





BRIEFLY

Impossible to ask probe team on Dharmasthala ‘murders’ to give time-bound report, says K’taka HM

**Bengaluru:** Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameshwara on Saturday stated that it is impossible to ask the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to submit its report on the alleged Dharmasthala mass murder case within a time-bound framework. Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, HM Parameshwara said, “We have only asked the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to expedite the probe into the alleged Dharmasthala murder case. It is not possible to ask them to submit a report within a fixed timeframe.” He added that it is currently unclear which direction the investigation is heading, “If the investigation is completed early, the report will be submitted accordingly. Otherwise, the SIT will continue probing the case until they reach a conclusion,” he said. “These are not matters where we can demand that the investigation be completed in a certain manner or within a stipulated period. A specific timeframe cannot be given in this case,” HM Parameshwara emphasised. He reiterated that the SIT has been asked to fast-track the investigation into the case, but ultimately, the decisions lies with the investigating team.

Gang rape accused shot in leg in Karnataka’s Belagavi

**Belagavi:** Karnataka police on Saturday shot a gang rape accused in the leg when he tried to escape by attacking policemen in Belagavi district of the state. According to police, the incident has taken place in the limits of Kittur police station. Ramesh Killar, is the accused person who has been shot in the leg. Police stated that Ramesh Killar is accused in a gang rape case, a case of dacoity, one robbery and an arms case. Three Non-Bailable Warrants (NBW) were executed against the accused. Gathering information about the accused, the Kittur police team had gone to arrest Ramesh Killar at 6 A.M. on Saturday.

TN launches ₹84-lakh project to track Olive Ridley turtles

**Chennai:** The Tamil Nadu government has sanctioned Rs 84 lakh for a two-year study to track the fine-scale movements of Olive Ridley turtles along the State’s coastline, aiming to strengthen conservation measures and reduce turtle mortality. The initiative, running from 2025 to 2027, will employ advanced telemetry technology to monitor turtle behaviour, nesting patterns, and their interactions with fishing activities. The move comes after hundreds of Olive Ridley turtles were found dead along the northern TN coast between December 2024 and March 2025, many suspected to have perished after becoming entangled in fishing nets. According to a Government Order issued by Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Forests, 20 Olive Ridley turtles will be fitted with satellite transmitters at key nesting sites, including the Chennai coast and the Cauvery Delta.

Conspiracy to replicate SIR in TN will be defeated: CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
Chennai, 30 August

Asserting that any conspiracy to replicate Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Tamil Nadu by the Election Commission (EC) will be defeated, Chief Minister and ruling DMK president MK Stalin on Saturday said the state had the necessary wherewithal to accomplish that.

“Whatever might be the plan of the EC, the SIR will not succeed even in Bihar. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned any attempt to impose such an exercise it will be thwarted and we have the wherewithal to accomplish that,” the Chief Minister told the media at the Chennai airport before leaving for his European tour of Germany and the United Kingdom.

Sharing what he saw and observed in Bihar where he teamed up with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav and CPI-ML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya in the ongoing



Vote Adhikar Yatra, he said the EC had awakened the people and made them aware of their vote. In his view, it has become counterproductive. Stalin, accompanied by his sister and DMK Deputy General Secretary Kanimozhi, MP, had joined the yatra, which is getting a massive response.

Responding to a question on the recent opinion poll, predicting a landslide for the BJP if Lok Sabha elections are held now, Stalin was dismissive of that and said the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA), comprising the Congress, Left Parties, VCK, MDMK and Muslim Parties and the

Tamizhaga Vazhuvurimai Katchi, will register a resounding victory as in the past. The Chief Minister declined to comment on actor-turned neta Vijay’s claim that the 2026 assembly election is a direct contest between his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) and the DMK. “No comment,” was his response. Vijay, attempting to position himself as the alternative and as the ideological heir of Dravidian icons, Anna and Periyar, has been targeting the DMK as the TVK’s primary political enemy and the BJP as the ideological enemy.

On reports of new parties entering the DMK-led front,

Stalin said, “Whether new parties are coming or not, new voters are coming to the DMK. This is the truth.” There are reports of the DMDK of late actor Vijayakanth, led by his wife Premalatha, as well as a faction of the PMK joining the DMK-led front. The DMDK teaming up with the DMK combine gained credence after Premalatha called on Stalin on his return from the Hospital a fortnight ago.

The Chief Minister was dismissive of the opposition criticism of his foreign jaunts to scout for investment. All the MoUs entered into will bear fruit with some having set their shops already while others are in the final stages of completion, he said adding since he took over office in 2021, the state had signed 922 MoUs, attracting over Rs 10 lakh crore ensuring employment opportunities for 32.81 lakh people. “Securing foreign investment by making Tamil Nadu a prime destination for investments is to achieve the target of making the state One Trillion Dollar economy by 2030,” he said.

Azhar to be MLC as Cong looks for BC candidate in Jubilee Hills

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
Hyderabad, 30 August



The Telangana Cabinet’s decision to nominate former cricketer Mohammad Azharuddin as MLC under the government’s quota will ensure that chief minister A Revanth Reddy has a free hand to decide on his own candidate for the upcoming bypoll for the Jubilee Hills constituency, deemed to be a prestige fight. Azharuddin, who lost from the same seat during the Assembly elections in 2023, had, on his own, announced his candidature from Jubilee Hills, but the chief minister

seemed reluctant to renominate him once again. The Congress is reportedly considering fielding a BC candidate this time. The state Cabinet today decided to nominate Professor M Kodandaram as MLC, along with Azharuddin, under the governor’s quota after the Supreme Court struck down his earlier nomination. Chief minister Revanth Reddy had his way in deciding the party candidate for the Jubilee Hills constituency, which will be a prestige fight for the Congress since the party had failed to win a single seat in Hyderabad in the Assembly elections, 2023.

Birla stresses Centre-state coordination for SC/ST empowerment

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
Bhubaneswar, 30 August

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Saturday underlined that coordinated efforts between the Centre and States are essential for the empowerment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Concluding the two-day National Conference of Chairpersons of Committees on the Welfare of SCs and STs of Parliament and State Legislatures here, Birla announced that a “Bhubaneswar Agenda 2025” will soon be framed with actionable recommendations for the government.

The Speaker said that the deliberations focused on ideas, innovations, technology, and best practices being followed by state legislatures and Parliament committees. “All these suggestions will be studied, and a consensus-driven Bhubaneswar Agenda 2025 will emerge to further strengthen and empower SCs and STs,” he noted. It will be a roadmap for an equitable and inclusive society by 2047, he added.

Highlighting that every state faces unique challenges, Birla emphasized the need for identifying common ground. He pointed out that this was the first such conference held outside Delhi in 25 years.

Education and technology are key drivers of future empowerment of SC/ST youth, he said while adding that recommendations of committee should be seen as constructive guidance, not as criticism.

Calling for synergy between central and state governments, the Speaker said, “Only through such coordinated effort can the true benefits of development and progress reach marginalized communities.” He also urged State Assemblies to constitute dedicated Committees on the Welfare of SCs and STs to ensure sustained attention and accountability.

Birla stressed that the overarching goal remains the vision of Babasaheb Ambedkar—an equitable, just, and inclusive society. He expressed confidence that the Bhubaneswar Agenda 2025 will serve as a guiding framework for future legislative action.

One dead in Kerala’s Kannur in suspected bomb-making incident



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
Thiruvananthapuram, 30 August

One person was killed in a powerful explosion that took place at a house at Keezhara near Kannapuram in Kerala’s Kannur district. The explosion that happened

at around 2 am on Saturday, has completely destroyed the tile-roofed house.

The intensity of the blast was so powerful that it shook the houses within the radius of 500 meters. The shock waves damaged many nearby houses, breaking doors and leaving cracks in walls. The police suspect

that the blast occurred during the making of country bombs. The deceased has been identified as Muhammed Asham, a native of Chalad in Kannur.

His body parts were found scattered across the site. The police, the bomb squad, dog squad and fire and rescue team has reached the scene. It is not

known whether more persons are trapped under the debris. Heavy machinery was brought to the site to clear the debris. The house, belonged to a retired teacher, Govindan, was rented out to one Anoop Malik. He was earlier booked by police in connection with a bomb making case.

Manushi to hit the screens after prolonged court battle challenging CBFC terming it anti-national

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
Chennai, 30 August

Successfully challenging the Censor Board denying film certification on the ground that the Andrea Jeremiah-starrer ‘Manushi’ is anti-national and directing 30 cuts, the film is all set to hit the screens shortly.

With Madras High Court giving the green nod after Justice N Anand Venkatesh had a private screening of the movie and exclaiming that it ‘masterfully explores the dark underbelly of power’, the film crew is readying it for release. The Judge had ordered minor modifications as against the 25 cuts and 12 modifications mandated by the CBFC.

Claiming it as a victory for freedom of expression to critique society and the state, the film’s director Gopi Nainar said: ‘Manushi opens up a conversation in order to expand the democratic space and be conscious of the failure of the state as well as society in addressing the structures of oppression. In a country like India, it is not enough to have legislations to curtail casteist atrocities and highhandedness of the instruments of the state. What is needed is



implementation.”

On why the CBFC had perceived the film as anti-national, he said “They see things through the prism of Hindutva which has set a framework which is opposed to any violation of ascribed identity and transgression of ascribed location. It has been the case for over 2000 years. In the movie, the female lead attempts at a democratic conversation.”

The film is produced by acclaimed national award winning filmmaker Vetrimaran he had approached the court for the second time since the CBFC insisted on the 37 cuts. The director Gopi Nainar, a well known Dalit activist, rose to fame with his first movie, ‘Aram’ in which the lead was played by female superstar,

Nayanthara.

After watching the movie on August 24, along with CBFC officials, the Judge delivered the verdict on Friday. In his judgement, he wrote: ‘Manushi is a poignant cinematic reflection of how ordinary lives can be torn apart when systematic prejudices and State machinery collide in moments of political suspicion. At its heart, the film narrates the story of a humble father and his young daughter, who find themselves ensnared in a police dragnet because they leased part of their modest property to three women, later branded as extremists. What begins as a gesture of goodwill spirals into a nightmare, as layers of suspicion, ideological bias and caste prejudice converge against innocent lives.”

Kerala readies for 26-dish Onam Sadhya

AGENCIES  
Thiruvananthapuram, 30 August

When Onam arrives, Kerala awakens not only in a riot of flowers and festivities but also in the irresistible aroma of the Onam Sadhya -- the grand vegetarian banquet spread on a glossy green plantain leaf.

More than a meal, it is a sensory experience that binds heritage, flavour, and fellowship into one unforgettable celebration.

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
**E-TENDER NOTICE**  
AMM/EMU/GZB acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender against NIT No. 46255313 Dt-28-08-2025 The details are as under:  
1. **Name of Work:** (1) Current Insulated Cylindrical Roller Bearing for ND-End of Medha motor of SKF make bearing no. NU 318 ECMRA/C4VA3091R2 INSOCOAT + HJ 318 ECVA301 (Make: SKF-imported) for MEDHA make MOTOR TME 48-45-6 as Medha part no. SPTSA700179P0001 or Schaeffler bearing NU318-E-M1-F1-J20AA-C4-M32N along with angle ring HJ318-E-F1 (imported make only). Qty -64 Nos. and (2) CURRENT INSULATED CYLINDRICAL ROLLER BEARING NU322 ECMRA/C4VA3091R2 INSOCOAT FOR DE OF SKF (IMPORTED ONLY) for MEDHA make MOTOR TME 48-45-6 CR as MS MEDHA PART NO SPTSA700099P0003 OR EQUIVALENT MAKE OF Schaeffler/FAG (IMPORTED). Qty -64 Nos.  
2. **Approx. cost of work** 70,84,159.36/-  
3. **Quantity** (1) 64 Nos. (2) 64 Nos.  
4. **Last Date & Time of Submission of tender bid of tender:** 26-09-2025 (11:00 Hrs.)  
5. **Date of Time of Opening of tender document** 26-09-2025 (11:00 Hrs.)  
6. **Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen:** www.ireps.gov.in  
Note: (i) The tenderers must be registered on the Indian Railways E-Procurement System (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in.  
(ii) Please refer to the tender document for all terms and conditions.  
(iii) No manual offers are acceptable.  
NIT No.-46255313 Date:28-08-2025 2636/2025  
**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE**

**HIMACHAL PRADESH JAL SHAKTI VIBHAG**  
**SHORT NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER**  
Online bids on items rate basis are invited by the Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division, Shilla on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh, in electronic tendering system in two covers for the under mentioned work from the contractors/firms of appropriate class enlisted with Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Vibhag.  
Sr. No. Description E/ Cost E/Money Time Cost of Item  
1 C/O F/S To Benot Manal in G.F. Laza Manal Tehsil Shilla District Sirmour HP under (NABARD) (SH) - C/O 2 Nos. diversion weir 2 Nos. RCC collection chamber, Cement concrete main channel & pucca field channel, C/O of 5 Nos. RCC outlet in part-1.82 and laying & jointing of GMS pipes 100 mm dia. in main channel from RD 540 to 690 in part-2)  
1. Tender documents and other instructions can be downloaded or viewed online from the portal <http://hptenders.gov.in>, by the firms/ individual registered on the website which is free of cost.  
2. As the bids are to be submitted online are required to be encrypted and digitally signed, the bidders are advised to obtain Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from suitable vendors or from any authorized agency at the earliest.  
3. Key dates will be as under:-  
1. Date of Online publication 29/08/2025 AT 5:00 PM  
2. Downloading of tender Documents From 29/08/2025 at 5:00 PM up to 9:00 AM on 09/09/2025  
3. Date of submission of e-tendering From 29/08/2025 at 5:00 PM up to 9:00 AM on 09/09/2025  
4. Physical submission of earnest money deposit and cost of tender documents Up to 11:00 AM on 09/09/2025  
5. Date of opening of Cover-1 (Eligibility criteria) and Cover-2 (Technical bid) 09/09/2025 at 12:30 PM  
6. Date of Opening of Financial Bid Cover-2 Shall be intimated separately.  
Note: Other Tender information may be checked online portal website: www.hptender.com  
2706/2025-2026 HIM SUCHANA AVAM JAN SAMPARK  
Sd/- Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Shilla

**TENDER**  
**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
**Applications are invited under scheme of 'One Station One Product' for setting up:**  
• **Total Thirteen (13) Stall** at: Hazrat Nizamuddin, Delhi, Delhi Cantt., Delhi Shahdara, Meerut City, Palwal, Panipat, Bahadurgarh, Ghaziabad, Samalkha, Sonapat, Meerut Cantt & Gurgaon Railway stations.  
• **Total Thirty Four (34) Trolley** at: Badli, Baghpat Road, Ballabhgarh, Baraut, Jakhai, Delhi Kishangunj, Faridabad, Jind, Delhi Saraihillah, Faridabad New Town, Mansa, Deoband, Khatauli, Khehra, Narwana, Nangloi, Palam, Partapur, Noli, Narsela, Sakoti Tanda, Tapri, Okhla, Tohana, Shakurbasti, Shamli, Tughlakabad, Juliana, Sampla, Modinagar, Muradnagar, Shivji Bridge, Tilak Bridge, Delhi Safadargunj Railway Stations.  
• The period for setting up of stall at Kurukshetra, Subzi Mandi, Palwal, Gurgaon & Meerut Cantt. Stations per spell will be 90 days.  
• The period for setting up of Trolley at stations mentioned in (B) above will be 30 days per spell.  
• Registration fee for NSG 1, 2, 3 & 4 stations will be charged @ rate of Rs. 2000 for each spell of thirty days and for **NSG 5** (Delhi Kishangunj, Deoband, Badli, Okhla, Shamli, Tapri, Jind, Jakhai, Tohana, Mansa, Narwana, Baghpat Road, Khehra, Nangloi, Muradnagar, Khatauli, Meerut Cantt, Juliana, Sampla, Shivaji Bridge, Tilak Bridge & Delhi Safadargunj) & **NSG 6** (Partapur & Sakoti Tanda) registration fee will be charged @ rate of Rs. 1000 for each spell of thirty days.  
• The following are the eligibility criteria for participant viz.  
f) Holder of Artisans/Weaver ID card issued by Development Commissioner Handicraft, Development Commissioner Handloom, or by the requisite state/Central Government Authority.  
g) Individual artisans/weavers/craftsmen enrolled/registered with Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED)/National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC)/Khad/ Village Industries Commission (KVIC) associated with Social Organizations, State Govt. bodies and associated with registered micro enterprises on the Udyam Portal of the Ministry of MSME and NGOs etc.  
h) Self Help Groups registered with PMEGP (Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme).  
i) Marginalized or weaker sections of society.  
j) No separate logo shall be allowed.  
• The applicant will have to submit an undertaking to the Station Superintendent indicating that no activity would be undertaken to adversely affect the train operations, passenger safety and image of the Railways.  
• Applications should be addressed and can be submitted to Station Superintendent at station by the applicant till 15:00 hrs of 08.09.2025, which will be opened on same day.  
• Station Superintendent will make priority roster of all approved participants and priority will be established through a draw of lots conducted at the station in the presence of all approved applicants by the Station Manager/Sectional CMI and nominated Finance representative.  
• The One Station One Product scheme shall be governed by Railway Board's Commercial Circular No. 12 of 2022 and 09 of 2023 respectively available at website: [www.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.indianrailways.gov.in) & URL: [https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/traffic\\_comm/Comm\\_Cir\\_2022/OSOP%20Policy.pdf](https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/traffic_comm/Comm_Cir_2022/OSOP%20Policy.pdf) & [https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/traffic\\_comm/Comm\\_Cir\\_2023/CC%20%2009%20of%202023.pdf](https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/traffic_comm/Comm_Cir_2023/CC%20%2009%20of%202023.pdf) For any queries applicant may contact Station Superintendent or CMI of the respective stations. 2624/2025  
**Serving Customers With A Smile**



BRIEFLY

Zelenskyy seeks Trump, EU talks on stalled Russia peace efforts

**Kyiv:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday that Ukrainian officials want to meet with US President Donald Trump and European leaders next week to discuss recent developments in efforts to end the three-year war with Russia.

The proposed meetings appeared designed to add momentum to the push for peace, as Zelenskyy expressed frustration with what he called Russia's lack of constructive engagement in the process while it continues to launch devastating aerial attacks on civilian areas.



Trump has bristled at Russian leader Vladimir Putin's stalling on an US proposal for direct peace talks with Zelenskyy, and said a week ago he expected to decide on next steps in two weeks if direct talks aren't scheduled.

Trump complained last month that Putin "talks nice and then he bombs everybody." But he has also chided Ukraine for its attacks.

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Friday, the United States warned Russia to move toward peace and meet with Ukraine or face possible sanctions.

Turkey shuts airspace, restricts trade with Israel over Gaza war

**Istanbul:** Turkey announced Friday it was closing its airspace to Israeli government planes and any cargo of arms for the Israeli military while closing its ports to maritime trade between third countries and Israel.

The announcement by Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan came on top of a ban on direct trade between Turkey and Israel announced in May of 2024.

"We have completely cut off our trade with Israel. We have closed our ports to Israeli ships," Fidan told a special parliamentary debate on Gaza in Ankara. "We do not allow container ships carrying weapons and ammunition to Israel to enter our ports, nor do we allow aircraft to enter our airspace."

Ankara has been a harsh critic of Israeli attacks on Gaza, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly referring to Israel's actions as genocide and likening Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Hitler.

WHO warns of worsening cholera outbreaks, urges swift action



**Geneva:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported that cholera outbreaks, driven by conflict and poverty, are worsening across multiple countries and pose a significant global public health challenge.

The latest Disease Outbreak News said that 409,000 cholera cases and 4,738 deaths were reported across 31 countries between 1 January and 17 August 2025, with six countries reporting case fatality rate exceeding 1 per cent.

According to the data, the Eastern Mediterranean Region registered the highest number of cases, while the African Region reported the most deaths.

The report warns that conflict, mass displacement, natural disasters, and climate change are driving the spread of cholera, particularly in rural and flood-affected areas with weak infrastructure and limited healthcare access.

Indonesia: Protesters burn legislature, 2 dead

AGENCIES Jakarta, 30 August

An angry mob set fire to a local parliament building in an Indonesian provincial capital, leaving at least three people dead and five others hospitalised, officials said.

The blaze in Makassar, the capital city of South Sulawesi province, began late Friday. Television reports showed the provincial council building ablaze overnight, causing the area to turn an eerie orange color.

Rescuers retrieved three bodies by Saturday morning, while five people were hospitalized with burns or with broken bones after jumping from the building, said Fadli Tahar, a local disaster official.

Protesters in West Java's Bandung city also set a regional



parliament ablaze on Friday, but no casualties were reported. In Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, protesters stormed the regional police headquarters after destroying fences and torching vehicles. Security forces fired tear gas and used water cannons, but demonstrators fought back with fireworks and wooden clubs.

Foreign embassies in Jakarta, including the US, Australia and Southeast Asian countries, have advised their citizens in Indonesia to avoid demonstration areas or large

public gatherings.

Calm largely returned to Indonesia's capital on Saturday as authorities cleaned up burned-out cars, police offices and bus shelters that were set ablaze by angry protesters.

Five days of protests began in Jakarta on Monday, sparked by reports that all 580 lawmakers receive a monthly housing allowance of 50 million rupiah (\$3,075) in addition to their salaries. The allowance, introduced last year, is almost 10 times the Jakarta minimum wage.

Critics argue the new allowance is not only excessive but also insensitive at a time when most people are grappling with soaring living costs and taxes and rising unemployment.

The protests grew wider and more violent following the death of 21-year-old ride-hailing driver Affan Kurniawan. A video on social media apparently showing

his death during a rally in the capital Jakarta on Thursday shocked the nation and spurred an outcry against the security forces.

Kurniawan was reportedly completing a food delivery order when he was caught in the clash. Witnesses told local television that the armored car from the National Police's Mobile Brigade unit suddenly sped through the crowd of demonstrators and hit Kurniawan, causing him to fall. Instead of stopping, the car ran over him.

On Saturday, hundreds of ride-hailing drivers and students in Bali staged a solidarity demonstration over Kurniawan's death in a rare protest on the tourist island. They called for police reform and the release of those arrested during the protests.

Protesters marched to Bali's regional police headquarters and riot police fired rounds

of tear gas at them to push back those who tried to reach the heavily guarded compound. Protesters responded by throwing rocks, bottles and flares.

Clashes between riot police and protesters erupted in multiple cities across Indonesia on Friday, including in Medan, Solo, Yogyakarta, Magelang, Malang, Bengkulu, Pekanbaru and Manokwari in easternmost Papua region.

Some 950 people were arrested in rallies in Jakarta alone by Thursday, according to the National Commission on Human Rights, or Komnas HAM.

Authorities said about 25 officers were hospitalised with serious injuries after being attacked by protesters in Jakarta. The Komnas HAM believed that the number of injured people on the community side is much bigger.

Israel to cut humanitarian aid to northern Gaza as it expands offensive



AGENCIES Jerusalem, 30 August

Israel will soon slow or halt humanitarian aid into parts of northern Gaza as it expands its offensive attempting to cripple Hamas, an official said on Saturday.

The official who spoke on condition of anonymity, told agencies that Israel will stop airdrops over Gaza City in the coming days and reduce the arrival of aid trucks into the northern part of the strip as it prepares to evacuate hundreds of thousands of residents south.

Israel on Friday declared Gaza City a combat zone, calling it a Hamas stronghold and alleging that a network of tunnels remains in use despite several previous large-scale raids on the area throughout the nearly 23-month-long war.

The shift comes weeks after Israel first announced plans to widen its offensive in the city, where hundreds

of thousands are sheltering while enduring famine. In recent days, the military has ramped up strikes on the city's outskirts. Agencies video footage overnight Friday showed several large explosions across Gaza.

The military's announcement to resume fighting came as the death toll in Gaza rose to more than 63,000 people. On Saturday, four people were killed by Israeli gunfire while trying to get aid in central Gaza, according to health officials at Awda hospital, where the bodies were brought. It was unclear when the pause in aid would begin and when the airdrops would fully stop. By Saturday there had been no airdrops for several days across Gaza, a break from the almost daily drops for the past few weeks.

Israel's army didn't respond to a request for comment about the airdrops or how it would provide aid to Palestinians as Israel ramped up its offensive.

US appeals court rules Trump tariffs illegal

AGENCIES Washington, 30 August

A federal appeals court ruled Friday that US President Donald Trump had no legal right to impose sweeping tariffs on almost every country on earth but left in place for now his effort to build a protectionist wall around the American economy.

The ruling from the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit found Trump overstepped his authority under an emergency powers law, a major legal blow that largely upheld a May decision by a specialised federal trade court in New York.

"It seems unlikely that Congress intended to grant



the President unlimited authority to impose tariffs," the judges wrote in a 7-4 ruling.

But they did not strike down the tariffs immediately, allowing his administration until mid-October to appeal

to the Supreme Court.

The president vowed to do just that. "If allowed to stand, this Decision would literally destroy the United States of America," Trump wrote on his social media platform.

White House spokesman Kush Desai said Trump had acted lawfully, and "we look forward to ultimate victory on this matter."

An attorney for small businesses affected by the tariffs, meanwhile, said the ruling shows Trump doesn't have unlimited power to impose tariffs on his own.

"This decision protects American businesses and consumers from the uncertainty and harm caused by these unlawful tariffs," said Jeffrey Schwab, director of litigation at the Liberty Justice Centre.

Still, it remains unclear whether businesses will see any effects from the decision, said National Foreign Trade Council President Jake Colvin.

Taiwan opposes China's 'Victory Day' parade

ASHOK TUTEJA Taipei, 30 August

Taiwan has expressed its serious concern over China's plan to hold a "Victory Day" parade in Beijing next week and has appealed to all nations to refrain from attending such events in the greater interest of peace in the Taiwan Strait.

"China is organising a large-scale military parade in September. These kinds of parades heighten tension in the region. We are appealing to all countries that have been invited to reconsider any decision to attend it," Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Deputy



Minister Shen Yu-chung told visiting journalists from Indo-Pacific nations.

He said China invariably makes it a point to use such events to demonstrate its military power to its immediate neighbours." They (China)

have the ability to annex Taiwan. But we are also strengthening our defence forces and have been steadily increasing our defence budget," he added.

The Taiwanese minister's statement came in the wake

of reports that Russian President Vladimir Putin, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and several other leaders would attend the September parade, marking the end of World War Two after Japan's formal surrender.

Mr Shen said major world powers and democratic countries should issue a stern warning to China that there would be economic sanctions against it if it were to use force against Taiwan. China must be made to pay a heavy price if it were to threaten or use force against Taiwan or its other neighbours, he added.

Leisure

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD

1 Food retailer (5)  
2 Climb (5)  
3 Wedding attendant (5)  
4 Adult (5-2)  
5 Apalling (8)  
6 Region (4)  
7 Peeved (11)  
8 Eye part (4)  
9 Long flag (8)  
10 Film advert (7)  
11 Surpass (5)  
12 Odour (5)  
13 Awning (6)

1 Pampas cowboy (6)  
2 Alternative (5)  
3 Revenue (8)  
4 Tract of unclosed ground (4)  
5 Disconcert (7)  
6 Formal headwear item (3,3)  
7 Farming (11)  
8 And so forth (2,6)  
9 Copy (7)  
10 Gap (6)  
11 Umbrella (Informal) (6)  
12 Paste, (8)  
13 Unnecessary, (6)  
14 Oversupply (4)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS: 14 See eye to eye, 17 Oval, 18 Abolished, 22 Spine, 23 Risible, 24 Meek, 25 Teak.

DOWN: 2 Heart, 3 Wide-eyed, 4 Zest, 5 Naughty, 6 Last, 7 Unnecessary, 8 Paste, 13 Somerset.

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker

RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson

DADDY DAZE/John Kovalleski

NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

RAILWAY INQUIRY

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

FLIGHT INQUIRY

SCRABBLE

SUDOKU



# The Pioneer AGENDA

RSS

## 100 Years of Chequered History



RSS, born in 1925, will turn centenarian next month. It has been a roller-coaster ride for this apolitical organisation—from facing bans and leaders behind bars to being embroiled in controversies to emerging as a premier social organisation. RSS has seen it all but remains steadfast in its commitment to nation-building

### RSS: The torchbearer of cultural nationalism

RSS has endured enough but is as committed to its goal of national service as ever

The history of RSS reveals one interesting aspect. It has always been surrounded by challenges since its inception, and they have been both the cause and effect of its moral and physical strength. Dr Hedgewar founded it in 1925 with a sole vision to uplift the nation from the miseries of ideas, an unevolved national character, fractured social life, and above all, the state of amnesia of its own glorious life in its thousands of years of history. This is known as a task of nation-building. Dr Hedgewar made it a futuristic movement. This is a reason there has not been any moment in its 100-year history to take pause to feel it has accomplished its task. RSS visualises India as a nation based on organic civilisational ideas and legacies and believes India has a world mission, re-humanising humanity to achieve an ideal of the world as family, which is expressed as “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”

Mohan Bhagwat, in his Vigyan Bhawan speech, unfolded this futuristic agenda of RSS to reach out to people of the world and present RSS as an imitable example before them. This is an indication that cultural nationalism, as explained by him, is not at all envious and doesn't cause binary either inside or outside India. The series of lectures had twin purposes. First, it was intended not to celebrate but to present before the nation a social audit of its hundred years.

He aptly said that the biggest voluntary organisation in the world, RSS, has faced unbridled criticisms. He cautioned the critics that their criticisms were like corrupted coins that lose their monetary value. Seventy-five years ago, a senior Congressman, A G Kher, local self minister in the United Provinces, in his article, “Admit RSS in Congress fold”, in the English daily Mahratta on 18 November 1949, said, “repeating the same allegations again and again against the RSS does not serve any purpose.”

The criticisms against it by left liberals and Nehruvians were not without motive. They were mentally hegemonised by the West and subordinated themselves to their ideas. For them, any quest for originality means feuds, confrontations, rigorous intellectualism, and activism. They realised its futility for their mental and physical comforts. RSS negated it. It made its mission to explore its philosophy, cultural ethos, pro-



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gressive ideas in its thousands of years India's history and to remake the nation on its own foundation. In brief, it is a revivalist quest for redefining “who are we?” It was the longest way to regain our identity, but the only way, so for the RSS, it was the shortest way. This gave it the stamina to bear unfounded criticisms and unwarranted repression. Bhagawat reminded the historical events in the life history of the RSS in these terms. In fact, ideological adversaries who controlled the state power made arduous efforts to declare the RSS as a legitimate entity that was against secular democracy and the idea of India. Bhagawat was right, the RSS crossed that stage, and now it is being heard both in India and outside with an emotional bond with it, expectations from it, and also curiosity about it.

No leader, whether social or political organisation, had ever spoken before the people and addressed all types of critiques about himself and his organisation. They enjoy super celebrity status. RSS presents an exceptional example. Bhagawat explained it, “I am at the disposal of the organisation. Even at the age of 80, the Sangh can ask me to run a shake, and even a Swyamsevak at the age of 35 can be asked to sit in the office.”

It is not a simple statement. It carries the basic characteristic of the Sangh, where individualism has no place. The hierarchies in the organisation are based on not position or power but responsibilities and ethics. It is difficult to realise, he said, “unless you come to see the real happenings inside the organisation.” This shows with millions of swyamsevaks, RSS still carries the ambition to expand to those who could not reach its basket. It is not a numerical target.

In his speech, he articulated RSS's perspectives on the great social transformation. The most important among them, he argued, was to create a new consciousness of casteless and classless feelings among the people.

Therefore, expansion means creating a new wave. Marx preached struggle to end inequality. RSS addresses the problem by creating social sensitivity. That is a reason he appealed to the people to take their children to localities where the poor live and see their miseries.

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### RSS and the Long Shadow of ‘Vote Chori’

How Hindutva's founders learned from Hitler & Mussolini

Over the past weeks, Rahul Gandhi has alleged large-scale manipulation of voter lists and patterns, pointing to Mahadevpur in Bengaluru as a case study; the Election Commission has demanded a formal declaration, shifting the burden on the accuser. That's a move that is designed to shield the game-riggers. And in a move aimed at chilling protest, opposition leaders were briefly detained during a march to the Commission in Delhi on August 11. These are not stray incidents. They land on a terrain poisoned decades ago — an ideology that insists dissenters and “outsiders” survive here only on fragile sufferance, exposed to rejection at any moment, treated not as citizens but as tenants on probation.

I say this because MS Golwalkar, the RSS's key ideologue, wrote the exclusion into doctrine itself. In his 1939 book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, he decreed that “foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen's rights”.

#### This is not theory — it is humiliation scripted into the very idea of nationhood

He went so far as to hold up Nazi Germany as a teacher, praising its “purging” of Jews as an act of “race pride”: “To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the Semitic race, the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by”.

This isn't cultural pride; it is a cold architecture of exclusion, a blueprint for abandonment and subjugation. His doctrine exposes all Indians who practice ‘a foreign faith’ to a brutal ultimatum: merge into the “national race” or exist at its mercy, fragile, unwanted, and always at risk of erasure.

Crucially, Golwalkar's admiration for Nazi Germany went beyond race — it stretched into the realm of rule itself. He derided democracy as a Western weakness and praised dictatorship to enforce uniformity and suppress dissent, precisely the logic of Mussolini and Hitler. The RSS absorbed that poison structurally: A rigid hierarchy with the Sarsanghchalak wield-

ing “absolute authority,” cadre drilled to obey without question, and an avowed leader-principle mirroring Hitler's Führerprinzip (Supreme Leader).

This is where “only we should rule” stops sounding like rhetoric and hardens into an operating procedure - a manual for domination. What was once a chilling dream of domination now reads as cold instruction: silence dissent, erase pluralism, replace democracy with submission.

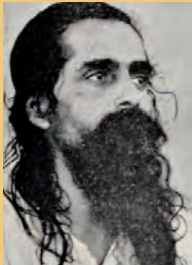
Hindutva thinkers have consistently endorsed an anti-democratic order. Historian Marzia Casolari in *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, exposes what they admired most: the militarisation of society and the suffocation of dissent.

To them, the anti-democratic system was not a warning but a promise, a seductive alternative to democracy. She notes the chilling parallels with European fascism: Secretive operations, rigid hierarchies, and the demand for unwavering loyalty. It is a portrait not of strength but of obsession, intimidation and control.

Casolari goes further: by 1938, Nazi Germany had become the chief point of reference for the Hindu Mahasabha, under Savarkar's presidency. Germany's rabid racial policies were studied as a “model” for solving India's so-called ‘Muslim problem’. What followed was an organisation steeped in secrecy and blind obedience to a supreme leader. In this frame, the bending of institutions is not a slip or excess — it is the method, coldly calculated and merciless. And this is the figure arendra Modi calls his inspiration.

In his 2008 book *Jyotipunj*, Modi dedicated the longest chapter to Golwalkar — “Pujniya Shri Guruji”, as he reverently addresses him. Time and again, Modi has praised Golwalkar's “values” and claimed his “legacy” guides his service to the nation.

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**M S Golwalkar**  
1940-1973



**Madhukar Dattatraya Deoras**  
1973-1994



### Chronology of Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh

#### 1925 - RSS IS BORN

#### 1930 - EARLY GROWTH

- Expansion in Maharashtra and parts of Central India.
- Emphasis on character-building, discipline, and Hindu identity.
- Developed Sanghchalaks (leaders) system to guide local units.

#### 1940 - WORLD WAR II & QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT:

RSS initially supported British during WWII to oppose Axis powers, later aligned with Indian nationalist sentiments.

1942-1947: Played humanitarian roles during riots and refugee crises amid Partition.

1947-48: RSS members were accused of involvement in Mahatma Gandhi's assassination; the organisation was briefly banned but reinstated after government inquiries.

#### 1950 - CONSOLIDATION AND SOCIAL OUTREACH

- Moved focus to nation-building and social service.

#### Expanded shakhas across India.

- Began fostering allied organizations which later formed the Sangh Parivar, a family of socio-political and cultural groups (like VHP, ABVP).

#### 1960 - EXPANSION AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE

- Began active engagement in cultural and educational initiatives.
- Played behind-the-scenes roles in shaping discourse on Hindu identity and national integration.

#### 1970 - EMERGENCY ERA

- RSS opposed Indira Gandhi's Emergency (1975-77); many activists jailed.
- Strengthened ties with political entities, notably the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which emerged from earlier Jana Sangh roots.

#### 1980 - POLITICAL PRESENCE

- Influenced the rise of BJP as a national political party.

- Involved indirectly in Ayodhya movement, promoting Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, which became a significant socio-political issue.
- Expanded youth and student wings, such as ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad), to cultivate leadership.

1990 - NATIONAL VISIBILITY: Consolidated influence through sangh-affiliated organisations, including trade, educational, and religious institutions.

2000 - SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL ENGAGEMENT: Promoted Swadeshi culture, youth training, and Hindu societal values.

2010 - POLITICAL ALIGNMENT AND EXPANSION: RSS influence became more visible in national policy through BJP governments (2014 onwards).

2020 - CENTENNIAL ERA: Maintains influence through Sangh Parivar organisations in education, health & politics.



# Gulzar’s Aandhi: Film that rocked Power Corridor 50 years ago

SOMEN SENGUPTA

A film with strong political message often earns ruler’s wrath but 50 years ago the film *Aandhi* directed by Gulzar released on 14th February 1975 with a storyline of an emotionally devastated female politician was banned after 22 weeks of it’s successful running by a Government only on the basis of a baseless surmise that it has directly portrayed the Prime Minister of the country.

Gulzar the exceptional poet, lyricist and film maker had his cultural orientation in a school of cinema and literature which was dominated by Bengal and Bengalis. He had his initial grown up days in Bombay under the shadow of Bimal Roy, Rishikesh Mukherjee, SD Burman, Hemant Kumar, Asit Sen, Kishore Kumar and Sachin Bhowmik. He befriended with RD Burman and Rakhi Biswas who later became part of his life. All these Bengal connections dragged him closer to Bengali cinema and he from early 1950s he was engrossed with the magic spell of Suchitra Sen the prima donna of Bengal’s silver screen. Gulzar always nursed a dream in his heart to work with Sen and once he rushed to her Calcutta home to read a script. Sadly Gulzar did not like Suchitra’s dominating attitude in script reading session and left Calcutta by aborting the project.

Years later Gulzar again approached Suchitra and this time with an exceptional story never seen before on Indian silver screen. Gulzar wrote the story line and famous Hindi author Kamaleshwar developed the same into a script with additional dialogues added by Gulzar himself. This time Suchitra was excited to work with Gulzar and Sanjiv Kumar was eying to work with Suchitra Sen.

The story of *Aandhi* was exceptional. It talks about the pain and internal conflict of a lady politician whose life is challenged between domestic course and political career.

This is surprising that by early 1970s India had a lady Prime Minister ruling the country with extra ordinary dominance and iron grip since 1966. Even before states like UP and Orissa had lady chief ministers viz Sucheta Kripalini and Nandini Sathpathy respectively. India had Vijay Laxmi Pandit as one of her top diplomat serving in US and Russia.

It had Padmaja Naidu as Governor of Bengal. Still no one ever thought to capture the emotional tumult of a lady politician in public life.

Story of the film shown how a daughter of an ambitious politician indulged herself in the game of power by sacrificing her happy family leaving behind his ordinary husband whom she married against the wish of her powerful politician father. The film shown her in an unusual act of smoking and boozing in private something unthinkable for a lady politician in the decade of 1970’s India. In film she accidentally met her husband and broken emotionally. She repents of losing a normal life of housewife but regains enough strength to go back to the corridor of power. Needless to say that one who knows the personal and political life of Indira will find enough reasons to watch the movie vividly for so much of similarities with screen and real life.

Plus in the film the character played by Suchitra was shaped up almost near resemblance of Indira of that time. Her partial white hairlines, big dark glasses, full sleeves blouse and few more physical signatures were injected in Suchitra’s screen appearance.

