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RODERICK MATTHEWS ON GURINDER CHADHA'S PARTITION FILM

20 MARCH 2017 / RS 50

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MARUTI SUZUKI
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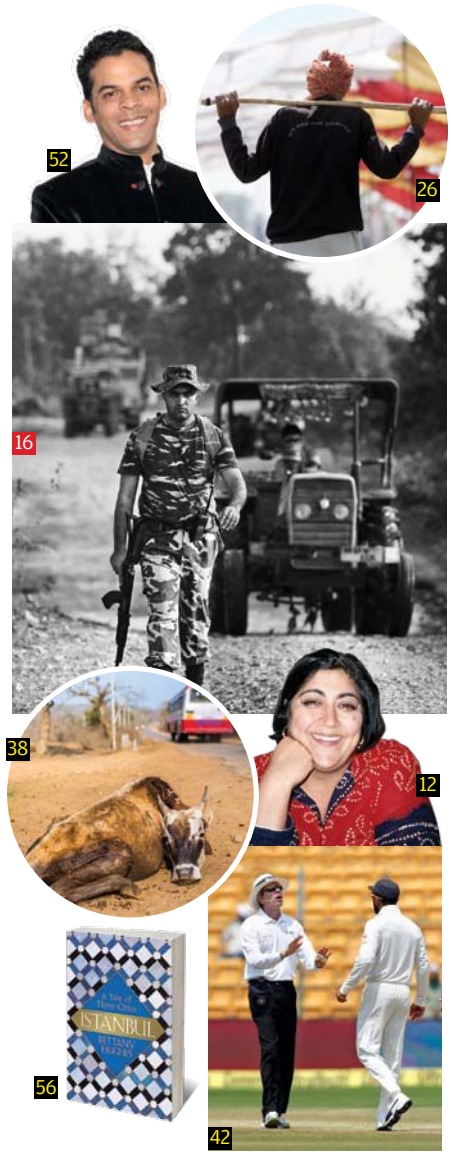

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

The elections in Uttar Pradesh have certainly got everyone excited and on the edge ('The War He Cannot Afford to Lose', March 13th, 2017). In no other state do the politics of caste, community and class make a greater appearance. This has been evident in the rallies of all leading political formations—the BJP, SP-Congress and BSP. The biggest challenge that Modi faces in the state is to secure the Muslim vote, which Mayawati is hoping to exploit to her advantage. Also, there is immense pressure on Rahul Gandhi to make the Congress alliance with SP work, and he too is going all out to ensure that those sections of society who won't vote for the BJP take a chance on his party instead. It is, however, going to be very interesting to see how this loss or win is going to shape BJP tactics in the future, especially given the party's defeat in the Bihar polls. Will it make the BJP more sensitive towards those of other religions in order to woo their votes? Or will it continue to rely on Modi's charisma to win the next round of elections? Perhaps it is time the BJP camp learnt the art of winning 'others' over.

Pankaj Rao

THE DYING AMERICAN DREAM

Though we may not be able to call the US an 'unsafe' country for Indians, the frequency of anti-Indian attacks is doubtlessly alarming ('Death in Kansas City' by Sunanda K Datta-Ray, March 13th, 2017). More shocking is that the accused in the last two cases both asked the victims to 'go back' to their country, which means that there are growing signs of unrest among US citizens, at least in some sections of society, about immigrants living in their midst. One can only hope that US President Donald Trump will take serious note of such incidents and act fast against those at fault so that there is a sense of security amongst Indian-Americans. While critics may link such crimes with recent statements made by Trump about immigrants and visa restrictions, it is wrong to blame him alone. Anger is clearly present in the US and it was waiting for an outlet. Instead of playing the blame game, it is best that the US acts swiftly to reinforce its economic security because that is what it will take for Americans to overcome their fear of outsiders. Many of them blame immigrants for their job problems and financial slowdown. They need to realise how much they depend on immigrants and appreciate the extent of the contribution made by other citizens to the US.

Reyansh Patel

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

E-commerce was a flawed business model from the start ('An End to Cheap Thrills', March 13th, 2017). And yet, we all took to it like bees to honey because it seemingly made our lives 'easier'. Now, we have to pay the price when Uber goes on strike and Snapdeal closes its operations; suddenly, we are stuck on the road waiting for a cab or wondering what will happen to the last basket of products we ordered on Snapdeal. And we realise that e-commerce was too good to be true.

Meghana Bakshi

TOO VULGAR TO VIEW

The Censor Board was right in not passing the film *Lipstick under my Burkha* ('Waiting to Erupt', March 13th, 2017), as it allegedly shows several vulgar scenes. The demand to pass it as an 'Adult' film is absurd. This kind of cinema is not even fit to be watched by adults, as it corrupts their minds too. There is nothing wrong in showing such subjects in a dignified manner. Then no one will object.

Mahesh Kumar

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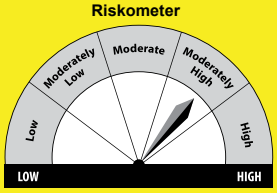

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INDRAPRASTHA

Virendra Kapoor

THE INDIA International Centre (IIC), regarded as the capital's premier intellectual and cultural hub, is in the throes of an election. Every two years, full members elect one representative to its Board of Trustees and two to its Executive Committee (EC). This time, four are in the fray for the Board seat while ten candidates compete for the two EC seats. Though no pecuniary or career gains are on offer, the contest has become fierce over the past few years. The IIC, a non-governmental body funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, might frown upon canvassing of any sort, but it is not hard to spot some candidates campaigning openly. For instance, yours truly has been spoken to on behalf of a contestant for the EC by a leading Delhi High Court lawyer and a veteran journalist. The votes of some of my bureaucrat friends have been solicited over the phone and in person.

Ordinarily, such zeal to be elected to the IIC management bodies should make little sense. However, certain intangibles must flow from such positions, which alone can explain why the aspirants spend such a lot of time and energy chasing fellow members for votes. Mercifully, so far there is no evidence of IIC members being wined and dined by rival candidates. Elections for honorary positions in other clubs such as the Delhi Gymkhana and Delhi Golf Club (DGC) are now an expensive affair, with major candidates spending freely to woo voting-members. A couple of years ago, a Customs officer contesting for leadership of the DGC hosted a no-expense-spared dinner at a posh hotel with the choicest of food and wine flowing freely. The bill was reportedly picked up by a client-friend of the host. This, however, proved insufficient for him to win the DGC lottery. In the last elections of the Gymkhana Club, a candidate for the club president's post had his reputation mauled after a rival revealed that he had retired from the army at a lower rank than he led people to believe. He too lost the election.

Though things have not yet reached this level at the IIC, there is no denying that it hasn't altogether remained unaffected by the general dumbing down seen across the social and cultural landscape of the capital. Unmindful of its founding charter, which lays emphasis on higher pursuits of an intellectual nature, IIC visitors can be excused for mistaking it as a centrally-located watering hole with multiple dining halls and tea lounges serving relatively wholesome food at reasonable prices. Only a handful of members seem keen to participate in discussions of a serious nature. Besides, the increasing renting out of facilities to outsiders for group meetings and events has virtually turned the otherwise elegant complex abutting the historic Lodi Gardens, and designed by the celebrated American architect, the late Joseph Allen Stein, into an open-ended banquet location. The desire to make ready money needs to be curbed, especially since IIC, a non-profit, is already sitting on considerable cash reserves.

PROXIMITY TO POWER can often corrupt, especially when one lacks a strong moral spine. It should, therefore, cause no surprise that a spokesperson of a political party is often seen dining at top-bracket restaurants. To the best of our knowledge, he has no known sources of current income. But what really raises eyebrows is that he is always flush with cash. It is not uncommon for him to insist on paying for his and his guests' meals at five-star hotels with wads of crisp currency notes. Before demonetisation, he used to take out a wad of Rs 1,000 notes and offer to pay the bill even if you had actually invited him for lunch in order to get an inside track on what's happening in his party in particular and the polity in general. Since his sole patron is a senior leader, perhaps it's the latter who should worry about what such supposed surrogates are doing to his reputation.

LEAVING REAL identities undisclosed while reporting human foibles invariably whets curiosity. Some weeks ago, a Supreme Court lawyer was mentioned in this column who sold premium bottles of wine and whisky at a discount. Numerous acquaintances in the legal profession have since accosted yours truly on social occasions, wanting to know the name so that they could get these spirits at cut-rate prices. Surprisingly, a couple of senior lawyers had no difficulty zeroing in on the cheap-shot who regularly flogs gifted bottles of pricey hooch at a 15-20 per cent mark-down. A well-known PR professional with a multi-crore practice even phoned to check whether or not his guess was correct. He was pleased to have got it right on his very first try. ■

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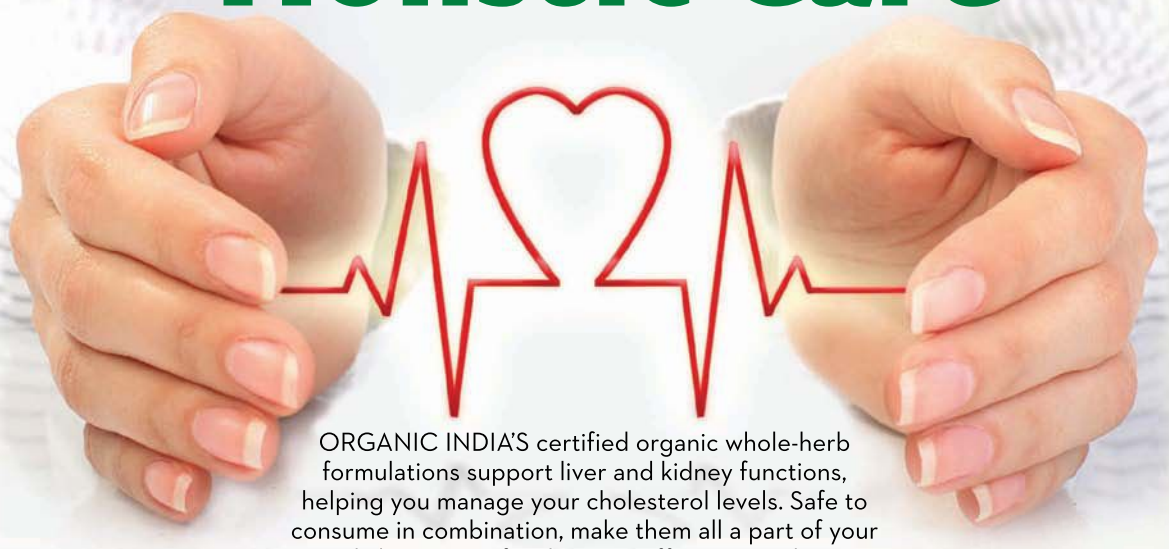

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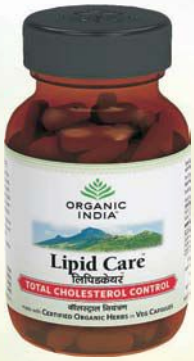

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OPENINGS

Urbanpod in Mumbai offers 140 capsule rooms for guests

NOTEBOOK

CHECKING INTO A POD IN MUMBAI

WHEN HIREN GANDHI crawled into his bed in a tiny pod on his first night in Singapore, he wondered if he could get any sleep at all. The pod, somewhat like a hibernation capsule in a science fiction film, was roughly the size of a futon, large enough to accommodate him, but not large enough to stand upright. It cost him only 40 Singapore dollars (about Rs 1,900), about half the cost of the cheapest regular-sized hotel rooms in Singapore. Gandhi was severely jet-lagged, and he knew if his past first-nights in new countries were anything to go by, he would not get any sleep. "I was thinking, 'What am I going to do for the entire night in this pod if I don't get any sleep?'" he says.

There was wi-fi available, so Gandhi, who heads the Vadodara-based Express Group of Hotels, watched YouTube videos to pass time. And before he knew it, he had dozed off. "The next morning, I was thinking, 'This can work. This can really work, even in India'."

As travel guides and media reports will often tell you, either nudging the point respectfully or explicitly stating it, there are several things that appear baffling to outsiders when they visit Japan. This ranges from their exceptionally polite manners, unusual fashion trends and efficient-but-strange lavatory controls to the popularity of things like anime porn and, more seriously, the demographic time bomb they now face with deaths far outnumbering births. And in this list of the bizarre is the Japanese concept of capsule or pod hotels. Tiny rooms, plastic boxes really—where the price is right and the space just big enough for guests to crawl in and sleep—stacked in rows, sometimes one on top of another. It is a reflection of an increasingly near future, if it hasn't happened already, where the value of every cubic centimetre of space in a modern city will be optimised.

Over the years, this concept of pod hotels has spread with mixed success to other countries. They have sprouted in Singapore, China, Europe and the US. And now, for the first time, a pod

hotel has opened in one of India's costliest cities, Mumbai.

Like other expensive cities in the world, the standard complaint about hotels in Mumbai has been that their size is too small and price too high. Guests deliver this line with the implied query, 'Can you do something about it?' But what can you do about it in a city where area is measured in square millimetres and almost everything is crammed, from the trains people take to work to the matchbox-sized apartments they return to at night?

But Gandhi, enthused by his experience, and his friend Shalabh Mittal—CEO of the Mercator Group—believe they now have a response to that complaint. The duo have made accommodation cheaper, but also drastically reduced its size, offering just the bare essentials in tiny yet thoughtfully-designed pod accommodations that roughly cost Rs 2,000 per night. Each of these pods is supposed to serve as a self-contained miniature hotel room, complete with a bed, lights, plug points to charge electronic devices, and even a tiny TV set (with headphones), all within a fraction of the usual space taken.

While trying out pod accommodations in Singapore, Gandhi and Mittal figured that there would be demand for similar spaces on rent in India. "We are looking for travellers who want value for their money. People who don't want extravagant lobbies and wasteful spaces. Just a nice, clean, no-frills place where they can sleep and leave the next morning," Gandhi says. "Just think about it—can you find a good clean hotel room in a place like Mumbai for less than Rs 4,000? Nope. We give you that for almost half the cost. What we are doing is introducing an entirely new category."

Pod hotels are believed to have first come up in Japan in the late 1970s for working men who missed the last train home; an otherwise efficient public transport system would shut down at midnight. Over time, as land prices shot up, hotels became expensive, and families had to move to tight quarters in distant suburbs, demand for capsule hotels also picked up. Reportedly, during the 2008-09 global recession, many laid off workers moved into capsule hotels after they had to vacate their company-sponsored houses.

But now Gandhi and Mittal believe that price-conscious, stylish travellers will gladly check into truly tiny spaces as long as they're well-designed and maintained. Their capsule hotel, Urbanpod, is in Andheri and caters not just to workers but also tourists who need to catch a flight from the airport nearby.

In appearance, Urbanpod is all futuristic chic. There are a total of 140 pods on offer. You drop your luggage at a separate locker facility when you check-in. The cafe, lobby and bathrooms are common. And for a little more money, one can upgrade one's stay to a 'suite' or private pod. Gandhi and Mittal plan to take this concept to other cities too. They also hope to set up pod hotels by means of a public-private partnership model with the Indian Railways at some train stations.

"We think the concept can really work in India," Gandhi says. "We are using the [Andheri] pod hotel as a showroom to exhibit this concept."■

By LHENDUP G BHUTIA

AFTERTHOUGHT

ON TRIAL FOREVER

Delays in the Babri Masjid demolition case do nobody any good

THE DEMOLITION OF the Babri Masjid on December 6th, 1992, is considered a turning point in Indian history. It was more than just the physical razing of a structure, but a signal of the crumbling of the country's Nehruvian order. One byproduct of that event was the trial of political leaders of the time which included, among others, LK Advani and Uma Bharti. A quarter century has elapsed since then and the criminal proceedings against these politicians are yet to conclude. On March 8th, the Supreme Court took the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to task for laxity in trial proceedings that led to charges being dropped on technical grounds in one particular case.

There are two cases being tried in two different courts in Uttar Pradesh that relate to the events of 1992. In Lucknow, a court is trying charges of the mosque's demolition, while another court in Rae Bareli is hearing charges of mob instigation. Charges of conspiracy were dropped by the Lucknow court. The CBI displayed tardiness not only in filing an appeal to the apex court, but also a supplementary chargesheet that could have fixed the legal loopholes. The Supreme Court has asked why the two cases should not be tried in a single court.

This is another instance of how legal cases drag on interminably. Often, entire lifetimes are exhausted before the law takes its course to a final conclusion. Appeals, requests for stays and counter-appeals being filed tend to stretch the process out even longer at times. The latter has happened in the Babri Masjid case. Technical problems—such as unfiled chargesheets, prosecution infirmities and procedural wrangles—have come to top everything else.

What Advani and others face is not only a simple trial but a case that has political overtones, even if politics plays little or no role at the legal level. Unlike cases of violent crime where a delay in delivering justice is a denial of justice, in this case the delay also hurts those defending the charges set out against them. Then there are other questions: if a joint trial does begin now, will it require the 100-plus witnesses who have deposed before to testify all over again? This will prolong misery for everyone involved. It is high time the proceedings are wrapped up quickly. A new trial may be appeal to some with a particular political disposition, but it will serve no purpose.■

PORTRAIT

DIAMONDS AREN'T FOREVER

Is the eternal stone losing its appeal as a symbol of love?

MILLENNIALS OFTEN GET bad press. The lazy narrative about them tells us that they are hooked to devices and have the attention span of a gnat. But in many ways, millennials are proving to be smarter than their predecessors. For one, they have turned their noses up against the diamond—that harbinger of commitment, that rock which (supposedly) says 'I do' like no other gem. Their snobbery towards the diamond ought to be noted, for it shows that they've caught onto the marketing gimmick that it is and have realised that when it comes to courtship and 'love', clichés ought not to do. Of course, one could also speculate that they simply don't have the money—in this economy and at this time—to spend so much on mere bling.

Without a doubt, diamonds are beautiful. They shine and shimmer, they respond to light, they flirt with reflections, they even match every outfit. What is not to like? And the story of their origin sounds similar to the birth of a Greek god. They were formed a billion years ago. In the core of the Earth (more than a 100 km below the planet's surface), the high pressure and low temperatures crystallised the carbon to its hardest form. Volcanic activity brought them to the surface of the earth; otherwise they would have remained buried deep forever.

SAURABH SINGH

The story of their formation, the fact that diamonds have the 'highest hardness and thermal conductivity of any bulk material' proved useful in mythologising them. But how did the diamond become the *de facto* emblem of 'love' between two people? And how were otherwise intelligent men and women convinced that spending two months' salary on a rock was actually a desirable (in some cases, even deemed necessary) move? What really floated the gem's boat was the link that De Beers made between diamonds and love. As *The Economist* once noted, 'Their modern status, though, is a corporate creation, a story inextricably linked with that of De Beers itself... This particular courtship gift was dreamed up by an ad agency for De Beers, the cartel that sold almost all the world's diamonds throughout the 20th century.'

But it would now appear that younger people (especially in the West) are choosing to spend that same money on travel and experiences rather than a blip of jewellery.

While there will be those (especially in China) who continue to pine for a diamond, the socially conscious are more likely to be suspicious of a stone that is associated with blood. Grisly campaigns by Amnesty International and Global Witness have percolated into our consciousness, reminding us that the lustre can have a flip side. If nothing else, it at least forces buyers to ask questions on the provenance of the stone. Today, more and more people are veering towards synthetic diamonds, which have been supported by the likes of Leonardo DiCaprio (who starred in the Hollywood blockbuster *Blood Diamond*).

But the biggest blow to the diamond would be if it became 'cheap'. Will it still have the same appeal? It has been projected that diamond production is likely to peak in 2019, and after that will begin a slow decline. Companies are no longer willing to invest money to explore new diamond mines and the older ones are likely to shut down.

