



What it took to remake the classic 'Manthan' from a damaged reel

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The Sunday Tribune

SPECTRUM



A surge of pilgrims and tourists in Uttarakhand has thrown life out of gear

INDEPTH PAGE 6

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Photi La, en route to Demchok that lies on the LAC.

In remote Ladakh

On his eighth trip, Vijay Mohan takes the route less taken, and it's quite an adventure

THE condition of the road to Umling La is excellent, quipped a jovial constable from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). "But if you are travelling all the way to that place, then why not go beyond to Demchok on the border with China," he added, as we sipped piping hot tea at a kiosk near Nyoma (in south-eastern Ladakh) amidst a torrential downpour in July last year.

Demchok, located in the furthestmost corner of south-eastern Ladakh, lies right on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and for long has been a hotspot of Chinese incursions and face-offs with Indian troops.

The route to Demchok lies over the 19,024 feet high Umling La, the world's highest motorable pass, constructed and maintained by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). Till a paved road was inaugurated by the Defence Minister in December 2021, it was little more than a dirt track and Demchok was off limits for tourists.

"The government has now permitted tourists to go right up to the border," the constable, who along with his companion had also stopped for a tea-break, explained. "If you already have an inner-line permit to travel in this area, you don't need separate permission to go there," he told us. An inner-line permit is issued by the administration to allow tourists to travel to remote areas beyond Leh such as Nubra, Pangong Tso, etc, and has to be produced at various check-posts en route.

The visit to Umling La itself was a surprise development. During a trip to Ladakh in 2019, we had been told that civilians were not allowed to drive up to the pass. While discussing our 2023 travel schedule in Ladakh with an Army officer in Leh, it was a chance question whether Umling La was now open to civilians. It yielded an affirmative response, requiring an on-the-spot tweak in our programme.

So, when a friend bought a new SUV recently, what better place to test it out than on the highest and the remotest that the varied Indian terrain had to offer. Thus was conceived my second trip to the highest motorable pass within a span of 10 months.

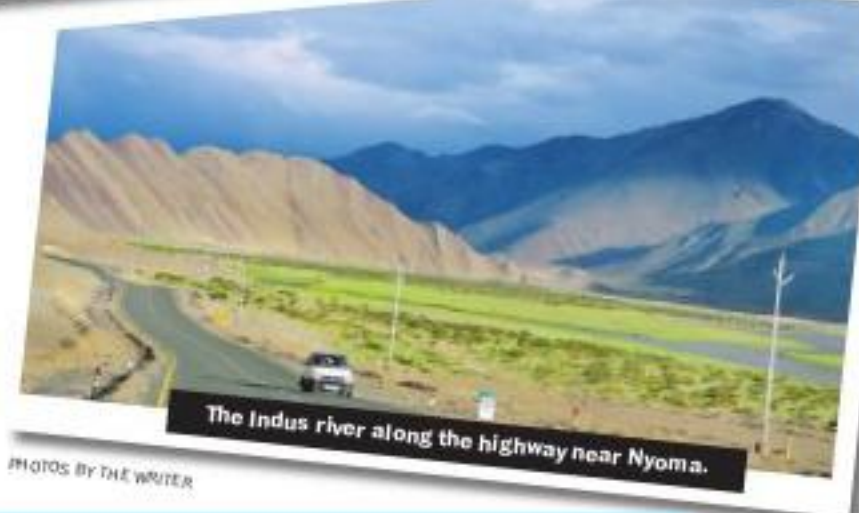
It would be my eighth trip to Ladakh, including two to Siachen, the world's highest battlefield. Four have been by road on vacation. Ladakh is amazing and enticing, its towering jagged peaks, stark slopes and treacherous rock faces, interspersed with specks of greenery, glistening snowcaps and sparkling streams, present a spectacular landscape and texture that leave a vivid imprint. The steep, narrow paths twining along the high mountains and the chill in the air are an adventurer's delight.

Mid-May, just after snow-bound passes in Kashmir, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh were opened for vehicular traffic and before the June onslaught of tourists, seemed ideal for yet another trip to Ladakh. The plan was to reach there via the Jammu-Srinagar route and head home to Chandigarh along the Manali axis.

The highway up to Udhampur whizzed by, but the 90-odd-km stretch from Udhampur to Banihal was troublesome. Construction of tunnels and overbridges, as well as road widening, led to heavy



Demchok, with a Chinese post in the background.



The Indus river along the highway near Nyoma.

PHOTOS BY THE WRITER

jams, overshooting the schedule by several hours. The next choke point was Zoji La, known as the 'mountain pass of blizzards'. Among one of the tougher passes to negotiate, it was dusty at the lower altitude but snow-capped at the top and beyond till the 'zero-point' on the other end. Visible across the valley along the ascent was the abode of Amarnath, still under a white snow blanket.

The 11,575 feet high pass between Srinagar and Kargil was reopened by the BRO in early April, but was closed frequently owing to snow and avalanches. The narrow drivable road between 15-foot ice walls, at places just sufficiently wide to allow a single vehicle to pass, mandated that traffic was permitted from Srinagar to Kargil and from Kargil to Srinagar on alternate days. The same system was in place at Baralacha La in Himachal Pradesh on the Manali-Leh road.

After crossing Zoji La, a mandatory halt was at the Kargil War Memorial, dedicated to the martyrs of the conflict that would mark its 25th anniversary in July this year. It is located near the town of Dras, where a signboard proclaims it to be the second coldest inhabited place after Siberia. Visible in the backdrop are the famous battle sites of Tiger Hill, Rhino Horn, Tokoling and Sando Top.

After a smooth drive till Leh began the adventure. Moving over Chang La and passing by the world's highest research station built by DRDO at 17,644 feet, the next check-point was Pangong Tso, on the way to Hanle. Few visitors proceed beyond the popular tourist spots like Spangmik, Man and Merak on the northern edge of the lake.

Moving south towards Chushul, the colour of the water becomes a deeper shade of blue, with tinges of turquoise and sea green. As the lake bends eastwards into China, the 'fingers' can be seen on the opposite bank. Contested by India and China, these have witnessed frequent face-offs between the troops of both countries and came into public gaze during the confrontation along the LAC in 2020.

At Chushul, an important battle site of the 1962 Sino-India conflict and now one of the five official border personnel meeting points in Ladakh, the black-top road ends. For the next 60 km till Loma, where this route links up with the regular Leh-Chumathang-Hanle road, it was totally off-road driving.

Though the terrain was largely flat, dotted with shrubs and stones, there were places where a track could not be discerned and the direction in which to proceed was judged by the alignment of telecom poles or tyre marks. Sometimes, the path was blocked by ice or rocks, requiring a change of course or engaging the vehicle's four-wheel drive. At places, one could see the remnants of a road that once existed. Work is on to lay a new road, but it could well take a few seasons for the entire stretch to be built.

About 15 km from Chushul lies Rezag La. It was here in 1962 that 124 troops from 'C' Company of 13 Kumaon made the famous 'last man last round' stand against the overwhelming Chinese troops. The company commander, Maj Shaitan Singh, was decorated posthumously with the Param Vir Chakra. With the Rezag La peak in the background, an impressive

war memorial, with a huge Tricolour and regimental pennants fluttering in the mountain breeze, stands along the road.

A sand model gives the operational perspective of the sector, making for better understanding of the terrain and identification of geographical features than can be had from maps and photographs.

Hanle, a small village about 250 km from Leh with a monastery dating back to the 17th century, was the base for the journey to Demchok. It is also home to the Indian Astronomical Observatory, one of the world's highest located sites for optical, infrared and gamma-ray telescopes. Perched atop Mount Saraswati at an elevation of 14,764 feet, it is open to visitors, who can have a look at the equipment housed inside, but cannot use it as the gadgets are operated remotely from Bengaluru.

Toreach Demchok, Photi La, the world's sixth highest motorable pass at 18,124 feet, had to be negotiated first, which involved a tough drive over steep inclines, sharp curves and hair-pin bends. The isolated yet spectacular route was devoid of any traffic. We did not come across a single vehicle.

A few miles ahead of the base was a café run by a unit from the Assam Regiment, offering tea and snacks. Fresh samosas accompanied by ethnic Assamese red chutney were dished out. In fact, most Army units based in that area run cafés that are open to civilian travellers.

The ascent to Umling La, though higher, was relatively easier. "You are now higher than Everest Base Camp" read a sign a few kilometres short of the top. By now, a few

bikers were also on the road. The "world's highest café" run by the BRO at the top treats you to tea, coffee and snacks, besides putting out souvenirs.

Strangely, the highest pass was devoid of snow, barring a few small patches here and there, even though other passes at lower altitudes like the Zoji La, Tanglang La, Lachung La and Baralacha La had significant snow cover for this time of the year.

Conversely, the descent to Demchok was steeper and on the return leg, the vehicle laboured furiously — something not experienced at other passes. Forty minutes later, the Indus valley becomes visible over a blue metal bridge, with China-held mountains in the backdrop. Hillside bunkers are built en route. Driving along one can see tracks on the mountains across reaching down to the expansive plains that are the grazing grounds for herds of local shepherds.

Demchok Café is the first signboard you see on approaching the garrison. Soldiers approach to record particulars and brief you. "The area below is Demchok Plains. The Indus further away marks the LAC and the hills behind it are in China. Chinese surveillance cameras are mounted atop the hillock in front," a soldier said.

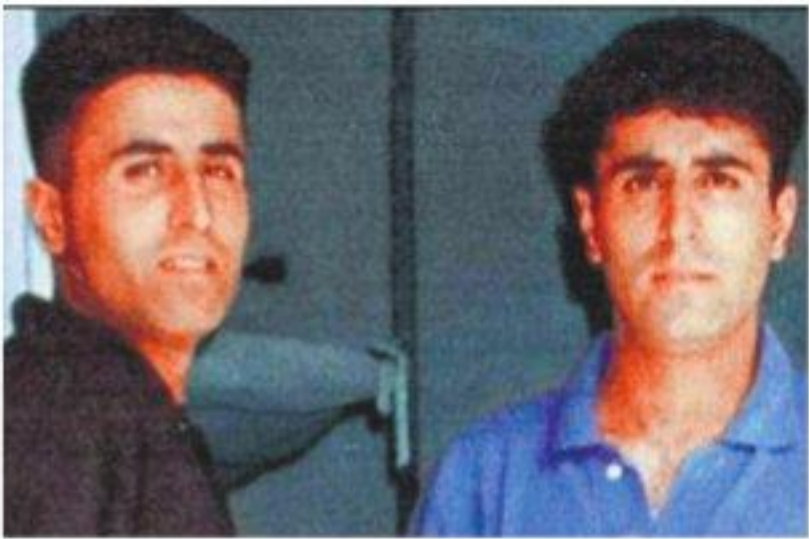
"You can drive through the post to Demchok village and go to Hot Springs, a natural geyser spewing warm water. Lunch will be ready by the time you come back," the trooper said. "But do not cross the nallah as it is the border," he warned.

