high, sloganeering and protests are no longer a viable option — perhaps why we are seeing more photos of watermelons, coffins and painted hands in the news

3 innovative protests of 2023

"In September, I painted a seven-storey-tall mural in Kolkata along with the trans masculine community. I'm queer, and I wanted to change the script for masculinity — which is always cis masculinity. Why can't it be trans masculinity, which embraces softness, care, and all things not seen as traditionally masculine? The process was collaborative: trans men in my workshop talked about how they want to be seen, and then photographed themselves. The photos were used for the mural."

— Nandini Moitra, 31, artist

Neha Mehrotra
neha.mehrotra@thehindu.co.in

When artist Shilo Suleiman first arrived at COP28 in December, she was very aware of being a mere 2,000 km from Gaza. Given the UAE's many restrictions around what can and can't be said, she had been warned: stick to the climate and don't bring up the war. But it all changed once she got there.

Fearless Collective, an organisation founded by Suleiman in 2012, propels social justice movements through art and creativity. As they do every year, they had come to the Conference of the Parties to protest for climate justice. Once there, they ended up forming connections: with the climate alliance for Palestine, Palestinian activists, Sudanese activists and others, and before they knew it, they were protesting against the Gaza war. Of course, they had to be creative about it. "Within the U.N. space, the rules for what can and can't be said kept changing," says Suleiman, 35. "One day, they'd say, 'You can't use the word Gaza', 'You can't use the word 'Palestine', you can't say 'From the river to the sea', 'You can't talk about ceasefire'. They kept changing the rules, so that every poster, every banner you were holding could be termed objectionable."

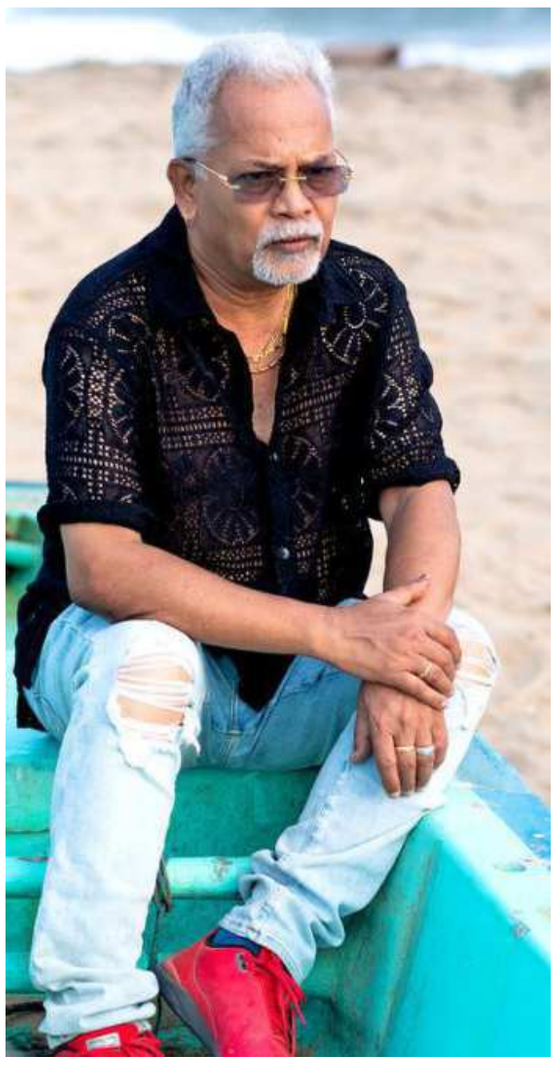
Fed up, Fearless found a way around these restrictions: they started reciting the names of Gazans killed since the war started. One by one, they'd stand up, recite the name of a martyr, and write his or her name on their hand in henna. "This was a sign of solidarity and compassion, but it was also a way to counter the restrictions imposed on war-related protests," says Suleiman.

Navigating restrictions

Stories like Suleiman's are increasingly common – where rising restrictions and stricter surveillance are creating a hostile environment for protests and protesters at large. But from these restrictions is often born a greater creativity. The last year has seen protesters across the world employing inventive protest strategies: in February, women in Israel dressed up in red and white a la *The Handmaid's Tale* to protest against some of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposed judicial reforms; in July, tribal groups in Manipur organised a 'coffin rally', where they marched from the morgue to the Wall of Remembrance carrying empty coffins that signified the bodies of their dead they hadn't received.

Increasingly, protests are not only

History lessons (Clockwise from left) A 17th century painting of Aurangzeb in his *darbar*; author Charu Nivedita; and translator Nandini Krishnan. (WIKI COMMONS, BACKIARAJ M. AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



INTERVIEW

In the spirit of Aurangzeb

Author Charu Nivedita and translator Nandini Krishnan discuss their new book that reimagines the story of the most controversial Mughal emperor

Radhika Santhanam
radhika.s@thehindu.co.in

Tamil writer Charu Nivedita's *Conversations with Aurangzeb,* translated by Nandini Krishnan, is an unpredictable book. In it, a writer begins a novel with an idea but soon meets the spirit of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, who decides to seize the opportunity to tell his side of the story. This is an irreverent, indignant Aurangzeb, most unlike the historical character we are familiar with. The writer and Aurangzeb speak of the past and present, of Mughals and Marxism, of satire and Sunny Leone, and a host of other contemporary subjects. Krishnan says the novel is "defiant of all genres". In the lead-up to *The Hindu* Lit Fest 2024 on January 26-27, Nivedita and Krishnan discuss the wildly imaginative book, their collaborative process, and the latest translation fad. Edited excerpts:

Question: *You've given an unpopular historical figure a voice to defend his actions. In a country where satire is often lost on a lot of people, did you ever feel this book was a risky proposition?*

Charu Nivedita: All my writing is risky because I always choose taboo topics. I have always been a misunderstood guy. In a historical perspective, Aurangzeb is also a misunderstood guy. So, I find some similarity between Aurangzeb and myself as a writer.

Q: *There are Tamil references throughout the novel. Why and how did you decide to weave these in?*

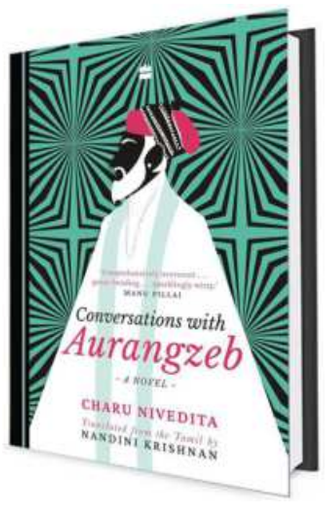
CN: Even though I live in Tamil Nadu, I don't agree with the culture here. My fellow writers don't consider me a writer; I always feel like an outsider. Though I write in Tamil, I imagine a European, South American or an Arab readership. I mock the land in which I live. I feel sometimes that I live in a circus when I see the film industry, the *paal abhishekam* (a ritual of worship with milk) for the cut-outs of actors, or the happenings in the political arena. Self-mocking is important. One who is ready to parody himself or herself can do that with others.

Nandini Krishnan: When the book was originally written, it was targeting a very small population of Tamil readers. For all of them to be able to relate to the novel, there had to be these references.

Q: *You have said in your translator's note that some books are untranslatable. Why is that?*

NK: I mean there are certain books that are extremely localised. For example, anyone in India who has watched Hindi films would find the line '*Kitne aadmi the?* (How many men were there?)' funny in any context. But if you're going to use that line with an American audience or with someone who doesn't watch Hindi films, it would make no sense at all.

The history of Tamil cinema is as old as modern Tamil writing. There are constant references and cross-references to it in literature. Even in (Nivedita's) *Zero Degree,* there is a reference to a scene from the film *Chinna Gounder*. Unless you get its context, it is not jarring or funny or discomfiting in any way. That's why I felt *Zero Degree* was untranslatable.



> **I am unknown outside Tamil Nadu or Kerala.** There is no controversy or award because of which people might know me. This is the sad state of affairs
>
> CHARU NIVEDITA

Q: *There is a larger reach now of Tamil books for an English reading audience. What do you think of this translation boom?*

NK: Right now, translations are sexy because Geetanjali Shree won the International Booker Prize in 2022. In the 90s, because of Vikram Seth's enormous advance and later because of Arundhati Roy's Booker win, Indian writing in English became sexy. This is just a fad. This has also given space to some very subpar translations because everyone is trying to get 20 books translated. We need to maintain the quality of someone like a Charu Nivedita or Ashoka Mitran or Perumal Murugan or Thamizhachi Thangapandian. Translations do have reach, but does the same quality of work reach an audience? I don't know.

Also, there is a lot of focus on the writer's story rather than the story that the writer is telling. And by that, I mean the writer's gender, caste, their politics, and so on. Unless we go beyond these to the quality of their stories, we are in trouble.

CN: There is a translation boom. But unless there is a miracle, as in the case of Perumal Murugan or Vivek Shanbhag, one is unknown outside their own region. I am unknown outside Tamil Nadu or Kerala. There is no controversy or award because of which people might know me. This is the sad state of affairs.

Gsquare Group presents
The Hindu *Lit Fest 2024 in Association with NITTE Education Trust & Christ University. Bookstore partner: Higginbothams*

Kerala in 13 frames

This anthology of ordinary people's stories also pokes a sly finger at society's hypocrisies

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Fehmida Zakeer

There is no dearth of stories about Kerala – academic and journalistic writings, quantitative data that indicates a community bucking the statistics seen elsewhere, all juxtaposed against contemporary discourses. Every story has multiple narratives within, nudging readers to uncover them and figure out the truth for themselves.

When J. Devika, feminist historian, social researcher and translator, wanted to write a book about her home state of Kerala, she turned to contemporary stories in Malayalam that looked intimately at the life of people in the region. The 13 stories in this collection, aptly titled *Feeling Kerala*, offer a mix of voices of well-translated writers as well as those whose works have not yet been as widely read. In these stories, the authors have attempted to capture the realities hidden beneath carefully constructed narratives as also the imaginative ways through which the characters attempt to regain their rightful spaces.

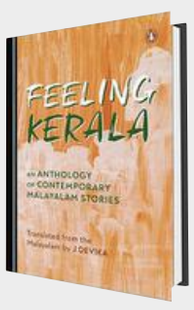
In her introduction to the book, Devika writes: "Literature alone may capture social processes in all their complexities in a regional culture swept up in rapid social change..." The chosen stories in the collection highlight the subtle ways in which the less-privileged are marginalised, scarce resources are claimed in unequal balances, and how migration can result in corralling native people inside strict boundaries while taking away their natural privileges in the name of growth and development. Devika prefaces each of the stories with a short introduction to situate the landscape and ambience for the reader.