Above all the movie hit the theatre in such a time when India was slowly



coming out of Indira Gandhi’s over rated larger than life image and many conducts of her son and herself were slowly ensuring her impending decline.

*Aandhi* won a rave reviews in most of the film journals and newspapers. The Times of India on 16th February 1975 wrote :

Arti played by Suchitra Sen had faint smile, the quizzical look, the confident air, the high pressure reticence, the tightly veiled sadness, something that could be said about Indira Gandhi.

Needless to say people started finding Indira in Aarti. In south India the film was campaigned with a punch line that reads “Watch your Prime Minister on Screen”. The film rocked both the box office and political circuit of that time. It was return of Suchitra Sen to Hindi cinema after Mamta a big hit she delivered in 1966. This was enough to create a buzz in Bombay. Secondly Gulzar exploited best outdoor locations of Kashmir in this film.

He shot a songs in the archaeological ruins of Martand Sun temple of Anantanag a location largely unseen and unexplored in Hindi cinema. The film has only one female character and that was the central one. Rahul Dev Burman scored one of his career best tune for the film and recorded three immortal duet songs of Kishore Kumar and Lata Mangeshkar all picturized in breath taking panoramic valley and Mughal gardens of Kashmir with the background of snow-capped mountains. The songs of “*Aandhi*” are still one of the top downloaded songs in internet. From 1974 onwards the law of India was slowly becoming law of Sanjay Gandhi the unofficial powerhouse of India Gandhi’s eco system. With the imposition of emergency in June 1975



Sanjay’s extra constitutional conducts started crossing all democratic decorum and he simply over grown beyond the control of his mother who as her biographer Kathrine Frank started fearing him for all kind of abuses. Hindi cinema became a soft target of Sanjay’s brutal aggression of running a system. From banning Kishore Kumar from All India Radio to burning the reels of the movie “ Kissa Kursi Ka “directed by Amrit Nahata. Indira too was not known for her kindness towards anyone who dared to mock her in any artistic form.

Many cartoonists and newspaper editors often used to get cold threat from her office if she was ridiculed in any political cartoons. Her nature in this was just opposite of her father Nehru who used to appreciate political cartoons drawn on him.

Indira herself did not watch the movie but knowing the character Arti donning her shadow on screen she instructed IK Gujral former I & B minister under whom the movie passed the censor. Gujral watched the movie and assured Indira that there was nothing objectionable in it.

By the time emergency was declared Gujral was replaced by Vidya Charan Shukla the very “yes man” of Sanjay as I & B minister.

Sanjay was hell bent to crash the movie and by that time Indira had very little control over him. Thanks to his near equal power to mobilise decision Sanjay influenced Indira and the movie was banned on 11th July 1975 just within 16 days of emergency was announced.

A newspaper report said that the movie is banned for two months with immediate effect. Gulzar was in Moscow where he got the news. Suchitra was also very upset. By that time the film was doing fair to moderate business across India. It’s songs in disc was selling like hot cakes.

Till date it is not clear why Government banned the film but there is no doubt that the ban was a culmination of Sanjay’s personal wrath and anger on the presentation of the central character and the story. Gulzar never said that his film is based on Indira Gandhi. He always maintained that he wanted to show the hardship of a lady politician in Indian political arena. He in his memoir has written that he developed the story and script in a room of Delhi’s Akbar hotel and picked the name JK the character played by Sanjeev Kumar from there. Even Kamaleshwar also said that the film is not a shadow biography of Indira but the character Aarti has little resemblance of Gayatri Devi of Jaipur.

In 1976 it got seven nominations in 23rd Film Fare award and won two out of that. Though it was nominated in almost all categories RD Burman was not nominated for best music director. Both Sanjeev Kumar and Suchitra Sen were nominated for best actor and actress but only Sanjeev Kumar was given award.

The ban on *Aandhi* was finally withdrawn in 1977 when Indira was thrown out of power and Janata Party formed first ever non-Congress Government of India. The ban was lifted with a special premier in television ensuring to make the film reach as much as possible. Be it an exceptional story, enigmatic screen presence of Suchitra Sen, unforgettable music created by RD Burman, Gulzar, Kishore Kumar, Lata and being the a surprising victim of an obnoxious political arrogance of a tyrannical system *Aandhi* the film 50 ears after it’s release is now a heritage of Indian cinema.

(Somen Sengupta writes on films and entertainment)

## The Weaving Threads

The discerning Indian consumer seeks individuality, and convenience, driving demand for specialised offerings



RACHNA TIWARI

The Indian fashion industry, always a vibrant tapestry of tradition and modernity, is currently witnessing a fascinating evolution. While “big sizes” and “sustainability” have undeniably emerged as significant growth areas, with brands like *DressBerry Curve*, *Sassafras Curve*, and *Kalki Fashion* leading the charge in inclusive sizing, and sustainable pioneers like *Doodlage*, *No Nasties*, and *The Summer House* championing eco-conscious practices, a deeper dive reveals an exciting array of new niches that are redefining how we dress and consume.

For aspiring fashion entrepreneurs, this is a golden age of opportunity. The discerning Indian consumer is no longer a monolith; they seek individuality, purpose, and convenience, driving demand for specialised offerings. Here are some of the most promising new avenues:

### Adaptive Clothing: Fashion for Every Body and Ability

This is a niche born of necessity and evolving into a powerful statement of inclusivity. Adaptive clothing, designed for individuals with disabilities, chronic conditions, or specific mobility needs, is gaining traction. Imagine garments with magnetic closures instead of buttons, seated-friendly cuts for wheelchair users, or sensory-friendly fabrics. In India, brands like *Haxor* are at the forefront, offering stylish and functional adaptive wear, recognising that fashion should be accessible to all. This segment is not just about utility; it’s about dignity, comfort, and the right to self-expression.

### Modest Fashion: Style with Substance

With a significant population that values modesty in dressing, this niche is far more than just conservative wear. Modest fashion in India blends contemporary trends with cultural and religious sensitivities, offering elegant, sophisticated, and comfortable options. Brands like *Niswa Fashion*, *The Hijab Company*, and *Mushkiya* are skilfully crafting collections that appeal to a wide demographic seeking coverage without compromising on style. This segment demonstrates a strong understanding of cultural nuances and the desire for chic yet respectful attire.

### Gender-Neutral/Androgynous Fashion: Beyond the Binary

The lines are blurring, and fashion is reflecting this shift. Gender-neutral or androgynous clothing is about creating pieces that can be worn and embraced

by anyone, regardless of their gender identity. It challenges traditional sartorial norms, focusing on silhouette, comfort, and expression rather than prescribed gender roles. While still nascent, Indian labels like *Two Point Two Studio Limited*, *HUEMN*, and *The Pot Plant* are carving out a space with their fluid designs, appealing to a generation that champions individuality and self-definition. This niche is a powerful testament to fashion’s role in social progress.

### Fashion Rental Services: The Circular Economy Takes Root

The “rent, don’t own” philosophy is gaining serious momentum, especially for occasion wear. With the rising awareness of fast fashion’s environmental impact and the desire for variety without the commitment of purchase, fashion rental services are thriving. Platforms like *Flyrobe* and *Stage3* offer a vast array of designer wear and trending outfits for everything from weddings to parties, making luxury and variety accessible. This model not only promotes sustainability by extending the lifecycle of garments but also caters to the desire for fresh looks without the hefty price tag.

### Hyper-Personalised and Bespoke Fashion

In an era of mass production, the desire for something truly unique is growing. Beyond simple customisation, hyper-personalised fashion leverages technology and skilled craftsmanship to create garments tailored to an individual’s precise measurements, preferences, and even personality. Think virtual try-ons, AI-driven design suggestions, and direct-to-designer collaboration. While traditionally a luxury segment, the integration of technology is making personalised experiences more accessible. *CloudTailor*, for instance, is making waves in online tailoring and personalised fashion, demonstrating the potential for this niche to scale. The Indian fashion industry is dynamic and ever-evolving.

These emerging niches are not just fleeting trends; they represent fundamental shifts in consumer values and offer immense potential for innovative entrepreneurs. By understanding these currents and embracing creativity, we can continue to weave a truly diverse and prosperous future for Indian fashion. The thread of opportunity is strong – it’s time to pick up the needle and start stitching.

(The writer is an entrepreneur with expertise in HR. An innovator, she has contributed significantly to start-up ecosystem development and e-commerce platform management)

## RSS: The torchbearer of cultural nationalism

RSS treats society as a laboratory to achieve an egalitarian social order. His speech represented RSS’s vision of an inclusive society and holistic development. RSS had crossed various phases of national life.

During the lifetime of Dr Hedgewar, it contributed more than its capacity in anti-colonial struggle and faced repression, ban on drill, arrest and martyrdom of its volunteers, and the ban on the organisation, its training camps. Golwalkar faced the attacks of ideological adversaries controlling the state. He was arrested and abused. Then the task of the RSS was to give maximum assistance to protect Hindus who were victims of the partition. Thirty-three years (1940-73), he stood like a Himalaya before the state power and its patronised intellectuals. His successor, Bala saheb Deoras, faced no less suppression than the past. More than lakhs of swyamsevaks were put into jail. He himself spent 19 months in jail.

During his time, RSS initiated social actions, and now its impact is more than visible. When Bhagawat became sarsanghachalak, the Indian state made its last attempt to cut it into size. Never before have such attempts been made. It was linked with terrorism and compared with Islamic terrorist organisations. The ruling elites failed to reconcile that Bhagawat’s RSS was not the RSS of the 1940s. The narrative of Saffron terrorism was an effort to defame the organisation all over the world. It failed. Nevertheless, none of the RSS Sarsanghachalak, Hedgewar, Golwalkar, Deoras, or Mohan Bhagwat spoke a single jealous, bitter, revengeful word against their adversaries. Rather, they emphasised to all of them.

It is another exceptional instance in the history of the world’s social and political movement. Bhagawat’s speech was an endorsement of an open society, fraternity, and harmonious social order, and unending democratic dialogues. His speech was a decolonised speech and ended with a call and determination of a new horizon of world mission. He propounded a new vision of unity of opposites. As a great social democrat, he spoke with optimism as well as with firmness. It was an expression of the organic will of the RSS that we will work both in summer and winter, in the forest and the metropolis, with the same mission and vigour, with our own progressively evolved capacity to minimise their impact, and will continue till civilisation exists.

## RSS And The Long Shadow of ‘Vote Chori’

But what is being praised here? Men who openly admired Hitler, borrowed freely from Nazi ideology and sketched a blueprint of submission. To elevate such figures is not homage, it is a

betrayal of democratic India’s soul.

That betrayal of India’s pluralist promise showed itself early. The RSS elevated the saffron flag above the Tricolour, mocking the symbol of unity the freedom movement had chosen. Golwalkar sneered in Bunch of Thoughts: “Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It is just a case of drifting and imitating....Then, had we no flag of our own?” RSS founder Hedgewar went further. In his circular on January 26, 1930, as the nation saluted the Tricolour, he ordered shakhas to bow to saffron — “the true guru and god of the Hindu nation”. In that act, the organisation revealed contempt for the nation’s chosen emblem of unity, placing allegiance to saffron above service to all its people

When the country rose for Quit India in 1942, Golwalkar later admitted, “Sangh decided not to do anything”. To him, the largest mass mobilisation for freedom was “reactionary”, a distraction from the priority of indoctrination. While our forefathers were braving prison, exile and the bullet for self-rule, the Sangh stood aside — loudly telegraphing that its loyalty lay not with the nation’s struggle but with its own project of control.

Savarkar had by then supplied the blunt majoritarian creed to match this one-party hunger. In 1938, he declared, “A Nation is formed by the majority living therein. What did the Jews do in Germany? They being in a minority were driven out from Germany.” Two years

later, he praised authoritarian “tonics”: “Who are we to dictate to Germany, Japan or Russia or Italy to choose a particular form of policy of government simply because we woo it out of academic attraction? Surely Hitler knows better than Pandit Nehru does what suits Germany best. The very fact that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful as never before at the touch of Nazi or Fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political “isms” were the most congenial tonics their health demanded.” Minorities, he argued elsewhere, “must live here as the subordinate allies of the Hindus.” An idea presented as inclusion, with inclusion already defined by its limit: never as equals.

Stripped to its core, the ideology sanctifies a hierarchy: The majority rules unchallenged, dissent is treachery, and institutions exist to ratify the will of the chosen. That is why today’s allegations of padded, pruned and tilted voter rolls feel less like scandal than continuity. It is the same logic at work: Seize the referee, control the field, tilt the game. The Election Commission’s combative replies to Mr Rahul Gandhi are thus the ideology made visible, an umpire re-trained to play for one side.

How does an ideology like this travel from text to power? By training obedience early and organising for capture. BS Moonje, mentor to Hedgewar, toured Mussolini’s youth brigades in 1931 and wrote admiringly: “Mussolini saw the essential weakness of his country and conceived

the idea of the Balilla organisation for the military regeneration of Italy. India, and particularly Hindu India, needs some such institution for the military regeneration of the Hindus”.

The RSS answered that call with its shakha as a unit of drills, salutes, uniforms and baudhik sessions, binding boys into a brotherhood that pledged lifelong allegiance “with whole body, heart, and money.” Around the saffron flag — “true guru” — they rehearsed blind obedience and hierarchy. It was the Indian mirror of Hitler Youth: Indoctrination as muscle memory.

So when I say “vote chori” it carries a genealogy. I’m recognising a pattern.

Indoctrination plus hierarchy: That is the formula for domination. ‘Vote chori’ is not just theft — it is the symptom of a ruthless project: The hunger to be the only ruling force by deciding who matters and who can be erased as if their voices never existed. A movement that spurned the Tricolour and boycotted freedom’s call now parades itself as the sole claimant to rule. It is revolting, carrying with it a stench of betrayal that makes democracy itself gag. Mr Gandhi’s argument is already in public record: An exclusionary idea of the nation breeds an exclusionary practice of power. And in our present, the battlefield has shifted from the parade ground to the electoral roll, the polling booth, the role of the umpire. That is why India must insist — calmly, firmly, without flinching — on transparent rolls, open processes, and institutions of courage to withstand pressure.

FROM AGENDA COVER



EMPIRE  
OF THE  
MIND



**Gurucharan Gollerkeri**  
The former civil servant enjoys traversing the myriad spaces of ideas, thinkers, and books

# What moral imagination means in our polarised times

In our fractious age, it has become easy to believe that we are fundamentally irreconcilable. Lines are drawn with alarming speed—between left and right, us and them, believer and non-believer, citizen and migrant, patriot and traitor. Political rhetoric tightens like a noose. Social media converts disagreement into a performance. Even within families and friendships, ideological lines quietly harden, calcifying into silence or rupture. We are living not just in an age of disagreement, but of *unseeing*—a refusal, or perhaps an inability, to imagine the moral world of another.

It is in this context that we must return to an undervalued but urgent faculty: moral imagination. Coined by Edmund Burke in the late 18th century, the term originally signified the capacity to envision ethical life in concrete forms—through customs, institutions, and inherited practices. But in more recent usage, especially through thinkers like Martha

Nussbaum, moral imagination has come to mean the ability to inhabit another's experience emotionally and intellectually. It's what allows us to perceive others not as categories, or threats, but as fully human—messy, yearning, and vulnerable—like ourselves.

In a world saturated by binary thinking, cultivating this capacity may be one of the most radical acts we can undertake. But here is the paradox: for all the noise, something vital is missing. *Listening*. Not just passively, but actively—listening with the openness that comes from moral curiosity. What drives the person I disagree with? What are they afraid of? What stories shaped their convictions? What grief or aspiration animates their anger? These questions do not excuse injustice, but they illuminate its human context. Without this middle space of moral imagination, we risk not only misunderstanding others—we risk misunderstanding ourselves. We become prisoners of our own positions, unable to

evolve or question. Our identity collapses into ideology, and our empathy narrows to the circle of those who agree with us. How, then, do we cultivate this fragile faculty? The most enduring teachers are not politicians or pundits—they are novelists, poets, and dramatists.

A great novel invites us to dwell inside the consciousness of a stranger. When we read Toni Morrison or Dostoevsky or Premchand, or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, we are asked to feel with people we might otherwise fear, dismiss, or simply overlook. Literature slows us down. It disrupts certainty. It makes us linger in ambiguity. It refuses to resolve contradictions too quickly—and in doing so, it mirrors life itself. Reading widely is not a luxury; it is a civic act. It forms citizens who are not just literate, but *imaginatively literate*—people who are capable of resisting the impulse to dehumanise. In fact, the decline of literary reading in public life is not merely a cultural loss; it is a political one.

Philosophy, too, is an ally of the moral imagination. Not because it tells us what to think, but because it teaches us *how* to think—how to slow down, interrogate assumptions, and hold ideas to the light. Socratic dialogue, for instance, is built on a profound ethical premise: that the other may know something we do not. The opposite of ideological rigidity is an invitation to learn, and therefore to change. In a time when public discourse rewards performance over reflection, the quiet courage of philosophical doubt becomes a moral stance. Philosophy reminds us that disagreement need not be war. It can be inquiry. It can even be intimacy—the kind that sharpens understanding rather than blunting it. And then, there is silence.

In an age of constant commentary, silence may be the most undervalued moral tool. Not the silence of indifference, but the silence of humility. The kind that pauses before judging. That waits before responding. That listens

beyond the words. Silence is what allows us to be moved—by someone else's pain, by the beauty of an idea we did not originate, by the terror of being wrong. In silence, we confront the limits of our own perspective. We become porous again.

It is in such silence that the moral imagination is most alive. Cultivating the moral imagination is not to retreat from justice, it is to *deepen* it. True justice begins not in courts or parliaments, but in the recognition of the other as fully human. And this recognition cannot be legislated—it must be imagined. In our classrooms, we must teach not just critical thinking but *empathetic* thinking. In our public discourse, we must reward not just eloquence but humility. In our personal lives, we must practice the art of listening, even when it hurts. The work of rehumanisation is slow, and often invisible. It does not go viral. But it is the quiet harbinger of peace.

Let us inhabit it, and invite others in.

GADFLY

## HEIs: A moment of reckoning

Since we are approaching Teachers' Day, this writer would like to make a small appeal to our Central government and state governments (since education is a State subject). Mr Mayhem, US President Donald Trump, is bashing on his pet peccates, the US liberal intellectual class and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), almost each fortnight. He's wrecking the intake of talent (and monies) that US HEIs are globally known for. Large sections of students at these institutions are international.

The era which India and other countries identified with 'brain drain' looks somewhat set to end. Spiralling admissions costs, plummeting financial aid, cratering returns on investments in terms of employability, restrictive visa regimes and post-education work opportunities are some of the factors militating against students going abroad in the current international climate. Atop this sits Trump. America may account for an extreme current instance, but more or less the same climate prevails in other HEI destinations like Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Germany. So, what can countries like India do about this?

If only India had China-like dogged vision and intent, this situation would be a windfall to turbocharge Indian HEIs, both private and public. Yes, to some degree, the National Education Policy of 2020 tilts our imperatives in that direction, but Trump has created a situation that calls for immediate, yet considered actions from the Centre and states. At the moment, India is sitting on not insignificant pool of talent across higher education fields that would typically aim to fly away. India also has not insignificant numbers of internationally trained returnees, mostly scholars, researchers, teachers, idea generators, and students, who are academics with undergraduate educational bearings in India. So, there's a burgeoning set of young people who want to learn more and another slightly larger set that could possibly benefit higher education, either in terms of research, or teaching, or both.

It is disappointing to either wait to buntish your talent or to wait to a home environment having honed talent elsewhere and not find the appetite next for its expression and enhancement. Our respective governments must act soon to tap into the restive student/young scholar demographic that increases by the day, and present a workable roadmap. India is well behind the higher education curve vis-a-vis its much more strategically thoughtful neighbours. Fleet-footed China is earning international accolades as high-profile international scholars partially live and work there. Southeast Asian nations such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam have made strong strides to attract and retain international talent, and usher in pools of its youth into higher and/or primary education careers. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries established swathes of urban areas for western university campuses to get set in locations like Doha and Dubai.

Let me just make one, I don't want to preach the mantra of internationalisation for its own sake. What they signal is concerned intent to make education more attractive, and help strengthen and nurture strong, good, practices and temperaments for the long-term future of the country. Well before their attempts to internationalise education, even a rudimentary scrutiny over budgetary spends on education in these countries over the last 30 years displays a marked intent to bolster it and lay a solid foundation for the future of its respective youth. Chinese companies such as DeepSeek have joined in the race to build Artificial Intelligence spaces. When they shook early this year, Indian captains of industry again rued why Indian companies and institutions were unable to generate such ideas. In my view, that moment was also a triumph for Chinese HEI investment. Now, Trump is closing the door. While solidifying its foundations, India must look out for others, but carefully, thoughtfully, and quickly.



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## Vocal for Local!



## ILLUSIONS AND DELUSIONS

# The hype and hard truths of cryptocurrency

For over a decade, cryptocurrencies have dazzled the public imagination—a heady mix of technological innovation, financial independence, and the tantalising prospect of outsized returns. The decentralised digital currency using a new type of data—the blockchain, a distributed ledger that records transactions across many computers—eliminated dependence on any single person or central authority. The entire network owns and certifies the system, which rewards participants with auto-generated by-products, tokens or bitcoins. It promised anonymity, transparency and freedom from intermediaries. Soon, it became a rage. The potential was revolutionary and could/would seemingly allow decentralised maintenance of a variety of records.

However, in practice, the blockchain's very strength—its ability to remove intermediaries and lower costs—made it unattractive to the powerful institutions it hoped to reform. Banks, lawyers, payment processors, and notaries make money by being trusted third parties. The more the trust, the higher the fees. Lower costs destroy their business models, earnings, and salary structures. Though several promising pilot projects did start, none seem to have flourished.

However, tokens caught the market's fancy. Once the rewards for running the system, they are now its only needed product with an allure that has pivoted from utility to speculation. Today, several thousands of cryptocurrencies are available in a variety of forms: Ethereum, Solana, Dogecoin, Stablecoin, etc. At least 40 cryptos have market caps exceeding \$1 billion and interestingly, without apparent underlying profitability or even income streams or business models. Some offer new functionalities like smart contracts, but most are riding on hype, trading momentum and volumes, and retail optimism. Interestingly, more than 2,000

cryptos have already failed, taking billions in investor wealth along with them and revealing how fragile infrastructures can be if they overruns regulation.

Decentralisation doesn't, therefore, guarantee durability or security, and utility doesn't always translate into volume. Yet, a remarkable allure exists, though investor information available for evaluating risk is far below what is available for stock/commodity market investments. The crypto market values have quadrupled or more, post 2020, in contrast to Indian equities or the US S&P 500, which have merely doubled alongside.

Historically, speculative booms anchored primarily on belief, sans fundamentals, rarely last, however solid and apparently self-evident the initial allure.

Admittedly, support for the belief in digital money is also coming from central banks, but with a technological twist. Bitcoin was visualised as a philosophical statement, to reimagine the foundations of trust in financial systems. However, now, the attempt is to reinforce State authority and regulatory compliance via tightly controlled programming. It is less about rebellion and more about infrastructure and avoidance of system leaks. The State's attention towards tokens was brought about by Facebook's attempt to popularise Libra, a global stablecoin pegged to a basket of currencies. This threatened to bypass national currencies and allow transactions outside formal banking systems and undermine State controls.

China was the first to start a pilot project to create alternatives to the US dollar for cross-border settlements. The initial idea was attractive. Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) can, if popular, enable instant and direct settlement of transactions and reduce remittance/transaction costs by eliminating intermediaries (card networks, payment processors, and even bank branches) while enabling tax compliance and tighter enforcement of money laundering rules. This pushed other countries, including the US, EU, India, Japan, and Nigeria, to explore CBDCs as a strategic safeguard.

However, in a combative, sanction-prone world, securing interoperability for national tokens could be challenging. Hence, at the interfaces, earlier challenges faced with blockchains will resurface. Also, digital money increases vulnerability to cyber- and chip-based attacks. In an age of AI and quantum computing, these vulnerabilities may prove costly. Digital innovations will undoubtedly shape the future, but some innovations may turn out to be red herrings, diverting energy, skills, and focus away from endeavours to secure enduring progress in technological manufacturing, materials efficiency, and supply chain resilience.

China, post-Covid, has been differentiating between soft tech and hard tech. Even highly successful ed-tech and e-commerce companies like Alibaba (and its once iconic founder Jack Ma), New Oriental, and Yuanfudao faced severe State ire. All individual/corporate activity in crypto systems is banned. Several tech firms hastily repurposed themselves. India, as per media reports, continues to rank globally as one of the preeminent centres despite experiencing high taxation. Perhaps more active incentivisation of alternative areas of digital and technological innovation may be needed to counter the crypto's allure.

## STATE, MARKET, SOCIETY

## Harnessing the power triad

How can India hold its own during a time of strong geopolitical winds? There are many opinions on how we should best respond.

However, the interest in this question has so far provoked only a uniform response. Most opinions point to three options—we should use this as an opportunity to reexamine our global friendships and make new alliances, initiate another round of reforms to liberalise the economy, and loosen the public purse and lend more rules to boost domestic consumption. Trim the fat and tune up muscle, as former NTTI Aayog head Amritab Kant put it.

These things might help, and some proposed reforms were probably necessary even before we were provoked by Trump. But there is something else we can do, which would be far more powerful than technical and regulatory fixes.

For too long, we have lived with the idea that when it comes to development, the State must lead, and market and society must align or follow. It is quite easy to see that Nehru made this more or less explicit in his time at the helm, but even decades later, we continue with the framework. Some might even say that things have become more asymmetrically skewed.

Compounding this, we have endured the misconception that while national and state governments are important, local governance is just an administrative matter. Until the early 1990s, we didn't even have a legal framework for local councils in most parts of the country, and since then, we have mostly not implemented the framework. Many states don't even bother to hold local elections on time. All this despite the fact that the people are the ones who are most directly affected by the immediate surroundings and public services.

These twin missteps have greatly slowed development. Critically, we are more vulnerable to the uncertainties of geopolitics. We have put too much faith in the centralised, top-down State, instead of giving ourselves a range of options. That has left us no choice but to embrace the flag and play victim, instead of looking at those who made this mistake.

In contrast, many of the countries we compete with have figured out how to leverage State, market and society into a concerted effort. Some of them do it by force, like China does, but most others do it by letting each of these spheres all it can be. On the other hand, the Russians and the Turks of the world are clearly sidelining the capacities of society by force and the market in the next decade. We are reduplicating the mistakes that country still of the US President's oddball executive decisions. We even hope that such opposition might eventually rein him in. But we rarely pause to ask if such things are possible in India.

The Indian situation is not as extreme as that of Russia or Turkey, but we're also not actively promoting a peer relationship between State, market and society. If we choose to do that now, it will signal confidence about the future by a method that invites more and more people to decide and steer it. There really is strength in numbers. We just have to believe that.

Merely tweaking the business environment will not produce such an equal relationship. What the State gives, it can also take away. Or just dilute—it is also noteworthy that the drumbeat of Ease of Doing Business has not meant much to the majority of businesses. Nor has there ever been any commitment to improving the business environment in the states. Even if it is a lesson in that for all those joining the reform chorus.

But philosophers like Ronald Dworkin challenged Hart. Dworkin discussed a famous New York case called *Riggs v. Walter*. A person killed his grandfather and as if so happened, was entitled to inherit his grandfather's property after his death. The court disallowed the inheritance on the principle that a person should not benefit from his wrongs. Dworkin argued that the principle that a person should not benefit from his wrongs is a principle that the rules described by Hart. There was no statute prohibiting people from enjoying their own wrongs. But the judges certainly thought they were applying binding legal standards. But where did these legal standards come from, if these were not established in any statute or precedent? This is not a question to be considered as a nice puzzle on rainy evenings but has important implications for our lives. Judges fine people and send them to jail. We better have a handle on the standards they purport to apply.



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## JUDGEMENT DAY

# Statute v Morality: The complex case of Speluncean Explorers

Here, I discuss a case that was never decided, because the parties to the case did not exist, except in the imagination of a Harvard Law School professor: Lon Fuller, a professor of legal philosophy, used a fictional case to illustrate the nature of the law. The general public is aware of the law as a set of rules that regulate our conduct but beyond that, there is little appreciation of the law's characteristics. People outside legal academia rarely think about these matters and yet it matters a lot, because the law impacts all of us. The Speluncean Explorers case is a good gateway for everyone, not just lawyers, to appreciate the mysteries of the law.

Fuller begins with a story about a group of people who decide to explore caves (known as spelunking). They run into deep trouble when there is a cave-in and the speluncean explorers are trapped. Martians reach such a sorry pass that the explorers kill one of their mates out of

hunger. After they are rescued, the explorers are tried for murder.

The law in the fictional state they are tried in has the following text: 'Whoever shall willfully take the life of another shall be punished by death.' The case goes before multiple judges and each of them provides a ruling. Through these rulings, Fuller tries to show how various approaches to the nature of the law can affect judicial decisions. Each of the decisions shows a particular legal philosophy. The case, therefore, manages to achieve two objectives: it showcases the key claims and problems with each philosophical position. It also shows how these are not just abstract, ivory tower issues but issues with which judges struggle. Depending on the kind of legal philosophy a judge adopts, the accused would be hanged or set free.

One of the judges believes that the statute left no option to the judges but to convict the

accused. The law is whatever a statute says it is, regardless of what morality requires. The Speluncean Explorers were in a situation where desperate hunger overcame reason, but the law is the law. His brother judge disagrees; he believes that one ought to adopt a purposive construction of statutes. The purpose of the homicide statute is to deter murderous acts. Since the explorers were in a situation where deterrence would not work, the homicide legislation should be interpreted to exclude them from the charge of murder. A purposive interpretation looks at the values (ethical and moral) behind a statute and thus leads to a closer connection between law and morality.

Another judge, a realist, believes that the entire discussion is bunkum. Except in certain extremely limited cases, realists judges are against the idea of discerning rules established in past legislation and case law and then applying such rules mechanically to the facts of the cases before them. According to the realists, judges can look beyond formal legal sources in coming to a decision. In this case, the realist judge looks at public opinion and gossip in coming to his decision to acquit the accused. As is clear by now, the nature of the law is not an easy matter and because judges have different opinions on it, the law's requirements are in a state of constant contestation.

In the end, the Speluncean Explorers case is about the standards people apply when they perform the judicial function. Contrary to what many believe, there is no clear answer to this question. H.A. Hart, the first of the great modern legal philosophers, believed that the standards judges apply are supplied by lawmakers, such as the legislature. The rules emanating from the lawmakers may not fit all the situations that judges consider; in which case, judges use their discretion to fill in the gaps in the law. Most people intuitively agree with this analysis.

Most people intuitively agree with this analysis.

Most people intuitively agree with this analysis.



THE ASIAN AGE

31 AUGUST 2025



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

Why birthdays matter, well into our dotage...

Why do we celebrate our birthday when there's little we did that day that deserves congratulations? I tossed and turned in my mother's womb with such impatience that I got the umbilical cord wound around my neck, nearly strangling myself. Saved by a caesarian, my bumpy ride into our world ensured I approached it forever more with irreverence. What it didn't make me, however, was the hero of my birth. That is always the long-suffering mom, and sometimes the support act.

In the case of my eldest child who pooped panic-green Meconium on his way out, when my body started fighting the alien invasion it thought he was, it was my husband's unstinting care that got me through 33 hours of agonising labour, rather than any ministrations (or lack thereof) on the hospital's part. Though medics can also be the heroes of our birthing sagas, the one person it rarely is, is the newborn! So, why on earth do we celebrate *ourselves* on the anniversary of other peoples' heroism?

Having said that, uplifting occasions, especially ones dedicated to feeling good about ourselves, are literal lifesavers in these dark times. Even if delivery-day revelries appear illogical, the truth about humanity is that if we don't hold space for ourselves in this chaos, no-one else might, so, celebrating birthdays are, in fact, essential to our wellbeing. With the calendar crawling with dates earmarked for worldwide commemoration, every day an International Cheese/Cousins/Campanologists/Carbuncles Day if not something else, we're left with little option on days to call our own.

Besides, as you slide into middle-age and have kids to boot, you'll find ringfencing dates well-nigh impossible. You'll hear yourself promise your friends, "We should have that coffee/chat/knees-up pronto", but tomorrow never comes, y'know. The one day we can hold on to annually, therefore, with the blessings of convention, to do things we find pleasing with people of our choosing, is the day of our birth.

Despite our best attempts, and many memes on self-love that social media regurgitates, the truth is we all crave external validation, and nothing does that better than the celebrations of self that are birthdays. You know what else helps? Whilst festive food, the bedrock to every great birthday, lifts the spirits, as do libations for some, a well-planned gift, proving that you're seen by your people, hits the spot too.

Yet, as lovely as presents are to unwrap, they have their pitfalls: From faking fondness for something that frankly horrifies you — E.L. James' collected works, e.g. — to finding a discreet new home for it so no toes are trampled, to realising that someone you believed knew and valued you for who you are, hasn't the slightest clue! This can be avoided by dropping everyone from your birthday party who won't first complete a quiz on your interests, ruthlessly eliminating anyone who thinks you might like knitting, Guinness, or lemon drizzle cake. Or you could just tell 'em what you want, what you really, really want, & la the Spice Girls.

Living in Britain has helped me appreciate another Great British institution, the friendly but firm Gift List, which leaves no room for doubt about desired tributes. Call it a wish-list if you're squeamish, sticking only the smallest frills on it you forgot to gather on your yearly slog. For my birthday this weekend, I'm confident my family will make me their always-scrumptious chocolate cake, as well as eminently frameable handmade art, without my having to ask. But this year, I've also requested a trio of those newly issued vintage-look Agatha Christie books. The Queen of Crime was so prolific that if I limit myself to just one per birthday, amassing her entire oeuvre (all of which I've already read but lost along the way) will require more years than I fancy I have left!

Yet, that on this post-50 birthday I can enjoy life while thinking with equanimity of death, reveals how birthdays themselves have morphed wildly over the decades. If you're of a certain age you might agree, that this anniversary on which each of us celebrates our unique existence, has gone from being exciting in childhood, to meh in younger adulthood when we seemed equally blasé about everything else (but weren't really!), to welcomed back into our embrace with fresh appreciation for those that remain, even as we wryly clock our renewed interest.

As a Monsoon child in Calcutta, the convergence upon our home, of family, friends and fabulous food (including a pistachio and chocolate cricket pitch cake, with tiny cricketers in icing sugar, that I still remember fondly), was invariably accompanied by torrential rain, dangerously flooded streets and interminable power cuts. But the 'load shedding' only made the lighting of the cake candles more electrifying, and the guests braving the elements to be there for me more gratifying than I could've known then. In the years of mistaken immortality that followed the festivities on my 21st, I couldn't be bothered to mark my birthdays as I roamed the earth. And it wasn't till my 40th birthday that I brought my friends from across the decades together to celebrate it with me in India once again.

This year, with no illusions whatsoever of my contributions to my birth day (or any other), I consider it more important than ever to celebrate the small wins along the way. So join me, won't you, in raising a glass to the lives of resilience we've all led, and the gift that is our birthdays?

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PM's ghuspetiya outrage: Isn't it too little, too late?



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

As Bihar stands on the cusp of another Assembly election, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, in a speech in Gaya on August 22, has suddenly trained his rhetorical guns on the issue of "illegal intruders and migrants". According to him, such *ghuspetiyas* are taking jobs meant for Biharis, and seizing lands of locals. This raises a fundamental question: Is this an expression of genuine national concern, or a calculated attempt to polarise, distract, and divide?

At one level it is a genuine issue. No nation can allow illegal migrants to proliferate. But what is curious is the timing of the PM's new found concern, and the motivation behind it. If, indeed, *ghuspetiyas* have become a serious problem, it is logical to ask what the Central government of which he is the leader has done about it for the last 11 years, especially when an NDA government is also part of a "double engine" in Bihar for the past eight years? Where are the detailed policy proposals, the data-driven assessments, the sustained administrative actions?

The security and supervision of the border, and the duty to prevent illegal migration, are the responsibility of the Central government. Surely, the PM was not publicly confessing to his own failure. Further, for most of the government's tenure, this issue lay dormant in Bihar's political discourse, barely meriting mention in parliamentary debates or policy initiatives. Yet, as the electoral clock ticks louder, it has erupted into fiery speeches and headlines. The PM has only now announced the cre-

ation of a "Demography Mission" to tackle this problem. But no details have been provided of its structure, modus operandi, timeline, and objectives. One wonders how a government that has not yet carried out the much-delayed National Census, which should have been held in 2021, is now going to implement a separate Demography Mission.

The question also arises where is the evidence regarding this new menace? The Election Commission of India (EC) made a general statement that there are "large numbers of people from Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar in Bihar". But in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in which it has deleted 65 lakh voters, the overwhelming number are those who, as per its claims, are either deceased, or have possibly shifted permanently elsewhere, are voters at multiple places, or are "untraceable". How many voters has the ECI, or any other state authority, specifically categorised as Rohingyas or Bangladeshis? This figure needs to be made public.

Bihar, unlike Assam, does not share a long, porous international border with Bangladesh, nor has it historically been the epicentre of mass illegal migration. Its struggles are inward-looking: endemic poverty, outmigration, woeful infrastructure, rampant unemployment, agrarian distress, and a crumbling public health and education system. It is intriguing that when issues of such magnitude are begging for attention, why is the spectre of illegal migrants suddenly being given priority.

The argument that illegal immigrants will usurp jobs in Bihar begs the question: Where are the

The PM has only now announced the creation of a 'Demography Mission' to tackle this problem. But no details have been provided of its structure, modus operandi, timeline, and objectives.

jobs to be taken? Bihar has the country's highest rate of unemployment. That is why lakhs of Biharis leave the state to find jobs in far flung corners of India, working on unacceptably low wages and living in miserable conditions. The state government's claims to have provided jobs needs a serious audit. It should make public what jobs in how many numbers have actually been implemented. What is known is that a mere 6837 appointment letters were distributed by chief minister Nitish Kumar in February 2025. How many of these actually fructified into actual employment also needs to be put in the public domain. According to the 2022 Bihar Caste-Based Survey, only 1.5 per cent of the state's population are employed in government jobs — equivalent to about 20-21 lakh individuals. In the absence of any other successful employment scheme, this helps to benchmark the scale of current efforts. Of course, as elections approach, there is a shower of promises. The Bihar cabinet on July 15 approved the creation of one crore jobs by 2030. If the track record of the last five years is taken as a touchstone, this is hardly a viable or convincing promise.

The truth is that using the ploy of illegal migrants, the government is pursuing the art of political distraction. When governments face scrutiny for their governance record, and are found lacking, they often seek to redirect the electorate's attention to an external "other". By invoking this threat, the attempt is to transform the election from a referen-

dum on the government's performance into a moral crusade to "save" the nation. It is a tried and tested formula, not unique to India. Moreover, the language employed in such speeches often goes beyond policy concerns into the realm of identity politics. The illegal intruder is often implicitly linked to a specific community. This deliberate conflation stokes fear, resentment, and ultimately, communal division. It turns neighbour against neighbour, converting what should be a contest of ideas into a contest of identities.

For too long the interests of the people of Bihar has been sacrificed on the altar of religion or caste. The cost of such politics is not merely electoral gamesmanship; it is the slow poisoning of India's social fabric. Bihar, for centuries, has been a land of cultural synthesis, where Hindu and Muslim, upper caste and lower caste, have shared not only space but heritage. It was the crucible of Buddhism, the land of Gandhi's Champaran satyagraha, a region that once epitomised resilience in diversity. To inject into this milieu a divisive narrative is highly unfortunate.

The larger danger is to Indian democracy itself. Elections should be an opportunity for citizens to evaluate governance, to debate competing visions for the future, to hold leaders accountable. When they are reduced to referendums on who is 'us' and who is "them", democracy is hollowed out from within.

