





# Opinion

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Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan stitched together an unbeaten 32-run stand to get Bangladesh over the line

## Pak vs Bangla: An upset that was on the cards

RINGSIDE  
VIEW

Tushar Bhaduri

IT'S FAIR TO say that the result of the Pakistan-Bangladesh Test series wasn't what most people expected, even the most diehard supporters of the visiting side. But the 2-0 verdict didn't flatter the Tigers in the least—as the 10-wicket and 6-wicket margins would suggest. As with all things, there are two ways to look at this result. While there will be lot of chest-beating in Pakistan, the improvement in Bangladesh—especially their fast-bowling arsenal has been eye-catching. Add to it, the spectre of turmoil and political instability back home, and one has a riveting storyline.

One has seen some highs in Bangladesh cricket in recent years, but hopes of a sustained upturn in their fortunes were dashed when such results turned out to be exceptions rather than the rule. But the series outcome in Pakistan could be expected to be a sign of Bangladesh turning the corner. A prominent reason could be that the wins were secured in clinical fashion in the second half of games. A target of 185 in the fourth innings of the second Test could have prompted anxiety, especially with arguably the biggest series result in the country's history on the line. But the top six batsmen all made valuable contributions—even if the individual scores in themselves were not eye-catching—with grizzled veterans Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan coolly getting them over the line. Shakib didn't set the world on fire in the two Tests, but made vital contributions to the team. He is Bangladesh's greatest cricketer of all time and performed despite being charged in a murder case related to the political turmoil back home. The backdrop seemed to have given Bangladesh inspiration to overcome the odds. Their overseas coaching staff could only join the team in Pakistan due to the instability in the country. While on tour, they constantly received news of friends, family members, colleagues, and even fellow cricketers injured, arrested, missing or worse during the political agitation. Floods in the country made the situation worse. The players in Pakistan were determined to provide their countrymen a reason to smile. What else could explain the proceedings on Day 3 of the second Test? After managing 274 in their first innings, Pakistan had Bangladesh at 26/6 with all their specialist batsmen back in the pavilion. Khurram Shahzad and Mir Hamza were making the ball talk under helpful conditions. It seemed that normal service was restored after the upset in the previous game.

### Turning the tables

But wicketkeeper-batsman Litton Das and spin-bowling all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz refused to toe the script. They got themselves entrenched in the middle, survived the tough period, saw off the main bowlers, milked the others before putting their foot on the gas to reverse the pressure. The 165-run stand for the seventh wicket, and the 69-run partnership for the ninth between Das and fast bowler Hasan Mahmud demonstrated that Bangladesh were never ready to give up. In the second half of the game, the visitors did what they had done in the first Test, bowling out Pakistan for well below 200 and chasing down the target

without much drama. That the two wins were secured with a lot of time lost to the weather just underscores which side played better Test cricket for a longer period. That all 10 Pakistani wickets fell to pace in the second innings of the second Test proves the evolution of Bangladesh's bowling attack that could make them competitive away from home. Shakib will not go on forever and while Mehidy is a class performer with bat and ball, the emergence of speedster Nahid Rana and Hasan Mahmud gives them another dimension, for which Bangladesh should be grateful to legendary pacemen Allan Donald and Courtney Walsh, who worked as bowling coaches in the past.

Bangladesh will soon be in India for a Test series, and though what happened in Pakistan would not alter the fact that the hosts will be overwhelming favourites, Najmul Hasan Shanto & Co can be quietly confident that the home team, which rarely does anything other than win on its own turf, may not have things all its own way. Bangladesh's middle-order batting and spin bowling is an experienced hands and they have unearthed a promising battery of pacemen, which needs to be taken good care of. The reversal at home is likely to prompt a lot of soul-searching in Pakistan. Some former players have called it the darkest chapter in their cricketing history, but that's just over-reaction.

### House in disarray

But the decision-makers in Pakistan cricket have reason to ponder whether they have accorded long-form cricket the respect it deserves. Preparing for Tests entails playing first-class cricket, and the home team was undercooked in that regard. It explains what captain Shan Masood meant when he said that Pakistan prepared for a maths exam by studying science. In this era of franchise T20 leagues eating into more and more of the cricket calendar, that's not a problem exclusive to Pakistan. And with the country hosting the 50-over ICC Champions Trophy early next year, there is no easy solution in sight. But Pakistan's plight in Test cricket is not limited to one series. Masood has lost the first five matches he has led his country in, and it has been a long time since they won a game on home soil. They don't really know what constitutes home advantage for them, alternating between placid tracks and green-tops, depending on the opposition, without getting the desired results. Their main batsman, Babar Azam is going through a prolonged lean patch, and it seems a long time since he was considered to be knocking on the door of the 'Fab Four' comprising Virat Kohli, Steve Smith, Joe Root and Kane Williamson. Not many prolific young batsmen appear to be coming through the ranks. That wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan is their most reliable batsman as well as troubleshooter shows the brittle nature of their line-up.

The cupboard, as far as spin bowling is concerned, seems to be bare, but the manner in which the Pakistan pace attack was out-bowled by Bangladesh in the city of Shoaib Akhtar adds insult to injury. Not too long ago, Shaheen Shah Afridi was considered one of the premier fast bowlers in the world before injuries and loss of pace made him ineffectual. Naseem Shah was once touted as a future star, but he hasn't yet displayed the fitness to perform in Tests on a consistent basis. And with the likes of Haris Rauf effectively turning their backs on Test cricket, things don't look promising ahead of England's arrival.

## ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



In his speech, the Prime Minister said, "...today, the people of Bharat are filled with a renewed confidence." Just a few days ago, we saw news reports that 395,000 candidates, including 6,112 postgraduates, 39,990 graduates and 117,144 who had studied up to Class 12, had applied for the position of sweeper in the Haryana government at a salary of ₹15,000 per month on a *contract* basis. Surely, that is no sign of 'renewed confidence'

I WAS VERY happy that I was able to read an entire speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in *English*, thanks to *Economic Times*. He spoke in Hindi, and I assume the translation was accurate. Mr Modi congratulated his government and told the World Leaders Forum that in the past ten years "our economy has expanded by nearly 90%". Admirable — if it was correct. The numbers that I have are:

Year	GDP at constant prices (₹ cr)
March 31, 2014	98,01,370
March 31, 2024	173,81,722

The increase was ₹74,88,911 crore and the growth factor works out to 1.7734 or a growth rate of 77.34%. Even that is good for a developing country. Of course, one must compare that rate with the rates of the previous two decades since liberalisation. Between 1991-92 and 2003-04 (13 years) the size of the GDP (proxy for the economy) *doubled*. Again, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (10 UPA years), the size of the GDP *doubled*. I had estimated that the GDP would not double in Mr Modi's ten years and said so in Parliament; the prime minister has now confirmed it. India's economy has indeed grown but we could have done better.

### Unemployment — the elephant

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Indian Youth Congress workers protest over the issue of unemployment in Jaipur

FILE PHOTO: ROHIT JAIN PARAS

# No comfort in 100 days

a salary of ₹15,000 per month on a *contract* basis. Surely, that is no sign of "renewed confidence". I know there are apologists who will interpret the story to mean that people already employed are seeking the security of a government job! I do not wish to break their reverie.

The prime minister also said "The aspirational youth and women of Bharat have voted for continuity, political stability and economic growth." Many observers think that the vote was for the opposite. The vote was for change, constitutional governance and growth with equality. The two sets of goals are poles apart: continuity *vs* change, political stability *vs* constitutional governance and economic growth *vs* growth with equality. Just as the prime minister tried to make a case for *approval* of his set of goals, a powerful argument can be made for people's *disapproval* of the BJP's governance, and desire for a re-set of the goals.

### Wanted a re-set

I wish to stay on 'unemployment' in this column. The All India unemployment rate, according to CMIE, is 9.2%. The Congress Manifesto 2024 said that after 33 years since liberalisation, "the time is ripe for a re-set of economic pol-

icy". The Manifesto put forward two specific proposals on 'jobs':

- Apprenticeship scheme that will guarantee a one-year apprenticeship to every graduate and diploma holder to impart skills, enhance employability and provide regular jobs to millions of youth.

- Employment-linked Incentive scheme (ELI) for corporates to win tax credits for additional hiring against regular, quality jobs.

