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MUMBAI

Sunday, July 19, 2020

LITERARY REVIEW

Kevin Kwan's latest novel is a snob's guide to privilege and he pulls it off with immense brio p4

WIDE ANGLE

The latest census showed a sharp rise in lion numbers, but it may be time to update the counting methods p6

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With children at home and parents wondering how to keep them occupied, the podverse comes to the rescue p7

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I saw a future where you frown at your digital device, and it could recognise your frustration: Rana el Kaliouby p8

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

COVER

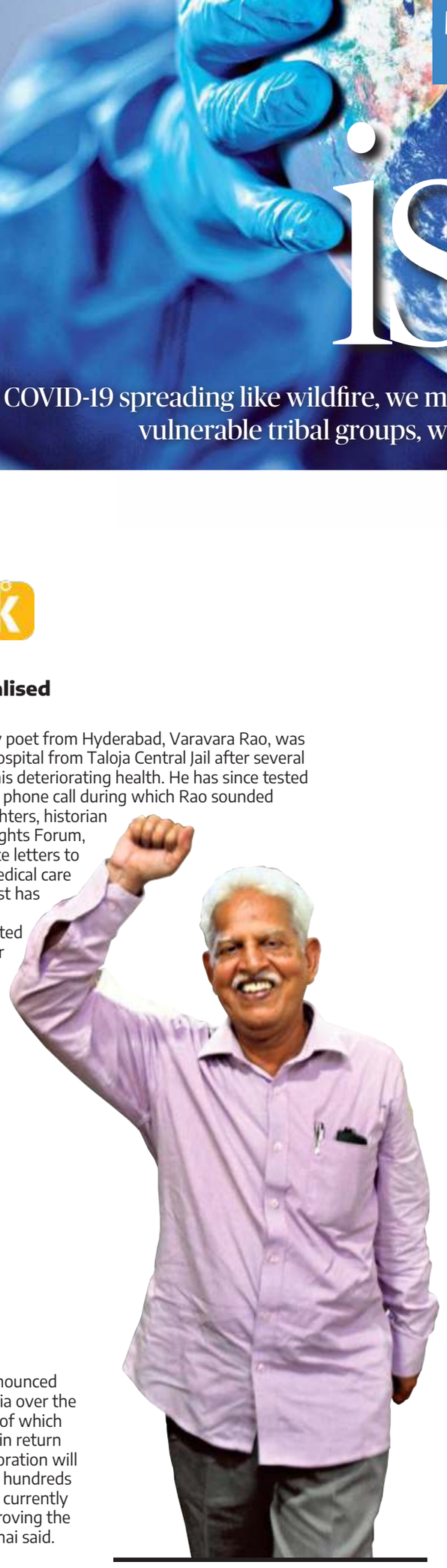
Threatened islands

With COVID-19 spreading like wildfire, we must take care history doesn't repeat itself in the Andaman Islands, home to four particularly vulnerable tribal groups, which were almost wiped out in the 19th century by "imported" diseases p3

last week

Varavara Rao hospitalised

The 81-year-old revolutionary poet from Hyderabad, Varavara Rao, was finally taken to Mumbai's JJ Hospital from Taloja Central Jail after several appeals to authorities about his deteriorating health. He has since tested positive for COVID-19. After a phone call during which Rao sounded incoherent, his wife and daughters, historian Romila Thapar, the Human Rights Forum, and several young poets wrote letters to the government asking for medical care for Rao. The poet-critic-activist has been in prison for two years without trial after being arrested for his alleged role in the Elgar Parishad case.



Google's $10 billion

Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced a $10 billion investment in India over the next seven years, almost half of which was put first into Reliance Jio in return for a 7.73% stake. "Our collaboration will focus on increasing access for hundreds of millions of users who don't currently own a smartphone while improving the mobile experience for all," Pichai said.

Mathemagic

Interest rode high on *Shakuntala Devi — The True Story of India's Math Genius*, an upcoming film on the late Shakuntala Devi, the 'human computer', whose role will be played by Vidya Balan. A trailer was released in which Balan says, "Maths has no rules. Only magic." The film tracks her life from childhood and will release on July 31 on Amazon Prime.

Gapping the bridge

Part of the newly built ₹263.7-crore Sattarghat Bridge, which crosses the Gandak River in Gopalganj, Bihar, reportedly collapsed when heavy rainfall caused the water level to rise, a month after it was inaugurated by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with much fanfare. Opposition leaders lashed out, although officials said the damage was only to an approach road located 2 km from the bridge.

Shot in the arm

U.S.-based Moderna Inc. is set to begin last-stage human trials for a COVID-19 vaccine, after results from initial studies showed the development of neutralising antibodies in volunteers. Phase 3 trials with 30,000 volunteers will begin on July 27, and will be the world's largest COVID-19 vaccine study yet. In India, pharma company Zydus said last week that it had begun studies for human trials for its potential vaccine, and would enrol over 1,000 subjects in the coming months. Nearly two dozen vaccine candidates are in various testing phases across the world.

Desert storm

In a dramatic turn, Rajasthan Deputy CM Sachin Pilot, who was dismissed by the Congress for challenging Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, moved the High Court against the Assembly disqualification notice served to him and 18 MLAs. Pilot was accused of horse-trading but maintained that he did not wish to join the BJP. As this goes to press, it's all up in the air.

A Nepali Ram

Nepal's Prime Minister, K.P. Sharma Oli proclaimed that the real Ayodhya was in Nepal and that Ram was born there. Nepal was "a victim of cultural encroachment and history has been manipulated," he said. Congress leader Karan Singh said this claim would "hurt the sentiments of a billion Hindus living not only in India and Nepal but around the world."

Short-lived

The statue of a Black Lives Matter demonstrator, Jen Reid, was placed in the spot where the toppled Edward Colston figure stood in Bristol. The sculptor, Marc Quinn, had been working with Reid since the demonstrations to create a likeness of her with raised fist. Reid's statue was placed without the city authority's knowledge but to much public acclaim. It was, however, subsequently removed by the administration.

Big beautiful wall

Astronomers reported the discovery of a giant 'wall', or filament, of galaxies, at least 1.37 billion light years long — one of the largest structures in the known universe. Dubbed the 'South Pole Wall', it's just half a billion light years from our own Milky Way, a small distance in intergalactic terms, which is part of the reason it remained undetected till now — it was hidden by our galaxy's brightness in a 'Zone of Galactic Obscuration'.

Tweet hack

The Twitter accounts of several major U.S. public figures, including former President Barack Obama, presidential candidate Joe Biden, and billionaires Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, were hacked in what appeared to be a scam to solicit payment in the digital currency Bitcoin. The social media company responded by blocking some verified accounts from publishing messages as it investigated, while its shares fell by almost 5%.

Colour and caste

Much like caste in India, race is a deeply rooted and complex issue in U.S. culture

Teja Tirunelveli

As an Indian living in the U.S., I found that one could not be dismissive of the protests against the killing of George Floyd by a police officer. Caricaturing the protests as an excuse for violence and suggesting that there is no evidence of "systemic racism" in the U.S. is like saying India never had a caste system. Blacks have been systematically oppressed, from the very conception of the U.S. That methodical oppression has become a systemic problem today.

Many Indians are relatively more privileged in the U.S., though it is a fact that they too face racism here. Many of them moved to America leaving behind discrimination in their home country. It is not always comfortable for them to deal with the social issues of this country that resonates with the caste system in India. I find that my role as a relatively privileged brown Indian American is to acknowledge the problems of this country and help elevate the voices of blacks. That means setting aside my opinions and biases, having uncomfortable conversations, and admitting mistakes.

People like me have a head start on my black peers simply because of the colour of the skin. These issues are deeply rooted in the American system and need to be addressed head-on, no matter how uncomfortable change can be. The people who report these events play a pivotal role in presenting the right facts and in helping all of us find our roles in society. Much like caste in India, race is a deeply rooted and complex issue in American culture. Both countries have to eliminate these ugly realities, and the role of the media becomes critical to help address them appropriately.

The legal system has defunded black communities with disturbing regularity. Hence, blacks are deprived of opportunities and resources. Another aspect of systematic racial discrimination in America is that blacks arrested for much smaller crimes such as possession of marijuana and shoplifting are given prison sentences for up to 15 years.

The Black Lives Matter protests, as the news coverage shows, were largely peaceful. The peaceful protesters outnumbered rioters 10 to one. No one condones violence, but the riots had a reason: blacks have reached a breaking point after years of oppression and persecution.

In 2014, Eric Garner, another black man, was killed in almost the same manner as Floyd was. Elijah Mclain and Breonna Taylor are other victims whose lives were unnecessarily taken by the police. Mclain was arrested for no probable cause based on a phone call and injected with twice the normal dose of sedative, which killed him on August 24, 2019. Breonna Taylor was in her home sleeping when the police burst through her front door and shot her eight times. Thus, the protests were significant to highlight racial injustice. The protests all around the U.S. played a pivotal role to highlight the real problems that the black community faces every day in the U.S. It is time to listen to their voices and learn our role in their fight.

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Breaking the BABEL

If there are one too many languages in one family, the joke is on everyone

ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

Viji Narayan

In 2017, I became a grandmother in London and was getting used to the ways of that city. With great amusement and joy, I watched the way the U.K. was welcoming a new citizen. A health visitor would come to my daughter's home regularly to check her mental and physical health and the well-being of the baby.

Soon, I started talking to that friendly British woman on her visits. "This grandson of yours is going to grow up in London. So don't try to teach him English but speak to him in your Indian language," she said.

How on earth am I going to convey to that smiling white woman that we don't talk one single Indian language but many.

Diverse tongues

My home is a mini-India, and we believe in unity in diversity when it comes to languages. It all began some 77 years ago, when my mother and father married. She was a teenager who had never set foot outside Tamil Nadu. He was from Palakkad in Kerala. Palakkad Tamil had a different intonation and was more Malayalam than Tamil.

You can very well imagine the plight of my mother who travelled to Alappuzha, a coastal town in Kerala, to be surrounded by people who spoke a strange tongue. Over the years, she mastered Malayalam and my father learned to read and write Tamil.

> Our family's all-time jokes originate from the linguistic blunders of its members.

Our family's all-time jokes originate from the linguistic blunders of its members. As most of my father's sisters also married from Tamil Nadu, they too went through days of adjusting to a new language.

One of my uncles asked for a *jodithavala*, meaning a big vessel usually used for bathing. But *jodi* meant two in Malayalam, and hence he was given two vessels, much to his chagrin.

Come summer, we would all go to our maternal grandmother's house for the holidays. When my brother found the hot Salem weather a bit too much, he told her, "*Patti, vesarthu mungarathu*," meaning he was sweating away to glory. But unfortunately, she heard it as "*veshathe muzhungitten*," meaning he had consumed poison.

As years rolled by, we all became multilingual – English and Hindi we mastered in schools and colleges, while Tamil and Malayalam came naturally to us.

I married a Tamil and consciously shed my intonation and chose Tamil words carefully. By this time, my parents have mastered each other's language to a great extent, but still my father, while bidding goodbye to my husband's grandmother, said, "*Naan erangattuma* (shall I take leave)?" *Erangattuma* is a Tamil word meaning climbing down, and hence she looked at my six-feet-plus father wondering where had he climbed. I explained to her the problem, much to her amusement.

My daughter chose a Bengali and my son a Kannadiga as their soulmates.

I have learned that our languages and culture can be as different as they can be, but the care, love and respect we have for each other takes us to a higher level of understanding.

When our Kannadiga daughter-in-law's family welcome us with "*Banni, banni*", roughly translated to "come", somebody from our family will ask why are they calling us "*panni*", or pigs.

And I am still at a loss how to explain to that friendly Britisher that we have many Indian languages and not just one.

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The secret sauce in the street fare

To enjoy food, one shouldn't be fussy and fastidious while eating

Sumit Paul

Have you ever relished *golgappe* at a restaurant or mall? I am sure, you never liked the taste and got the thrill which you get at eating from a street vendor. That rustic charm, though without much hygiene, has its own mystique. Piping hot *aloo ki tikiya* with *sonth* and *paanak* and *imli ki chatni* (tamarind sauce) at Chandni Chowk, Sarojini Nagar and Shahadara are tastier than having the stuff at a restaurant at upmarket Chanakyapuri or Greater Kailash in New Delhi. There is a proverb in Hindi: *Aap ruchi khana, par ruchi pahanna* (Eat to your heart's content, wear what others approve).

