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The India Connection

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GRC India, F-374-375,
Sector-63, Noida-201 301 (UP)

Printed at

Rolleract Press Services, A-83/1, Naraina
Industrial Area Phase 1, New Delhi-110028

Printed, published and owned by RASHMI and printed
at Rolleract Press Services, A-83/1, Phase-1, Naraina
Industrial Area, New Delhi-110028 on behalf of M/s
Template Media LLP. Place of Publication: New Delhi. PARSA
VENKATESHWAR RAO JR is Editor.

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Mapping New Rhythms

The news of Rishi Sunak taking over as prime minister of the United Kingdom remains a matter of immense interest in India. After the initial vague sense of euphoria that an 'Indian' – an Indian by origin and Hindu by faith – is now the prime minister of the UK, there is curiosity over whether he will succeed in healing the ailing British economy, and whether he will lead the Conservative Party to victory in 2024. His Indian origins notwithstanding, he is a British citizen who belongs to the upper middle class of class-conscious England! Andrew Whitehead, former BBC correspondent in India and the man who covered Westminster as political correspondent, and Lord Meghnad Desai, member of the Upper House of the British Parliament, assess the challenges facing Sunak.

In Diaspora Voices, Divya Kaeley narrates a captivating immigrant experience of settling in Canada. Back home, we have interesting analyses by Kumud Das and Vishal Duggal on how the Indian economy in general and Indian real estate in particular have managed to stay afloat despite the global volatility. B. Shekhar takes stock of the concerns arising out of the possible dilution of powers of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in the Draft Telecom Bill 2022 and Amarendra Kishore assesses the contrasting positions of India in the Multidimensional Poverty Index and in the Global Hunger Index.

In the Lifestyle section, we spot new trends which are interesting as well as surprising. One was never conscious of the fact that food should not only taste good but should look good as well in this age of Instagram when youngsters make it a point to click pictures of what's on the plate before eating it. So, the visual aesthetics of food have suddenly become important and we carry a piece looking at this new trend.

Supriya Newar brings a lively account of the cultural festival in a Rajasthan village, Momasar, away from the pomp and show of usual urban settings. The bards and musicians participating in the festival are not celebrities but exceptionally talented, with the focus on their inherited artistic heritage.

In the Book Nook section, Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr talks to Dr Sanjeev Chopra about his book, *We, the People of the States of Bharat: The Making and Remaking of India's Internal Boundaries*, that maps state boundaries and takes a close look at the contemporary political history of India through its geography. Enjoy reading PRAVASI INDIANS....

CEO and Publisher

We would love to hear from you. We also invite diaspora members to write for us and share their experiences

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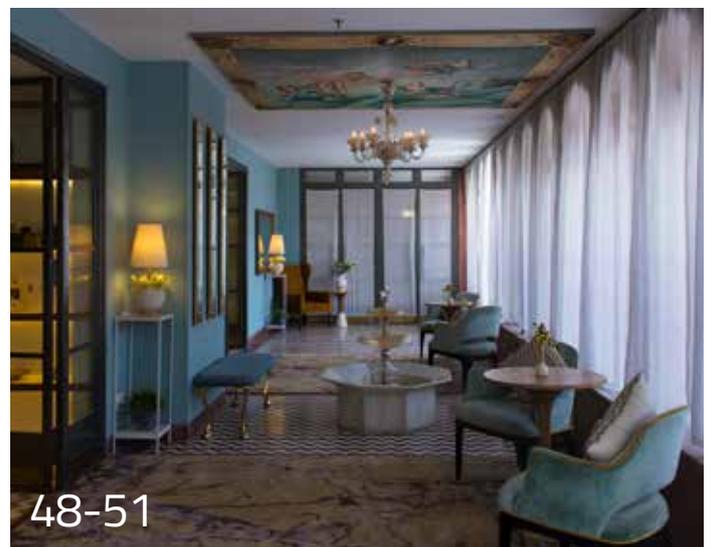
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SURMOUNTING ALL ODDS

The immigrant experience is full of excitement and the hurdles become easy to overcome because of the irrepressible desire to succeed, says **DIVYA KAELEY**



It's mid-2012 when we arrive at the busy Toronto Pearson Airport as permanent residents. The hustle and bustle makes me nervous and the cool July air whispers in my ears: Welcome to a whole new world.

Coming to Canada was definitely broadening our horizons. Two well-paying stable jobs back home to a fresh start from zero is entering the chaotic, with the hope that things will be great in the end. When we

land here in Ontario, our friends are already throwing words of caution at us. Others are giving advice on survival in Canada. We brace ourselves for a long road ahead.

The first month is pure excitement. The clean roads, sparse population, fresh air and greenery of the 'first world' are surely enamouring. Everything seems glowing, when suddenly reality starts mocking in your face. There is no job! In the next couple

of weeks, we rent an apartment with the lingering fear that monthly bills might soon deplete our savings.

But we aren't going to give up so soon. Step one is to focus on getting your Canadian driver's licence. With a completely different system, it's like unlearning how you drove back home. We pass our driving tests, and that is our first achievement.

My spouse, Dr Narinder Pahwa, an

orthodontist from India and an erstwhile army officer, is an optimist by nature. While we did get some discouraging ideas in the beginning—"it's not easy to be a doctor here"—he wasn't affected by it. Narinder certainly had a mountain to climb. Medical and health professionals in Canada have to pass a series of examinations before they become eligible to practise in the country. But with a will to surmount challenges, he studies hard alongside taking care of our two-year-old son.

Coming to Canada, in the first place, was always marked with scepticism at the dinner table. I recollect a conversation with my family 10 years ago: "You two have successful careers here. Is it the right step?" Especially the fact that the job market is looking for what is called "Canadian experience"—a glass ceiling that may prevent immigrants from achieving high-paying jobs rightaway.

As for me, I start hunting madly for jobs, accessing almost every possible employment website and uploading my resume. In the first month itself, I land a job at a South Asian newspaper and start reporting on the Indian community in Canada. This is the second achievement in getting Canadian experience. I also find a volunteering opportunity at a local centre helping new immigrants learn English. I enrol in an English language teaching course to become a licensed instructor. Within a couple of months, I get a job at a local language centre—helping immigrants pass IELTS and TOEFL. But it's more than that—coming to a foreign country forces you to explore other skill sets. As I extend my research, I find other opportunities that may be conducive to my skills. I find an entry-level position at a Canadian bank. By now, we are already in acceptance stage. I am willing to take up different responsibilities and focus on new priorities. I am excited about my new beginnings and learn something novel—banking.

All this while, Narinder focused on his dentistry exams and he clears them in the first attempt—he gets accepted at the University of Manitoba for the Doctor of Dental Medicine program. In between, our comfort is the temple and our resort to spirituality, prayers and mantra chanting.

Today, 10 years down the line, I have two kids—12-year-old Parth and five-year-old daughter, Meher. Narinder is an accredited Canadian dentist. I have successfully passed a series of banking exams to achieve the



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While we did get some discouraging ideas in the beginning—'it's not easy to be a doctor here'—he wasn't affected by it.

world-recognised Certified Financial Planning designation in Canada. As a financial planner with a reputed bank, I empower families with holistic planning and help them achieve their goals in a tax-efficient way.

My education in India, a master's degree in literature and a decade-long background in journalism, built me into who I am today. It has given me the appetite to pursue newer ventures and enhance my learning.

My story may resonate with that of several Indians who have built a life for themselves overseas. Manitoba has a significant Indian representation among medical and health professionals, restaurateurs, entrepreneurs and even the city councillors. This strong Indian diaspora has made Canada a relaxing place to live, perhaps as comfortable and familiar as my home, India.

Living in Winnipeg, I see Indians striving towards passing their culture to the future generations, whether it's through knowledge of scriptures, music or languages. There is a huge inclination towards learning cultural traditions, promoting food habits and celebrating heritage festivals. People encourage

children to volunteer in places of worship and temples. While I do miss the festive frenzy of India, and the feasting and gifting that go with it, I notice that Indo-Canadians keep the spirit alive through their get-togethers, events and functions.

To use a cliché, there is a hope for a "better life" when you travel abroad with your family; there are hopes for a brighter future for your kids and more opportunities for their growth. While hopes can come true, it is all at a cost of leaving your extended family back home. It can be a severe test of your patience while you settle in.

From starting a new career to owning your first home in Canada, it seems like a fantasy story. As I walk in my backyard today on the dewy grass, I try to relive our past struggles as newcomers. We have certainly travelled a long distance. Is there any rest, I don't know. ■

(The writer is a Certified Financial Planner in Canada. A former journalist, she has worked with India's leading dailies and is an enthusiast about immigrant issues.)



HOW HUNGRY IS INDIA?

While international agencies used inadequate sample size and methodology to determine the extent of poverty in India, the government needs to focus more on the ground reality than official data



BY
**AMARENDRA
KISHORE**

The writer is a Delhi-based development journalist and expert on tribal issues of India and south-east Asia

The poverty status of India has now become a contentious issue. The statistics presented by some independent agencies that monitor worldwide economic conditions and poverty put forth a distressing perspective. The situation arises due to the fact that figures in one report contradict those in another. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MDPI) compiled jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) reveals that 41.5 crore people exited poverty in India during the 15-year period between 2005-06 and 2019-21, out of which two-thirds exited in the first 10 years, and the remaining one-third in the next five years.

On the other hand, a joint report released by Concern Worldwide (CWW), an Irish aid agency, and Welt Hunger Hilfe (Welthungerhilfe), a German organisation, discloses that India has fallen six positions in the 2022 Global Hunger Index (GHI), being ranked 107th out of 121 countries. The ranking is worse than all countries in the South Asian region except war-torn

Afghanistan. The report has significance as it captures three dimensions of hunger—insufficient availability of food, shortfalls in the nutritional status of children, and child mortality.

In hunger statistics, India stands lower than neighbours Pakistan and Nepal. In this index, the best position in South Asia is occupied by Sri Lanka, ranked 64th; Nepal is at 81st place and Bangladesh at 84th. Even Sudan fares better than India.

It is noteworthy that since 2000, the GHI is released every year to highlight country-wise poverty status so that appropriate technical solutions can be applied to achieve the goal of global zero hunger by 2030. It is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. This index is determined on the basis of micronutrients instead of calories, the popular scale of measuring nourishment.

As soon as the GHI report came out, the opposition parties in India got an opportunity to confront the government. However, it was a well-known fact that during the UPA regime, the rations allocated for the poor were frequently sent to Nepal-Bangladesh through crores of fake ration cards. Even the blackmarketing of rations at village level was a gigantic challenge for local administrations across the country. This malpractice has reportedly been stopped, according to the present government. This correction is said to have eradicated extreme poverty, and improved the implementation of the right to food. The government criticised the report for not

taking note of these outcomes. The government claims that it seems to be a well-planned conspiracy through malicious reports to malign India's image globally.

The Indian government has rejected the report outright. But this does not mean that Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide have no credibility. Their reports have been recognised all over the world for long. Welthungerhilfe is financially supported in its work by institutional grants from the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the EU Commission and the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) that endorse the authenticity of its work. The CWW also delivers life-saving and life-changing interventions to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. From rapid emergency response to innovative development programming, CWW reaches the most remote places to make sure that no one is left behind. Emergency relief in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, covering health, hunger and humanitarian response in emergencies, form the remit of CWW.

However, at a time when the entire world is praising the Indian economy and government efforts to eradicate poverty as being successful, the negative picture of India in the GHI appears unconvincing. Recent reports by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are also raising questions on the GHI episode.

Recently, the World Bank president admitted that the way India has extended support to the poor and disadvantaged people during the Covid-19 pandemic has been extraordinary. More recently, the IMF has also praised the Digital India campaign and called the Direct Cash Transfer Scheme (DCTS) exemplary.

The question arises, which data and conclusions should be trusted? The manner in which Sri Lanka has been ranked 64th in the report is surprising. Sri Lanka has been going through politico-economic instability for a long time due to Chinese interference. There was a situation of mass revolt due to high prices of foodgrains and other essential commodities. The situation was controlled by food supplied by India.

Is it right to reject this report? Is there any *mala fide* intention on the part of these international organisations regarding India? The Government of India argues that many issues have been overlooked in this report that reflect the biases while undertaking this study. First, the data is collected from a minuscule sample for a country of India's size through Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) to compute Proportion of Undernourished (PoU), the percentage of the population whose consumption falls below the Minimum Dietary Energy Requirement (MDER) value. This is biased as well as unethical. The government had also mentioned media reports that said Concern Worldwide and Welt Hunger Hilfe had evidently not done due diligence before releasing the report.

It is evident that such questions do not search for facts based on relevant information about the delivery of nutritional support and assurance of food security by the government, especially during an epidemic. The government of India has strong views and concerns over the right to food, keeping in mind that this is a single way to root out poverty. So, the government concludes that availability of grains in FCI godowns, public accessibility to fair price shops to procure wheat and rice, utilisation

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of grains through a proper distribution scheme and stability of food stocks have not been rationally evaluated in this report.

This has automatically raised questions about the credibility of the report. It is ironical that on the one hand the World Bank and the IMF are praising the Government of India's direct cash transfer and food security schemes, and on the other India is being ranked seven places lower than last year in the GHI. The reason for this irony is that out of the four indicators based on which the Hunger Index is prepared, three are related to children, which does not give information about the entire population. The index is an erroneous measure of hunger and suffers from serious methodological issues. Three out of the four indicators used for calculation of the index are related to the health of children and cannot be representative of the entire population. The fourth and most important estimate of Proportion of Undernourished (PoU) population is based on an opinion poll conducted on a very small sample size of 3,000.

It is noteworthy that in the past eight and a half years, the Narendra Modi government has made extensive reforms in the public distribution system. In the process of linking ration cards with Aadhaar, 4.7 crore ration cards were found to be fake. So far more than 20 crore ration cards have been linked with Aadhaar. Point of Sale (POS) machines have been installed at every fair

price shop so that no person other than the beneficiary can draw rations. This has ended the blackmarketing of subsidised foodgrains. Today, 75 percent of the rural and 50 percent of the urban population is covered under national food security: 81.35 crore people are being provided foodgrains at subsidised rates. After the implementation of One Nation One Ration Card, the beneficiaries can pick up their foodgrains near their homes or from the ration shop of their choice.

The government emphasises that several steps were taken during the critical period of the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 to ensure nationwide food security. The government had announced the distribution of free foodgrains (rice/wheat) to 80 crore people; thereby effectively doubling the quantity of monthly foodgrains delivered to the National Food Security Act (NFSA) households. So far, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) scheme, the government has allocated almost 1,121 lakh metric tonnes of foodgrains to the states/UTs, equivalent to about ₹3.91 lakh crore in food subsidy. The scheme has been extended till December 2022.

However, the government's arguments are open to debate and discussion. Is it right to accept the availability of foodgrains and their proper distribution as an effective way to eradicate poverty at the grassroots level? The government's arguments differ widely from the standard indicators of health-education and living standards under the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MDPI). Regrettably, the most vulnerable sections of Indian society have had to bear the brunt of adverse effects of the pandemic. It is also a stark fact that India had been witnessing declining economic growth even before the pandemic. Budget 2021-22 saw virtually no change in allocations for health, food security, pensions, and actually saw decreased spending in some sectors such as education which is one of the fundamental rights in the Constitution. ■



BY KUMUD DAS

The writer is a Mumbai-based senior business journalist.

WEATHERING THE STORM

Amid global economic turmoil, India remains resilient with positive indicators for growth and consumption

At a time when the global economy is faced with a host of ongoing challenges, India is steadily emerging as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das, "Amid the global economic crisis and despite the unsettling global environment, the Indian economy continues to be resilient." Significantly, India has already secured its position in the top five global economies of the world in terms of size of GDP, by surpassing the UK.

The world has witnessed two major shocks—the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia conflict—which have had a profound impact on the global economy. All segments of the financial market, including equity bonds, and the currency market are in turmoil across the world.

In fact, the just concluded Samvat 2078 will go down in history as one of the most

volatile years when exuberance around tech stocks and the IPO boom was followed by the Russia-Ukraine war, multi-decade high global inflation and the fastest interest rate hikes in recent times.

Amid this hazy global scenario, India is today looking like a pearl in the ocean with benefits from food security, domestic demand-driven economy, the Production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme across the manufacturing and defence production sectors, a strong banking system with decade-low non-performing assets (NPAs), strong infra capex and rising investments in unicorns.

