



TRAVEL 2025
UNPLUG,
EXPLORE

magazine

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GETTY IMAGES

Raul Dias

On-call hypnotherapists. AI-assisted beds. Smart goggles that use heat, massage and vibration to lower the heart rate. Bedtime tea blends. Electro magnetic and infrared therapy. Sequestered guest rooms – with one in London even housed inside a three-storey stainless steel sculpture, to promote meditative stillness. These are just some of the things travellers are signing up for on holiday. All for one simple reason: to sleep.

There's been a big shift from the earlier standard of a vacation, where catching Zzzs was the most boring thing you could possibly do. Now, sleep tourism is the year's hottest travel trend. It's no surprise – India (and the world) is tired. According to a 2025 survey by LocalCircles, a citizen engagement platform, ahead of World Sleep Day (March 14), nearly 60% of Indians sleep for less than six hours daily. For many, even those precious few hours are not uninterrupted. This is cause for concern when studies link poor sleep to mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. It could explain why 'napcations' are getting popular as a concept and why holiday programmes are being designed to improve health and well-being through curated sleep experiences.

‘Why am I so tired all the time?’ “The growth of sleep tourism can be attributed to rising stress levels and a growing recognition of sleep's crucial role in maintaining health. Individuals are now actively looking for ways to prioritise rest,” says Rajesh Srinivas, general manager at Swastik Luxury Wellbeing Sanctuary. Opened last November, this wellness retreat in Khadakwasla on the outskirts of Pune has made sleep tourism one of its major calling cards with a programme called ‘The art of restorative sleep’.

“Designed to help individuals combat sleep disorders, it includes personalised sleep assessments, mind-body practices like yoga *nidra* and meditation, alongside modern therapies, including sound baths,” says Srinivas, who ensures guests leave adequately equipped to maintain this sleep hygiene back at home. “We suggest ways for them to set up a sleep-conducive environment, be it via lighting, audio-visual aids and even recipes for pre-sleep elixirs like *kaadhas*.”

Sayali Sancheti, 37, has been battling insomnia for a while. The Pune resident recently underwent the five-day sleep therapy programme at Swastik. One that she says has made a difference. “I had

read a lot about the body's circadian rhythm, and thought of addressing it for a more long-term solution for my insomnia,” she says. “The mind-sound resonance technique, aerial yoga, and diet have all worked in my favour.”

Back home, the branding specialist has incorporated a lot of what she learnt on holiday, such as going to sleep while focusing on her breathing. “While the information is available online, seeing it doled out in a practical, problem-solving way made all the difference,” she says, adding that she does miss Swastik's unique ‘tuck-in’ routine – where an attendant administered a mini foot massage and anointed her temples and forehead with sleep-inducing lavender oil.

Another Pune resident, Natasha Sharma, 45, doesn't have a problem getting sleep but is still considering a sleep holiday. The writer and novelist finds it tough to get back to sleep if interrupted during the night. “Ever since becoming a mum, I've noticed that I'm quick to snap out of a deep sleep with the slightest of disturbances. It could be my daughter's voice or even a whimper from my dog,” says Sharma. “I feel that an itinerary-bereft, pure sleep vacation, where I'm on my own and equipped with the techniques to fall back into a deep sleep is something I desperately need. [I'll pick a place depending on] the bundled-up activities related to sleep on offer, and what they have when one is not sleeping. A nice pool, perhaps!”

The situationship of conscious uncoupling Unsurprisingly, sleep, or in this case, the lack thereof, is having a major impact on interpersonal relationships. Although they have been married for seven years, the

proverbial ‘itch’ for Mumbai couple Mina and Louis Noronha (names changed on request) had begun to fester just a few months into living together. Unable to bear her husband's snoring, which has since been diagnosed as clinical sleep apnea, brought on by his borderline obesity, Mina has made a spare bedroom her refuge. A “sleep sanctuary”, as the 34-year-old management consultant calls it.

Louis, a 37-year-old fintech specialist, is trying to get a handle on his problem through intensive sleep therapy sessions that include light therapy to regulate his circadian rhythm, and cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia. He says this, coupled with medication (according to IKEA's Sleep Report 2025, 37% of Indians use sleep medication – the highest in the world) and personalised sleep vacations, is helping him cope.

Pegged at over USD \$800 billion, according to a 2022 report by Grand View Research, the global sleep tourism market is poised to punch through the USD \$1 trillion ceiling in the next three years. Meanwhile, in India, the Skyscanner Travel Trends 2025 report on the rise of wellness tourism – of which sleep tourism is a major vertical – has revealed that prioritising health during vacationing is being sought by 57% of Indian travellers.

Zzzs at a premium

Napcations can come at a hefty price. ‘Sleep with Six Senses’ programme will set the sleepless back by ₹1,22,750 per couple (excluding the actual stay and meals), while Swastik's ‘The art of restorative sleep’ comes at a whopping ₹3,99,000 for a week's stay, inclusive of everything.



I feel that an itinerary-bereft, pure sleep vacation, where I'm on my own and equipped with the techniques to fall back into a deep sleep is something I desperately need. [I'll pick a place depending on] the bundled-up activities related to sleep on offer

NATASHA SHARMA
Writer and novelist

So far, he's been on four sleep vacations; his first at a wellness retreat in Austria in 2019 and three in India. With a less intense approach in comparison to his sleep

therapy sessions, these napcations have helped him learn to maintain a consistent sleep schedule and establish a relaxing bedtime routine, such as listening to soothing sounds on his sound machine.

There is now a term for this rather unconventional but effective conjugal compromise. A sleep divorce. Where couples or partners sleep in different rooms or in different beds, or go on sleep-oriented vacations separately. (A 2025 Global Sleep Survey by ResMed, a medical equipment company, found 78% of couples in India have adopted the practice at some time.)

Minnu Bhonsle, a consulting psychotherapist at Mumbai's Heart to Heart Counselling Centre, however is optimistic of its efficacy – despite any social stigma it might attract. “If the overall health of the relationship is good, then there is nothing wrong with sleeping in separate rooms or seeking out a tailor-made sleep vacation independent of a partner,” she says. “I very often recommend this seemingly simple solution to an otherwise impossible situation that can be detrimental to a marriage or romantic partnership.”

Staycations turn snoozecations Taking a slightly different approach, and promoting sleep as a shared “we” activity are a number of properties across the country. Ever since it opened its gates in India in 2021, the Six Senses Fort Barwara resort in Rajasthan has been aligning with the brand's decade-old ‘Sleep with Six Senses’ global programme. The comprehensive package (for stays of three, five or seven nights) encompasses everything from personalised sleep assessments and yoga therapies to a nifty sleep kit with essential oils and sleep balms. “We offer personalised tips based on

sleep data to help guests improve sleep quality,” says Mark Sands, vice president of wellness, Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas. “We also offer sleep-enhancing touches, including sound healing, and magnesium-rich foods.”

Of course, as *The New York Times* stated recently, sleep tourism can be called an old dog with new tricks. Before the trend got a name, hotels were offering pillow menus, blackout curtains, and white noise machines for staycationers. Today, they are upping the game with tech such as Therabody SmartGoggles (which uses heat and vibration to lower heart rate), sensory deprivation tanks, and Brain Gauge Pro (a programme that tests cognitive performance and monitors brain conditions to offer customised sleep solutions). Last month, the Westin Hotels and Resorts, one of the first hotel chains to introduce a sleep programme in India, held ‘The 90-Hour Rest Week’ contest – a nationwide search for the person most deserving of rest – offering them a three-night wellness retreat at a Westin hotel in India.

Ayurveda is also at the forefront of many sleep programmes. Think Ananda in the Himalayas in Uttarakhand, Blue Hill Lotus Holistic Wellness Village in Tamil Nadu, and Atmantan Wellness Retreat in Maharashtra, which prioritise yoga, *pranayama* and meditation.

A hit or a miss? Kumaar Bagrodia is a neuroscientist and founder of NeuroLeap. The eight-year-old Mumbai-based company offers advanced neurotechnology-based brain assessment and improvement. Post COVID-19, Bagrodia says he's seen an increase in issues such as anxiety and brain fog. “[Lack of] sleep is one of the most visible symptoms. In fact, in India, there's been a rise in [the use of] prescription drugs for these issues.”

So, are travel companies on the right path with sleep tourism? Can napcations be effective in the long run? “I believe sleep is one of the many facets of why people go to such places.” Bagrodia believes it is naive to assume that somebody will spend lakhs to go somewhere just to sleep. “I think it is all the factors that lead up to it [sleep]: the environment, the experience, your routine, the food, and the amount of meditation, yoga or physical therapies that you will have access to, among other aids [at such sleep programmes].”

The Mumbai-based writer is passionate about food, travel and luxury, not necessarily in that order.



Author Harlan Coben; actor Reese Witherspoon; and stills from TV adaptations of Coben's novels. (GETTY IMAGES)

IN CONVERSATION

HARLAN AND REESE: A SUSPENSEFUL PAIRING

The bestselling author on his back-to-back adaptations on OTT and on working with the *Legally Blonde* star for his next novel

Mini Anthikad Chhibber
mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

Four months into 2025, and there are three adaptations of author Harlan Coben's books on Netflix – *Missing You*, the Polish adaptation of *Just One Look*, and *Caught*, set in Argentina. Two more adaptations are in production, and his latest book, *Nobody's Fool* (published by Penguin Random House) has just been released. There is also the thriller he has written with actor-producer Reese Witherspoon coming out in October.

