



**SPEAK EASY**  
His aides rue, "Why can't he be more diplomatic?" Manohar Parrikar now brings a refreshing dose of candour to South Block **p3**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2014



THULASI KAKKAT

In Kerala, a simple act of affection is still a source of voyeuristic pleasure to many. But as liberal voices rise on its streets, the state begins its reluctant journey towards change **p10**

# The first kiss



**NOAH IN VEMBANAD**  
Dr Irving Finkel decodes 4,000-year-old instructions on how to build an ark **p2**



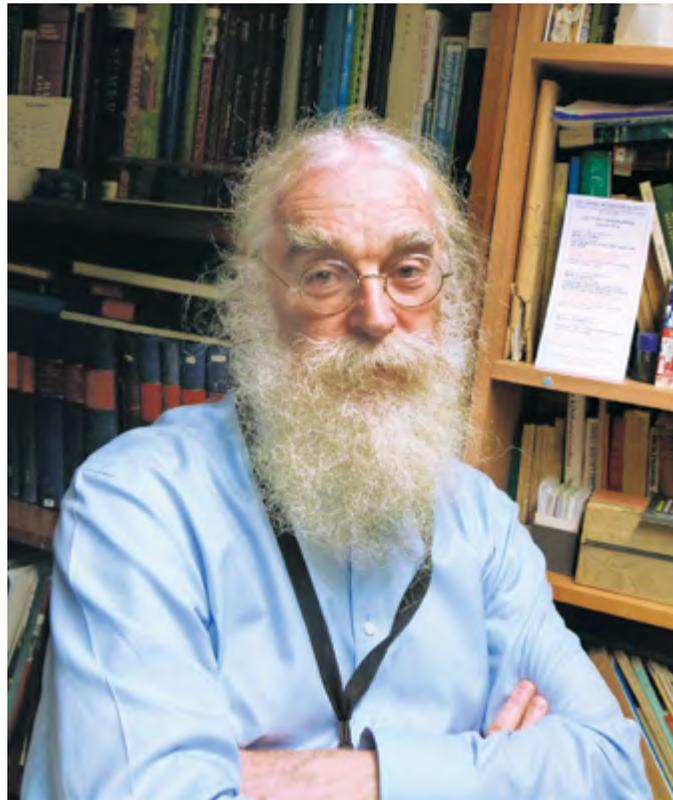
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*Interstellar* might have arresting visuals but collapses under its own weight **p15**

# The return of the ark

The discovery of a long-forgotten tablet provides 4,000-year-old instructions that can be followed to build the mythical ark

In 1985 Douglas Simmonds, a man of few words and the son of a Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot with a penchant for collecting antiquities, walked into the British Museum with a handful of items from his father's collection packed into a plastic bag. Dr Irving Finkel, now assistant keeper at the museum's Middle Eastern department, was the curator who examined the objects at the time. As soon as he chanced upon one of them — a clay tablet the size of a mobile phone, dating back to around BC 1800 — he recognised that it had something to do with the story or legend of the Flood: an integral part of Mesopotamian mythology, and subsequently of many religions across the world. "Wall Wall! Reed, wall! Reed Wall, That you may live forever! Destroy Your House, build a boat; spurn property and save a life." Thus began the 60-line tablet, written in cuneiform script — Mesopotamian writing so old it predates any form of alphabet.

Around a third of the inscription on the tablet was damaged and unclear. He placed the tablet in a drawer in his office and examined it for over a decade, whenever he got the chance. Then, word by word, he began to unravel the more complex parts of the text. Some of the discoveries left him astounded: far from being a simple rendering of a classic story, the tablet was in the form of a dialogue between the god Enki and an unwitting hero, Atra Hasis. It contained detailed, mathematical instructions on how to build a boat that would save mankind. But this boat was not shaped like the ark we think of today: it was round and bore a clear resemblance to the coracles built in modern-day Iraq (old Mesopotamia) as late as the 1930s and '40s. Another phrase left him even more astonished: "2 by 2" was how the wild animals were meant to board the boat. This seemed a clear link to the story of Noah and the ark. "I al-



**Treasure finder** Dr Irving Finkel nearly fell off his chair when he read that animals were to move onto the boat "2 by 2" VIDYA RAM

most fainted when I looked that word up in the dictionary and found what it meant," says Finkel, in his office, tucked in a corner of the British Library.

For Finkel, whose study of cuneiform writing at university had left him with a lifelong interest in Mesopotamian literature and history, the conclusions were clear: "The presence of the story in the Bible and Koran is undoubtedly a borrowing from the Mesopotamian world that preceded it." Earlier this year, Finkel published *The Ark Before Noah*, an engaging, personal and often gently humorous account of the cuneiform literary tradition, his discovery and the conclusions he draws from it.

He believes that once in the history of Mesopotamia there was a hugely destructive flood far exceeding the routine flooding from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. "I think this was never forgotten and was often referred to and became a part of the culture," he says. "The myth of the rescue, as I see it, was the answer to their psychological fear that if nature lost control, one of the gods would come along to rescue the core of life."

The tablet itself was likely to be a memory aide, perhaps for a travelling storyteller or pair of storytellers. In river communities, elaborate mathematically valid details might be needed to win over an audience with boat-building experience. "It would have been imperative for the people who recounted this story to have this kind of data."

When the suggestion to build a boat based on the tablet's instructions came from a documentary company, Finkel leaped at the opportunity. "What is miraculous for me is to have a

4,000-year-old set of instructions that can be followed to produce an object that is functioning. I don't know another instance of it," he says.

And so began the complex process of creating an ancient boat based on an ancient text. With the help of a mathematician, three Oman-based boat builders experienced in building ancient boats from original materials (without glue or nails), the process began. They decided against building a full-sized one, which would have occupied half a football pitch. As Finkel writes in his book, this boat would have been so high that a giraffe would have struggled to peek over its side. So the team opted to scale down and, using the same proportions, build a boat roughly a fifth of the original.

Given the political and security risks, building the craft in Iraq wasn't really an option. The obvious alternative was Kerala, with its ancient boat-building traditions and ready supply of essential materials such as the reeds and bitumen specified in the instructions. Besides that, many of

the experienced workers and boatyard managers who worked alongside the team of boat-building experts in Oman were from Kerala.

Earlier this year, it took 60 to 70 workers four months to build the boat. Many challenges slowed the pace of work: the bitumen used didn't prove as watertight as everyone had hoped, and at points, water had to be pumped out and the structure re-patched. But in March

it was finally there: a miniature replica, weighing 35 tonnes, of the circular craft described in the ancient tablet.

The boat now sits on a small canal off Lake Vembanad. Bitumen waterproofing problems have led to it gradually taking in water. Sheikh Nasser of Kuwait, who runs a museum in Kuwait and has a home in Kerala, is set to take over the boat and all the required maintenance.

Whatever its future, to Finkel its significance is tremendous. "It proved the validity that this wasn't just the stuff of fantasy but there is some kind of reality underpinning it," he says.

He recalls with palpable enthusiasm the time spent in Kerala with the workforce, who kept their pledge of keeping the building a secret. "It was the most collaborative, collegiate thing ever, and a real exciting experiment in boat-building history. It was such an adventure. Daft people like me who work on inscriptions don't normally have a whisper of an opportunity like this..."

Belying his white beard and formal academic credentials, Finkel exudes the passion, vigour and boyish enthusiasm of an adventurer on the track of new treasures.

**The presence of the story in the Bible and Koran is undoubtedly a borrowing from the Mesopotamian world that preceded it**



**Without glue or nails** The ark being built at an undisclosed location in Kerala BLINK FILMS AND CHANNEL 4

# Against the grain

The original *aam aadmi* chief minister Manohar Parrikar brings his pragmatism and innovation to the office of the defence minister



**Truth be told** In a city of sycophants, Manohar Parrikar still speaks his mind  
MONICA TIWARI

In a city teeming with sycophants, Manohar Parrikar is the rare Narendra Modi loyalist who can be counted on to give him frank – even critical – counsel. The new Defence Minister from Goa has a mind of his own, and a friendship with Modi that goes back over two decades when they were in the RSS together.

In early September 2013, a fortnight before Modi was officially declared BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Parrikar gave me an interview for *The New York Times'* India blog. He backed Modi's nomination, but also called the 2002 Gujarat riots a "blot on Modi's career". Delhi's media went into a tizzy over the quote, painting this as another example of a party still divided over Modi's candidature.

The morning after the interview was published, when I reached Parrikar's office-in-residence in Panjim's well-heeled Altinho neighbourhood, his aides were in damage-control mode. The media was calling persistently, looking for a few more juicy quotes on Modi. The RSS was offended: in the same interview Parrikar had said that while he was a Hindu nationalist, he wouldn't "take out a sword and kill Muslims". The state's Christians were unhappy because he had called them "culturally Hindu".

"Why can't he be a bit more diplomatic in his interviews," sighed one Parrikar aide that same morning.

"But then he wouldn't be Manohar Parrikar," said another with a chuckle.

## The pragmatic Kejriwal?

Parrikar's frugal lifestyle is legendary and has made him a middle-class hero: he carries his own luggage at the airport and travels economy class. As chief minister, his office used only two government cars, one for him and another shared by his staff. When Arvind Kejriwal was making news for his austere lifestyle at the helm of Delhi, many Parrikar fans quickly pointed out that their man was the real *aam aadmi* chief minister.

There is something to the Parrikar-Kejriwal comparisons. Parrikar, a 58-year-old metallurgical engineer from IIT-Powai (Kejriwal went to IIT-Kharagpur) also burnished his reputation with a fight against corruption. Parrikar took on Goa's powerful illegal mining lobby. According to the Justice MB Shah Commission report, between 2005 and 2012 there had been illegal mining worth ₹35,000 crore in Goa.

Before the 2012 Goa elections, Parrikar started a Jan Sampark Yatra, where he travelled across Goa, staying with voters and supporters. He painted the Digambar Kamat-led Congress government as corrupt and ineffective,

and then rode a strong anti-incumbency wave to deliver a BJP majority for the first time in the state Assembly.

But after taking over as chief minister, the Opposition had accused Parrikar of going soft on illegal mining. In August this year, he had supported the renewal rather than fresh auctioning of 27 mining leases in the state. While the opposition has taken him on over his flip-flops, Parrikar's supporters say that he has been a pragmatic administrator who did not want to further cripple the mining industry, which was already reeling from a Supreme Court ban, leading to thousands of job cuts and loss of revenue for the exchequer.

A similar story played out with Goa's offshore casinos. While in Opposition, Parrikar had led protests against them, demanding their immediate closure. But as chief minister, he had delayed the closure till 2016. Doing it in a rush, he reasoned, could certainly scare away investors.

The big policy feather in Parrikar's cap was his decision to reduce value added tax on petrol from 22 per cent to 0.1 per cent in the state, making it the most affordable in the country at ₹55 a litre. He also reduced VAT on aviation fuel from 22 per cent to 12 per cent, incentivising refuel stops for all airlines at the Dabolim airport. More and cheaper flights to Goa meant more tourists for the state, and more revenues for residents and the exchequer.

## Sunny Goa to South Block

If policy pragmatism and innovation are Parrikar's hallmark, he will need plenty of that in his new job. The Defence Ministry office in South Block will be a far cry from sunny, laid-back Goa, though Parrikar himself is reputed to put in long working hours.

Crucial decisions await his approval, including shoring up the artillery wing of the Army, which has not seen any acquisitions since the Bofors scandal of 1987.

Parrikar has the squeaky-clean image to set things in motion on that front, particularly in purchasing light artillery guns that can be moved easily in the mountains, where the Indian Army's face-offs with the Pakistani and Chinese armies are only increasing.

A \$22-billion deal for the delivery of 126 Rafale fighters with French manufacturer Dassault Aviation is also pending. The Indian Air Force chief said we cannot afford any more hold-ups, particularly after the Sukhoi fleet was grounded in October. The Navy has been pitching for more submarines and helicopters as well. All this will require Parrikar to convince Narendra Modi and Arun Jaitley to increase capital expenditure on defence, which may not be easy till the economy has recovered fully.

Politically, Parrikar will be expected to talk tough with Pakistan and China during border skirmishes. A man who once called Lal Krishna Advani "rancid pickle" may soon have to come up with some more colourful adjectives for the neighbours.

There is something to the Parrikar-Kejriwal comparisons; they both fought corruption



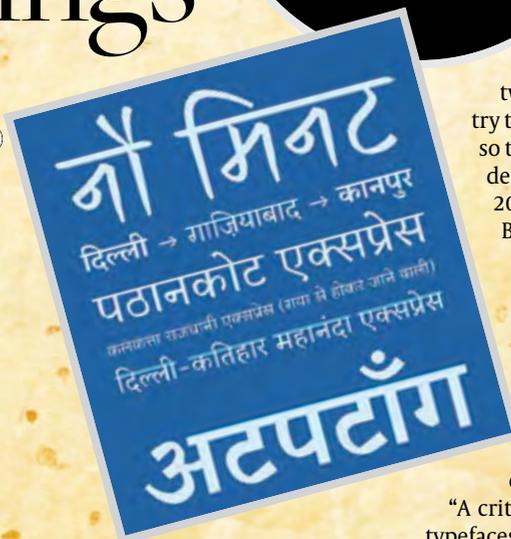
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# Type of things to come

3



With dot Bharat domains in the pipeline and an Indian Language Internet Alliance by Google, designers of Indian fonts are readying for a brave new future

4



**A perfectionist slant** (Clockwise from the top) 1. Skolar, a Devanagari typeface by Rosetta Type Foundry; 2. Pakhangba and Sanamahi, Neelakash Kshetrimayum's Mayek typefaces in Manipuri; 3. Pooja Saxena's Cawnpore Devanagari typeface based on handwriting models; and 4. designs in multiple scripts by Rajeev Prakash

Legends surrounding the Nirnaya Sagar Press — at its peak in 19th- and early 20th-century Bombay — are often repeated in the font design circles of India. Rajeev Prakash, art director at Delhi Press and designer of popular fonts like Alan- kar, narrates one such tale where the proprietors of the press, or the Jawaji family, while finalising typefaces for the Kavyamala anthologies, a 14-volume collection of ancient Sanskrit poems, insisted on making Sanskrit scholars read the text in point size eight at the break of dawn, with only a lantern at hand. Despite the tediousness of making new typesets with metal, wherever the scholars faltered, words or letters were painstakingly recast and the text was reprinted to ensure legibility even in low-light conditions.

Designing a font today is not nearly as trying as it used to be. Yet it's a manifold and rigorous process with its own contemporary challenges. Popular fonts like Yogesh and the Linotype Devanagari and Linotype Bengali, for instance, have been in use for decades. But since they are all from a pre-digital era, they don't always translate as well on computer screens as they do on newspapers or billboards. Designers must constantly innovate to cater to new, ever-changing needs — for a good font is essentially about utility.

Fiona Ross, the brain behind Linotype Bengali and other successful Indian fonts such as Rohini, says, "I look back on some fonts that I have co-designed — ones that have been successful in terms of the users' and readers' responses — and can see things that could be improved upon. If it weren't for deadlines, or some new idea for a different design, it would be hard for me to know when to stop."

