

SNAPSHOTS



Iron snow

The Earth's inner core is capped by snow made of tiny particles of iron, much heavier than the snowflakes seen in the atmosphere, a study published in the journal *JGR Solid Earth* finds. The iron-snow falls from the molten outer core and piles up in the inner core of the Earth creating stacks that are up to 320 km thick.



Quick to see

The peregrine falcon, one of the world's most common predatory birds, has the fastest vision in the animal kingdom and can register nearly 130 frames per second, according to a study published in the *Journal of Experimental Biology*. In comparison, humans see up to a maximum of 50 to 60 blinks per second. This is the first time scientists have studied the speed of vision among birds of prey, calculating how fast they see.



Early immunity

Researchers have discovered how a brief disruption in the guts of pre-born mice can compromise their adult immunity to rotavirus infection. The study, published in *Science Immunology* showed that this prevented a robust antibody response in adult mice to rotavirus. This early disruption limits the ability of the immune system to later trigger and generate production of Immunoglobulin A (IgA) antibodies.



Ancestral home

The last known settlement of *Homo erectus*, direct ancestors of modern humans, who disappeared around 4,00,000 years ago, was situated in Ngandong on the Indonesian island of Java, a new study published in *Nature* finds. According to the researchers, the human ancestors existed on the Indonesian island between 1,08,000 and 1,17,000 years ago.

Mutation in smell gene found to be associated with asthma

Studying a multi-generational Indian family led to the discovery of associated gene variant

R. PRASAD

Based on a study of a four-generation family in Mysuru with high prevalence of asthma, a multi-institutional study by Indian researchers has shown that a variant of an olfactory gene (OR2AG2) is a novel candidate for asthma. This is the first time in India a four-generation large family with high asthma prevalence has been studied for the said purpose.

The gene was validated in a north Indian cohort of 141 children with asthma and 130 controls. About 80% of children with asthma carried a copy of the gene variant.

Twenty individuals representing the four generations were selected. Of the 20 persons studied, 14 had asthma and the rest served as a control group. Whole genome genotyping was undertaken on all the 20 participants and exome sequencing was carried out on five people with asthma and three controls. While whole genome genotyping helps in detecting variations across the genome, the exome sequencing allows variations in the protein-coding region of any gene to be identified.

Several variants were seen after genotyping and exome sequencing. The team led by Anurag Agrawal, Director of the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB), Delhi, turned to computer modelling to narrow down the possible variants that might be responsible for asthma and finally confirmed the genetic variant through conventional sequencing.

"Mutation in the sensory pathway such as olfaction is a plausible mechanism for increased asthma



Inherited: All 14 family members with asthma had one copy of the gene variant • P.V. SIVAKUMAR

risk because of inability to mount an appropriate counter response. The inability to mount a counter response could lead to lung damage," says Dr. Agrawal. The inability to smell could be a potential mechanism for lung damage.

Identifying odour

To test this, the researchers evaluated the ability of the 20 participants to smell a sweet odour and the concentration at which they could identify the odour. All 14 family members with asthma had one copy of the gene variant.

"Healthy individuals and those with asthma were able to identify and differentiate different smells, but those with asthma could detect smells only at higher concen-

trations," he says. "This suggested a defect in their ability to smell. Also, family members with asthma said they could not smell burning odour."

"Whether olfactory gene was associated with asthma or not was not known till now. Ours is the first study to find such an association," says Dr. Samarpana Chakraborty from CSIR-IGIB and the first author of a paper published in the journal *Scientific Reports*. "The gene variant may cause olfactory dysfunction in the family members who have asthma."

"By studying the four-generation family alone or the children cohort individually, we couldn't have identified the gene. We need both groups," Dr. Chakraborty

says. "In population-based studies that have been undertaken, it becomes difficult to identify such variants."

"There are three main reasons why we could identify the gene variant – asthmatics in the family had difficulty in smelling, we saw the same variant in the cohort and we were looking for a novel genetic variant," Dr. Agrawal says.

Suppressing expression

But during the validation studies, asthmatic children with or without the variant did not show significant difference in the ability to smell, which was unexpected. "Asthmatic children without the variant too had impaired smell threshold, which made us wonder if asthma-related pathway itself can cause suppression of the gene independent of the genetic variation," he says.

To validate the hypothesis, the researchers directly measured the gene expression in lung samples of those with asthma and normal subjects. In people with asthma, there was significant reduction in the expression of the gene.

They also carried out cell culture studies. When the cultured human cells were treated with IL3 cytokine, which is associated with allergy, there was suppression of OR2AG2 gene expression.

"So there is either a genetic defect in the OR2AG2 gene at birth leading to suppressed expression or there is acquired suppression of gene expression later in life due to inflammation or environmental factors," he says. "This supports our hypothesis that the gene may be a convergence point for asthma pathways at the lung level."

Carbon dots help detect herbicide pollution

ASWATHI PACHA



Waste to wealth: Water hyacinth was used to produce carbon nanoparticles. • M. KARUNAKARAN

In an extraordinary waste-to-wealth feat, researchers from Assam have used the commonly found invasive plant water hyacinth to produce carbon nanoparticles. These extremely tiny (less than 10 nanometre) particles can be used for detecting a commonly used herbicide – pretilachlor. The nanoparticles were found to be selective and sensitive for the detection of the herbicide.

"At the biodiversity hub of our institute we have been trying to figure out how to convert this weed into a value-added product. Here in Assam, every water body is infested with water hyacinth, and it was an easy and cheap option to explore. Some teams are exploring if its fibre can be used to make furniture. We are also working on making activated carbon using the plant and these carbon dots were one of the innovations born in our lab," explains Devasish Chowdhury from the Material Nanochemistry lab at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology, Assam. He is the corresponding author of the work published in *Heliyon*.

Leaves to carbon

The team harvested water hyacinth leaves, removed the chlorophyll, dried and powdered it. The sieved powder underwent several treatments including heating at 150 degree Celsius to convert it to carbon dots. "When a nanoparticle is less than 10 nanometre we call it a dot or nanodot. Our carbon dots were able to give a green fluorescence under UV light. The extremely small oxygen functional groups on the surface of the dot are responsible for the fluorescence," explains the first author of the paper Ma-

nash Jyoti Deka.

The herbicide pretilachlor is mixed with water and carbon dots, and studied using special equipment. The fluorescence intensity increases in the presence of the herbicide. The team also tested using different pesticides and other compounds having similar chemical structure and found that the carbon dot was extremely sensitive to pretilachlor and could detect even very small quantity of the herbicide. After successful testing in the laboratory conditions, the team collected soil samples from different places across the State and proved the efficiency of the carbon dots in detecting pretilachlor in soil samples.

Fluorescence enhancement

The paper also describes the mechanism by which electron transfer happens between the dot and the herbicide which enables the fluorescence enhancement. Dr. Chowdhury adds that this will be a commercially viable option when compared with the sensors currently available in the market, as the raw material for the construction of the sensor – the water hyacinth – is readily available and is practically a waste material. Based on this study, the group is now developing a paper strip-based sensor for on-site detection of pretilachlor.

IIT Hyderabad team uses plant extract, heat to kill cancer cells

The nanoparticles, which encapsulate the extract, had no adverse effect on mice, indicating their biocompatibility

R. PRASAD

Lipid-based nanoparticles encapsulating chlorophyll-rich extract of a medicinal plant *Anthocephalus cadamba* and a near-infrared dye has been found to selectively kill cancer cells when exposed to near-infrared light.

Unlike the conventional photothermal therapy that relies on heat to kill cancerous cells, a multi-institutional team led by researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad used heat generated by the dye when exposed to light to destroy the encapsulation and release the extract.

Through *in vitro* studies, the team led by Aravind Kumar Rengan from the Department of Biomedical Engineering at IIT Hyderabad found that the extract generated excess amount of reac-

tive oxygen species, which caused cell death through autophagy (body's way of removing damaged cells).

Collaborative effort

Researchers from the University of Hyderabad, IIT Bombay and Bose Institute, Kolkata, were part of the study and the results were published in the journal *Nanoscale*.

The extract showed selectivity in killing only cancer cells; the extract released inside normal cells caused insignificant cell death. The reason: the extract did not increase the amount of reactive oxygen species generated inside normal cells thus not causing them through autophagy.

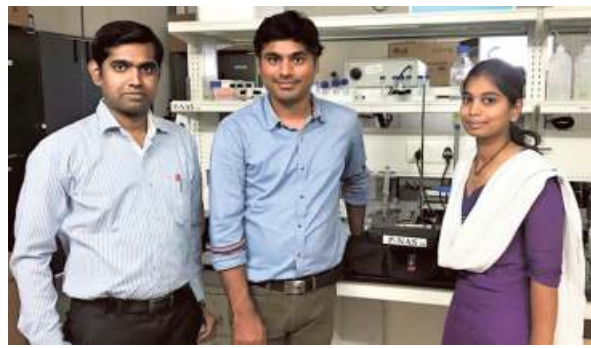
"In our study, heat is used mainly to destabilise the lipid nanoparticle encapsulation and release the extract,"

says Prof. Rengan. "We optimised the amount of dye used and the duration of illumination so that the thermal effect is mainly for triggering the release of the extract."

Potent mechanism

The lethal effect of the extract to kill the cancer cells when exposed to thermal energy was already demonstrated by the team a couple of year ago. But the mechanism through which the extract killed the cancer cells was not known then. "Based on studies using breast cancer cell lines we found that the extract increased the generation of reactive oxygen species, which enhanced autophagy-mediated death of cancer cells," he says.

When photothermal therapy alone was used, nearly 50% cancer cells died in



Targeted killing: The extract showed selectivity in killing only cancer cells, says Aravind Kumar Rengan (left).

about 24 hours. But 45% cancer cells grew back in about a day. "But there was no significant growth (about 7.5% of cancer cells even 48 hours when photothermal therapy was used along with the extract. The extract was able to restrict cancer cell growth," says Tejaswini Appidi from IIT Hyderabad and one of the first authors of the paper.

Autophagy-mediated cell death was confirmed by using a particular protein that serves as an autophagy marker. "When cancer cells were treated with the extract, the amount of protein marker generated showed an increase. The protein marker produced varied depending on the amount of extract used," says Deepak Bharad-

waj Pemmaraju from IIT Hyderabad and the other first author of the paper.

Reactive oxygen

Since the extract increased the amount of both reactive oxygen species and autophagy, the researchers set out to explore the link between the two. They used a known chemical that inhibits the generation of reactive oxygen species and then treated the cancer cells with the extract. "Cells where the ROS generation is inhibited showed negligible cell death due to reduced autophagy" says Appidi. "This helped confirm the role of reactive oxygen species in causing cell death."

Similarly, the researchers used an inhibitor to prevent autophagy and treated the cells with the extract. "We saw significant reduction in

cell death in the presence of the extract when autophagy was inhibited. This helped confirm the role of autophagy in causing death of cancer cells," says Pemmaraju. "These two experiments helped confirm that the cell deaths that occurred could be due to ROS-mediated autophagy."

The efficacy of the nanoparticles containing the plant extract and dye was tested in mouse model with breast cancer. The tumour volume reduced significantly when treated with the extract along with photothermal therapy compared with controls and cells treated with the extract alone. "But the nanoparticles had no adverse effect on the body weight of mice, indicating the biocompatibility of the nanoparticles," says Pemmaraju.

Ramanujan's legacy used in signal processing, black hole physics

Due to the remarkable originality and power of Ramanujan's genius, the ideas he created a century ago are now finding applications in diverse contexts

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

There is no question about the fact that mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan has left behind a rich legacy of problems in pure mathematics. What is surprising is that his mathematics, done over a hundred years ago, finds applications today in areas other than pure mathematics, which were not even established during his time (22 December 1887 - 26 April 1920). Two among these are signal processing and black hole physics.

Signal processing

Examples of signals that are processed digitally include obvious ones like speech and music to more research-oriented ones such as DNA and protein sequences. These all have certain patterns that repeat over and over again and are called periodic patterns. In reality, complex repeating patterns may need to be identified as they bear significance to health conditions. So in sig-

nal processing, one thing we are interested in is extracting and identifying such periodic information.

The mathematical operation of identifying and separating the periodic portion is much like using a sieve to separate particles of different sizes. Some of the best known methods to extract periodic components in signals involve Fourier analysis. Using Ramanujan Sums is much less known.

"A Ramanujan Sum is a sequence like $c(1)$, $c(2)$, $c(3)$... This sequence repeats periodically... It was thought by a number of authors before me to be useful in identifying periodic components in signals, much the same as sines and cosines are used in Fourier analysis," says P.P. Vaidyanathan who has developed these ideas over the last decade. He is the Kiyo and Eiko Tomiyasu Professor of Electrical Engineering at the California Institute of Technology, U.S.

Prof. Vaidyanathan came across this work in an inter-



Still relevant: Srinivasa Ramanujan's mathematics now finds applications in areas not known during his lifetime. • M. SRINATH

esting process that illustrates the role of friendly connections in the development of science. Several years ago, mathematicians H. Gopalakrishna Gadiyar and R. Padma, from VIT, Vellore, were studying the twin prime problem when they observed that some arithmetical function which captures the properties of the primes should have a Ramanujan-Fourier Series.

They sent their paper to Bhaskar Ramamurthi, Director of IIT Madras, who in

turn forwarded the paper to Prof. Vaidyanathan, a friend from his graduate days. Intrigued by the Ramanujan Sum mentioned in the paper, Prof. Vaidyanathan delved deep into it and developed the concept of "Ramanujan subspaces".

These ideas were further developed by his doctoral student Srikanth Tenneti who showed that using these gave a method that worked better than Fourier analysis when the region of periodicity is short. "A number of ex-

tensions using two- and high-dimensional generalisations for images and video, and extensions for non-integer (non-whole number) periods," are on the cards according to Prof. Vaidyanathan.

Partitions of a number

Ramanujan was famously interested in the number of ways one can partition an integer (a whole number). For instance 3 can be written as 1+1+1 or 2+1. As the number to be partitioned gets larger and larger, the number of ways to partition it becomes difficult to compute. The seemingly simple mathematical calculation is related to a very sophisticated method to

reveal the properties of black holes, as has been established by physicist Atish Dabholkar, who is now Director, International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy.

Ramanujan related this counting problem to some special functions called "modular forms". A modular form is symmetric, in the sense that it does not change, under a set of mathematical operations called "modular symmetry". "A geometric analogy for such a function would be a circle which does not change its shape under the 'circular symmetry' of rotations," explains Prof. Dabholkar. "Using this symmetry, Ramanujan and G.H. Hardy found a beautiful formula to compute the number of partitions of any integer."

Nearly modular

In his famous letter to Hardy in 1919, Ramanujan introduced the "mock theta functions" and observed that they were "almost modular". "A geometric analogy would

be a 'mock circle' that is nearly circular but with a small blip," explains Prof. Dabholkar. "It is not easy to explain precisely what a 'blip' is, similarly, 'almost modular' remained a mystery for close to a century," he adds.

Following the work of mathematician S. P. Zwegers in 2002, in which he introduced "mock modular forms," giving a precise definition of what "almost modular" means, Prof Dabholkar's paper with Sameer Murthy and Don Zagier made the connection between mock modular forms and Black Hole physics.

Black Hole entropy

A separate concept in physics, entropy, explains why heat flows from a hot body to a cold body and not the other way around. The results of Ramanujan and Hardy on partitions and his subsequent work on what are called mock theta functions have come to play an important role in understanding

the very quantum structure of spacetime - in particular the quantum entropy of a type of Black Hole in string theory, according to Prof. Dabholkar.

Stephen Hawking showed that when quantum effects are taken into account, a Black Hole is not quite black, it is rather like a hot piece of metal that is emitting Hawking radiation slowly. Thus one can associate thermodynamic quantities like temperature and entropy to a Black Hole.

"Mock modular forms are beginning to appear more and more in many areas of physics... Our work has also had unexpected applications in new topics in mathematics such as 'Umbral Moonshine', which are quite unrelated to black holes," adds Prof. Dabholkar.

"It is a tribute to the remarkable originality and power of Ramanujan's genius that the ideas he created a century ago are now finding applications in such diverse contexts," he says.

Death of a doctor who turned 'deserts into gardens'

Japan national Tetsu Nakamura, who had worked in Afghanistan for decades, was killed by gunmen

KABUL



Few other foreign nationals have perhaps received as much love and admiration from the Afghans as Tetsu Nakamura, a Japanese doctor who dedicated his life to improving healthcare, water availability and agriculture in Afghanistan over the last four decades. Affectionately referred to as Kaka Murad, the 73-year-old was killed, along with five others, by armed gunmen in the eastern city of Jalalabad early this month.

Nakamura's death evoked an outpour of grief from Afghans across the country, with candlelight vigils held in many cities and activists painting his murals on the walls of Kabul and Jalalabad city, the doctor's adopted hometown. Civil society activists

have demanded justice for the man they saw as one of their own. "It is a very innocent story of a man who worked for Afghanistan, his dedication was visible in the results he achieved in changing eastern Afghanistan, literally changing deserts to gardens, and perhaps that is why so many Afghans feel affected by his death," said Omaid Sharifi, founder of ArtLords, an arts collective that painted the murals.

Among Nakamura's achievements is the construction of a Japanese canal over the Kunar River that irrigated close to 40,000 acres of desert land in the eastern province. The Ramon Magsaysay awardee also undertook water projects, including the building of 11 dams and 1,500 wells that impacted over 6,50,000 Afghans living in Nangarhar province. He was awarded the Afghan citizenship in October to honour his contri-

butions to the conflict-ridden country. "Dr. Nakamura was a man who did a lot for the poor Afghans than some of our own leaders and politicians; that's why the entire nation was pained over his murder," said Idrees Stanikzai, a political activist of a movement called Youth Trend in Kabul.

Public mourning

Mr. Stanikzai's organisation was one among the many that organised public mourning and candle light vigil to honour the slain doctor. The response to calls for mass mourning of the Japanese national in Afghanistan was overwhelming, he said. "He knew and respected our culture and had a very clear message – he used to say that he hasn't come with tanks, guns and helicopters. He has come with love to serve Afghanistan," Mr. Stanikzai said.

Mr. Sharifi of ArtLords, too, experienced a strong sense of solidarity while painting the murals. "We did two murals, one in Jalalabad and one



in Kabul, in central parts of the cities. In both places, children, local vendors, people on the street came up to us and offered to help paint him and everyone was grieving. They all knew his face intimately," Mr. Sharifi recalled, adding that even

the local police, who usually tend to harass the artists when they are painting the street, were supportive.

The larger than life murals carry the portrait of the martyred hero along with words of Afghan poet Rumi that roughly translate as 'On this soil, we will plant seeds of love and empathy'. "Afghans feel connected to his man and want to honour a good soul. In some ways this connection tells you so much about Afghans and how we bond to those with genuine intentions," Mr. Sharifi said.

Many individuals and organisations have pressured the government to investigate the killing and bring the perpetrators to justice. "We have asked for justice and also to punish security officials responsible for this lapse," Mr. Stanikzai said, adding that many officials suspect Pakistani military and intelligence powers to have been behind this attack.

"The dams that Dr. Nakamura had proposed to build over Kunar River

could arrest water flow to Pakistan, which we believe could be the motive to kill him and hurt the projects," Mr. Stanikzai said. While the Taliban denied involvement in Nakamura's death, Afghan government has arrested six suspects.

However, as a country aggrieved by many tragedies, the recurring losses of compatriots and allies weigh heavily on Afghans. "When we started ArtLords, we wanted to bring smiles and encourage empathy in Afghanistan. We wanted to heal the wounds of the war through music, theatre and art. But lately, I feel we have had to paint the faces of dead heroes," Mr. Sharifi said. "Every single day, our people die, we are losing some very good souls, the best of humanity are lost to this cause." Indeed, the ongoing conflict has claimed thousands of lives, with UN agencies documenting over 8,200 civilian casualties this year alone. "I hope it stops. I hope I don't have to paint another deceased hero," Mr. Sharifi said.



Ruchi Kumar is a journalist based in Kabul

A film that stirred up a hornet's nest

No Dorai, which shows a woman surfer's struggles, has triggered a legal battle in Bangladesh

DHAKA



A film that portrays surfing as a symbolic way of women's empowerment in Bangladesh has stirred up mixed reactions for its unusual theme. *No Dorai* that translates as "Not Afraid" delves into an obscure community in the small beach town of Cox's Bazar – a community that does not let women venture out to sea and tends to force them to comply with its strict social norms. The setting is a microcosm of how men subjugate women by sheer brute force. Ayesha, the central character played by Sunerah Binte Kamal, faces violence in her own family – first from her brother, a man with a bruised ego, and then from her husband, who is three times her age.

Within the same impoverished community exists a group of young people with "crazy passion" for surfing. "I think they're ready to sacrifice their lives for surfing. And that was our inspiration," Taneem Rahman, who directed the film, said in an interview. Their indomitable passion inspired the film's producer Mahboob Rahman to go for the project to tell a story about the girl in a society where surfing is akin to a taboo.

Taneem Rahman insists that it is not a commercial film; it's a film that has a mass appeal. The film deals with women's rights as a quiet, subtle theme, but Mr. Rahman refuses to view it as part of a campaign or a movement in Bangladesh, a country that faces allegations of disregarding human rights.

But the film fell out with a group of people. Supreme Court lawyer Huzatul Islam served a legal notice on



the filmmakers and filed a petition with the High Court, demanding that authorities revoke the censor certificate of the film in Bangladesh, where it is unusual for women to swim in public. The court, in a ruling on December 10, ordered the government

to explain in four weeks why the censor board's approval should not be deemed 'illegal'. Mr. Rahman said the producer and his legal team would fight the court battle.

The filmmakers chose relatively unknown actors for the project, which was both risky and rewarding at the same time. They wanted to pull the characters in the story from obscurity through storytelling and ignite conversations about the community they are bound to live in and their daily struggle to go beyond, not about the actors.

Central symbol

As the story unfolds, the audience sees the presence of Ayesha dominating the plots as the central symbol. A beach-town teenager is trapped in the strict social code imposed mostly by men and followed silently by women. Her life is briefly upended by a failed marriage but she is determined to follow her passion. The sea, spectacularly captured by cinematographers, appears to stand

for her life itself: it is sometimes calm with its vast blue expanse of water and sometimes deadly with its raging waves.

"I think we've made the core message clear through the film. About 90% of people didn't know surfing existed there. But it's not documentation of surfing," Mr. Rahman said. Social restrictions and the perpetual human struggle to overcome them are at the heart of the story.

In broader terms, the film revolves around two kinds of people in the community: one group consisting of both men and women silently adhering to a set of social barriers handed down from generation to generation and the other group seeking to break them. The characterisation of Ayesha's father, a nameless man, is heartwarming. The man is often reprimanded by his wife for sleeping away most of the day. He does not express his love for his daughter, but quietly leaves open the door to the room she is locked up in. He fails to protect Ayesha from re-

lentless torture but cries uncontrollably in his bed after seeing his daughter being brutalised by his son, Liyakat, for walking out on her husband.

Ayesha's best friend Sohel, played by Sariful Razz, is a blend of four real surfers in Cox's Bazar. The two characters play out as a big contrast to each other. Surfing brings newfound fame to Sohel, who represents men's world, but it brings miseries to Ayesha. Like other youngsters, Ayesha and Sohel are trained by Amir, a self-made and resolute surfer played by Sayed Babu. Amir is the key driver of surfing enthusiasm that gets attention from international documentary filmmakers and raises the prospects of money generating jealousy, squabbles and power tussles on the seashores.

