



Get a taste of the traditional cooling drinks that have provided solace for centuries

VARIETY PAGE 2

The Sunday Tribune

SPECTRUM



Between a temple and an art gallery, the wonder that is Narbadeshwar

ARTS PAGE 3

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PHOTOS COURTESY: THE WRITER



Mundri Lal, the legendary tumbi player, was an entertainer on and off the stage. Even at his home, he had pitched a tent on the roof, to practise at any given time.

Popular for enacting ballads & lampooning the powers that be with the conventional licence of clowns, their art form is on the wane

NEELAM MANSINGH CHOWDHRY

POST-INDEPENDENCE, there was a fervent search for form and content that would define and also echo the spirit of nationalism. Many artists looked back at tradition for inspiration. Some sought stencils through which new identities could be forged. The training in most art schools in the late Sixties was persuasively reflective of western sources, forms and traditions. However, in the early Eighties, folk forms and traditions started being explored and valorised. The assumption was that there existed in these forms a theatrical vocabulary that would enable urban theatre to establish links with their forgotten past, and devise a method of training the urban artist.

When I moved to Chandigarh in 1984, I was fascinated with the concept of putting together a company that could, in a cross-cultural matrix, integrate a theatrical folk form by not only delving into history or ideology or politics, but the way in which modernity and tradition move.

Trained at the National School of Drama, I was also influenced by the teachings of Stanislavski, but my four years of working with BV Karanth at Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal had given me an insight into the rich local traditions that existed in each state of India. When I started working with the Naqqal performers, I was not really interested in the form as something 'material', far removed from my urban world, to be cited and imitated. Neither was I looking to create a patch and paste sort of experimentation. What interested me was how performers coming from different sides of the road could work together.

Naqqal is derived from the Persian word 'naql', which means to imitate. They are also referred to as bhaands.

The Naqqals as performers have a long lineage, but are paradoxically without a continuous or firm tradition. They enact ballads, sing, dance and lampoon the powers that be with the conventional licence of clowns.

In recent times, their considerable popularity has been challenged by cinema and television and they have had to survive by doing 'disco' dancing at weddings and community events, including jagratas. But, in my work, they appear along with urban performers, not as decorative 'acts' or even as a sign of cultural aesthetics, but to enable diverse and complex perspectives to emerge.

The Naqqals have been nomads and like all nomads, a trifle aloof and suspicious. Their background is mysterious as all claim separate genealogies even though they belong to the same family. Prem Chand, the self-styled ustad, said his family came from Rajasthan to Patiala on the invitation of the Maharaja. Tall and fair, with henna-tinted hair and gold loops in his ears, he looked more like a buccaneer than a musician. A compulsive talker, with a propensity towards exaggeration, he claimed that he was 100 years old and still virile. His passport put his age as 72.

Mundri Lal, the legendary tumbi player, claimed no



Bahadur Chand, a female impersonator; (above) urban actors and Naqqals share the stage for the writer's play.

such grand ancestry. Wrapped in a huge overcoat, even in mid-summer, with thick military shoes bought from the flea market, his favourite activity was sleeping and a stubborn resistance to bathing. At his home in Maloya (Chandigarh), his sons and wife lived in their 5-marla house, while Mundri Lal had pitched a tent on the roof — eating, sleeping and practising in rain and sunshine.

On performance tours within the country and abroad, he never carried any baggage. The required clothes were worn one on top of the other, making him look like a stuffed turkey.

The Naqqals are musicians who can play a variety of musical instruments and are trained singers. It would be no exaggeration to say that they are the repositories of qisas and the lost songs of Punjab. Karanth, an iconic music director, composed music with them based on lyrics written by Surjit Patar. He showed them how traditional instruments could be played in a non-traditional manner. Instead of playing the drums conventionally, they could also create sound and rhythm from the wooden walls of the drum. He made them recognise that anything that makes sound can be a musical instrument. In 'Kitchen Katha', a play about food, he created an orchestration of sound patterns using kitchen utensils.

I have seen at a village performance near Solan, Bahadur Chand, a female impersonator from the Naqqal tradition, sit on the lap of the patron and twirl

his moustache in an attempt to extract money from him. Shows that are performed at night by a group of female impersonators, musicians and singers have a carnivalesque quality as these affirm and mock, celebrate and critique the prevailing definitions of what titillates and stimulates a predominantly male audience. The actors flaunt their bodies in shiny costumes, drawing their references from cultural stereotypes — the seductress, the goddess, the idealised wife and daughter. Often, their names suggest an inflated sexuality: Miss Sweetie, Miss Rosy, Miss Hurricane, Miss Bulbul-e-Hind, Miss Chashme-Baddoor. The spectators always present a version of masculinity that has the sanction of the dominant culture and as such, raucous and coarse behaviour is the norm at such performances. In the middle of a show, the female impersonator can lash out as a male to discipline an unruly spectator and without much effort slip back into the female role.

My meeting with the Naqqals was serendipitous and a combination of chance and choice. The first time I saw them perform was in 1986 while driving from Amritsar to Chandigarh. A car breakdown had me stuck en route. While the driver went looking for a mechanic, I waited. Suddenly, in the wilderness of a summer evening, I heard sounds of singing and laughter coming from the fields and followed the sound. The impact of what I saw was startling. A group of singers, musicians and dancers were per-

forming, ad-libbing and telling stories. A mixture of pop art and natural fun was their chosen vocabulary. The stage on which they performed was made of temporary planks of wood laid on a trestle, lit by oil lamps that created giant shadows on a soiled white sheet strung haphazardly as a backdrop.

An actor entered the improvised stage and blew an antelope horn. Another sound that seemed suspiciously like a car-hooter was let out simultaneously to the beat of insistent drumming.

An ancient man with a mop of white hair appeared blowing fire from his mouth. It seemed as if some ritual was going on, and I was a trifle intrigued as no women were visible in the large rush of children and men. A group of singers entered and made social comments, interspersed with the dohas of Kabir and Baba Farid, before indulging in some risqué exchanges with a co-actor, with each punchline being underscored by a swish of a leather band.

After that, a group of female impersonators entered the stage and were gyrating wildly to the Hindi song, 'Jhumka gira re, Ravan kedar mein' (I have lost my earring in the court of the demon, Ravan). Their performance was nocturnal, sexist and far removed from the precincts of the village.

The stories they enacted were pan-Indian myths conjoining local myths, transformed and renewed for local meaning. The gods they invoked rode bicycles, aspired for a sarkari naukri, and cursed like soldiers on a rampage. In the middle of a tragedy, a horse (an actor with a shawl flung on his back) appeared on the stage and broke into a song. In an episode of the famous love legend Sohni-Mahiwal, the matka or the earthen pot upon which Sohni is crossing the river Chenab, suddenly animates itself and starts to narrate the story.

This is a theatrical device that does not fit into any known grammar of realism, but is nonetheless completely acceptable to the audience. The actor represents the common man, and also functions as a social critic and commentator.

Naqqals were also hired occasionally by the Song and Drama Division, a governmental public relations wing that used performers to sell products, pass on social messages, and damage the reputation of a rival political opponent when necessary.

It is sometimes uncanny to see issues of dowry, birth control and female infanticide being rendered with such a declamatory flamboyance that makes these issues get a dash of the mythological. The Naqqal tradition provided a fount of stage conventions, concepts and technique. The beating of a metal kettle with a spoon to suggest war, the smearing of flour on the face to suggest fear — simple techniques, but powerful in their impact and loaded with suggestiveness.

While watching them perform, I understood the true meaning of the words 'spontaneity' and 'openness'. To see a large number of people sitting out on a starlit night, responding to the mood of the performance was an enriching experience. To observe how the audience pumped energy and excitement into the performers was in some way to recognise that something real and precious was being exchanged. I then understood that tradition does not mean something back there, lost, but something constantly alive — living and expanding. I was completely hooked!

Mundri Lal died four years ago, but his performances and persona resonate loud and clear. The challenges are many, but the Naqqal show must go on.

Harpal, a legendary algoza and tumbi player.

PUSHPESH PANT

IT'S not surprising that in India, where summer is like a furnace, poets smitten by love have found solace in sherbet. Many shayars have penned verses using sherbet metaphorically to describe the beauty of the beloved.

The word 'sherbet' is derived from the Arabic 'shariba', that translates as drinking. In Turkish and Persian, it becomes 'sherbet'. In India, it retains the Persian name. The first documented reference is traced to a medicinal work, 'Zakhira-e-Khawarizm Shahi', compiled by Syed Hadi Hussain Khan, sometime during the 11th and 12th centuries. This is considered a medicinal encyclopedia that mentions many therapeutic sherbets.

Sherbet was very popular in Persia, where the sun was scorching in the southern parts during summer. The people of Hindustan were used to drinking sugarcane juice to cope with the heat till they encountered tastier juices of fruits and flowers blended together. Empress Noorjahan is credited with introducing the rose sherbet in the subcontinent.

