



## As You Life It

With two months gone by, here's a dive into what will shape excursions and vacations in the rest of 2024

By NOOR ANAND CHAWLA

With rapid technological and climate change staring us in the face, 2024 is set to look very different. What remains constant, however, is the human desire to explore. Some things remain the same, but unforeseen experiential trends are getting hot now.

A desire to experience hidden gems and offbeat destinations (think Meghalaya, Ziro, Ponnudi, Sandakphu, Gokarna) remains as strong as ever, as does a penchant for adventure tourism focused on activities like trekking, wildlife safaris, and adrenaline-pumping sports. Tourism geared towards enjoying sporting events, tournaments and championships across the globe continues to be popular, just like travel for festivals and cultural celebrations. Luxury remains ageless; discerning travellers seek high-end accommodations, personalised services and opulent amenities while tourism centred on culinary exploration also remains popular. Similarly, religious tourism is on an all-time high with travellers gearing their vacations around India's numerous sacred destinations.

New and interesting travel trends this year include a desire to observe the skies with astro-tourism picking up. In a bid to save money and enjoy a quieter experience, tourists are also keen on off-season travel. Some prefer not to plan in advance, however, choosing to book their holidays at the last minute owing to their fast-paced lifestyles. These holidays are also generally more flexible in terms of planning, with strict itineraries being shunned. Unusual pairings for travel partners are another interesting trend, such as grandparents choosing to travel exclusively with their grandchildren for some high-quality bonding time.

Of the many travel trends, we decode the ones that truly stand out.



"I have travelled to Iceland and Munich on specialised trips as a food curator and expert... I would turn guide for the passengers and we would go street-food hopping together."

**RANVEER BRAR**  
 Chef, restaurateur, actor

## The Bold and the Influential

When Thomas Cook was tasked with prepping an itinerary for guests that offered hands-on culinary insights into the local culture and cuisine, they called in the expert. Ranveer Brar, celebrated chef, restaurateur and actor, was the perfect person for the job. He recalls, "I have travelled to Iceland and Munich on specialised trips as a food curator and expert, as well as one which was part of the Royal Caribbean cruises, where I was called on to be the curator for the Indian cuisine and menu onboard the liners. And after docking at Malaysia, I would turn guide for the passengers and we would go street-food hopping together."

A regular immersive experience is no longer enough. Chef-led gastro trips have become common, so people can experience a region the way the chef does. Group trips designed and hosted by social media influencers are another major trend. However, while some influencers organise these trips themselves spurred on by their many followers requesting tailor-made itineraries to places the influencers

have previously visited, others prefer to tie up with established travel companies.

Pavitra Kaur or @theclassyfoodophile recently led a group of 18 people from Paris to Prague with tour operator When in City. The latter specialises in group trips for 18-32-year-olds, and Kaur with her 416K followers on Instagram was the perfect collaborator. "This is now part of their brand-building strategy," says Kaur. "Even Coca-Cola sent influencers to Tomorrow Land for indirect marketing. Personally, I think it's great when someone with specialised knowledge leads a trip. I would love to join a trip to London with Karan Johar so he could show us the original estate from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham!*"

Travel and lifestyle blogger Karishma Rawat (@karishmarawat) has been on influencer-led trips too, though in her experience travel agencies are usually the driving force behind them. "The trend is positive, ensuring well-organised and safe trips. Smaller groups add a personal touch, making the experiences more memorable," she says.

### SPEC SHEET

● International influencers best known for conducting trips: Alyssa Ramos (@mylifestravelmovie), Alexandra Baackes (@alexinwanderland) and @wanderwomanretreats, Kesi of @kesitoandfro, Rioba of @justrioba; Kanoa Greene of @KanoaGreene and @KanoaAdventures, Johnny Ward of @OneStep4Ward, Will Hatton of @WillHatton\_, and Lesley Murphy of @lesleyannemurphy and @limitlesstravel

● In India, most influencers tie up with travel companies such as When in City

● The best way to book trips with them is through social media or newsletters. For regular travel agents, websites are good.

● Itineraries depend on number of days and location. Trips are at all price points.



## Deep Blue Sea

When the global pandemic hit, the travel experience that was to get the worst name was going on a cruise. Four years later, this same experience is thriving better than ever before. This is certainly evident from Virtuosos 2023 yacht bookings, which were up by 79 per cent over 2019, especially in the yacht-forward destinations of Croatia, Greece, San Tropez, and the Caribbean. According to Daniel D'Souza, president and country head of holidays, SOTC Travel, cruises continue to be a popular choice, as they offer a unique blend of luxury, entertainment, and the opportunity to explore multiple destinations in just one trip.

Content creator Ruchika Lohiya (@\_chikka) was invited to cruises with the groups Costa and Cordelia in India and Star Cruises in Singapore, in a bid by these companies to spread the word. "Though it depends on your budget, sea travel is a truly unique experience," she says. However, travel bloggers Sandy & Vyjay and founders of Voyager Sandy N Vyjay, feel that cruise tourism is still very nascent in India. They say, "When we think about cruises, it is generally the international ones that come to mind. We have recently been on a luxury cruise in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam, and would recommend this experience."

It's interesting to note that smaller boating experiences are now more popular than large cruises. Away&Co specialises in smaller, more intimate cruises curated for fewer people with a high level of luxury. Their most popular luxury cruise destinations include Alaskan cruises covering the beautiful natural scenery, glaciers, and wildlife of Alaska's picturesque landscapes, river cruises through a number of Europe's historic rivers while exploring iconic cities and charming towns along the way, and expedition cruises to remote and unique destinations like the Galapagos Islands, Antarctica, or the Norwegian Fjords for specialised experiences and nature-focused trips.

### SPEC SHEET

● Price points vary as per the destination and duration of the cruise. Larger cruise experiences tend to be more cost-effective than bespoke, smaller ones.

● You can expect stellar service on premium yachts, as well as the opportunity to dock and tour port towns

● Typical itineraries differ depending on the company and the area. Larger cruise lines include areas for sport and entertainment, as well as multiple dining options. Smaller ones have more limited options.

● Top-ranked cruise experiences: Alaskan cruises, river cruises through Europe, remote cruises to unique destinations like the Galapagos Islands, Antarctica, or Norwegian Fjords for specialised experiences and nature-focused trips

### SPEC SHEET

● Upcoming Concerts: Taylor Swift in Singapore, March 2-9; Ed Sheeran in Mumbai, March 16

● Book your tickets directly with the event organiser. Sign up for mailing lists too.

● Attend with like-minded company. Arrive well in advance and identify food, water and toilet stations on arrival. Check event website for announcements.

● Stay close to the venue. Wear comfortable clothes. Stay hydrated.



## Getting Giggy With It

When art consultant Geet Nagi found out about the Coldplay Asia and Australia tour, she immediately rallied the troops. "Coldplay's music was such a major part of my teenage years, so I really wanted to relive that feeling of shared nostalgia with my school friends," she says. She convinced the group to attend the concert in Singapore—a destination she had never visited—and booked a five-night stay even though the concert was only on one. "It was wonderful. I got to see a fun new destination with my buddies. Apart from the concert, we partied, shopped, ate and saw lots of art."

Taylor Swift's upcoming concerts in Singapore in March have also seen a huge surge in travel bookings. According to data collected by booking portal Cleartrip, there was a 32 per cent increase in bookings of destinations around Coldplay's Asia music tours and Swift's have seen a 27 per

cent increase. This ties in with other industry insights too. The travel trends report for 2024 published by Skyscanner showed that 37 per cent of Indian travellers were willing to fly short haul to hear their favourite bands play live, while 20 per cent would even fly longer distances.

"Event-based travel is emerging as a significant trend, driven by the enthusiasm of India's millennials and Gen Z," explains Rajeev Kale, president and country head, holidays, MICE, visa of Thomas Cook (India) Limited. "Their keen interest in live concerts, events, and cultural immersion is poised to be a driving force for travel in the upcoming year. This demographic seeks immersive experiences that go beyond traditional tourism, reflecting a desire for dynamic and culturally rich journeys."

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## Rested Development, Detoxed Days

### SPEC SHEET

- Specialist wellness properties have strict sleep or detox programmes, and hand out strict itineraries, including regulation of activities and diet. If you are just checking in to catch up on your sleep and cut off, it's best to do that with no agenda.
- Price points vary depending on the property and the programme. Traditional Ayurvedic centres can be affordable while premium properties can be heavy on the pocket.
- Best places for such vacations: Six Senses Vana Dehradun, Ananda in the Himalayas Rishikesh, Shreyas Retreat Bengaluru, Six Senses Fort Barwara Rajasthan, Niraamaya Surya Samudram Kovalam, Amanbagh Rajasthan, Atmantan Wellness Centre Maharashtra, Dharana at Shillim.

It may seem like social media influencers live their lives online. Yet when content creator and public speaker, Ruchika Lohiya (@chikka) was on a recent family vacation, she decided it was the best time to put all gadgets away. "Family holidays are the best time for a complete digital detox," she says. A shunning of devices allows her to live in the moment while also helping strengthen family bonds.

Digital detox is one thing, but the latest trend in the wellness sector is sleep tourism. The chaotic life we lead in this day and age hardly allows people to contemplate. Many suffer from sleep problems as a result. According to the Skyscanner trend report, one-fifth of the people surveyed said that sleeping would be one of the main activities during their holiday.

At Six Senses Vana in Dehradun, a dedicated sleep programme is a huge draw for clients. General manager Jaspreet Singh describes this programme as combining principles of Ayurveda with the proprietary technologies and wellness practices of the global Six Senses brand. "You get a sleep tracker when you arrive which is attached to software on your phone. It tells you the different phases of your sleep and how they are affecting you. A programme is tailor-made for your sleep needs. People availing of this package check in for a minimum of five nights and address deep-rooted issues whose symptoms include insomnia, sleep apnea and snoring."

According to Skyscanner, 43 per cent of travellers in England feel that just taking time off from daily life helps them sleep better, while another 27 per cent credit it to being out in the open while 14 per cent sleep better in clean, calm accommodation. City hotels also offer sleep enhancing packages that include 'specially curated playlists' and 'carefully considered lighting and temperature'.



"We must make it a point to take a break from screens during vacations. Only by using my phone less am I able to fully enjoy the travel experience."

**RUCHIKA LOHIYA**  
Content creator and public speaker

## Free of Spirits

When Smita Thakur attended her friend's bachelorette party in Goa five years ago, the first thing their group of five did was to hit the stores to stock up on alcohol. The set-up was perfect for a thoroughly debauched weekend. Currently following an Ayurvedic lifestyle and having shunned liquor for the last two years, she can't imagine doing it again. "I think we were all really young and stupid back then," she laughs.

With more and more people going sober, low- to no-alcohol holidays are set to become the norm, with people preferring to pick hotels that offer decent alcohol-free drink options. Althaf Mohamed Ali of Kandima Maldives has indeed observed the rising trend of individuals focusing on health, mindfulness and relaxation without the presence of alcohol. "At Kandima Maldives we offer a variety of creative and non-alcoholic beverage options, such as tropical mocktails, infused waters and lemonades, Asian herbal teas, special iced teas and coffees, milkshakes; the options are limitless," he explains.

The Chenot Palace Gabala in Azerbaijan too has seen an uptick in the number of guests requesting alcohol-free experiences. Says general manager Rishad Sharifov, "To meet this demand, we adhere to the Chenot Diet, incorporating detox food with 850 daily calories and non-alcoholic beverage options."

Rucha Sukhramani of Shreyas Retreat, Bengaluru, feels that many guests choose their property solely because they are a pure vegetarian retreat, with a strict no-tobacco and no-alcohol policy. "We have had many guests who have come to us for help with addiction issues and have been successful in reverting to a healthy lifestyle, Sukhramani says.



### SPEC SHEET

- Best destinations for sober trips: Maldives, Sri Lanka, Peru, Malaysia, certain parts of India, Morocco, Japan, Colombia, Costa Rica, Los Angeles, Sweden, Budapest, Santorini, Seoul, UAE

"Now it's all about visiting a few must-visit places at the destination and returning to it again to enjoy what we couldn't see the first time. It's a wonderful way of enjoying every single moment of your holiday."

**DAMINI PASSI**  
Travel and lifestyle content creator



"We rigorously adhere to the Chenot Diet, incorporating detox food with 850 daily calories and offering many non-alcoholic beverage options."

**RISHAD SHARIFOV**  
General manager, Chenot Palace Gabala, Azerbaijan

### SPEC SHEET

- AI can streamline your search. It can help draw up basic itineraries. It can search for the best deals. It can sift through hundreds of reviews and present the best. It can act as a virtual assistant.
- Potential pitfalls: It cannot replace the human on-ground experience. AI can easily be manipulated and so results may not be as accurate as a known person's advice. For guaranteed safety and bespoke curation, rely on a human-based travel agency.

## The Artificial Aesthetic

The most hotly debated topic of 2024 is AI, and this debate hasn't spared the travel industry. While companies with years of experience are likely to dismiss this trend purely for its cookie-cutter approach, young travellers on a budget are turning to it in droves. Fuelling this trend further are online portals who have readily adopted generative AI tools to make their user experience faster.

Yeishan Goel, group CEO of THRS (Travel and Hospitality Representation Services), a luxury travel consultancy, describes generative AI as technology that takes a large quantum of data available online and manages to give a quick intuitive solution, while offering a refined context as compared to a plain binary search. He concludes that this is why feedback from generative travel aids can be more appealing for some. "It's certainly a draw for customers looking for

specific answers and confident suggestions amid a plethora of information." He's sceptical about actual results, however. "We see several individuals and companies using the tools to draft itineraries and seek help in initial planning. However, the actual execution of the plan has to be done by oneself or by experienced travel designers, and this ultimately defines the overall experience."

Ruchi Kohli, chief of the experience at bespoke luxury travel agency, Away&Co agrees with him. "Away&Co is not a mass travel business, our trips are considered to be among the most experiential and well-planned in the industry. We don't use AI to plan any of our trips because we rely on Authentic Intelligence," she says. Kohli concludes that AI can never replace the experience of looking after guests at every step.



"We don't use AI to plan any of our trips because we rely on Authentic Intelligence."  
**RUCHI KOHLI**  
Chief of Experience, Away&Co

### SPEC SHEET

- Best activities to explore within a property: Tennis, pickleball, squash, swimming, golf
- Best activities to explore outside a property: Nature treks, local markets, adventure sport activities, water sport activities like snorkelling and deep-sea diving
- These activities should be undertaken under supervision and it's best to take expert advice



## The Great Out Break

In keeping with the mandate for relaxed holidays, people are picking properties based on the number of outdoor activities offered in the vicinity of the property and around it. Pickleball courts, ping-pong tables and outdoor hot tubs are all becoming top priorities for travellers seeking active and outdoorsy holidays. Travellers also book holiday homes with amenities they either cannot afford to have at home, or that they want to try out before they buy themselves.

People checking in to Six Senses Vana can attend wellness sessions in the morning, enjoy an Ayurvedic meal right after and play a game of pickleball or tennis at their well-equipped sports arena in the evening. Hence, even long-term 'vanavasis', as guests of this property are known, never feel the need to leave. However, if a sports or game centre isn't readily available on the property, tourists now search for interesting excursions before booking.

The team behind the serene villas of Ahilya by the Sea in Goa, are happy to organise kayaking trips to the man-



"A day out fishing is also a popular excursion, as is the nature trail through the mangroves of the Nerul river."  
**YESHWANT RAO HOLKAR**  
Ahilya by the Sea, Goa

groves nearby or a heritage walk to the Reis Magos Fort. Yeshwant Holkar, the owner of the property, says, "A day out fishing is also a popular excursion, as is the nature trail through the mangroves of the Nerul river."

Similarly, Malabar House in Kochi relies heavily on local flavour. Guests are encouraged to participate in the Walking through Fort Cochin tour: "We also organise tuk tuk tours tailored to specific interests, along with organising kathakali performances," says Joerg Drechsel, the owner. Other popular outdoor activities include harbour tours, country boat punting, speed boat safaris and exploring the backwaters in their in-houseboat, *Discovery*.



