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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Renewing the Journey

This issue of *Pravasi Indians* comes to you in a refurbished format, with a new look and feel, enriched with new sections focusing on lifestyle, which includes food, fashion, well-being, and a lot more. The lifestyle section will share with Indians living abroad the changes that are taking place in India, changes in tastes, trends and views. Sometimes, Indians who left the country several years ago still harbour the old perceptions which prevailed then. But times change and the country has undergone a transformation for both better and worse. There are improvements and challenges, achievements and failures. So, *Pravasi Indians* will provide you vivid glimpses of the changes taking place in the daily lives of people. You will get to feel the pulsating excitement spreading across the nation. Remember, hallowed India has the world's largest population of youth. This section will keep you abreast with this segment of Mother India.

You must have heard of the Canadian media theorist's pithy formulation, 'Medium is the message'. It has become a cliché almost 60 years after it was coined. But there is an underlying truth which retains the freshness of its insight. The form in which anything is presented is not a mere external wrapping. The external form helps in understanding the intent and the meaning of what is being conveyed. That is why the design of the clothes we wear, of the houses we live in and the cities we inhabit convey their own messages. That is why we seek clothes that fit the occasion, houses that create the right ambience and cities that help us live meaningfully.

Design has the same significance in magazines and newspapers. It shows up what we are trying to convey. You will find the truth of this as you turn the pages designed by Pankaj Bhatia, look at the pictures, and delight in the fonts used for headlines and the text of the articles. All this will enhance the enjoyment of reading the magazine.

Pravasi Indians is connecting you to the India of today, while reminding you of eternal India. It is also connecting you to Indians in other parts of the globe. We will not claim that we have succeeded in creating this global connect of all Indians. But that is where we are heading.

Happy reading *Pravasi Indians*!

CEO and Publisher

We would love to hear from you, We also welcome Diaspora members to write for us and share their experiences

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TEACHING THE WISDOM OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA IN SINGAPORE

Many Indians living overseas worry that their traditions may end with them. They fear their children may be losing touch with their roots. Recognising this, **PAMPOSH DHAR** started lessons that are helping the diaspora find equanimity and the purpose of life

It was a personal tragedy, the loss of a much-loved and still-young nephew, that pushed me to search rather desperately for meaning in what seemed at that moment to be the randomness of life. I sought the answers in different traditions and found meaning and solace especially through Buddhism and Sufism, the mystic sect of Islam. I found Buddhism to be amazingly rational and loved its focus on living well now, rather than worrying only about an afterlife. Sufism spoke directly to my heart.

There is no right or wrong response to a spiritual tradition – this was simply mine. So I found myself still seeking – looking for something that would bring it all together for me, something that would appeal to both my mind and my heart. This search eventually led me to a course in the Bhagavad Gita. My studies in Buddhism and Sufism had surely prepared the ground so I understood so well the teachings of this ancient text. I also connected to the Gita on a personal level – as a child I had known

that my grandfather read from the text every evening and I had always wondered about this book that never seemed to end! Now I understood that one goes a little deeper, and understands a bit better, with every reading.

I found the Gita to be both practical and philosophical, full of wisdom applicable to everyday living as well as esoteric discussions of the nature of God. It is my greatest gift from the land of my birth. And it is a gift I am most happy to share with others through programmes for adults and children. Given the shifting landscape of Covid-related regulations, I teach online, which has opened up the courses to people outside Singapore, including India. Being based in a cosmopolitan city like Singapore, I am used to seeing people from several different countries in my Reiki and meditation classes. Not so for the Gita courses. About 80 percent of my students are Indian, or of Indian origin.

Many of the Indian students join to gain a

better understanding of their own spiritual heritage. Others see the Gita as a major world philosophy, part of the common heritage of humanity.

“Growing up in India, I absorbed messages from scriptures in bits and pieces from my parents,” says Reena Agrawal. “I enrolled in this course to get a deeper and practical understanding of lessons from the Gita.” Among her key learnings were finding equanimity and the purpose of life.

Amita Chawda, too, wanted to deepen her understanding of concepts she had learnt as part of her Indian upbringing. “For me the key takeaway was learning the essence of ‘doing the right thing,’” she says, referring to the concept of karma yoga.

For Bianca Polak, who is Dutch, the reasons for joining were different. “As someone who loves philosophy and culture, I was very interested in learning more about the Bhagavad Gita – especially because the life lessons in this ancient book are in a way



“
**The Bhagavad
Gita is essential
reading for
anyone on a
spiritual journey
to understand
the nature of the
Divine**”

says
Geetika Velloor

timeless and still relevant to this day and age,” she explains. “Through studying the Gita in depth, I also reflected on my own life and experienced new self-realisation.”

“The Bhagavad Gita is essential reading for anyone on a spiritual journey to understand the nature of the Divine,” says Geetika Velloor. “With her Gita classes, Pamposh not only helped her students discover their true nature and the nature of their relationship with a higher power, she also helped them gain insights into the nature of life itself.”

Many Indians living overseas worry that their traditions may end with them. They fear their children may be losing touch with their roots. Recognizing this, I offered a course for children in 2020. Reena Agrawal was among the first to sign up her daughters, Sanjana (10) and Samika (8). She wanted to “sow the seeds of spirituality” in her children, she says, and hoped the course would also “bring some mindfulness amidst the crazy world around us during the pandemic.”

Children, of course, need to be taught in a very different way from self-motivated adults – firstly, because they often join only because their parents push them to do so; and secondly, they are at an age where their default setting is to question everything. Every child takes away something a little different from the programme.

“We joined the programme because Mom signed us up,” says Sanjana quite frankly. Having joined, though, she found the course “calming and peaceful”. In her feedback at the end of the course, she pointed to a very specific learning: “One thing I learnt is that being smart is not about having the knowledge in your head. It’s about applying the knowledge.”

Another student, 15-year-old Advait Atreya, said he learnt “not to have prejudices about anyone – everyone is equal. And just be compassionate. Follow karma yoga – selfless action.” In these few words, he very effectively summed up a great deal of the essence of the Gita.

For me, there is no greater joy than sharing the wisdom that transformed my own life.

Krishna says in the final chapter of the Bhagavad Gita: “Those who teach this supreme mystery of the Gita to all who love me perform the greatest act of love; they will come to me without doubt.” (18:68, translated by Eknath Easwaran). ■



Pamposh Dhar

The writer is founder of Terataii, a Singapore-based company that offers counselling, coaching, meditation, Reiki classes and courses in the Bhagavad Gita. She works with both adults and children.



REGAINING BUYER'S TRUST

Despite disruptions caused by the pandemic, there are overriding factors that inspire confidence of both domestic and foreign investors, including NRIs, in the realty market

BY VISHAL DUGGAL

As the Indian economy shows signs of recovery after two turbulent years reeling under the disastrous impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the country's real estate sector too is gradually acquiring growth momentum. Though the outbreak of Omicron has refuelled worries, the demand for real estate is unlikely to ebb; rather, it will accelerate across categories. The country has emerged wiser since tackling the crisis since 2020 and even if the need arises to observe strictest adherence to counter-pandemic measures such as lockdown, business activities including those related to real estate are unlikely to come to a grinding halt. In fact, 2022 may witness unleashing of the demand which has been muted over the past two years as property

sales and prices had remained stagnant. How has this change come about, promising happy days ahead for India's real estate market?

INCREASED TRANSPARENCY IN REALTY DEALS

The enforcement of the Real Estate Regulation and Development Act 2016 (RERA) has infused much-needed transparency in the realty sector, which has now embraced an organised, regulated set-up. This has reassured NRIs and drawn increased investment from them as the RERA regime has managed to keep fly-by-night operators at bay.

CAPITALISING ON A HEALTHY ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

According to the latest Global Economic

Prospects report released by the World Bank, the Indian economy is expected to expand by 8.3 percent in FY 2021-22, riding on a host of aspects such as "ongoing structural reforms, a better-than-expected financial sector recovery, and measures to resolve financial sector challenges despite ongoing risks".

The real estate industry, an important contributor to the country's economic prosperity and the second-largest sector in terms of employment generation after agriculture, is all set to benefit from the positive economic outlook and evolving trends. The Knight Frank report titled "Real Estate Outlook 2022" corroborates this renewed optimism in the growth of the property market in the country. According to this report, residential real estate has

already witnessed a recovery, riding on the growing trend of work from home (WFH), which has become a new work culture during the pandemic. The report projects around 5 percent capital value growth for the residential property segment in the country in 2022.

Property advisory company Anarock too estimates that prices may appreciate in the range of 5 to 10 percent in residential realty. As per its projections, new supply and sales of homes might reach 2019 levels in 2022. Flexible work options have driven the demand for a second or a larger home with better amenities among professionals who are now looking for wider work-life choices. They evince interest even in the city's periphery which offers a wider choice of large, open areas.

Similarly, homes complementing lifestyles have become a preferred choice with ultra-high net worth individuals (UHNIs) and non-resident Indians (NRIs) who wish to own a piece of property in their motherland.

According to Anarock, between January and September 2021, the residential sector saw a hike of 27 percent in new supply vis-à-vis the full-year supply in 2020. During this period, 1.45 lakh housing units were sold, marking a 5 percent increase over the sales in 2020. Among other factors, continuing low interest rates on home loans, stamp duty and affordable prices have expanded the realty growth in tier 2/3 cities too. This has further encouraged investment by Indian expats who stand to benefit from the rupee-dollar exchange rate in property transactions.

COMMERCIAL REALTY NOT LAGGING BEHIND

Commercial real estate too has witnessed healthy growth. As per a report by commercial real estate services and investment firm CBRE, office leasing activity reached 13.5 million sq ft in Q3 2021, growing at about 140 percent quarter on quarter. The demand for office space has received a boost on the back of the upswing in Information Technology (IT) companies' hiring momentum.

Further, uncertainty arising in the wake of the pandemic has prompted businesses to opt for co-working spaces and hybrid models which offer enhanced flexibility and affordability in operations and cost

Residential real estate has already witnessed a recovery, riding on the growing trend of work from home (WFH) which has become a new work culture during the pandemic.



components. The new trend is catching up not only in metros but in tier 2 cities as well with companies showing marked preference for leveraging flexi spaces with well-connected infrastructure, advanced technologies and smarter functioning to reduce their costs and improve productivity.

According to the latest CII-ANAROCK report, "Workplaces of the Future", currently approximately 35 million sq ft of flexible office stock is available across the country. Of this, around 71 percent or 25 million sq ft is owned by large operators. But new players too have major future expansion plans. For instance, co-working firm Smartworks is planning an approximately 20 million sq ft co-working space comprising approximately 2.5 lakh seats over the next three to four years.

RETURN OF RETAIL

Customers are back to physical shopping destinations. According to a CBRE report, retail leasing activity touched 0.6 million sq ft in Q3 2021 across Grade A malls and high

streets, and also witnessed a quarter on quarter growth of nearly 165 percent. Faced with the challenges posed by e-commerce, retail is all set to get into experiential mode with high streets, malls, hypermarkets coming up with new concepts to provide an engaging experience to visitors who can unwind, relax, and entertain themselves, apart from shopping.

ADOPTING DIGITALISATION AND INNOVATION

With the beginning of a new era of online home buying and selling, real estate companies have enhanced their technology factor and changed their offerings as per the new standards. They are investing in technology and digital channels to reach out to consumers in the country and abroad in a more efficient way.

Enhancements in technology are going to make property sale and purchase a seamless, hassle-free and transparent affair, making investment in Indian real estate a value proposition for NRIs.

EASE IN INVESTMENT NORMS

Of the top 20 investment destinations globally, India continues to attract high levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The government has recently allowed 100 percent FDI through the automatic route in construction-development projects — townships, residential and commercial buildings, roads, bridges, hotels, resorts, hospitals, educational institutions, recreational facilities, and city- and regional-level infrastructure. Thus, FDI has emerged as an important growth driver for real estate projects, which have succeeded in attracting increased remittances from NRI investors, especially in the residential market.

Luxury homes in global cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai are a preferred choice of these investors. Anarock's consumer survey shows a clear rise in the preference for properties priced over Rs 90 lakh. During the first wave, 27 percent of respondents preferred properties priced over Rs 90 lakh, which increased to 38 percent during the second wave. Now that we are in the midst of the third wave, will the security and reassurance provided by property bring more investors to the country's real estate market? All in all, experts predict an optimistic year ahead for the real estate industry. ■

The bad bank concept has been a huge success in several countries and can be a very effective remedy for NPAs of Indian banks. But laws must be foolproof and sans any scope for ambiguity



BAD BANK FOR BAD LOANS

BY B SHEKHAR

The writer is a Bengaluru-based business journalist associated with IMS Foundation.



When a bank shares its financial statement, the first figure that an analyst looks at is the percentage of NPAs (Non-Performing Assets), which precisely indicates the health of the bank. The acceptable range of NPAs for any bank, private or public, is up to 4 percent of total assets. Any figure above that indicates the bank has a high percentage of stressed assets, which is not good for the growth or efficiency of the bank. This near-invisible small statistic can have a cascading effect on the bank's performance: reducing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the lending system, and significantly shrinking availability of credit – thus creating a problem not only for the bank but also for policy-makers, and affecting the economic growth of the country.

Increasing NPAs has become an unending nightmare for the Indian banking sector over

Countries where bad banks are a success



the years, due to various factors including deliberate default in loan repayments which has a clear political background. In fact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself said recently that banks' NPAs kept increasing in the past due to lack of transparency and various other banking sector practices.

However, with the introduction of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), strengthening of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest (SARFAESI) Act and Debt Recovery Tribunals laws, as well as setting up of dedicated Stressed Asset Management Verticals (SAMVs) in banks for large-value NPA accounts in the past three years, the NPAs have stabilised somewhat and brought a sharper focus on recovery.

But, in spite of these efforts, a substantial amount of NPAs remain on the balance sheets of banks primarily because the stock of bad loans, as revealed by the Asset Quality Review, is not only large, but fragmented across various lenders.

The RBI's 24th Financial Stability Report (FSR), released on December 29, 2021,

ACCEPTABLE LIMIT OF NPAs

4%

GROSS NPAs IN SEPTEMBER 2021

6.9%

ESTIMATED GROSS NPAs IN SEPTEMBER 2022

8.1%

(ACCORDING TO BASE LINE SCENARIO)

ESTIMATED GROSS NPAs IN SEPTEMBER 2022 (ACCORDING TO STRESS LINE SCENARIO)

Source: RBI's 24th Financial Stability Report

The Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) indicate precisely the health of the bank. The acceptable range of NPAs for any bank, private or public, is up to 4 percent of its total assets.

NATIONAL ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY (NARCL) A.K.A BAD BANK CORPUS FUND IN CR.

30,600

AMOUNT OF BAD LOAN FOR NARCL TO PAY

15%

AMOUNT OF BAD LOAN CONVERTED TO GOVERNMENT-GUARANTEED SECURITY RECEIPTS

85%

indicates that the gross NPAs of banks may increase from 6.9 percent in September 2021 to 8.1 percent by September 2022 under the baseline scenario and to 9.5 percent under a severe stress scenario. The Government of India, in order to check banks going into the red, in September announced the setting up of the National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL), paving the way for operationalisation of the bad bank concept.

The Union Cabinet had approved a corpus fund of Rs 30,600 crore as government guarantee for the NARCL. The proposal has come as a welcome move for the banking sector which has been reeling under the weight of bad loans. The bad bank or NARCL will pay up to 15 percent of the agreed value for the loans in cash and the remaining 85 percent will be government-guaranteed security receipts.

