

What was the tussle over Covaxin IPR?

Jacob Koshy

Why does being cited as an inventor matter?

IPR is a vast, complex domain and spans the minutest parts of the product invention process. As the development of pharmaceutical products involves a wide range of expertise, it is hard for single firms or entities to develop everything in-house. Just like the BBIL-ICMR collaboration, companies may enter into several licensing agreements – BBIL for instance had a technology licensing agreement with Virovax for the adjuvant – with other companies. If a single product thus involves multiple entities and collaborators, being listed as an inventor has a bearing on the sharing of intellectual property rights, royalties and even determining how a product can be used. There is no field of human activity that is untouched by disputes over IPR. In patent filings, not listing out all the inventors – in the U.S especially – could even lead to patent applications being rejected.

Priscilla Jebaraj

Why have there been so many problems?

Outrage and uproar: Members of the Students' Federation of India staging a protest in Vijayawada on June 22. G.N. RAO

Shiv Sahay Singh

What is the proposal?

What are the political considerations?

What is the way ahead?

CM
YK



REFLECTIONS

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Soft power options to win and retain friends

How India can delay the backlash that its economic rise will inevitably bring

All rising powers face contestation and containment. How should India prepare for it? China had a 10-year honeymoon when it went from a \$1.2 trillion economy to a \$6.5 trillion economy between 2000 and 2010. The United States (US) facilitated China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) as US consumers benefitted from lower prices, US companies got cheaper supply chains, bigger profits, and ultimately a large market to sell into. It was only with Xi Jinping's appointment as general secretary in 2012 that there was a change in tone and tenor in China's attitude to the US. Xi mounted a challenge to US supremacy and sought a redrawing of the world order to accommodate China's rapid rise. This led to a growing backlash against China which is now at a fever pitch with tariffs and non-trade barriers imposed by the US with bipartisan support. What should India learn from this? Can it use its soft power to extend the honeymoon phase to 15 years rather than China's 10?

The 30-year globalisation phase post the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union is under major challenge today. The electorate in many countries is upset by what they believe globalisation has done to their lot.

Populist Right-wing leaders in many western countries have blamed globalisation for the stagnation in living standards, growing inequality, and joblessness in their country. So, there is a return to nationalistic jingoism and reaction against free trade and immigration, whatever the long-term costs. Supply chain disruptions during Covid have further spurred self-reliance and a return to industrial policy, witness the US IRA and our own production-linked incentives-type actions across the world. The WTO is giving way to regional and bilateral trade deals. Geopolitical agility is now a requirement for countries and companies alike.

India is in a bad neighbourhood. China and Pakistan are hostile nations. Other neighbours such as Afghanistan, Nepal and Myanmar are unstable. Despite this, geopolitically, this is India's moment. The US has shifted its attention to the Pacific and India belongs to useful US-led arrangements – Quad (US, Japan, Australia, India), I2U2 (India, Israel, US and UAE), and the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC). Yet it has retained workable relations with Russia and Iran. At the same time, it has strengthened its relations with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates and has good relations with the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe. It has also reached out to African nations with success.

The backlash against China has created space and opportunity. Despite India's fast

growth and its ascent on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) league tables, today it is not seen as threatening as it only accounts for 3.6% of global GDP. It remains a poor country with a per capita income below \$3,000 and is not expected to reach developed status till 2047 even by its own estimates. India must use its soft power to extend this honeymoon period and be allowed to grow without containment for the foreseeable future.

A word on using soft power. Soft power is the ability to co-opt rather than coerce. It involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. Soft power is non-coercive, it uses culture, political values, and foreign policies to enact change. India has a long tradition of soft power, which originates with its ancient belief in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* or (the world is one family). During the Independence struggle against the British, Mahatma Gandhi's actions and the poetry of Ravindranath Tagore increased India's soft power and embarrassed the British, creating global goodwill for India.

The world sans China and Pakistan does not feel threatened by India's rise. India's soft power is rooted in the core Indian values of secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and assimilation of multiple cultures in its civilisation. So much so that William Dalrymple writes, "India has always had a strange way with her conquerors. In defeat, she beckons them in, then slowly seduces, assimilates, and transforms them." Today,



Janmejaya Sinha



India's soft power is rooted in the core Indian values of secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and assimilation of multiple cultures in its civilisation. Today, this is enhanced by India's democracy, food, movies, music, inclusive non-missionary religion

this is enhanced by India's democracy, food, movies, music, inclusive non-missionary religion, the easy use of the English language, and respected higher education institutions. Its technology services companies and global capability centres (GCC) have created a strong services brand. In fact, the number of GCCs has doubled in the last 10 years.

Its diaspora in the US and UK is especially strong. It is rich and well-placed in academia, business, health care, technology, and politics. Top US companies have CEOs of Indian origin, the US vice-president and the UK prime minister belong to

the Indian diaspora. Just as an example, I was in a Seattle nightclub a few years ago and a mixed crowd were all dancing to Bollywood hits.

Yet we must recognise that the soft power of the US is, in fact, as strong as its hard power (nuclear, military, technology, economic, space). Despite major errors in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Gaza, US soft power cannot be underestimated. It is further bolstered by the opinion-shaping role of the Anglo-Saxon press and Hollywood movies. I don't know whether the US dollar is a soft or hard power – but it is clearly a superpower. The US still defines who the

bad guys are!

We need to recognise that an "opportunity" is not the same as an "outcome". Our soft power needs constant strengthening. We must nurture our respected institutions and take steps to fix what is currently broken, like primary education, health care access and delivery, and strengthen corporate research and development further. Complacency, in today's context, is a death wish and yet the opportunity before India is like never before.

Janmejaya Sinha is chairman, BCG India. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



Claim to prohibition is immoral, ahistoric

The truth is deaths caused by the consumption of spurious liquor are double tragedies. Not only are they horrific but they're also entirely preventable. Man has caused them but man can also ensure they do not occur. All it requires is the acceptance of a cold fact of reality. Not all human beings are teetotalers. Many want to drink. They enjoy doing so. And frankly, in any mature, sensible, democratic society, they have an inalienable right to do so. It is attempts to deny that right or place unacceptable curbs on it that cause the problem.

If safe, good quality and cheap or reasonably priced alcohol is available for all adults to buy, within all the acknowledged and accepted conditions of the law, few if any people would risk their lives drinking hooch. The vast majority of drinkers are not suicidal. They simply want to relax, ease their tension and tiredness, or spend

an enjoyable evening. It's because they can't buy what they want that they resort to what is dangerous and even likely to kill. But, remember, death was never their intention. It's just the unintended corollary of what circumstances have forced on them.

At the root of the problem is the belief that alcohol is bad and, therefore, its consumption must be stopped or, at least, severely discouraged. Article 47 of our Constitution says, "the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health".

No doubt, in excess, alcohol is bad. Only a fool would deny that. But so, too, is sugar, butter, cream and, indeed, even exercise. However, taken in moderation it becomes a different matter. And, anyway, adults are entitled to decide for themselves. Even make their own mistakes. Prohibition as

state policy (as in Bihar and Gujarat) is not just a deliberate denial of the rights of citizens but it infantilises them. The nanny State makes children of us and it doesn't know best. But governments that treat their people like toddlers in a nursery seem unable to accept that.

There is, however, a deeper problem. It explains this attitude to alcohol. It's why leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and, sometimes, Constitutions like ours seek to wean people away from what they consider human weakness or vice. It's the mistaken quest to make people perfect or, at least, to strive towards it. From a moral position, this may make sense. Perhaps from a practical standpoint, it could prevent problems. But from a human perspective, it assumes someone in authority is entitled to decide what's right and if you differ, you're wrong.

This is true of how Mahatma Gandhi and the governments of Bihar and Gujarat view alcohol. It's also true of Rishi Sunak's foolish proposal to ban people born after a particular year from smoking cigarettes. They believe that if protected from their own temptation, human beings can be transformed. But they're wrong.

True transformation comes from learning from your mistakes. But you have to first make those mistakes to learn. This is the difference between people who've given up smoking and those who never took it up. A lesson learnt from experience is deeper and longer lasting than one enforced by mummy.

TRUE TRANSFORMATION COMES FROM LEARNING FROM YOUR MISTAKES. BUT YOU HAVE TO FIRST MAKE THOSE MISTAKES TO LEARN. THIS IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO'VE GIVEN UP SMOKING AND THOSE WHO NEVER TOOK IT UP

The truly bizarre part is alcohol is part of our culture and ancient traditions. Soma ras was the nectar of the Gods. Indra was particularly partial to it. Prohibition, on the other hand, is foreign. America tried it in the 1920s and failed. And that raises another set of issues we need to address. Why don't we follow the way of our Gods? That would be the perfectly desi thing to do. Why, instead, are we imitating the American way?

The moral of this piece is simple and straightforward. Good governance lies in making sure honest people can drink safely within the prescriptions of the law. Bad governance is making that difficult, if not impossible, and pushing them to alternatives that often kill.

Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story. The views expressed are personal

Colonial clubs and the fetish about dress code

Rajinath Singh, the raksha mantri, may be a little surprised that the Kasauli Club, whose chairperson is the serving brigadier of the cantonment, could well stop him from entering the Club. This is because the Club, founded in 1898, still persists with an antiquated dress code, which allows men to enter wearing lounge suits, safaris, and blazers, but not what is the impressive trademark dress of the minister – an elegantly worn dhoti with a starched kurta. He may find it difficult too because the Club also insists only on shoes with socks, and bans sandals, even closed Peshawaris.

Our British rulers set up a chain of clubs for themselves, and for long, they were for "whites only". When they left, Indians were admitted, but mostly "brown *sahibs*", who were, as Macaulay had prophetically predicted, Indian only in colour. This class of anglicised, English-speaking Indians was also the new power elite – members of the civil services, senior police and Army officials, the old rich, and some leading corporate figures.

Thus, nothing really changed in these exclusionist bastions. In Kolkata, the Bengal Club where Macaulay once lived, opened its doors to Indians only in 1959, more than a decade after Independence, and an Indian did not displace a Britisher as the president of the club until another seven years after that! In Mumbai, another leading club kept this notice outside its premises for many years after

1947: DOGS AND INDIANS NOT ALLOWED.

Such clubs have, therefore, become today the symbols of a cultural confrontation, between a new, less anglicised and more egalitarian India, and the colonial traditions of the past. The Delhi Gymkhana Club, founded in 1913, occupies 27.3 acres of prime land in Lutyens Delhi. But in 1991, when I went to the club, wearing a silk *kurta*, starched pyjamas, expensive buttons, and Peshawari sandals, I was asked by the burly doorman who had known me since childhood, to wear a Jawahar jacket as well. I agreed until I saw that people in jeans and T-shirts were allowed in, while I, dressed in formal attire in my own cultural traditions, could not. I protested strongly, and fortunately, the then president, Admiral Tahlani, revised the rules.

But old habits die hard. In 2013, the same club stopped a high-ranking Bhutanese monk from entering because of his traditional dress. The Delhi Golf Club, another elite citadel, had a shameful incident in 2017 when a Khasi lady from Meghalaya, Taiin Lyngdoh, invited there for lunch, was asked by club officials to leave because she was dressed in the *jainsem*, her state's formal attire. Apparently, the officials told her that it looked like a "maid's dress". The incident created public outrage, but colonial mentalities persist, and little attempt has been made to accommodate India's vast formal sartorial diversity. For instance, the popular Tollygunge Club in Kolkata, founded in



The Delhi Golf Club is an elite citadel

ARASTU GUPTA / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

1855, and occupying 110 acres of prime land, does not allow a formally clad *pyjama-kurta* guest or member in any venue of the club but permits all varieties of T-shirts and jeans. Nor would it allow in former minister P Chidambaram, if he was wearing his elegant *veshti* and shirt.

I am a member of most of these clubs, and my criticism comes from an insider as cautionary advice on the need to change, especially since most of the members of the current ruling party, without an anglicised pedigree or felicity in English, would not qualify to become members, and quite understandably resent these remnants of cultural colonisation. The situation becomes worse because inbreeding breeds infighting. Allegations of financial irregularities

between rival groups in the clubs swirl around, literally inviting the government to take over, as has happened with the Delhi Gymkhana Club.

Clubs are entitled to their autonomy, but not to their refusal to change. It is not coincidental that after the government takeover of Gymkhana, Om Pathak was appointed the administrator. A member of the Bharatiya Janata Party national executive, he had applied for membership as far back as 1982 but never got it. Two of his decisions were to keep an open copy of the Bhagavad Gita in the library and have a performance of the Ramayana.

Pavan K Varma is author, diplomat, and former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha). The views expressed are personal

For small islands, climate finance is about survival

This month, sadly, more than 100 people have died from oppressive heat in India. At the recent Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, we considered how the climate crisis is increasing the spread of vector-borne diseases, including malaria and other dangerous diseases.

Commonwealth leaders have been calling for global climate action since 1989, before international negotiations even began. In line with their calls, climate scientists have long warned the world of the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C to avoid irreversible damage.

Worryingly, in February 2024, we breached this critical threshold. Global temperatures surpassed 1.5°C over the past 12 months, making it the hottest year on record. This increase has intensified extreme weather events, sea-level rise and other climate risks which disproportionately affect Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Despite covering only 3% of the world's land area, SIDS are vital for humanity and the planet we share. They safeguard 11.5% of the oceans' Exclusive Economic Zones, which include 20% of all terrestrial bird, plant, and reptile species. Yet SIDS experience five times more climate-attributable deaths due to extreme weather events, and when shocks hit, SIDS are hit hard.

