



# magazine

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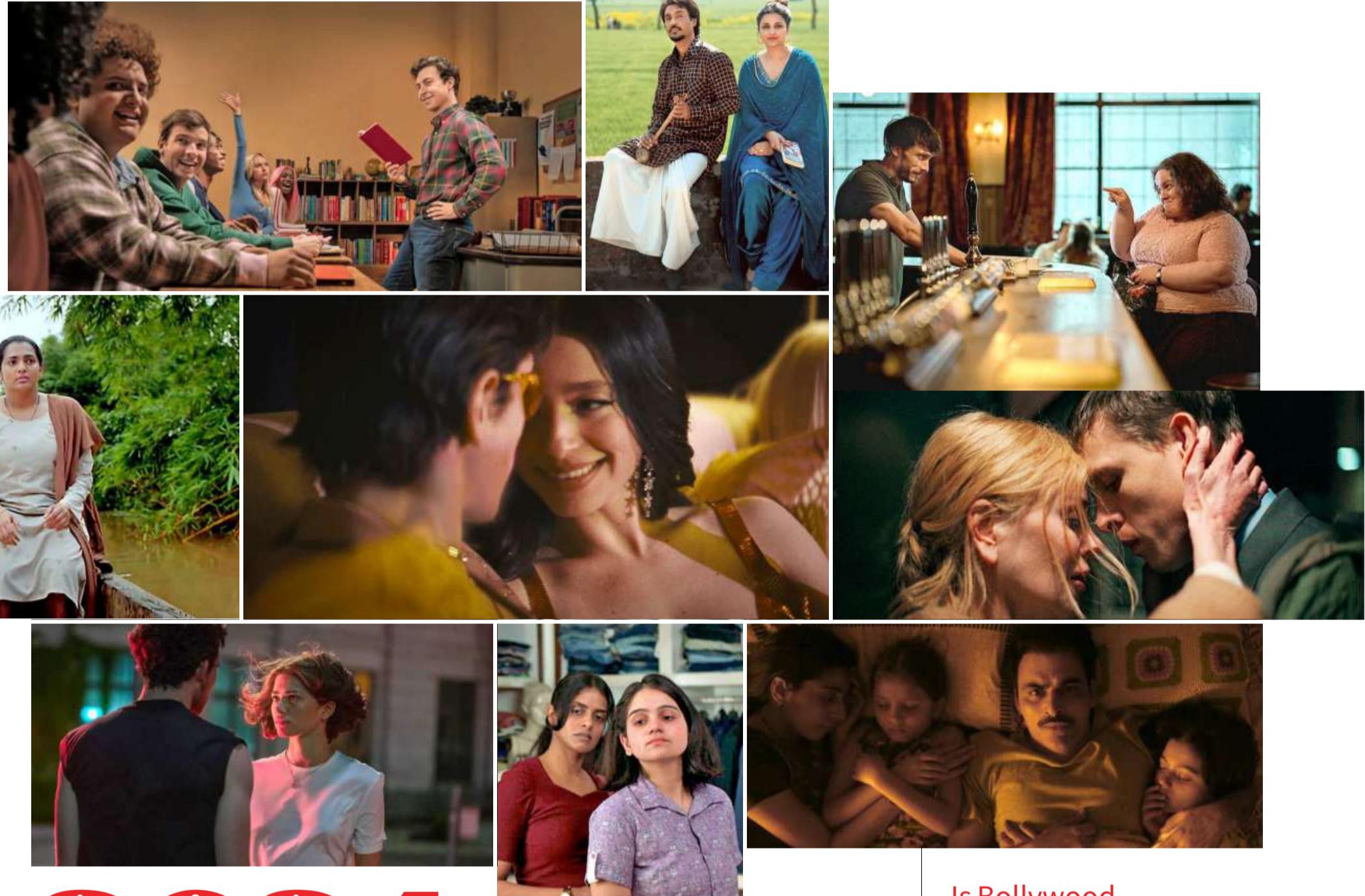
## LITERARY REVIEW

The Hindu's best fiction and non-fiction list 2024

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**Bold storytelling**  
(Clockwise from right)  
Stills from English Teacher; Amar Singh Chamkila; Baby Reindeer; Babygirl; Tribhuvan Mishra CA Topper; Girls will be Girls; Challengers; Ullozhukku; and Anora. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



Jaydeep Sarkar

**R**ecently, during an interaction with some law students, I was asked: where have all the rom-coms gone? I have heard this before – at family lunches, in writers' rooms and at school reunions. Each time, instead of answers, we are left with a dull lament for "simpler" times. But nostalgia is often overrated. Were those "simpler" times really that simple?

While people flocked to see rom-coms, mesmerised by the promise of a soulmate, stories of spouse-swapping farmhouse parties did the rounds at get-togethers. Cinema never spoke of those stories, lest the carefully curated structure of morality came undone. And when movies did speak of them, they were framed within the construct of 'sin and punishment'. As Alankrita Shrivastava, who made the compelling film on female desire *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, says, "The 'happily ever after' serves the patriarchy really well."

It's possible that there are no simplistic rom-coms today because the very idea of a 'happily ever after' has changed. The idea of the family unit is evolving; finding a partner and settling down is not the obvious answer anymore; many people in committed relationships would prefer not to co-habit; and many more are choosing to not have children. Few people court today – we are mostly just swiping right and left. Many people I know are polyamorous, thriving in polycules. How do you sell simplistic stories of patriarchal bliss to such a bunch?

#### In the pursuit of pleasure

Rom-coms worked for decades, until they suddenly didn't. In 2024, something new happened. Individual pursuit of pleasure slowly came to the centre of the discourse. Film after film, show after show started asking uncomfortable questions of us: about who we loved, how we loved, and how we wanted to be loved back. Many filmmakers told stories that moved the lens right back to our unspoken loves and forbidden desires united by one motif – it always lacked judgement.

From Richard Gadd's breakthrough hit *Baby Reindeer*, about the complex relationship of an abuser and her victim, to Puneet Krishna's hit series *Tribhuvan Mishra CA Topper*, about a married woman who employs the services of a male sex worker, people are shedding shame to tell stories unapologetically.

Konkona Sen Sharma, who made the seminal thriller about a voyeur and an

# 2024 AND ITS CINEMA OF DESIRE

There are no simplistic rom-coms today because the very idea of a 'happily ever after' has changed. Instead, movies and shows are increasingly exploring desire, sexuality and gender

exhibitionist, *Mirror*, in the 2023 Netflix anthology *Lust Stories*, tells me, "It was groundbreaking that *Baby Reindeer* blurred the victim-perpetrator line, showing how, in this case at least, the victim may participate in their own abuse. The storyteller refused to keep the author figure 'clean', exposing both the victim's and the perpetrator's vulnerabilities."

Watching Shuchi Talati's poignant coming-of-age thriller *Girls will be Girls*, I was absolutely disarmed by the raw, genuine and vivid telling of a complicated family dynamic. And yet, I was unprepared for where it took me: the healing and happy destiny of a complex protagonist. The author accepts her proclivities, and you would be pretty not to.

Sean Baker's extraordinary *Anora* opens with Mikey Madison's Ani, a sex worker, in the act, fully confronting the realities often sanitised in mainstream

cinema. For example, the 1990 hit *Pretty Woman* keeps Julia Roberts' Vivian's professional life at a distance, preserving the fairytale romance while ignoring the grit beneath.

And then there's Halina Reijn's ground-breaking *Babygirl*, about a CEO who begins a torrid affair with her much younger intern. It wasn't the raw exploration of the dominance-submission fetish of BDSM that was shocking, but how Nicole Kidman's Romy 'owned' her kink – a watershed moment in studio-backed star-studded cinema. Romy is not Sharon Stone's Catherine from *Basic Instinct*, a 'femme fatale' who is only sexy so that she can wreak havoc. Romy is just a girl kneeling in front of a boy begging him to feed her grapes. Only because it turns her on!

**Shifting the lens**  
Have films tried to shed shame

before? Of course, they have. But not so frequently, and not with such elan. In 2024, desirous characters were rewarded with compassion, empathy and power. And every time I've encountered it, it's added up to a feeling: are we on the cusp of a new wave? The 'Cinema of Desire', where desire doesn't need to be punished – where, by attempting to redefine the destiny of desire, cinema could possibly be changing the lens on how we see love and, thus, life itself.

Friends caution me about being such an optimist, but I can't help noticing desire triumph in cinema everywhere. Watching one of this year's finest Hindi films, Imtiaz Ali's *Amar Singh Chamkila*, I learn that the singer of risqué songs in the 80s earned the title 'Breaker of Terraces' because hordes of women would gather on rooftops to see Chamkila perform, eventually bringing the terrace down with their dancing. The biggest fanbase of his 'lewd' songs were women, who had never heard their desire sung about. Chamkila was punished with a brutal death, and those songs and stories taken away from the women.

Many filmmakers have attempted telling this story before. Kabir Singh Chowdhry's avant-garde 2018 piece *Mehsampur*, an investigation of Chamkila's death, struggled to be seen. But in 2024, the Punjabi singer's martyrdom is finally being commemorated.

Desire isn't a 'crime of passion' now. It's a valid life force. To film critic Mayank Shekhar, Talati's tour de force *Girls will be Girls* offers a perspective on women's desire that he was never privy to before. "What is striking to me is the unadulterated telling of the tale, without the titillation that was once employed to serve a primarily male audience, like in *The Graduate*," he says. "Once movies about women were made for men. No one's bothering with that anymore."