"I can't share anything about the novel," says Coben, 63, over a video call from New Jersey, where he lives. "I can, however tell you how it happened. We've known each other. Reese has read my books. I've seen all her movies. She called saying, 'I want to talk to you about an idea I had.'" Coben was wondering how to tell Witherspoon that it would not work. "I don't collaborate on books or stories."

But when the star of *Legally Blonde* told Coben her idea, he was sold. "I said, 'We can also do this', and we started talking, knocking it back and forth. Next thing you know, I've got a pen and paper and I'm starting to write. And three hours later, we're like, 'Why don't we try to write this as a novel together?'"

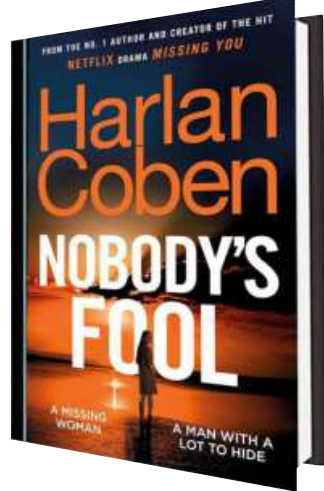
Witherspoon is the perfect partner, says Coben, whose books have sold over 80 million copies worldwide and been translated into 46 languages. "I don't know if I'll collaborate on a novel with anybody else. Reese

is so smart, and also is so great with people. She knows when to push me. We helped each other be more creative. With Reese, I would probably do it again."

Coben says he did most of the writing. "It was mostly about talking out the ideas with her. We created our own mixed voice. We email or text every day and talk about the book all the time. We both are obsessed with it."

The three shows on Netflix, almost simultaneously, Coben says, is not by design. "It just happened. We were filming them all around the same time. I'm not the one who does the scheduling. Netflix decided to do it this way for the year."

Next up is an adaptation of his 2023 novel, *I Will Find You*, with Sam Worthington of *Avatar* fame playing the father serving a prison sentence for killing his son. "We start filming in a couple weeks, sometime in April. I'm excited about working with Worthington. We are also filming an English series based on my book *Run Away* (2019),



I don't know if I'll collaborate on a novel with anybody else. Reese is so smart, and also is so great with people. She knows when to push me. We helped each other be more creative. With Reese, I would probably do it again

with Minnie Driver, James Nesbitt and Ruth Jones."

Writer's empathy
Nobody's Fool, published last month, is a case of the screen inspiring the book. It marks the second appearance of Detective Sami Kierce from *Fool Me Once*. "*Nobody's Fool* was inspired by the 2024 adaptation of *Fool Me Once*. Adeel Akhtar is one of my favorite actors and I wanted to work with him for a long time. We hired him to play Kierce for the TV show. And as I watched him, I thought, 'This guy has got more stories to tell.'"

Taking place a year after the events of *Fool Me Once*, *Nobody's Fool* finds Sami at his lowest. "He has lost his job and is in disgrace. When he was 21 years old, he took a college trip with some friends, met a girl and fell in love, like it happens on these kinds of trips. One day he wakes up, to find her murdered, and he runs. Now over 20 years later, he's teaching a class of misfits at a night school in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He sees a woman in the back of the room, and realises it's her, it's Anna, the girl he thought was murdered all those years ago,

and his world explodes."

Every novel starts with an idea, Coben says. "Then I ask, 'Who's going to tell the story?' So sometimes it's Myron Bolitar, a couple of times it was Wilde [*The Boy from the Woods*, *The Match*] and now it is Sami. I do plan on writing Sami again, but man plans and God laughs."

While the tone of the novel is ironic, like the Myron Bolitar novels, Coben says, Sami is a little more damaged than Myron. "He's more impetuous and gets himself in trouble. I wanted it to be in first person, which I don't usually do. I wanted to be in his head, he's funny. Myron is a big, strong guy, 6'4" and over 200 pounds, while Sami is little and channels things differently."

Sami, like actor Adeel Akhtar who plays him in the TV adaptation, is of Pakistani origin, says Coben. "Half of him is Pakistani and the other half is something I'll save for another book." Their attitudes are different, Coben says, because they come from different worlds. "I wanted the book to be fast-paced and wanted to be with Sami and enjoy his company."

Though he mostly writes in the third person, Coben says he chose a first-person narrative for *Nobody's Fool* "because I wanted it to be Sami's book". It was not difficult getting into his head. "I spoke to Adeel a bit and also spoke to some other people, and had them read the book to make sure I didn't make any mistakes. My job as a writer is to be empathetic – not necessarily sympathetic, but empathetic. You have to be able to see the viewpoint of all the characters in a way that works," he signs off.

Drama at high noon

Annie Zaidi's novel set in the worlds of film and theatre widens the lens to bring in intimate facets of human personality and relationships



Slice of life A still from the folk play *Jas Ki Tas* at the META festival 2025 in New Delhi.

Sanjay Sipahimalani

Many novelists have explored the interplay between the performing arts and life to illuminate their themes. A recent example that comes to mind is Irish author Anne Enright's 2020 novel *Actress*, which is set against the world of theatre and film and delves into a fraught mother-daughter relationship. Annie Zaidi's *The Comeback* uses the same world to explore ideas of friendship and self-realisation.

The narrator of Zaidi's novel is an actor who has changed his name from Jaun Kazim to John K. to gain wider acceptance, a decision that reflects his self-interested approach to navigating the world. After years of auditioning for meaty roles in Mumbai, he strikes gold when a producer listens to his narration of an audiobook and selects him for the central role in the film version.

John is from the town of Baansa, located "north of Lucknow but south of Bareilly". It was while he was in college here that he was bitten by the acting bug, and his talent was spotted and shaped by Asghar, a close friend and theatre group leader. "His was the hand that had picked up a rock", John acknowledges, "and polished it into a gemstone".

Now, however, John is on the cusp of success while Asghar works as a bank employee. After an ill-judged interview with a film publication in which the actor reveals details of their misdemeanours during a college exam, Asghar is fired from his job, much to John's chagrin.

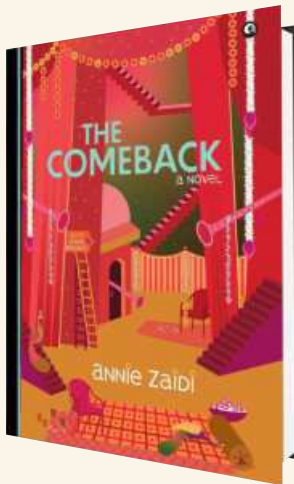
Asghar retreats to his mother's house in Baansa with his wife and children to lick his wounds and plan for his future. Holding John responsible for his fate, he refuses to return calls and messages. The rift between the friends grows by the day, even as John devotes himself to signing contracts and "making the most of my moment".

This, then, is the slim novel's central predicament, related in a manner that is both economical and absorbing. It contains more than a few touches of broad irony, especially when it comes to the business of art and the way eastern and western dramatic traditions are appropriated by the cognoscenti.

In his late 30s, and with his career now on the skids, John becomes obsessed with finding out what Asghar is up to. When he learns that his old friend is returning to the stage, it feels like "a needle-stab in my heart". Consumed by envy, he tries his best to be cast in the upcoming production.

Coming to terms with the past

The Comeback could well have restricted itself to an insular world in front of the arc lights, but Zaidi adroitly widens the lens to bring in other relationships. She traces John's shifting bonds with, among others, his ex-wife, his own and Asghar's family, and a former potential love interest. He also contacts earlier members of his theatre group, one of whom serves as his ears and eyes in discovering Asghar's next steps. In passing, this leads to a serviceable feint in which the first-person narrative briefly shifts to deal with Asghar's concerns and dilemmas.



The Comeback
Annie Zaidi
Aleph
₹599

In Prayaag Akbar's *Mother India* (2024), a character's actions leading to guilt and awareness unfold against the backdrop of right-wing social media posts. In *The Comeback*, social media, particularly Instagram, becomes a vehicle for John to orchestrate his return and make amends, albeit in a characteristically self-serving manner.

In the process, he probes "the twisted innards of honesty" to move towards a redemption of sorts. That means coming to terms with the impact of past actions and dealing with the way his narcissism has hampered relationships. "I might be selfish, an ambitious fool, and a liar, even a coward", he thinks, "but I do have one good quality: a strong sense of self-preservation".

"What's your soul worth?" reads a poster tagline for one of the theatre productions delineated in *The Comeback*. By teasing out the possible answers to this question, the novel suggests that the path towards greater understanding may not be straightforward, but it's ultimately worth the effort.

The reviewer is a Mumbai-based writer.

BROWSER

Sunrise on the Reaping

Suzanne Collins
Scholastic Press
₹899
This second prequel to *The Hunger Games* trilogy, set 24 years before the events of the first novel, sold more than 1.5 million copies in the Anglosphere in its first week of sale. The film adaptation is expected to hit screens in November 2026.



Hot Water

Bhavika Govil
Fourth Estate India
₹599
A portion of this debut novel won the inaugural Pontas & JJ Bola Emerging Writers Prize in 2021. The coming-of-age tale centred on a single mother and her two young children explores themes of desire and identity, and is also being translated into other languages.