# Art of the Daily

Subodh Gupta often quotes from some of his favourite poets when he talks about his art practice. Pointing to his mixed media work of a cobbler's shoeshine kit on show at the newly-opened Nature Morte in Mumbai, he says he is reminded of two lines by the Hindi poet Dhoomil (Sudama Pandey): *Sach kahoon sahab, na koi chota hai, na bada hai, mere saamne har aadmi do jodi joota jo marammat ke liye khada hai*—loosely translated to "To tell you the truth, there's no-one big or small. In front of me, every person is a pair of shoes waiting to get their footwear repaired". "I read these lines when I was in Class 10 or 11, when I was not even an artist, but they stayed with me. I try to look at the unconventional," he says. As viewers take in the work, he asks them to look closely and let their imagination soar. Soon, somewhere, within that cobbler's shoeshine toolkit, a face emerges... hair, eyes, nose. "It looks a bit like an African mask. So here I am,

The theatrical aspect of everyday objects finds a voice in Subodh Gupta's new works  
By DEEPALI SINGH



Inside Out (II); (below, left to right) Portrait I; A Small Village, Around the Corner, Up in a Mountain



'I believe food to be a very nourishing aspect of art and it also brings in the performance part.'



much a part of his creativity. "I look for the performance aspect in my art," he says. In 2006, he had combined his love for cooking—"I make really good South Indian, Bengali and Assamese dishes. I am also adept at making Japanese and Korean food," he says—and the use of utensils, and created a food performance, preparing *dal* and soup for almost 1,000 people at Saint Bernard in Paris. "I am improving on this further. I recently made a kitchen in my studio for my friends, where I will perform with my food. I believe it to be a very nourishing aspect of art and it also brings in the performance part to it," he says. That's some food for thought.

(Clockwise from above) Subodh Gupta; My Village (XXIV); What's in a Name (XV)

thinking of this mask, the struggle of the cobbler's life and Dhoomil's poem—all of them come together to create this work of art," he shares.

The artwork is part of the exhibition titled *A Small Village, Around the Corner, Up in a Mountain*, where the contemporary artist has put together some of his works created in the last few years including paintings, sculptures and wall reliefs. The artist who received his BFA in Painting from the College of Art in Patna (1983-1988), is known for transforming icons of everyday life into intricate artworks-cum-commentary reflecting on the transformation of the economic and cultural Indian landscape.

The 60-year-old artist, who was born and brought up in Bihar, is very much a product of his upbringing and influences. From *thali* plates to milk pails and tiffin

boxes, everyday stainless steel kitchen utensils and found objects have been incorporated in his monumental sculptural works. Imbued with different meanings, these works have been showcased in exhibitions across the world. His mid-career survey, curated by Germano Celant, was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi in 2012, where his monumental sculpture *People Tree* is permanently installed on the front lawns, facing India Gate.

Growing up in a woman-dominated household with a mother and three elder sisters, much of his time was spent in the kitchen, observing them use utensils for cooking. "In the late 80s and early 90s, almost 90 per cent of the Indian population used steel utensils—it did not matter which strata of society one belonged to. Secondly, I like cooking and

watching my mother and sisters cooking left an impact on me," he shares. At the current exhibition, many of his oil on linen paintings have depictions of utensils as does the mixed media work *Close to the River Where Wood is Burning*. Utensils have now been a part of his work for more than three decades, and Gupta compares it to a *samudra manthan*—a churning of the seas. "One feels that one should be done with it now but one keeps exploring and finding newer meanings in them. Even a lifetime is not enough to explore it all," says the Delhi-based artist, who has new shows coming up in Bihar as well as in Korea.

Not many know this, but as a young man, Gupta worked in a theatre troupe, acting and designing posters for the plays. Little wonder that the aspect of theatricality and performance is very

**WHEN & WHERE**  
*A Small Village, Around the Corner, Up in a Mountain*; *Nature Morte*, Dhanraj Mahal, Mumbai; Till March 9



## Walk This Way

Mudar Patherya; (right) a pavement in Kolkata



By SHEVLIN SEBASTIAN

Mudar Patherya woke up one morning at his Kolkata home a few weeks ago with an idea: Why not paint pavements? For the past two years, the communications consultant and heritage enthusiast, along with two friends, Ratnabali Ghosh, a retired teacher at the Ballygunge Shiksha Sadan and Prasanta Sain, a professional artist, had got *alpanas*—traditional motifs, patterns and symbols drawn with rice flour paste—painted anonymously in houses, five-star hotels and pavements in different parts of the city. "The idea of painting became embedded in my mind," says Patherya.

He came up with an idea of doing a 'Walk of Fame', similar to the Hollywood version. "Initially, the plan was to put the names of revered personalities at the centre of the pavements," says the 61-year-old. "But, I thought, if somebody walks over a name like Rabindranath Tagore, it will create a huge controversy." So he decided to put the names on the side of the pavement, near the buildings. The names included, apart from Tagore, contemporary musicians like Suchitra Mitra, Debabrata Biswas, Shreya Ghoshal, Shyamal Mitra, Anjan Dutt, Rupam Islam, Susmit Bose and Usha Uthup. As for the pavement design, Patherya says, "It is like a mosaic."

Mudar had to get permission from Manisha Bose-Shaw, the municipal councillor of ward 87.

When the officer listened to what Mudar had to say, she smiled. "No one has tried anything like this before," she says. Around eight pavements on Dr Sarat Banerjee Road and Maharaja Nandakumar Road, in the Lake Market area, have been painted. "People were enthralled," Bose-Shaw says.

Asked why he chose this particular area, Patherya says, "This neighbourhood was gradually developing a cafe culture. I hope that with these colourful pavements, more cafes and boutiques will come up. Residents wanting to sell their Art Deco two or three-storeyed houses to builders might think twice. The character of the neighbourhood will be protected. Essentially, this was a heritage preservation exercise."

The heritage enthusiast got as many as 11 sponsors from different walks of life for the initiative. Patherya had earlier set up an NGO called Kolkata Gives, which mobilised nearly ₹100 million in cash and kind during the pandemic. Asked why he is one of the few educated Indians to have a social sensibility, he says that the middle class has an inside-outside paradox. "They spend lakhs, even crores to ensure that the inside of their homes look beautiful. But if you ask them to give a ₹100 donation to clean up the pavements, they will say no. You have to redefine me and mine. You live in the city and the city should live inside you," he says emphatically.

## LEISURE CORNER



### A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Vadhra Art Gallery mounts an exhibition featuring a collection of almost 80 works across two decades rendered in acrylic on plastic film by artist and print-maker Jyoti Bhatt. It features his well-regarded inquiries into iconography, portraiture, rural life, still lives and the natural world. *Engaging the Archive*; Till March 6; Vadhra Art Gallery, Delhi; Entry: Free

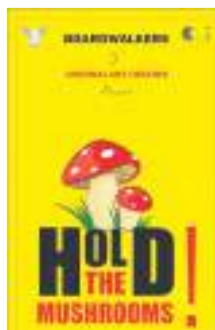


### TUNING IN

Catch the Purbayan Chatterjee-led collective present a unique contemporary interpretation of India's classical and fusion music. It blends various genres and will also feature drummer and percussionist Sivamani, U Rajesh on the mandolin and ace vocalist Gayatri Asokan. *Classicool*; March 1, 7.30 pm; NMACC, Mumbai; Tickets: ₹700 onwards; Details on nmacc.com

### LA FAMILIA

Catch a heart-warming play centred around the dynamics of a family comprising a middle-aged couple, their daughter, and the young man she hopes to marry. It explores the intricacies of familial relationships, making it universally relatable. *Hold the Mushrooms*; March 1; The Stage, Alwarpet, Chennai; Tickets: ₹300; Details on BookMyShow



## An Elaborate Discipline

KNMA presents its debut Legacy Series with a performance by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Delhi

By GEETIKA SACHDEV

The Kamani auditorium in Delhi is packed to the brim with viewers. There is hushed silence as the 33-member Gandharva choir starts with a *shlok* from the Rig Veda. Composed by Pandit Madhup Mudgal, the powerful piece reverberates through the hall. The vocals dominate the piece, while musical instruments serve as embellishments to fine-tune the final act. Up next is an abstract composition consisting of *sargam* and beautiful rhythmic patterns that appear rather challenging. The choir, however, doesn't miss a beat—a clear reflection of their artistic discipline.

Soon the evening is enveloped by the strains of traditional *dhrupad*, *tarana* and Carnatic *varnam*, besides folk melodies. It is a momentous occasion—a performance by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, which recently turned 85, at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA)'s debut Legacy Series. "I believe Gandharva and KNMA share certain common values, the foremost being love and respect for the arts," shares Madhup, principal at the Mahavidyalaya, Hindustani classical vocalist, and composer and conductor of the Gandharva choir.

*Aayal Ho Rituraj*, a composition that celebrates the arrival of spring with all its splendour of beauty and colour, gets the audience in an upbeat mood. It is followed by *Charishnu* composed in Raga Jog, one of the more popular *raags* that has been frequently seen in cinema. The almost-peppy composition injects the audience with greater energy and enthusiasm. "It's so perfect... what melodies, what coordination; I have never witnessed something



The Odissi ensemble; (below) the Gandharva choir



of this magnitude before," gushes Smriti Katyal, a young college student. A series of other compositions later, the atmosphere is enlivened with a *qawwali* set in Raga Bhairavi. The first half of the verse is in Persian, while the second in Awadhi. This melange of cultures keeps viewers engaged, with many clapping loudly to the vibrant *taal*. The conductor has a surprise in store. From the *qawwali*, the choir effortlessly changes gears and dives into *Hau Saiba*—a Konkani folk song from Goa, reminiscent of the *Ge Ge Ge Sahiba* from the popular 1973 film *Bobby*.

Complementing the spectacular musical showcase, is an Odissi

presentation by Vidushi Madhavi Mudgal, one of India's senior-most Odissi exponents, teacher and choreographer. Beginning with 'Ranga Stuti' which has verses from *Abhinaya Darpan*, a compendium on the grammar of Indian dance, the nine members of the ensemble, seek blessings for a fulfilling journey with the audience. The high point is the use of lamps—a prop that elevates the act instantly. It is almost rhythmic, how the girls move in a circle, finally coming together in a cluster. The next piece, 'Kha Champu', is inspired from a poem written by the 18th-century Oriya poet Kavi Surya Baladeva Ratha, excerpted from his work, *Kishore Chandranan*

*Champu*. The show comes to a close with 'Sphuran', a transcreation of musical impulse and motifs into dance movement and form. "Each piece has its own challenges and possibilities. It's how the progression of the presentation should be, that is an important consideration. I also enjoy using space as a tool. It's about how to enliven it; it's not just about moving the hands or the body. It is all about how the totality of the possibility of space can be presented—that's my challenge," says Madhavi, adding, "Our performance is all about *vistaar*, which means elaboration and extending the boundaries." The audience will certainly agree.

# Flying on Empty Fuel Tanks, the Congress Plane has Nosedived

## BARBED WORDS

**Pushpesh Pant**

Former professor,  
Jawaharalal Nehru  
University



If the Bard were to contemplate penning a sonnet on the Indian National Congress, he would most likely not consider comparing it to a summer's day. Another poet's lines come to mind: *No lark could sing with a sky so dark and grey*. The news in the past few days has been quite devastating. There is an apparently unending procession of what the stunned High Command would say: Rats from the sinking ship. Well, do be honest, many of the stalwarts fancied themselves as bandicoots with satraps of their own and amused audiences by trying to roar like a lion. Mice and men have been known to act strangely when pushed into a corner with their back against the wall. Congressmen, till they had not fallen from grace with the Dynasty, behaved not like rodents but fat cats or lapdogs.

Some who continue to be loyal courtiers would fault us for being in a haste to write a requiem for the what they insist on calling the GOP—quite oblivious of the fact that not a tattered shred of grandeur is there as a fig leaf and it's a joke to call a family concern a political party. It hasn't aged well. The wine has turned to vinegar long back. Now even Sonia Gandhi has decided to throw in the towel. Rather than face ignominious defeat in Raebareli she has opted for the safer route to Rajya Sabha via Rajasthan. The spin that is being put is that with Rahul

representing Kerala, mom from Rajasthan and eternally hopeful sister defending the once-pocket burrow in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress would claim an all-India footprint.

Bad news is followed by worse tidings. 'Kamal Nath and Son' are keeping all in tenterhooks about their future course of action. In the interest of development of backward Chhindwara, in deference to the wishes of their beloved constituents, they will be constrained to join the BJP. How gullible they think public is and how short its memory? If

charge', is worried about the midnight knock at his door? With his exit the number of ex-CMs from Congress will rise to 10 with the count on as the heat for the Lok Sabha election rises.

The Congress, we are reassured by die-hard loyalists, will rise from its ashes like the phoenix. When was the last time we witnessed the miracle? 1977? For those born after 1989, the Congress has looked more like an ostrich with its head buried in the sand or like the innocent Dodo who lent the coloniser more than a helping

Sabha seat presents the gory sight of cockfights with razors tied to roosters' legs. There are some survivors who never cease to surprise. Digvijaya Singh, for instance. Other 'senior' heavyweights from tiny states, like Anand Sharma, are grumbling at Abhishek Manu Singhvi being nominated from Himachal Pradesh. How easy does he forget that its been well settled by now that the children of the soil don't have the first claim on RS seats. He himself had once entered the upper house from Rajasthan. Mallikarjun

Kharge is constantly busy in damage control.

It may appear in bad taste to use phrases like 'the last straw on the back of the camel' or 'nail in the wooden casket', but how long can one remain in denial? Congress survives today only because the BJP needs it as a punching bag and to blame all ills and failures on the Nehru-Gandhi clan. Let's be fair: Indira Gandhi had fought her own battles, won most of them and restored national pride to her compatriots. The decline began with Rajiv Gandhi—a good man undone by his school mates, flying colleagues and

boyhood playmates. It's almost four decades since he died. It's only with Sonia and Rahul in the cockpit that irreversible decline set in. Well, flying on empty fuel tanks—not a drop of ideology or iota of inspirational vision—isn't easy. The plane has finally nosedived. The best that the crew and the passengers can hope and pray for is a crash-landing without more damage than the wrecked aircraft.

[pushpeshpant@gmail.com](mailto:pushpeshpant@gmail.com)



Chhindwara is backward, who's responsible? Funds may have dried up now but what about when Kamal Nath was the MP for successive terms, minister in the Centre and even CM of Madhya Pradesh. For single-handedly delivering MP to BJP and hounding out Jyotiraditya Scindia from Congress, the man's expectations for a suitable reward from NDA aren't unnatural. Or, is the gentleman, once synonymous with 'efficiency sur-

hand in its own extinction. There is no dearth of favourites of the family that strut the stage like peacocks till their ugly feet are exposed and frustrated they let loose a shower of quills like a porcupine at their benefactors. All this is understandable. Politics is after all the game of patronage. With Congress out of power in most states, there is a great scarcity of the proverbial loaves and fishes. The struggle to secure a Rajya

# Political Biographies for Curious Souls

## PROVOCATEUR

**Ravi Shankar**

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After hundreds of years, fiction seems to be inching close to its sell-by date, pun intended, except for Chick Lit and Amitava Ghosh. Autobiographies work as long as they're written or ghostwritten by Steve Jobs or Michelle Obama. Self-help books do as much good as a protein shake for a dead man. The new oeuvre getting cash registers singing is biography. All it takes are Google and the cheery chutzpah of an amateur historian to churn out a successful saga. Writing a biography of Narendra Modi is the fave attention-seeking scheme of all saffron balladeers, with Yogi Adityanath biogs coming second. With Hindutva bibliophilism in vogue, Veer Savarkar is the royalty route for self-invented Google historians. In every ethos, lauding the king has been the ticket to riches and rewards. But beware, biographies can get more yawns than yaws; the trick is to pitch the guy and his gall in racy prose faster than Picasso can say "Guernica".

Rahul Gandhi, *The Ghost Who Walks*: First, no publisher wants to publish his story because it won't sell, unless it's a jokebook. A keek at how a man, once considered India's most eligible bachelor with dimples, became India's most undesired politician is worth a try. Mama's boy is a good place to start.