Even as high inflation has impacted demand in lower and lower middle income sections, festive demand is buoyant with the waning Covid impact, good monsoons, pick-up in infra and real estate development, and strong hiring demand across sectors. Although an uncertain global environment

and expected slowdown in the US and Europe remain a concern, a report by Prabhudas Lillardher believes India will successfully navigate this period and emerge stronger. In fact, analysts continue to prefer companies with presence in emerging segments, strong balance sheets and business moats.

The New York Times was right when it wrote in September, "As global economic growth slows sharply, with many major economies gripped with worries of recession, there has been a conspicuous exception: India."

This is not all. Have a look at the narratives used by other global stakeholders. Deutsche Bank chief executive Christian Sewing called India the "shining star" of the global economy at the moment. Citigroup chief Jane Fraser back in July called this a "pretty unique point in time for India". International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva

also reportedly called India a “bright spot” in the global economy.

Gopal Krishna Agarwal, national spokesperson of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, says, “We are hopeful that the RBI’s target of 6 percent inflation will be met. Globally, there is a recession. Commodity prices are softening, crude oil prices are coming down too.” Inflation is at 7 percent at present. The RBI is looking to bring it down to 6 percent which is much lower than in even developed countries like the US and European nations, he said.

The pandemic and the war in Europe have pushed the economic issue to the centre stage globally. Many countries are facing economic challenges—some are on the verge of sovereign default and some have already defaulted. On the other hand, India, with its current GDP at USD 3.15 trillion, is the fastest growing economy in the world. India is now the fifth largest economy in terms of GDP and is poised to be the third largest economy in the near future.

There are several positive indicators. Purchase Manager Index (PMI)—services and manufacturing—is in expansion mode. In September, service sector PMI stood at 54.3 and that of the manufacturing sector at 55.1. Bank credit is steadily growing. In August, the year on year growth figure was 15.5 percent, which is the highest in nine years.

The Central government expenditure in infrastructure as well as capex by public sector units (PSUs) is on the rise. Corporate sector earnings are also growing. Direct tax collection for the year has increased by 24 percent and GST collection for September has crossed ₹1.47 lakh crore.

There is upward momentum in air traffic, coupled with increase in travel, tourism, retail and recreational visits. India’s exports have hit a record high and are increasing further. There is significant increase in defence exports with the sale of the indigenously developed and manufactured Tejas aircraft and other arms and equipment to other countries.

The country is blessed with strong and well-capitalised PSU banks with NPA recovery happening through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) mechanism. A corruption-free delivery ecosystem through technology integration like Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and Jan Aadhaar Money (JAM), and leakage-proof collection of direct and indirect taxes was already in place. Policy reforms like the new logistics policy, strong

India has witnessed the highest number of real-time digital transactions in the world. Around 678 crore transactions occurred in September with a gross value of approximately ₹11.84 lakh crore.

connectivity in terms of rail, road, waterways and airways, digitisation initiatives like those relating to land records, data transparency have helped greatly. India has witnessed the highest number of real-time digital transactions in the world. Around 678 crore transactions occurred in September with a gross value of approximately ₹11.84 lakh crore. Internet penetration to nearly 6,25,000 villages at *panchayat* level, along with 5G services are heartening signs. As of now, 100 unicorns with a robust start-up ecosystem are flourishing.

Coming to gold, prices underwent significant volatility with a peak to trough ratio of about 1:2. In March, prices took off to near record highs on the back of geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine. However, they swiftly cooled off as the geopolitical pressure waned. In addition to this, the tightening cycle and withdrawal of liquidity by global central banks added further downward pressure on the prices. Despite this, gold has given returns of around 7 percent since the start of Samvat 2078. Now the question on investors’ minds is, will gold shine? Well, the answer to this is extremely uncertain and unpredictable given the rapidly changing economic environment and the push and pull of various macro-economic and geopolitical factors.

The quantitative tightening cycle by the majority of the central banks to combat rising inflation has been a clear headwind

for asset classes such as equities, bonds, and gold. When the interest rates are hiked, it increases the yield on government bonds which in turn increases the real yields. For instance, the US 10Y TIPS yield is now at 1.5 percent compared to -1 percent in January. This incentivises investors to move the money into a positive yielding asset as gold is a non-yielding asset class.

The flight of money into bonds has strengthened the US dollar with the DXY (US Dollar Index) trading at a 20-year high near 114. Therefore, the combination of a strong dollar along with the rising yields had a bearing on the gold prices. If the US Fed achieves a soft landing in an ideal but unlikely scenario where inflation is brought under control and the economy remains robust, gold prices will continue to remain on a downtrend.

However, there are a host of other factors that have given a floor to gold prices. One is the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war where Russia has threatened to use nuclear weapons to annex parts of Ukraine. Any such geopolitical flare-up would result in risk aversion and divert flows to relatively lower risk assets like gold. Additionally, rising inflationary pressures due to the disruptions caused by the war may result in a further uptick in inflation. Given the fact that the economy has already started slowing down, a further rise in inflation could cause stagflationary pressures. Historically, a stagflation-like scenario has been good for gold prices.

Recent incidents such as what happened with the UK pension funds, where higher interest rates led to falling bond prices which in turn triggered margin calls from banks because of the complex leveraged products, may cause systemic risks to the economy. The era of free money during the pandemic may have resulted in malinvestments and there is a possibility of excessive defaults and losses due to the withdrawal of liquidity that may eventually lead to disruptions in the financial markets.

However, prospects of economic growth cannot be analysed through challenges alone but depend on the strength of the institutions to manage them as well. India has challenges but its strength is based on a decisive government with strong leadership, prioritising national interest in matters like crude oil purchase policy despite global pressure, and bilateral trade in rupee terms with more and more countries. ■

Money Matters

FIGHTING GLOBAL HEADWINDS

Persistent repo rate hikes have not dampened domestic demand for and NRI interest in resilient Indian real estate

BY VISHAL DUGGAL

In response to elevated inflation levels due to geopolitical tensions, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has increased the repo rate successively quarter over quarter in the current financial year. The hikes, four times in a row, have been necessitated by the spiralling inflation and worldwide recession in the financial markets.

To rein in the persistently high inflation, the RBI decided to raise the key policy rate in an off-cycle announcement on May 4, 2022. The apex bank effectuated a 40 basis point increase in the repo rate, bringing it to 4.40 percent. In a virtual briefing, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das announced an increase of 50 basis points in cash reserve ratio, to raise it to 4.50 percent. Subsequently, on June 8, the RBI increased the repo rate by 50 basis points. The hike brought the RBI's short-term lending rate to 4.90 percent. The move ushered in the end of a record low-interest rate regime which was established by the RBI to ease economic hardship in response to the Covid-19 crisis. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic and preserve financial stability, the Central bank had slashed interest rates, keeping the policy repo rate at a low of 4 percent.

But the worsening global macroeconomic situation in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war changed it all.

On August 5, the RBI increased the repo rate by 50 basis points. The move brought

the RBI's benchmark lending rate to 5.40 percent, making home purchases costlier for prospective homebuyers. The decision also resulted in housing EMIs going up for existing borrowers.

In view of the heightened geopolitical risks, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in its meet on September 30 again increased the repo rate by 50 basis points to bring it to 5.90 percent. This marked the fourth time the central bank increased the repo rate since May to combat stubbornly high inflation driven by increase in food prices including cereals, vegetables, pulses and so on, and additional inflationary pressures emerging from steep depreciation of the rupee.

For the uninitiated, the repo rate is the rate at which the commercial banks borrow from the RBI. An increase in repo rate leads to a hike in the lending as well as deposit rates. Basis points (BPS) are used to show the change in the value or rate of a financial instrument, one basis point equals 1/100th of 1 percent, or 0.01 percentage point.

The consecutive repo rate hikes over the past couple of quarters, leading to rising interest rates, have added to buyers' overall acquisition cost. Coupled with elevated property construction costs and product price pressures, the high interest regime threatens to adversely impact real estate sentiment, predominantly on the affordable housing side.

The increases in repo rate have prompted banks in India to start a rate hike cycle. It has impacted all borrowings including home loans, car loans, business loans, personal loans, vehicle loans, credit cards and various other loans disseminated by banks and other financial institutions, leading to increased EMIs for consumers.

Central banks across the world including the US Fed have taken similar measures to counter inflation risks amidst geopolitical tensions, and tightening global financial conditions. However, as far as India is concerned, the repo rate hike has not adversely affected the overall consumer spending, or disrupted the entire supply and demand chain. Growing geopolitical uncertainties have not impacted the broad-based recovery of the Indian economy that has been witnessed recently. According to a State Bank of India (SBI) report, the RBI seems "focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remained within the target going forward, while supporting growth".

Despite slowing exports amidst considerable tightening of global financial conditions, the Indian economy is supported by improvement in private consumption, steady improvement in industrial activities, a favourable monsoon, rebound in the manufacturing and services sectors, a relatively better placed agriculture sector, strong growth in bank credit, and optimistic



business outlook. Other positive factors include increase in government spending and low risk of fiscal slippage confronting India despite additional subsidy, due to improved tax collections.

According to experts, notwithstanding the recent hikes in key policy rates, loan affordability is still quite good. Historically, the repo rate in India has been between 6-8 percent, and currently it is at 5.90 percent. So, the buying capacity of consumers has not been grossly undermined. According to Surendra Hiranandani, chairman and managing director, House of Hiranandani, "Despite the RBI's strategic decision to raise repo rates in an effort to control inflation, the buyer of real estate seems to be less influenced by the most recent increases. Higher premium sales levels are the result of rising demand for larger properties, a recovery of buyer confidence, and greater NRI interest."

Significantly, the latest CII-ANAROCK Consumer Sentiment Survey shows that Hyderabad, the NCR (National Capital Region), and Bengaluru are NRIs' top picks for housing investment. Notably, at least 60 percent of NRI respondents will buy homes in one of these three cities, with 22 percent focused on Hyderabad, 20 percent eyeing the NCR, and 18 percent preferring Bengaluru.

Notably, more NRIs prefer investing in Indian real estate over stocks, mutual funds, gold, and fixed deposits. In the

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survey's current (H1 2022) edition, 71 percent of NRI respondents saw Indian housing as the best investment bet. This is markedly higher than the 55 percent in the pre-Covid edition. "Despite the worst of Covid-19 now in the past, NRIs have clearly not forgotten the uncertainties associated with living in a foreign country during a major pandemic," says Prashant Thakur, senior director and head – research, ANAROCK Group. "Securing homes in India

became, and remains, a priority for Indians everywhere. While domestic homeownership sentiment remains strong despite hardening home loan interest rates and property prices, the depreciating rupee value against the US dollar gives NRIs a distinct advantage."

Housing has seen a 15-20 percent increase in NRI demand in the first nine months of 2022 compared to the corresponding period in 2021. "As per ANAROCK Research, the January-September period of 2022 saw approximately 2.73 lakh homes sold in the top seven cities," says Thakur. "On an average, NRIs account for 10-15 percent of homes sold in any given quarter."

The current H1 2022 survey finds that over 77 percent of NRI respondents will buy bigger homes—54 percent favouring 3BHKs and 23 percent looking to buy 4BHKs. Just 22 percent of NRI respondents are now looking for 2BHKs. In the pre-Covid survey, at least 40 percent were eyeing 2BHKs.

Many NRIs are now looking to shift back to India and actively use these homes. The current economic situation in many countries is uncertain because of the recessionary dynamics brought on by the Ukraine-Russia war, while the Indian economy is markedly better off, concludes the CII-ANAROCK survey. All this bodes well for buyers of Indian properties living within the country as well as overseas. ■

WATCHDOG TURNS WARY

Due to concerns over possible dilution of powers of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill 2022, the government is mulling removal of provisions related to the regulator from the bill and introduction of a separate bill later to strengthen the regulatory body

BY B. SHEKHAR

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

When it comes to the telecommunications sector, India is on a par with First World infrastructure. With the launch of 5G services, the Indian telecom sector has just proved that it has seamlessly established the requisite infrastructure to service the masses, although the penetration is too low considering the population spread. This is an area of serious concern for Telecom Service Providers (TSPs).

Overall, India's telecom industry had around 116 crore wireless subscribers at the close of June 2022, growing 0.16 percent month-on-month. Of these, 625.49 million were urban, while 521.90 million were rural subscribers. As such, 54.51 percent of the country's total telecom users live in urban areas and 45.49 percent in rural areas. Though the telecom sector is just about two decades old, it is growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10 percent.

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹12,195 crore production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for telecom and networking products under the Department of Telecom (DoT). In October 2021, 31 companies comprising 16 MSMEs and 15 non-MSMEs (eight domestic and seven global companies) were approved under the PLI scheme. To drive the development of 6G technology, DoT has developed a sixth

generation (6G) innovation group. By 2025, India will need more than 22 million skilled workers in 5G-centric technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics and cloud computing.

The open-ended and pro-reform policies of the government have been instrumental in the rapid growth of the Indian telecom sector along with strong consumer demand. The government has enabled easy market access to telecom equipment and a fair and proactive regulatory framework that has ensured availability of telecom services to the consumer at affordable prices as compared to any other Bretton Woods nation.

The deregulation of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms has also substantially boosted the sector to grow at a faster pace and it is currently among the top five employment opportunity generators in the country.

Though the telecom sector is in the pink of health, a slew of policy issues still bog down this industry vertical. Considering that this sector needs policy reforms, the Government of India has introduced a draft Indian Telecommunication Bill 2022—open for comments from the public until November 20, 2022—which basically seeks to radically redefine the very structure of the policy and practices with an

objective to bridging the gaps so as to seamlessly integrate with global standards.

The draft bill is an attempt by the government to update the extant regulatory framework in keeping with the advancements and challenges in the sector. This was much needed given that the three main legislations that occupy this domain are considerably outdated, with the most recent of them having been enacted more than 70 years ago. These legislations are the Indian Telegraph Act, enacted in 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, enacted in 1933, and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful) Possession Act, enacted in 1950. The Indian Telecommunication Bill looks to repeal these legislations and "restructure the legal and regulatory framework" for the telecommunications sector.

One of the key reforms proposed under the Telecom Bill is that it deal with an iron hand on perpetrators of cybercrime with a ₹50,000 fine and suspension of operation of the specific mobile number or barring of the person from using the telecom service for a certain duration. A conservative figure estimates that over ₹1,000 crore is siphoned off by fraudsters using cyber space every year. The draft bill also proposes that the identity of the person communicating, using any form of

telecommunication services, shall be available to the user receiving such communication. This would mean that unlike now where only the phone number of the person making the communication is displayed, going forward the name of the person would also be displayed.

Further, the draft bill also provides that commercial communications which are advertisements and promotional in nature, should be made only with the prior consent of a subscriber. This provision in itself plugs cybercrime substantially.

In the wake of recent violence in the country by using social media to intentionally spread fake news, a very hard-hitting reform has been proposed in the bill—that of shutting off internet services. For the first time in Indian legal framework, a specific provision enabling the government to order suspension of internet connectivity has been proposed through the draft bill. Currently, suspension of internet services is ordered under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency and Public Safety) Rules, 2017 that have been drawn up under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885.

However, since the draft bill was placed in the public domain, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) which is currently the supreme telecom authority,

has objected to several provisions as it feels that its powers are being confiscated or completely truncated.

The draft bill has proposed 13 changes to the TRAI Act, which could greatly reduce the powers of the watchdog.

The Broadband India Forum (BIF) opines that the amendments might undermine TRAI and dilute its powers within the telecom sector and thus require a critical review. "The Draft Telecom Bill provisions propose to take away TRAI's statutory independence and seek to make it subservient to the Government," feels the industry body.

However, the good news is that following the concerns over the possible dilution of powers of TRAI in the proposed policy, the government is mulling the removal of provisions related to the regulator from the bill. It is thinking of introducing a separate bill to strengthen the regulatory body at a later stage.

"DoT has had discussions with TRAI and all the concerns were addressed. Everyone agreed that the intent was good.... There are no differences between DoT and TRAI now. All issues have been resolved," sources revealed.

Further, it was said the government wants to strengthen TRAI to bring it on a par with bodies such as the US regulator, the Federal Communications Commission

(FCC), and the UK's Ofcom, with highly technical people and powers to impose penalties, among other things.

India is the world's second largest telecommunications market with a subscriber base of 1.16 billion and has registered strong growth in the past decade. It surpassed the US to become the second largest market in terms of number of app downloads. The Indian telecom and networking economy is growing rapidly and will contribute substantially to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Over the next five years, rise in telecom penetration and decline in end-user tariffs will add 500 million new internet users in India, creating opportunities for new businesses. And the principal objective of the proposed new policy is to provide strong and vibrant policy reforms to enable this sector to grow at a much faster rate and be on a par with global benchmarks.