On the other side of the Army post, driving over an uneven, rocky track along the Chardang Nallah that joins the Indus a few kilometres down, a Chinese post is visible about 800 metres away. Called Zorawar Complex, it has a watch tower and a surveillance dome mounted atop a hillock. To its left is a Chinese village with red flags and neat rows of houses amidst trees. There is a road on the other side of the nallah and a couple of Chinese cameras overlooking the Hot Springs.

Not visible from the Indian side but set up behind the hillock is a larger Chinese establishment that is estimated to house about a company-level strength.

It is well into summers with temperatures crossing 45°C in the plains, but significant snow cover persists on the Himalayan peaks. Crossing passes on the Leh-Manali route required driving through ice walls, water puddles and some road stretches requiring immediate repairs. The entire stretch from the northern base to the southern base of Baralacha La, including the popular Suraj Tal, was mostly frozen.

The road network in Ladakh is now vastly better than what it was a few years ago. There was a time, about a decade ago, when if a single vehicle broke down on the Leh-Srinagar stretch, traffic on both sides would be held up for hours. Now, it's a double-lane highway allowing high-speed driving. Of the 2,500 km traversed on this trip, only a cumulative stretch of about 150 km was broken or where construction was underway. It's quite an achievement.



Capt Vikram Batra (left) with brother Vishal Batra.

25 yrs on, he lives on

Kargil war hero Capt Vikram Batra would have turned 50 this year. Twin brother Vishal Batra pays tribute

HE was Luv, and I, his identical twin (younger by 14 minutes), am Kush. Our childhood was spent in Palampur and we made the most of our identical looks — playing pranks, filling in for each other and at times, even getting punished for the other's mistakes. The similarity ran deeper than looks.

'Shershaah of Kargil', that's what the enemy called Vikram. That's the mark he made on those unforgiving mountains of Kargil in 1999, 25 years ago.

As students, both of us were always in awe of the men in uniform as our school was inside the Army Cantonment at Palampur. The dream of joining the armed forces was embedded in 1986-87 when TV serial 'Param Vir Chakra' was broadcast every Sunday on Doordarshan.

Vikram cleared his SSB in March 1996 and I, not recommended twice by the SSB, settled for an MBA. It was on December 6, 1997, that Vikram got commissioned into 13 JAK Rifles. His first posting was in Sopore. There, he was involved in anti-insurgency operations. We knew that he was born to fight against the odds.

During his annual leave, he would talk for hours about the challenges he faced in Sopore. I would dream of the day he would command his regiment and I would get a chance to attend some of the regimental functions.

When Kargil happened, their first mission was to capture Point 5140 at 17,000 feet. With the roaring sound of their regimental war cry, 'Droga Maki Ki Jai', Vikram led his contingent on the night of June 19, 1999. He had promised his Commanding Officer, Lt Col (later Lt Gen) YK Joshi, that he would have his morning tea at Point 5140.

He led the attack so ferociously that he was intercepted by some of the enemy soldiers. They challenged him to not climb the top. He strategically regrouped his men and lobbed a hand grenade, destroying one of the bunkers

and killing five Pakistani soldiers in hand-to-hand combat. As he had promised, he radioed his CO, 'Yeh Dil Munge More', by hoisting the Tricolour atop Point 5140 on June 20.

His last remark to one of our friends before proceeding for Kargil was that either he would hoist the Tricolour or come wrapped in it. He did not dither.

Never could I have imagined that 'Param Vir Chakra' would one day become so real for me and our parents, and Vikram would be the hero, just short of his 25th birthday (on September 9).

It was a reconnaissance mission when Lt Naveen Nagappa was hit by a grenade in the second mission at Point 4875 (the most strategic feature which overlooked the Srinagar-Leh National highway), counter-led by Vikram on July 7.

As Vikram jumped on the other side of the cliff to silence the machine gun that was firing indiscriminately, he got into a close combat with three Pakistanis and put them to death before being hit by a sniper from a close range. Having realised that their commander had fallen, the charged-up company went berserk and destroyed all the enemy bunkers. The Tricolour was planted atop Point 4875 — they call it Batra Top now for his supreme sacrifice and giving an edge to recapture this strategic feature.

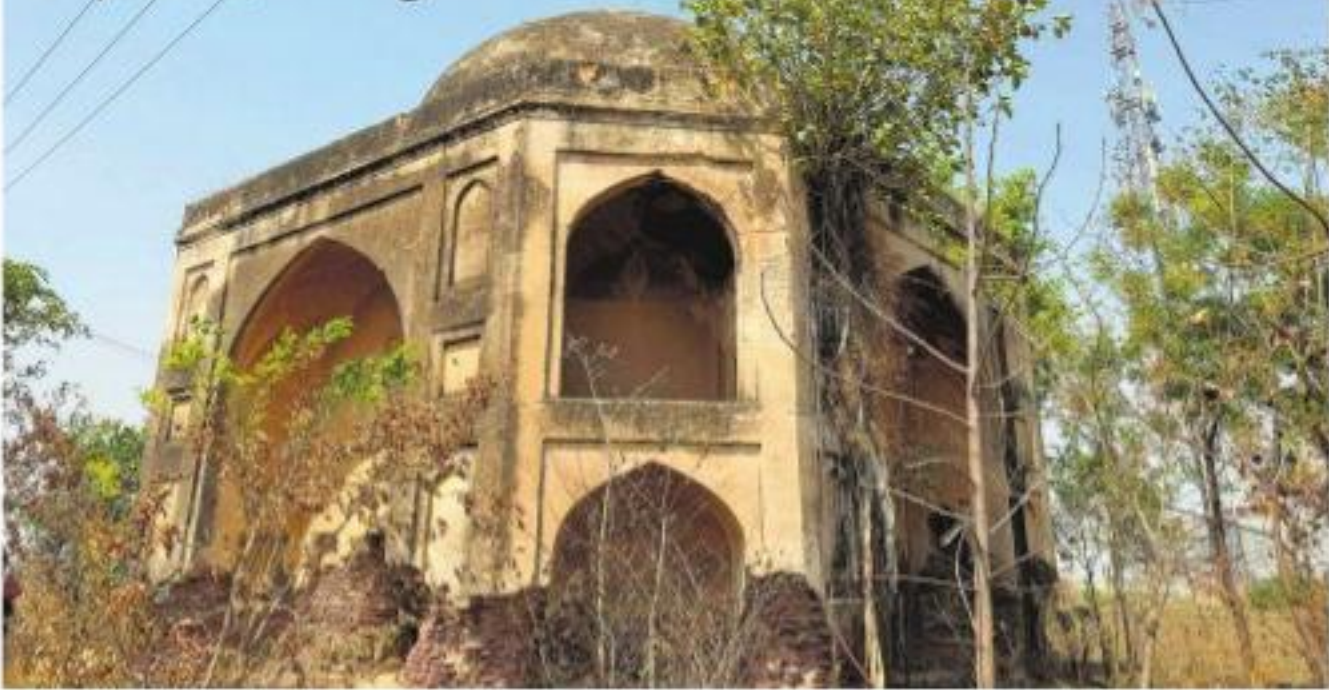
It's been 25 years. A lot has changed, and so much remains the same. I have grey strands in my hair. Vikram is as youthful as ever. Time cannot touch him.

My dream of visiting Vikram as a CO couldn't come true, but Vikram still commands. I could witness that when I travelled to Drass and paid tribute to my brother and all valiant soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice at Batra Top on July 7, 2019, to commemorate 20 years of their martyrdom. Next month, it will be 25 years.

Every alternate year, I visit the shrine (that's what I call the mighty peaks at Drass) and it's a blissful feeling. Jai Hind, Capt Vikram Batra, PVC.

Nurdi's Mughal connect

Caravan serai and tomb in Tam Taran village lie dilapidated, and forgotten



Serai Nurdi is a symbol of government apathy. Only one gate of the heritage structure survives. PHOTO BY THE WRITER

AMANPREET SINGH GILL

NURDI, a small village on the Tam Taran-Attari road, is more popular for landmarks in the city of Tam Taran like Nurdi Bazaar, Nurdi Road and Nurdi Adda. Few would recall that Nurdi was named after a Mughal official, Nurul Din Quli Isfahani. As the names suggest, he belonged to the Irani faction at the Mughal court. Isfahan in Iran was the centre of Islamic architecture and at Nurdi, an anonymous tomb and remains of a caravan serai survive to tell the story of this broken link with the Indo-Persian and Central Asian heritage.

Nurdi is much quoted as the birthplace of Bhai Santokh Singh, a 19th century poet and historian who composed a multi-volume history and 'sakhis' of Sikh Gurus and later-day developments in Sikhism. This unique work, 'Gurpartap Santokh Granth', is composed in Braj Bhasha.

There are many Mughal remnants along the Sher Shah Suri road near Nurdi. Akbar spent 14 years (1584-98) in Lahore. This area was the theatre of chase of Khusrav Mirza, Akbar's grandson and Jahangir's rebel son, in 1606. Jalalabad, Fatehabad and Khwaspur are the towns around Tam Taran which speak of the Mughal legacy. The last remaining sites, however, are Serai Amanat Khan and Serai Nurdi. These caravan serais were medieval time container docks where traders used to stay with their goods, camels, horses and servants.

A high-vaulted entrance, vast courtyard for men and cattle, small resting compartments and places of worship — these were similar in style to the grand serais in Central Asian trading towns.



