

# The Sky People

Climate change has made weather unpredictable. Its interpreters, official and private, are the new safety guides



## STORMTROOPER

Provided timely warning during the intense thunderstorms in Ghatkopar on May 13

RUSHIKESH VIJAY AGRE, Pune, Maharashtra

Weather forecasters have two main enemies: cyclones or storms, and drought. Agree is a 22-year-old weather enthusiast who divides his time between Pune and Mumbai. The weather forecasting bug bit Agree in 2019, triggered by conflicting reports during an India-Pakistan cricket match on June 16 of that year. Confused by the inaccuracies, Agree delved into studying Indian monsoons and weather patterns. A law student at Government Law College, Pune, he initially honed his skills by observing meteorological data on platforms like Windy and Ventusky. His growing passion for accurate forecasting led him to pursue an online certification course from Harvard.

His timely warnings have proven critical, such as during the intense thunderstorms in Ghatkopar on May

13, when his alerts saved lives and earned media recognition. He primarily relies on the IMD GFS model for his forecasts, observing radars and providing alerts through X formerly Twitter. Climate change, he believes, is a huge contributing factor today. "Human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes, are causing a warming effect. This disrupts the natural balance of weather systems and impacts weather in several ways: average global temperatures are rising, leading to hotter summers and milder winters. There is an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, heat waves, droughts and heavy rainfall," he says, adding that in this scenario, it is pretty challenging to get the forecast right.

By ALIYAH MULLA and KASMIN FERNANDES

In 2023, Asia faced a staggering 79 extreme weather events that caused over 2,000 deaths and affected nine million people. These alarming numbers from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) underscore the growing urgency for precise and localised weather forecasts. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) uses advanced technologies such as AI and Doppler radars to provide hyperlocal predictions. Adding to weather power are independent weather forecasters operating separately from the IMD. But their work often complements the IMD's efforts. They predict weather by using a variety of tools and techniques, including high-resolution regional climate models, statistical and dynamic weather prediction models, high-performance computing for hyperlocal predictions, and advanced weather models like GFS, ECMWF and CMC. They also bank on online platforms such as Windycam, the Global Flood Awareness System, satellite images, and Doppler radar data. They then choose a specific geographical area and time frame for their forecast or historical analysis, besides employing high and low-pressure systems to understand general patterns.

While using social media platforms (Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram) to circulate their forecasts, some independent forecasters are developing custom tools like mobile apps for live weather alerts, and low-cost weather stations to empower people affected by weather like fishermen and farmers to collect and analyse local data. By building custom platforms and engaging directly with their audience, they are growing their own community, which might be harder to

achieve if they were part of a large institution. Their credibility stems from consistently accurate and timely forecasts that demonstrate real-world impact in real time.

Most of the analysis is done with the help of a laptop and weather readings from open websites, but some forecasters also put in their own savings—amounting to 20-30k—to buy analytical equipment like weather vanes, and even develop apps to disseminate information, like Kolkata-based Santosh Subramanian is doing. Then there are enthusiasts like Mumbai-based Ankur Puranik, who bought a weather station worth ₹1.5 lakh to measure rain, in order to have greater accuracy.

Their stories highlight the broader narrative of how indie forecasters are bridging the gap between official meteorological predictions and the real-time, localised needs of the population. Unlike the IMD, which provides updates at scheduled times and follows strict protocols to avoid causing public panic, independent local forecasters can make announcements whenever they like. For instance, if there is a possibility of heavy rain leading to flooding, the IMD might issue a cautious warning which they may not be able to withdraw quickly enough if the situation changes. In contrast, an independent forecaster can promptly update the public via social media. This flexibility allows them to provide real-time alerts for sudden changes. Such quick response is possible because they can focus on smaller geographic areas, providing more detailed and timely information than IMD.

## COURSE CORRECTOR

Accurately predicted that Cyclone Remal would not affect Maharashtra and Gujarat and quelled panic

ANKUR PURANIK, Mumbai, Maharashtra

Ankur Puranik began weather forecasting after he became a Ham Radio enthusiast. This hobby, which involves providing emergency wireless communication during disasters like earthquakes and cyclones, exposed the 43-year-old Mumbaikar from Wadala East, to the critical need for accurate weather information. Despite holding an MBA in Entrepreneurship & Leadership and a degree in Electronics & Telecommunications Engineering, he taught himself meteorology. He attended a course at IIT Bombay to further his knowledge.

Today, Puranik is the founder of a WhatsApp group called 'The Indian Weather People', comprising over 200 weather enthusiasts, including Krishnanand Hosalkar—scientist 'G' and head of climate research and services, and surface instrument division, IMD. His mornings begin with analysing data to ensure he provides timely updates to over 40,000 people on WhatsApp, X and Instagram. He also holds a patent for his invention of a Rain Water Logging Detection, Measurement & Reporting system, which provides real-time information. "The data collected by this system can also be stored and analysed by scientists and meteorologists to create a comprehensive flooding map of a city or district," he says. No city has a flooding map. Puranik believes this is essential today, especially with climate change, when you cannot accurately predict the quantity of

rainfall or the intensity of a cloudburst. One can gauge the state of the stormwater drains and understand whether more water-drawing pumps would be required in case of flooding. "It can act as an early warning system," he says.

His automatic weather station, which he set up with a personal investment of ₹1.5 lakh, helps the Railways record how much rainfall has occurred at a particular place. "If the rainfall in a particular area crosses 100 mm, the railway lines would be non-functional due to water-logging," he says. He is also developing a low-cost weather station priced under ₹10k that can be beneficial to farmers and fishermen, and even help budding forecasters and climate change experts.

One of Puranik's most notable contributions came when Cyclone Remal threatened the East Coast on May 26. Widespread panic ensued in Maharashtra and Gujarat due to a viral caution note. Puranik quickly reassured the public that the cyclone's impact would be minimal in these regions.

## FARMERS' FRIEND

Involved in the real-time flood forecasting project by IIT Madras

KIRTHIGA MURUGESAN, Chennai, Tamil Nadu



Kirthiga Murugesan gazes out of her window in Velachery, Chennai, watching dark clouds gather on the horizon. The sight reminds her of the millions of farmers across the country who also have their eyes on the sky; the monsoon rains are crucial for their crops' survival. "My father is a farmer, and I have seen him suffer the vagaries of weather," says the 35-year-old, who holds a PhD from IIT Madras. Behind her weather forecasting talent is a childhood interest in maths, problem-solving and coding. Subsequently, she got an undergraduate degree in agriculture informatics, leading to her specialising in weather forecasting for natural resource management at IIT Madras.

Women are significantly underrepresented in meteorology; a field where they face gender challenges. Murugesan, who started real-time forecasting in 2020, has emerged as a trailblazer; her contributions marked by the development of a high-resolution regional climate model at the hyperlocal level. This model, created in

partnership with IIT Madras and C-DAC Pune as part of the National Supercomputing Mission, uses supercomputers for precise predictions. "This employs two ways to forecast weather—one is the statistical model based on available weather data. The second is dynamic modelling, a numerical weather prediction model that uses the laws of physics," she explains.

Murugesan's work at the World Resources Institute (WRI) as a senior programme associate allows her to combine her expertise with an inherited passion for agriculture. "Seasonal patterns are shifting, with earlier monsoons and delayed winters. Some regions experience heavier rainfall and flooding, while others suffer from prolonged droughts. Melting polar ice caps and glaciers contribute to rising sea levels, which can affect coastal weather patterns and increase the risk of storms," she says, as she gets ready to share the next update on the COMK (Chennai Rains) group.





## LONG AND SHORT

NAVDEEP DAHIYA, Gurugram, Haryana

**Correctly predicted a severe cold wave in North India in January 2023**

Navdeep Dahiya has dedicated his life to improving weather predictions to support India's agricultural sector. Growing up in a farming family, Dahiya, like Kirthiga witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of unreliable weather forecasts. He was motivated to bridge the communication gap and provide reliable information to farmers. His curiosity about weather patterns began early. "I started to understand why it rains and why thunderstorms occur. Weather readings can vary significantly within the same region due to several factors. Diverse topography and manmade constructions, both, impact the climate along with industrial and vehicular emissions," explains the 23-year-old. Dahiya's self-education in meteorology was bolstered by a degree in Physics and online courses from Harvard.

In 2016, the young weatherman launched 'Live Weather of India' on Facebook. The platform grew quickly, now boasting

over 44k followers on Facebook and 28k on YouTube. His updates provide invaluable weather information, especially to farmers. He shares data from the IMD and other reliable sources for accurate and actionable forecasts. "Data can be from ground observation, satellite, etc. Understanding climatological data and checking past patterns is crucial," he notes. He leverages various weather models, updating them multiple times a day to generate precise predictions. Forecasts range from long-term predictions to short-term nowcasts.

One of Dahiya's significant achievements was predicting a severe cold wave in North India in January 2023. Despite scepticism from senior meteorologists, his prediction proved accurate. "West Rajasthan had a temperature of minus 4.5 degrees, and Delhi recorded 1.6 degrees," he recalls. He uses Facebook and YouTube to reach farmers, while X targets urban audiences.



## WINDCATCHER

DHANAPRAKASH, Erode, Tamil Nadu

**Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia and Singapore monitor his forecasts**

Dhanaprakash, better known as 'Sanjay Weatherman', is from Bhavani in Erode district, Tamil Nadu. This 23-year-old's weather zest began in 2018, driven by a childhood fascination with data collection related to agriculture. Growing up in the delta region of Tamil Nadu, he was particularly intrigued by cyclones and their impact on the local environment. "In Tamil Nadu, we face the brunt of cyclones frequently. I wanted to learn how to predict these events and alert people," he says. In 2019, he launched his YouTube channel, Sanjay Weatherman, which quickly gained traction among viewers across India and even in countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia and Singapore, since his forecasts are often for those regions, too.

Dhanaprakash's approach to weather forecasting is largely self-taught. But he is on-spot: "Aside from harsh weather, climate change has already slowed agricultural growth over the last 50 years, especially in mid and low latitude regions like India and Southeast Asia—and this leads to a food security issues, too." Utilising online resources like Windy.com and the Global Flood Awareness System, he compares rainfall data to make mostly accurate predictions. His dedication is evident in his daily routine: waking up at 3 am to research weather patterns until 7 am, followed by his regular job as a CFL coordinator at the Daan Foundation. "During monsoons, I am even more heavily involved with this work," he adds.

## DAYS AHEAD

SANTOSH SUBRAMANIAN, Kolkata, West Bengal

**In 2020 Cyclone Amphan, the path projection was 92% accurate**

Santosh Subramanian celebrated the 11th anniversary of this platform, Weather of Kolkata (WOK), this month. Over the years, WOK has become a trusted source in the region. The team consists of five members in Kolkata, with correspondents in Abu Dhabi and Hyderabad. They rely on data patterns spanning the past 200 years, linking them with current weather models to make accurate forecasts. "We predicted the intense heat wave patterns in Kolkata. We also predicted that spring would be the longest in 2024. This is also related to climate change. For instance, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan have experienced intense heat waves these last few years, with temperatures soaring above 45°C," says the 30-year-old.

In 2020, during Cyclone Amphan, their path projection was 92 per cent accurate five days before landfall, a breakthrough that garnered significant attention. Subramanian emphasises the importance of simplifying complex meteorological terminology for the layperson. By breaking down data, he makes weather information accessible to everyone. This approach has proven invaluable, especially for farmers who depend on accurate forecasts to time their crop rotations and for industries like tea plantations. Subramanian is currently developing a free app to offer live alerts. "The motto is to make the average Joe interested in the weather," he says.



## HIT AND HIT

**In 2023, Srikanth issued a warning of severe floods hitting Chennai, 24 hours before the rains started**

SRIKANTH K Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Srikanth K, popularly known as 'Chennai Rains', boasts a following of over 173k on X. His fascination with weather began not with a formal education in meteorology, but through routinely reading the weather columns in newspapers. Despite his background in Economics and publishing, Srikanth applied his analytical skills to understand weather patterns. His blog, Chennai Rains, quickly became a trusted source for weather updates. His forecasting methodology is rigorous: it involves real-time tracking using satellite and radar images from the IMD and the Joint Typhoon Warning Center. Studying all the data requires waking up at 4 am and spending two hours on weather updates every day. "There are no 'off' days in this line," he says, adding, "Localised atmospheric conditions, such as pressure systems and wind patterns, also contribute to variations in weather readings. Additionally, human activities like pollution and land use changes can affect local weather conditions. For instance, air pollution in cities like Delhi can trap heat and alter rainfall patterns."

He is part of the state weather task force whose purview is early warning and disaster preparedness initiatives. "Disaster preparedness does not come with the flick of a switch. It requires constant vigilance and preparation," says Srikanth, whose predictive capabilities were tested in December 2016 when Cyclonic Storm Vardah threatened the Indian coast. While official predictions suggested the storm would hit Puducherry and some pointed to Andhra Pradesh, Srikanth predicted that the storm would strike Chennai. "I got a lot of flak for it," he recalls. As Vardah approached, it formed over the southeast Bay of Bengal and crossed north of Tamil Nadu near Chennai on December 12, just as he had predicted. In 2023, when severe floods threatened Chennai, Srikanth issued a warning 24 hours before the rains began. Initially met with ridicule on social media, his forecast was vindicated when the rains started that night and continued for 24 hours.



## THE PROS

### Calling the Shots

Officials at the IMD and Skymet, who have trained to forecast weather, believe climate change is a big disruptor

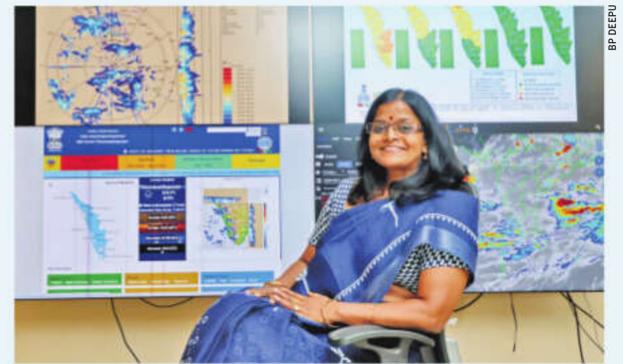
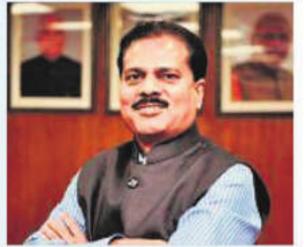
## LONE RANGER

Mrutymanjay Mohapatra

Director General, IMD

The roots of the career of Mrutymanjay Mohapatra, DG, IMD, lie in his memories as a six-year-old boy who witnessed the devastating cyclone in Odisha in 1971. "It left a mark on me," says the official. The country has come a long way since, and IMD's weather forecasts are getting more accurate by the day. Mohapatra attributes it to the technological developments in meteorology and telecommunication.

"Satellites were available even 30 years ago, but we got cloud images once in three hours, only in Delhi, and the images weren't easily recognisable. Now they come in every half an hour with details such as wind speed, humidity etc.," he says. Mohapatra's career stands on a bedrock of accurate forecasts, but if he had to choose one, it would be predicting the intensity of the 2013 cyclone, Phailin. "International agencies predicted it to be a super cyclone and insisted that India was underestimating the situation. We had predicted that Phailin would have a sustained wind speed of 220 kmph. At the time we were under pressure to change our forecast, but we stuck to it, and were proven right at the end." No wonder he is called the Cyclone Man of India.



## TRAILBLAZER

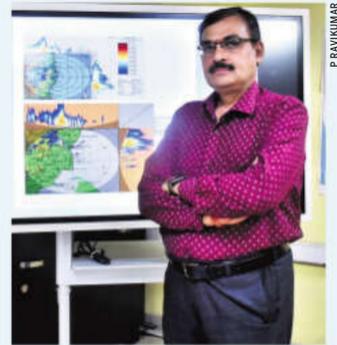
Neetha K Gopal, Head, Meteorological Centre, IMD Thiruvananthapuram

As a young girl, Geography fascinated Gopal. Naturally, she took to a career in Atmospheric Sciences, whose foundation is Geography. Today it's been 25 years that she has been with the IMD, one of the few women weather scientists in the country. "It is true that there are only a few women forecasters. This is mainly because we work away from home. So, joining the IMD isn't an attractive choice for most women. To plug the gap, the WMO, as a policy matter, now promotes participation of women," says the 53-year-old. In over two decades of her career, Gopal has seen the IMD's computing systems evolve with modern techniques for data collection and communication. "Today we have better understanding of atmospheric conditions. Since the IMD is a WMO Regional Specialised Centre for Tropical Cyclones, it is capable in tropical cyclone monitoring and prediction. For last-mile connectivity, we use social media," she adds. Reminiscing about the Ockhi cyclone in 2017, which affected Kerala, she says, "At the time, many models were indicating formation of another cyclonic storm in Bay of Bengal. But we were unsure and so did not issue any such forecast. Ultimately, we were proved right and the cyclonic storm was not formed." says Gopal, who believes the biggest challenge is forecasting localised high-impact weather events with good lead time.

## EVER VIGILANT

Dr S Balachandran, Head, Regional Meteorological Centre, IMD Chennai

For the last 33 years, Balachandran has been forecasting storms and cyclones. "When I started out in 1992, IMD was not that popular. Being a Physics student, I was drawn to interpreting and calculating the mathematical data available. When I joined, I also underwent IMD's own training programme," says the 59-year-old. Surface data is what he swears by. Also, down the years, IMD's precision has gone up, thanks to evolving science and technology. Earlier an analogue system was in place, now IMD has numerical models that translate readings from mathematical equations. But, he maintains, there is still no perfect forecasting system. "Forecasting is a complex business. There are weather phenomena that last for a few seconds, and then there are some that go on for a year. There are also weather phenomena that occur across different timespans at the same location," he says, and is candid enough to admit that 80 per cent of the time forecasts are proved right, but there are times when the readings fail too. "It happens all over the world," he says. The one thing he stresses that is most needed is constant knowledge update and keeping up with climate change. "For example, the Chennai 2015 floods occurred due to 30 cm rain in 24 hours. Nowadays, some places get 20 cm rain in six hours," he says, adding that his stint in Tamil Nadu is challenging as the state is prone to cyclones and the IMD needs to constantly monitor the same.