Diverse landscapes

The narratives move through urban and rural centres, taking readers through diverse communities and landscapes – forests and coastal areas, humble homes and mansions, places of worship, airport runways and border towns. Even when the stories move through varied themes of climate change, oppression and othering of minorities and natives, and majoritarian high-handedness, they also highlight the continuance of misogynist attitudes towards women.

But the women in these stories are not meek or stubborn. Jinsy, portrayed by Prince Aymanam, refuses to comply with orders to erase the historical role played by her ancestors to suit a classist narrative, while the women of Mangala Lane, as depicted by E.K. Shahina, rise up in a shocking manner to confront the never-ending sexual abuse they face. In Yama's 'Angry Young Woman', the main character must find a way to keep moving forward in the absence of family support, which is also the journey undertaken by Sujatha in the story, 'Sujatha's Houses'.

Feeling Kerala offers a layered insight into the lives of the people of Kerala while also poking a sly finger at the hypocrisies perpetuated by those holding the strings of power and wealth.



Feeling Kerala
Trs J. Devika
Penguin
₹599

The reviewer is an author and translator based in Kochi.

Case of the missing sapphire

Author Kalpana Swaminathan takes readers along on a wild ride as detective Lalli chases a century-old mystery

R. Krithika
krithika.r@thehindu.co.in

When we last met retired policewoman Lalli in Kalpana Swaminathan's *Raagam Taanam Pallavi*, she was recovering from an illness. In the latest, *The Kala Ghoda Affair*, she is in quarantine, having been infected with COVID-19. Not just that. Her usual sidekicks – Inspector Shukla, Savio, Dr. Q and Sita – are also not in a position to be distracted; each one dealing with his or her own issues.

But mysteries don't wait for anyone and neither does Ramona – niece of Lalli's friend Hilla – want to wait. Her parents do not approve of her engagement to her boyfriend, Madan, because of "the family scandal... we're responsible for the disappearance of the Kala Ghoda". Not the South Mumbai neighbourhood that takes its name from the statue of a black horse but a sapphire that disappeared 125 years ago.

The Kala Ghoda Affair
Kalpana Swaminathan
Speaking Tiger
₹499

From here, the reader embarks on a rollicking journey through Mumbai's past and present. The city is as much a character as any of the people in the book. Sita, who narrates the story, offers pithy and keen comments on the happenings and the way the city has changed. The chapter set in Watson's Hotel is a case in point. In just three paragraphs, Swaminathan, through Sita, gives us an idea of the building's history.

Entangled with the larger mystery is Sita's relationship with Savio and his involvement with Mala, a former girlfriend who vanished five years ago and reappears in his life suddenly. How is Mala connected to the Kala Ghoda mystery? What of Madan, the behavioural anthropologist and Ramona's boyfriend? A descendant of the man suspected to have stolen the jewel, does he know more than he is letting on? Then there is Jean Claude, a retired French police officer, following the trail of the *cheval noir* (black horse) laid by the legendary detective Edmund Locard more than 100 years ago.

All these strands come together in a neat denouement with Lalli being in crackling form, as she solves mysteries, advises Sita, climbs in through windows, and more. Here's looking forward to the next Lalli adventure.

How to profit

Monika Halan on why mutual funds should be a part of the Indian investor's portfolio

Prashanth Perumal J.
prashanthperumal.j@thehindu.co.in

Mutual funds have grown hugely popular in India in recent times, with the size of assets under the management (AUM) of mutual funds crossing the ₹50 lakh crore mark at the end of 2023. The total AUM of Indian mutual funds was only around ₹8 lakh crore a decade ago. Monika Halan, author of *Let's Talk Mutual Funds*, talks to *The Hindu* about why mutual funds should be part of the Indian investor's portfolio, the risks involved and how investors can mitigate them.

Let's Talk Mutual Funds
Monika Halan
HarperCollins India
₹399

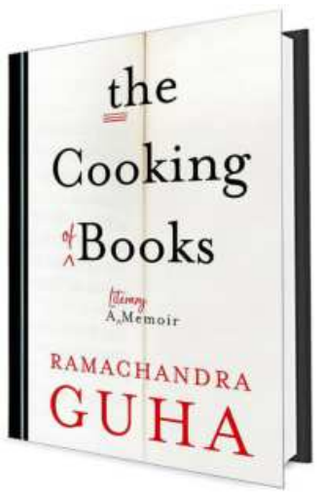
Q: *Why should Indians choose mutual funds over traditional assets such as fixed deposits, gold and real estate?*
Answer: We access different asset classes to build our portfolios. Mutual funds give access to equity, debt and gold through one route. Investing is not just about getting the highest return, it is also about risk, costs and ease of transaction. When you take a lifetime portfolio approach, mutual funds come out ahead of other product types on all these counts.

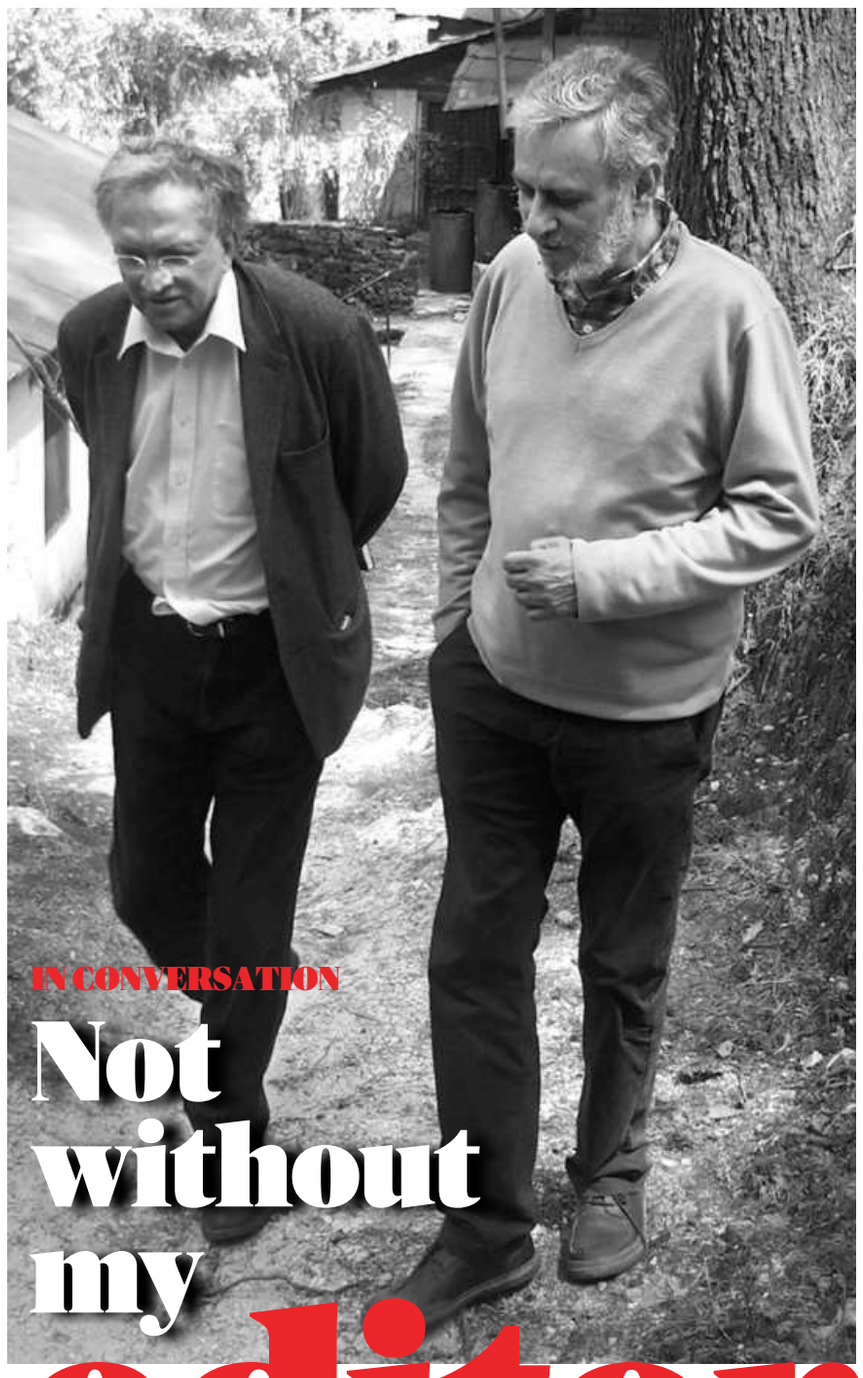
Q: *Fear of loss of capital in stock markets is a major reason why Indians have traditionally invested only in FDs, gold, and real estate. Why should ordinary retail investors trust mutual funds with their money?*
A: While FDs (fixed deposits) have no potential for loss of capital, that possibility exists in both gold and real estate over the short term. Equity is no different – it is over a holding period of at least seven years that the true wealth generating impact of equity is felt. The most efficient and cost effective way to hold a diversified equity portfolio is through a mutual fund. For new investors, buying, holding and funding an index fund on the Nifty or Sensex is the easiest way to get an equity exposure. Onboarding of a more efficient way to managing money is one of the key reasons why mutual funds are being increasingly preferred over the other older ways. Why use 1970s products in the 2020s?

Q: *Many retail investors pick mutual funds based on past returns. How important are past returns? Is there a better way to choose mutual funds?*
A: Past returns are as important as a report card of a student's past performance. It is no promise for future grades, but does give an indication of the potential. Consistent past returns are the right metric to judge a fund by. Take a 10 or 15-year performance history and then look for a fund that stays in the top quartile year after year. The way to choose a mutual fund is to judge by both risk and return. We want a fund with a good risk-adjusted return metric.

Q: *Common advice given to young retail investors is to invest for the long term in mutual funds through SIPs. But are retail investors today aware of the fact that stock markets have in the past suffered long-term bear phases?*
A: That is why the advice is to have a holding period of at least seven years. Most business cycles get worked out in that time and markets respond to growth in the economy. Before you invest in markets you need to understand them. They are not a gambling den or a lottery ticket. There is a science to investing and unless you understand the rules and commit to following them, stay away. Don't blame markets for your own inability to understand them. The long-term Sensex return over 30 years has been 12% year on year. Even post-tax, this is a great long-term rate to create wealth. But it takes time, patience and a basic understanding of the rules of the game.