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## Is Bollywood low on love?

Much of Bollywood's contract with its audience is being rewritten; the industry isn't going in for straightforward romances any longer. The highest-grossing Hindi films of 2024, for instance, are *Stree 2* (₹874.58 crore approx), *Bhoolaiya 3* (₹417.51 crore), *Singham Again* (₹389.64 crore), *Fighter* (₹344.46 crore), *Shaistaan* (₹211.06 crore), *Crew* (₹157.08 crore), *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya* (₹133.64 crore), *Munjya* (₹132.13 crore) and *Bad Newz* (₹132.13 crore).

Two are action blockbusters, the rest comedies or horror films (or that propitious combination of both). The only unambiguous 'love story' on the list is *Teri Baaton*, although the film's heroine, quite representatively, is a robot. The exception proves the rule.

There are several reasons for this shortfall. The contemporary theatre-going audience is perceived to have grown awfully impatient – it needs its genres punched within genres, like a mixed-spirit cocktail. Hindi movie-watchers, it is believed, do not have the stamina to sit through a three-hour epic predicated on the breaking and mending of hearts. Personally, I disagree with this analysis: one of the most successful re-releases of the year was *Veer Zaara*, a two-decade-old grief-kissed romance, starring Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta, and directed by Yash Chopra. The runtime? A brisk 192 minutes. Clearly, a mix of nostalgia and melodrama isn't lost on a contemporary Hindi film audience.

A more tenable explanation may be the lack of original love stories being sought out and greenlit by studios. Even a film like *Do Aur Do Pyaar*, an otherwise charming rom-com featuring Vidya Balan and Pratik Gandhi, was remade from the 2017 American film *The Lovers*. But if studios were feeling a little adventurous, are our filmmakers and technicians up to the task? Popular Hindi film music and choreography of late hinges on virility – reels and hook steps supersede emotional uplift.

Going into 2025, the road looks uncertain for plain old romance in Hindi films. Its paradoxical future – where it must vie for space with more strident cinematic emotions – is echoed by the title of the forthcoming Sanjay Leela Bhansali film: *Love and War*.

— Shilajit Mitra



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— Shilajit Mitra

# Who read what this year

From revisiting *Animal Farm* to taking a deep dive into history, politics and finance, here are some of the titles these newsmakers spent time on in 2024



**As I browsed through my collection, I instinctively picked up Amartya Sen's *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2008). My concern about India's narrowing visions prompted me to re-read this excellent analysis of an India, and a world, gone amok with religious identity. Sen addresses these issues with the facility of logic and rationality that comes naturally to him. It is a book all young people should read to counter the confusions that exist in public discourse today.**

Aruna Roy, activist (as told to S.D.)



**How the World Made the West** (Josephine Quinn) is one of the most fascinating works of global history to appear for many years. Incredibly wide-ranging, it completely reframes our conception of the western classical world and its influences and inspirations. *The Great Flap of 1942* is another brilliant read. Mukund Padmanabhan, long regarded as one of India's most admired journalists and editors, has now emerged from that chrysalis to reveal himself as the new superstar of Indian narrative non-fiction.

William Dalrymple,  
author and historian (as told to S.D.)



**My book of the year is** Akhteruzzaman Elias's *Chilekothar Sepai*. It's a Bengali book. And it's a political book. The author writes it with a strange political apathy, which is quite remarkable. And he's got this brilliant commentary — funny, distant, and also sort of not cynical. I've noticed that Bangladeshi writers, and also Pakistani writers, have a light touch when it comes to politics. Authors like Elias or Syed Shamshul Haq have a fantastic ability to tell stories with politics in the background. It's very nice to read something like that in an ultra-woke society where people are constantly walking on eggshells.

Sarnath Banerjee,  
graphic novelist (as told to S.D.)

**What I Learned About Investing From Darwin** by Pulak Prasad is a fascinating take on how Darwinian theory explains so much about the mindset of the tenacious investor. Then there's *The Money Trap* by Alok Sama, a witty, joyful and gripping behind-the-scenes view of the world's most bold tech investor, through an autobiographical narrative of the firm's CFO. Another book was *Bad Therapy* by Abigail Shrier, a hard-hitting book tracking the state of the mental health of the young generation.

Ankur Warikoo,  
entrepreneur and content creator (as told to S.D.)



I must confess to having spent a large part of 2024 immersed in writing my own book, 2024: *The Election That Surprised India*, so I had less time to read as many books as I would have liked. A book I enjoyed reading was *An Uncommon Love: The Early Life of Sudha and Narayana Murthy* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It stood out for me in the manner in which it wove a real-life love story onto the wider canvas of the making of an iconic start-up company. It is a feel-good middle class success story that is easily relatable for those who might have grown up in a pre-liberalisation India.

Rajdeep Sardesai, journalist and author (as told to Swati Daftuar)

Nandini Bhatia

**F**iction is a reflection of life. It allows writers the liberty to speak the truth — about themselves, about their countries and the world. 2024 has been no different. Authors have written personal stories, new and old, by means of metaphors or alternative realities, with universal meaning and socio-political undercurrents. Some of them have been nominated for multiple awards; some deserved but did not receive enough spotlight. Some, like Hisham Matar's *My Friends* or Swadesh Deepak's rediscovered plays and short stories, may not be on this list but are worth an investment. Here are 10 (of many) works of fiction, across genres, that have made a dent in the literary world this year:

**James** by Percival Everett

A retelling in the most modern sense, Everett breathes new life (and meaning) into the 140-year-old Mark Twain classic in this Booker-shortlisted novel. Jim, the subdued slave from the original *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, gets a voice and the courage to stand up for others like him, albeit subtly. Everett proves through Jim's political awakening that real freedom lies in equality — of resources and the means to use them. Ever the more reason why his story needed to be retold.

(Also: If you like your reading to reflect the current socio-political/economic climate of the world, then this year's Booker Prize winner, *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey, makes for as good a read as *James* does.)

**Martyr!** by Kaveh Akbar

This debut novel, a National Book Awards finalist, is an ode to love that resembles longing. The protagonist, Cyrus Shams, lost and displaced and with a family legacy of trauma, chooses to write about martyrs, in his search for a lost mother and a lost identity. Akbar's writing reflects his poetic flair, making *Martyr!* a meditative pursuit of the meaning of life.

**Sanatan** by Sharankumar Limbale

Shortlisted for the JCB Prize for Literature this year, Limbale's

With personal stories, metaphors and alternative realities, these authors have attempted to capture the zeitgeist

## BEST FICTION

*Sanatan* also won him the highest literary award in India, the Saraswati Samman, in 2020. Creating space for the neglected Dalit community of Maharashtra in Indian history, *Sanatan* exposes the foul play of caste inequalities, with or without its label, at a time when British India faced reform and revolution — be it educational, political or religious; giving readers of modern India something to reflect upon, as labels (and their untoward consequences) make their way back to the political nomenclature.

**Animals: Eight Studies for Experts** by Eva Menasse

Like most short story collections, *Animals* (translated from the original German) is a mixed batch, although these stories reinvent metaphors like no others. Menasse picks unique characteristics of animals such as sharks, bees, caterpillars and so on, and places, if not personifies, them in social context, amplified

by human complexities. Her astute observations coupled with her openness and ability to explore emotional depth make this volume an underrated gem for the English reader.

**Small Rain** by Garth Greenwell

This novel is a contemplation of how much a person can exist outside their bodies and in their minds. The unnamed narrator in Greenwell's latest novel unexpectedly finds himself in a hospital ward. As he lets literature and memories rescue him, peace eludes him. His mind wanders — his personal crisis is painted in the emerging global health crisis brought on by COVID-19; he wonders not only what it means to be in a hospital but what it means in the current American political climate. Although a recent release, *Small Rain* deserves more attention by readers.

**Woebegone's Warehouse of Words** by Payal Kapadia

Kapadia's fantasy world is strangely riveting. It ventures into Orwellian territory and has an aftertaste of Mark Dunn's *Ella*

*Minnow Pea*. Curbed, controlled, and violated freedom (especially freedom of expression) is the common theme here, and an uprising, quiet or not, is the only way out. *Woebegone's Warehouse* offers a fresh take on an age-old problem.

**Schrödinger's Wife (and Other Possibilities)** by Pippa Goldschmidt

This novel honours the human history of science, rather the history of women in science, in as thorough and empathetic a way as possible. We witness these women not only in the light of the findings they made but the personal costs these discoveries came at — from nuclear physicist Lise Meitner, to biologist Margaret Bastock, and of course, Schrödinger's wife, "Anny" Bertel. These "other possibilities" are worth exploring and would make for a great New Year's gift, if you are still looking for one.