## ALL-ROUNDER

Mahesh Palawat, SkyMet Weather Services

Mahesh Palawat became the face of SkyMet Weather Services, India's first private sector organisation to provide forecasts, post-pandemic. When Covid forced many staff members to leave the organisation, the 59-year-old meteorologist took on the responsibility of writing and presenting weather forecasts on SkyMet's website and social media channels, in addition to his primary job of plotting atmospheric data. Palawat's relationship with weather is that of sheer passion. He pursued a degree in Geography simply because he "wanted to know more about the world". Then, he found himself as a meteorologist with the Indian Air Force, where he was also a boxer. In 2006, he joined

SkyMet, where he is now the VP, Meteorology. Ask him why there is a need for a private service when there is the IMD, and he says, "We offer location- and client-specific forecasts." Their forecasts, he explains, are meant for the general public, but also for power and oil companies, and farmers, who reach out in order to take adequate precautions. Speaking about the evolution of technology in the field, Palawat cites several examples ranging from better satellite images to the advent of Doppler radar which helps in the detection of wind speeds and is vital in forecasting cyclones. He recalls how during his time in the Indian Air Force he used to plot data by hand. "Now there are tools that help us do that within minutes," he says.



# The Acts Effect

In a secluded corner backstage at the Siri Fort Auditorium in Delhi, Sunny Raj zealously practices his juggling routine, deftly manoeuvring colourful balls through the air. The dim lighting casts intriguing shadows around him, emphasising his focused expression as he perfects each toss and catch with precision and grace. "Mastering juggling requires relentless practice and unwavering focus. I adore witnessing children awestruck by our acts," he says. Tanveer Mujawar, Raj's companion at the Rambo Circus, smiles, "The circus is my lifeline." Hailing from Maharashtra, Mujawar's life took a challenging turn when his father passed away when he was just four years old. Financial constraints forced him to discontinue his education. Bereft of support, he found an unexpected lifeline when his uncle suggested exploring opportunities at a nearby circus. Thus began Mujawar's transformative journey with Rambo Circus, where he not only found a career but also a paternal figure in Sujit Dilip, proprietor of the circus.

Rambo Circus enchants audiences with acrobatics, laughter and air-conditioned luxury at Siri Fort Auditorium in Delhi

By TANISHA SAXENA



"We've transformed the tented circus experience into a spectacle within auditoriums."

SUJIT DILIP, proprietor

various parts of their bodies. But there are challenges that the team faces at each new venue. "For instance, the auditoriums vary in their flooring materials. At St. Andrews Auditorium in Mumbai, the floor is flat and polished, which is perfectly suitable. However, here at Siri Fort Auditorium, the flooring is quite old, resulting in a more uneven surface. This poses a challenge, especially during performances like the cycling act," Prakashan says.

Animals have been banned in circuses in India with effect from July 14, 2018. Circus was quick to adapt. "We've shifted our focus to acrobatics and other innovative attractions to draw attention. Consequently, we've transformed the circus experience into a spectacle within auditoriums, complete with dazzling lights and impressive sound effects, aimed particularly at captivating the Gen Z audience," says Dilip.

As the show in Delhi concludes, the troupe gets busy. There is no rest for them as they pack their bags to head to Jaipur and Amritsar.

As the clock strikes 7.15 pm, attendees begin to fill the auditorium. Some troupe members attempt to sell toys to the children in the audience. Anil Kumar Nishad, a clown who has been with Rambo for five years, is selling laser glow swords. He says, "I see people of all ages coming to the circus. Grandparents walk in with their grandchildren, youngsters arrive with their friends, and families come together to relax and laugh. Isn't it beautiful?" The excitement is palpable

(Clockwise from right) The troupe at practice; the Candle Balance Act; clowns



with the children's energy filling the auditorium. A six-year-old hugs the clown as his father captures the moment.

Founded in 1991 by the late PT Dilip, Rambo Circus has journeyed through 32 years of evolution. Starting from humble makeshift tents, the circus has embraced digital enhancements and now performs in theatres. "Nowadays, almost every home has an air conditioner. We decided to

extend the same comfort to our circus experience," says Biju Pushkaran, a clown at the circus. Dressed in layers of polka dots and stripes, with a nose that glows like a cherry and a smile that stretches from ear to ear, Pushkaran in his oversized shoes is managing the 45-member troupe with finesse.

Taking the circus from a tent setting to a theatre is no easy feat. In late 2022, Dilip approached Bengaluru-based anchor and musician Sameer M Rao, asking if he would be interested in hosting the shows at each venue he visited. Cut to today: Rao has spent a year and a half with the troupe, visiting different cities and performing in over 900 shows. But he is desperate to go home now, "The heatwave in Delhi has been unbearable. I am



yearning for the pleasant weather back home."

Acting as a catalyst between the audience and the performers, Rao bridges the gap with his dynamic presence. "I grew up watching WWE and was always fascinated by how they introduced the wrestlers. From day one, I decided that for me, these circus artists are my WWE

superstars," he smiles.

The approximately 90-minute show comprises 22 acts, beginning with a lively skit by the clowns followed by the opening act, the Candle Balance Act. This mesmerising spectacle demands an extraordinary combination of skill, grace and intense concentration as performers delicately balance flickering candles on

## Art of the Spirit



By BINDU GOPAL RAO

A couple of years ago, 23-old IT engineer Pratheek Gudigar decided to leave the city and go back home to catch spirits. Celebrate them, to be precise. There's Chikku, a *daiva* or good astral being. Then there's the Tambula Yakshi, or Yakshi holding a mirror, and Maha Sati, the *daiva* who self-immolated herself.

Pratheek, who relocated from Bengaluru to Kundapura village in Karnataka, says these nature spirits protect their villages; a local belief that manifests in the form of the generational profession of making Bhoota Kola idols in the region. Among the most conspicuous examples would be the menacing face painted in dark red that stares out of the Brahmalingeshwara Temple in Maranakatte, 16 km from Kundapura.

The small community of artists from the Gudigar caste carve the spirit idols from jackfruit wood. Currently, only two or three families in the Uppunda, Basaru

A Bhoota Kola idol



and Kundapura villages practise the art form. Pratheek's father was one of them, until he passed away during Covid, prompting his son to quit his job and continue the family legacy. "I used to watch my father and grandfather make idols. It is important for me to keep their tradition going," he explains, adding that he is thankful to the 2022 Kannada film *Kantara* that portrayed Bhoota Kola as a shamanistic dance performance, bringing it to the public eye.

The busy season for Bhoota Kola figurines is typically from January to May when the demand for the idols go up due to the annual temple festivals at that time.

These wooden idols—commonly seen in Kundapura, Byndnoor and Udupi—are anywhere from 1 to 15 ft tall. To carve intricate profiles and paint a roughly two-foot figurine requires a minimum 10 days of work; if the design is complex it takes more. "Our community is small and we are trying to revive our art and generate interest in the youngsters to take it up. The idol of Veerabhadra in the Mandarthi Durgaparameshwari Temple located about 30 km from Kundapura was made by my grandfather. It is among the finer examples of our craft," says Pratheek.

The young craftsman believes that his work will speak for itself. "I cannot work in Bengaluru since the craft demands full time commitment. I have decided to take it up full time. I owe it to myself to keep the family tradition going," he says, while carving a *daiva*. The spirits would be happy that one of their own is back to serve through creation.

## LEISURE CORNER

### ODE TO NOSTALGIA

KNMA presents *A Bollywood Retro* that pays homage to the iconic cultural phenomenon of Bollywood through the artistry of esteemed photographer JH Thakker. The evocative black-and-white photographs immortalise the legendary film stars of yesteryears.

*A Bollywood Retro*; Till June 14; The skybridge connecting Nexus Select CityWalk Mall and DLF South Court Mall, Delhi; Entry: Free



### THE RIGHT BEAT

Immerse yourself in the *Ghatam Symphony*, a celebration of Indian classical music led by Grammy Award winners Vidwan Vikku Vinayakram and V Selvaganesh. It is a vibrant fusion of tradition and innovation, bridging multiple generations through music. *Ghatam Symphony*; June 20, 7.30 pm; NMACC, Mumbai; Tickets: ₹850 onwards; Details on nmacc.com



### PEEK INTO THE PAST

Journey through forgotten corners of every home, where old trunks, suitcases, and other cherished items hold the treasures of our past. These props evoke a sense of nostalgia and wonder. *The Room of Memories*; July 14; MLR Convention Centre, Bengaluru; Tickets: ₹499 onwards; Details on BookMyShow

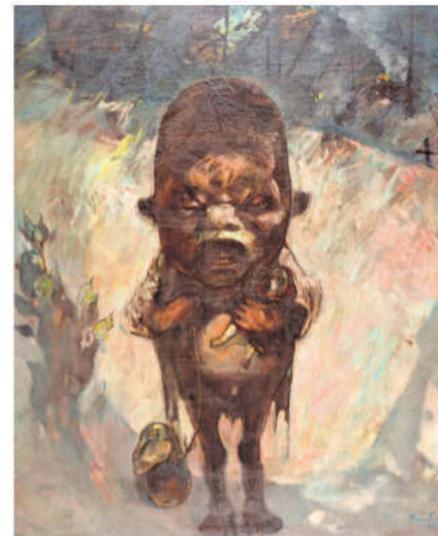
## Hidden in Plain Sight

A Delhi gallery offers an insight into the little-known Madras Art Movement and traces its journey from inception

By MEDHA DUTTA YADAV

The painting by KCS Paniker that awes you at the *Madras Modern: Regionalism and Identity* exhibition by DAG, almost looks like a dystopian version of Humpty Dumpty. The dark colours and menacing face with an open cavernous mouth will haunt you. It stays with you for a long time after walking out of the gallery. But what surprises at the same time, is that of the over 50 works on display, there are probably just a few names that one would connect with. Showcasing the works of a core group of artists of the Madras Art Movement, the exhibition tries to address the lack of information and awareness regarding the works of artists from the Madras School of Art. The first iteration opened in 2019 in Mumbai.

Why did the Madras School remain almost a sideshow? "One primary reason is that though the Madras School of Art (now the Government College of Fine Arts) was established in 1850, its visual art department had a very late beginning. It began only in 1930 under the tenure of DP Roy Chowdhury, its first Indian artist principal. The other art centres were well established by then with a robust infrastructure of artists, patrons, collectors and gallery system. There was a thriving art community in places like Calcutta and Bombay," says Kishore Singh, Senior VP, DAG. But just setting up a department was not enough. Though the artists were hugely proficient, they were not included in exhibitions in the other centres because there was lack of knowledge about them. Madras didn't have a robust art community. And being a late starter, getting patronage in the art centres of Calcutta and Bombay—which boasted the Bengal School



Untitled works at the exhibition



of Art and the Progressive Movement respectively—was difficult.

To counter this, Paniker founded the Cholamandal Artists' Village in 1966. Located in Injambakkam, it is the largest artists' commune in India. This community provided a thrust to the art school. "The Madras Art Movement revolved around the pedagogy of the Madras Art School. To take it forward—post students passing out from there—Paniker's idea was to create a community where people could sit together and exchange ideas around art making and practices. It was that that became the catalyst for setting up the Cholamandal

Artists' Village. The community—artists residing together, communicating with each other, working together—provided a big boost of momentum to the movement. It brought into focus the artists as a cohesive unit practicing a certain kind of modernism that made them distinctive," says Singh.

One distinct theme of the movement—evident in the ongoing exhibition—is the use of mediums differently. The modernists work typically with canvas, oil, acrylic, water colour, paper, gouache. That aspect of using materials was the same in Madras, but the treatment was different. The sculptors within the



group, instead of working typically in the round, worked on frontal sheet-based image with repousse work (hammering a malleable metal from the reverse side) being a significant character in their practice. Another theme that strikes viewers is that of regionalisation of the art works. Singh says, "The whole idea of Madras Art Movement was based on localisation with a Southern influence, which includes their mythology, their architecture, their design. All these found a significant place within the purview of their practice."

While the Cholamandal community helped the Madras Art Movement thrive, it lost its space to emerging contemporary art in the 70s and onwards, which began to take over the market and change the dynamics. With this exhibition, the gallery hopes to shine much-needed light on the hidden canvas.

**WHEN & WHERE**  
Madras Modern: Regionalism and Identity; DAG, Delhi; Till July 6

# Qualifying Tests No Longer Open Doors to Upliftment

**BARBED WORDS**

**Pushpesh Pant**

Former professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University



The battle isn't to the strong, nor the race to the swift—these words from the Bible have suddenly acquired poignancy in the context of 'paper leaks' and cancellation of 'competitive tests' like NET-JRF and CSIR-NET after allegations of the process having been compromised. Heads have rolled, as usual leaving behind a stink that will take a long time to go away. The HRD minister has, for a change, accepted his moral responsibility, but it appears that damage control would be limited to pointing out to errors.

There is nothing like 'human error' traced to a scapegoat to distract agitated protestors. Unfortunately those at the helm at present and their predecessors have all been distracted by vainglorious projects like gleaming bullet trains flying on imaginary wings to beat aeroplanes to keep their feet firmly planted on earth. The New Education Policy, 2020, creates a mirage of transforming India into a knowledge superpower in a blink—a real *vishwa guru*—while in real life universities are being systematically demolished and devalued by a UGC that has repeatedly shown itself to be the lapdog of the politician who patronise it. The chairmen aren't squeamish about being used as cat's paw to paint the syllabi in colours from pink to saffron at the drop of the proverbial hat.

The NCERT has registered a new low under the present director. Dinesh Prasad

Saklani has no sense of shame when he justifies dropping chapters in secondary school textbooks on the ground that why teach young students about riots and acts of vandalism against places of worship? These can only create animosities between communities. The students can learn about these issues when they grow up. Come on! A youth can vote at the age of 18 and in most cases the young are in secondary classes in late adolescence around 16-18 years of age. This is like drawing a very fine line, that can be

revised are the gold/coal mine from which the questions for MCQs in qualifying exams are dug out. Not only NEET/FITJEE/NET are dependent, but aspirants of the no-longer-heaven-born-services—the IAS etc—bet their lives on. The rot set in long time back. First it was the copying epidemic including impersonation in these 'qualify or die' tests. Then came the coaching mafias that made a mockery of board examinations. What mattered is to crack the premedical or engineering qualifiers. Many kids pushed by

moral values, start pontificating about education and examinations from primary to doctoral research level, the dangerous slide to the precipice accelerates. There is no comparison between real Gurudev who dedicated his life to injecting creativity and refreshing changes at Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati and imitators who can only flaunt similarities with the great man in attire and not possessing formal qualifications.

What can no longer be swept under the carpet is the nexus between parties in power—not only the BJP—and businessmen patronised by them in education. Private universities are mushrooming. Not long ago our government boasted of a unicorn in education business with a valuation of over USD 22 billion. Now the silence is deafening as the operation allegedly turned out to be a Ponzi scheme involved in nepotistic money laundering.

From schools to universities, no level playing field exists. The rich and the powerful don't have any need for education. They can endow chairs and schools in Ivy League universities to let their progeny breathe the heady air on these hallowed campuses without facing any competition for admission and scholarship. They return with impressive degrees in engineering and management to employ the *creme de la creme* of survivors of the cutthroat competition at home. Those blessed by Goddess Lakshmi can turn a blind eye to Saraswati. It's only the lower and middle-middle classes who still believe that the qualifying tests will open doors.

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easily fudged if need be, in juvenile justice system. What is going to change in a few months to endow them with maturity to grasp volatile topics? Is the posturing educator-administrator aware of the fiery lava of hate speech that is broadcast on all media that the innocents are exposed to day in and day out? In most cases, sectarian polarisation is engineered by political leaders at the highest echelons for electoral gain. When the students walk out of school they aren't freed from the clutches of the clumsy NCERT. Its text books frequently

their parents and peers perished mid course. The number of frustrated mentally crippled and depressed youngsters taking their own lives in IITs and medical colleges is increasing shockingly. Add to this the barbaric ragging, caste prejudice and communal baiting, and the toxic witches' brew is boiling out of the cauldron to scald us all. The credibility of all regulating institutions is totally lost. When leaders, who have not walked through portals of a university or college known for academic excellence and inculcating

# No Tolerance for Terror Apologists

**PROVOCATEUR**

**Ravi Shankar**

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The polemic of politics is a slippery slope. Asaduddin Owaisi, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) MP from Hyderabad just made a banana peel gaffe. Owaisi's postscript panegyric "Jai Palestine!" after his oath taking is nothing short of support for Hamas, a terrorist organisation comprising Gaza civilians and UN officials who were involved in the October 7 rape, murder and infanticide of 1,139 Israelis; and the kidnapping of about 250 hostages. Hence does Owaisi's endorsement indicate AIMIM supports mass murder?

Since its beginning on November 12, 1927, AIMIM which started life as MIM has been an anti-India outfit. Its ideology was Ashraf dominion and opposition of Muslim-majority Hyderabad's accession to India; Ashraf dominion calls for the rule of high caste Muslim nobility, considered the true descendants of Prophet Muhammad. MIM's storm troopers were Razakars, an armed paramilitary organisation notorious for pogroms against Hindus in cold blood, rape and looting. Their slogan was: '*Bamman ko looto, Bariye ko kaato, Aapas mein sab baato*' (Loot the Brahmin, kill the trader, and share in the pillage). Nehru and Patel sent in the Army and forcibly merged Hyderabad with India. Subsequently Asaduddin's great grandfather Abdul Wahed Owaisi changed the party's name to AIMIM and his descendant Asaduddin has tried to launder its bloody past by denying any connection with Razakars. India's most prominent Muslim dynastic party has a record of making murderous threats; hence its backing of Palestine is understandable. In 2012, Owaisi's deputy and brother Akbaruddin warned that 25 crore Muslims will need only 15 minutes to show 100 crore Hindus who are more powerful, if the police stay out of it. You can take the Owaisi out of Razakars, but you cannot take the Razakar out of Owaisi. Hailing a region that harbours terrorists in the House is enough to disqualify Asaduddin.

Disqualification is a tricky affair, though made easy in Modi 2.0. The Constitution guarantees freedom of speech: Owaisi's argument is if BJP MPs can say 'Jai Sri Ram!' why can't he say 'Jai Palestine?' But the rhetorical equivalent of 'Jai Sri Ram' would be 'Allahu Akbar', not fealty to another country. One provision for disqualifying an MP is "acknowledgment of allegiance or adherence to a Foreign state". The matter is referred to the President of India who sends it to the Election Commission. Owaisi is in trouble and the Opposition will be undecided on supporting him.