A single cyclone can derail a small State's growth for years, if not decades. In 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated my own country of birth, Dominica, destroying 225% of its Gross Domestic Product. The damage of such shocks is worsened by inadequate financial support.

Despite contributing only 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, SIDS struggle to unlock climate finance. In 2019, they had access to only \$1.5 billion out of the \$100 billion pledged to developing countries. With no alternative, these countries are often forced to obtain financing on unfavourable terms, resulting in high debt burdens, creating a vicious cycle where debt becomes unsustainable and access to finance becomes more limited.

The Commonwealth is home to two-thirds of the world's SIDS, and this exceptional convergence of hardships is at the heart of my motivation to support SIDS at every level. SIDS have also been saying enough is enough, and

are leading the charge to reset our climate finance ambitions. At the 28th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), the Commonwealth SIDS were at the forefront of hard-won progress on Loss and Damage.

Samoa, the Commonwealth's incoming chair-in-office, joined other small islands and vulnerable countries at the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4), calling for "collective quantified finance goals and funding" to help them deal with intensifying natural disasters.

The Commonwealth is working to ensure that the SIDS' voices are heard at the highest level of the international system while providing practical support in critical areas. Our Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub has unlocked \$330 million for small States, with another \$500 million worth of project proposals in the pipeline. For years, we have seen these countries take the steps needed to transition toward low-carbon, climate-resilient development. But to scale up this action, reliable climate finance is key.

We will continue to advocate for increased funding for adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building. Our commitment to the climate crisis is not new; it is part of the Commonwealth's DNA.

The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will take place in Samoa this October – the first summit in a Pacific Small Island State – with a focus on building resilience essential for our 56 nations. If we are to achieve this, the world must keep its promises. Every commitment to climate action and finance made by world leaders is vital. Every failure to meet those commitments is an insult to the vulnerable. Every example of inaction is an act of violence against those who need us to succeed, now and for generations to come.

The call to action on climate finance will continue to resound from Commonwealth SIDS at the UN General Assembly in September to the negotiations at COP29 in November. It must be heeded.



Patricia Scotland

Patricia Scotland is the secretary general of the Commonwealth. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Education for future citizens

This is with reference to "Preparing our children to encounter the world" by Rajmohan Gandhi (June 23). The fact that political science textbooks are being "cleansed" or revised is a troubling notion. As Indians, we must introspect on the kind of education that should be imparted to our children.

Arun P

India cannot be compared with Quebec

This is with reference to "Seditious hearts and mature democracies" by Karan Thapar (June 23). Scotland and Quebec have a far less complex religious and ethnic spread than India. Therefore, Arundhati Roy's comments on the integrity of one of the most sensitive regions in India could be considered irresponsible.

Amol Subhedar

Good transport can bridge gender gap

This is with reference to "A pink auto route to empowering women" by Lalita Panicker (June 23). It is the duty and responsibility of the government to minimise the gender gap through a reform in transport.

Subhash Taneja

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Across
THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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There have been several setbacks in the 20 days since the government was formed. The National Testing Agency imploded and the raging fire consumed the aspirations of lakhs of students. There was a horrific train accident in Jammu & Kashmir...

What has changed? Apparently nothing

THE BJP-led government under the Hon'ble Mr Narendra Modi was sworn in on June 9, 2024. It did not have a happy start. Mr Modi had to share the head table with the leaders of the TDP and JDU and allot portfolios to them and other allies. In the election of the Speaker he had to go through the motions of consultation. Both were unusual experiences for Mr Modi in his 22 years as head of government.

SEVERAL SETBACKS

There have been several setbacks in the 20 days since the government was formed. The National Testing Agency imploded and the raging fire consumed the aspirations of lakhs of students. There was a horrific train accident in Jalpaiguri. Terrorist attacks continued in Jammu & Kashmir. The prices of tomato, potato and onion increased, year on year, by 39, 41 and 43 per cent, respectively. The Sensex and Nifty soared to historic highs while the dollar-rupee exchange rate plunged to a historic low. Toll tax on highways was raised by 15 per cent. In an apparent censure, Mr Mohan Bhagwat, the *sarsangchalak* of RSS, admonished those who displayed 'arrogance'; the BJP's leadership squirmed but decided that discretion was the better part of valour. Local mutinies broke out in several state units of the BJP.

In the first session of Parliament, save the election of the Speaker and the President's Address, there was no substantive business. But even the routine business had its share of controversies. By convention, the member of Parliament who has been elected most times to the Lok Sabha would be nominated the *pro-tem* Speaker to preside over taking the oath by elected members. That person, undisputedly, was Mr K Suresh (Congress-Kerala) who has been elected for the 8th time, though with a break. However, the government nominated Mr B Mahtab (BJP-Odisha) for the office although he has been elected only 7 times (six times on the BJD ticket and, after he crossed over, the 7th time on the BJP ticket).

Why did the BJP kick up the avoidable controversy? Possible answers are: BJP wanted to signal that the results of the LS elections have not dented its supreme leader's way of doing things, namely, 'it's my way or highway'. Another answer could be that the controversy-courting Mr K. Rijiju, the new minister of parliamentary affairs, wanted to signal his arrival. The most plausible answer is that the nomination was a reward for Mr Mahtab's defection from the BJD to the BJP and to encourage more MPs to defect to the BJP.

1947, China for the war in 1962 and the United States for sending an aircraft carrier to intimidate India in 1971. The resolution was an unwarranted provocation.

The President's Address to the joint session of both Houses was an opportunity to restore civility after false starts, but the opportunity was missed. The speech could have recognized the changed composition of the Lok Sabha, the fact that the leading party (BJP) was short of a majority by 32 seats, that the prime minister was the *primus inter pares* of a *coalition* government and that, after 10 years, there would be a Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Disappointingly, the President's Address made no reference to the altered circumstances.

The speech was a litany of claims made by the BJP before and during the elections. The claims were rebuffed by the vast majority of the people. The new government is not a BJP government but a *coalition* government. The BJP has refused to acknowledge the bittersweet fact and the President echoed that view. The word '*coalition*', did not occur in the speech. Other words that were conspicuous by their absence included '*consensus*', '*inflation*', and '*parliamentary committee*'. There were references to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes but all others — especially the minority communities — were clubbed in the catch-all phrase 'social and religious groups'. There was no reference to the tragedy of Manipur. As a small mercy there was no reference to 'Agniveer' or 'Uniform Civil Code'. Finally,

India is no longer a *Vishwa Guryu*, and is content to be a *Vishwa Bandhu*!

MORE OF THE SAMENESS

Apparently, in the view of the BJP, nothing has changed, not even the mood of the people.

Hence, it is the same Cabinet, the same ministers, the key ministers hold the same portfolios, the same Speaker, the same principal secretary to the prime minister, the same National Security Adviser, the same chief of the Intelligence Bureau, the same government law officers, and many others remaining in the same positions. Besides, I am told that the social media is full of the same paid trolls who are semi-literate, diversionary, proficient in the science of scatology, and obvious losers. That, I am afraid, is conclusive proof that nothing has changed despite the verdict of the people!

In the run-up to the Budget, the top concerns of the people remain (1) unemployment and (2) inflation. According to, the CSDS' post-poll survey (*The Hindu* dated June 25, 2024), '*price rise/inflation*' and '*growing unemployment*' got 29 per cent and 27 per cent as the most 'disliked' work of the BJP government. On addressing the top two concerns, the formation of the Cabinet and the President's Address let down the people. Will the Budget for 2024-25, due in July, awaken the Modi government? Parliamentary etiquette requires that we keep our fingers crossed.

inside
TRACK



COOMIKAPOOR

EMERGENCY RERUNS

LAST WEEK, the anniversary of Indira Gandhi's draconian Emergency was commemorated in Parliament. But the outpouring of condemnation from the ruling party seemed more about scoring political points than genuine concern over the real issues involved. Having written a book on Emergency, I am often asked about my first-hand experiences. I always find it ironic that many of those who commemorate June 26 and regret the horrors of suppression of the media and fundamental rights, seem oblivious that a dark cloud still hangs over freedom of expression and liberty even today. For instance, in the last Lok Sabha session, parliamentary correspondents were never so ruthlessly restricted, except during the Emergency. The difference today is in the style of operation, but not the basic effect.

All rulers want to control the narrative. Indira, despite her liberal upbringing, used sledgehammer tactics, announcing upfront that she was suspending fundamental rights and introducing censorship. Subsequent governments have resorted to less in-your-face methods. Strong-arming individuals and groups funding the media, unjustly applying laws concerning terrorism and corruption, raiding media offices and arresting scribes without following due process, denying visas to foreign journalists, using the CBI and the ED to settle scores are some of the more draconian methods of media regulation of late. But control of news emanation can even be effected by simply shutting out legitimate sources of information. Scribes who don't toe the line are cut out from the loop of newsgathering, like background briefings, interviews, and entry to Parliament and government offices. The media starts introspecting less than it should on official claims. How, for instance, did so many scribes get it wrong in the recent poll results?

STRONG GOVTS VS WEAK ONES

Politicians tend to lump the media into two categories: those who are with them and those who are against them. Unhappily, the middle ground of objectivity in journalism has practically disappeared. I personally believe the thumb rule generally is that the stronger the government, the more

History
HEADLINE



CHAKSHUROY

How Lutyens Delhi became a home for MPs

Delhi churns every five years. The general election results decide the political fate of incumbent Members of Parliament (MPs), and there are new public representatives and their ideas for the country. Besides its broader impact on Parliament and governance, this churning has a personal dimension. Electoral loss means vacating the official housing that outgoing MPs lived in during their time in Parliament.

For MPs who were ministers or had longer tenures in the national legislatures, it means looking back at politics and their time in bungalows with spacious gardens, open verandahs and high ceilings. The incoming parliamentarians then start jostling for the most coveted housing in the heart of Delhi, these Lutyens bungalows.

The term 'Lutyens bungalow' is a misnomer. Contrary to popular belief, architect Edwin Lutyens did not design them. In the newly established capital city of Delhi, architects like Robert Russell, W H Nicholls, C G Blomfield, Walter Sykes George and Herbert Baker designed the residences of the colonial government officials. The allocation of these residences was straightforward — the higher an individual's position in the British government, the larger and closer their accommodation to the Viceroy's House. For instance, Teen Murti Bhawan, the residence of the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, was the largest and the closest.

During this time, the question of official housing for parliamentarians was not a significant issue. The Central Legislative Assembly, which started functioning in 1921, had 145 members and met for less than three months, splitting its time between Delhi and Shimla. Some assembly members also had official responsibilities in the colonial government and were entitled to government accommodation. The government also constructed smaller bungalows closer to Parliament House to house the other elected members. Some members, like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had the means to buy their bungalows. The first elected President (as the Speaker was known then) of the central assembly, Vithalbhai Patel, was allocated the bungalow on 20 Akbar Road as his official residence. And nearly 100 years later, it continues to be the official residence of the Speaker of Lok Sabha.

Jawaharlal Nehru's official residence during his time in the Constituent Assembly was on York Road (now Motilal Nehru Road), Vallabhbhai Patel on Aurangzeb Road (now APJ Abdul Kalam Road), etc. Post-independence, the government constructed houses closer to the Parliament House complex to cater to 400 plus MPs.

In 1952, Parliament also established procedures for allocating houses to MPs and set up a House committee to deal with these matters. The government also divided the different types of bungalows in Delhi into pools, such as those for ministers and officials, Lok Sabha, and Rajya Sabha members. The two houses' committees now decided on the housing allocation for their members. They use criteria like the number of tenures in Parliament, previous positions like ministers in state or union, etc., to decide whether an MP gets a large bungalow or a smaller residence. The presiding officers of the two Houses can also intervene to get an MP an accommodation higher than their entitlement. Contrary to public opinion, most MPs now live in single and multi-storey apartment complexes closer to Parliament.

Over the years, MPs have used and abused their housing privileges. Using official accommodation also means that members had to vacate the premises when they left public office. In the beginning, members were quite prompt in doing so. When B R Ambedkar resigned as law minister, he quickly vacated his bungalow. However, with time, former members and ministers started occupying these premises for long periods after leaving office and paying minimal or no rent.

The charm of the Lutyens bungalow has enabled the government to dangle it as a carrot to political leaders to win their support. Over the years, public angst against housing privileges has grown, prompting Tavleen Singh to comment, "...more privileged Members of Parliament live at taxpayers' expense in a style to which they should never have been allowed to grow accustomed. No modern democratic country pays through its nose to accommodate its officials and elected representatives in homes that only billionaires can afford".

The writer looks at issues through a legislative lens and works at PRS Legislative Research

A multi-storey apartment for MPs in New Delhi. Praveen Khanna

On the
LOOSE



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THE PRACTICE of polygamy (more than two people consensually in a marriage) has made a tumultuous debut on *Bigg Boss OTT 3*, where popular YouTuber Armaan Malik is a contestant, along with his 'wives' Payal Malik and Kritika Malik. "Behind every successful man there is a woman," quipped the host Anil Kapoor, "And sometimes there are two!" The women, onscreen at least, seemed to be on easy, good terms, and the nonplussed husband laughed alongside them. Of course, that they've decided to out their lifestyle on *Bigg Boss* suggests a canny plan of creating a stir; we know that on reality TV nothing succeeds like shock value. Sure enough, outraged reactions on Twitter

When three isn't a crowd

at this "gross, illegal and filthy" trio, blamed the producers for lack of ideas that lead them to focus on a "trashy" *ménage à trois* for entertainment.