Science of investing
Monika Halan
(SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)





IN CONVERSATION

Not without my editor

Historian Ramachandra Guha on his literary confidant, Rukun Advani, and a relationship that deepened over long letters, not boozy lunches

A few walks together
Ramachandra Guha (left) and Rukun Advani. (ANURADHA ROY)

Mini Kapoor

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020, historian Ramachandra Guha found himself unable to make his quarterly trips to the archives that nourished and punctuated his writing. Stranded, he "took recourse" to his personal archive, specifically, his correspondence with Rukun Advani, his editor of long standing at Oxford University Press who went on to found the imprint Permanent Black. The result: a writer's memoir of his relationship with his editor, *The Cooking of Books*. In an interview over email, Guha speaks about the book. Edited excerpts:

Q: *You write that as far as you know, this is the first full-length book on the relationship between an author and his/her editor, "at least in English-language publishing". From this personal history, can you identify the hallmarks of a great editor?*
Answer: The epigraph to the book quotes Norman Podhoretz as saying that good editors uniquely combine arrogance with selflessness. Rukun began his career in publishing with impeccable intellectual credentials – two first-class degrees from India's finest university followed by a Ph.D. from Cambridge. That gave him the confidence, early on, to reshape the prose and arguments of sometimes very famous scholars. Yet because he is by temperament so shy and reserved, he never remotely wanted to claim any public credit for his work. He thus met, and meets, these twin criteria better than any other editor I have known or worked with.

Rukun also has an extraordinary range of intellectual and literary interests. This is partly innate, and partly a result of working over the decades with different authors working in different academic disciplines. He is steeped in novels, poetry, plays, and travelogues out of personal interest, and in biographical, historical, and sociological studies out of professional compulsion. In these respects he can, or should be, a model for young editors starting out. He himself believes that his keenest interest, which is in the music of Beethoven, has made him sensitive to the rhythms and cadences of prose. He thinks it necessary to "listen" to the flow of sentences and paragraphs during the process of editing.

Q: *Are these qualities completely overlapping for editors of academic and trade books?*
A: No. Trade editors need to be more interested in marketing and publicity than Rukun is or can be. Rukun dislikes this side of publishing, which is why he has for many years been based in Ranikhet. The danger now is that editors may forget their first and primary duty, which is to polish the prose and refine the arguments of manuscripts before they are published, in favour of promoting their authors after their books are published.

Q: *In what ways did your biography of Verrier Elwin, and Rukun Advani's vital role in it, inform how you went on to write your biography of Mahatma Gandhi?*
A: I think I might have just become a historian and cricket writer without Rukun Advani, even if a less skilled one. But I could never have become any sort of biographer had I not had him as my editor. A biography may be the most difficult of literary forms. In writing on Verrier Elwin, I had to shed the residues of my academic training as a sociologist, and learn to write about human relationships of intensity and complexity. I had to situate my subject's life against the backdrop of the times he lived in, and pay equal attention to Elwin the friend, lover, husband, and father as to Elwin the scholar, writer, and public intellectual.

My book on Elwin went through more drafts than any book I had previously written. Rukun was at hand to improve every draft, in terms of structure, flow, argument, and language.

Q: *This memoir is also, you write, a record of a vanished world in publishing.*
A: One can think of it as a memoir of publishing before the age of Facebook, X, Instagram, and a literary festival every week. More significantly, it records the sort of relationship a writer and editor are unlikely to ever have again – one which endures for so long, and across different genres. Writers change editors as often as they change their smartphone nowadays. I had Rukun Advani as my principal editor for almost two decades, and, even after I began publishing with presses other than the ones he worked with, he has remained my principal literary confidant. Finally, this relationship has been deepened not through boozy lunches or holidays taken together, but by correspondence... except for a few years when we both lived in Delhi.

The point now increasingly forgotten about epistolary relationships is that long letters exchanged by people of a literary bent contain things that the internet and WhatsApp have decimated – the considered expression of sentiment and feeling, the sense of empathetic communication between two people bonded by an old friendship that both strongly valued, the feeling that the letter-writers were crafting or at least carefully putting together sentences that they had the time to carefully think through.

Q: *What advice would you give young writers today?*
A: I would advise them always to follow their own instincts, to write the sort of book their heart or mind tells them to write, not the sort of book they think will make them famous or rich. And I would advise them not to associate themselves publicly with politicians or political parties. Writers are nowadays increasingly tempted to have themselves photographed with powerful and influential men, partly out of personal ambition, and partly because their publisher advises them to do so. Independence of thought, and integrity of vision, will in the long run bring far greater rewards than those constituted by money or fame.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based journalist and critic.

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Human bondage

A diplomat and historian traces the story of India's indentured labour, forced to work in plantations after slavery was abolished

Dammu Ravi

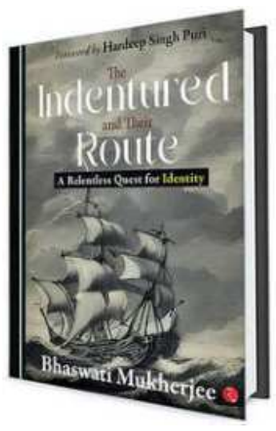
Slavery is one of the worst forms of human exploitation, but no less dreadful is indentured labour, or bonded labour, when thousands of colonised populations were driven to work overseas on plantations and elsewhere after slavery was banned. Diplomat historian Ambassador Bhaswati Mukherjee unravels the story of 'Girmitiyas' in her new book, *The Indentured and Their Route*, illuminating the dark corners of the journey forced on India's forgotten people.

The author traces the indentured struggle to the infamous 1793 Permanent Settlement that triggered a ruthless exploitation of farmers in eastern India, forcing them to enter into 'Girmit' (temporary contract), not realising that their thumbprints would deprive them of their liberty for a lifetime. This exodus embraced people from all castes, communities, including women, united by economic deprivation and bonded by collective hardship. They set sail to unknown destinations in the belief that their salvation lay across the 'Kalapani' (ocean). If they survived the perilous journey on board the ship, battling appalling conditions of hunger, thirst, disease etc., harsh exploitation awaited them on arrival in plantations.

Corollary of imperialism
Mukherjee elaborates that indentured labour followed slavery in a devious way. These bonded labourers were masked as contractual workers, after slavery was abolished in 1833. Dadabhai Naoroji aptly described indentured labour as a natural corollary of imperialism, implying that both forms of exploitation are two sides of the same coin.

The moment of inspiration for Mukherjee came in 2006 when, as India's ambassador to UNESCO and representative to the World Heritage Committee, she sought the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat in Port Louis in the UNESCO world heritage list.

This represented a pivotal point in the journey of indentured labour, much like 'the door of no return' in Senegal's Goree Island, a memorial for thousands of Black slaves who were held in transit there on the way to the Americas. The launching of the 'indentured labour route' project of UNESCO in 2014 was a culmination of the author's cherished initiative. Further, she advocates setting up of a UN Truth Commission on indentured labour to help families of survivors get some closure.



The Indentured and Their Route: A Relentless Quest for Identity
Bhaswati Mukherjee
Rupa
₹595

By the time the British abolished the indentured labour system in 1917, more than 2.2 million indentured labour had moved out of India to about 26 countries, making it one of the greatest mass movements of India's future diaspora worldwide. As identity is the raison d'etre of human existence, indentured labour clung to their culture and to their motherland, even as they walked a lonely and troubled path. In their adopted land, they continued to contribute to the rainbow culture. Befittingly, India honours its diaspora by recognising January 9 as Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, the date when Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest pravasi (overseas Indian) of all, returned to India in 1915 to lead the freedom movement.

The subject of indentured labour evokes emotion and anger which Mukherjee handles delicately. These stories of human bondage and suffering need to be known, narrated and inscribed to enhance our understanding of the past. This book pays tribute to all the diaspora worldwide who have reconnected with their motherland.

The reviewer is a serving Indian Foreign Service officer.

Raising their voice (L to R) Henna inscriptions of the names of Gazans killed since the war started; and writer Vidhya Iyer (in the cap) with Mindy Kaling and other protesters during the recent Hollywood strikes.

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

THE MANY CREATIVE SHADES OF PROTEST

People read work by the likes of B.R. Ambedkar and Gauri Lankesh, and play musical instruments like the *tamate* (a hand drum played by Dalits in southern Karnataka at funerals). "One keeps getting disillusioned, but you always go back because it's important to fight, especially if you're privileged enough to be an English-speaking, upper class man," says Sreenivasa.

At the other end of the country, Angana Chakrabarti, 27, is a freelance journalist covering the Northeast. Every time she hears talk of the war in Gaza, she's sympathetic, but she also wants to scream, 'What about Manipur?' "We have a State that is physically divided, the army is camping at the line between the two communities, things are very far from normal," she says. Chakrabarti has seen radical acts of protest on both sides since the conflict started, whether it is the Meira Paibis, women considered guardians of Meitei society, sitting on the sides of streets all night in vigil against a possible attack; or the call on the Kuki-Zo side to boycott Christmas celebrations, a significant step given most tribals are Christian.

According to Ginza Vualzong, 46, spokesperson for the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF), a key political association of Kuki leaders, if the situation is urgent, they announce a protest spontaneously; at other times, rallies are planned a week or so in advance. For instance, the coffin rally required a lot of planning. "We made dummy coffins for all the people killed in the conflict – at the time there were 100 of them," says Vualzong. As they passed villages, volunteers gathered by the roadside to give the protesters a gun salute. "It was a silent march, no slogans, no noise. We wanted to show that we hadn't received the bodies of our dead, and no justice had been done to our people who had given their lives."

Working with the virtual

Social media has played a vital role in protest movements globally, ensuring the spread of news, moments and images across the world, in a way that both packages the movement and proliferates it. Accounts such as MoTaz on X have kept people apprised of the death and destruction in Gaza through photographs, first-hand accounts and on-ground reporting.

Social media was deployed quite handily during the recent Hollywood strikes, when writers and actors boycotted work and picketed the lots of big studios such as Netflix, Amazon, and Disney for 148 days straight. They were trying to renegotiate their contracts to ensure better pay and safeguards against AI. "There were different themed pickets on different days," says Vidhya Iyer, 30, a writer who is one of the chairs of the South Asian Writers Committee and was a part of the strike. "We had a *Star Wars* picket, a Beyoncé picket, even a singles picket, where single people could picket and meet somebody they like. It was such a long drawn out strike that you had to make it sustainable for people to come out every day for six months. It was hot, people were losing their livelihoods, so we tried to actively make it fun."