The West is overwhelmed by Islamist migrants, mainly Muslim, West Asian and African who call for sharia in their host nations. It is also engulfed by violent anti-Semitism from Muslim migrants and Black Americans, but not Nazis this time. Public attacks on synagogues and Jews are rampant, and the police stand by watching. A British policeman was seen on video arresting a Jewish Londoner for waving an Israeli flag at a mammoth Palestinian protest, not the protestors who were yelling for Israel's elimination; the London police reports to Mayor Sadiq Khan. The BJP may have lost the election, but still holds the fort. Under Modi, not a single pro-Palestine rally has been allowed in India. The Opposition laments that Modi is an enemy of civil liberties. One fact is clear: he is there to protect the liberties of Indian citizens from any cultural or religious invasion. It is how history will judge him.

THINK

# The Press Freedom Index Needs Objectivity If It is to Remain Relevant

**BY INVITATION**

**Ajai Sahni**

Executive Director, Institute for Conflict Management, South Asia Terrorism Portal



There has been a tremendous decline in—or perhaps a greater exposure of—the functioning of international agencies over the past decades, with their data and listings clearly pushing particular narratives and alliances. There has, concomitantly, been a growing loss of faith in such agencies. One can hardly forget the scandalous behaviour of the World Health Organisation and its Director General, Tedanos Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who helped in the cover-up of China's role in the Covid-19 pandemic. WHO and its Director General, a Foreign Policy commentary noted "became China's Coronavirus accomplice". "WHO was uncritically repeating information from the Chinese authorities, ignoring warnings from Taiwanese doctors... and reluctant to declare a 'public health emergency of international concern'." As a result of the deliberate blocking of access in the initial months, and China's smokescreen, the virus spread rapidly across the world, resulting in more than seven million deaths and nearly 753 million people infected. Unsurprisingly, WHO receives a very substantial proportion of its funding from Beijing. Another large proportion of funding comes from the US, which subsequent disclosures indicate, also had a joint research programme ongoing with the Wuhan Laboratory, where the virus is widely believed to have originated. Recent US Senate hearings on the origins of the pandemic have exposed the deceit and misdirection that muddled the debate over the years.

Reporters Sans Frontier (RSF) is not, of course, an international institution of the same category; it

is an international non-government organisation of high repute, which boasts consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO, among others. It has enjoyed immense credibility as a source of assessment relating to press freedom globally, and the annually published Press Freedom Index was widely relied on.

Astonishingly, the 2023 edition of the Index saw India fall abruptly from the 150th rank in 2022 to the 161st in 2023. In 2021, India was ranked 142nd. There can be little doubt that Press freedom in India has seen a drastic decline since 2014 (rank 140), when the Modi government came to power and, on first sight, the ranking was widely accepted, particularly in liberal circles, as validation of their accusations of



repression, infiltration and debasement of the Press—the transformation of the mainstream into 'godi media'. A somewhat closer look, however, is disquieting. Pakistan, we discover, ranked at 150 in 2023 and, even more astonishingly, Afghanistan—under Taliban rule, with all independent media shut down, all international media chased out, and with severe edicts banning any reportage or commentary critical of the government—ranked at a relatively respectable 152nd. For all the purportedly objective 'indicators' on which the rankings are based, it is difficult to believe that India lists 11 ranks below Pakistan, and nine ranks below a Talibanised Afghanistan.

The Press Freedom Index 2024 makes a marginal correction, taking India up to 159, and Afghanistan down to 178.

Pakistan falls a couple of ranks to 152. It is not clear what extraordinary transformations occurred in Afghanistan, for it to drop 26 ranks in a single year: India places seven ranks below Pakistan, where security agencies are accused of the targeted killing and abduction of several journalists over the years, and terrorist groups have their own hit lists for uncooperative media. RSF, moreover, clarifies, "Some countries' rises in the Index are misleading in as much as their scores fell and the Index rises were the result of falls by countries previously above them. This is the case with India (159th), which was pushed up two places despite recently adopting more draconian laws." Despite the improvement in ranking,

consequently, India was, in fact, worse off. Astonishingly, on its 'security indicators' for 2024, India fares worse than conflict-ravaged Yemen, Libya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the electoral dictatorship in Egypt, among others.

It is not unreasonable to suspect that various international 'indices' are instrumentalised by the major powers to push a particular narrative, to exert pressure on target states whose foreign affairs postures are not aligned with theirs. Similar distortions have been pointed out in several other 'global indices' in recent times.

India's deterioration on a multiplicity of parameters over the past decade is a reality that Indians struggle with on a daily basis. With disinformation and manipulation dominating the media, with the constant suppression of statistics and the rampant circulation of falsehoods, trust is the one factor that has most been undermined. Objective, reliable sources of data and assessment are essential in these circumstances, if the people are somehow to be pulled out of the quicksand of fabrications. By exaggerating the threat, by distorting assessments, global agencies and NGOs do the country and its people a grave disservice.

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# Elegy for a Boab Tree

**BY INVITATION**

**Sathya Saran**

Author & Consulting Editor, Penguin Random House



Let's begin with a small attempt to Understand one of Nature's marvels. Looking like a misfit, the boab tree, also known as bottle tree or upside-down tree due to its freaky swollen trunk, is a venerable living thing that can, if it had a voice, narrate the passing of history. Perhaps dating back to before the Continental Shift, the boab is a tree that grows both in Africa and in parts of Australia. Inscriptions made on the bark of the tree by unknown hands, have proved to be more than a century old. Some specimens of the African boab are estimated to live for almost 2,000 years.

Anyone who has visited the historic town of Mandu in Madhya Pradesh will know that the streets are still lined with boab trees, that were imported from Africa and planted there, because they took a king's fancy. In the absence of tamarind trees in the region, locals use the paste of the sour fruit instead.

By some quirk of chance three boab trees have stood like minor minarets in

different places along the busy roads of Mumbai city too. They stood unnoticed, curious characters watching the city grow beyond its limits towards self-destruction. In a city, once full of a huge variety of trees, some flowering, some fruiting, some ornamental and all home to birds and small animals, the boabs added their bit to Nature's effort.

Perhaps no one knew it, but if left alone, they would still be standing, impavide, when the 21st century gives way to the 22nd.

But the town planners, those men with degrees and power-driven machines and an army of workmen at their command, knew little of the history of the boab. They knew they had to fulfil the vision of a new Mumbai, where people could fly in their cars over elevated roadways, or in noiseless metros and could move from one end of the linear city to the other without hindrance.

They knew little, and cared less about the trees that shared space with the bustling populace of the city. The trees lived lives as busy as any human; providing valuable oxygen, nurturing

insects and birds, butterflies and bees that all had a role to play in keeping the city functioning. Having no voice, the trees did their work silently, as they had been doing for centuries; and an entire ecosystem thrived parallel to that.

To the men with machines and purpose, the trees were but a hurdle. A useless impediment in the way of the city's progress. Except for a few street children who waited for the fruiting trees to bear their bounty, no one cared about the fruit, or the bouquets the branches sent out. Who had the time?

So the boab tree, witness to generations of Indians, Bombaywala, Mumbaiikars... was removed. Swiftly, hopefully painlessly.

In another country, the tree would have had placards placed in front of it, a curiosity that would make people stop, read and exclaim about this strange green citizen of African descent. Here, it lived and died, unnoticed. Doing its duty quietly while it lived, dying without a murmur, when it was cut down. And we were once a people who worshipped trees.

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**The trees lived lives as busy as any human; providing valuable oxygen, nurturing insects and birds, butterflies and bees that all had a role to play in keeping the city functioning**

# Adverse Effect of a Reverse Sweep

**BY INVITATION**

**Balaji Vittal**

Film commentator and author



Somehow Baloo Gupte (a senior Bombay Scricketer) got wind of the fact that I could do a fair mimicry of film star Dev Anand...; a cricketing legend shared in his autobiography. Five years later, by which time the youngster had established himself as one of the best batsmen in the world, he bagged a role in the Marathi film *Savi Premachi*, making Sunil Gavaskar arguably the first Indian cricketer after Salim Durani in *Charitra* (1973) to enter films. A few others followed suit down the decades and the recent buzz that Shikhar Dhawan would be starring in Amir Khan's project *Sitare Zameen Par* added to the list of international cricketers chasing the wide ball.

But their track record in Bollywood has been like a batting collapse. Durani, Gavaskar, Sandeep Patil, Syed Kirmani, Ajay Jadeja, Vinod Kamble were not able to build momentum. But then why would we expect a good cricketer to be successful in films as well? Especially when even trained

actors and FTII toppers struggle to get the right break?

Acting, like cricket, is a highly demanding full-time profession. So, the audience perceives these 'switch-hits' as mere off-season indulgences. Therefore, unless the movie rises above the clutter why would someone spend money to watch a part-time actor? In fact, given India's emotional investment in cricket, a cricketer spending time on things apart from cricket raises doubts about his commitment to the game. Sandeep Patil, burdened with a pre-existing perception of not being a hard-working cricketer, may have been a victim of this negative sentiment when *Kabhi Ajnabee The* released in 1985. True or not, Patil's plummeting batting form might have been attributed to this distraction.

Also, when a cricketer enters tinsel town post his retirement, he is lagging other debutants in age by 8-12 years. Durani was pushing 40 in *Charitra*. Jadeja was 32 when he debuted as the male lead in *Khel*. His cherubic face notwithstanding, his shallow voice and inability to emote caught him plumb in front. Interestingly, a rare exception has been a non-Indian—retired Pakistani batter Mohsin Khan who played

DSP Rajender Singh in *Batwara* (1989). Not only was it a major box office success, Mohsin's performance was appreciated well enough for him to win a Filmfare nomination. Mohsin followed this up with another blockbuster; *Saathi* (1991).

Effective pinch hitters get promoted up the batting order. But not in Bollywood. Actors like Shetty, Mac Mohan, Mohan Sherry, Bob Christo kept playing the 'yes boss-ok boss' sidekick roles all their lives without graduating to playing the kingpin. And this is why Kamble's brief role of Bandy, the big don's flunkie in *Anarth* (2002), was unlikely to sail into the stands.

Cricketers playing themselves seems to yield better results. Gavaskar's cameo as in *Malamaal* (1987) with his witty exchanges with Naseeruddin Shah looked refreshing, while Jadeja looked authentic playing a cricket commentator in *Kai Po Che* (2013). As did Shikhar Dhawan playing himself in *Double XL* (2022).

The spectators' advice to the cricketers seems to be: 'Stick to your position in the batting order'. Maybe Dhawan heard them. He recently denied that he was acting in *Sitare Zameen Par*.

[Posts on X: @vittalbalaji](https://x.com/vittalbalaji)



# Scent Into Raptures

Fragrance is the most personal form of the beauty aesthetic. A perfume list to redefine your personality

By IRAM ARA IBRAHIM

With GenZ stuck between Boomers and Millennials and with Gen A taking immanence seriously, identity is the new black. What you buy and wear, what you order and consume, and where you check in and which spa you go to is an inner quest to make your public mark. The reasons are many, starting with non-owning financial attitude, affordable elegance in a rich getting richer world as well as the quiet is out, is loud in shtick—at last in some matters like perfume. In Peter Siskind's dark classic *'Perfume'*, the true essence of perfume is unspoilt innocence. In 2024, let's leave the innocence out of it and consider what makes perfume enticing. The answer would be attitude.

## CHALLENGES

The fragrance market has seen a number of innovations across the globe as a response to COVID-19 and the economic climate – both of which have been dominating consumer behaviour. These innovations included the positioning of fragrance as a tool for escapism or as an extension of self-expression. In five years and beyond, the fragrance industry will need to adapt to challenges created by global warming and the increasing consumer demand for sustainable products.

## THE FRAGRANCE INDUSTRY AT A GLANCE

In 2024, the fragrance industry is expected to generate \$47.3 billion in revenue – a 2.75% increase from 2023.	By 2028, the global fragrance market will sit at \$52.8 billion.	After cosmetics and beauty tech, fragrance is set to be the third-fastest growing beauty product in 2024, accounting for 9.3% of all sales in the beauty sector.	Though mass market currently dominates, the premium segment will be the fastest growing in the near future.	Perhaps unsurprisingly, offline channels hold the largest share of market distribution – these include speciality stores, department stores, markets and hypermarkets.	Markets across Asia Pacific are growing rapidly, demand is emerging in Africa and the Middle East is prime real estate for exclusive and niche perfumeries.
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## WHAT'S SOUGHT IN 2024

### SMELLING NOSTALGIA

Perfume that helps us be our unapologetic self, reflects on the experience of existence, or even identify with our 'shadow selves'. This unexpected niche movement is on the rise. With consumer interest rising in perfumes that encourage self-expression, you can never go wrong with vanilla, a classic used in perfumery since the beginning. Using the fragrance is no less than the inimitable feeling of returning to your childhood home where you have experienced some of your important milestones.

Kayali Vanilla 28 Eau De Parfum  
Price: ₹8,150

### GENDERLESS FRAGRANCES

In the new world, gender fluidity and role reversal are defining phrases. The perfume industry has caught on. There are no specific rules for fragrance. Any one can work for anybody is the magic formula. Traditionally, floral fragrances fall into feminine categories while woody and spicier fragrances are considered masculine. 2024 is the Age of the Great Mix, when scents combine stereotypical feminine and masculine accents to make a statement.

LoveChild Masaba - Island Suit  
Price: ₹2,200



### LOUD BUDGETING

2023 had quiet luxury as a leitmotif. In 2024 it is loud budgeting: Have Money Won't Spend, and No FOMO is the *Eau De Trend De Jour* on social media. Creators are consistently talking about how much money they are saving when buying an affordable scent. Perfumers are promoting scents that smell just like a luxury designer perfume but for a fraction of the price.

Ajmal Silver Shade Eau De Perfume  
Price: ₹1,400

### EDIBLE PERFUMES

Popcorn, pistachios, pastries—the new guard of food-inspired scents is a savoury one. The menu of gourmand fragrances is expanding and turning deliciously complex. Brands are offering unique blends of 'edible' notes, as the trend wafts through bakeries, patisseries and sweet shops, picking up delectable accords and balancing them with woods, musks and elements of the unexpected. It reveals how foodie fragrances will evolve next.

Jo Malone's English Pear & Sweet Pea  
Price: ₹5,900

### SMOKY OUDS

A woody, and very fragrant oil extracted from tree resin—Oud is a major player picking up more scent real estate. The strong impact of Middle Eastern fragrances and their social media popularity makes Oud the main character energy ingredient which brands are reinterpreting. Its less animalic and the smoky, leathery and woody character is designed to evoke the exotic and mysterious atmosphere of the Arabian Nights.

Smoky Oud & Balsam Amber Parfum  
Price: ₹4,325

## SKINNING IT Dr Deepali Bhardwaj



### Screen Time Blues

We live in a world where screen time is an indispensable part of our lives. Whether for work, entertainment, or social interaction, we spend countless hours in front of screens that emit blue light. While most of us are aware of the potential impact of blue light on our eyes and sleep patterns, its effect on our skin is less commonly discussed but equally significant. Here's how screen lights, particularly blue light, affect your skin.

#### WHAT IS BLUE LIGHT?

Blue light, also known as high-energy visible (HEV) light, is part of the visible light spectrum, with wavelengths ranging from 400 to 490 nanometers. It is naturally emitted by the sun, but digital screens, LED lights, and fluorescent lighting are artificial sources that have significantly increased our exposure.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT MY SKIN?

**Premature ageing and oxidative stress:** Blue light penetrates deeper into the skin compared to UV rays. The deep penetration damages skin cells, collagen, and elastin fibres that are crucial for maintaining your skin's elasticity and firmness, contributing to premature ageing.

**Hyperpigmentation:** Prolonged exposure to blue light can stimulate melanocytes (cells that produce melanin), leading to hyperpigmentation, which is especially apparent in individuals with darker skin tones. Hyperpigmentation often results in an uneven skin tone and dark spots on your skin.

**Inflammation:** Blue light exposure can trigger inflammation by disrupting your skin's barrier and causing irritation. This inflammation can exacerbate conditions like acne, rosacea, and eczema.

**Disruption of skin barrier:** Your skin barrier, which protects you against environmental aggressors and retains moisture, can be compromised by blue light. This disruption can lead to increased dryness, sensitivity, and a compromised ability to repair and regenerate.



#### HOW DO I PROTECT MY SKIN?

Given the very intrusive presence of screens and blue light in our environment, it's crucial to adopt protective measures to safeguard your skin. Here are my top recommendations:

**Use sunscreen daily:** Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen that offers protection against both UVA/UVB and blue light. Look for ingredients like zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, and iron oxides, which can provide a barrier against blue light.

**Incorporate antioxidants into your skincare routine:** Antioxidants such as vitamin C, vitamin E, niacinamide, and ferulic acid help neutralise free radicals generated by blue light exposure. Using serums or moisturisers containing these ingredients can bolster your skin's defence.

**Screen time management:** Limit your screen time wherever possible and take regular breaks using the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. This not only helps reduce eye strain but also minimises prolonged blue light exposure to your skin.

**Use screen protectors:** Invest in screen protectors that filter blue light. These are available for most smartphones, tablets, and computer screens, and can significantly reduce the blue light exposure your skin is exposed to.

**Maintain a healthy skincare routine:** A consistent skincare routine that includes cleansing, moisturising, and regular use of sunscreen is essential. Ensure you're hydrating your skin adequately to maintain a strong skin barrier.

**Wear protective clothing:** Always wear protective clothing. If you spend a lot of time in front of screens, consider wearing clothing that covers more skin, especially on your arms.

**Use blue light-blocking glasses:** These glasses are designed to filter out blue light and should be added to your daily routine.

Incorporating the above measures into your skin care can help you significantly reduce the risk of blue light-induced skin damage.

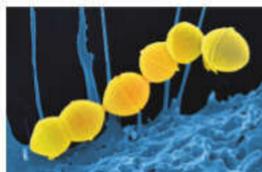
Anti Skin Allergy Specialist & Consultant Dermatologist at Max Hospital Saket, Delhi

## FIT BIT



### SALMON SPERM FACIAL

The skincare industry has invented some pretty wild treatments which are not just limited to snail slime serums, vampire facials, cryotherapy, and magnetic face masks. We're calling the next big thing in K-Beauty set to become mainstream: salmon sperm facials, also known as the Rejuran skin booster. So, what are salmon sperm facials exactly? Rejuran contains polynucleotide (PN), a DNA component extracted from salmon. As one of the number one skin boosters in Korea, it intensely hydrates the skin from within while stimulating the body's natural collagen production. The salmon sperm Rejuran facials are just one type of skin boosters you can get. The category is already huge in South Korea, and it's becoming more mainstream in the United States and the western culture, as well.



