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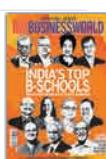
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EDITOR'S LETTER



A VOTE FOR INDIA'S STREET FOOD

A pang of jealousy hits me hard each time I see young reporters on TV enthusiastically travelling to nameless and faceless towns and villages of India, backpacks slung, trying to ascertain the mood of voters in the back of the beyond places in this vast country. I get nostalgic because since 1984 till recently, I too was among them, touring the length and breadth of India every election season. I believe I popularised phrases like "arithmetic" and "chemistry" of the election game, and even the "greatest people's festival" to describe the polls — a term that the Election Commission has borrowed in translation describing elections as "*maha tyohar*".

Election coverage has taken me to big cities and tiniest of villages, made me shack up in nondescript places like Saharsa in Bihar and Cudappah in Andhra Pradesh, putting up in obscure hotels but relishing delicious local food.

I particularly remember the tantalising *kulfi-faluda* from a tiny street corner shop in Faizabad, a stone's throw from the twin hotels of Tirupati and Shaan-e-Avadh (where, incidentally I consumed the finest *Murg Musallam*) in memory. When I first reached Nellore in Andhra in 1989, I was puzzled by the restaurant menu which listed Chicken 65 and Chicken 90 respectively. Curiously, I summoned the waiter to figure out what the numbers meant. In barely understandable Hindi, he explained that the figures implied the age of the slaughtered bird; that 65 was the most favoured dish as it was tender while 90 was bigger in size but also its meat was relatively tougher.

In my opinion, food has become roughly uniform all over India's roadside restaurants/*dhabas*, but street snacks retain their distinct identity, varying from city to city. Indore literally takes the cake with one particular *gali* boasting 56 cheek-by-jowl snack and sweet shops from *bhels* to *gol gappa*, *raj kachauri*, *dahi bhalla* and sweets aplenty. Chowk and Aminabad in Lucknow are at the other end of a gastronomic fiesta, with myriad kebabs and biryani, especially by the iconic Tunday Kababi group, donning the pride of place. Old-timers insist that the absence of *bade ka* (beef) of late has robbed much of Lucknow's culinary diversity, but the flavour of the food, I find, remains pretty much the same.

In Assam's roadside eateries, fish Tenga, a salty-sour fish curry is inevitably delicious. Similarly I found a fish curry served with plain rice at a restaurant dwarfed by the walls of the Idduki Dam to be finger-licking good. For connoisseurs, Punjab is numero uno. As I travelled across the State during the dreadful terrorism years, I feasted on its many delicacies, including some really surprising fish items from the Nangal barrage in the Amritsar region. Sometimes, defying warnings from locals, I ventured out in cars or motorbikes in the dead of the night to the outskirts of Amritsar, Jalandhar or Ludhiana for some out-of-the-world *tandoor* preparations or local delicacies like *gurda-kapoora*.

Some towns come alive especially during elections. But places like Hyderabad are bustling with the aroma of food at all times. Recently I visited some stalls in the walled city selling a variety of *haleem*, usually served at wedding feasts or during Id festivities. I wish other cities, too, had specialities like this, such as *nahari*, a Delhi delicacy during Ramzan.

Not being a morning person, I am not too familiar with breakfast delicacies but hope to catch up with them like most election reporters can be seen doing these days on TV programmes.

CHANDAN MITRA, *Editor-in-Chief*
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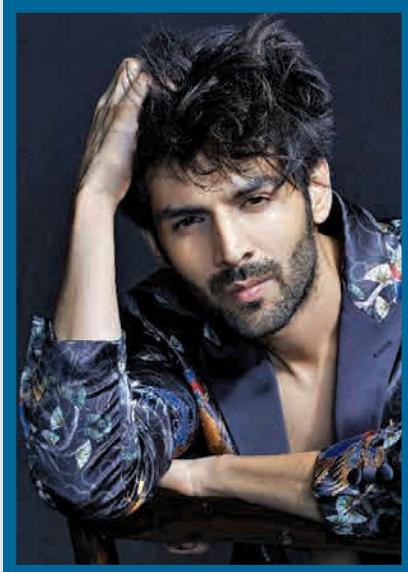
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Kartik Aaryan

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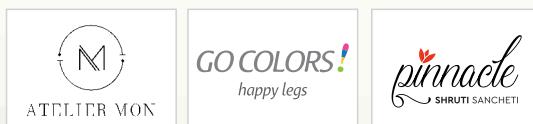
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The boy next door

ACTOR KARTIK AARYAN IS OFTEN MISTAKENLY BELIEVED TO BE A DELHIITE BUT HIS HEART STILL BEATS FOR HIS HOMETOWN GWALIOR AND THE VALUES HE LEARNT THERE, SAYS **SAIMI SATTAR**

Have you eaten?" Even before I can ask a question, actor Kartik Aaryan fires the first salvo and makes you wonder if you are on a social visit at his home rather than for an interview at a hotel. But then it is this next-door comfort that has made him the nation's hearthrob, one who equalises reality and aspiration on his sneakers. Dressed in a dark blue suit blazer with a barely there print, white shirt that is unbuttoned and blue trousers, the actor sips his tea perched on the 20th floor and glances around at the people who are assembled in the room.

The actor, who is known for his comic capers in films like *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* and its sequel as well as *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*, is often mistaken for a Delhi boy. "May be it is because of the way I look or my *lahja* (tone). May be it has to do with the fact that I have done a lot of films that have seen me play a character from Delhi. But yes, this idea has caught on in popular imagination," says the 29-year-old actor who stayed in the city for two years



before making his way to Mumbai. Maybe that is where the mannerisms originate from.

Kartik is from Gwalior where his last film, *Luka Chuppi*, is set. Last heard, the film has raked in 90 crores in the first three weeks. "I could never imagine that I would be shooting in the place where I had dreamt of being an actor. My friends, families and relatives are all there. Everyone knows each other as it is a small town. The welcome was surreal. They started calling me Son of Gwalior. There were huge hoardings with my name and photographs which were a bit embarrassing, especially because they all were from my scrawny days. I wish they had asked me for some better ones," he guffaws. "It was surreal."

However the love for the city comes through in his voice. "I took my entire cast and crew around. I loved these *boondi laddoos* from Bahadura Sweets as a child. So I got those and *rasmalai* for everyone everyday. Everybody had to chuck their diet plans. The *aloo* patties are famous as is the *poha*," he says as he seems to be savouring all the delicacies once again.

But it is also in his values that he continues to remain a small town boy who is not affected by failures and success. "I keep on working on myself because that is what I did after getting scolded by my parents," he says.

Coming back to the present, the actor says that his entire trajectory has been about doing relatable cinema. "*Luka Chuppi* is about the problems that a small town couple faces when wanting to live-in. But it has a quirk. It is live-in *sah parivar* (with family). It is a social satire and many can identify themselves with the characters. After watching *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*, a lot of people felt that they wanted a Sonu in their life as they felt that they were Titus," he says.

The actor believes that Guddu Shukla, the protagonist in *Luka Chuppi*, is the most earnest and honest character that he has ever played. "He is the guy you would want to take home to mum," he says.

And when one asks him if his claim of being marriage material in a recent interview is true, he immediately answers, "Yes," without batting an eyelid. And then laughs and adds, "May be I became the character of Guddu. I am *shaadi* material as I am a person who believes in being together with the family. I have shifted to a bigger place recently so that I can get mine to Mumbai after staying alone for seven-eight years." However, he believes that he is not as righteous as Guddu. "And that is me being honest," he says guffawing again. The other characteristics that he believes he shares with his role are that he is upfront and committed. If he is convinced about any choice that he makes, he goes for it with great passion.

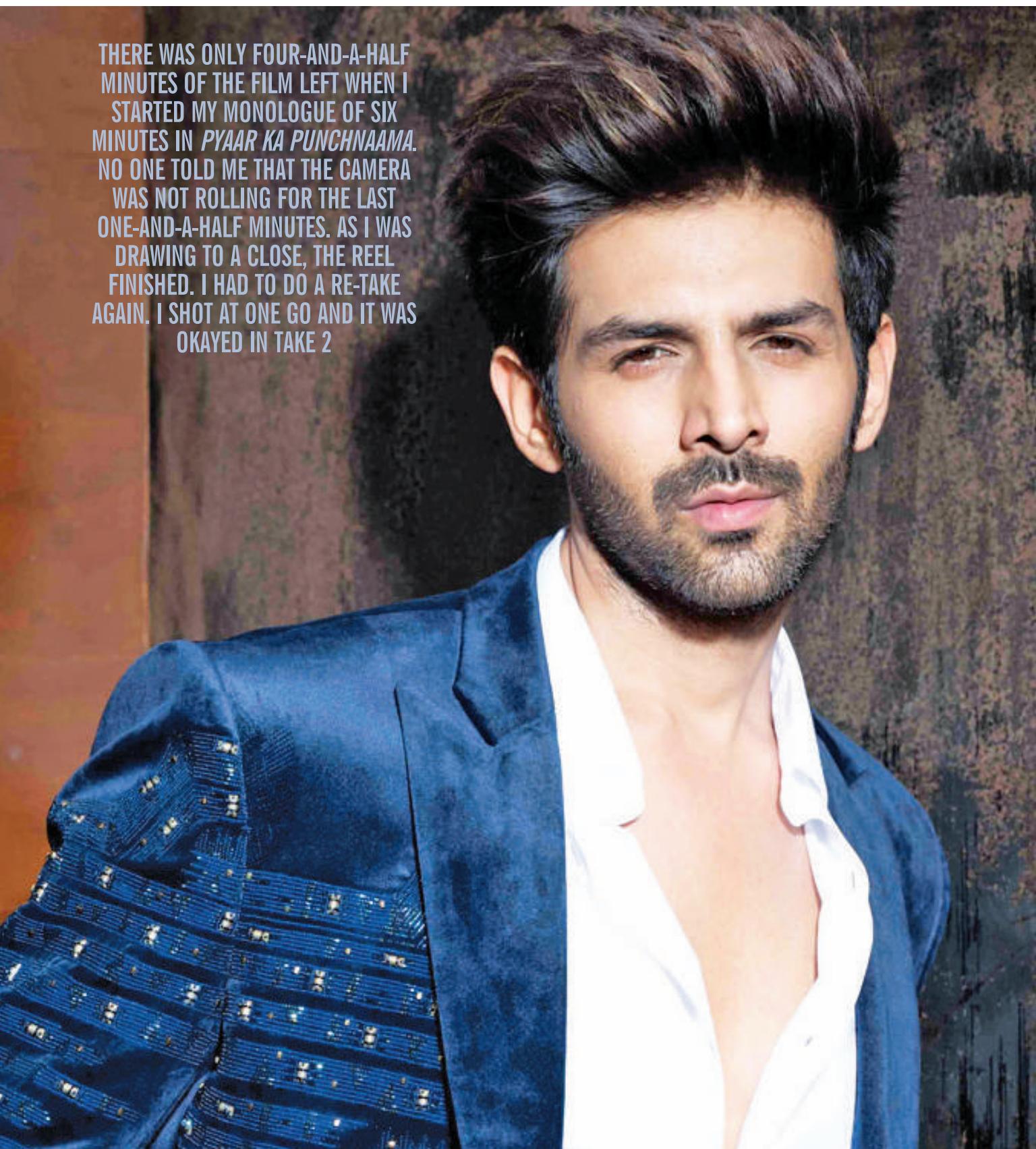
Besides the relatability factor, what excited Kartik was that for the first time he was speaking in a dialect in the film. "My character is from Mathura, so he talks like the people from the city. But his manner of speaking is situational because he is educated. So it changes depending on the people that he is interacting with. I think my rawness will be visible here. While Sonu and the other characters were flamboyant, street smart and with grey shades, here I play an average guy who fits in the setting and is not stylish. His appearance, too, is such that he fits into the scenery. From the first scene you will see Guddu and not Kartik Aaryan."

So is that his way of making a mark when all the young actors are competing for the same set of roles? "Whatever I am doing, I believe it is working. I have that belief in my sense that it is going in the right direction and I don't want to change it. I am relying on my gut feel," he says. About his

'I COULD NEVER IMAGINE THAT I WOULD BE SHOOTING IN GWALIOR, THE PLACE WHERE I HAD DREAMT OF BEING AN ACTOR. MY FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND RELATIVES ARE ALL THERE. EVERYONE KNOWS EACH OTHER AS IT IS A SMALL TOWN. THE WELCOME WAS SURREAL. THEY STARTED CALLING ME SON OF GWALIOR. THERE WERE HUGE HOARDINGS WITH MY NAME AND PHOTOGRAPHS WHICH WERE A BIT EMBARRASSING, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THEY ALL WERE FROM MY SCRAWNY DAYS. I WISH THEY HAD ASKED ME FOR SOME BETTER ONES'



THERE WAS ONLY FOUR-AND-A-HALF MINUTES OF THE FILM LEFT WHEN I STARTED MY MONOLOGUE OF SIX MINUTES IN *PYAAR KA PUNCHNAAMA*. NO ONE TOLD ME THAT THE CAMERA WAS NOT ROLLING FOR THE LAST ONE-AND-A-HALF MINUTES. AS I WAS DRAWING TO A CLOSE, THE REEL FINISHED. I HAD TO DO A RE-TAKE AGAIN. I SHOT AT ONE GO AND IT WAS OKAYED IN TAKE 2



compatriots, he adds, "I think that this is a very good time for the young brigade as there are so many content creators and avenues of expression. Content is king and that is the reason why there is ample amount of chance for all of us to put ourselves out there in projects which are different and also work on screen."

Few know that he locked on to this character soon after he finished *Sonu ke Titu ki Sweety*. "It is not just the protagonists. The side track in the film is an interesting commentary on our intrusive culture. Everybody has a habit of poking their noses in other people's lives instead of minding their own business. So the elder brother wants to know what the younger one is up to and the third *bhaabi* might be jealous that the first one has an important position in the family. In this too, everyone has an agenda. Each character has a separate track. That is the funniest thing. There was a lot of situational comedy. When I heard the script I decided that this has to be my next film. I was actually the first person on board."

It is apparent that Kartik follows everything with a deep conviction and passion. "I was in class VIII when I decided that I wanted to be an actor," he says. It was in pursuit of this goal that he applied to all the engineering colleges only in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. "In Gwalior, appearing for PMT and IIT entrance exams was the done thing. I could not have told my parents that I wanted to pursue acting as they would not have been able to afford a course. So engineering in Mumbai became an excuse. I never attended classes as I was busy with auditions," says the actor who did manage to complete his engineering during *Pyaar ka Punchnama 2*.

Kartik burst on in the popular imagination with a six-minute monologue in his first film, *Pyaar Ka Punchnama*, and he has an interesting story behind it. "For three years, I searched online with key words like audition and actors required. I got an advertisement where I was paid ₹2,500 which was a channel promo where I was holding a placard," he recalls. It was during this time that he got an audition call for an unnamed film. "I caught the train from Belapur to Andheri which took 2.5 hours and did my bit," he says. The back and forth went on for six months and as a part of the last audition, he had to



PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

I AM SHAADI MATERIAL AS I AM A PERSON WHO BELIEVES IN BEING TOGETHER WITH THE FAMILY. I HAVE SHIFTED TO A BIGGER PLACE RECENTLY SO THAT I CAN GET MINE TO MUMBAI AFTER STAYING ALONE FOR SEVEN-EIGHT YEARS

say this monologue which was five-and-a-half pages long! "It was the first time something like this was being attempted. But this was crucial to clinching the role. To add to my woes, I had to perform it the next day," he recalls. So Kartik did what he knew best. Took it up passionately. "I didn't sleep. I kept learning it throughout my train journey and in my PG. Then, I enacted it, recorded it, saw the mistakes and attempted it again. The next day I kept on doing it in the train. But it was worth the effort as people actually clapped when I finished," he says, the pride still surfacing in his voice.

During the actual shooting, they worked on a reel camera which has a limit unlike the newer digital ones which are used now. "There was only four-and-a-half minutes of the film left when I started my monologue of six minutes. No one told me that the camera was not rolling for the last one-and-a-half minutes. As I was drawing to a close, the reel finished. I had to do a re-take again. I shot at one go and it was okayed in Take 2," he says. But he feels it was well worth the effort as the monologue is the most popular scene from the film. "It has been circulated all over the world and has been a hit," he says.

Having nailed it, Kartik went on to top this further. In *Pyaar Ka Punchnama 2*, the monologue was seven minutes long. "They kept working on the final draft, so it came to me when I was in the midst of shooting. But somehow I managed to pull through," he says.

One reason that his films have drawn flak is the misogynist gaze on the female characters. "See, we are not generalising boys. It is these characters in the films that are roguish and loveable rakes."

Another reason why Kartik has been in the news is on account of Sara Ali Khan taking a shine to him and wanting to date him or his alleged link-up with Ananya Pandey. Something that has kept his name in circulation among Bollywood's swish set. But the young star likes to keep it grounded. "I don't pay attention. I only feel good and flattered but that is bound to happen when someone says something good about you. Link-ups are a part and parcel of the industry and I know how to deal with them," he nods sagely. The small town boy is growing up.

A drive through Andalusia

FOR 700 YEARS, ARABS RULED OVER LARGE SWATHES OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA, CHANGING EUROPEAN HISTORY. TRAVELLING THROUGH ANDALUSIA, WHERE THE ARAB KINGDOMS OF SPAIN HAD THEIR STRONGHOLDS, YOU CAN STILL SEE THE ISLAMIC INFLUENCE, EVEN SIX CENTURIES AFTER THE RECONQUISTA.

KUSHAN MITRA DOCUMENTS A LAVISH ROAD TRIP



Spain has the longest network of motorways in Europe at over 15,000 km and many of them, called the Autovia, have been built or improved upon in the past two decades thanks to money from the European Union. While I have driven in Spain in the past, they have mainly been short loops around Barcelona and I have always wanted to drive through the Iberian peninsula. Coupled with my desire to knock off another major historical monument from my bucket list, which was the grand fortress of Alhambra in Granada and the Nasrid Palaces inside, I zeroed in on a drive from Madrid to the province of Andalusia, and after being offered a car from Ford, the trip was a go. I was travelling with my mother and we would cover over 1,300 km in less than a week.

We started in the Spanish capital of



(Above): Churros at Chocoletaria San Giovanni. (Below): Spanish Tortillas

Madrid, which is one of those hidden gems when it comes to travel. Barcelona is quite rightly one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, in fact, the second-most visited city in Europe after Paris. In the northern Basque country, you have the rather picturesque Bilbao and the stunning Guggenheim Museum. But Madrid, the capital of the country, gets much more press for its football than for the city. The food and wine is spectacular here. This was the city that churros were invented in and the Chocolateria San Gines near a central square is a must-visit. It even has one of the nicest urban parks in Europe, the Parque Retiro. There are some lovely food stalls in the Anton Martin meat and fish market and some particularly lovely restaurants in that area, but as all tourists should, a visit to Mercado di San Miguel next to the Plaza Mayor is essential. It might



The summer palace in Granada



(Clockwise from top): Parque el Retiro; the Balcon de Europa' in Nerja on the Costa del Sol and a view of the city of Granada from Alhambra

feel like a bit of a tourist trap and finding a place to stand can be a challenge but some of the tapas and sangria on offer is excellent.

But it is the city's museums, particularly those dedicated to art, that you must visit. The Prado, which is celebrating its bicentennial this year, has an amazing collection of medieval and classical art, particularly its collection of Francisco Goya, including the royal portraits, the famous *Maja* but crucially the stunning as well as disturbing *Black Paintings*. The vast Prado Museum, whose size could rival the Louvre in Paris, is outdone by the modern art Museum of the city, the Reina Sofia, which has a spectacular collection of works by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Juan Gris and Joan Miro, all Spanish artists and father figures of modern art. It is in this museum that you finally comprehend just how central Spain and her artists became to the nation's ethos. While one might hesitate to call the Reina Sofia "better" than the Orsay in Paris or the Tate in London, it has a grand collection, including Picasso's amazing *Guernica*, in a massive wing dedicated to art from Spain's brutal Civil War that preceded the Second World War.

We left Madrid after a quick visit to the Ford Spain office to pick up the Ford Kuga that I would be driving over the next few days. The roads in and around the Spanish capital are fairly crowded but using Ford's SYNC infotainment system, which is also available on

their Indian products, I hooked up my iPhone to the car and started Google Maps through Apple CarPlay. This told me that the 450-odd km to Granada would take me just over four hours. This put me in a bit of a quandary, since it was just 10.30 in the morning and we had informed our apartment host in Granada that we would reach at four in the afternoon. For kilometres on end, through the plains of La Mancha, made famous in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the road was poker straight with the compass on the map pointed south, albeit of excellent quality. Some grand viaducts and tunnels made it obvious that it had recently been upgraded. Once we crossed into Andalusia, obvious by the sudden appearance of Arabic script in the road signs, we switched over to the highway to Granada, called the Autovía Sierra Nevada-Costa Tropical, the road that cut through the Sierra Nevada mountains till the Costa del Sol on Spain's Mediterranean coast. And if you are confused about the Sierra Nevada mountains being near San Francisco, California, well those Sierra Nevada mountains got their name from these ones.

Granada, whose historic heart is a UNESCO protected zone, was the last Muslim kingdom in Spain to fall after the crowns of Castile and Aragon were merged under Ferdinand II and Isabella. The story of Boabdil, the last Arab (Moor) king of Granada, forms a major plot point in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and the gain (or loss) of the Al-Andalus province is



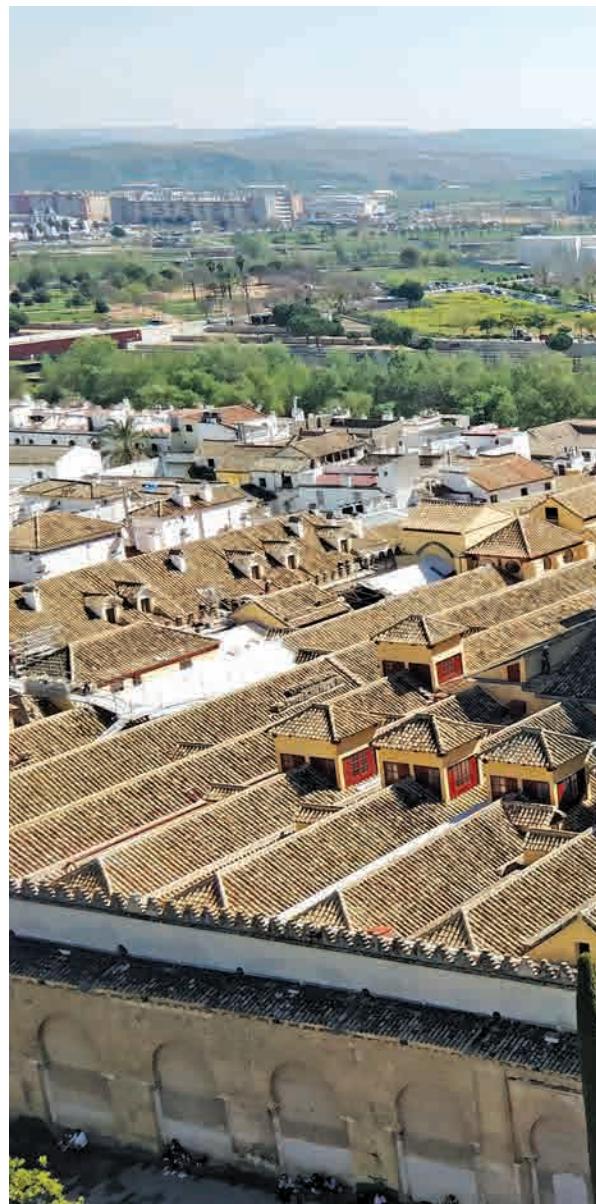


The Mesquita-Catedral of Cordoba

critical in understanding European attitudes towards Islam to this day. The story of Islamic Spain is a long one and not a subject for a travel column but an understanding of history helps. The initial conquest of Spain by the North African Berbers took place in 711, around the same time the first Turkish invaders came to the subcontinent. And while Islamic architecture reached huge highs in India in Mughal times, the incredible architectural achievements of the Moorish rulers such as the Alhambra and the Mezquita (Mosque) Cordoba and Seville are sights to behold.