These themed pickets turned out to be very popular on platforms such as Instagram, with protesters putting up pictures of their costumes, and others sharing 'picket line bingos' to show off how they had hit all the picketing spots in the city. "Aesthetics have always been a part of protest movements, but the aestheticisation of protests has been a lot more rampant due to social media," says Umut Korkut, 47, professor of international politics at Glasgow Caledonian University. In the last few years, he's been seeing an interesting shift: protest movements on social media are increasingly relying on AI technologies to generate visuals, memes and imagery. For instance, since the war in Gaza began, images of bombed-out homes and ravaged streets have been circulating on social media. The worst have been images of bloodied, abandoned infants. But as a recent report by the AP pointed out, a lot of these are deepfakes, created using AI. It's not to say that all such images are fake; rather, that "the link between the event and imagery is not clear any more because there's now a mediating factor: AI", says Korkut.

3 "In November, there was a protest against the Gaza war on Church Street [Bengaluru]. We knew the police would detain us if we mentioned the word 'Palestine'. So we brought pictures of watermelons instead. Even our slogans were like, 'From the rind to the seed, the watermelon will be free'. There must have been around 200 people. We managed to evade the police initially, but ultimately, they detained some protesters and even filed FIRs against some of us."

— **Aratrika, 28, member of the All India Students Association (AISA)**

"Art is a very intrinsic part of protests in the U.S. For instance, at every protest around the Gaza war I've been to, they hand you a *keffiyeh* [traditional headdress, **in pic**] to wear in solidarity with Palestine. In another case, they used a projector to display a massive Palestinian flag on a Starbucks storefront — a chain whose funds go to Israel. And recently, there was a sit-in on campus, where people were silently working in the library and academic buildings, but the backs of their laptops all had A4 sheets with slogans and pictures. It was an amazing way of infiltrating space."

— **A 26-year-old student of graphic design (who wishes to remain anonymous) in the U.S.**

Ripple effect

Irrespective of the disruptive effects of social media and AI on protest cultures, most mass movements continue to have an indelible physicality – which compels people to come out to the streets. And sometimes, out of this presence, creativity emerges spontaneously. Independent filmmaker and founder of ChalChitra Abhiyaan, Nakul Singh Sawhney, 41, is in the midst of making a documentary (scheduled to come out later this year) on the farmers' protests of 2021, when more than 40,000 farmers converged on the borders of Delhi to protest against three farm bills introduced by the BJP government.

At first, he went to express solidarity. "But the sheer scale of the protest was so fascinating that I started shooting it. I realised this has to be one of the most glorious struggles in history. The nature of it has just never been seen before, where so many people came 200, 300, 400, 500 km from their homes and literally built new cities on the borders of Delhi." Movements like these highlight a slew of other issues in society, says Sawhney. For instance, the farmers' movement also raised questions of gender, with massive participation of women from Haryana, who were making speeches and performing on stage; on the other hand, the men were cooking, many for the first time. There was also talk of caste, with many landless labourers expressing solidarity with landed farmers.

"Punjab and Haryana farmers sorted out historical differences over water-sharing issues, with Haryana farmers just saying, '*Woh humare bade bhai hai* [they are our older brothers]'. These contradictions may not have been fully addressed but there was conversation around it," he adds. Sawhney continues to see the protests' ripple effects in parts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana; whether it is when riots plagued Mewat in July, prompting farmer unions to stand in solidarity with the Meos; or the two *hari chunri panchayats* organised this year – all-women *panchayats* to discuss issues that mattered to them.

"All protest is an act of art and radical imagination," says Fearless Collective's Suleiman. If we look at our own history, she says, whether it is Gandhi lifting salt from the sea or the Chipko movement, where women wrapped their arms around trees to stop them being cut down, they're all a kind of performance art piece. "It just serves to show that art and creativity are not something separate from protests. Art is the first language of protest."

Their COP28 protest ended with protesters raising their hands, inscribed with the names of Gaza's martyrs, to recite the poetry of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. *No spectators at chasm's door... and no one is neutral here. And you must choose your part in the end. So I say: I'm missing the beginning, what's the beginning?*

started shooting it. I realised this has to be one of the most glorious struggles in history. The nature of it has just never been seen before, where so many people came 200, 300, 400, 500 km from their homes and literally built new cities on the borders of Delhi." Movements like these highlight a slew of other issues in society, says Sawhney. For instance, the farmers' movement also raised questions of gender, with massive participation of women from Haryana, who were making speeches and performing on stage; on the other hand, the men were cooking, many for the first time. There was also talk of caste, with many landless labourers expressing solidarity with landed farmers.

"Punjab and Haryana farmers sorted out historical differences over water-sharing issues, with Haryana farmers just saying, '*Woh humare bade bhai hai* [they are our older brothers]'. These contradictions may not have been fully addressed but there was conversation around it," he adds. Sawhney continues to see the protests' ripple effects in parts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana; whether it is when riots plagued Mewat in July, prompting farmer unions to stand in solidarity with the Meos; or the two *hari chunri panchayats* organised this year – all-women *panchayats* to discuss issues that mattered to them.

"All protest is an act of art and radical imagination," says Fearless Collective's Suleiman. If we look at our own history, she says, whether it is Gandhi lifting salt from the sea or the Chipko movement, where women wrapped their arms around trees to stop them being cut down, they're all a kind of performance art piece. "It just serves to show that art and creativity are not something separate from protests. Art is the first language of protest."

Their COP28 protest ended with protesters raising their hands, inscribed with the names of Gaza's martyrs, to recite the poetry of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. *No spectators at chasm's door... and no one is neutral here. And you must choose your part in the end. So I say: I'm missing the beginning, what's the beginning?*

Water's edge Scenes from Biswanath Ghat and (below) a sandbar along the Brahmaputra RITU RAJ KONWAR

Rahul Karmakar
rahul.karmakar@thehindu.co.in

BEYOND THE REIGN OF THE RHINO

Why Biswanath Ghat, on the fringes of Assam's Kaziranga National Park, was named the best tourism village of India for 2023

The man operating the speedboat switches off the motor. We are about to reach the confluence of the Jia Bhoreli and Brahmaputra rivers at Bhomoraguri, the western boundary of Assam's Kaziranga National Park. "That's a calf with its mother," says an Assam forest officer pointing to two Gangetic dolphins leaping in and out of the water in tandem. Now closer to the speedboat, these endangered dolphins bob up once more before vanishing, the sunlight bouncing off the oily chocolate-brown skin of the calf more than its grey-brown mother. "Did you know they are virtually blind, depending on echo-location to move?" says the officer.

The 'big five' flagship species that inhabit the 1,300 sq.km. Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve – the tiger, elephant, rhino, Asiatic wild buffalo, and eastern swamp deer – do not rule a watery part of the wildlife preserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Biswanath Wildlife Division, encompassing a 107 km stretch of the Brahmaputra River, is the domain of the elusive Gangetic river dolphin.

The playful mammals, arching out of the water, have been central to the 'Greater Kaziranga programme' launched in October 2023, that entails opening up the national park beyond Kohora and Bagori, the two rhino-dominated ranges of Kaziranga bearing the brunt of tourist pressure. Apart from boat rides at Bhomoraguri to follow the dolphins, the initiative includes a nature walk in Burachapori Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary (on the western edge of Kaziranga National Park) to explore mangroves, trekking up the hills on the southern fringes, and a nature-meets-spiritualism trip to Biswanath Ghat.

In September, the Ministry of Tourism selected Biswanath Ghat as the best tourism village of India for 2023. The place was chosen from among 791 applications from 31 States and Union Territories.

However, it is uncertain what this entails besides the possibility of investments in the private sector, possibly by local entrepreneurs.

"The rhino will always remain Kaziranga's main attraction but the idea behind the Greater Kaziranga concept is to popularise other natural wonders of the tiger reserve sustainably," says Sonali Ghosh, the first woman field director in Kaziranga's 119-year-old history.

Upping the stickiness factor

Biswanath Ghat is about 240 km north-east of Guwahati. The speedboats docked here are crucial to the forest protection force to monitor this stretch of the Brahmaputra, where rhinos are often poached.

Umatumuni is a small island dotted with medieval temples and connected by a bridge of rocks to Biswanath Ghat. "There are 27 *devalayas* (temples) on the island. These have attracted tourists for years but we hope the recognition for Biswanath Ghat will help improve the infrastructure for more people to come and stay longer," says Pradip Sarma, the local priest at a temple here.

Beyond the Ghat

The opening up of the north bank of the Brahmaputra has seen the birth of new circuits covering Biswanath Ghat, tribal villages along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, and a jeep safari at Panpur, a 40 sq.km. area of wetlands on the western side of the division. "Panpur is one of very few patches of land in our division with 25-30 rhinos. We intend to start an elephant safari soon," says Khagesh Pegu, the divisional forest officer.

Thanks to the Brahmaputra, 75%-90% of the Biswanath Division is watery. A group of grassy sandbars expanding and contracting according to the Brahmaputra's season-dictated mood, are temporary homes for wildlife. Rhinos and tigers inhabit them.

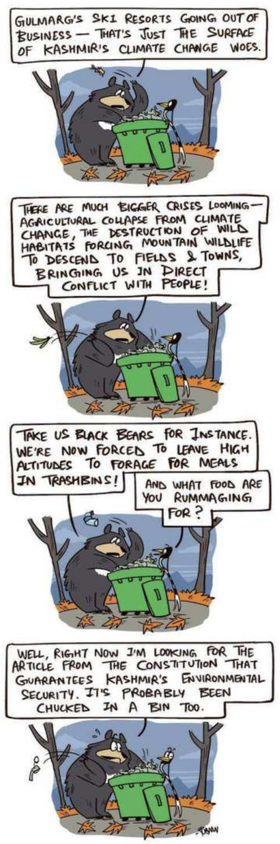
Ghosh says that all tourism activity would inevitably have an impact on wildlife. "But we need to study the carrying capacity. The boating is for six months and there were 2,000 tourists in 2022-2023 [more data is needed to explore capping visitor numbers]," she says. The best season to visit the park is October to April.

"Biswanath Ghat is central to our plans to promote rural and farm tourism," says Assam's tourism minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, pointing to locals undertaking projects to capitalise on the hospitality industry in hitherto unknown places around Kaziranga. Organic farms and small tea growers producing chemical-free beverages in Biswanath and adjoining districts are also hopeful of cashing in on niche tourism. The district has built a reputation, largely localised, with its annual 'Folk Tea Festival', which blends the flavours of tea with Assam's cultural heritage.