Besides, the diversity of languages and

scripts in India — nearly 66 scripts and 780 languages, according to the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) — poses other problems. Delhi-based type and graphic designer Neelakash Kshetrimayum, who designed one of the first fonts in Manipuri, says that for historical reasons Manipuri was written in the Bengali script rather than the native Mayek.

"There was this major incident in 2005, where a library with more than 1.45 lakh Manipuri books written in the Bengali script was torched in Imphal," he says. This resulted in a revival of sorts for Mayek. Kshetrimayum says, "I don't know much about history, but what I do know are typefaces. So when I set out to create my Mayek typefaces Pakhangba and Sanamahi, I went back and looked at how the script evolved, studied how it was carved out in stone earlier. I also researched samples of manuscripts, the wooden press and wooden blocks of lettering before starting my work."

In the last five years or so, Indian font design has had a major facelift. Designers such as the Czech David Brezina and his colleague Vaibhav Singh of the Rosetta Type Foundry, Sarang Kulkarni of Mumbai's Ek Type, designers at Ahmedabad's Indian Type Foundry (ITF) and independent players like Pradnya Naik and Pooja Saxena have tasted success both commercially and in terms of design. Re-entry of companies such as Monotype in the Indian market has also given type designers a boost.

Itu Chaudhuri, who has re-designed English dailies like *The Economic Times* and magazines like *Open*, says that Indian font design is slow-

ly coming of age and beginning to adapt itself to the digital age. "While designing a font, you are looking to capture something of the spirit of the age in which it is appearing," he says, "Like any designed object, it is interesting to see how it becomes part of our visual culture. Projects by groups such as ITF are promising in this sense."

Ahmedabad's ITF, set up by National Institute of Design-graduate Satya Rajpurohit and Slovak typographer Peter Bilak, has designed typefaces for television channels. "Although we have thousands of fonts available, if you look for those that support a language like Hindi, work in small point size on a computer screen and have many different styles for differentiating text hierarchy, you would end up with just one or two possible candidates," says Bilak, "I try to look at text not just formally but also the meaning behind it. At ITF, we have designed and published fonts for over 200 languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Bengali and Arabic."

Rosetta Type Foundry's Vaibhav Singh, who is also pursuing his Master's at the University of Reading (one of few design schools where students can select the scripts they want to design typefaces for), warns that certain limitations in font design ought to be overcome first.

"A critical issue in designing Indian script typefaces is to recognise and respect the logic behind the letter-shapes — how they are formed and treated. Taking Latin-script features and grafting them on to a different script is an unfortunate approach, common even today. So far designers have been merely providing Indian-script equivalents to Latin typographic conventions."

Largely, though, font design in Indian scripts is adapting well to digitisation and to new media, such as the internet, mobile phones and television. With Google launching the Indian Language Internet Alliance, designed to encourage content in regional languages and the government set to announce dot Bharat domain names soon — where the text in the website as well as the site's address will be in Indian languages — there's a whole new set of opportunities up for grabs.

While the 'Helvetica' of Indian fonts is probably not out there yet, technological innovations and a growing market for Indian fonts are paving the way for better typefaces and design.

As British designer Jonny Pinhorn, who also works with ITF and has designed fonts such as Akhand Tamil, Akhand Malayalam and Saguna Gujarati, says, "Designing type is a fascinating task because you're trying to design difference within sameness, balancing both unity and flair. You have total control over every aspect of the micro and macro elements right up to the point of publication. Then, at that point, your design becomes a tool for others to use and communicate with. You hold no control over its use anymore."

Largely, though, font design in Indian scripts is adapting well to digitisation and to new media



# Paisleys and AK47s

Two young Kashmiris rework the region's famed shawl business to reflect its politics and socioeconomic realities

When Mahum Shabbir began learning the art of the famed Kashmiri papier-mâché, she had a strange feeling that the miniature flowers, leaves and branches she was drawing were all dead. Shabbir, then 19, had just enrolled as a freshman at Harvard University and was home during the summer, attempting to deepen her ties with the Valley through this centuries-old art. But with every motif she attempted, the feeling of estrangement intensified. Kashmiri papier-mâché was filled with unblemished paradisiacal beauty, but Shabbir belonged to a generation that grew up with an ongoing strife in that 'paradise on earth'.

"Everything on those papier-mâché boxes looked like an imitation of an imitation, and all of it was dead," she says. "And it had nothing to do with the artist's expression anymore. It all felt like a farce, a beautiful farce, and not art, which must have an ethical imperative and concern for social justice."

Together with her friend Suhail Mir, an artist and newspaper cartoonist, she now runs an online shawl business — Crafted-in-Kashmir —

that has radically changed the age-old Kashmiri shawl by contemporising the motif. Instead of blossoming branches, barbwire runs through the Pashmina shawls, skulls take the place of chinar leaves, guns and paisleys face each other, and flowers in the colours of spring are imprisoned in loops and tangles of barbwire.

"We have heard about attempts to contemporise Kashmiri art, but contemporising does not mean brightening the colours and resetting prices; instead, it's about making the art an expression of the artist and artisan. And that is what we wanted to do: to give the art a voice," says Shabbir.

Together, they work with young artists and designers as well as senior weavers and spinners to create a shawl "that is not only a thing of beauty but also the voice of an artisan, the voice of a people". So far, the site has sold shawls and sweaters mostly to foreign buyers, and their prices range from \$400 for the 'sada' cashmere range to \$1,000-plus for the exquisite kani range.

Instead of blossoming branches, barbwire runs through the Pashmina shawls

Although both these young Kashmiris grew up during years of political uncertainty and long for a peaceful and just solution, they come from very different backgrounds. Shabbir's parents are both doctors, whereas Mir's mother educated him with the money she earned from spinning yarn. They have been brought together by their common belief in art as a means of social justice and the voice of lived experience.

Rather than asking the weavers to replicate a design, as is routinely done, Shabbir and Mir design each shawl in consultation with the weavers and draw from their traditional knowledge system.

"I had been making kani shawls for 20 years but have never made or seen a shawl with a barbwire or gun in it," says one of the weavers, Aashiq Hussain Dar. "But when I was making it, I knew that it was the same barbwire that I had seen through my life in Kashmir, around the Army camps and bunkers, in numerous curfews and crackdowns; and while I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to make it, it just came to me naturally."

Dar is currently working on another shawl with just two motifs all over it — paisleys and Kalashnikovs. "Their (Crafted-in-Kashmir) shawls are pure quality, and the motifs are so different... no one has ever made shawls like these before. They are interesting and also say something about this place and the times we live in," the artisan says.

Each Kashmiri shawl takes months to make and passes through several hands in the process. For centuries, it has remained a major source of income for thousands: the weavers, washers, dyers and spinners, who are almost always women.

Mir's mother, Mehrunisa, has worked the spinning wheel for three decades now. One afternoon, during curfew, we walked across Srinagar to meet her at her house in Chattabul.

"When I got married, my mother gave me this spinning wheel as a gift," says Mehrunisa. That, in turn, helped her give her children the gift of education. Today she believes spinners are a dying breed as there is little money in it. "I got one rupee for one knot 30 years ago and get the same today. Why would anyone do it?" she asks.

That one rupee includes the cost of the yarn, which the women have to buy themselves. "We used to buy 10gm of yarn for about ₹100 and, after spinning it over two days, sold it back for ₹140. The ₹40 we earned is nothing these days."

Back when she was young, almost every second house in Srinagar had a woman spinning yarn to bolster the household income and fetch her financial independence; today, these women find less work due to the mechanisation of looms and spinners.

Mir has seen the ins and outs of this business since childhood, and was always struck by the gender inequality that denied his mother and hundreds of other women spinners in his neighbourhood their rightful share of income.

"When we went into this business, we decided to give the women yarn for free, so everything they earned was profit and we pay in advance," he says.

Shabbir and Mir want to ensure that their shawl business goes beyond commercial interests and helps put the cottage industry back on its feet on improved social terms. The shawl's engagement with the politics of the time is yet another of its *raison d'être*.

## Spinning out of control

At one time, nearly every second house in Srinagar had a woman spinning yarn and her financial independence, but few can do so now





# Eye in the sky

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are taking to the Indian landscape in various roles — from wedding photography to police surveillance and crowd management

**W**hen filmmaker Rahat Kulshreshtha was shooting a music video for singer Shreya Singhal last year, he wanted to take a few aerial shots over the Noida Expressway on the outskirts of Delhi. The only way to do it was to hire a helicopter and seek regulatory permissions for its use. Yet, shot from a minimum of 2,000 feet, the footage would

not have been up to the mark. It was then that he found out about unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) being used in the US for taking aerial shots from less-distant heights. He bought one from there for his own venture.

UAVs are defined as vehicles installed with avionics that can either fly autonomously or by using the commands from the base. The common person perhaps knows them better as drones, because of the military connotations. However, UAVs can be used for various civilian purposes, such as film productions, wedding photography, surveillance and high-rise real estate projects.

Kulshreshtha teamed up with Gaurav Mehata and Tanuj Bhojwani, two batchmates at Ashoka University. They set up Quidich earlier this year — a Delhi-based firm that provides aerial images and videos through UAVs.

Three friends from Mumbai's Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI) are also working overtime to tap this growing market for UAVs, in Navi Mumbai, the satellite city of India's financial capital. Aniket Tatipamula, Neeraj Waghchaure and Shinil Shekhar successfully created a UAV, after a few failed attempts, in their college lab in 2012. In October 2013, the trio set up Airpix, a professional aerial photography and video production company, whose client list includes real estate developers, town planners, the police, government departments and even media houses.

Another Navi Mumbai-based start-up, ideaForge — brainchild of students at IIT-Bombay — offers services only to the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and paramilitary and security forces. Their clients include National Security Guard, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, National Disaster Response Force and Delhi Police. "It is a really hot market right now. Over the last few years, there has been a consistent annual growth of 70 to 80 per cent," says Deshraj Singh, head of marketing and sales at ideaForge.

Kulshreshtha agrees: "In less than one year since we started, Quidich has already broken even and we are profitable. The market is growing rapidly." Quidich's first assignment was election coverage with a leading news channel. "We travelled with them for 40 days, our UAVs following their bus. The interviews with politicians were also captured with our drones. We got a lot of mileage from that." Soon, Quidich was flooded with clients.

## Farewell, copters

So what are the benefits of UAVs? For starters, they are a cost-effective alternative to helicopters. While choppers can be used for everything — from security surveillance to film and music production — they come with a huge price tag. Charges for hiring a helicopter range from ₹1 lakh to ₹2 lakh an hour, depending on the use. In contrast, a drone can be hired for eight to 10 hours from a starting price of ₹1 lakh to ₹1.5 lakh and customised to requirements. For filming, even if a shot has to be re-taken, a drone can be brought down, its battery changed and sent back again. "Shooting with a helicopter is time-consuming and a pain," says Kulshreshtha. Moreover, helicopters are not allowed to fly below a certain height, making it difficult to take close-up shots. An average drone rental package includes 10 batteries, which are more than enough for a day-long shoot.

More importantly, says Kulshreshtha, the ease of permissions makes drones a better option, as only the local police needs to be informed. Helicopters require various approvals, at least a week in advance. But since people have been using drones without regulation, they may interfere with flight paths at higher altitudes, posing security risks. To check that, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has banned the use of drones till it finalises guidelines on their use.

However, companies like Quidich and Airpix can seek permission from DGCA and other

**From a distance** A UAV from ideaForge (above); an aerial view shot by a UAV (below) AIRPIX



authorities for using drones under 300 feet. "This is free air space and any object at this altitude does not interfere with routine flight paths," says Kulshreshtha.

#### View from a home

While UAVs might be used to take aerial shots of actors and actresses, Airpix uses it in the real estate sector as well. It bagged its first project from Haware Builders in Mumbai's suburban Thane early this year. "The view from a flat is the USP of high-rise buildings. We use drones to capture the view, which can leverage flat sales," says Shekhar. So, even before the construction commences, Airpix drones can create a virtual view from a flat on any floor. And it has done this for marquee names, including Lodha Developers, Shapoorji Pallonji, K Raheja Corp and Omkar Realtors.

Airpix works with its clients on a project basis. "A definitive cost cannot be reached since we customise the drone as per the final application with different kinds of performances and payloads," says Shekhar. The physics of the equipment and electronics change with project needs. So for real estate projects, UAVs have to be fitted with high-resolution cameras to provide images that can be blown up. And for aerial photography of sports events, the equipment's mobility and manoeuvrability have to be good.

With growing demand, Airpix has expanded from one to six UAVs in less than a year; Quidich has gone from one to seven. These players are now assembling their own UAVs rather than buying them from manufacturers. The parts are flown in from other countries, assembled and customised as per requirement. Quidich gets its motors from China, bodies from Belgium and other parts from the US. "We put them together based on how much weight it has to lift," says Kulshreshtha. So while a UAV for lifting compact and lightweight Go-Pro cameras can cost ₹2 lakh, the one for lifting film cameras that weigh 5-8kg can cost up to ₹20 lakh.

#### Higher and brighter

Photographer Jasmer Singh has used Quidich drones fitted with cameras to shoot stills for industrial locations as well as resorts. "The essential advantage is that UAVs take cameras to



places where we cannot take them otherwise. And the quality of images is good too." He can also see the display in real time and adjust aperture, shutter speed, while sitting in front of a computer. In most cases, UAVs produce sharp images from a distance of 500 metres to a kilometre. This also makes it suitable for sports events; Airpix provided aerial coverage for a Brazilian TV series *Kayak*, which covers white-water rafting in various countries. "We did the aerial view shooting for their Nepal edition. It helps capture the thrill and action better," he adds.

Gasha Aeri Alawani, Marketing Motorsports at Volkswagen India agrees. She says her company first used UAVs in 2013. "This year too we will take their services to cover our VW Polo-R-Cup. In circuit racing (such as the Buddh International circuit, Greater Noida), through a camera installed on UAVs, we can capture what a handheld-camera cannot. They can also follow the track well." She does, however, find the cost on the higher side. Alawani believes that with the increase in competition, prices are likely to come down and the quality of the product will improve.

With growing demand, Airpix has expanded from one to six UAVs in less than a year; Quidich has gone from one to seven

Airpix, for example, is already staying away from aerial wedding photography as that market is getting commoditised. Shekhar says his firm has done four wedding assignments, but will stop at that. "There is no value addition in those services. We are consciously trying to stay away from this segment as drones are just complementing other mediums." Ditto for Quidich. "In Delhi, anybody can buy a drone for ₹2 lakh for wedding photography. That is not a particularly lucrative market," says Kulshreshtha.

Not surprisingly, drones can be bought for as little as ₹50,000 in Delhi's Chandni Chowk. In Khan Market, the base price can go up to ₹1 lakh. But they are mostly imported from China. And it is these players that are increasing the competition in the UAV space.

Both Shekhar and Kulshreshtha agree that competition will bring rentals down. But the serious players are working on specialised verticals and will offer more data-based analytical services. ideaForge, for example, has created a niche by working only with security forces. "With UAVs, you can't just issue a tender and ask for the lowest bidder. Every single requirement needs to be specified and it has to be customised," says Singh of ideaForge.