### JAPAN BACTERIA MYSTERY

In Japan, cases of flesh-eating bacteria have reached a record high. The outbreak of Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS), also called the "flesh-eating bacteria", has affected almost 1,000 people from the beginning of the year to June 2, according to the National Institute of Infectious Diseases. The disease has a mortality rate of 30 per cent and can become fatal within 48 hours of infection. It is a rare but serious bacterial infection. It develops quickly and becomes life-threatening. The bacteria spreads into deep tissues and the bloodstream and releases certain toxins. The first symptoms of STSS include fever and chills, muscle aches, nausea and vomiting. Soon, after the symptoms kick in, it results in low blood pressure, organ failure, faster than normal heart rate and rapid breathing.

## You Nailed It

The clean girl nails aesthetic continues to grow as the popularity of new manicure style BB Nails shows

By POOJA PRABHAN

Not too long after the craze around milky nails and the classic French mani reigned supreme among manicure lovers, a new nail fad has officially sailed into the beauty dock on Indian shores—BB Nails. True to its name, the manicure trend draws inspiration from the purpose of BB creams, and offers a clean, no-frills finish while enhancing the natural sheen of your nails with a glossy, nude finish. A raging trend in the west; BB nails continue to attract buyers from various ages, owing to its minimalist and sophisticated appeal. "One of the primary reasons behind the rising popularity of BB nails is its understated elegance—you can't go wrong with a classic style," says Dipti Tamang, a senior nail trainer at Bodycraft Academy. However, she gives a few doable post-nail care tips to ensure they don't bear a stained appearance earlier than expected. "Daily moisturising of your nails is crucial after any kind of manicure/nail art to ensure that your nails and



### WANT YOUR BB NAILS TO LAST LONGER?

Here's what you need to do:

**Cleanliness:** Wash your nails regularly with gentle soap and water, and make sure to dry them thoroughly to prevent infections.

**Moisturise:** Apply moisturiser to your nails and cuticles to keep them hydrated, preventing dryness and cracking.

**No Chemicals:** Minimise exposure to harsh chemicals like acetone, which can weaken nails and make them brittle.

**Protection:** Wear gloves when doing household chores to shield your nails from damage.

**No Nail-Biting:** Avoid biting or picking at your nails, as it can damage the nail bed and lead to infections.

**Immense Care:** Be gentle with your nails and refrain from using them as tools for tasks like opening cans or scratching off stickers.



the cuticles stay hydrated, besides reducing the repeated use of acetone, which can ruin the texture of your nails."

Echoing similar views is Santosh Kumar, Business Head-Luxury Division, SINH Salon, CIPL-RSPL Group, who says,

"Taking care of your natural nails is much simpler as compared to

maintaining artificial nails and nail extensions." He further avers that the BB nail trend is focused on enhancing your existing features, concealing imperfections flawlessly, and achieving a natural yet perfectly polished look for your nails. "In order to get rid of discolouring or colour fading, one must use a base coat, apply a thin layer, seal with a top-coat, avoid usage of harsh chemicals, limit water-based work, and must do touch-up as and when needed," he adds.

## PRODUCT REVIEW

### Get Your Curl On

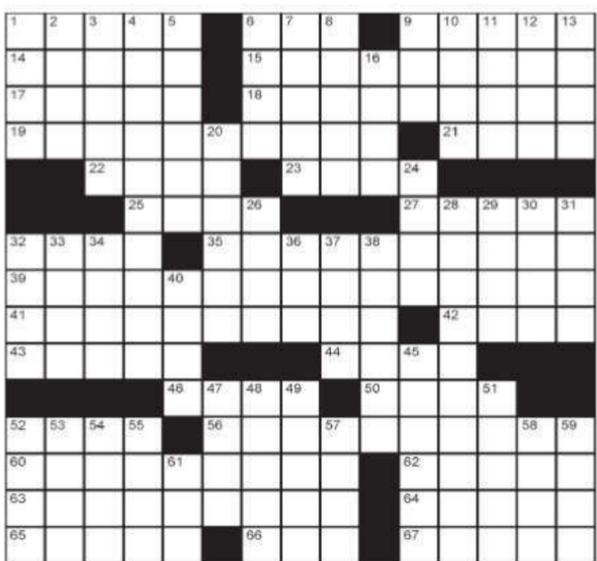
Hask Curl Care line for soft & smooth curls delivers what it promises. Almost. The range comprises four products—a moisturising shampoo, an intensive deep conditioner, another detangling conditioner, and a defining cream. The products are designed specifically for natural curls, so trying the curly girl method on your straight hair using Hask's new launches is pointless. But, it is good news for the curly grrlles. The shampoo has a fuzzy fragrance, and cleans the scalp without leaving it or the hair dry. So much so, that you can skip the conditioner on a busy day, without your mane feeling dull and lifeless. But on days you go for the full thing, the conditioner definitely adds an extra dose of hydration without making the hair seem greasy or weighing it down. Follow it up with the detangling conditioner. Self explanatory, this leave in spray makes the otherwise tiring combing process a cakewalk. The only thing that I did not like in this range was the curl defining cream. While it does the job of restoring the curls post detangling, it leaves a greasy residue on the strands, often making them feel clumpy and the head heavy. Plus, its bleachy smell can be a downer. But all in all, this line is a no-brainer if you are looking to give your curls that extra bounce.

—Trisha Mukherjee



Available: online

CROSSWORD | FAST WALKER — 402



Across

- 1 Most Lebanese and Libyan citizens
- 6 "I know what you're thinking" skill, for short
- 9 "In what way?"
- 14 Airplane director
- 15 "Go educate yourself for once!"
- 17 Vertebrate feature
- 18 Outsize contributor of political funds
- 19 Wiernobile company
- 21 "At Last" singer James
- 22 Sword with a V-shaped groove
- 23 Bohemian
- 25 Walden \_\_\_
- 27 Goaded, with "on"
- 32 Actress lone
- 35 Self-described "black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet"
- 39 "It's not what it looks like!"
- 41 Many a body fed by glacial meltwater
- 42 Recolors
- 43 Green alternative to marinara sauce
- 44 Family \_\_\_ (diagram with branches)
- 46 Negotiator's asset
- 50 Sunbathes

Down

- 1 Lhasa \_\_\_
- 2 Breaks into tears?
- 3 Author Walker or Munro
- 4 "Enjoy your meal!"
- 5 Sound system
- 6 Humorist Bombeck
- 7 "Later!"
- 8 Device for an on-call doctor
- 9 Possessed
- 10 Instrument with keys and a bell
- 11 Refuses to
- 12 Chimney substance
- 13 Vegetable with a starlike cross section
- 16 Projectile that might be aimed at a triple ring
- 20 More than a pest
- 24 Review site

- 26 \_\_\_ citizenship
- 28 Tenet aka the ethic of reciprocity
- 29 Cloudy sky's color
- 30 Singer Brickell whose first name rhymes with CD
- 31 Lairs
- 32 Exchange
- 33 Green in some Caesar salads
- 34 High-pitched barks
- 36 Genetic strands
- 37 Gamer's spelling for a synonym of destroyed
- 38 Wilds, as influence
- 40 Straightening out a tie, for short?
- 45 Holes in one on a par three, e.g.
- 47 Envelope-directing abbr.
- 48 Admonish
- 49 Less wild
- 51 Detect
- 52 Browser array
- 53 What New York and New Jersey do
- 54 \_\_\_ list (set of tasks)
- 55 Reply starter?
- 57 1,000,000 x mega-
- 58 \_\_\_-washed jeans
- 59 Third- or first-person pronoun
- 61 AFC Richmond coach Lasso

Solution to last week's puzzle in the bottom right corner of the page

ARE YOU GUY SHY? (ADULT FEMALE)

- 1: While in a coffee shop you notice that a gorgeous guy at a table opposite you keeps giving you an interested smile. What would you do?
- a) Hurriedly drink your coffee and rush out
  - b) Become embarrassed, but take several quick peeks at him when he's not looking
  - c) Smile back in the hope that he comes over and introduces himself
- 2: Would you ever make the first move by asking a guy out on a date?
- a) No, you wouldn't even have the first idea how to go about it
  - b) Yes, though only if you knew him, you could never ask a total stranger
  - c) Yes, you would be quite happy to
- 3: One of your friends invites you to her birthday party. One of the other guests is a hunky, handsome guy, who is on his own. How would you approach him?
- a) You wouldn't, you would hope that he would spot you and make the first move
  - b) You'd move around the room so you can strike up a conversation
  - c) Ask your friend to introduce you
- 4: A single, handsome guy of about your age moves in next door to you. Would you go round and welcome him?
- a) No, you would let him introduce himself first
  - b) No, you would wait until you saw him in the street and then say hello
  - c) Yes, and you would take a small house

- warming gift with you
- 5: Having met a guy online you have been emailing each other for several weeks. Now he wants to meet up. Would you go on a date with him?
- a) Yes, it would be great fun to meet him
  - b) You would meet up with him, but would be nervous that you wouldn't find it so easy to get along in real life as you do on the net
  - c) No, you wouldn't have the confidence to meet up with a stranger, even though you had been in contact with him on the web
- 6: Your neighbour is on holiday and you have been looking after her dog. Each morning when you take the dog for a walk in the park you see a good-looking guy exercising his dog. He seems friendly, would you speak to him?
- a) No, you could never break the ice with a stranger
  - b) Yes, you would say good morning and hope he took things from there
  - c) Yes, you'd think of something to say about his dog
- 7: Your best friend offers to set you up on a blind date with her brother. Would you let her?
- a) Yes, because you have difficulty finding your own dates
  - b) No, you prefer to find your own dates
  - c) Yes, because it could be fun
- 8: How do you feel when a guy is very clearly flirting with you?
- a) Bemused, because it's not a happening you

- have very often
- b) Flattered, and keen to encourage him
- c) Embarrassed, but secretly pleased
- 9: Having agreed to go on a date with a guy, he asks you where you would like to go. Which of these venues would you choose?
- a) A restaurant, where you can chat
  - b) A movie, then you would have something in common to chat about afterwards
  - c) Bowling, where you will be mixing with other people, and won't feel so ill at ease at being with him
- 10: You meet a guy that you really like. How would you act with him?
- a) You'd flirt like an expert
  - b) You would try to flirt, but lack of experience would probably make you look like a fool
  - c) You would become embarrassed and tongue-tied
- HOW TO SCORE:
- |     |   |   |   |
|-----|---|---|---|
|     | a | b | c |
| 1.  | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 2.  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3.  | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 4.  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5.  | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6.  | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 7.  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8.  | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 9.  | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. | 3 | 2 | 1 |

What your score means:

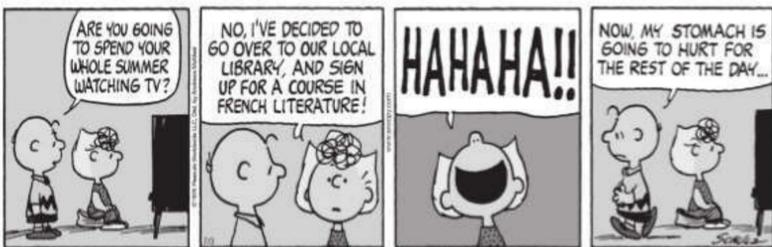
**Between 0-10:** You are so retreating when it comes to guys that quite often men don't even notice your presence. While there is no need to develop a super confident nature, you do need to break out of your shell. Try to build friendships with the opposite sex; this will stop you being so timid in the company of men. This will help you to build your confidence so you will no longer be shy with guys. **Between 11-20:** Normally you are not in the least shy with guys, but when you meet one that you are attracted to your poise fades away and you become faint-hearted and bashful. This isn't an insurmountable problem; you have it within your capabilities to easily overcome it. You need to make a conscious effort to stop yourself turning from a self-assured woman into a silly teenager. Eventually this will become second nature and your coyness will turn to confidence.

**Between 21-30:** Have you noticed men that you are sure like you, never make an approach? The answer could be that your self-assured nature and poise deters them from doing so. Guys don't always like their ladies to be as forward and uninhibited as you are. So, while it may be a struggle for you to suppress your confident nature, it may improve your romantic life if you were to feign shyness when you met a man you are attracted to.

GARFIELD by Jim Davis



PEANUTS by Charles M Schulz



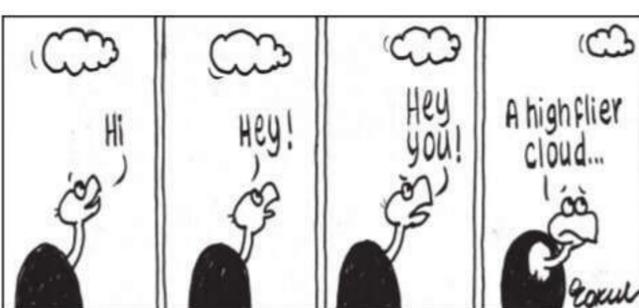
DO JUST ONE THING BY DANNY SEO

If investing in a pricey dehumidifier to help remedy a damp room isn't in the budget, try this simple idea to draw moisture out of a room: Use rock salt. The same de-icing salt used on driveways in winter can help pull moisture out of the air. All you have to do is drill some holes into the bottom of a small bucket and fill it up with rock salt. Place it inside a larger bucket and put it in the damp room. Over time, water will collect in the small bucket and drip into the larger one. Empty when it's full of water.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS by Arun Ramkumar



SMALL TALK by Gokul Gopalakrishnan



## Shortcuts

by Jeff Harris

# LOOK AT THE ATM

**BANK SHOT**  
Inventor Luther Simjian first patented ideas for his "bankomatic," an ATM-like machine, back in 1939. Later called the "bankograph," Simjian's invention was tested in 1961 by City Bank in New York. The project was discontinued after six months due to lack of interest.

**LAUGH ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK**  
Can you help this customer reach the ATM?

**BANKED**  
Automated teller machines, or ATMs, first appeared in the late 1960s. The idea of a machine dispensing cash was met with little enthusiasm by banking customers. Eventually, people began to warm up to the idea, and by the 1980s, ATMs began to gain popularity. Today, there are more than 3 million ATMs being used daily by millions of people around the world.

**CASH ADVANCE**  
One of the first cash-dispensing machines was installed in Japan in 1966. The first modern ATM was installed in 1967 by Barclays Bank in London. The first ATMs to use plastic cards with magnetic strips were installed in 1968. Friday is the busiest day for ATM use. The most isolated ATM in the world is located at McMurdo Station in Antarctica.

**WORD SEARCH**  
Can you find the hidden words? Search carefully because some words are backward or diagonal.

**QUESTION TIME**  
by Lalitha Balakrishnan

- Which of the following is featured on the US National Emblem?  
(a) Bald Eagle  
(b) Rattlesnake  
(c) Grizzly Bear
- "QANTAS" Airlines is associated with which country?  
(a) Canada  
(b) Australia  
(c) Qatar
- Which underwater apparatus is similar in its functioning to the howls used by whales to navigate the ocean?  
(a) Laser  
(b) GPS  
(c) Sonar
- What does PAN stand for?  
(a) Passport Account Number  
(b) Permanent Account Number  
(c) Pensioners Account Number
- Which of the following produced from sugarcane can be used as an additive in vehicle fuels?  
(a) Ethanol  
(b) Butanol  
(c) Methanol
- A kit is a young?  
(a) Hammer  
(b) Beaver  
(c) Hummingbird
- Holi is celebrated grandly at Majuli. In which state is Majuli?  
(a) Tripura  
(b) Assam  
(c) Bihar
- Name the lake in Maharashtra that was created as a result of a meteor collision.  
(a) Lonar lake  
(b) Futala lake  
(c) Venna lake
- What does Navy Day celebrated on December 4 annually commemorate?  
(a) Induction of first Indian built warship  
(b) Crippling of Karachi harbour in the 1971 war  
(c) Sinking of Pakistani submarine PNS Ghazi
- What is the name of the gas that leaked and was part of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy?  
(a) Carbon Monoxide  
(b) Nitrous oxide  
(c) Methyl isocyanate

**SUDOKU | EASY AND MEDIUM**

4		9	1	7	5			
	8		9	4				5
5	3			2				9
	1	7	6	9				
1				6			5	8
8				3	7		6	
			2	1	8	7		3

2	8			3	5			
5			8	7				
4				6				1
	3			4				
	4	1				3	9	
					8			1
3			9					6
				7	8			2
		2	1				4	8

Test your number crunching with our unique 2-in-1 puzzle

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any. Each w has a unique solution that can be reached logically without guessing

CHESS R Srinivasa Raghavan



**SOLUTION:** 1.Rg6+ (if 2. Kh2 Kf7! 3. Rg2 Qh3+! 4. Kxh3 Rh8 mate (4. Kh1 Qxg2 mate) 2. Kh1 Qh3+ 3. R2 Qxh2+! 4. Kxh2 Kf7 5. fxe5 Rh8+ 6. Qh6 Rhxh6 mate.

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER



Year: Krodhi  
Aani: TheiPirai /  
Jyeshtha: Krishna  
Paksha.  
Tithi: Navami till  
12.20 hrs.  
Nakshatra (Star):  
Revati till 07-35 hrs.  
Moon in Meen till  
07.35 hrs.  
Rahukaalam:  
04.30 pm to 06.00 pm  
Yamagantam:  
12 noon to 01.30 pm  
Gulikakalam:  
03.00 pm to 04.30 pm



**BIRTHSTONES  
CANCER**

(June 22 - July 23)  
Ruby is the birthstone which has a great impact on the relationships, financial matters in the life of a person. Ruby, the cancer birthstone is considered to be the gateway in the life of a wearer. Cancerians always want independence while doing anything. They are self-sufficient and do not want to depend on others, but for emotional support and encouragement they need motivation. This cancer birthstone possesses the energies of the ruling planet Mercury which brings major changes in the life of a wearer. Cancerians are emotional, they do need motivational support for encouragement. Ruby is considered to be the very good source of energy that provides emotion of love and helps the wearer to feel compassionate for all life. It fills the heart with sparkles. Ruby, the cancer birthstone includes the power of courage and self-esteem. It also helps the wearer in attaining spiritual and mental satisfaction.