Writing on the tomb indicates that it existed during the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58). PHOTO COURTESY: SUBHASH PARIKHAR

A Tribune report published in 2021, 'Slice of history from Tam Taran', mentions how the serai was built by Nawab Amirudin in the memory of his father, Noordin, in 1654. Only one gate of the serai survives, but the tomb has refused to succumb to the vagaries of time. Though forgotten, it sits majestically on a Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak linking Nurdi with the Anritsar-Khemkara road via Lala Ghuman village.

Historian Subhash Parihar, who has spent a lifetime researching medieval architectural heritage in Punjab, discovered some unique references about this tomb. In an article in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1997, he used graffiti inscriptions as a source of historical enquiry. He employed a historian's caution that whose remains are entombed in this structure is

not exactly known, but he tried to gather evidence to link it with Nurul Din Quli Isfahani, who was killed by Kishan Singh Rathore in 1632. When the tomb was built is not known. Graffiti on the tomb is proof that it existed during the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58). Among five graffiti texts, one is unique because it indicates the date of the Balkh expedition sent by Shah Jahan. The text deciphered by Parihar goes like this:

Ali Muham mad, the son of Ali Moud Barlas, on Tuesday 24th of the month of Ramadan year (AH) 1055 (3 November 1645), from Akbarabad to Lahore with all hopes, was going at a time when in the expedition against Balkh, Nawab Ali Mardian Khan, Nawab Aslat Khan, Raja Jagat Singh, Bahadur Khan Rohilla and others were assigned to the expedition...

This precious record now survives only in the form of photographs clicked by Parihar. Tam Taran became a district in 2006, but the administration took no interest in conserving or popularising the medieval heritage in and around the city. This tomb was declared a protected monument in 2016 under the Punjab Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1964. Today, thorny weed is the only protection it has against trespassers.

While Serai Nurdi suffered from government apathy, another serai on the same road, Serai Amanat Khan, gained more attention from heritage lovers and authorities. It was built by another Iranian, Abd-Al-Haq, later known as 'Amanat Khan' for his services as the chief calligrapher of Taj Mahal. The serai was restored following sustained efforts of the Archaeological Survey of India and the Punjab Tourism Department.

— The writer teaches at SGTB Khalsa College, Delhi

CAPTION CONTEST 1461

RIJESH AGGARWAL



Entries are invited to suggest a caption for the photograph. The caption should only be in English, witty and not exceeding 30 words, and reach Spectrum, The Tribune, Chandigarh, 160030, by Thursday. The best five captions will be published and awarded ₹300, ₹250, ₹200, ₹150 and ₹100, respectively. Each caption must be accompanied by a clipping of the caption contest and its number. Photocopies or scans of the caption photo won't be accepted. Online subscribers may attach an epaper clipping at captionpics@tribunemail.com or a scanned copy of the epaper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number in your address.

SELECTED ENTRIES FOR CAPTION CONTEST 1460



SPECTRUM MAY 26 ISSUE (SEE PHOTO)

Head-on coalition — Sudesh Kumar Sood, Moga

Handful gesture — ML Kapur, Jalandhar city

Midway relief arrangement — Ramesh Aggarwal, Chandigarh

Mutual exchange — Anshita Sharma via epaper, Zirakpur

From head to head — Anu via epaper, Chandigarh

Sold out on cold meals

When hot weather lands you in the soup, it's time to eat some cold, soothing delights that are also easy to make

RAHUL VERMA

EVEN a few years back, I would have sniggered if told that I was seen reaching out for a second helping from a salad bowl. But it was a hot day, and I was irresistibly drawn to the cold salad placed before me. It consisted of some crisp iceberg lettuce, tart rocket leaves, juicy watermelon chunks, green apples, pomegranate seeds and crumbled feta. It had been tossed in a light vinaigrette, and I, who had always derided salads as ghaas-phoos (grass and weeds), thought it was just what the doctor had ordered.

This weather calls for cold meals. If you are planning on entertaining guests in these hot and humid months, you can consider serving a cold meal — from cold appetisers to soup, mains and dessert. The starters can consist of strips of chilled cucumbers, carrots and celery stalks served with a cold yoghurt dip, garnished with pomegranate seeds and coriander leaves. And for the soup, you could opt for a cold cucumber soup prepared with some curd. For this, you need to blend three tablespoons of curd with two chopped cucumbers, a sprig of rosemary or chopped mint leaves, a pod of peeled and chopped garlic, a dash of olive oil, some cold water and seasoning. My favourite, though, is gazpacho, a delicious Spanish cold soup that has many variations. The traditional recipe calls for blending all ingredients in a blender.

INGREDIENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Tomato juice | 300ml |
| Bread (shredded) | ½ slice |
| Cold water | 600ml |
| Vinegar/white wine vinegar | 1 tsp |
| Bell pepper (deseeded, chopped) | 1 |
| Cucumber (chopped) | half |
| Onion (chopped) | 1 |
| Garlic clove (minced) | 1 |
| Olive oil | 2 tbsp |
| Sugar | 1 tbsp |
| Chilli powder | A pinch |
| Celery (chopped) | 1 tbsp |
| Ice cubes | 4 |
| Salt | To taste |
| Basil leaves | To garnish |

Chefs tell us that we should keep some stock ready in the fridge for any homemade soups. For a simple vegetable stock, take carrots (100g), onions (50g) and a bouquet garni of leeks (30g), celery (10g), parsley (10g), bay leaf (1), thyme (a sprig) and peppercorns (1 tsp) in a saucepan filled with three litres of water. Put in on stove and simmer on low heat for an hour or so. Keep removing the scum from the top. Strain the liquid. Refrigerate this stock and use as and when required.

When it comes to salads, you can let your imagination run loose. You can use fruits. Melons, cherries or mangoes work well in salads. Cold shrimps and boiled eggs are a good choice for non-vegetarian salads. Cold pasta salads, mixed with pieces of ham or tofu, are a delight. The dressing has to be light, of course. An emulsion of extra virgin olive oil, yoghurt and white wine vinegar works well, as does a vinaigrette with rosemary and lime juice. A few mint leaves add to the taste, and the cool quotient.

For a side dish, how about some eggplant? Cut them into thick rounds, lightly fry them, dip them in cold yoghurt that has been tempered with the flavours of your choice (curry leaves, mustard

GAZPACHO



METHOD

Put everything (barring the basil) in a food processor and blend until smooth. Serve in pre-chilled bowls. Garnish with basil leaves.

seeds), or toss the fried eggplant in a bit of olive oil, dried parsley, pepper and salt before serving.

Another vegetable dish, quite simple and tasty, is prepared with beans. For this, I string and wash a cup full of French beans, and then steam them. I drain and place the beans in cold water to retain the green colour. Then I heat a pan, and add the beans, some sesame seeds, a pinch of sugar and a bit of soy sauce. I stir and toss the mix well, remove from the heat and let it cool.

My all-time favourite cold entrée is a fish preparation that I have often cooked for friends. I steam a fillet of fish (behti or sole), add a layer of boiled and diced carrot, peas and beans to it, season it, squeeze a lemon over it, and then coat it with a generous helping of thousand island dressing, or a mix of mayonnaise and tomato ketchup. Mayo is not really a dressing for this weather, but it works well with the ketchup, which gives it a nice colour, and a sweet-and-sour kick. I refrigerate this, and serve it with crusty bread. And for dessert, what could be better than vanilla ice-cream and chunky pieces of mangoes?

As a wise man said, do not curse the dark, light a candle. I also say, do not curse the heat — just chill.

ARTS

Remaking a classic

From a damaged reel to Cannes, what it took to bring 'Manthan' to life

SARIKA SHARMA

IN 2014, when filmmaker Shivendra Singh Dungarpur set up the Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), noted director Shyam Benegal had donated him his entire archive. The repository was a veritable treasure trove, with scripts, booklets, lobby cards, notes, and a 35mm print of 'Manthan', his 1976 gem. A decade later, the film has been screened at the Cannes Film Festival this year. Amidst a sea of applause, it garnered a five-minute standing ovation, a crescendo to a challenging and exhilarating journey.

Dungarpur's tryst with restoration began when he was making the documentary 'Celluloid Man', an ode to film historian and archivist PK Nair, who was once director of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI). Through Nair's eyes, Dungarpur gained insight into the dismal state of film archiving in India. He was soon collaborating with Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation on Uday Shankar's 'Kalpana'.

'Manthan' was a fictionalised account of the early phase of the dairy cooperative movement that transformed India from a milk-deficient nation to the world's largest milk producer, inspired by Dr Verghese Kurien. Shot in Sangana, a village about 26 km from Rajkot in Gujarat, it boasted of a stellar ensemble cast, including Girish Karnad, Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, Mohan Agashe, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, among others. Nearly 5 lakh farmers from Gujarat contributed ₹2 each to fund the project. This December, Benegal turns 90. And Dungarpur, director of FHF, wanted to restore the director's 'favourite' film to coincide with it.

"The first thing we did was to speak to the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Federation. No one understood why we needed to restore a film that was already on YouTube. We had to make them understand that the film needed to be on 4K resolution," says Dungarpur. The Federation had deposited the original



(From left) Naseeruddin Shah, Shivendra Singh Dungarpur and Prateik Babbar at Cannes.

camera negative with the NFAI. When the FHF got its hands on it, it was in a bad shape. "The negative had green mold, the colours had faded and there were flicker problems. It was grainy and the prints were not complete. We had to match several copies to get what was the original edit of Shyam Benegal. Also, there was no sound negative. And since this film was dubbed, there were problems of sync as well," recalls Dungarpur. And then began the year-and-a-half-long crazy journey of restoration, spanning from Chennai to Bologna in Italy.

The film elements underwent meticulous repair by FHF conservators. The scanning and digital clean-up was done at Prasad Lab in Chennai under the supervision of Bologna-based L'Immagine Ritrovata lab; the grading, sound restoration and mastering were also carried out in Bologna. When Shyam Benegal saw the complete film, he was ecstatic. "It's even better than the original," he told Dungarpur.

Back in the 1970s, the film had been shot in different stocks — Gevacolor, Eastman and Kodak. The negative was printed on to Orwo and Govind Nihalani, director of photography, was very unhappy with the final print. "He always maintained that what he had shot never came out. When he

saw the restored version, he said this is what he had wanted the film to be," recalls Dungarpur.