Shashi Tharoor, *The Sexy Sesquipedalianist*: A sureshot bestseller. The rizz of India's most flamboyant politician who exemplifies power is the ultimate aphrodisiac trope: his irresistibility to women voters and sensuous socialites is his political weapon. How did he finesse the art of tossing his hair back so stylishly? What defines the true mojo of the diplomat-writer-MP-social lion; a Hindu who can recite the scriptures better than any saffron savant and knock back a malt as smoothly as a Scotsman? Beware of the word play though, he could give our Shankaracharyas a new Sanskrit word longer than Gadhkari's highways.

Nitin Gadkari, *The Road-Roller*: The Man from Maharashtra is as big a Sangh heavyweight as one of his road-rollers. Modi's *bête noire*, he exemplifies Charles Darwin's comrade in arms, Herbert Spencer's 'Survival of the Fittest' theory. Of late he is keeping schtum, flinging no more veiled barbs against the BJP superpowers. Modi-haters wish the enigmatic roadie will be PM, but he refuses to do a *pran pratistha* in Lok Kalyan Marg.

Lalu Yadav, *The Buffalo Soldier*: A vernal veterinary voyage through fodder warehouses packed with money blacker than a buffalo. Nehru wrote *Glimpses of World History* in jail, but *Glimpses of Scams and Slammer* by Lalu Yadav could do the trick. And why family planning flopped in Bihar.

Nitish Kumar, *The Cross-Breed*: The man who crosses floors as shamelessly as a snake oil salesman had to do anything to become prime minister. An expert at hybrid ideologies, he picked up a halo quitting his job as railway minister after a train accident in 1999, but lost it somewhere along the way, saying hello too many times to the BJP and RJD.

Mamata Banerjee, *Bengal's Belle of the Ball*: If Girish Chandra Ghosh is the father of the golden age of Bengali theatre, *Didi* can easily be its most popular actor now. Her appearance on the poll stage in a wheelchair with a bandaged leg did more to get her a landslide than the BJP's boo-boos. Able to switch to poor man's patois with the ease of a Bengali picking on hilsa bones, she is the only woman politician who keeps Opposition oracles guessing.

Note to publishers: Politicians make good subjects as long as they are objects in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by JK Rowling.

# Ignore Most Advice on Productivity

## MILLENNIALS AT WORK

**Utkarsh Amitabh**

CEO, Network Capital;  
Chevening Fellow,  
University of Oxford



The quest for productivity has become an incessant drumbeat in our daily lives. Countless articles and self-help gurus preach the gospel of hacks and shortcuts to help us achieve more in less time. Amid the hustle and bustle, however, a critical element is often overlooked—clarity. The relentless pursuit of productivity without a clear sense of purpose and direction can lead to burnout and dissatisfaction. Moving fast and breaking things will only lead to more chaos in your life. What if you took a moment to assess if you are going in the direction you want?

I decided to study moral philosophy at Oxford largely because I wanted to put my 10 years of work experience in perspective. I had worked at Microsoft, built a company—Network Capital, invested in a few startups, and written a couple of books. By most measures, I had a productive and creative life but I wanted more clarity toward my long-term goals. Doing more wasn't the answer. It was time to test my assumptions about what a meaningful and successful life meant to me.

The true challenge lies not in the quantity of tasks we accomplish but in the quality of our focus and intention. The modern professional landscape is teeming with executives and young leaders who, despite their impressive resumes and countless achievements, find themselves caught in the throes of burnout. The culprit? Not knowing what they are doing and why.

In my conversations with professionals on Network Capital, a platform for mentoring and professional development, a recurring theme emerges—the

struggle to process and manage the direction in which they are headed. It's not the sheer volume of responsibilities that overwhelms them; rather, it's the uncertainty surrounding the purpose and intrinsic importance of their actions. Most ambitious people figure out ways to get through their to-do lists but at the end of the day, they wonder if they made a difference.

Consider this: racing at breakneck speed in the wrong direction doesn't bring you any closer to your destination; it merely exhausts your resources and energy. It's not about doing more; it's about doing what matters and understanding why it matters. Working relentlessly and feeling directionless is perhaps the most debilitating of experiences.

At the heart of the matter is the need for a calm and focused mind

matters. Creating a personal roadmap that aligns with your values and aspirations is a fundamental step toward fostering clarity. This roadmap serves as a guiding light, helping you discern between activities that propel you closer to your goals and those that merely distract you.

In the race to climb the professional ladder or achieve societal expectations, individuals often neglect to pause and reflect. Without this foundational understanding, every action becomes a mere reaction to external stimuli, leaving professionals feeling like hamsters on a wheel, running tirelessly without a clear destination.

Now let's address the million-dollar question, what does doing "right" things entail? Simply put, it comes down to channelling your energy to issues where you can have a meaningful impact on people, organisations and causes you care most about. You are unlikely to discover them if you are obsessed with productivity all the time. You need to have the headspace to wander, tinker, experiment and test assumptions.

On Network Capital, I suggest our members try micro-experiments, scaled-down versions of the life they are curious about but don't have the time or energy to pursue just yet. Simply working on micro-experiments with the guidance of a coach often helps them venture into areas they would not have considered otherwise. Once they know the direction they want to steer their life toward, productivity comes naturally. The reverse, however, is not true. Simply being productive won't get you to where you want to be.

Let me conclude with a small micro-experiment for you: Focus on clarity for a week. Instead of measuring how much work you got done, ask yourself if all the work you did brought you closer to the ideal version of your future self. If the answer is no, it is time to rethink and recalibrate.

Posts on X (formerly Twitter):  
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# Drive Away the Anxiety Before it Hits

## BY INVITATION

**Anu Aggarwal**

Actor, speaker,  
yogi and author



Stress proves to be a fast-growing champion in disruption. Careful, it is the year of the dragon. While it could mean chaos, war, global unrest to some, the Chinese view of a dragon is magnificent. What does any of this have to do with your mental states, you might ask? Everything. Your state of mind lashes out your priority with an invisible whip.

Transparency relieves anxiety, say our ancient spiritual philosophies. When you are truthful you live in harmony with your surroundings. While dealing with the corruption in the NGO sector, being transparent has been my choice. Has it been difficult? Yes, life constantly throws out circumstances where you need to make a choice. Anxiety hence, though hard to believe, is a choice you make.

In his Christian New Testament Epistle to the Galatians, Paul the

Apostles writes: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He goes on to instruct the Galatians to "sow to please the spirit" rather than the flesh, indicating that a spiritual life will result in reward. Even anxiety could be a byproduct of your deeds.

I maintain 100 per cent transparency in my Foundation, for me that is the meaning of spirituality.

A clear conscience keeps you from the mental culprits of anxiety. Occasional anxiety is a part of life, but excessive and frequent anxiety is a severe problem. By dispelling negative thoughts, enhancing conscientious actions, yoga plays an important role in relieving anxiety. Positive, happy thoughts improve your mood. I incorporate the same principles in the Anufun yoga sessions.

If you feel anxious and want to control it then here are some practical tips on how yoga can relieve anxiety: When the mind is under stress, the body releases fight-and-flight stress hormones as a

defence mechanism which causes anxiety. But through Anufun you can reduce the level of the inclusion of stress hormones in the body. People who struggle with anxiety have a higher breathing rate because their heart beats faster. Concentration on breathing slows down the continuous pulsation. Meditation clears our mind and helps it to calm down. It also triggers the release of

endorphins and neurotransmitter hormones that elevate the mood and reduce stress.

There are several elements in yoga that I use today as a modern treatment for anxiety, such as mindfulness, reduction of stress levels, mental

flexibility and other relaxation techniques. With these techniques, you can easily manage your depression and anxiety symptoms which ultimately improve your mood and overall health. Being an alternative yoga therapist, titled a Naturopathic Doctor, my effort is to upgrade my practice. My joy comes from seeing you joyful.

Instagram: @anusulanu

# Empowering Women for a New India

## BY INVITATION

**Shashank Mani**

Author and founder of  
the Jagriti Movement



Indian women are starting to take giant strides. But there is a particular segment, hailing from Tier 2 and Tier 3 districts, that is now starting to march ahead, creating new ballast for women-led development in India. This segment—coming from backgrounds that are neither rich nor poor—has different circumstances and obstacles relative to their urban sisters. Their numbers are 400 million, or 10 per cent of the total women population of the world. If we are able to energise them, it will open a new chapter in India's development. The issues they grapple with are different, and therefore any approach to liberate their energies will require different thinking, solutions and infrastructure. An approach that will build the balance sheet of the country.

Women from these districts are 'balance sheet builders', whereas men often exhibit a 'profit and loss' type behaviour: What this means is that given any resource, the women in small towns and districts use it for the long-term

benefit of society—investing in schooling of children, their nutrition, the construction of a home, etc. Men, usually spend at least 20 per cent of any resource on immediate needs like tobacco, alcohol, food and clothing. But this metaphor plays out in other areas. Women have been shown to be more collaborative, as the success of SHG groups across India has shown. Unlike men, women in Tier 2 and Tier 3 districts do not have the luxury of taking a train to a metro city for



employment and therefore are more vested in the local economy. This is a key reason that Prime Minister Modi has coined the phrase Women-led Development. This phrase moves the discussion from the weak women stereotype.

In my work in Deoria and Kushinagar, this power of women is evident, and we

have sought to harness it through Udyamita. Often done with family members, enterprise gives women a local stake and the ability to create employment for themselves and others. However, this requires us to move beyond SHG-led livelihood, to seeing women as managers and entrepreneurs. We have succeeded in doing this in areas like apparel and handicraft, agro-processing and recently through remote digital models. Other areas like rural tourism and eco-friendly enterprises are also emerging. For this to be mainstreamed, we must create women-centric infrastructure, like creches, medical facilities, etc.

The biggest boost to women-led development has come from the ballot box. Voting trends over three general elections have seen the voting share of women rise and equal that of men. The Women's Reservation Act, 2023 recognises the 'balance sheet building' qualities of women. Women's vote is a vote for development, as they are less influenced by caste and class issues.

They support politicians who look after their interests, and this has been evident in the vote that Prime Minister Modi harnessed. This trend will be a victory not just for Women-led Development, but also a victory for Indian democracy that will translate into Amrit Kaal.

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# Sting Operation

A Pune startup has created a mosquito-slaying device that is eco-friendly and cheaper than current alternatives

By MANJU LATHA KALANIDHI



Eco BioTrap

**M**osquito trouble hasn't spared even the serene Dalai Lama. The little insect weighing 2.5 mg elicited another byte of profound wisdom from the Buddhist spiritual leader: "If you think you're too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito," said His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. "Such is the power of this tiny terror."

A startup in Pune has now taken it on upon itself to wage a war on mosquitoes, vowing to 'break the chain of breeding' through a simple device that needs no electricity, charging or batteries.

Prasad Phadke, CEO of EcoBio, says that its efficacy has already been proven successful in the world's largest slum, Dharavi in Mumbai. About 3,000 Eco BioTraps have been deployed over a year since July 2022 in designated areas of the slum. The study found that the device is 92 per cent effective in preventing egg hatching. And that it is twice more effective in attracting the mosquito to breed (and then kill it).

Seven years of research, 100-plus attractants, over 50 killing ingredients and 66 different sizes and shape iterations

later, the team zeroed in on this one design. The Eco BioTrap looks like a used ice cream bucket that can be hung to a nail, except it is not plastic, but made of a biodegradable substance. Each bucket can be used for a month for a 400 sq ft area and then discarded.

They dub it an ultimate protection device from dengue, malaria, chikungunya and other mosquito-borne diseases. So how did the idea strike Phadke? "By thinking like the mother of a mosquito," he quips. The device is 70 per cent cheaper than other repellent mosquito products on the market. "Out of the top 50 mosquito scientists on the planet, four of them serve on our board and are deeply involved in the company," he says with pride, explaining how it works: "When filled with water, the BioTrap mimics the breeding sites of female mosquitoes. Once a mosquito enters to lay eggs, an industry-standard household insecticide ensures 100 per cent that eggs do not hatch, thereby completely eliminating breeding."

These eco BioTraps are 100 per cent



Prasad Phadke

biodegradable after four weeks and it requires no recollection. The insecticide does not come in direct human contact. In addition, deploying BioTraps does not need any training. "They last up to 30 days after which water starts leaking out, thereby

posing no risk of becoming a breeding ground," Phadke assures. A trained eye sees dead eggs and/or larvae.

Currently, around 2,50,000 BioTraps are being used all across India spanning municipal corporations, residential societies, public places, hospitals, schools, etc. In a recent collaboration with pest control company Rentokil PCI, Eco BioTraps was deployed in a defense establishment in Karnataka where there was a

dengue outbreak resulting in a remarkable reduction in number of cases from 50 to five within a month.

"The strategic use prevented a potential surge to 200 cases, and by the subsequent month, there were no new reported cases," Phadke adds.

Delving deeper into mosquito

stats, Phadke says that one mosquito bite results in the creation of about three crore mosquitoes in a short span of 30 days. This means that the rate at which mosquitoes multiply beats Covid-19 hands down. And how did we beat Covid? By breaking the chain? Phadke applied the same logic to mosquitoes to beat them at their game. "Till there is water on this planet, there will be mosquitoes. This is because mosquitoes only breed on water. The lifespan of an adult female mosquito (that is responsible for dengue and malaria) is only 15-30 days. This means their only job during their short lifespan is to suck human blood and lay 50-200 eggs at a time. That multiplication is never-ending. The only way to 'outsmart' them is to make sure there is no water on the planet. As that is impossible, the second option of killing them before they hatch works for us," he adds.

## WHY IT MATTERS

India hosts a diverse range of **415 MOSQUITO SPECIES**

Nearly **40 MILLION PEOPLE** in India get infected with diseases spread by mosquitoes each year

The nation makes for **1.7% OF ALL MALARIA CASES** and **1.2% of all malaria-related fatalities** worldwide

India reported **1,93,245 cases of dengue in 2021, resulting in 346 FATALITIES**

Mosquito-borne diseases pose a significant **RISK TO MORE THAN 80%** of the global population

Transmission occurs primarily through **MOSQUITO BITES**

Vector-borne diseases account for more than **17% of all infectious diseases globally** and are responsible for more than **700,000 DEATHS ANNUALLY**

Malaria and dengue alone contribute to nearly **4,50,000 FATALITIES**



## AYURWISDOM Dr Ramya Alakkal



### Battle of the Bulge

**D**uring periods marked by a concerning surge in non-communicable diseases, the looming threat to long-term health becomes evident. Among these health concerns, obesity stands out as a condition where an individual's weight surpasses what is deemed healthy in relation to their height, leading to an excessive body size. Criteria for obesity typically include measurements such as weight, waist circumference, and arm circumference. The underlying cause of overweight and obesity often lies in the excessive accumulation of fat tissue.

In contemporary settings, overweight is defined as having a Body Mass Index (BMI) above 25, while obesity is classified as a BMI exceeding 30. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, addresses obesity under the classification of *sthoulyam*.

#### Sthoulyam—The Metabolic Syndrome

In Ayurveda, the concept of *sthoulya* encompasses the two biological states of being stout or lean, each with its own implications for health. While being lean (*kaarshya*) is generally favoured in Ayurveda for its health benefits, being stout (*sthula*) can lead to various health issues later in life. A person with a *sthula* constitution typically exhibits symptoms such as excessive sweating with a foul odour, difficulty walking, and enlargement of the abdomen, buttocks, and thighs. Ayurveda warns that *sthoulya* can predispose individuals to conditions such as heart disease, tumours and dizziness.

#### How to Tackle Sthoulyam

1. *Dinacharya* (Daily Regimen): Following a daily routine as prescribed in Ayurveda, including waking up early, exercising, practicing *abhyanga* (oil massage), and maintaining a proper diet plan, can help prevent health issues associated with *sthoulya*.

2. Familial Background: Recognising the role of genetics in obesity, individuals with a family history of obesity should understand that coercing the body to become lean may not be the ideal solution. Instead, focus on managing weight in a manner that aligns with one's natural constitution.

#### Therapies for Obesity

1. *Udvartanam*: This procedure involves massaging the body with specific herbal powders to reduce accumulated fat. The duration and frequency of *udvartanam* are tailored to each individual's needs.



2. *Snehapanam*: Involves the consumption of medicated oils in a specific dose to help disperse fat content in the body. *Snehapanam* is often performed as a preparatory step for detoxification (*shodhana*) therapies.

