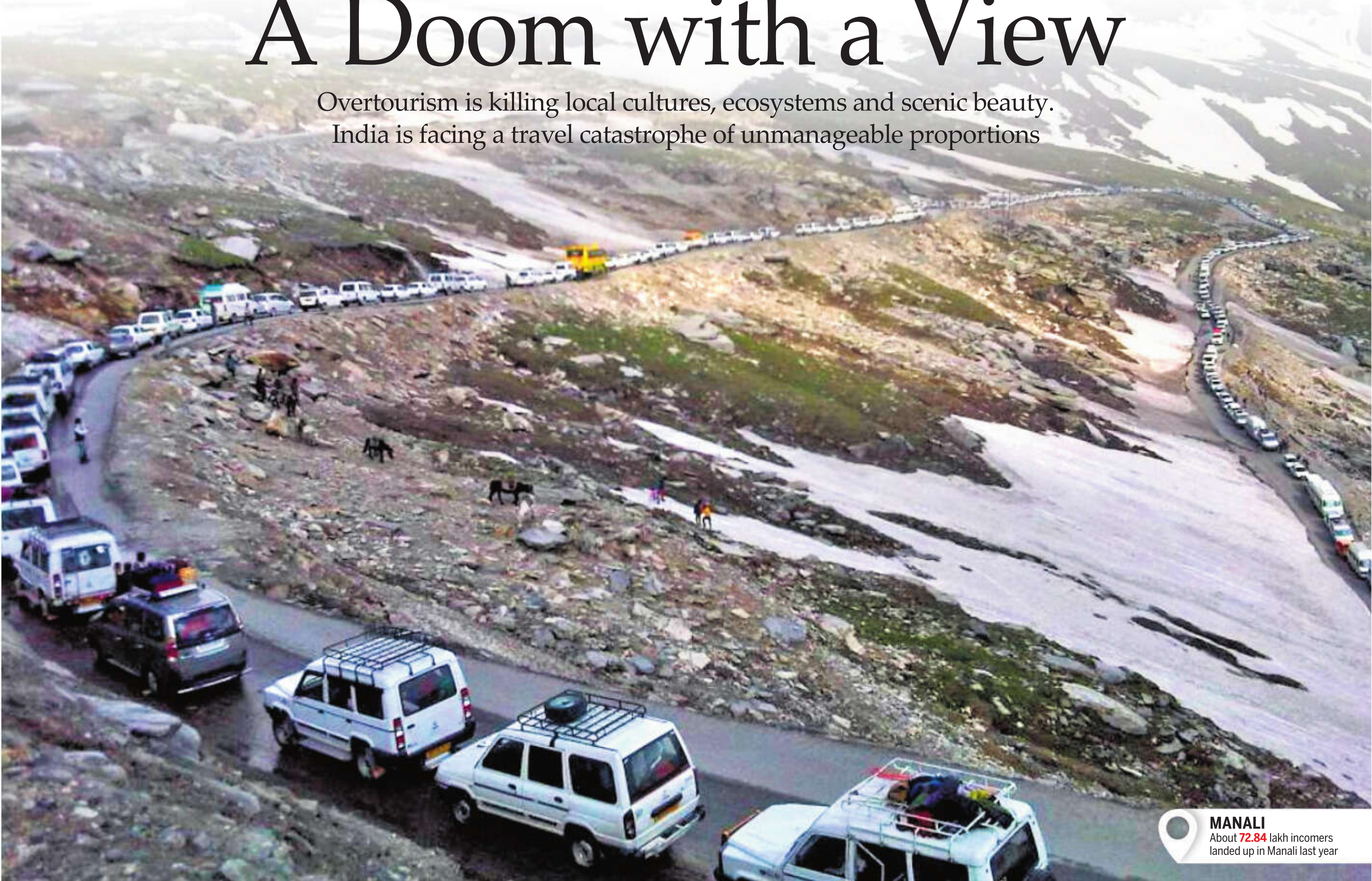


# A Doom with a View

Overtourism is killing local cultures, ecosystems and scenic beauty.  
India is facing a travel catastrophe of unmanageable proportions



**MANALI**  
About **72.84** lakh incomers  
landed up in Manali last year

By SNEHA MAHALE

In 2022, Kerala made it to the *TIME* magazine’s ‘50 extraordinary destinations to explore’. Just two years later, God’s Own Country is teeming with masses of tourists from across the country and the world. Consequently, the state has been included in Fodor’s Travel ‘No List 2025’—the global travel guide’s list of tourist destinations to avoid, citing “unsustainable tourism practices” and “mounting environmental challenges”. The southern state has also been categorised under ‘Destinations Beginning to Suffer’. Particularly highlighted were the catastrophic landslides in Wayanad this year; numerous landslide incidents between 2015 and 2022, and the alarming shrinking of Vembanad Lake; a Ramsar site—the Ramsar international environmental treaty aims to conserve wetlands and their resources—and the backbone of Kerala’s backwater tourism.

Overtourism is the new torment of India, plunging popular travel destinations into an ecological and cultural nightmare. The pandemic of 2020 has a lot to answer for: revenge travel by Indians in 2021 meant 677 million domestic tourists spreading their air wings and stepping on the gas; a number that rose to 2,509.63 million in 2023. In Goa, where the population is around 1.6 million, the state had more than 8.5 million visitors in 2023. Imagine that. However, the number of its foreign tourists are down by 60 per cent. An influx of digital nomads has driven up prices. While the surge benefits certain businesses, locals are finding it increasingly difficult to afford living in their own communities.

In 2018, India announced its plan to limit daily visitors to the Taj Mahal to 40,000 to preserve its iconic 17th-century structure. With millions of tourists visiting each year, the growing footfall was causing wear and tear on the white marble of the tomb. Experts warn that the crowds may cause strain to the monument’s foundations. Similarly, overcrowding is common at Vrindavan’s Banke Bihari temple, and has led to six deaths from 2021 to 2023 due to suffocation. The 161-year-old temple, which has a daily average footfall of 50,000 visitors, regularly sees crowds exceeding one lakh on weekends and over five lakh on festive days. In 2023, Joshimath, a gateway to pilgrimage sites like Badrinath and Hemkund Sahib, as well as a skiing hub for Auli, was declared a “sinking town” as buildings and roads cracked, leaving many areas uninhabitable. Experts attributed this crisis to rampant, unchecked development destabilising the region’s delicate ecology, compounded by the constant influx of tourists. Unchecked commercial development is also damaging sensitive regions. In places like Kasol, Himachal Pradesh, a rush to build homestays and resorts has driven

up land prices, displacing locals and replacing natural landscapes with concrete monstrosities, causing deforestation and habitat disruption. In Coorg, renowned for its coffee estates and lush landscapes, rapid commercialisation has pushed local infrastructure to its limits. Here too, homestays and resorts are putting immense pressure on water resources. “Local farmers, like me, now face severe water shortage. The region has drought, which has been exacerbated by the tourism boom,” says Ankita Nanda, who runs a small coffee farm in the area. According to a 2018 study published in *Nature*, India ranks as the fourth-largest contributor to the global tourism carbon footprint, trailing only the US, China, and Germany. To counter this, travel guilt can maybe motivate tourists to adopt more conscientious behaviours. “However, it relies on both individual and societal awareness, alongside effective destination management that demands strategic leadership and governance,” explains Tanja Mihali, a professor at the School of Economics and the Business University of Ljubljana in Slovenia, and a former member of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics which works under the aegis of the World Tourism Organization.

The choice is yours.

**STEERING THE NIGHTMARE:** The adage across the world say the hills have memories. In tourist season, the 30-odd-km road from Dehradun to Mussoorie, once a sleepy, verdant colonial hill station built in 1823, is choked with traffic lines longer than the memory of its ancient ghosts Ruskin Bond is so fond of writing about. During peak season the police allow only about 2,000 vehicles to go up, unless the visitors have a confirmed hotel reservation. Religious travel has rocketed over the decade: last reported



**ATAL TUNNEL**  
**28,210** vehicles passed through the  
Atal Tunnel around Christmas last year

figures show 1,439 million tourists visited religious sites in India, including 6.64 million international visitors in 2022. This year, the Uttarakhand Tourism Department says 5,21,965 vehicles reached the four shrines of Char Dham by the end of pilgrimage season—mid-November. Of these, a significant number reached Badrinath and Gangotri directly, raising vehicular and noise pollution levels and littering the once-pristine region. Kedarnath Valley was tourist Ground Zero: the number of vehicles at 1,87,615 was nearly double from last year’s count of 88,236. This year, Gangotri was stormed by 8,18,273 outsiders and 88,236 vehicles. “The growing number of vehicles is damaging the Himalayan ecosystem seriously,” warns historian and author Jai Singh Rawat. Road traffic jams, haphazard parking, garbage and carbon dioxide fumes. Vehicular pollution is the main villain in tourist destinations. The rise of adventure tourism in Ladakh has increased traffic in an area vulnerable to climate change. “With more and more tourists renting vehicles to navigate rugged terrain, local air quality has taken a hit,” says Stanzin, who runs a homestay near Leh. According to a 2021 study published in *Frontiers in Earth Science*, tourist vehicles

“Overcrowding is having a major impact. The health of the Himalayas cannot be over looked just for the sake of tourism or pilgrimage.”

UDIT GHILDYAL,  
Director, HIEED



contribute significantly to black carbon deposits on glaciers, speeding up their melting. In Rishikesh, overtourism has stressed the fragile River Ganga ecosystem. “The link between climate change and last-chance tourism is clear. Sadly, the media can’t make the same link between biodiversity loss and tourism,” says Lemelin. India’s rich cultural heritage is also at risk due to overwhelming crowds. “Cultural tourism focuses on top landmarks and historic sites, which often have limited spaces and are quite vulnerable to damage,” says Sandeep Arora, director of Brightsun Travel, India.

**HOW IT STINKS:** States need visitors with fat wallets. Tourism in Himachal Pradesh accounted for seven per cent of state GDP amounting to ₹14,000 crore, and generated 14.2 per cent direct and indirect employment, as per the latest economic survey. In 2018, its capital and popular hill station Shimla, once the summer capital of the British Empire, nearly had water riots—too many hotels built with scant regard for regulations to accommodate the tsunami of tourists which choke the Mall Road every year when residents struggle for water. This year such a situation was avoided only because the administration cut water supply to six days. There are 276 registered hotels in Shimla besides 963 home stays and Airbnbs. Over one crore holidaymakers visited HP in the first six months of 2024: Kullu and Shimla districts drew 4.73 lakh and 4.48 lakh vacationists respectively. About 72.84 lakh incomers landed up in Manali last year; 17.36 lakh crossed the Atal Tunnel. Due to the heavy influx of tourists, trails of trash scoured the sensitive mountain ecosystem. In Manali the deadly detritus of irresponsible travel, garbage, increased manifold; the waste treatment plant designed to handle 20 to 30 tonne of garbage

daily was inundated with 70 to 100 tonne of trash. “The Himalayan region’s self-sustainable capacity has its limits. Where does the sewerage generated by millions of pilgrims visiting the holy shrine go? The health of the Himalayas cannot be over looked just for the sake of tourism or pilgrimage,” says Udit Ghildyal, Director, Himalayan Institute for Environment, Ecology & Development (HIEED).

**THE OUTSIDER INVASION:** Overtourism has plunged the country’s popular travel destinations into chaos, diluting local culture. “If we continue to live here, we’re more isolated than during Covid. It’s so crowded that we try not to go out,” shares 68-year-old Mohan M, who has lived in Ooty his entire life and watched its transformation with a heavy heart. With the rise of digital nomads, viral social media trends, and growing accessibility to destinations, wanderlust is at an all-time high in India. “It is placing immense strain on both domestic and international destinations. In India, popular spots like Goa, Jaipur, Agra, and hill stations such as Manali and Shimla are struggling with overwhelming tourist volumes,” says Arora. Goa, once the coastal jewel of India which was one of the best global beachside destinations until the turn of the decade, is receiving more Indian travellers but fewer foreign visitors. Goa media is already comparing the tourist-choked state with Spain, France and Greece where locals have taken to the streets waving placards saying ‘Tourists not welcome!’ Property prices in this once-laidback haven of beaches, villages, emerald paddy fields, chalk-white churches set against a cerulean sky and elegant Portuguese-built villas have zoomed vertical with out-of-towners buying vacation homes here. Builders have destroyed the natural beauty of places with high-rise condominiums. “You can hardly see Goans now, it’s all people from Delhi and Mumbai. The locals really resent it,” is the popular grouse. Both prices and crime are up. It’s not just the overcrowding; littering, rising cost of living, disruption of local culture, weather changes and ecological strain have turned once-serene destinations like Ooty into overrun, fragile ecosystems and distorted its architectural heritage. The main drawback is that harassed residents cannot protest because tourist destinations have no strong local economy with revenue coming almost fully from tourism. “Because of excessive traffic and illegal parking children get to school late,” laments Sanjay Haleja, who owns the popular Gulmohar Hotel in Mussoorie. Overcrowding is having a major impact on socio-economic life of locals especially in the hills of Uttarakhand.

**LIVING ON THE EDGE:** Ecological danger threatens South India equally. More than 20,000 vehicles enter the Nilgiris daily during peak season, according to a Tamil Nadu government report. Such mass tourism has sparked concerns over its impact on the local ecosystem, particularly elephants, and the ongoing drought.

Turn to page 2





“Tourists are often driven by the desire to visit iconic landmarks, experience places of cultural significance, or enjoy world resources while they are still available.”

TANJA MIHALJ, Professor, School of Economics and the Business University of Ljubljana



“Cultural tourism focuses on top landmarks and historic sites, which often have limited spaces and are quite vulnerable to damage.”

SANDEEP ARORA, Director, Brightsun Travel



#### GUNA CAVES

On March 23 and 24 alone, it saw over **10,000** visitors



#### GOA

The state gets **8 million** tourists annually, impacting the pristine beaches

Continued from page 1

In response, the court in April mandated electronic passes to be issued to all motor vehicles between May 7 and June 30 to track tourist numbers and vehicle types. As tourism-focused development takes precedence, it is driving up the cost of living. Locals like Vignesh, owner of a small lakeside restaurant in Kodaikanal, are struggling to make ends meet. “Many landlords have converted their properties into homestays, making affordable housing scarce. Rents are skyrocketing,” he rues. Responsible travel is the buzzword in officialdom, but how much of a buzz it has created among travellers is questionable. In 2023, Kerala had an all-time rise in domestic tourist arrivals; around 2.18 crore. Former deputy director of the Tourism Department Prasanth Vasudev explains, “When we encourage people to travel, we should make them aware of how they should travel responsibly.” Following the landslides in Wayanad, the High Court stepped in to rein in unchecked tourism activities and ordered the state to carry out a ‘carrying capacity study’ at the destinations. Just weeks before the disaster, the state’s tourism minister, PA Mohammed Riyas, had warned that Wayanad was “dealing with an influx of more people than it can handle, a classic example of a place facing the problem of overtourism”. According to former chief secretary V Venu, a huge contributor is the lack of effective regulations. “A lot of construction is happening, destabilising the hilly terrain,” he says. In Landour where the rich and famous like broadcaster Pranjoy Roy, actor Victor Banerjee and author Steve Alter live, resistance to tourists is more vocal, especially on social media. Once considered the enclave of the elite, the tranquility of this heavily pine-forested slice of Uttarakhand hillside coloured with rhododendrons has been disrupted by honking vehicles, selfie-seekers and holidaymakers who come for a sandwich at the snooty bakery. Says author Ganesh Saili “Every weekend, Landour is full of what a friend refers to as the ‘New Age vulgarians’. They are loud. They are in-your-face with aggression matched by their cars and bikes. They go berserk, far outnumbering the overworked constabulary who try their best to regulate traffic. Better highways, wheels

and social media combine to fuel these crowds. As local residents suffer, there is no quick-fix solution in sight. The way things are going, who knows, one may soon see human jams. We are the new plague.”

**IN GOD’S NAME:** Religious tourism has ratcheted up in the last 10 years after states like Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh went on overdrive to promote sacred sites. Kashi Vishwanath in Varanasi saw over 6,00,000 visitors on March 31, a non-festival day. The influx of tourists caused traffic jams, stretched local resources, and caused hygiene concerns. A total of 48,04,215 devotees participated in the Char Dham Yatra this year—the four sacred shrines of the Himalayas—Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri. It concluded on November 17. However, this figure marks a decline of 8,14,282 compared to the 56,18,497 pilgrims in 2023. The main reason for this decrease was fear—severe landslides, sudden cloudbursts, and relentless rainfall have killed many tourists. Corruption is the usual suspect; hotels operating illegally have eroded soil strength, causing the earth to sink and buildings to collapse as it happened in Shimla and Uttarakashi. A more pressing concern is about the effect of vehicular pollution over the rapidly retreating glaciers of the Ganges’ sources, such as Gangotri and Satopanth. Ninety-year-old Padma Bhushan awardee and leading environmentalist Chandi Prasad Bhatt laments, “The Himalayas are being neglected. The rampant helicopter flights and their thunderous roars are affecting the glaciers. In my childhood, when we ventured into the ‘Bugyals’ (high-altitude meadows), we were advised to speak softly and avoid wearing bright clothing. Such actions could disturb the local wildlife.” The government is trying to prevent natural disasters like the flash floods and cloud bursts. Due to the number of devotees at the Char Dham Yatra growing, the Uttarakhand government made registration mandatory for visiting its four sacred shrines, starting 2022. This year, it got even stricter. Due to limited accommodations and ecological risks at Gangotri and Yamunotri, Vinay Shankar Pandey, commissioner, Garhwal division, said that only a restricted number of pilgrims can now cross it. His statement came



#### KEDARNATH

Number of vehicles this year has reached **1,87,615**

days after a video of the jam-packed Yamunotri temple route went viral on social media. Ashish Todaria, a local horse owner, underscores the importance of balance in this approach. “Tourism is vital to our local economy, but we need to ensure that the benefits reach the community without overwhelming our resources.” Its also social media, stupid. The Fear Of Losing Out is causing a tourism wave. “Tourists desire to visit iconic landmarks, places of cultural or historical significance while they are still accessible. FOMO pushes them to overcrowded destinations. The perception of these locations as ‘must-see’ spots can overshadow concerns about overcrowding,” says Mihalj. Instagram junkies taking pictures on their cellphone and doing outrageous, or sometimes dangerous, poses in front of historical sites is the new travel normal. “What’s the point of going somewhere if you cannot be on Insta and get Likes? My hotel has a scenic view which is perfect for that,” reveals hotelier Rahul Dhiman in Mussoorie.

**PLAYING SMART:** Bucolic Odisha, seems set to be the next Goa. Known for its pristine beaches, freshwater lakes, wildlife sanctuaries and forest-clad hills, the state administration is facing new management challenges from overtourism, primarily in ecological sites and heritage spots. Alarmed by plastic pollution in protected areas and eco-tourism sites, the government imposed a blanket ban on single-use plastics inside sanctuaries, national parks and tiger reserves with effect from April 1, this year. Assam, once a low-tourism impact region cannot take comfort from its past. The Kaziranga National Park, home to endangered species like Bengal tigers and one-horned rhinos, clocked a record-breaking 3,27,493 visitors between 2023 and 24. Such influxes cause habitat destruction due to excessive foot traffic and vehicles disturbing the fragile eco-balance of the park. In Sikkim, nearly 3,00,000 visitors, including 30,000 international travellers, arrived in the first quarter of the year. Projections

flag 1.2 million tourists by the end of the year. A reason travel is up to such places previously unpolluted by excessive and irresponsible travellers, is social media which informs users about unseen attractions like Nathula Pass and Tsomgo Chho Lake in Sikkim. Cleanliness is one of the hallmarks of Gangtok; the government has ordered that all tourist vehicles must carry large garbage bags. Likewise Meghalaya is shifting its tourism strategy towards enhancing the quality of visitor experiences over numbers. “We wish to shift the focus from high-tourist numbers to high-quality experiences that respect the needs of our residents and the integrity of our natural heritage,” says chief minister Conrad Sangma. Travellers are also adjusting, opting for off-peak time travel and exploring lesser-known destinations. Vishal Chaurasia, an advertising professional and frequent traveller from Mumbai, explains, “I avoid crowds, expensive accommodation, and reduce pressure on popular sites.” To promote responsible travel, travel companies are adapting their itineraries. Shashank Birla, co-founder of Wilderlust Expeditions LLP, which organises sustainable safari tours in India, notes, “Non-biodegradable waste is carried back, and during safaris, we educate guests about minimising their carbon footprint. We also encourage visitors to take part in conservation efforts like clean-up drives.” The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that tourism could grow India’s annual GDP contribution to INR 43.25 trillion by 2034. The Government of India is targeting 100 million inbound tourists under Viksit Bharat @2047. Tourism has become a faceoff between ecology and culture on one side and irresponsible travel on the other. Without strong emphasis on sustainable tourism, the short-term economic gains of tourism policies risk causing long-term harm, making overtourism an urgent issue that demands action. Now. Inputs from Narendra Sethi, Harpreet Bajwa, Sudarsan Maharana and Shainu Mohan

#### THE WHYS AND WHATS

**1. Domestic tourism boom:** According to the McKinsey report, The State of Tourism and Hospitality 2024, India’s domestic market, fuelled by a growing middle class and a travel spending growth rate of around nine per cent annually, is set to surpass Japan and Mexico to become the world’s fourth-largest by 2030.

