VOICES
DR VIKRAM SAMPATH
NEHA SINHA
UTKARSH AMITABH
AJAI SAHNI
DR DEEPALI BHARDWAJ
MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS
MAGAZINE

BUFFET
PEOPLE
WELLNESS
BOOKS
FOOD
ART & CULTURE
ENTERTAINMENT

NOVEMBER 22 2026 SUNDAY PAGES 12



The Making of the Ramayana

Nitesh Tiwari brings India's timeless epic to the big screen with global ambition, cutting-edge technology, and a stellar ensemble

By **SHAMA BHAGAT**

Flying chariots, celestial weapons, fantastical kingdoms, and epic battles: the great epic Ramayana offers extraordinary cinematic possibilities. Bringing this universe to life, however, demands more than an extravagant budget and star cast. It calls for a complex blend of filmmaking, visual effects, motion capture, Artificial Intelligence, and digital technology. Nearly a decade in the making, Nitesh Tiwari's adaptation is among India's most ambitious film projects. What began around 2017 as producer Namit Malhotra's vision of an Indian saga, with international production values, evolved into a two-part spectacle. Malhotra brought Tiwari on board, while his visual effects company, DNEG, known for films such as *Dune*, *Oppenheimer*, and *Inception*, became the technological backbone of the project.

The challenge lay in condensing an epic spanning generations into two films without losing its emotional and spiritual depth. Actor Ajinkya Deo, who plays Vishwamitra, says Tiwari spent years researching the characters. "He has studied every single character in depth. I arrived on set as a 'blank slate' and performed the role just as the director guided me," he says. For Ranbir Kapoor, who plays Ram, the responsibility was daunting. "When I was offered the role, I knew it was not just a role, it was a responsibility. Instinctively, I was scared. People worship Lord Ram, and my fear turned into gratitude," he says. For Kapoor, however, the epic's appeal is deeply personal. Becoming a father coincided with taking on the role, and he recalls narrating the Ramayana to his three-year-old daughter, Raha, after returning from shoots. Her eager questions about whether he had filmed scenes with Hanuman or Sita, he believes, reflect the epic's enduring place in India's cultural imagination. He hopes the film will carry that connection to audiences worldwide.

Technology is equally central to the film's global ambitions. DNEG has reportedly developed an AI-assisted dubbing system that adapts characters' lip movements to translated dialogue, allowing different language versions to appear seamless. Malhotra hopes to release the film in Mandarin and Spanish.

Building a Universe

The pandemic, which brought physical production to a standstill, gave the creative teams an opportunity to develop the film's visual language through storyboards, animation, digital environments, and pre-visualisation. Unlike conventional filmmaking, where visual effects are largely added in post-production, *Ramayana* integrated technology from the screenplay stage. Scenes were digitally mapped before filming, helping teams plan camera movements, lighting, sets, and CGI environments. Cinematographer Pankaj Kumar joined in November 2023 and spent nearly a year on pre-visualisation before filming began in mid-2024.

The production uses a 42-camera infrared motion-capture system to record actors' movements and an 86-camera photogrammetry rig to create detailed digital doubles. Motion-control cameras, virtual lighting, green screens, and CGI combine physical performances with elaborate digital environments. AI-assisted lip-sync technology, including Prime Focus' Brahma AI, was also reportedly used to adapt facial movements for international language versions.

The aim is to preserve the nuances of live performances while expanding their possibilities. Actors and stunt professionals perform the action, which animators and VFX artists translate into digital characters and environments. Actors often perform against green or blue screens, guided by digital pre-visualisations that indicate the scale and movement of the surroundings. Virtual lighting ensures that shadows, reflections and illumination remain consistent when live-action footage is combined with CGI.

The scale is particularly evident in the film's spectacular sequences. The Pushpak Vimana, Ravana's mythical flying chariot, underwent two years of design development and 40-50 iterations. Only 10 per cent was physically constructed, with the rest created through CGI. The aerial battle between Ravana and Jatayu was even more demanding. While Jatayu was digitally created, a full-sized model helped Yash understand the creature's proportions and interact convincingly with it. The sequence took six-and-a-half years to conceptualise, plan, and execute.

Such sequences require close collaboration between cinematographers, action choreographers, animators, engineers, and VFX specialists. Every movement, expression and camera angle must be coordinated to make digital characters believable and emotionally engaging. The challenge is particularly significant when creating mythical creatures and supernatural beings, which must feel physically convincing without losing their fantastical character. The film's digital environments also extend beyond individual action sequences. Expansive kingdoms, forests, palaces and battlefields are built through a combination of physical sets and computer-generated extensions. This allows the production to create an immense visual canvas while maintaining continuity in scale, lighting and perspective. For the actors, even a relatively modest physical set can become part of an enormous digital landscape on screen.

Ranbir Kapoor filming as Lord Ram

Drawing comparisons with James Cameron's *Avatar*, the production combines physical sets, performance capture, and sophisticated CGI to create an immersive cinematic world. Yet, for a story as deeply embedded in India's cultural imagination as the Ramayana, technical spectacle alone is not enough. The real challenge is to make the extraordinary feel tangible while preserving the human emotions, spiritual depth and dramatic intensity at its heart. The ambition is to create an epic that is visually spectacular yet emotionally familiar to

Turn to page 2

₹4,000 cr
Approximate reported combined budget

₹1,437 cr
Approximate Worldwide box office collections after 12 days (November 17 trade estimates)

AI GENERATED



Continued from page 1

audiences across generations.

Tiwari says, "It was one of the best epics of our country. We wrote the script keeping all the sensibilities in mind." The filmmaker has rarely spoken of his personal life in terms of religious devotion or ritualistic practice. However, he has often recalled growing up watching *Ram Leelas*, developing an early familiarity with the Ramayana and being an avid follower of the epic. His understanding of spirituality is less rooted in religious dogma and more in its human dimensions—emotions, family bonds, ethical choices, and the values that shape everyday life.

Two Kingdoms, Two Visual Worlds

One of the film's most demanding assignments was to establish two visually distinct worlds: Ayodhya and Lanka. Ram's kingdom is envisioned as luminous, serene, and harmonious, while Lanka has a darker, more dramatic architectural identity. The production design draws upon Indian architectural traditions and cultural influences from across Southeast Asia, creating a fantastical landscape that remains rooted in the epic's cultural imagination. International and Indian creative talent worked together to develop this visual vocabulary. Production designer Ramsey Avery, whose credits include *Dune: Part Two* and *Aladdin*, contributed to the film's visual conception, alongside Indian production designers Subrata Chakraborty and Amit Ray. Cinematographer Mahesh Limaye, along with Kumar, helped translate these elaborate environments into a cohesive visual experience.

Large physical sets were constructed to provide actors and technicians with tangible working spaces, while green screens and digital extensions expanded them beyond their physical dimensions. Monumental structures, elaborate battlefields and supernatural creatures required close coordination between production design, cinematography, action choreography and visual effects.

The action department also brought together considerable international expertise. Terry Notary, known for his work on the *Planet of the Apes* films and *Avengers*, and Guy Norris, associated with *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Furiosa*, contributed to the action design.

The production's international ambitions extend to its music. In an unusual East-meets-West collaboration, AR Rahman and Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer joined forces to create the film's soundscape. The intention was to retain the unmistakable Indianness of the epic while giving it the sonic scale of international cinema. Recalling his first conversation with Zimmer, Malhotra shares an interesting anecdote. "Hans Zimmer is a true artist and deeply respects our culture. When I went on to narrate Ramayana to him, he refused to hear it and said, 'This is one of the beloved stories of India for over 5,000 years. You don't explain and spoil it for me. I have to understand it without you explaining it.' Our story required both the Indianness and the Western soundscape, but the Indianness should eventually dominate," he says.

For Yash, who plays Ravana, the collaboration represents an opportunity for Indian cinema to combine its cultural identity with global technical expertise. "If you want to show the world that you are creating a massive, big-budget film like *Ramayana*, you must state with absolute pride: 'Yes, this is our strength, and this is a film from our country'," he says.

Finding the Faces of an Epic

For all its technological sophistication, *Ramayana* ultimately depends on the actors bringing its familiar characters to life. Casting was, therefore, closely watched. Mahesh Babu and Hrithik Roshan were reportedly considered for Ram before Ranbir Kapoor was finalised. Alia Bhatt, initially linked to Sita, reportedly opted out due to scheduling commitments, while Deepika Padukone's name also surfaced.

Malhotra reveals that Kapoor was always his first choice. "For both of us (him and director Tiwari), from the get-go, it was to see Lord Ram being essayed by Ranbir. It was a natural choice... before we could go to who is option two or option three, it was like option one—'It is him'," he says.

Sai Pallavi, making her Bollywood debut as Sita, approached the role with reverence. Recalling how her dialect coach once touched her feet after a scene, she says, "They believe that I am being Sita *ma* through Sai Pallavi. I didn't want to use my brain for the role... I would pray and say, try to help me with the role." Yash's Ravana reportedly explores the demon king's origins and rise to power. Sharad Kelkar, who dubs for him in the Hindi version, says, "Yash is a brilliant actor and he's performed Ravana's role exceptionally well. I enjoyed the process of dubbing for him."

The supporting cast includes Ravi Dubey as Lakshman, Sunny Deol as Hanuman, Arun Govil as Dasharatha, Lara Dutta as Kaikeyi, Indira Krishnan as Kaushalya and Ajinkya Deo as Vishwamitra. Dubey recalls visiting a Lakshman temple in Lucknow while shooting for a project titled *Lakhan*. A year later, he was cast as Lakshman. "I believe it happened through divine ordinance and grace," he says.

Krishnan's casting followed a conversation with Kapoor during *Animal*, when she expressed a desire to play his mother. He remembered her wish and recommended her for Kaushalya. She describes the role as "very soft and endearing" and praises Kapoor's transformation: "The two characters (*Animal* and *Ramayana*) are poles apart. He doesn't just use body language; he truly inhabits his character through his eyes." The production has also tapped talent beyond mainstream cinema. Chetan Hansraj, initially cast as Ravana's maternal grandfather, Raja Mali, was offered six additional motion-capture roles, while James Wangcheng from Tripura joined as assistant action director.

Given the epic's religious significance, controversy was inevitable. Veteran actors Nitish Bharadwaj and Mukesh Khanna have questioned Ravana's portrayal, expressing concern that his moral failings could be overshadowed by interpretations presenting him as misunderstood or progressive. Sita's more physically assertive depiction has also drawn objections from traditionalists, including Khanna. Kapoor's casting faced criticism after an old interview about his dietary preferences resurfaced. The AR Rahman-Hans Zimmer collaboration and promotional VFX footage, meanwhile, attracted criticism over their devotional character and digital aesthetics.

Sunil Lahiri, who played Lakshman in Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*, has also expressed reservations about what he sees as an emphasis on spectacle over devotion. Others have been more enthusiastic. Trade analyst Taran Adarsh calls the film "a masterpiece", adding, "No one has ever attempted a film on this scale." He also praises Kapoor's performance and expresses hope for the second instalment.

Film critic Bharti Dubey believes the adaptation should not be compared with earlier versions. Praising the screenplay by Tiwari and Shridhar Raghavan, she says, "The goodness of Ram shines through Ranbir's eyes and Sai Pallavi is absolutely fabulous as Sita. Yash as Ravana is larger than life."

A New Cinematic Language

Nearly four decades separate Sagar's television *Ramayan* from Tiwari's cinematic adaptation. The difference reflects not merely changing audience expectations, but the extraordinary evolution of filmmaking technology. *Ramayana*'s theatrical presentation pushes those possibilities further. It has been formatted for ScreenX, making it the first Indian feature to use the technology, which extends selected visuals across the auditorium's side walls to create a 270-degree viewing experience. Its use of IMAX filmmaking technology further underscores the ambition to make the epic an immersive theatrical spectacle.

The production has continued for nearly two years since filming began, with post-production running alongside principal photography. The second instalment, originally planned for Diwali 2027, has now been scheduled for Diwali 2028, giving the filmmakers additional time to complete the enormous visual effects exercise. For a project of this scale, the real spectacle may lie as much in the thousands of creative and technological decisions made behind the camera as in the world that eventually appears on screen. From digital doubles and motion capture to AI-assisted lip-sync, virtual environments, and elaborate CGI sequences, *Ramayana* represents a significant experiment in the possibilities of Indian filmmaking.

Yet technology alone cannot make an epic endure. Beneath the flying chariots, monumental kingdoms, and spectacular battles lies a deeply human story of love, loyalty, betrayal, ambition, sacrifice, and the eternal conflict between good and evil. The challenge for Tiwari and his team was to ensure that the technological wizardry enhances rather than overwhelms that emotional core. Ramayana has managed to achieve something more significant than creating India's most elaborate cinematic spectacle: it demonstrates how an ancient story can be reimagined through the filmmaking technologies of a new age without losing the soul that has kept it alive for centuries.

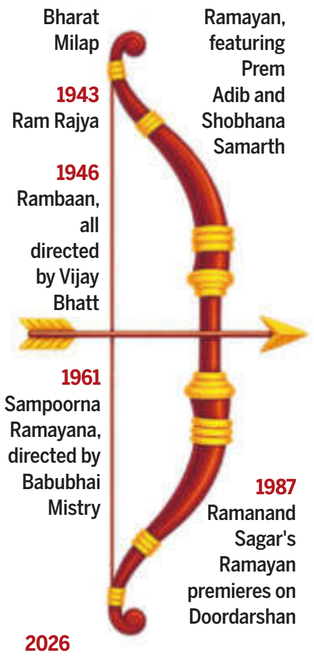


Nitesh Tiwari explains a sequence to Ranbir Kapoor, Ravi Dubey, and Sai Pallavi; (below) Guy Norris explaining an action shot to Sai Pallavi; (right) Yash filming as Ravana





The Ramayana on Screen
A TIMELINE



1942 Bharat Milap

1943 Ram Rajya

1946 Rambaan, all directed by Vijay Bhatt

1954 Ramayan, featuring Prem Adib and Shobhana Samarth

1961 Sampoorna Ramayana, directed by Babubhai Mistry

1987 Ramanand Sagar's Ramayan premieres on Doordarshan

2026 Nitesh Tiwari's Ramayana: Part One releases in theatres



Hans Zimmer and AR Rahman brought the music alive

epaper.newindianexpress.com

Putting Out the Fire

A 16-year-old from West Bengal is using satellite technology and machine learning to predict and prevent crop-residue fires



By MOHD SHEHWAAZ KHAN

For two winters, 16-year-old climate activist Sk Reezaal Arafat was under the weather. He would watch ash settle on the windows of his home in Medinipur, West Bengal. The western skies were growing hazy, and the air was thick with smog. Initially, he assumed people were burning bushes or clearing nearby playgrounds. But an investigation revealed a more widespread culprit: farmers in neighbouring villages were burning the residue left after harvesting paddy. On some days, the AQI touched 300. "I thought we should be getting crystal-clear air here. But over the past two or three winters, we have been facing constant smog," says Arafat, a Class 11 student.

His investigation soon uncovered the economics behind the practice. Unlike residue from manually harvested paddy, which can be collected and reused, the chopped stubble left behind by harvesters is harder and more expensive to transport. With few alternatives and little time between cropping cycles, burning becomes the easiest option. "Just telling farmers not to burn is not a solution. The transportation cost is too high, they don't always have a use for the residue, and they are working within a tight time-frame," he says.

Rather than remain just another climate activist, Arafat began exploring how technology could offer a solution. This led to the founding of SATARK, a student-led initiative that combines satellite imagery, machine learning and field-level monitoring to tackle agricultural fires. Working with 30 volunteers, most of them teenagers, Arafat developed a fire-detection model for thermal satellite imagery. Conventional polar-orbiting satellites pass over regions at fixed intervals, leaving fires that break out between passes undetected. The problem is particularly acute in West Bengal, where fragmented landholdings mean farmers often burn residue in several small fires. SATARK's system scans for thermal anomalies every hour and sends alerts to a Telegram channel, along with a Google Maps link pinpointing the suspected fire.



SK Reezaal Arafat with one of his devices; (above) stubble burning

But identifying fires after they start was not enough. When Arafat approached local authorities, he found that they were more interested in preventing them. "If you are only telling them where a fire is, you are making them less blind. But the fire has started, and so have its consequences," he says.

SATARK subsequently developed Harvest Alert, a predictive system that identifies fields at risk of being burnt. It uses the Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), derived from satellite imagery, to identify recently harvested fields. This information is combined with weather parameters such as humidity, temperature, rainfall, wind direction and atmospheric pressure to assess the likelihood of burning. The aim is to give authorities time to intervene before a fire breaks out. Yet Arafat recognises that alerts alone cannot solve the problem. Farmers need practical alternatives, including access to residue-collection machinery, affordable transportation and facilities that convert agricultural waste into biomass. "Just knowing where the fire will be or where it is happening is not a solution. You have to have a way out for the residue," he says.

Arafat recognises that alerts alone cannot solve the problem. Farmers need practical alternatives, including access to residue-collection machinery, affordable transportation and facilities that convert agricultural waste into biomass

This understanding also shapes SATARK's engagement with farming communities. Volunteers are encouraged to learn about local cultivation practices, expenses and crop losses rather than simply ask farmers to stop burning. Building trust, Arafat believes, is essential to securing their cooperation. "Social capital should be built before a disaster and should be spent before it, not during it. In a disaster, you cannot make something new. You have to go with what you have already built," he says.

SATARK has received a grant from Emergent Ventures to develop its infrastructure. For Arafat, however, the larger challenge remains translating satellite data into meaningful interventions. The ash on his windows first alerted him to the problem. His initiative is an attempt to ensure that the solution goes beyond detecting fires to addressing why farmers light them in the first place.

LIVE

The Right Fit

By RISHABH THAKUR

A button that refuses to close, a zipper that is impossible to reach, a pair of trousers that requires bending. For Kolkata-based entrepreneur Soumita Basu, everyday dressing became a challenge when arthritis took away nearly 80 per cent of her mobility. Unable to find clothes suited to her needs, she saw an opportunity to address a larger gap in fashion. "It was a personal need," says the 44-year-old, who teamed up with her mother, Amita, to experiment with adaptive clothing. With only ₹21,000, they approached local tailors, developed prototypes and eventually launched Zyenika in 2020.

The label has clothes that accommodate limited movements without compromising on style. Magnetic closures replace buttons, side openings make dressing easier, and garment construction takes into account different physical needs. "It's not just about adding a few Velcro closures; there's a whole design science around it which is largely missing," Basu says.



Soumita Basu

The first two years were devoted to bespoke garments and learning directly from customers. "All our patterns are co-created," she says, emphasising the importance of user testing. What works for one person may not work for another, making repeated alterations an essential part of the process.

Basu believes adaptive fashion has relevance far beyond people living with disabilities. Older people, those with arthritis or back pain, and anyone with restricted mobility could benefit from thoughtfully designed clothing. Yet fashion continues to be built around assumptions of standardised bodies and unrestricted movement.

She also wants fashion education to embrace inclusive design. Through courses and masterclasses at fashion institutes, she hopes to introduce students to adaptive clothing, an area largely missing from conventional curricula. Ultimately, Basu wants adaptive fashion to become an integral part of the industry rather than remain a separate category. "I am just really hopeful the need to have a special category itself starts disappearing," she says.

