

Inactivated COVID-19 vaccine CoronaVac associated with TTP

The Hindu Bureau

A study published in the journal *Frontiers of Medicine* has found an association between the inactivated COVID-19 vaccine CoronaVac from Sinovac Biotech and immune thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP). The study presents two cases of TTP occurring after the administration of the vaccine, highlighting the potential association between this type of vaccine and

TTP. The article also provides an analysis of TTP incidence in the Nanjing area of China, suggesting a possible correlation between COVID-19 vaccination and the occurrence of TTP.

The first case details a 23-year-old female who developed symptoms of TTP three days after receiving her second dose of CoronaVac. Initially presenting with dizziness and weakness, her condition progressed to include thrombocytopenia, anaemia,

elevated lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), and hydroxybutyrate dehydrogenase (HBDH) levels, with further deterioration indicated by decreased platelet count, haemoglobin levels, and the presence of schistocytes in peripheral blood smears. Her condition improved following the introduction of glucocorticoids, plasma exchange, and rituximab, with a gradual return to normal values for ADAMTS13 antigen and inhibitory antibodies.

The second case involves a 45-year-old female who experienced fever and muscle soreness five days after her second dose of CoronaVac. She presented with high fever, haematological abnormalities, acute renal failure, and thrombocytopenia. She was finally diagnosed with TTP based on the presence of schistocytes in peripheral blood smears and significantly low ADAMTS13 levels. Treatment with plasma exchange and glu-

cocorticoids led to her recovery.

Incidence rates

The study also examines a series of TTP cases from 14 hospitals in the Nanjing area, showing an increase in TTP incidence from 2019 to 2022 that may be related to COVID-19 vaccination. The data suggests that while TTP is rare – about one new case per million – the incidence rates increased in years following the initiation of CO-

VID-19 vaccination campaigns. It is hypothesised that the increase in TTP cases could be associated with the vaccines, although a direct causal link is not established.

The report delves into the potential mechanisms by which COVID-19 vaccines could trigger TTP, focusing on the autoimmune response that may cross-react with ADAMTS13, leading to its deficiency and subsequent TTP development.

SNAPSHOTS



Caterpillar fungus can slow down growth of cancer cells

New research into a chemical produced by a caterpillar fungus that has shown promise as a possible cancer treatment has revealed how it interacts with genes to interrupt cell growth signals. The chemical Cordycepin, interrupts the cell growth signals that are overactive in cancer, an approach that could be less damaging to healthy tissues than most currently available treatments. Cordycepin is converted to cordycepin triphosphate, and this molecule was found to directly affect cancer cells.

Why Cambodia's H5N1 reassortant virus needs close monitoring

All available data suggest human infections caused by the reassortant virus are attributed to direct poultry-to-human transmission, with no evidence of human-to-human spread

The Hindu Bureau

More than 10 years without any H5N1 case, Cambodia suddenly witnessed a spurt of H5N1 cases in humans, with 16 cases reported between February 2023 and August 2024 caused by A/H5N1 clade 2.3.2.1c viruses. If the sudden spurt in cases was already concerning, 14 cases were caused by a novel mixing or reassortment of A/H5N1 virus. The reassortment was due to mixing of the gene segments from clade 2.3.2.1c known to circulate in Southeast Asia with the newer 2.3.4.4b clade that has spread globally.

Investigations found that three human cases were in contact with sick poultry or bird droppings. Till date, three deaths caused by the reassortant virus have been reported. However, no human-to-human spread has been reported till date.

In a preprint, which is yet to be peer-reviewed, posted on November 5, a team led by the Pasteur Institute in Cambodia published a detailed genetic analysis of the novel H5N1 reassortant, which yielded new details on the spillover timeline and emphasised the need for stepped-up surveillance.

For each human case, a collaborative One Health investigation was conducted, which was able to link the human cases to infected poultry through rapid whole genome sequencing. The rapid assessment through genome sequencing and linking the human cases to poultry enabled rapid response and control measures.

Clade 2.3.2.1c viruses in poultry were first reported

Time for stepped-up surveillance

Since October 2023, the reassortant virus has caused 14 human cases and three deaths

- The reassortment was due to mixing of the gene segments from clade 2.3.2.1c known to circulate in Southeast Asia with newer 2.3.4.4b clade that has spread globally
- Till date, three deaths caused by the reassortant virus have been reported but no human-to-human spread has been reported
- The first spillover to two related individuals in February 2023 involved clade 2.3.2.1c virus
- The second spillover to humans, which began in October 2023, involved 14 cases and six deaths. The second spillover is marked by a novel reassortant virus.
- The exact origins of the reassortment are unclear. But the reassortment has likely been facilitated by high-density poultry farming, wild bird migration, and cross-border poultry trade
- The detection of PB2 627K mutation in the novel reassortant genotype is a concern. The PB2 627K mutation is associated with increased mammalian adaptation and airborne transmission in ferrets
- Close monitoring of the novel reassortant genotype for signs of increased mammalian adaptation is necessary



in Cambodia in March 2014 and one human case caused by this clade thereafter was also reported from Cambodia. The clade 2.3.2.1c viruses continued to circulate since 2014. However, clade 2.3.4.4b viruses were first detected in live bird markets in Cambodia in 2021, co-circulating with clade 2.3.2.1c viruses.

There were two spillovers to humans, with the first occurring in February 2023 involving clade 2.3.2.1c viruses when two related individuals were detected and death of one person. The second spillover to humans began in October 2023. Between October 2023 and the end of August 2024, Cambodia has reported 14 cases with six deaths. The second spillover is marked by a novel reassortant virus.

According to the authors, the exact origins of this reassortment are still

unclear. However, the reassortment has very likely been "facilitated by high-density poultry farming, wild bird migration, and cross-border poultry trade in the region, highlighting the ongoing risk of zoonotic transmission in Southeast Asia".

Apparently, after the emergence of the novel reassortant genotype, the clade 2.3.2.1c is no longer in circulation in poultry in Cambodia. "Novel reassortant replaced the circulating 2.3.2.1c clade in Cambodian poultry," Jurre Y. Siegers, from the Institut Pasteur du Cambodge, Phnom Penh, Cambodia and the first author of the preprint said in a post in X (formerly Twitter). "All available data suggest human infections are attributed to direct poultry-to-human transmission, with no evidence of human-to-human spread."

Phylogenetic analysis of

the HA gene segment undertaken by the researchers reveals that all A/H5N1 viruses sequenced from human cases belong to clade 2.3.2.1c. According to the authors, the virus responsible for the February 2023 case in humans was closely related to clade 2.3.2.1c A/H5N1 viruses that has been circulating in Cambodian poultry and wild birds since 2013.

Significant divergence

But since October 2023, the hemagglutinin (HA) sequences from both humans and poultry in Cambodia displayed significant divergence from earlier Cambodia strains. "These HA genes clustered with two duck samples from Vietnam during July and August 2023, and were derived from a sublineage of clade 2.3.2.1c continuously detected in Laos during October 2020 and May 2023," they write. "Togeth-

er, this indicates an introduction of a sublineage of clade 2.3.2.1c viruses with a common ancestor detected in poultry in Vietnam and Laos, but the exact introduction pathway cannot be pinpointed due to gaps in available surveillance data."

Though the phenotypic contributions of newly introduced clade 2.3.4.4b internal gene segments have yet to be elucidated, the presence of certain amino acid mutations in both human and poultry viruses in the gene segment of 2.3.4.4b suggests enhanced capacity for mammalian infection, they note. "To better understand the zoonotic risk that these viruses pose, further risk assessment in silico, ex vivo, in vivo, and in vitro is critical. In addition, the detection of the PB2 627K mutation in the novel reassortant genotype in poultry is also a concern, as it may become established in widespread circulation," they caution. The PB2 627K mutation is associated with increased mammalian adaptation and airborne transmission in ferrets. This underscores the need for close monitoring of the novel reassortant genotype for signs of increased mammalian adaptation.

This makes it critical to carry out sustained surveillance of avian influenza virus circulation in poultry and wild birds, particularly in high-risk regions like Southeast Asia. Simultaneously, awareness programmes to reduce human exposure to infected poultry is paramount. Also important is building awareness about safe handling practices, and encouraging early healthcare seeking behaviour, says Dr. Siegers.



Daytime sleepiness may be tied to dementia syndrome

Older people who are sleepy during the day or lack enthusiasm for activities due to sleep issues may be more likely to develop a syndrome that can lead to dementia. People with the syndrome have a slow walking speed and have some memory issues, although they do not have a mobility disability or dementia. Called motoric cognitive risk syndrome, the condition can occur before dementia develops. The study does not prove that these sleep-related issues cause the syndrome, it only shows an association.



DNA evidence of people buried in volcanic eruption

In 79 CE, the active volcanic system in southern Italy known as Somma-Vesuvius erupted, burying the small Roman town of Pompeii and everyone in it. Now, ancient DNA collected shows that individuals' sexes and family relationships do not match traditional interpretations formulated largely from modern-day assumptions – an adult wearing a golden bracelet and holding a child, traditionally interpreted as a mother and child, were an unrelated adult male and child.

India will fail to meet 2025 TB 'elimination' target

R. Prasad

In March 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set an ambitious goal of "eliminating" TB by 2025, five years ahead of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) deadline set for 2030. Mr. Modi reiterated the government's goal of "eliminating" TB by 2025 even in March 2023 while inaugurating the One World TB Summit 2023 in Varanasi.

The SDG targets for 2030 is 90% reduction in TB deaths compared with 2015 and 80% reduction in TB incidence compared with 2015. As per WHO's post-2015 End TB Strategy, compared with 2015, countries are required to meet the 2025 milestones of re-

ducing TB deaths by 75%, and reducing TB incidence rate by 50%. But as per the WHO Global TB Report 2024 and the India TB Report 2024 released a few days ago, India will not be able to even meet the 2025 milestones set by the WHO End TB Strategy, let alone achieving the ambitious goal of "eliminating" TB by 2025.

According to the India TB Report 2024, the TB incidence rate in India in 2015 was 237 per 1,00,000 population and the mortality rate was 28 per 1,00,000 population in 2015. According to the WHO global TB report 2024, the TB incidence rate for India in 2023 was 195 per 1,00,000 population. It was 199 per 1,00,000 in 2022. In the



Lagging: Even in 2023, India has not met the 2020 milestones of the End TB Strategy for both TB incidence and deaths. GETTY IMAGES

case of TB mortality, the rate was 22 per 1,00,000 population in 2023, down from 23 per one lakh in 2022. As per the WHO report, the TB incidence rate in India had reduced by 18% between 2015 and 2023, while the reduction in the total number of TB deaths between 2015 and 2023 was only 24%. Since

the End TB Strategy 2025 milestone requires 75% reduction in the total number of TB deaths and 50% reduction in TB incidence, India has to reduce the TB death rate from 28 per 1,00,000 in 2015 to 237 per 1,00,000 by 2025 and the TB incidence rate from 237 per 1,00,000 in 2015 to 118.5 per 1,00,000 by 2025.

Not only will India fail to "eliminate" TB by 2025, it will not even be able to meet even the End TB Strategy 2025 milestones for TB incidence and the total number of TB deaths.

Worse, even in 2023, India has not met the 2020 milestones of the End TB Strategy for both TB incidence and deaths. As per the End TB Strategy target for 2020, there should have been a 35% reduction in the number of TB deaths compared with 2015 and 20% reduction in TB incidence rate compared with 2015. With only 24% reduction in the total number of TB deaths and 18% reduction in TB incidence between 2015 and 2023, India has not even met the 2020 milestones for TB deaths and TB incidence even

three years after the 2020 target date.

India did not meet the 'elimination' targets set for 2023 by the India's National Strategic Plan for TB elimination: 2017-2025 report published in 2017 – reducing the estimated TB incidence rate per lakh population to 77, and reducing the estimated TB deaths per 1,00,000 population to six.

Despite the very slow progress in reducing TB incidence and deaths and far from "eliminating" TB by 2025, a November 5 PIB release says India achieved a "noteworthy 17.7% decline in TB incidence from 2015 to 2023, a rate that is over twice the global average decline of 8.3%", as reported by the WHO Global TB Report 2024.



Question Corner

Not volcanism

Did the world's best-preserved dinosaurs really die in 'Pompeii-type' events?

By the 1990s, it was clear that the so-called Yixian Formation contained uniquely well-preserved remains of dinosaurs, birds, mammals, insects, frogs, turtles and other creatures. Unlike the skeletal and often fragmentary fossils unearthed in most other places, many animals came complete with internal organs, feathers, scales, fur and stomach contents. It suggested some kind of sudden, unusual preservation process at work. The leading hypothesis for the

perfect fossils up to now has been sudden burial by volcanism, perhaps like the waves of hot ash from Mt. Vesuvius that entombed many citizens of Pompeii in A.D. 79. The Yixian deposits have been popularly dubbed the "Chinese Pompeii". Though the Pompeii idea is highly appealing, a study says it is totally wrong. Instead, the study says the creatures were preserved by more mundane events including collapses of burrows and rainy periods that built up sediments that buried the dead in oxygen-free pockets.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

PROFILES

Revenge of the dispossessed

MAGA

What the ruling establishments of both Republican and Democratic parties had tried to dismiss as an inconsequential disturbance in American politics has turned out to be a powerful political movement that returned Donald Trump to the White House

Varghese K. George

An undefined, indefinable glorious past; a present that is of turmoil and loss; a future of reclamation and renewal – all popular mobilisations, religious and secular, populist and elite, have this understanding of time in common. At its core, the Make America Great Again – MAGA – movement that Donald Trump leads in the U.S. also follows this understanding of the past, present and the future. It has precedents and parallels, but there are uniquely American and contemporary factors too that fuel MAGA.

MAGA has an immediate history which starts around the turn of the millennium with the 9/11 terrorist attack, and an economic crisis. Within the decade, yet another economic downturn battered the country, and Barack Obama was elected the first non-white President of the country in 2008. A sharp division in the American society emerged against this backdrop, about the country's identity, purpose and claims of exceptionalism. The MAGA movement is the result of this churn. The heart of the debate is globalisation, and its discontents on two fronts – cultural and economic. MAGA is an insurrection of the dispossessed who may not care for, or understand, or are incapable of, or reject the standards of liberal democracy.

Dominant account

The dominant account of MAGA considers its foot soldiers as a group of racist, misogynist bigots led by a megalomaniac. This view is supported by the unhinged statements by Mr. Trump and his associates about migrants and women. It can be safely assumed many racists, misogynists, homophobes, and nativists of America are in MAGA, but it is not limited to them. The 2024 victory of Mr. Trump is a clear demonstration of the wide base of support that MAGA has.

Around 45% of Latinos are estimated to have voted for Mr. Trump this year; and so did around 20% of Blacks and considerable sections of Hindus and Muslims.

Fertile ground

Global trade had devastated American manufacturing and impoverished its working class. By 2010, the current generation could not take for granted a life better than the previous one, as has been the case in the U.S. all through history.

The country was meanwhile caught in wars abroad. Mr. Trump, earlier a New York businessman and a Democrat, was an opponent of trade and wars for decades. By 2015, he had made up his mind to make the Republican Party the platform of his politics and personal ambitions. The ground for MAGA was already fertile. What was lacking was "someone with the political talent, charisma, fame, or resources to popularize its ideology (as Ronald Reagan did for his sunny small-government conservatism) – until Trump," writes Isaac Arnsdorf in *Finish What We Started – The MAGA Movement's Ground War to End Democracy*. It was Reagan who first used the slogan, 'Let's Make America Great Again,' and Mr. Trump has counted him as the last great President of the country before himself.

Strange and paradoxical as it may well be, a major section of American working class found a champion in Mr. Trump. The economic distress of the majority is not captured in expert accounts but Mr. Trump could sense the opportunity to market his politics.

Apart from identifying the potency of anti-globalism as a political agenda, Mr. Trump who has no record of being a practising Christian, also sensed the cultural dispossession that the white Christians of America were confronting. The religious composition of the population is changing due to changing patterns of migration, and an evident trend of secularisation.

In the early 1990s, 90% of U.S.



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

adults identified as Christians, but now the figure is around two-third of that. The proportion of those who identified as followers of no religion grew sharply in the same period, which is currently at 29%. They form the ruling elite of the country.

The share of Muslims and Hindus among new immigrants began to rise too. Christianity is part of MAGA's motivation and Mr. Trump constantly invokes it. In 2016, he promised "Christianity will have power," and in 2024 he asked Christians to unite behind him.

But he specifically sought to enlist

Hindus and Muslims too into MAGA. Critics of MAGA could never imagine that it might appeal to minorities. "The MAGA movement now controlled one of the two major parties, but it remained unpopular with a majority of Americans... Democrats discovered that Trump's MAGA brand was widely disliked," writes Mr. Arnsdorf in the book that was published after the 2022 mid-term election setback for the party. Democrats would discover something else by 2024 – minorities in MAGA.

Minorities are the most ardent aspirants to the promised greatness of

America, and they probably connect with the slogan as well as the current reality of challenges very well. Minorities are also evidently concerned about protecting their religious rights, perhaps even more than Christians. Mr. Trump promised them that, and showed the irreligious third of the population as their enemy. While the Christian, nativist right is a major driving force of the MAGA movement, it has found common cause with other religious groups against the non-religiosity of the elite. For instance, the large sections of Hindu and Muslim conservatives are vocal supporters of MAGA's resistance to transgenderism.

Electoral performance

This explains the latest surge in MAGA's enhanced popularity, and Mr. Trump's electoral performance. He could flip Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, which gave Joe Biden his victory in 2020. In Pennsylvania, Mr. Trump increased his support among Latinos to 42%, from 27% in 2020. In Dearborn, in Michigan, where 55% of the population is Muslim, Mr. Trump won more than 42% votes and led Ms. Harris by around six points. In 2020, three-fourths of the city had voted for Mr. Biden. African Americans' support for Mr. Trump is constantly on the rise – from 8% in 2016, to 13% in 2020 and 20% in 2024. Exit polls suggest that a third of pro-choice women voted for Mr. Trump. This is the "the biggest, the broadest, the most unified coalition in American history," Mr. Trump said after the results.

In the late 19th century, the U.S. had witnessed a populist upsurge that sought to rein in its robber barons and protect the interest of the commoners. Both parties had to respond to the questions raised by this populism. The ruling establishments of Republican and Democratic parties have so far tried to dismiss MAGA as an inconsequential disturbance that would eventually fade. The 2024 elections showed it is persistent.

THE GIST

After Barack Obama's back-to-back victories, a sharp division in American society emerged, about the country's identity, purpose and claims of exceptionalism. The MAGA movement is the result of this churn

The 2024 victory of Trump is a clear demonstration of the wide base of support that MAGA has. Around 45% of Latinos are estimated to have voted for him; and so did around 20% of Blacks and considerable sections of Hindus and Muslims

While the Christian, nativist right is a major driving force of the MAGA movement, it has found common cause with other religious groups against the non-religiosity of the elite and with the resistance to transgenderism

Minister of war

Israel Katz

Israel's new Defence Minister, who replaced Yoav Gallant, echoes Prime Minister Netanyahu's views on key policy issues

Adithya Narayan

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose firing and re-hiring of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant made a controversy in March 2023, triggered another political storm last week by sacking him again. This time, Mr. Netanyahu replaced Mr. Gallant with Foreign Minister Israel Katz. That the move came on November 6, when the Jewish nation's strongest ally, the U.S., would be preoccupied with presidential elections, was no surprise.

Mr. Netanyahu's decision spurred protests in Tel Aviv and other parts of the country, where citizens assembled for a repeat of the 2023 demonstrations, calling it 'Gallant Night II'. Unlike last time, the Prime Minister stuck to his decision, seeing through that Mr. Gallant, who rose through the ranks to become a General during a 35-year-long military career, made way for Mr. Katz, a long-term ally with little military background.

Though Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin struck a conciliatory note saying the U.S. looked forward to working with Mr. Katz, Mr. Gallant, who has held more than 100 phone calls with Mr. Austin since the start of the Gaza war, had been perceived as a moderate figure. Having realised the disproportionate nature of Israel's response to Hamas's October 7 attack – that has so far claimed more than 43,000 Palesti-



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

nian lives – Washington changed its stance recently and had begun calling for a measured approach, asking Israel to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Mr. Gallant, in his response, cited three reasons for his ouster. He believed a deal was possible with Hamas which would see the release of all hostages held in captivity; he remained steadfast on his demand for the military conscription of ultra-Orthodox Jews; and he also wanted an enquiry looking into the security failures that made Hamas's October 7 attacks possible.

He had also sought clarity on post-war plans for Gaza; brushed aside military rule over the enclave; and dismissed Mr. Netanyahu's ambitions of a complete victory over Hamas – all of which prompted the Prime Minister to appoint a pliable Mr. Katz to the post of Defence Minister.

The reshuffle also witnessed the induction of hard-liner Gideon Saar as Foreign Minister. The move presents Mr. Netanyahu with an opportunity to formally bring Mr. Saar's

right-wing party into his government and bolster his coalition. The alignment of interests ensures an extra layer of political stability for the Likud leader.

Mr. Netanyahu's tenure, which began towards the end of 2022, had been marred by incidents before the Gaza war. One leader whom the Prime Minister invariably found at loggerheads with was Mr. Gallant. When military reservists threatened to quit services to protest against Mr. Netanyahu's proposed judicial reforms in 2023, Mr. Gallant adopted the popular voice by criticising the move, prompting his first termination.

Multi-front wars

The latest tiff came a week back when Mr. Gallant pushed to enlist ultra-Orthodox Jews into the military, threatening to destabilise Mr. Netanyahu's coalition that enjoys the crucial support of two parties from the group.

As Mr. Katz assumes leadership of the military, the country is fighting a war with Hamas in Gaza, battling Hezbollah in Lebanon

and anticipating an Iranian response to Israel's attack of October 26.

The 69-year-old's only brush with the military comes in the form of a four-year stint as a paratrooper in 1973. He subsequently shifted to politics and first ran for the Knesset in 1992, managing to win a seat in the Israeli parliament in 1998. Since then, he has served on various committees and handled ministerial portfolios such as transport, energy, finance, agriculture, intelligence and foreign affairs.

Mr. Katz's posting as Agriculture Minister came under the scanner when police investigated him for fraud and breach of trust over political appointments made by him. But the investigation was closed by the then-Attorney General.

Mr. Katz echoes Netanyahu's sentiments on major policies. The former top diplomat played a major role in defunding the UN relief agency (UNRWA) and banning Secretary-General Antonio Guterres from Israel. He admires Donald Trump to the extent that he suggested naming a train station after the Republican leader when Mr. Trump, as President in 2017, recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

In Mr. Katz, Mr. Netanyahu has found an ally who trumpets and parrots his thoughts. Whether that is enough to hold him in good stead as Defence Minister during such a tumultuous period is doubtful.

The Ice Maiden

Susie Wiles

As the first female Chief of Staff to the U.S. President, Trump's star-campaigner has her work cut out: run the office of an unpredictable President in an orderly manner

Joan Sony Cherian

"Tough, smart, innovative, and universally admired and respected" is how the 2024 president-elect and former President Donald Trump described his campaign manager and now Chief of Staff appointee Susan Summerall Wiles, more commonly known as Susie Wiles. Along with Chris LaCivita, an experienced Republican political strategist, Ms. Wiles ran one of the most successful, disciplined and effective electoral campaigns of Mr. Trump than the ones he led in 2016 and 2020.

The 67-year-old political lobbyist, considered quiet and unassuming, is feared and respected within and outside the party. Quite contrarily to other people close to Mr. Trump, the U.S.'s first female Chief of Staff keeps away from the limelight and prefers to 'work in the background'.

Her demeanour has earned her the epithet of 'Ice Maiden', a title even Mr. Trump used during his victory speech while congratulating her on her work on the presidential campaign.

Seasoned strategist

Ms. Wiles is a seasoned political strategist with her first major stint in electoral politics being with Ronald Reagan for his 1980 presidential bid.

Since then, Ms. Wiles has worked in the electoral campaigns of a wide range



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

of Republican candidates – from moderate candidates such as former U.S. Ambassador to China Jon Huntsman Jr. (who criticised Mr. Trump after the capitol siege in 2021) to current Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

Early beginnings

Ms. Wiles met Mr. Trump in 2015 and became his campaign manager for the State of Florida during his 2016 presidential run. Following her success there, Ms. Wiles also headed the successful gubernatorial campaign of Mr. DeSantis to Florida in 2018.

However, a falling out between the Governor and Ms. Wiles led to him dismissing her when he assumed power and actively sabotaging her relationship with Mr. Trump who then dropped Ms. Wiles from his campaign during his 2020 presidential run.

Ms. Wiles later used her knowledge of working with the Governor against him when he ran against Mr. Trump for the 2024 Republican nomination for President.

Her successful strategy for Mr. Trump made Mr.

DeSantis look out of touch and lacking personal charisma.

Rocky road ahead

The Chief of Staff of the White House is the head of the U.S. President's Executive Office. They act as the President's confidante, advising him on key policy matters while also overseeing staff appointments to the executive office, directing and managing the flow of information between different offices of the President, and most importantly regulating access to the President (that is, deciding on who is or is not allowed an audience with the U.S. President).

Ms. Wiles apparently was very keen on the last point. According to CNN, she had told Mr. Trump that she would only take on the role if she was given power to control access to him in the Oval Office.

Being the Chief of Staff, Ms. Wiles will have her work cut out. Between 2017 and 2021, President Trump went through four different Chiefs of Staff. His brazen, crude and unpredictable nature has made him difficult to work with.

Moreover, his refusal to be 'controlled', or worse, reprimanded has led to sour relations with a lot of his staff over the years such as his former political strategist Steve Bannon and former communications head Anthony Scaramucci.

Out of his Chiefs of Staff, his second appointee in 2017, John Kelly has been one of his most vocal critics. Mr. Kelly, who had a military background and was seen as politically neutral, was brought in to bring more order to a very chaotic President's office in 2017.

However, Mr. Trump's aversion to the restrictions Mr. Kelly put on his office brought things to a head and he left the position after almost a year-and-a-half. He has since gone on record to state that "Mr. Trump met the definition of a fascist, would govern like a dictator if allowed, and had no understanding of the Constitution or the concept of rule of law."

However, Susie Wiles, whose father is Pat Summerall, an NFL player and later sports broadcaster, has worked with Mr. Trump since 2016 and is yet to fall out of favour with him. Her steely disposition has earned her the former President's trust.

But while she is a seasoned lobbyist, her lack of experience holding government office might work against her. It remains to be seen whether Ms. Wiles will be the one who can finally 'tame the shrew'.

Across THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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ANOTHER *STRONG* leader has been elected. Mr Donald Trump won fair and square in a democratic election in one of the oldest democracies of the world. No one can question the legitimacy of the election process in the United States. Mr Trump, the Republican Party candidate, won the majority of the electoral votes: **301 to 226** for Ms Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party candidate. He also won the popular vote: **72.9 million to 68.3 million**. The Republican domination of the 2024 election was further established by the party acquiring control of the Senate and likely to retain control of the House of Representatives.

By every standard it was a comprehensive and thumping victory for Mr Trump and the Republican Party.

The pre-election polls were terribly wrong. The so-called 'close' election was not anywhere near close. The so-called seven 'swing' states swung one way, in favour of Mr Trump:

STATE	POPULAR VOTE	
	TRUMP	HARRIS
Arizona	1,303,793	1,167,898
Georgia	2,654,306	2,538,986
Michigan	2,799,713	2,715,684
Nevada	688,179	647,247
North Carolina	2,876,141	2,685,451
Pennsylvania	3,473,325	3,339,559
Wisconsin	1,697,237	1,668,757

Most independent observers and most unbiased media were agreed that Mr Trump's election campaign and his speeches were misogynistic, racist, abusive, and divisive.

But the majority of the American people did not care. They cared — and apparently were very concerned — about *immigration, inflation and crime*. Except inflation, the other two are not what we call 'bread and butter' issues; they could be described, loosely, as 'survive or sink' issues

Bare-knuckle politics

In a fiercely contested election, the margins were significant to substantial.

WHAT MAGA MEANS

Most independent observers and most unbiased media were agreed that Mr Trump's election campaign and his speeches were misogynistic, racist, abusive, and divisive. But the majority of the American people did not care. They cared — and apparently were very concerned — about *immigration, inflation and crime*. Except inflation, the other two are not what we call 'bread and butter' issues; they could be described, loosely, as 'survive or sink' issues. Immigration is seen as opening the door for 'people not like us' swamping the white American Christian citizens of the U.S.

Letter-day immigrants (mainly Latino voters) also felt that the new immigrants were a threat to the old immigrants. Inflation hurts everyone in every country. Although inflation was contained in the U.S. to 2.4 per cent and the U.S. Fed is poised to reduce the policy interest rate (a sign of lower inflation), nevertheless inflation was a powerful weapon in the hands of the Republican Party. The U.S., like most countries, has witnessed more crimes, thanks to growing population, urbanisation and drugs. Crime is an all-season weapon and any government in of-

fice is vulnerable.

Mr Trump exploited these issues to the fullest. And he did in his own bare-knuckle way using coarse and profane language. What surprised me was that the voters did not object to the coarseness and profanity.

MODERATION & DECENCY LOST

On the other hand, the main issues that Ms Kamala Harris took up in her campaign did not find resonance among the majority of voters: abortion and women's rights, the sanctity of the Constitution, fairness, racial equality and compassion. It is a tragedy that these values lost the battle against Mr Trump who has scant regard for them.

Among other issues that seem to have 'lost' in the U.S. elections is the brutal killing of nearly 44,000 Palestinians (among them thousands of women and children and United Nations staff). The Russian invasion of Ukraine hardly created a ripple. Most Americans did not give tuppence for China threatening Taiwan, North Korea firing long-range inter-continental missiles that could land on American soil, the civil wars in several countries, and the restrictions on freedom in so-called democracies. Nor did most voters seem to care that they were voting for

— and eventually electing — a convicted person awaiting a sentence. On the economy, the majority of American voters seem to care little for withdrawing from policies (free and open trade, low tariffs, anti-monopoly) that have made the United States the richest country in the world. The economic players who are cheering Mr Trump's victory are Big Oil, Big Pharma and Big Tech.

GENDER AND COLOUR

Ultimately, the American voters voted according to their predilections and prejudices. Male voters preferred Mr Trump. Young voters (18-29 years) preferred Mr Trump. Working class voters preferred Mr Trump. Non-graduate voters preferred Mr Trump. Latino voters (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans) preferred Mr Trump. The blunt truth be told, they voted against Ms Harris mainly because of her gender and colour.

It is a matter of speculation whether the results of the U.S. elections will influence the elections in other countries. They could. Mr Trump's victory could encourage leaders of other countries to emulate the coarse language and the divisive rhetoric that he successfully used in the American elections. If Mr Trump's model spreads to other countries, it will be a grave setback to democracy.

Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

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Socialist prince vs real princes

FIRST AN admission. I glanced through Rahul Gandhi's article on his economic ideology published in this newspaper last week and found it dull and predictable, so I did not read it carefully. It was when my friend Gaj Singh (Bapji) Jodhpur sent me his views on it that I paid more attention. I have known Bapji for years and have never seen him react angrily to anything. But Rahul managed to infuriate him enough for him to say that as someone who was a product of the architects of the License Raj, it was outrageous for him to accuse the Indian Princes of killing Indian enterprise by colluding with the East India Company. Correct.

If anyone managed to almost destroy Indian enterprise, it was Rahul's granny and her father, J.R.D. Tata is on record saying that though Jawaharlal Nehru was his friend he never managed to convince him that his economic policies would not benefit Indian industry. Here, may I remind you that when our colonial masters were still ruling India and crippling private enterprise with sanctions and penalties, Indian companies continued to grow and thrive. Indian businessmen defied British sanctions and succeeded well enough to begin manufacturing not just motorcars but aero planes and ships. It was Nehru's central planning that put an end to their ambitions.

Then came his daughter's License Raj which created an economic dictatorship that ordained who could produce what. Those who dared exceed their quotas were punished. But despite all this 'socialism', the shining dream that the Indian public sector would produce enough wealth to lift the Indian people out of poverty never came true. So, to blame the East India company or the Indian Princes is both incorrect and ignorant. But, as Bapji pointed out in his email to me, the Nehru family has always had a problem with the Indian Princes. He knows this well.

His father, Hanwant Singh, who became the Maharajah of Jodhpur at the age of 24, just weeks before Independence, resisted merging his state into the Indian union till the last moment from an over-arching sense of responsibility for his people. Then in India's first general election, he proved that he was a ruler who could adjust to modernity. He formed a political party and won nearly all of Marwar's seats in Parliament and the assembly. Had he not been killed in a mysterious air crash on the day the results came, he may have been Rajasthan's first chief minister.