At the dawn of the 20th century, famous Unani physician and freedom fighter Ajmal Khan had created a sherbet not to beat the heat, but to combat coughs and cold in winter. Another Unani hakim, Abdul Majid of Hamdani Dawakhana, made a sherbet after blending juices of myriad flowers and vegetables that had time-tested refreshing, cooling and invigorating qualities. It was appropriately named Rooh Afzah, a drink which promised to revive wilting spirits. But before the traditional sherbets could step out to conquer the world, the American carbonated sodas and cold drinks colonised the world.

'Dilli Ke Chatkhane', a memoir written by Shahid Ahmed Dehalvi at the turn of the 20th century, mentions a sherbet-farsh of Delhi who braved the blazing sun to bring assorted sherbets to thirsty patrons. But with the invasion of bottled drinks and fizzy sodas, their days became numbered.

Some sherbets of yore that have become almost extinct are mahua (madhuca longifolia) ka sherbet, palash (flame of the forest) ka sherbet and gul gudhal (hibiscus flower) ka sherbet. All were prepared with juices of flowers. Phalse ka sherbet, with its delicate purple hue and slightly tangy taste, used to be quite popular in Delhi. Phalse are berries that have a very short season and squeezing the juice out of these is a testing process. Bael ka sherbet has a pleasant yellow colour and fragrance. It was believed to have many therapeutic properties and was much easier to make once the hard nut — the stone apple — was cracked. A much lighter shade of green was displayed by amla-adrak ka sherbet, garnished with refreshing mint leaves.

Different regions of India take proprietorial pride in their own sherbet. Sattu ka sherbet sweetened with jaggery is beloved of the people residing in eastern UP and

Sherbetnama

In the sweltering heat, a taste of the traditional cooling drinks that have been providing solace for centuries



IMLI KA SHERBET

INGREDIENTS

Imli pulp/paste (easily available without additives)	50 gm
Jaggery or unrefined sugar	50 gm
Black rock salt	1 large pinch
Black peppercorns (coarsely pounded)	10-12
Alubukhara (pitted dried plums)	5-6
Seedless dates (optional, sliced)	4

Method: Bring to boil 6 cups of water in a pan and add the tamarind pulp and other ingredients into it. Cook on medium flame till all ingredients are well blended. Check seasoning. Remove from flame and allow to cool. Sieve through a fine cloth or soup strainer. Chill and serve with preferred garnish. This used to be the traditional first sip imbibed after the daylong fasting in the holy month of Ramzan, not only in India but in Turkey as well. It is called tem rindi sherbet. Tamarind was identified as the date of India by the Arabs and Turks. Alubukhara adds a fruity tang to it.



Rose sherbet



Amba panna

Bihar. Its texture is more like a smoothie than a squash and it is more of a light meal than a beverage. In Jharkhand, we were introduced by our tribal host to neem ka manda, a mildly sweetened (with jaggery) antidote to sunstroke, prepared with dried and powdered neem leaves mixed with kanji-like starchy water obtained after boiling rice.

Along the coastal belt, kokum sherbet is preferred. In Uttarakhand, juice is extracted from the large flowers of buranish (rhododendron) to prepare a sherbet that is blood red in colour and tickles the palate with a refreshing tang. In Kerala, the most popular traditional sherbet was prepared with Indian sarsaparilla's (anantimula) root.

None of the desi coolants needed the crutches of artificial colours, fragrances or added flavours. Badam sherbet and thandai were white, bael and sandal swerved

towards yellow, khus was emerald, and amla-adrak-pudina concoction and amba panna were a lighter shade of green. Phalse, palash and gudhal were in shades of red, while jamun ka sherbet was violet-tinted.

Our good friend Qamar Agha from Allahabad insists that the art of preparing and serving sherbet is almost dead. The old way was to pour sherbet into a copper or brass pyaal. The water used was naturally cooled in a clay surahi. In any case, ice was an unaffordable luxury for the masses till the 1930s. Slabs of ice were brought for Mughal rulers and aristocratic courtiers from the Himalayas via special runners or on boats. The British started 'farming ice' in Delhi in ice factories much later.

According to Ayurveda, the summer season depletes energy by dehydrating the body and exposing it to high-heat-like

body temperature. The sensation of heat takes many forms: doah (burning), toop (heating) and santaap (residue of unpleasant heat that lingers like remorse).

Fresh coconut water is an excellent readymade natural sherbet. Bottled sweet coconut water is now available all across the land, as are tender green coconuts. City-dwellers sometimes substitute coconut water for water in shikanji and some other sherbets. Alas, most thirsty people resort to the shortcut of bottled sherbet concentrates, overloaded with preservatives, acidity regulators, artificial flavours, colours, etc.

We have pleasure in sharing with our readers some hassle-free recipes of traditional sherbets that retain their natural goodness and are guaranteed to keep you cool, hydrated and refreshed as the mercury rises and relentless heatwave persists.



ISTOCK

PALASH KA SHERBET



INGREDIENTS

Petals of palash flower	A handul (fresh or dry)
Fennel seeds	1 tsp
Mishri/crystal sugar	1 tsp
Black peppercorns (coarsely pounded)	10-12
Green cardamom seeds (crushed)	1/2 tsp
Rock salt	To taste
Dried mint leaves	1 tsp
Lemon juice	1 tsp

Method: Soak all ingredients in 5 cups of water. Cover and keep aside for at least six hours. Sieve the aromatic water into another pan. Refrigerate and serve undiluted with ice cubes and fresh mint leaves as garnish.

CAPTION CONTEST 1462

HIMANSHU MAHAJAN



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@tribunemal.com or a scanned copy of the e-paper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number in your address.

SELECTED ENTRIES FOR CAPTION CONTEST 1461



SPECTRUM JUNE 2 ISSUE (SEE PHOTO)

A gaggle ready to paddle — Dhanu Patwari via epaper, Gurdaspur

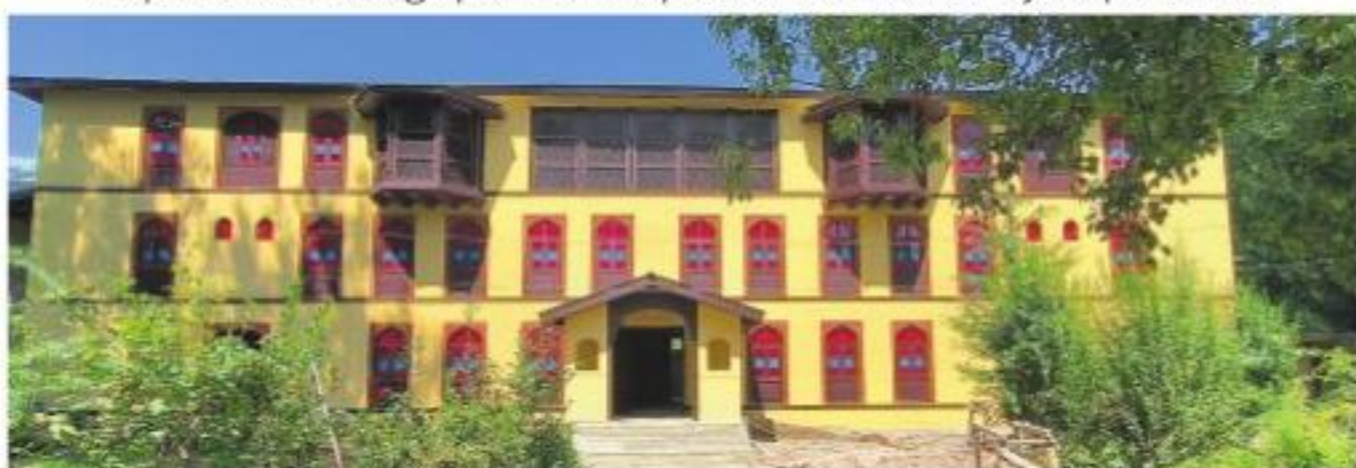
Bank balance — Surinder Migani, Kailthal

Playpool — Gopal Krishan Juneja, Chandigarh

A bond in the pond — Jaswinder Singh, Chandigarh

Birds of a feather frolic together — Rajiv Sharma via epaper, Amritsar

Atiqa Bano's heritage palace in Sopore is now helmed by Jaspreet Kaur



The building and interiors have been redesigned as per international standards for museums.

2 women & Meeras Mahal

NASEER AHMAD

SOPORE in north Kashmir is known as the 'apple town'. Having faced turmoil in the 1990s, today, it is a peaceful place where democracy flourishes, going by the high voter turnout in the recent elections.

At the far end of Sopore, a remarkable cultural place has emerged that draws intellectuals, educators, students, architects and history enthusiasts alike — Kashmir valley's first private ethnographic museum, Meeras Mahal.

The museum houses an extensive collection of artefacts, all gathered by Atiqa Bano, whose grave lies next to the museum. The collection numbers a staggering 7,000 items. Bano, who passed away in 2017, devoted her life to preserving these artefacts. She aimed to save everyday items from Kashmiri life that were on the brink of disappearing.

Before the 1990s, these items were used in some areas of rural northern Kashmir. However, rapid urbanisation changed lifestyles significantly, leading to the vanishing of these artefacts. Meeras Mahal, meaning 'Heritage Palace', preserves this culture.