What was also remarkable was that, unlike India, the Islamic rulers were on the whole rather secular in Spain, and both Granada and Cordoba had large Jewish populations. Many believe that modern-day anti-semitism was born in the aftermath of the *reconquista* (reconquest) of Spain, with Jews being forced out. Most Muslims, too, were either pushed out of Spain or forced to convert to Catholicism, but looking at the modern Spanish, it is clear that many have a mix of genes. Arab culture obviously deeply influenced modern Spain. Many of Spain's famous and brutal conquistadors of South and Latin America used the same tactics as their Arab forebears and Arab horses.

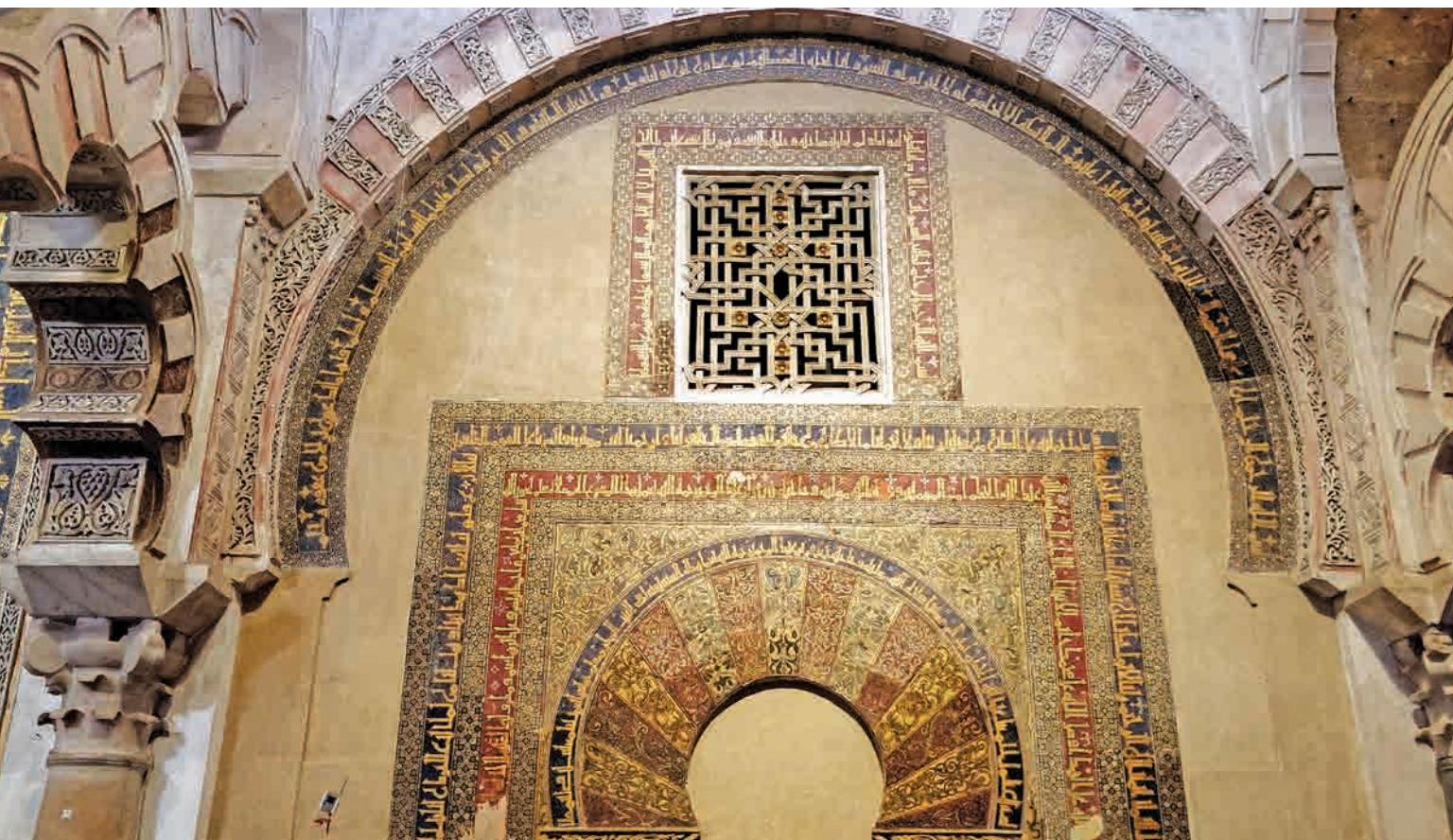
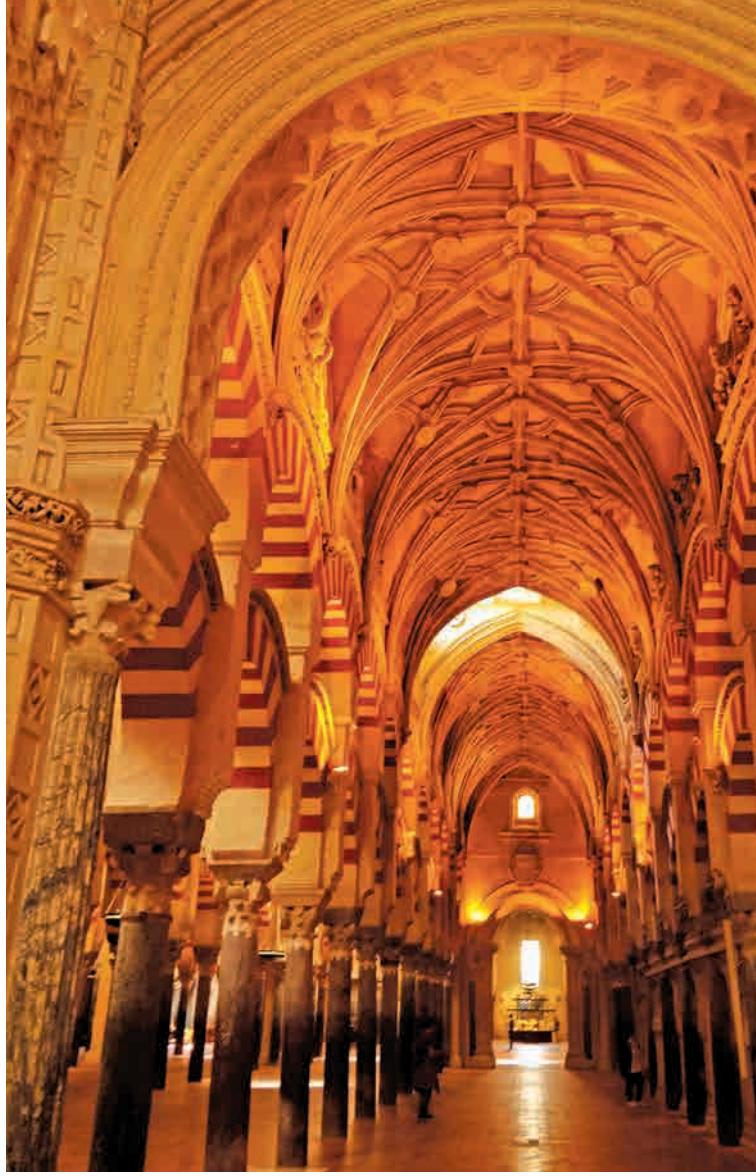
The Alhambra and the Generalife (*Jannat-e-Arif*, the architects' garden) are on a hilltop overlooking the city of Granada. The historic heart of the city does not allow outside vehicles in. Thankfully our host, Juan, had parking in his modern apartment in the "new" city; we were, however, staying in his apartment in the heart of the old city right behind the Plaza Nueva. "This building is older than the United States", Juan joked, but the steep staircase and the low wooden tiled ceiling was worth it because the view of the fort from the balcony overlooking the old Arab and Jewish quarters of the city was stunning.

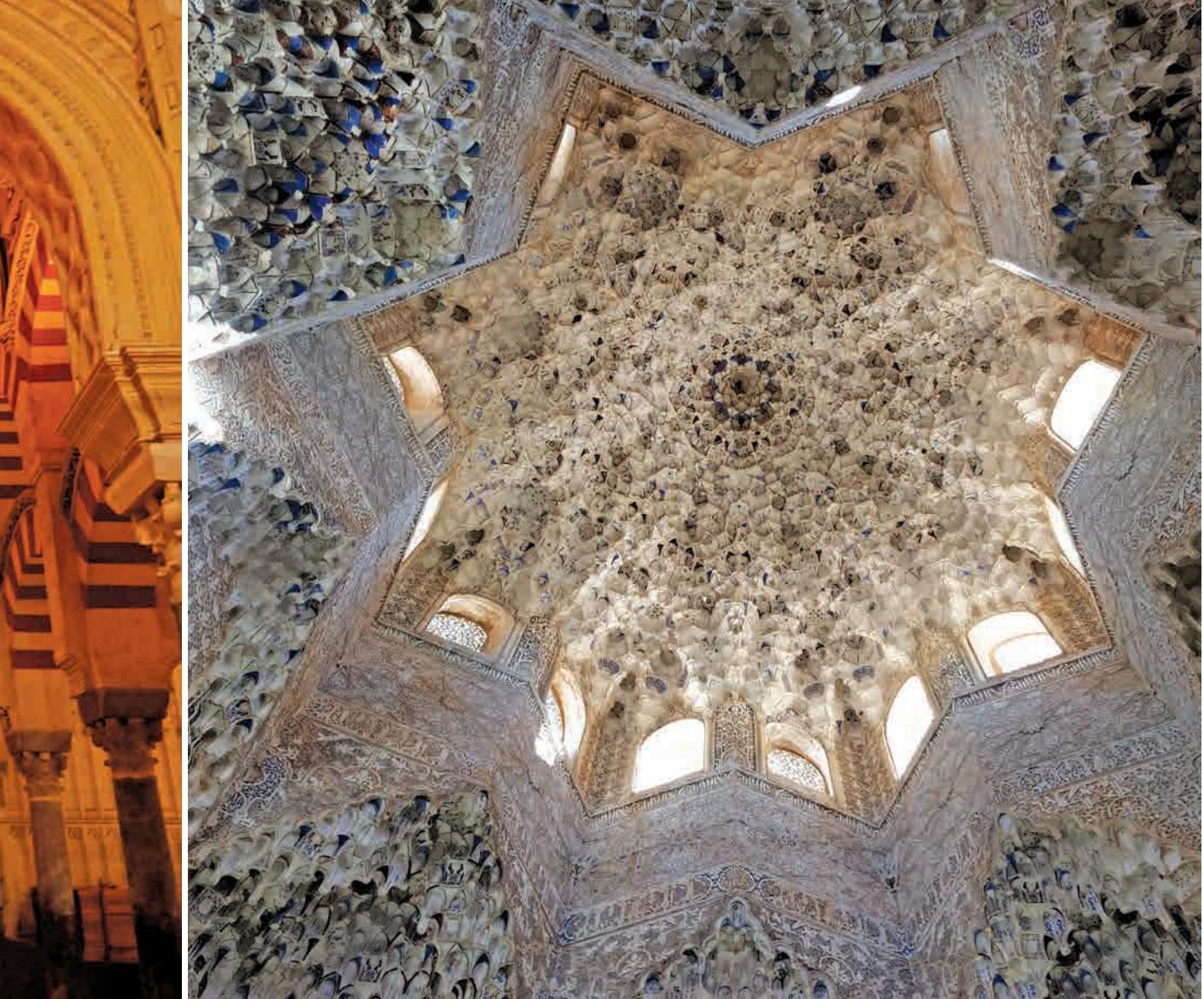




The one thing you should know about the Alhambra and Generalife is that the Spanish conservationists only allow a certain number of visitors every day. A regular entrance ticket costs only 14 Euros but these often get booked very fast and you will then be forced to join a tour group with a guide where tickets cost upwards of 50 Euros. Thanks to being a bit slow off the block, we were forced to take the latter option. At the same time, the number of visitors to the Nasrid Palaces is also restricted, and you can only enter the palaces at the time written on your ticket. You must be careful with your tickets because you will need to scan them multiple times. But the gardens, now filled with bitter Seville orange trees, are beautiful and back when they were built, the water engineering and the plumbing to bring the water from the mountains was a massive achievement. It is the oldest surviving Moorish gardens and while modern gardeners try and make improvements, some of the old skills have clearly been lost.

Of course, the Nasrid palaces are stunning, with their geometric designs and impressive stucco, stone and tile work. They are being slowly restored but can get very crowded and with a lot of people crammed in a small space, it was quite warm even in the nice early-March weather we were in. Ideally, one would want to admire the palaces a bit slower but the rush of people can be a bit much. One has to remember that the Alhambra-Generalife is the second-most visited site





(Clockwise from above left): Inside arches of the Mesquita-Catedral of Cordoba; Nasrid Palace, Alhambra and the interiors of the Mesquita-Catedral of Cordoba are decorated with calligraphy

in Spain after the La Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona, and while it is a place that one should indeed visit, you can, as an Indian, get caught up in comparing Indo-Islamic architecture with the Alhambra. Its scale and the fact that much of this was built long before the peak of Mughal architecture in India should pique your interest, as well as understanding the history of Islam in the Iberian peninsula. There is a lovely Alhambra museum as well, that is attached to the unfinished palace of Charles V, unfinished because of the expulsion of Muslim artisans following the *reconquista*. That said, it is remarkable that the Spanish Christian rulers did not demolish the Alhambra and even kept its Islamic nature, with some changes. And although at places you can see the shield of the Spanish crown along with other modifications, much of the ruins are in good condition and surprisingly, you learn that Napoleon destroyed a lot of the city on his Spanish campaigns many centuries later.

From Granada, our plan was to drive down to Cordoba, the erstwhile capital of the province and then the Caliphate of al-Andalus, but we decided to take a slight detour. After all, most hotels in Europe are fairly strict about early check-ins. So instead of heading due West to Cordoba, we continued down south on the Autovía Costa Tropical, eventually joined the Autovía Mediterraneo, the stunning highway that literally hugs the Spanish Costa del Sol (the Sun coast) and decided to pull into the lovely small town of Nerja. Here you see the so-called Balcon d'Europa (The Balcony of Europe) and the view from the town is spectacular with the cliffs of the Spanish coast melting into the azure waters of the Mediterranean. On another trip, this little town would be a great place to stop for a couple of days.

Now we found ourselves needing to move from Nerja, via Malaga towards Cordoba. Malaga, one of the biggest cities on the Costa del Sol, looks immense from outside. This stretch of coastline is immensely

popular with sun-worshippers from northern European countries and it was in the sale of houses and apartments here that the Spanish economic boom started and eventually crashed.

We moved back onto the Autovía del Sur, but heading north this time. Soon after passing the mountains, we hit the rolling landscape around the province of Cordoba, again filled with olive groves as far as the eyes could see. That olive oil you use for dressing your salad most likely came from olives grown around here.

Our hotel in Cordoba was on the edge of the Jewish Quarter and a short walk to the famous Mezquita Catedral of Cordoba. This was built by the Caliphs of Cordoba as a grand mosque to rival those in Damascus and Jerusalem. Walking down to the Mezquita, you can see ruins dating back to Roman times. Hispania is where the great Roman Seneca came from and there is a statue of him beside the old walls as is a more recent one of the great Sephardic Jewish philosopher and theologian Maimonides in the Jewish Quarter. Much of the historic town of Cordoba is again off-limits for cars but there are several hotels and apartments in the area and you can find several parking spots with municipal parking.

Unfortunately we had arrived on a Monday and several of the museums and sites like the Alcazar (Palace) were shut but it was still a lovely walk to the river's edge where the old Roman bridge still stands, albeit much modified over the years. Most of the several taverns and cafes are open and you can try several local tapas such as Salmojero, which is a type of gazpacho or cold tomato soup but made with bread and topped with a boiled egg and Spanish ham. But the absolute



(Clockwise from left): Bell tower of the Mesquita-Catedral; the old Roman bridge in Cordoba still stands, albeit much modified over the years and Spain has the longest network of motorways in Europe at over 15,000 km called the Autovía

must-have is the *berenjas con miel*, which is essentially aubergine fritters drizzled with local honey. Alongside local wine, you really do not need to eat too many tapas shared between a couple of people to get full.

We visited the Mezquita the following morning. The tickets are affordable and despite the fact that it remains a functioning Catholic church, the money raised goes towards the continuing restoration of the immense hall with its distinctive double archways. There are several reasons the Mezquita is unique, even though it was consecrated as a cathedral after the *reconquista*. But the biggest singular achievement is the immense scale of the monument and the fact that it is one of the few extant mosques that have actually survived from that time anywhere in the world. There is a level of





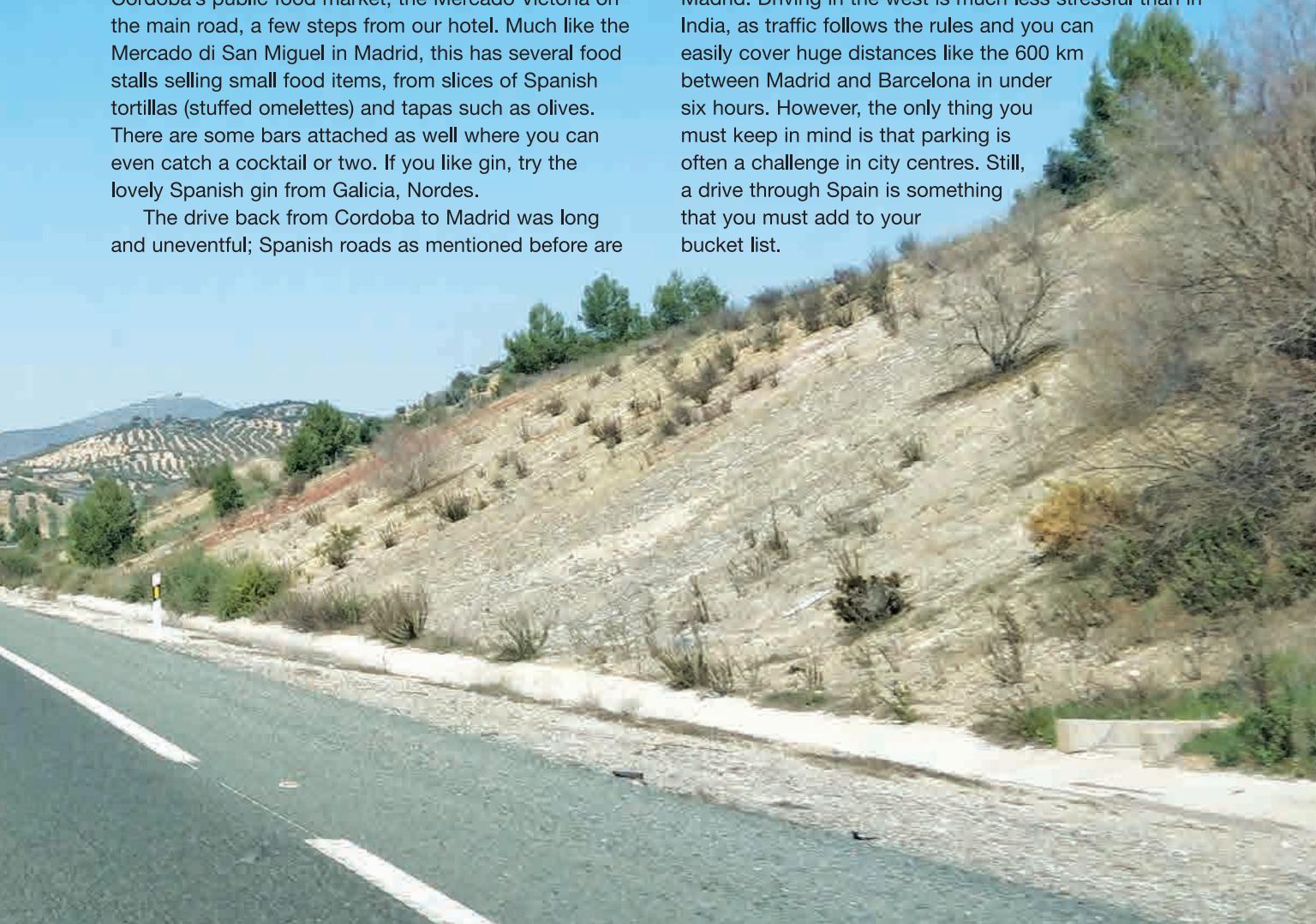
controversy to this day because modern Muslims wish to offer prayers in the Mezquita but those attempts have been actively thwarted by the Spanish authorities. Later on, I climbed up the Bell Tower of the cathedral which was once the minaret, with the modern bell tower built over it. This offers a stunning view of where the reconstruction happened as well as the lovely “Court of Oranges” outside.

For the final evening in Spain, we decided to visit Cordoba's public food market, the Mercado Victoria on the main road, a few steps from our hotel. Much like the Mercado di San Miguel in Madrid, this has several food stalls selling small food items, from slices of Spanish tortillas (stuffed omelettes) and tapas such as olives. There are some bars attached as well where you can even catch a cocktail or two. If you like gin, try the lovely Spanish gin from Galicia, Nordes.

The drive back from Cordoba to Madrid was long and uneventful; Spanish roads as mentioned before are

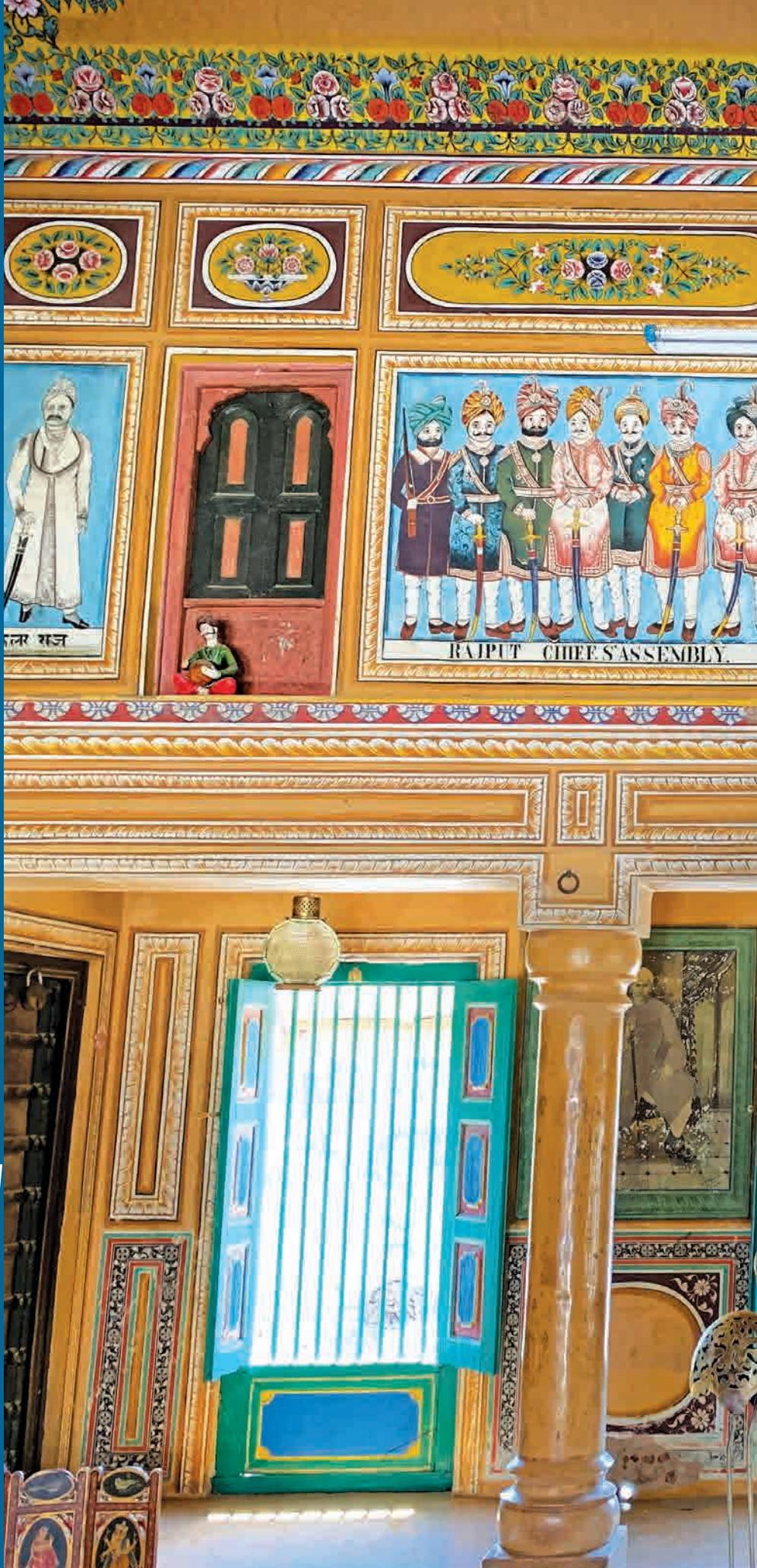
spectacular. But traffic does get a bit chaotic as you enter the city of Madrid. Traffic is orderly in Spain, much more so than Italy for example, so choose your lanes well in advance and using indicators is not an option.