Bihar deserves better. It deserves an election fought on the real issues that shape its people's lives — jobs, education, health, infrastructure, corruption, social justice. It deserves leaders who trust its electorate enough to engage them on substance rather than seduce them with fear. It deserves, above all, honesty.

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LETTERS INNOVATION SHIFT?

Squeezing visas is being peddled by Donald Trump as protection for American jobs. He forgets that the US, while zealously nurturing creativity, has failed to build and sustain consistent rigour and equity in its own compound. It has long been lax in addressing pre-collegiate STEM proficiency. Thus its own pipeline is unable to meet its requirement of tech-savvy positions. Its reliance on immigrant talent can not be wished away overnight. It is certain to invite great lag in technology. India will feel the immediate sting, fewer H-1B slots and lost remittances and overcrowding in domestic job market. But the US suffers more as Silicon Valley faces talent droughts, higher costs and the shift of innovation per se to Canada, Europe and Asia.

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AGE NO BAR FOR SENIORS

**RETIREMENT** at 75? Clearly, that's a suggestion for mere mortals, not titans like Modi and Bhagwat ("Age no bar for leaders: RSS-BJP friction eases", August 30, 2025). While the RSS debates centenarians and baby quotas, the real curiosity is: who actually retires in Indian politics? The "age no bar" model might work if wisdom grows with years, but what about fresh ideas? And if the RSS doesn't dictate BJP moves, why do their timelines always seem to sync so conveniently? As for swayamsevakas and temples, the line between support and silence seems strategically blurry. Is this ideological harmony, or just very clever choreography?

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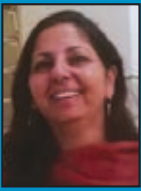
ANTI-BENGALI GOVT

**THE APEX COURT** has rightly understood the crux of the matter as well as the hidden intention of the BJP-led Centre behind its anti-migrant drive. It has been brought to the notice of the court when a pregnant woman was reportedly forced across the border into Bangladesh without due process as she spoke Bengali. This has prompted Justice Bagchi to ask whether citizenship could ever be decided based on the language a person speaks. If a person possess sufficient documents in support of his/her citizenship how can the government make an illegal deportation?

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Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Is BJP rattled by Opp's voter rally? Big fuss over film on Gopal Pantha

Clearly rattled by the enthusiastic response to the Opposition's ongoing "Voter Adhikar Yatra" in Bihar, the Bharatiya Janata Party has dispatched a team of senior leaders to the state to take the INDIA bloc head on. Besides countering the Opposition charge that voter lists were being manipulated to help the BJP and its allies, attempts are also being made to create a division between Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal leaders Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav, who are leading the charge on what is being labelled as "vote chori". In the course of their press conferences, BJP leaders have referred to the "growing rift" between the two, stating how Rahul Gandhi evaded giving a direct answer when recently asked if Tejashwi Yadav would be projected as the Opposition's chief ministerial candidate. The RJD leader, on the other hand, had remarked that he would like to see Rahul Gandhi as the country's Prime Minister. Though Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav have been working in tandem during the yatra, the story about differences has found many tak-

ers as the joint Opposition rally planned for September 1 at Patna's Gandhi Maidan has been put off though the yatra will continue.

More on Ranjeet Ranjan, also known as Ranjeeta, who was constantly by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's side during the recently concluded Parliament session. Ranjeet, wife of the famed Madhepura MP Pappu Yadav, is from Bihar and it would be expected that as a fiery speaker she would be an active participant in the Opposition's ongoing "Voter Adhikar Yatra". But strangely, she has not been seen or heard so far. Pappu Yadav, who is not known to have cordial relations with the Rashtriya Janata Dal leadership, has been spotted accompanying Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav during the yatra. On an earlier occasion, Pappu Yadav was not allowed on stage with Tejashwi Yadav and Rahul Gandhi. But this time, the Congress leader went up to him and the two were seen chatting together. The question everyone is asking whether Rajneet is staying away from the yatra because she does not

wish to be seen on the same podium as her husband. The guessing game is on.

Right wingers in India were particularly ecstatic when Donald Trump took over the US Presidency for a second time early this year. Social media was inundated with posts on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's special bond with Trump and how Indo-US relations would henceforth go from strength to strength. Six months later, it's a different story. Not only has Trump offered no concessions to India, he has penalised the country for purchasing oil from Russia, which, he said, was funding the war on Ukraine. Right wingers here are predictably angry over the turn of events. Unhappy with Trump for what he is doing to India, the right-wing ecosystem here has instead unleashed its fury on external affairs minister S. Jaishankar for India's foreign policy crisis. Since the minister has been the Modi government's voice on foreign policy issues, he has become an easy target for the angry right wingers, who are blaming him for Trump's latest India policy. Not just Jaishankar but

his son, who heads the Washington office of a high-profile think tank, has not been spared either.

When the Congress Party announced an organisational revamp at the district level, it was decided that freshly-constituted district committees would be headed by upcoming leaders. It was also decided that the new appointees would not contest elections and no MLA would hold that post. However, this informal diktat has gone for a toss with the appointment of Jaivardhan Singh, son of senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh, as the president of the party's Guna district committee in MP. Not only is Jaivardhan an MLA but he is unlikely to opt out of the electoral race in future. It is to be seen how the Congress leadership deals with this situation.

Even before the film has been released, the trailer of director Vivek Agnihotri's latest offering, *The Bengal Files*, has generated a heated controversy. In this case, anger has erupted over the film's portrayal of a shadowy figure like Gopal Pantha as a

Hindu avenger in the 1946 Calcutta riots. Pantha, it is argued angrily, was no hero of his times but a disreputable person, widely seen as an extortionist. A butcher by profession, Pantha ran two meat shops, and is best remembered for helping B.C. Roy win a contentious election to enable him to retain the chief minister's post. Instead, the film shows him to be a symbol of Hindu resistance. While there is a pushback against juxtaposing Pantha with leaders like Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has not helped matters by ordering a police raid on a private screening of the trailer as it has ended up giving unnecessary publicity to the film. On the other hand, there is a subtle contradiction in the film's attempt to help the BJP use historical figures for its campaign against illegal immigration as it comes at a time when the party has actually dismissed Bengali language and identity to help build its narrative on the issue of "ghuspetiyas".

*Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist*



Across  
THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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If the Bill to remove arrested ministers is passed, India will join the ranks of Belarus, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe which routinely jail Opposition leaders

ARTICLE 368 of the Constitution of India embodies the constituent power of Parliament to amend the Constitution. Sub-article (2) of Article 368 reads, *inter alia*, (2) *An amendment of this Constitution may be initiated only by the introduction of a Bill... and when the Bill is passed in each House by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting, it shall be presented to the President who shall give his assent to the Bill and thereupon the Constitution shall stand amended...*

The NDA does not have the numbers to pass a Constitution Amendment Bill in either House. The NDA's strength in the Lok Sabha is 293 (out of 543 members) and in the Rajya Sabha is 133 (out of 245 members). The numbers fall short of the magic number of two-thirds in each House *if all the members of that House are present and voting*.

The Opposition parties, put together, have 250 members in the Lok Sabha and 112 members in the Rajya Sabha. The Bill will not pass if the MPs cast 182 votes in the Lok Sabha and 82 votes in the Rajya Sabha *against* the Bill. But, ironically, not all Opposition parties are in opposition to the NDA! The YSRCP, BJD, BRS and BSP, and some smaller parties, have tended to support the NDA government. AITC and AAP are *opposed* to the NDA but whether they are *with*

# Thankfully, dead on arrival

the I.N.D.I.A. bloc is dependent on the issue.

## A DESPERATE GAMBLE

It is in this situation that the NDA government has put a ball in play. It is *The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025*. After its introduction, the government promptly referred the Bill to a Joint Select Committee for consideration.

On the surface, it is a simple Bill with a straight intent: to remove a minister (including prime minister and chief minister) who is arrested on a serious criminal charge punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years or more and remains in jail for 30 days. In the 30 days, *invariably*, investigation will not be completed and there will be no chargesheet, no charges, no trial and no conviction. Nevertheless, on the 31st day, the minister will be given the marching orders staining him or her as a 'criminal'.

The BJP trumpets the Bill as the apotheosis of constitutional and political morality.

Its argument is: can there be a goal more lofty than removing a 'corrupt' minister? Can a minister (or chief minister) rule from jail? Those who say 'Aye' to the Bill are true patriots and nationals; those who say 'Nay' are anti-nationals, urban naxals or Pakistani agents.

## ON THE CONTRARY...

The common experience of how the criminal law works under the NDA government is frightening. At present,

- practically, all laws have been weaponised — even GST laws;
- *any* police officer (that includes a constable) can arrest with or without a warrant *any* person against whom... *a reasonable suspicion exists* that he has committed a cognizable offence;
- trial courts are loathe to grant bail despite Justice Krishna Iyer's dictum that 'bail is the rule, jail is the exception';
- High Courts do not grant bail at the first hearing and, after letting the prosecution drag the matter on one pretext or another, may grant bail after 60-90 days;
- as a result of this lamentable state of affairs, scores of bail applications land up in the Supreme Court *every day* and the Supreme Court has become the *Court of first resort* for claiming liberty; and
- the inclusion of the prime minister in the Bill is laughable: no police officer will dare to arrest the prime minister.

## STAND STEADFAST

The I.N.D.I.A. bloc and the Trinamool Congress can easily muster the numbers to defeat the Bill. However, the NDA government is confident that it can find a way to pass the Bill. It may have a trick up its sleeve to win over some Opposition par-

ties or MPs in each House. Or it may have a Machiavellian scheme to make some Opposition MPs 'disappear', and enable the government to pass the Bill. Or it has a stratagem that is beyond my ken.

The battle cry has been sounded by the prime minister and the home minister and duly broadcast by the 'yours obediently' media. The Select Committee may keep the issue alive (like the One-Nation-One-Election JPC) until after the elections to the state assemblies in Bihar (2025) and Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal (2026).

The *Indian Express* reported (August 22, 2025) that, since 2014, 12 ministers belonging to the Opposition parties were held without bail, and many for several months. According to another report, 25 political leaders with serious charges against them have joined the BJP since 2014, and 23 of them have been exonerated of the charges! As far as I can recall, no BJP minister has been arrested since 2014.

If the Bill is passed, India will join the ranks of Belarus, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe which routinely jail Opposition leaders. If political parties that have declared their opposition to the Bill stand steadfast, the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill will fail. When the Bill is re-introduced, it will be dead on arrival.

## Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Twitter @tavleen\_singh



# Unfinished, urgent business

IT IS hard to remember a week in which India has been more publicly humiliated on the world stage than the one just ended. First, came the fifty per cent tariffs on Indian imports to the United States imposed by our Prime Minister's ex-best friend. Then came comments from Donald Trump's Trade Adviser that were ugly and untrue. Peter Navarro declared that the war on Ukraine was 'Modi's war' because India was 'profiteering' from it by continuing to buy Russian oil. The Big Bully in the White House is too scared to take on China, so it is India that he chose to unleash his attack dog upon.

In the face of this biased and unwarranted public humiliation India has chosen so far to maintain a dignified silence. Well done, India. But now that Trump has stabbed us in the back and made a mockery of the Hindutva enthusiasts who were so in love with Trump that they organised elaborate Hindu rituals to celebrate his second term, what should we do? Well, for a start, we need to spend much more time on comprehensive economic, judicial, educational and agricultural reforms than on bringing about the Hindutva cultural revolution. Far too much time has been wasted on deciding what people should eat, drink, love and wear. And on how they should worship. It turns out now that we do not have the luxury for a cultural revolution until we get our basics right.

I was brooding upon these gloomy thoughts when I heard the Prime Minister's speech in Japan in which he invoked his old mantra 'reform, perform, transform'. Exactly right. If he had not forgotten this mantra for so very long, we would have been in a stronger position to face up to the big bully in the White House. Reform, reform, reform should be the new mantra. There is much to do.

In the opinion of your ever humble columnist the most important reform must be of our justice system. It is scandalous that despite the grandiose assurances of successive Chief Justices there has never been a serious attempt to speed up the bullock cart speed at which our justice system works. Reform is not complicated as I discovered from a lawyer friend who is a member of the Law Commission of India. Hitesh Jain spelled out for me his '3-2-1 formula'.

"Three years to resolve all legacy cases clogging our courts. Two years to ensure that new cases are decided conclusively. One year for disposal of appeals with strict discipline and focused judicial management." Something like this needs to be done urgently because one reason why it is so hard to do anything in our ancient land is because the justice system works so slowly it may as well not work at all. Getting justice for even the most heinous crimes not only takes too long, it is unaffordable for the average Indian.

Side by side with judicial reform should come reforms in our hopelessly outdated and shamolic education system. It produces graduates who end up unemployed not because there are no jobs but because their 'education' leaves them barely literate, linguistically challenged and unemployable. I am constantly running into young people who cannot speak a word of English despite having studied in 'English schools'. English is vital in today's world no matter what the RSS chief believes.

From the time that tariffs have been weaponised by Donald Trump, our Prime Minister has said in almost every other speech that he will never betray the interests of our farmers and fishermen. Great. But in the past 11 years, there has been too little done to improve the infrastructure that farmers and fishermen need to be able to access new markets. The farm bills were opposed by farmers but instead of finding out what it is that farmers really need, every attempt was made to make them sound like traitors and terrorists. Unwise because since then the subject has remained taboo.

The Prime Minister told his audience of Japanese businessmen that he has got rid of hundreds of regulations to make it easier to do business. What he seems not to know is that the officials, high and low, who run this country manage somehow to delay things anyway by coming up with some new rule or regulation. This is without mentioning the corrupt practices they deploy to harass honest citizens who do not wish to bribe them. It is on harassment they spend their energies instead of on governance and all you need to do is to drive around India to see the consequences of this. It is not a happy thing to admit but vast tracts of our beloved Bharat Mata are now in such a state of degradation and decay that I sometimes feel that we have turned our beautiful country into a gigantic slum.

My apologies for writing such a gloomy piece this week but it is hard to write a cheerful column when India has been humiliated, bullied and threatened by a man we thought was our friend. Political pundits, wiser than me, predict that in the end it is the United States who will pay for what Donald Trump has done. But that time is not now. The only way that India can continue to grow and prosper despite the hostilities and humiliation inflicted upon us is to reform and reform. With a vengeance.

# To answer son's queries, I turned to the Constitution

## How to RAISE A BOY

WALIAHMAD



THERE ARE certain dates that trigger a repeated sense of fear and insecurity — 26/11 is one such date etched in India's collective memory as the day when terror took over Mumbai. But there is one more 26/11 memory that I wish I could forget, but that remains as a personal memory of pain — as a citizen and as a father.

A six-year-old boy asked to enact the role of a villain despite his pleas to let him play a commando seems fair game, doesn't it? After all, every young child wants to be the hero, and someone does have to be a villain. Except that the six-year-old was assigned the role because he was a Muslim. It was November 26, 2018, when my son came home crying that he had been made the "bad guy" in a game with his friends. It would have been fine if it ended there, but he had also been called a "Pakistani". My son did not know that it was his first brush with communalism.

As a new-age parent, there is a lot one has to learn and unlearn in order to keep pace with the demands of modern parenting and to ensure that the child gets a conducive environment to learn, question, agree and disagree with the world around her/him. We make sure that the content they consume online is age appropriate; we try to befriend them so that they are comfortable enough to share their insecurities with us. These are check-boxes common to all parents, irrespective of religion. But there is an added layer to parenthood if you are Muslim.

When my son asked me why he had been called a Pakistani, I had no answer. I know the deep-seated prejudice it comes from. But how does one prepare a child for a world where he will be identified by the religion he belongs to, or the food he eats? How does a parent tell a child that, as he grows up, it might be dangerous to be friends with a girl child from a different community?

These are the questions I grapple with, and the answer is not easy. As space

for nuance in public discourse shrinks, should I just tell him to ignore the bigotry that is being perpetuated in the name of nationalism? Or, make him understand that the Constitution guarantees equality for all in our country? The answer is obviously the latter, but how much of that truth percolates down in every-day life?

An entire generation is growing up on a cocktail of competitive religiosity and performative nationalism. They hear these conversations at the dinner table and among peers. Television and social media tell them to "identify their enemies" at an age when they don't even know who their friends are. These are uncomfortable times. After the Pahalgam attack in April, Muslim friends of my son were called "Pahalgamwalon" by others in their cohort. It was meant to be a joke. It did not land, especially for the kids at the receiving end of what was supposedly friendly banter.

Should our nationalism be defined by the level of hate one harbours for a neighbouring country that has a specific religion and, by extension, for those who follow the same religion everywhere, including in our own country? These are questions I find myself asking as a parent.

Sad as it is, it is utopian to think that India of the 21st century will not see discrimination based on caste, colour and religion. But, as adults, as parents, we have to try harder to make the world a more equal place. Nationalism cannot be exclusionary, its canvas has to necessarily be more inclusive, more accepting of India's diversity. There cannot, and must not, be any difference in the values of nationalism we preach to our children and the one embodied in our Constitution.

With my son poised to enter his teens soon, I have chosen to answer his queries and my doubts the only way I can. I have handed him a copy of the Constitution of India. This will prepare him to understand his rights and responsibilities as a citizen who is as equal as any other person in this country. It will teach him not to be defensive about his religion, to be unapologetic about who he is. As a father, that is the best talisman I can give him to ensure that his mind is "without fear and the head is held high".

The writer is Editor (Operations), indianexpress.com (How to Raise a Boy is a fortnightly column)

## History HEADLINE

VIKAS PATHAK



DAYS BEFORE the 50% "Trump tariffs" kicked in on an array of Indian exports, PM Narendra Modi repeated his message of "aatmanirbhar Bharat" and "swadeshi".

In India, these words date back to the freedom struggle. Before Mahatma Gandhi burst on to the political scene, swadeshi (from one's own land) rose as a powerful idea in 1905, when Indians protested against the Partition of Bengal by the British.

However, swadeshi acquired greater intensity from 1920 onwards under Gandhi, who identified it as not just a cultural metaphor for Indianness against colonial culture, but also as a powerful form of resistance against British colonialism.

The riches of the British Empire were built on cotton taken from India to the textile factories of Manchester, just as the Industrial Revolution was taking off. Raw cotton would be taken at throwaway prices from India to England via ships, processed into mass-produced clothes, shipped back to India and circulated via the Railways.

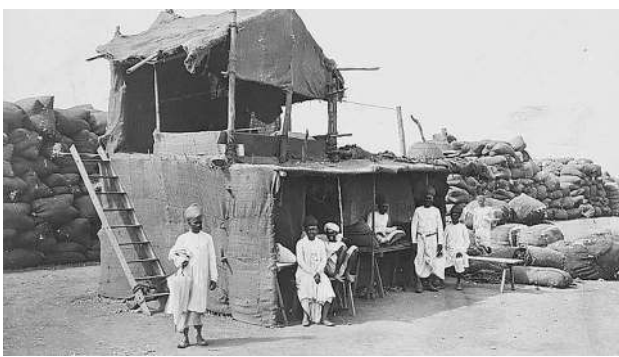
A 70%-80% duty was imposed on Indian cotton textiles to help Manchester, without which, according to British historian H H Wilson, "even the power of steam would not have helped the British city compete". Even as the prohibitive tariffs kept down the demand for Indian textiles, machine-made ones from the UK, which were cheaper, took over the Indian market. In his book *Inglorious Empire*, Shashi Tharoor writes that the move wiped out 25% of India's share of global trade in textiles, even as British exports of cotton goods soared from 60 million yards in 1830 to 968 million yards in 1858, and 1 billion yards in 1870. "(Indian) Master weavers became beggars," Tharoor writes.

Then, the Independence movement adopted the concept of swadeshi, and called for the boycott of all things foreign. By 1936, 62% of the cloth sold in India was made by Indians, Tharoor writes, with the figure jumping to 76% in 1945.

Gandhi's push for the *charkha* (spinning wheel), on which people could spin their own yarn, took the swadeshi concept one step further — challenging colonialism in a simple language while also striking deep at its core economic logic. The imagery of the rough khadi also struck a chord with rural India, which for the first time saw leaders who dressed like them.

In *India's Struggle for Independence*, historian Bipan Chandra recounted an

# From Gandhi to Modi: A new shade of Swadeshi



Cotton merchants in Bombay in the late 1800s. Francis Frith/Wikipedia

episode from 1921, when Gandhi was addressing a student gathering in Madurai. Some students complained that khadi was too expensive, Chandra wrote. Gandhi replied that the answer lay not in wearing foreign clothes but wearing fewer clothes, and announced that he was discarding the *dhoti* and *kurta* and would now wear only a "*langot* (loin cloth)". Until his assassination in 1948, he stuck to this vow.

The idea of *aatmanirbharta* (self-reliance) was one of the defining features of a newly independent India in the Jawaharlal Nehru years. In his paper, 'A Brief Economic History of Swadeshi', published in *Indian Public Policy Review* in 2021, Nitin Pai writes that, for Nehru, "the context of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the decline in foreign trade resulted in... the urge towards self-sufficiency". Political scientist Ashwini K Ray pointed out that India's preference for "non-alignment" during the Cold War-era was a sign of a "resurgent post-colonial nationalism".

The Nehru years saw a commanding role for the public sector within a mixed economy, apart from building of top-notch public institutions such as the IITs and AI-IMS. Large dams came up, as did many large PSUs. These moves were later criticised by critics as slowing down India's growth.

Trying to find her feet in the shadow cast by her father, Indira Gandhi turned to redistribution as her economic priority framework, coming up with the slogan of poverty alleviation. The tensions with the US, seen as pro-Pakistan, also made her government lean towards the Soviet Union.

An added rush of the swadeshi pitch was brought by George Fernandes as Industry Minister when the Janata Party came to power in 1977, after the Emergency. He famously threw out Coca

Cola and IBM from India for refusing to reduce their stakes in their local partners. The 1980s saw some liberalisation measures in export-import policy, fiscal policy and foreign investment — signifying that the grip of swadeshi as an idea of national policy was loosening. But even as imports shot up in the late 1980s, this wasn't matched by a rise in exports.

It eventually led to the grave foreign exchange crisis of 1991, persuading India under Congress PM PV Narasimha Rao to approach the World Bank and IMF, and to open up its economy. What followed was 'LPG' (liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation), steered by Rao and his Finance Minister Manmohan Singh.

With globalisation and liberalisation becoming State policy, swadeshi became the mantra of the Opposition. Thus was born the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, finding a corner under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar. On the other end of the spectrum, the Left opposed the policy shift as bringing in evils of "neoliberalism".

The renewed focus on swadeshi and aatmanirbhar Bharat by PM Modi now reflects both the tight corner the US administration has put India in, as well as his own government's muscular nationalistic imagination of itself. As the CM of Gujarat, he prided himself on his 'Vibrant Gujarat Summits', which showcased investment into the country. As PM, the ambition of his government was becoming "Vishwaguru", a destination the world would make a beeline to.

As he has repeatedly said, Modi's Swadeshi means production in India with Indian labour, even if the capital comes from abroad.

The author is Deputy Associate Editor, The Indian Express

## she SAID

ANJALI CHAUHAN



ON AUGUST 21, as the flames engulfed 26-year-old Nikki Bhati's body in a Greater Noida house, India was, once again, confronted with the brutal truth we try to deny — that marriage, too often celebrated as a sacred bond, remains one of the most dangerous institutions for women.

Nikki's crime was not just her "failure" to meet the escalating dowry demands, but daring to assert her autonomy. She wanted to reopen her modest beauty parlour, post reels on Instagram and carve a life not wholly defined by her husband and in-laws. For that, she died in a violent manner. Nikki is not an aberration. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 6,450 women were killed in dowry-related violence in 2022 alone — meaning nearly 18 women died daily because of dowry. Dowry is not just a de-

# Flames that doused the fire within

mand for money or cars, but a system of structural violence that makes women's lives perpetually negotiable. It begins with marriage negotiations, only to creep into daily life as a reminder that her worth is transactional, that she is not a person, but property. Beyond the husband and in-laws, we must ask the uncomfortable question: what about the parents? Why do so many parents, even when they know their daughters are being tortured, still choose silence over confrontation? Why is a woman's life weighed against the family's *izzat* in samaj and why does *izzat* almost always win?

In Nikki's case, her sister has spoken of years of harassment and escalating violence. Did her parents consider encouraging her to walk away, refusing to bow down to demands that were eating her alive? Or did they, like so many, fear the stigma of divorce more than the certainty of her suffering? Divorce, in our society, is

treated as a mark of failure, not of the marriage, but of the woman. A divorced woman is branded as a "burden", while men who abandon or abuse their wives face little social sanction. The weight of this stigma is so heavy that many women are pushed back into violent marriages, told to "adjust", "think of the children" and "keep the family honour intact."

In reality, we are not protecting honour or family, but patriarchy, the fragile ego of men and a society that would rather see a woman die as a wife than live as a divorcee. We need to say it out loud: every time parents prioritise societal reputation over their daughter's safety, they become complicit in the system that kills her.

Marriage in our society is constructed as a woman's ultimate destiny, her only respectable future. But, within this institution, her autonomy is relentlessly policed. Nikki's desire to rebuild her parlour and post Instagram reels became flash-

points because they symbolised freedom — economic, social, and personal. A woman with her own income and a public voice is a figure patriarchy fears most. Nikki's case has sparked outrage, as it should. But we know how quickly outrage fades. Tomorrow there will be another headline, another woman set ablaze. The question is: will we still keep pretending these are isolated incidents, or will we confront the fact that our entire social system is soaked in this violence?

Justice for Nikki cannot only mean jailing her husband and in-laws. It must mean creating conditions where no woman has to live in fear of being killed for resisting. It must mean economic independence for women, swift legal redressal for survivors, community networks that intervene and, above all, a cultural revolution in how we view honour and women's lives.

The flames that consumed Nikki and

countless others must burn into our conscience till every parent realises that no *izzat* is worth more than their daughter's life, and every community admits that dowry is not a custom but a crime.

And perhaps most urgently, we must re-imagine marriage itself — not as a woman's destiny or the only acceptable form of partnership but as a choice freely made between two consenting individuals, grounded in love. Only when marriage ceases to be the norm that defines a woman's worth, and becomes one option among many ways of living with dignity, can we begin to dismantle the culture that continues to burn women alive.

The writer is a PhD researcher at Delhi University's Department of Political Science

National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column



## NATIONAL SECURITY

## CENTRE DEFENDS MOVE ON IMMIGRANTS' DEPORTATION

CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Illegal immigrants pose a serious threat to sovereignty, security, and public resources, said Solicitor General Tushar Mehta on Friday during a hearing in the Supreme Court over alleged illegal detention and deportation of migrant Muslim workers from West Bengal on suspicion of being Bangladeshi nationals.

SG Mehta, appearing for Centre informed that illegal Bangladeshi immigrants often mix with Rohingyas



groups, with some reportedly turning to extremist activities. He further argued that individuals must prove their legal presence in India.

The Supreme Court bench of Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi

was hearing a petition filed through the West Bengal Migrant Workers Welfare Board claiming that individuals are being pushed back across the border without any legal determination of their citizenship.

The bench expressed concern over delays in habeas corpus petitions and directed the High Court to urgently hear such cases and verify the citizenship status of affected individuals.

Justice Bagchi also raised the issue of possible bias against Bengali-speaking individuals. He remarked that there should not be a presumption that all Bengali-speaking persons are illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. The Court said national security, sovereignty, and resources are valid concerns. It added that the govern-

ment must also consider the shared culture and heritage of border regions like Bengal and Punjab. In these areas, language and ethnicity often overlap despite international borders, bench noted.

Senior Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner argued about a specific case where a pregnant woman was deported to Bangladesh without due process.

It was alleged that, later, she was arrested there as an Indian national. This, he argued, shows the dangers of arbitrary deportations.

## NATIONAL MONUMENT

## SC notice to Centre on plea by Swamy over Ram Setu

CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday sought a response from the Centre on a plea filed by former Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy, urging the government to take a decision on declaring the Ram Setu as a national monument. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta issued notice to the Centre and posted the matter for hearing after four weeks. Ram Setu And The Plea Ram Setu, also known as Adam's Bridge, is a natural chain of limestone shoals connecting Pamban Island off Tamil Nadu's southeast coast with Mannar Island in Sri Lanka. The site

has long been a matter of historical, archaeological, and religious significance.

In his plea, Swamy argued that the Centre has failed to act on its assurance given to the court in January 2023 that the matter was under consideration. He stressed that the government is duty-bound to protect Ram Setu from pollution, desecration, or misuse, given its cultural and religious importance.

On January 19, 2023, the Supreme Court had recorded the Centre's submission that the issue of declaring Ram Setu as a national heritage monument was being examined by the Ministry of Culture. The Solicitor General had told the court that Swamy could pro-

vide additional materials or representations within two weeks for consideration.

The court had then directed the Centre to take a decision and allowed Swamy the liberty to return to court if he was dissatisfied. His interim application was disposed of on that basis.

No Action Yet, Says Swamy Swamy's latest petition contends that despite the court's directions, no decision has been communicated either to him or to the Supreme Court.

He said he had submitted a detailed representation to the government on January 27, 2023, with supporting documents, and again sent a fresh representation on May 13, 2025.

## APPOINTMENT

## Two new judges take oath in SC

CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Two new judges, Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice Vipul Manubhai Pancholi, on Friday took oath as the Supreme Court judges.

Chief Justice of India BR Gavai administered the oath of office to the newly appointed judges.

The Supreme Court Collegium, in its meeting held on August 25, recommended the elevation of the two Chief Justices of the High Courts as judges in the Supreme Court.

With the appointment of the two judges, the apex court will function with its full complement of 34 judges. Justice Aradhe was the Chief Justice of the High Court of Bombay, and Justice Pancholi was the Chief Justice of the Patna High Court.

The Centre, on August

27, has cleared the recommendation of the Supreme Court Collegium for the elevation of Justices Aradhe and Pancholi as judges of the top court.

On August 25, the five-judge Collegium, led by the CJI, also comprising Justices Surya Kant, Vikram Nath, JK Maheshwari, and BV Nagarathna, made the resolution on the two appointments by a 4:1 vote.

Reportedly, in the Collegium, Justice Nagarathna had dissented on the recommendation on the elevation of Justice Pancholi, citing his 57th rank in the all-India list of seniority of the judges of the High Court.

Justice Aradhe was born on April 13, 1964, in Raipur. He has been a former Chief Justice of the Telangana High Court and has also served as a judge of the Karnataka High Court, Jammu and Kashmir High Court,

and Madhya Pradesh High Court.

He has also served as Acting Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court and the Jammu and Kashmir High Court.

He was appointed as an Additional Judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on December 29, 2009.

Justice Pancholi, born on May 28, 1968, in Ahmedabad, was enrolled as an advocate in September 1991, marking the beginning of his practice at the Gujarat High Court. In October 2014, he was elevated as an additional judge of the Gujarat High Court and confirmed as a permanent judge in June 2016.

He was transferred to the Patna High Court in July 2023, where he took the oath as a judge. He was appointed Chief Justice of the Patna High Court in July 2025. (ANI)

## AMBUR RIOT CASE

## TIRUPATTUR COURT CONVICTS 22, ACQUITS 106

CORRESPONDENT  
VELLORE

The District and Sessions Court in Vellore on Thursday convicted 22 persons in connection with riots that broke out following the death of 26-year-old Shameel Ahmed in Ambur in 2015. 106 others were acquitted.

Judge Meenakumari of the Tirupattur District Sessions Court delivered the verdict against 22 individuals who were found guilty in connection with the 2015 Ambur riots.

The case stemmed from the disappearance of Pavithra, wife of Palani from Kuchipalayam near Anaikathur, under Pallikonda police limits. During the investigation, police led by Inspector Martin Prem Raj summoned Shameel Ahmed, a youth from Ambur. While under



inquiry, Shameel developed health complications and was admitted to the Government General Hospital in Chennai, where he died despite treatment. His relatives alleged that he died due to police assault while in custody.

Following this, thousands of people staged a roadblock

protest on the Ambur National Highway. During the protest, buses, police vehicles, a liquor shop, a private hospital, and several shops were damaged.

A total of 71 policemen were injured, and cases were filed against 134 individuals. Out of them, 6 died during the course of the

proceedings, and the trial against the remaining 128 continued in the Tirupattur District Sessions Court, leading to today's verdict by Judge Meenakumari.

In the first six cases, 106 accused were acquitted on grounds of insufficient evidence. The judge also criticized the then government for its failure to act promptly during the riots and ordered compensation for damages. Further, the properties of late Aslam Basha, former Ambur MLA of the Manithaneya Mahakkal Katchi, who was identified as one of the key instigators, were ordered to be confiscated and paid as penalty to the government.

In the seventh case, 22 accused were convicted of crimes including damaging public property, attacking police personnel, and misbehaving with women

police officers. Depending on the severity of charges, they were sentenced to a minimum of 3 years to a maximum of 14 years imprisonment, along with fines ranging from Rs 3,000 to Rs 25,000. Additionally, the court ordered compensation of Rs 10 lakh each to Head Constable Vijayakumar and Woman Constable Rajalakshmi, both of whom were injured, and Rs 1 lakh each to government witnesses. The court also commended policeman Raja, who carried injured women officers on his shoulders to safety during the riots.

For the pronouncement of this verdict, more than 700 police personnel were deployed across Tirupattur district under the supervision of Tirupattur District SP Shyamala Devi and Vellore District SP Mayilvaganan.

## BIHAR SIR

## SC to hear plea for extension of deadline for filing SIR claims

CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear a plea of the RJD on September 1 seeking an extension of time for filing claims and objections for voter registration in Bihar.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Justice Surya Kant, seeking a one-week extension on the September 1 deadline.

Bhushan informed the bench that the RJD and a few other parties have filed applications seeking an extension of the September 1 deadline to file claims and objections regarding the draft voters' list.

The apex court was informed that parties want a one-week extension of the deadline, claiming that over 1.75 lakh claims were made before and after the August 22 court order.

On August 22, the top court had ordered that persons excluded from the draft electoral roll during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in poll-bound Bihar can submit their applications for inclusion through online mode and that physical submission of forms is not necessary.

It had been said that an individual, on their own or



with the assistance of booth-level agents (BLAs) of a political party, is entitled to apply online and does not need to submit an application in physical form.

The bench had said all 12 political parties in Bihar shall issue specific directions to party workers to assist people in filing and submission of requisite forms with any 11 documents in Form 6 for the Aadhaar Card to get themselves included in the voters' list.

It had stated that BLAs of all political parties are directed to make an endeavour that approximately 65 lakh persons not included in the draft rolls are facilitated, except those who are dead or have voluntarily migrated, in submitting their objections by the cutoff date of September 1.

The top court was hear-

ing a batch of petitions challenging the poll panel's move to conduct SIR of electoral rolls in Bihar.

The Election Commission had also filed an affidavit stating that the list of names and details of 65 lakh electors in Bihar who were not included in the draft roll published on August 1 had been posted on the websites of all 38 District Electoral Officers in the state.

The list also contained the reasons for their non-inclusion, including death, shifting of ordinary residence or duplicate entries. ECI had told the apex court.

ECI had filed an affidavit in compliance with the August 14 directions of the Supreme Court directing it to publish an enumerated, booth-wise list of approximately 65 lakh electors not included in the draft elec-

toral roll during the ongoing SIR exercise in poll-bound Bihar.

The petitions challenging the ECI decision were filed by RJD MP Manoj Jha, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), PUCL, activist Yogendra Yadav, Trinamool MP Mahua Moitra, and former Bihar MLA Mujahid Alam.

The pleas sought direction to quash the ECI's June 24 directive that requires large sections of voters in Bihar to submit proof of citizenship to remain on the electoral rolls.

The petitions also raised concerns over the exclusion of widely held documents like Aadhaar and ration cards, stating that this would disproportionately affect the poor and marginalised voters, especially in rural Bihar.

## PLEA

## Hindu marriage cannot be dissolved by village deed: Delhi High Court

CORRESPONDENT  
KOHIMA

The Delhi High Court has categorically held that "a duly solemnised Hindu marriage cannot be dissolved by signing a marriage dissolution deed before village persons."

With this observation, the high court dismissed the plea of a CISF constable who was challenging his dismissal for contracting a second marriage while his first marriage was still subsisting.

A Division Bench of Jus-

tice C Hari Shankar and Justice Om Prakash Shukla observed that no legal principle permits the dissolution of a Hindu marriage through such informal means.

The court further observed that Rule 18 of the CISF Rules also extends to situations where an employee enters into a second marriage after joining the service.

Citing the precedent in Ex. Head Constable Bazir Singh v Union of India, the court stressed that the rule must be interpreted pragmati-

cally. "If a person with two wives is ineligible even for appointment, it would be absurd to say that he can perform a second marriage after joining the service," the judges remarked, adding that such conduct makes the employee ineligible to continue in service.

The petitioner had argued that his first marriage had ended through a dissolution deed executed in 2017 before "social people and witnesses" in his village. The court rejected this contention outright, stating that the law does not recognise

such a practice.

While noting that in the Bazir Singh case, the punishment awarded was compulsory retirement, the Bench pointed out that it could not grant similar relief as the petitioner had not completed the qualifying service for retirement benefits. The High Court concluded that the case was fully covered by existing precedents and that the petitioner had "no defence on merits."

The High Court upheld the disciplinary action and dismissed the writ petition.

## RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT

## CBI court sends two men to three years in jail in bank fraud case

CORRESPONDENT  
PATNA

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Patna on Thursday, sentenced Rana Ashok Kumar Singh @ Dina Singh (Pvt. Person) to 3 Years Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) with a fine of Rs 7 Lakh and Anil Kr. Srivastava (Pvt. Person) to 1.5 Years Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) with a fine of Rs 17,50,000 in a bank fraud case.

The Central Bureau of Investigation registered the instant case on 07.02.1996 against Dina Singh based

on a complaint lodged by the Manager of Allahabad Bank, alleging that the accused had deliberately and willfully cheated the Allahabad Bank by pledging a forged/fake NSC of Rs 3,59,000.

It was alleged that the accused, Rana Ashok Kumar Singh, in collusion with other persons, prepared forged National Savings Certificates (NSCs) and thereafter obtained a loan of Rs 2,60,000 from Allahabad Bank against these forged NSCs, in active connivance with another

accused, Shashu Bhushan Pandey, Branch Manager of Allahabad Bank.

Investigation revealed that the accused persons prepared forged NSCs with the help of an employee employed in the press. A printing machine was also recovered from the residential premises of the accused, Rana Ashok Kumar, which was used to assign unique numbers to the NSCs. The Zonal Office of Patna sent a loan proposal to the Calcutta Headquarters. It was recommended that the work of the letter

holder be completed expeditiously.

Accordingly, CBI filed a charge sheet on 30.04.1998 against the following persons:

- (1) Rana Ashok Singh @ Dina Singh, Pvt. Person.
- (2) Anil Kr. Srivastava, Pvt. Person
- (3) Ganga Sagar, Pvt. Person.
- (4) Shashi Bhushan Pandey, Branch Manager, Allahabad Bank, Exhibition Road, Patna
- (5) Bideshwari Singh, Officer, Allahabad Bank, Exhibition Road, Patna



# Sorry economists, the foreign policy experts are right on Trump

## SWAMINOMICS



SWAMINATHAN S  
ANKLESARIA AIYAR

According to German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, PM Narendra Modi apparently declined to take four calls from President Donald Trump. Though neither Washington nor Delhi have confirmed this, it's marvellous if it's true. This reported snub sends a clear message that India will not be cowed by a capricious bully.

Trump has imposed an additional 25% tariff on imports from India, which now total 50%. This is among the highest he has levied on any country. The US is treating India as a foe.