**2. Social media and Bollywood:** A single viral post featuring the crystal-clear waters of the Umngot River in Dawki or a pristine beach in Odisha can inspire thousands to add these spots to their travel itineraries. “Travellers seek more Instagrammable spots, which often worsens the situation,” says Chadha. Bollywood has been a powerful driver of tourism. The stunning Pangong Lake in Ladakh showcased in Aamir Khan’s *3 Idiots* (2009), and the royal forts of Rajasthan highlighted in *Jodha Akbar* (2008) and *Padmaavat* (2018), have all seen their tourist numbers increase.

**3. Cheap flights and mass tourism:** The rise of airlines has made it easier than ever for people to hop on a plane and explore the country, from Kashmir to Kanniyakumari. According to The State of Tourism and Hospitality 2024 report, domestic air passenger traffic in India is expected to double by 2030.

**4. Revenue:** Many cities and states depend heavily on tourism as a major source of income. This reliance creates a vicious cycle where authorities hesitate to impose visitor restrictions due to economic concerns. For example, the 2022 Draft Development Plan for Shimla (2041) reveals that the hill station originally designed for a population of 25,000 now has over 2,40,000 residents plus a significant floating number of tourists. More foot traffic and littering has ravaged the area’s delicate ecosystem. “In places where tourism is embraced, there may be less resistance to high tourist numbers, potentially worsening overtourism.

Conversely, regions with strong preservationist values may enforce stricter regulations to protect cultural and environmental resources,” says Mihalj.

**5. Management Mess:** Tourists are choosing less-crowded destinations now. “There is a shift to offbeat places like Spiti, Gokarna, and the Northeast. While this eases the burden on popular destinations, it presents a new challenge: managing tourism in areas less equipped to handle large numbers of visitors,” says Chadha. For instance, the Atal Tunnel that connects Manali to Lahaul witnessed record-breaking traffic around Christmas last year. According to the Lahaul and Spiti police, “As many as 28,210 vehicles passed through the Atal Tunnel, the highest since its opening.”

**6. Last-chance tourism:** The travel trend focuses on exploring the world’s most fragile and endangered natural and cultural treasures before they are irrevocably altered or disappear. “While some travel is driven by the desire to witness cultural loss, it is largely motivated by the urgent realities of climate change,” says Reynald Harvey Lemelin, a professor at Lakehead University in Canada, who has published several studies on the subject. For instance, in Ladakh’s growing tourism sector, snow leopard tourism has become a significant niche.

**7. Global appeal:** Former Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, G Kishan Reddy, in a written response to the Rajya Sabha in 2023, revealed that foreign tourist arrivals surged from 1.53 million in 2021 to 6.44 million in 2022. In 2023, from January to November, the number climbed to 8.17 million. The tourism ministry is actively promoting tourism segments to sustain this momentum. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her recent budget presentation, also emphasised the government’s focus on the holistic development of iconic tourist destinations.



# Inside Mindscapes that Define Us

Three artists engage with Nature and make a statement that explores the geological, cultural, and material facets of our planet

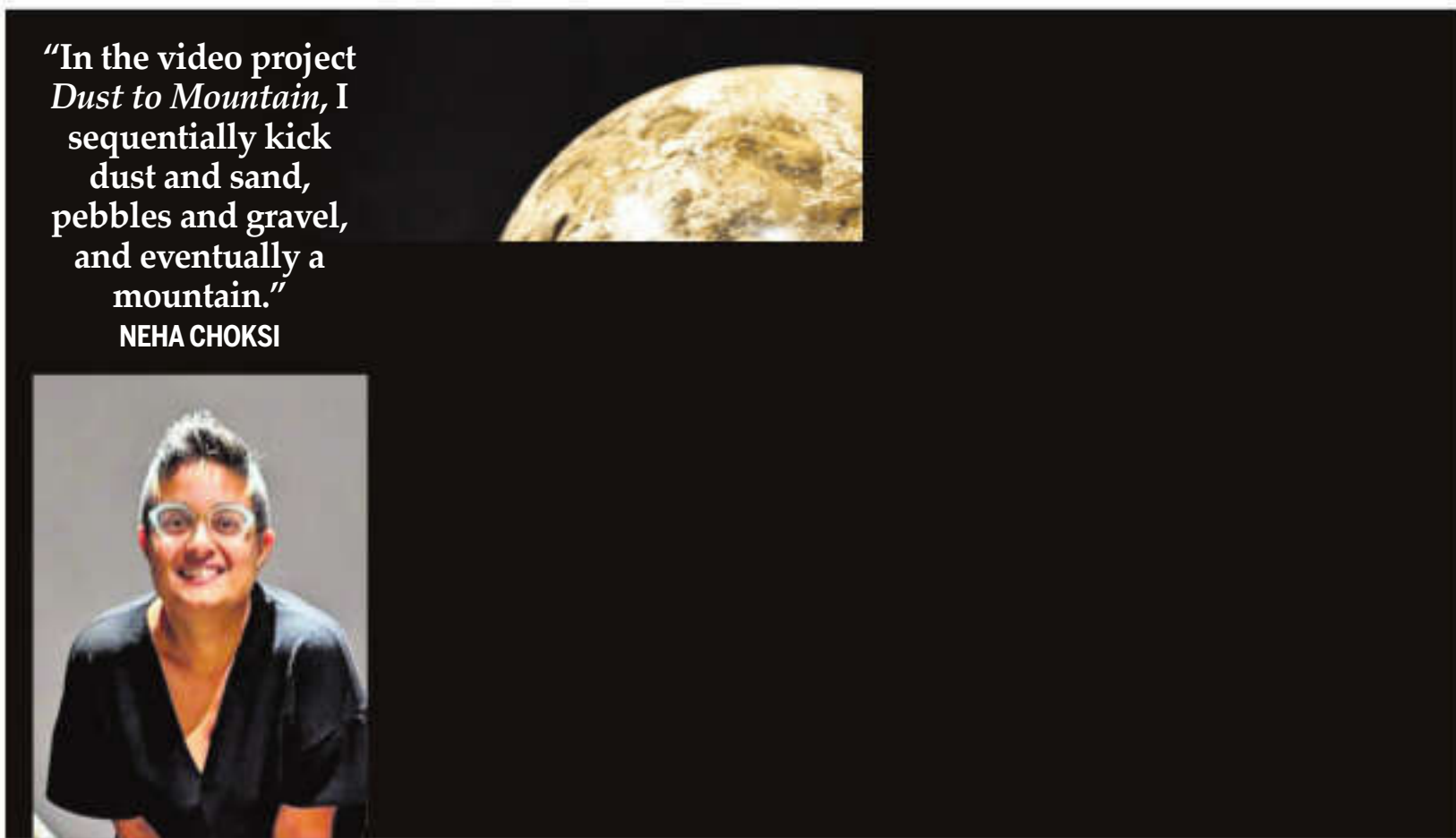
By RAHUL KUMAR

This is me as the curator of the exhibition finding myself, leading on a journey, sharing my vulnerability, and inviting visitors along the way. What holds us, makes us, carries us, now, in near and long precarious futures, I ask myself these questions as well as question the viewers,” says Akansha Rastogi, as she takes you around Kiran Nadar Museum of Art’s (KNMA) new exhibition—*The Elemental You*—in Saket, Delhi. Aimed to be a ‘slow’ exhibition, it provokes and encourages the viewers to pace down and engage with the works by three South Asian diaspora artists, Simryn Gill, Neha Choksi and Hajra Waheed.

The project is layered with the larger framework of collection-building exercise aligning exhibition-making as a method to do so. Commenting specifically on the presentation of the three practices, Rastogi admits that it is an unusual intertwining and yet the works complement each other.

The three artists explore the geological, cultural, and material aspects of our planet, with a specific focus on care and consciousness. Rastogi elaborates, for instance, Port Dickson, Gill’s hometown in Malaysia is a recurring theme in different ways in her work. “She has been documenting and working on it for decades. Its shores, mangroves, abandoned gardens, plantations, market places, inside private spaces of its inhabitants...all of it,” she says. In the exhibit, however, all three of the artists are addressing and engaging with the natural world around them.

Gill’s works open up the cultural politics of embodying, how people become the landscape where they live, how geography become people, the complex processes of being and becoming one with the things around us—animate, alive, or dead. One may wonder then,



when a tree is brought to the ground, does it remain a tree? For Rastogi, the kind of material that opens up in this exhibition is varied. “With Gill’s *Eyes and Storms*, Hajra’s *Strata 1-24*, Choksi’s *Porous Earth*, the geological timescale touched is huge, it is like the deep time of matter and making of the Earth itself,” she explains.

Gill talks about her work titled *Clearing*. “A fallen tree lets you get up close, touch crevices, run your hands along parts you would otherwise not have been able to get to in such grounded comfort; you can minutely and slowly investigate where branches divide and smooth bark creases and folds....” It is a large, multi-part work of which we have three photograms in the KNMA collection that are presented in this exhibition. The fragile photograms are based on inner parts of a 110-year-old Canary Island palm tree that had to be uprooted from the compound of a museum in Australia because of an expansion project.

Curatorially, these three intertwining pathways in the exhibition come directly from the words and references in the



works of the three artists. These are not definitive sections or thematic structures in the exhibition, but more like conceptual, as well as practical methods to allow the exhibition to speak to the viewers. Rastogi says, “Sometimes acting as guiding principles, to bear in mind as one walks through and unfolds the works, they become noticeable, overlay, merge and often get lost too. In certain works, they are too strongly

present.” For instance, Choksi explains, “In the video project *Dust to Mountain*, I sequentially kick dust and sand, pebbles and gravel, and eventually a mountain in a dialectic between thinking like a rock vs Dickinson’s line—‘brain is wider than the sky’. I am working with this dichotomy in this work.”

Waheed conversely offers the paradigm of ‘survival as revival’ in her profound and breathtaking video work *The Spiral*. She



“A fallen tree lets you get up close, touch crevices, run your hands along parts you would otherwise not have been able to get to in such grounded comfort.” SIMRYN GILL

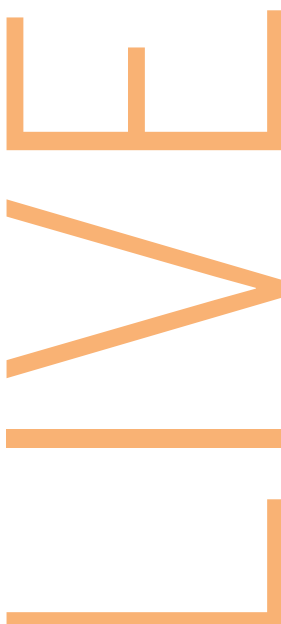
says, “*The Spiral* is much more than just a form. Universal and ubiquitous, centrifugal and centripetal, representing both growth and decay, spirals are one of the most widespread forms found in nature. It grants us insight into the consciousness of self and the expansion of this awareness outwards—a springboard for reflecting on individual upheaval and collective human experience.” The film builds on Waheed’s existing

practice of mapping patterns of colonial and state violence, acting as a meditation on change while reminding us of the importance of maintaining the long view, especially in relation to social transformation

The exhibition is simple, quiet and straight-forward, and yet deeply conceptual. In the gallery where you see Naga Doodles, you also see other examples of Gill rubbings with ink and colour. She encourages our eye to hover on the details that capture the textures, the punctured parts of its body, and body fluids staining the paper. In Hajra’s works you can feel the heat, the temperature, tautness of each sheet of paper she put under the sun for different durations. Climate and environmental degradation are a concurrent narrative in all the works and bind the exhibition together.

**WHEN & WHERE**  
*The Elemental You*; Till January 9, 2025; KNMA, Saket, Delhi

3  
THE SUNDAY  
MAGAZINE



## Dancing to the Stars



By ARTI DAS

On a cool night in November, in three forested villages of Goa, a group of women come together to sing and dance around a *tulsī vrindavan* (holy basil planter), in a formation that looks like a star from above. This folk dance is part of the Katyo festival which is held in the villages of Udalshe, Okambi in Dharbandora taluka, and Pazwada in Ponda taluka of Goa. The night is dedicated to *Krittika nakshatra*. “Katyo is the sole festival among all the Indian festivals that is actually in praise of a *nakshatra* in the sky,” says Devansh Cholera, founder of Goa-based Cosmic Ventures that conducts stargazing excursions. This one-of-a-kind festival is held on the night of the full moon.

Gautam Jalmi, who conducts various science, astronomy, and environment-related awareness events in remote villages of Goa, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, under the banner of Chaand Surya, maintains that this festival speaks about the intricate relationship between man and nature. “Katyo is held at the crucial time of the year when we experience a change in climate as it heralds the arrival of the winter season,” he explains.

In Udalshe village this festival is held for four days and culminates on the full moon night or Poornima. On this day the woman of the village headman’s or *gaonkar*’s family keeps a fast. “It is a very strict fast where one must not even drink water for 24 hours,” says Sheetal Kalekar, who kept the fast this year. The festivities begin at dusk with a drawing of *rangoli* of the sun, moon, and *Krittika nakshatra* near the *tulsī vrindavan* by Sheetal along with *gaonkar*, Ganapat Kalekar. He then recites a *garhane* (invocation) near the *tulsī vrindavan*, asking for the peace and prosperity of the village. *Naivaadya* or *prasad* is offered which consists



of rice pancakes (*pole*), rice *kheer* (*paais*), and steamed wild tubers (*kanga*).

Then through the night women gather from the village to sing and dance forming an inner and outer circle around the *tulsī vrindavan*. Dressed in traditional attire, these women of all ages—married, unmarried, widows—sing songs that praise the celestial wonder of the moon and the stars, their deities, village life, ecology, etc. The women dance till past midnight or till the *Krittika nakshatra* is seen clearly in the sky. Mainly celebrated by the Gawda community in Goa, it also speaks about the agrarian tradition as it was held to protect their crop from wildfire. Kalekar says, “It is believed that in the old days during this time of the year due to the weather conditions, the paddy would often catch fire. So, for the protection of the paddy and the village, we host this festival.” A fiery passion that continues.

## LEISURE CORNER



### NATURE IN MOTION

A solo exhibition by emerging artist Pankaj Kumar Singh, invites viewers to embark on a captivating journey through the cycles of nature. Through rhythmic geometric patterns, and textured layers of charcoal dust, the works offer a meditative exploration of nature’s eternal dance. *Eternal Rhythms*; Shridharani Art Gallery, Delhi; December 2-11; Entry: Free



### THE POWER OF RESILIENCE

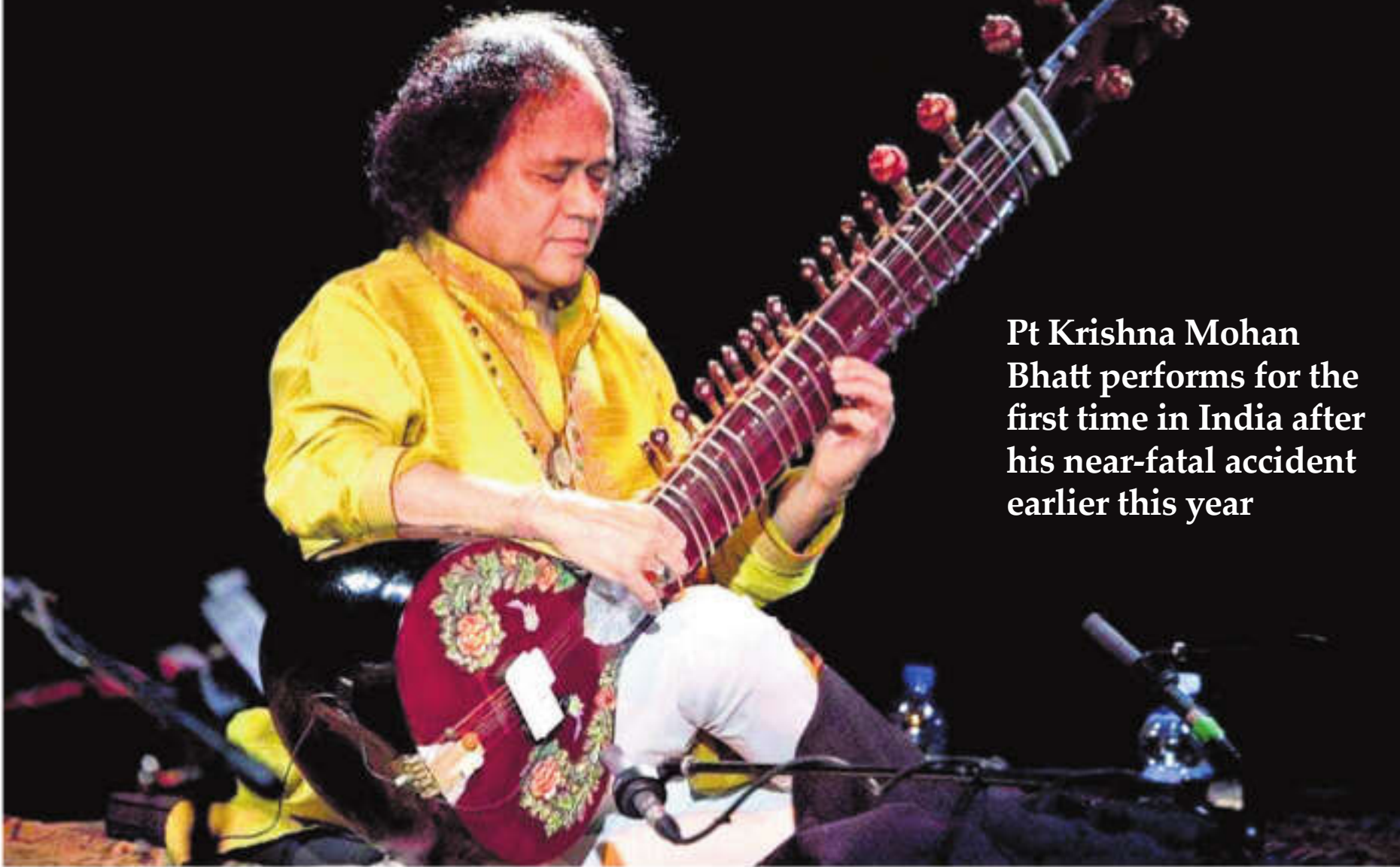
The five-time Olivier award-winning production is making its India debut. Based on Yann Martel’s acclaimed Man Booker Prize-winning novel, directed by Max Webster and produced by Simon Friend, this stage adaptation by Lolita Chakrabarti, tells an epic tale of resilience and optimism. *Life of Pi*; December 5-22; NMACC, Mumbai; Tickets: ₹1,200 onwards; Details on nmacc.com



### A GLOBAL FEST

*Echoes of Earth* makes its much-anticipated return to Bengaluru with its seventh edition. This year’s festival promises to awaken the vibrant celebration of art, music, and nature will transport you on a journey through the enchanting beauty of seasonal cycles. *Echoes of Earth*; December 7-8; Details on echoesofearth.com

## Pulling the Strings



By MEDHA DUTTA YADAV

As you push open the glass doors of the Dhoomimal Gallery in Delhi’s heart, Connaught Place, the faint strains of a sitar reaches your ears. You follow the melody to a corner of the mosaiced terrace to find a *baithak*-of-sorts set to begin. The smell of incense fills the evening air as Pt Krishna Mohan Bhatt sits on a makeshift stage tuning his instrument. The 79-year-old sitarist is set to perform on the sidelines of the gallery’s new exhibition, *Joining the Dots: The Past has a Home in the Future*, curated by Dr Annapurna Garimella. Someone approaches him to ask whether he is seated comfortably as he would need to maintain eye contact with his tabla player on the right, Bhatt says, “*Humara dil ka rishta hai. Hum kaano se dekh lete hain aur aankhon se sun lete hain*” (There is a connection of hearts. We can see with our ears and listen with our eyes)."

The evening grows chilly with hints of early Delhi winter; the small crowd eagerly reaches for the cups of tea being passed around. It warms the throat. As the viewers sip quietly, Bhatt starts with Raaga Charukeshi as if on cue. It takes a little while for his sitar to connect with the audience. Not surprising. Bhatt is playing for the first time in India after his near-fatal accident in January earlier this year. As his new body urges the sitar,

“Our musical tradition is an oral one, we don’t follow sheet music like they do in the West. So every generation adds something to the tradition.”

balanced a little awkwardly on his lap—he can no longer sit cross-legged—the music suddenly comes alive. It courses through the veins of the audience; some nod in appreciation, others tap their feet or let their fingers sway in tune with the *laye*. He branches into Raaga Khamaaj, with Vihaag elements.