BAD BANK OPERATIONS

A bad bank is a corporate structure that isolates risky assets held by banks as a separate entity. It is established to buy NPAs from a bank at a price determined by the bad bank.

Carrying non-performing assets, also called non-performing loans, on the balance sheet places significant burden on the lender. The

THE MALADY	THE REMEDY
 <p>The Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) indicate precisely the health of the bank. The acceptable range of NPAs for any bank, private or public, is up to 4 percent of its total assets.</p> <p>The RBI's 24th Financial Stability Report (FSR) indicates that the gross NPAs of banks may increase from 6.9 percent in September 2021 to 8.1 percent by September 2022 under the baseline scenario and to 9.5 percent under a severe stress scenario.</p>	 <p>The Government of India, in order to check banks going into the red, in September 2021 announced the setting up of the National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL), paving the way for operationalisation of the bad bank concept.</p> <p>The Union Cabinet had approved a corpus fund of Rs 30,600 crore as government guarantee for the NARCL. The proposal has come as a welcome move for the banking sector which has been reeling under the weight of bad loans.</p>



Having a significant amount of NPAs on the balance sheet over a period of time is an indicator to regulators that the financial fitness of the bank is at risk and its asset quality needs improvement.

HOW BAD BANK WILL WORK



The bad bank or NARCL will pay up to 15 percent of the agreed value for the loans in cash and the remaining 85 percent will be government-guaranteed security receipts.

The NARCL will acquire assets by making an offer to the lead bank. Once NARCL's offer is accepted, the India Debt Resolution Company Ltd (IDRCL) will be engaged for management and value addition. This will benefit the bank in getting a new structure. IDRCL is a service company/operational entity which will manage the assets.

BENEFITS OF BAD BANK



- **The government, through the NARCL and IDRCL, will incentivise quicker action on resolving stressed assets, thereby helping in better value realisation.**
- **This approach will also permit freeing up of personnel in banks to focus on increasing business and credit growth.**
- **Further, it will bring about improvement in the banks' valuation and enhance their ability to raise market capital.**

non-payment of interest or principal reduces the lender's cash flow, which can disrupt budgets and decrease earnings. Loan loss provisions, which are set apart to cover potential losses, reduce the capital available to provide subsequent loans to other borrowers. Once the actual losses from defaulted loans are determined, they are written off against earnings. Having a significant amount of NPAs on the balance sheet over a period of time is an indicator to regulators that the financial fitness of the bank is at risk and its asset quality needs improvement.

Resolution mechanisms of this nature which deal with a backlog of NPAs typically require a backstop from the government. It is here that the role of a bad bank comes into play, improving cash flow and thereby

asset quality. In addition, it also builds credibility and provides for emergency financial buffers. Hence, the government guarantee of up to Rs 30,600 crore will back Security Receipts (SRs) issued by NARCL. The guarantee will be valid for five years. The precedent condition for invocation of guarantee would be resolution or liquidation. The guarantee shall cover the shortfall between the face value of the SR and the actual realisation. The government guarantee will also enhance liquidity of SRs, as they are tradable.

The NARCL will acquire assets by making an offer to the lead bank. Once NARCL's offer is accepted, the India Debt Resolution Company Ltd (IDRCL) will be engaged for management and value addition. This will benefit the bank in getting a new structure.

IDRCL is a service company/operational entity which will manage the assets and engage market professionals and turnaround experts. Public Sector Banks (PSBs) and public Financial Institutions (FIs) will hold a maximum of 49 percent stake while the rest will be with private sector lenders.

BENEFITS FOR THE STRESSED BANK

The government, through the NARCL and IDRCL, will incentivise quicker action on resolving stressed assets, thereby helping in better value realisation. This approach will also permit freeing up of personnel in banks to focus on increasing business and credit growth. As the holders of these stressed assets and SRs, banks will receive the gains. Further, it will bring about improvement in the banks' valuation and enhance their ability to raise market capital.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Reserve Bank of India, being the regulator of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs), has already prescribed a regulatory framework for the functioning of ARCs and there are well-stipulated norms for transfer of stressed assets by banks and non-banking finance companies to ARCs.

Last year, the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) had proposed setting up a bad bank for swift resolution of the NPA problem. Following this, the Finance Minister, in the 2021-22 Union Budget had proposed the setting up of an ARC, along with an Asset Management Company (AMC), to take over the stressed debts of banks.

Bad banks have been institutionalised and considered a success in several countries including the US, Sweden, Finland, Belgium and Indonesia. In India the concept is new and the issue related to purchase and sale of stressed assets of banks is a big challenge which may result in ambiguity. And, of course, not to neglect other structural reforms that are required in parallel to deal with the NPAs at large. If these parameters are laid out comprehensively in the regulatory framework, the bad bank concept will be a huge success similar to the introduction of GST in 2017. ■

Review

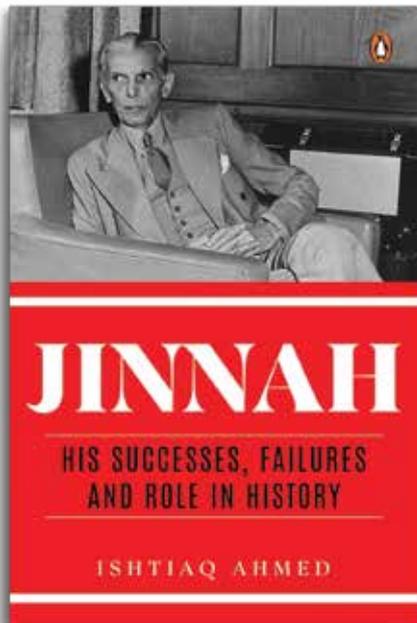
DEMYSTIFYING JINNAH

Ishtiaq Ahmed assesses the founder of Pakistan with remarkable objectivity as a person who put millions of lives at stake for his single-minded ambition to achieve political power



By
DR SANJEEV CHOPRA

The writer is a historian, public policy analyst, and Festival Director at the Valley of Words, Dehradun. Until recently, he was the Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie.



Jinnah: His Successes, Failures and Role in History

Author: Ishtiaq Ahmed

Published By: India Viking | Price: Rs 999 | Pages: 840

This is indeed a weighty book – both literally and metaphorically. This is how I described it when introducing Ishtiaq Ahmed at the (online) Kolkata edition of Valley of Words (VoW). The book went on to receive the PFC-VoW award for the best non-fiction work published in India in 2021.

Jinnah: His Successes, Failures and Role in History is a magisterial work spread over 800 pages and is based on exhaustive research on the writings and utterances of Muhammad Ali Jinnah from the time he entered public life. As silence is also a form of communication, Dr Ahmed also notes the critical moments when Jinnah ‘spoke’ by choosing to remain quiet! Till the publication of this book, the mainstream understanding of Jinnah came from the works and writings of Stanley Wolpert, Hector Bolitho, and Ayesha Jalal – all of whom raised him to a pedestal. While Wolpert and Bolitho asserted that Pakistan was created by him, Jalal’s argument was that Jinnah’s ambition was not the creation of Pakistan but recognition as being the sole spokesman for Indian Muslims. This would to some extent explain his reluctance to share the stage with two formidable leaders of Muslim majority states who could have posed a challenge to him: His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in Kashmir.

While their assertions are true, based on their selection of facts, to get to the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, one needs to read Ahmed, for he leaves out nothing. There is not one statement of Jinnah from 1906 (when he joined the Indian National Congress) till

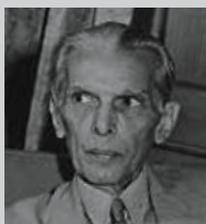
his death in 1948 as Qaid-i-Azam (Arabic: "Great Leader") or all-powerful Governor General of Pakistan which has not been analysed by Dr Ahmed. He identifies four stages in the political career of Mohammad Ali Jinnah: first as an Indian nationalist, then as a Muslim communitarian, third as a Muslim nationalist and, finally, as the founder of Pakistan. Each stage is historically contextualised, and politically theorised. The first three unfolded against the backdrop of British rule, and the fourth after Pakistan had come into being. However, as the rise of Jinnah and the Muslim League (ML) in Indian politics is intertwined with the history of the Congress as well as the worldview of its principal leaders, Gandhi, Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru, Azad, Bose, and Patel, it makes for a fascinating read – for it is also the story of India's independence, as well as the machinations of the Empire in delaying first the Dominion status, and then the independence of the country.

The book vividly describes his contribution to the Lucknow Pact of 1916, which won him the epithet of being an icon of Hindu-Muslim unity. Speaking in 1916, Jinnah had said, "this country has not to be governed by Hindus, and let me submit, it has not to be governed by the Muslims either, or certainly not by the English. It must be governed by the people and the sons of this country." However, over 1920-29, he began arguing that Muslims were a distinct community, and sought constitutional safeguards that would prevent the perceived Hindu majoritarian domination in a united India. In the all-party convention held in Calcutta in 1928 to discuss the Motilal Nehru report, the main sticking point was whether the residuary powers should be with the Centre or the states. Jinnah stuck to his resolve that the residuary powers would be with the provinces. Ahmed avers that the British did their best to ensure that the gulf between the Congress and the League became unbridgeable: that was the guarantee for the Raj to continue for longer.

The third phase of Jinnah's activism was Muslim nationalism. The core argument advanced during this phase was that Indians were not one nation but two nations – Hindus and Muslims – and that Muslims were not a large minority, but a political nation entitled to self-determination. But this was not all. He stretched the argument to state that, other

than the Muslim League ML, no other party was 'representative' of the Muslims. Not only was this argument conceptually flawed, it was also empirically inaccurate for the Muslims in Punjab, Bengal and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) were certainly not with the ML. This was borne out in the election results held after the GoI Act of 1935, when the ML could not make a dent in the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab, Bengal and the NWFP. However, as Ahmed correctly points out, this period also saw tactical mistakes (or blunders!) by the Congress in vacating the political space in 1939, thereby making it possible for the ML to occupy centrestage when the Empire 'needed all hands on deck' for the World War II. If the Congress under Gandhi took its idealistic opposition to the extreme, Jinnah precisely leveraged those situations to extract the relevant concessions from the Raj. We also learn how the Communist party in India tagged behind their Soviet mentors, refused to think independently, and provided the 'theoretical construct' for the creation of Pakistan. But Jinnah was always suspicious of them, and the Left soon became peripheral to the politics of Pakistan.

In many ways, Jinnah was also lucky. Many of those who could have contested his leadership simply passed away. They included the premiers of Punjab and Sindh, as well as the influential leader of the Unionist party, Sir Chottu Ram, who could have held the party together against the onslaught of the ML.



Ahmed's book serves the purpose of looking at Jinnah's life with greater objectivity. True, Jinnah overcame several obstacles but whether he could be cast in the mould of a Carlyle's hero is doubtful.

Ahmed's book serves the purpose of looking at Jinnah's life with greater objectivity. True, Jinnah overcame several obstacles, but whether he could be cast in the mould of a Carlyle's hero is doubtful. For, unlike Gandhi, he did not proffer any new way of dealing with the historical situation. Gandhi brought to political theory the insistence on the means being more important than the end. He was also uncompromising in his resolve to settle issues through non-violence and Satyagraha. Even as he was able to get his way with the Congress, there were many leaders in the Congress who had their own perspectives: Patel, Nehru, Azad and Kriplani, among others. Jinnah, on the other hand, was determined to be the 'sole spokesman', and he did all he could to achieve his aim of creating a separate state for Indian Muslims – whatever the cost or consequences.

In fact, Gandhi emerges as the real hero in the book. His letter to Lord Irwin in which he pleads for sparing the life of Bhagat Singh is a fine example of draftsmanship: "Popular opinion rightly or wrongly demands commutation. In the present case the chances are that if commutation is granted, internal peace is most likely to be promoted. In the event of execution, peace is undoubtedly in danger." He ends the letter by saying, "Charity never faileth."

It is true that at the time Gandhi called him a Gujarati Muslim in 1915, Jinnah would have preferred to be known as an Indian nationalist. However, Gandhi truly and genuinely believed that everyone living in India was an Indian – and he said this to everyone who met him. There was certainly a clash in the way the two envisaged nationhood – for Jinnah, it was a nationalism based exclusively on religion, whereas for Gandhi, nationalism was territorial: he said so to the Naga leaders who came to visit him just before Independence.

One can conclude by saying that while Jinnah was successful in the short run – Pakistan did come into existence and India was divided – in the long run Pakistan has encountered many more problems than it could ever have envisaged and in this sense his project was a failure. In the long durée, history will appraise him as a person who put millions of lives at stake for his single-minded ambition to achieve political power, which he then refused to share with anyone. He did not, when he could have, put Pakistan on the path of democracy and constitutionalism: instead, he centralised all power, postponed the making of the Constitution, reduced the states to the level of municipalities, alienated over 55 percent of the population of East Bengal with his insistence on Urdu being the sole official language, and set the terrible precedent of getting the governors to dismiss chief ministers.

One look at Pakistan today, and one realises that a nation cannot be built exclusively on religion without considering factors like language, ethnicity, and cultural hegemony. The hatred between Sindhis and Punjabis is well known, the Muhajirs, the Baluchs and the Pashtuns have their own reasons to feel alienated from the mainstream discourse.

What then are the key takeaways? First and foremost, facts may be kept under wraps for some time, but there will always be an Ishtiaq Ahmed to ferret them out from archives and oral histories. Second, religion and politics make a heady cocktail but, more often than not, it spins out of control, garrison states soon develop a logic of their own – creating a 'deep' state which is far removed from the pressing needs and aspirations of civil society, commercial establishments, and academia.

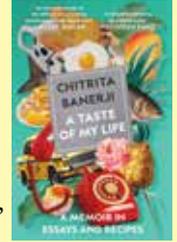
Last but not least, I have my own theory about recent converts trying to outdo everyone else in the assertion of their new identities. We know that the families of both Jinnah and Iqbal were recent converts, and that Lajpat Rai's father had returned to the Hindu fold after conversion to Islam. Master Tara Singh too had been a Hindu before his conversion to Sikhism. These leaders were far more rigid in their approach – as if they had to prove a point. As local saying in Punjab goes, "a new Muslim reads the namaz seven times a day!" ■

New Releases

A TASTE OF MY LIFE

by **CHITRITA BANERJI**

A two-time winner of the Sophie Coe Award in Food History, Chitrita Banerji is a Bengali-American writer who examines the relationships between memory, history, culture, religion, and food in her works.



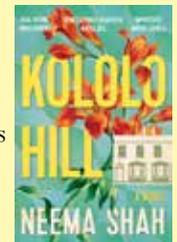
In this memoir, styled like a three-course meal with an ironic twist, she offers an absorbing portrait of a life that has intermingled with food in moving and unexpected ways. Through vividly evoked repasts with family, and other meaningful gastronomic encounters in settings both personal and political, Banerji reveals how food has played a defining role in her experiences of love, adventure, conflict, loss and reconciliation. In the process, she introduces us to those dishes and drinks most special to her – Kadam Bhai's duck bhuna, her father's favourite tea, winter treats such as narkel naru, a chicken sandwich from memoryland – and charms us throughout with her sublime and enchanting prose.

Picador India / Rs 399 / 176 pages

KOLOLO HILL

by **NEEMA SHAH**

Uganda 1972. An edict. All Ugandan Asians must leave, take only what they can carry and never return.