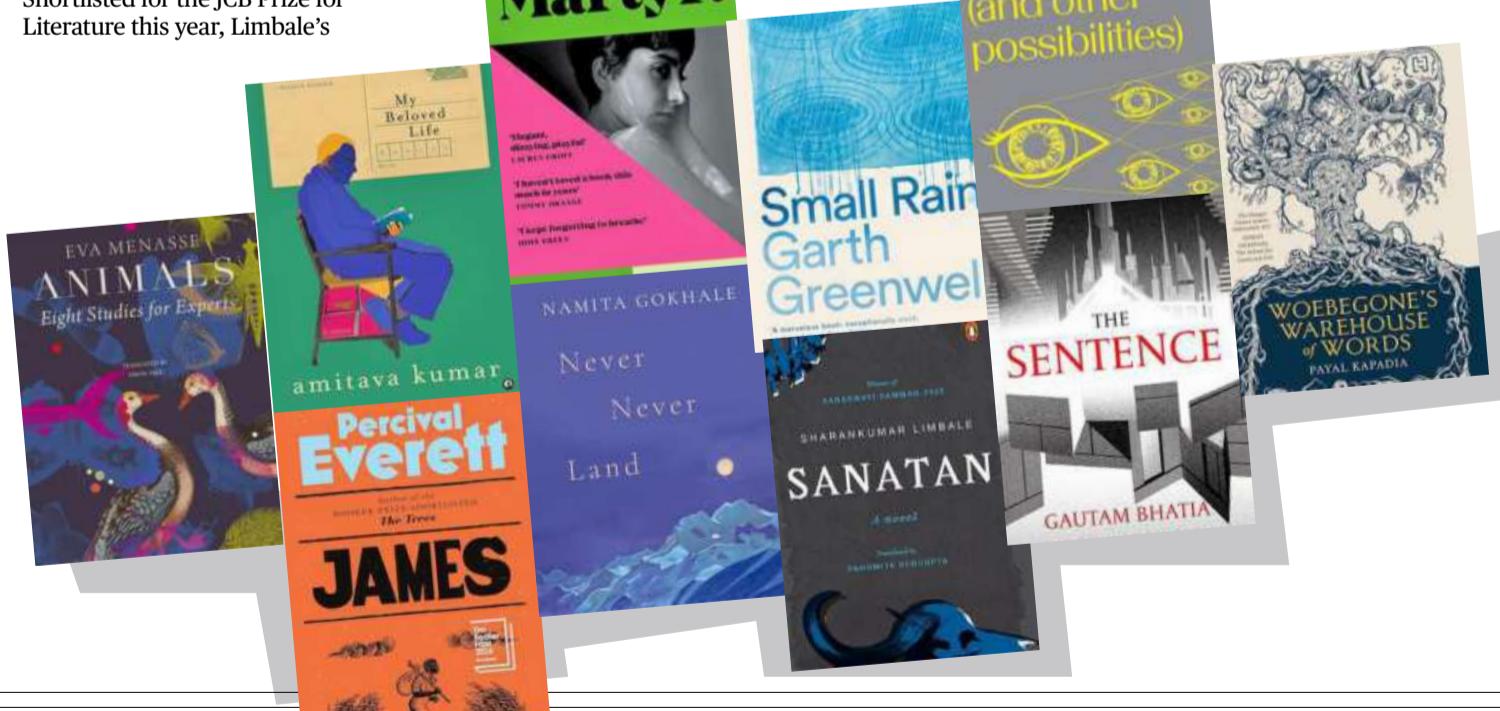
**The Sentence** by Gautam Bhatia

The body of Jagat R., a convict, lies frozen in a 'cryobox'; he can be revived till a time, if proven innocent, which Nila pursues with all her life. In Bhatia's speculative fiction

**Never Never Land** by Namita Gokhale

Fuelled by the search for belongingness, *Never Never Land* is a thoughtful and nostalgic remembrance of the past — of places, friends and homes — and a realisation of just how much one is distanced from one's own identity; a distance brought on by time, age, space and a sense of loss. Gokhale's latest is testimony that she never shies away from exposing her characters to the deepest, rawest emotions. A short but impactful read.

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



**This year, I ended up reading a lot of beautiful books.** If I had to choose two, I think no. 1 would be *Last Queen* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. I've loved everything I've read by her before. I remember, very vividly, sitting in my living room when I finished reading the book, and for a good 10 minutes, the tears just wouldn't stop. That book has stayed with me throughout this year. I'm also a huge romance fan, so I think no. 2 would be *Play Along* by Liz Tomforde. I love how she writes the arcs of the women in her books. They are so beautifully relatable but at the same time aspirational, which is a stunning contrast.

Prajakta Koli, actor (as told to S.D.)



Scan the QR code to watch a video of the top 10 fiction titles.





**I had read *Animal Farm*** by George Orwell long ago and forgotten most of it, but I re-read it because my daughter had just discovered it. I marvel at writers like Orwell, Isaac Asimov and H.G. Wells, who have written things far ahead of their time. I also read a very interesting book called *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, the toast of the times. It is written in a very original style, realistic, but going beyond the dimensions of reality, representing society and the fragility of human existence. Another book I read was *The Hotel Years* (by Joseph Roth), a remarkable story of a journalist who wrote about Germany during the two World Wars, true accounts of people he met in the in-between years.

Imtiaz Ali, filmmaker (as told to Preeti Zachariah)



**Glorious Exploits** by **Ferdia Lennon** has had me in splits at moments and in deep discomfort at others — a rare feat for a novel set in 412 BCE Syracuse, in the aftermath of the Athenian invasion of Sicily. As two local potters stage Euripides' *Medea* with enslaved soldiers in a quarry, you're left marvelling at the incredible power of poetry even in the most dire times.

Anish Gawande, national spokesperson, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) (as told to Radhika Santhanam)



**The book of the year, for me, undoubtedly** is *War* by Bob Woodward. The key takeaway is that the U.S. knew that Russia was going to invade Ukraine a year before it happened. Why did they not head it off is the key question that remains unanswered. Great book, wonderful insights. A masterclass in what journalism should be.

Manish Tewari,  
Lok Sabha member and Congress leader  
(as told to Sandeep Phukan)



**The passing of author Gabriel Garcia Marquez** in 2014 came as a big shock to me because he had been an all-time favourite of mine. Having read all his works, there was little else to look forward to other than re-reading them. I was in for a pleasant surprise this year when his last novel, *Until August*, was published. I kept it aside to read on a long flight to Kolkata. Published posthumously by Marquez's sons, the book is beautifully written, but it did leave a sadness behind, being the last work of a great storyteller.

Abhilash Tomy, retired Indian Navy officer and solo circumnavigator  
(as told to S. Anandan)



**Open, Andre Agassi's autobiography** which I read earlier this year, comes to my mind for various reasons. One, my daughter has now started playing tennis seriously. I was a huge fan of both Agassi and Steffi Graf, and I loved the way he was World No. 1, slid down the rankings to the 100s and then came back to the top again. Also, the fact that he won the career Slam and the Olympics gold medal (Atlanta 1996) showed that his game was so adaptable to the demands of various surfaces.

Viren Rasquinha,  
former India men's hockey captain (as told to N. Sudarshan)

# BEST NON-FICTION

These titles caught the prevalent themes of the times, from majoritarianism to climate change

Sudipta Datta  
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**T**wo wars, elections in the world's oldest and largest democracies, memoirs, biographies and ancient histories dominated the non-fiction titles of 2024. If cartoonist and journalist Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (and *War on Gaza*), Antony Loewenstein's *The Palestine Laboratory*, Bob Woodward's *War*, Rahul Bhatia's *The Identity Project*, and Dhirendra K. Jha's *Golwalkar* caught the state of the world in flux, other books on history, such as Manu S. Pillai's *Gods, Guns and Missionaries*, artificial intelligence, anthropology and environment put a spotlight on prevalent themes. Here's *The Hindu*'s top books of the year.

**Gujarat Under Modi**  
by Christophe Jaffrelot

The French political scientist and Indologist, Christophe Jaffrelot, was ready with his book in 2013, but he was asked to delete so many passages he decided not to go ahead with it. He held on to it, till it could reach readers in 2024. "Gujarat was the blueprint for post-2014 India," he told *The Hindu* in an interview, pointing out that four mainstays of Narendra Modi's strategy in Gujarat was scaled up to the national level – communal polarisation, the

capture of institutions, crony capitalism, and a specific kind of high-tech communication-based national populism.

**The Burning Earth**  
by Sunil Amrith

Historian Amrith maps 500 years of human neglect of the environment and the huge costs of such acts. "The dream of human freedom from nature's constraints is under assault by viruses, burned by wildfires, drowned by floods, scorched by extremes of heat," he writes in the Introduction, and explains through his masterful study how the earth has reached this state of planetary crisis.

**The Many Lives of Syeda X: The Story of an Unknown Indian**  
by Neha Dixit

Dixit chronicles the lives of home-based female workers with a focus on Syeda, a Muslim woman who makes everything from namkeen to photo frames, door hangings, cycle brake wires, plastic toy guns, wedding cards, rakhis and faux leather balls, even while she is displaced from her home in a communally-charged north India. In an interview to *The Hindu*, Dixit rued the fact that such stories "are everywhere around us, but not in the media

because the media has structurally stopped talking about the urban poor in the country."

**Why We Die: The New Science of Ageing and the Quest for Immortality**  
by Venki Ramakrishnan

The molecular biologist and Nobel laureate in Chemistry examines the hype around this question: would we want to live forever? In an interview to *The Hindu*, he said living extremely long lives would lead to a weird and stagnant society. "We are having a much slower turnover between generations than we did before, so it will be a different kind of society. That's also assuming that your brain stays sharp and aware, and that's not a solved problem. Regenerating the brain is not in the realm of possibility right now."

**Knife** by Salman Rushdie

In 27 seconds one August in 2022, Rushdie was viciously stabbed in his eye, neck, chest and thigh by an assassin. Coming over three decades after Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini had issued a fatwa following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, it's incredible that Rushdie lived to tell this tale in this book. At a personal level, the "angel of life" prevailed over the "angel of death".

**The Incarcerations**  
by Alpa Shah

Shah narrates the story of each of the 16 accused in the Bhima-Koregaon case, who found themselves thrown into jail between 2018 and 2020, accused of being Maoist terrorists or 'Urban Naxals'. She writes that they were all "custodians of democracy" and had fought for the social justice of India's most vulnerable sections.