I was delighted when the finance minister borrowed the ideas and included them in her Budget speech. Mr Modi and his ministers were sworn in on June 9, 2024. The BJP claimed that a third-term Modi government will have a plan ready to be rolled out in the first 100 days. The 100 days will be completed on September 17. The government has shown no urgency to roll out the two Budget announcements. Contrast the zeal with which the government tried to pass the Wakf (Amendment) Bill and push the lateral entry into senior government positions; they were forced to put both on 'pause'.

### Bad news mounts

Meanwhile, we have more bad news on the employment front:

Indian companies have laid off people in 2023 and in 2024. Among them are Swiggy, Ola, Paytm, etc. Tech companies have announced that they are in the process of rightsizing their workforce.

In a column in *Times of India*, September 5, 2024, two educationists reported that IIT Mumbai has been able to place only 75% of its graduating class this year. Adjusted against the exchange rate, the salaries seem static. The placement of graduates of institutions other than the IITs is at a disappointing level of 30%.

The World Bank's India Economic Update (September 2024) reported that urban youth employment remained elevated at 17%. Thanks to a muddled trade policy, India has not increased export earnings from labour-intensive sectors such as leather and garments. The World Bank report advised a critical review of India's approach to trade and pointed out that India has not been able to take advantage of China's withdrawal from labour-intensive manufactured goods. The report pointed to India's protectionist policies and aversion to free trade agreements.

The issue of unemployment will not go away by denial or rhetoric or fake statistics. Unemployment is a ticking time bomb and the Modi 2.1 government has done nothing — absolutely nothing — to address to defuse it since June 9.



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## INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



### Perception test

Electoral politics is often more perception than reality. So if PM Narendra Modi is looking slightly faded and faded at the start of his "historic third term in office", it is because the optics that favoured him in the past are now working against him. The BJP is, in fact, well ensconced, with just 32 MPs short of the halfway mark and more than double the Congress party's strength. The NDA's tally of 293 is 21 over the halfway mark. Unlike the Vajpayee government, which was totally dependent on a mercurial Jayalalithaa, or Manmohan Singh's regime, which was at the mercy of several ever-demanding allies, the Modi government is not reliant on any single alliance partner for survival. If it chose, it could dump political fledglings like Chirag Paswan, Anupriya Patel and Jayant Chaudhary and still survive. Yet, the perception persists. Modi's rather domineering style has grown over two unchallenged tenures as PM and three as the Gujarat CM. The image of wielding absolute power has

both its plus and minus points. On the one hand, people appreciate a strong leader, but on the other hand, disrespect for democratic norms and the Constitution is frowned upon. Backtracking by a strong leader can also be perceived as weakness and recently, the Modi government has uncharacteristically retreated on several occasions.

### Unusual U-turns

At the start of his third term, Modi gave the impression that he would continue his unilateral style of functioning. He refused to yield over the choice of the Lok Sabha Speaker, has yet to concede the Deputy Speaker's post to the Opposition and has kept the media in Parliament at an even greater arm's length than before. He mostly retained his old cabinet ministers and generally handed out minor portfolios to allies. Despite the outcry over the NEET exam leaks, he stood firm on not cancelling it.

But the façade of business as usual got dented after the proposed amendments to the Waqf Board Act, announced with fanfare, were dispatched to the cold storage of a joint parliamentary panel, following allies' objections. A UPSC advertisement for lateral entries in government was hastily withdrawn after protests that it violated the reservation quota policy. The revamped pension scheme for government employees seemed yet another sop to electoral interests. A

Broadcasting Bill to include online content seems to have been put on the back-burner too.

Whether Assam CM Himanta Sarma's decision to end a colonial-era practice of a two-hour prayer break on Fridays for Muslim legislators will hold, with NDA allies already making noises, is uncertain. The proposed Waqf Board amendments and changes in the Assam legislature rules might appear fairly reasonable, but the perception of the BJP as "anti-minority" is too hot a potato for the government's allies to defend. The censor board is dragging its feet over clearing a film produced by actor Kangana Ranaut and two FIRs for hate speeches were filed against BJP Maharashtra MLA Nitesh Rane. The Supreme Court recently criticised courts for not granting bail to the government's political adversaries for long stretches.

The government's backsliding is in contrast to Modi 2.0, when the PM remained implacable for months over the powerful farm Bill protests and the overwhelming demand for the removal of Brij Bhushan Singh as chief of the wrestling federation. There is a belated awareness that the government's adamancy harmed it electorally.

### Potholed road

Neither Jawahar Lal Nehru and Indira Gandhi completed their last terms because of their untimely deaths. But long before their demise, they were viewed as lame duck PMs

because of their flagging spirits. Modi, however, is respected for his resilience and combativeness. But can the PM change his style of functioning after over 20 years? He has to walk a fine line, projecting his image as a strong leader along with enough humility to be pragmatic when required. His unequivocal apology for the collapse of the 35-foot statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was a step in this direction.

Normally, his short-sighted media advisers would have adopted a shrill counter attack and whataboutery as the best form of defence. With the Opposition using the caste card and minority appeasement to undermine the government, the ruling party has to tread cautiously. The RSS recently indicated it is not against caste census.

Extensive consultations before announcing a major move would be a good step for the BJP to adopt in future, along with stopping the practice of using a house-trained Enforcement Directorate to keep political rivals in check. Fickle constitutional bodies have belatedly developed a conscience, after their perception that the Central government is not necessarily here to stay. Modi stands at the crossroads in the battle of optics, with some tough Assembly polls and by-elections due in coming months, the road ahead has many potholes.



# Para-athletes, champions all



GOOD SPORT  
ROHIT MAHAJAN

**I**N a cruel world that emphasises limitations, the greatest service a para-athlete performs for society is to normalise physical disability — to bring it right under the public eye, and then perform sporting acts of such skill and courage that even 'normal' people can't emulate.

Several years ago, when a para-athlete was awarded the Khel Ratna, the country's highest award for sports persons, hitherto won only by 'normal' athletes, a colleague couldn't hide his contempt: "These 'non-elite' athletes getting the top sports award — the very idea!"

Having watched para-sports over the years, this person is now a fan, for the story of each para-athlete, medal-winner or not, is fascinating and inspirational, worthy of a book.

Let's talk about, say, Sumit Antil, just one among the para-heroes.

Javelin in his right hand, a spring in his steps, Antil jogs rather than sprints to the white line. With a mighty heave, he sends the spear flying. There's a hush. There's a roar. Antil looks at the giant screen flashing the distance the spear has travelled — it's over 70 metres. It's a personal best. It's good for gold. Antil turns around and slaps his right thigh — he's very unlikely to ever slap his left thigh because it's a prosthetic limb. It's due to this artificial left limb that he jogs rather than sprints; it's this artificial left limb that presents him the greatest difficulty in his dream of hitting the 80-metre mark.

"My left leg, which is my blocking leg, is an artificial limb. It's difficult to balance on it. There are just two nails at the base of the prosthetic that get a grip on the ground. Balancing your entire body on just two nails is very difficult," said Antil a day



Para-athletes Sheetal Devi and Rakesh Kumar after winning bronze in the Paris Paralympics. ANI

The story of each one of them, medal-winner or not, is fascinating and inspirational

after winning gold at the Paris Paralympics. "After your hip has done its role while throwing, the blocking leg has to move into action. I was losing my balance a couple of times, which is why I couldn't throw even better."

"When I will be at my peak, just once in life, I want to touch the 80m mark. I want to know how it feels when the javelin crosses that distance," said Antil, 26.

Antil, two Paralympics gold medals to his credit, wants to expand his horizons.

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. The courage of the para-athlete reshapes perceptions, breaks down physical and emotional barriers, and redraws the limits of possibilities. Antil has had to be very courageous — there was no other option after a

motorcycle accident led to the amputation of his left leg when he was just 17.

Sheetal Devi, born without arms, had to be very courageous. The archer, who hits bull's-eye using her feet, won a Paralympics medal last week. "Before, I used to live in a small village. And then I started para-archery, I saw that people with disabilities could also achieve something," Sheetal, 17, wrote on social media. "There was a time when I felt incomplete and sought true validation. It took time to embrace my true self, but the moment I did, magic unfolded."

Sport does create magic. But, as Anais Nin wrote, life indeed does shrink or expand in proportion to courage — and it's not just about bravery, it's more about stepping out of our comfort zone and confronting and defeating fears.