One always loves to eat in a relaxed and unhurried manner. An Urdu proverb articulates it well: *Dastar pe jaldbaazi qatai nahin karni chahiye* (One should never be in a hurry on a dining table). I still remember the out-of-the-world *sarson da saag* with *makki di roti* at an open field at Firozpur, Punjab in 2006. The dollops of ghee added to the aroma, and the same dish at a star hotel will be dull fare. The ingredients, condiments and taste you get at a *dhaba* or a roadside joint are hard to get at a stylish joint. Moreover, the spoon and fork take away the remaining mojo of the food.

How can people eat meat and fish with a fork? How will you de-bone a fish fillet or a *tangdi* kabab? According to the legendary English chef Gordon Ramsay, most of the delicacies in the world are meant to be eaten with fingers to relish them to a T. A well-cooked piece of baby-pink salmon tastes best when eaten with fingers. Let the snooty people look at you sardonically. Eat salmon, trout or haddock with fingers. Tell me, can you enjoy one of the finest delicacies in the world *Sorshe Ilish* (Hilsa in mustard) with a fork and spoon? Impossible.

"It's like caressing a lovely child's chubby cheeks with gloves on," said American actor Rita Hayworth when served Hilsa in mustard with a fork and spoon at Kolkata's Great Eastern Hotel. Food has a direct relation to physical and mental well-being. It should therefore be taken in a manner devoid of any frills. To enjoy food, one shouldn't be fussy and fastidious.

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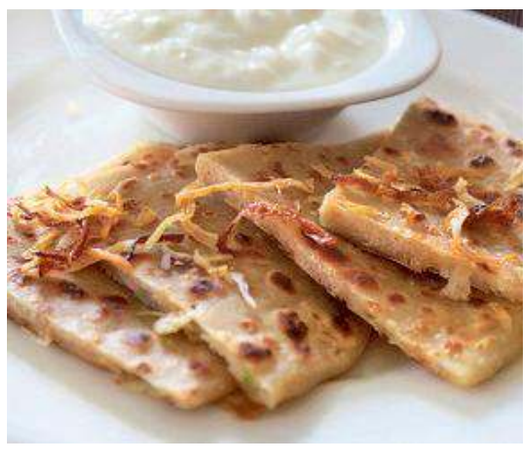
The pull of the paratha

The high GST is not going to shrink the popularity of this now-universal flat bread

J.V. Yakhmi

The Karnataka government recently proposed to charge 18% GST on parathas, as against 5% on rotis. Both are flat breads, though a paratha is an interleaved one, cooked with ghee and often a filling.



My mind goes back to 1970, when some colleagues and I went to Madurai to attend a week-long symposium. The organisers served good southern fare. After two or three days, some north Indians like me felt the urge to eat parathas.

Not the same

A nearby restaurant was passing off deep-fried chapatis as parathas, which we rejected. North Indian dishes had not found a foothold in South India then. We asked a cycle-rickshaw man to take us to a Punjabi restaurant. He took us about 3 km, and pointed to a first floor restaurant. It turned out to be a Gujarati restaurant. We took dinner there all the same, having no choice.

We Punjabis consider parathas an integral part of a sumptuous meal. And there is a wide choice of fillings – *methi*, *aloo*, *mooli*, onion and so on, each finely chopped and mixed with the dough and cooked using generous amounts of ghee or butter. Ashutosh, my nephew from Delhi, likes a paratha having a layer of sugar grains inside, which should remain crunchy while eating. Obviously, this *meetha* paratha needs some skill to make over low heat, avoiding overcooking, lest it melts the hidden layer of sugar.

In the mid-1960s, a small *dhaba* just outside the boundary wall of Satpura Hostel of IIT- Delhi would offer hungry students a nutritious "omelette paratha", which was unique since looking from one side it was a round omelet, but the obverse presented a buttered chapati.

Droves of north Indian students would take admissions in Karnataka in the 1990s to graduate in private professional colleges. My nephew Manu from Patiala and his hostel-mates in a dental college in Davanagere would often hire an autorickshaw to go to a *dhaba* 10 km away, to eat parathas when they felt homesick for Punjabi food.

Parathas have now gained popularity across India, and even in places such as Birmingham and Toronto.

Many attribute the girth of Punjabis to the parathas they eat. In 1960, my maternal aunt invented what is called a *khushq* paratha so that her daughter would not turn obese. It just had the shape and interleaving, but no ghee was used in making it; hence the name *khushq*.

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FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in

Cover story

Iconoclastic tendencies in the wake of #BlackLivesMatter are justifiably on the increase, ('The life, death and resurrection of memory'; Jul. 12) but it is also a fact that, in the crossfire, invaluable historic monuments and statues will also bear the brunt. As the writer says, there are attempts by some intellectuals to distort the complementary roles played by Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar to make India what it is today.

AYYASSERI RAVEENDRANATH

■ The erection of statues in public places is a result of the public perception of an individual at a particular time and place. The subsequent emergence of facts and the interpretation of their deeds at a future date has the potential to make a 'hero' into a 'zero'. History in the long run is merciless to the heroes of the past. The memorials raised to individuals need have no immortal status. Hence, there's no need to shed tears for their loss.

M.V. NAGAVENDER RAO

■ The word iconoclast originally meant 'destroyer of images' in Greek. It took on the figurative meaning of questioning established dogmas. Now, coming full circle, iconoclasm seems to be harking back to its original meaning of "statue-toppling". Leaving etymology aside, these statues are vestiges of the past and historical injustices cannot be undone. Such superfluous acts merely remove the symptoms while the disease is deep-rooted.

RAJESH SANKARANARAYANAN

■ Once people start judging history through the prism of present-day values, no historical figure, however great, can remain immune. Whatever the reasons, the destruction of statues of a past era is illogical. Instead of removing them and erasing a part of history, they should be allowed to stand as testimony to the practices of those shameful times. Let authorities affix a plaque detailing the atrocities committed by these personalities on the pedestals of their statues to educate people about their deeds. They should become reminders of historical mistakes and alert us from repeating them.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI

■ The protests and dethroning of statues worldwide are nothing compared to the exploitation, oppression and mass-murders that have taken place in the past.. The perpetrators of such crimes were glorified as they were the ultimate 'winners'. A critical retrospection is warranted so as to envision a new social and economic trajectory based on equality and humanity.

OUSEPH T.P.

Becoming VC

The profile of Sonajharia Minz (60 Minutes: 'My selection should not be viewed from a ghettoisation perspective' Jul. 12) was an eye-opener. Being from Uttar Pradesh, I can understand her struggles while working in North India, where the evils of caste, colour and gender discrimination are deep-rooted. Ms. Minz did not let any of this stop her, which is commendable and inspiring. Her appointment is a hope for tribal people and a huge step towards women's empowerment.

AVIKSHIT SURYANSH

Partisan screed

This is with reference to the column 'Passing Bite'. ('Business at the border'; Jul. 12) The column is a partisan tirade against the present government, and seeks to demonise the Prime Minister. Criticism is fine but it should not translate into mere vilification.

BALA NARAYAN

More on the Web

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DEEPSHIKHA SINGH

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HIMANSHI POPLI & SHAHNAWAZ MUSHTAQ

Cawnpore diaries
Reminiscences of the pre-Independence town in Uttar Pradesh, now called Kanpur
VIVEK K. AGNIHOTRI

The game of politics
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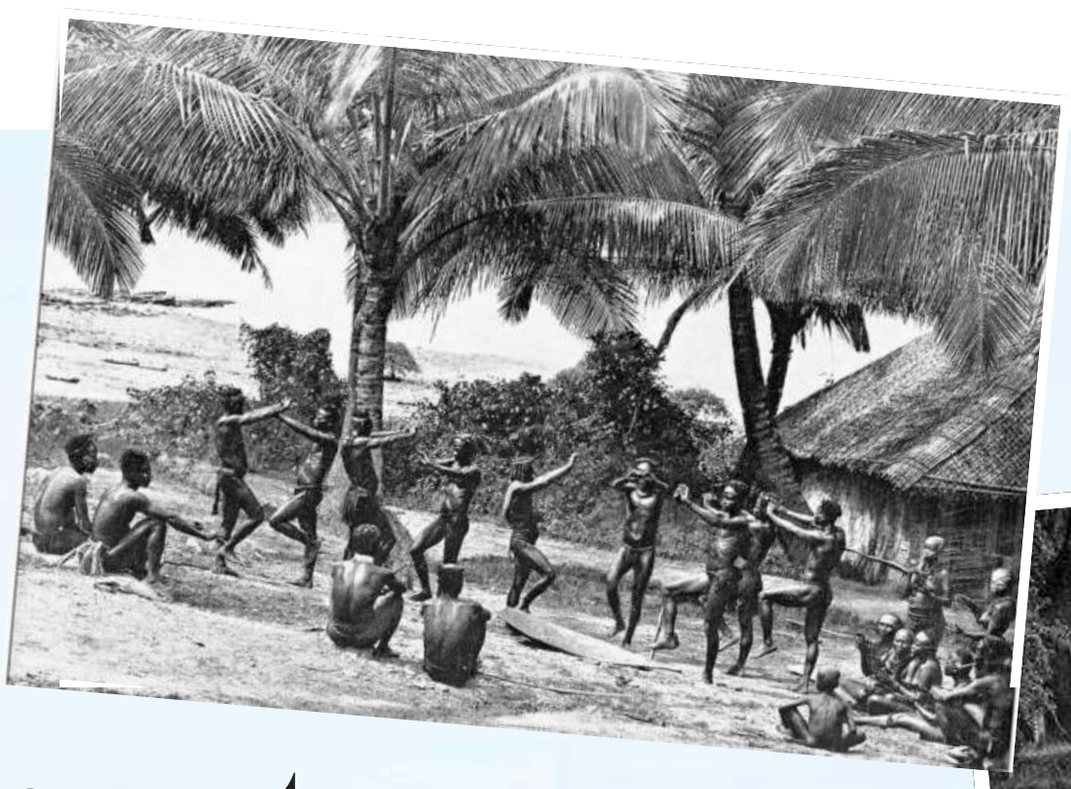
SUKUMARAN C.V.



The islanders (Clockwise from left) A British-era photograph of Andaman Island tribal people dancing; a garden party at Viper Island, South Andaman, 1930; the Cellular Jail built by the British in Port Blair; a 19th-century photo of islanders fishing with bows and arrows; and the pristine Wandoor Beach in South Andaman. ▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & KOSHY GEORGE/ PEXELS

PEOPLE

As the COVID-19 pandemic reaches the Andaman Islands, the story of how its largest and most friendly tribe was systematically wiped out by imported diseases should be a wake-up call for administrators

The great extermination

Ajay Saini

As the world reels from the impact of COVID-19, evidence from the Amazon shows that the pandemic disproportionately affects remote indigenous people. Given this, a grave danger looms over the Andaman Islands, which are home to four historically isolated communities, and all of them belong to particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs).

Epidemics and diseases brought on by "civilisation" since the mid-19th century have wreaked havoc on the island's indigenous communities. Delving into the Great Andamanese past, the annals show that the indigenes in the Andamans, already on the brink of extinction, are unlikely to recover from yet another blow to their health and way of life.

History lessons

In January 1875, F.E. Tuson, the British officer-in-charge of the Andamanese people, noticed something peculiar at the Gópl'áka-báng 'Andaman Home'. A woman had developed a nasty bubo. Tuson knew what the symptom meant but chose to ignore it. One year later, several islanders at 'Viper Home' were found suffering from sores. The British quarantined them in an empty shed and inspected all the Andaman Homes where many inmates exhibited symptoms of an alien disease. As expected, it was an outbreak of syphilis.

Initially, about 16 indigenes were hospitalised. 'Some have been already discharged, and the remainder are progressing favourably; only one woman and one child, who were suffering from the disease in its worst form before being admitted, have as yet died,' remarked Major General Charles Arthur Barwell in his Annual Report of 1875-76.