**The Ancient Road**  
by William Dalrymple

Dalrymple is known for his books on the East India Company, but in

this latest book, he has turned his attention to ancient and early medieval India, mapping its role as an exporter of ideas. In an interview to *The Hindu*, Dalrymple said the book is the story of how India had a much larger footprint in the world than even Indians realise. "This is a story of how Indian trade led Indian ideas to spread around the world."

**Iru: The Remarkable Life of Irawati Karve by Urmilla Deshpande and Thiago Pinto Barbosa**

Irawati Karve is one of India's foremost anthropologists, and the first woman to lecture in the social sciences. This book profiles the pioneer, tracing her personal and historical journey by researching archives and places she worked at.

**Iconoclast: A Reflective Biography of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**  
by Anand Teltumbde

Last year, there were at least seven books on Babasaheb Ambedkar, including Ashok Gopal's *A Part Apart* (Navayana), which won the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Prize for 2024. Ambedkar's tumultuous life has warranted another look in this book, which is a warning against the deification of Ambedkar by the Hindu Right and by political parties who cynically seek the Dalit vote in his name.

**Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI**  
by Madhumita Murgia

The book, shortlisted for the inaugural Women's Prize in Non-Fiction, lifts the veil hanging over humans who are building the base for AI's super structure to stand on, and why they need to be mindful of the lurking dangers. In an essay for *The Hindu*, she wrote about future concerns surrounding AI-led machines like ChatGPT: how will children learn while leaning heavily on these tools? Can they think properly without learning to write well? And, ultimately, who the hell are we if all our ideas and thoughts can be replicated by machines?



**Knife** by Salman Rushdie was one of the most anticipated books of 2024, from my point of view. I am a great admirer of Rushdie and what he has survived is something that no one in the world should ever have to go through — to pay such a heavy price for his/her personal beliefs. I was looking forward to the book. I liked bits of it, the way it started. To me, it felt less of a book about the actual stabbing and more like a medical journal of his time in hospital and a love letter to his current wife. So, there were two books in one, but both were fascinating because nothing that Rushdie writes can ever be boring.

Shobha De, columnist and author  
(as told to Amarjot Kaur)

I really enjoyed Daniel Kahneman's last book *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment* (he passed away this year). His *Thinking, Fast and Slow* is a real masterpiece, but I also learned a lot from *Noise*. It raises some very important questions. We all make wrong judgements but how difficult is it to make the correct judgement? Why do our ministers and politicians make mistakes? The main lesson I learnt from the book is that all of us have to be very humble and should not jump to conclusions before making the right judgement.

Boris Gelfand,  
2012 World chess championship challenger and former Indian team coach (as told to P.K. Ajith Kumar)

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According to Shrivastava, even something as humble as a selfie is helping people change how they see themselves and how they want to be seen. "Women are stepping out of being someone's daughter, mother or wife. Be it in a selfie, where she is dressed for a wedding party, or a simple recipe video, she is asserting her individuality outside of the family photo," she observes.

Where a rom-com would end with someone finding their soulmate, the individual is now stepping into the spotlight. And cinema is finally beginning to tell them: we won't judge you for feeling what you feel.

**'Liberation is precious'**

Five months ago, *Tillotama Shome* played the lead, Bindji in *Tribhuvan Mishra CA Topper*. In the hit Netflix show, Bindji, a woman in an unfulfilling marriage, boldly acts upon her desires. It ruled the 'Most viewed' charts for months, but what feels truly precious to Shome is when married women walk up to thank her for telling their story. In many ways, they finally feel seen.

While the actor has received much love for her work around desire in *Sir, Mirror* and even my own film *Nayantra's Necklace*, this forthrightness from fans feels new to her. "I am often looking closely at them choosing their words carefully, as they utter to me things they haven't even uttered to themselves yet," she says. These invisible stories need to come out, for cinema to truly start capturing the human experience outside of outdated moral codes.

When *Rainbow Rishta* hit Amazon Prime Video in late 2023, I was often met with a very surprising remark – that the show was "eye-opening". My 73-year-old aunt was moved to tears because she discovered that LGBTQIA+ folks were "actually just like us". Cinema had only cast us as freaks or jokers.

**With Rainbow Rishta**, I wanted to show that while I love different from you, my heart beats just the same. And it's time we were seen for all of it.

This liberation is precious, and is something of a cultural milestone. Just look at the number of OnlyFans (the racy subscription-based service) creators from B and C towns of India. Or even the rise of apps focused on finding partners with similar fetishes and kinks. It's taking over little circles of sexual subcultures and our cinema is beginning to acknowledge it, without judgement.

*Babgiri's* exploration of the dom-sub roleplay points to a shift where taboo desires could be finding validation through cinema. It makes me wonder if this has everything to do with the slow disappearance of the rom-com?



## 2024 AND ITS CINEMA OF DESIRE

**What is striking to me** is the unadulterated telling of the tale [in *Girls will be Girls*], without the titillation that was once employed to serve a primarily male audience, like in *The Graduate*. Once movies about women were made for men. No one's bothering with that anymore

MAYANK SHEKHAR  
Film critic

Maybe people are not finding joy in looking for soulmates to walk into sunsets with. Maybe they want new experiences; they don't want to 'settle down' but want to wander free.

**What people want** For the past few months, every room you step into in the film world resounds with a chorus of alarmist despair. How money in the film industry is drying up, how the best days of OTT programming are behind us. From producers to actors, everyone is scrambling to make sense of what the audience really wants. The lament for the rom-com often comes up in these rooms. But I think it's time to bury

the trite rose-tinted films, as we knew them.

The love story must evolve with the times, and this year has thrown up shining examples. Luca Guadagnino's *Zendaya-starrer Challengers* may be a film about tennis and helping a grand slam champion out of a losing streak, but at its core it explores the complex, erotically-charged relationship between three individuals caught in a web of rivalry and desire. Christo Tom's Malayalam gem *Ullozhukku* successfully goes beyond the monochrome of right and wrong, and understands desire outside of the boxes of patriarchy, while Anees

fast rising TikTok influence who's determined to overcome poverty by launching an online 'sugar baby' operation, Mathias Broe's *Sauna*, about a gay man who falls in love with a transgender man, to the first Marathi film at the festival, Rohan Kanawade's *Sahar Bonda*, about a gay couple in rural Maharashtra.

Let's turn hushed whispers of desire into bold stories. People everywhere are fearlessly rewriting their narratives. It's time cinema catches up.

**The writer is a Mumbai-based filmmaker.**



**It was ground-breaking** that *Baby Reindeer* blurred the victim-perpetrator line, showing how, in this case at least, the victim may participate in their own abuse. The storyteller refused to keep the author figure 'clean'

KONKONA SEN SHARMA  
Actor and director, pictured here with actor Tillotama Shome

**What is striking to me** is the unadulterated telling of the tale [in *Girls will be Girls*], without the titillation that was once employed to serve a primarily male audience, like in *The Graduate*. Once movies about women were made for men. No one's bothering with that anymore

MAYANK SHEKHAR  
Film critic



**Women are stepping** out of being someone's daughter, mother or wife. Be it in a selfie, where she is dressed for a wedding party, or a simple recipe video, she is asserting her individuality outside of the family photo

ALANKRITA SHRIVASTAVA  
Filmmaker

Bazmee's superhit *Bholuayai 3* portrays a transgender character's primal struggle, with unprecedented empathy and understanding. Even feel-good shows such as the underrated Hulu series *English Teacher* by Brian Jordan Alvarez examines and celebrates 'open' relationships within the gay community, without the weight of judgement.

Today, the audience wants more true, raw and unapologetic stories. And the new year is already looking exciting. Sundance's 2025 programming, for instance, includes Rachel Fleit's *Sugar Babies*, about a

fast rising TikTok influence who's determined to overcome poverty by launching an online 'sugar baby' operation, Mathias Broe's *Sauna*, about a gay man who falls in love with a transgender man, to the first Marathi film at the festival, Rohan Kanawade's *Sahar Bonda*, about a gay couple in rural Maharashtra.

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**Simrit Malhi**

**Walking into the AI Minilab at the just-concluded Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa, I was armed with prompts I was dying to ask ChatGPT. The first one: for the chatbot to create a piece of art from its imagination. Very reassuringly, the AI replied that it has no imagination of its own.**

**It is based, it told me, "on pattern recognition, learned relationships and algorithms... and though AI might be able to produce outcomes that surprise, inspire or resonate, the processes will always be based on human intelligence."**

**When trepidation turned into fun**

Mathieu Wothke, the founder of Somewhere Global, a Stockholm-based creative agency that focuses on culture and uses AI-generated art, put together the Minilab as a simple set-up – of six iPads equipped with ChatGPT. The role of accessibility clearly stood out. Visitors could engage in an interactive dialogue with the chatbot and share ideas that it transformed into vivid visual.

From 'high tech Goa in 3025 with flying cars' to 'pink horses'. Wothke found that while many walked in with some trepidation, they soon had fun making images, the young often showing the elders how to use it. But he tells me with a laugh that none was art. "There is this very interesting fine line of what's art and what's not. AI gives everyone the tools to do it, but that doesn't mean all can do it."

It brings to mind Refik Anadol, who is planning to open the world's first AI arts museum, DataLab, in Los Angeles next year.

The new media artist, whose interactive digital canvases showcase creations made from colossal datasets – from weather conditions to

real-time data from the Amazon rainforest – insists that it is important for artists to build their own AI tools, so that they are co-creating with the machine.