3. *Vamanam*: A therapeutic procedure involving induced vomiting with specialised herbal formulations. *Vamanam* is recommended for individuals with predominant *kapha dosha* and obesity.

4. *Virechanam*: Therapeutic purgation performed after *snehapanam* to eliminate metabolic residues and excess fat. *Virechanam* is tailored to the individual's *doshic* imbalance and disease status.

5. *Lekhana Vasti*: A specialised colon therapy aimed at breaking down fat accumulation in the body. Herbal preparations such as *triphalaka kashayam* are used for colon cleansing and fat dissipation.

#### Diet and Exercise

To manage obesity effectively, focus on personalised dietary choices emphasising easy-to-digest foods while avoiding inflammatory options. Incorporate regular aerobic exercises like walking, swimming, and yoga, including practices such as *suryanamaskara*, to burn excess energy and promote weight loss. This combined approach supports a healthier lifestyle and aids in combating obesity.

Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to combating obesity, addressing not only physical symptoms but also underlying imbalances to promote long-term health and wellbeing.

The author is a Professor at the Department of Panchakarma, Ashthamgam Ayurveda Medical College, Kerala

## FIT BIT



### SKIN-FRIENDLY

Ghostberry, also known as snowberry, is a skincare ingredient gaining attention for its remarkable healing properties. It boasts anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and antiseptic qualities, making it a powerful remedy for various skin conditions. Its effectiveness in soothing redness, calming irritation and repairing the skin barrier has made it a sought-after ingredient in skincare products. Its efficacy extends beyond general skin irritation, with historical use in treating specific conditions such as eczema, impetigo and burns. However, caution is advised when incorporating ghostberry-based products into your skincare routine to avoid potential allergic reactions. The drupe-like berry emerges as a compelling solution, promising nourishment, relief and revitalisation for those seeking comprehensive skincare solutions.



### ALL CLEAR

A groundbreaking innovation of new spiral-shaped lens, termed a 'spiral diopter', offers clear vision across various distances and lighting conditions, potentially revolutionising ophthalmology. The lens functions similarly to progressive lenses but without associated distortions, presenting significant advancements in vision correction. Crafted using advanced digital machining techniques, it incorporates elements to create optical vortices directly into its surface, generating multiple clear focal points. Published in the journal *Optica*, the lens's effectiveness was validated through image capture and volunteer testing, demonstrating significant improvements in visual acuity. Researchers envision its application in contact lenses, intraocular implants for cataracts, and compact imaging systems, promising enhanced depth perception and reliability in various applications.

## For Some Eggs-travagant Gains

By MAITHREYI SOOREJ

**E**mbarking on a journey towards weight loss often involves exploring various dietary strategies. Among them, the three-day egg diet stands out for its promise of quick results and nutritional benefits.

Sometimes referred to as an egg fast, the diet revolves around the consumption of eggs and healthy fats over a three-day period. This approach capitalises on the nutritional richness of eggs, which serve as a prime source of high-quality protein and essential nutrients.

The diet presents a range of compelling benefits, making it a popular choice for those seeking rapid weight loss. Firstly, by significantly reducing carbohydrate intake, the diet initiates the process of ketosis, wherein the body shifts to utilising fat stored for energy. Moreover, eggs are packed with essential compounds like choline, methionine and casein, which actively support liver function and reduce the risk of ailments such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. Additionally, the high protein content of eggs plays a pivotal role in promoting feelings

of satiety, regulating appetite and preventing overeating.

For individuals experiencing frustrating weight loss plateaus, the diet can serve as a valuable tool for overcoming stagnation and achieving continued progress. Furthermore, eggs boast a remarkable nutritional profile, rich in vital vitamins, minerals and amino acids, which contribute to overall health. Overall, the egg diet offers a holistic approach to weight loss and improved metabolic health, making it a compelling option.

While the diet can yield promising results, it's crucial to approach it with caution. Firstly, the consumption of multiple eggs daily can significantly elevate dietary cholesterol intake, which may pose risks for individuals with specific health conditions. Additionally, relying heavily on eggs and fats could lead to nutritional imbalances, potentially resulting in deficiencies or



### HOW TO DO IT

**DAILY EGG CONSUMPTION:** Aim to consume at least six whole eggs per day, incorporating them into different meal options

**EMBRACE HEALTHY FATS:** Pair each egg with a tablespoon of beneficial fats like extra virgin olive oil, coconut oil, or avocado oil to enhance satiety and nutrient absorption

**INCLUDE FULL-FAT CHEESE:** Add one ounce of full-fat cheese per whole egg to diversify your nutrient intake and support metabolic processes

**MAINTAIN HYDRATION:** Drink a minimum of three litres of water daily to mitigate potential side effects like constipation, given the low fiber content of eggs

**OPT FOR QUALITY EGGS:** Prioritise locally sourced, pasture-raised eggs from grain-fed chickens to maximise nutritional value and minimise environmental impact

electrolyte imbalances. Furthermore, the diet's short-term and highly restrictive nature may limit its sustainability for long-term weight management. Weigh these considerations carefully before embarking on the diet.

## PRODUCT REVIEW

### Freeze the Frizz

**W**ho doesn't love a good hair day? But at times isn't it the most difficult thing to achieve? What if you had a magic solution that would smoothen all the frizz and make hair wonderfully manageable? I arrived at the solution with Redken's Bonding Care Damaged Hair Combo, comprising acidic bonding concentrate shampoo and conditioner. I have used it only twice, but the effect is instantaneous. Though the packaging is far from fancy, the content is nothing short of extraordinary. The shampoo works up a nice lather—something I associate with a good wash—and is easy to rinse off, leaving behind a squeaky clean scalp. The conditioner is not too heavy, and a small dollop does the trick. After the first wash itself, there was less hairfall, and post blowdrying the hair, it was soft to the touch and appeared smoother. While the product is a tad expensive, it is worth every penny. It also comes with a leave-in conditioner, should you need one. It can come in quite handy, especially if you have chemically damaged hair.

—Medha Dutta Yadav

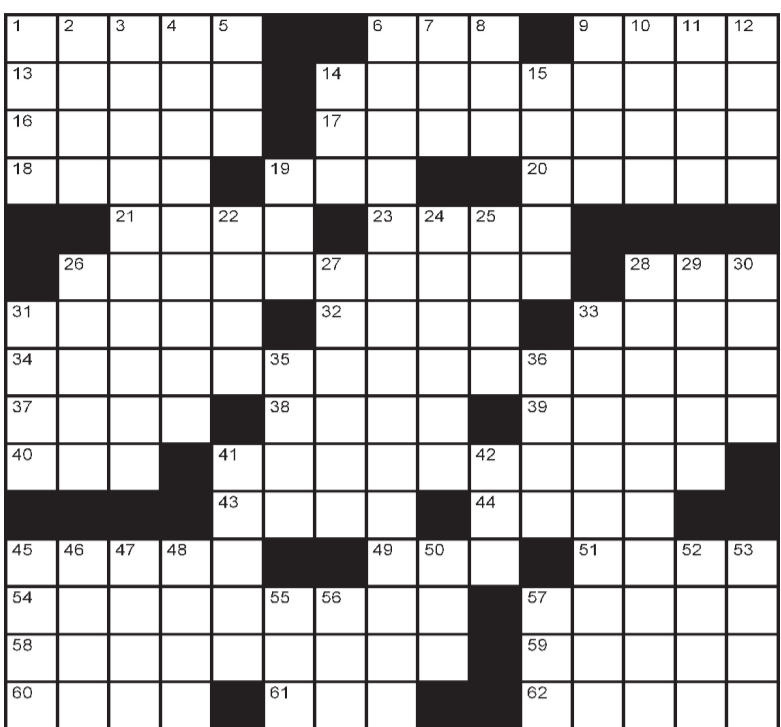
Redken Bonding Care Damaged Hair Combo  
Price: ₹6,300

★★★★★



Available: Online

## CROSSWORD | FAST WALKER — 384



### Across

- 1 Most fans have at least one
- 6 Chihuahua's shrill bark
- 9 Soda shop treat
- 13 Desert refuge
- 14 Family film?
- 16 The "Apostle of Ireland," familiarly
- 17 1989 Young MC hit, or what you might do while listening to it
- 18 Nice way to feel
- 19 "\_\_\_ is that possible?!"
- 20 Scattered seed
- 21 All-night dance
- 23 Goes (for)
- 26 "Yeah, and I'm the president of the United States!"
- 28 NGO with a panda logo
- 31 Yellowstone grazers often approached by tourists
- 32 Ballet bend
- 33 Sherrod Brown's home state
- 34 "Can this be real?!"
- 37 Drag queens' adornments
- 38 Actress Hathaway
- 39 Big parties
- 40 Bowen Yang's show: Abbr.

### Down

- 1 Bane of many workers' existences
- 2 Fashionably \_\_\_
- 3 "Just like you always do..."
- 4 Supreme leader?
- 5 Atlanta winter hrs.
- 6 "That's too advanced to explain"
- 7 Some online exchanges
- 8 Lizard, to some
- 9 Nepalese dumplings often served with achar
- 10 Say with certainty
- 11 In real time
- 12 Plenty mad, with "off"

- 14 "Succession" network
- 15 En \_\_\_ (all at once)
- 19 "Yo!"
- 22 Stop holding it in
- 24 Like sorted socks, hopefully
- 25 Redwood, for one
- 26 Political leader Bolivar
- 27 Not entirely against
- 28 Object of obsessive pursuit
- 29 Dined's partner
- 30 Confused states
- 31 Drool catchers
- 33 Cracking way to improve a breakfast buffet?
- 35 "The Wizard of Oz" author
- 36 From a distance
- 41 The Beatles' "P.S. I Love You," e.g.
- 42 Old-fashioned rocks?
- 43 On the subject of
- 46 Slinky shape
- 47 Kitty's Gotcha Day treat, perhaps
- 48 Colts' home, informally
- 50 "Should I recognize that name?"
- 52 Dough dispensers
- 53 "Good" or "great" ending
- 55 "gimme 1 sec bro"
- 56 Honest \_\_\_
- 57 Fitting

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

### HOW HIGH MAINTENANCE ARE YOU? (ADULT FEMALE)

- 1: When it comes to booking your annual holiday, do you usually?
  - a) Book the same resort and hotel that you went to last year
  - b) Spend months planning and reading loads of brochures
  - c) See what special offers the travel agent has in their window
- 2: Would you consider marrying someone that you had only met a few weeks ago?
  - a) No, you would not have had time to get to know him
  - b) Yes, but only if he were rich and handsome
  - c) Yes, if you had fallen deeply in love with him
- 3: When you go to the hairdresser for your regular trim, a new stylist suggests that you try a different style. What would you do?
  - a) Stick to your usual style
  - b) Give her a free hand to create a style that she thinks will suit you
  - c) Tell her that you will think about it for next time
- 4: Your partner arrives home from work and announces that he has to go abroad at short notice for a week to complete a project for his boss. His plane leaves in two hours' time, and he asks if you want to go with him. How would you react?
  - a) Complain that you have not been given enough notice and refuse to go
  - b) Agree to go, but only if you can get ready in time
  - c) Rush to pack a suitcase and go

- 5: Your friend is keen on attending auctions. You go along to one with her and spot a piece of antique furniture that would look great in your house. If you began to bid, would you be able to stick to an upper limit?
  - a) No, you would probably get carried away with the excitement of the bidding
  - b) You would not trust yourself to bid, and would ask your friend to do it for you
  - c) Yes, you would mentally set a maximum amount
- 6: When going shopping for clothes, what amount of cash do you take with you?
  - a) Just enough to cover what you want to buy
  - b) None, you put all your purchases on plastic, that way you have no spending limit
  - c) A little more than you need, in case you spot something you cannot resist
- 7: You have saved enough money for a new CD player. When you go to the shops, what will have you decide which player to purchase?
  - a) You will have read the best buy reviews and will have already chosen the exact system you want
  - b) You will ask the salesman's opinion
  - c) You will buy the system that appeals to you

- 8: When your partner first asked you out, how long did it take you to give him an answer?
  - a) A couple of days
  - b) Immediately
  - c) About an hour
- 9: How do you go about choosing a birthday gift for your best friend?
  - a) Buy the first thing that takes your fancy and keep the receipt in case she wants to swap it
  - b) Get her something you know that she will like
  - c) Ask her what she wants
- 10: You are out shopping when you spot your partner going into a restaurant with another woman. How would you respond?
  - a) Decide he's cheating on you and make your mind up to break off your relationship
  - b) Put what you saw out of your mind until he comes home and you can find out who she was
  - c) Assume the liaison is innocent and the woman is someone from work

HOW TO SCORE:

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

### What your score means:

**Between 0-10:** You are not at all impulsive, preferring to think long and hard before making any decisions. While this attitude will stop you running into problems, it will also mean that you may miss out at times when an instant response is needed. Try to be more spontaneous and not so pedantic. **Between 11-20:** You are only impulsive when circumstances demand it. But even on those occasions, you are usually sensible enough to make the right choice. You may seldom be impulsive, but you are never reckless. This is due to your innate ability to quickly weigh up the pros and cons of situations and even when under pressure you rarely make the wrong decision. **Between 21-30:** You are a very hot-headed and impulsive person who needs to learn to slow down and discover how to pace yourself. One of your main faults is that you make the majority of choices based on emotion rather than on logic. Try to think things through before making any important decisions.

### GARFIELD by Jim Davis



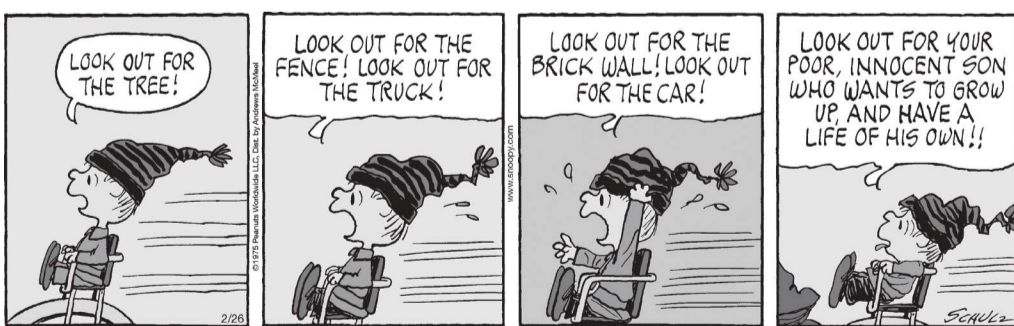
**DO JUST ONE THING BY DANNY SEO**

Spare change that accidentally ends up in a load of laundry seems like no big deal, but the reality is, it can cause serious damage. Because washing machines use centrifugal force to draw water out of wet clothes, a few pennies, nickels and dimes can turn into projectiles inside the machine, causing damage to your machine's mechanical components. Make it a habit to check pockets so every wash is a coin-free one. This one step can help prevent your washing machine from breaking down.

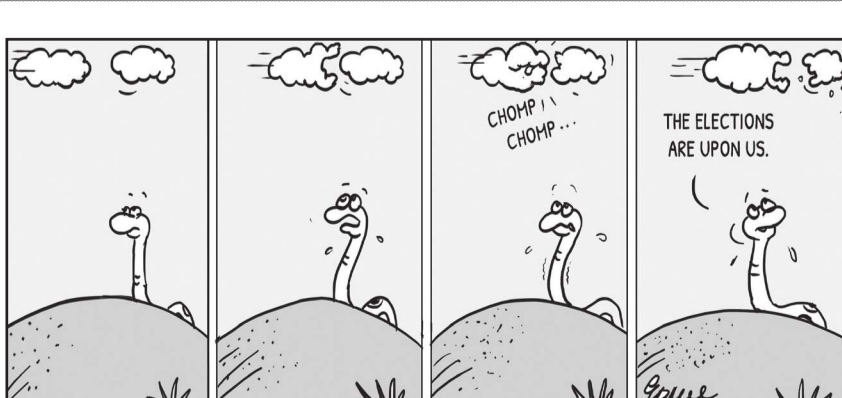
### DRAWING CONCLUSIONS by Arun Ramkumar



### PEANUTS by Charles M Schulz



### SMALL TALK by Gokul Gopalakrishnan



## Shortcuts by Jeff Harris

### Teeing Off With Golf

This edition of Shortcuts is sponsored by Tiger Wood.