Shekhar should know. His firm worked on a project with the Mumbai police on Ambedkar Jayanti. For a gathering held at Shivaji Park, the police wanted to monitor crowds from a vantage point and, in case of a mishap, identify the spot as soon as possible. "We used a high-zoom camera to close in on places where mishaps might occur, and a high-definition camera to capture data," he says.

Quidich has also developed UAV software for agriculture surveys, which will help measure crop density and quality, soil conditions, and so on. "We can put thermal cameras to monitor this. We are also working on a system for disaster management," says Kulshreshtha. Quidich also has engineers on board to work on analytics and is offering a top-end UAV of around ₹30 lakh. With major companies like Amazon entering the UAV space with Amazon Prime Air, and Facebook looking into solar-powered UAVs by 2015, clearly it is the technology of the future. Shekhar at Airpix says, "We want to grow as a technology company, which provides real solutions to real problems."

RASHMI PRATAP with inputs from Sibi Arasu

#### The hover craft

UAVs can be used in real estate projects (above); and for crowd monitoring (below) AIRPIX



PRESENT IMPERFECT

# Such a sorry state

If women in Kerala believe the day the state turns dry will be the first of a violence-free domestic life, they are likely to be very disappointed



**Tug of war tokenism** When will women in Kerala exercise their power and fight for what's right  
G RAMAKRISHNA

Of all the distressing aspects about the ban on consuming liquor in Kerala, the most disheartening is the fact that it is seen as some kind of victory for the state's women. A member of the Kerala Women's Commission seems to have aired a standard anecdote to all who would listen about a woman who complained about her husband who beat her (and their two children) when he was drunk. She also added that the husband was kind and gentle while sober. "How often does he drink?" she was asked. "Seven days a week," came the reply. It's a remarkable anecdote, one that is tailor-made to demonstrate how drink — and only drink — drives domestic violence. It's also a story that is laden with naiveté.

If women in Kerala believe the day the state turns dry will be the first of a violence-free domestic life, they are likely to be very disappointed. For the most part, domestic violence is cultural, and just because it isn't preceded by a quarter of rum does not mean it will disappear entirely. More than anything though, what I am disappointed by is this benign acceptance of their lot in life that women in the state have demonstrated all along. To be honest, I've been waiting for a few years now for a story that shows women in Kerala, shall we say, kick some ass. Resmi Nair, Kiss Day organiser, is so far the lone sign of promise.

On paper, women in no other state have so much going for them. The state boasts 100 per cent literacy, an enviable sex ratio of 1084 and has a long history of women going outside their homes and working. Despite higher levels of education and the empowerment that come from financial independence, there hasn't been a memorable event in the last two decades here of a woman standing up for what is right and not feeling embarrassed to create a row about it. Forget activists, even in public life, Kerala women are woefully absent. There is one woman in the state's cabinet. There are seven women in the Assembly. In

comparison, in 1957, when women in other parts of the country were barely visible in politics, the Kerala Assembly had six women.

It's perhaps unkind but not entirely incorrect to say that women in Kerala are often too busy keeping one another in check to worry about fighting for what's right. This neighbourly censorship of who's wearing what and talking to whom is a full-time occupation. (It is also the only place I know where there is a great deal of curiosity about others' personal hygiene. Random people, even relative strangers think nothing of asking you if you have had a bath. This question, conveniently reduced to one word in Malayalam, is a favoured manner of introduction in my parents' village, near Palakkad).

The background score of my own childhood in Kochi was my mother's anxiety about what people would say about one thing or another. Remarkably, it stopped being a concern the minute they moved out of the state, even though I was then a teenager prone to, let's call it, experimentation. But most girls I knew, (and in this, I was a happy exception), were raised with one eye on the calendar and another on the bank locker. A horoscope was drawn up and a suitable groom sought as soon as they turned 21, and the mandatory minimum of 101 sovereigns of gold was accumulated.

In a post-liberalisation sartorial leap, salwar kameezes replaced the skirt and blouse. (While in an equally awkward development, the nightdress became legitimate outdoor apparel.) Other than that, very little has changed in Kerala between the '80s and now. This is particularly magnified now because women from the state are doing supremely well while living in other parts of the country and the world. They are heads of multi-billion dollar IT companies, CXOs of FMCG companies, pilots,

doctors, nurses, writers, sporting icons, activists and entrepreneurs

But in Kerala, the enduring Malayali fantasy is still a girl dressed in a traditional white sari, damp hair loosely tied, eyes firmly on the ground. For the state's men, the twirlers of lush moustaches, who have been raised on the appeal of an unquestionable machismo, this woman is a convenient fantasy. She is the one who knows that she should demand nothing, never raise her voice or complain about things because she is raised to focus only on shielding the ugliness of her household away from the neighbours' ever-prying eyes. All insults about women in Kerala are entirely of a sexual nature. The good Kerala woman is supposed to live her life in anticipated avoidance of this. All of which brings me to one word — why?

Why can't women in Kerala break out of this? Why can't they take some risks, grab the cause of their own selves and demand more freedom? Why can't they take their education and experience and mould the culture to one that doesn't assume violence against them is purely a function of how much alcohol their men have drunk? And why can't they help each other in breaking these stereotypes? Why can't they marry later? And be worthy brides without carrying the weight of two kilos of gold on themselves? Why can't they have each other's backs instead of peeping from behind the window, sniggering about their neighbour's muffled brawl?

This is 2014, it doesn't take a lot to not behave like it's 1982. In fact, if you ask me, the most effective thing women in Kerala can do is head to the bar themselves. Make it a gender neutral, democratic location where everyone unwinds after a hard day's work. That in itself would keep most men out.

On paper, women in no other state have so much going for them



**Veena Venugopal** is editor BLink and author of *The Mother-in-Law*

@veenavenugopal

BAWDY LINE

# An equal music

In our household, in the domesticity of our newly acquired old gramophone, is an atavism



**A good old spin** The musical enigma that was the shiny black plate SHUTTERSTOCK

My seven-year-old son's first encounter with the mechanical being of the gramophone machine produced a response that was something of a cultural atavism. It was redolent of that keenly written chapter in *The Magic Mountain*, where Thomas Mann describes Hans Castorp's discovery of a German-made gramophone in the salon of the Berghof sanatorium: "He bent over the whirring, pulsating mechanism as over a spray of lilac, rapt in a cloud of sweet sound."

In a state of melded reverie and alertness, my son listened and his lips parted in a smile. What stood before him was a small mahogany cabinet with a detachable crank: the 80-year-old colonial HMV 113a Transportable — by any reckoning an object of great physical and tonal beauty. The last wind-up gramophone produced by HMV. I suppose the only manner in which it could have been considered transportable was on the back of some Gunga Din, who would convey it up the hill for a bit of Hill Station phonography in the Indian Summer.

The essence of the machine, if one may dare to define it from a seven-year-old child's perspective, was in the abstraction of music from the object whirring on the green fleece-covered turntable; the music a strange compound of granular recorded sound and the unrelieved scratchy whine of surface noise.

After just one practical demonstration Rudra learned the motions of producing music from it: to screw in the fine steel needle into its slot in the pickup head (with the aluminium diaphragm) that was attached to the tone arm — a pivoted hollow metal lever whose halves moved in the vertical and horizontal axis, respectively, to enable the needle to settle lightly on the record. Then to crank the handle that loaded the spring in the clockwork to set the platter twirling. Finally, to allow the needle to be in communion with vinyl at a 45° angle. Rudra could sense that it was the tone arm that conveyed the sound into the cabinetry, which

then issued it out of a concealed horn through a fine mesh in the latticework below. All moving parts. Analogue sound. No amplification. Nothing to be plugged in. Just the slight bother of the preparatory ritual. Like cigarette-rolling or coffee-making in the moka pot.

For Rudra, the form of the gramophone record, its thingness, was the puzzle. A shiny black plate that came out of its brown paper sleeve had music worth three minutes written on each side in an Archimedean spiral, in infinitesimal, tightly packed grooves, one hundredth to an inch, each finer than human hair. Under the magnifying glass, the grooves were what they seemed: unexciting furrows with humps and wiggles. Where was the music?

He solved the puzzle with his fingernail. On the turntable, with the record spinning, he placed his fingernail on the surface instead of the needle. In a barely audible mewling sort of way, the song played itself. Any fine thing running in those sinuosities became a stylus. Actually, the platter was what was running. At 78 rpm.

That was followed by *How to Make Your Own Gramophone* from YouTube, which was promptly pulled off using a pencil for a peg, a CD stack holder, a conical roll of paper and a sowing needle. By the end of it, Ella Fitzgerald was mewling *Dream a Little Dream of Me* out of the paper roll. It was Rudra's pinhole-camera moment. He had learnt how to make those black plastic records yield their music. Over the days, he found that the fidelity of his apparatus got better as he improved on the needle. In a book on gramophones, I showed him an advertisement (that had appeared in a local newspaper in Calcutta in 1911) that read as follows: 'If you wish to obtain a natural reproduction of a singer's voice or sound of a musical instrument on a Disc Talking Machine, you are strongly recommended to use 'Gauhar Jan' needles. By using these needles you will find

your phone to be a lifelike singer. Price: One rupee and eight annas for 1,000 needles.' Gauhar Jan was the Armenian heartthrob from Calcutta, who had become a thumri singing sensation. She was one of the first singers in India to be recorded by the pioneering sound-recorderist FW Gaisberg for the Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. In 1903, when her discs were released, she became the first person whose voice could be possessed as a thing by Indians. Her performances became material objects, something one could hold in their hands, which could be bought and sold. The success of Gauhar Jan's records not just transformed the way musicians made their living but shifted the principal context of musical performance from its long-established locus (salons, concert halls, public festivals) into the home. By 1910, the Indian market teemed with 75 recording companies with European and local labels wrangling with the Gramophone Company for a slice of the market. The Gramophone Company's earnings between 1910 and 1913 showed an average sale of almost half a million records and over 6,000 machines per year. They had ended up creating a market where the raw material came from. The shellac that formed the physical substance of records was sourced almost entirely from India. The music industry had become the most consummate form of capitalism. Imagine a division of Toyota as an oil and gas company marketing petroleum products.

Music as a thing was where I lost his interest. For a seven-year-old in these times, the MP3 has been assigned the rank of a thing. Music as an object of private, individualised consumption is losing its property as a commodity as it passes around outside the value economy. It can be reproduced at will, without the exchange of money. MP3 is the obverse form of the gramophone record; the anti-particle.

But both avail of the same caprice of the physiology of listening, which is this: the human ear and its sense of hearing discards most of the sounds that it hears. The MP3 works on a mathematical model that second guesses the process of human auditory perception. It pre-emptively discards data in the sound file that it expects will be discarded by the human ear anyway. What we get is a much smaller file, with 90 percent of the particulars taken out of it.

The old gramophone record, on the contrary, brings into play the human psycho-acoustic response. The ear acts as a sieve for all the wow and flutter, the background noise, the tonal inconsistencies to let in no more than an equal music.

In our household, in the domesticity of our newly acquired old gramophone, is the atavism. We are once more the bourgeois family that gathers around it after dinner to enjoy the music. In a way, it has returned something that we'd misplaced.

He solved the puzzle with his fingernail



**Ambarish Satwik** is a Delhi-based vascular surgeon and writer

# XOXO, Kerala

The Kiss of Love was foiled, but the truth is that liberal voices are louder than ever before in Conservatism's Own Country



**Near perfect** Away from the prying eyes of 'well-meaning' neighbours, a couple find solitude by the beach at Fort Kochi

VIPIN CHANDRAN

On November 2, Marine Drive in Kochi saw a large crowd of over 10,000. They fell roughly into three categories, out of which two were unfamiliar sights in Kerala: a group of couples, young and middle-aged, who had gathered to kiss in public in order to make a symbolic statement against moral policing; a hitherto unseen collaboration of diametrically opposite right-wing organisations marching to ensure the culture of the land is not tainted by the public display of affection; and the third group was perhaps the least unsurprising — people who came to watch people who came to kiss.

It is against such a backdrop, where a simple act of affection is still a source of voyeuristic pleasure to many, that Kiss of Love becomes a milestone for Kerala. Perhaps, I should clarify that it is not the event itself which deserves this accolade (although it saw encores in oth-

er cities like Delhi and Kolkata). While definitely the centrepiece of the stir, it suffered from poor organisation, which was expected given the constraints of the organisers, and was quickly smothered by the 'protective custody' of the police. The symbolic nature of the protest was lost on many, as evidenced by questions like "They want to kiss on the street today, what tomorrow?" But the public debate it managed to whip up on moral policing and personal liberty is its lasting legacy. In Kerala, there has never been a lack of provocative ideas, but for (a significant portion of) the general public to take a stand on either side, instead of being indifferent, signals an accelerating cultural shift.

There are many factors which contribute towards the increase in liberal voices in the state

— the post-2000s Malayalee exodus to major Indian cities for higher studies and employment is an important one. This is not to say that living in metros or education in elite institutions is a magic wand, which makes individuals more liberal. Those who moved to these cities at an impressionable age became more open to, or at least were exposed more to things that they were socially conditioned in Kerala to

consider scandalous — PDA, homosexuality, live-in relationships, women who drink and so on. Most of all, people began to appreciate the concept of personal space. Given that social media is ubiquitous and has increasingly replaced barber shops and tea stalls as a popular site for political and cultural debates in Kerala, non-resident Keralites effortlessly contribute to the zeitgeist in the state. Additionally,

They want to kiss on the street today, what tomorrow?

the people who returned to Kerala from the Indian metros and foreign countries — notably less-puritanical Gulf countries, such as Dubai and Bahrain — also added to the cosmopolitan texture of Malayalee society.

**Mob in the Net**

The internet has played a crucial part in enlightening us about more liberal as well as repressive lands, showing us where we stand on personal liberty. Before the internet, the average Malayalee relied on *Mathrubhumi Azhchappathippu* for weekly commentaries on world affairs. It has been discussed at length how cyberspace has amplified the less-palatable aspects of the Malayalee society — it did

she did not know who Sachin Tendulkar was. More importantly, the internet also quickened the shift towards progressive thought in the state. People who had a liberal worldview found out there were several others like them, and had the chance to read and share the thoughts of people who articulate better than them. The power of social media in creating mass movements and sustaining them on the ground can't be understated. The Kiss of Love campaign was planned by a single Facebook community, Free Thinkers, and popularised almost exclusively via Facebook and Twitter.

**Queering the pitch**

Another heartening sign of social progress in

ty when dealing with deep-seated taboos and should try to shape societal reaction rather than mirror it. But the filmmakers' decision to include unambiguously homosexual characters was still commendable considering how mainstream Malayalam cinema has shied away from it for so long. In 1986, when Padmarajan made *Deshatanakkili Karayarilla*, a movie with strong lesbian undertones, the L-word was not mentioned in it even once, which was a testament to how taboo the subject was at the time.