Not long after, Congress leaders warned the princes that they would lose their privy purses if they continued to contest elections. They lost their privy purses and have continued to prove that they remain popular enough to win not just seats in Parliament but whole states. And since Indian democracy has produced socialist princelings galore, why should they not be allowed to show that this is a game that they know how to play well.

What saddens me when I travel in those parts of India that the British did not rule is that Indian historians have never fully acknowledged the role played by the princes in keeping Indian civilisation and our traditions alive. It was in the princely states that our classical music, painting, dancing, languages and customs were preserved because of the patronage of Maharajahs and Nawabs. In those parts of India that the British ruled directly, these things were frowned upon and a generation of brown sahibs was born. They produced more brown sahibs who continue to impose colonial governance on India. Modi has failed to change this despite coming from outside the privileged enclave we call Lutyns Delhi.

Having just finished reading William Dalrymple's outstanding new book 'The Golden Road', I confess that it saddened me that we Indians have not written enough books that tell us of our own history. Even in these times of Hindutva there is a dearth of Indian writers who care about our civilisation enough to explore it more fully. For the criminal neglect of our ancient monuments, all our politicians need to answer. There was much more to Indian civilisation than religion and temples but inexplicably, nobody in these Hindutva times seems to care about this. So it is in western universities that ancient Sanskrit texts are paid more attention to than in our own. And it is worth remembering that these texts may not have survived if more than half of India had not remained under the rule of Indian Princes.

Proof of this lies in the museums that the princes have set up in their crumbling forts and palaces. Many of them fell to ruin when the privy purses were stopped by Indira Gandhi. If they have seen a revival in recent years, it is because when foreign tourists started coming to India, they made it clear that it was not socialist princes they were interested in or the ugly, Soviet-style buildings that came up in socialist times. They went looking for the 'real India' and found it in those states that were ruled by the much-maligned Indian maharajahs.

For the record, I did read Rahul Gandhi's article on his new deal for businessmen and found it as dull and predictable as I thought it would be. He would do well to sack his economics and history tutors. And he would do well to also read 'The Golden Road' for his own discovery of India's ancient wonder.

What if we let boys opt out of traditional masculinity?

How to RAISE A BOY

LALITA IYER



AS AN 11-year-old who fought for women-eating-before-men at the wedding ceremony lunch of one of my aunts, I was raising men even before I was aware of my womb. So eventually, when I begat a boy at 41, the bar was already set very high.

I imagined my husband and I would raise him together. But that was not to be. I was a single parent since my son was four and all he saw was me being in charge. Since then, we have moved at least six different homes, lost four cats, several teeth (his), believed in Santa and the Tooth Fairy, and then pretended we had grown up.

I don't know whether my feminism came from a single-mom ecosystem (we were surrounded by them and their children) but it has to be more than that. With his absent father, a scarcely communicative grandfather and a maternal uncle who lives continents away, I didn't exactly have "male role models" on speed dial.

As a child, he has been woke for as long as I can remember. Almost a poster child for feminism, his icons had always been women — ranging from Dora to Sofia to the Winx Club. He wholeheartedly rejected the pink-and-blue world and we always found a middle ground — he created it and I made space for it. Treating feminine-coded play as natural was one way. As a child, whenever he was offered Kinder Joy toys "for girls" or when people referred to him as "baby", thanks to his long ringlets, I never bothered correcting them. If we had to smash the patriarchy, this was as good a place to start as any.

As a teenager and feminist, he is quick to call out toxic masculinity, particularly those complicit in sexism, misogyny and homophobia. When he turned 10, I gave him a house key, taught him how to cook the basics for survival, do his laundry, run errands, manage money, etc.

Men in my family never got brownie points for cooking (at least not from me) or caregiving. Both my father and brother have been excellent cooks. Food had no gender in our home. I find this "maa ke haath ka khana" to be the biggest roadblock in raising kids — boys or girls. The minute something acquired a prefix — "my mother's hummus", for instance — I shied away from making it. When he was younger, I would

burst a capillary whenever he addressed something as "nani's green dal" or "nani's tomato chutney". "It's just a palak dal!" I would scream. It was time to talk about the link between food and patriarchy. I started involving him in prepping meals as early as age eight. Some of my friends took on the stance of "I don't cook" while parenting, but then they invariably got other women to cook for them, so all the children saw was a woman as a provider of meals. When women are relegated to being providers of meals, it becomes a baggage that children carry forever. "I miss my mother's cooking" is no way to say that you love your mother.

Money is a big one too. Women who say "I don't know anything about finances, my husband handles it all" are probably conveying to their sons and daughters that financial power always rests with the man. When your child goes to higher grades, particularly when he becomes a teenager, suddenly, there's no place for a middle ground, just different forms of toxicity. You either blend into the herd's notion of male-hood or you are excluded, you cease to matter.

So, then, what does it mean to raise good boys? I asked my son. "First of all, you have to go beyond the binary. And second, maybe you can start by teaching them how to talk to girls," he said. Instead of focusing on that single or singular path of "raising a boy", what if we gave them the agency to opt out of the traditional (and often damaging) ways of being a boy or a man? Sometimes, even using the term "little man" for boys speaks so much about our struggle with masculinity.

A good place to start is rejecting a gender binary, revisiting our own gender assumptions, having vulnerable conversations with our children, even if we come undone in some of them. Allowing them the space to voice unpopular opinions teaches our kids that resisting peer pressure or popular conceptions is okay, especially in environments of intense masculine pressure.

We need to change the narrative around what it means to be a man and focus instead on raising good humans. Remember that they will mirror us, so we have to watch what we do. In the end, masculinity is a box that traps those that stay within it. We can't entirely free ourselves from the box, but we can begin to pry it open. Maybe we will never be able to erode the limits of patriarchy completely, but in our own words, we can make a dent, however small.

Iyer is a Kodaikanal-based author, educator and sourdough baker (How to Raise a Boy is a fortnightly column)

She SAID

POOJAPILLAI



ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2016, mere weeks before he was to be elected president of the United States for the first time, Donald J Trump spoke at the funeral of one of the figureheads of the American right, Phyllis Schlafly, in St Louis, Missouri, where he drew parallels between his journey and hers: "Her legacy will live on every time some underdog, outmatched and out-gunned, defies the odds and delivers a win for the people."

Schlafly's story, seen from one perspective, is certainly inspiring: A housewife — she wore the label like a badge of honour — Schlafly is best known for leading the fight against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a key feminist project of the 1970s to enshrine the principle of gender equality in the American constitution, explicitly prohibiting discrimination against women.

'MINDLESS EQUALITY'

For Schlafly, a true-blue conservative, the Amendment signified everything that was wrong with the US at a time of great churn, when women and queer folks marched the streets and pushed for recognition of their rights: To her, the ERA, with its "mindless equality", spelt the end of women's privileges.

Women, she warned, would no longer have the right to be financially supported by their husbands and would be drafted into the armed forces, and that women who chose to be housewives and mothers would be looked down upon.

The irony is that, until a friend told her about the ERA, gender politics was not even on Schlafly's radar. Her passion was national security — Schlafly had written four books on nuclear strategy and described the atomic bomb as "a marvellous gift that was given to our country by a wise god".

In a deeply sexist political culture, however, she was not taken seriously by those whose ear she sought — that is, until she started speaking on women's issues. The underdog then suddenly came out on top — and here the irony deepens — by speaking against and defeating a movement that fought to make women equal citizens of the US in every sense.

In many ways, the US that voted Trump back into the White House this week has changed from the days when Schlafly sent freshly-baked loaves of bread to male politicians in order to solicit their support

Women in US politics will always be the underdog



Phyllis Schlafly is best known for leading the fight against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a key feminist project of the 1970s. X/@tperkins

for her crusade against the ERA.

It is no longer a bizarre idea for women to be in mainstream politics, hold important positions and push policies and laws on a range of subjects, from national security to trade, and not just "women's issues". They now lead Fortune 500 companies and figure among those instrumental in shaping the cultural landscape and defining popular tastes.

WOMEN BILLIONAIRES

There are 31 self-made women billionaires in the US today — a record high — including musicians Katy Perry and Taylor Swift, skincare and fashion mogul Kim Kardashian, Silicon Valley czars Sheryl Sandberg and Marissa Meyer and eBay CEO Meg Whitman. Which is why, as Kamala Harris's campaign picked up pace following her nomination at the Democratic National Convention in August, it seemed just possible that a woman would finally make it to the Oval Office.

A lot of post-result analysis has focused on Team Harris's failure to put real distance between the vice-president's campaign and her boss, Joe Biden, the wishy-washiness of her position on key issues, as well as the Democrats' inability to understand just how much the "liberal elite" tag and their general lack of touch with ground reality worked in Trump's favour. Yet, the fact is that Harris

ran at a time when, like in the 1970s, there is great anxiety about new forces — embodied, to a large extent, by women seeking and holding power — undermining an older way of life, when men were still, by and large, in charge.

SEXIST REMARKS

Team Harris's astuteness in tapping into the rage and despair of women in the post-MeToo, post-Roe v Wade era came up against Team Trump's recognition that a so-called "browall" of disaffected men — especially young and White — could stem the tide. The latter's successful strategy of focusing on young men voters, a demographic that has historically recorded very low turnout, and mobilising them to vote in a man with a documented history of misogyny and sexist remarks and who is a convicted felon, suggests that certain fundamental things have not changed since the days when Schlafly found her political ambitions frustrated and pivoted to more "gender-appropriate" issues.

In 2020, Harris became the first woman vice-president of the US since the position was created in 1789. But the glass ceiling had not disappeared. It had only moved higher, as 2024 shows — the woman, it turns out, is still the underdog.

National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column

History HEADLINE

GULUEZEKIEL



WITH THE meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Movement (CHOGM) completed last month in Apia, Samoa, and with Indian cricket reeling after being whitewashed by New Zealand in the Test series, it is relevant to look back 75 years when the Commonwealth movement and Indian cricket almost collided.

The Imperial Cricket Conference (now the International Cricket Council) was formed in 1909 with England, Australia and South Africa as the three founder-members. The first two had played the first official Test series in 1877, while South Africa's first was in 1889. The standard of cricket in South Africa

How Nehru saved Indian cricket

at the time however was barely that of an English county second XI. Yet they were granted membership over more deserving candidates, particularly US and Argentina where cricket at the time was much stronger, purely due to South Africa being a member of the Commonwealth which USA and Argentina never were. One of the main clauses of the ICC was that only Commonwealth nations were granted membership.

India became a member of the ICC in 1926 and played its inaugural Test at Lord's in 1932 when still under British rule. It played its first series as an independent nation in Australia in 1947-48. A piquant situation arose in 1950 when after becoming a republic, the government was considering leaving the Commonwealth altogether, which, in

turn, would have meant India losing membership of the ICC and its Test status. But despite pressure from Home Minister Sardar Vallabhai Patel and his own ruling Congress party, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took the call to stay within the Commonwealth.

The ICC, at its 1948 meeting at Lord's, London, even while the debate was raging in India, decided to defer a decision on India's membership for two years and granted it provisional status. India became a Republic on January 26, 1950, but thanks to Nehru remained in the Commonwealth. This in turn meant at its 1950 ICC meeting, India was now granted permanent membership.

Nehru took a keen interest in cricket but whether his decision was at least partly motivated by a desire for India to

retain ICC membership and Test status is not known. In effect though he did save cricket in India, however inadvertently, at a time when it was competing for attention with football and hockey.

Being stripped of Test status so soon after Independence would surely have sounded the death knell for the game in the country. This incident was narrated by journalist Mihir Bose in his 2019 book *The Nine Waves: The Extraordinary History of Indian Cricket*.

There is a twist to the tale though, which concerns South Africa. In 1961 it withdrew from the Commonwealth under threat of sanctions from numerous member nations due to its policy of racial discrimination (Apartheid).

South African business tycoon Sir Abe Bailey, with Clause 5 of its constitution implicitly intended to exclude the United States. But the 1962 ICC meeting swept the issue under the carpet, deciding there was nothing to prevent South Africa's matches being called Tests, though these would not be recognised as official, causing further confusion. They continued to play only against the 'white' nations of New Zealand, Australia and England, till finally being banned in 1970 and returning post-Apartheid in 1991.

Today, the ICC has over 100 member nations worldwide, though only 12 full members enjoy Test status.

The writer is an independent sports journalist based in New Delhi and the author of numerous sports books

DECCAN Chronicle

10 NOVEMBER 2024



Rupa Gulab

Off the beaten track

Paperback or Kindle: Joy of reading in many ways

I'm not a ditherer like Hamlet. Nor do I have mood swings, but it's been almost two decades since the Kindle was launched, and I'm still not quite sure what deserves more votes: physical books or e-readers.

It's just that as I grow older, my needs constantly change. I confess that when the Kindle made its debut, I gave it a Roman Emperor-like thumbs down. "I love the smell and the feel of paper," I insisted, "Kindles are cold and metallic, whine, moan, etc." Apart from the emotional argument, I had practical considerations too: I only ever had to paint three walls in my rooms because the fourth walls were concealed by packed bookshelves with no breathing space — physical books helped me save money, and their spines added cheerful splashes of colour, yay.

When my sister bought her first Kindle I regarded her as a traitor. No, I did not shriek, "You wicked anti-national, go to Pakistan!" as is the peculiar practice in "new" India, but I did feel she had done authors a disservice, because there's nothing that turns on an author more than seeing her/his book on a shelf. I had already written two books by then, so I took it personally. I grimly stuck to physical books and pointedly averted my eyes when my sister shamelessly flaunted her Kindle.

A few years later, my jaw dropped when I saw my sister reading without her spectacles. "Jesus saves, or did you have laser eye surgery?" I squawked. She looked smug. Unbearably smug, and shoved her Kindle under my nose. The point size was super large, even I could read it without my spectacles. "You can adjust the type," Her Unroyal Smugness said. And just like how in those sweet old-fashioned romances the girl first detests the boy, and then suddenly falls in love with him, I developed a mad crush on the Kindle and ordered one immediately.

See, I have been wearing prescription spectacles since the age of eight, and I still hate how they make the bridge of my nose feel sweaty, and the way the spectacle arms jab the sides of my skull. I switched to contact lenses in my teens and spent less time partying and more time crawling on the floor looking for a lens that suddenly fell out of an eye. Very often, I never found the fallen lenses at all, and it turned out to be a rather expensive proposition. I wisely switched back to spectacles when I had to earn my own keep. Which is why when my very first Kindle arrived, I flung my spectacles aside and sang its praises daily. Needless to say, my sister rolled her eyes like an insolent gum-chewing teen.

I didn't give up physical books, though. I had both, and still had to paint only three walls in my rooms, and I was happy. Till my husband and I started moving from city to city, and rented house to rented house. Our collection of books weighed more than several well-fed adult elephants, and the owners of the packer & mover company we employed earned enough from us to educate their children in the US from Kindergarten onwards. But we loved our books, and it was worth transporting them because just seeing them around made rented flats feel like home.

Till the time we literally broke our backs during a shift from one flat to another in the very same complex. Trucks were not allowed in, and the packers used wheelbarrows to transport our books to the flat in C block. Yes, wheelbarrows, not even grocery store trollies! They had only two tiny wheelbarrows, so it took all day. By night fall, they had put the furniture in place but left all the books scattered on the floor. My husband and I literally broke our backs putting our books on the bookshelves. Then we paid a grand sum to a physiotherapist for a home visit. While lying in bed groaning over our aches, we decided to donate 99.9 per cent of our books and keep only the ones we absolutely could not live without.

I, of course, kept all the books I had written, and about 200 others including Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice*, William Saroyan's *The Human Comedy*, and my mother's copy of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* gifted to her by "Aunt Margaret, February 1951, Sierra Leone." It goes without saying that we had stiff drinks the day the books were taken away. We got over it eventually. Dear Reader, and when we next moved house, we got down on our knees and thanked God for the Kindle.

Things are changing again now. The harsh glare from lap tops, smart phones, iPads, e-readers, etc has left us with blurred vision, watery eyes, and frequent visits to ophthalmologists who prescribe eye drops that we're frightened to use. We haven't forgotten the articles we've read condemning and banning certain brands of Indian eye drops across the world. What we've forgotten are the names of the manufacturers, so we play it safe and avoid all. We've limited our screen time drastically and our bookshelves are blooming like colourful spring flowers again. Lovely, but not so lovely when I remember that our next house shift is a month away.

Rupa Gulab is an author and columnist

Subhani



EC's double standard on byelections irks parties



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

While critics allege so, I have tried to believe that the Election Commission of India (EC) is not partial and discriminatory in implementing its constitutional obligation of conducting elections freely and fairly. However, recently — and much to my own disillusionment — I found that the allegations appear to be true.

I tried to reach the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar last week to inform him that the four by-polls due on November 13 in Bihar would be seriously affected by the week long Chhath Puja celebrations just preceding them. As anyone familiar with Bihar knows, this Puja is the longest and most important festival in the state. This year it was scheduled from November 5 — although preparations began much earlier — and lasted until November 8. During these joyous celebrations, politics becomes an unwanted intrusion, and electoral canvassing extremely difficult.

However, my repeated phone calls to his office either went unattended, or if I got through, my request to talk or meet him elicited no response. Every time I was told by his staff that he was busy, and my message would be conveyed to him. My messages on his personal mobile were delivered but not replied to. When I called, I was directed to a voice mail, where even though I left detailed reasons why I urgently needed to talk to him, it was to no avail. I know that anyone holding the exalted position of the CEC is a very busy person, and

does not take calls from every Tom, Dick or Harry, but even if I was one such in his eyes, the professional purpose of my call, and my personal background in politics, had been given to his staff and conveyed to him. If nothing else, I thought that as his senior colleague in service, he could have shown the courtesy of responding. Other CECs before him have invariably been more accessible, and certainly — in terms of my own experience — less arrogant.

During this period, the Jan Suraj Party (JSP) sent a written representation to the EC, which was duly acknowledged but did not receive a reply, or an invitation for a hearing. Petitions from dozens of independent organisations of Bihar involved in the Chhath Puja, requesting for a postponement of the election date, were also received by the EC. Finally, only after crucial days had elapsed, Rajiv Kumar returned my calls. He was brusque, dismissive, and totally insensitive to such a genuine request, saying that if the EC took into account religious festivals it would be impossible to hold elections. He further said that even after November 8, there would be two days left for canvassing, and that the five days where it would be near impossible to do so, so close to the elections, was irrelevant. However, on my insistence, he did agree that since the party's petition had been received, and so had the requests from Chhath organisations, he would have the matter examined internally, and inform me. Needless to say, in spite of my emphasis on urgency in

Apart from the Jan Suraj Party, petitions from dozens of independent organisations of Bihar involved in the Chhath Puja, requesting for a postponement of the election date, were also received by the EC

the matter, I heard nothing further from him.

Imagine my shock then when the same EC issued a directive shortly thereafter that the by-elections in UP, Kerala and Punjab, also due on November 13, would be deferred to November 20 on account of "large scale social, cultural and religious engagements". These factors, the EC stated, may cause "inconvenience to large numbers of people, give rise to various logistic issues, and may lead to reduced voters participating during the poll". The sheer insensitivity and disdain to precisely the same reasons in the case of Bihar, was an unacceptable insult to Biharis, their "religious engagements", and their democratic participation.

To my mind, therefore, it does appear to be true that the EC has — as more and more people allege — greatly diluted its constitutionally mandated duty to be an independent, autonomous and fair ombudsman for the conduct of elections in the world's largest democracy. Worse, it appears that its three Commissioners who, in spite of a Supreme Court ruling to the contrary, are appointed through a process where the ruling party's will prevails, are selected for their admirable pliability and lack of spine, reinforcing the perception that they are mere puppets in the hands of the powers that appoint them.

Moreover, what lessons does this hold for a government that is a votary of "one nation, one election", when the EC selectively changes the dates

for even by-polls? If there is such arbitrariness in not sticking to one date for some states, and such inflexibility in enforcing the same date for others, in spite of legitimate if not identical reasons applicable to all, the only conclusion that one can come to is that where it suits a certain party, modifications in schedules are kosher, and where it does not, they are not. In the Haryana Assembly elections in October this year, the dates were changed to suit the religious requirements of the Bishnoi community, a decision I respect. When I mentioned this, the CEC's disingenuous answer was that in this case the festival would take place on the polling date, as though the disruption of the democratic process for a week before the polling date was of no consequence.

The JSP has approached the SC against such arbitrary double standards. While we await justice, the perception is growing that the EC only responds to the dictates of its political masters. As a citizen, I write this not only with a valid sense of indignation, but also great disappointment. A free and fair election, ensuring the functioning of a genuine democracy, is a basic structure of the Constitution. This is a principle which the highest court of the land has reiterated on more than one occasion. For ensuring this, a level playing field for all states, all political parties, and all politicians, is a must. For former IAS officers, or senior bureaucrats, who are supposed to have been apolitical during their official career, to so transparently jettison their conscience when they are appointed to a constitutional post as guardians of democracy, is a matter of deep anguish.

The writer is an author, diplomat and former member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)

LETTERS TRUMP AS US PREZ

What US President Joe Biden had said about the transition of power in a peaceful manner and his assurance to provide all possible cooperation to Trump are quite welcome and it would, doubtlessly give a harbinger of confidence to Trump to bring the lopsided economy on the track without hurdles. It cannot be reminiscent of how Trump made a big hue and cry and put a spanner ahead of Biden ascending the 46th President of the USA. Therefore it is time Trump is supposed to perceive the essence of democracy and the validity of people's verdict right now and make the flag fly high.

Rajamani Chelladurai Palayamkottai

For many countries, Donald Trump's win in the US elections has stoked uncertainty over the future of global climate action. Trump has long deemed climate change a "hoax", railing against Biden's climate policies and dismissing threats like rising sea levels. As a person of incertitude towards climate science, Trump has outlined a path that contrasts sharply with the green initiatives spearheaded by the Biden administration. Trump's return to power could see the US leave the Paris Climate Agreement again, undermining international climate targets. The Trump 2.0 regime will likely rekindle debates around climate science, renewables, and economic sustainability, and may push global climate action into an uncertain territory at a time when global scientists urge immediate and unified efforts to offer solutions to the climate crisis. Undeniably, Trump's return to the White House is a real setback for climate action.

R.Sivakumar Chennai

Mail your letters to chennai@deccanmail.com

Anita Katyal Political Gup-Shup



Fadnavis really cosying up to RSS? Cong lets J'khand down

Though relations between the Bharatiya Janata Party and its ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, have recently improved after a brief period of tension, there is considerable speculation about Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis's recent disclosure that he has sought the Sangh's help in the upcoming Assembly elections. Different interpretations are being offered by BJP insiders about this statement. One section believes Mr Fadnavis was prompted by the top BJP leadership to make this statement to reassure the RSS that the party has not forsaken the Sangh and continues to depend on it for guidance. This was also an effort at damage control following BJP president J.P. Nadda's remarks in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election that the party had shed its dependence on the RSS. On the flip side, there is a buzz that Mr Fadnavis is keeping the RSS in good humour for personal reasons. He can do with the help of the Nagpur-headquartered RSS as he is contesting the upcoming Assembly election from this area. And in case the BJP fails to form

the government, Mr Fadnavis could well be securing his future at the national level by ensuring he is on the right side of the RSS.

Guess who is among the most sought-after campaigners in the Congress for the forthcoming Assembly polls in Jharkhand. It is Pappu Yadav. The Bihar MP from Purnea, who won his election as an Independent candidate but is aligned with the INDIA bloc, has been campaigning for the Congress and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha as the state prepares for the first phase of polling on November 13. Mr Yadav is particularly in demand by the backward castes who were depending on Rahul Gandhi and other top Congress leaders to make a strong pitch for a caste census in the run-up to the election. As it happens, Rahul Gandhi hit the campaign trail a few days before polling while most senior party leaders have not been sighted in Jharkhand. This has upset its alliance partner, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, which has to shoulder the responsibility of running the show on its own.

The conciliatory statements made by National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on taking over as Jammu and Kashmir chief minister was predictably seen as a move on his part to cosy up to the Narendra Modi government. This view was further strengthened following the resolution adopted by the state Assembly last week on restoring the special status of the erstwhile state. While the National Conference election manifesto had listed restoration of Article 370 in its election manifesto as a major poll plank, the text of the resolution makes no mention of Article 370 but instead expresses concern over the removal of the constitutional guarantees which safeguarded the rights and identity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The resolution also does not make an outright demand for the immediate restoration of this "special status" but instead asks the Centre to open a dialogue with the elected representatives in this regard. In fact, soon after winning the election, Omar Abdullah had publicly backtracked on the party's demand for the restoration of Article 370 which, he said, was not going to be accepted.

The Congress in Madhya Pradesh is in a mess, having been reduced to a rump after its successive defeats in the state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. And yet the party refuses to get its act together. Though it is acknowledged that the party needs a new leadership in the state, veteran leaders like former chief minister Digvijaya Singh continue to call the shots. The latest example in this instance is the upcoming election in former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's assembly constituency Budhni. It's a prestigious battle and it was expected that the Congress would field a strong candidate. Instead, the Congress leadership picked old timer and perennial loser Rajkumar Patel, a known protegee of Digvijaya Singh, for this seat. Mr Patel has been fielded for every election in the last 30 years but has won only once and that, too, way back in 1993. This has angered local Congress leaders who complained that the party's principle of denying tickets to candidates who have lost two elections is conveniently overlooked in Mr Patel's case only because he is backed by Digvijaya Singh's

backing. There is growing resentment among the foot soldiers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh over the opulent lifestyle adopted by the organisation's leadership. The cadre is particularly upset about how the old low-key RSS headquarters at Delhi's Jhandewalan area have been replaced by plush new buildings which, they feel, do not reflect the organisation's ethos of service and simplicity. They said the striking contrast in the living conditions of the RSS bosses and karyakartas logging it out in remote villages and tribal areas is not going down well with ordinary workers. The new office, under construction for the past several years, has three 12-storey towers which are equipped with all modern amenities. The buildings have been earmarked for different activities while providing space for the Sangh's employees and visitors and for its affiliate organisations like the *Organiser* and *Panchjanya*.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

Opinion

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024



Bryson DeChambeau, who regularly tests himself with near-impossible tasks for his YouTube channel, loves a good challenge

INSTAGRAM

A riveting match

Bryson DeChambeau vs DLF Golf & Country Club in Delhi-NCR is likely to be one tight contest

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah

IT'S GOING TO be a hoot. I'll be the first to admit there's some perverse pleasure to be derived from watching Bryson DeChambeau pulverise a sadistic golf course that has been the scene of the unravelling of the game (and composure) of many a professional golfer. Of course, there's a great deal of speculation in this hypothetical situation: rumours have abounded for a while now about a LIV golf event being brought to India by the country's golf patron in chief, Pawan Munjal of Hero Motors. Now those have been more or less confirmed after a news report in which DeChambeau has been quoted as being excited to tee it up at his best buddy Anirban Lahiri's turf.

Or more specifically, the DLF Golf & Country Club in the National Capital Region.

If DeChambeau has a reputation, then the club will be keen to preserve its own. Don't expect DLF Golf & Country Club to roll over; as you read, the course superintendent and greenskeepers are probably busy devising all sorts of nefarious traps to keep the US Open winner in check when he drops by in February 2025. It's too close a contest to call, if you ask me.

DeChambeau isn't infallible, but neither is the course. Some people seem to get the measure of the layout rather quickly, while others can spend all of the tournament week, assuming they make it to the weekend, fumbling around, trying to find a way to score. Equally challenging, especially to overseas players visiting the Capital are the deadly noxious fumes of Delhi's winter.

This year, courtesy of a freak weather phenomenon (and certainly not the prudence of its residents) the air after Diwali has been surprisingly good. By Delhi standards that means an AQI at a reasonable 300 which in itself is an egregious example of how we normalise the unacceptable. Assuming things continue in the same vein, DeChambeau and his cohorts in the LIV Golf league can expect half-decent visibility, and somewhat breathable air when they drop by in three months time.

Last month, the weather turned at just the right time. And this time, it worked for the Ladies European Tour players who're used to playing in much cooler climes across Europe.

The Hero Women's Indian Open was quite the event and the heat of the competition did not include, thankfully, the heat.

Relief was writ large on the faces of players like Sara Kjellker and Madelene Stavnar who have to be applauded for coming back to Delhi after struggling here in the past. In 2023, galleries saw Stavnar using

powder to keep her hands dry and the club from slipping through her fingers, especially during a final round 79 that dropped her to 11th place. That year Kejellker managed to surmount the conditions and finished second to Aline Krauter who won by a whopping five shots.

Even though the German player did not return to defend her title, the 2024 Hero Women's Indian Open had a packed field.

Past winners of the event — Christine Wolf, 2019; Becky Morgan, 2018; Camille Chevalier 2017; and Caroline Hedwall, 2011 — were all in the fray.

But the focus was on Order of Merit leader, Chiara Tamburini, who, in what's been an astonishing season for a rookie, has won thrice during the season.

Diksha Dagar, Gaurika Bishnoi, and professional debutant Avani Prashanth, were joined by Vani Kapoor, Amandeep Drall, Hitashree Bakshi, Ridhima Dilawari, Pranavi Urs and Tvesa Malik to round up the local challenge for the \$400,000 event.

As is usually wont to be the case at the DLF Golf & Country Club in the National Capital Region scoring across the field was way higher than it is at a typical LET event.

The cut was applied at an unheard of score of 10-over par, and Urs with a cumulative one-over-par led the Indian challenge heading into the weekend.

On moving day, Emma Spitz of Austria and Manon Del Roey came out of nowhere to shoot a pair of scintillating 7-under 65s.

Roey led by a stroke going into the final day but was surpassed by Liz Young who shot an even par 72 totalled a modest two-under winning total to clinch the title for her second LET win.

Amateur Mannat Brar was the best finisher from the Indian squad at tied 11th place. Urs and Bakshi in tied 15th spot wrapped it up for the Indians in the Top 20.

With just eight players finishing at par or better, the DLF G&CC clearly got the better of the field on this occasion. For reference, at the Hero Indian Open in March 2024, that was played at this venue, the cut line stood at one-under par and 50 of the 90 players that made the cut finished under par. Keita Nakajima won the event with a fantastic score of 17-under-par.

Even more memorable was the second round 62 shot by Espen Kofstad that shattered the previous course record of 64 (held by Shiv Kapur) by two strokes.

It is possible to go really low at the DLF Golf & Country Club in Gurugram; DeChambeau who regularly tests himself with near-impossible tasks ('Break 50') for his YouTube channel, loves a good challenge.

Whether he wins or loses, it'll certainly make for a riveting watch.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Most independent observers and most unbiased media were agreed that Mr Trump's election campaign and his speeches were misogynistic, racist, abusive, and divisive. But the majority of the American people did not care. They cared — and apparently were very concerned — about *immigration, inflation and crime*. Except inflation, the other two are not what we call 'bread and butter' issues; they could be described, loosely, as 'survive or sink' issues

ANOTHER STRONG LEADER has been elected. Mr Donald Trump won fair and square in a democratic election in one of the oldest democracies of the world. No one can question the legitimacy of the election process in the United States. Mr Trump, the Republican Party candidate, won the majority of the electoral votes: **301 to 226** for Ms Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party candidate. He also won the popular vote: **72.9 million to 68.3 million**. The Republican domination of the 2024 election was further established by the party acquiring control of the Senate and likely to retain control of the House of Representatives.

By every standard it was a comprehensive and thumping victory for Mr Trump and the Republican Party.

The pre-election polls were terribly wrong. The so-called 'close' election was not anywhere near close. The so-called seven 'swing' states swung one way, in favour of Mr Trump:

STATE	POPULAR VOTE	
	TRUMP	HARRIS
Arizona	1,303,793	1,167,898
Georgia	2,654,306	2,538,986
Michigan	2,799,713	2,715,684
Nevada	688,179	647,247
North Carolina	2,876,141	2,685,451
Pennsylvania	3,473,325	3,339,559
Wisconsin	1,697,237	1,668,757

In a fiercely contested election, the



Republican Party candidate Donald Trump won fair and square in a democratic election, in one of the oldest democracies of the world

Bare-knuckle politics

margins were significant to substantial.

What MAGA means

Most independent observers and most unbiased media were agreed that Mr Trump's election campaign and his speeches were misogynistic, racist, abusive, and divisive. But the majority of the American people did not care. They cared — and apparently were very concerned — about *immigration, inflation and crime*. Except inflation, the other two are not what we call 'bread and butter' issues; they could be described, loosely, as 'survive or sink' issues. Immigration is seen as opening the door for 'people not like us' swamping the white American Christian citizens of the US.