There will always be those who want a diamond on their finger, and that is fine. But if couples today are asking if the stone is necessary as a symbol of love and a signifier of a relationship, then that is worth celebrating. ■

By NANDINI NAIR

ANGLE

IN AN UNFREE INDUSTRY

Kangana Ranaut and the burden of failure

By MADHAVANKUTTY PILLAI

ONCE IT BECAME clear that *Rangoon* was a flop, actor Shekhar Suman tweeted about an 'actress carrying the burden of her non existent stardom' falling flat on her face. He termed it poetic justice. His son Adhyayan Suman, who had a relationship with Kangana Ranaut in which he alleged that he was relentlessly abused, also gloated over the flop. Some months back, filmmaker Rakesh Roshan, reinvigorating a controversy that was thought to have died down, said that Kangana had spread lies about his son Hrithik, the 'lie' alluded to being the revelation of her affair with Hrithik. The actress is not on good terms with a number of other prominent male stars. Most recently, Karan Johar, smarting from being called a flag-bearer of nepotism in Bollywood by Kangana on his chat show, said at an event that he's done with her 'playing the woman and victim card'. "You cannot be this victim every time and have a sad story to tell about how you've been terrorised by the bad world of the industry... leave it," he added.

It is unusual for an actress in the Hindi film industry to make so many enemies. Honesty might be a good quality to have, but used with abandon it is self-injurious. It is even more unusual that Kangana should do so and continue to survive in her career. Luckily for her, Bollywood's economics has been at a point when a movie tends to be a safe investment only if it has a male star. This helps the producer sell the movie to distributors and make a profit even before it is released. Other movies have to test their profitability at the ticket counter. Such a system makes the male star prime property but also inaccessible for gifted filmmakers who are starting out. Over the last decade or so, the tactic they used to get around it was to write female-themed plots and get an actress of some renown and talent. This would at least guarantee a release.

You saw actresses like Kangana and Vidya Balan riding this wave. It allowed Kangana the space to circumvent the established order with movies like *Queen* and *Tanu Weds Manu*. A decade or two earlier, if she had taken on the blue blood of Bollywood, she would have been ostracised and out of work. But now she herself was thought to have the only power from which all other powers flow: the ability to bring in an initial weekend audience. That has, however, turned out to be not true.

Male superstars can make people come and see even their horrendous movies once. Every movie of Kangana that has flopped over the last few years deserved it and her presence made no difference. That takes the sheen off her aura. If *Rangoon* was a blockbuster, Johar wouldn't say what he did because successful people are not considered victims. Nor would Suman, who now uses what he sees as her lack of stardom as a weapon against her. Voices will get more strident the more she fails. Unless she doesn't. ■

IDEAS

TOKENISM

The annual ritual around Women's Day becomes more cringe-worthy every year. If the surfeit of messages on social media weren't bad enough, it has now become institutionalised soppiness. Like all 'Days', this too has its importance in some places, in certain contexts. In rural areas, it is often used sensibly by local bodies and NGOs to give women a 'day off'. But in our cities, it is only used as an occasion to 'sell more stuff' (roses, especially). Public Relations agencies are often the biggest culprits, as they feel that on this day suddenly stories around 'women's issues' become all the more relevant. We don't need a day. We need equality. ■

WORD'S WORTH

'Women's rights is not only an abstraction, a cause; it is also a personal affair. It is not only about us; it is also about me and you. Just the two of us'

TONI MORRISON

By RODERICK MATTHEWS

GHOST HOUSE OF HISTORY

What's wrong with Gurinder Chadha's middlebrow Partition thriller?

SEVENTY YEARS ON and the wounds of 1947 still sting for so many, including director Gurinder Chadha. Her personal history, as a descendant of a family caught up in the horrendous events of that year, has driven her to tackle the epic subject of India's Partition in her latest film, *Viceroy's House*. But how she was persuaded to make the film is perhaps even more interesting than the film itself.

In a radio interview with the *BBC*, she revealed that her grandmother, who lost a child to starvation while trekking across Punjab, had brought her up to believe that "somehow Partition was our shameful fault" and that "the mischievous English did some kind of black magic on us". This view was different from the history she learned at school, which featured the British battling to get an agreement out of Indians and failing. Her confusion was finally resolved when she read a book that purported to reveal secret layers of deviousness among British politicians, notably Churchill, who, the book claimed, had planned the division of India well in advance, for geo-strategic reasons.

That book was *The Shadow of the Great Game* (2009) by Narendra Singh Sarila, which promised an 'untold story of Partition' based on 'certain documents' which had been kept secret.

There are many ways to criticise this book. It creates long chains of suggestion and assumption to build its conclusions, it uses selective quotations, and it is almost perverse in its misreading of the documents it reproduces. But most of all, it is excessively dominated by the need to prove one central thesis—namely that Partition was planned, long before the event, by Winston Churchill, Clement Attlee and Lord Wavell, Mountbatten's predecessor as viceroy.

Put briefly, the book maintains that the British feared that after Independence, a Congress-led India would not cooperate in matters of global imperial defence. This meant not only keeping the Russians out of India, but also defending sea-lanes to the Persian Gulf, with its oil, and to other far-flung dominions and British possessions. The solution was to keep an amenable corner of the subcontinent—'a bit of India'—where airbases could cover Central Asia, and the perfect patsy to do this was Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose demand for a Muslim homeland conveniently overlapped with Britain's strategic needs. Jinnah therefore had to be supported in whatever way possible, and plans had to be made to prepare the military details, including the areas to be included in the new client state—Pakistan.

The Shadow of the Great Game has had many fans in India, and at least one very high-profile admirer in Britain. Prince Charles is said to have pointed Chadha in its direction, which might seem odd for such an anti-British book, but the oddity is explained by one unusual characteristic of Sarila's work. Uniquely among Partition conspiracy literature, it is very kind to Mountbatten; HRH, we must remember, was very fond of Mountbatten, and saw him as a hero, mentor and surrogate grandfather. Following the book, the

Gurinder Chadha

AP

film *Viceroy's House* also shows him in a favourable light—vain perhaps, but a lover of India and its people. Sarila knew Mountbatten well, having worked for him as *aide-de-camp* after Partition, and this personal acquaintance seems to have softened the author's view of Dickie's responsibility for the carnage—an amnesty granted by few other observers.

The alleged Churchill-Wavell conspiracy is a subplot too far, and the film would have worked just as well without it

Kind as it might be to the last viceroy, Sarila's book is seriously flawed. It persists with its thesis and pursues its villains in the face of common logic, its own printed content, and events as they actually transpired. Sarila seems wilfully blind to the fact that senior British officers were unanimous in their opposition to Partition for two very credible reasons. First, they believed that to divide the Indian Army on religious lines would risk starting a civil war which they would then have no way of controlling. Second, even without bloodshed, the dismantling of the Army would render it ineffective for up to a decade, leaving India defenceless in the interim. Partition to them seemed the best way to invite the Russians in, not keep them out.

Several senior generals were more specific. Alanbrooke, in London, contradicts one of Sarila's main assumptions—that Pakistan would be a military asset—by describing Pakistan to Attlee in April 1946 as "militarily unsound", though Sarila insists, bizarrely, that he was "supporting" the Pakistan scheme. In May 1946, General Claude Auchinleck, who was Commander-in-Chief for India, concurred. He wrote that Pakistan would 'most certainly not be adequate as a base for operations on a grand scale', and would be quite useless against a Russo-Indian alliance. The book carries detailed reasoning on this: Pakistan was too small, too poor, its borders too long and too sensitive.

Wavell, admittedly, did not take this line, and was more sanguine about Pakistan as a military asset. But if he was really the architect of Partition—in agreement with Churchill about its necessity, and a key part of Attlee's 'smoke screen' to disguise imperial intentions—then we need to ask two pertinent questions. First, why did Churchill want to get rid of him in 1945? Churchill was keen to relieve Wavell; he felt he was too soft on Indians, and would be unsuitable as an overseer of the post-war demission process. And Wavell *would* have been replaced, but for the upcoming general election. Secondly, why did Attlee sack Wavell in 1947?

Sarila also makes another central erroneous assumption—that Congress leaders were not amenable to defence cooperation with the British after Independence. Either Sarila made no attempt to research this, or he was wilfully blind. The British

A scene from *Viceroy's House*

made great efforts to canvass opinion on this subject. The armed forces were not fully Indianised in 1947, so all the highest-ranking officers were still British, and if they all left at once, India would be crippled. Accepting membership of the Commonwealth—which was not Congress policy at the time—would mean that they could stay on, and Mountbatten hammered this into Indian leaders, including Krishna Menon. He also spoke to Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister in the interim Government, and Singh fully acknowledged India's potential weakness, especially if Pakistan stayed in the Commonwealth and thus came to enjoy such privileges as supplies, training and leadership from British officers. Singh sought assurances that the British would stay on.

Mountbatten also spoke to several high-ranking Indian officers in the Army and Air Force, including Brigadier KM Cariappa, Brigadier Nazir Ahmed and group Captain S Mukherjee. They all told him that they wanted Britain to stay on in some way for at least five years, if not more. Sarila makes no mention of any of this.

The Congress High Command had always been conflicted about military affairs. Such things were not to the taste of Gandhi, and Nehru detested the idea of supporting imperialists, or allowing India to be anything less than completely free of subordinate obligations to Britain or the King-Emperor. Sarila himself accuses them of naivete in such matters, but Gandhi had always been rather more pragmatic about foreign forces than is generally appreciated. He had a long correspondence from jail with Wavell after the Quit India agitation, in which he was at pains to spell out that he did not want to undermine the war effort against Japan, but that an independent India would have to be consulted about the presence of foreign troops, and shouldn't be expected to pay for imperial defence.

The embarrassing truth was that in 1947 Nehru was not talking to his military, whereas the British were. And the proof of the truth of India's weakness was that, despite all the public pronouncements he had made, Nehru duly assented to Commonwealth membership, thus guaranteeing defence cooperation with Britain, the sure absence of which, according to Sarila, drove the whole Partition process.

Following the book *The Shadow of the Great Game* (2009), the film also shows Mountbatten in a favourable light—vain perhaps, but a lover of India and its people

This just leaves two loose ends.

First, Wavell's 'plan for partition', which turns out to be yet another misunderstanding. In late January 1946, Wavell was asked by the India Secretary in London to make 'recommendations as regards definition of genuinely Muslim areas'. A list was duly sent a week later. This exchange was part of the initiative spearheaded in India by the Richards Parliamentary Delegation, which had arrived in India on January 5th, 1946, and was the first body to make Jinnah specify exactly what he meant by Pakistan. When Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the Boundary Commissioner, also looked for Muslim-majority areas 18 months later, it should hardly be a surprise that he reached very similar conclusions. The same criteria and the same data produced the same conclusions. Why is this sinister? The two men would have been working with the same census details. So the maps that we see Mountbatten slam onto the snooker table to confront Ismay, about two-thirds of the way through the film, were the result of a perfectly normal planning exercise, intended to let London know what the demand for Pakistan might actually look like on the ground.

Lastly, what about Attlee the villain, with his 'secret hand' that he refused to reveal to anyone, and is not recorded in any document provided by Sarila? We are expected to believe that Attlee wanted Partition for military reasons against all the military advice he was given, except from Wavell, whom he

repeatedly thwarted, then fired. This doesn't really add up.

At a meeting on April 12th, 1946, the Chiefs of Staff agreed that 'a loose all-India federation is far better' than Pakistan. On May 30th, 1946, Wavell wrote: 'we should endeavour to bring about union on the best terms possible, and then withdraw altogether'. In March 1947, Attlee sent out Mountbatten with orders to press upon Indian leaders the 'importance of maintaining the organisation of defence on an all-India basis'. All this is in the archive. All ignored by Sarila. In the end, Partition was driven by politics, so it should hardly be a surprise that trying to understand it by looking at the military advice—which was overwhelmingly against it—produces incomprehension.

Let us move out of the shadows now and back into the light. What really happened?

The story of Partition is the story of three weak political forces that were unable to establish their own legitimacy, primarily because they all discounted each other's. The British were an invading military power; the Congress declared that it represented all Indians, but it didn't; and the Muslim League claimed it represented all India's Muslims, but it didn't. These three bodies continued to argue about fine details in a country that was starving, bankrupt and sliding into civil disorder. The decisive factor was when the Congress leadership, in late April 1947, reconciled itself to Partition, and saw an opportunity to give Jinnah the worst deal possible. They then speeded up while Jinnah tried to slow down, but the momentum was unstoppable. The British had tried for years to reach a negotiated, all-India settlement, which was still Mountbatten's brief as he flew out in March 1947, but circumstances foreclosed all options.

THIS WAS THE political background to Partition, but not the massacres, which are a different matter. The British did not kill many people around this time, but that does not absolve them of responsibility. The real killer was the power vacuum in partitioned provinces, and the British as the governing power have to take their share of blame for allowing a situation where nobody knew what to do, who was their enemy, and where safety lay. Under such conditions, pre-emption is the best policy, and this effectively means killing other people before they get the idea of killing you. This is not some special fault in Indians; other killing sprees in other parts of the world since 1947 have shown the same human universal. Matthew White, in his book Atrocitology, has ably demonstrated that of all the murderous regime types in the world, the deadliest is not any form of tyranny, it is anarchy.

Indian leaders too must take some share of responsibility. They all agreed that Partition was likely to quell disorder rather than inflame it. They all agreed that the presence of hostage populations was a good thing—a guarantee of good behaviour on all sides. And they all agreed that it was better to talk down the perils of Partition than to talk them up, in order not to spread panic. And the bulk of the violence happened after the British had no legitimate power in either successor state—exactly the situation that all the parties had intended to bring about. No one thought it would be that bad, and no one had taken precautions to avoid the worst possible consequences.

Here we can detect the root cause of the considerable corpus of conspiracy literature on Partition. Conspiracy theories explain well-known events in an unorthodox—even rebellious—way, providing new interpretations based on assessments of motivation rather than of evidence. Indeed, evidence is the least important element in a conspiracy theory. Much more important is the basic methodology of it, which starts with the observation that bad people do bad things, and proceeds to an extension of that idea—that bad things must have been done by bad people. Once this is established, we only have to look for villains to explain any disaster. In the case of Partition, it is all too easy to line up potential miscreants. The main objective is to make sure that they aren't Indian patriots, which means Nehru, Jinnah and any Brit can be included, whereas Sardar Patel cannot. This is Chadha's point, and probably the reason she was attracted to the Sarila thesis, which is only the most sophisticated and best written of the various theories floating around.

'History is written by the victors,' we see as the film's opening caption. So what? Does that automatically make it worse than history written by the vanquished? Having read a lot of both, I think they can be equally bad. Bias is the enemy of good history, and it can take hold in the bitterness of defeat as easily as in the thrill of triumph. Detachment is the thing, and there can be shrewd winners as well as deluded losers.

Viceroy's House is a very enjoyable middlebrow film: lavish, lively, funny, touching, awash with humanity. I would happily see it again just for its score, supplied by the incomparable AR Rahman, a musician of sublime gifts who blends East and West in a uniquely ravishing way. The script even manages to treat all its major historical characters pretty fairly, and generally represents their positions accurately. This perhaps betrays the influence of the other book Chadha used to construct the film, *Freedom At Midnight* by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins, which is based on extensive interviews with Mountbatten, and contains many of the best known phrases in the script.

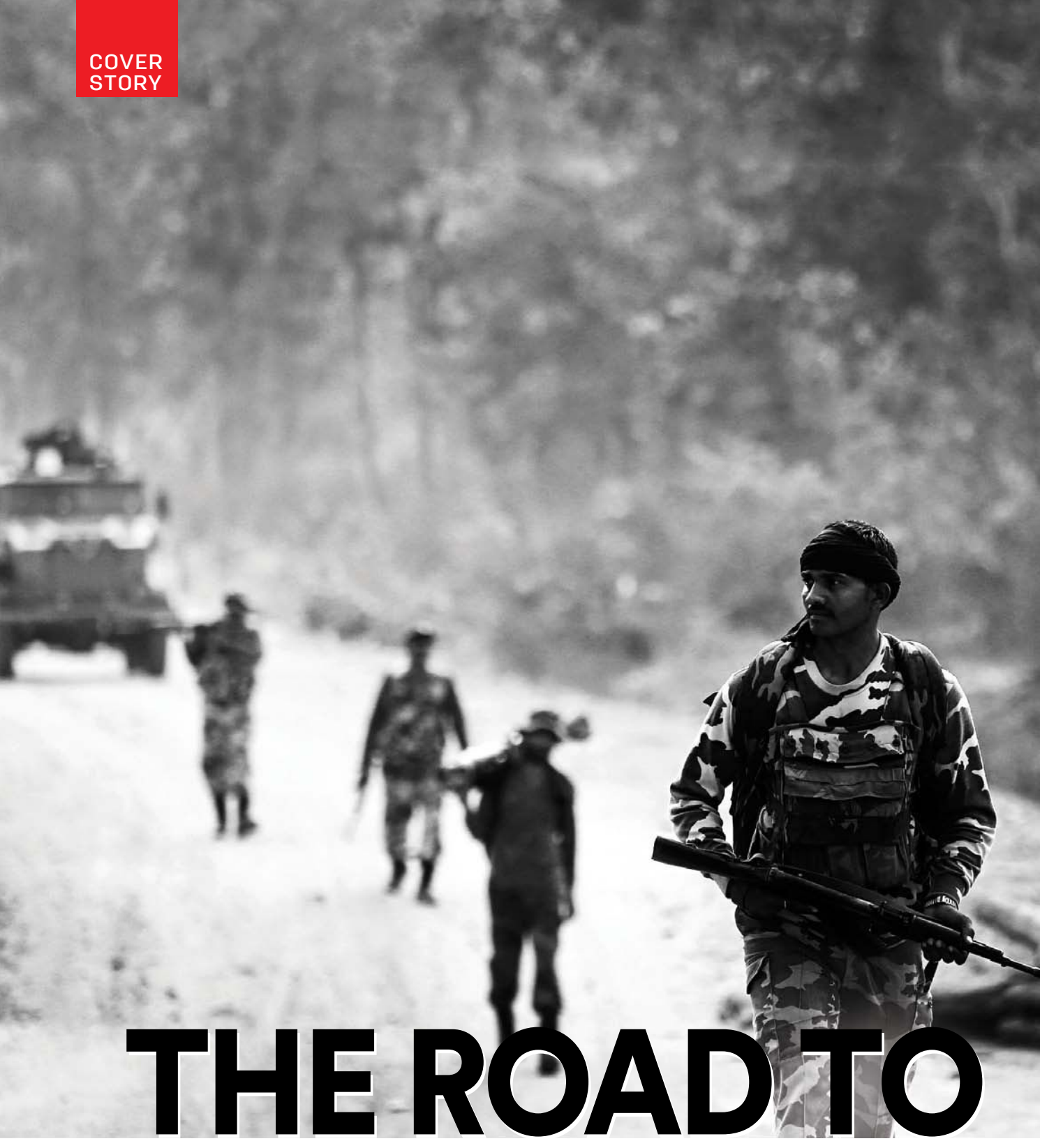
The one person who is much less than fairly treated is Churchill, who does not actually appear. The British prime minister had not 'already granted' Jinnah his Pakistan in 1945, as Mountbatten suddenly discovers in Chadha's telling of the tale; at that time no one even knew what Jinnah wanted.

The alleged Churchill-Wavell conspiracy is a subplot too far, and the film would have worked just as well without it. Perhaps it was included to spice up the narrative—to give us the extra layer that a good thriller should have, the sudden twist that reveals more about the characters. Or perhaps it is a muted tribute to the fallen, an attempt to explain to the ghosts of the victims that they carry no stain and no fault, that there were larger forces at work beyond their control and their imagination.