For Asha and Pran, married a matter of months, it means abandoning the family business that Pran has worked so hard to save. For his mother, Jaya, it means saying goodbye to the house that has been her home for decades. But violence is escalating in Kampala, and people are disappearing. Will they all make it to safety in Britain and will they be given refuge if they do? And all the while, a terrible secret about the expulsion hangs over them, threatening to tear the family apart. From the green hilltops of Kampala, to the terraced houses of London, Neema Shah's extraordinarily moving debut explores what it means to leave your home behind, what it takes to start again, and the lengths some will go to protect their loved ones.

Shah's parents and grandparents left India to make their homes in East Africa and later in London, where she was born and lives. Kololo Hill is her debut and was shortlisted for the Bath Novel Award and the DGA First Novel Prize.

Picador India / Rs 650 / 352 pages



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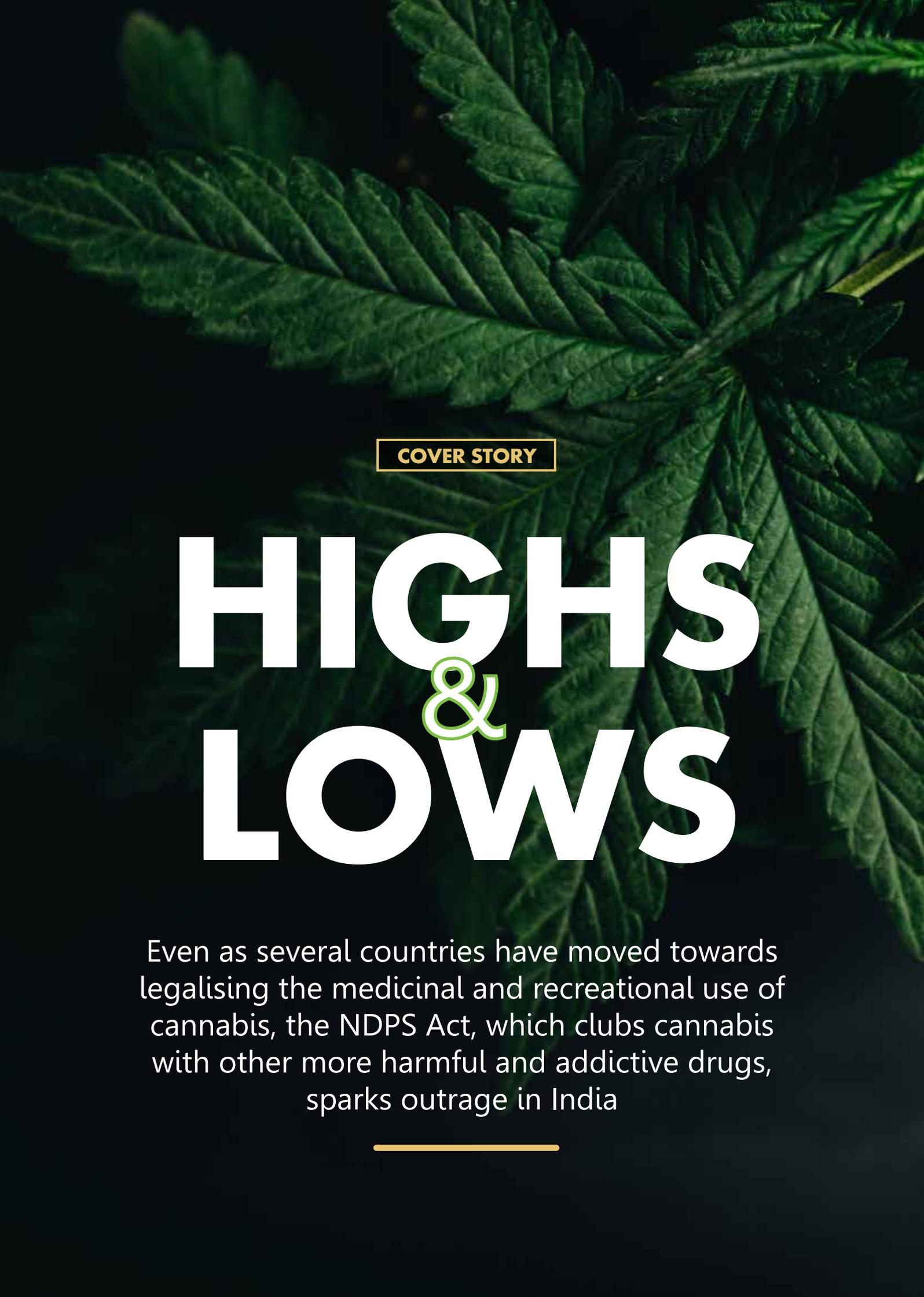


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COVER STORY

HIGHS & LOWS

Even as several countries have moved towards legalising the medicinal and recreational use of cannabis, the NDPS Act, which clubs cannabis with other more harmful and addictive drugs, sparks outrage in India





By
Samudra Roychowdhury

The writer is an IT professional, passionate about Indian history, and the founder of [www. indicvoices.com](http://www.indicvoices.com).



“Legalisation has brought more awareness about cannabis in Canadian society. The involvement of the government has made the industry safer,” says Jared Samson, manager of Green World, an authorised cannabis store in Ajax, a town in Ontario, Canada. He feels that everything in this industry must be licensed, starting from the store, salespersons, and products. He then goes on to talk about the evolution of the industry and the various types of products available. “We sell cannabis in various forms, ranging from smoking, vaping, beverages, edibles, topicals, and lotions,” Samson reveals.

Destiny Gibbs, a long-time consumer of cannabis, which is colloquially called weed, echoes similar sentiments. “We are getting better quality and safe products. We get all the products in tamper-proof packaging.” Though she laments that some people still go to illegal shops to get beyond government regulations, that is, to buy a larger quantity of cannabis than the government-mandated 30 gm of dried cannabis or its equivalent.

The above instances reveal interesting outcomes of the initiative by Canada to legalise cannabis in 2018. The Canadian government had a number of goals while legalising weed. Among them were keeping hard drugs away from the youth, taking profits away from criminals and protecting public health by regulating the use of cannabis.

According to the Canadian Cannabis Survey 2020, only six to eight percent of Canadians reported obtaining cannabis from illicit sellers. This is definitely an achievement as it is evident that people have moved to legal sources as far as the procurement of cannabis in Canada is concerned. The study also unearthed that illegal cannabis products were contaminated with microbes and pesticides.

According to the same survey, 27 percent of participants reported having used marijuana in the past year — an increase from 22 percent in the first cannabis survey conducted in 2017. There is an increase, but it is not alarming. It dispels the apprehension that legalising cannabis would make a greater percentage of the country’s population users.

RESEARCHERS ARE STUDYING WHETHER MEDICAL MARIJUANA CAN HELP TREAT A NUMBER OF CONDITIONS INCLUDING:



ALZHEIMER'S



ANOREXIA



CROHN'S



CANCER



EPILEPSY



GLAUCOMA



SCHIZOPHRENIA



**POST
TRAUMATIC**



**STRESS DISORDER
(PTSD)**



**MULTIPLE
SCLEROSIS**

On an average, in 2019, six percent of Canadians aged 15 or older reported using cannabis daily or almost daily — about the same level as in 2018 (5.9 percent).

Before legalisation of cannabis in Canada, there was a concern that there would be an increase in the number of people driving after consuming cannabis and this would increase road fatalities. According to the same survey, the likelihood of reporting driving after cannabis use did not change with legalisation of the drug. For example, in 2019, 13.2 percent of cannabis users in Canada with a

valid driver's licence reported driving within two hours of using cannabis — unchanged from 2018.

GLOBAL SCENARIO

The ingredients obtained from the cannabis plant are known by multiple names around the world — marijuana, Mary Jane, weed, pot, hemp and grass. Various countries, apart from Canada, have legalised various forms of the cannabis plant for recreational use. These countries include Mexico, South Africa, Uruguay, Georgia, and the Australian capital region. In the US, 18 states, two territories,

Recreational use of cannabis legal in: Canada, Georgia, Malta, Mexico, South Africa, Uruguay, 18 states, 2 territories, and the District of Columbia in the US and the Australian Capital Territory.



Use of cannabis in India is regulated by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 which sparked a debate after Bollywood got dragged into drug cases



and the District of Columbia have allowed or at least decriminalised use of cannabis, though it is still banned at the federal level. The medical use of cannabis is allowed in even more countries.

In many countries, cannabis has been found to be of medicinal and industrial value. Its various forms have been found to be of use in managing various diseases like Alzheimer's, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), epilepsy and seizures, among others. Found to be an excellent muscle relaxant with an ability to lessen tremors in Parkinson's disease, marijuana is also used to manage nausea and can be helpful for cancer patients after chemotherapy.

Research is on-going on cannabis usage. Two compounds found in the cannabis plant, cannabigerolic acid and cannabidiolic acid, have the ability to fight the novel coronavirus! Oregon State University has recently conducted a study in a lab setting and found these two chemicals can prevent the Sars-CoV-2 virus from entering cells that typically line internal organs and the skin.

INTEGRAL TO INDIAN TRADITION

There is evidence that cannabis has been used for medicinal purposes in India for more than 2000 years. Sushruta Samhita, the ancient Sanskrit text on medicine and surgery, documents the use of cannabis for treating respiratory ailments, diarrhoea and acute pain. The same fact finds mention in the Ashtadhyayi of Panini from 2,300 years ago.

In India, cannabis is available under different names like charas, bhang, and ganja. While bhang is a paste derived from grinding cannabis leaves and stems together, ganja is made from dried flower buds of the plant. Charas is a resin that is obtained by rubbing cannabis flowers for hours.

Sadhus and yogis belonging to Shaivite and Shaktiya cults have been known to use either cannabis or opium or both to induce concentration of the mind for meditation on the Supreme Being. Lord Shiva is described as a cannabis user, and known as the 'Lord of bhang'. Bhang, prepared in different forms, has been utilised in

religious rituals. In some parts of India, bhang prepared in the form of a syrup is consumed on festive occasions such as Holi and Shivaratri.

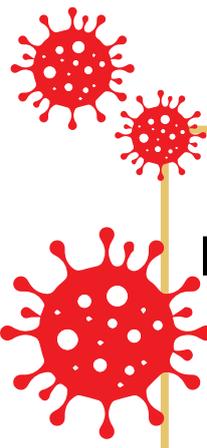
MUCH-ABUSED LEGISLATION

The use of cannabis in India is regulated by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act) of 1985. But this law has sparked an intense debate after the involvement of Bollywood actors has often surfaced in many drug cases. Even though it is a pity that certain media houses got involved in such page three equivalent gossip journalism, it indeed brought an important topic to the fore, that is, much-needed reform of the NDPS Act.

The law, in its current form, aims to prohibit "the manufacture, production, trade, use, etc. of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances", except for medical or scientific purposes. Punishment for possessing such drugs may range from one to 10 years in jail, depending upon the quantity possessed.

The biggest concern with this law is that, unlike most other laws in India, it shifts the burden of proof on the accused. Innocent unless proven guilty is not applicable here! The law does not even require personal possession of drugs during the arrest. It gives law enforcers ample scope to put up charges against someone.

The law puts drugs like marijuana in the same group as hard drugs like cocaine, heroin and meth. By clubbing cannabis with more harmful and addictive drugs, this law inadvertently tends to encourage the illegal drug trade to focus on hard drugs as the punishment is the same whereas the monetary gain from heroin smuggling is much more than from cannabis. Moreover, an outright ban on all sorts of narcotic drugs in India, except for medical or scientific purposes, encourages underground drug peddling and siphoning of revenue into other illegal activities, including terrorism. Further, this law puts huge pressure on the already strained law enforcement agencies in India. Instead of running after drug smuggling involving large amounts, our police force is often seen busy catching personal consumers of cannabis and small-time



CAN CANNABIS PREVENT COVID?

At a time when the world is battling raging COVID-19 infections, a new study has revealed that a chemical found in live cannabis plants could help protect human cells against coronavirus infections.

A study by scientists at Oregon State University (OSU) and Oregon Health and Science University published in the Journal of Nature Products, has said that two cannabinoid acids commonly found in hemp varieties of cannabis, cannabigerolic acid, or CBGA, and cannabidiolic acid, also known as CBDA, prevent the virus from entering cells and causing infection, potentially offering new avenues to prevent and treat the disease.



TYPES OF DRUGS

DEPRESSANTS

impact the body's central nervous system, and slow down messages between the brain and the body. They adversely impact the user's ability to respond to what is happening around them. Example: Rohypnol/Roofies.

STIMULANTS

speed up messages between the brain and the body. They make the user agitated and insomniac, among many other effects. Example: Cocaine, Methamphetamine/Meth.

HALLUCINOGENS

change the user's sense of reality. They can cause confusion, disorientation, dizziness, paranoia, panic attacks. Example: LSD, MDMA/Ecstasy.

OPIOIDS

are powerful painkillers that produce a sense of well-being or euphoria, and trigger sudden mood changes. Example: Heroin, Morphine.

DISSOCIATIVES

distort the user's perception of reality. They inhibit pain by cutting off or dissociating the brain's perception of the pain. Example: PCP, Dextromethorphan.

CANNABIS

Cannabis, native to Central and South Asia, is used as a drug for both recreational and medicinal purpose for centuries. Its effects include euphoria, altered state of mind, difficulty concentrating, impaired memory and body movement, relaxation, and an increase in appetite.



'We sell cannabis in various forms, ranging from smoking, vaping, beverages, edibles, topicals, and lotions.'



– Jared Samson, Manager, Green World, authorised cannabis store, Ajax, Ontario, Canada

India must ensure regulation before legalising so it does not lead to profiteering. Canada offers example where sale is run by public-private joint ventures

peddlers of it. When the Indian media was busy covering the Aryan Khan case, precisely at that time nearly 25 kg of heroin was seized from a container in Nhava Sheva Port in Navi Mumbai! We need to focus on the right priorities as no nation has infinite numbers of police personnel.

Moreover, criminalising personal consumption of cannabis puts a stigma on the victims and leads to their alienation from society. Instead of helping, it causes hindrance in the process of rehabilitation of drug users. A criminal record poses serious challenges in various aspects of a person's future life even after the person has discontinued use of cannabis.

PERILS OF CANNABIS

The use of cannabis does have its share of potential harmful effects. When used long-term, it can have very detrimental effects and can even cause brain damage.

A study has found that rats exposed to Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis, before birth, soon after birth, or during adolescence show notable problems with specific learning and memory tasks later in life.

So, certainly, cannabis is not something that should be encouraged for random use or for recreational purposes. But that is applicable for any addiction like tobacco and alcohol.

LEGALISATION WITH REGULATION

We need to understand that in most cases, attempts to ban something give a fillip to its underground economy. Eventually, it causes more harm than good to society in the long run. We can draw an analogy here from the recent hooch tragedy in Bihar where 30 people died from consuming spurious liquor in November 2021. It was attributable, among other things, to the enforcement of Prohibition in the state.

Before legalising or decriminalising cannabis in India we have to ensure that there is strict government regulation so that it does not become an unbridled private profit-making business. We can learn from the Canadian example here as well. In the province of Ontario, cannabis sale is run by public-private joint venture with the Ontario Cannabis Retail Corporation, a public company, commanding the legal monopoly over online retail of recreational cannabis to consumers and wholesale distribution to privately operated brick and mortar retailers throughout Ontario.