The telecom sector in India has to deal with various challenges like maintaining a sufficient spectrum and adopting new technologies faster to be able to use the new features and techniques to serve customers with better and feature-rich service.

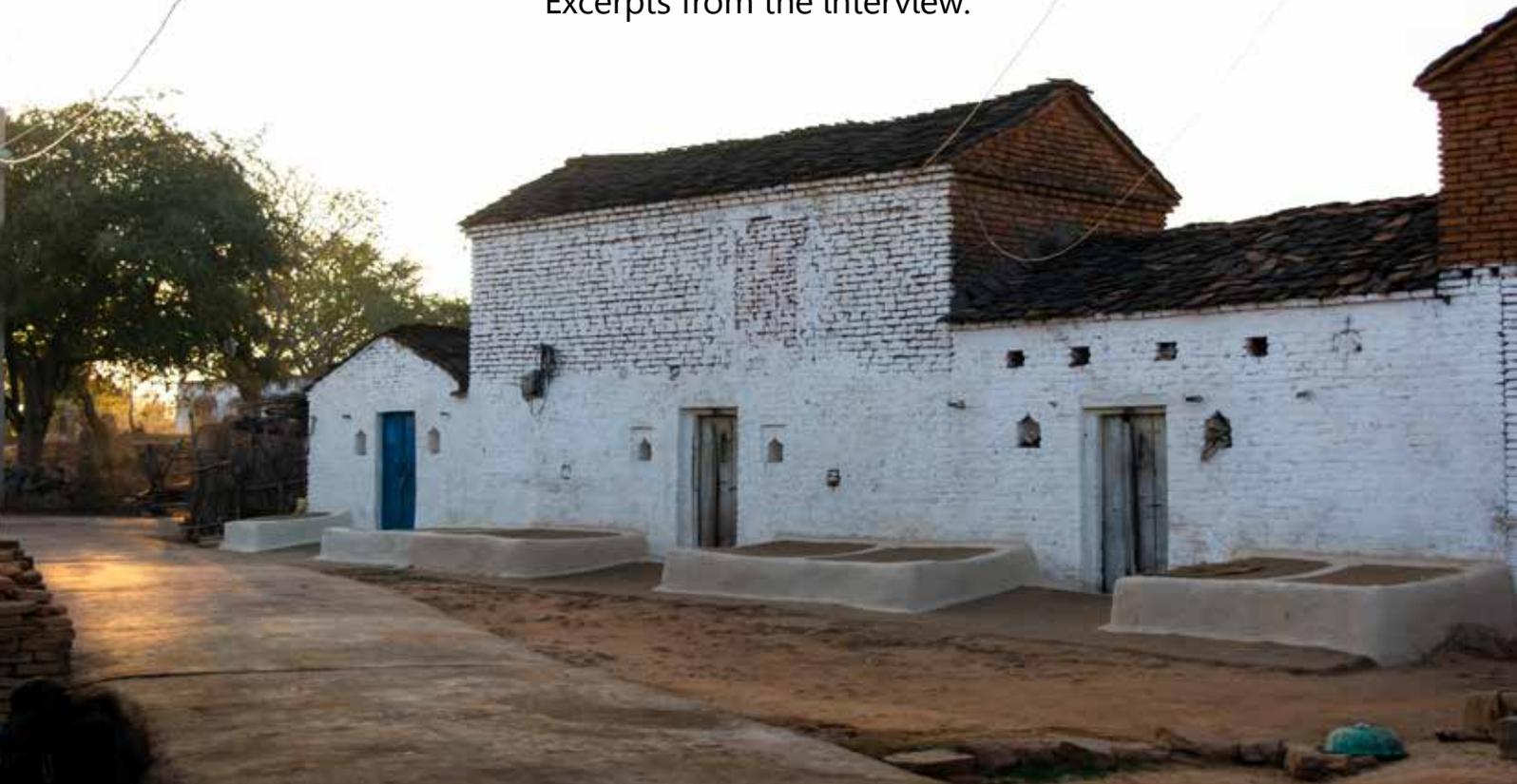
The draft bill addresses these challenges and is open to discussion which would lead to a comprehensive policy regarding the future of telecommunications in India. ■

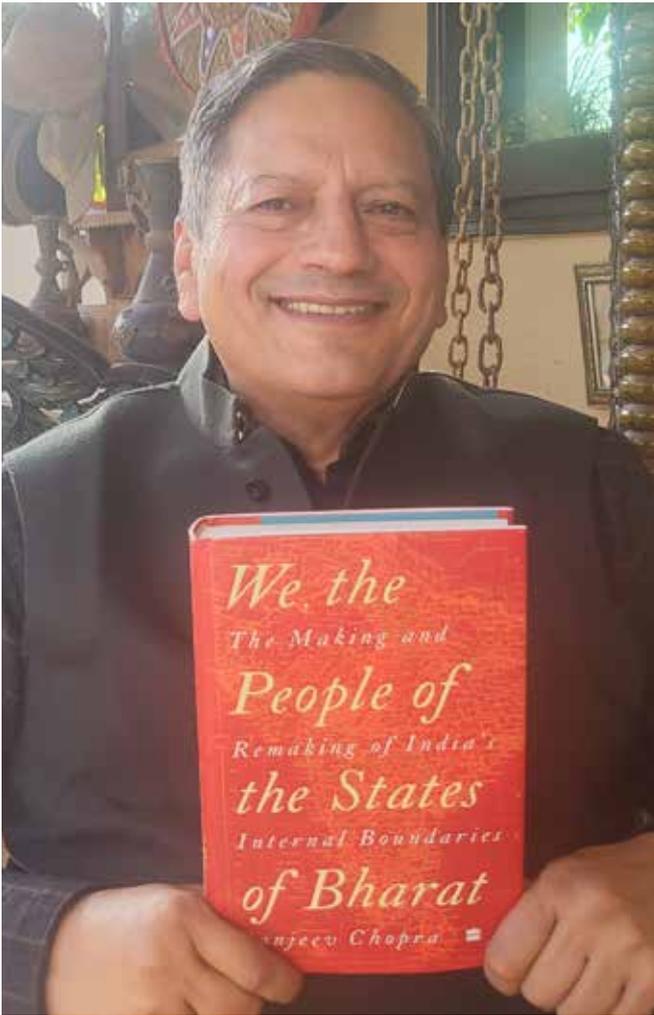
MEET THE AUTHOR

'THE RECOGNITION OF DIVERSITY WILL KEEP THE NATION TOGETHER'

Administrative boundaries of villages, *tehsils*, districts and provinces keep shifting, much like the course of rivers and streams, but the administrative shift occurs because of political intervention. It is this much overlooked aspect of modern Indian history that eminent civil servant and litterateur **Dr Sanjeev Chopra** grapples with in his new book, *We, the People of the States of Bharat: The Making and Remaking of India's Internal Boundaries* (HarperCollins). Dr Chopra, a columnist for *Pravasi Indians*, spoke to **Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr** about his book that maps state boundaries as it records the contemporary political history of India through its geography. The book delves deep into multiple boundary adjustments for every state and Union Territory in India from 1947 to the 75th year of independence.

Excerpts from the interview:





We, the People of the States of Bharat:
The Making and Remaking of India's Internal Boundaries
Author: Dr Sanjeev Chopra
HarperCollins | ₹799 | Pages 350

It seems that you were drawn into the subject, based on land surveys and records. Does it go back to your early days as collector/commissioner at the district level where land issues crop up in the day-to-day administration?

Let me say that my visit to the Surveyor General's office acted as a sort of trigger. Managing land records, adjudicating revenue disputes, initiating and following up on land acquisition is certainly a core part of the job at the district level and for districts like Cooch Behar and Murshidabad where I was posted as ADM and DM, the disputes on the border get an international dimension. I would certainly say that the Teen Bigha dispute and the issue of enclaves were always there at the back of my mind when it came to settling border issues.

What struck you most about the land surveys and records? Are they accurate? Do they reveal the changing patterns of society and agriculture?

We are now adopting technology in a very big way to manage our

“You cannot make a watertight compartment between cultural identity and political assertion. Culture and language are very significant factors in political mobilisation.”

surveys and our land records. This has made the system far more transparent. I have to admit that the revenue system had become quite opaque and left a lot to discretion at the level of the local revenue officials. It was also very difficult to retrieve any records. There is still one step to go—the integration of revenue and registration records. This integration will make it easier to transact regarding agricultural land. We must also recognise that proper land and revenue records are the precursor to land leasing and partnership farming in agriculture.

At the macro level, when it came to the question of linguistic reorganisation of the states, did the matter of drawing boundaries become an issue of cultural identity or was it just political?

It was both. You cannot make a watertight compartment between cultural identity and political assertion. Culture and language are very significant factors in political mobilisation. Also, there is nothing like 'just political'. Every demand that is articulated is, has the potential of morphing into a political demand. As I mention in my book, the SRC report, the Shah Commission report and the Mandal Commission report are the three most read reports in the country. In the case of the SRC report, there were so many arguments and counter arguments especially when it came to the reorganisation of the borders of Punjab, West Bengal, Bombay and Andhra Pradesh.

Do you feel confident that, despite all the differences of language and culture, the Indian state is strong and the fear that it will break down is misplaced?

The recognition and celebration of diversity is what will keep the nation together. The counterfactual is the breakup of Pakistan for not respecting the cultural and linguistic identity of a major constituency. To me there is no contradiction between being a good Punjabi and a good Bengali as well as a proud and confident Indian. Do we not sing our national anthem with equal fervour?

One must also understand that India is not just a nation state ... it is also a living civilisational entity. Let's go to the very first *shloka* of the *Bhagwad Gita* in which Sanjaya is asked to describe the armies on the sides of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Does it not, therefore, mean that even in times of war, the basic understanding is that all these are armies from within the larger construct of Bharat?

I must end by mentioning that the title of my book is about the states of Bharat, which also means that while the internal boundaries of states within India are amenable to change, Bharat is not! ■

NEW RELEASES

'THE BIOSPHERE IS OUR GIFT TO OUR CHILDREN, AND IT IS UP TO US TO KEEP IT UNPOLLUTED'



BY RUKMA SALUJA



The Fragrant Healing Earth
Author: Bhavna Mathur
Good Times / ₹295 / 226 pp

This is the story of university student Prakriti's prayer to the Mother Goddess for peace and prosperity for the entire creation that resides on Planet Earth.

Prakriti and her family experience life through joys and struggles, including the recent ravaging pandemic. Through the experiences of college professor Kalyani, close friend Jannat, family friend Ganesh and development professional Phoolpreet, the plot addresses significant themes such as environment conservation, climate change, education and integrated development.

A native of Khushrang village in the hill state of Uttarakhand, Prakriti both as a participant and an observer in the journey represents our interaction with the natural environment. Her story encourages the reader to introspect and shatters the illusion of a safe world, helping the reader to hold on to hope and seek solutions towards preservation rather than destruction.

Bhavna Mathur has a post-graduate degree in community resource management and extension from Lady Irwin College, Delhi University. Her poems and articles reflect her views on life and express refreshing thoughts about childhood, life and people. The spiritual meaning of life and the purpose of living are themes that hold her interest. The impact of rapid globalisation and industrialisation on the environment are her areas of concern.

Excerpts from an interview with the author:

What inspired *The Fragrant Healing Earth*?

Nature and its breathtaking beauty have inspired me since I started writing as a child. The excesses that emerge as an offshoot of development have always influenced my perspectives regarding the environment and our place in it. Clean air, water and soil are resources I believe are really life-forces for the entire ecosystem for survival. During the pandemic, I put my thoughts on paper and through the story clearly understood the link between the pandemic and pressing environmental concerns.

When did you begin to take such a deep interest in environmental issues?

I started with writing poetry on nature at the age of 10. I was an intern on the Environment Project and also studied resource management.

Development, more often than not, equals the destruction of nature. Is there another way?

Sustainable development takes effort, time and ingenuity but holds the key to making development productive rather than destructive. Governments and organisations are coming up with innovative policies that, if followed with the right intent, can ensure a safe and green earth for all.

What are some key points of resource management?

Reduce, Recycle, Reuse. Live a life that balances the judicious use of natural resources, for one's need and not for greed. Turning to renewable sources of energy is the need of the hour and individuals and communities are taking to it in remarkable ways.

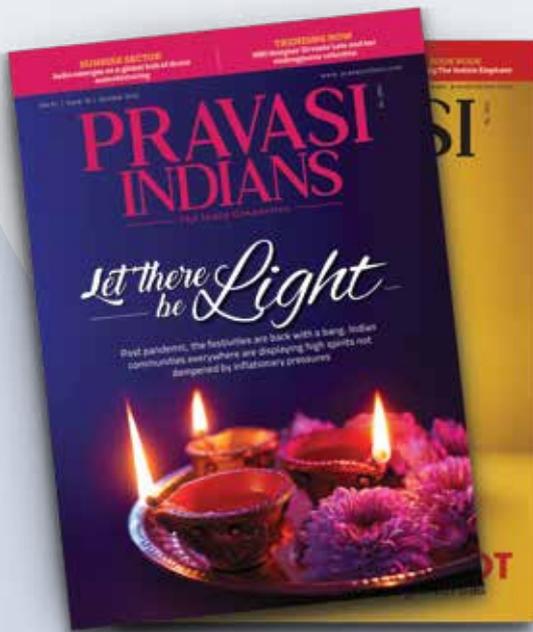
What can we, as individuals, do to make a difference?

We must practise what we preach, be sensitive to our surroundings. We should reduce our carbon footprint, conserve paper, segregate waste to keep the soil clean, plant more for a lush, green cover, check vehicular congestion, make cleanliness a part of our lifestyle. The biosphere is our gift to our children, and it is up to us to keep it unpolluted. ■

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Language: Bilingual | **Publisher:** M/s Template Media LLP | **Frequency:** Monthly | **Format:** Digital Edition



UK'S MAN OF THE HOUR

COVER STORY

The challenge before Rishi Sunak, Britain's first Indian-origin Prime Minister, is to stabilise the economy, reassure the financial markets and plug the huge hole in public finances, without hurting the middle class and the working class

BY ANDREW WHITEHEAD

The writer was both India correspondent based in Delhi and a political correspondent based in Westminster in his 35-year career with BBC News.



You would have to be stone-hearted not to relish the symbolism of Rishi Sunak's rise to the top job in British politics. For the first time, a nation which was once the foremost imperial power is headed by a man whose family sprang from the colonised and not the colonisers. It doesn't wash out the ugliness of imperialism, and the stain of perceived racial and civilisational superiority which was intrinsic to it, but it does suggest that Empire's shadow is fading.

British politics has been a circus show for quite a while now and for the past few months it has felt like the clowns have been in charge. But the attention of the world—and the eyes of India and its diaspora in particular—has been drawn to 10 Downing Street by the advent of the first non-white Prime Minister. Ireland has had a man of Indian origin at the helm; Portugal has at the moment; the US Vice-President's mother was born in Chennai (when the city was still known as Madras). But this is the first time any G7 nation has had a 'desi' head of government.

Rishi Sunak did not become Prime Minister because he is a practising Hindu or because his grandparents hailed from Punjab. It was neither an asset nor an obstacle. In his 'Ready for Rishi' campaign video when he first stood for the party leadership back in July, he made a lot of his family's back story. But on the day he finally made it into the PM's office, there was not a mention of who he was or where he came from.

Historians and documentary film-makers will in the decades ahead trawl through Sunak's remarks as he entered Downing Street for a quote or a phrase which captures the global significance of a man of colour leading the country. They will be disappointed. There's not even a nod towards his heritage, or what it says about the maturity of Britain's democracy, or how this could encourage others from minority communities to enter politics.

On Sunak's first appearance in the House of Commons as Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, offered congratulations and described the appointment of the

first British Asian as Prime Minister as a "significant moment in our national story". Starmer added that "Britain is a place where people of all races and beliefs can fulfil their dreams". Sitting opposite him, Sunak acknowledged the comments but did not address them directly.

That's in part because Sunak doesn't do the personal. He wants to keep attention away from his family, and particularly his two young daughters, Krishna and Anoushka. And he's been stung by the criticism of his wife, Akshata Murthy, for enjoying tax privileges—now forgone—which while entirely legal didn't feel appropriate for the spouse of a top politician.