## VINESH'S COURAGE

One brave person who's stepped out of her comfort zone is Vinesh Phogat, the greatest female wrestler from India. Vinesh, having done nothing but wrestle for two decades, put her career on the line when she started a campaign to bring to justice Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, then Wrestling Federation of India president and a powerful BJP MP. This required physical and mental courage of the highest order. Her dream of an Olympics medal — she had suffered a horrible injury in 2016, heartbreak in 2021 — seemed to be over. Yet, Vinesh came to winning gold at the Paris Olympics last month after shocking the world with her upset of Yui Susaki, the Japanese superstar, in the final 15 seconds of their first-round bout. This was followed by heartbreak — she was 100 grams too heavy to fight for gold.

She's again stepped out of the comfort zone, quitting sport to enter politics. Politicians have immense power, and the taste of even minimal power creates little despots. But Vinesh, a victim, just might do some good for sport and women if she gets political power. She's always declared herself to be a non-political person — but by now, at 30, she knows that everything is politics and politics is everything. Stepping into the discomfort zone of politics will be a life-changing decision — hopefully, a fruitful one in her quest for gender justice and equality.

# Lessons learnt the hard way



RAAJA BHASIN

**A**ROUND this time of year, my 'speaking circuit' begins and continues through the winter till the onset of summer. Some of this is a part of the 'history and heritage' walks in the hills and elsewhere. Some part consists of more formal indoor lecturing. Most of the audience is from Great Britain or from other former British colonies like Australia and Canada. A few still arrive with a dated and pre-conceived 'elephants and snake-charmers' image of India. Most, fortunately, are aware of and well in tune with a rapidly changing world. There are moments of gentle amusement like the time when a gentleman carried a set of notes made by his uncle to help him on his visit to Shimla. Among other exhortations and bits of advice were the invaluable information, "There are no cars in Shimla and rickshaws are the only means of transport." Another, having heard with great reluctance and considerable resistance about the civilisation of ancient India, wanted to know why there wasn't a greater sense of gratitude towards the colonising British.

Occasionally, one is also asked to speak at management institutions. Most want and expect me to talk about writing, nature and my beloved hills. To speak of how this slow life is not so bad. However, occasionally, one is thrown a googy. Once, someone in the audience, during the Q&A session, said, "But what you have spoken about teaches us nothing about management, business and the real world for real people." So, there it was. The ivory tower had been reduced to dust. At that moment, I mumbled something about Nietzsche having said that "art was there so that we did not die of the truth". And the muttering continued to add, "Suppose the world was populated by only one sort of people. That could be accountants or managers. There would be no music and art. It would be a very dull and bland world."

For the next lecture, one wanted to be more coherent. I spent some time rifling through my head to see what appropriate episodes or anecdotes could be used. A surprisingly large number popped up. If one were to take them all, many lessons would contradict others. A little bit of sifting and some stood out more prominently than the others. These may not have had much to do with textbook management, nor could they provide ground-breaking management techniques, but they were simple everyday lessons that may have relevance in our lives.

One thing that has been rightly ingrained in us is a deep respect and regard for our armed forces. That respect goes beyond the high regard for the uniform and includes the numerous institutions and bodies that

are attached to this. One occasionally misused and sometimes maligned institution is the canteen. Needless to add, much fuel to the fire is added by civilians in search of cheaper (and 'pure') liquor. On principle, one has never accepted something from the canteen. It is not meant for us civilians and that's all there is to it. Decades back, there was, however, a moment when there was a slip. A certain somebody was posted to town and wanted to let everyone know that he had arrived in more ways than one. Repeatedly, he would ask if I wanted something from the canteen. Whisky? Rum? My answer was a flat "no". But then, one morning, his batman was at the door with two bottles of rum which I made the mistake of accepting and paying for. Those two bottles of cheap rum subsequently cost me more than the best possible single malt. Over the next several months, whenever that certain gentleman would meet me, he would call out (loudly, and preferably with enough people within earshot), "Did

Never ever compromise on basic principles, and avoid making presumptions

you get the bottles of rum I sent you?"

The time came when that person moved on and I learnt an invaluable lesson, "Never ever compromise on basic principles. The cost will be higher than you can ever imagine."

Another lesson came from a fine set of worthies — who in their heyday were big shots in their own world. They were holding forth with convictions set in stone and worldviews that only retired worthies, with secure pensions, can hold. Sitting nearby was another person whom I'd met for the first time. He joined the conversation and asked a few simple but remarkably pertinent questions. One of the worthies turned to him and with great condescension asked, "And, what is it that you do?"

The gentleman named a company that none of us had heard of and said he was its managing director.

"Oh, never heard of it. Where are you based? Baddi or Barotiwala?" This was followed by loud laughter.

"We have operations in different parts of the world," was the quiet gentleman's reply.

"So, what do your different operations do?" This worthy wasn't letting go. "We are into space technology and we launch satellites on behalf of various governments into space."

Expectedly, this was met with suitably stunned silence. The bravado had suddenly vanished. Here was another lesson: never presume. Don't think you are the biggest gun at the table. Some cannons are far bigger if not louder.

Do either of these incidents have any relevance, apart from a vague feel-good factor? I don't know. All one can say is that there may be something to them, as both have become a fairly indelible memory.

# Amid brave hearts, in the hero's honour

COL ASHOK AHLAWAT

**T**HE young Captain of Rashtriya Rifles got a patrol ready in five minutes. He must have wondered at the improbable demand of the visiting middle-aged Colonel to scale the nearest hill. The soldiers spread out and started climbing up the hill terraces in which maize was sprouting.

The over-eager visitor's knees started creaking. He asked a soldier for a light machine gun. It felt heavy and he climbed for a few hundred yards up the farm terraces. He returned the weapon and wished he had a sturdy walking stick. He felt all his machismo melting away. The soldiers kept moving up. They were super fit. You know it when you climb with them. Your brain and college certificate don't tell you that. Your legs and lungs give you that education when you move up a mountain with them.

Cries of 'Jai Hind' rang out from the old men living in the mud houses. They offered water. It was scarce in the mountains and they had to buy it in tankers. They pulled out plastic chairs and offered hospitality, as they started talking about their Army stints. "I served in so and so battalion of JAK LI (Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry)." Then came the long list of sta-

tions they had served in. The Army men had been climbing for two hours. When they descended from the hilltop, the Colonel stopped at a shop on the road bend. The owner let out a sonorous 'Jai Hind'. From almost every mud-roofed hut that he passed, he could hear 'Jai Hind'. Old men, their faces washed with deep lines, proclaimed having served in JAK LI. Buffaloes stood tethered in solid mud and the timber huts were built on hewed slopes. A listless Bihari mason stood and stared as the patrol passed. When asked what he was doing so far away from home, he said he earned ₹600 a day as most young men of the village worked in foreign countries.

The shop was well stocked with provisions. A beaming, handsome, 6 foot tall young boy came and stood there. In this part of India, people are generally good looking. The mountains and woods all around are a wanderer's delight.

The lad insisted that the Army men come to his house. Another good-looking young man came out. He had long, curly brown hair. A tall man who looked in his sixties stood outside the simple house in a *salwar kameez*. He welcomed the officers and took them to a drawing room with plastic chairs and a centre table.

A matronly woman came and sat next to the man. Another young man fetched tea, almonds,

pistachios and biscuits. The tea was thick-sweet buffalo milk with just a whiff of tea leaves. In rural communities, such tea is an honour. Not much different from the customary offerings in the Colonel's native Haryana.

The young men were shy and there was a tall young girl, their sister, who went away briskly. The boys had come home from their regiments on leave. It was Eid and homecoming season.

The father was strong, dignified and had little to say. Clouds of sadness remained settled on the mother's face. The father of the boys got up and went into another room, returning with a framed medal. It had a green ribbon and a bronze circular disc with the Ashoka wheel. On the mother's face, the lines of sadness and memory became deeper. The boy to whom the medal belonged had left the world.

The brave woman had five sons. She had permitted all of them to wear the olive green. One of them had given up his life in the service of the nation.

Darkness set in on the mountain slope. It was time to leave. The Captain sat quietly. The Colonel got up, saluted the parents and the patrol started walking back.