In colonial India, cannabis was not banned but the British had imposed a tax on different byproducts of cannabis to discourage its excessive use.

We have to appreciate the fact that India has historically been a liberal society and has taken the lead in terms of science and culture for centuries. We also have the ability to rectify our past mistakes and take scientific as well as informed steps regarding the future. One such step can be legalising cannabis usage in India through an effective, well-conceived regulatory regime. ■

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श्रीशैलम

जहाँ चेंचू लोगों के दामाद बने शिव

मंदिरों में स्थापत्य के कई अप्रतिम उदाहरण दक्षिण में दिखते हैं। उनमें भी श्रीशैलम स्थित मल्लिकार्जुन ज्योतिर्लिंग की कथाएँ और अंतर्कथाएँ तो और भी दिलचस्प हैं

इष्ट देव सांकृत्यायन

लेखक वरिष्ठ पत्रकार एवं साहित्यकार हैं



श्रीशैलम के लिए हमारी यात्रा तिरुपति से शुरू होनी थी। जाना तो रेल से था और रिजर्वेशन भी कनफर्म था। लेकिन अफसोस रेल की शुद्ध सरकारी कार्यप्रणाली के तहत करीब 8 घंटे प्रतीक्षा के बाद भी जब ट्रेन नहीं आई तो हमने बस से चलने का कार्यक्रम तय किया। बस शाम 6 बजे तिरुपति से चलकर रात साढ़े तीन बजे मरकपुर पहुँची। यहाँ से श्रीशैलम की कुल दूरी 84 किलोमीटर यानी दो घंटे की बचती है, लेकिन बस फिलहाल इसके आगे नहीं जा सकती थी। इसकी वजह बीच में पड़ने वाली श्रीशैलम वाइल्ड लाइफ सैंक्चुरी है। इस सैंक्चुरी में सुबह 6 बजे तक प्रवेश वर्जित है। जाहिर है, ढाई घंटे का समय हमें यहीं काटना था। सुबह 6 बजते ही बस चल पड़ी। रास्ता जंगल से होकर गुजर रहा था। सड़क के दोनों तरफ घने जंगलों में इधर-उधर दौड़ते-भागते छोटे-छोटे वन्य जीव बच्चों के लिए आकर्षण का केंद्र बन रहे थे। यहाँ हिरन, भालू, बंदर और सेही तो बहुतायत में हैं। पक्षी भी कई तरह के हैं। सवा सात बजे हम श्रीशैलम पहुँच गए थे। मात्र आधा किलोमीटर आगे बढ़ने पर कई गेस्ट हाउस

और धर्मशालाएँ हैं। हमने भी एक जगह कमरे लिए और फिर तेजी से तैयार होकर 9 बजे मंदिर के लिए निकल पड़े।

कथाओं में कथाएँ

इस छोटे से कस्बे की महत्ता का अनुमान इसी से लगाया जा सकता है कि इसे दक्षिण का कैलाश कहते हैं। इसकी जो धार्मिक महत्ता है, उससे भी अधिक दिलचस्प वे कथाएँ हैं जो इस ज्योतिर्लिंग को लेकर स्थानीय समुदाय में प्रचलित हैं। कथाओं में कथाएँ और उनमें भी अंतर्कथाएँ। नल्लमलाई पर्वतशृंखला पर मौजूद इस पहाड़ी को सिरिधन, श्रीनगम, श्रीगिरी और श्री पर्वत भी कहते हैं। मान्यता है कि अमावस्या को स्वयं शिव और पूर्णिमा को माता पार्वती इस ज्योतिर्लिंग में वास करती हैं। प्रवेश के लिए हमने टिकट लिए और लाइन में लग गए। 11 बजे तक हम मुख्य मंदिर में दर्शन कर चुके थे। श्रीशैलम ज्योतिर्लिंग को लेकर कई किंवदंतियाँ यहाँ प्रकारम पीठिका पर खुदी भी हैं। एक तो यह है कि महर्षि शिलाद के पुत्र पर्वत ने घोर तप किया। भगवान

शिव ने दर्शन दिया तो पर्वत ने उनसे अपने शरीर पर ही विराजमान होने का अनुरोध किया। शिव ने उनका अनुरोध स्वीकार कर लिया। इस प्रकार तपस्वी पर्वत उसी स्थान पर पर्वत के रूप में बदल गए और उन्हें श्रीपर्वत कहा गया तथा भगवान शिव ने मल्लिकार्जुन स्वामी के रूप में उनके शिखर पर अपना वास बनाया। इसीलिए श्रीशैलम में भगवान शिव को मल्लिकार्जुन स्वामी के नाम से जाना जाता है। इधर यही एक ऐसा ज्योतिर्लिंग है, जो शक्तिपीठ भी है। मल्लिकार्जुन स्वामी के साथ देवी भ्रमरांबा भी इसी परिसर में विराजित हैं। श्री शिव महापुराण के अनुसार देवी सती के ऊपरी होंठ यहीं गिरे थे। कथा यह भी है एक राजकुमारी ने भगवान शिव को पति के रूप में पाना चाहा और इसके लिए उसने कठोर तप किया। एक रात भगवान शिव ने स्वप्न में उसे निर्देश दिया कि तुम इस भ्रमर के पीछे आओ। जहाँ यह रुक जाए, वहाँ ठहरकर मेरी प्रतीक्षा करना। नींद खुली तो उसने पाया कि सचमुच एक भौंरा उसके सामने मंडरा रहा है। राजकुमारी उसके पीछे-पीछे चल पड़ी। काफी दूर तक

चलने के बाद भ्रमर श्रीशैलम पर्वत पर स्थित चमेली के एक पौधे पर ठहर गया। राजकुमारी वहीं बैठकर भगवान की प्रतीक्षा करते हुए पुनः तप करने लगी। अंत में भगवान शिव एक वृद्ध के रूप में प्रकट हुए और राजकुमारी के साथ विवाह किया। इसके कुछ दिनों बाद वनवासियों ने उन्हें भोजन के लिए आमंत्रित किया। वनवासियों ने अपनी परंपरा के अनुसार भोजन में उन्हें मांस और मदिरा परोसी, जिसे वह स्वीकार नहीं कर सके। राजकुमारी ने हठ किया तो शिव वहाँ से दूर चले गए और कई बार अनुनय-विनय के बाद भी लौट कर नहीं आए। इससे रुष्ट राजकुमारी ने उन्हें पत्थर हो जाने का शाप दिया। वे यहाँ ज्योतिस्वरूप शिवलिंग में बदल गए और मल्लिका (चमेली) पुष्पों से अर्चित (पूजित) होने के कारण मल्लिकार्जुन कहे गए। जब यह बात देवी पार्वती को पता चली तो उन्होंने राजकुमारी को भ्रमर हो जाने का शाप दिया। इस प्रकार उनका नाम भ्रमरांबा पड़ा और वही यहाँ शक्तिस्वरूप में प्रतिष्ठित हैं। एक कथा यह भी है कि भगवान शिव श्रीशैलम के जंगलों में एक बार शिकारी के रूप में आए। यहाँ उन्हें एक चेंचू कन्या से प्रेम हो गया। उसके साथ विवाह कर वह यहाँ पर्वत पर बस गए। इसीलिए स्थानीय वनवासी चेंचू समुदाय के लोग मल्लिकार्जुन स्वामी को अपना दामाद बताते हैं और चेंचूमल्लैया कहते हैं। चेंचूमल्लैया का अर्थ है चेंचू लोगों का दामाद।

श्री शिव महापुराण के अनुसार भगवान शिव के पुत्र श्री गणेश और कार्तिकेय एक बार विवाह को लेकर आपस में बहस करने लगे। दोनों का हठ यह था कि मेरा विवाह पहले होना चाहिए। बात भगवान शिव और माता पार्वती तक पहुँची तो उन्होंने कहा कि तुम दोनों में से जो पूरी पृथ्वी की परिक्रमा पहले पूरी कर लेगा, उसका ही विवाह पहले होगा। कार्तिकेय तुरंत अपने वाहन मयूर पर बैठकर पृथ्वी की परिक्रमा के लिए चल पड़े। उधर गणेश जी ने सामने बैठे माता-पिता के पूजनोपरांत उनकी ही परिक्रमा कर ली और इसी को पूरा मान लिया। जब तक कार्तिकेय लौटे तब तक गणेश जी का विवाह हो चुका था और उनके दो पुत्र भी हो चुके थे। अतः कार्तिकेय रुष्ट होकर क्रौंच पर्वत पर चले गए। फिर माता पार्वती कार्तिकेय को मनाने निकलीं। बाद में भगवान शिव भी यहाँ पहुँचकर ज्योतिर्लिंग के रूप में प्रकट हुए। चूँकि शिवजी की पूजा यहाँ सबसे पहले मल्लिका पुष्पों से की गई, इसीलिए उनका नाम मल्लिकार्जुन पड़ा और माता पार्वती ने यहाँ शिवजी की पूजा एक भ्रमर के रूप में की थी, इसीलिए यहाँ उनके स्थापित रूप का नाम भ्रमरांबा पड़ा। मान्यता यह भी है कि भगवान शिव के वाहन नंदी ने स्वयं यहाँ तप किया था और शिव-पार्वती ने यहाँ उन्हें मल्लिकार्जुन और भ्रमरांबा के रूप में दर्शन दिए थे।

अतिशय प्राचीन

पुराविज्ञानियों का विश्लेषण यह है कि इस परिसर में प्राचीनतम अस्तित्व वृद्ध मल्लिकार्जुन शिवलिंग है, जो संभवतः अर्जुनवृक्ष का जीवाश्म है। यह 70-80 हजार साल पुराना है। इसीलिए इसे वृद्ध मल्लिकार्जुन कहते हैं। मंदिर में प्रवेश से पूर्व एक मंडप है। इसके बाद चारों तरफ ऊँचे मंडप हैं। यह स्थापत्य की विजयनगर शैली है। वस्तुतः वर्तमान रूप में इसका निर्माण विजयनगर के सम्राट हरिहर राय ने कराया था। इनके अलावा कोंडावेडू राजवंश के रेड्डी राजाओं ने भी इसमें महत्वपूर्ण योगदान किया था। इसके

जान कर चलें

कैसे पहुँचें

हैदराबाद तक भारत के हर बड़े शहर से हवाई, रेल और सड़क सभी मार्गों का सीधा संपर्क है। इसके बाद आपको सड़कमार्ग से ही जाना होगा। स्थानीय भ्रमण के लिए आप टैक्सी या ऑटो कुछ भी ले सकते हैं।

कहाँ ठहरें

शहर में बड़ी संख्या में बजट होटल, गेस्ट हाउस और धर्मशालाएँ हैं।

खाना-पीना

दक्षिण भारतीय शाकाहार आपको कहीं भी आसानी से मिल सकता है। कई अच्छे रेस्टोरेंट्स हैं। उत्तर भारतीयों के लिए थोड़े दिन स्वाद बदलने का अपना अलग ही आनंद है। मांसाहार और सुरापान यहाँ वर्जित है।

कब जाएँ

जा तो आप कभी भी सकते हैं, लेकिन अक्टूबर से फरवरी तक का समय बेहतर होता है। इसमें भी अक्टूबर-नवंबर में यहाँ बारिश होती है। यहाँ का औसत तापमान 27 डिग्री सेल्सियस होता है। गर्मी में 44 डिग्री तक चला जाता है।

धरती उत्सवों की

उत्सव यहाँ पूरे साल चलते रहते हैं, लेकिन फरवरी/मार्च में होने वाला महाशिवरात्रि का उत्सव विशिष्ट होता है। इस अवसर पर यहाँ बहुत बड़ा मेला लगता है, जो पूरे एक सप्ताह चलता है। मार्च/अप्रैल में मनाया जाने वाला तेलुगु नववर्ष उगाडि (संभवतः युगादि का बदला हुआ रूप) प्रमुख उत्सवों में है। इसके अलावा कुंभोत्सवम, संक्रांति उत्सवम, अरुद्रोत्सवम, कार्तिक महोत्सवम और श्रवण नामोत्सवम भी प्रमुख उत्सवों में हैं।

उत्तरी गोपुरम का निर्माण छत्रपति शिवाजी ने कराया है। वैसे यहाँ इस मंदिर के अस्तित्व के प्रमाण दूसरी शताब्दी ईस्वी के पहले से ही उपलब्ध हैं। चारों तरफ से छह मीटर ऊँची किले जैसी दीवार से घिरे इस परिसर में कई अन्य हिंदू देवी-देवताओं के मंदिर हैं। इनमें सहस्रलिंग और नटराज प्रमुख हैं। भ्रमरांबा शक्तिपीठ के निकट ही लोपामुद्रा की एक प्रतिमा भी है। महर्षि अगस्त्य की धर्मपत्नी लोपामुद्रा प्राचीन भारत की विदुषी दार्शनिकों में गिनी जाती हैं। कहा जाता है कि आदि शंकराचार्य ने श्री मल्लिकार्जुन स्वामी के दर्शनोपरांत ही शिवानंदलहरी की रचना की थी। मंदिर की चारदीवारी पर जगह-जगह रामायण और महाभारत की कथाएँ उत्कीर्ण हैं। कहीं तेलुगु, कहीं संस्कृत और कहीं चित्रों की भाषा में भी। निकासद्वार पीछे से है। नारियल के पेड़ों की छाया में दीवारों पर खुदी इन कथाओं को पढ़ते-देखते निकलना एक अलग ही तरह का सुखद एहसास देता है। मंदिर से बाहर निकले तो धूप बहुत चटक हो चुकी थी। जनवरी के महीने में भी हाफ शर्ट पहनकर चलना मुश्किल हो रहा था। बाहर एक रेस्टोरेंट में दक्षिण भारतीय भोजन किया। बच्चे डैम देखने के लिए इतने उतावले थे कि भोजन

के बाद अल्पविश्राम की अर्जी भी नामंजूर हो गई। हमें तुरंत टैक्सी करके बाँध देखने के लिए निकलना पड़ा। एक अच्छी बात यह भी है कि यहाँ तिरुपति की तरह भाषा की समस्या नहीं है। वैसे मुख्य भाषा तेलुगु ही है, लेकिन हिंदीभाषियों को कोई असुविधा नहीं होती। हिंदी फिल्मों के गाने यहाँ खूब चलते हैं। कस्बे से डैम तक पहुँचने में केवल आधे घंटे का समय लगा, वह भी तब जबकि रास्ते में हमने साक्षी गणपति का भी दर्शन कर लिया। ऐसी मान्यता है कि मल्लिकार्जुन स्वामी के दर्शन-पूजन के लिए जो लोग आते हैं, उनका हिसाब-किताब गणपति ही रखते हैं और यही उनका साक्ष्य देते हैं। इसीलिए इनका नाम साक्षी गणपति है। वैसे इनका दर्शन सबसे पहले करते हैं।