Latter-day immigrants (mainly Latino voters) also felt that the new immigrants were a threat to the old immigrants. Inflation hurts everyone in every country. Although inflation was contained in the US to 2.4% and the US Fed is poised to reduce the policy interest rate (a sign of lower inflation), nevertheless inflation was a powerful weapon in the hands of the Republican Party. The US, like most countries, has witnessed more crimes, thanks to growing population, urbanisation and drugs. Crime is an

all-season weapon and any government in office is vulnerable.

Mr Trump exploited these issues to the fullest. And he did in his own bare-knuckle way using coarse and profane language. What surprised me was that the voters did not object to the coarseness and profanity.

Moderation & decency lost

On the other hand, the main issues that Ms Kamala Harris took up in her campaign did not find resonance among the majority of voters: abortion and women's rights, the sanctity of the Constitution, fairness, racial equality and compassion. It is a tragedy that these values lost the battle against Mr Trump who has scant regard for them.

Among other issues that seem to have 'lost' in the US elections is the brutal killing of nearly 44,000 Palestinians (among them thousands of women and children and United Nations staff). The Russian invasion of Ukraine hardly created a ripple. Most Americans did not give tuppence for China threatening Taiwan, North Korea firing long-range intercontinental missiles that could land on American soil, the civil wars in several countries, and the restrictions on free-

dom in so-called democracies.

Nor did most voters seem to care that they were voting for — and eventually electing — a convicted person awaiting a sentence. On the economy, the majority of American voters seem to care little for withdrawing from policies (free and open trade, low tariffs, anti-monopoly) that have made the United States the richest country in the world. The economic players who are cheering Mr Trump's victory are Big Oil, Big Pharma and Big Tech.

Gender and colour

Ultimately, the American voters voted according to their predilections and prejudices. Male voters preferred Mr Trump. Young voters (18-29 years) preferred Mr Trump. Working class voters preferred Mr Trump. Non-graduate voters preferred Mr Trump. Latino voters (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans) preferred Mr Trump. The blunt truth be told, they voted against Ms Harris mainly because of her gender and colour.

It is a matter of speculation whether the results of the US elections will influence the elections in other countries. They could. Mr Trump's victory could encourage leaders of other countries to emulate the coarse language and the divisive rhetoric that he successfully used in the American elections.

If Mr Trump's model spreads to other countries, it will be a grave setback to democracy.



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FIFTH COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

FIRST AN ADMISSION. I glanced through Rahul Gandhi's article on his economic ideology published in this newspaper last week and found it dull and predictable, so I did not read it carefully. It was when my friend Gaj Singh (Bajji) Jodhpur sent me his views on it that I paid more attention. I have known Bajji for years and have never seen him react angrily to anything. But Rahul managed to infuriate him enough for him to say that as someone who was 'a product of the architects of the License Raj', it was outrageous for him to accuse the Indian Princes of killing Indian enterprise by colluding with the East India Company. Correct.

If anyone managed to almost destroy Indian enterprise, it was Rahul's granny and her father. JRD Tata is on record saying that though Jawaharlal Nehru was his friend he never managed to convince him that his economic policies would not benefit Indian industry. Here, may I remind you that when our colonial masters were still ruling India and crippling private enterprise with sanctions and penalties, Indian companies continued to grow and thrive. Indian businessmen defied British sanctions and succeeded well enough

Socialist prince vs real princes

to begin manufacturing not just motorcars but aero planes and ships. It was Nehru's central planning that put an end to their ambitions.

Then came his daughter's License Raj which created an economic dictatorship that ordained who could produce what. Those who dared exceed their quotas were punished. But despite all this 'socialism', the shining dream that the Indian public sector would produce enough wealth to lift the Indian people out of poverty never came true. So, to blame the East India company or the Indian Princes is both incorrect and ignorant. But, as Bajji pointed out in his email to me, the Nehru family has always had a problem with the Indian Princes. He knows this well.

His father, Hanwant Singh, who became the Maharajah of Jodhpur at the age of 24, just weeks before Independence, resisted merging his state into the Indian union till the last moment from an overarching sense of responsibility for his people. Then in India's first general election, he proved that he was a ruler who could adjust to modernity. He formed a political party and won nearly all of Marwar's seats in Parliament and the assembly. Had he not been killed in a mysterious air crash on the day the results came, he may have been Rajasthan's first chief minister.

Not long after, Congress leaders warned the princes that they would lose their privy purses if they continued to contest elections. They lost their privy purses and have continued to prove that they remain popular enough to win not just seats in Parliament but whole states. And since Indian democracy has produced socialist princelings galore, why should they not be allowed to show that this is a game that they know how to play well.

What saddens me when I travel in those parts of India that the British did not rule is that Indian historians have never fully acknowledged the role played by the princes in keeping Indian civilisation and our traditions alive. It was in the princely states that our classical music, painting, dancing, languages and customs were preserved because of the patronage of Maharajahs and Nawabs. In those parts of India that the British ruled directly, these things were frowned upon and a generation of brown sahibs was born. They produced more brown sahibs who continue to impose colonial governance on India. Modi has failed to change this despite coming from outside the privileged enclave we call Lutyens Delhi.

Having just finished reading William Dalrymple's outstanding new book 'The Golden Road', I confess that it saddened me that we Indians have not written

enough books that tell us of our own history. Even in these times of Hindutva there is a dearth of Indian writers who care about our civilisation enough to explore it more fully. For the criminal neglect of our ancient monuments, all our politicians need to answer. There was much more to Indian civilisation than religion and temples but inexplicably, nobody in these Hindutva times seems to care about this. So it is in western universities that ancient Sanskrit texts are paid more attention to than in our own. And it is worth remembering that these texts may not have survived if more than half of India had not remained under the rule of Indian Princes.

Proof of this lies in the museums that the princes have set up in their crumbling forts and palaces. Many of them fell to ruin when the privy purses were stopped by Indira Gandhi. If they have seen a revival in recent years, it is because when foreign tourists started coming to India, they made it clear that it was not socialist princes they were interested in or the ugly, Soviet-style buildings that came up in socialist times. They went looking for the 'real India' and found it in those states that were ruled by the much-maligned Indian maharajahs.

For the record, I did read Rahul Gandhi's article on his new deal for businessmen and found it as dull and predictable as I thought it would be. He would do well to sack his economics and history tutors. And he would do well to also read 'The Golden Road' for his own discovery of India's ancient wonder.

A NEW ERA OF ECONOMIC RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

With a forecasted 7% GDP growth rate, India stands at the forefront of economic innovation

IN a packed auditorium at the Kaulitya Economic Conclave, Jagdish Bhagwati, the renowned Indian-American economist, spoke with a confidence that matched the scale of India's transformation. His words echoed with a sense of pride and progress: "India's economic situation has undergone a complete transformation. In the old days, the World Bank used to tell India what to do, but now, India tells the World Bank what to do. We have completely arrived at a new age." His statement perfectly encapsulated India's extraordinary journey—from an economy that once followed external guidance to one that now shapes global economic discourse.

The World Bank's recent India Development Update (IDU) underscored this economic transformation, projecting a robust 7% GDP growth rate for FY 2024-25, with similarly positive forecasts for the future. It also noted that India remains the fastest-growing major economy, with growth accelerating from 7.0% in FY 2022-23 to 8.2% year-on-year in FY 2023-24. Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook (WEO) Database reported that India's GDP ranking improved significantly, moving from the 10th largest economy in 2013-14 to the 5th largest in 2021-22.

In addition to this economic progress, NITI Aayog's report titled 'Multidimensional Poverty in India since 2005-06' revealed that 24.82 crore people have escaped multidimensional poverty between 2013-14 and 2022-23. This significant reduction is attributed to various government initiatives aimed at addressing all dimensions of poverty during this period. The report emphasizes that these efforts have played a crucial role in improving the well-being of millions across the country. Furthermore, Provisional Estimates released by the National Statistical Office indicate that India's per capita GDP at cur-



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rent market prices for 2023-24 stands at ₹2,11,725, underscoring the nation's economic advancement.

This positive outlook results from deliberate reforms and visionary leadership over the past decade. A key factor in India's economic turnaround was the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, which unified the country into a single market by simplifying fragmented state-level taxes. As a result, GST collections soared to ₹20.18 lakh crore in 2023-24, averaging ₹1.68 lakh crore monthly.

As India strengthens its economic foundation, financial inclusion has emerged as a crucial driver of equitable growth. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), launched a decade ago, has transformed access to the banking system, with over 53 crore accounts opened by October 2024. This initiative has brought millions of previously unbanked individuals into the formal financial fold, enhancing access to services and reducing economic inequality.

Along with GST, these reforms have significantly fuelled India's ongoing transformation toward inclusive growth.

The "Make in India" initiative, introduced in 2014, has also been pivotal in positioning India as a global manufacturing hub. By simplifying regulations and improving the ease of doing business, the initiative has attracted record-breaking levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Between April 2014 and March 2024, India secured \$667.41 billion in FDI, with an impressive \$84.83 billion coming in the 2021-22 fiscal year alone. This influx of investment has fuelled industrial growth, created jobs, and strengthened India's role in global supply chains. India's growing appeal as a manufacturing hub is also bolstered by its vast market and entrepreneurial spirit.

Alvaro Santos Pereira, Chief Economist at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), echoed this sentiment in a recent interview, saying, "India has all it takes

to have a strong rate of growth over the next few decades. There have been significant reforms in the past 10 years, and there's a dynamism, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a reformist attitude I don't see in many countries." Pereira's words emphasize the unique blend of ambition, resilience, and foresight that is driving India's economic resurgence.

Infrastructure has been another critical pillar of India's growth story. Flagship projects like Bharatmala Pariyojana and PM Gati Shakti have transformed the country's transportation and logistics sectors. In the last 5 years, more than 24,000 kilometers of highways have been constructed, reducing travel time and improving connectivity between economic hubs. These projects are also key contributors to employment, creating millions of jobs across the country. By investing in infrastructure, India is not only improving its domestic mobility but also setting the stage for continued economic expansion.

Innovation is another area where India's transformation is clearly visible. The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), launched in 2016, has nurtured young talent by establishing over 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs in schools. These labs encourage students to explore new technologies and develop problem-solving skills, laying the groundwork for future breakthroughs. This focus on innovation has contributed to the rapid expansion of India's startup ecosystem, now the third largest in the world. As of October 2024, India boasts over 150,000 recognized startups, which have created more than 1.5 million jobs, highlighting the country's entrepreneurial vitality.

As Jagdish Bhagwati remarked, "We have completely arrived at a new age," reflecting India's growing prominence on the global stage. In 2023, India assumed the G20 presidency, a significant milestone in its international journey. Under the theme "Vas-

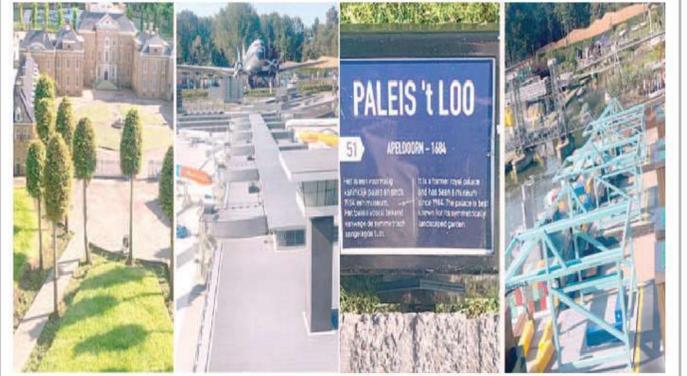
udhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), India hosted the 18th G20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi. During the "One Family" session, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the adoption of the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, a landmark achievement amid rising geopolitical tensions, including the Ukraine conflict. This presidency showcased India's diplomatic leadership and reaffirmed its commitment to multilateralism at a time of deepening divisions among major powers.

India has also taken a leading role in promoting sustainable development through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA), launched in 2015 with France to mobilize \$1,000 billion in solar energy investments by 2030. The seventh session of the ISA Assembly will take place in November in New Delhi, further emphasizing India's leadership in global sustainability efforts. This commitment to renewable energy is underscored by the achievement of 1.02 million jobs in the renewable energy sector in 2023, as reported by the 2024 Annual Review of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). As of October 10, 2024, India's renewable energy capacity surpassed 200 GW, reaching 201.45 GW, reflecting substantial progress toward a greener future and sustainable economic growth.

India's transformation, from an economy that once took advice from global institutions to one that now shapes international economic strategies, is a remarkable testament to its resilience and ambition. With sustained reforms, robust infrastructure development, and an entrepreneurial spirit, the country is poised for long-term growth. India's combination of reformist zeal and a dynamic economy sets it apart, ensuring that its transformation will continue to influence global economic discourse for years to come. (PIB)

'DAG' (Goodbye) Amstelveen, Amsterdam!

57 days in Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Germany



VANAM JWALA
NARASIMHA RAO

IN between our trips to cities in 'Netherlands bordering European Countries' and precisely before the final leg of our tour of Europe to Emmerich, we had been to the 'Miniature Marvel of Netherlands, the Madurodam in the Hague', nestled in the 'Heart of The Hague' and about 60 Kilometers from my son's house in Amstelveen, which is renowned for housing the 'International Court of Justice (ICJ)' at the 'Peace Palace'. The International Court plays a pivotal role in resolving disputes between nations and promoting global peace. Due to road repairs, we were not able to reach the exactly the 'Peace Palace' except going very near to it for a close glimpse.

Our journey through 'Madurodam' was nothing out of mesmerizing, and we could not help but think of how this experience could inspire our fellow citizens back in India. Madurodam encapsulates the essence of the Netherlands, and since its inception, this unique park has drawn visitors from around the globe, offering a glimpse of the 'Dutch Landscape, Culture, and History' all in a compact yet intricate form. This was officially opened in 1952 as a 'Living Memorial to George Maduro' a war hero from 'The Hague' who lost his life in World War II.

His parents, in collaboration with the 'Dutch Royal Family' envisioned a place that not only celebrated 'Dutch Heritage' but also contributed to charitable causes. Over the decades, 'Madurodam' constantly updated to reflect 'Modern-Day Netherlands' while preserving its rich past history. The park initially focused on miniature replicas of historical and modern landmarks, but today it stands as a 'Beacon of Innovation, History, and Charity' incorporating famous Dutch Artistic Buildings, Infrastructures, and Landscapes, all intricately crafted with meticulous attention to detail.

The miniature park is built at a scale of 1:25 in a total area of 62,630 square meters (6.26 hectares or about 15.5 acres. 'Madurodam' may not be covering every single landmark or aspect of the Netherlands, but it does offer a perfect and broad overview of the most important and significant places across the country, including Amsterdam, that convey the essence of Dutch Culture, History, and Innovation.

The 'Top 10 Must-See Attractions' at Madurodam, broadly are: Miniature replica of the famous Rijksmuseum; One of the busiest ports in the world The Rotterdam; Netherlands' famous Tulip Parks; The Peace Palace; The Dutch Windmills; One of Europe's largest airports Schiphol; Dam Square, the heart of Amsterdam; Netherlands' water management system, the Delta Works; Anne Frank House; the Erasmus Bridge etc. all of which symbolize modern

Dutch Engineering. Decision to place Madurodam in 'The Hague City' may have been influenced by historical connections and adequate space availability. In addition, the City offers a peaceful, family-friendly experience in besides being known for its diplomatic and governmental importance. Added to this, 'The Hague' is the seat of the Dutch Government and the Monarchy, making it an ideal place to represent 'Dutch Culture and History' in miniature form. George Maduro in whose memory Madurodam Park was founded, was a War Hero from The Hague. Further, The Hague is a significant tourist destination.

Similar to Madurodam Miniature Marvel, there are few world-famous miniature parks in the world, some bigger and some smaller. They are: the Mini-Europe in Brussels (Belgium), the Legoland Miniland, Minimundus in Klagenfurt (Austria), Tobu World Square in Tochigi (Japan), Window of the World in Shenzhen (China), Italy in Miniature, Gulliver's Gate in New York, Swiss miniature in Switzerland, Bekonscot Model Village in England, Cockington Green Gardens in Australia etc.

Miniature parks around the world, like Madurodam, offer visitors a unique way to explore famous landmarks and cities on a small scale. On seeing the Madurodam, our instant feeling was, it is much more than a tourist attraction. It is a celebration of Dutch resilience, creativity, and commitment to both historical preservation and innovation. For visitors from India, like me and my wife, it provides a powerful message, that, small things, when done with great care and vision, can create a lasting impact.

Just as Madurodam brings together history, technology, and culture in miniature, so too can our endeavors back home build bridges between tradition and modernity. We encourage our fellow citizens to explore such destinations, to see how other nations honor their past and embrace their future. It is essential to cherish and preserve our heritage while also striving for progress. Madurodam serves as a reminder that with vision, commitment, and unity, we can turn even the smallest ideas into something extraordinary.

Thus, after 57 days of our stay in Amstelveen (Amsterdam) from August 14, 2024 to October 9, 2024, and going around parts of the Europe, like Paris (France), Antwerp (Belgium), Emmerich and Hochelten (Germany), in addition to places of interest in Netherlands, we left for Hyderabad. In Amsterdam our weather experience was a totally bright sunshine most of the time except occasional drizzle. Our initial glimpse of Netherlands was on our way from 'Amsterdam Schiphol Airport' to my son Aditya's House in Amstelveen, that included

the cycling culture, well-maintained streets, vibrant neighborhoods, and quiet canals among others.

During our two months stay, we had been to Paris City by 'Eurostar Train' and there visited, 'Eiffel Tower, Seine River, Love Lock Tradition, Pont de l'Alma Tunnel, Arc de Triomphe, Louvre Museum, Golden Triangle, Luxemburg university and Gardens, Arc de Triomphe Replica' etc. among others. Paris was generally welcoming. Back in Amstelveen we visited 'Amsterdam Forest Park' located in about thousand hectares of lush greenery, near 'Amstel River' and has a variety of natural landscapes.

We visited 'Zaanse Schans' or the 'Windmill Town' that depicted a glimpse into the Netherlands' rich industrial past. We had been for shopping to 'Sligro Mal in Amsterdam' which is a part of the larger 'Sligro Food Group' a prominent Dutch Company. On another sunny day, we had been to the 'Vibrant Amstelveen Friday Market' where we found the 'Hub of Energy' with local sellers and buyers are 'Brought Together' in a 'Well-Organized Environment'.

One day we set off on a delightful road trip to 'Antwerp in Belgium Country' where our first experience of city's vibrant atmosphere was the touch of 'Antwerp Central Station'. Our little bit of shopping in the 'Diamond World' was memorable. The concept of a 'Flight of Four' where four different types of beer in smaller glasses were served, was equally thrilling. We also had been on a short visit to 'Emmerich' and nearby 'Hochelten' in Germany, both located near the German-Dutch border, where we visited 'St Vitus Church, Rhine River, Emmerich Rhine Bridge.

The efficient waste management and recycling process in Amstelveen, through the 'Three Garbage Bins' placed in front of houses for waste segregation, and disposal across the city is perfect. The 'Green Bin' for organic waste, the 'Blue Bin' for paper and cardboard recycling, and the 'Black Bin' for non-recyclable waste. For 'Organized Clearance of Garbage' by the Municipality, waste from the bins is collected on designated days for each category, using specialized garbage trucks, equipped with mechanical arms or hydraulic systems to lift and empty the bins filled outside on scheduled days, ensuring timely and efficient clearance.

With just a day left, we had been to IKEA for a last-minute shopping. Though we left this delightful place Amstelveen, where we enjoyed every bit of it, we would like to visit it greater number of times. Until then, 'DAG' (Good Bye) Amstelveen, and Thank You 'Aditya, Parul, Kanak, and Irah' for making it a 'Memorable Stay'.

(End of Europe
Tour travelogue)

The Indian cricket cap has very little value

JAYURVINDRA SINGH

INDIA'S 3-0 loss to New Zealand has stunned the cricket fans and followers. A series that one thought would be easily won by India has turned out to be a disaster for Indian cricket.

The knives are out for the non-performers, a few are the darling of Indian cricket. It is just a game, one can say, however, the trauma of such a defeat was just not fathomable.

One felt that with India ruling the roost at home since 2013, the process of demolishing an opponent in cricket in their backyard was forever set in stone. Cricket is an unending game in which one has seen over many decades, many an unconquerable side fall when least expected. India, faced this humiliation after having conquered all who came to their shore in the last decade. New Zealand, the good boys of World cricket, simply destroyed India and they deserved every bit of their victory. The young side batted, bowled and most of all, out thought, in every way, the Indian think tank. They batted and bowled with purpose and their field placement was brilliantly executed.

They were without their former captain and their best batter Kane Williamson and with Trent Boult, their spearhead fast bowler, having recently retired from Test cricket, the New Zealand side looked a bit inexperienced and raw.

However, the feeling that one got watching and following the New Zealand side, was how proud and honored they were playing for their country. The players seem to

The feeling that one got watching and following the New Zealand side, was how proud and honored they were playing for their country. The players seem to accept a change in leadership without a fuss and the team selection without a grudge. With very little domestic cricket for them to play at home they value every match they get to play, whether at home or away. What a contrast to Team India!



accept a change in leadership without a fuss and the team selection without a grudge. With very little domestic cricket for them to play at home they value every match they get to play, whether at home or away. When they adorn their national colors they seem to rise above one's expectation. With a population of 5.3 million they have had 3 important victories recently. A Test series win against India, beating England in rugby, as well as winning the Americas Cup in sailing in Barcelona recently.

When one plays cricket in India, one aims is naturally, like all other sports, to play for the country. That to a sportsperson is the ultimate goal. Excelling in it for one's nation is the dream that one feels blessed by forever. To make one's country proud through a win is a feeling of joy not just for oneself but also for the millions of fellow countrymen following the proceedings or matches.

The most startling factor of the present Indian cricket side was that they were at sea in their own conditions. The reason being that most of the top Indian players do

not play domestic cricket. This is not pertaining to the 1st class matches, but also more importantly at the local club level. Tricky turning tracks were the regular feature at most of the venues one played on, especially, once the summer set in. One learned the skills to handle those conditions through playing with soft hands while batting and making the bowler err through deft placements and feet movements.

Somehow, the importance of playing for ones country among the Indian cricketers has lost its importance. The Indian cap is no more an exclusive or a far reaching goal. Indian International players are being churned out like a factory production. One barely remembers many of them who have come and gone and are now dwindling into obscurity.

A good example is the present situation. Two Indian sides, one to South Africa to play a T20 series there and the other to Australia are overlapping each other. Apart from that an India A side is playing against an Australian A side in Aus-

tralia. This would add up to nearly 50 of the top Indian players missing playing in the India premier domestic tournament, the Ranji Trophy. To defuse the importance of such a tournament that was the base of Indian cricket, can be detrimental in the future. The first repercussion of it was the last test series against New Zealand.

There will be around 30 capped players in the coming months, all playing for India. This has been the trend since quite a while in Indian cricket. The limited overs will be there as a relief if one missed out on a Test cap and so aiming to get a test cap is not a necessity.

This one feels is the reason that the Indian cricketers during the Test series looked complacent. The top players were more concerned about their prospects and retention in the IPL, rather than worrying about the Test championship. How can a side give rest to their premier fast bowler and Vice-Captain of the side, Jasprit Bumrah, in a crucial point accumulating match in order to keep him fresh for the Australian tour 3 weeks later. If Bumrah

could not complete a 3 Test match series, one wonders about his fitness during the 5 Test match series against Australia.

One gather that Rohit Sharma will not be available for maybe the first two Test matches, as he is staying back for the birth of his second child. The honor of leading India in cricket is one of the most prestigious positions one can hope for. The sad part is that an Indian cricketer feels and rightly so that he is entitled to taking days off. However, Indian cricket is as much their baby as one of their own. If they do not nurse it with their presence, the growth and success that Indian cricket is having at present, it can diminish quite rapidly.

The dream of making the World Test Championship is fading, however, a series win against South Africa in the T20 series would be a redeeming option. After all, a good performance in it should get players a lucrative IPL contract during the auction.

Who cares about the Indian cap!

(Writer is a former
India cricketer)



Language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so to make it true

Salman Rushdie

D Y CHANDRACHUD: AN UNFORGETTABLE LEGACY ON BALANCE

IT'S said if one wants to be remembered, one must either write something worth reading or do something worth writing about. Chief Justice Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud did both. Over the last decade, I have appeared before several chief justices of the Supreme Court; yet, Justice Chandrachud's is the legacy worth writing about.

He led probably the biggest revolution in the Indian judiciary post independence—the e-courts system that has expanded access to justice to a considerable extent. Chandrachud's pivotal role in the process—first as chairman of the committee overseeing its implementation and later as chief justice—was radical and crucial. He modernised and decentralised the judiciary in such a way that it now has the potential to fight plutocracy.

He was a democrat on the bench who tried to treat every lawyer equally and encouraged even the 'ordinary' ones. He was soft in his manners and honoured the research lawyers painstakingly do. I felt this when I argued for the petitioner in the *Joseph Shine* (2018) case before a Constitution bench, which led to the decriminalisation of adultery in India.

Justice Chandrachud was always hard-working. By one count, he wrote 93 judgements as chief justice—a record that's possibly unbreakable. During his eight years in the Supreme Court, he wrote a total of 613 judgements.

Language is the light of the mind, said John Stuart Mill. And legal language is the light of an analytical intellect. Chandrachud had an effective language—simple, yet beautiful and powerful. He enjoyed the art of writing judgements. Those who would



OPINION
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successfully try to imitate the linguistic felicity of Justice V R Krishna Iyer with dictionary support should learn from the outgoing chief justice. He was a man of original thoughts that he articulated in a straightforward prose his own.

He wrote eloquently in defence of privacy in the *Puttaswamy* (2017) case. Decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations in *Navtej Singh Johar* (2018) was another milestone. However, when it came to *Supriyo* (2023), his refusal to endorse same-sex marriage invited critiques from those who pleaded for it. In *Davinder Singh* (2024), the majority on the bench, speaking through Chief Justice Chandrachud, validated the sub-classification of communities for the purpose of reservation.

Constitutional socialism has been a contested idea in Indian judicial parlance. It's no wonder the Chief Justice Chandrachud's judgement in the *Property Owners Association* (2024) case has ignited an ideological debate on and off the bench. He disagreed with the socialist view on the Constitution's Article 39(b) evolved by Justice Krishna Iyer in *Ranganatha Reddy* (1977) and pleaded for "economic democracy". There could be two views on this. Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia's defence of Krishna Iyer's view in the same judgement, by way of dissent, marks the quality of intellectual deliberation on the topic.

A three-Judge bench headed by Chandrachud upheld the validity of the UP Madarsa Act. In the Aligarh Muslim University case, the majority view authored by Chandrachud overturned the verdict in *Azeez Basha* (1967) that had posed the twin requirement of a minority community establishing and administering an institution to be able to claim minority status. The liberal view in the judgement, delivered on his last working day, said it's enough if an institution is established by a minority community. In *MediaOne* (2023), he upheld the freedom of expression and directed the ban on the television channel to be lifted.

However, views might vary on the conclusions in some of Chandrachud's judgements. Many support his views in *M Siddiq vs Mahant Suresh Das* (2019), popularly known as Ayodhya case, while many others oppose them. I have serious reservations about the conclusions. The verdict on electoral bonds in the *Association for Democratic Reforms* (2024) case has been significant, though it refused to reopen and investigate the secret deals political parties purportedly made for bond purchases.

By the time the case on Kashmir's special status was decided, it became almost impossible to turn the clock back. Even then, a bad precedent that might enable the Centre to take away statehood in an abrupt way could have been avoided. Likewise, failure to fix a time limit for the restoration of statehood, by blindly relying on the Centre's assurance, was a serious error.

Justice Chandrachud trod a tough path during a difficult phase of majoritarianism. There could be criticism that he was less assertive than required on some occasions. The collegium's decisions on judicial appointments were often meddled with by a recalcitrant executive, which could not be countered by the court. More importantly, as the master of the roster, CJ Chandrachud failed to effectively prevent the prolonged incarceration of political prisoners, which led to tragic results.

At the end, the Chandrachud legacy embodies some marvelous achievements on one hand, and some glaring aberrations on the other. However, as a judge who battled for transparency in private and public life, and as a man who tried to redefine India's judicial imagination, his innings will be unforgettable.

Aristotle laid the foundations of biology. Will Durant, who in *The Story of Philosophy* told us that Aristotle also made some egregious errors, concluded, "Aristotle makes as many mistakes as possible for a man who is founding the science of biology." The same approach is justifiable in the case of a chief justice who tried to change the foundations of Indian judicial reality.

MODI & TRUMP: MADE FOR EACH OTHER



POWER & POLITICS
PRABHU CHAWLA
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IF any world leader is as loved as he is hated, it is Donald Trump, elected 47th president of the US. His tenacious twin is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who shares his values of patriotism, traditionalism and national identity. Trump is abhorred by the leftist media, Hollywood latitudinarians and European liberals. Modi is lambasted by the Lutyens' Lilliputians and secularism's near-extinct conscience cavaliers for his aggressive nationalism. Both Trump and Modi are cults that dominate the New World Order.

Americans voted for Trump's unapologetic stand on illegal immigration and putting his country first. His tough stand on Palestine and threats to deport terror-supporting students made him a pugnacious political pugilist.

Both Modi and he were political parvenus. Modi swore to bring down Delhi's drawing-room caucus, while Trump vowed to drain Washington's political swamp. The billionaire real estate developer may be America's oldest president, but has the energy of a rampaging Rambo. Modi's PMO calls the shots as he has centralised power to enforce his mission and vision. Both men are ultimate outsiders, though Trump had a privileged upbringing and an Ivy League education; Modi sold tea.

Modi's victory in 2014 and Trump's in 2024 symbolise the acceptability of leaders with absolutist agendas, the empowering of patriotism and a natural affinity with authoritarians. The two are separated by 12,000 km, but are conjoined by conviction. Both are bigger than their parties. Both swear by the constitution

but find enough loopholes to garner more power than what the book provides. They surround themselves with 'bezzies' who tell them what they want to hear. Both want to shine solo, centre-stage. Both want to deliver maximum governance through minimum government. The similarities are uncanny.

● **Nationalism and patriotism:** In January, Trump will stride into the White House for a second term, pumped on 'Make America Great Again' steroids. He convinced voters that the idea of a United America was in jeopardy. MAGA weaned away many Democrats. With sig-

using the phrase to mean immigrants envenoming America's bloodstream.

Modi consistently hammered a similar sentiment during his 2014 campaign about the danger of illegal immigrants creating cultural anarchy, and law and order disruptions. Even during the current state assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, Modi has charged the Congress and regional parties for encouraging illegal flow of people from across the borders for bolstering their prospects.

● **Cultural cohesion:** Both Modi and Trump are strong votaries of protecting the way of life of their nations. In 2017, *Politico Magazine* called Trump "the culture war president" and quoted *The New York Times*: "President Donald Trump is a war president of a different sort: a culture war president."



The *NYT* reported this week, "In private, the president and his top aides freely admit that he is engaged in a culture war on behalf of his white, working-class base... against 'politically correct' coastal elites... He believes the war was foisted upon him by former President Barack Obama and other Democrats—and he is determined to win." By polling over half the popular vote, the Don has won the culture war.

Modi is relentlessly fighting to restore what he deems the Hindu way of life to reinforce the superiority of 'Bharatiyata' over other faiths. Under his leadership and nudge, not only have BJP-led state governments renamed old cities, but they have revived old Hindu and tribal shrines that were vanishing fast.

● **Restricted capitalism:** Trump was born and brought up as a businessman. Modi's business savvy is synchronous with his birthplace's ethos. He frankly admitted after becoming the prime minister: "I am a Gujarati and Gujaratis know how to do business."

HOW TO BE ON TOP OF THE GAME



OPINION
GEETHA RAVICHANDRAN
Former bureaucrat and author, most recently of *The Spell of the Rain Tree*

VIDEO games came to India decades ago—to the delight of children and despair of parents. Since then, it has consistently won fans across ages, thanks to evolving technologies. The size of the global gaming industry is estimated at about ₹29 lakh crore—bigger than the movie and music industries. The Indian gaming industry, with a user base of around 450 million, was valued at ₹33,000 crore in 2023. Surely, we have come a long way.

With better technology and faster access, gaming's sphere of influence has widened beyond entertainment. It has great potential for productive use, as it promotes strategic thinking and encourages problem-solving. Sandbox gaming allows players to explore and modify the game environment, fostering creativity. Developers have introduced nuances like conflict resolution beyond combat and winner-takes-it-all scenarios.

Gaming is also being considered an art form, integrating storytelling, graph-

ics and music. Unlike social media platforms, which have a built-in possibility of doom scrolling, gaming is interactive. Gamers find themselves in an intrinsic learning loop. Players before a screen have heightened levels of attention and concentration, which could be harnessed to promote learning.