Sunak and his wife are famously well-off—richer than King Charles, and wealthier than any other MP. In the United States, that might be seen as a political advantage. Not so in the UK. The British public doesn't seem to mind posh politicians, but they are not quite so sure about the super wealthy. Sunak doesn't flaunt his money—but he does have several very smart homes and he dresses well and expensively. In the months ahead, as he has to introduce some unpopular economic medicine, a lot will be made of his money. He will be accused of adding to the hardships of ordinary people with spending cuts—and perhaps tax rises—from which his family won't feel any pain.

The new Prime Minister's primary goal is to stabilise the economy, reassure the financial markets and plug the huge hole in Britain's public finances. The Conservatives were once seen as the party of sound money. Liz Truss's disastrous seven weeks as Prime Minister have thrown away that huge asset. She introduced the biggest tax cuts in half a century at a time when recession was looming and the government had still to make good on the billions spent in easing the impact of the Covid pandemic. And she manoeuvred to do this without the customary fiscal stress test provided by the Office of Budget Responsibility. She put libertarian, free market ideology over fiscal common sense.

The markets took fright—which meant that Conservative MPs

No one is suggesting that Sunak has appointed people because of their ethnic identity. It's simply a coincidence. But it's a coincidence that tells you something about how inclusive the British Conservative Party has become, much more so than any other right-of-centre party in a major western democracy.

also took fright—and that led to the surreal spectacle of a Prime Minister forced out of office before she had even settled in.

Sunak says he will be compassionate in drawing up remedies for what he's termed as the "profound economic crisis" afflicting Britain. It's a very difficult balancing act. If too much of the pain falls on the middle class, the traditional Conservative supporters, then his party may turn against him. If the poor take a hit, it could lead to a wider meltdown, and the sort of unrest—strikes, demonstrations and civil strife—that could derail his government.

Conservative Members of Parliament have chosen their new leader and Prime Minister because they see him as a safe pair of hands who has proved to be a wise steward of the economy. They are looking to Sunak to navigate the economic and social storms ahead and then offer the Conservatives the prospect of a fifth successive general election victory in a little over two years' time.

The prospects for the Conservatives don't look too good. The Labour Party has been ahead in the opinion polls for several months, ever since revelations about Boris Johnson's lockdown-busting parties in Downing Street during the pandemic. During Truss's tempestuous weeks in power, Labour's poll lead soared; some polls put Labour's support at almost three times that of the embattled Conservatives. Even a few prominent Conservatives acknowledge privately that they have little chance of remaining in power after the next election.

The tough economic medicine that Sunak will dispense is bound to be unpopular. It will be difficult for a governing party to bounce back in terms of public support while the economy is in recession. However bold Sunak's budgetary plans, public finances are unlikely to come good within two years. So, it's more than possible that Sunak will join the tiny number of British Prime Ministers—Gordon Brown and Truss are the only recent examples—who never led their party to an election victory.

Sunak acquitted himself well, though, in his first Prime Minister's Questions, a high-octane weekly Parliamentary joust which can

often be an ordeal for the PM as for half-an-hour or more he has to deal with questions from MPs on any topic. Conservative MPs were cheered by their new leader's performance, so much so that at the close they were calling out: "More, more!"

At 42, he's Britain's youngest Prime Minister for more than 200 years. Narendra Modi is 30 years his senior; Joe Biden had served for seven years in the US Senate by the time Sunak was born. It feels that this could be a moment of generational change in British politics, much as when Tony Blair came to power 25 years ago.

If economic policy is Sunak's strength, then foreign policy is where he has least experience. And he will have to get up to speed very quickly with all the implications of the war in Ukraine, an increasingly confident and assertive China, and the fraught task of rebuilding close ties with the major EU nations which have been so badly bruised by Brexit.

As for relations with India, Britain still wants, and needs, a Free Trade Agreement. The target of getting a deal by Diwali has been missed, but London will want to get those talks back on track. And Sunak may be willing to make the concessions on the visa regime for Indian skilled workers and students which could help get those talks over the finishing line.

On a personal note, I started reporting on British politics in 1988. In the general election the previous year, four black and Asian MPs had been elected, all representing the Labour Party. They were the first non-white MPs for more than half a century. The Conservative benches in Parliament were at that time exclusively white. A non-white Conservative leader was unimaginable.

Since then the Conservative party has taken active steps to recruit among ethnic minorities and to select non-white candidates for winnable seats. That's paid a political dividend.

There are now 65 non-white MPs, that's one in ten of the total, and of these 22 are Conservatives. Quite a few, including Sunak, represent constituencies which are overwhelmingly white. The notion that you put forward an Asian candidate only in seats which have a large Asian electorate is now emphatically out of date.

Among MPs of Indian origin, there are now as many Conservatives as Labour Parliamentarians. That reflects the changing social profile of Britain's Indian community, which numbers almost two million people and constitutes the country's biggest ethnic minority. Many Britons of Indian origin have been successful in business, retail, the academic world, law and medicine, and over the decades their loyalties have, very broadly, shifted somewhat from Labour, which used to be seen as the anti-racist party, to the Conservatives.

It's striking that in Sunak's new cabinet, the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, is also of Indian heritage (her father's family is from Goa while her mother is from the Tamil community in Mauritius) and the Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, is of African heritage (his mother is from Sierra Leone). Of the top four jobs in British politics, the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer is the only one held by a white politician (Jeremy Hunt). No one is suggesting that Sunak has appointed people because of their ethnic identity. It's simply a coincidence. But it's a coincidence that tells you something about how inclusive the British Conservative Party has become, much more so than any other right-of-centre party in a major western democracy.

And while some nations are turning towards majoritarian politics, where the role of minorities in public life is squeezed and their patriotism questioned, Britain is heading in the opposite direction. ■

COVER STORY

NAVIGATING THE TROUBLED THAMES

Rishi Sunak's first job will be to steady the ship which has been holed in the bottom, unite his fractious crew and direct the ship to its destination: economic recovery and victory in the next election

BY MEGHNAD DESAI



National pride is a strange phenomenon. Often, in the events most remote from our lives, we react to signals which tell us that 'one of us' was involved. Say, when, sadly, someone dies thousands of miles away in a jet crash. We feel sad though we may have never met him. He was Indian. That is all you need to know.

Happier moments are when India wins at cricket or a woman weightlifter of Indian descent wins a gold medal at the Olympic Games. Why is that? What is the psychological basis of this fellow feeling? Is it that the now often quoted expression *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the whole world is my family) is not so much true as its reverse *Mama Kutumbakam Eva Vasudha* (my family is the world). Apologies for my rusty Sanskrit.

But suppose we ask who was the first person of Indian origin to be head of a Commonwealth nation; the answer would be Cheri Jagan who was President of Guyana (formerly British Guyana) back in the Sixties. (I had the privilege of meeting him 30 years later in the 1990s. He was as ever a radical Socialist distrusted by the Americans.) The second person of Indian origin to be Prime Minister (Taoiseach in his case) was Leo Varadkar, whose father was a Maharashtrian doctor while his mother was Irish. He was Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland.

But let us face it. Indians barely noticed these triumphs. We love the Brits. The political elite who want to establish their left liberal credentials may denounce the East India Company or the terrible loot the Imperialists committed but India only cares about winning in Britain. Hence Rishi Sunak being the first British Indian Prime Minister is extra special. It is the colony striking back and conquering the Imperial seat.

But there ought to be a warning signal posted here. If the British thought he is Indian, his political future would not be bright. The British want a British Prime Minister. He happens to have in his ancestry people of Indian origin. But even they had left India a few decades ago and gone to East Africa. That part of the story is not told. Most Gujaratis in East Africa had followed indentured Indian workers—Bihari, Punjabi—as traders or *dukanwalas* (*dukan* being the word for shop). The indentured workers left their impoverished lives in India, signing an agreement (hence *girmitiya*) to work in sugarcane fields or building railways for 15 years. After the indenture period, they settled in Africa. (These are the people Mohandas Gandhi fought for in Pretoria.)

The traders prospered and in Uganda and Kenya even as a small part of the population they were the majority contributors to tax revenues. But nationalism is a virtue in yourself, and a disease in others. The East Africans, upon independence, began to ask if these Indians were genuinely African. To be honest, except in South Africa, few Indians elsewhere in Africa were able to overcome the nationalist pride of Africans to satisfy them that the Indians belonged. Just as we think an Indian living in any country is still one of us, the others have the adverse side of the same sentiment—distrust over whether these outsiders who have been here for merely a hundred years really belong. So let us view Sunak with British spectacles as well as Indian ones.

It is a very unusual event in the annals of the United Kingdom as well as India that Rishi Sunak, a young man in his early forties, has become the Prime Minister of the country. I know that a lot of Indians, if not all, think an Indian will rule over the old colonial masters, the British. But the important point is that he is a British citizen, British born of Indian ancestry. He has acceded to the highest pinnacle not through family connections but because of

The important point is that Rishi Sunak is a British citizen, British born of Indian ancestry. He has acceded to the highest pinnacle not through family connections but because of his ability and his determination in fighting for the top job twice in open competition and succeeding.

his ability and his determination in fighting for the top job twice in open competition and succeeding.

It is ironical that it is his defeat by Liz Truss in a contest a few weeks ago, facing the ordinary members of the Conservative Party, that eased his way to the top. Truss had made extravagant promises of tax cuts to stimulate economic growth, Sunak had warned then that such tax cuts were unaffordable by the British economy given the state of the public finances. Yet she went ahead soon after she became Prime Minister. The financial markets gave a loud negative reaction. The pound collapsed against foreign currencies and the Bank of England had to intervene to stabilise the market for national debt. The tax cut cost the Bank billions of pounds in supporting government securities and the higher interest rate incurred on government debt as a result of that precipitate action by Truss will hang on as a burden for a while.

You have to give it to the British. They have genuine inner party democracy. Neither the Family nor some such body as the RSS dictates who should be leader of the Parliamentary Party and hence Prime Minister if the party commands a majority in the House of Commons. The Conservative Party has a structure—the so-called 1922 Committee which represents all MPs of the Party, especially the backbenchers. These members have the right to choose their leader by secret ballot. Indeed, whenever 15 percent of the members write to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee that they want a test of confidence in the leader, he has to hold a secret ballot.

Lately, the Conservative Party has been badly divided. The reason has been relations with Europe. Differences within the Cabinet meant that Mrs Thatcher resigned after scoring less than a convincing majority in the first round of leadership elections in 1990. This opened up a division between those who wanted to remain in the European Union (Remainer) and those against (Brexiters). Between 1990 and 2020, the party had eight leaders with Boris Johnson the eighth, who won one of the largest majorities in 2019 on the platform of Get Brexit Done. But then he ran into multiple problems of ethics and discipline and had to resign when most of his Cabinet (starting with Sunak) resigned.



That opened up a contest for leadership among the Tory MPs. Eleven candidates ran, five of them immigrants one way or another. The final two, Truss and Sunak, went on to fight a poll where ordinary members of the party voted. Truss won this fight although in the ballot of MOs, Sunak topped the list. Truss had fun on the platform of tax cuts which would stimulate growth and hence pay for themselves. She, however, launched her tax cutting policy far too early in her regime—after a fortnight. The financial markets saw the likely loss of public revenue and calculated that before growth could pay for the cut, the government would have a bigger deficit for which it would need to get into a bigger debt. So the pound sterling collapsed (as I had publicly forecast) and Sunak's fiscal caution drew praise. Truss's position became untenable.

Truss had to resign 44 days after becoming Prime Minister, the shortest tenure in British history. In the ensuing melee, new names cropped up as well as Johnson's name for a comeback. But this time around, the 1922 Committee upped the bar at securing at least 100 members' nominations before a candidate could contest. Johnson tried but failed to garner enough backers. Penny Mordaunt, who had contested on the earlier occasion, threatened to run but finally admitted just minutes before the deadline of 2 pm British time on October 24 that she too would drop out. Sunak was able to show the support of 190 members, more than half of the 370 Tory MPs. So, it was a coronation, not an election when, just minutes past 2 pm, Sir Graham Brady, Chairman of the 1922 Committee, announced to a meeting of Tory MPs that Rishi Sunak would be the next Prime Minister of the UK.

His first job will be to steady the ship which has been holed in the bottom. He has to unite his crew and direct the ship to its destination. In other words, he has to not mess up like Truss did, last till 2024 when the elections are due. The Conservative Party is 30 percent plus behind the Labour Party in the voting polls. It is going to be a huge challenge. There were people arguing that Johnson would be a better choice for winning the election. But the MPs are fed up with Boris. They chose Rishi—dishy Rishi, as he was named two years ago by the tabloids.

Winning the next election, keeping a fractious party united will not be easy for him. He displayed exemplary ability when he took over as Chancellor at the start of the pandemic. I watched his first appearance as Chancellor from the Peers gallery in the House of Commons. He was calm and impressive. Being an academic, I am always rating people as if they were students. I knew that he had been to the Stanford Business School which is academically

The UK needs its new Prime Minister to look after itself. It is a matter of pride that a person with ancestral roots in India is now the Prime Minister of the UK. But he will be no more Indian than Barack Obama was Kenyan.

tougher than Harvard or Wharton School. So, he can do the maths. Not many Prime Ministers can.

Sunak fared well as Chancellor and demonstrated that he knows about fiscal responsibility. Yet the test he faces is a much tougher one. Now he has to be a politician, not just a techno whiz kid. Being a British (or indeed any country's) politician is a much trickier task than people imagine. Sunak will have to develop the political persona he will require to reach the public. Everyone will give him a lot of space since the country is in dire straits.

I do not recall, in the nearly 60 years I have been here, a time when the country has been at a lower ebb in its national confidence and international reputation. So, he will have to demonstrate that he is in charge. Jeremy Hunt, who stepped in as Chancellor for Truss after she sacked her first Chancellor within days, calmed nerves early last week but then the manner of Truss's last day in the Commons once again sank the ship. Thankfully, she saw (or was shown by Sir Graham Brady) that her time was up. Sunak can leave the finances to Hunt and turn his attention to addressing the people who are bemused and worried as to who, if anyone, is in charge.

Indian commentators are all talking of an Indian running the UK and hoping that the Free Trade Agreement between the UK and India will now be an easy walkover. Steady on, I would advise. The UK needs its new Prime Minister to look after itself. It is a matter of pride that a person with ancestral roots in India is now the Prime Minister of the UK. But he will be no more Indian than Barack Obama was Kenyan. ■

COVER STORY

NOTHING PERSONAL ABOUT SUNAK-MODI EQUATION

The temptation to see the bonding between the two leaders as that of two Hindus is off the mark

BY PARSA VENKATESHWAR RAO JR

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi shook hands with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali, it must have occurred to each that the fact that they were both believing and practising Hindus standing on the Hindu island of Bali in Muslim Indonesia was just a minor detail which had its own sweet tones of poetic justice, but that more importantly they were heads of government of two countries, and that their primary responsibility was towards their own peoples. In the case of Sunak, it is to the people of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and in that of Modi to the 1.4 billion Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians. And that they have to strengthen India-UK ties because it is of strategic importance to their respective countries. Sunak is as enthusiastic about the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India as were his predecessors, Liz Truss and Boris Johnson, because they all look to India as a key economic partner, especially after Brexit. India is seen as an attractive market for Britain. India too is keen on the FTA because it is seen as beneficial to India. But it is not likely to happen in a hurry.

The Modi-Sunak Bali meeting has yielded a positive result with the Sunak government agreeing to allow 3,000 professionals in the 18-30 age group every year to work in Britain for two years. And a similar opportunity is there for British professionals of the same age group to come to India. It is generally expected that it is the Indians who will take advantage of the scheme more than the British. But there might be a surprise here because Britons may want to come to India given the acute cost of living crisis that Britain is facing. Downing Street, the British prime minister's home and office, has placed the agreement in the wider Indo-Pacific context. It said, "The launch of the scheme is a significant moment both for our bilateral relationship with India and UK's wider commitment to forging stronger links with the Indo-Pacific region to strengthen both our economies."

If this is the relatively sweet part of the deal, the bitter part is about Indian immigrants who are in Britain without visas. But it has been



worded rather ambiguously, saying that it relates to "immigration offenders" on both sides. The British PMO explained: "A landmark Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the UK and India in May 2021 aimed at increasing mobility between our two countries, returning those with no right to be in the UK and India, respectively, and sharing best practices on organised immigration crime." (This leaves out economic offenders in India now in Britain like business tycoons Nirav Modi

and Vijay Mallya because their extradition cases are being dealt with on a separate footing. Both Modi and Mallya are in Britain with proper documents, and the Indian government is seeking their extradition through the British courts.)