The film was part of the Cannes Classics sidebar. The screening was attended by actor Naseeruddin Shah, family of the late actress Smita Patil, daughter of Dr Verghese Kurien, producers of the film and Dungarpur. This was the Foundation's third year at the event. Earlier, G Aravindan's Malayalam masterpiece 'Thamp' (1978) was showcased in 2022 and Aribam Syam Sharma's Manipuri-language film 'Tishanou' (1990) in 2023.

The FHF has been closely working on regional cinema — Manipuri, Kannada, Odia, Malayalam... "Because that is where the true colours and true essence of India are," believes Dungarpur, for whom films are an important marker of the era that they have been made in. For him, it is equally important to take these restored films to the audiences.

Post-Covid, life was still struggling to normalise and cinema halls were running empty. "Mr Bachchan (also one of FHF's donors) was turning 80 and we wanted to showcase his films. 'Back to the Beginning' was conceived and 12 of his films were taken to the theatres. What a phenomenon it became! People were thronging the theatres, dancing at songs. It was crazy," Dungarpur says.

This was followed by festivals dedicated to Dilip Kumar and Dev Anand. A Raj Kapoor festival has been planned for the year-end. "Our effort is to bring more and more cinema back, to be able to reconnect with the public and ensure that what was once an important film is released in every part of India," says Dungarpur. Over the weekend, 'Manthan' has been released in 50 cities and 100 cinemas across India.

At present, the FHF is working on Girish Kasaravalli's 'Ghatashatka' with Scorsese and George Lucas' 'Hobson's Choice' Family Foundation, marking yet another step in the journey to save what could have been lost forever.



(L-R) DoP Govind Nihalani, Anita Patil Deshmukh, sister of Smita Patil, and director Shyam Benegal show the new poster of 'Manthan'; (below) the damaged negative of the film.

RESTORATION, STEP BY STEP

- The first step is to physically repair the film. For this, you must have an original camera negative. If you don't have it, then you need the dupe (duplicate). You would also need a print of the film.
- Once you repair the film, you put it through scanning, Wetgate or Drygate. If the negative is old, go for Wetgate.
- Next comes digital restoration, which happens frame by frame. You control the flicker and the stability. You balance



the film and clean it up.

- This is followed by colour grading, which entails colour correction, and then mastering into a suitable format.
- Once restoration is complete, a celluloid film is still the best way of preservation. It gives a 24k resolution; what you watch in theatres is digital, 4k resolution. That's why directors like Christopher Nolan and Quentin Tarantino still shoot on film.

— COURTESY: SHIVENDRA SINGH DUNGARPUR, FILMMAKER AND ARCHIVIST



(L-R) Chhaya Kadam, Payal Kapadia, Divya Prabha and Kani Kusruti, the women behind the Cannes-winning 'All We Imagine As Light'.

One, two, three, four... encore

NONIKA SINGH

IT was not just another photo-op, but an iconic moment etched in cinematic history: four Indian women on the most coveted stage of Cannes Film Festival. Payal Kapadia's fiction debut, 'All We Imagine As Light', picked up the second highest honour of the festival from Viola Davis in the presence of Greta Gerwig of 'Barbie' fame. As the select audience bowed to our very own Payal, the first Indian woman to win the Grand Prix, with Kani Kusruti, Chhaya Kadam and Divya Prabha in tow, the words of Kate Hodges — "Behind every great woman... is another great woman" — came to mind.

As rave reviews are summing up the film as a 'tale of sisterhood' and 'a delicate triple portrait of women', Zico Maitra, one of its co-producers, gushes, "The future is female." What does the win mean for other indie voices, especially those of women? "It will be a game-changer," believes Zico.

Payal, who earlier won the festival's L'Oréal d'Or award in 2021 for her documentary 'A Night of Knowing Nothing', has proved that nothing is impossible. The only other Indian film to win the same honour was Chetan Anand's 'Neecha Nagar' in 1946. The last one from India to make it to the competition section was Shaji Karun's 'Sudham' in 1994.

As Payal breaks the 30-year jinx, the world is trying to figure out who this bundle of talent from the Film Training Insti-

tute of India (FTII) is. Reams are being written on her individualistic voice, her dare to call out the powers that be during the students' protest at the FTII. The daughter of renowned artist Nalini Malani, she seems to have inherited the same artistic DNA. Her film's curious title comes from one of her mother's works.

Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, noted Indian filmmaker and producer, who worked with Payal in her formative years, feels, "She is an individual in her own right." In fact, he realised back then that she had it in her to be counted among the world's best.

Such high praise might seem a trifle exaggerated, but there is no denying that her distinctive cinematic language is as brilliant as it is lyrical. Kani Kusruti, who plays a Malayali nurse in the film, shares, "When Payal read out the story, there was such tenderness and poetic beauty to her vision. I was curious to know if the same would get translated on to the screen. She did not lose that charm. Her authorship came through."

Payal's success, she agrees, does "lead to a strong possibility for indie filmmakers to get the right producers and platform."

Zico insists that as a producer, he wants to focus only on women-centric projects with more women at the helm as directors, producers, cinematographers, editors. "There is concrete, incontrovertible proof now that indie films can work on the highest possible levels," he observes.

Transcending borders and language,

when Payal decided to use Malayalam in the film, she did extra homework so that she didn't miss a single note. "She worked so intensively and found all the probable words for one meaning, and knew exactly what every word meant," recalls Kani.

She can't say whether women directors have greater empathy for women characters as each one explores human minds in their own way, but finds the atmosphere on their sets 'kinder and democratic'. "Even when things are falling apart, they treat the team with love and kindness, which is less on other sets," Kani adds. Any wonder then that the actor, who has acted in series like 'Poacher' and 'Killer Soup', takes home 'a friend in Payal'. She is rejoicing in the moment, but feels that other Indian films, such as Gurvinder Singh's 'Chauthi Koot', which was in the Un Certain Regard section in 2015, also deserved the honour.

Indian women are raising the bar to another level. At the 2023 Oscars ceremony, Guneet Monga, producer of Kartiki Gonsalves' 'The Elephant Whisperers', had beamed: "We as two women from India stood on that global stage making this historical win!" Can we manifest a similar encore from Payal next year at the Academy Awards? Zico says, "Let's not get too ahead of ourselves," but adds, "We have got great American distributors, Showmax and Janus. We trust them completely on that front."

The world is our stage... and more than one Indian woman has owned it.

Extreme poverty to creative triumph

Shakila's rise from the streets of Kolkata to international platforms is phenomenal

MONICA ARORA

THIS is a story of an artist whose life has more twists and turns than a quintessential Bollywood potboiler. Her journey from the streets of Kolkata to the hallowed portals of white cube art galleries is nothing short of spectacular. Shakila was born to Jaheran Bibi and spent her early years growing up on the pavement along with her two sisters. She was married off to Akbar, a vegetable seller, when she was only 12, and life kept on throwing up challenges. A silver lining emerged in the form of BR Panesar, a kind-hearted philanthropist-artist, who helped street children in tandem with Young Men's Christian Association. When he came in touch with Jaheran, he took her three girls under his tutelage. When Shakila turned 16, Panesar enabled her to find a job as a paper-bag maker and this tryst with creativity led her to dabble with painting. She was deeply inspired by her mentor and started making collages with paper.

As her work evolved, Panesar showcased some of Shakila's collages at the Society of Contemporary Artists. People were enamoured by her creative vision, and one thing soon led to another. Notably, from 1991 till now, she has had five solo shows and been part of over 30 group shows in Kolkata. Her recently concluded show, 'Shakila: Artworks from 1993-2024', at the Bihar Museum, which was presented by the Centre of International Modern Art (CIMA), was her first exhibition beyond Kolkata.

She credits Panesar for what she is today. "He was the driving force behind my art. Not only did he supply stationery and colours to me and other street children, he would also take me to see various exhibitions and workshops with him. He would ask me to compete with myself," she says. Encouragement also came from artists such as Bikash Bhattacharjee, Ganesh Pyne and MF Hussain.

Shakila's work reflects life. "Whatever happens around seeps into my work. I've created many works on the atrocities against women and children, besides the villagers, who are at a crossroads of political games in rural India," she says. If one were to observe her oeuvre, one encounters an element of intrigue. The play of a multitude of hues and moods sets each creation apart from the next. Each work, with its rough edges, offers



A Scene. Collage on canvas, 2007.



Untitled - V. Collage on canvas, 2011

PHOTOS COURTESY: CIMA ART GALLERY

a kaleidoscope of musings on real life, making it compelling and evocative.

She has received recognition for her two decades of work by the Academy of Fine Arts, the Indian government and UNESCO. She was the only artist selected by the India Festival authorities at Paris by Galerie Lafayette in 1995, and was commissioned in 2000 by the Hannover Fair in Germany to create some hundred installation pieces.

CIMA director Rakhi Sarkar says, "Shakila's story is a deeply inspirational chronicle of an emerging woman of our subcontinent — from extreme poverty and suffering, she rose to a creative resurgence and ultimate triumph. She has repeatedly restored our faith in the power and magic of the visual medium and its ability to uplift, inspire and sustain creative excellence and human dignity. Her art is all about light and shadow, at the confluence of reality and the invisible."

India, Pak and the psychology of conflict

MANOJ JOSHI

THE book is really about India and Pakistan, their neuroses and psychoses, as well as their real problems and the prospects of peace. What is new about the book is that it is mediated by a trained psychiatrist, Neil Aggarwal. This is an entirely new approach to the issue, but we can only leave it to the reader to judge whether a psychotherapist's technique of defusing tension "by acknowledging negative emotions and shifting the approach to collaborative problem-solving", will work in the chronic case of India and Pakistan.

The virtue of this book is that while we have a lot of Indians and Pakistanis talk to each other, here we have two protagonists, AS Dulat and Asad Durrani, talking to each other and their conversation is mediated by a well-known psychiatrist Aggarwal is trained to cut through deceptions and obfuscations. Their conversation is frank and reflects their background of being involved in the security services of their respective countries, but is still civil.

The contemporary history of India and Pakistan is definitely something of a psy-

chological conundrum. Whether you can come up with a Freudian understanding of the India-Pakistan psychosis is another matter, but we do know that they are of common parentage and both reject their origins in their own way. They may have had an older civilisational history, but, as nation-states, they have had a common birth. Yet, both reject their common parentage, which is from the British empire. No doubt, their approaches have been shaped by the trauma of the parent hurriedly and callously abandoning them and leaving behind a trail of blood, disruption and dislocation.