Whatever it is, it isn't true history. ■

Roderick Matthews specialises in Indian history. He has written three books on the subject, including Jinnah vs Gandhi

COVER STORY



THE ROAD TO JAGAR

Cobra commandos of the CRPF return from an operation on the Dornapal-Jagargunda road in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district

The Indian state's final push in the Maoist heartland

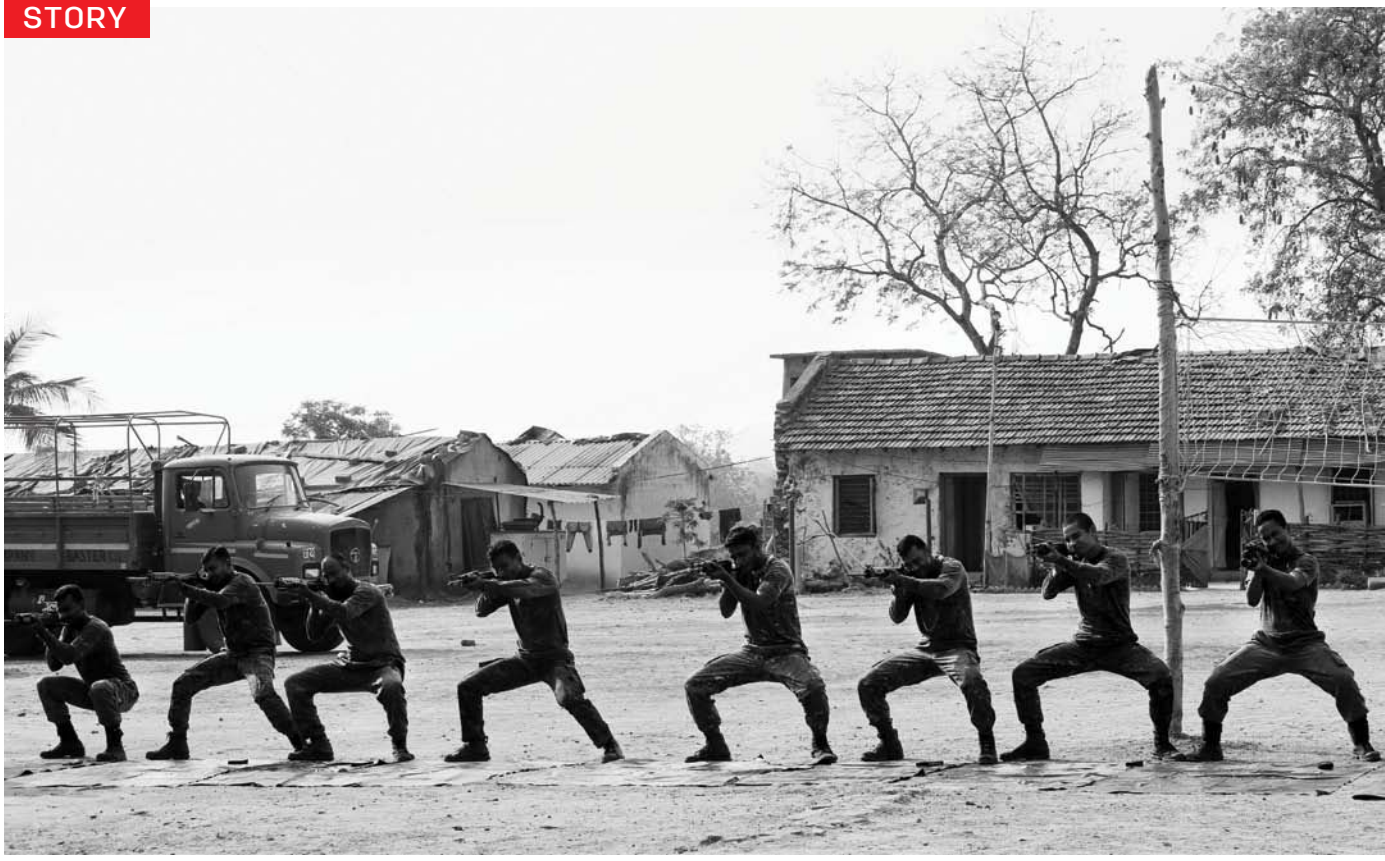
By RAHUL PANDITA
in Dantewada

Photographs by RAUL IRANI

On THE NIGHT OF February 4th, two armed Maoist guerrillas abducted Suriyam Buccha from Merwahi village in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district. The village is situated in a dense forest, about 18 km from Dornapal town. In the absence of a road, one can only reach there by foot or on a motorcycle. By the time Buccha's wife and two children followed them to the forest, his abductors had killed him by cutting his chest open with sharp-edged weapons. As his wailing family looked on, the Maoists put an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) under his body. It was meant as a trap for police personnel who would come later to retrieve his body. But after much pleading by his family, the guerrillas relented and removed the bomb before disappearing deeper into the forest.

Buccha's killing is not a lone case. In the past few months, Maoists have killed hundreds of civilians in their areas of influence along the entire Red corridor, especially in the Dandakaranya Special Zone Committee (DKSZC), of which Bastar division (now divided into seven districts, including Sukma) is a part. "Every day we come across such killings by Maoists in remote villages where no First Information Report (FIR) has been filed," says Vivek Shukla, deputy superintendent of police in Sukma. Three days before killing Buccha, Maoists held hostage the entire villages of Burdikarka and Dhanikarka in the neighbouring Dantewada district and severely beat up dozens of villagers. People from these two and another village called Gadmiri had recently held a mass protest against Maoists. In a kangaroo court held by Maoists that night, a villager of Burdikarka called Samo Mandwi was pulled out and killed. Mandwi had, a few days earlier, taken part in a police

GUNDA



Cobra commandos at the Jagargunda training camp

recruitment programme. On March 5th, Maoists killed Kalmu Podiya in Sukma's Rabripara village on charges of being a police informer. On March 3th, they slit the throat of a young man called Mahender in Dhurawas village on similar charges.

The killings are seen as a sign of desperation as the Indian state pushes deep into the Maoist heartland, pressing thousands of security forces, who are for the first time now entering villages that have remained cut off for decades. In the entire Bastar division, roads and mobile networks are being built on a war footing. In areas where the Maoist writ has run large for at least three decades, road construction is going on in full swing, even at night, under a heavy security cover. In the past, construction companies were reluctant to bid for work due to the fear of a Maoist backlash. But now, in Chhattisgarh at least, no tender for road construction has gone unfulfilled.

The presence of security forces has rattled Maoists to such an extent that they are now targetting areas where they once held pockets of sympathy

Open travelled from Dantewada to Jagargunda, situated in the north-western tip of Sukma district. Jagargunda has remained cut off for 12 years. This stretch, a distance of over 180 km, runs through what the security forces call the 'Maoist Tora Bora'. From Sukma town to Jagargunda, roughly a distance of 100 km, a new concrete road is being laid, which will take about two years to complete. Think of this stretch as the wings of a swan in flight (*see map*). Sukma is on the upper tip of the right wing, while Dornapal town is at the base of it. Then it rises towards the left wing with extremely sensitive villages on the way: Polampalli, Kankerlanka, Puswara, Timilwade, Chintagufa, Burkapal, Chintalnar, Narsapuram and finally to the upper tip of the left wing where Jagargunda lies. For years, the Maoists lorded over this stretch. The entire road, whatever existed of it, had been cut off and Maoist insurgents had laid landmines at several places to prevent the movement of security personnel. From Jagargunda, two roads lead in another V, one to Dantewada and the other to Basaguda in Bijapur district. At every point on the crucial Dornapal-Jagargunda axis (about 60 km), camps of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have come up. It is they who control the road now. But it has not been easy.

"For almost two years now, we have lost at least one boy every month to IEDs on this road," says Jitendra Sahu, deputy commandant of one of the CRPF's Cobra battalions, fighting Maoists on this axis. More than 130 IEDs have been recovered in that period. On the road from Jagargunda to Dantewada, about 100 IEDs were recovered in less than six months in 2016.

On both sides of the Dornapal-Jagargunda road is a dense forest area dotted with tiny hamlets. The security forces are just begin-

SAURABH SINGH

MAP NOT TO SCALE

ning to get a sense of the interiors here. The map of this region that the security forces use is more than 25 years old. "We still do not have correct maps. Many of these villages would not even exist now," says a police officer posted in Chintagufa. From Dornapal till Chintagufa, though, the security forces have made inroads now in several villages to the north of the road. From Chintagufa to Jagargunda, on both sides of the road, the Maoists are still very much in power. "It is still their liberated zone," says a CRPF official, "but once this road is built, we will squeeze them." As the security forces develop more intelligence on ground, they have identified most local Maoist commanders and roughly know their areas of operation as well. "We know lot of things now," says a police officer in Dornapal, "we know, for example, that the Maoists in this area buy most of their essential items from the weekly *haat* (market) in Burgalanka village [south of Polampalli]".

It is a vicious cycle, though. The more intelligence inputs that security personnel are able to gather, the more Maoists get angry and kill civilians. This fuels even more anger towards them, which in turn helps the police strengthen their intelligence network.

Across the Red corridor, Maoists are known to ruthlessly kill police informers. But, as pressure mounts on them, they have recklessly begun to kill people on suspicions of divulging information about their activities to the police. On January 19th, Maoist guerillas killed a villager, Sukhdas Baghel, right outside the Chintagufa CRPF camp. Chintagufa is a Maoist stronghold; in 2010, about 6 km from here, 76 security personnel were killed in a Maoist ambush—the highest casualties inflicted upon security forces in a single incident anywhere in any theatre of insurgency in India. Baghel had an entrepreneurial streak; he had opened up a small eatery in the village that he ambitiously named Taj Haven. He sold snacks to CRPF personnel outside their camp. That afternoon, just a few metres away from the camp, two Maoist guerrillas waylaid him and slit his throat. A few minutes earlier, they had entered a school nearby and asked the children to scurry out. "When he fell, Baghel's wife shouted, '*Sahab, goli chalao* (Sir, open fire)'. We could have easily killed his assailants, if it were not for the presence of school children," says a CRPF officer who witnessed the killing from the camp. In a note left in Merwahi, next to Suriyam Buccha's body, the Maoists accused Baghel of being a police informer. "We have undoubtedly built intelligence networks inside; but the poor guy was not our informer. He would come to the entrance of the camp to sell snacks to us," says the officer.

The almost permanent presence of security forces on the road to Jagargunda has rattled Maoists to such an extent that they are antagonising people in areas where they once had significant pockets of sympathy. The woman sarpanch of Chintagufa, Podium Muia, was abducted and kept hostage for 15 days. "They hung her upside down and beat her up," says a CRPF officer who claims that Muia had to pay Maoists a ransom of Rs 1.5 lakh to let her go.

THE MAOISTS ENTERED Bastar for the first time in June 1980. The newly founded CPI-ML (People's War)—which later merged with another Maoist group in 2004 to become the CPI (Maoist)—led by its Andhra-based leader, Kondapalli

Tempos with vegetables and other wares for Jagargunda market stuck at Chintalnar after receiving a Maoist threat

Seetharamaiah, formed seven squads to create a rear base where safe guerrilla zones could be created. Four of these pitched camp in areas that are now in Telangana: Khammam, Karimnagar, Warangal and Adilabad. Three other squads went across the Godavari river, one of them to Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, while two of them went to Bastar (then a part of Madhya Pradesh).

In April 2014, I spoke to Badranna, who was among the first batch of Adivasis in Chhattisgarh recruited by Maoists (he surrendered in 2000 along with his Maoist wife, Latakka). A Dorla Adivasi, Badranna was a teenager when the Maoists came to his village, Pamed, in Bijapur district. Initially, local Adivasis would run away in fear upon spotting Maoist guerrillas, some of whom carried rudimentary weapons. "Our elders told us that Maoists carried some potion that made people follow them," he recalled.

Villagers in Pamed—and this was true of entire Bastar—lived a difficult life. Badranna's family and everyone else he knew earned a pittance by collecting tendu leaves, used for the making of *bidis*. The Maoists gradually worked towards winning the confidence of Adivasis. On account of their strongarm tactics, tendu leaf contractors were forced to pay better wages, and they confronted petty government officials like forest guards as well. Around the same time, the Maoist cultural troupe, Jana Natya Mandali, began extensive tours in the area. The troupe adapted local folk forms to revolutionary themes that Badranna says galvanised the youth. Badranna and two other men from his village, Bimanna and Deva, joined the Maoist squad that had come visiting them. In a few years, Maoist squads had entered several villages, and many young men (and later women) got attracted to their politics.

> **"We lost everything in these twelve years. We have lived like ghosts"**
>
> **RAMA RAO** Jagargunda resident

Electricity had come to Chintalnar village on the Dornapal-Jagargunda road in 1986. In the mid and late 70s, Thakur traders from Uttar Pradesh made Chintalnar their home. Some of them set up small liquor distilleries in the area. In 1987, a large platoon of Maoists burnt down over a dozen houses belonging to these traders and looted several guns that had traditionally been in their possession. By the early 2000s, Maoists had turned the entire Bastar division into a guerrilla zone.

And then Salwa Judum happened.

In 2005, the state government decided to patronise a group of

vigilantes (called the Salwa Judum, which means 'purification hunt') who it said would help the police fight Maoists. The Judum divided Adivasis to the extent that in household after household, one brother would join the Maoists and other the Judum. It raised the level of violence in Chhattisgarh to unprecedented levels, displacing thousands of Adivasis. Many of those who suffered violence at the hands of the Judum fled to Bhadrachalam in Telangana, bordering Chhattisgarh. Those who were seen as supporters of the Judum were pursued by Maoists and had to flee to the safety of police camps.

In response to Judum, Maoists uprooted electric poles and destroyed transformers wherever they existed in their strongholds. "Imagine, I had almost 24-hour access to electricity in Chintalnar in 1986. More than 30 years later, I have to have my dinner under

"I don't know why Maoists killed my brother. He had no role to play in Salwa Judum or anything else"

VARTAMI GANGA Jagargunda resident

a solar lantern," says a villager.

It is in 2005 that Jagargunda was cut off as well. The village was turned into a security enclave of sorts, as residents of four other villages—Tarlaguda, Milampalli, Kunder and Kodmer—were brought within the cordon by security forces; immediately afterwards, the Maoists labelled these villagers Salwa Judum supporters. There are currently 538 families (approximately 3,000 people) who live in the enclave under heavy protection. There have been several attacks on the camp. The Maoists demolished all government buildings in Jagargunda and damaged the Mallevaju Bridge on the Dornapal-Jagargunda road, cutting off access. From Chintalnar onwards, in the absence of any security personnel, Maoist guerrillas would come out unhindered and operate freely.

Rama Rao was 23 when Jagargunda got cut off. He has not stepped out of the camp since then. Vartami Ganga from Milampalli came here in 2007 after his brother Madkam Joga was killed by Maoists. "They accused him of being a Judum supporter and slit his throat," he says. Gradually, Jagargunda fell off the map and Maoists took control of the entire area around it. For the past 12 years, its only contact with the outside world has been in the form of a bi-annual convoy of trucks rolling in under police escort with rations for its inhabitants.

But now with the road construction, the axis of control has changed. The Maoists have retreated from the road. Though still in constant danger of being attacked, the villagers of Jagargunda have begun to slowly venture out. For the last few months, a few residents have returned to farming in neighbouring villages. They have also started to get employment in government projects. According to government figures, development work under MGNREGA worth Rs 1.50 crore has been done for the first time with 1,340 registered families from villages on this axis, including Jagargunda.

Before 2005, Jagargunda used to be a thriving market place. Traders from as far as Bhadrachalam in Telangana would come here to sell their wares. Now, to achieve further normalcy, the police are encouraging small farmers and traders to restart the Sunday *haat* in Jagargunda. A few locals actually set up their shop at the *haat* on January 29th—after a 12-year gap—on the promise of police protection. But on the night before the next haat, scheduled on February 5th, a dreaded local Maoist commander called Papa Rao put up a notice in Chintalnar warning farmers and traders of dire consequences if they helped the police in the endeavour. As

Jagargunda village was kept isolated by Maoists for twelve years

a result, they refused to venture beyond Chintalnar.

Subba Lakshmi, who is from Konta, had hawked vegetables in the Jagargunda market every Sunday for 20 years before 2005. After Jagargunda became out of bounds, she could only sell her produce in Dornapal. "I was twenty when my husband left me," she says, "I raised two children by selling vegetables in Jagargunda." But after the market wound up, business has not been the same. Though she did sell vegetables in Jagargunda on January 29th, she did not want to return after hearing of the Maoist threat.

Many people got caught between their fears and the forces pushing for business-as-usual. Several Tempo loads of vegetables and other products stood in a line in Chintalnar. The villagers refused to go further to Jagargunda and the police refused to let them go back and sell it elsewhere. Golak Mandal, who sells clothes in the weekly *haat* held in Chintalnar on Saturday, was one of the people held up. "Business was good in Jagargunda," he says, "but it is better to sell less and stay alive." On March 5th, though, the police managed to start the market again in Jagargunda.

Before 2005, Jagargunda used to be a thriving market. Traders from as far as Bhadrachalam in Telangana would come here to sell their wares

Apart from Dornapal-Jagargunda road, several other roads through Maoist strongholds are being built under security cover. These include a road from Chintalnar to Maraiguda, a distance of 65 km that connects 13 villages. Another 20-km long road from Injaram to Bhejji and a 12-km road from Kistaram to Pedaguda are coming up as well. The mobile network has vastly been improved in the area with the setting up of 16 telecom towers. "Earlier, the Maoists would destroy mobile towers," says a police officer, "But now they have been set up inside CRPF camps."

To put further pressure on Maoists, the police have started a special drive in Sukma in villages where they have hardly ventured before. Inspired by the recent film, *Udta Punjab*, the drive is called Tedumanta Bastar (like *udta*, the term '*tedumanta*' means flying). It involves police personnel going from village to village along with a cultural troupe of Adivasis to perform songs and short plays. "We are using the Maoist strategy now to counter them only," says DSP Shukla. Just like Maoists, the troupe tells stories, in this case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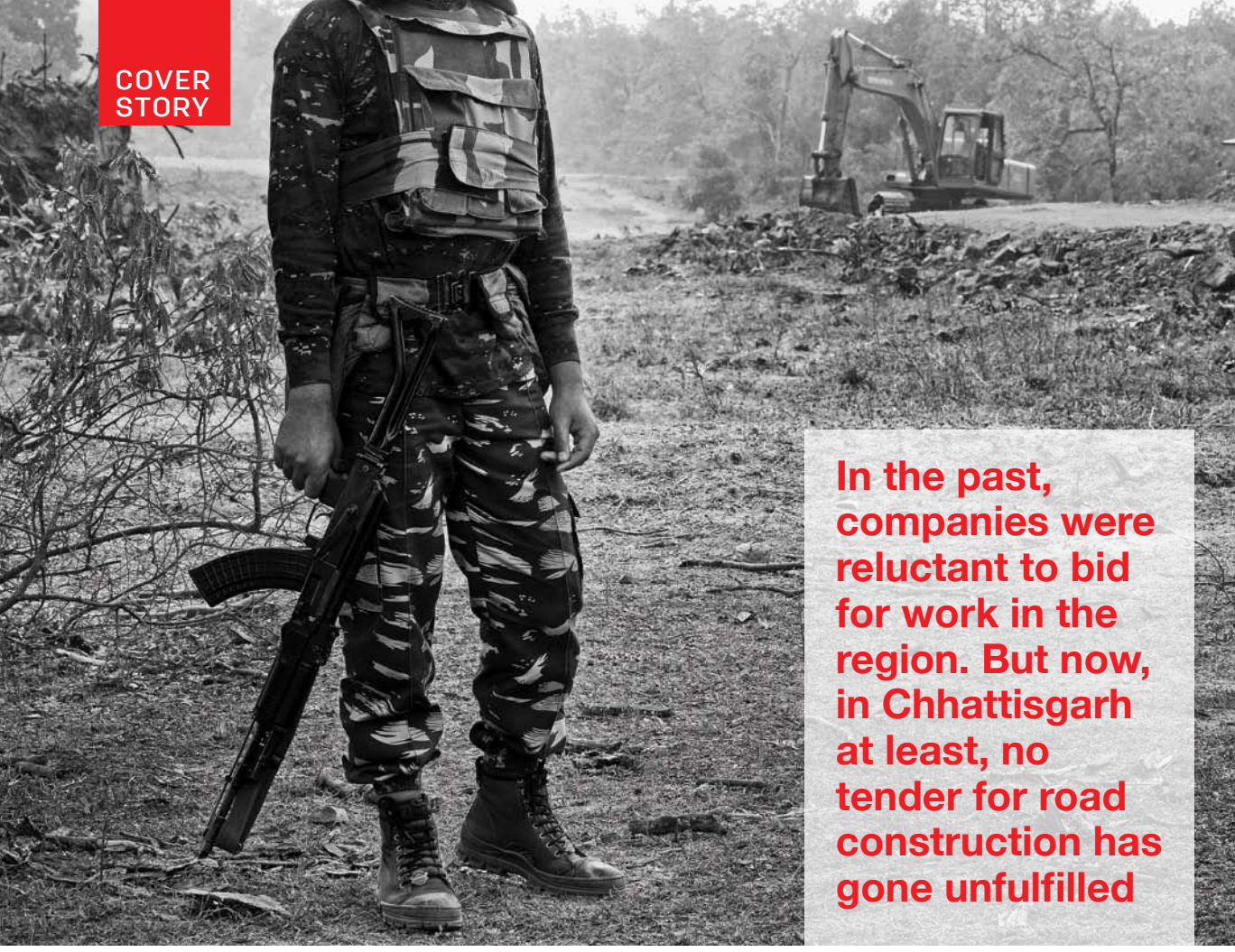

In the past, companies were reluctant to bid for work in the region. But now, in Chhattisgarh at least, no tender for road construction has gone unfulfilled

Construction work on the Dornapal-Jagargunda road

of Maoist atrocities, and urges the villagers to rise against 'slavery forced upon them by Maoists'. The idea has yielded benefits, albeit slowly. Adivasis, for example, do not run away in most cases when they see the police approaching now. "Earlier, they would run off into the forest as soon as we entered," says Shukla, "that is what Maoists had taught them."