There are quite many loose ends on this front. There would be many people in Britain without visas or whose visas have expired but who are not guilty of any other criminal offences. The Conservative government has taken a tough position on immigration as such, and this has been reflected in the unpopular policy of repatriating unwanted immigrants to Rwanda through an agreement between Rwanda and Britain.

Sunak has brought back a fellow Indian-origin Briton, Suella Braverman, as home secretary despite her tough stance and undiplomatic expression on the issue of immigrants. Speaking at the Conservative Party conference in October, she had blamed the clashes between India-origin and Pakistan-origin migrants in Leicester after a cricket match in Dubai on unchecked migration and the failure of migrants to integrate into British society. But Braverman's stance on immigration is that of the Conservative governments of the past three years.

Sunak again has a very strong anti-Russian stance over the Ukraine war but like the United States, the UK too is now reconciled to the fact that neither Britain nor the US can push India around on the close ties between New Delhi and Moscow.

The Modi-Sunak equation will be that of the India-UK equation, and it is as it should be. ■

A GOAN'S GLORIOUS SAGA

EGIDIO MONIZ found his passion after his retirement in a country that is a haven for the brew that delights millions across the globe

BY ROWENA KAY MASCARENHAS

"Coffee is an art, more like a passion, akin to producing grapes for wine. It obliges you to become a better farmer," says the 'Indiano' in Brazil, Egidio Moniz, founder of the coffee brand, Café Goa.

My generation cannot do without it. More than two billion 'cups of joe' are drunk every day, and for many it is virtually impossible to carry on a work day without it. The story of coffee drinking and growing worldwide is a deeply fascinating one linked to the history of the world and its wars and that of Sufi saint Baba Budan, credited with "smuggling" the first coffee beans into India in the 17th century. When I heard recently of the Brazilian coffee brand "Cafe Goa", I caught up with its founder, to unravel what is the fascinating story of Egidio Moniz, and his efforts to maintain a connect with his ancestral homeland, Goa.

Moniz's earliest memories relate to his grandmother's resplendent home in Curtorim, Goa, which had a yard full of fruit-bearing trees where they, as children, frolicked in the layers of hay that were used to ripen the mangoes harvested every summer. Etched in those memories are three striking coffee trees, and the process of plucking the coffee cherries when they changed from green to red. His grandmother dried, roasted, and ground the coffee cherries into coffee powder for home consumption. Always an abundance of produce off the land and fields, the home never saw any limitations on food. Little Egidio could have barely foreseen what life in Bombay would come to mean to him. As a child of nine in 1957, he accompanied his father to Bombay, an annual trip his father would make over the years to relocate each



'In agriculture, you've got to relate to the crop. Plan on doing something that you love doing, and your work will become leisure with a passion. Take into account the community who will benefit from your crop, and let that decide the profitability of your initiative,' says Moniz.

of his seven children from Goa to Bombay in the hope of giving them a better education. "The journey," Moniz says, "involved going by bus from our home in Curtorim to the Goa border, staying overnight at the border, and taking another

bus from the other side of the border all the way to Bombay."

Mazagaon, in Bombay, was where his father, Riario Moniz, had a three-room house and where Egidio would spend the next 12 years of his life with his father and siblings, while his mother, Helena Quadros, continued to look after familial responsibilities in Goa. The relocation took him from a life of abundance in Goa to a frugal one in the big city where rice, milk, sugar and flour were rationed. In Goa, the children would sink their teeth into 700 mangoes every season, but in Bombay they would get seven mangoes, one for each child. Yet, for Egidio and his siblings, the move to Bombay unlocked the best Jesuit education at St Mary's School, a private Catholic secondary school for boys founded in 1864.

In 1969, Moniz moved to Pune to do his B.Sc. in agriculture. In 1973, he returned to Goa after completing the four-year undergraduate course and took up a job with the government as an agronomist. At the time, two significant events were unfolding in his life; both would shape his future in an immeasurable way. The first was his decision to apply for and acquire a Portuguese passport; it was to pave the path for his migration to the West. And the other was meeting his wife-to-be, Lourdes Lobo, at a family picnic in Colva. They would go on to marry in 1977, and raise two sons, Nilesh and Ravendra.

Moniz left Goa for Brazil in 1975, via France. His college senior, Gill Rebello from Divar, had moved to Brazil a few years earlier, and the experience was worthy enough for him to invite Moniz to join him there. After taking a temporary job, Moniz

Egidio Moniz Ancestral House in Goa



Egidio Moniz at his Coffee Farm



Egidio Moniz at his farm in Brazil



got his lucky break and was recruited by Imperial Chemical Industries (later acquired by AstraZeneca and Syngenta), where he went on to spend the next 36 years spanning sales, research, tech, and stewardship in sustainability. He moved seven times: Maringa in the state of Parana, Campo Mourao (also in Parana), Santo Angelo and Passo Fundo in Rio Grande de Sul, and three postings in the state of Sao Paulo, Ribeirao Preto, Campinas, finally closing a long and successful career in Sao Paulo city.

His career with ICI began with what would eventually be termed an exciting era in the "no-till movement" in Brazil. He was part of the team that worked on zero tillage, where soybean was planted through direct drilling. Yields began to double and farmers, though initially slow to catch on to technology, were sharp enough to understand that costs were less and erosion was under control. Today, it is fair to say that zero tillage has taken root in Brazil, with millions of hectares under cultivation.

However, it was Moniz's stewardship project, School in the Field, that brought him accolades, and an award in 2008-09. Under this project, he modernised the process of training 25,000 to 30,000 school students every year, in rural areas, on the principles of Safety, Health, and

Environment (SHE) in agriculture. He retired from Syngenta in 2010-11.

Moniz began to work on his 32 hectares of land at Araguari in western Minas Gerais at an altitude of 950 metres above sea level in the Cerrado biome whose weather characteristics make it easier to produce gourmet coffee. The Robusta coffee-bean trees in his grandmother's house had a profound impact on him, as also the memories of jackfruit and cashew trees, every time he returned to visit his grandmother's home. "I started with one worker, and gradually increased the workforce with an agronomist who would visit occasionally. Now, I have 4,000 Arabica plants per hectare, and a production capacity of 1,500 sacks of coffee per year," says Moniz, beaming with pride.

There are two activities in the year that are significant for coffee plantation owners: harvesting and pruning. "Beginning in June and going on till the end of August, I stay at the farm for the harvesting and drying process. During this time, I employ locals to work on my farm, using machinery for harvesting and processing," he says. Immediately after the harvest, the trees are pruned by his workers. Ninety percent of the coffee harvest is exported and 10 percent is sold locally. Sales are achieved

through cooperatives as they are fair in their price and also support the plantation owner with technical assistance.

"My brand of coffee is called Café Goa, and my farm is called Fazenda Goa," says Moniz. His message for young Goans is clear. "In agriculture," he says, "you've got to relate to the crop. Plan on doing something that you love doing, and your work will become leisure with a passion. Take into account the community who will benefit from your crop, and let that decide the profitability of your initiative."

Moniz is now thinking about his next project, which he calls the 'Curtorim Project'. "Even though I have been in Brazil for 45 years and love this country, I miss India and Goa in a big way. I would like to do something for my beautiful village, Curtorim. I have this simple agricultural project in mind which I would like to start implementing in 2023. The project consists of encouraging each family in Curtorim to have six very important and crucial plants in their backyards. These plants will give each family a supplement to the daily nutrients: drumstick (*Moringa oleifera*), grapes, Acerola cherry (*Malpighia emarginata*), tapioca (*Manihot esculenta*), coffee (*Robusta*) and tabebuia (a beautiful flowering tree, food for the soul)," he says. ■



MUSIC, DANCE UNDER THE STARS

A cultural festival in a quaint Rajasthan village, Momasar, keeps it simple and earthy even as people from the cities and foreign countries flock to the rural haunt for the experience

BY SUPRIYA NEWAR

The writer is a bibliophile, music aficionado, and author of *Kolkata Classics*, a book of verse

As I land, there is a car waiting at Jaipur airport for me and without a minute's ado, we head westwards towards Shekhawati. My destination is Momasar, a small village that lies in Bikaner district of Rajasthan, near Sridungargarh. The village is all set to celebrate its annual festival, Momasar Utsav, which promises to bring together 200 artistes and craftsmen over the next 48 hours and I am eager to soak in the vibes, atmosphere and culture.

As we catch the sun going down on the Jaipur-Bikaner highway which is a smooth, five-hour drive, we navigate the last 45 minutes through dark, bumpy village roads

that suddenly burst upon a riot of colour. We are in Momasar and the village is bedecked and festooned with wall art and ribbons and an air of gaiety. The festival director, Vinod Joshi, who has been associated with the Jaipur Virasat Foundation and the Rajasthan International Folk Festival (RIFF) and is deeply passionate about the indigenous traditions and culture of Rajasthan, greets us warmly and officially welcomes us to Momasar Utsav.

A detailed programme schedule is shared. The next two days are to start at 5.30 in the morning and end only very late in the night. The festival is spread across

the village, at different points. At a renovated *haveli*, in courtyards, in the open fields, under the open skies and at an old, much revered temple. In anticipation of an early start, I decide to retreat to my tent which is a few minutes away from the main village square. There is a significant drop in the temperature and a lovely nip in the air.

The next morning begins with a live recital of the mellifluous notes of Bhatiyar on the sitar under a deep-domed *shamiana* that offers natural acoustics sans microphone. Pt Hariharsharan Bhatt hails from Jaipur and is a veteran sitarist. We watch the sun come up as the stars melt

Meghwals singing in the open



Motu, Patlu and the beherupia

Punmaramji Meghwal and the writer with his beena

into the morning sky. A tea break later, a group of seven Meghwals, led by Punmaramji Meghwal from Boya, Jaisalmer, takes over. In their signature all-white *kurta-dhoti* attire that is off-set by colourful, well-tied *safas*, the Meghwals sing *bhajans* of Lord Ram and Krishna. Their voices are earthy and soulful and the *dholak* provides just the right pitch for percussion support. They strum their *tamburas* or *beenas* as their voices waft into the vastness of the land. What is special is a chance to listen intimately, to every word and note and even ask them to explain some of the songs which they gladly do. Later, I get a picture with Punmaramji with both of us holding his *beena*, which by then is covered in Barmer-style clothing.

If the morning has been mellow, the day is anything but! The Momasar Utsav stands formally inaugurated by noon and we leave the sands behind to get into the busy town square which is buzzing with energy. By then I have met several other enthusiastic attendees who like me have come from urban landscapes but have made long journeys for their love of culture and music. There's a writer from Delhi, a traveller from Norway, a couple who dabbles in theatre from Jaipur, and many others.

The *mela* grounds are a melee of colour and sound. There's a massive *nagada* placed in the centre of the courtyard whose thump and bellow fill the skies. All along are stalls selling various handmade, traditional Rajasthani items—Barmer-work cushion covers, clothes, organic soaps, bangles, *jutis*, home décor and more. There's another row that is taken up by folk musicians who give live demonstrations of instruments like the *ravanhatta*, *morchhang*, *suranyi*, *khartal* and more. Though I'm drawn to the musicians instantly, I am distracted by the duo of Motu-Patlu, who are clowning around in their gold- and silver-dyed hair, looking for *samosas*, cracking jokes and playing the fool. They delight the gathered village kids no end.

When the *nagada* drumming pauses, the trapeze act takes over. A daredevil youth, dressed in a colourful vest, climbs up a tall bamboo only to walk on a tightly bound rope and reach the far end. Egging him on throughout his act is a commentator who stays on the ground but rattles on about the *kartab*, the *khiladi* and the *khel*. Almost everyone's mobile phones are clicking pictures, and many a mouth is agape in wonder. But we are far from done. What is a village *mela* without a *beherupia*, an

impressionist, who wears dark make-up, sneaks up to you and emits loud chants and grunts! There's a *sapera*, a man on stilts, a camel; enough and more props to make you marvel, to leave you engrossed and delighted in a colourful burst of sounds, sights and senses.

In all the chaos, there's a quieter stall with a *totawala*, a parrot-fortune teller as well and quite a few are queuing up to the rather wise-looking gent. For fun's sake, I land up too but being a good *bania*, the gent first collects his *peshgi* or fee and then goes on to make all kinds of predictions and guesses based on the card pulled out by the parrot. As I walk away after five minutes, fairly amused, I observe that the parrot consistently picks out the same card the next three times! But the predictions differ each time and are quite fun.

If one end of the *haveli* premises is fun and feisty, the other end is more artistic—a calligrapher occupies a corner along with a 3D artist, a pen and ink artist and a face sketcher, a Nathdwara artist and a painter. All of them have their art on display and also enthral visitors with live art. After exploring each, I decide to spend the next couple of hours talking to musicians and getting a chance to witness them making



Tents

their instruments by hand—a sight as marvellous as it is inspiring. Each of the above mentioned instruments is made by using extremely simple, everyday little things that are available in abundance—a piece of chiselled iron, stretched pieces of goat skin, sheesham wood, horse-tail hair, cowries, beads, electric wire, *ghungroos* and so on... but when these pieces come together in masterful artistry, they produce sound that has lasted centuries and evoke a sentiment that transcends time.

With the sun beating down and my energies a bit spent, I decide I've earned a break and a lunch which turns out to be a delicious spread—*moth ki roti*, *gate ki sabzi*, *bajre ki khichdi* and a few other traditional items that never taste the same back in Calcutta, no matter how well they're prepared.

Bhanwari Devi, after the sumptuous spread, is just perfect. A much-acclaimed folk artiste, she sings in her signature voice, sans microphone, her son accompanying her deftly on the harmonium. Her voice, at once plaintive and searching, carries with it the scent of shifting sands. She performs to a packed audience at the Jaichand Lal Patawari Haveli with her *ghoongat* on, but later obliges me with a wonderful picture without it. Hakam Khanji comes in next with a *kamaicha* ensemble. One of the oldest instruments played by the Manganiyars, the *kamaicha* is a particularly difficult instrument to play but Hakam Khanji, at 80, astonishes us with his agility, his dexterity

and of course his musical prowess. The ensemble boasts of one of the brightest, youngest players as well and after their formal performance in the *haveli*, they gather under a peepul tree where I listen to them up close and chat with them informally. They reveal that some of their *kamaichas* are more than 200 years old and, other than requiring a bit of tuning, continue to go strong even today.

Bhomiyaji Maharaj is the much-revered *dwarpal* or reigning Lord of the village and has a temple dedicated to him. As the story goes, hundreds of years ago, he rid the village of an evil spirit and since then is looked upon as the protector of the entire village. But that evening, the Bhomiyaji Maharaj temple is decked up for a *mahaarti*, which is carried out by a senior *purohit* who's come all the way from Pushkar. Hundreds of gathered villagers and outsiders like us hold small *diyas* in our hands and witness the *mahaarti*.

There is music under the stars after dinner in the open fields where *charpayis* and chairs are laid out. *Ravanhattas* in hand, a group of Bhopas, dressed in their flowing and flaming red attire, perform Pabuji Phad against a beautiful scroll that depicts traditional folk deities of Rajasthan. And finally, a group of Langas play their *sarangis* in unison.

The next morning also starts with a sitar recital and some yoga. The first formal programme of the day in the open is Harijas by Ramchandra Gangoliya and group, who've

come all the way from Malwa. This group of six sits under the shade of a large tree and captivates a sizeable audience with their Sadgurubani, Gorakhnath, Kabir and Meera *bhajans*. What's remarkable is that Ramchandrajji's daughter and wife are both part of the group and the other members too are all part of the same family. Besides a *dholak* and a pair of small drums that are caressed by a brush-like apparatus, there is the *manjira*, the harmonium and the *tambura*.

Just like most festivals, Momasar Utsav too saves its biggest crowd-pulling performances for the closing day. Manganiyars make an appearance once more but the crowd reserves its loudest cheers for the dancers—the Kalbelias swirl to the thunder of the *nagada*, a group performs the graceful Ghoomar and yet another does Kathak. The closing act is held at the Taal Maidan to accommodate the large crowd.

I've been going into the villages of Rajasthan and listening to folk music for over two decades. I've had the tremendous fortune of listening to the best of the best, closely and exclusively. And yet, Momasar Utsav has secured a special place in my heart. For its intimate settings. For its authentic experiences. And for the fact that it chose to treat music bigger than any single star musician; that it chose to recognise and salute time-tested traditions over individual talent and that the entire village came together to be suffused in and infected by Momasar magic. ■



EXPERIENCE COLOURFUL MP THROUGH

Events & Festivals

The heart of incredible India Madhya Pradesh is a state where people of various castes and religions are nestled and this is what makes it a state with multi-dimensional culture and tradition. The specialty of Madhya Pradesh is its different colourful tribes which is the add-on to the lively cultural collage of the state.