At Serendipity, the last room of the installation highlighted this dichotomy, juxtaposing AI-generated visuals from novices with works crafted by seasoned artists. The differences reveal themselves in the intent, message, and emotional resonance. "It's the vision, storytelling [and technique] that set art apart from mere production," explains Wothke.

**Disruptor, but not the enemy**

AI-enhanced technologies and solutions are currently more widely available across industries.

Concurrently, it is also pushing up AI

conditions to

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It brings to mind Refik Anadol, who is planning to open the world

**I**magine, if you will, that you are a typical Indian citizen who self-identifies as an extremely middle-class person. Perhaps you run a simple family business such as a petroleum refinery, and you live a simple, and indeed humble, life across your three homes in Delhi, Mumbai and the Amalfi Coast.

One day you wake up in the morning in your house in Delhi, stretch, open the window, inhale the fresh air, and immediately collapse head-first into the aquarium because, due to pollution, your lungs are the consistency of last month's black forest cake.

On the spot, you decide that it is time to go abroad on a holiday with your family.

You book your tickets, pack your bags, and just four or five hours later, you have reached the airport. Immediately, one of your children, Bhagat Singh, named after the Bobby Deol-superhit film *Shaheed*, starts complaining: "What an absolutely nonsense country is India. Look at this traffic. Look at this airport. Look at this aircraft. Look at this person breaking the queue. At least have the decency to bribe the policeman so that other passengers think you are VIP. EXCUSE ME MADAM OUR FLIGHT IS LEAVING IN TEN MINUTES PLEASE UNDERSTAND. Fed up of country fellows. Basic decency is missing in the country."

The next morning you land in your first destination: London. And from that moment onwards, you start sharing every single thing you have done abroad on your Twitter and Facebook and, worst of all, on your LinkedIn.

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#### TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 4

## RETURN OF THE PATRIOT

When the pizzas of Pisa don't compare to the *rajma chawal* of Rajinder Nagar

mattress I have slept in all my life. The English really know the meaning of true hospitality. Perhaps our so-called five-star hotels in India can learn a lesson. During our busy corporate life it is easy to sacrifice sleep. This post is a reminder to all my fellow business executives that

sleep is good. Sleep is a superpower. Hashtag sleep hashtag sleeppower hashtag sabkasleepsabkavikas."

And then a few days later:

"You might be wondering why I am posting this picture from the top of Eiffel Tower in Paris. Is that Champagne in my hand? Yes. Is that

Champagne Dom Perignon? Also, yes. Is that my entire family sitting with me in the VIP section? Absolutely correct. Did we just take this photo after an amazing classical French lunch at 3-Michelin restaurant Le

Leparylepyarlepyarle? Am I trying to show off? Never. This photo is a tribute to my father and mother who suffered untold hardships in bringing me up. Not in their wildest dreams could they have imagined that their son would one day be in Paris. Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Dhirubai Singhania-Parker-Bowles. Your son owes everything to you, and the lack of risk management in Indian public sector banks."

And so it goes. Dinner in Helsinki. Disco in Berlin. Stroopwafel in Amsterdam. Pizza in Pisa. And throughout your journey, you post a relentless stream of updates online. In each one, you compare the glories

#### Videshbhakt

/ vɪdeɪʃ'bʌkθ/

**noun**

**Plural:** videshbhakt

**Definition:** A person who, after enjoying a fabulous trip overseas, and covering the Internet with their adoration of life abroad, suddenly discovers a patriotism that is more than Bose, Gandhi, Patel and Nehru combined... just in time for their return flight.

**Related forms:**

**Videshbhakti (noun):** The act of excessively praising one's homeland after a foreign trip, often accompanied by dramatic social media posts and unsolicited advice on how to improve local customs.

**Videshbhaktism (noun):** The phenomenon of oscillating between foreign admiration and national pride, typically observed in individuals who have recently returned from overseas travel.

friends who are working in the government of India think? It will be a terrible humiliation. So just before boarding your plane, you post your final masterstroke from abroad.

"Friends, for the last few weeks I have enjoyed the finest luxuries that the western world has to offer. Many people have asked me, Bunty why don't you stay abroad? Because, my friends, at the end of the day, there is no country in the world like India. The pizzas of Pisa are nothing compared to the *rajma chawal* of Rajinder Nagar. There is nothing in the world that can compare to traditional Indian hospitality. And what about the banking infrastructure. Hundreds of people asked me, 'Bunty, why don't you bring UPI to Europe?'. As I run to my plane to come back to India, my heart has grown even fonder for my motherland. If there is a future for the world, it is Indian! My son will be staying in London for the foreseeable future. Hashtag *Indiuture* hashtag *proudtobelindian* hashtag *howtogeekworkvisa*."

And that, my friend, is how you become a Videshbhakt.

Example sentence: "After two weeks in Barcelona, last night Anamika did one videshbhakti by saying how public transport in India might be terrible but in reality it gave her the resilience to conquer the world. Hashtag *Desidiva* hashtag *blessedtobelindian* hashtag *BhayanderBetterThanBarcelona*."

Please stop these absolute shenanigans.

**Sidin Vadukut** is head of talent at Clarisights. He lives in London and is currently working on a new novel.

#### GOREN BRIDGE

**Bob Jones**

**T**oday's deal is from a team match between some of the best players in Europe. The scoring method was Board-A-Match. BAM was a very common scoring method for teams before it was replaced by Swiss Team scoring some 50 years ago. It is an exacting form of the game where every point is crucial. The

tiniest difference in score will award a win on the deal. One win is available on every deal and a tie is worth a halfwin. A competitive auction, featuring a cocktail-hour raise by East, saw North-South end up in an excellent slam. Six spades would have been a playable contract, but it would fail due to the 5-0 spade split.

West was David Gold, one of England's best

**NORTH**  
♠ K J 5  
♥ A K Q 6 3  
♦ K 6 5  
♣ J

**WEST**  
♠ Void  
♥ J 9 8 4  
♦ Q 7  
♣ A K Q 9 7 4 2

**EAST**  
♠ Q 6 4 3 2  
♥ 10 7 5 2  
♦ 8  
♣ 8 6 3

**SOUTH**  
♠ A 10 9 8  
♥ Void  
♦ A J 10 9 4 3 2  
♣ 10 5

**The bidding:**  
**NORTH** 1♥  
**EAST** Pass  
**SOUTH** 2♦  
**WEST** 3♣  
3♦  
4♦  
Pass  
5♣  
Pass  
6♦  
All pass

Opening lead:?

players. There was no beating this contract, but Gold didn't know that. There were only six missing clubs and his partner had raised, meaning that partner held at least three clubs. East was a favorite to hold the jack. Gold brilliantly led the seven of clubs! Had partner held the jack he would have had no trouble finding a spade shift to give

Gold a ruff. Alas, dummy's singleton jack won the trick and declarer quickly scooped up all 13 tricks. Gold was distraught thinking that his lead had lost the board for his team. When he compared scores with his teammates, he found that the West player at the other table made the same lead! The board was a tie, and both West players were very happy about it.

#### QUIZ

## Easy like Sunday morning

What has science done for us in 2024?



**When the trumpet sounds** A research at Kenya's Samburu National Reserve has revealed that elephants can identify 469 distinct calls among themselves. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

**Berty Ashley**

**1** Earlier this year, the company Intuitive Machines's vehicle named 'Odysseus' became the first commercial vehicle to land here. It carried a library, art, the internet archive and portions of Project Gutenberg. Where did it land to provide info for millions of years?

**2** This year, a new species of animal was found in the Caribbean islands. Named *E.akayima*, its DNA proved to be

completely different from the other species we are familiar with. Easily one of the largest in the world, what animal is this, that proves there is still so much to discover on our planet?

**3** In February, astronomers from Carnegie Institution added three new items to a list of 290 already known. What is this a list of, which Saturn has the most and Earth the least?

**4** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

items as big as 96 ft. long and 32 ft. wide, made of thermoplastic polymers. This is the world's largest example of what device?

**6** A study done for more than 20 years at the University of Nevada has now proved that 'Retrowalking' is highly beneficial and strengthens the spine. Usually practised by football referees to have a good view of the game, it is also a sport by itself. What do researchers say one has to do 20 minutes every day?

**7** A study that has been going on since 1986 among elephants at Kenya's Samburu National Reserve has concluded. They identified 469 distinct calls, and how certain members of the family responded to each call. What interesting (and almost human) inference did they make?

**8** Since 2003, when the Concorde aircraft was retired, commercial supersonic flight has not been active. The ability to cut down travel time by half is there, but one of the main issues was a physical phenomenon that disturbed those on the ground. This year, the X-59 Quiet Supersonic Transport (QueSST) is ready to fly. What iconic factor will be missing from

this aircraft's supersonic flight?

**9** A devastating fungal disease wiped out entire species of a certain animal in 2023 and researchers were looking at ways to combat its spread. This year they finally found a low-tech immune boost, which helps them fight the fungi. A hot bath or sauna stops the Chytrid disease. What animals are these, which ironically also feature in a story about not perceiving slowly approaching danger?