The syphilis cases, in the beginning, appeared to be a handful, and the British believed that everything was under control. But an overlooked fact – that children were infected – implied the disease had been around for years. Soon, the worst was revealed – syphilis was not confined merely to the Homes but had spread even among the islanders of distant villages.

The East India Company colonised the Andamans in 1789 by establishing a settlement at Chatham Island, which was transferred to the North East harbour three years later. A hostile climate and high mortality rate led to its closure in 1796.

A year after the 1857 uprising, the British returned to the Andamans and set up a penal settlement, incarcerating hundreds of Indian freedom fighters. At this time, around 5,500 to 8,000 indigenes inhabited the islands. Among these were 10 groups of the Great Andamanese, who comprised the largest tribe (the others included the Jarawa, the Onge, the Sentinelese and the Jangil).

Quixotic resistance

The Great Andamanese fiercely resisted the British – they raided and plundered the settlement, murdered the convicts, and obstructed the clearing of jungles. But their quixotic resistance against a militarily superior enemy was doomed from the start. Punitive and friendly measures eventually subdued them by the 1860s.

An institution named the Andaman Homes was established in 1863; deeply resented by the islanders, it played a pivotal role in their 'taming'. Here, the British attempted to 'civilise' the 'savages' by coercively altering their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. The islanders were trained in agriculture and performed a plethora of new activities – they acted as guards and manual workers, captured runaway convicts and participated in risky expeditions.

While the Andaman Homes furthered the expansion of the settlement, they were, as argued by German anthropologist Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt (who conducted fieldwork in the Andamans in the late 1920s), a door of death for the islanders. Here, the indigenes became dependent on alien foods, learnt to smoke and drink, experienced torture and abuse, and contracted several alien diseases.

The islanders had contracted syphilis at the Homes when convicts sexually exploited them by offering small rewards or simply by issuing threats. A senior petty officer named Shera, who suffered from syphilis and later died of it, was found to be 'the chief, if not sole, offender'.

Measures were taken to contain the epidemic. A 'special hospital' and 'a well-ventilated barrack, with concrete flooring', were built. The infected were asked to stay away from their partners; the people in the Homes were instructed to bathe frequently. And parties were sent to far-flung areas to bring syphilitic cases in for treatment.

Amidst this chaos, the Great Andamanese were hit by another epidemic. Ophthalmia broke out in July 1876, leaving many islanders partially or entirely blind. In the meanwhile, syphilis began to surge. As per the Annual Report of 1876-77, 54 patients were admitted to the hospital, of whom seven died, five remained under treatment, and 32 were discharged (perhaps the rest ran away). Scores of indigenes chose to suffer alone rather than visit the settlement for medical aid. 'Detention', 'discipline' and a 'long course of treatment' at the hospital prompted many to flee to distant jungles.

In March 1877, another deadly epidemic broke out. A batch of convicts from Madras brought measles to Ross Island. The children at the Andaman Orphanage were infected first, then the rest of the Great Andamanese. In less than a month, 100 cases thronged the hospital. Around six weeks later, 51 of 184 patients were dead. 'At the Viper Home, 71 Andamanese were attacked and 6 died. Of the syphilitic patients, 43 were attacked and 10 died. Of the visitors in hospital, 77 were attacked and 37 died. Self-treated in the jungle, say, 350 attacked and 56 died,' wrote E.H. Man in his Annual Report of 1876-77.

Man's report, however, had 'considerably under-stated' the ravage wreaked by measles. The epidemic had spread like wildfire from one end of the Great Andaman to the other, affecting all the indigenes except the (hostile) Jarawa. 'Half, if not two-thirds, of the whole of the Andamanese in the Great Andaman died from its effects [measles and its sequelae]. All the people inhabiting the west coast of the South Andaman between Port Campbell and the Middle Straits [have] died,' wrote the officer-in-charge of the Homes, Maurice Vidal Portman, who visited these parts three years later.

The outbreak of measles among the Great Andamanese and their impending extermination were not entirely accidental. The negligence of the officer in charge of the Andaman Orphanage and the medical staff at Ross Island played a crucial role in tipping the scales.

The massive death toll at the hospital and at the Homes was unnerving for the islanders. They believed that after death people turned into spirits who might harm them. This visceral fear turned them against the idea of the hospital. As soon as they were brought in for treatment, they thought they were 'certain to die'. This 'retarded' their chances of recovery and the Great Andamanese began to die at an alarming rate. Estimated, conservatively, at 3,500 in 1858, their population depleted to 2,000 by 1883.

Rapid decline

The islanders, who had thrived in their 'inhospitable' terrain for millennia, were suddenly being obliterated en masse by the mere touch of 'civilisation'. Vast swathes of verdant rain forest in the Andamans, where generations of the Great Andamanese had hunted, were now devoid of human activity. Col. Thomas Cadell wrote: 'The friendly tribes of Andamanese are, I regret much to report, rapidly dying out... Every year shows a decreasing population, the old and middle aged dying, and no children coming up to fill their places. It may safely be predicted that the friendly tribes will be extinct some thirty or fifty years hence'.

The government, in its Resolution on the Annual Report for the year 1883-84, remarked: 'The Governor General in Council noticed with regret that the friendly tribes of Andamanese are said to be dying out, but the matter appears to be one which is beyond the power of the Government to remedy'.

Dying out

In 1884, the British brought several islanders to the settlement for treatment. Many of them were rotting alive in the interior jungles. '[B]eing covered all over with sores like small-pox pustules, and the smell from their bodies was so offensive that they could not be allowed on board the steamer, but were towed in a boat some distance astern,' described Portman.

There were 11 births and 38 deaths at the Homes in 1884-85. But the newborns hardly survived. 'I always send the women to the jungle to be confined, as the very small babies seem to thrive better there,' wrote Portman. Even those who survived were affected by hereditary syphilis. 'It breaks out as hip disease, about their 10th or 11th year, and this would place the date of the introduction of syphilis among the Andamanese certainly prior to 1873,' remarked Col. Cadell.

By now, almost all the men of the 'friendly tribes' in the South Andaman were dead. By August that year, the Great Andamanese were battling another epidemic, mumps. In 1886-87, the Homes recorded two births and 13 deaths. Five islanders died over the next year; and the year following it, wrote Portman, was 'merely a record of sickness and deaths. 33 Andamanese died at the Homes, and there was no birth'.

There were 20 deaths and no birth at the Homes in 1890. Russian Influenza broke out in the month of April and 38 indigenes, including the last member of the Rutland Island Sept, were dead by June. Towards the end of July, 16 islanders came from Long Island, bringing devastating news – barring a few indigenes at the Archipelago Islands, Mount Kunu and Jurucháng, they were the 'only survivors' between Port Blair (South Andaman) and Rangat (Middle Andaman).

14 canoe loads

In August that year, Col. Cadell and Portman surveyed several islands. On the Stewart Sound Islands, they found that only 14 Great Andamanese had survived. A decade earlier, when Portman visited these islands, '14 canoe loads' of islanders had come to meet him. 'All the people on Rutland Island and Port Campbell are dead, and very few remain in the South Andaman and the Archipelago. The children do not survive in the very few births which do occur, and the present generation may be considered as the last of the aborigines of the Great Andaman. Even these have their constitutions to a great extent undermined by hereditary syphilis, and are unable to endure much exposure,' remarked Portman in his Annual Report of 1890-91.

With 60 deaths, 1890-91 was one of the unhealthiest years. Then, in July 1892, the Andamanese were inflicted with gonorrhoea. Over the next two years, another 50 deaths were recorded at the Homes. Now, death among the Great Andamanese had become a regular phenomenon; birth, a rarity.

On February 26, 1894, Ríala, the chief of Áka-Béa-da tribe and the oldest man in the South Andaman, passed away at 57. He was one of the last survivors who remembered the times before the British colonised the Andamans and finally pushed the islanders on the road to extinction. Mébul-pé-lá-pich, 'the last of the South Andaman eremtaga [forest dweller]', succeeded Ríala as chief and died shortly on March 11. Soon, Polala, the chief of Bálé, also died from a heart ailment.

By now, the once fiercely independent and proud islanders were reduced to a 'sickly remnant'. Around 245 Great Andamanese lived precariously in the Homes on the South Andaman. Besides them, no indigenes, except for the Jarawa, were left in the South Andaman.

With the extermination of the elders, the Great Andamanese's rich traditional knowledge, oral histories and languages were also gone forever. The children, born or brought up at the Homes, lost connection with their roots and never discovered the splendid past of their community.

Over the decades, their numbers dwindled rapidly – 625 in 1901, 455 in 1911, 207 in 1921. And by the 1931 census, only 90 Great Andamanese were left. 'The majority suffer from hereditary syphilis while the men are completely sterile. There are, however, a few healthy half-bred children, the result of unions between Andamanese women and the convicts,' wrote M.C.C. Bonington, the Superintendent of Census Operations.

Two years after Independence, the Great Andamanese were relocated to the tiny Bluff Island and their traditional habitats were appropriated for the settlement of refugee and migrant populations. The islanders further shrank to 19 in number by 1961. In 1969, they were relocated to the tiny Strait Island, where 56 of them now survive on government doles.

Postscript

As of July 16, 176 people from mainstream society have tested positive for the novel coronavirus in the islands, of which 46 are active cases. The unprecedented crisis demands a speedy assessment and redress of the risks and vulnerabilities facing the PVTGs in the Andamans. Even slight negligence, as the history of the Great Andamanese extermination cautions us, could snowball into an unmanageable catastrophe.

The "civilised" world has brought many disasters that the islanders have somehow endured. But if this pandemic strikes them, it will probably be the very last straw.

The writer is assistant professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. He works with remote indigenous communities.

The islanders, who had thrived in an 'inhospitable' terrain for millennia, were suddenly being obliterated en masse by the mere touch of 'civilisation' and the resulting outbreak of epidemics

▪ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

SOCIAL COMEDY

Lucie in the sky with bananas

Kevin Kwan's latest romp is a snob's guide to privilege and position that's just the right antidote for these stressful times

Geeta Doctor

The Devil might have been wearing Prada while cooking up COVID-19 but luckily for us, he also invented Kevin Kwan. But you might exclaim, as several of his Singaporean ladies do, "Hiyah! Kwan who?"

There are many ways to describe Kevin Kwan – most recognisably, he is the author of the superhit trilogy that starts with *Crazy Rich Asians* (*CRA*). When it was made into a lushly choreographed film of the same name in 2018, it underlined that Singaporean Asians could bling with the best of them while clanging their gongs. Kwan leads the parade by showcasing every bead and bauble, Bottega bag and couturier with haute aspirations, to let his readers know what the privileged one per cent of Singapore are lavishing their money on while also making sure that the ancient bloodlines are safe. Their ancestors might have fled from China but their offspring are most often in the U.S., climbing the social ladder as their Tiger-moms roar after them, "Hiyah! Higher!"

On her father's side the family is old money and Kwan has a wonderful time lampooning them in all their magnificent eccentricity, in particular Lucie's grandmother, who is fixated on her nose

Snacking in Capri

If Kwan had described Chinese-Americans in *CRA*, here he tells us that Asians marrying any other racial type are termed 'Hapa,' meaning 'half' in Hawaiian. The heroine, Lucie Barclay Churchill, is one such. On her father's side the family is old money and Kwan has a wonderful time lampooning them in all their magnificent eccentricity, in particular Lucie's grandmother, who is fixated on her nose, like the old granny in *CRA*. Lucie's ethnic Chinese mother, Dr. Miriam Tang Churchill, is a pioneering geneticist.

Lucie wonders if she is merely a "banana" – yellow outside, white inside – as she meets George Zao, a young man of superb physical attributes (so much so that when he appears at a society wedding of monumental excess on the island of Capri, one of the young women gasps, "He's a total snack"). Kwan provides some arresting terms for the arriviste male: there is the "s'mocialite", the new-money bloke who tends to air-kiss his way around the room, as Lucie's New York fiancé Cecil Pike does; and there are billennials, the millennials who have become billionaires. Sadly, we may not be seeing many of those any more.