Psychologically, Pakistan is an interesting entity. It is one-fourth the size of India and yet, it has sought to maintain parity. This is not something that is unusual in familial rivalry and the India-Pak interaction does look like a sibling quarrel most of the time.

Over the decades, Pakistan has used various means to assert what can only be effective, not real, parity. It began with the creation of an army that was too big for its real needs and that army has since taken over the state, claiming to be its guarantor. The next step was an external alliance with the US, which enabled Pakistan to field a mili-



COVERT: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WAR AND PEACE

by AS Dulat, Asad Durrani, Neil K. Aggarwal.
HarperCollins.
Pages 256.
₹699

The book highlights the importance of the Composite Dialogue process as a means of promoting peace

tary more powerful than that of India by 1965. After being truncated in a war with India in 1971, Pakistan took the next step to develop nuclear weapons to offset India's size and strength. And finally, since the 1980s and 1990s, it has used covert war and terrorism to try to break up India into a manageable size or at least to keep it off balance.

India, too, has had its own obsessions with Pakistan, an example being the fact that it is only after the Chinese actions in eastern Ladakh in 2020 that its Army decided to reorient itself away from the so-called Pakistani threat towards the real Chinese one. The Indian security establishment even today remains uncommonly focused on Pakistan more than anyone else.

What is possible in the India-Pakistan context is there before our eyes. Take the relationship of the two Punjab. In 1947, both sides of the border saw massacre and mayhem of immense magnitude. Yet, today, attitudes towards Pakistan in northern India are, perhaps, most moderate in Punjab and, I dare say, on the other side as well. How this has happened is difficult to say. After all, besides the initial Partition mayhem, the period 1980-1995 or so saw a covert war being carried out in Indian Punjab from

bases in Pakistan Punjab. Despite this, the kind of anti-Muslim rhetoric heard in other parts of north India is absent in Punjab.

What is possible is also visible in the 2004-2007 period when the intractable problem of Kashmir was on the verge of resolution through a process that involved both sides arriving at a compromise after a decade and a half of a Pakistan-backed insurgency.

The book highlights the importance of the Composite Dialogue process that took place between 1997 and 2008 as an important means of promoting peace between the two countries. Under this, the two sides discussed the entire range of issues between them: Jammu and Kashmir, terrorism, Siachen, Sir Creek demarcation, Tulbul navigation project, economic and commercial cooperation, and promotion of friendly exchanges.

The idea was a simultaneous dialogue on these issues and a process through which smaller problems being resolved build the momentum for solving the larger ones. Never mind that this did not quite work the way it was intended to; nevertheless, it made a major change to the texture of India-Pakistan relations.

Celebrating Raza

S ELDOM have an artist's birth centenary celebrations resonated across continents. But Syed Haider Raza was different. Having spent 50 years of his active life as a painter in Paris, he was as much theirs as he was ours. In 2023, a three-month exhibition of his works was organised by the Progressive Art Gallery and Raza Foundation at Paris. On May 31, a three-month show ended at Dubai. In between, several exhibitions were held in New York, Delhi and Mumbai.

This book brings together the works displayed at these exhibitions, besides several other rare works from PAG's own collection. There are essays by art appreciators and veterans, including Ashok Vajpeyi, Raza's friend and director of the Raza Foundation, art historian Yashodhara Dalmia and art critics Geeti Sen and Gayatri Sinha.

The writings offer a rich, layered and colourful glimpse into his life. How he arrived in the thriving metropolis of Bombay in 1943, joined the JJ School of Art and found a discerning teacher in Walter Langhammer, art director at *The Times of India*, who introduced him to the work of European artists. And, how, the general atmosphere of effervescence in a free India saw the first exhibition of the Progressive Artists Group in 1948, of which Raza was an important member.

His move to France in 1950, influence of the structure of Cezanne, colours of Van Gogh; the advent of the bindu on his canvas during his initial years in Paris and its many manifestations across the years; his last days in India... the essays explore various facets of his practice. The book also shatters the misconception that he only painted landscapes. His early drawings in the collection indicate his explorations with studies of the human figure. Throughout, though, the tone of his work derived from Indian miniatures and Indian aesthetic traditions.

The book is as rich as the life SH Raza lived, his legacy cemented by the high prices his works command today, his canvases still a burst of energy — sometimes a quiet enigma, at times flaming with passion. — TNS

Stories behind hit songs

RAKESH CHOPRA

T HERE are music lovers who do not just enjoy a song but take pains to know who sang it, which film it featured in, who wrote it and who composed it. Then there are those who even want to know how a particular song came to be, the stories behind its making. The book, 'Lyrics by Sameer', is for the latter variety.

The book chronicles 50 hit songs written by lyricist Sameer in the 1990s and 2000s and recounts how they germinated and, going through various processes, became finished products.

The Eighties was an era of action films till 'Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak' bucked the trend. The Aamir Khan-Juhi Chawla starrer brought a breath of fresh air to the film industry and its music did wonders. Love stories once again were in vogue.

Sameer, the son of veteran lyricist Anjaan, had been writing songs for quite some time till 'Dil' happened in 1990 and gave him his first major hit in 'Mujhe meend na aaye, mujhe chain na aaye'. Next came 'Anshiqui', a film woven around a bunch of songs written by Sameer and composed by Nadeem-Shravan. 'Nazar ke saamne jigar ke pass' from the film brought Sameer his first Filmfare trophy. With 'Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin' and 'Saajan', Sameer stamped his authority on the film scene as far as romantic numbers were concerned.

The book is replete with interesting anecdotes. One such incident is that while 'Phool Aur Kaante' was being made, director Kuku Kohli was asked by music composer Nadeem if he could bring the hero for the next music session. One day, Kohli entered the room along with an average-looking young man who looked nervous. He introduced the man as Ajay Devgn. Nadeem got upset and immediately left the room. He said that if this was the hero of the film, then he could not make the music. But the director assured the composer that the man had potential. The movie went on to be a big draw at the box office and its song, 'Maine pyar tumha se kiya hai', was a chartbuster.

Then there is the story of how filmmaker

Mukul Anand wanted him to write a grand patriotic song for his film 'Dus'. When he, along with composers Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, presented the song 'Suno gar se duniya wala, bur nazar na hona pedalo' to Mukul, he loved it so much that he announced that while the budget of the film was ₹6 crore, he would allocate ₹8 crore only for this song. But destiny had other plans. One morning, Mukul passed away following cardiac arrest and the film was shelved. T-Series, the producers of the film, turned the song into an album. The song was shot with a small budget on Juhu beach.

It is not that Sameer always wrote good poetry. He pandered to the public taste and even wrote meaningless lyrics like 'Main to ruste se ja raha tha, main to bheh puri kha raha tha'. With producers making a beeline for his door, Sameer became so prolific that soon his name featured in the Guinness Book for writing the maximum number of songs.

In this book, Sameer has narrated innumerable incidents behind his successful songs. Co-author Shuja Ali has presented them in such a way that it makes for interesting reading.

I relate more to the music made till the Eighties but there are some songs of the present era that have the old-world charm. One such melody is 'Tere naam humne kiya hai jeevan apna saam anam'. Music director Himesh Reshammiya put his heart and soul into the composition. No prizes for guessing who wrote it.



LYRICS BY SAMEER

by Sameer Anjaan and Shuja Ali.
Rupa.
Pages 212.
₹295



BACKFLAP



THE DISTASTE OF THE EARTH

by Kyrinham Singh Nongkynrih.
Penguin Random House.
Pages 417. ₹799

Inspired from the tragic love story of Lieng Makaw, a queen, and Manik Raitong, a pauper, this novel explores the nature of human existence, raising questions about earthly powers, godly dispensation, and where our anthropocentric attitude is leading us.



KATHMANDU CHRONICLE

by KV Rajan, Atul K Thakur.
Penguin Random House.
Pages 280. ₹499

The much-vaunted India-Nepal 'special relationship' has repeatedly experienced setbacks. Why is there so much mutual distrust and suspicion? This book tells the stories of India-Nepal relations that largely remain unknown.

Multiple reconfigurations in Punjab's cultural life

SALIL MISRA

P UNJAB as a historical region has been distinctive in some ways. Being a frontier zone, it has been shaped by multiple migrations and movements of people, in and out. As a result, the growth of the region has been marked by considerable fluidities. These have shaped the cultural and linguistic life of Punjab.

After the British takeover in the mid-19th century, Punjabi society was thrown open to modern influences in the form of new technologies, institutions and education. Significantly, the shaping of Punjab's cultural life was conditioned as much by the new developments as by older realities.

The book under review tells the stories of multiple reconfigurations and transformations in Punjab from the mid-19th century onwards. The focus of the book is primarily on culture, print, literature and modern education; and how they have interacted and intersected with questions of gender, religion, caste and language. Modern Punjab's encounters with its own past were marked neither by conquest over the past nor surrender to it, but by creative negotiations between the two. A syncretic and multi-stranded past retained considerable autonomy and resisted the homogenising and segregating impulses of modernity.

Nowhere is this more evident than in religious life. Punjab's experiences with the zone of faith were unusual in some ways. The dominant presence of formal and doctrinal faith systems such as Islam and Hinduism had not been very successful in casting Punjabi religious life into their own moulds. It retained considerable autonomy. The essence of formal religions is generally premised on the idea of boundaries. Religious life in Punjab, by contrast, was based on fuzzy, unclear and, often, completely missing dividing lines. This began to change in modern times with pressures from top from formal Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. This aspect of Punjab's religious life has been brought out most competently in the essay by Yogesh Snehi ('Territorialising Shrines in the Sacred Landscapes of Punjab', easily the best part of the book).

In Snehi's view, Punjab's traditional religious life, founded in local sacred shrines, had successfully resisted incorporation into formal institutionalised religions. But in modern times, they began to be appropriated by formal religions. Ritualism of the local sacred shrines came under pressure of scripturalism. The examples from Gurdwara Bhagat Jalan Das on the Indo-Pak border, the Durgiana temple at Amritsar, and the shrine of Ghuram Sharif in Patiala tell the story of the encounters between doctrinal pressures at the top and the local reali-



PUNJABI CENTURIES: TRACING HISTORIES OF PUNJAB

Edited by Anshu Malhotra.
Orient Black Swan.
Pages 391.
₹2,150

ties. The sacred objects and artefacts, and the practised rituals at these sites were such that they defied any neat and exclusive identification with Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. None of these shrines conformed to the standards prescribed by the high cultures. Both syncretic and unbounded, they practised versions of faith that were rooted more in Punjab's entangled realities rather than in formal religious doctrines.