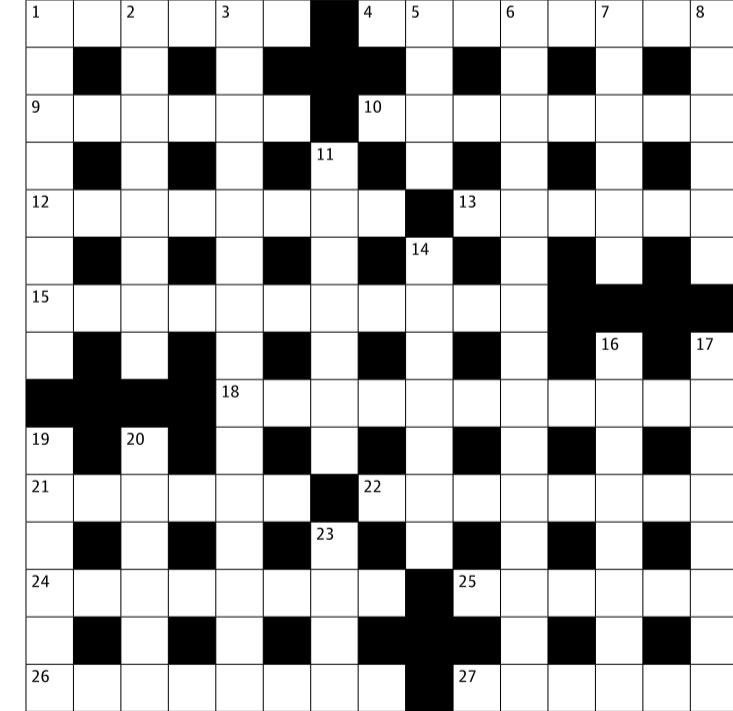
**10** Artemis 2 will be the first mission to carry humans to the moon since 1972 and this year the rocket stacking operations began for the operation scheduled to take off in April 2026. In Greek mythology, Artemis the goddess of the hunt and nature is the twin sister of which god?

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

moon mission was named)  
10. Apollo (after whom the first 6. Rolling (from in hoover story)  
8. Sonic Boom  
9. Specific names  
7. Elephants call each other by 5. 3D printer  
6. Walking backwards  
4. Mosquitoes  
3. New moons of the solar system  
2. Aurora  
1. On the moon (lunar library)

**Answers**

#### THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3338



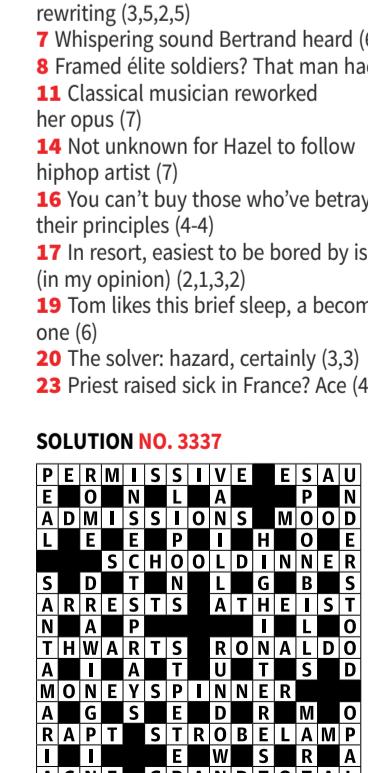
##### Across

- 1 Take two buses back — one interminable, that's about right — to outskirts (6)
- 4 Envisages crumbly pie crust (8)
- 9 Object: Everyman has salad (6)
- 10 Emphasizes anxieties (8)
- 12 Uncooperative? Quite the opposite! (8)
- 13 Saman perhaps on leave, a rest (6)
- 15 Heartless hello — daggers brandished — daggers drawn (11)
- 18 Misbehaviour characteristic of the 2000s, you say? (11)
- 21 A professor is Greek, that's lovely (6)
- 22 Poirot's one that's been had, by Jupiter (8)
- 24 Posh comedian? I won't react (5,3)
- 25 Act as inspiration for puzzle (6)
- 26 Perpetual child's play (5,3)
- 27 Please raise one's Stein in toasting, primarily! (6)

##### Down

- 1 Banksy's materials: stone — and pencils? Not principally (8)
- 2 Bit of hubub — a din — a geezer offering banter (8)
- 3 Take apart so as to understand Lenurb? (7-8)
- 5 Greek character included in audiotape (4)

##### SOLUTION NO. 3337



extremely middle-class person. Perhaps you run a simple family business such as a petroleum refinery, and you live a simple, and indeed humble, life across your three homes in Delhi, Mumbai and the Amalfi Coast.

One day you wake up in the morning in your house in Delhi, stretch, open the window, inhale the fresh air, and immediately collapse head-first into the aquarium because, due to pollution, your lungs are the consistency of last month's black forest cake.

On the spot, you decide that it is time to go abroad on a holiday with your family.

You book your tickets, pack your bags, and just four or five hours later, you have reached the airport. Immediately, one of your children, Bhagat Singh, named after the Bobby Deol-superhit film *Shaheed*, starts complaining: "What an absolutely nonsense country is India. Look at this traffic. Look at this airport. Look at this aircraft. Look at this person breaking the queue. At least have the decency to bribe the policeman so that other passengers think you are VIP. EXCUSE ME MADAM OUR FLIGHT IS LEAVING IN TEN MINUTES PLEASE UNDERSTAND. Fed up of country fellows. Basic decency is missing in the country."

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# Sharing the sorrow of fellow creatures

Teen Maria George

teenmariegeorge@gmail.com

**W**alking into a veterinary hospital, I felt the weight of a different kind of sadness. It's not just a place for healing; it's a gathering of silent struggles, of creatures unable to explain what they feel, and somehow, that makes it so much heavier.

I was there with my little goat kid, Suzy, the last-born of her siblings. She is small and a bit fragile, and I had come hoping to find some way to help her. But the moment I entered, the stillness of so many animals in pain settled on me, deep and unavoidable.

In the corner lay a goat, heavy with pregnancy but unable to give birth, with loud cries that pierced the silence of the hospital. The doctor said her uterus was tangled. She was moved to be operated on. I murmured a little prayer for her.

A sick cat lay curled up in the arms of a girl who had wrapped it in a towel, silent as if accepting whatever came next, while a hen sat quietly in another room after the injection the doctor had given her. A German Shepherd, apparently fine, stood by his owner, watchful. My Suzy, unable to keep her head straight, let out little cries. None of them could speak or tell us where it hurt.

**United by grief**

There is a quiet understanding that flows among the people there. We may all be strangers, but in those moments, we are bound by the weight of watching the animals we care for struggle. People glance at each other, nodding in silent sympathy. Between the calls and soft murmurs, small conversations start – a simple "What happened to yours?" or "Is the goat feeling better?" Each answer carries its own bit of pain or hope.

One woman spoke quietly about her goat's labour complications, and I shared Suzy's condition, about her being the last-born, a little weak. Somehow, sharing these words is a kind of comfort, an invisible hand on the shoulder.

I saw people finding solace in these small exchanges, a shared experience of waiting, of helplessness, of hope.

As I left, holding Suzy close, I felt like I was carrying the sadness of every life there. It's hard to walk out of a veterinary hospital without feeling sorrowful – knowing the animals can't tell us what hurts, knowing they simply wait in silence, as if hoping someone will understand.

# A culture of hope and promise

**Good deeds lend meaning, purpose and hope that there is optimism and positivity in today's world**

Ashok Warrier

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**S**anskar" is a very Indian concept and therefore to translate it into English will always be risking getting into the pitfalls of semantics. However if the word has to be understood in English, it has to be translated as best as possible. Simply put, it refers to the values or impressions one has received from one's ancestors including parents. "Sanskar" also encompasses cultural traits.

One often hears of things like "To help fellow human beings is in his 'sanskar'" or "To be selfish and think only about oneself is his 'sanskar'" or "To donate to charities" or "to use others' resources to further one's own selfish needs or ends" are his "sanskar".

It is not that people will forever be typecast in a certain "sanskar". It is said that some learn from observing, some others learn from listening while most others have to personally and necessarily experience a situation before doing any course correction assuming that such an intent is there. Some who are associated with a certain "sanskar" do make an effort to change from a negative "sanskar" to a more positive and robust personality. This change however comes to only those who constantly review their words and deeds and have a desire to self-improve. One comes across people who talk big, promise a lot of things only to renege on every one of them or pretend as if there was nothing mentioned. Such people are not only fooling themselves but also letting themselves to be exposed as



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

persons who lack sincerity and dignity in their words and utterances. Good behaviour and mannerisms are noticed as much as negative or insincere behaviour and both can be attributed to a person's "sanskar".

Very recently, the young World Chess Champion, Gukesh, all of 18 years and a few months, was seen rearranging the pieces on the chessboard not just of himself but also of his opponent (who had left soon after the match) after the championship match was over. He could have been excused in the wake of his memorable victory to leave soon after the match. But no, he made sure

that he put not just the chessboard pieces but also his own chair back in place before demonstrating any form of celebration of his victory. Some would perhaps term this conduct his "sanskar".

It is not just what one does but how one does it. It matters not what one does for oneself but what one does for someone else. Somebody might give something precious to someone but how one gives it matters a lot. Does he give it with grace or does he give it with an expressed feeling of loss or remorse?

I have seen sportsmen take a loss in their stride with great dignity and forbearance. I recollect the touching note penned by Roger Federer, one of the greatest tennis players to have played the sport, in memory of his arch rival and equally illustrious friend, Rafael Nadal, with whom he had multiple meetings – some of which he won while some others he lost – on the tennis court of various ATP and other tournaments. There is a recognition here that in the field of sports, there are bound to be wins and losses and one needs to take both in one's stride. In the Tokyo Olympics, there

were two athletes, one from Italy and the other from Qatar, who were vying for a gold medal in the high jump finals. Both were on level. It was at this juncture that the Italian got injured and was in no position to better his last jump. The Qatari could have tried for a higher jump and bagged a gold medal all for himself. But what did he do? He decided to forgo another try and instead he opted for a tie with the Italian and the Olympic Committee decided to award a gold medal to both the Qatari and the Italian.