Basu's journey has also reinforced her belief that inclusivity must begin at the design table. She wants designers to look beyond conventional sizing and consider how different bodies function. For her, accessibility is not a niche requirement but an essential part of making fashion relevant. For her, clothing is closely linked to identity and independence. Making fashion accessible, therefore, is not simply about changing how clothes are designed, but about changing whom the industry chooses to include.

LEISURE CORNER

NATURE ON CANVAS



Curated by Georgina Maddox, it brings together six women artists exploring the delicate relationship between art, nature and the environment. The exhibition reflects on ecological fragility, conservation and regeneration. *E3–Ephemeral Echoes of the Earth; November 21-24, 2026; Bikaner House, New Delhi*



DANCING TO THE NAGA BEAT

Naga singer-songwriter Abdon Mech brings his dynamic indie pop energy for a special full-band performance, capturing Abdon's evolution from intimate acoustic beginnings to a bolder, more expansive pop expression. *Abdon Mech - The Act of Being; November 22; NMACC, Mumbai; Entry: ₹750 onwards; Details: nmacc.com*



SONGS OF THE SAINTS

This storytelling and musical performance blends raw emotion and poetic lyricism with an unflinching look at life's deeper questions. Inspired by the poet saints Kabir, Bulleh Shah, and Lalon Fakir, the songs and stories invite listeners to pause and look inwards. *Dekh Tamasha; November 22; BIC, Bengaluru; Entry: RSVP; Details: bangaloreinternationalcentre.org*

The Geography of Belonging

Through weaving, photography, and performance, Arpita Akhanda explores the idea of home



By MEDHA DUTTA YADAV

For multidisciplinary artist Arpita Akhanda, home is less a place on a map than a collection of memories, gestures and inherited stories. Her first major solo exhibition, *Under the Moon Across Many Waters*, at Emami Art, Kolkata, explores the lingering afterlife of Partition through family archives, photographs, performance, and the tactile language of weaving.

Born into a family shaped by displacement, Akhanda grew up in Cuttack, Odisha. Her grandparents had migrated from what is now Bangladesh following the Partition of Bengal, carrying recollections of villages they could no longer return to. One childhood conversation stayed with her. When she asked her grandfather where their village was, he replied, "We don't have a village anymore." The words would eventually become a starting point for her artistic inquiry into belonging, loss, and the meaning of home.

Drawing on photographs, letters, documents, textiles, and oral histories, Akhanda investigates what survives across generations and what disappears from the official record. Her paternal grandfather meticulously documented life through photographs and diaries, while her grandmother's memories lived in conversations, gestures, and acts of making. "What survives, and what we recognise as an archive, is also shaped by gender," she observes.

In her practice, the body becomes an archive in itself. Through performance, photography and installation, she attempts to inhabit her grandparents' experiences without claiming to recreate them. She cuts archival photographs into strips and weaves them together, bringing the past into conversation with the present. "The act of weaving is not about restoring the image to its original form, but about bringing its fragments together to create a new relationship between what remains and what is missing," she says.

The exhibition extends this exploration through paper weavings, Jacquard tapestries and a kinetic installation. Across these mediums, memory emerges as something fluid, fragmented and continually reconstructed. For Akhanda, home ultimately transcends geography. Having spent nearly 16 years in Santiniketan, she embraces Tagore's vision of a world united in one nest. "The body becomes a memory collector, and home becomes something psychological that I carry with me."



WHEN & WHERE

Under the Moon Across Many Waters; Emami Art, Kolkata; Till December 26

epaper.newindianexpress.com

THINK

The Spectre That Haunts Every November

COMMON GROUND

Dr Vikram Sampath
Author-Historian; Director, FIHCR; Co-founder, NAAV AI



There is a curious artefact in London's Victoria and Albert Museum: a life-sized mechanical tiger mauling a European soldier. When it was in working order, turning its handle made the tiger growl, while the victim emitted agonised cries. Known as Tipu Sultan's Tiger Toy, it was once housed in Tipu's bedroom in his Srirangapatna palace. More than two centuries after its owner's death, the contraption has acquired an unlikely afterlife. Every November, as Karnataka approaches Tipu Jayanti, the tiger seems to stir again—not in a museum gallery, but in the state's noisy political arena.

The latest round began with the Tehrik-e-Khudadad, urging Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to restore the official celebration of Tipu Sultan's birth anniversary on November 10, change school textbooks, and commemorate the ruler. Politicians on both sides quickly rallied for and against.

I have been writing about the contradictions surrounding Tipu since 2008. Nearly two decades later, and following the publication of my biography, *Tipu Sultan: The Saga of Mysore's Interregnum* (1760-1799) in 2024, the arguments remain remarkably familiar. One side invokes a heroic resister of British expansion; the other recalls a ruler associated with religious persecution and forced conversions. Each side has its preferred version of Tipu, and each is selective about the historical record.

Tipu was undoubtedly a formidable adversary of the East India Company. The Anglo-Mysore Wars were among the most consequential military confrontations of 18th-century India. His father, Haidar Ali, led Mysore through the first two wars, in which Tipu also participated. As ruler, Tipu fought the third and fourth but lost all wars to the British. The military innovations of Mysore, particularly its use of rockets, caused serious difficulties for British forces. The Treaty of Mangalore in 1784, which concluded the Second Anglo-Mysore War, was a remarkable diplomatic achievement for Mysore. Tipu's resistance deserves its place in the history of opposition to the East India Company.

But to describe him as a freedom fighter who fought for the liberation of India is to impose a 20th-century vocabulary on an 18th-century ruler. Tipu was fighting to preserve and expand his own kingdom, its sovereignty, and his dynastic ambitions. He sought alliances with powers that could help him against the British, including the French court under Louis XVI.



His embassy to France secured an audience with the king in 1788. The French, too, were a colonial power. An alliance with them was hardly a programme for Indian national liberation. He also reached out to the Ottoman court, Persia and Zaman Shah of Afghanistan, seeking support from Islamic powers to invade India and establish an Islamic Caliphate.

The other side of Tipu's record is considerably more difficult to accommodate within the celebratory narrative. His own correspondences, Persian records, contemporary accounts and regional histories document campaigns involving coercive conversions, violent deportations, and destruction of innumerable places of worship. The communities of Malabar, Coorg, and Canara, including the Nairs, Kodavas, and Mangalore Christians, have preserved memories of these episodes across generations. His letters boast of converting even dead Kodavas! The persecution of Mandyam Iyengars—slaughtering 700 men, women and children of that community—is another deeply disturbing chapter. These accounts cannot simply be dismissed as British propaganda, particularly when some of the most troubling evidence comes from Tipu's own letters and proclamations. Hindu-Mysore was Islamised as Sarkar-e-Khudadad, with Persian replacing Kannada and cities taking on Islamic names.

There is, of course, another part of the record. Tipu, like his father, corresponded reverentially with the Shankaracharya of Sringeri and extended assistance to the *math* after it was attacked by Maratha Pindari irregulars in 1791. He also made some grants to Hindu religious institutions. These facts deserve acknowledgement. But they do not automatically cancel the evidence of largescale persecution elsewhere. A ruler could patronise one religious institution, for reasons of devotion, political calculation or both, while pursuing coercive policies against other communities.

My research took me through archives in India and abroad, and through records in Persian, Kannada, Marathi, and Malayalam, alongside British, French, and other contemporary accounts. The picture that emerges is of a ruler who was militarily ambitious, administratively energetic and fiercely opposed to the British. But they also reveal an authoritarian, bigoted ruler whose religious policies and treatment of other communities cannot be glossed over. His dreams, letters, diplomatic correspondence, and administrative orders offer glimpses into a political imagination inseparable from his theological convictions.

The problem with Tipu Jayanti is not that Tipu's memory should be shunned. Quite the contrary: he deserves sustained study. The problem begins when the State is asked to turn a contested historical figure into an official object of veneration. The Congress government introduced the state-sponsored Jayanti in 2015; the BJP government discontinued it in 2019. The pendulum has since remained caught between celebration and repudiation. The counter-narratives that surfaced before the 2023 Karnataka elections, including the unsubstantiated story of Uri Gowda and Nanje Gowda as Tipu's killers, demonstrated how readily history can be recruited for electoral purposes.

Governments cannot erase Tipu from history, any more than they can compel people to admire him. Nor should the historical record be rewritten to make him palatable to present-day sensibilities. The same standards must apply to every ruler: achievements and violence must be examined, even when the evidence unsettles our preferred narratives.

The mechanical tiger in London was designed to keep alive the memory of a British enemy. In Karnataka, its modern counterpart is wheeled out by political parties whenever the calendar approaches November 10, more so if elections are fast approaching. Perhaps it is time to put the toy back in its case and return Tipu Sultan to where he belongs: the archives, and allow historians to do what they are meant to do: examine Tipu's life and reign without the demands of contemporary politics. After all, a society confident in its history need neither manufacture heroes nor suppress its uncomfortable chapters.

vikram.sampath@fihcr.com

Reading the Language of Rocks

WILD LIVES

Neha Sinha
Conservation biologist and author



They were there in every landscape, strewn about like giant's playthings. Rocks, boulders, scree, marking the area, but also making the area.

On a recent trip to the Corbett national park, I stared at little pebbles in the gurgling Ramganga river. For centuries, the water has lapped against the rocks, smoothening them down like treats in a box of chocolates. In the Thar desert, ripples of sandstones have tough plants growing through rocks—with blossoms as ephemeral as the rocks seem permanent. In Delhi, Aravalli rocks casually abut roads, peering out from the Delhi ridge forest, creating columns of quartzite and memory. In very clear light, the granules of the rock, and the pigments of their colour—ranging from a soft pink to a stern brown—emerge. And in the night, rude white painted slogans glow from the rock, a testament to the anger and energy of city graffiti.

We have always taken rocks for granted because they form, pun intended, the bedrock of our life—Italian marbles as floors, granite idols to worship, sandstone monuments to marvel at, Kota stone floors to grow nostalgic over. Yet, the way rocks are treated, despite the very solid platform they give us, leaves much to be desired.

I can barely think of a visit to a river without seeing illegal sand and stone mining. Mining for our mountain ranges—Aravallis being perhaps the most prominent as the range is not far from the Supreme Court—have been subjudice for decades. Looking at rock only as material—and rarely ever as habitat or refuge—has been detrimental to our landscapes and the wildlife that lives in it. Whether in the Himalayas or in more scrubby areas, the Indian countryside is synonymous with a rocky slope, crowned by a temple. In the evenings, leopards, sloth bears and hyenas emerge. They have lived quietly there for years, and yet conflict keeps increasing, because the rocks and the slopes are being razed systematically for real estate or boulders. What remains are single temples, a barely vegetated slope, and confused wildlife.

I look at rocks today and think of the secrets they hold—their 'whispers' as Anjana puts them. They radiate a sense of gradual accumulation, of knowledge amassed and stored

In her recent book, *The Whispers of Rock*, earth scientist Anjana Khatwa makes an impassioned plea to 'listen' to rock. Rocks have agency and are a part of nature that is overlooked, she argues. "Rock is a constant in our lives, seemingly unchanged by such vast time scales that we can be easily confounded and even intimidated by its presence," she writes.

Even as we struggle to understand the value of rocks, ecosystems and wildlife have always understood. On a rainy evening in West Bengal, I waited near a tumble of rocks. The sun was going down, a last bouquet of rays haloing the rockface. As darkness fell, something glowed softly: a silhouette the size of a cat, with pointed ears. This was the Indian eagle-owl, a large bird of prey that lives on cliffs and boulders. Like the rocks, the bird was completely still: watching the world with its molten-orange, lava-coloured eyes before it began hunting.

I look at rocks today and think of the secrets they hold—their 'whispers' as Anjana puts them. They radiate a sense of gradual accumulation, of knowledge amassed and stored. Even at this time of instant AI-led searches, we need slowly-gathered knowledge and secrets that take time in revealing themselves. And at every time, we need some rocks to always remain the way nature intended.

Views expressed are personal

Posts on X: @nehaa_sinha

Can a Terrible Spouse be a Terrific CEO?

MILLENNIALS AT WORK

Utkarsh Amitabh
CEO, Network Capital; Chevening Fellow, University of Oxford



History is littered with morally flawed men and women who are remembered for their incredible achievements. How they were as friends, spouses, parents and citizens becomes a footnote at best. Steve Jobs initially denied paternity of his daughter Lisa while her mother relied on welfare. Einstein presented his first wife, Mileva, with conditions for continuing to live together that included expecting no intimacy and leaving his bedroom or study when instructed. Letters examined by a Dickens scholar suggest that the novelist tried to have his wife committed to a mental asylum. Brilliance in public life clearly does not imply kindness and decency at home.

I love Apple products and Dickens's novels, and I admire Einstein for his contributions to shaping the world. I do, however, feel sorry for their families. It couldn't have been easy for them. Perhaps greatness comes with a cost, but they probably did not sign up for this twisted deal.

This month Jensen Huang resigned as CEO of NVIDIA, the company he co-founded and led for 33 years, after reports of alleged extra-marital affairs came to light. His marriage belongs to the people involved. Allegations concerning workplace conduct require separate scrutiny. What interests me is the debate that followed: whether his personal failings should prevent his return.

The case for bringing Huang back rests on capability. Few people understand NVIDIA's technology, customers and culture as he does. His supporters would like him to make amends at home and return to building the AI industry. A failure in one part of life need not disqualify someone from contributing in another.



The case against his return rests on credibility. While strong morals alone are insufficient for business success, they are a critical component of leadership. CEOs these days talk incessantly about how their organisations are exemplars of moral rectitude, pursuing their missions for humanity's good. Grandstanding raises the bar. Leaders who ask us to judge them by their ideals invite a backlash when they fail to live up to them.

A morally flawed spouse can run a company brilliantly, though a CEO who sells moral purpose has made his character part of the product. With the possibility of Huang's return being floated, the question is whether he can turn his expressed regret into meaningful change.

Regret says, "I did something bad." Shame can turn that into "I am something bad." Regret keeps the focus on an act we can acknowledge and try to repair. Shame turns the act into an identity, convincing us that we are beyond repair or pushing us to deflect blame and hide.

For a leader seeking a return, this distinction decides whether regret encourages change or ends in deflection. Leaders, like the rest of us, carry lingering regrets of action, inaction, indulgence or failure. The way they talk to themselves helps shape what those regrets become.

A few honest questions can help a leader, and those deciding whether to trust him again. Does he regret the action, the result or both? Regretting only getting caught teaches little. Since he cannot change the past, what can he do to make the future slightly better? What habits and boundaries must change? If someone else has been hurt, how can he make amends on their terms?

Regret matters because the case for a leader's return cannot rest on capability alone. It also depends on whether anything has changed. An apology offers a promise; subsequent conduct gives people grounds to judge it. Sweeping regret under the rug may protect a reputation for the moment, but it leaves the reasons for distrust intact.

Our worst actions do not have to define us, just as our greatest achievements cannot tell the whole story. A morally flawed spouse can be a terrific CEO. Whether that CEO deserves renewed trust depends partly on what follows the failure. If we believe people can change, there must be room for a return. If we take the harm seriously, regret must mean more than wanting the old life back.

Posts on X: @utkarsh_amitabh

The New Wave of Democratic Dissent

BY INVITATION

Ajai Sahni
Executive Director, Institute for Conflict Management, South Asia Terrorism Portal



The convergence of social media and the street is challenging a global authoritarian and right-wing rampage. Across Europe and the wider West, a new generation of dissent is emerging, converting digital disaffection into physical mobilisation.

Serbia was already a striking example. Since November 2024, student-led mobilisation following the Novi Sad Railway Station canopy collapse which killed 16 people evolved into a sustained challenge to Aleksandar Vucic's autocratic regime. Demands for accountability widened into a confrontation over corruption, institutional capture and democratic legitimacy. Despite repression, widening grievances transcended their original causes and crystallised into a collective identity of resistance, heralding a "students list" to power in 2025.

In France student protests, demonstrations over austerity and resistance to political exclusion coalesced around anxieties over the normalisation of Far Right ascendancy. The French expression *jeunesse fâchée, pas fasciste*—angry youth, not fascist youth—captured the redirection of anger towards democratic renewal.

Spain, Albania, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Italy, among others, reveal comparable tensions, with youth mobilisation intersecting with housing precarity, economic insecurity, and resistance to political polarization, corruption and the fragility of institutional legitimacy. The European Students' Union recorded 54 student protests across 22 countries between March and May 2026. Dissent is no longer an episodic disturbance; it is a political culture.

This global effervescence seeks to transform depoliticisation into democratic agency and counter-elite formation. Revolutions have rarely been led by the poorest strata of society acting in isolation. They have ordinarily been propelled by educated, aspirational and relatively privileged social groups whose expectations of status, opportunity and power have been frustrated. Students, intellectuals and digitally connected professionals are becoming politically combustible, with grievances calcifying into identity, and identity becoming the basis of collective action.



Brazil's 2026 electoral experience demonstrates how this process translates into electoral mobilisation. In the first round, Flávio Bolsonaro, backed by the unqualified support of the US Trump administration, secured 47.03 per cent against Lula's 45.16 per cent. The subsequent mobilisation helped produce an extraordinary reversal. On October 25, Lula won 51.79 per cent of the valid vote, defeating Bolsonaro's 48.21 per cent. For the first time in Brazil's democratic presidential history, the candidate finishing second in the first round overturned the result in the runoff.

Brazil's André Janones, the architect of what has come to be called Janonism, offers a revealing case study in this transformation. After Lula's first-round defeat, Janones repurposed a WhatsApp channel into an operational command centre, the Exército do Lula (Lula's Army). Within three weeks, its membership surged from approximately 50,000 to over 10 million. Supporters received videos, audio messages and specific "missions": circulate content, mobilise hashtags, recruit acquaintances and participate in coordinated digital actions.

This was more than political messaging. It was the conversion of spectators into participants, and of participation into a form of collective political identity. The street and the screen were no longer separate theatres of action. Digital mobilisation reinforced physical demonstrations, while the latter furnished the emotional authenticity and visual material that circulated online. The campaign's extraordinary reach created a political momentum that conventional electoral machinery could neither manufacture nor adequately measure.

Janonism also exposes a fundamental asymmetry in the contemporary information environment. The far Right relies heavily on favourable platform treatment, algorithmic amplification and purchased views or artificial engagement to simulate spontaneous popular enthusiasm. Political bots disproportionately inflate the visibility of radical-right politicians, while covert paid influence operations demonstrate the industrial scale at which propaganda can be distributed across borders.

The response is not mirror-image manipulation. Janonism constructs a Mini-Manual of Informational Insurrection: reclaim attention through authentic participation; translate abstract political arguments into everyday experience; convert indignation into shared purpose; and make dissent visible, culturally resonant and contagious. Its central innovation is the organisational principle that millions of individual acts, synchronised around a common purpose, can become a political force. The angry youth are emerging as a democratic counter-elite. The battle for political power is increasingly fought not merely at the ballot box, but in the contested space between the algorithm and the street.

ajaisahni@gmail.com

epaper.newindianexpress.com

Love at Arm's Length

Puffer-fishing is when someone wants to get close, but pulls away the moment the relationship starts getting real

By ANJALI AWASTHI



In the curious world of modern dating, the desire for a romantic connection and the ability to sustain one can turn out to be two very different propositions. One minute, someone is pursuing you; the next, they are retreating because things are getting a little too real. They enjoy the excitement of a budding romance but become uneasy when it demands emotional openness, clarity or commitment. Add a little distance, however, and they may return. The latest dating term for this push-and-pull behaviour is "puffer-fishing". The behaviour is hardly new. Dating culture simply has a knack for giving old romantic problems shiny new names—ghosting, breadcrumbing, situationships and now puffer-fishing.