Later during a candid chat, when he recalls performing his first concert at the age of 17, the Jaipur-based Bhatt says, “I don’t have any age. I could be 600 years old, or maybe 18. All I know is that music has been my companion throughout.” The artist, who has performed across Asia, Europe and North America, shares his mantra to master music, “You have to know how to open the door, how to use the 12 keys—raagas are the root music. There are only seven notes in the whole world, 12 together if you think of tones. The entire music of the world is based on those 12 notes, what I call the 12 keys.”

Born into a family of musicians, poets and Sanskrit scholars—his father, the late Pt Shashi Mohan Bhatt was a distinguished sitarist of his time—the son studied under Pt Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan.

Pt Krishna Mohan Bhatt performs for the first time in India after his near-fatal accident earlier this year

Along with his classical training, he worked on creative innovation. “Our musical tradition is oral, we don’t follow sheet music like it is done in the West. So, even while learning under legendary gurus, every generation adds its bit to the tradition,” he says, as he reminisces about a time in New York performing with Zakir Hussain. His sitar string broke midway. “Replacing a sitar string takes time. To fill in the gap I started singing a lullaby, accompanied by the soft *taal* of the table,” he smiles.

Bhatt has performed across the globe. How do people abroad—especially when they are not aware of the nuances of Indian classical music—react to his music? “Musicians communicate through their music. It is a deep ocean of emotion. And when you surrender to the raagas, you immediately connect to your audience. Of course, the connection is more pronounced when it is an intimate setting,” says the artist who often collaborates with Rajasthani folk artists like the Manganiyars and the Langas. But if there is one raaga that is closest to his heart, what would that be? “That’s a difficult question. It’s like asking a mother who is her favourite child. But, still, if I had to choose, I would pick the South Indian raagas. They are largely mood pieces and evoke an emotion—something that I like to do with my performances,” he smiles. It is through such artists that India understands itself.

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# Congress is the Fit Case of Sins of Children Visiting on the Father

## BARBED WORDS

**Pushpesh Pant**

Former professor,  
Jawaharlal Nehru  
University



After the Tsunami in Maharashtra that drowned the remnant dredges of the Indian National Congress—once a political party—time has come to the legacy and the burden of past in contemporary India. Lest there is any misunderstanding, it's imperative to make it clear at the outset that the term Gandhi has no relation to the Father of the Nation. Late Prime Minister Indira Priyadarshini Nehru got this suffix after her marriage to Feroze Gandhi, a Parsi gentleman and feisty parliamentarian who was often a strident critic of his father-in-law's policies. She found it convenient to use a hyphenated surname to proclaim that she was the inheritor and custodian to two great men's legacy. This isn't the place to recall differences between the Mahatma and Panditji, and the contrasting visions of India of their dreams. Hind Swaraj and Discovery of India are difficult to reconcile. But let's not digress. What is referred to as the first family in Independent India's politics has quite happily erased the word before the hyphen and for majority of Indians anyone in the family bearing the Gandhi name from Indira, Rajiv, Sonia, Rahul is an heir to the priceless treasure trove. Even Sanjay, Maneka and Varun have benefited from the ambiguity of historical resonance. Priyanka Vadra, too, has chosen to retain the Gandhi part in her name in

public life.

To some it may appear as futile an exercise as beating a dead horse, but the INC reduced to a mom-n-pop shop is far from a dead horse. It continues to be a nightmare. Even those who detest Prime Minister Modi's polarising politics believe that the zombie-like presence of the dynasts in the electoral arena makes his task so much easier. All he has to do is to aim a few barbs at the *shehzada* and others who display a sickening sense of entitlement—divine right to

alternative offered by Rahul Gandhi time and again. Many who once supported the Nehruvian idea of a Secular Socialist India have started having serious second thoughts about the agenda articulated by RaGa. When NaMo calls the INC a parasitic party that feeds on its allies, the sarcastic allegation rings true.

The whimsical way in which tickets are distributed, allies arrogantly alienated, favourites catapulted or paraded, has destroyed the organisation. How long



rule by birth and to lead autocratically the carefully created aura of charisma dissolves.

The 'Man who would be King' is exposed as the poor Humpty Dumpty time and again. As the rhyme has it, all the kingsmen can't put him together again. The coterie-sycophants never tires of chanting mantras like shamanic priests of yore to make the Phoenix rise from its ashes. They refuse to accept that people of India are sick and tired of their antics. They have rejected the

can they blame the hacked EVMs and misuse of ED and CBI, etc? The scale of BJP's victory in Maharashtra is so huge that if the party sniffs a conspiracy it can't deny that it was a vastly popular conspiracy. It's said that there are none so blind as those who don't wish to see. The INC may continue to dwell in an echo chamber denying reality till it becomes extinct insisting that all this is their internal matter but the harsh reality is that RaGa and Co. have been written off by the majority of Indians.

Partisan analysts may continue playing with words like the North-South Divide or mushrooming dynasties in all parties, including the BJP, but what needs underlining is the writing on the wall—the voters from Haryana to Punjab, Kashmir to West Bengal, Jharkhand to UP have given the Congress a big Thumbs Down. The INC hangs like an albatross around its allies necks. It has lost all leverage to orchestrate anti-NDA strategy in the Parliament or on the streets.

Like the originally lampooned Bourbons in pre-revolutionary France, the INC Gandhis refuse to learn. They keep threatening their compatriots, *Après moi le deluge!* Nor have they shown any awareness of Marx's dictum about history repeating itself as tragedy and farce.

The greatest casualty in the Quixotic tilting at windmills has been the Idea of India envisioned by the first prime minister. No one can deny his Himalayan blunders vis a vis China and Pakistan, but it would be churlish to deny him credit for laying the foundation of a modern, industrially self-sufficient action. He also strove to build democratic institutions.

He had his weaknesses and was certainly no Mahatma. But the poor man was enthroned, not by his father, but by the Father of the Nation, who overrode the majority who in the party favoured the Sardar.

Ironically, his is the case of sins of children visiting on the father. It's the children born in the 21st century who will build India of their dreams. One should have faith in their ability to do so discarding the deadwood and the dynasties.

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## Why Pappu hasn't Defined Rahul Gandhi Yet

No tomb raider would have rummaged through the remains of a lost city as much as the Indian National Congress has examined its presently distressed soul.

After its rout in Haryana and Maharashtra, its soul searchers are seeking introspection: which, in partyspeak means Rahul Gandhi is the suicide bomber who blew up his own chances to be PM. They may be bang on. Until Rahul came along, the Gandhis were clearly defined characters in the political theatre. People knew what they were and what they stood for.

**Jawaharlal Nehru, Cosmopolitan Contradiction:** He is the ultimate winner-loser combo. The freedom fighter and iconic prime minister who laid the foundation of modern India was diplomatically naïve, losing two wars and part of Kashmir to Pakistan, and to China parts of Ladakh and the UNSC seat.

**Indira Gandhi, Mother Superior:** She was Democracy's Durga who liberated Bangladesh. She set the precedent for authoritarianism by declaring the Emergency and promoting her offspring and inexplicably lifting it in 1977. As India's strong (wo)man, she sent the Army into the Golden Temple with fatal consequences. Her machinations within and outside the party were the reasons for the dynasty's infirmities today.

**Rajiv Gandhi, India's Hamlet:** A tragic figure whose dimpled charm faded in the storm of scandal; he is the first prime minister to lose an election following kickback allegations. His misadventure in Sri Lanka was a harbinger of doom, ultimately costing him his life in a suicide bombing.

**Rahul Gandhi, Heir Apparently:** Rahul's flaw is the absence of specificity. What Modi stands for is clear: rhetoric, nationalist machismo, global influence, personality cult and retaliation. The same cannot be said about Rahul. His identity until the Bharat Jodo Yatra was Pappu; in a sense, Modi's 'Hindu Hridaya Samrat' was seen in context with Pappu's *mohabbat ki dukaan* which sounds like a shoddy grocer in a small town in Uttar Pradesh. The Yatra however diffused the Pappu image, but that was it. Meanwhile, Modi's self-deification during the Ram Temple consecration and mono-focus optics diluted the PM's hold over the people as was evident in the BJP's poor show in the 2024 elections; and to an extent on the saffron ecosystem, which had been kept at bay by the sheer force of his personality. Still Modi remains Grand because 'it is difficult for a ruler to be both feared and loved', as Machiavelli put it. And Rahul, wandering the fertile fields of self-satisfaction and assured optimism doesn't seem to acknowledge that Pappu needs a Thesaurus pronto.

Excerpt from *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli: "Since it is difficult for a ruler to be both feared and loved, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two must be lacking. For this can generally be said of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, avoiders of danger, greedy for profit; and as long as you serve their welfare, they are entirely yours, offering you their blood, possessions, life and children."

Hindus believe Modi serves their welfare. Rahul may be loved, but is not feared like his grandmother, or even his mother who still rules the Congress with an iron fist.

In short, the great beast of democracy cannot be controlled with love alone, because it will devour whom and what it doesn't fear. Rahul is an idealist in the purgatory of politics, without an exit plan for salvation. He is just a Good Samaritan in a bad situation. Pappu's image hasn't got a replacement yet. Pappu was always the Clown Prince in a populist power parody. What Rahul Gandhi will be from now on is a decision he alone can take.

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## Are Adult Friendships Really that Hard; Why Not Make the Effort?

### MILLENNIALS AT WORK

**Utkarsh Amitabh**

CEO, Network Capital;  
Chevening Fellow,  
University of Oxford



is that it leaves a tiny window for serendipity and spontaneity. When was the last time you surprised an old friend? Most people will have to scratch their heads to remember.

Adult friendships need effort. When you are in university or graduate school, there are ample avenues to create shared experiences. The depth and frequency of interactions ensure that meaningful bonds are formed over the years. However, when people move on to a different phase of their lives, they prioritise settling in. The willingness to look back and nurture older bonds makes way for more practical networking

also make adult friendships challenging.

I know I am presenting a bleak outlook here but it may be helpful to recognise where we stand on the spectrum. If you read this and think, the theme doesn't resonate with you, that's a great thing. You probably are among the minority who managed to make room for friendships despite everything going on.

However, if this piece makes you pause, it may be worthwhile to recalibrate how you spend your time and who you spend it with. Beyond family, friends play this pivotal role of reminding us who we once were and who we are becoming. They have this unique lens to view your life as a novel: Just far

enough to see the changes, and close enough to connect the dots to your former self.

Friendships will fade. That's part of life, but you shouldn't let them go without a try. Recently a friend from high school called me from Canada. I had seen him on social media but we hadn't spoken in 15 years. At the time I was moving homes and starting my PhD at Oxford. I almost cancelled

the call because figuring out time zones was becoming hectic, but he just picked up the phone and dialled. We spoke for an hour or so and reconnected over our love for cricket, adventures in rickety buses in Delhi, and random elements of our lives. For me, it was one of the highlights of the year gone by. I realised I had forgotten so much of my former self.

Even though I am blessed to have a reasonably strong circle of friends, there are many I have not been able to speak to for a while. Maintaining our bond, at least in part is up to me. I can always find an excuse not to pick up the phone and dial but what if I didn't? What if we didn't?

*Posts on X: @utkarsh\_amitabh*



and agenda-based associations.

It is not that people are wired to hang out with those who offer a certain 'utility'. If asked, most people would say they value their friendships; they just don't have the time. I have a simple rule: If we consistently don't have time for something, it means that it is not a priority. The friendship may still be valuable (in theory) but it isn't valuable in the moment. The return on invested time doesn't seem worth it to most.

Then there is the issue of change. The friend you knew back in college could have turned into someone you just don't recognise. S/he could be far more or far less successful than you are. The difference in outlook and career trajectory

## Of an Age Gone by and a Language Lost

### BY INVITATION

**Ganesh Saili**

Author, photographer,  
illustrator



Our villages have become ghost villages; will our language take the same road? A googly was flung at me by a student.

In Tibetan settlements, you will find them still speaking Tibetan. Uprooted from their home, living in an alien land, they speak to each other in the same tongue they once spoke on the Roof of the World.

Our story is a whole different one. Going back in time, I see my mother, all 16 years old, accompanying my father to Mussoorie. The only language she knew was Garhwali. Of course, over the years, she did pick up a smattering of Hindi. Fortunately, she spoke to me in Garhwali (a language that now comes to me easily). I have no idea why my other siblings (five of them) had to make do with cobbled-together Hindi.

At the age of five, I was sent off to the school run by the Garlahs—three of

them—Edith, Doris, and their brother Cecil who looked after 20 pupils. I am grateful to them for opening the doors of Anglo-India to me. This is where I picked up a second language.

Miss Doris Garlah, an accomplished math teacher, worked in the Railway School of Oak Grove. She is remembered for giving the girls the treat of treats in 1960, by permitting them to tune into the radio broadcast to hear Princess Margaret say 'I do' as she wed the Earl of Snowdon, Antony Armstrong-Jones.

'Saili Sa'ab, what a chatter-box your son is!' I overheard Edith Garlah tell my father, adding: 'The fellow talks nineteen to the dozen!'

While my father tried to decipher her, the monkeys raided the 'dooli' placed outside the kitchen.

'The blessed latch is not working! They've flinched the *jharans!*' wailed Doris. Her tea towels had gone.

Soon after I too learnt to shorten words; 'remember' was pared down to 'member'; 'brother' to 'bro' and later; much later I picked up priceless expressions like 'she looks like a dying duck in a thunderstorm'.

Cecil Garlah would send me off to the

wood godown: 'Go! Give Arthur that old boozarda *jhaanp!*' Arthur Fisher was a down-and-out hobo who lived out his life among sacks of charcoal and occasionally doubling as a projectionist in the Electric Picture Palace cinema.

One day I found him counting his pennies. He was stacking them into neat piles muttering: 'Eightsies! Charjees! Dohjees!' Winking at me, he slipped the

coins into his pocket, saying: 'A swig a day keeps the doctor away!'

'Don't you have a family?' I ask a dumb question.

'After the war, I camehome to find that they had gone off to England. Harmony Cottage had been sold.'

'Did they ever get in touch?' I twisted the knife. 'Of course not!' he spat back.

In his old age, Arthur was an assistant to the cemetery's undertaker and saw many to their graves. One day he too came to rest in the pauper's section of the Camel's Back Cemetery.

Edith, the youngest of the Garlah family crossed the Golden Bridge in 2006, a few days short of her 100th birthday.

With her passing, an age had gone. My days of kofta curry and yellow rice were all but over.

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**Uprooted from their home, living in an alien land, Tibetans still speak to each other in the same old tongue**

## The Art and Madness of Writing a Book

### BY INVITATION

**Preeti Shenoy**

Novelist, Illustrator,  
Speaker



By the time this article is published, my 17th book would be released into the world. Seventeen books—it is a number that still feels surreal to me. When people hear of my work, they label me prolific, but I am far from it. What they see as productivity is simply the result of persistence, discipline, and an unwavering commitment to the craft. If you want something badly you will make time for it. Else, you will make excuses.

I never envisioned that I'd write so many books. While I enjoyed creative writing in my college and won a few accolades for it, writing a novel is an entirely different enterprise. Aspiring writers often ask, 'How does one write a book?' The answer, though simple, demands a profound commitment: one word at a time.

Every book begins as an idea. From that spark, a world is constructed—complete with characters, their relationships, and a plot. The process of writing is rarely

linear. Each manuscript undergoes several drafts. With every iteration, the narrative deepens, characters evolve, and sometimes unforeseen elements emerge. Writing a novel requires a willingness to grapple with uncertainty and the ability to let go, when something isn't working.

Research is an integral part of this journey. For instance, one of my unpublished novels is set between 1940 and 1960—a period that demanded painstaking investigation. The lack of readily available information meant poring over archival British administrative reports spanning hundreds of pages. Such immersion is indispensable for authenticity.

Once a book is published, one might assume that the most demanding phase is over. On the contrary, the work has only begun. In today's competitive literary landscape, authors must take an active role in promoting their work.

Many writers find marketing uncomfortable as it clashes with their creative sensibilities. Yet, the reality is that a book, regardless of its artistic merit, is also a product. Like any product, it requires careful positioning. Identifying your

audience, understanding where they can be reached, and articulating the value your book offers, are crucial components of a successful launch.

Once had a fellow writer lament that despite writing 'good books', their work was not selling. This highlights a fundamental truth: it's not enough for a book to be well written. It must resonate emotionally with readers and offer them something meaningful—a fresh perspective, knowledge, or a deep connection.

In the digital age, the biggest competition is no longer other books but the omnipresent allure of the smartphone. A story must be compelling enough to draw readers away from their screens and into its pages.

Writing demands solitude, patience, and a certain degree of madness—a willingness to dedicate months, even years, to creating something with no guarantees of success. And if a book falls short of expectations, it requires the fortitude to start anew.

For those who find exhilaration in this process, welcome to the chaotic world of writing. But for those who do not, it is best admired from afar:

*Instagram: @preeti.shenoy*





# The Artificial Way to Work Happiness

By MAMTA SHARMA

Gen Z seems to have got the workplace right, artificially. With 31 per cent of them reporting a healthy relationship with work, it places them ahead of Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. A significant factor behind this shift is Gen Z's willingness to embrace artificial intelligence (AI). Data from HP shows that 83 per cent of Gen Z workers use AI tools at work, outpacing the 75 per cent Millennials who use it.

### REDEFINING JOB SATISFACTION

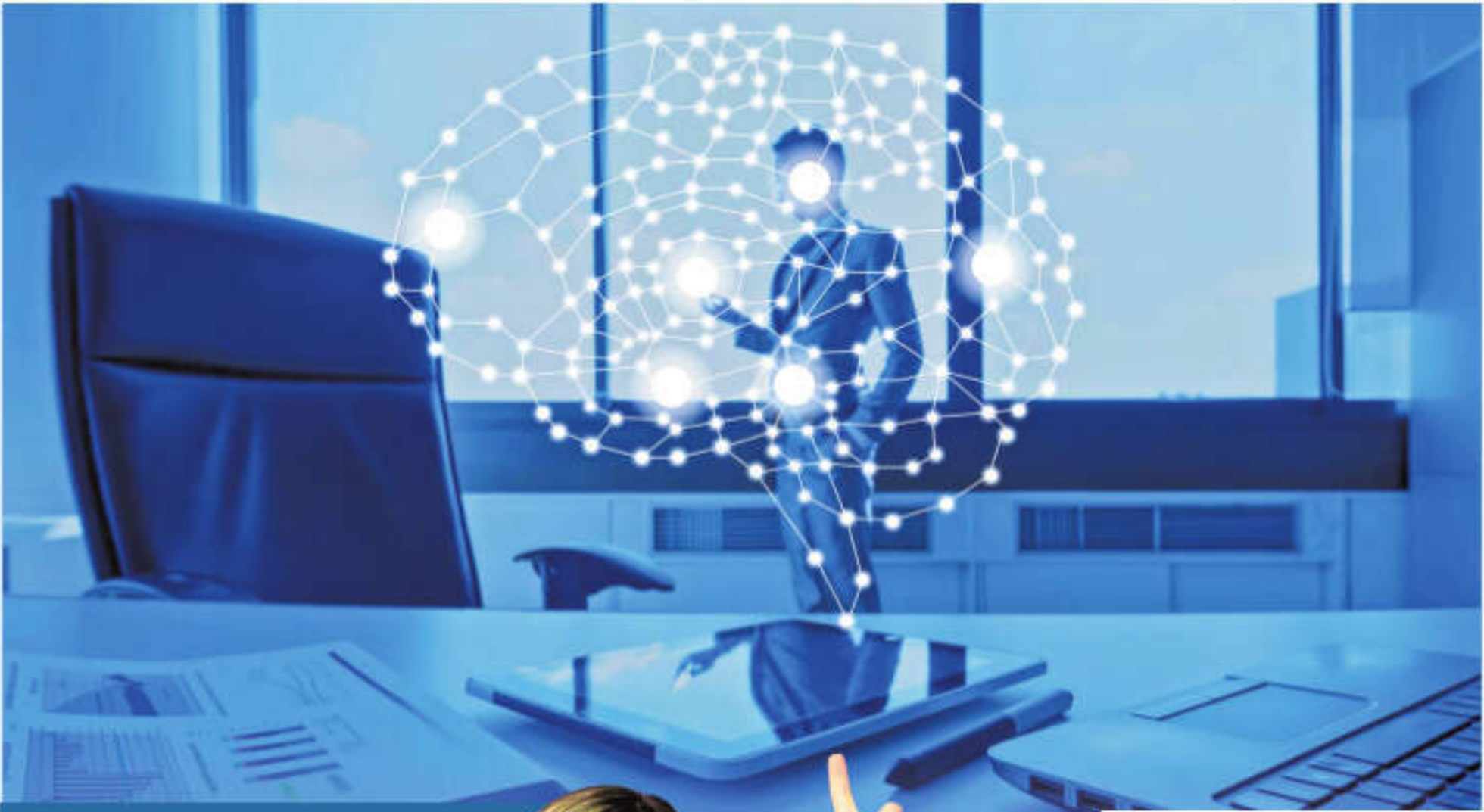
"Gen Z, being digital natives, is super comfortable with tech and loves experimenting with new tools," Divya Dixit, Chief Growth Officer at One Health Assist explains. Since they value productivity, AI frees them from mundane tasks, giving them more time for meaningful work, which directly boosts job satisfaction. This tech-savvy generation expects workplaces to stay ahead of the technology curve, and AI-driven roles feel "future-focused," complementing Gen Z's attraction to innovation and flexibility.