The Best of Everything

Kit de Waal
Tinder Press
₹693 (ebook)
Known for her emphasis on working class struggles, De Waal used the advance from her award-winning debut book, to set up a creative writing scholarship for the under-privileged. Here, she tells the story of a single mother living in London.



The Tiger's Share

Keshava Guha
John Murray India
₹699
With his new novel set in New Delhi, Guha says he has attempted to make "an inquiry into the anti-feminist backlash among men of my generation". This story of two ambitious women is set against a dystopian background of ecological collapse and political unrest.



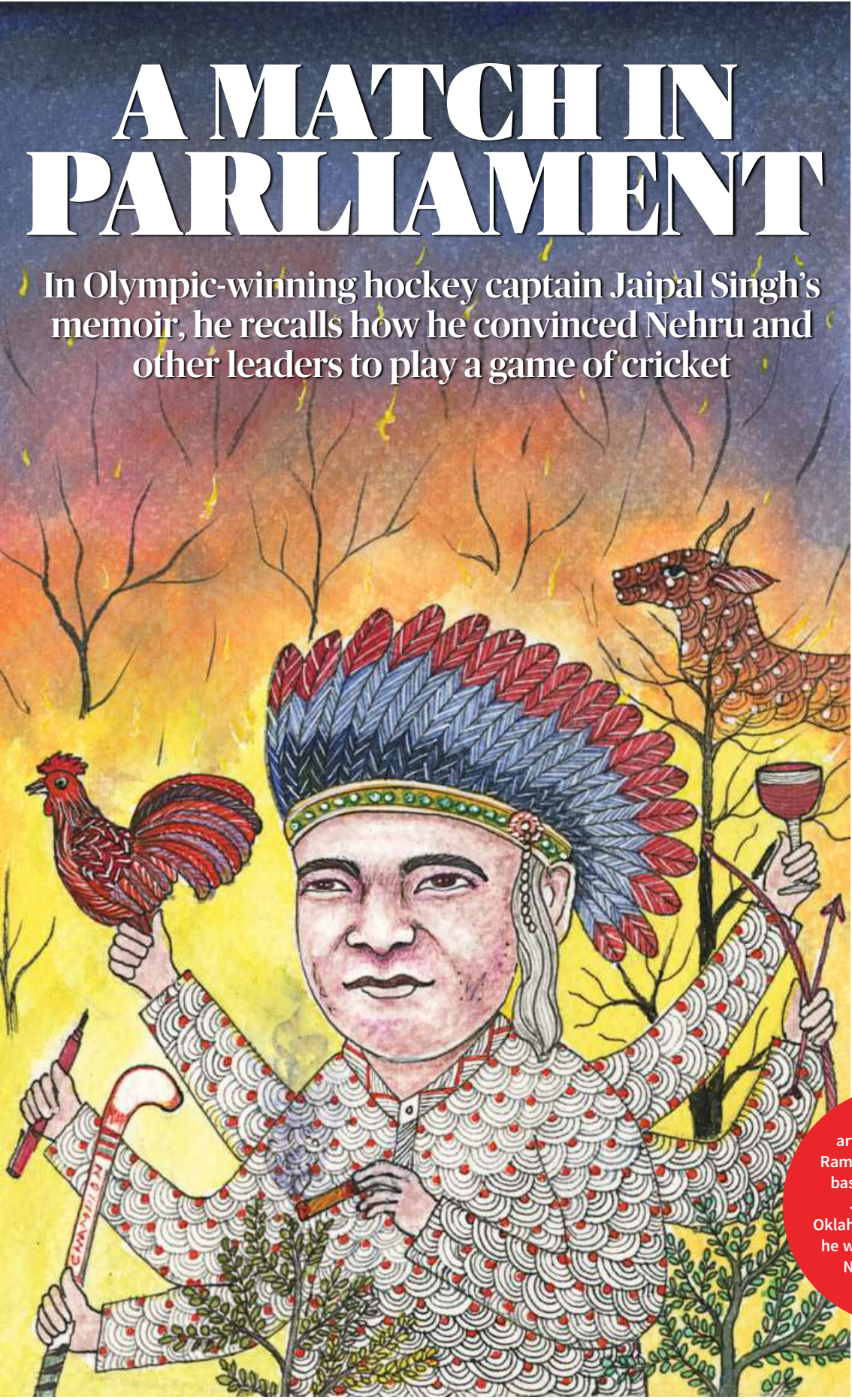
The Olympic-winning hockey captain of the 1928 Amsterdam Games and a stalwart of the Adivasi movement organised several sporting events as a parliamentarian. In his memoir, Lo Bir Sendra: A Hunter in the Burning Forest, Jaipal Singh recalls setting up a cricket match for MPs. Jawaharlal Nehru, S. Radhakrishnan and a host of politicians took the field. The editors of the memoir note that it was written during a long sea voyage to Europe in 1969, a year before Singh's death. It was first published by 'Prabhat Khabar' with a foreword by Stan Swamy, but soon went out of print. With its republication, a new generation of readers will learn of Singh's life and times. An edited excerpt:

There were also occasions when sporting events had to be organised for MPs. The first one I took charge of happened in September 1953, in the wake of the floods that besieged Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. I found there were enough cricketers in Parliament, some of them top class, like the maharaja of Dungarpur and Sardar Surjit Singh Majithia. The Parliamentary Sports Club was formed with Nehru as chairman, the president of the republic as patron, and I, manager. I appointed the maharajadhiraj of Darbhanga as treasurer. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was a keen member of the executive committee.

I decided that there should be a match between the Prime Minister's XI and the Vice-President's (Dr. Radhakrishnan). The press took all this as a joke to ridicule the MPs. I arranged net practice and gave press communiques. Special blazers and caps with the parliamentary badge were also issued for the participating players. Even the Prime Minister had to pay for his blazer and cap.

Bata shoes for Gopalan

Characteristic 'native' problems cropped up. Kaka Gadgil, a Cabinet minister, insisted on playing in his dhoti. Gopalan, the communist leader, had never worn boots. Rajkumari Kaur and Begum Aizaz Rasul insisted on their inclusion. A deputation of Nehru's admirers demanded he should not play. Although I had taken the decision without consulting anybody,



Nehru wanted to play so I included him. No dhotis in cricket, I decided. I bought Bata shoes for Gopalan. I promised the women I would not leave them out if I couldn't get twenty-two male players. I said they could even umpire.

The brochure was a big job. Anthony de Mello, former president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, took charge of this task. I got a letter of support from the Prime Minister, and this got 'Tony' hundreds of advertisements. We made nearly ₹50,000 on this one item. Tony, who was also honorary general secretary of the National Sports Club of India, organised a Parliament-like seating arrangement in the National Stadium Gallery for distinguished visitors, the Speaker's guests, in the officers' box and the President's box. Seating also had to be arranged for the players. Lala Sir Sri Ram, a big businessman, undertook to lunch us. Beer, I got free from Dyer Meakin.

Printing the tickets was also a problem. In Delhi, and perhaps elsewhere, it quickly becomes a money-making business, with black markets emerging almost immediately after tickets are printed. Tony connected me with one of his many stooges. Twenty-five thousand one-rupee tickets were printed for the hoi polloi. Then, ten- and five-rupee tickets for the Bhavnagar Pavilion. I arranged for one row of thousand-rupee tickets just behind the teams. Every ticket sold out. Maharajas were keen to sit near the Prime Minister. I had no difficulty with the twenty-five thousand one-rupee tickets. I gave them to P.L. Mehta, the Delhi police chief, and got ₹25,000!

The President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, a great lover of sports, arrived by the front lane. I presented the two teams to him. Dr. Radhakrishnan put on the cricket cap for a change. The two captains had to go out to the field for the toss. Nehru, the Harrovian, inspected the pitch and Tony commented on the ongoing. A gold sovereign donated by [Ramnath] Podar, the left-hand bowler, decided in Nehru's favour. Majithia and M.K. Krishna

thrashed the bowling. An Indian crowd is not interested in the finer points of cricket. They want boundaries. Majithia gave them the boundaries. The spectators weren't really interested in cricket. They only wanted to see the national hero in action. I put him in with Gopalan, who had never played cricket in his life.

Shah Nawaz bowled to Nehru. The first ball he completely missed. The second narrowly contacted his bat and he scored two. The third ball whizzed past him and went to gully. He ran, Gopalan didn't. When the ball was thrown back to the wicket keeper, Barrow, he would not stump Nehru and threw the ball to the boundary. I declared the innings.

Caught by Nehru

The maharaja of Dungarpur Maharawal Sir Lakshman Singh captained the Vice President's XI. He opened the innings. General Maharaja Ajit Singh bowled from the NSCI end. Lakshman Singh hit the very first ball up into the air straight in my direction. It was an easy catch, but I dropped it. Keshav Malaviya came in third. He was a left-hander and was caught by Nehru. The crowd went rapturous with applause. For months, Nehru talked of the catch.

The women insisted on playing. Begum Aizaz Rasul had turned up in trousers. I disappointed them. Instead of playing, I asked them to sell the brochures. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Renu Chakravarty brought in the most sales.