It's a thought that because many of the users tend to be older; the Twitter landscape no longer accurately reflects the headspace of India's urban 20 to 35-year-olds. Young singles, it turns out, are less enamoured of old fashioned commitment, which is increasingly seen as not a one-size-fits-all model. A new generation is aware they needn't follow the same drill, the beaten path of school, college, job and marriage, the bane of Indian existence so far. Online dating has opened up a range of possibilities that subtly challenge traditional, Indian middle class ambitions of owning a flat, a car and having two children.

A quick glance through Tinder India's website reveals that in 2023 they introduced a new feature called "Relationship Types" to allow users to be specific about what they're looking for. Choices include 'monogamy', 'ethical non-monogamy', 'polyamory' and 'open to exploring'. A significantly large proportion, 41% of users, are open to or are seeking non-monogamous relationships and multiple romantic connections, simultaneously. So, the data suggests the Malik family arrangement isn't quite that unusual; there are plenty of people out there disregarding conventional goals and redefining their romantic futures based on their individual needs.

Is this a cultural shift unfolding (in no small part due to cynicism about the myth of marital bliss), or are the youth today enjoying themselves so much they prefer to prolong this extended, responsibility-free adolescence? Most likely, it's just a phase to notch up some life experience that will come in handy at the point of negotiating the complications within real relationships. The upside of financial security is having the freedom to choose, the only danger being dating apps are like a buffet at a five-star coffee shop: you want to try everything because it all looks sumptuous but nothing tastes especially good. The paradox of choice is that as options increase so does the difficulty of knowing what's best. But old habits die hard. In time, the majority will get around to marrying. At least, there is much more acceptance for the idea that there is no universally correct way to live. Pressures of timelines and labels have lost relevance. The Tinder tagline, 'It starts with a swipe', has captured imaginations and postponed the breathless hurtling towards the altar that Indians have always favoured.

Interestingly, stories about couples in unconventional arrangements are an enduring theme on OTT platforms currently: in *Couple to Throuple* (Jio Cinema) single people become the third wheel to couples after a messy and long-winded process. In *Couples Therapy*, intense conversations between real couples in crisis features a polyamorous trio whose home lives are exactly as difficult as anybody in a fraught marriage. It makes one wonder whether the unforgettable stories of romantic love, dreamy sagas like *Dostor Zhivago* and *Gone with the Wind* are somewhat dated; a thing of the past, to be consigned to history. Alas, the novel of love will have to change dramatically to reflect the postmodern world of no-strings-attached and total freedom.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

Fifth
COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

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Criticism we cannot ignore

LAST WEEK India faced censure that we need to take seriously. The US Secretary of State while releasing the Report on International Religious Freedom for 2023 said that some of the things that were happening to people belonging to minority religions in India were disturbing. Anthony Blinken's words as reported in this newspaper were, "In India we see a concerning increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities." Usually, when India faces criticism from foreigners the reaction from high officials in the Government of India is to show fake disdain and fake bravado.

This is not a confident response from the 'mother of democracy'. None of the things that Mr. Blinken said are untrue. There are anti-conversion laws in ten out of twenty-eight states, says the report. And we do not need anyone to remind us of hate speeches that have called for genocide and bulldozers that somehow only find Muslim houses to demolish. Bulldozer justice worries me personally to such a degree that I have often written against it in this column. Every time the general reaction in the digital public square has been to berate me for not realising that the demolished homes and mosques were built illegally on government land. They ignore the horrible truth that bulldozers only arrive after there has been violence of some kind.

Demonising those of other faiths, especially Muslims, has become so routine in the past ten years that incidents of yet another 'cattle smuggler' being lynched now barely make the news. The tragic reality is that the killers are almost never brought to justice and always remain faceless. Now that there is a powerful opposition in Parliament, we must hope that this changes as do a few other practices that have given India a bad name.

Dissidents in the past decade have been regularly arrested under laws that were made for terrorists. It is beyond belief that Umar Khalid, a student leader, has spent four years in jail without being brought to trial. If the government has a good case against him, he should be tried in a court of law instead of being allowed to rot in a jail cell indefinitely. The laws under which dissidents like him are arrested are such that make it impossible to get bail, so officials get away with lying that it is for the courts to decide who and when someone should be given bail. Judges have no choice but to deny bail if the law has no provision for it.

The latest dissident against whom charges have been brought is Arundhati Roy. This is a lady I have known for many years, and I have never agreed with her political views. But she is not a terrorist. She is a rebel and often a rebel for any old cause. She is given to making reckless speeches. So, she once said that in her view the Indian Army had been more brutal with the Indian people than the Pakistani army had with that country's civilian population. Arundhati had clearly not heard of Baluchistan or noticed that the Pakistani Army executed an elected prime minister. It was not this speech that she could soon be put on trial for but a speech she made more than a decade ago in which she said that Kashmir had never been an integral part of India. She was obviously referring to 1947 and not Kashmir's ancient Hindu past. In any case it was a stupid remark. But this does not make her a terrorist.

One of the greatest achievements of India is that we have managed somehow to remain a liberal democracy amid countries that have been always ruled by military and Marxist dictators. In the old days when relations were better between India and Pakistan, I remember that every time I returned from the Islamist republic next door, I had this sense of suddenly being able to breathe again. Repression and religion so filled the Pakistani air (and still do) that it was difficult to do the most ordinary things. We need to be grateful that this has not happened in India yet, but I can report that I was part of a panel discussion on Kashmir at the Kasauli Literary Festival some years ago and a BJP busybody reported me to the local police station along with a fellow panelist. He disagreed with our views.

These are not things that can or should happen in a democracy. Especially not when as the Prime Minister said last week, we must resolve to never allow another Emergency of the kind that Indira Gandhi imposed. It made me happy to hear him say this. But I feel the need to remind him that the only time, other than then, that I have seen foreign correspondents kicked out of India has been in the past ten years. The two French journalists who have recently been expelled had not just lived here for years but were married to Indian citizens. So, their families face being torn apart. When journalists, writers and dissidents are expelled, it damages India's democratic credentials.

Now that the Prime Minister has won a third term and there is a solid opposition block in the Lok Sabha, it is my fervent hope that we can go back to those days when India was confident enough to not be afraid of foreign correspondents or Indian dissidents.



Sport thrives on underdog stories

RINGSIDE
VIEW

Tushar Bhaduri

BIG STARS AND marquee names drive the sports industry, which is why they are the darlings of sports administrators. But the most memorable sports stories often are of underdogs prevailing over more fancied opponents, fighting against the odds.

The T20 World Cup and the ongoing European football championship have provided several heart-warming moments, even if they may not be to the wholehearted approval of the marketing personnel.

Afghanistan was widely acknowledged as a dangerous cricket team that could do some damage on their day if conditions were to their advantage. But in the Caribbean, they can rightly claim to have come of age having made their way to the semifinals, even toppling the all-conquering Australians. They can now genuinely claim to be the second-best Asian team behind India, at least in the 20-over format, with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh enduring a bit of a tough time of late.

In Rashid Khan, they have an inspirational leader who seems to rise to the big occasion. He had always been recognised as a quality leg-spinner but in the shortest format, a few hits to and over the boundary in the closing stages of an innings could make a vital difference.

Significantly, Afghanistan now also have a robust opening pair in Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran, who can hold their own against the best of bowling attacks. Young Azmatullah Omarzai showed what he is capable of at the 50-over World Cup and along with Mohammad Nabi and Gulbadin Naib, gave the team all-round depth.

For a team largely reliant on their spinners, it was heartening to see them getting wickets with the new ball through left-arm pacer Fazalq Farooqi and the feisty Naveen-ul-Haq. Finishing among the top four at a World Cup could just be the fillip for Afghanistan to take their game to the next level in terms of consistency and depth. For an emerging team such as them, it's vital that they seize the moment and not let the opportunity go by.

Cricket has been just a fringe sport in the United States over the decades, played largely by expatriates, but till the next big event is staged in the country or India comes to play a few games, it will be the US team that has to carry the baton to ensure the sport occupies a foothold in the market.

Towards that end, the performances of the co-hosts were an unexpected breath of fresh air, making it to the Super Eight stage at the expense of Pakistan. They were always expected to struggle there in the company of England, South Africa, and West Indies, but if the cricket administrators hope to have a few players in the team who do not have roots in traditional cricketing countries, they have to ensure that the sport is played at the grassroots, in schools and colleges.

Nepal and Scotland also caught the eye in the tournament and were close to scalping major teams in this competition. They have the advantage of close proximity to major cricket hubs, and it's important that they don't have to wait till they make it to their next big ICC

event to make their presence felt.

Underdogs bite back

International football has largely been dominated by the traditional powerhouses, but upsets are more likely in The Beautiful Game than in cricket, where individual class and quality can often make the difference. In football, a well-coached, disciplined, and committed team can frustrate an amalgamation of more talented individuals. That's what has been on display at the Euros.

Other than a handful of players, the Austrian squad doesn't boast of many household names outside their country. But they topped a group featuring France and the Netherlands, a big credit to manager Ralf Rangnick. They are fast starters and press the opposition high up the pitch. Their results in the group stage will ensure that they fear no team.

As far as feel-good stories, not much can top Georgia and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. The team is the lowest-ranked outfit at the Euros, but that didn't prevent them from beating Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in their final group game to seal their passage to the knockout rounds. Kvaratskhelia scored in that game, a significant event in itself, as a picture from 2013 soon emerged showing the then 12-year-old in the same picture frame with Ronaldo when the Portuguese superstar, already acknowledged as an all-time great of the game, visited the Dinamo Tbilisi Academy in Georgia, where Kvaratskhelia developed his game in his formative years.

Slovakia was part of Czechoslovakia when they were crowned European champions in 1976, but as a separate nation have had few team successes to celebrate — till they beat World No. 3 Belgium in their opening match of Euro 2024. A draw against Romania got them to the next stage and a meeting with England. Slovenia, part of erstwhile Yugoslavia — a region that was a perennial source of high-quality football talent — emerged unbeaten from a group featuring high-profile England, Denmark, and Serbia.

These results attest to the competitive nature and all-round quality of European football and show that there's some substance to Kylian Mbappe's claim that winning the Euros is, in some respects, tougher than winning the World Cup. Upsets are more likely and even if there has been a lack of too many high-scoring games, there's no chance that any of the matches will be taken lightly by any fancied side.

Big guns dominate

In comparison, across the Atlantic, Brazil's goalless draw with Costa Rica in the Copa America was considered almost a disaster by supporters of the five-time world champions. That's because apart from Brazil and Argentina, none of the teams from that continent have been a major factor at recent World Cups and are expected to sail through their initial Copa games without much trouble. Argentina are the current world champions, but that was the first for South America in two decades. The match timings in the United States are not finalised keeping in mind Indian viewers — in contrast to the T20 World Cup — but even with Lionel Messi in the tournament, the lack of relative competitiveness is also a big factor making the Copa America a less attractive option than the Euros for casual football fans.

ACROSS THE
AISLE

P Chidambaram

There have been several setbacks in the 20 days since the government was formed. The National Testing Agency imploded and the raging fire consumed the aspirations of lakhs of students. There was a horrific train accident in Jalpaiguri. Terrorist attacks continued in Jammu & Kashmir...

THE BJP-LED GOVERNMENT under the Hon'ble Mr Narendra Modi was sworn in on June 9, 2024. It did not have a happy start. Mr Modi had to share the head table with the leaders of the TDP and JD(U) and allot portfolios to them and other allies. In the election of the Speaker he had to go through the motions of consultation. Both were unusual experiences for Mr Modi in his 22 years as head of government.

Several setbacks

There have been several setbacks in the 20 days since the government was formed. The National Testing Agency imploded and the raging fire consumed the aspirations of lakhs of students. There was a horrific train accident in Jalpaiguri. Terrorist attacks continued in Jammu & Kashmir. The prices of tomato, potato and onion increased, year on year, by 39, 41 and 43%, respectively. The Sensex and Nifty soared to historic highs while the dollar-rupee exchange rate plunged to a historic low. Toll tax on highways was raised by 15%. In an apparent censure, Mr Mohan Bhagwat, the *sarsangchalak* of RSS, admonished those who displayed "arrogance"; the BJP's leadership squirmed but decided that discretion was the better part of valour. Local mutinies broke out in several state units of the BJP.

In the first session of Parliament, save the election of the Speaker and the President's Address, there was no substantive business. But even the routine business had its share of controversies. By convention, the member of Parliament who has been elected most times to the Lok Sabha would be nominated the *pro-tem* Speaker to preside over taking the oath by elected members. That person, undisputedly, was Mr K Suresh (Congress-Kerala) who has been elected for the 8th time, though with a break. However, the government nominated Mr B Mahtab (BJP-Odisha) for the office although he has been elected only 7 times (six times on the BJD ticket and, after he crossed over, the 7th time on the



The BJP-led government under PM Narendra Modi was sworn in on June 9

FILE PHOTO: PTI

What has changed? Apparently nothing

BJP ticket).

