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magazine

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At NSIC Grounds
A visitor checks out Chemould Prescott Road's booth.
(INDIA ART FAIR)

From collectible design and experimental practices to prioritising emotional value, the 2025 India Art Fair saw buying trends evolving, and a buyer profile that is as diverse as it has ever been

WHO IS THE INDIAN ART COLLECTOR?

Nidhi Gupta

Within six hours of day one at the India Art Fair, curator Alaiia Gujral has sold 10 pieces of the collectible design showcase 'Shifting Horizons'. In the dimly-lit, sparsely-decorated booth, she has brought together pieces by 17 emerging designers, including a fibre-board, teakwood and brass swing, natural dyed rattan and white ashwood stools, and a ceramics-based "illuminating sculpture".

"Hopefully, a few more will go," Gujral says with a little laugh, perched on designers Nitush and Aroosh's *Vidya Vrtta*, a light installation made of stainless steel, faux fur and glass, taking a breather from answering questions from patrons, many curious about what furniture is doing at an art fair. "Art and design are always in conversation. I've been insistent on showcasing new designers and never-seen-before works by prominent ones. It's affordable and we have a good range. It's nice that you can own something different in your home."

Elsewhere in the conjoined tents at Delhi's NSIC Grounds – whose facade is struck through with artist Ayesha Singh's minimal, monochrome artwork *Skewed Histories and Site Lines* – DAG's multicoloured walls stand out against a sea of white, its booth abuzz with visitors. On display is a show titled 'DAG Past and Present: 18th-21st century Modern Art', in which Bengal wash style watercolours, mountain landscapes, Anglo-Indian art as well as Progressives and other modernists vie for attention. "It seems everyone wants to be at the art fair this year," exclaims Ashish Anand, director of DAG. "The Indian art world has grown in volume and its discernment. Viewers, and collectors are now hungry for more discoveries."

In a third tent across the green carpeted path lined with makeshift cafes, a stage and outdoor art exhibits, takes centrestage. At its largest edition yet, 120 Indian and international exhibitors show classical, modern and contemporary art – by the superstars, the usual suspects and emerging artists from around the world. It also spills out into a larger-than-usual radius – where art stands in conjunction with fashion (Kunel Gaur x Almost Gods at Dhan Mill Compound), celebrity (at Shalini Passi's official IAF party), food (The Kindness Meal at Neem ki Haveli in old Delhi), music (Parvathy Baul responding to Jayasri Burman's paintings at Art Alive gallery) and, of course, more art (lunches, talks and retrospectives at galleries such as KNMA, Bikaner House and Vadehra Gallery).

The curatorial team's canvas too has grown wider by the year, with technology, traditional craftsmanship, and sustainable materials being deployed to world and time-melding effect. The results turn up in immersive art installations such as Goa-based artists NON-LINEAR and CURSORAMA's *Biolume*, the winning commission for the BMW x India Art Fair 'The Future Is Born of Art' project; and outdoor installations like Mumbai-based Yogesh Barve's *I Am Not Your Dalit*, supported by Art & Charlie who make their IAF debut this year, in which LED tickers such as those found at railway stations suspended from a glass ceiling broadcast Ambedkar's message.

There is also a deeper focus on collectible design – now in its second year – through 11 established studios, including Vikram Goyal, Ashiesh Shah, Jaipur Rugs, along with Gujral's emerging designer showcase, and the unstoppable rise of textile and fibre-based art, exemplified in the popularity of the Chanakya School of Art's booth which, word on the grapevine has it, sold 50% of its IAF collection within the first day-and-a-half.

"Our job really is to expose people to different forms of art, whether it's craft-based or design or digital art," says IAF director Jaya Asokan, sitting at the BMW VIP Lounge, minutes before she is to join Chanakya School's Karishma Swali to announce a major new craft prize. "The more they see it, the more openness there is to engage with and purchase it."

Other than the democratisation of art, the commercial aspect is, naturally, the fair's (indeed any such fair's) primary function. The chatter around India's thriving art and luxury market grows louder by the season – reportedly pegged at ₹3,000 crore in registered auction sales in 2023. (Hurun India's Art List for 2024 showed a record-breaking ₹301 crore in sales by the top 50 artists – a 19% increase from the previous year.) While that's still a fraction of the global market size of $70 billion, it's being propelled, no doubt, by western and institutional interest in Modern masters. But who is the Indian art buyer and what do they want?

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There is a mix of people buying. Definitely a large percentage appears to be in their 40s and 50s, but there are also a lot of younger people eager to enter the market

ROSHINI VADEHRA
Director, Vadehra Art Gallery

hoards trip over themselves to giggle at the captions accompanying the textile-based works of Viraj Khanna and take selfies with the artist, who is also showing a new set of *khakha*-based portrait-like acrylic on paper paintings at his show *Love Me, Love My Dog* at Kalakriti Gallery. "There's a young collector base that's interested in buying my work," observes the medium-agnostic artist. "A lot of people who travel and are seeing a lot of textile in international fairs – they are picking it up. Most of them are from Mumbai, I don't know why. There's also people who've worn our clothing [his mother Anamika Khanna's designs] and they want to see what's happening next."

A growing art market

For one weekend this month, a corner of New Delhi transforms into its own garden of earthly delights at the 16th edition of the annual India Art Fair (IAF), where art in all manner of shape, form, material, provenance, and pedigree

Collecting is about building a long-term relationship with art. An artwork can become part of one's home, family, and personal legacy — an heirloom that transcends generations. This shift towards emotional and cultural value, rather than purely financial investment, is becoming more pronounced

MOKSHA MODGILL
CEO, Geek Art

IN CONVERSATION

‘I want my reader to feel disoriented’

Sophie Mackintosh, Man Booker-longlisted author of mythical feminist novels, discusses her inspirations and her upcoming novel, a romance set in a parallel universe

Preeti Zachariah
preeti.zachariah@thehindu.co.in

In 2016, when Sophie Mackintosh was writing her debut novel, *The Water Cure*, a deliciously dark fable that tells the story of three sisters stuck on a remote island, she couldn’t help but notice the change that loomed thick in the air. “Trump was coming into power... there was Brexit in the U.K. as well,” says the London-based Welsh writer. “I felt it was a time of such shift.”

It was also around the time the #MeToo movement was gathering steam, and Mackintosh found herself stumbling on multiple testimonies of women from across the world speaking up about the sexual harassment and abuse they had encountered. “It’s important to hear them, but it’s also difficult,” she says. Mackintosh remembers being overwhelmed and even somewhat physically sick just reading and hearing about these accounts. And then it got her thinking: what if toxic masculinity could make women physically unwell?

This idea was funnelled into her first novel, *The Water Cure*, which was longlisted for the 2018 Man Booker Prize. The book is a modern fairy tale that explores toxic masculinity and reimagines its consequences into something more tangible, one that makes women very sick. “I’m interested in making abstract things literal and exploring them more that way,” says Mackintosh on the sidelines of the 8th Kerala Literature Festival (KLF) in Kozhikode. “I am talking about big topics in a different way.”

Creative pursuit

Mackintosh was born in South Wales, spending her early years in Pembrokeshire, where she grew up speaking Welsh at school. “It’s a very beautiful language, and I spoke it every day for 15 years,” she says, adding that the lyricism of the language made her aware of rhythm, a striking feature of the finely-honed sentences in her novels. She began writing early, mostly poetry and short stories, but “struggled to write anything long for a while until my mid-20s”.

What helped change that, she believes, was her stint at Warwick University in Coventry, where she took a B.A. in creative writing. “It was nice to have the opportunity at a young age to be doing creative practice,” she says. In the years that followed her graduation, she began writing and honing various first drafts while holding multiple jobs. “I was writing at any chance [I got]. But it wasn’t even a struggle because I was just so happy to do it,” she says.

The Water Cure, published in 2018 after a fierce bidding war, and then longlisted for the Booker Prize, changed her life, says Mackintosh. While she admits she did not expect the award, “especially not with my first book”, she says the nomination opened doors to opportunities and “inspired me to write more”. Mackintosh has since published two other novels – *Blue Ticket* (2020) and the 2023 Women’s Prize-longlisted *Cursed Bread*. Her fourth novel will be out next year.

Growing up with mythology

Mackintosh’s novels have a mythical, otherworldly quality, the mundane and the magical seamlessly co-existing, something the author attributes to her Welsh background. “I grew up with mythology, it was a big part of my childhood,” she says, pointing out that there is something about the timelessness of fairy tales that offers a different way of looking at contemporary issues. “Fairy tales disorient us, and I want my reader to feel slightly disoriented... see the world off-kilter. There is just so much resonance and magic in it,” says Mackintosh, who counts the English writer Angela Carter, best known for her feminist retellings of fairy tales and folk stories, as a “huge influence”.

Questions around female desire, bodily agency, feminism, and free will often seep into her work. *Blue Ticket*, for instance, examines a society where a woman’s choice to have a baby or not is based on a lottery, while *Cursed Bread*, loosely based on a real-life mass poisoning that took place in 1951 in France, offers insights into the politics of gender and the complexity of desire. “I’m always interested in how desire can come through,” says Mackintosh, for whom the body is often pivotal to her work because “I live with it every day”.

She is also deeply invested in relationships, both the romantic sort and female friendships, the latter a place of safety and intense intimacy but also at risk of terrible betrayals. “My friends are very important to me and have always been as important as romance. We take friendship for granted... don’t think about the possibilities of intimacy that way to be so transformative and painful,” says Mackintosh. Her next book, however, is “very much about romantic relationships”, she says. It tells the story of a secret relationship set in a parallel universe. “It’s sad, romantic, but playful too. I had a lot of fun writing it,” she says.

Writing women Questions around female desire, bodily agency, feminism, and free will often seep into Sophie Mackintosh’s work. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

(Clockwise from left) Stills from *Kabuliwala* (1961), based on Rabindranath Tagore’s short story; and *Neelavelicham* (2023), based on Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s story.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW

This anthology spanning three centuries claims to be the biggest collection of Indian short fiction in a single volume

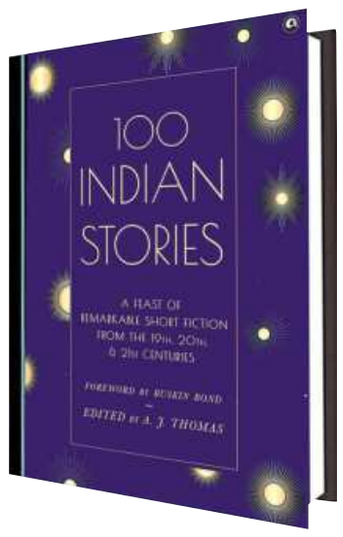
Geeta Doctor

Salman Rushdie described them as a ‘Sea of Stories’ to Haroun, the little boy in his fantastical tale of loss and remembrance. Like Haroun, the contemporary short story is a changeling of mixed parentage nourished by myth and history.

To early seafarers like Sinbad the Sailor, stories are etched along the Milky Way, with stars pointing their ships to distant shores just beyond their reach. To some observers, tiny fragments of star-stuff attracted by Earth’s gravity rappel down in wings of light and plunge into the ocean’s depths. They lie in wait for immortality with siren’s songs of love and longing. They lurk in underground caves and crevices of ice and rock to morph into mythical beasts that claw open the thin carapace of human society.