The match was broadcast by All-India Radio. The Speaker, Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, was introduced by the maharajkumar of Vizianagram, Vijay Ananda Gajapathi Raju, an old Test player. Nehru also spoke. I too had to make my comments. Hirendranath Chattopadhyay amused us all with his topical limericks. The umpires were General Rajendra Singhji and Anthony de Mello.

The Prime Minister threw a dinner for all the players, organisers and attending dignitaries. His catch was the talk of the evening. The whole event had a great effect on the political atmosphere.

Lo Bir Sendra: A Hunter in the Burning Forest; Jaipal Singh, Navayana, ₹399.

Excerpted with permission from Navayana.



DALIT HISTORY MONTH

Words that heal

From Ambedkar to Bama, what Siddhesh Gautam is reading in April

I've recently started reading again, not to remember but to heal. I'm reading to find the pieces of me that the world keeps trying to scatter. These books aren't just texts. They're testimonies. They don't ask to be read. They ask you to remember. To listen. To rise.

- 1 Path to Salvation** by B.R. Ambedkar
This sharp essay doesn't just question religion, it questions the terms of our survival. One of the most important works of Dr. Ambedkar for the young generation. Once you walk through it, you know you'll never bow again.
- 2 The Vulgarly of Caste** by Shailaja Paik
It unravels the tight knots of shame and respectability tied around Dalit women. Every sentence is a blade cutting through the silence, reminding me that dignity isn't given, it's seized.
- 3 Masawat Ki Jung** by Ali Anwar
This book blew my mind and

made me realise so many things I was brought up around but never read about. It gave me a new map of shared struggles, cross-stitched across Dalits and Muslim Dalits and Pasmanda Muslims. A reminder that caste is shrewd, but our solidarities can be sharper.

- 4 Just One Word: Short Stories** by Bama
It reads like home and heartbreak. Her stories made me walk barefoot, with mud between my toes and fire in my voice. It's the nostalgia that popular culture doesn't touch. I felt my aunties, my neighbours, my childhood, my anger; all talking through her.
- 5 Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada** by Shahu Patole
This book fed me. It talks about food as memory and food as resistance. Recipes that taste like struggle, like Sunday mornings, like my refusal to forget my grandmother. Shrujana's illustration on the cover only makes you want to light up your stove and cook some of your own culture.

Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India by Sujatha Gidla

Sujatha's *Ants Among Elephants* felt like listening to an elder sister (that I never had) telling her story just before sleep at midnight. Soft. Brutal. True. The kind of truth that sticks to your skin. Her family's resistance becomes your inheritance too. I wish I had read it as a kid who never had a sister. I would've been a much better human being today.

7 Concealing Caste by K. Satyanarayana and Joel Lee
I picked up *Concealing Caste* not because I did the cover illustration but it spoke about incidents that I can relate to. Satyanarayana and Joel Lee laid it bare, how caste is not just a system, but a performance. A disappearing act. How even in "progressive" spaces, the ghost of caste lingers behind every smile.

8 Dalit Art and Visual Imagery by Gary Michael Tartakov
It reminded me of why I draw. Because we've always drawn. We've carved our lives into stone, stitched our grief into cloth, painted our revolutions in colour. Even when they tried to make us invisible, we made ourselves seen.

9 We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement (revised edition) by Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon
It made me weep. Because we did make history. But they never wrote us in. So we wrote ourselves back. Page by page, wound by wound, march by march.

10 Motherwit by Urmila Pawar
This book didn't speak to me, it sat beside me. It held my hand. Her voice is like my mother's: sharp, teasing, full of love that hides in complaint. She reminded me that survival isn't just about strength, it's also about laughter.

The writer is a Delhi-based mixed-media artist, designer and storyteller whose visual documentation of the anti-caste movement is at @bakeryprasad on Instagram.

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RUCHIKA SACHDEVA AND A TOKYO WINTER

The designer and conscious traveller shares her Japan checklist

I started my label Bodice in 2011 as a young designer but I have always been conscious about the depletion of natural resources, and am constantly on the lookout for alternative materials. The spring-summer collection we launched in Delhi last month was a collaboration with Bemberg, an eco-friendly textile produced by the Japan-based Asahi Kasei. It is a 100% regenerated cellulose fibre processed from cotton linter that is biodegradable and soft.

Before I started work on the collection, I wanted to inspect their process myself. It wasn't the first time I had used Bemberg or my first visit to Japan. But last November, I travelled to the plant in Noboka, a city known for its vintage vibe and rarely visited by tourists. Thanks to the Bemberg team and my many cool hipster friends in Tokyo, I was in and out of so many *izakayas* (informal bars), sampling everything from raw chicken – tender and a delicacy, but not an experience I will repeat – to the *umihodo* or sea grapes, a seaweed that is an Okinawan speciality. People drink a lot here and it's loud and fun.

Here are some of the steps I recommend if you are in Japan:

Shimada
Tucked away in the Shinbashi district, Shimada is a quintessential *izakaya* where locals sip in after work – no fuss, just good food, drinks, and that unspoken rhythm of everyday Tokyo. When you're in



the city, you must go to a neighbourhood *izakaya*. The menu will probably be all in Japanese, so have Google Translate ready or take a chance and order what looks good. The grilled mackerel is simple but kind of perfect.

Meguro
This part of the city ward, especially around Nakameguro and Aobadai, has a quiet confidence to it. Nothing screams for attention, but everything feels considered.

The Visvim General Store is tucked into a residential street, almost like a secret you're supposed to find. It's part gallery, part shop, and each item inside feels like it's been chosen with care. After you've wandered through the store, take a slow walk



Kyoto stopover

Nishiki Market: This isn't a 'market' in the usual sense – it's more like a long, narrow alley packed with generations of small shops, each focused on just one thing and doing it really, really well. You'll find everything from pickled plums and *yuba* (tofu skin) to tiny skewers of grilled squid, and knives so sharp they're basically artwork.

Kamo River: Right across from the opera house in Kyoto, the stretch of the Kamo River is a good place to take a walk. Locals hang out on the steps and, in good weather, nearby restaurants pull out tables so you can eat right by the water.

sits behind a wooden facade that's easy to miss if you're not paying attention – which is kind of the point. It feels more like someone's beautifully restored home than a restaurant. They do set meals here, you can't really walk in. You have to make a reservation and let them know your preferences in advance.

Shimokitazawa

Walking through Shimokitazawa feels a bit like flipping through a very curated zine – vintage shops, record stores, small cafés tucked into alleyways, all layered together without trying too hard. The streets are narrow and easy to wander through without a plan. People dress well here, but not to impress. Grab a coffee, poke around for old band tees or worn-in denim, and don't be surprised if you end up staying longer than you meant to.

Tama

Tama is the kind of place that feels like a bit of a secret, even though it's right in Shibuya. The space is small, with an open kitchen and shelves lined with natural wine. It pulls a cool, mixed crowd. Here you can try Okinawa cuisine which is different from the Japanese cuisine we know of, but nothing feels forced. It's relaxed, stylish without trying.

Around town

(Clockwise from above) Ruchika Sachdeva; Nishiki; and Meguro. (RUCHIKA SACHDEVA)

Meiji Shrine

Tucked behind the chaos of Harajuku, the shrine feels like a portal. One minute you're surrounded by noise and neon, the next you're walking through towering *torii* gates into a forest that somehow muffles the whole city. The gravel crunches under your feet, and everything slows down. It's not just a tourist spot – it's where people come to pray, get married, breathe. The scale of it is quietly humbling. Take your time, maybe write a wish on one of the wooden *ema* plaques. Even if you're not spiritual, it's hard not to feel something here. Go early in the morning if you can, when it's just you, the trees, and the sound of wind through leaves.

Lanterne Hanare

Down a quiet street in Higashi-Kitazawa, Lanterne Hanare



along the Meguro River. Even when it's not sakura season, the path is peaceful and dotted with tiny cafes and shops that feel more like someone's passion project than a business. It's one of those neighbourhoods where you want to move slower, look closer.



Responsible tourism
(Clockwise from left) An Antara cruise ship; guests at Woods at Sasan; a visitor interacts with artisans in the Gir region; and Pushpendra Singh Ranawat in Jawai. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

VACATIONS THAT GIVE BACK

How boutique retreats are organising responsible holidays, weaving sustainability with community-driven initiatives – reducing impact and restoring ecosystems

retreat for international creatives at the property. Stringent checklists include commitment to environmental stewardship, social equity, and cultural integrity.

When tourists turn conservationists

India's sustainable tourism market, valued at USD \$26.01 million in 2022, is projected to reach \$151.88 million by 2032, according to the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India. Unlike sustainable travel, which minimises harm, regenerative travel actively improves destinations for lasting impact.

"In green travel, you're still a tourist, but in regenerative travel, you become a participant," says Vijay Dhasmana, an environmentalist and self-taught ecologist specialising in rewilding work that restores indigenous flora and fauna to degraded landscapes. His most significant



project is transforming a 380-acre abandoned mining site on the outskirts of Gurugram into the Aravalli Biodiversity Park. Dhasmana points to the 'Thar Desert as an example. People visit for its sandy landscapes but often overlook the

local species of flora and fauna threatened by windmill projects. "Awareness isn't enough to move the needle. Travellers must find ways to get involved, to become conservationists," he adds. When the 38-key Woods at Sasan



encouraged to participate in farming and planting trees, while also learning about the agricultural practices from an onsite horticulturist. A standout initiative is the mobile community library, which travels to 13 villages with over 2,300 books, fostering literacy.