In this fight against Maoists, however, the question of human rights violations by security forces remains a salient issue. On January 29th, the police killed two Adivasis, Sukhmati and Bheema, in the Purangel forest area in Dantewada's Kirandul police station. Both were residents of Gampur village in the neighbouring Bijapur district. Local residents contend that they were killed in cold blood, and hundreds of them had marched to Kirandul to protest against the killings. On February 17th, security personnel waylaid a group of Adivasis of Gampur, who were returning from forest after collecting *mahua* flowers, and beat them up severely. This, human rights activists allege, was done to silence the villagers into submission so that they do not raise questions about the alleged fake encounter. On February 8th, the Chhattisgarh High Court admitted a criminal writ petition in the case of the alleged gang rape and assault of 28 Adivasi women by security forces in Chinnagelur and Peddagelur in Bijapur district. The women had approached the court after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) found allegations of rape and assault by the police on 16 women to be *prima facie* true.

In the Chintagufa CRPF camp, a group of young CRPF officers, who have gathered to speak to me and wish to remain anonymous, are hopeful that the Indian state will shortly prevail in the war against Maoists. "Earlier when we would distribute household and other items among Adivasis, they would throw them away on the periphery of their villages. But now, they come to us discreetly and take these items," says an assistant commandant. Some of them go to the school nearby in their spare time and teach English and Mathematics. "Our cricket kits are extremely popular and we have distributed hundreds of them," says another officer. Seven months ago, for a woman whose child died in her womb, the CRPF had sent an urgent request for an airlift chopper. On learning that one could not be made available immediately, the officers stumped up Rs 3,000 for a pickup truck to ferry the woman to Dornapal town. "Her life was saved and we were so happy," says the second officer.

But there is sadness for their own who could not be saved. In August 2015, Sachin, a 25-year-old jawan from Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, got badly injured in an IED blast just outside the camp. "We got him inside; as his life was ebbing away, his only wish was to speak to his family, to see his young son," recounts the assistant commandant. They have now created a memorial inside the camp for Sachin. Outside the camp, there is another memorial for six CRPF soldiers who died fighting Maoists in April 2009. "By the time the war is over, this stretch will be dotted with such memorials," says the officer. ■

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THE UNREASONABLE JATS

Why they remain aggrieved, always. KUMAR ANSHUMAN travels to Jassia in Haryana on the eve of another agitation to find out

A protestor in Jassia, Rohtak district of Haryana

PHOTOS RAUL IRANI

JASSIA, A SLEEPY village in Haryana that has become a hotbed of the Jat agitation for reservation, lies some 10 km off the Rohtas Bypass, a local landmark on National Highway 10. As we reach Bahadurgarh on our way from Delhi, we confront legions of tractors flying the national flag and trolleys full of enthusiastic men and women. Also to be spotted are 'Chalo Jassia' stickers on SUVs. Everybody seems headed for the village.

Huge tents have been put up in Jassia, and thousands of people have been gathering all morning. "The crowd will swell to more than double this size in less than an hour from now," predicts 29-year-old Pawan Hooda, who is taking care of the stage built for leaders of the community to address the crowd. Jats have already held demonstrations in various other places in the state this year to demand their inclusion in the country's job and education quotas for Other Backward Classes (OBC). As a culmination of the current mobilisation, they plan a mass protest in Delhi on March 20th that they expect will be attended by more than a million people. Jats not only from Haryana but also from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab are expected to march into the national capital to make their case. "We will occupy all the seven highways connecting Delhi to the outside world and stop the supply of essential commodities," says Somveer Jassia, a 31-year-old lawyer from the village. "We won't come back until we get our demands fulfilled."

While such protests are almost an annual ritual in Haryana, the mere mention of a 'Jat agitation' brings back horrific memories of the particularly violent protests last February which saw mobs go on a rampage in many parts of the state, resulting in 30 deaths and leaving more than 200 injured. The police had failed to maintain law-and-order, and there were also allegations of murder and rapes committed by agitators. Sensing that the state government will come down heavily on any havoc this time, Jat leaders are keen to emphasise that this is a 'peaceful protest'. Last year's law-breakers were "some miscreants sent by the state government to damage our reputation and image", alleges Krishan Lal Hooda, Rohtak district general secretary of the Akhil Bharatiya Jat Arakshan Sangharsh Samiti (ABJASS), which is leading the current round of protests that began on January 29th. "No one can create trouble, as you can

see there are more women protestors than men," says Krishan Lal.

Jats account for 22 per cent of Haryana's population. They are estimated to hold one-third of the state's land and their social dominance is visible in villages as well as in cities such as Gurgaon and Rohtak, where escalating property prices over the past few years has enriched many of them. "It is plain absurd that a community that dominates every sphere of a state's life should cry discrimination," argues Vipul Mudgal, director and chief executive of the advocacy group Common Cause. "If the basis of affirmative action serves the powerful, then the whole idea goes for a toss." Yet, the clamour for reservations has grown louder among Jats, who tend use their demand as a bargaining chip with political parties in exchange for votes.

Jats are classified as OBCs in UP, MP, Bihar and Rajasthan (except Jats of Dholpur and Bharatpur). In 1990, they were placed on the OBC list even in Haryana, but the Bhajan Lal government revoked it in 1994. More recently, an inclusion order by Haryana's previous Bhupinder Singh Hooda government was struck down by the Punjab & Haryana High Court. The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) has turned the demand down not once but twice

In 2015, the Supreme Court flatly rejected the UPA's move to include Jats in the Central list of OBCs. In the judgment, Justices Ranjan Gogoi and Rohinton F Nariman dismissed the argument for a Jat quota on lack of support for the case, saying while 'caste may be a prominent and distinguishing factor for easy determination of backwardness of a social group', such identification could not be 'solely on the basis of caste'. The apex court asked the state to conduct a continuous evaluation to identify groups eligible for reservations, and to look beyond caste. Backwardness, it held, cannot be a matter of perception.

LAST MARCH, JAT lobbyists got the Haryana Assembly to pass the Haryana Backward Classes (Reservation in Services and Admission in Educational Institutions) Bill, 2016, to secure reservations for themselves, but the move was stayed by the Punjab & Haryana High Court. This was welcomed by many observers. They point out the anomaly of a caste that has had nine of the state's 11 chief ministers claiming itself underprivileged. "What is so absurd about such knee-jerk legislation is that rather than providing comfort to poorer OBCs with little assets, it forces them to compete with their powerful neighbours," says Mudgal. "A rational answer lies in addressing rural India's economic stagnation and removing weaknesses in reservations through consensus rather than recklessly expanding the list of beneficiaries."

Aggrieved Jats, however, feel an injustice has been done unto them *vis-à-vis* other castes. "People think we have land. But so do other castes like Yadavs and Sainis," argues Kaala Malik from Mokhra village who has been on protest for over a month now. "Why do they get reservations?" Leaders of Jats, who are mostly farmers, argue that with farming becoming less lucrative, their social status has been on the decline. They are frustrated that the average land-holding per farmer has fallen to less than an acre, which they say has rendered their status as landowners meaningless. According to a Lok Niti Survey on the state of Indian farmers carried out in 2014, around 60 per cent of all farmers in the country have 1-3 acres of land. Over generations of being passed down, the holdings have been getting subdivided. "There is no one is my village who owns more than an acre," says Satpal Hooda of Dhamar village in Rohtak district. "I am not able to pay the school fees of my kids through agricultural income. If I don't protest today, tomorrow my son will have nothing to eat."

> "The government tried to instigate a Jat versus others fight in UP and Haryana. But they won't be successful now"
>
> **YASHPAL MALIK** (centre)
> national president, ABJASS

The demand of Jats in Haryana is similar to that of Patidars in Gujarat and Marathas in Maharashtra. What is common to these states is that land-holding castes feel that other group beneficiaries of affirmative action are forging their way up the social hierarchy while they are left to lag on various socio-economic parameters. "It is time to question the equation of reservations with the redressal of caste inequality," says Satish Deshpande, a sociologist at Delhi University, "not because a reservation policy is no longer needed, but because it is no longer enough." Yogendra Yadav, a social scientist and politician, says that reservations should go beyond the caste matrix to address changing socio-economic structures, ensuring that no one feels left behind.

The wider set of demands that Jats are making of the government right now, though, suggest that the movement is at least partly an exercise in flexing social muscle. They want martyr status accorded to all Jats killed during last year's agitation and their families given 'fair compensation' and government jobs. They want police officers controlling the protests to be punished for their actions. This attempt to portray themselves as victims of state oppression rather than vandals flies in the face of what happened and only loses them the sympathy of others.

Aware perhaps of the dangers of aliening non-Jats, the movement's leaders appear to have shifted tack. Jassia, the control centre of the agitation, has around 5,000 voters that include 35 non-Jat castes. Wary of a widening social divide, Jats here now talk of unity among all: '36 *Jaat Ka Bhaichara*' (36-caste brotherhood) is a slogan that figures prominently on protest posters. There is another notable feature of the movement this time: since last October, there has been a large increase in the participation of women. '*Matri shakti*' (women's power) finds mention in every speech at the protest site. A tent has been erected exclusively for women protestors.

"This time, we have decided that women and elder people too would be part of our agitation," says Om Prakash Hooda, *pradhan* of Hooda Khap in Haryana. "The women are more enthusiastic about coming out of their homes and fighting for their rights. They understand it is for the future of the community." Several Jat women address the gathering. Renu Jassia, a 30-year-old woman ascends the stage to give a stirring speech: "Our idol is Deen Bandhu Choudhary Chhotu Ram, who always advised Jats to maintain discipline. Learn to control your aggression and demonstrate at the right time. Victory will be ours." The crowd cheers for her. Another woman, her face covered with veil, takes the stage. "We won't celebrate Holi this time. Our Holi would be after the victory. Raise your hands if you agree," she exhorts.

ALMOST EVERY SPEECH stokes Jat pride. "We are the most humble people till so long as we get respect," says Atar Singh of Ismaila village. "But if someone plays with our *atma samman* (self-respect), we can fight to the death." Most speakers reserve special anger for the state BJP government, and especially Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. "We committed a big blunder by voting for BJP," says Kishan Lal Hooda. "Last year, they projected us as villains across the country. That was not true. We will teach the government a lesson."

Yashpal Malik, national president of the ABJASS, which he began in 2009 after quitting his job in the Air Force, has campaigned extensively across western UP for the state's Assembly polls, asking fellow Jats not to vote BJP. "They say that they will waive farm loans within 15 days of coming to power," says Malik. "Why didn't they do it in the state where they have a government? They tried to instigate a Jat versus others fight in UP and Haryana. But they won't be successful now," he adds.

Malik's stature among Jats here is clear from the reverence he gets. "Some BJP leaders say, 'How can a Jat from UP lead Haryana Jats?'" says Ashok Balhara, who is in charge of ABJASS in the state. "If Rama can become the lord of the country, why can't Malik become our leader? He is like Lord Rama to us." The ABJASS chief's mass popularity is apparent the moment he arrives with a small cavalcade of SUVs. Young men and women rush to greet him as soon as he alights from his vehicle, swarming around.

Malik takes the mike and assumes command of the crowd. "I have to make an important announcement," he declares, talking about March 20th, "Women won't march to Delhi on that day. Instead they will keep up the protest here. We want to divide police attention at various places. Besides, you have to take care of our homes when male members are away." He has been touring various states over the past few days and is pleased with the turnout everywhere. "There are 30 such protests happening simultaneously across Haryana and almost 10 lakh people are participating regularly for more than a month now," he says. "Despite that, the government has ignored us. We had no option but to announce a huge protest in Delhi." On March 2nd, he held a demonstration at Jantar Mantar in Delhi where a decision was taken to hold the mega-rally coming up. There will be no shortage of cash for the event. "Collections have reached around Rs 2 crore from each site," the leader claims. "Also, all the villagers are collecting money and have promised to take care of our basic needs like food and shelter during the protest." After Vinay Budhwar, 18, died while returning from the March 2nd protest in Delhi, community leaders gave his family Rs 11 lakh with a promise of more.

Rajmani from Kaloi village darts towards the person collecting cash in Jassia, waves a Rs 500 note, and says, "*Chhore ke liye* Kaloi Mahila Mandal *ki taraf se* (for the boy from the Kaloi women's group)." Everyone who turns up at the site has something or the other to offer. Some bring wheat-flour packets, others potato bags, mustard oil and milk to serve the thousands in attendance. "I may not be alive for long, but this protest will help my grandsons," says 83-year-old Chet Ram who hasn't returned to his village Ghillour since he came here in late January.

The protestors say they are aware the government is watching them. "Our phones are on surveillance," says Malik, "So we don't talk over the phone." Decisions taken at this meeting are to be conveyed to others in person. Only tractors—thousands from Jassia alone—will be used for transport, it transpires. Water tankers will accompany them, and people are being asked to bring food. "The young will be trained how to break police barriers," says Malik. "We will do a peaceful protest by blocking everything towards Delhi." He himself will lead a convoy of tractors from Meerut in UP.

Meanwhile, the Haryana government has constituted a five-member committee headed by Chief Secretary DS Dhesi to hold talks with Jat leaders. "The officers in the committee don't have a mandate to take a decision," says Malik, "They have reached us twice, but their intent is to disrupt the movement." On his part, Dhesi says, "I am personally involved in the talks and am confident something will be worked out."

The founding fathers of India's Constitution had seen job reservations as a way to end the caste system with all its inequities, but post-Mandal politics and the extension of quotas to such a vast part of the electorate as OBCs turned the policy into just another political bargaining chip. India's polity must realise that this is a slippery slope. More and more quotas will make a mockery of the aims of affirmative action. ■

ASHISH SHARMA

FREE SCREECH

Campus culture wars and the trivialisation of an ideal

A poster at the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus; (below) Gurmehar Kaur with a placard that sparked a controversy

By SIDDHARTH SINGH

DELHI WAS SUBJECTED to a strange spectacle recently: a series of unrelated events that began with a cancelled seminar at Ramjas College in Delhi University and ended with a social media storm after a tweet by a young woman. What tied it all together was the claim that 'freedom of speech' was in peril in India.

It all began on a day in February when a seminar on 'Cultures of Protest' that was to feature Umar Khalid, a Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student once charged with sedition, was cancelled allegedly under pressure from the ABVP, a student union affiliated with the BJP. The day after the event was cancelled, 'pro-freedom' students took out a march on the campus where, allegedly, slogans favouring independence for Kashmir were chanted. Within no time, chaos gripped the University. A counter-march by the ABVP on a tense campus worsened matters. If this were not enough, a social media post by Gurmehar Kaur, a student of Lady Shriram College (LSR) and daughter of an Army officer killed in action, took the situation seemingly to a point of no return. Allegations, counter-allegations and bitterness of a kind seldom seen marked the latest round of student unrest in the capital. Then, as suddenly as it all began, the episode cooled down.

All this is reminiscent of earlier 'protests' by writers returning awards in 2015 and the week of rage in JNU last year when anti-India slogans became fashionable. Perhaps the most vexed issue in all these controversies—ranging from the events of February 9th last year at JNU where '*azaadi*' slogans were allegedly raised to the latest brouhaha at Delhi University—is that of freedom of speech. From the number of thwarted academic programmes in the Delhi area—where 'contentious' topics were to be discussed—a conclusion can be drawn that free speech stands imperilled in India. Matters are, however, more complicated.

In JNU, amid the lush expanse of its campus, a professor at one of its relatively liberal (read: non-Left dominated) schools explains the complexity of the debate beyond the simple 'the state wants to crush dissent' one-liner. In academic settings, the search for excellence requires questioning almost everything that comes one's way. That is essential for new discoveries to be made and solutions to be found for problems. The liberty to raise slogans such as 'freedom of Kashmir' squarely falls within this domain of freedom. "I would be fine with the slogans on Kashmir. But the issue is that what has taken place here has skirted the boundary of incitement. Now that is not acceptable. It is difficult to make a judgment where one (freedom of speech) ends and incitement (in Kashmir) begins," says the professor.

How much of a problem is this? Is there evidence that the shouting of slogans does incite violence elsewhere—in Kashmir, for example?

Open reached out to a government officer closely involved with such matters and asked him if JNU-like events pose a danger to security. "If you ask me about the existence of a link between

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A rally against ABVP at Delhi University

shouting slogans for 'freedom for Kashmir' and secessionists being emboldened in Jammu and Kashmir, I cannot prove this in the manner of a law court. But if you ask me whether this emboldens militants, yes it certainly does," he says.

This is a treacherous domain where a vital freedom can turn into something dangerous for the country on one side, and on the other any attempt to 'squeeze' freedom appears to militate against what distinguishes India from many other developing countries where precious freedoms have been sacrificed. "Take the case of 'freedom for Kashmir'," the JNU professor says, "It has a very weak case when seen from legal, political and historical perspectives. There is overwhelming evidence that India is on the right side and there is little merit for so-called *azaadi* there." The trouble, this scholar says, is that by shouting down academics who want to say something in favour of letting Kashmir go its own way, we only give them more credit than they deserve on a scholarly plane.

BEYOND THE SINGLE substantive issue of freedom of speech, these protests show something much more mundane. First, they are triggered by single events and lead to an escalation and counter-escalation that dies down as quickly as the flare-up. In the instant case, after the seminar at Ramjas College was cancelled, a huge rally by the 'pro-freedom' group was followed by a counter-rally a day later by students affiliated to the ABVP. Then, within a week, Delhi University returned to normalcy. Two, these protests are largely Delhi-centric. With the exception of protests in Hyderabad University after Rohith Vemula committed suicide, campuses across India have remained peaceful and students have gone about their regular activities: classes, exams and other work have continued unabated. Three, at the most mundane level, it is a simple fight between the Left's student unions—which have little influence in Delhi outside JNU—and the ABVP, which has historically been strong in Delhi University, defending its campus turf. "It is not a serious ideological fight... it is designed to be oppositional. There are elements of opportunism in all this. But yes, there are other issues pertaining to academic work that have become hopelessly tangled in all this, ones that do not permit an easy solution," says Rajesh Rajagopalan, a professor of international relations at JNU.

In recent weeks, one such matter has grabbed attention to an extent. In accordance with University Grants Commission (UGC) rules, JNU recently asked faculty members not to take on more than eight PhD students each. This was a normal academic-cum-administrative measure meant to streamline the functioning of the university and also improve the quality of academic output. This step, too, has been sucked into the political maelstrom of campus politics. Now, sinister motives are being imputed to what the university administration considered a purely academic matter.

Depending on one's vantage, the events of the last two weeks appear to be either a case of India creeping towards 'fascism' (the Left's view) or a matter of abiding with the idea of India as a nation-state whose boundaries ought to be respected (the ABVP's).