The museum, established before the militancy period by Bano on her property, serves as a testament to rural life. It shows



Atiqa Bano

Jaspreet Kaur

how people lived and worked; how Kashmiris, both Pandits and Muslims, celebrated festivals and coped with different weather seasons over the centuries.

The collections are categorised into terracotta, woodwork, wicker and grassware, metal (including jewellery), stone, textiles and manuscripts. The terracotta collection features everyday kitchen items like pickle jars, clay stoves and water pitchers, each bearing the mark of Kashmiri's artisanal heritage.

The museum displays a rich collection of wicker baskets and traditional Kashmiri firepots, skilfully crafted from terracotta.

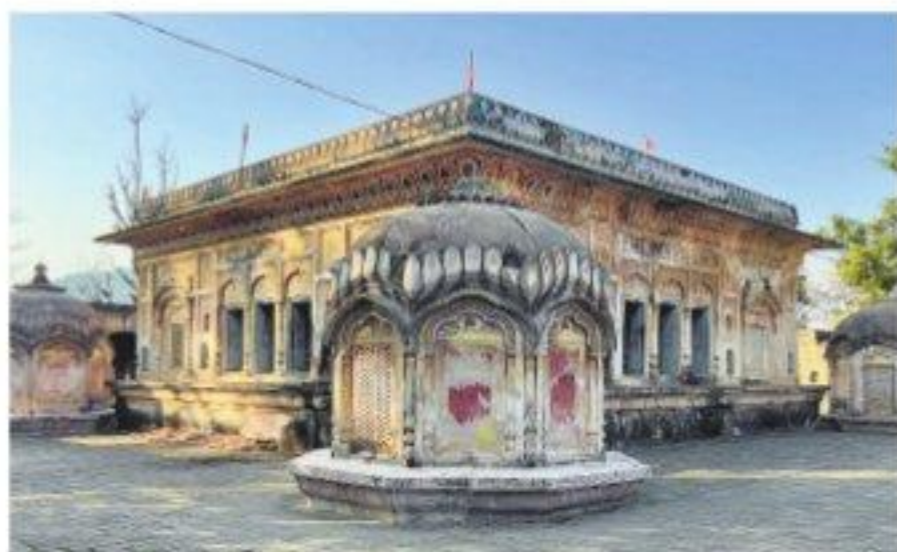
Meeras Mahal houses an exquisite collection of white metal handmade jewellery, including necklaces, head pendants, earrings, chokers, bracelets, arm jewellery, mas koent (elegant hairpins), kasabtsisin (kasab pins), and embellished buttons.

Born in Sopore, Atiqa Bano conceived the idea of Meeras Mahal while working in the

Department of Education. During her various stints across Kashmir, she collected artefacts, often purchasing them herself. Even after retiring, she continued her efforts. The museum's collection includes handwritten Korans in Persian and Arabic, Sanskrit manuscripts, as well as 300-year-old handwritten books. Visitors can also find historical coins and a detailed history of the Kashmiri pheran. Pottery and tools related to the making of the exquisite Pashmina fabric are also on display.

In 2017, Jaspreet Kaur, an architect and designer by training, joined the efforts to preserve Atiqa Bano's legacy. She came to Kashmir for a visit and fell in love with the place. Kaur met Saleem Beg, head of the INTACH chapter in Jammu and Kashmir, who introduced her to Bano's work. Inspired by Bano's dedication, Kaur's Delhi-based SPAN Foundation backed INTACH's refurbishment and renovation programme for the museum.

The building and its interiors were redesigned to create galleries accommodating around 30 per cent of the museum's collection, following international standards for museums. On November 25 last year, at the museum's soft inauguration, Jaspreet Kaur had only one request, that the community should embrace and adopt it.



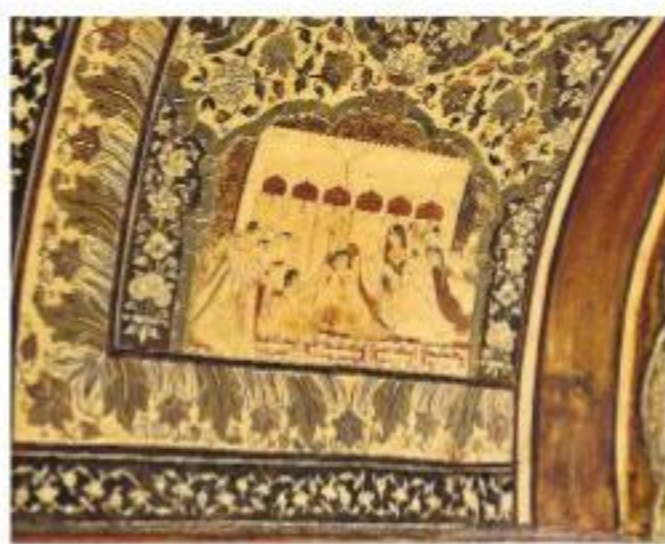
BETWEEN A TEMPLE & AN ART GALLERY

The wonder that is Narbadeshwar in Tira Sujanpur

SIDDHARTH PANDEY

WHENEVER the epithet 'Dev Bhoomi' is used with reference to the religious landscape of Himachal Pradesh, it is usually a select list of temples that readily comes to mind. The official website of the Himachal Pradesh government, for instance, enlists 26 Hindu pilgrimage sites, from Chamba's well-known Lakshmi Narayan Temple to Shimla's celebrated Jakhu Mandir. But the state holds a number of other treasures as well, that deserve equal if not greater appreciation. One such edifice is the extraordinary 200-year-old temple of Narbadeshwar, that lies in a sleepy corner of Hamirpur district's Tira Sujanpur town, overlooking the Beas river from a low perch.

It is perplexing as to why this structure, awash with some of the greatest wall paintings of India (and possibly of the world), eludes popular awareness, even within the state itself. Visitors travelling through that belt in the shadow of the colossal Dhauladhar are likely to pay obeisance to the deities at Brajeshwari, Baijnath, Baba Balaknath and Jwala-



This structure, awash with some of the greatest wall paintings of India, eludes popular awareness, even within Himachal Pradesh itself.

mukhi, all spread within a few hundred kilometres of each other. They might even drive up to Sujanpur's highest point crowned by its famous fort, that holds the shrine of Gauri Shankar. But the knowledge of Narbadeshwar as something more than a regular site of local worship remains conspicuous by its absence.

First and foremost, the temple complex strikes as both an architectural masterpiece and a venerable art gallery, that hosts among the rarest and finest specimens of Kangra art on its walls and ceilings.

Built in 1802 by Rani Prasani Devi, the wife of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, Narbadeshwar resists classification as a

prototypical North Indian temple from the outset. As visitors climb up the rural walkway from the main road to enter its premises, they are struck by a flat-roofed building at the centre of a large, stonewalled courtyard, that resembles more of a fort than a Hindu shrine. Devoid of a shikhara — that most prominent part of temple typology — Narbadeshwar bears the influence of both Rajasthani and Mughal building styles.

Ostensibly dedicated to Lord Shiva and Parvati, whose wedding ceremony it depicts in enormous detail on the sanctum sanctorum's front wall, the temple actually hosts a plethora of other subjects across its arched corridors lining

the garbhagriha. Even a cursory glance stuns the viewer with the sheer abundance of religious, royal and natural motifs, that cover almost every inch of the walls, both inside and outside. Elegantly done floral chains, avian couples and intricate wreaths weave across the building, furnishing frames upon frames for all kinds of entities. In between, long panels depicting colourful mythological and quasi-historical sequences from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and other records routinely punctuate the artistry. Perhaps the most idiosyncratic aspect of this imagery is that while all of it qualifies as Kangra art, there are palpable sty-

listic differences among the illustrations themselves. This attests to the variety of artists deployed for the decoration, who brought their own imprints whilst being united under a singular painterly genre.

Other distinctive features mesmerise as well. Sections depicting aristocracy and local kings (including Sansar Chand himself) share space with those of gods and goddesses, many of them draped in long, flowing Pahari costumes. Narbadeshwar is one of the few places where Krishna is not only detailed through his childhood legends, but also via his role as a king. And while inter-religious imagery doesn't usually enter temple art of the region, one is truly moved by the inclusion of Sikh Gurus as well, confirming the influence of Sikhism in the area.

Even after spending hours together staring at its multifarious elements, this glorious temple retains the rare ability to reveal something new with every glance, much like an invaluable picture gallery. It is as if the structure actively 'asks' of its visitor to 'attend' properly to its details. And the artists who were at the helm of this project surely knew this. For, as the philosopher Simone Weil observes, "Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer." Attending to art as graceful and as evocative as Narbadeshwar's also amounts to another kind of worship, one that seamlessly blends the spiritual with the skilful.

— The writer is a historian, artist and cultural critic from Shimla

While superstitions have long orchestrated the doom of *rudra veena*, the instrument is also unwieldy limiting the number of its exponents

Strings attached

SHAILAJA KHANNA

ONE of India's oldest extant string instruments, the *rudra veena* (often, as it is colloquially called) has been in a state of decline for the last 100 years. Today, very few practitioners remain.