Ayesha is a shadow of Nasima Akter, who was featured in California-based Heather Kessinger's documentary as Bangladesh's first woman surfer. The film is a ray of hope for many in Bangladesh.



Arun Devnath is a journalist based in Dhaka

Making returning citizens feel at home

Tamil politicians, activists are asking govt. to make it easy for refugees to return to Sri Lanka

COLOMBO



In the widespread resistance to the recently-passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act, many have repeatedly highlighted the omission of Sri Lankans among persecuted communities in the neighbourhood who now qualify for Indian citizenship, for the first time based on their religion.

Nearly 1,00,000 Sri Lankan Tamils live in India, mostly in refugee camps across Tamil Nadu. They fled a civil war in their homeland – Sri Lanka's north and east – that spanned over 30 years, brutally destroying life and property. Over the years, some Sri Lankan Tamils have returned from India.

As the pace of return accelerated after the war ended in 2009, nearly

16,000 are back home now.

With the spotlight falling on the community, many in India have challenged the Centre on why Sri Lankan refugees don't qualify. Sri Lanka allows its people to hold dual citizenship, but India doesn't. Consequently, if a Sri Lankan seeks Indian citizenship, she has to necessarily forego her Sri Lankan citizenship. There is no exhaustive data on what the Sri Lankans living in India want in these circumstances.

Sri Lankan Tamil political leaders and others working with returnees say it's time that Sri Lanka removed all the hurdles to their smooth return, should they wish to get back.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main political grouping representing Tamils in Sri Lanka's war-hit north and east, has said it would like to see Sri Lankan Tamils return. "I don't wish to comment on

what laws must be enacted in India. Our own position on Sri Lankan refugees living in India is that they must return to their country," TNA spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran told media in Jaffna recently. "If they choose to live there [in India], they could as per international law, and if Indian law accommodates that position. But if you ask what the TNA's position is, it is that they should come back. They are our people, who were forced to flee the country because of the situation here."

Right to return

When a journalist asked him if the TNA's position was driven by a desire to expand its vote bank, Mr. Sumanthiran said: "This is not about our vote bank at all. This is about their fundamental right to return, they are people of this soil."

The Jaffna legislator added the Sri Lankan government must make all arrangements for their smooth return, underscoring housing and livelihoods for those returning. "We ad-

mit that there are inadequacies in the process. Even the government we backed didn't fully implement all the measures needed, despite our persistent requests. It must be done now." A decade after the civil war, more people – "about 60-70%" – appear inclined to return, but much of that depends on how easy the process can be made, according to Sinnathambay Sooriyakumari, president of Organisation for Elnakai Refugees' Rehabilitation – Ceylon.

In her view, the Sri Lankan government needs to create an apex body to look into the resettlement of returnees, and to streamline paperwork. "At the moment, we have to coordinate with so many ministries – from education, health, foreign affairs, public administration to get their documents in order," she explained. For children of Sri Lankans born in India, applying for a National Identity Card in Sri Lanka is the chief task, as it is necessary for every other application, including citizenship. "There are deadlines and penalties



involved, so the process is pretty tedious," she said.

Converting education certificates, marriage registration and obtaining formal citizenship documents are only part of the logistical hassle, which also includes physically tra-

velling here with assets and belongings accumulated over decades.

Basic needs such as food and shelter are very real, everyday concerns that returnees confront. Some of their family homes may have been destroyed in the war, or their ancestral land may be under military occupation. There are no jobs, or thriving business waiting for young returnees. "But at least it's home," she noted. "They say this in Tamil... even if a rat is in a net, it makes a difference when it's the rat's own net."

Addressing Colombo-based foreign correspondents recently, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said he did not wish to comment on the new Act in India. Asked if he thought the Sri Lankans living in India must come back, he said "yes." Mr. Rajapaksa has repeatedly emphasised development over power devolution for Sri Lanka's war-affected Tamil community. Whether his version of development speaks to locals and allures those hoping to return will be clear in the next five years.



Meera Srinivasan is The Hindu's Colombo correspondent

A race to keep China's food delivery business bustling

A big downside to the success story lies in the risk delivery executives take to meet deadlines

BEIJING



Ahead of noon on any working day, most white collar Chinese go through elaborate pre-lunch rituals. Departing from their work stations and computer screens, some head to swanky ground floor kiosks that usually are a staple of a typical office complex in any metro in China, be it Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen or hundreds of other cities that fall in the tier-2 domain.

Bubble tea, for instance, is a big hit among those who are in need of a pre-lunch stretch-out. Young women usually queue up in larger numbers for the brew, which took root in Taiwan in the 1980s. Apart from a tea with a strong "body," such as Assam tea, and liberal doses of milk, Bubble

tea fans love the "pearls" – toppings such as chewy tapioca balls, along with sago seeds, or various kinds of fruit jellies, cream and an array of flavourings that go with it.

But many prefer to order food and drinks from their indoor comfort zones. Lulkin coffee, a Chinese brand, now in fierce competition with Starbucks, is pushing back against its better known rival, by focusing on online delivery.

Tight deadlines

Unsurprisingly, the infusion of lunchtime hunger and online ordering is shifting tectonic plates elsewhere as well. By afternoon, food delivery personnel recklessly race along the busy streets to beat the clock to reach out to their demanding consumers. In the fiercely competent buyers' market, failure to do so can be harsh on their wallets.



The online food delivery system has to conform to insanely tight deadlines. It is generally a thumb rule that deliveries within a 3-km radius must be completed in about half-an-hour, including cooking time. That usually puts enormous pressure on

the drivers, who swarm the streets on their e-bikes – many sometimes meeting with serious accidents en route.

"I believe 80% of these accidents were caused by insufficient delivery time," says Yu Yong, a delivery man, as quoted in the *Nikkei Asian Review*. "Only those who drive fast enough can make it."

Some companies are known to fine drivers who fail to deliver on time, apart from paying 50 yuan (₹500) less, in case a customer decides to complain.

Attuned to a pervasive digital culture, China's tech savvy generation-next is naturally drawn to ordering online. Orders are routed through an app, which lists restaurants close to the user's location.

Clicking on the restaurant's icon reveals the menu. The order is completed through online payments, through platforms such as WeChat or Alipay.

Customers can also use the app to track the location of the delivery

man. Rating the food quality and service, which goes into an ever-expanding database of the company, is also routine.

The food delivery boom has pitted two titans in China's digital space – the Shenzhen-based Tencent Holdings, led by Pony Ma, and the Alibaba Group Holding, the brainchild of Jack Ma, the former company head, who championed e-commerce in China, against each other. Tencent backs the food delivery giant Meituan Dianping, while Alibaba steels its rival Ele.me.

The two big boys of the Internet have high stakes in the digital culinary business. Last year, China's food delivery transactions totalled a hefty 500 billion yuan (\$71 billion), according to investment bank Bernstein. By 2023, the market is expected to rise three times.

Both rivals also generate massive employment. Together, they employ at least 5.7 million delivery personnel, according to the *Nikkei Asian Review*.

For now, Meituan is the undisputed leader, with a 52% market share in the first half of this year, while Ele.me was behind with 43.9%, according to a market research firm.

But there is also a big downside to their success, evident in risks the drivers take to meet the exceptionally demanding delivery deadlines. Shanghai saw an average of two accidents involving delivery personnel every day in the first half of 2019, government data show.

The plight of the drivers grabbed headlines and critical comments after the two market leaders dispatched drivers in August in Shanghai amid Typhoon Lekima, the fifth-largest cyclone in Chinese history to hit the country's commercial capital.

"Even airlines and train operators have to suspend their services during typhoons due to safety considerations. How can food delivery drivers withstand the threat of extreme weather?" noted an article in the state-owned *Guangming Daily*.



Atul Aneja is The Hindu's Beijing correspondent

With series on the line, India ready to go for the jugular

West Indies has the firepower to make a match of it as seen in recent outings

WI IN INDIA

Y.B. SARANGI
CUTTACK
India's resilience, evident from its confident fightbacks in the T20I series against Bangladesh and the West Indies, will hold it in good stead in the third and final One-Day International against the Caribbeans at the Barabati Stadium here on Sunday.

With the series evenly poised at 1-1, the decider may turn Barabati into a pressure cooker.

Having 'been there, done that', the Indians know their job well.

High-stakes players

"Even the last match was a do-or-die (affair) for us with the series on the line. We will play with a similar mindset. When the stakes are high, I feel all the players pull up the socks, put up their hands," said middle-order batsman Shreyas Iyer, designated to speak for the team here on Saturday.

Nearly the whole squad – barring Rohit Sharma, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mohammed Shami and K.L. Rahul – turning up for an optional practice session on Saturday spoke of the hosts' intent.

The dew factor comes into play here as early as 5 p.m.,



Toughening up: The West Indies will have to produce a better all-round show to break India's hegemony at home. •K. R. DEEPAK

the Indians are ready for the challenge, though.

"I think it's going to be really fast in the second innings and the dew plays a massive role. We have played here before, against Sri Lanka, and in the evening there was dew in the outfield. The fielding coach literally made it wet and we took catches. So we are actually prepared.

However bad the circumstances would be, we are ready for it," said Shreyas.

Belligerence

Rohit and Rahul's top-order belligerence and Shreyas and Rishabh Pant's follow-up act have helped India.

It will assume importance again as the Virat Kohli-led side will look to out-bat the

'Men in Maroon'.

Captain Kohli's form in this series – he has scored 4 and 0 – and track record on this ground – a total of 34 runs in three ODIs and one T20I – may not be great, but the champion batsman, who spent considerable time in the nets on Saturday, has the ability to break the shackles any time.



Form is temporary: India captain Virat Kohli will be looking to put behind him the poor run in this series in the decider on Sunday. •K. R. DEEPAK

Pacer Mohammed Shami and hat-trick man Kuldeep Yadav will be keen to continue their good work as India hopes to win its 10th straight bilateral series over Windies.

Navdeep Saini, who replaced Deepak Chahar, will hope to make his ODI debut.

So far, the West Indians have given a good account of themselves and will need to

come up with a sound all-round performance to get a first series win over the Men in Blue since 2006.

The Visakhapatnam match slipped out of the visitors' hands in the death overs as the Indians' fiery strokeplay made possible a stiff target.

With dangerous batsmen like Shai Hope, Shimron Het-

myer and Kieron Pollard and effective bowlers like Sheldon Cottrell and Keemo Paul in its ranks, West Indies has the wherewithal to stop India at home, a feat not achieved since 2002-03.

The Caribbeans must improve their fielding, especially catching, to complement the other two departments of the game.

It will be interesting to see how the fresh-looking pitch, which is expected to produce another run glut, behaves as the ground is being used for the first time for a cricket match after being hit by Cyclone Fani in May.

Eye on floodlights

The floodlights, some of which have been changed after being damaged in the cyclone, will be under scrutiny as well. The organisers are, however, confident the nearly 38,000 fans, for an international match here after two years, will not be disappointed.

The teams (from):

India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, K.L. Rahul, Rishabh Pant (wk), Kedar Jadhav, Manish Pandey, Shreyas Iyer, Mayank Agarwal, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Shardul Thakur and Navdeep Saini.

West Indies: Kieron Pollard (Capt.), Sunil Ambris, Shai Hope (wk), Khary Pierre, Roston Chase, Alzarri Joseph, Sheldon Cottrell, Brandon King, Shimron Hetmyer, Nicholas Pooran, Evin Lewis, Romario Shepherd, Jason Holder, Keemo Paul and Hayden Walsh Jr.

Umpires: Shaun George and Nitin Menon; **TV Umpire:** Rod Tucker; **Fourth umpire:** Anil Choudhary; **Match Referee:** David Boon.

Match starts at 1.30 p.m.

Shreyas — the team man

Ready to bat according to the demands of the situation

Y.B. SARANGI
CUTTACK
With experience, Shreyas Iyer is maturing into a responsible middle-order batsman and his knocks of 70 and 53 against the West Indies in the ongoing ODI series bear witness to that.

On the eve of the third and final ODI between the two countries at the Barabati Stadium here, the 25-year-old Mumbai batsman said he was enjoying his new role.

Realisation

"I think that (restraint) comes with maturity and responsibility. I was a flamboyant player when I started playing First Class cricket. I used to just back my instincts and go with the flow.

"Lately, I have realised that when you play at the highest level, you have to play according to what the team demands. And that's what I did the other day.

"The team didn't expect me to play big shots at that time; we needed a big partnership. I'm really happy about what I did in the first



Cool head: Shreyas Iyer says he has shed his flamboyance in the interests of the team. •BISWARANJAN ROUT

match," he said.

Shreyas is ready to bat at any position. "I batted at No. 5 in the previous ODI. I'm flexible that way. It's just that you got to play according to the situation and what the team demands. I know that I can play in both flows."

Asked whether he had picked up any good habits from Ricky Ponting, the Delhi Capitals captain said even though the Indian Premier League was a different format he had noticed a few

positives in the former Australia skipper's approach.

Points from Ponting

"Ponting is a very positive guy. He backs every player and that's the best quality about him. He treats everybody equally, so he's got an amazing nature as coach and his man management skill is outstanding."

Shreyas added India captain Virat Kohli's form in the series was not a concern at all.

Team-building is primary concern: Simmons

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CUTTACK
West Indies coach Phil Simmons said his team's focus in the match here on Sunday would be on the team-building process that has been set in motion.

"We are trying to build something, and the match tomorrow does not influence the direction in which we are going. All the guys know even though we play our best, we may not win," said Simmons on Saturday.

Simmons praised the current batch of West Indian pacers, who were trying to adapt to different situations.

"It has been a great effort from them because it is a case of different environment, different pitches, you have to bowl differently," he said.

Million-dollar buy

Simmons was happy for Sheldon Cottrell, who was bought by IPL side Kings XI Punjab for ₹8.5 crore.

"Definitely, it will be life-changing for anyone, because he is getting a million dollars. But, I don't think it is career-changing, because he knows where he is at with the West Indies in white-ball cricket," said Simmons.



Morale-booster: Sheldon Cottrell, seen with Keemo Paul, left, will be on a high given the price he commanded at the IPL auction. •K. R. DEEPAK

Super excited to join CSK: Curran

'Great opportunity to pick the brains of Dhoni and Fleming'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI

England all-rounder Sam Curran is looking at his entry into the Chennai Super Kings setup as an "opportunity to pick the brains" of seasoned captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and coach Stephen Fleming.

The 21-year-old Curran was the most expensive English player in the IPL auction at ₹5.5 crore, bought after an intense bidding war between Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals.

"Can't wait to come to Chennai and meet all my new teammates, playing under M.S. Dhoni our captain and our coach Stephen Fleming. It's obviously going to be a great opportunity for me to pick their brains and, hopefully, we can bring the trophy home to Chennai," Curran said in a video uploaded by his new franchise.

Curran had a fairly successful stint at Kings XI Punjab in the last edition, including a hat-trick.

He is now looking forward



Looking ahead: Sam Curran was bought by Super Kings after an intense bidding war with Delhi Capitals. •REUTERS

to turn out for three-time winner CSK.

"Super excited to be joining the Chennai Super Kings for next season of IPL. A massive thank you to the coach, management staff.

"Just want to say I can't wait to play in front of the

home fans in Chennai. I felt some amazing things, I was lucky enough to play last year against Chennai, and to play in front of the home fans this year is going to be really special. Hopefully, we can put in some great performances for the fans."

Abid, Masood on song



Two to tango: Abid Ali, right, and Shan Masood put on 278 for the opening wicket. •AFP

SL IN PAKISTAN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KARACHI
Abid Ali and Shan Masood became only the third opening pair for Pakistan to hit centuries in the same innings as Pakistan turned the tables on Sri Lanka in the second Test on Saturday.

Abid hit 174 for his second hundred in as many Tests – becoming the first Pakistan and ninth batsman overall to

score two centuries in his first two Tests.

At stumps on the third day, Pakistan was in a strong position at 395 for two, having an overall lead of 315 after conceding an 80-run lead in the first innings.

Pakistan added 338 runs after resuming at 57 for no loss on a National stadium pitch which dried up to help batting. Masood blasted 135, his second century in his 19th Test.

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan — 1st innings: 191.
Sri Lanka — 1st innings: 271.
Pakistan — 2nd innings: Shan Masood c Oshada b Kumara 135, Abid Ali lbw b Kumara 174, Azhar Ali (batting) 57, Babar Azam (batting) 22; Extras: (lb-5, w-2); 7; Total (for two wkts. in 103 overs): 395.
Fall of wickets: 1-278, 2-355.
Sri Lanka bowling: Fernando 21-2-84-0, Kumara 22-5-88-2, Embuldeniya 36-2-136-0, Perera 17-1-63-0, de Silva 7-0-19-0.

Everton, Arsenal play out a dull draw

Barcelona and Leipzig top their leagues for Christmas

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LIVERPOOL
Carlo Ancelotti and Mikel Arteta got a glimpse of the problems that lie ahead in their new jobs as they watched Everton and Arsenal share a dreadful 0-0 draw, while Southampton beat Aston Villa 3-1 in Saturday's Premier League relegation showdown.

Former Napoli boss Ancelotti was confirmed as Everton's new manager on the

morning of the match, 24 hours after Arteta left his role as Manchester City assistant coach to take charge of Arsenal.

A point leaves Arsenal 11th while Everton moves up to 15th, but only four points clear of the relegation zone.

Despite having two goals ruled out after VAR reviews, Sheffield United climbed to within one point of the top four as Oli McBurnie's 23rd minute strike clinched a 1-0 win at Brighton.

Barcelona goes into the

brief Spanish winter break on top of La Liga after a glittering show from Lionel Messi helped the defending champion beat Alaves 4-1 on Saturday.

Real Madrid can draw level top on 39 points but behind on goal difference if it wins at home to Atletico Bilbao on Sunday. Seville is assured third place over Christmas on 34 points after its 2-0 win in Mallorca.

RB Leipzig will go into the Bundesliga winter break in first place after coming from

behind to claim a 3-1 home win against Augsburg on Saturday.

The results: Premier League: Everton 0 drew with Arsenal 0; Aston Villa 1 (Grealish 75) lost to Southampton 3 (Ings 21, 51, Stephens 31); Bournemouth 0 lost to Burnley 1 (Rodriguez 89); Brighton 0 lost to Sheffield United 1 (McBurnie 23); Newcastle 1 (Almiron 83) bt Crystal Palace 0.

La Liga: Mallorca 0 lost to Sevilla 2 (Silva 20, Banega 63-pen); Barcelona 4 (Griezmann 14, Vidal 45, Messi 69, Suarez 75-pen) bt Alaves 1 (Pons 56).

Serie A: Udinese 2 (De Paul 39, Fofana 85) bt Cagliari 1 (Joao Pedro 84).

Bundesliga: Cologne 1 (Cordoba 39) bt Werder Bremen 0; Mainz 0 lost to Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Alario 90+3); Schalke 2 (Serdar 27, Kutucu 80) bt Freiburg 2 (Peterson 54-pen, Grifo 67-pen); Bayern Munich 2 (Zirkzee 86, Gnabry 89) bt Wolfsburg 0; RB Leipzig 3 (Laimer 68, Schick 80, Poulsen 89) bt Augsburg 1 (Niederlechner 8).

Friday: La Liga: Eibar 3 (Enrich 21, Kike 26, Inui 87) bt Granada 0.

Serie A: Fiorentina 1 (Badelj 34) lost to Roma 4 (Dzeko 19, Kolarov 21, Pellegrini 73, Zaniolo 88).

Bundesliga: Hoffenheim 2 (Adamyani 79, Kramaric 87) bt Borussia Dortmund 1 (Gotze 17).



Spectacular: Arturo Vidal, who scored Barcelona's second, goes aerial. •GETTY IMAGES

The legend is here!



Grand opening: Athletics superstar Usain Bolt at the inauguration of the National Stadium, venue for the upcoming 2020 Olympics, in Tokyo on Saturday. •AFP

TV PICKS

NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 7 a.m.
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka: 2nd Test, Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.
India vs West Indies: 3rd ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.
I-League: D Sport, 2 p.m.
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m., & 1.30 a.m. (Monday)
Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m. & 10 p.m.
ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Bundesliga: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 8 p.m. & 10 p.m.

IN BRIEF


Porzingis leads Mavericks' rout of 76ers

WASHINGTON
 Injury-hit Dallas, powered by Kristaps Porzingis, routed Philadelphia 76ers 117-98 in the NBA on Friday. Latvian forward Porzingis scored 22 points and grabbed a career-high 18 rebounds.
Important results: Indiana Pacers 119 bt Sacramento Kings 105; Boston Celtics 114 bt Detroit Pistons 93; Toronto Raptors 122 bt Washington Wizards 118. AFP

Railways women begin in style

LUDHIANA
 Railways opened its defence of the women's title with a 141-51 victory over Maharashtra in the 70th National basketball championship.
The results: Men: Services 82 (Joginder Singh 32, Nikhil Kumar 18) bt Kerala 70 (Sejin Mathew 19, Basil Philip 18, Sugeethanath 11).
Women: Kerala 74 (P.S. Jeena 32, P.G. Anjana 16, Stephy Nixon 13) bt Karnataka 56 (Varsha 18, Vinaya 12).
 Railways 141 (Sruti Aravind 21, Madhu Kumari 15, R. Ramya 14, Poonam Chaturvedi 12) bt Maharashtra 51 (Neha Sahu 14).

Shahbaaz & Zayed out

DOHA
 India's Shahbaaz Khan and Mousa Shahan Zayed of Qatar lost 7-5, 6-4 to second seeds Daniel Kossek and Maciej Smola of Poland in the doubles quarterfinals of the \$15,000 ITF men's Futures tennis tournament here.

Banthia guides Crusaders home

Supersmashers defeat Avengers in the other match of the day

PRO TENNIS LEAGUE

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
 NEW DELHI

Young Siddhant Banthia was able to establish his strong game against some of the best players in the country as he guided DMG Delhi Crusaders to a 29-25 victory over Haryana Sapphires in the Pro Tennis League here on Saturday.

The 19-year-old Banthia, who has played the junior Grand Slams, impressed with his keen anticipation, quick movement and dynamic volleying as he stood out in two doubles matches that tilted the balance in favour of the Delhi team.

Banthia combined remarkably well with the gutsy Mahak Jain to win the mixed doubles match 6-4 against Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan and Sowjanya Bavisetti.

A thriller

Later, he combined with Dalwinder Singh to survive a couple of match points against Jeevan and Vijay Sundar Prashanth to clinch a thriller in the tie-break.

Thereafter, Tushar Jagota and Ajay Malik outplayed Ar-



That's the way! Siddhant Banthia and Mahak Jain turned the tide in favour of Delhi Crusaders against Haryana Sapphires. • KAMESH SRINIVASAN

jun Uppal and Garvit Gupta 6-1 to put Delhi in a strong position.

Ramkumar in good form
 In the other match of the day,

Ramkumar Ramanathan was in robust form as he blanked Sidharth Rawat in singles and won the doubles 6-3 with Arjun Kadhe, against Niki Poonacha and Sidharth Ra-

wat. Earlier, Daria Mishina of Russia had won her singles in the tie-break against Riya Bhatia, after Ashish Sinha had lost the opening match to Nishant Dabas.

Mishina also won her mixed doubles 6-1 with Arjun, against Riya and Niki, which paved the way for a comprehensive 29-21 victory for Proveri Supersmashers against ARA Avengers.