बंद डैम का आनंद

डैम पहुँच कर बच्चे अभिभूत थे। इस समय यहाँ पानी कुछ खास नहीं आ रहा था। पानी के अभाव में न तो कोई टर्बाइन चल रही थी, न कोई और ही गतिविधि जारी थी। उत्पादन बंद था, लेकिन इसकी भव्यता से इसकी महत्ता को समझा जा सकता था। नल्लामलाई (श्रेष्ठ पर्वतशृंखला) पर्वतशृंखला में कृष्णा नदी पर बना यह डैम देश का तीसरा सबसे बड़ा जलविद्युत उत्पादन केंद्र है। समुद्रतल से 300 मीटर ऊँचाई पर बने इस बाँध की लंबाई 512 मीटर और ऊँचाई करीब 270 मीटर है। इसमें 12 रेडियल क्रेस्ट गेट्स लगे हैं और इसका रिजर्वार 800 वर्ग किलोमीटर का है। बाएँ किनारे पर मौजूद पावर स्टेशन में 150 मेगावाट के छह रिर्वर्सिबल फ्रांसिस पंप टर्बाइंस लगे हैं और दाहिने किनारे पर 110 मेगावाट के सात फ्रांसिस टर्बाइन्स जेनरेटर्स हैं। इसकी उत्पादन क्षमता 1670 मेगावाट बताई जाती है। इसके अलावा यह कुर्नूल और कडप्पा जिले के किसानों को सिंचाई के लिए पानी भी उपलब्ध कराता है। यह तब है जबकि इसमें बाढ़ के दौरान आने वाला बहुत सारा पानी इस्तेमाल किए बगैर छोड़ दिया जाता है।

इतिहास में पंचमठम

घूमने के लिए यहाँ और भी कई जगहें हैं। इनमें श्रीशैलम के इतिहास और संस्कृति में पंचमठम का महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहा है। उच्च अध्ययन को समर्पित इन मठों में घंट मठम, भीमशंकर मठम, विभूति मठम, रुद्राक्ष मठम और सारंगधारा मठम शामिल हैं। इन मठों का इतिहास सातवीं शताब्दी से शुरू होता है। तब यहाँ कई मठ थे। अब केवल यही पाँच बचे हैं और वह भी जीर्ण हालत में हैं। ये मठ श्रीशैलम मुख्य मंदिर से करीब एक किलोमीटर दूर पश्चिम दिशा में स्थित हैं। श्रीशैलम से 8 किमी दूर स्थित शिखरम समुद्रतल से 2830 फुट की ऊँचाई पर है। शिखरेश्वरम मंदिर में गर्भगृह और अंतरालय के अलावा 16 स्तंभों वाला मुखमंडपम भी है। सुंदर जलप्रपात फलधारा पंचधारा कस्बे से पाँच किलोमीटर और अक्क महादेवी की गुफाएँ करीब 10 किलोमीटर दूर हैं। समय हो तो आप हटकेश्वरम, कैलासद्वारम, भीमुनि कोलानु, इष्ट कामेश्वरी मंदिर, कदलीवनम, नगालुती, भ्रमरांबा चेरुवु, सर्वेश्वरम और गुप्त मल्लिकार्जुनम को भी अपनी यात्रा योजना में शामिल कर सकते हैं। यहाँ आकर हमें एहसास हुआ कि इस छोटे से कस्बे की घुमक्कड़ी का पूरा आनंद लेने के लिए कम से कम एक हफ्ते का समय चाहिए। ■



बसंत पंचमी

ज्ञानी बनने के लिए संकल्पित होने का सही अवसर

विद्वान् व्यक्ति कुछ भी हासिल कर सकता है। माँ शारदे की अभ्यर्थना करने पर विद्या, विवेक, बुद्धि सब कुछ प्राप्त होता है। यही वजह है माँ सरस्वती को न केवल 'ज्ञान की देवी' माना जाता है बल्कि ब्रह्मा, विष्णु और महेश भी माँ सरस्वती को पूजते हैं।



गोवर्धनदास बिन्नाणी

बीकानेर निवासी लेखक विसीय सलाहकार और समाज चिंतक हैं

श्रीमद्भागवत गीता में प्रभु श्री कृष्ण जी ने स्वयं को 'ऋतुनाम् कुसुमाकरः' कह कर बसंत ऋतु की श्रेष्ठता प्रतिष्ठित की है। और जैसा हम सभी जानते हैं कि पतझड़ पश्चात् बसंत ऋतु में माघ शुक्ल पंचमी को बसंत पंचमी के साथ-साथ 'श्री पंचमी' या 'ज्ञान पंचमी' के नाम से भी जाना जाता है। इस दिन को ज्ञान और कला की देवी 'माँ सरस्वती' का जन्मदिवस माना जाता है। इसलिये इस दिन विद्या की देवी माँ सरस्वती की पूजा बड़े ही उल्लास व उमंग के साथ की जाती है। मुझे भी बाल्यकाल में माँ सरस्वती की नित्य उपासना हेतु एक निम्न स्तुति बतायी गयी थी जिसे मैं आज भी बिना भूले प्रतिदिन करता हूँ:

यया विना जगत्सर्वम्, शाश्वतजीवनं मुक्तं भवेत् । ज्ञानाधि
देवी या तस्यै, सरस्वत्यै नमो नमः ॥

यया विना जगत्सर्वं, मुक्तमुन्वत् यत् सदा । वागाधिष्ठात्री या
देवी, तस्यै वाण्यै नमो नमः ॥

सरस्वती महाभागे, विद्ये कमललोचने ।
विश्वरूपे विशालाक्षी, विद्यां देहि नमोऽस्तुते ॥

आप सभी के ध्यानार्थ बता दूँ कि विश्व प्रसिद्ध जर्मन दार्शनिक मैक्स मूलर ने लिखा है "विश्व की पुस्तकालयों में

प्राचीनतम ग्रंथ ऋग्वेद है और इसी ऋग्वेद में उल्लेख है

सरस्वतीं देवयन्तो हवन्ते

अर्थात् देव-पद के अभिलाषी सरस्वती का आह्वान करते हैं।

पुराणों के अनुसार, माँ सरस्वती से सप्तविध स्वरो का ज्ञान प्राप्त होता है। यही वजह है उन्हें माँ सरस्वती कहा जाता है अर्थात् माँ सरस्वती को ज्ञान की देवी माना जाता है। इसलिये ब्रह्मा, विष्णु और महेश तीनों ही माँ सरस्वती को पूजते हैं। प्रबुद्ध पाठक जानते ही होंगे हिंदू धर्म के अठारह प्रमुख पुराणों में से एक देवी-भागवत में भी माँ सरस्वती के

“ माघ शुक्ल पंचमी को बसंत पंचमी के साथ-साथ ‘श्री पंचमी’ या ‘ज्ञान पंचमी’ के नाम से भी जाना जाता है। इस दिन को ज्ञान और कला की देवी ‘माँ सरस्वती’ का जन्मदिवस माना जाता है।”



बारे में विस्तार से बताया गया है

आदौ सरस्वती पूजा कृष्णेन विनिर्मिता। यत्प्रसादान्मुनि श्रेष्ठ
मूर्खो भवति पंडितः ॥

मतलब श्री कृष्ण ने भी सबसे पहले माँ सरस्वती के महत्व का वर्णन किया और कहा कि उनकी पूजा अवश्य की जानी चाहिए जिसकी कृपा से मूर्ख भी विद्वान हो जाते हैं।

माँ शारदे की अभ्यर्थना करने पर विद्या, ज्ञान, विवेक, बुद्धि की प्राप्ति होती है। इसलिये यह तो आप सभी को मानना ही होगा कि विद्वान व्यक्ति कुछ भी हासिल कर सकता है। इसी तथ्य को प्रमाणित करने के लिये एक ऐतिहासिक सत्य घटना आप सभी के साथ साँझा कर रहा हूँ: ‘हिन्दू शिरोमणि पृथ्वीराज चौहान जिन्होंने विदेशी इस्लामिक आक्रमणकारी मोहम्मद गौरी को सोलह बार पराजित किया और उदारता दिखाते हुए हर बार जीवित छोड़ दिया, पर जब सत्रहवीं बार वे पराजित हुए, तो मोहम्मद गौरी ने उन्हें नहीं छोड़ा और उन्हें बंदी बना अपने साथ काबुल (अफगानिस्तान) ले गया और वहाँ उनकी दोनों आँखें फोड़ दी।’

यह समाचार जानने के बाद राजकवि चंद्र बरदाई हिन्दू शिरोमणि से मिलने काबुल कैदखाने पहुंचे तो जिस दयनीय हालत में उन्हें देखा तो राजकवि के कोमल हृदय को गहरा आघात लगा और उसी वक्त उन्होंने मोहम्मद गौरी से बदला लेने की योजना बना डाली।

उसी योजनानुसार चंद्र बरदाई ने गौरी को अपने प्रतापी सम्राट हिन्दू शिरोमणि की एक विलक्षण विधा शब्दभेदी बाण (आवाज की दिशा में लक्ष्य को भेदना) के

बारे में बताते हुये आग्रह किया कि यदि आप चाहें तो इनके शब्दभेदी बाण से लोहे के सात तवे बेधने का प्रदर्शन आप स्वयं भी देख सकते हैं।

इस अनोखी विधा के अवलोकनार्थ गौरी तुरन्त ही तैयार हो गया और उसने आनन फानन में अपने राज्य में सभी प्रमुख ओहदेदारों को इस कार्यक्रम को देखने हेतु आमंत्रित कर दिया। निश्चित तिथि को दरबार लगा और गौरी एक ऊंचे स्थान पर अपने मंत्रियों के साथ बैठ गया।

चूँकि हिन्दू शिरोमणि और राजकवि ने पहले ही इस पूरे कार्यक्रम की गुप्त मंजुरी कर ली थी और इस रणनीति के तहत चंद्र बरदाई ने मोहम्मद गौरी से लोहे के सात बड़े-बड़े तवे निश्चित दिशा और दूरी पर लगवा देने का आग्रह किया और मोहम्मद गौरी ने राजकवि के निर्देशानुसार तवे लगवा दिये। इसके बाद दोनों आँखों से अंधे पृथ्वीराज को कैद एवं बेड़ियों से आजाद कर बैठने के निश्चित स्थान पर लाया गया और उनके हाथों में धनुष बाण थमाया गया।

इसके बाद राजकवि चंद्र बरदाई ने पृथ्वीराज चौहान के वीर गाथाओं का बखान करते हुए मोहम्मद गौरी के बैठने के स्थान को चिन्हित करते हुये पृथ्वीराज को अवगत करवाने के इरादे से निम्न बिरुदावली गायी:

चार बांस, चौबीस गज, अंगुल अष्ट प्रमाण। ता ऊपर सुल्तान
है, चूको मत चौहान ॥

अर्थात् चार बांस, चौबीस गज और आठ अंगुल की दूरी पर सुल्तान बैठा है इसलिए चौहान अपने लक्ष्य को चूकना नहीं, अवश्य हासिल करना।

इस तरह पृथ्वीराज चौहान को मोहम्मद गौरी की वास्तविक स्थिति का आंकलन करवा उन्होंने मोहम्मद गौरी कि ओर मुखातिब होकर निवेदिन किया कि मेरे प्रतापी सम्राट आज यहाँ आपके बंदी की हैसियत से उपस्थित हैं, इसलिए आप के आदेश के पश्चात ही पृथ्वीराज अपने शब्दभेदी बाण का प्रदर्शन करेंगे। इस पर ज्यों ही मोहम्मद गौरी ने पृथ्वीराज जी को प्रदर्शन का आदेश दिया। पृथ्वीराज को गौरी कहाँ बैठा है, ज्ञात हो गया और उन्होंने तुरन्त बिना एक पल की भी देरी किये अपने एक ही बाण से गौरी को मार गिराया।

बाण लगते ही गौरी उपर्युक्त कथित ऊंचाई से नीचे धड़ाम से आ गिरा और उसके प्राण-पखेरू उड़ गए। उसके बाद चारों ओर भगदड़ और हाहाकार मच गया और इसी सब का फायदा उठाते हुए हिन्दू शिरोमणि प्रतापी सम्राट पृथ्वीराज जी और राजकवि चंद्रवरदाई ने पूर्व निर्धारित योजनानुसार एक-दूसरे को कटार मार कर अपने प्राण न्योछावर कर दिये।

यह आत्मबलिदान वाली घटना 1192 को बसंत पंचमी के दिन ही हुई थी।

उपरोक्त घटना से यह तो स्पष्ट हो गया कि विद्वान व्यक्ति कुछ भी हासिल कर सकता है। साथ यह भी कि बसंत पंचमी का दिन ज्ञानवान बनने के लिये संकल्पित होने का सही अवसर है।

चूँकि आजकल बसंत पंचमी वाले दिन अनेकों जगह अनेकों प्रकार के आयोजन होने लग गये हैं इसलिये आप उमंग व उल्लास के साथ आयोजित होने वाले इन सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रमों में अपना हुनर प्रदर्शित करने के अवसर का लाभ अवश्य उठावें ॥ ■



Kala Kumbh: A team of artists creates a series of images on scrolls to commemorate 75 years of Independence

A MOVEABLE FEAST

BY SUJATA PRASAD

A former civil servant, Sujata Prasad is an acclaimed author and columnist.



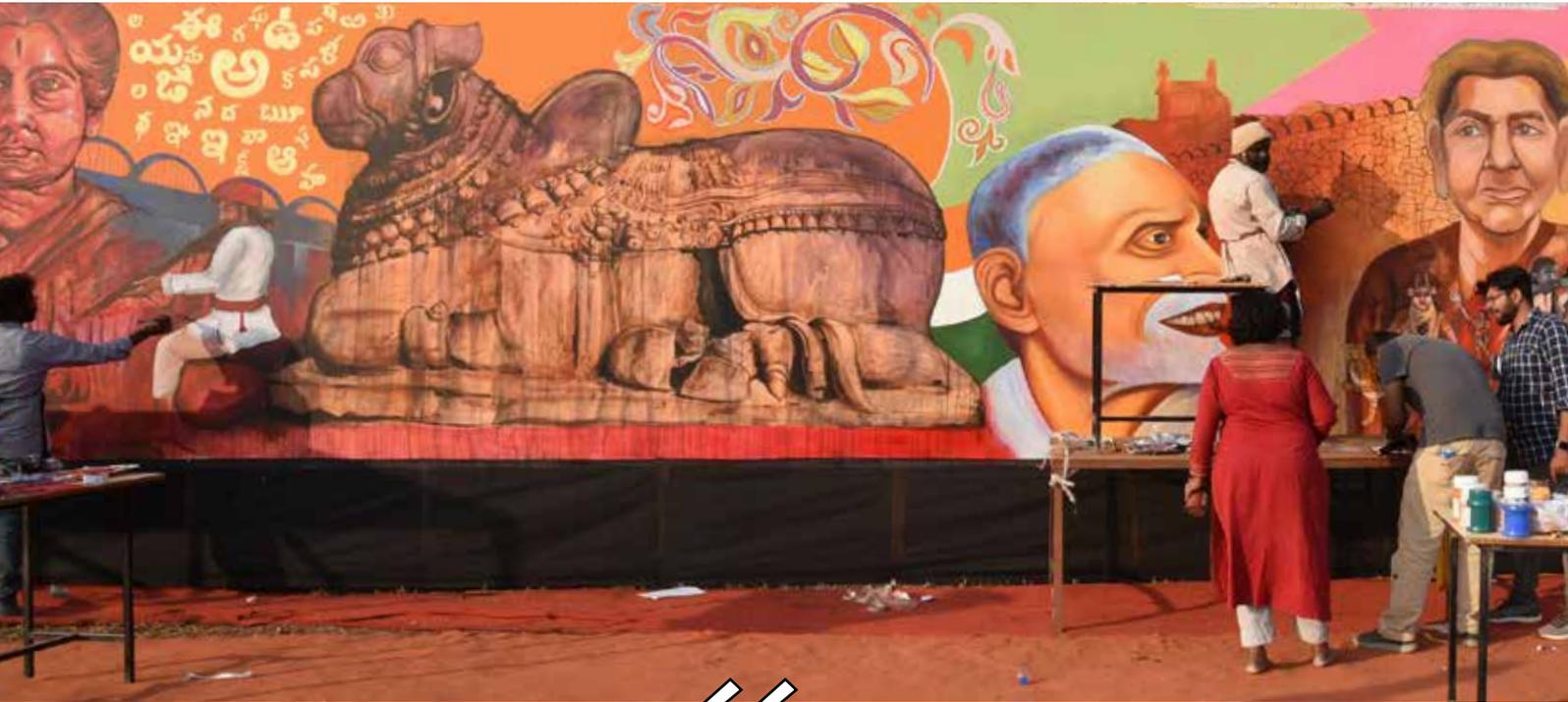
The curtains closed on 2021 with a veritable explosion of creativity. The National Gallery of Modern Art, a premier institution of the Ministry of Culture, organised regional workshops involving hundreds of indigenous and contemporary artists, as part of the ongoing Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. The novel idea of using the powerful vocabulary of visual art forms to showcase the legacy of the freedom struggle and India's rich cultural heritage resulted in a unique collaboration between the ministries of culture and defence. Display of painted scrolls, stretching over a kilometre at Rajpath in New Delhi during the Republic Day celebrations, are a form of tribute to the valour of freedom fighters, many of whom remain unsung.