To Plato, the Greek philosopher, human beings are trapped in a dark cave bound in chains. They look at the images of shadows playing against the walls of the caves and take this for reality. His metaphor for humanity has become yet another story. To King Gesar of Ling, whose stories light the icy mountain paths of Tibet and travel along the Silk Route, the battle between good and evil takes the form of equally gifted creatures, whether human or non-human. Stories are told to trick or tempt the traveller along the way.

To A.J. Thomas who has walked along the seashores, riverbeds and mountain passes of the Indian subcontinent, collecting a hundred stories from a myriad other habitats, the essence of a short story is enchantment. In this marvellous anthology of Indian short stories from three consecutive centuries, he becomes the Scheherazade of his age. The Caliph whom Scheherazade outwits in the original, might be for us the nabob of consumerism. Of indeterminate sex, our nabobs traipse through their palaces of conspicuous consumption in their designer garments walking the thin line between the serpent of endless desires and the rope of illusive pleasures.



100 Indian Stories
Ed. A.J. Thomas
Aleph
₹1,499

Old favourites

Part of the enchantment is the discovery of old friends. Who can forget the hypnotic tenderness of Tagore’s Kabuliwala shouting to attract the attention of his “*Mini, batcha, Oye Mini batcha,*” immortalised on film by Balraj Sahni? Or Unni, the little boy seeking a dragonfly’s red tail, in ‘On the Riverbank’ by S.K. Pottekatt (translated from the Malayalam by Thomas)? Or the mysterious journey through jungle and crumbling mansions to hook a fish in the mysterious waters of a lake in ‘The Discovery of Telenapota’ (translated from the Bengali by Arunava Sinha), like the hero in Premendra Mitra’s compelling adventure story? How can one not read Satyajit Ray’s ‘Two Magicians’ (translated by Sinha), and not imagine Ray is a magician of the written word keeping the reader in suspense till the very end?

One might go on listing one’s favourites. Each one needs to be read separately on a dark and stormy night. How these stories from a pre-electricity age allow a frisson of terror in the darkness so that you become complicit in the action, as in the case of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s ‘The Blue Light’ (translated from the Malayalam by O.V. Usha), is hard to describe. You become a child again.

It’s also true that in the midst of all the triumphs of the human spirit, the exquisite recollections of love and fortitude, the tenderness of youth, and stray descriptions of the lushness of bird, animal and plant life, there is also much pain. The indignities of caste and ancient rites of privilege that exist in close-knit communities are given a savage outing in the book, particularly in the stories of post-Partition India, where loyalties have also been divided. Poverty rises like a lurking spectre just waiting around the corner with hunger as its companion to ravage and tear apart the fragile links that we sometimes imagine will give us immunity.

Contemporary themes too

As Thomas explains, he has organised the stories according to the age demographic of the authors – from the oldest to the more recent ones. He himself cites the many early publications such as Khushwant Singh’s *The Illustrated Weekly of India* that carried short stories, or excerpts from a variety of authors, as being a part of his inspiration. He then went on to become a poet, editor, academic and translator himself. Thomas has also edited Aleph’s 2023 compilation, *The Greatest Malayalam Stories Ever Told*, and was a former editor of the Sahitya Akademi journal, *Indian Literature*. As the saying goes, he’s dipped his pail in many wells.

From a reviewer who tends to fast forward through what seems like a vast terrain, one suggestion to the reader is to take each story for itself. Just like the sparrows that Khushwant Singh’s grandmother fed on her terrace, they come chirping if you do not force them. For instance, the latter half of the stories in the collection tends to foreground issues such as patriarchy, social stigma, and environmental degradation in ways that cut close to the bone.

In Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi’s brilliantly evocative image of rats rampaging through the countryside and destroying the grain as they tend to do during the periodic flowering of the bamboo in the wild, in ‘The Smell of Bamboo Blossoms’, translated from the Assamese by Aruni Kashyap, the co-incidental phenomenon of plague on the other side in Surat, Gujarat, that escalates to a horrific denouement, underlines how delicately balanced our lives need to be.

As to whether there is something specifically Indian to these stories, whether it’s the grandmother who becomes a crocodile, or the flowering of the bamboo trees that creates an infestation of rats, one can only repeat Ruskin Bond’s advice in the Foreword: “Honour the writers/ Salute the translators/ Celebrate the short story.”

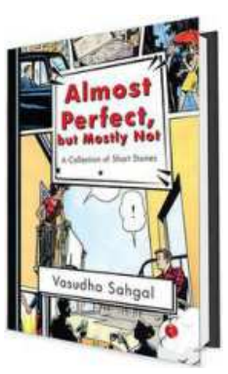
The reviewer is a Chennai-based critic and cultural commentator.

BROWSER

A Different Distance
Marilyn Hacker and Karthika Naïr
Context
₹499
Friends Marilyn Hacker and Karthika Nair began a correspondence in verse during France’s COVID lockdown in March 2020. Renga is an ancient Japanese form of collaborative poetry, and the two Parisian poets, create a delightful harmony.

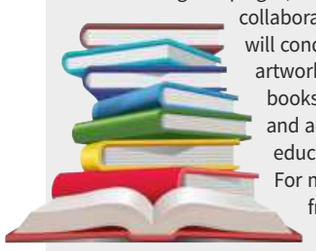
Unexpectedly
Maithree Wickramasinghe
Penguin
₹499
Another book of poetry set against the pandemic but in Sri Lanka. The academic who has written widely on gender equality explores universal topics such as war and feminism as well as her privileged status as the First Lady of Sri Lanka (wife of former president Ranil Wickremesinghe).

Almost Perfect, But Mostly Not
Vasudha Sahgal
Rupa
₹295
Freelance journalist and screenwriter Vasudha Sahgal’s storytelling began at the age of eight. Her debut solo short fiction delves into the imperfections that make life real, with themes of love and loss, relationships and daily fears.



Donations invited

The Free Libraries Network's (FLN) two-week social media fundraising campaign (February 14-28) called Library Love, in collaboration with writers and artists who will conduct workshops, sign books, and sell artwork, hopes to raise money for curating books for grassroots libraries, research and advocacy, and paying FLN’s team of educators and facilitators.



For more details, write to freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com.

INTERVIEW

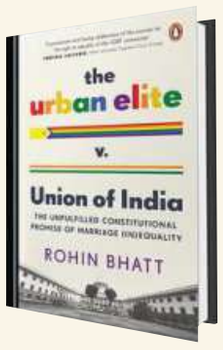
Multiple voices must be heard

Rohin Bhatt on the way ahead for the queer community's fight for equal rights

Chittajit Mitra

Lawyer and activist Rohin Bhatt was an active part of the marriage equality case. Bhatt and others have been pushing for inclusivity for the community at the Supreme Court, and their efforts have led to positive changes. In a new book, *The Urban Elite v. Union of India* (Penguin Random House), Bhatt delves deeper into the proceedings and what the future may hold for queer rights. Edited excerpts from an interview:

Question: *We have all heard the tirade about the Indian queer community being 'urban elites'. What would you like to say about it?*
Answer: There are two parts to it; the first is obviously the title of the book. I think it becomes important to turn that mockery on its head and perhaps reclaim the word and call ourselves the 'urban elite'. Assuming for a minute that queerness is only limited to the urban elite, does that mean that the Constitution does not work for us? The answer is no. But if you look at the petitioners – and Chief Justice D. Y. Chandrachud's judgment traces the backgrounds of each of the petitioners – you will see that a wide range of people were a part of it, from people from marginalised castes to Catholics. The whole process of using this urban elite definition was to kind of disenfranchise the queer community. One would expect that arguments, especially when advanced before the Supreme Court, would be based squarely on legal points, but we've seen ad hominem attacks on the petitioners across the board in human rights litigation, on the lawyers for the petitioners and also on the motivation behind the demands of petitioners.



Q: *After the setback in court on marriage equality rights, what is the way ahead for the Indian queer community?*
A: Regarding the marriage equality litigation, reviews were filed but were later dismissed, and now is the time to figure out how we go ahead as a community. There are multiple demands from within the community, like horizontal reservations, challenges to The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act , etc. that are diverse, and there seems to be an ad hoc-ism in how we take issues to the courts. We must be more focused on how and when we go to court and it is a path that should not be drawn only by lawyers.

Q: *Who should drive the agenda?*
A: The queer movement is still very lawyer dominated; it is time to democratise it, and that can happen through decentralisation of the movement. The demands from the queer community in Manipur are very different from what is happening in the southern states or in Gujarat or Delhi. Litigation will eventually end up in the Supreme Court and in Delhi because of the nature of the way things are run in our country, but it's time lawyers like us take a step back. The agenda ought to be driven more from a bottom-up approach by the communities around the country. The second part would be to draw up a manifesto. I have avoided drawing up a manifesto because it's not one person's job. It is essential that we have conversations within the community and then build solidarities with other movements as well.

The interviewer is an independent writer, journalist and translator based in Allahabad.

Rohin Bhatt (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

GRAND SYNTHESIS

Srikar Raghavan's book is a travelogue through the social, cultural, literary, political and intellectual movements that made modern Karnataka

Suresh Menon

In school we called it Holly Kolly, the ball game everyone could play. There was no victory or defeat. It was (we learnt years later) an infinite game. It ended only when the bell for classes rang. You threw the ball into the air and counted to three (in other places they said "Rama, Bhima, Soma") before someone grabbed it to strike the person nearest; the person gathering the ricochet did the same, and the person after that... and so on.

The manner in which Srikar Raghavan handles the metaphor is brilliant. He weaves a rich, colourful tapestry, imbuing each thread with energy and enthusiasm in this accomplished work of stunning originality, great subtlety and much humour.

Rama Bhima Soma
Srikar Raghavan
Context
₹899

Myriad strands

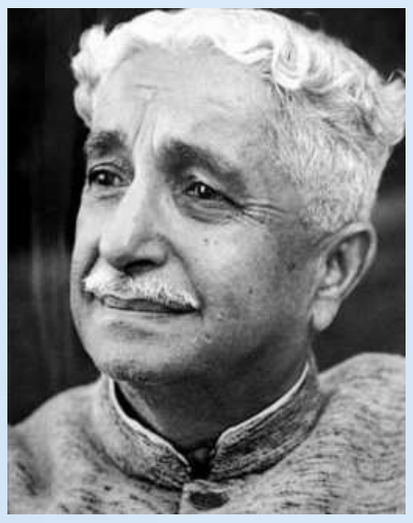
Tolstoy is quoted as saying somewhere that the most profound critique of a book is the book itself. It is tempting to write a Borgesian review here that reproduces the book exactly. Anything less might do this superbly researched, delicately crafted work an injustice! It is a travelogue through the social, cultural, literary, political, intellectual movements and accidents that made modern Karnataka. There are glimpses of the routes leading to contemporary India too.