Peter Navarro, a White House trade advisor, has trashed India for buying cheap Russian crude, refining it and selling the refined products to the US and Europe at a high profit, increasing its trade surplus with the US. He says the Ukraine war is "Modi's war", arguing that India is preventing the end of the war.

This is no longer a trade issue. It is, squarely, a foreign policy issue. The US is trying to bleed and browbeat India into abandoning its independent foreign policy.

Most Indian economists are reluctant to retaliate against Trump's tariffs, as China did. They say China has strong cards such as the supply of rare earths, while India has none and so cannot get tough. Instead, they argue, India should grit its teeth and take a one-way beating, depending on diplomacy to eventually bring Trump to his senses.

By contrast, most Indian foreign policy experts want to stay tough and not give an inch. China and the EU, which import more energy from Russia than India does, have not been penalised. Pakistan pays US tariffs of just 19% against India's 50%, raising questions about whether US policies are approaching total reversal.

Indian economists are wrong and foreign policy experts are right. We must stay tough. India's policy of multi-alignment means it seeks links with many sides that may be opposed to one another. Trump wants to force India to treat Russia as a foe and break old ties with it. India must refuse to give in. Another polite snub would be to actually increase purchases of Russian oil, not just because it is cheap but

**India's policy of multi-alignment means it seeks links with many sides that may be opposed to one another. Trump wants to force India to break old ties with Russia. India must refuse to give in**

because it would emphasise the value India places on such bridges to Moscow.

Russia used to be India's main, cheap source of arms. In recent decades, India has diversified its arms suppliers, buying from France, Israel, and the US. When the tariff issue arose, Indian trade negotiators proposed to reduce India's large trade surplus with the US by buying billions worth of US aircraft.

But now India must change tack. It must tell Trump, gently but firmly, that India cannot buy arms from a country that imposes a 50% import tariff. That is retaliation through foreign policy rather than trade. It will be a big, credible threat. The economists are plain wrong in saying India has no cards.

A country perceived to be weak will be subjected to ever more pressure. The classic case is Laos, which abolished all tariffs on imports from the US, yet got slapped with a 40% tariff on its exports. This is a bully's idea of tariff equality.

If India retaliates, it will have something to give up in exchange for lower US



**CHILL PILL:** India supplies nearly half of US's generic drugs, but its real leverage lies in its power to block patents of Big Pharma and issue compulsory licences to desi firms

tariffs. India cannot give up agricultural tariffs as Trump wants for political reasons. It cannot stop buying Russian oil for foreign policy reasons. What, then, can it give up? The answer: India must first retaliate and then give up retaliatory action as part of a mutual return to normalcy. India imposed retaliatory tariffs on 28 US items when Trump imposed tariffs in his first term, eight years ago. It should do so again.

Some economic commentators have noted that India supplies 47% of US consumption of generic drugs, and wonder if India can threaten to withhold such supplies as a negotiating card. That is a bad idea. Indian drug exporters will be hit much more than US consumers. Besides, Trump wants to stop generic drug imports and have these manufactured in the US and he is threatening a 100% tariff on all generic drug imports to this end. He will be delighted, not dismayed, if India opts out voluntarily.

India does indeed have a big card in pharma but a different one. US drug companies now produce only patented drugs, leaving generics to Third World countries. US drug giants fear India will make it difficult to get fresh patents. Even more they fear India may liberally issue compulsory licences, allowing Indian companies to cheaply produce drugs still under patent. India can gently turn the screws on both issues without any open announcement. It can then agree to retreat as part of a deal.

Trump changes policies in a trice. If we stay tough, he will come around. Whatever he says about India being in the Russian camp today, strong fundamentals will eventually bring India and the US together. Multi-alignment is a sound, workable foreign policy. ■

# Razia Sultan and Noor Jahan: What girls lose when queens are erased

## BY INVITATION



IRA MUKHOTY

The great French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir once wrote that girls were not born into a pre-ordained state of "womanhood" but instead learnt how to become women by absorbing societal cues as they grew up. This process begins early on in infancy, via whispered fairytales and myths. It continues through childhood via books and texts, then from observing the lived examples of mothers, sisters and aunts, and through the cultural representations of women in popular culture.

The myths that make up the tapestry of a young girl's imagination as she grows up, therefore, also include the stories she hears in her school, of actual historical women. In a profoundly patriarchal society like India, girls will receive a great many signals, both subliminal and more overt, designed to make them believe that women are meant to be beacons of quiet sacrifice and exemplary duty. Young girls will come across gender stereotypes time and again, in which they will see the women around them expected to sublimate their own ambitions and desires for the 'greater good' of the family, the home and society.



**JUDGED HARSHLY:** Once maligned as shrewish and manipulative, Noor Jahan and others are only now being reclaimed by serious scholarship

In addition, the portrayal of women in popular culture in India does not do anything to counter the tired old tropes of ideal Indian womanhood. In a recent survey by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, for example, 25 blockbusters from 2019 were examined and almost three-fourths of the characters in the films were played by men. Of these, nine out of ten men were in decision-making roles such as politicians, army officers and policemen while the women were almost all minor players like doctors, nurses, teachers and journalists. Nor is it entirely coincidental that the women are shown in typically caregiving roles like nurses, mothers or teachers.

In a country like India, therefore, in which deeply conservative norms inform the aspirations of young girls — glorifying the ideals of sacrifice, submission, caregiving and nurturing, the school can be an exciting and liberating arena in which to offer an alternative vision of womanhood. Here, for a time, young girls can unfetter themselves from a pedestrian reality and dream of more capacious horizons. To do so, they need to see themselves reflected in the stories of women who have led lives of unashamed ambition, of fierce beauty and exemplary courage.

But in the new NCERT Social Sciences textbooks for Class 7, two extraordinary women have been calamitously excised from the records — Razia Sultan and Noor Jahan. Noor Jahan was the last wife of Jahangir, fourth of the great Mughals of India. So candescent was Noor Jahan's power and influence during the rule of Jahangir that his-

torian Ruby Lal has described her as the co-sovereign alongside her husband, the only woman of the Mughal empire who can be considered a co-ruler. As for Razia Sultan, she was the first female Muslim ruler of South Asia, a woman who ruled as Sultan in her own name during the age of the Delhi Sultanates in the 13th century. At a time when Razia's female contemporaries in Catholic Europe were confined to the walls of their homes and kept out of all spheres of influence, this Delhi monarch minted coins in her own name, put aside her veil and rode to war to defend her lands.

Despite the remarkable achievements of these two women, their legacy was never safely anchored in the public imagination. For far too long, tainted by colonial prejudice and post-colonial prurience, these women had been relegated to that shadowy space where ambitious women are shunted to; Noor Jahan was judged shrewishly over-ambitious, manipulating a helpless emperor who was in sexual thrall to her. And though Razia Sultan was admired in her own age, later historians were far more scathing — criticising her disregard for the veil, and gloomily predicting the end of the world once women began ruling in lieu of men. It is only in recent decades that a serious scholarly re-evaluation has restored these women to their rightful place. Now, that hard-worn legacy is under threat once again.

It is not coincidental, naturally, that Noor Jahan and Razia Sultan have gone missing from the new Class 7 textbooks. In a nimble sleight of hand, the new books omit the Delhi Sultanates and the Mughal empire entirely. When they are introduced in the new class 8 books, it is to present these empires as eras of 'darkness' in a completely ahistorical and regressive assessment reminiscent of old colonial prejudices. Through this act of chicanery, two inspirational queens have disappeared, almost negligently. Perhaps it is an inconvenient truth today to discuss Muslim dynasties which fostered women of such talent and verve.

As authoritarian govts around the globe reconfigure their worlds according to a mythical past, it is women who will be required to suffer the greatest myth-making. Women's rights and women's stories are already under assault in many parts of the world. In the West, there is the unfathomable trend of women on social media simpering about being 'trad wives' and stay-at-home girlfriends while in India, it has become de rigueur to proclaim a regressive religiosity in the name of cultural traditions. In this violent curation of history to suit an imagined idealised past, it is women's bodies that are being shackled and young girls' minds that are fractured. As consolation for a shifting and violent world, young girls today deserve ever more examples of luminous women to inspire them, not fewer. ■

**Two extraordinary women have been calamitously excised from textbooks. Perhaps it is an inconvenient truth today to discuss Muslim dynasties which fostered women of such talent and verve**

religiosity in the name of cultural traditions. In this violent curation of history to suit an imagined idealised past, it is women's bodies that are being shackled and young girls' minds that are fractured. As consolation for a shifting and violent world, young girls today deserve ever more examples of luminous women to inspire them, not fewer. ■

*Mukhoty is a historian and author of the upcoming 'The Lion and the Lily'*

# Odd as it may seem, my journeys in exile reinforced my bond with India

*"To lose one's country is to know an intimate shame, like being disowned by a parent, turned out of one's home... without a country we are adrift," Aatish Taseer writes in his new book, 'A Return to Self: Excursions in Exile'. The son of assassinated Pakistani politician Salman Taseer and Indian journalist Tavleen Singh, he has long grappled with questions of identity and belonging. In conversation with Jai Singh, the New York-based writer reflects on the fault lines of history that run through his work. Edited excerpts:*

**■ After your Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card was cancelled in 2019, you plunged headlong into travel, tracing the Silk Road through Uzbekistan, wandering the ruins of Al-Andalus in Spain, and journeying through Mongolia's steppes. How did these journeys reshape your sense of being Indian?**

There was an odd sense of euphoria. I felt the world to be so wide and varied, and myself so comfortable within it. I revelled in just the little things about travel: the lunch with a friend at a Black Sea restaurant in Istanbul; the dawn arrival at Chinggis Khaan International in Ulaanbaatar; the drives across the spine of Asia. It was romantic, to be sure, but there were more serious lines of inquiry, such as the suppression of Buddhism in Mongolia. My ability to see these things in the context of other movements in Asia spoke to a kind of cosmopolitanism (ever a dirty word) that I felt very proud to possess. Also, odd as it may seem, it reinforced my connection to India. Because, regardless of my passport, I was not travelling as an American, or a Briton, but only as an Indian could, with certain sensitivities that had come down to me through its varied history. That tradition I was travelling in, which (VS) Naipaul, (Amitav) Ghosh, and others pioneered, shows you who you really are when you're away from home — away, too, from the binary of India and the West.

**■ Do you think India today is closer to an 'equilibrium' it was always headed toward? Or has the 'idea of India' reached its natural expiry date?**

In many countries, with

similar tensions, we've seen the pendulum swing, again and again. If you define 'equilibrium' in the sense of a new political reality finding articulation, then yes, I think to some degree that has occurred. But, if you mean it in the sense of lasting peace, or balance, or even reconfiguration, then no. What really happens in these situations is that different visions of the country vibrate next to each other. It's an uncomfortable dissonant process, an atonal music, and the most one can hope for is that the different visions are not so deeply incompatible that they tear the place apart. India may be roiling, but it's in moments like these that we should check to see how intact India's continuities are — not political continuities, but cultural ones. I think you'll find many of them unchanged.

**■ If you were to return now, which places in India would you feel most drawn to?**

I never make a point of revisiting places unless asked to. I like letting memory, accretion and distance accumulate. I will say that the North doesn't call me at all. On the level of sensual memory, I am haunted by the South, where I went to school. By lunches served on banana leaves in roadside restaurants, where they pour ghee onto the rice out of steel buckets. By that first breath of the Palani hills. I loved being at school in Kodaikanal. I keep waiting for homesickness, but it never really comes, except in these very oblique ways. I can't tell if I'm blocking it, or if one is really glad to be away from the bad air and the malice.

**■ In a world that is more interconnected and yet more insular, what does 'home' mean to you today?**

One of the things I like about America is how much home — no doubt, a carry over of the settler spirit — is an act of doing and making, and not merely inherited belonging. This is true in the narrow sense of the agency required in building or buying a home, but also true in the abstract. People like to give reasons for why they live where they live.

In India, it's the op-

posite. Home is the great mother. We're constantly trying to prove ourselves worthy of her. I don't know if I buy in anymore. I know where I live — it's my address — but, for the rest, I'm going to let the great mother prove herself worthy of me.

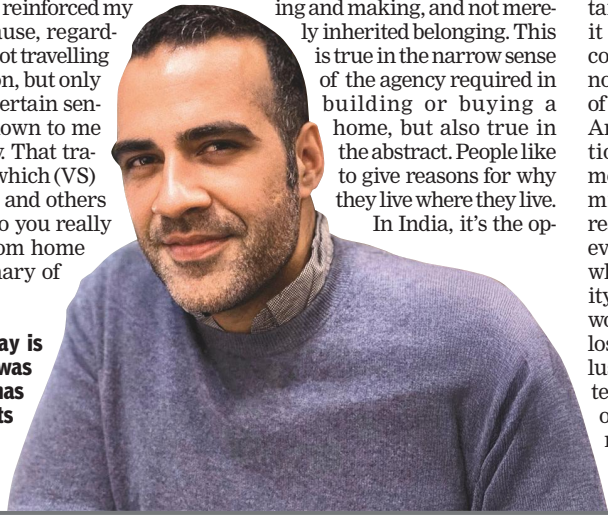
**■ Your essays often circle back to historical fissures. Why is that so important to you?**

I think of my work as primarily being a form of historical portage, or, as you say,

the fissures of history. I do it, in part because I grew up along such a line — the Partition — but, more deeply, to paraphrase (James) Baldwin, the war occasioned on the Indian soul by the presence of Islam on the subcontinent. As I travelled more, I found other such fault lines: Shia/Sunni, pre-Columbian/Hispanic; Shaman/Buddhist; Shinto/Buddhist... the list goes on. These lines of convolution matter because their tension can still be felt into the present. They influence politics and human behaviour. In the US, for instance, the interracial drama' is still so visceral, despite the conceit of America wanting to be a country without history. My role is very neutral. I don't try to make history matter when it doesn't; I'm only interested in dramatising the tension that I can feel in the air. What does (American literary critic) Fredric Jameson say? "History is what hurts."

**■ Living in the US, you've had a front-row seat to the Donald Trump phenomenon. What strikes you about him?**

To me, Trump is more interesting as a cultural phenomenon than a political one. He has upended Wyndham Lewis's idea of America as the "rootless Elysium." That elastic American idea of belonging, which allowed every variety of hyphenation, and which was so attractive to those in the world beyond, now has the distinct taint of blood-and-soil about it. Perhaps it had always been a fiction, but what a compelling fiction! The pessimism one now feels in America is new. That sense of a world grown old, and full of history. American possibility; American exceptionalism; the role of the country as a moral force in the world — all of these might have been fictions, but they had real traction on the ground. Now nobody even talks about them. That represents what Hannah Arendt describes as "natality," the arrival of something new in the world. Some people see this as a necessary loss of illusions, but all societies have illusions, and these drive people to be better, to not merely be themselves. Fiction or not, I fear we will miss what America made us believe about who and what she was, and may yet be.



# Sci-Hub case: What's really at stake is future of research in India

## BY INVITATION



ARUL GEORGE SCARIA

On August 19, researchers across India woke up to unsettling news: access to Sci-Hub — the shadow library that has long been their lifeline — had been blocked by order of the Delhi High Court. If appropriate long-term measures are not taken, this could have enormous implications for the future of research in the country.

## THE LEGAL BACKSTORY

The ban did not come out of nowhere. It was the outcome of a long-running copyright battle playing out in Indian courts since 2020. On one side was Sci-Hub, founded by Kazakhstani computer programmer Alexandra Elbakyan, which has long provided free access to millions of published research articles. On the other were three major international publishers (Elsevier, Wiley and American Chemical Society) who filed a copyright infringement suit against it. During the proceedings, Ms Elbakyan gave an undertaking that no new articles covered by the plaintiffs' copyright would be uploaded till the proceedings conclude. But while this undertaking remained in force, she released new articles through another website named Sci-Net. Arguing that this violated her undertaking, the publishers went back to court, leading to the blocking order on Sci-Hub, Sci-Net and all mirror websites.

## WHAT THE COURT IGNORED

While this appears like a simple blocking order, one should not overlook some of the public interest dimensions.

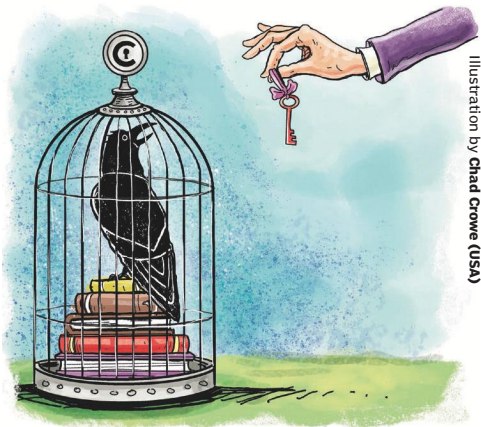
First, it is an undeniable fact that even the most resource-rich institutions in India like IITs

and IIMs fail to provide access to all the publications necessary for facilitating good quality research. One can only imagine the plight of researchers in other institutes.

Second, the blocking order relies heavily on jurisprudence laid down in the context of issues like online movie piracy. But are these comparable infringements? The business models in academic publishing are very different — not just from movies but even fiction and newspaper publishing. Journal authors are almost never paid royalties or remuneration for their contributions. Even open access journals that allow the authors to retain copyright often charge them 'processing' fees, clearly illustrating the continued exploitation by journals. In such a context, the traditional incentive-based justifications for grant of copyright protection hardly exist. Most researchers contribute to journals for reasons such as advancing knowledge, signalling expertise, and meeting requirements for appointments/ promotion in academic and research institutions. This fundamental difference is why scholars like Steven Shavell argue for abolition of copyright in academic works and placing them in the public domain for broader social benefits.

Third, it is debatable whether the publishers own valid copyright in all the articles available through Sci-Hub, as this also requires valid copyright assignments from the authors to journals. A substantial number of articles could already be available in the public domain for multiple

**Even the most resource-rich institutions in India like IITs and IIMs fail to provide access to all the publications necessary for facilitating good quality research. One can only imagine the plight of researchers in other institutes**



**URL WAR:** Such cases are not mere private disputes. It is important to look at the public interest dimensions before issuing sweeping orders

reasons such as expiry of copyright term, relinquishment of copyright by authors or application of open-access mandates by those who funded the research. These are complex issues that can only be determined through a full trial, and in such circumstances, the courts should avoid sweeping blocking orders applicable to the entire website. It is also worth adding here that cases like this should not be seen as mere private disputes between two parties. It is important to look at the broader public interest dimensions before issuing any injunction.

## THE PATH FORWARD

The case and the resulting blocking order should act as a wake-up call for our policymakers. If India has to achieve economic and scientific progress, access to scientific information is a must for researchers and students. While the country

has initiated the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) policy to provide access to journals for institutions across the country, the economic prudence of the scheme is questionable. It is also important to notice that not all publishers are part of ONOS, thereby limiting coverage.

The only sustainable long-term solution to the crisis is open access to research publications. A starting point would be to mandate that all work funded by public money — and all research produced in publicly funded institutions — be made openly accessible. The draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020 had recommended steps in this direction; it is time to implement it.

Another important step is enacting restrictions on assignment of copyright to journals. For instance, France has adopted a specific secondary publication right for authors, which empowers authors to share their final accepted author version of publications, irrespective of any exclusive contract they may have signed with publishers. While allowing authors to publish in any journal they prefer, such measures can help authors and institutions address the current imbalance in bargaining power. It is also important to note that author-protective measures are not alien for Indian copyright law. For example, the Copyright (Amendment) Act 2012 introduced restrictions with regard to assignment of copyright and mandatory royalty sharing, with the primary objective of protecting lyricists and composers against economically powerful producers.

The long-term solution is, therefore, to take inspiration from our own history and achieve a fair balance between copyright protection and broader social interests. Only then can we create a research ecosystem that truly democratises knowledge. ■

*Scaria is a professor of law at the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru*

## WORD DROP

### MIDWIT

Not to be confused with a dimwit, the new term 'midwit' refers to "someone who is around average intelligence but is so opinionated and full of themselves that they think they are some kind of genius," as per Urban Dictionary. They're not



dumb, but they're not smart either, but the latter is unthinkable to them. Think uncles on WhatsApp groups waxing eloquent about foreign relations or X users turning experts based on the news cycle, as decisive about animal birth control as they are about tariffs. AI has only supercharged the rise of the midwit, giving shallow takes the polish of clever thought with the help of chatbots. In an age where decisiveness trumps curiosity, midwits are having their moment.







# Ancient humans evolved to walk on two legs in two steps

## The Hindu Bureau

Walking on two legs is the single most distinctive trait that separates humans from other primates. For more than a century, scientists have known that bipedalism set our ancestors on a unique evolutionary path. Yet the developmental origins have been a mystery.

Traditional explanations that focused on fossil anatomy and biomechan-

ics couldn't reveal the molecular and developmental processes at work. Moreover, unlike other skeletal features, the ilium, which is the broad upper bone of the pelvis, shows no obvious counterparts in primates that could have revealed signs of change.

Researchers sought to uncover the hidden steps in embryonic development that shaped the pelvis into its human form. Their findings were published in *Nature* on August 28.

The team examined human embryonic pelvises across critical weeks of development, using histology to map cartilage zones and micro-CT scanning to track bone formation. They compared these with embryos of mice and of chimpanzees and gibbons held in museum collections. At the molecular level, they used single-cell multi-omics and spatial transcriptomics to catalogue which

genes and pathways were active in different cell types.

The study uncovered two major innovations. First, instead of elongating vertically as in apes and mice, the growth plate of the iliac cartilage expanded horizontally, rendering the pelvis wider and shorter. Second, the onset of bone formation in humans began later, at the posterior edge of the ilium, and spread outward along the

surface rather than inward through the cartilage.

This unusual timing and placement allowed the pelvis to keep expanding in width before hardening into bone. These shifts were tied to a network of developmental regulators, shaped in turn by changes in human DNA.

The findings suggest bipedalism arose via a two-step reprogramming of pelvic development: by redirecting cartilage growth

and delaying bone formation, human embryos gained a pelvis capable of supporting upright walking and accommodating childbirth. Understanding these pathways may illuminate the origins of pelvic malformation. In evolutionary terms, the authors have said this work may also clarify why fossil hominins like *Australopithecus* already had short, wide pelvis millions of years ago.

## SNAPSHOTS



### Genes that made horses rideable found

By analysing DNA from ancient horse remains, researchers have found that an important shift occurred at the *GSDMC* gene from around 4,200 years ago. Variants of this gene affect body shape, spinal structure, motor coordination, and strength, likely producing faster, stronger horses suited for riding. Experiments in mice confirmed that changes at *GSDMC* alter spine anatomy and movement ability. The resulting horses transformed human societies by enabling faster travel and mounted warfare.



### Hardy braille device displays multiple lines

Existing braille devices are often expensive, fragile, and limited to one line of text. A new device uses rubber membranes that flip inside out when powered by small bursts of combustion. The researchers built a grid of these eversible actuators and found each dot rose in less than 1 ms to form clear braille characters. The device is water-resistant and can withstand strong finger pressure, making it suitable for use in real-world settings like kitchens and bus stops.



### Orangutans feast on fruits to prep for famine

Researchers tracked wild orangutans' diets in Borneo's forests over many years and tested their urine samples. When fruit and energy-rich foods are scarce, the orangutans shifted to burning stored body fat to supply their brains with glucose. In times of plenty, they rebuilt these reserves. This protein prioritisation strategy plus metabolic flexibility helped them cope with famine. The findings suggest humans' constant access to energy-dense, protein-poor foods may help explain the surge in metabolic diseases.

# Microbes that digest plastic may fuel antibiotic resistance

An IISER Kolkata study has raised the possibility that those microbes capable of breaking down plastics are reservoirs of antibiotic resistance genes; plastic particles may serve as hotbeds where genes accumulate, spread between microbes

## Madhurima Pattanayak

Plastic is cheap, versatile, and used almost everywhere, from packaging and textiles to medical supplies. But unlike natural materials, plastic doesn't simply decay; instead, it breaks down into smaller fragments called microplastics (<5 mm) and nanoplastics (<1 µm).

These particles persist for decades or longer, accumulate in water bodies, and attract other pollutants like heavy metals, antibiotics, and toxic chemicals. They provide sticky surfaces where bacteria thrive, and recent research shows such surfaces can even host microbes carrying antibiotic resistance genes (ARGs). This raises fears that plastic waste may not only choke ecosystems but also help spread antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Biodegradation offers a potential way forward. Some microbes produce enzymes capable of disintegrating the strong chemical bonds in plastic polymers. A famous example is PETase, discovered in *Ideonella sakaiensis*, which can degrade polyethylene terephthalate (PET), a common plastic used in bottles. Yet despite such exciting discoveries, natural microbial communities with this ability remain poorly understood, especially in environments where plastic pollution is constant and intense.

The Sundarbans, stretching across India and Bangladesh, is the world's largest mangrove forest and receives around three billion microplastic parti-

## Dangerous treasure

The Sundarbans' floating bacterial community has both the genetic tools to degrade plastics and to resist antibiotics

- The Sundarbans' floating bacterial community contains hundreds of genes to degrade many plastic polymers

- Metagenomic sequencing revealed 838 plastic-degrading enzyme hits, with polyethylene glycol degradation genes being most abundant

- Plastic-degrading enzyme abundance peaked during the monsoon, reflecting influx of nutrients, microbes, microplastics from rivers



The Sundarbans' microbial community has already adapted to deal with a flood of plastic waste. ISTOCK PHOTO

- Microbes carrying plastic-degrading genes also frequently possessed antibiotic resistance and metal resistance traits

- Network analysis showed strong associations between plastic-degrading enzymes, antibiotic resistance genes, metal resistance genes

- While offering natural solutions for plastic breakdown, the microbes risk amplifying antimicrobial resistance and threatening public health

cles every day through the rivers that feed into the Bay of Bengal. With such heavy exposure, microbes in this ecosystem may have evolved new ways to handle plastic waste. At the same time, because microplastics can carry antibiotics and metals, the same microbes may also acquire resistance traits.

This two-faced possibility – plastic breakdown plus resistance – is at the heart of new work by scientists at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Kolkata. Published in *FEMS Microbiology Letters*, it shows that the floating bacterial community in the Sundarbans possesses the genetic tools to degrade plastics and that these tools are also linked with genes for AMR and metal resistance.

The scientists collected one litre of surface water

each month for nearly a year (2020-21) from a site in the Mooriganga estuary, a branch of the Sundarbans. The water samples were filtered to capture microbial cells, and the DNA from these microbes was extracted. Using a technique called metagenomic sequencing, the researchers read the genetic material of the entire microbial community.

Then they compared the DNA sequences to specialised databases. PlasticDB was used to identify plastic-degrading enzyme (PDE) genes, while other resources helped detect ARGs, metal resistance genes (MRGs), and mobile genetic elements – pieces of DNA that allow genes to move between microbes.

The analysis revealed an impressive 838 hits for plastic-degrading enzymes, representing the ability to act on 17 different

plastic polymers. Most hits (73%) targeted synthetic plastics, while the rest targeted natural polymers like polyhydroxyalkanoates.

The single most abundant set of enzymes was those breaking down PEG, suggesting a strong contamination input from biomedical and industrial sources.

The PDEs were more abundant during the monsoon. "HpB reflects the occurrence of PDEs and ARGs per season," IISER Kolkata biologist and study coauthor Punyasloke Bhadury said this is because "freshwater flow from inland to the coast during monsoon brings in nutrients, bacteria, and other materials including microplastics."

Crucially, however, the study found that microbes carrying PDEs also often carried resistance genes. Genes for zinc resistance and for resistance to ami-

noglycoside antibiotics were particularly common among plastic degraders. A co-occurrence network analysis revealed strong associations between PDEs, ARGs, and MRGs, hinting that the same selective pressures – plastic additives, metals, and pollutants – are shaping microbial adaptation.

On one hand, the discovery of such a diverse and abundant set of plastic-degrading enzymes is promising. It shows the Sundarbans' microbial community has already adapted to deal with the flood of plastic waste, potentially offering natural solutions to one of the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

On the other hand, the very microbes capable of breaking down plastics are also reservoirs of antibiotic and metal resistance genes. If such microbes were deliberately released or enriched in natural settings, they may contribute to the spread of resistance traits, undermining efforts to control AMR. In fact, plastics themselves may serve as hotbeds where resistance genes accumulate and spread between microbes through horizontal gene transfer. This makes the application of plastic-degrading microbes more complicated than it first appears.

"Changing climate can potentially accelerate the transfer of ARGs among bacteria, which may ultimately end up in humans," Mr. Bhadury said. "This could have consequences for One Health and public health in general."

Madhurima Pattanayak is a freelance science writer and journalist

# Land-use change reduced flows in China's river stations

## Jacob P. Koshy

A range of natural and human-induced factors have caused declines in the flows of at least 70% of hydrological stations in China, the most comprehensive analysis of this kind attempted in the country has found.

Changes in land-use and vegetation cover (LUCC) were the most important cause of such declines, followed by climate change-induced variability (CCV), and water abstraction, diversion, and regulation (WADR). There are 1,046 such stations distributed across the major main-streams and tributaries of the nearly 1,500 rivers in China.

Scientists at China's Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Bei-

jing, analysed data from all of these stations over 1956-2016, segregated the factors that influenced these flows, and assessed their relative contributions. The study was published in *Science Advances* on August 6.

For their analysis, the researchers grouped the factors influencing streamflow into three major drivers: CCV, LUCC, and WADR.

Recent studies, the authors said, highlight climate change's dominance in altering historical streamflow, whereas others underscore the role of natural variability in short-term variations and the strong effects of vegetation greening and human water withdrawals on streamflow reductions. The researchers said both factors contributed "almost equally" to changes in streamflow,



The Jinshajiang River ravine in Yunnan province in China, November 2018. ROD WADDINGTON (CC BY-SA)

although natural climate variability had "a slightly stronger contribution".

The scientists computed changes in water flow at the 1,046 stations with the year 1986 as a fulcrum year of comparison. Around 750 stations reported a declining trend, while the remainder reported an increasing trend. For these 756 stations, CCV enhanced the decrease at 53% and dampened it at

358 stations (47%), suggesting a counterbalancing effect. For the 290 stations with increasing flow, CCV enhanced the increase at 92% of stations and dampened it at 8%, suggesting climate change had a greater propensity to increase flows when the average flow was increasing.

"China's future water security would be determined by the extent to which ACC increases in the

coming decades," the authors wrote. "We encourage greater cooperation between climate and hydrology sciences to improve the accuracy of mid- and long-term national streamflow projections."

"The streamflow declines across more than 70% of measured stations may pose a threat to ecosystems, environments, socioeconomic, and agriculture. In dry regions of northern China, such declines, if maintained, could lead to water crises in the foreseeable future," the authors added.

Lower streamflow was broadly seen in central and northern China, with 593 stations decreasing by up to 40% and 163 stations decreasing by more than 40%. A total of 433 stations displayed significant decreasing trends, including 273 stations with reduc-

tions up to 40% and 160 stations with decreases exceeding 40%. Increases in streamflow were also reported from the lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

While the analysis was specific to China, it mirrors tropical hydrological situations like those in India. The Central Water Commission has 901 hydro-meteorological stations across all the major river basins.

The Ministry of Water Resources had said in March that the annual average flow data maintained by the CWC, for the last 20 years for major/important rivers, "did not indicate any significant decline in water availability." However, the per capita annual water availability has progressively dropped due to increasing population, urbanisation, and better lifestyles of residents, it added.



## Question Corner

# When gravity wins

Why doesn't water fall in one go from a cloud?

A cloud is not a big pool of liquid water but consists of minuscule droplets (-10 microns each) and sometimes ice crystals. These particles are so small and light that they are suspended by rising air currents and turbulence in the atmosphere. Each droplet is subject to gravity, but because it's so small, air resistance almost perfectly balances its weight. The falling speed of a 10-micron droplet is only around 1 cm/s, so it would take hours to fall through 1 km of air. Updrafts in clouds are often stronger than this. As droplets coalesce into

larger drops or as ice crystals grow and melt, their mass increases much faster than air drag. A 2-mm-wide raindrop can fall at around 7 m/s, which is faster than updrafts. Once droplets reach that size, gravity wins and the droplets fall as rain. A bucket of water is a continuous body. Surface tension holds all the molecules together, so if you overturn it, the water pours out in a sheet. A cloud has no such cohesion: it's just a diffuse suspension of independent droplets scattered through kilometres of air.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



# Is the Gangotri glacier losing snow earlier than usual?

How is climate change altering the water cycle in the Gangotri Glacier System which feeds the Bhagirathi river?

Jacob Koshy

**The story so far:** A recent study has reconstructed the long-term discharge flow of the Gangotri Glacier System (GGS), the source of the upper Ganga basin which contributes to the waters of the Bhagirathi river in the central Himalayas. In the wake of climate change, glaciologists the world over have been studying the impact of glacier melt.

**Why is the GGS significant?** The snow and ice reserves of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) are critical sources of water to sustain major rivers like the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra. Significant climatic changes, however, have been observed in recent decades in the region, altering the cryosphere and the hydrological cycle. This has meant a change in the dynamics of glacier-fed hydrological systems, accelerating glacial retreat and shifting seasonal discharge patterns. Modelling studies, or theoretical assessments of these changes, are a popular approach to assess these changes. Given their size, however, assessing river flow and delineating the contribution of snow melt and precipitation is challenging. It is easier to estimate this in relatively smaller systems such as the GGS and this is why it is a popular choice among hydrologists and climate scientists. The current study, ‘Hydrological Contributions of Snow and Glacier Melt from the Gangotri Glacier System and Their Climatic Controls Since 1980’, led by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Indore, the Universities of Utah and Dayton in the U.S. and the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, attempts to fill the gap. The study appears in the Journal of the Indian Society of Remote Sensing.

**What did the study find?** The study reconstructed the long-term discharge trend of the GGS by combing a high-resolution glacio-hydrological model, called Spatial Processes in Hydrology (SPHY). This simulates terrestrial water balance processes, such as rainfall-runoff, evapotranspiration, and cryospheric processes. This is combined with the Indian Monsoon Data Assimilation and Analysis (IMDAA) dataset spanning 1980–2020. Their analysis finds that maximum GGS discharge occurs during the summer months, with a peak in July at 129 cubic metre per second. The mean annual GGS discharge was estimated as 28±1.9 m3 /s, with the major contribution from snow melt (64%), followed by

Analysis shows a shift in the discharge peak from August to July post-1990, attributed to decreased winter precipitation and enhanced melting in early summer glacier melt (21%), rainfall-runoff (11%) and base flow (4%) over 1980–2020. A decadal discharge analysis, their study found, showed a shift in the discharge peak from August to July post-1990, which they attributed to decreased winter precipitation and enhanced melting in early summer.

The mean, decadal GGS discharge showed the highest volumetric increase of 7.8% from 1991-2000 to 2001-2010. While the mean annual temperature increased, no significant trend was observed in mean annual precipitation or glacier melt. Despite the warming, snow melt declined, mainly due to a decreasing trend in mean snow cover area, whereas rainfall-runoff and base flow increased over GGS during 1980–2020. Statistical analysis revealed that the mean annual discharge of GGS is mainly controlled by summer precipitation, followed by winter temperature.

**Which glaciers make up the GGS?** The study area of the GGS comprises the glaciers Meru (7 km²), Raktavaran (30 km²), Chaturangi (75 km²) and the largest glacier Gangotri (140 km²). The GGS covers an area of 549 square km (km²) spanning an elevation range between 3,767 metres and 7,072 metres. About 48% of the GGS is glacierised. The GGS receives precipitation from the western disturbances during winter (October to April) and from the Indian summer monsoon during summer (May to September). The average seasonal rainfall (May to October) is around 260 mm, with an average mean temperature of 9.4°C for the period 2000–2003.

**What are the implications of the findings?** Rainfall run-off and base flow have exhibited increasing trends on GGS, suggesting warming-induced hydrological changes. This year the summer monsoon has been particularly intense in north India with nearly 25% more rain than usual from June to August. There have been several instances of intense floods in Uttarakhand, Jammu and Himachal Pradesh often prompting State authorities to label them - without a scientific basis - as ‘cloudburst’, despite the lack of appropriate instruments or satellite imagery to justify this. A cloudburst is when over 10 cm of rainfall is reported in an hour over an area less than 30 square km.

# What is top court’s order on social media?

What does the Supreme Court’s push to regulate content mean for free speech? Who will frame the guidelines so that freedom of speech and expression are not abused? What does the Constitution lay down? On what grounds are free speech restricted?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

**The story so far:** On August 25, 2025, the Supreme Court urged the Union government to frame guidelines for regulating social media, observing that influencers often commercialise free speech in ways that can offend the sentiments of vulnerable groups. A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi directed that the regulations be prepared in consultation with the National Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA). The directive comes at a time when nearly 491 million Indians are active on social media, highlighting the challenges of safeguarding free expression while simultaneously protecting individual dignity.

**What were the directions?** The court’s order stemmed from an intervention application filed by a non-profit supporting individuals affected by Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), a rare and debilitating genetic disorder. The organisation alleged that stand-up comedians Samay Raina, Vipul Goyal, Balraj Paramjeet Singh Ghai, Sonali Thakkar, and Nishant Jagdish Tanwar had “abused the freedom of speech and expression” by making derogatory comments about individuals suffering from SMA. During the proceedings, the Bench emphasised that the right to free speech does not encompass speech made purely for “commercial purposes”. “When you are commercialising free speech, you should also bear in mind not to hurt the sentiments of certain sections of society,” Justice Bagchi observed.



**Under scrutiny:** Guidelines should address the evolving challenges posed by modern modes of communication, says SC. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

‘Any additional regulation must be drafted with care so as not to impinge on free speech’

Attorney-General R. Venkataramani, appearing for the Union government, assured the court that the Centre would frame guidelines in consultation with stakeholders to ensure “the rights of all parties concerned are adequately protected without impinging upon individual dignity, honour, and respect.” The Bench further clarified that such guidelines should not serve merely as a “reaction to any particular incident” but should be designed to address the evolving challenges posed by technology and modern modes of communication. The court also ordered the comedians to issue public apologies on their YouTube channels and other social media platforms.

**When can limits be imposed on free speech?** The Constitution permits restrictions on free speech only on eight narrowly defined grounds under Article 19(2) – the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, contempt of court, defamation, and incitement to offences. “There are already laws in place to regulate expression on these grounds. However, the Supreme Court has consistently held that the state cannot impose restrictions beyond these constitutionally prescribed limits,” Jay Vinayak Ojha, research fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, told *The Hindu*.

In 2015, in the case of *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, holding that vague grounds such as “annoyance,” “insult,” or “hatred” cannot justify the criminalisation of speech. The ruling affirmed that speech which “offends, shocks, or disturbs” remains constitutionally protected, and that restrictions on free speech must satisfy the test of reasonableness under Article 19(2). The principle was reiterated in *Kaushal Kishore v. State of Uttar Pradesh* (2023), where a Constitution Bench held that the grounds enumerated in Article 19(2) are exhaustive and cannot be expanded, however well-intentioned the attempt. The judges underscored that “no one can either be taxed or penalised for holding an opinion which is not in conformity with the constitutional values”.

Similarly, in March 2025, the Supreme Court quashed a criminal case registered by the Gujarat Police, accusing Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi of inciting discord through a poem. A Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan observed that speech may well discomfort even members of the judiciary, but it remains the court’s “duty to uphold” and “zealously protect” the fundamental freedom to free speech

guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a).