On the whole, a driving holiday in Spain is definitely worth it. While the country has a lovely network of buses and trains, as well as affordable low-cost flights, having a car allows you freedom to visit places like Nerja or even the shopping destination of Las Rozas outside Madrid. Driving in the west is much less stressful than in India, as traffic follows the rules and you can easily cover huge distances like the 600 km between Madrid and Barcelona in under six hours. However, the only thing you must keep in mind is that parking is often a challenge in city centres. Still, a drive through Spain is something that you must add to your bucket list.



OLD TOWN, NEW BEATS

BAGAR, AN OLD SHEKHAWATI TOWN, IS MORE THAN JUST ITS FRESCO-RICH HAVELIS. LOCALS HAVE SMARTLY ADAPTED MODERNITY TO THEIR CIRCUMSTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING. SO THE RESTORATION ARTIST IS ADDING HIS OWN TWIST TO A MURAL. ONE SCENE, WHICH HAD KRISHNA HOLDING A FLUTE, HAS BEEN CHANGED TO KRISHNA SPEAKING ON THE TELEPHONE! **SHOBHIT MAHAJAN** MAPS AN INDIA IN CHANGE WHILE **NANDITA JAIN MAHAJAN** PICKS THE COLOURS FROM THE LOCAL MELA





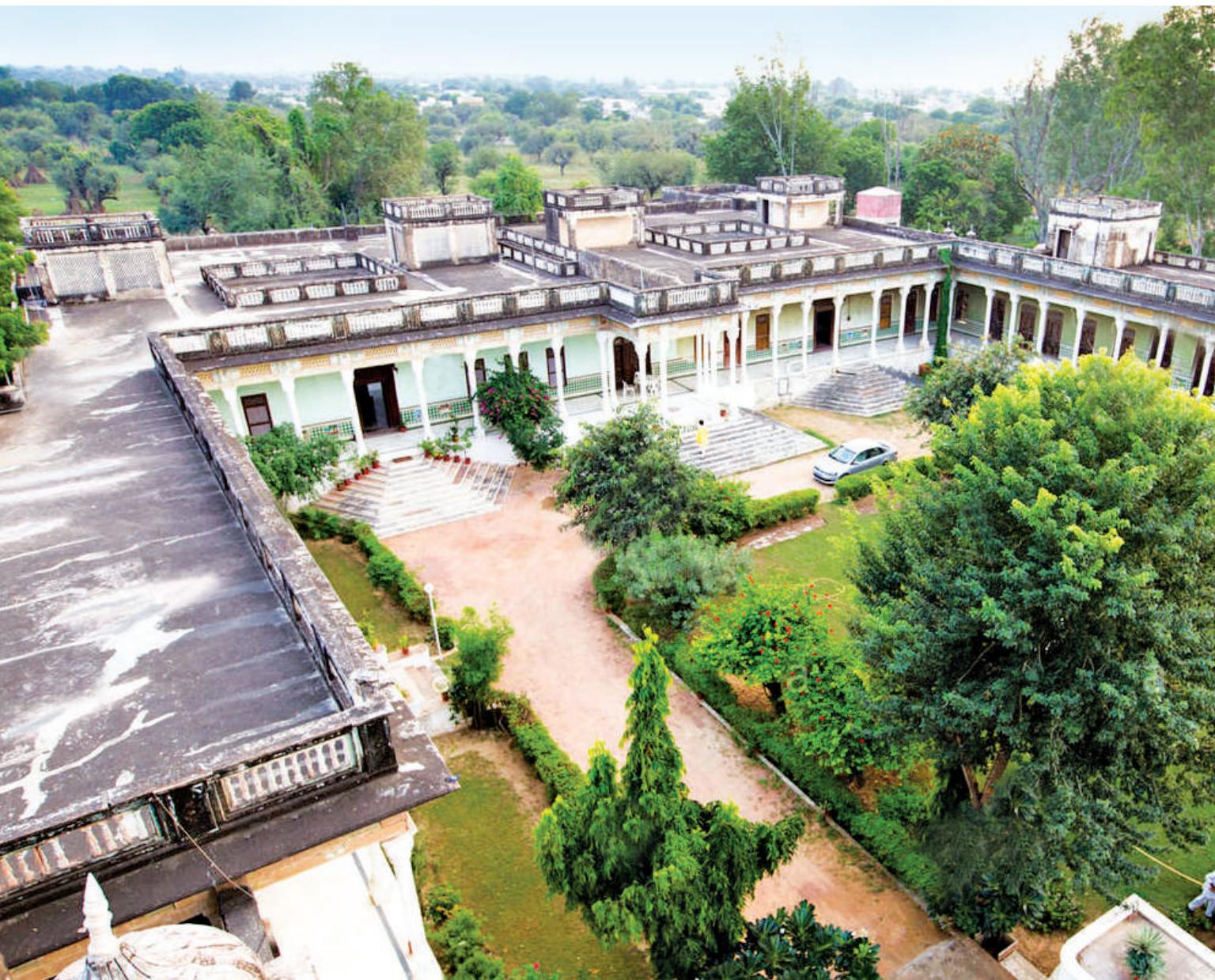
The loud music of electro *bhajans* can be heard from a distance. One lane of the undivided road is blocked by a procession of men, women and children carrying flags. Leading the procession is a tractor with huge speakers. The procession is accompanying a youngster who is rolling on the road. He is fulfilling a promise made to the venerable Khatu Shyam on being granted a wish. He will be rolling his way to the nearest Khatu Shyam temple, reaching later in the day, just in time for the *aarti* on the 11th day of the waxing moon in the month of Phalgun.

We are on our way to Bagar, a small habitation in the Shekhawati in Rajasthan, a region famous for its old *havelis*. The sleepy town, with a population of around 10,000, is based beside the main highway to Jhunjhunu, the district headquarters some 15 km away. Entry to

Bagar is through a three-storeyed gate, the Piramal Gate, and right next to it is our hotel, which is a restored Marwari *haveli*.

The Marwaris were traders par excellence who made their fortunes in places as far away as Assam and Madras (as Chennai was called then). Wherever they spotted a business opportunity — tea in Assam, jute in Bengal or even opium in China — they were quick to exploit it. The menfolk moved to wherever their business took them while leaving the families in their ancestral towns and villages. The money made in business made it possible to build not just *havelis* for their families but also give generous endowments to community projects like temples and schools.

Our *haveli/hotel* has the standard architecture of the region. A row of rooms looks out into the garden past a deep verandah. The entrance is a big room which served as a *baithak* for business dealings. This leads to





a courtyard with rooms on all sides. This was the space for the males of the extended family as well as male guests. On the side opposite the *baithak* is the entrance (usually behind a wall to ensure the purdah from the outside) to the inner courtyard which was the female space with kitchens and bedrooms. This is the usual layout for a single storeyed *haveli*. When there are two floors, then the *baithak* is outside the courtyard, the ground floor is the private (female) space and the top floor is for the male relatives. The entrance to the top floor is from the outside to ensure the privacy of the women quarters. The courtyard walls are covered with very elaborate frescoes.

In the evening, we take a walk along the “Main Street” of Bagar to the other end of the village where the two tourist attractions are located. An old, dirty pond with the pretentious sounding name of Fateh Sagar Lake. And a temple of who else but Khatu Shyam!

Khatu Shyam is a very popular deity in Rajasthan, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh. The main shrine is at a place called Khatu in Rajasthan, about 80 km from Jaipur, where lakhs of people descend, especially during the month of Phagun, for the annual festival. Most towns and even villages have their own temples to this deity, who is especially revered by the Marwari community. The temple at Bagar is one such temple where the annual mela is on.

The fair itself is the standard small town affair with various stalls selling household items and food and there is also the regulation Ferris wheel and roller coasters. The action, however, is in the open space near the temple. This being the day of the annual festival, preparations are on for the procession, which will move all over the village.

There is a row of jeeps and tractors lined up in front of the temple. Leading the procession is a multi-coloured Bolero, from Bharat DJ Sound. It is a self-contained vehicle, fitted with huge speakers and spotlights at the back and a diesel generator welded to the front. The sides of the vehicle are brightly painted with pictures of Bollywood starlets in alluring poses. There are dancing and performing troupes from several places who have been hired for the procession.

The star attraction though is the Mahadev Arts Group from Sirsa, a town in

Haryana. The group's leader, Ramu Rajasthani "Malang", is playing the part of Shiv. A rotund man, who is surprisingly agile and expressive, Ramu is accompanied by several youngsters. Shiv is appropriately coloured blue and has a live snake around his neck. The children are in awe of the brave demeanor of the God given that the snake is slithering around his torso. It is only on closer inspection that one notices a transparent tape around the snake's mouth to prevent it from biting!

The dancers, who appear to have trained for one of the many dance reality shows on television, are a very energetic lot and dance well to the devotional songs, set to popular Bollywood tunes blaring at 150 decibels from the humongous speakers. The role of Parvati is played, as are all the female roles, by an effeminate looking youngster. The crowd is ecstatic at the various antics of the dancers and the romance of the God and his consort.

Despite the acrobatic dancing of the troupe, the children are moving to the other star attraction — a dancing camel. The camel is being made to tap to the music by his minder with the help of a stick. Apparently, dancing camels are all a rage in these parts as is



evident from the various advertisements I saw in the village as well as the owner's mobile number painted on the camel's neck!

The procession starts and vends its way around the narrow lanes of Bagar. There is hardly any space for the large number of onlookers, who are not just from Bagar but also from the neighbouring villages. The women are mostly sitting on the roofs of houses. Interestingly, the married women here are almost always veiled while the unmarried ones are typically clad in jeans and tops. Maybe in a few years we would be seeing these teenaged girls also metamorphosing into conservatively dressed women.

Bagar is a village which seems to be dominated by the family of the Piramals who also own the *haveli* where we are staying. And curiously, it is an educational hub of sorts with at least two dozen educational institutions — from schools and colleges to even a Leadership Institute. Most of these are run by some trust or the other set up by the extended Piramal family. This is something I also noticed in the other towns we passed on our way — the philanthropic tradition is quite strong among the Marwaris, especially when it comes to setting up institutions in their ancestral towns.

The tradition of community involvement is not restricted to the Marwaris. In Udaipur, in several government schools, there are boards announcing how

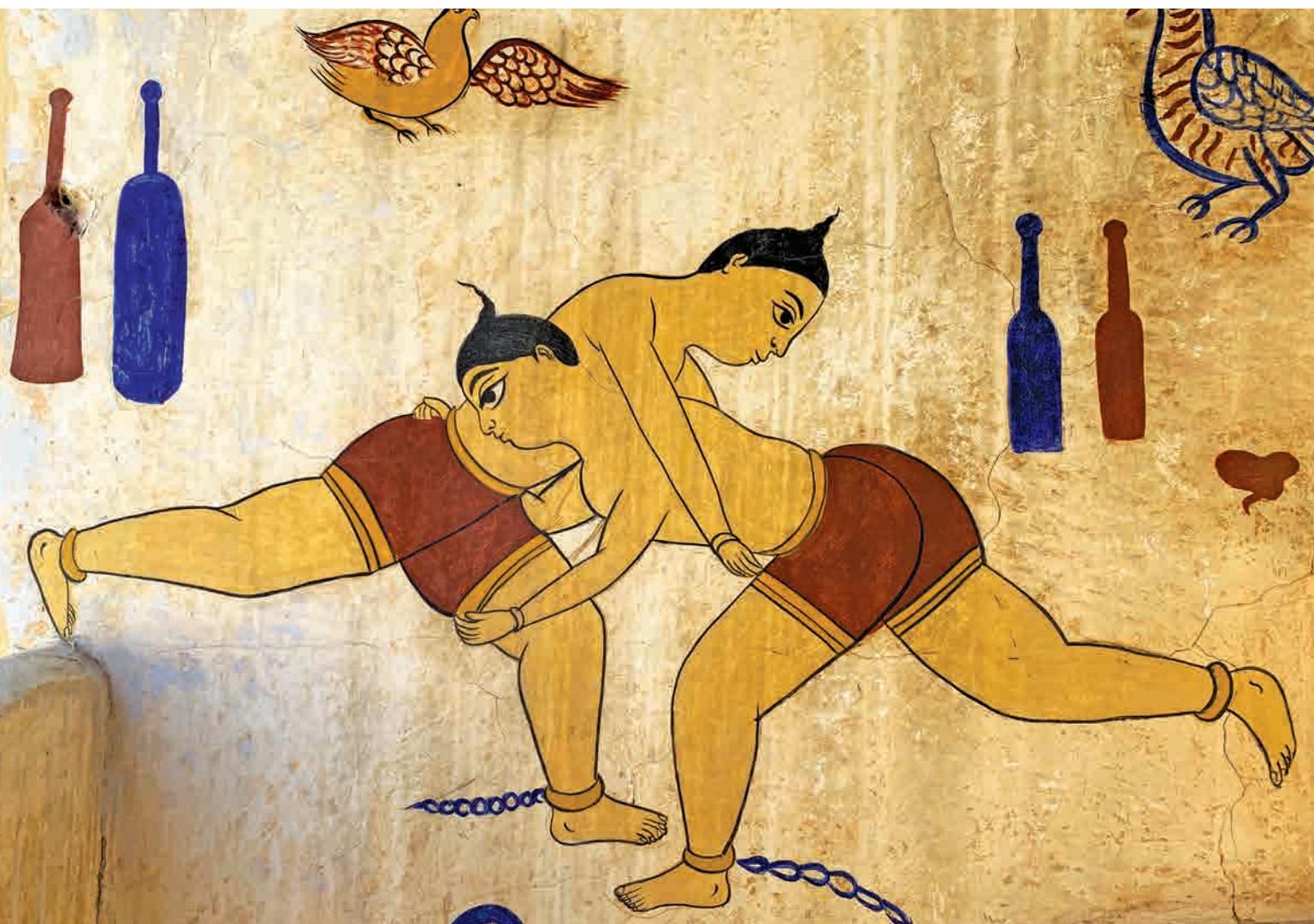
certain individuals have donated money for specific things like a water cooler or an R.O filter. In Bagar, the government primary health centre has waiting benches, railings and even counters donated by individuals in the village. Even the space around electric poles, where there are usually naked wires hanging making it a death trap, have been cordoned off by walls constructed by various organisations who then have the right to advertise on those walls. This model of community participation in what is usually considered to be the state's exclusive domain is something I have not seen elsewhere.

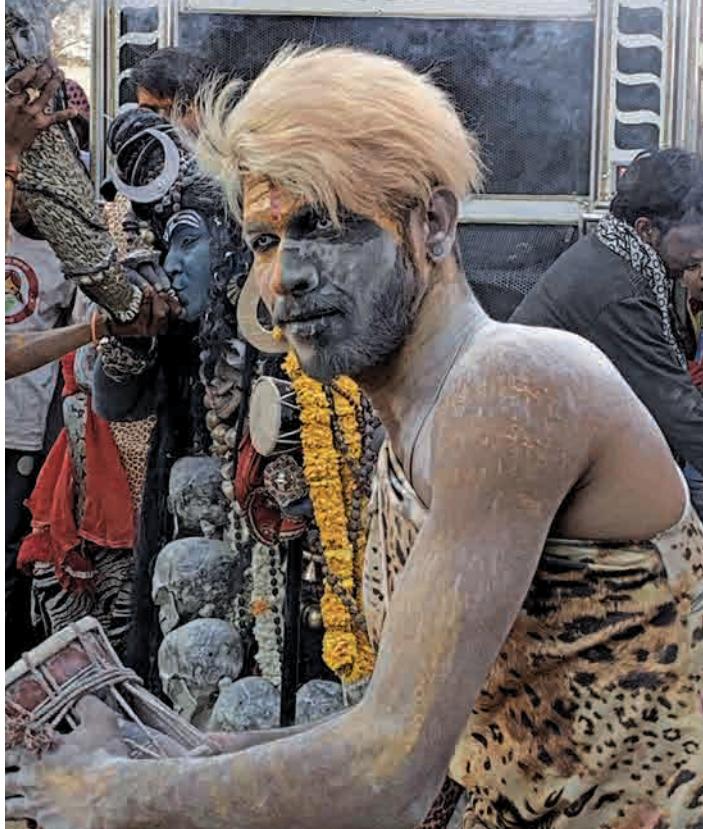
The next morning we drive to Mandawa — the main tourist attraction in Shekhawati with its many *havelis*. The drive is through a fascinating landscape — undulating lush green wheat and mustard fields interspersed oddly with post-apocalyptic looking barren sandy wastes and the occasional bare *khejri* tree. All along, we pass huge billboards advertising various schools and private hospitals. The schools in these parts, unlike their metro counterparts, do not advertise their wards' success in JEE or NEET. Instead, the billboards proudly display mugshots of scared looking

students who seem to have joined the defence services or have cleared the Sainik School entrance. In fact, a couple of schools we passed on the way had boards claiming to have ex-NSG commandos to train for the gruelling physical examination in these entrances. The advertisements for the private hospitals on the other hand, have huge pictures of the owner doctors, dressed appropriately in their operating masks and blue overalls. I guess this is to instill confidence in their capabilities to cure.

In Mandawa, we ask around for one Mr Ashok whose name has been recommended by a friend as someone who can show us around. He is to be found at the Goenka *haveli* where he also runs a shop selling the usual tourist souvenirs — prints of miniature paintings, postcards, over priced antique-looking trinkets, which are obviously made in Moradabad or some such place.

Hearing Mr Ashok trying to convince a group of French tourists to buy an over-priced applique umbrella reminds me of Raju guide — Ashok speaks fluent French! The sale over, he comes to us and quite nonchalantly informs us that he can speak five languages while his helper Mukesh is fluent in four. He





also proudly tells us that he does not mind fleecing the White folk since they have looted us for centuries!

He takes us on a guided tour of three *havelis* in the neighbourhood and gives us a long spiel about the frescoes. There are scenes from the Mahabharat and Ramayana as well as several incongruous figures like Sumo wrestlers and a train. Ashok tells me that the owner of the *haveli* wanted his womenfolk to see what a train would look like, decades before it was introduced in India and so got it painted.

These mansions belong to the extended Goenka clan and are being restored by artists from Jaipur. The colours used are vegetable extracts and are surprisingly durable to the elements. Apparently, the frescoes were painted with these colours on wet plaster and once dry, were polished with coconut oil. However, some of the frescoes which have faded are being brought to life once again by the artists. Except that they are adding their own twist to the originals. One scene which had Krishna holding a flute, has been changed to Krishna speaking on the telephone! Pointing this out, our own Raju guide informs us that since Krishna had many girlfriends, he was busy and had to keep in touch with them using a phone!

Our final destination in Mandawa is the famous fort/hotel which we are told can be seen in many Bollywood films. It also has become the favourite destination for weddings of the nouveau-riche-but-not-quite-Ambanis set from Delhi. The huge wooden doors have the regulation tall, well-built Rajasthani gent with handle bar moustaches guarding it, who follows us

around so that we don't sneak in without paying the ₹250 entrance fees. Since it is very hot by now, we avoid the fort tour and head back.

On the way back, we pass the District headquarters of Jhunjhunu where the major attraction is the biggest Rani Sati temple in the world. The temple interestingly abuts what seems to be the Muslim quarter since I notice many shops selling biryani as well as several small mosques. The big mosque is some distance away.

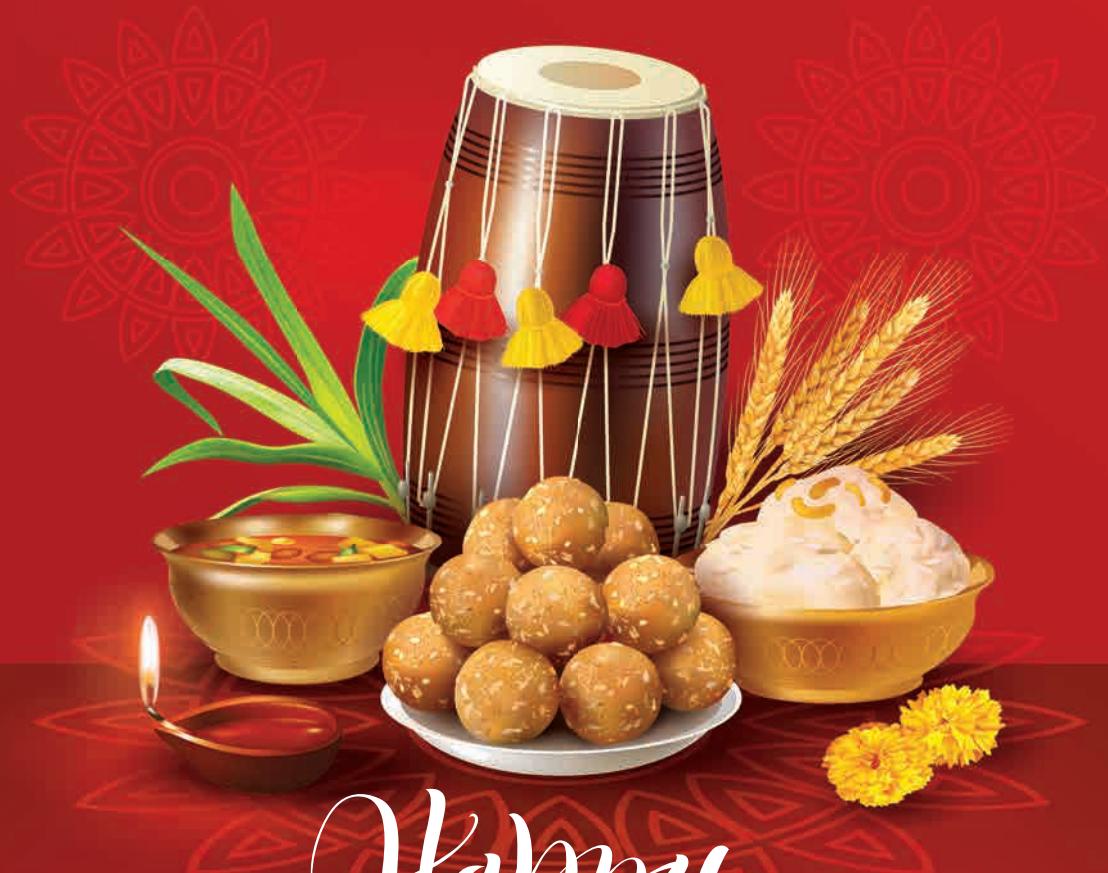
The temple is a huge complex and apparently sees tens of thousands of devotees every day. Crossing the courtyard to the main temple, there are boards for the general canteen and one for the *idli-dosa* canteen. And just before the entrance, there is a sign for a AC toilet where one can have a shower with a towel for ₹15 or use the toilet for ₹10. The toilet does justify the price since it is all marble, five-star hotel quality with swank fittings!