What was true of Punjab's religious life was also true of its linguistic profile. Many speech forms, languages and scripts existed without any clear pattern of a language-script identification. No script was monopo-

lised by any single language and vice versa. Punjabi language had grown by the amalgamation of multiple oral and literary forms. The arrival of print homogenised and standardised this great diversity. But even so, the earlier forms were not entirely obliterated.

The arrival of print didn't just alter Punjab's literary and linguistic profile. It also introduced new cultural forms and styles in Punjab's life. It enlarged the size of the reading and writing public. Several people wrote on their lived lives and reflected on the times they were living in. In the process, they became acutely aware of their caste, religious and gender identities. An uncategorised and nebulous consciousness became much more explicit and reflexive. As they made sense of the world they were living in, questions of gender, caste and religion inevitably surfaced in their explorations. Many essays in the volume have highlighted this churning in Punjab's cultural and ideational life.

The production of new texts and knowledge often retrieved older confrontations of history. In this venture of retrieving the past, history was not just brought alive, but often invented and manufactured. The new imaginations of past events were also shaped by contemporary considerations. The article by Kamika Singh describes one such historical event from the 18th century and many representations of that event in

the historical memory of the present. The event belongs to the late 18th century when the Sikh army led by Baghel Singh, an important chieftain from Punjab, entered Delhi and had a confrontation with the Mughal army around the Red Fort. The confrontation eventually ended in a settlement. This event has been stored in historical accounts of the time, plays and paintings. They offer different versions of the event. However, a Victory Day organised by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee at the Red Fort in 2014 created its own historical memory of the event. The annual celebrations of Victory Day will obviously impart a new historical consciousness of the 18th century event. Singh's article has highlighted the complex and uneasy relationship between history and historical memory.

Full of rich details, the volume has told the stories of multiple reconfigurations in the cultural life of Punjab over the past two centuries, since the 19th century, particularly in the sphere of language, religion, caste and gender. What is perhaps missing is an over-arching narrative to bring the disparate threads together. The volume is dotted with several important factual details scattered all over, without much of an effort to tie them together into a single comprehensive narrative. Much like Punjab, the book on Punjab also remains unbounded and multi-stranded.



RAZA: THE OTHER MODERN
by Geeti Sen, Yashodhara Dalmia and Gayatri Sinha.
Mapin Publishing.
Pages 128. ₹1,950



SH Raza in one of his Paris studios.
COURTESY: RAZA FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

REFLECTIONS

Intrusive camera-derie



GOOD SPORT
ROHIT MAHAJAN

AFTER the IPL final was won by Kolkata Knight Riders, after the cricket had ended, the tamasha began. The camera followed team owners Shah Rukh Khan and Juhi Chawla in the dressing room, and Khan rather than cricketers became the centre-piece of the media coverage.

Old-timers sputtered at this horror, for the player dressing room has long been considered off-limits for TV cameras — and for even still cameras in the past.

But the mores of cricket have changed, and the camera is everywhere — this bothers not just old-timers, even active players think the camera has become a nuisance. And all for eye-balls and money, as India captain Rohit Sharma well knows.

Rohit Sharma, also former Mumbai Indians captain, was enraged after his conversation with a KKR coach, Abhishek Nayar, was recorded and aired despite his objections. "The lives of cricketers have become so intrusive (sic) that cameras are now recording every step and conversation we are having in privacy with our friends and colleagues, at training or on match days," Rohit posted on Twitter.

"Despite asking Star Sports to not record my conversation, it was and was also then played on air, which is a breach of privacy. The need to get exclusive content and focused only on

views and engagement will one day break the trust between the fans, cricketers and cricket. Let better sense prevail," he added.

Michael Holding, former West Indies fast bowler, supported Rohit Sharma, and lamented that morality in cricket broadcasting matters no more. "Of course, he has a point — definitely. It's a bit unethical of the broadcaster to do that, especially if he has already asked not to record... What you're doing is not illegal, but there is something called morality. But I'm not sure if those things matter any longer."

It's not just cricket broadcasting — the ethics of cricket as a game, like that of life,

By placing cameras in every hand, mobile phone manufacturers have turned everyone into a chronicler and performer

have undergone a post-conventional morality churn with disconcerting speed in the last decade or so.

The churn has been caused, as is often the case, by money. IPL's billions have helped manufacture consensus in favour of T20 cricket, upturning conventional wisdom of cricket. The sport's most flimsy format is now also the most talked-about one, gushed over by cricket's legends.

Eleven years back, Tarak Sinha, the great Delhi cricket coach, expressed his love for the IPL thus: "It's like a cancer." When this writer pointed out to him that legendary cricketers like Sunil Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri were its

most active and enthusiastic promoters — for a large fee, of course — he said: "IPL has people who are hired to speak good of it. It is poison for cricket. Supporting it for money is like selling cocaine for a living." Harsh words, reflecting the morality of the times he grew up in and learnt to play the game, the 1950s and 1960s.

But morality isn't absolute — in sport as in life, it evolves; Sinha's bitterness with the devolution of the sport he loved, in the past 15 years of his life, reflected his inability to change with the times. He rallied against the force of T20 cricket, despairing but resolute, to the end; Bishan Singh Bedi, who died last year, did the same.

Gavaskar's devotion for days' cricket (First-Class and Test cricket) is the stuff of legend; he had such disdain for One-day cricket that his book on cricket in the year 1983, 'Runs 'n Ruins', contains just a few paragraphs on India's win in the 1983 World Cup.

But Gavaskar, born three years before Sinha, has been more pragmatic; his views more malleable; he's evolved with the times and now can speak about the primacy of Test cricket and the wonders of T20 cricket/IPL, all in the same breath.

As for Rohit Sharma and his desire for privacy, that's not a new story, for celebrities have always been chased by cameras, and by crowds before cameras came into being.

His cry for privacy brings to fore the larger issue of the ubiquitousness of the camera — by placing cameras in every hand, mobile phone manufacturers have turned everyone into a chronicler and performer. Every act of life has become a performance, and every phone owner a performer who, unlike Rohit Sharma, craves publicity — and is willing to forsake privacy and lower standards of morality imposed by society — for fame and money.

Fire in the hills



RAAJA BHASIN

TURN in any direction and one will see smoke, if not the fire itself. All across the lower and mid-hills of the western Himalayas, forest fires are raging. Fires in the hills, and elsewhere, are not new. When the Kalka-Shimla railway line started functioning in the early 20th century, sparks would fly out of the coal-burning locomotives. These were held responsible for flames along the slopes. Villagers who lived along the track complained that their crops were affected and grasslands, on which their cattle depended, were destroyed. A system of compensation was worked out and, suddenly, there was a spurt in the number of fires. Spark arrestor chimneys, like those used on locomotives that steamed across the American prairies, were installed and other innovations added. The fires caused by the locomotives stopped but the claims for compensation did not.

In 2003, I joined a group of friends that was walking down the Kalka-Shimla railway track to commemorate a centenary of its construction. Along a short stretch, I was going to walk with them for a day. They would take four days and cover the entire length. My reason for choosing a single day was quite simple. I wanted to walk along, arguably, the prettiest stretch which lies between the stations of Kathlighat and Kandaghat. This is the section where the permanent way does not run close to the highway, but veers away to the opposite side of the hill. Open grasslands, patches of woodland and a few small villages mark this stretch. On the walk, marvelling at the 'chocolate-box' beauty, there were swathes of charred trees and blackened ground. These were remnants of previous fires. At the same time, I was not prepared for the rubbish which debased this beauty and lay parked in every possible nook and cranny. Fifteen years later, in May 2018, I became a part of a massive clean-up along the Kalka-Shimla railway track. An initiative had been taken by Himachal's Legal Services Authority and hundreds of volunteers removed a significant amount of the rubbish that had accumulated along the line.

A few months later, I was travelling on the train where the area had been cleaned. A father passed an empty bottle to the mother, who passed it to their young child and out of the window it went. One of the passengers, very politely, remarked on this. The gentleman, with whom the empty bottle originated, was ready for a fight; the lady cried, "What else is one supposed to do?" In all likelihood, the child would have learnt that it was acceptable to toss one's rubbish anywhere. In conversation, there are very few things

that will put me on the back foot regarding my country. One of these is litter, and our seeming indifference to where we throw our rubbish. That day, everyone in the compartment fell silent. Today, places that once held pristine beauty seem to have embraced filth with open arms. All across the hills, there was a time we would rejoice when we saw a bit of colour emerge with the spring thaw. The first flowers are coming up, we would tell ourselves. Now, that bit of colour, often enough, is a piece of plastic or an empty sachet that had been covered by the snow and has decided to reveal itself.

In the hills, an older generation will tell you that if you can avoid doing so, do not buy land in a chir pine (pinus roxburghii) forest. While the tree has certain medicinal qualities, the cover of pine needles and their chemical content does not allow any substantive undergrowth. The springs can run dry. These are also the woods that are most prone to fires — some of which are accidental and some seem to have been

Fire & fury marked the speeches of electoral hopefuls. What is of note is that no one mentioned environment and its protection

deliberately lit. There is a premise that land cleared with fire will yield a better crop of grass in the monsoon.

Tenuous as it may seem, there is a connection between fallen pine needles, litter and fire. Some of the rubbish is flammable and what is not, works its way into channels and adversely affects the springs and streams. Bottles, like the one thrown from the train, can be the biggest culprits of them all. They act as magnifying glasses and can set the woods alight.

Christ Church in Kasauli has a plaque marking the death of two British soldiers, Selby Lane and Richard Reed, who died fighting a forest fire in 1935 which, "... threatened to destroy Kasauli". Like them, there must be numerous others who have had no plaques to mark their passing. Humans apart, thousands of birds, insects and animals also lose their lives. Those who survive have lost their habitats and their chances of possible recovery. The odds are stacked against them as they are the lowest rung on nature's food chain, which has been broken.