Where leopards are king

While Woods at Sasan has gained global recognition for its regenerative effort, it is part of a broader movement across India. In Rajasthan's Jawai, Varawal Leopard Camp exemplifies community-driven conservation. Unlike other wildlife zones, Jawai is governed by its locals. Conservationists patrol the area, tracking the big cats and sharing data with the forest department. Owner Pushpendra Singh Ranawat, whose

family pioneered leopard safaris in 1997, has introduced quieter jeeps, enforced silent phone modes, and implemented strict no-littering policies.

The 100-acre property maintains a low footprint with just four tents, set away from leopard territories. "Post-pandemic, we added 10 rooms but removed them in 2023 to attract only those seeking Jawai's quietude and genuinely interested in wildlife," he says, pointing to a move that echoes regenerative practices.

Over-tourism remains a concern in regenerative travel, notes Ranawat. "Despite 11 safari zones, most vehicles crowd into just five or six for the best sightings." In response, villages have begun charging fees and capping vehicle numbers. "Hotels must follow suit," he insists. "Ranchdays should restrict NOC [no objection certificates] in Varawal village and guide investors to other areas."

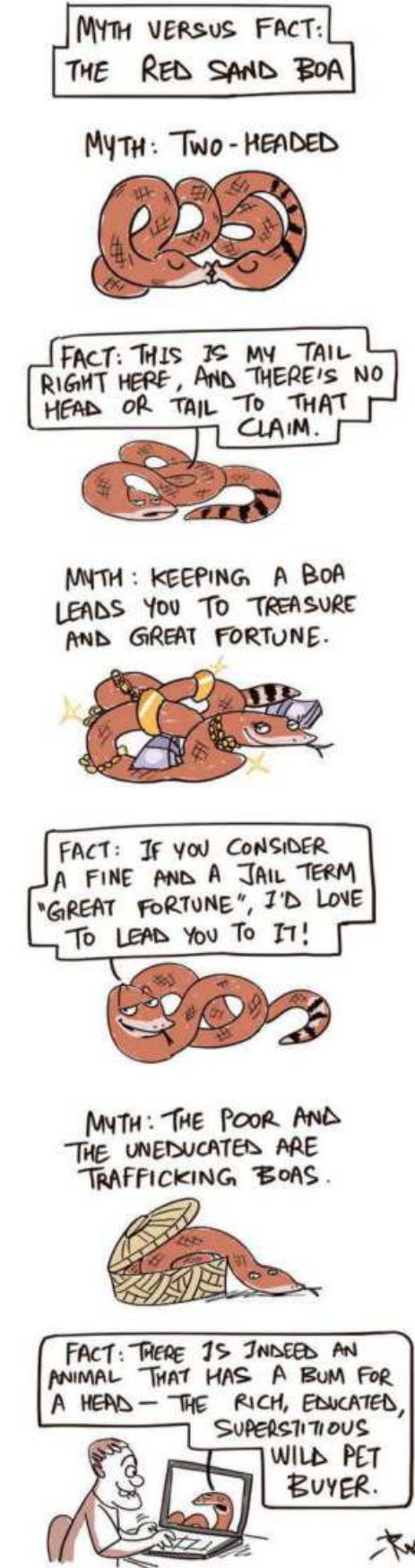
Mindful of the dolphins

Beyond land conservation, responsible tourism is reshaping waterways, too. Floating hotels have long struggled with sustainability, but Antara Cruises – also recognised by Regenerative Travel – is setting new standards. Sailing along the Ganga through Bhitarkanika National Park, India's second-largest mangrove forest, it works with local stakeholders along the cruise's route to preserve cultural heritage. "We prioritise minimising our environmental footprint, especially for marine life," says founder and chairman Raj Singh. Advanced onboard systems ensure zero discharge, with oil separators preventing river contamination. To protect aquatic ecosystems, particularly the endangered Gangetic dolphins, all ships are fitted with electronic deterrents and hospital-grade silencers to reduce noise pollution.

With travellers embracing more purpose-driven holidays and experiences tailored to support local communities and wildlife, it's time to expand the scope of regenerative travel in India. Especially in the country's many biodiversity hotspots.

The Mumbai-based journalist writes on food, art, culture, and travel.

GREEN HUMOUR



Shalini Philip



TRAVEL 2025 UNPLUG, EXPLORE



Farm to plate (Clockwise from far left) A radish salad with *chhurpi*; a Bhutia meal with broth, stinging nettle soup, the radish salad, *chhurpi*, and a *dalle* chili; a natural yeast starter used to make *chang*; Bara Bazaar; and a shopping haul with *chimpling*, *chhurpi*, bitter lemons, dried *dalle*, black cardamom, and yeast starters. (SHALINI PHILIP)

many) is Dzongu. Home to the original inhabitants of the state, the Lepchas, it is nature at its most abundant. Crystal blue streams, skies that match, and pathways that lead through beautiful forests.

The Lepchas are known to make the best *chang*, a local drink made by fermenting rice or *rugi* grains. It is cool, light and refreshing, and can really pack a punch because one tends to drink a fair amount rather easily.

One night in Gangtok

The ideal end of many days of slow village life is to get to Gangtok and enjoy the bustle of the capital that is bursting with produce. As always, I have a list. Places to eat at – there was no way we were leaving without enjoying some meaty *shaphalay* (bread stuffed with meat), more *momos*, *lapthang* (a cold noodle dish) and the now famous *dalle* fries – and more importantly, shops in the market to buy produce from and take home. And as always, I know I will buy an extra bag or three to pack all the things I simply must have.

The day after I returned, as I unpacked my bags, I couldn't help but liken the food to the people of Sikkim: simple yet so unique, warm and immediately likeable, colourful and quite unforgettable. With every visit to this beautiful mountain state in the eastern Himalayas, I realise all over again how apt the Sikkimese name for this place is – Demazong. Hidden paradise.

I also packed stinging nettle that can be used in soups, hog plums to make a pickle, Sikkimese coffee, which seems to be all the rage in Gangtok, and books from my favourite bookstore in the city, Rachna Books.

The writer is co-owner of The Farm in Chennai.



Dalle and chhurpi in my suitcase

Bara Bazaar, as the main market is known, blows open on the weekends with people coming from all the smaller towns and villages to sell their produce. Organic by default, it is fascinating to walk through the mountains of fresh, dried, fermented and preserved produce sold by fashionably dressed women who seem to constantly be snacking while they go about business.

I picked up bouquets of *chimpling* (hogweed), a spice that bring a citrusy tang to chutneys, hard *chhurpi* (fermented cottage cheese) that one can chew on for hours, bitter lemons, dried *dalle* chilies, black cardamom, and yeast starter for the local alcohol (because the cakes are just so pretty).

SHARING TABLES AND TALES IN SIKKIM

Tingmo, smoked pork, *chang*, and *sel roti* with *dalle* chillies – exploring the best of Sikkim's food and its people's hospitality on a 10-day visit

of a relationship to be established. marigolds, ferns and poinsettias.

The Nepali families here are warm, welcoming and always happy to have you come into their kitchen and help with the daily meals. The food is served on gorgeous hammered brass plates that seem to make it taste even better. And, as is common in most villages, all meals are made from scratch, using local ingredients that change with the season. Late November gave us fiddlehead ferns, wild avocados, a

A Nepali home in West Sikkim
The little village of Darap is nestled in the mountains. It is straight out of a story book with stone stairways leading up and through the village, fields of black cardamom, and

gardens bursting with dahlias, marigolds, ferns and poinsettias.

The Nepali families here are warm, welcoming and always happy to have you come into their kitchen and help with the daily meals. The food is served on gorgeous hammered brass plates that seem to make it taste even better. And, as is common in most villages, all meals are made from scratch, using local ingredients that change with the season. Late November gave us fiddlehead ferns, wild avocados, a

small and precious quantity of *nakima* (a wild flower-vegetable) and lots of fresh *chhurpi*.

South Sikkim and the Bhutias
Several hours down a bumpy road took us to another part of Sikkim – the south, to a Bhutia home. Of Tibetan origin, these households make the kitchen the central room of their homes. Wood-fired cooking, smoking racks hung from the ceiling, and meals that involve the entire family; I have a special place in my



ALLEGEDLY

'V' for vandalism

Ever visited a monument and scrawled your name on the walls with a permanent marker? You have a bright future ahead

Their chests in pride, is an act of epic vandalism – the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Despite their many contributions to human civilisation, vandals remain victims of prejudice. But happily, there is now increasing recognition of vandalism as a viable career choice. I am aware young aspirants have a lot of questions. So let me address the most common ones.

How do I know if I have the aptitude for vandalism?
Have you ever visited a monument and scrawled your name on the walls with a permanent marker? Do you find it impossible to exit a historical site or art exhibition or cricket stadium without leaving your imprint on it in some way – if not with graffiti, then by throwing water bottles, littering, or spitting *paan*? When you dislike a joke, are you too stupid to react with words, and prefer violence

instead? If you answer 'yes' to any of the above, you got it. **Does India offer a stable career in vandalism?**
Not only is India the only country where vandalism offers a stable career, vandalism is the only stable career option in India. So go ahead, turn your passion for desecration into a vocation that strikes fear in the hearts of lily-livered liberals and bourgeois naxals.