When the last great *beenkar* from a *beenkar* family, the late Ustad Asad Ali Khan (1937-2011), went for an audition to All India Radio in the late 1950s, he introduced his instrument as *Saraswati veena*, the more well-known version of the instrument played in South India. When questioned as to why he did that, he simply said no one knew the *rudra veena* and there was no slot for it in the AIR's documentation. Despite being a seventh generation *rudra veena* practitioner, this is what he had to resort to for being enrolled with AIR.

But why was it sorely played? One obvious reason was that it was a difficult instrument, unwieldy and acoustically not as audible as more modern string instruments. Also, it was not taught to every musician.

Believed to have been created by Lord Shiva himself, the *rudra veena* was considered an instrument for prayer. "He who can play the *veena* and has *shruti* (knowledge) can reach God," said Rishi Yagnavalka. Over the centuries, even after it had ceased to be just an accompanying instrument and was being played solo, it retained its aura of exclusivity. Only certain traditional families played it; within these, too, only a few chosen disciples, who were considered capable of maintaining the ritual service associated



A disciple of Ustad Asad Ali Khan, Jyoti Hedge teaches *rudra veena* to several students; (R) Ustad Bahauddin. PHOTO COURTESY: BHARATI TIWARI

with it, were allowed to learn it. Purity of the body and mind and strict adherence to daily practice were a must for *beenkar*s. If there was any laxity, the *rudra veena* could curse you, it was universally believed. Those who dedicated their lives to it could become childless if they were not worthy of playing it. Such superstitions made it an even more demanding instrument to learn.

Interestingly, Mir Nasir Ahmed, grandson of Mian Himmat Khan, the last great *beenkar* of the Mughal court, was childless while in service at the Delhi *durbār*. He escaped the city in 1858 and began living under the patronage of Kunwar Bikrama Singh in Jalandhar. He was now just playing it for prayer, not in the court. He was blessed with two children in his fifties. This belief of being inauspicious for unworthy practitioners was a huge deterrent and every generation saw very few *beenkar*s. Those who played were accorded a universal seniority, regardless of lineage. In the



Mian Himmat Khan, a blind *beenkar* in the court of Mughal emperor Shah Alam. PHOTO COURTESY: KATHERINE BUTLER SCHOFIELD

last 100 years, Ustad Bande Ali Khan, who lived in Indore, has been one of the most respected *beenkar*s. Hailing from his line-

age, Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (1929-1990) was a great *beenkar*, too. The story of how this link came about is interesting. Bande Ali Khan challenged the musicians of the day to sing while he played his *veena*. He said that whoever won would get to marry his daughter. Ustad Zakiruddin Dagar took up the challenge and married Umrao. His son, Ustad Ziauddin Dagar, spent nine years in Indore with his Nana, learning the *rudra veena* from him.

Ziauddin's son, Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar, turned out to be a great *veena* player too. He also made physical modifications to the instrument, making it more audible. He changed its hold and it was now held on the lap like the *Saraswati veena*, not upright.

Today, his son Ustad Bahauddin Dagar is the finest exponent of the *rudra veena*, and teaches six students. Interestingly, Bahauddin's father encouraged him to play the *veena*; the family tradition was Dhrupad

singing. A generation earlier, Zia Mohiuddin had to take permission from his father to play the *veena* as the superstition attached to playing the instrument was so palpable.

Bahauddin shares that the rules were still rigid — to not touch the instrument without bathing, only lay out the instrument in a pure clean place, never play if you are ill, and never use the knowledge to show down anyone musically. These rules remain in force. "If you do *beimaani* (dishonesty) with the instrument, there will be repercussions," he cautions.

In recent times, Swami Parvatikar (1916-1990) has been a well-known exponent. Ustad Wazir Khan of Rampur, the last of the great *Senia* *ustads*, did not teach the *veena* to most of his students. His grandson Dabir Khan (1905-1972), who lived and died in Kolkata, was a *beenkar* but not really a professional musician; as was Pandit Birendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury (1901-1972). Ustad Wazir Khan taught only *sarod* and *sursingar* to his disciples Ustad Allaadin Khan and Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan. Interestingly, the *sursingar* was created to teach *been* techniques to non-been playing disciples!

Ustad Asad Ali Khan belonged to a *beenkar* family; sadly, he was the last of his line. His best-known *veena* disciple is Jyoti Hedge, who lives on a farm in Karnataka and is teaching *rudra veena* to 41 students. Ustad Shamsuddin Faridi Desai (1936-2011) was a fine *beenkar*, too; his father had trained under Ustad Waheed Khan of Indore.

The superstition of inauspiciousness attached to the *rudra veena* extends to its makers too. Rikhi Ram, the most well-known instrument maker in North India (the family moved from Lahore to Delhi), did not make *veenas*. The late Bishan Das Sharma apparently sustained an eye injury while he was merely repairing a *veena*. The instrument makers who are 'authorised' to make it are few. It takes about two years to make a really good *veena*. And the low number of practitioners isn't helping the cause of the *rudra veena*.

Several themes adorn the temple's arched corridors lining the garbhagriha. PHOTOS BY THE WRITER

Survival, struggle, triumph of human settlers

PARBINA RASHID

THE human imagination is obsessed with the idea of leaving" — Chitvan Gill introduces us to the concept of migration in her book 'Dreaming a Paradise'. To explain how the idea of migrating has consumed the human race since the beginning of life, she builds her argument around Adam and Eve's eviction from paradise, to the cursed wanderer Cain, to Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Adi Shankara.

One may agree or disagree with Gill, like I didn't with her bringing in Laika the dog's space voyage in support of her contention, but once she holds our hands and gives us a guided tour of the *gallis* of Buland Masjid, the Sputnik 2 tragedy is forgotten.

From those *gallis* emerges a beautiful story that embodies the quintessence of survival, struggle and triumph of the human settlers. As the author puts it, "Buland Masjid is the story of migrations

into hell and they (the early settlers) end in a struggle to create a paradise."

Gill, who has worked extensively on social and developmental issues in the urban sector as a writer, independent filmmaker and documentary photographer, brings the story of Buland Masjid alive both with her words and photographs. Her observations of this human settlement are hard-hitting and her style of documenting these is almost lyrical, which at times borders on surrealism.

As she brings us face to face with the characters that inhabit Buland Masjid, we see them in silhouettes, but their souls are laid bare — for us to understand them, know them as persons rather than 'the invisible other'.

Here we meet Mohammad Zafar, who came from Moradabad and converted the swampland near the Yamuna into a paradise for thousands of destitutes, who were forced to leave their homes in search of a better future in Delhi. There are others who enrich Gill's narrative, like Rizwan Bijnori, a *dhaba* owner; Dr Ishtiaq, who



DREAMING A PARADISE: MIGRATIONS AND THE STORY OF BULAND MASJID

by Chitvan Gill
Seagull Books.
Pages 185.
₹599

runs a Unani clinic; Sohan Lal, one of the few Hindus of the colony; Nafisa, who runs a beauty parlour; Shabana, who runs a tika stall, or Hare Baba from Kolkata. Most important of them is Haji Aneesuddin, the one 'who knows how to get things done'.

Getting things done in Buland Masjid is not easy. Spread across 8.5 acres, it is just one of the 1,797 unauthorised colonies of Delhi. Gill lets the researcher in her shine as she pits these unauthorised colonies against the 'great idea of urban India and the smart cities so meticulously being planned for this great urban age'. With the zeal of an activist, she attacks the Delhi Development Authority for the housing shortage by approximately 20 lakh units.

"In 1961, the DDA was handed over 19,190 hectares for residential development, but till 2011, had not been able to build houses on even half that land," she comments. This chapter on 'The Urban Age' is informative but sees a departure from her usual soft and poetic style of writing.

She immediately returns to her original tone as she captures the social milieu of the colony. Gill observes how everything is divided and sub-divided within the colony — linguistics, customs, regionalism... Bareilly, Bijnori, Bengali, Bihari. Surprisingly, the handful of Hindus who live in

the colony confess, "It never struck us that we are living in a place dominated by Muslims." Religion-based politics is a rich man's muse as far as the inhabitants of Buland Masjid are concerned.

The scene is fast changing though. The politics of the nation has seeped in and turned them into a nervous lot. Nobody is willing to talk to Gill any longer. "We can't talk. Don't come here. They will take us away," they tell her. Twisted, discriminatory laws, the revocation of Article 370, communal riots — "the residents of this colony are being forced to submit to a new language, the language of fear," she writes.

Gill's language on human migration and their subsequent rehabilitation is fearless. Only if she had refrained from using too many excerpts and quotes of writers (from Charles Darwin to VS Naipaul to Charles Dickens — 75 of them in total). The real-life drama of her subject is so engaging and her way of capturing it is so skillful that she could have done better without such frills.