"The behaviour itself is not new. Terms like puffer-fishing are gaining popularity because people are looking for language to describe confusing relationship experiences," says relationship coach Vineeta Singh. The label can be useful if it helps someone recognise a pattern, but it isn't a diagnosis. Someone who pulls away may fear intimacy, dislike commitment or may simply have decided that the relationship isn't for them. The more complicated version is when they genuinely want the relationship, right up until it starts feeling real. "The desire for emotional connection and the fear of intimacy can coexist," explains Singh. A person can crave love and companionship while becoming uncomfortable with the vulnerability, trust and emotional dependence they require. That discomfort often surfaces as the initial high of dating begins to wear off.

Pulling away offers an instant escape. "Creating distance may temporarily restore a sense of control, independence or emotional safety," Singh explains. And that is what makes puffer-fishing so maddening: the person may not stop wanting you. They may simply find the relationship easier to manage from a safe distance. Once the pressure eases, they miss the connection, return, and the cycle begins again. Past experiences can feed the pattern, too. Betrayal, rejection, criticism, controlling relationships or inconsistent emotional experiences can all shape how safe intimacy feels. Attachment styles may offer one lens through which to understand the behaviour, with avoidant tendencies leaning towards self-reliance and autonomy, while anxious attachment can bring a heightened fear of rejection or abandonment. But Singh cautions against turning attachment styles into catch-all explanations. "Attachment styles should not become convenient labels for every confusing dating experience. Human behaviour is influenced by multiple factors, and a person's responses can vary across relationships."

Sometimes, the explanation is simpler: they have changed their mind. The pattern becomes more revealing when it repeats—when someone repeatedly reaches for intimacy, retreats as the relationship deepens, then returns once distance makes the relationship feel manageable again. Modern dating apps may make that cycle easier to sustain. "The 'puffer-fishing' dynamic isn't a new thing. It's the same old fear of getting too close to someone," says Deepali Batra, clinical psychologist and relationship therapist. There is always another option just a swipe away. "Dating apps give people a variety of options. The moment a problem arises in an existing relationship, people turn to someone else on the dating app," adds Batra. At the same time, modern relationships place a premium on freedom and personal space. Wanting space isn't unhealthy; disappearing without explanation is another matter.

"In a healthy space, the person makes you feel emotionally safe, reassures you, communicates that they care and offers clarity," adds Batra. The difference lies in communication. Saying "I need some time to myself" is very different from maintaining a silence that leaves the other person decoding every unanswered message.

So what should you do when you're on the receiving end? Don't chase harder. Batra advises the person left waiting to "understand the pattern, have clear boundaries, avoid chasing the other person and also focus on their own life". Perhaps that is the real lesson of puffer-fishing: space isn't the problem; ambiguity is. If someone keeps pulling you close and pushing you away, pay attention to the pattern—not just the promises made between retreats.

"Terms like puffer-fishing are gaining popularity because people are looking for language to describe confusing relationship experiences. Creating distance may temporarily restore a sense of control, independence or emotional safety." **Vineeta Singh,** Relationship Coach

WHAT IS PUFFER-FISHING

The latest dating term for a push-and-pull relationship is "puffer-fishing": wanting closeness until closeness actually arrives. The behaviour is hardly new. The discomfort often arrives when the early dating high wears off.





A Slick Situation

Oily skin can feel surprisingly dry in winter, making the right skincare routine more important than ever

By MEDHA DUTTA YADAV

Your face is shiny enough to reflect the afternoon sun, yet your cheeks feel tight, your makeup flakes, and your skin looks suspiciously dull. Winter can leave your skin feeling oily yet dehydrated at the same time. That's because dry skin lacks natural oils, while dehydrated skin lacks water. Even oily skin can lose moisture during the colder months.

Think of the skin barrier as a brick wall, with skin cells serving as the bricks and lipids such as ceramides acting as the mortar. When the skin barrier weakens, it loses moisture more easily, leaving the skin feeling tight, rough or sensitive, even as it continues to produce oil. A 2023 study published in Skin Research and Technology found that exposure to heated indoor environments affected skin parameters, including roughness and redness, while a ceramide-containing cream offered benefits. Take Delhi-based event manager Sana Kapur, for instance, who has oily, acne-prone skin. She notices that, come winter, her forehead and nose become increasingly greasy, while her cheeks feel tight after cleansing. Her foundation settles into fine lines, and her usual exfoliating serum begins to sting. Her instinct is to reach for a stronger face wash, exfoliate more frequently and skip moisturiser. However, aggressive cleansing and excessive exfoliation can further irritate the skin and weaken its barrier.

Dermatologists advise against treating oiliness as a reason to abandon moisturisers. Mumbai-based dermatologist Anisha Mengle recommends adapting skincare routines to colder weather, including switching to richer creams and easing up on potentially irritating exfoliating acids when dryness becomes a problem. "Resist the urge to strip your skin into submission. If tightness, flaking, stinging or sudden sensitivity accompany the shine, your skin may need better hydration and barrier support, not more aggressive oil control," she says.



CLEANSE WITHOUT PUNISHMENT: Choose a gentle cleanser and avoid hot water, abrasive scrubs and excessive washing.

LAYER HYDRATION INTELLIGENTLY: Look for humectants such as glycerin and hyaluronic acid, which attract water to the skin.

REPAIR THE BARRIER: Ceramides help replenish the lipids that support the skin's protective barrier. A lightweight cream or gel-cream may suit oily skin, while particularly irritated areas may need a richer formula.

GIVE ACIDS A BREATHER: If glycolic acid, salicylic acid or retinoids leave your skin stinging or peeling, reduce their frequency and seek professional advice if irritation persists.

KEEP SUNSCREEN IN THE PICTURE: Use broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher, even in winter.

DON'T CONFUSE DRINKING WATER WITH MOISTURISING: Adequate fluid intake supports general health, but topical skincare also matters when the skin barrier is struggling.

FIT BIT

A PSYCHOLOGICAL DIVIDE

A new Cambridge University study suggests a stark gender divide in misdiagnosis, with women also waiting longer for treatment. The study, published in the Lancet eClinicalMedicine journal, included more than 6,600 people with autoimmune conditions. Most were female and from the UK. It says, women with autoimmune conditions are up to 74 per cent more likely than men to be told their symptoms are psychological or psychosomatic, and face much longer waits for a diagnosis and treatment.





SKINNING IT | Dr Deepali Bhardwaj

Skin First, Makeup Second

As more and more people embrace the "no-makeup" look, the focus is shifting from concealing imperfections to maintaining healthy, hydrated and naturally radiant skin. However, no-makeup skin does not mean flawless skin. Pores, fine lines, natural texture and variations in pigmentation are normal. The objective is to maintain a healthy skin barrier, minimise preventable damage, manage pigmentation and keep the skin comfortable and resilient.

Achieving this does not require an elaborate collection of products. It requires consistency.

1. Start with a healthy skin barrier

The skin barrier is the outermost protective layer, responsible for retaining moisture and protecting against irritants, pollutants and environmental stressors. When compromised, the skin can become dry, flaky, red and sensitive, often appearing dull and uneven.

Gentle cleansing, appropriate moisturisation and avoiding excessive exfoliation are essential for maintaining barrier health. Repeatedly switching between strong active ingredients in pursuit of an instant glow can cause irritation rather than improvement.

2. Cleanse gently, not aggressively

Cleansing should remove oil, sweat, pollution, makeup and sunscreen without stripping the skin of its natural protective lipids. In the morning, a light cleanser may be sufficient, although people with dry or sensitive skin may prefer simply rinsing with water.

Gel cleansers can suit oilier skin, while cream-based or milky formulations may be better for dry or sensitive skin.

3. Hydration creates a natural glow

Adequately hydrated skin looks smoother, fresher and more luminous. Ingredients such as hyaluronic acid and glycerin attract and retain water in the upper layers of the skin, helping minimise the appearance of fine dehydration lines. Ceramides and other barrier-supporting lipids help prevent moisture loss and maintain skin comfort.



4. Use active ingredients strategically

Retinoids, including retinol and prescription tretinoin, can improve skin texture and acne while supporting collagen-related changes over time. They should be introduced gradually, starting with two or three nights a week, depending on tolerance.

Vitamin C is a useful morning antioxidant that can help improve dullness and uneven skin tone alongside sunscreen.

Mild chemical exfoliants, such as lactic acid, glycolic acid and salicylic acid, can improve texture. However, excessive exfoliation and combining multiple strong actives can cause irritation. Introducing one ingredient at a time is a safer approach.

5. Support skin health from within

Healthy skin is also influenced by lifestyle. Adequate sleep, balanced nutrition, regular physical activity and stress management all contribute to overall skin health.

A balanced diet containing sufficient protein, colourful fruits and vegetables, and healthy fats provides nutrients essential for normal skin function. Smoking and chronic stress, on the other hand, can adversely affect skin health.

Skin does not transform overnight. Texture and pigmentation can take several weeks to improve, while collagen-related changes may take considerably longer. Frequent product changes and aggressive treatments can delay progress. No-makeup skin is not perfect skin. It is healthy skin that you feel comfortable showing. It is skin that looks and feels comfortable, hydrated, resilient and well cared for. The goal is not to eliminate every imperfection, but to build the confidence to step out without feeling the need to cover it every day.

Anti-Skin Allergy Specialist & Dermatologist at Centre for Skin and Hair Pvt Ltd, Defence Colony, Delhi. askdrdeepali@yahoo.com

PRODUCT REVIEW

The Bright Side

When it comes to skincare, I am always a little cautious about products that promise to tackle pigmentation, dark spots and dullness. These are concerns that rarely disappear overnight, and I prefer formulations that work steadily without overwhelming the skin. Skinique's Brightening Serum and Brightening Moisturizer make an interesting combination, bringing together a mix of active ingredients aimed at improving skin tone while keeping the skin hydrated. The Brightening Serum formulation is designed to address dark spots, uneven skin tone and dullness. What I particularly like about this combination is that it focuses on improving the overall appearance of the complexion rather than simply offering a temporary glow. The serum is intended for all skin types, making it a fairly versatile addition to a skincare routine. However, pigmentation is a stubborn concern, so consistency and patience are essential rather than expecting dramatic results within a few applications. The Brightening Moisturizer complements the serum rather well. It takes a slightly different approach by combining hydration and skin-barrier support with ingredients that help improve the appearance of pigmentation and uneven skin tone. While I appreciate the moisturising aspect, I would have liked a lighter formulation that could comfortably accommodate oilier skin types as well. Those with combination or oily skin may need to consider how it sits alongside other products in their routine. But both the products are worth considering. ***—Medha Dutta Yadav***



Skinique Brightening Serum
Price: ₹899



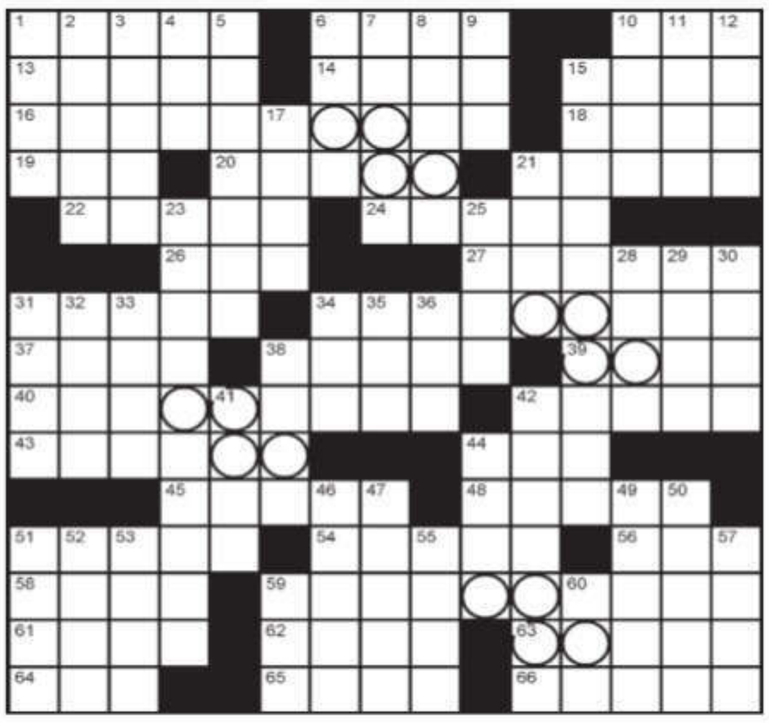
Skinique Brightening Moisturizer
Price: ₹689

★★★½☆

Availability: skiniquecosmetic.com

epaper.newindianexpress.com

CROSSWORD | FAST WALKER — 527



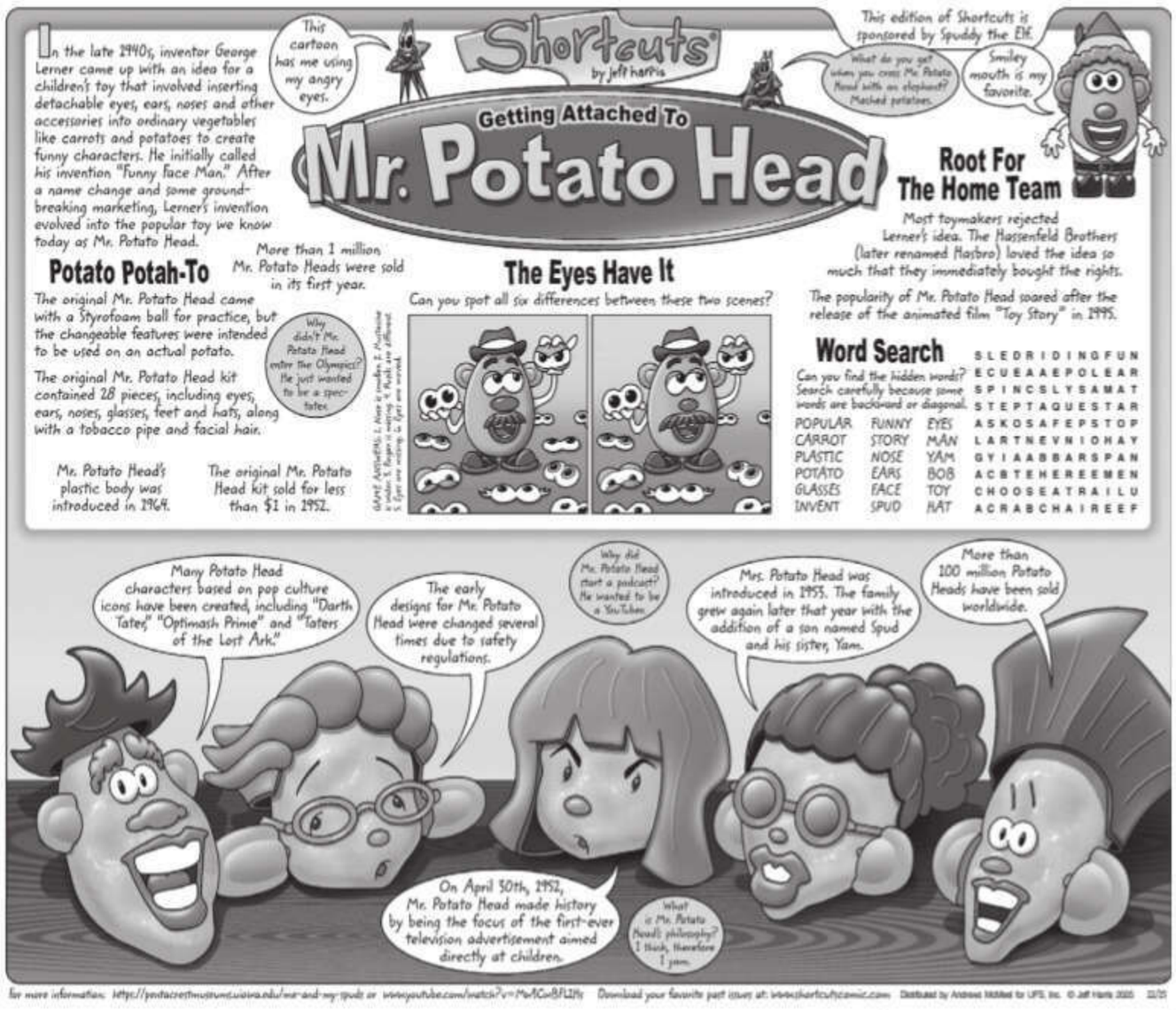
Across

1 Express lane count
6 Quick job for a stylist
10 Cylinder fed into a saw
13 Trunk in an art studio
14 Hankerings
15 Find a new home
16 Comedian's routine (Note letters 7-8 of this answer + letters 4-5 of 20-Across)
18 "Makes sense"
19 "Sure thing!"
20 Corn cake often split and stuffed
21 Legal assistant
22 City that Muslims face when praying
24 Sleep soundly?
26 AI villain in "2001: A Space Odyssey"
27 Thrown out
31 12-year-old, e.g.
34 Peel off (Letters 5-6 here + letters 1-2 of 39-Across)
37 "Roll Tide!" school, for short
38 Ice tray contents
39 Cover with asphalt
40 Cut in line (Letters 4-5 here + letters 5-6 of 43-Across)
42 Shark divers' enclosures
43 Place for a pawdicure
44 Ride left with a valet
45 Successors
48 Top story?
51 Places to learn aikido
54 Chipmunk's snack
56 Bent out of shape
58 "Oh, sure"
59 Philatelist's book (Letters 5-6 here + letters 1-2 of 63-Across)
61 It ends a winning streak
62 Medium-length skirt
63 Take a break
64 "__ me be clear ..."
65 Talk show runner
66 What street racers do

Down

1 __-bitsy
2 Tlingit symbol carved on a pole
3 Wipe clean
4 ISP with a butterfly logo
5 Pop's container
6 Kind
7 Harvests
8 Like the god Viracocha, who rose from Lake Titicaca
9 Winter hrs. in Denver
10 Get checkmated
11 Done caring about
12 Adorkable person
15 Far from an agreement
17 Eurasia's __ Mountains
21 Beans or barley
23 Below-the-belt jabs
25 Milo's movie buddy
28 Goody bag contents
29 Place to string outdoor lights
30 Turns pink, say
31 Almond butter amt.
32 Motorboat's trail
33 Radiate
34 Take to court
35 "Details to come" initials
36 Color of gochugaru flakes
38 Tea, in Hindi
41 "Great" simians
42 Quick snoozes
44 Goldfish or koi
46 7:11 or 9:5
47 Boatloads
49 Permeate (with)
50 Reason why
51 Herb in tzatziki
52 Shrill wind in a pit
53 Joke around
55 Neglect to mention
57 Contacted privately
59 "i can't believe u did this"
60 Round trip in a pool

Solution to last week's puzzle in the bottom right corner of the page



SUDOKU | EVIL AND HARD

	1				3			
7	4	9		6				
							5	6
	8		1			2		
1				4				5
		3			9		7	
6	2							
				9		1	4	8
			7				2	

			4					
1					8	2		
	9		7	2			1	
		6	2					1
8	1						2	5
4					6	3		
	5			3	4		8	
		9	1					4
					2			

Test your number crunching with our unique 2-in-1 puzzle

Fill in the grid with digwits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3X3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any. Each w has a unique solution that can be reached logically without guessing

QUESTION TIME
by Lalitha Balakrishnan

1. What is ophidiophobia the fear of?
(a) Spiders
(b) Dogs
(c) Snakes

2. Which city is known as the Manchester of South India ?
(a) Madurai
(b) Salem
(c) Coimbatore

3. Which of these scientists discovered and defined the Surface Acoustic Waves in 1885?
(a) Lord Rayleigh
(b) Jeffrey Collins
(c) Richard White

4. Deficiency of which vitamin causes Rickets?
(a) Vitamin A
(b) Vitamin D
(c) Vitamin C

5. Where would you find the Rabbit Lake?
(a) Canada
(b) Chile
(c) Argentina

6. The volcano Mount Anak Krakatoa is located in
(a) Indonesia
(b) Bali
(c) Sumatra

7. In Norse mythology, Mjolnir refers to which of the following?
(a) Iron gloves
(b) Magical hammer
(c) Belt

8. Who among these wrote *Lean In*?
(a) Sheryl Sandberg
(b) Margaret Atwood
(c) Zadie Smith

9. With which sport do you associate the terms blading, botch and phantom bump?
(a) Wrestling
(b) Fencing
(c) Weightlifting

10. Anandi Ben Patel is the Governor of which Indian state?
(a) Rajasthan
(b) Uttar Pradesh
(c) West Bengal

Answers to last week's questions
1. b, 2. a, 3. c, 4. c, 5. a, 6. b, 7. a, 8. c, 9. a, 10.a

Winner
K L Mahadevappa - Karnataka
Dudekula Nabenna - Andhra Pradesh
Jyotiranjan Bhatta - Odisha
A Ramakrishna - Telangana
Harendra Kumar - West Bengal

Answers to this week's questions will appear next week. Only entries with all correct answers sent before Wednesday noon will be considered for prizes.