The 'best tourism village' tag has not yet brought anything apart from the hope that the recognition may help market the place as a sustainable tourism destination and not a mass-tourism hub; the area does not have enough infrastructure. The idea is to divert some of the tourist traffic to make oft-visited parts of Kaziranga breathe easier.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



INTERVIEW

POWER OF OLDER WOMEN

50-plus is just the beginning, say journalists-turned-podcast hosts Kiran Manral and Shunali Shroff as they reclaim their space

Swati Daftuar
swati.daftuar@thehindu.co.in

Authors and journalists Kiran Manral and Shunali Shroff are not your average 50-year-olds, and are definitely not ready to hang up their boots. In their podcast, *Not Your Aunty*, they discuss everything from the Ozempic craze to climate change to Bollywood's bestie, Orry. Ahead of *The Hindu* Lit Fest 2024, where both are speakers, the podcast hosts talk about the need to reclaim their space as women in an increasingly youth-obsessed world. Edited excerpts:

Question: *How did the* Not Your Aunty *podcast begin?*

Shunali Shroff: One day, Kiran and I were catching up over coffee and lamenting about middle-age and the state of the world and hot flashes and how motherhood is overrated. And then we said, let's do a podcast and see if people will be interested in it.

Kiran Manral: We did wonder if anyone would really want to listen to two middle-aged women talking about these things. But surprise, surprise – people are listening. That's been a pleasant shock to both of us.

Q: *Who are your listeners?*

KM: We thought it would be women in our demographic, but you know, it's also young women. I was at a literature festival in early December, and there were young girls coming up to me and saying that they love the podcast. I was in shock. How is this podcast resonating with that demographic? But no complaints, of course!

SS: You know, there's a devoted listener who is a friend of mine. Very cerebral, very bright – he's a very senior art consultant and runs an ad agency. He says to me the other day, when I told him that it had been a year since we spoke, that he feels like he talks to us every week! Because he listens to the podcast. He said, 'Doesn't it drop every Thursday?' I was baffled, because he's 37, and I thought, my god, a 37-year-old is hooked to our podcast. So I asked him why, and he said, the chemistry works for him because we are both such different people. The other thing he said was that we say a lot of things in the podcast that many people are thinking but not saying.

Listen up Catch Shunali Shroff (left) and Kiran Manral at *The Hindu* Lit Fest 2024 in Chennai on January 26-27. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Kiran and Shunali's go-to podcasts

Empire by William Dalrymple and Anita Anand

Hard Fork by Kevin Roose and Casey Newton

Office Ladies by Jenna Fischer and Angela Kinsey

The Ranveer Show

Q: *So much about the podcast, not least the name, is about where older women find themselves in society...*

SS: There's no better country to feel middle-aged in than India because it happens so swiftly. We have no problem with growing older, but I think that when you reach a certain age you realise that the time you have between now and when you become completely invisible, there's very little of it left. And that is a complaint most women have.

It's a reminder that though you feel young, and you are not ageing that quickly mentally either, from a marketing point-of-view, you are no longer relevant. The TG is now 20- to 32-year-olds. The whole world is focused only on this critical mass of really young people.

Q: *Is the podcast a way to reclaim your space and voice?*

KM: We didn't actually talk about that, but I'm sure it was at the back of our minds. You have to remember that both of us have been kind of forerunners in the digital space. We were early mommy bloggers back when blogging wasn't even a thing. We know the space, even though we might not be making Instagram Reels. We have a very definite social presence. So, to dismiss us just because we've crossed a certain age bracket is to dismiss the host of life experiences that we bring to the table. So I think yes, this is intended to claim our space not just in the social media arena, but the world at large – to say we're here, we're not going away and we're still very relevant.

Q: *Having been friends for so long, how is it working together?*

KM: We started our careers together back at *The Asian Age*. So there is this familiarity with each other. There is a tacit understanding between the two of us as to where we step and where we don't. And I know that Shunali will say the things that I would hesitate to say. I think I weigh my words because I've been on Twitter since 2014 and we know how things have turned out. So I've learned to err on the side of caution.

Epic encounters (Clockwise from far left) A play based on the *Ramayana*; cover of the book *Ramayana: Divine Loophole*; and a still from the Nayanthara-starrer *Annapoorani*. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

POP-A-RAZZI

There were many Ramayanas

We all have our own versions of the epic because it belongs to all of us

When I was a child I wanted to write a version of the *Ramayana* where Jatayu did not die. The death of a great bird who tries to save Sita when Ravana abducts her always left me devastated. I would try to will Jatayu to rise like the Phoenix. I wanted to write the *Jatayu-ana*.

I never did write that story: not because anyone told me I was not allowed to do it. I didn't have the imagination to give Jatayu a new life. But I loved the *Ramayana* because it had bears, monkeys, squirrels and epic battles. To me Ram, Lakshman and Sita were less interesting. The real action lay elsewhere.

Later I realised we all have our own *Ramayanas* because it belongs to all of us. We see our own stories reflected in its magic mirror. The scholar Rakhshanda Jalil told me once there are some 300 Urdu versions. The brilliant writer of Bengali nonsense Sukumar Ray wrote *Lakshmaner Shaktishel*, a spoof based on the Lanka-kanda chapter. There Hanuman, reluctant to travel to a far-off mountain to get a magic herb, suggests they try homeopathy first. There are even quips about undying faith in *swadeshi* medicine long before anyone thought of a ministry for AYUSH.

Bengali *jatra* folk theatre had a version, *Bharat Bidaay,* which reimagines the *Ramayana* as a story where Kaikeyi actually loves Ram more than her own son. But she is coerced by the sage Vishwamitra into sending him into exile because he needed Ram to fight the forces of evil. Chapal Bhaduri, one of the last great female impersonators of Bengali theatre, told me that role was such an emotional powerhouse, the playwright dedicated the script to him.

In America I met Sanjay Patel who grew up in California hearing his parents say '*Siyaram*' whenever anyone sneezed. Hardly interested in Indian culture, he thought it was just *desi* gesundheit. Only later he realised they were saying 'Sita Ram'. In the thrall of X-Men, G.I. Joe and ninjas, he understood much later he had superheroes in his own cultural backyard. By then he was a storyboard artist for Pixar and he turned his skills towards telling those stories he had once ignored. I still remember the thrill of stumbling upon his book *Ramayana: Divine Loophole*. The illustrations leapt off the page – Hanuman streaking across a sooty chocolate sky, his tail on fire, setting Ravana's palace ablaze in a bonfire of orange and yellow. It was as if he had opened another portal into my grandmother's *Ramayana*.

At a time when a film is yanked off Netflix because

An epic written some 2,000 years ago can leap across time and cultures with the ease of Hanuman himself. And there is something profoundly inspiring about that

devotees are incensed at the suggestion that Ram might have eaten meat, the space for reinterpreting the *Ramayana* is shrinking. Some would argue that artists and writers need to understand that this is a sacred story for millions, not an artistic plaything for a few. M.F. Husain certainly felt that sting as did animation artist Nina Paley whose film *Sita Sings the Blues* told the story from a woman's perspective as a 'tale of truth, justice and a woman's cry for equal treatment'. "Just Google 'ban Sita sings the blues' and you will see all the petitions out there," she told me. Paley understood that what to her was a story was a sacred cow to others.

The cultural imprint of stories like the *Ramayana* run deep. She remembered a woman in Thiruvananthapuram who had grown up Christian but was always being told to be "more like Sita". Yet when her husband suddenly left her in the U.S. and went into radio silence in India, Paley saw parallels in her own story and the *Ramayana*. That tells us that an epic written some 2,000 years ago can leap across time and cultures with the ease of Hanuman himself. And there is something profoundly inspiring about that. Very little in the western world, including the *Bible*, has that kind of cultural currency.

In that sense it's amusing whenever a new *Ramayana* controversy arises, to see people wag their fingers and remind us that artists would not imagine taking such liberties with other religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism. But that was the strength of the great Hindu gods and their stories as told in our epics. They were *apna* stories, sacred yet down to earth. We could imagine their characters as our friends, families and neighbours, beloved and fallible, in fact more beloved because of their fallibility. When Chapal Bhaduri quivered with suppressed heartbreak as Kaikeyi, his eyes glistening with unshed tears, his audience, unperturbed by this unfamiliar twist in an old epic, wept with him.

They knew their *Ramayana* was not hurt in this retelling. There were many *Ramayanas* even though they told one story. That was always its greatness.

Sandip Roy *is the author of* Don't Let Him Know, *and likes to let everyone know about his opinions whether asked or not.*

Stories that crossed borders A mural from Thailand, depicting Rama from the *Ramakien*. (GETTY IMAGES)

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

Two epics and the idea of dharma

While the *dharma-shastra* was for the elite, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were for the masses

The earliest *Ramayana* retellings do not refer to the *Lakshman rekha*. The earliest *Mahabharata* retellings do not refer to Draupadi's *vastra-haran*. Both these ideas come from later versions of the epics. Does that make the oldest versions, composed in Sanskrit, the authentic narratives over which layers were added to make them more appealing to new target audiences?

Original geography

When we scan the Vedic corpus, we do come across names such as Dasharatha, Shantanu, Yayati and Krishna; but none of the stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The best evidence we have of these stories' antiquity is from the Ganga basin when red-black pottery was replaced by painted greyware 3,000 years ago; here, villages of the 21st century continue to have names found in the two epics.

We hear of the phrase *itihasa-purana* in late Vedic literature (800 CE). It refers to the hundreds of stories found in the Vedic corpus explaining how various *mantras* came into being, how they summoned gods to help people and how various rituals originated. But there is no mention of *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*.

Mahabharata is located on a stretch between what is today Delhi and Gujarat (Dwarka). *Ramayana* indicates movement through Bihar (Videha) towards Narmada. There is no reference to any southern river beyond Narmada in the earliest *Ramayana* manuscripts. Kishkinda and Lanka as per the oldest texts are full of sal trees, found in present-day Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, but not in South India.

Mauryan crisis

The epics themselves were written much later, around 2,000 years ago, by which time there were trade routes from the Himalayas to the coasts. By the Mauryan era (300 BCE) the old privileged position of Brahmins was gone. While Mauryan kings did patronise Buddhism, they were essentially cosmopolitan, heavily influenced by the Persians and Greeks. The 2,300-year-old Ashokan edicts indicate familiarity with Buddhists and Brahmins, but but not with the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*.

