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INDIA TODAY

A DEEPENING DIVIDE?

SEVEN PROMINENT VOICES ON THE CAUSES OF COMMUNAL TENSION AND HOW INDIA CAN AVERT STRIFE

• SHASHI THAROOR • RAM MADHAV • YASHWANT SINHA
• SESHADRI CHARI • FAIZAN MUSTAFA
• MAKARAND PARANJAPE • PUSHPESH PANT

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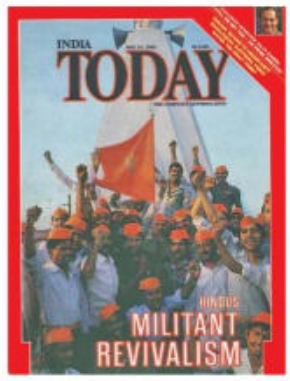
FROM THE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Several decades ago, I would frequently be asked at many international conferences what India's future was. Of course, the country has had its ups and downs, but my answer always was that the future is bright regardless of governments because it has a momentum of its own. With one condition. Sectarian violence could upset this upward trajectory. Sadly, my foreboding may be coming true. I see the beginnings of a toxic communal cloud across the country dominating public discourse. We should be debating issues that impact our 1.38 billion population the most—prices, jobs, governance and development, the prospect of another wave of Covid-19, the new education policy, and the right growth model. Instead, witness the sheer explosion of violence or near-violence on Ramnavami/ Hanuman Jayanti on our map. At last count, there were incidents in at least eight states—Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and, finally, Delhi. The only source of relief is that the death toll is low—one in Khargone, MP, another in Lohardaga, Jharkhand. Earlier, violence broke out in Karnataka over whether halal meat should be permitted to be sold during sacred festival seasons. In the same state, a local battle over banning Muslim women from wearing hijabs in classrooms in a pre-university college blew into a national storm that saw the Supreme Court being dragged in.



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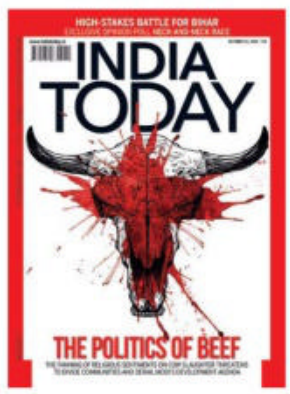

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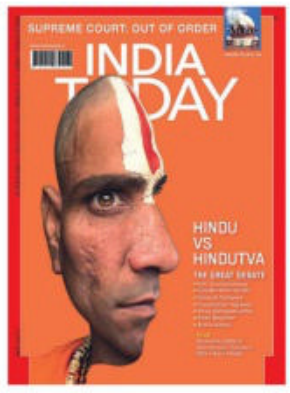

January 29, 2018

India has been in a state of permanent low-grade communal fever over recent months. Controversies over a host of issues have been orchestrated—whether the hijab, halal meat, the muezzin's azaan, *The Kashmir Files* or genocidal calls from saffron-clad sants at sundry *dharam sansad*s and from maulvis issuing equally dire threats. Extremist groups from both sides are guilty of pushing their hardline agenda and goading their flocks into confrontation, with many state governments sadly becoming complacent bystanders rather than enforcing the law. Communal clashes are not new to India. They have been taking place since Partition with varying frequency and for different reasons. The BJP has often used them to polarise the electorate for political gain and others to pander to the minority vote bank. No party is innocent of weaponising religion to attain power. The change is that there has been an increased radicalisation of the general population even when elections are not on the horizon. It is a low-intensity violence embedded at the ground level. Competitive fundamentalism is being driven by extreme elements on both sides.

To understand the consequences of such communal tensions, we invited a gallery of distinguished names to present their thoughts in a series of essays. A universal tone of condemnation fills their words. Even the right-wing commentators are chary of endorsing this spectre of violence. RSS ideologue Ram Madhav, for instance, talks of the "hubris" of Opposition leaders who "pretentiously argue on moral high ground when their own cupboards are filled with horrific skeletons". But he concedes that the voices of hate coming from "sections of Hindus, including some wearing saffron robes, is utterly un-Hindu"—and that "talk of annihilation of an entire community smacks of an attempt at Semitisation of Hinduism". Pro-right scholar Makarand Paranjape too writes that "the deadly dance of mimetic and retaliatory violence...does not augur well for the Republic". Congress leader Shashi Tharoor feels it is no more about one incident or the other—the "toxin" has spread into the very cells of the body politic. Former Union minister Yashwant Sinha laments that "the institutions...supposed to protect our democracy are themselves in need of protection today". Food historian Pushpesh Pant, too, is dismayed by the institutional retreat of the justice system, with "vigilantes taking upon themselves the roles of police, jury, judge and the executioner". NALSAR vice-chancellor Faizan Mustafa points that Muslim communities across the world suffered when Islamic radicalism by a few led to the perception of their religion being one of violence rather than of peace and brotherhood. He warns that the same fate could befall Hinduism "if lumpen elements are allowed to hijack it and damage its image as the world's most tolerant religion". Former editor of the RSS paper *Organiser*, Seshadri Chari, writes: "The larger issue is the responsibility of the leaders of respective communities to rein in the fringe elements and prevail over the troublemakers, by force or legal recourse if needed."

As the divide among Hindus and Muslims is sought to be deepened, is it not time we all came together and debated communally touchy issues in a far more civil manner than resort to street violence? There has to be a middle path between appeasement and demonisation of the minority. Shouldn't all communities condemn the hate, abuse and vandalism currently being unleashed in their names? There is a new generation in our midst, one that has not seen Partition or even the Babri Masjid demolition of 1992. India has survived those traumas—and thrived. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always maintained that peace, harmony and unity are prerequisites for development. In 2022, as the nation commemorates 75 years of Independence, we should celebrate our unity, showcase our diversity, and shun our divisiveness.

(Aroon Purie)

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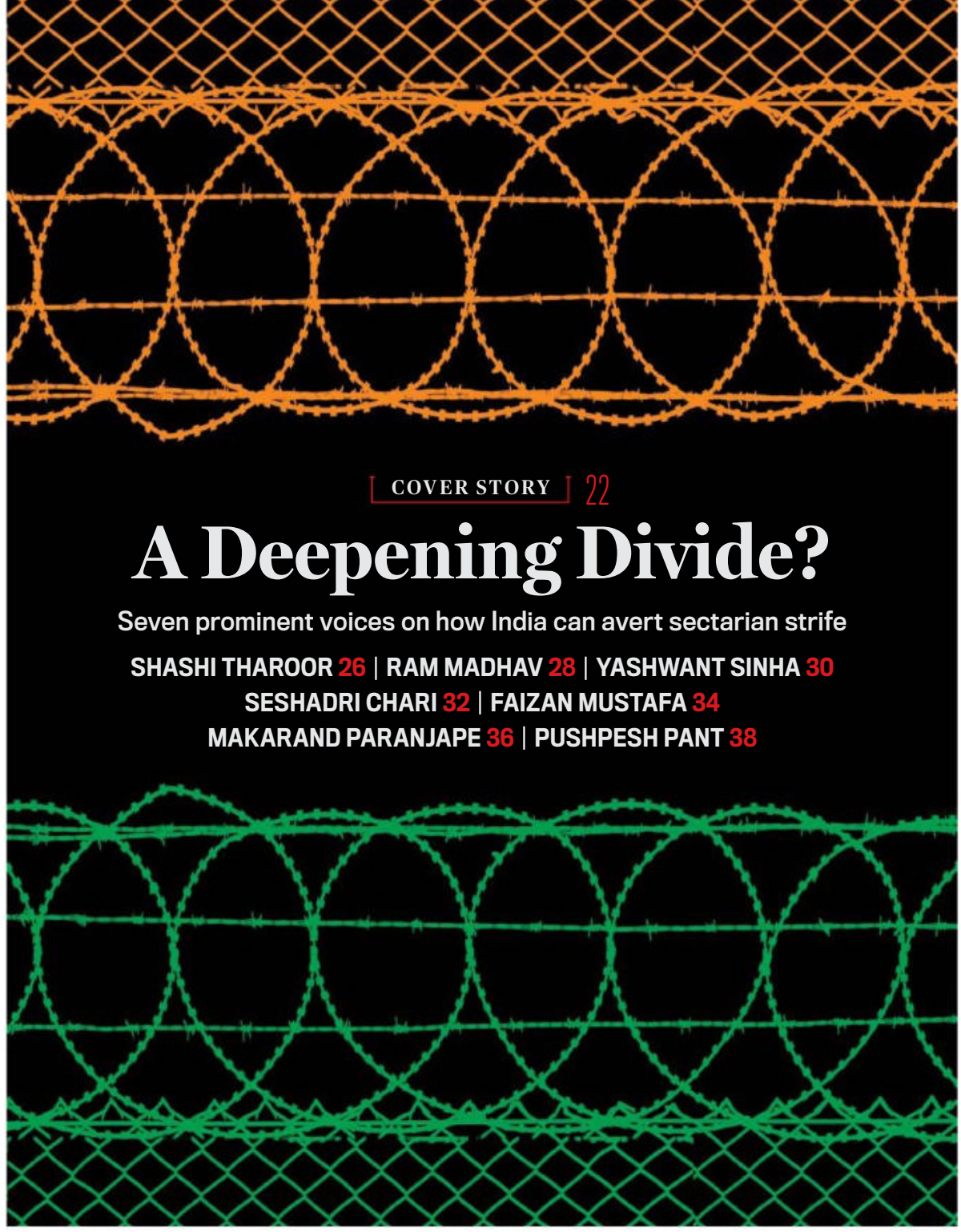

COVER STORY 22

A Deepening Divide?

Seven prominent voices on how India can avert sectarian strife

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

INSIDE

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UPFRONT

KASHMIR: RICOCHETS FROM THE PAST PG 14

RAJASTHAN: BRIBES & BIOFUEL PG 18

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

PUNJAB/ BHAGWANT MANN

THE PRICE OF POWER

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Singh Mann knows there is little room to manoeuvre, but he is trying to stay true to the pre-poll promises of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). So, following on the Delhi AAP model, every domestic consumer in Punjab will now get 300 units of free power per nonth from July this year. But it comes with a rider—cross the threshold and use more, and you pay for all of it. Among those who get a pass are Dalit homes, along with those of backward communities and freedom fighters; they will pay only for the extra power they use. Here, too, later clarifications sequestered the claimants—only those with a 1KV connection and do not pay income tax are eligible.

Of course, the largesse comes with a cost. Budget documents show that Punjab's power subsidy bill for 2020-21 was Rs 10,668 crore, of which Rs 3,488 crore went to the state's electricity distributor, Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd (PSPCL), to subsidise domestic supplies. The new proposition will put further pressure, worth about Rs 1,800 crore, on the state exchequer. Punjab has to satisfy 8 million domestic electricity consumers.

Mann has inherited an over-leveraged balance sheet with over Rs 2.82

आज तक

देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

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lakh crore in cumulative debt and depleting revenue sources. His cup of woes does not end there. In the next two months, the Centre's commitment to compensate for GST revenue shortfalls ends. This had provided almost Rs 15,000 crore to the state in the past five years. Punjab also has yet to implement the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission. The state already has committed expenditure of over Rs 40,000 crore in salaries and pensions. Implementing the commission's recommendations will require another Rs 5,000 crore. Meanwhile, Mann's cabinet has cleared the decks to fill 25,000 vacancies this fiscal.

Political opponents are already up in arms against Mann's decision to put riders in the 'free power' story. Social media foot soldiers of both the BJP and Congress are going to town about Arvind Kejriwal and Mann reneging on pre-poll commitments, the hope being that it will create doubt among possible AAP voters in other states.

Last month, the new CM had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked for special assistance of Rs 50,000 crore for two years. The Centre hasn't even responded to the demand. Anyway, it's almost impossible to give such a special package to a particular state. At best, the central government can assist with capital expenditure to execute infrastructure projects.

Mann is already blaming the previous regimes for the fiscal mess and has ordered an inquiry into how the state is left with almost Rs 3 lakh crore in debt. He has also threatened "recovery proceedings" if any wrongdoing is found, but it will still not solve the funds crisis at hand. Punjab had made commitments to the 15th Finance Commission (in 2019-20 during Amarinder Singh's tenure) to reform the electricity distribution system when it took the revenue deficit grant (RDG) for the period 2020-21 to 2025-26. The commission had recommended a 'post-devolution revenue deficit grant' of Rs 86,201 crore to 14 states, including for FY23.

As per the national tariff policy, Mann can neither cross-subsidise the free power nor can the state stress the distributor's balance sheet. This means he will have to pay the subsidies upfront to pass on the benefits. By deferring the implementation to July 1, Mann may have bought time to source the funds and also allow the kharif sowing season to proceed apace.

The AAP government has two workable options—cut down capital expenditure (around Rs 65,000 crore) or rework the free electricity supply to the farms. Punjab spends Rs 7,180 crore to provide free electricity to farms for irrigation. The state has 1.1 million land-owning farmers who operate around 1.1 million tubewells. Officials say roughly 370,000 of these are small/ marginal farmers, and almost the same number medium-size. The state has 310,000 farmers with 10-25-acre holdings and another 60,000 have over 25 acres. Officials have recommended that Mann charge the large farmers. In fact, economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia, in his expenditure reforms recommendations to the Punjab government (post-Covid scenarios), highlighted that around 56 per cent of the power subsidy goes to farmers who own more than 10 acres. In 2018, the Punjab state farmers' and farm workers' commission, too, had recommended the same.

But it's a political hornet's nest that could put the elite Jat Sikhs on the warpath. It's also quite complex to implement since most farms in Punjab either do not have electricity meters, or have outdated ones. The state has been providing free electricity since 1997, so neither the discoms nor the farmers have bothered to upgrade the system. There are even connections that allow irrigation facilities to multiple farms.

The Centre has been urging states to take up power reforms to cut down supply losses. It will be difficult to implement in Punjab, though. This time, the Jat Sikhs had moved en masse to AAP; and free electricity is a sensitive issue for the community. Mann has been claiming that his government doesn't intend to cut free power for farmers. Charging the big farmers for the same might sound politically correct, but will need serious political muscle to power through. ■

300 units
of free power a month from Jul. 1

₹10,668 cr.
Power subsidy bill for 2020-21

₹2.82 lakh cr.
Punjab's cumulative debt

IS IT AFFORDABLE?
Punjab spends Rs 7,180 crore to provide free electricity to irrigate farms

PRABHJOT GILL

Short of funds, Mann has two workable options—cut down capital expenditure or rejig the free electricity supply to the farms

E-COMMERCE

SO, WHAT'S NEU? TATA'S NEW APP

By M.G. Arun

It's a familiar feeling—sifting hurriedly through 50-odd apps downloaded on our phones to look for the one app we need in the moment. A "superapp" in such a situation would be quite the time-saver, a one-stop solution for all one could want—shopping for clothes, medicines or groceries, paying utility bills, browsing social media sites, booking a hotel or even buying airline tickets. On April 7, the Tata Group launched its much-publicised Tata Neu app for commercial use. It brings together all of its digital services and apps on a single platform with the possibility of onboarding third-party apps, too, in the future. Until Tata Neu, the Paytm app, launched in 2010, and Reliance's MyJio app, launched in 2016, with 100 million downloads each on Google Play Store, were said to have been the closest thing to what a superapp could offer. By April 18, Tata Neu had already seen over a million downloads on Play Store.

"Our aim is to ensure that Neu becomes a superapp which simplifies the life of every consumer, from a product, services and financial needs point of view," said N. Chandrasekaran, chairman of the Tata Group, at the launch. "And for that, the offerings may come from the Tata stable or from outside." The company will reward its users with 'Neu Coins' for spending on the app, which will be redeemable through the Neu Pass loyalty programme. Experts say this is a key factor distinguishing the app from others. "The biggest differentiating feature of the app is its loyalty programme with a single reward points system for all brands," says Varun Mishra, a senior analyst with Counterpoint Research.

THE SUPERAPP QUEST

(No. of downloads on Google Play Store, till Apr. 19, 2022)

MyJio	Paytm	Tata Neu
100 million+	100 million+	1 million+
(2016*)	(2010*)	(Apr. 2022*)

Year of launch (*)

"For example, points earned by spending on a hotel booking can be used for consumer appliances in Croma, giving customers a lot more flexibility and incentive to transact through the app."

Companies are vying to build a big mass of loyal customers in the digital space as e-commerce grows, driven by increasing internet penetration and use of smartphones. According to data analytics company GlobalData, the Indian e-commerce market is expected to grow by 21.5 per cent and hit $74.8 billion (Rs 5.7 lakh crore) in 2022. "Two basic innovations—Aadhaar and UPI—have been big enablers for this growth," says Harish H.V., managing partner at ECube Investment Advisors. These, along with the pandemic, have lent a big boost to the digitisation of services.

However, these apps still have a long way to go before they can offer sophisticated services like WeChat or Alipay do in China. These apps bundle together online messaging (similar to WhatsApp), social media (similar to Facebook), marketplaces (like eBay) and services (like Uber). "One of the reasons for WeChat's success has been the stickiness and frequent usage of its core service—chatting. It provided a platform to integrate other services around it. This is a factor missing from superapps in India," says Mishra. He adds that strategic expansion of the app into newer and more "sticky" categories with the use of a loyalty programme can help bridge this gap.

It is now crucial for Tata Neu to see if existing customers of various Tata digital platforms are able to migrate to this omnibus one, with all its distractions. "Today, a BigBasket customer is used to navigating a particular app. How easy will it be for them to navigate a comprehensive app like Neu?" asks Harish. Moreover, big players like Amazon gained a large customer base by offering large discounts in the initial stages. The question then is whether the Tatas will be able to provide similar incentives to build a massive customer base.

So far, user reactions have been mixed. "It is not at all user-friendly. Onscreen options are not available. Very slow," commented Mehmood Mulla on Google Play Store. Another user, Anoop Shah, hopes the app will improve with time. "I think some more services will make the app more super by adding features like messaging, calling, standard newspaper, video lectures and classes...," he wrote. With consumer expectations high, the Tatas have a real challenge on their hands—scaling up the app so that it can make good on its myriad promises. That will also answer the larger question: is integration the way to go? ■

BACK FOOT PLAY
CM Mamata Banerjee also holds the home portfolio in Bengal

ANI

HANSKHALI RAPE

TEMPER OVER DIDI'S INTEMPERANCE

By Romita Datta

In a state where even minor mistakes by politicians are seized upon by adversaries and blown up as far as they would go, this was a misstep that invited condemnation. So much so that the shrill cries of castigation by the Opposition had to be tempered by critical voices from the party under attack.

The alleged gangrape and murder of a 14-year-old Class 9 student at Hanskhali, Nadia, around 100 km from Kolkata, on April 4, had sent shockwaves across the state. The girl had gone to attend the birthday party of the 21-year-old main accused, Brajagopal Gayali, alias Sohail, who was arrested after an FIR was filed on April 10. Sohail was the son of gram panchayat member and local Trinamool Congress heavyweight Samar Gayali.

However, speaking at a state government event on April 11 in the presence of state police chief Manoj Malaviya, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee wondered if the incident could be called a rape. "I condemn the incident...but I heard there was a love affair between the boy and the girl. Was it an actual rape, love affair, a case of pregnancy or any other reason?"

As expected, Bengal's otherwise beleaguered Opposition trained their guns at the CM in a trice. BJP's Suvendu Adhikary, Leader of Opposition in the assembly, asked people to "rethink whom they've voted to power". Senior CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakraborty called it "unfortunate" and Congress's Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury cuttingly remarked, "Does this victim not fall under the TMC's Maa, Mati, Manush governance?" All of them suspected the CM was trying to shield a party member from the law.

The Opposition's shows of denunciation at the outrage and the CM's reaction to it are one matter; many citizens are deeply dismayed by the turn of affairs. Not only has there been a string of rape cases reported in Bengal in recent times, the accused in almost all of these are allegedly from the ruling TMC.

Yet, prima facie, the state police probe into the Hanskhali gangrape wasn't hushed up. After the victim died of excessive bleeding on April 5, she was hastily cremated in an alleged move to destroy evidence. Moreover, her parents lodged a police complaint only on April 10, five days after the girl's death. Her father alleged that the accused forced them into the hasty cremation. The matter came to light after a BSF personnel with BJP leanings apparently convinced them to file a complaint. After his arrest, Sohail was sent to 14-day judicial custody.

What drove Mamata to those remarks was, say political observers, the Opposition's continual linking of the alleged crime to the TMC. "She's always smelling a political conspiracy and thus combative. Sometimes she says things that she later regrets, but by then the damage has been done," says social scientist Prasanta Ray. A TMC insider concurs. "The TMC is one big family for her.... She's unsparing towards any offence and corruption, but doesn't like her family being criticised by the Opposition," he says. The nearest Mamata would get to publicly admit a faux pas came on the eve of the Bengali New Year on April 14, during a visit to the Kalighat temple in Kolkata. She had come to pray, she said, so that good sense and humanism prevail. "Politics aside, I am, after all, a human being...," she said.

Most people in Bengal would have instantly connected Mamata's Hanskhali remarks to those she

LITANY OF HORROR

MARCH 3

Class 4 student allegedly raped at Sagardwip. Accused is a Trinamool Congress worker

MARCH 22

Tribal woman in Basirhat raped by TMC worker

MARCH 24

17-year-old raped multiple times in Basirhat. Accused is TMC leader

APRIL 1

14-year-old Madrassa student allegedly gangraped in Harishchandrapur. Accused associated with TMC.

APRIL 1

Health worker raped at Galsi, Burdwan. Local police, TMC leaders allegedly threatened her against lodging a complaint.

APRIL 4

A minor allegedly raped by son of influential TMC leader in Hanskhali, Nadia

APRIL 10

A tribal minor raped multiple times at Bolpur. TMC leader arrested.

APRIL 11

Alleged rape attempt on differently abled woman at Pingla, West Midnapore by local panchayat member

APRIL 11

Class 9 student allegedly raped by TMC supporters.

APRIL 14

Tribal girl gangraped while returning from fair

APRIL 15

Minor girl survives rape attempt, sets herself on fire as political leaders allegedly pressure her to withdraw case

APRIL 16

Burdwan: Woman allegedly abducted, sexually assaulted in moving vehicle. Two TMC workers arrested.

made after the Park Street rape case in February 2012. After a woman returning from a night club was gangraped by five men in a car, Mamata made light of the incident, trying to play it down as "fabricated" and "minor".

Senior TMC leaders Saugata Roy and Mahua Moitra added to the gasps of horror by speaking out against the rising graph of atrocities against women. As Mamata is in charge of the home portfolio, their remarks have created a flutter in the TMC leadership.

Visiting the family of the Hanskhali victim, Moitra, the MP from Krishnanagar, Nadia, said, "The question of consent is being talked about. Even consensual sex with a minor is illegal; it is rape in the eyes of law." It was in complete departure from what Mamata hinted at. "As a party MP...I will not tolerate such things. The only identity of the accused is that he's a criminal," she added. Dum Dum MP Roy was even more direct. "In a state that has a woman chief minister, if any incident of atrocity on women occurs under her leadership, it is a matter of

A TMC VETERAN SAYS MAMATA REGRETTED HER WORDS AND SENT MOITRA TO NADIA TO SEND A MESSAGE

DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

OPPOSITION OUTRAGE
A BJP team led by Bharati Ghosh visits the victim's home in Hanskhali, Nadia

shame for all of us," he said. Predictably, some TMC leaders rushed to Mamata's defence. MP Satabdi Roy said atrocities on women had nothing to do with the gender of a chief minister. "Does the chief minister want such incidents to occur?" she said. State vice-president Jay Prakash Majumdar echoed her.

Two related explanations about the motives behind Moitra and Roy's statements are doing the rounds. The first is that Moitra and Roy, both reportedly close to Mamata's nephew and TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, were rushed in for damage control by a section of the party. A party veteran, however, confided that Mamata herself regretted her words and sent her party MP from Nadia (Moitra) to iterate the party's stand of zero tolerance to such incidents. Be that as it may, their remarks have caused some embarrassment to the party.