The spread of liberal values that threaten the status quo is often derisively dismissed using the catch-all term 'New Generation culture', even though the attitude towards cultural liberalisation cannot be strictly demarcated along generational lines. It is true that broadly the younger generation are impacted adversely by the factors discussed — influence of life outside Kerala and the internet. But the 'New Generation' here does not literally refer to the newer generation, and instead comes from the term 'New Generation Cinema' used in Kerala to describe a fresh wave of movies that broke away from formulaic stories and used new narrative techniques to depict predominantly urban themes. These movies captured the cosmopolitan nature of the modern Malayalee and changed the way women were depicted on screen by overturning at least the more obvious sexist tropes.

**She's different on screen**

Women who drink, smoke and flirt are not necessarily alien to Malayalam cinema, but they were mostly established as the 'other' — the brat brought up abroad; or the vamp who can barely speak Malayalam. The new movies boldly depicted the urban Malayalee woman as she is — not bothering to hide the bits the Malayalee public didn't care to see in their women — sometimes for the sheer shock value. This doesn't mean that they were all strong female characters who held their own against the male characters; a few female-oriented movies did stand out, such as *22 Female Kottayam*, but if I were to administer the Bechdel test on all these movies, I would expect very few to come out looking good. But that is a different fight — the point is that the New Generation movies did manage to portray the changing social and cultural fabric of Kerala.

I thought about Kerala and the Kiss of Love when I watched a clip of comedian Aziz Ansari ranting about people who opposed LGBT rights in the US: "At this point, why is anyone against gay marriage? These are the same people that didn't want women to vote, that didn't want black guys to play football." I can't quote the rest because it is "unsuitable for our culture", but you can look it up online. As a nation where Sec 377 is still in effect, we have a long way to go before Ansari's words become relevant to us. But, to transplant his question to Kerala, just take a look at the people who think a couple kissing in public will tarnish our culture — these are the same people who opposed the right of lower-caste women to cover their breasts, the rights of dalits to enter temples. These are the same people who oppose the right of homosexuals to lead normal lives. These are the same people who post lewd comments on the photos of the Kiss Of Love organiser Resmi R Nair, demanding to know the colour of her underwear and posting diatribes on their own walls against her immoral kisses ruining our sacred culture. The bottom line is: when a culturally progressive change is here, it is here to stay. Time will only reinforce it. Anyone who opposes it is on the losing side, even if they are the majority now.

**ABDUL RAOUF** is a software engineer currently based in Washington DC



**Make love, not war**  
PDA at the Kiss of Love campaign in Kochi

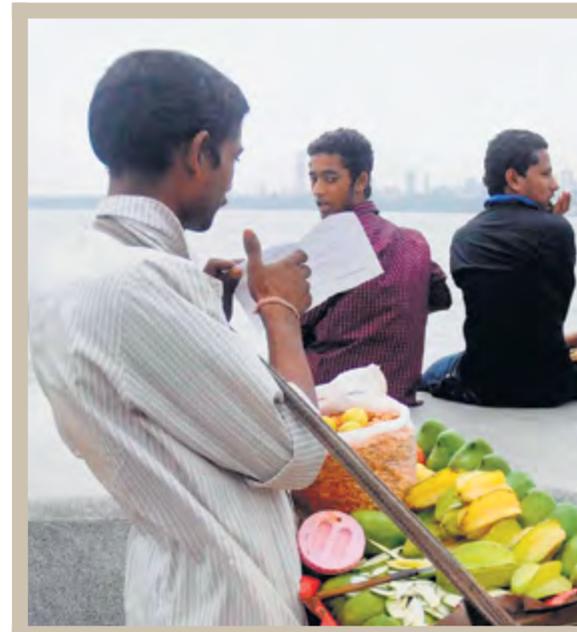
definitely provide a new outlet for the repressed tendencies of the Malayalee male, with the added dimension of mob mentality.

Safe in the relative anonymity of the internet, Malayalees are unconcerned by how they will be perceived outside the state. Occasionally, this has given rise to hilarious stories like when actor Mohanlal's website was hacked by a Pakistani group, which mistook a page describing his connection to the Territorial Army as an Indian Army-related page. In retaliation, his fans hacked multiple Pakistani sites, including the website of Pakistan Electric Power Company (PEPCO). The Malayalee hackers chose to demonstrate their dismissive contempt for their Pakistani counterparts by displaying on every hacked page one of the actor's popular dialogues: "Nee po, mone dinesha (*Get lost, dear Dinesh*)". Similarly, tennis star Maria Sharapova's page was inundated with Malayalam comments after she revealed

the state is the measure of acceptance achieved by the LGBT community. Kerala hosted its fifth LGBT pride march in July this year, organised by the Queer Pride Keralam Group, consisting mainly of Queerala (a support group for the LGBT community) and Sahayathrika (a human rights organisation for lesbian and bisexual women in Kerala). These organisations hold workshops all over the state to increase awareness about homosexuality. The taboo of not conforming to societal sexual norms is still strong, but it's a welcome change that the rights of the LGBT community are popping up in mainstream conversations more than ever. Recent mainstream Malayalam movies like *Rithu* and *Mumbai Police* had pivotal characters who are gay. They were not without flaws — the portrayal of the homosexual characters and the reactions to their sexual preference are perhaps too stereotypical. I believe that movies have a social responsibili-



**Spicy bites** A street vendor peddles *chana jor garam*, a popular snack made of gram, spices and raw mango powder, near the Gateway of India



**By the seaside** A peddler woos prospective customers at Marine Drive



**Spud nick** A Mumbaikar has her fill of *vada pav* at Juhu beach



**Rice time** Veg pulao for office-goers near Churchgate



**Anytime food** A stack of local *pav* to mop up the *bhaji* with



**Meat of the matter** Kebabs aplenty at Mohammed Ali Road



# Vada pav and cutting chai

The flavour of the streets of Mumbai



**Naturally sweet** Watermelon and pineapple pyramids at a *khau gali* near Marine Drive

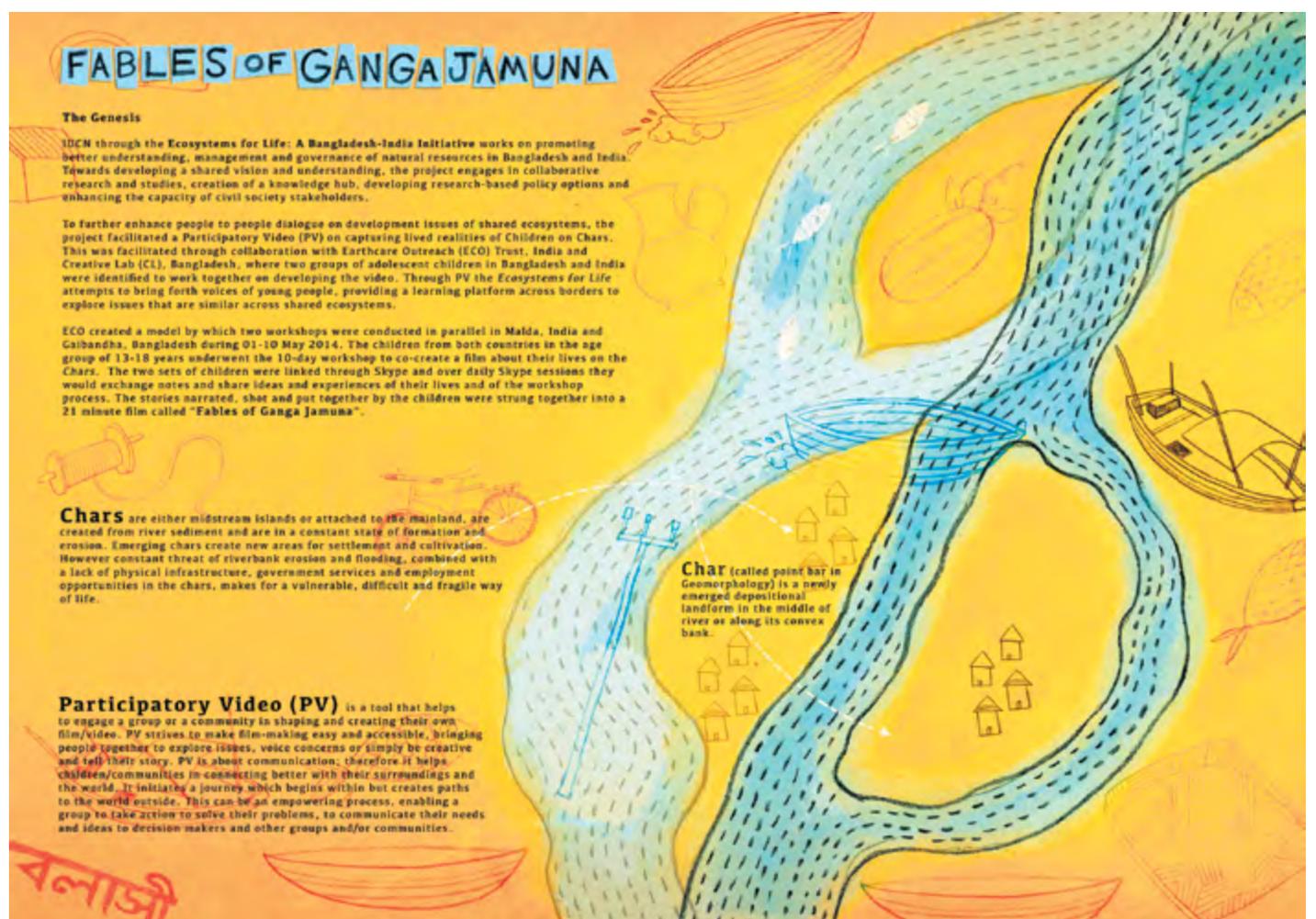


Soon Mumbai will taste its first (beef-free) Burger King Whopper. Like others that went before it, the international quick service restaurant chain will feed the city's curiosity, and perhaps succeed in doing brisk business. But as anyone who has lived in the city, or had a *vada pav* or three on its streets will tell you, Mumbai – despite its flirtations with global favourites – will never lose its local flavour. Grilled corn-on-the-cob in season, *bhel* all year round, *pani puri* by the dozens and kebabs that send smoke signals to hungry customers at sundown will continue to rule the maximum city.

Along its beaches like Girgaum Chowpatty and Juhu, or at the *khau galis* – lanes in different parts of the city lined with food stalls of every kind – lovers and friends, families and weary office-goers will tuck into plates of cheap, filling familiarity. Elsewhere, the sound of laughter and the wafting smells of Mughlai food will fill Mohammed Ali Road long after the streetlights flicker to life. At eateries like Noor Mohammadi, Hindusthan Hotel and Sarvi Seekh Kebab, it will be business as usual as regular patrons and tourists queue up for yet another helping of *biryani*, rounding off the meal with *phirmi* and fruit salad. Come Ramzan, the atmosphere will be even more electric... All you need to savour the city's many delights is a cast-iron stomach.

PAUL NORONHA

**Common thread** The chars are depicted on the film's CD cover using *kantha* stitch, also found in both India and Bangladesh



# Shared struggles

A short film made by children living on river bars, or *chars*, on both sides of the Indo-Bangladesh border tells the story of their precarious existence

Shohail, Firoza, Ruma and Mizanur of Gaibandha district in Bangladesh and Tapan, Pinky, Naseem and Rocky of Malda district in West Bengal have several things in common, including their language and heritage. The teenagers on both sides of the border are equally victims of shifting rivers and *chars* — the landmass that forms in the middle of a river or along its convex banks. Known as river point bar in geomorphology, a *char* is created or eroded as the river changes course. As newly formed *chars* offer new areas for settlement and cultivation, the erosion and flooding of existing *chars* lead to the displacement and devastation of multitudes along the banks.

Children living on *chars* in both countries have produced a short film, *Fables of Ganga Jamuna*, with the help of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), that tells the story of their precarious existence as seen through their young eyes.

What is today's *Pepulia char* in the Jamuna river in Gaibandha district of Bangladesh was once the location of a thriving river-port, Fulchory Ghat, connected by a railway network. Over the years, the river receded and took with it the livelihood of a large number of people. Without the river, there is no longer a Fulchory ghat or any of the river services ferrying people and cargo. One can see boats rotting on a sandy surface that was once the bank of a mighty river; the railway station has been abandoned, and the once-thriving eating places along the river bank have disappeared.

Firoza narrates the travails of life in Gobindi

*char* in Bangladesh. The receding Jamuna has snatched away many joys of her life: diving into the flowing waters any time of the day, the smell of fertile land, the swaying of golden-yellow corn, and the colours of fairs and festivals after the harvest is done. "The absence of water has pushed us to the brink," she says.

Tapan's family watched helplessly as their home and those of others on Purba Paranpur *char* in Malda district, West Bengal, were sucked into the river by erosion. They shifted to Hamidpur *char*, surrounded by rivers on all sides, only to face more challenges, both man-made and natural.

Some *chars* are home to lakhs of people but bereft of basic amenities. Malda *char*, for instance, is all of 390sqkm and inhabited by an estimated two lakh, who have no access to clean drinking water, roads, or medical or basic educational facilities allegedly due to "political reasons".

Paradoxically, however, even where help is at hand, life on the *chars* remains dangerously unpredictable. Thanks to the Jharkhand government, the people living on Jharkhand *char* in the Ganga river, in West Bengal today, have roads, *pucca* houses, banks, schools and a bridge over the Bahudubi river. Yet they keep their fingers crossed. A flood or two, and an erosion can wash away all of it.

The Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna are the largest among the 56 river systems shared by India and Bangladesh. Together these three

major rivers drain an area of about 1.75 million sqkm and directly impact the livelihood of more than 600 million people. Cross-border cooperation is, therefore, imperative to meet the growing water needs of the region. IUCN's four-year project Ecosystems for Life focuses on several critical themes, including food security, water productivity, poverty, climate change, trans-boundary inland navigation, environmental security and biodiversity conservation. Each of them is intricately linked to water management both at the national and trans-boundary levels.

The 20-minute film *Fables of Ganga Jamuna* was recently screened for the first time in Kolkata, leaving the select audience impressed. It is difficult to believe that the children of the *chars* in both countries who shot the film were handling video cameras for the first time in their lives. Prior to shooting, they attended workshops held simultaneously in Malda and Gaibandha. The children used Skype to exchange notes across the border and share their experiences of living in *chars*.

Postscript: A few of the children involved in the film's making were present at the screening to share their experience. All of them happened to be from the *chars* in West Bengal. Sadly, their counterparts in Bangladesh could not be reached, even through Skype. The floods have displaced them again.

Children of the chars who shot the film were handling video cameras for the first time in their lives

SANTANU SANYAL is a Kolkata-based writer

# No sensawunda at all

With a stream of arresting visuals and a preposterous plot, Christopher Nolan's ambitious *Interstellar* goes only as far as two dimensions

The Golden Age of science fiction happens at the age of 14. It's the best time of your life to read SF. The arteries of the brain haven't hardened yet, and you are willing to have your mind blown. Each book you read promises, nay, guarantees this. Of the millions of fans who go through this ontogenetic development, there are a few who dare to ask themselves – can I write too?