Devroop Dhar, Co-Founder and Managing Director at Primus Partners, says, "For India's 377 million Gen Z individuals, AI isn't just a tool; it's a co-pilot unlocking their potential and reshaping the way they learn, work, and innovate." This sense of alignment between their roles and personal values fosters a strong sense of fulfillment and growth.

### FLEXIBILITY, AUTONOMY, AND PURPOSE

Gen Z is highly motivated by work-life balance, purpose-driven tasks, and flexibility. "By using AI to automate repetitive tasks, they can save time and focus on creative, strategic work—factors they deeply value," says Kamaljeet Singh, CHRO at The Sleep Company. Gururaja Yellapur, Vice President and Head of Product Engineering at Omega Healthcare, echoes this sentiment: "AI minimises time spent on mundane tasks, enabling Gen Z to concentrate on creative and impactful projects, fostering both balance and engagement."

Mili Panicker, Director of HR & People Operations at WebEngage, emphasises that Gen Z's focus on purpose and growth is supported by AI's role in enhancing efficiency and enabling greater career focus. Automation allows them to shift their energy toward innovative projects and collaborative efforts, increasing engagement.



Gen Z's ease with AI is keeping them ahead of Millennials in workplace happiness



"Gen Z employees are motivated to incorporate AI tools in tasks like documentation or reporting, ensuring efficient task completion."

MAYA NAIR, Executive Director



"Eighty per cent of Gen Z users believe AI tools help achieve better work-life balance by automating repetitive tasks."

SMITA SHETTY, CEO, Kelp

She notes, "AI-driven personalisation in feedback and development pathways also aligns with their desire for continuous growth, fostering a culture of engagement and retention." As 59 per cent of workers report increased job satisfaction from AI, it's clear that for Gen Z, AI isn't just a tool but a catalyst for deeper engagement and job fulfilment," she adds.

### PATHWAY TO WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Recent data shows 26 per cent of Gen Z frequently uses generative AI, compared to 22 per cent of Millennials. Smita Shetty Kapoor, CEO and Co-founder of Kelp, explains: "80 per cent of Gen Z AI users believe these tools help achieve a better work-life balance by automating repetitive tasks. This allows them to reclaim mental well-being and personal time while aligning with their need for flexibility."

### EMPOWERING CREATIVITY AND REDUCING WORKLOAD

At Mitgo, Managing Director Neha Kulwal shares that Gen Z employees benefit significantly from AI in areas like anti-fraud and fintech, where AI reduces repetitive tasks by hundreds of hours each month. This allows Gen Z employees to focus more on creative, high-impact tasks. Kulwal explains, "AI integration in the workplace lets Gen Z concentrate on creative and significant areas of their profession, as digital natives prefer customised tools tailored to their unique working style, which boosts productivity."

### ADDRESSING POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Despite enthusiasm, AI brings workplace pressures. Dixit points out that while it enhances satisfaction, fears of job replacement create anxiety. The potential for automation to replace certain jobs can impact their happiness if not managed effectively. Yellapur stresses: "Clear communication and upskilling opportunities are critical to strengthening Gen Z's confidence in AI as a career enabler rather than a threat."

### AI AS A CATALYST FOR GROWTH

Gen Z values mentorship, seeing it as a chance to innovate while honing their skills with AI. Maya Nair, Executive Director at Elixir Consulting, mentions "Gen Z employees are motivated to incorporate AI tools in tasks like documentation or reporting, ensuring efficient task completion." By embracing AI, they can better manage their workload, remain engaged, and benefit from meaningful mentorship.

## SKINNING IT Dr Deepali Bhardwaj



### Glow, Glowworm

If you're constantly seeking ways to maintain your skin's glow, clarity, and perfection—then you're in for a treat. Let's face it—navigating the world of skincare can often feel overwhelming with all the serums, masks, and miracle creams available. But zinc and magnesium could be the key to achieving healthier, radiant skin. These incredible nutrients can be your skin's best friends. They not only combat acne but also help soothe your skin.

#### Zinc: The Ultimate Acne Fighter

Dealing with breakouts can be incredibly frustrating, but there's a powerful ally in your skincare arsenal: zinc. This mineral has remarkable abilities to decrease sebum production—an oily substance responsible for clogging pores and leading to pimples. For those struggling with persistent acne or eczema, incorporating zinc into your routine may provide the relief you've been searching for. With over 13 years of experience in the field, I have witnessed remarkable improvements in patients using zinc supplements, particularly for those dealing with stubborn cases of acne that seem unmanageable. Whether you are combating oily skin or chronic eczema, zinc plays a crucial role in skin repair and healing.



#### Smart Snacking for Clear Skin

Here's a list of zinc-rich options to consider adding to your meals:

**Avocados:** This beloved toast topper is a fantastic source of zinc. Eating about one avocado each day can be particularly beneficial, especially for those prone to acne.

**Pumpkin Seeds:** A small handful of these seeds can deliver a significant zinc boost, making them an excellent addition to your diet.

**Chickpeas:** These legumes are not only packed with zinc but also

versatile enough to be a tasty snack or an excellent ingredient in various dishes.

**Magnesium:** It acts as the quiet champion your skin needs, operating subtly to enhance your glow. If you find yourself feeling exhausted, struggling to get quality sleep, or operating at a sluggish pace despite being in good health, you may want to consider a possible magnesium deficiency.

#### The Role of Magnesium in Skin Health

Magnesium is essential for maintaining overall body balance, and this extends to the health of your skin. It contributes to the integrity of your skin by promoting the health of bones and tissues. It enhances skin repair processes and helps regulate calcium and vitamin D—both vital for maintaining strong, healthy skin. Higher magnesium consumption has been associated with improved glucose regulation, which is crucial as blood sugar fluctuations can trigger inflammation and breakouts. Maintaining optimal magnesium levels can lead to clearer skin. Apart from this, if you experience stress, anxiety, or migraines frequently, magnesium may become your essential ally. Low magnesium levels are linked to increased stress, which can manifest on the skin as irritation, breakouts, or a dull appearance. Magnesium can help soothe these issues, reducing inflammation and allowing your skin to recuperate.

Here are some simple and enjoyable ways to incorporate it into your meals:

**Spinach:** Popeye had the right idea. A single cup of cooked spinach is an excellent source of magnesium. Add it to your smoothie for an extra boost.

**Dark Chocolate:** Yes, you read that correctly—dark chocolate is packed with magnesium. So go ahead and enjoy it without guilt.

**Almonds:** Whether you enjoy them on their own or mixed into your oatmeal, almonds are a fantastic source of magnesium.

Small adjustments to your diet or incorporating a supplement can yield significant benefits.

Anti-Skin Allergy Specialist & Dermatologist  
at Centre for Skin and Hair Pot Ltd, Defence Colony, Delhi

### FIT BIT



#### AMLA SUPREMACY

Social media has rediscovered an age-old Indian kitchen favourite to enhance our winter diet. Indian gooseberries, aka amla, and social media, especially Instagram is filled with recipes and ways you can add them to your diet. Out of these, people seem to be having a special inclination towards the pickled ones, which can make it last longer and also give added benefits. Amla is rich in Vitamin C, which experts say nourishes our skin and hair. Experts suggest that Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that helps to boost collagen production to keep skin firm, reduce wrinkles, improve elasticity, lock in moisture, and reduce dullness. Amla also has anti-inflammatory properties that help to reduce inflammation, soothing acne, redness, or irritation.



#### EYELASH CARE

While dandruff is commonly associated with the scalp, it can also appear in other areas, such as the eyebrows, moustache, and nose. But did you know eyelash dandruff is also a thing? Unlike other areas, eyelash dandruff is barely visible to the naked eye and can pose some serious risks if left untreated. Lens wearers should especially be cautious of eyelash dandruff to avoid infections. It is a common eye condition involving crusty, dandruff-flake-like deposits on your eyelashes. This happens when you have too much bacteria on your eyelids at the base of your eyelashes or if your oil glands get clogged and irritated. Experts say it is commonly seen during winter or season changes.

## All that Sunscreen is Gold

The internet is divided on the benefits of the holy grail of skincare—sunscreen. Experts weigh in By Pooja Prabbhan Srijith

The importance of using sunscreen has been widely propagated by skincare experts and influencers. However, there's no denying that the internet is abuzz with advice against regular application, often stemming from the belief that the product comes with potentially harmful side-effects.

"The fear surrounding sunscreen often arises from misinformation about certain chemical filters," says Dr Mikki Singh, Founder & Medical Director at Bodycraft Clinics. Besides advising buyers to look for labels indicating protection against both UVA and UVB rays, she adds how the right amount of SPF (Sun Protection Factor) and formulas make all the difference. "For daily use, SPF 30 is sufficient; higher SPF's are beneficial for prolonged outdoor exposure. Use mineral-based sunscreens (zinc oxide or titanium dioxide) if you have sensitive skin or allergies. Gel-based sunscreens work well for oily skin, while cream-based ones suit dry skin."

#### Compatibility with Skin Tones

Among several misconceptions, one of the most popular theories against sunscreen usage is that Indians, or rather people of colour, are less likely to benefit from regular sunscreen application.

Dr Madhuri Agarwal, Founder & Medical Director at Yavana Aesthetics Clinic, says, "All skin tones, especially deeper skin tones, need to wear sunscreen. Deeper skin tones on



sun exposure accumulate a pigment that can lead to dark spots, melasma, or worsen acne marks."

If you've been using sunscreen and feel it isn't working well for your skin, chances are you have grabbed a purchase that contains ingredients that trigger your sensitivities. "Some people may experience allergic reactions to ingredients like fragrances, preservatives, or chemicals such as oxybenzone or avobenzone," says Dr Madhurya Gogineni, Dermatologist at Zennara Clinics. "In contrast, sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide are gentler and better suited for sensitive skin. Performing a patch test before using any new sunscreen is essential."

And, if you're a skincare enthusiast, the first step is to buy a sunscreen with adequate levels of UVA and UVB protection. While mineral or physical sunscreens are known to lend a chalky white cast, tinted sunscreens

combine these broad-spectrum mineral UV filters with added pigments. Together, they create a visible, skin-like tint in various shades that can reflect away visible light and match your skin perfectly, giving you an even-skin glow.

#### Potential Risks

"Certain chemical UV filters like oxybenzone have raised concerns regarding potential hormone-disrupting effects. While the evidence is not definitive, individuals concerned about this can opt for mineral-based sunscreens," says Dr Gogineni, who suggests non-comedogenic formulas for those with acne-prone skin to avoid clogged pores and minimise breakouts.

#### Myths to Unfollow

"As one of the best defences against UV rays, sunscreens are a powerhouse of goodness if one cares to exercise discretion while opting to use one," says Dr Simal Soin, Founder & Chief Dermatologist of AAYNA Clinic. Additionally, if you've been under the impression that avoiding sunscreen is okay, this is the time to rethink. "A prominent misconception that persists is that sunscreen isn't necessary in winter. UV rays can pass through clouds and bounce off surfaces such as snow or water, increasing exposure. Sunscreen should be part of your daily routine, regardless of the weather or season," says Gaurav Virmani, Founder and CEO of Grass.

### PRODUCT REVIEW

#### The Curl Slay

Curls are easy to manage, said no one ever. But now, it all just might be easy-peasy with the Moxie Curly Routine in your corner. It consists of a scalp-loving shampoo—one that doesn't itch or make your scalp dry, a rich conditioner that's like a TLC hug for your hair, a luxe curl defining cream—for that purrfect extra bounce in your stride, and styling serum gel that banishes frizz. It's time to get, set, and take on the world! Trust us when we say that your hair has never felt more tamed and beautiful. Moxie is just the right companion, making sure you have a head of hair with character, and not the negative kind. One wash will make your scalp feel squeaky clean, and of course, it's a big plus is that it smells great. Want something better yet? Try Moxie On The Fly Hair Finishing Stick and watch those baby hairs turn slick and super stylish. One application will easily take you through the day it's non-sticky formula makes sure you are not screaming for a wash right after. —Medha Dutta Yadav

The Moxie Curly Routine  
Price: ₹2,570

★★★★★



Available: moxiebeauty.in

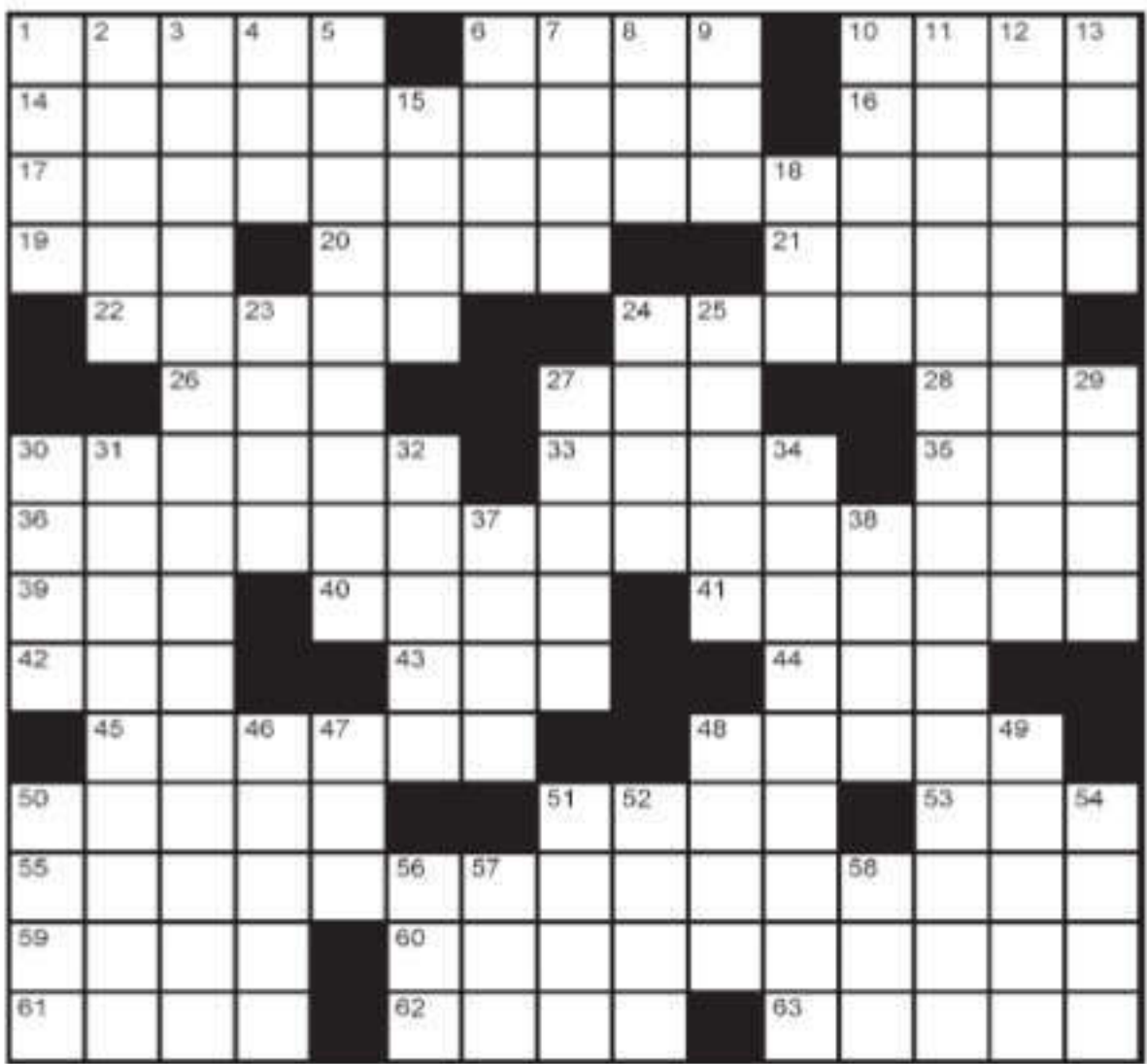
On The Fly Hair  
Finishing Stick  
Price: ₹545

★★★★★





CROSSWORD | FAST WALKER — 424



Across

- 1 Wedding cake feature  
6 National Adopt-A-Cat Month  
10 Very poor diving scores  
14 "That doesn't bother me anymore"  
16 "That's horrible!"  
17 Deal with the devil, essentially  
19 \_\_\_-al-Fitr  
20 Perfect diving scores  
21 Tired travelers?  
22 Near-perfect diving scores  
24 Slowly enter  
26 Leonine lair  
27 Chili \_\_\_ (Asian condiment)  
28 Hush-hush doc  
30 Tried out, as a new product  
33 440,800 square miles, for Colombia  
35 Stalled driver's request  
36 2019 superhero film  
39 The "L" of UNLV  
40 Jubilant feeling  
41 Absolutely loved  
42 Stock market debut, for short  
43 Weight units for dog food: Abbr.  
44 Only three-letter

- 45 Texan city said to be named after a Ukrainian city  
48 "Dirty Computer" singer Janelle  
50 Refraction device  
51 Energy grp. with many Arab members  
53 Palindromic explosive  
55 Perfect place on this planet  
59 Palindromic Indian flour  
60 "No more messing around!"  
61 A piano has 88  
62 \_\_\_ prof.  
63 Fundamental principle

Down

- 1 Vivacity or vitality  
2 Once more  
3 "The betrayal! I can't believe it!"  
4 Klingons, e.g.  
5 Last one in, to a child  
6 \_\_\_-Jacques Dessalines (leader of the Haitian revolution)  
7 Huge coffee vessels  
8 Cacao \_\_\_  
9 "when will u be here?"  
10 Get dressed in one's best

- 11 "That can't be!"  
12 Bulbous roof style  
13 Princes, to queens  
15 Competes (for)  
18 Comedian Charlotte or actress Issa  
23 Gas in bright lights  
24 Address for a king  
25 WNBA star Delle Donne  
27 Desert respite  
29 Stunned  
30 "The Persistence of Memory" painter  
31 Vanish into thin air?  
32 Secluded valleys  
34 Enticing button for an online shopaholic  
37 Country musician McEntire  
38 Enter  
46 "Como \_\_\_, amigo?"  
47 Texter's "I'm so disappointed"  
48 \_\_\_ mortal  
49 Follow sequentially  
50 Mountaintop  
51 Makes a choice  
52 Word before "due" or "tense"  
54 "This is only a \_\_\_"  
56 NYC airport code  
57 "I would love to!"  
58 Go kaput

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

HOW ADVENTUROUS ARE YOU? (ADULT FEMALE)

1: Would you consider having body piercings?

- a) You've quite a number of piercings  
b) Never, the idea revolts you  
c) You've had your ears done, but nothing else

2: You and your partner are walking along a deserted beach, when he suggests you go skinny dipping, what's your reaction?

- a) Be totally disgusted by the idea  
b) Strip off and run towards the water shouting "face you!"  
c) Undress to your undies but no further

3: Would you go on a blind date organised for you by a friend?

- a) If you trusted her not to set you up with a nerd  
b) Yes, you'd think it could be a laugh  
c) Yes, it could be a way of meeting the man of your dreams

4: Are you a great joke teller?

- a) No, you always forget the punch line  
b) Your delivery needs work  
c) Yes, when you can remember any clean ones

5: If you won or were bequeathed a lot of money would you-

- a) Immediately give up work and go on a world cruise  
b) Keep your job, buy a bigger house, a new car and give a lot to charity  
c) Buy a small business and invest the rest of the money

6: Which one of these creatures would be your ideal pet?

- a) A Vietnamese pot-bellied pig  
b) A talkative parrot  
c) An eight foot long python

7: Which one of these women from history would you liked to have been?

- a) Nurse Florence Nightingale  
b) Outlaw Bonnie of Bonnie and Clyde fame  
c) Egyptian queen Cleopatra

8: At a party a group of your friends want to play truth or dare, what do you do?

- a) Join in, but be prepared to tell a few white lies  
b) Join in enthusiastically  
c) Suggest a game of Monopoly instead

9: Your boyfriend of three months is spending more time with his mates and less with you, would you say to him?

- a) It's either me or them  
b) Nothing, believing it's up to him who he sees  
c) I'd like to see you more often

10: You are at the circus with a group of friends when a volunteer is wanted to take part in the knife throwing act, would you -

- a) Be eager to take part in a new experience  
b) Be too terrified to step forward  
c) Reluctantly be encouraged by your friends

HOW TO SCORE:

|     | a | b | c |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 1.  | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 2.  | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 3.  | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 4.  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5.  | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6.  | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 7.  | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 8.  | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 9.  | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 10. | 3 | 1 | 2 |

What your score means:

**Between 0-10:** Apprehensive and timid, you automatically think twice before doing anything remotely adventurous. You need to be reassured about the outcome of any venture before embarking on it. This is a commendable trait, but it does remove the element of surprise from life. Try taking a few gambles, nothing too serious and you'll find life becomes a little bit more fun. **Between 11-20:** On the surface you give the impression of being a levelheaded person, who generally plays it safe. Always use caution should be your motto, but it's not one that you stick to. Being easily raised to a challenge is a problem that you need to address. When this happens, all common sense is abandoned. Learn to control your emotions and not allow anyone to dare you. **Between 21-30:** You aren't always aware of the difference between adventurous and dangerous. Left unchecked your behaviour could become reckless. You can get over confident, almost to the point of egotism. I can, is often the first thought to enter your mind when confronted by a challenge. At times it would be wise to back down and admit that you aren't the superwoman you try to convince everyone else you are.