The word *dhamma* was popular among Buddhists and indicated a monastic lifestyle. Brahmins challenged this view and argued that the concept is about fulfilling household obligations. Thus began the movement to popularise *dharma* through *dharma-shastra* texts and the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The tales, once told by wandering minstrels, started being narrated by Brahmin priests during royal ceremonies.

The purpose of the tales was not to narrate history, but to remind kings of an ancient glorious time when Vedic ways were respected, and kings were successful as they valued Brahmin advice.

Educational narratives

The composition of the *dharma-shastra* and *itihasa*, which began around 300 BCE, found success around 300 CE with the support of the Gupta kings. This was also the period when *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* reached their final form in written Sanskrit.

While the *dharma-shastra* was for the elite, the epics were for the masses. They helped everyone understand concepts such as *raj-dharma* (duties of kings), *stri-dharma* (duties of women), and *apad-dharma* (duties in times of crisis). The epics were tools to educate newly emerging regional kings of the subcontinent. They also told stories of the price of upsetting Brahmins such as Parashurama and Aurva, whose wrath could destroy kings. This helped establish Brahmins as statecraft consultants.

Soon, every king wanted to mimic ancient Vedic kings. So they sponsored regional works on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and read them out in court to affirm their royal status. The earliest stone artworks on the epics appear around the 5th century CE in the Madhya Pradesh region and by 8th century CE in the Deccan region, sponsored by Gupta and Chalukya kings.

The epics inspired kings of Southeast Asia, too. They were carved on grand temple walls in Java's Prambanan by the 10th century and Cambodia's Angkor Wat by the 12th century. In the 18th century, the Thai king of Buddhist faith authored the *Ramakien* to illustrate his vision of ideal kingship.

Since the 19th century, it has become an agenda to project the epics as describing authentic historical events, a privilege given to the *Bible* by Christians, and to the *Quran* by Muslims. In each case the belief in historicity has been challenged by scientists, but dismissed by believers. Since belief, not science, props up political power, science will always have to make way for faith. As the history of the epics reveals, it has never been about what actually happened. It has always been about what people gossip about.

The epics inspired kings of Southeast Asia, too. They were carved on grand temple walls in Java's Prambanan by the 10th century and Cambodia's Angkor Wat by the 12th century.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Resourceful declarer

North-South vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from the Norwegian Teams Championship some years ago. The contract would surely have failed had West led a low heart, but South bid hearts and West did not want to give South a cheap heart trick. Many would feel the same way.

South won the opening spade lead with dummy's ace and ran the jack of clubs for a much-needed finesse. East, thankfully, held the king, and South cashed four club tricks. East came under serious discarding pressure on the last two clubs. He shed a low heart, a subtle error in hindsight, but what else? A spade or a diamond discard and South could set up a trick in that suit. The defence would not be able to take more than three heart tricks provided South did not cover the ten of hearts with the queen. East chose to discard another heart. South ran the nine of spades into East's jack and East cashed the king of hearts before exiting with a low diamond. South won in hand with the king, crossed to dummy with the ace of diamonds, and led another diamond.

There was nothing the defence could do. Should East play low on the third diamond and let West win the trick, West would have to give South the queen of hearts. East could rise with his queen on the third round, but that would make dummy's 10 of diamonds the ninth trick. Even if East had started with both diamond honors, he would be forced to lead a spade from his queen-four into dummy's king-seven. Very nicely played!

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

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♣	Pass	1◇	Pass
1♡	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	3NT	All pass

Opening lead: 10 of ♠

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Feels for wheels

Berty Ashley

1 On this day in 1981, DeLorean started production of its sports car in Northern Ireland. The DMC-12 had a unique look, with its gull-wing doors and a brushed stainless-steel outer body. Unfortunately, it lacked power and after producing just 9000 units, the company shut it down. In 1985, its futuristic looks led to it being used as a time machine in a science fiction franchise. In the movies, the car, when driven at 88mph, could traverse time. Which movie series is this?

2 The 1982 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am was the first Firebird to have a factory fuel injection and hatchback body. A TV series redesigned the car slightly, to be completely black in colour with red lights in the front to give it a futuristic look. Known as the Knight Industries Two Thousand, it ran on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and could talk to its driver. You would have seen this car in which series, whose theme music is famously iconic?

3 This action TV series that ran for just 14 episodes follows an ex-cop who is recruited for a secret government mission, in which he must ride an all-terrain attack motorcycle that can travel at 480 kmph to fight crime. Driven by the character Jesse Mach, what was the name of this bike, and hence the series?

4 The GMC Vandura van had a lot of interior space. It featured in a 1980s action-adventure TV series about four former members of the US Army special forces, who escape military prison and drive around in the van, trying to clear their names while helping wronged people. The iconic black van with a large red stripe was almost always driven by the protagonist Bosco 'BA' Baracus. Which series was this?

Travel in style A famous car from a TV series, on display at the Santa Ynez Historical Museum in California. (GETTY IMAGES)

5 The 1968 Chevrolet Sportvan 108 had very comfortable interiors and usually came painted in teal. After a very famous cartoon series sported this van as its main mode of transport, its sales went up, and till date, many are seen with the same paint job. Known as the 'Mystery Machine', this colourful van appeared in which series, that was named after its title character?

6 This was actually a concept car known as the Lincoln Futura made by Ford, and was designed to look like a Manta Ray with two globular glass cockpits in front like eyes. First seen in a 1966 TV series, over the years it was shown to have infrared cameras, a super-magnet, an ultrasonic radar, a parachute, a battering ram, a projector and a phone. What is the name of this vehicle, and in which series would one have seen it?

7 The Aston Martin DB5 made its first appearance on screen driven by the lead character of a 1964 movie. What made it different from the commercially available model was the gun that popped out from behind the front indicators, the bullet shield over the rear window, and a three-way revolving number plate. Which character drove this car, that at one point of time, was known as the 'most famous car in the world'?

8 The Ectomobile (Ecto-1) is a 1959 Cadillac Miller-Meteor Sentinel limo-style endloader combination car, which appeared in a series of movies in the 80s, where it was converted into an ambulance. One of its most vital components was a Proton Cannon that could be used against giant-sized entities. In the movies, this converted ambulance is ready to help anyone experiencing paranormal activity. If in such a situation, who you gonna call?

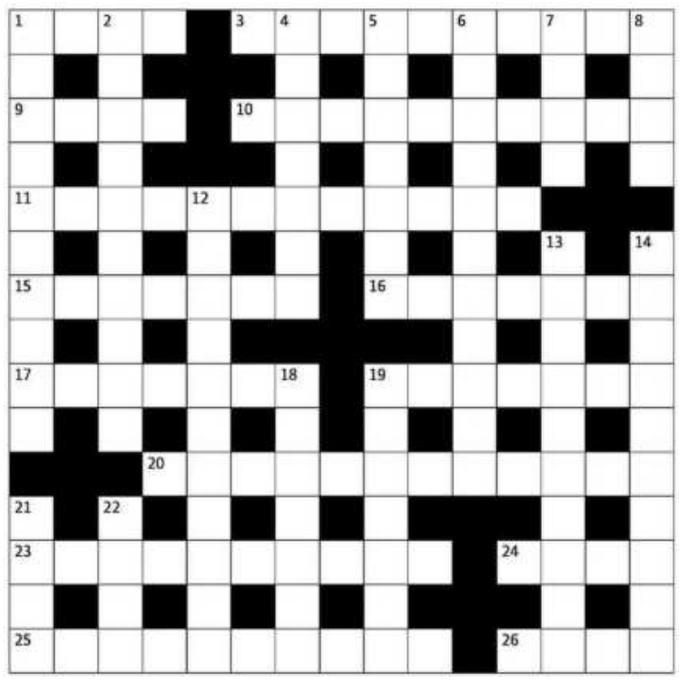
9 The Mach Five is a fictional car created by the character Daisuke Mifune, aka 'Pops Racer', for his son Go to race. It's a white car with a giant red 'M' on its hood. Its iconic steering wheel hub has seven buttons with a special function for each. Originally written as a manga comic, the story was eventually converted into an animated series, and became a global hit and even spawned a film. What is the name of this series?

10 The Ford Mustang Shelby GT500, nicknamed 'Eleanor', sported a blistering 360 horsepower, and was used as a central character in a 2000 film, where a retired car thief tries to steal 50 vehicles in one night. In an earlier 1974 film with the same name and plot, the car used was a 1971 Mustang Sportsroof. What is the name of these two films, spread 26 years apart?

Answers

1. *Back to the Future*
2. *Knight Rider*
3. *Street Hawk*
4. *The A-Team*
5. *Scooby Doo, Where are you?*
6. Batmobile, *Batman*
7. James Bond
8. Ghostbusters
9. *Speed Racer*
10. *Gone in 60 seconds*

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3290



Across

1 Check section of fire insurance (4)
3 Old fellow satisfied, calm, drinking beer in reflection (10)
9 'As you'd say, the whole thing?' 'A few' (4)
10 Questionably demand list separated into unconnected items (10)
11 Boredom beaten: dessert's announced in fancy part of hotel (7,5)
15 Pickles plays the fiddle (7)
16 German, let down in the end, scowls and scowls (7)
17 Former lover takes care of spreads (7)
19 Foolish – as in, inefficient (in earliest stages) (7)
20 Germ attendee disseminated in public function (4-3-5)
23 Thrash musicians getting rich pastries (5,5)
24 Relish with which duck and root vegetable knocked back (4)
25 Inadequacy shown by nephew wearing suit in untidy state (10)
26 In announcement, apprehend – in the main? (4)

Down

1 Revolted by former First Family: they're in the White House Garden (4,6)
2 Everyman's to act as chair? That's unreasonable (10)
4 Puzzles, games in play (7)
5 Amateur served up food somewhere in North Germany (7)
6 Authorising, penalising (11)
7 Loud, ultimately; lady ululating, primarily? (4)
8 Mask and whip (4)
12 Phone Empire about blockbuster (11)
13 Cautious ponder (10)
14 Claims señoras sit around (10)
18 Brood, feeling blue: you need a rest (3-4)
19 Not initially gaping, small canopies (7)
21 Second piece of recording equipment making racket (4)
22 Welsh actress taking part: Greek character (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3289

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

Living on hope

It's the longing for home and family that sustains profoundly the struggle of the people of Palestine

Shelley Walia
shelleywalia@gmail.com

"And when we die,/ Our bones will continue to grow,/ To reach and intertwine with the roots of the olive/ And orange trees, to bath in the sweet of Yaffa sea. / One day we will be born again when you are not there."