Five scrolls, each 75 metres long, were created in workshops held in Bhubaneswar and Chandigarh, on the vast campuses of the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, the Silicon Institute of Technology, and Punjab's Chitkara University. Artists in hundreds gathered from different parts of the country, forming an impressive microcosm of the country's creative DNA. With encouragement and advice from a team of senior mentors, they worked on individual themes and used a ladder to paint the upper reaches of the 10-foot-wide canvas.

A broad consensus was reached on the compositional structure of each of the scrolls, the subtleties of use of specific colours, and the contours of major images. The mentors managed to recreate the

ambience of Kala Bhavan, the school of visual arts set up by Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan. The school was lovingly nurtured by Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij, and Benode Behari Mukherjee – the trinity of contextual modernism in Indian art. As they painted under the open skies, the camaraderie of the close-knit community of artists was a joy to behold.

"The workshops had a festive air...we were encouraged to share our dreams and aspirations and give visual form to our perception of history, particularly of the freedom movement. We sometimes painted through the night, enjoying every moment of the collective process," reminisced a young Gond artist from Madhya Pradesh. "The alchemy between



We sometimes painted through the night, enjoying every moment of the collective process.

artists from the Bhil, Pithora, Gond, Warli, Madhubani, Manjusha, Jadupatua, Pattachitra, Sohrai, and several other so-called folk traditions and the contemporary artists was wonderful. It was as if a few drops of nectar from Garuda's pitcher of immortality had fallen on us too, amplifying the beauty of our collective effort," added a contemporary artist from Andhra Pradesh.

The positive energy exuded by the artists was a welcome change after months of isolation during the first and second phases of the pandemic. "As a community, we were hit by the blight of Covid. Many of the proposed exhibitions seemed to wither away, galleries and museums were shut – the smaller ones permanently – while displays moved to digital spaces or hybrid forms of digital and limited in-person experiences. For us, coming together like this was no less than a deeply spiritual experience, like taking a dip at the holy Sangam. The joy of working together for a national cause was truly infectious," observed an artist from Odisha, watching the line-up of dance and music

performances choreographed for the occasion by the Zonal Cultural Centres.

Nandalal Bose's evocative illustrations for the Indian Constitution inspired a recurrent theme running through the panels on the upper border. On January 26, 1950, after 165 days of deliberation, 284 members of the Constituent Assembly unanimously accepted the proposed constitutional text. The original calligraphed copies were sent to the iconic artist in Santiniketan to be illustrated so as to represent India's rich cultural heritage. Using the traditional technique of application of gold leaf and stone colour, Bose and his group of young artists created 22 historic images which left an indelible imprint on the collective consciousness of independent India. The images and this same sense are reincarnated in the colourful and evocative scrolls: the Zebu bull motif seal from Mohenjodaro and Harappa, the revered tradition of gurukul from the Vedic era, images from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the scene of Arjun's penance at Mahabalipuram, the Chola Nataraja, Gautam Buddha's

enlightenment, and a host of others.

The man behind the conceptualisation of this idea is Adwaita Gadanayak, the self-effacing director general of the National Gallery of Modern Art, who is also the vice-president of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. "It is important for museums to move beyond their walls and reach out to people. What we have created is a vibrant visual narrative, one of the most spellbinding commemorations of India's independence. We have bridged the chasm between urban and rural, folk and contemporary, building a bridge across regions, communities, and cultures. Hundreds of artists have come together in the Kala Kumbhs, each participating artist and art form is represented, yet there is a unifying oneness in the visual vocabulary used for the occasion. I imagine that the same feeling of oneness must have inspired the multitudes of artists who would have come together to paint the Ajanta murals more than 2,000 years ago. Can there be a better way to celebrate our wonderful heritage and civilisation?" ■



RELIVING THE JOY OF

An Awadhi Meat Delicacy

Raan Musallam, marinated, steamed and cooked, is one of the delicacies to emerge from the court of epicurean Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, and it continues to be the gastronome's delight 150 years later

BY ANAND MANIKUTTY & AMITA ROY

Raan means leg o' mutton and musallam (Persian) means steam while Dum is cooking an entire leg o' mutton marinated in fragrant spices and steamed covered for hours. It was Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who introduced the dum pukht style of cooking to Lucknow while building the Bara Imambara. Cooks were hired by him to feed hundreds of labourers and these cooks introduced the method of slow steam cooking to feed them hot food at night. The marinated leg o' mutton cooked with steam became a favourite which was further refined by the descendants of the cooks for generations. Awadhi cuisine reached its zenith under the exiled Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. But its point of origin lies in the Mughal empire which reached the peak of its power around the turn of the 17th century. Royal cuisine had been elevated to the level of being a state concern, as indicated by Abu'l Fazl, the famous court historian of Emperor Akbar in the royal gazette Ain-e-Akbari. In reality, it was the Mughals who first gave shape to the concept of Indian cuisine though they never truly made it pan-Indian. Feudalistic in nature, rich and costly ingredients made Mughal cuisine primarily haute cuisine, though pared down versions gradually came to be adopted by the commoners in north



India. It retained its very central Asian character of adding dry fruits.

A regional variant developed in the suba of Awadh, incorporating local peasant cooking in the capital, Lucknow. Awadhi cuisine to this day remains a symbol of aristocratic, sophisticated traditions of Islamic cooking marked by subtle use of aromatic spices and the dum pukht technique, the slow cooking of meat and rice in a round pot or handi with the lid sealed with dough. The

Nawabs of Awadh belonged to a dynasty of Persian origin from Nishapur, Iran. The Raan-e-Musallam available at the legendary Bukhara restaurant at ITC Maurya in New Delhi was curated by another legend, MasterChef Imtiaz Qureshi whose ancestors were royal Khansamas in the kitchens of the Nawab of Awadh. Raan-e-Musallam has local variants, like those from Jaunpur and Rampur, but the one from Awadh is probably most popular. ■



It was Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who introduced the dum pukht style of cooking, the slow cooking of meat and rice in a round pot or handi with the lid sealed with dough



RECIPE

INGREDIENTS

1.2 kg full-meat raan; 125 gm clarified butter; 80 ml curd; 2 tbsp ginger-garlic paste; 2 tbsp kewda water; 2 tbsp salt; 5 qts onion (cut and fried); 3 tbsp papaya paste; 1.5 tbsp Kashmiri chilli powder (used only for colour); 10 qts cashew paste; 10 qts almond paste; 1/2 tsp cardamom powder; 1/2 tsp black pepper; 1/2 tsp hot spices powder; 1.5 tsp coriander powder; 2 tsp red chilli powder.

METHOD

TO MARINATE THE RAAN

Step 1: Pour the curd in a medium-sized bowl.

Step 2: Add the ginger-garlic paste, kewda water, salt, cashew-almond paste, papaya paste, Kashmiri chilli powder and fried onion paste (chopped onions fried in clarified butter until golden, cooled and blended to a smooth paste).

Step 3: Add the spice powders – cardamom powder, black pepper powder, hot spices powder, coriander powder and red chilli powder.

Step 4: Mix all the ingredients well.

Step 5: Place the raan in a large dish/tray. Score the raan (make four deep slashes on each side).

Step 6: Fill the spice mixture well into the scored areas and coat it all over. Flip the raan and apply the spice mixture similarly on the other side.

Step 7: Cover and marinate for two hours.

COOKING PROCESS

Step 8: Heat a pot over medium-high heat. Pour the clarified butter and wait for a minute until it heats up.

Step 9: Gently place the marinated raan (along with all the spices) in the pot. Cover and cook for 30 minutes on medium-low heat. At the 15-minute mark, flip the raan and cover again.

Step 10: After the 30 minutes are up, remove the lid and baste the meat for one to two minutes with the juices released by the meat.

Step 11: Pour in about a cup of water. Cover and cook for 30 minutes on medium-high heat. Remember to flip the raan at the 15-minute mark.

Step 12: Uncover and baste the meat for a minute. Then cover and cook for 15 to 20 minutes more.



Globetrotting and exploring the food scene of the world? Here are some of our picks to tickle your palate

BY RUKMA SALUJA

Flavours

Food is really the ultimate aphrodisiac, wouldn't you agree? And when creativity is the genie released from the bottle, magic is the fallout. No reviews, we promise. Just some great hangouts or must-have items that pack a punch and make your mouth water.

SONA

(New York)

Among this year's launches, Chef Abhijit Singh Rathore who helms Sona in New York deserves a special mention. His dishes are like works of art and the recipes truly inspired. Take the Crab Puri with Caviar. Stuffed with crab, the puris are topped with jicama and caviar. And if that doesn't tempt you, there's the Ghevar Cheesecake with Pickled Rhubarb. Chef Rathore's roots in Rajasthan are clearly visible in this sweet delicacy inspired by his home state. There's the full menu, of course, which includes Buckwheat Bhel with Honeycomb Crisp and Autumn Paapdi Chaat.

WAKAI

(Fort, Mumbai)

Wakai at Fort Mumbai makes it to this list. Chef Parvez Khan brings his years of experience at Wasabi at the Taj in Mumbai to his own enterprise. The ambience here is Manga, and all things Japanese. Designed by Rupin Suchak, Wakai takes you on a mini tour through the streets of Japan as you tuck into Black Cod Miso and Wasabi Cornettos. Looking for Umami? It's right here.

BOJU'S KITCHEN

(Gurugram, NCR)

The pandemic and the lockdowns brought back home food with a bang. Some, like this trio of women Maiyya, Arati, Chitrangada, turned this home enterprise into a commercial one. The grandmother helped



CHÔ



her granddaughter fight the lockdown blues with traditional Nepali fare. A success with friends, it turned into Boju's Kitchen (Granny's Kitchen in Nepali). So here's where you can get authentic momos and thukpas (among other items, of course).

CHÔ

(Mehrauli, New Delhi)

At the Capital's Ambawatta complex in Mehrauli, CHÔ, derivative of the word 'CHÔ

nhà', which means a cottage or a home in Vietnamese, helmed by Chef Vaibhav, you get variants of the vibrant street food and regional favourites of the Mekong delta and Nguyen dynasty. Items like Belgium Pork Gyoza in chilli oil, salad leaves and herbs, or Katsu Tofu & Avocado, a healthy rice paper roll stuffed with the goodness of Vietnamese herbs, vermicelli noodles, and edible flower served with peanut sauce. The cocktails get a new spin here. Odd Fashioned comes with



Boju's Kitchen



New!

Whisky lovers! Estuary is water to pair exclusively with your preferred spirit. Add it to your choice of blend or single malt for a sip. To meet the unmet needs of spirit connoisseurs, Estuary is designed to redefine and elevate your drinking experience. Do check it out for an enhanced taste of whisky on your tongue.



Wakai

burnt jasmine rice blended whisky, bitters, rice crackers, while the Vietnamese Highball has vodka, Vietnamese coffee, condensed milk and caramel.

POSA

(Gurugram, NCR)

Who would have thought the humble kulcha would become a speciality? You don't need to wait for a trip to the Golden Temple anymore to gorge on that old favourite, the Amritsari Kulcha. At Chef Shailendra Khanna's Posa in Gurugram, the selection is



Posa

delectable. The success of their kulchas, he reveals, lies in their dough. The work their chefs put into the dough is reflected when you bite into the kulchas. The classic version is the Ambarsari Kulcha, of course, and the

variations include Achari Kulcha which is packed with Rajasthani stuffed red chilli pickle and paneer, the Murgh Keema Kulcha, and in these times of fusion, there's one stuffed with spinach and Feta. ■

Quintessentially Indian

These pages will bring to the diaspora Indian style and fashion trends, classics as well as the new discoveries. We will delve into the fashion fabric of the country to bring you clothing, jewellery, watches, statement pieces and accessories

BY RUKMA SALUJA

SAREES BY SAWAN GANDHI

What can be more Indian than the sari? But did you know that what we claim as our very own might have its roots in Greece. Legend has it that this elegant Indian garment came to us from the Greeks. Alexander of Macedonia, known as one of the first conquerors the world has seen, is said to have left behind his trusted lieutenant, Seleucus Nicator, in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. His daughter wore the Grecian robe which was adopted by Indians of the time and morphed over the millennia into the sari as we know it today. Some find mention of it in the Rig Veda. Does it matter? It is perhaps the only garment in the world that enhances the beauty of any woman wearing it. But I may be biased. Forgive me. Versions of the sari are as varied as the ideas that weave them into warps and wefts.

We showcase Sawan Gandhi's creations, which bring both oomph and elegance to the wearer:



KURTA & MORE BY RAGHAVENDRA RATHORE

The kurta, a loose collarless shirt for men, is perfect for our hot climate. Styles abound from the Lucknowi and the Bhopali to the kali and the Hyderabadi. Cotton, linen, silk, fabric, weave, texture, style and look, there's no end to the possibilities. No one does it better than Raghavendra Rathore who brings elegance to an everyday item of clothing. Paired with jeans or pyjamas, alone or with Nehru jackets, they are an evergreen item in any wardrobe.

Get inspired by our curated collection from his latest creations:





The Mandu Festival combines the natural and historical attractions of Mandu with food, art, adventure and an array of activities. Add this to your list of reasons to travel to India in the winter. Mandu has been included in UNESCO’s tentative list of world heritage sites

BY SYED SAAD AHMED

LOVE & OTHER MONUMENTS



From the sky, Mandu’s Jami Masjid looks different. On the ground, its sloping buttresses catch your eye, but from high above, its multitude of domes stand out. There are three massive domes surrounded by a sea of smaller ones that cover its entire roof. But I can’t admire these features for long. I am in a hot-air balloon and the strong wind is pushing us away from the plateau to the forested valley.