Why did the BJP kick up the avoidable controversy? Possible answers are: BJP wanted to signal that the results of the LS elections have not dented its supreme leader's way of doing things, namely, 'it's my way or highway'. Another answer could be that the controversy-courting Mr K. Rijiju, the new minister of parliamentary affairs, wanted to signal his arrival. The most plausible answer is that the nomination was a reward for Mr Mahtab's defection from the BJD to the BJP and to encourage more MPs to defect to the BJP.

Stale assurances

Although the election of the Speaker concluded on a sour note, the rest of the session need not have been affected. But the Hon'ble Speaker added more bitterness when he moved a resolution from the Chair excoriating the Congress for the imposition of Emergency 49 years ago (yes, 49 years, not 50)! Next, Parliament may 'teach' other history lessons by condemning Pakistan for the invasion of Kashmir in 1947, China for the war in 1962 and the United States for sending an aircraft carrier to intimidate India in 1971. The resolution was an unwarranted provocation.

The President's Address to the joint session of both Houses was an opportunity to restore civility after false starts, but the opportunity was missed. The speech could have recognised the changed com-

position of the Lok Sabha, the fact that the leading party (BJP) was short of a majority by 32 seats, that the prime minister was the *primus inter pares* of a *coalition* government and that, after 10 years, there would be a Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Disappointingly, the President's Address made no reference to the altered circumstances.

The speech was a litany of claims made by the BJP before and during the elections. The claims were rebuffed by the vast majority of the people. The new government is not a BJP government but a *coalition* government. The BJP has refused to acknowledge the bittersweet fact and the President echoed that view. The word '*coalition*', did not occur in the speech. Other words that were conspicuous by their absence included '*consensus*', '*inflation*', and '*parliamentary committee*'. There were references to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes but all others — especially the minority communities — were clubbed in the catch-all phrase 'social and religious groups'. There was no reference to the tragedy of Manipur. As a small mercy there was no reference to '*Agniveer*' or '*Uniform Civil Code*'. Finally, India is no longer a *Vishwa Guru*, and is content to be a *Vishwa Bandhu*!

More of the sameness

Apparently, in the view of the BJP, nothing has changed, not even the mood of the people.

Hence, it is the same Cabinet, the same ministers, the key ministers hold the same portfolios, the same Speaker, the same principal secretary to the prime minister, the same National Security Adviser, the same chief of the Intelligence Bureau, the same government law officers, and many others remaining in the same positions. Besides, I am told that the social media is full of the same paid trolls who are semi-literate, diversionary, proficient in the science of scatology, and obvious losers. That, I am afraid, is conclusive proof that nothing has changed despite the verdict of the people!

In the run-up to the Budget, the top concerns of the people remain (1) unemployment and (2) inflation. According to, the CSDS' post-poll survey (*The Hindu* dated June 25, 2024), '*price rise/inflation*' and '*growing unemployment*' got 29% and 27% as the most 'disliked' work of the BJP government. On addressing the top two concerns, the formation of the Cabinet and the President's Address let down the people. Will the Budget for 2024-25, due in July, awaken the Modi government? Parliamentary etiquette requires that we keep our fingers crossed.



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INSIDE
TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Emergency reruns

LAST WEEK, THE anniversary of Indira Gandhi's draconian Emergency was commemorated in Parliament. But the outpouring of condemnation from the ruling party seemed more about scoring political points than genuine concern over the real issues involved. Having written a book on Emergency, I am often asked about my first-hand experiences. I always find it ironic that many of those who commemorate June 26 and regret the horrors of suppression of the media and fundamental rights, seem oblivious that a dark cloud still hangs over freedom of expression and liberty even today. For instance, in the last Lok Sabha session, parliamentary correspondents were never so ruthlessly restricted, except during the Emergency. The difference today is in the style of operation, but not the basic effect.

All rulers want to control the narrative. Indira, despite her liberal upbringing, used sledgehammer

tactics, announcing upfront that she was suspending fundamental rights and introducing censorship. Subsequent governments have resorted to less in-your-face methods. Strong-arming individuals and groups funding the media, unjustly applying laws concerning terrorism and corruption, raiding media offices and arresting scribes without following due process, denying visas to foreign journalists, using the CBI and the ED to settle scores are some of the more draconian methods of media regulation of late. But control of news emanation can even be effected by simply shutting out legitimate sources of information. Scribes who don't toe the line are cut out from the loop of newsgathering, like background briefings, interviews, and entry to Parliament and government offices. The media starts introspecting less than it should on official claims. How, for instance, did so many scribes get it wrong in the recent poll results?

Strong govts vs weak ones

Politicians tend to lump the media into two categories: those who are with them and those who are against them. Unhappily, the middle ground of objectivity in journalism has practically disappeared. I personally believe the thumb rule generally is

that the stronger the government, the more overbearing it is, both in state or at the Centre. The media is far more free and fearless under unstable governments. PM Modi and Indira were similar in terms of mass appeal, unilateralism and a deep suspicion of newsgathers. Some may question my theory, citing the example of Rajiv Gandhi who, despite his huge majority, was unable to suppress the Bofors exposé that led to the fall of his government. But that may have been less due to lack of intent than because his media controllers were ham-handed and some newspapers remained defiant. Also, a hostile President Zail Singh was in the Rashtrapati Bhavan for much of his tenure. I recall first-hand back in 1989, when a shell-shocked Vijaypat Singhania was ordered by a Rajiv aide to shut down his newly started newspaper, *Indian Post*, where I worked then, because a damaging lead story had appeared against one of the PM's close friends. Earlier, then editor-in-chief Vinod Mehta was provided a list of people who were not to be written about negatively, which he shared sheepishly with me.

Past governments far more tolerant of a free press included those of Morarji Desai and Deve Gowda. But perhaps their *laissez-faire* attitude was more because they lacked a clear majority and many from within their own ranks were plotting their downfall.

Can't control the narrative

Despite total censorship, with a few courageous exceptions like *The Indian Express*, Indira lost the 1977 elections because news of her regime's excesses spread throughout the country by word of mouth. In 2024, the age of social media, aspersions were cast on 'godis' and 'pappus' scribes in traditional media, but the most effective counter to government propaganda may have come from irreverent YouTubers and influencers, curiously some of whom started out as travel writers and bodybuilders. The new entrants attracted millions of viewers. And thousands of aspiring writers dashed off disrespectful WhatsApp campaign messages that went viral. The Modi 3.0 regime should learn from Emergency — that you cannot control the narrative, particularly in the 21st century. Devising new IT laws to monitor the Internet and earning international opprobrium is definitely not the answer, but Rabindranath Tagore's powerful poem, 'Where the mind is without fear' is the soundest advice. If PM Modi were to restrain some of his overzealous media advisers (unofficial censors), it would go a long way in restoring goodwill and confidence in his image as a benevolent, strong ruler. Indira learnt this lesson the hard way, with her ignominious Emergency defeat.

ODD & EVEN

ROHNIT PHORE

TRUMP-BIDEN GERONTOCRACY AND THE WORLD ORDER

THEY say age is just a number. Not if you are in politics. This April, at a conference in Washington, Gordon Brown, the former chancellor and prime minister of the UK now in his early seventies, introduced himself as someone too old for European politics and too young to be an American politician. The point made only half in jest triggered some laughs and the hiss of resigned sighs.

On Thursday, the sighs of dismay were amplified as they resonated across the United States and the world as folks watched an 81-year-old in a face-off with a 78-year-old in the first presidential debate. The Thursday hustle between Joseph Robinette Biden and Donald J Trump was a validation of the worst fears—America's future and that of the world order was now hostage to oneupmanship in the race of geriatrics.

The 90-minute spectacle of rant and ramble was scarcely a debate and hardly presidential. Juvenile jibes chased coarse charges of the unverifiable variety. Try this for flavour: At one point Trump chided Biden, “Let’s not act like children”; Biden retorted, “You are a child”. As Biden stuttered and stumbled over words and thoughts, Trump paraded personal victimhood with superlative self-certification.

Fact-checkers had a field day—apparently, Trump had 30 lies while Biden had nine. Each called the other the worst president. Trump coined a new epithet as he called Biden a “bad Palestinian”. Biden paid in kind, saying Trump had the morals of an “alley cat”. Issues worrying folks, ranging from inflation and immigration to abortion, from tariffs to taxes, got cluster-bombed by puerile name-calling. Trump was coherent in marketing his claims and lies, while Biden was incoherent in presenting his facts.

Post the debate, the spin doctors went into overdrive. Trump Republicans rushed to declare victory since the ex-president didn’t go rogue. Biden found comfort in orchestrated applause at an event where the banners said, “Let’s go, Joe.” Kamala Harris stepped in to argue the contest was about 40 months, and not 90 minutes. The calls asking Biden to step down have been countered—for now—by Barack Obama, but the angst is real.

It was verily an exposition of the state of American politics reflected in candidature. Trump faces multiple cases, has been impeached and was recently convicted in a felony case. Biden carries the legacy of u-turns and must bear the burden of his son Hunter Biden’s actions and recent conviction. It is true that both Trump and Biden are being chosen by the process. It is equally true that this is a rematch people do not want—an ABC poll shows 59 percent of voters believe both Biden and Trump are too old, and a Pew report states nearly half the voters would like the candidates on the ballot changed.

Yet, people in the world’s oldest democracy must suffer a no-choice race. The fact that neither candidate moved the needle on undecided voters underlines the pathos. In one of his last interviews, Henry Kissinger worried about the state of American politics and the extreme theory of ‘America first’. The choice of contestants is worrying allies in Europe and Asia. Biden’s brand of protectionism, the stalling of Nippon Steel’s takeover of US Steel and Trump’s threat to impose tariffs on all imports are manifestations.

History is witness to the split-screen American hypocrisy in the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, and in the rushed abandonment of Afghanistan. In February 2021, Biden declared, “America is back”—but US influence is waning. In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, an Israeli prime minister has ignored and defied a US president and leaders in West Asia shied away from meeting Biden in Jordan. The ‘what if’ question about China’s move on Taiwan is blowing in the wind.

The US has conveniently switched from its evangelism of the power of example, quoted by Biden in his November 2020 acceptance speech, to practise the example of power. Whether it is through tariffs or treaties, allies in the western hemisphere are crafting policies to Trump-proof their economies and geopolitics. Elsewhere, those wedded to the idea of strategic autonomy—for instance, India and some other emerging economies—would no doubt seek to double down on maintaining neutrality.

Soon after the debate, a news anchor asked in dismay, “How did we get here?” The question morphs into viral memes on the other side of the world. Minutes after the debate, X owner Elon Musk tweeted, “Tonight was a clear victory ... for memes.” One of the memes had Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un laughing on a conference call. In the real world, Dmitry Peskov, Putin’s spokesman in the Kremlin, mocked with a cryptic line, “Putin didn’t set his alarm to watch the debate.” Farther east, the Chinese media found “the debate was very entertaining”.

There is no question the rules-based world order is unraveling. China and Russia, collaborators in the propagation of a competing new world order, were front and centre in the questions on geopolitics. Did candidates Trump and Biden debate and deliver answers on geopolitics, on the usage of disruptive technology, on the climate crisis? The answer is a deafening NO.

Neither the choice of candidates nor the debate served as a beacon of inspiration for the concept of democracy. The question American people and politicians must ponder over is if this is the best the United States of America can present for what they proudly define as ‘leader of the free world’!



QUOTE CORNER



I did [go to a psychologist] for a while when I was at Barcelona, a long time ago. I was very reluctant at first. I'm someone who keeps everything bottled up. But the truth is, when I went, it did me a lot of good, I really liked it, and it helped me.

Lionel Messi, Argentinian footballer, about seeking help during his time playing for Barcelona FC (2004–21)

Mummy kehti hai' greens khad... Sun rahe ho na, Team India?
(Mom says eat your greens... Are you listening, Team India?)

Delhi Police, on its official X.com handle, referring to the T20 World Cup final with South Africa, a team that wears green jerseys

I've written this moment down and wished for it and dreamt it and worked so hard... Little me would just be beside herself right now.

Dua Lipa, 28-year-old British singer of Albanian origin, at her headline show in the Glastonbury festival, UK, where she voiced support for the Palestinian cause



POWER & POLITICS

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picture is worth a thousand words. A photograph is worth a powerful phrase: rigorous reinvention. The snapshot in question is a *mise-en-scene* of political theatre: the new Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi shaking hands with Speaker Om Birla, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju stand behind him. Modi and Rahul together had escorted Birla to the Speaker's chair—a convention followed since 1950, though there is nothing conventional about either leader.

So, do the tea leaves foretell the return of Gandhi? It took over two decades in politics for Rahul to make it to the front bench of the opposition. The Bharat Jodo Yatra tee and chinos were gone. Rahul wore a formal, white kurta-pyjama on Day One of the new Lok Sabha. DNA matters—father Rajiv Gandhi and mother Sonia were also LoPs, the latter for almost five years during the Vajpayee government.

Rahul will have a full entourage and Cabinet minister's rank. He gets a fully-furnished office in the parliament building. He will be assisted by a phalanx of personal staff including a private secretary. He will be on numerous statutory panels that select the Lok Pal, CBI director, vigilance commissioners, information commissioners and election commissioners. He has the privilege of initiating any debate and responding to the PM's speeches. Like his mother did in 2004, maybe he listened to his inner voice by accepting and not rejecting: “It doesn't matter how much wisdom you have. If you don't have a position, you have noth-



OPINION

ANURADHA GOYAL
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WITH the cacophony of the elections settled, the Modi-led NDA has started its third stint and second decade in power. Let me take this opportunity to ask for some mundane things that seem to have been missed in plain sight, but would give instant relief to a large section of common Indians.