**HOW THE CARDS FALL** Meenakshi Rani

meenakshirani33@gmail.com



**WHAT TO EXPECT, HOW TO COPE**

LOVE RELATIONSHIPS WORK HEALTH MONEY

**ARIES**



Truth has a way of surprising you as you stumble upon nuggets of information. A close aide proves to be a traitor-translator and envious of a growing friendship or bond. Some find messages intercepted or interpreted to suit their own agenda. Pulling away from 'influencers' you realise you must take charge of your love life. Regaining trust that dissolved on a whim involves taking a simpler route where you speak from the heart. Texts are passé; a personal visit fixes the cracks like Japanese 'Kintsugi'. What emerges is more precious like gold. Hop on the gravy train of taking a bag of edible goodies as a peace offering. Wear pinks and rose quartz for Venus.

**TAURUS**



There's plenty to celebrate as good news arrives in most quarters. A reunion, wedding, graduation or overseas posting has the makings of fun. Destination venues prove to be surprisingly affordable and you keep a party excited with a slew of activities. Some rekindle a friendship with a school or college mate and discover you still have a great deal of affection. A move towards pooling resources for a business or marriage starts to make sense. Some discover the joys of learning, philanthropy, lecturing or being a source of inspiration to others. A dazzled audience is one of the perks. Organise a book club or meet the author over food and drink and a book signing for extra brownie points. Wear yellows and citrine for Jupiter.

**GEMINI**



Ties meander on a road to recovery. You find the atmosphere crackle and then fizzle out as inertia and distance creep in. Someone takes you for granted and seems interested in cultivating a new source. Some 'watch the space' and play along while others refuse to play second fiddle. A trust deficit emerges as you find amusing loopholes in peoples' tales. A social 'loiterer' gushes over your hospitality but moves to a new table presumably for scraps of gossip. An old friend arrives to perk you up with visits to delightful places. A new social group gives you a shout out and expects you to join their 'high table'. Wear pastel green and yellows with yellow sapphire for Mercury and Jupiter.

**CANCER**



A turnaround in perceptions; you find yourself craving the assistance of someone you perceived to be iffy. A run in with the law is narrowly averted. Friends and old associations rise to the occasion and assist provided you ask them nicely. Regrouping after a stealth attack has you pick different horses to ride. Some come out of the closet even if it means having a difficult conversation at an inopportune time. A youngster lands you in a bind with a commitment that was hardly theirs to make. Someone damages property or a car in the garb of having been authorised by you. Learn a new hobby or skill that adds confidence. Wear purple, white and black with amethyst for Venus and Saturn.

**LEO**



A checkered past is all set to be aligned. You iron out differences with someone and discover you may have prejudged them. Youngsters decide to go slow in matters of the heart as they sense a fork in the road. Seniors have a bout of ill health and need tender loving care. An adult entrusted with responsibilities goes in an entirely different direction than expected. Locking horns with a newbie, new recruit or even articulate partner has you tone down rhetoric. Focus on fixer-uppers, repair and restoration; be it a mood, a project or a magic mantra. Wear accents of red and magenta with ivory, white with pink sapphire accessories for Venus.

**VIRGO**



Unfinished business has you arrive at the right place and right time. A trip turns out to be a 'reconnaissance' of sorts as you make notes seeing as you must make the journey once again. Friends come calling expecting forgiveness or favours. You are drawn to a suggestion that can change things almost overnight. A refusal is tempered down as someone considers your point of view. A 'poisoner' of the waters of love, friendship or loyalty now gets a hard taste of his/her own brew. Cocktails, mocktails, mixology, cooking, catering or a masterclass in gastronomy all speed up the alchemical process this week. Wear blue, white, chalcedony and pearl for the Moon.

**LIBRA**



A bolt from the blue; decisions arrive that have little to do with reason or expectations but more from feedback or knee-jerk responses. A wedding is postponed as someone decides to 'clear their head' while you get knotted in the time-space conundrum. Fame arrives in fits and starts; oddly giving you collective credit but individual blame. A relative is wilful about disposing assets and you sense a mutiny in the ranks. Neighbours have a request but worry about quid pro quo. Admire the scenery, art, museums or even architectural marvels. Wear yellow, gold and sandstone for the Sun.

**SCORPIO**



Extra responsibilities arrive and have you cross check your budget. What you lack in resources or time you make up for in enthusiasm. House guests make themselves comfortable even as you get about the daily business of living. A promotion arrives simultaneously and you are pressured to stay pleasant even if stressed. A relative makes an emotional demand that is easier said than done and you want to deliver. An elder is full of suggestions for a new addition to the family but comes off looking hard to please. Upgrade electronics; enjoy a sound and light show; upskill in technology and the multiverse may bend a few rules for you. Wear maroon and brown with hessonite and garnet for Uranus.

**SAGITTARIUS**



A veteran is back in the game and you extend to them a worthy welcome. Mergers, partnerships and collaborations are professional notches but unfold as valuable friendships too. Someone relies on you to pass on an important message faithfully. You decide to ditch protocol and jumpstart a process to help a friend. Office associates watch you with an eagle eye as you promise to undertake something. A triangle dissolves and a marriage is free of encumbrances. Watch live action sports, theatre and stunts or adrenaline pumping action to activate a chain reaction of momentum. Wear burnt sienna, beige and coral for Mars.

**CAPRICORN**



A reflection has you ponder the after-effects of speaking too frankly. A youngster does little with advice and instead stays fixated on the tone and tenor of a conversation. Sibling rivalry extends to emotional equanimity and handling of tiny issues even as parents add fuel by picking their favourite early in the game. A colleague or nemesis returns to dominate what you perceive to be your terrain. You are in for a surprise as instead of reprisals there are refreshing episodes of warmth. A figurative 'stalker' finds someone new to harass. Some are rid of a clingy or possessive acquaintance. Visit farmer's markets, art collectives and cottage industries for stabilizing, grounding energies. Wear dark blue and turquoise for Saturn.

**AQUARIUS**



A peace maker' turns into a social troublemaker. You are jolted out of your reverie with too many questions that are frankly your own business. Matchmaking options run dry and swiping on images feels cut and dry. Turning the clock back has you consider someone's feelings. Divorced Aquarians ponder the possibility of a second innings. A trip is devoid of comfort with a series of goof ups and crossed wires. Familiar turf starts to look good in myriad ways. A new connection turns out to be a kleptomaniac. Play some sports with humorous mock 'wagers' to get back your sense of humour. Wear pinstripe red and white with ruby for the Sun.

**PISCES**



There's some crying over spilt milk that has you wander off into the realm of regrets. You wonder if you should dash off a letter straight and to the point or colour and camouflage all that you believed went wrong in a friendship. You sense a firewall with a sweetheart that shows every sign of staying put. Faith in your affections and confidence that time will heal all has you hold on with a respectful dignity. A thaw arrives when a beloved senses you took a sensible decision rather than a sensitive one. Extended family indulges in politics over distribution of lolly or assets but at least two players stick up for you. A live concert brings everyone in tune with each other. Wear green and jade for Mercury.

**THE WEEK AHEAD** Peter Vidal

**Mar 21-Apr 20:** The first half of the week could be an excellent time for travel, but you are also urged to sort out any lingering legal questions. You'll become very much more insistent about asserting your rights after Wednesday, and Thursday and Friday could see you taking the right steps - at last!

**July 24-Aug 23:** While the month emphasises work, this week's stars promote changes and you'll become steadily more concerned with personal questions. If you get as much as possible accomplished early on, you'll then have very much more time to throw yourself into the social whirl.

**Nov 23-Dec 22:** Probably the most useful days for achieving your romantic ends are Monday and Thursday. If you are so inclined, a spot of emotional black-mail may be permissible! At the end of the week, the intervention of planets aligned suggests you can now let your hair down.

**Apr 21-May 21:** I hope circumstances are on your side, because home is the place to be this week, deep in the bosom of your family. Even if you travel, as you may around the end of the week, the most attractive destinations will be places which have a homely feel about them.

**Aug 24-Sept 23:** You should be aware that partners might be in a difficult mood around Wednesday to Friday but, in reality, they're challenging you to change your attitudes and preconceptions. It's time for a few experiments with your lifestyle.

**Dec-23 Jan 20:** To be brief, it's a period for organised fun and games, so enjoy the atmosphere and cast your cares aside. The only problem area could be work, where the storm clouds gather after the middle of the week, with possible flashes of lightning by Friday.

**May 22-June 21:** The promise of your horoscope is now being pushed forward by leaps and bounds. You might even discover that a loved one or younger relation comes up with just the idea you need to break the bank and set yourself up for life.

**Sept 24-Oct 23:** Romance seems to be inseparable from travel, so a holiday affair may be revived, or you may find that a hint of far-away places is necessary to get your juices flowing. A deeper look at your chart also indicates that the religious side of your life requires a little attention.

**Jan 21-Feb 19:** You're a perfectionist by nature, and that's why you're always trying to make the world, or at least your corner of it, a better place. Much of your energy this week will be directed towards sorting out other people's little problems, if only because there's no other way you can feel settled.

**June 22-July 23:** If you only do one thing this week, see that it is to break with the habits of a lifetime and reform your entire approach to money, setting yourself on a prosperous course. Even love affairs may stumble unless you back your desires with suitable amounts of cash.

**Oct 24-Nov 22:** You can't afford to be depressed for longer than five minutes. You have too much to achieve to waste any time, and the roots you put down at work, in love and at home will set you off on a new cycle of experience lasting anything up to eighteen months.

**Feb 20-Mar 20:** In relationships, two things count: your need for both emotional security and physical satisfaction. Hopefully, you'll find both in the same place. The beginning of the week looks set to be fairly bright and optimistic, especially on the social front.

**YOUR FORTUNE THIS WEEK** Amarakosha

What the planets say about your prospects for wealth, romance and professional success this week



**ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 19)**  
**Work:** You tend to work smart. You will remain calm in all conflicts and take advantage of some. Jobseekers will get a job in the travel industry.  
**Money:** Negotiation related to property or money will end well. Your clear expenses smoothly.  
**Couples:** If you are in two relationships, this will expose an intensely stressful situation.  
**Singles:** Your popularity will arise. Someone familiar may confess their feelings for you.

**TAURUS (Apr 20-May 20)**  
**Work:** You may busy with both career and side hustle jobs. An interesting opportunity to enter a foreign market may come to you.  
**Money:** Income is smooth and allows you to reward yourself. A long-lost item may return as well.  
**Couples:** You perceive your partner as overly critical or nagging more frequently.  
**Singles:** Someone you met at work and is older may develop feelings for you.

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20)**  
**Work:** You may busy with both career and side hustle jobs. An interesting opportunity to enter a foreign market may come to you.  
**Money:** You generate income smartly and find revenue which allows you to pamper yourself.  
**Couples:** There is joy and mutual support in your relationship.  
**Singles:** If you wish to ask someone out on a date, go ahead, you will get a positive response.

**CANCER (June 21-July 22)**  
**Work:** The opportunity to expand your network, create new and good connections may happen more often than expected.  
**Money:** An unexpected great fortune may come to you but don't reveal it to anybody.  
**Couples:** You have healthy communication and good mutual understanding.  
**Singles:** You may bump into a stranger whose appearance is exactly how you imagined it to be.

**LEO (July 23-Aug 22)**  
**Work:** You handle office politics and competition very well as you have support from your seniors.  
**Money:** Expenses over work-related social activities may be higher than expected.  
**Couples:** You may get quality time together and find swift resolution to disagreements.  
**Singles:** You may encounter someone perfectly aligned with your lifestyle and interests. You family may play cupid and introduce you to someone.

**VIRGO (Aug 23-Sept 22)**  
**Work:** You may have challenging assignments and more workload than expected.  
**Money:** You will make significant financial gains, along with potential side hustle opportunities.  
**Couples:** Be calm and mindful when communicating with your partner.  
**Singles:** You may encounter a stranger or a friend who has feelings for you but their clingy behaviour will make you uncomfortable.

**LIBRA (Sept 23-Oct 22)**  
**Work:** A thorny situation may allow you to showcase exceptional skills, earning admiration and respect from your colleagues.  
**Money:** Awaited money will arrive as expected, allowing you to optimise income and spending well.  
**Couples:** Healthy communication allows you to engage in meaningful discussions.  
**Singles:** Seeking transition from a casual to serious relationship may lead to disappointment.

**SCORPIO (Oct 23-Nov 21)**  
**Work:** You are motivated, focused, and proactive, and often complete tasks before deadlines.  
**Money:** Skillful budgeting and diligent saving efforts contribute to a sense of financial security and stability.  
**Couples:** You have mutual love, support and care for each other.  
**Singles:** If you wish to ask someone out for date, go ahead, you will get a good response.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22-Dec 21)**  
**Work:** Your competence may attract widespread support in the workplace, opening doors for unexpected opportunities.  
**Money:** If you have any debts, you will be able to repay some of them.  
**Couples:** The opportunity to experience a new shared hobby may arise.  
**Singles:** If you are in a love game and have a rival, you will be the winner.

**CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 19)**  
**Work:** You turn unexpected challenges into creative opportunities. Business pitching or job interviews will get a good result.  
**Money:** Income stream will be in good shape. Unexpected expenses may arise on the family front.  
**Couples:** Maintain composure and mindfulness in conversations with your partner.  
**Singles:** Exercise caution when using dating apps as there is a huge risk of encountering frauds.

**AQUARIUS (Jan 20-Feb 18)**  
**Work:** Technical glitches and sudden plan changes may escalate your workload. However, inspiration and guidance from higher-ups could help you.  
**Money:** Incoming funds may not be as large as expected but you'll manage expense smoothly.  
**Couples:** Despite challenges, you are like to remain connected to your partner.  
**Singles:** You are in a whirlwind of emotions as you may have feelings for someone who acts distant.

**PISCES (Feb 19-Mar 20)**  
**Work:** Adaptation to evolving technology and knowledge within your field will be crucial.  
**Money:** Unforeseen urgent expenses may arise. Avoid lending money and refrain from gambling.  
**Couples:** There will be joy and laughter in the relationship and a safe space for each other.  
**Singles:** Your charm may attract someone whose your age. An ex who left you with a painful breakup may attempt to re-enter your life.

**AUGURIES** Meenakshi Chawla  
Twitter: @Astrology\_us

Starting tomorrow we move to the second half of 2024 making the next six months more strenuous than the previous ones. July marks the beginning of the retrograde season of the planets. As more and more planets get closer to Earth, they create a greater impact on all of us. Saturn is the first one to go retrograde today until November 14th. It will mostly stay in the fiercest *Purvaabhadrapad Nakshatra*. While it is retrograde it will move backwards on the same ground that it covered while going forward from late March till June end. If we are able to revisit, reconnect and reevaluate, only then will we be able to finish some of our unfinished tasks from this earlier period of time. Saturn anyway is a tough taskmaster but it is tougher during its retrograde motion. As a slow-moving planet, its lessons are associated with personal responsibility, patience, discipline and creating instructive experiences such as

setbacks, annoyances and endings. Changing of plans and commitments are also some of its learnings. There could be some changes in the law-and-order situation. Problems with NEET could get murkier and oil and gold prices may rise. It is required to stay cautious for the next two weeks as Saturn in its backward motion will be making connections with Mars with same degree aspect. Both Mars and Saturn can stir up trouble making these days intense, contentious and controversial. Cases of fires and accidents could increase and be more severe. Keeping in mind the current social environment, it does not take much to feed the fires of bitterness and discord which is another reason to stay vigilant. Mars is at its highest profile in its own sign Aries where it fully expresses its energy in its field of action. On a positive note, this is good for sports, the military and the police forces. The strong Mars energy helps them in



taking quick actions as and when required. Mercury has moved to the most sensitive sign Cancer for the next twenty days in a fast and furious transit by coming under the strict aspect of Mars, *Rahu* and the outer planet Pluto. This transit will affect us harshly in many areas such as the IT sector, in air and road transport, communication, social media, health but most importantly in trade and business. Intense rain coupled with thunderstorms will be there at many places. One needs to be vigilant of online scams, forgery

or counterfeiting. Making this a busy week for most of us will be the meeting of Moon with many planets in its transit. It will be with Mars for the next two days, cautioning us not to overdo things impulsively or rashly as we may feel extra energetic and active. Going close to the Sun and giving us *Amavasya* on July 5th, Moon will end the week with Venus and Mercury. The malefic as well as benefic aspects of many planets on Moon can bring aggressive energy and we may overindulge and exaggerate.

# Don't Say Just Cheesesteak

Insta cuisine is eccentric at best and downright ridiculous at its worst. The 'Everything is Cake' trend is a beguiling social media trick of fantasy and reality: imagine you're looking at a flower pot packed with mud and blooms in the middle. A hand with a knife appears. Flower pot murder isn't even Agatha Christie's domain. It is epicurean legerdemain: the knife plunges into its clay victim which isn't clay, mind you. It is chocolate. And the metaphorical blood is coffee mousse, coffee ganache, espresso chocolate cake, buttercream and vanilla ice-cream.

This dessert is the pride of 1906, a fine dining restaurant in the sprawling Longwood Gardens, Brandywine Creek Valley just outside of Philadelphia. The main course has roasted beets, braised savoy cabbage

Philadelphia's food scene is a fiesta of big flavours and small neighbourhoods with a cool UNESCO twist

By JOANNA LOBO



The flower pot dessert at 1906; lamb barbacoa tacos; (below) Éclat



and a juicy crab omelette. Philly, best known for its cheesesteak—a power-packed sandwich of beef, provolone and onions—usually is not a star in the gourmet galaxy of the East Coast, especially with New York as a close neighbour. But if you go beyond this epic sandwich, many surprises are guaranteed.

**Shock and Awe:** Take

(Clockwise from top) Food at SkyHigh, Garden Restaurant, Isgro

Vedge, for instance. The restaurant highlights local vegetables. Rutabaga (a root vegetable) becomes a fondue served with pretzels; chiggia (a garden beet) is salt-roasted and served with an arepa pancake and a smidge of black garlic; the cauliflower gets a 'Chicken 65' upgrade with a tangy spicy sauce; carrot is cooked rilette style (similar to a confit) and placed on pumpernickel toast; and rhubarb becomes a cheesecake with a sweet pea ice-cream. Elsewhere, the Garden Restaurant at the Barnes, which looks out onto its blooming namesake, serves a comforting seasonal sweet corn and pumpkin squash soup; roast chicken paired with spring vegetables, herbs and horseradish *beurré blanc*; and a grilled salmon with puy lentils and

sweet pea.