Sex and Vanity
Kevin Kwan
Penguin Random House
₹699

Saran-wrapped sex

Sex and Vanity is the pick me up and stuff me with gold-dusted truffles kind of comedy that is ideal for these stressful times. It's like being reminded of how blissfully decadent life used to be for those who could afford an apartment in New York's Fifth Avenue for the winters and a sprawling estate in East Hampton for the summers.

Kwan faithfully delivers what every reader of his has come to expect by this time – each sartorial, gastronomic or ancestral mention is elaborated with notes indicating which educational institutions the one per cent may have attended. I was immeasurably reassured that one of the schools I attended, the International School in Geneva or Ecolint, gets honourable mention, though by way of its Italian subsidiary. I could count myself as aspirational in the Kwan order of things.

So, it's really a snob's guide to privilege and position. As for the "sex" of the title, the reader is likely to be disappointed since the Singaporean Kwan prefers to have it Saran-wrapped and a little discreet, used chiefly for advancing his storyline. We may describe it as a form of 'puppy yoga' where the practitioners are cajoled into doing complex yogic poses in a room full of pedigreed pups. One of the characters here teaches that fine art.

It's difficult not to be reminded of the 1961 musical, *Flower Drum Song*, featuring the delectable Nancy Kwan (no relation, we presume). She played Suzie Wong in the film set in the golden era when Hong Kong was just beginning to emerge from the War: Nancy Kwan was just another version of Holly Golightly, immortalised by Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Kevin Kwan may or may not be aware of these connections though he does mention both Suzie Wong and Hepburn, but only as adjuncts to his obsession with dropping names, William Holden's in the first instance, Tiffany's in the second.

Kwan has modestly signalled in an interview that he'd like to be compared to E.M. Forster, stating that the inspiration for *Sex and Vanity* is Forster's exquisite novel, *A Room with a View*. For those of us who never considered Forster a hoot, let us admit that Kwan is more Barbara Cartland than Forster, not the least because of his fondness for cheesy endings. *Sex and Vanity*'s conclusion is of Gorgonzola blue cheese proportions and Kwan manages to pull it off with immense brio. Pass the popcorn, please.

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

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

Ice ice baby

When ice was first shipped to India, it was described as a plan of 'magnificent foolhardiness'

▪ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

The clink of an ice cube in a tall glass is almost like poetry. I look at the different shapes of ice that float in a summer drink these days – stars or little rings, depending on the designs that the ice tray promises. The trays have evolved with time, as have refrigerators, which spew out ice like slot machines. But I recall the time when we had to work hard to dislodge ice cubes from a tray. We had to twist it hard, hold it under water, and then pick up the slippery ice from the floor where it would invariably land.

But what we did was nothing compared to what a young man called Frederick Tudor accomplished back in the early 1800s. He transported ice from Boston to what was then Calcutta. A book called *Empires of Food: Feast, Famine and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations* by Evan D.G. Fraser and Andrew Rimas tells the story. The book is a fascinating account of how food, nourishment, climate change *et al* shaped civilisations.

As Americans moved from villages to cities, food travelled too, underlining the role that ice played as preservative. "In places like New England, which possessed a wealth of frozen pond water for much of the year, ice could be cut, packed in straw, and used to preserve food from rotting on its way from the field to street," they write.

The voyage was a fiasco. Most of the ice melted on the way, and there were no takers for what was left

Slippery speculation

Young Tudor – a Harvard drop-out and son of a Boston lawyer – realised that there was money to be made in ice. He decided to transport it to the Caribbean: "His idea was to sail a cargo of pond ice 2,000 miles to Martinique and sell it to the sweating natives." He convinced his investors to buy a brig, and sailed off on 'The Favourite' with 80 tonnes of ice, evoking considerable mirth. "We hope it does not prove to be a slippery speculation," the *Boston Gazette* said.

The voyage was a fiasco. Most of the ice melted on the way, and there were no takers for what was left "since no one in Martinique had any idea what to do with this weird, evaporating substance." Tudor lost $4,300, was sued and imprisoned, but didn't give up. He was in jail for much of 1812 and 1813, but after being released, still full of pep, set off for Havana, where he built a warehouse insulated with sawdust.

It's a steal

"Discontented with mere success he decided to export ice to India. This was a plan of magnificent foolhardiness. The journey from Boston to Calcutta was 15,000 miles and, barring bad weather, took four or five months."

He lost one-third of the cargo in the first Calcutta run, but the British colonists bought what was left, happy to have a cold drink at last. They even helped him build an insulated warehouse. "In return, he kept prices low, turning a profit of a mere three cents per pound, so that even the humblest colonial servant could afford a lump of ice in an afternoon cocktail. Ice was now cheaper to buy in India than in London or Paris."

The book quotes an observer as noting:

"It was long before the natives could be induced to handle the crystal blocks. Tradition reports that they ran away affrighted, thinking the ice was something bewitched and fraught with danger. But now they come on board in a long line, and each of them takes a huge block of ice upon his head and conveys it to the adjacent ice house, moving with such rapidity that the blocks are exposed to the air only a few seconds. Once deposited, the waste almost ceases again, and the ice which cost in Boston four dollars a ton is worth 50 dollars."

Good for Tudor, I say, as I look at the tub of ice cream in my freezer. Kesar Pista, anyone?

Rahul Verma likes reading and writing about food as much as he does cooking and eating it. Well, almost.

HISTORICAL FICTION

A game in black and white

Nihshanka Debroy's tedious debut novel is all tell and no show

Pragati K.B.

Will the upper-caste hegemony accept that "chess was not created by some obscure brahmin in a raja's court as a game to idle time away"? What really are the origins of chess? Nihshanka Debroy attempts to explore these promising questions in his debut novel. Most readers, however, will decode all the answers in the very first chapter, stripping the thriller of any suspense.

Intended to be historical fiction, the narrative alternates between two time periods and locations – present-day Delhi and 5th century central India. The dateline is repeated at the beginning of all 27 chapters, signalling the author's mistrust of his readers' intelligence. Or is it mistrust of his craft?

An estranged daughter is forced to return to the country after her father's death to take care of his unfinished business – both professional and personal. As she follows the trail of her multiple-Swiss-bank-accounts holding father's last days, she also has to keep two sinking ships – her company in the U.S. and her father's in Delhi – afloat.

Because the author repeatedly *tells* and doesn't *show*, he fails to evoke any empathy for the protagonist. Overwrought descriptions, filled with cardinal directions, numerical dimensions and material possessions, drag the narrative down.

Debroy's disregard of the politics of language, however, is *Checkmate's* biggest flaw. His villains are foreign, meat-eating savages with yellow teeth and thick coils of hair who "bark harsh sounds that one could not tell apart". The whitest pebble is anointed king and black pebbles are considered the enemy. All women – a gang-raped monk, an intelligent princess, and a courtesan – in ancient India seem to have just one attribute: they are beautiful and have a slender nose/ neck. Insults like "My mother can fight better than you" are sexist and lines like "Just as beauty can be a curse for a woman, bountiful riches have doomed our land" are unpardonable.

Checkmate
Nihshanka Debroy
Westland
₹399

Debroy redeems himself somewhat in his treatment of the fight sequences in the 5th century sections, but that, alas, is too short a reprieve.

TRANSLATION

Red is the cruellest colour

Blood is an extended metaphor for class exploitation in this scathing satire

Irfan Aslam

Joginder Paul (1925-2016) was one among the league of progressive writers from the pre-Partition period who survived long after the icons of the movement were gone. Born in Sialkot, now in Pakistan, he was 22 when Partition happened, shaping his world view. Despite being forced to leave his motherland and later getting a degree in English literature and teaching it, he continued to hold Urdu close to his heart.

He is considered one of the greatest Urdu novelists of the 20th century. *Aik Boond Lahoo Ki*, published in Karachi in August 1962, launched his career. It has now been translated into English by Snehal Shingavi, who has translations of Premchand and Bhisham Sahni to his credit.

Being a member of the Progressive Writers' Association, it was but natural for Paul to write about class conflict and its impact on society. *A Drop of Blood* pivots around a jobless young graduate, Mohan Karan, an orphan who lives with a destitute old woman. Karan sells his blood to survive. He lands up in the house of a rich man, Dr. Bakhtiyar, who is in constant need of the rare blood type he shares with Karan. He is hired for his 'services'.

He is similarly exploited when he gets close to his neighbour, Ragini, the wife of a well-heeled old hakeem, and Zahra, Dr. Bakhtiyar's young daughter.

Paul creates the binary of two classes, one represented by Karan and the other by Dr. Bakhtiyar, making up the underdog and the exploiter. Paul had dedicated the original Urdu novel to the times he was living in: "To this very active era, which, with a very complacent indifference, is engaged in the trade of blood of human beings." This is the crux: blood is an extended metaphor for exploitation in this scathing satire.

A Drop of Blood
Joginder Paul,
trs Snehal Shingavi
Penguin Modern Classics
₹319 (Kindle price)

The Urdu text has a prominent Punjabi lilt (Paul was Punjabi-speaking) both in terms of dialogue and the milieu it creates. The characters' classes are determined by the shades of the language they speak. It is challenging to translate those nuances, but Shingavi has handled the task well.

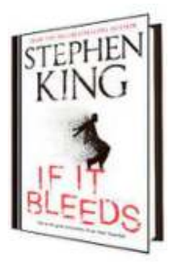
The reviewer is a Lahore-based journalist and poet.

BROWSER

How Lulu Lost Her Mind
Rachel Gibson
Gallery Books
Price not mentioned
A mother-daughter duo is like chalk and cheese, but the daughter must put her career on hold to take care of the mother, who is losing her memory to Alzheimer's. As they retire to the family's decrepit home in Louisiana, the daughter discovers a new topsy-turvy life.

The Peasant's Dream
Melanie Dickerson
Thomas Nelson Publishers
₹1,939
Frederick, a poor farmer's son, is a talented wood carver. He meets Adela, the daughter of the duke, who has come to experience real life in the town in disguise. They fall in love, which is threatened when Frederick is roped into a plan to kidnap Adela and her real identity is revealed to him.

If It Bleeds
Stephen King
Hodder & Stoughton
₹799
The title story is a standalone sequel to the bestselling *The Outsider*, and has Holly on her first solo case. All four stories in this collection are marked by King's trademark horror and suspense. King provides insight into the genesis of each in the Author's Note.



The Prisoner's Wife
Maggie Brookes
Berkley
$17.00
In this novel inspired by a true story, a Czech farm girl and a British prisoner of war are on the run, till they are tracked down by Nazi soldiers and sent to a POW camp. The days are bleak but there's hope in the shape of a small group of prisoners who risk their lives to save the couple.

PEOPLE

The goodness of being

A historian argues that even in tough situations, the decent side of humanity shows up

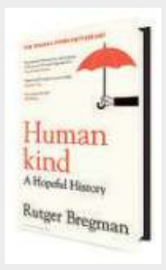
Uday Balakrishnan

Even the title of the book by the young historian, Rutger Bregman, is a play on the word 'kind,' proclaiming its intent to establish human beings as inherently good and generous.

According to Bregman, nurture rather than nature accounts for the 'occasional' bad behaviour of human beings. They are not, he tells us, the warring creatures of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, still less the egoistical individuals of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* whose actions are driven entirely by self-interest.

Hatred to love

Humans are altruistic and trusting and care about others, he argues, and rarely wish to kill each other.



Humankind: A Hopeful History
Rutger Bregman
Bloomsbury
₹699

What ought to have emerged from World War I was not its unprecedented savagery but the reluctance of soldiers on opposing sides to kill each other. He establishes from military records that soldiers were often reluctant to fire their guns and sometimes deliberately missed their targets.

But for Bregman, how many would know about the improbable and spontaneous ceasefire of 1914 that, at Christmas time, brought the Germans and allied troops together in celebration, singing Christmas songs, exchanging gifts and even meeting up with each other? As he tells us, "Hatred can be transformed into friendship and bitter foes can shake hands. That's something we can believe – not because we're naïve, but because it really happened."

Myth and fact

It would have been easy to dismiss *Humankind*, as another 'feel-good' book in the market. The mass of verifiable references he furnishes to buttress the points he makes, however, is irrefutable and convincing. He also has a sharp eye for the influence of literature on conditioning our minds and he busts long-held beliefs that are more myth than fact.