**Is commercial speech protected?** The Supreme Court’s jurisprudence on the protection accorded to commercial speech has evolved significantly over time. In *Hamdard Dawakhana v. Union of India* (1959), advertisers challenged the constitutionality of the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1954, which sought to curb misleading advertisements promoting products with supposed “magical” medical remedies. While the court acknowledged that advertising is “no doubt a form of speech,” it emphasised that once a commercial advertisement contains an element of trade or commerce, “it no longer falls within the concept of free speech for the object is not propagation of ideas – social, political or furtherance of literature or human thought.” However, this approach was revisited in *Tata Press v. Mahanagar Telephone-Nigam Limited* (1995), where the court held that commercial speech should not be denied constitutional protection merely because business entities issue it. The ruling recognised that commercial advertisements serve the public interest, as they disseminate information in “a democratic economy” and may be of “much more importance to the general public than to the advertiser.” Similarly, in *A. Suresh v. State of Tamil Nadu* (1997), the court observed that “where the freedom of speech gets intertwined with business, it undergoes a fundamental change and its exercise has to be balanced against societal interests.” Such interpretations led the court to distinguish between two categories of commercial expression – one that advances public interest by facilitating the free flow of information, and another that serves only private commercial interests.

**What are the implications?** According to Mr. Ojha, digital media is already governed by a robust statutory framework. “Social media companies are bound by the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, under the IT Act, 2000, which require them to prevent their platforms from being used to disseminate obscene, pornographic, or otherwise harmful content. Social media influencers, too, are not beyond the reach of ordinary criminal law and may be held accountable for what they say online,” he said. He cautioned that any additional regulation would have to be drafted with great care so as not to impinge upon the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Experts told *The Hindu* that the Supreme Court’s polyvocal character, shaped by judges’ differing approaches, results in inconsistencies in its free speech jurisprudence. Constitutional law scholar Gautam Bhatia has argued that this polyvocality produces a “patchwork jurisprudence” leaving domains such as free speech dependent on discretion of judges, who may at times disregard established precedents.

# How did Kerala pull off digital literacy feat?

Who were the volunteers? Who were trained? What do the numbers tell? Which panchayat was declared the State’s first fully digitally literate panchayat? What is the plan going forward? Why is the State focusing on smartphones instead of computer literacy?

S.R. Praveen

**The story so far:** On August 21, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan declared Kerala as the first fully digitally literate State in India, marking the completion of the first phase of the ‘Digi Kerala’ digital literacy programme, a grass-root level intervention across all local self-government bodies with an aim to bridge the digital divide. According to the Local Self Government Department, a total of 21.87 lakh people who were identified as “digitally illiterate” in a ground-level survey had successfully completed the training programme as well as cleared the evaluation.

**What did they learn to do?** The trainees, who were not previously acquainted with digital devices, were taught to make voice calls as well as video calls using smartphones, to use WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Those who were not too old were also taught to access government services and to carry out digital transactions.

**What led Kerala to take up the programme?** This is a classic case of bottom up, rather than

In the next phase, there will be awareness classes on cyberfraud and lessons to identify and reject fake news

top down, flow of government programme ideas. The idea originated from the Pullampara panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram in 2021, when some government officials native to Pullampara noticed long queues regularly in front of one of the few banks in the panchayat. Quite a few of those in the queue were daily-wage or MGNREGS labourers who had travelled from the interiors just to check their account balance. The travails of those who had to sacrifice their daily wages for even checking their account balance made the government and panchayat officials think about teaching them to use the basic digital technology required in daily life.

The panchayat launched the ‘Digi Pullampara’ project, under which a survey was carried out across all wards to identify those who are digitally illiterate. Out of 3,917 people thus identified, training was provided to 3,300 as the rest were bedridden. The core team designed 15 activities in three modules for training.

Students from the National Service Scheme (NSS) units of engineering colleges and schools in the region signed up as volunteers to teach, along with Kudumbashree volunteers, SC/ST promoters, and library council members. MGNREGS worksites and Kudumbashree neighbourhood groups where people come together in considerable numbers became classrooms. Training was also done by volunteers visiting households. After the training, a different set of volunteers conducted an evaluation of each trainee, with the requirement that they had to complete at least six of the 15 tasks to pass. In Pullampara, 96.18% of the trainees cleared the evaluation. Retraining was provided for those who failed. At an event in September 2022, in which the Chief Minister declared Pullampara as Kerala’s first fully digitally literate panchayat, it was also announced that the programme will be expanded State-wide.

**How did the government scale up the Pullampara model across the State?** The government brought the core team from Pullampara to the Kerala Institute of Local Administration to train a group of master

trainers, who later trained 2.57 lakh volunteers from across the State. The surveying and training process was thus scaled up without major tweaks and was implemented in a manner similar to the Total Literacy campaign of the late 1980s. In the survey, 1.51 crore people from 83.45 lakh households participated, out of which 21.88 lakh were identified as digitally illiterate. At the State level, the third-party evaluation was carried out by the Economics and Statistics Department, in which 21.87 lakh people passed. In panchayats where over 10% trainees failed the evaluation, re-training was conducted. To questions on whether the State-wide survey has truly covered everyone, the officials argue that local level Kudumbashree workers who accompany the volunteers for the survey helped them avoid the houses in which the residents are already digitally savvy.

As per the National Digital Literacy Mission guidelines for digital literacy, training needs to be provided only for those up to 60 years of age. But the Digi Kerala programme includes people of all ages, even those above the age of 100. As many as 15,221 of the trainees were above the age of 90, while 7.77 lakh people were between the ages of 60 and 75 and 1.35 lakh between the ages of 76 and 90. Over 13 lakh women, eight lakh men and 1,644 transgender persons completed the programme successfully, as per the data.

**What is the road ahead for the Digi Kerala project?** At the Digi Kerala declaration, the Chief Minister also announced the Digi Kerala 2.0 project, under which awareness classes on cyber fraud, lessons to identify and reject fake news and intensive training to access government services will be held. At the national level, digital literacy is focused on computer literacy, but the Pullampara panchayat as well as the State government shifted the focus to the use of smartphones to navigate daily life. The State government sees it as part of a larger project, which also involves its Kerala Fibre Optic Network (KFON) project aimed at ensuring universal Internet access and narrowing the digital divide by providing Internet free of cost to below the poverty line (BPL) families (14,000 BPL families have been connected till now, in addition to 74,203 commercial home connections) and the K-SMART project to make available all services of local self-government bodies digitally over a uniform platform.




## Peter Navarro

Varghese K. George

### **B. Sudershan Reddy**

**Sandeep Phukan**

**Vasudevan Mukunth**

CMYK        M VZ-VZE





Andrey Tarkovskiy on preserving the legacy of his father, Russian auteur Andrey Tarkovsky

ARTS PAGE 3

The Sunday Tribune

# SPECTRUM



'A Return to Self' by Aatish Taseer is more than a memoir of his life alone

BOOKS PAGE 4

CHANDIGARH | 31 AUGUST 2025



Water always has its say — greed is not the course it follows, the language it understands

## THE RIVER SPEAKS, LISTEN

R UMAMAHESHWARI

ONCE Gautama, the Buddha, advised Tissa (the *bhikkuni*): “Don’t let what can hold you back overwhelm you; when you are free from everything that holds you back, you can live in the world without the depravities that ooze from within.”

And I wondered, what if one replaced the rivers today with Tissa? What if, as the Buddha advised, the rivers were indeed freeing themselves of everything that came in their way as they moved towards their ultimate destination with gay abandon, exuberance and freedom to flow? What if the “depravities” were the innumerable manifestations of greed tearing at their bosoms, their waters, sand-beds, and even rocks and pebbles, that held them together?

An elderly fisherman of Kakinada (on the south-east coast of India) had told me years ago, “Actually, if you see, we are all living on a *lanka* (Telugu word for the islands formed on river banks); the sea is all around us. And all rivers shall go to the sea.”

He also told me that no amount of holding in dams and barrages can ever stop a river from “meeting her sea”.

In a folk tale from Lahaul (as recorded by Shivan Kumar, *Janjatiya Lok Kathayein*, 2020), a group of young boys wanted to attend a feast on the other bank of river Chandra. The *cham*, a makeshift bridge to cross over, had broken down, but they decided to cross over by forming a human chain during the night when the river ‘sleeps’. However, while crossing, one of them remarked, “How much do you think we will eat at the feast?” In excitement, his friend raised his hands and said: “This much!” And lo! The human chain broke and they were all swept away by the gushing river waters. This folktale is about human greed, so apt for today.

Hindi poet Omprakash Valmiki wrote in ‘*Maa Aur Nadi*’ (2011):

*Nadi, it ihas, aur vartamaan, dono hain*

*Maa ki tarah*

(The river is both the past and present, like the mother)

As for poet Rajesh Joshi (‘*Paani ki Awaaz*’):

*Paani ka hi jadu tha*

*Ki paani ki awaaz bhi paardarshi aur*

*taral lagti thi*

*Bahar samudra ki taraf jaati aawaazon mein*

*Pahaad se utarkar aane ki awaazein*

*bhi shaamil thi*

(It was but the magic of water that its sound seemed both transparent and clear. Inherent in the sounds of water flowing towards the sea were those of water descending from the mountains...)

Himachali writer SR Harnot, in his short story ‘*Nadi Tadapti Hai*’ (which later became the

Each river has its own temperament, vocabulary. Upset nature’s delicate balance — as we have, recklessly — and see the devastation that unfolds

### Water’s ways



MALKIAT SINGH

famous novel ‘*Nadi Rang Jaisi Ladki*’ — ‘A Woman, The Colour of River’, speaks of the free-spirited river and her bond with the elderly woman Sunma thus: “*Woh nadi dadi Sunma ki aankhon mein behi thi.*” (That river used to flow in the eyes of grandmother Sunma).

And goes on: “...*Bahut se rang the usmein. Anginat udaanein samaahit thi... Nadi ka pawanik naam Shatadru tha. Prachalit naam Satluj... Kitni pyaari lagti thi woh behi hui... Woh jahaan se guzarti, dharti mein yawan bhar deti... Shaant thi, vegmayi thi. Devi thi aur maa bhi...*”

(She had many colours within. The river’s ancient name was Shatadru; but Sutlej became her popular name. How beautiful she seemed as she flowed, showering youthfulness to the spaces she flowed past. She was peaceful. She was turbulent, too. She was a goddess, and a mother, too).

He writes that once she is confined within a dam, the river seems almost dead. “Once the dam gates open, the agonising, hungry cries of the river waters just remain submerged within and die.”

As for me, I learnt years ago of a feminine person, Godavari, who would ‘come’, ‘stay a bit’, and ‘leave’ — as floods were articulated in the Telugu

language of people along the banks of Godavari in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The same people today speak of two kinds of waters: the backwater and the natural ‘river’, post-Polavaram dam’s construction. I understood the difference between political-commercial waters and a natural river.

Through subsequent journeys alongside the Sutlej, Beas, Parvati, Pin, Spiti, Chandrabhaga, Siul, Baira Siul and other rivers, rivulets, lakes and streams, besides glaciers, snow passes, natural and forced waterfalls from rocks, I see larger connections between every form of water there is, each intrinsic to the being of rivers. Dissection or decimation of any one of these forms has a devastating impact on monsoonal flows.

I see also the beautiful interplay between the clouds above and the river and its many feeders below. It could not have been more strikingly reflected than through my recent travels in Cham-ba’s Churah and Pangri valleys, watching the sheer diversity and fragile balance between temperaments of wetlands and spaces interwoven with the Ravi, Baira Siul, and Chandrabhaga rivers.

How subtle yet obvious are the relationships! Water speaks in many languages, but one needs the heart to stop a while, and listen. Water gushes out through rocks, glaciers feeding various streams, wetlands breaking the monotony of green meadows — every aspect seems to be one synchronised ballet.

“The mountains that Himalayan rivers rush through are also in motion; they too are a process, though they seem the most stable of objects... In time the mountains will dissolve from the work of the rivers and rains and winds, the handmaidens that are delivering them back to the ocean from which they were once uplifted,” Cheryl Colopy writes in ‘*Dirty, Sacred Rivers*’ (2012).

Recent riverine devastations are the cumulative impact of certain ‘mythologies’ that have imprisoned our mountain and river systems. River beds are continuously mined at different stretches. And the tourist gaze of indifference is the same for a river, as it is for a glacier, or a meadow.

Many years ago (perhaps it was 2009 or 2010), I watched a commercial for a private engineering company where a group of engineers struggles over a problem as a lake obstructs the design, and the boss remarks, “Where is the problem? Let us shift the lake!”

Lest one forgets, I end with an older news report on a statement that reflected the way we are headed, oblivious to the anguish of water, glaciers, rivers, and mountains. At a town hall event at the Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was convinced that cities of the future would be settled around optical fibre networks, and not rivers.

— *The Shimla-based writer is the author of ‘When Godavari Comes’*

Living along the banks of Sutlej, and banking on community

### Fear of the darya

SUKHDEV SIDHU

THIS was in the early Sixties. My village, Udhawal, was a backward area of Nakodar tehsil (Punjab). I was a student at the local primary school. A newly qualified teacher had recently joined us, hailing from Mehatpur, a village that seemed like a city to us. She was in her early twenties. Initially, a family member would drop her off, but later she started walking to school. Unlike today, we addressed female teachers as “Bhehanjee” and male teachers as “Bhaji”.

July and August marked the monsoon season. One day, dark clouds gathered, and thunder rolled across the sky, signalling imminent heavy rain. In those days, rainfall was intense. We were thrilled, hoping we’d be sent home early.

Bhehanjee conferred with her fellow teachers and decided to leave before the rain began. My classmate, Piara, and I were tasked with escorting her home. We were merely seven or eight years old — students of third grade, at best. A teacher’s order was sacrosanct, so we followed it.

Bhehanjee led the way. She was dressed in white pyjamas, a colourful jumper, and a matching *chunni* — just like the famous actress Vyjayanthimala. As it started drizzling, it dampened her clothes. She seemed to shrink slightly, stiffened from the cold. While she was fully aware of her surroundings, we were oblivious to anything beyond our responsibilities.

The rain eventually stopped. Summoning whatever courage I had, I decided to head back to the village alone. Piara had quietly slipped away, abandoning me. Later, I learnt that his aunt lived in this village. He did not wish to take me with him.

By the time school ended, all the students had gone home, except us. Piara and I were the only sons of our families. Our families were frantic. No one at school had informed them that we were sent away. My family went to Mehatpur in the pouring rain but couldn’t find us.

I reached Ramuwal, a village in the exact middle of Mehatpur and my village. I was trembling

with fear — the ‘Buddha Darya’ had swollen, overflowing with terrifying sounds. There was no life in sight. The water kept rising. When we passed it earlier, it was bone-dry, but now, murky, reddish water filled the area. I couldn’t go back to Mehatpur. My fear of water overwhelmed me.

I would mark the water level, watching it rise quickly. I sat, then stood again, only to find the water rising higher. Finally, I gave up. I started crying and feeling feverish. My sobs grew louder, and dark thoughts flooded my mind.

By some miraculous luck, I spotted Puran Singh from my village. He noticed my anxiety. He kept reassuring me that I wasn’t alone. When we reached the middle of the stream, the water rose to my neck. I thought I would drown. But Puran, calm as ever, encouraged me: “Don’t be afraid. I’m with you.” In that moment, he was like an angel.

The ‘Buddha Darya’ had flooded a few times before. It wasn’t actually a river, but a small stream connected to the Sutlej river near the villages of Adraman and Lohgarh. When the Sutlej swelled beyond its limits, it overflowed, often bursting through the weakest points. This was one such weak point. The local *zamindars* often took advantage of the situation, using bullock carts to ferry people across the floodwaters for a fee.

Today, it’s almost impossible to identify where the ‘Buddha Darya’ used to flow. The land has been levelled, and fields have overtaken what was once a place of fear and danger.

Puran Singh took me home. As soon as I saw my family, I burst into tears. My grandmother immediately embraced me. My mother hurriedly changed my wet clothes.

The next morning, my *Taya* went to confront the teachers, warning them not to send me anywhere again. I didn’t return to school for three days due to fever, and was haunted by unsettling dreams. When I did go back, my teacher scolded me harshly: “You’re not dead, why all the fuss?” Even now, I find little comfort in the memory.

A decade later, a similar flooding occurred. Our neighbouring village, Baloki, broadcast a warning about the overflow of the Sutlej. In panic, our village organised a team to build makeshift embankments. We could hear the deafening sounds of water and collapsing structures. Fortunately, by dawn, the water began to recede.

Flooding is a near-regular occurrence for the communities residing along Sutlej’s banks. In many respects, it is nature’s harsh response to environmental degradation. As a result of repeated administrative shortcomings, farmers have often resorted to making their own preparations, however inadequate. At times, it appears to be a contest between the destructive force of the floods and the resilience of the people. They recover, rebuild, until the cycle gets repeated.

— *The writer is a Punjabi author*



# How to stay one step ahead of digital tricksters



DEAR customer, your SIM will be blocked in 24 hours. Click here to update your KYC — sounds urgent, right? Many of you panic, click and land on a page that looks exactly like your bank or telecom site. It asks for Aadhaar, bank details, or maybe even an OTP. By the time you sense something is fishy, scammers already have what they need to steal your identity or drain your account. And this isn't a rare slip-up. In 2024 alone, India logged over 36 lakh cyber fraud complaints, with victims losing a staggering ₹22,845 crore. Clearly, no one is safe. Students, professionals and even business owners are getting duped because the scams look so convincingly real.

The silver lining? Every con has cracks. Once you know the tricks, it is like spotting the strings in a puppet show. Let us decode the latest scams and stock up on a survival kit to beat them.

## Fake KYC texts to AI abductions, digital scammers are evolving — it's time we got smarter too



In 2024 alone, India logged over 36 lakh cyber fraud complaints. iSTOCK

### DIGITAL ARREST DRAMA

Fake "CBI officers" video-call you, accuse you of crimes and demand instant UPI bail. They flash fake IDs, use scary language and pressure you to pay on the spot. Seniors especially panic. In one tragic case, a Karnataka couple lost ₹50 lakh and their lives to this cruel trick.

### AI-POWERED KIDNAPPING SCAMS

This one's chilling. "Your child has been kidnapped! Pay now!" But it is all AI. Scammers mimic your child's voice or show a deepfake video. Sometimes, they even let you talk to the AI-cloned "child". It feels terrifyingly real and many families pay ransom before realising the truth.

### CALL-MERGING TRICKS

A "friend" asks you to merge another call. That second call is actually your OTP. By merging, you've basically gifted scammers your digital keys. Or the fake "bank tech support" agent who makes you install a remote-access app. The moment you do, they are inside your phone, watching you type passwords and OTPs in real-time.

### QR CODES, FAKE CHALLANS

Traffic fine on WhatsApp? With your vehicle number neatly typed in? Click it and your phone's hacked. Or a QR code that claims "scan to receive money". Then there are trading apps and job offers promising high returns. The dashboards are fake, the testimonials are fake and the moment you try to withdraw, your money vanishes.

### YOUR SCAM SURVIVAL KIT

Alright, enough doom and gloom. Let's talk defence. Here's your street-smart guide to dodging scams, explained like life hacks you can actually remember.

**Pause before panic:** Scammers thrive on urgency. "Your SIM will be blocked!" "Police will arrest you!" The aim is to scare you into instant action. Trick: next time you get such a message, count to 10. Banks, telecom companies and government agencies don't work like ransom gangs.

**Treat OTPs like gold:** Think of OTPs as mini-bags of cash. Would you hand over a bag of cash to a stranger? Nope. Then don't share OTPs, PINs or CVVs, not with the bank staff, not with delivery agents and not even with someone pretending to be your friend.

**Links are bait:** That tempting blue link in a text? Assume it is a trap unless proven otherwise. If it feels important, skip the link and go directly to the official website or app. One extra click saves a lifetime of regret.

**QR codes are one-way tickets:** Here's a fun rule, scanning a QR code never brings money in, only takes money out. So, if someone says "scan this code to receive cash", it is a red flag the size of a billboard. **Don't merge calls:** It feels harmless until you realise you just merged in your bank's OTP. Rule of thumb: if you didn't start the conference call, don't join it.

**The double-check rule:** A "job offer" with sky-high pay for zero work? Or an app promising 100 per cent guaranteed profits? It is most likely a scam. Always verify through official websites, not random WhatsApp forwards.

**Pass the word:** Change passwords often. Don't share them. And never use the same one everywhere. A password manager makes life easier, but even simple variations across accounts are better than one "master key".

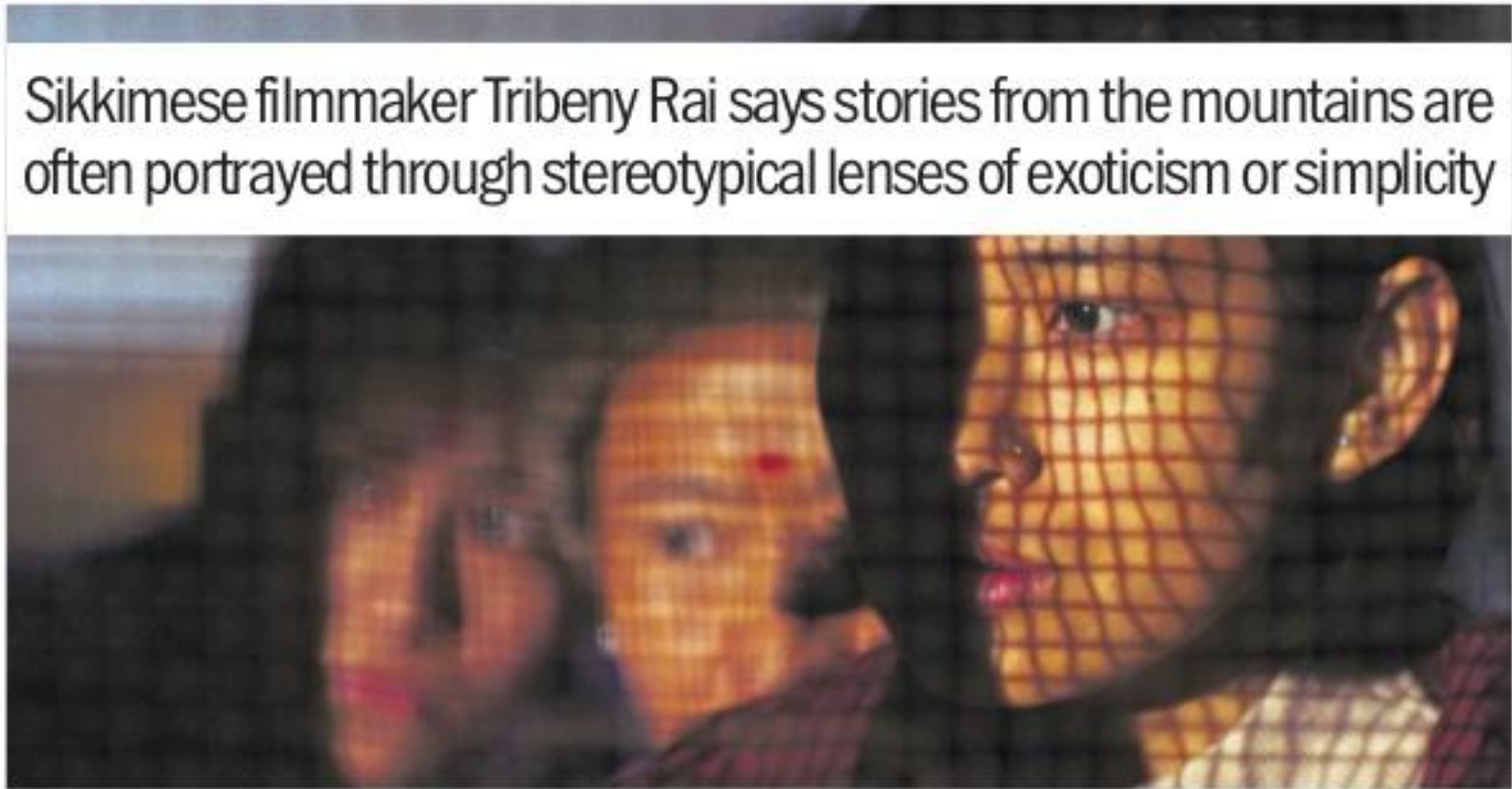
**Train your family:** Scammers love easy targets, elderly parents or unsuspecting teens. Have the "scam talk" at home. A five-minute chat over dinner could save lakhs.

**Report without delay:** If you do get conned, don't hide it out of embarrassment. Act fast, call the national cyber helpline 1930 or report on cyber-crime.gov.in. The sooner you act, the higher the chance the banks can block stolen money.

Cyber criminals feed on fear, greed and urgency. But you can flip the script. Stay calm, think twice and trust your gut. Next time someone tells you your SIM will be blocked or you've won a luxury car, just grin and say: "Nice try, bro. Better luck fooling someone else." Stay alert, stay safe and may your money stay where it belongs, snug in your pocket.

**Pro tip:** Treat every unexpected link, call or "urgent" message like a stranger knocking at your door at midnight. Don't open it until you are absolutely sure who is outside.

**Expert advice:** "Stay safe from financial scams by verifying authenticity, being cautious of unrealistic offers and keeping personal information secure. Always use official channels and stay informed to protect yourself from financial losses," warns A Venkatesh, DSP Cybercrime Cell, Chandigarh.



A still from 'Shape of Momo'.

# Gender is political

SUKANT DEEPAK

IT'S the pauses and silences that echo the loudest in the film. Each frame is unhurried, and a certain rhythm envelops the multiple themes that come through — not with thuds but yes, with delicate explosions. From identity, personal freedom, gender discrimination, and migration to presenting female characters as complex individuals and not just victims of patriarchy, Sikkimese filmmaker Tribeny Rai's Nepalese-language film 'Shape of Momo' emerged from what she calls an inner necessity. It will have its world premiere at the prestigious Busan International Film Festival in South Korea, followed by its European premiere at the San Sebastian Film Festival in Spain.

A diploma holder in direction and screenwriting from the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute in Kolkata, this 34-year-old filmmaker, returning to her village in Sikkim after film school, found herself caught between her own expectations and those of the people around her. "I began to notice how such pressures quietly shape our lives. I knew many others were going through the same experience. The thought stayed with me for a long time, and about two years ago, Kislay, the co-writer, and I began writing 'Shape of Momo' together," she tells.

The film, among other things, is about Bishnu, who returns to her Himalayan village after quitting her job, only to face mounting family pressures and heightened societal expectations. As tensions rise with her pregnant sister's arrival and a budding relationship with a 'suitable' boy from her community, she must choose between conforming to tradition or claiming her independence.

While the movie draws from Rai's personal experiences and observations of identity, freedom and tradition through a multi-generational female family, it aims to address the conflict between women's personal ambitions and societal expectations.

The filmmaker insists that gender discrimination is systemic and socially embedded, and by paying close attention to small, everyday details, they could show these dynamics naturally. "And in doing so, personal moments revealed larger social realities. When you remain truthful to your own existence, you begin to hear the echoes of many others," she adds.

It is almost a relief that 'Shape of Momo' stays miles away from the 'mountain utopia' clichés. "Stories from the mountains and villages are often portrayed through stereotypical lenses of exoticism or simplicity. I aimed to change this narrative and tell our story with honesty and depth," Rai says.

Of course, growing up in Sikkim with three sisters did have a profound influence on the film. The filmmaker says that being part of a household of women made her deeply aware of both the strengths and the pressures they live with. "There was a significant gender disparity growing up, and it is still not a thing of the past. Sometimes, it

is right in front of you, and other times it is subtly woven into everyday expectations and roles," she stresses.

However, Kislay, one of the producers of the film, adds, "The film may come from her own personal family experience, but rather than being nostalgic or self-pitying, she has an inward critical gaze. She can be both sympathetic and critical of the characters at the same time."

Even as the people in her village, where the movie was shot, are overjoyed with the news of it getting selected at major prestigious festivals, Rai feels the film had to be made in the Nepalese language, spoken widely in Sikkim. "It is my mother tongue, a language through which I experience the world most intimately. Not making it in Nepali was never even an option," she asserts.

Ruing that finding support for independent films is always tough — more so for a Nepali-language film — she opines that the market is driven by many factors and the films that succeed at the box office are often more spectacle than cinema. "And after the pandemic, when the industry was already struggling, securing support for our film became especially challenging."

And yes, she is quite excited about the independent cinema emerging from the Northeast and North Bengal and feels that filmmakers from this region are beginning to put a spotlight on their own worlds. "There is a growing awareness, and more filmmakers are committed to bringing these underrepresented narratives to the screen," says Rai, who has also made five short films and a documentary series for Doordarshan.

Having experienced the world most intimately through Nepalese, Tribeny Rai chose to make the film in it.



As the conversation veers towards dedicated support structures for independent filmmakers in Europe, Rai says that such structures there allow artists to take risks, explore personal stories and develop their voice without being entirely dependent on the commercial market.

"In India, independent cinema is growing, but the structures for mentorship, funding, and distribution are still limited, sadly," concludes the filmmaker, who feels being immersed in literature from an early age has shown her that the smallest gestures and the quietest observations can carry entire worlds...

— The writer is a Chandigarh-based freelancer

## CAPTION CONTEST 1525

RAVI KUMAR



Entries are invited to suggest a caption for the photograph. The caption should only be in English, witty and not exceeding 10 words, and reach Spectrum, The Tribune, Chandigarh, 160030, by Thursday. The best five captions will be published and awarded ₹300, ₹250, ₹200, ₹150 and ₹100, respectively. Each caption must be accompanied by a clipping of the caption contest and its number. Photocopies or scans of the caption photo won't be accepted. Online subscribers may attach an e-paper clipping at captionpics@tribunemail.com or a scanned copy of the e-paper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number, along with your address.

### SELECTED ENTRIES FOR CAPTION CONTEST 1524



SPECTRUM AUGUST 24 ISSUE (SEE PHOTO)

- Ball rounder — Rajiv Arora via epaper, Mumbai
- Soaking in the spotlight — Pavit Nanda via epaper, Gurugram
- Indepth sporting skills — RK Taneja, Chandigarh
- Throwback moment — Alisha Chandra, Chandigarh
- Water bodies — Neha Badsara via epaper, Bhiwani

The classic combination is delicious, full of balanced nutrition and easy to cook

# A makeover for rajma-chawal



FOOD TALK  
PUSHPESH PANT

RAJMA-CHAWAL is a combo dish that is one of the most beloved comfort foods in India. It is delicious, balanced in nutrition and easy to cook. The only problem with it is that familiarity in this case has bred indifference, if not contempt. More often than not, it is likely to be dismissed as a home-style staple. This is not quite true. *Ras-misse rajma* is a delicacy in Punjab, and in the *dhaam* of Himachal Pradesh, it occupies a coveted place as *madra*.

There is a great variety of *rajma* available in our country, each with a different appearance, texture and flavour. The multi-colour *rajma chitral* may have been named thus as these may have originally come from the Chitral region in the north-western frontier of undivided India, and some say that its marbled appearance with specks on a mosaic floor may have inspired people to lovingly call it *chitral*. Then, there is the most prized deep scarlet kidney bean grown in the Jammu region. It needs no embellishment other than salt, red chillies and dollops of *ghee* to make it irresistible. *Rajma* is also grown in Mun-

## AN ALL-NEW AVATAR

### INGREDIENTS

Rajma (soaked overnight)	1 cup
Tomato puree	1 cup
Red chilli powder	1 tsp
Salt	1 tsp
Coriander powder	1 tsp
Garam masala	1 tsp
Garlic-ginger paste	½ tsp
Salt	To taste
Rice flour	1 cup
Oil	½ cup
Rice papad (Optional)	1
Green coriander sprig (Optional)	1

### METHOD

- Boil rajma with powdered spices, ginger-garlic paste and salt in a pressure cooker till done. Uncover, allow to cool. Heat ghee and pour over it.
- Take rice flour in a flat plate, add salt and sprinkle a little warm water 2-3 times and start mixing. You should be able to hold the flour in your fist. When pressed, it should hold shape, and when crumbled, it should crumble well.
- Take four small steel katoris, grease



these and fill these bowls with the rice flour mixture till half. Cover the bowls with a piece of aluminium foil. Steam/cook for 10-12 minutes. Remove from the steamer, let it cool for two minutes. Carefully, unmould onto a plate.

- In a shallow bowl, pour some rajma. Place the *aloo tikki* lookalike rice cakes on top. Garnish with green chillies and coriander, if using. For some crunch, crumble some rice papad on it and enjoy!

syani in Kumaon; it is white in colour and nutty in flavour. It is also grown in Harsil in Garhwal.

The present generation is only famil-

iar with kidney beans in a salad or *chilli con carne*. Only recently, some chefs dared to plate a *rajma kebab* for the vegetarians. But the classic combina-

tion remains *rajma-chawal*.

Not very long back, we were invited to a wonderful meal at the Oberoi in the Capital for a commemorative lunch at Dhilli by our good friend and the brilliant chef, Vineet Bhatia, who has more Michelin stars under his belt than all other Indian chefs put together.

When we were served what was called *rajma-chawal* on the menu, we kept looking for the *chawal*, and Vineet kept smiling mischievously. Finally, when no rice plate was in sight, we dug in. The *aloo tikki* that we had thought was a garnish on top, crumbled to reveal its real nature — this was the *chawal*!

Once again, we marvelled at the genius of Vineet, who always remains rooted in Indian soil. There is no fancy fusion or pretentious plating, just the striving to take Indian food to the next level. Ably assisted by his wife Rashima, he has been outdoing himself for years.

The beauty is that you can easily replicate the magic at home. We don't really know what the maestro did in the kitchen, so we decided to take a shortcut of purloining a Khasi recipe for mini-rice cakes to make life easier for our dear readers. These rice cakes remind us of *puttu* in Kerala. In neither region is the *rajma* a red hot favourite, but believe you us, it makes the regional icon a pan-Indian classic. Do try this out as soon as you can!



Andrey A Tarkovskiy reflects on preserving his father's legacy — a cinema that still prays, still listens, and still answers

MURTAZA ALI KHAN

IN the pantheon of world cinema, certain names do not merely occupy space, they define it — Charlie Chaplin, Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Robert Bresson, Satyajit Ray and, among them, towering like a colossus, Russian auteur Andrey Tarkovsky. A filmmaker who refused to bow to trends, Tarkovsky transformed cinema from spectacle into sacrament, crafting works that remain meditations on time, memory, and the human soul. His films were not stories to be consumed but prayers to be lived — haunting, lyrical and inexhaustibly profound.

When Tarkovsky passed away in December 1986, the world lost not merely a filmmaker but a philosopher-poet of cinema — a visionary who elevated the medium into a spiritual language. Nearly four decades later, his presence looms larger than ever. This truth resonated in Delhi during two landmark screenings — a rare documentary, co-created with Italian poet Tonino Guerra during the making of *Nostalgia*, at the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre, and *Cinema as a Prayer*, an intimate homage by his son, Andrey A Tarkovskiy, at the India Habitat Centre.

"My father always admired India," recollected Andrey, his voice a measured blend of pride and longing. "He had a deep oriental sensibility — almost like oriental Christianity. He practised yoga all his life. There was always this pull towards the East. Sadly, he never managed to visit India. For me, coming here is an honour, something he couldn't do."

Tarkovsky's cinema — *Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrei Rublev*, *Solaris*, *Mirror*, *Stalker*, *Nostalgia*, and his swansong, *The Sacrifice* — remains the ultimate antidote to the disposable nature of contemporary imagery. His works are living texts,

PILGRIMAGE ON celluloid

open to rediscovery with every generation.

"Even now, 40 years later, people speak about Tarkovsky with incredible freshness," Andrey observed. "Young students rediscover him every year. This is not archaeology. It's about spiritual search — something we desperately need today when everything feels so difficult, so complicated. Art is the only language that unites us."

Indeed, Tarkovsky's cinema is universal. It transcends geography and ideology, forging a dialogue between cultures. Andrea Anastasio, director of the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre, framed it succinctly: "When you watch Tarkovsky, you engage with ethical questions central to our time. It's a dissident voice with a fantastic understanding of humanity."

The first screening, a documentary made during the shooting of *Nostalgia* in Italy, captured an artist grappling with exile and the weight of spiritual longing. *Nostalgia* (1983) itself is a tone poem of alienation, its mist-laden landscapes echoing the ache of displacement. It was in Italy that Tarkovsky's friendship with Guerra deepened, shaping this extraordinary meditation on memory and home.

The second screening, *Cinema as a*

*Prayer*, is Andrey's deeply personal work. "I was only 16 when he died," he recalled. "There was a beginning of a dialogue between us — abruptly interrupted. This film was my attempt to recreate that inner dialogue, to see if my ideas correspond with his. And they do. His vision of the world feels even more prophetic now — about politics, ecology, everything he warned about is coming true."

He paused, then added, "*The Sacrifice* was my father's farewell. Remember Alexander speaking to his child? It was a monologue because the child couldn't answer. My film is my answer."

This reflection anchored a larger truth: Tarkovsky's cinema was never bound by time. Consider *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), his debut feature, where war is seen through the fragile consciousness of a child. Or *Andrei Rublev* (1966), a monumental chronicle of art and faith, restored recently in breathtaking detail — a pilgrimage on celluloid through the moral wilderness of medieval Russia. Or *Solaris* (1972), which transposed metaphysics into the realm of science fiction, asking questions no technology could answer. And then there is *Stalker* (1979), a journey into a forbidden zone,

part allegory, part fever dream, where faith flickers like a dying ember yet refuses extinction. The film eerily predicted aspects of the actual 1986 Chernobyl disaster and its aftermath.

In his loosely autobiographical masterpiece, *Mirror* (1975), Tarkovsky beautifully used the poetry of his father, Arseny Tarkovsky. The film also featured Andrey Tarkovsky's wife, Larisa Tarkovskaya, and mother, Maria Vishnyakova. Each film resists interpretation even as it demands it.

In crafting *Cinema as a Prayer*, Andrey collaborated with people who knew his father intimately. "Michal Leszczylowski, who co-edited *The Sacrifice*, and my cousin, Aleksey Naydenov, director of photography, who assisted on *Mirror* — it was like an amour-court," he smiled. That warmth tempered the enormity of his task. "It's a responsibility," he admitted softly, "but also a joy. To keep his spirit alive, not as a monument of the past, but as a living, breathing force."

The Andrey Tarkovsky International Institute, located in Florence and helmed by him, is the crucible for this mission, restoring classics like *Andrei Rublev* for new audiences. These restorations are not mere acts of preservation but resurrec-

tions — each frame a relic infused with new light. Anastasio complemented this vision with a cultural note: "Culture is what you inherit, and what you create through interaction. That's why we also had the Duo Gazzana sisters performing an eclectic programme spanning Italy, Europe, and India. Their inclusion of an Indian composition acknowledged the multiplicity of voices defining our world."

As dusk settled over Delhi during these events, the anticipation transformed into fulfilment. These screenings were not retrospectives; they were rituals. For those who entered Tarkovsky's world — where time flows like memory, where landscapes are metaphors for the soul — the reward was nothing less than a glimpse of eternity. "After watching Tarkovsky," Andrey concluded, "it's easier to understand each other — whether you are in Japan, India, Russia, or anywhere. Art is the only language that unites us."

In that quiet assertion lay the enduring truth of Andrey Tarkovsky's cinema: a cinema that still prays, still listens, and still answers.

— The writer has served on the jury of various film festivals as well as National Film Awards

Andrey Tarkovsky (1932 - 1986)



A still from 'Mirror'.



A still from 'Andrei Rublev'.

Andrey A Tarkovskiy (L) with Aleksey Naydenov, director of photography. ©PETER CRUPENIN



10 sculptors draw from architecture, mythology & lived memory to show how even the hardest material bends to human imagination

SHIREEN QUADRI

STONE is the oldest witness we know; it has stood in silence as civilisations rose and fell. A material often associated with endurance, it becomes supple and fluid in the hands of sculptors. This was evident at StoneX India's refinery at Kishangarh in Rajasthan's Ajmer district recently, where 10 artists reimagined marble as a medium that could be chiselled and coaxed into a desired form.