Asia Features

GARFIELD by Jim Davis



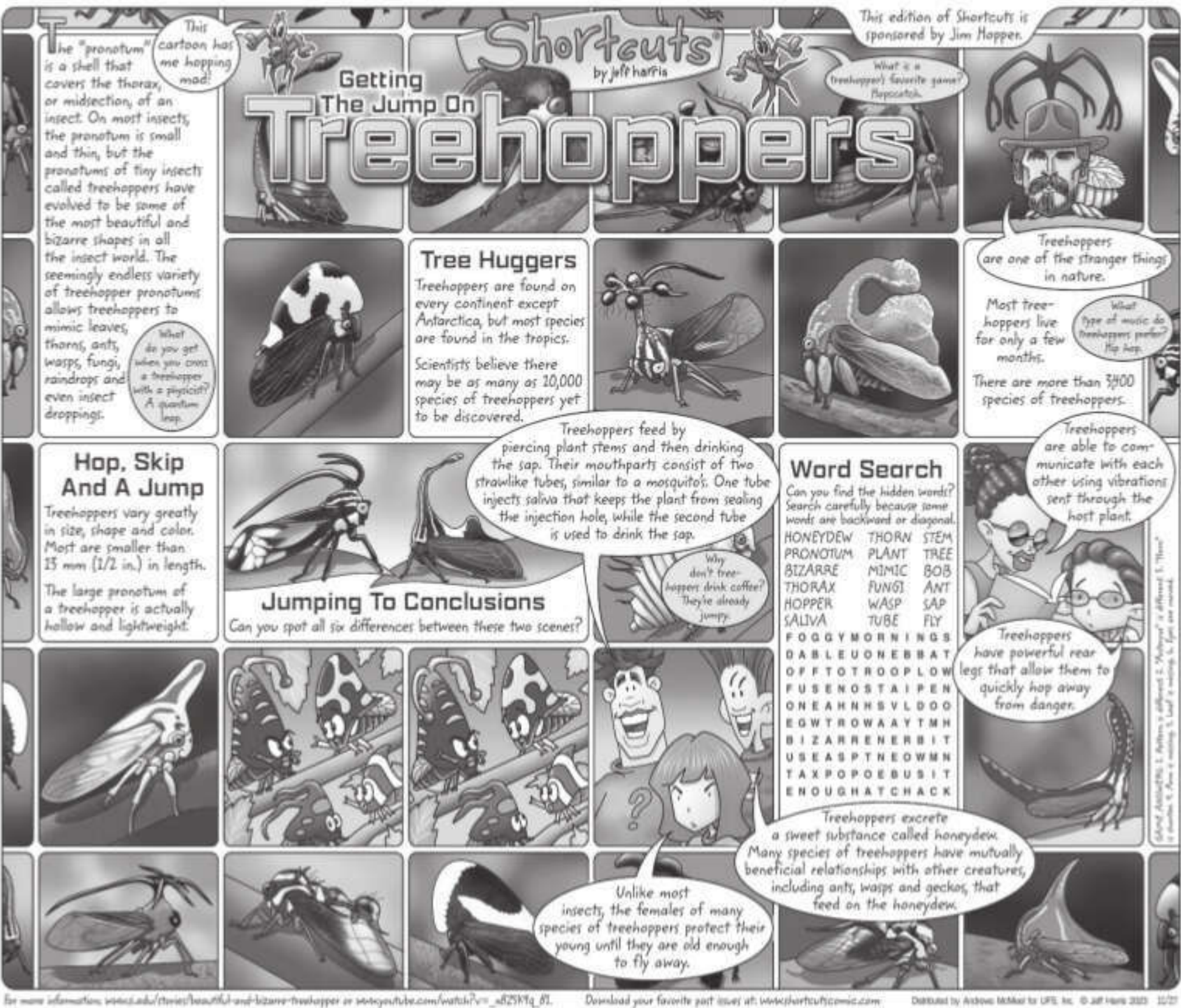
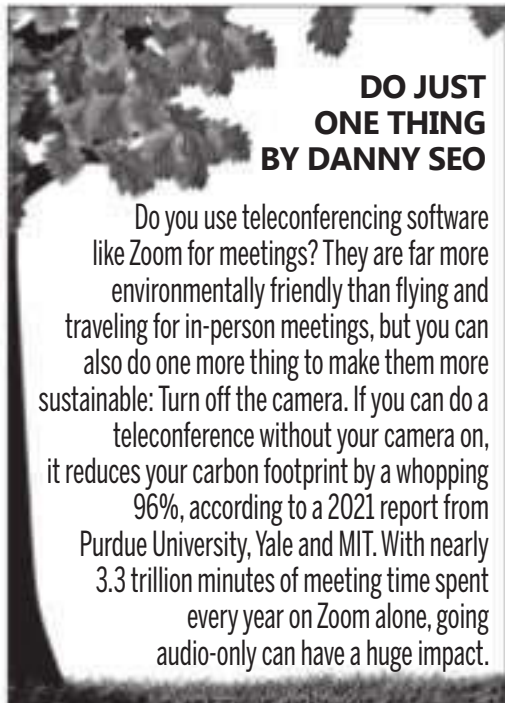
PEANUTS by Charles M Schulz



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS by Arun Ramkumar



SMALL TALK by Gokul Gopalakrishnan



SUDOKU | EASY AND MEDIUM

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

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

Fill in the grid with digwits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3X3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any. Each w has a unique solution that can be reached logically without guessing

CHESS Leonard Barden

BARDEN CHESS

What happens if your tournament opponent tries to chat you up before or even during the event? It's a rare occurrence at the chessboard, but at Hastings 1993 Russia's then world no 7 Evgeny Bareev made his play for Judit Polgar, the best ever woman grandmaster and then sweet 16. Polgar was unimpressed with the Muscovite and his 2650 Fide rating, and took it out ruthlessly on the Russian when they sat down for their individual games which finished Bareev 0, Polgar 2.

There was a mysterious conclusion as Polgar (Black, to move) retreated her king by 1... Kc7 2 Kc3 Kb7 whereupon Bareev resigned. Why did White concede defeat?

**Solution CN0011:** 1... Kc2 2 Kc3 Kb7 3 Kd3 Kb6 (the diagram, but with White to move and forced to give way with his king) when both 4 Kc4 Kc6 5 Kc3 Kd5 and 4 Kc3 Kb5 5 Kd3 Kb4 6 Kc2 c4 allow Polgar's king to eat her rejected suitor's pawns.

Chess Problems Distributed by Knight Features  
www.knightfeatures.com,  
info@knightfeatures.co.uk

QUESTION TIME by Lalitha Balakrishnan

1. Minerva is Roman equivalent of what Greek goddess of wisdom, victory and the arts?  
(a) Athena  
(b) Aphrodite  
(c) Hera  
2. Which organisation was set up on April 12, 1992 to regularise the capital market in India?  
(a) National Stock Exchange (NSE)  
(b) Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE)  
(c) Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)  
3. What diet created in the 1970s by Ancel and Margaret Keys focuses on a plant-based diet that also includes fish, dairy and olive oil?  
(a) The Mediterranean diet  
(b) Keto diet  
(c) Paleo diet  
4. The Olympics stadium at which city was nicknamed "The Big O"?  
(a) Tokyo  
(b) Sydney  
(c) Montreal  
5. Land that is surrounded by water on three sides?  
(a) Canyon  
(b) Peninsula  
(c) Cove  
6. A scientist who studies rocks?  
(a) Biologist  
(b) Astronomer  
(c) Geologist  
7. Which bowler picked up all 10 wickets against Kerala in a Ranji trophy match recently?  
(a) Axar Patel  
(b) Shami  
(c) Anshul Kamboj  
8. If you are in Phuket, which country would you be in?  
(a) Malaysia  
(b) Vietnam  
(c) Thailand  
9. Which place in Gujarat is the largest producer of the time clocks?  
(a) Morbi  
(b) Bhuj  
(c) Gandhinagar  
10. Which cooking medium is from the Sanskrit word meaning - Lord of the Forest?  
(a) Vanaspati  
(b) Groundnut oil  
(c) Sunflower oil

Answers to last week's questions

- 1.a, 2.c, 3.a, 4.a, 5.a, 6.c, 7.c, 8.c, 9.a, 10.b  
Winner  
R Soundarajan, Deepak Bhatia - Tamil Nadu  
PV Sivaram - Telangana  
CV Balakrishna Mallan - Kerala  
K Rajasekhar - Andhra Pradesh

Answers to this week's questions will appear next week.

Only entries with all correct answers sent before Wednesday noon will be considered for prizes.

Email your answers along with your name, phone number and complete address to: [sundayquiz@newindianexpress.com](mailto:sundayquiz@newindianexpress.com). For example, if the answer for Question No. 1 is A, it should be written as 1.A. Please mention QT and the issue date in MM/DD/YY format (for example, QT, April 25, 2021) in the subject line of the email. Only entries with these details will be considered for prizes.

FIVE ALL-CORRECT ENTRIES WILL WIN THE BOOK, THE GOENKA LETTERS: AGONY AND ECSTASY IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS

SUDOKU 1 TODAY'S SOLUTION

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

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

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | O | O | B | O | A | R | D | S | A | L | T | O |
| I | N | D | O | O | R | P | O | O | L | L | E | A |
| S | T | O | D | A | L | O | I | N | E | T | I | L |
| T | O | R | Y | C | L | I | T | T | E | R | S | K |
| S | E | L | L | S | A | V | O | I | D | S |   |   |
| R | O | E | R | O | E | O | P | O | I | E | S |   |
| W | E | S |   | U | S | I | N | G |   | M | A | G |
| I | N | N | S |   | M | S | U |   | D | I | S | K |
| N | E | O | N | S |   | N | E | E | D | S |   |   |
| D | R | A | T | S | O | N |   | O | I | L |   |   |
| G | O | A | P | E | A | T |   | L | O | T | U | S |
| G | Y | N |   | P | L | A | G | E | S | T | A | G |
| E | G | G |   | A | P | R | O | L | A | T | I | N |
| R | E | E | D |   | M | A | I | N | E | S | I | D |
| E | L | L | E |   | I | N | S | E | R | V | E | N |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |



**Year:** Krodhi.  
**Karthigai:** Thei Pirai / **Kartik:** Krishna Paksha.  
**Tithi:** Amavasya till 11.52 hrs.  
**Nakshatra (Star):** Anuradha till 14.24hrs.  
**Moon in** Vrischika.  
**Today is** Amavasya.  
**Rahukaalam:** 04.30 pm to 06.00 pm  
**Yamagantam:** 12 noon to 01.30 pm  
**Gulikakalam:** 03.00 pm to 04.30 pm



**BIRTHSTONES  
SAGITTARIUS**

( November 22 - December 21)

Turquoise is the birthstone for Sagittarius as it is opaque as the earth and it has the power to lift the spirit high. It provides wisdom of both earth and sky, thereby it is old and yet young. It is considered to be pure as it is believed to hold the atmosphere surrounding the earth and sky, thereby giving life and breath. Besides turquoise, there are several other stones that can render apposite impact on the individual like Beryl, Blue Topaz, Blue Zircon, Citrine, Lapis Lazuli, Ruby and Topaz. Turquoise helps in the effective conduction of the energies of the ruling planet Jupiter into the life of the individual and makes the planet more sympathetic towards the wearer. Turquoise is a symbol of the blue of the sea as well as of the sky. Infinity in the ocean speaks of the depth of the soul. Infinity in the sky speaks of the limitless heights of ascension. This is why it has been considered to be the most sacred stone by ancient and contemporary cultures.

**HOW THE CARDS FALL** Meenakshi Rani

meenakshirani33@gmail.com



**A R I E S**



An allegorical ‘charge of the light brigade’ has you at loggerheads with people determined to have their own way. Contracts unravel with clauses that add confusion. Partnerships turn fragile and dealings with government agencies are on a sticky wicket. You turn to friends and former allies who have more experience in certain areas and find relief. Someone expects you to keep a low profile when dialogue proves counterproductive. A brand identity is established with ‘chinks and kinks’ hammered out. Wear amethyst, olive green and mauve for Venus and Mercury.

**L E O**



A fun venture now turns demanding and you have had enough of a joyride. Changes in management, investors or focus groups have you justify your moves and decisions. Work hours increase and workload mounts and you look through contracts for a loophole. Associates resort to secret deals for petty gains and you ‘reel them in’ or show them the door. And miraculously, your power returns once a set of difficult decisions is behind you. Solutions beckon that have you do something you realise you ought to have done weeks ago. Wear sea green, pastel blue and paraiba tourmaline for Neptune and Mercury.

**S A G I T T A R I U S**



You are compelled to do something even if it is at the cost of your better judgment. Pressure tactics arrive as someone resorts to arm twisting. You hold your own and allow others to step in and take a ‘difficult decision’ out of your hands. A collaborator is viewed with prejudice seeing their past or sketchy dossier. A state-of-the-art venture opens its doors and you leverage yourself. A budgetary constraint forces you to find greener pastures or a step up. A letter of praise or recommendation is scrutinised for integrity as a new inductee fails to deliver. Wear mint green, grey and moonstone for Mercury and Moon.

**T A U R U S**



With ‘eyes on the prize’, you fulfil a professional commitment and rake in the rewards. Incentives, bonuses and promotions await. Some cash in early with voluntary retirement with an offer to join an impressive corporation. An impromptu meeting turns out to be a decisive interview that changes your life. Conduct and efficiency matter more than superficial appearance though you nail that as well. An overseas contract fills the corporate coffers with a tidy commission or brokerage. Wear bronze tones grey and cat’s eye for Neptune and Moon.

**V I R G O**



A paradigm shift has you focus on your own interests instead of playing lighthouse to others. Your skills are appreciated and you ‘follow the money’. An opportunity changes form and fills a career vacuum. A mentoring role is dropped as you enter a competitive field with renewed vigour. Someone who wrote you off is perplexed at a revival of interest in your ventures. Start ups are streamlined and you stay content with what is already on your plate. A disconnection in ties is repaired. Blocked finances are released. Wear ivory white and brown with pearl and carnelian for Moon and grounding Earth energies.

**C A P R I C O R N**



A back-door entry is fobbed off and you rely on your own credentials rather than a random favour. You work on strengthening your connections and being ‘in step’ with contemporary needs of an organisation. A rival appears out of the blue to make an interview more challenging but you are prepared for the wrinkle in plans. Health proves vulnerable and benefits are sought by those working in a hazardous environment. A colleague needs assistance, moral support, a think tank or sounding board. Absenteeism at a critical meeting sets off alarm bells. Wear steel grey, dull gold and topaz for Uranus and Jupiter.

**WHAT TO EXPECT, HOW TO COPE**

LOVE   RELATIONSHIPS   WORK   HEALTH   MONEY

**G E M I N I**



You draw up a list of outstanding tasks and find most of them are well on their way to completion. Minor details are handled as huge chunks of assets and responsibilities come your way. A long term plan is initiated that puts you squarely in view of a top position. You dodge politics as the focus shifts to other people and their foibles. A professional relationship- that you felt was dented- is repaired. You are grateful for the arrival of a strong support system. A set of rewards is tweaked to become more attractive. Wear pink, red, diamond and ruby for Sun and Venus.

**L I B R A**



A project gains traction and you are thrilled with the interest. Minute functioning and errors in planning and execution slow down things and put you in default ‘damage control mode’. Rather than be caught in a ‘many a slip twixt cup and lip’ situation; you postpone launches, advertising, stock announcements and conversations in the digital space. Technical areas are strengthened be it in production lines, the factory floor or in marketing. You are distracted by demands on your time by family and try to keep everyone happy. Wear tan, orange, russet and Rudraksha for Mars.

**A Q U A R I U S**



A breakthrough arrives leading you out of the mundane and ordinary. You land a major deal, policy point or target that lay on the back-burner. A softening of stances has others do a rethink and rule in your favour. A decision affecting software, goods and inventory allows you to gain benefits with retrospective effect. New additions to your core team give you the confidence to go for something ambitious. Bids, auctions or tenders go your way smoothly. An eclectic move works simply because it is timely. Wear ochre and yellow sapphire for Jupiter.

**C A N C E R**



Appraisals and attrition stir up insecurity but you have a secure footing. Treatment by a senior opens your eyes to a world of possibilities and the outcome of lowering standards. Ventures go through standardisation and tests that have you work tirelessly for quality and consistency. You choose a popular player as a teammate only to discover they are egotistical and shortsighted. A project lingers in the ‘approval tray’ of a government official but you manage to fix all that is necessary. Change of ownership of a family venture occurs. Wear burgundy, charcoal grey, garnet and agate for Mars and Uranus.

**S C O R P I O**



A focus on ‘ailing ventures’ has you delve into balance sheets and performance records. You strive to bring about a turnaround and decent levels of efficiency. Letting go of non performing assets leaves you with a ‘Hobson’s choice’. New recruits drum up enthusiasm in a project. Pensioners are relieved at the resolution of a dispute. A partnership hovers on the brink of dissolution but gets back on course. A loan is repaid and the cash register rings with new sales. A youngster learns better than to rely on a mentor or angel investor who silently tiptoes out. You skillfully navigate an incubation process. Wear brown, orange, coral and hessonite for Rahu, Mars and Uranus.

**P I S C E S**



A patient approach has you plant your course in a steady fashion. You sift through ideas, personnel and experts in search of the perfect synergy. A female colleague proves effective disproving every label under the sun. Family ventures take off with a test run, dummy launch and loads of feedback. Customer service modules perform better with an upgrade in ‘people to people’ communication. Night shifts have some burn the midnight oil as a deadline looms. Some resort to moonlighting with a hobby coming in useful to pay bills or just be ‘chump change’. A new recruit shows a temperamental side. Wear cream, white, and pearl for Moon.

**THE WEEK AHEAD** Peter Vidal



**A R I E S**

financial issues, a major opportunity is in the offing, one which could have a dramatic effect on your status and security for years to come.



**L E O**

bringing imaginative schemes to a routine close or planning a major advance in your long-term ambitions.



**S A G I T T A R I U S**

your afternoons, so you should always hatch your plans early on in the day and ask for help as soon as you possibly can. Above all, pay attention to partners’ little qualms and queries.



**T A U R U S**

willingness to seize any and every opportunity with a realisation that you should keep your feet firmly on the ground.



**V I R G O**

point in being hard on yourself, and you should learn to accept compliments and offers of help with good grace.



**C A P R I C O R N**

simply dealt with if they do arise. It’s all a question of maximising your potential by steering clear of hidden pitfalls.



**G E M I N I**

situation is not one where it counts who wins and who loses. Rather, it’s all a matter of doing what is best for now.



**L I B R A**

nor progress without hard work. The kind of challenges you will face are from partners and loved ones who only have your best interests at heart.



**A Q U A R I U S**

domestic situation may now be eased by taking active steps to make whatever improvements are necessary, from minor adjustments to a move of home.



**C A N C E R**

simmering away beneath the surface for too long. The chances for agreement are great, so try to find common ground whenever you can.



**S C O R P I O**

of irritation, yet they will have a positive influence on your life if they force you to look at your activities in a fresh light.



**P I S C E S**

confident about any choices and decisions you take at home. Those of you in the property market stand to gain.

**YOUR FORTUNE THIS WEEK** Amarakosha

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



**ARIES (Mar 21–Apr 19)**  
**Work:** Your hard work will soon yield positive results. You may encounter opportunities for growth and advancement.  
**Money:** An unexpected windfall or new source of income may come your way.  
**Couples:** Minor disagreements may arise, but open communication will help resolve any tension.  
**Singles:** You may unexpectedly fall for someone who is well-suited to you.

**TAURUS (Apr 20–May 20)**  
**Work:** Unexpected technical difficulties and sudden staffing changes may increase your workload. However, you manage your priorities.  
**Money:** Financial negotiations and fundraising efforts will be getpositive conclusion.  
**Couples:** Small conflicts and competition may arise, but you can still compromise.  
**Singles:** You may have a chance to connect with the one you are falling for.

**GEMINI (May 21–June 20)**  
**Work:** You may have your plate full because higher ups and clients trust in your skills. You may face unexpected legal drama.  
**Money:** Unexpected windfall or benefit may fall on your hands. You tend to rock at spending wisely.  
**Couples:** You and your partner may share more responsibilities together.  
**Singles:** You may not prioritise finding a partner. However, you may catch someone’s eye at work.