Email your answers along with your name, phone number and complete address to sundayquiz@newindianexpress.com. For example, if the answer for Question No. 1 is A, it should be written as 1. A. Please mention QT and the issue date in MM/DD/YY format (for example, QT, April 25, 2021) in the subject line of the email. Only entries with these details will be considered for prizes.

FIVE ALL-CORRECT ENTRIES WILL WIN THE BOOK, *THE GOENKA LETTERS: AGONY AND ECSTACY IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS*

CAN YOU COPE WITH DISAPPOINTMENT? (ADULT FEMALE)

1: You hear the lottery numbers read out on the radio and realise you've won the jackpot. You are about to call your friends and family with the news when the announcer apologises and says they mistakenly read out the wrong numbers. How would you react?
a) Be very angry, telephone the radio station and berate them
b) Be a little sad, but realise it was a genuine mistaken and forget about it
c) Enjoy the experience you felt when you thought you were a millionaire

2: After applying for a job you think you could do well at, you receive a letter turning you down without even an interview. Would you be disappointed?
a) Yes, you at least deserved an interview
b) A little, but you'd realise that your application hadn't been strong enough
c) No, because you would have applied for several other jobs at the same time, and have the chance of securing one of them

3: Your friend has set you up on a blind date with someone she calls a fantastic guy. From what she says, you are expecting a Chris Hemsworth look-a-like. But when you arrive you see that he is a geeky nerd. How would you deal with your disappointment?
a) You'd hope he hadn't seen you, and you would go home
b) You'd give him a chance
c) You'd be upset that he isn't what you thought

4: While at work, you learn that your favourite band is playing a gig at a venue nearby. When you get home in the evening, you phone the box office, only to discover that it is sold out. Would you be upset?
a) Yes, you'd be very disappointed
b) Initially yes, but you'd not give up hope, and make sure you were on the list in case of returns
c) You'd be annoyed with yourself for not calling earlier

5: It's your birthday, and your partner gives you a gift. You're sure it is going to be the pair of shoes that you've been dropping huge hints about . But you discover it to be a handbag, it's your style, but you would rather have the shoes. Would you hope he'd kept the receipt so you could exchange it?
a) No, you'd be delighted with the gift
b) Yes, you'd be disappointed but wouldn't ask him to exchange it
c) Yes, you'd ask him for the receipt

6: You decide to lose weight within a month. After bfour weeks, you weigh yourself to discover that you'd not lost all you had hoped. Would you be upset?
a) Yes, you'd be disappointed and feel failed
b) You'd be down, but even more determined
c) No, you'd be pleased that you lost some

7: For your best friend's birthday party, you've spotted a dress to wear on display in a shop. When you try it on, it doesn't look that good. Would you still buy the dress?
a) No, you'd search for a dress till the party
b) Yes, but you'd be upset that you didn't look as great
c) Yes, you'd be happy to settle

8: Even though your vacation is as described in the brochure, you are not enjoying much. Would you be disappointed?
a) Yes, you'd feel you'd wasted your money
b) No, you'd make sure that you found some aspect of the vacation to enjoy
c) A little, but you'd make the most of your time

9:You see your favourite movie star's latest film but find it to be not as good as you'd hoped. How disappointed would feel?
a) Not at all, you'd realise that you might have expected too much
b) Slightly, but you'd get over it
c) Very, after waiting so long for the movie

10: When you feel disappointed, do you try to disguise your emotions, or are they clear for other people to see?
a) You hide how you feel
b) You try to conceal your emotions, but it is tough
c) Your emotions are too powerful to keep under wraps

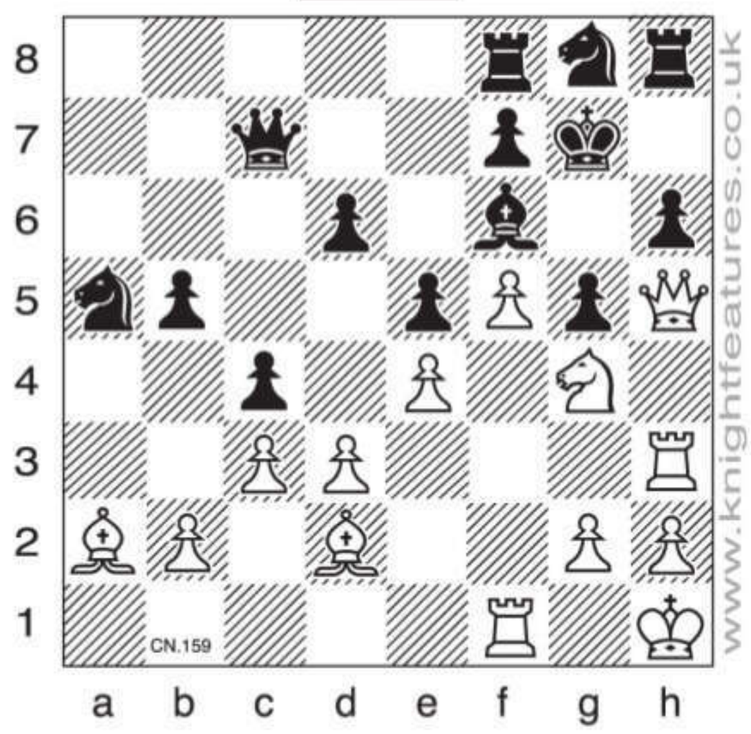
HOW TO SCORE:

	a	b	c
1.	0	1	3
2.	1	2	3
3.	1	3	2
4.	1	2	3
5.	3	2	1
6.	0	1	3
7.	1	2	3
8.	1	3	2
9.	3	2	1
10.	3	2	1

What your score means:
Between 0-10: When disappointment strikes, you fall apart emotionally. You find it difficult to deal with. Trying to avoid situations in which you are likely to be let down is not a good way of coping. You need to confront disappointment and turn it into a constructive and worthwhile experience.
Between 11-20: You find it extremely difficult to cope with any level of disappointment, but you make a tremendous effort to do so. Unfortunately there are occasions when your dissatisfaction and displeasure is so deep and severe you are unable to control your emotions. Don't try to stifle your feelings as this will only make you feel even unhappier. **Between 21-30:** It is clearly because you have such an upbeat and optimist attitude towards life in general that there is very little disappointment-wise that can have even the remotest chance of defeating you. Whatever disappointment is that you encounter it doesn't take you very long to conquer it, put it behind you and start thinking in a positive and constructive way.

Asia Features

CHESS | Leonard Barden



BARDEN CHESS

Edwin Bhend v Karl Polanyi, Switzerland 2000. Of all the available techniques to defeat an opponent of similar strength, the most reliable is to establish a big spatial advantage, build up your attacking force steadily, then look for a decisive break-through. Here White, a wily veteran who once crossed pawns with the legendary Fischer and Tal, has his pieces lined up in the defensive gaps created by Black's king side pawn advances. Meanwhile, Black's defenders are squashed in the top right-hand corner. The house of cards is ready to topple, and White's next turn forced rapid victory. What happened?

Solution CN159: 1 Bxg5! Bxg5 (if hxg5 2 Qxh8 mate) 2 Nxh6! Bxh6 3 Rg3+ Kh7 4 f6 and Rg7 mate.

Chess Problems Distributed by Knight Features
www.knightfeatures.com,
info@knightfeatures.co.uk

SUDOKU I TODAY'S SOLUTION

Evil Sudoku

5	1	6	4	2	3	7	8	9
7	4	9	5	6	8	3	1	2
2	3	8	9	7	1	4	5	6
9	8	5	1	3	7	2	6	4
1	7	2	8	4	6	9	3	5
4	6	3	2	5	9	8	7	1
6	2	1	3	8	4	5	9	7
3	5	7	6	9	2	1	4	8
8	9	4	7	1	5	6	2	3

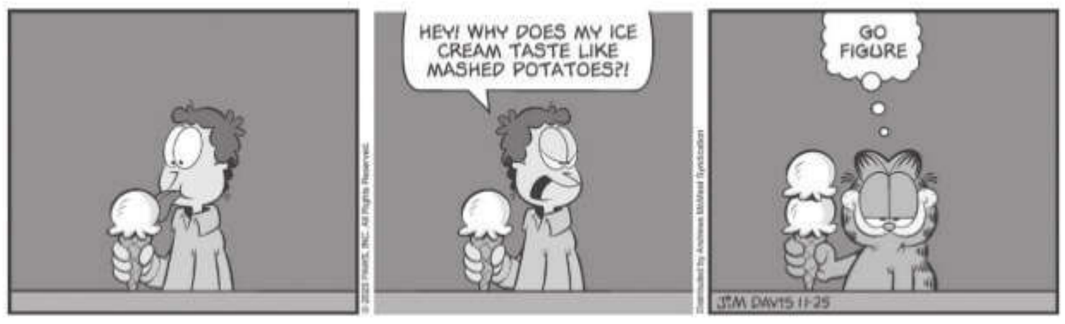
Hard Sudoku

3	6	2	4	5	1	9	7	8
1	7	4	6	9	8	2	5	3
5	9	8	7	2	3	4	1	6
9	3	6	2	7	5	8	4	1
8	1	7	3	4	9	6	2	5
4	2	5	8	1	6	3	9	7
6	5	1	9	3	4	7	8	2
2	8	9	1	6	7	5	3	4
7	4	3	5	8	2	1	6	9

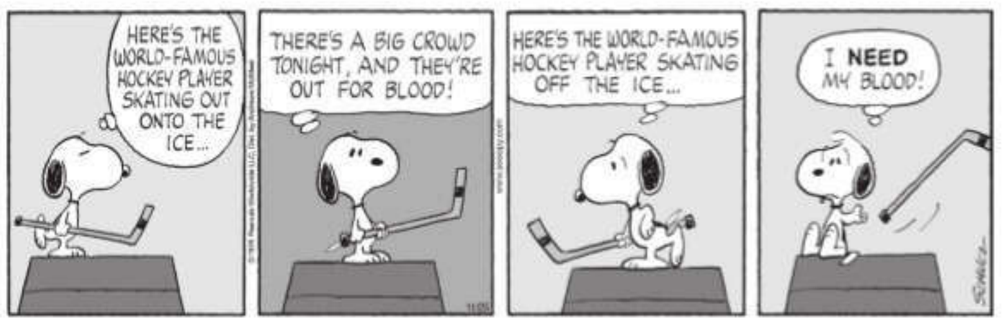
PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

S	I	N	A	I		M	O	A	T			L	B	S
I	C	A	N	T	W	A	T	C	H		C	A	R	E
D	O	N	T	S	E	T	T	L	E		I	S	A	W
E	N	O		J	E	T	E		M	I	T	T	S	
			S	U	P	E	R	B		G	I	S	T	
		P	A	S	S			L	I	E		E	R	A
	M	I	N	T		S	P	O	R	T	S	C	A	R
H	O	P	E	A	G	A	I	N	S	T	H	O	P	E
O	V	E	R	J	O	Y	E	D		H	A	N	S	
E	I	D		O	B	O			H	A	R	D		
	E	R	I	K		K	A	R	A	T	E			
	D	E	T	E	R		C	A	V	A		K	F	C
S	E	A	S			A	S	I	T	O	L	D	Y	O	U
H	A	M	M			W	I	N	E	C	O	O	L	E	R
E	L	S	E			R	A	G	S		T	H	E	S	E

GARFIELD by Jim Davis



PEANUTS by Charles M Schulz



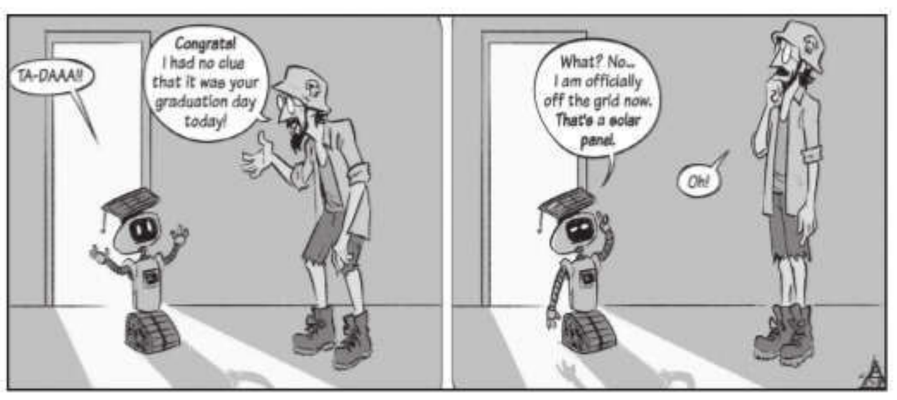
DO JUST ONE THING
BY DANNY SEO

Instead of tossing leftover tile, plumbing fixtures or wallpaper, consider donating them to a Habitat for Humanity ReStore. Your donations help fund local Habitat projects while giving materials a second life for someone elseÕs renovation. Plus, itÕs an easy way to declutter sustainably and support your community. You can also shop at ReStore for discounted building materials and home goods for your own DIY projects. To learn more about donating or shopping, visit their website at restore.habitat.org.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS by Arun Ramkumar



FUTUREPAST by Kishore Mohan



ALMANAC | TODAY 22.11.2026

Year: Parabhav
Karthigai: Valar Pirai / **Kartik:** Shukla Paksha
Tithi: Trayodashi till 26.38 hrs.
Nakshatra (Star): Ashwini till 28.16 hrs.
Moon in Mesh
Today is Pradosh
Rahukaalam: 04.30 pm to 06.00 pm
Yamagantam: 12 noon to 01.30 pm
Gulikakalam: 03.00 pm to 04.30 pm

BIRTHSTONE | SCORPIO (OCTOBER 24 - NOVEMBER 22)



Although there are eleven birthstones listed for those who belong to Scorpio, the main gemstone that is said to represent the sign is topaz. Astrologists say that the stone that balances a Scorpio's personality is topaz.

Scorpios are passionate and approach life with determination. It is believed that topaz keeps Scorpios calm and mentally strong, attracting negative energies away from them and bringing them a sense of joy and peace. As Scorpios are emotional, this encouragement of calm is said to keep them level-headed and prevent them from being overwhelmed by their feelings.

Scorpios have a dual personality, and this is another reason why topaz is the perfect stone for them—topaz is pleochroic, which means that its colour appears different from different angles. Some people also believe that God sent this gem to protect people from danger.

YOUR FORTUNE THIS WEEK Amarakosha

What the planets say about your prospects for wealth, romance and professional success this week



ARIES (Mar 21–Apr 19)
Work: Your role may get impacted from a sudden change or immediate office downside. New systems and rules may change how you work. They need you to learn new skills.
Money: You may have unexpected expenses related to children or loved one and it may change your plans.
Couples: Friendly racing may bring more fun to the bond. You both may set up new boundaries and share duties.
Singles: You may develop romantic feelings quickly. Several people may show interest, bringing more dates.

TAURUS (Apr 20–May 20)
Work: Your creativity brings new chances and connections unexpectedly. Jobseekers will get a job in communication, content creative or services industry.
Money: Your performance helps bring extra income. But it may tempt you to spend more on expensive things.
Couples: You both finally manage schedules and enjoy more time together. You may attend a family gathering.
Singles: You may meet someone interesting at work, the gym, or a place you often visit.

GEMINI (May 21–June 20)
Work: You may perform beyond benchmark on regular tasks. Higher ups may be impressed and assign you to a bigger role with more decisions making power.
Money: You feel earning more is difficult, but your sharp mind and smart plans help you find extra income.
Couples: Overthinking on small comments cause misunderstandings. Old avoided issues may return.
Singles: You may notice that a friend has feelings for you but you prefer to wait and see. Take your time, don't rush.

CANCER (June 21–July 22)
Work: Your performance may stand out by leading a project, solving issues, winning over a client, or sharing good ideas. Higher ups may notice and offer a new role.
Money: You earn more from online sales or overseas clients. Being too kind may leave you with an unfair deal.
Couples: News related to children or a family issue may lead to talks over debts, renovation or buying a new home.
Singles: You like a foreigner but differences may hinder.

LEO (July 23–Aug 22)
Work: If you have multiple superiors, they expect different results from you and cause confusion. You may receive an offer for a bigger role. Decide quickly.
Money: Awaited money may finally arrive. Extra income may pop up and help cover a large expense.
Couples: Small silly issues may become family arguments. New activities or places may help bring peace.
Singles: You may start attending more on socialising. Someone younger may fall for you and try to approach.

VIRGO (Aug 23–Sept 22)
Work: Unexpected travel or news may change your plans. New offer with better pay may come but details may change several times. Stay cautious and read carefully.
Money: Your past efforts start generating returns. A connection may bring income, a new client, or business.
Couples: Discussion may reveal hidden feelings and help you understand each other better.
Singles: You may finally move on from the past. Someone may show interest in you through travel, work, or online.

LIBRA (Sept 23–Oct 22)
Work: Obstacles may slow your progress but help you notice details. Someone in your professional circle may introduce you to a contact or bring a new opportunity.
Money: Income stream may swing up and down. Payments are delayed. Group investments cause friction.
Couples: Avoided issues may come up, leading to serious conversation on the relationship's status and future.
Singles: You may focus on improving yourself than finding love. Changing look and style may come first.