Fifty shades of provincial grey

RAJESH SHARMA

THESE "postcards from the peripheries" are meant to "free people from stereotypes" by helping them imagine "an emotional and intellectual map" that will showcase the provincials' great contribution to modern culture. Tagore, Shakespeare, the Bhakti poets, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Premchand, TS Eliot, Heidegger, Raymond Williams, Rahul Sankrityayan were, after all, provincials actually, Sumana Roy says.

Written in English (surely not a dialect), relying mostly on translations and bolstered with a quotation in every other paragraph, the book carries 527 notes and 10 pages of index to help readers navigate their way through this sprawling work of 'non-fiction': a word that has come to flaunt a dissatisfied despair as a triumph of insight. So you have memoir, social commentary, biography, literary journalism, criticism, cultural history, literary cartography, scholarly treatise, a college textbook, and then some. But nothing does quite wholeheartedly. And the genres don't melt. They have been mixed, forcibly.

Which raises the question: who is the book for? For a professional, an amateur, a dilettante, a college student? For a foreign reader? A metropolitan? The pages on Bhakti poets and the New Critics read like textbook stuff. Those on Shakespeare's sources awakened memories of my background reading on the Bard during my Bachelor's in a provincial college. The redundant phrases introducing well-known writers and familiar places seem aimed at readers who have no "cultural capital", nor access to the Internet. Roy over-explains as often as she under-interprets.

But the writing is simply brilliant in many places, as when Roy describes her parents' courtship, or reads Bhuvaneshwar's stories, or holds a conversation (something I wish she did more often) with some book or writer. The form is probing, tentative, always emerging, often surprising. The structure is kind of dialectical but veiled, ping-pong between the provincial and the metropol-

itan. Roy can be at once garrulous and elliptical, poetic and polemical. She can laugh at herself. And she doesn't scream, even at those she could have. She just politely admonishes those who ruin the taste of literature with their ill-cooked, scrambled theory.

When genre-mixing is not a formal requirement, it can be a chancy bait to draw assorted readers. But the book lacks coherence also because it is vaguely conceptualised and hurriedly executed. Incoherence is not ambiguity, the property some literary works famously possess.

Apparently, the paradoxical centre of the writer's periphery is Siliguri, from which she measures the distance or proximity to other places. The real centre is metaphysical: it is the toxic romance of places and roots. It seduces the writer to read Heathcliff as "an expression of becoming one's place" and to naively admire Heidegger's enchantment with "rootedness in the soil", with "organic life", with "authentic dwelling". Does Roy really not know of Heidegger's deep involvement with the Nazis and their ideology of "blood and soil"?

Her loaded binarism overlooks the historic contribution of great cities. Of Athens, Rome, Florence, Kashi, Prayag, Patna, Paris, New York, London, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Lahore, for instance. She doesn't even pause to reflect on a New Yorker's confessed provincialism that she herself mentions, which mirrors its probable opposite — a town dweller's metropolitanism. She forgets that the Khandwa-born Kishore Kumar's singing likely owed something to Hank Williams, Chuck Berry and James Brown. The truth is Roy's famous provincials are those who overcame the stifling embrace of the place and transcended its narrow conversation. Some cultivated cosmopolitanism, some walked into universality without any metropolitan stop-over. They didn't let roots become chains. They defied the stereotypes.

But Roy is unable to, in spite of her aspiration. Perhaps there's a tearing hurry to publish. Even the fact-checking is poor: the iPhone came two decades after she thinks it did, the Naxalbari movement was not an urban-rural war but an imported ideology of class war and provincials do not make a class.

Provincialism is a state of mind, an attitude, a space and style of thinking. Not the actual fact of having grown up in the provinces. Roy wades into the question, yet wouldn't go all the way in.

Finding Jassa Ahluwalia

SUPRIYA KAUR DHALIWAL

JASSA AHLUWALIA has done everything he possibly can to belong somewhere. Jassa's journey traverses multiple identities and geographies, from being named Jasvinder Singh Ahluwalia at birth to an exploration of who an 'Imperial Wonder Boy' could be. Poet Solmaz Sharif writes in her poem 'Look', "It matters what you call a thing. Exquisite a lover called me. Exquisite." Those who have already been othered would never let anything fuel this otherness. In the name Jassa, the author found not just solace, but an entire world that could be his, that was his.

In modern, post-Independence India, its minority-populated states have come to be known for their skyrocketing migration trends. For instance, Punjab has created their own Punjab wherever they have gone. India's constant othering of Punjab has not stopped Punjabis from achieving whatever they have wished to achieve. But it has come at a significant cost. These migrants have faced losses galore. These losses, in turn, have become their daily reality, but they have not let these losses define them.

Jassa was born to a white English mother and a brown Punjabi father, and grew up between Coventry and Leicester as a white boy who spoke Punjabi fluently. This baffled people more than once. As a result, it baffled Jassa too. Jassa, a British actor, writer, filmmaker and trade unionist, had to put in a life's work to know where he could belong. 'Both Not Half' is a blueprint of all the journeys he has set out on until now — the journeys of looking within, and the physical journeys that he has had to undertake. 'Both Not Half' welcomes hybridity and looks at cultural divisions with exemplary kindness.

There is a complexity that Jassa has afforded for Kipling's 'Kim', an Irish orphan in Lahore who is on the lookout for his place on this world's map. The author admits that he had to turn to Kipling because there was nowhere else to look. This complexity, however, turned out to be a source of great strength for Jassa.

More than halfway through the book, the author reminds us that 'Both Not Half' is a refusal to accept binary thinking at its face value, and is a book that sets out to challenge racial hierarchies.



BOTH NOT HALF
by Jassa Ahluwalia.
Bonnier UK.
Pages 352.
₹499

Jassa writes, "There is no us and them, only humanity." Something that he would expand on in the final chapter of the book that records the author's journey as an on-practising Sikh, who continues to be inspired by the teachings of Baba Nanak and Stoicism.

Those who have seen their cultures being othered often try to connect with their intimate histories through their mother tongues. While Jassa sets out to learn Gurmukhi in five days from a YouTube channel called BaruSohibHP, I, too, learnt Gurmukhi in my late teens from a book that was a gift from my father. 'Punjabi Primer' by Dr Gurbakhsh Singh was published by Akal Printing Press, Baru Sahib. My experience of this otherness was very different from Jassa's, since I was not mixed race but was born to Punjabi parents, in a different state, and that made all the difference for me even when I moved abroad.

This book is a millennial's love letter to the world. It is a plea to blur the boundaries that separate us. I smiled when I read 'mattha tek' in the book, which seems to be the NRI proper noun for the act of bowing down in front of Guru Granth Sahib. There are various tender moments in the book — from the sincerity of a 'Quom dhal' skit to calling his grandmother BG, the abbreviation for Biji, who writes her grocery lists in a Gurmukhi that is a transliteration from English.

'Both Not Half' ends with a heartfelt message for the author's sister Ramanique, who is queer and brown, who has also felt othered but because of reasons that are different from Jassa's. He tells her that he's ready to be her brother, that he is ready to be him.



BACKFLAP



A FLY ON THE RBI WALL
by Alpana Killawala.
Rupa. Pages 232. ₹595

Harshad Mehta scam, liberalisation of the Indian economy — Alpana Killawala's tenure with the communications department of the Reserve Bank of India coincided with a very vibrant phase of the central bank. 'A Fly on the RBI Wall' is a no-holds-barred account of her journey, a peek into the minds of the governors, all eminent scholars, under whom she worked over the course of a career spanning more than two decades.



FESTIVAL STORIES THROUGH THE YEAR
by Rachna Chhabila.
HarperCollins.
Pages 246. ₹250

Latest in the 'Roots of India' series, this book invites young readers to rejoice in India's rich culture through the simplest stories of two twins, Natesha and Nikhil, as they experience an entire year of festivals and celebrations — starting with Lohri in January and ending with Christmas in December. India is a country of myriad festivals. Not a month goes by in which we don't have something to celebrate. This work celebrates that happy spirit.

Why militaries support and thwart the transition to democracy

NAVTEJ SINGH

THIS pioneering work by Sharan Grewal, based on his revised PhD dissertation, focuses on the political transformation from autocracy to democracy through detailed case studies of Egypt and Tunisia. It is based on primary and secondary sources, personal interviews with civilian and military leaders, along with surveys of military personnel. He also probes the generalisability of the theory through a cross-national analysis of all countries between 1946 and 2010. The author brings the military front and centre to the study of democratic transition and consolidation, and examines critically why some militaries support and others thwart the transition to democracy.

The mass protests in the Arab world came to be known as the 'Arab Spring'. The protesters rallied for food, freedom and social justice and demanded an end to the decades of dictatorships. While each country's path to breakdown was unique and multi-

faceted, a critical element in every story was the role of the military. This, Grewal stresses, was not unique to the region. Militaries often decisively shape whether a transition is initiated in the first place, making or breaking revolutions, triggering defections or standing up in defence of the dictator.

Grewal is of the view that despite their centrality, militaries have been relatively neglected in the study of democratisation. Scholars have focused less on understanding militaries and their motivations and more on the underlying factors: poverty, recession, lack of education or polarisation. He argues that it has been less clear why some militaries seize these opportunities and others — "soldiers of democracy" — ignore them. Likewise, the elites may want to use the military to repress the lower classes or to help them stage incremental takeovers, yet it is less clear why the military sometimes obeys and other times does not.