There are historical echoes that show this 'debate' is not new. From the late 1940s until 1990, Leftists used to debate what was called the 'nationalities question in India'. This was something that had been dutifully picked up from Soviet literature. The idea was simple: India is not one single nation but a clubbing together of various 'nationalities', each with distinct aspirations. This is the prism through which the 'struggles' in Punjab, Nagaland and J&K were viewed by the Left. It is another matter that in all these three troubled states, the so-called nationalities question was closely tied to religion, something the Left has found very hard to come to grips with. The result was a series of intellectual somersaults over the decades that led nowhere except some kind of melancholic longing for a 'struggle'. In the meantime, Punjab returned to normalcy, as did Nagaland, leaving only Kashmir as the residual example.

But unlike the first wave of the debate on nationalism in India, this time around there is no care taken to build and argue a case for 'different nationalities' in India, but a cheap reduction of it to slogans and catechisms on the subject. 'India is an occupying force in Kashmir' and 'Kashmir has been colonised by India' are some of the Leftist slogans one hears on campuses. It requires no elaboration that these simplistic claims betray ignorance of what is a complex history. If earlier generations of Indian Marxists displayed some 'scholarly' engagement with nationalism, their successors are only adept at chanting what are mere slogans bereft of any analytical content.

"The question is no longer that of the Left or Right, but one of competence and rigour in arguments," says Makarand Paranjape, another scholar who has been subjected to hooliganism by Leftist students recently.

More than half a century ago, the American historian Richard Hofstadter described a similar climate of mistrust in the US as 'the paranoid style in American politics'. He was not questioning the mental status of those who made fantastic claims and dished out conspiracy theories, but the utterly fantastic air about it all. The 'paranoid style' was in rage soon after the Cold War began and lasted until after the defeat of the unconventional conservative Barry Goldwater in America's 1964 presidential election.

It won't be a stretch to say that India is experiencing its own 'paranoid style' these days—but on the Leftist end of the political spectrum. Since the start of 2014, when there were enough hints that Narendra Modi could become the Prime Minister of India, not a day goes by without some dire prognosis of doom. The common theme in all this is the coming end of various freedoms in India. But strangely, the louder these dire prophecies get, the weaker the claim of freedom in danger. ■


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Sins of the Father

Another case of sexual assault rocks the Catholic Church in Kerala

By SHAHINA KK

'But who so shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea'

—Matthew 18:2-6

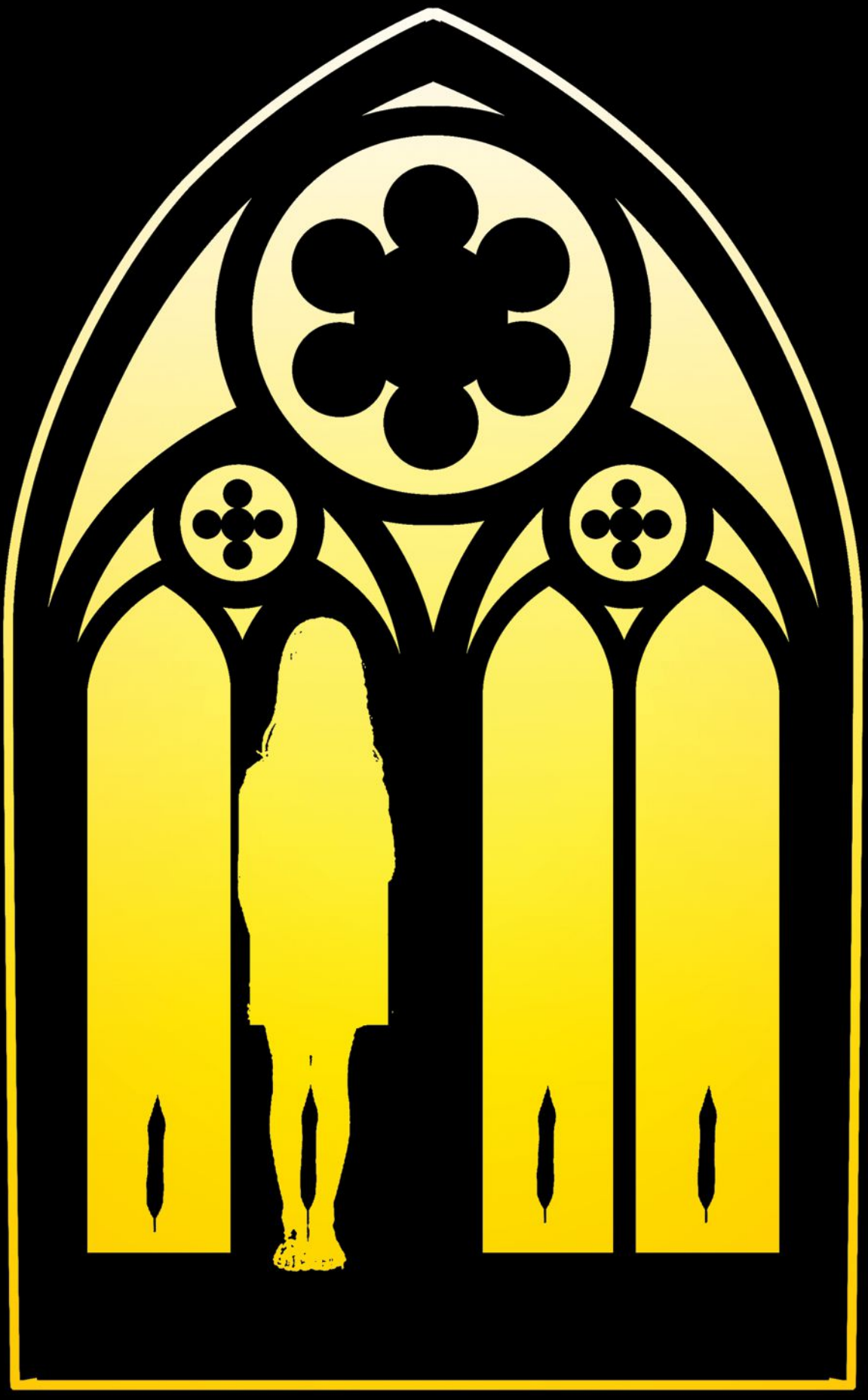
POPE FRANCIS' RECENT call for zero tolerance towards child offenders within the Church seems to have had little impact in Kerala. The recent arrest of a priest in Kannur for raping and impregnating a 16-year-old girl has thrown the issue in sharp relief again. Father Robin Vadakkumchery, the Parish priest of St Sebastian's Church in Kottiyoor in Kannur district was taken into custody under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code; he faces charges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) and Juvenile Justice (JJ) Acts as well. He stands accused of several crimes other than rape, including a conspiracy to cover up the alleged sexual abuse and a pregnancy that resulted from it, complicity in moving the newborn from the mother's arms to an unknown place, and finally offering money to the family to stay silent and forcing the minor to pin the child's paternity on her own father if anyone were to ask. According to the police, while the main accused is Vadakkumchery, other priests and nuns were involved in breaking a series of laws in his favour.

The case surfaced once the girl's plight was brought to the notice of Child Line, a private service meant for such reports. Its workers met the girl and learnt of her status as a minor, what she had undergone, and of the child she had borne. "We got the information from Child Line," says Sunil Kumar, Circle Inspector of Police at the Peravoor station in Kannur district, who is in charge of the investigation. "Initially, the girl was in denial mode, and said she had no complaints against anyone. She refused to disclose Father Robin's name. Upon further interrogation, she made the shocking statement that her own father raped her. When I questioned her father, I was convinced that he was innocent. We gave the girl extensive counselling and made her aware of the legal and social consequences .She disclosed the name of Father Robin only after she realised that her dad would go to jail."

The sequence of crimes began in May 2016, according to the police. It was a rainy day, and the girl had been left alone in the church hall after her brother, who had accompanied her there, returned home early. The priest allegedly asked the girl into the rest room and then raped her. Being of a poor family, the girl and her family saw themselves as helpless against the authority of the priest. Once the pregnancy was obvious, they were later offered Rs 10 lakh as hush money—and for the girl's father to be cited as the man responsible for it. On February 17th, the victim delivered a baby in Christhu Raja hospital in Kannur, and the newborn was moved to an orphanage run by the Church the same day.

Once an FIR was registered, the priest tried to flee, but the police caught him in Malappuram on his way to the airport. As questioning revealed, his plan was to move to Canada. The probe has since widened to cover the roles of eight others—among them, five nuns and the doctor and administrative officer of the hospital—and all are absconding.

Adding fuel to the fire, a Church-funded weekly magazine *Sunday Shalom* published a bizarre editorial holding the victim



ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAURABH SINGH

responsible for her so-called 'sin'. The editorial says: 'Dear girl, you are like my daughter, let me tell you this, you are also at fault before the God Almighty, Why did you forget who a priest is? Having a human body, he also has temptations. It was your duty to stop him.'

In a dramatic turn of events since, the police is currently on the trail of Father Thomas Joseph Therakom, chairman of Wayanad's Child Welfare Committee (CWC), and Sister Betty, a member of it, both of whom are suspects. "Child Line reported the incident to the CWC on February 7th, but they too tried to hush up the matter. They took no legal steps as stipulated in the JJ and POCSO Acts," says the police officer in charge of the investigation.

Since Therakom, a priest, was the head of a quasi-judicial authority, the police needed state clearance to act against him. On March 6th, the state government disbanded the CWC, taking away his immunity, and the Church authorities have informed the media that he has been suspended from the position he held as spokesperson of the Mananthavady Diocese.

CASES OF SEXUAL abuse involving priests have been coming to light with alarming frequency in Kerala. In December 2016, a special court in Ernakulam sentenced a Catholic priest to a double life term as he was found guilty of raping a 14-year-old girl. Father Edwin Figarez, a parish priest at Lourde Matha Church in Puthenvelikkara, had raped the girl several times that year. The existence of accomplices had raised eyebrows in this case too, with a nurse at a government health centre also

convicted for her failure to report the case to the police.

In a similar incident in 2014, Father Raju Kokkan, a Parish priest of the Thrissur Catholic Archdiocese was arrested for the alleged sexual abuse of a 10-year-old girl. According to the police, he took the child to the parsonage of the church where he would perform duties as a priest, and then raped and took nude photographs of her. The trial is underway at a Thrissur sessions court.

On July 23rd, 2013, Fathima Sophia, a 17-year-old girl, was found dead in the residence of Father Arokiaraj, a Parish priest of St Stanislaus Church in Walayar, Palakkad. The police closed the case as one of 'suicide', but the priest later confessed to murder. He made the disclosure as a 'strategic error' when he got caught in a sting operation by a Tamil TV channel, which aired footage of the priest admitting that he'd killed her when she resisted his advances. The case was reopened, and the court ordered that he be booked along with four other priests (for trying to conceal the crime), including Bishop Thomas Aquinas of Coimbatore. The confession had followed an epic battle waged by the victim's mother Shanthi Roselin. Over the phone, the priest had admitted to Roselin that he'd had sexual contact with her daughter, even though he'd insisted it was at the latter's instance, and also referred to the girl's death as an 'accident'. Having recorded the phone conversations, the mother sought the help of a journalist friend to arrange the sting. Thus the priest was caught on camera saying that he had strangulated Fathima with her *dupatta* to silence her once she started screaming. It was apparent that the police had been too hasty in closing the case as suicide, ignoring a letter written by the girl to her mother that Father Arokiaraj would be responsible if something were to happen to her. All the five accused are out on bail and the trial is yet to begin.

"Sexual crimes committed by priests cannot be compared to those by ordinary people," says Maria, who was once a nun. She quit her convent because she could not put up with the exploitation of nuns there. "The sexual offences committed by priests cannot be viewed as a singular crime committed by one person. It is an organised crime," she alleges, "The authorities or whoever is concerned only try to hush up matters instead of reporting the same to the police. They are worried only about the reputation of the Church and do not bother about victims."

Maria's own experience was traumatic. She was forced into sexual relations with a priest for a few years, and she felt she had no option but to cooperate with him if she wanted to stay at the convent. "Finally, I decided to wind up the double game," she says. Many other former nuns and priests vouch for what Maria has to report. "You cannot see a single incident of sexual abuse directly reported to the police by the Church authorities themselves. They take action against the priest involved only after the crime is exposed. Its power, absolute power, and even the media is silent on this aspect," says a former seminary student who quit three decades ago and is now a planter. "This is not a new phenomenon, I knew such things have been happening since 1980. Priests travel in India and abroad accompanied by nuns," he adds, "and nuns have very little voice, they have no choice but to follow instructions."

An activist working for socially deprived children in Maharashtra, a nun who has seen these power equations closely, says she feels sorry for the nuns booked in the Kottiyoor case. "This is a heinous crime and I have no doubt that whoever involved in concealing the crime should be brought to the court," she says, "but I assume that those nuns are too powerless to report the crime to the police even if they wanted to do. Once a nun, the choices are limited. Quitting the convent and going back home is hell."

Among the most sensational cases involving the Catholic clergy in Kerala was the 1992 murder of Sister Abhaya , who was found dead in the well of St Pius Xth Convent in Kottayam. It led to a national outcry, the CBI was brought in, and there were suspicions that the probe had been botched. There had been signs of a physical struggle at the crime scene, and bodily injuries found in the autopsy suggested a case of homicide, but attempts were allegedly made to pass it off as suicide. It was only in 2008 that two priests and a nun were charged with Sister Abhaya's murder, but by then much evidence had been lost or tampered with. In 2009, the CBI submitted a report saying the victim had most likely been killed with an axe and dumped in the well after she stumbled upon the two priests and a nun in a 'compromising position', but no conclusive evidence could be provided. The case has not yet come to a close, and several writ petitions on various aspects of the case have complicated legal proceedings.

> "Initially, the girl was in denial mode, and said she had no complaints against anyone. She refused to disclose Father Robin's name. We had to give her extensive counselling"
>
> **SUNIL KUMAR**
> circle inspector in charge of the Kannur rape case

While cases such as these do not mean that the Church itself has fallen afoul of the law in its conduct, its reputation risks being tarnished in public perception. "The Catholic Church has made a vital contribution to the growth of the state," says a senior Christian journalist, adding, "The popular image of a priest or nun was that of a person who dedicated his or her life to the welfare of the society. Malayalam cinema did not have a villain who is a priest or nun till the 90s. That trend began only after the Abhaya case." He holds the view that the Catholic Church is an institution powerful enough in Kerala to protect its own. It is in its own interest not to let criminals hide themselves under a cloak of piety. ■

WHEN COWS COME HOME TO DIE

Some of the worst casualties of the drought in south India are its cattle. V SHOBA visits the Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border where lives are tied to them

PHOTOS JYOTHY KARAT

THE DROUGHT-BLIGHTED world of 50-year-old Masiamma has a brutal kind of beauty. Chokkanalli, a tiny Irula settlement bordering Mudumalai National Park in Tamil Nadu, not far from the Ooty-Masinagudi tourist corridor, is part of the Sigur plateau in the northern Nilgiri hills. It is no one's idea of a holiday, its stark Ballardian landscape clothed in the browns of summer. The village and the forests around it are in the midst of a profoundly terrifying dry spell. Prickly pears past their prime and limp bougainvillea are the only things that thrive on the stripped earth. The drought has laid waste to livelihoods here, leaving the 40 households that have long since given up farming–the hamlet is part of an elephant corridor and agriculture isn't a viable option—bleak-eyed and broken-hearted. Their main source of income is their cows, born in their homes, defended with blood, and now stunted by scarcity. Over two-thirds of their 500-odd cattle are dead. The ones that remain, all skin and bones, are dead behind the eyes. When the cows go out to graze, the women send them off with a calm, kindly gaze, knowing they may never return. They try to keep busy, pitting and cleaning tamarind, combing their hair to look their best at the temple festival that is underway in the neighbouring village of Bokkapuram, and wrapping up flavoured rice for the menfolk who set out every day looking for work in the plantations only to return empty-handed. The villagers watch a lot of TV these days, says P Saroja, the wife of the local priest, sitting in the shade of her verandah with her teenaged daughter. "Who would want to bring children into this world? The TV is our only source of happiness," she says. "There is nothing to do. The government still owes us thousands of rupees for the [MNREGA] work we did last year. The cows are dying and the money we make selling

"This year, with over 60 per cent deficit in

The road to Mangala village, Karnataka

rainfall, all water holes in the forest have dried up" **SRINIVAS REDDY** field director, Mudumalai Reserve

milk and dung—Rs 30 per basket—is also dwindling. It feels like our lives are being blown away in the wind."

Masiamma is not yet ready to give up. She locks her bright blue door behind her, a plastic pot filled with water hoisted on her hip, an aluminum trough with hay dangling from her left hand. Seven of her 11 cows died in the past three weeks and one has collapsed in the woods, too weak to walk home. "It has been in the forest for three days. It can only walk a few steps every day and will die if I don't bring her food and water," she says. "It has birthed just one calf. It is too young to die." In a pink polyester sari, a towel draped over the head rising in a plume behind her, Masiamma walks nearly two kilometres—we trail her through the dirt, heat-sapped and exhausted—until she reaches the edge of the forest where the cow sits slumped in the dappled shadow of a tree. Beset by dehydration, it slurps up the water in a jiffy. The small bundle of fodder is not nearly enough, but it cost Masiamma Rs 25. She knows it is a matter of time before she loses this cow to starvation or to a predator attack. "Last night at 2 am, two elephants came into the village looking for water. All the animals are hungry and thirsty. I only hope the cow regains its strength and returns home before something attacks it. It cannot even fight back," she says, hurrying back to the village, where her two remaining cows and a calf are waiting for their meagre lunch.

"Last night at 2 am, two elephants came to the village

LAST YEAR, TAMIL Nadu received only 543 mm of rain as against its annual average of 920 mm, the lowest recorded since 1846. Most *taluks* in Karnataka are grappling for water and even Kerala is in the midst of the worst drought in a century. It is no surprise that the deciduous forests of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve are dry as paper, the ground a stagnant yellow-brown tract that can scarcely support the lives of over 100 species of mammals that depend on it. Deer amble into the burnt-down fireline like mythical spirits with antlers. Herds of elephants have upped and left for Bhavanisagar in search of water. Trees are bare sticks poking at the sky. "It is not as alarming as it looks. For four months every year, the forest is dry and the elephants and the deer lose weight during this time. The weakest of them die—it is a natural culling—and the rest learn to adapt to an increasingly drier climate. This year, however, with over 60 per cent deficit in rainfall, all water holes in the forest have dried up and we have had to employ water tankers to fill them regularly," says Srinivas Reddy, field director, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. The 32,000-hectare expanse of Mudumalai, along with the larger Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Silent Valley National Park, Mukurthi National Park, the upper Nilgiri Plateau, the Siruvani hills and Nilambur together constitute the 5,500-sq km Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, one of the most ecologically significant zones in India. Drought may be the new normal for the animals of the reserve, but the people living on its fringes, largely dependent on the forest, find their lives receding into poverty with each failed monsoon. Last month, a raging fire levelled over a thousand hectares in Bandipur and claimed the life of a forest guard. The same day, another blaze consumed a small hill in Mudumalai. Both, say forest officials, were started by disgruntled tribals. The forest department employs a few hundred tribals as fire watchers, but restricted access to the forest and its wealth of produce, coupled with the dearth of water and pasture land, have made it hard for most communities to eke out a living. "We are paid Rs 6,000 a month to look out for fires, but there are thousands without a job or any way to make money," says K Bomman, 25, an eco watcher from Masinagudi who is into his fourth year of service with the forest department. He is stationed by the road to Theppakadu along with three other watchers whose primary job is to look out for cigarette butts that could well start a fire. The trench behind them, now covered in dry underbrush, is actually a wetland, Bomman says.