Perhaps the most picturesque restaurant for a sundowner is SkyHigh at the Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia, where glass walls, mirrors and small waterfalls create a sensory dining space. The menu showcases Chef Jean-Georges' small plates that are big on flavour—a kale salad with mint and parmesan, crisp calamari with a piquant *salsa verde*, a stellar fried chicken with habanero butter, and seared salmon with mashed potato. Another rooftop space is El Techo, a bar and taqueria—a Mexican eatery which is devoted to tacos—doing *ceviche* with cucumber, mixed citrus, and coconut; crispy cauliflower tacos with salsa; and the freshest, crispest nachos served with an assortment of dips. For food hobos, *cebiche* (aka *sebiche* is a citrusy shell)

fish dish which has UNESCO rooting for it as a part of Peruvian traditional cuisine.

**Small is Beautiful:** Philly's small neighbourhoods is where wonders live. The countryside of Philadelphia has little stores where passionate foodies showcase their wares. At Éclat in West Chester, chef/owner Christopher Curtin—often called Philly's



Willy Wonka—will feed you his artisanal chocolate dreams such as earthy and bright porcini paired with thyme, and a lavender-infused bar. Nearby, at Taste of Olive, the walls are lined with stainless steel drums from which you can taste unique flavours of balsamic vinegars and olive oils. Look out for the caramel-like aged balsamic vinegar.

Kennett Square is a small, picturesque borough in Chester County, which accounts for over 60 per cent of the mushrooms grown in America, earning it the title of Mushroom Capital of the World. Predictably, mushrooms reign here. La Michoacana is a small shop at the end of the buzzing East State Street, coloured bright pink, and home to ice-cream such as sweet corn, avocado, guava and cheese, cookie dough, and of course, mushroom. The mushroom popsicle is vanilla at first but the chunks of the fungi soon announce themselves and make their mark. It tastes even better with a dusting of the homemade spice mix.

In South Philly, you can explore the vibrant neighbourhoods in the region with a multicultural food tour with Chef Jacquie Kelly. Highlights include a stop at Chef Cristina Martinez's South Philly Barbacoa. Her signature is the lamb barbacoa tacos, with an assortment of *agua frescas* in flavours like prickly pear, horchata and guava. The food tour ends at Isgro, a Philadelphia institution known for its cannoli, which is a secret family recipe that involves homemade wine, and an antique marble slab. It's a delicious crunchy, creamy sweet treat that's been satiating people since 1904.

In Philly, history isn't just found at the Liberty Bell, or at Independence Hall, but in its food fiesta too.

## Awaiting a Golden Moment

The idyll of Amritsar needs salvation from the chaos and clutter that marks the city's changed urban landscape

By RIDDDHI DOSHI

A drawing of the Durbar Sahib in Amritsar by William Carpenter in 1840 shows the Golden Temple as a towering structure with minarets rising through tree tops beside the placid waters of the Amrit Sarovar which was built by Guru Ram Das. In the drawing, a bunch of women walk alongside the *sarovar* and a big black bull ambles towards two urns. A lithograph shows the temple in its intricately carved glory, and a boatman on a small canoe hopefully looking at a couple of turbanned Sikhs. Amritsar then was an idyllic town, uncluttered by shoulder to shoulder shops selling *jootis* and temple merchandise, meshes of low lying electric lines and the clutter of a million pilgrims.

The jewel in Punjab's crown is without doubt the Golden Temple, the highest seat of Sikh faith. Like all Indian temple cities especially in the North, Amritsar is no longer the pastoral experience that inspired the fourth Guru. It is a sprawling ugly urban mess whose *chole kulcha* is a fave trademark even as the 400-year-old city's crumbling brick buildings, elaborate frescos, ornate doors and the colonial age Town Hall mourn a lost time. While on a heritage walk around the old bazars, one can visualise Guru Ramdass' shopkeepers working hard to make a new city, then called Ramdasapur.

In 1765, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia defeated Afghan



A drawing of the Durbar Sahib in Amritsar by William Carpenter; (below) the Lahori gate market



invader Ahmad Shah Abdali in the Battle of Amritsar and established the Katra Ahluwalia, a self-sufficient, small neighbourhood. "Such neighbourhoods were a common feature in the city," says heritage architect Gurmeet Rai. Like the Har Mandir Sahib and the other *sarovars* of Amritsar, the *katras* were also made of the Nanakshahi bricks—thin,

long, red blocks mostly found in Amritsar and Lahore; and named after Guru Nanak. Ahluwalia also constructed the Ahluwalia fort to safeguard his *katra*. The divine, however, is ever-present here; the Udashin Ashram Akhara Sanglawala, founded in 1771 remains a place for ascetics to meditate. The slow march of change eventually led from the idyll to commerce; in the 1900s, Marwari businessmen transformed the fort into a residence-cum-business precinct.

"Their *gaddis* (seats) and shops were placed in the front of the building and residences were at the back and on the

upper floors," says Balvinder Singh, former architecture professor of Guru Nanak Dev University.

Amritsar's built heritage is the last remnant of the city's eventful past, holding its ground amid the chaos of haggling tourists, cycle rickshaw bells and the smell of fried snacks. "It's fascinating to see the many narratives of Amritsar; of the Afghans, Sikhs and English in the city's old buildings," says Rai, who worked on restoring the Golden Temple on the now revamped Heritage Street. Martyrdom is part of



**Katra Ahluwalia**

Amritsar's legacy. The Gurudwara Saragarhi is dedicated to the 21 soldiers of the 36 Sikhs Battalion who lost their lives on September 12, 1897, protecting Fort Lockhart in Saragarhi (now in Pakistan), against 10,000 Pathan tribesmen. One of the three gurudwaras built to commemorate their sacrifice is in Amritsar in 1902.

But the buildings of the old bazars are crumbling. So are the brick buildings around *katra* structures. "Restoration must become part of the urban fabric; only then can heritage and the stories they hold survive," says Rai. For the Sikh community, which is proud of its heritage and giving back could step up and help restore the legacy of Guru Ramdass. Ambersar then can live as the city of gold, not of old, lost memories.

## QUICK TAKE



### SPOTTING THE FAKES

Japanese camera maker Nikon is working on a new technology that will authenticate images on its cameras, helping to distinguish them from sophisticated AI fakes. This move follows other camera makers, such as Sony and Leica, who are also adding in-camera digital signature technology to verify the authenticity of their images. The Leica M11-P, for example, includes Content Credentials built-in, enabling a picture to have detailed metadata included at the point of capture, acting as a verification stamp for the image. Sony, earlier this year, detailed how its machine-based digital signature technology works on the Alpha 9 Mark III camera when an image is captured. Earlier this year, Meta said it would apply a "Made with AI" label to identify images synthetically produced by generative AI systems at scale across its social media platforms.



### HISTORY BECKONS

Explore Hampi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, nestled along the banks of the Tungabhadra river. Hampi, once one of the world's wealthiest cities, now invites travellers to immerse themselves in its laid-back culture and unravel the mysteries of its history. With over 20 ancient landmarks and hilltops to explore, Hampi and the adjoining site of Badami promise a journey back in time amidst muddy roads and paddy fields, all beautifully preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India. Also, enjoy a coracle boat ride on the Tungabhadra river. The five-day tour will commence from Mumbai CST railway station with pickups from Dadar, Thane, Kalyan and Pune. From: July 12 to September 27; Price: ₹12,999 onwards; Details on BookMyShow

## A Rum Affair



(Clockwise) Tiki Puka Puka; Fog Cutter; Pacifico Tiki Grog

By RAUL DIAS

Cocktails are not really riding on the coat tails of their original base. Everything edible or drinkable has to be intriguing with legacy hints; tiki cocktails fit the bill. Hallmarked by summery and fresh ingredients, Polynesian-inspired libations channel island vibes like no other. Now Indian bars and restaurants are going tiki tock across the country.

Tiki cocktails are having their moment, "due to their vibrant flavours," says Mohit Badh, head mixologist at New Delhi's KHiKHi—a restobar famous for its tiki cocktail simply named 'TIKI Style'. It contains Bacardi Cuatrorum, coconut cream, gardenia syrup, passion fruit, mango and basil. The Indian love of rum also plays a significant role, being a key ingredient in many tiki drinks. "Additionally, the Indian palate appreciates the balance of sweetness and complexity found in these cocktails," believes Badh. Rum is a colonial hangover, pun intended, after the British officials started a distillery in Kasauli in Solan in Himachal Pradesh in 1855.

The newly launched Hawaiian-themed restobar Waikiki at Mumbai's Peninsula Grand Hotel has the apricot rum-based zombie, the coconut rum-based Island Grog (beverage manager Deepak Singh Koranga's personal favourite) and the white rum-based Tiki Puka Puka. "Among the array of tiki

cocktails on our menu, my personal favourite is 'The Secret of the Lost Lagoon'. It is a blend of premium rum, maraschino liqueur, Campari, pineapple juice, passion fruit syrup and freshly squeezed lime juice. All these create a harmonious explosion of flavours," says Souvik Bhattacharya, bartender at The St. Regis Goa Resort's Susegado, Seafood Grill & Bar.

The OTT presentation of tiki cocktails is part of its cachet. "Tiki cocktails are often as much a visual feast as they are a treat for the taste buds," says Stanley Fernandes, corporate bar manager at Kyma, Mumbai. A restobar with an outpost in Pune too that has an entire subsection of the menu dedicated to tiki cocktails. "Typically, these drinks are served in eye-catching, themed glassware such as tiki mugs, coconut shells, or carved pineapples. The garnishes are where tiki cocktails truly shine. They create a tropical paradise," he says.

The tiki cocktail started with the opening of the very first 'tiki' restaurant back in 1934 in Hollywood by Donn Beach. Regardless of who invented the Mai Tai, it is clear to see that Beach was the first person to start mixing fresh syrups, juices and rum. This practice is what makes cocktail a true tiki cocktail and was carried out throughout the renaissance of the tiki cocktail, leading to some of the great cocktails we now see plastered across almost every menu in every bar we ever go to.

# Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times

The *Bhagavata Purana*, also known as the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, is one of the eighteen *Mahapuranas* in Hindu literature. Comprising 12 books (cantos) and over 18,000 verses, it is revered for its devotional content, philosophical insights, and narrative richness. Traditionally attributed to the sage Vyasa, the *Bhagavata Purana* is a key text in *Vaishnavism*, celebrating the life and teachings of Lord Krishna. Despite its ancient origins, the *Bhagavata Purana* holds profound relevance in today's world, offering timeless wisdom and guidance on various aspects of life. Its emphasis on devotion, ethical living, mental well-being, social harmony, environmental awareness, and cultural expression provides a comprehensive framework for addressing contemporary challenges and enriching daily life.

As people continue to seek meaning and fulfilment amid the complexities of modern existence, the *Bhagavata Purana* serves as a guiding light, illuminating the path towards a more balanced and enriched life

By PALLABANANDA

**Philosophical and Spiritual Insights:** The *Bhagavata Purana* provides deep philosophical insights that remain pertinent today. Its central theme is the concept of *Bhakti*, or devotional love towards God, which transcends religious and cultural boundaries. The text emphasises that sincere devotion and love towards a higher power can lead to ultimate liberation (*moksha*), a principle that resonates with people seeking spiritual fulfilment in the modern age. The *Purana's* philosophical discussions, particularly in the third and 11th cantos, explore the nature of the self, the universe, and the Supreme Being. These teachings can be harmonised with contemporary spiritual practices and philosophical inquiries, offering a holistic approach to understanding existence and consciousness.

**Moral and Ethical Guidance:** The narratives within the *Bhagavata Purana* are replete with moral and ethical lessons.

Despite its ancient origins, the *Bhagavata Purana* holds profound relevance in today's world, offering timeless wisdom and guidance on life



earth as a divine entity, deserving of respect and care. Krishna's interaction with nature, such as his role as a cowherd and his miraculous lifting of the Govardhan Hill to protect the villagers from a storm, underscores the significance of environmental stewardship. These teachings are particularly relevant in the context of contemporary environmental challenges. The principles of sustainable living and respect for nature advocated by the *Bhagavata Purana* align with modern environmental movements, offering spiritual and ethical foundations for ecological conservation.

Stories of Lord Krishna's life, his interactions with devotees, and his role in the Mahabharata provide valuable insights into righteousness (*dharma*), justice, and the importance of maintaining moral integrity. For instance, the story of Prahlada and his unwavering devotion in the face of adversity illustrates the triumph of faith and virtue over tyranny and evil. Such narratives serve as moral compasses, guiding individuals in making ethical decisions in their personal and professional lives.

**Mental and Emotional Well-Being:** The teachings of the *Bhagavata Purana* promote the practice of mindfulness, meditation and the cultivation of a positive mindset. The practice of *Bhakti Yoga*, as

outlined in the *Purana*, involves engaging in acts of devotion, singing hymns and remembering the divine, which can lead to inner peace and emotional stability. Modern psychology increasingly acknowledges the benefits of such practices. Engaging in regular spiritual or devotional activities can reduce stress, enhance emotional resilience, and foster a sense of purpose and contentment. The *Bhagavata Purana*, therefore, offers practical tools for enhancing mental health in contemporary society.

**Social Harmony and Community Building:** The stories of Krishna's childhood in Vrindavan, where he lived among cowherds and shared a close bond with his community, highlight the importance of social cohesion and mutual support. In today's fragmented and fast-paced world, these values can help build stronger, more cohesive communities. By promoting principles of empathy, selflessness and communal harmony, the *Bhagavata Purana* provides a blueprint for creating a more compassionate and connected society.

**Cultural and Artistic Inspiration:** The *Bhagavata Purana* has been a rich source of inspiration for Indian art, music, dance, and literature. Its stories and themes have been depicted in various forms of classical Indian art, such as miniature paintings, *Bharatanatyam* dance, and devotional music (*bhajans*). This cultural heritage continues to thrive and evolve, with contemporary artists drawing inspiration from the text to create works that resonate with modern audiences. By preserving these expressions, the *Bhagavata Purana* helps maintain a connection with India's rich traditions while allowing for innovative reinterpretations that keep the narratives alive and relevant.

BELIEVE

## MODERN PANCHATANTRA AT WORK

In a jungle, there was a big fig tree with huge branches where a flock of geese lived happily. A little vine started growing at the tree's roots. A wise old goose warned, "Someday, this vine will be thick enough for someone to climb and kill us. We must get rid of it." The others laughed, "Silly old goose!" The vine grew. One day, while the geese were foraging, a hunter saw the tree and thick vine. He climbed up, laid a net around the nests, and quietly came down. That night, the geese got stuck in the net. The wise old goose reminded them of his warning. "What do we do now?" cried another goose. "Our only hope is to play dead. If the hunter thinks we are dead, he may throw us to the ground to take back his net. We must stay still until we are thrown out of the tree." The next morning, the hunter returned. Thinking the geese were dead, he threw them to the ground. When the hunter left, the geese flew back up. They pecked away at the vine until it fell, and they lived safely once again.



**MORAL:** Proactively addressing small issues today can prevent major problems tomorrow. Listen to experienced voices and take action early.

## EPICS FOR CHILDREN | GAURAV YADAV

### Playing Favourites Among Gods

Freedom of thought and belief has been an important feature of Indic religions since the beginning. The central truth has not been a 'revealed truth,' rather it has been an 'experienced truth.' Since everybody's experiences can be different, their truths can be different. Similarly, the god one prays to is also allowed to be different. There is the concept of *ishta devata* or personal or preferred god. One can choose any god as their favourite god and direct their prayers to them while respecting all other gods.



Many people choose Lord Vishnu and his avatars such as Sri Rama or Sri Krishna, while some choose Lord Shiva and his avatars like Hanuman. Some choose Surya or the Sun, while others worship different forms of the Goddess like Lakshmi, Parvati, Durga, or Kali. Many people choose Ganesha as their *ishta* because he is said to be easy to please. This was first popularised as '*Panchayatam Puja*'—worship of the five forms—by Adi Shankaracharya. A popular example given to explain the concept is that of the hand. It consists of one palm and five fingers. Just like all five fingers are coming out of the same palm, so all the five are forms of the same Supreme God.

While an *ishta devata* is at a personal level, there are also *kula devatas* and *devis* (ancestral deities of a clan), *gram devatas* and *devis* (village deities). These deities are worshipped at

important occasions like marriages and are supposed to protect the individual, clan, or village. It is not necessary that such deities must be from among the recognised gods only. Holy men and saints, even trees or rocks could be worshipped. There are virtually no restrictions on whom or what and why you choose!

Such a concept can also be found in Buddhism. For example, many forms of Buddhism prevalent in Tibet, Nepal and East Asia have the concept of *Yidam* (meditational deity), which a practitioner visualises and concentrates their mind on. Depending on the practitioner's own disposition, they could choose a *Yidam* that is 'peaceful' or 'wrathful' or 'neither peaceful nor wrathful.' Similarly in Japanese Buddhism, each sect has its own honzon (principal deity), whose images or statues are enshrined in their temples and households.

Having an *ishta devata* allows for more personal contact between the worshipper and the worshipped. While most religions describe the Supreme God as formless, it is difficult for a common person to visualise and meditate on a formless and featureless entity. Worshipping it in the form of an *ishta* helps the worshipper to focus on the individual characteristics of the *ishta*. The ability to choose one's personal god provides a unique democratisation and empowerment even in the field of divinity.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Amarnath Yatra



The much-anticipated Amarnath Yatra commenced on June 29 and will continue until August 19. This annual pilgrimage spans 52 days and attracts thousands of devotees who undertake the challenging journey to the Amarnath cave in Jammu and Kashmir. Situated at an altitude of 3,880 metres in the Himalayas, the cave is revered for its naturally formed ice Shiva Lingam.

According to legend, the Amarnath Cave is where Lord Shiva divulged the secret of immortality, the '*Amar Katha*', to his consort, Goddess Parvati. Seeking an isolated spot to ensure their conversation remained confidential, Shiva journeyed to this remote cave. En route, he discarded his worldly symbols: bull Nandi at Pahalgam, the Moon from his hair at Chandanwari, snakes at Sheshnag, son Ganesha at Mahagunas Parvat, and finally, the five elements (Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Sky) at Panjtarni.

Upon entering the cave, Lord Shiva began narrating the secret to Parvati. To guarantee absolute privacy, he created a Rudra named Kalagni and instructed it to annihilate any living being nearby. However, unbeknownst to them, a pair of mating pigeons overheard the entire conversation and were bestowed with immortality. To this day, many pilgrims report sightings of two pigeons inside the cave, believed to be the same immortal birds from the legend.

The pilgrimage, beginning from base camps at Pahalgam or Baltal, involves an arduous trek over challenging terrain, culminating in the darshan of the Shiva Lingam.