In Bagar, on our last day, we see that the Khatu Shayam mela is still on though the only visitors now are some children and teenagers out for some fun on the rides. The Mahadev Art Group and Bharat DJ Sound are packing up and moving onto their next assignment. The *dargah* of a local *pir* is desolate with just one old lady praying for his blessings at the tomb. Outside, some cows and a bull forage for food in the pile of rubbish, trying to find something in the plastic bags. A couple of baby monkeys jump on the bull which seems not terribly concerned about them. Bagar continues with its sleepy way of life, never mind the occasional intrusion of electro *bhajans* and *Dance India Dance*.



DELHI INDIRA GANDHI
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HISTORY



SAIMI SATTAR TAKES A WALK THROUGH DRISHYAKALA, AN EXHIBITION AT THE RED FORT, WHICH DOCUMENTS THE STORY OF OUR NATION, FROM THE 16TH CENTURY TO INDEPENDENCE. PANKAJ KUMAR ZEROES IN ON THE BEST WORKS

The barracks at Red Fort have always been a reminder of the unsavoury bits of our colonial history. The British, in their bid to avenge our first war of Independence in 1857, destroyed the Mughal architectural ambience and structures of Shah Jahan and symbolically tore down the fort's *nahoubat khana*, a place which welcomed the arrival of the emperor and his guests with the sound of drums and heralds. Now four of the five barrack halls have been turned into museums in an attempt to resolve the conflicts of history and feature artworks that document the evolution of a nation through them. Or despite them. In short, it is a scroll run of where we come from through



paintings, lithographs, prints and photos. So we feel quite like the time traveller when we notice a painting of an elephant cart pulling a hefty load next to the footsteps of Delhi's Jama Masjid, one where we routinely weave our way through street sellers and traffic. One of the grandest mosques in the country is bereft even of worshippers and seems to be rising out of nowhere in the frame. The unfamiliarity of the familiar reminds us that we are just momentary markers of time and the larger picture is what it is. Then there is Mahabalipuram, the temple we know from its brochure value, set in the ruins of Mowgli's world akin to the old, abandoned palace inhabited by King Louie.

We begin with the 144 prints by Thomas and William Daniell, which featured in the six volumes of *Oriental Scenery* published between 1795 and 1808, on the top floor of the *Drishyakala* exhibition at Barrack number 4. Thomas Daniells set out as a landscape painter but found it difficult to establish himself as one in Britain. So like many other Europeans of his time, he was drawn to India by stories of the wealth and fame that awaited travellers to the newly accessible East. In 1784, he obtained permission from the East India Company to travel to Calcutta to work as an engraver, accompanied by his nephew William Daniells, as his assistant. Today,



their works are the greatest testimony of Indian common life, particularly in the hinterland, one of our first visual histories of India in its everyday moments as well as royal games like tiger hunts. And, of course, its people. But it is the river Sutra that has us in awe, the ghats at Kannauj for instance, the lifeline for the many perfumeries here and today a hub on the country's longest expressway. Back then, it was an important pitstop on the waterways that the colonialists used to full advantage. In September 1788, the Daniells set out on a tour of north-west India leaving Calcutta (as it was known then) by boat along the Ganga, travelling as far as Srinagar in Garhwal, Uttarakhand, where they arrived in May 1789. They made many stops on their return journey, not arriving back in Calcutta until February 1792. And by March that year, the Daniells left Calcutta once more, this time for Madras (now Chennai). Having hired the services of a considerable retinue, including two palanquins and their bearers, and taking a route which more or less followed that of the British army which had defeated Tipu Sultan the previous year, they were able to recreate the southern part of the sub-continent, which was hardly represented in popular culture back then.

"The Daniells did something which was interesting. They started at one point and finished at another and whatever they saw, they documented. So it is the only visual narrative of India at that time," says Poonam Baid, Researcher and Project Coordinator, Exhibitions & Publications, Delhi Art Gallery (DAG). These works are part of the four exhibitions it has done with the Archaeological Survey of India as part of a public-private partnership and represent the story of India between the 16th century to Independence.

The showcase, which has works from private collections, museums and more, took more than six months to put together. "We got in touch with curators from outside DAG in 2017 and started towards the end of the same year. But it was in the last six or seven months that work started in full swing," says Poonam. There was a definite idea behind putting this up at a popular venue which does not fall in the realm of a traditional art gallery. "The idea behind putting these up at the Red Fort, which features on the must-visit list for everyone and not just art aficionados, is to cater to the common people who would not otherwise visit something like the Art Fair. Besides, it would give them a sense of belonging to their heritage. This would enable them to see so many national art treasures together for the first time," says Poonam. The effort seems to be bearing fruit as about 2,000-3,000 people are coming in every day. "Art is not successful till it breaks from its elitist confines and percolates down to the masses, talks



to them. And these artful images stay with them a long time simply because they are engaging and a window to the world that existed but is not quite understood,” she says.

The ground floor has the works of nine masters — Abanindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Gaganendranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose, Nicholas Roerich, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Ravi Varma and Sailoz Mookherjee.

The first floor is dedicated to portraits — which include the academic and the royal, by impressionists and expressionists — and popular prints. “Many of these canvases and water colours were done to build a momentum towards popularising art in that period and that is how prints came in the picture,” says Poonam. However, there are also overlaps. So while Raja Ravi Varma made paintings, he also set up the lithographic press and became the first person to print a picture in India. “He was a pioneer who set up a press and churned out oleographs and lithographs of his paintings so that every home had a Raja Ravi Varma as these were representations of divinities,” Poonam points out. It is not just the prints which make the cut at the exhibition. Varma was a master draughtsman and so his sketchbooks, too, have been put on display. Given how prolifically the works of the painter are available, it was not difficult to spot them among the many.

At the entrance itself, flanked on either side by rooms that display the works of the nine artists, is the Indian Constitution adopted on January 26, 1950, which

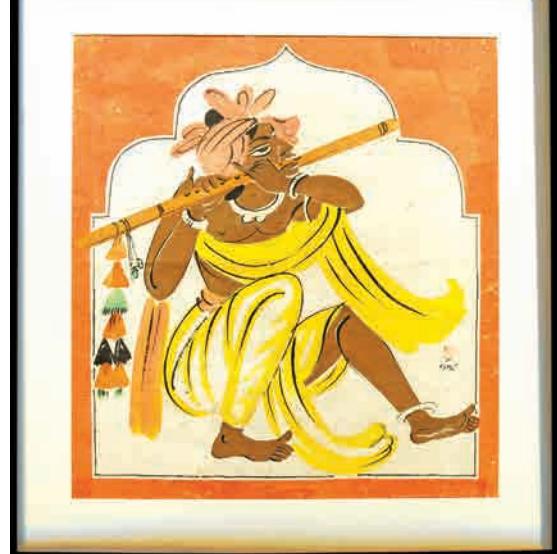
was not a printed document. It was entirely handcrafted by the artists of Shantiniketan under the guidance of one of the national treasures, Acharya Nandalal Bose, with the calligraphy texts done by Prem Behari Narain Raizada in Delhi. As always, we run through the words that everyone in the country knows so well, "We, the people of India..." and get goosebumps. Another important work by Bose is one of the Haripura panels done at the 1938 Congress session. "We felt that this was important due to its historical context and people should see it. But there is also a mythological print as well as nature studies from Shantiniketan and some collages. All the genres of the artist and what each of them represents can be seen here," says Poonam.

Bose's initiation into painting is closely associated with the Tagore family. Close association with the Tagores awakened his idealism for a nationalistic consciousness and commitment toward classical and folk art, along with its underlying spirituality and symbolism.

An early work of Jamini Roy does not show the influence of the *Kalighat Pat* (Kalighat painting), which was a style of art with bold sweeping brush-strokes that the artist is known for. On the contrary, it can be classified more in the genre of an impressionist landscape which is representative of his early works. Roy's interests were wide, ranging from the visual characteristics of home-sewn Bengal quilts to the Byzantine icon, from mythic tales closer home to Christian themes. Abanindranath Tagore's artistic journey moved from a nationalist framework to an intensely personified world of painting and writing, from a public to private domain.

Similarly Amrita Sher-Gil's works are showcased not just by her paintings but also by a sculpture of two wild cats — one of the few done by the artist. "The works of these nine artists cannot be exported," informs Poonam. "We selected the paintings on the basis of every genre and timeline. It also includes unseen works," she adds. Sher-Gil strived to interpret the life of Indians, particularly the poor, through her own visual vocabulary, which led her to paint various iconic canvases in her short artistic career.

Moving on to the next floor, there are portraits of all sizes and classifications. "People are interested in the *rajas* and royalty. A lot of thought process has gone into what would people like to see. You can engage with an academic portrait and look at the ornamental jewellery while being exposed to a legacy which has been put together," she says. Many of these paintings look like they have been done in a studio setting. Poonam explains the reason for this. "These paintings often took off from photographs. The





artists would imagine a studio with drapes and cushions and include these in their work."

There is also an interesting story behind how Indian artists started doing portraits. "When travelling European artists like Frank Brooks were given commissions to paint portraits, the Indian artists realised that the foreigners were getting good money as well as plumping up their repertory. So they too started doing commissioned works during the 18th and 19th century," adds Poonam. Interestingly, while the subjects are documented, often there is no trace of the artists, who have remained anonymous since they were doing commissioned portraits and did not sign it.

A really massive painting made by Bourn and Shepard shows Nawab Mohammad Ali Khan Bahadur (1881-1947) of Malerkotla, Punjab done in the 1930s. An oil on canvas, it shows him in his regalia. The colours are fresh and well-preserved, including greens which have tendency to fade away. "It still has its original frame which weighs 380 kg and it required 12 people to carry it. The massive 108.0 x 60.0 inch painting was brought in separately and framed here," says Poonam.

It was not just the royals who were getting their likeness painted. There is an entire section on Parsis, who were the first people to monopolise big businesses

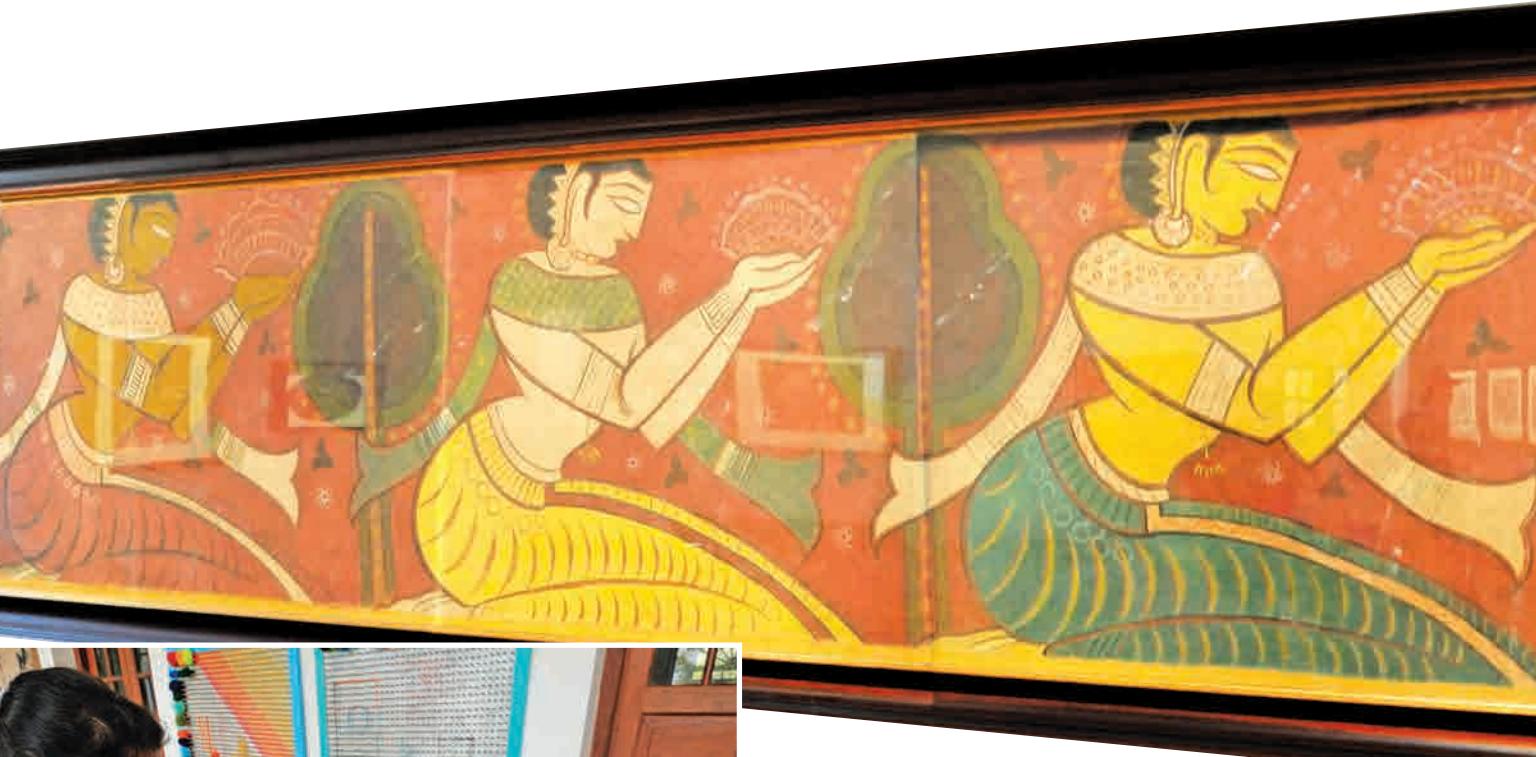


and foreign trade. "They used to sit in crafted studio settings for artists of their choice. You would find portraits of Pithawalla or Pestonji Bomanji as they had the money to get them done." Unlike the portraits of royalty which are standing, full-length and display an abundance of jewellery, those of the Parsis are either sitting or bust length and relatively simpler. There is no hint of opulence either in clothes or in jewellery which is conspicuous by its absence.

Another section is devoted to artists who have made self-portraits like the ones by Pestonji Bomanji or Kishori Roy. There is also a photograph, which has been hand-tinted to make it look like a painting.

M F Pithawalla's style is remembered by the album he was commissioned to make for Queen Mary on her Indian visit, containing water colour impressions of women from different Indian communities, indicating their characteristic mannerisms and dressing styles. Laxman Narain Taskar is one of the few artists who painted subjects such as courtesans, staring confidently out of the frame, as opposed to the usually passive portrayals.

The prints are anonymous though. Most of the time, it is only the name of the press that one comes to know of, while the artists would by and large remain anonymous. The prints are divided into sections, so



there is a representation of the heads of each of the princely states, a recreation of the 1911 Coronation or even one of George V and the royal consort Queen Mary. There is a separate section on the freedom struggle, which is rich in its representation of the heroes of the time, primarily Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose. What is interesting to note is that while the ones from the British Raj are more formal and stiff, these are more of an easy representation that is rooted in popular culture and local myth-making surrounding the personality. "A lot of literature was being written, which included caricature and sarcasm, during the freedom struggle. It was important to give representation through means of visual media as people could associate this easily with what they were reading," says Poonam.

Special attention has been given to the role of the common man in the national movement for Independence. In B1, there is a narrative on the grass-cutters of Bihar who had stopped supplying grass to the British cavalry. In B3, there is a copy of the fake

news which was reported in 1942 in the *New York Times* which mentioned that Netaji has died in a plane crash. Another crucial aspect included here is a full panel which mentions 27 people who were shot in different prisons of the country much before the Indian National Army trial started in 1945 at the Red Fort.

The exhibits at B5 museum introduce viewers to many unknown aspects of the Indian freedom movement. It showcases the life of people imprisoned in the Andamans for supporting the movement and the revolutionaries abroad. There are also many separate sections for the women, children, tribals, farmers, who were either imprisoned or were martyred. The idea was to bring forward the oppressive practices used by Britishers such as massacres, firing, *lathi* charge and so on.

The post-Independence section includes not just calendars but advertisements as well. The changing mood in the country can best be summed up by the addition of 'Shri' which is considered auspicious to E D Sassoon and Co Ltd, which is essentially a British entity.

"We have tried to put the prints together according to the event horizon. These start with the British era and go on to the freedom struggle. So while being divided into sections, it is also chronological but then some of the events were happening simultaneously. Two smaller rooms house newspapers, many of which have shut since, on display. But the ink is still indelible. Not surprisingly, these have become an important historical document. As has the exhibition.

— *The Drishyakala exhibition is on display till July 31 at the Red Fort*



FOR THE LOVE OF SWEET PEPPER



HAVE YOU EVER HAD VEGETABLES AND FRUITS PLUCKED STRAIGHT OFF PLANTS GROWING ON WATER? **SAIMI SATTAR** OPTS FOR A MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER. PHOTOS BY **MD MEHARBAN**

One bite into the luscious strawberry and the juice squirts out of the mouth, its explosive burst tickling all kinds of tastebuds. Plump, fresh and bursting with flavour. Isn't the fruit supposed to be this way? Not when we tell you that it was grown in coco peat in a greenhouse and not cultured in soil. Or that such futuristic experiments you see in sci-fi films and NASA research files can actually be a sustainable way of living. Hydroponic fruits and vegetables are being grown in and around Delhi/NCR on a pilot basis and may be the way forward for ensuring we do not run out of food in times of climate change.

In the 1940s, hydroponics was successfully used to supply fresh vegetables for troops in Wake Island. Later it was followed up by the Dutch and perfected by Israeli scientists. But that's history. What does it entail? Put simply, you can grow crops in places where the land is limited, doesn't exist or is heavily contaminated. Because all that plants need are provided and maintained in a system, you can grow your greens in your small apartment too. Plant roots usually expand and spread out in search for foods and oxygen in the soil. This is not the case in hydroponics, where the roots are sunk in a tank full of

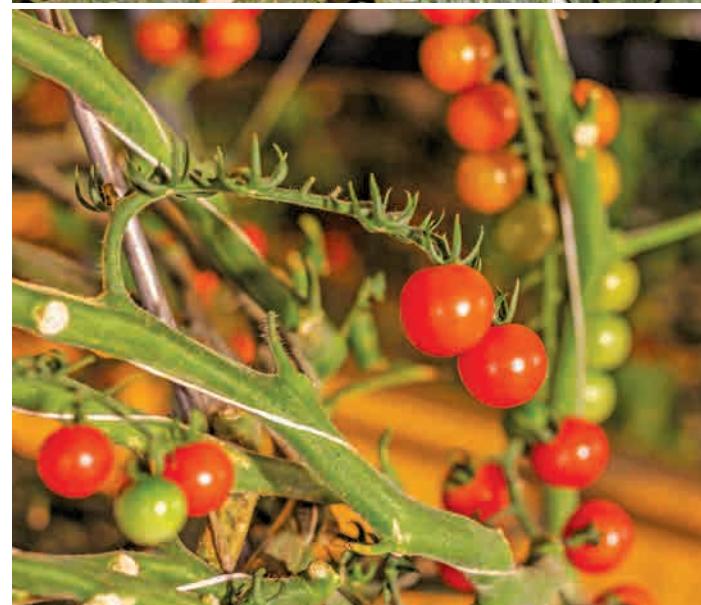


oxygenated nutrient solution and are in direct contact with vital minerals. All the plants need is a bit of coconut peat to wrap themselves around. This means you can grow your plants much closer. You can control the climate in your greenhouse be it the temperature, humidity, light and air. So you can grow foods all year round regardless of the season. Farmers can produce foods at the appropriate time to maximise their business profits.

Plants grown hydroponically can use only 10 per cent water compared to field-grown ones. Besides, the runoff is returned to the controlled biosphere. And the reason your strawberry is delicious is because growers can check what plants require and the specific amounts of nutrients needed at particular stages and mix them with the water accordingly. The biggest advantage? Plants grow faster as they no longer waste valuable energy searching for diluted nutrients in the soil. Instead, they shift all of their focus on growing and producing fruits. In short, cleaner and healthier food.

We walk into one such facility, Nature's Miracle, in Greater Noida, all of seven acres, four of which are dedicated to the cultivation of cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and strawberries. As we walk through the tunnels of the greenhouse, its founder Ravinder Kumar tells us how he is very passionate about plants and this facility initially started as an experiment to save plants from soil-borne diseases or pests and groundwater contamination. "While travelling, we visited Netherlands and Israel and decided to tie up with the former," he says. There are several things which makes the technology different.

The vegetables and fruits are planted in coco peat or husk which absorbs water well. Ankur Anand, head, cultivation, explains, "The roots need a base that is provided by coco peat. It has a very good water-holding capacity and drainage. Since there is no water logging, there are no soil-borne diseases." He waves his hand at a crate which has six plants of cherry tomatoes and says that not more than three could be





accommodated in this space if they were to be grown in an open field. "We are passing water-soluble fertilisers through drippers. Each plant needs a different recipe mix of the fertiliser. Although the product cannot be called organic as fertilisers are used, there are no traces of heavy metals. In organic farming they are actually feeding the soil rather than the plant. This water directly feeds the plant," says Anand. The facility is certified by Global G.A.P.

This is not all. There are sensors which can predict temperatures for the past 10 days and the next 10 as well. So cultivators regulate the conditions inside by controlling the temperature, amount of water needed and other parameters which are essential for providing plants with an ideal growth environment. The temperatures are controlled through hot and cold water pipes. "If the temperatures outside fall below 15 or 16 degrees celsius, we need to heat it up. There are also cooling pipes for the summer months," adds Anand.

The indoor setting also means that the lighting schedules are controlled, which improves plant production without making the farmers too dependent on the seasonality factor.

This system makes use of vertical space, which has increased planting density and ensures that the product's size, weight, shape and taste are uniform and consistent round the year. The yield is twice as high as one gets from farming for most plants. "The quantity as well as quality is better," says Anand. Every tomato plant has a life cycle of nine to 10 months and the first harvest is 70 days after seeding. After that, it is a continuous process for eight to nine months during which the plant keeps yielding fruit.

But the biggest advantage of this technology is the amount of water that it uses. It makes use of at least

90 per cent less water than the quantity required in an open field. If in an open field, a litre of water is used for irrigation, only 300 ml is actually needed and 700 ml goes waste. "The coco peat releases the excess water which is then channelised into pipes attached to the plants. This is collected, recycled by RO, disinfected, re-circulated and re-used. This not only reduces the quantity of water used but also minimises the possibility of diseases," says Anand. In a world staring at a water crisis given the challenges of irrigation, this could certainly hold the answer to sustainable crops.

There is a nursery, too, where the shoots are tended to and then transplanted to zones. Boilers maintain heat while an irrigation unit is used to prepare the nutrient mix for each plants. Each variety needs a different fertiliser mix for it to grow optimally.

The result of all this? Rows upon rows of trees growing vertically and laden with colourful fruits and vegetables, from bell peppers to strawberries. One wonders how pollination works in a controlled environment where nothing can filter in from outside. The query is soon answered by Anand who points towards large boxes kept at each end of the greenhouse. "These house the bees which are essential to pollination and development of fruit. They come out in the morning and return to the box in the evening," he says.

As they say, proof of the pudding is in the eating. So we begin sampling. The bite-sized tomatoes, especially the candy ones with a hint of sweetness, immediately find favour. As do bell peppers which are not too sharp on the palate. The small cucumbers, almost half the size of the normal variety, are ideally eaten without peeling, making it an ideal snack on the go. Of course, there are the strawberries. They're healthy and fresh, the taste is consistent and they can turn you into a salad addict.



"We take care of our produce like babies, to keep them happy we even play music to them and talk to them," says a caretaker.

More than 11,000 kg of fruits and vegetables go out from this outlet to top food brands like Le Marche, Food Bazar, Foodhall and Modern Bazar. There are also a number of B2B hotel clients like ITC, The Imperial and Andaz. In fact, Kumar says that while initially they were the ones approaching customers, the situation has reversed and people are now approaching him. "We have refused a number of clients as we cannot supply them the quantities that they want. There are those based out of Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai who were importing everything from Netherlands. It makes better sense to get the same quality and variety, as logically this would be cheaper."