Rifleman Aurangzeb was conferred the Shaurya Chakra, the third highest gallantry award, posthumously in 2018. *Jai Hind!*

# Steppe eagles, the vanishing voyagers from Central Asia

PARTH JOSHI

**T**HE morning mist was rising slowly as we stepped into the ochre-coloured grasslands of Tal Chappar in Rajasthan, known as a haven for birds of prey. Staring across the open expanse, a large silhouette caught the eye. On training the binoculars, it turned out to be a Steppe eagle, the ubiquitous post-monsoon visitor across many parts of India, undertaking long and arduous migrations each year to spend the winter in the temperate climates of the Indian subcontinent, as well as Southeast Asia, Middle East and Africa.

A large raptor with a wingspan of over 2 metres, the Steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) is a member of the 'booted eagle' family, meaning it has feathered legs. As the name suggests, grasslands or 'steppes' constitute the bird's natural habitat. While it mainly breeds and resides in Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia, as temperatures drop in these regions, it undertakes an annual migration southward. Like many migratory species, it has remarkable navigational skills, using the same route year after year, guided by an array of cues like the Earth's magnetic field, position of the stars and wind patterns to tra-



A Steppe eagle protects its prey from a horde of crows. PHOTO BY THE WRITER

verse thousands of kilometres. There are a few unique characteristics that set the Steppe eagle apart from other eagles. It prefers to nest on the ground as opposed to the canopy, a factor of its natural habitat, and prefers to walk or 'strut' a lot, spending far lesser time soaring in the air like other birds of prey. A specialised predator of squirrels, it also hunts other small mammals like hare and reptiles, and when fresh prey is scarce, also consumes dead animals, or 'carion'.

In terms of appearance, it can often be confused with the tawny eagle or the spotted eagle, and an easy way to distinguish it in the field is its elongated 'gape' or the end of the beak, and oval-shaped nostrils. Despite its fierce expression, it is quite approachable and relatively tame, and can adjust to a moderate level of human presence.

The Steppe eagle is not just a casual visitor. It provides important ecosystem services. As an apex predator and scavenger, it controls

the rodent population and consumes carion, preventing the spread of diseases and maintaining the health of their habitat. This natural 'clean-up' service reduces the reliance on chemical pest-control methods and promotes a healthy ecosystem. Their presence signifies a well-balanced environment with adequate prey availability and minimal human disturbances.

However, the species faces a multitude of threats today. Rapid urbanisation, agricultural expansion, and infrastructure development are encroaching upon open grasslands and wetlands, leading to habitat loss and diminishing prey availability. Increasing use of pesticides in agricultural fields is resulting in secondary poisoning, as they consume prey exposed to harmful chemicals. Collision with overhead powerlines and wind turbines is also emerging as a key threat.

These factors have led to a rapid decline in their population. In Kazakhstan, a major breeding ground, the population has halved in just 15-20 years, while surveys in India have revealed a long-term decline of nearly 31 per cent. As the threats to these avians persist, the species has been classified as 'endangered' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Concerted efforts are needed to protect this keystone species that plays a crucial

role in maintaining ecosystems across continents. Awareness campaigns highlighting the ecological importance of these raptors can encourage local communities and civil society to participate in conservation efforts. Better enforcement of regulations on pesticide use, and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices can help reduce instances of indirect poisoning.

Driving around a bend in the meandering mountain roads of Uttarakhand, the sight of branches of a pine tree struggling to bear the weight of their occupants made us bring the car to a quick halt. About a dozen Steppe eagles crowded the canopy surrounding a carcass dumping site, far out from their usual habitats or rolling grasslands. Trying to get a clear sighting, one couldn't help but marvel at their amazing adaptability, travelling mind-boggling distances so nonchalantly, and keeping a diverse range of ecosystems healthy.

Yet, it also felt as if they were clinging to the dwindling branches of survival. Their flight, a testament to the freedom of the skies, now carries the weight of a world struggling to remember that without its wild guardians, it loses more than just eagles. It is up to us to ensure that these majestic creatures continue to grace our skies for generations to come.



Members of the film fraternity and the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) stage a protest march to the Secretariat demanding fair wages and safety and security at the workplace in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. PTI

# FINDING THEIR VOICE

Based on testimonies from 51 movie professionals, the Hema Committee report's damning indictment of the Malayalam film industry is a wake-up call for systemic reform across the country

BINDU MENON

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT, in an interview, recalled a meeting at the White House with US President Bill Clinton and several senior officials. Albright had just been appointed the Secretary of State, the first woman in American history to hold the post. She said that during the meeting, she tried several times to make a point but couldn't edge in a word. And she thought to herself, "My goodness, how powerful a woman does one need to be in order to get heard?" But that was a lesson. Albright would later famously say, "It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."

Something similar is happening in the Malayalam film industry. Women professionals, who have long faced sexual discrimination and unfair treatment, have found their voice. And that voice of unison is getting louder, angrier and clamouring for justice. At the heart of this churn is the Justice K Hema Committee report.

The 232-page report, based on testimonies from 51 movie professionals, is a damning indictment of an industry where illegal bans by power groups, casting couch culture, pay disparity, drug and alcohol abuse and unsafe working conditions make it hard for women to survive. The report has not been made fully public, with 63 pages redacted to protect the privacy of the respondents.

The three-member Hema Committee was formed in the aftermath of the 2017 abduction and sexual assault of a young female actor by a group of men in a moving car in Kochi. The perpetrators also filmed her harrowing experience. The incident sent shockwaves across the nation, coming as it did from an industry that is celebrated for its boundary-pushing and genre-bending cinema. An industry don, actor-producer Dileep, was alleged to be the mastermind behind this sordid episode. Though he was indicted by court, there has been no closure in the case yet. The survivor was able to garner support largely through the pressure exerted by the WCC, or Women in Cinema Collective, a band of feisty women film professionals from Kerala, who came together following the assault.

### WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD

Again, it was Albright who said, "There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other." The WCC, however, went through a hellish experience when it tried to be that voice of dissent in a largely acquiescent industry. Film critic and researcher Aswathy Gopalakrishnan says the emergence of the WCC, initially backed by the leftist government, is a radical event in a space long dominated by patriarchal, feudal and strong capitalist forces. "Although the government later remained passive and even back-pedalled during the sexual assault trial, its initial welcoming of WCC and establishment of the Hema Committee crystallised the collective as a pivotal entity in Kerala's socio-cultural sphere. It set an imitable model for women in other Indian film industries



A protest against actors Mukesh, Ganesh Kumar, Siddique and others after the Justice Hema Committee report revealed instances of sexual harassment in the Malayalam film industry; and (right) actor Mohanlal, president of AMMA, holds a press conference after his resignation.

on how to organise and press for structural reforms," says Gopalakrishnan.

The WCC, she adds, made it plain that women actors are not merely subjugated, second-class members of the film industry but artistes with independent minds.

This backing spurred Bhavana, the actor who was assaulted, to waive her anonymity in an Instagram post even as she faced an undeclared ban for some years — an indication of the immense clout that a powerful male lobby within the industry enjoys. The persistent efforts of the WCC forced the state government to form the Hema Committee. Though the report was filed in 2019, it took another five years for it to see the light of day.

After the report was made public, many women from the industry came forward to share their accounts of mental and physical abuse. Some of the accusations were levelled against cinema stalwarts and key functionaries of film bodies, including one that is ironically called AMMA, or the Association of Malayalam Movie Actors.

### SHOWING THE WAY

What has also been disappointing but not surprising is the rather belated and bland response to the whole issue by the two superstars who rule the industry — Mohanlal and Mammooty. Mohanlal, who is president of AMMA, simply chose to resign from the post, along with all office-bearers, and cried hoarse about the Malayalam industry being crucified. Mammooty, too, signed off his statement saying, "Ultimately, the industry must survive." Both the actors also denied the existence of any power group, which the Hema Committee report repeatedly mentions.

However, what is heartening is that the report has served as a wake-up call. "We saw a handful of young actors speaking out, albeit hesitantly, against the AMMA leadership. The weakening of the old order is discernible, and it will have an impact on how the industry will go ahead from here," says Gopalakrishnan. For bet-

ter or worse, the Malayalam film industry has shown the way.