Experiences like these are the draw of the Mandu Festival, organised by Madhya Pradesh Tourism and event management company E-Factor Entertainment. While I had earlier been to Mandu, a two- to three-hour drive from Indore in central India, the festival presents its plethora of attractions in novel, offbeat contexts. You can enjoy an unparalleled vantage point

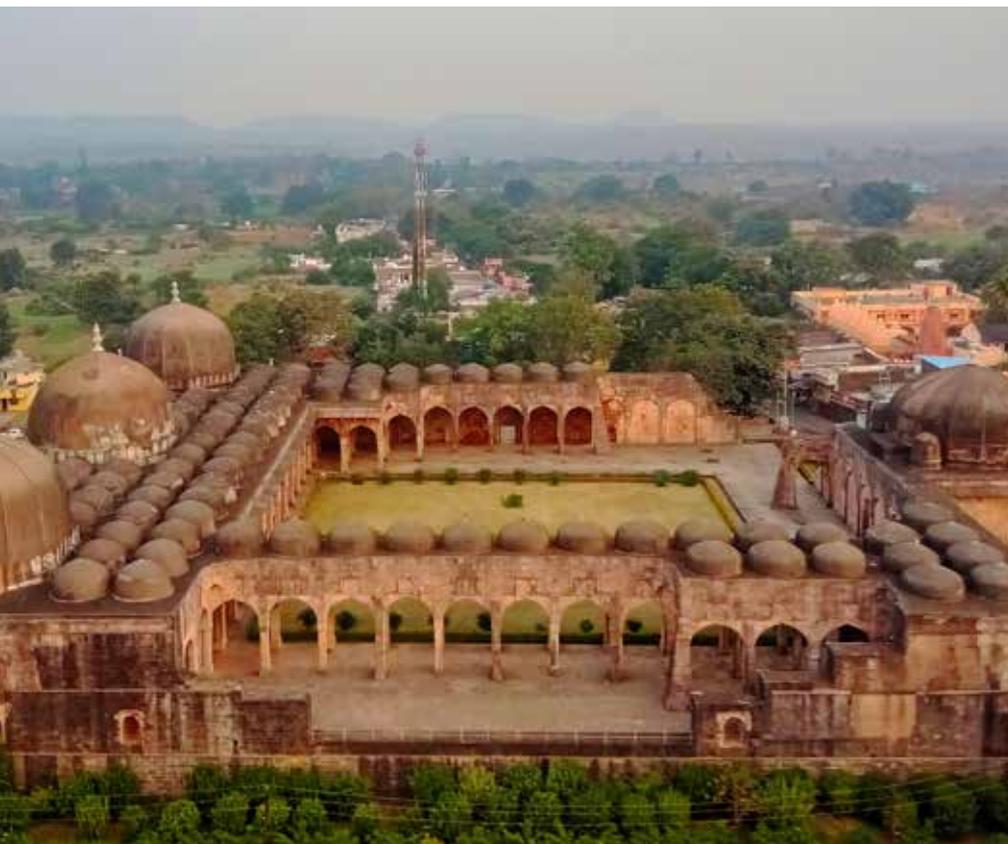
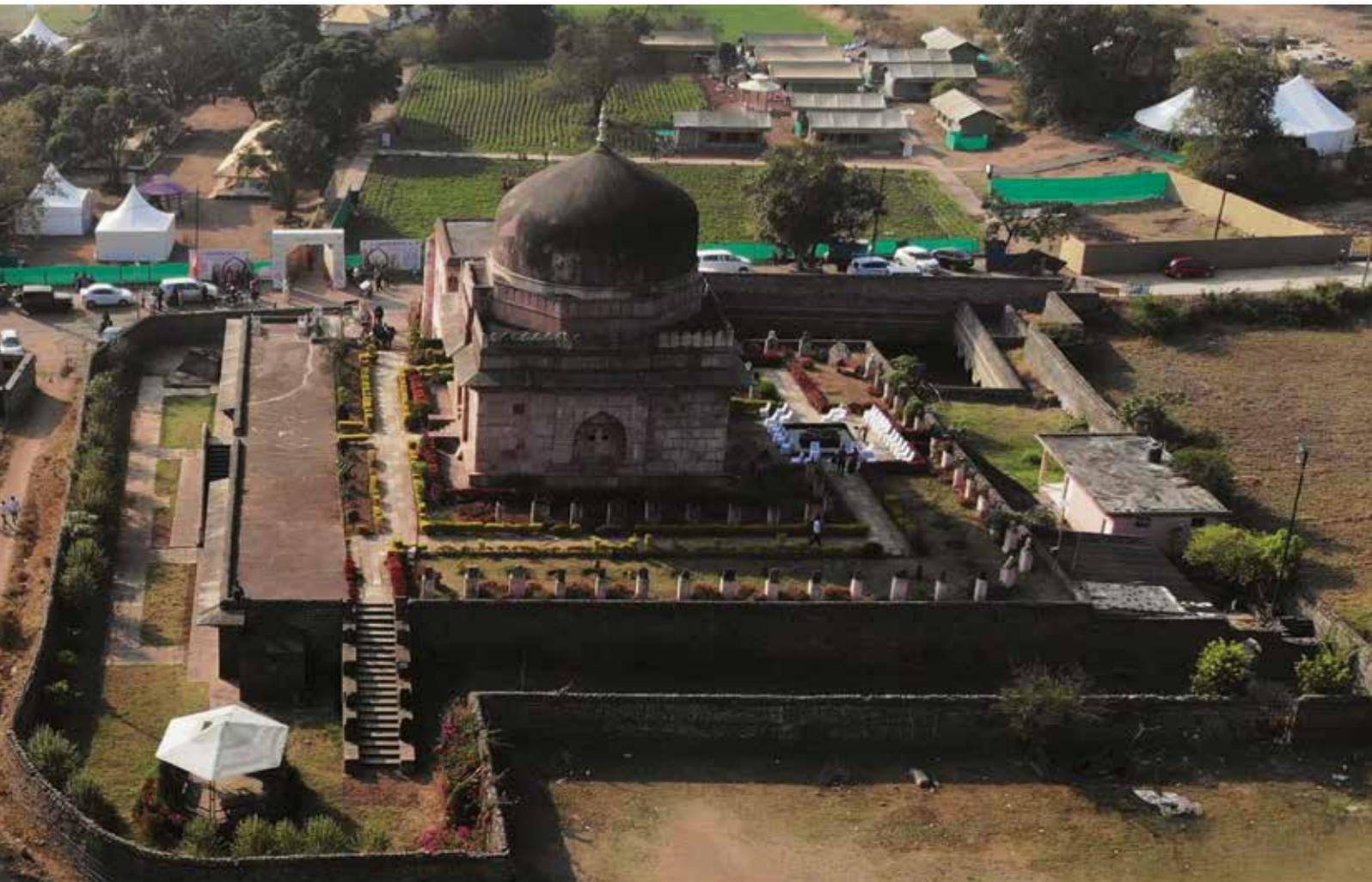
over its hills, forests and monuments from a hot-air balloon. You can enter a meditative trance to the sounds of Tibetan singing bowls and didgeridoos amid medieval ruins. A crumbling yet stately tomb sprouting tufts of grass becomes the backdrop for music and dance performances. An orchard in the middle of fields transforms into the venue of a feast of local cuisine and rotis straight from the hearth. Under an arched door with stone lattices, a storyteller narrates the legends of Baz Bahadur and Roopmati to the sound of a flute.

Baz Bahadur, the 16th-century ruler of Mandu, did not build any grand structures, but he is the name associated most with the town. After all, his legacy is greater than mere brick and mortar—love. The story goes that on a hunting trip, the king came

across the shepherdess Roopmati, whose singing bewitched him. They got married and had a blissful coupledom until Mughal emperor Akbar sent his forces to capture Mandu. As with all the great historical love stories—Romeo and Juliet, Laila and Majnu—the ending is dismal: the city fell to the Mughals and Roopmati killed herself. And that’s why, even after 500 years, Mandu remains synonymous with the ill-fated lovers.

Bharti Dixit, a storyteller from Indore, has been narrating the couple’s tale at the festival since its 2019 edition. She says, “Their story is relevant even today because it teaches us about love. Mandu stands as a symbol of their love.”

That’s perhaps why Mandu has often been



ATTRACTIONS

Guided historical walks, interactive bicycle tours, traditional folk arts, photo contests, yoga at Ek Khamba Mahal, culinary delights, art and craft, musical soirees, hot-air balloon rides, night Maa Narmada Aarti at the Rewa Kund.

GOOD TO KNOW



Website:

<https://www.mandufestival.com/>



Nearest airport:

Indore (80 km), a 2/3-hour drive to Mandu.



Nearest railway stations:

Indore (100 km), Ratlam (120 km) and Mhow (70 km).



Road:

There are two direct buses from Indore to Mandu: from Gangwal Bus Stand (8 am) and Sarawate Bus Stand (2 pm). Frequent connections are available from Indore to Dhar and Dhar to Mandu.



Accommodation:

The best place to stay is the tent city E-Factor Entertainment sets up during the festival. Other good options are Madhya Pradesh Tourism's Malwa Resort and Malwa Retreat.



Beyond the monuments, Mandu has plenty of natural wonders. When you're done with all the gallivanting, you can take refuge in glamping. Luxurious tents with four-poster beds, en-suite dressing rooms, bathrooms and verandahs are a star attraction



listed among the most romantic cities in India. It certainly is during the monsoon, which brings thick mists that lend the landscape and monuments a dreamy air. But it is a different kind of picturesque during the winter, when the festival happens. The strong sunshine and cool winds give you expansive views that are hard to come by during the monsoon. The vegetation turns from lush green to amber, seemingly aglow against the clear, blue skies. The romance persists, regardless of the season.

Along with love, there's plenty of lust, as I realise during the heritage walks organised by the festival. Our knowledgeable guide, Naveen, explained the elaborate water harvesting, filtration and storage systems in the 15th-century Jahaz Mahal. But

controversy and laughter erupted when he mentioned that the king who built the palace, Ghiyasuddin Khalji, had 15,000 wives. What's more, he had constructed a 'gym' nearby (the steps of the present-day Ashrafi Mahal) for his corpulent concubines to exercise in.

I initially ascribed this legend to his lurid imagination, but later found out that Mughal emperor Jehangir had started this rumour in his memoir—almost two centuries after Ghiyasuddin's death! The truth is that Ghiyasuddin was atypical for his time. He established a madrasa for the women of his harem. They learnt warfare, hunting, archery, theology and philosophy and often enjoyed greater wealth and status than male nobles.



Beyond the monuments, Mandu has plenty of natural wonders. Some events of the festival are held at the Dino Adventure Park & Fossils Museum, a 10-minute drive from Mandu. While the venue could charitably be described as aesthetically challenged, it offers sweeping views of the Kakra Kho gorge, where waterfalls gush during the monsoon. The museum's fossilised dinosaur eggs, nests, sea creatures (millions of years ago, the region was underwater) and a 70-million-year-old tree are exciting to behold, but their upkeep is disappointing.

During the festival, an Art and Craft District has been set up next to Sagar Lake, the largest water body in Mandu. Anup Shrivastav, whose canvases are on exhibit there, says, "We have paintings, installations and live craft demonstrations

by about 30 artists from Indore, Dhar and other places near Mandu. There is contemporary as well as traditional art, such as the Gond and Pithora paintings of the region's adivasis."

Himanshu Lodwal, Durgesh Bithare, Mona Sharma, Aman Tekam and Aditya Chadar are some of the artists whose works are on display. The one that captivates me most is Avdesh Yadav's installation, Filled with Void. It is inspired by a custom he came across while cycling in western Madhya Pradesh: the selling of oil in small, clear plastic bags. Hundreds of bags hang from ropes at the edge of the lake next to a centuries-old bridge. The installation is worth visiting twice. At night, the plastic glimmers in the lights; in the sunshine, you can see it in its entirety, which reveals different facets.

When you're done with all the gallivanting, you can take refuge in glamping. E-Factor Entertainment has set up luxurious tents with four-poster beds, en-suite dressing rooms, bathrooms and verandahs.

Jai Thakore, the founder and COO of E-Factor Entertainment, says, "Visitors can enjoy the tent city until the end of February. We want to make the festival and the tents a regular fixture, so that tourists can have a holistic experience that goes beyond just a day trip to see Mandu's main monuments."

Indeed, even the three days I spend at the festival are not enough to discover all the delights Mandu has. What next, you ask? The seven-km trek to Budhi Mandu, an archaeological site with hundreds of sculptures and ruins. ■

Every
Spice
has a
Story

The magical, yet ignored, superfood in your spice rack

Black Pepper



By Kavita Devgan



@kavitadevgan

Kavita Devgan is a Delhi-based nutritionist, weight management consultant, health columnist and author of four bestsellers, *Don't Diet!*, *50 Habits of Thin People*, *Ultimate Grandmother Hacks*, *Fix It With Foods*, *The Don't Diet Plan*.

Superfood is a word that has caught our fancy in the past few years. We have been swept away by a wave of “avocado toasts”, “kale”, “quinoa” and “chia seeds”. But how many of us realise that every Indian has a treasure trove of “superfoods” on their kitchen shelf! We are talking about our spice rack. We forget that people from faraway lands used to come to India in search of spices and, of course, Vasco da Gama journeyed to India to find a direct route to the “land of spices” and his arrival paved the way for the spice trade between Europe and Southeast Asia.

In this column we will delve into your spice rack and connect you with the amazing health benefits of some spices that are easily available at home.

Two things recently revived my interest in pepper, and reminded me of this much-ignored spice. The copious amounts of thandai (a milk-based drink that has subtle notes of black pepper) I ended up downing in the follow-up to Holi, and a talk on India's food history I attended, where the speaker mentioned that red chilli, today such a huge part of our cooking, is actually a Portuguese import (da Gama brought it to our shores). Traditionally, we (Indians) cooked with pepper!

Pepper farming in the south is a huge business. There is mention of spice trade

with King Solomon! Predating the Christian era. Black pepper is actually native to India, primarily from the Western Ghats and the Malabar region, but as it is apparently a hard spice to grow (it needs a set amount of rainfall), its price tends to vary tremendously. That could be one of the reasons pepper was gradually sidelined and overtaken so decisively by chilli powder, which is both cheaper and hotter (so less goes farther). Unfortunately, though, chilli powder is not nearly as loaded nutritionally. The red powder most of us use in cooking these days is mostly just colour, anyway.

Pepper, on the other hand, is not just a wonderfully versatile spice, but is extremely good for health. The ‘piperine’ (the bio-active compound that gives pepper its pungency) has potent antioxidant properties. It has a role to play in the prevention of cancer, and stimulates the stomach to secrete more hydrochloric acid to help digest proteins better (yes, that's why I sprinkle it liberally on my fried egg and add it to my chicken marinades too). Laboratory tests have proved that piperine may also effectively fight inflammation and reduce cholesterol levels.

Pepper also stimulates the brain, helps keep depression away and delivers some Vitamins A and C, flavonoids, carotenes and other antioxidants that help remove harmful free radicals from the body.



Plus, it is antibacterial, and helps cure/prevent cold and cough. That is possibly why it is part of traditional recipes in India, like the thandai that we begin drinking around Holi, which is celebrated during spring in the northern parts of the country, marking the winter to summer transition – a time when any help to keep seasonal infections and flu away is more than welcome.

Long Pepper

Another variety besides the round black and white peppercorn is pippali or long pepper, which is a unique aromatic version with extensive curative properties. Valued for its medicinal applications, it is the most extensively used plant in Ayurveda and is sweeter and more pungent than the round peppercorns. If you are lucky you might still get to taste a lentil stew (mostly rasam) made with long pepper, or maybe even a special pickle in some households down south.