Of course, there are logistical challenges of transporting such cultured farm produce to other cities. They have to be packed in special boxes and stored in the coldest part of the aircraft, which is the front of the plane. And they have to be delivered within two hours of landing. Of course, there are challenges of growing, like ensuring a continuous power supply and water. "One day it rained a lot and our plants died overnight because the humidity levels spiked. This was between 12 midnight and 1 am and even though we have sensors, the reaction time is four hours. So, we lost them all," says another cultivator.

Even though hydroponic farming seems essential in these times of climate change, there is one challenge, the high costs of establishing and running such a facility. But considering the world is staring at a food crisis as early as 2030, Delhi should make sure its salad bowl is, at least, full.

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HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS WHERE WIFI IS NOT GUARANTEED BUT PEACE AND TRANQUILITY CERTAINLY ARE



DARANG

[HIMACHAL PRADESH]

Most travellers head to Mcleodganj in search of Goa in the hills, but just like its beachy counterpart this, too, is overrun by tourists. Take a detour to Darang near Mcleodganj on the road to Palampur. For nature lovers, activities include — walking through lush tea gardens, tuning in to the chirping of birds, something that one never hears in the din of traffic. Or just partake the view of the Dhauladhars. Bliss.

Distance: 435 km



BIR BILLING [HIMACHAL PRADESH]

This is one of the top-ranked places for paragliding in India. And why not? It was here that the first Paragliding World Cup was held in 2015. Located at an altitude of 2,400 m above the sea level, Billing is the perfect take off-site for paragliding. And Bir, the landing site, is located at an altitude of 1,340 m. Camping in Bir Billing is a wonderful experience in itself. That's not the only reason for it being a delightful weekend getaway for the air is fresh and pollution-free and there are campsites which offer scenic views. **Distance:** 518 km

FAGU

[HIMACHAL PRADESH]

An enchanting little hill town in the Kufri region of Shimla, this can transport you to a different time. Dotted by little stone-walled houses and lush green plantations, this getaway also offers a glimpse of the majestic Himalayan summits.

Distance: 380 km





TIRTHAN VALLEY [HIMACHAL PRADESH]

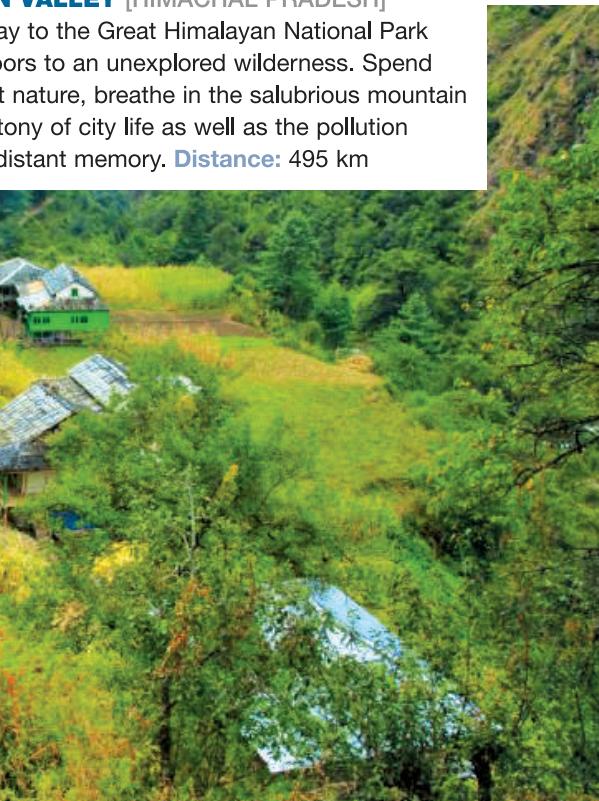
This is the gateway to the Great Himalayan National Park and opens the doors to an unexplored wilderness. Spend some time amidst nature, breathe in the salubrious mountain air and the monotony of city life as well as the pollution would feel like a distant memory. **Distance:** 495 km



NAHAN [HIMACHAL PRADESH]

This peaceful town, surrounded by Shivalik Hills, has charming scenery and peaceful ambiance. Whether you are looking for some soul-searching or a romantic escapade, the place fits the bill.

Distance: 248 km



SHOGHI [HIMACHAL PRADESH]

Those who frequent Shimla would have noticed a signboard that announced this place on way. Bookworms would be intrigued to know that this quaint retreat has inspired a lot of Ruskin Bond's stories. But it is the railway station of Shoghi that offers a charming, picturesque and colonial view. Go trekking or hiking or just amble around this quaint village and you won't be disappointed. **Distance:** 329 km





PANGOT [UTTARAKHAND]

Junk Nainital, which has become oh-so-commercial, and head to this little hill town in Uttarakhand. With around 580 bird species recorded in this area, it is a paradise for nature lovers and bird watchers. Whether you are an enthusiast who can tell one bird apart from the other or someone who prefers to just enjoy their flitting about in a full burst of innocence, this is a place where you can just watch them fly past without a care in the world. **Distance:** 310 km

RANIKHET [UTTARAKHAND]

Legends talk about Queen Padmavati of Kumaon, who was so fascinated by the beauty of the tiny hill station, that King Sudhradev built a palace for her here. The British rediscovered and developed it as a cantonment area. The destination has green meadows and peaceful surroundings. Fun activities include Mowgli walk, volley ball, badminton, cricket, rappelling and valley crossing.

It also boasts of one of the best nine-hole golf greens in the country. **Distance:** 401 km



BINSAR [UTTARAKHAND]

If you wish to be transported to the surreal realm, look no further. From the vivid view of the Trisul and Nanda Devi, Chaukhamba, Nanda Kot, Panchachuli and Kedarnath to its lush wildlife sanctuary, Binsar has a combination that can appeal to most travellers. Perched up at 2,400 metres above sea level, it is one of the highest hill stations in the Kumaon region. For uninterrupted panoramic views, one can head to Zero Point. **Distance:** 400 km



MUNSIYARI [UTTARAKHAND]

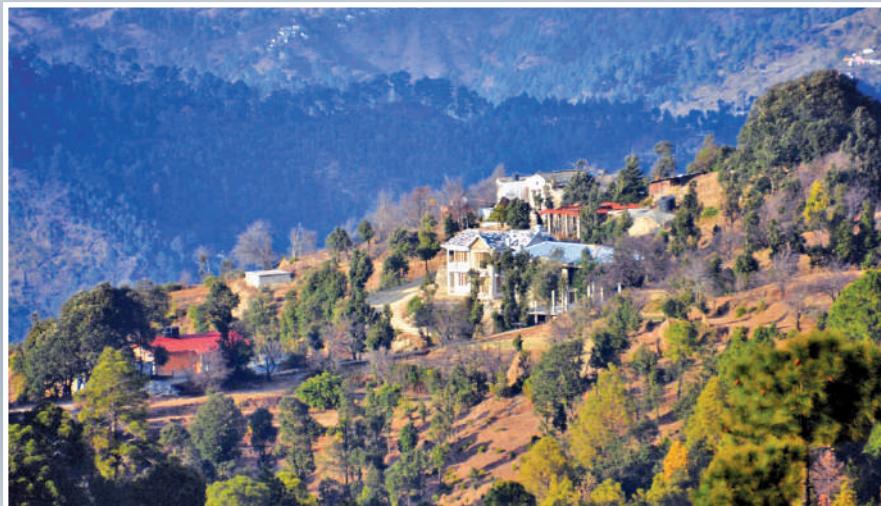
It is a popular destination among mountaineers and trekkers. The quaint little hamlet offers a clear view of the Panchachuli peaks from here. It is also the starting point for the Milam glacier trek. **Distance:** 572 km

**CHAKRATA [UTTARAKHAND]**

If Dehradun and Mussoorie are too cliched for you, then head to Chakrata. The place has rugged views of the mountains and quietude. Those looking for peace and quiet won't be disappointed. There is sprawling greenery all around and the shimmering waters of the Tiger Falls. Adventure activities include waterfall rappelling, rock climbing, river rafting, cycling, trekking, horse riding and camping. **Distance:** 319 km

MUKTESHWAR**[UTTARAKHAND]**

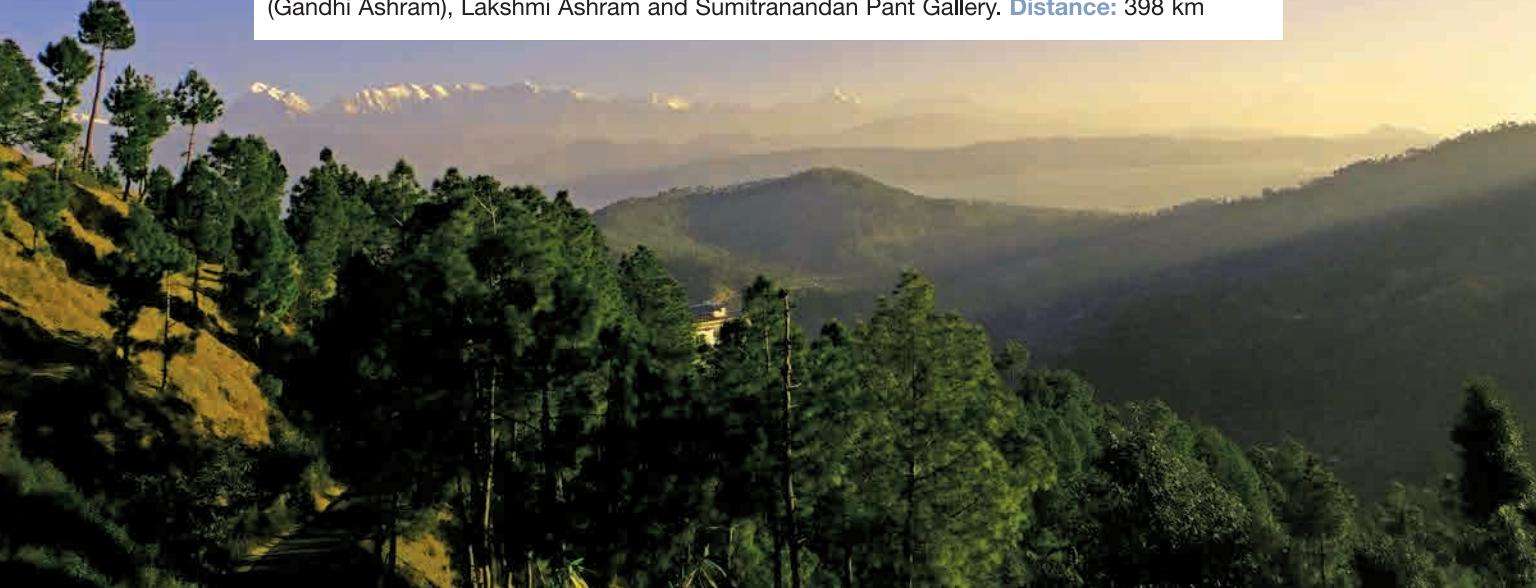
This small town, amid dense and evergreen pine forests in the Nainital district, offers 180° views of the Himalayas. Camping facilities offer adventure activities like trekking, paragliding, rappelling and rock climbing. Check out the verdant hills, green valleys and glittering waters of the Bhalu Gaad waterfall. For the religiously inclined, there is Mukteshwar Mahadev Temple, Brahmeshvara temple, Mukteshwar Dham and Rajarani Temple. **Distance:** 392 km

**PITHORAGARH [UTTARAKHAND]**

The beauty of Pithoragarh is beyond explanation. The place is surrounded by towering snow-clad peaks, alpine forests, green valleys and perennial rivers. Hiking in the nearby Soar Valley is an experience that one is unlikely to forget. **Distance:** 460 km

KAUSANI [UTTARAKHAND]

It offers a spectacular 300 km-wide panoramic view of Himalayan peaks of Nanda Devi, Trishul, Bandarpooch and Panchachuli peaks. Catching the sunrise is a must-do in this hill station as the first rays colour the peaks in the first flush of hope. An easy trek from the main town of Kausani will take you to the cave temple and waterfalls of Rudradhara in the Adi Kailash region. Another trek that you can take here is from Bageshwar to Sunderdhunga. There are temples like Someshwar, Baijnath and Kot Bhramari. Other than these religious sites, there are some museums and ashrams as well. These include Anasakti Ashram (Gandhi Ashram), Lakshmi Ashram and Sumitranandan Pant Gallery. **Distance:** 398 km

**NAUKUCHIATAL**

[UTTARAKHAND]

Flanked by the more popular Bhimtal and Nainital on either side, this picturesque hill town is known by its placid and beautiful lake which is the deepest in the region. It is believed that this lake was created after Brahmaji's intense worship and a small temple dedicated to him exists here. According to locals, anyone performing a *parikarma* of the lake will be blessed by Brahmaji.

Distance: 320 km

KANATAL [UTTARAKHAND]

Situated between two extremely popular and commercial hill stations, Mussoorie and Chamba, head to Kanatal for absolute tranquility and peace. Surkanda Devi temple is believed to be located where the head of Sati had fallen after Shiva carried her on his *trishool*. Located at a height of 9,995 feet, you get a 360-degree view from the top of the temple. Indulge in adventure activities like rappelling, rock-climbing, and valley-crossing.

For those who prefer something more peaceful, go on an accompanied nature walk.

One can also head to Tehri for some water activities like jet skiing and speed boat rides.

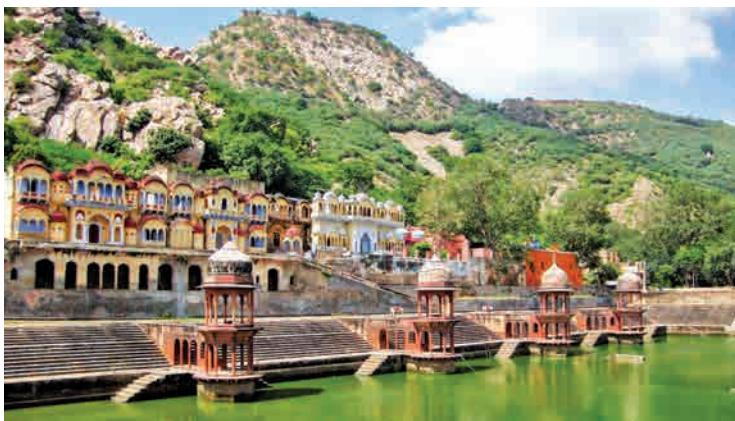
Distance: 317 km

**LANSDOWNE**

[UTTARAKHAND]

Named after a former Viceroy of British India of the same name, it sits amidst thick oak and pine forests in the Garhwal Himalayas. The imposing peaks and lush meadows make for a picturesque landscape. The banks of the river Kho are perfect for camping in Lansdowne. Relax in the lap of nature, sleep under the starry skies and enjoy bonfire by the river. Light adventure activities like flying fox, rappelling and trekking can also be enjoyed.

Distance: 258 km

**ALWAR [RAJASTHAN]**

This town, though under-rated, is famous for its Rajputana architecture and an abundance of flora and fauna. While Siliserh Lake and Sariska Tiger Reserve will take you closer to nature, Alwar Fort and Moosi Maharani ka Mahal where you find some delicate details of history. **Distance:** 165 km

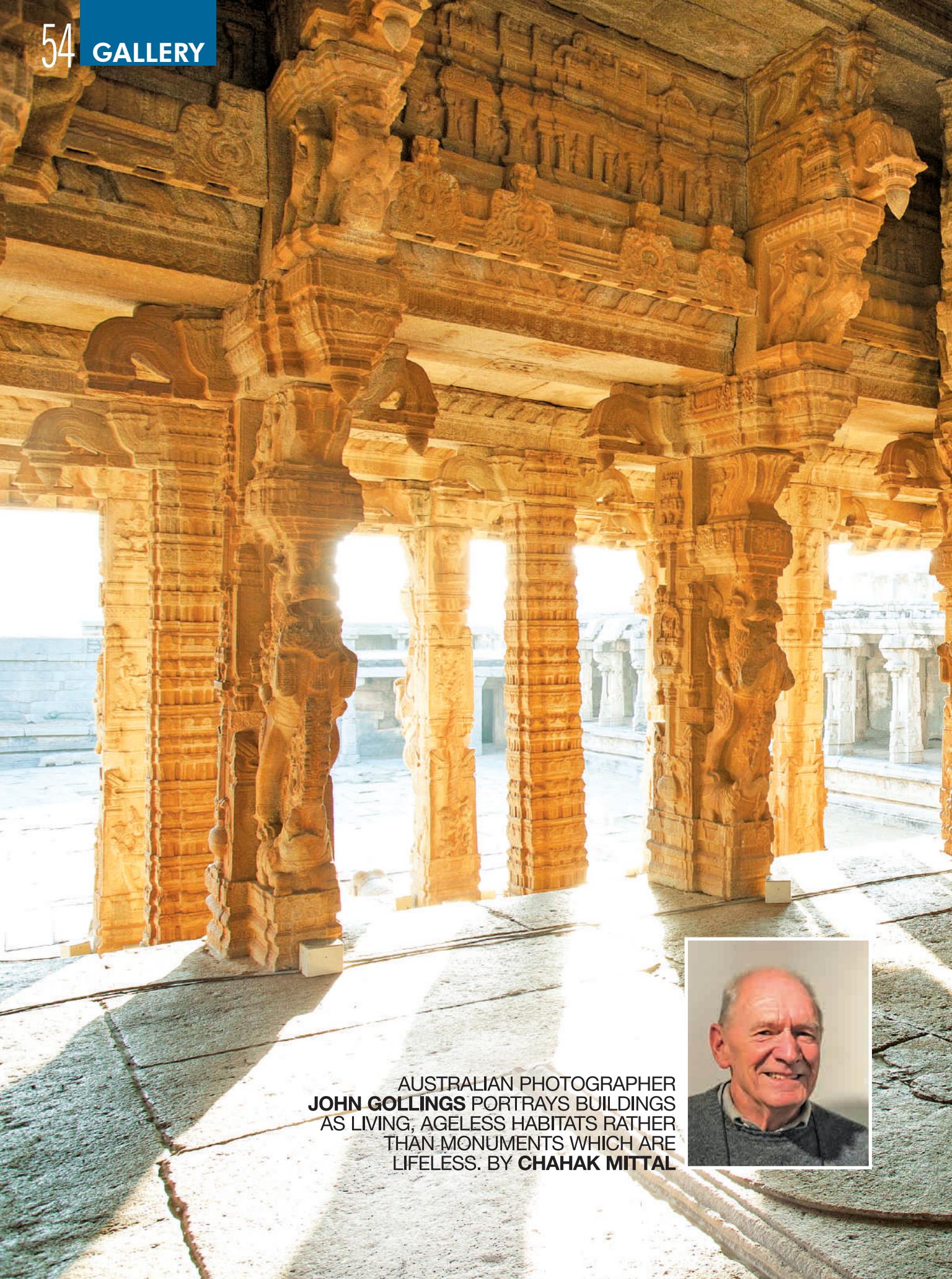
DAUSA [RAJASTHAN]

Those who do not fancy the hills can head to this quaint traditional village near Jaipur. Hollywood movie buffs will have fun spotting places like the bewildering step well that was featured as the pit in *The Dark Knight Rises*. Other historical marvels include Bhadrawati Palace and Khawaraoji. **Distance:** 258 km



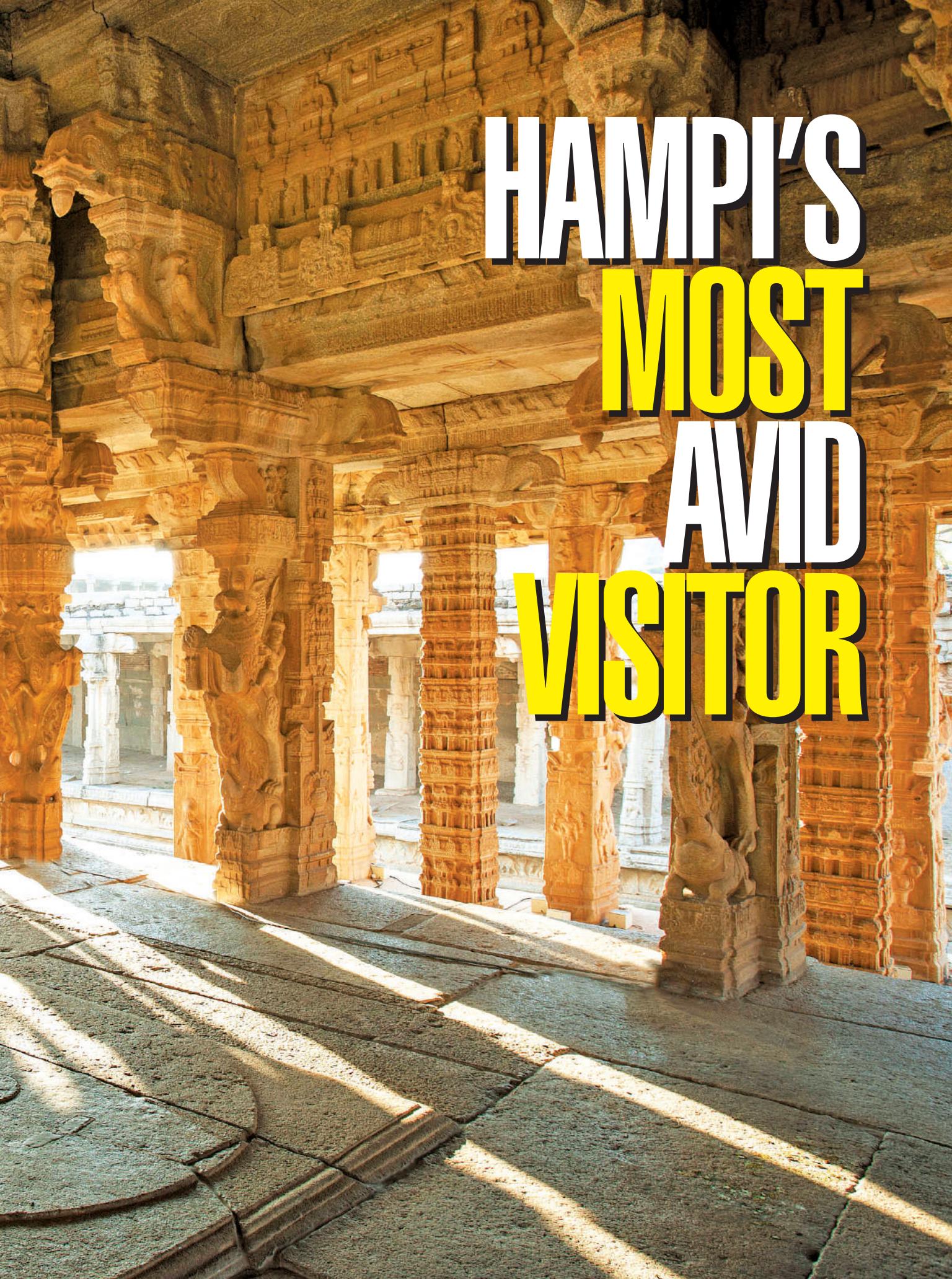
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AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHER
JOHN GOLLINGS PORTRAYS BUILDINGS AS LIVING, AGELESS HABITATS RATHER THAN MONUMENTS WHICH ARE LIFELESS. BY CHAHAK MITTAL





HAMPI'S MOST AVID VISITOR



As one entered the pavilion that showcased an array of Australian architectural photographer John Gollings' works, a variety of large canvas-like photographs spoke volumes about the maestro's years of endless wandering through the vast swathes of India —tribal hamlets, countryside, busy city streets and towns. In the process, he captured the greatest works by our artisans and architects, from gigantic facades to hideaway corners. But it is Hampi which had Gollings' attention as he had covered the town with its abandoned structures and bouldered terrain, the crumble of the past merging into the reality of the present.