Will I get a girlfriend if I become a vandal?
Bad question. Instead, ask yourself: will I still want to be a vandal if I have a girlfriend? Do I have alternative sources of frustration to tap into? How do I fuel my rage at the sight of other people having fun if I am also having fun?

How can I become a great vandal?
Build a close-knit team of

like-minded vigilantes, work out a reasonable rate card, and empanel yourself with as many politicians as you can. Initially you might find yourself laughing at political jokes. But once you start throwing chairs and breaking light fixtures, you will discover that the correct emotion (rage) automatically follows the matching behaviour. Perform the outrage enough times, and it won't be long before TV anchors start seeking your views on free speech and the constipation of India.

What are the perks?
Massive SUV with tinted glasses and party flats is a basic. You will also be sought after by freelance extortionists wanting to work under your protection. But the biggest perk is the increased respect you command in society, and the awe you inspire among the police.

Any dos and don'ts?
● Always get the name and spelling right. The objective – intimidation – would be undermined if people end up laughing at you. Kamra is not Kalra and Kalra is not cholera. So, take a moment to call up the target and ask for an Aadhaar copy for identity authentication. ● Injury due to 'friendly fire' is common. So when you throw a chair, table or mic, take care it doesn't land on the skull of a fellow vandal. ● Have a light, pure vegetarian meal before a mission. Don't drink before you destroy. But it's alright to down a few pegs if alcohol happens to be present at the venue.

Vandalism involves violence. How safe is it?
It is the safest occupation in India. Other than hate-spewing politicians, vandals are the only professionals who get mandatory police protection.

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

Cities can be wiped out but the lives of ordinary people who endure this must be recorded, says the artist

Giant arcs of metal and concrete dominate the landscape. Skyscrapers with sea views have balcony seats to the excavation of Mumbai's soul. As three figures from the Holocaust gaze silently into the city's bowels where a grave of bodies lies forgotten and surrounded by demolished homes, a red wave on a highway leads cars to a gate on the upper right corner of the painting: the doorway to Auschwitz. 'Work liberates', the Nazis had emblazoned on the concentration camp gate. At least a million people were exterminated here, many forced to labour until they were murdered. Artist Sudhir Patwardhan wants you to think about the purpose of 'development'. He says it's also a statement on the "absurdity of a nation which was created because of the suffering its people had undergone during World War II, and now they have become the perpetrators of another kind of Holocaust against another community... we repeat history in so many ways." He is talking about the war on Gaza. For 50 years, Patwardhan's art has centred Mumbai's working class. For three of these decades, he had a



PERSON OF INTEREST

SUDHIR PATWARDHAN: HOW DREAMS ARE DEMOLISHED

day job as a radiologist (he started painting in medical school), until his art finally started providing a livelihood. Now 76, he looks more bespectacled radiologist than artist. He says his new work reflects "some negativity" about the city he has been "attached to for a long time". The Thane-based artist's post-pandemic works highlight the exclusionary nature of development. For the labouring classes at least, the idea of city as urban utopia has crash-landed. "Somewhere in the

future, maybe the city will be a better place, a different place, but it's bound to be that only for a certain class of people," says Patwardhan, whose travelling exhibition *Cities: Built, Broken* showed in New Delhi and Mumbai recently, and will pause next in Kolkata and Kochi. "In the last couple of years, one has become exposed to what is happening all around the world, where cities can be wiped out," Patwardhan says. "The whole idea of

'cities' itself seems purely about real estate. Donald Trump, for example, sees Gaza as real estate." He's referring to the U.S. President's desire to turn Gaza into the 'Riviera' of the Middle East. "The absurdity of today's life is overpowering," he adds.

A city changed Patwardhan's figures have always looked pensive, now they are weary, defeated, disconnected. If his famous 1977 *Irani Cafe* depicted a robust gent in a crisp *kurta* sitting at a marble-topped table, in his new painting of an Irani cafe, the central figure is skeletal and raggedly dressed, mirroring the turmoil in the land he migrated to and the one from where his ancestors came. '*Is shahar mein har shaks pareshaan sa kyun hai?*' ('Why does everybody in this city look worried'), a visitor to

Common man Sudhir Patwardhan's art has always centred Mumbai's working class. (EMMANUAL YOGINI)

his Mumbai show quoted this line from an Urdu *ghazal* by Shahryar, Patwardhan tells me, with a laugh. The artist and his wife Shanta Kallianpurkar show up together every day at the Mumbai gallery, greeting old friends and visitors who throng the exhibition. Down the road, a retrospective of Patwardhan's best friend Gieve Patel, who passed away from pancreatic cancer in 2023, is showing. The two first connected when art critic Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni suggested Patwardhan meet the "other doctor who is a painter". It was the start of a friendship that included critiquing each other's work. On display at Patel's show is Patwardhan's painting of the two friends deep in conversation at Marine Drive, their regular *adda*. There's another work by him too, of Patel's last week in the hospital. Patel is dressed in white pyjamas and *kurta* and is sitting on a bed. There is no fear or regret on his face, it's a portrait of a man ready for whatever comes next. A well by his side depicts a childhood fascination of Patel's. Patwardhan worked all night to complete the painting from a photograph he took of Patel, but his friend was unimpressed. He said his left arm was not visible, so Patwardhan painted it in.

Space is political From the socialist 1970s to the 'super development' of this age,

Patwardhan's eye has always been empathetic and from the point of view of "ordinary people living through this period". His words may be gently understated, but his paintings tell another story. Demolitions are everywhere. A Muslim man, his back to the viewer, watches as a yellow JCB demolishes his home. Patwardhan feels acute discomfort about the "bulldozer Raj" and how it has become "less and less possible for people to speak out about anything". Other visible influences include the increased overcrowding and militarisation of our cities; clamping down on artistic freedoms; the geography of societal divisions; and the violence on television and in real life. "Hopefully people wake up to this reality and try to change things," he says. In another painting that depicts a thrumming collage of city dwellers, he starts with a central sketch of an Ajanta Caves gate that takes him on a journey through December 6, Ambedkar's death anniversary, and Buddhism. "Like the Marxist thinker Lefebvre, Patwardhan's intent is to show that space is political, even as it demonstrates a derailed modernity project," writes art critic Gayatri Sinha in the show's catalogue. Or in Patwardhan's simpler words: "The life of people who endure through this must be recorded and must be spoken about." That's exactly what he has done for half a century and why he has such a large following.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Morton's spoon?

Both vulnerable.
South deals

Bob Jones

The auction was simple enough. North's three-heart bid was invitational and Hard Luck Louie was happy to accept. Louie covered the opening club lead with dummy's king, losing to East's ace. East shifted to the queen of spades, covered by the

king, and won with West's ace. A spade to East's 10 gave the defence three tricks and Louie could not avoid a diamond loser later in the play. He drifted down one. "Both black aces offside! My usual crummy luck," said Louie. "At least this happened in the club's Saturday night duplicate instead of in rubber bridge. It

NORTH
♠ 5 2
♥ Q 10 9 7 2
♦ Q 7
♣ K Q J 6

WEST
♠ A 8 6 4
♥ 6
♦ J 6 5 3
♣ 10 9 8 7

EAST
♠ Q J 10 7
♥ 8 5
♦ K 9 8
♣ A 5 4 2

SOUTH
♠ K 9 3
♥ A K J 4 3
♦ A 10 4 2
♣ 3

The bidding:
SOUTH 1♥
WEST Pass
NORTH 3♥
EAST Pass

Opening lead: 10 of ♣

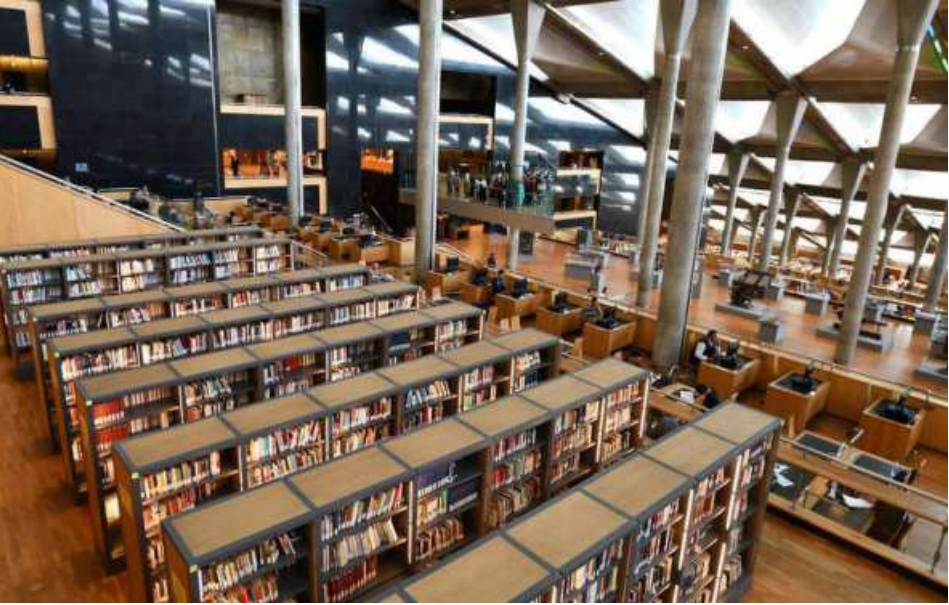
didn't cost me any money. The same thing will happen at every table." Lucky Larry played the same contract and faced the same

opening lead. He played low from dummy on the opening club lead, not covering the 10. East could overtake and shift to a spade but that would

leave three club winners in dummy for eventual diamond discards. East played low and West, with nothing better to do, led another club – king, ace, ruff. Larry drew trumps in two rounds, ending in dummy, and discarded two spades on the two good clubs. He still had to lose one spade and one diamond, but he had 10 tricks. Nice play!