Banthia and Ramkumar were adjudged the 'best players' of the two ties.

The results (league): DMG Delhi Crusaders bt Haryana Sapphires 29-25 (Kabir Hans bt Uddayvir Singh 6-3; Mahak Jain lost to Sowjanya Bavisetti 3-6; Mahak & Siddhant Banthia bt Sowjanya & Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan 6-4; Dalwinder Singh lost to Vijay Sundar Prashanth 2-6; Dalwinder & Banthia bt Vijay Sundar & Jeevan 6-5(4); Tushar Jagota & Ajay Malik bt Arjun Uppal & Garvit Gupta 6-1).

Proveri Supersmashers bt ARA Avengers 29-21 (Ashish Sinha lost to Nishant Dabas 2-6; Daria Mishina bt Riya Bhatia 6-5(5); Mishina & Arjun Kadhe bt Riya Bhatia & Niki Poonacha 6-1; Ramkumar Ramanathan bt Sidharth Rawat 6-0; Ramkumar & Arjun bt Niki & Sidharth 6-3; Ashish Khanna & Karan Srivastav lost to Saurabh Singh & Suvarth Mall 3-6).

Madras HC allows AICF meeting

Court dismisses president Raja's plea

EXCLUSIVE

RAKESH RAO
 NEW DELHI

The Central Council meeting of the crisis-ridden All India Chess Federation (AICF) will be held, as notified, on Sunday after the Madras High Court dismissed a plea from AICF president P.R. Venketrama Raja seeking an ad-interim injunction restraining secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan from convening the meeting.

As things stand, the fourth Central Council meeting of the year, as stipulated by the AICF constitution, will be held at Hotel Bristol at 11 a.m. at Gurugram on Sunday.

The court also dismissed Raja's plea to disallow "such an invalid meeting."

Belatedly filed

It observed that the "contention that the applicant has filed this application belatedly and, in fact, only two days before the meeting is true," and ruled, "In these facts and circumstances, I am of the view that the said meeting may be proceed-

ed."

Though a setback for Raja, the order also brought some cheer to his camp. The court allowed the meeting on certain conditions. It ruled that, "Agenda item No. 4 namely, the Bengal Chess Association Affairs in respect of which discussions may take place, but no decision should be recorded."

"As regards all other items on the agenda, the decision or resolutions at such meeting shall not be implemented until further notice."

The court listed the matter for further hearing on January 3, 2020. In this case, the AICF president has named the secretary as the first respondent and AICF as the second respondent.

Meanwhile, the Bengal Chess Association matter, pertaining to alleged financial irregularities, forms the agenda of the General Body Meeting scheduled on December 28 in Bhopal.

It may be recalled that the Urgent General Body Meeting held on December 14 in Chennai, scheduled the election for February 10.

BFI picks Nikhat as fourth boxer for trials

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 CUTTACK

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Saturday selected Nikhat Zareen as the fourth boxer for the women's 51kg selection trials for the Olympics qualifier.

There was speculation regarding the selection of the fourth boxer after Nikhat expressed concerns over the process of trials to be held in Delhi on December 27 and 28.

According to the BFI rules, World championships participant, finalist in National championships and another boxer selected by the selectors and coaches will participate in the trials for each Olympics weight.

The boxers for trials:
51kg: M.C. Mary Kom, Jyoti Gulia, Ritu Grewal and Nikhat Zareen.
57kg: Sonia, Sakshi, Manisha, Sonia Lather.
60kg: L. Sarita Devi, Simranjit Kaur, Pavitra and Sashi Chopra.
69kg: Lovlina Borgohain, Lalita, Meena Rani, Anjali.
75kg: Pooja Rani, Saweety Boora, Nupur, K.A. Indrara.

Prince Valiant has the edge

HYDERABAD: Prince Valiant has an edge over his rivals in the Speaker's Cup (1,600m), the feature event of the races to be held here on Sunday (Dec. 22).

1. SOLITAIRE PLATE (1,200m), maiden 2-y-o colt & geldings only (Cat. II), 1.10 p.m.: 1. Chuckit (7) Rafique Sk. 55, 2. Coastal Storm (1) Kuldeep Singh 55, 3. Kapell Bruke (6) Akshay Kumar 55, 4. Lightning Pearl (8) Ajeeth Kumar 55, 5. One For All (2) Ajit Singh 55, 6. Shanu Shanu (4) Aneel 55, 7. Team Player (5) Nakhat Singh 55 and 8. Whiskey Martini (3) Rohit Kumar 55.

1. KAPPELL BRUKE, 2. LIGHTNING PEARL, 3. TEAM PLAYER

2. OLYMPIC FLAME PLATE (Div. II), (1,100m), 3-y-o & over, rated upto 25 (Cat. III), 1.40: 1. Coconut Coast (2) Surya Prakash 62, 2. Negress Princess (8) Gaddam 62, 3. Vijays Maestro (1) Gopal Singh 62, 4. Ashwa Yudh Vijeta (3) N. Rawal 61.5, 5. Bom-bastic (7) Kuldeep Singh 60.5, 6. Blazing Speed (6) Rohit Kumar 58, 7. Country's Pet (5) Santosh Raj 58 and 8. Golden Adara (4) Afroz Khan 50.

1. COCONUT COAST, 2. BLAZING SPEED, 3. NEGRESS PRINCESS

3. SARDAR MOHAN SINGH BAGGA MEMORIAL CUP (Div. II), (1,400m), 3-y-o & over, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II), 2.15: 1. Midnight Dream (4) Rohit Kumar 60, 2. Galloping Gangster (7) Ashhad Asbar

59, 3. Reno Star (3) Akshay Kumar 58, 4. Platinum Claasz (1) Aneel 55.5, 5. Flamboyant Lady (2) Nakhat Singh 55, 6. Explosive (5) Jitendra Singh 54.5, 7. Flag Of Honour (8) I. Chisty 54.5 and 8. Rajneeti (6) Irvan Singh 54.5.

1. GALLOPING GANGSTER, 2. FLAMBOYANT LADY, 3. MIDNIGHT DREAM

4. SARDAR MOHAN SINGH BAGGA MEMORIAL CUP (Div. I), (1,400m), 3-y-o & over, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II), 2.45: 1. Marinetti (6) Akshay Kumar 60, 2. Miss Marvellous (8) Afroz Khan 58, 3. Blazer (7) Ashhad Asbar 57, 4. Ayur Shakti (2) Irvan Singh 53.5, 5. Sporting Smile (3) Jitendra Singh 53.5, 6. Angel Tesoro (4) B.R. Kumar 52.5, 7. Royal Dynamite (5) Ajit Singh 52.5 and 8. The Special One (1) Abhay Singh 52.

1. MARINETTI, 2. MISS MARVELLOUS, 3. AYUR SHAKTI

5. CYNDY PLATE (Div. I), (1,600m), 3-y-o & over, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 3.15: 1. Unstoppable (1) Deepak Singh 60, 2. Maxwell (7) Kuldeep Singh 59, 3. Tapatio (3) A.A. Vikrant 58, 4. Sterling King (10) G. Nareish 57, 5. Original Temptress (9) Koushik 56, 6. Barbosella (2) Surya Prakash 55.5, 7. Red River (8) Jitendra Singh 54.5, 8. Halo's Princess (4) Gaddam 53.5, 9. Dazzling King (5) Akshay Kumar 53 and 10. Jo Malone (6) Afroz Khan 53.

1. BARBOSELLA, 2. UNSTOPPABLE, 3. JO MALONE

6. SPEAKER'S CUP (1,600m), 3-y-o & over, rated 60 to 85 (Cat. II), 3.45: 1. Ashwa Bahula (1) I. Chisty 60, 2. Mark My Word (12) Nakhat Singh 58.5, 3. Navadeep (4) Irvan Singh 58.5, 4. Yanga (7) B.R. Kumar 57.5, 5. Doroteo (6) Koushik 56, 6. Durango (1) Aneel 55, 7. Mr. Baahubali (2) Kuldeep Singh 55, 8. Havelock Cruise (8) Akshay Kumar 53.5, 9. Prince Valiant (10) Ajeeth Kumar 53.10.

Shaquille (3) A.A. Vikrant 53, 11. Seven Eleven (9) Gopal Singh 52.5 and 12. Exclusive Blue (5) Ashhad Asbar 51.

1. PRINCE VALIANT, 2. HAVELOCK CRUISE, 3. EXCLUSIVE BLUE

7. OLYMPIC FLAME PLATE (Div. I), (1,100m), 3-y-o & over, rated upto 25 (Cat. III), 4.15: 1. Agilis (1) Surya Prakash 62, 2. Dillon (2) Rohit Kumar 62, 3. Invasion (4) Koushik 62, 4. Yogya (3) Afroz Khan 62, 5. Vallee Ikon (9) A.A. Vikrant 61.5, 6. Sun Dancer (8) Akshay Kumar 59.5, 7. Brave Syera (6) Jitendra Singh 58.5, 8. Golden Faraska (5) N. Rawal 57 and 9. Lion Heart (7) G. Nareish 56.5.

1. BRAVE SYERA, 2. SUN DANCER, 3. AGILIS

Day's best: **MARINETTI**
 Double: **GALLOPING GANGSTER - PRINCE VALIANT**

Jkt: 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7; Mini Jkt: 4, 5, 6 & 7; Tr (II): 2, 3 & 4; (II): 5, 6 & 7; Tla: all races.

Flying Gill back in charge

Championship leader Shivram suffers a crash in opening stage

POPULAR RALLY

STAN RAYAN
 KOTTAYAM

He had a massive 24-point lead over his nearest challenger and Chetan Shivram could almost feel the national championship trophy that appeared to be his. But the season's overall leader had a horrible day in the 25th Popular Rally, the Champions Yacht Club FMSCI Indian National Rally Championship's final round, on Saturday.

Shivram, the winner of the last two rounds in Coimbatore and Bengaluru, suffered a massive crash in the opening special stage and could not complete even one of the day's eight stages. But if the season's last four rounds are any indication, Shivram could still walk away with a good finish in the final standings even if he



Pulling through: Gill bounced back strongly.

misses the starting line-up on Sunday.

Stunning drive
 Defending national champion Gaurav Gill, who was seventh in the table before this rally – came up with a stunning drive despite losing much time with gearbox problems to race to the lead after the opening day in the two-day rally.

"We had a major gearbox

issue on the sixth stage. We actually came on neutral all the way down from the mountain and literally pushed the car into the service. The mechanics did an awesome job but the delay for being late out of service brought us a 50-second penalty and we were trailing by 43 seconds over our next driver," said Gill (navigator Musa Sherif), who was driving for Team Mahindra

Adventure. "I drove flat out after that and we got back our 50-sec lead in only two stages. I knew that either I'm going to be first or I'm not going to finish. I had nothing to lose, so we thought might as well give it a push."

Gill felt the opening stage at Pinnakanad, which took off three cars, was the toughest and his car was often jumping and flying in the air. Gill (29 points from the last four rounds) has no chance of going past Shivram.

Hot contest

There was a hot contest between Younus Ilyas (Harish Gowda) and Dr. Bikku Babu (Milen George) behind Gill and the two took the second and third spots at the end of the opening day.

Amritrajit Ghosh (Ashwin Naik) dropped out midway with power steering issues.

Krishna comes to ATK's rescue

His equaliser in the final minute breaks Hyderabad hearts



Drilling home: Roy Krishna scores ATK's opener. • K.V.S. GIRI

ISL

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
 HYDERABAD

Roy Krishna's strike in the 90th minute denied Hyderabad FC full points and helped ATK share the honours after a 2-2 draw in their Hero-ISL contest here on Saturday.

In the first half, a dominant ATK took the lead in the 15th minute when Krishna converted a spot kick.

The penalty was strongly disputed by the hosts though the referee decided that the ball had deflected off defender Ashish Rai's hands. However, TV replays suggested that it had gone off the player's chest when he tackled the advancing midfielder Francisco Javier. It was ATK which played

better football as the speedy Krishna and forward Jobby Justin worked in tandem on the right flank with solid support from Javier.

Bobo strikes

However, Hyderabad FC fought back in the 39th minute. Nestor Gordillo, playing his first match of the season after coming back from suspension, was the architect.

Gordillo's curling left-footer was anticipated well by Bobo, who timed his leap to perfection and beat the two closely marking defenders Salam Singh and captain Pritap Kotla to slot home.

The goal drew a cheer from the home fans as the teams went into the break 1-1.

In the 85th minute, Bobo scored off a header, thanks to a lovely Marcelinho pass from the left-flank to give Hyderabad what looked like a match-winning lead.

However, New Zealander Krishna showed fine opportunism when he sprinted down the centre and, seeing Hyderabad custodian and captain Kamaljit Singh charge towards him, chipped the ball over.

It deflected off the horizontal and bounced into the goal much to the delight of ATK fans.

Unfortunately, all the aggression the home team showed in the second session came to nought due to the enterprising Krishna.

The result:
 Hyderabad FC 2 (Bobo 39 & 85) drew with ATK 2 (Roy Krishna 15-pen & 90).

Jeremy Lalrinnunga on a record-breaking spree

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 DOHA

Youth Olympic gold medalist weightlifter Jeremy Lalrinnunga went on a record-breaking spree, claiming three world marks in a remarkable performance, on the way to a silver in the men's 67kg category at the 6th Qatar International Cup here.

In a power-packed performance, the 17-year-old smashed his own Youth World and Asian record in

snatch, clean and jerk and total lift with an effort of 306kg (140 + 166) to win the silver on Friday night.

This year, Jeremy has broken 27 records, all under his name, combining National and international marks.

He smashed 12 international records: three youth World, three youth Asian and six Commonwealth records; and 15 National records: five youth National, five junior National and five senior National.



Jeremy Lalrinnunga.

• FILE PHOTO

Neroca rallies to share honours with Chennai City FC

Khaiminthang and Siaka cancel out Katsumi and Shereef's strikes

I-LEAGUE

RAYAN ROZARIO
 COIMBATORE

Neroca FC held defending champion Chennai City FC to a 2-2 draw in the Hero I-league clash at the Nehru Stadium here on Saturday.

CCFC coach Akbar Nawas had said the other day that the team needs to attack more and defend better. The absence of key players from Spain did not affect the host's game plan. CCFC enjoyed better ball possession and were on the prowl most of the time.

The provider

Skipper and Spaniard Roberto Eslava came up with some defence-splitting passes from the back, keeping the Neroca defenders on their

toes. However, the CCFC strikers failed to find the target despite their best efforts.

When the home team finally managed to find the breakthrough, it went on to score two goals in the space of seven minutes and it was midfielder Katsumi Yusa who put the team ahead in the 25th minute.

The Japanese star, who played for the visiting side last season, took the Neroca defence by surprise with a brilliant run. However, he was brought down inside the box. The referee quickly pointed to the spot and Katsumi made no mistake.

Heading home

Striker Mashoor Shereef's superb header made it 2-0 for CCFC in the 32nd minute. It was Jackson Dhas who was

instrumental in the goal, sending a precise cross from the left.

Just when it looked like the hosts will go into the break with a 2-0 cushion came Neroca's goal through Khaiminthang Lungdim in the dying seconds of injury time.

The second session followed a similar pattern with CCFC calling the shots initially but Neroca pulling level through Boubacar Siaka's penalty in the 64th minute.

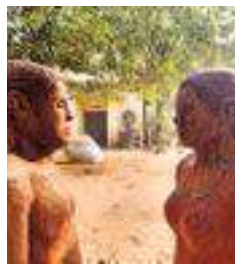
CCFC could have sealed the match in its favour had substitute Ranjeet Singh not messed up a chance in front of the goalmouth.

The result: Chennai City FC 2 (Katsumi Yusa 25, Mashoor Shereef 32) drew with Neroca FC 2 (Khaiminthang 45+3, Boubacar Siaka 64).



The architect: Mashoor Shereef, who was in the thick of things for CCFC, went on to score off a header. • S. SIVA SARAVANAN

Magazine



SPOTLIGHT
Exactly 100 years ago, Tagore planted new seeds of life in Santiniketan with a school of arts, the Kala Bhavana **p5**



WIDE ANGLE
The Paithani sari, originally woven from pure silk from China and spun gold from India, has seen a revival **p6**



60 MINUTES
Meet author Sanam Maher who pieces together the life and death of Pakistan's social media star, Qandeel Baloch **p12**



LITERARY REVIEW
Going by book releases, Christmas is all about love and eggnog. Say 'cheers' but don't forget the shadows under the light **p7**

COVER

When they RISE



From AASU in Assam, to IIT-Madras and FTII in Pune, thousands of students across the country march in solidarity with JMI and AMU students and to condemn the Citizenship (Amendment) Act **p3**



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Rape within marriage is nothing but rape

A recent film treats it as a silly mistake by a man, ignoring the trauma that the wife undergoes

Indu Balachandran

Something is horribly wrong with a Malayalam film I watched recently in a crowded cinema. Though my friends and I got only front seats as the show was heavily booked, we consoled ourselves that it was going to be a good entertainer. Why else would it be a full house?

But midway through the film, I felt shaken to the core. Some in the audience, however, were heard praising the “romance” between the lead characters and the acting chops of those essaying the roles.

The story is of a man who rapes his wife to prove his manhood and to get over his diffidence with women. The film’s take on such a serious issue is disappointing. The issue of marital rape is trivialised when the limelight falls on the perpetrator and his “dilemma”.

Flatly ignored

The victim does not even get much screen space or narrative prominence. Everyone treats the rape as a silly mistake by a man, arising out of his unfamiliarity with women. The light-hearted way the issue is handled is highly disturbing. It ignores the emotional roller-coaster that a rape victim undergoes and how traumatic it must be for her to live in unfamiliar surroundings with her attacker and his close relatives and friends.

A man’s ignorance does not justify the intense trauma that a wife is subjected to. The film suggests that men need to have sex education to be gentle with their wives. What it fails to remind people is that in preventing sexual violence, sensitivity, love and respect towards one’s partner do more good than sex education. It should be kept in mind that awareness without mutual respect is



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

no guarantee against sexual violence.

The film vainly tries to put in an element of romance into the rape narrative by harping on the fact that his wife is the first woman he has known and loved, apart from his mother and sisters. It tries to sugarcoat the bitter pill for the victim and the audience alike. But it totally ignores the emotional scars and mistrust that will be present in a real life situation.

Many people struggle to be in touch with their bodies after a sexual assault. They find it difficult to connect with the body of another person. In the film, the victim in question did not even resist on being touched again by her rapist-hus-

band. The shots depicting their intimacy show that they are having a happy, healthy relationship, irrespective of the traumatic past. And the film’s title ingeniously refers to the wife as the husband’s angel. What better way to placate aggrieved wives!

The film seems to suggest that all wives need to be the Woolfian “angel in the house”, forgiving and forgetting their husbands’ follies, even something as grave as rape. All for the sake of marriage!

It’s still rape

Some may argue that the film simply portrays a reality. What they do not realise is that the film trivialises and ratifies that reality. Marriage is about

togetherness and accepting each other. Rape within marriage counts as rape, even if not legally.

The film which touts itself as a family entertainer should have been more careful while treading on such sensitive topics. Because cinema is not just about stories. It is a powerful medium which could subtly influence and culturally condition people across generations.

The film, however, mirrors the attitude of society in general. The extent of social and cultural conditioning was evident in the response of an acquaintance of mine: “But ma’am, couldn’t she accept that it was her husband [who committed the act]?”

indub284@gmail.com

Marriage is about togetherness and accepting each other. Rape within marriage counts as rape

Poignant poinsettias, an Xmas memory

I have never been able to look at these flowers again without deep sadness and bitter regret

Usha Jesudasan

A clutch of red poinsettia pots caught my eye with a splash of brilliant colour as I turned the corner of my road. I stopped for a moment. The plant seller moved towards me with a pot in his hands. As I took it from him, a memory of my father carefully placing dozens of bright red potted poinsettia on the window sills of our English house filled my mind.

Red in the greys

I was always the first one up, and would come down and draw the curtains. December skies in Britain where we lived were always grey and gloomy. But these vividly beautiful flowers would brighten our home.

I stopped to buy a dozen plants. My brother Ramesh ran a little garden restaurant close to the Vellore Institute of Technology. He would love these, I thought, and they would remind him of home and dad. Besides they would look very pretty among the tables in his restaurant.

I lined up the pots and a small Christmas tree and some beautiful paper stars. I knew that this gesture from his sister would please him enormously.

I had been busy all morning and I thought I would take them over to him in the evening or the next day. I ignored that nagging feeling which said, “Why not take them right away. All the other things can wait.” That afternoon he had a heart attack and was gone by the next morning.

I have never been able to look at a poinsettia again without deep sadness and bitter regret. I wish I had taken them right away and seen the look of joy on his face. I learned a very painful lesson that day. Don’t take people you love for granted. There is no guarantee they will be here tomorrow. Show your love today. Don’t live with regret and a heavy heart.

Every December, the same plant seller brings me a dozen of these beautiful red poinsettias. He remembers the day I bought them.

He remembers that my brother never got to see those beautiful plants. I grieve silently, sometimes tearfully with him. This old man with the gnarled gardener’s hands is the only one who knows how I feel during Christmas.

ushajesudasan@gmail.com

Round and roly-poly? Make spirits bright

Santa assignments come calling for men with the right physique during the Christmas season

Arun Bhatia

Some 30 years ago, our club in Mumbai organised a Christmas party for children by the poolside lawn. With my rotund torso and pot belly, I was the automatic choice to play Santa Claus.

“We won’t need to stuff the red flannel costume with pillows,” an organiser said, patting my stomach. “Cute roly-poly Santa, be on time at 1 p.m. We’ll dress you up and you start your ‘ho ho ho’ and jingle bells by the pool...,” he trailed off.

Each club member was to bring a gift with his or her child’s name written on a tag, and so 120 gift boxes were stacked up on the table with a rigged-up mike.

In Mumbai, the winter is almost as hot and humid as at other times. So the minute I slipped into the flannel costume, I started sweating. The white whiskers of Santa hid the beads of perspiration, but the welts of moisture on the red flannels were visible along my shoulders and forearms. I was sweating rivers.

Ho ho ho

A stuffy Santa emerged from the dressing room ringing the bell and going “ho ho ho” as the children yelled and cheered him by the pool.

I would call “Chunnu Chatterjee” or “Munnu Merchant”, and the parents would direct Chunnu and Munnu to receive the gifts from me.

Through eyes misty with perspiration, I watched the children’s expressions: Chunnu was familiar with the concept of Father Christmas, while Munnu, scared stiff at the sight of a huge white-bearded red giant, burst into tears as I went “ho ho ho” and



handed over the box.

A cheeky fellow asked: “Remember what I wrote you? I wanted a *choo choo* train. But you can’t put a whole toy train in this little parcel. Nah! I don’t want it. You keep it.” The mother hastily took the item and dragged the brat away.

My nephew (then four years old) didn’t recognise me in the get-up and I could hear him telling my sister-in-law in our mother tongue Kutchi that Santa had invited him to his house.

Playing along, she said: “Yes we will go to Santa’s house.” The boy asked, “Are we going to the North Pole?”

I had to handle 120 different situations, and back in the dressing room, getting out of the stuffy costume, with a tall, iced lemonade in hand, I was glad that it was over.