H Natarajan, 56, a farmer from Vazhaithottam near Masinagudi, was an eco watcher for two decades before he started growing peanut, *ragi* and pulses on his father's agricultural land—about three acres—in 2004. There were some good years, but farming seems like a doomed prospect now. The Moyar river that drains the plains along the interstate border is reduced to a doubtful stream. Untimely rains, long dry spells and a lack of awareness and resources among small farmers to try new methods of irrigation could spell the end of agriculture in the drier regions of the Nilgiris, he says. "The government offers drip irrigation subsidies only to landowners. But most people here, especially SC and ST communities, farm on common land without a *patta*," he says. The only source of

Drought has become the new norm for animals of the 5,500-sq km Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve; (left) Masiamma, who lives close to Mudumalai National Park in Tamil Nadu, walks 2 km every day to fetch water for her cow

looking for water. All the animals are hungry and thirsty" **MASIAMMA** resident, Chokkanalli, Tamil Nadu

livelihood for small farmers is livestock, and this year, with pasture land drying up, more than half the cattle population of Masinagudi has vanished, Natarajan says. "Never have we lost so many cows."

SHRINKING COMMON PASTURES across south India are no more alarming than the government promoting a transition to the stall fodder system, says GV Ramanjaneyulu, an agricultural scientist with the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Hyderabad. "All government schemes are focused on stall-based rather than grazing-based options. Feeding grains to livestock puts extra burden on farmland and increases the ecological footprint of animal husbandry. Moreover, the Western livestock system, where animals are crammed into small spaces, makes them susceptible to disease, necessitating antibiotics and growth hormones," he says. The cumulative effect of the rainfall deficit over the past three years will be hard to shake off, he says, especially for farmers dependent on small numbers of milch cattle. "The stall-based system is a death knell for the small farmer."

Subsidised dry fodder depots set up by the governments of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are few and far between. "Milk prices are not rising despite the drought and higher cost of inputs—up by over three times in the past decade. In the absence of pasture land, I have to spend Rs 260 for a bale of hay, which can feed four cows for a day. Small farmers cannot afford this. The government, instead of trying to be a supplier of feed, should extend financial assistance to marginal cattle owners," says Karthikeya Sivasenaapathy, a native cattle evangelist and Managing Trustee, Senaapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation, Tiruppur. It is extremely difficult to estimate the number of milch cattle in south India, let alone guess the number of deaths from drought, he says. The 19th livestock census conducted in 2012 puts the number of cows in India at 122.9 million, with Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka accounting for a little under 15 per cent of the population. It also indicates a preference for high-yielding exotic breeds which, says Sivasenaapathy, are far less likely to survive dry spells.

Across the border, in Karnataka, the 16 villages in the vicinity of the Bandipur forests, hardened though they may seem from enduring arid summers year after year, are headed toward a dark future. Their cattle, walking the stubborn earth, are ghosts of their former selves, many of them collapsing on the streets and dying prematurely. En route to the village of Mangala, we meet 75-year-old Javraiya and his famished cows lapping at a leak in a water pipe by a field. He lost four of his cows just last week and shakes his head when I ask him how many of the remaining 20 will survive the summer. "I ran a dairy until last year, earning at least Rs 8,000 a month. Now, I have to buy milk," he says. The men of Mangala, home to over 1,000 healthy cows until a couple of years ago, now work as coolies in resorts and plantations nearby. "Youth no longer want to stay on in the village. In most of the 300 houses here, you will only find old people, living at the mercy of the rain. All the borewells in the village have dried up. We have not sown anything this year and with the cattle dying, we can no longer support ourselves," says Gayappa Devar, an ageing resident.

In Cheluvarayanapura, a hamlet of about 25 houses near Mangala, women carefully fill buckets at the common tank, spilling not a drop. There is enough water to drink, but no pasture, says B Kaliamma, 40, tearing up as she talks of her three cows that died two weeks ago. She only has one calf left, besides some fowl, two young goats and two acres of fallow land. She wants her nine-year-old son Anand and eight-year-old daughter Harini to work in the city when they are older, she says. "Our villages are dying. The cows are just the first ones to go."■

GAME N

The Bengaluru victory against Australia shows why the Test format inspires such devotion

By ADITYA IYER

FIRST, PICTURE A dog. An old, scraggly mutt. He doesn't shake hands, perform tricks or fetch newspapers—that kind of dog. Tugging at the choke chain, no sense of self-preservation dog. The kind of dog your children will never take a shine to. Sometimes, even you will secretly wish that it would be better off for everyone if he were gone. That kind of dog. But sometimes, just sometimes, when the half-blind, fully self-centred fellow lays a squirrel at your feet and shows you how much he cares, your devotion to him begins to border on the profound.

That kind of dog has a name. He's called Test cricket.

Earlier this week in Bengaluru, that old mutt hauled himself

OT OVER

REUTERS

Virat Kohli speaks to the umpire as Steven Smith (right) walks off the ground after being dismissed in Bengaluru

up the couch, nuzzled your neck and told you it will be 'A-okay'. Because that's exactly how overwhelming those four days of pure, old school cricket—asphyxiating, long-format cricket—were. Unanimously observed by all those who witnessed it (fans and critics alike), the match brought out a range of rich, primary emotions: fear, anger and sadness at one end. Joy, admiration and anticipation at the other.

This Test match, and Australia's ongoing tour in India, will now set aside the phenomenon that was the series between these very teams in 2001. During the 16 years in between, the dog had nearly lost relevance on these shores.

Like in life, the story of a Test match—any Test match, least of all an enthralling one—cannot be told without a larger narrative, a backstory. Before the Australians arrived on this soil, Virat Kohli's India had gone unbeaten in 19 Test matches—13 of those in India. They had won six consecutive Test series—the lack of contest draining the format of its romance. Australia, on the other hand, had last won a Test match on the turning tracks of Asia back in 2011 (Galle), a time when their current captain Steven Smith was still aspiring to be a leg-spinner.

Since then, they had been blanked 4-0 in India (2013), 2-0 by

Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates (2014) and 3-0 in Sri Lanka (2016). The pundits had written Smith's side off even before they landed in Mumbai in February. As an old foe of theirs, Harbhajan Singh, told a newspaper, "If Australia play well, India will win 3-0," adding, "That is if Australia play well. Otherwise, 4-0."

In spectacular fashion, Australia answered back on the dusty minefield of a wicket in Pune. For the first Test, the teams were welcomed with an abrasive pitch, one that was expected to turn square from Day One. It did, promptly bringing the Australian spinners into play. The greatness of India's spinners—R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Jayant Yadav—lay in the fact that they could summon their expertise and artistry on neutral pitches. A rank turner had blunted that edge. That winning edge.

The unlikely Australian win (by 333 runs) produced an unlikelier hero in left-arm spinner Steven O'Keefe (he took 12 wickets in the fifth match of his career) and the unlikeliest scorecard— Kohli's team was bowled out for 105 and 107 in the two innings. Test cricket in India was once again a bar-room brawl. The romance was back. "We shut a few people up," fast bowler Mitchell Starc said after the match. "But it's only one Test win, not a series win yet."

By the time we took our seats at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru, plenty of water had flowed under the Halasuru bridge. When Kohli won the toss on what seemed like a batting wicket, commentator Sanjay Manjrekar said rather than asked: "So Virat, obviously you will be batting first?" He did and before the end of day, India had been bowled out almost single-handedly by Nathan Lyon (figures of 8/50, the best bowling figures by any foreigner in India) for 189—their third straight innings of less than 200.

At stumps on Day One, Australia had consolidated their momentum, their openers David Warner and Matt Renshaw returning to the dressing room with the score at 40 for no loss. Captain Kohli, said pundits in the press box, would do well to draw this match.

AP

THE SAME PUNDITS will also tell you, but only with the crutch of hindsight, that the turnaround unfolded over Day Two, with the speed of growing fingernails. Over the course of seven part-excruciating, part-hypnotic hours, India's bowlers choked the Australian batsmen for runs. The going was slow for the men in the middle and also the spectators in the stands, with the visitors scoring just 197 runs (at a rate of 2 runs an over) all day. Momentum stalled, if only temporarily, Kohli still had to ensure that their first innings lead wasn't a sizeable one.

The lead had a number early on Day Three—87. The Australians would've liked a more bloated figure, but on this two-paced pitch, where some balls reared from good length and others kept alarmingly low, coupled with India's now-brittle batting line-up, it could've just been enough. It seemed more than enough when India found themselves floundering at 120 for four (essentially 37 for four), with no Kohli (dismissed for his fourth successive score of 15 or less) to forge a rescue either.

A lesser team, or almost any other Indian team from our recent past, would have folded under the weight of this pressure. But not Kohli's India. Just as Australia threatened to run away with the match, two walking wickets in this series, Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane, dug deep and learned to crawl. By the end of the third day, both were unbeaten and India had a lead of 126.

"In the last two years, it's one of the top two partnerships, or maybe number one," Kohli said later. "Because retrieving lost momentum and giving the team the lead was a question of character, and they both showed why they are India's best Test batsmen."

For three grimy days, the drama had played out like a soap opera. It climaxed on the fourth day. Starc broke the partnership and snapped a stump, Josh Hazlewood crippled India's lower order and Australia seized back the momentum, giving themselves a target of 188. The match was now ablaze, a fire that bellowed with the spectators' final day tickets. Even the most optimistic fan was aware of it.

Australia burst out of the gates in a hurry, wiping away 42 runs for the loss of just one wicket. But in a Test match where predictability was at a premium, India struck back with three wickets—all of which brought into play the contentious nature of on-field reviews and the Decision Review System (DRS). All of which would lend the final ingredient that makes some India-Australia Test series' more mythical than others—one captain dragging the reputation of the other through mud.

It began in 2001, when Steve Waugh claimed to have been 'wound up by (Sourav) Ganguly's continued petulance', and only got worse in 2008 when Anil Kumble all but called Ricky Ponting and his men cheats. "Only one team played in the spirit of the game," went Kumble's most famous quote at a press conference. Now coach of the Indian team, Kumble watched Kohli go a step further.

Test cricket. The old dog was now foaming at the mouth.

Virat Kohli was stirring up a frenzy. Not with his bat. Not with a microphone, as he would do later. At this moment, 1:46 pm on a turbid Tuesday afternoon in Bengaluru, Kohli was doing so with his bare hands—moving them like two spades raking up earth.

Just as Australia threatened to run away with the match, two walking wickets in this series, Cheteshwar Pujara (*left*) and Ajinkya Rahane, dug deep and learned to crawl. By the end of the third day, both were unbeaten and India had a lead of 126

He and his team, after all, were shovelling out of a grave they had dug for themselves over the last three days.

To Kohli's plea, some 30,000 spectators responded spectacularly. The concrete and plastic interiors of the Chinnaswamy Stadium resembled a living, ventilating, hyperventilating thing. They chanted Kohli's name. Then the country's. Then there was a Mexican wave. And another. The wave crashed against a drum roll and ebbed. The drum roll climaxed with a spine-chilling 'Huh!'

The Indian captain clapped for the crowd, then placed those palms on his knees and resumed his duty at first slip. You couldn't see his eyes (veiled by sunglasses, of course) but you knew they were now trained at the batsman, Steven Smith. Smith is Australia's captain, Australia's best batsman and Australia's best bet in this tricky run chase. Put simply, Smith is Australia's Kohli. Once he twitched into his stance, Umesh Yadav began his run-up from the far end of the field.

The ball kissed the dry, cracking, two-paced pitch and stayed low. Low enough to resemble an underarm delivery, smashing into the toe of Smith's shuffling boot. He looked up immediately and shook his head; knowing that he was gone for all money. So did the umpire, Nigel Llong, who raised his finger and so did Kohli, who pranced past Smith's peripheral vision and the stump mic and simply said, "Fuck off".

But Smith couldn't afford to. Neither could his team. Not at 74 for three. Not on a venomous pitch where the target of 188 seemed more like 788. So Smith stayed put and decided to check with his batting partner, Peter Handscomb, if the deadest LBW in the history of LBWs was worth reviewing. Only, he had only 14 seconds to initiate DRS. Handscomb looked sheepish, so Smith turned to the Australian dressing room, twisted his palm and asked them what they reckoned (a clear violation of the rules). And all hell tore loose.

Now umpire Llong is rushing towards Smith, wagging his finger like a school teacher who has finally caught the chalk-thrower. Now Kohli is rushing towards Llong and Smith, hissing "See! I told you, I told you." Now Llong is standing between Smith and Kohli like a referee in a boxing ring. Now Smith is on his way back to the dressing room—dragging with him his team's hopes, his spikes leaving behind a trail of dust and divot. It may as well have been gun powder, for an already incredibly volatile match is about to explode into a cloud of controversy. Not on the pitch—where Australia would eventually lose by 75 runs—but at the other end of the trail, in an innocuous press room.

"I got hit on the pad and looked down to Petey and he said 'Look up there'," said Smith, when asked about what happened. "So I turned around and it was a bit of a brain fade on my behalf. I shouldn't have done that."

"Brain fade?" asked Kohli, when informed about Smith's defence during his press conference. "The way I left the ball in Pune, you know, getting hit on the off stump. That was a brain fade. But if something is going on for three days, then that's not a brain fade, as simple as that."

The insinuation, for a room full of journalists, was too juicy to pass. Did it happen earlier as well then? "I saw that happening two times when I was batting out there," Kohli replied. "I pointed it out to the umpire, that I've seen their players looking upstairs for confirmation, and that's why the umpire was at him."

Kohli wasn't done just yet. "This has to stop, because there's a line that you don't cross on the cricket field. I don't want to mention the word, but it falls in that bracket. I would never do something like that on the cricket field."

Is the unmentionable word 'cheating', asked a reporter. Kohli smiled. "I didn't say that, you did."

Kohli has stirred up a frenzy. Not with his bat. Not with his hands, as he had done hours earlier. At this moment, 5:07 pm on a Tuesday afternoon in Bengaluru, Kohli has done so with his win and his words. For the sake of this Test match. For the sake of this Test series. And for the sake of bringing out the street-fighting, fang-snarling and flesh-tearing version of the oldest dog. Rabid session after rabid session. ■

RAGE AGAINST THE OTHER

What is fuelling anti-Indian sentiment in the US?

By BENNETT VOYLES

THE WHISKIES WERE a little suspicious, beer being the standard post-work drink for males in the US. The cigarettes would mark them as slightly foreign as well: most American professionals don't smoke. Otherwise, Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani fit right in, an ordinary part of an ordinary scene—the smoking patio of Austins Bar and Grill, a sports bar in Olathe, Kansas, a town of 125,000 about 32 km southwest of Kansas City, Missouri. In fact, they were regulars; the staff reportedly thought of them as 'the Jameson's guys.'

Unfortunately, that's not who everyone saw. A little after 7 pm on Wednesday, February 22nd, a drunk man started questioning them about their visa status. "They tried to tell him that they had done their [master's degrees] in Kansas in 2006 and had been staying there with valid work permits," a relative of one of the men told a reporter. He started shouting racist slurs at Kuchibhotla and Madasani, and making enough of a nuisance of himself that someone threw him out.

But the guy came back a few minutes later. He had covered his head in a grey and black scarf. Some people said he had military medals pinned on his white shirt. He walked up to the Jameson's guys, shouted "Get out of my country," and shot them both, killing the 32-year-old Kuchibhotla, injuring Madasani, 24, and also injuring Ian Grillot, a White 24-year-old who tried to stop him as he left.

The event seemed to come entirely out of the blue in the quiet, prosperous town. As Madasani told a *BBC* reporter, he'd never heard a racist comment in Olathe. Like nearby Overland Park, where Kuchibhotla and Madasani lived, Olathe is America at its best, home to Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and a growing number of South Asians. Crime is low, people make good money, and most people are doing well: the average household earns $126,000 a year, nearly double the $70,000 national average. It is 85 per cent white-collar, well above the national average, and 45 per cent of adults have a Bachelor's degree, compared to 21 per cent nationwide, according to *Neighborhoodscout.com*.

Immigration isn't really a problem in Olathe either. The truth is that a lot of the town's prosperity depends on people like the Jameson's Guys, two of many Indian engineers who've built the city's leading company, Garmin, a maker of Global Positioning hardware and software.

Kuchibhotla and Madasani were Telugu speakers from Hyderabad who came to the Kansas City area to pursue their Master's degrees in the 2000s, and stayed back to work. Like a lot of America's tech companies, Garmin itself is an immigrant success story. It began in 1989 as an acronymic partnership between an American and a Taiwanese engineer, Gary Burrell and Min Kao. The two started in 1989 in an office that consisted of two folding chairs and a card table, and over the next decade, built an enormous, globally listed company. Today, Garmin is a $9.7 billion business, part of which is housed in a 140,000 sq metres building on a 96-acre campus in Olathe. It employs 2,800 people in its local offices alone. When a 70,000-sq-metre addition is finished next year, the company plans to hire another 2,800 employees.

But that's the objective reality, the kind that Garmin is good at navigating. More difficult to map is the shadowy landscape of rage and alternative facts where Adam Purinton, the man who shot Kuchibhotla and Madasani, seems to have lived.

Purinton is a registered Republican and a Navy veteran. Although he looks the part of the crazed hillbilly now, the role seems to be new to him. Purinton lived in a large house on a c*ul-de-sac* of three-and-four-bedroom homes, some over 20 years old, seven or eight km away in Overland Park, with a view of a pond. The average list price of homes in his zip code is $621,000.

Neighbours said he had gone downhill the past year and a half, since his father died. He was drinking heavily now, and was often drunk before noon, usually on beer. In recent years before his father's death, the Wichita, Kansas, native had done some infotech work (in his LinkedIn profile, he describes himself as a desktop support specialist for Gen3ration, a Kansas City IT support agency that seems to have gone out of business). In the 90s, he worked for some time as an air traffic controller, a non-union job since the Reagan years that takes some training. In the late 80s, a year or two out of school, he had been in the US Navy.

It may just be blind chance that Purinton expressed his rage at two Indian engineers rather than a waitress serving him a warm

Alok Madasani (in dark blue), who was wounded in the shooting that left Srinivas Kuchibhotla dead, at a candlelight vigil in Olathe, Kansas

REUTERS

beer or a counsellor at an unemployment office who couldn't find him a job. In fact, he apparently didn't know they were Indians: two hours later, when he wandered into an Applebee's, a chain restaurant alongside the highway in Clinton, Missouri 80 km away, he told a waitress that he had killed Iranians.

However, the fact remains that police brought him in on a charge of shooting these particular men, and all over the country, Indians, Jews and other minorities have reported a sharp rise in hostile comments and aggression since November.

Even after the Olathe shooting, other Indians have been shot: Harnish Patel, a 43-year-old owner of a convenience store in Lancaster, South Carolina, who was killed outside his house on the evening of March 3rd; and on March 4th in Kent, a Seattle, Washington suburb, Deep Rai, a 39-year-old Indian man was told to "go back to his country" and then shot in the arm.

Prasad Kaipa, an executive coach and business advisor based in the San Francisco Bay Area, says he has not experienced any hostility personally, but when he asked Indian colleagues at lunch, many told him they had had a different experience.

All over the country, Indians, Jews and other minorities have reported a sharp rise in hostile comments and aggression since November

'I heard about how in an elementary school, a child came to Indian kid and told him to go back to his country,' he wrote in an email. 'When he complained to the teacher and the parent, the parent was not told what is being done about it in the school. He was told that it is confidential though his own child was affected by the hate speech. Another person narrated how they were told in the park by a random guy who came to them and told them to go back to their country in the past month.'

Where is all the rage coming from?

Jagdish Sheth, a Marketing professor at Emory University's Goizueta Business School, says the Trump election has stirred up a lot of latent racism. "But this has been true in America for many decades. Ronald Reagan stirred up the same things in the late seventies and early eighties especially against Mexican migrant workers." In the end, the roots of this kind of hostility are almost always economic, Sheth says. "Whenever there is an economic downturn, whether it's in an emerging market or an advanced economy, minorities are targeted as a scapegoat." The difference is that in the States, he says, people have guns. "We have such a large prevalence of gun own-

AP

Deep Rai's home, outside which he was attacked

Even after the Olathe shooting, other Indians have been shot. On March 4th in Seattle, Deep Rai, a 39-year-old, was told to "go back to his country" and then shot in the arm

ership that it makes it easier for somebody to commit a violent crime," he explains. Indeed, a recent survey by *Fivethirtyeight.com*, a data analysis site, found a clear correlation between hate crimes and income inequality. An analyst for the Southern Poverty Law Center, an advocacy group that tracks hate crime, explained the results this way: "It's typically not your objective situation that makes you angry and resentful, but rather your situation relative to others you see around you," said Mark Potok. "So, where income inequality is very high, so is anger and resentment against those 'other' people who you fear are doing better than you."