Using a gaming avatar is a form of role play. It could be used to reinforce responsible behavioural patterns. Exposure to challenges facilitates agility in responses. Features such as rules, goals, interaction and feedback, integrated into learning pedagogies, have proved valuable in skilling. Games are being used to teach language, economics and as a psychological research tool to observe responses.

Among the ingenious uses games have been put to is checking the spread of disinformation. During the pandemic, a game called 'Go Viral' allowed players to debunk misleading information about Covid. As financial scams are increasing, a game that teaches people to scan scammers and remain unscathed would be hugely welcome.

The power of games is that they are immersive experiences that can evoke deep emotions and involve deeper engagement. What makes games stand out from other media is that they offer players the agency to influence outcomes through their choices.

Innovations in animation, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality technologies are improving game design. Further use of blockchain and generative AI can enable other kinds of experiences.

The industry has immense potential for growth in India considering the demographics, high-speed internet, tech talent and digital fluency available. With strategic investment and regulatory support, it is projected to reach revenues of ₹66,000 crore by 2028 and provide for 2 lakh jobs. The increased number of startups in gaming and e-sports is expected to be the drivers of this growth.

Along with funding, they would benefit from training of fresh talent and research facilities. The proposed national



Video games stand out from other media because they offer players agency to influence outcomes. Such immersive experiences are being used to teach subjects and debunk misinformation. Given the right kind of support, it can do wonders in India too

centre of excellence for animation, visual effects, gaming, comics and extended reality in Mumbai, approved by the central government, could play a pivotal role in leveraging Indian cultural heritage and generating patents. Creation of narratives that align with traditions of the country can help branding and be an effective statement of Indian soft power.

Real-money gaming is a significant component of the Indian industry. It offers a bouquet of formats on various

online platforms. The earnings are subject to GST and income tax. However, regulators have flagged the potential for misuse of these platforms due to lack of customer details and use of bots.

There is also a risk of money laundering when cross-border jurisdictions are involved through the use of the dark web or virtual networks to evade tax laws and perpetrate fraud. Effective enforcement is needed to ensure a level playing field and a transparent, secure environment for gamers. For now, a voluntary code of ethics has been curated by online gaming entities as a step to self-regulation.

The danger of exposure to violence, particularly for young players, is present as games can stimulate aggression and recklessness in real life. Addiction to games has been classified as a mental health disorder by the WHO. This is where the role of content regulation and built-in safeguards by gaming platforms to restrict excessive user access comes in. Age-appropriate grading of games and parental monitoring are vital. There has also been a demand for a data protection law that will ensure mandatory parental consent for children under 18 to access gaming platforms.

A theory of simulation says the universe and its inhabitants are part of a gigantic video game, as seen in *The Matrix*. Whatever the possibility of that, it's undeniable that the evolving metaverse has engulfed us. It has diverse potential beyond mere entertainment and presents a valuable economic opportunity for India. So it makes sense not just to join the game, but to be on top of it.

QUOTE CORNER

Dear fellow citizens, I would have liked to have spared you this difficult decision, especially in times like these, when uncertainty is growing... All too often, minister Lindner has blocked laws in an inappropriate manner. Too often he has broken my trust.



Olaf Scholz, German chancellor, announcing the sacking of finance minister Christian Lindner, an act that has pushed Europe's largest economy towards mid-term elections

Gone is a genocidal president too hypocritical to admit it. In comes a genocidal president who wears it like a badge of honour.

Ghassan Abu Sitta, British-Palestinian surgeon and Rector of the University of Glasgow

India and its leadership shall be held responsible for the catastrophic and adverse situation that will arise out of the violent armed conflict between India and Nagalim.

Thuingaleng Muivah, chief of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), accusing New Delhi of reneging on their 2015 framework pact for peace in the region

MAILBAG WRITE TO

Interdependent economies

Ref: *Pragmatic business sense should trump US tariff threat* (Nov 9). The global economy operates on interdependence, with numerous US industries depending on imported resources. While tariffs can serve as a negotiating tool, the long-term considerations are vital. Building partnerships with allies can strengthen negotiating power and address challenges such as unfair trade practices.

N R Jagannath, Bengaluru

Economic democracy

The article should be eye-opening for politicians as well as the common public. Unrest would start if all the people in the country are not treated equally at least as far as their basic needs are concerned, if internal peace is not ensured and if there isn't growth for everyone. I strongly accept the opinion that our country needs economic democracy.

Dasari Yella Reddy, Vayalpad

Trillion-dollar question

Ref: *It's time for economic democracy* (Nov 9). Other than throwing around the forecast of achieving a \$5-trillion economy, there is no roadmap indicating the efforts the government is taking to achieve it. The article is right: India, with its population, will achieve the number at some point even without any effort from the government. The Modi government thinks that by distributing free rations to 60 percent of the population it has taken care of the ballooning unemployment and economic health.

Rajan Ugra, Bengaluru

Targeted policies

Reforms often aim to bridge economic disparities, but can disproportionately benefit the elite, who have greater influence and access. Without targeted measures such as robust social safety nets, equitable access to education, and mechanisms to curb wealth concentration, the gap between the rich and the poor will widen. True reform requires policies designed to uplift marginalised communities.

Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur

Minority status

The Supreme Court on Friday lifted the ban on the Aligarh Muslim University's claim of a minority institution, though the issue has been left to a regular bench to decide. Special rights for all in religious education can be welcomed. But what is the difference in the contents or gains from general or technical education between minorities and the majority? Let us wait to have equality among all citizens.

P R V Raja, Pandalam

Bold departure

Ref: *Ratan Tata, a leader who empowered a generation of dreamers* (Nov 9). The prime minister's write-up on Ratan Tata is significant as a bold departure from the hanger of Nehruvian Fabian socialism. That the head of the government feels bold enough to openly appreciate a great departed doyen of Indian industry and the head of a big corporate empire was unthinkable in yesteryears for the fear of being labelled anti-poor. Salute to the departed great soul indeed.

Ullattil Pakiteeri Raghunathan, Thrissur

Blackcaps' whitewash

The recent drubbing of the Indian team at the hands of the Kiwi Blackcaps has put the spotlight back on workload management in cricket. The time allows for constructive criticism of the team. But at the same time, the immature decision of team selectors on resting seasoned cricketers and completely relying on young guards is a decision too early to be taken up. Given the allure of white-ball cricket, it's time for the cricket board to be laser-focused on the players' workload and ensure a balance.

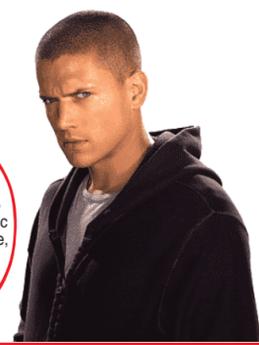
Rohit Srivastava, Ballia

Samosa scrutiny

The case of samosas meant for the Himachal Pradesh chief minister being eaten by subordinates is rather interesting. Though the CM has tried to downplay the episode, it cannot be ignored as the state CID has ordered a probe. The matter needs to be investigated as it concerns the integrity of officials as well as the failure of the objective of getting expensive samosas from a 5-star hotel.

K R Jayaprakash Rao, Mysuru

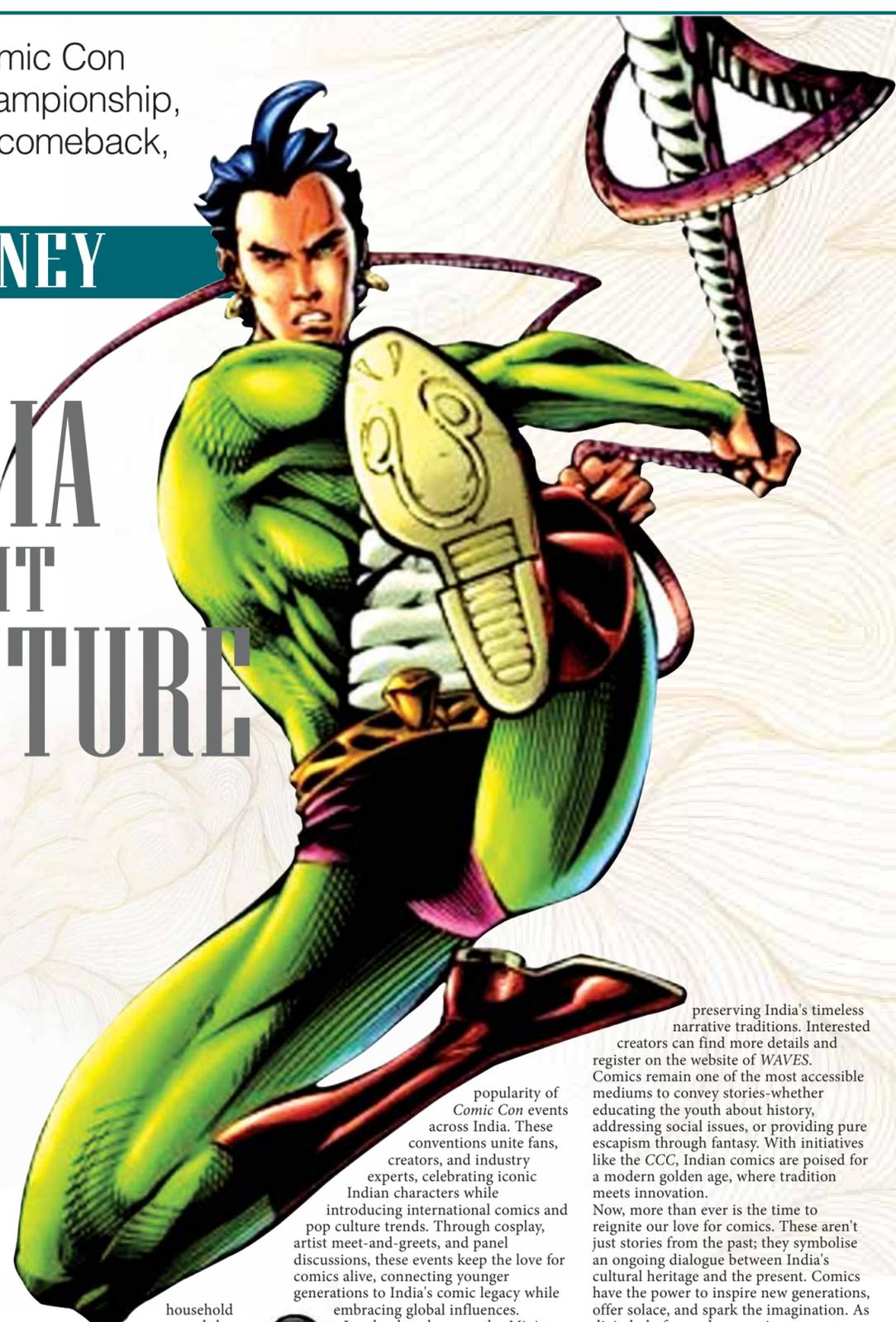
"My family put a lot of emphasis on homework, so there weren't too many comic books or video games for me, when I was growing up"
— Wentworth Miller



With a resurgence fueled by events like Comic Con India and the upcoming Comic Creator Championship, Indian comics are making a powerful comeback, writes SUPRIYA GHAYTADAK



A COMIC JOURNEY FROM NOSTALGIA TO A BRIGHT NEW FUTURE



Growing up, comics were an integral part of my life. My brother and I would save every bit of our pocket money just to buy our favourite comics. Whether it was *Champak*, *Amar Chitra Katha*, *Super Commando Dhruv*, *Nagraj* or *Chacha Chaudhary* stories fueled our imagination and became a key part of our reading journey. Whenever someone asked what we wanted for our birthdays, the answer was always the same-comics! Those colourful pages, filled with heroes and adventures, were more than just entertainment; they were treasured gifts that we eagerly awaited and cherished.



SUPRIYA GHAYTADAK

There was a time when streetside stalls, bookstores, bus stands, and railway stations buzzed with the vibrant display of comic books. The chatter of children and adults alike, poring over pages that transported them to fantastical worlds, was a common scene. Comics like *Amar Chitra Katha*'s mythological tales, *Chacha Chaudhary*'s wit, or *Raj Comics*' heroic sagas, invoked a sense of wonder and excitement. For many of us, these stories were more than just a form of entertainment; they were an integral part of our childhood—a gateway to imagination and learning. As years passed, digital platforms gradually replaced the physical charm of these marvels. Yet, in this fast-paced world, the nostalgia for these stories remains strong. Many long for the days when characters like *Bahadur*, *Super Commando Dhruv*, *Parmanu*, *Tenali Raman*, *Suppandi*, and *Shikari Shambu* lived not just in our imagination but in the comic strips that shaped our understanding of bravery, wit, and justice. For older generations, these comics represent a simpler time, filled with cultural knowledge and entertainment. For the younger generation, revisiting them now holds the potential to rediscover India's rich folklore and mythologies while connecting with modern interpretations of these beloved characters.

The Indian comic industry, once a booming sector from the 1970s to the 1990s, produced iconic characters and stories that captured the hearts of millions. The 'Golden Age' of Indian comics brought us legendary creators like Pran, whose *Chacha Chaudhary* became a household name, and the rise of superhero giants from *Raj Comics*.

“THE INDIAN COMIC INDUSTRY, ONCE A BOOMING SECTOR FROM THE 1970S TO THE 1990S, PRODUCED ICONIC CHARACTERS AND STORIES THAT CAPTURED THE HEARTS OF MILLIONS. THE 'GOLDEN AGE' OF INDIAN COMICS BROUGHT US LEGENDARY CREATORS LIKE PRAN, WHOSE CHACHA CHAUDHARY BECAME A HOUSEHOLD NAME, AND THE RISE OF SUPERHERO GIANTS FROM RAJ COMICS.”

household name, and the rise of superhero giants from *Raj Comics*. It was an era when *Indian superheroes*, mythological epics, and social commentary blended seamlessly, creating relatable content that resonated with generations. However, at the turn of the millennium, the industry witnessed a decline. Changing reading habits, the rise of television, and the flood of digital content pushed these comics to the background. Yet, despite this downturn, the comic book medium is quietly experiencing a resurgence, aided by digital platforms and a renewed interest in India's rich storytelling tradition. The resurgence of Indian comics is further boosted by the growing



popularity of *Comic Con* events across India. These conventions unite fans, creators, and industry experts, celebrating iconic Indian characters while introducing international comics and pop culture trends. Through cosplay, artist meet-and-greets, and panel discussions, these events keep the love for comics alive, connecting younger generations to India's comic legacy while embracing global influences. In a landmark move, the *Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (I&B)*, Government of India has partnered with the *Indian Comics Association (ICA)* to spearhead the first-ever *Comic Creator Championship (CCC)*, a centrepiece event at the upcoming *World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES)*. This three-phase comic-making competition is designed to nurture emerging talent and showcase India's creative potential on a global stage. By providing a platform for both amateur and professional creators, the CCC encourages fresh voices to engage in storytelling that tackles contemporary issues while

preserving India's timeless narrative traditions. Interested creators can find more details and register on the website of *WAVES*. Comics remain one of the most accessible mediums to convey stories—whether educating the youth about history, addressing social issues, or providing pure escapism through fantasy. With initiatives like the CCC, Indian comics are poised for a modern golden age, where tradition meets innovation. Now, more than ever is the time to reignite our love for comics. These aren't just stories from the past; they symbolise an ongoing dialogue between India's cultural heritage and the present. Comics have the power to inspire new generations, offer solace, and spark the imagination. As digital platforms democratize access to these narratives, an entire world of possibilities opens up for creators and readers alike. As we look to the future, let us celebrate this revival by participating in the *World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES)*, to be held in New Delhi from February 5th to 9th, 2025. This summit promises to be a landmark event, uniting industry experts, creators, and fans. It will also host the final round of the *Comic Creator Championship*, where India's brightest new talents will be showcased. Together, we can ensure that the stories of the past continue to inspire, innovate, and captivate audiences in the future. India's comic industry stands on the threshold of a renaissance, and all are invited to be a part of it. Now is the time to turn the page and start a new chapter in the vibrant world of Indian comics. Let's revive and elevate Indian comics to their rightful place in popular culture. Will you join this journey?

(The writer is an Indian Information Service officer, Ministry of I&B; views are personal)



THE ABILITY TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE IS AS PURCHASABLE A COMMODITY AS SUGAR OR COFFEE AND I WILL PAY MORE FOR THAT ABILITY THAN FOR ANY OTHER UNDER THE SUN
— JOHN D ROCKEFELLER

A TASTE OF CHINA, PAINTED

IN RED

At 'RED', Radisson Blu MBD Hotel Noida, the new menu brings the vibrant flavours of authentic Chinese cuisine to life. A perfect mix of traditional and modern dishes, it's a dining experience that's bound to excite your taste buds, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Step into 'RED' at Radisson Blu MBD Hotel Noida and you're instantly transported to the heart of China, where every dish tells a story. With a fresh new menu that celebrates authentic Chinese flavours, the restaurant brings together traditional recipes and innovative twists, promising a dining experience unlike any other. Whether you're a vegetarian or a meat lover, the culinary journey here is one that caters to all tastes, with bold flavours and unforgettable textures that will leave you craving more. The ambience of 'RED' is equally remarkable. With its dark, red-lit interior, the space exudes a cosy, intimate vibe, evoking the feel of an authentic Chinese restaurant. As you settle in, you know you're in for something special. Ms. **Sonika Malhotra Kandhari**, Joint Managing Director of MBD Group, shares, "The RED menu has been meticulously crafted with our guests in mind. This menu reengineering underscores our commitment to authentic Chinese flavours. We look forward to welcoming guests to explore this exciting new offering." At the heart of this dining experience are the sauces, a crucial part of any authentic Chinese meal. 'RED' offers a variety of carefully crafted options, including the classic *Chilli Black Bean*, the *Soya Chilli*

Coriander and their signature special sauce made with onion, tomato, chilli and garlic. And for those who enjoy a bit of spice and fermentation, the kimchi adds a delightful punch to any dish. The sauces truly elevate the experience and don't forget to master the art of eating with chopsticks - a fun and authentic way to enjoy the full flavours. Next up, I moved on to the *Dim Sum & Bao* section. The *Truffle Edamame* offered a delightful twist on the classic, with a subtle truffle flavour that complemented the beans beautifully, giving them a soft yet earthy taste. However, the *Tofu Bao with Chilli Bean Relish* turned out to be my absolute favourite. The silken tofu paired with the chilli bean relish was a perfect blend of soft and spicy, all encased in a delicate, fluffy bao bun. This dish encapsulated the balance of textures and flavours that make Chinese cuisine such a treat. Moving into the Appetisers, the *Chilled Mould Tofu with Peanut Sauce* was a refreshing change, delicate, smooth tofu dressed in a creamy, slightly tangy peanut sauce. As someone who isn't a big tofu fan, I found it intriguing. It's a dish that might take some getting used to, but the pairing of tofu with peanut sauce certainly creates a unique, palate-expanding experience. This dish left a lasting impression, as did the *Mogu with Dry Red Chili* and *Sichuan Pepper*, a crispy fried button mushroom stir-fry that managed to stay crunchy even as it cooled. This level of attention to texture and flavour is a hallmark of authentic Chinese cooking, blending tradition with a modern twist. The bold, balanced flavours in each appetiser felt like a true celebration of Chinese culinary heritage. Moving on to the main course, the *Mapo Tofu* was a definite standout. Known for its bold, spicy flavours, the tofu here was incredibly silky,



Photos: Pankaj Kumar

go-to. This fragrant dish, infused with exotic vegetables and bamboo shoots, was packed with flavour and left a lasting impression. While 'RED' offers a delightful selection of vegetarian dishes, the restaurant's non-vegetarian options are known to truly shine. As a vegetarian, I haven't tried them personally, but from what I've heard, 'RED' delivers on authentic Chinese non-vegetarian flavours. Crafting exceptional Chinese cuisine in a vegetarian style is no easy feat, but **Chef Sachin Malik** and his team have truly excelled in creating vegetarian dishes that rival their meat counterparts. From *Shandong Style Seafood Soup* to *Kung Pao Chicken* and *Braised Lamb*, each dish offers a window into authentic Chinese cuisine. Reflecting on the culinary vision, **Chef Sachin Malik**, Executive Chef, reflects, "We aim to celebrate the vibrant flavours of China. Our new menu is a tribute to this culinary heritage, blending traditional elements with modern techniques, with **Chef Ghanshyam Thapa's** expertise." The dessert menu is a lovely, light way to end the meal. The *Matcha Baked Cheesecake* stands out, with its creamy, indulgent dessert with

earthy matcha notes that balance the sweetness. It's rich, so sharing it with someone is a great idea to end the meal on a satisfying note without it feeling too heavy. Beyond the food, the drinks at 'RED' deserve a special mention. The beverages selection is inspired by China's rich cultural heritage, with classics like the *Lion's Tail* and innovative creations like the *Dragon on the Sky* and *Junshan Island Sundowner*. For those preferring non-alcoholic options, the *Chinese Tonic*, with lychee, star anise and lime juice is refreshingly fragrant. Meanwhile, the *Silver Tips*, a ginger-infused drink garnished with dragon fruit, is the perfect quencher, ideal for pairing with the rich flavours of RED's menu. 'RED' offers a dining experience that celebrates both authenticity and creativity. The vegetarian options are exceptional, proving that creating perfect Chinese dishes without meat is possible. **Chef Sachin Malik** and his team have truly outdone themselves, making this a must-visit spot for anyone craving a true taste of China. Whether you're a fan of vegetarian or non-vegetarian dishes, the menu offers something for everyone, ensuring that your journey through Chinese flavours will be a memorable one.

Cranberry Coffee and Beyond

Through Cranberry Coffee, Roastery Coffee House is redefining how the world experiences Indian coffee, placing India firmly on the global coffee map, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

In an impressive feat that showcases Indian ingenuity, **Roastery Coffee House** has become the first Indian brand to invent and trademark a specialty coffee: *Cranberry Coffee*. This unique drink—a refreshing combination of cranberry juice, sparkling water, and espresso—has not only captivated coffee lovers across India but is also gaining international attention. With its signature *Cranberry Coffee* now protected by a trademark, **Roastery Coffee House** is setting new standards in the coffee industry and redefining how the world experiences Indian coffee.

THE RISE OF CRANBERRY COFFEE: A REFRESHING INNOVATION
A playful yet refined twist on traditional coffee, *Cranberry Coffee* combines the boldness of espresso with the tartness of cranberry juice and a splash of sparkling water, creating a refreshing, versatile drink suitable for any time of the day. In the last six months alone, over 100,000 cups of *Cranberry Coffee* have been sold across **Roastery** outlets, making it one of the fastest-selling specialty coffees in India. Its popularity spans all age groups and has even become a staple on many café menus, signalling a growing demand for creative coffee options in India and beyond. **Roastery Coffee House's** founder, **Nishant Sinha**, is thrilled by the response, noting how *Cranberry Coffee* has quickly become a customer favourite. "It's very heartwarming to see how positively everyone has responded to this beverage," he said. "The success of is undeniable, and almost every



Photos: Pankaj Kumar



order across our chains includes it. Many coffee brands have drawn inspiration from **Roastery's** innovative creation, and we are very proud that people have embraced it."

ROASTERY COFFEE HOUSE: PIONEERS OF INDIA'S SPECIALTY COFFEE SCENE
Since opening its doors in 2017, **Roastery Coffee House** has continuously pushed the boundaries of India's coffee culture. Expanding across six cities, the brand has built a strong reputation for offering diverse, high-quality coffee options paired with mouth-watering snacks and light meals, creating an inclusive space for coffee enthusiasts. The introduction of *Cranberry*



“THE SUCCESS OF CRANBERRY COFFEE IS UNDENIABLE, AND ALMOST EVERY ORDER ACROSS OUR CHAINS INCLUDES IT. MANY COFFEE BRANDS HAVE DRAWN INSPIRATION FROM ROASTERY'S INNOVATIVE CREATION, AND WE ARE VERY PROUD THAT PEOPLE HAVE EMBRACED IT”

Coffee exemplifies the brand's mission to innovate and cater to the evolving preferences of coffee drinkers while staying rooted in authenticity and quality. Beyond its local success, **Roastery Coffee House** has recently set its sights on the international stage, opening its first flagship store in *Helsinki, Finland*. The move reflects **Roastery's** vision of not only sharing Indian coffee with a global audience but also positioning India as a significant player in the specialty coffee industry. The *Cranberry Coffee* trademark marks a pivotal milestone, as it is the first Indian-origin coffee to secure a global trademark—a



AN INSPIRING FUTURE FOR INDIAN COFFEE
With *Cranberry Coffee*, **Roastery Coffee House** has demonstrated how Indian coffee can resonate

on the global stage by combining local creativity with a deep understanding of customer preferences. This achievement is not just a victory for the brand but for India's coffee industry as a whole, setting a powerful example for other Indian brands and creating opportunities for international recognition. **Roastery Coffee House** has truly redefined Indian coffee culture and continues to chart a new course for the industry. As it expands internationally, it carries with it a legacy of innovation, quality, and passion, firmly establishing India's place on the global coffee map.



MY FILMS PLAY ONLY IN BENGAL, AND MY AUDIENCE IS THE EDUCATED MIDDLE CLASS IN THE CITIES AND SMALL TOWNS. THEY ALSO PLAY IN BOMBAY, MADRAS AND DELHI WHERE THERE IS A BENGALI POPULATION
—SATYAJIT RAY

THE TIMELESS ALLURE OF DELHI BAZAARS

Delhi's bazaars are more than just places to shop, they're vibrant, historical hubs where the city's past and present blend seamlessly, writes **KANISHKA SRIVASTAVA**



Delhi's bazaars, pulsing with life, colour, and history, are much more than marketplaces. They are a blend of heritage and modernity, places where the past and present meet in a seamless confluence of aromas, sounds, and sights. From the labyrinthine lanes of *Chandni Chowk* to the bustling avenues of *Dilli Haat*, Delhi's markets tell stories of centuries gone by and reflect the city's evolving culture.

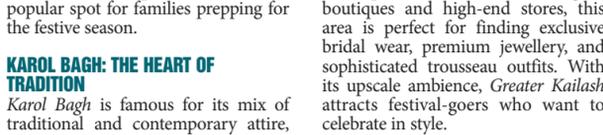
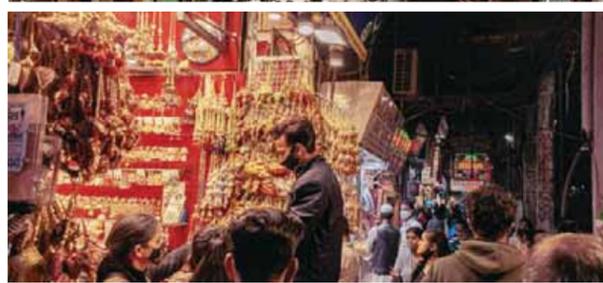
Delhi's bazaars have been central to the city's identity since its days as the capital of empires. Mughal emperor *Shah Jahan* established *Chandni Chowk* in the 17th century as a marketplace that would rival any in the world. Its name, meaning "Moonlight Square," was inspired by a water canal that once reflected the moonlight, lending a magical glow to the surroundings. *Chandni Chowk* became the heart of trade in Mughal India, where merchants from across Asia brought in silk, spices, and jewels, turning the area into a melting pot of cultures.

As the years passed, other bazaars sprang up, each with its own speciality and charm. For instance, *Khari Baoli*, the spice market, emerged as a go-to for spices and dried fruits, its intense aromas filling the air and adding a signature fragrance to Delhi's streets. Over time, bazaars like *Daryaganj*, which once hosted booksellers and publishers, and *Sarajini Nagar*, famous for its affordable fashion, have added layers to Delhi's shopping culture.

Every festive season, Delhi transforms into a radiant hub of celebration, where joy, traditions, and community take centre stage. Festivals like *Diwali*, *Navratri* and *Dussehra* infuse the city with vibrant energy, filling its streets with lights, colours, and shoppers in search of the perfect outfits, decorations, and gifts. From historic bazaars rich in tradition to modern malls showcasing top designer brands, festival shopping in Delhi is an experience that beautifully combines heritage and contemporary flair.

CHANDNI CHOWK: WHERE HERITAGE MEETS STYLE

Steeped in history, *Chandni Chowk* is the ultimate destination for exploring Delhi's cultural roots. With narrow lanes lined with shops, this iconic market offers an impressive selection of traditional wear, including bridal lehengas, sarees, and intricate jewellery. The new *Omaxe Chowk* adds modern amenities to the shopping experience, blending historic charm with contemporary conveniences. *Chandni Chowk* is a must-visit for



anyone looking to immerse themselves in Delhi's rich heritage during the festive season.

LAJPAT NAGAR: A FESTIVAL SHOPPER'S PARADISE

Known for its affordability and variety, *Lajpat Nagar* is a favourite among festival shoppers. This lively market offers everything from ethnic wear to home décor and accessories, all at competitive prices. Whether you're after an elegant saree or bridal outfit, *Lajpat Nagar's* vibrant atmosphere and wallet-friendly options make it a popular spot for families prepping for the festive season.

KAROL BAGH: THE HEART OF TRADITION

Karol Bagh is famous for its mix of traditional and contemporary attire,

making it a top destination for wedding and festival shopping. With stores packed into narrow, bustling streets, shoppers can explore an extensive range of bridal wear, textiles, and unique jewellery. The energetic vibe and variety make *Karol Bagh* ideal for those seeking traditional attire and festive accessories.

GREATER KAILASH: ELEGANCE IN EVERY CORNER

If you're looking for a more luxurious shopping experience, *Greater Kailash* is the place to be. Home to designer boutiques and high-end stores, this area is perfect for finding exclusive bridal wear, premium jewellery, and sophisticated trousseau outfits. With its upscale ambience, *Greater Kailash* attracts festival-goers who want to celebrate in style.

DOWNTOWN BY MANSAN – SOUTH DELHI'S MODERN SHOPPING DESTINATION

Soon to open, *Downtown by Mansan Group* brings a new shopping experience to South Delhi, conveniently located near the *Sarajini Nagar Metro Station*. Spread over 2.18 acres, this modern retail complex combines high-street brands with luxury outlets, offering a blend of shopping and contemporary office spaces. With ample parking and a range of dining options, *Downtown* is set to become a favourite for festival shoppers seeking convenience and a touch of sophistication.

KHAN MARKET: THE UPSCALE MARKET

One of Delhi's upscale markets, *Khan Market* presents a more sophisticated experience. Although it originated as a market for refugees from *Pakistan* after Partition, *Khan Market* has evolved into a high-end shopping hub, known for designer boutiques, international brands, and posh eateries. Its ambience strikes a balance between global trends and Indian tastes, attracting the city's elite and expatriates.

Delhi's bazaars are not just shopping destinations—they are cultural institutions that hold a mirror to the city's diverse population. During festivals like *Diwali* and *Eid*, bazaars take on a life of their own, with streets decked in lights, special offerings at every stall, and an air of celebration all around. Vendors and shoppers, coming from varied cultural and economic backgrounds, interact with warmth and camaraderie, making these spaces truly inclusive.

Besides, the food scene in Delhi's markets is an experience in itself. From *Paranthe Wali Gali's* fried delights to the chaats of *INA Market* and the kebabs of *Jama Masjid*, the bazaars have something to tantalise every palate. Street food vendors, often in families for generations, have honed their craft, turning simple snacks into icons of Delhi's culinary landscape. The Future of Delhi's Bazaars: Balancing Heritage with Modern Needs.

As Delhi modernises, its bazaars are also evolving. The government has initiated efforts to preserve historical markets, restoring facades and improving infrastructure to cater to tourists and preserve heritage. However, challenges persist: rapid urbanisation, increased footfall, and modernisation pressures can sometimes erode the traditional spirit of these markets. Yet, the resilience of Delhi's bazaars lies in their adaptability.



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

A Soulful Sojourn in Puri and Konark

Puri and Konark, two jewels of Odisha, offer a rich tapestry of spirituality, history, and culture that captivates the soul of every traveler, writes **VISHESH SHUKLA**

In quest of spiritual enlightenment, I embarked on a spiritual journey to *Jagannath Puri*, the revered abode of *Lord Krishna*. Boarding a local train from *Dhenkanal* railway station at dawn, I felt a thrill of excitement for the adventure ahead. The weather was beautiful, with the sun just beginning to rise, casting a warm glow over everything. As the train moved along, I found myself pondering my plans for the day once I reached *Puri*, eagerly anticipating the experiences that awaited me.

After a few hours of the train's rhythmic motion, I finally arrived at my destination. Upon exiting the station, I immediately started looking for a place to stay. Fortunately, I found *Hotel Nemili* nearby. I settled on renting 1400 to the hotel reception to get a room. The room was cosy and inviting, a perfect spot to rest after my journey. After resting and freshening up for a while, I felt rejuvenated and ready to explore.