The BJP, still smarting at the loss in the assembly poll, sundry bypolls, civic polls and, most recently, in bypolls to the Asansol and Ballygunge seats, grabbed the opening with alacrity. The central leadership promptly sent a National Commission for Women fact-finding

team. Now, after the April 12 direction of the Calcutta High Court, the CBI has registered a case on the basis of the police FIR and is probing the alleged crime in Hanskhali.

Within 10 days of the Hanskhali incident, five more rape cases have hit the headlines, and most of them could allegedly be traced to Trinamool men. Like in Hanskhali, police action in all cases has been speedy. But there is no doubt that the Opposition will flog the issue to its absolute end. The BJP certainly looks determined to extract the last ounce of indignation out of every incident of unnatural death in Bengal. An audio clip featuring a purported telephone conversation between two BJP members, planning to pin the TMC down over an alleged murder-rape in Ranghat, Nadia, proves the point, says Trinamool. The BJP denies the charge.

"In West Bengal, the opposition parties are pointing fingers at TMC as they have lost relevance after humiliating defeats. People cannot forget incidents of murder-gangrape like Bantala and Dhantala during the Left regime or, for that matter, Hathras and Unnao in Yogi's UP," points out TMC Rajya Sabha MP Sukhendu Shekhar Ray.

Meanwhile, the Calcutta HC has asked IPS officer Damayanti Sen to oversee the probes into four recent rape cases from across the state. She had, in the teeth of opposition from Mamata's government, identified the accused in the Park Street rape case. As a reward, she was shunted out of the city police. ■

BYPOLL RESULTS

FIVE-NIL CREATES NO PANIC IN BJP

By Kaushik Deka

Political pundits caution against taking bypoll results seriously, for they are often won by the party in power in a particular state. The BJP's defeat at the hands of the Samajwadi Party in the bypolls to Gorakhpur and Phulpur in 2018 is an example. A year later, the saffron party won 62 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

Thus, the drubbing the BJP got in the byelections held in five seats (one Lok Sabha and four assembly) in four states—West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh—may not worry it much. Barring Bihar, it's not in power in the other three. In Chhattisgarh, where the assembly poll is due next year, there is enough time to repair the damage. Besides, in Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, the BJP has not lost its vote share.

But there is more to politics than just electoral arithmetic. Despite mounting a high-pitched campaign against the TMC in Bengal, the BJP's electoral outing was a disaster. In the Ballygunge assembly seat, it finished third behind the CPI(M). What added to the embarrassment was that the two TMC winners—Shatrughan Sinha in the Asansol Lok Sabha seat and Babul Supriyo in Ballygunge—were former BJP star leaders. Sinha, in fact, helped TMC wrest Asansol for the first time.

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

BOTH SHATRUGHAN AND BABUL SUPRIYO, WHO WON FROM BENGAL, HAVE BEEN STAR LEADERS OF THE BJP IN THE PAST

In Bihar, the RJD's victory in the Bochahan assembly constituency is a warning sign for the BJP. Though it has claimed that it lost because former ally Vikassheel Insaan Party fielded a candidate, the result shows the importance of having better ties with allies, particularly in Bihar, where the BJP-JD(U) coalition has faced friction. In Maharashtra, Congress candidate Jayashri Jadhav won the bypoll to the Kolhapur North assembly seat. In Chhattisgarh, Congress's Yashoda Verma won the Khairagarh assembly bypoll.

On April 16, the day the bypoll results came out, opposition leaders Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, M.K. Stalin, Hemant Soren, Tejashwi Yadav, Farooq Abdullah and Sitaram Yechury sent a letter to PM Narendra Modi, requesting him to maintain communal harmony. The timing could be coincidence, but success in a national electoral battle against the BJP will need consistent unity among opposition parties that goes beyond issuing joint statements. That's nowhere in sight at the moment. ■

BATTLEGROUND ROYALE
The Daly College campus in Indore

DALY COLLEGE

King's Gambit

By Rahul Noronha

In Madhya Pradesh, politics has found an unusual battlefield—Daly College. The prestigious public school in Indore, established in 1870, has as its alumni some of the state's political bigwigs—former CM Digvijaya Singh, MLA Laxman Singh, former Union minister Arun Yadav, the current Guna Lok Sabha MP K.P. Yadav and seven MLAs from the state.

In a hostile takeover of the school board on April 6, Narendra Singh Jhabua, of the erstwhile royal family of Jhabua and the president of the board at the time, and his son Jai Singh, a parents' nominee on the board, were forced out by a group within the board. Sources say the trouble began over then principal Neeraj Bedhotiya seeking an extension. One section of the board was opposed to it, while the Jhabuas were in favour. The father and son were taken by surprise when they were stopped by the sub divisional magistrate (SDM), a tehsildar and police personnel from attending a board meeting. The SDM was carrying out orders from the office of registrar of firms and societies, which had apparently received a complaint on April 4 by an ex-student about Narendra Singh having his son on the board.

The school's board has 10 members—two alumni, two government nominees, two parents' nominees, two old donors, usually members of the erstwhile royal families, one new donor, and the principal, an ex officio member without voting rights. From among these, the president and vice-president are elected for a period of five years. The present board came into being in December 2020. After alumni Dheeraj Lulla and Sandeep Parekh were elected, the BJP government nominated BJP MLA Rajvardhan Singh (of the Narsinghgarh royal family) and Vikram Singh Puar (of the erstwhile Dewas family), whose mother is Dewas BJP MLA Gayatri Raje. Narendra Singh Jhabua and Congress MLA Priyavrat Singh were elected from the category of old donors, while Harpal Singh Bhatia was brought on as the new donor. Sumit Chandhok and Jai Singh Jhabua were parents' nominees. The members then elected Narendra Singh as president.

THE CLASH WITHIN THE SCHOOL BOARD HAS TURNED INTO A PROXY WAR BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE BJP

The clash within the school board has now turned into a proxy war between the Congress and the BJP with certain board members affiliated to the latter allegedly calling in the Indore administration to help them establish control over the board and edging out the Jhabuas, who are close to Congress leader Digvijaya Singh.

The board, on April 6, elected Vikram Singh Puar as president and Rajvardhan Singh as vice-president. Recently, Gunmeet Kaur Bindra became Daly's first ever woman principal. "The presence of the police on campus suggests that the government is keen on controlling the school," says a former student. So why is Daly's board so sought-after? Besides the prestige, all decisions related to the working of the school, including admissions, have to be approved by the board. It also helps that the institution is flush with funds.

Digvijaya Singh expressed his anguish over the fracas on social media: "Unfortunately, because of some vested interests, the MP government and Indore administration are openly flouting rules and interfering in the functioning of the School.... For god's sake, don't make Daly College a political *akhada*."

The matter has now reached the high court. Jai Singh moved the Indore High Court on April 13 and secured a stay against his removal from the board. "The notice was unconstitutional.... The subsequent stay by the HC vindicates my stand," Jai Singh told INDIA TODAY. Narendra Singh may move court too, say sources. Keeping politics out of Daly is clearly just a pipe dream. ■

IN MOURNING
Funeral of Satish Singh, a Kashmiri Rajput killed by a militant in Kulgam, Apr. 13

WASEEM ANDRABI/GETTY IMAGES

KASHMIR

RICOCHETS FROM THE PAST

By Moazum Mohammad

When gunshots rang out inside a Hindu home in south Kashmir's Kulgam district in the evening of April 13 just as the call for prayers was announced from the nearby mosque, the victim was not just Satish Singh, a Rajput truck driver, but also the inter-religious concord in Kakran. For decades, Muslims and Hindus have been coming to this village to visit the shrine of Kashmir's revered Sufi saint Hazrat Sheikh Nuruddin, popularly called Nund Rishi and Alamdar-e-Kashmir, and the refurbished ancient temple of Mata Katyayani a few steps away.

The bullets of the unidentified militant that riddled Satish's body have also blown holes in the social fabric of the district that is home to 40-odd Rajput families who did not leave the Valley during the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989-90. Satish's old mud house and seven other houses of Rajput families are inside a large compound with a traditional wooden entrance.

"We lived together with our Muslims neighbours and had no dispute with anyone over land or property," says Satish's brother Anil Kumar, an orchard farmer. "We don't know why my brother was killed. I am afraid of stepping out of the house now." The last time the 42-year-old visited the local market was just moments before tragedy befell the family. Four days later, when it was time for spraying insecticides in his orchard, Anil had to request his neighbours to do it. Another brother, who works with the Central Industrial Security Force and is posted outside Jammu and Kashmir, quickly left the village after a last glimpse of Satish's face.

With militants stepping up attacks on minorities in the state since March, there is growing fear among Hindus and many are leaving for the plains in Jammu or the few

A DEADLY SURGE

MARCH 2 Panchayat member killed at Srandoo village of Kulgam

MARCH 10 Sarpanch killed at Khonmoh, Srinagar

MARCH 11 Sarpanch killed at Adoora village of Kulgam

MARCH 12 CRPF jawan killed at his home in Shopian

MARCH 19 Non-local carpenter shot and injured in Aripal area of Pulwama

MARCH 21 Non-local street vendor shot and injured at Gangoo village of Pulwama

APRIL 3 Two non-locals shot and injured at Lassipora, Pulwama

APRIL 4 Kashmiri Pandit shot and injured in Shopian

APRIL 7 Non-local shot and injured at Yader village of Pulwama

APRIL 13 Kashmiri Rajput man killed at Kakran village in Kulgam

APRIL 15 Sarpanch killed at Pattan village of Baramulla

secured enclaves that have come up in parts of the Valley to encourage Pandits to return. Abandoning their native homes is, of course, not easy for the Rajputs of Kakran: they had chosen to continue here, and build their lives, despite decades of insurgency. "We stayed due to the affection of our Muslim neighbours. But now we feel threatened," says Kuljeet Singh. "And where will we go? Even if we sell the entire property, we wouldn't be able to buy a house in Jammu or another city."

By this March, according to data compiled by the Union ministry of home affairs, 14 Hindus, including Pandits, had been killed since the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019. Besides minorities, non-local migrant workers and elected members of panchayats are also in the crosshairs of militants. The past two years saw 38 targeted attacks, including 12 this year. The attacks have triggered a wave of fear among migrant workers who recently arrived in the Valley. "My parents, wife and children have been calling me several times a day since hearing of the attacks. They are worried about my well-being and want me to return home," says Sanjay Kumar, a 38-year-old mason from Bihar who has been coming to Srinagar for work every year since 2003. Annually, an estimated 1 million workers come to the Valley from states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal to earn a living as masons, carpenters, vendors, embroiderers etc.

NEW MILITANT OUTFITS ARE TARGETING LOCAL HINDUS, MIGRANT WORKERS AND PANCHAYAT MEMBERS

It is widely believed that The Resistance Front (TRF)—a new outfit that emerged on the scene after August 2019 and which the police describe as an offshoot of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)—is responsible for most of the attacks on minorities and migrants. These attacks are said to be in response to the abrogation of Article 35A, which had empowered the J&K legislature to define the state's permanent residents and give them rights denied to others. DGP Dilbagh Singh, however, believes successful operations such as the killing of two Pakistani LeT militants within a week after they attacked CRPF personnel in Srinagar has frustrated terror outfits. "That is why they are assigning soft targets to new recruits," he says.

Many like former deputy chief minister and BJP leader Nirmal Singh see the targeted attacks as part of the agenda of 'Gazwa-e-Hind', a term Pakistani militants use to describe a "holy war to conquer India". "Communal tension during Ramnavami (in parts of India) was orchestrated by some elements and the same is happening in Kashmir (to drive out Hindus), but people won't allow this to succeed," says Singh. Another motive, adds the BJP leader, is to disrupt the Centre's efforts to bring in investors to set up industries in the region. According to the Union home ministry, the J&K government has received investment proposals worth Rs 51,000 crore so far, and plans are afoot for the first J&K Global Investors' Summit.

Amid the spurt in targeted killings, the little-known Lashkar-e-Islam recently sent a threatening letter to the Veerwan Pandit camp in Baramulla, setting off panic among Hindus in the Valley. Comparing the current situation with that of the '90s when the community was "backstabbed and forced to leave Kashmir by creating a hostile environment", Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti president Sanjay Tickoo says similar conditions are being created again. "Though the people responsible were small in number, the collective silence of others created a trust deficit between communities that continues. In 1990, the hit lists were circulated from mosques; now, it's done through the internet. But the mentality that minorities have to face remains the same." The ghosts have returned to haunt them. ■

MAHARASHTRA

UDDHAV TAKES A U-TURN ON REFINERY

By Kiran D. Tare

BREAKING GROUND CM Uddhav Thackeray is keen to avoid the 'anti-development' tag

On March 27, Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan revealed Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's best-kept secret at a function organised by Marathi daily *Loksatta* in Mumbai. Pradhan, who handled the ministry of petroleum and natural gas earlier, said Thackeray has changed his mind on a proposed petrochemical refinery in coastal district Ratnagiri in the Konkan region, which he vehemently opposed earlier. On the next day, it became clear that Thackeray had indeed written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 12 expressing his willingness to acquire land for the refinery at Barsu village instead of the original site at nearby Nanar in the same taluka, Rajapur.

At Barsu, however, the villagers are unwilling to accept Thackeray's revised proposal. On March 30, they marched in large numbers to the Rajapur tehsil office under the banner of the Barsu-Solgaon Panchkroshi Refinery Virodhi Sanghatana and asked the government not to go ahead with the project as it would harm the environment. "We will fight to save our land till our last breath. The villagers are united against the proposed refinery," says Amol Bole, president of the organisation.

The $60 billion project, aiming at an annual oil production capacity of 60 million tonnes, had been a major reason for strained relations between the Shiv Sena and the BJP when they jointly ruled the state from 2014 to 2019. While PM Modi was keen on setting up the refinery at Nanar, Thackeray claimed that the project would adversely affect the environment of the entire Ratnagiri district, besides destroying fishing and the cultivation of mangoes, jackfruit and paddy in the area.

"UDDHAV HAS CHOSEN BUSINESS OVER THE ENVIRONMENT," SAYS A SENIOR LEADER OF THE SHIV SENA

Proposed in 2015 by the Centre, the refinery is to be constructed by the Saudi Arabia-based oil giant Saudi Armaco, the world's largest oil producer, and the UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). They have a 50:50 joint venture with Ratnagiri Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (RRPCL). Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum have invested in RRPCL. The Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC), headed by Shiv Sena's Subhash Desai since 2014, has been tasked with land acquisition for this ambitious project.

ANI

The original plan to set up the refinery at Nanar would have needed land from 17 villages in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. In his letter to Modi, Thackeray proposed an alternative site at Barsu as "90 per cent of the land available there is barren and no displacement of people is required". Assuring his complete support, the Maharashtra CM offered 13,000 hectares at Barsu for the refinery and 867.6 hectares in another village, Nate, for a crude oil terminal. "We are ready to hand over the land immediately after getting clearances from the Centre," he reportedly wrote to Modi.

Thackeray's assurance comes just a few years after he had cited environmental concerns to stall land acquisition by the MIDC in 2018. At that time, he had advised then CM Devendra Fadnavis to relocate the refinery to his hometown Nagpur—a suggestion that many laughed at as refineries are usually set up at places close to the sea, unlike Nagpur. And in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha election, Thackeray agreed to a pre-poll alliance with BJP only after the proposed project was put on hold.

So, why this change of heart? According to a senior Shiv Sena leader, the CM has chosen business over environment. "An investment of Rs 3 lakh crore and employment to one lakh people is something he (Thackeray) can't overlook at a time of economic distress," the leader says. Partial lockdowns due to the Covid pandemic have cost Maharashtra 30 per cent of its revenue—around Rs 1.25 lakh crore in the past one year. Surely, Thackeray wants to avoid the 'anti-development' tag.

The Sena chief is also seeking some political dividend. His party is facing stiff competition from Sharad Pawar's NCP (Nationalist Congress Party) and the BJP in its bastion, Konkan, which elects 35 legislators to the 288-member assembly. The BJP has roped in Thackeray's bête noire Narayan Rane to shake the Sena. Rane, the Union minister for MSME, has an ambitious plan to provide loans at minimal rates to Konkan youth under certain schemes of his ministry. The NCP, too, is trying to spread its wings in the region, and in the face of its aggressive posturing, the Sena looks like a divided house. In January, senior Sena leader Ramdas Kadam held his colleague Anil Parab responsible for depression among party workers in Konkan. The infighting could damage the party's prospects in the next election.

Meanwhile, it has been alleged that the Sena's changed stance on the refinery has much to do with an intention to benefit some people who have bought land near Barsu. Nitesh Rane, the BJP MLA from Kankavali, alleges that Sena leaders are involved in the land dealings. Uday Samant, higher and technical education minister, refutes the allegation. "If you check the land records, you will know the real landowners in the area," he says. Samant had defected from the NCP to the Sena in 2019.

While the CM is yet to comment on the issue, his son and environment minister Aaditya Thackeray said on March 28 that the refinery will come up only after seeking the consent of locals. "There are two opinions (for and against) about the refinery. It is most important that the project is discussed and local people are taken into confidence," he told reporters. "Second is what the project-affected people will get, and their relocation. The third thing is ensuring that local people, including women, get jobs."

Thackeray's about-turn has stunned Sena workers in Konkan. It will be interesting to see how he defends his revised stand. ■

RAJASTHAN

BRIBES FOR BIOFUEL

By Rohit Parihar

ALL THAT GLITTERS (From top clockwise) The residence in Jaipur that was raided; Rathore; ACB officials needed a machine to count all the seized cash

On April 7, when officers of the Rajasthan anti-corruption bureau (ACB) raided the residence of Surendra Singh Rathore, the CEO of Rajasthan Biofuel Authority (BFA) and a joint secretary in the rural development department, they unearthed Rs 3.62 crore in cash and details of unaccounted-for assets worth Rs 100 crore. Rathore had earlier been caught red-handed accepting Rs 5 lakh in cash, when apparently he boasted to the ACB officers: "You can't do anything to me. I run a thousand crore business."

But more than the cash, what surprised officials is the extent of corruption in the biofuels sector, deemed a novel concept aimed at reducing the nation's use of fossil fuels. Rathore himself personifies this, having risen from the post of havildar in the Indian Air Force (IAF) to an office equivalent to the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) in just 15 years. In his defence, Rathore told the court hearing his bail plea that "the cash seized was the collection from the mining and toll business of my son Deependra Singh...and so are the assets".

Annual bribes, documented thus far, are estimated to be around Rs 20 crore, and this is just from the manufacturers/ vendors for the licence to let them function. The ACB is still to track the main vein, the money taken from sellers of spurious diesel to let them operate. The ACB had Rathore under observation for some time and, in one incident, the wary BFA CEO had reportedly burnt cash worth Rs 20 lakh fearing a raid. "He was brazenly extorting bribes," alleged Dinesh M.N., additional director-general, ACB.

Rathore's hold over the government machinery too has brazen written all over it. In fact, there were even a few attempts to nominate the ex-havildar to the IAS cadre in the past decade but it didn't go through. "His appointment, postings and the all-round corruption were backed heavily by some powerful politicians from both the BJP and Congress as well as a section of the bureaucracy," alleged a senior officer who was reportedly privy to some of the dubious dealings in the department.

There are already indications that a possible cover-up is under way. The ACB hasn't pressed before the court the need to investigate the money trail, nor has it involved the income tax authorities or Enforcement Directorate in the probe. Sources allege that there is pressure to confine the investigations to Rathore being caught red-handed. K.K. Pathak, secretary, rural development, who is heading the committee looking into Rathore's appointment as CEO and any malpractices in his decisons says, "Prima facie, it appears the appointment rules were tweaked to suit only one candidate (Rathore). It will take time to examine all the documents to prove any malafide." An ex-chief secretary and some top IAS officers who worked with the rural department in the past, and a few on deputation at the Centre, are reportedly under the scanner.

Rathore, an ex-havildar who rose to be the key figure in the biofuels scam, once allegedly burnt Rs 20 lakh in cash, fearing a raid

One of the complainants alleged that Rathore was taking Rs 15 lakh each month from the 10 bio-diesel manufacturers besides bribes from retailers in lieu of registration and NOCs. The extent of the bribe-taking was such that it was eating into nearly 80 per cent of the profit, says one source. Rathore was also said to be getting a cut from the spurious diesel sellers. "He suggested that we too start selling the spurious bio-diesel to make extra profit...he was always boasting about his contacts among the top leaders and bureaucrats," a retailer told INDIA TODAY on condition of anonymity. All eyes are now on the state government—will the high-profile case get a quiet burial or will we see some top heads roll? ■

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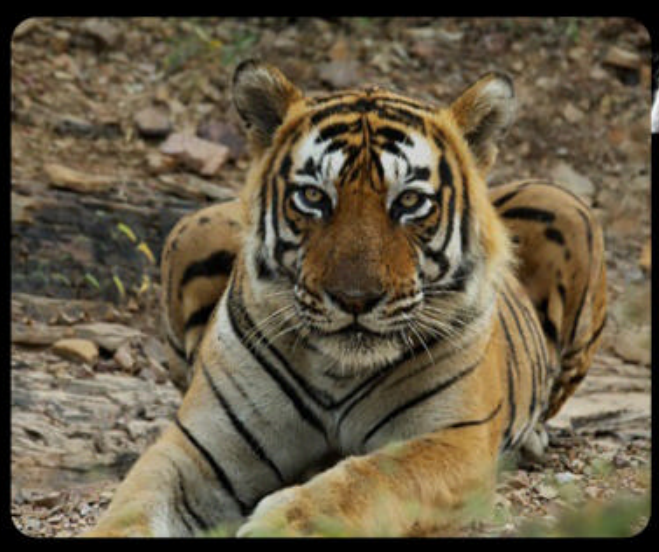


Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

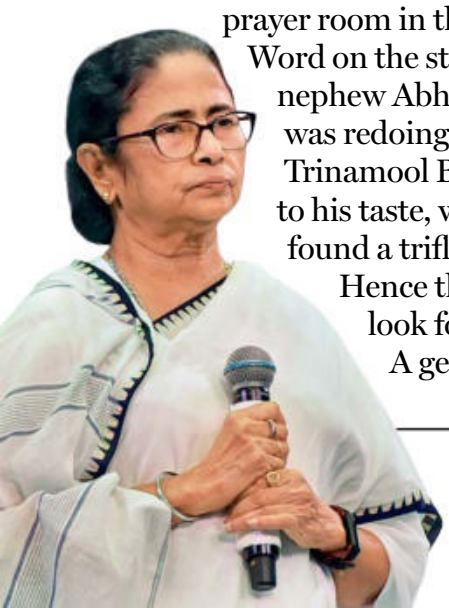
GLASSHOUSE

OLD GUARD, NEW BATTLES

On April 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya—dedicated to all the 14 prime ministers of India—at the Teen Murti Estate in Delhi. Given that Teen Murti Estate was first Jawaharlal Nehru's home and, later, his memorial, the Congress was opposed to the museum, alleging that it was the BJP's way of undermining him. No one from the Gandhi family attended the inauguration; instead, the Congress released a video the next day celebrating PMs from the grand old party. To no one's surprise, P.V. Narasimha Rao, who goes largely unacknowledged by the Congress due to his bitter relationship with Sonia Gandhi, was missing in the video. Last year, a BJP attempt to embarrass the Congress by releasing a commemorative stamp on PVN's 100th birthday was scuttled after a leak before its official release. A stamp of disapproval?

Generation Gap

West Bengal chief minister **Mamata Banerjee's** new Trinamool office is all done. Though located on the same street as the old office, EM Bypass, it doesn't quite have the swank of the former. Apart from her room, Mamata also has a separate prayer room in the new office. Word on the street is that nephew Abhishek Banerjee was redoing the former Trinamool Bhawan according to his taste, which Mamata found a trifle flamboyant. Hence the decision to look for a new address. A generational gap?