## AMMASPEAK Mata Amritanandamayi



### Understanding Tragedy With Love

Children, disaster unexpectedly strikes the lives of many of us. The sudden death of a loved one or unbearable financial losses can make us lose our mental balance. We may then feel overwhelmed by sorrow and disappointment.

If anyone is responsible for this pain, we might feel intense anger towards that person. That anger can lead to a strong desire to take revenge. However, if we are careful not to act indiscriminately, we can lead the mind back to the right path.

To do so, we must calm the mind at once. Only a calm mind can think clearly. Strong and uncontrolled emotions affect one's discernment and impair one's memory. Hence, instead of reacting impulsively, we must calm the mind down first so that we can think clearly and ascertain the causes for the disaster that befell us.

Amma remembers a story. A drunken driver knocked into a young man, killing him. The young man's mother could not bear the sorrow of her son's untimely death. For days on end, she remained lost in memories of her beloved son. She was overwhelmed by grief, which slowly transformed into the desire for revenge. She

decided to kill the driver to avenge her son's death.

But when her mind became calmer, another thought entered her mind: "If I kill him, will my son come back to life? No. Not only that, I suffered unbearable anguish because of my son's death. If I kill that man, his mother and loved ones will suffer so much. Why must they grieve because of me? No one else should suffer the misfortune I did."

She reflected further: "The car knocked my son down because the driver was drunk. If he wasn't drunk, this wouldn't have happened. So, the real cause of this tragedy is alcohol. If I launch a campaign to increase awareness among people of the dangers of drinking and driving, such accidents can be reduced."

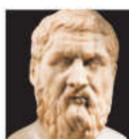
She enlisted the help of some friends to increase awareness among people about the perils of alcoholism; she spent the rest of her life in this way. Her earnest efforts led to the creation of a large organisation dedicated to helping addicts recover.

If she had killed the man who killed her son, how much harm would have befallen her! Not just that, the world would not have benefited in any way from the act of revenge. Once she realised the real cause of her son's death, she was able to harness her anger to serve a noble purpose. This benefitted both her and society.

We usually do not try to find out the real cause of our problems. This is why they never cease. If we calmly seek their real causes, like the mother in this story did, we can channel our anger and desire for revenge along an outlet that benefits society. If we strive to find out calmly the reasons for our problems instead of reacting impulsively, we will be able to do a lot of good in the world.

The writer is a world-renowned spiritual leader and humanitarian.

## MASTER MIND



"The worst of all deceptions is self-deception." ~ PLATO

# Love in the Time of Terror

A riveting tale of cops and jihadis set in panic-ridden Mumbai, with an unlikely story of endearment at its core



**The Black Orphan**  
By: S Hussain Zaidi  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Pages: 249  
Price: ₹399

By IRAM ARA IBRAHIM

The world's most dreaded terrorist has been put down by a US Navy SEAL team. The Americans have avenged 9/11, but forgotten to share the credit with the Indian spies, who helped them with specific intel, especially DIG Ajay Rajvardhan from the National Investigation Agency (NIA). But, our man is a hero. Despite the oversight, as he gets busy saving his own city, Mumbai, from the evil plans of those who want to avenge Osama bin Laden by bumping off India's top nuclear scientists, one by one, and planning to reduce Mumbai to rubble.

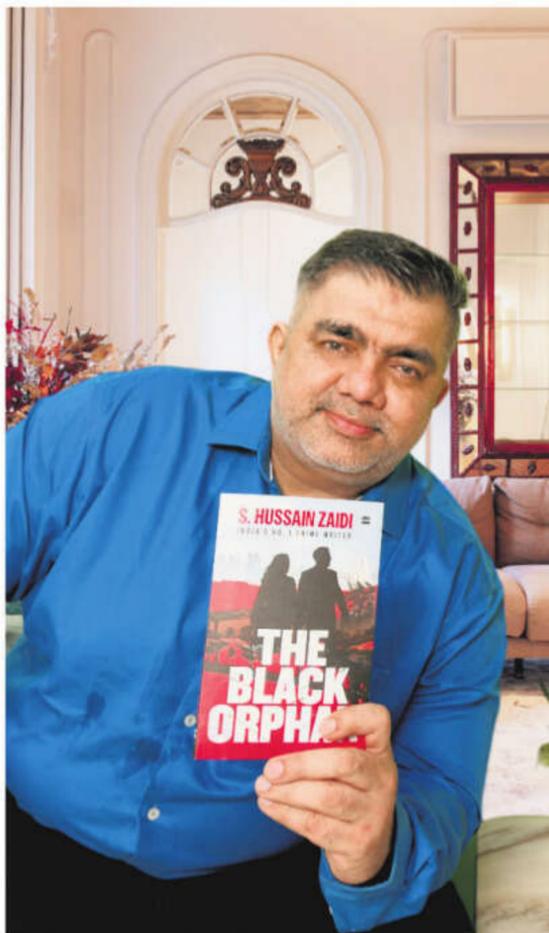
These new faces of terror are harder to track. Unlike bin Laden, their faces are not on the front pages of international newspapers or flashed on TV screens. They are women in burqas, trained by the world's best to unleash hell on unsuspecting citizens of Mumbai in the name of jihad. And, it is left to Rajvardhan to stop them before the city goes up in flames again.

India's top crime-fiction writer and former investigative journalist S Hussain Zaidi paints this dark world in his new book, *The Black Orphan*, where spies and serial killers,

jihadis in burqas, and hard-boiled cops rub shoulders with each other as you breathlessly pace through the pages to get to the end of the story.

This is a world Zaidi knows well, having covered the Mumbai underworld in his reporting years, and making a mark for himself as one of the best in the tribe of women and men, who have risked life and limb for a scoop in the narrow bylanes where encounter cops and hitmen traded bullets. What makes *The Black Orphan* stand out, however, is not your regular *Singham*-style supercop story, but the subplot of blind love and passion between Rajvardhan and Asiya Khan, a gorgeous lawyer representing a young woman who has been charged with terrorism by the NIA. Can the two unlikely characters, divided by religion, profession and notions of justice, keep differences aside to become one?

*The Black Orphan* is too thin a book, and too fast a read to spend time on these two unlikely lovers, but the most riveting passages in book are those that detail how a battle-hardened cop falls so dangerously in love with a woman he barely knows, and keeps all his intelligence-gathering skills aside as he fails to



S Hussain Zaidi with his latest book

stop himself from pursuing an adversary in the court of law. On her part, Asiya Khan leads him on, with just the right dose of encouragement, once she realises his intent. Their love is sealed with a kiss as Rajvardhan defuses a bomb planted at a Mumbai police event where Asiya is also present.

But, can the two carry on in love in a world so divided by terror? Are the main characters in the book who they say they are, or are they hiding terrible truths? Can one good cop save a city from an international terror racket? *The Black Orphan* will not let you rest till you reach the last page, and have all the answers.

WRITE VIEW

## 'I'll Never Completely Deviate from Crime Writing'

S Hussain Zaidi speaks to Deepali Singh about his new book and using fiction to make facts visible

**You have acknowledged in the author's note that the biggest source of inspiration for your fiction is fact. Why is that?**

I love to rely on facts, because fact is stranger than fiction. Where would I get a better, stranger or crazier premise to base my fiction on, than in fact itself? It is also my chance to bring these stories to light, to give some important facts their due, the visibility they deserve.

**There are many plot lines and narratives in *The Black Orphan*. What was the main inspiration for this story?**

There was no single inspiration. It came from many places: the unsung stories of our intelligence operatives, the new and developing threats to India, the impact of past events on the present and future and more. All of these became plot lines and narratives. A writer's challenge is to weave all these with a suitable thread.

**'Inspiration came from the unsung stories of our operatives, new threats to India and more'**

experiment a lot, push myself out of my action-and-suspense-only comfort zone, and helped me find new sides to myself. I can only hope the reader is as charitable to my romantic side as they are to the action-writer side.

**Crime is a popular genre, especially in literature. Why do true-crime stories have such an appeal for readers? After being known as India's No 1 crime writer, do you see yourself ever deviating from the genre?**

I may experiment from time to time, but I don't think I'll ever completely deviate. My writing comes from my experience as a crime reporter, and you can't take something like that out of a person. Why just crime; any reporter on any beat is always mired in it in one way or another for the rest of his or her life. Would you ever be able to look at a book without thinking of questions to ask its writer?

**Is there another book in the pipeline? If yes, can you share some details?**

With me, there is always another book. But, that is all I am at liberty to reveal at the moment, not just because of Non-Disclosure Agreements, but also because a story may begin as a book and end up as something else. It has happened before, and it happens a lot.

**There is also a love story in the middle of all the terror. What made add romance to crime?**

My earlier fiction, *Eleventh Hour*, too had a love story, which continued in its sequels, *Endgame* and *Zero Day*. But to be fair, *The Black Orphan* is the first time that a love story is so central to the plot, and affects much of it. It let me

READ

This is a world the author knows well, having covered the Mumbai underworld in his reporting years

BOOK TASTINGS



**Banker by Chance, Leader by Choice**  
By: Shiv B Singh  
Publisher: Rupa  
Pages: 232  
Price: ₹595

A book encapsulating the author's transformative journey, illustrating how he managed the metamorphosis by proactively riding the wave of change



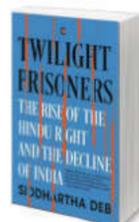
**Dalithan**  
By: K K Kochu  
Translated by: Radhika P Menon  
Publisher: Speaking Tiger  
Pages: 344  
Price: ₹599

Not merely a gritty story of an individual, this is also a thought-provoking history of modern Kerala, from a subaltern perspective



**Sky High**  
By: Tarun Shukla  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Pages: 272  
Price: ₹699

Based on years of research, interviews and authoritative data, the book analyses Indian commercial aviation, decipher the secret behind IndiGo's success and the likely future for the airline



**Twilight Prisoners**  
By: Siddhartha Deb  
Publisher: Westland  
Pages: 288  
Price: ₹599

An absorbing and disturbing portrait of India as a religious fundamentalist dystopia as the country continues to descend into authoritarianism, painted in precise language and with an eye for detail

ATTENTION PUBLISHERS: PLEASE SEND YOUR BOOKS FOR REVIEW TO THE SUNDAY STANDARD, Express Building (Third Floor), 9-10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110002. THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS, Express Gardens, 29, 2nd Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate, Chennai 600058

## The Many Mosaics of Meaning

A tale of a death-obsessed writer told in prose that nudges readers to feel inexplicable emotions



**Martyr!**  
By: Kaveh Akbar  
Publisher: Picador  
Pages: 352  
Price: ₹399

By MAYANK JAIN PARICHHA

Since its release, Iranian American poet Kaveh Akbar's debut novel *Martyr!* has been creating waves, and for all the right reasons. The story of Cyrus Shams—the logophile (lover of words), and orphan protagonist, who strives, albeit exhaustively, to salvage or heal his world through art—is told in a prose that helps the reader feel things that are otherwise rendered ineffable.

Kaveh attempts to write about martyrdom but ultimately rejects its possibility. As the novel progresses, we see Cyrus experience exhaustion and ennui with art and writing. But he stays at it. Even if art can't reprieve—it can't bring back his parents—it offers him something like "palliative care". It serves as an elegy that gives him room to lament, grieve, and eventually, feel better.

Cyrus was brought up in America by his father, Ali Shams, after the death of his

mother. He was a baby when they moved to the US from Iran. His father tried to hide his Iranian identity since he believed that "announcing his Iranian-ness was to invite violence, harm". He worked as a labourer in a chicken farm, and made sure his son got a good education, until he died of a sudden stroke when Cyrus was in college.

The novel grows on a reader. Cyrus's quest, and struggle with art, feels personal as he delves into his family history, almost remaining oblivious to his personal life. We realise that he is obsessed with death. When he finds out that his mother's Iran Air flight 655 was accidentally shot down by *USS Vincennes* (a US Navy missile cruiser), and he wanted to define what her death should be called, he questions, ".....so was she a martyr? There has to be a definition of the word that can accommodate her. That's what I am after."

The novel's structure is mosaic, with each chapter containing something contemplative, expressed in

a meditative language, that is not always capable of putting the exact words to the emotions. Look at how Cyrus's mother Roya Shams describes her friend Leila: "A horse is beautiful, a mountain or an ocean is beautiful. Leila, in those sunglasses, was something else. Something beyond language." In another instance, on discovering the word 'sonder', which means the realisation that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own, Cyrus thinks, "Incredibly, how naming something took nothing away from its stunner. Language could be totally impotent like that."

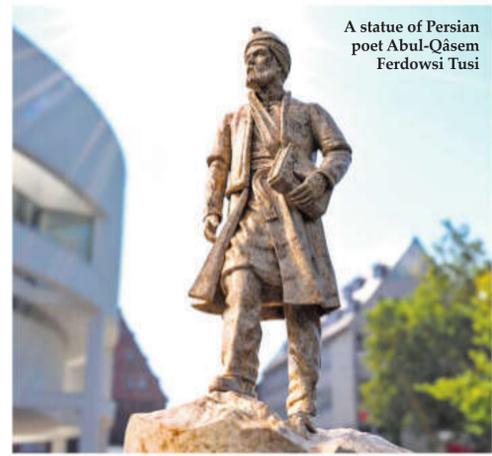
Akbar's narrator changes in each chapter, which

somehow makes them incandescent. Cyrus's meeting with a cancer-stricken artist Orkideh, who is spending the last days of her life in the Brooklyn Museum, helps him face his questions about martyrdom, life and death. Akbar beautifully captures their meeting. The tenderness and affection between them remind Cyrus of his days with grief. Never would a reader imagine that this meeting hid behind it a mystery, an interesting twist to the tale. And, here lies Akbar's dexterity as a writer.

Until this point, the novel was beautifully meandering into the uncertain, without feeling like an atypical novel. But, Akbar had more in store. As he delves into history to

tell the story of Abul-Qāsem Ferdowsi Tusi, the author informs his readers that the great Persian poet's epic poem—*The Shahnameh: The Book of Kings*—serves as an interlude to the tale. The author also includes anecdotes and ironic tales of misery from Iran, such as the story of a boy named Alireza, who adopted his brother's name after his death in order to advance in studies. As a result, he served both his and his brother's two-year conscription and was killed during the latter. Interestingly, majority of Akbar's characters are queer, although whether the decision was deliberate or it was simply the demand of the narrative is unclear. There's Cyrus's unhappily married mother, who was in love with his husband's best friend's wife. Then, there's Cyrus's love affair with his best friend and roommate Zee Novak, which exists at a subconscious level.

*Martyr!* is by far among the best novels to have come out this year. The sincerity of the prose can perhaps be attributed to the evident parallels between Akbar and his protagonist. Only one decision separates the two. While Cyrus drops the idea of writing due to an inability of language, Akbar takes to it to write dazzling poetry and prose. That *Martyr!* has been shortlisted for this year's Waterstones Debut Fiction Prize, is therefore, no surprise.



A statue of Persian poet Abul-Qāsem Ferdowsi Tusi

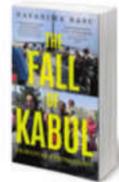
## The Kill Zones

By NANDITA BOSE

Whether in real life or fiction, most Indians have grown up knowing (of) *kabuliwalas*. When global superpowers chose Afghanistan to stage their war drama, India became too close to the violence geographically and metaphorically. News outlets as well as social media provided the headlines and snapshots: the retreat of the US military, an unstable government, and its takeover by Taliban amid chaos. This first-person account, *The Fall of Kabul* by Nayanima Basu, is an in-depth view of the country's troubled history, a ground report from a media person and an insightful and deeply personal record of those turbulent days.

In a sense, the book is a journal and a unique travelogue on adrenaline; instead of sightseeing there's war; ambush, automatic rifles and dead bodies. The menace of the situation is so palpable that it seems foolhardy of the author to have ventured into zones from which the strongest flee, despite well-meaning diplomats and media personnel dissuading her. Yet, she connects to the place, the people, their travails and the human spirit indomitable despite utter uncertainty. Further, she outlines, in stunning clarity, the role of other nations in the internal politics of Afghanistan.

It's such a subcontinental story: only to us can it make sense that army soldiers had been at their posts despite months of no salaries. The common man ventures no opinion unless paid handsomely in dollars. While people fear for their lives, they go about their business mimicking normalcy. Hours from loss of homeland, livelihood, family, future and security, folks seem resigned, yet dignified in their hopelessness. To their conversations, they bring sparks of optimism. Over and over,



**The Fall of Kabul**  
By: Nayanima Basu  
Publisher: Bloomsbury  
Pages: 198  
Price: ₹599

the question from unexpected quarters: will I get a visa to India? Once it is someone from former premier Hekmatiyar's inner circle.

The author's journalistic credentials permit her to speak to the powerful, and soon-to-be powerless. Sources within the Taliban, and others high up in the Ministry of Defence, equally provide insight into the events and their aftermath. Throughout, the language shimmers in its honesty and description, taking the reader along. "Even at night, while I sat beside the window of my room in the Serena, sipping coffee, I saw American bombers and C-17s fly overhead, one after the other... Eventually, we would leave this country, I thought to myself, but what about the Afghans we will leave behind? What about that mother in the refugee camp who looked at me helplessly? What about the girl I met at Mazar airport who came to Kabul with me on the same flight hoping to make it to India someday for a better future?"

Decades of US occupation have altered Afghanistan. It has altered the Taliban who are now stronger, equipped to run a nation according to their goals. Whether Soviets, the Americans, their own warlords-turned-politicians, or now the Taliban, the war games continue. The Afghan people roll with the changes; aware no matter who, no ruler puts them first. This jewel of a book is more than an eye-opener.

# All That Glitters is Not Gold

There was a time when Big Jo's was a big name in New Delhi as the capital's first air-conditioned, multi-storeyed department store. But then time, tide and liberalisation swept in and sent it away to the museum of old memories. Owner Sanjeev Kumar Jain, and his sons Samir and Sidharth, got busy with their real estate business and silver jewellery manufacturing for the export market.

But, the love for retail clearly remained, and earlier this year, the Jain brothers came back into the Indian and Middle East market with a line of 92.5 sterling silver jewellery, fittingly called Miss Jo. They started with an experiential store in Delhi's tony, Khan Market, and simultaneously launched their website.

The launch makes sense. Having worked in the export market for years, the Jains have a good understanding of the silver jewellery category. They also have an in-house design studio, their own

The Big Jo's family returns to its old stomping grounds of retail with an eclectic range of hallmarked silver jewellery

By YEZDEE KAYE

Samir (left) and Sidharth Jain



manufacturing facility and, most importantly, the market know-how. Samir says, "The thesis for my PhD was on the global silver jewellery market, and I covered manufacturing techniques, bullion trends, branding and pricing. Given my background, I handle production and business development while my brother handles finance and operations. Both of us see silver as 'the new gold', given its inherent qualities, its ability to be moulded into interesting shapes and its affordability vis-a-vis gold."