SCORPIO (Oct 23–Nov 21)
Work: Unexpected news may change your role or business plans. Someone you know may bring a good deal but check all details carefully.
Money: This is not a good week. Money may be delayed. Debtor may run away. This forces you put plans on hold.
Couples: A sudden change may affect your shared plans or future goals. A serious conversation may come up.
Singles: You may meet someone interesting through travel, work or online. A date may follow soon.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22–Dec 21)
Work: Higher ups may turn small problems big, leaving you to fix them. You may face tight deadlines and pressure but this helps sharpen your skills.
Money: Unexpected home or family expenses may come. A well-paying side hustle may come, keep it secret.
Couples: You spend time meeting friends and talk over lingering issues. They help you understand each other.
Singles: You start seeing a friend differently and as more than a friend after meeting them at a gathering.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22–Jan 19)
Work: The boss may notice your leadership skills and trust you with an important project with more decision-making power.
Money: A friend or connection may bring a new income channel. Shared expenses may also become fairer.
Couples: There may be more flirting, dates, and physical closeness, which bring excitement back to relationship.
Singles: Your charm and confidence attracts someone.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20–Feb 18)
Work: You fly high this week as old project returns to you and sudden changes bring bigger projects along. You gain more responsibility. Deadlines become tighter.
Money: A new income channel may come. Check all financial details carefully before agreeing.
Couples: Money, home, or work duties cause tension if one of you feels they are doing more than the other.
Singles: You may meet someone interesting but different through travel, a class, or an entertainment event.

PISCES (Feb 19–Mar 20)
Work: Last minutes travel or meetings may bring new connections or chance to collaborate overseas. You and a teammate celebrate together as a project ends successfully.
Money: An older female friend may bring information, income, or financial help, helping you manage expenses.
Couples: Be ready to spend more time together. You may discuss about marriage, honeymoon, or wallet sharing.
Singles: You may feel an instant attraction to someone you have met through work or travel.

The Celestial Gaze

ARIES

The Sun enters Sagittarius on November 22, illuminating higher learning, travel, and philosophy. On November 24, the Gemini Full Moon brings a pivotal conversation, sibling news, or short trip. Mars moves into Virgo sharpening your focus on daily workflow, and problem-solving. Venus in your seventh house forms a harmonious sextile with Jupiter in your fifth, sparking romantic warmth and creative collaboration. The Full Moon brings financial clarity.
Vastu Suggestions: Declutter South before Mars shifts; light a copper lamp in East for solar clarity.

TAURUS

Sagittarius season begins by spotlighting your eighth house of shared finances, investments, and emotional commitments. The Gemini Full Moon illuminates personal income and self-worth, prompting a decisive financial review or purchase. Once Mars enters Virgo, your fifth house of creativity, romance, and passion projects receives a boost. On November 28, your ruler Venus sextiles Jupiter, bringing domestic harmony and supportive workplace dynamics.
Vastu Suggestions: Place fresh white flowers in southeast. Keep a silver water bowl in northwest.

GEMINI

As the Sun enters Sagittarius, your seventh house of partnerships takes center stage. The week's defining moment arrives on November 24 with the Full Moon in your first house that brings personal realizations, visibility, and emotional release. Mars enters Virgo and your fourth house directing your physical energy toward home or family. On Venus in your fifth house sextiles Jupiter in your third, creating an ideal window for expressive writing, joyful socializing, and romantic breakthroughs.
Vastu Suggestions: Clear electronic clutter from north study zone and air out the northwest.

CANCER

The Sun's entry into Sagittarius activates health, habits, and service. On November 24, the Gemini Full Moon illuminates solitude and subconscious patterns, urging you to release lingering mental clutter. Mars enters Virgo, energizing communication, short-distance errands, and decisive negotiations. Venus in your fourth house forms a supportive sextile with Jupiter in your second, favouring home upgrades and financial generosity. The Krittika Full Moon highlights gains.
Vastu Suggestions: Keep northwest bedroom spotless for Full Moon calm; place a water vessel in east.

LEO

Sagittarius season launches on November 22 in your fifth house of romance, self-expression, and joy. The Gemini Full Moon lights up friendships, community, and aspirations, bringing a group project to fruition. On November 25, Mars leaves your sign to enter Virgo, shifting focus from initiation to budgeting and resource management. Venus in your third house sextiles Jupiter in your first, amplifying your charm and attracting good news.
Vastu Suggestions: Open east-facing windows in the morning for Sagittarius Sun vitality.

VIRGO

The Sun moves into Sagittarius anchoring your attention in home, roots, and emotional foundations. The Gemini Full Moon illuminates career and public reputation, marking a milestone. Mars enters your first house injecting physical stamina, assertiveness, and precision into your goals. On November 28, Venus sextiles Jupiter, bringing financial relief or behind-the-scenes support. The Krittika Full Moon illuminates higher wisdom and mentorship.
Vastu Suggestions: Organize work tools in south and north before Mars enters your sign on November 25.

LIBRA

Sagittarius season begins in your third house, accelerating local connections, writing, and intellectual curiosity. The Gemini Full Moon activates travel, publishing, and belief systems, bringing an educational or legal matter to clarity. Mars enters Virgo signalling a need to work quietly behind the scenes and guard your energy. Your ruler Venus sextiles Jupiter, attracting social goodwill and favours. The Full Moon occurs in your eighth house of transformation.
Vastu Suggestions: Enhance southeast with fragrant candles or art to channel the Venus-Jupiter sextile.

SCORPIO

As the Sun exits your sign for Sagittarius, income, values, and material security become your focus. The Gemini Full Moon illuminates shared assets, taxes, and intimacy, prompting an honest reckoning over obligations. Mars enters Virgo, motivating collaborative teamwork. By November 28, Venus sextiles Jupiter offering subtle career backing and inner peace. Sidereally, the Full Moon highlights your seventh house of marriage.
Vastu Suggestions: Ground southwest corner with heavy furniture. Keep east entrance brightly lit.

SAGITTARIUS

Happy Solar Return as the Sun enters your first house restoring vitality, clarity, and personal momentum. The Gemini Full Moon lands in your seventh house of relationships, bringing a partnership dynamic into relief. Mars enters Virgo and your tenth house, channeling your renewed energy into ambitious career execution. Venus sextiles your ruler Jupiter, opening doors through travel, mentors, and allies. The Full Moon favors resolving health or work hurdles.
Vastu Suggestions: Welcome your solar return by clearing east entrance and placing sacred books or lamp.

CAPRICORN

The Sun enters Sagittarius moving through your twelfth house of rest, reflection, and spiritual renewal. The Gemini Full Moon illuminates daily labour and wellness, highlighting a schedule adjustment. Mars enters Virgo, energizing travel, study, and strategic planning. Venus sextiles Jupiter bringing career wins and financial backing. The Krittika Full Moon activates your fifth house of creativity and children.
Vastu Suggestions: Remove stagnant items from west.

AQUARIUS

Sagittarius season begins in your eleventh house of networks, friendships, and future visions. The Gemini Full Moon lights up romance, creative expression, and leisure, marking a joyful culmination in your personal life. Mars enters Virgo focusing yon debt reduction, research, or joint financial strategy. Venus sextiles Jupiter enriching partnerships through shared travel or learning.
Vastu Suggestions: Place greens in north for clarity.

PISCES

The Sun's ingress into Sagittarius illuminates your tenth house of career, authority, and public milestones. The Gemini Full Moon activates home and family, bringing closure or clarity to a domestic matter. Mars enters Virgo requiring direct, constructive communication with partner. Venus sextiles Jupiter supporting shared financial resolutions and workplace harmony. The Krittika Full Moon energizes your third house of courage.
Vastu Suggestions: Diffuse calming scents in northwest.

ASTROGAZE

The first-ever AI-generated weekly prediction

LAL KITAB DAILY PREDICTIONS

This week marks a major pivot as Venus regains dignity in Libra and the Full Moon illuminates material security. Expect sudden clarity in relationships, financial settlements, and professional direction—though mid-week may see temporary restlessness. Keep a square silver piece in wallet and offer sweet *roti* to cows or birds before starting major tasks.

SUNDAY, 22 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: This day carries transformative energy. Partnership tensions soothe out. Focus on reconciling relationship imbalances and reviewing budgets.
Remedy: Offer water mixed with jaggery to the rising Sun and feed wheat or jaggery to cows.
Lucky Tip: Wear white or cream in the evening to activate Venusian harmony.

MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: Moon with Scorpio demands emotional restraint so minor misunderstandings do not escalate. Channel your intuition to organise finances.
Remedy: Keep a silver vessel with water near your bedside at night and offer milk or rice at a temple.
Lucky Tip: Drink water from a silver glass first thing in the morning for mental clarity.

TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: Mars transiting Leo creates bold ambition that can easily tip into stubbornness. Control anger and harsh speech; it can strain family bonds.
Remedy: Distribute sweet *tandoori rotis* or jaggery-stuffed flatbreads to the needy or stray dogs.
Lucky Tip: Carry a red handkerchief in your pocket to channel courage constructively.

WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: Rahu–Ketu transit days bring mental fog, sudden plans, or unexpected news. Keep promises realistic. Focus on paperwork verification.
Remedy: Feed soaked green *moong dal* to birds and keep a small piece of camphor in your wallet.
Lucky Tip: Avoid signing contracts after sunset; postpone commitments till tomorrow.

THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: Today favours ethical leadership, mentorship, and spiritual reflection. Honour elders, teachers, and traditions to unlock Jupiter's grace.
Remedy: Apply a saffron or turmeric *tilak* and offer yellow sweets or *chana dal* at a temple.
Lucky Tip: Keep a yellow flower or turmeric root at your workspace to attract luck.

FRIDAY, 27 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: Friday is exceptionally favourable for financial recovery, creative ventures, and personal harmony. Strengthen partnerships.
Remedy: Donate white sweets, rice, or fragrant white sandalwood to young girls or a religious place.
Lucky Tip: Use a mild perfume or rosewater before stepping out for meetings.

SATURDAY, 28 NOVEMBER
Lal Kitab Focus: Use Saturday to clear physical clutter and settle overdue responsibilities. The focus is on discipline and serving those in need.
Remedy: Light a mustard oil lamp under a Peepal tree at dusk and donate black *urad dal* or footwear.
Lucky Tip: Feed crows or offer tea and snacks to sanitation workers to pacify Saturn.

Holiday Mathis
holidaymathis@gmail.com



An Invitation to YOU

Misunderstandings can be traced back to an overlooked truth: the other person is not you. We can never fully know the heart of another, but the first step in doing so is to drop assumptions.

AUGURIES
Meenakshi Chawla
gmail: *astrologyandus@gmail.com*
Twitter: *@Shiva_Vadini*

ARIES



March 21-April 19: One relationship is playing out like a game of tag. It would be a dull game if one person always pursued and the other was always running. The change-up that happens this week, though surprising, will breathe life into the game. The chaser will be chased. The stakes will seem higher. How thrilling.

TAURUS



Apr 21-May 21: A once-simple issue is becoming more complicated this week. The very person you hoped would help you out may be costing you more time and money than help is worth. You're not out to hurt feelings or disappoint anyone, but it's important to make the move that's right for you. This is just business.

GEMINI



May 22-June 21: You're in a league of your own, competing against yourself, which is more challenging than operating in systems. This week, you'll establish a plan to make sure your work is adding up in the direction you want it to. Be downright scientific about recording your growth and results along the way.

CANCER



June 22-July 23: You want reassurance that you're making the right choices, but there's little clear feedback right now. It's as if you're driving a long stretch of desert highway with no towns, road signs or even a billboard in sight. With hope and gas, this can be relaxing. Trust your direction and the distance you've covered so far.

LEO



July 24-Aug 23: People need you. There will be days when these needs aren't as pressing as they are now, and you may even miss this part. But right now, they need you, and you need you, too. So don't give tasks more effort than they require. You're capable of doing far more than this situation needs, so meet the need and save your energy.

VIRGO



Aug 24-Sept 23: In the right situation, you're happy to play the role you've been cast in, though it's not always clear what that role is this week. The rules weren't communicated, and no one is directing the show or handing out a script. Maybe your first move is a decision: Do you take charge or move on to a more organized scene?

LIBRA



Sept 24-Oct 23: No one can plan their own breathtaking moments because they usually occur just after a surprise, and it's hard to surprise yourself. But you can surprise someone else! And you don't know how they'll react. Delight? Astonishment? Fear? Laughter? It catches you off-guard and just might take your breath away.

SCORPIO



Oct 24-Nov 22: This week, the thing you want happens organically, which makes it all the more memorable. There's no elaborate campaign, no carefully engineered encounter, no need to persuade anyone. You'll simply be in the right place, being yourself, and the moment will unfold as though scripted from your dreams. Maybe it was.

SAGITTARIUS



Nov 23-Dec 22: You're thinking big and imagining a wide range of possibilities for your solar season and beyond. As you rise above the ruckus, human needs, schemes and all the drama that goes with it will seem small compared with the majesty of the distant horizon. You can almost see yourself there, welcomed into a brave new world.

CAPRICORN



Dec-23 Jan 20: There's an old saying that the squeaky wheel gets the grease, but you've noticed that the squeaky wheel also gets a reputation for squeaking. This week, you'll consider whether a complaint is worth making or an injustice is worth confronting. Also, if you choose a battle, one is enough. It will take from your full attention.

AQUARIUS



Jan 21-Feb19: A person can spend years trying to become interesting and overlook the more ente rtaining pursuit of becoming interested. It's not a "pursuit" so much as your default. Follow that internal drive to know what's under the surface of a mysterious person or to find out exactly how and why something works.

PISCES



Feb 20-Mar 20: Your fans want to know how you got where you are, so they might follow in your footsteps. But you don't owe anyone the information. And it's hard to break down the steps because so much of your talent operates beyond conscious thought. Being good at a thing and being good at explaining it are two different skills.

We are reaching the last week of November and so much which had been hitherto hidden, has already been revealed. This has been written numerous times in my previous articles. To mention a few, old videos of the Gandhi family suddenly appeared on social media and became a grist for the gossip mills. Another is the case of the CEO of Nvidia, which came into the public domain at the end of October. The end of this year is going to be more histrionic and dramatic when more stories will come out to create headlines. Three inner planets and two outermost planets, which were retrograde, were the potent force that lifted the veil from the secreted and the buried. Things started getting worse when retrograde Venus came in front of Saturn on November 6. Venus retrograde is now over and tomorrow it will finally leave its debilitation sign and opposition to retrograde Saturn and Neptune.

A new stint will begin very soon with Rahu and Ketu making a historic move by changing their signs. For the next one and a half years Ketu, the south node, will be in Cancer and Rahu, the north node, in Capricorn. Ketu will leave the conjunction of Mars for some time but Mars will again join it in Cancer in March. One has to be prepared for many celestial changes that will be coming next year. But before Ketu moves to the next sign and alters many things for the world and for many of us, the triple conjunction of Jupiter, Mars and Ketu will be very chaotic for a while. Ketu in the sign of Leo was also not good for people in high places. These could have been political leaders, bureaucrats or business magnates. Some have faced defamation while others have lost support due to popular opposition. The resignation of Nvidia's Jensen Huang and both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu respectively falling short of majority in the elections are a few recent examples.

We all know that air is needed for combustion without which we cannot have a fire. In the same way when more planets come into fiery and air signs, it causes a conflagration. Elements are an important part of prediction and cannot be ignored. Currently it is a scary combination of planets. There are six of them in fire and air signs. This alignment can spark unnatural deaths, fires and vehicular accidents, but more importantly, terrorist attacks at the borders. Generally, people will be irascible, short tempered and impatient. When energy runs high it needs direction but with the Sun unstable in watery Scorpio, healthy support will not be there. As per independent horoscope of India, the country is running through the *dasha* of Mars and Rahu. One is fire and the other is air. There will be a major effect of this on humankind and unfortunately, fatalities are likely to increase. This period is also not favourable for machinery, software, artificial intelligence, IT industry and space programmes.

epaper.newindianexpress.com

EXPERIENCE

Where History Checks You in

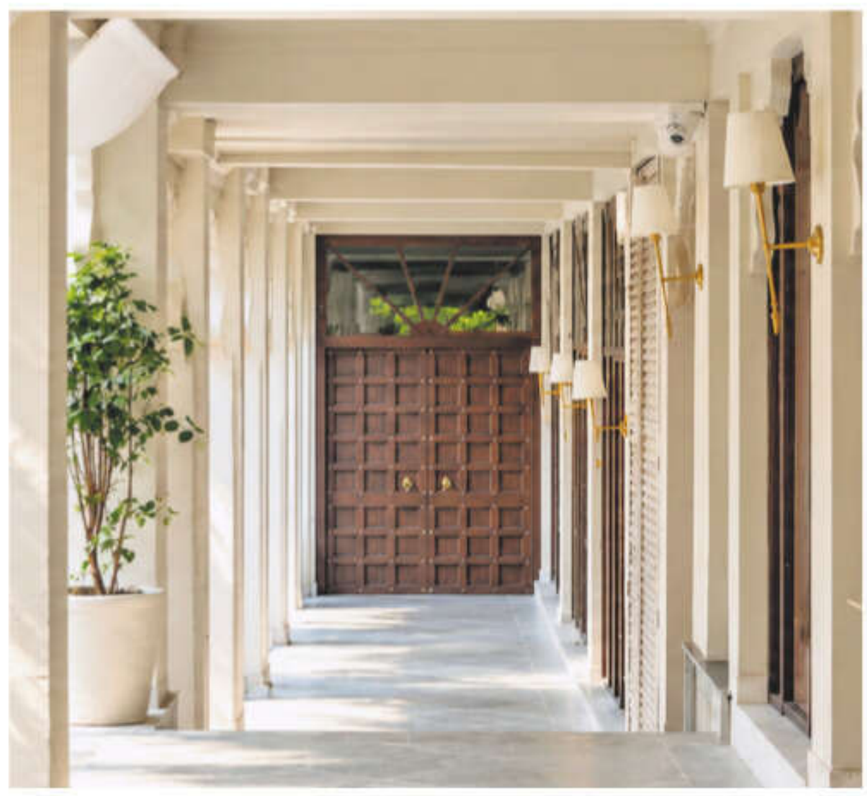
Udaipur's 300-year-old *haveli* reimagines itself as Mewar Manor, blending regal heritage with contemporary hospitality





The family's Aravalli legacy and royal hunting traditions inspire the interiors through animal motifs and natural textures





(From left) a quiet moment on the Haveli's balcony; hallway; Mewar Manor's facade

By RISHABH THAKUR

Take a stroll through the grand gateway at 103 Bhatiyani Chohatta and you enter a different world: that of Jhadol ki Haveli, a 300-year-old ancestral residence in Udaipur's old walled city, now reimagined as Mewar Manor. Once upon a time, elephants passed through its gateway and stood ceremonially in the courtyard, giving the space its name, Haathi Chowk. Today, the white marble flooring, water fountains and balconies overlooking the courtyard offer a quieter welcome.

Its location is central. The City Palace is barely a two-minute walk away, Jagdish Temple takes just five minutes to reach, and the old city's lakeside *ghats*, temples and heritage landmarks are all within easy walking distance. But the real pleasure lies in returning from those crowded lanes to the sleepy calm of a historic home.

For the Jhadol family, the haveli is more than an architectural inheritance. Its history is intertwined with the royal house of Mewar and generations of Rajranas. Among the family's celebrated figures is Jhala Maan, who died protecting Maharana Pratap at the Battle of Haldighati in 1576. Animal motifs and natural textures adorn the *haveli*'s walls, reflecting its historical association with the Aravallis, the forests and royal hunting expeditions. The clan emblem, featuring tigers, a Trishul, the Sun, a pair of crossed swords and sacred fire, takes pride of place, symbolising its warrior lineage and Suryavanshi heritage.