**CANCER (June 21–July 22)**  
**Work:** An unexpected flurry of tasks and challenges will come your way. However, you could manage priorities effectively.  
**Money:** Your social network activities could spark cool ideas for making money.  
**Couples:** Small conflicts may arise, but you can still be considerate towards each other.  
**Singles:** If you wish to ask someone out for a date, go ahead, you will get a good response.

**LEO (July 23–Aug 22)**  
**Work:** Surprise changes might bring you to past achievements, leading to a more stable position or career advancement.  
**Money:** If you wish to get financial support, you have high chance to get it as you wish.  
**Couples:** You may be unexpectedly busy with work leaving little time for your partner.  
**Singles:** Work and family demands may leave little room for romance.

**VIRGO (Aug 23–Sept 22)**  
**Work:** Higher expectations from your boss and clients may result in heavier workload and increased responsibilities.  
**Money:** Networking and social interactions may spark new ideas for earning money.  
**Couples:** You may unintentionally break promises or commitments to your partner.  
**Singles:** Love at first sight may happen to you if you’ve never experienced this before.

**LIBRA (Sept 23–Oct 22)**  
**Work:** You may celebrate with your team as the work you’ve contributed to managed to get success exceeding expectations.  
**Money:** Lifestyle inflation and a tendency for instant gratification may take a toll.  
**Couples:** You may sulk but your partner may find it endearing and try to reconcile with you.  
**Singles:** If you’ve never experienced love at first sight, this could be your time.


**SCORPIO (Oct 23–Nov 21)**  
**Work:** You will handle conflicts and expectations excellently, producing outstanding results and gaining recognition from colleagues.  
**Money:** Your friends or connections may bring unexpected money-making opportunities.  
**Couples:** You may feel the desire to express your true self more openly.  
**Singles:** You may fall for a foreigner. You will be attracted to each other despite language barriers.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22–Dec 21)**  
**Work:** You may encounter challenges in managing your budget, resources, and expectations. Things that seemed easy turn out to be more complex.  
**Money:** Stay grounded and be cautious when it comes to impulsive spending.  
**Couples:** You may accidentally discover a few skeletons in your partner’s closet.  
**Singles:** Passionate love at first sight may happen to those who never experienced it.

**CAPRICORN (Dec 22–Jan 19)**  
**Work:** Your creativity and proactive approach will help you exceed expectations and attract opportunities.  
**Money:** Financial negotiations and fundraising efforts will go smoothly.  
**Couples:** Conflicting over finances may arise and you may also encounter jealousy from your partner.  
**Singles:** You may bump into someone interesting, but he/she may not be open to engaging with you.

**AQUARIUS (Jan 20–Feb 18)**  
**Work:** You may receive recognition for past achievements, leading to a more stable position or career advancement.  
**Money:** If you wish to get financial support, you have high chance to get it as you wish.  
**Couples:** You may be unexpectedly busy with work leaving little time for your partner.  
**Singles:** Work and family demands may leave little room for romance.

**PISCES (Feb 19–Mar 20)**  
**Work:** Teamwork will become smoother, and the joint project could achieve success. You and your colleagues may even celebrate together.  
**Money:** Valuable insider information or a heartfelt gift may come your way.  
**Couples:** A heart-to-heart conversation may help resolve past issues.  
**Singles:** You may meet many interesting people, making it hard to choose who to date.



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

December being the last month of the year is always a bag of mixed emotions of what has gone by and hopes for the future. At the end of the year, it always feels that the past is rapidly receding in the rear-view mirror. The first week of the last month begins with the continuation of the extraordinary New Moon.

Jupiter aspect on Sun is genuinely considered good and protective by our *shastras*. As this comes once in a year and for a month, it surely has a positive impact in spite of whatever wrong is happening otherwise. But with the Scorpio lord Mars being in debilitation, this aspect is showing its incapability to bring us its full results. We are experiencing a long transit of retrograde Mercury opposite retrograde Jupiter which is making the axis on India’s *lagana* and the seventh house. This spotlights international affairs, diplomacy, networking, teamwork and increased work for the judiciary.

Another interesting vantage

point in astrological delineation is elemental balance. Each zodiac sign is associated with one of the four elements namely fire, air, water and earth. Contemplating on these can be very revealing. December has begun with Scorpio rising and the emphasis for this month is again on water as its lord Mars is also moving in a watery sign with a little bit of the fire element. Water element has many layers to it. Water is emotional and works on the deeper subconscious mind. Water is also unstoppable as we have already seen in a lot of catastrophes this year.

Venus has shifted to Capricorn for the whole month of December and is now under direct aspect of Mars. This shows ups and downs in the stock market, some rule changes or new orders in the banking or financial sector, a rise in inflation and an increase in the cost of general commodities. More heartbreaks happen when Venus gets the opposition of weak Mars. It also causes religious sentiment to suffer. It is



only by the end of the month that the elemental balance will shift to fire, signifying a practical, sensible, feet on the ground and get the job done approach.

Two planets that will stay in their respective signs for a long time are Mars in Cancer and Mercury in Scorpio. Both are in watery signs and both are under the harsh and challenging aspects. These planets will force us to make some serious changes in our lives or at the mundane level, compel the government to deal with diffi-

cult situations and other obligations. These include but are not limited to the ongoing political conflicts, health issues, taxes, insurance, terrorism, aquatic, marine or water crises. What remains to be seen is how much these planets will yield in their unusually long journey while travelling in the most mystic signs.

Riding the highs and lows of the rolling waves of watery Pisces, Scorpio and now Cancer, it has been quite a strenuous journey for many of us in the year 2024.



# Shimmering on the Silk Route

For travelphiles who grew up on a steady diet of Silk Route lore, perhaps the most famous trading route in history evokes the romance of adventure. While Uzbekistan gets the prize for variety, neighbouring Kazakhstan has some little-known destinations, which open the gateway to a bejewelled past. About 688 km southwest of Almaty, the gateway to Kazakhstan and most-favoured choice of travellers to the country, lies the hidden treasure of Shymkent.

On the surface, Shymkent can come across as just another Kazakh town, with a strong Russian ethos in its Soviet-era architecture, myriad conversations and signboards in Russian, and is reflected in dressing and mannerisms. Scratch the surface, and you will unearth Chimkent, as it was formerly known. A 12th-century trading town, it was originally established as a caravan serai for Sayram, a pivotal trading town 10 km to the east. Chimkent grew to become a massive trading centre in its own right, and doubled as a fortress and military base to protect Sayram. It was destroyed multiple times by invaders including Genghis Khan, then captured later by Russians, before ultimately gaining independence in 1993. Wandering through the ruins of the citadel and old city, Shym Qala, gives a glimpse into the world it once was. The historical open-air complex has several landmarks, a testament to its bygone stories.

Close to the old city is the iconic Ordabasy Square, adjacent to the Independence Park and Kosher Ata mosque. Three streets converge at this square which has the *zher-ana* at the centre, a monument built in honour of the three wise men of Kazakhstan whose quotes feature in local lore, the pillar topped with a symbol of Mother Earth. While exploring the town, cool off with a *khymyz* on a hot day, a fermented mare milk drink Shymkent was known for even in its trading heydays. While *khymyz* is a national drink available on stands across Kazakhstan, a drink particular to Shymkent is *kvass*, a low alcohol, fermented drink that mimics beer

Shymkent in Kazakhstan is Silk Route world where architecture and art have outlived the monotony of the Soviet era

By SHIKHA TRIPATHI



(Clockwise) Blue Mosque; a carpet at Altyn Orda; locals dressed in traditional attire



and more. For a deeper dive, opt for a self-guided audio tour. Finish your Otrar tryst with a stop two km ahead at the 14th-century mausoleum of Arystan Bab, dedicated to the highly revered legendary Sufi mystic.

Most people bypass Otrar to jetset straight to Turkestan, where the Blue Mosque awaits. Though Shymkent is just an hour away from Tashkent on the other side, Turkestan is where you will find a strong resemblance in elements and atmosphere to the sights across the border. Officially the mausoleum of Turkish poet and Sufi mystic Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, the place of worship is popularly known as the 'Blue Mosque' because of its beautifully blue, glazed, ornamental tiles and dome; it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Outside the historic complex, rugged walkways dissolve into cobblestoned paths, 15th-century structures give way to glitzy gold facades, and upmarket cafes; you transition to a contemporary complex modern day version of a settlement that retains aesthetic touches of the old town, bearing the name 'Caravan Serai'. Past meandering canals and high beige walls of the citadel-like township is where the old births the new. Somewhere in the distance though, you catch a glimpse of a blue dome now and then—a glance of a bygone travel trail travelling like a lifeline underneath the patina of modern times, waiting to be unveiled by a seeker resolute enough to look into the mirror of lost time.

Find more information on the region on [visit-shymkent.com](http://visit-shymkent.com).

## Recipes of the Heart and Home

After tasting success in London, celebrity chef Rohit Ghai is impressing the Omani palate with the subtlety of spice while he stays a *dal-chawal* sort of guy

By ROXANNE BAMBOAT

From Veeraswamy in London established in 1926 to Quilon in St James Park, Indian cuisine has influenced dining in England by going beyond mulligatawny and chicken tikka. Many Indian chefs have stormed the citadel over the decades to London, establishing cutting-edge fine dine Indian restaurants. Many fell by the side but some survived and thrived. Chef Rohit Ghai is one of the latter. Having worked at established names in the restaurant scene like Benares, Hoppers, Gymkhana, and Trishna he joined the Leela Palace Hotels to launch Jamavar—a Michelin star Indian restaurant which established his reputation in the highly competitive world of haute cuisine. Ghai is the first Indian chef to win a Michelin star within a year. Now the Punjab boy is back in the news in another shore with the Aangan at the Shangri La Al Husn in Muscat, Oman.

With restaurants in London, Dubai and Marrakesh, is it a natural extension to open shop in Muscat? "Aangan came to life with the idea of bringing authentic Indian cuisine to this part of the world. Muscat's rich culture and the beauty of the Shangri-La Al Husn were a perfect match. I wanted to recreate the courtyard theme that reflects traditional Indian gathering space, creating a warm, inviting spot for people to come together and experience Indian flavours," he explains.

Like many chefs, Ghai's inspiration to cook came from his mother. "I grew up in Punjab, where my love for food began in my mother's kitchen. Watching her cook and seeing how meals brought people together brought a spark in my mind. The path to becoming a chef was less of a defined goal and more about following my passion for Indian flavours," he says. After studying cooking in Delhi and working at the Taj and Oberoi hotels, he moved to London to realise his ambition.

Ask him about his favourite local Omani dish and he



"The journey to becoming a chef was less about a defined goal and more about following my passion for Indian flavours." ROHIT GHAI



Prawns Masala and Fish Moilee



### SAGO VADA

#### Ingredients

- Sago: 350 gm
- Potato: 150 gm
- Coriander: 20 gm
- Green chilli: 10 gm
- Beetroot: 250 gm
- Ginger: 10 gm
- Cumin: 10 gm
- Roasted peanut: 75 gm
- Salt to taste

#### Method

- Soaked sago in fresh water for 15 minutes
- Mix soaked sago with mashed potatoes, fresh coriander leaves, chopped green chilli, roasted cumin, roasted peanuts, and salt
- Make round patties of the mix
- Deep fry till golden and crispy

promptly says, "Shuwa, a slow cooked Omani goat or lamb dish. Its slow-cooked tenderness reminds me of Indian slow-cooking traditions. I also love the *halwa*." While *shuwa* or other Omani dishes don't feature on the Aangan menu, Ghai insists on using as many local ingredients as possible, allowing the food to be authentic in Indian and Omani flavours. Was Muscat ready for robust Indian tastes or did he have to tone down spice levels? "When I approach a new location, I try to find a fine balance for spice levels. While I occasionally make tweaks on special request, I don't change recipes drastically," he says.

Picking his favourites from the Aangan menu, Ghai chooses food that reminds him of home. "I personally love *aloo tikki* and *keema pao*. But I'm a simple man, so my go-to comfort meal after a long day is *dal-chawal*—it's soothing and soul satisfying," he says with a wide smile. Pity, the humble *dal-chawal* is not on the menu.

### QUICK TAKE



### RUN OF GOOD TIMES

Get ready for an unforgettable experience at Rann Utsav, one of India's most vibrant cultural festivals! Held in the stunning white salt desert of Kutch, Gujarat, this festival showcases the rich heritage, crafts, and culinary delights of the region. Rann Utsav will take place in Dhordo village, which was recently awarded the "Best Tourism Village" title by the United Nations. The event aims to showcase Kutch's cultural heritage through various traditional activities while maintaining a focus on environmentally friendly practices, including waste management initiatives and the use of battery-operated vehicles. Additionally, a Corporate Social Responsibility activity will target environmental conservation in the Great Rann of Kutch, building upon past successful initiatives. The festival will continue until February 20, 2025. For more information, visit [rannutsav.net](http://rannutsav.net)



### NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Café Delhi Heights has launched its latest venture—Sarava—nestled in the heart of Assagao, Goa. Housed within a century-old Portuguese villa, Sarava blends the deep-rooted cultural heritage of Goa with the global comfort food that Café Delhi Heights is known for, creating an extraordinary dining experience where tradition meets innovation. Sarava's menu offers a delightful mix of flavours and textures. From the smokey Fish Tikka and vibrant Tangra Style Chilli Paneer to the rustic Kerala Tawa Fry Fish, each dish is a celebration of taste. Star items like the Dhansoo Veg Seekh and the indulgent Old Delhi Butter Chicken provide familiar comforts, while the creative World of Mushroom—featuring caramelised oyster mushrooms and kale chips—presents a unique exploration of zest.

### \*\*\*\*\* RESTAURANT REVIEW \*\*\*\*\*

## Cocktail Custodians

Goa's newest bar doubles up as a lab space for Countertop India to prove that drinks are fun



By JOANNA LOBO

Bars in Goa are no longer content with just serving the usual cocktails. The drinks have to be innovative and memorable. Bonus points if they make for good Instagram pictures. At Goa's newest bar, The Lab at Amaraanth, Pankaj Balachandran and his team at Countertop have created a classy space that does just that, marrying local ingredients with modern techniques to create innovative drinks.

**Food:** It's a bar so the food is limited to snacky bites, and elaborate cold, and mezze, platters. There's *vada pav*, and cheese chilli toast, for those midnight street food cravings. The triple cooked *Patatas Bravas* are a revelation, with crunchy skin, soft and lightly seasoned insides; they are definitely worth reordering.

Expectedly, the drinks here are classy and highly innovative. The main mixologist is Uttkarsh Anthwal, who will willingly walk you through his playground, giving you the chance to taste his many ferments and infusions. The standout here is Grandmom's Curry, a cocktail version of a Goan fish curry. It has everything expected in a curry—tomato, coriander, tamarind, ginger, coconut milk—and some tequila making for an aromatic drink. Another signature is the Red Amaraanth, which uses the local *tambdi bhaji* in a flavourful drink with pickled onion gin and vermouth. Those seeking mocktails can find a zero-proof version of Grandmom's Curry, and a coconut and sarsaparilla root refresher. ★★★★★

**Service:** The aim is to offer personalised service. It does this with aplomb. Anthwal is a good host, and will take you on a personalised and well-curated cocktail journey. Stick around for his stories. ★★★★★

**Décor:** The Lab is an ideal date place, with soft lights, low but plush seating (for 20 people). The focus, expectedly, is the bar which is shadowed by an elaborate light piece. Despite the glass windows, the space offers privacy. ★★★★★

**Price:** A space this classy comes with a price. An evening for two, with food and drink, would cost ₹5,000 (including taxes). ★★★★★

Address: The Lab at Amaraanth, 741/B, 2nd Fatrade, Varca, Goa



# Trusting God’s Ultimate Plan

Much of our daily life is spent worrying. Life gives us many reasons to wonder how things will work out for us. We worry about our finances. Health is a major concern for most. Careers, jobs and studies have us worried. If we have a family, we are always worried about their health and welfare.

Life on this planet is filled with challenges. Every day, we learn about new diseases that threaten our health. We try to eat healthy, but each day, new research tells us that certain foods cause problems, so we may give up eating them, only to learn that another wave of research tells us they are good for us. We then resume eating them until we find it is not good anymore. We feel we are on a roller-coaster ride with little comfort.

Natural disasters abound, whether earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, droughts, record heat waves or frigid temperatures. Besides physical challenges, there are conflicts between neighbours, communities, cities, states, countries and cultures. All these crises cause stress.

Medical science has discovered that worry can lead to stress, which in turn can affect our physical and mental health. There are numerous studies on how stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline affect us. The purpose of these hormones is to help us when in danger so the body can either fight or take flight. Over extended periods, when not faced with physical threats to our lives, we bathe our organs in these hormones, contributing to stress-related illnesses. We are in a vicious cycle and wonder how we can stop it.

One reason that people worry is that they fear the outcome. Is there a way to overcome life’s

Life’s worries overwhelm us, yet embracing faith in God’s design and cultivating inner peace through meditation brings lasting joy

By SANT RAJINDER SINGH JI MAHARAJ



worries and live in peace and joy?

Each of us was created by God, the author of our lives. God knows how each of our journeys will end. It is the journey from the beginning to the end that needs to unfold. Some parts of our lives are laid out already by actions we committed in the past. We also have some free will in which we can make choices about what happens along the way. However, how we end up is already known to God. Along the way, our lives will take various twists and turns. But the ultimate end of each of our stories is that we will reunite with God. God sent us out to

the world, and we must return to God eventually.

The final scene for each soul is that we will end the cycle of living in a world of pain and sorrow, of suffering and illness. We will have our final scene when our soul is welcomed back into the Home of God, where there is all love, happiness, tranquillity and bliss.

A happy ending awaits each of us. Once we recognise that the story God wrote for us will have a blissful ending, what is there to worry about? Everything, in the end, will turn out fine for each of us. It is up to us to trust in God’s plan for us. We can learn how to become used to staying at an even keel

through the storms and sunny days of life by finding a calm centre. We can reach this still point through meditation.

Within us are spiritual riches. We are not just the body and the mind but the soul. The soul is filled with light, love and joy. Why? It is connected all the time with the source of the Creative Power, which is also all Light, love and joy. The Creative Power and the soul are made of the same essence. If we spend some time daily within the inner silence, we will be connected with a place of bliss and peace. Then, the outer circumstances of our lives, which are temporary, will not affect us. We can learn to

find a still centre filled with calm and balance, which will provide us with permanent happiness despite the outer variations of life. God’s plan is for each person to reach that still centre. If we were to follow God’s script for us, we would definitely find our oneness with the Creator.

Meditation awakens us to the fact that there is a God, and we are the soul, a part of God. Each time we meditate, we become aware that there are spiritual realms beyond this one into which we can journey. Meditating daily is the key to accelerating our journey to our happy ending back in the Abode of God.

## MODERN PANCHATANTRA AT WORK

Once, a Brahmin bought a goat to sacrifice at a holy ceremony. He slung it over his shoulder and started walking home. Three cunning crooks saw him and decided to deceive him into abandoning the goat so they could steal it. The first crook waited ahead and called out, “Why are you carrying a filthy dog on your shoulder?” The Brahmin, startled, looked at the goat and replied, “This is a goat, not a dog!” He continued walking, though slightly troubled. The second crook stopped him a little further down the road and said, “Why are you carrying a dead calf on your back? It’s disgusting!” The Brahmin hesitated but shrugged it off, unsure. Finally, the third crook exclaimed, “How can a holy man like you carry a carcass? You’ll bring misfortune upon yourself!” Convinced he must be cursed, the Brahmin threw the goat away in fear and fled. The crooks laughed, grabbed the goat, and feasted on their success.



**MORAL:** Guard against manipulation and the influence of repeated lies. Base decisions on facts, not others’ coordinated perceptions or pressure.

## EPICS FOR CHILDREN | GAURAV YADAV

### Origins of the Nath Tradition

Many people know that the current chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, belongs to the *Nath* tradition. The *Nath* tradition originated in Medieval India from the older Siddha tradition, which included monks from Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The *Nath* tradition combines aspects of Shaivism and yoga. An accomplished guru is considered essential for spiritual attainment. His word is treated as *aadesh* (order) by disciples, who address their guru only as *aadesh*.

*Naths* worship Adinath (also called Srinath), who is the originator of the tradition. He is usually depicted with Lord Shiva to his left and Mahamaya to his right. He is said to be the giver of *moksha*. He started yoga. It is said that Adinath did hard penance. Shiva appeared before him and gave him Shivastra. Adinath became a form of Shiva. Shiva was wearing *kundalas* (earrings), which were shining a lot. When Adinath asked for them, Shiva gave him the shadow of his *kundalas*. Adinath made it mandatory for every *nath* to wear *kundalas*. Because of their pierced ears, *naths* are also called *kanphata* yogis.

Besides Adinath, eight other *nath* yogis are considered avatars of Lord Shiva—*Matsyendranath*, *Gorakshanath*, *Chauranginath*, *Jalandarnath*, *Charpatinath*, *Kanifnath*, *Nagarjuna* and *Bhartrihari*. There are many



stories about Matsyendranath. Kartik Swami, Shiva’s elder son, threw Kulagama, the tantric who used to worship Devi, into the sea. To rescue him, Shiva jumped into the sea. Finally, his *kundalas* shone inside a fish. Lord Shiva killed the fish and took the tantric out. Since he came out of a fish, he was in the shape of a *matsya* (fish) and was called Matsyendranath.