Many Americans never quite recovered from the Great Recession, Sheth notes. After the housing bubble burst in 2007, they watched the value of their house decline along with their retirement account and their own economic value in the labour force.

A number of recent studies have found that there are a lot of frustrated, middle-aged White people like Purinton out there. A quarter of White men with only a high school diploma are now no longer working, and many aren't even trying to find work, according to federal data.

This frustration has had consequences, the kind you can see etched in the face of Purinton, who though only 51, looks at least 10 years older. From 1978 to 1998, the mortality rate of US Whites fell by 2 per cent a year, according to a 2015 Princeton study. After that, death rates have begun to rise by 0.5 per cent a year, even as other country's death rates continue to fall. The causes tended to be suicide or related to alcohol and drug abuse.

Professor Sheth believes this present wave of hostility against Indians will pass once the US economy picks up steam and both the stock market and the home market boom. "The negative impact on people's desire to come to America due to current hostility will be only temporary," he predicts. "I think the United States will be always attractive to immigrants," he adds. "It is because it has structural flexibility to adjust and it is a great place to put your roots for the children and the grandchildren".

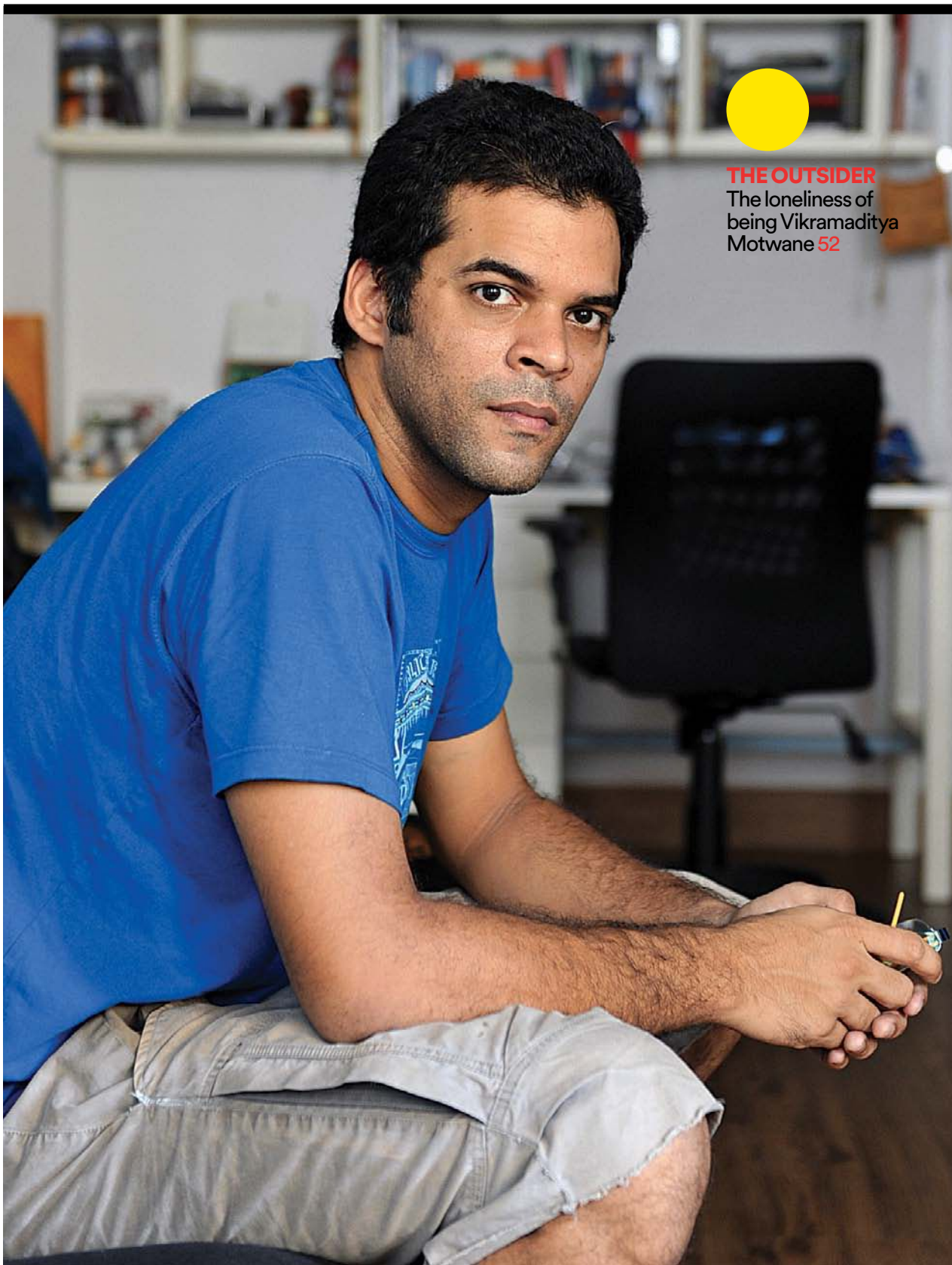
In the short run however, some signs are troubling:

- Trump's chief adviser, Steve Bannon, argues that foreign students and H1-B visa holders are squeezing out opportunities for Americans. "They can't get engineering degrees, they can't get into graduate schools because there are all these foreign students, when they come out, they can't get a job," he said in a 2016 interview.
- Reuters has reported that the Trump administration has proposed re-orienting the government's Countering Violent Extremism initiative to focus exclusively on countering radical Islamic extremism, away from the growing number of white supremacist groups.
- The administration has tended to be quite leisurely in the time it takes to comment on attacks they don't associate with Muslim attackers. It took Trump six days to condemn the Olathe attack.

For Trump's reality-show presidency, the show will go on, from lie to lie and tweet to tweet, concerned exclusively with its own spectacle. But outside the 'waste wing', in the sports bars, the driveways, and the convenience stores where real life continues, the Administration's jeers and silences alike threaten to inspire more Purintons to pin on their old medals, grab their guns, and find in terror some redemption for their own squandered life. ■

Bennett Voyles writes on global trends. He was formerly with The Economist Intelligence Unit

SALON



THE OUTSIDER
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GETTY IMAGES

‘AN ANTHEM FOR MOTHERS AND SONS’

Oscar-nominated Dev Patel talks about what it is like being a child of immigrants in a conversation with **Noel de Souza**

AP

IT’S BEEN A two-and-a-half-month long rollercoaster ride for Dev Patel with many stops along the way, including an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor for *Lion*. The ride came to an end on Oscar night; the golden statue was not to be his, but he did win a BAFTA, the British equivalent of an Academy Award.

Lion is the story of five-year-old Saroo from a village in India who suddenly finds himself on a train headed thousands of kilometres away from home and is hurled into the arms of bustling Kolkata. He must now learn to survive on the harsh and cruel streets of the city until he is picked up and taken to an orphanage. His life takes a turn for the better when he is adopted by an Australian family. But when he becomes an adult, he has a burning desire to find his birth mother and elder brother. The movie chronicles his amazing journey back to India, where he is reunited with his mother.

When we meet at a hotel in Beverly Hills, California, 26-year-old Patel is friendly and soft-spoken with an air of assurance about him. He opens up about falling in love with Mumbai, and wanting to be Bruce Lee.

You are of Indian decent and were brought up in the UK. Did you ever have an identity crisis?

This is probably the project that I had the biggest connection to. As a 26-year-old British-Indian guy, this was a character whose journey really mirrored my own. Growing up, I spent a lot of time trying to shun my cultural heritage to fit in since I didn’t want to get bullied. I didn’t want to stick out, I’d do anything I could to be like everyone else in England. And when I went to India with Danny Boyle to shoot *Slumdog Millionaire*, it was really the first time that I had been there since I was a young adult, and it was completely that light bulb moment, all those stigmas that I had were dispersed right away; it pushed me into another level of consciousness, and since then I’ve gone back and done five films and it’s been a love affair. Saroo’s (*Lion* is based on Saroo Brierley’s book *A Long Way Home*)

driving force for his journey is to go and reconnect with his roots, his identity, and I could really relate to that.

When did you first visit India? Was it for *Slumdog Millionaire*?
I went to India when I was 10 years old, dragged there by my parents to a wedding. I didn't really like it. I went to Gujarat... like more a villagey area. I literally got bitten to death by mosquitoes and I had a dodgy stomach. So I turned to my sister and said, 'We are not coming here again.' And now, working in Mumbai, I literally fell in love with it. I know it sounds cheesy but I mean it's hard not to, because you are surrounded by people, humanity and if you are human, you're going to love humans. I was 17 years old then. I told everyone I'd matured five years in the space of five months.

Do you know anyone whose life has been affected by this narrative?
Saroo and I went to the Google headquarters in San Francisco to give a talk there, and there was a young Indian girl, a Google employee, who came in to meet Saroo, and it was profound. She had been left on a train with her two sisters while her mother went to the toilet, but her mother never returned. She and Saroo stayed alone in the room, they had so much to talk about. She told him that this movie means so much to her. It is stories like this that make it all worthwhile.

Does a project like this change your perspective towards your parents?
I realise that I keep gravitating towards movies that I know that my mother would want to see. When I did *Marigold Hotel*, my mother worked at a daycare centre for the elderly. And as a kid I would go there and play dominoes with all the people in there, and I would sit there and look at her and think, 'God, you are a star', the way she looked after those people and the way they looked at her, so that film for me was special. But with *Lion*, at the core, it's a mother-and-son story, and there are two pillars here: there's the Australian mother and there's Priyanka (the birth mother), two pillars, and the roof that connects them is the boy who won't give up at nothing. This is a beautiful message and I was lucky enough to take my mother and grandparents to the premiere at Odeon cinema in Leicester Square. It was the most amazing moment because I walked past Odeon Cinema to get signed by my first agent and my mom and I stood out there for three hours just to see Will Smith at the *Hancock* premiere. And I got a picture of his forehead when he bent down to sign things. Now, I was there with my mom and sister and my grandparents and there was my goofy mug on these posters in Leicester Square with Nicole Kidman. The film is an anthem for the family, and mothers and sons for sure.

Tell us about your parents.
My parents are the perfect yin and yang. My mother is the driving force and my father has a silent strength, the strength behind my mother. He is a man of less words. Being a child of immigrants, what is instilled in us is 'Through hard work you will see the fruits of your labour'. So, that has been instilled in us—work, work, work. And my mom does it, my dad does it, and that is what I have tried to apply to my work.

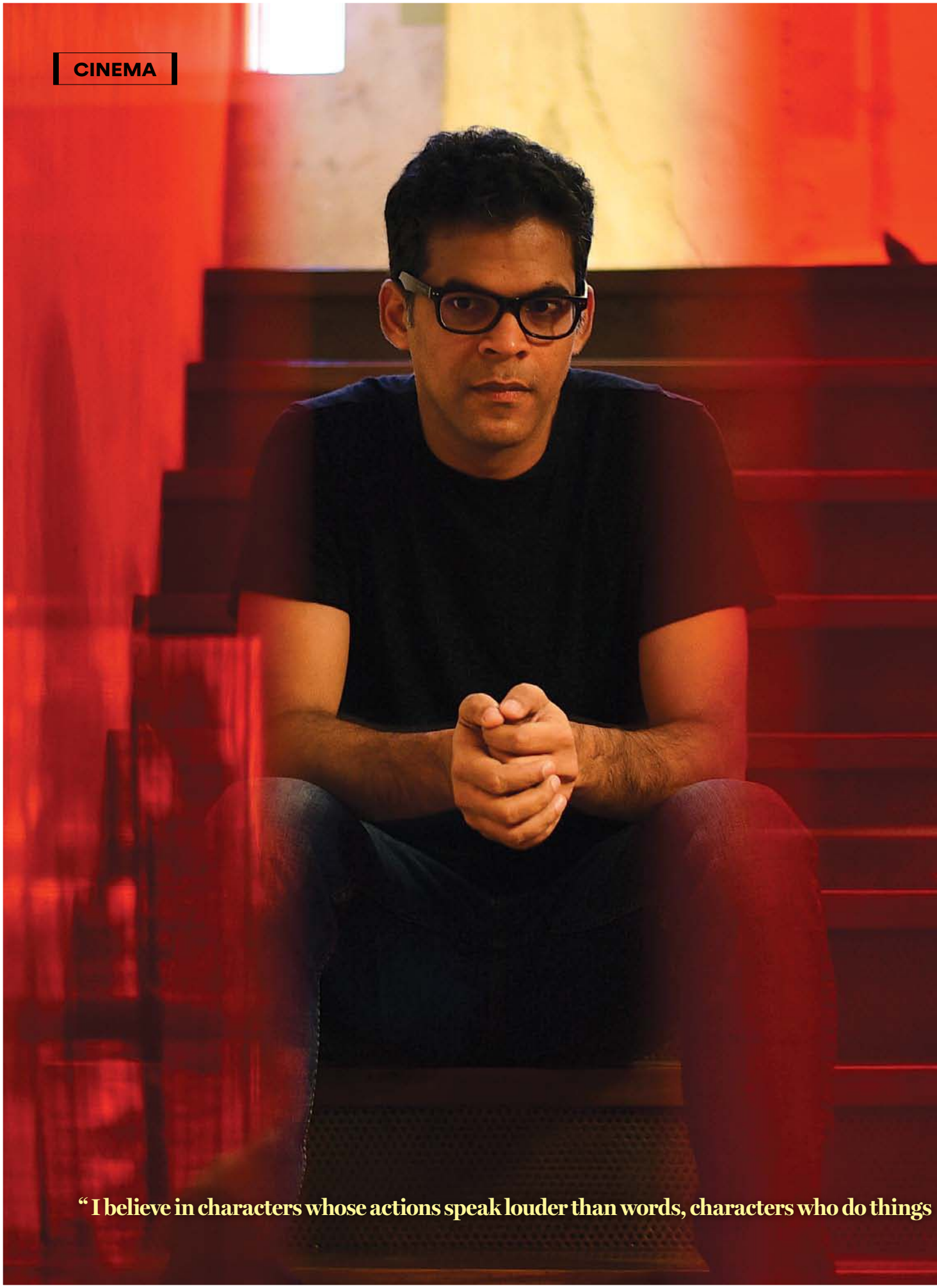
Is religion an important factor in your family?
I have grown up in a spiritual family. We have a little meditation room in the house, and we have lots of Hindu gods in there. And then my mother goes to Lourdes in France and she brings back the holy water from there. And she is hail Mary-ing if I drive the car too fast. She's a woman of the world, really, and she has given us that. We have gone to Mass and the whole thing. But you know, I met this taxi driver once in New York and I was going to the airport and we were just talking for some reason about life. And he said to me, 'Instead of doing things in the name of God, why don't you just add another O in God and what does that make it?' And I was like, 'good?' And he said, 'Yeah, you should do things in the name of good,' and I was like, 'That's cool, I am going to take that.'

> "GROWING UP, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME TRYING TO SHUN MY CULTURAL HERITAGE TO FIT IN SINCE I DIDN'T WANT TO GET BULLIED. I'D DO ANYTHING I COULD TO BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN ENGLAND"
>
> **Dev Patel,** actor

Besides acting, you are also involved in martial arts. Do you practice a lot?
I used to do a lot better. I haven't kept it up, but I did it for eight years, Taekwondo. It was actually my parents who got me to do it because I was such a hyperactive kid and that was a way to channelise my physical energy. I'm a big Bruce Lee fan. That is why I started acting. Once at home I went downstairs way past my bedtime and I saw this Asian man centre screen bursting with testosterone, and it was Bruce Lee, and I was like, 'I want to be like him.' So, that is why I got into martial arts too.

What are your grooming habits?
My grooming habits? Oh, my lord, I think that this is the first time that I've ever been asked that question. My friends and family would laugh out loud because they know that I'm the most ungroomed guy. My hair has its own kind of anti-gravitational pull and it is just the way it grows away from my big ears. But hey, moisturise! I can't believe that I'm talking about this. Any moisturiser left on your hand you put in your hair, and that's about how far grooming goes.

On that note we end the conversation and Patel walks out of the room still smiling at his answer... or is it at the question itself? ■



“I believe in characters whose actions speak louder than words, characters who do things

RITESH UTTAMCHANDANI

The Outsider

The loneliness of being Vikramaditya Motwane

By Nikhil Taneja

WHEN VIKRAMADITYA MOTWANE'S urban survival thriller, *Trapped*, releases on March 17th, it would have been three years, nine months and a few days since his last film, *Lootera*, opened in theatres to critical acclaim. For an industry that churns out 200-plus films every year, most directors of calibre typically release a film every second year, and the more prolific—or fortuitous—ones may even put out a film a year.

This gap between Motwane's two films has little to do with his calibre; his debut film, the coming-of-age drama *Udaan* (2010) was officially selected to compete at the Cannes Film Festival's prestigious Un Certain Regard category, the first Indian film to do so in almost a decade. His second, the heartbreakingly beautiful *Lootera*, inspired from O Henry's *The Last Leaf*, found a place in most year-end 'Best of' lists. Today Motwane is known for his painstakingly beautiful frames, which are as talked about as his grasp of storytelling.

His prolificacy isn't in question either; in the same period, as part of the directors' collective Phantom Films, he has produced an incredible 11 films (along with Vikas Bahl, Anurag Kashyap and Madhu Mantena) including critical and commercial successes such as *Queen*, *NH10*, *Masaan* and *Udta Punjab*.

As is the wont of Bollywood, it all comes down to luck, and Motwane has been plagued by a particularly bad stretch over the past four years. In this span he has been attached to a dysfunctional family drama starring Ahana Deol, a thriller, *AK vs SK*, starring Shahid Kapur, vigilante drama *Bhavesh Joshi*, first starring Imran Khan, then Siddharth Malhotra, and a superhero drama *Chakra*, co-created by Stan Lee. While the first film never took off, *AK vs SK* was shelved after a few days of shooting, and at some point, so was *Bhavesh Joshi*, as the script was no longer relevant, having been written back in 2011. And so, *Trapped*—the story about a man locked in an apartment in a newly constructed, empty

alone and quietly... I love making films without too much dialogue" VIKRAMADITYA MOTWANE

Rajkummar Rao in *Trapped*

Mumbai high rise, trying desperately to break free—happened because of and as a reaction to the stalled movies preceding it.

"To be honest, the film was made in anger," a wistful Motwane recalls in a packed Juhu café. "I had reached a point where I felt responsible towards my crew as they had hung around with me for so long through all those shoots that started and then stopped. I was also tired of just doing ads or prepping for movies. I wanted to shoot something narrative, something that was longer than three days."

The idea for the film came to him via an email from writer Amit Joshi, and Motwane's first reaction was, 'I can do this!' "It was such a good challenge for all of us," he says. "It was a great story, easy to make, and I liked that the idea was universal. It could have been set in Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore, Cal, or even Shanghai or America. And after everything that had happened, I just felt that I should jump in."

Motwane and a minimal cast and crew did just that. Within three weeks of having decided to do the film, he and his crew were shooting a start-to-finish month-long schedule in one location, an unoccupied building in the middle of Parel's frenetic commercial district. It felt almost like a "student film", Motwane says with a chuckle.

Beyond the fact that a survivor thriller like *Trapped* has not been done in India, what attracted Motwane was its theme of 'urban loneliness'. The lead character in the film, Shaurya, played by the very able Rajkummar Rao, is an immigrant in the city, one of the many anonymous people with anonymous jobs who come to Mumbai to find both their calling and themselves. He is completely alone, as there's no one by way of family to come looking for him if he goes missing. At the start of the film, Shaurya is in a relationship with Noorie (played by *Liar's Dice* actress Geetanjali Thapa). But Motwane characterises this relationship as a form of urban loneliness too, in that the two are "alone together". "When two people like each other in Mumbai, and you see them together at Marine Drive or Juhu Beach or in cabs or trains, both are lonely because it's only each other that they actually have," says Motwane. "Their isolation from the city to me was best encapsulated in a scene where the two of them are listening to music on the same pair of earphones in a train. It's something I've seen couples do... and I find that very cute," he says with a smile.