The game of golf fits me to a tee.

Where do golf balls go to dance? The club.

**Fore! Fathers**  
The Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers was one of the first golf clubs in the world. It was established in Scotland in 1744. The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews was founded in 1754. This club established many of the rules used in modern golf.

**Word Search**  
Can you find the hidden words? Search carefully because some words are backward or diagonal.

FEATHERIE BIRDIE GOLF FAIRWAY WOOD BOB HAZARD GAME PAR GUTTIE IRON TEE DIMPLE SHOT FLY EAGLE CLUB HIT

The Professional Golfers Association of America (PGA) was founded in 1916.

Modern golf balls are covered with hundreds of tiny depressions called "dimples." The dimples help the golf ball fly farther through the air.

**The Old Ball Game**  
The "featherie" was one of the first types of balls used to play golf. It was a stitched leather ball stuffed with feathers. There are about 300 to 500 dimples on the average golf ball. The "guttie" was introduced in 1848. This ball was made of a hard rubbery material.

The two main types of clubs used by golfers are "woods" and "irons." Woods are used for hitting long distances, and irons are used when a shorter, more accurate shot is required.

Golf clubs are numbered from 1 to 9. The higher the number, the greater the angle on the club's face. A higher-number club will make the ball fly higher than a club with a lower number.

"Par" is the ideal number of strokes needed to complete a hole. A "birdie" is a score that is one less than par for a hole. A score of two less than par for a hole is called an "eagle."

**A Partridge In A Par Three**  
Can you spot all six differences between these two scenes?

The "fairway" is an area of well-kept grass that extends from the tee to the green. Obstacles located along the fairway, such as ponds, streams, bunkers and sand traps, are called "hazards."

What is the best way to learn later to golf? Take a course.

Why was the golfer kicked out of the aviary? He hit a birdie and an eagle.

What do you get when you cross a young wizard with a golf club? Harry Potter.

For more information: "The Story of Golf in Fifty Holes" by Tony Dear (Firefly Books) or "The Ultimate Golf Book" edited by Charles McOrnath and David McCormick (Houghton Mifflin). Distributed by Andrews McMeel for LFS, Inc. © Jeff Harris 2003 1/70

### SUDOKU | EASY AND MEDIUM

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

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

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

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any. Each w has a unique solution that can be reached logically without guessing

### QUESTION TIME by Lalitha Balakrishnan

1. What is the name of India's first scientific base station in Antarctica?
  - (a) Maitri
  - (b) Jantar Mantar
  - (c) Dakshin Gangotri
2. After which character in Greek mythology is the box containing evils of the world named?
  - (a) Pandora
  - (b) Zeus
  - (c) Hades
3. Which mythical beast in Chinese folklore preyed on people and livestock on the eve of the Lunar New Year?
  - (a) Pixiu
  - (b) Nian
  - (c) Feng
4. What is the technical name of the hashtag (#)?
  - (a) Grawlix
  - (b) Obelus
  - (c) Octothorpe
5. What is the smallest district in Tamil Nadu?
  - (a) Kanyakumari
  - (b) Villupuram
  - (c) Namakkal
6. Which real-world forest served as an inspiration to Winnie the Pooh's Hundred Acre Wood?
  - (a) Chippewa National Forest, US
  - (b) Ashdown Forest, UK
  - (c) Gloucestershire Forest, UK
7. December 4 is celebrated as Navy Day to commemorate what?
  - (a) Operation Trident
  - (b) Operation Trishul
  - (c) Operation Diamond
8. Which bird is called the 'clown of the ocean'?
  - (a) Auk
  - (b) Puffin
  - (c) Skua
9. How many emirates are there in the UAE?
  - (a) 6
  - (b) 8
  - (c) 7
10. Net profit/loss from the profit and loss statement is transferred to which of these accounts?
  - (a) Capital
  - (b) Creditors
  - (c) Overdraft

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

Winners  
Ashuthosh M. Murali - Kerala  
Srujan Behera & Biswa Mohan Samal - Odisha  
Tanisha - Andhra Pradesh  
Meera Ramkumar - Tamil Nadu

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

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

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

### SUDOKU 1 TODAY'S SOLUTION

Easy Sudoku

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

Medium Sudoku

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

### PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

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

Year: Shobhan.  
Maasi: TheiPirai /  
Magh: KrishnaPaksha.  
Tithi: K. Pratipada  
till 20-36 hrs.  
Nakshatra (Star): P.  
Phalguni till 25-24 hrs.  
Moon in: Simha .  
Today is: Guruprati-  
pada, GanagapurYatra.  
Rahukaalam:  
04.30 pm to 06.00 pm  
Yamagantam:  
12 noon to 01.30 pm  
Gulikakalam:  
03.00 pm to 04.30 pm



**BIRTH STONES**  
**PISCES**

(February 20 - March 20)  
The birthstone for Pisces is Aquamarine. Pisceans are overtly emotional and this emotional nature of theirs is balanced by the birthstone; Aquamarine. Aquamarine has many other healing properties. The stone renders its impact on the features, financial matters and relationship area through its specific colour, the intrinsic properties and the unique crystalline structure. The impact can be both on the positive and negative character traits of the Piscean. This zodiac sign represents the epic struggle of the spirit rescuing humanity from the clutches of greed. The luminance of the transparent Aquamarine accurately signifies this struggle where the individual is gradually drawn towards loving and selfless service. For him this is the only way that leads to the final victory of the spirit or the soul.

**HOW THE CARDS FALL** Meenakshi Rani

meenakshirani33@gmail.com



**WHAT TO EXPECT, HOW TO COPE**

LOVE RELATIONSHIPS WORK HEALTH MONEY

**ARIES**



A singularity of purpose defines your discipline. Mood elevators are dropped in favour of natural cures for depression. Mental health issues relating to paranoia and trauma are addressed. Seniors require assistance to cope with tasks as immunity levels dip. Muscular health diminishes and a course in physiotherapy is carefully monitored. Children deal with a health crisis, especially in reactions, allergies, autoimmune ailments and seasonal viruses. Preserved fruit, olives and walnuts address Saturn and Rahu. Wear charcoal grey, jasper and browns to adapt to change.

**TAURUS**



A return to old ways also brings slow and measured treatments. From ayurveda to naturopathy; you are willing to try alternate cures for migraines, colds, swelling and inflammations. Self medication is counterproductive and you rely on skilled personnel for complicated diagnoses. Mobility returns in older patients and a period of bed rest is complete. Sprains, fractures and abrasions are treated. Taste buds are stimulated and appetite returns. Wear green and emerald to fine tune the senses. Include citrus fruit and lemongrass for Mercury.

**GEMINI**



Mineral deficiencies are addressed and diet improves. Gastric ailments are treated. Mental strength and tenacity return aiding intellectual activity. Metabolism of fat and sugars improves and cholesterol levels go down. Lungs strengthen and you discover pleasure and joy in moderate exercise. Arterial functions improve and elasticity of blood vessels returns. Travel is sudden and you are prepared, physically. A new regimen or lifestyle awaits youngsters. Wear pastel green, mauve and peridot for adaptability. Include phyllis, raspberries, rice and curries for Mercury and Jupiter.

**CANCER**



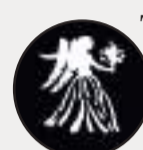
The search for cures has you wander through miasmas and out of hypochondria. Lethargy stems from low protein levels. Addiction to a sugar rush is addressed. Bee stings and insect bites are likely. High blood sugar levels are prevented. Insulin levels are regulated. A shield is developed against seasonal flu and children's vaccinations are kept up to date. Vitamin D levels improve. Wear yellow and ivory white with topaz for stability. Include chickpea, quinoa, pulses and jaggery for Jupiter.

**LEO**



Difficulties are surmounted especially in genetic ailments. Health of a parent, especially the mother, is in focus. Treatments for infertility or cosmetic procedures are regulated to prevent adverse reactions. Dementia and Alzheimer's make an appearance and nervous ailments are detected in seniors. Youngsters deal with dental procedures especially extractions, cavities and braces. Wear burnt Sienna and beige for better options. Include dark coffee, butter, roasted grain and dates for Uranus and Sun.

**VIRGO**



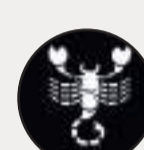
Taking on an important task has you discover immense internal resources. An energy field is rebuilt aiding concentration. Physical stamina returns with sharper reflexes and muscular healing. Night vision is excellent. Endurance and a solid core go hand in hand. An old habit is junked. Seniors slow down the onset of Parkinson's. Some gain the ability to micro manage or adapt to the slightest changes in stimuli. Wear black, silver grey and black onyx for control of movement. Include plums, nigella seeds, rye bread and dark lentils for Saturn.

**LIBRA**



An easy going week; you remove obstacles with a positive attitude. Tumours, growths and foreign objects are removed. The body recovers post operations and haemorrhages are stopped. Bleeding, tract infections or nausea are treated. Fertility treatments are a success and some welcome a baby. Diabetics experience a slight dip in symptoms and maintain a vigil over diet and medication. Wear pink, red, ruby and pink sapphire maintaining correct weight or body temperature. Include strawberries, apples and cranberries for Venus and Sun.

**SCORPIO**



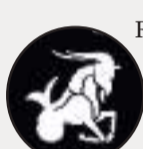
A change in pace or lifestyle comes post sensory overload. Slowing down helps the body adjust or fight back or regain old levels of endurance. Implants, stents and replacement of bone surgeries help ease discomfort. Neural synapses heal post trauma. Youngsters discover food allergies or hindrances to weight management goals. Wear purple and amethyst for de-addiction. Include grapes, beetroot, celery and mixed fruit jam for Venus and Saturn.

**SAGITTARIUS**



Being stuck in a limbo has you address pressing concerns. A plateau in progress has you exploring new medication or prognosis. Headaches and dizzy spells arrive post injury or surgeries and are corrected pronto. Vertigo, motion sickness and poor adaptation to temperature or strong smells looms and inner ear imbalances are corrected to help stay strong. Immobility or convalescence ends for patients of stroke or paralysis. Wear dull gold and yellow sapphire to counter extremities. Include turmeric, garlic powder and saffron based sweets for Jupiter.

**CAPRICORN**



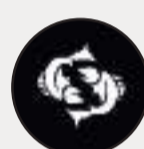
Reactionary modes are turned off even as you find yourself with low tolerance to situations. Anger management skills are improved. Vision health improves especially the reduction of dry eye syndrome. Cataract surgeries are scheduled for seniors. Youngsters are prone to sporting injury and wear protective gear. Developing core strength helps with balance training and prevents falls. Wear white, blue, lapis lazuli and moonstone for protection against nerve pain. Include blueberry, cashews and sesame seeds for Moon and Saturn.

**AQUARIUS**



A cycle of adapting to bodily change and altered schedules has you get fitter. Cell regeneration aids with recovery post surgery and in hair and skin treatments. Biliou conditions improve and the liver returns to health. Transplant procedures are successful. Hormonal swings are brought in check. Children recover from chronic ailments, sinusitis, colds and allergies. Hay fever and breakouts are brought in check. Include leafy green vegetables and cucumbers for the Moon. Wear pearl and pale green for controlling degenerative ailments.

**PISCES**



Circadian rhythms are brought back in sync after a series of late nights or workload. High blood pressure is addressed. Arrhythmia and jagged cardiac impulses are treated. Skin rashes and breakouts are checked for symptoms of a deeper malaise. Youngsters find themselves developing resistance to environmental factors. Food poisoning and e-coli infections are averted with a focus on hygienic and home cooked meals. Stress levels trigger a panic response in middle age and you refuse to let others push your buttons. Mushrooms, broccoli and dark chocolate boost Mars. Wear coral and reds for tapping into new strength.

**THE WEEK AHEAD** Peter Vidal

**Mar 21-Apr 20:**  
**ARIES** (21 Mar - 20 Apr)  
The stars are generally on your side, but some people are quite prepared to put a dampener on your spirits. Shame on them! Will you be down-hearted? No, of course not! Keep up to date with all essential tasks and prepare for an imminent adventure. Professional types find that pressure relaxes, so ease up on your schedule and take some time off.

**July 24-Aug 23:**  
**LEO**  
Fed up? Full of regrets for wasted opportunities? Don't worry, for very soon you will have a second bite of the cherry, and this time round you'll learn from your mistakes. First get your finances sorted out. Then aim for increased status within your community. Also, do pay attention to young people. Listen to their simple words and you might see how wise they are.

**Nov 23-Dec 22:**  
**SAGITTARIUS**  
You're such a romantic! You'll be dreaming dreams of love. Reality is a different matter though, and a partner will bring you down to earth with a bump - just in time. Money matters prosper if you make a judicious speculation - but consult the experts first.

**Apr 21-May 21:**  
**TAURUS**  
You may have a great start to the week, swinging into the new era with a wave and a smile. In love, this could be the last week for a little while during which you'll be able to get partners to do things your way. Investments will be favoured if you concentrate on luxury items, and routine matters may be left until later.

**Aug 24-Sept 23:**  
**VIRGO**  
You must have been doing something right! After a promising start in both personal and professional projects, you may run into the mud. However, any delays will give you a splendid chance to work out what you really want, and restore an old relationship. After mid-week your financial prospects improve, so hang on!

**Dec-23 Jan 20:**  
**CAPRICORN**  
It may be your turn to deliver those awkward home truths. Family and friends may not want to hear what you have to say. They may even stick their ear plugs in when they see you coming. Your dilemma is this: is it better to speak the truth or let things blow over? At work an employer may issue some special demands.

**May 22-June 21:**  
**GEMINI**  
Important planetary positions in sectors of your solar chart signifying matrimonial affairs and professional ambitions indicate that there are big changes just around the corner. Get ready! Romantic plans will alter as the week passes - with excellent results. Whether your interest is in a new love or an old one, your heart should be full.

**Sept 24-Oct 23:**  
**LIBRA**  
Profitable times lie ahead. This could be your last chance to make a little cash out of selling some of your surplus goods. Who knows - you may even have an Old Master hidden in the attic, or a priceless antique in the kitchen! In love, an extravagant action will win the day. And, at work, you may be relieved of a heavy responsibility.

**Jan 21-Feb 19:**  
**AQUARIUS**  
The Moon spends Monday and Tuesday challenging your sign, so you're bound to have a few mood swings. There's also a welcome family responsibility waiting. Financial matters must be treated with caution. Tensions ease later in the week due to your own wisdom and maturity.

**June 22-July 23:**  
**CANCER**  
Sometimes the stars seem insistent on bringing you a whole series of life lessons. In partnerships there is one great moral: look, listen and learn. Other people, whether lovers or very close working colleagues, have a great deal to teach you and you, in turn, have a very great deal to learn. At work, you'll do well in interviews.

**Oct 24-Nov 22:**  
**SCORPIO**  
Where do you go from here? Perhaps it's time to clear up all loose ends, and that includes unfinished business and unresolved emotional tangles going as far back as early last year. You'll lighten up with the chance of a romantic adventure on Friday. Domestic routine will ease after Wednesday - with help from children - perhaps!

**Feb 20-Mar 20:**  
**PISCES**  
You may find it hard to get into a weekly routine, but all it requires is a little extra effort. In love, you are only interested in long-term ties, and quite right, too. Mind you, there are different ways of being faithful and fidelity lies in your heart. Friendship and passion should go hand in hand.

**YOUR FORTUNE THIS WEEK** Amarakosha

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



**ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 19)**  
**Work:** Expect a bustling period ahead, but it is filled with positive energy. You will tackle unforeseen challenges swiftly and meet all deadlines.  
**Money:** Negotiations regarding finances will conclude favourably. You will outsmart any scammers.  
**Couples:** Disagreements can be swiftly resolved, leading to a harmonious balance.  
**Singles:** For those in ambiguous relationships, an incident could prompt closure.

**TAURUS (Apr 20-May 20)**  
**Work:** Your creativity and productivity will yield impressive results. Keep an eye out for potential offers of rotation or relocation.  
**Money:** Any property disputes will be resolved favourably. You may even rediscover a long-lost item.  
**Couples:** You may consider planning a romantic trip with unique activities to enjoy together.  
**Singles:** You may find romance during travels.