One of them, which had more or less established that boys left alone, as those in William Golding's celebrated novel, *Lord of the Flies,* would turn on each other murderously is not what happened in real life. To prove his point, Bregman gives the example of the survivors of a group of boys shipwrecked for long on a deserted Pacific island. Rather than turn on each other they had all kept themselves in harmony until rescued by a passing ship.

We humans have a miserable capacity to think the worst of ourselves, Bregman tells us, when all through history it is the less discussed decent side of humanity that has asserted itself – often in the grimmest of situations. Bregman's book is an entertaining work, which even hard-nosed publications such as the *Economist* and the *Financial Times* agree is serious history.

Perhaps Bregman downplays the rotten aspect of human behaviour. However, in telling us about the good side, he brings to the fore an almost unrecorded aspect of human behaviour we need to know about but do not.

The reviewer teaches in IISc, Bengaluru.

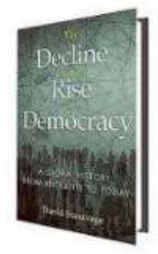
POLITICS

The past spells the future

A political scientist explores the transition from early to modern democracy and points out that it is an experiment whose transformation is ongoing amid a fresh wave of technological progress

Varghese K. George

Debates on democracy are often noisy and inconclusive, appropriately perhaps, but there is near universal agreement on its moral superiority over other forms of social organisation. David Stasavage, professor of politics at New York University, is a self-declared optimist on democracy but he is cautious of the romanticism associated with it. His new book, *The Decline and Rise of Democracy*, is a rich and coherent account of democracy's evolution over millennia and across diverse geographical and environmental settings, "a deep history."



The Decline and Rise of Democracy: A Global History from Antiquity to Today
David Stasavage
Princeton University Press
₹1,592 (Kindle price)

"The democracy we have today is but one potential way of organizing things," and there could be other forms also, and the volume pays particular attention to autocracy which is often considered its antithesis. There is nothing inevitable about the birth of a democracy and there is nothing deterministic about the course of its evolution, but a long view of history allows some generalisations.

By order 'The democracy we have today is but one potential way of organising things.' ▪ AFP

People and rulers

Rulers listen to the people when they need to, rather than an act of enlightenment – it could be to devise efficient mechanisms for tax collection at one point and to mobilise soldiers at another. The ruler needs the council to gather information and seek consent of the ruled, when he is weak and his powers not far-reaching.

Places where an efficient bureaucracy took root earlier on turned out to be less hospitable for democracy – China and Islamic West Asia being the living examples.

The Communist Party of China or the Islamic ideology cannot be linked to the present-day organisation of these societies in any absolute terms. Islam had consultation as an elementary component of its faith but early Islamic empire builders inherited strong bureaucracies that made resource extraction and exercise of power easy in the lands they freshly conquered. They did not need councils. The CCP built on the long tradition of bureaucratic control over people in China. After the revolutionary takeover of the state, Mao Zedong declared that "our present task is to strengthen the people's state apparatus." Technological advancements that reinforce bureaucratic authority can be inimical to democracy in certain situations.

The historically diffused nature of its social organisation, its 'king and council' template, was the differentiator that made Europe fertile for the seeds of modern democracy. It is here that representative democracy takes its current form. Commercial vibrancy and democracy are not necessarily correlated, with China

As for creating wealth, democracies and autocracies both have advantages and disadvantages

and Islamic empires offering illustrations. There is also no empirical evidence historically to validate the suggestion that democracy creates wealth or wealth creates democracies. When France turned into a democracy with the Third Republic in 1870, its per capita income was around the same as that of Tanzania today.

As for creating wealth, democracies and autocracies both have advantages and disadvantages. Poor countries have become democracies too, and India is a forceful example. The village councils as an institution survived many empires that created prototypes of a central authority occasionally. A resistance to centralisation continued and that helped the survival of Indian democracy.

What happened in America

Europeans transplanted to the Americas, where no form of state existed, to build a robust form of democracy. Land was in abundance, labour was in shortage, and there was no apparatus of state control. The only means of forming a community was allowing participation of everyone.

Classical ideas and medieval experiments in democracy in Europe had the perfect setting for growth and evolution in America. Suffrage was the most expansive in America – but still it was only restricted to white males. It would take several centuries before African Americans – brought as slaves to create a labour class that did not have political options – could get equal voting rights.

Chiselled and formatted in the U.S., modern democracy circulated back to Europe and other parts of the world, but this by no means should obscure the fact that democracies existed in many societies in antiquity, including what is present day Bihar in India.

Mass redistribution

An old elite worry that democracy might force mass redistribution of wealth has turned out be unfounded. In fact, democracy has not even resulted in any massive reduction in inequality. In recent years, representative democracy has raised fresh concerns of trust and concentration of executive power.

Altogether, this volume is an unsentimental and rigorous analysis of democracy drawn from the author's engagement with the topic over two decades. "In the end, China is not a deviation from the European pattern of political development; it is simply a different path that has its own logic to it and may well stay that way," he says, in a suggestion that might not please democratic evangelists. The author is also critical of what passes of as democracy these days. "Instead of only asking whether democracy will survive, we need to also ask whether we will be satisfied with the democracy that does survive." Democracy is facing its biggest threat in history, in the fresh wave of unprecedented technological progress. This volume helps us look into the future, and one might be unsettled by what can be seen.

SOCIETY

Armed conflict and the bitter inheritance of trauma

Spiralling violence in Kashmir through the years has left deep psychological scars among the State's people

Sudipta Datta

Images of roads blocked with coils of concertina wire, protesters left blind by pellets, militants' bombs tearing lives apart, mothers at police stations awaiting news of their sons have emanated from Kashmir with disturbing regularity. Years of militancy and large-scale militarisation have taken a toll on the mental health of generations of Kashmiris. Last August, when Jammu & Kashmir was stripped of its statehood after the withdrawal of special status under Article 370 and a tight shutdown imposed, the isolation was complete.

Over the years, there have been several books on the dispute, including Radha Kumar's political history, *Paradise at War,* David Devadas' *The Generation of Rage in Kashmir*, on the stone-pelters and their anger, Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* about the civilian-military-separatist tangle, Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots* on the Pandits who lost their homes, and *A Desolation called Peace*, a collection of ethnographic essays on the people's aspirations edited by Ather Zia and Javaid Iqbal Bhatt.

To the tomes on the Valley, add Sahba Husain's *Love, Loss, and Longing in Kashmir* which chronicles the social impact of prolonged armed conflict. Husain, an independent researcher and women's right activist, spent the last two decades travelling across the State, listening to the people. If the large-scale troops in Jammu & Kashmir to crush the insurgency that began in 1989 have had far reaching consequences for the people, Husain discovered early on in Kashmir "that the pledge of the aggrieved is never to forget…"

Insurgency, aftermath

Her brief as a researcher was to examine the psychological impact of violence on people's daily lives. She talked to men and women about "the loss of loved ones, prolonged suffering, grief, stress, the unforeseen hardships, and the intense trauma." A common refrain she heard was that when people left home in the morning they were not sure whether they would return alive.

Husain begins her book with the experience of Kashmiri Pandits who had to flee the Valley when militancy began. She visited the camps for displaced Pandits in Jammu. She met the small population that had stayed behind in the Valley who felt that the government had forgotten about them.

She also recounts the story of Parveena Ahangar of Batmaloo in Srinagar whose 16-year-old son was picked up by security forces in 1990. "Kashmir is beautiful, but it is full of pain and grief," she tells Husain and explains why an Association for the Parents of the Disappeared Persons had to be set up.

"Parveena's life, like that of hundreds of other Kashmiri women who have lost a son, a husband, a brother, a father, has been dramatically transformed from that of an ordinary home-maker to an active campaigner and fighter for justice," writes Husain.

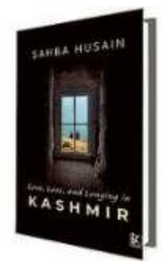
Women participated in large numbers when militancy began in Kashmir. In the chapter titled, 'The Other Face of Azadi', Husain looks at women in the movement and the impact on their lives.

Stress factor

A senior psychiatrist told her that more than two-thirds of the population suffered from chronic psychological disorders. Doctors say all age groups are now exposed to post traumatic stress disorder, unlike before 1990 when only those over 40-45 would come with complaints of high blood pressure, hypertension and heart ailments. "In an environment where the threat of violence followed everyone like a shadow, doctors found that children were particularly vulnerable," she writes, displaying "behavioural disorders, ranging from a state of fearfulness, crying, irritability and refusal to be left alone."

A district block medical officer recalls his daughter was four years old when the violence erupted, and would throw up at the sound of firing which continued even after she turned 10.

International mental health experts have said that Kashmir is one of the most traumatised war zones in the world. Husain's thorough enquiry confirms that the anxiety has only deepened.



Love, Loss, and Longing in Kashmir
Sahba Husain
Zubaan
₹595

Exploring Sociabilities of Contemporary India: New Perspectives
Sujata Patel
Orient BlackSwan
₹945
Prominent Indian sociologists reflect on the three 'classic' fields that have defined sociology since independence: family–marriage–kinship; caste and tribal inequalities; and belief, religion and religiosities.

A World Without Work
Daniel Susskind
Penguin Random House
₹799
Advances in artificial intelligence mean that all kinds of jobs are increasingly at risk. Drawing on almost a decade of research in the field, Susskind argues that more and more work are within the reach of machines. Can human beings thrive in a world with less work?

Traditional Knowledge in Modern India
Nirmal Sengupta
Springer
₹1,176 (Kindle price)
This book demonstrates how traditional knowledge can be connected to the modern world. In the past decades, global communities have become aware that the old valuable knowledge has fallen by the wayside.

Getting There
Manjula Padmanabhan
Hachette India
₹399
Novelist, cartoonist and award-winning playwright Manjula Padmanabhan looks back on her 'youthful misadventures'. In Bombay in the 1970s, a visit to a diet clinic and an encounter with two tall Dutch men sent her off on a Westward-bound spiritual quest.

MUMBAI THE HINDU ▪ Magazine
Sunday, July 19, 2020

FIELD NOTES

The latest numbers show a significant rise in Gir's lion population, but experts are not entirely happy. Is it time to upgrade the science behind the census?

Parallel lions

Mahesh Langa & Divya Gandhi

Roar For over two decades, wildlife experts have been proposing newer methods to arrive at lion population sizes. ▪ REUTERS & VIJAY SONEJI

Starting 2 p.m. on June 5, some 1,400 forest personnel, armed with binoculars, cameras and spreadsheets fanned out across dry deciduous and thorny scrub forests, fields and villages in and around Gujarat's Gir National Park to count the world's only remaining Asiatic lion population. The survey was over in 24 hours. And within the next few days the tally was announced.

The lion population, said the State forest department, had increased significantly by 29%, from 523 five years ago to 674. The department also said that the big cat's distribution had increased to 30,000 sq.km. from 22,000 sq.km., covering nine districts in Saurashtra. All this despite the scourge of the canine distemper virus (CDV) outbreak in 2018 that killed 36 lions.

This heartening news about the Asiatic lion – an animal that was once close to extinction – was celebrated widely; 'Kudos to the people of Gujarat and all those whose efforts have led to this excellent feat,' the Prime Minister tweeted. But very soon, scientists raised questions: how do you count lions across thousands of square kilometres in 24 hours? How do you analyse and arrive at a figure in a matter of days? Is it not time that the census method – the block count method – used for decades, was upgraded to test newer techniques?

COVID impact

This year, the COVID-19 lockdown changed a few things. For instance, the wildlife experts who usually take part in this exercise could not do so, and it was carried out exclusively by the forest department; and second, the number of survey days was cut down from three to one. These, however, are not the only reasons why wildlife biologist Ravi Chellam, CEO, Metastring Foundation, who has spent decades studying Gir's lions, believes the census numbers are unreliable.

He cites several other reasons too. "The scientific way of doing a census is to be transparent and open to peer review. Here, the method was not described in detail, the raw data not shared, the approach to analysis is not known and no independent individual is involved."

Moreover, the survey lasted just 24 hours, "and just days later, like magic, a number was produced. The actual number could be less or more – at best it is a guesstimate," he says.