FALLING IN LINE

Former Rajasthan chief minister **Vasundhara Raje** had, until recently, resisted showing her true saffron colours in public. However, on a visit to Karauli following the riots, she cried discrimination and asked the administration, "Is it a crime to be a Hindu here?" Raje also warned officials of stern action if she came to power. At another event, she recalled how she had spent Rs 550 crore on developing temples in Rajasthan and lauded PM Modi for building the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Seems like Raje is finally toeing the party line.

JUMPING THE GUN

On April 15, Bihar BJP chief **Sanjay Jaiswal** was among the last to arrive at Chief Minister **Nitish Kumar's** house for an Iftar party. But that is not all Jaiswal is late for. He is yet to placate Nitish after making a comment that Nitish will be CM only till 2025. It was construed as a signal from the BJP that it might be thinking ahead of the alliance. On April 16, the Rashtriya Janata Dal's drubbing of the BJP by over 36,000 votes in the Bochaha assembly bypoll made it clear that Jaiswal's assertions may well have alienated Nitish's voters.

Mirror Image

Outgoing army chief **Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane** and his successor **Lt. Gen. Manoj Pande** have several things in common besides their first name. Both come from respected Maharashtrian families. Naravane's mother Sudha was a newsreader with the All India Radio in Pune, while Pande's mother Prema was an annoucer for the AIR in Nagpur. Both their siblings are in the armed forces, too. Talk about following the leader!

—Kaushik Deka with Rohit Parihar, Kiran D. Tare, Amitabh Srivastava and Romita Datta

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COVER STORY

A DEEPENI

DESPITE THE DEPRESSING FAMILIARITY SEEN ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THERE IS ALSO A

ASHISH VAISHNAV/GETTY IMAGES

LOUD, LOUDER A procession for Hanuman Jayanti in Hyderabad (left); and Muslim students in Mumbai protest the ban on religious clothing in Karnataka colleges

NG DIVIDE?

OF THE RECENT HINDU-MUSLIM CLASHES — PALPABLE SENSE THAT THIS TIME IS DIFFERENT

HATE IN TIMES OF PRAYER

India's religious festivals are enthusiastically celebrated at home and are world famous everywhere else. The crowds, the colour, the din, the passion. Not to mention the hatred, the obscenities, the bloodshed and broken bones. The bulldozers... Perhaps there was a time when it might have been considered a blessing that fasting days of the Navratras and Ramzan coincided as closely as they did this month. A conjunction that might cause observant Hindus and Muslims to reflect on their cultural affinities or even their common humanity.

This is not that time. This is not that country. Instead, we had a slow-motion pile-up of Hindu-Muslim clashes that snaked across our land in a sorry sequence that we may not have seen since the days of the Rath Yatra in 1990. Nothing about this is a coincidence, of course. Indeed, with so many decades of hindsight, it's hard to ignore the malice aforethought in this dismal itinerary: from a boycott of Muslim vendors in Karnataka, to the intimidation of butchers in the NCR, to the flag-waving motorcycle gangs displaying their machismo, to stones thrown and shots fired as they passed through the narrow lanes of a certain community. Yes, 'a certain community', 'narrow lanes,' 'mandir-masjid'—it doesn't take much to invoke the mise en scène of this miserably familiar narrative. We know riots don't just 'happen', that polarisation is political. Our eyes are trained to scan suspiciously past the headlines for the names that will betray the religious affiliation of the latest victim or perpetrator in the morning papers. And we have learnt to cluck to ourselves about the historic wounds to our wounded civilisation. The many invaders. Our divide-and-rulers.

The thing is, they don't rule us any longer, do they? Yet after over seven years of a muscular Hindutvist government in New Delhi, the enduring sense of grievance against Muslims remains fresh. For 'appeasment' politics, for Kashmiri separatism, for Islamic radicalism, for making a song and dance about hijabs. So why did the Ramnavami-Ramzan riots cause such consternation? Perhaps it was the 'weaponisation' of festivals (quite literally given the massed swords and firearms suddenly on display) or the eruption of an uninhibitedly extremist 'fringe' of sants and sadhvis, a self-appointed vanguard of militant majoritarianism. Do these phenomena signal an escalation of communal hostility, a deepening of the 'great divide'? Or are we witnessing just another episode, of our country's perversely punctuated equilibrium?

THE RAMNAVAMI-HANUMAN JAYANTI RIOTS HAVE BROUGHT INTO FOCUS THE 'WEAPONISATION' OF FESTIVALS

This week, we turned to a number of prominent, politically engaged voices to ask what auguries they see in the boiling communal cauldron. Their responses, which range from despair to muted warnings, are far from hopeful, but they do suggest that this festival of hate has given pause for thought at either end of the polarised political spectrum. As peace returns—to the growl of vengeful bulldozers, bans on religious processions, a strong-armed police presence on the streets and surveillance drones above, there is the disconcerting realisation that we are being taught to be grateful for order and authority. ■

THE HIJAB

The controversy around the hijab first erupted on January 1 at the Government PU College in Udupi, Karnataka, when six girl students claimed they were not allowed to enter classrooms wearing hijabs, a face covering. Their protest against the college authorities soon became a nationwide movement, with several states seeing similar protests. In a college in Karnataka's Mandya, when a Muslim girl was allegedly heckled by boys in saffron scarves chanting 'Jai Shri Ram', she shouted back, 'Allah hu Akbar'. The Karnataka government justified the ban on hijab in classrooms under its 1983 Education Act, under which, it said, it can issue directions to schools and colleges to ensure maintenance of public order. The matter reached the Karnataka High Court, which upheld the state government's order, saying the hijab was not essential to Islam. The matter is now pending with the Supreme Court.

Illustrations by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

HALAL MEAT

The halal row started after the festival of Ugadi on April 2, when some right-wing groups in Karnataka, including the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, launched a campaign against the purchase of halal meat, traditionally consumed by Muslims. The BJP's national general secretary C.T. Ravi even compared halal meat to an economic jihad. The protests took a violent turn in Bhadravati in the state's Shivamogga district, where five men were arrested for assaulting a man in a meat shop and another at a restaurant. The next day, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the state will investigate the halal meat issue as serious objections were raised about it. In November 2021, a similar campaign against halal meat was mounted on social media in Kerala.

LOUDSPEAKERS IN MOSQUES

Over the past year, several right-wing organisations, including the Bajrang Dal, have demanded that the 'azaan' not be offered using loudspeakers. They even threatened to retaliate by playing 'bhajans' on loudspeakers near mosques. On April 2, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray urged the Maharashtra government to remove loudspeakers from mosques and threatened to play the 'Hanuman Chalisa' loudly if his demands were not met. On April 18, the Nashik police commissioner issued an order directing all religious places to seek permission before using loudspeakers by May 3. The police also prohibited the recitation of 'Hanuman Chalisa' within a 150-metre radius of a mosque.

The Supreme Court had in July 2005 banned the use of loudspeakers and music systems between 10 pm and 6 am in public places, except in cases of public emergencies. In August 2016, the Bombay High Court ruled that the use of loudspeaker was not a fundamental right. On May 15, 2020, the Allahabad High Court held that azaan could be recited only by a human voice, without using any amplifying device. In November 2021, the Karnataka High Court asked the state government to explain the provisions of the law under which loudspeakers and public address systems had been allowed in mosques, and what action is being taken to restrict their use.

RAMNAVAMI PROCESSIONS

Several states witnessed Hindu-Muslim clashes during Ramnavami in April. In Khargone, Madhya Pradesh, Muslim locals allegedly pelted stones at a Ramnavami rally, sparking a riot in which houses and shops were set ablaze and over two dozen people were injured. Muslims claim that the people in the procession were playing provocative songs. Similar, if smaller, clashes occurred in Gujarat, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka and West Bengal. In Goa and Gujarat, two mosques were set afire for allegedly sheltering stone-pelters. In Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, ABVP students clashed with Left-leaning students over the serving and eating of non-vegetarian food during Navaratri.

HANUMAN JAYANTI PROCESSIONS

Nine people were injured in clashes between Hindus and Muslims on Hanuman Jayanti in Delhi's Jahangirpuri area on April 16. Three processions were taken out and it was the third one that saw trouble since no permission had been granted for it. Those who organised it allegedly took a route next to a mosque located close to a temple. The loud religious chants clashed with the azaan, leading to violence between the two groups. An FIR was registered against the organisers of the procession and nearly 25 people were arrested.

By **Shashi Tharoor**

The author is a Lok Sabha MP from Thiruvananthapuram, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology and chairman, All-India Professionals Congress

The Toxin of Hate

Injected into our body politic for narrow electoral gain, the communal poison has envenomed society and turned India into something that it never was

When the Editor asks, 'Is the Divide Deepening?', I do not find myself thinking immediately of the depressingly familiar tragedies that must have prompted his question—the communal rioting, mob lynchings and cow vigilantism that have scarred our society—nor even the manufactured controversies over hijab, halal meat and azaan on loudspeakers that have recently served to marginalise our country's Muslim minority. Instead, I find myself thinking of three seemingly trivial anecdotes that came to my attention in recent weeks, which illustrated the divide more directly, if less starkly, for me.

Episode One: In Jaipur recently, I met a blonde Lebanese lady who had been coming to India for 15 years to deal in handicrafts and jewellery. Visibly foreign, she had been warmly welcomed in the past; when she introduced herself as Nour, people would say, "Oh, what a lovely name! We have the same name in India! We know it means 'light'!" Today, she says, things have changed. When she says her name is Nour, the reaction she gets is immediate: "Oh, you are Muslim?" The question, and the tone of the query, says it all. She is less sure now that she will be coming back as often.

Episode Two: A former Indian ambassador, who had enjoyed something of a reputation during his MEA career as a hawk on Pakistan and on Islamist terrorism, told me of a friend of his, an eminent surgeon in Kabul. The surgeon, alarmed by the rising influence of the Taliban in his country, decided, at this ambassador's prompting, to send his wife and children to India (not Pakistan!) to live and study, free from resurgent Islamic fundamentalism. They rented a flat in Gurgaon, enrolled in a good school. But within a year they realised this was no longer the India the surgeon had remembered when he took his decision. The most painful blow came when the children's playmates in their apartment building announced to them, "Our parents told us not to play with you because you are Muslim." My ambassador friend, in shock and despair, said he advised the surgeon, "Take your children to Dubai or London. I am ashamed that I encouraged you to bring them up in my country."

Episode Three: An Indian at the United Nations, an experienced peace negotiator who had served in many trouble spots across the Middle East, found himself in an Arab country in a tense meeting with an Islamic militant, complete with beard, turban and Kalashnikov. The ice broke: even though it was Ramadan, the militant lit up, offered the UN man a cigarette, laughed and joked expansively as they discussed a thorny issue. Then he asked, almost casually: "And where are you from?" When the UN official said "India", the mood changed instantly. "India? I have heard how you are treating Muslims there. Get out, UN man, or I will not be responsible for what happens to you." The UN official tried to remonstrate that the militant was misinformed, as did the European UN official accompanying him, but the militant would not be mollified. His sources, he said, were multiple: he might be a militant, but he read and watched the world media. The meeting was over. The Indian got out by the skin of his teeth.

Yes, I am aware of the limitations

Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

of analysis by anecdote. But these three unrelated and disconnected incidents, all of which came to my notice in a span of two or three weeks, reveal the extent to which the communal divide has deepened in our society. The toxin that has been injected into our body politic, in pursuit of the petty political goal of communal polarisation, has inevitably had repercussions that go far beyond the specific electoral gains that might accrue to the forces spreading the poison. It has envenomed our society, turning India into something it never was.

What has changed can be anatomised. Things are now being said from public platforms, and recorded and widely distributed via social media, that in the past would have been considered inappropriate to say even behind closed doors in your living room. Bigotry is openly expressed and hate speech has become so commonplace that it no longer arouses comment. There was a time when India's central and state governments went out of their way to set an example of communal harmony and convey public disapproval of its opposite. Today, the authorities hardly ever raise their voice to condemn such utterances and, if violence follows, take no action against those who instigate it, provided they belong to the "majority community".

NATIONAL INTEGRATION, ONCE A SINCERE PRACTICE, IS NOW ABOUT SUBMITTING TO THE DOMINANT COMMUNITY'S NARRATIVE

I grew up in an India where the "Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb" was celebrated and "national integration" was a slogan and a practice. Today, nationalism is equated with majoritarianism and integration implies only submission to the dominant community's narrative.

In my childhood, "entertainment tax" used to be waived on films like *Amar Akbar Anthony*, the tale of three toddlers separated in infancy who are brought up as Hindu, Muslim and Christian and unite at the end to defeat the bad guys. Today, it is waived on a film like *The Kashmir Files* whose screenings end in patrons baying for revenge against Muslims.

In the India the world knew, Indians were treated with respect and honour across the Muslim world, not least because they were seen as a land that Muslims proudly hailed as their own. Today, Indians are associated with the persecution of Muslims and rampant Islamophobia.

There was a time when we would boast with pride to foreigners that despite having 180 million Muslims in India, only a handful of Indian Muslims had joined the Taliban, Al-Qaida or Daesh, because Indian Muslims had a strong sense of belonging to India and a stake in its success. Today, the talk is increasingly of a fearful and alienated minority, of Muslims choosing to leave India wherever they have the option and others being radicalised, not by Islamist preachings, but by their own experiences in India. Intelligence officers now assume that the receptivity to extremism is growing.

The communal divide is not just deepening; it has poisoned our society and is transmuting it for the worse, unleashing unpredictable consequences and untold dangers for all of us. The era of national integration is over; we can only hope our rulers find enough wisdom to prevent an era of national disintegration. ■

By **Ram Madhav**

The author is Member, National Executive, RSS, and Member, Board of Governors, India Foundation

A Nation-First Narrative

Communalism will hurt India's prospects, but the exaggerated portrayal of it by the Opposition will hurt us more. Right now, we need the political discourse to single-mindedly focus on the economy

In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping, the then supreme leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), decided to focus exclusively on economic development. He realised that for the China dream to come true, the economy, shattered by Mao's decades of defective policies, must be reinvigorated.

The decade saw rapid economic growth and infrastructure development in the country. Foreign investors and technologies were invited into China. When his own colleagues in the party protested, accusing him of promoting capitalist policies, Deng shut them off with the retort that he didn't care about "the colour of the cat as long as it is catching the mice". This ruthless pragmatism, and the courage to set ideologies aside for the larger national good, has helped China reach where it is today.

The developing world is now debating these issues. As James Carville, the campaign strategist for Bill Clinton, quipped in 1992, "It's the economy, stupid." Countries are catching on to Carville's economic mantra, sidestepping ideological hamstrings. Whoever visited the Saudi Arabia pavilion at the recently concluded Expo 2020 Dubai will vouch for the progressive and ultramodern presentation of the mothership of orthodox Islam. Live images of surging race cars with Saudi women at the wheels left every visitor fascinated and flabbergasted. The same is the case with countries in Asia and Africa.

But, sadly, here we are, debating about communal polarisation. Leaders of the Opposition are writing op-eds as if in India, at every street corner, Hindus and Muslims have crossed swords. It may suit the political narrative for some, but it will certainly hurt the country's global narrative at a time when the leadership is steadfastly pursuing an agenda of growth and prosperity for every Indian. No other leadership appreciates this imperative better than the present one. The 2020s will be to India what the 1980s were to China. A decade of singleminded focus on the economy could unleash the country's latent potential and catapult it into the club of developed nations.

Pundits pointing fingers at the central government or some Hindu organisations for this perceived polarisation have a sinister agenda—they want to divert the national discourse by dragging the prime minister's name into it. But the actions of the government speak for its inclusive and development-for-all approach.

Communalism will hurt India's prospects, but the exaggerated portrayal of it will hurt us more. Is the 1.3 billion-strong Indian society really polarised? Should some fringe elements be elevated to the status of 'makers of the national narrative' for a vast country like ours? Isn't it tantamount to, say, calling the entire American society racist just because some truly reprehensible incidents of racial violence happened there?

India's communal problem is centuries old and it continues to erupt occasionally. This may be a kind of whataboutery, but isn't it hubristic on the part of some political leaders to pretentiously argue and take the moral high ground when their own

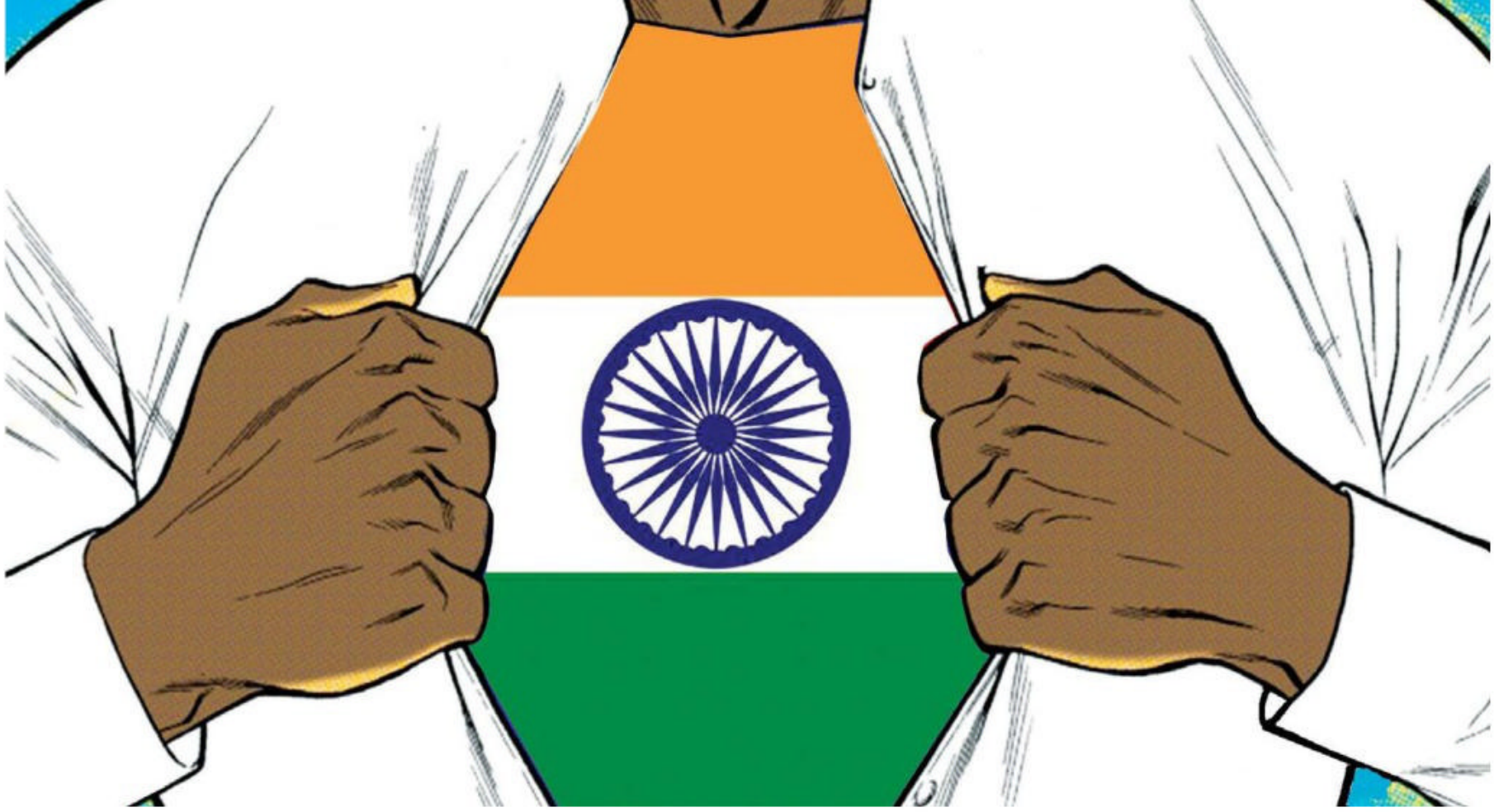


Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

cupboards are filled with horrific skeletons from communal orgies?

This is not to undermine the potential threat that communal elements pose to India's national fabric. We paid a heavy price for it at the time of Independence, the Amrit Mahotsav of which is being celebrated now. These elements, be it Muslim or Hindu, do not and should not represent our respective mainstream communities. To merely shrug off responsibility for their actions also amounts to being communal apologists. There is a need to frame a civil society response to it.

Social media is partly to blame. It is democratic not only in nature and spirit but also in noise and chaos. Perceived injustices as portrayed on Twitter or Facebook impact sensible people too. But the problem is that different stories and images circulate among different recipient groups, making each believe that their religion is under attack from the other. While the image of an attack on a Hindu procession gets wider traction among Hindu user groups, similar provocative images of acts against a mosque or a Muslim group make their way to Muslim user groups. Hence the important lesson that the social media narrative needs to be viewed with greater equanimity and objectivity and that it allows the law and order establishment to take necessary action against the culprits.

THE TALK OF POLARISATION MAY BE PREMATURE. INDIAN SOCIAL LEADERS NEED TO STAND UP TO THE FORCES OF HATRED AND VIOLENCE

These incidents are not all fictitious either. Every hate speech will have a fallout; every rape threat actually translates into a real incident. Hence the social leadership should immediately come forward, condemn and explicitly state that such words and acts have no place in a civilised discourse.

Post-Independence India witnessed the pampering of minority communal politics for vote bank considerations by the same parties that are preaching morals today. Communalism begets communalism. That brand of politics of appeasement has ended for good in the country, so the Opposition is calling the new order majoritarian politics. The minority leadership should reconcile to their new status and the end of such minority-majority distinctions. Learning to live in harmony with the rest of our mainstream national society should be viewed as an important obligation.

It is also important that the Muslim leadership come out of the Wahhabist hardline interpretations of Islam that seek to pit Muslim against non-Muslim and promote separatism and exclusivity. The return of debates like 'hijab' and 'niqab' is symptomatic of this as also the rise of violent, ultra-radical outfits like the Popular Front of India (PFI). A more inclusive and humanitarian Islam on the lines of the one promoted by organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama, a 90 million-strong Islamic organisation in Indonesia under the dynamic leadership of its chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf aka Pak Yahya, must be the way forward for them.

The reaction of sections of Hindus, including some wearing saffron robes, is also utterly un-Hindu. Violent language and talk of annihilation of an entire community smack of their attempt at semitisation of Hinduism. It is pertinent to note that mainstream Hindu organisations like the RSS have distanced themselves and disapproved of such rants.

Talk of polarisation may be premature but the Indian social leadership needs to stand up to the forces of hatred and violence by invoking peace, inclusivity and a nation-first narrative. India's narrative of the decade should be "it's the economy, stupid!" The onus lies on all of us. ■

By **Yashwant Sinha**

The author is National Vice-President, Trinamool Congress, and former minister of finance and external affairs

Weaponised Religion

The Indian Constitution, which had stood the test of time until now, is being destroyed by the very people who have sworn to uphold and protect it

Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

India is no stranger to communal strife. Ever since the British decided to follow the policy of divide and rule on the basis of religion, the country has been a witness to communal violence, even leading to its partition 75 years ago. Pakistan became a separate country on the basis of religion and, naturally, became an Islamic republic. But despite all the violence that preceded and accompanied Partition, India opted for a liberal, democratic and secular Constitution. And despite a large number of Muslims preferring to go to Pakistan (where they are still referred to as Muhajirs, a derogatory term), a larger number decided to stay on in India, hoping they would be safer and better off here. Yet the tension between the two communities continues to simmer and results in violence from time to time. But is what we are witnessing today part of the same pattern or is it different? In my view, it is vastly different. And it is so because of the role played by the government at the Centre and in the states ruled by the BJP. It is vastly different because the pursuit of political power has never been as devoid of values as today.