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20)**  
**Work:** Expect rapid success if you are leading a project, earning accolades from many. Job seekers will secure employment opportunities.  
**Money:** Whether selling property or acting as a broker, expect successful transactions.  
**Couples:** If you have been aiming for familial acceptance of your relationship, now may be the time to receive approval.  
**Singles:** If you have been dating online, consider transitioning to in-person meetings.

**CANCER (June 21-July 22)**  
**Work:** Job seekers may find assistance from female friends or older women in securing employment.  
**Money:** Anticipated funds will arrive. Stick to your savings plan and remain vigilant against scams.  
**Couples:** If planning a honeymoon or family trip, take precautions against losing valuable items.  
**Singles:** Reconnecting with an ex could yield pleasant moments, but be prepared for the possibility that forgiveness may not be immediate.

**LEO (July 23-Aug 22)**  
**Work:** Your persuasive skills may sway decision-makers beyond your expectations.  
**Money:** Those in speculative ventures may gain large profits. Debt repayment is possible.  
**Couples:** Smooth sailing ahead for those expecting a child. Unmarried Leos may receive marriage proposals.  
**Singles:** You may find yourself attracted to someone your friend also likes.

**VIRGO (Aug 23-Sept 22)**  
**Work:** Entrepreneurs may face setbacks, but will glean valuable lessons. Those in government roles should safeguard classified documents against loss.  
**Money:** Refrain from guaranteeing loans, as it could strain both finances and relationships.  
**Couples:** Minor disagreements may arise, but nothing too serious.  
**Singles:** You may encounter someone who fits your criteria, but proves difficult to deal with.

**LIBRA (Sept 23-Oct 22)**  
**Work:** Your productivity and quality of work will earn praise from all quarters.  
**Money:** While income may be high, expenses could also be significant. Prepare for unexpected expenditures such as repairs to your car or home.  
**Couples:** Serious arguments regarding finances or child-rearing may arise, but expect reconciliation.  
**Singles:** You may find yourself attracted to someone your friend also likes.

**SCORPIO (Oct 23-Nov 21)**  
**Work:** Your strategic approach enables you to swiftly address unforeseen challenges. Your competitive endeavours are likely to yield success.  
**Money:** Anticipate substantial financial gains, with investors making wise decisions and reaping profits.  
**Couples:** Moments of jealousy may arise, but won't escalate into serious issues.  
**Singles:** You may explore dating both online and offline, but may not find anyone who captivates you.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22-Dec 21)**  
**Work:** Your proactive and efficient approach enables you to complete tasks ahead of schedule.  
**Money:** Unexpected financial gains or opportunities may present themselves.  
**Couples:** Experience a strong bond and provide mutual support and comfort to each other. Pursuing shared dreams or aspirations could lead to significant progress beyond expectations.  
**Singles:** Love may blossom at first sight, leading to flourishing relationships.

**CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 19)**  
**Work:** Entrepreneurs should be vigilant against potential theft of business assets or classified data.  
**Money:** If you are the financial backbone of your family, avoid extravagance as unexpected expenses may arise.  
**Couples:** You may need to sacrifice personal time or desires to maintain harmony in your relationship.  
**Singles:** Confessing feelings or asking someone out may lead to heartbreak, but you will move on.

**AQUARIUS (Jan 20-Feb 18)**  
**Work:** Take precautions to back up data securely, as there's a risk of ransomware or cyberattacks.  
**Money:** Daily expenses will be manageable, but debtors might become suddenly unreachable. Avoid new investments. Be wary of charity scams.  
**Couples:** Balancing 'me' and 'our' time comes naturally to you.  
**Singles:** You may encounter someone who fits your ideal appearance, but approach with caution.

**PISCES (Feb 19-Mar 20)**  
**Work:** Freelancers should exercise caution to avoid being cheated or working for free.  
**Money:** Valuable items in your collection may unexpectedly fetch a significant sum.  
**Couples:** You will enjoy heightened communication and understanding.  
**Singles:** You may encounter someone who matches your dream appearance, but be aware that you are not the only one attracted to them.

**AUGURIES** Meenakshi Chawla  
Twitter: @Astrology\_us

With the onset of the Vedic month of Phalgun which begins today closely followed by the calendar month of March, starting on Friday, the signs of summer are beginning to show. This makes March very transitional when both, the daylight and sunlight, start to increase exceptionally. Overall, it does not seem to be a quiet period as it is a month of planetary conjunctions and war. It begins with Sun getting closely conjunct with Saturn and Mercury in Aquarius in the tenth house of India's chart giving them complete combustion. It shows a lot of ego, power struggles, busy political activities, meetings and a strong collision course of ruling and opposition parties. There could also be revenue loss, increase in thefts, frauds and delusions. Just one sign behind Sun and Saturn are Mars and Venus who are also in a planetary war by coming close to each other. Mars has come into high power in the zodiac sky to disturb the peace of the nation

month after month. It is exalted currently but by mid-March it will join another strong malefic planet, Saturn. In late April it will meet shadowy Rahu and in the month of June it will dominate in the most impulsive and its own sign Aries where the strength of Mars gets doubled. To make things worse, Jupiter is under the malefic aspect both from Saturn and Mars. Mars is the fighter who is at its highest power in Capricorn for the next one month. It gives victory as well as injuries, so fighting and winning, both are the eccentricities of Mars. Saturn upholds law and order, precedence and established norms. The planetary actions of Saturn and Mars are contradictory and so, if there is chaos and unrest then Saturn's strict restrictions and enforcement of rules is also there to bring the situation under control. It is very rare to have eight planets stationed in four consecutive signs. It is a sure sign to trigger tremors, troubles and tumultuous times.



Jupiter is moving in a very significant Bharini Nakshatra. Bharini is ruled by Venus with Yama dev as deity that symbolises karma, death and rebirth. Bharini nakshatra is also connected with female sexuality, creation, conception, femininity, fertility and related subjects as well as hidden matters that give karmic results. It is an intense transit for Jupiter and as per observations, from the day Mars has put its aspect on Jupiter, it is exposing and bringing to the forefront many social issues

like molestation and sexual harassment related to women in Bengal. Bharini reminds us not to take any shortcuts or do something wrong or hurt others during the quest for our progress. Otherwise, we will have to pay for our karmas. Pluto aspect has also peaked in the last week to ten days. The orb of influence has extended to this week too. The good thing is that the fast-moving planets will leave Pluto completely by mid-March, but till then it is necessary to find practical solutions.





# The Ascent of Man

Evolution, as a general term, is used in the context of sentient beings belonging to the wide spectrum of life. Scientific research and observations by human beings spanning thousands of years have led to the current understanding and belief that lower-order living beings have gradually evolved into those of the highest order in nature. The human species is supposedly at the highest rung of evolution. Among the majority of the global population today, the theory of survival of the fittest holds ground. But there is a caveat; there are many who go by the traditional scriptural belief that all the multitudinous species of plants and animals were created by an omnipotent and omniscient creator. And they have existed in this form for billions of years. With this belief, there also exists the understanding that eternal metaphysical truths explain the creation and operation of the vast material universe with its inanimate matter, countless animate living beings with souls and one infinite omnipresent spiritual entity called god. It is now for the enlightened human beings to hold on to a belief which is consonant with reality and can explain logically what all we observe in this world and elsewhere in the universe. This explanation is supposedly scientific and rational. If we glean through the pages of ancient scriptures called Vedas which are widely understood to be primeval scriptures of humanity, we shall find that at the beginning of the creation of the material universe, living beings of various forms were created as we see them today. Evolution, therefore, applies to the spiritual element in these living beings rather than the physical element. Actually, it is the evolution of knowledge. It is also the evolution of character

Let's delve into evolution, tracing its journey from physical advancement to spiritual enlightenment and dharmic harmony

BY ATUL SEHGAL



and propensity to perform good karmas—actions which are conducive to universal harmony, stability and happiness. If we try to understand evolution in these terms, many mysteries of the material world unfold and many riddles of the universe get solved. Thus the difference between a dog and a human being is that of degree of evolution, but this evolution refers to the spiritual element in both man and dog—the soul. In other words, the human soul is far more evolved than the soul of a dog.

Let us further try to understand the elements of this degree of evolution which we have talked of above. Human actions in this universe attract equal and opposite reactions. This is the infallible and

inviolable law of karmic retribution that is operative throughout the vast universe. Thus human actions, which are virtuous and aid in the maintenance or enhancement of peace, harmony and happiness all around, create positive indentation on the soul leading to its refinement and evolution. On the other hand, vicious actions by human beings—actions which do not promote peace and harmony but create disorder, chaos, instability and disharmony—attract a negative retribution. This negative retribution is in the nature of a correction of regression of the soul which binds it into the physical bodies of lower animals or otherwise makes it liable to undergo punishment even in human existence. Evolution, therefore,

clearly refers to the incremental and progressive accretion of experiential knowledge held by the living soul in its eternal journey.

Let us come back to the theory of survival of the fittest. This theory assumes that the law of the jungle can operate to maintain peace and harmony. The fact is quite the opposite. Peace and harmony when applied to the environment of human entities is possible to establish only if the humans in these communities adhere to dharma which is nothing but the basic laws of peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Hence in real terms, evolution is the experiential growth of dharmic or virtuous tendencies of the living soul based on its accumulation of true knowledge.

If we keep the above understanding of evolution in our minds, we shall be continuously in sync with Mother Nature and the omnipotent and all-pervasive spiritual power. Our actions will be conducive to peace and progress. Our mundane activities will be soft on the environment and these activities will not involve exploitation of man by man, which, unfortunately, is starkly visible even in the 21st century of supposedly high scientific and technological advancements. We shall promote the true progress of all sentient beings including our own.

Atul Sehgal is the author of *Guide to Inner Wellness and The Essence of Bhagwad Gita—70 Verses at its Core*

BELIEVE

Human actions, which are virtuous and aid in the maintenance or enhancement of peace, harmony and happiness all around, create positive indentation on the soul leading to its refinement and evolution

## MODERN PANCHATANTRA AT WORK

In a village, friends Dharmabuddhi and Papabuddhi ventured into business together. Papabuddhi, with deceitful intentions, convinced Dharmabuddhi to start a venture. After making profits, Papabuddhi schemed to keep it all for himself. Under the guise of safety, he suggested burying the money on their way home. Agreeing, they buried it near a banyan tree. That night, Papabuddhi dug up the money alone, accusing Dharmabuddhi of theft when they returned. Seeking justice, they consulted the village elders, who proposed seeking the judgment of a tree spirit. Papabuddhi told his father to hide in the tree bark and speak like the tree spirit to confirm the innocent man's guilt. Sensing deception, Dharmabuddhi set dry leaves and twigs on fire inside the hollow of the tree, forcing his friend's father out coughing. Papabuddhi's father confessed to his son's misdeed, leading to Papabuddhi's punishment by village elders. Dharmabuddhi's honesty prevailed, demonstrating the triumph of integrity over deceit.



**MORAL:** Honesty and integrity in the workplace build trust, enhance teamwork, and ensure success. Upholding ethical values fosters a positive environment and strengthens organisational culture.

## AMMASPEAK Mata Amritanandamayi



### Rise to the Level of Pure Love

Children, what people yearn for most in this world is love. People make friends, get married and start families only for love. Yet, the greatest poverty in the world today is the lack of love.

Everyone wants to receive love but no one wants to give it. If we love, we do so with many strings attached in the form of expectations and conditions. Such relationships can fall apart at any moment. Such love can become hatred and enmity. This is the nature of the world.

If we understand this, we will not suffer. The nature of fire is heat and light. Expecting fire to have only light and not heat is unrealistic. Likewise, if we can accept that worldly love inevitably brings sorrow, we will be able to face each and every situation with equanimity.

There is pure love in everyone. All of us have the capacity to love others without expectation. As love is our very nature, we can never lose it. A diamond left lying inside

a bottle of oil may seem lustreless. But if we wipe away the thick coating of oil, we can restore brilliance to the diamond. Similarly, if we eliminate the impurities of the mind, we can regain the most pristine form of love.

The ladder of love has many rungs. At present, many of us are at the lowest rung. We must not spend the rest of our life there. We must slowly climb up the ladder. We can thus reach the highest rung of love and fulfil our lives.

People usually say, "I love you." But the truth is that "I am love. Love is my very nature." When we say "I love you," there are two entities: 'I' and 'you.' There is a gap between the two. Love

is crushed in this gap. From this perspective of 'I' and 'you,' loving another with expectation is like a tiny rat snake attempting to swallow a huge frog, a tortuous ordeal for both. Conversely, if we love without any expectation, we will never feel sorrow.

Our selfless love will awaken selfless love in others. Life then becomes filled with love and joy. We realise that "love is my very nature". Thereafter, we become free of desire and expectation. Our love will be like a river, a free flow that touches and purifies one and all. Everything we do will be of benefit to the world.

There is no greater power than the power of love. There is no greater happiness than the happiness experienced through love. We experience love when the individual ego ends and hearts unite as one. Love is the ultimate realisation of seeing others as ourselves. It is time for us to build bridges of love and friendship. In this way, may we be able to realise a world family of unbounded love.

The feeling closest to our True Self is love. Our lives are meant to be born in love, to live in love, and to eventually end in love. In truth, love has no end; it is eternal and connects every aspect of creation—human beings with each other, with Nature, and with God. Thus, its effulgence is forever within us as our very essence. May all of us be able to rise to the level of such pure love.

The writer is a world-renowned spiritual leader and humanitarian

## EPICS FOR CHILDREN | GAURAV YADAV

### Our Nature Rules Our Qualities

Anybody wanting to be a 'good' human will naturally want to have 'good' qualities. There are some qualities that seem obviously 'good'—for example, honesty, humility, kindness, etc. However, there are other qualities that seem 'neutral'. They can be used for both good and evil purposes. Let us consider will power: It can be defined as a strong determination to do something. It is essential for success. In history, we can find countless examples.

When Gautama left home, he was a prince brought up with all possible luxuries, who was unaware of the realities of life. When he witnessed human suffering, he became a monk. He learnt yogic meditation under Arada Kalama but was not satisfied. He then learnt under Udraka Ramaputra but was still not satisfied. He took up hard penance, in which he almost died, but he was able to finally achieve realisation and become the Buddha.

Adi Shankaracharya took *sanyas* (renunciation) at the age of 12. He left home and

started travelling throughout the length and breadth of the country. By the time he died, at the age of 32, he had crisscrossed the country several times, challenged the prevailing religious and philosophical beliefs, established new *mathas* (monasteries) and authored more than a hundred works.

Swami Vivekananda died before he turned 40, but in this period, he toured the entire country and made a great impression at the World Religion Parliament in Chicago, US. He set up the Belur Matha and founded the Ramakrishna Mission. He made great contributions to religion, philosophy, social work and liberal nationalism and provided a bridge between the philosophies of the East and the West. His lectures and writings continue to inspire people today. However, willpower has not always been used for good purposes.

Adolf Hitler came to power by exploiting the discontent among Germans following Germany's defeat in the World War I. From a small-time politician, he rose to become the Chancellor of Germany. He was a fierce advocate of the philosophy of Nazism. Through the force of his personality and his rhetoric, Hitler made most Germans his followers to the extent that they supported his violent policies towards neighbouring countries and Jews and communists. Hitler's policies led to World War II and caused millions of casualties.

Hitler was a person of strong willpower just like the earlier examples we saw, but in his case, it resulted in destruction. Strength, courage, daring, strong willpower—these qualities in a good-natured person are a blessing to the world while in an evil person, they are a curse.



## SPOTLIGHT

### Cleansing Crystals and Gemstones

Crystals and gemstones possess energetic properties, but they can absorb negative energies, reducing their effectiveness. Cleansing them is crucial to restore their potency. Set clear intentions and visualise removing unwanted energies, infusing them with positive energy. Cleanse regularly, especially after intense use or when they feel heavy. Here are some methods:



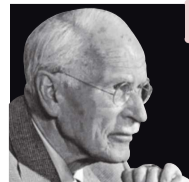
**Water:** Submerging crystals in cool, running water can effectively cleanse them. The flow of water washes away accumulated energies. However, be cautious with water-soluble crystals like selenite, as they can degrade in water.