Another story goes that once, Parvati was surprised to see Shiva wearing a necklace of skulls. Shiva told her that she died and took rebirth several times. He saved her skulls and wore them. Parvati said that while she was dying repeatedly, Shiva was

immortal, so he should teach her the knowledge that would make her immortal, too. Shiva said this knowledge could not be given in the open because it was secret. Shiva took Parvati to the middle of the sea in a boat. He started telling *Am-arkatha* (the tale of immortality) to her. Usually, in such story narrations, the listener makes periodic ‘hmm’ sounds called *hunakaare*. This tells the storyteller that the listener is continuing to pay attention. Parvati was giving *hunakaare*, but soon she fell asleep. There was a *matsya* under the boat. It wanted to hear the story, so it started giving *hunakaare*, and Shiva completed the story. When Parvati woke up, she complained that she had not heard the complete story. Shiva found out that the complete knowledge of immortality had been received by a fish. This fish became Matsyendranath.

## SACRED SITE

### Mayong: The Land of Black Magic

Mayong, a quaint village in the Morigaon district of Assam, is a sacred destination steeped in mysticism and history. Located on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra River and near Kaziranga National Park, Mayong is famously referred to as the ‘Land of Black Magic’. The village finds mentions in epics like the Mahabharata, where it is said that Bhima, one of the Pandavas, acquired extraordinary strength through tantric practices performed in this region. The name Mayong has various interpretations. One belief attributes it to the Sanskrit word *maya*, meaning ‘illusion’ or ‘magic’, symbolising the village’s association with mystical practices. Another suggests that *ma-yong* in the Dimas language means ‘elephant’, reflecting the region’s historical significance as an elephant habitat. For centuries, Mayong was renowned as a hub of sorcery and tantra. The Mayong Central Museum and Emporium preserves ancient manuscripts and ritual tools, while local legends speak of spells for healing and supernatural feats. Visitors are drawn not only by its mysterious past but also by the serene beauty of its Brahmaputra-fed landscapes and proximity to Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.



## SOOTHE SAYINGS Swami Sukhabodhananda



### The Movement of Moods

Everyone is solely responsible for their misery. My misery is my own creation as much as yours is your own. This realisation liberates us from the anguish we feel when we consider others responsible for all the ills that we face. At the centre of the misery is the mistaken notion that somebody else is responsible for our misfortunes. Getting rid of this misconception involves deep understanding. We are accustomed to living in a state of unconsciousness. It is the attribution of our misery to others by our unconscious selves that creates real misery. It is also the unconsciousness that devises false escape routes from misery. Resorting to drugs and alcohol is an example of such escape routes. Instead, choosing meditation means you have decided to drop misery. For example, in deep sleep all of us are happy as the kingdom of heaven lies within.

Most of us are moody in our own terms. If there are good traits in a person, he she gets good moods. Our moods are a result of certain thoughts we entertain. We are conscious of certain thoughts and we are unconscious of certain thoughts. It is the movement of thoughts that creates moods apart from chemical changes. Many of the chemical changes in our body are a result of conscious and unconscious thoughts. In order to manage moods, keep a diary and write down every negative mood that you experience. Next to it, write down what you think is the cause. Invariably, you feel the cause is the other. When the cause is the other, then others have control over your life. Then you become puppets in the hand of others.

Others hold the remote control of your life. Next to it, write the real reason for why you are upset. Take it to the other level and you will find you are the cause. Some of your expectations which were not fulfilled could be the real factor. Just be aware of the reality. Such awareness will have the intelligence to change your mood.

Many of our moods operate in circles. On a certain day there could be a pattern of anger; and on another day there could be a pattern of jealousy. If we identify with this pattern, it takes over us. Whenever we are negative there is a negative system that is created around us. Then the negative system takes over us. Whenever we are moody, there is a negative system which is created. This negative system operates in certain patterns and we are a

Many of our moods operate in circles. On a certain day there could be a pattern of anger; and on another day there could be a pattern of jealousy

victim to this cycle. How to break this cycle of moods taking over through its patterns? The power of will is very important and can be developed by techniques. The power of will is the power of decision. You have to move yourself with the power of decision coming from “I can”. The best technique is the scramble technique and the superimposition technique. Then adopt the scramble technique, like how you scramble an egg. Similarly, when an angry emotion comes, scramble it, shuffle it and mix it with a laughing mood. In other words, bring a happy thought and mix it with your angry thought. Then you confuse the emotion. This works wonderfully.

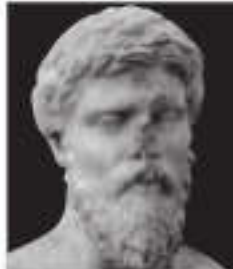
Next is the superimposition technique. When you are unhappy, those unhappy memories should be superimposed by happy memories. If you are sad that you are missing your beloved as she has gone away for a holiday, think of the happy times you have had. Bring it to the forefront and instantly your mood would change.

Join Swami Sukhabodhananda Ji’s 3-day residential retreat; Existential Laboratory (E-Lab) along with the Mahabaleshwar Yatra on February 6, 7 and 8 in 2025. Contacts: 99017 77003/ 91 91080 70452

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THE SUNDAY  
MAGAZINE

EVENING



## MASTER MIND

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.”

~ PLUTARCH



# Uncomplicated and Compelling

The story preserves not only the characters’ voices but also their goals and actions, which are convincing and believable



**The Sentence**  
**By:** Gautam Bhatia  
**Publisher:** Westland  
**Pages:** 364  
**Price:** ₹599

By SAURABH SHARMA

In 398, Peruma City finds itself at the cusp of revolution. It’s the ‘Day of the Barricades’. Director Purul, along with her secretary Milana Maran, is heading to meet the Council in Low Town. When they’re “side by side on the edge of the (Unity) Bridge”, they sense an unusual tension in the air. Soon, the “ground bursts open”, felling the director and the secretary. Through the smoke, two “feet away, blotting out the sun, stood a man”, Jagat R, the director’s assassin, a martyr in the eyes of the Commune. His last words: In the name of the Commune, unborn, die.

Thus begins Gautam Bhatia’s meticulously structured speculative fiction, *The Sentence*. Its gripping prologue is followed by a crisp timeline of the Peruman Empire to the day of the Revolution. The story, however, begins in 498 in the ‘Chapterhouse of the Free and Equal Confederation of the Guardians of Peruma’—the “Fortress Drab”. Its atmosphere signals an anticipation of a verdict: Whether the Mandalium Agreement (a “revenue-sharing formula”) must die? The Executive Committee wants to divide the Guardians into two six-member teams—one for the Commune and one for the Council—to ensure everlasting peace in Peruma City.

Before the teams are announced, Guardian Nila—the principal protagonist of the

**Bhatia’s world building is commendable. He takes great pain in outlining the architecture of this fictive city and describing the characters’ motivations**



story—and her colleague Maru, with the help of their ‘wristheld’, are trying to gauge what the media thinks of the situation. The headlines eerily resemble how divided the press is in the contemporary world, as if they’ve picked a side—wrong or right, it doesn’t matter, but one that’s certainly against the profession whose ethics it must uphold. But Nila, “pupil of the Confederation of the Guardians”, is in for a surprise. She isn’t part of either team. Instead, someone calls her from a “masked ID” using her “guardian key”. She’s asked to be present at ‘The Well’ for a private conference with Ani, Jagat’s great-granddaughter. The latter’s purpose of the call was to reopen the case of Jagat’s death sentence.

Interestingly, in Peruman City there was a culture of announcing a “guilt-free capital punishment”—the sentence, or the sleep of death (“a reversible death penalty”). It was announced only in the rarest of rare cases, such as director’s assassination. And in all such matters, the convict’s body was put in a “cryobox” until

someone could prove the guilty innocent. But science has its limits: after a point, it wasn’t easy to revive the human body. This period was nearing its end in Jagat’s case. Before the “Fifth Inflection Point of Peruman History”, which was a week away, Nila had to attempt to prove Jagat’s innocence, if she agreed to do this job, which she eventually did, for she was born in the Commune and wanted to make her mother (Meera D) proud.

The “central inspiration for the story”, Bhatia notes in the Appendix, was the Paris Commune of 1871. He also shares that the assassination of the director, who’s erroneously mentioned as “Chancellor” in the Appendix, “is loosely modelled on the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, by the Russian Narodniks”. Not only that, but there are also countless books, historical events, and concepts that inform the story, which is principally a crime investigation.

Besides the perennially sleep-deprived but unquestionably motivated Nila, pupil

Maru’s and President Mehman-dost Naram’s characters are brilliantly sketched by Bhatia. The way he employs Maru at specific junctures of the story centralises the latter’s role in helping Nila navigate through her research. As no side is willing to trust her, she finds herself utterly helpless except for Maru’s comforting company. On the other hand, Naram’s ways to demotivate Nila from pursuing this case are deftly constituted in this narration, too.

Bhatia’s world building is commendable. He takes great pain in outlining the architecture of this fictional city and describing the characters’ motivations. Furthermore, the way he manoeuvres the narration demonstrates his skills at offering something new to the readers each time he complicates the story’s graph. The scientific terminology is made extremely accessible to the readers, who find themselves engaged with one of Bhatia’s singular gifts: the art of writing dialogues.

The author has finely executed conversations between his cast

of characters. Each time and in every situation, he preserves not only his characters’ voices but also their goals and actions, which are convincing and believable.

While readers can easily notice Bhatia’s attempts at mirroring the conversations one can witness between people with conflicting viewpoints in the modern-day world, the semblance between the shared past in the ‘real world’, so to speak, and this mythic city are uncanny. However, at the same time, some narrative bits can overwhelm the reader, which to underline, is no flaw but the demand of this book.

Nevertheless, as the story moves forward, readers find Nila making several headways into cracking the case, but each time she finds herself defeated in accomplishing her goal, making her realise that it’s a complex cobweb of a murder mystery that she’s trying to untangle to its simplest, comprehensible parts. The methods she leverages to do so, and the conclusion she arrives at, make *The Sentence* a compelling read.

THE BESTSELLERS

FICTION

1



**Intermezzo**  
**By:** Sally Rooney  
**Publisher:** Faber & Faber  
**Price:** ₹699

2



**The City and Its Uncertain Walls**  
**By:** Haruki Murakami  
**Publisher:** Harvill Secker  
**Price:** ₹1,399

3



**Francis Itty Cora**  
**By:** TD Ramakrishnan  
**Publisher:** Harper Fiction India  
**Price:** ₹399

4



**The Curse of Muziris**  
**By:** Hamish Morjaria  
**Publisher:** Pan  
**Price:** ₹399

5



**Stories From My Heart**  
**By:** Ruskin Bond  
**Publisher:** Westland  
**Price:** ₹299

NON-FICTION

1



**The Golden Road**  
**By:** William Dalrymple  
**Publisher:** Bloomsbury Publishing  
**Price:** ₹999

2



**Ratan Tata: A Life**  
**By:** Thomas Mathew  
**Publisher:** HarperCollins India  
**Price:** ₹1,499

3



**Nexus**  
**By:** Yuval Noah Harari  
**Publisher:** Fern Press  
**Price:** ₹1,099

4



**Tipu Sultan**  
**By:** Vikram Sampath  
**Publisher:** Penguin Random House India  
**Price:** ₹920

5



**Chhaunk**  
**By:** Abhijit Banerjee  
**Publisher:** Juggernaut  
**Price:** ₹567

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## Diving into the Murky World of Scandals

In 10 select true stories of financial scams, spread across centuries and continents, the compendium shows how these crimes became catalysts for key regulatory reforms



**Fraudster Tales: History’s Greatest Financial Criminals and Their Catastrophic Crimes**  
**By:** Vijay Narayan Govind  
**Publisher:** Pan Macmillan  
**Price:** ₹499  
**Pages:** 290

By TANVIR AEIJAZ

No matter how much a financial system is fortified against scams, there is always a fraudster, a conman, or a swindler aiming to game that system. Financial crimes, a la white-collar crimes, are committed, interestingly, by those working closely with the system or those having the innate skill to justify the art through the framework of ‘fraud triangle’, that is in the terms of opportunity, incentive and rationalization. Scams, mainly the pecuniary ones, involve conduct of dishonest practices leading to perversion, depravity and debasement of the entire morals of the social fabric.

Financial scandals, like any other scandal, have a story of their own and, of course, the denouement. The truth of the scandals appears to be a drama at times, and at times an enthralling thriller: Vijay Narayan Govind, in his book *Fraudster Tales*, promises to tell select 10 true stories of financial scams, spread

across centuries and continents, and in his own words, “these frauds were significant enough at the time to send major ripples through the systems they challenged, with many of them serving as the catalyst for key legal and regulatory reforms.”

The book introduces 10 swindlers, each with their own story of fraud in a separate chapter with a suitable story-title to it. In Govind’s fraudster tales, Hegestratos’s tale emerges as the ‘First Fraudster’, circa 300 BCE, in Athens. He, along with his crime partner Zenosthemis, working as ship merchants, planned to steal the cargos, sink the vessel, and con the vessel’s insurers of shipload of valuable goods through enforcement of the clauses of bottomry and respondentia contracts. However, the plans went awry due to the alert captain and crew members and Hegestratos jumped and drowned himself in the sea. Zenosthemis was arrested, tried and imprisoned in Athens for a long time.



The author picks stories, random perhaps, from Athens and other countries, including India. Haridas Mundhra in the tale of ‘The Great Investor’ and Natwarlal in ‘The Master Manipulator’ are the two Indians figuring in the book. The Mundhra scandal, first of its kind in independent India, not only was embroiled with the stock markets and financial institutions but was an expose of the wicked nexus between political party, bureaucracy, ministers and business class, perhaps a prototype of ‘crony capitalism’. The conman Mudhra duped Life Insurance Company (LIC) by forging share certificates, using them as collateral for loans, and amassing huge loans to the tune of Rs 15.60 crore by the mid of 1957. It was Feroz Gandhi, the law maker, who brought this scam to public attention that led to nationalization of LIC, resignation of TT Krishnamachari – then finance minister, indictment

of finance secretary and some senior LIC officials, and, of course, sentencing of Haridas Mundhra to 22 years in prison.

In the Mithilesh Kumar alias Natwarlal’s case, the story, though intriguing, is simple. From forging signatures and withdrawing money from banks, he graduated to nefarious crimes such as decamping cash from merchants and siphoning off goods from the cargo areas while using more than 50 aliases.

Natwarlal even sold, impersonating himself as government official, the Taj Mahal thrice, the Red Fort twice, and the Rashtrapati Bhawan and Parliament once. He had developed this shrewd art of escaping prison, and one heard him saying quite often that ‘no jail is enough to hold me for too long’.

Then, there is a story of how an expert William Chaloner counterfeited coins, notes, and lottery tickets, in the 1600s, but finally got

caught by Sir Issac Newton, and sent to gallows for he was guilty of multiple currency frauds. Hugh Cameron’s story is about his conspiracy to cheat Royal British Banks and its customers, eventually which led to the Bank’s collapse. However, in due course, it triggered major legislative reforms in the corporate governance systems in Britain. Oscar Hartzell, a brazen rook, in another story, swindled millions of dollars from investors in a popularly known Sir Francis Drake estate scam. Another story, rather smutty and historical, called the ‘necklace scandal’, involves one French noble woman Jeanne de valois as the key conspirator. It became one of the scandals that led to French Revolution. US major Enron bankruptcy, led by Kenneth Lay, and the Ponzi scheme by Charles Ponzi, the two white-collar financial crimes, rocked the financial systems in the US.

The 10 tales are fun, and a riveting read and, in the tales, the readers would find themselves in the murky world of scandals. The criminals of the stories have two things in common, one they dreamt of becoming filthy rich in a trice, and when caught they tried to justify that all is done in good faith, and second, all of them are caught and punished, which the author seems to lay down as the moral of the book.

## A Rare Find that Enchants

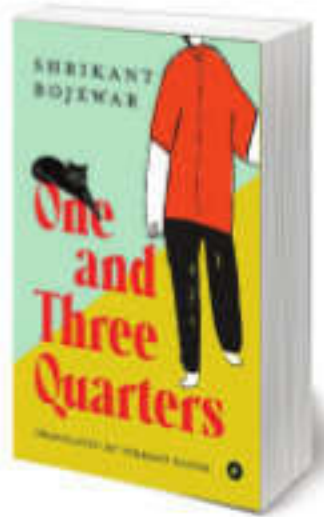
By NANDITA BOSE

A reviewer’s life is not without its rewards. For once in a blue moon a book comes along that possibly wouldn’t be a first pick in a bookstore but reveals itself to be a rare gem. *One and Three Quarters* by Shrikant Bojewar is a brilliant novella about a lad called Langdya who has difficulty passing Class VII. Based on this simple premise, the author weaves a marvellous work of social satire set in a tiny village in Maharashtra where life is simpler but not a stranger to complexities.

Naru Pingtya owns the local bar where Ajabrao drinks every evening. Later he climbs the roof of his house and sometimes sings *abhangs* in praise of Lord Vitthala. Gengane, the local schoolteacher, is also a regular; while his wife is set on seducing Langdya. There’s a crisis that calls for great improvisation because Langdya has tampered with his failed marksheet and fears his father’s wrath. When he spots the music teacher Mrs Deshpande going towards the deserted fort at the edge of the village, he tells Habib Sir and Gengane about it. To Langdya’s great fortune, it is Dhamale the headmaster that she goes to meet.

Langdya accidentally falls into his role of a fixer because fear of exposure makes Dhamale sign his matriculation form. Not only does he clear that, he also clears his Class XII. He discovers he has a natural talent for being a *dalal*. As a fixer, he is as masterful as he is without a moral compass. He is fated to cross paths with a tomcat named Latthya and discovers they understand each other in a shared language. With Latthya by his side, he has access to far more powerful information.

The author’s style is a restrained form of storytelling, almost minimalist. Yet he sketches the life around the



**One and Three Quarters**  
**By:** Shrikant Bojewar  
**Translated by:** Vikrant Pande  
**Publisher:** Westland  
**Price:** ₹399  
**Pages:** 164

local bar, each school teacher, the parents and Langdya himself with essential details. Interweaving the village cats and their dalliances while making them to be the more progressive species, adds a special note of whimsy.

Though when the scene shifts to Mumbai, Langdya is an adult and deals with real politics: “He soon learned that the journalist who walked with a chip on his shoulder in his territory was treated worse than a dog when he came to the newspaper’s headquarters in Mumbai. If that reporter filed 10 news reports, the paper published only two of them.”

What stands out is the biting satire, often stated in a matter-of-fact manner: “Anyone who has some knowledge of politics and who knows someone in a TV channel becomes a political analyst.” The translator Vikrant Pande must be given his due for conveying the style impeccably. More, gratitude is owed to him for this delightful book that enchants and tickles the funny bone in equal measure.



# The Traditional and the Suave

Fashion today is tradition yesterday. Often seeking inspiration from the past and enhancing it with a futuristic vision, true design reinvents custom with outrageous statements or understated elegance. The *dhoti* is having its moment in Indian fashion and retail with Bollywood actors such as Ranbir Kapoor to menswear influencers like Rohit Bose (who has a blog dedicated to the *dhoti*) flaunting it a style statements. The *dhoti* in its traditional, unstitched avatar is making its presence felt like never before—at society weddings, Bollywood parties and traditional festivals. The number of *dhoti* tutorials surfacing on Instagram and YouTube attests to its timeless appeal. The new-age *dhoti* enthusiasts have also rediscovered the various indigenous draping styles synonymous with different regions of India. While some are draping it in the traditional *mundu* style seen in Kerala, there are many, even among the non-Bengalis, who've fallen for the allure of the Bengali draping technique (once mostly seen during festivals like Durga Puja).

Bose shares that among all the drapes he's tried, the Bengali 'Mayur Puchha' (peacock tail) style with its intricate micro pleats holds a special place in his heart. "Its regal elegance and attention to detail makes it truly unforgettable," says Bose.

Bollywood, with its penchant for always being tops when it comes to the fashion game, is not far behind from embracing the traditional attire either. At Athiya Shetty's wedding, father of the bride, Suniel Shetty styled a *chikankari kurta* with a traditional *dhoti* by designer Anjul Bhandari. Actor Siddharth too embraced his South Indian roots as he chose to wear a traditional *dhoti kurta* when he tied the knot with Aditi Rao Hydari.

"In my experience, the *dhoti* is no longer confined to formal or ceremonial occasions alone; it's become a versatile statement piece that can be effortlessly styled for a wide array of occasions," shares Bhandari.