There is another blaze raging across the hills. Fire and fury marked the speeches of electoral hopefuls. What is of note is that no one mentioned the environment and its protection. This, after the last devastating monsoon, which is not even a year old. In 2020, there were 16 landslides; in 2023, there were 165. As many as 2,500 homes were destroyed and around 400 persons died.

Bitter home truths with 'Jaggi'

Punjabi movie 'Jaggi', released on MUBI, has been getting rave reviews for its brave and honest exploration of issues of sexuality and bullying in a rural setting. *Sheetal* talks to director Anmol Sidhu. *Excerpt:*

■ Now that 'Jaggi' is finally available on OTT, what has been the response?

I have been flooded with calls and messages. People have shared how they have been through the same trauma. For many, 'Jaggi' represents a personal reality that has for long been ignored or simply buried. The most interesting messages are that such films should be made in Punjab rather than the clichéd ones that hit the theatres every Friday.

■ How difficult was the whole process of scripting, acting and direction?

We were all students of theatre and were part of Alankar Theatre Group. Ramnish Chaudhary was a junior and I had directed him in one of my plays. When I narrated the story, he thought it's a subject that deserves a film. The only challenge was the lack of equipment. So, most of the scenes were shot in a single take. There were technical hurdles which we as a team managed to overcome. To keep it real, I preferred long shots and as every actor had a background in theatre, it went off smoothly.

■ It's a film that's brutally honest and sensitive. To be honest, when we decided to make a film



(From left) Harmandeep Singh, Ramnish Chaudhary with Anmol Sidhu.

on a disturbing reality that's prevalent in rural Punjab and is still not called out, it meant we were ready to deal with any eventuality. I think we were all very well trained by Chakresh Kumar Sir to approach any scene fearlessly.

For the intense role of Jaggi, Ramnish was handed the script seven months prior to the shoot to imbibe the trauma and struggles. He stayed away from the other actors and the only inputs came from me, so that the ridicule Jaggi faced could transfer well on to the screen.

■ How has the creative process of making 'Jaggi' and its success changed you and the team? It has changed everything for us. It was when I thought of making this film that I bought a camera. Ramnish and Harmandeep Singh, who play the main characters, were always

there with me. Harman used to work as an Amazon delivery boy. When I asked him if he could assist me, he agreed without thinking twice, despite having only a few scenes. He picked trips and assisted me throughout the making of 'Jaggi'. Ramnish too pitched in.

We made the whole film travelling on a motorcycle to different places. We did everything ourselves, from editing to sound design and would sit for days in a small apartment while also dubbing. My mother was also a great host. We made the film with zero external funding and finally found producers for our next project as they saw our talent and work through international festivals. It motivated us a lot.

■ Did you fall back upon cinematic references?

I consider Anurag Kashyap as my guru. He once said that one can make a movie through a phone and it really inspired me. It was a great honour to see him present our film. There's a film, '4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days', that inspires me. It is directed by Cristian Mungiu. I like every film of his. It influences my filmmaking.

■ 'Jaggi' supposedly is based on true events.

It's based on facts but there are also fictional inputs. It's a mix of five-six incidents. For instance, one came from my brother's hostel, of seniors sexually assaulting minors. There's also a novel, 'Rohi Babbar', by Kamjit Singh Kussa. The book did help in research work.

May the birds continue to soar and sing



RIMA DHILLON

'The woods would be very silent if no bird sang there' — Henry Van Dyke

THROUGHOUT history, humanity has been captivated by the allure of birds. Their sleek, aerodynamic bodies, their mastery of flight over vast distances and heights, and their intricate nest-building skills have served as an inspiration for countless inventions and innovations.

Bird observation takes on myriad forms, each individual imbuing it with their own unique passion and perspective. Whether it's the serene pursuit of birdwatching, the thrill of birding, the excitement of twitbirding, or the artistry of bird photography facilitated by the advent of affordable digital cameras with powerful lenses, a common thread remains: an unwavering fascination with birds, their behaviour, resilience, intelligence, and the tenacity of their existence amidst human interference.

A love for the outdoors and an interest in the world of birds was awakened in me



INDIAN WHITE EYE



SPOTTED FLYCATCHER



PURPLE SUNBIRD (MALE)



CRIMSON SUNBIRD



ASHY PRINIA

through the nature walks conducted by our teachers, while I was at a boarding school in Shimla. From the tender age of seven, it is a journey that has, over the years, given me invaluable insights into the lives of our feathered companions.

Birdwatching isn't merely a pastime, it's an immersive experience, a portal through which one can gain profound understanding and appreciation for the intricate lives of these tiny creatures.

Birds are present everywhere; they grace every corner of our planet. All it takes is a moment of stillness, a quiet observation, to invite them into our midst. It's akin to meditation, a tranquil communion with nature. Some of my most cherished birdwatching moments have unfolded right in my own garden.

Amidst the turmoil of the pandemic in 2020, with time hanging heavy on my hands, I embarked on a project to create a small waterbody in my backyard. It was as much for my own solace as it was for the

birds. Despite the chaos engulfing the world, the soft murmur and babble of the water as it trickled down the water channel and fell into the pond was infinitely soothing to the nerves. It attracted a large species of birds, captivating the interest of my entire family.

Observing the hierarchy at the birdbath became a daily ritual, a testament to the intricacies of avian social dynamics. The first to come were the stately doves, followed by the Mynas, Bulbuls and lastly, the spirited warblers. The antics of the Indian White Eye were a treat to watch as they danced and splashed and fluttered their feathers with great abandon.

The rewards of my backyard oasis were abundant, welcoming a diverse array of avian visitors over the ensuing years. I documented over a hundred species, including a Spotted Flycatcher, a rare gem previously unseen in our region, and several others deemed uncommon.

Among these visitors, the Jungle Bab-

blers stood out, their gregarious nature belying a profound sense of community. Despite their raucous behaviour, they epitomised solidarity, rallying around a fallen nest with unwavering support until the fledglings could fly up into the tree.

As parents, birds are unparalleled, embodying a selfless devotion to their offspring. It is a common sight to see the ground nesting Red-wattled Lapwing calling loudly as if 'dive bombs' dogs that might stray close to the nest.

The tiniest of birds will work untrudgingly from building the nest to bringing up the brood, protecting and keeping them from harm, imparting life skills and finally letting them fly off to lead independent lives.

The nest-building ability of many species is amazing. It is common knowledge that the engineering skills shown by Baya Weavers in building their nests are used as study models in architecture. Ashy Prinia and Tailorbird are adept seamstresses. They sew together the edges of the leaves

with fine plant fibres.

Yet, amidst the awe-inspiring beauty of the avian world, there looms a shadow of concern. Birds are tenacious in their will to survive against all odds. However, habitat loss, driven by human encroachment, pollution and environmental degradation, poses a grave threat worldwide. Wetlands drained, forests felled, grasslands razed, rivers mined for sand — each ecosystem lost is a blow to avian biodiversity.

Birdwatching is more than just a hobby; it's a reminder of how we are interconnected with all living beings and are custodians of our planet. Let us, therefore, heed the call to protect and preserve the precious ecosystems that sustain them. During the hot Indian summer, it is important to make sure there is enough water for the birds. Place water bowls at various places while ensuring they are cleaned regularly and filled with fresh water.

— The writer is president of Chandigarh Bird Club

ANIL K JOSHI

THE annual Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand (not to be confused with the traditional four dhams of Hindu religion) comprises four major shrines — Yamnotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath (strictly in this sequence), all lying in the Garhwal region. Yamnotri and Gangotri, from where the sacred rivers Yamuna and Ganga originate, lie in Uttarkashi district. Kedarnath, a major Shaiva shrine, one of the 12 Puranic Jyotirlingas, said to have been established by Adi Sankaracharya, is in Rudrapur district. Badrinath, a shrine devoted to Lord Vishnu, is in Chamoli district.

It's a crisis of our own making as an unprecedented surge in the number of pilgrims and tourists at Uttarakhand's shrines throws life out of gear and tests sustainability levels

Traditionally, pilgrims from all over the country visit the shrines between April/May and October/November. The shrines are out of bounds during winter months as the entire area is under snow, and the deities are relocated to alternate sites. Once the snow melts, these deities are carried to the original place in a procession with great fanfare, with the band of Garhwal Rifles in attendance. Each shrine reopens on a precise date calculated by astrologers.

The high priests of Badrinath are originally Namboodiri Brahmins from Kerala, who are said to have been installed by Sankaracharya himself. The rulers of Garhwal have been regarded as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and addressed as 'Bolanda Badri' in Garhwali lingo, meaning, the speaking Lord Badri. This myth continues to thrive even though royalty has long been abolished.

Apart from pilgrimage, people also throng these shrines for performing various rituals like yagyopavit (thread ceremony), mundan (tonsure of scalp), and funerary rituals, including shradddha. For these rituals, there are different sets of priests like Semwals, Gairwals, Hatwals and Dimris, who reside in adjoining villages.

It was obvious that people providing other services would also settle down in the vicinity. Like, the porters, who would carry not only luggage, but also the old and infirm people in large wicker baskets. The shepherds rearing furry sheep and providing warm mattresses and blankets. Men and women who would pick and sell flowers, sesame seeds, draw water, etc.

In olden times, this pilgrimage was considered very difficult and only old people, who were free from their family obligations, dared to undertake it. There were no roads, the narrow paths were treacherous and the inclement weather was a big deterrent. Many died on the way either due to natural calamities or some epidemic. For instance, thousands perished from plague at Kedarnath in 1823, as recorded by Brig Surgeon G Hutcheson, Sanitary Commissioner for North West Provinces and Oudh. Those pilgrims who didn't return were given up as dead by their kin and regarded as having attained moksha.