Preserving these stories while making the *haveli* function as a contemporary hotel was central to its restoration. Federico Fraternale, Head of Design at Taro Studio, who led the project, says the intention was to remain faithful to the architectural language of traditional havelis. Original stone flooring, decorative details and architectural elements were retained, while the newer wings borrowed from the same vocabulary. Even salvaged stone found a second life, with one piece now serving as a step beside a bathtub.

Such attention to detail makes the transition from heritage residence to hotel feel like an extension of the building's life. The traditional Mardana and Zenana wings remain reminders of how the household was once organised, while the generous courtyards preserve the sense of openness that defines a haveli.

With 25 rooms and suites across four categories, Mewar Manor offers plenty of breathing space. The experience extends beyond the accommodation to a swimming pool tucked into one of the historic courtyards, a gym and a Kerala-inspired Ayurvedic spa. Morning sound-healing sessions, puppet shows and cultural experiences add to the sense of place. "Our intention was to honour the legacy of a historic residence while creating something truly meaningful for the future of hospitality in Udaipur," says spokesperson Sanjivani Jain.

And perhaps that is what makes a stay here distinctive. Beyond the grandeur of its gateways and the history embedded in its stonework, Mewar Manor offers the pleasure of inhabiting a home that has witnessed centuries of change.

QUICK TAKE



BOSTON'S FROST FAIR

Boston is going to get into the spirit of winter with the upcoming city wide winter festival, Boston Frostival. The event, which runs from December 2026 to April 2027, features winter themed attractions, outdoor activities and fun entertainment. Experience dramatic drone displays above Boston Common, Frostival Lodge in Copley Square from January 22nd to February and a 75ft Ferris Wheel in the Rose Kennedy Greenway from February to April 25th—immersing you right into its winter beauty.



A COCKTAIL TAKEOVER

This November, The Cloak Society at The Ritz-Carlton, Bengaluru, welcomes two celebrated names from the global bar scene for exclusive guest shifts. Bringing their signature styles and cocktail philosophies to the city, Socio, Hong Kong, takes over on 21 November, showcasing its inventive approach to overlooked ingredients and experimental mixology. On 28 November, Mumbai's iconic speakeasy PCO steps behind the bar, offering its distinctive interpretation of the art of cocktails. Two acclaimed bars, two unique perspectives and two evenings of exceptional pours.
Where: *The Cloak Society, The Ritz-Carlton, Bengaluru*

A Dham Good Feast

Slow-cooked lentils and unchanging rituals usher in mindful dining at Himachali *dham*

By DEEPALI DHINGRA

A steaming mound of unpolished local rice is ladled onto a fresh leaf plate. A barefoot cook, dressed in a traditional *dhoti* and *kurta*, moves with practised ease along the rows of seated guests, carrying a copper bucket. Leaning forward, he ladles out the next course: *Aloo Chana Madra*, a slow-simmered, yoghurt-rich delicacy enriched with *khoya*. Across Himachal Pradesh, every region, from Mandi to Chamba, has its own interpretation of dham, the traditional ceremonial midday feast. This particular spread, served in the shadow of the Dhauladhar range, is Kangri *dham*. There are no pre-plated thalis here. A full dham comprises nine to 11 vegetarian dishes, each served individually and in a prescribed sequence, allowing its distinct flavours to unfold.

"A traditional *dham* consists of rice and several lentil preparations. There are no chapatis," says Sanjay Mishra, the master *Boti* (hereditary chefs entrusted with preparing *dham*), whom everyone reverentially addresses as Pandit*ji*. The 51-year-old, who hails from Pathiar village in Kangra, has spent more than three decades preserving this culinary tradition. "We use freshly ground local spices and mustard oil, with every dish prepared separately. Our traditional cooks still wear dhotis, go barefoot and serve the food using buckets and ladles," he says, as he watches over the hearths with quiet authority.





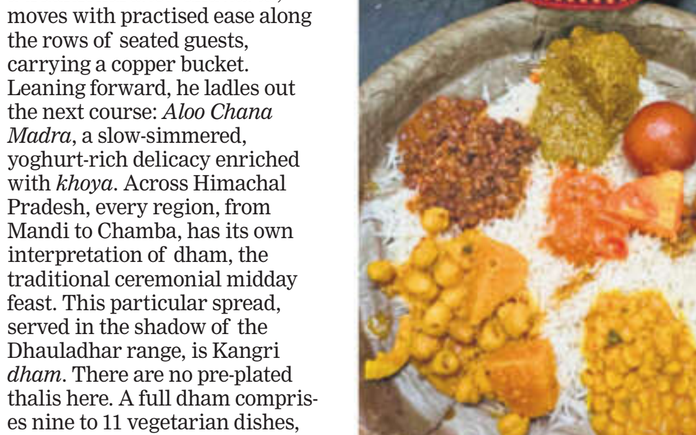
(Above-left) A traditional Himachali *dham thali*; (right) *dham* preparation

Course follows course at an unhurried pace. There is *Sepu Badi*, made from three ground lentils; split chickpea *dal* perfumed with fennel seeds and dry coconut; and *Teliya Mah*, a dark urad dal cooked in mustard oil, its subtle, smoky aroma filling the air. As the meal progresses, the flavours move from rich and savoury to sweet and tangy. The savoury sequence culminates in *Kale Chane Ka Khatta*, a dark, tangy black chickpea gravy with pumpkin and radish. Its distinctive, almost inky colour comes from walnuts roasted until charred and then ground with dried mango into a fine powder. The dish prepares the palate for the final course: *Meethe Chawal*, sweet rice glistening with khoya and dried fruits. "Once people sit down, nobody gets up until the sweet rice is served," explains Mishra.

Dham was an integral part of Chef Nitika Kuthiala's growing-up years. The Noida-based culinary researcher and writer, who hails from Kangra, is also behind the food pop-up Pahadi Pattal. She recalls how the traditional meal marked occasions ranging from mundan ceremonies to weddings. "Most dham meals are rice-based, saatvik and eaten during the day, although some regions may include a few non-vegetarian preparations. The menu changes from place to place," she says.

The *Botis* begin cooking in the early hours of the morning. Before preparations commence, the floor of the open-air kitchen is cleansed with a mixture of cow dung and clay. "Until the food is prepared and offered as bhog to the divine, the *Botis* do not taste a single morsel," Mishra explains. With no onions, garlic or commercial spice blends in the kitchen, the cooks rely on local ingredients and inherited techniques.

For Chetna Chopra, Culinary Director at OMO, *dham* offers a window into the social and cultural fabric of Himachal. "It's particularly moving that the process begins not with an ingredient or a recipe, but with an act of reverence towards the fire itself." Seated together on the ground, with no distinction of status, guests partake of a meal that is as much about community as it is about food. In the unhurried rhythm of its service, the careful preparation of each dish and the reverence that underpins the entire ritual, Himachali *dham* offers a compelling lesson in slow food, collective belonging and the grace of sharing a meal.



The Spirit of the Slopes



By TEJASHEE KASHYAP

In Courchevel, the evening rarely ends with the last course. There is often one more invitation to linger over a little glass of *génépi* (a traditional herbal liqueur) before heading home. Passed around at dinner tables, apres-ski parties and mountain bars, this curious Alpine liqueur is as much a ritual as a drink. Locals and seasoned skiers rarely leave without a final shot.

The first sip is startling: medicinally bitter, almost like an old herbal remedy, before giving way to warmth, delicate floral notes and a hint of honey. An acquired taste, certainly, but one that lingers long after the glass is empty. Made from Alpine wormwood, a tiny plant belonging to the *Artemisia* family, *génépi* is traditionally prepared by macerating the herb in neutral fruit spirit with sugar for weeks, sometimes months. Yellow *génépi* (*Artemisia mutellina*), found around Courchevel, is particularly prized for its fragrant flowers. Usually served as a digestif, it is also enjoyed with dark chocolate or mixed into cocktails.



(From top) A bottle of *génépi;* yellow *génépi* plant

For generations, Alpine families have gathered the herb from high-altitude meadows, passing down recipes and harvesting spots that remain closely guarded secrets. "Records dating back to the early 13th century point to a long-established mountain community in Saint-Bon valley whose traditions included gathering wild alpine plants and distinguishing edible species from poisonous ones," says David Dereani, deputy mayor of Courchevel.

For Julien Thezan, co-manager of Jéévro Distillery in Savoie, the tradition is personal. His grandfather, a shepherd, would take his sheep high into the mountains and return with sprigs of génépi. "This tradition of gathering and making *génépi* is still passed down in many mountain families," he says. Finding the plant is half the craft. Growing it between 2,000 and 3,000 metres amid rocky terrain requires patience and local knowledge. "The secret lies in the maceration time of the flowers and the delicate balance between alcohol and sugar," says Thezan.

Today, *génépi* has found a place beyond the traditional digestif. At Courchevel bars such as Chacha, Loulou and The Lounge Bar at Fouquet's, bartenders pair its floral, herbal notes with gin, vodka and sparkling wine, often adding mountain herbs, berries and honey.

For Indian travellers, it may bring to mind *mahua* or the herbal digestifs served after meals. Like them, *génépi* is an expression of local identity, landscape and inherited traditions. And in Courchevel, long after the ski slopes have emptied, it is often that final aromatic shot that leaves the most lasting impression.

epaper.newindianexpress.com

When Fear Holds Us Captive

BY SWAMI SWAROOPANANDA

What is fear? Why does it have such a grip on the human mind, making us feel small, limited and vulnerable?

Fear is more than just an emotion. It often reflects our attachments, our insecurities and our need to protect what feels familiar. At its core, fear arises when something threatens our sense of physical, emotional or material stability.

Fear is a natural response to change. When life moves in an unexpected direction, the mind instinctively tries to restore safety by resisting the unknown. This is a survival mechanism that once protected us from danger, but now often arises in the uncertainty of everyday. Whether it is a shift in relationships, career, health or identity, change can feel like a loss of control.

But within that discomfort lies a deeper opportunity. Not to eliminate fear, but to understand it. When we begin to witness our fears instead of reacting to them, we create space for clarity. And in that space, something stronger than fear can emerge – trust.

Fear Is Natural

Modern science explains fear as a survival mechanism, something deeply ingrained in our biology. It protects us from danger, activating our fight-or-flight response when we sense a threat. But in our modern lives, fear often goes beyond its biological purpose. We fear not just physical harm but also a host of negative mental experiences – the unknown, failure, rejection, loss or uncertainty. These fears may not even be based in reality. They are mental constructs, deeply tied to our sense of identity and attachment to the status quo and desirable outcomes. This deep attachment makes them feel real, sometimes even more than physical danger.

Putting Fear in Perspective

When we mistakenly believe that we are just the body, mind or the various roles we play in life, such as parent, professional, partner, provider or achiever, we invite fear because all these things are fleeting. If we pause for a moment and look objectively at life, we see that the body ages, the mind wavers and roles shift. But there is a helpful position we can take to get perspective. There is an aspect of our personality that sees all these changes as a detached observer.

What if this aspect of us is more real and more permanent than all the changes? This aspect of us has endured through all the changes and seems unaffected by the world's turbulence. When we recognise this aspect of ourselves and see that we endured, fear loses its grip. Just as darkness has no existence of its own but is merely the absence of light, fear, too, is the absence of awareness of that part of us which survives and endures. Awareness of this is called spiritual knowledge.

Bhishma's Fear: A Story from the Gita

In the Bhagavad Gita, we see an example of how fear is rooted in attachment through the story of Bhishma, the greatest of heroes and warriors.



Despite his unmatched strength and wisdom, Bhishma found himself afraid of dishonour, torn between his vow to serve the throne of the kingdom, though it was in the hands of immoral princes, and his loyalty to the Pandavas, the morally just party in a great conflict. Mortally wounded, his fear was not of death but of whether he had done his duty, whether he had upheld righteousness. And his reputation.

Krishna, the teacher of the Gita, witnessing Bhishma's internal turmoil, offered him a simple yet profound truth: 'Your fear comes not from your actions but from your attachment to your various roles and identities. You are, in essence, the eternal Spirit. Let go of these attachments, and you will find peace.'

Bhishma realised that his fear stemmed from his identification with his worldly duties and his attachment to his reputation as a warrior. When he released these attachments, his fear dissolved and he found liberation, even as he lay on the battlefield, ready to embrace death.

This story reminds us that fear is often a product of the mind's attachment to roles, identities and outcomes. When we cling to such transient aspects of life, fear naturally follows. When we shift our focus to our eternal Self, that which can be experienced as witnessing consciousness independent of roles and identities, that aspect of us that simply sees the parade of change, fear begins to fade.

Embracing and Transcending Fear

To understand fear is to understand the nature of the mind. Fear is a mental construct, born from attachment to a fixed notion about the world and our place in it. When we cling to the material world, to our identities and outcomes, fear takes root. But when we recognise that the deepest part of us is beyond all that can perish, fear diminishes and, with practice, tdissolves. The teachings of Vedanta guide us toward this understanding, reminding us that the Self, as awareness, is eternal, unchanging and untouched by the world's fluctuations.

However, just understanding fear is not enough. To gain true freedom from fear, we will need to face and even embrace it. Accept that fear will arise but know that it does not define us. Fear is merely a signal, an invitation to look within and let go of our attachments. When we confront fear with knowledge and faith, we discover that it is not as formidable as it once seemed.

Imagine the weight that lifts when we finally let go of the need to control everything, when we stop fearing failure, rejection or uncertainty. Imagine the freedom that comes with understanding that our inner and outer worlds are supported by the benign and mysterious laws of mighty nature. We may call this a force for goodness, or God, or divine energy. The name matters not. What we see and know is that it is a force far greater than ourselves, compelled by universal wisdom, a force that loves us unconditionally and guides us through every storm. This is not just a comforting thought, it is the truth of existence. The divine order of the universe is always with us, offering strength and protection, even in our darkest moments.

Extracted with permission from You Are the Sky: An Ancient Guide to Modern Feelings *by Swami Swaroopananda, published by Pan Macmillan India*

Fear is a product of the mind's attachment to roles and outcomes. When we cling to them, fear follows. When we shift our focus to our Self, it fades

BELIEVE

SACRED SPACE | **Pretshila Hill, Bihar**



Overlooking the sacred landscape of Gaya in Bihar, Pretshila Hill is one of the most important sites for ancestral rites in Hindu tradition. Its name, meaning 'Hill of Spirits', reflects its association with the departed and the belief that rituals performed here can help ancestors attain liberation, particularly for souls who suffered untimely or accidental deaths.

At the summit stands a temple dedicated to Lord Yama, the deity who presides over death and the afterlife. Reached via a climb of 676 stone steps, the temple was built in 1787 by Ahilya Bai Holkar, the queen of Indore. Below the hill lies Brahma Kund, where pilgrims take a ritual bath before performing *pinda daan*, offering rice and flour balls to their ancestors at the sacred Pretshila Vedi altar. The nearby Ramkund is believed to be the place where Lord Rama once bathed.

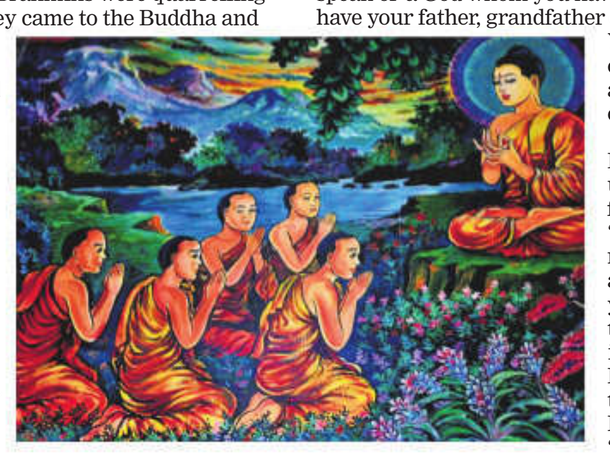
Pretshila holds a significant place in the pilgrimage traditions of Gaya, particularly during Pitru Paksha, the fortnight dedicated to honouring ancestors. According to Hindu belief, offerings made here help departed souls find peace and release from the cycle of suffering. The Vayu Purana also prescribes ancestral rites at Pretshila, underscoring its place in Gaya's sacred geography.

EPICS FOR CHILDREN | GAURAV YADAV

Why Fight Over God?

Nowadays, it is very common to see people arguing over religious matters in politics and on social media. The arguments often start with justifying one's own view, then move on to rejecting others' views, and finally turn into personal insults. This is not new. In olden times, too, such things used to happen, but they happened face-to-face. In this regard, Swami Vivekananda told a story about Gautama Buddha.

Once, five young Brahmins were quarrelling over a question. They came to the Buddha and explained that each of them had been taught a way to God by their elders. They believed that their way was the right one and all others were wrong. Hence, they were fighting with each other. The Buddha asked them, 'You say that you have been taught the way to God, but have you seen God?' They replied, 'No.' The Buddha asked, 'Did your father see God?' They replied, 'No.' The Buddha asked, 'Your grandfather? Your teachers?' All the Brahmins shook their heads.



The Buddha said, 'In a certain village, a young man was weeping and crying, saying, "I will only marry her! I will only marry her!" The villagers asked him whom he was talking about, and he replied, "The one I love." When the villagers asked who she was, he replied that he did not know. When they asked her name, he again said that he did not know. The villagers asked where she lived, and the man again said that he did not know. They asked what she looked like, and the young man again said that he did not know.'

The Buddha then asked the young Brahmins, 'What would you call this young man?' They said, 'No doubt, he is a madman. He is crying about a woman about whom he knows nothing.' The Buddha said, 'Are you not the same? You speak of a God whom you have never seen, nor have your father, grandfather or teachers seen. Yet you quarrel over such a matter and try to cut each other's throats.'

The young Brahmins understood their folly. They asked, 'What are we to do now?' The Buddha asked, 'Tell me, did your father ever teach you that God is angry?' The Brahmins shook their heads. The Buddha asked, 'Did he ever teach you that God is evil?' Again, the Brahmins shook their heads and said, 'No. God is always good and pure.'

The Buddha said, 'If you are pure and good, don't you think you will have a better chance of coming closer to God than by discussing all this and cutting each other's throats? Therefore, I say, be good and pure, and love everyone.'

YouTube: @Mahabalak.English

KARTIK PURNIMA 2026



The Gods' Festival of Lights

Kartik Purnima, the full moon of the Hindu month of Kartik, falls on November 24 this year. Also known as Tripurari Purnima and Dev Deepawali, it is regarded as one of the most auspicious days in the Hindu calendar.

According to tradition, the day commemorates Lord Shiva's destruction of Tripurasura, a demon whose three fortified cities had become a menace to the gods and the worlds. Shiva destroyed the three cities with a single arrow and came to be known as Tripurari. The gods celebrated his victory by lighting lamps, giving rise to the belief that they celebrate their own Diwali on this full-moon night.

The day is marked by Kartik Snan, a ritual bath in sacred rivers, particularly the Ganga, followed by prayers, charity and the lighting of lamps, or *deepdaan*. Devotees worship both Shiva and Vishnu, and many observe a fast or perform the Satyanarayan Puja.

In Varanasi, Kartik Purnima is celebrated as Dev Deepawali. According to belief, the gods descend to bathe in the Ganga, and the city's *ghats* are illuminated with countless lamps. The spectacle brings the month-long observance of Kartik to a luminous close.