If the country today is drowning in an ocean of hate and being pushed deeper into it by these governments, it is not for the love of Hinduism, it is merely to obtain and retain power. The Sangh/ Sant Parivar is enjoying the situation like never before as they feel that their dream of a Hindu Rashtra is about to be realised. It has, therefore, weaponised religion to achieve its political goals. This is how the present rash of communal violence in the country is different from the earlier ones. Governments in the past may have failed to control communal riots, but today they are complicit in pro-

moting them. What else can explain the brazen manner in which mobs of a certain community are allowed to chant the most objectionable slogans and hurl the filthiest abuses, specially while passing in front of the places of worship of the other communities, and the procession is still described as peaceful by complicit police? What else can explain the manner in which the provisions of the Constitution are being diluted and its spirit violated with impunity? The police and the bureaucracy are ever willing and ready to play the role of accomplices and the judiciary is happy being a bystander. The institutions that are supposed to protect our democracy are themselves in need of protection as the people are left without recourse. Some take to violence in these circumstances. Others suffer in silence.

Years ago, we talked of the Gujarat model of governance. Everyone thought it was a model of development that would be replicated nationwide once a certain individual assumed the top executive post in the country. It now transpires that the Gujarat model of governance is not really a model for development and people's welfare; it is only a model of obtaining and retaining power by questionable means. It is a model of hate.

THE BJP'S LOVE FOR HINDUTVA IS SIMPLY THE POLITICAL USE OF RELIGION TO ACHIEVE SHORT-TERM GOALS

And when hatred comes, can violence be far behind? This is what is happening in our country today. The state is sponsoring hate and enjoying the violence that follows because it begets further hate and violence, divides society down the middle and further secures the vote bank of the ruling party. What people are failing to realise is that this commitment to Hindutva has nothing to do with the Hindu religion; it is the political use of religion to achieve short-term political goals and keep the powers-that-be in power. The 'Godi media' is a full partner of the government in this enterprise. Communal divide has become the order of the day. Is this the India our forebears had imagined?

My mind goes back to the pre-Partition days. India was in the throes of unprecedented communal violence, a civil war that ultimately led to the partition of the country and a massive transfer of population from one newly independent country to another. India faced an economic and social crisis of gargantuan proportions. World War II, the communal riots and Partition had left it devastated and in ruins. Yet the leadership of the time stood its ground, gave the country a liberal, progressive and secular Constitution, which stood the test of time until very recently. Now, those who swore by the Constitution while taking office are precisely the people who are out to destroy it. It is not merely a new Parliament building that is being constructed in place of the old; it is a new Constitution that is being thrust upon us by misinterpreting, misreading, twisting and turning the old.

India is facing an unprecedented economic challenge. The growth rate is tepid. The scars of the pandemic are still visible. The global situation is alarming. Unemployment has touched painfully high levels. Price rise is making even the lowly lemon out of reach of the ordinary people. The future is grim. People, therefore, need a diversion. In ancient Rome, the gladiators in the Colosseum provided it, where they killed each other. Today, it is being provided through violence in the streets. Unemployed youth get a kick when they join a mob that breaks the law. Have you ever wondered who is churning out those pro-Hindutva and anti-minority hate messages on social media? Who is spreading all those lies that the gullible believe easily? Obviously, there is a whole factory, or perhaps many of them constantly at work to prepare and send out these messages. Who is employing these people? Who is paying for this? What you are receiving on your smartphones is far from innocent. It is a sinister attempt to change the way India thinks, to destroy our syncretic culture for good.

The question before us is stark. It is no more about who will win the next election. It is about India—will it survive in the shape and form we have known throughout or will it perish for good? ■

By **Seshadri Chari**

The author is a former editor of Organiser *and secretary general of Forum for Integrated National Security*

Don't Blame Hindu Assertion

It's easy to link communal flare-ups with the BJP's so-called strategy of polarising voters, but that would lead to flawed conclusions and, consequently, wrong solutions

There are two important aspects of the recent series of violent happenings obliquely referred to as 'communal incidents': their frequency and the increasing number of locations. The incidents cannot be dismissed as mere statistics nor can one wish to bring them under control with mere statements. There seems to be a deeper malaise at work, an attempt to create a different and dangerous narrative. Politicising these riots and blaming one or the other political party will not only be deceptive but also socially perilous, and subvert the democratic process that guarantees religious freedom and human rights.

With the BJP being the ruling party, it is easy to link these incidents to its so-called strategy of polarising voters on communal lines. Ironically, even as the flare-ups were making headlines, the party lost all the five bypolls held across four states. So much for the political advantage to the BJP!

Communal riots have always been analysed with different yardsticks. When processions by Hindus are attacked, the general refrain is to advise them to avoid Muslim localities and stop playing music when passing by a mosque. But the objection from Hindu organisations, and certainly a valid one, is that no one usually advises the intolerant sections among Muslims to respect the religious feelings of Hindus and other communities. Those who argue that stone-pelting in Jahangirpuri, Delhi, was a result

Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

of the 'noisy' Hanuman Jayanti procession should answer why stones were also hurled at the police party that went to arrest the vandals.

Looking at the communal riots through a narrow political prism would surely lead to flawed conclusions and, consequently, wrong solutions. There is a perceptible awareness among Hindus that is not the result of a particular party's ascendance. Rather, this rising awareness, assertiveness and at times aggressiveness has been successfully utilised by the BJP to catapult itself to power. This rising awareness among Hindus should be seen as a continuation of a larger renaissance movement that preceded the struggle for independence and continued through the turbulent times of the tragic Partition.

The highly truncated but otherwise noble idea of secularism turned out to be a tool in the hands of the new narrative-setters who inundated the corridors of power. Minority rights were considered more sacrosanct than the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. In fact, in 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Muslims should have the first claim on resources. The priorities set by the political class of that time proved to be a red rag to distraught Hindu groups that were nurturing the wounds of Partition and felt terribly short-changed.

It is nobody's argument that "an eye for an eye" reaction should be condoned or left unpunished. Pelting stones on a Hindu religious procession is as contemptible as vandalising a mosque. Both are punishable offences and should be treated as such, nothing more, nothing less. We must stop analysing communal flare-ups with different yardsticks.

The larger issue, however, is the responsibility of the leaders of respective communities to rein in the fringe elements and prevail over the troublemakers, by force or through legal recourse if needed. The ban on triple talaq and the court orders on hijab should be seen as equivalent to the ban on sati and allowing Dalits to enter temples. There is little doubt that Islam is perceived as being at loggerheads with democracy, human rights and gender equality on the grounds that these are not compatible with the divinely ordained irrevocable laws that bound a small sect some 14 centuries ago.

The widespread riots in Spain and Sweden have dented the image of Muslims further. It is argued that these rioters have nothing in common with the poor Muslims in India. That may be true to a large extent, but the larger Muslim brotherhood's loyal adherence to the holy book and the commonality of the core principles of Islam cannot be overlooked. Many of the Muslims in Europe do not belong to the countries they live in. The local traditions, culture and languages are alien to them. Most of them have sought asylum in these countries. They came as refugees and immensely benefited from the social security systems there. Yet they refuse to integrate with the locals, and demand separate and special extra-constitutional rights that are part of their religious ordination. Again, images of large gatherings of Muslims offering namaz in Times Square and other public places point to the emergence of an "us versus them" narrative in these places. The general argument is that there are not enough places of worship to offer prayers and hence Muslims congregate in public places. This becomes the basis for demanding more space for Muslims, besides special rights and freedom to follow the laws prescribed by the religious book rather than the laws of the land.

PELTING STONES ON A HINDU PROCESSION IS AS CONTEMPTIBLE AS VANDALISING A MOSQUE

Those who argue that Islam as it is practised today is divinely ordained should ponder over the aberrations that have crept in due to human interpretations at various times in its historical evolution amid heterogeneous cultures and local traditions in different parts of the world. Christianity has come a long way from the harsh and intolerant Justinian laws of the sixth century and integrated itself with modern societies. Islam, too, needs to undergo drastic reforms and adjust itself to the changed social and political norms. Any stagnation and refusal to modernise will give the *mullah*s and *moulvi*s a greater hold over their followers, but in the process also increase alienation, the number of ghettos, and the false and often calamitous notions of victimhood.

A number of Islamic societies and groups in democracies, especially in Asia, have been deeply influenced by the Arab version of Islam. This has led to the de-culturalisation of the faithful, alienating them from their roots, cultural moorings and identity. Unfortunately, any suggestion to avoid the dictates of "Arabisation" is seen as an infringement of religious freedom. When a court of law functioning under the provisions of the Constitution of India says hijab is not part of the basic tenets of Islam or frowns upon compulsory halal certification, the *mullah*s and *moulvi*s raise the war cry of "*Islam khatrey mein hai* (Islam is in danger)". This has to change.

Reform in Islam is possible only if there is a free and frank public debate and a readiness to accept that religious practices are prone to get corrupted, especially if they are left to human interpretations. Reform among Hindus has a long history and it is an ongoing process. Any society that shuns reform and chooses to stay rooted in obscurantism is destined to decay and become irrelevant. ■

By **Faizan Mustafa**

The author is a constitutional law expert and currently Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Views are personal

Why Hindus Should Worry

The majority community has good reason to fear a Hindu Rashtra because in any theocracy the State appropriates the official religion

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

The story of civilisations is all about the rise and fall of communities. But how do you characterise the rise and fall of a civilisation? Can what is happening in India be really termed as the finest hour of Hindu civilisation? Should we assume that the new wave of communal frenzy, the stinking environment of hate and the rise of the so-called fringe to the mainstream mean that Muslims are passing through their worst times and that it is the end of the road for them?

RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) chief Mohan Bhagwat repeatedly says that the happiest Muslims in the world are in India. Is the extreme right bent upon proving him wrong? Can anybody be happy being intimidated, demonised and maligned daily? Can one be happy when one's autonomy to eat, dress, marry, and now even worship, is undermined? Can one be happy hearing a seer declare that he has begun a *dharmayuddh* (holy war) against Muslims and their killing will start from eastern UP? What joy can there be in being subjected to open threats of rape against one's mother and daughters on a daily basis?

But are Hindus happy? In the recently released World Happiness Index report (2021) of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network pursuant to the General Assembly Resolution of 2011, India ranks a low 136th among 149 countries. In our neighbourhood, China is at 84, Bangladesh 101 and Pakistan

105. In the past three centuries, Indian Muslims have faced several existential crises, but they survived each time with huge support from the enlightened sections of Hindus. The first event was the end of the Mughal empire in 1857. Since Bahadur Shah Zafar was the symbolic leader of the revolt, Muslims had to face the wrath and anger of the British. Hundreds of them were publicly executed in Delhi.

The year 1947 marked another turning point in the history of Indian Muslims. Unfortunately, the country was partitioned in the name of religion and the regressive two-nation theory. Muslim *ulema* were at the forefront of those opposing Partition. Most Muslims did not endorse the divisive idea of Partition as they were not even voters under the Government of India Act, 1935, which confined franchise to the educated and propertied class. The majority of Muslims decided to stay in India of their free will and refused to migrate to Pakistan. The massive communal violence during and after Partition led to the killing of half a million people. After an initial wave of riots, the Hindus of the country, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, stood up for the cause of the minorities. India opted for a liberal, secular democracy that assured Muslims that the State will not have a religion of its own and that they will have full religious and cultural freedom in the modern and progressive India. In subsequent decades, the Supreme Court has upheld both secularism as well as minority rights as part of its basic structure, which cannot be changed even by a constitutional amendment.

This author is not averse to India becoming a Hindu Rashtra as, under it, heavens won't fall for the Muslims. It cannot take away their citizenship or deny them the fundamental rights available to other citizens. It won't ask them to leave the country. In fact, Hindus should worry more about such a possibility and should ensure that India does not follow the disastrous path of Pakistan. Hinduism would be the worst affected as in every theocracy, it is the State that dominates and appropriates the official religion.

In 1992, Hindu fanatics demolished the Babri mosque and Muslims sank into depression. The secular and liberal Hindus once more not only condemned the demolition in the strongest possible words but also extended a helping hand to the demoralised community. In the Babri Mosque judgment (2019), the Supreme Court itself held the demolition to be an 'egregious wrong'. The Muslim community survived this onslaught. In 2002, the ugly face of communal violence returned in Gujarat. But more than a dozen police officers and several leaders have been convicted and punished. In 2019, the Supreme Court awarded Bilkis Bano, who was gangraped during the 2002 riots, compensation of Rs 50 lakh.

DEFEATING THE BJP—OR ANY PARTY—IS THE BURDEN OF THE HINDU MAJORITY, NOT THE MUSLIMS

In 2014, the Modi government took office. Soon after, we had cases of mob lynching on allegations of possession of beef. Muslims were the worst victims and some 35 people were brutally killed. Subsequently, the prime minister himself condemned the so-called *gau rakshaks* as criminals. 'Love jihad' too dominated the public discourse for some time, leading to even the Supreme Court ordering an NIA (National Investigation Agency) probe. The latter did not find any evidence of motivated and systematic 'love jihad'.

The recent public calls for genocide, hate speech, playing of *Hanuman Chalisa* during *azaan*s or desecration of mosques will not be able to either dampen the Muslim spirit or solve the so-called Muslim question.

Indeed, the recent developments are more worrisome for Hinduism as a few lumpen elements have hijacked it and are damaging its image as the world's most tolerant religion. The speed with which the local administration bulldozing houses of alleged miscreants without due process of law is lowering our image as a country with a rule of law. Majoritarianism should worry the Hindus. They need to come forward to say no more hate, abuse and vandalism in their name.

Religious processions leading to communal violence are part of an old script. Muslims must demonstrate utmost patience and not react to any provocation. They must support a total ban on the use of loudspeakers by all communities.

Indian Muslims must have the satisfaction that rather than being excluded by the extreme right, they are accorded a place of prominence in its political narrative. They are at the centre of all debates, discussions and electoral strategies. It is the failure of the Hindu extreme right. It means it needs Muslims. The easy route to power is not really the 'othering' of Muslims but rather their centrality. All election speeches are about them.

However, Muslims, too, must realise that, as a minority, they need not take the responsibility of defeating any political party, including the BJP. It is the burden of the majority to decide the fate of political parties. The RSS chief in his speeches has been rightly blaming the British for the present communalism and hostility between Hindus and Muslims. Since the RSS is committed to nation-building and has influence over the current political dispensation, it, and nobody else, must lead the battle against communalism and prevent state governments from continuing the British policy of divide and rule. ■

By **Makarand R. Paranjape**

The author is Professor of English at Jawaharlal Nehru University. His latest book is JNU: Nationalism and India's Uncivil War. *Views are personal*

Might is Right in Campus Politics

To stand up against divisive forces, our youth need knowledge as well as understanding. Both, currently, seem to be in short supply

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), which many regard as both microcosm and barometer, affords an opportune insight into India's larger body politic.

On April 10, clashes broke out in Kaveri hostel over the serving of meat on Ramnavami and the obstruction of a *havan* (religious ceremony)—depending on whose version you are listening to. A few days later, on April 13, an outfit called Hindu Sena pasted posters and saffron banners outside the campus. The posters said "Bhagwa JNU" or saffron JNU. Vishnu Gupta, the president of Hindu Sena, claimed that *bhagwa* and Hindutva were insulted on the JNU campus: "Saffron is our culture...in the entire country, not just in Jawaharlal Nehru University." Those who didn't like it were "anti-national" and welcome to leave the country.

What is going on? The first thing to realise is that the JNU scuffle was not communal or religious, in the sense of being a Hindu-Muslim clash. It was ideological and political. A fight between the traditionally dominant Left and the emergent Right, led by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), over control of the campus. The Hindu Sena, purportedly of the same "Sangh Parivar", went a step farther, making ABVP look milder, more acceptable, in comparison.

The swift steps by the police against Hindu Sena indirectly implied that no action would be taken against the ABVP, although an FIR had been registered against its cadres. This inference is strengthened by the counter-FIR lodged by the ABVP against the leftist students. The two would probably cancel each other so that no one would be brought to book.

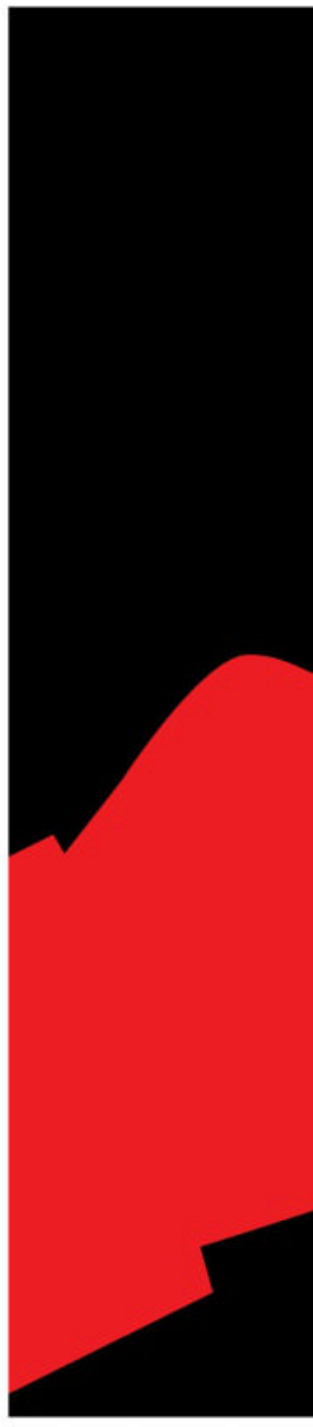
But the message was loud and clear. The takeover of the JNU campus is imminent if not already effected. The Left's last bastion in campus politics has fallen. Just like a fort in medieval India recaptured from enemy hands.

Thence to the Ramnavami and Hanuman Jayanti violence in the rest of India. Is it a coincidence that riots broke out on the same day in different parts of the country along similar lines—*shobha yatra*s or processions being taken out and attacked by Muslim mobs?

Processions before mosques, retaliations over cow killings, alleged burnings or desecrations of holy books—these and several similar provocations were the stock-in-trade of communal riots in colonial India. That they are being revived and deployed should not entirely surprise, even if it certainly saddens, us.

The "blasphemy" incidents over the Sikh sacred book, the Guru Granth Sahib, in Punjab, the killings in gurdwaras, including Shri Harmandir Sahib itself, the holiest of the Sikh holies, in retaliation against sacrilege, exemplify how easy it is to incite religious violence in India. Has anyone been punished for these acts of culpable violence?

Dial a riot, then return the call by massaging the message? Is that the formula in this new round of communal flare-ups in India? Anyone with even a modicum of common sense can be reasonably certain that there is no such thing as



a spontaneous riot or communal outbreak. No riot of this kind is purely accidental.

Mobs do not materialise suddenly or spontaneously. It is not as if on any given day, crowds and processions will abruptly gather and take out a march. Nor is it possible that those pelting stones at them will instinctively accumulate an arsenal of projectiles or hurl these from rooftops. Mobilising people on either side of the communal divide requires planning, organisation, resources and implementation.

Given the plethora of CCTV footage and video clips, it should not be too difficult, especially when the faces of several partisans are clearly visible, to identify them and bring them in for questioning to find out who their managers or handlers are. But such a line of investigation is rarely, if ever, deployed. Because the agents in the drama of the macabre are always shielded rather than exposed. Their very success and replicability depend on their obscurity.

How else can we explain why the first convictions in the anti-Sikh pogroms of 1984 did not occur till 34 years later? Despite over 10 high-level commissions and committees of inquiry. The overriding aim, it is obvious, was to mask rather than reveal the truth.

THE AGENTS IN THE DRAMA OF THE MACABRE ARE ALWAYS SHIELDED RATHER THAN EXPOSED

Illustration by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

In the aftermath of the Ramnavami and Hanuman Jayanti riots, is the Hindu-Muslim divide deepening? To find answers to such questions, reliable information, let alone deep knowledge, is hard to come by. Instead, we are inundated by armed falsehood and weaponised misinformation. Tremendous effort is needed to sift the true from the false, the real from the make-believe. Because untruths or half-truths are circulated so vigorously and vociferously, the task of reality-seekers has become even more difficult.

We may never know exactly what happened or why. But we are not totally without clues, evidence, or methods to figure it out. Is appeasement being replaced by aggression? If so, mainstream political parties, even those in power, are apparently colluding with extremist anti-India forces in a deadly dance of mimetic and retaliatory violence. While the former may think they will profit from such polarisation, the concomitant fuelling of the subversive activities of the latter does not augur well for our Republic. Let us not forget how India was made to look bad by a communal conflagration in northeast Delhi when US president Donald Trump came calling for 48 hours on February 24-25, 2020.

Whether in JNU or the rest of India, conflicts over territory or power will exploit existing faultlines. In the subcontinent, these just happen to be vehemently religious. This is why the Partition of India took place and the ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Pakistan continues apace.

Can our youth make a difference? Yes, they can. By sending out a loud and clear message against riots, whether religious or ideological. But they need knowledge as well as understanding. Both, however, are in short supply these days. ■

By **Pushpesh Pant**

Teacher, anchor and author of India: The Cookbook, The Indian Vegetarian Cookbook *and* Gourmet Journeys in India. *Views are personal*

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

Spreading Bitterness

A vicious identity politics mixes food with hate speech and majoritarian prejudices to erase the memory of our pluralistic traditions

It started with the lynching of persons suspected of cattle-lifting, presumably for cow slaughter and those transporting or storing prohibited meat at home. Vigilantes had no time or patience for the law to take its own course. They took upon themselves the roles of police, jury, judge and executioner. Unfortunately, these horrendous incidents were treated as random aberrations. The miscreants went unpunished, encouraging others to indulge in this bloody sport under the garb of saving religion and nation. '*Gau rakshak*' suddenly emerged from the closet and replaced

the traditional '*gau sevak*'.

Then, hordes of militant vegetarians descended on us, imposing patently illegal bans on all kinds of meat on days considered sacred by the Hindu majority or a minority like the Jains. No meat-selling during the *pitru paksha*, Navaratri, days associated with Hindu gods and goddesses. The list of days when meat-eaters should be denied flesh, fowl and fish is increasing. The governments—at the Centre and state capitals—failed to curb this menace. It is reasonable to conclude that politicians of a certain hue were busy evaluating how this, too, like beef, could be exploited to polarise voters. There is a shrill demand to ban the stuff totally in places of pilgrimage or on the roadside. One doesn't know where the intolerance will end. 'One Nation, One Language , One Election and One Satvik Vegetarian Diet' may work in an ideal fantasy world. But we live in a land that is inheritor to a pluralistic tradition and hasn't only tolerated diversity but also celebrated it.

Vigilantes enjoying political patronage have created a climate of fear, terrifying shopkeepers from the minority community. Many down shutters 'voluntarily' to avoid getting bashed up at the hands of marauding bands of hooligans who claim to be guardians of values cherished by the majority and specialise in making a preventive strike to deter anyone from 'hurting Hindu sentiments'.

What is dangerously overlooked is that sentiments can't be privileged over fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution. True, no right is absolute and can be restricted in public interest, but this can only be done reasonably, following due process. What we are witnessing is condoning by the government of gross violation of the rule of law. The meat wars infringe on citizens' right to life and livelihood. Schoolkids are denied eggs because some ignoramus believes they are alien to our 'swadeshi' tradition. An explosive debate is triggered on halal versus jhatka, adding fuel to fire just when the flames appear to be dying down.

Ignorance is not bliss. Statistics collected by different surveys, including government ones, show that a majority of Indians are NOT vegetarian. Hindus worshipping goddess Kali have traditionally offered animal sacrifice to the deity, and treat meat as *prasad*—blessed food. Not all Brahmins are vegetarians either—in Kashmir, Bengal, Assam, Odisha and the Mithila region in Bihar, meat or fish has always been a part of the diet. Tribal populations as well as a majority of Dalits consume meat, including the one that dares not speak its name. A vast number of middle castes are non-vegetarian. On the eastern and western seaboard, fish is staple. In the 'seven sisters' of Northeast India and in all of south India and Goa, the list of enthusiastic meat-eaters is a long one.

THE FACT IS A MAJORITY OF INDIANS ARE NOT VEGETARIAN. EVEN BRAHMINS EAT MEAT IN MANY PARTS OF INDIA.

What then explains the virulence of vegetarian violence? It has nothing to do with matters culinary. It is based on sheer opportunism and shrewd calculation that waving this flag will endear them to those in power. A local rowdy can enjoy police protection due to partisan political patronage. These musclemen can be extremely useful during elections. The lines between legitimate fundraising and blackmailing had blurred long ago. However, the politics of food at the grassroots has contributed significantly to divisive politics at its worst.