Eager to soak in the local ambience, I grabbed a cup of tea from a nearby stall, enjoying the vibrant atmosphere around me. The streets buzzed with life, filled with locals and tourists alike, all making their way to the temple. Soon, I decided to take a shared auto to the famous *Jagannath Temple*. The driver charged me Rs. 20 and dropped me a short distance from the temple entrance.



TEMPLE

As I walked along *Chakratirtha Road*, I noticed a significant crowd gathering, likely due to the weekend and the special occasion of *Govardhan Puja*. A police officer stationed nearby mentioned that it would take at least three hours to have darshan due to the rush. Many brokers approached me, promising faster entry for a fee of Rs. 500, but I decided not to engage with them and continued on my way, determined to experience the authentic essence of the pilgrimage.

The heat was intense, and I felt a bit uneasy, the sun bearing down as I moved through the throngs of people. After a while, I reached the temple's entrance, where I stored my mobile and shoes in the locker provided by the temple trust. I joined the long line for darshan, the anticipation building with

each step. After two hours of waiting and moving through the crowd, I finally had darshan of *Lord Jagannath*, along with visits to the *Sakshi Gopal* and *Ganesh* temples within the premises. The atmosphere was electric with devotion, and I took a moment to soak in the spiritual energy that filled the air. I also made sure to visit the *Mahalakshmi Temple* before leaving the complex, feeling grateful for the blessings received.

As I emerged from the sacred precincts of the *Jagannath Temple*, I was blessed with a profound spiritual experience witnessing the live installation of the *Patitapabana Bana*, a revered flag atop the temple's majestic spire. This sacred ritual, steeped in tradition and significance, left an indelible mark on my soul, with a sense of serenity and connection to the divine. By the time I exited the temple, my stomach growled in protest. I walked down *Chakratirtha*

Road again and stopped at *Ram Lalla* restaurant, where I enjoyed a satisfying meal. The flavours were delicious, and I found myself reflecting on the incredible experience of the day—the vibrant sights, the sounds of prayers, and the palpable sense of community. To make the evening even better, I set out for *Puri's* popular *Golden Beach*, where many people were already present. After sitting there for a while, I felt a deep sense of peace watching the waves crash against the shore. The sight of the ocean calmed my mind, and I enjoyed an ice cream being sold nearby.

savouring the moment. After spending some more time lost in thought and tranquillity, I decided to call it a day and returned to my hotel to rest.

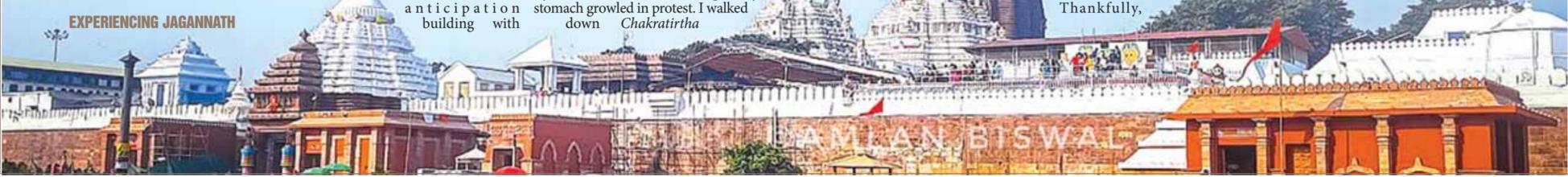
DISCOVERING KONARK

The next morning, I woke up early, checked out of the hotel, and placed my luggage in the locker room near the station. With excitement bubbling within me, I made my way to *Vatika Restaurant* for breakfast, relishing the local flavours before setting off for *Konark*. I took a shared auto to reach there, and as soon as I arrived, I was greeted by intense heat, much stronger than in *Puri*. My first stop was the *Sun Temple*, an incredible historic site under the *Archaeological Survey of India*, which required an entry ticket for Rs. 35. Thankfully,

tickets can be easily purchased online, making it convenient for travellers. The temple's architecture was mesmerising, a true marvel of ancient Indian craftsmanship. I spent some time exploring the intricacies of the carvings and the grandeur of the structure, feeling a sense of reverence as I walked through the sacred grounds.

After immersing myself in the history of the *Sun Temple*, I continued to *Chandrabhaga Beach*, just 4 kilometres away. The beach is very popular among tourists and offers fun activities like *ATV* bike rides and boat rides. I spent a while enjoying the beach, feeling the soft sand beneath my feet and the refreshing sea breeze against my skin. The vibrant energy of the beach was infectious, and I could see families enjoying picnics, children building sandcastles, and friends laughing together.

As the day went on, I checked the time and decided it was best to head back. I knew I had to catch the 5 PM local train back to *Dhenkanal*. Returning to *Puri*, I caught the train and settled in, watching the scenery change outside the window. I reached home with a heart full of cherished memories and stunning sights that stayed vividly in my mind, knowing that this journey had deepened my connection to my spirituality and left me yearning for more adventures in the future.



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Balancing Trade

As a second Trump term in the White House looms, India faces a renewed challenge in managing its trade relationship with the United States. During Mr Donald Trump's earlier term as President, India experienced direct and often aggressive pressure to lower tariffs on specific American goods, notably high-end motorcycles, in line with his "America First" vision. This stance demanded concessions to "balance" trade relationships, typically prioritising American economic interests. While recent years under the Biden administration saw a more measured approach, the return of Mr Trump's transactional diplomacy would likely mean a return to tough negotiations for India. The country's trade with the US is a high-stakes matter: the US remains one of India's largest markets for exports, ranging from engineering goods and pharmaceuticals to textiles and jewellery. Given the reliance on these sectors to drive India's economic growth, India stands to gain considerably from maintaining strong trade ties with the US. However, Mr Trump's probable emphasis on India reducing tariffs to benefit American exporters poses a direct challenge. From India's perspective, managing this relationship without conceding too much in sensitive areas like dairy or certain controlled medical devices will be critical. On the flip side, Mr Trump's return may also present opportunities for India, especially amid the US's increasing push to diversify its manufacturing base away from China. This "China + 1" strategy, which gained traction post-pandemic, aims to lessen dependence on Chinese production and has already opened doors for Indian manufacturers to access Western markets. To leverage this strategy, India needs a well-planned approach that not only addresses US concerns but also ensures that Indian exports remain competitive.

However, managing the Chinese influence brings additional complexities. As the US and Europe impose stricter restrictions on Chinese imports, there is a risk of China turning to other markets like India to offload surplus goods at reduced prices. This could lead to a flood of low-cost Chinese products in the Indian market, affecting domestic manufacturers, especially in sectors relying on intermediate goods. While anti-dumping measures may help curb this threat, overuse of these measures could harm India's small and medium enterprises that rely on affordable raw materials for production. To navigate these challenges, India must be prepared with a balanced, strategic approach to negotiate effectively while safeguarding domestic interests. Offering concessions on non-sensitive items like high-end luxury goods could pave the way for favourable terms without significantly impacting the domestic market.

At the same time, India must be cautious in protecting areas of national interest, ensuring any relaxation in duties is calculated and controlled. Ultimately, as India weighs its trade strategy, the larger goal should be clear: maximise gains in exports and economic cooperation while minimising vulnerabilities. The trade relationship with the US, while challenging, offers vast opportunities that India cannot afford to overlook. By taking a pragmatic and flexible approach, India can work toward a mutually beneficial relationship, seizing the economic opportunities created by global shifts while maintaining its strategic autonomy.

German Disarray

The collapse of Germany's coalition government marks a pivotal moment for the country, facing both economic strain and mounting geopolitical pressures. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's administration, a three-way coalition between his Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens, and the Free Democrats (FDP), has been marred by conflicting visions on spending priorities and national policy. The disintegration of this coalition, coupled with Germany's economic contraction, raises a question critical to both the German electorate and its allies: Is it time for Germany to hold an early election to reset and stabilise? Support for an early election has surged, reflecting broad frustration with the political stalemate and economic uncertainty that have taken hold. In the wake of the coalition's collapse, opposition leaders have amplified their calls for a vote sooner rather than later, arguing that delays only serve party agendas and prolong Germany's challenges. The current government's failure to agree on essential fiscal policies has left Germany vulnerable to further economic downturns and weakened its influence on pressing foreign policy issues, from supporting Ukraine to preparing for potential trade conflicts with major economies. An early election would offer Germans a chance to redefine the political mandate. For Germany, where coalition governments are the norm, voter turnout often dictates the balance of power in parliament and can determine whether moderate or more polarised forces dominate. With the stakes higher than ever, a new election would allow the public to recalibrate priorities around economic resilience, social stability, and global competitiveness. Germany's economy is contracting for a second consecutive year, and its industrial base - a historic pillar of its global strength - is grappling with high energy costs and labour challenges. Germany must address these issues decisively, and a reinvigorated government may be better equipped to implement needed reforms.

Notably, leaders like Robert Habeck of the Greens, currently the vice chancellor, could shift the political landscape. His vocal advocacy for increased spending to drive green energy and industrial revitalisation aligns with calls from industry leaders who worry about Germany's ability to stay competitive. Mr Habeck's potential bid for chancellorship suggests that the Greens may seek to capitalise on the current crisis to gain a stronger mandate for their agenda. Whether the public embraces this vision or pivots to a more conservative stance under the Christian Democrats is an open question, but an early election would offer a clearer direction. Beyond internal reforms, Germany's geopolitical role demands a coherent and steady approach. Europe is entering a critical period with the return of Donald Trump as America's President and escalating tariff tensions with China. As a leader within the EU and NATO, Germany must be prepared to engage with allies and adversaries alike. Only a stable, cohesive government can manage this effectively. Ultimately, an early election could allow Germany to rebuild its political unity and reassert its economic and global standing.

Their 'lost Jerusalem'

World citizens of today who can stomach gut-wrenching details, imagery of devastation and death do recall that 70 per cent of Gaza's population is composed of refugees of the 1948 Nakba, when an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were forced out of their homes by Zionist militias. What the relentless bombings are reviving are not just the memories of the Nakba 75 years ago, but brutalities and destruction in the ancient lands over the last 3000 years. Jerusalem itself, the Zion of song and longing in Babylon, is perhaps the single most bitterly contested patch of land in human history, wrote Neil MacGregor



Historical events through 2023 and 2024, and the shaping of politics and diplomacy, are providing intriguing insights into our world, bridging the past with a violent, volatile present. Widely reported in the global media is the mind-numbing, incessant and most intense bombing campaigns of Israel in Gaza. Israel said it struck at least 12,000 targets from 7 October to 1 November 2023, not sparing hospitals, schools, mosques, churches. Al Jazeera reported that by 25 October, just 19 days into the assault, Israeli attacks killed at least 7,028 people, including 2,913 children, in Gaza. Residents, including children, who had taken shelter in the Church of Saint Porphyrius, were killed in the bombings. Saint Porphyrius in Gaza's Old City is considered the third-oldest church in the world. Built in 425 CE, it offered sanctuary to many Christian and Muslim residents of Gaza.

Over the last 20 years, since 2003, the axis of destruction has been shifting when the Gulf War engulfed the entire region, with brief intense conflicts between Iraq and combined forces of the US and UK, and later, the US-led occupation of Iraq with the aim of deposing Saddam Hussein. The mysterious 'weapons of mass destruction' and the decadence of Saddam's long reign became common knowledge; what is lesser known is the story of saving the cultural heritage in the aftermath of military actions in Iraq, once the ancient land of Mesopotamia, a rich and powerful civilization which flourished 5,000 years ago. The world's first great cities emerged here, becoming major centres of knowledge, learning, trade and commerce.

In The Burlington Magazine (December 2015), an editorial brings alive the role played by the British Museum during the traumatic Gulf War. "Three weeks before the war broke out John Curtis, then Keeper, Department of the Middle East, and Robert Springborg, of the Middle East Institute at the School of African and Oriental Studies, warned the Minister of Defence (Geoff Hoon) of the potential danger to the cultural heritage of military action in Iraq. Why had the Coalition not sought to protect Baghdad's National Museum? These and other questions about Iraq dominated a British Museum press conference, on 15 April 2003."

It was under the leadership of the Museum Director Neil MacGregor that the Prime Minister's office was contacted with a request for immediate protection of

key historical sites. With remarkable alacrity, MacGregor announced that British Museum would play a lead role within an alliance of five world-class museums (the Hermitage, St Petersburg; the Louvre, Paris; the State Museums in Berlin, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) in providing Iraq's National Museum with assistance.

MacGregor's sense of urgency, as The Observer rightly pointed out on 8 June 2003 had moved antiquities up the political agenda. He also drew media attention to the universal sense that what was being lost or desecrated in Iraq were not distant artifacts but a heritage and history that belonged to the whole world. From this time on, MacGregor would repeatedly state his belief that we are all becoming 'world citizens'.

This magisterial ability to focus on world heritage and joining the dots between yesterday, today and tomorrow makes MacGregor's chapter titled 'Thy Kingdom Come' (in 'Living with the Gods') a compulsive read. "By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down; and there we wept / when we remembered Zion". He began with Psalm 137 which saw a Jamaican reggae band, the Melodians, turn the lament of the Jews for their 'lost Jerusalem' into a Rastafarian song of hope. Initially the Jamaican government found it dangerously subversive, only later realising the words were straight from the Bible. When the popular Boney M performed this song, it topped charts across Europe.

Remembering Zion, as MacGregor pointed out, has been a subject not just of a song but of political action for over 2,500 years. "The idea of Zion, a place remembered or imagined where the people of God could properly worship their God free from the tyranny of the powerful, became an enduring strand of Jewish thought, and later of all the Abrahamic faiths," he explained referring to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

World citizens of today who can stomach gut-wrenching details, imagery of devastation and death unleashed by Israel, do recall that 70 per cent of Gaza's population is composed of refugees of the 1948 Nakba, when an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were forced out of their homes by Zionist militias. What the relentless bom-

dings are reviving are not just the memories of the Nakba 75 years ago, but brutalities and destruction in the ancient lands of the last 3,000 years. Jerusalem itself, the Zion of song and longing in Babylon, is perhaps the single most bitterly contested patch of land in human history, wrote MacGregor.

Through his words the long span of global history unfolds: "The tragic conflicts of today are only the latest phase of a continuum that stretches back over thousands of years and includes British and Babylonians, Arabs, Crusaders, Persians, Egyptians and, most systematically brutal of all, Roman."

He wrote: "In 587 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar, one of the greatest Kings of the Chaldean dynasty of Babylonia, conquered Jerusalem. He destroyed and plundered the Temple, the supreme focus of Jewish faith and ritual sacrifice which had been built and embellished around 400 years earlier by King Solomon. Many thousands of Jews were deported to Babylon, by whose rivers - the canals of the

Euphrates - they dreamt of the day when might return to the land of their fathers and worship in a rebuilt Temple. Until then they would endure their exile, repeat the plaintive question of the psalmist: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

Timelines of the next 700 years are significant. By 539 BCE, Cyrus the King of Persia conquered Babylon; he allowed the deported Jews to return in joy to Jerusalem, to rebuild the city and the Temple where worship and sacrifice resumed. "It seemed a miraculous deliverance," commented MacGregor, adding "the experience of exile left a deep mark, spiritual as well as scriptural."

By 60 BCE when the Romans had effectively taken control of the area around Jerusalem, a strategic crossroads between Egypt and Persia, a puppet Jewish King was installed who bowed to the Roman Kings and Gods, sully the Jewish faith in the heart of the Temple, besides imposing heavy taxes on the people. The test of endurance for Jews continued for almost hundred years. They were advised by Jesus to remain accommodative and comprising. MacGregor explained: Jesus took a Roman coin, showed the Emperor's head on it and told his antagonists to 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's'.

In 66 CE, a great revolt against Roman military occupation broke out resulting in defeat for the Jews, and the total destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by 70 CE. Rome's victory over the Jews became for decades a central part of imperial propaganda. By 131 CE, simmering hatred of Jews towards their Roman rulers exploded into another war, with rebels fighting for an independent state: the Jewish rebel leader was Simon bar Kokhba.

From the British Museum collection, MacGregor weaves together the narrative through a clumsily-minted coin dating to 132 CE. The coin became instrumental in understanding turbulent centuries when people were being massacred, just as they are being ruthlessly bombed today.

The coin in question is a rough and powerful statement, with an image of the Temple destroyed in the first Jewish revolt: it also carried the rebel leader's name on its edge, Shimon. On the other side, Prof Mary Beard of Cambridge University explained, there are palm branches and in Hebrew script the words, 'For the liberation of Jerusalem'. Not just a coin, she felt it was an aggressively propagandist coin, minted by rebels of the second great revolt. For MacGregor the coin has a key message: "the miracle of deliverance from oppression, and of restoring worship in the Temple. The promise of Shimon bar Kokhba and his coin was that it could happen again. The occupier could be driven out. Zion could be restored."

The story of Shimon bar Kokhba had its heroic but tragic end, even though he created a small State of Beth Israel before being decimated by the mighty Roman armies in 135 CE. Emperor Hadrian wiped off buildings, culture and memories of the Jewish revolt, giving off the lands to the enemies of Jews, the Philistines. 'Jerusalem' simply ceased to exist; at the Temple where Jehovah was once worshipped, now the Roman God Jupiter and the Emperor were celebrated. MacGregor ended the section, with prophetic words, "For the Romans and for the Jews, it had become impossible to separate politics and religion."

For world citizens today, after the attack by Hamas and Israeli invasion from October 2023 onwards, it has become impossible not to shed tears for the 40,000 killed in the Gaza Strip, as reported by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.



RAJU MANSUKHANI
The writer is a researcher-author on history and heritage issues and a former deputy curator of Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Last chance

SIR, When India lost 0-3 in England in 1974, Ajit Wadekar resigned as skipper immediately. After India were eliminated at the preliminary stage in the 2007 World Cup, Dravid never skipped India again in limited overs cricket. So, should Rohit Sharma, hitherto a brilliant batsman and helmsman, quit after one of India's supreme ignominies? His reckless batting, moreover, set a terrible example as leader.

The jury is certainly out on his future. Greg Chappell was sacked as head coach after India prematurely exited the 2007 World Cup. Should the axe likewise fall on Gautam Gambhir? Here, too, jurors are in a huddle. Sharma and Gambhir staying in their posts, though,

appears to be a fait accompli for the tour of Australia.

Sachin Tendulkar wondered aloud if it was 'lack of preparation', 'poor shot selection' or 'lack of match practice' that caused India's abysmal showing against the Kiwis. Can India make amends in Australia? They did recover after being bundled out for 36 at Adelaide last time around.

It should be the last chance granted to Gambhir, Sharma and Kohli to redeem themselves. In the delirium that the BCCI has existed in lately, obsessed with phenomena like the Indian Premier League, certain fundamentals have been forgotten.

That it's not the BCCI's bank balance but India's display on the field which matters most. That while lifting the Twenty20 World

Cup this year wasn't insignificant, wearing the WTC crown is the ultimate prize in a game conceived as an even contest between bat and

ball. The BCCI boasts that its net worth is greater than the combined wealth of the rest of the cricket boards. But it is the Aussies with far

less funds who hold the WTC and World Cup trophies. Yours, etc., Shovanlal Chakraborty, Kolkata, 7 November.

SEMINKAR VERDICT

SIR, In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court on Tuesday decisively clarified that not all private property can be classified as "material resources of the community" for redistribution by the state under Article 39 (b) of the Constitution. The verdict, delivered by a nine-judge Bench draws a firm line between private ownership and public resources. It emphasised a nuanced, context-specific approach.

At the heart of the ruling is the recognition that not all privately held resources necessarily serve the "common good" when redistributed. The SC outlined specific criteria for determining whether a private asset falls within the community's material resources: its inherent characteristics, scarcity and impact on societal welfare. This protects individual ownership while ensuring that essential resources, such as natural reserves or spectrum, can be made available for the public benefit when necessary. This verdict marks a prudent shift in balancing economic policy with constitutional rights. By ruling that the judiciary's role is to respect the "intent of the framers to lay down the foundation for an economic democracy", the SC reaffirms the importance of elected representatives in shaping economic choices. This restraint is crucial as India's economic landscape expands to include new industries and complex assets. It underlines the court's commitment to safeguarding individual property rights while prioritising common good judiciously.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 7 November.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Finding balance and peace with nature

The 16th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) wrapped up on Saturday in Cali, Colombia. This was the first biodiversity COP since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at COP15 held in Montreal, Canada in December 2022. The parties (governments) and other stakeholders will review the state of implementation of the GBF and show the alignment of the respective National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the framework. A major focus of COP16 was on capacity-building, monitoring, and advanced resource mobilisation for the GBF. The event also saw the adoption of a multilateral mechanism on the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources. In addition, the parties provided updates on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing.

Improving our relationship with nature is the best way at the moment to address the consequences of climate change. The ecosystems around us, such as forests, wetlands, and mangroves, are natural machines for mitigating climate change. Forests alone absorb about 2.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) annually, which is one-third of the CO2 released by burning fossil fuels. Besides, mangroves and seagrass meadows can store five to ten times more CO2 per

The Daily Star

hectare than terrestrial forests. Forest restoration and wetland conservation could reduce up to 37 percent of the emissions to meet the Paris Agreement targets by 2030. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlighted the importance of the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems to remove an additional one billion tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere by 2050. However, we are aware that deforestation across the world due to agriculture has caused about 12-15 percent of global CO2 emissions, which is equivalent to the emission of the entire transportation sector. Around 10 million hectares of forest were lost during the period of 2015-2020. The global reforestation effort could sequester around 205 gigatonnes of carbon. Over \$44 trillion of global GDP (approximately half of the world's economic output) is mostly dependent on ecosystem services, i.e. water filtration, climate regulation, and pollination, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF). However, biodiversity loss could reduce global GDP by \$2.7 trillion annually by 2030. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), investment in biodiversity and ecosystem restoration could yield up to \$9 for every \$1. Sustainable practices like renewable energy, smart agriculture, and conservation could create 395 million jobs across the world by 2030. The 15th Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh (2011) affirmed the state's responsibility for biodiversity preservation. We then went on to enact several legal instruments, such as the Ecologically Critical Areas Management Rules, 2016, Protected Area Management Rules, 2017, and the Bangladesh Biodiversity Act, 2017. As a result, the country now has 13 ecological hotspots and 22 protected areas to conserve biodiversity. We also have a National Conservation Policy (2016-2031) in place to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, including biodiversity.

The government's eighth Five-Year Plan (2020-2025) and the long-term Delta Plan 2100 integrate water, land, environment, and biodiversity to mitigate climate change risks and reduce biodiversity loss. The National Adaptation Plan (2023-2050) prioritises biodiversity conservation and climate action, nature-based solutions, and the establishment of forest and coastal zone policies.

IN MEMORIAM

GANGULI DEBOBALA — Left us on 10th November, 1999. Missed by Chhanda, Babu, Munnum, others.

Could euphoria over win be a problem for Trump?

GOURI SANKAR NAG AND MANAS MUKUL BANDYOPADHYAY

November 6 marks the beginning of a momentous chapter in American history, not only as the date when Donald Trump was elected as the 47th President of the United States but also as a symbol of a new era characterized by a resurgence of American glory and pre-eminence. Although such an overwhelming victory could not be forecast before, the widespread euphoria that the election outcome exudes signifies a discernible shift in the political landscape, where Trump's persona seems to have re-emerged as a beacon of hope for many, particularly those disillusioned by both internal discomfiture and on-going global crises intensified by Biden's shaky conduct.

Although it would be too early to say this, the implications of Trump's new inning undoubtedly extend beyond domestic borders, resonating with hope for a battered humanity across the globe, whether war-ravaged Eastern Europe or regions like the Middle East, where conflict has spilled over into broader supply-chain and security disasters. For marginalized communities, including Black and Asian populations within the U.S., Trump's election represents an opportunity to get their voice heard, positioning him as a potential pivot for bold change both at home and abroad.

But how will a new administration under Trump respond to the pressure of huge expectations - the demand already built up by his pledges.

While the mandate favouring Trump is compelling and irrefutable, it is essential to analyze his leadership style critically. Unlike the model of statesmanship exemplified by thinkers like John Stuart Mill, who advocated for rational discourse and representative governance, Trump embodies a more impulsive approach. As noted by Sashi Tharoor, he is akin

to "an open book" - a leader who articulates his thoughts candidly but often without the restraint associated with the conventional decorum of formalities. His communication style can be described as spontaneous and at times hysterical, which raises questions about his astuteness, not to speak of dexterity, in navigating complex international relations.

Despite these traits, Trump adheres to a philosophy of benevolent authoritarianism and champions 'American exceptionalism' - a belief that America holds a unique place in the world that justifies its leadership role. These characteristics present both opportunities and challenges for his transition team as it seeks to address pressing issues domestically and internationally.

Trump, a septuagenarian often characterized as a showman, possesses keen political acumen that enables him to attract a diverse coalition of supporters, including moderates and those disenchanted with Democratic politics. His election campaigns have demonstrated an ability to connect with various segments of society by focusing on pragmatic issues rather than adhering to broader progressive ideals like climate. Unlike the Democratic Party, which emphasizes women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate change initiatives, Trump has strategically positioned himself as a champion of economic growth and national security.

Although it is difficult to mend the system overnight, particularly when society is stuck in the blind alley of bipartisanship and when democracy's inherent spirit gets stymied by elites and multiple divisions, it is notable indeed that Trump's pre-election meetings were designed to give a badly needed healing touch that appealed to ordinary voters alienated by the more progressive stances of his opponents. By avoiding the pitfalls of the left-of-the-centre stances associated with progressive agendas, he crafted a narrative that prioritized tangible outcomes over ideological commitments.

Moreover, Trump's understanding of the political landscape is evident in his campaign strategies. He adeptly identifies key issues that resonate with his base while simultaneously reaching out to moderates who may prioritize economic stability over social justice initiatives. His rhetoric often emphasized themes such as job creation, and American exceptionalism - elements that are designed to evoke a sense of nostalgia and pride among voters. This calculated approach not only solidifies his support among loyalists but also creates an inviting space for undecided voters. In this way, Trump's political tactics reflect a nuanced understanding of voter sentiment that transcends mere showmanship.

Trump's election campaign team included many stars from the very unassuming Susie Wiles to tycoons like Elon Musk. It is already being said that Musk is the architect of Trump's victory, hence credit goes to him for adeptly making new narratives of plausible change personified by Trump rather than restoration of Biden or Obama policies. Trump himself admitted the contribution of Musk in his victory speech. However, Musk's entry into direct politics is not novel because many CEOs before him have ventured into politics, which shows how the political economy remains closely aligned with big business. It was obvious that most business tycoons including Amazon's Jeff Bezos would quickly praise Trump. However, behind the story of Trump's win, a new star was born. That was Musk, who strategically used social media platforms to persuade a majority of voters with his rhetoric of change that means industry, business and profitability for companies.

Recently, Garrett Nelson, an analyst with CFRA Research, opined in a note, "In our view, Tesla and CEO Elon Musk are perhaps the biggest winners from the election result, and we believe Trump's victory will help expedite regulatory approval of the company's autonomous driving



technology". It clearly reflects that Trump's second innings is a façade behind which calculated steps were responsible for boosting the competition in the thriving auto industry thereby raising Tesla's stock price. It was not big data or voter turnout models, but rather voters' confidence in the authenticity of Musk's propaganda that succeeded in fostering a palpable sense among the youth and veterans alike that a golden chapter was about to commence.

However, there are many challenges before Trump, first and foremost because reforming systems of governance and external relations within a four-year timeframe is simply absurd even though he could implement some transformative policies during the second innings of his presidency. However, the so-called "epiphany effect" stemming from these policy shifts, unless neutralised with sobering adjustment, might engender confusion both domestically and internationally, as citizens grapple with the contradictions between expectations for concrete benefits and the reality of fluctuating stances on critical issues.

This dissonance is likely to demoralise voters who may have anticipated a clear trajectory towards improvement. Furthermore, the implications of such erratic policy changes might undermine the cohesion and resolve of security alliances like Nato, which remains predominantly defensive vis-a-vis increased

Russian aggression. The inability of the US leadership to adopt a more assertive posture against regional hegemony such as Iran might further complicate the quest for resolution of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine and Lebanon. This was evident when instead of engaging with Tehran, Trump withdrew impatiently from the nuclear pact in 2019 leaving the situation in unaddressed precarity.

Even the potential for Trump to pivot towards less consequential matters raises concerns about wasted opportunities for substantive engagement on pressing challenges, especially political ecology or immigration. At the end of the day, can America be oblivious to the fact it is a nation of immigrants? So why unduly securitise it while taking up superficial initiatives or ceremonial events - like foreign visits or festive gatherings at the White House - that do little to address the underlying domestic discontent? This inclination towards focusing on petty issues not only risks alienating constituents seeking meaningful change but also diminishes US credibility on the world stage. As international relations become increasingly complex, American leadership must ponder over what Franklin Roosevelt said, "The Presidency is not merely an administrative office...It is pre-eminently a place of moral leadership."

(The writers are, respectively, Professor, Department of Political Science, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, and Associate Professor (Retd.), Chandernagore Govt. College.)

NOW AND AGAIN

AN EPITOME OF SACRIFICE

CHANDER GUPTA

On the occasion of the 13th death anniversary of the unassuming hero that my father was, I owe to him a commemorative tribute. 'Pita ji', the sobriquet with which his four offspring affectionately addressed him, passed away on 2 November 2011.

My father was a budding lawyer when I was born in 1959 at Kaithal. As I was growing up and started going to school, he had in a short time established himself as a prominent lawyer of the area. In his heydays spanning three decades of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, my father was so famous that merely one line containing his name 'c/o Shri Lal Chand, Advocate, Kaithal' was the postal address for our residence. He was fondly called Bau ji, or Bau Lal Chand by his clients and others.

While his legal acumen was amply on display in court, his sterling character shone brightly in the commitment with which he discharged his duties towards his extended family. Ours was a joint family and my father was the sole breadwinner for 10 members of the family. His old parents and two younger brothers were fully dependent upon him. Because separation from old parents and younger brothers would have been abdication of familial duty for him, he never contemplated moving to the High Court at Chandigarh though he had the potential to flourish. An epitome of sacrifice, he didn't even bat an eyelid in shunning an offer of lateral entry in the judiciary as ADJ as that would have entailed movement.

Apart from being a brilliant lawyer, he was actively involved in the social milieu of the town. My father was the Charter President of Lions Club at Kaithal. He was a member of the Managing Committees of RKSD College at Kaithal and DAV College at nearby Pundri. He was elected President of the Kaithal Bar Association with a thumping majority. Due to his jovial and helpful nature, people adored him. He had friends from all fields: doctors, teachers, engineers, politicians, etc.

As I was the eldest of the siblings, everybody expected me to graduate in Law and join my father's office. As an adult, I had my own mind and did M.A. (English) instead and eventually joined a bank. My two younger brothers studied Law but worked with my father for a short while only before both of them joined the judicial service. My father's joy and pride knew no bounds when my brothers joined the judicial service though my parents were left alone at our Kaithal home. After decades of hard work and shouldering onerous responsibilities, my father's health started declining after he touched 70. As he turned 75, he gave up the legal profession. Finally, he bid adieu to this world when he was 82 in the holy land of Kurukshetra, where he had shifted in the care of my younger brother. None of us siblings could emulate him in touching the dizzying heights he had attained.

100 YEARS AGO

WIRELESS TEST CASE

MR. JOHN SCOTT-TAGGART, the wire-less authority, has placed £500 at the disposal of the Radio Society of Great Britain towards fighting a test case with the post office on the question of restrictions placed on amateur wireless transmission.

Dr. Eccles, President of the Radio Society of Great Britain, said that the restrictive regulations imposed were hindering scientific discovery and diminishing our wireless prestige relative to other nations.

The Wireless World has also offered £500 support to the Radio Society in the event of a test case being fought by them.

BOY'S GALLANTRY

RIGGING CLIMB ON WRECKED SHIP

WHEN a 40-ton motor boat, the Menie, was caught in a violent gale and blown on to the sands on the Ayrshire coast; a boy on board displayed great courage and resource.

The boy, who is the captain's son, climbed up the rigging and held a lighted torch as a distress signal, until it burned out. Then he fired a rocket, and afterwards worked at the pumps.

At one time the crew of four gave up all hope of being saved, but eventually they got safely ashore in an exhausted condition. The boat had been tossed about in the gale for four hours.

PRETTY-GIRL MUSIC

"There are some classes of music which are like some pretty girls," said Canon Bell, York Minister, speaking to the Hull Rotary Club.

These pieces of music, he added, seem to say: "Look at me and see how pretty I am, and later look at me a little closer and see how utterly silly I am."

Canon Bell described the tune of the hymn "Peace, perfect peace," as unconvincing and monotonous. Nobody wanted to suggest that peace was monotonous.