When the socialist S. Venkatram died, U.R. Ananthamurthy wrote that his funeral was attended by poets, workers, illiterates, journalists, Dalits, men and women of different ages, observing that "political figures like Venkatram are only going to become rarer in the days to come." It is only when red-hot politics is tempered by the calming influence of culture that such phenomena can take place, says the author, who throws a bridge across the scholarly and the popular without being precious about the former or apologetic about the latter.

Intellectual masala

He plays with the *marga-desi* (classical-indigenous) binary, quoting the novelist Richard Crasta, "It is the fate of every educated Indian never to be completely eastern but to be something of a psychological and intellectual masala..." Sometimes *margas* are created anew. The 'tradition' of elites safeguarding Sanskrit's 'peculiar orthodox atmosphere' exists, says the author, as if a language might die if it is made available to more people.

So much of the book will come as fascinating revelation. I have lived in Bengaluru on and off for over three decades, yet I am ashamed to say I knew nothing of 'avadhaana', a performance art combining memory, parallel thinking, impromptu verse creation and other skills. As Raghavan says, "The avadhaani takes centre stage and takes questions and riddles while simultaneously playing chess or counting the number of times a bell goes off and constructing a small poem." Picture a web browser operating a hundred tabs at the same time, says the author, who affirms *marga* and *desi* are amorphous labels depending on historical context. "Once a courtly affair, it has now expanded into the public sphere," he says, suggesting early the grand synthesis that is an important theme.



Cultural history (Clockwise from top left) A painting in the Mysore palace complex depicting a Dasara procession; Channapatna toys of Karnataka; Yakshagana artist Kumble Sridhar Rao; poet Kuvempu in the 1940s; actor-playwright Girish Karnad; and Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru. (SRIRAM M.A., PTI, WIKI COMMONS, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK, AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Gallery of luminaries

Homes in Karnataka often have cobblestone pathways leading to the main door. Some of the stones touch along the sides, others stand alone, still others barely touch tips. *Rama Bhima Soma* is a bit like that. Some of the chronicles (the verses are translated by the author) influence others, while some stand independently. Some have only a nodding relationship to the rest. In combination they take you to the door which opens into Karnataka.

It is not just the big names, Shivaram Karanth, Ananthamurthy, Shankar Punekar, Gopalakrishna Adiga, Bhyrappa, Rajkumar, Kalburgi, Dabholkar, Hebbar (there is a superb analysis of this artist's work), B.V. Karanth, Gopal Gowda, T.P. Kailasam, Girish Karnad, and the politicians and rulers who are invoked. There is 'history from below' and nods to the Western canon. Body builders, conmen, crooks, revolutionaries are in the cast too. In the cultural history of a region, no man is an island.

The "dawn of the twentieth century witnessed a cultural renaissance that dovetailed into a humanist aspiration for more enlightened politics... Through someone like Kuvempu, culture tried to take over the transcendental capabilities that had once been the sole preserve of religion..." says Raghavan.

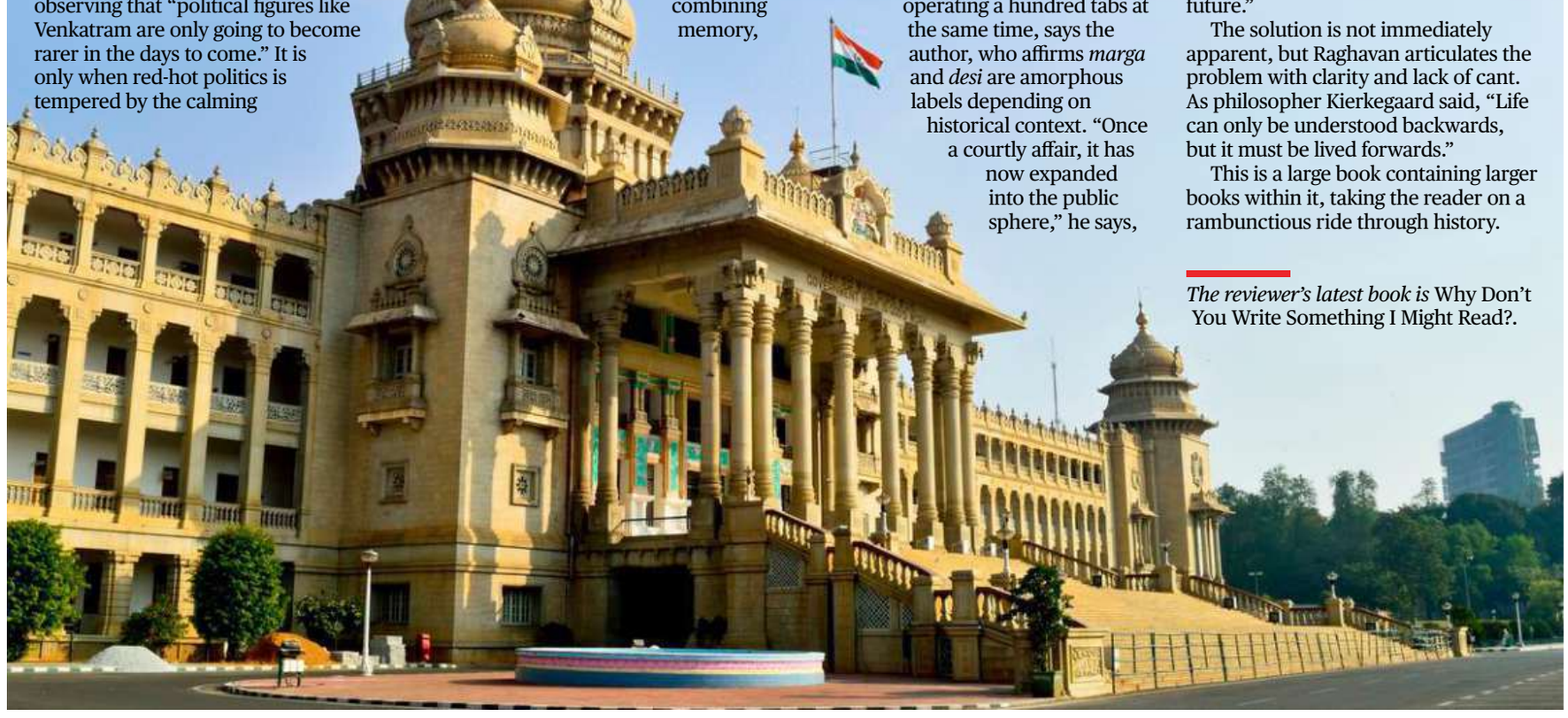
Books within a book

And if you thought we were in the best of all possible worlds, he brings you down with, "within the next few decades, the humbling of culture would segue into the arrival of consumerism... we are caught between a futurism trying to make sense of our cultural heritage, and a medievalism that is engaged in transplanting poorly grasped histories into political ideologies that simultaneously locate themselves in the past, present and future."

The solution is not immediately apparent, but Raghavan articulates the problem with clarity and lack of cant. As philosopher Kierkegaard said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."

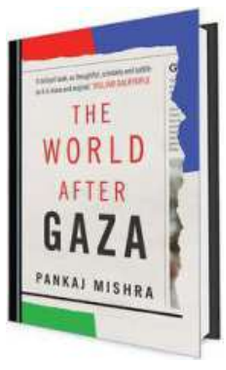
This is a large book containing larger books within it, taking the reader on a rambunctious ride through history.

The reviewer's latest book is Why Don't You Write Something I Might Read?.



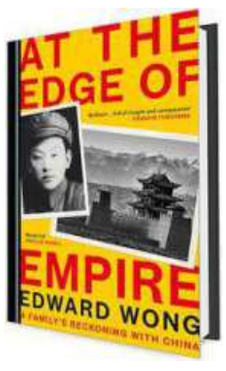
The World After Gaza

Pankaj Mishra
Juggernaut
₹799
Questioning the violence in West Asia, Mishra reckons with several fundamental questions posed by the crisis in Gaza — how some lives are valued more than others, why the West supports Israel and why racist, far-right movements are surging in many countries.



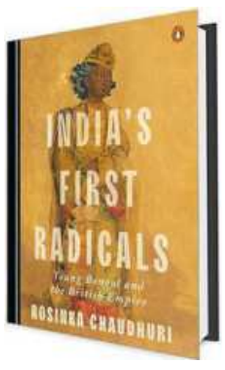
At the Edge of Empire

Edward Wong
Profile Books
₹1,227 (Kindle price)
This journalist with *NYT* who grew up in Washington DC as the son of Chinese immigrants with family secrets, returned to Beijing and probed his father's mysterious past. In his memoir, he tells the story of China, its past and present, through the story of his family.



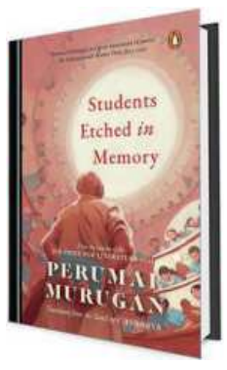
India's First Radicals

Rosinka Chaudhuri
Viking
₹899
Focusing on the activities of a group of 'Radicals' called 'Young Bengal', students of Henry Derozio, Chaudhuri examines their achievements in the 19th century. They campaigned for the rights of peasants, and fought against corruption, and racial, gender and caste discrimination.



Students Etched in Memory

Perumal Murugan, translated by Iswarya V.
Hamish Hamilton
₹599
This is a collection of essays in which Murugan delves into the lives of college students in small-town Tamil Nadu and follows their journeys. The essays reflect the challenges they face in family and society.



Market for collectibles

"Home is at the heart and centre of lifestyle at the moment — a post-COVID phenomenon globally," observes Mumbai-born Gunjan Gupta, whose design practice has spanned 20 years, and who was at IAF 2025 with *Continuum I*, where totem poles and vases in the shape of Mohenjo-daro dancing dolls were a big hit. "There was no Indian design here or abroad in 2006 when I started. In this time, the evolution has been incredible and significant. We are at a very interesting moment in time — Indians are proud to be Indians in a new way."

The numbers speak to a vibrant market for collectible design indeed. New York-based Carpenter's Workshop made sales worth $600,000 (approx ₹5.2 crore) at IAF, and Gujral's *Shifting Horizons* pulled in a total of ₹60-₹70 lakh with popular products such as lamps by Creatomy, Jhankar's partition screen and Sharol Ahluwalia's Kundalini stools. "95% were Indian, 40+ buyers who are design conscious and were looking to add statement pieces to their homes," she shares.

WHO IS THE INDIAN ART COLLECTOR?

CONTINUED FROM » PAGE 1

Loyalists and younger collectors

"The Atul Dodiya shutter got a lot of attention at our booth," says Roshini Vadehra, director of Vadehra Art Gallery. "A lot of people saw it for the first time or after many years in Delhi. The image was something that caught everyone's eye, and people enjoyed it with a mix of fascination and humour." She is referring to the contemporary master's *Weeping Ancestors*, whose mechanically operated shop shutters roll up and down to reveal painted historical figures mourning a conflict-ridden present.

Vadehra Gallery sold 90% of their booth on the first day, with prices ranging from $2,500 (approx ₹2.17 lakh) to $300,000 (approx ₹2.6 crore), including works by Dodiya, Sudhir Patwardhan, Shilpa Gupta and Vivan Sundaram. "There is a mix of people buying," she adds. "Definitely a large percentage appears to be in their 40s and 50s, but there are also a lot of younger people eager to enter the market."