QUIZ Easy like Sunday morning

Names in culture!



The Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt is a vast space designed to accommodate 2,000 readers. (GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley

1 Born this day in 1570, Guido Fawkes was an English soldier, who planned to assassinate King James I of England by blowing up the House of Lords. He was captured before he could carry out his plan and his real name entered the English language. What was his name?

2 This syndrome is used to describe people, usually children who have a better relationship with animals than humans. Like feral children, who are incapable of normal social interaction. It is named after a character who is raised by wolves, then cared for by a bear and a leopard. Which character?

3 *Metamorphoses*, a Latin epic tells the story of a very

talkative girl, who is admired for her voice and how she falls in love with a man who rejects her. Eventually she is cursed to remain just a voice. The mortal man then looks in the river and falls in love with what he sees. If the man is Narcissus, what is the name of the girl doomed to repeating her name?

4 "A powerful athletic body clutching a gleaming sword, with half of his head, that part which held the brains, completely sliced off", is the description of a particular coveted item. Margaret Herrick, a librarian, thought the person resembled her uncle. Soon it was picked up and was used to refer to this item. What was her uncle's name?

5 These are binary systems in which the smaller star sucks material out of the bigger

companion star, becoming bigger, hotter and bluer, which gives it the appearance of being young. While the companion burns out and collapses to a stellar remnant. Which fictional character is this star named after?

6 This is a process named after a French Scientist who first discovered this method to stop bacteria from spoiling food. The process involves heating the item to 63 degree Celsius, maintaining for 30 minutes or up to 72 degree Celsius for 15 seconds and then cooling it down. Who is this process named after?

7 In 1850, during the California gold rush, a German immigrant moved to San Francisco to sell canvas to the miners. It didn't do well so he made pants out of the material instead. The miners loved them as

they were very durable and nicknamed the pants after him. Who was this entrepreneur?

8 This is a new type of ice cream that is named after a member of a Germanic people that overran the Roman Empire. The word also refers to people who wear black clothes almost all of the time, and wear makeup regardless of sex. What is this ice cream called as?

9 This tech company's name was chosen to pay homage to the Library of Alexandria, drawing a parallel between the largest repository of knowledge in the ancient world and the potential of the Internet to become a similar store of knowledge. When the parent company introduced a virtual assistant, they chose this name to refer to it. What is the name?

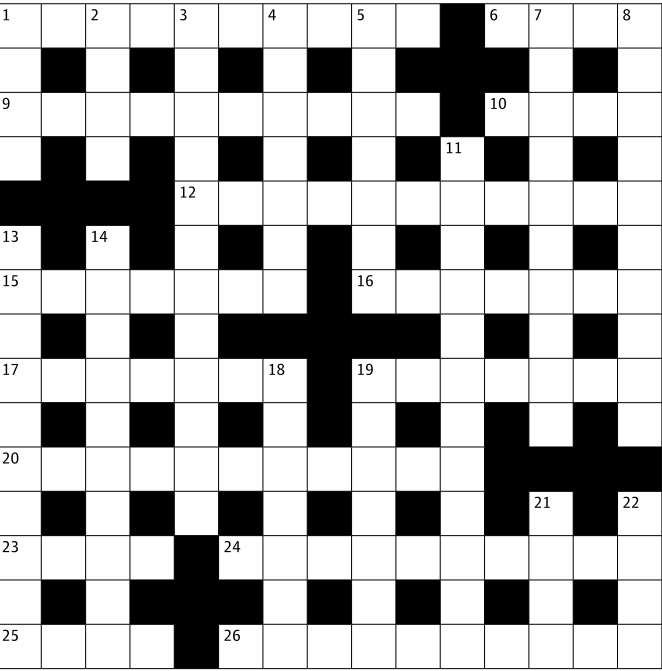
10 The ____ principle is named after a children's story. Used in developmental psychology, biology and astronomy, it refers to the concept of 'the right amount'. For example, the Earth is neither too hot nor too cold, and hence supports life. What is the name of this principle?

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

- 10. Goldilocks
- 9. Alexa
- 8. Goth
- 7. Levi Strauss
- 6. Louis Pasteur
- 5. Dracula
- 4. Oscar
- 3. Echo
- 2. Mowgli
- 1. Guy

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3353



- Across**
- 1** Detective Inspector, cop, old copper, last thing in obnoxiousness: dinosaur! (10)
6 Nothing new about Welshman (4)
9 Jalopy in which conductor confined? (10)
10 Rowers swaggered (4)
12 Snob: one who calls everyone simply 'Sir' or 'Madam'? (4-7)
15 Catchy song remixed, *Warmonger* — *No Good* (7)
16 One's just arrived, consumed by inert gas (7)
17 Sally's beginning to wear uniform — twice, as a rule (7)
19 Polymeric rows, ornately twisted — essential in nutrition, primarily? (7)
20 Pages describing Scotsman Oscar having row with keyboardist (5,6)
23 The writer swindles revered figure (4)
24 From prison, runs into trouble — who sees it all? (3,7)
25 Standard choice of extremes of Neoplatonism (4)
26 Meets anger flexibly for treaties (10)

- Down**
- 1** As you heard, one who'll stain clothes is awful (4)
2 Meaty spread for the Crown (4)
3 English actor to flourish following location of Disney World (7,5)
4 'Best opera? Time's running out! Time's running short!...' 'I'm not sure' (7)

- 5** African's somewhat smug and annoying (7)
7 Lacks power supply in offices etc (10)
8 City's owner, surprisingly, Banks (3,7)
11 Yogurt: 'moo' or 'oat', principally? Irritated parent's testy response (2,2,4,4)
13 Topless — impertinence — starting again! (10)
14 Minstrel with horn going round queen, old and grumpy (10)
18 Flogging — initially taking seconds, becoming year — crying in pain (7)
19 Outstanding isle for exile: constantly speak up (7)
21 Feature observed in etching (4)
22 A woman — a flower — Everyman with chance? Almost (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3352



Aavienda Chowdhry
aaviendachowdhry@icloud.com

Gender inequality is a global phenomenon ingrained into the fabric of society, manifesting itself in all aspects of life. In November 2024, India spoke on its commitment to gender equality in the UN Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+30 Review. The statement by the Women and Child Development Ministry highlights the progress made since 2019. This year, India boasts an allocation of \$37 billion to gender equality budgeting and has the highest proportion of women in STEM disciplines globally. However, the Ministry’s statement also acknowledges that many issues have yet to be addressed, such as the gender pay gap.

Indeed, a key component of gender inequality is a global gender pay disparity. Closing India’s gender wage gap is the first step towards gender equality in India, allowing women to equally contribute to, and benefit from, India’s economic growth. What is India’s progress on the fight for gender-equal pay, and what measures will it take to reach such equality?

Regarding the wider global context, the fight for gender equality has greatly progressed around the world – with key milestones such as the international Suffrage Movements of the 17th and 18th centuries, which fought for women’s right to vote, and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which defined gender-based discrimination and committed signatories to increase gender equality. Furthermore, the UN Sustainable Development Goals from 2015 included global women’s empowerment and gender equality within its agenda. Despite the UNSDGs’ 2030 target, however, the gender gap remains significant. A 2024 report by Focus2030 says it would take a staggering 131 years to achieve worldwide gender equality.

Falling participation

Overall, women’s global workforce participation has reduced compared with previous years, with a World Economic Forum (WEF) analysis of 2024 LinkedIn data showing that women account for 42% of the global workforce and 31.7% of senior leaders. A factor that perpetuates gender inequality in the workplace is the notion that women bear the responsibilities of the house (especially regarding childcare); this affects promotions and negotiation outcomes and restricts access to high-paying professions. Additionally, as women’s careers advance, the wage gap between them and men in the same position grows.

While India has ratified a number of conventions relating to women in the workplace, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Employment and Occupation Convention recognising discrimination as a “violation of rights”, it still has a long way to go. The WEF’s Global Gender Gap Report, 2024 places India at 129th out of 146 countries, with 64.1% of its gender equality gap closed. A 2023 report by Azim Premji University indicates that salaried women in India still earn an average of 76% of what salaried men do per year, with self-employed women earning 40% of what self-employed men do. While Azim Premji’s 2023 report found that wage equality for women has been improving since 2004, they also uncovered cause for concern. Controlling for factors such as caste and class revealed increasing discrimination against women that hindered full attainment of gendered wage equality.