This was the "sanskar" of the Qatari which made him opt for this most graceful act.

There are so many anecdotes of people putting aside their own interests and instead focussing on helping their fellow humans. The "sanskar" of these people in such cases can be said to supersede their own interests. The good "sanskars" of life are the ones that shine like an incandescent beacon in this world of complexity, avarice and self-centred behaviour. The good "sanskars" also lend meaning, purpose and hope that there is optimism and positivity in today's world however complex and humanistically hopeless it might appear.

# Making TV speak Malayalam

A recap of efforts to launch Malayalam telecast by DD in two months to the New Year in 1985

K. Kunhikrishnan

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**J**anuary 1, 2025 marks the 40th anniversary of Doordarshan's Malayalam telecast from Thiruvananthapuram. With advancement of technology and proliferation of channels, it may sound ordinary, but in 1985, this was an epochal event for television broadcast in Kerala.

On October 31, 1984, while working at Doordarshan in Madras (now Chennai), I was assigned to assess the facilities in



were old colleagues of mine.

Upon Karunakaran's return to Thiruvananthapuram, I met him and he was at his cajoling best, promising us the entire State government machinery for any assistance. But he insisted that we start Malayalam television programming in the New Year. Given the ground realities, that was a tall order. Except a few engineering officers from Madras, most of the staff had not even seen a television set. The Relay Station Engineer, P.R.S. Nair, and the Installation Engineer, N.C. Pillai, assured me that we could spring miracles and make the dream of broadcasting Malayalam television in the New Year come true. Recording and transmission could be done in a makeshift studio, and the black-and-white OB van could be turned into the production control panel. We informed the bosses in Delhi about our plans.

On seeing our proposal, Shiv Sharma cautioned me, "Television is a hungry monster. Once you start, there is no going back. Anything wrong, your head will roll!" I humbly conveyed our resolve and again he counselled me to wait till April. Finally, the proposal to produce and broadcast one hour of original programming was permitted.

Without a news broadcast, I knew we would not make any impact in Kerala. Later, a 10-minute news bulletin was sanctioned. While

shutting between my two assignments in Madras and

V.N. Gadgil, then I&B Minister, opening a 10-kW transmitter for broadcast over a 80-km radius (above); K. Karunakaran, then Kerala Chief Minister, inaugurating the Malayalam telecast on January 1, 1985. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Thiruvananthapuram, I prepared the fixed-point chart, or the programming timetable.

On December 10, 1984, I was transferred to Thiruvananthapuram as the station's first Director. Just three weeks remained for the first broadcast and the challenges appeared insurmountable. Everything was to be built from scratch, and at breakneck speed. Many tangles had to be untangled. Though budgeted, payments had to come from the pay and accounts office in Madras. We could only spend ₹10,000. Incredible as it may seem now, we purchased two office tables, by splitting quotations for parts from a public agency, and furniture for staff from a State government company. Teleprinter services of the news agencies PTI and UNI were installed after tremendous efforts.

Content was a prime concern. Malayalam titles for timeslots, montages and signature tunes for each were tasks achieved with gusto.

Selecting anchors, announcers, compères and news readers was a demanding task. The queues for application forms were so long that they made headlines on the front pages of local newspapers. From a few thousand applications, it was an uphill task to empanel a few youngsters and then train them to perform with the correct poise, diction and modulation.

The inaugural function on January 1, 1985 was broadcast live. It was applauded and welcomed by the public. For the live telecast, cameras were brought in from Bombay Doordarshan, and for sending the signals, Madras Doordarshan provided the microwave link, evincing the camaraderie in the Doordarshan family.



## FEEDBACK

Letters to the Magazine can be e-mailed separately to [magletters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:magletters@thehindu.co.in) by Tuesday 3 p.m.

### Cover story

The food, crafts and lifestyle of the Himalayan region should be made known to people south of the Vindhyas. ('In 2025, look to the Himalayas'; Dec. 22) End-to-End connectivity and dedicated tourism will help the cause.

### Carpe diem

The review gives an interesting glimpse of Garth Greenwell's *Small Rain*, a novel about relationships. ('View from the hospital bed'; Dec. 22) The author once said in an interview: "For me the great human value is promiscuity, the fact that we love mixture, that we are excited by collisions between cultures, languages, traditions."

**Kosaraju Chandramouli**

### True to self

As a sociology student, I had known of Irawati Karwe's work on the kinship system of India. ('Breaking glass ceilings'; Dec. 22) However, getting an insight into her life through the book review was inspiring. I was particularly impressed by the episode where she would not bandwagon with her supervisor Eugen Fischer and refused to connect race with "intellect and logic".

### To Ustad, with love

The table will never sound the same again. ('Zakir Hussain and the glow of fireflies'; Dec. 22) Zakir Hussain has left behind a vacuum, which will be extremely difficult to fill for any other tabla player. **Deepak Taak**

What a fitting tribute to the maestro. His simple manners and immense respect and love for humanity symbolised his greatness Ustad, you will be missed.

### Satish Sundar

**Merry and meatless** A meatless Christmas is a deliciously compassionate celebration. ('A merry (meatless) Christmas'; Dec. 22) With so many cookbooks on vegan recipes and with the trend catching up in the West, India, with its diverse food traditions and ingredients, is sure to follow suit.

**Parimala G. Tadas**

**A life inspiring** Kavya Mukhija's life is a lesson to many. ('Kavya Mukhija: can do everything'; Dec. 22) Persons with disabilities too deserve equality and social acceptability. A life sans discrimination will inspire them to thrive and survive with confidence.

**K. Rajendran**

**Charming photos** A picture is worth a thousand words. ('A miracle never dies'; Dec. 22) The photo essay by celebrity photographer Dayanita Singh has captured the tabla wizard in his many moods, playful at times, pensive at others, yet charismatic and charming as always.

**C.V. Aravind**

Through her photographs, Dayanita Singh has made Zakir Hussain immortal. And equally, her words have touched our heart. May god give eternal rest to the maestro's soul.

**Tharcius S. Fernando**



## MORE ON THE WEB

[www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page](http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page)

### Forced to comply, silenced by violence

Dowry-related deaths, sexual assaults, honour killings are expressions of a society that prioritises male entitlement.

**Y. Mercy Famila**

### The shackles of legacy

Once a woman becomes a mother, the expectations placed upon her grow even heavier.

**Vandana Verma**

### A poet to cherish

Edward Thomas' biography reveals a tortured soul struggling to come to terms with itself.

**P.M. Warrier**

### Beyond salary and freedom

There are several other factors which attract people to an organisation.

**S.A. Thameemul Ansari**

Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to: [openpage@thehindu.co.in](mailto: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 or the views contained therein.



The architectural conservationist and designer's *The India Cookbook* has treasured recipes from the country's who's who

## HOLIDAY TABLES WITH SUNITA KOHLI'S FRIENDS

**Joshua Muyiwa**

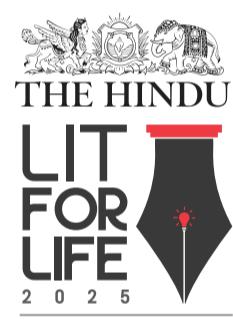
I think very architecturally," states Sunita Kohli, over a phone call from her home in New Delhi. The Padma Shri awardee and design maven – who has restored and decorated several Indian landmarks, including the Rashtrapati Bhavan – is speaking to the structure and formatting of her latest publication, *The India Cookbook: From the Tables of My Friends* (Aleph Book Company).

Her philosophy for constructing the pages of a cookbook or planning a dinner party aligns with her professional practice, she says. "Like in design, the more you work at it, the more you've prepared for it. In the end, the designed space should look effortless. The same thing goes for a home meal or a dinner party, you've got to think things through and do a little preparation beforehand."

In this follow-up to her popular *The Lucknow Cookbook* (co-authored with her mother Chand Sur), we get to learn about the delicious dishes from the homes of Kohli's friends, new and old, from across the length and breadth of the subcontinent. "This cookbook has recipes from literally my oldest friend Nasima Faridi Aziz – we've been friends

since the age of three-and-a-half in kindergarten at Loretto Convent in Lucknow – to those I've met in the recent past," Kohli, 78, says.

While there's an order to the recipes according to region, and exactitude to the ingredients in the cookbook, the instructions themselves are invitational. They resonate with the casual yet careful manner in which recipes are actually exchanged between friends. There's a nudge to employ our senses in the process of preparing these home-style dishes for our own dinner parties: touch to see if the lotus stem is tender, taste to tell if the sourness has reduced, smell for changes in the masalas, and so on.



Sunita Kohli will be talking about *The India Cookbook* at The Hindu Lit for Life (January 18-19) in Chennai. Scan the QR code to register.