Real issues trump vague feelings

BISMA TIRMIZI

There is nothing complicated about Donald Trump's win as much of the mainstream media would like the world to believe. If you live in America you know the truth, and if you watch Tik-Tok anywhere in the world, you know the truth and more.

While the liberals have a tantrum and try to complicate the reasons behind why the Americans chose to paint their country Red this time, and in essence decided to cosy up to the Draconian Blond, the reality is easy to decipher for first-time voters, seasoned baby boomers and all generations in between.

It was as simple and down to earth as 'roti, kapra aur makan'.

Election 2024 is a clear indication that after all is said and done, after all the soap opera, the theatrical and manufactured issues, dramatic hyperbole, staged debates, and woke issues that need no oxygen or air time, politics is still about only the real issues.

One may choose to hate Trump for his crassness or his politics, but he ran on what matters to an average American — no foreign wars, no inflation, no crime, no illegal immigration and the impact on a household. In

contrast, Kamala Harris ran on feelings, vague abstract vibes, oxygenating fairs, a high horse with a Hollywood saddle, constant virtue signaling, appearances on SNL, and a zero-sum issue-driven campaign. Being uncharismatic didn't help. She lacked authenticity and charisma and the Democrats' overall message was focused on vilifying Trump and the Republican voter. That backfired.

She clearly chose not to separate from her boss on most agendas. Plus the constantly invoked moral high ground — 'We are better than the Republicans' — did not work when tens of thousands of unarmed people were being obliterated in a genocide on her watch. And endorsements from the likes of warmonger Dick Cheney, which should have caused revulsion, were worn like a badge of honour. Bizarre!

Flashback 2020: Biden picked a losing vice-president in order to ensure he would do eight years. Her campaign had zero momentum from the get-go and a late arrival left no runway time for the campaign to take flight. She is no Barack Obama. And while Obama's politics may not be ideal, his persona was absolutely dynamic.

It seemed Harris only ran on the abortion issue, and despite her calls

from the pulpit, the country figured out that Trump is not really pro-life, as the Democratic rhetoric would like them to believe. Trump ran an intelligent campaign and perceptively pulled ahead of the Democratic rhetoric by clearly rejecting a countrywide abortion ban.

She beat the drum on 'cry wolf', when the wolf wasn't really there. The wolf wasn't interested in eating the sheep.

Another sensitive issue that Harris championed was the gender choice for minors — an issue that did not sit too well at the ballot box regardless of what the pundits or the extreme left wing might have had the campaign believe. The Red sweep clearly told the Democrats that if a child can't get a tattoo before the age of 18 without parental presence, then something as consequential, life-altering and monumental as gender change has to be off the table.

And here we are today and America has made its choice. It chose to let a felon into the White House, and as a friend said, "America decided it did not want undocumented immigrants no matter how persecuted they feel in their country of birth. Misogyny does not bother the majority, hate speech and dangerous rhetoric isn't that bad, reproductive rights for wo-



men aren't that big of a deal after all, and the list goes on."

But nothing, and I mean nothing, compares to normalising a yearlong genocide. Liberals worked overtime to make a fascist sound normal to the people who do not agree with what has been going on this past year. They thought we could focus on safe abortions instead.

He might turn out to be just like his predecessors and continue America's Middle East policy, but he won't feed the world lies about it. Those who did not vote for Kamala or simply abstained as an act of defiance or for

the lack of a better choice, you have my respect.

Cue the Muslims in the US who chose to make their voice heard.

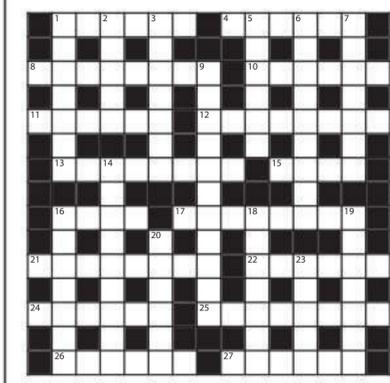
While in 2016 there was a feeling of deep depression at Trump winning, this time it was all about making sure that Harris lost. America voted, and it voted for a better life by tuning out the noise.

And while the mainstream media looks for more rhetoric as to why Trump won, the answer is simple: real issues always trump vague feelings. Period.

Dawn/ANN

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

CONCUPI SCENT
S W O E H S W B
E C L A M P S I A S P E L L
L P O M N A
F A C T O R S B A T H T U B
A L S O H Y B
W H E A T M E A L I S T L E
R A N G E P I C T O G R A M
E S S A E T E O
A A H S I X H R
N O H O P E R P A R V E N U
E A A R O Y T
S E V E N N A T L P U N C H
S E O T M I A S
N A R R O W E S C A P E

- ACROSS
- Weak theory oddly incorporated in system (6)
 - Little guards accompanying outlaw (6)
 - Mad fellow in charge drawing in soldiers with trap (8)
 - Attempt from left to shell stronghold (6)
 - Swapping knight for rook, alter attack (6)

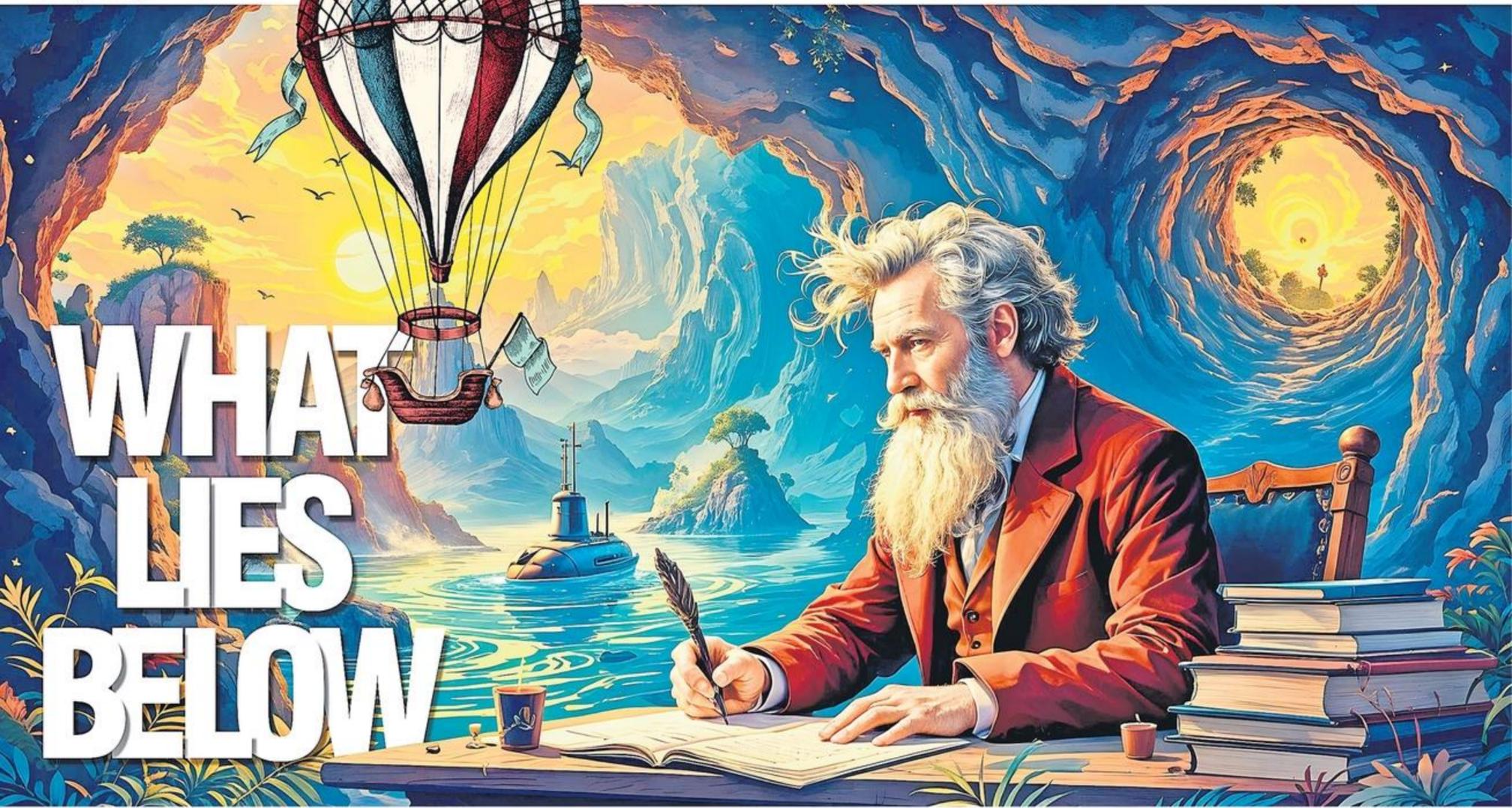
- Observing gin and tonic being drunk (8)
- Ball game team near swimming location (8)
- Sound of gas escaping that man's son (4)
- Throw dough in New York (4)
- Single word accepted by general public as horror (8)
- Claim fast is fun (8)
- Vehicle requiring internal upkeep essentially shuddered (6)

- First person that docked starts to comb an island (6)
 - Fledgling on me repelled man (7)
 - Fugitive climbing plant (6)
 - Strong shelter to west protected by enclosure (6)
- DOWN
- After brief crush, in love (7)

- Singer quite normally entertains (5)
- They're horrible river swimmers (7)
- A good person turned, receiving info for spies (6)
- Democrat powerful releasing one female not working (9)
- Masses of resistance in underwear (7)
- Birds saw between sticks close to lake (6,5)

- Canoe all over the place, get over (4,5)
- Aquatic creature switching ends of beautiful shore (7)
- We're told put fluid on bearing for investigation (7)
- Seriously back heartless lady (7)
- Youngster worried to change form (6)
- A villain dropping old dispute (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



GRAPHIC AI ILLUSTRATION: GURU G

WHAT LIES BELOW

Deep Sea explorations and mining are now routine matters with the advent of efficient technologies, and of course the ceaseless, relentless human greed for natural resources. But there was a time when the regions below the surface were a source of considerable curiosity, myth and imagination. The underground served the purposes of fantasy, the space of adventure and the testing ground for the current technologies. 2024 marks a celebration of the first, and most enduring, underground novel, as Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* turns 160. Édouard Riou's magnificent illustrations, on par with Gustav Doré's for Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and John Tenniel's for Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, only add to the power and charm of the novel.

Verne is best known for three adventure novels: *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (serialised in 1864), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872). Verne remains a global bestseller even

THE YEAR 2024 MARKS A CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST, AND MOST ENDURING, UNDERGROUND NOVEL, AS JULES VERNE'S *A JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH* TURNS 160

now — Wikipedia tells us he is the most translated author in history, below Agatha Christie and above William Shakespeare. *Journey* as the title indicates is a travel novel. Professor Otto Lidenbrock, a scientist, accompanied by his rather reluctant nephew, Axel (reluctant because he has to leave behind his love interest, Lidenbrock's niece, Gräuben) and an Icelander, man-servant, Hans, embarks on the journey after they decipher an old inscription in an Icelandic saga narrative. The inscription, by a chemist, Arne Saknussemm, tells them how to get to the centre of the earth through an extinct crater in Iceland. The perilous journey takes them deeper underground where they encounter a vast sea, forests and prehistoric animals. They run out of water, but the ever-faithful Hans discov-

WHILE NOT A CLEARLY ENVIRONMENTAL TEXT, THERE ARE HINTS THAT HUMANITY HAS BEEN OVER-USING NATURAL RESOURCES, AND THAT THESE, OBTAINED BY EXTRACTION, WILL RUN OUT

ers a fresh water source. While attempting to proceed deeper into the earth, their raft on the underground sea is violently spewed out by a volcanic spout. They land in Sicily and eventually make their way home to fame and fortune.

White Men, Black Materials

Although mining is not the focus of the novel, coal figures prominently in the work (Verne's mining novel is lesser known, *The Black Indies*, 1877, with some stunning illustrations by Jules Férat). As they move deeper into the earth, they discover coal seams, which, of course, give them paroxysms of delight, and Axel says of the place: the 'wondrous

THE NETHER WORLD, THE UNDERGROUND, HAS BEEN A SPACE OF CURIOSITY, MYTH AND IMAGINATION, WHETHER CAST AS HELL OR AS A SITE OF ADVENTURE

PRAMOD K NAYAR

coal mine in the very bowels of the earth'. And again:

When I took my hand away, and happened to glance at it, it was quite black. We had reached the coal strata of the Central Earth... "A coal mine without miners," responded my uncle, "I am perfectly certain that this gallery through successive layers of coal was not cut by the hand of man."

Verne uses the opportunity to educate his readers about fossil fuels:

only herbaceous plants, immense turfs, briars, mosses, rare families, which, however, in those days were counted by tens and tens of thousands. It is entirely to this exuberant vegetation that coal owes its origin. The crust of the vast globe still yielded under the influence of the seething, boiling mass, which was forever at work beneath. Hence arose numerous fissures, and continual falling in of the upper earth. The dense mass of plants being beneath the waters, soon formed themselves into vast agglomerations. Then came about the action of natural chemistry; in the depths of the ocean the vegetable mass at first became turf, then, thanks to the influence of gases and subterranean fermentation, they underwent the complete process of mineralization.

And then, as early as 1864, Verne predicts the crisis of fossil fuels when he writes:

In this manner, in early days, were formed those vast and prodigious layers of coal, which an ever-increasing consumption must utterly use up in about three centuries more, if people do not find some more economic light than gas, and some cheaper motive power than steam. The world will run out of coal — and of course, other fuels — in time, due to excessive consumption, says Verne. Now, although Verne's novel is not about mining, the references to coal in the novel seem to imply that it is a dominant force in the imagination of the time. In other words, Verne here indicates that the events underground, such as the natural processes that produce coal, are the driving force of events on the surface (industry) even as the surface processes push humanity deeper underground, questing for more resources. Axel, however, is hopeful:

coal is scattered over the whole surface of the globe, within a few yards of the upper crust. As I looked at these untouched strata, therefore, I knew they would remain as long as the world lasts.

The only hope, a form of veiled early environmentalist thought, is that at least the deeper strata remain 'untouched'.

Secret, Discovery, Wonder

Professor Lidenbrock calls himself 'the Columbus of these underground regions', and this clearly repeats the white-

man-as-discoverer image so inextricably linked with European colonial enterprise. The discovery process begins with Alex interpreting the strange inscription, which he describes thus:

I had discovered the secret! It came upon me like a flash of lightning. I had got the clue. All you had to do to understand the document was to read it backwards... By a mere accident I had discovered what he so much desired.

The discoverer, here, is the *man* — and discovery is a masculinised moment in colonial writing — who uncovers a secret meaning, mine, place, river, etc. But the discovery of an underworld is predicated on the discovery of a *text's* secrets. And this discovery itself must be kept a secret, for as Lidenbrock warns: 'you must keep the whole affair a profound secret. There is no more envious race of men than scientific discoverers. Many would start on the same journey. At all events, we will be the first in the field'.

Discovery entailed, as the critic Stephen Greenblatt argued about Columbus, the documentation of the experience of wonder. In Verne, everything about the caverns, paths and topoi they traverse is a source of wonder, which Alex repeatedly documents. While on the one hand, there is the distanced, focused and blind-to-all-else scientist, Lidenbrock, on the other is Alex, all wonderstruck, in the correct tradition of a discoverer.

Discoverers name the lands/water bodies they discover after themselves, their sovereigns or their beloveds, and Verne is no exception to this rule. So they name the features 'Lidenbrock Sea', 'Port Gräuben' and even a river after their loyal servant, 'Hansbach'.

'Discovery' is also the discovery of human tenacity, courage and strength of character. Alex at one point wonders whether his uncle is a madman or a 'discoverer of rare courage and grandeur of conception'. As in the case of the celebrated 19th century European travellers, the *man* has to demonstrate endurance and courage. In the process of the journey, he discovers his own qualities.

Verne complicates the idea of discovery by suggesting that these explorers are also aesthetes. He first calls the seams and pools of solidified lava a 'gallery'. In the underground, far from human eyes and hands, the works of nature present, at least to Alex, the fount of all artistic beauty:

Sometimes we gazed through a succession of arches, its course very like the aisles of a Gothic cathedral. The great artistic sculptors and builders of the Middle Ages might have here completed their studies with advantage. Many most beautiful and suggestive ideas of architectural beauty would have been discovered by them.

Verne implies that surface natural beauty is matched by the beauty underground. Or, the underworld mirrors the

world above in human perception or resembles the world humans aspire to.

The Technological Frontier

Early in the tale, there is a list of devices and apparatuses that the discoverers will carry with them:

A centigrade thermometer..., a manometer worked by compressed air..., a first-class chronometer..., two compasses..., a night glass..., two Ruhmkorff coils..., a voltaic battery. Mixing the historical with futuristic fantasy, Verne like others, underscores technology as the principal instrument of human triumphalism, especially when combined with the willpower and courage of the European man.

In many ways, from discovery to extraction, the planet's frontiers are coterminous with the technological frontiers of human ingenuity. In his *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, Verne would repeat this theme of technological triumphalism. Technology will enable conquest and governance of the new worlds. Verne describes this triumph in the following words in *Journey*:

Never had mineralogists been in such perfect circumstances for studying nature in situ. The drill, a brutal and unintelligent machine, could not bring the internal texture back to the surface of the globe — but we were going to examine it with our eyes, touch it with our hands. Through the layer of schists, coloured in wonderful green shades, there meandered metallic seams of copper and manganese, with traces of platinum and gold.

Biodiversity Underground

Verne's explorers encounter prehistoric beasts and birds. First, Alex has this dream where he meets a 'whole tribe of antediluvian creatures', who populated the earth well before the advent of man. 'Antediluvian' is Verne's term for 'prehistoric'.

Underground, the explorers meet a biodiversity that is astonishing. It is, says Alex, a 'hothouse of all the antediluvian plants'. The world underground is a pristine world untouched by humanity and thriving on elemental forces beyond human intervention:

Here we have the complete flora of the Second Era of the world, the Transition Era. Here we have those humble garden plants which became trees during the first centuries of the Earth... The underground is a history of the planet, then, inscribed in the rock strata and when the humans proceed underground, they are 'climbing up the scale of animal life, of which man forms the peak', in Verne's words.

They even witness the battle between two such ancient creatures:

The first of these hideous monsters has the snout of a porpoise, the head of a lizard, the teeth of a crocodile;

and it is this that has deceived us. It is the most fearful of all antediluvian reptiles, the world-renowned Ichthyosaurus or great fish lizard.

...The two monsters only disturbed the surface of the sea!

At last have mortal eyes gazed upon two reptiles of the great primitive ocean!

The other was the mighty Pleiosaurus, a serpent with a cylindrical trunk...

Was this wonderful combat to end in the depths of the ocean? Was the last act of this terrible drama to take place without spectators?

Verne, like Stephen Baxter in *Evolution*, maps the ancient world in the form of a fantasy of animal instincts and battles for survival among giant predators. Distanced in time and place, the underground is the final exotic space. Underground is also tropical and subtropical, for some obscure reason. Alex observes:

Vegetation was exaggerated in an extraordinary manner. I passed like a shadow in the midst of brushwood as lofty

VERNE'S FANTASY PROPOSES AN EQUAL IF NOT MORE BIODIVERSITY UNDERGROUND, MADE UP OF LIFEFORMS THAT NO LONGER SURVIVE ON THE SURFACE

as the giant trees of California, and trod underfoot the moist and humid soil, reeking with a rank and varied vegetation.

The descent of the hero into the depths — called katabasis — is an old vision that informs myth and literature from the very ancient times. The descent, marked by dangerous encounters, is preliminary to his ascent — to fame, fortune and success.

For the critic Karen Pinkus in her book, *Subsurface*, the underground is the site of both exploitation and potential. She asks:

What are the consequences of thinking about the subsurface as choice, as home? Can it represent a space where we might renounce control of all resources and simply wait for the surface to return to what it was? She adds: 'To get at fantasies about what

THE TEXT FOLLOWS THE DISCOVERY NARRATIVE WHERE THE EUROPEAN MAN IS A PIONEER, BUT ALSO COMBINES IT WITH THEMES OF SCIENTIFIC SECRECY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WONDER

lies below the surface is also to think beyond the time of now on the surface'. If the underland, as Robert Macfarlane writes in his book of the same title, is the storehouse of our 'memories, myths and metaphors', works like Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, remain popular because they include all three: the myths of conquest, the metaphors of discovery and the memories of the planet before us.

(The author is Senior Professor of English and UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies at the University of Hyderabad. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and The English Association, UK)



Theatre makes one understand the flexibility of time, the varied ways in which it is seen

ARTS PAGE 3



'A Rescue in Vienna' is the story of a Punjabi man who became an unlikely hero for Jews

BOOKS PAGE 4

CHANDIGARH | 10 NOVEMBER 2024



THE COLD EMBRACE

Exquisite Kani shawls embody Kashmir's cultural heritage, but are not finding many takers

SHAIKH GHULAM RASOOL AND LUBNA SAYED QADRI

ABDUL RASHID SOFI is a young artisan from Arwah village in Beerwah tehsil, Budgam, who belongs to a family of Kani weavers and has grown up weaving shawls. "I have so much respect for the craft, but haven't taken it up professionally because it is incredibly labour-intensive and the wages do not justify the effort. It takes months, even years, of painstaking work on a single shawl, and in the end, you barely make enough to get by. Besides, there are so many machine-made replicas flooding the market that people don't always understand—or even want to pay for—the true value of an authentic Kani shawl. I need a career that offers stability, a decent living, and a future. Right now, sadly, weaving doesn't offer that."

His is a story familiar to that of many young artisans in Kashmir: A labour-intensive craft, each Kani shawl can take months, if not years, to weave. The average price of an authentic Kani shawl starts at ₹1 lakh and goes up to several lakhs depending on the intricacy of design. Ironically, the hands that weave it do not get their just dues.

Farooq Ahmed Reshi, a skilled Kani weaver from Budgam, earns a maximum of ₹500 per day, barely enough to cover basic expenses. Despite the skill and time required to produce these shawls, artisans like Farooq get only a small fraction of the profits. The low income makes it difficult to support a family or even reinvest in their craft.

More than just exquisite textiles, Kani shawls embody Kashmir's cultural soul—rooted in the graceful influence of Persian art, weaving together flowing floral patterns, delicate leaves, and iconic paisleys. The unmatched craftsmanship brings a timeless touch to every shawl, and is therefore celebrated worldwide.

The Kani shawl represents a deep commitment to sustainable fashion, woven with indicators of environmental responsibility and cultural preservation. Each shawl is crafted from pure *pashmina* wool. The biodegradable fibre is redole and incredibly durable, making each shawl a heirloom piece that reduces the fashion cycle and waste. A Kani shawl is entirely handwoven, involving no machines or synthetic dyes. This minimises carbon emissions and water pollution.

Kani weaving is a heritage craft. The skill is passed down through generations of artisans, who depend on it for their livelihoods. By supporting Kani shawls, one fosters a circular, slow-fashion economy that respects both nature and craftsmanship.

Kani shawls are distinguished by a unique weaving technique that uses tiny wooden needles called *Kanis* (wooden spools). This skill dates back to 14th century,

when Persian mystic Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani, known as Shah Hamdan, introduced various crafts to Kashmir. Over time, Kani shawls evolved into symbols of Kashmiri heritage and cultural significance.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Kani shawls gained popularity among Europe's elite, with Empress Joséphine, captivated by their elegance, sparking a trend that spread through the French aristocracy. Napoleon himself gifted some masterpieces to her on their marriage.

Today, Kani shawls stand as resilient but fragile relics of artistry, embodying the dedication and skill of their creators. The journey to crafting a Kani masterpiece is labour-intensive, requiring skilled artisans to craft each piece.

The complex process begins with sourcing the finest raw material, wool or *pashm*, from Changra goats. The fibres gathered are exceptionally fine—so delicate that each strand has a diameter of 12–15 microns. The raw fibre is cleaned, de-haired and skilfully spun into a fine yarn using a traditional 'yender', a spinning wheel exclusively used by women.

With the yarn in hand, weavers (particularly men) move to the designing stage, meticulously conceptualising patterns and colour palettes. This planning phase is critical, as any error made at this stage is irreversible, making precision essential. The intricate designs are then encoded into a *taleem*, a detailed instruction pattern that guides the weavers in creating these shawls.

Once the *taleem* or coding is complete, the yarn is carefully dyed, and artisans begin the meticulous preparation of the warp, which involves arranging 1,700 'nuls' or double threads—totalling an impressive 3,400 single threads. With this foundation in place, the weaving process commences. Younger weavers typically follow standard *taleem* instructions, while older artisans rely on detailed graphs to navigate complex patterns.

Kani shawl weavers have long struggled under challenging conditions. Various regimes imposed heavy taxes and exploited their craft, forcing artisans to work for paltry wages, often at the expense of their creative freedom.

Even today, despite their exceptional skills, Kani shawl weavers earn between ₹300–₹500 per day. Although intricate designs can lead to higher earnings, extensive hours of labour often result in modest monthly incomes over extended periods, presenting significant challenges to the financial stability of these artisans. Each shawl tells a story of dedication and artistry, yet the economic realities they face cast a shadow over this beautiful craft.

Weaver Shabir Ahmed says, "The younger generation is less inclined to pursue Kani weaving, perceiving it as financially unstable. This has created concerns about a diminishing pool of skilled artisans.



Weaving a Kani shawl can take from eight months to several years.

PHOTO BY THE WRITERS

CREATING A MASTERPIECE, ONE STITCH AT A TIME

Authentic Kani shawls begin with fine wool from Changra goats, herded by nomads in Ladakh's high mountains, sometimes at altitudes as high as 18,000 feet. In response to the region's harsh winters, these goats grow a natural thick, warm coat. As the summer months arrive, the animals shed this protective layer, and herders hand-comb the goats to collect the delicate undercoat, which is cleaned, de-haired, and spun by women using a traditional *charkha*, creating a fine yarn.

Skilled weavers then conceptualise designs, choosing a colour palette for warp and weft, before encoding the intricate patterns into a *taleem*, which serves as a guide. With dyed yarn, artisans prepare a warp of 3,400 single threads, and weaving 'one stitch at a time' begins a process spanning eight months to several years, depending on the complexity of design. Only GI tagging helps recognise authentic Kani and *pashmina* shawls.

Financial incentives, stable income opportunities and skill development programmes could attract young artisans, safeguarding the future of this craft," he adds.

"Some provisions do exist for weavers in the organised sector. But, we must not overlook the urgent needs of unorganised artisans. Many skilled craftsmen lack access to modern looms that could enhance productivity or solar lights that can enable them to work comfortably in the evening without relying on electricity as the supply is unreliable. Additionally, construction of proper sheds can protect them from harsh weather, creating a safer and more conducive environment for their delicate craft," says Wahid Dar, another Kani weaver, who is based in downtown Srinagar.

Called the 'handloom village of Kashmir', Kanihama village, situated on the Srinagar-Gulmarg highway, is regarded as the heartland of Kani shawl weaving. At least 80 per cent of the 400 families of this village are dedicated to preserving the exquisite craft. In the 1960s, late Ghulam Mohammad Kanihama, a former MLA, played a pivotal role in reviving the nearly extinct art of Kani shawl weaving. Starting with just two artisans, he established a foundation that has since trained hundreds more and founded the Gule-Anar Cooperative Society. This cooperative successfully revived numerous historic Kani shawl designs, with four shawls dedicated to the Shri Pratap Singh Museum in Srinagar and another to the Crafts Museum in Delhi.

Kani shawls received the Geographical Indication (GI) status in 2008. The QR code-based GI status is intended to acknowledge and safeguard the authenticity of the shawls. According to the government figures, Jammu and Kashmir has granted GI tags to approximately 50,000 shawls and carpets over the past three years, and shawls worth ₹424.20 crore were exported in the last fiscal year.

Ghulam Mohammad's son, Sajad Ahmed Kanihama, has continued his father's legacy. He actively engages in welfare initiatives, providing healthcare, financial assistance, and skill development programmes for the artisans. Sajad emphasises the importance of training new weavers and advocates for their rights. By helping artisans develop their marketing skills and encouraging direct sales from the village, Sajad aims to maintain the integrity of Kani shawls and a sustainable future for shawl weaving in Kanihama. In 2020, Kanihama was designated a craft village, a status that celebrates its deep-rooted role in Kani shawl artistry.

Sajad says the GI tag ensures that traditional Kani shawls from Kashmir can carry the 'Kani' label. However, delays in issuing the tag, which may take up to six months, complicate matters. Clear categorisation is also essential for shawls, as authentic Kani pieces crafted from cashmere wool go up to

15.5 micron range, a mark of quality not found in lower-grade replicas going above 15.5 microns. Moreover, mass-produced, machine-made shawls mimic authentic Kani shawl patterns, impacting demand for genuine pieces, affecting quality standards and hence the market.

Climate change is another pressing issue affecting shawl production. Shrinking grazing areas have reduced the population of Changra goats, the primary source of *pashmina* wool. This scarcity drives up the cost of raw material and restricts production, impacting livelihoods and the sustainability of the craft. To protect the industry, establishing sustainable grazing practices, supporting eco-friendly methods, and offering subsidies for artisans could help stabilise raw material costs and ensure that Kani shawl production endures.

These weavers face substantial marketing challenges, especially when participating in fairs and festivals outside Kashmir. In the past, financial support from the Handloom Department, covering rental fees, travel and daily allowances, enabled them to attend these events. However, recent cuts have forced artisans to bear these high costs, including rentals up to ₹45,000 for 15 days, themselves. Many artisans now find it unaffordable to run stalls independently, often outsourcing them to intermediaries who compromise on the quality for minimal compensation. This not only affects the artisans' earnings, but also jeopardises the authenticity of Kani shawls. Subsidies or logistical support could empower artisans to manage their own marketing, enhancing product quality, while preserving the cultural value of Kani shawls and improving livelihoods.

Comprehensive healthcare provisions are crucial, as many artisans lack access to adequate medical facilities or insurance, leaving them vulnerable to health issues exacerbated by their demanding work. Common problems include musculoskeletal disorders and vision problems, often worsened by the physical strain of weaving. The absence of proper healthcare support can make their later years particularly challenging, underscoring the urgent need for accessible medical care.

To protect the livelihoods of Kani shawl weavers, it is essential for the government to revise and enforce consistent minimum wage standards. Current trends reveal significant wage disparities, leaving many artisans vulnerable to exploitation and struggling to support their families. By implementing fair compensation, the government can foster a more equitable industry that values the skill and dedication of these artisans.

By nurturing pride in this rich tradition and creating viable career paths, Kani shawls can continue as cherished emblems of Kashmir's cultural legacy, securing their place in the hearts and hands of future generations.

— Rasool is a conservationist and Qadri is a development expert

VARIETY



Rohit Bal, who carved Indian fashion's most iconic moments, died recently.

A designer who celebrated his roots

NARENDRA KUMAR

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

— Robert Frost

MY earliest interaction with Rohit Bal Gudda was in the early 1990s. I was in the National Institute of Fashion Technology in Delhi. As students, we were required to interact with designers who were all part of Ensemble, the store founded by Tarun Tahiliani in Mumbai, helping them backstage during fashion shows, and then partying after the shows till wee hours of the morning. The world of fashion was in its infancy then and revolved around a few designers like Rohit Khosla, Tarun, Shahab Durazi and Suneet Varma who captured the essence of western fashion and filtered it down for the Indian consumer. There were others like Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla and Rohit Bal who ploughed deep into the Indian sensibility.

Gudda was known for his colourful and happy disposition, which was reflected in his work and his interactions with people. There was never a dull moment when he was around. He had a magnetic personality that drew people to him, and he was always full of life and energy. This vibrancy translated into his designs, which were often bold, extravagant, and full of life. Whether it was a bridal lehenga, a red-carpet outfit, or a simple kurta, Bal's creations always had a touch of his exuberant personality.

Bal's designs were more than just clothing; emotive in nature, they were a form of artistic expression that conveyed deep emotions that reflected the stories and the lush luxury of the almost mythical Kashmir. He had a unique ability to blend traditional Indian elements with Sufi-inspired styles, creating garments that were both timeless and modern.

His shows, each of which was memorable, resembled dervishes dancing to the rhythm of the Valley, capturing the region's natural

beauty and rich cultural heritage. Intricate craftsmanship remained his trademark style to the very end, while his collections frequently featured motifs like flowers, paisleys and chinar leaves, which are synonymous with Kashmiri aesthetics. His use of luxurious fabrics like silk, velvet, brocade and rich embroideries that told stories about the gardens of Kashmir added a sense of opulence to his creations, while his attention to detail ensured that each piece was a work of art. Through his designs, Bal expressed joy, celebration, and a deep connection to his heritage, making his pieces resonate with a wider audience.