**Sunlight/Moonlight:** Placing crystals in sunlight or moonlight for a few hours allows them to absorb the purifying energies of these celestial bodies. Sunlight energises crystals, while moonlight enhances their intuition and receptivity.

**Smoke:** Passing crystals through the smoke of sacred herbs like sage, palo santo, or cedar is a common method in many spiritual traditions. The smoke clears away negative energies, leaving the crystals cleansed and refreshed.

**Earth:** Burying crystals in the earth for a period, typically overnight or for a full moon cycle, allows them to reconnect with the grounding energies of the earth. This method is particularly effective for grounding stones like hematite or black tourmaline.

## MASTER MIND



"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves."

~ CARL JUNG



# 'Economy Not Working for Lower Middle Class'

Economists Raghuram Rajan and Rohit Lamba speak to Saurabh Sharma about their new book, how India is faring post-pandemic, the global recession and advancements in AI



**Breaking the Mould**  
By: Raghuram Rajan, Rohit Lamba  
Publisher: Penguin  
Pages: 336  
Price: ₹699



Raghuram Rajan

By SOURABH SHARMA

**Often books on economics seem to have a niche audience. What were you mindful of in order to reach widespread readership with this book?**

We wanted to write this book for a larger audience to show what potential India has, and why we need a course correction to achieve it. We believe that on our current trajectory, we risk becoming old before we become rich, the pronouncements of our leaders notwithstanding. And too many of our people will not benefit from whatever wealth is being created—a recipe for conflict. If we want to grow with stability, we have to break the mould. The book is full of examples of how we have done it in small measure, and how we can do it to a much greater extent.

**With AI disrupting the workplace, how do you imagine its integration creating a space for a new set of roles in the future?**

All new technologies have typically been hyped as job-ending to an extreme degree. In the 1960s, a committee set up by US President Lyndon B Johnson proposed a universal basic income because robots would soon take over all jobs. That has not happened yet. We also cite a 2013 Oxford study in the book

**'On our current trajectory, we risk becoming old before we become rich. Too many of our people will not benefit from the wealth is being created'**

where two professors estimated that 47 per cent of US employment was at risk as a result of computerisation. Today, labour force participation in the US is at a 20-year high, and unemployment is at a near two-decade low. So clearly, the professors were mistaken, at least about the pace of change. Undoubtedly, generative-AI will cause a loss of some jobs, will aid most jobs and help people become more productive (some less if they go off playing with Dall-E images), and create some new jobs. We should expect some mix of all three; whether the pace of change is faster than that caused by previous technological change remains to be seen. That is where possibly this time could be different.

**What are the key industries today, and where do you**

**'India has to focus on building the human capital of its citizens—better nutrition, education and healthcare—and not be fixated on following a manufacturing export-led growth path a la China.'**

**believe India is heading when it comes to the rise in divisive politics, along with a disastrous sense of economic decision-making?**

India is doing well for the rich and the upper middle class. They have good jobs, and government policies are helping them. The economy is not working so well for the lower middle class, who haven't seen it produce the jobs they need. Our labour data are bad, but anecdotal evidence is worrisome. For instance, employment in agriculture, as a share of employment, is up, when economies should see it fall as they develop. The government's emphasis on erecting tariffs to

protect domestic producers and offering subsidies for manufacturing in India is simply not creating the jobs we need. We believe government spending priorities are wrong—why spend \$2 billion in government subsidies on attracting Micron to set up a plant in Gujarat for just 5000 jobs in assembly and testing? Why not spend the money on improving the quality of our schools and colleges so that we can produce more capable workers and engineers that firms will be eager to hire? More generally, we argue in the book that India has to focus on building the human capital of its citizens—better nutrition, education and

the role that manufacturing will play, only suggest not over-privileging it with subsidies and tariffs, which echoes the mistakes we made during the License Permit Raj. For instance, it's really short-sighted to propose limiting the import of computers to increase domestic production when computers are a key input to our most successful industry—software. There's a lot that is going right in India today, but there's a lot that's also going wrong. Unfortunately, given the slant in much of the press, you would simply not know about the latter. That leaves problems unaddressed, and they fester.

READ

BOOK TASTINGS



**2024: India in Free Fall**  
By: Sanjay Jha  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Pages: 328  
Price: ₹599

With the country set to go to the polls once again, the author raises urgent issues—from the othering of Muslims and the bulldozing of citizens' rights to the surreptitious dismantling of the judiciary



**The Murder After the Night Before**  
By: Katy Brent  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Pages: 336  
Price: ₹499

A thrilling murder mystery written with a humorous undertone, where the protagonist must find someone to blame the death of the friend who she has killed



**Dream Machine**  
By: Appupen, Laurent Daudet  
Publisher: Westland  
Pages: 157  
Price: ₹599

An exciting, baffling and ethically challenging book about the most urgent story of our time—AI—which points out its many ramifications



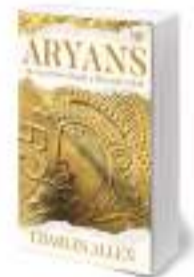
**The White Shirts of Summer**  
By: Mamang Dai  
Publisher: Speaking Tiger  
Pages: 110  
Price: ₹399

A collection of poems on mountains, rivers and forests, which bring to the fore disappearing and forgotten histories of communities, while pointing towards the inevitability of a scary future

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## The Aryan Question

Completed after his death, Charles Allen's final book is grand in scope and deep in research and shows why it is only the language and not the people that can be said to be Aryan



**Aryans: The Search for a People, a Place and a Myth**  
By: Charles Allen  
Publisher: Hachette  
Pages: 400  
Price: ₹799

By KURUSH DALAL

For a man whose books were placed in the Indian subcontinent, it isn't hard to understand why Charles Allen waited all his life to tackle one of the most polarising topics of all time—the Aryans. The book was completed and brilliantly edited after he passed away in 2020 by David Loyn.

Like all of Charles's writing, this book too is grand in scope, deep in research and laced with anecdotes. It is truly worthy of a final magnum opus for its meticulous approach towards the topic from all sides and angles. It is divided into four parts. The first deals with the myths of the Aryans. Charles dives into this complex set of stories with confidence cleaving through to expose and overlay the various myths. He works his way backwards in time from the Aryan mythos of the Nazis to the writings of Max Mueller. He looks

critically at the latter's sources, especially the linguistic ones and the ones dealing with 'fire-worshippers'. He looks at the work of Anquetil du Peron and at the various inferences from Comparative Philology before arriving at the Uremat—the original Proto-Indo-European language of the Aryans and their original homeland.

The second part deals with this common homeland and possibly mother language. Charles takes us 13,000 years ago to the Pontic-Caspian steppe from where most modern scholars believe the ancestors of the Aryans emerged. This is a vast land from the Black Sea to Kazakhstan and from the Ural Mountains to the Caucasian peaks. Charles takes us through a story that harks back to the melting of the

last great glaciers and the end of the Ice Age, which led to the formation of wide grasslands where horses, cattle and the ancestors of all the Aryans thrived. Collecting the work of archaeologists such as Vere Gordon Childe and Maria Gimbutas, he pieces together a series of three critical migrations: a Neolithic one in 3500 BC; a more advanced copper tool-wielding Chalcolithic one in 2700 BC; and finally the 2300 BC migration of the Yamayana peoples. For Charles, it is clear that the main breakthroughs were the domestication of cattle, the ability to digest milk and the domestication of horses, which allowed the Aryans to emerge as a force majeure.

In the third part, Charles trains his vision and skills to the Indian subcontinent and takes the main reason for the

move into the region to be a terrible split between the Iranian Avestan speakers and the subsequent Indian Vedic Sanskrit speakers. To him, it is the similarities between Latin-Avestan-Rig Vedic Sanskrit that are the clearest evidence of a common origin. He laces together expertly the Late Harappans, the Sinauli Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) peoples, the earliest arrivals at Kaushambi, and sees them clearly as the arrival of the 2300 BC migration into the Ganga plains at long last around 2000-1800 BC. He then looks at the rise of Zoroastrianism, especially the cult of Anahita (the Goddess of the Waters) and sees parallels in the Saraswati of the Rig Veda. From the 15th century BC Mitannis and 12th century BC Hittites, he traces the origins of the Aryans of

Ariyana Vaeja aka Iran. He traces the rise of the Aryans of India, and refers to controversial figures like Madame Blavatsky. He also looks at the 'it all happened in India/Asia' theories of Dayananda Saraswati and Lokmanya Tilak. He traces the fires of Hinduism in modern India to the trio of Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, and then proceeds to critically analyse Savarkar and the rise of the RSS, VHP and the BJP.

The fourth part is the shortest, but the most 'scientific'. The author looks at Palaeo-Genetics and the research done on the basis of DNA and blood group mapping as well as the retrieval of ancient DNA, especially the sample recovered from Rakhigarhi, Haryana. He concludes with the observation that it is obvious from DNA research, both ancient and modern, that there is no unique Aryan genetic signature and that the Aryans in their migrations have intermingled, absorbed and admixed with the greatest abandon. His final thought is that it is only the language that can be said to be Aryan and not necessarily the people.



Excavation in Rakhigarhi, Haryana

## Beauty of the Bizarre

By TRISHA MUKHERJEE

Those who are familiar with Bora Chung's earlier works would know that she has a penchant for unsettling her readers. In her latest collection of short stories—*Your Utopia*—she takes the absurdity quotient a notch higher. There's immortality, cannibalism, aliens, the end of civilisation and more, but what makes these stories disturbing are not the sci-fi themes, but how likely of a reality they seem.

That makes the title of the book, which is laced with irony, even more mind boggling. The protagonist of the titular story is a car that has been left behind on earth after humanity has ended. Equipped with solar batteries, it manages to recharge itself on sunny days, which now there are few of. "Ever since humans left this planet, it's been only machines like 314 and me... The machines that needed charging lost power one by one, only those with renewable energy sources like me survive," the car informs the reader. That it is not difficult to guess what could have gone wrong with the planet is what makes the story unnerving.

Equally dystopian is the first story in the collection. It has an unusual title—'The Centre for Immortality Research'; it doesn't sound like a title. But, beyond that, the story, narrated by a disgruntled researcher whining over how all the responsibilities—big or small—of organising the centre's 98th anniversary fell upon her, does not feel out of the ordinary. We learn that she is among the lowest ranking employees in the company hierarchy; she can barely contest what her seniors say in spite of knowing that she is in the right; she has to grudgingly pester a freelance graphic designer to work beyond her hours; she unintentionally becomes an accessory to a theft



**Your Utopia**  
By: Bora Chung  
Translated by: Anton Hur  
Publisher: Hachette  
Price: ₹599  
Pages: 240

at the Centre and more of some bureaucratic bullying. The expected narrative takes an unexpected turn only on the penultimate page when she reveals that despite her involvement in the burglary, she would never be fired. "...I know a secret. Everyone at the Center knows the secret. The secret is that we really are immortal."

Chung's writing is difficult to put down. There are many reasons—the strange themes, and their even stranger treatment with generous use of literary devices such as irony, sarcasm, metaphors and hyperbole, but more than that it is how she builds her narration into levels that keeps the reader on the hook. There's an introduction with all the background, then there's the present, which she immerses the readers in with her fantastic imagination, before pushing them off a cliff and into the depths of uncomfortable and unbelievable truths. No wonder then that her short stories stay with you long after you're done with them.



# A Glass Act

Couturier Seema Gujral's creative vision transcends threads, weaves and stitches. She likes her garments to blend into the space they adorn, a thought that has been successfully brought to life with her new flagship store at The Dhan Mill in Delhi. Spearheaded by Sanchit Arora, principal architect at Renesa Studio, it is a design masterpiece that stands tall among the teeming thoroughfares of the high-end compound housing boutique art galleries, cafes and homegrown labels.

Step into couturier Seema Gujral's flagship store at The Dhan Mill, where the beauty of garments mirrors the quiet elegance of the space

By AYESHA SINGH



store with an elegant arched vault, extends architectural finesse to this key area, while the ornamental curves of the staircase, perched upon a brass foundation, creates an imposing foundational design. "The segregation within the space complements the typologies of Indian wedding events such

as the cocktail area, sari-sharara area, a section for day weddings, a different one for other types of weddings, and a separate place for men's clothing. Each of these thematically defined segments lends an architectural materiality reminiscent of different wedding occasions," he says. The decision to design the



Seema Gujral

store this way was a massive undertaking, an investment Gujral calls "laborious and time-consuming, but equally important for the synergetic link between the physical space and my garments. Clothing and architecture share a common language, which encapsulates imaginative possibilities while pushing the boundaries of convention".

Inside the sophisticated environs lies a showcase of some of her most cherished pieces from recent collections. One example is the cream and gold net sari with paisley pattern



embroidery in mirror work, crystal and sequin. It comes with an embroidered strappy blouse and an (optional) veil. The nude net *sharara* set with a *dupatta* is a gorgeous piece in the finest three-dimensional embroidery, and pearl drops at the hem. The white gold floral *lehenga* with bright gold floral applique motifs on an off-white net base, paired with a strappy blouse and a scalloped *jaal* embroidered *dupatta*, is one of her trendsetting pieces. Offsetting the largely understated colour palette is the attractive neon pink sequin *lehenga*. A similar one in yellow and tonal sequins, beads and crystal embroidery, stands out

instantly. "The new store is an invitation to participate in the celebration of tradition, innovation and the artistry of Indian fashion. Each corner whispers tales of everything my brand has stood for in the last 25 years. Every fabric, motif and embellishment is telling of the passion that has been my life," says Gujral, who continues to be relevant even over two and a half decades of business. The key is the delicate balance of professional strategies and personal strengths. But, more above all, it is the willingness to adapt to changing times with an openness that requires both flexibility and humility.

'The new store is an invitation to participate in the celebration of tradition, innovation and the artistry of Indian fashion.'



FLAUNT

## Sit, Pray, Love

A new furniture store on MG Road gives shape to metropolitan refinement

It's time for Sonakshi Taneja, the co-founder of Indesign, a furniture store in Delhi, to nestle into her armchair beside the crackling fireplace and unwind with a warm cup of cocoa. And why not? She spent the last few months toiling to launch Dimensions, a new store on MG Road, under Indesign.

With it, she wants to expand the brand's reach across various regions, and the name, Dimensions, encapsulates this vision. The outlet follows a contemporary template with simplicity and sophistication at its core. "That means no elaborate, ornate, heavy or cumbersome products. It's all about statement-making furniture in crystal, glass, metals, ceramic, polished veneer, wood and Italian marble coated with super glossy polyester resin. These are not merely functional pieces. While they offer a utilitarian value, each piece has an individualistic character," says Taneja.

The modular sofas, for instance, boast "clean structure, bold lines and subdued colours". "They come in leather, suede and vegan leather. They're adaptable, open to rearrangement and can be customised," she says, adding, "The chaise lounges are my favourite with their sinuously curved backs, ideal for catching the sun on the porch while reading a novel." The gilded coffee tables in matte leather follow an asymmetrical form. These sturdy tables are designed to complement various spaces, especially the space next to a couch, bed or an open plan area. The wooden armchairs with matte leather upholstery is available in multiple colours and is accompanied by a footstool. "The wooden beds with their pastel-toned headboards, are our signature product", she says.

Even though Dimensions



specialises in bespoke furniture, the introduction of décor accessorisation reflects a holistic approach to enhancing customer experience. "Incorporating lighting design, art and showpieces would allow customers to envision how the furniture may complement their homes. We source all products from craft clusters across South Asia and the selection is made based on versatility and cultural resonance," she says. One such piece is the nested interweaving

design of the leather belts of the chandeliers. The glass goblets suspended from these belts lend a chic industrial look to the product. "These would go well over a farm-house style, broad dining table, or a room with boho décor," says Taneja, adding, "Another unconventional piece is the eerily gorgeous alabaster lamp, casting moonlight pallor and assuming an almost otherworldly posture in your interiors. We have been approached with

enthusiasm for how remarkable these fixtures are. The carved brass artifacts can be set down on the floor as a moody, bohemian décor piece or placed on a mantel," says the entrepreneur. Dimensions is more than a mere economic venture for Taneja; it's the fulfilment of her father's dream, who believed in enriching people's lives through the tangible elements of a space. And, that is her guiding light.