Gollings' documentation of both modern and ancient sites in India has resulted in a body of work that records its changing social, economic and political landscape. "These projects are of great cultural and historical significance. Their value should be kept





intact,” he said of his characteristic style, giving the viewer an understanding of the embedded perspectives in each of the captured structures.

It was in 1980 when Gollings first visited Hampi and fell in love with the ruins as they reflected an ancient city state. Ever since, he has been returning to the site every year to capture a site that spoke of life as it was lived, a shrine, a bazaar, remnants of a mansion, the stubs of a town square. “I discover a new aspect every time I come here, which is why I have become so fond of it. I am addicted to Hampi. I have gained a vast experience in architectural photography here as the sites give me a

chance to experiment in many ways. I am able to give an aesthetic touch to it by taking photographs during different times of the day when they are invested with different tonalities. There cannot be any other archaeological site like this,” said he.

It is from the reliefs at the citadel, the Vijayanagara empire’s hub, that we learn about the scale and nature of Dussehra proceedings — processions of caparisoned elephants and horses, followed by a pageant of women so richly turned out with crowns, necklaces, arm bands, waistbands and anklets from the royal treasury that they had to be assisted by attendants. Musicians, drummers,



dancers, jesters and acrobats, even those as far as from Central Asia (jackets, beards and caps on some performers in reliefs), put up their best acts. The climax of the celebrations was the great parade of troops and animals belonging to the provincial governors and commanders. The king reviewed battle plans and rounded off with a feast and fireworks. Most accounts by foreign travellers emphasise the king's obsession with physical might. At any time he had 100,000 soldiers, 20,000 horses and 1,000 elephants in readiness and ensured that food for them was grown in special enclosures of the palace. The cosmopolitan

nature of the city had much to do with the horses, the only way the southern sultans could be kept in check. Since the animal did not breed well in south India, the kings got the finest from the Arabian peninsula and paid in gold for them, including those that died during the voyage!

Interestingly, while women seem mostly in decorative roles in panels, we find a few unconventional ones too like that of an Amazonian hunter. According to traveller accounts, accomplished women were appreciated enough. The entire palace operations were looked after by women, some of them even taking internal



administrative decisions. They were members of the king's personal staff, taking care of his little things. Some of the courtesans were refined and educated, occupying posts and even showing envoys around while women wrestlers had prize fights.

The Portuguese gained immensely from the business of importing horses and diamonds. On their part, the Vijayanagar rulers used their soldiers, firearms and hydraulic engineers. This is evident from a Roman style stone aqueduct in the citadel which meanders into many reservoirs, troughs, baths and a giant step tank. The water was drawn from canals originating from anicuts and embankments, or in cases of higher elevation, lifted in leather buckets worked by bullocks into a cistern. Records show that the Portuguese governor of Goa sent a great mason, Joao della Ponte, a master of limework, to Krishnadeva Raya's court and helped in creating a large embankment with sluices and pipes.

The sophisticated irrigation system, that ensured luscious citrus fruits and flowers in the orchards of the citadel, finds mention in the accounts of Persian traveller Abdul Razzak. "One sees numerous running streams and canals formed of chiselled stone, polished and smooth."

Water was not only available but quite in excess. Some panels on the Dussehra platform depict Vasantotsava or Holi with royals and commoners alike squirting saffron water at each other, splashing each other in pools and continuing the merry-making in small boats. The queen's bath, a stern, straight façade surrounded by a moat adorning the outside, is rather

indulgent inside. It has a central pool surrounded by an arched corridor and projecting balconies overlooking the water. Beneath these overhangs are spouts that look like brackets but are just showerheads. If you didn't feel like swimming, you could just do with a shower and spa, possibly on platforms in the niches. Some accounts suggest that the bath was where the kings courted their women!

Gollings complained that ironically, ever since the place had been listed in the world heritage sites, "It has become difficult to work here. It was much simpler and beautiful before. Now there are fences all around the place and timing that limit my visits. It is closed for visitors after five in the evening."

He has also gone around capturing step wells in India. Describing them as examples of modern architecture. "They say a lot about traditionality and history of Indian temples. When I am capturing a building, I want it to stand out. Earlier, when Indian temples were captured in black and white, their colours would lie on the same page. But here, I wanted to make each colour stand out. Hence, these step wells with muddy look describe perfectly what architecture offers to traditions," he explained. Fashion might go out of style or change with time, but buildings and structures remain timeless. As an epiphany, the photographer said that it occurred to him that he "wanted to capture everything that had ever been built in the world." For him, it's all about taking and waiting for that "one perfect shot." One that places us in the timelessness of our civilisation.

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ARE YOU LISTENING TO YOUR BODY?



WE OFTEN ONLY PAY ATTENTION TO OUR BODIES WHEN THEY ARE NOT BEHAVING THE WAY WE WANT THEM TO. HOWEVER, A REGULAR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION WITH IT IS THE KEY, SAYS **DAIN HEER**



I have a question for you: When was the last time you paid attention to your body? In a world fraught with judgment about how we should look, it might have been long when you last caught your reflection. Or maybe you noticed a particular pain somewhere like your knee, back, or shoulder.

Too often, we only pay attention to our bodies when they're not behaving how we want them to. There's more information available to us by way of a natural, symbiotic connection to our bodies, where two-way communication is the key.

Our bodies communicate in energy — and that's your first language. The issue is, many of us aren't aware.

Why don't we listen to our bodies?

In essence, we're out of practice. Think about your childhood — who decided what and when you ate? Was it ever okay to skip vegetables and head straight for the desserts? And what about now? How often do you eat just because it's dinner time? How often do you not eat because you're anxious about your weight?

The truth is, your body knows exactly what nourishment it requires and would enjoy at all times. It also knows what clothes it would like to wear and the activities it would like to do. In fact, it has awarenesses and a gentle insistence around everything that concerns it. In short, it has a point of view. Would you like to tune in to it?

Step 1: Recognise you're an infinite being. Your body is your vehicle for the lifetime while you, the being, are infinite. You each have your own awarenesses and points of view and you can exist together, in harmony.

Try this: Here's a quick exercise to help you get the distinction between your body (the vehicle) and you (the infinite being). Close your eyes, and expand your energy out into the room you're in. Reach the walls of the room,

then go beyond them. Notice that if you choose to, you can go further. Expand 100 miles out in all directions. Notice how easy it is. Understand that you can circle the planet if you choose to. It's not your physical body that's expanding, it's your being.

How infinite are you?

Another question — If a being can travel so far in an instant and be that big, could it ever fit inside of a physical body?

Step 2: Recognise your body is conscious. Every plant, person, structure on the planet has consciousness — and your body is no exception. Your relationship with your body is deepened by asking questions from an open and present place. And then, listening.

Try this: Start with food. At breakfast, instead of auto-piloting your way to granola ask, "Body, what would you like to eat?" Then, be open, be present, and listen.

What do you sense? What are you picking up? Start to ask your body about everything that concerns it — food, clothes, movement, even the people it gets intimate with. Be patient. Like an old friend you haven't spoken to in a while, sometimes it takes time to rebuild your connection; sometimes it happens in a beat. An idea to play with — your body is a psychic receiver. If you'll forgive the comparison, your body is like a sponge. Why? Because it has the capacity to absorb the energies, thoughts and judgments of everyone around it.

Furthermore, it has the capacity to try to heal the pain and suffering of everyone around it. This means when you experience pain, it might not be your pain. When you feel sad or angry or afraid, these may not be your feelings.

Now, this is a huge concept that goes beyond its scope, but I just want to invite you to play with it. Recognising that what you feel in your body may not be yours, paves the way for letting go of any solid energy that might be limiting you. For some people, this piece of information is world-shifting and comes as a huge relief, while also deepening their understanding of what a gift their body is.

Try this: For any pain you experience in the next three days, question, "Body, who does this belong to?" You're not looking for conclusive answers. Just being open to the notion that what you're experiencing may not be yours and being willing to let anything go that doesn't belong to you, is a wonderful start. Your body is such a gift. Be with your body with total presence and with zero judgment. Take care of it. Get to know it better and enjoy breathing life back into your natural connection.

— The writer is the bestselling author of many self-help books

BACK WITH THE BARMAN

ONCE SEEN AS TOO COMPLEX A SPIRIT TO BE USED IN COCKTAILS, GIN HAS GOT A NEW LEASE OF LIFE, SAYS KAVIR ADVANI

Of all the major spirits, gin gets the least amount of attention when it comes to standing on its own. There are different ways to enjoy whisky, women love their vodka, tequila too has got its time in the sun. But the world of gin is just so much more than cool, cutting juniper and you owe it to your taste buds to do some exploring.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a sort of ‘gin renaissance’ across the UK, US and parts of Europe, with especially the modern variant gaining popularity. As is often the case, India soon picks up and follows these trends, especially in metros such as Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru. This is clear not just in the growing popularity of gin in major cities but also in the availability of a much wider selection of the spirit due to the influx of newer brands in the market.

Today, the variety of modern gins available in India has successfully moved ahead from the earlier juniper-heavy strong taste to deeper and more engaging aromas and flavours and more importantly managed to shrug off the perception of being a colonial old-age drink. This in turn has led to these modern gins being received with enthusiasm even among the well-travelled younger audience.

The other significant cog in the “gin Renaissance” has been the role played by mixologists and bartenders across the world. The history of gin is closely tied to cocktails as at one point it was the preferred spirit for them. However, with the advent and popularity of vodka, it was seen as too complex a spirit to work with and a majority of the bartending community began to migrate away from it. That trend began to change around a decade ago, partly due to the development of newer, more modern styles of gin and also largely due to the bartending community that began to





embrace the complexity of gin-based concoctions once again.

A part of this is also due to the evolving palette of the consumer. Today's consumer has an increasingly sophisticated palate — one who is keen to engage with brands and seeks information to educate oneself across spirit categories. These are nuanced consumers looking for authenticity and provenance in what they are consuming and are genuinely interested in knowing more about the heritage and craft that goes into their personal choice of brands.

As a result of these changing dynamics among consumers, most bars and restaurants today are looking for differentiation in their offerings and, therefore, investing heavily in developing unique experiences for their clientele through their drinks and cocktail menus. This in turn means more choice for the consumers.

PREMIUMISATION: As seen in the overall drinks space, the consumers are becoming more inclined towards better quality, even if it requires a greater spend. Be it the influx of super premium gin brands in the country, or the demand for quality tonic water that does justice to the premium spirits being consumed, the increasingly discerning audience is choosing quality over spend. In fact, this is why brands get motivated to cater to the Indian audience, even if today it is only to a small percentage in a predominantly brown spirit market.

PROVENANCE: Consumers today are keen to engage with brands, seeking information on the provenance and craft involved in the process of making gin. This is evidenced today when consumers, whether buying a bottle or consuming a drink in a restaurant, are inquisitive about the flavour or aroma of the liquid and conscious of the brand being served in their cocktail, instead of going ahead with a familiar choice. Caorunn, for instance, gets a lot of attention due to its locally foraged botanicals such as coul blush apple, rowan berries and heather. These are easy to pick up in the hand-crafted gin, which gives it an extremely smooth and fresh flavour profile.

COMPLEXITY: We are also noticing a trend of bars engaging foreign mixologists or spending time and effort in training their bar staff to present complex cocktails and be aware of the liquid and botanicals that go into their drinks. This is great as it, in turn, enhances the experience of the end consumer as well as increases the recall value of both the bar as well as the liquid consumed.

EXPERIMENTATION: Experimenting with cocktails, infusing them with unique ingredients is another hot trend. These days, mixologists understand their ingredients well enough to come up with interesting and daring concepts and many of them become immensely popular as signature offering at their bars. There are some fantastic cocktails with many unusual ingredients, such as coriander leaves, *jamun*, spinach and more on offer. As they say, every sip is a discovery.

— The author is advisor of a global drinks business

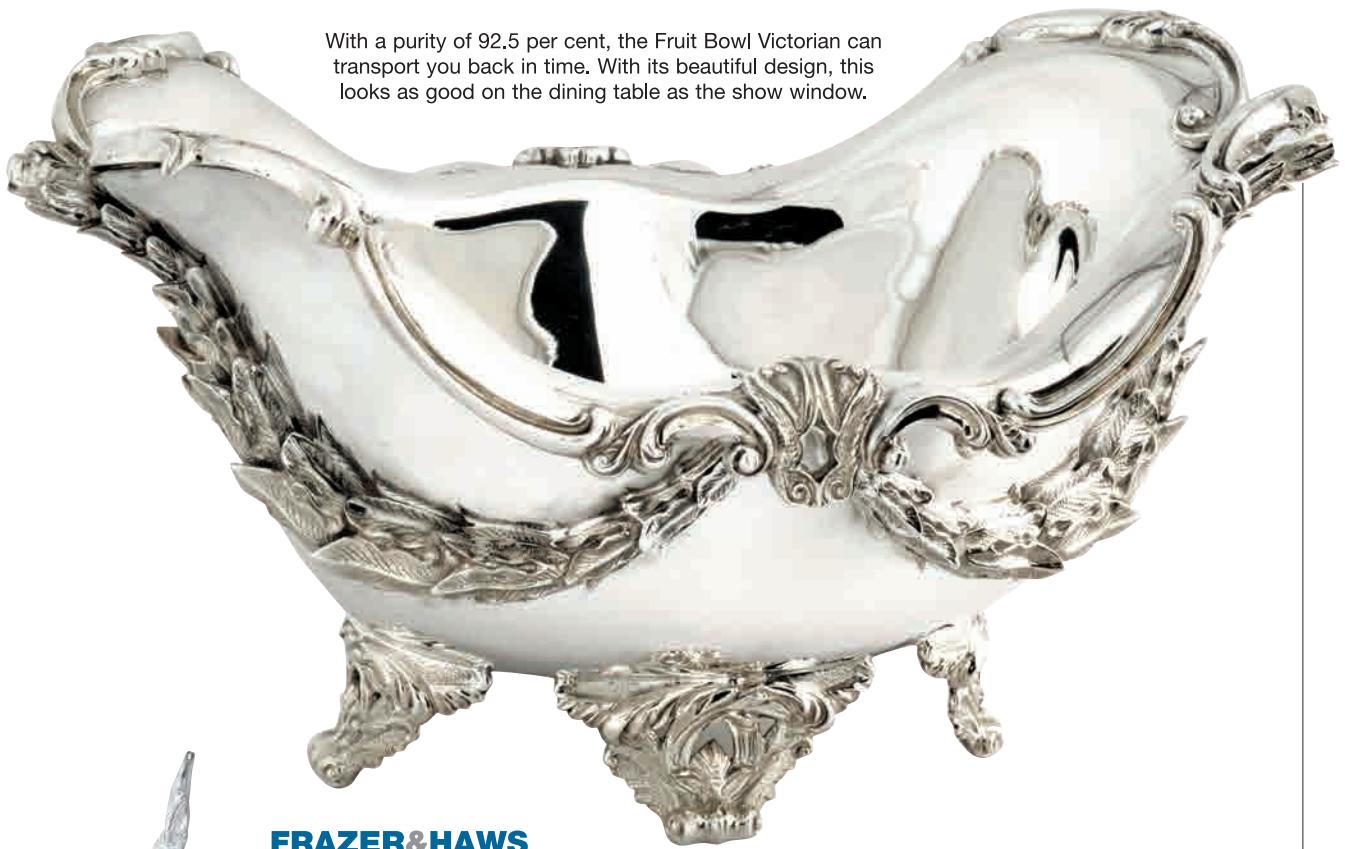
BOWLED OVER



FABINDIA

The noodle bowl with chopsticks is a part of the Aadhan, a studio pottery range, which uses lead free glazes and kiln-fired by traditional clay. These are produced by artisans in small batches, making each piece unique.

SILVER, CERAMIC AND WOOD — THE EVERYDAY ITEM IS GETTING A MAKEOVER. WHETHER IT IS FOR SERVING OR FOR DECORATION, BOWLS CAN DO DOUBLE DUTY AS CONVERSATION STARTERS WHILE HOLDING YOUR COMFORT MEALS



FRAZER&HAWS



Evoke a lush garden on your table with this classic serving bowl, decorated with Chintz-inspired motifs of floral blossoms, birds, fruits and butterflies.

GOODEARTH

**NISHAAT SALAD BOWL
(SET OF 4)**

A set of four salad bowls decorated with floral Chintz motifs on the interior, bringing the grandeur of Kashmir's Mughal Gardens to your table.



BEST FOOT FORWARD

THERE ARE SHOES AND THEN THERE ARE *THE* SHOES.
IT IS THE LATTER THAT HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO BE THE CYNOSURE OF ALL EYES
BECAUSE THEY ARE QUIRKY, FUN, UNUSUAL OR MAY BE ALL OF THOSE.
TAKE A LOOK AT SOME WHICH MAKE FOR CONVERSATION STARTERS



BARESKIN: This striking footwear for men and women has diverse, smart and quirky animal motifs, skull and camouflage prints. The lioness red two tone full velvet women slippers has the animal's head woven in gold which gets highlighted against the dark background and makes for slippers that are regal in appearance.

Price: ₹2,549



ESCARO ROYALE: Let's get checked. While one might have seen checks on clothes, on shoes, they make for an unusual design that stands out. The Corleone hand-painted check burgundy brogues are premium, handcrafted shoes that make use of curated designs. **Price:** on request

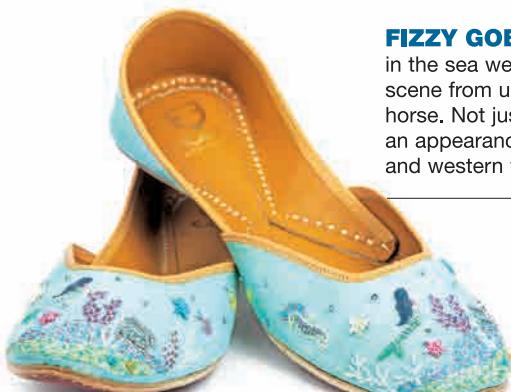


VANS: Bling it on with brocade shoes. The satin brocade ornately decorates the slip-ons. The prints are feminine and the outsoles monochromatic in flat black and shimmering gold. The embellished material makes it fit to be worn at a party or for a night out.

Priced: ₹3,999

NEEMAN: On first look, these blue woollen joggers from the brand might look ordinary. But slip your feet inside and the assumption would disappear quickly. Designed using natural and renewable Merino wool, castor bean oil, recycled rubber and other eco-friendly material, these are anything but ordinary. Don't think that since these shoes are made of wool, they can't be worn during summers, as they are fit for extreme weather. Moreover these are sock-free while at the same time being odour resistant and machine-washable.

Price: ₹6,800



FIZZY GOBLET: One gets the feeling of floating in the sea wearing these *juttis* as it replicates a scene from underwater down to details like a sea horse. Not just marine wildlife, sea plants too make an appearance that are appropriate for both Indian and western wear. **Price:** on request



More than **SIX** yards





IF THERE WAS EVER A SURVEY ABOUT THE SEXIEST GARMENT THAT THE INDIAN WOMAN WEARS, THE SARI WOULD BEAT EACH AND EVERY ITEM OF CLOTHING HANDS DOWN. THE SARI IS A METAPHOR OF HISTORY; ITS SEAMLESS AND UNSTITCHED CHARACTER MAKES IT MOULDABLE FOR EVERY BODY TYPE. IT IS ONE OF THE FEW ENSEMBLES THAT HAS WITHSTOOD THE TEST OF TIME, TIDE, TRENDS AND HAS HELD WOMEN'S UNDAUNTED INTEREST FOR DECADES. IN ITS MODERN VERSION, IT CAN BE PAIRED WITH A JACKET, WORN A NOTCH HIGHER, TEAMED WITH JEANS OR WORN WITH A T-SHIRT. IT IS THIS MULTI-IDENTITY THAT THE FASHION WEEK PAID A TRIBUTE TO AT ITS GRAND FINALE



ROHIT BAL: Floral and leafy gold on a nighty black makes for an opulent combination. The interspersing of large and small prints is an interesting detail that the designer has added.

TARUN TAHILIANI: Cinched at the waist, this sari gown reminds one of the Grecian drapes but at the same time, seems to take inspiration from the way the garment was worn in India in ancient times. Accessorised with *maang tikas*, the look is classic vintage.





WENDELL RODRICKS: Trust the designer to make the temperatures skyrocket with the garment. The pre-stitched sari gown is an absolutely contemporary take on the drape especially when worn with sandals that give the impression of gladiators.



ANITA DONGRE: Known for working with traditional threads, the designer has created a sari that is embroidered with floral patterns. Black, beige and pale gold make for a chic combination.

ROHIT GANDHI + RAHUL KHANNA:

KHANNA: Tassles, bling and pale colours work their wonder on the drape. This one is elevated by several elements including the sheer fabric used.

**ANAMIKA KHANNA:**

A classic black and white combination where the sari takes on tribal designs. The prints are reminiscent of sketches that are the leitmotif of tribal art as is the jewellery.



ANAVILA MISRA: The designer is known for her mastery over the garment and makes a statement with her simple and sober creation. The sari is worn not the way it is draped on the ramp but rather in a manner of everyday use.



RAW MANGO: After having given a new lease of life to Chanderi, Sanjay Garg reinterprets the drape by working with stripes and monochromes. The most striking element here is the pairing of the sari with jackets of varying lengths.



GAURAV GUPTA: The designer's statement look from gowns with its twirls and whirls is used in this pre-stitched sari. The ombre of green in the garment and in that of shoes adds the blobs of colour in this otherwise subtle affair.



PAYAL KHANDWALA: The designer creates a garment which is draped traditionally yet has the sheath-like appearance that contemporises it. The Chinese collar blouse adds a twist to the tale.



BODICE: Head out for a jog — in a sari. Constructed like a pair of trousers with two separate legs, the white piping runs the entire length including the sleeves and gives the impression of a jogging suit. The sneakers complete the sporty look.

ANAVILA MISRA: The black and metallic grey give the creation a futuristic tone. The sheer pallu, shimmering skirt and the printed blouse all add up for a look that is ideal for the sci fi nerd.



RIMZIM DADU: The fuchsia adds a strong dash of colour. The pallu has the metallic vibe of steel which makes the garment the cynosure of eyes. The off-shoulder blouse and purse in the same colour add to the detailing.



PANKAJ AND NIDHI: Black and metallic grey draped in a traditional fashion with some blobs of pink are what the designers have on offer. The garment has different elements in its skirt, *pallu* and the pleats which set it apart from the regular saris.



AKARO: A combination of metallic gold and silver in sheer where the garment has taken on an appearance which is almost plastic-like. This makes for a talking point as do the sleeves which are longer than the arms.

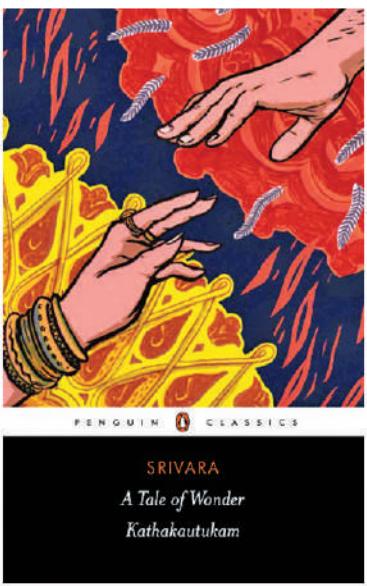
TANIRA SETHI: The black and lame gold pairing finds favour even without too much of detailing. With just a hint of gold on black and vice versa, this one can make waves wherever you wear it.



ALPANA NEERAJ: Constructed like a gown, this pre-stitched sari draws elements from both. While the *pallu* takes on the appearance of a fan, the skirt with its sheer element has detailing in self colours.