It is easy to dismiss and condemn 'left-liberals' as willing or unwilling members of an international conspiracy to interrupt, obstruct and retard India's economic development and resurgence. It's equally easy to brand anyone who raises a dissenting voice about rampaging *gau rakshak*s or vegetarian vigilantes a traitor or enemy of the Hindu religion. So scared are we that we mumble most of the time about majority and minority communities. Identifying lawbreakers and miscreants as Hindus and Muslims, we are told, can only aggravate the situation. But nothing stops senior ministers from raising provocative slogans in the midst of communal riots: "*Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maro saalon ko*!" Hate speech is now inextricably entwined with the politics of food. Those who eat only halal and wear a skull cap are *vidharmi*s, enemies of Hindus and are descendants of foreign invaders. Distorting well-settled facts of history and demonising Muslims (whose parents chose not to migrate to Pakistan during Partition) are par for the course. That ominous taunt—'go to Pakistan'—hangs constantly in the air. A youngster applauding the performance of a Pakistani cricket player does so at the risk of life or limb. Be warned! What is prohibited isn't only specified meat—the prescriptions are no less stifling in the realm of costume and language.

Self-styled godmen—many wielding tridents and swords—dressed in shades of ochre, have arrogated the responsibility to interpret Hinduism arbitrarily. This pressure group has organised itself in a parallel parliament, or *dharam sansad*, that flexes its muscles to browbeat elected representatives in the real Parliament. Those who have to 'fight' elections can't afford to neglect these gatekeepers of vote banks. Divisive wounds can only heal if those who hold public office realise that the unity of the nation is inseparable from its resplendent diversity. Calamity can perhaps yet be averted if individuals respect the separation of powers and majesty of institutions that have served us well in the past.

Alas, the judiciary has let citizens down on more than one occasion. The glimmer of hope that we can yet stop the slide to the abyss is fast fading. ■

INDIA'S NEW LEATHER HUB

Cheap land and labour, an integrated hub, government sops and a hassle-free environment make Kolkata an attractive option for Kanpur's tanners to relocate

By Romita Datta

Over the past few years, India's leather capital has been shifting downstream the Ganga—from Kanpur to Kolkata. Once the hub of the country's leather industry, the Uttar Pradesh town has had to gradually cede that distinction as cow vigilantism in the state made the transportation and slaughter of cattle increasingly difficult, which, in turn, dealt a blow to the leather trade. So, when Iqbal Naaz, the regional chairman of the Council for Leather Exports and owner of the Kanpur-based Naaz Exports Private Limited, met West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during a stopover in Milan in September 2018 en route from a business trip to Italy and Germany, he wondered whether her government could provide him land in West Bengal to expand his unit. Shortly afterward, at the Bengal Global Business Summit in February 2019, Mamata issued a notification inviting applications for land in the sprawling 1,100-acre Kolkata Leather Complex (KLC), located in the eastern fringes of the city in Bantala, and touted to be "South Asia's biggest integrated leather hub".

Bengal, it seems, is ideal in terms of land availability and cost, as well as in the facilities offered by the government. "Land cost Rs 30,000-40,000 per square metres in Jajmau and Rs 10,000-15,000 in Unnao," says Naaz. "At KLC, it was only Rs 2,800 per square metres." Not just that, capacity in the leather clusters in Kanpur, Jajmau and Unnao are full. The CETPs (common effluent treatment plants)—essential for treating the immensely hazardous chemical effluents released from tanneries—there too are functioning over the optimal level.

More than anything, however, it was vigilante attacks by cow protection groups in UP and the closure of many slaughterhouses by the state government in 2017 that made the environment for the leather industry unconducive for business. The row over cow slaughter forced the closure of 150 out of 400 tanneries at the country's biggest leather hub at Jajmau, a suburb of Kanpur. Then, three months before

HIDE TO FIND
Labourers process hides at the Kolkata Leather Complex

Photographs by DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

COW VIGILANTISM, THE CLOSURE OF SLAUGHTERHOUSES IN 2017 AND OF TANNERIES IN 2019 FORCED UP'S TANNERS TO LOOK FOR ALTERNATIVE BUSINESS LOCATIONS. THE INFRASTRUCTURE AT KLC MET THEIR NEEDS

the Kumbh Mela in January 2019, the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board passed an order asking tanneries to shut down for three months to stop the discharge of effluents in the Ganga. Hundreds of tanneries closed down, and foreign contracts cancelled. As tannery owners turned to Pakistan and Bangladesh for raw material, manufacturers started looking to Kolkata to move or open new production units. The reasons? A metropolis with an airport and access to a port, cheap labour, but mostly government sops and attractive land rates at the KLC.

"There were several hundred tanners asking for land," says Naaz. "But Didi chose only those who were serious about the leather industry, not those who were looking to use it for other purposes," he says.

Indeed, the West Bengal government has been serious about giving the labour-intensive leather industry a big push by scaling up infrastructure, upgrading effluent treatment plants and promising a conducive environment. It was not a surprise, therefore, that many Kanpur tanners started contemplating setting up new units at KLC.

Their endeavours, however, were rudely interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the debilitating lockdowns that accompanied it, having a crippling effect on the industry and slowing down the entire process of the actual physical relocation from Kanpur. As matters stand, over 30 tanners from the city have been allocated space in KLC and are in the process of moving in, with their units in various stages of construction.

"We took possession of land only a few months back...it was delayed mainly because of Covid and for

SOME 187 NEW TANNERY OWNERS ARE LOOKING TO INVEST Rs 4,000 CRORE AND CREATING ONE LAKH DIRECT JOBS IN THE BARGAIN

upgradation of the CETP plant. The building plan is ready. I am hoping to start production within two years," says Mukhtarul Amin, a tanner from Kanpur who is setting up his fourth unit in the leather industry. Amin is planning to invest Rs 15-20 crore in this expansion. Like Amin, around 20 tannery owners with units in UP are keen on expanding operations with new units in the KLC. In all, the businessmen from Kanpur are likely to bring in over Rs 400 crore in investment.

Now home to some of the biggest names in leather export, KLC has an annual turnover of Rs 15,000 crore and exports products worth around Rs 7,500 crore. This, too, makes it an attractive destination for investors from Kanpur and Chennai.

KLC's success, though, has come the hard way, and after almost a quarter of a century. A brief rewind to its journey may perhaps help put things in better perspective.

A SHAKY START

The year was 1997. The country's apex court had ordered the shifting of 538 old, polluting tanneries from Kolkata to a self-contained zone with effluent treatment facilities. The complex was conceived at Bantala. M.L. Dalmiya & Co Ltd, owned by the late Jagmohan Dalmiya (the former BCCI president), won the bid and got 1,100 acres of land on lease. As a BOT (Build Operate Transfer) partner, he was to develop the land for the relocated units by 2002 as per the Supreme Court order. However, the developer kept on missing deadlines. Even for the installation of a basic CETP, mandatory for running tanneries, the government had to eventually step in. The CETP was commissioned in 2004 and the first tanneries began moving in from 2005.

The complex was a picture of desolation in those days. Imran Ahmad Khan, the general secretary of the Calcutta Leather Complex Tanners Association, who had invested Rs 7 crore in 2000, was shocked when he returned from Australia in 2013. Other than the four modules of CETP, which had the capacity to treat 20 MLD (million litres a day), there was practically nothing for tanners.

"We were just paying EMIs for our investment. Those days, the complex had no streetlights, no drinking water facility. Even HDPE (high-density polyethylene) pipelines for the transportation of toxic effluents from tanneries to the CETP had not been laid. Instead, brick sewers and inferior RCC (reinforced concrete) pipelines were hastily laid, which led to serious pollution," says a tannery owner who has had a unit in the KLC since its inception. The dumping of solid waste also led to nearby villages complaining of fish dying in ponds, vegetables rotting away in fields and sundry health hazards.

With sparse security inside a largely empty complex, tanners complained of harassment by extortionists—all valid reasons for the close to 600,000 people directly or indirectly associated with tanneries to blame the government and the developer alike.

Furthermore, there were no sewerage treatment plants (STPs) for around 50 leather goods manufacturing units that had clubbed together under the Indian Leather Products Association. There was scarcely any provision for drinking water, and reservoirs needed for washing leather were constructed without water pumping stations. The KLC was an embarrassment.

SUN TANNING
Leather being put out to dry at the KLC

A GOOD PLACE TO HIDE

- **THE KOLKATA** Leather Complex has an annual turnover of Rs 15,000 crore and exports goods worth around Rs 7,500 crore
- **AT THE KLC,** 8 CETP modules can treat 40 MLD water a day
- **IT HAS** the potential to generate employment for lakhs
- **TWENTY TANNERY** owners from Uttar Pradesh are likely to expand operations here and bring in Rs 400 crore in investment
- **TOP NAMES** in UP's leather industry, like Super House, Pacific, Naaz etc., have plans to open units in Kolkata
- **KOLKATA'S** airport and port facilities are a big attraction for them

But the greatest handicap facing the KLC was the inadequate number of CETPs. For the highly polluting industry that is the leather business, they are an absolute must—actually considered as important as anything in a leather industry hub. Consequently, there were raps for allowing tanners to operate without adding to the capacity of CETPs to treat waste water. Instead of the proposed six CETP plants with a capacity to treat 30 MLD of effluents, the complex only had four CETP modules with the capacity to treat only 20 MLD.

In its first-ever environment audit in 2010-2011, the Comptroller and Auditor-General criticised the government in the strongest terms: "The project failed to achieve its stated objective of ensuring safe disposal of industrial effluents and solid waste from tanneries causing immense damage to the environment."

The gathering force of negativity around the KLC, combined with a need to generate employment and attract investment, forced the state government to act. The wheels started turning the other way around in 2015.

Bit by bit, infrastructure was improved, outstanding problems resolved. Three pumping stations with a capacity of 90,000 litres of water a day for washing leather were put in place. The matter of disposal of hazardous solid waste was also taken care of, with West Bengal Waste Management Ltd agreeing to transport 100 tonnes of waste every month to Haldia, a port city 120 kms south of Kolkata.

But the greatest difference came when four more modules of CETPs with the additional capacity to treat 20 MLD of effluent waste started operating in March 2022. While inaugurating them, Mamata said, "With eight CETPs, the only leather complex in the world to have such a capacity, KLC will attract investment worth Rs 80,000 crore and employ five lakh people."

Armed with this 40 MLD capacity, KLC is now ready to open its doors to the 187 new tanners who had already bought land in 2018 and were unable to shift because of inadequate effluent treatment capacities. Out of these tanners, around 30, among them Mukhtarul Amin, are from Kanpur and Chennai.

Now that KLC is up and running, other initiatives too are being taken up. The sludge, flesh and waste of the leather are being used for generation of electricity in a bio-gas plant as a pilot project. Along with SWITCH-Asia, a sustainable consumption and production programme, the KLC is extracting tallow oil for making tiles with 60 tonne weight-holding capacity. A secure land fill area spread over 51 acres is being prepared to store sludge and leather waste for manufacturing byproducts such as leather boards, paver tiles and sandals.

BIG NAMES IN KLC

Once their production units are up, Kanpur's tannery owners can readily benefit from the top manufacturing units that have set base in KLC. Vinit Gloves, with an annual turnover of Rs 100 crore, is a top exporter and is looking to set up a second unit. New Horizon, Trio Trends, Kompanero and ASG leather are all luxury brands with large footprints in the business and a presence in KLC.

The cost of labour—big units pay Rs 15,000-18,000 a month—too is favourable for UP's tanners. Wages of casual labourers are also cheap.

The promise of employment for 500,000-600,000 people also seems doable. According to Imran Ahmad Khan, for each crore invested in the industry, a minimum of 15 jobs are created. "This is central government statistics. So, if the new 187 tannery units are putting in an investment of Rs 4,000 crore, one can assume one lakh direct employment won't be too hard to generate," he points out.

That's a figure to be proud of. But giants from UP's leather belt—Super House, Pacific, Naaz and 15 others from Kanpur—have also taken a shine to Kolkata's leather hub. They have promised Mamata Banerjee investment worth Rs 5,000 crore. ■

YOGI ACTION PLAN 2.0

A crackdown on corruption, improving law & order and attracting investment top the chief minister's agenda for the first 100 days of his second term

By Prashant Srivastava

Yogi Adityanath began his second term as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh much the same way as he ended his first. Riding a bulldozer, that is, metaphorically speaking at least. The 'bulldozer baba' image fetched rich returns at the hustings, and the chief minister is determined to carry that impression into his second innings as well—of a tenacious administrator bent on taking down illegal constructions and corruption.

Yogi launched his 'war on corruption' within 10 days of taking oath on March 25. Two district magistrates—T.K. Shibu in Sonbhadra and Sunil Kumar in Auraiya—as well as Ghaziabad SSP Pawan Kumar were suspended for corruption and laxity during poll duty on April 1, April 4 and March 31, respectively.

To send the message that no one involved in crime will be spared, a building allegedly belonging to police inspector Jagat Narayan Singh was razed by the Lucknow Development Authority on April 3. Singh is currently lodged in Tihar Jail in Delhi in connection with the murder of Kanpur-based property dealer Manish Gupta. Singh was SHO of Ramgarh station in Gorakhpur when the

DEEPAK GUPTA/GETTY IMAGES

EYE ON THE GOAL
CM Yogi at the closing ceremony of a hockey tournament in Lucknow, Apr. 4

ON THE CM'S TO-DO LIST

- Attract Rs 10 lakh crore investment in the upcoming investor summit
- Ensure payment of Rs 8,000 crore for sugarcane within 100 days and Rs 12,000 crore in six months
- Establish a cow sanctuary. At least 50,000 cows to be rehabilitated through coordination with the panchayati raj department
- All service selection boards to provide government jobs to 10,000 youths in the state
- Set up three Mahila Battalions in the UP police to improve women's safety

murder took place there on September 28 last year.

The 'fear of Yogi' also apparently had Gautam Singh, a history-sheeter involved in several cases of kidnapping and extortion, surrendering at the Chapla police station in Gonda on March 15, a few days after the BJP's win in the state. Over two dozen criminals surrendered the same day in Saharanpur too. Liquor smugglers have done so in Deoband and Shamli. In Pratapgarh, a rape accused gave himself up days after he allegedly committed the crime. The police parked a bulldozer outside his house and had threatened to raze it if he didn't surrender.

"In the past two and a half years," says Prashant Kumar, ADG, law & order, UP, "property worth Rs 2,000 crore owned by the mafia and other criminal elements has been seized or demolished. Most of UP's top criminals are in jail. In the next 100 days, we will identify more criminals involved in organised crime."

To allay any misapprehension of the bulldozer becoming a symbol of oppression, Kumar adds, "Instructions have come that bulldozers should not be misused. They have been used to demolish illegal constructions, including on government properties. All judicial processes are completed before demolition."

The opposition, though, is unconvinced. Yogi's preoccupation with the bulldozer, says Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, is pushing the state into anarchy and jungle raj. "With his hand on the bulldozer steering, the CM is chasing the Opposition while criminals, protected by the powers that be, are wreaking havoc."

Unperturbed by the criticism, Yogi is thinking of

extending the police commissionerate system—where a commissioner of police heads a unified command structure—he had introduced in Lucknow, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Varanasi and Kanpur in his previous term to the entire state. Meerut and Ghaziabad districts are likely to be next, and Prayagraj and Gorakhpur after that. Meanwhile, 14 IPS officers have been transferred, either to take on fresh responsibility or an additional one.

The bureaucracy, too, is being hauled up. In a bid to implement the citizens' charter—a mechanism for swift disposal of applications and public grievances—a tweet by the CM urged officials not to sit on a file for more than three days, failing which the request would be granted or cancelled and the concerned official held accountable. The CM is also insisting on punctuality and urging officials not to go for extended lunch breaks.

HIGH ON ACTION

Yogi is also spurring his cabinet colleagues into action, asking them to submit their action plans for the first 100 days of governance. He also wants them to spend at least a day in the districts assigned to them to review the progress and implementation of development works and government schemes, and tune in to the problems of the people and partymen. He has also asked them to submit proposals and set targets to attract investments, as well as create job opportunities and improve infrastructure in the state.

At the groundbreaking ceremony for a second investors' summit (the first was in 2018) in Lucknow in July, UP government officials said they were hoping to attract Rs 10 lakh crore in investments. The first investors' summit saw 1,065 MoUs worth Rs 4.65 lakh crore being signed.

Several new areas of investment, be it drone production or cryptocurrency, are being explored. The excise department has proposed setting up a new winery in the state. The secondary education department has said that 84 new colleges will begin operations, and 1,060 colleges will have smart classes. And if previous governments were distributing cycles to students, the new proposals upgrade the mode of transport to scooties for meritorious girl students. The Yogi government is also planning a new sports policy while the sports department is contemplating an amendment to rules to allow sportspersons to join directly as gazetted officers.

"INSTRUCTIONS HAVE COME THAT BULLDOZERS SHOULD NOT BE MISUSED. THEY WILL BE USED TO DEMOLISH ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS, INCLUDING ON GOVT PROPERTIES AND LAND"

PRASHANT KUMAR
ADG, Law& Order, UP

The Yogi government would like all proposals being drafted to keep employment generation in mind. The CM has instructed all service selection boards to provide government jobs to 10,000 youths in the state in the next 100 days. These selection boards are required to coordinate with the state home department before conducting recruitment exams, given the recent uproar over cheating, leaks and cancellations or change in criteria in these tests.

"Ration and *sakht shaasan* (a strict regime) helped the BJP win a majority," says an official in the CM's office. Accordingly, the Yogi government has extended the government's free ration scheme for another three months.

ONE FOR THE WOMEN

Women's security is another area of focus in Yogi 2.0. The government has started a Mission Shakti Project for the security, safety and empowerment of women. "We have almost 10,000 female beat constables dedicated to women's safety, and there are women help desks in every police station. We also plan to have three more Mahila battalions in the state," says ADG Kumar. These special battalions for women are meant not only to fight crimes against women but also ensure their safety on the roads.

To 'safeguard college-going girls and check eve-teasing', the Yogi government is also planning to revive its controversial anti-Romeo squads. Each such squad will have 2-4 policepersons, including one female, and will be stationed around schools and colleges, where the concentration of women is likely to be greater. The UP home department has also decided to set up a new STF (special task force) unit in Ayodhya to ensure punishment for some 1,000 accused under the Pocso (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act.

TEMPLE RUN

Ayodhya will continue to be a passion project for the CM in his second term. The culture department is planning to identify land for a Ramayan University in the temple town besides dedicating the new Sant Kabir Research Academy's new building in Maghar to the public. Work on the 84-kosi parikrama marg, which links all the places associated with Lord Rama, will also start soon. Among other temple projects, the tourism department plans to start the renovation of the gate and drainage around the Gorakhnath temple.

With a hundred things planned for the first hundred days of his government, how many will Yogi Adityanath be able to actually deliver? That's a verdict for another day. ■

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GIVE AND TAKE
The iconic Open Hand monument in Chandigarh

MONEY SHARMA/GETTY IMAGES

THE NATION | CHANDIGARH

CAPITAL CONFLICT

Union home minister Amit Shah lit the spark, and Punjab and Haryana renewed their battle over Chandigarh

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

Days after the Punjab assembly passed a resolution reiterating the state's claim on Chandigarh, legislators from Haryana convened a special session of their Vidhan Sabha on April 5 to stake a counter claim. The two northern states have a long-standing dispute over the ownership of their joint capital, along with residual issues from the 1966 Punjab Reorganisation Act that carved out modern-day Punjab and Haryana. The latest round of hostilities was triggered after Union home minister Amit Shah, on a visit to Chandigarh on March 27, announced that Central Civil Services rules will apply on employees of the Union territory (UT), instead of Punjab Civil Services Rules, from April 1.

This has angered most political parties in Punjab who see it as "another big blow to the rights of Punjab". The Sukhbir Badal-led

PUNJAB'S CLAIMS

↘ Transfer of Chandigarh along with the Punjabi-speaking areas in Haryana

↘ Abandon Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) canal project

↘ Annul Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB)'s February notification that nixed Punjab's exclusive right to appoint a member to the board

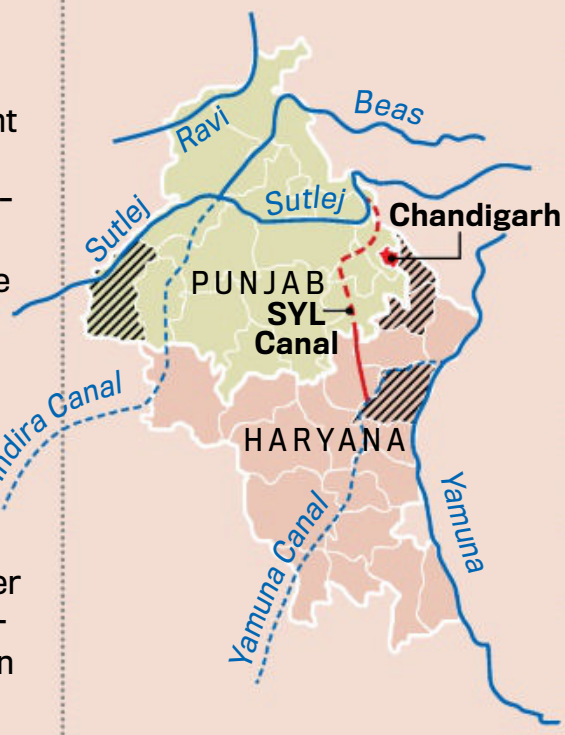
↘ Control of all headworks and dams; remuneration for river water flowing into Haryana and Rajasthan

↘ Control of all gurdwaras in the country under unified Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee

THE SYL CANAL DIVIDE

Haryana wants Hindi-speaking areas like **Abohar** and **Fazilka**

Punjab wants Punjabi-speaking areas in **Ambala, Panchkula** and **Karnal**



SYL CANAL

— 90 km in Haryana - - 121 km in Punjab

HARYANA'S COUNTER

↘ State also has right on Chandigarh; also claims Hindi-speaking areas in Punjab

↘ 85 per cent work on SYL is complete, Punjab should finish work on its side

↘ Punjab must share water, as stipulated by several tribunals

↘ BBMB notification should be revoked and Haryana's quota of sending one member to the board must be restored

↘ A separate gurdwara management committee for the state

Shiromani Akali Dal, looking to spring back into reckoning after the assembly poll rout, was the first to react, pushing Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann to escalate the issue further and pass the resolution at a specially convened session. Mann also threatened protests from the "streets to Parliament" against the implementation of central civil services rules in Chandigarh.

Chandigarh is a sensitive issue for the Sikh-majority state, which lost its original capital, Lahore, during Partition and has not had a capital of its own since. Chandigarh, goes the overriding sentiment, was built to compensate for this loss.

The capital, though, is not the only sore point for Punjab. Besides making Chandigarh the provisional capital of both Punjab and Haryana for 10 years, many Punjabi-speaking areas too were awarded to Haryana, adding insult to injury as it were. Further, the Punjab Reorganisation Act gave central agencies the control of irrigation water. In his speech in the assembly, Mann made a passionate appeal for the immediate transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab along with the Punjabi-speaking areas in Haryana, though he kept quiet on other contentious issues.

Back in January 1970, the Union government reportedly gave the nod to Chandigarh going to Punjab. Haryana was given five years to construct its own capital as well as a liberal Rs 10 crore grant for the purpose. This was linked to the transfer of Punjabi-speaking areas in Haryana to Punjab and the reciprocal transfer of Punjab's Hindi-speaking and Hindu-dominated Abohar and Fazilka regions to Haryana. However, the provisions were unacceptable to both sides and the dispute festered. Chandigarh then was made the provisional joint capital of Punjab and Haryana under the same Punjab Reorganisation Act, with the two states contributing government staff in a 60:40 ratio, respectively. But since the negotiations were not going anywhere, Chandigarh was accorded UT status in 1976.