Miss Jo currently has five collections: Signature, Secret Garden, Kaleidoscope, Enchanted Forest and Objet d'Art. All the lines offer 40-50 designs across earrings, bracelets, necklaces, rings and brooches. "Every collection is distinct in the way it is made, its visual appeal and the stones it uses," says Samir.

The Signature Collection tells a clean story in silver and white, with clear zircons set in silver. It's perfect for people with an affinity, if not the resources, for diamonds. Kaleido-

scope, as the name suggests, taps into colour, using rubies, emeralds and sapphires alongside clear zircons. Secret Garden pays homage to nature with pastel-hued rings, earrings and brooches shaped like dainty flowers and gossamer wings encrusted with tiny, sparkling stones.

Enchanted Forest takes the nature story a step further and goes deeper and darker; here, you will find butterflies, bees and bugs adorned with invisible-set stones in blood red, fuchsia, emerald green and deep moody

blue. The Objet d'Art Collection, packed with bold, vibrant, geometric-shaped gemstones set in gold-plated silver, is in-your-face glam. Think rock concerts, cocktail parties and soirees on the beach. Or #WearItLoud, as the brand puts it.

Samir says the Signature Collection is currently performing the best commercially. That's understandable, given the versatility of the tennis bracelets, hoop earrings and harmony rings that can easily make the transition from conferences to cruises. But, if you check out what the influencers are wearing—and promoting—

on social media, you will find it's the colour-drenched, flamboyant Objet d'Art that rules.

So who is the target audience, we ask. Samir says Miss Jo is not targeting any particular age group or income group. "Anyone with a fine eye for jewellery is our client," he says.

Some of the pieces bring Swarovski to mind. Samir admits it is immediate competition. But, he adds, there are not too many organised players in India who are creating BIS-hallmarked, nickel-free jewellery in sterling silver. "Marketing gurus say, 'If you cannot be the first in a category, then create a category in which you are the first.' That's what we are doing with Miss Jo."

Currently, the brand is available in India and the Middle East. The products are reportedly selling the best in Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi as well as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. But there are 20 more stores coming in the next few years at premium high streets and malls across the metros and at the major airports.

If all goes well, little Miss Jo may soon become another Big Jo.

FLAUNT

## The Sweet Smells of Summer

Choose from an array of seasonal fragrances to give your home an aromatic upgrade

By SHAMPA DHAR-KAMATH

Once upon a time, Indian homes—particularly those in the east—came alive to the fragrance of frankincense every evening. A brass or earthen fumer carrying incense layered atop slow-burning coconut husk was carried from room to room, suffusing the home with an evocative, fragrant smoke.



Parijat, the fragrant white flower with an orange heart, is named after a mythical princess who is believed to have fallen in love with the Sun God. It blooms through the night and falls off the tree at dawn, and is the only flower that can be offered to the Gods despite being picked up from the ground. Hence, its other name, Harsingar. Pour a few drops of Forest Essentials' Parijat diffuser oil onto a burner. Add a little water and let it do its magic as it disperses through the air. Price: ₹1,496 for 15 ml



Remember the first smell of rain, when drops of water land on thirsty soil and send an earthy aroma shooting into the air? Now imagine that rain in a forest, bottled especially for you. That's what Isak Fragrances' Forest Rain—which is as much for you as your surroundings—smells like. The perfume begins with a smell of petrichor mixed with lemon and lilac and ends with hints of amber, vanilla and musk. Quantity: ₹2,900 for 50 ml



For those who want the fragrance without the fuss, Essent Living offers organic *loban agarbattis*. The charcoal-free incense sticks are made from upcycled waste flowers (that would otherwise end up in rivers), soaked in 100 per cent natural oils and hand-rolled. The *loban*, which has a naturally calming aroma, is extracted from the resin of the *Boswellia* tree. Each box contains a holder and 40 sticks with a burning time of 40-45 minutes. Price: ₹150 a box



Given its divine fragrance, it's not surprising that jasmine was one of the first plants to be cultivated for perfume. But, did you know that jasmine is not just a visual and olfactory delight? Breathing in the aroma can also help calm and clear the mind, release tension, improve mood and—wait for it—reduce food cravings. Good Earth sells French perfume house Geodesis's delightfully fragrant wax candles infused with jasmine from South India. Price: ₹3,500 for 180 gm

Another offering that's as much for you as your surroundings is the Raat Ki Rani *attar*, which smells as if Raahi Perfumes has caught the essence of a moonlit garden from Kannauj and bottled it just for you. Its makers call it a seductive blend of floral elegance that's guaranteed to transport you to a world of enchantment. Try it, when you want to make a lingering statement wherever you go. ₹1,489 for 12ml



Atomicc Code's Awaken home fragrance is the brainchild of certified healer and product designer Gautam Seth (of Klove fame), and is designed as a pick-me-up. Guaranteed to energise you and lift your spirits this dreadfully hot summer, the fragrance contains three key ingredients: rose, grapefruit and bergamot. Rose lends Awaken its anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and astringent properties. The grapefruit, which is equal parts sour and sweet, gives Awaken its citrusy quality while the bergamot is believed to help reduce anxiety. Price: ₹2,600 for 100 ml



### HOW TO

## Polish Your Silver at Home



Most wearers of silver jewellery polish their pieces with toothpaste when they start looking dull. They squirt the paste on to the jewellery, rub it in with their fingers, and then wash it well under running water. It comes out shining and smells deliciously minty when worn.

Some others prefer to use tomato ketchup. They put a dab of ketchup on a paper towel, and rub the tarnished pieces with the towel. If the pieces are extra black, they wrap them in the ketchup-covered paper and let them sit for 15 minutes. When the time is up, they remove the silver articles from the paper, wipe them with a soft cloth and then rinse them clean. The ketchup users claim their method works better, but they admit that the pieces emerging from the other method smell better.

But there's a third—more elaborate—method on which all parties are sold. This works best for bigger pieces of silver, like a bowl or candle stand.

You need four things for this: a pan, water, aluminium foil and baking soda. Place the foil at the bottom of the pan and fill it with enough water to cover whatever silver item you want to clean, measuring out the water in cups. Bring the water to a boil and then add one tablespoon of baking soda per cup of water that you've poured into the pan. Then, slowly slip your silver item into the pan, ensuring that it touches the foil. Let it sit for two to 10 minutes, depending on the level of tarnish, and then remove it from the water with tongs. Voila. Prepare to be dazzled.



# 'Comfortable Can be Boring'

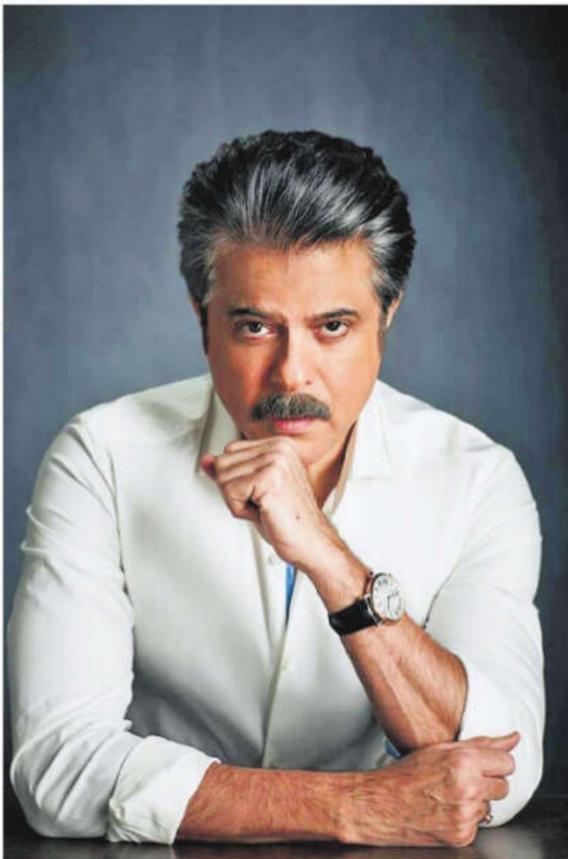
You have done shows like *24* and *The Night Manager*. Recently, you were also part of the documentary mini-series, *Rennervations* with Jeremy Renner. Did that help prepare you for *Big Boss OTT 3*?

*Rennervations* is kind of a reality-cum-fiction production. It was completely unscripted. That experience has helped me understand the format of *Big Boss*, where one needs to react to the situations impromptu, and make it interesting for viewers.

Your recent projects in the fiction space—films or OTT—have received a lot of appreciation. Why opt for a reality show at this time?

Every show and movie was a different experience for me. They kept me excited and I learned a lot. They also helped me meet new and young talent. Otherwise, you can get inside a cocoon, become comfortable doing what you're doing, and life becomes too boring. You have to find excitement in doing things you have never done. After spending so many years in this business, I would like to explore things that are out of my comfort zone. For instance, *Rennervations* let me work with some of the best talent in the world. I learned a lot from it and I applied that learning in *The Night Manager*. When you do something, which is scripted, then it has to be on a certain scale—

Anil Kapoor speaks to Deepali Singh about stepping into Salman Khan's shoes to host *Big Boss OTT 3*, comparisons with the *Ek Tha Tiger* actor, and his perennially positive mindset



'Salman and I are like brothers. We love each other. I feel he's always happy whenever I do something exciting. I know that he's too excited that I'm doing this'

films such as *Animal* and *Fighter* had that scale. On OTT platforms, however, the non-scripted shows work better.

Before coming on board, were you worried about comparisons with Salman Khan, who is synonymous with the show?

If we start thinking of comparisons, we will not be able to do anything. The

greatest basketball players, football players, cricketers or actors or businessmen might have also been told that there were people before them and that they cannot match up to them. If they had lived with that fear, they would have had to let go of the opportunities that came their way. You have to be ready to fail too, and then move ahead and do the next thing. I move

forward with a positive headspace for all endeavours, whether it is *24*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Mashaal* or *Woh Saat Din*. With *Mashaal*, I had wondered how I am going to work with Dilip Kumar. Or with Naseer in *Woh Saat Din*. I have questioned how I could do a Telugu or Kannada film, when I did not know the languages. But, I did them because I was convinced and simply took these opportunities as jobs.

Did Salman Khan give you any advice or suggestions on hosting the show?

He just said that if someone misbehaves, we will take care of it together (*laughs*). On a serious note, we're like brothers. We love each other. I feel he's always happy whenever I do something exciting. I know that he's excited that I'm doing this.

Lately, the audience has been seeing a diverse range of roles from you, whether it is *Jugg Jeyo*, *The Night Manager*, *Animal* or *Fighter*. How much of this choosing process did you plan ahead?

Everything has been organic. If you plan too much, it doesn't work. I tell youngsters too, to not be scared of taking risks. What difference does it make if something doesn't work? One just has to be on the battlefield, meet people and keep working hard. Work is worship. When you're unwell, work; when you're unfit, work; when you're depressed, work. And, everything will be fine. That's what I believe in.

You have started prep for Suresh Triveni's action film *Subedaar*. There's also a sci-fi comedy adapted from Malayalam film *Android Kunjappam* version 5.25. What can you tell us about them?

It is correct that I am doing these two films. Rest, I can only share once I have more information.

BUZZ CUT



SEEING THE LIGHT

Fresh from her electoral win in Mandi, **Kangana Ranaut** is back to her old stomping grounds of acting, and the first thing on her agenda is announcing the release date of *Emergency*, a biopic of Indira Gandhi, which has faced several delays in the past. It is now slated for November 24.



STEP UP

**Maitreyi Ramakrishnan**, known for her role as Devi in *Never Have I Ever*, has joined the cast of *Freaky Friday 2*. The actor will star in the sequel to the 2003 Disney comedy favourite alongside several original cast members, including Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis. Slated for release next year, it is being helmed by Nisha Ganatra.

KAMAL HAASAN ON TAKING A YEAR TO SIGN KALKI 2898 AD



'Self-doubt comes, you know.'



Poster of *Big Boss OTT 3*

## Equal in Khaki

New thriller *Bad Cop* features Harleen Sethi playing a cop and striking a blow for gender equality

By PUJA TALWAR

Harleen Sethi's Inspector Devika, in the crime thriller *Bad Cop*, finds herself in an unusual predicament. She is her husband's (Gulshan Devaiah) superior at work. But, their professional equation is the least of her concerns. Unknown to her, the man who she thinks is her husband, could well be his estranged twin, and a conman to boot.

Written by Rensil D'Silva and directed by Aditya Datt, *Bad Cop* on Disney+Hotstar is an adaptation of the German series of the same name, and also stars filmmaker Anurag Kashyap as the antagonist.

Sethi divulges that apart from the charm of wearing a uniform and stripes on screen, it was the opportunity to depict what gender equality looks like that drew her to the show. "There really should not be any gender classification in professional spaces. It is okay for a woman to have a thriving professional and personal life. She never should have to compromise one for the other," she says, adding, "I loved the husband-wife dynamic in the show; it is okay for a woman to be her husband's boss and for them to still have a happy marriage. I hope this makes an impact."

Talking about the success of a small-budget film like *Laapata Ladies*, which superseded the views of the mega-blockbuster but misogynistic *Animal*, Sethi says it is a classic case of art imitating life. "We (female actors) are finally getting to play diverse characters, which have agency. The



'I like playing strong, resilient and fierce women, who stand by their core values as well as push the boundaries for society'

writers are bringing nuanced stories and the audience is reciprocating. My character Nimrat from *Kohrra*, for instance, was highly appreciated and loved for all her complexities." For actors, especially emerging ones like Sethi, the layered characters are an opportunity to display their acting

Poster of *Bad Cop*



their voice. "I am drawn to carefree characters; it could be because somewhere I am not that uninhibited in real life, and strive to achieve this quality of standing up for myself. I like playing strong, resilient and fierce women, who stand by their core values, as well as push the boundaries for society," she says.

Despite spending over half a decade, however, Sethi is yet to find her footing in Bollywood. She admits it has been an uphill battle for her, like most outsiders, and the industry's inherent prejudices only make the journey tougher. "It is frustrating when you are locked in for a project after being through the drill of auditions, and then you are simply replaced by an A-list star, irrespective of whether they have the skill set or talent for the part or not. After *Kohrra*, I was chosen for this big solo lead female show, but despite having cleared my auditions, including one with the director, I was replaced by someone, who may have not been as deserving," she recalls.

But Sethi, it seems, has taken the disappointments in her stride, and is now awaiting that one project that will turn the tide in her favour. "At the end of the day, it is the director's medium, and a lot depends on how you are portrayed, and whether the story resonates with people," she says, adding, "I believe in divine timing, and things will happen when they do. In the meantime, you do what you do with sincerity."

Next on the wishlist of the actor, whose *Lamborghini* performance—a collaboration with choreographer Melvin Lewis in 2018—went viral in 2018, is a musical and comedy.

BINGE BOX



BRAVING BOOKS

In a city of coaching centers known to train India's finest collegiate minds, an earnest but unexceptional student and his friends navigate campus life. Watch the third season of popular series *Kota Factory*, starring Mayur More, Jitendra Kumar, Ranjan Raj and Tilottama Shome, on Netflix.

TRENDING

**Supacell** *Netflix*  
CAST Tosin Cole, Nadine Mills, Eric Kofi-Abreca  
PLOT Fiver ordinary South Londoners discover they have extraordinary powers

**Do aur Do Pyaar** *Hotstar*  
CAST Ileana D'Cruz, Pratik Gandhi, Vidya Balan  
PLOT One night rekindles a couple's long-lost romance, and now they have to sort out their respective love affairs

**The Whirlwind** *Netflix*  
CAST Sul Kyung-gu, Kim Hee-ae  
PLOT A power clash between the PM and her deputy unravels the day the president suffers an assassination attempt

**My Lady Jane** *Hotstar*  
CAST Emily Bader, Edward Bluemel, Jordan Peters  
PLOT An epic tale of true love, high adventure, regicidal maniacs, deadpan heroism and oodles of yearning

**A Family Affair** *Netflix*  
CAST Nicole Kidman, Zac Efron, Joey King  
PLOT The only thing worse than being the assistant to a high-maintenance movie star? Finding out he is smitten with your mom.

REVIEW

## Killing Them Loudly



TRIGGER WARNING  
Director: Mouly Surya  
Genre: Action  
Platform: Netflix  
Language: English  
Rating: ★★★★★

Boom. Crack. Crunch. That's the nature of *Trigger Warning*, starring an in-form Jessica Alba as Parker, an active-duty Special Forces commando who comes to her hometown after her father's demise. Alba performs throat-slashing, bone-crunching stunts in some well-executed action sequences. In one scene, after saving her male friend, Spider (Tone Bell), she quips, "Sup! Damsel in distress." There is a lot to like in this action thriller, even though it occasionally suffers from some convenient writing and perhaps has a protagonist who is almost invincible.

We first see Parker in mid-combat, trying to take down terrorists. She has an espionage background, and suspects that her father's death may involve foul play. The truth about it unravels around all the mayhem. The violence is not all about the gun, though. In an impactful stunt scene, after her rifle is knocked down, she coolly grabs a knife and stabs one of them in the heart. Soon enough, we understand where she got the knife from, and why there's some poetic justice being dispensed as she wields it to threaten intruders, slash tyres, and more. For the first half hour, the film maintains an aura of suspense about the protagonist's personality and motives, but once the cat is out of the bag, the rest of the film, even if with enterprising stunt scenes, turns into a predictable revenge thriller.

Once perpetrators get identified around the halfway mark, it's just a matter of scores being settled. It's here that the convenient writing proves to be a bit of a dampener. We learn early on that Spider is good at cyber-hacking, but later, how this skill comes in handy isn't exactly a great moment. A bigger issue perhaps is how Parker is invincible. Even when unarmed and handcuffed, no enemy can truly dominate her. This means that when she does slide out of tough spots, it's not exactly a surprise.

All said, *Trigger Warning* does have quite a bit going for it. The writing, for instance, ensures that Parker isn't just fighting a personal battle. Her resistance is also for the greater good of the country, resonating with her values as a soldier. So, even if it's a film with flaws, Jessica Alba's stunt dynamism is eye-catching. If you are considering checking this film out, just remember that it's about a protagonist that shoots first and asks questions later.

—Jayabhwaneshwari B