Mumbai-based Sudarshan Shetty (64), one of India's leading artists, says he is drawn to stone because of its inherent paradox. "Stone is often seen as eternal, yet even it carries the marks of time: weathered edges, soft erosions, hidden fractures. With the weight of its seeming permanence lies the quiet truth of all things ephemeral," he says. Shetty's *Interred Umbrella*, made of Turkish marble, is "a meditation on mortality and impermanence". When an everyday object is carved in stone, Shetty says, its familiar fragility is transformed. "What was once ordinary acquires a new gravity, as if time has been slowed down and what is perhaps simple and fleeting has been given the dignity of monument," he adds.

Shetty believes that to be able to master something, one has to play out one's own vulnerabilities and be open to the possibilities of human failure. Each piece of stone, he underlines, must hold the history of its own making over centuries. "My role, to begin with, is to enter a dialogue with it and insert, even in a small way, something of my own life into what it longs to become," he adds.

In his sculpture *Impossible Stairway*, Delhi-based Gigi Scaria (52) turns Cappadocia marble into a surreal commentary on cities and alienation. "I don't think of stone just as a permanent material. Cities themselves are built from stone, cement, concrete — materials we consider enduring. But, for me, any material, whether hard or soft, can reflect the concerns of its time. Stone too erodes, shapes itself over centuries, and arrives in the form we encounter today," says Scaria.

"Hierarchy comes not from the material



(Clockwise from left) Works by Sudarshan Shetty, Harsha Durugadda, Harmeet Rattan and Gigi Scaria.

itself but from the way it is placed. It is like language; you can use it to write poetry that resists authority, or you can use it to codify laws that control society. Language can liberate, but it can also suppress. Stone too has this dual potential; it can be moulded by its user, shaped to reflect the time in which we live," he says.

Talking about his sculpture, *The Way of the Wind* (Pantheon marble), which explores textures reminiscent of canyons

carved by centuries of erosion, Hyderabad-based Harsha Durugadda (36) says: "Stone changes when people touch it. That interaction is what keeps sculpture alive. If you look at our architecture... people might have touched a pillar over several centuries, giving it a sheen that the rest of the pillars do not have."

For Bathinda-born Harmeet Rattan (38), marble becomes a critique of the "modern obsession with home ownership". His

*'Dream House'*, a tower of cloud hewn from Greek stone, Thassos Novelato, showcases the conflict between aspiration and reality. "In *'Dream House'*, the choice of white stone was very intentional," says Rattan. "Stone carries permanence. It endures — like monuments of the ancient past that still stand as markers of human ambition. But here, I carved it into the form of a cloud, something transient, light, intangible. That tension — between what is solid and what

can never be held — was crucial to me."

Rattan says that for the middle class, a house is deeply desired, invested in, but it's also fragile, precarious, sometimes always just out of reach. "By translating the softness of a cloud into the hardness of stone, I wanted to make that paradox visible — the dream as both material and immaterial." The work's structure layers this narrative.

Pune-based Yogesh Ramkrishna (34) takes satire as his entry point. His work *'Shikhar'* transforms marble into a hammer, whose head fuses a mosque dome and a temple spire. "The piece becomes a point of investigation around how seats of power use religion as a tool to regain or maintain dominance," he says.

Mumbai-based Teja Gavankar's *'Khora'* draws from Plato's concept of an intermediate space where forms become reality. In her work, which uses Lasa Covelano marble, geometric spheres fracture rigidity into movement. "*'Khora'* is about in-betweenness and non-dualism, where something hard becomes fluid by breaking into smaller parts. It shows how becoming is never a fixed state; it is always about transition."

Shanthamani Muddaiah's *'Bloom'* translates Bengaluru's floral legacy and weaving traditions into Pantheon marble. R Magesh's *'The Monarch'* restrains the raw power of a horse within Grigio Bronze Amani marble. Shaik Azgharali's *'Cotton'* turns Carrara marble into fragile bolls that read as softness against solidity. Chandrashekar Koteswar's *'Hidden Gem on Museum Steps'* stages satire in Statuario marble, a stone historically reserved for monuments and temples.

Together, these works reposition stone as a medium alive with contradictions. As Sushant Pathak of StoneX Global notes: "Each encounter was... a doorway into the soul of the artist and the silent wisdom of stone. Together, they revealed that stone is not merely material, but a living presence."

A coffee-table book that situates these artists' work in a dialogue with global pioneers such as Sebastian Errazuriz, Nicolas Bertoux, Cynthia Sah, Alex Seton, and Kota Kinutani was also launched.

— The writer is a Delhi-based contributor



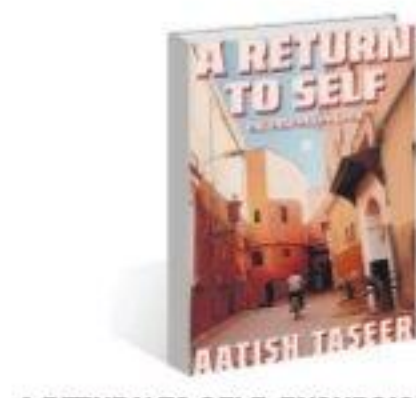
## BOOKS

## Intimate shame of losing one's country

ADITYA VIKRAM

**A**TISH TASEER had been harbouring a few dirty secrets. The bonafide "Indian" life had no place for some things — in his own words, he was "the illegitimate son of a Pakistani, a gay man, and a westernised product of a westernised elite". As happens with secrets too often, one constructs the most elaborate lies to cover them up. The harder he tried to assert his Indian-ness, the stranger his relation with the country became. He learnt Hindi-Urdu, translated a canonical writer, took Sanskrit classes, travelled to rural India, hid his sexuality, and tried forgetting his foreign loves. And yet, it wasn't enough. It took a few lines of journalistic truth to send him into exile forever. The Government of India revoked his citizenship in November 2019, after he published an article in *Time* about 'India's Divider in Chief'.

"To lose one's country," he says, "is to know an intimate shame", articulating for the first time his ill-fitting world fully, now released from the chokehold of the nation. When Taseer's estranged father was assassinated, the famous writer VS Naipaul told him that he must feel relieved, because "your [his] father was your [his] greatest enemy". As father, so nation; what is supposed to be home might just be an odd tale of origin. It is with this relief and tragic hon-



**A RETURN TO SELF: EXCURSIONS IN EXILE**  
by Aatish Taseer.  
HarperCollins.  
Pages 216.  
₹499

esty that he writes his latest.

Aatish Taseer's memoir, 'A Return to Self', is proof that knowing one's shame closely might offer a different possibility of freedom. However, it is more than a memoir of his life alone. The 'self' in his book refuses the confines of a personal diary, which runs the risk of turning into a long, vengeful confession. On the contrary, the self moves and is often forgotten. Between India (the lost self) and America (the new home) lies a vast expanse of the world, where Taseer wanders — Istanbul, Uzbekistan, Morocco, Spain, Iraq, and others.

He speaks of the language, history, and religion of these "places in between" and

quotes Wilde and Eliot, Said and Coetzee to complicate what would otherwise be mere landscape. In form, these chapters are much closer to the essay, which eases the letting go of plot. The self "returns" in bursts, as he trudges through these middle worlds and finds strange similarities with the nation he has lost — histories of invasion, the Silk Road, lotuses in bloom, "churches upon mosques upon churches", a city repurposed after religious violence, how the word *fulano* travelled across languages, or the smell of Oudh. These returns are honest, sometimes even brazen, and hence moving.

As he drives past orchards of ripening pomegranate in Uzbekistan, he thinks of Babur, the first Mughal, who "had been homesick in India for the sweetness of the fruits of his native land". This is not only his own poetic longing for home, but also another image of India, a nation built by those who came from elsewhere. When in Sri Lanka, he discovers that the lotus is the insignia of an ethno-nationalist political party there, similar to India. Taseer points out how its use in seals predates both Buddhism and Vedic Hinduism.

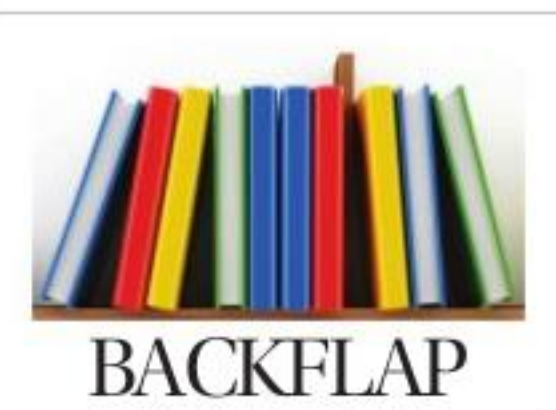
While one might be tempted to ascribe this to a pure past where all religions lived together, before the Britishers, before Partition, he reminds the reader that it is precisely this fantasy of returning to the glorious past that is false, and often fascist. The lotus is born in a bed of nourishing mud, an

impure thing. Aatish likens the flower to "our longing to rise above the muck of our lives", hinting at the desire of the nation.

In the chapter on Spain, when he confronts the complete ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Jews from Castilian culture, he asks in dismay: "What makes a society succumb to that primal cry for *limpieza de sangre*, a purity of blood?" An image of India emerges right after, and his own, an unlikely child of two nations that love and hate each other so much. Like a mournful ghost, India lingers in the background of his writing, as Taseer said in a recent interview. This is a ghost full of discontent, and a memory that spans beyond Taseer's life, into centuries past and even into myth, where a lotus calyx sprouts from Vishnu's navel. It has unclear origins and asks lamenting questions. The self traced by this ghost is everything India does not want to be today: plural, impure, incomplete.

'A Return to Self' shows that the true story of belonging can only be written in conversation with ghosts, not nation-states. It is tempting to claim that this ghost is the idea of India, formulated when the nation came into existence and under assault now, but it might just be our shame, buried in the foundation. Whatever we are writing about, even the self, we are always writing from the outside.

— *The reviewer, a translator and poet, teaches at Ashoka University*



## BACKFLAP



**MISSING FROM THE HOUSE**  
by Rasheed Kidwai & Ambar Kumar Ghosh.  
Juggernaut.  
Pages 270. ₹599

Muslim women in India have been victims of societal prejudice, cultural marginalisation, political-economic alienation. In the political arena, too, they have remained far more invisible, historically, than women from other communities. Through the lives of some trailblazing parliamentarians, this book uncovers the battles they fought, not only to win elections but also to challenge a political system designed to keep them out.

## What defines literary activity Inner journey of mountains

ADITYA BAHL

**T**HE Jewish-German Marxist, Walter Benjamin, opened his 'One Way Street' (1928) by rejecting the 'universal' form of books. "True literary activity," he famously argued, was the domain of 'minor' forms: "leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards".

His own academic career had recently ended. The examiners had found his dissertation on German tragic drama to be so esoteric that he was forced to withdraw his teaching application for good. Meanwhile, inflation had toppled his father's lucrative art dealership. Forced to fend for himself, Benjamin turned to journalism. Here, challenged by new constraints of

Weimar press (print and radio), he improvised an acutely compressed literary style.

A cryptic aphorism in the book's opening section explains his tactics. One cannot repair 'turbines' by pouring machine oil all over them. Instead, "one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints one has to know". 'Little' and 'hidden' — there are no better keywords for describing his enigmatic miniatures: riddles, parables, fairytales, vignettes, dreams, jokes.

A collection of Benjamin's writings, 'Unpacking My Library', has been included in Penguin Archive, a series of 90 slim 'classics' issued to celebrate Penguin's 90th anniversary. The small size and spare design instantly evoke Benjamin's miniatures. Yet the book collects only his standard essays: on book collecting, translation, photography, and a short diary on *hashish*. The problem with these 'cultured' choices isn't just their formulaic nature. Along with the miniatures, they also ignore the source of Benjamin's innovations: his ideas on time and revolution.

Unlike Social Democrats and Stalinists, Benjamin was never inspired by staple slogans of 'better future' or 'gradual progress'. Instead, he decried 'progress' as an essentially capitalist notion, whose contradictions had

found a logical expression in Nazi fascism. His solutions were also equally audacious. If orthodox Marxists planned to accelerate the proverbial 'train of progress', Benjamin worked to pull its 'emergency brake'.

This is why Benjamin gravitated towards such eccentric subjects. Book collectors, translators, photographers — yes, but also ragpickers, flaneurs, sexworkers. He was inspired by their penchant for rescuing outmoded commodities from the rubble of progress. Paralleling, he argued that, once 'rescued' from oblivion, certain historical moments could trigger an explosive 'short circuit' between past and present. This was a new kind of historical materialism, influenced less by Lenin and more by Jewish mystics.

For Benjamin, every moment — no matter how banal or bleak — became a gateway through which the 'Messiah' could enter. His own compressed style was an attempt to spark this 'short circuit'. He wanted to saturate his thinking with so much tension that his prose might simulate conditions of a 'revolutionary standstill'. Even so, these adventures in philosophy never resolved into political blueprints. Messiahs remained a poor substitute for concrete strategy. Similarly, histories of capitalism were too circuitous to be reduced to slick notions like 'homogenous empty time'. There were reasons though for Benjamin's detachment from activism and political economy.

Stranded between Nazism and Stalinism, his convictions could only find outlets in philosophy. In fact, this was true for an entire generation of western Marxists. Benjamin's situation though was uniquely precarious. Chased by fascists into exile across Ibiza, Nice, Svendborg and Paris, he finally committed suicide while crossing the Spanish border in 1940.

'Unpacking My Library' risks portraying Benjamin as an innocuous 'man of letters'. But this reveals only more about our own world, where publishing conglomerates alone determine the rules for 'true literary activity'. This compressed 'classic' lacks the insurgent spirit of Benjamin: he wrote in order to transform the apparatus of publishing, not to supply content for it.

— *The reviewer teaches at Department of English at UCLA, California*

PARTH JOSHI

**I**N today's age, when Uttarakhand's Char Dham pilgrimage has become a high-speed spectacle — marked by overcrowding, ecological strain and frequent disasters — 'The Travels of a Sadhu in the Himalayas' by Jaladhar Sen offers a nostalgic return to an era of quieter, more introspective journeys. Traversing the sacred mountain paths was once an act of endurance and self-discovery, not comfort and convenience.

Originally published in Bengali as 'Himalay' in 1900, the memoir is now available in a fresh English translation by Somdatta Mandal. Sen (1860-1939), a poet, editor and philanthropist, rose to prominence during the Bengal Renaissance. Born into modest circumstances and struck by a series of family tragedies, he turned to the Himalayas as a seeker.

His reflections became pioneering travel writing in Bengali, but his name remains little known outside the region. This edition, therefore, serves both as an introduction to his voice and as a reminder of what pilgrimage in the Himalayas once meant.

Devotees set out on foot through rugged valleys and steep passes, not because it was fashionable or convenient, but because hardship was considered intrinsic to faith. The very act of walking long distances, enduring cold nights and unpredictable terrain, became a form of devotion.

Today, the contrast could not be sharper. The Char Dham yatra has turned into a rush of vehicles and helicopters. What was once an arduous walk of faith is now packaged as mass tourism, leaving little space for solitude or reflection. It is precisely this loss that makes Sen's memoir so striking.

Unlike the heroic accounts of explorers who mapped new routes or scaled virgin peaks, his story is not about conquest but about encounter. He was not a mountaineer or an adventurer in the modern sense. He was, at heart, a wanderer who used his time in the Himalayas to observe, to question, to listen.

Sen's journey was challenging because



**THE TRAVELS OF A SADHU IN THE HIMALAYAS**  
by Jaladhar Sen.  
Speaking Tiger.  
Pages 264. ₹499

it was undertaken with limited resources and ordinary human capabilities.

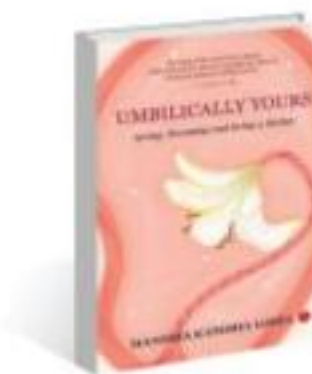
Written during the colonial period, the memoir also offers an Indian perspective on the Himalayan landscape and spirituality, free from the orientalist gaze that colours many western travel accounts of the time.

The language is simple, yet suffused with a quiet lyricism. The mountains are not described as obstacles to be overcome but as companions that invite self-examination. The silence of a trail, the pause by a river, the glimpse of a shrine tucked in snow — these moments serve less as scenery and more as mirrors to the mind. Sen's account speaks to anyone who has ever sought clarity in the act of walking.

Written as a daily diary, the memoir carries the rhythm of slower journeys: the dust of forgotten trails, the sound of temple bells borne by wind, the intimacy of fleeting encounters along the way. There is no rush to arrive, no pressure to cover ground quickly. The value lies in the experience itself — in being changed by the landscape rather than simply passing through it.

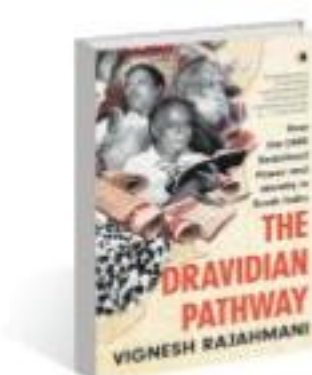
This book is a reminder that the Himalayas are not only geography but also philosophy, and that a pilgrimage is meaningful not because it is easy but because it is transformative. Sen beckons readers to slow down and rediscover the inner journey that the mountains, in their silence, still offer to those willing to listen.

— *The reviewer is an outdoor enthusiast and climate expert*



**UMBILICALLY YOURS**  
by Manisha Kanoria Lohia.  
Rupa.  
Pages 192. ₹595

An exploration of motherhood, this book is rooted in cultural wisdom, Montessori principles and spiritual insights. Drawing from the values instilled in her by her family, the author shares how long-held traditions, mindful parenting and holistic practices shape the experience of raising a child. The book traces her journey from observing motherhood to experiencing its transformative power first-hand. It aims to be a guiding light for mothers seeking to raise their children with consciousness, love and purpose.



**THE DRAVIDIAN PATHWAY**  
by Vignesh Rajahmani.  
Westland.  
Pages 296. ₹799

While the Dravidian socio-cultural movement and the Dravidian Munnetra Kazhagam, or DMK, have been widely studied, the interplay between the two has been largely neglected. This book highlights the challenges of navigating ideological commitments within the constraints of political pragmatism. The author explains how iterations on the initial ideology and political offering can reinvigorate such movements, keeping their politics agile, and importantly, incentivising inclusive policymaking.

## A women-centric narrative of the Mahabharata

RATNA RAMAN

**I**N this pithy collection, K Srilata's poems serve as footnotes to the ancient 'Mahabharata', whose tales of love, desire and war continue to be available to us in various narratives, languages, genres and voices. Srilata's poems allow us to revisit women's lives in the 'Mahabharata', reminding us of the contemporaneity of ancient myths and stories. The speaking women in these poems display a fierce intelligence through pain, anguish and pleasure.

The 'Mahabharata', written in patriarchal times, firmly ensconced women's lives in the interstices of power during peace and war. Male lineage, disrupted by the deaths of Shantanu's sons and Bhishma's oath renouncing conjugal and kingship, remains fraught in the original text, although the contestations to power continue unabated. In these poems, women protagonists articulate their desires and sorrows through powerful lyrics. Drawing inspiration



**FOOTNOTES TO THE MAHABHARATA**  
by K Srilata.  
Westland.  
Pages 128. ₹350

from Bhryappa's 'Parva', a retelling of the 'Mahabharata', the poems are modelled on 'Agananuru' and 'Purananuru' forms of Sangam poetry written in Tamil.

Srilata's experiments with *haikai* poetry (a short poetic form comprising the *haiku*, the *senryu* and the *haibun*) flesh out the intimate thoughts and conversations of the five powerful wives of Kuru Vansh in a poetic tradi-

tion that for long sustained male voices. Alli, Draupadi, Gandhari and Kunti are from mainstream royal families, while Hidimbi belongs to a forest tribe. The poems work exceedingly well as all women speak aloud to themselves or to a friend, lover, or husband.

Alli, the first speaker, belongs to Madurai and remains unknown in the abridged, televised or original versions of the epic. She is a founding, raised by the Pandyan king and queen. Arjuna seduces Alli as part of his masculine privilege and is aided by Krishna in this subterfuge. Alli voices her shock, pain and anger, choosing to reign in Madurai as warrior queen. She does not travel to Indraprastha as one of Arjuna's trophy wives, despite all the spite and chauvinism directed at her. These are the hooks and riffs that Srilata's poems provide, along with a compelling foreword and originary history, as women's voices, hitherto submerged, occupy the foreground.

Hidimbi's brother is killed and she is claimed by Bhima. Despite her supportive

role in the Pandava household in the forest, she is left behind while pregnant with Ghatotkacha. Cruelly abandoned, she raises her son and counsels him, continues to love Bhima, speaking highly of him, and accepts that her son will be collateral damage. This is Hidimbi's lot. Yet she speaks truth to power, indicting Kunti and Yudhishtira for not accepting her as family and Krishna for his observation that her son is a demon who must be destroyed. The reader shudders at the xenophobia, racism and insensitivity as Hidimbi quietly rips the bandages around the machinations of power. Unsupported and solitary, she reveals shrewd intelligence and dignity in the face of anguish.

Draupadi, Kunti and Gandhari, princesses not loved enough by their natal families, are intelligent and articulate. Kunti laughs at Pandu's empty boasts and acknowledges her forbidden infatuation with Marut, while Gandhari and Draupadi record the moments of joy and trauma in their lives. Gandhari recalls a happy adolescence, her

family's betrayal and the loss of her sons in a senseless war. Draupadi recalls her humiliation, her intense friendship with Krishna, her choosing Arjuna and the subsequent anxieties over his newly-acquired wife Subhadra, who is also Krishna's half-sister.

'Footnotes to the Mahabharata' reveals to us the myriad ways in which women have dealt with unequal situations. In ancient times as well, the men in power were no match for the women they sought to control. Yet these women, who came from different parts of the subcontinent, do not speak as beleaguered victims or survivors. Powerful and confident in their own skin, they find love, friendship and meaning in real worlds and communicate this through the intimate nuances of poetry. They are resplendent because they do not simply stand and wait but plunge headlong into whatever life throws at them and live it fully, displaying courage and grace under pressure.

— *The reviewer is professor of English at Sri Venkateswara College, Delhi*



# REFLECTIONS

## Write choices for languages



**TOUCHSTONES**  
IRA PANDE

**D**ESPITE the temptation to curse Trump and the mess created by our Election Commission over SIR, I will write this week about something that gave me pleasure. The *Book Review* journal celebrated its golden anniversary to mark 50 years of its existence. I've been an admirer of its contribution to the world of books by its founders, Chandra Chari and Uma Iyengar, who have brought it out in spite of the challenges they faced. The event attracted some of the finest minds from academia, language studies, publishers, reviewers and translators.

The first day, devoted to exchanges between publishers, reviewers and the new generation ushers of AI and digital publishing, was riveting for the ideas thrown up. The next day was mainly devoted to translating India's multiple languages into English and other Indian languages, and the possibilities that beckon. A recurring concern was the receding public and institutional support for journals that still bring us reviews and news about new writers and writing. Dr Romila Thapar, in her nineties now and almost wheelchair-bound, was given a round of applause as she arrived. Her mind, I'm happy to report, is as sharp as ever and still capable of raising questions that many of us forget to ask. She had come, she said half-laughing, to be educated on AI, ChatGPT and the vast world of information now available at the click of a button.

While most of us are aware of the line that separates academic writing from editorials and popular public writing, we often forget to ask whether one world can be a blend of both or not.

This question becomes relevant today when many young scholars have taken to writing a popular version of history that makes some nervous about the liberties taken with interpretation. Additionally, the digitisation of our National Archives, Teen Murti Library, the National Library among others, as well as the speedy access to the Indian Statistical Institute and the digital version of an academic publication available on Kindle, have changed the attitude of respect for the sincere research that many earlier scholars put in.

### Our pride in our own mother tongues is a romantic yearning

If plagiarism, Dr Thapar said, was a crime, then is there something unethical also about downloading someone else's work to modify it into an easier language for the new reader of today? The question is indeed something that makes one think about academic rigour and scholarly commitment. The tightening of retail trade in books and the declining numbers of those who visit bookshops is a universal concern. Retail trade and marketing, therefore, are important inputs in publishing houses and often dictate what should be published, regardless of any editorial hesitation. So, have books become commodities, she asked? Sheepishly, many had to admit that vanity publishing and aggressive promoters are here to stay. What their growing presence will mean is another uncomfortable question left hanging.

The next day, devoted to translation, brought another set of questions to ponder over. Here again, there are translators who concentrate on creative writing, while others devote themselves to bringing academic writing in European (mainly English) languages to students in a variety of Indian languages. To be able to hear some

of our finest translators expound on how what was once a mainly personal, even whimsical, choice became something much more opens up a whole new world. Gender studies, Dalit writers and patriarchy are all off-shoots.

Even 20 years ago, translations were of secondary literary value and most were works of classic writers: Premchand, Manto, Karanth and writers of that vintage. It is only in recent years that translations have come into their own and the award of the International Booker Prize to two Indian works (*Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree and Daisy Rockwell and *Heart Lamp* by Banu Mushtaq and Deepa Bhasini) have put them in a spotlight that is encouraging others to look afresh at this poor relative of Indian publishing.

Translation studies are now a part of literature courses and have brought some radical thinking into a hitherto desultory area of interest. Texts are now mined for the subtext of a work and what language, vocabulary and perspective can reveal. The inter-disciplinary expansion of teaching is an exciting field. Sociology, ethnography, psychology and anthropology are now entering a new dialogue. Above all, there is the transformative medium of artificial intelligence that a growing number of students are hooked on to for submitting essays and tutorials.

All in all, I came away very pumped up by all these ideas and wondered why most speakers made English translations so important when India has such a diverse spectrum of languages that have an impressive literary ancestry of their own. This growing obsession with ethnicity and pride in regional cultural identities also gives rise to some of the most bitter political battles.

Finally, a word of caution about the gobbling gene in English that is going to slowly eat away at the borders of our local languages. In the world of digital democracy, more and more Indians are opting to educate their children in English medium schools. Our pride in our own mother tongues is a romantic yearning, but find me the young who can read and write in their own *bhasha*. I fear, in a few more generations, many languages may go the way of Sanskrit.

— **The writer is a social commentator**

## Face to face with my father

SUKRITA PAUL KUMAR

**I** ALWAYS thought my father, Joginder Paul, was like Khodu Baba, a character from his story *'Khodu Baba Ka Maqbara'*, who walked across the borders between life and death so easily. When he wrote his *'Self Obituary'*, he declared convincingly of having been born at least four times in his life in four different cities: Sialkot, Nairobi, Aurangabad and Delhi. When I'm told his birth centenary year commences on his 100th birthday (September 5), this comes as a revelation of not absence but yet another comeback, with a difference. Indeed, a fresh perspective of time and distance comes by alongside. He passed away in 2016, leaving behind a throbbing world of characters and incidents in the parallel world of his fiction.

After his demise, I dived into that fictional world, setting their dwellings in order, securing the stories in their own linguistic domain, lending them their permanent address as it were, to stay within their boundaries and yet dream of flights outside. First, I needed to procure all the stories he wrote, the volumes he published in Urdu — he never could, or never cared to, organise or conserve his own writings in one place. In fact, I tried to even gather his beautifully handwritten drafts, lying scattered in yellowing paper in old half-ton files, some from Nairobi times.

Meanwhile, the National Council for the Promotion of Urdu accepted the proposal to bring out his collected stories, currently being managed by the scholar Abu Zaheer Rabbani, who has been also critically examining these works in Urdu. And then, the stories I thought needed to take wings to other languages through translation for a wider readership. Chandana Dutta contributed immensely in consolidating a Reader and a monograph on my father for Sahitya Akademi, in addition to editing a whole volume on him for the 'Writer in Context' series published by Routledge (UK).

And now, his characters, Deevane Maulavi *sab* of *'Khwabro'*, Baba of *'Nadeed'*, Bhabho of the story *'Jaadu'* and even the grannies of *'Dadiyan'* freely move around in at least three language domains — English, Hindi as well as in the Urdu original.

I remember he often talked about the autonomy of his characters, who carved out their own destiny and were not merely puppets with strings tied to the author's will. In one of his *afsaanche* (short stories), when the author does not allow his characters — the two lovers — to marry each other, they decide to elope, and several years later, they meet the author in another story with their children!

The upheaval of Partition had obviously impacted my father's consciousness deeply. As a writer, the experience stayed with him for the rest of his life. Off and on, he dug into it and brought out different aspects through his stories such as *'Dera Baba Nanak'*, *'Daryaan Pyas'*, *'Fakhtain'*, *'Mele Mulakatein'* and many others, including his acclaimed novel, *'Khwabro'*. They have all come together in an English translation as *'Rivers of Thirst'*, published recently by Speaking Tiger.

Often I am asked questions about the literary legacy I inherited from my



Joginder Paul (1925-2016) was born in Sialkot. His mother tongue was Punjabi, he did his MA in English literature, which he taught until he retired as the principal of a college in Maharashtra, but Paul chose Urdu for his creative expression.

father. A ruthless critic of not just literary production but someone who upheld the highest standards of honesty, hated pretentious behaviour and who made no bones to condemn fraudulence... I know for sure that these are the values I hope to uphold in literature as much as in life. Am I able to live up to them, I don't know.

What I know is that any compromise of these ideals brings up in my mind the image of my father ready to reprimand me. I do not have the courage to defy them. Where I defied him was in the choice I made in writing poetry and painting, the two forms of creative expression my father did not indulge in.

He always nudged me to write short stories but I didn't. I don't know if that was because I shunned the likely influence he could have had on my writing. He was undoubtedly a very powerful presence looming large over the family in the entire household, while I was fiercely protective of my independence. On the other hand, my mother, who was herself a popular professor of literature, was a friend, a very benign presence by my side always. Whatever I'd write, do or create, I would easily share with her. Not so easy with my father though. I was perhaps afraid that he would overshadow any creativity I'd lay claim on.

The range of his imagination, the delicate throb of his sensitivity to human concerns and his extraordinary handling of the creative expression overawed me. I needed to conserve my own self, needed the courage to evolve my own apprehension of life experience. But I know that whatever I got from him, came to me surreptitiously, on some deep subconscious plane. Even in my stirrings and reactions to him, even though I built my own structures of thought and feeling, the foundation I'm sure was provided by him covertly, if not obviously.

Often, I have resonated with Sylvia Plath's ambivalent relationship with her father: on one hand, a remarkably strong intensity of love and on the other, resentment suffused with a deep fear of control!

My dear father, your birth centenary year empowers me with the essential distance from your haunting presence, liberating me to find my own bearings in order to engage with you and your writings with greater non-attachment.

— **The writer is a poet, critic and academic**

## The path to tackling ego

**W**E all, at some point, have an exaggerated sense of our own self. It's a universal human experience. We call it ego when we see it in others, and term it self-worth when we look at our own selves. No wonder we struggle to recognise ego, which is referred to as *haumai* or *hankar* in Punjabi. It is instructive to trace the word back to the term *ahankara* in Sanskrit, which is a combination of *aham*, which means 'I', and *kara*, which translates into 'doing' or 'making'.

Instead of recognising the all-pervasive power of the Divine, we, His creations, exaggerate our identity to the extent that we believe ourselves to be at the centre of the universe. Naturally, this causes disconnect with the Divine and leads to spiritual ignorance. Attachment to worldly desires follows, and we confuse their transience with permanence.

Most religions recognise the detrimental nature of ego. There is almost universal agreement that ego impedes spiritual development and leads to selfish and immoral behaviour. The means of tackling it vary, depending on cultural and religious perspectives.

In *Japji Sahib*, Guru Nanak asserts: "*Hukamai andar sabh ko, baahar hukam na koi*." (All are under His command, no one is beyond it. O Nanak, one who understands His command silences his ego).

Understanding the true nature of God leads to the eclipse of ego. When you are self-aware, you realise your true place in the universe and sub-



### UNIVERSE

ROOPINDER SINGH

sume your ego to the Divine. As Guru Nanak says: "Ego is a chronic disease, yet its cure is also within it."

The cure to ego is humility, a powerful force that comes from truly following the Guru's teachings, meditating, and performing *sewa*.

Self-awareness is the key to understanding your true place in the cosmos, and to keep your ego in check. Let's recognise that ego cannot be truly eliminated; however, it can and must be kept in check. With self-awareness, you have the power to manage your ego and lead a more fulfilling life.

As individuals grow, they accumulate experiences and accomplishments. Unfortunately, this often leads to an explosion of ego, and they become self-centred. Their vision is blinkered, closing their minds and eyes to reality. Conse-

quently, they are open to *maya*, or illusion. Thinking of 'I' is a sure way of separating the soul from the Divine, as also from other beings. The ego is thus seen as the root of suffering. The five evils — duality, attachment, anger, greed and lust — are attributable to it.

How does one go about tackling one's ego? The Gurus tell us that the cure is in humility. Sikh religious practices lay enormous stress on it. A follower is expected to be humble in manner and perform *sewa*. Indeed, *sewa*, or service performed for strangers, is a central concept of Sikh religious conduct. We see it manifested in *langar*, where devotees cook food, serve meals, and clean the dishes.

In many gurdwaras, we see well-dressed people polishing and cleaning shoes: *sewa* that shows their devotion to Sikh religious practices, and their humility. Indeed, many devotees consider their pilgrimage incomplete unless they have performed *sewa* in some form or another. Understanding Gurbani and meditation is also necessary to learn the proper place of human beings in relation to God. Once that realisation comes, ego is subsumed by knowledge and the humility that results from it.

As the Guru says, we are all born with ego, and only the person who realises the true nature of God can truly escape ego. Let's recognise that we are all struggling to reach a goal that is far away from us. Even as we realise it, we come face to face with our limitations, and thus penetrate the self-indulgent but illusory world of *maya* that draws a veil across our perception.

— **The writer is a journalist and author**

## Ageing, decline and resilience in literary imagination



BINDU MENON

**S**EVERAL years ago, when my grandmother sought medical help for her diminishing hearing, the young doctor dismissed her concern with a laugh. "Dear granny, haven't you listened enough for an entire lifetime? It's fine if you can't hear everything at this age," he said. For my grandmother, an eager conversationalist, the remark was far from amusing. More recently, my 90-year-old father-in-law — an avid reader troubled by weakening eyesight — was similarly shrugged off by his regular eye doctor. Not one to be easily dismissed, he went to another specialist who prescribed new glasses, restoring to him the pleasure of newspapers and evening news bulletins.

Both incidents reflect a larger reality: the tendency to trivialise the concerns of the elderly. Such attitudes shrink the already limited spaces of activity available to them. The built environment compounds this exclusion — the absence of ramps or railings, the lack of safe footpaths and technology designed without consideration for ageing users. At banks and public utility counters, the elderly often persist with face-to-face transactions not out of resistance to change, but because digital systems rarely meet their needs.

The literary imagination has long grappled with questions of ageing, decline and resilience. At a literary festival, barely three years before her death at 90, Mahasweta Devi spoke of ageing with unflinching honesty: "Was yesterday not full of a thousand possibilities? That was the life! What has changed since then? You feel weak, insipid, a dreadful, debilitating listlessness worse than malaria fever. It is far, far worse. You are alone." Yet she tempered this starkness with resilience: "The end of strength is not quite a full stop. Nor is it the last station where you get off the train. It is simply a slowing down."

Khushwant Singh, who delighted in the

epithet "dirty old man", captured the bluntness of ageing in his trademark candour: "Old age is not pleasant; it buggers up your life." His novel *'The Sunset Club'* (2010), written at 95, traces the lives of three octogenarian friends who meet daily at Delhi's Lodhi Gardens. Raunchy yet reflective, the novel explores fading virility, friendship, and the stubborn march of time. When only one of them, Boota Singh, remains alive, he carries on their ritual alone — a quiet affirmation of endurance.

Similarly, Perumal Murugan's debut novel *'Eru Veygil'* (Rising Heat) beautifully portrays urbanisation and its toll on familial ties, especially the abandonment of the elderly.

The emotional dimensions of the twilight

### Ageing is never a singular story. It can be indignity or dignity, loneliness or companionship

years — loneliness, resilience, the persistence of self — have been captured in literature with varying shades of tenderness and severity. "An aged man is but a paltry thing/A tattered coat upon a stick," laments WB Yeats in *'Sailing to Byzantium'*. Its famous opening line, "That is no country for old men", refers to a world that he is not at peace with.

A more positive evocation of ageing can be found in Hemingway's *'The Old Man and the Sea'*. Santiago, the fisherman who has not caught a fish for three months, ventures into the sea with his young apprentice. Santiago's wisdom and patience, sharpened by experience, complement the boy's energy. For him, catching the giant marlin is not merely a test of skill but an affirmation of dignity in old age. As Hemingway's famous liner reminds us, "A man can be destroyed, but not defeated."

Simone de Beauvoir's *'The Coming of Age'* is one of the most influential philosophical meditations on growing old, challenging readers to confront not only society's "crushing" of elderhood, but also the unsettling alienation from their own ageing selves. For Beauvoir, old age is a socially constructed

reality shaped by exclusion and neglect. She writes: "Society inflicts so wretched a standard of living upon the vast majority of old people that it is almost tautological to say 'old and poor'." Yet Beauvoir also explores the existential estrangement of ageing, describing it as a confrontation with the "Other" within: "Since it is the Other within us who is old, it is natural that the revelation of our age should come to us from outside — from others. We do not accept it willingly."

Underlining a culture that is youth obsessed, actor Meryl Streep recalled how she was offered with roles because she was considered old at 40. "But the good thing about getting older is that you find your own way... You have your own understanding of yourself, and that's what you're going to count on," says Streep.

Ageing, therefore, is never a singular story. It can be indignity or dignity, loneliness or companionship, decline or renewal. What matters, finally, is whether we recognise in old age not the end of vitality but another, equally human, form of it.

— **The writer is a Bengali-based contributor**



Diamond jubilee of the Indo-Pak war is an opportunity to reflect on the geopolitical shifts and new dynamics of warfare

# 60 YEARS AFTER 1965

VIJAY MOHAN

**D**URING the monsoon season of 1965, foot soldiers plodded and tanks rumbled across the plains of north-west India, largely reminiscent of battles in the Second World War, as the country went into its first full-scale war with arch rival Pakistan, after the localised conflict in Kashmir in 1947-48.

Sixty years later, amidst complex power dynamics surging across the globe, the two neighbours engaged in a brief but intense three-day military confrontation in May. Operation Sindoor achieved India's military objectives of striking multiple targets deep inside Pakistan as well as neutralised enemy attacks. There were no visible boots on the borders, nor did tanks criss-cross the frontlines — instead, operations were conducted in the skies. The subcontinent had never seen anything like this before.

As the nation commemorates the diamond jubilee of the 1965 war in September, it is time to reflect on the geopolitical shifts impacting the Indian subcontinent, and the way the nature of warfare has changed and evolved.

From conventional operations involving thrusts by the infantry and armoured corps with some air support, the spectrum of warfare today is technology-driven and multi-domain, involving not only precision military strikes but also sub-conventional, asymmetric and hybrid operations, information and psychological warfare, remotely-operated artificial intelligence systems and network-centric operations, involving real-time flow of information across operators and decision-makers. Added to this is the presence of nuclear weapons.

Compared to today, in 1965, the war-fighting equipment, communications, methods of information gathering and tools for decision-making were almost rudimentary. Armies relied on basic infrastructure for a hierarchical flow of information and the ability of ground forces to strike targets was limited to the range of their artillery guns. Mobilisation of troops from their peace locations to the frontline took several days. Tactical intelligence was primarily through human resources or recon flights.

The nature of warfare saw little change in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. Large-scale mobilisation of troops, intensive engagements between opposing infantry and armoured formations and strategic attacks in the enemy's hinterland by the Air Force or cross-border raids by the Special Forces marked the 1965 and 1971 wars.

Such military thinking continued till Operation Parakram in 2001-02, when there was large-scale mobilisation along the entire Indo-Pak border in the wake of the terrorist attack on Parliament in December 2001. It took about two weeks for troops and their equipment to be deployed to operational locations.