No matter, where and when you are travelling to the heart of the country, one will always witness a festival or event to have a kaleidoscopic glimpse of the cultural heritage of Madhya Pradesh. The musical and art ancestry of Madhya Pradesh is nurtured all over the state in the forms of classical, folk and tribal music, which depicts the way of living and culture of Madhya Pradesh. The vivacious colours, matchless attires, and harmonious music make it all eye-catching. Throughout the year, different events, festivals and fairs are celebrated in the state. Here are a few important events and festivals that attract tourists from across

Khajuraho Dance Festival

Every year in February, tourists witness Khajuraho Dance Festival at UNESCO world heritage site Khajuraho. This grand cultural show is a stunning combination of art and architecture. One gets to experience a wonderful opus of enthralling classical dance performances by renowned artists coming from different cities and town in India. One can witness the magnificent display of many art forms like Kathak, Bharathanatyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri and Kathakali. Khajuraho dance festival is not only a festival of dances; it has been transformed into a wholesome festival of dance, literature, fine arts and everything. Tourists enjoy activities like heritage walk, nature visits, e-cycle tour, soft adventure sports etc.

Place : Khajuraho

Month : February



Jal Mahotsav

Jal Mahotsav – Hanuwantiya

Situated on the banks of Indira Sagar Dam in Madhya Pradesh, Hanuwantiya Tapu (Hanuwantiya Island) is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Khandwa district. Number of tourists enjoys an array of adventure activities during the Jal Mahotsav. A beautiful tent city is also developed during the festival where tourists spend their time

and participate in different activities along with enjoying delicious cuisines and beautiful art works. So many activities are conducted for tourists like yoga camp, bullock cart, volley ball, tug of war, cycling, kite flying, adventure zone, kids entertainment zone, camp fire, wind surfing, parasailing, water skiing, jet skiing, banana ride, water zorbing, motor boat, cruise boat, hot air ballooning, parasailing, para motoring, star gazing, bird watching, treasure hunt, trekking and night camping.

Place : Hanuwantiya Tapu

Month : November to January

Mandu Festival

Mandu, also known as the city of joy is a place with countless attractive monuments. Abound with historical tales, the city witness huge footfall during Mandu Festival in December every year. The festival showcases live concerts and folk dance by local artists. Tourists also experience yoga session, cycling tour, heritage walk, rural excursion, sound and light show and horse riding in the pristine village of Malipura.

Place : Mandu

Month : December



Mandu Festival

Akhil Bhartiya Kalidas Samaroh

Being organized in the name of the greatest poet of the country, Kalidas, who contributed profoundly to the Sanskrit literature, the Akhil Bharatiya Kalidas Samaroh is organized every year in Ujjain. Kalidas has portrayed heart-warming and vivid poetries. This festival plays a massive role in remembering this legendary poet. Writers, poets and artists from across the globe come together in the seven-day long event for poetry recitation, story reading, and cultural performances.

Place : Ujjain

Month : January

Tansen Sangeet Samaroh

Tansen Musical Festival is a platform to enjoy soulful rhythms of classical and folk music. The event is a tribute to legendary musical maestro Tansen, who was one of the nine gems of Mughal Emperor Akbar's court and brought folk music to a new level by composing expressive ragas. Many musical dignitaries gather to perform under the Tomb of Tansen in the four-day long event in Gwalior.

Place : Tansen Nagar, Gwalior

Month : December



Lokrang

Lokrang Festival

Depicting various folk dances, music and ethnic dances, Lokrang is a cultural festival where artists match their steps on folk music. It also a platform to witness several beautiful handicrafts made by tribal community of Madhya Pradesh. The event is organized by Adivasi Lok Kala Academy.

Place : Bhopal

Month : January

IMPARTING EDUCATION OF GLOBAL STANDARD

The Award and Felicitation Ceremony 2022 of NDIIT provided a prominent platform to motivate freshers as well as reward meritorious students, individuals and organisations for scaling new heights in various fields



Beginning on an auspicious note: Invited dignitaries lighting the lamp

The New Delhi Institute of Information Technology & Management (NDIIT), one of Delhi's most reputed B-schools, welcomed freshers and held its Award and Felicitation Ceremony 2022 on November 5, 2022 at its New Delhi Campus where the globally eminent magazine for the Indian diaspora, *Pravasi Indians*, was the media partner. Established in 1999, the institute is approved by the All India Council

for Technical Education (AICTE), Ministry of Education, Government of India. It is run and managed by highly experienced academicians and industry experts.

In keeping with its international flavour, the NDIIT ceremony was graced by eminent personalities as chief guest and guests of honour, including His Excellency Evgeny Griva, the Trade Representative of the Russian Federation in the Republic of India,

and the Deputy Trade Commissioner, Her Excellency Mrs Evgeny Griva; Ms Aigerim Zhakypbekoca, Attaché (Consul), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic; P. Srinivasan, Deputy Director, EREDA; Dr Fulkant Jha, Chairperson, JFK International, and others such as Ajay Pradhan, Founder-Director, CETUS Consulting Solutions, and Rajesh Kumar, Chief Operating Officer, *Pravasi Indians*.

World Rectors' Forum-2022 at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Dr Sant K Chaudhary felicitated by Kyrgyzstan Prime Minister for his contribution in the field of education



Chairman, Shankara Group of Institutions & NDIIT, Dr Sant Kumar Chaudhary, addressing the audience on the occasion



His Excellency Mr Evgeny Griva, Dy. Trade Commissioner, Russia and his wife

Dr Sant Kumar Chaudhary, Chairman, Shankara Group of Institutions, NDIIT, KVK, VVCE & Shankar Netralaya, welcomed the guests. The programme started with the lighting of lamps followed by Ganesh Vandana. The welcome speech was given by Dr Chaudhary, followed by the handing over of awards to students who had excelled in various academic programmes, and cultural performances thereafter.

Chief guest Evgeny Griva laid emphasis on youth power and also dwelled on the strong bilateral ties between India and Russia. He spoke about talks with NDIIT to deepen India-Russia ties in the field of education and culture. He also announced various mutual collaborations and exchange programmes involving faculty and students between Russian universities and the Shankara Group of Institutions including NDIIT.

Dr Chaudhary reiterated his commitment to impart affordable and quality education to all students of NDIIT and other group institutions.

The programme, with diaspora magazine *Pravasi Indians* (<https://pravasindians.com>) as media partner,

continued till evening and BBA, BCA and PGDM students showcased their talent in several cultural performances, as many in the audience were spotted tapping their feet to the music. *Pravasi Indians* COO Rajesh Kumar was seen deeply engaged in conversation with various foreign dignitaries about the diaspora magazine and how its digital edition has rapidly spread its footprint globally and drawn readers from numerous countries including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, the UAE, the UK and the US.

The Freshers Felicitation Ceremony 2022 concluded on a high note with the promise of even more enthusiastic participation and better results next year. The programme witnessed some vigorous and animated display of the colour and flavour of India, be it Ganesh Vandana or Punjabi Bhangra or popular songs and dances, with their resonance, colourful spectacle, religious affinity *et al*—to the wonder and entertainment of the foreign dignitaries. Not only was it a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many, such a get-together took place for

the first time after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reinforcing the institute's international stature, NDIIT Chairman Dr Sant Kumar Chaudhary had been honoured by the Kyrgyzstan Prime Minister and later by the Minister of Education and Science for his contribution in the field of education at the World Rectors' Forum 2022 held at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan earlier this year.

Located in the heart of Delhi, the NDIIT campus is easily accessible for students, parents, faculty and non-teaching staff. Besides a world-class infrastructure with up-to-date facilities and amenities, the NDIIT campus is also unique for its brilliant academic environment, strong teacher-student bonding, and students' meaningful engagement. The campus is well equipped with various facilities such as wi-fi, a library, a cafeteria, a computer lab, indoor and outdoor games and so on.

Last but not least, NDIIT also has a full-fledged Training and Placement Cell which strives to provide 100% placement to its students. The institute also helps its students secure appropriate and lucrative internship opportunities. ■

Flavours

COOKING FOR THE CAMERA

A shift, ever so gradual, in the way young diners are treating an evening out, has chefs keeping an eye on the camera

BY RUKMA SALUJA





Eating is a multi-sensory experience that bears no repeating. We eat with our eyes, our nose, before the taste buds get into the act. Chefs were wise to it as was the good hostess who knew how to set a good table. And we nibbled happily along, liking the look of what we ate before we actually ate it. Food pictures in magazines tempted us to try out recipes or check out the latest restaurant. So, what's changed?

It started with a chance remark by Pooja Sahu who owns Pot Belly (now more than a decade old), a restaurant serving Bihari cuisine, and does the catering at Bihar Bhawan in Delhi. Pot Belly took birth when her friends who'd eat the food prepared by her mum encouraged her to make it commercial. The menu, therefore, is largely the brainchild of her mother. About the menu being revamped periodically as is the norm with most eateries, Sahu said: We can't put some items on the menu because they don't photograph well.

That took a minute to sink in. Are we then losing out (in the commercial space) to 'good-looking' food? Is the Insta generation forcing chefs to consider beautiful plating over other aspects of a dish?

On the extreme end of this is Delhi-based Saumya Yadav, a young woman in her early thirties, who said: "I have friends who tell me, let's go to X place. The food there looks delicious." What happened to 'the food there is great'? Google it and you will find any number of Most Instagrammable restaurants / food from around the world. There are compilations and listicles. Photos matter to a certain demographic, certainly not the older diner more conversant with the process of cooking and its nuances. Disclaimer: That's not to say the young consumer isn't an informed eater.

This appears to be a phenomenon among younger diners who must constantly update their Insta feeds. The chefs are divided on this. Chef Vanshika Bhatia, founder, Petite Pie Shop, Gurugram, says, "How it should look on the plate definitely defines how we process the individual ingredients and how it all comes together at the end. In that way, it also pushes us to think up creative ways of reworking the techniques and ideas to bring about an amazing final product."

Other chefs tend to go with strong visual appeal presentation for the camera. While it is not the only thing that matters, it is

certainly not something that cannot be ignored. Chef Rohan D'Souza, Mumbai (Montagne, Leh; Pisco by the Beach, Goa; Silver Beach Cafe, Mumbai; Chop at the Urban Eatery, Nairobi), says, "While planning a menu dish, visual appeal is important for the dish to stand out and at the same time do justice to its flavour profile. That gives rise to smart presentation which in turn makes social media appealing."

For Mumbai-based Chef Vinayak Patil, corporate chef of the Shiv Sagar Group and executive chef at Butterfly High, there's no question about it. He's very clear about his plans for the table. "When I am planning a menu, I keep in mind that one of my first priorities with the dish is the presentation. It should be appealing to the eye, as you see your dish before you taste it. That is what attracts a diner to the food you serve them, and the second most important thing is the taste of food," he says.

Did chefs like Manish Mehrotra who were among the forerunners of beautifully presented Indian food imagine the trickle-down effect of their efforts? That every other hangout would take care about presentation? Social and Farzi Cafe took the



For the young diner, the exposure to international cuisine has made them more open to experimenting with flavours.

idea to gimmicky tableware for a funky feel where the focus of the evening is the alcohol and fun with friends.

That better looking food moves faster is a sort of given. Since she offers pies at her outlet, Chef Bhatia admits, "The sweet pies that we have on display, some of them do move better because of the way they look, combined with the flavours that are in that particular pie, example, trio of chocolate."

Chef D'Souza weighs in with his observations, "Plating brings out more elements than serving in a pot. Pot cooking is mainly dishes that have been cooked in a pot or using slow cooking methods but

plating is more varied for grills, BBQ, smaller cuts of meat and vegetables. Hence, serving it on a plate is preferable for a deeper visual approach."

Older diners used to family-style outings ordered in a certain way, perhaps a familiar dish that was shared by the table. For the young diner, the exposure to international cuisine has made them more open to experimenting with flavours. The presentation then takes precedence. The unfamiliar must first look beautiful.

Chef Patil has also noticed a slight shift in the food ordered by the older and the younger diner. "I believe young people order presentable dishes and a variety of food because they want to upload pictures and videos and share it in their social media. They prefer all types of food like continental, Indian, Chinese, fusion, etc. Older people also do the same on occasion, but mainly they focus on taste rather than the presentation or show of the food. They look for tried and trusted dishes and want their comfort food, no matter the looks."

For the young diner, taking pictures is perhaps the start of the experience. "100 percent! How can you not?" says Mumbai-

based Yamini Bhagchandani. "Clicking pictures of food makes me happy. I obviously don't click pictures of every dish but my favourite dishes and the dishes that are visually appealing."

Zainab Nasir, also a resident of Mumbai, is equally emphatic. "Visual appeal is certainly as important as the tasting experience of the food. Before I even take that first bite, I have already judged the meal in front of me so it has to look appetising and appealing." All is not lost in the look versus taste discussion; the look matters for the first visit. She says, "I personally feel there has to be a balance of both. Merely a good-looking plate with average taste would spoil the dining experience for me. So I would visit the place once for the look and feel but for me to revisit a place, the taste of the food is of utmost importance compared to the plating."

One might argue that a beautiful table has always been a given. But the desire to make every dish picture-worthy for a place in that endless gallery on the world wide web is indeed slowly, infinitesimally influencing the way menus are being planned and food being served. ■

‘MY PIECES ARE DESCRIBED AS WEARABLE ART, SO FUNCTIONALITY AND CREATIVITY ARE BOTH IMPORTANT TO ME’



RIMZIM DADU needs no introduction. What makes her stand out from her peers in fashion is her innovative technique of weaving fabric with metal. The result is a rich glossy look that stands out in a crowd

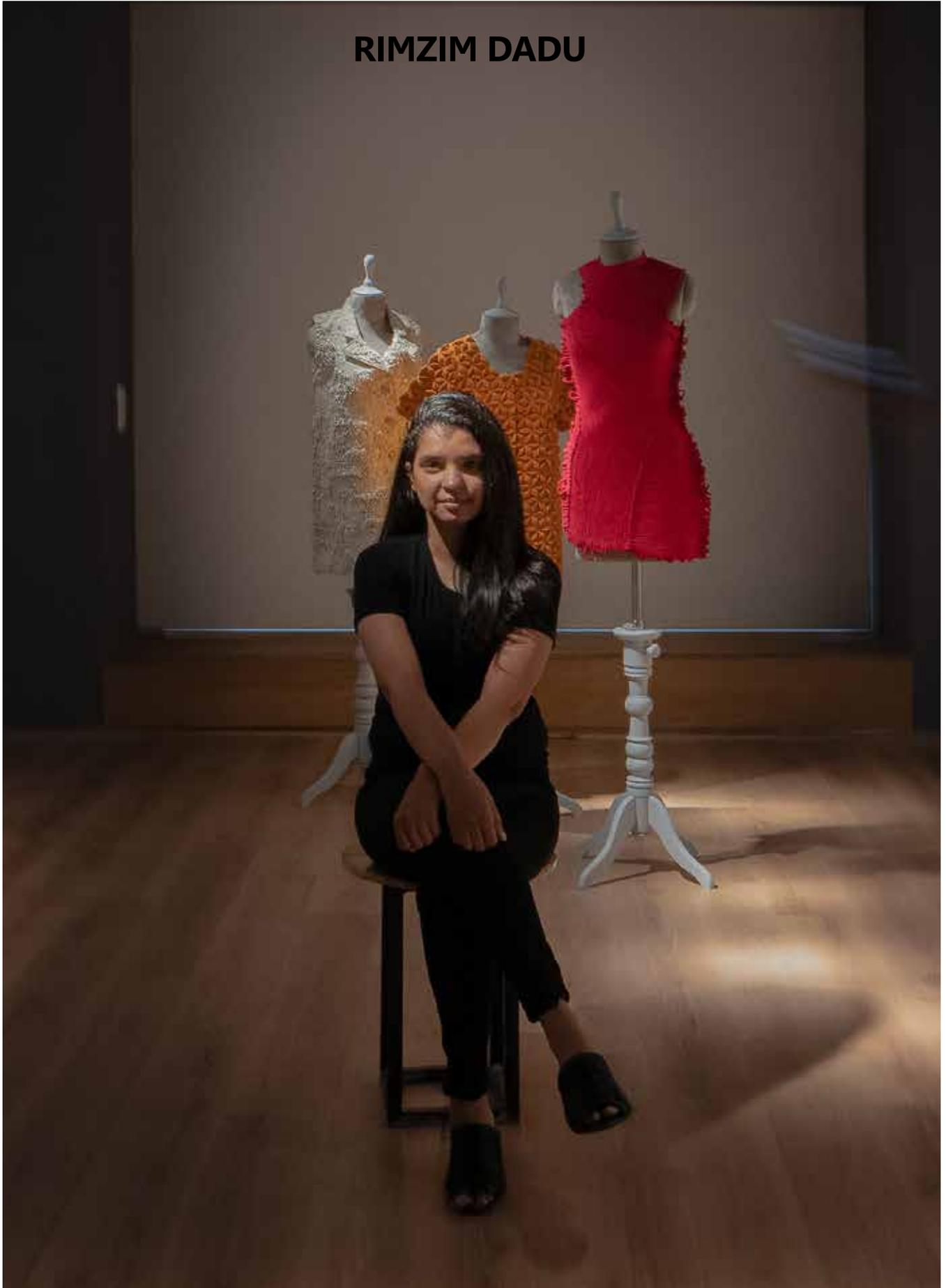
BY RUKMA SALUJA

Rimzim Dadu grew up amidst fashion. Her father ran an export house in Delhi and she was exposed to fabric, cutting, sewing and all the paraphernalia associated with fashion from an early age. She would accompany her father to international exhibitions and trade shows like Prêt-à-Porter, Premier Vision, Hong Kong Fashion Week and WWD Magic, Las Vegas. It was no surprise that she studied Fashion Design and

Technology at Pearl Academy in Delhi. Getting chosen for Lakme Fashion Week’s Gen Next program was what set the ball rolling for her. Her love of fabric and her love for experimentation led to the production of fabric woven with metal. The clothes have an eye-catching appeal. KNMA (Kiran Nader Museum of Art) recently held a retrospective exhibition celebrating 15 years of her work in fashion.