I was wrong. It wasn’t over yet. My young neighbour with her seven-year-old daughter was riding home with me. The mother had convinced

the child to wait till they were in the car before opening the gift. Now, the girl undid the ribbon, took off the wrapping paper, opened the box, and said: “That old man can’t read, or he must be knowing our dentist. I had asked for a box of chocolates... he got me this paint kit instead. Uncle, did you see the old man in the red suit? Didn’t he look stupid?”

Today, in Bengaluru, I still boast the round belly and so, still get the occasional Santa assignment.

These days I actually feel stupid having no idea what the children are asking for when they say a tablet or other such new-fangled things. I give my standard answer, “ho ho ho”, and feel relieved that the parents are the ones buying the gift.

Once, I played Santa at a prominent five-star hotel and was thus permitted to eat anything from the lavish Christmas buffet spread. Except that they made this offer after my make-up was done. Ever tried eating anything through white hair stuck with smelly glue across your lips and chin? Take it from me, it can’t be done. I had to forgo the feast.

There were no children partaking of the goodies at that expensive venue. So I had to hand out the toys and lollipops from my sack to rich, old ladies visiting from the U.S. and Australia. “Have you been a good girl and well behaved all year?” I asked. Their giggles were my reward.

Since Bengaluru is much cooler than Mumbai, I didn’t sweat in the red suit either.

Merry Christmas!

arundewdrop@gmail.com

These days, I actually feel stupid having absolutely no idea what the children are asking for

FEEDBACK

Letters to the Magazine can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in

Cover story

India lost its spots (‘How India lost its spots’, Dec. 15) because of the carelessness of humans. Not only cheetahs but many other species have disappeared.

Even today, hunting and smuggling of animals has not ended.

S.S.S. ANIL

Desertification might have also caused the extinction of cheetahs, since forests and grasslands were converted to agricultural and industrial land, and there was indiscriminate development. Desertification not only impacts animals but the entire biodiversity, from microscopic animals to human beings. India faces a growing crisis of land degradation. More than 30% of land area has been degraded through deforestation, over-cultivation, soil erosion and depletion of wetlands.

K.M.K. MURTHY

The cover story was well researched. The citations from various books made it all the more credible. It gave new insights into how different factors combined can have devastating consequences. Extinction might not be limited to just cheetahs if we continue to consider the wild the sole property of us humans.

JASVI SRIVASTAVA

Now that current governments are aware of the importance of protecting biodiversity, efforts to conserve at least the existing big cat species should be stepped up. Instead of bringing back the cheetah from Iran or Africa, it would be better to collate efforts to protect and conserve the existing species.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI

The article was very informative but regarding the reintroduction of the cheetah, the writer should have mentioned that India wanted to import cheetahs from Namibia, but the Supreme Court turned it down, observing that no scientific study had been done for that.

G. SHAHEED MATHRUBHUMI

Inspiring dance

‘Dancing in the dark’ (Photo essay; Dec. 15) was an awe-inspiring feature. Learning dance will have an immense impact on the lives of the visually impaired. One is



reminded of Ernest Hemingway’s single-sentence ode to humanity, that a man can be destroyed, but can never be defeated.

P.PERRAJU SARMA

Layered crisis

The otherwise brilliant piece on the current onion crisis sacrificed its charm by the overdose of saffron allusions.

P.R.R. NAYAR

Medicinal poetry

The article (‘Verse over the counter’, Dec. 15) touches on an important aspect of poetry: its ability to heal. Poetry Pharmacy is a novel and much-needed concept, particularly with the spike in mental illnesses today. Regional language publications too should take note and reach out to those who cannot read English.

ANUSHA PILLAY

I never realised the soothing remedial effect that poems have on us. The poem by W.S. Merwin made my day. Fathima

ANJO C.J.

An equal music

The December Music Festival has been part of Chennai’s culture for years. But one cannot deny that caste elitism has a strong presence in Carnatic music. (‘Where are Margazhi’s millennials?’; Dec. 8) If music has no language and no caste, should not Carnatic music reach out to the masses? It requires a strong effort from musicians, organisers and sponsors to ensure that Carnatic music is pushed towards inclusivity.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR

Veg bites

Buddhism lost ground in India (‘Why did the Brahmins become vegetarian?’; Dec. 8) because of the ability of Hinduism to assimilate other religious ideologies. Ambedkar’s embrace of Buddhism invigorated the cult further. But the contention that Brahmins turned vegetarian to strengthen Hinduism is unacceptable. The change could be attributed to a gradual evolution in their outlook.

K.R. UNNITHAN



More on the Web

thehindu.com/opinion/open-page



When films objectify women

If rapes are so rampant in India, part of the blame goes to Bollywood and other film industries

PARNAB DHAR

A ‘mannbaudhu’ girl

It’s not an encouraging label for a girl who dares to put forth her opinions and argues for her rights

REWATI KARAN

Break the gilded cage

We forget that the prime motive of being born is to enjoy life, and not sit idle wondering about ‘what ifs’

HARSHA MISHRA

This page consists of reader submissions. Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to openpage@thehindu.co.in. Please provide a postal address and a brief background of the writer. The mail must certify that it is original writing, exclusive to this page. The Hindu views plagiarism as a serious offence. Given the large volume of submissions, we regret that we are unable to acknowledge receipt or entertain queries about submissions. If a piece is not published for eight weeks please consider that it is not being used. The publication of a piece on this page is not to be considered an endorsement by The Hindu of the views contained therein.



For democracy Youth at a protest march in Kochi last week; (top right) a demonstration in Kolkata. • THULISA KAKKAT, REUTERS
Cover photo A student protester shouts slogans against the CAA in Guwahati. • AP



YEAR OF THE STUDENT

Beaten, never BROKEN

Overtured chairs, abandoned rucksacks, abandoned textbooks. This is the reading room at JMI. But students have risen across the country to denounce police violence and demand a rollback of the CAA

G. Sampath

On the afternoon of Tuesday, December 17, two days after the police invasion that galvanized students across India to hit the streets, protests are in full swing outside the gates of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) in New Delhi. It is a disciplined protest. Student volunteers stationed every dozen metres or so keep the protesters on one side of the road so that traffic is minimally affected. Others distribute bottled water. Some help pedestrians navigate the crowd to get to where they want.

The Indian flag is everywhere, waved by students chanting, "We want justice" and *Inqilab Zindabad*. The placards express the whole gamut of emotion, from a sober 'No CAA, No NRIC', to 'Shame on Delhi Police', to a poster, in the hands of a bespectacled girl student that simply said, 'Blind leaders and blood-feeders'. The demonstrators have two simple demands: justice for the students of Jamia and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) who were beaten by the police on Sunday, December 15; and a rollback of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

Tahir Akhtar, 24, one of the

protesters, is a JMI alumnus, class of 2018. He works at Barclays. "What are you doing here?" I ask him. "Don't you have to go to work?" He shakes his head. "I was born and brought up in India. I haven't come here from Pakistan or Afghanistan. Why should I prove that I am an Indian? If I am not able to prove it, I will lose my citizenship. But members of every other community except Muslims will get citizenship through the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. They are doing this to communalise things." But how long can they keep up the protest? What if the government doesn't withdraw the CAA? "I haven't been to work for a week," says Akhtar. "I've taken leave to protest. I have informed my manager that I have to fight this law, fight for my life."

At the crime scene

The gates of JMI are all shut and the guards won't let anyone in. It takes a visit to the Chief Proctor's office to obtain entry into the campus. Jamia's central library, named after the former President of India and founder of JMI, Zakir Hussain, will turn 100 next year. Forty-eight hours after it was stormed by policemen, it resembles a crime scene.

It's only five in the evening, but the steps leading to the entrance

are deserted. At the doorway, the flower pots, smashed to pieces, have spilled their muddy entrails on the floor. Amid the jagged pieces of terracotta, shards of metal, a broken lathi, and someone's ID card, and beside a glass panel completely missing the glass, lies a torn placard that pleads in capital letters, 'SAY NO TO VIOLENCE'. Another one, a few feet away, says, 'No Stone-Pelting'. Clearly, somebody, or something, has had a violent disagreement right here with some advocates of non-violence. In the main foyer inside, beneath the gaping holes in the book display, the Prime Minister's visage, on the cover of *Narendra Modi - A Charismatic & Visionary Statesman*, peers unsmilingly into the distance. Under the label 'New Arrivals' are large, weapon-like pieces of broken glass.

"This library's main entrance was closed on Sunday evening," says Iqbal Mehndi, 25, the security guard on duty. That might explain why the cops had to break in. He gestures toward the reading room. "The police threw bricks to break those windows. Then they flung tear gas shells into the reading room, entered from different

Continued on Page 4

Advertisement



Malaika Arora is the brand's new ambassador

Indian consumers more choices. The Indian market is expected to grow exponentially in the coming years as more consumers are picking this fruit and availability has started to penetrate into South India as well. In fact fruit stores like Kovai Pazhamudir Nilayam (KPN) have reported high sales for USA Pears."

Malaika Arora said, "I am excited to kick-start the awareness programme since pears are a regular part of my diet regime. I am convinced that this fruit provides me with all the necessary nutrients. I look forward to the #ThePearCare campaign. I urge my fans to include the USA Pears in their diet and see the difference themselves."



(L-R) Sumit Saran, Pooja Makhija, Malaika Arora, David J. Ranz and Jeff Correa

David J. Ranz, United States Consul General, stated "I'm proud of our American farmers for providing Indians with such a nutritious fruit that would complement their healthy lifestyle. For a tasty and healthy treat, Indulge in the mouth watering USA Pear this winter."



Pear: The quintessential fall fruit

Actor Malaika Arora has been appointed as the brand ambassador for USA Pears by the Pear Bureau Northwest. The event held in Mumbai, focused on highlighting the amazing nutritional benefits of Pears and breaking the myth that pear is not an everyday fruit. Celebrities and experts came forward to highlight the benefits of pears and its nutrient composition. Sumit Saran, In-Country Marketing Representative, Pear Bureau Northwest added, "USA Pears perfectly complements the Indian pear season, which ends in September. USA Pears arrive in the market from October giving



Outrage (Clockwise from left) Snapshots from anti-CAA protests at Osmania University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad and in Chennai. • NAGARA GOPAL, AP & AFP

Beaten, never...

Continued from Page 3

sides, and thrashed the students with batons," says Mehndi.

The reading room is a vast tangle of overturned chairs, abandoned rucksacks, abandoned textbooks, and abandoned stationery. Tables are stacked haphazardly in one corner – a failed attempt to erect a barricade against the invaders. A couple of broken things look like cameras, but have wires sticking out. "CCTV cameras," explains Mehndi, pointing to the walls. "They broke as many of those as they could."

On a darkened patch of floor near one of the windows is a tell-tale remnant of Sunday's violence – the melted shell of a tear smoke grenade. The label says it was manufactured at the Tear Smoke Unit (TSU) in Tekanpur, Gwalior. These grenades are to be used, the TSU website says, 'to neutralise agitated crowd in near vicinity of police party'. Their advantages are that they are easy to throw, they generate a large volume of smoke, and 'the plastic body starts melting on throwing and makes it difficult to throw it back'. TSU's mission, in its own words, is to 'help customers harness the power of Less than Lethal Munitions to achieve excellence (sic), customer satisfaction and sustainability'.

Customer satisfaction may have reached a peak inside the Jamia campus on December 15. No matter that the inner confines of a library reading room, marked every few metres with signs such as 'Please don't disturb the sitting arrangement' is not a place one might expect a tear smoke grenade to be used.

Serious injuries

The police's singular commitment to 'neutralise' was such that, according to Jamia's Chief Proctor Waseem Ahmad Khan, more than 20 students sustained serious injuries. "By serious injuries, I mean students whose hands were shattered, legs were broken, heads were battered," he explains. "Some have been admitted to Alshifa Hospital, some are in Holy Family Hospital, some in All India Institute of Medical Sciences. An M.Tech student, who was reading



quietly in the library, has lost one eye."

Meanwhile, students from across the country have risen overwhelmingly in solidarity with JMI and AMU students, to condemn the police violence and to oppose the CAA – from AASU in Assam, to IIT-Madras and FTII, Pune.

The National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, condemned the CAA and police brutality against the protests organised by JMI and AMU students. This move, said the Student Bar Association in a statement issued on Tuesday, "is intended to bring about a chilling effect on freedom of speech and to curb dissent".

At the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, students staged a silent protest holding placards that said 'We want democracy, not police Raj,' and 'Defend the right to protest'.

Students and faculty of the Indian Institute of Management-Bangalore wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, signed by 172 people, about the repression of students protesting against the Act.

Students of the University of Hyderabad were detained on Thursday morning as they tried to reach the venue of a protest meeting.

In solidarity

In Mumbai, over 600 students from Tata Institute of Social Sciences took out a rally on Monday. They were joined by faculty. Outside Mumbai University's Kalina campus, around 200 people, from a coalition of organisations such as the Social Democratic Party of India and the Students Islamic Organisation, gathered to express solidarity with JMI and AMU students.

Over 100 students of the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, gathered and shouted slogans condemning police brutality. Students of Chennai's Loyola College too held demonstrations. In Puducherry, members of the Students' Council of Pondicherry University gathered to demand the immediate release of the detained students.

At Cochin University of Science and Technology and the Central University of Kerala in Kasaragod, students joined their peers on campuses across the State to support the agitating students of JMI. Members of the Students' Federation of India and the Kerala Students Union protested at the Calicut University campus and protests were held on campuses under Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam and Pathanamthitta too.

Though it is not illegal for the police

to enter a university campus, the standard operating procedure is to take permission first. "The police entered the Jamia campus without permission," confirms Khan. The Delhi Police have maintained that they entered the campus only to flush out anti-social elements.

"If their intent was to catch anti-social elements, why did they beat up the guards?" asks Mehndi. "Most Jamia guards are ex-servicemen. They had served the country at the border, in extreme conditions. Did they deserve to be beaten like this for doing their assigned duty?"

Is it vengefulness?

There is a widespread sense that the police crackdown was disproportionately violent. "You know, even for using lathis, there are norms," says Shikha Kapoor, Associate Professor in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension, JMI. "Typically you target the lower half of the body, the legs, to intimidate crowds into dispersing. It's understandable if people get hit on the legs. But here, they have bludgeoned students on the head with lathis. How do you explain this – is it vengefulness or law enforcement? Forget the physical injuries. Can you imagine the mental trauma these youngsters must deal with for the rest of their lives?"

Mohammed Mustafa, 26, an M.A. student, has both his hands in plaster. A native of West Champaran in Bihar, he came to Delhi and enrolled in Jamia because he wanted to become a civil servant. On that fateful Sunday evening, as he sat in the first floor reading room of the old library building, preparing for the UPSC exams, little did he know that his life was about to change, thanks to the actions of some civil servants.

"Around 5.30 p.m., the police stormed the library. They started beating us mercilessly. I told them I have nothing to do with the protests. They wouldn't listen. I tried to protect my head with my hands. They hit me so hard that both my hands are broken," he says. A friend lifts Mustafa's shirt to reveal the deep welt marks left by the blows on his back.

Not in Jamia alone

Though aggrieved, almost every Jamia student I speak to makes it a point to stress that what AMU students are going through is far worse. "They were stripped and beaten. They were tortured. I can send you videos and testimonies," says Akhtar. There is a general sense that AMU and Jamia were systematically targeted because they are minority institutions. "There were men with the police who were not in uniform. They were also beating up our students. Who were they?" asks Khan.

"The police even barged into a reading room meant exclusively for women students. Some women have complained of molestation," says Raihan Shahid, 25, a student of International Relations at JMI, who was in the library at the time of the attack. He shows me around the reading room in Ibn Sina Block, which saw the worst of the police excesses. In addition to broken windows, broken chairs, and broken cameras, there are bloodstains on the staircase, and on the walls. The washbasins in the toilet are filled with shards of what used to be mirrors. On the floor are balls of crumpled tissue soaked in red.

In the far corner of the reading room just outside the toilet, under a desk are a pair of fashionable-looking heels. On another desk, an abandoned leather handbag. There are pens, pencils, erasers, and sample question papers on several of the desks. Torn pages of a notebook are strewn across the floor. I pick one up at random. The words, in blue cursive handwriting, are uneven but clear. "Tell me something about yourself," reads a question at the top of the page. The answer begins right below. "My name is Farha Parveen. I am from Sherkot. My mother's name is Halima Khatoon. She is a homemaker. My hobbies are preparing food and listening to music. My goal, I want to be a teacher..."

BUFFER ZONE

Satire in the age of post-truth

In true Orwellian fashion, nothing and everything is true at the same time

The world has gone to sh*t, there's no way around it. Donald Trump is busy trying to bully a 16-year-old climate change activist with Asperger's on Twitter. The U.K. is run by a man who hides inside refrigerators (literally) to evade tough questions from reporters. One Amazon is on fire, the other one is laughing all the way to the bank, covered in layers of cardboard and bubble wrap, not letting its employees take pee breaks. This is barely even the tip.

Closer home, the lovely people in power are locked in a bitter feud with past leaders who died a minimum of 35 years ago. During breaks, they put in place aggressive policies widely criticised for being unconstitutional, leading to democratic dissent, which is subsequently crushed, followed by predictable dog whistles attacking "anti-national elements" or, more recently, people's attire. As I'm writing this, students at public universities across the country are bravely protesting the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the face of aggression and force by the police and little to no support by the political elite. In such bleak times, humour can, for many, be a means of both relief and resistance.

The time is ripe, one feels, for creating bitter satire. And to spread it far and wide through the Internet (till it gets shut down). Except that there's a slight hitch.

Internet satire is at a bit of a crossroads. The genre itself demands a kind of physical immediacy in the viewer or reader's reaction. There's a constant race to go broader in tone and comedy, to bring in elements of surrealism, to create punchlines and then reverse-engineer the set-ups for the quickest impact. The shorter the punchline, the harder the punch lands.

An issue facing the unique demographic of Internet satirists is the so-called post-truth nature of public discourse today. In true Orwellian fashion, nothing and everything is true at the same time; a thing is both true and untrue together. 'Fake news' means news that's untrue, but it has also come to mean news that you claim is untrue but isn't.



Fake news
An 1894 illustration by Frederick Burr Oppen. • WIKI COMMONS

Before this current wave of absurdity intensified over the last two or three years, American satirical website *The Onion* did an admirable job highlighting the path of descent that modern society was on. At its best, *The Onion's* work would present satirical news stories

that were both believable enough to be real and unbelievable enough to be out of this world, spawning a series of pastiches and rip-offs (in India too).

Particularly outlandish

Except that news stories today, the true ones, are just as silly and unbelievable as those on *The Onion*. "Not *The Onion*" has become a common refrain, a shorthand comment on a particularly outlandish story. And it's getting steadily more farcical. Does chow mein cause rape? Does Sanskrit cure diabetes? Did Trump personally tackle IS leader al-Baghdadi and overpower him?

Does satire really land then? It's a creative challenge, one that is proving hard to navigate. And then there's Poe's Law, an old Internet law which states that satire or parody can get lost in translation without knowing the author's intent; that a winking emoji is a must. That it can, without a clear indicator like said emoji, be misconstrued as being the very thing it's attempting to attack, sometimes willfully so. What is said in irony or sarcasm can just as easily be misinterpreted as sincerity, which is why a lot of publications now add tedious disclaimers or tags that say "satire" or "fake news" to clear any doubts.

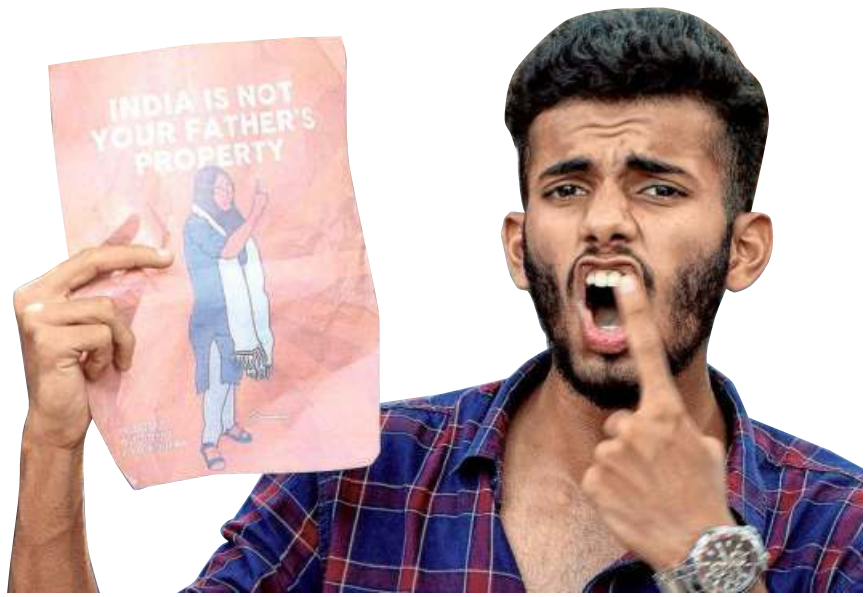
All of this, however, pales in comparison to the weaponising of satire, as is happening today, to put forth toxic and dangerous ideas. Misinformation on the Internet – deliberate or accidental – is a very real problem, with people seeking out news (regardless of validity) to confirm their own biases, to fortify their own belief system. Bad faith actors make it worse; publications and creators who insidiously advocate regressive, hateful views under the garb of "satire" – a convenient smokescreen, a façade to promote their propaganda. Twitter accounts claiming to be parodies often stoke communal fires, subsequently hiding under principles of free speech, satire, and humour.

For little fault of the earnest satirist, then, there is now an even greater responsibility on her to tackle these dilemmas. To make sure her words are not deliberately misused, especially given how the Internet theoretically allows us to reach an infinite audience. Added to that the fabled Indian inability to take a joke as well as the very understandable argument that humour can potentially dilute, trivialise, or normalise grave issues, and there's a certain fragility to the art form. Satire is meant to be subversive, but when that purpose isn't achieved – when it's arguably doing more harm than good – it all rings a bit hollow.

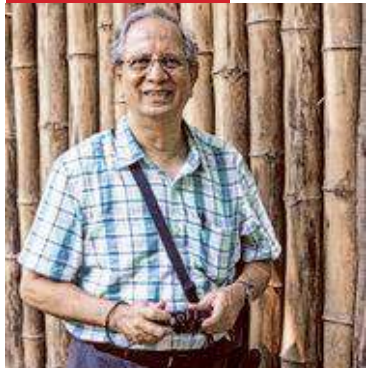


Akhil Sood is an author and freelance culture writer from New Delhi who wishes he'd studied engineering instead.

Though aggrieved, almost every Jamia student makes it a point to stress that what AMU students are going through is far worse. 'They were stripped and beaten. They were tortured,' Akhtar says

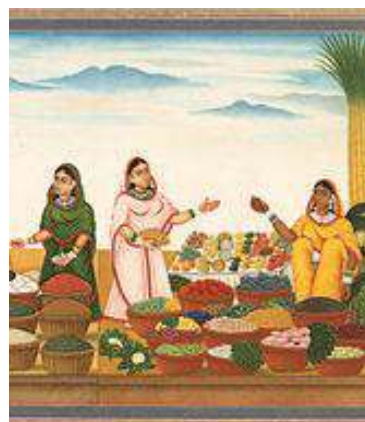


SCANNER



Patwardhan show

A retrospective on artist Sudhir Patwardhan's five-decade career, titled 'Walking through Soul City', is on view at National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai until February 12. Featuring more than 200 paintings and drawings, the focus of the works is the city of Mumbai itself in all its aspects, and the artist as an inhabitant.