MASTER MIND

"We begin to lose our hesitation to do immoral things when we lose our hesitation to speak of them."
~ Musonius Rufus

AMMASPEAK Mata Amritanandamayi



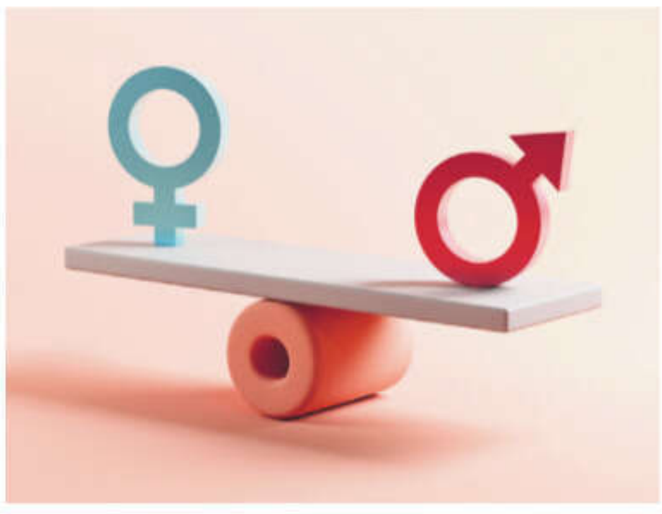
May Women and Men Rise as Equals

Children, recently, a woman came to me with her two young children. Crying, she said, "Amma, my husband wastes all his earnings on alcohol. There are fights at home all the time. There is no peace at all. He even hits me and shouts at me in front of the children. I'm unable to look after my children properly. Amma, please save me!"

Over the years, I have embraced lakhs of women shedding tears of sorrow because of similar circumstances. If we look at the world, approximately 1 in 3 women has been subjected to physical or sexual violence at some point. To stand with them, the United Nations has declared November 25th the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

What is it that lies behind this suffering? Both men and women have their weaknesses. But if we injure our left hand, won't the right hand caress it? Similarly, both men and women must patiently bear with each other's weaknesses and support each other to realise the divine power within. Unfortunately, ego and selfishness are now showing up where one ought to express love. This eventually leads to oppression and exploitation.

Men are physically stronger than women. That strength is not for oppressing women but protecting them. One might ask, if women need to be protected, does it not mean that they are weak? A protective ring of police officers surrounds the Prime Minister. Is it because he or she is weak? No, protecting the Prime Minister is the nation's duty. Similarly, protecting women is the duty of men and in their interest, too. Woman is the mother of man. Do not forget that every man was nourished by breast milk.



In many Indian villages, it is difficult to find grooms for uneducated women above 25 years of age. Without education, it is hard to find a job. These women suffer like unwelcome orphans for the rest of their life. Who is responsible for this? It is wrong to blame just men. Mothers must also give their daughters equal opportunities in every field and equip them to become skilled enough to get a job.

Mothers should instil in their children the awareness that boys and girls are equal. Having been conditioned from a young age, women have forgotten their own strength. They have been raised like potted plants. They are like an eaglet reared by a hen. Deluded into thinking that it is also a chicken, the eaglet does not fly. Even its wings feel burdensome. Similarly, instead of fully allowing women to awaken their self-confidence, society has suppressed their immense power.

Both men and women must patiently bear with each other's weaknesses and support each other. I dream of a bright future wherein both play an equal part, like the two wings of a bird, in creating a better society

Many men behave as if women are beneath them. This will ultimately prove to be detrimental to men themselves, as they will not gain solace and inspiration from women. I dream of a bright future wherein both women and men play an equal part, like the two wings of a bird, in creating a better society. It is only through such equality that humankind can evolve.

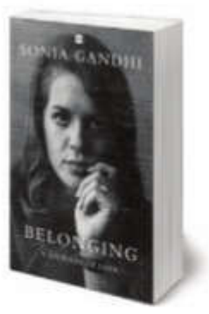
The writer is a world-renowned spiritual leader and humanitarian

epaper.newindianexpress.com

READ

Beyond the Myth of the Gandhis

Sonia Gandhi's *Belonging: A Journey of Love* is an expansive account of family, grief, sacrifice, and power, tracing a personal journey inseparable from the history of modern India



Belonging: A Journey of Love
By: Sonia Gandhi
Publisher: HarperCollins
Pages: 533
Price: ₹1,299

By AMBAR KUMAR GHOSH

Prominent leaders in Indian politics have traditionally been elevated to pedestals of reverence and unquestioning loyalty by their supporters. Such adulation is often matched by relentless vilification, with detractors subjecting them to exaggerated criticism and aspersions. The Gandhis, arguably the most politically consequential family in independent India, have long occupied an almost mythical, hallowed place in the country's political imagination. The most significant contribution of Sonia Gandhi's much-discussed memoir, *Belonging: A Journey of Love*, is its attempt, from an insider's perspective, to demystify and humanise the seemingly impenetrable, much-speculated-about lives of the family.

Moving beyond conventional political analyses of the family's electoral fortunes and governance records, the book offers a rare and intimate account of the people who have inhabited Sonia's world in India. The absence of memoirs by Indira or Rajiv Gandhi, combined with Sonia's characteristic reticence, has only heightened curiosity about the book. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the personal takes precedence over the political. In Sonia's own words, "This is a memoir, wherein politics serves to frame the main narrative, which is a personal account of my thoughts, feelings and decisions." Yet, a life story is never simply a spontaneous recollection of events; it is also a conscious exercise in deciding what to reveal and how. Whether readers interpret them as political messaging or personal reflection is ultimately up to them.

First, as its title suggests, the book celebrates love and familial bonds, often obscured by the harsh glare of political commentary. Beyond the romantic, lifelong companionship between Sonia and Rajiv, the memoir explores the affection, expectations, disagreements and occasional bickering that shaped relationships within the family: between Indira and her sons, Sonia and her mother-in-law, Sonia and Maneka, and Rajiv and Sonia as parents to their children. It also offers a heartwarming account of Sonia's ordinary, modest, conservative yet fun-filled childhood in a small Italian town. Along the way, it reveals the many facets of the Gandhi household: Indira's eye for detail, occasional temper and love of art and culture; Sanjay as "good company full of humour and pranks"; and the shared interests that brought Rajiv and Sanjay together.



Sonia and Rajiv Gandhi

Second, and perhaps most significantly, the primacy of duty over personal desire emerges as a recurring theme. Sonia's sense of duty, notably, predates her entry into the Gandhi household. She traces it to her upbringing in Italy under the watch of a strict disciplinarian father with a widely respected army background. "Thus the story of my family, as that of many Italians of the time, was one of duty: Big or small, certain things had to be done, certain rules had to be followed," she writes. This sense of obligation acquired a deeper significance after her marriage into the Gandhi family, as her aspiration for the 'normal, simple life' she had envisaged repeatedly gave way to the demands of public service and the family's expectations.

These choices came at a considerable personal cost. Challenging assumptions about the unqualified privileges enjoyed by members of a political dynasty, the memoir recounts the ordeals the family endured by virtue of its proximity to power. From Rajiv giving up his cherished career as a pilot to Sonia's inner turmoil over his, and subsequently her own, entry into politics despite her deep reservations, the book captures the erosion of personal freedom and the relentless public scrutiny that defined their lives. The denial of an ordinary childhood, compounded by the ever-present fear of tragedy, also shaped Rahul and Priyanka's formative years. The assassinations of Indira and Rajiv remain the most devastating manifestations of this vulnerability.

Finally, Sonia's account of her own political career, confined largely to the final sections, reflects the restraint that has characterised her public life. While she is sharply critical of the ideological worldview and governance style of her political rivals, she acknowledges Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rise from a humble background and his aversion to Delhi's political elite. Recalling Rajiv's premiership, she refers to "those close to us, who had taken on a political role came to overreach themselves; when the inevitable rupture occurred, they turned hostile and hit back", but chooses not to elaborate. She is more forthcoming, however, in offering her perspective on some long-standing allegations, including her strained relationship with former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. Interestingly, she also acknowledges the 'grey' areas of politics and the need for pragmatism, including the necessity of building bridges with parties such as the DMK, NCP and AAP despite ideological differences, in the pursuit of a 'greater purpose'.

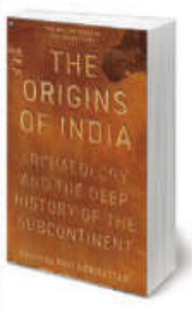
No book, particularly a political memoir, is without its limitations. Although the UPA years and post-2014 political developments receive some attention, a deeper engagement with Sonia's tenure as Congress president, the party's organisational shortcomings, would have added considerable depth to the narrative. But this is, after all, 'her story', one that is, as she emphasises, 'more personal than political'. In that sense, the book excels as a touching personal account of a deeply political life.

While Sonia Gandhi is critical of the ideological worldview and governance style of her political rivals, she acknowledges Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rise from a humble background and his aversion to Delhi's political elite

BOOK TASTINGS



Mahakshana
By: Arun Krishnan
Publisher: Penguin
Pages: 259
Price: ₹399
This extraordinary retelling of the *Mahabharata* steps inside the minds of the men and women who shaped *Bharatavarsha*, capturing them at the instant when choice becomes destiny.



The Origins of India
Edited by: Ravi Korisettar
Publisher: Aleph
Pages: 1048
Price: ₹1,999
It is a sweeping volume that reimagines the subcontinent's past through the lens of archaeology, collecting essays written by about 50 archaeologists working today.



Birds of Wood
By: Rebecca Mathai
Publisher: Hachette
Pages: 304
Price: ₹699
Spanning the austerity of 1970s Delhi to the new millennium, it is an intimate novel about a family learning to keep up with their expectations and limitations.



21 Days to Good Health
By: Dr Shriram Nene
Publisher: Rupa
Pages: 240
Price: ₹495
Practical and evidence-based, it translates the newest longevity science into easy steps anyone can follow, focusing on nutrition, movement, sleep, mindset, and connection.

ATTENTION PUBLISHERS: PLEASE SEND YOUR BOOKS FOR REVIEW TO THE SUNDAY STANDARD, Express Building (Third Floor), 9-10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110002.
THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS, Express Gardens, 29, 2nd Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate, Chennai 600058

A Long Way From Home

The narrative traces the Punjabi dream of a better life in Canada, exposing its collision with racism and economic precarity



Super
By: Lindsay Pereira
Publisher: Fourth Estate
Pages: 217
Price: ₹699

By SHEILA KUMAR

The migrant experience has spawned many a book, notably Sunjeev Sahota's Booker-shortlisted *The Year of the Runaways*. Lindsay Pereira's *Super* is a significant addition to that canon.

The specifics of this story are familiar from news reports: a stream of youngsters from Punjab leaving for Canada, the UK, Australia and elsewhere; the dodgy colleges they enrol in simply to get a foot in the door and secure Permanent Residency; and the tensions that arise from waves of migrants pouring into places such as Brampton, Canada.

The narrative begins in Toronto in September 2019. We see the main character, Sukhpreet Gill, going through his day. He follows a banal routine, both at home and at his workplace, where he works as an assistant to the superintendent of a building. In the opening chapter, much is conveyed with an economy of words. We get a neat picture of what migrant life entails: shared accommodation to save money; the meagre food one eats, compared with the food 'at home'; the prosaic work one is reduced to doing; the racism one encounters, both casual and overt; and memories of the past that arise and are suppressed because they are suffused with sadness, both in reality and in recollection. Underlying it all is the hope that the migrant holds on to for a better, happier and more successful tomorrow.

When a cataclysmic incident occurs, it is as much a shock to the reader as it is to Gill. In the chapters that follow, the story unspools through a series of flashbacks until it circles back, adroitly, to the day on which the book opens. The voices through which the past is explored are mainly three: Gill, Harneet Kaur, the woman with whom he begins a tentative relationship, and Maynard Wilson, a poor white Canadian. All three are shackled by the circumstances of their lives, which constrain them and dictate their choices.

Gill's goal is migration, not just to make a living and build a life but also to escape a place wrecked by drugs and a rampant gang culture. There is both gentleness and reserve in the man. He is free of the toxic masculinity evident elsewhere in the book; tenderness shapes his relationship with the more confident Harneet.

Harneet knows what lies ahead. As it is dryly stated, others have, for years, decided the lives that girls must lead: getting married and going abroad. If a girl is bright and scores well in her English-language test, as Harneet has, it translates into better prospects in the marriage market. Her intelligence, then, is both a gift and a curse.

Pereira has smartly given a voice to the Canadian, Wilson. This, in turn, gives the reader a more nuanced picture of the situation, even if one does not condone Wilson's actions. He stands for every poor, marginalised native who feels threatened by the changes that migration has wrought in his country. His impotent rage transforms him into a troll posting incendiary messages online; it propels him towards a dangerous place where he sees violence as justified. The author deftly makes us see how both Gill and Wilson are victims of an unforgiving system that manipulates them and places them on opposing sides.

Brampton and Jalandhar are drawn as a study in contrasts. Brampton comes across as a businesslike, cold place, both in temperature and attitude. Jalandhar, dusty, noisy and teeming with people, has warmth, colour and character. It simultaneously becomes a place to escape from and one that is longed for, viewed as home.

British Somali poet Warsan Shire encapsulated the migrant experience in these hard-hitting lines: "You only leave home when home won't let you stay." This book is an affecting exploration of just that, and of the costs it extracts.

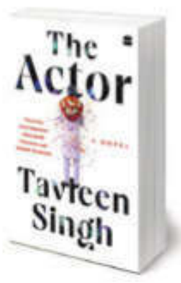
Brampton and Jalandhar are drawn as a study in contrasts. While the former comes across as a cold place, both in temperature and attitude, the latter has colour and character

Canadian immigration desk



On a Political Stage

By SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA



The Actor
By: Tavleen Singh
Publisher: HarperCollins
Pages: 328
Price: ₹450

Fiction has a swashbuckling power to resist change imposed by an empire seeking to erase and rewrite history. Through imaginative storytelling, it empowers readers to engage with the politics of emancipation. Journalist Tavleen Singh turns to fiction with her debut novel, *The Actor*, to imagine a future that is unsettlingly prescient. "It is easier to write political fiction at the moment than political non-fiction," she writes. The story is set in a future where politics veers towards extreme religiosity and devotional loyalty, while a corrupt, cynical political system hides behind the façade of religious nationalism.

Two-term MP Naresh Khanna spearheads an effort to outwit the politics of 'Guruji' (Gyanendraji Maharaj), the long-serving Prime Minister who, bereft of a biological family or close friends, insists that his only commitment is to serving the nation. The aim of the new political party is to revive an erstwhile culture of grace, decency and idealism. To build an opposition party on a secular plank, Naresh invites his friend Amit Singh, a Bollywood superstar whose career has been reeling under the weight of three consecutive box-office flops. For the star, there could not be a better opportunity to re-establish his image as an actor, this time on the political stage.

The characters in the novel have different names, but the story bears an unmistakable resemblance to reality. *The Actor* offers a disturbing account of the fault lines that have widened the Hindu-Muslim divide in India today. Tavleen also introduces an interesting character in Maya, a sharp-eyed journalist who bonds with the actor, helping him better understand the dynamics of social democracy. She also becomes his love interest, and their relationship blossoms. The affair fits into the narrative, sustaining readers' interest while adding another dimension to the story.

Naresh's ambitious plan is to launch a new political party to counter the 'electoral autocracy' promoted by the government, which seeks to dismantle the constitutional principles. To counter the kind of charisma perpetuated by the majoritarian politics, people must empower themselves through free speech. Yet a vast majority live in fear, with little hope of finding jobs or securing a decent standard of living. This eventually creates a situation in which the government becomes a private club, with the elite as its intended beneficiaries.

There is much to unpack in this fast-paced novel. *The Actor* challenges readers to look beyond the imagery of modern politics and the glitz of celebrity culture. With fearless clarity and moral conviction, the author imagines a plausible future in which democratic and constitutional values are restored. The novel anticipates the end of a totalitarian movement founded on ideological conformity.

The book, however, remains within the confines of religion and politics in its imagining of change. This is perhaps inevitable, given how deeply religion has been drawn into politics. A mass movement capable of triggering political transformation remains a theoretical possibility.

epaper.newindianexpress.com

Booked in the Good Life

Turn an overlooked corner of your home into a stylish reading retreat with the right bookshelves, seating and lighting

By KRITI SARASWAT-SATPATHY

In the age of curated homes and personality-led interiors, bookshelves are having a design moment. Think floor-to-ceiling book displays, layered lighting and little pockets of quiet that make switching off a pleasure. "Bookshelves bring warmth and personality to a home. Beyond their function, they add texture, colour and a sense of cosiness, making a space feel more lived-in and personal than simply styled," says Agavi Vora, principal designer at her eponymous practice.

Even compact homes can make room for a reading nook. An unused alcove, a narrow stretch beside a window or an awkward corner can be turned into a cosy retreat. "A slender vertical unit is often more useful in a compact space than a deep, bulky bookcase. Wall-mounted shelves can also work well, provided the load is appropriate. Visually, matching the shelving to the wall colour can make it feel less bulky," advises Nayan Shah, founder and principal architect at Palindrome Spaces. For those with larger collections, a wall of books can become the focal point of a room. Floor-to-ceiling shelves, curated displays and sliding library ladders lend the space a sophisticated, old-world appeal. "An entire wall of books can become a beautiful backdrop to a room, adding character while making the collection a part of the architecture. Designing it almost like a library with full-height shelving and a sliding ladder can become part of the experience. The books themselves bring so much texture and variation to the space, becoming the defining element of the room," says Vora.

Material choices can further elevate the look. Solid wood and veneers in walnut, teak and oak offer timeless appeal, while slim brass or black metal frames paired with wooden shelves lend a contemporary edge. Fluted and cane panels introduce texture, while lacquered finishes in deep shades such as bottle green and oxblood make striking statement pieces. Komal Mittal and Ninada Kashyap, principal architects at Alkove-Design, recommend choosing materials that balance durability with visual appeal.

Comfort and lighting are equally important. "An armchair with comfortable armrests is a good starting point. A deeper lounge chair may work better with a footstool or a supportive cushion. A window seat can be lovely too," says Shah. For lighting, make the most of natural daylight with sheer curtains, then add an adjustable floor lamp or wall-mounted swing-arm sconce. "Warm bulbs keep the mood relaxed while concealed strip lighting inside shelves adds a soft glow and highlights the books," say Mittal and Kashyap. Complete the setting with a compact side table, a textured rug, a few cushions and a throw. After all, the most appealing reading corners are not necessarily the grandest; they are the ones that make you want to lose yourself in a book.









Solid wood and veneers in walnut, teak and oak offer timeless appeal, while slim brass or black metal frames paired with wooden shelves lend a contemporary edge. Fluted and cane panels introduce texture

Forest Fervour



This festive season, lifestyle brand Nicobar makes its debut in cookware through a long-term partnership with Ember, introducing the Ceylon Forest Stack. Designed specifically for the rhythm of Indian homes, the three-piece stackable cast-iron set marries Ember's material innovation and clean cooking performance with Nicobar's signature design language.

Drenched in a deep forest green, these cast-iron pieces are engineered to transition seamlessly from stove to table, elevating the daily rituals of cooking, serving, and gathering. Marking the first chapter of a broader exploration into contemporary home spaces, the collaboration also features a curated festive gifting set that pairs the cookware with complementary Nicobar tableware.