RIMZIM DADU



‘Making the person try on something in metal and seeing them go “Oh, I didn’t know it would be so soft and comfortable” is something that drives me to constantly push myself and my muse—the material—further and further.’

Excerpts from an interview:

You are known as a ‘progressive texturist’. Could you explain what that means?

This term collectively just reflects the brand’s ethos of experimentation, innovation, art and surface texturing. The futuristic textiles and designs from the brand are the amalgamation of this ethos. The media coined this term and I am perfectly comfortable with it as it nicely encapsulates what we do.

What gave birth to the idea of using metal in weaving?

Surface texturing is at the heart of everything we do. We love seeing the unexplored potential of a material—often by breaking apart and then putting back together. That’s how we discover our techniques. It’s a time consuming process—sometimes it takes years. But it’s very satisfying when I give the go-ahead to a textile after a prolonged process of experimentation to understand its fluidity, its structure and its ability to take shape on human forms. The process of creating silhouettes kicks in at this stage. Once again, it’s driven by the re-engineered material and its abilities and we don’t force a silhouette on it. We try different things, keeping comfort and wearability in mind. My pieces are often described as wearable art, so functionality and art are both important to me.

Since you do not follow fashion forecasts and trends, where do you find inspiration?

The material has always been my inspiration and my muse. My creative process starts from the point when I get excited about a material. Then we start experimenting with it—taking it apart and then putting it back together in different ways—to see its hidden potential and then present it in a form that nobody expects.

The deception of fluidity in structure, and structure in fluidity is something that excites me. Making the person try on something in metal and seeing them go “Oh, I didn’t know it would be so soft and comfortable” is something that drives me



to constantly push myself and my muse—the material— further and further. Routine bores me and somehow I am always attracted to the unexpected. It’s good to have a bit of a rebel streak—it pushes me to break norms and conventions. When people describe my work as wearable art, I feel vindicated.

What childhood memories influence your design sensibility?

My design philosophy has evolved over the years. I usually don’t like tags but now I can reluctantly own the definition of wearable art that often gets assigned to my clothes. While the focus still remains on the textiles, the wearability and comfort factor is equally important to me.

You have been quoted as saying you have taken inspiration from the different artworks at KNMA. Can you give examples?

Going back to our roots is what inspired this collection. I wanted to revisit my work of the past 15 years with gratitude, honesty and also through a critical lens. We took inspiration from our textile innovations at different points in our journey to make the latest collection. We used innovative surfaces—like paper, silicone, acrylic, steel, re-engineered *zari* and chiffon—in this collection. It was interesting to revisit the work I did more than a decade ago and see it with a fresh perspective. It was refreshing to see that textile explorations from more than a decade ago are still relevant. I was happy to bring them back on the runway. Each look was an ode to our journey and it further strengthened our resolve to stay true to our ethos of creating timeless pieces. There is no limitation to when I look at a material and wonder if it could work as a surface. I don’t go to fabric stores for sourcing or inspiration. I go to unusual places like factories, scrap markets and hardware shops, to name a few. But not every experiment works. So even the different artworks at KNMA inspired me. ■

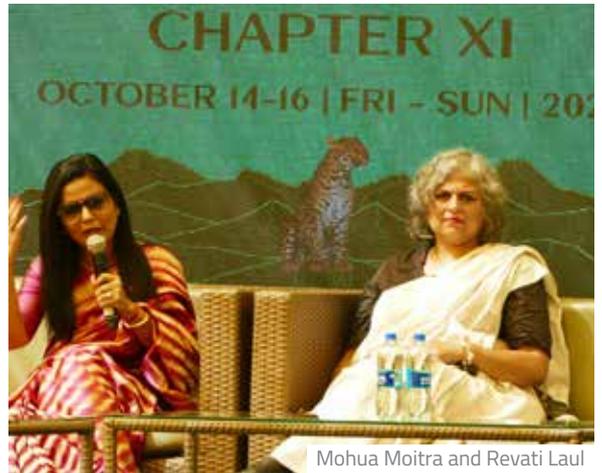
A LITFEST ON YOUR ITINERARY

Kasauli is a sleepy little stop on the way to Shimla that finds its place in the sun because of the Khushwant Singh Lit Fest that had enthusiasts thronging to it for both literary pursuits and some mountain fun

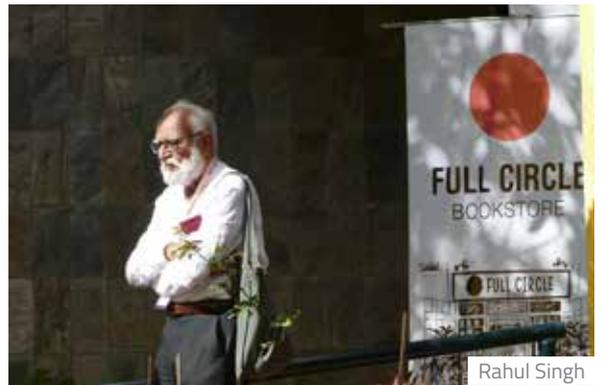
BYLINE VIJAYA PUSHKARNA | PHOTOS PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Muzaffar Ali



Mohua Moitra and Revati Laul



Rahul Singh



Usha Uthup



Rajmohan Gandhi and Mohua Moitra

There are litfests and there are litfests, but just one named after a person and that too in his home 'town', if it can be called that. And the pull of the person and the place together of course ensure an enviable panel of speakers, but equally this litfest has people jostling to be there, to hear them, and see the place. The 11th edition of the Khushwant Singh Literary Festival at Kasauli (October 14-16, 2022) showed that the renowned sardarji inside his incandescent bulb lives on in the hearts of his countless followers long after he is no longer alive to write for them his take on 'this above all' and his views with malice towards one and all. The author of scores of books, including two volumes of Sikh history and *Train to Pakistan*, would receive visitors by appointment at his Sujan Singh Park home in New Delhi, but even his summer abode, his home in Kasauli, had people coming by the droves. And the best part—Khushwant Singh remembered the name of every postman who brought him his snail mail, every technician who attended to his BSNL phone, and they all have stories about Kasauli's most popular resident. The 'Raj Villa', gifted to his wife by her father, Teja Singh Malik, is where he would sit by the fireplace on a cold evening or outdoors, taking in the sunshine during the balmy days.

And so, come October, Kasauli becomes a holiday destination as well as pilgrimage, this for those in love with the letters. This year's KSLF was, as always, dedicated to subjects Khushwant was passionate about—ecology and the environment, and the empowerment of the girl child; but with a twist. Themed *The Climate of Change: Still Sprightly @ 75?* If Amitav Ghose set the ball rolling on day one, Booker prize winner Geetanjali Shree wrapped up the three-day event, where Rajmohan Gandhi's reflections and recollection of India after 1947 possibly drew the maximum applause as he answered parliamentarian Mahua Moitra's very pertinent questions of India now; this even saw an emotional Gandhi unabashedly shedding tears as he came down heavily on the way Nehru and his legacy were being rubbished. Mallika Sarabhai's narration of her free fall and her experiments with life had everyone spellbound, as she bared all, putting a woman's perspective in the spotlight. Muzaffar Ali's light and shade of his time from childhood to now evoked nostalgia. The list of speakers was long, but the



common denominator was the celebration of Khushwant Singh and Kasauli, with people making it to the tiny cantonment 6,051 feet above MSL, with hardly enough accommodation within the hill station and roads that could have done with thorough relaying if not a quick patchwork, for love of the 2 Ks.

Kasauli is, as author Bikram Grewal puts it, "a hop, skip and jump" from Chandigarh, Punjab and Delhi. That it has always been in terms of distance, yet the tourist attraction was always Shimla, the summer capital of the Raj, the Queen of Hill Stations—a couple of preening points of the capital of Himachal Pradesh. Not so now. With growing climate-change concerns and environmental consciousness, this tiny hill station has its own variety of tourists—the nature lovers and environmentalists, for whom Kasauli is a 'look no further' point. Not that the run of the mill tourists don't come, their numbers too are increasing because, as Grewal says, "almost everyone has a car these days".

Kasauli proper is a cantonment hill station which has possibly the utmost sensitivity to issues environmental. And it is the environment that leaves visitors with an I-don't-want-to-go-back-to-the-city feeling.

On the Upper Mall, a stone's throw from the exclusive Kasauli Club, is a stone that proclaims the elevation—6,051 feet. And just a little down from the club is Raj Villa.

There are the Himalayan deodars filtering the sun's rays and adding a rejuvenating pine scent to the air. It is

indeed far from the madding crowd. And with a ban on vehicles beyond the entry point, Kasauli is a fitness freak's dream place: one has only one's legs to rely on! And the pedestrian does not for a moment have to think about reclaiming his rights on the roads—they belong to the pedestrians.

Kasauli's attractions are mostly about different viewpoints, each view prettier and more picturesque than the other and oftentimes very different—just what nature lovers, bird watchers and photographers would want. Manki Point or Monkey Point, Gilbert trail, Sunrise Point and Sunset Point figure on the bucket-lists of tourists. Those looking for cinemas, malls, gyms, Pizza Huts and Domino's and the like, stay away!

What Kasauli does offer is a quaint heritage market down a cobbled path where in the old days the *khatta meetha goli*—tangy tamarind candies spiced with Himalayan black salt—and *aam papad*, mango jelly and so on were what people bought. Very few old wooden and stone structures remain, others having been gutted, and there are quite a few bakeries and local pizza places, jostling for attention along with toys and knitwear brought up from the plains.

And, next only to nature, it is the remnants of the Raj that make Kasauli a must-see place.

There are very few hotels in Kasauli, but a half-hour drive around elsewhere in the Kasauli hills shows up very many resorts and guest houses and smaller hotels which is where most tourists stay. ■



Wellness in Winter

Seasons affect our well-being. Different body types require different food types. Ayurveda has the answer

BY GITA RAMESH

Joint MD, Kairali Ayurvedic Group

Each season has its own quality that affects our body's working. To what degree it affects an individual depends on our nature. Some like winter while others prefer summer. That is precisely why a seasonal routine is so important; thus we can talk about *Panchakarma*.

Come winter and there's a sense of heaviness as the sunlight appears weaker than what we are used to. Some people feel lethargic. The calm and peace of nature can sometimes become a bit oppressive and weigh us down, and make us feel uninspired.

A change in diet and lifestyle can help

adjust to any seasonal induced imbalance of the *doshas*. A balanced diet would normally contain all six tastes. One needs to regularly drink warm water or consume other hot beverages like turmeric milk and herbal tea.

Winter brings with it cold winds that dry your hair and skin. The skin becomes



scratchy and rough. Ayurveda prescribes warm oil therapies which also help energise and make a person feel active. These warm oil therapies in addition keep the immune system strong through these tough, dry months.

The digestive system becomes weaker in winter as compared to other seasons. During these cold months, therefore, one does not just need to eat warm food; the intake should also be lightly spiced. Yes, there's even a right season for certain spices. Most importantly, the food should be cooked well. In these months it is advisable to consume less raw food.

In Ayurveda the immune system is called *vyadikshamatva* and is attained by *Ojas*. This is a fine vital energy present in the body. It is important to highlight that unhealthy food and habits reduce the ability of the cells to cope with diseases including viral infections. Ayurveda recommends the use of dairy products such as homemade milk, cottage cheese and *ghee* for boosting the *Ojas* or energy. Moong *daal* with vegetables is nutritious and easily digestible in this season. Apples are considered immunity-boosting as they are rich in antioxidants, soluble and insoluble fibre, and help cleanse the intestines. One's kitchen should ideally include asafoetida, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, fennel, ginger, lemon, mustard seeds, nutmeg, pepper and turmeric, all of which are highly beneficial.

Ayurveda has always advised a diet that is rich in locally grown and seasonal produce. We humans were never meant to have food not grown around us. According to Ayurveda, the consumption of non-local food is cause for indigestion, bloating, gas and other digestive conditions. One should therefore consume a lot of vegetables,

especially those that grow during the season like radish, carrot, spinach, beetroot, corn, beans, turnips, and so on.

The food items that balance the *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* (the vital energy) that builds immunity in the body are a must in all seasons. A balanced diet is necessary to maintain overall well-being. Green leafy vegetables are recommended for a weak immune system—spinach and curly-leaf cabbage, for example. When stewed and spiced with immunity-boosting spices, they become a powerful immunity stimulant. They provide the body with calcium, iron and other valuable nutrients that have a cleansing effect on the bowels. Broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower are high in antioxidants and flavonoids that improve and stimulate immunity. Wholegrains such as quinoa, amaranth and flax seeds have a positive effect on a weak immune system, because of the fibre and valuable nutrients that clean the whole organism of toxic substances. Soups become important especially in winter as they are loaded with disease-fighting nutrients and their warm nature helps against flu/colds. This is an ideal winter food as it works well as an appetiser, it is mostly semi-liquid, warm, helps one stay hydrated and keeps the stomach full, thus helping against overeating. Soups also help boost one's immune system.

An intake of *ghee* during this time is recommended. Frozen food should be completely avoided. A daily routine is of utmost importance and a must in winter to keep up the freshness in you and have an appropriate balance in yourself. Immunity-boosting *leham* or *grilham* help increase energy and provide strength to the body. ■



Eat according to your *tridosha* (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*)

***Vata*:** Warm, nourishing foods with moderately heavy texture, with butter and fat are good for stabilising *vata*. Choose salty, sour, and sweet tastes as well as soothing and satisfying foods. Warm milk, cream, butter, warm soups, stews, hot cereals, raw nuts, and nut butters are good for *vata*. All sweet fruits (so long as they are extra-ripe) are good. Spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, dried ginger, clove, and garlic are good for this body type.

***Pitta*:** The best foods for *pitta* are cool or warm, not steaming hot foods. For breakfast *pitta* should consume something light like *idli*, millets (like *raagi* and *jawa*) or pancakes with honey porridge or seasonal fruits, if steamed, can be had. They should include moderate *ghee* wherever they can in the diet plan. For other meals soups can be the best for them along with all kinds of green/steamed vegetables. Any member of the gourd family is ideal for them. Do note that nothing raw can be given for *pitta*. Bitter, sweet, and astringent tastes are ideal. Herbal tea, specifically mint or liquorice root, are pacifying for *pitta*. Cold cereal, cinnamon toast, and apple tea is a good breakfast for a *pitta*. Vegetarian food in general is the best for *pitta*, as consuming red meat tends to heat the body. They should consume abundant amounts of milk, grain and vegetables.