Women professionals from other movie industries too have demanded a similar clean-up within their fraternities. Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu urged the Telangana government to urgently publish a "sub-committee report on sexual harassment, which can help frame government and industry policies, to establish a safe working environment for women in the Telugu film industry". In West Bengal, film organisations have together launched the Suraksha Bandhu Committee that aims to take on and resolve complaints of sexual misconduct on film sets. The Women's Forum for Screen Workers in the Bengali film industry has issued a charter of demands, signed by 50 actors and technicians, seeking safe working conditions.

### WILL THERE BE CHANGE?

A civil society group, comprising over 70 eminent personalities like Arundhati Roy, Indira Jaising, Vinta Nanda, Aparna Sen and others, has made an appeal to the Kerala government seeking a "360-degree approach" to the issues of women safety. "The state government's reaction to the Hema Committee's findings, as well as media coverage, have both placed an inordinate focus on the sexual misdemeanours and crimes described in the report, to the virtual exclusion of the considerable space devoted in its pages to discussing working conditions in the industry, lack of contracts, pay disparities and so on," says its letter.

Cautioning the media against "selective" coverage and the government for its visible inaction, the group has called for a "systemic reform of the industry".

The WCC, which saw many of its members sidelined in the Malayalam industry for daring to fight back and question the entrenched patriarchy, is firm in its resolve for actionable change in the industry. Actor Parvathy Thiruvothu, one of the outspoken members of the WCC, has cau-



tioned against sensationalising the report and bringing the focus back on safe working conditions for women in cinema.

Thiruvothu, who has headlined many women-centric films like the Tanuja Chandra-helmed 'Qarib Qarib Singile' and the more recent acclaimed Malayalam movie 'Ulozhukku' (Undercurrent), has asserted that the issue is not endemic to Malayalam cinema.

### NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Women actors from Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and other film industries are calling out the rampant sexism that exists in their fraternity. They are speaking out about better working conditions, more professionalism and pay parity. Priyanka Chopra once revealed that she received 90 per cent less pay than her male co-stars in Bollywood. That changed when she starred in an international web-series, where she received an equal pay cheque as her co-lead. Chopra said she didn't know she had the power to ask for more until her agents in Hollywood said she could. In other words, it shows the power of having a voice and using it.

It's a similar sentiment shared by actor Salma Hayek, who opened up about the blitz of sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of the now jailed movie producer Harvey Weinstein. "Men sexually harassed because they could. Women are talking today because, in this new era, we finally can," Hayek wrote in *The New York Times*.

While it's much more than a Harvey Weinstein moment in the Malayalam film industry, one wonders whether the ramifications of the Hema Committee report will have a pan-India effect. Gopalakrishnan puts it rather eloquently, "WCC has succeeded in creating a new consciousness among women in cinema, to organise against a system that uses shame and fear as weapons of oppression. While it's too early to say what the report will engender, this novel consciousness is sure to reorder the filmmaking space."

## NO LOOS, NO EQUAL PAY

- "The stars do not twinkle, nor does the moon look beautiful... Do not trust what you see: even salt looks like sugar." These are some of the opening lines of the Justice K Hema Committee report. These lines capture the double-faced nature of an industry known for its cutting-edge cinema but also, in many ways, the regressive treatment of its women workforce.
- The committee, headed by retired Justice K Hema, also comprised retired IAS officer KB Valsala Kumari and veteran South Indian actor Sarada.
- The report highlights the inequities, power games and unsafe working conditions skewed mostly against women in the cinema space. "Compromises" and "adjustments" — two euphemisms for sexual favours for work opportunities — stand out in this report. Women who enter the industry are made to believe that this is a requirement to get ahead in their career and face the inevitable "midnight knocks on hotel doors".
- Another damning revelation follows: "It has come out in evidence that 10-15 individuals in cinema who are in the forefront of the Malayalam film industry constitute a power group and they are controlling the industry."
- Highlighting the rather misogynistic attitude of this male preserve, the report also says that the industry ostracised outspoken members of the Women in Cinema Collective because producers are "afraid of women who make complaints" and would rather cast those who "don't create problems".
- Then comes the rather depressing issue of working conditions. All the women who spoke before the committee underlined the absence of toilet facilities or changing rooms on the set, especially while shooting in remote outdoor locations. Many would go without water till the shooting schedule ended to curb the urge to relieve themselves in the open. This has caused many ailments for women, the report reveals.
- In one instance, a junior artiste was refused permission by the production unit to take a loo break as that would have meant walking 10 minutes to reach the nearest toilet facility. The report also mentions that when queried about such problems, a prominent actor was dismissive and said it was only a question of adjustment and not a serious issue.
- The document calls attention to 17 major issues that point to the insidious ways in which the industry operates and how some of these impact men too. Informal bans against an artist or technician by power groups over "silly reasons", non-execution of contracts, online harassment, pay disparity and the absence of a legally-constituted authority to redress grievances are some of the pressing issues highlighted in the report.



"People say to me, 'You're so lucky. You get to see the world.' But I don't. I go to the hotel and to the pools and back again. That's it"  
— Michael Phelps

In the last two years, India's travel and tourism industry has flourished in an unprecedented manner. In the past, Westerners and even visitors from other Asian countries associated India mainly with landmarks like the Taj Mahal, Lal Qila, Qutub Minar, and Jama Masjid. Although India had several opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s to showcase its rich heritage to the world, leadership failed to seize the moment and market the country's lesser-known attractions. Events like the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in 1982 and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1984 were limited to New Delhi. The same pattern followed during the SAARC summit under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's tenure. The world, however, took notice during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India in 2014, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted him in Ahmedabad and Raj Nagar, Gujarat. This visit stood out for the unprecedented camaraderie between Modi and Xi. The "Chai Pe Charcha" and stroll along the Sabarmati River, along with traditional Gujarati delicacies, were a new experience for Xi (though, in an ironic twist, while enjoying hot and crispy pakoras, Xi had already instructed the PLA to provoke incidents along the India-China border). After this visit, India hosted several significant events, including the G-20 summit. For the first time in India's history, global dignitaries were taken beyond the capital to experience the diversity of the subcontinent. They were captivated by India's opulence and natural beauty, pushing the country to the forefront of desirable travel destinations.

India truly has something for everyone. The enchanting beauty of Kashmir, the stunning landscapes of the northeast, the lush jungles of the south, and the winding rivers of Krishna, Kaveri, and Godavari, along with the mesmerizing western coastline, are sure to attract hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. The concept of tourism has evolved over the last decade, and it is no longer just about leisure. The serene locations across India can rejuvenate the spirit, and the ancient Ayurvedic medicine system offers a holistic experience, revitalizing both body and soul. An untapped potential in India's tourism sector is MICE tourism—Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions. Pradeep Shetty, president of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India, believes that MICE tourism could play a crucial role in positioning India as a global tourism powerhouse. Beyond its cultural and scenic wealth, the sector offers immense job and business potential, catering to both skilled and unskilled labour, as well as entrepreneurs. Hotels in India are no longer limited to luxury chains like Taj Residencies or Hilton. Even clean, hygienic, and safe accommodations that serve regional cuisine with a smile can qualify as excellent hospitality options, regardless of star ratings.



## INDIA'S TOURISM BOOM: A JOURNEY BEYOND THE ICONS

### UNVEILING THE FUTURE OF INDIA'S HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

**PRADEEP SHETTY**, President of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), is currently preparing for the association's 54th annual convention, set to take place in October 2024. In an exclusive interview with *Kumar Chellappan*, Shetty shared insights into the immense potential of India's hospitality and tourism sector, its challenges, and the expectations from both the central and state governments

**What is the real potential of the hospitality and tourism industry?**  
India's hospitality and tourism industry is on a remarkable growth trajectory. According to Mordor Intelligence, the sector is projected to reach a valuation of USD 247.31 billion by 2024, with forecasts indicating it could soar to USD 475.37 billion by 2029, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.96%. Key trends driving this growth include a shift towards sustainable tourism, with eco-friendly accommodations and community-based initiatives gaining traction. India's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and geopolitical stability further bolster this expansion. However, to fully capitalize on its potential, the industry must address sustainability, infrastructure development, and adaptability to evolving consumer preferences.

**How do you view the current and future employment trends in the hospitality sector?**  
Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality sector is expected to rebound strongly. The India Food Services Report-2024 projects that by 2025, the sector will employ approximately ten million people. The industry's resilience, coupled with advancements in accommodation and government initiatives to promote tourism, supports its significant role in job creation.