Make all government websites more secure with an updated security certificate. As a small website owner, I ensure that my site is safe for my visitors even when there is no data collection or financial transactions done. GoI websites are responsible for providing first-hand, authentic information; they also collect crucial and sensitive data. Many of the websites are prone to easy hacks. It seems no one looked into it, else it is something that can be fixed in a day.

Stop official communication from Gmail or other free service providers. Today, most official communication is from personal or so-called ‘official Gmail’ IDs, including some from army

THE RISE, FALL AND RISE OF RAga

ing. That's the tragedy of India.”

Once, this entitled dynast treated parliament as a bagatelle—over two decades of being an MP, just 99 questions, participation in 26 debates, and an attendance record thinner than his own party MPs'. Rahul has mostly been AWOL at budget sessions since 2014, limiting himself to sudden dramatic Zorro-like appearances. The Congress failed to KO Modi because RaGa's nominees were ineffective. This time, the dynasty boy must become his party's buoy in the turbulent waters of parliamentary debate to take on Modi's guile. Will Rahul, like Alaric, become a hero of his people, or a royal wastrel like Bonnie Prince Charlie? Rahul's attitude and aptitude will determine his altitude in politics.

The Congress can't grab power on its own. It has not won a simple majority since 1984, when Rajiv won 404 seats. After wandering in the political desert for almost eight years, the Congress defeated the BJP in 2004. The credit goes to Sonia Gandhi; again in 2009, when she led her party to cross the 200 mark. Year 2014 was its Waterloo: just 44 MPs. In 2019, it was up a few notches at 52. Modi decisively decimated the Congress by targeting the Gandhis more than their party.

Rahul must invent a toolkit for the next Gandhi era. He needs the skills of Arjuna and the wiles of Shakuni to bring the bunch of ideologically disparate and ambitious allies to support his cause. He has the advantage of age and social acceptability. All INDIA leaders are age-wise, socially and economically compatible. Akhilesh Yadav, Tejashwi Yadav, Supriya Sule, Kanimozhi, Omar Abdullah, Abhishek Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal and Aadiya Thackeray are Rahul's natural allies. DMK and RJD have declared Rahul their PM choice. However, each has their own turf to protect

and expand. Rahul's advantage is that the Congress doesn't have much at stake in many states. He can afford to accept their dominance and make a tactical retreat in the short run. Sonia brought the Congress to power in 2004 by reconciling with former critic Sharad Pawar and giving plum portfolios to UPA allies. There is a lesson there.

Rahul's major political perturbation will be to blunt Modi's mettle in the Lok Sabha. Rahul isn't a forceful speaker. He must master the art of finding faults in Modipolitics, Modinomics and Modiplomacy. Modi has run both state and central governments like an unchallenged monarch. His popularity prevents him from diluting his mantra. Since he has to pander to the avaricious demands of allies, he may either succumb or falter. Rahul can grab that crucial moment and beat Modi only with substance, not style.

As the LoP, he would have to meet Modi word for word, argument by argument, with a narrative that transcends rhetoric. He will need a main-frame of expert researchers and advisors to brief him on economics, politics, government management, defence, foreign relations and the environment. He needs spin doctors and oration to teach him how to effectively deliver counter-narratives. Is Rahul's untested ideology in sync with grandfather Nehru's? Going by his parliamentary questions and public speeches on social sectors, it seems he has inherited the Fabian socialist gene. The 'Two Indias' trope is Rahul's idea borrowed from Nehru. Modi's strength comprises mesmerising slogans, big numbers and vertiginous targets. Since both of them would be in a confrontationist mood on a daily basis, Rahul must acquire new political and elocution skills to confront Modi on his own ground.

Every Gandhi built their own new



PTI

A MUNDANE WISHLIST FOR MODI 3.0

officers. This can be dangerous and is prone to scams. When I receive such emails, I am not sure if they are authentic. Two, the content is available to a third party in another country to be scraped and used in any fashion.

Use technology to make uploads of Form 26AS or similar documents on the income tax portal instant. The moment a company deducts TDS, it should be uploaded on the IT portal. So much productivity is lost in chasing the upload of this data every summer. It is a primary reason that delays the filing of IT returns. Even the biggest banks are guilty of last-minute uploads. I understand it is more because the authorities allow time, and we are a last-minute nation. We thrive in the chaos created. At least, put a penalty for late uploads or incentivise timely uploads so that people have a reason to act in time. While on income tax, remove double taxation on dividends; it will relieve the small tax payer.

Customer service calls must be trackable and accountable. Today, every such call takes data from customers with no trackability. We do not know who we are speaking to; they can disconnect the call or put you on hold forever. Make it mandatory to take complaints on email, so that there is traceability. Make it easy for the customers to be treated like customers and not lemons that are squeezed and then forgotten.

Strengthen the train network for short-distance travels and deincentivise short-distance flights. This is good for the economy, as well as the ecology.

On a war footing, work on reducing

the pre- and post-flight times spent at airport, including the time spent in travelling to and from the airports. It is good to have swanky airports, but if the buffer time on both sides for a 2-hour flight is 6-8 hours on average, the flights lose their utility. It is also an inconvenience for elderly and unwell people to go through so many steps at airports.

Make some simple canteen like food mandatory at airports. With so many people travelling, you cannot treat airports as luxury-only facilities for the



Some simple things that affect a large section of citizens need attention. They range from making government sites more secure and reviving libraries, to incentivising short-distance travel by train and making airports more efficient

elite. When we take pride in the fact that those wearing chappals can also fly, we must also cater to their basic needs during the time spent at airports.

I would like to see flexible fares go away, and fixed fares bringing predictability for travellers as well as airlines. At least put an upper limit to the fares for each sector. Stop convenience fees charged for work a customer ends up doing, which the airline staff once did. Do not extend this menace to the railways.

Congress. Nehru inherited a party overawed by his popular persona and Mahatma Gandhi's benediction. Indira split the Congress and created a Praetorian guard wearing dry-cleaned homespun; some of them became chief ministers and Union ministers. She wasn't eventually insecure because she was bigger than the party. Now Sonia has bequeathed it to her children.

“Often, as I wandered from meeting to meeting, I spoke to my audience of this India of ours, of Hindustan and of Bharata,” writes Nehru in *The Discovery of India*. The Gandhi family's discovery of India is continuity through tragedy: Rajiv's premiership was the by-product of Sanjay's death followed by his mother's. As the Bofors scandal escalated, Rajiv favourites moved to the BJP, which enticed them with cabinet berths and MP seats. Ironically, most of them were siblings of Congress leaders, and like Rahul, were to the manor born. With Sonia's tactical retreat, Rahul must keep the Congress together and turn it into a battle-ready army. Unlike the BJP, whose mid-level state leadership is still learning the ropes, many Congress leaders are young or just middle-aged, while a few are only in their early sixties. A combo of Sachin Pilot, Revanth Reddy, D K Shivakumar, Gaurav Gogoi, Nana Patole, Deepender Hooda, Shashi Tharoor, Bhupesh Baghel *et al* can individually and collectively deliver electoral success in their regions.

In January 2013, Rahul told reporters in Jaipur: “[The Congress] is a funny party. It is the largest political organisation in the world, but perhaps does not have a single rule or regulation. We create new rules every two minutes and then dump them. Nobody knows the rules in the party.” There is only one rule Rahul must follow: channel the lost Gandhi magic. He is just a step away from becoming the next prime minister. His transformation from Pappu to LoP became credible because of his two yaras. Gandhi 5.0 must remember that his cannot be a Congress of the Gandhis, by the Gandhis, for the Gandhis anymore. It has survived so far. But if the Congress has to thrive as well, it must become a Congress of the people.

Work on preventive wellness more than building hospitals. It may sound counter-intuitive for the pharma industry, but I think it is time we call it a wellness industry than a disease industry. It is time we incentivised preventive medicine and healthy lifestyles, so that fewer hospitals are required.

I see a lot of focus on the food processing industry, with the argument that it will enhance farmer incomes. But can we push both the Fit India movement and an increased consumption of processed food? Can we focus on local production and local consumption similar to the ‘Vocal for local’ initiative?

As a bibliophile, can we ask for reviving the state, city, district libraries as vibrant public places? We can also fill them with books that are relevant, that the area's populace wants in their libraries. We need to bring back the days of borrowing libraries and increase reading in the age of ubiquitous screens.

Make roads walkable. It will help reduce traffic and parking woes, especially in urban areas, if people can walk at least a 1-km radius around their homes and offices.

I want to say ‘reduce corruption’, but one must first acknowledge the problem. It might reduce the lure of sarkari naukri (government employment) and push entrepreneurship.

Finally, as a Bengaluru resident, may I throw a challenge that the Namma Metro's Blue Line be functioning before elections are back in 2028 and 2029? The pace at which the work is happening, it might still be a dreamy promise even then.

appear for the exam without fear and doubt. But do not hand over the exam to state governments. Aspirants will have to face lot of inconvenience. And the standard of education will go in the drain.
Jayamani Atta, Chennai

Principal lessons
Ref: *CBI arrests 2 from Jharkhand, says origin of leak established* (Jun 29). After the NEET-UG paper leak, the CBI's probe of the likely role of a school principal and vice-principal along with an infamous gang exposes the rot in the education system. It underscores the need to impart moral lessons to schools principals in the first place.
Pallicherlu V Prakash, Mumbai

Caste aside
With the leaders of two major castes in Karnataka commenting on the CM, the caste cauldron seems to be on boil again. The country has achieved stupendous progress, but is unable to unshackle itself from the clutches of a deep-rooted caste system.
R Sriramprasad, email

REFLECTIONS

Dark spots on whites

GOOD SPORT
ROHIT MAHAJAN

MANISH MISHRA, his yellowing cricket whites, grimy gloves, pads and bats lying by, grins at you — but no one grins back at him because he's dead. The photograph suggests that he may have been happy once, but he chose the death considered most disgraceful — death by his own hand. He had found the answer to the eternal question — to be or not to be. He wasn't going to be thwarted, so the night he hanged himself, he dragged the bed across the door in his tiny second-floor room in the small house he shared with over 20 family members in Lucknow. Researching stories of cricketers who'd died by their own hand 15 years ago, Mishra's absolute determination to defy help struck one as particularly sad — he didn't want to be saved.

Mishra, you'd never know, was a cricketer who played for Uttar Pradesh. Cricket didn't kill him — he killed himself because of marital discord and poverty and difficulties at work. But cricket defined his life, and he was scarred as a failure, for his talent was good enough for only a fourth-class job in the Railways.

Did David Johnson, who played two Test matches for India, think that he'd failed in cricket? Did he reach the conclusion that Mishra did in Lucknow? Johnson died after falling from the balcony of his fourth-floor

apartment in Bengaluru. Police suspect it was suicide; the trigger seems to have been depression, debt, hallucinations, loss of income — but underlying it all seems to be frustration at being a failed cricketer. "Sometimes, he wished he could have played, you know... more... so that we could have had a better life," his wife said. When he 'fell' to his death, Johnson's wife had to borrow money for the ambulance; he had dreamt of a life of a star cricketer and saw genteel penury at the end — own apartment, a pension from BCCI, but with no money at all.

Uttar Pradesh's Obaid Kamal, who came close to playing for India, swears he was haunted by a 'chudail' when he had fallen into particularly hard times — one night in Chandigarh, outside his window was an old woman: "She was glancing at me, like a mother busy with chores glances at her sleeping child".

Massive gulf between
superstars and those who
fail is a distinct Indian trait

In his worst days, Kamal contemplated suicide; he was saved by the words his mother had uttered when he was a child — "suicide is *haram*", a sin that won't be forgiven".

The underbelly of cricket is dirty. Corruption and favouritism mar selection, and players can be destroyed by an antagonistic coach or captain — a batsman can be ordered to play slowly or to attack wildly, and this could later be held against him; a bowler might not be given the ball when the conditions are helpful, and asked to bowl when the batsmen are set — and failure would be held against him. Kamal, for instance, said that when he played for Punjab

and lost the confidence of his coach/captain, he was asked to bowl only from the end which didn't offer pacers such as him assistance. Every cricketer knows there's grave injustice in cricket, every failed cricketer carries a heavy burden of injustice on his soul.

Kamal or Mishra would have given their left hands to play just one Test — but one always wants more, doesn't one? Johnson played two Tests and that's far too few; it's unjust that a player who's deemed good enough to play for the country is dropped after just one match, as Johnson was, and that was an abiding complaint.

British writer David Frith, whose seminal book *The Silence of the Heart* details death by suicide of over 150 cricketers, says that cricket "is unique in its propensity to take over a man's psyche" and, thus, cricketers are more vulnerable to depression than other sports persons. He writes that the suicide rate among British cricketers is nearly double the national average. Winter gloom could be a factor in Britain; the massive gulf between the superstars and those who've failed is an Indian trait.

Due to the stigma and secrecy, it's difficult to accurately compute figures of Indian cricketers who died by suicide, but many famous ones have said they did contemplate it — men such as Parveen Kumar, Mohammed Shami, Robin Uthappa, to name three.