***Kapha*:** Warm, light and dry food is favourable, or cooked light meals. The *kapha* type do best with lightly cooked foods or raw fruits and vegetables. Any food that is spicy is good for *kapha* such as very hot Mexican or Indian food, especially in winter. Dry cooking methods (baking, broiling, grilling, sautéing) are preferable for *kapha* over moist cooking such as steaming, boiling, or poaching. Foods such as romaine lettuce, endives or tonic water are good for stimulating the *kapha* appetite, while preferred spices are cumin, fenugreek, sesame seed, and turmeric.

CHAMPIONS OF CRAFTS

India has a proud heritage of crafts. AnanTaya, co-founded by Ayush and Geetanjali Kasliwal, completes 15 years of reviving traditional crafts and livelihoods



BY
MALATI K. VIJAY

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.

Few designers have won critical acclaim and commercial success by reviving and redefining India's ancient crafts for the contemporary world as has Ayush Kasliwal. The NID graduate, who has emerged as a significant design thinker of our times, brings a rare combination of creativity and innovation, sustainability and mindfulness to the products, furniture and interiors he designs.

Together with his wife, Geetanjali, an architect, he has made tradition future-ready by distilling the essence of India and its crafts into his designs. Today, Ayush Kasliwal Furniture Design studio (AKFD) and AnanTaya, the inter-disciplinary lifestyle design studio co-founded by the couple, are globally recognised for the new aesthetic they represent. Their repertoire encompasses furniture, home décor, tableware, lighting, accessories, textiles, fragrances and stationery, as well as interior projects, across the world.

"Over the years, I have come to see that there is something truly special about India, and Indian design. We have given the world concepts like yoga and Ayurveda—simple arts that connect us all. If this simplicity can percolate into objects and spaces, we could do



Punjab Grill restaurant , Washington, DC



O Void Chair, Noguchi Seating System, Armature Stool



Yoga Lounge Chair, Bridge Desk Table, Yoga Leather Dining Chair

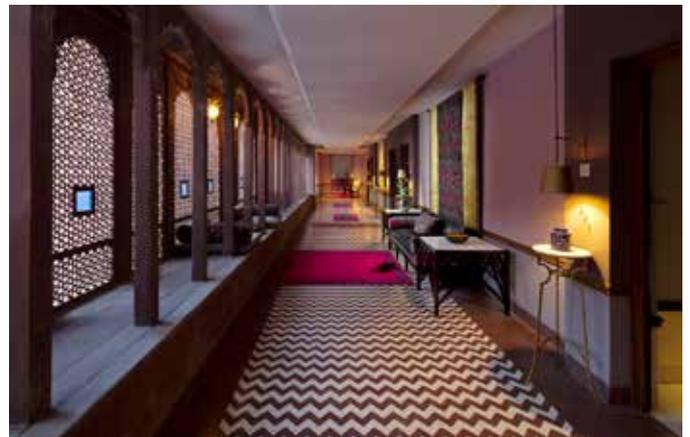
wonders," says Ayush of his love for the country's crafts traditions.

It is this pursuit of simplicity and sustainability, vast knowledge of native materials and indigenous artisanship, and emphasis on the highest quality that have won AnanTaya the UNESCO seal of excellence four times. Yet, what stands out for the Kasliwals amid this stupendous success is that they have revived and fostered many dying crafts and given a fresh lease of life to thousands of artisans.

"Our vision is a million artisans. This vision has contributed, along with a core belief of AnanTaya being a way of life, to unending possibilities of bringing '*anant -anand hi anand*' to lives," says Geetanjali. The couple's creative enterprise has impacted more than 6,000 artisans, drawing awards by SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari in December 2019 for being the highest employment-generation small enterprise.

By incorporating an amazing array of native crafts into their designs and projects, they have enabled the restarting and growth of many artisan clusters, master artisans and producer groups,

Narendra Bhawan, Bikaner, Rajasthan



and infused life into languishing techniques across Rajasthan and other parts of India. Whether it is the chic wire lamp by the birdcage-making village of Sultana, or the hand-beaten trays and Kalash hand-hammered stool by the Thathera metalwork artisans, or the Thikri mirror craft that decorates the walls of Punjab Grill restaurant they designed in Washington, their work is touched by the expert hands of generational artisans. The Tazia light is a result of innovative employment of a craft that had its relevance only annually for religious purposes. Ayush has also used Tazia in designing the Indian pavilion at Ambiente International Trade Fair (2019).

Following the dictum “design happens in the dialogue”, the Kasliwals’ interior projects spread across the world evolve on the basis of what the client and the context demand.

Some of their important projects include the recent Kshemavana, a wellness and naturopathy retreat near Bengaluru, Narendra Bhawan in Bikaner, and also the magnificent *mudra* installation at the T3 terminal, New Delhi International Airport.

Since he bagged the Charles Eames scholarship at NID for his work in ceramics to winning the Lexus Design Award India 2019, Ayush’s designs have earned many accolades—such as Interior Lifestyle Award 2015 by Messe Frankfurt, EDIDA India Designer of the Year (2013), to name a few.

AnanTaya products have been showcased at several prestigious international fairs. It also boasts an illustrious client list that includes Anthropologie, ABC Home, The Conran Shop, Terrain, CB2, Louis Vuitton and Tom Dixon (UK).



Excerpts from an interview with the Kasliwals as AnanTaya completes 15 years:

How do you look back on the AnanTaya journey?

GK: The journey of AnanTaya 15 years ago initiated a collaboration of design and craft. We started from a small room, now the family includes thousands of lives. Interestingly, it's not the enormity, but the warmth and blessings that fill our hearts.

AK: The journey birthed perennial objects. When talented designers merged their curiosity with master artisans, the *jugalbandi* impacted more than 6,000 artisan lives and more than 30 crafts were revived and promoted. The brand has come a long way in influencing lives and this year is about celebrating it.

You have said that the future for India lies in craftsmanship. How do we make it happen in these times of machine-made mass production?

AK: Our motto has been: "We must find activities in which everyone can engage meaningfully and the world of crafts provides such opportunities."

GK: I think it comes from the fundamental aspect of our life. Sustainable lifestyle is the way forward. We need to look at the wisdom in how our ancestors lived. How can we raise awareness of authentic crafts versus fake machine copies for the patron? How can crafts be democratised with more people demanding it, thereby lowering costs?

Also, how can we measure the impact of every purchase, and the circularity of designs such that people can choose wisely? The scope of crafts can be expanded by engaging with them on a wider scale in projects, installations, lifestyle products, furniture, decor, etc.

Your idea of sustainable design...

AK: At the design level, we believe that if something works well,

and is not rooted in a particular time, the object will be used for longer, thereby keeping it from going into a landfill. Where quality is concerned, consistently making high calibre products that get better with time is important. Products that look great in the beginning but deteriorate with use are not sustainable.

Finally, materials sourced sustainably, or materials that are inherently sustainable, have a direct impact on their ecological footprint. We use a lot of recycled materials, fabrics, aluminium and recycled teak. We also use plantation timber like mango and sustainably harvested oak, and a lot of the products are finished in oils or water-based paints. Once the functional life of the product is over, it should be able to come apart for recycling.

GK: It is about considering one's impact on the environment, community and, ultimately, on ourselves. How does it affect the underprivileged and the voiceless? Being conscious of how our decisions affect others is essential.

Conscious materiality, modern yet culturally rooted designs, and well-engineered manufacturing create timeless objects that last for decades, and yet have circularity in-built in them.

Other than the age-old materials and crafts techniques that you use, what new materials and techniques would you like to experiment with?

AK: We are excited by the new recycled materials that are now easily available—tetra pack boards, tyres, *papier mache*, vegetable-based leather and a host of other materials, and we see immense potential in crafting with them. Perhaps the new paradigms combine ancient crafts with recycled materials, the imagining of which is aided by technology!

GK: Materials crafted out of recycled and upcycled materials are already being incorporated in our designs. The future looks promising with bio-engineered materials that go back to the earth gently. ■

Young
&
Restless



WOMEN, WOKE & THE WORKPLACE

Workplaces are now going woke and expectedly, a lot of it is in contention

The thing about being of not-so-Gen-Z age in this age of Gen Z is that every day is an opportunity to learn something new. Whether you're scrolling through Twitter or talking to someone IRL (in real life, for the less informed), you're constantly being barraged with new information, ideas and ideologies. While it

can be a bit infuriating at times, I like to look at the brighter side—I get to make a column from it!

A couple of weeks ago, on a rain-drenched weekend in Delhi, I found myself at an intimate dinner party hosted by one of the city's most dynamic young female entrepreneurs. Celebrating her PR firm's

fifth anniversary, Alankrita Khanna (name changed) was basking both in success and her Sabyasachi ensemble as she proudly listed the newest HR policies of her company, one of them being period leaves for female employees.

"What the hell is period leave?" Ayush Verma (name changed), one of the city's top

What has changed is the way women view themselves and the world around them. They're no longer shy about camouflaging their conflicts or putting aside their problems. They're being vocal now and asking to be heard, demanding solutions.

new architects, had asked this question more from a place of bewilderment than condescension but it was enough of a trigger for Alankrita to launch into a tirade.

"Menstruating women experience a lot of pain, making it extremely difficult to even get out of bed, let alone come to work. They more than deserve taking a period leave or two every month. If only men understood how difficult it is being a woman!"

Ayush was stunned into silence. So were the rest of the men at the party. It's a particularly challenging time for cis-heterosexual men everywhere. Wokedom has officially entered the workplace—bow down or bow out!

"I'm so glad women are fighting for their rights at the workplace—it was a long time coming!" Deepti Sharma (name changed), a legal consultant in Mumbai, is one of the fiercest young female rights activists in the country and never ceases to amaze me with her passion for the causes she believes in. "For far too long, women have worked in

abysmal conditions, sacrificing their well-being just to make an honest living, without even getting paid enough. Not anymore!"

From time immemorial, or since the time women stepped out of domesticity and embraced their own dreams and ambitions, the gender dynamics at the workplace have been completely skewed in favour of the not-so-fair sex. From unequal pay to 'women are too emotional for top management roles' and many similar clichés, the list is endless. It's anyway hard for a woman to break away from societal norms and get to work; that she has to face a zillion other problems while at the workplace is perhaps why the statistics around participation of women at work aren't too bright. From 36 percent in 2021—a number that wasn't great to begin with—to 33 percent in 2022, the picture is only getting grimmer.

"Organisations have to wake up and smell the coffee—women need and deserve the same treatment as men at the workplace. Otherwise, the statistics just won't improve!" Rakhi Bishnoi (name changed), entrepreneur and social media consultant for many bigwigs, has long been advocating for woke-er workplaces. "Increasing maternity leave from three to six months is just the first step, and setting up the Internal Complaints Committee as per the POSH guidelines is the second. But there are many other steps that need to be taken pronto!" What are those steps? In the words of Sarika Sharma (name changed), up-and-coming PR honcho in Mumbai, "Equal pay is paramount. So are equal opportunities across levels. Our gender can't come in the way of being hired or promoted."

As organisations go woke rather rapidly, are men and women finally on the same page?

"I'm all for women's empowerment and equality but at the risk of getting cancelled, it's not a level playing field. If women want equal pay, they should be willing to put in an equal number of hours, right? You can't get period leave every month when there's no equivalent for men!" As a hot-and-happening entrepreneur from Mumbai, Karan Khanna (name changed) makes it to those 30-under-30 lists rather frequently. Naturally, then, you can trust him to know what men his age are feeling. "Feminism isn't about being biased towards women, right?"

Has the changing conversation around women at the workplace altered the way

potential employers are looking at candidates? Naman Bhardwaj (name changed) runs a much talked about new-age media brand in Delhi. According to him, it all boils down to return on investment. "When I'm hiring someone, I have to take into account their availability, right? A man when hired is not going to ask for period leave, won't mind working late and won't ask for a six-month maternity break. Hiring him makes a lot more sense, purely from a business point of view."

Even though the glass ceiling for women now appears reachable, there's no denying it continues to loom large. Till the time when women kept quiet about their struggles, things were hunky-dory. But in the post-#MeToo world, now that they aren't shying away from speaking out, it's only made things harder for them. Yes, harder, not easier. Not only are organisations and the men leading them more careful, they're also more hesitant. "I don't think I get what women want. Do we treat them as gentle beings and allow them a day off for menstruation or consider them on a par with men and treat them the same?" Ashok Mehta (name changed), HR head at a popular PR agency in Delhi, isn't entirely sure about the growing wokeness of workplaces. "I can't remember my mother ever asking for a day off because she had her period. What's changed for women now?"

What has changed is the way women view themselves and the world around them. They're no longer shy about camouflaging their conflicts or putting aside their problems. They're being vocal now and asking to be heard, demanding solutions.

Is that too woke for you? Well, how about keeping quiet? Women have done it for ages, after all! ■

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.

THE TIMELESS APPEAL OF SHAH RUKH KHAN



This year marks the Badshaah's 30-year reign in Bollywood. **BALAJI VITTAL** tries to decode the secret of SRK's frenzied fandom across two generations and counting

Back in the 1990s, I remember overhearing two teenage girls discussing his lips and his hairless chest. A magazine poll in 2007 named him the sexiest man in Asia. But was his success only about his sex appeal?

In his early days he was a thinking actor The Filmfare Award for the Best Debut actor for *Deewana* was not a fluke. SRK had brought in fresh, bouncy energy to the role similar to Shammi Kapoor's in his turning point *Tumsa Nahi Dekha* (1957). Khan had done his homework and identified what would work. The outsider in Bombay had wedged his way in—both into the industry and into people's imagination. After two duds in *Dil Aashna Hai* and *Chamatkar*, he ventured into a space which no mainstream hero had dared step into, a mentally ill person. *Baazigar* was a revenge saga, the storyline not unlike *Yaadon ki Baaraat*, *Zanjeer* or *Trishul* but with a difference. The anti-heroes of the three last named films had their morality streak intact, taking care not to let innocents get hurt. But SRK's Ajay in *Baazigar* went after the innocents on his path to revenge. In *Darr* and *Anjaam* he went a step further, playing the OYM (Obsessed Young Man). Equal credit to SRK and the script writers for lacing these characters with a certain vulnerability and helplessness. It was well thought out. And it worked.

He invested in partnerships SRK built deep associations with film makers Yash Chopra, Aditya Chopra, Karan Johar, and with production houses like YRF, Dharma Productions and Abbas-Mustaan. This included personal friendships with Farah Khan



and Karan Johar. When two professionals connect at a personal level the result is greater than the sum of two as evidenced in *Darr* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ)*, continuing through *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Main Hoon Na* and *Om Shanti Om*.

The Raj/Rahul brand SRK's Raj Malhotra in *DDLJ* was a bratty version of Richie Rich. The Young Turks in a new IT-conscious India loved the idea of unshackling themselves the way Raj did. In the second half of the film, Raj suddenly turns into an obedient boy, and every family wanted to have someone like him in the household. *DDLJ* running for 1,000 weeks in a theatre is only a statistic. The bigger story is about how an expanding diaspora and a have-wealth-will-flaunt-it in the 20s-40s age group found Raj Malhotra their brand ambassador. SRK's Raj took root in the individual and collective imagination over the years. His relevance grew.

The entrepreneur Khan's shrewd business sense in investing in Red Chillies, and Kolkata Knight Riders IPL cricket franchise transformed his image from an actor to an entrepreneur, rising above comparison with peer actors.

Top class production values Even his string of trashy films like *Chennai Express*, *Happy New Year* and *Dilwale* made for breathtaking visual treats as SRK took them to locales like Dubai and Europe. They came in for one viewing at least and the films made money.

Bollywood's Mr. Clean Apart from rumours of his link-up with Priyanka Chopra in 2010-11, Shah Rukh Khan has been a one-woman man. His personal integrity and respect for women had him put the female lead's name ahead of the male lead in film credits. Little wonder that his female fan following has been rock-solid and generational with the hysterically shrieking girls of the 1990s passing on the SRK 'bug' to their daughters. SRK has been a staunch family man, supporting his kids during his son's drug case, or during the hustle at Wankhede stadium in Mumbai that involved his daughter. As a businessman, he was infinitely patient with his cricket team through its first four underperforming years, putting an arm around their shoulders and assuring them of his personal support. The team loved him and tried even harder. ■

Balaji Vittal was awarded the National Film Award by the President of India in 2012 for the best book on cinema co-authored with Anirudha Bhattacharjee. He is also a public speaker, having hosted numerous talk shows at major literary festivals and public events in India, Dubai, Singapore and London.



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