Maternal pay gap

Despite improvements in recent years, women often occupy lower-paying jobs and mothers are subject to a maternal pay gap as they often earn less than women without children. This was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic as women took on



Wide gap Despite improvements in recent years, women often occupy lower-paying jobs. GETTY IMAGES

increased caregiving responsibilities to the extent that the pay gap grew by 7% from 2019 to 2021. World Bank estimates put the percentage of Indian women working and seeking jobs at 33% of all women in 2023, rising from 26% in 2020; Indian men, contrastingly, had rates of 77% and 74%, respectively. Moreover, the digital gender divide in India remains another obstacle to women’s economic participation. The Annual Status of Education (ASER), 2023 Report highlights how girls, especially in rural areas, have less access to technology than boys and their technical skills are resultantly worse than those of their male counterparts. This means women have unequal access to jobs requiring digital skills which is detrimental in today’s increasingly digital world.

As such, attaining gender equality in India – starting with the gender wage gap – requires a multifaceted approach that both breaks down social norms while concurrently implementing legal frameworks to create more equitable work environments.

Changes to education, care, and architectural infrastructure can address the systemic barriers that perpetuate gender inequality. For instance, investments in the completion of secondary education and soft-skill acquisition can equip women for diverse employment opportunities. This is especially relevant in India as high rates of child marriage in rural areas mean many girls drop out of school. Furthermore, access to high-quality, low-cost childcare through government incentives and tax breaks enhances economic development as by reducing the burden of childcare on women. Commutes to work and school can be made safer through improvements to public infrastructure such as lighting and security. Women and girls would thus have better access to education, support for childcare, and safe travel to work and school without fear.

Social, cultural barriers

Underpinning these infrastructure changes would be efforts to reduce social and cultural barriers to

gender equality, such as using community-based initiatives such as equality-focused collectives to address negative stereotypes about women’s contributions in the workforce, provide the childcare and schooling help listed above, or awareness campaigns about women’s safety and bystander intervention.

Corporate-facing legislation and revamped corporate processes are crucial in closing the gender pay gap. Enhancing anti-discrimination laws in India and implementing pay transparency systems are critical in instilling a sense of security and value among woman employees, while inclusive workplace policies that support recruitment and career progression ensure equal access to opportunities.

Moreover, conducting regular gender pay audits can detect and resolve compensation discrepancies alongside providing data for action plans aimed at solving these disparities. Companies which publicly commit to these action plans also demonstrate their dedication to gender equality, presenting them as desirable employers to talented woman workers.

Lastly, women in leadership roles serve as powerful role models. Therefore, promoting qualified women to positions of power is vital. To support this, there must be an implementation of policies such as gender budgeting, flexible work schedules and parental leave for employees regardless of gender.

The government should actively promote gender equality through programmes that support work-life balance to maximise output and ensure economic growth.

In conclusion, closing the gender pay gap in India requires policymakers, employers, and society to foster environments where women can thrive professionally and economically, by implementing legislation and dismantling social norms. Should India manage to eliminate this gender pay gap, it will establish it as a united country willing to break down centuries-old oppressive systems and take a step towards a more equitable future, inspiring other countries to do the same.



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story
India will surely lead from the front when it comes to the implementation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programmes. (‘Corporate Inclusion, India style; April 6) The policies formulated and steps being taken by the Central and state governments will enhance DEI and improve the standard of living of common people.
G.V.N. Murthy

Water woes
Restoration of the Devanahalli Lake in Bengaluru is a telling example of the success of the Shallow Aquifer Management programme. (‘Recharge and replenish; April 6) With more people migrating from villages to urban areas and its peripheries, the demand for potable water is on the rise. Local bodies have a greater role to play in identifying lakes, ponds and discarded public wells for rejuvenation.
R.V. Baskaran

On a mission
Every word that author John Green utters speaks of his exemplary compassion for tuberculosis patients. (‘Funding for TB is in crisis; April 6) Reminding developed nations of their colonial past and pleading with them to liberally fund campaigns to end the disease in the third world is laudable indeed.
M.V. Nagavender Rao

Ancient wisdom
In his classic *Thamizhaka Oorum Perum*, Tamil scholar R.P. Sethu Pillai traces the names of places ending with ‘vaavi’ to the presence of waterbodies. (‘Tamil Nadu’s wells reclaimed; April 6) The Kannada equivalent of ‘vaavi’ is ‘baavi’ and it means a well. Several villages that dot the Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border have a ‘baavi’ suffix. In fact, there are several places that end with a

The Indian politician
Mahatma Gandhi is believed to have once said, ‘Consistency is the virtue of a donkey’. (‘Champions of free speech; April 6) I feel, sometimes, Indian political leaders (with a few exceptions) practise these words too well.
S. Ramakrishnasayee

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When AI out-thinks humans
Experts seek stringent regulations, but enforcing them requires global cooperation and rigid monitoring
C.S. Krishnamurthy

Gender dynamics in classroom
Mixed seating arrangements are but a start to a generation with healthier relationships
Bhavya J. Menon

Reality bites
Reality shows promote unrealistic beauty standards and set an unhealthy benchmark for teenagers
Tarab Afza

Making sense of life
Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forward
Milind Kumar Sharma

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At weddings, eat all you take

Advitya Madan
advityanidhi14@gmail.com

The wedding season has finally wound up. One lasting imprint has been the colossal food wastage. While organising dinners for weddings of close relatives, I always kept a hawkish eye on the “used plates” table. Almost all were piled up with wasted food which could have fed several people. I wondered why even educated people had been so insensitive towards the social obligation of not wasting food. The other day, while travelling by train from New Delhi to Patiala, I chanced upon a B.Tech. student. He spoke of how he had excelled at managing the student mess with software he developed to keep a digital record of wasted food in grams. Every student’s plate gets weighed, and depending on the weight, he has to pay a fine.

It took me back to my UN tenure in Israel. Most restaurants there offered an “all-you-can-eat” package but fined customers if they wasted food. A few days ago, I saw a video of an Indian wedding. The host had posted two tough waiters at the “used plates” table to ensure that guests left their plates empty. If anyone came with leftovers, they were forced to eat them on the spot, or they were not allowed to keep their plates. So think twice before piling food on the plate.

K. Ganapathy
drkganapathy@gmail.com

Artificial intelligence (AI) will eventually become part of healthcare. Though the A in AI stands for artificial, it can be augmenting, amplifying, accelerating, assisting and analysing in an ambient milieu. AI techniques are unlocking clinical information, hidden in massive data. AI is pole vaulting not leapfrogging. As much as 80% of 41 zettabytes (410 trillion gigabytes) of digital information is unstructured. AI will detect patterns and trends, which human grey matter is unable to decipher.

A neurosurgeon trained five decades ago, I am concerned that in our enthusiasm to be future-ready, we may not look at the other side. Good and evil are two sides of a coin. Queries will, no doubt, be addressed. Transitions offer great opportunities. We should never forget that it is NI (natural, native) Intelligence which led to AI. In a world where algorithms make diagnoses, wearables track vital signs and remotely controlled robots operate

AI in healthcare

A smart clinician will become smarter using AI; a mediocre clinician may not



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on people, AI should be subservient to NI. AI enthusiasts argue that specialists will not spend valuable time extracting information from voluminous data, clinical findings and reports. Specialists will manage information extracted by AI, enabling more time with the patient. AI will assist clinicians, providing current information from journals, textbooks and clinical practices to better individual care. AI extracts information from a much larger identical patient population, assisting in real-time inferences. When AI recommends CAR T cell therapy, does it

realise that the patient cannot raise ₹40 lakh for it. Nothing is more devastating than being advised a treatment beyond one’s reach. Using NI, I will not discuss this management. We factor in what the patient and family wants before recommending treatment.

Lars Leksell, inventor of the Gamma Knife, had remarked, “A fool with a tool, is still a fool.” When one has a hammer, everything round looks like a nail – an expensive hammer more so! Technology is a means to an end, not an end. AI is an enabler. Future doctors schooled in an AI milieu may not be taught that every clinician needs to get into the beneficiary’s mind. Will empathising with the patient and family be part of the standard operating protocol prescribed by AI. All are equal, but some are more equal than others. Socioeconomic status plays a part in implementing management plans.

AI development includes ethics enforcement. These include constant human oversight, technical robustness, real-time continuous retraining using unbiased data, safety, privacy, data governance, transparency, diversity, non-discrimination, societal and environmental well-being and accountability. To be accountable and trustworthy, machine learning algorithms must include ethics and humane values. Trust is the key word for doctors. AI systems are becoming autonomous, resulting in greater direct-to-patient advice, bypassing human intervention. Decision to rely on AI is an NI judgment. Culture-sensitive AI systems must have moral and ethical behaviour patterns aligned with human interests. Constantly reevaluated, they need fresh additional training data sets. AI should not lead to depersonalisation and dehumanisation. A smart, empathetic clinician using AI will become smarter. A mediocre clinician may not. There will be no change in healthcare outcomes when a below average clinician uses AI.



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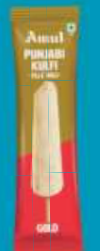
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1L / ₹230*



Chocolate
Brownie
1L / ₹230*



Butterscotch
Gold
1L / ₹260*



Vanilla
Gold
1L / ₹230*



Epic Choco
Almond Gold
80 mL / ₹100*



Frostik Gold
70 mL / ₹45*



Chocolate
Tricone
Gold
120 mL / ₹50*



Tricone
Butterscotch
Gold
120 mL / ₹40*



Chocochips
Gold
125 mL / ₹50*



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