Now, imagine our hypothetical 14-year-old dashes off a script. Hollywood throws a couple of hundred million dollars at it, and gets the buzziest director in the world to direct it. The result would be something like Christopher Nolan's new film *Interstellar*. The reach of the ideas contained within is well beyond the grasp of adolescent enthusiasm. "We must confront the reality of interstellar travel," intones Michael Caine's character gravely. But did the Nolans (the script is by brother Jonathan) confront the reality of making a genuine science fiction film?

*Interstellar* posits a world where crops are failing and immense dust storms scour the surface. Science and exploration are frowned upon. The Earth is dying and a few brave astronauts are sent on a journey to find a planet

where humanity can start afresh. A scientist played by Michael Caine concocts a plan to send humans to another galaxy.

How do you get there? NASA, which has now turned feral, has discovered a wormhole near Saturn, placed there by unknown entities. A wormhole is an artefact in space-time that enables one to traverse unimaginable distances, a kind of cosmic shortcut. A host of promising planets have been found on the other side of this escape hatch, orbiting a colossal black hole called Gargantua.

At the core of the plot is an effect called gravitational-time dilation. A consequence of the theory of relativity, it predicates that gravity can affect the flow of time. There are many masterpieces that use this concept; my favourite is Joe Halde- man's *The Forever War*, where soldiers fighting an alien foe are permanently estranged from the Earth and from each other thanks to the inexorable logic of this relativistic mechanism.

The world's first known story using this effect, however, is found in the Mahabharata, in the legend of King Kakudmi and his daughter Revati. Instead of searching for habitable worlds, they search for something even more precious, a suitable husband. Revati is all kinds of awesome and there are so many suitors that the king decides to meet Lord Brahma and get His take on who to pick.

When the appointment happens, the Creator has a good laugh and tells them that time runs far slower in His plane of existence.

He helpfully adds, "Those upon whom you may have already decided are now gone, and so are their sons, grandsons and other descendants. You cannot even hear about their names. You must therefore bestow this virgin gem upon some other husband, for you are now alone, and your friends, your ministers, servants, wives, kinsmen, armies, and treasures, have long since been swept away by the hand of Time".

The poignancy of these words is the emotional force that moves *Interstellar*. So is it any good? Alas, not. There are more plot holes than wormholes in this clunky effort. As long as there are shots of spaceships

coasting past Saturn, sling-shooting around black holes, or haunting desolation of alien vistas, all accompanied by Hans Zimmer's majestic score, it is utterly beautiful.

What causes it to lose orbit and plummet back to earth is an age-old flaw, a systemic weakness in Hollywood. Science fiction is the literature of the imagination. The foundation of the reading experience, which is absolutely unique and essential to the genre, is the sense of wonder – or 'sensawunda' as fans dub it. An emotional pitch that can be likened to a kind of revelation, that sudden shift in perspective leading to heightened awareness. When compared in this light, *Interstellar* can be defined as existing in two dimensions – one as a

stream of arresting visuals evoking this feeling, and the other, a preposterously banal plot that just doesn't grapple with the images that move and breathe. And when a character says, "Love is the one thing that transcends time and space" – in the sense of an actual physical force, you know that this rocket has exploded on the launch pad.

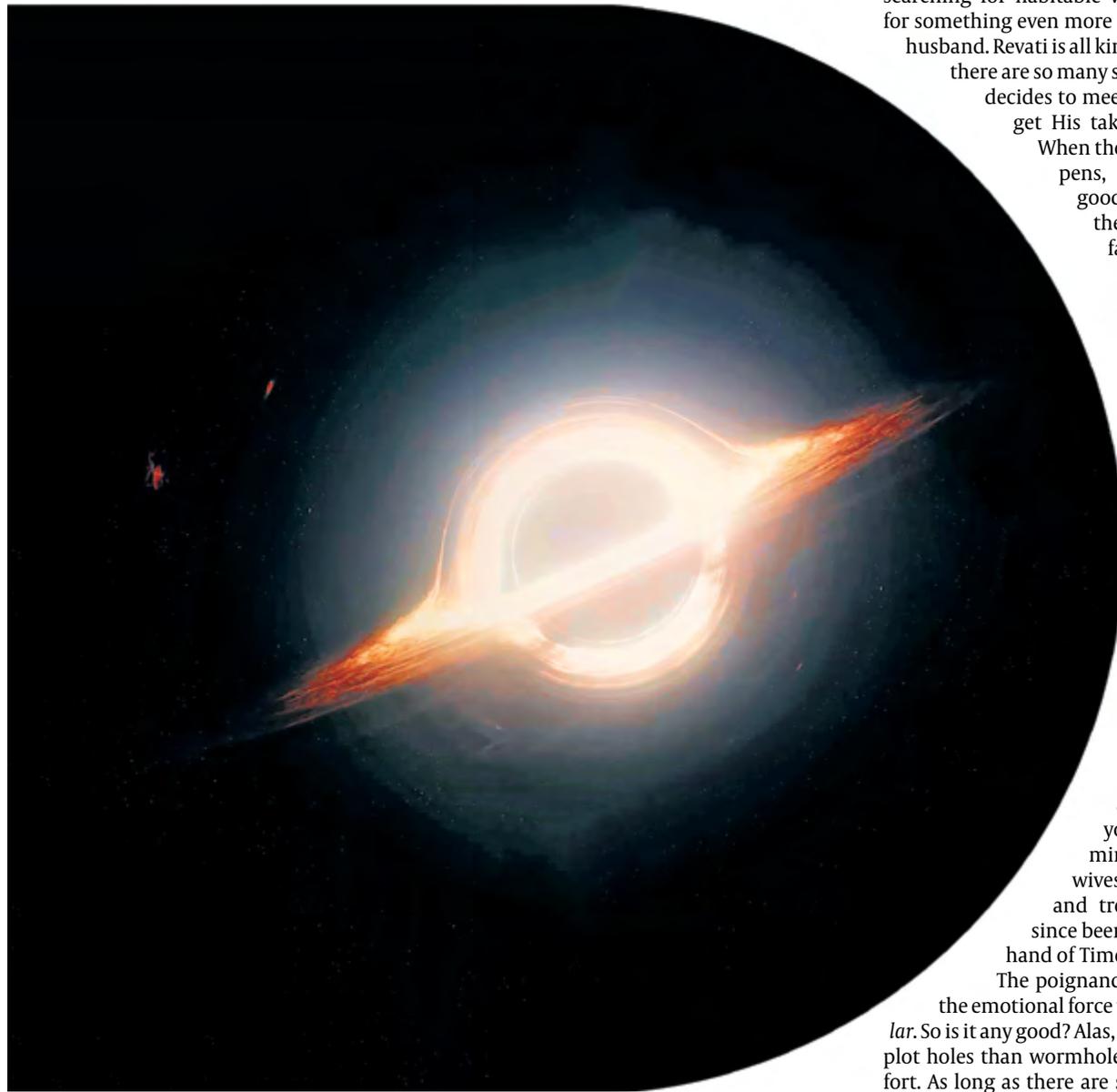
One of the building blocks of SF is the "What if?" question, which forces taking their ideas all the way to their logical conclusion. For example, there is an offhand mention of a 'Plan B', which involves sending thousands of fertilised embryos to the new planets! That sounded far more intriguing than anything that unfolds on screen. Still in some respects, *Interstellar* certainly has the architectural elements of SF. It is littered with AYKB or "As you know, Bob" dialogues, which are expository info-dumps aimed at the audience disguised as conversation between characters.

The science-fictional aspect of the film is unintentional. Curiously, "mankind's future" here is held to be a white, American future. The Stars and Stripes are everywhere, emblazoned on spaceships, fluttering on alien planets, draped in offices. At a time when the Chinese, Europeans and Indians are forging ahead in space exploration, when the Russians still have a robust capability, to advance a future driven by jut-jawed Anglo-Saxons is rather daring. (There is even a backstory to explain this boldness: At some point India and the Asians went to war with the US, and lost. However, our drones still loiter aimlessly in their airspace.)

The most fascinating aspect of the film is buried in the making of it. Nolan hired black hole expert Kip Thorne to help out. Existing VFX software is not built to handle the incredibly complex movements of light around a black hole. Thorne wrote dense formulae on how light would behave, and these were fed into custom-built algorithms to generate the incredible. When the images were generated, Thorne realised that existing theories on how black holes would look like had to be revised – and Science happened, as it were. A black hole is formed when a giant gas-filled star collapses under its own weight. Much like *Interstellar*.

JAIDEEP UNUDURTI writes on popular culture, chess and cinema

**Into the abyss**  
Supposedly the most accurate depiction of the black hole, as seen in *Interstellar*





# Disrupting the canon

*Pratilipi*, an online magazine from Bikaner where Norwegian and Urdu writers stand side by side, confounds the neat categories of the Indian literary world

There are subversive, wayward words that often keep up their workaday face and dodge attention. I caught one at the recent festival of Indian languages, Samanvay, at the India Habitat Centre (IHC) in Delhi. *Pratilipi*, which means a copy, commonly a photocopy, is a routine word in the daily Hindi world of the government, commerce and education. But on the masthead of a literary magazine, it comes alive in its many disruptive hues.

*Pratilipi* is a unique bilingual online literary magazine, which is also available in print on demand. Its founder and editor, Giriraj Kiradoo, is a creative director of Samanvay, which the IHC organises every year. Samanvay looks like an offline twin of *Pratilipi* since both promote Indian languages and literatures.

The juxtaposing of Hindi and English on the masthead of the *Pratilipi* website reminds me of a notorious book by a rogue philosopher. Jacques Derrida wrote an anti-book, *Glas*, which runs in two parallel columns of text in different type. The left column is on German philosopher Hegel and the right on the writings of French kleptomaniac playwright and novelist Jean Genet. Between these columns is a medley of comments, quotations and other marginalia. By juxtaposing literature and philosophy, Derrida tries to expose each to the other's assumptions and possibilities. More than a book, it is a confounding collage of interplaying ideas and impressions.

*Pratilipi* isn't as crazy as *Glas* and has none of its frustrating complexity. It's an accessible magazine true to its title. It provides a lot of translation in several directions: from Norwegian into Hindi and Assamese into English, for instance. Its latest issue, titled *Freedom*, features more than 50 writers in about a dozen languages. But the magazine does share the book's disruptive zeal. While it seems to give

you a transcript of the maddening variety of Indian literatures, it also gives a full play to other meanings hidden in the word: representation and duplication. As it places side by side various national and international literatures, they gaze at one another and raise uncomfortable questions. Is fiction in Hindi or any other regional language a truer copy of Indian reality than fiction in English? Is literature a transcript of the society and class in which it emerges or can it transcend its context? Can Hindi provide a truer copy of Oriya poetry than English? Is Scandinavian literature in Hindi as much a transcript of colonial politics as the British literature we read in classrooms? As *Pratilipi* spreads itself across languages, cultures and politics, it confounds readers who are used to neat categories.

The variety of *Pratilipi* isn't merely a product of editorial inventiveness; the magazine was birthed in hybridity. Kiradoo publishes it from Bikaner in Rajasthan, not the best location for a national literary arbiter. He is a PhD in English literature, writes prose, poetry and fiction in Hindi, and has no true love for his Rajasthani origins. "Six years ago, I was fed up with Hindi literary journals, which were either Left or Right. The formalist school was anti-Left and evaded contemporary issues. The problem with the Left was a focus on issues and very little emphasis on literariness. We lived in the long shadow of cold war," he says. As the internet blurred boundaries and demolished borders, they could dream of publishing a literary magazine they wanted to read. With his friend Rahul Soni, who shared his hybridity, and designer Shiv Kumar Gandhi, Kiradoo set up the online magazine and

named it *Pratilipi*, indicating the translated lives we live in the age of the internet, which brings together diverse people and cultures from around the world. "We wanted to disrupt the centre-periphery binary in the literary world and do away with the hierarchy of languages and writers. We even publish writers in alphabetical order," he says.

*Pratilipi* is a long way off from the times when it seemed English and regional languages were two worlds that could never meet. English writers came from upper middle-class urban backgrounds, while regional writers lived in small towns. Big writers like Salman Rushdie could get away by declaring that Indian writing in English was far more valuable than all that has been written in regional languages. *Pratilipi* is at the front of a new literary movement that mixes the metropolitan with the mofussil and 'contaminates' the canon. But Kiradoo says they aren't trying to bridge any divides. "We just disrupt the old order. We bring writing from different re-

gions, languages and cultures together and let these writings look at each other the way they want," he says. In *Pratilipi*, English and Hindi are not necessarily adversaries; each can find in the other its own *pratilipi*.

Kiradoo can't write fluently in English though he has been an English lecturer. He says creative writing comes to him only in Hindi. He lives a life in constant translation, which shows in his magazine: only in *Pratilipi* can you find both the reclusive Urdu writer Naiyer Masud and Norwegian writer Ingrid Storholmen side by side.

We wanted to disrupt the centre-periphery binary in the literary world and do away with the hierarchy of languages and writers



**Snap to attention** Should we use moving images to promote the printed word?  
SHUTTERSTOCK/GUY SHAPIRA

PAPERWALLAH

# Advertising our wares



JANICE PARIAT

**Book trailers — do they remove the element of the imaginative process, cheapen the medium or make you want to pick up the book?**

Lately, I have been thinking about book trailers.

You may roll your eyes, and mutter, Jonathan Franzen-style, about your profound discomfort with having to use moving images to promote the printed word. “To me, the point of a novel is to take you to a still place,” he says in the *Freedom* promo video. “The world of books is the quiet alternative — an ever more desperately needed alternative.” (Who else would make a book trailer about being reluctant to make a book trailer?) You may nod in commiseration — yes, it’s come to this, the publishing industry falling in forlorn compliance with the laws of a YouTube world. Yet, as we all agree, the job of publishers is placing books in people’s hands. And as Lorin Stein, editor of *The Paris Review*, says, “We’ve been advertising our wares in silly ways since putting a dirty picture on the cover of a Faulkner book.” True. In the early 20th century, printed ads were all the rage. From the downright inappropriate — a reprint of Kipling’s *Kim* prompted one that termed India an “Orient treasure-trove” — to the sweetly earnest — a 1926 newspaper clipping for *The Sun* *Also Rises* claimed “that with this book Mr Hemingway’s sun will also rise.”

It seems only natural that book promotion (like everything else) would move into digital

space. As Franzen grudgingly admits, in the same breath he uses to state his “profound discomfort,” it “makes eminently good sense to be recording little videos like this.” Of course, he wouldn’t be happy to know that this has been going on as far back as 1986. A video for *Wildwood*, a novel by ‘Southern Gothic’ writer John Farris may just be the first ever made, complete with terrifically awful CGI, gigantic shoulder pads, and electrocuted hairstyles. (One must watch it, if for nothing else, the spectacle of a dainty slippered foot transforming into a tiger paw.)

Yet perhaps it might be more customary to start with the question: ‘what is a book trailer?’ As self-explanatory as that might sound, a quick Google search will tell you that there seem to be no designated ‘standards’ for book promos. Take length, for example. Videos may range from 30-second quickies, like Irvine Welsh’s *Skagboys* featuring a dancing skeletal marionette, to lengthy documentary-style projects, such as Naomi Klein’s trailer for *Shock Doctrine*. Nothing like movie trailers, where you can hold certain predictable expectations that are usually met. While book trail-

A quick Google search will tell you that there seems to be no designated ‘standards’ for book promos

ers may escape dogmatic definitions, the worst usually spring from an overlap between the two genres. Perfectly decent efforts have been ruined by ‘Voice of God’ voiceovers, while four-minute epic dramas try to sell you the plot. TC Boyle’s *The Women*, for example. It’s alleged that some book trailers inherently remove the element of the imaginative process and potentially cheapen the medium by suggesting a sort of inadequacy. This is Exhibit A.