– **Mosab Abu Toha, Palestinian poet**

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R KUMAR

When you exist within an apartheid state, daily surviving, or learning to "survive survival", it is your pride that comes to your rescue in a celebration of the undying spirit, of hope and of love. As Mahmoud Darwish, the great national poet of Palestine, would say, "The homeland is distant and near, and in this everyday grief and everyday death, the writing gets written..." with pains of longing unremittingly transforming "the lyrics of loss into indefinitely postponed drama of return".

You vaguely remember your village and the hope of retrieving all those childhood things you left behind in your room. In some of the most poignant lines in the poetry of dispossession, the poet Mosab expresses a feeling of *saudade* remembering his mother, "Do you still lie on your mattress,/ Reading from the Quran,/ Do you still use your reading glasses, or have they been blinded/ by the smoke of the bomb,/ Do you still drink your morning coffee/ With dad or have you run out of gas/ Do you still know how to make my favourite cake/ Last month was my 31st birthday/ You promised to make my birthday cake on the / Rubble of my bombarded house.../ You are my shelter/ when I am scared/ I am about to die/ Are you still alive?"

It is this longing for home and family that profoundly sustains the struggle of the people of Palestine. It is a sustaining impulse imbued both in their blood and their land. Many still remember in their hearts their childhood spent laughing and frolicking in the citrus groves in Yaffa or olive fields in Qumya. How can you keep people out of places where their mothers and grandmothers played freely?

The Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan's lines echo in the soul of every Palestinian: "Enough for me to die on her earth/ be buried in her/ to melt and vanish into her soil/ then sprout forth as a flower/ played with by a child from my country./ Enough for me to remain in my country's embrace/ to be in her close as a handful of dust/ a sprig of grass a flower." Swaying tantalisingly between longing and despair, the dwellers walk along the shore picturing the sky full of birds and the waters warm and silent, but their hearts flooded with memories.

Darwish expresses the joy of the Palestinians seeing their flag flutter in the wind: "Flying on the horizon, the flag is a symbolic recompense for the humiliations of the past, a practical commitment to changing the present, and an epic aspiration for winning the future." Returning from years of exile, the uprooted inhabitants under the shade of the flag imagine that they have finally arrived, "carrying the thirst of twenty years in their souls for the spring now under siege". Their flag is indeed their identity, their truth, their history.

Justifiably, Palestinians have a dying pact of blood with their land, with their vibrant history of love, freedom and laughter, before the invaders came. Their resistance, their shared fears and hopes, their enduring struggle perseveres against the numerous barricades between the people and their right to return to a normal life. Besides the activists and poets who tell their personal stories in a carnival of optimism that abides in their very soul, there are many pro-Palestinian supporters across the world who have unswervingly demonstrated against the plummeting accountability of Israel to human rights violations, a serious lapse of all global institutions for the maintenance of peace and justice.

Truly "plagued" with crimes against humanity, the Palestinians daringly hold out against the threat of the arrogant and the inhuman in a struggle founded on radical notions of dialogue and participation. Their call for sacrifice, their valiant struggle and their stories supersede any political manifesto. Their fidelity to their homeland is deep and sturdy in the face of media misrepresentation and its complicity in collectively sidelining and silencing the people. The horror of decades of dispossession, and the gradual vanishing of a landscape are haunting and provocative signs that have motivated generations to fight for a transformative politics of hope, of freedom and recognition. No one will be silenced again.

The genocide we are witnessing in Gaza is the highpoint of over a century of European imperialism, European Zionism and American conspiracy and deception. The horrific crimes done to the people of Gaza can only be undone, if stakeholders and like-minded people become radically open, defiantly inviting and profoundly just. Rage will not help. Hardening of our hearts will not free the oppressed. And when the ongoing Nakba comes to an end and the fight against apartheid leads to a free Palestine, it is then that we humans have the legitimate right to celebrate freedom, autonomy, life and dignity.

As writer and activist Arundhati Roy optimistically remarked at the World Social Forum, 2003, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

Heroes and hero worshippers

By heroism, humans seek to win the adulation of a few people who they feel are close to them

G.L. Krishna
krishnagl@iisc.ac.in

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Even good scholars and scientists shy away from publicly siding with truth when their intimate friendships are at stake. They lose their courage and independence in trying to keep intact the adulation of a few friends. Many heroes rust out by crawling to hero-worshippers.

All heroism that man seeks appears to have for its end the adulation of a few people who he feels are close to him. There is an interesting episode towards the end of Napoleon's life that attests this truth.

Napoleon, who was one of the greatest military heroes in history, played a key role in the French Revolution and was the first emperor of France (1804-15). After a series of military defeats, he was forced to abdicate and exiled to the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean where he spent the last six years of his life.

The living conditions at St. Helena were not particularly hard for the emperor. He had the company of loyal officers and was supplied with good food and allowed to move freely. St. Helena had a good climate too. But the emperor, a captive in exile, seemed to waste away day by day. There was a very private reason for the emperor's pain.

Marie-Louise, who he had fondly loved and married, sent no word for him when he was in exile. Day after day, he waited for solace from her letter that would never come. Eventually, he received the news of her marriage with another man and this brought the final blow to the emperor's already marooned life. Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, the master writer of Kannada, suggests in one of his best known stories that Marie-Louise's departure from Napoleon's life was a defeat more gruesome than all the military losses the great General had suffered.

All external losses can perhaps be made good if there are intimate friends who console and bring solace. But if such friends are lost, even victories appear barren. This fact of the human psyche perhaps explains why heroes die craving for the approval of their hero-worshipping friends. The problem has no easy solutions. As someone said, human beings are lovers first and heroes next.

Reading alone won't maketh a 'perfect' human; be observant

Self-improvement is a never-ending practice of introspection; try to consolidate strengths and overcome weaknesses

Arun Sahu
arun.sahu68@gmail.com

GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

"Could you please suggest some books related to self-development," a young man asked. An appropriate answer did not strike me instantly since I had not read any specific book for my self-development as a child or an adult.

Self-development, to me, is not an end in itself but a continuous process resulting from fierce scrutiny of oneself in different times, spaces and contexts while dealing with people, places and institutions. When one is young, the family, the peer group, schools, teachers and elders become reference points. Their habits and responses to different situations intensely affect a tender mind. For instance, I have been amazed by my father's routine of waking up at 4 a.m. and spending at least two hours on his lifelong passion for medicine, literature and poetry. I learnt from him to make sacrifices for one's passion. Similarly, I was deeply influenced by my mother's empathy and kindness to one and all, both critics and admirers.

Stories, fables, folk tales and classics made an indelible impact. Unfortunately, my grandparents were not alive to tell me stories, and my parents told me some. *Chandamama*, a children's magazine, fulfilled that need to some extent. I read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as a young boy, which elevated my imagination and curiosity. I listened to the Puranas and Bhagavatha. As I grew up, I read other epics, classics and literature of other cultures. I watched dance, drama and theatre. I learned to appreciate music.

Three books which stuck with me immensely when I was young were *Parajaa* and *Maati Mataala* of Odia novelist Gopinath Mohanty and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Mohanty's exquisite literary craftsmanship was dipped in the acute sense of humanism. Hemingway, of course, opened a new way of thinking – how to express what to express with precision and intensity. Reading a good book is like interacting with a brilliant mind, and there is no substitute for it for self-development.

As I entered adulthood, I struggled to balance body and beauty, emotion and logic, diffidence and decisiveness, dreams and reality, and failure and success. Every failure offered me an opportunity to introspect and made me stronger and bolder; every relationship made me mature and wiser. Every personal loss taught me to value the near and dear ones more. As I started working, I met many personalities with different skills and expertise – academics, bureaucrats, businesspeople, diplomats, sportspersons, artists and filmmakers.

I am hesitant to suggest "self-development" as a project for which one can read specific books in a time-bound manner. For me, it is a never-ending practice of introspection till one lives. Each individual is different, endowed with different abilities, passions, and dispensations. So are their circumstances. As one passes through the various stages of life, one must recognise one's strengths and weaknesses and consolidate the strengths while overcoming the shortcomings. It's an inward-looking activity, and people, institutions, situations, and books can only help one provide choices for personal growth and self-development.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

Temples stand as a testament to our age-old customs and traditions. ('The great temple revival'; Jan. 14) It is the duty of the state to protect monuments of national importance. Rejuvenating lost structures is a gift to future generations. Rather than viewing temples through a political lens, we should look at them from the point of view of personal responsibility.
Viveka Vardhan Naidu Bhyripudi

That several of our renowned temples are getting a makeover after decades of neglect is refreshing. It will undoubtedly prompt a surge in visitors, allowing us to showcase our cultural and religious heritage. But these religious places should help in the moral and spiritual transformation of the people.
Kamal Laddha

Ancient temples embody the cultural ethos of the country. The temples, built during the regimes of different Hindu emperors, showcased precious architecture. Indian history is also replete with stories of patronage for temples by non-Hindu rulers. They should not be used for politics.
G. Ramasubramanyam

Power couple

The promising biography of Narayan and Sudha Murthy has appeared not a day too soon. ('Writing my way into non-fiction'; Jan. 14) The story of how Murthy co-founded Infosys Technologies with monetary help from his wife is almost folklore. Similarly, Sudha being the only woman employee at TELCO is also well known. One hopes the book will bring other little-known facts to light.
Narendra Dani

Business of truth

The authors have been bold enough to debunk theories involving 'love jihad', 'population jihad' and 'minority appeasement', all terms coined by the ruling dispensation. The journalists deserve a pat on the back for calling a spade a spade. They have presented cogent arguments against the theories propagated by vested interests to stoke communalism.
C.V. Aravind

Laughing out loud

PM Modi's scuba diving adventure in Lakshadweep has been an immense boost to tourism in the unexplored waters of our Indian islands. ('Green humour'; Jan. 14) The cartoon didn't spare Maldives either! The dialogue between the birds warns of human intervention.
K. Nehru Patnaik

Holy muse

The painting of an iconic Benares ghat by James Prinsep is captivating. ('Painting Benares'; Jan. 14) The people aboard the boats and the throng of pilgrims on the shore come to life. It is heartening to note that the DAG Exhibition showcased all of these prints that were a veritable feast for the eyes.
N. Rama Rao

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Fear on screen
When people cheer, smile, and enjoy violence on screens, whether for good or bad, it signals a societal loss
Sajraj S.