Dodda Ganesh, Johnson's teammate for Karnataka, hit rock bottom after being dropped from the Indian team. Four years ago, he wrote: "I was dropped in 1997. And I did not step out of my house for a month... For me, it was the end of the world... It was a dagger through my heart to see bowlers who'd picked much lesser wickets than me being rewarded with the Indian cap." To those battling depression, Ganesh had some advice: "Live for your loved ones." Mishra and Johnson may have reached the conclusion they had none.

The two pillars of
McLeodganj

RAAJA BHASIN

THERE have been repeated moments across history when people have had to leave their homes as a result of manmade scourge. Here is the result of one such. This, by fate, circumstance and event, has also bestowed an aura of sanctity upon a crowded hill.

Long before McLeodganj (Upper Dharamsala) became a smart city and a trash-maker's paradise, NN Nowrojee had a shop at the entrance to the *bazaar*. Even in the late 1990s, the shop lived in a world of its own and its owner, the affable Nauzer Nowrojee, carefully preserved a legacy that went back to the mid-19th century.

Placards of JB Mangaram's biscuits, cutouts endorsing Vimto, tins of Craven A cigarettes, all belonged to a time long gone. It was at the end of the Anglo-Sikh wars in 1849 that the lands that were to become the twin towns of Dharamsala and McLeodganj were absorbed into British India. When the Great Uprising of 1857 had come to an end, Nowrojee's ancestors moved up from Punjab to McLeodganj in 1860, with the British army. As the place steadily grew, for close to a century, the establishment of Nowrojee and Son were the primary purveyors of a variety of goods to the residents of the area.

NN Nowrojee belonged to the fifth generation. With the end of the colonial rule in 1947, many of the area's European residents emigrated and most left the keys of their properties with the man they had grown to trust and like. For a couple of decades, Nowrojee kept watch over the bungalows in his charge and was often called the 'unofficial custodian of McLeodganj'.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama was compelled to leave Tibet and came to India, he began searching for a place for himself and his people. Seeing something fall into place, Nowrojee supposedly wrote to the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, and suggested that the Dalai Lama take a look at McLeodganj. Soon after he had sent off that fateful missive, three large Landmaster cars drove up to his shop — and this was a time when a solitary vehicle in McLeodganj would have attracted attention. The men in the cars are believed to have gone up to the now rather nervous Nowrojee.

"Did you write a letter to the Prime Minister?" asked one.

"Yes," replied Nowrojee, as he recounted to me in 1996.

"We are from the government," said one of the now very-obvious sleuths.

They took a look at McLeodganj and returned to wherever they had come from. Then, the Dalai Lama himself came to inspect the place in 1960 and approved it. His Holiness, thus, became perhaps the most prominent of dignitaries that have made Himachal Pradesh their home.

Next came the issue of security. On July 11, 1963, a comprehensive set of

standing orders was prepared by the SP of Kangra. In the normal course of things, a set of these orders was sent to the DIG, CID, of Punjab, as Kangra was still a part of that state.

These standing orders noted that His Holiness had taken up residence at a house known as 'Swarg Ashram' and noted: "In view of the widespread sympathy for the Dalai Lama and the present strained Sino-Indian relations, it is necessary that proper security arrangements for the person of the Dalai Lama should be made."

The basis for these standing orders were the 'Rules and Instructions for the Protection of the Dalai Lama when in Residence and on Tour' that had been formulated by the Intelligence Bureau and had been received by the SP, Kangra, in 1960.

When the Dalai Lama
came to India,
NN Nowrojee
supposedly wrote to
PM Nehru and offered
the vast estates he
was looking after

A noting by hand on the file observed that rooms to be occupied by His Holiness were to be searched by the Private Secretary or by the Confidential Secretary. All mail and parcels were to pass through the hands of the Security Officer before being handed over to the Private Secretary — who, in turn, was expected to open these before handing them over to His Holiness. A special note was to be made of persons who were granted interviews with His Holiness. Not unexpectedly, the officer was told to be extremely vigilant as once a visitor passed the Enquiry Office, he could move unchallenged right up to the security cordon. An unarmed constable was detailed on duty both day and night by this point.

This section of the file ended with the observation that "it is particularly necessary for the Enquiry Office staff to be polite, courteous and tactful in their dealings with visitors". It added that they should abstain from entering into an argument that could lead to an embarrassing situation. As 'Swarg Ashram' was surrounded on all sides by woods, for safety, an outer cordon was marked on the ground and was divided into four patrolling beats, each with an armed constable.

Today, the issues of security and the world's political contours are somewhat different. Yet, as the years have gone by, in more ways than one, Himachal and McLeodganj have come to be closely associated with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The man who was supposedly responsible for bringing him there, Nauzer Nowrojee, passed away on October 24, 2000. The shop has also gone. His Holiness, the second pillar, constantly challenged yet gently firm, unwaveringly wise and compassionate, still stands tall.

Selecting the first Army Chief



LT GEN BALJIT SINGH (RETD)

AT the end of World War II, there emerged approximately 20 "native" Indian Army officers in their forties, most of whom had led infantry battalions and a few tank squadrons, with utmost courage and distinction, over seething battlefields in Europe, Africa, Middle East, South Asia and South-east Asia. All of them except one were scions of elite feudal families or progeny of royalty, who were granted King's Commission on graduation from the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, or the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, both in the UK. But the lone and in time the towering exception was a child of destiny, born into a modest but proud household in the erstwhile Coorg state (present-day Kodagu), who never left the shores of India till drafted for service in WW-II.

On the night of his birth (January 28, 1899), his maternal grandmother had in a dream "heard the sound of horses' thundering hooves and drum beats... She was convinced that the newborn was destined to be a great military man". Be that as it may, the child, KM Cariappa, born and schooled at Mercara village in Coorg, next joined the Presidency College, Madras. Soon after, he qualified for the first batch of teenagers to enter the 'Temporary School for Indian Cadets' at Daly College, Indore, in 1918. On grant of Commission as 2nd

Lieutenant in the Indian Army on December 1, 1919, he aggregated two decades of baptism under fire across the wayward North West Frontier. Concomitantly, he also burnt the midnight oil to become the first Indian to graduate from the Defence Service Staff College, Quetta, and by April 1942, on promotion to Lt Colonel, was placed in command of 17 Rajput battalion, becoming yet again the first Indian to attain that benchmark!

During the course of WW-II, he served in the operational logistics branch, first at HQ 10 Indian Infantry Division in Iraq and Syria, and later at HQ 26 Indian Infantry Division in General Slim's 14th Army in Burma. It was in this latter appointment that he imbibed the spirit of the 14th Army's dictum: 'We shall tackle the impossible immediately, the difficult later!' In recognition of his services, Lt Col Cariappa was Mentioned-in-Dispatches thrice, followed by the Order of the British Empire on April 5, 1945.

In the run-up to Independence, when it was decided to expose one Army officer and three bureaucrats to hone the politico-military duality paradigm of the higher defence strategem at Imperial Defence College, London, in 1946, here again Brigadier Cariappa was the chosen one. He was to put that learning to good use as shortly the subcontinent was driven into another savage war over J&K in October 1947.

As Pakistan had the advantage of the first mover, the Indian Army's initial response was found inadequate to the challenge and the fall of Ladakh seemed imminent. Maj Gen Cariappa, who at the time was overseeing the Army Reorganisation Committee, was promoted to command the newly created Western Command in January 1948 (once again, the first for an Indian!), charged to conduct the J&K war.

As was the General's wont, the very next day he was at Srinagar, providing inspiring leadership with a resolve that "we will not allow Gen Tariq to capture Leh. We have got to stop this and we will stop it... we have decided to take tanks up the Zoji Pass, a kind of operation which has never been done before." The rest is history.

The end of the J&K war on January 5, 1949, provided the much-anticipated moment for the Army to have an Indian C-in-C as the tenure of Gen FR Roy Bucher was about to terminate. The choice appeared obvious as among the distinguished pack of about 20, Lt Gen Cariappa stood out. Yet, "there were two other names that were proposed. The first was Lt Gen Maharaj Rajendrasinhji of the Cavalry, brother of the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar. The second was Lt Gen Thakur Nathu Singh of Dungarpur... That stated, it must go to the eternal credit of both General officers, who insisted that the honour of being India's first C-in-C should rightly be 'Kipper's' because he was the seniormost Indian officer" — this was placed on record by Air Marshal KC Cariappa (ret'd) in his father's biography.

The Government of India had not been lacking in grace as evidenced from Sardar Patel's letter: "...your record of achievements inspires our confidence in your ability to lead your men at such a critical period of the country's history and I can assure you that we on our part will extend to you all goodwill and cooperation."

So, on January 15, 1949, a ramrod straight man, along with a boy not yet in his teens and a seven-year-old girl were perhaps the first visitors at the Gandhi Samadhi. After dropping his children home, Gen KM Cariappa walked into the appointed high office sans any ceremonial trappings or Guard of Honour!

The Siblings, and their many adventures

KULBHUSHANSINGH SURYAWANSHI

SOLITARY, ghostly, shy, alone, hard-to-see, and even lonely, are some of the words that are often used to describe the snow leopard. But, the Siblings, as the two snow leopards of Kibber came to be known, were none of that.

Kibber is an idyllic village tucked on a rocky knoll at an elevation of 4,200m in the Spiti valley. To the north of it is the summit of Mt Kanamo, standing just 5m short of 6,000. To the south of it is the wide 'U-shaped' valley formed by the Spiti river. For the past 25 years, this village has been the epicentre of research on snow leopards and community-led efforts to conserve this species. Thanks to these efforts, Kibber is today one of the best places in the world to see snow leopards. This year, the stars of the show were the Siblings, or Chunu and Munnu, as some of the local people and tourists had started calling them.

The first time I saw the siblings was in February last year. That winter was mild, and temperatures barely dipped below -15°C.

There was little snow on the ground. My good friend, Prasenjeet Yadav, was filming for the BBC and I was playing an advisory role, given my 15 years of experience working in the region. The Siblings were then only a year old. We would see them almost every day. They spent most of their days sleeping under an overhanging rock or on a ledge high above a cliff. Their mother, also sleeping nearby, was always vigilant.

One evening, at around 4 pm, the mother and the Siblings twitched their ears, and all the tourists and filmmakers clicked away, which was the most exciting thing that had happened all day. Then, they woke up and stretched like house cats, and excitement built up in their audience. A cub walked a few steps and hunched down to poop, and only cats can look cute while pooping. I made a mental note to go down to that spot later and get a sample for genetic analysis.

A half-frozen stream flowed past the three snow leopards. We watched them from a cliff high above. Across a bed in the river, on a small grassy meadow, a herd of ibex were grazing in the golden light of the evening sun. We could see the

Two snow leopards,
Chunu and Munnu, and
their mother are the
stars of Kibber village
in Spiti valley

ibex and the snow leopards, but the ibex could not see the snow leopards.

The mother, however, seemed to know

about the ibex, and she started walking deliberately and carefully towards them. She could not have seen them because of the bend in the cliff along the river. She either heard them or knew that they grazed there at that time. The Siblings followed her with equal care and attention. I was impressed with the discipline the cubs were exhibiting. As they got closer, the mother got into stalking mode, and the cubs followed.

This was the most important thing they would have to learn if they had to survive in the wild.

Tension built up, and we all watched it from across the bank from an overlooking cliff, as if watching a nail-biting cricket match from the high stands.

Now, the mother was within 30m of three big male ibex. With their scimitar-shaped horns, these goats are formidable prey even for a veteran snow leopard mother. The Siblings stayed back and watched their mother. I wondered how she communicated to them that they need to stay back now.

She got closer, 20m; the cubs were watching, and all of us were holding our breath.

The attack could come any moment now. This was going to be more spectacular than the cheetah coursing down an impala in the Serengeti. Now, 5m, and the ibex have still not seen her, she is only one leap away from making a kill. She is being careful to avoid those big horns of the ibex which can cause a serious injury.

And just the moment when we expected her to commit to the leap, the Siblings got impatient and started chasing the rest of the ibex herd in the open meadow which was still 40m away from them. The element of surprise was lost. There was chaos, 25 ibex running around and two year-old snow leopards bounding ungainly after them. The mother sat glum.

It was outrageous that the cubs had spoiled her hard work because of their impatience. After the dust had settled, the Siblings approached their mother with tentative steps. I was expecting her to reprimand them, but she was their mother after all. She licked them clean and the three walked away into the dusk that was spreading over the mountains.

— The writer is director of the India Programme of the Snow Leopard Trust

“Disease is an experience of a so-called mortal mind. It is fear made manifest on the body”
— Mary Baker Eddy



ON A FUN FILLED PAWCATION!

Indulge in exciting activities with your pets and make a holiday with them truly special, writes SHARMILA CHAND

Whether indulging in gourmet cuisine for your pets, celebrating their birthdays, pampering them with grooming sessions or participating in fun activities, there's something to enrich every experience during a vacation with furry members. There are a range of pet-friendly hotels and resorts that are more than happy to welcome you and your loyal companion. From luxury resorts to cozy retreats, these properties ensure complete comfort and are a haven both for you and your four-legged buddy.