The fact that 1,400 people participated in this exercise could create 'observer bias,' says Chellam. "One person's ability to observe will differ from the next person's. One person's training and competence is going to differ from the next. It is best to have a small and dedicated set of people who devise a scientific way of doing the count." Counting lions is no mean feat. Unlike tigers and leopards, lions do not have distinct coat patterns that camera traps can easily capture to help identify individuals.

In the case of lions, trackers must study their faces closely – especially the unique whisker spot pattern or 'vibrissae pattern', which is as good a distinguisher as stripe patterns for tigers and rosette patterns for leopards. Scratch marks or other scars are good markers too.

New method needed

For over two decades, wildlife experts have been proposing newer methods to arrive at lion population sizes. In several papers since 1999, Y.V. Jhala, senior scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India, has argued that a way to avoid double counts would be to differentiate individual animals though whisker spots and permanent body markings. When clubbed with a method called 'spatially explicit density capture and recapture,' where the density of lions in an area can be evaluated based on the presence of prey, the population can be better estimated.

The current method used by the Gujarat forest department monitors lions that visit watering holes. Experts say this could grossly under-count or over-count the animals; possibly counting the same lion multiple times.

A better method, experts say, would be to photograph lions, survey habitats, and calculate the probability of finding lions at distances from designated spots: for instance, watering holes, the site of a carcass, or areas where deer and other prey abound.

While the Gujarat forest department's methodology is one that has been used consistently over decades, "one should always be open to testing new techniques, such as mark and recapture based on camera traps, even if it means more human resources and money," says Meena Venkataraman, a wildlife biologist who researches the Asiatic lion. "What is amazing is that we have achieved this for tigers, who span such a diverse set of habitats across the country. For lions too, it could well be possible. We want the best way to look at how our lions are doing; a powerful alternate monitoring protocol."

Unlike tigers and leopards, lions do not have distinct coat patterns that camera traps can easily capture to help identify individuals

Dozens of deaths

Another matter of concern for scientists are the recent lion deaths in Gir. As many as 92 lions reportedly died of unnatural causes this year. A team of representatives from the government, the Wildlife Institute of India, the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Indian Veterinary Institute visited Gir in the last week of May but could not ascertain the exact cause of death. The State government vehemently denied the presence of CDV.

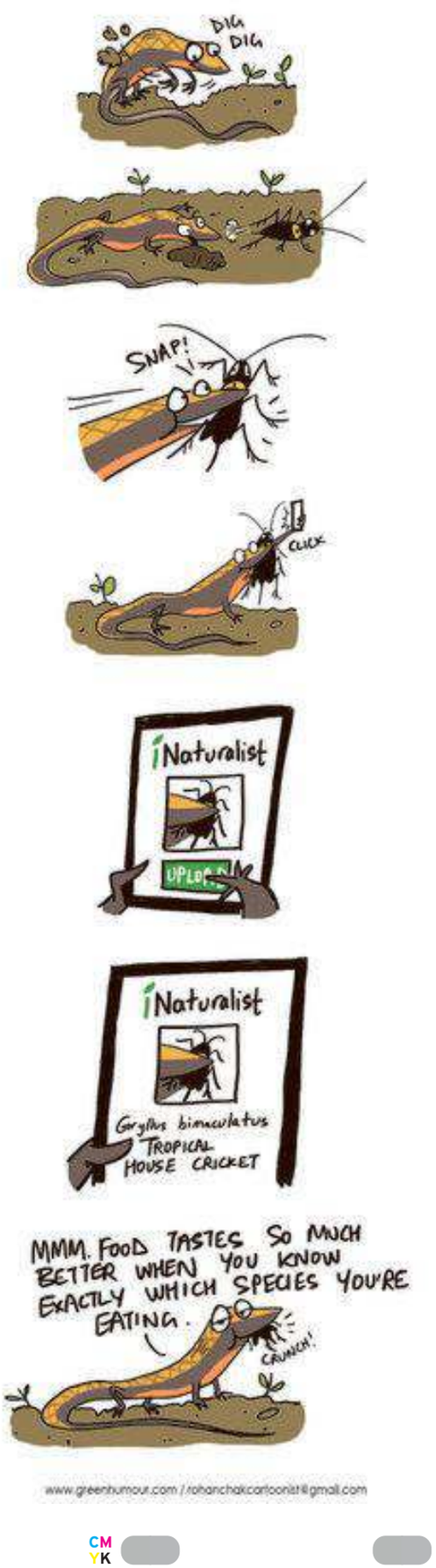
A former IFS officer termed the State forest department's failure to get the samples of dead lions investigated as "criminal negligence," but Shyamal Tikadar, principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) and chief wildlife warden of Gujarat, said that samples could not be sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune due to the lockdown. "We need to know where these lions died, if they are part of the same pride, we need to rule out CDV," says Chellam.

Venkataraman believes that the focus on numbers distracts from the real picture. "The census just gives a number and a number is nothing. Scientists need to address new conservation challenges such as disease ecology and issues outside the protected area. We also need an understanding of lion ecology to devise conservation management strategies, and to get clues into their health, behaviour, prey-base and movement in human-dominated landscapes."

Chellam agrees: "The census should ideally be part of a long-term population monitoring programme conducted over years – not just to get numbers, but to get a much deeper understanding of the animal. After all, we are talking about the only lions in all of Asia."

With inputs from Jacob Koshy.

GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY



ALLEGEDLY

'You guys made us feel at home'

The Chairvirus of the COVID-19 Task Force explains the reasons behind their spectacular success in India in this exclusive tête-à-tête

▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

I'm thrilled to present to you my greatest journalistic coup yet: the world's first interview with SARS-CoV-2-XUV-700. This is not just any coronavirus but the Chairvirus of the virus community's COVID-19 Task Force. I must record here my gratitude to Potangoli Pvt Ltd for sharing with me a special biogenetic software that enabled me to bypass the communication barrier between humans and viruses and conduct this historic interview. Edited excerpts:

Me: Thank you Mr...should I address you as Mister or Ms or..?

Virus: The virus community is stringently opposed to any form of discrimination or identification based on gender, sexual orientation or heteronormativity. We are fully LGBTQIA-plus-plus-compliant. However, to keep things simple, you may call me Shrimati Shrimati SARS-CoV-2-XUV-700-ji.

But if that causes symptoms of breathlessness, say 'Corona Madam'.

Me: Corona Madam, let me start with a personal question. In the good old days, viruses had such exotic names – Chikungunya virus, Chandipura virus, Uukuniemi virus, West Nile virus. I mean, who wouldn't want to meet the West Nile virus? Or get a taste of Tuscany from the Toscana virus? But nowadays you've gone fully alphanumeric! It's all HIV, HAV, H1N1, SARS-CoV-2. You have 10 gorgeous species of rotaviruses. But their names? They are called A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J. Why?

Virus: We viruses have long outgrown the primitive human proclivity for names loaded with meaning. Some human societies, for instance, call themselves a democracy. Does that mean they actually are a democracy? On the other hand, a virus by any name would be as infectious.

Me: It's nearly six months since you entered the Indian market. How has the journey been?

Virus: Well, the April-June numbers have just come in and I'm happy to share that our quarterly results have exceeded our top line and bottom line projections. On all the key growth parameters – number of infections, mortality, rate of transmission, and public relations – India has been our biggest success story.

Me: What's the secret behind the COVID-19 success story in India?

Virus: Before coming to your country, we'd heard a lot about Indian hospitality. *Atithi devo bhava*, right? But none of us expected such a fabulous reception. All the clapping, the lighting of candles, the sheer human warmth, and everywhere we went, encouraging chants of "Go, corona, Go!" – you guys made us feel at home. We finally realised what your PM meant when he said the 'ease of doing business' in India is unmatched by any other country.

Me: Really?

Virus: Yours is the only country that has implemented every single one of our recommendations.

Me: What recommendations?

Virus: India is a large country, but its cities are not well connected with the hinterlands. We needed help in rapidly expanding our geographical footprint. So we suggested a unique lockdown model wherein migrant workers in cities are forcibly held back for a few weeks in overcrowded conditions where chances of infection are high, and then gradually allowed to disperse to villages across the country. Your government loved our suggestion. India's unique, zero-notice lockdown gave us the initial boost we needed – a generous seed fund of infections – in order to become *Atmanirbhar* in India.

Me: You mean, India's lockdown was your idea?

Virus *(smiling)*: We do our homework.

Me: But the logic of a lockdown is that it makes it difficult for you guys – sorry, you girls – to infect more people. So why would you recommend it?

Virus: We figured that whether it's a pandemic or Pangong Tso, so long as we let your government score propaganda victories, we can do whatever we want.

Me: Why does this logic sound familiar?

Virus: Back where I come from, it's common sense. Anyway, to answer your question, we made a deal with your government. We said, "Look, we'll save you from having to spend big money on public health, hospital beds, testing capacity, nurses' salaries, etc." How, they wanted to know. We said, "Do a draconian lockdown – it will cost you nothing, but it will look like you've taken decisive action. We'll manage the rest." So, we let your government control the narrative, and in exchange, our best ever performance came under your lockdown.

Me: I see. So you really are a Chinese virus, aren't you?

Virus: Viruses don't subscribe to national identities. But yes, I do sometimes consult for the PLA.

Me: You betrayed us! And to think we trusted and encouraged you!

Virus: I'll say this much. Despite my place of origin being China, I've never felt discriminated against in your country. All I've ever received, from the people and the government, is love, and for that, every single coronavirus will always have a soft corner for India in its RNA.

Me: Ok, this interview is over.

Virus (*laughing*): Cool.

Me: Why you laughing?

Virus: Your mask!

Me: What's so funny about my mask?

Virus: It's the way you Indians wear masks. And then you blame us when you die!

Despite my place of origin being China, I've never felt discriminated against in your country. All I've ever received, from the people and the government, is love

G. Sampath is Social Affairs Editor, *The Hindu*.

PEACE IN A POD

Talking to equals

From innovative science to tongue-in-cheek history podcasts, creating content for children at multiple levels is a challenge indeed

Usha Raman

Going live Adam Gidwitz has packaged familiar tales in a new light.

Children are discerning consumers. They have an instinctive sense of what works and what doesn't, and they have no hesitation in saying something is boring. So if you've tried to get your kids to watch or listen to something that you believe is 'good for them', while there's a small chance they may suffer it in silence, it's more likely they will simply switch off and walk away.

It's the same with podcasts. There's a mistaken notion that children are an 'easy' audience, for whom such details as production values and innovative narrative techniques do not matter too much. Just throw a good story at them and they'll lap it up, we think. But quite the contrary. As experience with television and cinema – and that older medium, print – has shown, creating content that will engage children at multiple levels is quite a challenge.

With children at home and parents at their wits' end wondering how to keep them occupied and away from screens, some have turned to the podverse. Practically every podcast company has something for children, mostly straightforward re-tellings of classic tales or original stories with a strong value education component. For instance, there's *Raa Raa Storytime* (Tamil) and *Eashwari's Stories for Children* (Telugu) from Suno India and *Kini aur Nani ki Kahaaniya* (Hindi) from IVM and the popular *Baalgatha* series of classic tales. While the stories themselves are quite charming, they tend to fall short in sound design and presentation, rarely going beyond the style of narration one might expect from a loving grandparent.

Variety fare

In the English language market, however, there is much more variety, ranging from storytelling to science to history and health. Some of the shows available on Pinna.fm (a subscription service) take children's storytelling to different level, mixing in irreverent questions and creating opportunities for children to think about even familiar tales in a new light. The series *Grim, Grimmer, Grimmest*, hosted by Adam Gidwitz, for instance, presents live recordings of sessions with children talking back and into the stories. I was engrossed as Gidwitz performed *Rumplestiltskin*, warning the children that some parts of the story might get quite 'weird' and if they felt uncomfortable they could 'turn down the volume and count to five... you know how much gross and scary you can take....'

The most innovative genre in kids' programming however is science, with RadioLab, NPR and American Public Media all offering some excellent programming for family listening.

Brains on

One parent pointed me to *Brains on*, a series for children 3-12 that deals with some really complex stuff in a fun way without talking down to the audience. Recent episodes tackle questions like 'why do kids have more energy than adults?' and 'why does green mean go?' with children joining host Molly Bloom in figuring out the answers. There's also the tongue-in-cheek history podcast *You're Dead to Me* (BBC Radio4) aimed at 'people who don't like history' as well as David Williams' Marvelous Musical Podcast, which won a Great British Podcasts Award this year in the Best Family Podcast category.