Food seminar

A seminar titled 'The Past and Future of Food on the Indian Subcontinent: Identity and Cultural Heritage' will be held at K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Mumbai, on January 11 and 12. A number of academic sessions will address areas including the political economy of food, culinary cultures and historical perspectives.



Water documentary

Aquarela, a documentary by Victor Kossakovsky, showcases the power and majesty of water and ice in various manifestations around the world, from glaciers and the frozen Lake Baikal in Russia to Venezuela's Angel Falls and even a hurricane attacking America's east coast – and how people handle and survive such phenomena.

UNPLUGGED

The unsung heroes

Hearing less-performed ragas is a rare treat

One of the great draws of a daytime Hindustani classical concert, and that too on a Sunday morning, is that one can reach the venue relatively unscathed by traffic. But more importantly, it is the promise of morning or late morning or afternoon ragas. And if the recital is inside the thick-walled, cool dark interiors of a temple, minus the paraphernalia of electronics, then all the better.

Sometimes, one of the biggest takeaways of a recital of this kind is that you get to hear ragas that you knew, but had kind of forgotten. They are the ragas that do not have the exalted status accorded to the Big Ones. They are unassuming, almost modest ragas, rendered even more modest by the fact that they are not popular anymore on the performance circuit. As the tanpura or swaramandal tunes up, it is as if a searchlight has been trained on the inner recesses of your memory, and with that, various forgotten gems are awoken.

It is something like playing the word game Taboo, which I do in a creative writing class that I teach – it leads people to not so much learn new and bombastic or ‘big’ words as to remember and revisit existing ones in their vocabulary, which have fallen into disuse. It turns the Taboo player back to the riches that reside inside us, which have gone into some kind of blind spot, while we overuse just a handful of words. When words fall into disuse, our vocabularies shrink, and with that, our repertoire.

Whether you are a writer, speaker, reader, performer or listener, everyone loses, when words, phrases, swara combinations and ragas are simply left by the wayside. Sometimes, we under-employ our vocabulary or our engagement with ragas out of sheer laziness, taking the path of least resistance, presenting as well as lis-



• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

tening to the familiar, the popular, the easily accessible. There are about 150 ragas that are more commonly sung now, from the 500 or so existing ones in Hindustani classical music. But most performers will present from an even smaller bandwidth of 30 or so ragas, letting dust gather on hundreds of other gems.

Guaranteed nods

Now whether this is because it is safer to pander to the popular and easily accessible, or because even the artists have begun to forget or have not been trained in the lesser-performed ragas that lie outside this tight circle of 30, is a bit of a chicken-and-egg question. Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, in his later years, would say in a tired and ironic tone, upon hearing the standard request for Puriya Kalyan from the audience, “Yes of course, I will sing it, and exactly as I sang it in the long-playing record that you have at home.” The irony was lost on most of the audience. Not just performers, even music programme organisers sometimes insist on the performer singing the familiar. They want guaranteed nods and *waah waahs*, and will not risk a ticket-paying audience being challenged to listen to something new.

There are a slew of ragas that are considered *apchalit* or *anwat* – less heard, uncommon, difficult, sometimes combining two ragas and creating an unusual synthesis. However, there is a whole lot that is not exactly uncommon, but has been relegated to waiting patiently in the wings, over just the last few decades.

At a recent recital by Agra gharana singer Pt. Ram Deshpande in one of the small halls of the 18th century Omkareshwar Mandir in Pune (organised by The Baithak Foundation and the Sakal Group of Publications), some of us were delighted to catch up with just such a raga. Even the name of the raga – Devgiri Bilawal – when announced, seemed to come from far away. It was like meeting someone from very long ago – you need a few seconds to place the person, but once their features, their voice, their mannerisms become apparent, you are infused with a rush of affection and warmth.

When a performer presents a less performed raga, you are grateful that a light shower has fallen beyond the usual circle, and places farther afield have been re-greened in the performance space as well as in the listener’s mind.

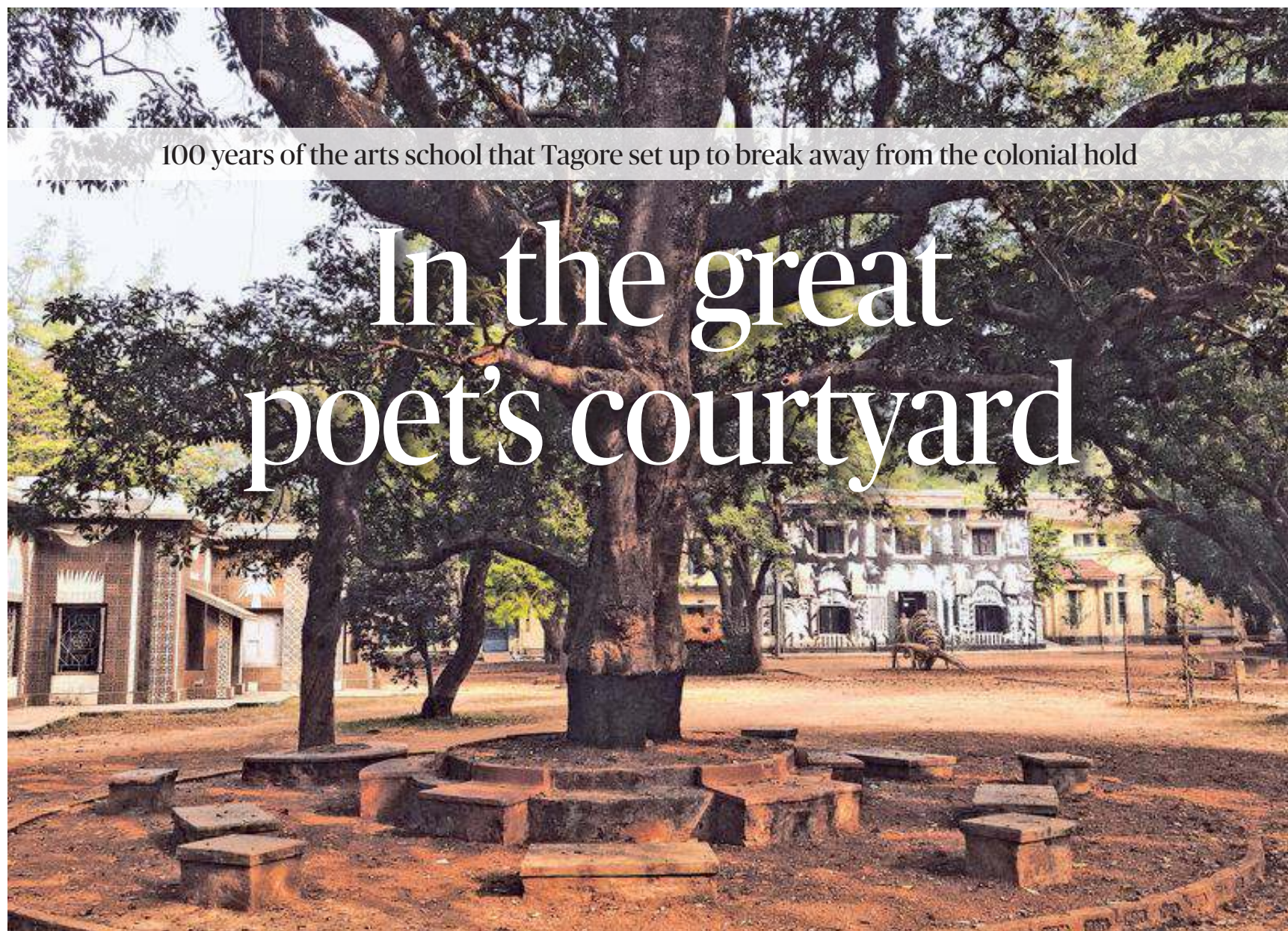


Gouri Dange is a novelist, counsellor and music lover who takes readers through the Aladdin’s cave of Indian music.



Ceramics exhibition

Gallery Ark in Vadodra is hosting an exhibition with a focus on ceramics and the use of clay as a narrative tool, titled ‘Elements in Mythology’, until January 18. Works by artists including Ira Chaudhuri, Jyotsna Bhatt, Madhavi Subramanian, Savia Mahajan, Reyaz Badaruddin, Vineet Kacker and Vineet Daroz are on view.



100 years of the arts school that Tagore set up to break away from the colonial hold

In the great poet’s courtyard

Bishwanath Ghosh

The cow poking its head into the canteen window is real, but the raging bull nearby isn’t – it’s made of bamboo strips. The two puppies fast asleep near a camel are real, but the camel isn’t – it’s made of junked two-wheelers. The birds on the numerous trees are real, but those countless birds on the lawn are synthetic, part of an installation. There’s an angry anaconda too, fortunately made of twigs.

One word binds it all together, the real and the unreal: creation.

It’s a word that drove as well as defined Rabindranath Tagore. In 1919, when the country was still bleeding from the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, he planted fresh seeds of life in the soil of Santiniketan by setting up Kala Bhavana – a school of arts.

The word *bhavana* may bring up the image of a large building in mind, but Kala Bhavana is anything but grand. Its size lies in its expanse: low-rises dotting a vast open space landscaped with ancient trees and art installations – the bull and camel and anaconda are only some of them.

Anti-colonial

The institution is celebrating its centenary this year. No one is quite sure about the exact date Kala Bhavana was started, but art historian and Santiniketan veteran Prof. K. Siva Kumar says it was most likely in June that year, going by letters written at the time. In other words, barely weeks after Tagore had returned his knighthood in protest against the massacre.

“At the time, art in India was governed by colonial tastes and needs. This was the first institution to break away from the colonial method. It was a part of the nationalist movement, a model of anti-colonial education,” says Siva Kumar, a professor in the art history department, formerly



head of the department as well as principal of the institution (in Santiniketan institutions, the posts of principal and HoD are assigned on rotational basis).

“But Tagore was not a narrow nationalist; he wanted to connect with the larger heritage of world art, including non-Western traditions such as Chinese and Japanese. At the same time, he also wanted to redefine Indian art. His stay in the villages of East Bengal was an eye-opener for him. He realised there was so much of nature to engage with, and so much of urban-rural divide that needed to be responded to,” says Siva Kumar.

Having joined Kala Bhavana as a student in 1974, Siva Kumar, a native of Kera-

Back then, people came to Santiniketan because they subscribed to Tagore’s ideology, but now they come for the salary and job security because this is a Central government institution

la, is one of the very few serving teachers who has clear memories of watching legendary sculptor-painter Ramkinkar Baij at work. Today, he sees “a lot of dilution” in Tagore’s ideals. “Back then, people came to Santiniketan because they subscribed to Tagore’s ideology, but now they come for the salary and job security because this is a Central government institution.” (Visva-Bharati came under Central control in 1951.)

But Kala Bhavana, the professor insists, still remains different from other art schools because the teaching here continues, by and large, to be individual-oriented – a tradition started by Nandalal Bose – and also because of the strong inter-personal relationship between teacher and student.

Bhavna Khajuria, a former student who now teaches ceramic art, agrees. “The interaction between teachers and students extends beyond class hours,”

says Khajuria, who hails from Jammu. “Students can walk into the studios of their teachers even at 1 in the morning to watch them work. There may be colleges with better infrastructure but Kala Bhavana has the best atmosphere.”

Feet at home

Her colleague, Lawanshaiba Kharmawlong, also a former student of Kala Bhavana, quit his arts teacher job in Doon School some years ago and returned to Santiniketan as a member of the faculty. “I come from a village in Meghalaya and my family had not even heard of Tagore, leave alone Santiniketan. Then one day my father, while leafing through a booklet, came to know about Tagore and brought me to Santiniketan. Now I feel at home here – the only thing I don’t like about this place is the heat,” says Kharmawlong.

The campus is strewn with creations, most of them products of young minds. In the workshop that once served as Ramkinkar Baij’s studio, young Lakshmi from Thiruvananthapuram is busy giving finishing touches to a fish that has a human leg sprouting from it. She is so engrossed that one hesitates to initiate a conversation. On the first floor of another workshop next door, young Suchetana Das from Howrah is not so busy because she has just finished her work – Arjuna aiming at the fish’s eye – and has placed it by the window to dry in the sunlight.

“I first visited Santiniketan as a child on a family holiday. I became so enamoured with the place that I decided to study here – it has exceeded my expectations,” says Das, a second-year fine arts student.

To cap the centenary celebrations, Kala Bhavana is planning a series of camps on the campus in association with Lalit Kala Akademi, as well as two large exhibitions, one in Kolkata and another at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. “The schedules are still being worked out. As of now we are preparing a list of former students whose works will be exhibited,” says Sanjoy Mallik, principal of Kala Bhavana.

One hundred years, times have changed, but the campus, nestled in nature, still belongs to the time of Tagore. If Tagore were to be spotted today, walking across the courtyard with his hands clasped behind him, he wouldn’t look out of place. “Tagore is always watching over us,” says Khajuria. “Even unconsciously we are conscious of his presence.”



Inspired minds The Kala Bhavana campus is strewn with creations, from murals to sculptures, of young students. • SAYANI CHAKRABORTY



Plastic problem

Malaysia is turning into a major dumping ground for the world’s plastic waste. ‘Recycling Sham’, the fourth episode of the investigative documentary series *Broken* on Netflix, looks into the country’s legal and illegal recycling of plastic, and how a lot of supposedly recycled scrap – that is in fact not recyclable – is ending up in landfills.

FIELD NOTES

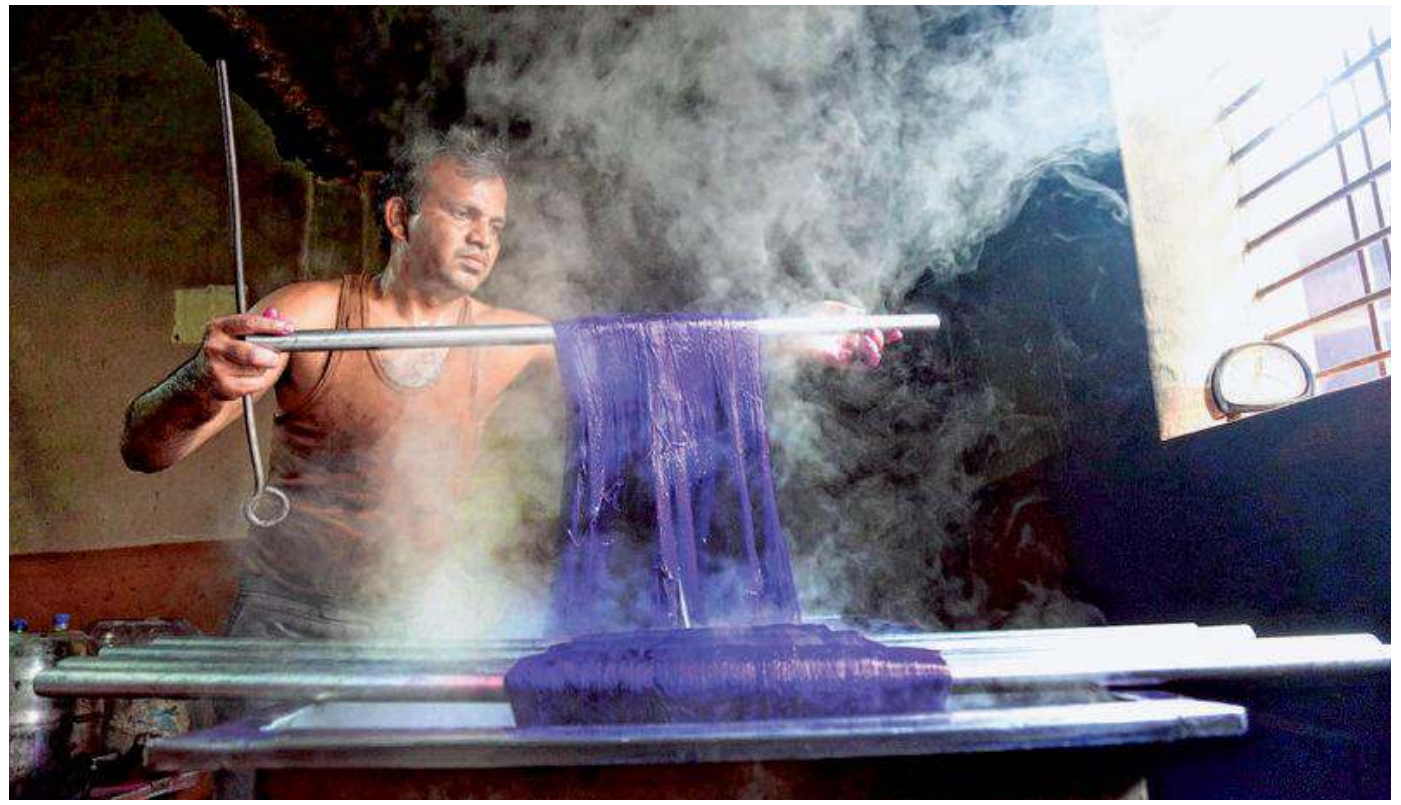
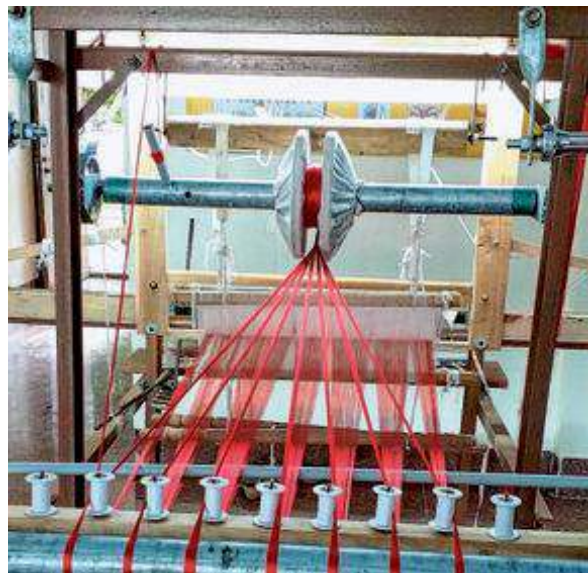
With patrons like Lata Mangeshkar and Pratibha Patil, the Marhati Emporium has played a key role in the revival of Paithani weaving

Silk and spun gold



Ancient art (Clockwise from above) A sample sari at the Marhati Emporium; a Paithani weaver colouring the silk; weavers at work at Marhati; and one of the looms.

• R. SUJATHA & AJAJ SHAIKH



R. Sujatha

Three days after Deepavali when I visited Paithan, I wasn't sure I would see weavers at work, considering that it is a five-day holiday across north India. But it was worth the effort.

Sitting on the banks of the Godavari, about 60 km from Aurangabad, Paithan can be reached either by a shared taxi or a state transport bus. Either way, it's a rickety ride down dusty Panchayat roads. The view made up for the ride – vast swathes of green fields of two-feet-high sugarcane and cotton plants that had just started flowering were rewarding sights.

At the end of the 90-minute

bone-jolting ride, we reached Paithan bus station, from where we hired an autorickshaw to the Marhati Emporium, a one-hall showroom with a collection of cloth bags, scarves and bedspreads on display.

Paithani traces its history to the reign of the emperor Shalivahana. Paithan, then known as Pratishtana, was an international trade centre for silk and art, says the booklet published by Marhati, a unit of the Maharashtra Small Scale Industries Development Corporation (MSSIDC). Originally, a Paithani sari was nine yards of pure silk and spun gold, and called Navvari Pathani. The silk came from China and the gold from India.

The Peshwas patronised the fabric, but with their fall, Paitha-

ni faded away. During Mughal and British rule many weavers migrated and either set up units or left the business.

Rebuilding a craft

"In 1976, the State government transferred the design-cum-demo centre to the MSSIDC. At that time there were only four weavers. We got a grant of ₹1 lakh from the Norwegian government. We bought a few looms and announced a training programme. One of the experts came forward and we trained five, six people," said Alka S. Manjrekar, divisional manager of the Aurangabad, Nanded, Latur MSSIDC.

Silk yarn was procured from Silk Board Karnataka and in 1987 an exhibition was held with just

a dozen saris in Mumbai. It ended with an order for around 300 saris, and helped to build a fund. Since then, over 2,000 weavers have been trained. The success encouraged the government to allocate funds annually to revive the art. And Marhati, a centre to revive Paithani, was set up. Its emblem is the *nath* (nose ring) worn by Marathi women.

"The pre-weaving process has not changed till date. The saris are woven by hand and not jacquard machines, making it a painstaking process," said Manjrekar. The weavers fashion paper rolls for thread reams for the motifs, all of them replicas of Ajanta paintings, including munias, parrots, simple flowers, lotuses and, most intricate of all, peacocks. Those who know the value of the fabric hand the saris down as heirlooms, she said.

At the emporium in Paithan, behind the showroom in a cavernous hall, 100 looms stand testimony to the effort. Around 10 women, young and old, were busy at work. An elderly woman explained the nuances to a youngster, helping her roll the yarn. Women wove the coloured threads for motifs following the outline of the designs on trace sheets. The trainees are paid a monthly stipend of ₹1,700 and taught to work with cotton first. Of the 1,200 persons trained, 65 work at the centre and 300 are working in the town, where each house has a loom.

Thirty-five-year-old Alka is a trainer with 17 years of experience. She lives in the town with two school-going children. "I have made 12 to 15 saris so far.

A sari uses 800 gm of silk and 160 gm-400 gm of gold-coated silver zari, and may take anything from a month to two years to weave, depending on the design

When I visited the centre, I knew I wanted to become a weaver," she said. Another weaver, Renuka, who says she is around 40, was also trained at the centre and has been weaving saris for the past 15 years. Both women are the only ones in their families to learn the art. Women have been employed on all 100 looms. "They are from modest families and the wages help them," said A.K. Rakshhe, who is in charge of the showroom.

Luxurious product

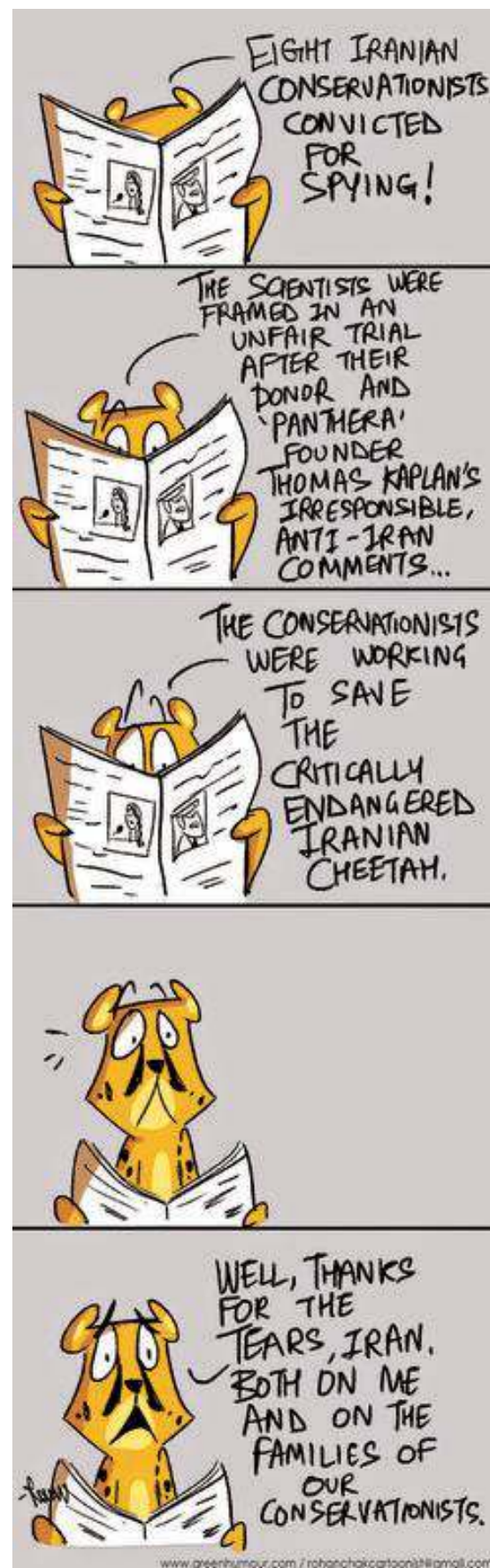
A sari uses 800 gm of silk and 160 gm-400 gm of gold-coated silver zari, and may take anything from a month to two years to weave, depending on the design. Weavers are paid a third of the sari's cost. "99% of the weavers we have trained are women," he added. The price ranges from ₹25,000 to ₹3 lakh.