That was the last time the Indian Army

undertook such a massive mobilisation along the western borders. The drawback of such an exercise led to a doctrinal rethink, resulting in the formulation of the Cold Start Doctrine and later in the concept of integrated battle groups.

Cold Start involved rapid, limited conventional military operations against Pakistan in response to provocations such as terrorist attacks or cross-border aggression, without escalating to full-scale war or triggering nuclear retaliation.

Between 1971 — the last major conventional war in the subcontinent — and the shift to a proactive strategy in the early 2000s, several events occurred that had a profound impact on the history, socio-economics, diplomacy and geopolitics of the subcontinent, some of which were characteristic of Pakistan's deep-rooted animosity towards India and its recurring attempts to foment trouble.

Terrorism in Punjab in the 1980s and insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir in the early 1990s stand out. Both states witnessed a heavy loss of lives and an adverse economic impact. The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, under whose leadership India had liberated Bangladesh in 1971, was a fallout of terrorism.

Perhaps the most profound event to alter the strategic landscape was India conducting nuclear tests at Pokhran in May 1998. These tests marked India's emergence as a declared nuclear weapons state, reshaping its strategic posture and regional dynamics in accordance with emerging security challenges.

A few days later, Pakistan tested its own nuclear devices. This resulted in an environment of mutual deterrence, with the premise that it lowered the risk of a conventional war between India and Pakistan. While India adopted a no-first-use stance, Pakistan did the opposite, claiming that it would employ nuclear weapons first if its red lines were crossed.

It was the umbrella of nuclear weapons that emboldened Pakistan to intensify its proxy war and sub-conventional operations against India, supporting intrusions, terrorism and social destabilisation, even though, by all accounts, it teeters on the brink of collapse. India, on the other hand, has surged ahead economically and technologically.

The 1999 Kargil conflict should also be viewed through this prism. Many experts believe that it was the nuclear shadow that constrained India from escalating operations beyond the Line of Control (LoC) in the Kargil sector. Pakistan has, ever since, continued to keep the LoC active, with reports of firing coming in now and then.

This period was also marked by India's ballistic missile programme gaining speed. The Prithvi was test-fired in 1988, while the Agni demonstrator took flight in 1989. Since then, different versions of these missiles, along with a host of other missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads over several thousand kilometres, have been developed. Meanwhile, China — silent since the 1962



THE TRIBUNE, 23 SEPTEMBER 1965

Since the 1965 war, the battle space has changed. From soldiers and tanks charging across frontiers, it is now dominated by niche technologies and automation. Long-range missiles, unmanned drones, satellites, digitised networks providing real-time situational awareness, and information warfare through cyberspace have become central to military operations.

border conflict till the 2000s, barring isolated confrontations on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) like that at Sumdorong Chu in 1987 — began becoming belligerent and aggressive. From the mid-2000s, its transgressions across the LAC increased and face-offs with Indian troops became more frequent and at times violent, involving scuffles and the use of non-lethal weapons.

The rapidly growing Chinese economy provided ballast for its aggression.

Its actions, mirrored in other parts of the world like the South China Sea, are backed by its huge strides in economic, technological and infrastructural domains.

The most serious incident occurred in 2020 in the Galwan valley, when China made several incursions into Indian territory in eastern Ladakh, in which several soldiers on both sides lost their lives. A massive build-up of troops followed; the standoff continued till 2024, when troops disengaged at most places.

The continuous enhanced deployment of troops at places and at heights as never before, according to defence officers, is now the new normal in the security calculus.

Two other notable events also marked India's changing approach to terrorism. The first was the wide-ranging surgical strikes across the LoC, when Special Forces hit several terrorist camps inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in September 2016, in response to a terrorist strike on an Indian Army camp at Uri that killed 17 soldiers.

The other was an airstrike by the Indian Air Force at a terrorist camp at Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, west of PoK, in February 2019, after a suicide car bomber killed 40 CRPF personnel at Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir.

Operation Sindoor was retribution for a terrorist attack at Pahalgam that killed 26 persons in April. It put the stamp on India's doctrinal shift from strategic restraint and

cautious response to deterrence by punishment through a proactive strategy and swift military action.

The initial phase of the operation marked India carrying out precision strikes at several terrorist camps deep across Pakistan, hitting targets in main-land Punjab — marking terrorist infrastructure in Muridke and Bahawalpur — for the first time since the 1971 war.

Pakistan responded with a barrage of missile and drone attacks at numerous places in India, from Baramulla to Bhuj — all were effectively neutralised. In retaliation, the Indian Air Force carried out precision strikes at 11 strategic sites in Pakistan, including airfields, drone bases and air defence sites. The targeting of the Nur Khan base, close to Pakistan's strategic and nuclear command, is said to have tilted the direction of the conflict. Pakistan sued for peace.

The enormous significance of these operations must be underlined. They showcased new-age warfare that in 1965 would have been considered stuff of a feverish imagination — involving air power, electronic warfare, drones, loiter munitions and missiles in a digital environment backed by satellite-based communication and surveillance systems which provided real-time seamless inter-service integration and coordination.

India hit its targets inside Pakistan from within its own territory. There was no face-to-face combat. Alongside, information and disinformation campaigns on social media were mounted to change perceptions both inside the country and abroad.

It was also for the first time that the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, which lays the framework for utilisation of waters from rivers flowing from India into Pakistan, came into active play. India suspended the treaty, not only depriving Pakistan of crucial hydrological data on water levels, but also enabling India to construct more power projects and



THE TRIBUNE, 27 AUGUST 1965



THE TRIBUNE, 22 SEPTEMBER 1965

water-storage facilities on rivers in J&K.

Notably, the China-Pakistan nexus also came to the fore in this operation. China, the major supplier of weapons to Pakistan and a diplomatic supporter at international forums for decades, provided real-time intelligence inputs as well as missiles to Pakistan's air force.

India's own military capabilities have undergone a sea-change since 1965. At the time, India had primarily relied on the erstwhile Soviet Union for its tanks, armaments and fighter jets — as much as 80 per cent of India's defence equipment was imported. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 forced the government to overhaul its own public sector-dominated defence industry which had hitherto been restricted to low-technology items or manufacturing foreign equipment under licence.

A 'Make in India' mindset, before PM Modi came to power and after, has meant far greater focus on indigenous research and development, and the increasing participation of the private sector in producing warships, helicopters, fighter aircraft, artillery guns, missiles, communication equipment and electronic warfare suites. Domestic manufacturing now accounts for 65 per cent of India's defence equipment — even though larger defence systems, like the Rafale fighter jets, continue to be imported.

Sixty years after 1965, strategic experts say the global security matrix will only get more complex. Beyond building up military capability, India must strengthen its economic and scientific sectors and ensure social harmony and internal security.

Compared to today's standards, in 1965, the war-fighting equipment, methods of information gathering and the tools for decision-making were rudimentary.

# IS COMMERCE DRIVING CLIMATE CRISIS?

The heavy loss of life and extensive damage in Jammu region may be the result of unchecked development

ARJUN SHARMA

**F**LASH floods and landslides have left a trail of death and destruction in the Jammu region within a span of 12 days, throwing up troubling questions that need urgent answers. Of the nearly 140 persons who lost their lives, most were pilgrims. The pathways to the Machail Mata temple in Kishtwar and Vaishno Devi shrine in Reasi turned into sites of tragedy.

On August 14, a large group of pilgrims, mostly from Jammu region, gathered at a community kitchen in Chosoti, the last motorable village for the Machail Mata Yatra, when a cloudburst triggered a flash flood that brought with it massive slush and boulders. Dozens got trapped. As many as 65 bodies have been recovered so far, while 32 are still missing and feared dead.

On August 26, 34 persons died when a landslide struck near Ardhkuwari, en route to the Vaishno Devi shrine, following heavy rainfall.

Torrential rains across Jammu triggered flash floods in several districts, including Doda, where four more persons died a couple of days back.

Experts say while the Kishtwar incident was a highly localised one, the Vaishno Devi

tragedy occurred due to a rare weather phenomenon, coupled with loose soil and rocks in the Trikuta hills. Sonam Lotus, a scientist with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Leh, says, "The Jammu region witnessed interaction between western disturbances and monsoon currents from the Bay of Bengal. Combined, these factors caused very heavy rain."

In Kishtwar, there was intense rainfall within a short duration. "Whenever there is heavy rainfall in mountainous areas, it triggers flash floods in catchment areas," says Lotus. "The frequency of flash floods has increased. There is a need for immediate action on the ground whenever the IMD issues early warnings like it did this time. Construction in floodplains is another reason why houses are being damaged due to the flooding. In the months of July-August, people should remain on high alert."

The Kishtwar administration and the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) have drawn criticism because the IMD and the J&K Disaster Management Authority had issued weather-related alerts well in advance. Despite prior warning, pilgrims were still allowed to proceed.

The National Conference-led J&K govern-



According to experts, increasing human activities in ecologically-fragile areas are spelling doom. PTI

ment and the Congress have sought answers from J&K Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, who is chairman of the SMVDSB, about the administration's failure to save lives. Sinha has set up a three-member panel to inquire into the reasons behind the landslide.

A statement by SMVDSB said the location where the disaster took place was near Indraprastha Bhojanalaya on the old track. "This is one of the safest locations. However, nature's fury struck in the form of a sudden severe cloudburst in this stretch of 50 metres, which triggered a massive landslide at 2.40 pm. It was unpredictable and unforeseen. No such event of landslide has ever been recorded in this area," it said.

According to a study by the National Institute of Rock Mechanics (NIRM), 24 potential landslides in shooting stone-prone areas were identified by the SMVDSB engineers with the help of NIRM in 2010, both along the old and new

pathways. "A topographical survey for 24 slide-prone locations had been carried out by IIT-Kanpur, while geological investigations were conducted by IIT-Roorkee," the study revealed.

However, some experts point towards the increasing human activities in ecologically-fragile areas in the region. Multiple projects have either been completed or are under construction near the Vaishno Devi shrine to cater to the increasing rush of pilgrims. Construction of roads, hydro-power dams and other projects has led to frequent landslides across J&K.

Dr Yudhbir Singh, Associate Professor, Department of Geology, University of Jammu, says the recent incidents, specifically the one in Kishtwar, were not random events. "These are a direct consequence of a combination of natural processes and human activities."

Dr Singh, an expert in landslide analysis, says the problem is getting worse because of

unplanned construction, deforestation and other factors, which are impacting the fragile ecosystem of mountains.

Even Jammu city witnessed nature's fury, with at least two bridges on the Jammu-Pathankot National Highway and one on Tawi river getting damaged due to the flooding of rivers and other streams. Waters of Tawi entered many homes after it crossed the danger mark.

Stating that Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and J&K are now prone to glacial lake outburst floods and cloudbursts, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has called for consultation with experts for risk mitigation.

Environmentalists, however, insist that the incidents are a result of haphazard development that is taking place to increase the tourist and pilgrim footfall. Anmol Ohri, founder of NGO Climate Front, says the climate crisis being witnessed in Jammu region is manmade.

According to Ohri, the Tawi riverfront beautification project is a major issue of concern as its barrage is 50-metre deep. "The areas that suffered damage in Jammu were close to where the barrage ends. Due to the intensity of the gushing waters of Tawi, it breached residential areas. Ranbir Canal was a saviour as it diverted some water outside the city," he points out.

Ohri laments that the government's focus is only on economic progress, not on climate-resilient development. "Pilgrimages are being commercialised for profit. There is no focus on the carrying capacity of pilgrimage sites. The infrastructure should be climate-resilient, drainage should be smart, illegal infrastructure should be mapped, so that early warning can be issued in these areas," he says.

The administration alone cannot take the burden of climate change, all stakeholders are equally responsible, Ohri stresses.



# TARIFF THREAT: CALL CMs’ MEET TO PROPEL REFORMS

THE WhatsApp Universe is caught in a spicy tizzy. Last year, the forwards industry was busy propagating prayers and a havan for Donald Trump’s re-election and a boycott of Chinese goods. This week, as the India-China *détente* unfolds in Tianjin, touch-screen warriors trashing Trump are in a bind whether Chinese goods are kosher or not.

Beyond the outrage and the compulsions of binary jingoism, the fact is that the answer to the “unfair, unjustified and unreasonable” tariffs imposed by Trump is strengthening the domestic economy. The chasm between reality and potential is littered with systemic burdens imposed on the economy. Making India competitive demands wholesale reforms—of laws, taxation, permissions and compliances.

The tariff threat merits a national response—for a meeting of chief ministers chaired by the Prime Minister to put reforms on the clock. Why the states? As N T Rama Rao said in the 1980s, ‘Every square mile of India is ruled by states.’ The 1991 reforms dismantled licence raj, but left a permission raj intact. The power to liberate factor productivity for boosting growth is vested with the states.

The idea is wrapped in cautionary caveats. It cannot be yet another Vigyan Bhavan photo-op. India must leverage the scale of its economy. What is it that states do to accelerate the virtuous cycle of investment, jobs, income and consumption growth? Typically, the discourse gets wrapped in performative platitudes.

The agenda has to be pre-baked and must be about trimming the costs imposed on the economy.

The political class has invested in vote guarantees. Ergo, how about the states presenting their ideas and three changes they guarantee to usher in? For instance Tamil Nadu, along with Karnataka and Gujarat, is able to compete for global investments. Can these states present and share their best practices?

The rigidities in labour laws corrode the promise of enlarging manufacturing’s share in GDP to 25 percent. In 2015, the Centre held consultations with states. By 2020, parliament modified laws on wages, industrial relations, safety and social security. In 2025, the new code is stranded as states are yet to adopt it and frame rules. Will states agree on a deadline to adopt and frame rules?

Enterprises waded through a plethora of registrations to set up business. Will states collaborate and agree on a common interoperable number visible across ministries? Entrepreneurs must get between 30 and 110 clearances to set up a manufacturing unit, a hotel, hospital or a power plant. Once set up, the businesses must survive regulatory cholesterol of thousands of compliances and the swamp of inspector raj. How about doing a flow chart of the permissions for a new national template?

Trump’s tariffs threaten the very viability of exporters and livelihoods of employees producing shrimps, gems and jewellery, garments. Perhaps states such as Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have ideas and can present a plan to ensure their survival.

India is a major exporter of solar equipment to the US and tariffs threaten its viability. The complexities of supply chain and tariffs could render them a casualty. A TeamLease Regtech report reveals renewable energy projects require 799 unique compliances. States can promise to clean up the regulatory mess in the domestic rooftop solar adoption to enable their survival.

There is much hope resting on the promise of ‘next generation’ GST reforms to be defined at the GST Council meeting in September. There are murmurs of loss of revenue—even if GST is often used as an ‘MSP’ for governments to fund populism. Can states agree on minimum definitions—redress the ills of an inverted duty structure where inputs are charged higher than the output? Must GST on yarn be more than fabric and garment?

Sure, programmes require funds. States are vested with surplus lands and can follow asset monetisation plans. There is much debate about central public sector undertakings and little about the state of state PSUs. How about a white paper on which state owns what and how well or poorly they are doing? The Comptroller and Auditor General’s reports reveal the rot and erosion of public wealth. Is this sustainable?

The emerging spectre of disruptions underlines the need for funding skilling and re-skilling. Nobody quite knows the quantum of funds lying in the labour welfare funds managed by states. Can states reveal how these are being used? A recent information request revealed that cess worth ₹70,744.16 crore collected from workers and employers for the welfare of construction workers is lying unused with the states. Worse, these funds are being diverted for other populist purposes.

Social media is replete with counsel on crisis-driven change. Indeed, my 2012 book *Accidental India* chronicles the phenomenon of India’s crisis-led transformation. There is an entrenched belief that Delhi holds the key for change. The necessary and sufficient conditions for change depend on context. The agenda must focus on equipping India’s economy to sustain in a world where the rule-based order is unravelling into uncertainty.

India’s lament for decades is not about what could not be done, but what could be done and yet was not. The aspiration for a Viksit Bharat rests on what is done now. So that GenNext can croon, like the Huntrix girls in ‘*KPop Demon Hunters*’, “When darkness meets light, this is what it sounds like.”

# BHAGWAT CONSOLIDATES IDEA OF BHARAT



POWER & POLITICS

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HERE are voices that wound and voices that heal. Some speak merely to vilify, while others attempt to speak to the soul of a nation. Mohan Bhagwat, the sar-sangchalak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, belongs to the latter category—an unassuming paterfamilias whose quiet humour and classy candour reflect the organisation’s long-cultivated ethos: restraint, rootedness, and an unbroken belief in Bharat’s historic cultural continuity.

Last week, his day-long lecture series at the centenary celebrations of the RSS at New Delhi’s Vigyan Bhawan carried a symbolic weight: a reminder that the RSS, founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, is not just a social experiment, but a cultural force preparing for its second century. For the first time in its history, the RSS chief fielded over 200 audience questions on language, Hinduism, secrecy, population, technology, and caste reservations—that he supports reservations until communities themselves feel otherwise, and that ‘Hindu’ is someone who identifies as Bharatiya and is rooted in Indian culture. One point is not negotiable: infiltrators must be deported. All regional languages, he said, are national languages, while imposing a foreign one is unacceptable.

He threw open RSS offices and shakhas to critics, urging them to see firsthand, instead of clinging to prejudice. In a pointed move against what he called a leftist-driven anti-RSS ecosystem, Bhagwat even suggested “*Hum do, hamari teen*”—not “*do*”—as a liberal, but culturally conscious approach to population policy. The message was blunt: the Sangh is not an enigma. Step inside and see it for yourself—or abandon the manufactured narrative.

The timing of this outreach is critical, as it coincides with a sustained political assault led by Rahul Gandhi, whose critiques have intensified since 2018. Gandhi has repeatedly accused the RSS of undermining India’s pluralistic ethos, alleging it seeks to impose a homogenous Hindu identity and exerts undue influence over the BJP. His remarks, including calling the RSS a “threat to India’s secular fabric”, have galvanised opposition narratives, particularly during election cycles.

While earlier criticisms of the RSS by Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi eventually waned, Rahul Gandhi’s persistent tirade has prompted the RSS to adopt a proactive, confrontational approach. By inviting opposition leaders and engaging with minority communities, including Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists, the RSS aims to dismantle the perception of exclusivity.

The scale and ambition of this the flagship event—100 Years of Sangh Yatra: New Horizons—saw about 2,000 participants including diplomats from over 50 countries such as the US, UK, Germany, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, whose presence underscores international interest about the RSS’s role in shaping India’s ideological currents as a global power. The BJP allies were conspicuously present. So were some Congress leaders, but a no-show by Rahul Gandhi showed an unwillingness to debate than accuse.

The exercise covered 17 thematic categories, from youth entrepreneurship to national security and cultural identity, aiming to project the RSS as a broad-based, inclusive force to foster grassroots connections, ensuring that the message of unity permeates rural and urban India alike.

For decades, the RSS remained an inward-looking cadre movement, focused on shakhas and discipline. Now, it presents itself as an interlocutor in the global marketplace of ideas. Bhag-

wat’s formulation of ‘belongingness’ as the Sangh’s core principle recalls an older Indian philosophical tradition: that the self is not isolated, but always situated within a larger whole. He draws from the ‘*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*’ trope—Hindu thought is not sectarian, but universal. He framed Hinduism as rooted in inclusivity and mutual respect across communities. History shows that institutions evolve under pressure. Just as Ashoka, after the Kalinga war, redirected imperial power into a moral enterprise, the RSS is recasting itself as a reconciliatory force, not a polarising one.

RSS articulation of ‘Panch Parivartan’—social harmony, family enlightenment, environmental awareness, selfhood, and citizen’s duties—resonates with older Indian frameworks of dharma.

Unlike Western political categories that separate religion, state, and society, Indian philosophical tradition is the ethical, social, and cosmic as an interwoven entity. Bhagwat’s emphasis on environmental stewardship re-frames climate change not merely as a technocratic challenge, but as a dharmic responsibility in continuity with Vedic injunctions about harmony between *purusha* (human) and *prakriti* (nature).

Bhagwat’s defence of tariffs as a means of protecting Indian farmers was not couched in policy language, but linked to the principle of swa—the autonomous refusal to surrender to alien systems of thought or commerce. This nationalist vocabulary situates trade debates in the same lineage as swadeshi, a reminder that economic sovereignty has always been central to Indian nationalism. Yet, for all its philosophical appeals, the RSS remains under ideological scrutiny of its ‘woke’ and ‘secular’ foes. Critics, including Rahul Gandhi, have portrayed the RSS as a headline Hindu nationalist organisation that marginalises minorities and promotes a monolithic cultural agenda.

Bhagwat’s words carry weight not just for the movement, but for India itself. If its first century, the RSS was about consolidation and control; its second may well be about interpretation and dialogue. In a world where civilisational states are reasserting themselves—China with Confucianism, Russia with Orthodoxy, the Islamic world with pan-umma narratives—the RSS seeks to position Hinduism not as dogma but as a global philosophy of belongingness. Ultimately, the philosophical question the RSS poses is: can a cultural identity anchor a modern nation-state without erasing its plural voices? History teaches that civilisations endure when they can absorb contradiction, not when they erase it. If the RSS can sustain dialogue with its critics, engage minorities as participants, and solve its own internal fissures of caste and language, it could transform itself into a truly integrative force.

In this sense, the centenary campaign is not just an organisational exercise, but a meditative experiment. It asks whether the word ‘Hindu’—which once meant simply the people of the Indus—can be rearticulated as a universal ethos of kinship in the 21st century. As the RSS moves into its second century, it should sustain its inclusive approach, ensuring minority voices are not just invited but actively heard. It must address internal issues about caste and regionalism, and foster a truly pan-Indian identity. By leveraging digital platforms, the organisation can amplify its message to younger audiences, countering misinformation while promoting its vision of ‘belongingness’.

Finally, it should engage constructively with critics like Rahul Gandhi, using dialogue to bridge divides rather than entrench them. When Bhagwat threw open RSS offices and shakhas for others to see, the message was about transparency—we are Bharat and have nothing to hide. Step inside and see for yourself, or abandon the manufactured narrative. The true measure of this centenary is whether a villager in Bastar, a student in Aligarh, or a worker in Chennai feels fraternity together. For India, the question endures: can we build unity without erasing difference? The RSS’s response will shape not just its own future, but the destiny of Bharat itself.

# WHOSE MOVIES ARE THEY ANYWAY?



OPINION

NAMRATA JOSHI

Consulting Editor

Follow her on X @Namrata\_Joshi

RAmesh Sharma’s 1986 film, *New Delhi Times*, is often cited as the best Hindi film on media and on the dubious linkages between politics, business, crime and corruption. The story of an honest journalist, Vikas Pande (Shashi Kapoor) who finds himself in an ethical quandary for having been used unawares by the shady political establishment, *New Delhi Times* won three national awards—for the best debut film, actor and cinematographer. However, it proved too hot to handle in its times by the distributors and Doordarshan for its portrayal of political assassination and instigation of riots, leading to several disruptions to its screenings.

Its recent official reappearance online has also proven to be contentious because of the voluntary censorship of

content by the platform shemaroom.com, that too without having taken the filmmaker into confidence. Another official print on the YouTube channel called Kapoor of Bollywood has since been taken down.

The self-censorship can be interpreted as a sign of the film’s continued pertinence in speaking truth to power. The touchiness highlights the fact that little has changed since the 1980s when it comes to locating threat perception in our popular culture. Most weirdly, some changes appear to have been done to supposedly bring it on par with the current finesse in image-making and HD quality visuals, but make it lose out cloddishly on its narrative integrity and soul.

While the original was 121 minutes long, the new version streaming online has a run time of 114 minutes. “It shows an absence of moral compass. It’s unfair to me,” says Sharma of the arbitrary deletion of seven to eight minutes of the film and the random, inexplicable meddling with the technical and artistic aspects in the guise of remastering.

He has unlikely company in Anand L Rai, whose 2013 hit *Raanjhanaa* also found itself getting maimed recently at the hands of producer-distributor Eros International with everyone’s favourite new toy, artificial intelligence. For the release of the film’s Tamil-dubbed version, *Ambikapathy*, Eros altered the climax, using AI to generate an alternative

happy ending where the hero Kundan (Dhanush) survives, drawing criticism from both the director and Dhanush.

Rai called it “unauthorised” for not taking him or the creative team into confidence. Calling it reckless and disrespectful in an Instagram post, Rai wrote: “To cloak a film’s emotional legacy in a synthetic cape without consent is not a creative act. It’s an abject be-



**New Delhi Times and Raanjhanaa were altered by the films’ rights-holders before their official re-release. The original creative teams were not even consulted. It raises questions of copyright and artistic fidelity**

trayal of everything we built.”

Dhanush felt that the alteration had set a bad precedent by “stripping the film of its very soul”. Such a problematic use of AI wouldn’t just threaten the integrity of storytelling in the present and the future but will be a danger to the past, the “legacy of cinema” as well.

Eros contends it’s legally on the right side and that its attempt was not to denigrate the original but to use the new technology to offer a fresh experience to

a new audience, and that it’d be similarly reintroducing other classics as well.

Beyond the issues of censorship, politics, technology and sheer callousness, these two examples raise the vital question of the lopsidedness in the ownership of a cinematic creation. While, the makers—the director, writer, actors, technicians—appear to have no say in something that they themselves conceived and created, the copyright-owning producers/distributors are merrily meddling away on their own. Why should commercial rights lend them an upper hand creatively? What moral rights do artists have to prevent their work from being mutilated? Do they have protection under copyright law, especially in the digital landscape?

“Once we have made it, we have no say in our work. We are at the mercy of the rights owners,” says Sharma. “Many producers may not have even seen their own films.”

Perhaps it’s time for the creative community to take a leaf out of Javed Akhtar’s book. He lobbied for the Copyright (Amendment) Act 2012 for rights to royalties from the commercial use of their work for the lyricists and composers beyond the fiefdom of the music companies and producers.

It’s ironic that, in retrospect, Sharma feels that bad, pirated prints of his film are more loyal to his vision than the remastered official one.

## QUOTE CORNER



Assam was never like this. [The state] has become something like a Frankenstein, like his monster... It has become a dangerous place. All I can say is about the vindictiveness against Muslims—they used to say ‘*miyan*’ in a nice sense, but now ‘*miyan*’ is like a cuss word.

**Syeda Hameed**, former member of the Planning Commission and a founder trustee of the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation

The judiciary has to rise to the occasion. Floods may have submerged the court, but justice must not sink.

**Tahir Khursheed Raina**, a principal district judge in J&K after reaching the Anantnag district court that was submerged in flood waters

Your English teacher and your gym teacher are getting married.

**Taylor Swift**, singer, announcing engagement to footballer Travis Kelce



## Nuclear safety

Ref: *Incentivise pvt sector in N-power generation* (Aug 30). India’s nuclear ambitions must go hand in hand with strict precautions, learning from the disasters in Japan and Russia. Beyond private incentives, priority should be on robust safety norms, disaster preparedness, and transparent accountability. Only by ensuring safety can nuclear energy become a trusted pillar of India’s clean future.

**K Sakunthala, Coimbatore**

## Lazy India

Ref: *India’s battle of the bulge* (Aug 29). The health issues arising due to obesity is a matter of concern irrespective of age. On a recent visit to a temple in Thalassery in Kerala I remembered that, decades ago, many children used to play on the streets nearby till late evening. The sight of children playing would also motivate the elderly to do their walking. Today, you can’t find any children near that temple

compound playing, nor the elderly walking. Most of them are glued to their mobiles, laptops or TV. On this, no government policy can help. It’s for the individual to decide.

**Sreenivasan Raman, Bengaluru**

## Fuelling confusion

Ref: *Need clarity on E20* (Aug 30). The Quick Take rightly points out the confusion over E20, but the real concern is its impact on owners of older vehicles. Many middle-class families cannot afford new cars and are left with few choices. Unlike the phased unleaded petrol transition, this rollout lacks clarity, options, and support, making a green initiative feel like an unfair economic burden.

**A Senthil Kumar, Kaniyur**

## Disowned MLA

Ref: *Congress in a fix as police tighten noose around disgraced MLA* (Aug 30). I am confused about the suspended-animated status of Rahul Mamkoot-athil. The man has been officially disowned by his party and the Palakkad people are silently opposing

his MLA-ship. Then how can he continue in that office? I think we need constitutional amendment number 131 for such cases, in which an MLA or MP would automatically cease to be one if his party disowns him.

**Krishnaswamy N Ponnani, Palakkad**

## Watershed visits

Ref: *Modi says India, China must work together for global stability* (Aug 29). PM Narendra Modi’s visit to China, soon after his visit to Japan, will be a watershed in geopolitical affairs highlighting a major shift in India’s relations with the world. The turbulent times with the US have necessitated India to explore other avenues to strengthen its global stand. Though it’s considered a marriage of convenience, the better bilateral relations with China will bear substantial fruits for both. In the multipolar world, no country can afford to be isolated or to be confined to narrow groupings. To stand firm on one’s own feet and be open to global friendships is the new mantra for all.

**D V G Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram**

## Whose war?

Ref: *With photo of Modi in saffron robe, Trump’s trade adviser targets India again* (Aug 29). Trying to explain the 50 percent tariffs on Indian goods, White House trade advisor Peter Navarro has blamed India for buying oil from Russia and described the Ukraine-Russia conflict as “Modi’s war”. This is most unfortunate and totally unjustified. India is perhaps one of the very few countries that have maintained friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine. Hope wiser counsel will prevail in the near future.

**K R Jayaprakash Rao, Mysuru**

## Assimilating ex-cons

Ref: *TN to pilot counselling scheme for ex-convicts* (Aug 30). The Tamil Nadu government has taken an important social reform step to facilitate ex-convicts’ integration into society after their release. The counselling must guide them towards not repeating crimes. Government must facilitate their access to jobs too.

**N R Nagarajan, Virudhunagar**

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{ OVER THE HORIZON }

Arunabha Ghosh



# Saving climate action in the age of global fragmentation

With multilateral forums gridlocked, bilateral deals on climate action must move beyond donor-recipient dynamics to that of mutual gains

The world is navigating turbulent times. Conflict continues in West Asia and Ukraine. US trade tariffs loom large over India and global commerce, and China's restriction on rare earth exports disrupts supply chains. Energy security is back on top of national agendas, with several major powers retreating from their climate commitments. In this fragmented world, the multilateral climate regime faces its greatest test yet. At the same time, the climate crisis itself cannot be ignored. News of extreme heat waves and flash floods inundating cities are commonplace across nations.

We are no longer in the world that signed the Paris Agreement in 2015: Not meteorologically, not politically, not economically, or socially. Today, the international climate architecture is under threat — not only in its letter but, more worryingly, in its spirit.

The letter — national targets, finance flows, technology cooperation — is faltering. At the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), we estimate that only two developed countries — Belarus and Norway — are on track to meet their 2030 climate targets. Many others are backsliding. But

more troubling is the erosion of the Paris spirit — the understanding that climate action is a collective geopolitical and macro-economic imperative. That shared, cooperative method is now at risk of being downgraded, sidelined, or eclipsed by more immediate crises.

We are in a world of polycrises: Economic stagnation, growing debt burdens, rising disasters, and the ongoing challenge of decarbonisation. Nearly 60 countries are now spending more on debt servicing than on education or health — forget climate action. Vulnerable countries face repeated shocks that aren't even being counted, let alone compensated.

South Asia, home to nearly two billion people, is at the frontline of a converging climate and economic crisis. From 1970 to 2022, the Asia Pacific region accounted for over half of global disaster-related deaths (over two million) and nearly half the economic losses (\$2.7 trillion), reflecting the region's outsized vulnerability. In South Asia, heatwaves, sea-level rise, and flash floods, among other climate impacts, are lived realities. This is more than an environmental emergency; it is an economic risk. Agriculture, industry, infrastructure, and public health are all exposed unless resilience is built into the heart of development.

As Brazil prepares to host the COP30 climate negotiations, we find ourselves in a moment of fracture — but also of redesign. If countries choose to act through three strategic pathways — internal transformation, strategic bilateralism, and smart plurilateralism — we can begin to redefine climate action even as the global order shifts. For

South Asia, this is a critical opportunity to reframe climate action as a lever for growth, jobs, stability, and investment.

As global climate cooperation frays, South Asia cannot afford to wait. The region must chart its own path through a new theory of change — by embedding climate action into economic planning, rethinking bilateral partnerships, and forming agile coalitions that get things done.

First, embed climate resilience in domestic economic strategies. Energy security, jobs, and clean power must go hand in hand. India is proving that self-reliance works — not just in energy generation but in building a future-ready economy. Clean energy is creating new jobs, anchoring industrial growth, and cutting costs. Take the decentralised renewable energy (DRE) technologies powering rural enterprises across India. Research by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) finds that DRE solutions — such as solar dryers, micro solar pumps, and energy-efficient food processors — have raised average annual incomes by ₹40,000, avoided more than 29,000 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions, and supported over 33,000 livelihoods across 30 states and Union territories. Nearly half of these users are women. These clean technologies reduce emissions, expand irrigation, and create rural jobs — demonstrating that climate action, when localised, is also an economic multiplier for resilience and inclusive growth.

The recipe is clear: Climate action must be woven into our economic fabric, not treated as a standalone sector. For South Asia, this requires green industrial policies



In South Asia, heatwaves, sea-level rise, and flash floods are lived realities for its populace. AFP/UTTARAKHAND'S STATE DISASTER RESPONSE FORCE (SDRF)

that create markets through public procurement, financial innovation to channel capital where it's needed most, and skilling to train millions for the jobs of tomorrow.

Second, with multilateral forums gridlocked, bilateral deals must move beyond donor-recipient dynamics to mutual gains. India's collaboration with Sweden on green steel — a sector responsible for 8% of global emissions — is an example of this shift. India developed the world's first national taxonomy for sustainable steel, setting benchmarks for decarbonising heavy industry. The Australia-India Critical Minerals Partnership, meanwhile, helps secure lithium for India's electric vehicle ambitions while strengthening trusted supply chains across the Indo-Pacific. These deals work because they exemplify asymmetric reciprocity, where partner countries match strengths with each others' needs. Such approaches

offer climate-vulnerable countries a lifeline while stabilising global supply chains.

The third pathway requires building a "coalition of the doing" — flexible, results-oriented groupings that bypass diplomatic gridlock. Agile coalitions must target specific challenges. The Global Biofuels Alliance, launched by India alongside 19 countries including the US and Brazil, is a case in point — broadening the global clean energy conversation beyond just solar and hydrogen, and opening up new climate-aligned trade routes. The Mangrove Alliance for Climate, with Indonesia and Australia, demonstrates how shared ecosystems can drive nature-based cooperation across borders. Meanwhile, the International Solar Alliance, co-founded by India and France, continues to pool capital and technology for scaling renewables, while the Leadership Group for Industry Transition, with India and Sweden,

is pushing industrial decarbonisation through common standards and collaborative innovation. These models have a chance of success because they are voluntary, focused, and built to deliver within political cycles — not diplomatic epochs.

The physics of climate change won't pause for current geopolitics. COP30 must be the summit where we stop debating action and start building what we all need: An economy that thrives because it protects, not in spite of it. Our children's future depends not on assigning blame or salvaging a broken status quo, but on writing new rules for a world that's already changed.

Arunabha Ghosh is CEO of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and special envoy for COP30 representing South Asia. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



# It is no more about trade; peoples' ties are at risk too

It's time to address a question that's been staring us in the face. Is President Trump being vindictive towards India? Has he got it in for our country? Because if the answer is yes, it's a far more worrying situation that we face than we first thought.

Vice-president JD Vance has said that 25% secondary tariffs have been imposed on India for importing Russian oil as "aggressive economic leverage" on Russia to stop the Ukraine war. Doesn't that suggest India is collateral damage, and President Trump doesn't care what happens to our country?

Indeed, if the objective is "aggressive economic leverage" on Russia, how come China, which imports more oil than India, has not had secondary tariffs imposed on it? In fact, in China's case, US secretary of state Marco Rubio has said it's okay for China to keep importing Russian oil because that prevents inflation in global energy prices. Isn't this double standards? A case of one logic for China and quite

another for India?

But it's worse. Scott Bessent, the treasury secretary, has accused India of funding Russia's Ukraine war and wants Europe to also impose sanctions on India. Peter Navarro, Trump's trade advisor, says India is threatening America's national security by buying Russian oil, and the intention is to "hit India where it hurts." He now calls the Ukraine war "Modi's war", claiming "the road to peace runs through New Delhi". Whilst Trump himself has said he doesn't care if India's "dead" economy sinks. Doesn't this feel vindictive and vengeful?

George Friedman, the former chairman of Stratfor, suggests there's a second sense in which India could be collateral damage. In a recent podcast, he says the 50% tariffs are also intended by Trump as a message to China, with whom he wants to do a deal. Friedman claims the message is America is not siding with India against you. In the larger geopolitical scheme, Trump has in mind, which prioritises

Russia and China, India is "dispensable".

If Friedman is right, India has been used to send a message to Russia, and it's been used to send a very different message to China. Either way, India suffers, and Trump, it seems, doesn't care.

However, the predicament we face goes beyond tariffs, oil and geopolitics. The Trump Administration is also targeting the bedrock of India-US ties, people-to-people relations. Commerce secretary Howard Lutnick says he wants to change the H1B visa programme. That could adversely affect the 70% beneficiaries who are Indian. The department of homeland security intends to restrict student visas to four years. That could constrict Indian students, the biggest cohort of foreign students in America. Meanwhile, Trump's considering admitting 600,000 Chinese students, almost three times the present number!

In these circumstances, what should we make of Sergio Gorr's appointment as the new US ambassador to India? There's no doubt he's very close to Trump and has his ear. On the other hand, he has no diplomatic experience and no prior understanding of India. Most people fear he'll race down Trump's chosen path without pausing to caution or suggest alternatives. That can't be a welcome prospect for us.

Gor has also been appointed special envoy for South and Central Asia. What does this unusual step suggest? Is it an indication of the sort of hyphenation India resents? Perhaps the start of an attempt to mediate between India and

# IS THERE A CONSTITUENCY IN THE US THAT'S WILLING TO TELL TRUMP HE'S MAKING A TERRIBLE MISTAKE? THERE ARE DEMOCRATIC PROTESTS, BUT NONE FROM WITHIN THE MAGA WORLD. ALSO, I HAVEN'T HEARD ANY FROM THE INDIAN EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

Pakistan?

I'm beginning to fear this is an onslaught. India is being picked upon at many levels and in multiple ways. We've clearly fallen out of Trump's favour. He seems upset, possibly angry, with us.

But is there a constituency in America that's willing to stand up for India and tell Trump he's making a terrible mistake? No doubt there are audible democratic protests, but none from within the MAGA world. More disturbingly, I haven't heard any from the Indian expatriate community.

So are we being hung out to dry? I don't have a clear answer. But doesn't it feel like that?

Karan Thapar is the author of *Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story*. The views expressed are personal

# Mathematician who tracked down India's maths heritage

Physicist and the country's pre-eminent math historian, PP Divakaran, who died recently in Kochi, was a cherished friend of mine for over six decades. We first met at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and immediately fell into a discussion about the ground breaking work on parity violation by TD Lee and CN Yang, a topic that had captivated physicists worldwide, and for which they won the Nobel Prize in 1957. What immediately struck me was the remarkable clarity with which Divakaran, or PPD, as his friends called him, explained the intricate details of their research. His ability to distil complex ideas into understandable points was extraordinary, and would be the hallmark of his eventual work. The second thing about PPD that would soon become evident was the breadth of his interests and his polymathic ability to synthesise them. Sometime in the 1960s, when I was teaching at IIT Kanpur, he came to visit us and expressed a desire to see a temple nearby which was famous for its Gupta-period architecture. As we explored the temple with him, his profound knowledge of its architectural nuances left us all in awe.