Over the years, with the UT making its own recruitments, the number of Punjabi employees declined but the Punjab civil services rules continued to apply. While IPS and IAS officers held posts in a similar ratio from these cadre, the seniormost bureaucrats came from the AGMUT (Arunachal, Goa, Mizoram and UT) cadre.

In 1984, under the shadow of the Sikh insurgency, the Punjab governor was made administrator of Chandigarh. About a year later, the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi negotiated a deal with H.S. Longowal, who was heading the Akali Dal. Less than a month after the July 1985 accord, Sikh militants opposed to it assassinated the Akali chief. Political parties in Haryana too were opposed to the accord as they blamed the then Congress state government for entering into a vague agreement, especially regarding the territories to be transferred to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh.

Later, the Centre formed commissions for the transfer of territories, including one under the then Supreme Court Justice E.S. Venkataramiah in 1986. Assigned to define Hindi- and Punjabi-speaking villages, the judge recommended exchange of some 70,000 acres of land. But neither Punjab nor Haryana agreed, and the transfers never took place.

The Justice J.C. Shah-led Punjab Boundary Commission as well as other reports also upheld Punjab's right over Chandigarh, but the state's politicians were not willing to relinquish claim over Hindi-speaking areas and give them to Haryana. Over the years, the issues of water-sharing vexed

VIKRAM SHARMA

the situation even more. In July 1986, with the Khalistan insurgency set to condemn Punjab to two fallow decades, the Union government suspended the transfer of land indefinitely.

Cut to the present, and you find Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar too wading into troubled waters with his aggressive stand on the Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) canal construction and sharing of river water. While Haryana has completed its side of the work (85 per cent of the total) on the canal, Punjab has not moved an inch in the past so many years. It continues to be defiant, despite an arbitration mechanism being in place. The new Mann government has also shown no interest in the issue so far. Water has been a particularly fraught and emotive issue for Punjab (indeed more so during the two decades of the Khalistan insurgency). Despite directions from the Centre, sundry tribunals and even the Supreme Court, Punjab has refused to share water with Haryana.

Mann, who is just starting his term in office, has little leeway since emotions in the state are already running high. There is still residual anger against the farm laws, stoked further by the BJP-controlled Centre's February 23 notification amending the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) Rules, 1974, and changing the criteria for the selection of full-time members. Board members can now be from across India, instead of just Punjab and Haryana. The BBMB was created as an autonomous board under the provisions of the Punjab Reorganisation Act to regulate the supply of water and power to Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Chandigarh. The common belief is that the new rules will take away Punjab's control on the crucial dam headworks.

Water is a critical issue for both Khattar and Mann. Both states have stuck to their stand that depleting groundwater levels leave them with no choice in the matter. In Punjab, the water resource ministry data shows that 109 blocks out of 128 are in the 'dark zone' (severely depleted groundwater levels). Haryana needs the SYL water to irrigate farms in its southern parts. Officials here say groundwater levels in places like Gurugram district have fallen from a depth of 6.6 metres in 1976 to over 30 metres now. Haryana will not let go of Chandigarh even if it was inclined to unless Punjab relents on the water issue. The latter, meanwhile, says the water allocation system decided by the Balakrishna Eradi Tribunal in 1987—5 MAF (million acre-feet) water to Punjab and 3.83 MAF to Haryana—was faulty since it didn't consider Haryana's share of Yamuna water. Anyway, neither state had accepted these provisions and the dispute remains unresolved.

In 1960, after India signed the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, Punjab got use of the water from the tributaries. The 1966 reorganisation recommended water-sharing with drier Haryana. Punjab has three rivers—the Ravi, Sutlej and Beas—whereas Haryana gets water from the Yamuna. The SYL canal was planned as a 214 km conduit that would connect the Sutlej and Yamuna. But when construction started in 1982, political parties in Punjab cried foul and have resisted every move to complete the construction. In fact, in July 2004, the then Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh convened a special assembly session and passed the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004, which abrogated all river water agreements with neighbouring states. In February 2017, the Supreme Court said Punjab would have to abide by its order on the SYL canal and it would pass a decree if the two states did not come to an agreement. Yet the SYL canal remains stuck, except for the occasional burst of political activity, like being raked up alongside the Chandigarh issue last week.

After the Aam Aadmi Party tsunami in the assembly election and with the general election due in 2024, political parties in Punjab are eyeing a consolidation. They need to be watchful, as an emotive issue like Chandigarh can stoke discontent in the state and have unpredictable repercussions. And that, for Punjab, would be a capital shame. ■

LEISURE

MUSIC

MUSIC OF THE PEOPLE

Never has Coke Studio been more entertaining or relevant

Kaifi Khalil and Eva B perform the Balochi song 'Kana Yaari' on season 14 of Coke Studio Pakistan

A NEW LOOK Ali Sethi and Shae Gill; and (right) Zulfiqar Jabbar Khan

S

Still reeling from the effects of Omicron, the world felt gloomy when Coke Studio Pakistan released the first song of its 14th season on January 14. Performed by Abida Parveen and folk artiste Naseebo Lal, 'Tu Jhoom' proved to be distraction, yes, but it was also prescription. The song wanted us to rejoice in the face of adversity, to delight despite our despair. For ardent followers, though, the song was also a departure. Gone was the familiar, cosy studio. In its place, we had a plush music video.

Speaking to INDIA TODAY over a Zoom call from Lahore, Coke Studio producer Zulfiqar Jabbar Khan (or Xulfi, as he is known) says, "Try and recall the first few frames of 'Tu Jhoom'. The setting is dark. What you see looks almost like the old Coke Studio, but in the next 30 seconds, it transfers you to the new Coke Studio. The light comes in to reveal the artistry, the imagery, dancers, the theatrics."

In its 13 earlier avatars, Coke Studio thrived on a kind of musical chemistry which often results only from collective immersion. When trusted with Season 14, Xulfi wanted to take his inheritance a few steps further: "I wanted to capture all of your senses—your intellect, your feelings. It had to be an irresistible spectacle." Dropped over nine weeks, each of Coke Studio's 13 songs came to us in a shiny package that gave us the option of *seeing* the music we were listening to. "There needs to be a visual movement to the story you are telling sonically. That's what makes a connect," says Xulfi.

Narratives are important to Xulfi. He feels everyone—whether an art director, choreographer, make-up artist or cinematographer—is a storyteller. Part of the Coke Studio band in previous seasons, Action Zain (Zain Ali) was brought on as an associate music producer this year. He says that while experimentation and collaboration have always been at the heart of Coke Studio's success, Season 14 also felt extremely inclusive: "Ideas were allowed to flow freely; nothing was off limits. I was constantly being encouraged to stay authentic, to be myself."

WHILE EXPERIMENTATION AND COLLABORATION HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AT THE HEART OF COKE STUDIO'S SUCCESS, SEASON 14 ALSO FELT EXTREMELY INCLUSIVE, SAYS ZAIN ALI

When Zain was given a demo recording of the qawwali 'Thagyan', his first response was to strip it of all its qawwali elements. "What I had left was an interesting groove and baseline, an interesting way to move the melody." Though 'Thagyan', in the end, retains the customary qawwali crescendo, the love it speaks of is more romantic than it is spiritual. Sung by the celebrated Quratulain Baloch and Zain Zohaib, a young Pakistani qawwali group, it teases old boundaries, instead of fully breaking them.

Season 14 did, of course, leave some Coke Studio traditions intact. With every song, we were given a behind-the-scenes 'Magical Journey' video that made our listening and watching more intimate. We see Baloch and other Coke Studio veterans like Meesha Shafi almost wonderstruck by the platform's makeover. At times, these videos perform a separate function—they help musicians spell out for us the true intent of their songs.

Ali Sethi, for instance, passionately tells his fellow singer, Shae Gill, that the theme of their Punjabi song 'Pasoori' is more profound than the tribulations of a difficult love: "We live in this very polarised world where borders and boundaries of all sorts have become more rigid. 'Pasoori' [dilemma] is about someone who is oppressing you, who is preventing people who want to be together from meeting." 'Pasoori' has since gone viral with 70 million views on YouTube and 20 million hits on Spotify. Gill, 23, says, "When the song was in its creation process, I knew

it was something special and that it will be received with love, but I didn't know that I, as an artist, would receive such attention. That was a surprise."

While it was Gill's ghazal renditions on Instagram that put her on Coke Studio's radar, the show's line-up did make clear that Xulfi and his team had cast their net far wider. Not just is there something very joyful about seeing Eva B rap in an orange hijab, everything

about the Justin Bibis—right from their clothes to their lyrics—seems to have been chosen to cause delight. "Someone told them you can't sing in English because you aren't educated enough," says Xulfi. "They then learnt the lyrics of Justin Bieber's 'Baby', and when they sang it, the video went viral. That's how I saw them—confident, passionate and resilient."

Abdullah Siddiqui, an associate music producer on the show, says that even though Season 14 has made the show more relevant for Pakistan's youth, that was never the express intention. "We just wanted to make something that was a holistic snapshot of all the different kinds of music across the country. And in doing so, we did end up capturing a lot of the youth because the youth make a huge demographic. Our real aim, though, was to make something universal enough that could transcend these age demographics."

The song 'Go' gave Siddiqui, 21, an opportunity to perform with Atif Aslam, 39, one of Pakistan's most popular musicians. Like many of the tracks in this season, it is hard to pin the bilingual (English and Urdu) 'Go' down to a genre. Siddiqui says, "With the songs I produced and the one I performed, I wanted to take this vast lexicon of *desi* music and deconstruct it, retool it. I wanted to also see if I could usher in a new tradition of electronic music that was global but also very Pakistani."

With one of its singers, Arooj Aftab, having won a Grammy this year, this season of Coke Studio seems to underscore an obvious point: Pakistani music has never been more international. "Our bigger vision was to showcase the progressive and artistic side of Pakistan," says Xulfi, "but when I see the response from people all across the world, I start to feel even more strongly that it is the listeners who make music universal." Hasan Raheem, whose 'Peechay Hutt' is doubtlessly this season's best headbanger, says, "To spread different emotions through your song to people living far away from you... Who wouldn't be happy?"

Even though Xulfi calls Coke Studio an "export", it is also sometimes a template. While India's appropriation was largely lacklustre, the recent premiere of Bangladesh's Coke Studio Bangla leaves one feeling more hopeful. The three episodes of the first season seem to borrow the free-wheeling energy of its Pakistani counterpart, but making a comparison might well be missing the point. As Xulfi says, "We just need to keep our egos aside and make a music that the world can think of as its own." ■

–Shreevatsa Nevatia

GREATEST HITS

How Coke Studio took South Asia by storm

'ALIF ALLAH'
Coke Studio Pakistan
(Season 3)
Performed by folk singer Arif Lohar and pop star Meesha Shafi in 2010, it was this song which made the world sit up and take notice of a musical revolution brewing in Pakistan. Though unusual, the collaboration hit all the right notes, paving the way for several more such juxtapositions.

'NASEK NASEK'
Coke Studio Bangla
(Season 1)
A new entrant but no amateur, Bangladesh's Coke Studio released on February 23 this year. Its first song already has over 10 million views on YouTube. Featuring Animes Roy and Pantho Kanai, the track checks many boxes—danceability, diversity, delight.

'KATTEY'
Coke Studio India
(Season 3)
Most listeners agree that it was with this song that Coke Studio's Indian chapter peaked. Composed by Ram Sampath, 'Kattey' featured the Rajasthani folk powerhouse Bhanvari Devi and rapper Hard Kaur. Together, they created a track which mixed a lover's longing with feminist assertion.

The literary moral police disapproved when Hanya Yanagihara's first novel, *A Little Life*, became a runaway success. Yanagihara was an emotional pornographer, they tut-tutted; her readers were masochistic beyond the allowable limits of Discriminating Literary Goodtaste.

Like thousands of other readers in the anglophone world, I too, in 2015, set my life to pause mode for a long weekend so that I could surrender to the baroque pleasures of *A Little Life*. The 800-page *bildungsroman* of four young men kept me riveted despite—or more likely because of—the sorrow and anguish I experienced while reading.

HANYA YANAGIHARA'S To Paradise reminds us that love has the capacity to give us back our memories

Readers who cried encore to *A Little Life* are forewarned that *To Paradise* will demand more of them. As with *A Little Life*, relationships between men, familial and erotic, are the connective tissue of this novel, but *To Paradise* dislocates, it departs from the reliable form of the *bildungsroman*, that gave *A Little Life* its Pain-on-Tap mouthfeel.

The novel is divided into three books, separated in time. In 1893, in a dystopian New York, homosexuality is unconstrained—though race and class distinctions are enforced via a system of arranged marriages. In 1992, Hawaii is hungry for an identity-giving nationalist utopia. And, familiarly, eerily—because Yanagihara started her book before the Covid-19 outbreak—in 2093, a dystopian America is ravaged by multiple pandemics.

People lead sterile clockwork lives in Yanagihara's post-pandemic(s) world: international travel is (still) prohibited; full body suits are de rigueur (you can eat through your masks); the internet has been cancelled (no more dangerous fake news); books are controlled; a small number of storytellers are state-sanctioned, their canned heartwarming tales sound as if riffed off *The Gift of the Magi*. Homosexuality is not illegal, but it is ghettoised. Since most people have become sterile from pandemic treatments, the state rewards reproduction and, therefore, heterosexuality (so what else is new?).

In each of the three books, there is a character who is torn between safety and desire. Each of them is plotting a way out. Each of the central characters, and several of the ancillary ones, reckon with the erotic shame of being unloved; they wrestle with the jarring differences in need and desire that are the spoilers of romantic friendships. Grandfathers are writ large in this book: they love their grandchildren, they arrange their marriages, they want them to be safe.

To add inflection to the jumps in time, 100 years at a go, between the book sections, the names of the characters also repeat and disorient. Each section of this triptych has Davids and Charleses, sometimes they mirror in some emotional register the David or Charles that went before them. Each section closes with the longing for paradise—is it the right to desire freely?

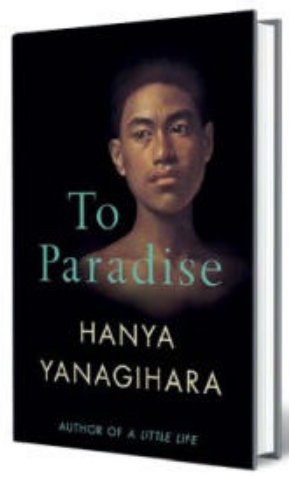
If you get there, *To Paradise*—704 pages long—reminds us that love—and perhaps the love of reading—has the capacity to give us back our memories. But whether you can match Yanagihara's relentless capacity to inhabit other—most often unlucky—bodies, depends upon your psyche's tensile strength for shame. ■

– Amrita Narayanan

BOOKS

Locked Out of Heaven

In a novel that spans three centuries, **Hanya Yanagihara** asks if it is ever possible to desire freely



TO PARADISE
by Hanya Yanagihara
PICADOR
₹799; 720 pages

DAVID LEVENSON/GETTY IMAGES

LOVE MARRIAGE
By Monica Ali
VIRAGO
₹899;
512 pages

BOOKS

SEX, LIES AND FAMILY TIES

Monica Ali's new novel might leave you breathless, but its rewards are well worth the exertion

Monica Ali confessed in a recent interview that the reception of her last novel, *Untold Story*, left her paralysed for a decade with depression and a catastrophic loss of confidence. Critics, and perhaps readers, she says, were left "confused" by a writer they associated with immigrant narratives turning her hand to a counterfactual about Princess Diana. Stay in your lane, Ali assumed they were saying. That she was foolish and naive to think she could write about "whatever I wanted, like a white male writer can".

After 11 years, Monica Ali has re-emerged with her fourth novel, a familiar blockbuster. Having read about her dejection at the critical obsession with taxonomy, the desire to bully certain kinds of writers (women and minorities) and to put them in their place, you almost wish she would come back fists swinging, flipping the bird at her critics with a radical departure from what you might imagine to be the 'typical' Ali novel. But who wants to tell a writer what to write?

Of course, Ali's writerly fate was sealed the moment her debut *Brick Lane* burst onto the British literary scene. A novel about immigration, abuse, infidelity, identity, arranged marriages, hypocrisy, *Brick Lane* angered the self-appointed 'leaders' of the Bangladeshi immigrant community who accused Ali of pandering to British prejudices.

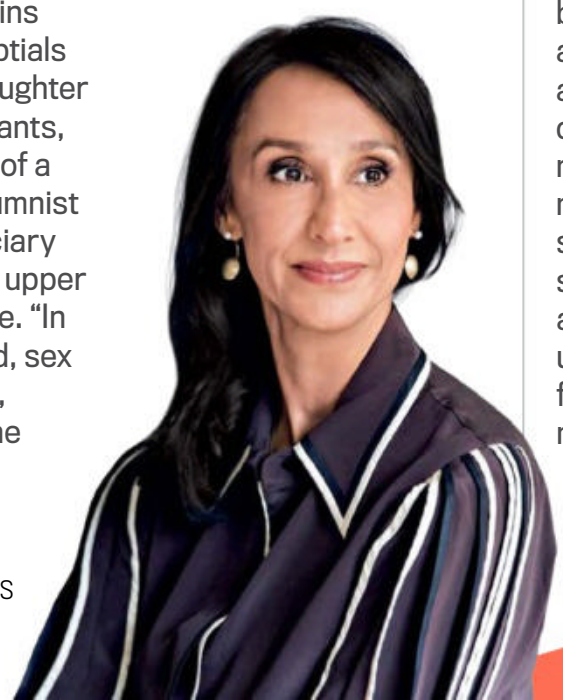
Love Marriage begins with the impending nuptials of Yasmin Ghorami, daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants, and Joe Sangster, son of a prominent English columnist and writer and beneficiary of all the certainties of upper middle class English life. "In the Ghorami household, sex was never mentioned", the novel begins. It's the cue for a comedy of manners, an unravelling of every family taboo. The novel begins by exploring Yasmin's feelings of embarrassment about her immigrant parents, how they don't look right, sound right, act right and over many hundreds of pages shows how she has misunderstood not just her own parents, but the ostensibly warm and easy relationship between Joe and his mother, Joe himself and, indeed, the strength of her own relationship with Joe.

It's a novel in part at least about the upturning of assumptions, about the folly of trying to box people in. (Maybe Ali is flipping the bird at her critics after all.) Perhaps fittingly, given Ali's love for the great 19th-century novelists, *Love Marriage* is a teeming, heavily populated, creakily plotted novel of the kind Henry James famously described—both disparagingly and admiringly—as "large, loose, baggy monsters".

There is so much going on; so many people talking, doing, feeling, thinking, being; so many skeletons tumbling out of closets; so much action and conversely inaction, that readers will find themselves breathless and occasionally impatient with yet another digression. Ali is sometimes clunky, reliant on cliches and shortcuts of both character and phrase. Still, *Love Marriage* is a likeable, large-hearted, forgiving novel. There is horror, too, but Ali is broadly optimistic about human nature. There are no second acts in American lives, Scott Fitzgerald did not say, or at least he said more. *Love Marriage* is about second acts, about the reassuring possibility that love and understanding can help us make up for, and recover from, even the most terrible mistakes. ■

–Shougat Dasgupta

Monica Ali's *Love Marriage* is about second acts, about how love can help us recover from terrible mistakes



YOLANDE DE VRIES

HISTORY

Courtesy: LHAMO TSERING ARCHIVE

ON A WAR FOOTING

An exhibition in Delhi tells the story of how some Tibetans had once taken up arms to fight China

Courtesy: LHAMO TSERING ARCHIVE

RAISA GALOFRE

After China invaded Tibet in 1950, 'sporadic armed resistance' started springing up across the country, and when these factions later united, they together came to be known as the Chushi Gangdruk army. Interestingly, these events all unfolded during the Cold War, when the US wanted to contain the spread of communism. So, when the resistance fighters sought support, the CIA both trained them and funded their movement. This secret operation, which ran from 1957 to 1970, was code-named STCIRCUS. This little-known chapter in history is the subject of Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam's exhibition *Shadow Circus: A Personal Archive of Tibetan Resistance (1957–1974)*. Organised with curator Natasha Ginwala, it is on view at India International Centre's Art Gallery in Delhi till May 1.

Shadow Circus includes material that Sarin and Sonam have gathered since they started researching the topic in the late 1980s. Inspiration to do so first came from Sonam's late father, Lhamo Tsering, a key figure in the resistance and its main liaison with the CIA. "He was a meticulous archivist who kept detailed records of the resistance, including photographs, maps, documents and letters," says Sonam, via email. The centrepiece of the exhibition is a re-edited version of the 1998 documentary film *The Shadow Circus: The CIA in Tibet* that saw Sonam and Sarin interview former fighters and CIA officers. Contacting the latter, Sarin says, was especially hard: "Tenzing's father knew them only by their first names...

SHADOW CIRCUS HAS ON DISPLAY CIA-ISSUED MAPS AND DRAWINGS FROM THE GUERRILLA HAND-BOOK MADE BY TIBETAN TRAINEES AT CAMP HALE

RESIST! (clockwise from left) Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam; Lhamo Tsering and others; Classroom at Camp Hale; members of the Mustang Resistance Force; and Lhamo Tsering's CIA-issued camera, compass and a map of Tibet

Courtesy: BRUCE WALKER, HOOVER INSTITUTION

We spent a summer in Washington, DC, researching these elusive figures."

In 1957, the CIA started work in Saipan by training a pilot group of six Tibetans in guerrilla warfare and radio communications and they were parachuted back into Tibet. Then, in 1958, they twice airdropped weapons to fighters in Tibet. Encouraged by the operation's success, the CIA also set up Camp Hale in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, where nearly 259 Tibetans were trained between 1959 and 1964. Amongst the exhibits at *Shadow Circus* are CIA-issued maps, drawings from the Guerrilla Handbook made by Tibetan trainees at Camp Hale, Tsering's camera, binoculars and a compass given to him by the CIA. "A lot of the documents that we collected are from the CIA's archives and Eisenhower Presidential Library archives. Some of those will be on display as well," says Sonam. He also adds that IIC visitors will be able to hear an audio clip in which the Dalai Lama implores the Mustang guerrillas to surrender.

When the CIA pulled out abruptly in 1970, Tibetans did feel betrayed, but "accepted that they were the only people who came to their aid in any meaningful way," says Sarin. Over the years, the Tibetan freedom struggle turned non-violent, and this clandestine operation has almost been forgotten. "We thought it was important to tell this story and remind the world of the sacrifices made by so many Tibetans who took up arms to defend their country," says Sonam. ■

– Anu Prabhakar

ART/ PHOTOGRAPHY

An Open Mind

An online exhibition is laying bare the human mind by exploring its myriad complexities

Though excellently curated by the Science Gallery, Bengaluru, *PSYCHE* can feel a little overwhelming. Besides the 10 exhibits that all delve into the complexities of the human mind, this online exhibition also features six films and over 40 live programmes that include virtual masterclasses, workshops and public lectures. It also gives access to books, podcasts, games and graphic novels. *PSYCHE* isn't just about mental health. It also focuses on forensic psychology, hypnosis, AI and psychedelics.

Speaking of the collaboration with the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), The Wellbeing Project and Museum Dr. Guislain, Dr Jahnavi Phalke, founding director of the Science Gallery, says, "This has been an exciting opportunity to bring together academics, curators and artists to debate questions concerning the social and sometimes not-so-social lives of our mind. It is inspiring to learn of the still unanswered and unexplored big questions in a cluster of related yet specific fields—psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, neurosciences, philosophy among others."

Put together by psychiatrists Alok Sarin, Sanjeev Jain, and Pratima Murthy, 'The Asylum' is perhaps the best exhibit to start with. By helping us trace the fascinating histories of asylums in Delhi, Ranchi, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru, the exhibit helps us map the trajectory of mental health treatment in India. Earlier known as 'The Lunatic Asylum', NIMHANS, we learn, was the first facility to be built for mental health treatment and this is where India's first lobotomy was performed.

PSYCHE explores the history of mental health treatment in India while also debating questions concerning the mind

Other notable exhibits include the audio-visual 'Black Men's Reality' (about Black men's mental health), 'Change My Mind' (implications of brain implants on minds), 'Playing with Reality' (an award-winning interactive work on psychosis) and 'Hamlet's Live' (six monologues about social media).