At the final frontier
A shelter where life coexists with death, where life-support systems are as much part of the infrastructure
V.S. Raghavan

Monkey tales
They stray from a forest and the very sight of them amuses all
C.V. Sukumaran

The saga of a room
There were old books competing with the latest. The covers look faded, the pages moth eaten and yellowed
Vidya Vasudevan

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.

Stories from the kiln (Clockwise from below) Asish Chowdhury; Kumbhar Ismail Hussain's family at work; Kushala Vora's installation; Birender Kumar Yadav's homage to brickmakers; Hayley Coulthard and Rona Rubuntja's work; and Astha Butail in her studio.

INTO THE HEART OF CLAY

The second edition of the Indian Ceramics Triennale features 60 artists from 12 countries, and subjects that straddle the personal and the political

Gautami Reddy

We manifested this," declares Vineet Kacker, artist and one of the six founding members of the Indian Ceramics Triennale, which returns for its second edition in the newly opened Arthshila gallery in Okhla, New Delhi. All practising ceramists, Kacker, along with Anjani Khanna, Madhvi Subrahmanian, Neha Kudchadkar, Reyaz Badaruddin, and Sharbani Das Gupta, describe the triennale as "first and foremost a passion project," brought together to showcase ceramics – or rather, clay.

Aptly themed Common Ground, the triennale brings together over 34 powerful art projects by more than 60 artists from 12 countries. Each artist's proposal, chosen through an open call, addresses diverse critical issues and perspectives while being bound by clay. The mission is straightforward: to challenge the conventional perception of ceramics and give it the platform it deserves.

"Ceramics have often been linked to functionality and decoration, and not commonly considered as an artistic medium," shares Khanna. "Bringing about this shift is of utmost importance for us." This shift is realised by incorporating a range of artists, from traditional and contemporary practitioners working with ceramics to those engaged in highly multidisciplinary practices involving performance, sound and even Virtual Reality (VR) – all firmly grounded in the realm of ceramics.

Mirror to the everyday

Tradition, often confined to functionality, is thoroughly explored through multiple presentations at the triennale. This includes a showcase by the national award-winning artist Om Prakash Galav from Alwar, Rajasthan, belonging to a family of potters, who makes the familiar unfamiliar through contemporary terracotta creations. He explores the abstract concept of *Shunya* (the state of nothingness) through pieces that diminish in size from large to the smallest, almost requiring a magnifying lens to appreciate.

Hailing from the Lodia district of Gujarat, master artist Kumbhar Ismail Hussain and his family are showcasing ancient Kutch pottery and painting reinvented to mirror their everyday life. The vibrancy of indigenous life also finds expression in ceramic pots crafted by Australian aboriginal artists Hayley Coulthard and Rona Rubuntja. The pieces are painted with luscious landscapes of their native Hermannsburg, while miniature figures of humans and animals adorn the lids, adding a touch of whimsy.

The artist-curators of the triennale have harnessed the power of cross-cultural collaborations too, to unlock individual potential and creative energies. Potters Lota Ismailbhai Husen and Kumbhar Alimamad Dhavad in Kutch, and Santosh and Rakhi Warekar from the Warak Cluster in Jaipur, closely collaborated with curators Rajesh Kulkarni and Raju Sutar of Creative Dignity, an initiative to energise the craft ecosystem. Together, they have created a striking installation titled *Lost and Found*, composed of arranged *lotas* – or pots – as a means to revive and honour the ordinary vessels used for water and grain across India, as well as the clusters of people who craft them.

Similarly, in a unique collaboration among artists and makers across continents, Ugandan artist Lilian Nabulime and British artist Andrew Burton will work with the women of Mandi Village in South Delhi to build a structural installation out of clay and cow dung, drawing from the visual of huts covered in cow dung cakes, which is used as fuel in both rural and urban households.

Each project emphasises the importance of embracing the handmade as India navigates its transition into a digital ecology. "The boundaries between different disciplines are becoming more fluid, and clay's unique properties allow it to be a common ground for artists, designers, and creators to come together and explore innovative possibilities," says Subramaniam, herself a versatile ceramic artist.

Not limited by the medium

The creations on display respond to a spectrum of subjects, including political and environmental issues, as well as the artists' personal concerns, reflecting both philosophical reflections and contemporary experiences. New and emerging ceramic artists Birender Kumar Yadav and Asish Choudhury pay homage to the brickmakers whose labour in clay goes unnoticed, while Munich-based Yulia Repina takes it a level further, inviting viewers to use VR to uncover the range of emotions that lie beneath her ceramic busts of human figures, while Canadian artist of Indian heritage Heidi McKenzie combines ceramics with photography to document women who migrated from India to the Caribbean to Canada three generations ago due to colonisation, presenting her work in a porcelain tile quilt.

"Performance is another one of the dynamic approaches intersecting with clay that we are exploring," notes Subramaniam. Tel Aviv-based artist and sibling duo Roy Mayaan and Erez Mayaan, also known as the Mayaan Brothers, will showcase *Play with Me*, a performance where they engage in a playful game of catch with a ceramic ball, as a means to highlight the delicate bond shared between siblings. In a highly fascinating experiment, *Copper Sounds*, artist duo Isaac Stacey and Sonny Lee Lightfoot from the United Kingdom, will present and play sonic instruments made using clay.

Overall, the Indian Ceramics Triennale seems to suggest that while the technical aspects of clay are crucial, the approach to endlessly explore the material holds even greater significance. "Some of us began as functional potters, and over time, our practice expanded into a more artistic realm," adds Kacker, signalling a period of transition that began in the 80s when the place and position of ceramics began to evolve within the art world.

Encouraging diversity

Over the years, there has been a notable increase in the number of shows featuring ceramics by Indian artists. Galleries are increasingly embracing the material and commercial possibilities of clay, and ceramic artists are gaining visibility at art fairs and museums including the major exhibition *Passages From India* at Northern Clay Center in Minneapolis, U.S., in 2021, and *Multiple Realities: Voices in Indian Contemporary Ceramics*, currently ongoing at the Clayarch Gimhae Museum in South Korea.

"Clay is the most ancient medium of expression, and ceramic cultures are found all over the world," says Subramaniam. While artists from India have been deeply rooted in the rich cultural history of the region, some have also been significantly influenced and inspired by Japanese, British and American artists who, in turn, drew inspiration from Eastern ceramic cultures. The cross-cultural exchanges have played a major role in shaping the artistic journey. "Comparing ceramic cultures is an impossible task. But having said that, Indian ceramicists have finally been receiving critical recognition globally, and the triennale has played a significant role."

Taking pride in the process, Kacker adds, "Our commitment to selecting artists through an open call sets us apart. We welcome submissions from people of all backgrounds, with or without prior experiences, as long as their work with clay aligns with our curatorial theme." This experience has unveiled the depth and diversity of practices artists are engaged in, some that even as practising artists and organisers, they were not familiar with.

The Indian Ceramics Triennale is on till March 31.

The culture writer and editor specialises in reporting on art, design and architecture.

Thinking large

Beyond the exhibition, the triennale will host public talks, workshops and walkthroughs with an aim to invite, educate and inspire audiences through dialogue and practice. Additionally, there will be two parallel exhibitions — a group show featuring over 60 artists who are members of the International Academy of Ceramics at Shridharani Gallery in Triveni Kala Sangam, and a large-scale installation made of columns that will adorn the India Art Fair grounds next month. Components for the project will be crafted by more than 100 ceramists across the country to collectively represent their artistry.

Conflict in the everyday

T.V. Santhosh may not label himself an activist, but his work reflects his political and ideological views

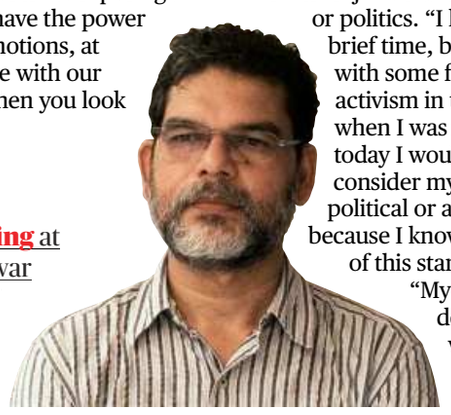
Anasuya Menon
anasuya.m@thehindu.co.in

Ideas of conflict and violence continue to be at the heart of T.V. Santhosh's work. His latest show, *History Lab and the Elegy of Visceral Incantations*, a solo after a decade-long hiatus, at Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai, examines how the twin concepts have become a part of our everyday experience.

Santhosh's oeuvre is political, powerful, yet also personal. The works on display – including watercolour paintings featuring the protagonist's image in various dystopian scenarios and Santhosh's persuasive sculptural installations – are an attempt to understand why history is infested with stories of conflict and war. "It is about looking at the evolution of war from the point of view of technological development," he says. "How weapon technology redefined strategies and the impact of warfare, where innocent civilians were also killed. It is about history itself where there are multiple readings and clashes of view points, truth and agendas."

Humanistic approach

An artist of international repute, whose works are regulars at auctions, Santhosh's art has constantly questioned the manipulation of reality by politics and media. "We look at reality through the filters of news reportage and history. They have the power to play with our emotions, at times even interfere with our sense of justice. When you look at things from a larger humanist point of view, you realise that there is always an alternative, but that it never seems to happen."



It is about looking at the evolution of war from the point of view of technological development

Yet he rejects labels of activism or politics. "I had, for a brief time, been involved with some form of activism in the mid '80s when I was in Kerala, but today I would not consider myself a political or artist activist because I know the gravity of this stance," he says. "My works are derived from a very personal approach. It is a philosophical inquiry, and political and ideological views are ingrained in it by default. I believe my approach is more open and humanistic in nature."

Thought-provoking Artwork from *History Lab and the Elegy of Visceral Incantations*; and (far left) T.V. Santhosh.

Santhosh started out as a student of painting at the Institute of Fine Arts in Thrissur, Kerala, before he focused on sculpture during his bachelor's and master's in fine arts at Santiniketan in West Bengal and Sayajirao University of Baroda respectively. Today his practice is a combination of sculpture, painting and installation using various materials, including LED panels. Does the subject dictate the medium? "In some cases, yes, especially sculpture," he says. "Unlike most postmodernist practitioners, my sculpture is not material-specific; rather it is a combination of the transformative possibilities of the material in respect to image making and how far the meaning can be generated."

The show is on till February 11.