Vadehra's thoughts are echoed by Anand of DAG, who is seeing younger collectors growing in numbers, even as their loyal buyer base remains steadfast. By day three (of four), DAG "concluded healthy sales of several works with individual prices ranging between ₹40 lakh and ₹1.5 crore each... including J.P. Gangooly's mountain landscape and a similar scene by M. Sain; S.H. Raza's abstract set within an old window frame; Laxman Pai's wondrously modern rendition of spring painted in Paris; Nirode Mazumdar's imagined scene of a folkloric story from his *Quest* series; and Madhvi Parekh's 1975 work, an oil on canvas board composition".

International and diasporic artists are in high demand, too. On the first day, the international gallery David Zwirner sold a painting by Zimbabwean painter Portia Zvavahera, a painting by Colombian artist Oscar Murillo, a sculpture by Pakistani-American artist Huma Bhabha, and a painting by Kochi-born artist Sosa Joseph, amongst other works.

"We've started representing a lot of international artists now, which would've earlier been a lot for Indian buyers at those price points, but now they're buying," says Shreemoyee Moitra, lead of exhibitions and projects at Akara gallery. At their IAF booth, Moitra enthusiastically takes visitors through the processes and origin stories of the artists represented, including U.K. sculptor Jonathan Trayte, Tokyo-born artist Keita Miyazaki, Sri Lanka-born painter Anjuna Gunarathne, and Mumbai-born New York-based sculptor and artist Tarik Currimbhoy – whose surgical steel sculpture titled *Pendulum* sold on day one. "We are getting a great response for younger contemporary artists from young collectors – they are looking for art that is accessible, reachable, yet good."

'Shift towards emotional and cultural value'

"Many contemporary artists may not yet have an established secondary market presence, but true collecting is not about short-term speculation," observes Moksha Modgill, CEO of Geek Art, an Indo-Japanese gallery soon to open in the south Delhi neighbourhood of Saket. Their IAF booth, curated around the theme of the medium as the muse, is grabbing eyeballs for Harsha Durugadda's sculptural series – the artist comes from a lineage of temple sculptors in Hyderabad, Thai artist Pannaphan Yodmanee's multi-media, layered painting *The Three Worlds and The Three Mothers*, and Delhi-based artist Tarini Sethi's metal sculptures. "Collecting is about building a long-term relationship with art. An artwork can become part of one's home, family, and personal legacy – an heirloom that transcends generations. This shift towards emotional and cultural value, rather than purely financial investment, is becoming more pronounced," adds Modgill.

For Bhavna Kakar, director and founder of Delhi-based gallery Latitude 28, this may have something to do with the evolution in the Indian art practice itself. "There's a growing preference for art that straddles tradition and innovation – works that incorporate unconventional materials, explore indigenous knowledge systems, or engage with socio-political themes," she says. Take, for example, the Baroda-based artist Ketaki Sarpotdar, patiently taking every curious visitor who found themselves arrested by her large-scale painting on the exterior wall of Latitude 28's booth, through her process of layering metaphors from *Panchatantra* and Tulu folk tales to unpack her enduring fascination with crowd psychology.

"Collectors today are more willing to take risks, investing in experimental practices rather than purely aesthetic or decorative works," says Kakar, adding that Sarpotdar's work was bought by a museum (undisclosed) for ₹22 lakh. "Regional diversity is also becoming more evident, with interest growing beyond the traditional metropolitan hubs of Delhi and Mumbai to include buyers from cities like Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Kochi."

But as far as fairs are meant to be hubs to court new buyers, Ashvin Rajagopalan, founder of the Chennai-based gallery Ashvita's, feels that he hasn't met enough people outside of the Indian art community at the IAF. "The irony is that people from Chennai who wouldn't make the effort to come to the gallery, are coming here and buying," he says with a grimace, as he rests his feet after a long day of walks and talks on day two of IAF. "We've done well, but we're selling because we're bringing something different, something people are not used to, or not expecting to see."

Ashvita's debuted at IAF this year with 'The Madras Line', an academically inclined show on the Madras Art Movement begun by D.P. Roy Choudhury in 1929, and traced through his students and later teachers at the Madras School of Art, including select works by S. Dhanapal, K.C.S. Paniker and R. Krishna Rao, among others. By the end of the fair, Ashvita's sold five works by Choudhury to a Mumbai-based collector for $69,000.

Art for every pocket

Inside the IAF tents, sales remain brisk throughout the four days. Nature Morte sold 70% of their booth by the second day, including a Jitish Kallat for around $100,000; Iram Gallery sold works by Promiti Husain and Sangeeta Sandrasegar, as well as a large work by Dinar Sultana, to an Indian collector for $24,000; Shrine Empire sold two works by Nandita Kumar for over $30,000 each and multiple smaller works at the $10,000 price point.

Still more affordable are the limited edition prints of Modern masters at Archer Art Gallery. "In the 1980s, artists like Husain and Raza had the foresight that one day their work might be too expensive to own, so they decided to produce these limited-edition, hand-signed prints," says Manan Relia. "And now people realise that there's value in this too – and a fine example of that is Picasso's prints, which would sell for $50 in his lifetime. Now you can't get your hands on anything for less than $50,000."

"There's a strong interest in art," observes Anand, "but equally art is being seen as something people want to identify with. India is poised to become an art superpower and we're seeing this interest accelerating." This is clearly evident by sundown on the opening day – the wine's begun to flow, the electronic music and chatter are getting louder, and the queues outside M. Pravat's installation *I Don't Want You To See This* are getting longer. "I was really drawn to the textile art at the fair," says a Delhi-based graphic designer, who is now working on her own skincare brand. "I may not buy anything, but it's amazing – there's art for every kind of pocket here."

The writer is an independent journalist based in Mumbai, writing on culture, lifestyle and technology.

Scan the QR code to watch artist Viraj Khanna's India Art Fair walkthrough on **magazine.thehindu.com**

There's a growing preference for art that straddles tradition and innovation – works that incorporate unconventional materials, explore indigenous knowledge systems, or engage with socio-political themes

BHAVNA KAKAR
Director and founder, Latitude 28

The knowledgeable Indian buyer

Regardless of who they are, where they come from and what they want to buy, one thing everyone agrees upon is that the Indian art collector today is a knowledgeable, well-informed species — whether it's a veteran collector like Kiran Nadar or a Gen Z one like Viraj Khanna.

At this year's IAF, Nadar bought three works by the Kolkata-born contemporary artist Buddhadev Mukherjee from Art Exposure gallery — who sold a total of six works by the artist for $44,000, including one to another Indian collector, and a couple to a U.S.-based collector. "My interests have become more varied," says Nadar, on the sidelines of opening a retrospective on the poet-painter-critic Gulam Mohammed Sheikh at her Saket museum. "For somebody who had 500 works and has grown that in the last 10-12 years to 15,000 works, it's a few leaps forward. I'm interested in younger artists, too, but I also try to make the process of collecting an artist or a period in-depth. Be it Husain or Souza or Raza, if I had 10 works then, now I have 50-100 works. Still, if I see something, I really just go for it. I'm not normally told I'm making the wrong decision," she laughs.

Khanna recalls that his first art acquisition was a Jayasri Burman painting, but he has since felt more drawn to younger artists with whom he can relate more, and to the things "I myself cannot do, such as a hyper-realistic painting or when someone's doing something radically different and pushing the boundaries of art history". He has recently acquired a Jayesh Sachdev Ganesha sculpture made with AI, and he calls himself a "big collector" of Hyderabad artist T. Venkanna's "courageous and vulnerable" works. "I respect and value when an artist is being really brave," he says. From IAF 2025, he's added paintings by Indore-born 27-year-old artist Shailee Mehta and London-based 28-year-old artist Raghav Babbar. What about collectible design? "I've yet to research that space, so I don't quite understand it yet.

(Clockwise from above) Visitors at Vikram Goyal's exhibit; Shifting Horizons; the DAG showcase; and Harsha Durugadda's *Geology of Spirit* at Geek Art. (INDIA ART FAIR AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

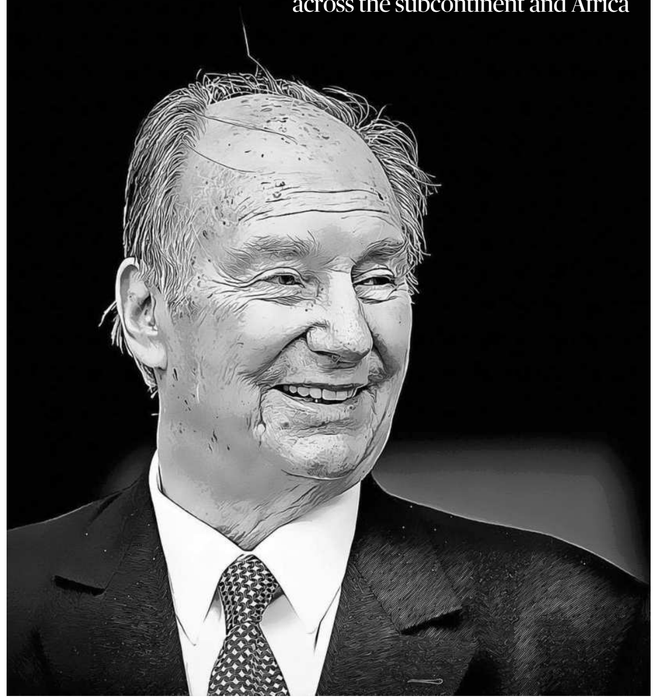
GREEN HUMOUR

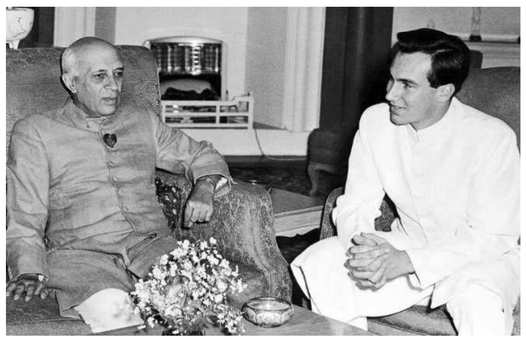
Rohan Chakravarty

TRIBUTE

AGA KHAN IV: IMAM OF THE 'ATOMIC AGE'

A legacy of fame, fortune and goodwill that spread across the subcontinent and Africa





Enlightened leader The Aga Khan IV (right) with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi, 1958; and (far left) at an event in London, 2019. (GETTY IMAGES)

Geeta Doctor

The Imam is dead, long live the Imam!" With these words, Prince Aly Khan, the man who would have been Imam, embraced his son, the 20-year-old Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, and solemnly acknowledged his ascension as the spiritual heir and leader of the Nizari Ismailis in Versoix, near Geneva, on July 12, 1957.

It was only the second time in the unbroken lineage of the prominent Shia sect that a son had been bypassed. The family traces their descent directly from Prophet Muhammad and the Aga Khan is treated as a head of state.

The late Aga Khan III was very clear about his choice. He had written in his will: "...in very recent years due to the great changes which have taken place including the discoveries of atomic science, I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shia Muslim Ismailia Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of the new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam."