My interactions with Gudda continued through my early days, and he was one of the first persons I approached as fashion editor of ELLE magazine when I was in the process of setting up the first fashion week in India in 1998. I approached him and suggested that designers should come together to form an association which would create the fashion week. His response was pragmatic and visionary in bringing the bunch together.

Later, when Lakme and the Fashion Design Council of India undid their association, he had the courage and foresight to work with me and other designers on the advisory board of the Lakme Fashion Week, at great risk to our careers, to bring together the opposing factions in the larger interest of Indian fashion.

Bal's legacy is not just about the clothes he created, but also about the joy and inspiration he brought to the fashion world. He will be remembered as a designer who celebrated his roots, expressed his emotions through his work, and shaped the future of Indian fashion with his unique vision. His passing is a great loss, but his influence will continue to inspire future generations of designers and fashion enthusiasts.

Yes, of course he had inflections that one might consider not appropriate but everybody has some, we are not perfect, that's too boring, but what he did inflict upon us was the joy of fashion and creativity.

— The writer is a fashion designer



FOOD TALK
PUSHPESH PANT

IT would not be an exaggeration to suggest that dal — lentils and legumes — is the backbone or foundation of Indian foods. Dal-roti and dal-bhaat are the staple diets that sustain wheat and rice eaters. Dal is well known as the most important source of protein for vegetarians and it is prepared in myriad ways across the land — sweet-sour, savoury, dry and gravy versions. Dal makhani, prepared with unhusked maash, and sambar and amla as well as arhar in almost infinite variations are well known all over the world.

But, to borrow and tweak an old saying, man does not live by dal-roti alone! To vary the taste and enhance the nutritional value, our ancestors and contemporaries have added vegetables — green leafy ones, tubers as well as squashes to this soup. Sambar from South India and dalma in Odisha are examples of this. In Hyderabad's dalcha, lentils are cooked with meat. A variation on this theme is encountered in Rampur where wad dal is paired with boneless meat. In Awadh, spinach is added to unhusked moong dal to prepare saag paista. In Kashmiri wazwan, lotus stems are cooked with moong dal to create a delicious combination.

One may readily acknowledge that 'Dal plus' is like an old raga in Indian classical music that never ceases to delight due to the limitless improvisations it allows. Or, you may compare it to a folk melody that can follow any path, footloose and whimsical.

Recently, we were treated to a lentil-based exotic dish that took our breath away. To our mind, it is comfort food at its best. You can enjoy it with chappati, parantha or steamed rice. Equally enticing is it as a heart-warming bowl of soup on a cold winter evening! Slurp!

HUMBLE DAL GOES GOURMET

It is prepared in myriad ways — savoury, sweet-sour, dry and gravy versions



DAL-PLUS

INGREDIENTS

Arhar dal (soaked for 30 minutes)	100 gm
Pumpkin (yellow, small)	750 gm
Onions (large)	3
Garlic cloves	6
Green chillies (sweet, plumpones)	2-3
Coriander powder	1&1/2 tsp
Turmeric powder	1 tsp
Red chilli powder	1 tsp
Kashmiri chilli powder	1/2 tsp
Jaggery	25 gm
Tamarind paste	120 ml
Coconut milk	150 ml
Black mustard seeds	1 tsp
Curry leaves	A small sprig
Fresh coriander leaves	A small sprig
Coconut oil (or any other vegetable oil)	1/3 cup
Salt	To taste

METHOD

■ Peel the pumpkin, remove the seeds and cut the flesh roughly into 2-inch long chunks. Peel and finely dice the onions. Crush the garlic cloves.

- Dilute the tamarind paste with one cup of hot water. Crumble the jaggery to obtain coarse powder (you may grate it, if you prefer).
- Heat oil in a thick-bottomed pan on medium-high flame. Put in the mustard seeds. When these begin to crackle, add the onions, along with curry leaves. Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring in between. Lower the flame if these begin to scorch. Sprinkle a few drops of water, if necessary. The onions are done when these acquire a rich golden-brown colour.
- Add lentils, pumpkin and tamarind water, along with salt. Add crushed garlic, green chilli, powdered spices and cook for two to three minutes, stirring continuously to avoid scalding. Stir gently, cover and cook for about 25 minutes on low flame. When done, the pumpkin chunks should be soft, but not mushy.
- Uncover, pour in coconut milk. Sprinkle powdered jaggery. Stir, cover and cook for about five minutes more. If you want a thinner gravy, add three-fourth cup of boiling water to the lentil-squash stew. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves and enjoy.

MOONG DAL CHICKEN

This famous Lahori street food dish can be easily prepared at home. Very fortifying for winter!

INGREDIENTS

Chicken	500 gm
Moong dal	250 gm
Onion (large)	1
Tomato (large)	1
Garlic-ginger paste	1&1/2 tsp
Turmeric powder	1/2 tsp
Coriander powder	1 tsp
Cumin powder	1 tsp
Red chilli powder	1 tsp
Garam masala	1/2 tsp
Salt	To taste

FOR TEMPERING

Red chillies whole dried (shredded)	1
Bay leaf	1
Garlic cloves (chopped)	4-5
Green chillies (chopped fine)	2
Coriander (chopped fine)	A small sprig
Oil	1 cup



ISTOCK. PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

METHOD

- Wash, clean, trim and pat dry the chicken. Wash and chop the tomatoes. Peel and slice the onion finely. Soak the moong dal for 30 minutes.
- Heat half the oil in a pressure cooker. Put the sliced onion in it. Stir fry on

- medium flame till they turn pink.
- Add chicken. Stir fry till the chicken is well browned. Add garlic-ginger paste, along with the tomatoes, and continue to cook till these are mushy. Add all powdered spices, except the garam masala and salt. Stir well and cover.
- Cook for about two minutes, uncover, stir well and continue cooking till the oil separates from masala. Add the dal and stir fry for a minute.
- Pour in 4 cups of water, put pressure lid on. Switch off the flame after 1 whistle. Let the pressure drop by itself. Uncover, bring to boil, remove scum that rises from the surface.
- Prepare the tempering by heating the remaining oil in a ladle. Add to hot oil the ingredients listed under this head and pour over the lentil-chicken dish. Stir well. Sprinkle garam masala just before serving.
- Garnish with fresh coriander and green chillies. A few drops of lemon juice will enhance the bliss.

CAPTION CONTEST 1484

HIMANASHU MAHAJAN



Entries are invited to suggest a caption for the photograph. The caption should only be in English, witty and not exceeding 10 words, and reach Spectrum, The Tribune, Chandigarh, 160030, by Thursday. The best five captions will be published and awarded ₹300, ₹250, ₹200, ₹150 and ₹100, respectively. Each caption must be accompanied by a clipping of the caption contest and its number. Photocopies or scans of the caption photo won't be accepted. Online subscribers may attach an epaper clipping at captionpics@tribunemail.com or a scanned copy of the epaper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number in your address.

SELECTED ENTRIES FOR CAPTION CONTEST 1483



SPECTRUM NOVEMBER 3 ISSUE (SEE PHOTO)

- Dyeing for attention — Rajiv Sharma via epaper, Amritsar
- Colour mates — Subhash Chander Gupta, Panchkula
- Black and white — Alisha Chandra, Chandigarh
- Creamy layer — Surendra Miglani, Kaithal
- Hidden truth — Inderjit Kaur Anand via epaper, Manimajra

Film that makes awkward conversations easier

RENU SUD SINHA

DISCUSSIONS, debates, instructional videos by police, schools and NGOs, shorts, animation films, 'how to' manuals/articles — there's a lot of content available on 'safe and unsafe touch'. "Parents, teachers, other stakeholders — everyone is aware about it and the need to tell children. What's missing is actual conversations with kids. Sure, we tell them, but do we listen to them? Are we comfortable having these conversations with them? Most importantly, are children comfortable or willing participants in such discussions?" asks filmmaker Poorva Bhat, whose short documentary on this topic premiered at Dharamshala International Film Festival.

Interestingly titled, 'What's the Film About?' is based on conversation about safe and unsafe touch between a mother and her two children. The film, which had its world premiere at Visions Du Reel (Visions of the Real), an international documentary film festival at Nyon, Switzerland, wasn't a planned film, says Poorva, who is also a film editor. "I have been working on a feature documentary on child sexual abuse for more than three years. The subject would crop up in daily conversations with my team, over phone calls. So, as a mother, I wanted my two children, a son (11) and a daughter (9), to know about it," says the filmmaker, who was a banker, a translator and an author before she found her calling.

Talking about safe and unsafe

Poorva Bhat's documentary has been selected for screening at Amsterdam docu-fest



'What's the Film About?' is based on conversation about safe and unsafe touch between the filmmaker and her kids.

touch was the basic foundation before she could approach the topic of abuse with her children. "But I realised that despite my notions about me being a cool mom, it was very difficult to have these conversations. I felt very awkward." That's when the filmmaker in her realised that this could be a film by itself.

Working on her documentary, she knew from experience that such conversations on personal safety were difficult and awkward because these bring out fear, insecurity and trauma in children and parents/caregivers alike. As a mother, she was absolutely clear that the children will have full agency.

Despite the challenges, her conviction has paid off. 'WTF?', her first independent film, has been invited

for screening at the prestigious International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), world's largest documentary film festival, being held from November 14 to November 24.

As a filmmaker, Poorva is very passionate about "owning the narrative". "I like telling urban stories from India because urban India doesn't get showcased enough in the western world. Most Indian documentaries focus on third-world struggles," says the storyteller, whose film was accepted at the IDFA for precisely this reason.

"People in the West are used to westerners talking about issues like sexuality. A programmer at IDFA said a film on such a topic from India is what excited them in the first place. It was a fresh perspective because

somebody from the third world was talking in their language, something that doesn't happen very often," says Poorva, whose earlier documentaries have been on sex workers, drug users, high-risk groups battling AIDS. The issues may be serious but her objective has always been to address sensitive topics in a manner that doesn't overwhelm audiences, but allows them to introspect.

Poorva hopes that 'WTF?' becomes a conversation starter about making awkward conversations easier and reminds families, parents, educational institutions to keep these conversations going. But above all, she hopes her film is able to create a space of trust and love for children that gives them more agency to ask questions and express emotions.

What is it that makes us connect with our past? Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry tries to find the answer in theatre

THERE is something pleasurable about discovering the ancient, and finding connections. I love ferreting out old stories and drinking in the ancient well of knowledge. The story that has held me in thrall is about the nature of 'time'.

A *guru* and his disciple are on a journey. As they travel through mountains and across rivers, under the burning sun and strong winds, the *guru* begins to feel thirsty. He hands his disciple a *lota* and asks him to bring water from a nearby village. The disciple goes to the village, knocks at a door, which is opened by a beautiful maiden. Wonderstruck by her beauty, he falls in love and subsequently marries her. Many years pass by. The disciple is now a father to three beautiful children. One day, a flood in the village reminds him of his *guru* waiting for water. Chastised, he brings out the *lota*, which is now covered with dust, cleans it, fills it with water, and climbs the mountain. He finds his *guru* still standing where he had left him, waiting for water.

This story made me understand the flexibility of time, the varied ways in which time is perceived, from temporal to cosmic.

In his book *'Midnight's Children'*, Salman Rushdie wrote: "No people whose word for 'yesterday' is the same as their word for 'tomorrow' can be said to have a firm grip on time." This is because the Hindi word *kal* means both 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday'.

The story of the *guru* and his disciple is from the *'Mahabharata'* and made me realise that the *'Mahabharata'* is omnipresent—in ditties, parables, folklore, traditional arts, popular culture and cinema. It is amazing how we as a nation connect through an epic poem, and its characters, divine yet flawed, make us understand that even gods are humane and subjected to the wheels of destiny.

What interested me in stories from the *'Mahabharata'* was their positioning in the literary journey—from the past to the present, and back to the past. It is interesting to emphasise that most of the characters looked in both directions: from the religious dilemma of good versus evil and tales of morality to the complex ambiguities of modern sensibilities, enabling us to transit through history and mythology.

TS Eliot says: "Time present and time past/Are both perhaps present in time future/And time future contained in time past."

If all time is eternally present, as Eliot suggests, then time is not linear, it is cyclic, it loops and swirls. If this is so, how can the past not belong to us and how can the present not be part of the past? These are questions that came into mind, while watching *'Urubhangam'*, a Sanskrit play written by Bhasa, a 3rd century AD playwright considered the father of Sanskrit theatre.

Amongst all the Bhasa plays, *'Urubhangam'* has an eternal relevance that cuts through centuries. In this oldest surviving one-act play, the hero is Duryodhana, the



'Urubhangam' is the oldest surviving one-act play, where the hero is Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava prince.

TIME TRAVEL

eldest Kaurava prince, usually regarded as an anti-hero. Duryodhana, wounded by a lethal blow inflicted by his cousin Bhima during the Kurukshetra war, awaits his death stoically. Filled with remorse, he seeks reconciliation with his cousins, the Pandavas. It can also be described as the first anti-war play written in India. The play humanises the villain, Duryodhana, offering an alternative perspective to the grand narrative in the process.

Recently, I saw a performance of *'Urubhangam'*, done in the Kootiyattam form, which is the oldest Sanskrit theatre genre from Kerala. Originating more than 2,000 years ago, Kootiyattam represents a synthesis of Sanskrit classicism and also encompasses within its fold the local traditions, beliefs and aesthetics of Kerala. It is a stylised and codified theatrical language, derived from *'Natyashastra'*, the earliest treatise on music, dance and drama, written somewhere around 200 BCE by the great Bharata Muni. A compendium of theatrical techniques, *'Natyashastra'* codifies all aspects required for staging a play in minute detail. From backstage discipline to an actor's relationship with the audience, from the structure of a performance to acting grammar, body language, costumes, make-up, music and the musical instru-



Kapila Venu as Gandhari, the mother of Kauravas. PHOTOS: MANOJ PARAMESWARAN

ments played in theatre.

The treatise also laid down the architectural dimensions of the stage and backstage, to its height and seating arrangements, along with decorations and placement of oil lamps.

Kootiyattam is traditionally performed in a space called Kuttampalam, which is located within the precincts of a temple complex in Kerala. The actors trained in Kootiyattam, as attested by purification rituals prior to the show, are considered sacred. Traditionally, the Kuttampalam are illuminated by large oil lamps on stage during the performance, to symbolise the presence of the sacred.

The performance that I saw at the Rang-

shankara auditorium in Bengaluru a couple of days ago was seeped in mythology and led to a host of questions within me. What is it that makes us connect with our past: is it the characters, the narrative, the religious content? Or do we seek identification with it because of our collective heritage?

'Urubhangam' was directed by G Venu. A well-known research scholar, author, performer and director, he has been responsible for the rejuvenation of several rare traditional art forms of Kerala. His magnificent daughter, Kapila Venu, learnt Kootiyattam from her father and played the role of Gandhari, the mother of Kauravas.

After the great battle is over, Gandhari goes to Krishna and curses him for not ending the battle even though he had the power to do so. The monologue, where she laments on the futility of war and the loss of her 100 sons, is expressed with fiery poignancy. A unique world—of gods and demons, a lamenting mother and a warrior in the throes of death—is created on the stage. Elaborate headgear, the swirling skirt, the painted faces, the guttural voices, the Mizhavu drummers, the huge brass lamps...

Aided by modern technology, these larger-than-life figures come alive on stage before a mostly urban audience. The shift from temple space to proscenium arch does not, in any

way, diminish the impact of these powerful performers. Time stands still, and the epic figures from the *'Mahabharata'* come alive; they were relatable and not alien figures from an unfamiliar past. When Duryodhana, wounded by Bhima, flailed in pain, his dying breath filled the auditorium.

As indicated in the *'Natyashastra'*, death is not shown in Sanskrit theatre. A hand-held curtain, or *Rang-Patti*, appears instead. The actor playing Duryodhana removes his costume and walks away from the stage in a *mundu*. The curtain covers the pile of clothing, almost like a shroud. The gold head gear at the helm looks like a glittering epitaph, commemorating the fallen hero.

Peter Brook very eloquently said: "Even if it's ancient, by its very nature, theatre is always an act of modernity. A phoenix that has to be constantly brought back to life."

Kootiyattam is a living tradition and comes alive every night in the chassis of the actor and the imagination of the audience. Watching a performance far removed from the familiar helps to avoid the indisputable separations between the known and the unknown. The tagline should perhaps be: keep your antennae out always, something unusual can happen!

—The writer is a Chandigarh-based theatre director

UNUSUAL PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

Amit Dutta's MAMI-winning animation film on classical vocalist Kumar Gandharva is a moving tribute

ESHAN SHARMA

AMIT DUTTA's latest film, *'Phool Ka Chhand'* (*Rhythm of a Flower*), which premiered at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival recently and won the Golden Gateway Award, the event's top accolade, is a full feature-length hand-drawn animated film on the life and music of noted classical vocalist Kumar Gandharva. Amit, considered one of the most important contemporary practitioners of experimental cinema, graduated from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, in 2004. However, I would like to distance myself from categorising Amit as an experimental filmmaker. Over the years, he has built his own niche in the world of visual storytelling and motion picture. His research-based cinema surprises his audience every time, as he elegantly weaves together aural and visual narratives as the editor of his films.

My first introduction to Amit Dutta was through a collection of his short films, *Animating the Archives*, which was shown at MAMI in 2023, and I have followed his films ever since. I asked my friend and a PhD candidate at JNU, Abhinav Mishra, to describe Amit's films in one sentence, and he replied promptly, "You can smell the images and feel the texture of the sound in his films."

My introduction to Kumar Gandharva happened via the music of Kabir *bhajan* singer Prahlad Singh Tipanya. Ever since I heard *'Sunta hai guru gyami'*, there was no going back; the mesmerising voice of Kumarji held me tight. The Films Division had earlier made a 78-minute documentary on Kumar Gandharva's life, which included a range of



interviews with his wife, friends and students. But *'Rhythm of a Flower'* is a class apart, unique in its style and format. This film is Amit's first full-length animated feature.

At the peak of his career, Kumar Gandharva contracted tuberculosis, throwing him out of action for six years, with uncertainty about whether he would ever sing again. He continued to try, softly humming during his practice. His music flowed through the rich landscapes of Malwa in Madhya Pradesh, much like the river Rewa.

The film opens with a person approaching Kumarji's house while he is bedridden, and his wife sits in a corner of the room with a *tanpura*. Through a window, he interacts with the world outside: the sound of grass playing with the winds as musical notes flow in tempo (*laya*), occasional folk melodies, and, through this same window, we explore the world of Kumar Gandharva.

The 81-minute film brings together animation, nature and music to create a visual *raga*—it is this *raga* that gives freedom to the *bandish* (composition). *Bandish* is something which is bound, yet, contrary to



(L) Director Amit Dutta; (above) hand-drawn animation by Allen Shaw and his team, combined with the music, flows beautifully. PHOTOS COURTESY: AMIT DUTTA

its meaning, it always tries to set itself free. The film's narrative unfolds from his later years, with a moment of introspective reflection, before flashing back to his childhood in Sulebhavi. He is shown running behind a bird. We are introduced to the travelling *Hari katha* singers, who came to his village and inspired him.

This is an unusual portrait of an artist; more than a portrait, it is an interpretation of Kumar Gandharva and his understanding of *bandish*. I entered the theatre expecting the film to cover the life and times of Kumarji. Instead, it opened new possibilities of looking at Kumar Gandharva. The questions that arise when thinking about an artist like Kumarji became unimportant, and the line between documentary and spiritual quest blurred, as if a devotee were searching for an abstract idea of the divine. Kumarji's music is like the rain that nourishes the soil, giving it a new life after the scorching summers.

During the post-screening conversation with illustrator Allen Shaw and filmmaker Chaitanya Tamhane, co-writer and

music consultant Kuldeep Barve shared their reasoning behind this depiction of Kumarji's life and music. He said that a lot had been said about Kumar Gandharva's life, but here they wanted to explore the idea of a *bandish*, his presentation and exposition of a *bandish*, and the concept of *upaj*, or improvisation.

The hand-drawn animation by Allen and his team, combined with the music, flows beautifully. One can only imagine how tiresome the entire process of animating the film would have been, painting many different versions and animating them in subtle colours. The *bandishes* and *ragas* explored in medium tempo (*madhya laya*) in the film were unique, at least to my ears.

This film is not very different from Amit's cinematic approach, where Pahari paintings seem to walk, dance, and take on human figures, as in *'Nainsukh'*. Kumarji's music takes the form of motifs like fish and birds, camels and goats. The imagery of a snake getting tangled and trying to eat itself is a powerful motif to show the long battle Kumarji fought with lung-related issues.

The beauty of abstraction lies in the fact that whether or not one knows about the subject, it does not affect the film's impact. Here, that impact is a sense of serenity and calm emanating from Kumarji's music and philosophical discourse on the style and structure of *khyal*. Even if you are unfamiliar with Kumar Gandharva's music, you can still experience the universe Kumarji created through his artistry. We swim with him in the river of music, see him transformed into the mountains from where the river originates and, in the end, witness Kumarji disappearing into the light.

There is a rhythm in every frame of this film, from the grass dancing in the field to the moving vinyl record. As Kumarji wrote, "Bina chhand toh koi phool bhi nahi ugta (No flower blooms without rhythm)," this film is a moving ode to Kumar Gandharva, undoubtedly one of the greatest artists of 20th century, created by an exceptional contemporary artist, Amit Dutta.

—The writer is a film scholar and founder of Karwaan Heritage

BOOKS

Punjabi who saved Jews from Nazis

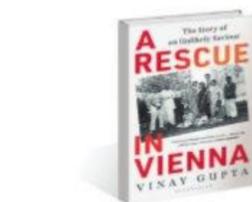
ROOPINDER SINGH

PUNJABIS are not known for documenting their history, even as they played an outsized role in shaping major historical events. As time went by, information about what they achieved was lost; but, diligent research by dedicated writers has brought to light what the folds of time enveloped.

Historians, naturally, shoulder the main load, but personal or family histories bring to light events that may have escaped broader studies. This book is one such account of a person from Ludhiana, who found himself in a unique position to make a difference in the lives of people he met in Vienna.

Kundanlal earned his MSc degree in 1915. He passed the Provincial Civil Service examination and received favourable postings. But eventually, he quit to become a businessman. In 1921, along with his father, he purchased an old business venture, the Amrit Match Factory in Kota, and revitalised it. Kundanlal prospered, but remained restless. In time, he passed on his factory to his brother and relocated to Ludhiana, where he would later play a major role in organising the Ludhiana session of All India States Peoples' Conference, when Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders came to his house.

After some setbacks in his ventures, Rai Sahib Kundanlal transitioned into machine



A RESCUE IN VIENNA: THE STORY OF AN UNLIKELY SAVIOUR
by Vinay Gupta.
Bloomsbury.
Pages 208.
₹599

tool manufacturing. On one of his trips to Europe, he travelled to Vienna for treatment. Always on the lookout for business opportunities, he sought meetings with various manufacturers. Soon, he became aware of the malevolent Nazi discrimination against the Jews. His humanitarian and entrepreneurial instincts coalesced; on his personal guarantee, he secured visas for six Jewish families, allowing them to escape Austria and head to Ludhiana.

The coastal regions of India have long been a refuge for the Jews, but Punjab became a refuge for Iranian Jews, who had escaped the massacre in Mashhad. They

found shelter in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom in 1839 and lived in Rawalpindi.

A century later, in October 1938, the first European Jew reached Ludhiana — Hans Losch, a textile design expert, who began working at Kundan Cloth Mills. An honoured guest, he stayed at his house, which was strictly vegetarian. Kundanlal seldom, if ever, made allowances for others' personal preferences! No surprise that Losch lasted only three months, before moving to Bombay.

Other families came. Kundanlal established a furniture business that would benefit from their expertise. However, starting a new business was challenging, both financially and because the specialised machinery failed to arrive. Later arrivals were given private accommodations and dietary independence, but they still had to live in a small town, with minimal interaction outside of each other and the workers. Over time, financial and social factors contributed to them seeking greener pastures, especially since the contract specified 25 per cent of the profits, but these suddenly impoverished individuals required regular payments, much like salaries. Kundanlal, who had sunk much money into the ventures, was left in a lurch after their departure.

Oh! The twice damned. They fled Austria and came to India because Hitler discriminated against the Jews. In mid-1940, colonial India interned them because they were Aus-

trians. And because Austria was now a part of Germany, they were considered Germans! As Europeans, they received better treatment, but eventually found themselves imprisoned at Purandhar near Poona. The shifting fortunes of these families makes for a fascinating read, including how Alfred Wachsler and Marcel Levy moved to Karachi. However, Partition forced them out once again when they found themselves in an Islamic country that grew increasingly intolerant. In time, all families that Kundanlal had brought to India left.

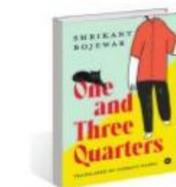
We follow the fortunes of Kundanlal, who became estranged from his son. He founded a school, Kundan Vidya Mandir, in 1941, and left much of his fortune to the trust that continues his mission to educate Punjabis, particularly girls. Kundanlal's legacy is alive through the institutions he founded. Now the world knows his story, written by his grandson. It is an intriguing well-researched tale of a complicated story of a gifted workaholic who "lived a modest life, not tainted by cupidity", and was a success at many of his endeavours, even as he faced major challenges in his family life.

Most of all, it is the chronicle of an enterprising and compassionate Punjabi, who saved six Jewish families from the clutches of the Nazis.

— *The writer is a Chandigarh-based senior journalist*



BACKFLAP



ONE AND THREE QUARTERS
by Shrikant Bojewar. Translated by Vikrant Pandey.
Westland.
Pages 154. ₹399

Young Pitambar reluctantly limps his way to a ramshackle school to please his unlettered father. Looking for a formula to get rich, he chances upon the secret affair between the school principal and the music teacher; and using the magic wand of blackmail, finds his way to the local politician's office, landing a henchman's job. Next step, he is on a fast-track to the Mantralaya in Mumbai. Part social satire, part fable, this book is a commentary on the moral decrepitude that ails post-Independence India.

Of writers, by writers

MANINDER SIDHU

SOUTH Asia Speaks is a recently formed writers' collective that supports outstanding emerging talent from South Asia, given the precarious conditions of freedom of expression in the region. It offers annual fellowships to promising voices, including disabled writers. In 2022, the initiative was firmed up with a series of masterclasses for the enrolled fellows. Each session featured two authors of South Asian origin — as interviewer and interviewee. 'How I Write: Writers on Their Craft', edited by Sonia Faleiro, founder of the mentorship programme, is a collection of these reflective dialogues that took place between acclaimed writers, translators, filmmakers and editors.

In keeping with its manifesto of empowering and representing the shared social experiences of the region, the editor has included conversations of writers from, or with origins in, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India. The unfolding of related cultural experiences of writers like Pankaj Mishra, Jamil Jan Kochai, Taymour Soomro, VV Ganeshananthan, and 26 others, through these narrative dialogues, intelligently erases parochial political divides off the pages. The edition is not exhaustive, and understand-

ably so, but to the delight of the reader; it engages with sharp South Asian talent that is holding its own in the domain of editing, journalism, literature and publishing.

Even as the title, 'How I Write', conveys the core theme of experts sharing trending literary strategies and skills, in no manner does it prepare you for a dive into the gripping life stories of achievers shared with extraordinary candour. Details about struggles with stories/self, research dilemmas, enduring friendships, editorial slashes, networking, livelihood, reviews, and more, shed light on the fast-evolving dynamics of the publishing industry. For instance, literary journalist Mansi Choksi shares how she used Facebook chats, diary entries, photos, videos and court documents to accurately profile the couples

in her book 'Newlyweds' (Simon and Schuster, 2022). She is open about her 'post-pub' chagrin: "I loved the pitching. I loved the private torture of writing. But... the real shocker for me was that I did not get a review in *The New York Times*." Having remained low for a few months, she shares, "I became a different version of myself, the book marketing version that is not actually the writer."

Most writers in the collection are not just storytellers, but also journalists and editors of considerable repute. This 'omnivorous', overlapping aspect of their vocations helps them spell out the need for accuracy in journalism, importance of credibility in fiction, role of pitching right to editors, and more. Most contributors also double up as creative writing teachers, and their lessons on survival strategies, for both writers and humans, spring straight from the bone. It makes sense to note Vauhini Vara's observation: "There's a funny relationship between writing and financial incentives. I really struggled just finding time to focus on fiction and commit to it, because there's always a bill to be paid."

Complex discourse cascades smoothly on the clear texture of the book. For instance, style is best explained by Kamila Shamsie's simple statement on books: "Often it comes down to opening and reading the first page and something pulls me in." What lies beneath the birth of a book is unforgettably etched through a metaphor by Suketu Mehta: "Line editing, as anyone who has written a book knows, is like trench warfare. Line by line you have to decide what lives and what dies." Diasporic author Manjushree Thapa vouches for translating native language texts to resolve the issue of cultural depth: "I learnt how to write in English about my subjects who live in a Nepali-language world, who inhabit another language in their inner lives... through translation."

The interview with Mira Nair encapsulates artistic nuances and real-world wisdom imbibed while creating world-class cinema; perhaps the platform should consider the possibility of including other art forms of South Asia in its future plans. Readers will cherish the candid, unguarded stories, and aspiring writers will 'download' the shared literary expertise for sure.

— *The writer teaches at Govt College for Girls, Sector 11, Chandigarh*

Bravehearts we forgot

VIJAY MOHAN

THE Victoria Cross (VC) was instituted by the British in 1856 as the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy, but it was only in 1911 that the right to receive the VC was extended to Indian native soldiers. Till then, the Indian Order of Merit (IOM) was the highest decoration for gallantry that could be awarded to Indian soldiers, though extremely high standards were set for it.

The history of the VC is made more interesting by the fact that, while Indian natives were then not eligible for this award, the highest number of VCs awarded in a single day — 24 — was on Indian soil in 1857 at Lucknow, during what we call the First War of Independence and the British refer to as the Sepoy Mutiny. All awardees were British.

The story of Indian VCs began on October 31, 1914, at Hollebeke in Belgium. Sepoy Khudadad Khan from the 129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis in Undivided India was in the machine gun section of his battalion and was working one of the two guns. The British officer in-charge of the detachment had been wounded and the other gun was put out of action by a shell. Sepoy Khudadad, although wounded, continued working his gun even after all the other five men of the detachment had been killed. He was left by the enemy for dead. He later managed to crawl out and rejoined his unit. At 26, Khudadad, who later rose to the rank of Subedar, became the first native-born Indian to win the medal.

Of the 1,363 VCs awarded so far, 40 recipients are ethnic South Asians, both officers and men, who served in the erstwhile British Indian Army during the pre-Independence era and fought in World War-I and World War-II. This era came to an end when the last surviving Indian VC recipient, Hony Capt Umrao Singh, passed away at his home in Haryana in November 2005, at the age of 86.

In his book, Lt Col Dilbag Singh Dabas, a veteran Gunner, chronicles the saga of valour and provides a detailed narrative of each of the 40 recipients, supported by a plethora of photographs, maps and

anecdotes, so as to present a vivid picture of the battles and times of yore that still have a historical and military relevance.

In his own words, the author felt the need to pen down this book as very little has been written about the Indian VCs, perhaps on the pretext that they had fought for a colonial power and in foreign lands. He viewed this as disrespect of the 40 'bravest of the brave', as gallantry is not measured by the yardstick of ethnicity, race, colour, region or country, but is an act of courage by the human spirit for a cause loftier than one's own life. For the soldier, it is always Naam, Namak, Nishan and Izzat and bravery is bravery, no matter what the circumstances.

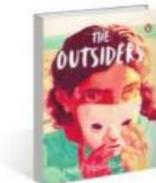
Going beyond the individual acts of gallantry and sacrifice mentioned in official citations, the author also gives the historical context of the institution of the medal and details of the first award ceremony held at Hyde Park in London in June 1857. An illustration of the ceremony, along with a photograph of the names of Indian recipients inscribed at the Park's Menin Gate, features in the book.

An overview of the two World Wars, along with the Orders of Battle in different theatres, adds to the historical perspective in which the recipients went to war and were decorated for their actions.

In the end, there is a compilation of some unknown facts about the Victoria Cross itself, details about the Indian VC recipients, including their personal details, precedences, incidents and some obscure facts and figures.



VICTORIA CROSS: THE INDIAN ARMY WINNERS
by Lt Col Dilbag Singh Dabas.
Real Heroes Publishers & Distributors.
Pages 348.
₹1,999



THE OUTSIDERS
by Devi Yesodharan.
Penguin Random House.
Pages 254. ₹399

Nita is desperate for a better-paying job and accepts one in Dubai. It is the 1990s, and Dubai is becoming a boom town. Nita struggles to adjust. Her job as a live-in tutor for a young girl puts her in an unfamiliar, servile role with a wealthy family. Nita starts telling the child's mother a story from ancient India, where Darius, a sailor, arrives at a port seeking his fortune. As she tells this tale, making it up as she goes, she finds that she's no longer alone. This is a two-headed story, with narrators Nita and Darius nested inside each other like Russian dolls.