Among Marhati's patrons are playback singer Lata Mangeshkar and former President Pratibha Patil, as well as a range of film celebrities. Their silk saris have adorned the deities of Tirupati, Vittala Panduranga, Kolhapur Mahalakshmi and Shirdi Sai Baba. They have centres only in Paithan, Aurangabad, Bombay and Delhi, but have customers the world over.

Marhati continues to make only a few hundred saris a year, which are in great demand. Weavers from Kancheepuram and Varanasi visited the centre to learn the art and introduce technology, but were left in awe of the intricacies in weaving, said Manjrekar. With the price of gold and silver rising there is concern that it may become difficult to continue to offer original Paithani saris.

By the time I boarded another rickety bus back to Aurangabad, it was sunset. A co-passenger took a look at the booklet I held and said "Paithani?" I nodded. "Very expensive. But you get what you pay for," she said.

GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY



GUEST COLUMN

Carving out a South Asian identity

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act's protectionist approach is insensitive to the realities of identity and migration in the subcontinent

Rimple Mehta

The raging debate and protests around the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019 raise important questions around identity. With a protectionist approach, CAA claims to correct a historical wrong and rescue specific religious minorities from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh by offering them a possibility of Indian citizenship. The CAA has incurred five main criticisms: it is unconstitutional; it furthers the Hindutva ideology; it is violative of the Assam accord; threatens tribal identities; and it is arbitrary in its selection of countries and religious minorities that will be eligible.

The debate in Parliament invoked data on the decreasing number of Hindus in Pakistan and the increasing number of Muslims in India, to indicate that the Nehru-Liaquat Pact hasn't been honoured by neighbouring countries whereas India has fulfilled its commitment.

In 2006, the Sachar Committee Report gave a clear picture of the socio-economic condition of Muslims in India. This compels us to ask if a mere increase in population is indicative of protection of a community or if we must also seek a qualitative assessment of their lives. Moreover, citing data on increases or decreases in pop-

ulation does not take into account, for instance, aspirational or economic migrations or conversions through marriage.

There is widespread fear that the CAA, in conjunction with the proposed countrywide National Register of Citizens (NRC), will facilitate citizenship only for certain religious minorities, leaving Muslims excluded as stateless. Amongst those declared 'foreigners' or 'illegal migrants' through the CAA as it now stands. There is no discussion of what will happen to the rest – who will basically be Muslims not verified through the NRC.

Who is a refugee?

It must be noted also that the NRC is an exercise in verifying documents, which large populations in South Asia still don't possess.

Moreover, through CAA we have limited the understanding of cross-border mobility only as a result of religious persecutions. What about linguistic, political, environmental or cultural persecution? India has evaded the question of refugees for a long time, primarily due to its own large population, economic burden, and lack of welfare services to offer to those seeking refuge. It has, however, taken ad hoc decisions to give refuge to Afghans, Tibetans and other such

refugees from time to time.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion". As a developing country, India's reservations about signing the Convention are understandable. But what has stopped it from devising its own refugee policy?

Shared histories

India shares international borders with seven countries, and the people in many of these borderlands live in close proximity and have deeply shared histories and everyday practices. Invoking history partially by just referring to the Nehru-Liaquat pact obliterates these shared histories. It also obliterates their everyday lives in the borderlands. If history were to be invoked impartially, it would involve their shared histories and identities, which were divided because of the political borders created over different time periods.

These shared histories and identities remain etched in the everyday lives of a number of communities living on either side of national borders. It promotes cross-border mobility of various kinds – some legal, some extra-legal.

This compels us to look at the different categories of people crossing the Indian borders – refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, illegal migrants, trafficked persons, people visiting estranged family members, tourists, medical tourists, etc. We need ground research to understand these different groups crossing over. And it pushes us to argue for a policy that will take into account the realities of different kinds of mobile populations, especially refugees.

Is it possible for us to base this exercise, therefore, on a shared understanding of a South Asian identity? Or are we only going to base our actions on knee-jerk reactions? A bottom-up approach that takes into account people's lived experiences is required rather than policies that are framed as responses to correcting 'historical blunders'.

Let us keep in mind that as a society we have not been able to protect or provide a minimum sense of security to those at the margins of class, caste, religious, gender and sexual identities. In such a reality, the CAA with its selectively protectionist approach is both an overstated measure and a deeply discriminatory one.

The writer's latest book is *Women, Mobility and Incarceration: Love and Recasting of Self across the Bangladesh-India Border*.

The 'Allegedly' column by G. Sampath will return in the Jan. 5, 2020 issue.

Literary Review



Ibis on screen

Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy is soon to be adapted for screen. It will be directed by Shekhar Kapur while the screenplay will be by Michael Hirst. The series is about the opium trade between India and China and the consequent Opium Wars.



Classics festival

Penguin Random House India has extended its second edition of 'The Penguin Classics Festival: There Is One For Everyone'. It is now on all through December. Covering eight cities across India, it has seen massive footfalls since it started on November 1.



McCartney for Netflix

Paul McCartney's book for children, *High in The Clouds*, published in 2005, is to be made into a Netflix series. It's the story of a squirrel called Wirral who fights Gretsch the owl, a tyrant and fabulous singer who steals the voice of anyone who upstages her.

THE LEAD

Ghosts of Christmases past

A potted history of the Christmas industry from Dickens to *Die Hard*, and a reminder that grimmer socio-economic conversations must not be silenced amid all the festive cheer



Cunning plan Jim Carrey in *How the Grinch stole Christmas* (2000). • GETTY IMAGES

bandwagon – with carefully calibrated sexual tension in the 'Historical', 'Modern', 'Desire' or 'Dare' imprints featuring Jeeves or written by an animal activist who signs his name 'Wolf'.

Moving pictures

But enough of these clumsy book things. Poring over tiny print is a slow way to ruin the eyesight. Let's hasten the process with our addictive, beautifully bevelled screens, those portals to an unending stream of moving images.

You could go back all the way to 1901 for the earliest surviving adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, or zip forward to a Muppet version in 1992. You could breathe in the crisp, saccharine winter air in *Miracle on 34th Street*, *A Christmas Story* or *The Bishop's Wife*. Pick up a mug of hot chocolate, and throw in marshmallows and some laughs with *Home Alone* or *Elf*. When it's just you and a special someone, make an immediate left turn into romance. This genre is, unsurprisingly, the motherlode. If you're a sucker for *Love Actually*, *The Holiday*, the charming *While You Were Sleeping*, you might even have considered dipping your toes in an arena dedicated to romance, like Hallmark Channel, a niche place for chaste love.

Turns out Hallmark is no niche player. It's a beast. According to a profile in *The New Yorker*, in 1910, about 70 years after Henry Cole printed the first 1,000 Christmas cards, a teenager named Joyce Hall began peddling printed postcards. He saw potential in the business and took it up a notch or two or 100. In 1914, he set up a company with his older brothers. In 1917, they invented modern wrapping paper. After pioneering a new card display technique and partnering with Disney and Norman Rockwell, Hallmark turned to television in 1951, and turned it upside down, bagging 81 Emmys. Today, Hallmark Channel owns a cable network. This year alone, it produced 103 original movies, 40 of them Christmas-themed.

If you now need an anticid from shovelling in all those super-sweet romances, pick up a gun and rock out to *Die Hard*. One of the best action movies ever, it plucked Bruce Willis from a *Moonlighting* gig and stuck him front and centre in the identity of America. It also taught us the invaluable lesson that the threat of violence can save everything, even a failing marriage. It was picked up and replicated with gusto – in-

cluding in more *Die Hards*, *Lethal Weapon*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, and even snuck into the Marvel universe with *Iron Man 3*, although it was released well after the Yuletide season.

True horror

If that adrenaline dose isn't enough, you can veer downwards into Christmas horror. Cue scratchy violin. Snuggle deep in your sheets and scream silently to *Gremlins*, *Christmas Evil*, *Dead End*, *Black Christmas* or the more contemporary chiller from Down Under, *Better Watch Out*. You're looking now for something even more horrifying. Something more bleak, more cynical than Billy Bob Thornton in *Bad Santa*, or, to come full circle, the business of Christmas. If there's one thing worse than wanton spending during the festive season, it is not spending in the festive season. Besides, we can't seem to agree on recommendations from popular culture, so cue the Indian economy.

Diwali is in India, in economic terms, what Christmas is in the West. When the festive season buoys buying, we welcome it even when we know it is a temporary spike, hoping the market might correct itself in the cold light of a post-holiday Monday. This year, however, the economy flagged even in the festival season. Brick and mortar stores took the heaviest hit, with a 40% slump in sales and a 60% dip in footfalls. Average consumption, a number that has only ever risen, actually dipped. A horror story. But wait a second. What are we doing discussing economics in a conversation about wholesome Christmas reading?

With apologies to the reader for the sucker punch, it is unfair to not break the genre wall, to make merry in a bubble. Every festival must be a hearty celebration, but also make room for conversation about the shadow under which these celebrations take place. While we stock up on fruitcake and bone up on festive literature, we must also talk about the economy, the National Register of Citizens, and the Citizenship Amendment Act. Not doing so is to tacitly condone a 'Let them eat cake' approach to citizenship.

Truth is, there are no conversations exclusive to or barred from the festive season. In the spirit of this Yuletide, we must invoke the ghosts of our own inescapable past, our myopic present and inevitable future. If we don't, we remain blind to the afflictions of others, and blind to our own shot at redemption.

The former journalist works as a consultant in fintech and crypto-economics.

Anand Venkateswaran

There is a certain topical phenomenon that grips writers in the Yuletide season. Besides listicles, that is, and bursts of autobiographic reminiscences. The latter are most likely the result of being lulled by eggnog or stronger alternatives into believing that we are more interesting than we really are. No, the now hoary festive tradition is an economic rant, particularly the invocation of Joel Waldfoegel's 'The Deadweight Loss of Christmas', which argues that the most efficient Christmas gift is cash.

The deadweight theory is rubbish, as the discerning reader would agree. It goes against the spirit of compulsive giving, and the century and a half of product promotion that the festive season has inspired. But that's not to say it is inaccurate. Published in 1993 and dredged up every year since, like a Grinch movie, Waldfoegel's paper says that since the

choice of gift is made by "someone other than the final consumer", the gift-giving leaves them "worse off" and that this whole exercise is a source of potential deadweight loss. According to the paper, the macro-economic equivalent of virgin soan papdi boxes, perplexing and impractical crockery, and drawing room fixtures ripped off from Bond villains was between \$4bn and \$13bn in 1992 in the US. There have been equivalent estimates in India as well, more incredulous ones in recent times. More on that later. Readers scrunching their eyebrows in disbelief or disapproval are not alone. In fact, they are in esteemed company. Practically Dickensian, one might say.

In 1843, the times they were a-changin'. Industry steamrolled comforting traditions and social harmony even as children worked in appalling conditions. When sloganeering and flyer thrusting fell flat, the only antidote to rabid modernity lay in resurrecting the appeal of an English Christmas. Also, Charles Dickens' wife was big with

their fifth child and he needed the money. Over a fevered six weeks, Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*, a story that crafted Christmas as we know it – a time for family, love and redemption. The first imprint of 6,000 copies, published on December 19, was sold out by Christmas Eve. The book has never been out of print since. At around the same time, Henry Cole imagined and produced the first Christmas card – a hand-coloured artwork showing a family gathering with the greeting "A Merry Christmas And A Happy New Year To You".

Global industry

As Cole's one-shilling card birthed a global industry that continues to layer cheese in every relationship, Dickens discovered, through the Dickensienest of his works, a cyclical market for books as gifts.

One needs only to squint one's eyes and think 'Christmas' and 'books' and up pop half a dozen titles, including but not limited to *Father Christmas* and *The Snowman* by

Raymond Briggs, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, 'The Night Before Christmas' by Clement Clarke Moore (a poem, but one that practically invented Santa), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss. These are, however, originals. Not representative of the indefatigable Christmas literature industry that is kept churning by publishers like Mills & Boon.

Founded in 1908, this British publishing house conjures 120 new titles every month. Manuscripts from 1,500 authors worldwide feed an appetite for all shades of romance. Even 10 years ago, over 200 million M&B novels were sold worldwide every year. And come December every year, Christmas titles roll out on an editorial conveyor belt. This romance juggernaut thrives on predictability and the comfort of familiarity. Before they fixed on the formulaic romance, among M&B's contributing authors were Jack London, P.G. Wodehouse and Hugh Walpole. Fascinating to imagine these authors getting on board the new

IN CONVERSATION

'Hatred is created by sucking poetry out of our lives'

It was curiosity about the lives of religious people that drew Amitabha Bagchi to Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* and led to *Half the Night is Gone*, the winner of this year's DSC Prize for South Asian Literature

Anusua Mukherjee

Amitabha Bagchi's *Half the Night is Gone* has been getting rave reviews ever since its publication in June last year, and now it has won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, sealing its reputation as the "great Indian novel". The novel spans generations living in pre- and post-Independence India, but the shifts in time are conveyed less through the description of external events than through characters who live the change. The title alludes to a line from *Ramcharitmanas*, and Tulsidas's version of the *Ramayana* lies at the novel's core.

In his acceptance speech, Bagchi said, speaking with reference to what is happening in India at present: "Hatred is created by sucking poetry out of our lives. By bringing poetry back to life, we can bring

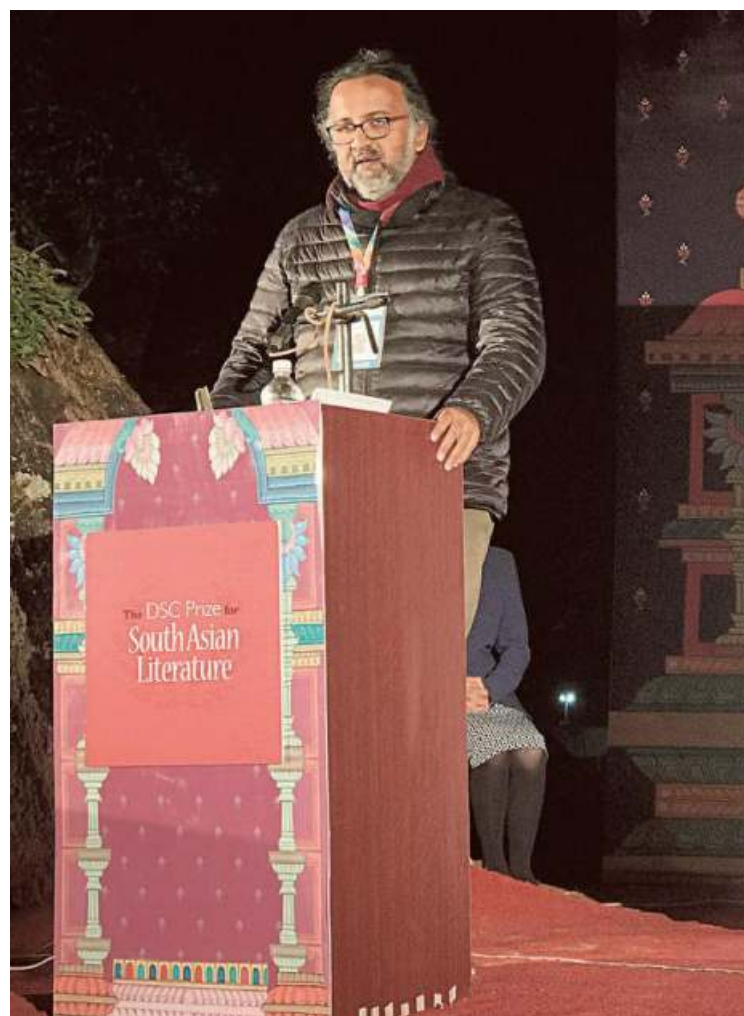
back the love and togetherness that poets have given us over centuries." Excerpts from an interview:

Did you expect to win the DSC?

■ This is my fourth novel and I think I have been shortlisted four or five times but never won a prize. So this was not expected because, you know, jury decisions are subjective. All the shortlisted books are strong in their own ways and so you can't tell. You try not to expect. You can only hope.

From *Above Average* (2007), your first novel about an IIT aspirant, to *Half the Night*, about the philosophical and social conflicts of an entire nation, you seem to have travelled a long distance. Do you think you have grown as a writer in these 11 years?

■ Yes, I think I have. My concerns



Acceptance speech Amitabha Bagchi at the DSC award ceremony in Pokhara, Nepal. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

have remained the same. But the sources I have worked with have changed. *Half the Night* has a lot to do with the reading I've been doing

over the past 20 years. The first three books were more about the life I had seen around me in different places.

Half the Night features the fictional Hindi novelist, Vishwanath, who is grieving the death of his son and also writing a novel. Do you think writing can be an antidote to grief? Or does writing accentuate it?

■ Good question. I have always felt that writing is an antidote but I can see how for some people it can also accentuate certain feelings. This kind of question has no definite answer; it depends on who the writer is. Vishwanath might be writing because he wants to save his loss, to repent. When we undertake an act of writing, we hope something will happen. Whether it happens or not needs to be seen.

The pivot of the novel is Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*. How did that come about?

■ I have wanted for a long time to enter into the world of religious people. I think that curiosity finally bubbled to the surface and pulled me towards *Ramcharitmanas*.

Fiction writers typically tend to be curious about the inner lives of other people, people who are different from us.

This is an English novel where the characters belong to a time and segment where it is natural to think and talk in Hindi. How did you achieve this feat of Hindi-ising English, as it were?

■ While writing literary fiction, you channel a lot of what you have been reading. I had been reading a lot of Hindi prose and Urdu poetry – those channelled themselves into my prose. It was not a deliberate act, it

happens with all writers.

You were also reading Proust?

■ Yes, I spent one year reading Proust – a great year. Proust sees the multitude of connections and points of view that cohere around every single idea, action. When I read Proust, I was in that frame of mind where I could not focus on one thing without seeing it in relation to everything around it. Proust showed me it was possible to write like that without sounding incoherent.

One of the shortlisted novels for the DSC is a translated work – Manoranjan Byapari's *There's Gunpowder in the Air* – and translation is getting attention like never before in India now. Do you think it's a kind of revolution that will change the way we think of Indian fiction?

■ I think so, hope so. Not just older authors but contemporary writers too are being translated. This will make Indian writing a more coherent system. Till now Indian writing in English and writing in the regional languages have existed in silos. Hopefully, those silos will now start bleeding into each other. And who will benefit the most from this? English writers from India, because we will get to savour the experiences contained in languages that we cannot read.

What after winning the DSC? Do you think anything has changed?

■ No, I am happy for this but the writing process has its own logic that is not really decided by which prize you win.

The only antidote to rabid modernity lay in resurrecting the appeal of an English Christmas. Also, Charles Dickens' wife was big with their fifth child and he needed the money

Till now Indian writing in English and writing in the regional languages have existed in silos. Hopefully, those silos will now start bleeding into each other



SHORT STORIES

Dictionary of memories

Argentinian writer Silvina Ocampo's short stories, translated into English for the first time, are like modernist paintings in their blend of the surreal and the mundane



Forgotten Journey
Silvina Ocampo,
trs Suzanne Jill
Levine
City Lights
₹720

In Ocampo's fiction, the real drama usually takes place in the past or overlaps with memories of other characters

Shelley Walia

Jorge Luis Borges once remarked about the Argentinian poet and novelist Silvina Ocampo that she has "a virtue usually attributed to the Ancients or the people of the Orient and not to our contemporaries: that is clairvoyance." Her "condition as a poet" and artist fashioned her unique prose style, which was to make her one of the great modernist writers of the 20th century.

Translated from Spanish into English for the first time, Ocampo's collection of short stories brings out life's harsh imbalance through the visual representation of emotional life reaching back to early childhood. Here emotions supersede the physical world. One recalls in this context her novel, *The Promise*, where a woman falls overboard and is adrift at sea, fighting for life. What seems more important to her is not her impending death but her escape from the real world into the fabulist land of her imagination, made up of sensations, visions and horrors of everyday life. In Ocampo's fiction, the real drama usually takes place in the past or overlaps with memories of other characters. The ability to remember matters more than the inevitability of death.

For Ocampo, the act of writing becomes an exercise in fighting the dementia that she battled for so long. A moment, signifying a single recollection of a place or an incident, forms the crux. The brevity of the snapshots gives her stories the flavour of modernist paintings.

For instance, in the short story, 'The Enmity of Things,' an apparition of windows in a long-forgotten house filled with secret rooms weighs on the mind "like an unpredictable destiny". The narrator begins to feel "accountably apprehensive about the things around him". Even his cardigan, his tie, his suit "seem to provoke his misery". His return to his country estate awakens in him a consciousness of the countryside: "...until then he had been deaf to the silence of the trees, deaf to the brilliance of the sky, deaf to everything except the anxiety that had taken hold of him".

Terrible beauty

The terrible beauty of Ocampo's sentences is apparent in 'The Olive Green Dress,' which follows the life of Miss Hilton, a teacher, who has travelled across the world with "sailors and black smoke", meeting on one of her voyages an Indian in Ceylon living in the company of snakes. She bathes in a warm sea "where one could look for the water and never find it, because it was always the same temperature as the air". Her last pupil is scandalised when Miss Hilton takes her to a painter's studio to pose for a portrait in her velvet dress and she discovers there a nude study of Miss Hilton among the paintings. The next day Miss Hilton receives a note saying "We don't want teachers with so little modesty".

In another story, 'The Lost Passport,' a 14-year-old girl and a street-walker board a ship for Liverpool, but die when the ship wrecks. The little girl had been safeguarding her

passport, afraid she may become incognito without it. Then all is lost at sea. Her last thought is, "The ship would sink forever, carrying her name and irreplaceable face to the bottom of the sea."

Excruciating reminders

A child's realisation of death, remembering clothes that make you miserable, or the freezing ocean are the kind of things that make up Ocampo's landscape. A bathing suit becomes a reminder of the sea as "a device of endless torture". In 'Forgotten Journey,' the little girl imagines babies born in parcels and when unpacked, emerging red in the face owing to the heat inside the packet. To create hope, Ocampo compiles a "dictionary of memories" – like the protagonist of her novel, *The Promise*, picking excruciating memories to distract herself from the "immensity" of death and bodily suffering. Though idiosyncratic, the response to life is inherently subversive.