He also added that the young Prince Karim, who had studied at Institut Le Rosey, an exclusive boarding school for boys near Geneva, with a winter retreat in the ski resort town of Gstaad, would have as an official mentor, his grandmother Begum Om Habbibeh Aga Khan, a Swiss citizen by birth. Prince Karim went on to Harvard to complete his studies. Thanks to his grandfather's will, he was hailed as the "Imam of the Atomic Age". He passed away in Lisbon, Portugal, on February 4, and was buried at the Mausoleum of Aga Khan in Egypt, also his grandfather's resting place.

A home in Mumbai

The title of Aga Khan was first bestowed upon Hasan Ali Shah (1804-1881), the 46th Imam of the Nizari Ismailis, by the Iranian king Fath-Ali Shah Qajar in the 19th century. Many years later, Hasan Ali relocated to Bombay after spending a large part of his life in Afghanistan and Sindh in Pakistan. His mausoleum in the Mazgaon docks of Mumbai was once a well-kept place of pilgrimage.

It's perhaps due to his patronage that the Ismailis in the region flourished as traders and merchants. Despite the fact that Aga Khan was revered as the spiritual heir of the Ismailis, he did not actually rule a country or province. Yet, by the time of Aga Khan III, his fame was such that at the golden jubilee celebrations of his accession in Bombay and later in Nairobi in 1936, the whole world watched. In both places, he was publicly weighed in gold donated by the Ismaili followers.

The proceeds were apparently used to further the fortunes of the community spread across the subcontinent as well as in East Africa. Ismailis traditionally give a tithe, or a percentage of their earnings, to the Imam. He returned their trust by being an exceptionally enlightened leader. Not only did he not believe in the veil or hijab for women, he insisted that girls be given equal educational opportunities.

During the Idi Amin years, when thousands of Ismailis faced eviction from Uganda, Aga Khan IV found a willing friend in then president of Canada Pierre Trudeau, whose government allowed the Ismailis to immigrate

Philanthropy in good measure

Amongst the many acts of patronage that marked the age of Aga Khan IV was the creation of the Aga Khan Development Network, described as "the largest private development network in the world". One very well-known effort was the institution of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. It celebrates contemporary design keeping in mind traditional crafts and building practices. The restoration of Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi was a part of this initiative. In 2015, Aga Khan IV was bestowed with the Padma Vibhushan.

Given the tragedy facing displaced people today, one has to also mention how, during the Idi Amin years in Uganda, when thousands of Ismailis faced eviction from the country, Aga Khan IV found a willing friend in then president of Canada Pierre Trudeau, whose government allowed the Ismailis to immigrate. People from East Africa and Burma are also said to have been relocated by the Aga Khan's initiative.

Prince Karim, mindful of his grandfather's injunctions, proved to be an exemplary Imam by the time he died in Portugal at 88. In 1969, he married Sarah Frances Croker Poole, his first wife, who became Begum Salimah. Their son, Rahim Al-Hussaini, has now become the 50th Imam and Aga Khan V.

The writer is a Chennai-based critic and cultural commentator.

A still from the new Cadbury ad.

POP-A-RAZZI

Uncles just wanna have fun

The new Cadbury ad for Valentine's Day is proof that there is hope yet for the Indian uncle, away from sexist jokes and patronising comments

As a bona fide Indian uncle, I am thrilled. FMCG giant Cadbury has recognised my power. Their new *Destroy Valentine's Day* ad is all about the Indian uncle.

To destroy the pernicious Valentine's Day once and for all, they are calling on all uncles to step up to the plate. This does not involve heckling young couples trying to go on a date at a pub. Nor does it require thrashing an interfaith couple trying to get married in a court.

Instead, the ad for 5 Star chocolate bar requires uncles to embrace Valentine's Day whole-heartedly. If they fill the cafes with teddy bears and balloons, wear shirts with heart prints, it will be the end of Valentine's Day. As the ad tells us, "When uncles join a trend, the youth instantly lose interest in it. It happened to social media platforms, skinny jeans, YOLO and many others." Now uncles can kill Valentine's Day. With love.

He knows it all

All cultures have the uncle problem. But the Indian uncle is a breed apart. No uncle knows as much as this uncle. He knows the "real" motives of both Donald Trump and Narendra Modi. He could fix the Indian economy in a jiffy. He can hold forth on whisky, women, mutual funds, diabetes and the GDP. In the school-friends' WhatsApp group, he is still Romeo No. 1 and his friends remember the penalty kick he made 37 years ago. Intermittent fasting is an acceptable topic for discussion, enlarged prostrates not so much.

Denial is the first commandment of uncle-dom. The other day I met a friend's father. He scolded me for letting my hair go grey. "If you all let your hair go grey, how will we look?" he said disapprovingly, his own slicked-back hair a shiny jet black. I am hardly immune either. The first time someone in the market called me "*kaku*" (uncle), I bristled. I still wanted to be "*dada*" (brother).

When a teenaged Aparna Sen was cast in Satyajit Ray's *Samapti* (1961), the third part of his *Teen Kanya* triptych, she was delighted to hear her co-star would be the dashing Soumitra Chatterjee. Chatterjee was already the heartthrob of young Bengal after playing Apu in Ray's *Apur Sansar* (1959). He immediately dashed her hopes by introducing himself to her as "Soumitra *kaku*." He was too young to be a *kaku* then, but Chatterjee, unlike most film stars, accepted his uncle-ness with relative equanimity. Ray turned him into Bengal's most famous *dada* by casting him as the charming, cerebral detective Feluda. When Ray's son embarked on his own Feluda movies years later, he hesitantly told Chatterjee he was planning to cast a new actor. Chatterjee agreed wholeheartedly saying at that point he was no longer Feluda but had become Felu-uncle.

Toxicity in new India

At one time, uncle-hood was more about the waistline and the hairline. At worst, this was mutton trying to pass as lamb. Uncle-hood in the new India has become more toxic. In the open economy, the bar for success is higher. Where age and membership to the right club had been enough at one time, now they are not sufficient. Performance anxiety is higher even for the Indian uncle and that has translated into a small-heartedness that resents the progress of others, especially non-uncles.

In an essay, economist and writer Shrayana Bhattacharya writes "we live under the tyranny of the Indian Uncle" – from corporations (where they want everyone to work Sundays) to the RWAs (where they object to everything), they live to dominate, and insist on imposing their bad jokes on everyone. But while it's easy to pile on the patriarchal tyrannical conservative uncle who fumes about feminists, Bhattacharya writes that "self-professed liberal uncles" are even more problematic. They are the "unhelpful uncles", the gatekeepers and mansplainers, the ones who are "stylish in the sexism", smilingly ignoring the input of female colleagues while they suck up the oxygen in the room as they deliver non-stop *gyan*.

But what strikes me from my unscientific survey of WhatsApp groups is that Indian uncles are not just killjoys, they are singularly joyless. They like to shoot down new ideas and are ever ready to tell you why something will not work. And I worry that, surrounded by a cohort like that, I will easily become like that as well, sitting in the club, nursing dyspepsia on the rocks.

That's why the 5 Star uncles give me some hope. For once, the uncles are having fun without tired sexist jokes. They are wearing brightly coloured outfits, they are whooping it up in cafes, and holding onto teddy bears. Of course, the WhatsApp uncle will sourly point out this is all to sell a diabetogenic candy bar.

But at least for once, some uncles *just wanna have fun*.

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

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 7

I TOLD YOU SO

Says that particular class of human being who will insist they had perfectly predicted everything

Dear reader, have you been enjoying the cricket lately? The Indian cricket team has been delivering some very interesting results, no? Such a wealth of talent in Indian cricket if you ask me.

Actually, I have no idea if there is any cricket going on. Or if the team is doing well. And I have no idea who is even playing in the cricket team these days. There used to be one Ravikumaran Ashokan or something. I don't know. I think he was a right arm spin medium classic fit linen blend.

But in fact you can safely say things like "Cricket is so interesting", "so much talent is there" et cetera whenever you want because at any given moment in time, some unbelievable amount of cricket is happening. India is in England, Sri Lanka is in Pakistan, Ireland is touring South Guyana or something.

However, I have completely stopped watching cricket because of one simple phenomenon: borecasters.

Borecasting? What is this new addition to the English language you ask? Let me explain.

Surprise, surprise

Do you remember in 2007, when Yuvraj Singh hit English bowler Stuart Broad for six sixes in a single over? Many people in Delhi have still not stopped shouting to this day.

Well, I was sitting next to a college friend in a restaurant in Mumbai when this happened. And do you know what he said less than two minutes later? The words he said are permanently imprinted on my mind like the luggage sticker on your passport that has been there since 1987.

He said: "I knew this was going to happen. I am not surprised."

Excuse me but STRING OF ABUSES IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES REMOVED FROM COLUMN.

Friends, this is what I mean by borecasting. It is a particular class of human being who will insist that they had perfectly predicted any fantastical thing that has happened anywhere. And will behave totally unsurprised.

Maybe one day when you are in office, you accidentally drop coffee on your keyboard and while trying to clean the keyboard before manager notices, you accidentally drop the keyboard on the floor, and then your office chair rolls over the keyboard, and accidentally sends a message to Sam Altman on LinkedIn who immediately hires you as CEO of OpenAI.

Your colleague sitting next to you, who has a Ph.D in borecasting from IIM Bore-ikode, will say, "*Machaan*, this and all I knew last week itself. I was surprised it took so long. Congratulations."

Why are some people like this?

These people are everywhere

Okay, fine. Mostly you can avoid these fellows. But then suddenly, out of nowhere, some election will happen somewhere in India. For instance, let us take the case of the elections in Delhi.

Your local borecasting expert – uncle, auntie, friend, colleague – who has not mentioned Delhi elections once in the last two or three years will suddenly emerge and absolutely annihilate your peace of mind. Two days ago if you'd asked them who is the Chief Minister of Delhi, they'd have said something like, "Is it Mr. Pragati Maidan?"

But today they will sit in front of the TV and unleash absolute and utter shenanigans. They will say, "Sidin, I told you last week itself that BJP will win between 47 and 49 seats. And look, they won 48. Do you remember when I said that?"

Sidin does not reply at all because he is wondering if Onida TV remote control can be used as a weapon.

In fact, friends, this borecaster made no such prediction, did not even know how many seats there were in Delhi Assembly, and probably heard of the elections for the first time that morning when they switched on the TV.

But for millions of Indians who live amongst us, often disguised as normal people, the innate need to borecast is irresistible. They cannot help but pick up the newspaper each morning, turn the pages, and then say loudly to everyone nearby: "Knew it. I told you. I am not surprised. Was bound to happen. I could have told you last week." Et cetera. Et cetera. No incident, however unlikely, anywhere in the world, is something they did not foresee coming.

However what happens if you ask them their predictions about something before it happens?

Ho ho ho. Then they will put terms and conditions as if they are some mutual fund: "Actually in my opinion we should approach this delicate situation with a certain amount of balance and introspection, there are many variables at play, but I do have some conjectures, however it would be premature to share these musings in this current moment."

Thank you, sir. Please leave some English for other people also.