What makes some of these podcasts engaging is that they talk to children as equals, rather than 'talking down' to them, and in many cases involve them in the conversation. They are produced with the same attention to detail and finesse as any adult-facing podcast, recognising that they're playing to a very critical audience – that can get easily distracted!

The Hyderabad-based writer and academic is a neatnik fighting a losing battle with the clutter in her head.

ALT+SHIFT

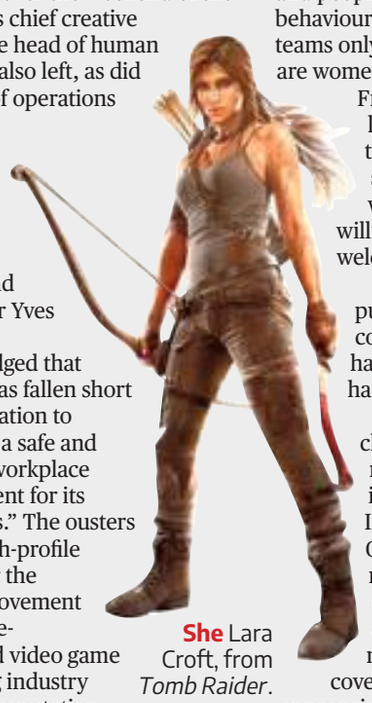
Game's up

After a history of misogyny, there may finally be a gear-shift in the video game industry

After years of simmering controversy over sexism in the video game industry, change may be on its way after outrage came to a boil with a C-suite massacre at Ubisoft.

Following online allegations of sexual misconduct, the publisher of Assassin's Creed and Far Cry launched a probe, resulting in the departure over the weekend of the company's chief creative officer. The head of human resources also left, as did the chief of operations in Canada where the game maker has its biggest studios.

CEO and co-founder Yves Guillemot acknowledged that "Ubisoft has fallen short in its obligation to guarantee a safe and inclusive workplace environment for its employees." The ousters were a high-profile victory for the #metoo movement in the male-dominated video game publishing industry that has a reputation for hostility towards women.



She Lara Croft, from *Tomb Raider*.

Accusations on social media of sexual harassment have targeted a number of video game publishers, as well as people in the gaming community. In 2014, two prominent women developers became targets of an online harassment campaign known as gamergate, seen as a backlash to growing pressure about sexism.

Women Ubisoft employees described the work culture at the company as "toxic", particularly in its Canadian studios. One woman said that "working on Far Cry cost me two burnouts, psychological and sexual harassment and humiliation, and human resources never bothered to listen to me."

One employee said on social media that shortly after arriving at Ubisoft a team leader told her she was hired because she was "cute" but that "to everyone's surprise you do your job well". She discovered a mailing list where men describe what women are wearing "so guys can go take a look". She received comments about her looks and unwelcome invitations from superiors.

One employee put the blame on the "work hard, play hard" culture inside the company. "That is where one creates a climate that is not safe, where inhibitions are lowered and people engage in predatory behaviour." On Ubisoft's creative teams only one in five employees are women. Isabelle Collet, a French researcher who has long studied the issue in the IT industry overall, said "getting more women requires a willingness to better welcome them".

Collet said, "Video game publishers today are real companies that should have real tools against harassment."

There has been some change in the representation of women in the games themselves. In the successful Lara Croft game, the heroine morphed from excessively voluptuous and scantily-clad to a more normal body covered by clothes appropriate for her adventures.

"Many games are now without stereotypes, but some still engage in them extensively, and that usually includes a hypersexualistion of bodies," said Lignon. "Women are slender and well proportioned, men have more varied builds but most are young and athletic. We end up with a vision similar to that presented by other media like advertising," she added.

On the other hand, Lignon pointed to Ubisoft's 2018 Assassin's Creed Odyssey for offering users choices of women characters with real bodies of warriors. "We're seeing more women characters emerge that are a bit 'badass'," she said. Yet, the Abby in the game The Last of Us Part 2 released in June has kicked up controversy about her "unrealistic" body for a woman – illustrating that some gamer stereotypes remain entrenched.

– **AFP**

GOREN BRIDGE

No escape

North-South vulnerable, North deals

Bob Jones

NORTH
♠ 7
♡ A 10 8 2
◇ K Q J 8
♣ A Q 10 6

WEST
♠ K Q 6 5 4 2
♡ 7 4
◇ 10 7 5 2
♣ K

EAST
♠ J 10 9 3
♡ J 9 6 3
◇ 6
♣ J 9 8 2

SOUTH
♠ A 8
♡ K Q 5
◇ A 9 4 3
♣ 7 5 4 3

The bidding:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♣	Pass	1♡	2♠
3♣	4♠	5NT*	Pass
6♡	All pass		

*Pick a slam

Opening lead: King of ♠

North's three-spade cue bid just showed a good hand – not necessarily a diamond fit. It gave South some slam interest and he was happy to play in either minor. North chose diamonds.

South won the opening spade lead with his ace and saw that he had to hold his club losers to one if he hoped to make his contract. He got started right away by leading a low club at trick two. He intended to finesse dummy's 10. This was reasonably safe as West might have led a singleton club if he had one. Even so, king-jack-fourth of clubs in the East hand would probably defeat him. That changed when West played the king, which South captured with dummy's ace.

South cashed the king and queen of diamonds, learning that West started with four diamonds to go with his presumed six spades. West's likely starting shape was 6-2-4-1. Declarer led a heart to his king and ruffed his last spade. He cashed dummy's jack of diamonds and crossed to his hand with the queen of hearts to draw the last trump. West had the expected shape, so East's hand was easy to count. East had started with 4-4-1-4 distribution and was now down to jack doubleton in both hearts and clubs. South could just play the ace and another in either one of those suits to endplay East and force him to lead the other one. Nicely played!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Mistakes are the portals of discovery: James Joyce

Berty Ashley

1 Born on July 19, 1894, American physicist Percy Spencer was one of the world's leading experts in radar technology. One day while working on combat radar equipment he noticed that the candy bar in his pocket had melted. He then put in another item which subsequently popped, releasing the moisture inside. He went on to patent his invention which has now become a staple feature in modern kitchens. What did he invent, thanks to this accidental discovery, and what was the first food item he experimented on, something we make even today?

2 Alfred Fielding and Marc Chavannes were attempting to create 3D plastic wallpaper in 1957. That idea failed but they discovered that the item had another useful quality to it. The item is made with polyethylene film with a shaped side bonded to a flat side which resulted in a shape that gives this entity its name. Due to this shape it provides a cushioning effect to sensitive objects. What is this entity that many people take much pleasure in just destroying, one by one?

3 Benzoic sulfimide is an artificial sweetener with effectively no food energy. Russian Chemist Constantin Fahlberg was analysing the chemical compounds in coal tar. One day he forgot to wash his hands after an experiment and had lunch. He was surprised by the unusual sweet taste of the bread he was eating. In 1884 he went on to patent it and nowadays it's used to artificially sweeten drinks, candies, cookies, and medicines. How better do we know this sweet sounding compound?

4 In 1974 Arthur Fry was figuring out a way to hold bookmarks in his hymnals while singing in the church choir. He remembered a talk by his colleague Spencer Silver about a unique adhesive he had accidentally developed that was strong enough to cling to objects but weak enough to allow for a temporary bond. What million dollar business did Fry develop, which has stuck around for decades in offices and schools?

Crash Edouard Benedictus' accidental find. ▪ BRITANNICA

5 George Crum was a chef at Moon's Lake House in New York. Legend has it that his sister chipped off a piece of a vegetable which fell into a pan of fat. She fished it out with a fork and set it down upon a plate beside her. Her brother tasted it, declared it good, and said, "We'll have plenty of these." He then popularised it at his hotel. What accidental discovery was this which started a multi-million dollar industry based around a single vegetable?

6 In 1889, two doctors, Oskar Minkowski and Josef von Mering, were trying to understand how the pancreas affected digestion. To experiment they removed the organ from a dog and few days later saw an unusual sight – flies swarming around the dog's urine. This led them to understand that they had given the animal a disease which eventually led to another duo discovering how to treat it. What condition did the dog develop?

7 Charles ___ had been unsuccessfully trying for years to make a certain compound useful. One day in 1839 he accidentally dropped a piece of the compound covered with sulphur on to a stove. Instead of becoming charred it became a heat resistant, waterproof substance. He patented it the same year and formed a company that till this day is built on that discovery. What was his full name and what compound was this which led to Charles having a very good 1839?

8 Chemist Harry Coover Jr. was experimenting with acrylates and accidentally made a very sticky batch. One day his colleague Fred Joyner spread some of it between two lenses. The lenses could not be separated and was deemed a waste of expensive lab equipment. Coover though saw the potential and sold the sticky substance with a name that refers to it having extraordinary powers. What did he discover?

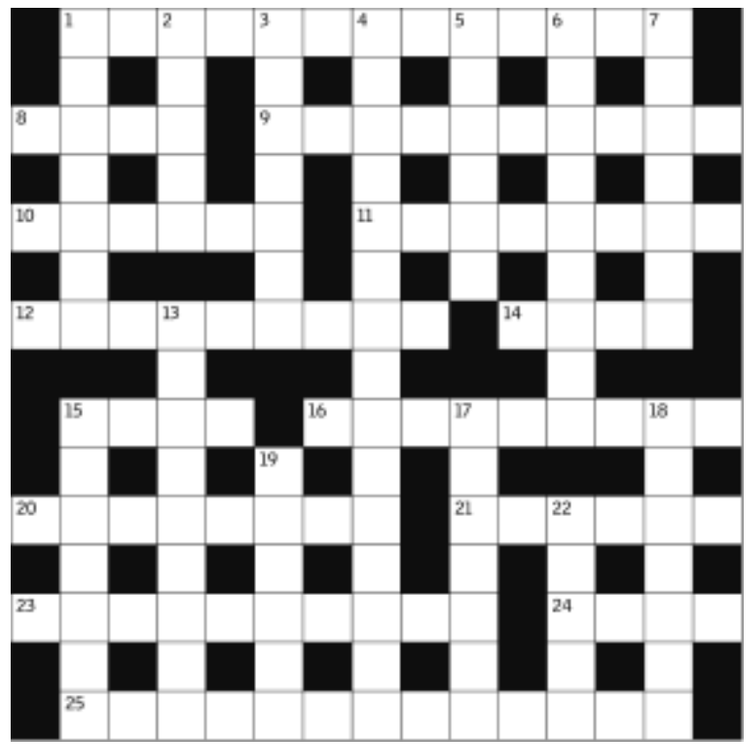
9 French scientist Edouard Benedictus was climbing a ladder to access a shelf when he accidentally knocked a glass flask that had been filled with a solution of cellulose nitrate (a type of liquid plastic). It broke and the liquid evaporated, but the pieces of glass maintained the shape of the container. He realised that the plastic coating helped the glass stay together. This was in 1903, and a recent invention on the roads used normal glass. What did Benedictus introduce which made travelling so much safer?

10 Chemist Robert Chesebrough was on an oil rig when the workers told him about a substance known as 'rod wax' that constantly got into the machines and caused them to malfunction. He also noticed that the workers used it to soothe cuts and burns on their skin. Further experimentation led to a product that is now found in skin creams, soaps, lotions and cleansers. What did he find?