Ocampo concerns herself not with the tangible but with the evocative, combining it with the magic realist style of her contemporaries like Adolfo Bioy Casares or Borges. Memory mixes with desire, the hyper-real with the mundane, always to slide into the bizarre and the cruel. The delicacy of Ocampo's craft springs from the pain of her personal journey, and she brings her terror of living to the reader with an unsettling immediacy.

The writer is Professor Emeritus and Fellow, Panjab University.

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

More than vada pao

Flavoured with ancestral lore, a new book with some 200 recipes brings Maharashtrian cuisine into the limelight



Rahul Verma

It all started with a meal at Delhi's Maharashtra Bhavan. I wanted some good Maharashtrian fare, and instead found myself staring at a dish of butter chicken. Where is the local food, I asked. The staff looked at me pityingly. People only want to eat butter chicken, a waiter replied.

This happened a long time ago, and I am told the menu at the State bhavan has changed since. But it triggered a war between me and some of my good Maharashtrian friends. I would tease them about their fondness for butter chicken, and they, in turn, would loftily tell me their State has food the rest of the country can only dream of.

I believe them. Ever since I ate some Kolhapuri mutton a friend served some years ago, I have turned into an avowed Maharashtrian food lover. And I now understand the frustrations of the Marathi community when it tries to explain to others the various facets of its cuisine.

"Even today, it pains me to hear things like Marathi food is 'only spice', 'only coconut' or 'only vada pao and misal pao'," writes Saeed Koranne-Khandekar in her book, *Pangat, a Feast: Food and Lore from Marathi Kitchens*.

The author of this recently launched volume points out that she studied and interpreted the food of her community and her ancestors for three years before writing the book.

Vast and varied

"With this book, I hope to rekindle the flavours and food memories of Marathi people who have forgotten what they cooked and ate before potatoes and tomatoes and generic mix masalas took over; to bring them back to childhood kitchens, where every meal looked and tasted entirely different from the previous one," she writes. "I also hope to open the minds of non-Marathi food enthusiasts who have not had a chance to sample the State's vast and varied offerings, to appreciate the nuances of each region's produce and cooking style."

While eateries serving regional cuisine have been mushrooming across India, Maharashtrian food strangely still remains under wraps. Yet the food, as

the author says, is really varied, and every region in the State – Konkan, Desh, Khandesh, Marathwada and Vidarbha – has its own cuisine.

Konkan food, for instance, is rich with fish and coconut milk, while Vidarbha is known for dishes prepared with whole grains and sun-dried vegetables. The food of Khandesh, bordering Madhya Pradesh, is mostly spicy. I once cooked a Khandesh mutton curry that had a spice list almost as thick as a telephone directory.

That there is a lot more to the food than misal pao becomes obvious when you read *Pangat*, or another book called *Tiffin: 500 Authentic Recipes Celebrating India's Regional Cuisine* by Sonal Ved. Ved's book also mentions several delicious dishes, including one called nariyal machchi, fish cooked with coconut milk and tamarind; and pandhra rassa, a white, flavourful lamb stock prepared with white sesame seeds, shredded coconut, poppy seeds and ground cashew nuts.

200 and counting

I followed a nice dessert recipe from *Khichdi – The Taste of Mother India*.

Called vhanedali khichri, it's a Konkani dish of wheat, channa, jaggery, grated coconut, milk, raisins, cashew nuts, desi ghee and cardamom, and is especially popular at weddings. "Usually prepared with broken wheat, some household traditions prescribe wheat and suji or rawa for ease of preparation. It is also used as a prasad called panchkajjaya prasad," it says.

Koranne-Khandekar's book includes some 200 recipes. You will find recipes for whole pomfret stuffed with coconut chutney, semolina-crusting prawns, stewed colocasia leaves with peanuts and lentils, onion and fenugreek salad in spiced yoghurt, goat meat in a spicy rich curry, crisp bread stuffed with jaggery and sesame, hot and sour minced chicken, crisp puris in syrup and lentil soup with ginger and lime.

She has another 500 recipes that she couldn't include in this volume, she writes. I can tell you one thing. Butter chicken is not among them.

The writer likes reading and writing about food as much as he does cooking and eating it. Well, almost.

FAMILY DRAMA

Sadness and schadenfreude

An impressive first novel about an unconventional mother-daughter relationship

Rohan Manoj

Antara was never able to reconcile with her mother Tara's self-centredness and wild, bohemian ways – how she could abandon her marriage to follow a guru, live on the streets as a beggar, chase after a vagrant artist, all the while dragging her child alongside her. And all Antara's advances, her attempts at closeness, were rebuffed by an oblivious Tara.

Now, as the mother begins to lose her memory with the onset of age, the daughter must confront both the situation – she does not know how to care for this unreachable person who was never able to care for her – and her own utterly understandable feelings – a tug-of-war between sadness and schadenfreude. It's a conflict expressed with biting precision in the ve-

ry first sentence of Avni Doshi's debut novel, *Girl in White Cotton*: "I would be lying if I said my mother's misery has never given me pleasure."

The opening sets the tone for the rest: stark reality embodied in crisp prose. Doshi's powers of observation – of human relationships as well as the physical reality of Pune and Mumbai – and empathy are evident as she unravels a family and digs up a decidedly unwholesome history, including but not limited to betrayal, deception and incest, while ensuring that the emotional fallout strikes close to home. Discomfort is a feeling that never leaves you when you're reading this novel, or even after you've closed the book.

Tara's long line of self-inflicted tragedies and Antara's own issues come to a conclusion that's hardly explosive, but rather true to life – and all the more disturbing for it – even as the rest of the cast, such as Antara's husband, her father and his new wife, stay firmly in the background in this anti-romance between two well-etched characters. Their commonalities heighten each one's status as the other's *bête noire* – compare Tara's bull-headedness and refusal to accept her condition to Antara's own firm independence, born of necessity from a childhood of neglect. This is an impressive first novel and well worth the read if you're prepared to take the emotional plunge.



Girl in White Cotton
Avni Doshi
Fourth Estate
₹419

IMMIGRANT NARRATIVE

Museum of confusion

An insightful exploration of expatriate life, but the narrative lacks coherence

Anjali Thomas

As a Ghanaian child in Germany, Maya has learned the painful truth that to be better than the people around her, she has to be like them so completely that they no longer notice the differences. This sense of otherness, which every migrant or expatriate is forced to come to terms with, is an underlying note in *The God Child*, Ghanaian writer, historian and filmmaker Nana Oforiatta Ayim's debut novel.

Having spent her childhood in Germany and England, with only brief visits to Ghana during the holidays, Maya remains an outsider in every country, including the land of her parents. She remains separate from other migrants as she does not carry the "reek of illegality" like the men who stand huddled outside McDonald's or the women who sit in Afroshops chat-

ting in "mismatched syncopated chorus... like multicoloured species of exotic animals".

Maya's understanding of Ghana in her formative years is coloured by her mother's stories of their motherland. Her beautiful and perfect but attention-seeking mother, who remains a prominent figure in the narrative, is a descendant of a royal family. Her father, a doctor, is a distant figure who packs his bags and leaves his family after a fight with her mother.

The arrival of Kojo, her mother's godson from Ghana, adds an urgency to the narrative. He is a whirlwind ready to upend the ordered though confused life that Maya has constructed for herself. "He smelt like the insides of the trunks we kept

clothes in for when we finally went home," she recalls. Kojo, driven by the need to reclaim the family's glory and re-draw Ghana's history, draws Maya into his quest.

The bond between the two remains strong, even when they are separated in England and sent to different schools where they face the reality of colonial imperialism and racism every day.

As a young adult, Maya returns to Ghana where she is reunited with Kobo, who is trying to build a museum that will showcase the family's history.

Through Maya and Kobo, Ayim untangles themes of family and cultural ties, expatriate life and colonial appropriation, but the novel loses some of its power in its disjointed narrative.



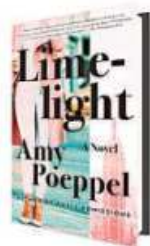
The God Child
Nana Oforiatta Ayim
Bloomsbury
Publishing
₹550

BROWSER

Limelight: A Novel

Amy Poeppel
Simon & Schuster
₹399

Allison Brinkley is wife, mother, and optimist – till she moves with her family from Dallas to Manhattan. She finds New York bewildering. Then she encounters a spoilt teenager who turns out to be a pop star and her life changes.



These, Our Bodies, Possessed by Light

Dharini Bhaskar
Hachette
₹599

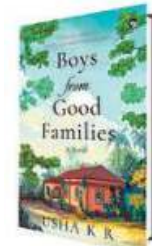
Deeya is married, but finds contentment in the memories of her affair with an older man. Then comes Neil, offering a new romance and another identity. Will Deeya compromise, as her mother and grandmother did before her?



Boys from Good Families

Usha K.R.
Speaking Tiger
₹599

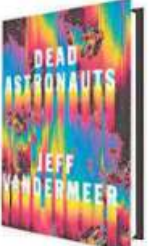
Stified by traditions, Ashwath leaves Bengaluru for America, where he goes from success to penury. He is compelled to return after 25 years to lay claim to his inheritance – the family mansion. In doing so, he encounters tangled family relationships and his first love.



Dead Astronauts

Jeff VanderMeer
MCD
₹27

A city without a name. An all-powerful Company. A messianic blue fox. A homeless, haunted woman. A raving madman who wanders the desert lost in the past. Human and other forms come together to save the world from the Company in VanderMeer's latest.



HERITAGE

Murals, a legend, and Christian architecture

An account of the churches of India doesn't mention some key places of worship

R. Krithika

My abiding memory of a church comes from Chennai's Annai Velankanni at Besant Nagar. As a young child, I played among its pews and aisles as my grandfather and the priest had long conversations and usually finished with a storytelling session and a 'biscuit' as a treat. Much later, I learnt that I'd been happily munching on a communion wafer. When I told my Christian friends this story, it raised quite a few eyebrows. Luckily those were more tolerant times.

Which is why I was very excited by Joanne Taylor's *The Churches of India*. Beginning with a lovely aquatint on the cover, the book is filled with photographs of altars, external façades, plaques, pulpits.

Temple motif

Initially I pored over the photographs, exclaiming at lace pankhas, hand-painted tiles, murals and more. It took a while to move to the text, which is eminently readable.

Taylor first establishes the arrival of Christianity in India and how elements of temples were incorporated in the early churches. She then moves on to the entry of the Portuguese in Kerala and the changes that wrought.

There are interesting nuggets of information like "each year an eagle is seen flying high in the sky, seeming to follow the procession" on the feast day of St. Sebastian at Arthunkal, Kerala. This reminded me of the legend of the eagles that are said to visit Tirukazhukundram daily.

Then she starts exploring her selection of churches, which are mostly restricted to the coastal belt: Kerala, Mumbai and Goa on the west and Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Chandannagar and Kolkata on the east. Only Delhi, Bengaluru and Kottayam are from the interior. Every single church is easily accessible and one wonders if this was done with an eye on tourists. The Northeast and central India don't even get a look in.

Some quibbles

Shouldn't Christ Church in Shimla, All Saints Cathedral in Allahabad, the Moravian Church of Leh, the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health in Velankanni, St. John's Church in Meerut to name just a few have been featured in a book titled *The Churches of India* (emphasis mine)?

In fact, after reading this book, I looked up the churches of Coimbatore and found at least four that were more than 100 years old. Given that this is likely to be true across the country, perhaps the author and the publishers should have taken more care with the name. This is definitely not "the most comprehensive work on India's churches to date," as the front flap cover text claims.

One more grouse: The Cathedral Church of Redemption, New Delhi, is referred to as Roman Catholic in the entry. The history that follows makes it amply clear that the church is Anglican. Designed by British architects Henry Medd and completed by Edwin Lutyens, the then Viceroy Lord Irwin took a great deal of interest in the plans and, in fact, the church is known as Viceroy's Church. Shouldn't this have been caught?

POLITICS

Of, by, and for the people

As right-wing populists hold sway across the world, two writers argue that only public action and collective mobilisation can neutralise democratic collapse

Neera Chandhoke

The rise of right-wing populists across the world has destabilised constitutional democracy, a form of government that protects citizens against the brute power of majorities on the one hand, and limits the proclivity of elected governments to hold and exercise immense power on the other. Citizens are shielded, and governments controlled by constitutions, institutions, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, fundamental rights, and democratic civil societies.

Populists relentlessly undermine constitutional safeguards by appeals to an undifferentiated and amorphous category called 'the people', and focus on elections that have brought them to power. Though populists claim that they have reclaimed power from the iron grip of corrupt elites and institutions, citizens have been rendered more not less vulnerable. Unsurprisingly, a veritable publishing industry has grown around the deleterious effect of right-wing populism on constitutional democracy, democratic erosion and decline.

The book under review comes as a proverbial breath of fresh air because it spells out in some detail



How to Save a Constitutional Democracy
Tom Ginsburg, Aziz Z. Huq
Oxford University Press
₹1,595

what the core components of constitutional democracy are. The argument is crisp and clear. The two authors prefer to concentrate on a minimalistic and legalistic approach to democracy, and eschew the complications that presumably stalk political philosophy. Conventional wisdom, they argue, about what properly counts as democracy is hazy. It tends to concentrate heavily on the subjective preferences of voters for 'this' party over 'that'. The core institutions of liberal constitutional democracy, that mutually reinforce each other, are electoral competition, the right to free speech and association, and the rule of law.

Autonomous bureaucracy

The first two are self-explanatory, but the rule of law demands various preconditions: a bureaucracy that is autonomous of the executive, rule-following, and an independent judiciary.

The argument is interesting and weighty tomes can be, and have been written on each of these core components. For example, the preconditions of competitive electoral politics are a level playing field for all parties. Each vote counts for just one, no one should be privileged because he is far, far more influential than others, and no one disadvan-

taged because she is not influential at all. In political philosophy, however, the right to free speech is tracked by anxious debates on, for example, what counts as limits on this right: sedition, defamation, pornography, incitement to hate and violence, and blasphemy. Finally, the rule of law raises vexed questions about the nature of law, whether law can be its own source and justification, and the right to civil disobedience.

Curbs on media

The problem with a minimalistic institutional approach to democracy is that the power of each one of these institutions can be insistently subverted by, as the authors themselves register, threats that curb the autonomy of the media. Corporate ownership of media houses assures that a compliant media truncates free speech. Rabid nationalism and an irresponsible social media places limits on the right. Above all, draconian laws inhibit opposition. Finally, the authors ask us to imagine a situation where the awesome communicative skills of a leader are combined with (a) an ability to exploit government and (b) tactical skills. Each right-wing populist studied by the authors fits the bill. Populists appeal to, and are elected by social groups who detest inherited privilege, distrust institutions, and above all resent 'immigrants' and 'strangers' who have appropriated land, resources, and employment. No matter that these so-called immigrants

might have contributed to the wealth of society through labour.

At the end of the argument, the authors recognise that only public action and collective mobilisation can neutralise democratic decline and erosion. The specific recommendations they make are meant for the United States but hold relevance for us in the postcolonial world. For instance, political parties must not compromise on democratic principles, so that civil and political society can work together. "Put otherwise, laws and institutions are tools. And the effects of tools depend upon the motives and good faith of those who wield them."

In the final instance, the effectiveness of institutional design is dependent upon deep political commitment to the value that democracy places upon each citizen. This commitment might be incipient, it might well be sparked off by a social movement or campaign. What is important is that such movements stretch across the political divide and reach out to those who support populist leaders.

Civil society must be inclusive not exclusionary. Right-wing populism can only be fought by a democratically aware civil society. Ultimately, the two authors recognise the power of politics. Politics can be messy but it can be occasionally creative.

The writer is a former professor of Political Science of Delhi University.

One voice
Students protest against the new citizenship law, outside Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad.

• AFP



BIODIVERSITY

Listening to the call of the wild

From *jhum* cultivation in the Northeast to rain-forests in Anamalai hills, a nature scientist highlights various factors that affect India's synergy with its environment

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

The uproar against the felling of trees in Mumbai's Aarey Colony or the sense of doom over raging fires in Brazil's Amazon forest are all pointers to a general awareness about nature's intrinsic merits and the way it shapes our lives. Yet, jungles vanish, roads broaden, factories sneak in, most species lapse into a death-rattle and rivers get stained while the human race marches ahead in its quest for a tenuous prosperity while ravaging an environment meant to sustain future generations.

In India, we tend to split nature into the boxed ones seen in zoos or the

sprawling acres found in various sanctuaries and it is presumed that as citizens, our duty is done. But there is more to the nation's throbbing ecological core and it starts with awareness, empathy and a fierce will to protect what remains of our fragile green cover.

All these aspects are evident in T.R. Shankar Raman's *The Wild Heart of India*, a lovely book with its gentle nod to the myriad hues of nature. If there is a grouse against the tome, it is that Raman's wife and fellow-scientist Divya Mudappa, who has contributed eight essays among the 65 in this bulky volume, doesn't get due credit on the cover.

Raman, who works with the Nature Conservation Foundation,

holds our hands and gently guides us towards the world around us. First up, he writes: "Nature, some people believe, is something out there, in forests or far wildernesses, separate from the dwelling or presence of humans." And he then proceeds to show how nature is all pervading and very much around us like an owl flying across Chennai's bustling Anna Salai at night.

Roots at Valparai

It is also about living a dream he nursed as a school kid. Back then, in one of his essays, he wrote: "But now I was in the Western Ghats – at the Anamalai jungles at the foot of the awesome Nilgiris. I was where I had always wanted to be." And he

does strike roots in Valparai, a tea town in the Anamalai range, studying rain-forests, building bridges between the local population and the flora and fauna around including lumbering elephants.

He and to some extent Divya highlight various factors that affect India's synergy with its environment. Raman offers a fresh perspective and surely his heart is in the right place. In the pantheon of nature writers embellished with the likes of M. Krishnan, Bittu Sahgal, S. Theodore Baskaran, Salim Ali, Jim Corbett, Stephen Alter, Kenneth Anderson, E.R.C. Davidar, Janaki Lenin and Bahar Dutt to name a few, Raman has carved his own space.

Be it the Guindy National Park in

Chennai or the verdant sights in the Northeast, Raman oscillates from the wide gaze to a microscopic scrutiny. He also gives alternative viewpoints like open pastures being essential for deer within forests or for that matter how a slash-and-burn shifting agriculture practice in the Northeast known as *jhum* or *lo*, is much better than mono-culture traits that eventually strip the soil of all its nutrients.

Dragon flies and trees

There is a simmering anger too as he watches governments whittling down forest protection Acts to facilitate highways and mining. Conservation is often pigeon-holed in the tiger but Raman shows that there is more

to care about and when he dwells upon road-kills, he even writes about dragon flies that die on your windscreens while you drive through forests. While roads widen, Raman writes an elegy: "Before the men and the machines came, the tamarind trees seemed to have an abiding presence, like torchbearers marking a productive countryside, like the enduring blue mountains in the distance."

This is a book that will help you appreciate nature and he winds up with this hope: "A land ethic and place in a community, open to all who care to participate, who will feel moved to act and make space for other species in their lives and in their hearts."

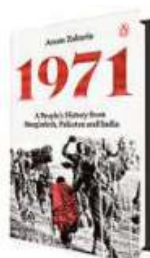


The Wild Heart of India
T.R. Shankar Raman
Oxford University Press
₹795

1971: A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India

Anam Zakaria
Penguin/Vintage
₹699

Navigating the widely varied terrain that is 1971 across Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, Zakaria sifts through three distinct state narratives, and studies the institutionalisation of the memory of the year and its events.



All the Wrong Turns

T.C.A. Ranganathan, T.C.A. Srinivasa Raghavan
Westland Publications
₹799

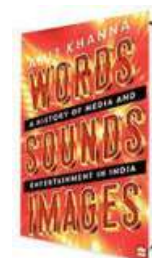
Two observers analyse the Indian economy over the past seven decades to examine how governments have managed it. Among other things, they ask why India lurches from one crisis to another.



Words Sounds Images: A History of Media and Entertainment in India

Amit Khanna
HarperCollins
₹1,499

From Kalidasa's plays, the development of ragas, classical dance forms to a post-Independence look at every decade of cinema, music and television, the former chairman of Reliance Entertainment writes an exhaustive history.



The Killing in the Consulate: Investigating the Life and Death of Jamal Khashoggi

Jonathan Rugman
Simon & Schuster
₹699

An award-winning journalist pieces together what happened after Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi went inside the Saudi consulate in Turkey on October 2, 2018.



BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

A hundred Tibetan gazelles

The dark-eyed beauties ensured the survival of soldiers during a period of war and want. It's time the government returned the favour

Janaki Lenin

The beautiful big black eyes of the Tibetan gazelles captivated Yash Veer Bhatnagar. He had seen photos before catching his first glimpse of them, but he had been unprepared for their doe-eyed beauty. In the next instant, he was left staring at their large heart-shaped white rumps as the group of five receded in the distance. That moment in September 2000 at Lal Pahadi, 20 km north of Hanle Gompa, Ladakh, lasted only 10 seconds. Their skittishness, an unusual trait for mountain ungulates in Indian Trans-Himalaya, surprised and saddened the researcher. Other wild herbivores were bolder, watching him approach on foot. Why were the antelopes so afraid?



Fresh start A female Tibetan gazelle. • UDAYAN RAO PAWAR

Tibetan gazelles were unlike them in another respect: they lived in a few valleys avoiding most others. Why were they so fussy? This enigma lodged like a thorn in his mind.

Sparse forage

Bhatnagar thinks the answer may lie in the antelope's 20-kg weight class. Too small to put away enough body stores to last through the subzero winters, it would have to dig through snow to find nutrient-rich herbs, an uncommon diet in the Ladakh desert. With the wide array of other herbivores living off the more common but less nutritious grasses, the gazelle settled for this sparse forage. The species would stick around areas with its favourite food, explaining its uneven presence across the landscape.

Could the answer to the gazelle's nervous behaviour lie in the geopolitical turmoil that affected this region in the early 1960s? Impoverished refugees from Tibet arrived after the 1959 Tibetan Uprising. While the Changpa pastoralists sheltered the recent arrivals, they couldn't provide for them indefinitely. Many immigrants turned to wildlife for sustenance, and the gazelles frequenting the rolling terrain were easy to fell.

During the 1962 Indo-China War, ill-prepared Indian troops sent up to the 4,000-metre-high cold desert had to fend for themselves. With poor supply lines to feed them, the personnel also hunted the antelopes for meat, elderly herders told Bhatnagar. Instead of hightailing it to the surrounding hills, the naïve animals had stood watching curiously before being gunned down. Entire herds were wiped out.

"The main target of two desperate parties through the 1960s was the Tibetan gazelle," says the researcher. Did this wave of killing make them nervous of people? "It happened a long time ago," replied Bhatnagar. "While hunting isn't prevalent anymore, perhaps it continues at a lower level."

Blocked routes

Livestock numbers doubled but land for grazing wasn't adequate. The war closed the international border with China, blocking the routes to many traditional pastures. Pastoralists brought their animals to available meadows, turving out the Tibetan gazelles.

No one realised these events had brought the ungulates' to their knees. Researchers estimated their range in Ladakh had been 20,000 sq.km. in the early 20th century. By the 1980s,

They lived in a few valleys avoiding most others. Why were they so fussy?

it had shrunk by 95% to 1,000 sq.km. The devastating winter of 1998-1999 killed most of the surviving gazelles. In 2006, Bhatnagar and his colleagues estimated approximately 50 animals survived in about 100 sq.km. across Ladakh.