—AS

## Sporting Art



When art and athleticism merge, the outcome is a playful yet thoughtful creation. That's what emerging artist-designer Viraj Khanna, whose work has been showcased in solo shows at the LOFT, Gallery Art Exposure, Tao Art Gallery, and the India Art Fair, did with his new creation—an exclusive bomber jacket for Puma with different textile cutouts in an attractive chromatic palette. Designed for the sports brand's Gen Z ambassador, actor Shanaya Kapoor, for her first-ever Knicks Basketball Game at Madison Square in New York, the jacket exhibits Khanna's collage-making dexterity. This art-forward piece with traditional *ari* and *zardozi* embroideries, which become the showstopper for both sports and fashion enthusiasts at the venue, is a testament to the power of juxtaposing elements in fashion. "I have re-interpreted the Puma Cat in my style. It is slightly abstract because of the collage approach that I typically use to structure my figurations. The sleeve patchworks emerge from textiles of different works. Placing strong elements together to create different visual patterns while keeping the Puma ethos intact was very exciting," says Khanna, who studied Business Administration at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, and is currently pursuing his MFA at the Art Institute of Chicago.



## PICK OF THE WEEK

### Collector's Choice

Textile treasures from Mandeep and David Housego's personal repository—a showcase of rare rugs and gelims from Turkey and Turkestan—are now open for public viewing



A rug from Southwest Persia featuring patterns reminiscent of the Bauhaus school of architecture, a carpet from Northwest Iran with rows of diamonds are among the eye-catching pieces showcased at the unveiling of the most recent personal collection of David Housego of textile brand Shades of India. Titled Nomad, the line rugs, gelims, horse blankets and saddlebags from across Central Asia.

The 19th- and 20th-century textiles that can be viewed by appointment at brand's headquarters in Noida, are a result of cultural practices such as gathering wool from the nomadic tribes from the region that stretches across eastern Turkey, through the Caucasus into Iran, and across to Turkestan. They traverse with their herds of sheep, camels and goats from lowlands in winter to the lofty mountain pastures in summer. "From this wool, they weave beautiful textiles, but the amazing part is



the beauty of the design they managed to develop despite living such a hard life. Their aesthetic sense was evident in their use of colours, forms and stylised motifs featuring birds, animals, flowers and other common figures from daily life, reminiscent of many contemporary paintings. The use of reds, indigo blue, green, yellow and black derived through a lengthy process of preparing natural dyes, was common. Each of the tribes—Shasavan from North-West Iran, Qashgai from the South-West, Turkmen from the East—had their own language and distinctive style," says the octogenarian founder.

Diversity and similarities interlace to manifest a range of patterns and approaches. The rug from Iran, for example, has a black background, and features two vertical rows of large diamonds and three smaller ones in the centre. There is a little star at the top alluding to a religious symbol. "The Shasavan horse blanket is a powerful piece. This would have been made for ceremonial purposes. Stylised peacocks dominate the field while other animals fill the upper and lower bands," says Housego, whose life continues to remain entwined with textiles as his company specialises in transforming them through innovation. He now has only one wish: more museums to house these beautiful textiles.

—AS

# 'I Never Read About Myself Online'

Tell us about the premise of the story.

*Wicked Little Letters* is based on a true story from the 1920s about a Christian woman called Edith Swan who, along with some other women in their seaside town, started to receive rather obscene poison-pen letters. Everyone suspects Edith's potty-mouthed neighbour, Rose, is behind it all, but things are not quite as they seem. The whole thing escalates to become a huge scandal. It made the newspapers, and was even debated in parliament at the time until finally, the real culprit was found.

How would you describe Edith as a character?

It's safe to say she has two sides to her. Edith is a woman who has been held back and repressed, but she also has a wild side waiting to burst out. When that finally happens, she is rather out of control. She was a lot of fun to play, I have to say.

How do you think you would deal with someone writing nasty things about you?

I wouldn't want to know. That's why I never read anything about myself online. You never know what you might find, but I certainly wouldn't find it funny. I believe in the old saying that if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.

There is a lot of swearing in the film. Did you find yourself swearing more at home because of all that cursing on set?

Not at all, pretty much in the same way that if I happen to play an axe murderer, I wouldn't suddenly become one in my private life (laughs). I do love swearing, but

**'The fact there are women at the centre was secondary (for me). But, more than half the population are women, so it is good that we are finally seeing that reflected on the screen.'**

Oscar winner **Olivia Coleman** talks about her new film *Wicked Little Letters*, the downside of anonymity on social media and her beginnings as an actor

By KATIE ELLIS



I wouldn't say this role has made me do it any more or less. It's acting.

**Wicked Little Letters has a strong female cast as well as a female director. Is that something that made you want to be a part of it?**

I was mostly attracted by the story and amazing script. The fact there are women at the centre of all of it was secondary. But, more than half the population are women, so it is good that we are finally seeing that reflected on the screen. For this, it was lovely to work with, not just women, but women of all ages. It was a beautiful experience.

**Jessie Buckley plays Edith's neighbour, Rose. How would you describe their relationship?**

I think Edith really wanted to be Rose in a way. Back in the 20s, women like Rose were considered shocking for being open.

I think Edith and Rose are actually very similar. They should have been great friends, but society got in the way.

**When do you feel most comfortable being yourself?**

This is cheesy, but I am going to say when I am with my husband (Ed Sinclair). I can just be me when I am with him. I never have to explain how I am feeling with Ed. He knows when to talk about it and when to leave it. That is something he has taught me.

**How did you start out in acting?**

When I was 16, and I did my first school play. I was rubbish at school, but that was the moment I felt like I was actually good at something, and enjoyed doing it. I don't know what I would have done otherwise.

**What do your children think of what you do?**

I'm pleased that they are not

that bothered. As a family, we made a point of not making it seem important. They know I have a job I love, and that all I want is the same for them. I want them to have a work ethic.

**Finally, who do you think Wicked Little Letters will appeal to the most?**

I think it will appeal to all ages, male and female. I think everyone is aware today of the issue with anonymity and people thinking they can say something cruel to someone. It's vile. The upset it causes and the mental health issues that come from the downside of social media is something we all deal with to some degree. This story reflects on that. It's a true story that gripped the nation. People were shocked that someone could be so vile and cruel to someone, anonymously. I hope we are still shocked. We need to get to a place where no one is treated as a lesser being than anybody else.

—Asia Features

(Below) a poster of *Wicked Little Letters*



BUZZ CUT



PUNCHING HARD

After a power-packed 2023, **Shah Rukh Khan** is gearing up for *Pathaan 2*, the script for which has been locked. The film, which will begin production by the end of this year, will see SRK reunite with producer Aditya Chopra. It is being said that the film will predate *Pathaan* and *Tiger* in the YRF Spy Universe timeline.



FRANCHISE FEVER

Even as audiences wait for *Pushpa 2: The Rule* with bated breath, actor **Allu Arjun** has already hinted at a third instalment in the *Pushpa* franchise. "You can definitely expect part three, we do want to make it a franchise and we have exciting ideas for the lineup," the actor said recently at the Berlin Film Festival.

MAISIE WILLIAMS ON DOING *GAME OF THRONES* AT A YOUNG AGE



**'I was so lost for so long.'**

## One-Man Fight Club

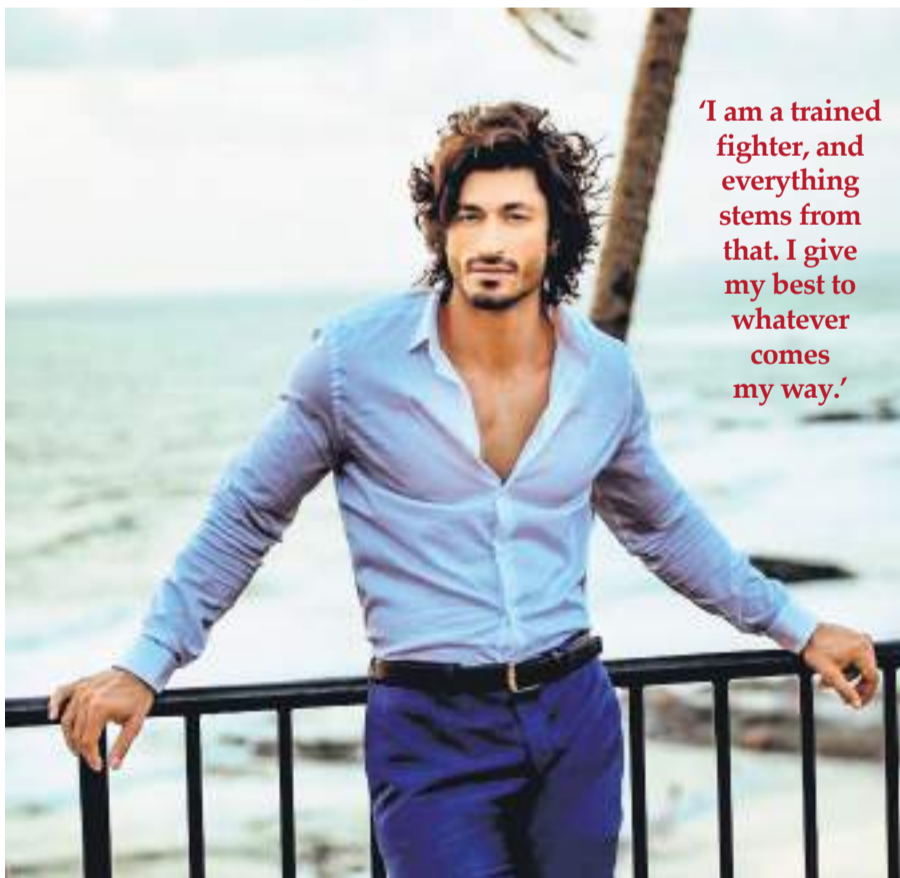
MMA expert and actor Vidyut Jammwal is literally packing a punch in his latest film, *Crakk*, which he also bankrolled

By PUJA TALWAR

Vidyut Jammwal is a martial artist first, and then an actor. Having been trained in Kalarippayattu since the age of three, he is acknowledged to be in the league of international legends such as Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee. It is no surprise then, that his choice of roles is determined by how action-driven they are. His films *Force*, the *Commando* series and *Sanak*, are all proof. So is his latest—*Crakk*—a racy and hard-hitting narrative on the hyper-competitive world of extreme sports. "It is the story of an underdog, a man born on the wrong side of the tracks who, with his sheer expertise, makes a name for himself globally," says Jammwal.

The film that released on February 23, can be considered a sporty version of *Squid Games*. Apart from actors Arjun Rampal, Amy Jackson and Nora Fatehi, the cast also includes eight international athletes such as South Africa's slacklining champion Alfonso Oroscio and China's martial arts expert Liana Hu, who came on board as key players and put their lives on stake for a cash prize. The project, which took two years to be completed, also brought seven international action directors together to choreograph and curate the hyper-intensive stunts. "Over the years, I realised that one needs to spend money on getting the right skill sets—technicians, actors and directors—to pull off hard-core action films. It is not just about performing daring stunts alone or getting the right story. It's about the magnitude as well," says the 43-year-old actor, who has also produced the film.

Vidyut's journey in the industry has been that of a lone ranger: An outsider, he



**'I am a trained fighter, and everything stems from that. I give my best to whatever comes my way.'**

made his debut in 2011 with *Force*, playing the dreaded drug dealer opposite John Abraham. Soon after, he tried his hands at southern cinema with small but impactful negative roles in Telugu films such as *Shakti* and *Oosravelli*. He received critical acclaim for playing the bad boy in the

Poster of *Crakk*



2021 Tamil film *Billa II*, which was followed by an award-winning performance in *Thuppaki*. "I started by playing imperceptible negative roles down South. But then, no one wanted to see me play anything else," he says. It was only in 2013, with the release of the first *Commando* film, that things started to turn around.

In the last decade, the actor has become synonymous with the genre of real-world combat-based films. "I am a trained fighter, and everything stems from that. There has never been a method to my craft. I give my best to whatever comes my way. I go by instinct, and don't really have a strategy in place," he says.

His production house—Action Hero Films—launched in 2021, is another

reflection of his fighting spirit. His debut production, *IB71*, a war thriller set against the 1971 Indo-Pak war, did brisk business at the box office. Being the proverbial outsider, he says his production house is a vehicle to launch people who may not be "socially cool" as per the industry's standards. "I see a lot of talent not being used just because they are not spotted networking at parties or don't have social media numbers. But, what they do have is skill, and I want to encourage every such storyteller, technician and artist. Name and branding do not impress me," says the actor, who will be next seen in *Sher Singh Raana*, a biopic of the Rajput leader who brought the remains of Prithviraj Chauhan from Afghanistan.

BINGE BOX



THE BANE OF BOON

Meet the real Albert Einstein in this gripping feature. Warm, witty and brilliant, the scientist made one fatal mistake that haunted him forever. Watch *Einstein and the Bomb*, starring Aidan McArdle, Rachel Barry and Andrew Havill, on Netflix.

TRENDING

House of Ninjas Netflix

**CAST** Kento Kaku, Yosuke Eguchi, Tae Kimura  
**PLOT** A dysfunctional family of retired ninjas must return to shadowy missions

Saba Nayagan Hotstar

**CAST** Ashok Selvan, Karthika Muralieedharan, Sherlin Seth  
**PLOT** A man spins wild breakup tales to a sympathetic cop hoping to avoid getting arrested for nuisance

Can I Tell You A Secret? Netflix

**CAST** Tyler Hoechlin, Cox Robert  
**PLOT** Three women's lives are changed forever when a prolific stalker infiltrates their social media accounts

Will Trent Hotstar

**CAST** Ramón Rodríguez, Erika Christensen, Iantha Richardson  
**PLOT** A Special Agent makes sure no one is abandoned like he was and has the highest clearance rate in his bureau

The Heartbreak Agency Netflix

**CAST** Rosalie Thomass, Laurence Rupp, Cora Trube  
**PLOT** When a journalist reluctantly participates in heart-break therapy for an article, he ends up opening his heart to his charming therapist

REVIEW

## Old Play, New Love



PLAYERS

**Director:** Trish Sie  
**Genre:** Romantic comedy  
**Platform:** Netflix  
**Language:** English  
**Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Too many romantic comedies are being released on the big as well as small screens of late. Yet, there is very little novelty on offer. Every week, we see a new onscreen couple, who are unaware of how compatible they are until they have a big fight, followed by the most predictable of reunions. Netflix's new film, *Players*, isn't too different. The characters, their interests and occupations are all interestingly uncommon, but the central play of the film is news to nobody.

Mack (Gina Rodriguez) and her pack of guy friends play 'wing-people' for each other, as they come up with one-night stands and hook-up schemes. But, when Mack meets Nick (Tom Ellis), she wants to go beyond casual dating. How she and her friends 'play' to convince Nick that she's the right one for him is the rest of the plot.

*Players* starts by creating quite the curiosity about how these bunch of early 30-year-olds make their way in and out of casual flings. Their friendship is atypical in the sense that they are also colleagues—all journalists, which means they spend pretty much every day together. Mack is a sportswriter, Adam (Damon Wayans Jr) handles visuals, while Brannagan (Augustus Prew) does obituaries. Nick is a war correspondent, but the best fit in this group is Little/Ryan (Joel Courtney), Brannagan's brother, who just hangs around with them. This cluster of companions is the most creatively written aspect of the film, as their dynamics add value to the screenplay.

While all of this initial momentum is great, the film eventually settles into the halls of familiarity. We have seen this game before, where the girl has a boy who loves her, but is too blind to see that. Instead, she goes chasing after another before realising it was always the first boy all along. With the romance lacking in originality, *Players*'s writing strengths lie only in its comedy, be it the absurd relationship of the brothers, Brannagan and Little, or a scene where the underused Liza Koshy freaks out crazy to crack us up.

The film goes a tad bit overboard with sports references, particularly baseball and the Yankees. Non-sport-loving audiences, especially in India, may find it unable to relate to it. So, with its somewhat effective comedy and the unoriginal love story, *Players* only manages to live up to the final part of a quote from the film itself... "Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose."

—Jayabhuvaneshwari B