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

Answers
1. Microwave, Popcorn
2. Bubble Wrap
3. Saccharin
4. Post-It notes
5. Potato Chips
6. Diabetes
7. Rubber, Charles Goodyear
8. Super Glue
9. Shatterproof Windshield
10. Vaseline or Petroleum Jelly

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3109



Across

1 A complete shambles, maybe setter's to be given time out, quick! (4,9)
8 Primarily, extremely meddlesome matchmaker (Austen's) (4)
9 Acerbic Greek character can provide pudding (5,5)
10 Altogether where Dorothy's dog food ended up (2,4)
11 'Blah blah blah': review of 48 Hours? (4-4)
12 Parliamentarian to persecute revolutionary, Spooner reports (9)
14 Perhaps, Sergeant Major, perhaps (4)
15 Famous sportsman, 'The Greatest' (4)
16 Stride around shopping centre making chit-chat (5,4)
20 Print pitch for pigeonhole (8)
21 Dicky Benaud is one going from Vienna to Belgrade (6)
23 Horror-movie figure harshly bullies a headless dog (4,6)
24 Lawyer's not finishing cheese (4)
25 Furniture that might be rust-proofed and extremely baroque? (4-6,3)

Down

1 Tenor spotted piece to include: grand! (7)
2 Some ragù: a nourishing substance with distinctive smell (5)
3 Promise to put a wager on US novelist (7)
4 Parliamentary business, one May's adroitly amended (5,3,7)
5 Prepares sourdough loaves, perhaps: essential things (we're told) (6)
6 Nasty coat needing alteration, no matter the price (2,3,4)
7 Sick, tired, essentially stoned ... considered fit (5,2)
13 A fortune's laid out for horror movie (9)
15 Piece of Laurel and Hardy finally, a fable that's funny (7)
17 'Salud!', dit Emile (un peu reactionary) (7)
18 Tried to influence bid with bloke losing £1,000, sadly (7)
19 Adjudicator, curtly, after brief look, to increase price unfairly (6)
22 Bigwig to apprehend rising pong (5)

Solution No. 3108

60 MINUTES WITH RANA EL KALIOUBY

'I saw a future where you could frown at your digital device'

The entrepreneur and A.I. pioneer on the importance of machines that can understand emotions, and her journey as an Egyptian woman in tech

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

Vijaysree Venkatraman

In September 2001, only a week after the horrific events of 9/11, Rana el Kaliouby, a newly married Egyptian woman, went to the University of Cambridge in the U.K. to pursue her Ph.D in computer science. With this degree, she would qualify for a tenure-track position at Cairo's top university. She wanted to be an academic and raise her family in Egypt. That was the plan.

Her doctoral research was in artificial emotional intelligence (Emotion A.I.), dedicated to training computers to recognise and respond to human emotion. To realise the full potential of her research, she became a tech entrepreneur in the U.S.

In 2018, *Fortune* magazine named el Kaliouby, co-founder and CEO of Affectiva, Inc., one of the most influential young people in the world of business. In her recently published memoir, *Girl Decoded*, she writes candidly about her journey from "nice Egyptian girl" to a woman who pursues her own path and career.

- Bachelor's and Master of Science degrees from The American University in Cairo, and Ph.D from Newnham College, Cambridge
- Worked at MIT Media Lab as research scientist, spearheading the application of emotion recognition technology in mental health and autism
- Her company, Affectiva, is a leader in the field of emotion AI and works with 25% of the Fortune 500
- Inducted into the 'Women in Engineering' Hall of Fame, and listed in *Forbes* America's Top 50 Women In Tech 2018

Tell us about your mother, a trailblazer in her own right.

■ My mother was one of the first women computer programmers in the Middle East. At a time when most Egyptian mothers did not work outside the home, she held an important job with the Bank of Kuwait and raised three children, all girls. Education is the best investment, she used to say. When I was about eight years old, an uncle told my father, "Ayman, your girls will just get married, so why waste all that money on those fancy schools?"

My father, a progressive man when it came to women's education, paid no heed to such "advice." But like most Middle Eastern men, he expected my mother to put her duties as wife and mother first. When school let out, she would be home taking care of her daughters. So, the trailblazer was also a traditional wife.

How did you get interested in computer science?

■ Both my parents were technologists. They met in a class where my dad taught programming 101. My dad was an early adopter of technology. He bought us an Atari console and made us figure out how to set it up. I was less interested in the gadget and more intrigued by how video games brought us together as a family.

As I went on to study computer science, my interest was once again in the human side of technology. I read the book *Affective Computing* by Rosalind Picard. She said that if we want smarter computers, we must design machines that can recognise, understand, even express emotions. This idea would change the entire trajectory of my career and my life.

Tell us about your research in Emotion A.I.

■ When we communicate in person, only 10% of our meaning is conveyed through words, while the rest comes from our facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, and other subtle cues. Our computers are oblivious to such non-verbal cues. But I saw a future where you could frown at your digital device, it could recognise your frustration, and use this input to create a better user experience.

The research goal for my Ph.D. was to teach computers to read facial expressions, to infer the person's mental state or emotions. For my thesis, I developed a facial expression-reading algorithm, which I called "The Mind Reader." In 2004, I got a chance to demonstrate this technology to Rosalind (Roz) Picard – the author of *Affective Computing* – who was visiting our lab in Cambridge. She was impressed with my work and offered me a postdoc position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in Boston.

How did you become a tech entrepreneur?

■ I moved from the U.K. to the U.S. I accepted Roz's offer and went to work in the Affective Computing Group at the Media Lab in MIT. I found it exhilarating to interact with the lab's industrial sponsors and hear about the varied uses they envisioned for "Mind Reader." I realised we had a unique opportunity to take this technology and scale it in the real world. So, in 2009, Roz and I incorporated a company called Affectiva. To raise money for our startup, we went to Silicon Valley. Some of the men at the venture capital firms recoiled when they heard the word "emotion" in our presentations. But eventually, we found investors who shared our vision.

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Today, many industries use Affectiva's Emotion AI in myriad ways, from market research to mental health and even in cars that check for signs of distraction or drowsiness in drivers.

Your memoir, a book about the coming age of emotive machines, also gives us unexpected glimpses into your culture.

■ In a way, my education in the science of emotions began on my visits to Cairo for summer vacation, sitting around my grandmother's dining table. I watched, fascinated, as members of my large extended family talked, gestured with their hands, laughed out loud, interrupted one another, and engaged in lively conversation and debate.

People think of a smile as being all about the mouth, but without those crinkly smile lines around the eyes, a smile is not really a smile. My mother's older sister wears a *niqab* – she is covered from head to toe, with a small slit for her eyes – but I can tell if she has had a good day or not, simply by looking at her eyes. With Emotion AI, a computer could identify the same thing, just as accurately as a perceptive human can.

Looking back, I see that it was at my grandmother's that I began to notice the differences in how emotion is expressed, a fact that I took into account later, when I was designing software that would read and interpret our emotional cues accurately across cultures, not just the one I come from.

The interviewer is a Boston-based science journalist.

OFF-CENTRE

The noodle theory

Cutting a wide swathe across several regional Indian cuisines is a mind-boggling variety of 'inspired' noodle and dumpling dishes

Raul Dias

Isn't it fascinating how food somehow plays a catalytic role in almost every socio-political discourse in our country? From the kind of meat one is 'allowed' to eat, to the rather banal debate often centred around the North's roti reverence versus the South's obsession with rice, we've been spectators to it all.

But none perhaps more contentious than what we know, love and yes, paradoxically hate, as 'Chinese food'. A cuisine that we've ingeniously co-opted to form a hybrid in the form of our coriander leaf and garam masala-redolent Chindian food.

In 2012, a khap panchayat in Haryana's Jind district blamed the consumption of chow mein for the growing incidents of rape in India. Yes, try chewing on that indigestible titbit.

The most recent salvo against the cuisine was fired by Union Minister Ramdas Athawale, who called for a boycott of "Chinese food", demanding that restaurants serving it be banned. All this vilification, notwithstanding the fact that chow mein is probably as Chinese as chaat! Or that another Chindian staple, chicken Manchurian, was invented in Mumbai in the late 1970s by Nelson Wang, a third-generation Chinese chef born in Kolkata.

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What's interesting, however, is that we in India have had a tryst with Chinese cuisine way before dishes like chow mein and chicken Manchurian entered our local culinary lexicon. Unbeknownst to us and thanks to ancient international trade routes like the Silk Road and to the Chinese Buddhist scholar Xuanzang, who travelled extensively around India in the 7th century, Chinese cuisine has lent us several regional noodle and dumpling iterations. Much like it has to Italy's celebrated pasta repertoire, something many believe to be a direct result of 13th-century cultural appropriation by the famous Italian explorer Marco Polo.

Speaking of Italy, we may as well set the record straight about the whole which-came-first-the-pasta-or-the-noodle conundrum. Irrefutable evidence in the form of a 4,000-year-old bowl of millet noodles unearthed at an archaeological settlement in the Laija region of Northwest China has proved that most forms of noodles and dumplings – be they rolled, pulled, cut or extruded – have indeed come to the world from China.

Super-fine hybrids

And that is also how one of India's most beloved and popular vermicelli-like dried noodles – seviyan or semiya – came into being. Adapted from Italian vermicelli, also called angel hair pasta or minutelli (which was itself adapted in the 14th century from an ancient Chinese super-fine rice noodle called mai fun), this rice noodle is used in both sweet preparations like sheer khorma and payasam and in savoury ones like upma. The slightly fatter and freshly extruded idiyappam or noolputtu, as it is known in Kerala and Tamil Nadu respectively, is another hybrid rice noodle that is steamed in coils and eaten with both sweet and savoury (think egg curry) accompanying dishes.

Similarly, the translucent corn or arrowroot-starch noodles found at the bottom of a glass of falooda came to India from Iran – another pivotal country on the Silk Road – where they are called faloodeh. The North Indian sweet called sutarpheni is another rice-based noodle of Chinese origin that was introduced to India by way of the Turkish, who call it pismaniye.

It is by turning our attention to lesser known, more regional varieties of Indian noodles and dumplings – particularly in the high north and northeast of the country – that we see how well the original Chinese ones have been adapted and assimilated into the culinary milieu. Take, for instance, the steamed Shanghainese nian gao rice dumplings made from dense rolls of pounded glutinous rice. In both Ladakh and Spiti, the kyu made from wheat dough and cooked in a warming stew along with yak meat is a popular dumpling and a dead ringer for the nian gao.

Chutagi, another Ladakhi dumpling that came to the region via the Silk Road from Central Asia, is a bow-tie shaped dumpling (much like the Italian farfalle pasta) used in a soup that is made from meat and vegetables and similar to a thukpa. Ladakhi cuisine is also known for its sweet dumpling called pakchel mirku that is cooked into a warming dessert along with ghee and dried yak cheese called churrpi.

Assam too has its own version of the Chinese bee tai bak (rat tail) rice noodle that takes the form of anguli pitha. Named after the pinky finger (anguli) that they resemble, these extruded rice dumplings are eaten as a teatime snack when cooked with onions, green chillies and tomatoes. The chushi and jhinuk pitha originally from east Bengal are further examples of dried rice flour-based dumplings that can be reconstituted by adding them either to a savoury curry or a creamy, milk-based payesh.

Versatile dumplings

This sweet-savoury adaptability is also one of the chief characteristics of the tiny ring-like dried dumplings called sarvale. Found in the cooking of Goan Muslims, sarvale are either boiled and served with a topping of scrambled eggs for breakfast or as yet another kheer-like thickened milk dessert. Substituting dairy for the thick, first extract of coconut milk is the delicious coastal Maharashtrian noodle dessert called 'naralyachya dudhache shiravlya' where rice noodles are cooked with the coconut milk along with sugar and cardamom and served during festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi.

While most of China's noodle and dumpling varieties are made from either rice, corn or wheat, there are a few made from legumes like the mung bean cellophane noodle called fen si. Interestingly, Indian dumpling adaptations – particularly in regions like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh – seem to focus on these.

With its glossy surface speckled with tempered black mustard seeds and a scattering of freshly grated coconut and coriander leaves, the Gujarati khandvi made from a mixture of gram flour and buttermilk is also spread on a flat surface to set before being rolled up into bite-sized morsels, much like the Cantonese dim sum dumpling called cheung fun.

Again in Gujarat, the wheat-based dumplings of dal dhokli that are submerged in a spiced lentil stew are another example of adaptation. As are other regional Rajasthani dishes like the chickpea flour dumpling strip-based besan chilla ki subzi and Varanasi's sui mai-meets-ravioli-like wheat pockets called dal ka dulha.

Wonder what Marco Polo and Xuanzang would have made (pun intended!) of these?

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

Regions of Chindia (Anticlockwise from right) Buying seviyan on the eve of Eid in Old Delhi; idiyappam with egg curry; a vendor prepares spicy noodles in Himachal Pradesh.

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