The group Bhatnagar saw in Lal Pahadi had disappeared by then. When he's pessimistic, he thinks the animals have been killed. When he's not, he feels they may have walked to Kalak Tartar, about 30 km away, to join a group of about 30, the largest population in India.

Kalak Tartar resembles an African savanna but without the trees. Herders largely left the waterless valley to the wild ungulates. The researcher saw red foxes and pikas, while argali, Tibetan gazelles and kiangs grazed the rich 40 sq.km. expanse. Since 2006, gazelles have rebounded to roughly 60, but other populations in Ladakh number only two or three each. Another group of about 50 survives in Sikkim, edging the total Indian population past a hundred. The dark-eyed beauties ensured the survival of soldiers during a period of war and want. Isn't it time the Indian government returned the favour?



Janaki Lenin is not a conservationist but many creatures share her home for reasons she is yet to discover.

GOREN BRIDGE

Touch and go

Both vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones



South in today's deal was Philadelphia expert Ken Cohen. The contract looks impossible, but Cohen found a way home. He assumed that the opening lead was a singleton. Why else would anyone lead a club after this auction?

Cohen won the opening club lead in hand with the 10, cashed the king of hearts, and led a heart to dummy's ace. He led a low spade from the dummy and inserted his 10 when

East played low! Cohen cashed the ace of spades and then the queen of hearts, drawing the last outstanding trump. East had trouble finding a discard on the third trump and did the best he could by shedding a low diamond. Cohen led a club to the ace and ruffed a spade. When West showed out, Cohen knew that East had started with 4-2-2-5 distribution.

Cohen led a diamond to dummy's ace, extracting East's last diamond, the king, and exited with a spade to East, while discarding a club from his hand. East was forced to lead a club away from his queen in this three-card ending and Cohen took the marked finesse to make his slam.

Had East put up his jack of spades on the first round of the suit, Cohen would have won with his ace, drawn the last trump, and led the 10 of spades. East couldn't defeat the contract whether he won this with his king or ducked. Well played!

NORTH
 ♠ Q 7 6 4 3
 ♥ A 8 4
 ♦ A J 7
 ♣ A 4

WEST
 ♠ 5 2
 ♥ J 6 2
 ♦ Q 10 8 6 5 4 3
 ♣ 9

EAST
 ♠ K J 9 8
 ♥ 10 5
 ♦ K 2
 ♣ Q 8 7 5 3

SOUTH
 ♠ A 10
 ♥ K Q 9 7 3
 ♦ 9
 ♣ K J 10 6 2

The bidding:
 SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
 19 Pass 2NT⁺ Pass
 44⁺ Pass 40 Pass
 44 Pass 54 Pass
 50 Pass 62 Pass
 *Game-forcing heart raise
 **Good five-card side suit

Opening lead: Nine of ♣

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Mathematics is written for mathematicians: Nicolaus Copernicus

Berty Ashley

Born on December 22, 1887, this gentleman was able to make some legendary contributions to the world of Mathematics in the very short life he lived. He was so averse to schooling that his family had a local police constable to make sure he attended school regularly. By the age of 13 he had mastered trigonometry and soon began showing phenomenal prowess in the subject. Eventually his contribution led to his birthday being celebrated at National Mathematics Day in India. Who was this prodigy?



Preserved on papyrus One of the oldest fragments of Euclid's Elements, found at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, and dated to circa AD 100. • WIKI COMMONS

This is an International standard that uses a 1:√2 ratio (approximately 1:1.4142). If you cut these entities in half crosswise, the same ratio will be maintained. The clever advantage of this system is that it is great for scaling up or down. It allows scaling without compromising the aspect ratio from one size to another. What object that you use on a daily basis is governed by this ratio?

The Fibonacci series is made up of 3 numbers that are the sum of two previous numbers — 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34... This coincidentally lends itself to being an excellent way to convert one unit to another in a particular factor. What are these two units, which you need to do the calculations for, if you were to go on a road trip in the United States?

This is known as the 'X' Problem. If there are 23 random people in a room, there is a 50.71% chance that two of them will share something. This is due to the probability of 365/365 = 1, and for the 23rd person's probability = 343/365 = 0.9369. For all 23 persons the probability will be

49.29. Hence the probability of two people sharing this is (100-49.29) 50.71%. What would they share?

Ancient Babylonians did mathematics using cuneiform numerals of which we have evidence since 2000BC. They use a sexagesimal system which means they calculate in base 60 and not base 10 as we do. Due to this unique nature and the fact that the Babylonians have contributed significantly to history, the legacy is still seen in our daily lives. Where would you see a remnant of this system today?

This person was a brilliant mathematician and known for his word play, logic and fantasy. He worked primarily in the fields of geometry and linear/matrix algebra producing nearly a dozen books under his real name. He is better known for his children's book which he wrote under a pseudonym. In that book the central

character says, "4 x 5 = 12." It's multiplication in base 18. Who is this author and where does this complex equation appear?

'XY' is a double digit number where (X x Y) + (X + Y) = XY. Since it has an odd number of 1s in its binary representation, XY is sometimes called an 'odious number'. This number is far more popular in the pop culture world than in mathematics. What number is this that you would find in the name of an American rapper, a novel by Murakami and songs by Deep Purple and Bryan Adams?

This mathematician is credited with the discovery of the theorem of musical harmony and its basic intervals. He also believed that numbers possess genders — odd numbers were male and even numbers were female. He is better known for a particular theorem that he learnt from mathematicians in India and Baby-

lon, and introduced to the Greeks. This theorem is one of the most popular ones and is often referenced in pop-culture. Who was this mathematician?

'X' is the only number that is spelt with letters arranged in alphabetical order. Conversely, 'Y' is the only number that is spelt with letters arranged in descending order. When put together they spell out the sum of the first six prime numbers. What are X and Y?

An obelus is a symbol resembling a small dagger. It comes from the ancient Greek word for a sharpened stick. It is commonly used to denote a simple mathematical function and you might have seen it on some old calculators. The first use of an obelus for this purpose was by Johann Rahn in 1659 in his algebra book *Teutsche Algebra*. Nowadays the obelus has started giving way to 'Solidus' which is what you would probably find on your computer keyboard. What function do these symbols refer to and what is Solidus better known as?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

1. Smritisa Ramanujan
 2. Paper sizes — A4, A5, A3, etc.
 3. Miles to kilometers (2 in 1.609344, 5 in 1.609344 km, etc.)
 4. Birthday
 5. 60 seconds in a minute/ 360 degrees in a circle
 6. Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland
 7. 69
 8. Pythagoras
 9. Fort, One, 41
 10. Division, slash

LETTER FROM A CONCERNED READER

Marriage memories

Respected Madam/Sir,

What and all adventure happened yesterday. Eleven o'clock in the morning suddenly Mrs. Mathrubootham came and said, "Old man, do we have all the documents?"

I said, "Kalam, how many times I have said, hundreds and thousands of times, please don't do half the thinking in the kitchen and then do half the talking with myself. Total confusion only will happen. Please start the story from beginning."

She said, "Old man, any idea whether all the documents in safe place? Birth certificate and wedding certificate and degree certificate and all? Exact location is known? Better to not take any risk these days." I said, "Kalam, can I finish one more chapter of Jack Higgins superhit novel *Angel of Death* and then look for documents?" She said, "Old man, you do what you want, I said what I have to say."

Madam/ Sir, have you seen superhit World War Two film *Tora, Tora, Tora* in which Japanese leader is saying 'Tora Tora Tora' and this is codeword for start fighting. When Mrs. Mathrubootham is saying do what you want, it is same as Tora Tora Tora.

So I went to bedroom and opened wardrobe and removed one box. Inside box is files and brown papers covers we are collecting for decades. Madam/ Sir, what and all memories are coming nonstop. School report cards of the children. One old newspaper cutting of one function in Anna Nagar, you can see Mrs. Mathrubootham in the background. Appointment order for Mrs. Mathrubootham first job in Income Tax department. Bank of India certificate for long service of 10 years and 20 years and all.

Then in one other file birth certificates for full family and then photocopy of wedding certificates for all the children. Suddenly all the warm feelings are gone when I noticed one tragedy.

Where is wedding certificate of Mr. and Mrs. Mathrubootham? In the files? No. In the box? No. In the cupboard? No. In the box under bed with marksheet and house loan documents? No.

"Kalam," I said, "have you put our marriage certificate anywhere?" She said, "Old man, yes every two weeks I am taking it out of the box and crying and crying like anything. What nonsense you are talking. I don't know where it is." "Oh my god," I said, "I think it is lost."

Next 45 minutes panic and panic in the house. Both of us looked here and there. Then suddenly Mrs. Mathrubootham said, "Old man we took it for U.S. visa no last year? You are remembering? Man in photocopy shop said madam you are wife of uncle? I thought daughter or grand-daughter. You remember?"

I said, "I remember, daughter is ok, grand-daughter was *bayankarama* over maybe eyesight problem." She said, "100% it is inside suitcase we are taking to embassy. Where is the briefcase? Oh

no, we gave it to Mr. Pratapan for his Singapore trip."

Immediately I ran to Pratapan's flat. I said, "Pratapan, where is the briefcase, whether any marriage certificate is there inside?" He said, "I don't know, I gave it to Mrs. Nalini son." I said, "Manda shironani, why you will give 50-year-old briefcase to five-year-old boy."

He said, "Boy is going for fancy dress competition as Mr. P Chidambaram during budget." I ran and ran to Nalini's house.

"Mrs. Nalini," I said by mistake, "where is Mr. Chidambaram? Bring him here immediately, no hiding in the house no time for games." For five minutes 100% pure Tamil abuse came from Mrs. Nalini. Then I did clarification. She said, "What nonsense you are talking my son is returning it to your son last month itself."

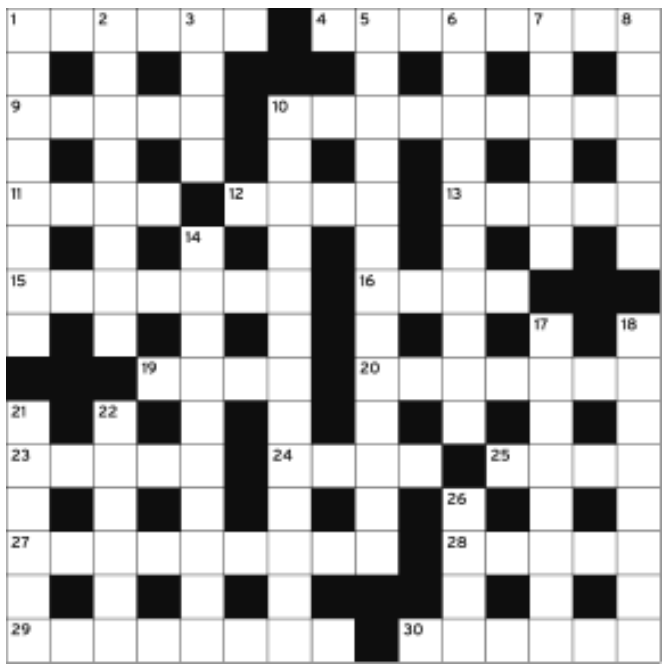
Madam/ Sir, my son is gone to Bombay for office work.

Immediately I called I said, "Kanna open the briefcase immediately." He said, "What suitcase?" I said, "Suitcase with marriage certificate." He said, "Are you talking about red suitcase from *Jambuvan* period? It is in the dicker of the car, I think two-three documents are there inside." I said, "Thank you Guruvayoorappa, finally problem is solved I can keep all the documents safely."

I told Kalam, "Briefcase is in the car dicker." She said, "Who has the car keys?" I said, "I don't know, are you having?" No. Now we are looking for car keys since morning.

*Yours in total exasperation,
J. Mathrubootham*

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3079



- Across**
- Elected absurdity that only amuses some (2-4)
 - Philosopher's hypocrisy is called out(4)
 - Send a rude chef out with malicious glee (13)
 - As to this charge: are you sure? (2,4,2)
 - Ditching North, retire to Piedmont location (5)
 - Unconventional bunch of cheques for the auditor? (9)
 - First two notes in wrong order? Try again (4)
 - Invested in 'About a Boy' (4)
 - Scottish speciality — flipping internal organ! — not liked at first (5)
 - Determined chaps united to get food at agreed price (3,4)
 - We're told massage is a necessity (4)
 - Ladies given latitude to opine online (4)
 - Little baby going around city causing rampage (3,4)
 - Country dancing yankee shaking behind (5)
 - Rascal, no-good rascal (4)
 - Removing silver plating, asking to reveal surface (4)
 - Expert put on weight for TV show (9)
 - Spanish greeting: in return, a Hawaiian greeting (5)
 - A fight? What might end a fight? (4-4)
 - Perhaps quark's revolutionary energy covering casing of electrons (6)
- Down**
- Bury the hatchet finally, suppressing second concern (8)
 - Civic responsibility that might involve a lot

Solution No. 3078





Body of work At Kolkata's Babu Ghat, men come to unwind with a traditional one-hour massage; the masseurs are a dwindling group of men from Girima village in Odisha's Puri district who have been in the profession for generations.

BALMS

The mystic MASSEURS

At Kolkata's Babu Ghat, 13 traditional masseurs knead and pound weary bodies as generations have done before them

K.R. Deepak

Vinod Barik's day begins at 5.30 a.m. He steps into Babu Ghat by the Hooghly in Kolkata, carrying with him bottles of mustard and olive oil. Now in his late 60s, Barik is a member of a vanishing tribe of traditional masseurs from Girima village in Odisha's Puri district.

For 35 years, Barik has earned a living massaging *babus* at the ghat. There was a time when masseurs from Girima and their traditional massages were highly patronised. But today, there are just 13 masseurs left at the ghat. "Our profession is nearly 200 years old. My great-grandfather told me that they had seen the Howrah bridge coming up," says Barik.

Earning ₹300 for an hour's massage and with three or four clients a day, the masseurs struggle to make ends meet. None of them can afford to bring their families to the city. As clients dwindle, the next generation has begun looking out for better paying jobs.

The handful of masseurs still have a small but steady clientele. Satyabrat Basu is a regular client at Babu Ghat. He says that the men in his family go there for a massage once or twice a month. "We believe that this *malish* helps with blood circulation," he says.

"I have a couple of NRI clients who visit Kolkata once a year, and during their month-long stay, they get massages here every other day," says Pradip Barik, a third-generation masseur. He, like the others, does not particularly approve of photographers clicking shots of the ghat.

The masseurs, who spend the entire day at the ghat, get their boost of energy from regular sips of tea. Some watch Hindi films on their smartphones as they wait for customers. And they all know that one day, this familiar scene at the ghat will become just a memory.



Massage in a bottle With his bottles of mustard and olive oil ready, traditional practitioner Vinod Barik begins a head-to-toe massage.



Twist and turn Clients are diminishing, and there are now only 13 masseurs who work at the ghat



Reflexes A traditional touch to relax muscles.



Push and pull A masseur helps stretch a client's back.



Free time Masseurs sip tea while they wait for customers.



Me time Masseurs watch Hindi films on their smartphones as they wait for clients.

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

60 MINUTES WITH SANAM MAHER

'Qandeel was murdered because of people's judgement'

We need to 'rewire our rotten social structure,' says the author of a book on social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch, who was murdered three years ago



woman. Women are somehow given this responsibility of projecting an image of how we want the world to see us as a society. And therefore there is anxiety when a woman transgresses societal notions of how she should dress, behave or think. A lot of it has to do with an entire culture built around policing and controlling women's bodies and actions.

The lead police investigator on Qandeel's case, Attiya Jaffrey, comments at one point 'But is becoming Qandeel Baloch freedom?' I am interested in this idea of 'freedom' for a woman. Can we talk about what it means to be a free woman?

■ In Attiya's case, freedom to her meant making a space for herself in a male dominated profession, fighting societal and cultural biases and finding the support of her husband and in-laws along the way. In Qandeel's case she wanted to be a singer and an actor. At the time of her death she was still trying to figure out a way to leverage the attention that she was getting – even if it came at a risk to her life – to financially support her parents and herself. Even today, whenever I say something about Qandeel, someone will inevitably comment: she was asking for it, why did she not study and work, why did she not do 'good' things and find other respectable paths, she deserved what she eventually got. We tend to discount the fact that it is not easy for a woman in our part of the world to come from nothing and make a name by being hated.

At the end of the day their paths were different but they both wanted the same thing: a meaningful life that they got to choose on their own terms, a life 'free' of consequences for not behaving the way society expected them to. Isn't it the same freedom you and I aspire for too?

Your book was shortlisted for the Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize in 2018 here in India. How has the book been received everywhere else?

■ I had no idea that it would become this big. I didn't foresee readers taking to the book the way they did. The most heartening thing to me is when people send pictures of their grandparents reading the book, or when women reach out to me and say, "I really judged Qandeel and I did think that she was really slutty and just an attention grabber. But well, I actually didn't know very much about her life."

■ The Karachi-based journalist has written on art, culture, business, politics, religious minorities and women

■ The *Sensational Life And Death Of Qandeel Baloch* was her debut book

■ The book just made it to *The New Yorker's* list of favourite non-fiction books of 2019

■ It is published under a different title — *A Woman Like Her* — in the U.S. and the U.K.

Archana Pidathala

Sanam Maher's debut book *The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch* pieces together the story of Pakistan's first social media star, Qandeel Baloch, who was murdered by her brother in the name of 'honour' in July 2016 in central Pakistan. The only crime she committed was to live life on her own terms. She offered to striptease for the national cricket team. She mocked a presidential warning not to celebrate Valentine's Day. She declared her love for Virat Kohli. She posted provocative selfies with a well-known religious cleric Mufti Qavi. And had an entire nation transfixed with her risqué *How I'm looking?* YouTube videos. Qandeel had over 8,00,000 followers on Facebook and over 40,000 followers on Twitter at the time of her death: unprecedented

for a young Pakistani woman who tried to escape poverty and an abusive marriage to make 'something' of her life.

Excerpts from an interview:

In September, three years after Qandeel's murder, her brother Waseem was sentenced for life. The other five accused of abetting the murder — including the cleric Mufti Qavi — were acquitted. What is your response to the verdict?

■ There has been a great deal of focus on the verdict and it does make a powerful statement. However, it didn't bring a measure of relief or closure, for me at least. Although I am relieved that Waseem wasn't let go, I feel terrible for Qandeel's parents, who were judged when they asked for their son to be pardoned. When you meet them you see where they are coming from and how this has destroyed their lives.

I really don't know what the best outcome is or should be. What we tend to forget is that Qandeel was also murdered because of people's judgement. There is a lot of work to be done to rewire our rotten social structure.

In the days before the murder, a newspaper published images of Qandeel's passport, revealing that her real name was Fouzia Azeem. Soon the world learned that she came from a poor home with mud walls in rural Pakistan and was not the daughter of a rich landlord as she claimed online in her American accent. Why did Qandeel hide her true identity?

■ Qandeel tried curating a 'classy' image of herself because she understood this inherent bias that people from a certain strata of society are allowed to behave in certain ways. A wealthy

identify with her and admire her."

We put her on a pedestal and ascribed all these values to her after she was killed. But when she was alive and getting this tide of hatred online, I wish we had stepped up and offered support. The least we could do if we encounter another Qandeel is speak up so that the online trolling doesn't spiral into something that will eventually threaten the person's life.

What is society's problem with overtly sexual women?

■ In our part of the world, when a woman is murdered, it is common to publish gory pictures of the victim in newspapers. If there is a picture of a woman in a swimsuit or a very revealing dress, there would be a fair amount of outrage.

We are more likely to be comfortable looking at a dead woman than an overtly sexual

There is anxiety when a woman transgresses societal notions of how she should dress, behave or think

glamorous girl posting amazing photos online is cool, brave and sexy. An influencer. Whereas a woman 'open' about wanting attention and fame, translating that into some sort of financial resource is looked down as cheap.

Did death make Qandeel a hero?

■ When Qandeel was killed, a lot of men and women, who had criticised and judged her in the past, did come forward and say, "We now see meaning in what she was doing. She was brave and just wanted freedom. We really



OFF-CENTRE

Idea of a monochromatic India

Kashmir and Assam are just the first two test cases in the vision to exclude Muslims

Amit Baruah

Integration'. That is what ending Jammu and Kashmir's special status was about. 'Protection' and 'safeguarding' the rights of people in the Northeast. That is what the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is about. Or so says the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But in Kashmir, far from feeling 'integrat-

ed', people get the sense that the Central government is actually furious that they enjoyed a version of (progressively diluted) autonomy over the years; that they now have to pay for what was once constitutionally and legally extended to them.

And in the Northeast, and specifically in Assam, the Centre has torpedoed the 1985 Assam Accord, which came about as the result of prolonged negotiations between the

Rajiv Gandhi government and the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU), and which had been preceded by enormous turmoil.

After the horrific massacres of Nellie and Gohpur in 1983, the anger on the streets of Assam, and the general disruption of life for years, the Assam Accord came as a much-needed, if partial, balm that ended the agitation and handed political power to AASU leaders.

Uprising People come together in Guwahati and Delhi to protest the Citizenship Amendment Act. • PTI & SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The Assam agitation had led to the creation of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) that had once wanted the secession of Assam from India, but eventually crumbled from within when the political accord was reached.

An accord killed

By enacting the CAA, the government has rendered the 1971 'cut-off' date in the Assam Accord redundant. The new cut-off date allows migrants to gain citizenship if they have come into the country until December 31, 2014. In fact, the CAA has effectively killed the Accord.

If Assam was on the boil in the 1980s, it was Kashmir in the 1990s. In both places a measure of peace was achieved after a great deal of unrest and blood-letting. The present government, in dealing with Kashmir and Assam, both sensitive and volatile parts of the country, has shown a singular lack of interest in either consulting political leaders, civil society groups, or reaching out to people.

As this piece is written, three elected

Chief Ministers, with whom the BJP was in alliance at one time or another, continue to be under preventive detention.

Instead of dealing with people and issues on the ground, the government simply responds to all criticism by pointing out that ending Kashmir's special status and bringing in the CAA have been BJP's political agenda for decades.

In Jammu and Kashmir, BJP's alliance with Mehbooba Mufti's party must have convinced it that it could never come to power in the State without a base in the Valley. Clearly, this led to the precipitous move to abrogate Article 370 and to bifurcate the State.

A mockery

And in Assam, the BJP mistook its growing electoral clout as popular support, and made a mockery of the sentiments of the Assamese people, who now feel betrayed by the party.

The Indian mosaic, however fissured, has been held together by a series of compromises and concessions made by both authorities and agitators in different parts of the country. Today, the path to dialogue, especially in Kashmir, is closed. We don't know what will happen in Assam, as its future is now tied up by the national CAA. Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC), a messy and painful exercise, led and supervised by an Assamese Chief Justice, has been thrown to the winds by the Modi-Shah government, which now promises a new NRC with a fresh cut-off date. Can there be a more arbitrary exercise of power? Meanwhile, the man who led the NRC, civil servant Prateek Hajela, has been banished to Madhya Pradesh.

A new Delhi is creating a monochromatic nation under a leadership whose overriding vision appears to be one that excludes Muslims altogether. Kashmir and Assam are just the first two test cases for this vision. The entire idea of the nation, as envisaged by our Constitution, is being upended under the guise of protecting persecuted minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Across India, students and ordinary citizens have taken to the streets to protest the CAA. Going by their courage and resolution, this new idea of India might not be so easy to implement.