**PRADEEP SHETTY**  
President, Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI)

**What are the prospects for job creation in the hotel and restaurant industry over the coming years?**  
India's hospitality and tourism sector has the potential to generate 50 million direct and indirect jobs in the next 5-7 years. This growth will depend on robust government support, including granting industry and infrastructure status at various levels. The sector's resilience and strategic investments, along with effective policy implementation, are critical for shaping its employment landscape. Notably, the industry has already seen a 14% increase in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) in the first half of the current fiscal year, with expectations of a further 15-20% growth in the latter half of FY24.

**What does the industry expect from the Government of India and state governments?**  
The industry seeks favorable policies that encourage investment, reduce regulatory burdens, and provide tax incentives. Essential infrastructure development, such as improved roads, airports, and connectivity, is crucial. State governments should align regional policies with national goals, streamline hotel project approvals, and support skill development through training programs. Promoting India as a global destination requires targeted campaigns that highlight its cultural diversity and unique experiences. Post-pandemic, enforcing health and safety protocols is vital for rebuilding traveler confidence, while state governments should foster sustainable tourism and create a

business-friendly environment by simplifying licensing and permits. Public-private partnerships and engagement with industry stakeholders are also key to enhancing tourism growth.

**Has the Government of India shown any commitment to granting infrastructure status to the hospitality sector?**  
The Government of India's interest in granting infrastructure status to the hospitality sector is a promising development. If approved, this status could attract more investments and empower the sector to contribute to the development of the 50 new destinations recently announced by the government.

**What benefits would infrastructure status bring to the industry?**  
Granting infrastructure status to the hospitality sector could provide access to more favorable financing options, including better interest rates. Currently, the lack of industry status in several states results in higher power tariffs and interest rates. Infrastructure status would incentivize both domestic and international investments, fostering stability and growth within the sector.

**As the current President of FHRAI, how well is the Federation positioned to address these issues with regulators?**  
The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant

Associations of India (FHRAI), founded in 1955, is the apex hospitality association in India and the third largest globally. It represents 55,000 hotels and 500,000 restaurants across the country. FHRAI advocates for the industry's interests, engaging with government bodies, regulatory agencies, and other stakeholders to promote growth and address challenges.

**What are the major issues facing the industry, and what do you expect the government to do about them?**  
The hospitality industry faces several critical challenges that require strategic solutions. First, GST rationalization is needed to implement a uniform rate of 12% across all hotels. Second, separating GST on food services from room rates would address high costs and complex regulations. Third, granting infrastructure status would provide access to better financing options and encourage investment. Finally, uniform sectoral reforms and streamlined business processes under the Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) would attract more investments. The government should simplify regulations, support infrastructure development, and provide incentives for training and technology to foster a vibrant and resilient tourism industry. Addressing these issues will enhance service quality and support industry growth.

INDIA'S HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SECTOR HAS THE POTENTIAL TO GENERATE 50 MILLION DIRECT AND INDIRECT JOBS IN THE NEXT 5-7 YEARS. THIS GROWTH WILL DEPEND ON ROBUST GOVERNMENT SUPPORT, INCLUDING GRANTING INDUSTRY AND INFRASTRUCTURE STATUS AT VARIOUS LEVELS





BY SHARMILA CHAND

Onam, the harvest festival of Kerala, is renowned for its grand feast known as the Sadya. Also known as Thiruvonam or Thiruvonam, this is a harvest festival that celebrates the return of King Mahabali/Maveli to his beloved state. It's a time of thanksgiving for the bountiful crops. Truly, what adds to the festival is the tradition of the 'Onam Sadya'.

Traditionally, an Onam Sadya consists of around 24 to 64 dishes. What sets this meal apart is its intricate balance of tastes—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and spicy—all harmoniously combined to create a delightful experience.

The number of dishes vary based on the region. There is a specific order in which the dishes are served on the banana leaf. It usually starts with serving the rice, followed by various curries, pickles, and desserts.

Interestingly, the feast is traditionally eaten with the hands, believed to enhance the sensory experience of the varied flavours. Families and communities come together to enjoy the feast, which is a way to celebrate the bountiful harvest, express gratitude, and bring people together in a spirit of joy and togetherness.

People decorate their homes with floral arrangements called "Pookkalam" and wear traditional attire during the festival for a holistic experience, an integral and cherished part of the celebration.

**Folding the Banana Leaf Is Important**

Towards You: Once you've finished eating, fold the banana leaf towards you. This helps to signify that you've enjoyed the meal and are satisfied. The grandeur of Onam Sadya awaits you offering annual culinary extravaganza in Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Pune and Bengaluru.

**EXCLUSIVE ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA AT SOUTH OF VINDHYAS, THE ORCHID HOTEL, MUMBAI**

South of Vindhyas, the authentic Southern Indian restaurant at The Orchid Hotel Mumbai, is all set to



welcome the diners for the much-awaited ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA feast. This exclusive culinary experience promises an immersive experience for guests to the rich flavors of Kerala, in authentic style.

Chef Bala Subramaniam, the culinary maestro behind South of Vindhyas, has meticulously crafted a menu featuring 56 authentic dishes that capture the true essence of Southern India. Upon arrival, guests will be greeted with a refreshing Kachia Moru (Buttermilk) or a warm Thakkali Rasam (Tomato Soup), setting the tone for the culinary journey ahead. The feast unfolds with a variety of crispy and flavorful chips, including Banana Chips, Jackfruit Chips, Plantain Chips, and the ever-popular Nendrankai Chips. Guests can indulge in an array of traditional breads like Appam, Kal Dosa, and Malabari Paratha with main course, which includes a diverse selection of vegetarian dishes that celebrate the harvest. From Olan (Chowlibeans & White Pumpkin) and Kalan (Suran) to the flavorful Avial and Kootu Curry and much more, each dish is a celebration of Kerala's culinary heritage. A variety of pachadis (pickles) such as Vellari Pachadi (Cucumber Pickle), Pavakkai Pachadi (Ridge Gourd Pickle), Bhindi Pachadi (Okra Pickle), and Manga Curry (Mango Curry) add a tangy twist to the meal. Complementing the spread are rice preparations including Red Rice, Steamed Rice, Lemon Sevai, and Coconut Sevai.

To conclude the meal, guests can indulge in a range of traditional sweets like Ada Pradhaman, Kadala Pradhaman (Black Gram Payasam), and Mambazha Pradhaman/Chakka Pradhaman (Mango/Jackfruit Payasam), along with other delightful treats like Pazham Pori (Banana Fritters) and Panchamrutham (Sweet Nectar).

Step in and you will be transported to Kerala with the venue adorned in beautifully arranged banana leaves and vibrant rangoli patterns. Enhancing the authenticity, the staff will be dressed in traditional South Indian attire adding a genuine touch of Kerala's rich heritage to your dining experience. The ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA at South of Vindhyas is not just a meal; it's a celebration of culture, tradition, and the joy of sharing food with loved ones. The meticulously prepared dishes, the vibrant ambiance, and the warm hospitality make this an experience not to be missed.

**LUNCH & DINNER**  
12th to 16th September  
At South of Vindhyas,  
The Orchid Hotel Mumbai  
Contact : 7506010316

# CELEBRATE THE SPIRIT OF ONAM WITH SADHYA ROOTED IN TRADITION

The Onam is a celebration of culture, tradition, nature's bounty, symbolising harvest festivals and expressing gratitude, bringing families, communities together in a spirit of joy and togetherness



**SADHYA CULINARY VOYAGE AT SANA DI GE, DELHI**

Sana-di-ge, the well known culinary haven for coastal cuisine enthusiasts, is set to treat the patrons once again with an exceptional Sadya experience. The acclaimed restaurant, like every year, promises a sensory journey into the diverse and aromatic world of coastal India's gastronomic legacy. The stunning entrance with beautifully oil lit diya is the reminder of its name - Sana-di-ge, derived from the Tulu language meaning a brass lamp. The restaurant is known for its authentic coastal recipes curated with freshly sourced ingredients. The extensive menu comprises delicacies from Mangalore, Goa, Maharashtra, and Kerala. The food here is served on brass plates lined with plantain leaves giving an experience of Dakshina Kannada dining.