Over the years, he and I would meet across the country at various institutes of learning — the Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSC), Chennai, and then for a substantial period at the Harish-Chandra Research Institute, Prayagraj, formerly Allahabad, where he gave a series of lectures on neutrino physics. A set of three lectures he delivered there set the tone for my research interest for the next ten years. I bring up these meetings because through them I realised PPD's unstinting generosity towards other scholars, whether it was editing their papers or guiding them with their research projects.

His interest shifted to studying mathematicians from Kerala, and as was his wont, he dived into it deeply. His text, *The Mathematic of India: Concepts, Methods, Connection* is a testament to his tremendous intellect, and put ancient Indian mathematicians and their contributions on the international map. He shone a light on the radicalism and the rationality of ancient Indian mathematicians. Aryabhata, he noted, may have been a "godless secularist" because his writings do not

invoke any identifiable Hindu god.

PPD noted in his writings that Aryabhata's unwavering rationality was in direct contrast to what some of his supporters referred to as "pauranika" (traditional) or "sruti" (scriptural) knowledge. This is further supported by the criticism Aryabhata received from his most notable opponent, Brahmagupta. PPD pointed out that Brahmagupta's attacks were directed less at Aryabhata's astronomy and mathematics and more at his divergence from accepted wisdom and traditions.

PPD, who retired from TIFR in 1996, studied Aryabhata's work, *Aryabhatiya*, and pointed to verses 3 and 4 of the text's *Gitika* section as the first indication of his ground breaking theories. These verses list the number of "revolutions" (or periods of motion) for all the *grahas* (celestial bodies) within a *yuga* (a specific period of time in Hindu cosmology). The author considers this list of revolutions to be the initial hint of Aryabhata's theory of a spinning Earth. This idea would have been a radical departure from the prevailing geocentric models of the time.

The two other key points that PPD raised in his study of the ancient mathematicians were the advanced state of Indian trigonometry and the decline of Indian mathematics after the 16th century. He argued that the expansion of trigonometric functions like sine and cosine and their inverses were studied by the Nila school of mathematics in Kerala before they were developed by Western mathematicians. He supported this claim with rigorous evidence. PPD's work was appreciated by David Mumford, the Fields Medalist renowned for his work on algebraic geometry. PPD also noted that this period of mathematical innovation and creativity was not followed by steady progress. Instead, the Nila school marked the end of an "essentially autonomous progression of mathematical thought in India," he wrote. While he acknowledged various reasons for this, the "immediate trigger was the arrival of Portuguese colonialists on the shores of Kerala".

HS Mani taught at IIT Kanpur and HRI Prayagraj and presently, teaches at the Chennai Mathematical Institute. The views expressed are personal



{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

## An entrepreneur's Kryptonite

This is with reference to "Superman entrepreneurs driving the Indian economy" (August 24). The article captures both the strengths and limitations of India's first-generation wealth creators. But it is also true that the very traits of these stars that ensured early success also sometimes impeded scaling.

Sanjay Chopra

## Stop exercising control over girls

This is with reference to "Where's is the freedom of choice for daughters" by Namita Bhandare (August 24). Despite educating women, Indian parents haven't given them the liberty to make decisions when it comes to choosing a partner for marriage or a career. Parents ought to give their daughters liberty of choice.

Abhilasha Gupta

Women have been burdened with weight of family and community honour in India for too long. Education is a powerful tool to rid our society of this useless standard. This needs to be internalised by all generations.

Akshay S

# How the wedding market perpetuates dowry culture

If Donald Trump has tariffs, India has weddings. The upcoming wedding season bodes well for the Indian economy, with the wedding industry pegged at \$130 billion. Government data suggest that this industry, the second-largest in the country, is responsible for creating nearly one crore jobs. Such is the potential of the Indian wedding market that almost every sector caters to the life event of two individuals joining in matrimony.

Three cheers for the resilience of the Great Indian Wedding? Probably not.

Just like the unsavoury bits of the *shaadi ka laddoo* — and the unpredictability of its crumbling — horrors underlie these glitzy stats. Research shows that an average Indian family's expenditure on a wedding is about three times its annual income. Worse, this single life event claims twice the amount spent on the child's education for 18 years.

Are we still feigning surprise at the continuance of dowry killings despite some of the strictest legislations against perpetrators? If yes, we are simply blinding ourselves. By pretending to be horrified at a young woman's death while comfortably consuming "aesthetic" visuals from various moodboards and events, not limited to ostensibly wedding-related ones, we are complicit in this societal scourge.

The manufactured consent, to borrow from Noam Chomsky, around the spectacle of the wedding is rarely seen as an assent to dowry. All conversations around



Nishtha Gautam

a "dream wedding" are but a neatly gauzed talk of what the woman is worth in mercantile terms. The asymmetry of gendered agency is too glaring to give in to the naïveté of the bride's choice. It is no longer amusing to watch the tragedy of the wedding expenditure unfolding from the pleats of a designer *lehenga* — or, its much-cheaper replica.

An entire army has risen, and rightly so, against parents who force their daughters back into abusive marriages. Examining this tendency under the socio-economic microscope reveals despair and debt. A daughter's wedding is often considered part of her inheritance among the affluent and a necessary debt among the poor. A marriage on the rocks, therefore, is seen as both an emotional and an economic blow to the woman's family.

The seduction of the perfect wedding is far stronger than that of the mate one is exchanging vows with. It is no wonder, therefore, that even the rebellious, unconventional couple find themselves managed by the rubrics of the arranged marriage. What is in vogue, then, is an ideal setting where everything is aesthetically — and expensively — arranged to announce the matrimonial choice. Instead of reinventing the mercantile underpinnings of the arranged marriages, most weddings end up being co-opted into the economy of desire.

Curated images of wedding celebrations, promising an equally fanciful after-life for the couple despite the inevitable



Research shows that an average Indian family's expenditure on a wedding is about three times its annual income. HT ARCHIVE

attack of the mundane, work like a serrated knife. The cuts are way too many to bandage. The easier thing is to stay numbened. It is easier to appreciate the gloss than subject oneself to the process of thinking.

No underscoring of the essentially economic institution of marriage is going to dent its control over the collective psyche of religiously driven peoples. The bigger problem is those who willingly suspend their disbelief around the myth of marriage and, by extension, the wedding. The cultural primacy of the fetishised union of two individuals continues to bring death and disaster in many cases. But we are doubling down on the aesthetics.

Women continue to be harassed in the name of dowry and its many "cultured" euphemisms. Just because polite society doesn't display or announce the dowry, it

doesn't negate its existence. We know that dowry is also the "respect" given to the wedding party in tastefully calligraphed envelopes. Part of the dowry goes to caterers, decorators, photographers and videographers, make-up artists, wedding planners, entertainment artists, and even matchmakers.

The most unfortunate aspect of this scenario is that women, and their families, continue to be seduced by the siren song of the *shehnai* and often become willing participants in the perpetuation of the death cult. Weddings are like the Goblin market in Christina Rossetti's poem, where the mercantile "Come buy, come buy" shouts of the goblins continue to lure Lizzies and Lauras.

Nishtha Gautam is an author and academician. The views expressed are personal







# DECCAN Chronicle

31 AUGUST 2025



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

## Why birthdays matter, well into our dotage...

Why do we celebrate our birthday when there's little *we* did that day that deserves congratulations? I tossed and turned in my mother's womb with such impatience that I got the umbilical cord wound around my neck, nearly strangling myself. Saved by a caesarian, my bumpy ride into our world ensured I approached it forever more with irreverence. What it didn't make me, however, was the hero of my birth. That is always the long-suffering mom, and sometimes the support act.

In the case of my eldest child who pooped panic-green Meconium on his way out, when my body started fighting the alien invasion it thought he was, it was my husband's unstinting care that got me through 33 hours of agonising labour, rather than any ministrations (or lack thereof) on the hospital's part. Though medics can also be the heroes of our birthing sagas, the one person it rarely is, is the newborn! So, why on earth do we celebrate *ourselves* on the anniversary of other peoples' heroism?

Having said that, uplifting occasions, especially ones dedicated to feeling good about ourselves, are literal lifesavers in these dark times. Even if delivery-day revelries appear illogical, the truth about humanity is that if we don't hold space for ourselves in this chaos, no-one else might, so, celebrating birthdays are, in fact, essential to our wellbeing. With the calendar crawling with dates earmarked for worldwide commemoration, every day an International Cheese/Cousins/Campanologists/Carbuncles Day if not something else, we're left with little option on days to call our own.

Besides, as you slide into middle-age and have kids to boot, you'll find ringfencing dates well-nigh impossible. You'll hear yourself promise your friends, "We should have that coffee/chat/knees-up pronto", but tomorrow never comes, y'know. The one day we can hold on to annually, therefore, with the blessings of convention, to do things we find pleasing with people of our choosing, is the day of our birth.

Despite our best attempts, and many memes on self-love that social media regurgitates, the truth is we all crave external validation, and nothing does that better than the celebrations of self that are birthdays. You know what else helps? Whilst festive food, the bedrock to every great birthday, lifts the spirits, as do libations for some, a well-planned gift, proving that you're seen by your people, hits the spot too.

Yet, as lovely as presents are to unwrap, they have their pitfalls: From faking fondness for something that frankly horrifies you — E.L. James' collected works, e.g. — to finding a discreet new home for it so no toes are trampled, to realising that someone you believed knew and valued you for who you are, hasn't the slightest clue! This can be avoided by dropping everyone from your birthday party who won't first complete a quiz on your interests, ruthlessly eliminating anyone who thinks you might like knitting, Guinness, or lemon drizzle cake. Or you could just tell 'em what you want, what you really, really want, & la the Spice Girls.

Living in Britain has helped me appreciate another Great British institution, the friendly but firm Gift List, which leaves no room for doubt about desired tributes. Call it a wish-list if you're squeamish, sticking only the smallest frills on it you forgot to gather on your yearly slog. For my birthday this weekend, I'm confident my family will make me their always-scrumptious chocolate cake, as well as eminently frameable handmade art, without my having to ask. But this year, I've also requested a trio of those newly issued vintage-look Agatha Christie books. The Queen of Crime was so prolific that if I limit myself to just one per birthday, amassing her entire oeuvre (all of which I've already read but lost along the way) will require more years than I fancy I have left!

Yet, that on this post-50 birthday I can enjoy life while thinking with equanimity of death, reveals how birthdays themselves have morphed wildly over the decades. If you're of a certain age you might agree, that this anniversary on which each of us celebrates our unique existence, has gone from being exciting in childhood, to meh in younger adulthood when we seemed equally blasé about everything else (but weren't really!), to welcomed back into our embrace with fresh appreciation for those that remain, even as we wryly clock our renewed interest.

As a Monsoon child in Calcutta, the convergence upon our home, of family, friends and fabulous food (including a pistachio and chocolate cricket pitch cake, with tiny cricketers in icing sugar, that I still remember fondly), was invariably accompanied by torrential rain, dangerously flooded streets and interminable power cuts. But the 'load shedding' only made the lighting of the cake candles more electrifying, and the guests braving the elements to be there for me more gratifying than I could've known then. In the years of mistaken immortality that followed the festivities on my 21st, I couldn't be bothered to mark my birthdays as I roamed the earth. And it wasn't till my 40th birthday that I brought my friends from across the decades together to celebrate it with me in India once again.

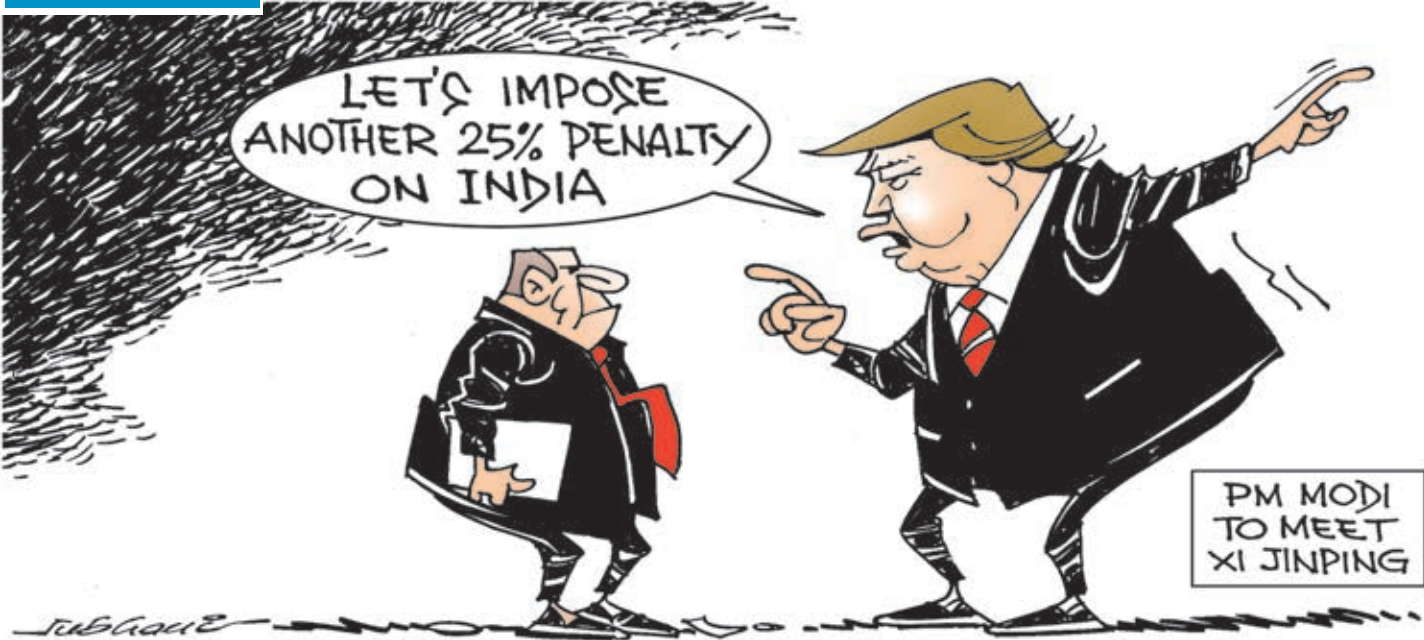
This year, with no illusions whatsoever of my contributions to my birth day (or any other), I consider it more important than ever to celebrate the small wins along the way. So join me, won't you, in raising a glass to the lives of resilience we've all led, and the gift that is our birthdays?

**Shreya Sen-Handley** is the award-winning author of *Memoirs of My Body*, short story collection *Strange and travelogue* Handle With Care. *She is also a playwright, columnist and illustrator.*



**The truth about humanity is that if we don't hold space for ourselves in this chaos, no-one else might, so, celebrating birthdays are, in fact, essential to our wellbeing**

Subhani



## PM's ghuspetiya outrage: Isn't it too little, too late?



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

As Bihar stands on the cusp of another Assembly election, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, in a speech in Gaya on August 22, has suddenly trained his rhetorical guns on the issue of "illegal intruders and migrants". According to him, such *ghuspetiyas* are taking jobs meant for Biharis, and seizing lands of locals. This raises a fundamental question: Is this an expression of genuine national concern, or a calculated attempt to polarise, distract, and divide?

At one level it is a genuine issue. No nation can allow illegal migrants to proliferate. But what is curious is the timing of the PM's new found concern, and the motivation behind it. If, indeed, *ghuspetiyas* have become a serious problem, it is logical to ask what the Central government of which he is the leader has done about it for the last 11 years, especially when an NDA government is also part of a "double engine" in Bihar for the past eight years? Where are the detailed policy proposals, the data-driven assessments, the sustained administrative actions?

The security and supervision of the border, and the duty to prevent illegal migration, are the responsibility of the Central government. Surely, the PM was not publicly confessing to his own failure. Further, for most of the government's tenure, this issue lay dormant in Bihar's political discourse, barely meriting mention in parliamentary debates or policy initiatives. Yet, as the electoral clock ticks louder, it has erupted into fiery speeches and headlines. The PM has only now announced the cre-

ation of a "Demography Mission" to tackle this problem. But no details have been provided of its structure, modus operandi, timeline, and objectives. One wonders how a government that has not yet carried out the much-delayed National Census, which should have been held in 2021, is now going to implement a separate Demography Mission.

The question also arises where is the evidence regarding this new menace? The Election Commission of India (EC) made a general statement that there are "large numbers of people from Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar in Bihar". But in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in which it has deleted 65 lakh voters, the overwhelming number are those who, as per its claims, are either deceased, or have possibly shifted permanently elsewhere, are voters at multiple places, or are "untraceable". How many voters has the EC, or any other state authority, specifically categorised as Rohingyas or Bangladeshis? This figure needs to be made public.

Bihar, unlike Assam, does not share a long, porous international border with Bangladesh, nor has it historically been the epicentre of mass illegal migration. Its struggles are inward-looking: endemic poverty, outmigration, woeful infrastructure, rampant unemployment, agrarian distress, and a crumbling public health and education system. It is intriguing that when issues of such magnitude are begging for attention, why is the spectre of illegal migrants suddenly being given priority.

The argument that illegal immigrants will usurp jobs in Bihar begs the question: Where are the

**The PM has only now announced the creation of a 'Demography Mission' to tackle this problem. But no details have been provided of its structure, modus operandi, timeline, and objectives.**

jobs to be taken? Bihar has the country's highest rate of unemployment. That is why lakhs of Biharis leave the state to find jobs in far flung corners of India, working on unacceptably low wages and living in miserable conditions. The state government's claims to have provided jobs needs a serious audit. It should make public what jobs in how many numbers have actually been implemented. What is known is that a mere 6837 appointment letters were distributed by chief minister Nitish Kumar in February 2025. How many of these actually fructified into actual employment also needs to be put in the public domain. According to the 2022 Bihar Caste-Based Survey, only 1.5 per cent of the state's population are employed in government jobs — equivalent to about 20-21 lakh individuals. In the absence of any other successful employment scheme, this helps to benchmark the scale of current efforts. Of course, as elections approach, there is a shower of promises. The Bihar cabinet on July 15 approved the creation of one crore jobs by 2030. If the track record of the last five years is taken as a touchstone, this is hardly a viable or convincing promise.

The truth is that using the ploy of illegal migrants, the government is pursuing the art of political distraction. When governments face scrutiny for their governance record, and are found lacking, they often seek to redirect the electorate's attention to an external "other". By invoking this threat, the attempt is to transform the election from a referen-

dum on the government's performance into a moral crusade to "save" the nation. It is a tried and tested formula, not unique to India. Moreover, the language employed in such speeches often goes beyond policy concerns into the realm of identity politics. The illegal intruder is often implicitly linked to a specific community. This deliberate conflation stokes fear, resentment, and ultimately, communal division. It turns neighbour against neighbour, converting what should be a contest of ideas into a contest of identities.

For too long the interests of the people of Bihar has been sacrificed on the altar of religion or caste. The cost of such politics is not merely electoral gamesmanship; it is the slow poisoning of India's social fabric. Bihar, for centuries, has been a land of cultural synthesis, where Hindu and Muslim, upper caste and lower caste, have shared not only space but heritage. It was the crucible of Buddhism, the land of Gandhi's Champaran satyagraha, a region that once epitomised resilience in diversity. To inject into this milieu a divisive narrative is highly unfortunate.

The larger danger is to Indian democracy itself. Elections should be an opportunity for citizens to evaluate governance, to debate competing visions for the future, to hold leaders accountable. When they are reduced to referendums on who is 'us' and who is 'them', democracy is hollowed out from within.

Bihar deserves better. It deserves an election fought on the real issues that shape its people's lives — jobs, education, health, infrastructure, corruption, social justice. It deserves leaders who trust its electorate enough to engage them on substance rather than seduce them with fear. It deserves, above all, honesty.

*The writer is an author, diplomat and former member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)*

### LETTERS

#### INSENSITIVE TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's plea to families to have three children smacked of total insensitivity to women's rights and autonomy. Issuing diktats to people on procreation in this age is not a right thing to do. Families must have free choice in the matter of reproduction. Bhagwat's volte face on the retirement age of Sangh Parivar leaders was not unexpected. The RSS is still to decide on membership to women in 'the world's largest NGO' and Dalits in its top leadership. From the speech, it is clear the RSS is unlikely to repudiate its core ideology and accept India as a multi-source civilisation and reinvent itself as an organisation representing the entire mass of Indian humanity.

**G. David Milton**  
*Maruthancode*

#### RSS-BJP RIFT EASES

Your editorial has analysed that RSS has softened its stand that leaders should retire on attaining 75 years. Earlier, it was like a dagger to PM Modi's head. In his Independence-Day speech, the PM had said that RSS is one of the biggest NGOs in the world. He specifically noted that the RSS deserves merit for its services, sacrifice and discipline. In the past I-Day speeches from the Red Fort, Mr. Modi never mentioned RSS. His recent utterance on RSS has brought rich dividends. This is not uncommon in Indian politics.

**Rajakumar Arulanandham**  
*Tirunelveli*

#### SC CANNOT MAKE LAWS

TVK leader has filed a petition in the Supreme Court for enactment of a law to curb honour killing. The budding leader who considers himself as matured as any other senior politician may not be aware that enactment of any law or amendment to the Constitution are the sole prerogative of the Parliament and the Supreme Court cannot issue any mandate to the Parliament in this regard. The Bharathiya Nyaya Samhita is comprehensive enough to deal with all forms of crimes that includes murder which cannot be categorised or classified as murder for honour or dishonour or revenge.

**Kooduthuraiyan**  
*Coimbatore*

Mail your letters to [chennaidesk@deccanmail.com](mailto:chennaidesk@deccanmail.com)

Anita Katyal  
Political  
Gup-Shup



## Is BJP rattled by Opp's voter rally? Big fuss over film on Gopal Pantha

Clearly rattled by the enthusiastic response to the Opposition's ongoing "Voter Adhikar Yatra" in Bihar, the Bharatiya Janata Party has dispatched a team of senior leaders to the state to take the INDIA bloc head on. Besides countering the Opposition charge that voter lists were being manipulated to help the BJP and its allies, attempts are also being made to create a division between Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal leaders Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav, who are leading the charge on what is being labelled as "vote chori". In the course of their press conferences, BJP leaders have referred to the "growing rift" between the two, stating how Rahul Gandhi evaded giving a direct answer when recently asked if Tejashwi Yadav would be projected as the Opposition's chief ministerial candidate. The RJD leader, on the other hand, had remarked that he would like to see Rahul Gandhi as the country's Prime Minister. Though Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav have been working in tandem during the yatra, the story about differences has found many takers as the

joint Opposition rally planned for September 1 at Patna's Gandhi Maidan has been put off though the yatra will continue.

More on Ranjeet Ranjan, also known as Ranjeeta, who was constantly by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's side during the recently concluded Parliament session. Ranjeet, wife of the famed Madhepura MP Pappu Yadav, is from Bihar and it would be expected that as a fiery speaker she would be an active participant in the Opposition's ongoing "Voter Adhikar Yatra". But strangely, she has not been seen or heard so far. Pappu Yadav, who is not known to have cordial relations with the Rashtriya Janata Dal leadership, has been spotted accompanying Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav during the yatra. On an earlier occasion, Pappu Yadav was not allowed on stage with Tejashwi Yadav and Rahul Gandhi. But this time, the Congress leader went up to him and the two were seen chatting together. The question everyone is asking whether Rajneet is staying away from the yatra because she does not

wish to be seen on the same podium as her husband. The guessing game is on.

Right wingers in India were particularly ecstatic when Donald Trump took over the US Presidency for a second time early this year. Social media was inundated with posts on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's special bond with Trump and how Indo-US relations would henceforth go from strength to strength. Six months later, it's a different story. Not only has Trump offered no concessions to India, he has penalised the country for purchasing oil from Russia, which, he said, was funding the war on Ukraine. Right wingers here are predictably angry over the turn of events. Unhappy with Trump for what he is doing to India, the right-wing ecosystem here has instead unleashed its fury on external affairs minister S. Jaishankar for India's foreign policy crisis. Since the minister has been the Modi government's voice on foreign policy issues, he has become an easy target for the angry right wingers, who are blaming him for Trump's latest India policy. Not just Jaishankar but

his son, who heads the Washington office of a high-profile think tank, has not been spared either.

When the Congress Party announced an organisational revamp at the district level, it was decided that freshly-constituted district committees would be headed by upcoming leaders. It was also decided that the new appointees would not contest elections and no MLA would hold that post. However, this informal diktat has gone for a toss with the appointment of Jaivardhan Singh, son of senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh, as the president of the party's Guna district committee in MP. Not only is Jaivardhan an MLA but he is unlikely to opt out of the electoral race in future. It is to be seen how the Congress leadership deals with this situation.

Even before the film has been released, the trailer of director Vivek Agnihotri's latest offering, *The Bengal Files*, has generated a heated controversy. In this case, anger has erupted over the film's portrayal of a shadowy figure like Gopal Pantha as a

Hindu avenger in the 1946 Calcutta riots. Pantha, it is argued angrily, was no hero of his times but a disreputable person, widely seen as an extortionist. A butcher by profession, Pantha ran two meat shops, and is best remembered for helping B.C. Roy win a contentious election to enable him to retain the chief minister's post. Instead, the film shows him to be a symbol of Hindu resistance. While there is a pushback against juxtaposing Pantha with leaders like Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has not helped matters by ordering a police raid on a private screening of the trailer as it has ended up giving unnecessary publicity to the film. On the other hand, there is a subtle contradiction in the film's attempt to help the BJP use historical figures for its campaign against illegal immigration as it comes at a time when the party has actually dismissed Bengali language and identity to help build its narrative on the issue of "ghuspetiyas".

*Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist*



Across  
THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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If the Bill to remove arrested ministers is passed, India will join the ranks of Belarus, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe which routinely jail Opposition leaders

# To answer son’s queries, I turned to the Constitution

How to  
RAISE A BOY



WALI AHMAD

THERE ARE certain dates that trigger a repeated sense of fear and insecurity — 26/11 is one such date etched in India’s collective memory as the day when terror took over Mumbai. But there is one more 26/11 memory that I wish I could forget, but that remains as a personal memory of pain — as a citizen and as a father.

A six-year-old boy asked to enact the role of a villain despite his pleas to let him play a commando seems fair game, doesn’t it? After all, every young child wants to be the hero, and someone does have to be a villain. Except that the six-year-old was assigned the role because he was a Muslim. It was November 26, 2018, when my son came home crying that he had been made the “bad guy” in a game with his friends. It would have been fine if it ended there, but he had also been called a “Pakistani”. My son did not know that it was his first brush with communalism.

As a new-age parent, there is a lot one has to learn and unlearn in order to keep pace with the demands of modern parenting and to ensure that the child gets a conducive environment to learn, question, agree and disagree with the world around her/him. We make sure that the content they consume online is age appropriate; we try to befriend them so that they are comfortable enough to share their insecurities with us. These are check-boxes common to all parents, irrespective of religion. But there is an added layer to parenthood if you are Muslim.

When my son asked me why he had been called a Pakistani, I had no answer. I know the deep-seated prejudice it comes from. But how does one prepare a child for a world where he will be identified by the religion he belongs to, or the food he eats? How does a parent tell a child that, as he grows up, it might be dangerous to be friends with a girl child from a different community?

These are the questions I grapple with, and the answer is not easy. As space

Thankfully, dead on arrival

ON THE CONTRARY...  
The common experience of how the criminal law works under the NDA government is frightening. At present, ■ practically, all laws have been weaponised — even GST laws; ■ *any* police officer (that includes a constable) can arrest with or without a warrant *any* person against whom... *a reasonable suspicion exists* that he has committed a cognizable offence; ■ trial courts are loathe to grant bail despite Justice Krishna Iyer’s dictum that ‘bail is the rule, jail is the exception’; ■ High Courts do not grant bail at the first hearing and, after letting the prosecution drag the matter on one pretext or another, may grant bail after 60-90 days; ■ as a result of this lamentable state of affairs, scores of bail applications land up in the Supreme Court *every day* and the Supreme Court has become the *Court of first resort* for claiming liberty; and ■ the inclusion of the prime minister in the Bill is laughable: no police officer will dare to arrest the prime minister.

STAND STEADFAST  
The I.N.D.I.A. bloc and the Trinamool Congress can easily muster the numbers to defeat the Bill. However, the NDA government is confident that it can find a way to pass the Bill. It may have a trick up its sleeve to win over some Opposition parties or MPs in each House. Or it may have a Machiavellian scheme to make some Opposition MPs ‘disappear’, and enable the government to pass the Bill. Or it has a strategem that is beyond my ken.

The battle cry has been sounded by the prime minister and the home minister and duly broadcast by the ‘yours obediently’ media. The Select Committee may keep the issue alive (like the One-Nation-One-Election JPC) until after the elections to the state assemblies in Bihar (2025) and Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal (2026).

The Indian Express reported (August 22, 2025) that, since 2014, 12 ministers belonging to the Opposition parties were held without bail, and many for several months. According to another report, 25 political leaders with serious charges against them have joined the BJP since 2014, and 23 of them have been exonerated of the charges! As far as I can recall, no BJP minister has been arrested since 2014.

If the Bill is passed, India will join the ranks of Belarus, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe which routinely jail Opposition leaders. If political parties that have declared their opposition to the Bill stand steadfast, the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill will fail. When the Bill is re-introduced, it will be dead on arrival.

History  
HEADLINE



VIKAS PATHAK

DAYS BEFORE the 50% “Trump tariffs” kicked in on an array of Indian exports, PM Narendra Modi repeated his message of “aatmanirbhar Bharat” and “swadeshi”.

In India, these words date back to the freedom struggle. Before Mahatma Gandhi burst on to the political scene, swadeshi (from one’s own land) rose as a powerful idea in 1905, when Indians protested against the Partition of Bengal by the British.

However, swadeshi acquired greater intensity from 1920 onwards under Gandhi, who identified it as not just a cultural metaphor for Indianness against colonial culture, but also as a powerful form of resistance against British colonialism.

The riches of the British Empire were built on cotton taken from India to the textile factories of Manchester, just as the Industrial Revolution was taking off. Raw cotton would be taken at throwaway prices from India to England via ships, processed into mass-produced clothes, shipped back to India and circulated via the Railways.

A 70%-80% duty was imposed on Indian cotton textiles to help Manchester, without which, according to British historian H H Wilson, “even the power of steam would not have helped the British city compete”. Even as the prohibitive tariffs kept down the demand for Indian textiles, machine-made ones from the UK, which were cheaper, took over the Indian market.

In his book *Inglorious Empire*, Shashi Tharoor writes that the move wiped out 25% of India’s share of global trade in textiles, even as British exports of cotton goods soared from 60 million yards in 1830 to 968 million yards in 1858, and 1 billion yards in 1870. “(Indian) Master weavers became beggars,” Tharoor writes.

Then, the Independence movement adopted the concept of swadeshi, and called for the boycott of all things foreign. By 1936, 62% of the cloth sold in India was made by Indians, Tharoor writes, with the figure jumping to 76% in 1945.

Gandhi’s push for the *charkha* (spinning wheel), on which people could spin their own yarn, took the swadeshi concept one step further — challenging colonialism in a simple language while also striking deep at its core economic logic. The imagery of the rough khadi also struck a chord with rural India, which for the first time saw leaders who dressed like them.

In *India’s Struggle for Independence*, historian Bipan Chandra recounted an episode from 1921, when Gandhi was addressing a student gathering in Madurai. Some students complained that khadi was too expensive, Chandra wrote. Gandhi replied that the answer lay not in wearing foreign clothes but wearing fewer clothes, and announced that he was discarding the *dhoti* and *kurti* and would now wear only a “*langot* (loin cloth)”. Until his assassination in 1948, he stuck to this vow.

The idea of *aatmanirbharta* (self-reliance) was one of the defining features of a newly independent India in the Jawaharlal Nehru years. In his paper, ‘A Brief Economic History of Swadeshi’, published in *Indian Public Policy Review* in 2021, Nitin Pai writes that, for Nehru, “the context of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the decline in foreign trade resulted in ...the urge towards self-sufficiency”. Political scientist Ashwini K Ray pointed out that India’s preference for “non-alignment” during the Cold War-era was a sign of a “resurgent post-colonial nationalism”.

The Nehru years saw a commanding role for the public sector within a mixed economy, apart from building of top-notch public institutions such as the IITs and AIIMS. Large dams came up, as did many large PSUs. These moves were later criticised by critics as slowing down India’s growth.


Trying to find her feet in the shadow cast by her father, Indira Gandhi turned to redistribution as her economic priority framework, coming up with the slogan of poverty alleviation. The tensions with the US, seen as pro-Pakistan, also made her government lean towards the Soviet Union.

An added rush of the swadeshi pitch was brought by George Fernandes as Industry Minister when the Janata Party came to power in 1977, after the Emergency. He famously threw out Coca



Cotton merchants in Bombay in the late 1800s.  
Francis Frith/Wikipedia

she  
SAID



ANJALI CHAUHAN

ON AUGUST 21, as the flames engulfed 26-year-old Nikki Bhati’s body in a Greater Noida house, India was, once again, confronted with the brutal truth we try to deny — that marriage, too often celebrated as a sacred bond, remains one of the most dangerous institutions for women.

Nikki’s crime was not just her “failure” to meet the escalating dowry demands, but daring to assert her autonomy. She wanted to reopen her modest beauty parlour, post reels on Instagram and carve a life not wholly defined by her husband and in-laws. For that, she died in a violent manner. Nikki is not an aberration. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 6,450 women were killed in dowry-related violence in 2022 alone — meaning nearly 18 women died daily because of dowry. Dowry is not just a de-

Flames that doused the fire within

mand for money or cars, but a system of structural violence that makes women’s lives perpetually negotiable. It begins with marriage negotiations, only to creep into daily life as a reminder that her worth is transactional, that she is not a person, but property. Beyond the husband and in-laws, we must ask the uncomfortable question: what about the parents? Why do so many parents, even when they know their daughters are being tortured, still choose silence over confrontation? Why is a woman’s life weighed against the family’s *izzat* in samaj and why does *izzat* almost always win?

In Nikki’s case, her sister has spoken of years of harassment and escalating violence. Did her parents consider encouraging her to walk away, refusing to bow down to demands that were eating her alive? Or did they, like so many, fear the stigma of divorce more than the certainty of her suffering? Divorce, in our society, is treated as a mark of failure, not of the marriage, but of the woman. A divorced woman is branded as a “burden”, while men who abandon or abuse their wives face little social sanction. The weight of this stigma is so heavy that many women are pushed back into violent marriages, told to “adjust”, “think of the children” and “keep the family honour intact”.

In reality, we are not protecting honour or family, but patriarchy, the fragile ego of men and a society that would rather see a woman die as a wife than live as a divorcee. We need to say it out loud: every time parents prioritise societal reputation over their daughter’s safety, they become complicit in the system that kills her.

Marriage in our society is constructed as a woman’s ultimate destiny, her only respectable future. But, within this institution, her autonomy is relentlessly policed. Nikki’s desire to rebuild her parlour and post Instagram reels became flash-points because they symbolised freedom — economic, social, and personal. A woman with her own income and a public voice is a figure patriarchy fears most. Nikki’s case has sparked outrage, as it should. But we know how quickly outrage fades. Tomorrow there will be another headline, another woman set ablaze. The question is: will we still keep pretending these are isolated incidents, or will we confront the fact that our entire social system is soaked in this violence?

Justice for Nikki cannot only mean jailing her husband and in-laws. It must mean creating conditions where no woman has to live in fear of being killed for resisting. It must mean economic independence for women, swift legal redressal for survivors, community networks that intervene and, above all, a cultural revolution in how we view honour and women’s lives.

The flames that consumed Nikki and countless others must burn into our conscience till every parent realises that no *izzat* is worth more than their daughter’s life, and every community admits that dowry is not a custom but a crime.

And perhaps most urgently, we must re-imagine marriage itself — not as a woman’s destiny or the only acceptable form of partnership but as a choice freely made between two consenting individuals, grounded in love. Only when marriage ceases to be the norm that defines a woman’s worth, and becomes one option among many ways of living with dignity, can we begin to dismantle the culture that continues to burn women alive.

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Fifth  
COLUMN



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# Unfinished, urgent business

IT IS hard to remember a week in which India has been more publicly humiliated on the world stage than the one just ended. First, came the fifty per cent tariffs on Indian imports to the United States imposed by our Prime Minister’s ex-best friend. Then came comments from Donald Trump’s Trade Adviser that were ugly and untrue. Peter Navarro declared that the war on Ukraine was ‘Modi’s war’ because India was ‘profiteering’ from it by continuing to buy Russian oil. The Big Bully in the White House is too scared to take on China, so it is India that he chose to unleash his attack dog upon.

In the face of this biased and unwarranted public humiliation India has chosen so far to maintain a dignified silence. Well done, India. But now that Trump has stabbed us in the back and made a mockery of the Hindutva enthusiasts who were so in love with Trump that they organised elaborate Hindu rituals to celebrate his second term, what should we do? Well, for a start, we need to spend much more time on comprehensive economic, judicial, educational and agricultural reforms than on bringing about the Hindutva cultural revolution. Far too much time has been wasted on deciding what people should eat, drink, love and wear. And on how they should worship. It turns out now that we do not have the luxury for a cultural revolution until we get our basics right.

I was brooding upon these gloomy thoughts when I heard the Prime Minister’s speech in Japan in which he invoked his old mantra ‘reform, perform, transform’. Exactly right. If he had not forgotten this mantra for so very long, we would have been in a stronger position to face up to the big bully in the White House. Reform, reform, reform should be the new mantra. There is much to do.

In the opinion of your ever humble columnist the most important reform must be of our justice system. It is scandalous that despite the grandiose assurances of successive Chief Justices there has never been a serious attempt to speed up the bullock cart speed at which our justice system works. Reform is not complicated as I discovered from a lawyer friend who is a member of the Law Commission of India. Hitesh Jain spelled out for me his ‘3-2-1 formula.’

“Three years to resolve all legacy cases clogging our courts. Two years to ensure that new cases are decided conclusively. One year for disposal of appeals with strict discipline and focused judicial management.” Something like this needs to be done urgently because one reason why it is so hard to do anything in our ancient land is because the justice system works so slowly it may as well not work at all. Getting justice for even the most heinous crimes not only takes too long, it is unaffordable for the average Indian.

Side by side with judicial reform should come reforms in our hopelessly outdated and shambolic education system. It produces graduates who end up unemployed not because there are no jobs but because their ‘education’ leaves them barely literate, linguistically challenged and unemployable. I am constantly running into young people who cannot speak a word of English despite having studied in ‘English schools’. English is vital in today’s world no matter what the RSS chief believes.

From the time that tariffs have been weaponised by Donald Trump, our Prime Minister has said in almost every other speech that he will never betray the interests of our farmers and fishermen. Great. But in the past 11 years, there has been too little done to improve the infrastructure that farmers and fishermen need to be able to access new markets. The farm bills were opposed by farmers but instead of finding out what it is that farmers really need, every attempt was made to make them sound like traitors and terrorists. Unwise because since then the subject has remained taboo.

The Prime Minister told his audience of Japanese businessmen that he has got rid of hundreds of regulations to make it easier to do business. What he seems not to know is that the officials, high and low, who run this country manage somehow to delay things anyway by coming up with some new rule or regulation. This is without mentioning the corrupt practices they deploy to harass honest citizens who do not wish to bribe them. It is on harassment they spend their energies instead of on governance and all you need to do is to drive around India to see the consequences of this. It is not a happy thing to admit but vast tracts of our beloved Bharat Mata are now in such a state of degradation and decay that I sometimes feel that we have turned our beautiful country into a gigantic slum.

My apologies for writing such a gloomy piece this week but it is hard to write a cheerful column when India has been humiliated, bullied and threatened by a man we thought was our friend. Political pundits, wiser than me, predict that in the end it is the United States who will pay for what Donald Trump has done. But that time is not now. The only way that India can continue to grow and prosper despite the hostilities and humiliation inflicted upon us is to reform and reform. With a vengeance.