The timeless drape sees a major revival with new-age *dhoti* enthusiasts reawakening to its allure

By MANISH MISHRA

"The Mayur Puchha's regal elegance and attention to detail makes it truly unforgettable."  
ROHIT BOSE



Riteish Deshmukh; (right) Suniel Shetty

With today's man seeking sophistication but also looking for ease of wearing and comfort, the beauty of the *dhoti* lies in its ability to look elegant, yet provide that sense of ease. It is a fluid garment that transcends the boundaries of occasion, and with the right styling, it can be as suited to a festive gathering as it is to a contemporary wedding celebration. The use of intricate *chikankari* on *dhotis* has been a standout feature in many of these sets, as the delicate, hand-embroidered patterns add an element of refinement and artistry that appeals to modern sensibilities. "A well-crafted *dhoti* set, especially when paired with a *chikankari kurta*, is not seen as a one-time wear; it becomes a treasured piece as the timeless nature of the hand-embroidery, coupled with the light,

breathable fabrics, makes it an investment in both style and comfort," she adds.

Designers in the festive menswear space are celebrating the *dhoti* in its purest form. For instance, designer Rizwan Shaikh of label Nafs prominently features the yardage in indigenous textile in his latest collection. "*Dhoti*, in its traditional unstitched style, is making a comeback and how. It is a beautiful symbol of our culture that has stood the test of time. Many Bollywood actors, such as Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan to Ranveer Singh, have been seen wearing *dhotis*, showcasing how stylish and versatile this classic attire can be," observes Shaikh.

At Nafs, the designer has customised *dhotis* twice for Riteish Deshmukh—once for



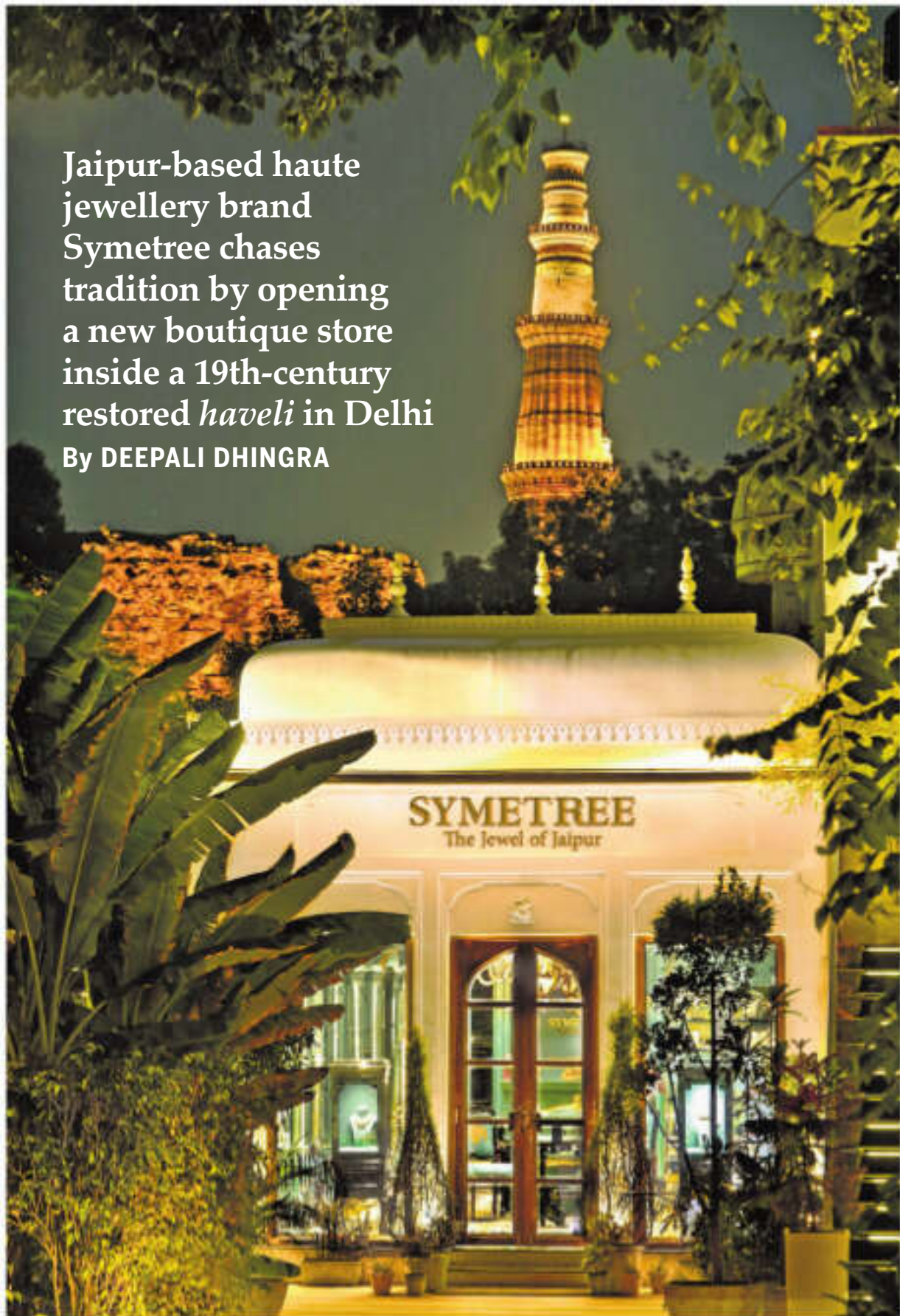
Anant Ambani's grand wedding and again, for the *Bigg Boss Marathi* show because the actor wanted to sport a traditional vibe. "It's great to see people embracing our heritage," he says.

Apprehensive of how to style this traditional piece of clothing without making it seem too hard? Designers suggest pairing the it with an array of separates—it could be a *kurta* or a tee, a jacket or a waistcoat. Complete the look with flip-flops, boots or sneakers, depending on the occasion. Alternatively, one can either hold the end of the *dhoti* in your hand or tuck it in your jacket pocket and you're good to go. Last but not the least—wear the *dhoti* with a sense of pride. After all, it's not just a piece of clothing but a reminder of your Indian roots.

FLAUNT

## Pandering to the Royal Flush

Jaipur-based haute jewellery brand Symetree chases tradition by opening a new boutique store inside a 19th-century restored *haveli* in Delhi  
By DEEPALI DHINGRA



They made the world's largest emerald necklace—a 2,200-carat single centre stone. They believe in the niche glory of Indian royalty; the aspirational lure of seller and buyer alike. They are Symetree, a handcrafted luxury jewellery brand born in Jaipur, which has opened a new store that speaks of its core philosophy of pandering to the royalty trope. In a 19th-century restored *haveli*, located on the very hillock where British painter Thomas Daniell sketched the Qutub Minar in 1789, now stands the purveyor of handcrafted luxury jewellery. Abhishek Haritwal, who founded the Symetree brand in 2005, admits that while it is Jaipur-based, he could not ignore the fact that India's bridal capital is Delhi. "Being here is extremely important for us. We have

been in Khan Market for close to 14 years and wanted to take this experience further," he says. The inspiration for Symetree is typical Jaipur where palaces, forts, fables and fantasy represent grand history. The handcrafted pieces on sale are a fusion of tradition and the contemporary, which makes sense to the new buyer.

Now upmarket stores are not just about the shop window; they need to tell a story. Symetree's Delhi signature sight is the Qutub Minar that towers over the restored *haveli*. "The architecture at the time had a blend of Rajput and influences. We have managed to restore the building to its original glory. There is *arabesque* stucco on the walls, hubcaps on the top of the roof and arches which form the lead motif of our story, Tirbati," he says. The



innermost and most private space inside the store is Rani Mahal that houses the finest of jewels

The brand's latest offering is The Sawai: One and a Quarter, a limited-edition collection of rare uncut diamonds and emeralds; it is supposed to be a tribute to Jaipur royal family. Rajasthan's exotic export is royalty, and Symetree has cottoned on to its cachet. The pieces are cleverly matched with contemporary-coloured gems but with age old settings. "Sawai, was the title the British gave to most of the prominent ruling families of India. This goes well with our collection which aims to be larger than life. Under the Sawai brand, we did a bloom of royalty; an uncut diamond and a very unusual-shaped pear," he shares. Other prominent collections include the Nawalgarh, a desert fortress in Rajasthan. "All our signature pieces with varied colours, tourmalines, rubies, sapphires and emeralds are under Nawalgarh," says Haritwal. East Meets West is for international clients such as Hillary Clinton, Hilary Swank, Sharon Stone, Oprah Winfrey and Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser. At their boutique luxury level scale, they might be the only brand which is 'mines to market' with mining assets in Africa as well as in India. Conscience with class is a trademark of this ode to royalty.

## Bag this Look



At the heart of every premium Aproduct lies the promise of quiet exclusivity and modern sophistication. That is what YUR promises to be, especially with its online platform, featuring the innovative 'Shop the Look' concept. This unique feature is an interactive one, offering customers curated ensembles that highlight the art of pairing. Their debut collection with iconic leather bags crafted from premium African leather are certainly up there with their craftsmanship and looks. The brand's aim, they say, was to create pieces that aren't just beautiful but have a soul. Honouring age-old tanning techniques, each bag tells a story of heritage and originality, resonating deeply with those who value timeless, meaningful designs. Now, if that isn't music to the ears, what is?



## PICK OF THE WEEK

## Into the Loop

An Ahmedabad furniture brand launches an innovative line that combines art and function seamlessly



That there is no limit to pushing the boundaries when it comes to design and form may be a creative cliché, but the latest collection of furniture from Ahmedabad-based studio andblack is totally novel. The LOOP series by founders Jwalant Mahadevwal and Kanika Agarwal is both deeply rooted in their ethos of parametric design and brimming with imaginative interpretations of 'the loop'.

Can a single surface made from a single material, elegantly bent and twisted into seamless loops, create both strength and visual intrigue? Well, in this collection, it most certainly does. Says Mahadevwal, "The LOOP series is a celebration of design perspectives that strings together form and function. Each piece, a study in curves, invites exploration and interaction. From gentle curves to dramatic sweeps,

these elements add a sense of fluidity and dynamism to the space." A striking product is the LOOP bookshelf, which combines the rigid functionality of a storage unit with the sensuous flow of a sculpture. With graceful curves and a minimalist silhouette, the LOOP bench invites the user to sit and engage with the piece, subtly blurring the line between art and utility.

Form and function meet yet again in the LOOP spiral *jhoola*. Its closed, double-loop structure provides a space to relax, allowing one to be enveloped by the strength and warmth of the wood. The LOOP quad bench uses a singular upward arch to create a visual effect that enhances the space around it, while the LOOP twisted table brings a playful twist to the collection, with each curve and slope sparking curiosity.



# ‘Hard Work Came First, Stardom Later’

By AJULI TULSYAN

Actor Adivi Sesh’s career in Tollywood has included a variety of roles and genres. From playing Bhadra in *Baahubali* to Agent Gopi in *Goodachari*, Sesh has established himself as one of the most versatile performers in the industry, having played complicated characters with profound emotional arcs as well as action-packed thrillers. During a recent conversation, he discussed his path, approach to acting, and planned projects. Excerpts from the interview:

**You’ve worked across various genres, from action to suspense thrillers, and portrayed both protagonists and antagonists. What drives you to take on such diverse roles, and how do you prepare for each one?**

I find it strange that people classify *Kshanam* and *Goodachari* just as ‘thrillers.’ Each story has a different emotional drive. I don’t plan, I just follow what comes to my heart. If it touches me, I believe it’ll touch the audience. The challenge is not just making good cinema, but making art that influences the culture. The antagonist I’m most proud of is Munna in *Panja*. As a protagonist, I’m equally thankful for *Major*, my dream project. My prep is always tailored to the role. For example, the Madanapalle slang I practiced for *Dacoit* was a lot of fun.

**Among all the characters you’ve portrayed, is there one that you feel closest to? And, is there a specific character you dream of playing?**

I think Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan is the one role I truly sunk into, a role that became part of my psyche. So much of it can be attributed to the great man (Major Sandeep). I’ve always dreamed of

**Adivi Sesh on his evolving career, the excitement of *Goodachari 2*, his new role in *Dacoit*, and the challenges of balancing multiple roles**

playing the warrior Karna. I see many similarities in the personalities of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan and Karna from the Mahabharata.

**How does *Goodachari 2* build on the first film, and what can audiences expect from your character?**

I can only say that shooting is now 50 per cent complete. It is the biggest film I have ever done—a truly massive film spanning six countries, including Europe and a planned North American schedule. The *G2* set is dynamic, with massive crews, locations, stunts, and twists. I’m living the dream, something I’ve envisioned since I was 14.

**What drew you to the antagonist’s role in *Dacoit*: A Love Story, and how does your approach differ from playing a hero?**

I’m having more fun on *Dacoit* than I had on any other film. Here is a protagonist with completely antagonistic qualities. I’m enjoying being this rough guy from Madanapalle. No attention is paid to looking good. The rougher the gait or the body language, the better.

**You’re collaborating with Emraan Hashmi in *G2*. How has that experience been?**

Emraan sir is a gem. I loved picking his mind about his experiences of handling stardom, the industry and handling the world. I used to dance to his songs on stage when I was in the US. He’s extremely grounded and focused. He’s fantastic in the film and brings a gravitas that I love.

**What qualities do you look for in a script, and how do you judge if it will resonate with audiences?**

I gauge scripts by whether the story and its emotional content touch my heart. If it stirs me, I don’t overthink it. Growing up in three countries shaped my sensibilities. I can’t do scripts just for heroism; they need to be grounded. But if it’s too real, it defeats the purpose of escapism. I’m drawn to scripts that balance both.

**Who are the actors or filmmakers you look up to? How have they influenced your career choices?**

I’ve always been a huge Aamir Khan fan. I had the chance to spend time with him before the *Laapataa Ladies* release. Despite being a big star, he was so down-to-earth and genuine. He shaped my childhood, and his dedication to quality films and hard work has influenced my career.

## BUZZ CUT



### STAR STRUCK

South Indian star **Prabhas** will be seen in a captivating romantic-horror entertainer *The Raja Saab* Directed by Maruthi Dasari and starring Malavika Mohanan and Niddhi Aggerwal, the film is set to mesmerise audiences in multiple languages in early 2025.



### DESI ROMCOM

The official poster for **Dil Ka Darwaza Kholna Darling** is out. The film starring Jaya Bachchan, Wamiqa Gabbi, and Siddhant Chaturvedi is set to release next year. This film has a unique blend of comedy and romance, and seeing Jaya Bachchan in this new avatar is going to be special.

### JANUARY JONES ON HER EX-BOYFRIEND ASHTON KUTCHER



**‘He was not supportive of my Hollywood career.’**

## Aspirations Unbound

At 69, Anupam Kher is far from done. Whether it is romance or fitness training, he is ready for it all

By PUJA TALWAR

The circle is far from complete, I am somewhere in the middle”, says Anupam Kher as he celebrates four decorated decades in the film industry. The veteran’s journey in Bollywood began as an experiment; a 28-year-old who decided to play a 65-year-old bereaved father in Mahesh Bhatt’s *Saraansh*. Now, at 69, Kher has decided to tackle the subtext of age being just a number in his latest film *Vijay 69*.

Directed by Akash Roy, the film sees the actor in the role of Vijay, a widower who takes on the daunting task of competing in a triathlon. The biggest obstacle is his entourage of so-called supporters, who chide him with the obvious: he is too old for it.

“It’s very fascinating that I get to do a film where the hero is 69. The whole definition of what makes a hero is changing, and it needs to change. A hero is not always someone who can fight, and break into a song. Rather, a hero is somebody who breaks his image and pushes the boundaries. I have approached all my characters as if they were the heroes of the stories because that’s how I look at my own life

**“No longer do co-actors bond over a scene; they finish their jobs and get into their vanity vans.”**

and journey... as a hero.”

Kher is as enthusiastic as Vijay. The actor reveals that he took swimming lessons for the film and worked on his physical training. “It is wonderful to keep rediscovering and reinventing yourself. I have always strived to be different, and that comes to the fore in the way I approach the parts given to



me,” he says.

The classic rags-to-riches story of a small-town boy from Kashmir who arrived in Bombay with just ₹37 in his pocket, now boasts of a filmography with over 525 movie credits. Kher’s indelible performances, be it the alcoholic father in *Daddy*, the evil Dr Dang of *Karma*, the supportive goofy father in *Dilwale*

*Dulhaniya Le Jaayenge* or the middle-class man who takes on money grubbers in *Khosla Ka Ghosla*, went on to cement his position in Bollywood. It also translated with him being one of the successful crossover actors scouring plump international assignments such as *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, and *New*

*Amsterdam*.

“I am not bogged down by adhering to a particular image and perception. Many actors become prisoners of their own image, but I am constantly trying to make my job difficult, and looking for the roles that stimulate me as an actor. It’s great to be competent, but it could serve as the biggest speed breaker for being brilliant.”

This could well serve as the cue for filmmakers, because the film industry is languishing under the burden of formulaic narratives, with little to no recall value. Kher believes that it is the result of business taking precedence over creativity. “Business is important, but when storytelling is neglected and commerce becomes paramount, the shortcuts to success don’t serve the purpose.”

He, however, adds that the success of films such as *Lapataa Ladies* is the silver lining in the dark clouds of poor box-office returns hovering over the film industry. “The innocence of cinema has gone, and the audience is no longer forgiving. It is great that with technological growth, your films can be accessed and viewed in countries across the world; it is commendable. But, the wholesomeness of it is all gone,” the actor says, adding, “Today we are talking to people, but there are no conversations. No longer do co-actors bond over a scene; they finish their jobs and get into their vanity vans, or stare at their phones. It is all very clinical and orchestrated now, which also reflects in the work.”

Kher will be seen next in Anurag Basu’s *Metro... In Dino*. His bucket list? “I don’t believe in bucket lists. I intend to work, and do what I am for as long as I live,” he answers with characteristic candour.

## BINGE BOX



### HEIST HORROR

A suspense series in eight parts about the drama behind one of the most spectacular heists in history. Watch *The Helicopter Heist* directed by Ronnie Sandhal and starring Vic Carmenn Sonne and Mahmut Suvacki on Netflix

### TRENDING

**Beyond the Fairy Tale** Netflix  
CAST: Nayanthara, Vignesh Shivan

**PLOT:** Celebrated actor Nayanthara looks back on her journey towards love and superstardom amidst personal struggles in this intimate documentary.

**A Man on the Inside:** Netflix  
CAST: Ted Danson

**PLOT:** A retired professor gets a new lease on life when a private investigator hires him to go undercover in San Francisco retirement home.

**Vettaiyan:** Prime Video

CAST: Rajinikanth, Amitabh Bachchan

**PLOT:** A sought-after supercop gets caught in a series of unexpected events when he guns down a criminal in a murder case.

**ARM:** Disney Hotstar

CAST: Tovino Thomas, Krithi Shetty, Basil Joseph

**PLOT:** Set in the Northern Kerala, three generations of heroes try to protect the most important treasure of the Land.

**Ye Kali Kali Ankhein:** Netflix

CAST: Tahir Raj Bhasin, Shweta Tripathi

**PLOT:** A woman’s unhealthy obsession with a young man could ruin everything he holds dear.

## REVIEW

### The Tunes that Teach



#### THE PIANO LESSON

Director: Malcolm Washington

Genre: Drama

Platform: Netflix

Language: English

Rating: ★★☆☆☆

An adaptation of August Wilson’s play, *The Piano Lesson*, provides an insightful look into the lives of African Americans in the 1930s. The film blends supernatural undertones with a historical lens.

The story begins on July 4, 1911, with Boy Charles (Stephan James) stealing a piano from the Sutter family, who once enslaved his ancestors. This act is met with retaliation in the form of an arson attack, which results in his death. Twenty-five years later, his children—Berniece (Danielle Deadwyler) and Boy Willie (John David Washington)—disagree over the piano. Berniece views it as a sacred family heirloom, while Boy Willie wants to sell it to buy the Sutter land that has gone up for sale following James Sutter’s (Jay Peterson) death. The central conflict revolves around who will ultimately determine the piano’s fate.

The setting of the film mirrors a stage, with characters entering and exiting, making for a seamless theatre-to-film adaptation.

As the central conflict is established early, the film relies on its characters to keep the narrative engaging, and the cast delivers. Each actor brings nuance to their roles: Berniece fights to preserve the family’s heritage, while Boy Willie sees the piano as a reminder of their enslavement and hopes to trade it for a better future. Doaker remains neutral yet wise, while Wining Boy, unlike the others, is consumed by nostalgia for his past musical glory.

This humanisation of characters is enhanced by performances from Samuel L Jackson, John David Washington, Ray Fisher, and Michael Potts, many of whom reprise their roles from the 2022 Broadway revival.

In the early moments, we empathise with Boy Willie’s pragmatic desire to move forward. But the significance of the piano, with its engravings of the family’s ancestors, gradually shifts sympathy toward Berniece.

While the film succeeds in delivering its moral lesson, some aspects feel underdeveloped. A deeper dive into Berniece’s ancestors would have added more layers, such as Boy Charles engraving his family’s images on the piano at his enslaver’s behest could have been more impactful.

*The Piano Lesson* serves as an important reflection on the history of slavery, capturing the struggle for dignity and financial stability during the Great Depression with marked poignancy.

—Akshay Kumar