Savour a symphony of Sadya feast with dishes, elegantly served on traditional banana leaves. Says Executive Chef Suresh Kanchan, "In our Sadya menu, each dish captures the essence of Kerala's culinary heritage. The highlights of the menu are Sambharam - Spicy buttermilk with fresh coriander, ginger and curry leaves; Upperi - Banana chips; Sharkara Upperi - Sweet banana chips; Kosambari Salad - Traditional Kannadiga salad; Cabbage



**THE ADIPOLI ONAM SADHYA AT SOUTH OF VINDHYAS IS NOT JUST A MEAL; IT'S A CELEBRATION OF CULTURE, TRADITION, AND THE JOY OF SHARING FOOD WITH LOVED ONES**



Thoran; Mezhukku Puratti - Stir fried raw banana finished with coconut silvers & crushed dry red chilli; Avial and a lot more. The feast concludes on a sweet note with the signature 'Chana Dal Payasam', a melding of jaggery, cow's milk, coconut milk, and chana dal.

The culinary art and decor of Sana-di-ge are sure to transport patrons to the kitchens of the coast bringing in a one-of-a-kind experience.

**LUNCH & DINNER**  
12th to 16th September  
22/48 Malcha Marg, New Delhi  
Contact : 01140507777

**ONAM SADHYA EXTRAVAGANZA AT TAJ RESORTS, GOA**

Celebrate the joyous occasion of Sadya at the luxurious Taj Holiday Village Resort & Spa and Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa. Chef Dibyendu Roy and Chef Somnath Rakesh are all set to prepare Sadya where each dish comes in its authentic style, ensuring that the flavours and textures are true to tradition. The meal is served in a traditional setting, complete with banana leaves and copper vessels, service team in traditional ensemble, creating a truly immersive experience. Beyond the culinary delights, the Onam celebrations at these resorts also feature Carnatic music playing in the background. These performances offer guests a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of Kerala and add to the festive atmosphere. By celebrating Onam with traditional food and cultural performances, Taj Holiday Village and Taj Fort Aguada are fostering a sense of community and preserving the rich heritage of Kerala.

**Venue :** Caravela at Taj Holiday Village  
**Date :** Lunch On 15th Sept  
**Venue :** Kokum Kitchen at Taj Fort Aguada  
**Date :** Lunch on 14th and 15th Sept

**ONAM SADYA AT SANTOSHAM, MUMBAI**

Santosham Foods is thrilled to unveil its beloved Onam Sadya, where tradition meets taste in a celebration that promises to be nothing short of spectacular.

At Santosham, which aptly translates to 'Happiness' or 'Joy' in Malayalam and Tamil, the team is passionate about delivering an experience that lives up to its name.

Founded in May 2022, Santosham Foods has become synonymous with genuine South Indian flavors in Mumbai. While the city is known for its love of South Indian cuisine, finding those truly authentic tastes amidst a sea of fusion trends is rare. That's where Santosham comes in, offering a slice of home with every dish.

The Head Chef and Co-Founder, Bhagyalakshmi Gohokar, brings her rich heritage to her kitchen. Growing up in the bustling environment of Shanti Bhavan in Nagpur, she has always been surrounded by the irresistible aroma of freshly brewed filter coffee and crispy medu vadas. Her childhood memories of watching the magic of South Indian cooking unfold have inspired her to bring these authentic flavours to Mumbai.

This year's celebration promises to be even more memorable, with a menu featuring over 40 traditional dishes that will transport your taste buds straight to South India. From the rich and sweet Palada Pradhaman to the spicy and tangy Lemon Achar & Manga Kari, each dish is crafted with love and care, reflecting the true spirit of Onam.

"Last year, we had the pleasure of serving over 2,000 delighted diners during Onam, and this year, we're set to create even more unforgettable experiences. Our Sadya is not just a meal; it's a vibrant celebration of tradition, culture and culinary excellence.

So, come and join us at Santosham for a feast that's brimming with flavour and festivity. Whether you're a longtime fan or a first-time guest, our Onam Sadya is sure to leave you with a smile and a satisfied belly," says Bhagyalakshmi.

**Dates:** September 13th, 14th, 15th, 21st, & 22nd  
**Location:** Powai, Chandivali  
**Date:** September 14th & 15th  
**Location:** Manpada, Thane

**EXQUISITE SADHYA AT THE SHERATON GRAND PUNE BUND GARDEN HOTEL**

Celebrate the spirit of Onam with a traditional Sadya at the Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel. Feast starts with classic starters like Dal Wada, and Medu Vada, perfectly complemented by refreshing Sambar and the Ingi Thayir. Next are the traditional condiments like Sarakara Uperi, Nendran Chips, and Mango Pickle that set the stage for the main course. A vast range of authentic delights such as the Avial, Kadla Curry, Olan, and Thoran, all served with the aromatic Ponni Rice, flaky Pooris and finished with the comforting Thayir Sadam. Indulge in Paruppu Payasam and the Banana Sheera to complete the feast.

**Lunch** On 13th, 14th, and 15th of September  
At Feast, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel

**GRAND SADHYA AT HILTON BANGALORE EMBASSY GOLFLINKS**

Savour timeless classics like the appetizing Neyyappam, wholesome Avial, Kootu Curry, Thoran, Olan, Kalan, Pachadi, Inji Puli, and Erissery, each crafted with a perfect balance of spices to awaken your senses to be enjoyed with the wholesome goodness of Parippu, Matta rice and the delightful flavours of Sambar and Rasam, all served on the traditional banana leaf. Conclude your Sadya on a sweet note with desserts such as Paal Payasam.

**Venue:** MOF, Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks  
**Date:** 15th September  
**Timing:** 12:30 pm to 04:00 pm

Sharmila Chand is a senior Journalist and Author who writes on Food, Travel, Lifestyle.





# A FUSION OF LUXURY, TRADITION AND CULINARY EXCELLENCE

Discover how Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla, brings dreams to life with its exquisite and personalised approach to creating unforgettable wedding celebrations, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

**C**rowne Plaza recently presented a magnificent Wedding Showcase, offering an immersive experience that symbolises elegance and grandeur. The event showcased the hotel's ability to create unforgettable wedding celebrations with a blend of stunning venues, luxurious decor and exceptional culinary offerings.

## A GRAND WELCOME: SETTING THE TONE FOR ELEGANCE

The red and white theme, aesthetic lighting and wedding-themed photo booth set a vibrant and warm tone for the evening. Guests were greeted with an opulent welcome as they entered the beautifully decorated lobby. The grand entrance was further enhanced by the Red Wedding Hues Tunnel, accompanied by the traditional shehnai music, creating a memorable and enchanting atmosphere from the very start. The grand welcome was a perfect introduction to Crowne Plaza's commitment to blending luxury with tradition, ensuring that guests felt special and immersed in the wedding experience right from the beginning.

## EMERALD BALLROOM: A GLAMOROUS COCKTAIL EVENING

The Emerald Ballroom was transformed into a glamorous cocktail venue with a black and glitter theme, highlighted by a breathtaking chandelier. Accommodating up to 400 guests, the ballroom provided an elegant setting enhanced by a soulful Sufi live band, which created a magical and romantic ambience for the evening. The Emerald Ballroom exemplified Crowne Plaza's ability to create a luxurious and adaptable space, making it an ideal setting for a grand wedding reception that



can be tailored to the couple's preferences.

## JADE LAWN: A SERENE OUTDOOR CEREMONY

The Jade Lawn offered a picturesque outdoor setting for the wedding ceremony. Adorned with floral decor and soft lighting, the lawn, which can host up to 500 guests, provided a serene backdrop for the bride and groom's vows. The vibrant mandap, decorated with red and white flowers against lush greenery, created an elegant and natural atmosphere. The Jade Lawn was an ideal venue for couples seeking a tranquil and naturally beautiful outdoor setting for their wedding, showcasing Crowne Plaza's ability to create serene and picturesque environments.

## OPAL BANQUET: A VIBRANT HALDI CEREMONY

The Opal Banquet was transformed into a lively venue for

the Haldi ceremony with a vibrant yellow and blue theme. The banquet, which accommodates 180 guests, featured joyful decor, including entries decorated with yellow marigold flowers, capturing the essence of the traditional ceremony. The Opal Banquet's vibrant and traditional setting perfectly captured the joyous spirit of the Haldi ceremony, reflecting Crowne Plaza's attention to detail and commitment to creating memorable pre-wedding rituals.