IF YOU ARE YET TO DECIDE YOUR TITLE LIST,
HERE ARE SOME BOOKS TO CONSIDER FROM THIS MONTH'S RELEASE

reader's block

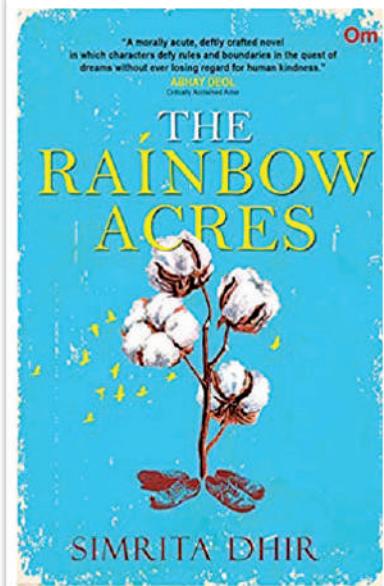
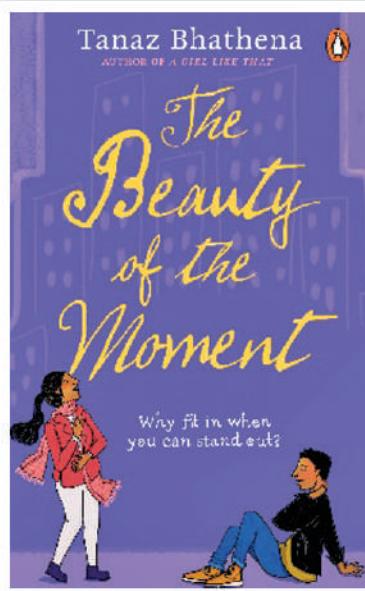


A TALE OF WONDER :

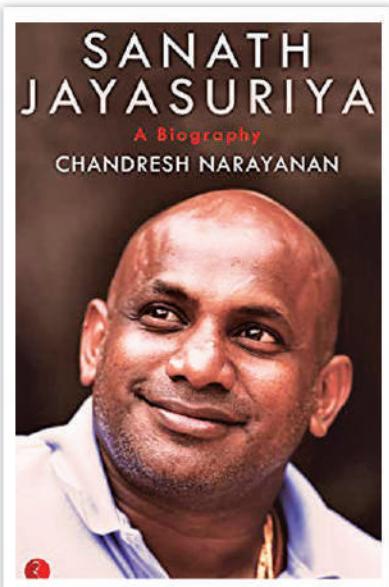
KATHAKAUTUKAM: **Translator:** AND Haksar — An example of cross-cultural harmony from medieval Kashmir. A Biblical and Koranic story in medieval Persian reaches Kashmir and is transformed there into a Sanskrit epic poem, with India's mythic overtones—an attestation to this country's rich syncretic and multicultural past.

THE BEAUTY OF MOMENT:

Author: Tanaz Bhathena — Susan is sharp and strives to meet her parents' expectations. Malcolm is the bad boy who started raising hell at 15, after his mom died of cancer. Susan hasn't told anyone, but she wants to be an artist. Malcolm doesn't know what he wants — until he meets her. Love is messy and families are messier.



THE RAINBOW ACRES: **Author:** Simrita Dhir — It spans continents and centuries to take the reader on a historic journey from a village in Punjab with its rustic farmers, who travel to California, the new land of promise with its huge tracts of land, rivers and the discovery of gold in 1849. A vivid, lucidly told tale that takes the reader on a roller coaster ride of adventure.

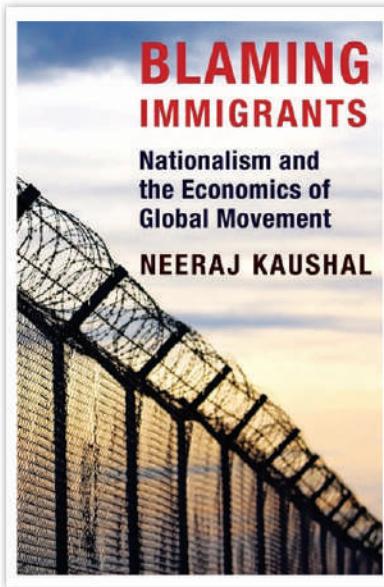


SANATH JAYASURIYA: A BIOGRAPHY:

Author: Chandresh Narayanan — Very rarely in history does one man shape the sporting fortunes of a nation. Sanath Jayasuriya quite clearly achieved that with just his forearms. For a nation yearning to break into the big league, it required just the unorthodoxy of Sanath to break away from the past. When lights shone brightly over Sri Lanka at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium in the 1996 Cricket World Cup, it was all down to the brilliance of this young man from Matara.

BLAMING IMMIGRANTS:

Author: Neeraj Kaushal — Anti-immigration and ultranationalistic politics are rising in Europe, the United States, and countries across Asia and Africa. What is causing this nativist fervour? Are immigrants the cause or merely a common scapegoat? The author, an economist investigates the rising anxiety in host countries and tests common complaints against immigration.



GIVE YOURSELF AWAY



VOLUNTEERING IS A WAY OF LEARNING TO MAKE OUR LIVES INTO A PROCESS OF GIVING WITHOUT ANY EXPECTATION IN RETURN

The whole process of yoga is just to give yourself. When I say this, people may not know how to simply do that. They need some kind of means to give themselves. Whatever you may provide in your life to anybody, it may be money, food, or something else, all the things that you actually give do not belong to you, including your body because you gathered it from this earth. When you go, you have to return it. You cannot take one cell of this body along with you.

So whatever you have today with you is something that you have borrowed from this planet. It is not really yours. You can use it, enjoy it, but you really cannot own it. You believe you own your house, clothes, children, husband, wife and even people. But in reality, you don't own anything. They are here, you can enjoy them, you can use them but when you go, you have to leave all of it behind. So nothing really belongs to you. So how can you give something that does not belong to you?

So, there is really no providing. I take and give you something that belongs to somebody else. There is no value to this kind of providing. But you need a means to do it. Fundamentally, the only thing you can give is yourself. But you do not know how to do that simply. So you do it through your money, food or something else. You are using a thing as a means to give, you are using activity as a means to give yourself. Whatever you provide, the only thing you can really give is yourself. If you are not aware of this, then it becomes a great problem.

If you don't will to give yourself, it becomes a very painful process. When you understand it as only giving things,



SADHGURU
Isha Foundation



IF YOU DON'T WILL TO GIVE YOURSELF, IT BECOMES A VERY PAINFUL PROCESS. WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND IT AS ONLY GIVING THINGS, THEN NATURALLY A FEAR WILL COME INTO YOU. 'IF I GIVE AWAY EVERYTHING, WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME?' PEOPLE HAVE BECOME STINGY AND MISERLY WITH THEIR LOVE AND THEIR JOY, SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY CAN ONLY THINK IN TERMS OF GIVING THINGS. BECAUSE OF THIS ECONOMY, SLOWLY, WE HAVE BECOME LESS LOVING, LESS JOYOUS AND LESS PEACEFUL

then naturally fear will come into you. "If I give away everything, what will happen to me?" People have become stingy and miserly with their love and their joy, simply because they can only think in terms of giving things. Because of this economy, slowly, we have become less loving, less joyous and less peaceful.

You can give only yourself through whatever you do. But unless there is activity, people don't know how to give themselves. They need action to volunteer themselves to do something. So providing is a tremendous possibility in the direction of giving yourself. You can really offer yourself through your work.

Normally, whatever little work we have to do, we always calculate. "How much should I do? What will I get out of this?" In these calculations, all the beauty of deed is gone. In these calculations, the very process of life has become ugly. Most of the things that you are doing in your life are things that you have chosen to do actually. Whether it is your work, or your marriage, or your family, or anything else, you started all these willingly because you wanted them in your life. But once you started, you forgot why you started this, and now we have involved unwillingly which has made it a painful process.

So volunteering is a way of learning to make our lives into a process of giving without any expectation in return. Volunteer means one who is willing. Not just to do this or that which he or she chooses but simply willing to do everything. No spiritual process will happen to any human being unless he is willing.

—Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author

We often come across people suffering from a condition called frozen shoulder or adhesive capsulitis. In this, the soft tissue capsule around the shoulder joint becomes inflamed. It develops adhesions or bands of scar tissue that make it tighten and shrink. This causes stiffness, pain and limits shoulder movements.

Frozen shoulder develops slowly in three stages. In the first stage, it is stiff, movements are limited and painful. In the second 'frozen' stage, there may be less pain but the shoulder is stiffer and movement more difficult. In the third 'thawing' phase, the range of movement begins to improve on its own but this process can take one to three years, depending on the severity.

Its cause is unknown but this condition often develops in those who have had a shoulder injury, surgery and diabetes. Also at risk are those with cardiac and thyroid problems. It is more prevalent in the 40-60 age group and more so among women.

Usually in this, the shoulder is stiff and the movement restricted. Sometimes it is not possible to lift the arms higher than horizontal. Shoulder rotation can be difficult. Gentle stretching exercises are usually the key to alleviating this condition along with any pain-relief treatment that doctors may prescribe.



BHARAT thakur
is a yoga guru and
founder of Artistic
Yoga

WHILE THE CAUSE FOR A FROZEN SHOULDER IS UNKNOWN, THIS CONDITION OFTEN DEVELOPS IN THOSE WHO HAVE HAD A SHOULDER INJURY, SURGERY AND DIABETES

Yoga has hundreds of *asanas* (postures) and variations that are suitable and can be adapted to the individual's need. There are *asanas* like *Uthitta lolasana*, where the arms hang down and gently swing like a pendulum, that help loosen shoulders and arms. *Asanas* like *Viprit ardha naukasana* (arm and leg stretch) help to restore motion to shoulders. If the movement is too painful or not possible, there are standing *asanas* like *Virbhadrásana* (warrior) where the hands can simply rest on the hips. *Asanas* like *Dwikonasana* stretch the shoulders backwards to the extent possible. All postures can be modified and will help blood circulation and the other systems of the body to work at optimum.

Yoga also helps in other important ways. Living with pain, stiffness and a limited range of movement for a prolonged time, can be stressful, anxiety-inducing and depressing. Relaxation practices like *Shavasana* and *Yoga nidra* (yogic sleep) at the end of *asana* or at any time, help to relax the body and mind. The breath links directly to the nervous system and *pranayama*, (yogic breathing techniques), will help to soothe nerves, reduce stress as well as improve breathing, lung capacity and increase oxygen levels in the body.

It is a slow process and patience, persistence and regular practice are needed. The postures need to be done very slowly in sync with the breath and with awareness of what is happening in the body. Moreover, each exercise has to be done only to the extent that it is possible where it stretches enough to improve movement but does not overstretch and result in pain.



STIFF NO MORE

**TADASANA**

- Stand with your feet slightly apart, hands interlocked and resting on head
- Inhale as you turn palms out and slowly stretch arms above head and rise up on toes, balancing weight equally on both feet
- Hold for 10 seconds or for as long as you are comfortable while breathing normally
- Breathe in, exhale as you come down to start position
- Repeat three to five times

BENEFITS:

- Stretches the arms, shoulders and spine

MARJARIASANA-SARNAGAT MUDRA COMBINATION

- Come down on hands and knees with hands below shoulders, back straight
- Inhale. Exhale as you slowly stretch back on arms and shift hips back to rest on heels
- Put arms straight in front, forehead on ground
- Breathe normally two-three times



- Shift back to start position.
- Repeat cycle five times

BENEFITS:

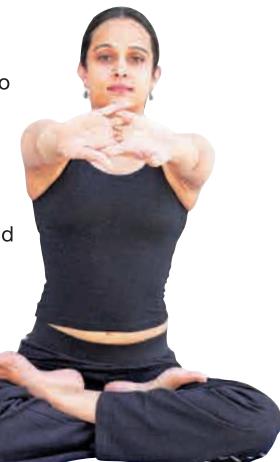
- Stretches and improves shoulder flexibility
- Stretches the upper body and back
- Energises and relaxes the upper body
- Improves blood flow to head and brain

**SHOULDER STRETCH**

- Sit in padmasana (lotus) or cross-legged, back straight
- Interlock fingers, palms turned outward
- Breathe in as you turn the palms out and slowly stretch both arms out in front of you
- Turn palms in and breathe out as you slowly bring hands back to the chest
- Repeat five times

BENEFITS:

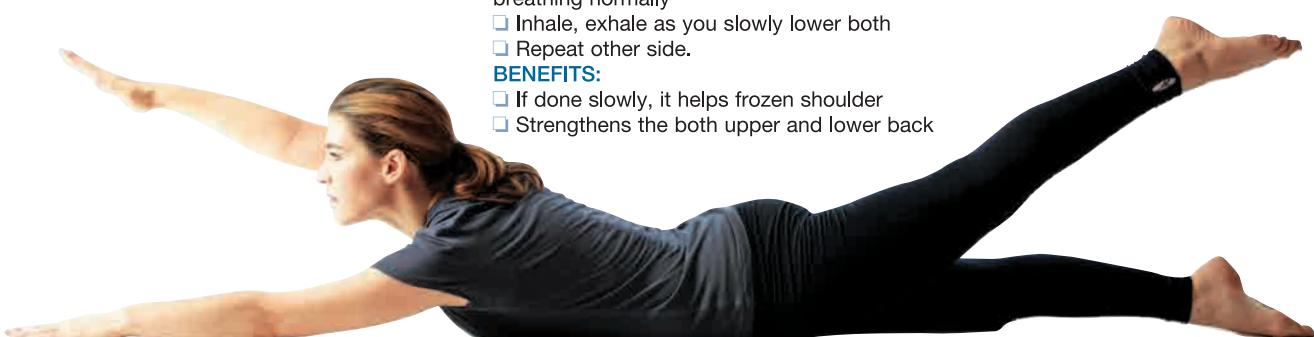
- Gently stretches the shoulders and arms
- Improves flexibility, strength and blood circulation to the arms and shoulders

**VIPRIT ARDHA NAUKASANA**

- Lie flat on your stomach with arms stretched out
- Inhale as you slowly raise your right leg and left arm at the same time. Shoulders are in line with the ear
- Hold 10-30 seconds or as long as comfortable while breathing normally
- Exhale, inhale as you slowly lower both
- Repeat other side.

BENEFITS:

- If done slowly, it helps frozen shoulder
- Strengthens the both upper and lower back





KUSHANmitra
Auto & tech expert



FROM A FINE STABLE

THE REVAMPED FORD ENDEAVOUR REMAINS THE BEST CAR IN ITS CLASS

There are often vehicles that surprise you with sales that belie their ability, and the Ford Endeavour has always been one of those cars. Because it is so darn good at what it says on the cover, the Endeavour remains one of the best off-road vehicles available in India. It is really not something that you should consider a 'Sports Utility Vehicle' but a car that is a full-

fledged off-roader. And Ford India just gave the car a minor update, adding a new grille among some other small things, but most importantly, the Endeavour gets a ₹30,000-50,000 price cut. Prices now begin at ₹28.19 lakh and go up to ₹32.97 lakh. In addition, the range now starts with a six-speed manual version of the 2.2-litre variant, and it is not available only in the titanium trim.

All well and good, but why, you would ask rather reasonably, would a good car not sell very well. There is the minor matter of the Toyota Fortuner, which in terms of almost everything is not as capable as the Ford but is built stronger than a Red Army tank from World War II and has a resale value that would make most other cars red with embarrassment. While I would consider the Innova to be a far more practical vehicle, the Fortuner has always exuded confidence and power. The white Fortuner in particular has been incredibly popular with politicians. In fact, one would argue that a white Fortuner is as essential a part of an Indian politician's wardrobe as a starched khadi *kurta*. And Ford, which did have first-mover advantage in the market if you remember, did miss a trick by delaying introduction of the new Endeavour, allowing Toyota to come in and steal the market.

But you know what? While driving over the sand of the Sam dunes outside Jaisalmer, we saw a couple of politicians also driving up and down the sand. And both those gentlemen and their retinue were travelling in Endeavours. One of them plainly stated that if you wanted to do this sort of stuff, only Endeavour can do that. Well, you can do similar things in much more expensive cars like the Land Rover Discovery and Mercedes-Benz G-Wagen, but you get the point, right?

This isn't the first time I have been on the soft, fine sand of the Sam sand dunes. The last time I was in a (then) prototype of the Mahindra Thar and even today, the dunes are full of Mahindra 540s and Thars with local drivers driving like utter maniacs and tourists, without a care of personal preservation, standing at the back. Sure, it looks fun, but somehow nowadays I just see a tragedy waiting to happen with no safety gear. These are light, four-wheeled vehicles



DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITY

LENGTH: 4,903MM

WIDTH: 1,869MM

HEIGHT: 1,837MM

WHEEL BASE: 2,850 MM

FRONT TREAD: 1,560MM

REAR TREAD: 1,564 MM

KERB WEIGHT: 2,394 KG

TYRE SIZE: 265/60R18

TYRE TYPE: TUBELESS ALLOY

WHEEL SIZE: 18 INCH

SEATING CAPACITY: 7

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

ENGINE TYPE:

TDCI DIESEL ENGINE

ARAI MILEAGE: 11.9 KMPL

FUEL TYPE: DIESEL

ENGINE(CC): 3198

MAX POWER:

197BHP@3000RPM

MAX TORQUE:

470 NM@1750-2500 RPM

SEATING: 7

ENGINE DESCRIPTION:

**3.2 LITRES 197BHP
DIESEL ENGINE**

TRANSMISSION TYPE

AUTOMATIC

NO. OF CYLINDER: 5

VALVES PER CYLINDER: 4

VALVE CONFIGURATION: DOHC

FUEL SUPPLY SYSTEM: TDCI

BORE X STROKE: NO

COMPRESSION RATIO: NO

TURBO CHARGER: NO

SUPER CHARGE: NO

GEAR BOX: 6 SPEED

DRIVE TYPE: 4WD

OVERDRIVE: NO

SYNCHRONISERS: NO

CLUTCH TYPE: NO

unencumbered by the weight of creature comforts and ride over the sand with a sense of purpose. And they are fun to drive over the sand because you can virtually do anything.

The Ford Endeavour on the other hand is a heavy vehicle, with full smartphone connectivity, three-zone air-conditioning as well as three rows of comfortable seats which include lumbar and side support. Really, it should not have been doing what we were doing with the car. Sure, we had reduced the tyre pressure to give the Endeavour's rubber a wider contact patch, but other than that and switching the car's terrain response system to 'sand' mode, there were no modifications to the car. Nothing, nada.

We drove over the dunes quite comfortably, and the one time I did get stuck, it was my fault in not giving the Endeavour enough gas at that moment. The one thing about driving on sand or other non-road surfaces such as ice or gravel is that you often have to do things that might appear to be counter-intuitive. While I'm really not making excuses for my driving abilities, I cannot praise the car enough. Think about it, this is an almost three-tonne car driving on a surface that you would assume something so heavy would need tracks like a tank.

It is not perfect. I do not like the incredibly small speedometer and instrument cluster, a vehicle's speedometer should at least reflect its size and this one is tiny. While you can get a bunch of information on the cluster, you have to choose between the rev counter and the trip meter.

But these were minor irritants at the time and living with them though could be an issue. I have gone off-roading in the Endeavour in the past as well and then, like now, it impressed me with its sheer ability. If I was a politician who wanted to go deep into the countryside on tracks rather than on the road, I know what I would buy.



SIXTY YEARS ON... WHAT'S CHANGED?



ACTRESS NEHA SARGAM, WHO PLAYS ANARKALI IN DIRECTOR FEROZ ABBAS KHAN'S *MUGHAL-E-AZAM*, TELLS CHAHAK MITTAL THAT WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS RETALIATED, NO MATTER THE END RESULT OR THE ERA THAT THEY COME FROM



When one talks of grandeur of epic proportions in the Hindi film industry, the name *Mughal-E-Azam* cannot fail to make an appearance. The 1960 film chronicling the love story of Prince Salim and a court dancer, Anarkali, is remembered for the seemingly-real *sheesh mahal* (palace of mirrors), the offscreen romance which had turned sour between the lead pair of Dilip Kumar and Madhubala, iconic dialogues and more. The film's commentary on the reality of a society ridden with taboos and hierarchical differences continues to cast a spell and fascinate the current audience even today.

Director Feroz Abbas Khan adapted it to stage and the Broadway-style musical has got such a rousing response that it has made a comeback. Actress Neha Sargam, who essays the role of Anarkali says, "The script was modified according to the current context, especially in terms of women and personal relationships."

She believes that every era has had its own share of challenges and revelations. "There have been different set of challenges for both men and women in each era. However, there are certain things which continue to be common and have only evolved. For instance, even though the restrictions on women have been abundant, yet they have always tried to get up and create their own space, irrespective of the era. In the play, driven by social norms of gender and hierarchy, even though Anarkali looks like the victim, she does try in every possible way to take a stand. She stands up for herself in difficult times. It doesn't matter whether she wins or not. In a way, she is a powerful woman," she says.

This Anarkali won't let her self-esteem be destroyed or taken for granted. This is the way, Neha believes, Anarkali's character can connect with today's and every generation's woman who has always tried to retaliate, no matter the consequences or end result. "Our director has

brought it out with a feminist approach, keeping in mind the woman of today's era, who is ever-evolving," says she.

The actress describes one of the scenes in the film to highlight the difference — where Salim tightly slaps Anarkali — "The scene was very regressive and according to the norms of the time, nobody questioned it. However, today, it means a lot. In the film, Dilip Kumar had actually slapped Madhubala hard. In the play, the script has been modified and now Salim doesn't slap her, rather just pushes her away." She says that such small gestures often influence the audience in a huge way which sometimes go unnoticed.

Talking about present relationships and parental acceptance, she says there is still a large population who might not happily accept the person their daughter or son brings home. She says, "The story highly resonates with the current youth, who still, to some extent, struggle to get their parents' consents before marrying someone of their choice. Be it any criteria — caste, class or religious differences, homosexuality — parents do take these elements into account before giving their approval. They may have progressed but are not completely over it."

She laughs and says that to show the audience what should have been done, one can't change the plot. After all, "of course, Akbar won't suddenly accept Anarkali instead of bricking her up in a wall. The story will always be the same."

The actress, who has been a part of daily soaps since a long time now, says she feels fortunate to have bagged the role of Anarkali, since this is the first time she is doing theatre. Narrating the story, she says, "I had received a mail from Mukesh Chhabra Casting Company in June, last year. However, it somehow landed in the spam. Later, I received calls from the company for the same. They told me that they were trying to contact me since a long time as they were looking for a singer as well as an actor. So, in the play, I am singing, dancing and acting live. Initially, I was confused since I had never been a part of theatre before and always had stage fright."

However, it turned out to be a great learning experience for her as she also had to practise and learn Urdu to rehearse the play's dialogues.

She tells us that even though a play's script has to be followed in a certain way, which is challenging, "the director wanted us to express ourselves and our characters in our own way. I should react the way I would but with a touch of Anarkali's style."

Around 700 costumes were factored by designer Manish Malhotra for the play's crew of 200-300 people. The play, she tells us, was not going to come back to the city after its first two seasons in September 2017 and February 2018, but is now back on popular demand. Starting from April 6, the play would mark its 175th show.

Food for the soul

MARIA GORETTI REFLECTS HOW EVEN THOUGH HER CHILDHOOD WAS AWAY FROM THE METHODS AND HACKS OF KITCHEN, IT LATER BECAME ONE OF HER BIGGEST STRENGTHS OVER TIME. FOOD NOT JUST BECAME SOMETHING THAT COULD BE CONSUMED, BUT WHICH COULD MAKE PEOPLE SMILE

In my past life, I must have been born in a country that had no food, because frankly, I am eternally hungry and my near and dear ones will vouch for that. My paternal grandmother, Agnes, was a brilliant cook and I can still remember the aromas wafting in from her kitchen; her picking mushrooms from the garden during the rains to make soup and pâté. My maternal grandmother, Rosemary, was a darling in the kitchen, and her fish curry is something that I would love to have just once more. Unfortunately, I never learnt any cooking from either of them. I was interested only in eating.

My love affair with food started about eight years ago, when I was pregnant with Zene, and didn't have much to do. Ergo, I spent time watching travel and food shows on TV, and started writing down recipes to try them out. Fortunately, I was travelling with Arshad for the shooting of a film and was living at the beautiful St. James Apartments. I had plenty of time to saunter through the farmer's market and pick and choose fresh produce. I would cook for the cast and crew who came over often.