COMFORT MEETS LUXURY AT PRESIDENT, MUMBAI - IHCL SELEQIONS

Looking to celebrate your pet's birthday? Go for a Pawcation at President, Mumbai - IHCL SeleQions. "We have curated a well thought out pet-friendly vacation concept known as Pawcations," says Afzal Khan, General Manager. "We understand that pets are cherished members of the family, and we strive to create a comfortable and enriching environment for them during their stay. Hence we provide pet-friendly amenities like plush pet beds and bedding, engaging toys, and a gourmet pet menu crafted by our culinary experts." Embracing a pet-friendly policy, the hotel team makes sure the guests' comfort is enhanced by offering the services of on-call pet caretakers, as per specific requirements. Moreover, if there is any health related issue, there is a specialist veterinarian on call. Not to forget pet grooming services with prior appointments, exclusive pet toiletries, and designated pet-friendly zones. "We not only organize elaborate party with delightful high tea and fun outdoor activities for furry birthday boys and girls but also make sure the service is professional with warmth and care. Our team undergoes regular comprehensive training programs to understand animal behavior, hygiene protocols, and proper handling procedures. We also invite external pet trainers and behaviorists to train our staff regularly, ensuring they are well-equipped to interact with pets and provide top-notch service. Hence, we take great pride in being a pet-friendly destination," concludes Khan with a smile.



PAMPERING PETS AT 'OUR NATIVE VILLAGE ECO RESORT', BENGALURU

At 'Our Native Village Eco Resort', nestled in the serene village of Hesarghatta, guests can indulge in a memorable vacay with the joy of bonding with their beloved pets amidst nature's embrace. "Whether exploring our sprawling grounds or immersing yourself in our cultural experiences, every moment promises a harmonious blend of luxury, responsible tourism and eco-conscious living, adhering to our pet-friendly policy," tells Antharaj A, The Operations Manager. He adds, "We get repeat guests who have enjoyed their staycation in seamless harmony with their furry companions. As a proud pet-friendly establishment, the retreat provides essential amenities, including a variety of dog foods, water bowls, leashes, floor mats, and cozy blankets. The sprawling grounds offer ample space for pets to roam freely amidst lush lawns and village paths, perfect for leisurely strolls and bonding moments." Designed with meticulous care, the dedicated pet bathing area combines comfort with rustic charm, ensuring a refreshing bath experience for furry companions. Specially prepared food ensures pets receive nutritious meals, supporting the commitment to sustainability by minimizing environmental impact. "Complete with all necessary amenities, the resort's natural charm

reflects our dedication to pampering pets just as we do for our human guests. While the guests rediscover childhood joys playing village games like gilli danda and kite flying, their pets act as best cheerleaders!" Antharaj says with a smile.

DISCOVER PET-FRIENDLY RETREAT AT MYSA ZINC JOURNEY BY THE FERN

Pet parents looking to take a break and hit the road with their fur babies, look no further than MYSA Zinc Journey by The Fern, a premier resort located in Nani Devati, Gujarat. Renowned for its serene ambiance and top-notch amenities, this resort stands out as a haven for pet lovers, offering an exceptional blend of comfort, luxury, and pet-friendly hospitality. Naveen Vaishnav, Squad Champion at the Resort says, "Committed to pampering four legged guests, at MYSA Zinc Journey by The Fern, pets are warmly welcomed and cherished. Furthermore, the property offers a range of facilities, making this resort the ideal choice for travellers with pets. The resort offers 24 elegantly designed rooms and villas, each providing ample space for you and your pets to relax." Spread across 9 acres within the scenic Glade One Golf Resort, the resort features beautifully landscaped gardens and open spaces perfect for the four legged to explore and enjoy. For a leisurely stroll or a brisk walk, the serene pathways and green expanses offer a perfect retreat for pets and their owners.

"At the resort we offer dedicated services and facilities that include comfortable bedding and special dietary options for your furry friends. Our chefs cook as per pets' liking and specifications, we don't have printed menus as we believe in curating for them. While your pets enjoy the outdoors, you can indulge in a variety of resort activities. From the challenging 9-hole Gary Player-designed golf course to rejuvenating spa treatments and a sparkling swimming pool, here is the unique blend of luxury and pet-friendly hospitality. Located just a short drive from Ahmedabad, this resort provides a tranquil retreat where you and your pets can relax and rejuvenate," adds Vaishnav.

BONDING IN A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

Nestled amidst the serene landscapes of Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa, Taj Holiday Village Resort & Spa and The Yellow House, lies a haven not just for humans but also for their beloved furry companions. Embracing the bond between pets and their owners, we proudly declare ourselves a pet-friendly resort, where wagging tails and happy barks are as much a part of the atmosphere as the rustling of leaves and gentle lapping of waves. "As the pet's comfort is paramount, we provide cozy & comfortable beddings to ensure their good night's sleep. Offering a range of soothing amenities such as gentle shampoo, conditioner, and nourishing paw and nose butter - these products are carefully chosen to keep your pet looking and feeling their best throughout their stay. Beyond physical comfort, we cultivate a nurturing environment where every aspect of your pet's experience is thoughtfully considered. Our dedicated staff is trained to provide attentive care and ensure that all pets receive personalized attention and affection, says Sanchita Banerjee Rodrigues, MarCom for North Goa Resorts. Fitness is of utmost importance. Whether it's a leisurely morning walk or an evening romp under the setting sun, the scenic surroundings provide the perfect backdrop for the pets to stay active and happy. "Understanding that pets thrive when they can engage in physical activities, we offer a variety of opportunities for them to stay active and happy amidst our scenic

surroundings. Whether it's a leisurely morning walk along our lush trails or an energetic romp during the enchanting sunset hours, every moment outdoors is tailored to keep pets healthy and stimulated. Providing designated areas where they can engage in interactive play and socialize with other furry companions under the watchful eye of our attentive staff. These supervised activities not only keep pets physically fit but also mentally stimulated, ensuring a well-rounded experience during their stay." When it comes to pets' dining, Chef Nishant Diwakar Executive Sous Chef of Taj Fort Aguada being a pet parent himself takes keen interest in designing and planning of the pet menus of Taj North Goa Resorts. He firmly believes as important a balanced diet is to us humans, our furry friends require the same amount of attention. We provide specially curated menu for them to get the perfect amount of nutrient & a tasty treat. From dishes made with bacon & chicken bones to drool over to waffles made of yoghurt, banana & pumpkin. The team goes beyond basic sustenance to provide culinary experiences that enhance their stay and contribute to their overall enjoyment.

A PERFECT GETAWAY WITH PETS!

At Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, there are special pet fiestas and brunches that create memorable moments for pets and owners alike. For long-staying guests, there is a unique touch of companionship-a small fish in a pot to keep them company. "At our hotel, we pride ourselves on providing an immersive experience with cozy beds, engaging toys, and meticulously sanitized play areas, creating a haven for our four-legged guests," tells Anjali Naik, Director of Sales and Marketing. She adds, "Pets have access to our dining outlets and lush lawns, where they can relax and play freely. Our exclusive pet menu offers health-centric, salt-free options for their dining pleasure. Our commitment to creating a pet-friendly environment goes beyond mere accommodation, offering a truly immersive and delightful experience for both you and your beloved companion."

—Sharmila Chand is an author and independent journalist who writes on Travel, Food and Lifestyle



FROM THE PEN OF A GROUNDED POET

It is important to note that Neerada is as much a Nature poet as she is a people's poet, says SWATI PAL

How many of us have had to be admonished for things not being aligned? The books in our book case in the days when books were bought and read? The clothes in our cupboard? The shoes in the closet? How many of us were ticked off at school perhaps for the tie being askew or the pair of socks not climbing up at the same place on each leg? Or the writing in our notebooks being asymmetrical? For the better part of my childhood and those of my friends, there was a constant, relentless push and shove towards alignment and well, we certainly rebelled at it as young people! A part of me still does and thus when I chance upon a poppy flower for example, in a neat bed of chrysanthemums in the college gardens, I cannot deny that my heart lights up with joy at this break in the order of things!

So when I was invited to read and speak on this utterly delightful collection of poems called 'Alignment' by Neerada Suresh, I cannot deny that my interest was instantly piqued by the title and I immediately read the title poem. Rohan Kaul's home and his partner, Promilla simply came alive by the word picture painted by Neerada Suresh in her rib tickling comparisons between the state of the house in the absence and presence of Rohan. There is a certain glee in the air when Rohan is away as things lie unaligned and unfettered; the same things, to quote, *But when Rohan Kaul is in, Newspapers stand stacked, Compressed, breathing in. Shoes align themselves Awed, open mouthed. Paintings, curtains, Cushions, sofas All tell a tamed tale.*

The fact is that while alignment is not only, politically speaking an important credo that nations strive for and while it may have its merits, alignment can often come at great cost. It may be the cost of freedom, it may be about being 'tamed' as Neerada put it; it may leave us in gaping fear and thus 'open mouthed'. The hope perhaps lies in Promilla who, as the poem ends with *defies A certain kind of alignment.*

Don't let the light and bubbling language deceive you, this poem has far greater implications if we read it closely and it is this deceptive mirth that the

poem has which makes the poem, like many others by her, such a joy to read. Neerada is a grounded soul. Her poems reflect that and she makes poetry out of the ordinary quirky eccentricities and foibles that fill all of our lives. A poem that really clicked with me is *Of Lists*. It has that elegant humour that seems to be a characteristic trait of Neerada's, the wonderful ability to laugh at one's self. It begins with the declaration *I am one For lists.*

And then, with great good humour she narrates how fishing out her list from her bag full of things makes the list redundant as she involuntarily lists from memory and then she swears, *Under my breath Now to list down A set of instructions How not to forget Getting across The list you make.*

I cannot recall the uncountable times that I have had to strip my entire bag to find a list and then found it much later. It is such a relatable experience and that is what endears the reader to Neerada's poetry, the sheer relatability of the experiences.

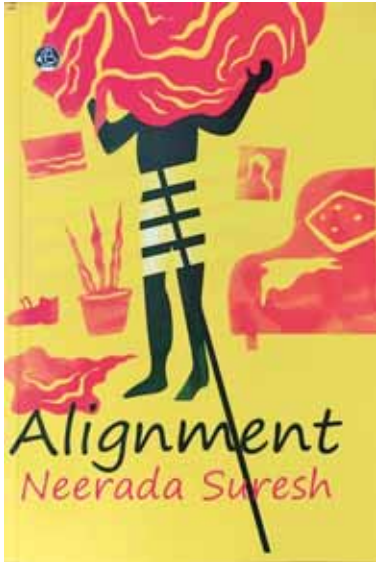
Life and the times as we live them are the focus of Neerada's poetry. We talk for example about how communication between people now is held ransom by the cell phone. Neerada converts our trite conversations into a poem which she entitles, *The New Normal.*

New normal is Sitting side by side On a sofa With no eye contact Chatting of this and that

These are the first few lines and the poem ends with the sad fact that the new normal is: *And at all times Not facing each other But thumb twitching On the mobile through Inane vicarious clips Of far and near ones And total strangers Never once glancing Directly or even sideways Smiling at each other.*

Modes of communication or rather the language of communication comes up again in another poem called *Version 3.0* where the poet talks about her journey from the deep south up north 'travelling light with nothing/more than

ALIGNMENT
Author:
Neerada Suresh
Publisher: DC Books
Price: ₹199



a bilingual tongue'. Subtly yet strongly commenting upon the Rashtrabhasha issue, she says, *At the workplace, monolingual, mute Biding time mastering a language National though notional, Opening floodgates of ecstasy mouthing My own tongue, my mother tongue, At regional gatherings.*

This is such striking comment upon the way in which so much in our relationships with people, so much of our identity, so many of our needs, are determined by the fluency with which we speak different languages. But are we accepted because we speak the required language or do we remain strangers divided by our regional differences, not explicitly stated but always there? Do we, in turn, become one with the region of our profession or adoption or do we still dream of lands we associate most with the tongue that comes easiest and naturally to us, our mother tongue? These are questions to think about. Neerada makes you think.

She makes you laugh and cry as well, sometimes together. One such poem is *When my brother fell sick* in which the poet describes her brother who was bedridden after a botched up eye surgery. She writes about his courage, *He still smiles as always. Not once did he Lament this plight, foul mouth The surgeon or contemplate Suing. Resigned at once To a possible, partial vision In his bad eye, pacified His wife, my raging sisier in law. His expressive eyes Now inscrutable Behind the dark glasses. But his smile had the same texture and tinge Of the smile he sported When Mother died And he lingered by her one last time.*

The poem is such a beautiful reminder that warriors are not found only on the battlefield; there are many who soldier on heroically confronted by the vicissitudes of life. The brother you read about will surely capture your heart and become your hero.

One of the characteristics of Neerada's poems in 'Alignment' is that there is a lot said through implication which is sometimes sensuous and can get your heart beating a bit faster. For example, in the poem *Delete*, the poet writes about *Your unsolicited Picture on FB And she goes on to say, The familiar contours Of your face Traced out a trillion times Through summer and winter Stood out embossed On my finger tips. The best option now For the photo shopped version, Press delete To wipe out that sting Of dormant memories Off my fingertips.*

This is a brilliant use of synesthetic imagery and one can literally feel the tingling in the tips of one's fingers. A poem that ends with a delightful twist is *Chrysnathemums* where the unnamed 'he' always came when the chrysanthemums bloomed and he always asked if they were dahlias or marigolds, and the poet says *Too polite to correct She'd smile- a wide smile*

Her lashes lowered and The chrysanthemums paled Into insignificance. The evening Stretched to its elastic limits Catapulted into night. What she didn't know was That he had always known They were chrysanthemums.