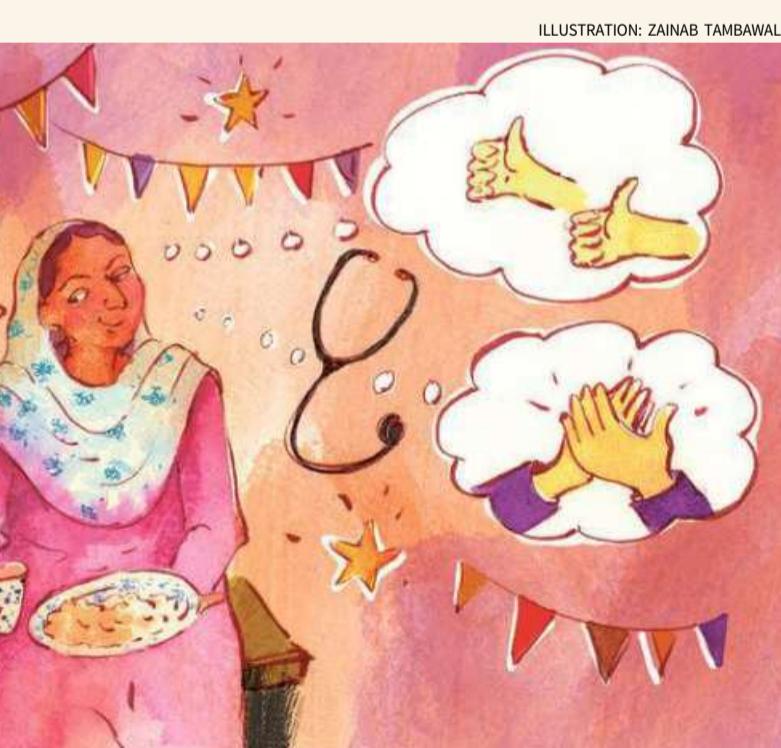


**The tomorrow that never came**  
This choice in the easy methodology of the dishes is also telling of the many means employed by Kohli to patiently get these recipes out of her friends. "If somebody asks me for a recipe, I would write it out and give it to them immediately," she claims. But, that wasn't the case with compiling these personal recipes for the book. "Dilshad Sheikh, known for her legendary dinners at her Srinagar home, and sister to actors and producers Feroze, Sanjay and Akbar Khan said, 'Oh Sunita, I don't know how to write all this, but if we meet I'll tell you and you can write it'. So, I went to meet her, took down the recipe for *surkh murg* [page 3], and when she saw the final draft, she boldly pointed out that I've made errors in taking down the recipe and made me re-write it, imagine," she says and bursts out laughing.

And there was the actress Shabana Azmi, who promised to send her recipe for *Hyderabadi biryani* [page 126] 'tomorrow' to Kohli. "That tomorrow never came for many tomorrows," she tells me. "Eventually, I said, 'Shabana, please

can you not send the recipe' and then she sent me a badly taken photograph of a handwritten page from a family cookbook, and asked me to transcribe it. While doing it, I realised I couldn't read the end. So I called her and she says, 'You're a good cook, you'll know what to do'. My friends are really crazy!"

**'Not afraid to try things out'**  
Kohli hasn't simply eaten each of these dishes at her friends' homes,



### A LITTLE LIFE

# Sugared eggs and unwanted guests

**Phuphee's advice for a new year? Celebrate yourself even if others are slow to do so**

with. She would whisk eggs with sugar and fry them in ghee or homemade butter, and serve it with walnuts and wild honey.

"Who has come so early?" I asked, looking around for the

unannounced guests. "Some guests are invisible," she said.

I should have realised that the unannounced guests were my thoughts. The trouble now was that

I wasn't excited about securing my placement. My friends' reactions seemed far more important than the placement itself, and that left me feeling a little lost and confused. I sat there trying to warm my



**'Be an easy hostess'** (Far left) Sunita Kohli; a table setting for dinner at Kohli's house; and the book's cover. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



**Sunita and I are dear friends**, who travel together with a group of women who do historical tours across the country. I contributed the recipe of *podi kura maasam* [page 114, pictured below] or crispy shredded lamb, which is specific to the homes of the royal families of Vijayanagara, which I belong to. It is a twice-cooked dish, and can be kept outdoors for a long time. It doesn't need refrigeration and therefore was a perfect snack during the hunts. A kind of meaty trail mix

**VIDYA GAJAPATHI RAJU**  
Of the erstwhile Vijayanagara royal family



**The Sindhi kadhi and Sai bhaji** recipes were my mother's favourites. We make them often in our Punjabi household. So even if I don't speak Sindhi and have never visited Sindh, it is as close as it gets to celebrating that part of my heritage

**PRIYA PAUL**  
Hoteler and art collector, whose mother was a good friend of Kohli's

can you not send the recipe' and then she sent me a badly taken photograph of a handwritten page from a family cookbook, and asked me to transcribe it. While doing it, I realised I couldn't read the end. So I called her and she says, 'You're a good cook, you'll know what to do'. My friends are really crazy!"

**'Not afraid to try things out'**  
Kohli hasn't simply eaten each of these dishes at her friends' homes,

**The naarange pilau was a dish inherited from my mother-in-law**

They migrated to Lahore from Delhi. Food was a big thing at my in-law's home, but it had a more delicate flavouring from food in my own childhood home. I grew up in Lahore, but my mother's family was from Lucknow, so my home food had bolder aromatics. The exciting thing about this recipe is that I feel like I'm returning it to India, the place it was created in by my mother-in-law.

**NUSRAT JAMIL**  
A former journalist and newspaper editor based in Lahore

she has made some of them part of her own dinner menus, too. And she isn't afraid to try things out with them either. "For a dinner last October, with Frank Wisner, a former American ambassador but also a close family friend, I tried out *naarangee pillau* [page 220], an amazing pilau where everything is made in orange juice. The mutton and rice are cooked in orange juice and it is finished with saffron and caramelised orange rinds. I can't tell you the *khushboo* [fragrance] of it," she says. "Even if it isn't perfect, they are my friends. They won't judge me forever," she adds, offering it as a tip to tackle one's own future experiments with friends. "But also be an easy hostess and have easy-going friends," she quips.

While Kohli thinks "that this is a terrible statement about herself", she admits that "I probably can't think of many of my friends separate from my association of them with a particular food dish". She has the same system with places. "Even on a visit to archaeological sites, I'm more likely to remember a nearby restaurant or *dhaba*. I have an unbelievable memory for these details," she flexes. "For me, Preetha Reddy [chairperson of Apollo Hospitals] will always be associated with spicy pickled *avakkai* biryani [page 115] or Shirin and Priya Paul [who runs the Park Hotels chain] with their soothing Sindhi kadhi [page 38]."

**Notes from Pakistan**  
But if we think Indian hospitality is legendary, then there's nothing to beat the generosity of Pakistan, she says, having just returned from there at the time of this interview. Kohli was born in Lahore, and her parents and husband, Ramesh, were born in areas in and around in Undivided India.

She recalls a wonderful dinner with Yousaf Salihuddin, a cultural figure and grandson of the poet Iqbal, during the Lahore Lit Fest at Haveli Barood Khana where she ducked into the kitchens to get the recipe for *dhania murgh* [page 223] by interviewing the "cook with a beautiful face". "The first thing she says to me in Punjabi: 'Don't be afraid of these recipes. They are super easy.' I recorded her telling me the recipe, and transcribed and translated it for the book. I also got two more recipes from that night's decadent dinner for myself," she admits, mischievously.

**The author is a Bengaluru-based poet and writer.**

hands and feet in front of the *daan*, and trying to thaw the chill which had taken root somewhere deep inside of me. Phuphee handed me a plate of *pachhay thool* and a cup of steaming *nun chai* (salt tea). As I ate, I could feel the blood making its way back to my peripheries. By the time I was done, I felt mostly like myself but a tiny sliver of the frost remained, staying inaccessible to the warmth that always came with Phuphee's food.

Phuphee sat sipping her umpteen cups of *nun chai* and smoking her two cigarettes.

"It was not my intention to upset you last night," she said.

I talked to her about what had happened with my friends and how her words had really brought everything home. She listened patiently, and stubbed out her cigarettes in her *chin pyaale* (a small china cup without a handle used to serve *nun chai*).

"Boaz, myoun jaan [listen, my life], wanting a sprinkling of validation here and there is alright, but seeking validation for everything you achieve is dangerous. The trouble with seeking any form of validation is that it may never come, and even when it does, it may not come in the form you were seeking it. That will lead to heartbreak and confusion."

"It is also not possible for everyone to always understand what something means to you. Look at these woolly slippers I knit every year. I started doing this when I got married. At the beginning, when I would hand them over to someone, I would expect them to be over the moon. But they would simply say thank you and move on. I would feel a little disheartened. I spoke to

Aapa [her maternal grandmother] about how I felt, and she told me, 'Tahira, not everyone can see what you have had to do to get these done. Nobody knows how you get the yarn, how you sacrifice other things to sit down and knit, and how your fingers ache as you knit. But nobody needs to know or validate, because you know and that has to be enough'.

"At first I didn't understand what she meant," Phuphee continued, "but slowly I realised that it is enough to know that I did what I did. That is validation enough."

She took my face in her soft hands and asked, "Do you know what the worst thing about seeking validation is? Slowly, we start to mistake the approval we receive, for love. Then, one day when it doesn't happen, instead of feeling a little disappointed [as we should], we feel lost and rejected. You must always remember that the approval you seek for your achievements must come from you." She then kissed me on the forehead and got up to get more eggs from the hen house.

I sat there looking down at the red woolly slippers on my feet that she had knitted, thinking about what she had just said. I pulled them more snugly around my feet, feeling the last bit of frost melt in the gentle, warm sunlight that Phuphee's presence, her words and her cooking brought into my life. And it was with those that I ushered in another year.



**Saba Mahjoor**, a Kashmiri living in England, spends her scant free time contemplating life's vagaries.