An interactive game, 'The Serpent of a Thousand Coils', can seem a touch unnerving in the way it leads viewers through a tricky maze, towards their individual fears. Artist Anuj Malhotra, who battles OCD, says the game is a manifestation of his reality. A player is given the choice to inhabit one of two narrative circumstances that have transpired within a fictional small town. As they navigate the story, the game poses a series of questions, each of which has two possible answers. Malhotra says, "The layout of this inquisition is based on the discoveries made by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky in the field of decision research, which was presented in the book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*." ■

–Jayanthi Madhukar

MIND GAMES Stills from 'Black Men's Minds'; and 'The Asylum' (right)

In His Own Image

ART/ BOOKS

Artist Waswo X. Waswo's new book is typically opulent, playful and self-absorbed

Karkhana is a sumptuously produced coffee-table book, replete with reproductions of the artworks produced by Waswo X. Waswo (WXW) and his team in Udaipur over the past decade or so. For those unfamiliar with WXW's work, the book is a comprehensive introduction to the American artist's immersion into the traditions of Rajasthani miniature painting. Those who already know his oeuvre will recognise the typical mix of studio photography, hand-painted photographs and miniature painting for which WXW is now known.

Along with the various series of works, WXW writes a light and engaging diary of his daily life in Udaipur. Explaining that his practice is rooted in collective effort, WXW also stresses that it is *his* vision the team works to render. As we follow the daily routines, we see the different kinds of work: the conception, possibly the photography (though not all the images have a photo-element), the actual execution of a painting, with different highly skilled artists responsible for different parts (one for the figures, one for the flora

A COLLECTIVE (from top, left) 'Dalpat Jingar's Workshop', by Chirag Kumawat; 'Chai' by WXW and Rajesh Soni; 'When Searching is not Finding', by WXW, Vijay, Dalpat Jingar and Shankar Kumawat

Turning page after page of *Moving Focus*, a compendium on Indian art edited by Mumbai gallerist Mortimer Chatterjee, one hopes that there would be a parallel universe in which the two volumes would serve as guidebooks for an actual public collection of art in India, made since 1900, which we would be able to experience together in all its eclectic, idiosyncratic and cacophonous expansiveness.

To make *Moving Focus*, Chatterjee invited 54 artists, curators, historians and writers to each nominate five artworks made by artists living in India or identifying as part of its diaspora. In the overall selection, there are, of course, a lot of paintings, some sculptures, photography, installations and new media art, a fair number of them recognisable and iconic, but also unexpected objects like Dashrath Patel's in-flight serveware from 1968, and Dilip Chowdhury's cover for *Design* magazine from 1964.

While *Moving Focus* could have easily been just a canon-building exercise, the openness of Chatterjee's invitation allowed the contributors to make both personal and political arguments for each of their choices. The explanations that accompany the art then not only familiarise readers with the significance of the work at hand but also with the inspirations, preoccupations, and obsessions of the nominators themselves. When artist Atul Dodiya introduces us to his mentor and friend Bhupen Khakhar's *Ranchodbhai Relaxing in Bed* (1977) by recalling the moment when he first encountered the painting at Mumbai's Jehangir Art Gallery,

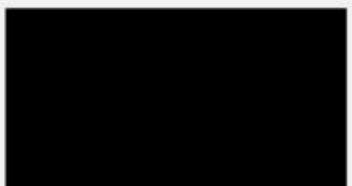
Courtesy: VIVAN SUNDARAM

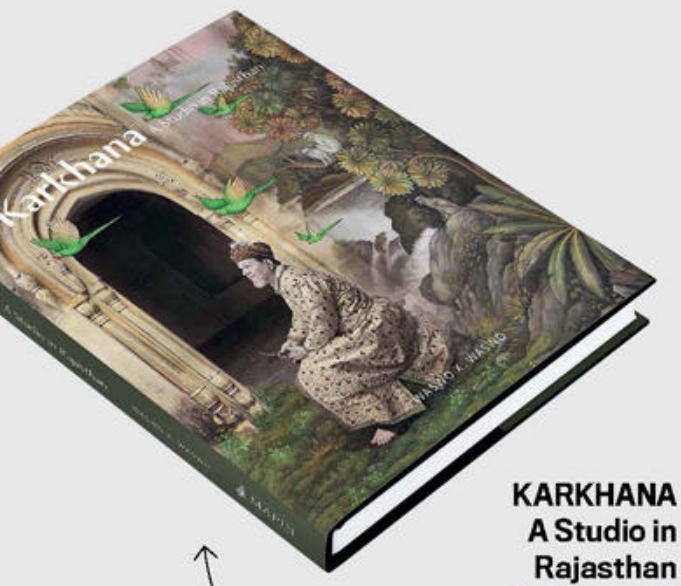
JOINT ART 'Burial-Coffin' by Vivan Sundaram, 1993; and (right) 'Is It What You Think?', 1998, by Rummana Hussain

ART/ BOOKS

State of the Art

NO EXPLORATION OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART CAN BE EXHAUSTIVE, BUT **MORTIMER CHATTERJEE'S** NEW COMPENDIUM IS CERTAINLY EXPANSIVE





KARKHANA
A Studio in Rajasthan
by Waswo X. Waswo
MAPIN PUBLISHING
₹2,950; 247 pages

and fauna, one for the borders, etc) in a model that replicates a typical medieval atelier (a *karkhana*), the printing of the editions of the final digital images made from the composite pictures, the construction of the frames, and so on.

Parting the gorgeously rendered foliage that's present in so many of the images, one can see that WXW's chief subject is himself; whatever comment on the world or on art and visual perception a WXW work might make, it makes it through the lens, as it were, of the artist's constant presence in the image. In this, WXW owes a debt to various western artists: as a sort of anti-Frida Kahlo/ Cindy Sherman; not so much Chuck Close, who mined his own face across a painting career, as William Wegman, who photographed his Weimaraner dogs in different contexts (here, of course, WXW becomes his own Weimaraner). For any art lover, the other fun game to play is spot-the-quotation; and indeed the Waswo delicatessen has a wide selection of *hommage* on display, from Indian mythology to Tantra, to Husain, Warhol and Koons.

Parting the gorgeously rendered foliage that's present in so many of the images, one can see that **WASWO X. WASWO'S** chief subject is himself

Ultimately, one is left with two reactions: the first is that one has observed at length an elephant gracefully bathing itself in the river of its own admiration; the erotics signalled in several of the images here take us not to an examination of any desire of the other but a sort of onanimagism, a möbius strip of self-regard. Secondly, whatever the tongue-in-cheek intentions towards critiquing the Orientalist gaze, the constant presence of the jovial or alarmed, clueless, suited white man actually ends up reinforcing the colonial, totally undercutting the flagged undercutting. The lovely filigree of detail in the images makes all this somewhat bearable, but as you close the book you feel as though you have sampled a heavy buffet of quite nice dishes that all taste vaguely similar. ■

–Ruchir Joshi

Courtesy: TALWAR GALLERY, NEW YORK | NEW DELHI

he notes that the work presented an alternative understanding of how paint can be applied, figures rendered and our ordinary realities represented on canvas—all of which are questions Dodiya has continued to attend to in his own practice.

One volume of *Moving Focus* features such anecdotes and analyses alongside images while the other volume provides large reproductions of the artworks for closer study. There are also a number of short essays addressing canon-formation and institution-building in India and abroad accompanied by a lively panel discussion with six of the nominators. This discussion along with Chatterjee's two essays—one on collecting and the other on memory and memorialising—covers a vast terrain and touches upon subjects that may otherwise escape the general reader, such as the decisive role of the art market in consolidating the significance and visibility of the Progressive Artists' Group, or the impact of museum shows in the US and UK in reorienting the canon within the country, and the oft-repeated but inaccurate story of the fragmentation of art-making into installation as a response to the fragmentation of society with the rise of Hindutva in the 1990s.

MOVING FOCUS, INDIA
New Perspectives on Modern & Contemporary Art
by Mortimer Chatterjee
ACC ART BOOKS
₹25,000; 620 pages

While many historical, political and formal turns and currents within art in India emerge in reading the book, backwards and forwards, no claim to a complete or total understanding of the field is made. What *Moving Focus* does make us aware of, though, is that most of the art that matters to various well-known practitioners is largely out of sight and reach of the public, turning these printed lists into their only available galleries. Although the collectors were deliberately left out of the group of nominators, they haunt the book in that they hold the keys to much of the art featured in it. The book itself could not have been made without the support of collectors Deepak and Priya Tanna. ■

–Zeenat Nagree

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

Even though his new crime thriller, London Diaries, *has just begun streaming on Voot Select, actor* ***Arjun Rampal*** *says it isn't just OTT entertainment that is keeping his hands full*

Q+A

Q. You say your character in *London Diaries* "personally impacted" you. How so?
It was one of the most difficult characters I have played. He has isolated himself from the world, even though he is solving mysteries as a detective. Yes, we all have been isolated through the pandemic, but you still had your family. With this guy, I was left hoping that no one is this lonely in their life. It has been an intense experience.

Q. Are OTT shows now affording you meatier opportunities?
I don't think so. The films that I have done in the past few years have left me spoiled for choice, be it Aparna Sen's *The Rapist*, *Dhaakad*, a period film based on true events that I just completed with Honey Trehan, or *The Battle of Bhima Koregaon*, or even the two projects that I have done with Abbas-Mustan.

Q. You are also doing a film with Telugu star Pawan Kalyan...
When this mega film first came to me, my first reaction was 'I can't do this. How can I speak in another language?' Then I was told that my character doesn't need to speak much Telugu. I just felt that being part of this larger-than-life world, going to another industry and seeing how they work is going to be such a wonderful experience, and that I will only learn from it.

Q. *The Rapist* is leaving quite an impression on the film festival circuit. Tell us about it.
There's a huge process behind doing a film with Aparna Sen—the way she constructs her characters and allows you to explore yours. Konkona [Sensharma] and I hadn't worked together before but the workshops we did allowed us to get to know each other. So, by the time we reached the set, there was camaraderie and an ease.

—with Suhani Singh

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

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INDIA TODAY

HOME

APRIL 2022

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The helical staircase steals the spotlight in this Delhi home by Studio Lotus

BREAKING THE RULES

HOW INNOVATIVE DESIGN IS CHANGING THE GAME

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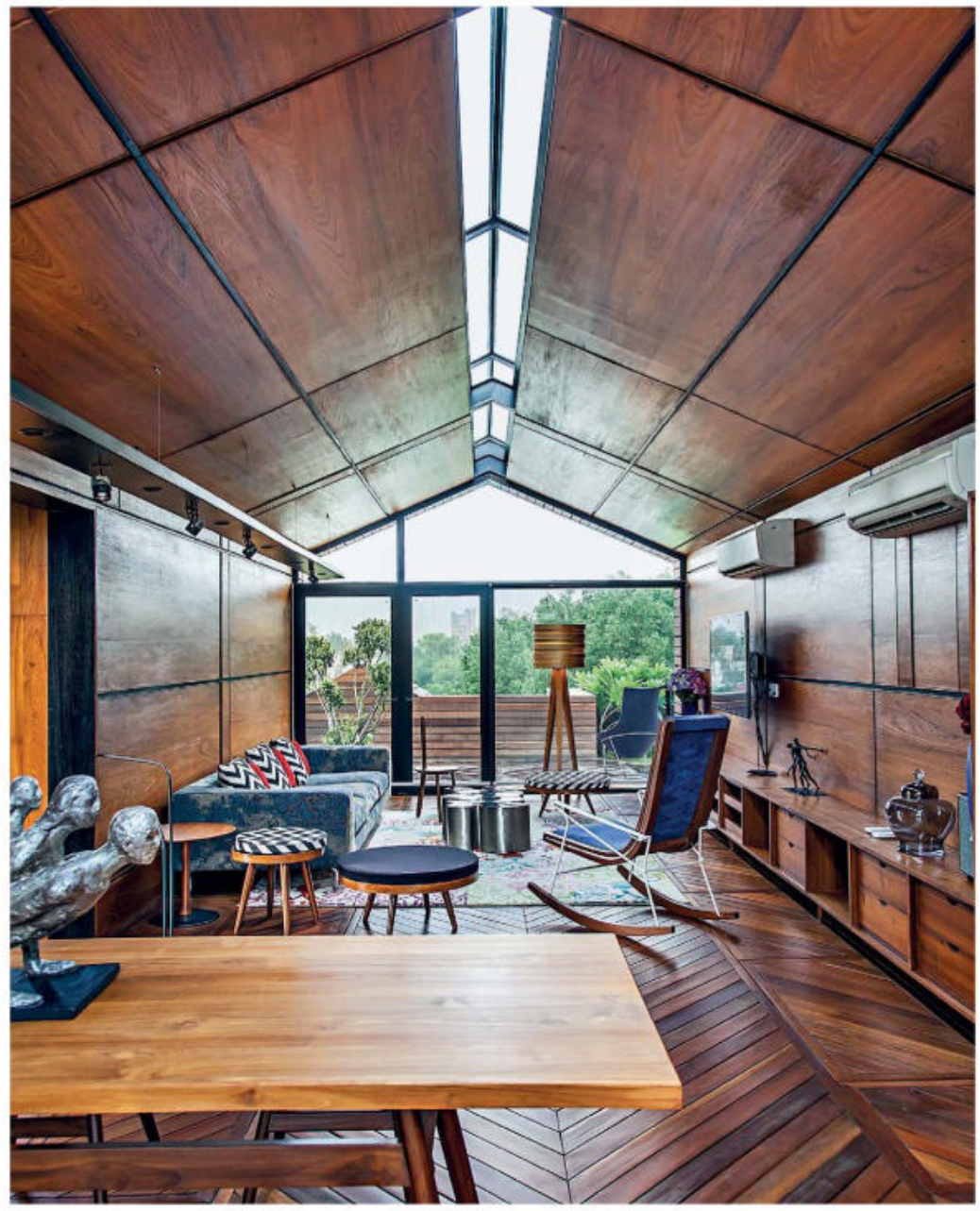

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news
Launches

iSpy

Your guide to the hottest new stores and products

By **RIDHI KALE**

HOB KNOB

E-commerce platform, IndianShelf, has launched Theia, a gold inspired collection of ceramic knobs. The limited edition range is handmade and durable.

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Natural Beauty

Natural yarns and fabrics are the need of the hour for interior designers. Keeping this in mind and the onset of summers, Nirmals Furnishings' latest textiles collections extoll the beauty of natural woven fabrics. The resultant textural quality brings out a unique charm and exudes sophistication. The deep rooted passion for finest quality fabrics, refined aesthetics and an eye for latest innovations ensures Nirmals Furnishings' keeps coming up with products that the design community appreciates and welcomes.

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BED AND BEYOND

Duroflex has teamed up with fashion designer Rohit Bal to release a collection called Masterpiece, a limited edition collection of 12 premium bed linen designs. Powered with superior N9 pure silver technology, it is an anti-bacterial range.

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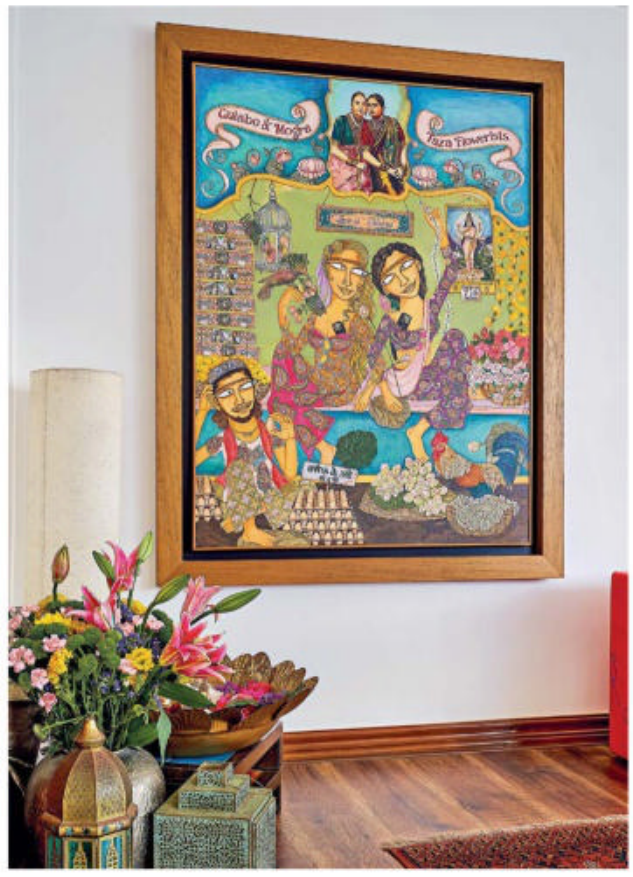
DESIGNER DEN
A very relaxed and playful Aditi Rao Hydari (left); colour artwork in her apartment (below); a restful bedroom (bottom)



A PRIVATE PARADISE

Minimal, magical and modern, actor Aditi Rao Hydari's home in Mumbai is all that and more

By **RIDHI KALE**

The latest season of Asian Paints 'Where the Heart Is', takes us inside actor Aditi Rao Hydari's home in Mumbai. Here's why we loved the space. Inspired by both her ancestral home in Hyderabad and the doll's house, her father made for her when she was young, Hydari's apartment in Versova, Mumbai is warm and welcoming. Natural light bathes every nook and corner here. You can't miss the cute outdoor space, an oasis in the middle of the concrete jungle. From the playful prints in the living and the elevated dining room to entertain friends and family to the carefully selected artworks and the restful bedroom, each space is an extension of her personality. Clearly, season 5 of of Asian Paints 'Where the Heart Is', is an exciting one.

Spectacular Sanctuary

Three different construction systems, a unique design language between the indoors and outdoors and a celebration of craft, this weekend retreat by Studio Lotus is designed to be a sight for sore city-bred eyes

By **RIDHI KALE**

The Earth and Glass House, a weekend retreat in Sultanpur, Delhi by Studio Lotus is all about interconnected volumes that establish a dialogue between the indoors and the outdoors. Designed for a family looking to host friends and relatives to unwind and move far away from the chaos city life; it is situated on a two-acre rectangular plot with one half is for hosting events.

Photographs by: NIVEDITAA GUPTA

STUNNING SPACES
The striking dining room located next to a Jenga-inspired bar designed in collaboration with Mangrove Collective (inset); the outdoors and indoors connect seamlessly (left)

The house is surrounded by farmlands on three sides and a dense urban settlement on its eastern edge. "Breaking rank with conventional construction, the Earth and Glass House unites three construction systems: a mild steel framework, load-bearing walls made of rammed earth, and exposed RCC slabs. A key design challenge was to develop the requisite joinery and junction details to cohesively unite these three distinct structural systems," says architect Sidhartha Talwar, principal, Studio Lotus.

"The entrance porch is shaded by a ten-metre long cantilevered volume resting on a load-bearing rammed earth wall and a pair of V-shaped columns. The building form appears almost weightless, suspended above grade like a floating box," adds Talwar. The entryway has a double-height, sky-lit courtyard. "The entrance court is punctuated by a helical staircase that features a custom-made brass railing emulating twigs and branches of the nearby trees as a nod to nature," he says.

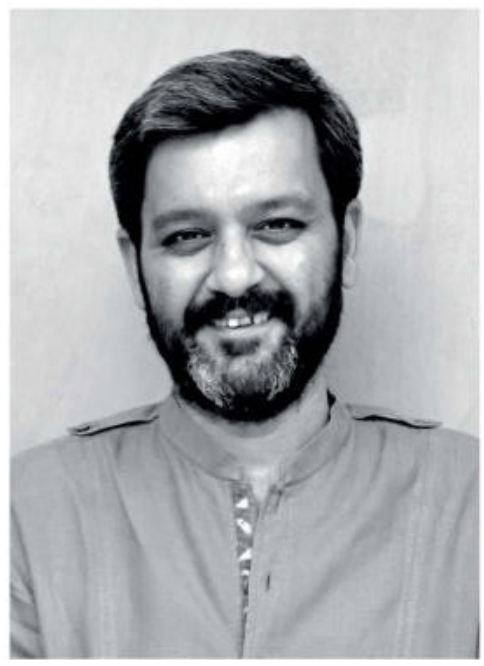
Designed in the form of a pavilion, the living area has large glass windows that ensure the interiors remain lit throughout. "A Jenga-inspired brass bar, articulated in concrete and brass, serves as a node between the living and dining areas," says Talwar. Beyond, the dining extends into the kitchen and utility spaces. The bedrooms are housed on the upper level of the cantilevered block, where each bedroom is outfitted with bespoke furniture. "The scale of the home is almost monumental; the extra-high ceilings, large doorways and expansive sky-lit bathrooms as well as the generously sized custom-designed consoles and furniture are a stark departure from convention," he shares.

"The home is an unbridled celebration of craft and sculpture, characterised by sinuous curves and playful geometry," says the architect.

By not following a conventional design philosophy this weekend retreat manages to provide a sanctuary for its residents, allowing them to truly wind down and connect with the outdoors.

VISUAL DELIGHT

The entrance porch with load-bearing V-shaped columns allows the building to appear suspended like a floating box (above); the sculptural staircase by Mangrove Collective (left)



Architect **Sidhartha Talwar,** principal at Studio Lotus, a Delhi-based practice that excels in innovative architecture and spatial design. www.studiolotus.in

NOT WALLED IN
The steel kitchen seamlessly moves into the living room, powder bathroom and the wet kitchen

A FREE FLOWING SPACE

Photographs by SAMEER TAWDE

cover story
Architecture

This bachelor pad by MuseLAB called Naked, does away with walls, doors and room divisions to create a space that is bare, bold and beautiful

By **RIDHI KALE**

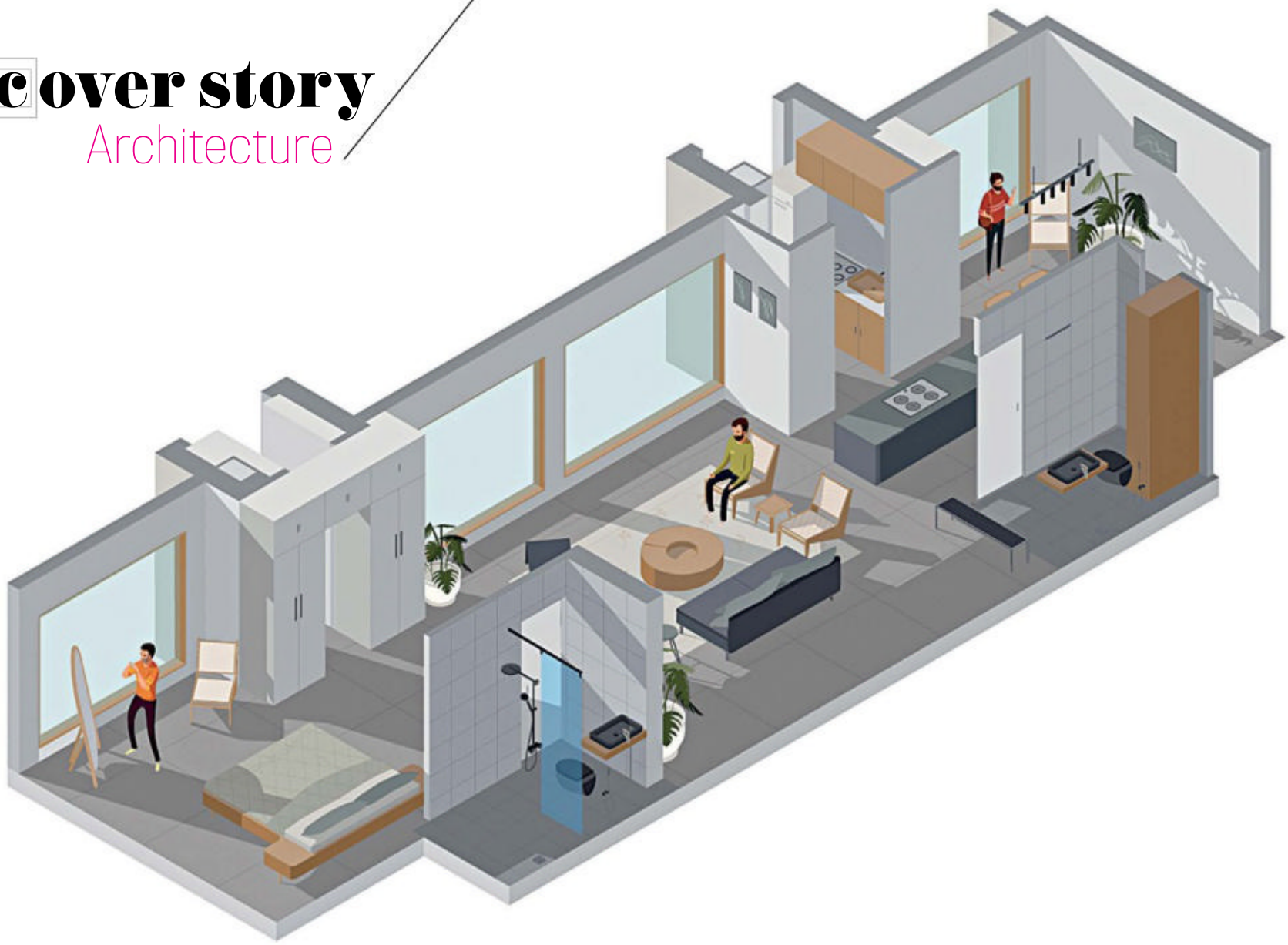
Architects **Huzefa Rangwala** and **Jasem Pirani** are the founders of MuseLAB, an end-to-end design studio based out of Mumbai. www.muselab.in

Architects Huzefa Rangwala and Jasem Pirani are known for designing spaces high on colour and patterns. But when it came to designing a bachelor pad they threw convention and the rule book out of the window. "Naked is a home that is undraped, undisguised and unexaggerated. Our client's bold vision and unconventional brief required us to envision a 1,000 sq ft bachelor's pad akin to Philip Johnson's Glass House with an open plan sans walls and doors. Essentially, we had to create a pavilion for viewing the hillock in the distance, a lucid space that offers a seamless integration with the cityscape 15 floors above the ground," says Rangwala.