Initially, I wasn't quite sure if they really loved the food or were just being nice, but soon, they began coming over often for a tasty meal. Today, my mother's food is what I actually want to learn. I love the food my mum, Joanna, makes. She is my recipe book and always a call away to tell me about my next step if I ever get stuck.

A few years down the line, if anyone had told me that I would one day put together a food book, I think I would have rolled on the floor laughing. I started my blog about five years ago. My friend Mini Mathur insisted that I watch the film *Julie & Julia* but just wouldn't tell me why. When I did, I suddenly knew my path. I was thrown into the thick of things — the kitchen, vegetable market, groceries, cooking — and to top it all, two very hungry children looking expectantly at me. So, I started taking baby steps into the kitchen.

Gradually, I started to get seduced by the aromas, textures and the possibilities that could conspire in this beautiful place I discovered in my own home — my kitchen. It was like meeting a stranger and becoming friends. I discovered the secrets of fire to vegetables, yeast



to flour, wine to meat, and the right amount of kneading, whipping and marination.

Jaya Misra, my friend, introduced me to blogging and insisted that I write about my experiences. She always read my pieces before I uploaded them. This whole process took off like being on a surfing board, and I was busy riding wave after wave. It was catharsis that I never thought I needed.

At one point, I needed to learn how to make bread, because my dad used to make it when we were kids and by the time I wanted to learn, he said he had forgotten how. So, I joined a one year part-time baking course at Sophia Polytechnic and under the tender hands of Shashi ma'am, I learnt more than I had bargained for. Baking taught me the art of patience, something that I still struggle with. She once caught me staring down at my bread and pointed out that if I kept staring at the dough, it would still not rise up in a second. I always think of her when I bake.

In 2011, I went off to the sleepy town, Woking, and spent 11 weeks at Tante Marie. With amazing teachers, I learnt about sweating onions, kneading puff pastry, cooking meat at just the right temperature to keep it pink in the middle, understanding how important it was to whip the egg whites till they had the right amount of stiff peaks for a meringue, how to debone a fish, how to cut chicken, clean the floors, wash the fridge, do the vessels and much more. I also travelled to Paris, Budapest, Austria, Ireland and sat for exams, and watched every play that was worth its salt on the weekends.

My life is a series of coincidences. After years of being part of ad-films, theatre, anchoring TV shows, travelling for work and being an MTV VJ, I was ready for a new chapter in my life. Food was just a side-effect of being a mother. Arshad, who was the chef in my kitchen, just took a back seat and sat and watched me, as I struggled my way into food heaven. He always encouraged me even when the food was really not up to the mark. He always said that it was fantastic and gave me advice for something new. And every time I made *kheema* or *paaya*, he would say, "It's lovely, but does not taste Muslim!" Well, I really want to learn cooking Mughlai and Kashmiri food one day. It's on my bucket list. And Arshad, who is 'world famous' within our circle of friends for his Biryani, bowed out

of my kitchen with a smile. I finally took over my kitchen.

Post two years of food blogging, I finally got enticed to do a book. I remember when the first offer came, I refused because I was too scared. When the second offer came, I had, by then, digested the fact that probably something is right. The third offer came when I went to Bhutan, the land of happiness. Though it did feel like a good idea, it made me nervous. Neither was I a chef nor a writer. I procrastinated for six months and decided that because I cook only for people whom I love, the book should be an apt reflection of that. I then started putting menus in place and designing my food according to the people I was cooking for. It was a tedious process writing down recipes and taking care of a teaspoon of this and a tablespoon of that. I never go by accurate measures when I cook for myself. But to give a recipe that worked, I had to.

I had jumped into the deep end of the pool and had to swim to the shallow. I could not think of a better photographer for this book other than my friend, Amit Ashar. He is someone who will always capture what no one else sees. I remember the first day of shoot when we were doing the Christmas menu. I brought the baked chicken out of the oven. It was hot, looked yummy, and Amit set up the shot, looked at me and said, "Do you have glycerine?" I asked, 'Why?' He explained that food stylists used glycerine to make the food look shiny and moist. I was aghast! Why would anyone do that to good food? I took the chicken, warmed up the gravy, poured it over the chicken and we shot the dish. This is how we did the entire book, what you see is what you will get. We never used anything artificial to enhance the look, nothing was over or undercooked to look good.

This book is me, with all my flavours and enthusiasm, cooked at temperatures that were sometimes too hot to handle and sometimes like a tropical day, with the freshest of ingredients and cooked with a whole lot of love. A very wise person once said, 'You are what you eat.' Well then, I want to eat a 'fit person' to be fit myself! But I am not a cannibal. So, I try and eat healthy and do my regular workout and yoga. And yes, I run. It's one of those things that makes me happy.

— Excerpts from *From My Kitchen to Yours*, published by Om Books International





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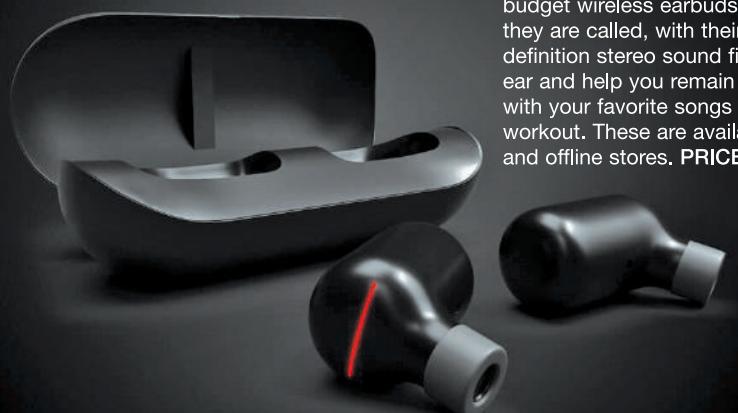
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IMPERFECTO PRESENTS KUTLE KHAN PROJECT LIVE:

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Where: Imperfecto, Logix, Noida Wave City Centre, Sector 32, Noida

Kutle Khan
PROJECT
PERFORMING LIVE



SNEAK PEEK



THE BANIYA PUNJABI SHOW:

While it is hard to compete with even civilian Punjabis and Baniyas for laughs, Gaurav Gupta and Gaurav Kapoor have elevated it to an art form. In a show like no other, two of the funniest comics in the country will take to stage with the sole intention of killing the audience softly. They may even throw in a roast or two. **When:** April 6

Where: Canvas Laugh Club, The People and Co., Ground Floor, Cyberhub, Gurgaon



CONNECTIONS: The annual International boutique performing arts festival brings outstanding artists and performances from around the world. The explosive Remi Panossian Jazz trio from France will perform on the first day. On the two following days, the Beijing Dance Academy, one of the premier dance institutes of the world, will perform at the festival. They are known to give an 'edge of the seat' experience. **When:** April 12-14 **Where:** Shri Ram Centre 4, Safdar Hashmi Marg, Mandi House, Delhi



KAUSHIKI CHAKRABORTY AND RAKESH CHAURASIA

LIVE: Rakesh Chaurasia, child prodigy and nephew of flute maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia incorporates the tradition of his renowned uncle while infusing his personal style. Kaushiki, 'the next big phenomenon in Hindustani music', will come together with the Manganiyars, whose music is described as folklore from Rajasthan. **When:** April 14 **Where:** Kamani Auditorium, Copernicus Marg, Janpath, Mandi House, Delhi

JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ PLAYS WITH WHITES AND BLACKS TO CONSTRUCT A LOOK THAT IS UBER STYLISH AND CHIC

Leather pants and a matching jacket with a white cropped top make the actress look cool and yet so hot. The ankle length boots raise the temperature a few notches further.

The denim pinafore teamed with a full sleeves, high neck white soft shirt make her look like a school girl. Her hair is scrunched up in a ponytail which further reinforces the image. A cute pink cap completes the picture.

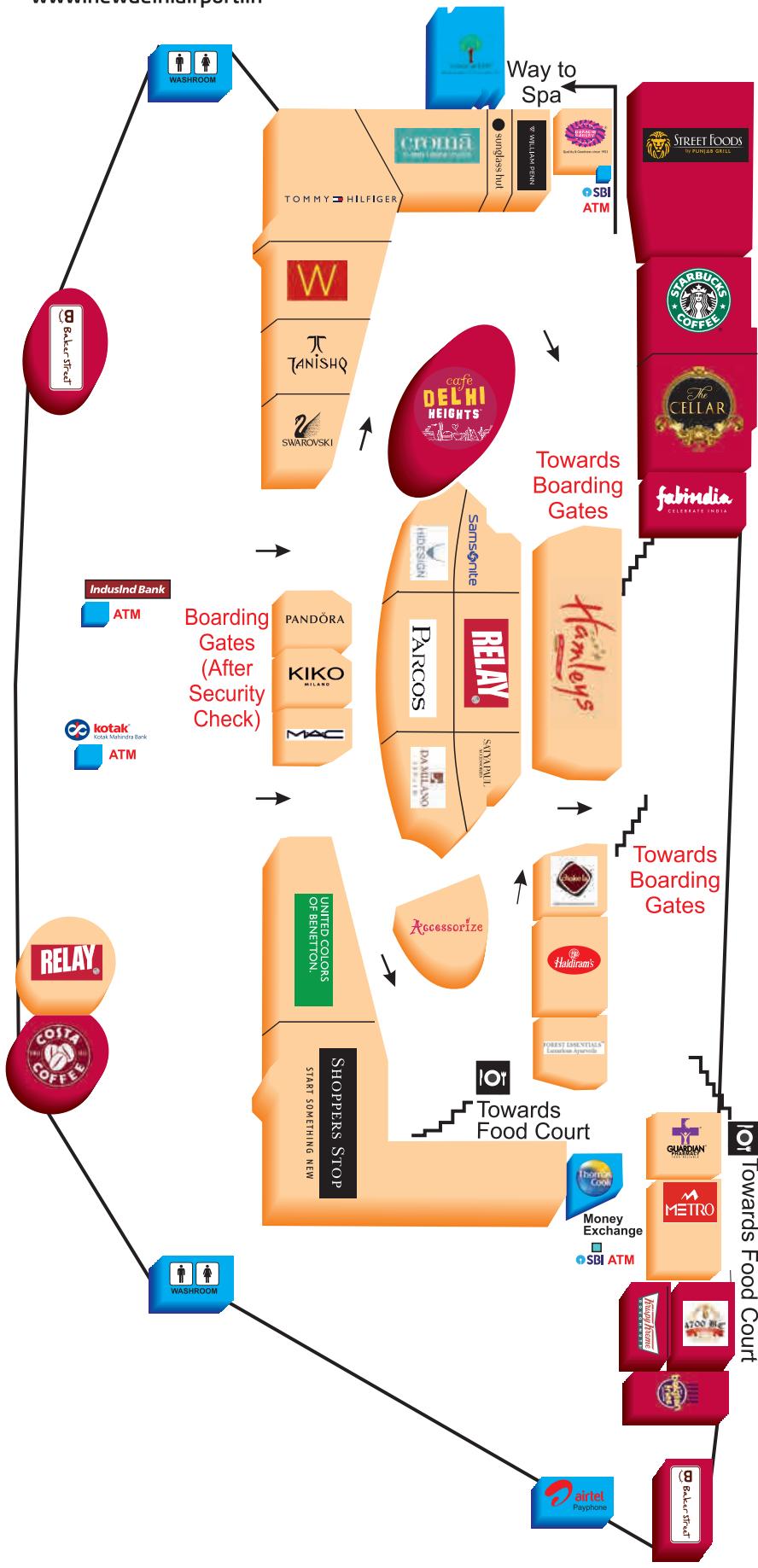
A busy printed t-shirt immediately draws attention. The black coat and light blue flared denims make for an arresting picture. The dark round shades complete the perfect look.

The black cropped top perfectly shows off her toned abs. Combined with an ivory jacket and the blue jeans, the entire look is casual yet chic.

An off-shoulder top with horizontal stripes is paired with a white slit skirt. The multicoloured buttons add an interesting detailing to the entire look as do the aviators.



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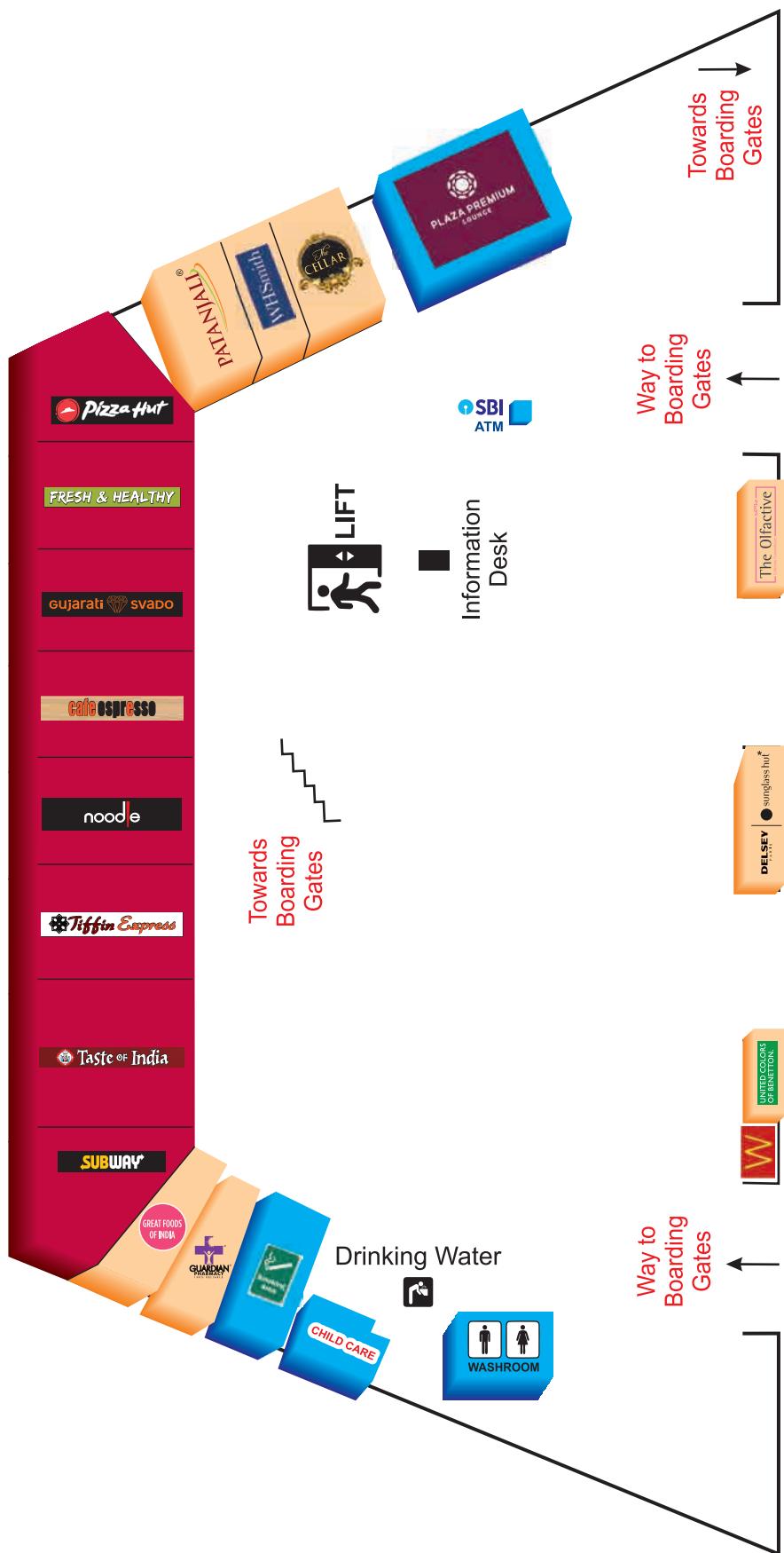


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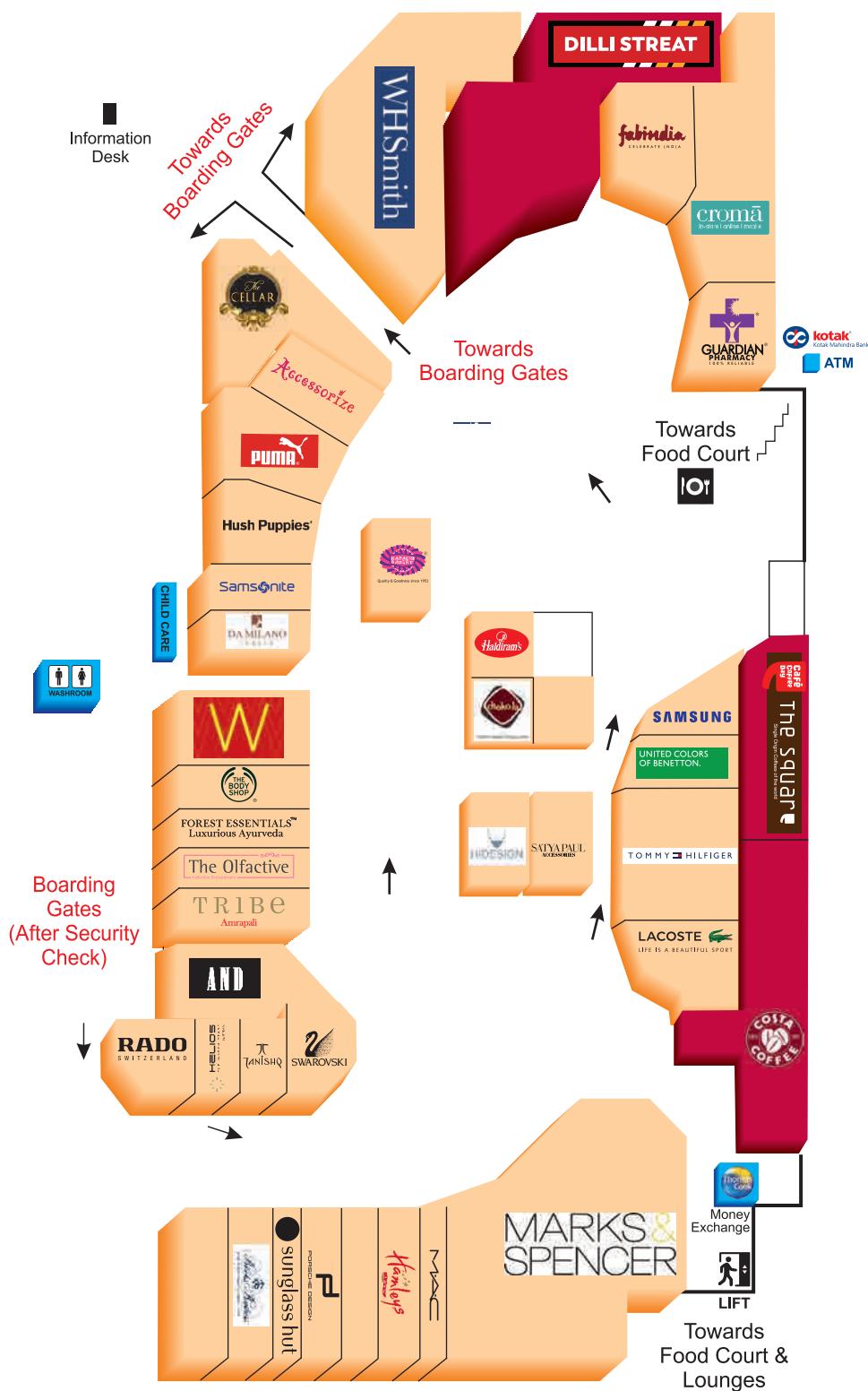
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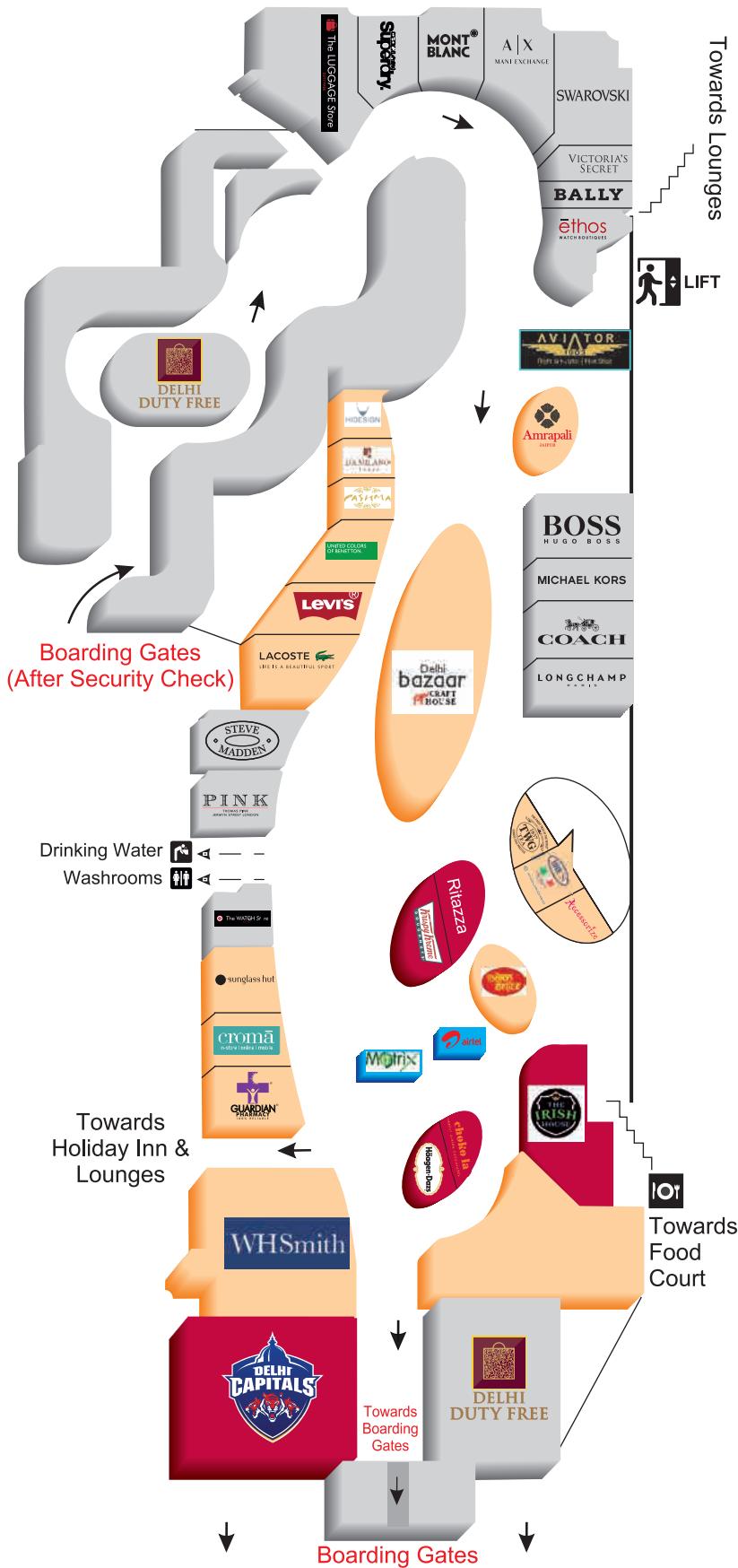
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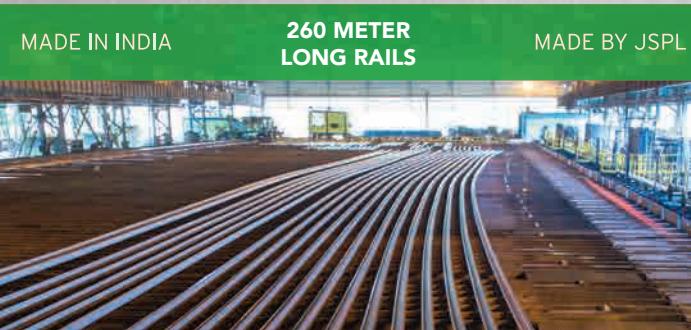
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