Pippali manages diabetes, shields against infections, aids in weight loss, and promotes digestion, among other things.

So, pull out that pepper jar from your spice rack and use this superfood to add pep to your meal. ■



THE INDIAN GRANDMA HACK

Mix 1 tsp of pippali powder, turmeric powder, dried ginger powder and 1 tsp of honey into a cup of lukewarm water. Drink this herbal kadha to strengthen the lung tissues and improve lung health.

MILAGU (BLACK PEPPER) RASAM

In a large pan add 1 tomato, 1 green chilli, a few curry leaves and ½ tsp turmeric, 1 cup tamarind extract and salt to taste. Cover and boil for 8 minutes and add 2 more cups of water.

Give a boil and add in 1 tsp crushed pepper. Temper this. Heat oil, add 1 tsp mustard seeds, 1 tsp jeera, a pinch of hing, 1 dried red chilli and a few curry leaves and allow the tempering to splutter.

Pour the tempering over the rasam. Garnish with coriander leaves. Makes for an excellent accompaniment to hot steamed rice with a slather of ghee on top. Or simply drink it as a soup.



REINVENTING INDIAN CRAFTS *that harmonise with* GLOBAL HOMES

Indian crafts keep up with global aesthetics in a jugalbandi of the old and the new, the modern and the traditional. We take a look at designers who are making them relevant in modern homes across the world



By
MALATI KALAPUR

The writer is a Bengaluru-based freelance journalist and content consultant. Formerly with the Times of India, Economic Times and Livingetc India, she writes primarily on design, art and lifestyle. She also enjoys giving a healthy twist to various cuisines.

India's diverse ancient arts, crafts, design and architecture have inspired the world for centuries with its rich and ornate tradition. As urban and international sensibilities permeate Indian lifestyle and thought, our design too has begun to embrace a new contemporary parlance, and the buzzwords of good design – green, sustainable and functional – have entered our lexicon.

When India opened up its economy in the 1990s, it gave rise to a new generation of Indians who travelled, studied and worked abroad. The movement of people brought a movement of ideas that helped evolve Indian interior and product design, allowing it to come out of its clichéd image of being overly colourful, ornate and grand. This

does not necessarily mean Indian design is in conflict with its traditional roots. On the contrary, the timeless crafts and hand-making skills remain inherent but with a newfound respect for crafts that has led to reinterpretations to suit a new visual vocabulary and function.

A slew of young designers, many of whom have studied abroad, are reinventing a contemporary language that brings forward the ancient traditions into the 21st century but is both sophisticated and functional. Designers like Ayush Kasliwal of AKFD fly the flag for India's time-old crafts with authentic designs that gel with the modern milieu, while ensuring a continuum between the old and the new.

SAIF FAIZAL



SAIF FAIZAL: ANCIENT ARTISTRY IN MODERN DECOR

Saif Faizal, a trained architect with a passion for automotive racing and design, and an award-winning designer, employs the 700-year-old Bidri technique where exquisitely crafted furniture and décor strike a balance between tradition and cutting-edge innovation in keeping up with modern sophistication.

“What drew me to this age-old craft was a conversation I had with Spanish designer and architect Patricia Urquiola in 2015 in Delhi, about the interaction of traditional crafts and contemporary design,” says Faizal. “There is a huge lack of innovation that is essential for the successful transition of these skills in the modern world. I wanted

to explore and bridge this gap.”

A part of Formula Student racing for five years, he brings the same precision and elemental approach from the experience to his creative process, making what he terms “essential, but not necessarily minimal, design”. His nature-inspired series, Snowflakes, Waves, etc., engrave designs inlaid with copper and silver on charcoal-black oxidised alloy. Sparkling dots, linear patterns, shifting waves, and geometric patterns, say, on a chair or the Katha Ripple vase, could sit comfortably in any contemporary home.

“The old techniques were inadequate to achieve this inlay work of lines in poetry that required special tooling to help the

artisan achieve the perfect results. I’ve been fortunate to collaborate with master craftsman M.A. Rauf and his son, M.A. Bari. They have been very willing to explore and experiment with us,” says the designer, whose forte includes product design, furniture, lighting, architecture, interiors, motorcycle design, and jewellery.” Tracing back to a long lineage of expert craftsmen, M A Rauf has played a quintessential role in elevating Bidriware into a contemporary art form without compromising on the traditional and cultural relevance of the craft. “The Bidri craft has tremendous potential, though there is a damaging trend of over-exploiting it with mediocre and boring design, especially by those who have little clue about its traditions.”



TIIPOI



TIIPOI: MAKING CRAFTS FUNCTIONAL

Designer Spandana Gopal, who founded Tiipoi, a product design studio in London, to challenge the stereotypical narratives around Indian design, says, "Particularly the nostalgia shrouded around Indian crafts, whereby value could only be generated by repeating the past, and 'maintaining' craft traditions. We want to prove that artisanal products can be more than mere souvenirs. They can be everyday, functional pieces."

Tiipoi products, made at a workshop in Bengaluru, espouse clean and sustainable designs employing indigenous materials that can be used by households anywhere in the world. The handmade, sustainable and functional Ayasa pourer in brass or copper, for example, celebrates the 'rim or lip' feature typical of Indian design with an extended rim, making it a wonderfully no-drip utensil.

ELLEMENTRY: BRANDS ON THE CRAFTS WAGON

India has been the leading exporter of handicrafts, which continued to grow through the pandemic, according to the Economic Times. Quality handcrafted products have, unfortunately, not been a part of everyday life in modern India. This, however, has changed in recent years with the proliferation of e-commerce platforms,



ELLEMENTRY

and studio products now available to discerning customers.

Ayush Baid, the son of award-winning Indian handicraft products exporter Dileep Baid, founded Ellementry to retail products that carried the same sensibility that endeared them to an international audience. With sustainability, minimalistic design and contemporary flair at their core, Ellementry's handmade products bring

indigenous craftsmanship to Indian homes.

"We take on the role of design messiah and liberate the customer from having to choose between beauty and function, when it comes to hand-made products," says Baid.

NO-MAD: INSPIRED BY EVERYDAY INDIA

Brave new Indian designs poised between tradition and modernity look beyond the



borders for inspiration. No-Mad 97 % India celebrates the Indian way of life by adding a twist to its local and ancestral traditions. The emphasis on '97 percent India' suggests the external influences brought in by travel and exposure in a globalised environment.

"Every No-Mad product tells a story, the story of India," says Anuj Kothari, the founder, who wanted to embark on a creative endeavour where his love for art,

crafts and travel would come together to breathe quality into everyday life. "We are inspired by everyday India. Simple everyday items are what inspire us, be it the humble muddah stool or the thali tray found in practically every household. These are hand-strung by cane furniture makers, while the ties on our cushions are made by patwas who string beads for jewellery. Traditional crafts and artisans are at the heart of No-Mad's contemporary products.

I would say we are a perfect mix of modern technology and traditional crafts. Using diverse techniques like screen and block printing, hand and machine embroidery, each item passes through several hands."

For pravasi Indians, these are the best of times, as they straddle a life across continents. Indian design speaks to their soul and allows them to stay rooted even as they blaze trails across the globe. ■

Young
&
Restless

IT'S ALL OUT in the OPEN



Open relationships are thriving,
now more than ever!

At a Diwali party last year, there was a rather volatile conversation on the perils of being in a profession that has you shuttling between cities. My friend, Tushar (name changed), was complaining about living out of a suitcase as he was travelling so much. As the creative head of a leading advertising agency, he's forever on some campaign shoot or pitch, meeting with clients in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. "It's a tough job and the travel makes it harder," he grumbled. His friend jumped in to ask how his wife had been coping. "Isn't it almost like being single again? If you don't get to spend time with each other, it's basically a long-distance marriage, right?"

Tushar then confessed to being in an open marriage, thereby opening a can of reactions. Everyone had something to say. My favourite was this priceless gem: "If you're living out of a suitcase, you might as well live a new life!"

Welcome to the new India. It is indeed the age of un-innocence – people are up to all kinds of things behind closed doors and, ironically, relationships are more 'open' than ever. Who said we're not a developed country? As far as relationships go, we've

come a long, open way.

To be fair, open relationships have always been around. They were covert, sure, but entirely existent. I remember hearing about one over a decade ago, from a colleague who was talking about his friend who was 'open' with his long-term girlfriend in Delhi. As a 20-something, I was quite amazed. What has changed since then is the number of people in such arrangements and, more importantly, how honest they are about them.

So often does one come across open relationships and marriages now, I'm starting to believe it's a new kind of ice-breaker. "Hi, I'm so-and-so and I'm in an open relationship. What about you?"

Before you dismiss this as a fad of the rich and elite, let me remind you that relationships and marriages have undergone a sea change everywhere. Log in on any one of those interchangeable dating apps and you're bound to encounter numerous people in open relationships. Ever since these apps came into the picture and work-life balance went for a toss, the desire to work on a relationship has ceased



Who Am I?



Shobhaa De famously said, "Some people watch birds; I watch marriages." Author (India's answer to Jackie Collins?) and social commentator, she is one of the most notorious chroniclers of India's young and elite, whose candour I've always admired. If Ms De would allow, I'd like to borrow her quote.

I too watch marriages. I also watch relationships, both casual and consequential. Straight, gay, bisexual, et al. There are few things more exciting, intriguing and almost-educational than

modern-day relationships.

BUT THIS BEGS THE QUESTION: WHO AM I?

Think of me as someone who knows the minds, hearts and bedrooms of the young Indian today. I have a social life across cities that allows me access to coveted parties, people and positions (pun absolutely intended!). Through this column, I aim to keep you abreast of how the young people of India go about their personal lives. I promise to keep it honest and to-the-point. No judgements, no prudishness.

to exist and relationships have changed for the better, or worse, depending on where you stand. A couple from Chandigarh, who have been in an open relationship for over a year now, told me last month: now it's all about making life simpler and not playing by pre-set rules.

In a survey conducted by Gleeden, India's first extramarital dating app, 55 percent of married Indians confessed to cheating on their spouses. The numbers would go much higher if you were to take into account unmarried and LGBTQIA+ couples. Clearly, people are less monogamous now as couples find their own version of what an 'ideal' marriage or relationship should look like. What is morality, anyway, if not just a point of view?

"Between a back-breaking work schedule and a fast-fading youth, who has the time to fix things? I'd rather hop on Bumble and get myself a distraction." As a teacher in a popular school in Mumbai's Mahim, Shalini (name changed) didn't want to deal with an unsatisfactory sex life, after dealing with students all day. What she craved was a man who knew her body and what he'd do with it. When she mooted the idea of going

open to her husband, surprisingly (and not-so-unpredictably), he was game. They've been in an open arrangement for four years and their marriage has never been better.

WHY SHOULD THE STRAIGHT ONES HAVE ALL THE FUN?

As one of the founders of a new-age digital media start-up, Rohan (name changed) and his partner decided to go open after his job made him move to Bengaluru and their newly-turned long-distance relationship started to fizzle out faster than a thoroughly-shaken can of soda. They now enjoy a heady mix of sex with other people and coitus-on-camera with each other every once in a while, just for a change. The same is the case with Vikram (name changed), a lawyer I met a few weekends ago, who now enjoys a 'healthy'- his words, not mine - open arrangement with his live-in boyfriend of three years.

Then there are those who are 'open' on the quiet. Don't you dare call it cheating, though; these men and women take serious offence at this label. "It would be cheating if I had indulged in a full-blown affair but I still love my wife. I'm just having sex; it's nothing emotional!" The man in question

leads a dual life. Everyone but his wife knows about his philandering ways and he doesn't seem to care to be secretive about it. But Amit (name changed) wouldn't want me to call him a 'cheater'. He is, as he puts it, completely in love with his wife but not sexually satisfied with her. What's in a name, eh?

Young adults today want everything on their terms. They won't work at a place that isn't giving them their due and won't live in a city that's not matching their 'vibe'. In the boudoir, they'll do 'it' exactly how they like. Age no bar, gender no bar and monogamy not needed. What about romance? Love and sex can mutually co-exist - you just didn't get the memo!

I like to call this a different kind of Art of Living - some swear by it, some want to adopt it and some others choose to dismiss it. Does it work? The verdict isn't out yet but modern-day men and women in India certainly seem to have taken to it.

What should the rest of you do? As my friend's father once put it, "it's the world of the young and we're just living in it!" ■

Don't call me **AUNTIE**



It is time to change how people think, feel and act towards age and aging, says **RITU AGARWAL**

"I cringe at being called Auntie or Mama by anybody other than my nieces or godchildren," Oprah famously said in an interview.

As we age, particularly women, it's intriguing and frustrating to see the world struggle not just with how to deal with us, but also how to address us, more so if we happen to be well preserved, smart and in sync with the times.

"Oprah has worked pretty well for me. Though sometimes strangers refer to me as Lady O, which feels friendly, yet respectful of the age difference. It feels appropriate," Winfrey has stated. Calling someone older than you Auntie is definitely ageist. I have been an office-going person, working with teams, for a large part of my adult life. As I moved up the ladder, my team and everyone around me simply called me by my first name. It worked beautifully. I also got along very well with people half my age, as both friends and colleagues. And lately, simply teaming up with bright youngsters on projects, from whom I get to learn a lot and with whom I can share my experience. It is a win-win relationship unhampered by big words such as Ma'am and Ms. Age has never come up. So, what does being 'age appropriate' mean? And why do we need it?



Ritu with the happy team of Inspired Traveller, a start-up by under -25 year olds, she had collaborated with

When I turned 50, I wondered if I should be dressing in a certain way; if there was an age appropriate dress code was a question that crossed my mind. In India, showing skin is definitely a part of the "not age appropriate" dossier. While we have women such as Jennifer Lopez turning up the heat at 52, a 63-year-old Madonna and her 27-year-old boyfriend being chased by paparazzi and closer home 48-year-old Malaika Arora dating a 36-year-old Arjun Kapoor or Falguni Nayar turning a billionaire at 59 with her brand Nykaa... these are all still seen as behaviour that is breaking social norms. And not just in India but globally. The amount of trolling Priyanka Chopra received from the American press for marrying Nick Jonas, a man 10 years younger than her, was rather revealing of ageism everywhere. In general, forced retirement based on age is illegal in the US. In India, I have given many interviews where they have loved everything they see and hear, till they get to the age. "Oh, but you don't look your age!" I get that very often. Equally, I get "you are over-experienced for the role".

A report released by WHO in 2021 calls for urgent action to combat ageism and better measurement and reporting to expose ageism for what it is – an insidious scourge on society. Stating that ageism leads to poorer health, social isolation, earlier deaths and costs economies billions, this report calls for swift action to implement effective anti-ageism strategies. "Ageism harms everyone – old and young. But often, it is so widespread and accepted – in our attitudes and in policies, laws and institutions – that we do not even recognise its detrimental effect on our dignity and rights," said Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "We need to fight ageism head-on, as a deep-rooted human rights violation."

As global bodies like the UN and WHO urge all countries and stakeholders to use evidence-based strategies, improve data collection and research and work together to build a movement to change how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing... I am just happy if I am not called Auntie. Ritu will do. Thank you. ■

The writer, a lifestyle editor moved from a successful career in journalism to re-skill and explore newer contemporary content platforms. Age agnostic, she has worked well with bright & positive people of all age groups



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