The other category of book trailers, one that Rachel Arons, author of *The Awkward Art of Book Trailers* for *The New Yorker*, seems to favour, is the kind in which the author embarks on a postmodernist metaphysical pitch. The kind in which they oh-so-cleverly insert themselves in the trailer. Either in an apparently hilarious reversal of roles (author John Wray interviews actor Zach Galifianakis, who is portraying — wait for it — author John Wray) or they hatch heinously elaborate plots to make what I call the ‘non book trailer’. BJ Novak’s *One More Thing*, for example, set up as a faux French movie, or actor Aasif Mandvi ‘rallying’ his mates to be in his promo video. This last also features another (American?) book trailer trend — the ‘oh, look at my many celebrity friends’ promos. You might argue that Mandvi’s involvement in showbiz justifies his star-studded soirée. Yet there’s Russian-American satirist Gary Shteyngart, who Arons calls “the leading book-trailer auteur of our time”. His mini-movies parody the absurdities and humiliations of authorly self-promotion (yes, funny), but with the help of... James Franco, Rashida Jones, Jeffrey Eugenides, Mary Gaitskill, Alex Karpovsky, and even Jonathan Franzen. Who could possibly compete with promos like that? Especially if all you have at your disposal is stock footage, bad sound effects, and text-presentation flourishes reminiscent of PowerPoint.

One can’t help but feel that while these visual forays make for highly entertaining after-lunch distraction, something ultimately has been lost: the book itself. I find that I’m drawn to book trailers that focus on text, interplaying that with fittingly captivating imagery. Ones that shun the awful Voice of God in favour of an author’s own voice

reading their own work. Excerpts from Zadie Smith’s *NW*, for example, populate stills of bustling Camden Town. *Blackbirds* and *Mockingbird* by Chuck Wendig arranges words at creative angles to accentuate the writing’s cadence. My absolute favourite, though, would be the Italian Einaudi’s trailer for Murakami’s *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. Sparse line

drawings melt and merge, accompanied by a measured voiceover and excellent use of sound. It made me want to read the book even though I haven’t picked up a Murakami in years. That, surely, is a book trailer’s simplest, highest accolade.

JANICE PARIAT is the author of *Seahorse*  
@janicepariat

# In proximity

Compared to Sarah Waters' previous breathless novels, this one offers quieter introspection



SHUTTERSTOCK



**The Paying Guests**  
Sarah Waters  
Virago  
Fiction  
₹599

I came upon the work of Sarah Waters quite accidentally. I was at the Delhi Book Fair and had resolved to only buy authors I hadn't read or heard of. Reading the pile over the next few weeks, I realised as far as making book choices go, buying one based on the cover image and the flap synopsis was likely to end more often than not in disappointment. And so, when I picked up Waters' *Night Watch*, it wasn't with much hope, but merely a dogged determination to finish. The book starts with Kay – wearing military clothes and sporting her short hair, stepping out into a 'limp day'. "Don't you know the war's over?" men ask her jeeringly. And within two pages you are sucked into the curious life of overt and covert lesbians in post-war England. It was a shockingly good book. With a discovery like that, there is only one thing a reader can do, obsessively buy all the works of the author. *Night Watch*, I realised, was Waters' fourth novel, there were three before set in Victorian England and filled with layered protagonists who mostly loved other women. My favourite though is *Fingersmith*, a book so well plotted that bang in the middle of it, you realise with a gasp that you've been had and you have to re-read from the beginning.

All of which is to say that I'd been waiting all year to get my hands on Waters' sixth and latest, *The Paying Guests*. Set in London in the 1920s, the book is a tight narrative of the merging of class and sexual mores. Frances, the young protagonist lives with her mother in their grand house in Camberwell. Her father and brothers died in the war, and times are so tough that not only does Frances do all the housework herself, they are even forced to rent out a portion of the house. The book starts on the day the tenants Leonard Barber and his beautiful wife,

Lilian, move in.

They are all in equal measure horrified by the proximity with which they have to live their lives and peculiarly fascinated by one another. Frances lies in her room at the end of long days spent cleaning and scrubbing, smoking her cigarette in secret and listening to the sounds of the Barbers chatting, eating their dinner and going down to the lavatory. Being a feminist (who had once thrown a shoe at a police officer) and a lesbian, Frances is curious and critical of the Barbers' marriage. And this being a Sarah Waters novel, it is only a question of time before she and Lilian manage to fall in love with each other.

Waters flawlessly describes the tribulations and conflicts of being in an "unnatural relationship" at that time through Frances' own confusions. And while her earlier narratives, like her heroines, have breathlessly raced through edge-of-the-seat plotlines, *The Paying Guests* is a work of much quieter introspection. In fact, it takes about 200 pages for Frances and Lilian to just kiss! The rest of the plot is hard to describe without giving much away. So let's just say things happen, some of which eventually lead to a courtroom even.

Waters is a master of writing about a certain kind of England and effortlessly paints pictures in a perfect sepia tone in your head. Yet, I found myself a bit weary of both Frances and Lilian by the end of the book. As a Sarah Waters fan girl, I see in this book a maturing of an author, a toning down of pace and drama, which makes me curious about what she'll dish out next.

But if you haven't read the author before, I'd say start with another book. *Fingersmith*, in fact, if you have a healthy heart.

VEENA VENUGOPAL

ELSEWHERE



## Hitch a ride?

At times, the Universe does listen to our pleas

Friday morning. I had booked a cab for 6:30am but it wasn't there when I stepped out. I called the cab company. "He's on his way," said the lady at other end. The seconds ticked by. Finally, I saw an Orange Cab draw up. But when I walked towards it, the driver shook his head regretfully. "I have a passenger," he said, indicating the woman in the passenger seat. She was looking straight ahead, with a this-is-SO-not-my-problem expression on her face. Apparently they had stopped in the parking lot of my building in order to get a coffee from Dunkin' Donuts.

I needed to be at the Marriott Hotel at 6:55am in order to board the shuttle service to the airport in Providence. I had been invited to attend the annual South Asia Conference as a visiting playwright. It was now 6:40am, the airport was one hour away and check-in was at 9:30am. If I missed the shuttle, which was operated by the same company as the cabs, my only other option was a bus. It would get me to the airport just on time but only if there was no traffic along the way.

I went up to the Orange Cab driver. He and his passenger were sipping their coffee in a leisurely manner. I said, "Umm ... any chance you could drop me off at the Marriott?" It was

literally just down the road from where we were. The driver shook his head once more, though he did call up the cab company. According to the dispatcher, my driver had arrived on time but pushed off because he didn't see me waiting in the driveway.

I stepped back, feeling defeated. My best option now would be to walk to the bus terminal because I had surely missed the shuttle. I had only a small backpack as luggage but it was drizzling slightly and I didn't want to start the day on a downbeat. Just then, a voice spoke to me: the lady in the car parked next to the cab had leaned out of her window. "Aww, honey," she said. "You want a ride to the Marriott? Hop in!" She had a few minutes to spare, she said, and it wasn't very far out of her way. So I got in.

Thanks to this kind stranger, I arrived at the Marriott in time to board the shuttle. I was the only passenger and chatted with the friendly driver all the way to the airport, caught my flight and spent two wonderful days in Madison. I had some great conversations, attended a lively reading of my play *Harvest* and enjoyed my luxurious room at the Madison Concourse Hotel. On the return journey, I boarded the Orange shuttle once more from the airport. One of the other passengers was a silver-haired businesswoman with a laughing twinkle in her eyes. We soon began talking like long-lost friends and shared a cab when we got down from at the shuttle's terminal stop. I got home feeling warm and happy, cherished by the Universe.

MANJULA PADMANABHAN author and artist, tells us tales of her parallel life in Elsewhere, US, in this fortnightly series [marginalien.blogspot.in](http://marginalien.blogspot.in)



SHUTTERSTOCK

# An easy patch

A few (green) thumb rules to plant and watch your kitchen 'garden' grow this season

**D**on't let the word 'garden' discourage you. A few plants on a sunny windowsill, a foot-wide bed of soil around your compound, or even a row of pots on a waterproofed terrace could suffice. The important thing is to start small with easy-to-grow plants.

## THUMB RULES

Soil used to grow any vegetable should be well aerated, neither too loose nor too compact. And the depth of the soil needs to be more than one foot. The soil should retain moisture – for example, a mix of red soil, clay, small pebbles, vermicompost, and once the seed has germinated, dried leaves to cover the top layer, works well.

It is worthwhile to do a germination test before sowing – soak seeds in water for four hours, discard floating seeds (these won't germinate) and sow the others. The best time to sow is when there is at least three hours of strong sunlight left; so around 9-10am in most

places across India would be ideal.

You can start with either seed or sapling. For newbie gardeners, saplings cut down on the waiting time and the chances of the seed not germinating or getting affected by pests in the early stages. To avoid disappointment, you could buy a few saplings from a nursery first.



## HERBS

I started my kitchen garden experiments with a few herbs in my tiny Mumbai apartment balcony. The joy of garnishing a dish of pasta with a freshly plucked leaf of Italian basil is unparalleled. Be it basil, rosemary, thyme or mint. And a little goes a long way, as they are most flavourful when they go straight from pot to plate. Also, unless you are making a pesto – in which case you'll need lots of basil –

most dishes call for just a few leaves, for which you don't need to buy a big expensive bunch from the supermarket.

Don't ignore the Indian favourite, tulsi or holy basil. It is excellent in teas to prevent or soothe a bad throat. Mint grows easily from sprigs that you have bought from the market. It covers the ground very quickly, so it is best grown in pots. Curry leaves, a south Indian favourite, is best planted in the soil as the roots run deep.

When you buy lemongrass from a supermarket, choose one with the root end intact. After you use up the leaves, keep the root immersed in a jar of water for a week. Once new rootlets develop, this can be sown in soil and soon lemongrass leaves will sprout. These can be used in Thai curries and also to flavour masala chai.



## CHILLIES

While there are many different varieties of chillies, kandhari is one that grows well in winters. One of my plants produced nearly 3-4kg in season. Since they couldn't all be used at once, I allowed them to ripen, dried them in the sun, and now I use them in daily cooking. Kandhari can be grown in pots, but the yield will be more when grown directly in soil.



## OTHER GREENS

Sow garlic cloves in soil and in a few days you'll find green garlic shoots, which can be snipped and used in chutneys and curries. Salad greens like lettuce and rocket also grow well in shallow trays. Seeds are available in most online gardening stores such [annadana-india.org](http://annadana-india.org), [florafields.com](http://florafields.com), [kraftseeds.com](http://kraftseeds.com) and [bigbasket.com/pc/household/gardening-needs](http://bigbasket.com/pc/household/gardening-needs).



## ROOT VEGETABLES

Red radish is a delight to grow as it is ready to harvest in 30 days. Don't sow too many at a time, as you can't eat all of them together. Also, don't sow the seed deeper than 1-2cm.

To grow turmeric and ginger, bury a piece in the compost pot, sprinkle water every day and after a few days bury it in soil along with some of the compost. This has a better success rate. Turmeric leaves lend a delicate aroma to foods wrapped and steamed in them. They are also tied around the neck of a pot of pongal, so the perfect time to plant them is before the onset of winter.

For inspiration, you can sign up with Facebook groups such as Grow Your Own Veggies and Organic Terrace Gardening, which have many enthusiastic kitchen gardeners with ready advice, suggestions and support.

And when you can, attend local farmers' markets, events like Oota from your Thota in Bangalore, or seed- and sapling-sharing events, such as the one being held today at the Kotturpuram Tree Park, Chennai.

Start small and bask in the joy of cooking with homegrown herbs and vegetables.

**NANDITA IYER**, Bangalore-based blogger ([saffrontrail.com](http://saffrontrail.com)); with inputs from organic farmer Allaladi Mahadevan ([theorganicfarm.in](http://theorganicfarm.in))

# Natural habitat

A tale of lost rubber chappals, charming farm stays, learning to cook on an open flame and uncovering the unexpectedly gorgeous countryside in Konkan



## Deep forest

The Farm of Happiness, near Ratnagiri, veiled in green RAHUL KULKARNI

**W**e knew we had veered off the beaten track when the Google Maps lady began instructing us to drive into haystacks and mango orchards. “Take a right turn in 100 metres,” she commanded, trying her best to drown us in a pond filled with wallowing buffaloes. “Take a right turn. Take a right turn.”

The babbling Android was not the only sign that we had parted ways with the convoy of tourists driving from Mumbai to Goa on that Tuesday afternoon. Suddenly the roads were narrow and deserted – barring the occasional ST bus, purple rickshaw and suicidal chicken. We passed a few sleepy stores in the middle of nowhere, signs for villages with names like Heloba, and a crude shed that identified itself as a “Phanas Stop”. Perhaps, a retiring room for weary jackfruit?

Otherwise it was just us and the glorious road. Endless ribbons of tar, fringed with jade green shrubs and moptop palms. Shadowy avenues that seemed to lead to a fairytale. Though actually, they were taking us to Maachli, a little farm stay in the heart of charming Sindhudurg. Or so we hoped.

For the fourteenth time, I read out the directions sent by our host. We had passed Pinguli village, where we had asked for directions. “You will be guided to take second right turn,” stated the instructions. “After taking right come straight for 14km. At village path, you will see statue of King Shivaji. Take right turn at statue. Come ahead for 4km. You will see Madhuram Paryatan board. I will welcome you there.”

We were relieved to spot Shivaji, maintaining his lonely vigil. And even more relieved to

see the Madhuram board – and, Prathamesh Samant waiting to welcome us.

“We’ve reached,” my three daughters crowed at once.

Well yes. And no. The car had reached its destination. But we still had a short way to go.

Samant, an unflappable 25-year-old, led the way down a rough path that terminated in a clear, shallow stream. “You have to cross this water body to reach Maachli,” he explained, as if splashing through a knee-high stream was as commonplace as crossing Shahid Bhagat Singh Road in Colaba, Mumbai.

Rather nervously, we clutched bags and phones and iPods and wires and waded in. My three goggling, giggling daughters almost lost four slippers between them. Then Naima fell flat and emerged looking wet and mortified. Which is when we first heard the laughter that was to become the soundtrack of our Konkan adventures. Three local women were almost doubled over with mirth. Clearly, they found city bumpkins highly amusing.

Ten minutes later, we were ensconced in our spotless cottage – a cosy wooden structure tucked away in a dense plantation of cashew, mango, betel nut and kokum trees. My daughters rushed out to help Samant’s sister light clay diyas. And though they returned with burnt toes and tales of Jurassic Park-style insects, they were absolutely delighted with their newly acquired skills.