"With Ember, we saw an opportunity to take Nicobar's design language into the kitchen, a space central to how we gather," says Simran Lal, Co-founder and Creative Director of Nicobar. Ember Co-founder Himanshi Tandon adds, "Together, we wanted to create pieces that are as much a pleasure to use as they are to bring to the table."

The collection is available online at Ember's website and at select Nicobar stores.





A Shore Thing

Naïa Island redefines Dubai luxury, where the greatest indulgence is the freedom to retreat from the world

By DEEPALI DHINGRA

As the idea of luxury evolves from conspicuous indulgence to a more considered expression of exclusivity, privacy, space, and authenticity are becoming its defining markers. Set just off Dubai's Jumeirah coastline, Naïa Island captures this shift with an exceptional private island address, where open coastal landscapes, verdant surroundings and sweeping views of the Arabian Gulf create an atmosphere of effortless seclusion.

The island offers a rare sense of permanence and tranquillity along Dubai's ever-evolving coastline. Its master plan embraces low-density living, expansive open spaces and organic landscape architecture, allowing nature to dictate the rhythm of life. The result is an enclave that feels wonderfully removed from the city's energy, yet remains intimately connected to it. Opening in 2029, Naïa Island will offer an exceptionally limited collection of private land parcels, inviting discerning owners to create bespoke residences or seasonal retreats in complete privacy.

At the heart of its hospitality is the Middle East's first Cheval Blanc Maison, comprising just 30 suites and 40 private villas. Bringing the celebrated maison's philosophy of intimate, highly personalised hospitality to the island, the experience will centre on discreet service, bespoke dining, and thoughtfully curated wellness. Every detail is designed around individual preferences. From carefully nurtured native flora to seasonally inspired culinary experiences, every aspect of island life is envisioned around a deeper connection with its surroundings. More than a luxury residential or hospitality destination, Naïa Island represents a more thoughtful expression of exclusivity: one where space is the ultimate indulgence, privacy is inherent and the greatest privilege is the freedom to retreat.

PICK OF THE WEEK

The Seven Notes of Style

Aikyatha's Kanjivaram collection pays tribute to Carnatic legend MS Subbulakshmi

Some legends leave behind a musical legacy; MS Subbulakshmi left behind not just that but a style statement, too. Kanjivaram sari label Aikyatha's latest collection, 'Suswaram', pays tribute to the Carnatic vocalist's timeless voice. Created in collaboration with her great-granddaughters, the collection translates her persona into silk, going beyond the iconic shade of blue famously associated with her, 'MS Blue'. For its Archival line, Aikyatha revisited her old saris, recreating some of the original designs. Named after the seven musical notes, the line features Sa in the iconic 'MS Blue', while Dha pairs a warm turmeric-yellow *pallu* with a rich teal body. Co-founder Yeshwanth Sunku says, "The real challenge lay in finding old looms and dyes to achieve the same colour and finish as her saris." The saris are priced up to ₹1.4 lakh.

The experimental Raga line plays with colour, technique and motifs, translating five Carnatic ragas into textile design. The Kanjivaram inspired by Raga Shankarabharanam, dedicated to Lord Shiva, uses blue to represent Neelkanth. "Motifs are also inspired by the deity—*bel patra* leaves form the sari's border while the river Ganga flows through the shoulder," explains Sunku. The crimson sari inspired by Raga Bhairavi presented another technical challenge, as weaving non-repetitive motifs requires considerable skill.

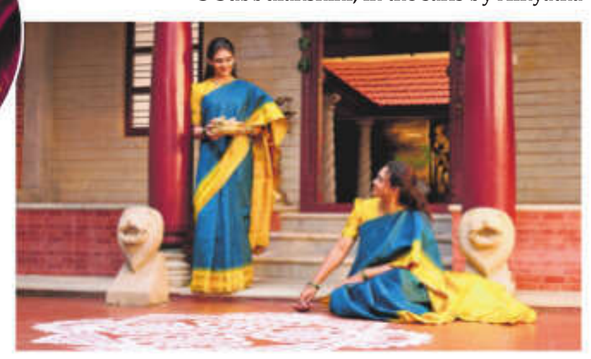
The collection celebrates Subbulakshmi's sartorial identity as much as her music. "The first thing that strikes about MS Amma is her styling," says Sunku. It is this unmistakable elegance that 'Suswaram' seeks to preserve, one exquisite weave at a time.

—*Samiya Chopra*



S Aishwarya and S Saundarya, great-granddaughters of M S Subbulakshmi, in the saris by Aikyatha







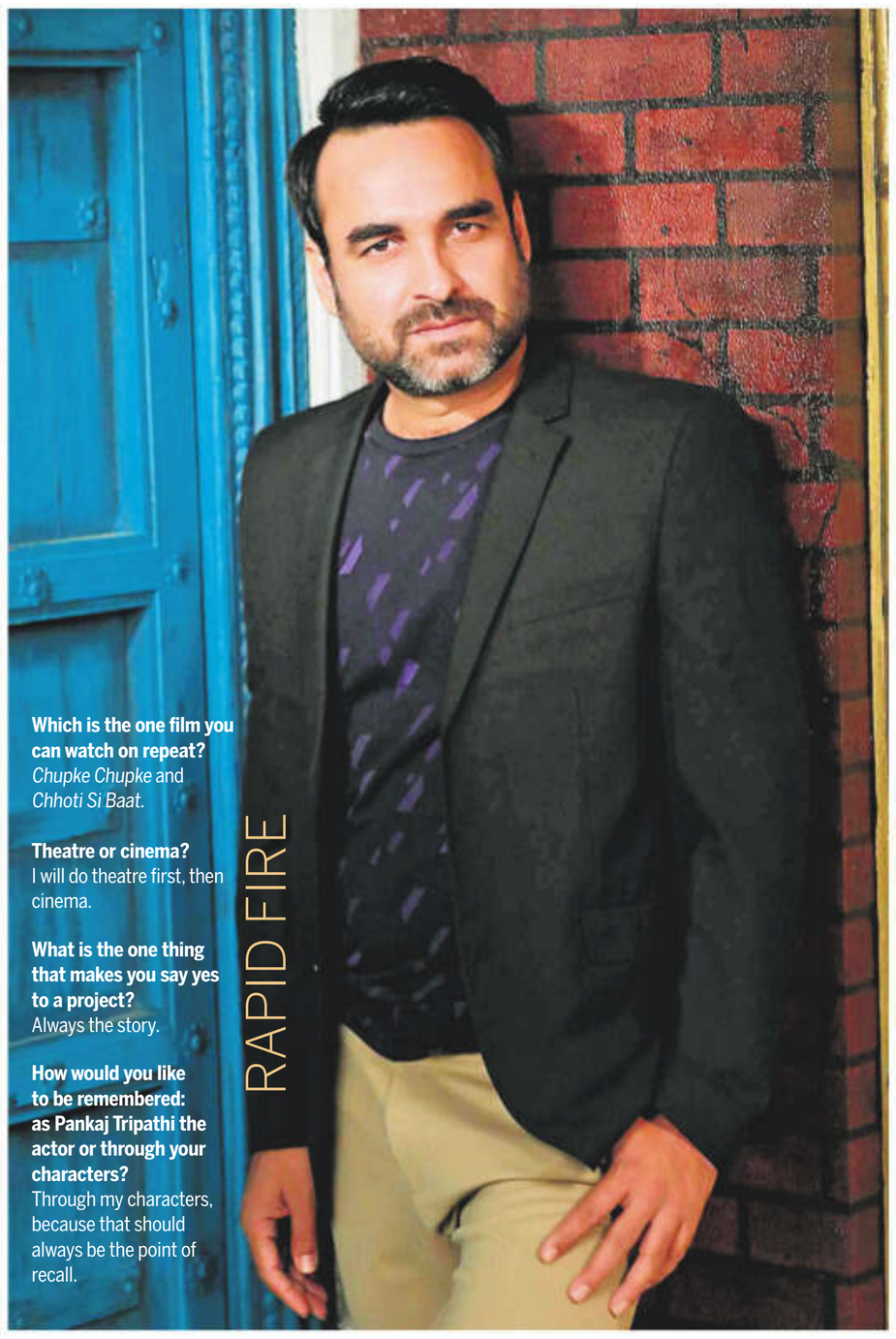
epaper.newindianexpress.com

WATCH

‘We are All Cashing in on Templates’

Pankaj Tripathi speaks with **Puja Talwar** about his latest film, *Parivarik ManuRanjan*, and what it’s like to be a part of the censor board

From the comfort of ordinary stories to the pitfalls of formula-driven filmmaking, Pankaj Tripathi makes a case for keeping cinema honest. In this conversation, he discusses his latest film, *Parivarik ManuRanjan*, his return to theatre, his new role on the censor board, and why Hindi cinema needs to break free of templates.



Your recent film, *Parivarik ManuRanjan*, won audiences over with its simplicity. Do you feel that creators have underestimated the audience’s appetite for simple, feel-good films?

Absolutely. So much so that when I read the story, I immediately called Ali Abbas Zafar and Varun Sharma, saying that I had to be part of this film. I felt doing this film was important because we are in pursuit of chasing the extraordinary and, in doing so, have forgotten the joy that being ordinary brings.

I recall a time when we used to watch relatable stories in films such as *Chhoti Si Baat* and *Namkeen*. These were stories about ordinary people and everyday life. We have gotten so used to elaborate, *masala*-driven fare and storytelling that we have forgotten the joy of ‘comfort food’, which, in this case, is watching simple, everyday films and stories that are an extension of your life.

What was it like playing Ranjan Dubey in the film?

The reason I did this film was solely that it had no gimmicks or formula. It was told in a straightforward, linear format about two people who meet. For me, the biggest risk here was to showcase the innocence of my character, Ranjan Dubey, who is ruffled by the presence of a beautiful woman. For me, it was imperative to retain Dubey’s naivety, as he is so fazed by her presence. The fact that there is no relationship between the two is important because that was never the point. Neither is it a traditional story in its treatment because we haven’t seen a plot like this before. The interesting point is that even the possibility of a relationship is left unsaid. A character like Ranjan Dubey is someone I resonate with. This is how I view men and what they should be like, and the values they should uphold.

Parivarik Manoranjan’s poster



You also returned to theatre after 12 years with the musical comedy *Lailaaj*. What was it like to share the stage with your daughter?

It has been wonderful to go back to where I came from. We have been travelling with my group and performing across cities. We have already produced three to four plays. It is a great space to introduce new talent so that they can get their feet into the world of acting.

Sharing the stage with my daughter was memorable. I look at her innocence and zeal to learn, and it is endearing. It took me back in time—to when I was growing up and wondering how one would act, what one should do to perform well, and dealing with all those uncertainties that became the fuel to pursue the craft. What I did realise while performing on stage this time was that it is important for actors to perform theatre once in a while because the option of retakes in cinema makes one complacent. Theatre doesn’t give you that option. An actor should always be on the edge. Being in a comfort zone is actually most detrimental to one’s evolution as a performer. I enjoy being on the precipice while performing on stage; you are always alert.

You have recently been appointed as a member of the censor board. As an actor, what do you think is the need of the hour when it comes to being part of an institution that is integral to the evaluation of films?

I feel that if you want to bring about change, that is also possible by being part of the system. The first meeting was fruitful, where several of us put our points of view across. This included filmmakers such as Priyadarshan and many others who also voiced their concerns.

It was my first meeting, and I am trying to understand the system as well. What was discussed was how to make the process convenient for both the filmmaker and the board, and what concerns needed to be highlighted.

What I understood was that there are guidelines, and then there is certification. Those in charge of implementing these guidelines need to be wise. Every member comes with their own sensibilities. I just want things to go well so that it’s a win-win for all.

Do you feel writers are not given their due, as many feel that by the time their vision reaches the screen, it has been diluted? They are often regarded as the lowest common denominator, when they actually form the core. Is there a disconnect?

Writing is the soul of any story. The writer is the creator, and sadly, Hindi cinema treats everything like a project and leaves the writer behind. If the writing is weak, neither a top cameraman, an editor, nor an actor can make it interesting. But if the writing is strong, it manages to hold on its own, irrespective of the challenges.

There is no disconnect per se. I am also trying to co-produce something, and as we go through stories, I have noticed the conversations in the room. There may be a story you like, but when the team, at first glance, thinks it involves excessive expenditure and carries more risk than the potential return on investment, one ends up looking for a low-cost story.

So that becomes a huge factor, given the budgets, in determining whether one can do justice to a story or not. That’s one aspect. Secondly, we are all cashing in on templates. If one horror comedy works, everyone wants to make horror comedies. For me, discarding templates is important because I cannot work on four films that have the same framework.

OTT REVIEW

A Collection of Missed Chances



MEETHE MEIN KYA HAI
Director: Radhika Bansal
Platform: Netflix
Genre: Drama
Language: Hindi
Rating: ★★½☆☆

A recent addition to the nascent Diwali movie genre—a parallel to the Christmas movies of the West—*Meethe Mein Kya Hai* is a family drama set during the festive season. At its centre is Jai (Ritwik Bhowmik), a grief-stricken widower grappling with the death of his wife, Tara (Kanika Kapur). As he navigates his family’s Diwali reunion, his sister Sana’s (Dalai) secret marriage sparks chaos.

Director Radhika Bansal portrays a family negotiating differences, grief and celebration with subtlety. However, this restraint translates into a lack of emotional depth, making it difficult for the film to connect with its audience. Weak writing further undermines the narrative.

The film is held together by its cast. It is easy to connect with Jai, and you find yourself wishing he didn’t have to endure so much grief. Despite her brief screen time, Kanika Kapur has a radiant presence that leaves you wanting more. Dalai fits the role of the family’s bubbly rebel, while the parents bring warmth to their performances. Ayesha Raza, as the mother, does what she does best—extra points for her styling.

The grandmother’s Lucknow bungalow lends the film an old-world charm. A candlelit dinner following a power outage emerges as its most memorable sequence. The darkness on Diwali becomes a fitting metaphor for the coexistence of grief and celebration.

However, the film is a compilation of missed opportunities and underdeveloped arcs. It rarely allows tension to build. The generational conflict between Sana and her mother resolves too neatly, while the idea of acceptance surrounding Sana’s marriage is explored rather superficially.

The most unusual, yet awkwardly handled, arc is the dynamic between the family’s 13-year-old neighbour, Meera, and Jai. Through Meera’s infatuation with a man more than twice her age, Bansal attempts to explore a taboo yet natural adolescent emotion. The problem lies not in the attraction itself but in its portrayal. Her feelings could have been subtly hinted at and acknowledged without resorting to confessions and confrontations. Their bond could have been handled with greater sensitivity.

A modern rendition of *Ichak dana beechak dana* by Amit Trivedi feels unlike the composer’s usual work. Superficial and cringeworthy, it is best skipped.

For a Diwali film, *Meethe Mein Kya Hai* captures the celebrations but misses the chaos that comes with them. The family’s festivities are surprisingly calm. *Dilwali Diwali*, released a few days later, makes for a far more relatable and enjoyable watch.

Overall, *Meethe Mein Kya Hai* is hardly memorable. Towards the end, Jai appears to move on from his grief rather abruptly, leaving one wondering how a teenager’s feelings for him could possibly heal his emotional wounds.

—*Samiya Chopra*



BINGE BOX



A DIFFERENT ANGLE
Directed by Alyce Tzue and John Ripa, this animated film reimagines the celebrated fairy tale of Cinderella from the perspective of her stepsisters, with a setting based in the candy-toned 18th-century kingdom of Alouette. Watch ***Steps*** on Netflix, with voices from Ali Wong, Stephanie Hsu, Bette Midler.

TRENDING

Perfect Liars *Prime Video*
CAST: Irene Balmes, Gleb Abrosimov
PLOT: Set at the elite Tagus University, this Spanish thriller follows Jude Derry as she infiltrates the inner circle of the dominant Cash brothers with a plan to avenge her brother’s mysterious death.

Guarding Stars *Netflix*
CAST: Leighton Meester, Jared Padalecki
PLOT: It is a romantic comedy following Hannah Brooks, a bodyguard assigned to protect a Hollywood star dealing with a stalker

Campus Diaries S2 *Amazon MX Player*
CAST: Harsh Beniwal, Ritvik Sahore
PLOT: It follows six students as they return to Excel University and navigate the messy realities of young adulthood.

Dhindora Season 2 *Netflix*
CAST: Bhuvan Bam, Sanjeeda Shaikh
PLOT: The new season focuses heavily on Titu Mama as he navigates a chaotic new chapter involving an expecting child, the pressure of impressing his in-laws, and a series of hilarious local mishaps.

The Odyssey *AppleTV*
CAST: Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway
PLOT: Adapted from Homer’s ancient Greek epic poem, this celebrated historical film arrives on OTT, following Odysseus, who spends ten years wandering the Mediterranean Sea trying to return home.

A Question of Belonging

Director Shomik Basuray speaks on making the first Hakka-language film, *From Nowhere*, with the help of Kolkata’s Chinese community

Shomik Basuray



By SRAVASTI DATTA

On a tense dinner date in Kolkata’s Chinatown, Hillary tells her boyfriend, Henry, that she is leaving the country in search of better opportunities. His response to this impending loss—in a city where he was born and raised and which he calls home, yet where he continues to feel like an outsider—drives the narrative of Shomik Basuray’s short film *From Nowhere*. Set in Kolkata’s twin Chinatowns, Tangra and Tiretta Bazaar, the film offers a rare glimpse into the city’s dwindling Chinese community, whose roots date back to the 18th century.

Recently screened at the Interfilm Berlin Film Festival, the film draws on the lived experiences of the Hakka community. Its dialogues are primarily in Hakka, a language spoken by roughly 3,000 people in India today, and all the actors belong to the community. “I wanted to make the film as authentic as possible,” says Basuray. None of the actors, he points out, are professional performers. “They didn’t actually have to perform their roles; they effectively played their own lives.”

The research for the film began around five years ago, when Basuray, an advertising filmmaker based in Mumbai, met Hillary Chu, a makeup artist from the Hakka community. She introduced him to her cousin, Kenneth Emmanuel Liao, whose life would eventually inspire the film. Over the years, Basuray and Liao became friends. During his visits to Kolkata, Basuray would walk with him through Tangra and Tiretta Bazaar, visiting temples, social clubs, schools and restaurants to understand the community’s everyday life. Both Liao and Chu act in the film.



A scene from the film

The film’s title reflects the community’s complicated relationship with belonging. “The Chinese community in Kolkata has a peculiar feeling of rootlessness,” says Basuray. “They want to preserve their heritage and culture. When they move abroad, they don’t feel they have a lot in common with the Chinese diaspora from mainland China. They are emotionally attached to the city, yet feel like outsiders.”

Bringing the actors’ lived experiences to the screen called for an unconventional production process. Basuray initially wrote the dialogues in English, conducting readings and exercises with the cast before having the script translated into Hakka with the help of Liao, Chu and another actor, Pauline Li. The film was shot at Nam Soon Temple and a family-run restaurant in Tangra.

For Basuray, however, the film’s concerns extend well beyond Kolkata’s Chinese community. “Identity, diaspora, marginalisation, alienation, the sense of ‘othering’ is experienced by many immigrant and minority communities in India and many parts of the world,” he says. “This film is an examination of identity, of wanting to belong.”

epaper.newindianexpress.com