The author highlights an under-structured structural factor — military legacies — that shapes the chances that democracy takes root. Although some scholars have begun to



SOLDIERS OF DEMOCRACY? MILITARY LEGACIES AND THE ARAB SPRING
by Sharan Grewal.
Oxford University Press.
Pages 336.
₹25

explore how coup-proofing shapes the military response to mass uprisings, the author extends these studies to show how they also shape democratic transition and consolidation. He aims to refine the understanding of what shapes the military's attitudes towards democracy.

Grewal stresses that in contrast to the

popular perception that the era of military coups has passed, the reality is that the military is likely to play an even larger role in future democratic transitions.

The author comes to the conclusion that in Tunisia, a military neglected and counter-balanced under autocracy saw its position improve under democracy. In Egypt, a military empowered under autocracy saw its privileges curtailed.

In fact, Tunisian and Egyptian militaries exhibit major differences in their corporate interests, composition and professionalism. Each of these variables should shape how these militaries view the revolution and democratic transition. In Tunisia, all three factors pointed towards supporting the democratic transition, while in Egypt, they pointed towards overthrowing it, thereby validating the author's theory that a dictator's coup-proofing strategy can create legacies that shape the process of democratisation.

Grewal argues that the desire for democracy is universal and contagious, yet democracy is by no means guaranteed to take root. New democracies must respect the mili-

tary's interests. He concludes that the military's behaviour under democracy is shaped by how it had been treated under autocracy. Autocrats who had empowered their militaries produce soldiers who will repress protests and stage coups to preserve their privileges. On the other, autocrats who had marginalised their militaries produce soldiers who support democratising, but who are also more susceptible to incumbent takeovers and civil wars. The dictator's choice to either empower or marginalise the military thus creates legacies that shape both the likelihood of democratisation and the forms by which it breaks down.

The structural factors and role of the international community also have a significant place. For the author, keeping the military far from politics is typically the better option for democracy. Thus, the control of power is a shared phenomenon and cannot be the sole individual wish.

Grewal's book reflects his meticulous analysis and highlights new aspects of power and its control, along with recommendations for the future.

REFLECTIONS

Real hero of the verdict

TOUCHSTONES
IRA PANDE

KABIR, the popular folk poet, will always remain the original wise man of Benaras. He wrote thousands of couplets (*dohas*) that are memorised by generations of schoolchildren, though quickly forgotten. However, they have an uncanny ability to burrow themselves in one's brain and rise unbidden to open a window of wisdom at odd moments. The *doha* that has haunted me after the June 4 poll verdict is: 'Durbal ko na satayige, jaki moti haai'. Roughly translated, it means, don't torture the weak for he has a potent curse. If there are lessons to be learnt from this *doha*, then all political parties had better heed them. This election was a stunning revelation of the pain and misery the hapless poor of this country have suffered in the last few years. The triumphant slogans of the ruling parties about the booming economy, India's rising worth worldwide and how many millions have been lifted out of poverty—all these meant nothing to those who were doomed to subsist on dole, charity and State neglect.

Why blame the ruling government alone? Are we, the well-fed, the smug middle class living in comfortable condos with uninterrupted power and water supply, any less guilty? We write long articles on how this country's poor are suffering, but have even a small number among us ever lifted a finger to alleviate their misery? I know of neighbours who deduct wages for the days their helper is unable to come for work. Remember the Shylock speech from *The Merchant of Venice* where he asks whether Jews are any different from the rest of Venetians — 'If you cut us, do we not bleed?' he asks the Rialto's smug burglers. Do

these workers not have days when they are unwell or have an urgent task to attend to at home? But no, 'these people are shirkers' is the response most employers have. The othering of 'these people' will come one day to bite is all I can predict.

Let us now turn to Punjab, the state that concerns me most deeply. When we left it in 1990, it was just emerging from a frightening decade of separatism, terrorism and social turmoil. It took years of work and political

Overlooked, despised and dismissed as foolish and illiterate, the aam aadmi has more wisdom in his little finger than all those psephologists and reporters

compromises to bring it to a level of normalcy that it enjoyed for a brief while. However, in the last few years, some unhappy developments threaten to take it back to those grim days when religious fundamentalism, agricultural backsliding and a comatose industry have risen simultaneously to derail the state. Add to this its fragile political atmosphere and you have a state that may erupt into flames before we realise it. The old generation of politicians—Badal Senior, Amarinder Singh, who wielded political power by turns—as well as those bureaucrats and citizens who understood Punjab so well and never left it despite the challenges they often faced—sadly, all have vanished. Rampant corruption, the open meddling by Pakistan and the drug dealers from as far away as Afghanistan

and Canada have filled that vacuum.

Everyone talks of their rights but lead me to the person who points out our duties. Rights and duties go hand in hand and unless the citizens themselves step in and help those who need help, we will always be dissatisfied with the State. Perhaps it is the eternal legacy of colonialism that we do not regard our land as our own. We wait for the sarkar (an amorphous concept) to resolve problems because they have the power. In truth, as the recent election results show, we the people have the power but we don't know it. Once in five years, we let the incumbent government know it has failed us, but we elect instead the same set of rogues.

I may not be around five years later to see or comment on the next General Election, but what I have learnt from this one disturbs me deeply. Those of you who pride themselves on their Punjabiyaat or Bharatiyata, stand up and take control of your fate.

Finally, a salute to the aam aadmi, the common Indian, who is really the hero of this verdict. Overlooked, despised and dismissed as foolish and illiterate, he has more wisdom in his little finger than all those psephologists who only crunched numbers, and those reporters who thought they had the elections on their plate as they ate and chatted with citizens who spoke fluent English or Hindi. They picked their way, hanky to nose, through the overflowing gutters and filth of a tiny village that had not seen a politician or reporter ever before, and who held the mike in a death grip to curse the netas who never bothered to come their way. Broken, rutted village roads, unemployed youth sitting idly making reels, women working in a brick-kiln in the grueling heat of the afternoon were brushed aside even as paeans of praise were read out on the shining highways, or the infrastructure of our cities by the sleek netas who basked in his huge bungalow, smug in the belief that 'Modi ki guarantee' will bail him out once again.

As we now enter an era when the Opposition benches will be as strong as the ruling coalition, let us hope they use Parliament as it was meant to be. A place to uphold the rights of the common Indian.



PHOTO BY THE WRITER

The silent sentinels of mountain landscape

PARTH JOSHI

IT was a cloudy morning as we negotiated the moraines and scree leading up to Phanghi Gahu, a 4,500-metre pass in the Great Himalayan National Park in Himachal Pradesh connecting the remote Jiva Nal and Parvati valleys. As we walked amidst the magnificent scenery in pin-drop silence, a rockfall on a distant slope broke the reverie, and we spotted a group of ibex at the top of a slope, scampering away out of sight.

As we stood a bit perplexed, being quite far away to be the instigator of this panic among the ungulates, one of the porters smirked casually, "I saw a long tail, must have been a snow leopard." Such are the sightings of this enigmatic species—hardly a fleeting glimpse, earning it the moniker 'the ghost of the mountains'. Most of the times, one has to contend with subtle signs of its presence, a pugmark here or there, the carcass of a devoured prey, or some scat.

The snow leopard is one of the seven big cat species found globally, and perhaps one of the most fascinating. Inhabiting high-altitude mountain landscapes in 12 countries across Central and South Asia, they are highly specialised predators that can survive in extremely cold temperatures and rugged terrain. Their total population is estimated to be between 4,000-7,000, of which around 700 are found in India across Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

By preying on herbivores like sheep and goats, they prevent them from overgrazing, which leaves enough food for smaller animals, and also maintains ecosystem factors like water retention capacity and nutrition of the soil, thereby ensuring a healthy ecosystem for all. The food chain they manage helps maintain a complex network of wetlands and meadows that provide a buffer zone between glaciers and rivers, absorbing excess water during wet seasons, which prevents floods and also provides water during dry seasons, while allowing plant life to flourish.

In India, snow leopard habitats are estimated to provide ecosystem services worth US \$4 billion annually, which include fresh water, minerals, and medicinal and aromatic plants. The Himalayas are often referred to as the 'Third Pole', holding the third highest amount of freshwater after the polar region. It is no understatement to say that the snow leopards are the guardians of these water sources.

Today, the snow leopard is classified as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), just one step away from becoming 'endangered'. There are multiple reasons for this. Due to climate change, their natural habitat is shrinking as global temperatures increase. Uncon-

trolled grazing in wild areas by domestic livestock leaves less food for wild herbivores, leading to a decline in their population and consequently, less prey for snow leopards. This brings them to human settlements in search of livestock as prey, resulting in retaliatory killings by villagers. Wild sheep and goat are also susceptible to poaching, another reason for a decline in snow leopard populations.