BURIAL OF HEARTS
by Shania Sarup.
Rupa.
Pages 288. ₹395

'Burial of Hearts' is inspired by the true story of Sir Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadeja, who offered refuge to Jewish children during World War-II. Silana's quiet, cushioned life in Poland is shattered when her father calls the Gestapo on his own family. She seeks shelter in colonial India. Here, Tara is outraged when her father, the Maharaja of Bramsadha, opens the gates of their Summer Palace to war refugees. Silana and Tara embark on a journey that forever alters the course of their lives. Their unlikely friendship emerges as a testament to the transformative power of empathy.

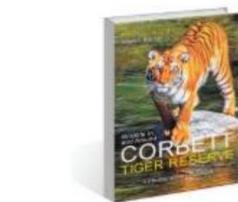
A photographic journey through India's oldest national park

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

JIM CORBETT, who died in 1955, is widely known for 'Man-Eaters of Kumaon', his bestseller published in 1944, which was translated early on into several Indian languages. What is not as widely known is that Corbett himself was an early defender of the wildlife of his beloved Kumaon. He was among those who helped persuade the United Provinces government to set up a national park in 1936.

The forests had been taken over by the British in the late 19th century and were 'worked' for timber. They were also divided into Shooting Blocks, where big game was hunted by officials and their guests. The actual pioneer of tiger and wild animal photography — given due credit in the book — was not Corbett, but the forester FW Champion.

The national park was Asia's first such enclave, long after Yellowstone National Park



WILDLIFE IN AND AROUND CORBETT TIGER RESERVE: A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDEBOOK
by Rajesh Chaudhary & Vinesh Kumar.
Niyog Books.
Pages 400.
₹1,495

in the US (1872) or South Africa's Kruger (1926). After Independence, its name was changed from Hailey National Park (after the former Governor of the United Provinces) to Ramganga Park. However, Corbett was held

in such high regard that it was renamed in his honour in 1957. It was here, appropriately enough, in Asia's first-ever park that Project Tiger was launched in April 1973. The Reserve now spans nearly 1,300 sq km and is the jewel in the crown of not only India's tiger reserves, but also the entire system of parks and sanctuaries in India.

This is a befitting tribute, not only for doing justice to the tiger, India's national animal, and being host to plants, animals and birds, but also for documenting, with striking photographs and informative texts, the amphibians, reptiles and insects, as well as the flora of the Reserve. In doing so, it captures the richness and intricacy of the webs of life in the forest in a way accessible to all readers.

Corbett is home to 500 of the 1,300 bird species recorded in India, besides 500 of the country's 1,300 species of butterflies. The 55 reptile species include the rare *gavial* or *gharial* found in the Ramganga reservoir area.

The authors place Corbett Tiger Reserve in the wider context of the Terai Arc Landscape that stretches across two nation states, Nepal and India, both having long cooperated on conservation. Tigers move across the park and administrative boundaries and this book records some tragic encounters for humans and animals alike.

This reviewer was also struck by the detail on different ranges and zones beyond the well-known and justly famous Dhikala *chaur* or grassland. This is all the more important as it will enable nature enthusiasts to visit lesser-known but equally important locations, helping to ease the pressure of tourists at popular sites.

Even regular visitors to Corbett might, for instance, be unaware that serow sightings are possible in the Sonanadi zone and *nilgai* (blue bulls) and sloth bears in the Jhirna zone. The Reserve is much larger than the original 525 sq km national park and hence encompasses a greater spec-

trum of habitats and landscapes. This bears emphasis, as too much is made of tiger sightings and this has done immense damage to a more holistic appreciation of nature. Any visitor would love to see a tiger in the wild, but the tiger does not exist in isolation. A deeper appreciation of its world, and of nature in general, is what parks should aim at.

A word about the authors: Dr Chaudhary is a biologist and associate professor at Acharya Narendra Dev College, Delhi, and his co-author, Vinesh Kumar, is a nature enthusiast. The bulk of the photos is by the authors, with the others duly credited.

This book is a labour of love and serves as a fine introduction to the park. It is striking that in contrast to Ranthambhore, Kaziranga or Panna, there are few books on Corbett National Park or Tiger Reserve. Now, as India's oldest national park gets its due, the readers will both enjoy and treasure the book.

— *The writer is a historian*

Simple lessons learnt well



TOUCHSTONES
IRA PANDE

I AM writing this column days after the momentous US presidential election results. Enough has been written about them for us to be able to see the deep fault lines between the 'woke', left-leaning academic elite and the rest of middle-class America. I am, perhaps, not the only Indian who sees a similar divide here between our two main political groupings.

So, let me make this more personal. Our family moved to Allahabad in 1963 from Nainital, and it seemed to us hillbillies like no other town we knew. Perhaps, this was because we saw and savoured many new sights and sounds in a 'big city' for the first time. Vegetables such as *tinda* (which I first thought were raw tomatoes), *parval* and *kundru* were discoveries to us simple *pahari* folk nourished on greens, radish and many varieties of *gobhi* till then. This was also the time when I became aware that as a young girl, there were certain places that were never to be visited because these were 'unsafe'. Large swathes of the city areas with evocative names — Muithiganj, Alopi Bagh, Attarsuiya — were declared out of bounds, so that we spent years in Allahabad without ever going there. Once, during the 1966 Kumbh Mela, my two older sisters and I were allowed to go all alone to spend a night at the camp of the *mela* officer (an uncle). Moving unescorted among the crowds late in the night, bathing in the Ganga the next morning and changing into dry clothes in full public view was the closest we ever came to skinny-dipping and flashing, I think. How we savoured every moment of freedom because it was so hard to wrest from parents who guarded their daughters like gold!

Perhaps, the greatest lesson we all received was to deal creatively with boredom. One of these was writing letters to each other. My friend Harini and I wrote to each other every week after her parents were transferred to another town. Often, we had to use three envelopes because there were too many sheets to stuff into one or two. We had also devised a code so that no one could decipher our secrets. I think that was my first lesson in creative writing.

The 1950s and 1960s were the years of my childhood and girlhood, so naturally nostalgia makes me look back at them fondly, erasing the unhappiness and the misery that was also so much a part of growing up in small towns. Our lives were light years from what happened in the metros. For instance, we only heard of

correct Hindi, perhaps because we still carried the burden of the Raj then. Pride in our heritage, our languages and customs, and in our simple but spartan lives, were hidden from our teachers and fellow students. My brother and I were given private lessons in Sanskrit by an old Panditji, who came largely for the tea and snacks served everyday by our mother. As he slurped his tea, he would place a greasy finger on the book in front of us and say, 'Explain this'. Naturally, we never could, so with another noisy slurp, he would start the explanation with, 'To *hum batlavain?*' (Shall I explain then?). We hated those lessons because we felt that exposure to 'Hum Batlavain' (our cruel nickname for him) would — like prolonged exposure to deadly UV rays — dim the patina of the English education we were receiving in our schools. Today, such a cross-cultural experiment may result in some kind of bipolar disorder but we bore the schizophrenia this created in our childhood cheerfully, oblivious of those mental conditions that then had no name, and so did not exist.

At some point, small-town India (to say nothing of rural India) fell off the map of modernity. Simple folktales and popular writing, particularly in vernacular languages, were ignored or rubbished as arcane mumbo-jumbo. The academic fraternity that controlled history writing mostly addressed each other in jargon-ridden polemical debates that alienated the interested lay reader from a knowledge of indigenous events and memories. William Dalrymple's new book 'The Golden Road' is a fascinating account of a lost history and forgotten dynasties beyond Delhi. A terrible consequence, he says, of this was a near-amnesia of Vedic texts and the cultural civilisation that connected the Indian subcontinent from Afghanistan to modern Indonesia.

The Democrats in America paid a high price for overlooking popular concerns in favour of 'woke' issues. Our own politicians would be well-advised to become aware that most Indians want money in hand, food in their bellies, dignity and safety from usurious and sexual predators.

It's as simple as that.

—The writer is a social commentator

At some point, small-town India fell off the map of modernity. Folktales and writings in vernacular languages were rubbished as arcane mumbo-jumbo

the Beatles and Flower Children: to us in our small towns, these were a large generic lot called 'Hippies'. For years after, perhaps, even now, in small-town India, the word 'hippie' denotes an evolutionary stage of being that is just above the cockroach.

We went to English-medium schools but led Hindi-medium lives at home. Then, this was a fact that we hid from our posh, Anglicised schoolmates: today it is something that I am profoundly grateful for. We read 'Chandamama' and 'Rang' while 'they' read 'Schoolfriend' and 'Girl's Weekly'. Their mothers read 'Woman and Home' and 'Woman's Weekly': ours read 'Dharmayug' and 'Sarika'. It was considered stylish to know only English and pretend that you could not spell or speak grammatically

The permanence of our loss

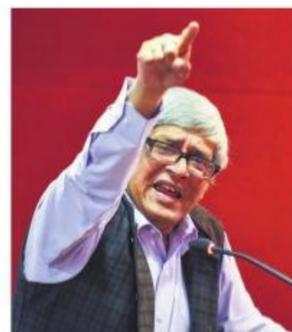
KATYAYANI SANJAY BHATIA

MUCH like how vaccines work, loss too operates, though just a bit differently. Once you have taken a vaccine, the next time your body senses the disease, it knows the drill. Just a bit similarly yet differently, once you have gone through loss, the next time you witness loss, your body recognises it, even though it does not ever learn to deal with it. Loss bruises you again, and you learn to sense loss, every time. The stalwart Dr Bibek Debroy died last week, and he had penned his obituary four days before he passed away, which was published in a national daily. The news of his passing made me feel a profound sense of what Dr Debroy terms 'social loss', but it was definitely reading his self-obituary that catapulted me into feeling loss at its very atomic form. While I did not know Dr Debroy personally, I do know loss personally, for it is a shared feeling, though it looks different to and for each of us — much like living, we all know what it is to live, though in our own ways.

While reading Dr Debroy's note, I was spurred into exploring my detachment with life, for two of Dr Debroy's thoughts echoed consistently — whether on his possible passing away permanent loss will accrue (except one personal loss), and his concluding sentence on whether the mind will or can heal from the experience undergone.

On loss, Dr Debroy wrote, 'not much social loss', 'possible private loss', finally concluding with 'no permanent loss'. And so I wonder, what is loss, beyond the dictionary? Is loss just the future loss of the social value we create, the networks we might have enriched in the future? Is loss quantified as the missing ideas that someone would have ideated had life not been cut short? Is loss seen as the empty seat at the dining table that speaks of the love that once flowed? Is the absence of grieving an indicator of the impermanence of loss? I borrow ink from CS Lewis and Madeleine L'Engle who called the death of a beloved 'an amputation'. You indeed feel like you have lost a limb when you lose someone you love. The pain, searing at first, persistent yet fading as time passes, and as the months go by, the dull ache of loss, the bottomless pit in your being that talks of your loss, all the time. The loss is permanent but you learn to live with the loss. Does it mean the loss is lost? Maybe not. We are so adept at adapting, we learn. Yet, the loss is potentially permanent. You cannot tell someone to stop missing their arm, or their leg, you cannot tell someone to stop missing someone they loved. Like the vaccine response, my muscle memory invokes my sense of personal loss on losing my father. As we step out of the festive season, for one going through the loss of a loved one, this time of the year is that intrusive thought that keeps scraping off the scab every time, and any hopes of living with a healed scar are lost. And so was it for us as a family, this year.

Navigating a melange of emotions,



Eminent economist Dr Bibek Debroy passed away at 69 recently. P 11

In feeling the sense of loss at losing you, not public or social or private, loss, in its very atomic form, I did not need to know you, I just needed to know losing, or loving

my mind was occupied with what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her deeply felt memoir 'Notes on Grief', wrote, 'I am writing about my father in the past tense, and I cannot believe I am writing about my father in the past tense'. This sentence remained with me ever since, for this parting sentence of the book carves an abyss so deep where even silence does not reach. I realised I will choke if I told myself the meaning of Chimamanda's sentence, and so I just read it like it is, literally. Is this loss not permanent? I have learnt to live with the loss of my father whom I loved dearly, but is routine akin to forgetting? I affirm, no. If Chimamanda could not bear the thought of writing about her father in the past tense, was loss really impermanent?

Dr Debroy concluded his note wondering whether the mind will or can heal from the experience undergone. This nudged me to think whether the very act of writing our own obituary can be termed as an inflexion point in the trajectory of our lives, for a self-obituary is not just a reflection on how we lived life, but a blueprint of how we intend to live life. Dr Debroy spoke with detachment of the vast body of work he leaves behind, but the intangible aspects of loss and detachment are what he leaves for us to think. What if we write our own obituaries at some point in our lives, will we be able to add meaning to the years lived, and the moments to be lived?

Dr Debroy, in writing your obituary, you have etched the permanence of our loss, you have imparted language to what can only be felt. In feeling the sense of loss at losing you, not public or social or private, loss, in its very atomic form, I did not need to know you, I just needed to know losing, or loving. That I look up to you has made the gash of this loss deeper.

—The writer is an officer of the Indian Revenue Service

Diagnostic centres liable for negligence



CONSUMER RIGHTS
PUSHPA GIRIMAJI

GIVEN the increasing dependence of medical professionals on a variety of scans for diagnosing ailments and abnormalities, any negligence on part of a scanning centre or a radiologist could play havoc with the physical and mental well-being of the victim and the family. A recent order of the apex consumer court in Shrivari Sono Scans vs Sureshan highlights one such case where a resident of Kasargod in Kerala had to undergo a series of unnecessary tests and suffer immense anxiety, thanks to an erroneous report given by a diagnostic centre.

It all began with TM Sureshan consulting a doctor for a stomach ache, way back in 2019. The abdominal and pelvic scan showed such serious complications in the liver and gall bladder that the doctor advised treatment from a specialist. Two days later, Sureshan travelled 100 km to Mangalore and consulted doctors at the Kasturba Medical College. Further tests carried out showed no abnormality. A repeat scan

showed the first scan to be false. The National Consumer Disputes Redressal commission here upheld the order of the lower commissions awarding compensation of ₹25,000 and costs of ₹3,000 to Sureshan.

There have been instances where the consequences have been extremely grave. In Udayan vs Imaging Point, failure of the ultrasound scans to detect foetal anomalies denied the parents an option to terminate the pregnancy and prevent lifelong suffering for the child and themselves. The scanning centre argued that diagnosing genetic anomalies required a level 2 scan or a target scan, which neither the gynaecologist nor the patient asked for. All four scans were basic scans that could not detect such abnormalities.

After referring the issue to an expert panel from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the commission held the gynaecologist as well as the radiologist guilty of negligence. Considering that the patient was 37 years old and suffered from gestational diabetes, the doctor should have asked for a target scan but failed to do so. The radiologist, too, had an ethical and legal duty to take the history of the patient, ascertain the gestational age and perform the relevant ultrasound scan, which he failed to do. Besides, limb anomalies such as presence or absence of arms, legs and feet should be checked in all standard obstetric ultrasound examinations performed in the second trimester and document-

ed by the radiologist. The report of the scanning centre did not comment on the limbs at all, the commission observed. It directed the doctor and the scanning centre to jointly and severally pay ₹1.25 crore as compensation and ₹1 lakh as cost (May 25, 2022, case filed in 2009).

Last year, the Kerala State Commission awarded a compensation of ₹50 lakh, with 8 per cent interest calculated from the date of complaint (2015) in a similar case. Here again, the baby was born with no lower limbs and hips but several scans done during the pregnancy did not reveal this. The commission held the doctors guilty of negligence for not recommending a level 2 scan and the hospital that conducted the scans equally liable for routinely reporting the increase in the length of the femur in every report, while the baby did not have legs at all (Jayesh JR vs St Luke Hospital).

Given the enormous financial burden such negligence puts on the victims and the mental pain they undergo, consumer justice should be quick and compensation fully commensurate with the suffering. Unfortunately, in all these cases, the final orders have taken years, exacerbating the victims' suffering. Award of strict punitive damages by consumer courts and strict disciplinary action by the regulator are also necessary to prevent such carelessness by diagnostic centres.

—The writer is a consumer rights and safety expert

The fascinating world of agama, the reclusive lizard

PARTH JOSHI

WALKING in the high mountains or lush tropical forests, often a splash of bright colour or a sudden movement catches the eye, and more often than not, it turns out to be an agama, quietly basking in its surrounding, still as a statue or scurrying across to safety at great speed, scared out of its reverie by an intruder. The diverse world of reptiles is often overshadowed by fear and misunderstanding, yet it holds creatures that are crucial to the delicate balance of our ecosystem. Among these are the agamas — a family of small to medium-sized lizards belonging to the family *agamidae*, widespread in Asia, Africa and Australia.

Known for their sturdy build, powerful legs and a range of vibrant colours, they are highly adaptable creatures, occupying a wide range of habitats from deserts and mountains to rainforests, and often close to human settlements as well. Despite being cold-blooded or ectothermic like most reptiles, unable to regulate their body temperature internally and relying on external sources of heat, they can survive

at an elevation up to 5,000m.

Agile hunters of insects and other small invertebrates like ants, termites and beetles, they play an important role in controlling their populations in the ecosystem. Some species that consume plants and fruits also play an important role in seed dispersal.

India is home to a fascinating variety of agamid species, each uniquely adapted to the country's diverse climates and landscapes. Some well-known species include the Himalayan Rock Agama (*pariaudakia Himalayana*), Peninsular Rock Agama (*psammophilus dorsalis*), Fan-throated Lizard (*Sitana ponticeriana*) and the commonly seen Oriental Garden Lizard (*calotes versicolor*), each with their own unique appearance and ecological role.

Agamas possess a fascinating array of physical and behavioural adaptations that make them unique. One of the most captivating aspects of these lizards is their ability to change colour, especially in response to different environmental and social stimuli.

The Oriental Garden Lizard, for example, displays a striking red colouration during the breeding season, with dominant males often showing off this brilliant hue to attract mates or warn rivals while the Fan-throated



Lizards have long suffered from an undeserved negative image in popular culture

Lizard does the same with a thin flap of skin called a gular appendage between its throat and abdomen. This colour-changing ability is not only visually remarkable but also serves as a form of communication within the species. At the same time, they are masters of camouflage as well, blending seam-

lessly into their surroundings.

Despite their ecological value, agamas face a number of threats that jeopardise their population and the larger ecosystems they support. Habitat loss is a major issue, as urbanisation, deforestation and agricultural expansion encroach upon the natural habitats where they thrive.

Many species such as the Peninsular Rock Agama rely on specific rocky or arid environments that are increasingly being destroyed or fragmented by human activities. As natural habitats shrink, agamas are forced into smaller, fragmented areas, which can lead to decreased genetic diversity and increased vulnerability to environmental changes.

Climate change further exacerbates these threats by disrupting the delicate environmental cues that guide agamas' breeding, feeding and hibernation patterns. Rising temperatures, altered rainfall patterns and the increasingly erratic availability of food can place tremendous stress on these small lizards, leaving them vulnerable to population decline.

Another significant threat is human hostility rooted in misunderstanding. Lizards, in general, have long suffered from an undeserved negative image in popular culture,

with many people associating them with danger or disease. Agamas are no exception, often viewed with fear or disgust, and people go to great lengths to remove them from homes, gardens and public spaces.

In reality, agamas are shy, reclusive creatures that avoid human contact, making them unlikely to harm anyone. The simple act of allowing agamas to coexist peacefully actually offers effective pest control in our surroundings without the need for harmful pesticides or insecticides.

Promoting a greater appreciation for agamas and reptiles, in general, is essential, not only for their preservation, but also for the overall health of ecosystem. Educational initiatives that raise awareness about their harmlessness to humans and importance in the ecosystem can go a long way in dispelling misconceptions. Simple actions — such as letting agamas coexist in gardens and parks within cities — can allow them to continue their ecological functions while enthralling us with their vibrant social behaviours. Agamas remind us of the intricate and delicate web of life that sustains our planet, and it is up to us to protect and cherish every thread.

—The writer is a climate expert and outdoor enthusiast

As the term of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud comes to an end, a look at the imprint he left on the annals of legal history

SATYA PRAKASHI

SELDOM does a judge hog the limelight in India where the media space is dominated by politicians, filmstars and cricketers. But the Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud, who retires today, has proved to be an exception. Often described by young lawyers as the "Rockstar CJT", Justice DY Chandrachud has been the darling of the media which rarely missed out on reporting proceedings, orders and judgments of his court as also his erudite speeches delivered in India and abroad.

Son of former CJI YV Chandrachud, he did BA (Honours) in Economics from St Stephen's College in New Delhi and completed LLB from Campus Law Centre, Delhi University, before going to the Harvard Law School in the US from where he obtained LLM and Doctorate in Juridical Sciences (SJD) degrees.

Appointed as a judge of the Bombay High Court in March 2000 and the Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court in October 2013, Justice Chandrachud was elevated to the Supreme Court on May 13, 2016, and appointed the 50th CJI on November 9, 2022.

Unlike his predecessors, who generally kept media at bay, CJI Chandrachud shared information about his personal life. Be it his routine of waking up at 3.30 am to do yoga or following a vegan diet or taking his differently-abled foster daughters Mahi and Priyanka to his courtroom — the media was kept in the loop. He gave interviews to TV channels and attended summits, award functions organised by media houses. The Supreme Court Registry ensured that his speeches and pictures of various events reached every legal journalist.

ISSUES OF INTEREST

During his almost eight-and-a-half-year-long stint in the Supreme Court, including two years as the CJI, Justice Chandrachud has authored many landmark verdicts that will continue to impact the social, political and economic landscape of India and advance individual freedom and human rights.

His verdict on the vexed Ayodhya dispute paved the way for the construction of Ram temple. Upholding the abrogation of Article 370, scrapping electoral bonds, redistribution of wealth and those declaring right to privacy a fundamental right, decriminalising of gay sex and declaring adultery unconstitutional are certainly historic verdicts. He also ruled in favour of abortion rights for unmarried women and upheld the constitutionality of the UP Madarsa Education Act. In the Sabarimala case, he ruled in favour of entry of women into Lord Aiyappa temple in Kerala. He headed the Bench that refused to recognise same-sex marriage in India.

WHAT REMAINED UNDONE

While the CJI has been highlighting the changing demography of judiciary, where an increasing number of women have been joining the district judiciary, the Collegium led by him didn't recommend even a single woman for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court.

Recognising the concept of marital rape for the purpose of abortion, a Bench led by Justice Chandrachud in September 2022 said a woman becoming pregnant as a result of non-consensual sexual intercourse performed upon her by her husband was entitled to seek medical termination of such pregnancy. However, when it came to deciding petitions seeking to criminalise marital rape, he deferred the hearing to a date beyond his retirement, despite repeated requests from some women lawyers.

CJI Chandrachud also chose not to adjudicate on hundreds of petitions challenging the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, which relaxed norms for the grant of Indian citizenship by naturalisation to Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi victims of religious persecution from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India before December 31, 2014.

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Before he took over as the CJI, the Supreme Court and the Centre were at loggerheads over judicial appointments, with the former accusing the latter of sitting over the Collegium's recommendations. However, during his tenure as the CJI, the judicial appointment process got smoothened and quite a good number of judges were appointed to the Supreme Court and various high courts. However, the Centre didn't appoint senior advocate Saurabh Kirpal, who's an openly gay person, as a judge of the Delhi High Court. Also, the Collegium changed its recommendation to transfer Orissa High Court Chief Justice S Muralidhar as the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court.

"As the head of the Collegium, it has become clear that he was not able to stand up to the government at all. In many cases like Kirpal and Muralidhar, we know how various changes were made in meetings of the Collegium earlier. But, he certainly, in appointments, has made many compromises with the government, so the government appointees have come in. And I fear that this will begin the saffronisation of the Indian judiciary," said senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan. Senior advocate Sriram



"Forgive me if I ever hurt you... that was never the intention," with folded hands, an emotional CJI Chandrachud said to lawyers gathered to bid him farewell as he rose from the Ceremonial Bench in court no 1 of the Supreme Court for the last time on Friday afternoon, his last working day.

IMPORTANT VERDICTS BY THE 50TH CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

<p>RIGHT TO PRIVACY Justice Chandrachud was the author of the lead judgment of the nine-judge Constitution Bench, which in 2017, declared right to privacy a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution</p>	<p>ABORTION RIGHTS FOR WOMEN A three-judge Bench led by him in 2022 extended abortion rights to unmarried women. It also said that a married woman can seek medical termination of pregnancy if it was a result of non-consensual sex by her husband</p>
<p>RECOGNISING LIVING WILL "Dignity in the process of dying is as much a part of the right to life under Article 21," Justice Chandrachud wrote in his separate concurring verdict as part of five-judge Bench, which in 2018, recognised 'living will'</p>	<p>ABROGATION OF ARTICLE 370 A five-judge Constitution Bench led by him in 2023 upheld the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution</p>
<p>ADULTERY VERDICT He was part of the five-judge Bench that in 2018 declared unconstitutional adultery as an offence as it punished only a man for having sexual relationship with a married woman. He wrote a concurring verdict</p>	<p>SCRAPPING ELECTORAL BONDS A Constitution Bench led by him declared unconstitutional the electoral bonds scheme that allowed individuals and companies to make unlimited anonymous donations to political parties</p>
<p>DECRIMINALISATION OF GAY SEX Justice Chandrachud was part of the historic verdict by a five-judge Constitution Bench, which in 2018, decriminalised gay sex in India. He wrote a concurring verdict</p>	<p>REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH A nine-judge Constitution Bench led by him ruled that not all private properties can be taken over by the State and courts should not endorse a particular economic ideology</p>
<p>AYODHYA DISPUTE He was part of the 2019 'consensus verdict' by a five-judge Bench that paved the way for the construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya</p>	<p>UP MADARSA ACT A Bench led by him upheld the validity of the UP Madarsa Education Act. It said minority institutions can impart secular education without destroying their minority character</p>
<p>DEMOLITION OF NOIDA TOWERS A Bench led by him in 2021 ordered the demolition of Supertech's 40-storey Emerald Court twin towers in Sector 93-A of Noida for violation of building laws</p>	<p>AMU MINORITY STATUS A seven-judge Bench led by him overruled the 1967 verdict in S Azeez Basha case, paving the way for Aligarh Muslim University to be declared minority institution</p>

Panchu said the CJI suffered from hesitation and was grappling with the government on judicial appointments.

"He should have asserted. He failed in notable cases... Very visible failure, and there is no excuse. It was the most pro-executive court during his tenure," said Panchu.

However, Prof Ranbir Singh, former Vice Chancellor of the National Law University, Delhi, said, "I think the CJI has been keeping a very fine balance. And, that was the reason that he could make a lot of appointments as far as the Supreme Court was concerned. And also of judges for the high courts. Except for a few cases, the Collegium's recommendations were accepted by the government."

COURTING CONTROVERSIES

Justice Chandrachud attracted criticism from various quarters when Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended a widely publicised Ganpati puja at his residence.

Dhavan termed it as a "photo op". Again, many frowned upon his disclosure that he had prayed to God for a solution to the Ayodhya dispute. "Very often we have

cases, but we don't arrive at a solution. Something similar happened during the Ayodhya (dispute) which was in front of me for three months. I sat before the deity and told him he needs to find a solution. Believe me, if you have faith, God will always find a way," the CJI said. Panchu strongly disapproved of his comment on Ayodhya judgment, terming it "strange". "I expected better from him," he said.

The CJI inaugurated the National Judicial Museum and Archive set up in the vacant space where the Old Judges' Library used to function in the Supreme Court premises. The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) and the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association (SCAORA) boycotted the event. Former SCBA president and senior advocate Vikas Singh wrote to him raising strong objections to his decision to convert the Old Judges' Library into a public museum.

Justice Chandrachud wrote the judgment that rejected PILs seeking an independent probe into the death of special CBI judge BH Loya and concluded that he had died of 'nat-

ural causes'. Loya, who was hearing the high-profile Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case, died of cardiac arrest in Nagpur on December 1, 2014, where he had gone to attend the wedding of a colleague's daughter.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

As Patron-in-Chief and Chairperson of the Supreme Court's e-Committee, CJI Chandrachud led the charge for significant administrative reforms — digitisation of court records and processes as a part of the ongoing e-Courts project and ensured live-streaming of proceedings in all courts and tribunals to allow the common man and lawyers alike to have wider access to judiciary.

Video conferencing emerged as the mainstay of the courts during the Covid-19 lockdown period as physical hearings and normal court proceedings in the congregational mode were not possible.

According to the Department of Justice, "Since the Covid lockdown started, the district and subordinate courts heard

2,42,18,903 cases while high courts heard 88,86,450 cases (totalling 3.31 crore) till October 31, 2024, using video conferencing. The Supreme Court heard 7,54,443 hearings till June 4, 2024, since the beginning of the lockdown period."

Also, the Supreme Court judgments are being translated in Hindi and other regional languages. So far, 73,000 translated judgments are available to the public.

UMAR KHALID AND OTHERS

Recently, the CJI said he has granted bail from A to Z (Amab Goswami to Mohd Zubair) as part of his philosophy. However, asked about Umar Khalid and some Bhima Koregaon case accused languishing in jail, CJI Chandrachud said at a media event, "For the one or two cases you did mention, I can tell you at least a dozen cases, sensitive cases, somebody will call them politically sensitive cases, politically important personalities whose names I don't think I should be mentioning as the Chief Justice of India where we have dealt with those cases and bail has been granted.

"I am not going to doubt because none of these cases has been dealt with by me, and I would like to respect the fact that my colleagues have dealt with it, and I respect those colleagues for the work they do," he said.

Noted lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan said, "One of the great failures of Justice Chandrachud's chief justiceship was not to stop the political use of agencies like the ED, the CBI, the NIA and (laws such as) the UAPA and the PMLA and allow the continued incarceration for five-six years of some of our finest human rights activists in the Bhima Koregaon and the Delhi riots cases".

FEARS AND ANXIETIES

Of late, CJI Chandrachud had been anxious about his legacy. "As my tenure is coming to an end, my mind has been heavily preoccupied with fears and anxieties about the future and the past. I find myself pondering over questions such as: Did I achieve everything I set out to do? How will history judge my tenure? Could I have done things differently? What legacy will I leave for future generations of judges and legal professionals?" Justice Chandrachud wondered, while speaking at the Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law in Bhutan last month.

"I do know that, over the last two years, I have woken up every morning with a commitment to give the job my fullest and gone to bed with the satisfaction that I served my country with utmost dedication. It is in this that I seek solace. Once you have this sense of faith in your intentions and abilities, it is easier to not get obsessed with the outcome. You begin to value the process and the journey towards these outcomes," the CJI said.

JUDGING HIS TENURE

Did CJI Chandrachud display judicial statesmanship and provide the kind of leadership to the judiciary that would ensure its independence and give a direction to constitutional jurisprudence which could guide the nation in decades to come?

Panchu said, "He came with a lot of expectation rising on him. Partly because three previous CJIs could not deliver much. In fact, nobody can deliver to the level of expectation. But in his case, it was disappointment for something he could not do and something he did. It was expected to be two resurrection years (CJI's tenure) but it didn't happen." He, however, praised the CJI's verdicts on social issues. "On the social front, he has a very good record," Panchu said, citing his verdict on abortion, adultery and homosexuality. While criticising his verdicts on the Ayodhya dispute and Article 370, Dhavan also praised his judgments on social issues.

Describing CJI Chandrachud as a competent judge who listens to lawyers patiently, senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan said, "There is a kind of ego in him and that ego has never left him throughout his career as the CJI. And one of his legacies will be the ego of the CJI triumphing over everything else."

Dhavan said, "His father (CJI YV Chandrachud) had a very, very tumultuous court. Remember, the court had to recover from the Emergency. There were so many Left-wing judges there. And nevertheless, he made sure that the court was controlled with great dignity.

"But he (CJI DY Chandrachud) has not been able to give leadership to his court in a calm and dignified manner," Dhavan said, citing the recent examples of judges on Benches led by him criticising him for lack of proper consultation.

However, Prof Ranbir Singh termed the CJI's tenure as "quite successful. He delivered many landmark verdicts and managed to get judicial appointments back on track". About controversies, he said, "That generally happens at the end of the tenure."

Bidding farewell to CJI Chandrachud, SCBA President Kapil Sibal said, "We can criticise any judge because there is nothing called perfection in life. There's also nothing called eternal truth. Perfection is relative. Truth is relative. You have to judge the man or the judge on the basis of the times in which we live. When we write about Justice Chandrachud, we will discuss his judgments, his manner, his simplicity, his patience — all attributes... one of the greatest judges in this country."

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