We walked to the dining area through a purple night twinkling with tiny flames. And then gazed in astonishment as a parade of dishes – fried fish, crab curry, fish curry, dal, a couple of veggies, kheer and a pot of pink, irresistible

sol kadi – arrived at the table. All this was being conjured up in a kitchen with open fires, an army of women and implements that would have looked more at home in a torture chamber.

Samant’s mother, who ceaselessly supervised the kitchen and turned out magnificent treats like malpua for breakfast and fried tiger prawns for dinner, was clearly a traditionalist. But then her vast kitchen – which would give most modern homemakers conniptions – is part of the “village experience” that the Samants so proudly offer. And they are clearly delighted that people

from far corners of the world are landing up at their “ancestral property”, crossing the stream, visiting the local temple, learning to cook on an open flame and exploring the unexpectedly gorgeous countryside.

**W**hich is how we find ourselves heading the next morning towards a beach with the unpretty name of Bhogve. Panicked by the thought of crossing the stream and dirtying clothes, I’ve insisted that my daughters wear their pyjamas over their swimsuits. But all bashfulness is forgotten once we drive past Parule village and turn into an untouched golden grassland. Brown boards point

“You have to cross this water body to reach Maachli,” he explained, as if splashing through a knee-high stream was as commonplace as crossing Shahid Bhagat Singh Road in Colaba, Mumbai

the way to an array of beaches – Nivati, Tarkarli, Vengurla. But we remain Bhogve loyalists. And sensibly so.

Bhogve is a curvaceous 'C' of pristine sand, enclosing a bay of pellucid water through which we can see shells and tiny fish and green crabs going about their business. The only other soul around is a villager walking his dog. My husband swims. Aaliya, Nisha and Naima launch into a game of Mermaid Mermaid. And I read a juicy murder mystery. And it's noon before I pop my dehydrated daughters into their bedraggled pyjamas and we head back – with a quick stop for a Limca at the Parule restaurant, where villagers in their Diwali finery gape at the three damp and sandy girls in pyjamas.

On the way back to Maachli, Aaliya's slippers succumb to the rough and tumble of village life, which is why we are back at Parule that evening, standing outside the chappal shop. The Diwali celebrations have kicked in and a loudspeaker is playing bhajans so loudly that the entire bazaar is vibrating. The shop owner takes one look at us and produces fancy purple slippers which have shoe bite written all over them. "No, no," I mime and holler, trying to communicate through the high-decibel celebrations, "Simple rubber slippers."

The shopkeeper is not best pleased. He sniffs. He sighs. He rolls his eyes in a manner that indicates 'cheapskates'. Then he shuffles to the back of the shop, pokes a couple of boxes and returns with a sturdy black pair with patterned straps. They fit, they are moderately comfortable. Only one problem – one has a green strap, the other has a blue strap. And my fashion-conscious 11-year-old doesn't agree that "mismatched is funky".

More eye rolling, more shuffles. Then the Salesman of the Year produces basic black slippers with blue straps. "They match," I exclaim encouragingly. But Aaliya is staring at her feet with a perplexed expression. One slipper fits. The other is a different size altogether. The salesman gives a 'just adjust' shrug.

It's another 10 minutes before we leave Pa-



**Country living** A cottage at Maachli in Sindhudurg

rule with matching slippers, loudspeaker-induced migraine and the embarrassed sense that half the village has gathered around to watch our shopping spree.

From Parule we drive through the tranquil grasslands and walk along a path that runs between the serene, silver river and the famous mangroves of the Konkan. We spot kingfishers and listen to birdsong. Till a cow, that was hitherto munching stolidly, develops a frisky interest in us. We skedaddle.

More amused laughter. But now we are used to it.

The next afternoon, we hear the rumble of distant thunder. Samant, though, is unfazed and urges us to go along on a nature walk through a jungle filled with wild mango trees. We're standing on a plateau covered in waist-high, coppery grass when the storm arrives. A crack of lightning, a roar of thunder and a wind that ripples through the grass in waves of silver and violet. We're transfixed. We've never seen a celestial Diwali firework display such as this.

The rain starts as we scramble back to our cottage, and drums on the asbestos roof all night. By the time we are packed and ready to leave the next morning, the stream is deep and swirly, and my daughters put on a bravura Titanic performance.

Then, after an uneventful drive on the lovely, old Bombay-Goa Highway, we return to village roads in our quest for the Farm of Happiness. This is a farm stay near Ratnagiri, and even more remote than Maachli, with directions like "Drive till Manjare Fata. This one is a V junction. The major road turns left here for Guhagar. DO NOT TAKE THIS LEFT. Take the road to your right towards Phungus Fata."

We arrive at Farm of Happiness in time for a fabulous fish lunch, and a lazy afternoon spent on the porch dotted with hammocks and comfy chairs. The Farm of Happiness is run by Rahul Kulkarni, who, sick of his life as an ad man in Mumbai, returned to his ancestral village and fashioned an organic farm out of a patch of jungle. He built a large, traditional Konkan house with porches and verandahs and creeper-clad courtyards, and now shares his patch of peace and paddy with visitors.

We ask for tea, so Rahul takes my daughters along to milk the cattle. Then we wander around the vegetable patches and fields and I watch gobsmacked as my veggie-phobic threesome munch their way through a cluster of sweet potatoes yanked out of the mud. Then we take a long walk in the deepening dusk to a little village temple standing alone amidst pewter rocks. "You can go and collect

## Travel Log



### Get there

Driving is the best option. Trains ply from Mumbai to Kudal and Ratnagiri. The farm stays will organise autorickshaws for the last leg of the journey. AC buses also ply to Kudal and Ratnagiri.



### Get around

If you don't have your own car, you can make an arrangement with a local auto driver.



### Stay

Maachli at Parule village offers four basic but elegant cottages (₹4,900, inclusive of meals, nature trail and plantation walks for two; [maachli.in](http://maachli.in)).

Farm of Happiness has rooms in an old Konkan-style house (₹4,000, inclusive of meals and complimentary activities for two; [farmofhappiness.com](http://farmofhappiness.com)).

Other options in the area include Atithi Parinay, in Ratnagiri district (₹3,300-3,900; [atithiparinay.com](http://atithiparinay.com)).



### Eat

Eat at the farm stays. The food is unmatched. If you like seafood, Mama Samant's spread is fabulous. At Farm of Happiness, the farm's produce is used to make delicacies, including an addictive, savoury ragi porridge for breakfast.

### BLink

#### Tip

If you are driving via Kolhapur, stop at Hotel Parakh for a lunch of Kolhapuri rassas and mutton.

your eggs and eat them for breakfast," Rahul promises the girls.

It will have to be next time, though. For in the morning we're once again navigating T and V junctions on our way back home. But these challenges are a small price to pay for our wonderful rambles in the Konkan. And for realising that golden grasslands and sparkling bays are just a drive away. All we need to do is pack plenty of rubber slippers, summon up Google Maps and head south.

**SHABNAM MINWALLA** is a Mumbai-based journalist and author of *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*



## CREATURE FEATURE

# Bulbuls

Eluding the predator (and the photographers' lens), or 'coexisting' without stepping on each other's birdie toes, life is never short of drama



**Diversion ahead** The red-vented bulbul watches out for predators  
DEBASHIS MUKHERJEE

In a perfect world, one would hope to always spot an animal without disturbing it, to always be able to watch an animal without worrying about the effect of your presence. But realistically, many animals notice you long before you notice them. You only see them from the corner of your eye as they're fleeing.

But no creature creates quite as much of a ruckus about an approaching predator (or person) as a nesting bird because nesting birds aren't really fleeing — they're staging a diversion. Many birds chirp raucously, and even fake injury, to distract predators from the eggs or chicks inside their nest. It's this sort of drama that first drew my attention to the nest of a red-vented bulbul in a patch of thorn-scrub forest in Kutch.

Resting amid the thorny succulent branches of a cactus-like euphorb, branches filled with noxious sap, this

nest was impeccably defended. The bulbuls' defence seemed effective — the chick in this nest did not get eaten. But the geographic range of the red-vented bulbul extends into ecosystems quite different from thorn-scrub forest, into regions where there are not only fewer euphorbs in which to safely nest but also myriad other species with which they must interact, not the least of which is the red-whiskered bulbul.

A large portion of the range of the red-vented bulbul overlaps with that of red-whiskered bulbuls. And in many ways, they seem near-identical — they eat a similar mix of fruits and insects, build similar nests from twigs, roots and cobwebs, and make a fuss about predators. On realising that such similar birds occupy over-

lapping ranges, one is compelled to ask how they coexist.

In peninsular India, these two species coexist by not fully coexisting. They seem to prefer slightly different weather conditions — red-whiskered bulbuls live in marginally wetter, more humid environments than red-vented bulbuls. Such fine separation isn't unusual — the natural world is rife with pairs of closely related species that divide up their shared habitat along almost imperceptible axes, giving the impression of coexistence, while carefully avoiding each other.

In Hawaii, these two species recreated a pattern akin to their geographic distribution in India

What is remarkable about these bulbuls, however, is that they maintain this separation even in a new home established over 12,000km away, on the island of Oahu in Hawaii. In the '60s, red-whiskered bulbuls were introduced into some of the wetter parts of Oahu. By the '80s, they hadn't spread too far from where they were introduced, unable to cross drier habitats to reach new patches of moist forest. The red-vented bulbuls, however, spread much further in the

same time, into drier regions. These two species therefore recreated, in miniature but also in quick time, a distribution pattern that closely resembled their geographic distribution in India. Why would species that have spent millions of years balancing avoidance with coexistence do it differently on the other side of the world? Similarly, I imagine wherever they are, red-vented bulbuls put as much effort into defending their nests from predators as did the pair of birds nesting in the euphorb — if a survival mechanism isn't broken, why fix it?

**AMBIKA KAMATH** studies organismic and evolutionary biology at Harvard University

# MOM's the word

Tracing the Mars Orbiter's quick journey

When a top scientist of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) says, "Life is not a molecule of methane," one wonders what the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) is doing out there, 680 million kilometres away, all strapped up with the methane sensor. The same scientist also claims we should have gone to the virgin planet of Mercury and not Mars. There are others too; those who believe the red planet isn't the "formidable combination of favourable characteristics to make a habitable environment" just yet. And those who think the mission is a "national waste". With so many misgivings, one is tempted to ask if the cheapest mission to Mars, the ₹4,500-million Mangalyaan, is worth the four rupees that went out of our pockets.

In *Reaching for the Stars: India's Mission to Mars and Beyond*, authors Pallava Bagla and Subhadra Menon do little to allay such misplaced fears, rather they do their best to couch India's foray into the science of the final frontier in earthly things like space races, politics and worthy Indian values. The book traces MOM's journey from the chambers of a dusty building in Khan Market, Delhi, to the second launchpad at Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh. Ordinarily, a mission of this scale

would've been a marathon run over years, but it's reduced to a "100-metre dash" spanning 15 months. The earliest window of opportunity — November 2013 — was chosen, not so much for the right alignment of orbits but to beat the Chinese in the Asian space race. That the probe would have a front-row view of a speeding comet was incidental. The authors insist, however, that the department of space and ISRO are far removed from the Capital, unwilling to participate in the politics of space. Nations take space race so seriously that when Chandrayaan-I failed to keep its 1998 deadline, falling behind China's maiden lunar probe, Delhi was so upset, former PM Manmohan Singh never granted an audience to the moon mission team in his tenure. This, after Chandrayaan-I discovered water on the moon; a major scientific breakthrough, before losing contact.

Much of the book is preoccupied with the 'virtues' of Indian space science: from launch vehicles that arrive atop bicycles and bullock carts, and scientists who "never brag" to the amount of *jugaad* in the frugal engineering, and the *tilak*-sporting missions blessed by the Church and the lord at Tirupati. *Reaching for the Stars* is not a "human story of an epic achievement," unlike say, the revealing account in *Apollo: Race to the Moon* that told us of the story of a space probe riddled with political controversies and engineering obstacles. Despite the righteous swag of the book, there is much to celebrate about MOM and Indian space missions. The methane sensor may or may not confirm the presence of the gas. Even if it does, we won't

know if it's biologically generated methane (indicating life existed on Mars) or just asteroid dust. But, as Bagla writes, "the journey itself is a great achievement, and that is why scientists call MOM a 'technological demonstrator'". It is a good time for space science. Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* gave us a near-accurate depiction of a blackhole; China unveiled their Mars rover on the heels of Mangalyaan; and Philae left mothership Rosetta to attempt the first-ever landing on a comet. India too has ambitious plans to launch Aditya (a flight to the Sun), to visit a passing aste-

roid, and send humans into space. Move over Virgin Galactic!

The hero of the book, and the probe, is arguably, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The workhorse satellite was chosen over 'naughty boy' GSLV, as it could inject MOM into Mars's orbit with minimum energy transfer. On its 25th mission with MOM, PSLV has been used for different missions differently. In 2008, it set a world record by launching 10 satellites in one shot; an ISRO official said it was akin to a school bus dropping children home, only at the speed of 27,000 kmph, with high chances of collision. And thanks to PSLV, since November 24, 2014, about a year after its launch, MOM is safely installed in the red planet's orbit, tweeting pictures, hollering at fellow probes and steering clear of whizzing comets.



**Reaching for the Stars**  
Pallava Bagla and Subhadra Menon  
Non-fiction  
₹899

MOM was a "100-metre dash" spanning 15 months

PRIYANKA KOTAMRAJU



## Karma is a...

Cops become pawns in political games

How the tables have turned for Asansol circle inspector Bamapada Das. Just months ago, he was subjecting the then BJP candidate Babul Supriyo to a most searching interrogation. Last Sunday however, the tide turned and Das had to accompany a procession that was celebrating Supriyo's induction into the Modi Cabinet. In April, Das had grilled the singer, detained under the Arms Act. So severe was the interrogation that Supriyo said he had "never faced such a moment in my life before". A case was lodged against the singer by Trinamul Congress, allegedly at Mamata Banerjee's behest. "I don't have a personal grudge against the inspector. In Bengal, the police only obey Didi," says Supriyo. But political pawn or not, Das must lick his wounds and sing a different tune.



## Cold diplomacy

Putin's gesture of warmth at Beijing greeted with customary Chinese chill

When various heads of states met for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit at Beijing last week, news about economics and cooperation was sidelined by a simple 'shawl incident'. On the cold night of the opening ceremony, when the Chinese president was busy chatting up Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin was seen draping a shawl on the Chinese first lady Peng Liyuan, presumably to keep her warm. A heartthrob among Chinese women, the divorced Russian president's gallant gesture was captured on video and soon went viral. The Chinese media have so far portrayed the first couple as lovey-dovey; Putin's shawl diplomacy has upset that script. Soon, all references to the incident — comments, tags, likes, the video itself — were wiped off the Internet. Peng Liyuan accepted the shawl with a only slight bow, and soon, pulled her own black coat out. Russian diplomats, on the other hand, have complimented Putin for his gentleman-like behaviour. But that is cold comfort, surely?