Example sentence: "As the match ended in 15 minutes with an unprecedented triple hat-trick by Umpire Noam Chomsky, James, the office borecaster, emerged from his cubicle to announce that 'cricket is too predictable, why is it so boring?'"

Borecasters are everywhere. They live among us. Beware. Have you suffered at the hands of these borecasters? Please leave comments.

Borecaster
/bɔːkɑːstər/
noun
Plural: borecasters
Definition: A person who claims to have predicted significant events only after they occur, while remaining deliberately vague about future predictions. Distinguished by their frequent use of phrases like "I knew it" and "I'm not surprised" after unexpected events.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Sure thing

Both vulnerable, North deals

Bob Jones

South's two-heart bid was forcing to game and North's jump to four hearts showed a minimum. A simple raise to three hearts would have shown a better hand. There was no stopping South and he used Key Card Blackwood to reach slam.

West did not want to warn South about the bad spade split by leading a spade and he found the excellent lead of a low trump. Dummy's seven won the first trick. 12 tricks would be easy if the spades split 3-2, but there was a danger if the spades split 4-1. An opponent might be able to ruff the second spade and lead another trump, leaving South with very little chance to make his contract. Abandoning a possible overtrick to assure his contract, South cashed the ace of spades and led a low spade from dummy. East won with the jack, as West discarded a diamond, and shifted to a club. South rose with his ace and led a heart to dummy's jack. He ruffed a spade with the ace of hearts, establishing the suit, and crossed back to dummy with a heart to the king. This drew the last trump and South discarded his two remaining clubs and the jack of diamonds on the good spades. Beautifully played!

NORTH
♠ A K 9 7 6 5
♡ K J 7
◇ Q 6
♣ 5 2

WEST
♠ 2
♡ 9 6 5
◇ K 10 9 8 3
♣ K 10 8 6

EAST
♠ Q J 8 3
♡ 4
◇ 7 5 4 2
♣ J 7 4 3

SOUTH
♠ 10 4
♡ A Q 10 8 3 2
◇ A J
♣ A Q 9

The bidding:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♠	Pass	2♡	Pass
4♡	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♡*	Pass	6♡	All pass

***2 key cards, among the 4 aces and the king of hearts**

Opening lead: Five of ♡

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Popular phrases!

Berty Ashley

1 On this day in 600 AD, Pope Gregory the Great passed a decree. It declared that one should say a particular phrase as a response to someone doing an involuntary action. The phrase was supposed to stop the devil from entering the person in the split second they are not in control of their mouth. What was the decree?

2 This phrase means 'cherished above all others'. It is used in the King James *Bible* and in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The phrase originally referred to the operational part of a vital organ in the body. Researchers think that the fruit in the phrase came by as a reference to something globular in shape. What is the phrase?

3 This phrase comes to us from the ancient Indian game 'Moksha Patam'. Now known as 'Snakes & Ladders', it represented life's journey of attaining Moksha by doing good or being reborn as a lower form for doing evil. In the worst case, one can slide all the way down. Which phrase comes from this?

4 This phrase symbolises superficial sympathy. It is a reference to the fact that a certain top-level predator seems to be showing 'grief' when actually causing the pain. Scientifically they do this for lubrication as being out of water causes drying out. What phrase is this?

Pope from a monastery
Saint Gregory the Great is the patron saint of musicians and teachers. (GETTY IMAGES)

5 This phrase just indicates that each individual in a group that is involved in a collective endeavour is responsible for their own expenses. Legend has it that it comes from when British soldiers fighting in Holland would do this to avoid being in debt to a colleague, in case they were killed in battle the next day. What phrase is this?

6 Unlike other phrases, we know exactly when this one originated. On December 15, 1956, Horace Logan said this to the crowds at an auditorium in Louisiana. He had to say this to quiet the audience, who expected a certain performer to return to the stage and sing more songs. This is now a catchphrase, which is used to refer to any dramatic exit. Which phrase is this?

7 This phrase is used to describe a sudden or unforeseen problem, and is usually an ironic understatement of the magnitude of the issue. The original phrase was said by Jack Swigert and commander Jim Lovell in present perfect tense, while the popular version is in present tense. What is this, which comes from the Apollo mission #13?

8 This simple phrase attained cult status after it was uttered onscreen by a cyborg assassin when he was refused entry into a police station. It has gone on to give rise to multiple memes, jokes and call backs in other movies. What phrase is this, which is usually said with an Austrian accent?

9 This expression refers to the disproportionately major portion of something. The phrase comes from the *Aesop Fables*, where a group of animals come together to execute a successful hunt. But when it comes to splitting the share, one animal successfully reasons why he should have more than the others. What phrase is this?

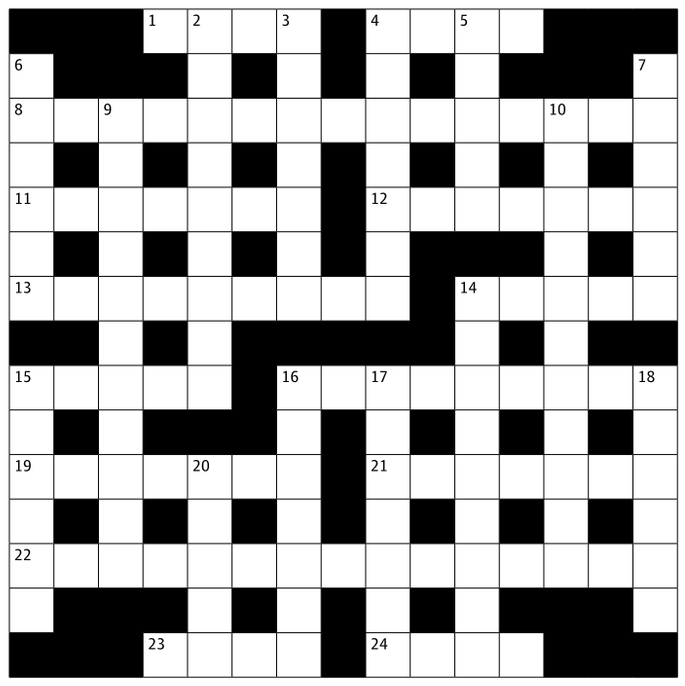
10 This phrase suggests that a person is suffering from insanity. Although made famous by the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it is a reference to a disorder that affected a certain professional. In olden days, they used mercury, while working with leather, and its ingestion caused hallucinations. What phrase is this, which refers to the profession?

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

Answers

1. Saying 'bless you' when someone sneezes
2. The apple of my eye
3. Back to square one
4. Crocodile tears
5. Going Dutch
6. Elvis has left the building
7. Houston, we have a problem
8. I'll be back
9. Lion's share
10. Mad as a hatter

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3345



Across

1 Primarily squalid purveyor, illicit vendor? (4)
4 Tiny amount of drink — damn! (4)
8 Mustard on a roll, for a song (6,9)
11 A bounder, the writer describing European universities etc (7)
12 Mo in no need of barista (7)
13 Improved health for hubby? (5,4)
14 Counterpart of red — and of black? (5)
15 Scrap fairy tale with king at the end becoming... dead (5)
16 What boots may be in a different case? (5,4)
19 How a list of Henry's wives goes, excluding the final queen, OK? (2,2,3)
21 Component of lathe is twitching? I'm sceptical (7)
22 Understood, in a phrase, how a lipreader describes her work (1,3,4,3,4)
23 Location of unpleasantness on edge of eyelid? (4)
24 Falling over, run into swarm (4)

Down

2 I reopened bananas and showed the way (9)
3 Victor is constant, on time, showing guts (7)
4 Gather intel from — scare the pants off? (7)
5 Catches son, acts the scold (5)
6 Monday rattled one that's full of beans (6)
7 Place — place to drive from — place to park it? (6)
9 Dubious treat, the eel's dressed 'skin' (11)
10 Everyman's given a drink at 4; from the outset, Everyman's making things up (11)
14 One who wrote amusing novels such as *Emma,* you say? (9)
15 Detective Inspector puts up with absence of intelligence (6)
16 Heavy criticism, lawyers blow a fuse (7)
17 Number-cruncher: fastidious, proverbially patient type accepting unknown number (7)
18 Cockney's cooking — then... ? (6)
20 ...piece of snipe with another bird (5)

SOLUTION NO. 3344

M	A	R	K	R	O	T	H	K	O	■	A	S	A	P
O	■	I	■	A	■	A	■	E	■	■	E	■	A	■
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E	■	H	■	S	■	E	■	N	■	■	S	■	A	■
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O	■	B	■	R	■	E	■	E	■	C	■	T	■	E
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E	■	C	■	■	■	S	■	L	■	R	■	N	■	V
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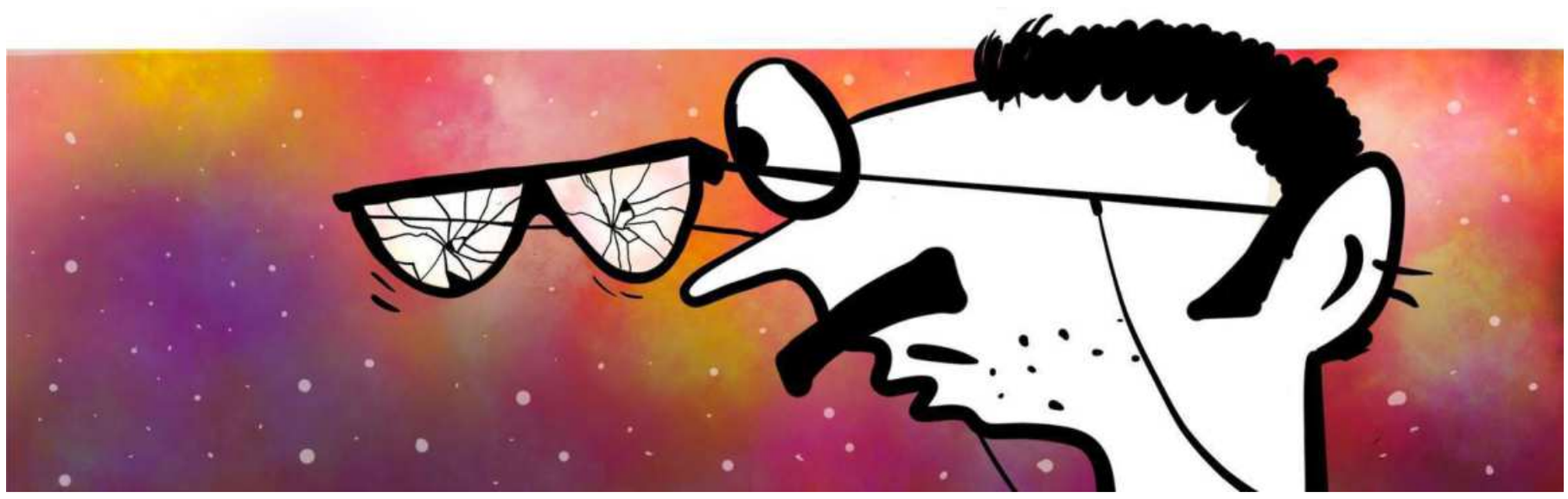

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

Cracking the patriarchal prism

The path to gender equality must transcend legal framework, besides reimagining societal consciousness

N. Anand Venkatesh
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Recently, I was reading a judgment authored by Hon'ble Justice Manjula of the Madras High Court in *Dr. Supraja vs State* pertaining to sexual harassment of women at the workplace and how far the existing law is effective in handling this serious issue. The judge has raised a very interesting and important perspective and that is to look at the problem from a woman's perspective or apply the standard of a reasonable woman.