They were given two one-bedroom units (each with a living-dining space, kitchen and bathroom), which they merged into one large unit. "We demolished all the walls to create one contiguous space that is further sprinkled with bare minimum furniture and in the process, we fashioned a home that is synonymous to a galerie de sculptures with no patterns or colours," says Pirani.

You directly enter the central living space of the home. "Each piece of furniture exudes a certain amount of rawness in its tactility; the idea behind bringing together these pieces was to experience their materiality and silhouettes, with visual and physical interactions," adds Pirani.

Photographs by MANDAR DEODHAR



One part of the home is a dedicated 'cook and eat' zone. "Here, we have designed an open steel kitchen in collaboration with Kuche 7 for our client who also happens to be a closeted epicurean. The kitchen countertop extends to form a dining table that seats four gastronomes," says Rangwala, adding, "A panoramic landscape shot by him dons the wall that bookends this open plan. A nondescript portal leads to the wet kitchen and the dry yard." Across the wet kitchen is the powder bath.

PLOT AND PLAN
The 3D layout of the home showing how each room leads to the other, only the powder room and bathroom are behind walls (above); the dining room (right)

SMART LIVING
The living room moves into the bedroom that has a dedicated dressing area (left); the clean and straight-lined bathroom (below)

"The other end of the home is the sleeping space, comprising a simple wooden bed with a backrest upholstered with faux tan leather; the bed-side tables are merely shelves sans drawers. Across from the bed is Nougat II, floor mirror by MuseLAB. FN Souza and Rabin Mondal pair up to don the other wall," says Pirani. Next to the bed space is a pair of wardrobes flank the entryway to the walk-in closet for athletic gear. Opposite this space is the bathroom.

"This particular project is extremely special for us as we are rarely presented with such bold briefs and bold clients. It made us think laterally; we had to de-clutter not only the space, but also our minds to design for what one needs and not what one wants. And before we go on and on, the home says, I want you to see me naked, un-apologetic, gritty but honest," says Rangwala.

Photographs by: ARIEL HUBER

HIT THE ROOF
(clockwise from right) The roof is the most standout feature of this home; the staircase divides the living spaces; in this bedroom the ceiling does away with civil walls; the roof by the pool adds to the aesthetics of the space

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

Can a home be just a plinth with a roof with no civil walls? We take you inside one such amazing space by _Opolis Architects.

By **RIDHI KALE**

This home is aptly called the Roof House. As the name suggests the hero of this space is the roof. Located in Khandala, Maharashtra the 10,000 sq ft plot receives a lot of rainfall. "The house uses the roof not only as a rain protection element but also as a space making element where the roof itself becomes the vertical space making element," says architect Sonal Sancheti of _Opolis Architects, adding, "Past experiences of building in this region led us to create roof surfaces to take the onslaught of the monsoon from the south west direction. A concrete portal—low and cantilevered, free from the ground breaks this roof to create openings that include the main entrance and the connection to kitchen exterior space." The use of levels further creates privacy and lets the roof itself enclose space. "The house is essentially a plinth with a roof, with no walls towards the eaves ends of the roof and only precast 50 mm Aerocon panels or fenestration in the gable direction of the house," she

STEP BY STEP
In this living space that houses the kitchen, a staircase and the dining, the roof is the focal point

adds. Another interesting aspect of the roof is that the water from the roof is channeled in a RCC gutter which becomes an exciting element in the monsoon season.

As for the rest of the space, an open living room enclosed partially by black agricultural mesh and roll-down bamboo screens gives an ideal semi-open space to the house. A plunge pool attached to this verandah adds to its usability and informal character. "The parking and service areas are tucked at the lower and ground level and become part of the heavy plinth on which sits a light-weight steel structure," says architect Rahul Gore. The staff accommodation forms a retaining wall along the compound and enables the creation of the main green space for the living room of the house.

"A mezzanine space is accommodated within the high roof volume to give additional play space to the children and overlooks the children room on one side and the kitchen and dining spaces on the other," he says. A multiuse family room has vertically pivoted shutters that enclose or open up the space. "This family room opens out onto a terrace that overlooks the entrance forecourt and connects to the green landscape," says Sancheti.

The rooms have intentionally been kept small but have high volumes making creative spaces flooded with daylight. "The rooms and master bathroom make use of exterior courtyards to create privacy," says Gore.

Clearly for this home, breaking the rules has worked well.

Architects **Rahul Gore** and **Sonal Sancheti** are the founders of _OPOLIS Architects, a multidisciplinary design practice, based out of Mumbai. www.opolis.in

WOOD YOU
Wrapping the living area in different woods creates an interesting visual

THE URBAN CABIN

Using materials like teakwood to give it a monolithic appeal, this apartment by Architecture Discipline has been designed to stand out

By **RIDHI KALE**

Architect Akshat Bhatt has never followed rules, allowing his designs to defy convention with élan. The result? Unique and interesting spaces. A good example of this is a project he calls A39. "It is a family residence in New Delhi, conventional notions of neutral, rectilinear spaces are set aside to create dynamic volumes imbued with warmth, colour and texture. Classic materials such as brass and timber

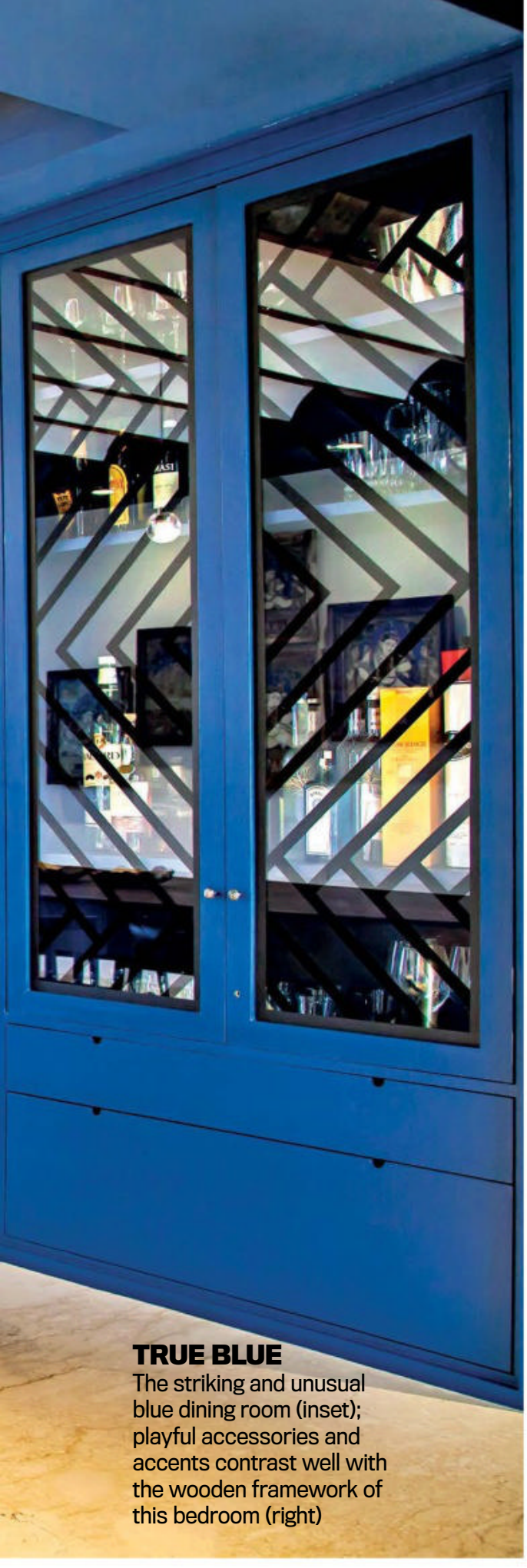
are experimented with to create exaggerated playful expressions that fit modern contexts," says Bhatt.

The third floor apartment is renovated, extended and punctured to connect with a timber cabin on the rooftop. This is flanked by the formal garden on one side and a water body with a fountain on the other. The apartment has been deconstructed to form an open plan space, where the living area, the dining area and the formal living space merge into one entity, but with enough separation to have a distinct identity. The central lobby configures the linear plan into a private space and guest space. The dining area acts as a juncture, with the bedrooms beyond it. "The dining room is rendered in a striking blue with an atypical vaulted brass ceiling and a large rosewood dining table in the centre," says Bhatt.

"Experiments in roof form are carried forward to the bedrooms, with the master bedroom showcasing a sinuous sloping roof coupled with a monastic aesthetic. The children's rooms exude playfulness with a triangular paper folded false ceiling profile,

rudimentary notion of a shelter and is interrupted by an end-to-end skylight at the apex of the pitched profile," says Bhatt, adding, "The interior surfaces are rendered in an all-encompassing palette of teak wood, giving it a monolithic appeal and adding natural texture to the space. The cabin forms a breakout space beyond the home for the family to enjoy in the winters."

The house is a very special one, done as a tasteful assemblage of various themes. "The idea of timber and connection upstairs, the garden, the water bodies, various spaces, the art and artefacts weaves and narrates a story in itself for this residence," says Bhatt.



TRUE BLUE
The striking and unusual blue dining room (inset); playful accessories and accents contrast well with the wooden framework of this bedroom (right)

pops of bright colour and custom-designed furniture," he adds. The rooms are designed to evoke creativity and a sense of exploration in the children.

The home also features a winter cabin on the rooftop accessed by a spiral staircase. "The cabin showcases a distinct hut shaped sectional profile reminiscent of the

Akshat Bhatt is the principal architect at Architecture Discipline, a multi-disciplinary architecture practice based in Delhi.
www.architecturediscipline.com

Photographs by: JEETIN SHARMA

Designing for Kids

Your little ones may be small in size but their spaces need to be big on style. Confused where to start? Our expert shares some great tips and tricks.

By **GARIMA AGARWAL**

A CHILD'S ROOM IS THE HEART OF THE HOUSE. It is a magical space. Therefore when designing for them the central idea remains that it is a room that is thoughtful; that helps children develop a well-rounded personality and gives them gentle nudges to being more creative, practical, organised and most importantly, happy. Here are four different children's rooms that will give you ample inspiration and ideas.

BABY'S DAY IN

The Heirloom nursery space is a neutral, elegant, dreamy and stylish baby nursery themed room, done up in a muted grey aesthetic that shines a soft

spotlight on the white furniture. A beautiful chandelier adds an upscale air to a little baby's first home. Leave some walls empty so you can add a baby rocker, high chair or stroller as and when the requirement arises. Another handy tip to keep in mind while designing nursery spaces is to plan storage well in advance as before you know it, the little babies have bloomed into toddlers and are armed with a battalion of toys, games, clothes and knick knacks that have to be neatly packed into their rooms.

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

The Savannah bed room is designed for toddlers. It offers the little one a walk on the wild side with larger-than-life statement wallpaper on a concentrated area, animal-themed accessories and gorgeous rustic furniture in warm, earthy palettes. A design faux pas to avoid here would be to not go overboard on the animal theme and start adding animals to every element of the décor. Instead, pick a statement-wallpaper, restrict the animal motifs to a select few items and keep the rest of the space clean and minimal. You can even add a few child-safe potted plants.

DOUBLE THE FUN

The Confetti Play Room is done up in neutral colours with a purpose to enable today's modern millennial to be active at home too. The crown jewel of the space is a multi-level Play Bunk. It has two levels with the top level closed off with a picket fence, there's even a space for creativity at the lower level. This area can be transformed into an art station, meditation corner, yoga space or book nook, the possibilities are endless. Two ladders on both sides of the bunk give access to a cosy hangout. A rule of thumb to follow is to cantilever structures to the wall to ensure maximum safety. One should also be mindful of the available space while planning a slide as the slope has to be at just the right angle. Customise furniture according to the requirement of the space available. For instance, if the space is small, open up all sides of the bunk structure to keep it airy, open, and make the room seem more spacious.

GLOBAL GOALS

The Wanderlust bed room is a built-to-grow, teal and white, minimalist room concept that's especially designed for little adventurers with world map wallpapers, car-shaped beds, ship-shaped lamps and more. Avoid cluttering up the space too much; if the room is small, remove the four posts from the car bed. A soft blue world map wallpaper embraces the restful side of the room, while the wardrobe and study table are done up in an elegant white, with pops of teal. It's always more impactful to incorporate one highlighted colour like teal into the palette, and offset it with a second accent Use LED strips in the wardrobe to accentuate decor accessories placed on the shelves.

Garima Agarwal is the founder of Peekaboo Interiors and Peekaboo Patterns. Based out of Chennai, she specialises in furniture and design for the little ones. @peekaboo_interiors (Instagram)

OBJECTS OF BEAUTY

JJ Valaya's new store not only blurs the line between home, fashion, art and photography, but also sets in motion a new design semantic

By **RIDHI KALE**

A cushion is just a cushion, a chair simply a chair and a lehenga can't be anything more than a lehenga, right? Wrong. Step into The World of Valaya and get ready to have every definition and convention thrown out of its chevron windows. We have long known that couturier JJ Valaya has had more than a passing interest in home. A few years ago he even launched a store dedicated to it. But that was before he took a sabbatical and decided to reset. The result: a new showroom that houses all his loves (home, fashion and photography) under one roof in JW Marriott, Aerocity, Delhi. To say it is an experience would be an understatement. It is a journey into the realm of chic maximalism, where art, craft and colour speak the same language and where you are bound to find something that will elevate the overall aesthetics of your room.

THE LAYOUT

Valaya was given a large hall which had the luxury of height. Levels were created to create a magical experience for all those who walk

Photographs by: ASHISH SAHI

in. Spread across 12,000 sq ft over two storeys; as you enter you see the a smorgasbord of delightful design ranging from a new affordable clothing line, consciously made fashion jewellery, JJ Valaya's books on photography, fashion accessories, and a selection of Valaya Home furniture.

A short walk down the Art Deco-inspired stairs takes you to walls with antique Jamawar shawls, Art Deco inlay flooring and a grand chandelier. This opens into a central passage with signature chevron ceiling illuminated by a series of pendant lights. To the left of the central passage is the fashion section, to the right, a black arched entrance with signature Valaya wall tapestries takes you to the Home line. In the fashion section besides men's and women's clothing there's also a couture museum showcasing single-edition masterpieces, private lounge for bespoke consultations, Le Salon du Musée and a line of precious jewellery.

FANTATSIC FINDS
The lounge by the bar (above); JJ Valaya (top right); the store's dramatic interiors (previous page)

DID YOU KNOW

Valaya's first standalone fashion and lifestyle store was launched in 1996

This store marks the launch of the new bridge-to-luxury Valaya brand, JJV

Valaya's art photography has lots of interesting hidden icons

HOMING IN

In the home section there are five seamlessly interconnected zones—the living room, the bar with a dedicated lounge, the dining room, and the bedroom. At the core it's got that signature Valaya feel and appeal, but what makes this different from its previous avatar is that while it is maximal, multi-cultural and filled with art and craft, there is also room to move, space to meditate and take a step back and enjoy the designs.

BUYER'S GUIDE

If you get a chance to visit the store, check out the rare, vintage finds handpicked by Valaya from various parts of the globe. Don't miss his art photography, sculptural in form, artistic in approach and spiritual by design. Another thing that caught our eye was the white bedding with fine detailing. There's also furniture, carpets, lighting, and fine art to choose from.

This showroom is a trailblazer and marks a new age of Indian design—lavish, modern and proudly maximal.

A HUE HAVEN

Different styles, colours, textures and patterns come together to create a unique vacation home in Delhi

By SANJYT SYNGH

ALL ABOUT DRAMA
The black and white bench in the living space is more like functional art (left); this bedroom has a dramatic, exaggerated headboard (below); the colourful living room (bottom)

Photographs by DEEPAK AGGARWAL AND ROHAN LUTHRA

I was asked to design a farmhouse that would serve as a vacation home nestled amongst sprawling farms in Rajokri, New Delhi. Spread over 48,000 sqft, the structure masses over 19,000 sq ft split into two floors. The space includes generous balconies capturing views of the greenery on all four sides. Huddled amongst massive trees it was important to create focal points and experiential moments within the design itself. This was achieved using large metal sculptures, typographic sculptures, axial water features and detailed landscaping.

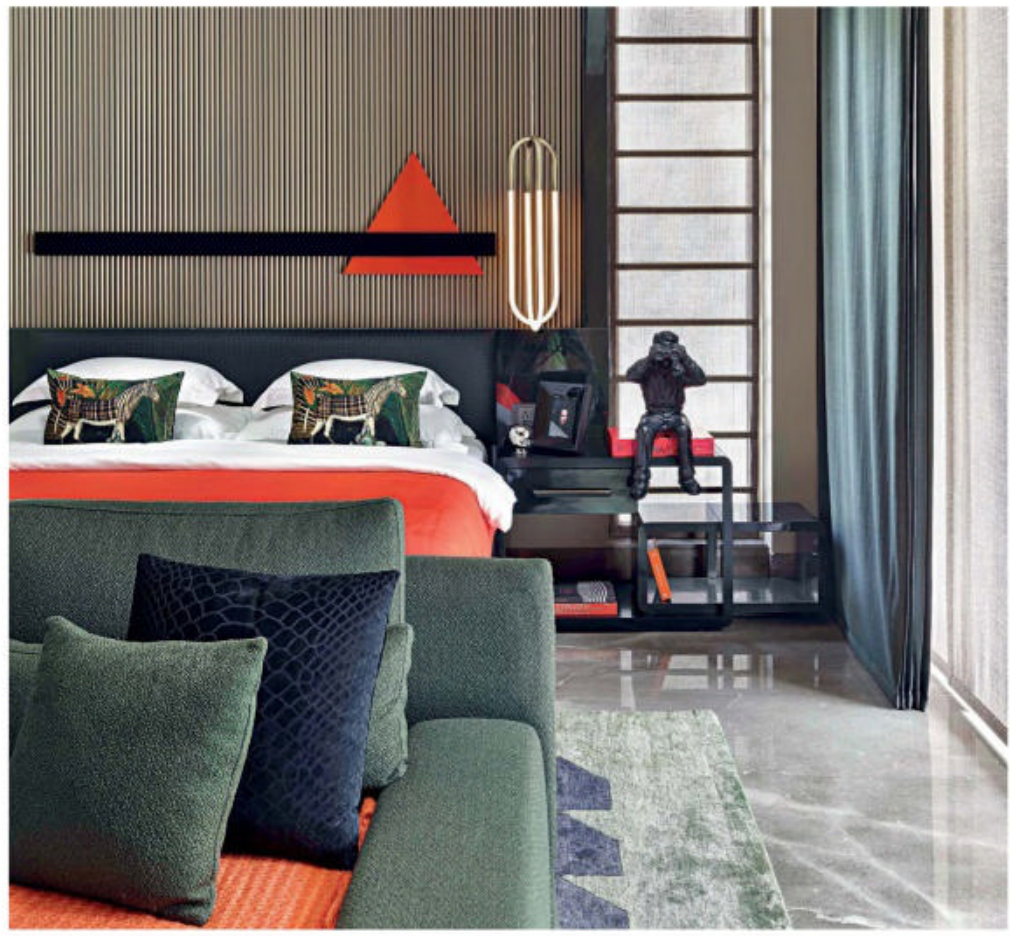
While the exteriors are muted, the interiors are a riot of colours. The house features

Sanjyt Syngh is a Delhi-based, interior designer and stylist. His design consultancy is dedicated to luxury spaces and takes pride in creating spaces that are a visual delight. @sanjytsyngh (Instagram)

FACT FILE

Location Rajokri, New Delhi
Design Sanjyt Syngh
Completed October 2021
Site Area 48,000 sq ft
Built-up Area 19,000 sq ft
Structural Details & Engineering Architects Studio

double volume open plan living spaces that extend to the rooms. The idea was to let the interiors feel as good as they look. So, the layout was designed paying attention to the needs and comforts of the inhabitants. We have used a mix of multiple styles to form a unique identity. As the styles blur, the space starts to scream its own character. There is a sense



MAKE SPACE
The dining room takes its colour cues from the living room and opens into a show kitchen (left); this bedroom has a masculine design style (right); one of the dressing rooms in the home (below right)

of softness in elements portrayed through gentle curves. There is also a sense of ambiguity, yet power portrayed through colour. Even though there's pattern, texture, repetition and boldness, there is a sense of calmness.

Spread over two floors, the ground floor is primarily for formal entertaining. There is a waiting lounge at the main entrance of the house overlooking the water body and the lavish greens. This area leads to a large open space comprising formal entertaining and dining and a show kitchen. This entire space overlooks the main sprawling greens that feature sculptures. Adjoining this space are two bedrooms, the guest bedroom and a bedroom suite. Each room has its own identity. The suite has a very masculine vibe with a strong orange accent. It balances the dark mood. The bed and the artwork in the guest bedroom are on the lines of Brutalism, monochrome with a dash of ochre.

The first floor is primarily a personal space accessible with two elevators, one for family and the other for staff. This floor comprises two large bedroom suites, one kid's room, a family lounge, a pantry, and a huge storage space. As for the walls and open areas, they are treated with interesting art, panels, and sculptures.

The house promotes a deep sense of tranquillity with a connection to nature with uninterrupted views.

Haute Seat

This iconic furniture continues to grab eyeballs at the new Scala Home flagship in the Capital

By **RIDHI KALE**

Chances are you have never sat on a cloud. And this is the closest you will ever come to it. The Up Series 2000 by B&B Italia was designed over 50 years ago in 1969 by the renowned architect, artist and designer Gaetano Pesce. It continues to make an impact even today. Housed proudly at the newly opened Scala Home's flagship store of B&B Italia and Flos in Delhi, it is upholstered with an elastic fabric. If this doesn't catch your fancy you can check out Husk bed by Patricia Urquiola or the Atoll sofa by Antonio Citterio also by B&B Italia that are on display at the store.

PRICE on request

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