There is the sweetness of romance in these lines that is unmistakable and so appealing; one can almost imagine the whole scene played out in one's head. Tea 1 carries the same fragrance of romance very delicately framed, implied through such lines as *While I made tea On a rusty stove He stood watching Leaning by the door Aand then said, I like the cut of your dress As though it were a cue To turn the stove on to sim And let the simmering within Come to a boil.*

Coming back to the pictorial quality of the poems, a reason why many of the poems in fact can be almost dramatically played out in the imagination is the kind of detailing that Neerada works into her poems. Take the poem *Of Haystacks*. This entire poem is literally painted with an eye for the minutest of details and it reads *The cotton tree stood In its slender trunk With its bursting pods Of parachuting blobs As the turbaned, earth hued Cart man, cushioned On bales and bales Of golden yellow straw Came swaying, swinging Whistling to the orchestra of The hoof clicking clap dance Of the ambling bullocks.*

Colour, sound, movement all seemed fused almost like a motion picture being played out on the printed page. And of course the symbolism, the personification is discernible, as is the use of alliteration in the swaying swinging, cart cushioned, clicking clap. This lends a wonderful rhythmic motion to the scene and has been really cleverly used.

Again, in *The Breadfruit Tree*, the poet describes the tree, *We didn't make much Of the breadfruit tree That stood sentry like*

By the boundary wall Spilling its bickering spread Over the neighbour's roof Dropping yellow leaves Plopping crow eaten messy fruits

Like I said, the tree, pretty much like the haystacks in the previous poem, comes to life in the mind's eye. If brevity is the soul of wit, Neerada really aces it in her short poems, two of which are *Absence* and *Sorrows*.

Absence, Distance Were surefire Terminators Of whatever was Between us I thought, But they Like rings in trees Add girth, depth Linking the past With the present, Casting shadows Of decay Into the future

Direct and simple, the simile is so apt and new- the rings on the trees and the passage of time. It's important to note that Neerada is as much a Nature poet as she is a people's poet. In *Sorrows* she says, *Sorrows Like a newborn Arranged itself In my arms Purring in content As if to say Never let me go For the reward Of great truths To be reaped And revealed In the future.*

Those who carry their sorrows with them will feel that the poem is made for them. But that's the magic of Neerada's pen, she will make her readers feel that the people, places, thoughts and experiences are theirs that she writes about. Read her, you will feel at home.

— Swati Pal, Professor and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, has been a Charles Wallace; John McGrath Theatre Studies and Fulbright Nehru fellowship, scholar. She has published on theatre, creative and academic writing, education and translates from Hindi to English. In *Absentia* is a collection of her poems

Journey to an expanded self awareness

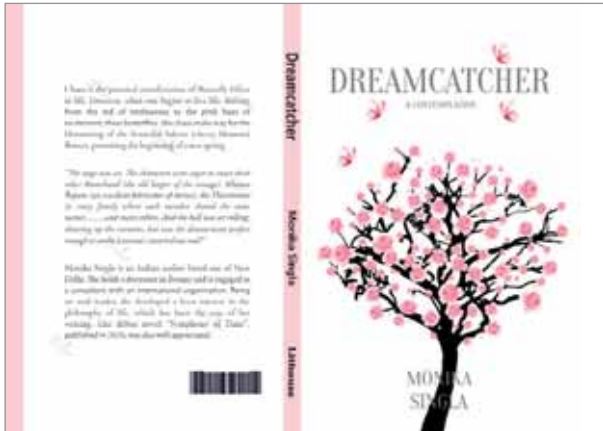
The book opens in the present-day scenario, where a rather unsure Loveena of mid-thirties is boarding a train to Pathankot.

Her already raw senses are over burdened by the onslaught of experience of a train station environment.

Yet her insecurities are deep seated in her psyche and are result of the generational trauma she endured during her growing up years by the hands of her equally tormented mother Neena, reviews **DEEPAK KUMAR JHA**

The ("Dreamcatcher") is the story of Loveena, the protagonist of the book who is a sensitive soul. It beautifully narrates the journey through her trials and tribulations, her realisations, her pains and her metamorphosis and an ultimate 'coming of age' which leaves her in a state of expanded awareness of self as well as her surroundings and people there in. Author Monika has orchestrated her sound knowledge of literature, language and the subject & object to bring on paper the story of a child Loveena, till she finds solace passing through life's labyrinth, unfortunately all nurtured in close walls of her family. The just published book revolves around Loveena's mother Neena who attained motherhood through Loveena after a long wait of ten years. Neena's intensity

thus shifted to being extra protective about her daughter from the negativities of the world. Having brought up in a rather affluent and rich family, she desires nothing less for her daughter. And even though Loveena had both her parents-Neena and her father Dev, it was her mother and mother's stories which were to carve her life and make her the person that she would become. And the story's trajectory thus turns to Loveena's mother Neena's life. Neena's husband Dev was a victim of his own sense of helplessness for his lack of understanding the business of Neena's father and inability to take it up for posterity, even though he was the sole son-in-law the family had. His job as an assistant professor of history in the university projected him as most suitable boy for Neena, when a friend of Neena's



father told him about Dev and his docile nature. Quite obviously Neena's father believed it to be the significant trait suitable for her pampered daughter. As Neena entered Dev's life and his house after her wedding, it was bustling with Dev's family. Neena was immediately overwhelmed by the sheer number

DREAMCATCHER
Author:
Monika Singla
Publisher: ISPCK
Price: ₹295



of people and was unable to adjust to this new environment which was totally unlike her solitary and exclusive upbringing in an affluent household. Sensing Neena's hesitation and reservations, Dev's family too accepted her into their family but without completely absorbing her into their lives. So, even though

Neena was married into Dev's family she could never truly become a part of it. Dev's detachment or lack of desire to correct this situation further acerbated the relationships. Troubled relations with in-laws, Dev's indifference clubbed with an anguishing wait of ten years to attain motherhood further fed Neena's sense of mistrust and suspicions and her belief that the world was a dangerously bad place. Loveena who was born as a happy child with a calm, pleasing, innocent disposition was always eager to embrace everybody, never earned approval for her behaviour from her mother. Neena always dismissed these traits as incompatible with the ways of world. Thus, growing up, Loveena's world protected by her mother, remained confined within the four walls of the palatial house with the house help Babli as a constant companion who

too gets married leaving behind a void in Loveena's life. Finally, Loveena finds her suitor in Sanand and her engagement to him was greeted as the most welcome news by everyone later on which did not worked due to triggers of Neena's fears. For Loveena this incident proved to be the one which augmented her belief in Neena's words that world is a bad place. Her father Dev too gone followed by passing of Neena. Loveena finally married, not to start a family but only to drown the haunting hollowness of her soul into joys and laughter. Vikram was a colleague of Loveena and the only thing she knew about him was that he was a divorcee with two grown up kids. Soon this too developed a marital conflict. Unable to handle this situation any longer Loveena decides that she needs to get

respite from her choppy life that and decides to leave the house and Vikram. She goes looking for solitude in a place away from the chaos of the city, away from the prodding eyes of the society. Her life's journey takes a new turn as she arrives at Pathankot where she embarks upon a spiritualistic journey. Armed with the strength of her soul and her renewed faith in life and self and the world in general, Loveena finally finds herself ready to go back to place from where she herself had once run away from all her life challenges a long time back. Her tumultuous relationship with Vikram's place was when she had shunned everything to cross over into next phase of her life. She was now ready to go meet Vikram as a new person. But this time she isn't running away. This time she is running towards meeting life head-on.

TANGRA TALES

Kolkata, Bengalis the world over, and Tangra, share a very special culinary heritage and culture, going far back in history. **SHOBORI GANGULI** got to relive the bond at the Westin Gurgaon recently



Most people familiar with the trademark Chinese cuisine of Kolkata would know about Tangra. An erstwhile tannery on the eastern outskirts of then British Calcutta, soon to become famous as the city's Chinatown, this tiny colony was populated by Hakka origin Chinese folk who came to India to work in the tanneries, their craft and art soon to become synonymous with the finest leather accessories in the subcontinent. The womenfolk worked home kitchens to supplement meager household incomes. Today, the tanneries are all gone but Tangra has left its signature on a cuisine now globally known as Hakka Chinese. Recently, I had the fortune to relive some childhood memories of anniversaries and birthdays most often spent at some restaurant or the other in Tangra, wolfing down Golden Fried Prawns, Chicken dimsums, Hakka noodles, prawns sauted in garlic and red chillies, the list goes on. The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, hosted a



CHEF HO CHI MING

nine day culinary pop up aptly called Tales of Tangra which promised an "explosion of flavours" from Kolkata's Chinatown. The event featured a specially curated menu by Guest Chef Ho Chi Ming from The Westin Pune Koregaon Park. By sheer geography, one can easily identify the unique Kolkata-Chinese culinary bond, the two regions in such close physical proximity, underlining the very special nature of the food not be found anywhere else in the world despite Tangra's journey as an Oriental cuisine beyond the frontiers of Bengal. The menu at Westin was indeed meticulously planned by the Chef to capture the essence of this legendary fusion cuisine, tracing its roots back to an era long ago when Chinese immigrants in then Calcutta, blending their traditions with Indian culture to script and create Chinatown's culinary

prowess. Unfortunately, none of that history now remains, except in the hands of home and professional chefs, who still keep the history of Chinatown resonating with contemporary approaches, and of course, special twists given to recipes long lost. While Chef Ho did put up a great show with his Scallion Crepes, Homestyle Taro Cakes, Kari Fish Dumplings, Sweet and Sour Prawns, Four Season Green Beans, Crispy Chilli Garlic Potatoes, Tangra style authentic Hakka noodles, the menu had a huge vegetarian accent. With the world turning to vegetarianism each passing day, this is only understandable. But one fervently hopes that Hakka Chinese seafood will always have its patrons surviving in some corner or the other in the world. Chef Ho's passion for Asian cuisine was apparent in the innovations he brought to each dish. His approach, affability and commitment to authenticity were truly welcome. Chef Amit Dash, Multi Property Executive Chef for The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi said, "We are



excited to host Chef Ho Chi Ming and present Tales of Tangra to our patrons. This pop-up is a tribute to the rich cultural tapestry and culinary excellence of Tangra and a testament to our commitment to continue offering our guests diverse and exceptional dining experiences." The soups ranged from Manchow, Assorted Vegetables, Ginger, Cilantro Broth, Hot and Sour soup, non vegetarian bits like prawns and chickens were only add-ons. Personally, I feel a soup or broth must stew in its original juices and not be relegated to add-ons for a vegetable broth. It makes a critical culinary difference in terms of taste, texture and aromas. All in all, it felt good to taste a bit of Tangra far away from its original shores of Kolkata right in the heart of Delhi. Long live Tangra's signature Hakka cuisine.



Disappointing Service Mars Fine Dining Experiences



PAWAN SONI ventures to The China Kitchen at Hyatt Regency, New Delhi, famed for its peking Duck. While the star dish impressed, but the experience is marred by inattentive services

I recently visited The China Kitchen at Hyatt Regency New Delhi, renowned for its exquisite Peking Duck, which I consider among the best in the National Capital Region. Some might argue that Hakkasan in Mumbai outshines it, but my personal experiences at Hakkasan in Abu Dhabi and a pop-up at Shangri-La Delhi didn't include the duck, so I can't compare. Nonetheless, my recent dining experience at The China Kitchen, despite the superb duck, left me dissatisfied, primarily due to subpar service. The evening began on a sour note with a lackluster welcome. We received no warm greetings or guidance to our table, and no one offered us menus or water, despite the sweltering Delhi summer. The absence of hospitality was in stark contrast to the standards one expects at a 5-star property. When we ordered our first dish, a gomai salad, I specifically requested extra sesame dressing on the side, a preference I had made clear to the server. However, the salad arrived without the extra dressing and was neither cold nor flavorful, lacking the acidity and vibrant tastes I anticipated. The China Kitchen could learn a thing or two from China Garden, which excels at this dish in the city. Fortunately, the other dishes like chicken shao mai dumplings, edamame dim sum, and honey chilli lotus roots were much better. Yet, the service remained mechanical and impersonal. There were no smiles, no proactive plate changes, and no clearing of the



table. Even the chef who came to carve the duck remained silent, possibly due to a language barrier, but a smile would have gone a long way. The hostess who prepared the pancake rolls also wore a stony expression while she stood near our table for some time preparing the pancakes. Despite enjoying most of our meal, we quickly finished and left, paying over Rs18,000 (including a 10% service charge) without any drinks. I contemplated asking for the service charge to be waived but refrained, considering how dependent the staff might be on these tips. I was particularly disappointed when my request for duck salt and pepper was denied because we had ordered only half a duck, a decision that seemed unnecessarily rigid. A little more flexibility and hospitality could have made all the difference, especially when very few order it. Attentive and friendly



service could have transformed our dining experience. Even though the food was largely enjoyable, the lack of warmth and attention overshadowed it. Similar was our experience just a day prior at Pullman hotel where a friend hosted his daughter's



birthday party at their all-day dining restaurant Pluck. Orders were mixed up, a sparkling wine cork flew in the air missing the patrons without any apology from the server, prawns vanished from the buffet spread, and orders either took a lot of time or were

completely missed. Something has happened to that smiley and polite star hotel service, especially after COVID. Fresh batches are seeing fewer takers, most experienced staff have either left the industry or are moving abroad for better wages and work



conditions. What remains is the new service levels. Either we will get used to it or start paying them the wages they truly deserve to retain deserving candidates. — Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com