Protecting snow leopards requires protecting their habitat, where humans have peacefully co-existed with them for centuries, many of them nomadic and pastoral settlements. These communities are the last bastions of unique traditional knowledge and cultural systems, finding ingenious ways to survive the harsh conditions. Such communities, and their way of living in harmony with nature, need as much protection as the snow leopards themselves.

One of the major challenges is tracking the movement of snow leopards

The food chain snow leopards manage helps maintain a complex network of wetlands & meadows

and the knowledge of local communities becomes extremely useful. In Uttarakhand, the government has involved youth from villages to assist in conducting snow leopard population census. In Sikkim, community volunteers frequently patrol forests to discourage poaching.

Providing alternative livelihoods to communities can reduce their dependency on snow leopard habitats for natural resources. In Ladakh, cottage industries like community-based tourism, handicrafts and food processing are providing a stable source of income for villagers. This reduces the need for them to increase the size of their livestock and allows for regeneration of pasture lands for wild herbivores.

Infra-red alarm sensors are reducing instances of snow leopards wandering into human settlements, while frugal innovation like wire meshes to cover corrals or sheep pens is reducing damage to livestock if they enter villages.

It is bright and sunny in Tarchit, a village in Rong valley in Ladakh, which is being developed as a winter tourism destination for people to come and spot snow leopards when they descend to lower altitudes during the colder months. For villagers in Tarchit and thousands of people living in the high-altitude Himalayas, the snow leopard is a beacon of hope for a sustainable future.

— **The writer is a climate expert working with the United Nations**

As Beas Dam completes 50 years

NARINDER SHARMA

AS per the Indus Water Treaty signed in 1960, the waters of the three eastern rivers—Sutlej, Beas and Ravi—were allotted for use to India. Multipurpose river valley projects were planned for harnessing their waters. The massive Bhakra Dam (Sutlej) was taken up first, followed by Beas Dam and Ranjit Sagar Dam (Ravi).

The Bhakra-Nangal complex was accomplished by 1963. The workers and engineers gained experience and confidence in dam building and this trained force went on to undertake the Beas, Ranjit Sagar and many other dam projects in the region.

Beas Dam at Pong (Kangra district) is an earthen dam. Work on this flood control and storage dam was taken up in 1961 and completed in 1974. Its waters are the lifeline of parched lands in Rajasthan and it is also home to migratory birds and various fish species. The Pong power plant has a capacity of 396 MW and 1600 million units annually. Beas Dam is celebrating its golden jubilee on June 30.

The highest dam in Asia of its time was completed by the sweat and toil of a dedicated band of 15,000 workers and 1,000 engineers and technicians. Over 130 workers and other associates died during the construction. We salute them!

I started my career here as a Sub-Division-

al Officer in 1969 and after almost 33 years, joined the project as Chief Engineer. Those days are still fresh in memory.

A concrete spillway had been provided on the left side of the dam. During the excavation, a swarm of fearful reptiles was encountered. They would come out in large numbers and attack the dozer and its operator. The work had to be stopped as crushing of reptiles was considered inhuman. We sought the advice of the area's famous 'Ghati Wale Babaji'. He advised to build a 'Shivji' temple. A makeshift temple was built. After a few days, work was resumed after a slight adjustment in alignment of the structure. A full-fledged temple was constructed later at a hillock as an observatory for spillway operations. The temple remains a vibrant site.

The wars of 1965 and 1971 with Pakistan affected the construction schedule of the dam as allocation of funds was slashed. In 1971, construction was in full swing but Army officers insisted on taking away some equipment to strengthen their war strategy. They loaded dozers and allied machines on their trailers and left for the borders, saying, 'First war, later wall'.

The financial crunch and import restrictions came as a blessing in disguise. Many equipment and machine innovations were achieved by technicians and engineers.

During 1974-75, the dam work was nearing completion and the retrenchment of surplus labourers was on cards. Work on the Thein (Ranjit Sagar) Dam couldn't start due to lack

of funds. This generated a fear of unemployment. There were protests and some labourers even devised ways to slow down work. It was then that many skilled workers and trained operators were sent by the government to Gulf countries and neighbouring regions. Similarly, some engineers were deputed as experts to foreign locations.

Also unforgettable is a down-to-earth senior officer, humble and disciplined to the core. He would always stand in a queue in any public place. He would never jump the queue, even if requested. One day, he went to a Junior Engineer's house disguised as a helper and told his family that he was sent by 'Sir'. He obeyed all orders of Bibiji throughout the day, be it sweeping, watering the plants or bringing the children from school. He had brought his own tiffin and declined all hospitality of the family.

At 4 pm, he told 'Bibiji' that his duty was over. While leaving, he took all the pilfered items—hose pipe, buckets, table and chairs—and got these deposited in the government store as 'lost and found'. Word spread fast and pilferage stopped almost at once.

Then there was a Chief Engineer who was surprised to find that he was not the only 'Chief'. The Chief Fire Officer, the Chief Purchase Officer—they were addressed as 'Chief' too.

The *acodeshi* Beas Dam—planned, designed and constructed by Indian workers and engineers—has completed 50 years of life. It's a modern temple of a resurgent India in service of mankind.

Patronise only those buildings that are fire safe

CONSUMER RIGHTS
PUSHPA GIRINUJI

THE Gujarat High Court's recent outburst over the state government's failure to follow its earlier orders on fire audits and fire prevention reflects the collective anger and frustration felt by citizens over the continuing neglect of fire safety in public buildings around the country. The series of devastating fires that took a heavy toll last month has, in fact, brought into question the state administration's ability to enforce fire safety laws and protect consumers.

Be it the amusement facility at Rajkot,

where 28 persons were charred to death because the administration allowed it to make money at the cost of consumers' safety, or the private neonatal care hospital in Delhi, that fleeced even the poorest of the poor, no one paid attention to their safety. What is apparent is the complete disregard for fire safety laws by those who are supposed to comply and those who are supposed to enforce them. The victims are, of course, the consumers of these services.

In a desperate bid to rectify such enforcement failures, consumers often seek judicial intervention or sometimes, the court itself takes up the matter *suo motu*, as the Gujarat High Court did following the gaming centre tragedy. What really irked the court was that in response to a PIL filed in 2020 following a series of hospital fires in the state, it had given detailed directions on ensuring fire prevention and protection of life and property.

Yet, the Rajkot civic authorities had ignored the court's directions and allowed the amusement centre to function and flourish without a fire safety certificate. Going by

preliminary reports, the fire was inevitable, and so also the deaths, because the temporary tin walls were covered with highly inflammable plastic foam sheets as shadow walls. More combustible material, including petrol and diesel, was stored on the premises, but there were no fire alarms, fire extinguishing systems and escape routes!

As usual, the government woke up after the fire and the resultant checks of gaming centres in Ahmedabad, Vidodara, Rajkot and Surat showed the extent of lawlessness—as many as 19 recreational facilities were shut down after inspections for not having the required permissions and fire NOCs! But this is the usual practice everywhere in the country—following a major fire, the authorities suddenly spring into action and, nudged by courts, they start hauling up offenders. But once the tragedy moves away from the media glare and the courts' scrutiny, everything is forgotten and violations continue, till the next tragedy!

Following the devastating Kumbakonam (Tamil Nadu) school fire, the Supreme Court

had in 2009 directed all states and UTs to ensure that all schools strictly complied with the National Building Code of India, particularly Part IV—Fire & Life Safety, and the Code of Practice of Fire Safety in Educational Institutions, formulated by the Bureau of Indian Standards. But, even today, PILs are being filed in state high courts to ensure compliance with the apex court's order.

Now, in the aftermath of the deadly fire at the Baby Care Newborn Hospital in East Delhi, that robbed six couples of their babies, the Delhi High Court has taken up two petitions seeking directions to the government to conduct regular comprehensive fire safety audits of small and medium-sized nursing homes and ensure that they have adequate facilities for fire prevention, life safety and fire protection measures. There were as many as 340 nursing homes with expired registration, a petition said.

One can imagine the quality of registration from the fact that the neonatal hospital had no clearance from the Fire Department, no smoke detectors or sprinklers, no fire

exit, nor any provision for safe storage of highly combustible oxygen cylinders!

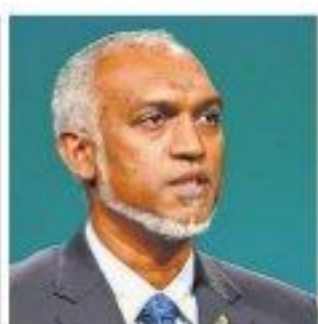
Since corruption in the enforcement process and administrative apathy and sloth are the major hurdles to fire safety, consumers/citizens must demand transparency and accountability in the enforcement process through Citizens' Monitoring Committees that would regularly evaluate and assess the implementation of the law. In addition, it should become mandatory for every district administration to publish on their websites the complete list of public buildings in their area and whether they have fire NOCs or not. Establishments that do not have fire clearance or do not renew their certificate should be shut down.

It should also become mandatory for every public/commercial building to display prominently at the entrance, the fire safety certificate and the fire exits. This way, consumers can patronise only those buildings that are fire safe. Residents' associations would also do well to check on schools, hospitals, restaurants, malls, etc., in their area for fire safety.