## Call of love? Nah

Know your chances before you make elaborate proposals

Move over basketball stadiums, Eiffel Tower and giant screens of love. A man from Guangzhou city in China has come up with a new-age proposal that keeps up with the times. Paying homage to the country's smartphone-obsessed culture, the man decided to woo his sweetheart with the iPhone6 — 99 of them, arranged in the shape of a heart. For a whopping \$94,000, that is nearly ₹60 lakh! The grand proposal was caught on camera, and went viral on Weibo and international media sites. Incidentally, November 11, which was the day of the proposal, has been celebrated as 'Singles Day' for the last few years. At the national event, those unlucky in love come together to woo objects of affection or meet prospects. What happened to our iPhone lover, you ask? Ah, his girlfriend said no.

## Begone world peace!

Beauty queens get real at pageants

The number of times 'world peace' makes an appearance at pageants is perhaps, rivalled only by the number of times Rahul Gandhi says 'women's empowerment'. Even as beauty contests continue to be dismissed, the Miss International pageant at Tokyo last week saw the winner and her fellow beauties ditching 'world peace' for serious political talk. While Puerto Rican stunner Valerie Matias spoke about her country's rotting education system, Colombian Zuleika Suarez attacked racial intolerance and Britain's Victoria Tooby tackled unemployment. When Frenchwoman Aurianne Sinacola won the 'Perfect Body' title, she surprised all by admitting she doesn't "work out at all". Things have changed, you feel? Worry not, there was a swimsuit round, plunging necklines and some world peace.



## Not married to the job

Bihar's Opposition says no to the CM's son-in-law, who doubled up as his personal assistant

Who needs to go out and look for talented personnel when you can keep it all in the family? At least that's what the Bihar chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi must have thought when appointing his own son-in-law Devendra Manjhi as his personal assistant. This, despite a circular issued in Bihar in 2000, which clearly states, "appointment of relatives as private secretaries adversely affects the government's functioning". After the Opposition made a hue and cry about the issue, the CM gave in and asked his kin to resign. Devendra, understandably, was a tad disappointed. "I'm his son-in-law only at home," he told a local daily. "My body language and behaviour are different as PA. I follow the system and do things like 'yes sir, no sir'." Well, now that PA Devendra is gone, what happens to son-in-law Devendra?





**IN-FAQ** BY JOY BHATTACHARJYA

**Bans**

Prohibition is around the corner in god's own country. Kiss of Love protests thwarted. Great time for a quiz on prohibitions and bans.

- Which country's national broadcaster bizarrely allows music to be shown on its network but has a complete ban on showing musical instruments?
- On the same lines, in September 2007, which country passed a decree about citizens not being allowed to reincarnate without prior consent. Work it out.
- In 1975, the Maruti factory in Gurgaon was the unlikely location for the destruction of the only prints of which film, starring Shabana Azmi, Utpal Dutt and Manohar Singh?
- What specifically did Peter the Great of Russia first ban, and then implement a heavy tax on, to control the influence of the Boyars, the old Russian dynastic families?
- Which book was banned in the Soviet Union on its publication in 1973, but since 2009, has been a high school textbook in the Russian Federation?

6 In the late '80s, a British edition of *The Economist* ran a blank page with the following explanation, "In all but one country, our readers have on this page a review of \_\_\_\_\_, a book by \_\_\_\_\_. The exception is Britain, where the book, and comment on it, have been banned. For our 4,20,000 readers there, this page is blank — and the law is an ass." Name the book, or the author.

7 Which two games were banned by the Scottish parliament in 1457 with the following observation; 'and that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ should be utterly condemned and stopped. And that a pair of targets should be made up at all parish churches and shooting should be practised each Sunday?'

8 For what specific reason did Woody Allen refuse to allow the release of his film *Blue Jasmine* in India?

9 Which classic novel is set in an unspecified American city in the mid '60s and has three parts; 'The Hearth and the Salamander,' 'The Sieve and the Sand,' and 'Burning Bright'?

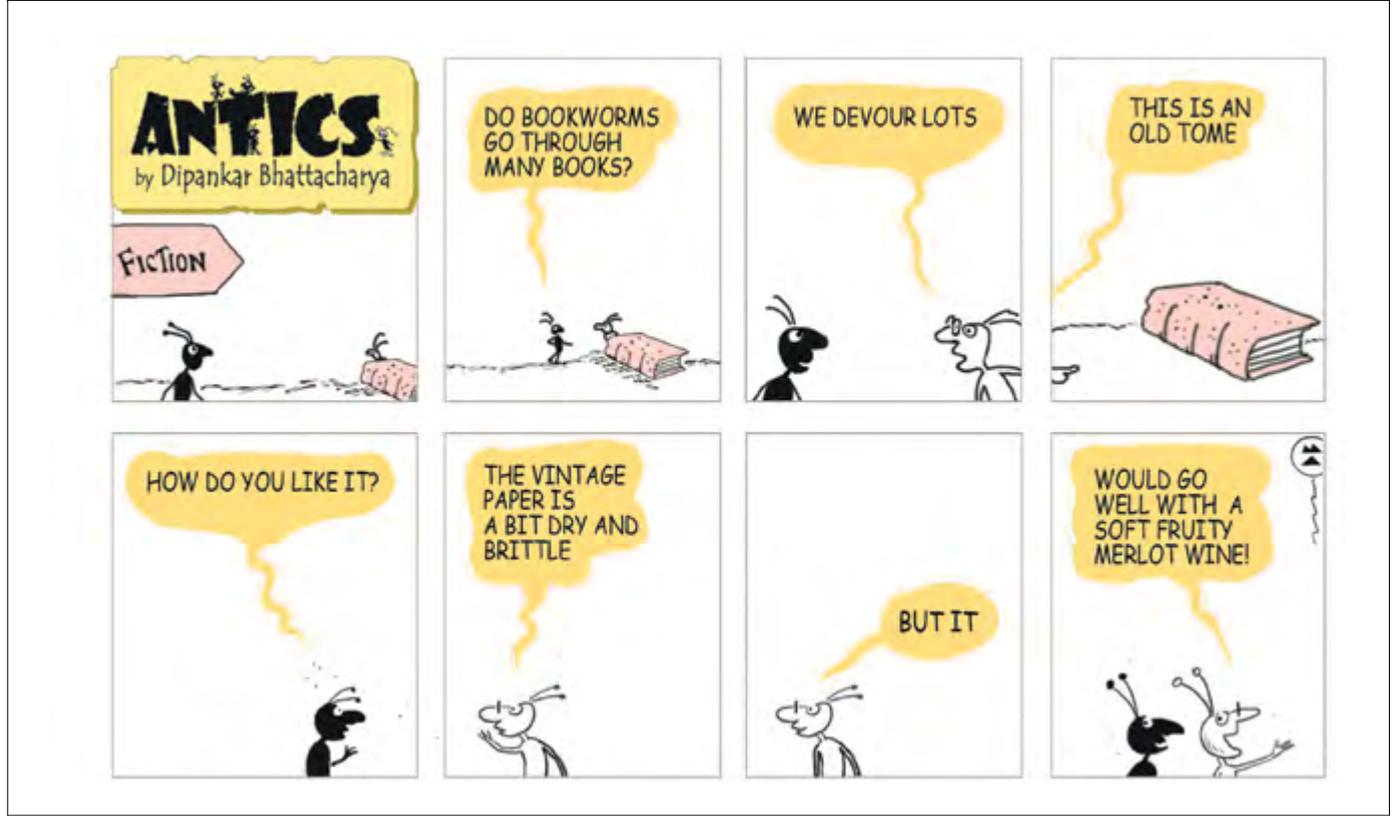
10 The term was first applied to establishments in Pennsylvania at the turn of the 20th century, originating from the practice of not talking about such a place and alerting the police. It came into national use in the '20s and remained popular even after 1933, when it became less prevalent. Name the term.

**ANSWERS**

- Iran. In January 2014, one of their shows actually showed a santoor and a lute, but the broadcaster admitted it was a mistake.
- China. To control and register the reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhists.
- Kissa Kursi Ka*, which was a spoof on the then government and Sanjay Gandhi's car manufacturing plans.
- Beards. The Boyars were recognised by their long, flowing beards.
- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.
- Spycatcher* by Peter Wright, which speculated about the fifth person in the Cambridge Spy Ring.
- Golf and football. To make the men focus on archery practice.
- He was not comfortable with the anti-smoking ads on screen every time a character lit up.
- Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the ultimate account of book burning
- Speakeasy, for unlicensed drinking establishments.

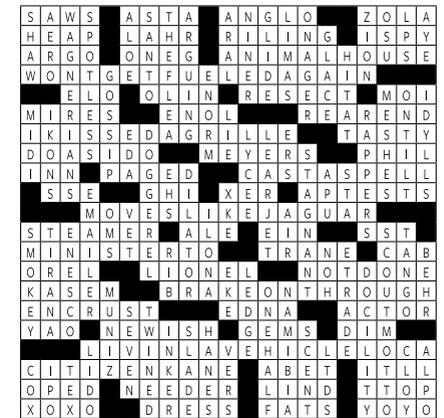
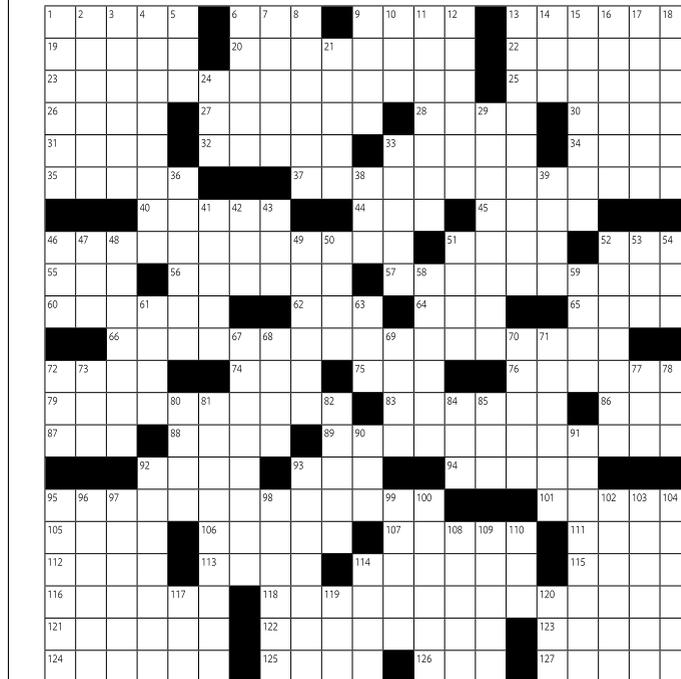
JOY BHATTACHARJYA is a quizmaster and author of *Junior Premier League — The First Eleven*  
@joybhattacharj

**CORNERSTONE**



**THE NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD-0608**

**ALADDIN**



**ACROSS**

- 1 To the same extent
- 6 Something Pedro and Pablo might have?
- 9 Coll. program
- 13 Tug-of-war participant
- 19 Watts on a screen
- 20 Like some desk work
- 22 One of a group of Eastern Christians
- 23 King's move?
- 25 Only what a person can take?
- 26 In fine fettle
- 27 Process of sorting injuries
- 28 Gets browner
- 30 Start of something big?
- 31 Mineralogists' study
- 32 Anoint, archaically
- 33 Like some French sauces
- 34 Brooklyn squad
- 35 The two sides of Pac-Man's mouth, say
- 37 Principles espoused during Women's History Month?
- 40 Cry after a roller coaster ride, maybe
- 44 Together
- 45 Coward from England
- 46 Ability to walk a tightrope or swallow a sword?
- 51 Land in the Golden Triangle
- 52 Part of a giggle
- 55 Pass with flying colors
- 56 Like the 10-Down
- 57 Soupçon
- 60 Olden
- 62 Finish (up)
- 64 Soprano Sumac
- 65 At the discretion of
- 66 Dream for late sleepers?
- 72 Identity
- 74 Car antitheft aid, for short
- 75 Informal way to say
- 76 Sheen
- 79 Chooses beforehand
- 83 It's all tied up with the present
- 86 Start to love?
- 87 "Certainly"
- 88 Collapse, with "out"
- 89 Waterway leading to a SW German city?
- 92 Way to Île de la Cité
- 93 Feature of many a Ludacris lyric
- 94 Add up
- 95 Slinky going down the stairs?
- 101 Dough raiser
- 105 Large family
- 106 Postlarval
- 107 Crimean conference locale
- 111 Over
- 112 Captain, e.g.
- 113 Confederate
- 114 Biblical book in two parts
- 115 Star burst
- 116 Neighbor of an 8-Down
- 118 Dissertation on people's inherent spitefulness?
- 121 Chaperone, often
- 122 Treasure Stater
- 123 Human or alien
- 124 Some cheaters have them
- 125 Frat members
- 126 Drivers brake for it
- 127 Pungent green

**DOWN**

- 1 Hold down
- 2 "The ostrich roams the great \_\_\_/ Its mouth is

- 3 Gave birth on a farm, say
- 4 Unlikely memoirist
- 5 Fix
- 6 Derision
- 7 1966 title role reprised by Jude Law in 2004
- 8 Neighbor of a 116-Across
- 9 Inflamm, with "up"
- 10 South American tuber
- 11 Touchy?
- 12 Tidies up
- 13 Not be bold
- 14 Commercial version of crazy eights
- 15 In-between
- 16 Cosmetician Estée
- 17 And so on and so forth
- 18 Go over and over
- 21 Lost it
- 24 Letter between two others that rhyme with it
- 29 Like some care
- 33 Lacks
- 36 One who might stick his tongue out at you?
- 38 Long time
- 39 Agosto or settembre
- 41 Ed of "Up"
- 42 "\_\_\_ be my pleasure!"
- 43 Burns's refusal
- 46 It's widely hailed as a convenient way to get around
- 47 Frozen over
- 48 Entertains
- 49 Bemoan
- 50 Organic compound
- 51 Monastery resident
- 52 One parodied on "Portlandia"
- 53 Fangorn Forest denizen
- 54 Inflatable thing
- 58 Reason for glasses
- 59 Captain Morgan and others
- 61 Does away with
- 63 Layer
- 67 Action-packed
- 68 It has a light at one end
- 69 Roll of the dice, say
- 70 Up
- 71 Strip for a fashion show
- 72 Secret collector
- 73 Before, poetically
- 77 The \_\_\_ City (New Haven)
- 78 Literary inits.
- 80 Nobel Prize subj.
- 81 Trousers
- 82 Racing boat
- 84 Sandwich order, for short
- 85 Scary word
- 90 Young Darth Vader's nickname
- 91 Evergreen shrub
- 92 Thumbs' opposites
- 93 Represent, sportswise
- 95 Lines at a theater?
- 96 Like Flatland
- 97 Became less than a trickle
- 98 Composure
- 99 Spiral-horned antelope
- 100 Mischievous girl
- 102 Social breakdown
- 103 Common dice rolls
- 104 Elements of some accents
- 108 "American Graffiti" director
- 109 Frigid temps
- 110 Like
- 114 Srs.' worries
- 117 Colony member
- 119 Telephone trio
- 120 Its logo displays all Roy G. Biv except indigo

By Tom McCoy / Edited by Will Shortz

Reach us at blink@thehindu.co.in. Follow us on @Ink\_BL and facebook.com/hbl.blink or log on to thehindubusinessline.com/blink