I also read the observations made by Hon'ble Justice B.V. Nagarathna of the Supreme Court in a case relating to dismissal of a woman judge whose case disposal came down since she was suffering from the effects of a miscarriage. "I wish men had menstruation, then only they would understand," Justice Nagarathna had observed.

I happened to read an article by Elizabeth Seshadri, an advocate practising in the Madras High Court, on what society must undertake to break the cycle of sexual abuse. The author advocates for accelerated action by teaching boys empathy, respect, and understanding from childhood in a formalised curriculum. In the intricate amalgams of gender dynamics, the clarion call for understanding women's perspectives emerges as a profound necessity. The journey towards gender equality must transcend mere legal frameworks and requires a reimagining of societal consciousness.

Indian epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata serve as powerful historical markers revealing how deeply patriarchal perspectives have marginalised women's experiences. These narratives, in my opinion, have fundamentally reduced women to objects of male narrative rather than autonomous individuals. In the Ramayana, Sita's journey – her forced exile and humiliating *agnipariksha* (trial by fire) symbolising the profound lack of agency women experienced – powerfully demonstrates women's systemic struggles. The Mahabharata presents even more stark examples of women's objectification. Draupadi, treated as a "communal drinking cup" and property to be wagered, represents the brutal commodification of women. She was publicly disrobed in the royal assembly, starkly illustrating how women were perceived as tools for male revenge and humiliation.

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are not isolated incidents but systemic manifestations of deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets. The perspectives shared by Justice Manjula, Justice Nagarathna, and Ms. Seshadri illuminate the critical need for a paradigm shift – from viewing women's experiences through a male lens to genuinely comprehending their lived realities.

Women's viewpoint

Justice Manjula's landmark observation in *Dr. Supraja vs State* specifically emphasises applying the "standard of a reasonable woman" when examining workplace sexual harassment – a revolutionary perspective that demands understanding experiences from women's viewpoints rather than male-centric interpretations. Justice Nagarathna's strong observation powerfully challenges men to step outside their privileged perspectives and genuinely empathise with women's experiences. This statement cuts through superficial understanding and demands experiential empathy.

The shocking revelations in cases such as the Gisela Pelicot incident underscore the disturbing reality that perpetrators of sexual violence are not monstrous strangers but often respected members of society – fathers, husbands, professionals who occupy positions of trust. This challenges the simplistic narrative of the "sexual predator" and demands a more nuanced understanding of systemic gender violence. Ms. Seshadri's analysis of the Pelicot case reveals that the perpetrators ranged from 27 to 74 in age, and they included fathers, husbands, prison guards, and IT professionals, demonstrating that sexual violence transcends stereotypical boundaries of criminality.

Education emerges as the most potent weapon in dismantling patriarchal constructs. Consent, emotional intelligence, and gender sensitivity should be core components of educational curricula, not peripheral discussions. The goal is not to elevate women to pedestals of worship but to recognise their fundamental human dignity. Women are not goddesses to be worshipped or objects to be controlled, but equal human beings deserving respect, autonomy, and opportunities.

Philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir argued that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", highlighting how societal constructs shape gender experiences. Feminist thinkers have consistently emphasised that true liberation requires dismantling systemic oppression.

The path forward demands collective responsibility. Men must become active allies, not passive observers. They must challenge toxic masculinity, call out discriminatory behaviours, and create spaces where women can thrive without fear or compromise. The emerging field of neuroplasticity offers a groundbreaking pathway to genuine gender understanding. Neuroscience reveals that male cognitive frameworks are not immutably fixed but remarkably adaptable, presenting a revolutionary approach to comprehending women's experiences. Neuroplasticity research demonstrates that male brains can be intentionally reshaped through targeted interventions. The brain's remarkable capacity for neural reconfiguration means that patriarchal perspectives are not destiny, but malleable constructs that can be reconstructed.

The author is a judge of the Madras High Court.

Breaking the shackles of expectations

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The world has become hyper-competitive and unsettling, where success is defined by one's bank balance, luxurious assets, designation, and parties. In simple words, it's a "show-off" culture. People run, fight, compete, earn money, and party, perpetuating an unending cycle of competition. They live for the sake of appearances, seeking external validation and acknowledgement.

As they relentlessly pursue success, they eventually burn out, realising that a significant chunk of their life has slipped away. All that is left is an exhausted body and mind. They begin to question themselves, recognising that physical and mental health cannot be restored with their accumulated wealth.

They come to a sobering realisation: those who validated their glamorous lifestyle won't be there to support them in their fallen state, not even their family. This prompts a profound question: "What have I truly earned?" The success, reputation, and validation they earned to satiate their ego are now meaningless.

Then what is the definition of success? What is achievement? Is this the way abundance should find me?

Initially, they start to question and point a finger at the outer world, people, and society. "They are bad, they are selfish," they blame others. This blame game still satiates their ego. However, they don't find peace. One day, the question "Why does all this happen to me?" changes into "What is my problem? Have I made any mistakes? Is my path wrong?" The finger finally points to themselves. This marks the beginning of reflection, questioning, and introspection.

Identity theft and after

Being the victim of a cyberfraud is a painful experience

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The first call was from a long-lost friend who had not been in touch for years. After warm greetings, he started enquiring about my wife's health and appeared very concerned.

When I told him she was absolutely fine, he revealed he had received a mail from me requesting for financial help as she was seriously ill and had been in hospital in a distant city for an emergency operation that cost several lakhs. I told him that it was obviously a fake mail and hackers may have stolen my email ID and address book.

The next call came from a relative in the U.S. who could make out that it was fake since it came from an account which I never use. And then, there was an avalanche of calls conveying the same story, from friends, acquaintances, former colleagues and relatives. I could only express my apologies for the unnecessary worries caused to them.

But when a good Samaritan informed me that the hackers had not only created a fake email id in my name but had also created a savings bank account to credit the ill-gotten money, it was a matter of deep concern.

The first step was to register a complaint with the cybercrime reporting office (CCRO). When I called its number to do so, the officer who took the phone asked if I had lost any money. When I answered in the negative, he told me that in that case, the complaint must be filed with the local cybercrime police station.

Next morning, when I reached the station, there were already three or four glum-looking, worried faces ahead of me, registering their complaints.

When I informed the dealing officer that no money was lost, he said he could register a case only if there was a loss of at least ₹5 lakh. The right thing for me would be to approach the local police station.

The local station staff were also considerate; but since I had not lost any money, there was no question of filing an FIR. I could, however, report the incident to the CCRO. When I repeated that the CCRO was my first port of call, the kind officer volunteered to call them to clarify, but could not get through. Back to square one!

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Calling the bank

After the abortive attempts with the police, my next endeavour was to request the bank to block the account. So, I visited the nearby branch in which the mule account was said to exist and met the friendly manager. He confirmed there was indeed an account with the details provided in the emails, but he was not authorised to give me the details.

But he said such fake accounts were not uncommon, and suggested that I ignore it. He advised me that since senior citizens make up a large number of cyberfraud victims, I must be careful when using ATM, debit, and credit cards, Internet banking and e-payments.

Since the IFSC details were available in the fake mails, I next reported the fraudulent nature of the account to the branch located in a remote town. The branch manager promptly conveyed that the said account had been partially frozen based on a police investigation. I felt relieved, but my joy was short-lived because the subsequent phishing mails had the details of another account in a different bank.

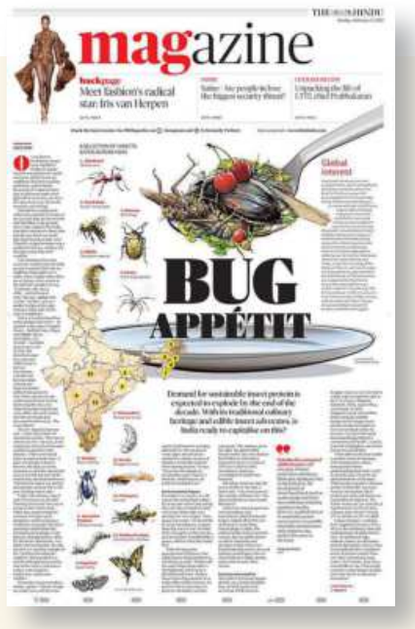
This time, the bank concerned washed of its hands by letting me know that the said account had been opened in line with regulatory guidelines.

Being the victim of a cyberfraud is an extremely painful experience, because of not only the loss of one's savings but also the trauma. The fear of becoming the victim of online frauds lurks in the mind whenever one uses a mobile phone or opens the laptop. It is difficult to perceive how hackers access our accounts: it can be due to clicking an unknown link or responding to an unsolicited message. But the benign advice of the helpful bank manager sounds like gospel to me: minimise all Internet transactions even if they cannot be avoided altogether.

Frauds on the rise

The good old days when we relied on cheque books and conventional banking were indeed far more safer. The loss due to cyberfrauds in India is said to be substantial and increasing. Media reports highlight a variety of such frauds occurring every day: courier, investment and regulatory frauds, honeytrap and more, with the naïve but absurd "digital arrests" at the crest.

Technology is a great boon, but it also throws up infinite risks. Its use calls for extreme vigilance at every step. But the bottom line is that no one can help us but ourselves, by being vigilant all the time.



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

The article was an eye-opener on the variety of edible insects. ('Bug appétit'; Feb. 9) India suffers from a wide 'protein gap'. A shift towards an insect diet will do wonders. This concept needs to be popularised.
Buddha Jagdish Rao

While those who cringe at the sight of bugs might not find this idea appetising, it is the benefits that might accrue from consuming insects that could tilt the scales in its favour.
C.V. Aravind

Insects can be a good alternative to protein supplements available in the market. A high market growth opportunity awaits this nascent industry in India.
Sukanya Saha

The fact that insects are also related to crustaceans, the potential for them to cause food-related allergies needs considerable study before further exploration.
K.M.K. Murthy

Forgotten history

The life and legacy of LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran was indeed a case of missed opportunities. Through the brutal killings of fellow Tamil leaders and leading politicians of Sri Lanka, the LTTE achieved nothing. No wonder that the once mighty organisation is now consigned to the dustbin of history.
J. Anantha Padmanabhan

Nature love

It is absolutely true that if one loves anything, be it a tree or a bug, one will protect it. ('Rewilding imagination'; Feb. 9) Bijal Vachharajani's mission to make children fall in love with the planet is laudable. The need of the hour is environmental consciousness.
S. Ramakrishnasayee

Invasion of privacy

The rules for live-in couples under the Uniform Civil Code are absurd. ('Reject all time-pass relationships'; Feb. 9) It scares one as it signals a future where privacy and individual rights are threatened. This should no doubt be opposed.
Rohith Varon S.S.