The shift from 2014 to 2024 is stark. Not inviting Pakistan for the oath-taking ceremony of Narendra Modi as PM for the third term amid India's neighbourhood outreach is a sign of the freeze in ties



Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, PM of Nepal



Mohamed Muizzu, President of Maldives



Pravind Jugnauth, Prime Minister of Mauritius



Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh



Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of Sri Lanka



Ahmed Aref, Vice President of the Republic of Seychelles



Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of Bhutan

AJAY BANERJEE

TEN years ago, when Narendra Modi took oath as Prime Minister on the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhawan on May 26, 2014, succeeding Manmohan Singh, in attendance was Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, along with six other South Asian leaders. The invitation to Sharif became a talking point in diplomatic circles, raising hopes of a new start in the otherwise fractured bilateral relations. When Modi gets sworn in as the Prime Minister for his third term on Sunday evening, top political leaders of neighbouring countries would again be present, but a notable omission would be that of a leader from Pakistan.

Not inviting Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of Nawaz Sharif, stems from the diplomatic freeze in bilateral relations. An invite had seemed unlikely, if not impossible, but it was ruled out amid the prevailing icy relations.

The shift from 2014 to 2024 is stark. Ten years on, bilateral ties are not in a 'working mode' as they were in 2014. Conversely, relations are not as bad as they were in May 2019, when sequential events in February that year meant an invite to Pakistan was ruled out when Prime Minister Modi took oath for his second term.

Experts feel that while realism demands drawing of red lines, India needs to invest its diplomatic capital in the right way

The abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution in August 2019 changed the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Since then, ties with Pakistan have been acrimonious, with no bilateral political contact.

Sharat Sabharwal, the former Indian Ambassador to Pakistan (2009-2013), says there is nothing strange in Pakistan not getting invited for the swearing-in. "As of now, it's not an easy situation. There are hardened positions on both sides."

Sabharwal, who was appointed Ambassador just months after the November 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai that left 166 dead, says, "In 2014, the India-Pak relationship was relatively stable as a result of the dialogue conducted in 2011-12 following the Mumbai attacks."

TCA Raghavan, Ambassador to Pakistan from 2013 to 2015, agrees that 2014 and 2024 are "vastly different scenarios; an invite to Pakistan for the swearing-in ceremony would be unrealistic and even bizarre at this stage as there is a total freeze in bilateral relations."

In July 2018, Prime Minister Modi had called up cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan to congratulate him on his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), winning the most seats in the general elections.

Then came the events of February 2019—a terror attack in Pulwama killed 44 troopers of the CRPF; some 10 days later, Indian Air Force jets bombed a terror camp at Balakot in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. The next day, an air duel ensued with Pakistan in which Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman's plane was hit and he parachuted down in Pakistan.

Despite the muscle-flexing by both sides, just three months later, in May 2019, Imran Khan rang up Prime Minister Modi to congratulate him on winning a second term in office.

Dr Ashok Behuria, coordinator of the South Asia Centre at the Manohar Parikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, says, "The inertia of post-Pulwama-Balakot and downscaling of diplomatic contacts continues till date."

Raghavan compares 2014 with 2024 and says, "As of now, we have a ban on trade between the two sides. High Commissioners of either side are not in place. J&K cross-border confidence-building measures are not there and political contact is missing."

Sabharwal avers, "We have a problem on both sides. The Pakistan side has an unreasonable stand, asking India to reverse the abrogation of Article 370 and restore statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and till then, talks cannot happen."

India's stance that talks and terror cannot go together has kind of "gelled, but has constrained the government", adds

Leaving Pak out of the picture



Newly sworn-in Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in New Delhi in May 2014. New Delhi has chosen to give the cold shoulder to Islamabad by not sending an invite when PM Modi takes oath for his third term in office.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST, MALDIVES INCLUDED

India has a 'neighbourhood first' policy and the oath-taking ceremony will be witnessed by top leaders from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Mauritius and Seychelles. Even Maldives, that has had a few public tiffs with India, has been invited. Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu will head to India for the oath-taking ceremony on what will be his first visit since taking over in November last year.

Seen as pro-China, Muizzu had travelled to Türkiye first and to China for his first state visit in January. Within hours of taking over in November last year, Muizzu had demanded the removal of Indian military personnel from his country, straining bilateral ties. He posted on X, "I look forward to working together to advance our shared interests in pursuit of shared prosperity and stability for our two countries."

Sabharwal, who also served as India's Deputy High Commissioner in Islamabad from 1995-1999.

TIME FOR POLICY SHIFT

A period of 35 months from September 2016 to August 2019 saw events changing the course of India-Pakistan ties. In September 2016, the Indian Army retaliated following a militant attack on its camp at Uri by carrying out surgical strikes at multiple locations across the Line of Control. Within the

forces, it's a known fact that surgical strikes across the LoC were carried out in the past, too, but never acknowledged publicly. Then came the February 2019 events, followed by the abrogation of Article 370.

A serving Indian Army officer says the Pakistan army is capable of giving any spin to its narrative of victory in military actions, but "doing away with Article 370 and its impact on J&K would take a while to be absorbed by the army, the Pakistani politicians and its people, who have been given

the impression that Kashmir can be taken".

A notable development, though, has been Nawaz Sharif's admission of violating the Lahore pact in context of the Kargil conflict.

Former Ambassador to Pakistan Satinder Lambah, in his book 'In Pursuit of Peace: India-Pakistan Relations Under Six Prime Ministers', published after his death, narrates the back channel talks during Manmohan Singh's tenure as Prime Minister. He lists three key points on J&K—there cannot be any redrawing

of borders, no joint sovereignty and the LoC has to be respected like a normal border between the two countries.

The Modi government made its own attempts at mending ties. The Prime Minister made an unannounced visit to Lahore on December 25, 2015, to meet Nawaz Sharif. In April 2016, just months after the attack on the Pathankot airbase, an extraordinary Track-2 event was hosted in Delhi where six former Pakistani High Commissioners to India and nine former Indian High Commissioners to Pakistan sat down for the first time to take stock of bilateral relations.

The 15 former envoys had dinner at Hyderabad House, the foreign ministry's venue for state banquets, and met National Security Adviser Ajit Doval. In 2017, an Indian industrialist, known to the Sharifs, was despatched with a message to Islamabad.

Ambassador Raghavan says "it is time for a shift in policy; it has to be done gradually and opportunities will arise". Pakistan, he adds, would be keen, too, but the initiative has to come from India.

Dr Behuria concurs: "The new government should not avoid any diplomatic interaction aimed at normalising relations with Pakistan. However, realism demands that while we draw our red lines, we need to invest our diplomatic capital in the right way."

With ties in such a freeze, Ambassador Sabharwal says the way forward would be taking steps like restoring the High Commissioners. "Pakistan has stopped trade with India, it should resume it. Pakistan has shown no flexibility. Their Ministry of Foreign Affairs says create a conducive environment, but statements are rhetorical and anti-India," he adds.

Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch on Saturday said, "Since the new government hasn't officially been sworn in, it is premature to talk about congratulating the Indian Prime Minister." Baloch added that Islamabad desired cordial and cooperative ties with all its neighbours, including India, and wants to resolve disputes through talks.

ATTARI-WAGAH TRADE

A mention of Pakistan during the Lok Sabha electioneering is usually in a negative connotation. However, during the last two phases of electioneering—when the poll battle shifted to Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh—BJP leaders changed tack and mentioned the need to have trade via the Wagah-Attari land route.

The Baddi-Nalagarh belt in Himachal Pradesh has several '100 per cent export-oriented units', but cannot export to Pakistan using the land border that is just 250 km west of Baddi. The issue of trade ties with Pakistan became a central point in electoral campaigning in Punjab. Several candidates, including former Indian Ambassador to US and contestant from the Amritsar seat Taranjit Singh Sandhu, promised resumption of India-Pakistan trade via the Attari-Wagah land route.

The Shiromani Akali Dal's manifesto also mentioned the issue. SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal questioned why trade with Pakistan could be allowed through Gujarat ports, but not through Punjab's road network.

Post NDA's victory, Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar said: "We would like trade links to be opened with Pakistan. Punjab has a geographical advantage. It will also improve people-to-people ties." Jakhar, who hails from Abohar, located just 20 km from the India-Pakistan border, however, warned that "trade cannot be at the cost of national security and national pride. These things have to be factored in".

After the Pulwama terror attack, India imposed 200 per cent duty on imports from Pakistan, making business unviable. Pakistan put an end to trade with India after the abrogation of Article 370. Trade activities are carried out through the UAE, raising costs. Unofficial estimates peg the trade at \$3 billion. Indian firms export tyres, processed food, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. Imported items include garments, spices and some machinery items used in small-scale manufacturing, with a decisive balance of trade favouring India.

Pakistan has remained indecisive on resumption of trade with India. In March, its Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar, announced that the government was "seriously considering" resuming trade ties with India. Days later, Foreign Office spokesperson Baloch contradicted him, saying no such plan was under discussion.