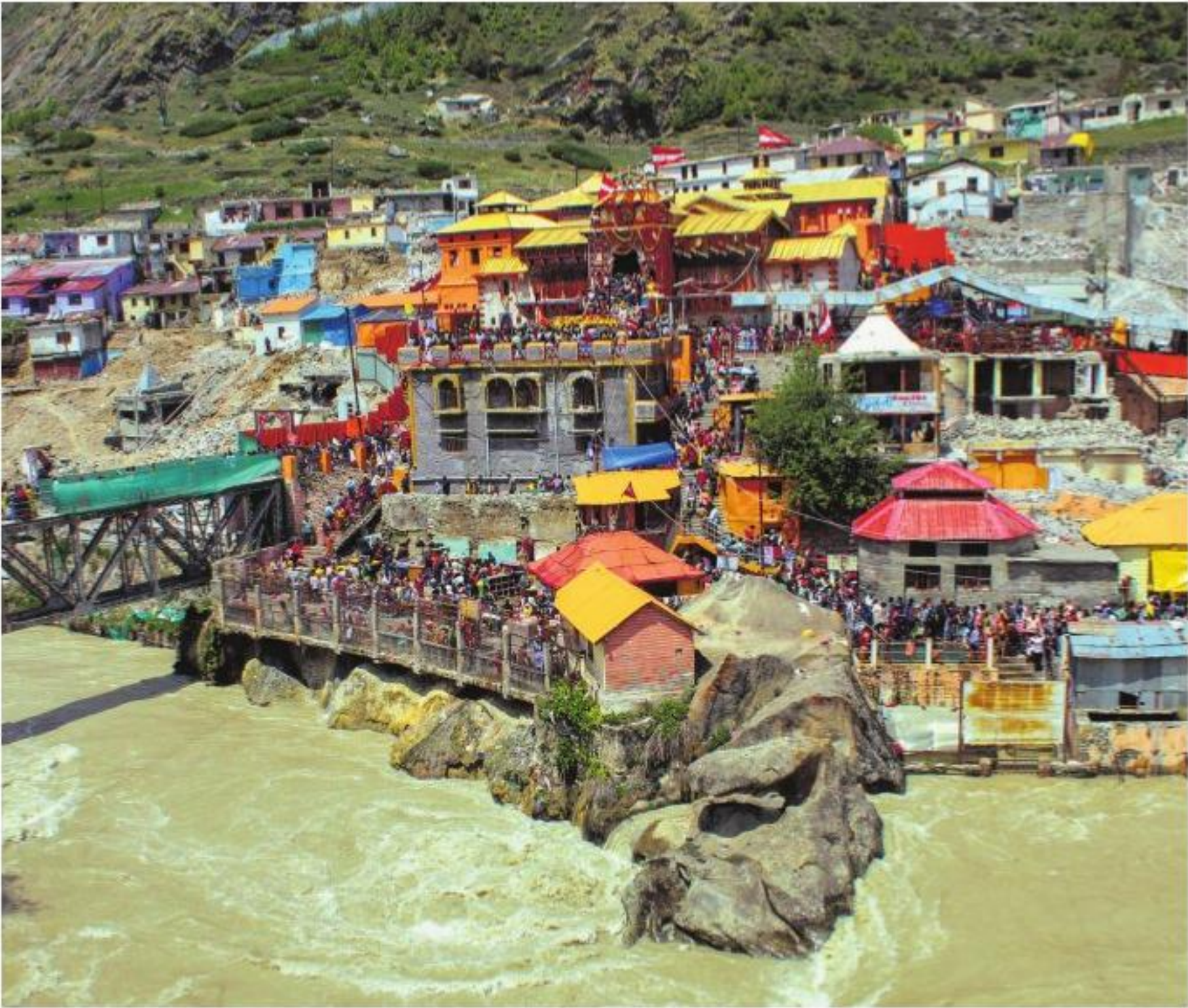
The Char Dham Yatra received an impetus after Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh in 2000. With agricultural and trade activity not quite productive and other means of livelihood very limited, leading to a massive exodus of able-bodied men in search of employment, this pilgrimage was seen as a money-spinner, a major source of revenue.

The idea was fair enough, but the implementation didn't exactly go according to the script. With most visitors hiring plush cabs from Delhi or Dehradun, eating at swanky restaurants and staying at fancy resorts that have mushroomed all over, the local population is no longer the major beneficiary of this windfall. It's the travel agents or the resort owner sitting far away in some metropolis who are minting money.

As the government agencies went on an overdrive, they lost sight of the fact that most pilgrims of this era are not visiting for any real salvation, but just as tourists.

This year, the craze for Char Dham pilgrimage has reached ridiculous proportions, partly because of the hype created in the election year. The ill-advised eagerness to watch the opening ceremony of the shrines has added to the mad rush. When the sanctum sanctorum of Badrinath, the most frequented shrine, opened on May 12, more than 20,000 persons were present inside a compound which can barely hold 500 at a time. The opening ceremony at Kedarnath witnessed a 3-km-long queue. More than six lakh people have visited Kedarnath within a fortnight. Little wonder then that nearly 60 persons have died so far due to varied ailments which get aggravated at high altitudes.

Government agencies, to their credit, have made fervent appeals to people to stay back for a while, stating that the yatra season shall go on till October. Online registration was blocked for three days between May 17



When the sanctum sanctorum of Badrinath, the most frequented shrine, opened on May 12, more than 20,000 persons were present inside a compound which can barely hold 500 at a time.



(Left) Devotees throng the Kedarnath temple in Rudrapur district on May 30. More than six lakh people have visited the shrine within a fortnight; and (above) pilgrims protest against the administration over the alleged mismanagement during the ongoing Char Dham Yatra in Rishikesh. (PI)

THE UPSWING

| Year | Pilgrims in season |
|------|-----------------------|
| 2019 | 34,10,035 |
| 2022 | 46,27,292 |
| 2023 | 56,18,497 |
| 2024 | 12,27,748 (May 10-27) |

and 19. The Director General of Police has camped in the area to regulate the ingress. Yet, the rush continues unabated.

Helicopter services are in place for people who can afford to reach Kedarnath, thereby reducing the load on roads. But that too is fraught with danger as the uncertain weather renders flying hazardous. Recently, a chopper full of passengers went into a tailspin while landing due to a hydraulic malfunction. Fortunately, it hit a grassy slope as it slithered down and all had a providential escape.

The roads are choked with traffic, the hills are groaning with massive forest fires adding to the woes.

It goes without saying that this sudden spurt in the number of pilgrims has a lot to do with the advent of renaissance Hinduism, of late. Ironically, it was the horrendous calamity at Kedarnath on June 16, 2013, which resulted in an unprecedented loss of life that became a catalyst. A sizeable number of pilgrims who went missing hailed from Gujarat. The then Chief Minister made a dash to the shrine to locate the bodies and evacuate the survivors, a move which his detractors dubbed as a "Rambo-like act". He also despatched special relief trains from Gujarat ferrying food and clothes. No need to elaborate as to how this act of chivalry propelled the Chief Minister

to a higher pedestal.

Subsequent symbolic acts of appropriating the shrine, the cult of Adi Sankaracharya, meditation in an adjoining cave, all went viral and prompted a craze to visit.

It's not just the four major pilgrim sites that are under stress. Even more alarming is the case of Kainchi, once a small nondescript temple complex built by a saint in the 1960s, 20 km downhill of Nainital on the national highway. It used to be a quaint little place where passersby would stop at will, pay obeisance and move on unhindered. Alas, not anymore.

During the Prime Minister's meeting with Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg in 2015 in California, the latter made a passing mention of Kainchi, and how his mentor Steve Jobs had visited it. Kainchi was immediately put on the priority list and, as a logical corollary, the current Chief Minister of Uttarakhand declared it a dham.

This virtually opened the floodgates and, of late, the place has been witnessing an uncontrollable rush of tourists. Politicians, business tycoons, cricketers, film stars, all have been flocking to seek blessings. At any time of the year, one encounters people milling around, rendering movement difficult. The pavements have been occupied by makeshift eateries and hand carts selling trinkets.

Located on the banks of a rivulet passing through a gorge with steep hills on both sides, there's little scope for broadening of the road or expansion. But, that has not stopped people from constructing pigeon hole-like accommodation at every possible place in the garb of homestays, converting the once-picturesque spot into a concrete forest.

The riverbed, which remains dry during the lean season, has been filled with mud to provide parking space, conveniently overlooking the fact that if there's very heavy rainfall at any given time, everything would be washed away in a flash and the vehicles would be carried away miles down the stream. The spot has become a traffic bottleneck since it lies on the busiest section of the most important highway reaching out to every corner of Kumaon. Hardly a day passes by when passengers don't miss their trains, flights or ambulances ferrying patients/pregnant women get stuck in the traffic snarls. Even the movement of Army and paramilitary convoys heading towards the sensitive India-China and Nepal borders gets compromised.

Another case in point is Jageshwar, an ancient Shaiva temple complex, tucked inside a dense deodar forest which is so remotely located that it had escaped notice of the marauding Rohilla commander Hafiz Rahmat Khan, who had invaded Kumaon in the latter half of the 18th century and destroyed most ancient temples.

Though a major tourist attraction, it recorded regulated footfall and thrived with activity only in the month of Shravan when, as per Shaiva tradition, devotees perform an elaborate puja. Not anymore. Now the place is under siege, not by any invader but by the glut of tourists.

Last year, the Prime Minister made a maiden visit to Jageshwar and, not surprisingly, declared it as another dham.

As expected, this declaration had a ripple effect, and this year, the pristine place has become almost inaccessible to the locals. Last fortnight, a 4-km-long traffic jam was reported and the charming picture postcard place was littered with waste. Another holy shrine defaced or, one could say, desecrated.

All this movement also entails unmitigated collateral damage. In order to facilitate vehicular movement, the roads are being widened indiscriminately. As the gargantuan machines continue to dig deep and chip at mountain slopes, massive landslides occur, ironically holding back the same traffic for which the broadening exercise is underway.

As the rocks and boulders come cascading down at a menacing speed, the trees also get uprooted, leaving the slopes barren and scarred. The subsoil water bodies created as a result of geological changes thousands of years ago, and which account for the numerous perennial streams and ponds downhill, are destroyed forever, aggravating the scarcity of water.

It is more than obvious, therefore, that the Char Dham Yatra, far from being beneficial to the people of Uttarakhand, has proved to be counterproductive. It hasn't created as many job opportunities as envisaged. The problem of migration remains unsolved and environmental destruction is a major concern. The sole beneficiaries have been the fly-by-night operators, most of whom don't have any affinity with the region. They make a quick buck, leaving the villagers even worse off.

— The Ranikhet-based writer is former head, Department of History, Kumaon University, Nainital

It's not just the four major pilgrim sites that are under stress. More alarming is the case of Kainchi, a temple complex built by a saint in 1960s downhill of Nainital. It used to be a quaint little place where passersby would stop at will, pay obeisance and move on. Not anymore