Yoga for the win

Teaching yoga to older people is always difficult as they think it is of no use for them. ('Saurabh Bothra: mum's the word'; Feb. 9) Saurabh Bothra has trained lakhs of older women to prioritise their health, and he is deserving of the fame that has come his way.
Rajni Chhabra

The founder of Habuild has set things right as he follows a woman's heart, his mother's. When a woman is uplifted and taken care of, the whole family enjoys the benefit of it.
Sohini Mahapatra

What sets Saurabh Bothra apart is his realistic approach. He doesn't make lofty promises of quick results like instant weight loss. Instead, he emphasises on consistency, encourages us to do whatever we can, and gently pushes us to challenge ourselves a little more each day. I recently attended his 21-day free yoga programme, and it was an eye-opener in understanding the power of consistency.
Sujatha K.

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Double standard at the workplace
While a man's charisma is lauded, an equally striking woman risks being typecast as ornamental
Shivangi Sinha

The PTA meeting has it all
It's a vantage point for teachers to watch the parent-child dynamics
Rose Sebastian

Sugar and spice and everything nice
In the battle against calories, it's normal to slip up but one can surely bounce back
Sharon Roshan

Having a grand time
And ready to wait to become a grandparent
Lakshmi R. Srinivas

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In the crosshairs (Clockwise from far left) Husain's *Ganesh Darbar*; an exhibition of sketches by Akbar Padamsee; Anubhav Nath; Ashish Anand; Peter Nagy; and Debottam Bose. (GETTY IMAGES, SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

HUSAIN AND THE QUESTION OF CENSORSHIP

Last month, two of the painter's works were seized, sparking conversations on artistic freedom, disagreements, and cultural conformity

Rahul Kumar

As a teenager, each time I crossed the boundaries of good behaviour, my father would remind me of the saying, 'With freedom, comes responsibility.' Liberty has an inseparable second half – that of being held accountable for actions. And the balance between these two seemingly opposite ideas inevitably comes with tension. This applies to how we view 'freedom of expression' too, including using visual arts as a tool to communicate.

There have been several instances in the past when works of art have been censored by authorities for not following the legal or moral code. In 1954, modernist Akbar Padamsee fought a court case, in which he was acquitted. Padamsee, then 26, was charged under section 292 of the Indian Penal Code for two artworks – *Lovers 1* and *Lovers 2* – which were exhibited in his debut show at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai. The paintings showed a man's hand on a woman's breast. The instinctive expression of love on canvas was labelled as obscene and seized by the police. More recently, the Bombay High Court restrained the Customs department last October from destroying, yet again, paintings by Padamsee (and a few by F.N. Souza), stating, "Not every nude painting is obscene."

The words didn't carry across state borders, though. In January this year, a Delhi court ordered the seizure of two of M.F. Husain's paintings exhibited at DAG (formerly the Delhi Art Gallery), after allegations that they obscenely portrayed Hindu deities and hurt religious sentiments. Though the court later dismissed the plea seeking the registration of a first information report against the gallery, for lack of evidence, it kicked off discussions on censorship and where the line must be drawn. And as expected, the opinions have been varied and divided.

Restrictions vs. no boundaries

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, and it enables creative practices to serve as social commentary. But as Debottam Bose, a practising art lawyer, explains, "No society permits completely unrestricted speech because unchecked expression can lead to chaos, harm, and the erosion of other fundamental rights. Hate speech, incitement to violence, defamation, and false propaganda can inflict real damage. Therefore, most legal systems impose certain restrictions on expression, ensuring that its exercise does not infringe on the rights and safety of others."

But not everyone agrees. Peter Nagy, co-founder and director of Nature Morte gallery, takes a contrarian view. "There should not be any boundaries to expression," he says. "Censorship should never happen, and if an artist or institution exhibiting a work of art has as its mission to insult or aggravate people, then so be it. Let the chips fall as they may." He feels since everything that is viewed by the masses is controlled by someone, it is the duty of artists to expose and re-examine the errors and blind spots of history.

The debate isn't restricted to these binaries, either. Some believe that if the purpose of art is to communicate, then the exercise becomes futile if the audience is alienated. "Art must question our pre-disposition and proclivities of histories, but must maintain a constructive alignment and not disrupt it so the whole exercise is lost," says Anubhav Nath, founder of Ojas Art, which provides a platform for indigenous visual art. "There is the risk of art getting reduced to shock and sensationalism, which becomes counter-intuitive to its purposes." An idea Bose concurs with. Freedom of expression is most effective when accompanied by responsibility, ensuring that voices are heard, but not at the cost of justice, dignity, or peace.

Rejection and acceptance are integral

The challenge, however, lies in determining who decides what is harmful and what is merely controversial. This is not the first time Husain's paintings are being pulled up. In 1996, his painting of a nude goddess Saraswati became the target of protests. In 2008, the Supreme Court shot down a petition seeking an initiation of proceedings against the artist for hurting the sentiments of Indians, and ruled that his work, *Bharat Mata* – which depicted a nude female figuration of India's map – was not obscene, pointing out that the Khajuraho temples and other sites also have nudity.

"The recent court order to seize his paintings raises the concern that legal instruments meant to protect public order are often wielded to enforce cultural and political conformity rather than to prevent actual harm," says Bose. While we have the right to be offended by something, we cannot take public actions that violate the spirit of expression. "If you are offended by a book, film, or work of art, don't read, view or go to see it," shares Ashish Anand, CEO and MD of DAG, which is at the centre of the current controversy. "We must not forget that even scientific discoveries have offended many in the past. The best we can do is to keep an open mind even when we do not like or agree with something."

Viewed more broadly, everyone is at liberty to act as they want – to express and to protest said expressions. "This is the nature of culture in the public arena and is part of a free and democratic society," says Nagy. "These disagreements are perfectly healthy." The arts do not work in the template of absolutes. Rejection and acceptance are integral aspects in allowing for constructive conversations and deliberations. It should not, however, inevitably translate into censorship.

For the sake of sensationalism

There have been opinions that Husain often resorted to making art purely to provoke, and thus remain in the news. When sensationalism is used for shock value without substantive engagement with the issue at hand, it risks becoming a hollow exercise in self-promotion. "There is no doubt that some artists deliberately create controversy to capture public attention. But sensationalism, when used effectively, can amplify important messages and force society to confront issues it might otherwise ignore," says Bose. "Artists like Banksy, Ai Weiwei, and Zehra Doğan have used provocative imagery to highlight oppression, war, and state censorship."

Does an artist have a duty to ensure their work contributes constructively to public discourse rather than merely inciting outrage? The answer is complex – while an artist is expected to freely express their deepest personal emotions, being part of a larger society, they also have a responsibility towards others. "The seizure of Husain's paintings demonstrates how legal and political mechanisms can be weaponised to suppress artistic freedom rather than foster discussion. If one individual's complaint can lead to the removal of artwork, it sets a precedent where any controversial expression is at risk of being silenced," concludes Bose.

The Delhi-based culture writer is a practising artist and curator.

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

Tales of marriage and murder

Beheadings abound in the stories of goddesses, as do the fears and concerns that communities could not openly discuss

(Clockwise from left) Bahuchara on her cockerel *vahana*; a Mariamman procession; and Durga slaying the buffalo-demon. (WIKICOMMONS)

Stories of the folk goddesses of India are often lost in myriad oral versions. Which ones do we consider authentic? A common thread is some form of sexual violation followed by brute violence. We can say these are tales of (almost) marriage and (almost) murder. Are these to be taken literally or metaphorically?

In Jammu, a woman called Vaishnavi was meditating, hoping to marry Vishnu, when she was attacked by Bhairava. He wanted her to participate in Tantrik sex rites. She rejected his offer, but he persisted. She ran; he pursued. Finally, she turned around, transformed into a goddess in her rage, and beheaded him. As he was dying, he begged for forgiveness and the goddess said that everyone who visited her shrine would visit him. His shrine only has his head.

In Gujarat, a princess called Bahuchara wondered why her husband never came to her bed after their wedding. Instead, he rode out at night. She followed him one day, and found him with the help of a rooster. She discovered him masquerading as a woman. Realising he was queer, she turned into a goddess in her rage, accused him of tricking her, and castrated him. He begged her forgiveness, and she said that men like him will have to serve her as transgender priests if they want liberation from the wheel of rebirth.

Blackface and worship

In Kerala, Ali Mappila, a Muslim merchant and sorcerer, attacked women. So, the goddess Chamundi enchanted him, got him to remove his magical protective talisman and then beheaded him. As in other tales, Ali begged for forgiveness and was told he could attain liberation if he helped the devotees of Chamundi. A shrine was built next to hers, and in certain Theyyam ritual ceremonies – which combines theatre, mime and worship – a shaman lets Ali's spirit enter him. The performer has a blackface (to indicate African roots, perhaps), wears a fez cap (to indicate Turkish roots, perhaps), is called Ali Chamundi, and is venerated by local Muslims and Hindus.

In the Deccan regions of Vidarbha, Telangana and Karnataka, a woman discovered that her husband duped her. He was not a Brahmin, but someone who loved to eat beef and pork. Furious, she beheaded him. Every year, the husband is represented by a male buffalo calf and offered to her. The man performing the ritual is referred to as her son or brother, and identified as Potaraju (buffalo king). He is often painted black, appears demonic, whips himself, walks on fire, apologises to the goddess, and worships her.

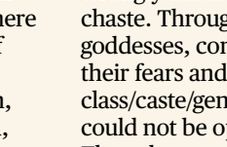
The most Sanskritised version of this tale is the buffalo-demon Mahisha drawn to Durga, the goddess who rides a lion. She challenged him to a duel and impaled him with a trident. Images of the buffalo-killing goddess have been found in India since Kushan times, 2,000 years ago. Her images were later carved on temples and the buffalo was equated with the forces of evil and disorder. But in folk shrines, there is a memory of Mahisha, the buffalo-demon, being Mhasoba, the buffalo-god – husband, son, lover or violator.

Hidden subaltern feminist history

Sometimes, it is the woman who suffers and dies. In Sanskrit Puranic literature, Sati, the Brahmin wife of Shiva, exasperated by the disagreement between her father and her husband, killed herself in a Vedic fire pit. Her corpse broke into pieces, which fell in different parts of India now known as *Shakti-pithas*, or seats of the goddess of power.

In the *Mahabharata*, there is the tale of the seven sages in the sky who make up the Great Bear constellation in the northern sky, having seven wives. One day, six of these women were accused of being unfaithful. Furious, the women left their husbands and became the Pleiades constellations, the Krittika *nakshatra*. These women, sometimes six, sometimes seven, are worshipped across India as the seven wild women who cause miscarriages and fatal fevers in children unless they are acknowledged and worshipped with gifts of bridal finery.

Thus, the man who offends the goddess can be a Bhairava, a queer person, a Muslim, a low-caste man, a demon or a sage, even a Brahmin father or husband. In each case, either her consent is not taken or she is duped, she is ignored or is wrongly accused of not being chaste. Through the tales of the goddesses, communities express their fears and concerns of class/caste/gender/sexuality that could not be openly discussed. They also reveal a hidden subaltern feminist history that most elite historians deny.



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