## POOLSIDE: A FESTIVE MEHENDI CELEBRATION

The poolside venue was styled for a vibrant Mehendi night with colorful decor in red, yellow, pink, and green. This intimate space, accommodating 60 guests, featured delightful food and drinks, creating a lively and festive atmosphere for an unforgettable celebration. The poolside setup was perfect for an intimate yet vibrant Mehendi



celebration, demonstrating Crowne Plaza's expertise in crafting fun and festive environments for wedding events.

## CHAOBELLA: A CHIC BOHEMIAN DINNER EXPERIENCE

The evening concluded with a Bohemian-themed sit-down dinner at ChaoBella. The al fresco setup, adorned with chic

bohemian decor, offered a stylish and intimate dining experience, providing a perfect end to the showcase with its elegant and relaxed ambience. ChaoBella's Bohemian-themed dinner provided a sophisticated and unique dining experience, showcasing ability to deliver memorable and stylish wedding receptions.

## CULINARY EXCELLENCE: A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

Food is an integral part of any celebration and Crowne Plaza excelled in delivering an exceptional culinary experience. The showcase featured an array of mouthwatering dishes, like *kulkad wale taka-e-tak*, a variety of *idlis - ragi, vegetables and steaming hot idlis* - paired with five types of *chutneys*. *Street-style chats* and *pani puri*'s added a burst of flavours, while the dessert table was a highlight with options like *berry panna cotta, tres leches cake, tiramisu, brownies* and the star dessert - *badam halwa*. Each dish, from the street-style treats to the exotic desserts, demonstrated the hotel's dedication to providing an extraordinary dining experience with a diverse range of flavours meticulously prepared by talented chefs. The culinary offerings were a standout feature of the event, showcasing Crowne Plaza's commitment to excellence with a



diverse and delectable menu that catered to all tastes and preferences, enhancing the overall wedding experience.

## CRAFTING UNFORGETTABLE WEDDING EXPERIENCES

"At Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla, we believe in creating wedding experiences that are as unique and special as the couples themselves," said the General Manager. "This showcase was a glimpse into the endless possibilities we can offer, from personalised decor to gourmet cuisine, ensuring that every wedding is truly unforgettable." Wedding Showcase exemplified their commitment to creating exceptional wedding experiences. From the grand entrance to the diverse and delectable culinary offerings, every detail was designed to impress. As the General Manager noted, "We strive to make every wedding unique and unforgettable."

The Wedding Showcase at Crowne Plaza exemplified luxury and attention to detail. With stunning venues, exquisite decor and a diverse culinary spread, the event demonstrated the hotel's dedication to crafting unforgettable wedding experiences. Crowne Plaza is ready to turn every couple's vision into a unique celebration, ensuring each moment is as special as their love story.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

## CANVAS OF HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION

**Artix 3.0**, the much-awaited sequel in New Delhi, once again dazzled art enthusiasts by bringing a vivid fusion of indigenous and global art to the forefront. The event, held at *The Claridges Hotel*, showcased the power of creativity, seamlessly blending the worlds of tribal art, textiles and luxury and creating an unforgettable experience for both artists and visitors says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Entering the transformed Spaces of The Claridges Hotel, attendees immediately sensed the magic in the air. Each room was thoughtfully curated to provide a distinct narrative, turning the venue into an immersive, multi-dimensional art gallery. The transformation was not just physical but also emotional, offering art lovers and connoisseurs a unique opportunity to engage deeply with the artworks, live installations and textile displays. It felt as if each room had its own story waiting to be discovered. The lineup of galleries was extraordinary, featuring established names like *Treasure Art Gallery, Artrise Art, 108 Art Projects, Bespoke Art Gallery, Ashvita's and Vision Art Gallery*, among others. These galleries, along with solo artists like *Aanchal Garg, Shobha Broota and Cholamandal*, created a vibrant mosaic of artistic expression that was both diverse and profound. Artists such as *Raza Husain, Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Anjolie Ela Menon and Prabhakar Kolte* showcased their works, alongside renowned names like *FN Souza, Laxma Goud and Manu Parekh*, adding depth and dimension to the event. The inclusion of luxury brands such as *Heeramaneck & Son Fine Jewellery, Lotus Arts de Vivre and Chayroot x Prabhu Viswanathan* further enriched the event,



creating a confluence of art, fashion, and design that was truly mesmerising. A special highlight of the opening was an engaging session featuring luminaries like *Satish Gupta, Prayag Shukla, Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Shobha Broota and Arpana Caur*, followed by a curatorial walkthrough by *Jyoti Kathpalia*. The discussions were insightful, providing a deeper understanding of the themes and ideas that shaped this year's Artix. Each day was packed with activities that encourage interaction and exploration, enriching a vibrant dialogue between artists, collectors, and art lovers. The exhibition also paid tribute to the lesser-known but equally captivating traditions of Indian art. *The Devi Art Foundation* presented "A Little Bird Told Me..." featuring artworks by the Tribal Women Artists Collective from Hazaribagh, Jharkhand. This collective has worked tirelessly to keep the centuries-old traditions of the Kohvar (marriage) and Sohrai (harvest) wall paintings alive, transitioning these from the mud walls of village homes to paper, ensuring their survival and giving women artists a means to sustain themselves. These panels, with their vivid



depictions of flora, fauna and life, evoked a deep connection to the past while providing a glimpse into the future of tribal art in India. Similarly, the work of *Usman Tirandaz* from Rajasthan, known for his intricate depictions using pigments on cloth, added another layer of cultural richness to the exhibition. *Shobha Broota*, one of India's most celebrated contemporary artists, showcased her ethereal canvases that possess a deceptive simplicity. Her works, characterised by abstract forms, rhythmic lines and rich textures, brought a sense of calm and introspection to the event. Broota's unique artistic journey, from portraiture to abstract and



her ongoing exploration of the spiritual and metaphysical, captivated visitors and provided a contemplative counterpoint to the more vibrant displays. The corporate social initiative AADYAM Handwoven, by the Aditya Birla Group, added another dimension to Artix 3.0 by showcasing the intricate craftsmanship of weavers from various parts of India, such as Varanasi, Pochampally, Bhuj, Kashmir and Bhadohi. Their efforts to create a self-sustaining ecosystem for artisans were evident in the quality and diversity of the textiles displayed, which celebrated age-old weaving techniques while appealing to contemporary tastes.



What made *Artix 3.0* truly special was its ability to humanise the experience of art. It went beyond just exhibition spaces and brought together a community, creating a dynamic space where art was not only viewed but felt. It challenged the conventional gallery model, making art more accessible and intimate. The organiser's, led by *Payal Kapoor, Malvika Poddar and Sethu Vaidyanathan*, envisioned a traveling art affair that not only defied traditional norms but also celebrated the multitude of forms that art can take. Their dedication and passion were visible in every corner of the exhibition, making Artix a unique and memorable experience.



*Artix 3.0* succeeded in capturing the essence of what makes art truly powerful, its ability to connect people across boundaries, evoke emotions and inspire new ways of thinking. The atmosphere was electric, filled with conversations that ranged from the technical aspects of a painting to the deeper philosophical questions it raised. *Artix 3.0* was more than just an art exhibition - it was a celebration of creativity, a gathering of minds and a bold statement that art is for everyone.

As *Artix 3.0* works to expand to other cities like Bangalore, Mumbai and Kolkata, it is hoped that it will continue to build on this momentum, bringing its unique blend of luxury, creativity and accessibility to new audiences. For those who had the chance to experience *Artix 3.0*, it was a reminder of why art matters and how it has the power to transform spaces, people and even our understanding of the world. *Artix 3.0* served as a vivid reminder that art is not just something to be looked at but something to be experienced, felt and lived. And that, in itself, is its greatest achievement.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

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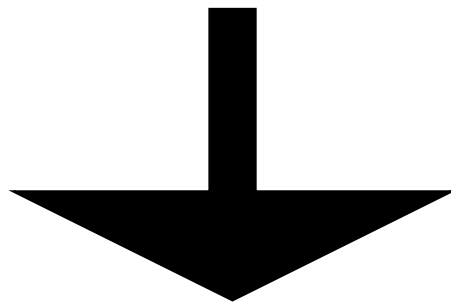
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