Motwane talks about loneliness with a certain ease and comfort, and for anyone who has followed his work so far, it's not tough to see why. Both *Udaan* and *Lootera* were films about lonesome, misunderstood characters whose battles were not just with the world outside, but with their own selves in a world that they were trying to find their place in.

In *Udaan*, the lead character's isolation and quest to be appreciated by his father was memorably captured in a scene where he smashes his father's car. In *Lootera*, the isolation manifests both physically, as Sonakshi Sinha's character, betrayed in love, lives in seclusion in Dalhousie; and symbolically, as Ranveer Singh's character takes up the task of painting the last leaf on a tree every day, so as to give hope to the dying woman he loves.

In hindsight, Motwane reveals, he's always been a bit of a loner himself, and his films may just be a manifestation of that on to the big screen. "I believe in characters whose actions speak louder than words, characters who do things alone and quietly," he says. "I love making films without too much dialogue. That's not to say there's no communication in my films; in fact there's a lot of it and I really, really enjoy that. But I really get off on silent scenes." "*Udaan* has a lot of that, *Lootera* has a lot of that, *Bhavesh (Joshi)* also has a lot of that," he says with a laugh, adding, "And now that I think of it, maybe that's what attracted me to *Trapped* as well. I like lonely characters... I find them interesting in cinema, in books, and in general. There's something about one man versus the world."

On further reflection, Motwane believes this could be because, hailing from a divorced household, he grew up a lot faster than other children his age. He started drinking and smoking weed

before his peers did. He tried to fit in with his elder cousins, but was a misfit there too. "I never could fit anywhere, not with them or with my friends," he says.

Meanwhile, the 'Bombay' which Motwane grew up in changed into 'Mumbai', and he couldn't recognise his own city. He characterises his relationship with it as one of "love-hate". There are parts of the city that he knows like the back of his hand, and there's Mumbai, a metropolis of indifference. This nagging feeling of being an outsider within one's own city has stayed with Motwane for much of his life. And as a filmmaker who belongs to that school of filmmaking where God lies in the details and craft is just as important as the story, this sentiment has percolated into his art—and the industry too.

"I still feel like an outsider, even within the industry and film circles," Motwane admits, "in the sense that my stories are very different from what anybody else is making. I think that's a good thing because compromising or becoming like everybody else is not going to be a solution to anything. On every story I develop or work on, I soon start feeling that 'Oh, this has got a very limited audience,' which I'm quite happy about. I know I can then take them and turn them into something larger and bigger, within the *aukaat* (stature) of the film."

Motwane agrees that it may be the producer in him talking about making things 'bigger', but the fact is, the movies that he grew up with—the classic cinema of Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg or even Quentin Tarantino—are hardly relevant anymore. The last movies of these auteurs—*Silence*, *The BFG* and *The Hateful Eight*, respectively—failed to light up the box office, and the ones before didn't rake in profits either.

It now seems that with dwindling attention spans of the audience, in the age of Snapchat, the only way to stay relevant is to move on from purist cinema towards a new kind of event cinema, which all modern-day directors from Alfonso Cuarón (*Gravity*) to Alejandro Inarritu (*Birdman*) to Christopher Nolan (in every film) seem to be embracing.

"I like lonely characters. I find them interesting in cinema, in books, and in general. There's something about one man versus the world" VIKRAMADITYA MOTWANE

Five years ago, Motwane would have been reluctant to agree, but today, having seen the collapse of the mid-budget film that could well have been his strength, he concurs: "You have to grow as a filmmaker... I think every film you make should be an event." He adds, "The world is not as patient with cinema as it was when I made *Udaan*, or even *Lootera*. You have to be conscious of that, and I'm understanding that."

But all is not lost where commercial Indian cinema is concerned, and Motwane recognises this. As a producer, he's been part of films like *NH10* and *Udta Punjab*, which challenged the *status quo* of 'mainstream sensibilities' and still worked at the box office. Such risks are inherent to Motwane's storytelling ability, and it gives him heart that the audience has welcomed them. The fact that *Dangal*, a film that Motwane believes may not have been made 10 years ago, is the highest grossing film of all time, proves that the audience now accept a certain kind of story—and that perhaps, it's not a lone fight anymore.

And so, the *Trapped* director is prepping himself for the next stage of his career, where he wants to liberate himself from his own boundaries, by 'overstretching' and 'overreaching' and making all kinds of movies, including sci-fi and animation, as well as a sequel to *Udaan*. He wants to make up to two films a year, and will work on scripts till he is able to achieve that, but at the same time, is keenly aware of the library of his work that he eventually wants to create.

"I feel that there is the here and now, where you go and make films and get successful, and then make more films, but then what? Do you want your films to be seen 15, 20 years from now, do you want a library, in the (Stanley) Kubrick sense of the way, that people value? I do, and I'm conscious of that. So you need to not only challenge yourself, but in some sort of way, challenge your audience too."

For Motwane, the greatest challenge lies in finding a balance in his work in a way that feeds his creative soul and still appeals to the audience. He calls *Trapped* his 'most commercial film' and believes that with it, and his next film, *Bhavesh Joshi*, he has identified a way to make his stories "more accessible" and "universal".

"I have tried to open up my audiences, but at the same time, I have taken exactly the kind of risks in *Trapped* that I know the audience for *this* kind of a film would like. So I'm hoping, film by film, the audience grows. Because what's happening on the commercial spectrum is so heartening that you also feel like extending yourself." Motwane pauses for a brief moment, and then says with a smile, "Or maybe it's just maturity, you know." ■

The Beauty of Disruption

Where East and West look hard and longingly at one another

By Bettany Hughes

THE ELEGANT CAMONDO steps in Galata leading to the Bankalar Caddesi, the street of banks, which the Camondo family developed, still stand. But the Camondo family, along with tens of thousands of other Jews who fled from major Ottoman cities in 1943 (such as Thessaloniki, where 54,000 were rounded up by German soldiers just a stone's throw from the location of that dreadful massacre ordered by Emperor Theodosios I more than 1,500 years before), were eradicated, entirely, in Auschwitz. As the Second World War made its ugly progression, the Turkish Embassy in Paris—hearing that Jews were being put on to trains heading for concentration camps—opened an office where Ottoman Jews were given the passports of young Muslim students so that they could escape France to travel back to Istanbul. It is estimated that in the space of two months 15,000 souls were saved in France and, by the end of the war, a further 20,000 in eastern Europe.

The day that I submitted this book to my publishers in May 2016, Istanbul hosted the first ever World Humanitarian Summit, spearheaded by the UN. It took place in the midst of the greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War, and as the dignitaries and heads of state arrived there were more international refugees in Istanbul fleeing stasis in the lands that had once been Ottoman than in any other capital city in the world. Istanbul might have been a settlement besieged since antiquity, but she fights against succumbing to a siege mentality.

Peace abroad, peace at home, was the foundation stone of the new Republic.

Today the population of the city of Istanbul is larger than those of two-thirds of the world's countries; it stretches 100 miles from end to end.

From 1924, on postcards, for the first time there was a systematic policy to brand the diamond between two sapphires as Istanbul not Constantinople. In 1928 the Latin script replaced the Arabic. From 28 March 1930 the Turkish post office no longer delivered post addressed to Constantinople. There had been similar attempts before (during the wars with Russia in the eighteenth century, sultans had struck coins in 'Islambol' rather than Constantinople), but the Turkish Republic's endeavours were more systematic. Nations which are unaware of their history are obliged to die out, said Kemal Atatürk; his words are immortalised at Istanbul's Ottoman Military Museum. All who have controlled Istanbul—Thracians, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Latins, Ottomans, the British, and the Turks—have come here specifically to trade goods, politics, humans or ideas, so the invisible lines of connection that have given the settlement her strength as a place and as an idea are hard to break. The city exists both as herself and beyond herself.

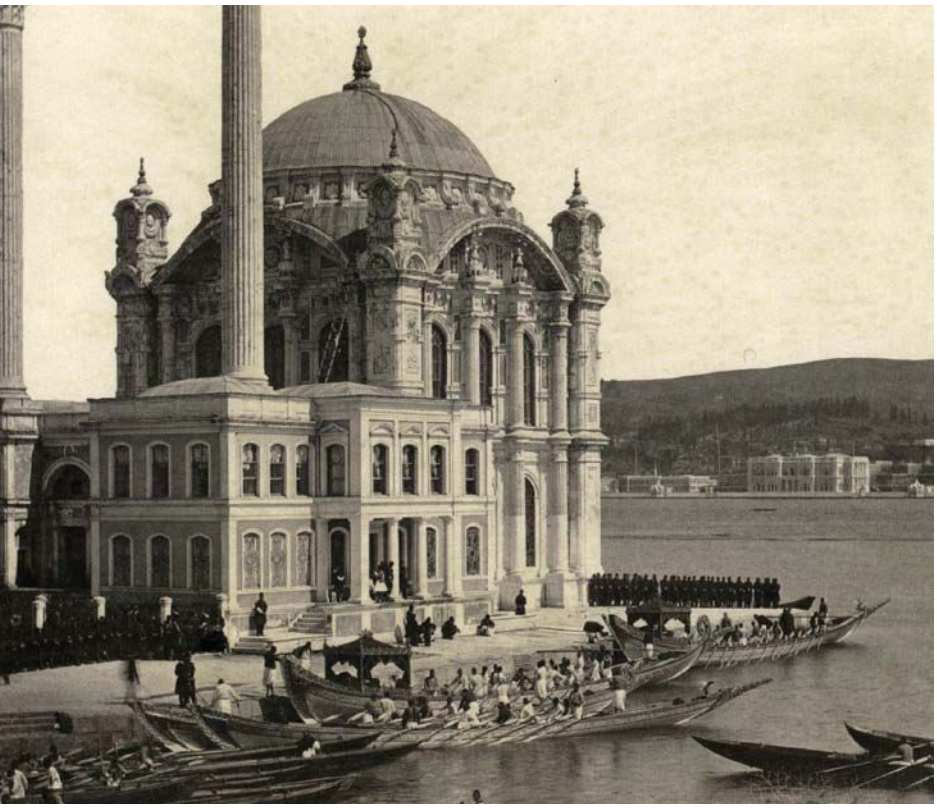
In the 1960s ferocious fires on the Bosphorus, sparking because of the transport of fossil fuels demanded by Europe and America in the new supertankers that ground from north to south and back again through the straits, recalled the scene on the waterways 1,500 years before when the Byzantines had unleashed Greek Fire. Some of the conflagrations in the 1960s burned for days. The sticky, black fumes seemed to smoke-signal an entry to a new kind of world. A beneficiary of the Marshall Plan after the Second World War, Istanbul started to take on the mantle of American influence. Up until the First World War a visitor from 400 years before would have been able to find their way around the city without too much difficulty. After the urban developments of the early 1960s and 1970s, they would have been lost. Istanbul's administrators harboured an ambition to become global players once again in an increasingly globalised world, from a 'modern' global city.

And yet, despite its profound influence, despite the fact that this has always been the first and last city of Asia and Europe, and the fastest route between North and South, that a Greco-Roman heart beat in the Byzantine body politic, despite the fact that Constantinople was the Caput Mundi throughout the medieval period and that the Ottomans drove international politics for close on 500 years, Istanbul's is still a civilization that does not hold its own among the world's greatest hits. Its story is perhaps so complex, each chapter interwoven with the next, it does not satisfy our desire for unitary explanations for how the story of the world runs. As a city Istanbul is both 'ours' and 'other'; it is a cosmopolis that defies categorisation. In the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels—an institution rudely apparent in its debt to classical influences, with a rotunda and pillared colonnades, its collections adapted to celebrate the idea of a briefly united Europe—the treasures of one of the first medieval civilisations to attempt comparable unity are squashed into the basement. One gorgeous finely carved Byzantine ivory casket is boxed up next to a radiator, whereas Greece and Rome are lauded on the first floor and the culture of Islam now has its own specially designed and lavish gallery with slatted windows.

This is a city whose legends and locus might serve to stimulate fantasies, but it has also systematically nourished the hard reality of popular, political protest. Constantinople—The City, complex, variegated, ambivalent—was forged and

A painting by Laura Lushington of a synagogue in Istanbul

AS A CITY ISTANBUL IS BOTH 'OURS' AND 'OTHER'; IT IS A COSMOPOLIS THAT DEFIES CATEGORISATION



The Ortakoy Mosque, built by the Armenian family of Balyan in AD 1721 and then rebuilt in AD 1853

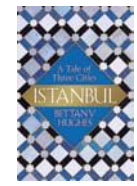
then reworked in the heat of certain belief. Although nominally a kingdom, an empire of God, did the fast turnaround of rulers and subsequent instability serve to give voice to the people? Was that seductive topography of Byzantion, Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul such a character in its own right that individuals here felt a connection not just to their ruler but to the physical power of the cityscape itself? There is a scale of geography and topography in greater Istanbul that seems to demand a brio, an ideology to match. The majority of generations that have lived in the city have witnessed some form of popular protest. When President Erdoğan, a child of Istanbul and once its mayor, took to social media to try to quell the attempted coup of summer 2016, his rallying cry was this: 'there is no power higher than the power of the people.'

'ISTANBUL–BYZANTIUM–CONSTANTINOPLE–IS OURS' Istanbullus declared on vandalised windows during the Gezi Park protest.

The graffitist's statement is a cogent one. Who does now own Istanbul? And what is her direction of travel? From those first neolithic footprints, through the adventuring work of the Greek founding fathers, Rome's empire-builders, Christendom's creators, the New Justinians and the Young Turks, this has been a settlement with precedent and purpose, a potent capital with an innate energy that refuses to run dry. Istanbul can never be listless: the topography of the city means that you always arrive at it with dynamism. Locals note sagely that the Asian and European quarters of Istanbul can simultaneously experience different weather fronts. Through history on both sides of the Bosphorus there have been earthquakes and tsunamis, storms with hailstones the size of a man's foot, and fishermen have thirty different names for the winds that pluck the waters here. The Greek poet Pindar believed that the secure foundation of cities was eunomia, good order, but Istanbul also encourages something which, physiologically, our minds seek – disruption. In terms of both historical fact and written histories this place reminds us why we are compelled to connect, to communicate, to exchange. But also to change. Byzantion started her historical life as a rough frontier town. Life in the city has always been demanding, even if it occasionally enjoys the odd, languid interlude. Today the Dardanelles Straits are the busiest waterways in the world and the Bosphorus connects all the points on the compass. If Chalcedon was the city of the blind, Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul has long been the land of clear sight: in the very essence of the city there is photography, writing in light, before the word is invented. This foundation is one of those bright ideas, one of those lambent entities that commands the world's stare, that compels us to look. But if this was a diamond between two sapphires, it is also a gem into which we can gaze and see, as well as a multi-colour prism, our own desires reflected back.

THIS IS A CITY WHOSE LEGENDS AND LOCUS MIGHT SERVE TO STIMULATE FANTASIES, BUT IT HAS ALSO SYSTEMATICALLY NOURISHED THE HARD REALITY OF POPULAR, POLITICAL PROTEST

Istanbul is not where East meets West, but where East and West look hard and longingly at one another, sometimes nettled by what they see yet interested to learn that they share dreams, stories and blood. ■



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Boris Pasternak

The Poet of Patience

Seeking Boris Pasternak in Putin country

By A Damodaran

IT WAS A sunny morning in the month of May in Peredelkino, a sleepy Stalin era writer's colony in the suburbs of Moscow. The year was 1956. Boris Pasternak walked out of his *dacha* clutching a thick packet. "This is Doctor Zhivago. May it make its way around the world," he said nervously, while handing over the packet to his guest Sergio D'Angelo, who was waiting for him at his garden.

Sergio D'Angelo, an Italian Communist was on a secondment with *Radio Moscow* when he came visiting Pasternak that day. He was hunting for promising manuscripts for a Milan-based publishing house run by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a senior member of the Italian Communist Party. The packet that Pasternak handed over to D'Angelo carried a touching revelation of the raw face of the Russia's October Revolution. For the Soviet leaders, *Dr Zhivago* was an act of literary subversion. For D'Angelo, it was the catch of the century.

With his Communist Party card, D'Angelo slipped through the iron curtain and reached his treasure to Feltrinelli. Within a year of the Peredilkino rendezvous, Feltrinelli published *Dr Zhivago* in Italian. The English version followed in 1958. Later that year, the Swedish Academy announced Boris

Pasternak as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 'for his important achievement both in contemporary lyrical poetry and in the field of the great Russian epic tradition.'

Pasternak was expelled from the Union of Soviet writers and given an ultimatum to decline the prize or leave the country. Pasternak opted to decline the prize. Two years later, the devastated, cancer-stricken writer was dead.

Boris Pasternak hailed from an aristocratic Jewish family. His mother Rozalia was a talented pianist. His father, Leonid Pasternak was a celebrated impressionist painter who tantalised Lev Tolstoy with his brilliant illustrations for the 1892 edition of *War and Peace*. Pasternak grew up seeing Leo Tolstoy, and composers Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff visit his parents at their home in Moscow. In his youth he was drawn to Scriabin and tried his hand as a musician. After studying at the Moscow State University and at Marburg, he gave up his earlier plans and finally opted to be a poet.

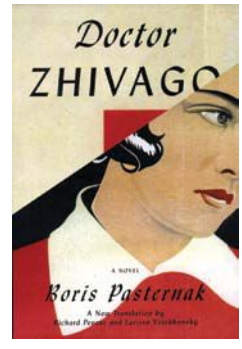
Initially drawn to the romance of the Russian Revolution (the Kerensky version), Pasternak gradually got disillusioned with the Bolsheviks and spent agonising years under Stalin's rule. He narrowly escaped the concentration camps as the Dictator had a soft corner for him. As a member of the Soviet Writer's Union, the poet-turned-novelist wrote poems and lived through the Stalin era as a translator of Shakespeare and Goethe. However unnoticed by the state and its sleuths, he was silently working on his passion, *Dr Zhivago*.

The story of the novel revolved on Yuri Zhivago, a poet-turned doctor, his love for two women (Tonya his wife and Lara his muse), his initial enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution, his gradual disillusionment with life and finally his death on the streets of Moscow. Yuri Zhivago was Pasternak's alter ego. During his lifetime Pasternak too was tormented by his relationship with two women (Zinaida , his wife and Olga Ivinskaya, his lover) and led an agonised life just like his protagonist.

David Lean's epic movie *Dr Zhivago* (1965) opened the world to the Zhivago story. Thanks to Omar Sharif, the movie captured the imagination of cinema goers of North Africa and the Middle East. In the tea districts of Assam, the movie was immensely popular, as its heroine Julie Christie was born and brought up in Chabua in a tea garden by the name Singlijan.

PEREDELKINO—A forested, exurban hermitage for writers that Stalin created in 1934 at the bidding of Maxim Gorky—was driven by a simple philosophy: provide creature comforts to a band of impactful writers and they would slave for you. The idea worked well as some of the renowned literary figures of the Soviet Union queued up to receive the largesse. Pasternak was one of the chosen few to be allotted a *dacha* in Peredelkino. Mikhail Baktin, the celebrated philosopher of language and Alexander Solzhenitsyn were the others to stay in this exclusive hermitage.

Last September, I took a break from my teaching schedule at Moscow State University to visit the Pasternak House which is now a museum. I was early to reach Peredelkino as the morning train from Moscow was faster than I thought it would be. From the train station, I walked down a small road, which had high walls on either side to finally reach the Pasternak Museum. I unlatched the gate and walked through a gravelled pathway that was drenched by the previous night's rain. To my left was a thick stand of birch trees that had shed its leaves. The trees shrouded the sight of the *dacha* from the gate. As I walked along the path, the silhouette of the building became visible.



PASTERNAK'S ABILITY TO ENDURE AND WAIT FOR THE ULTIMATE REDEMPTION CASTS HIM IN THE MOULD OF A 'POET OF PATIENCE'

I crossed the tree stands and reached a small garden which had a wooden bench and a table. The garden faced the steps to the veranda of the *dacha*. I could see that the Museum was closed. I walked around the garden, waded through the birch trees, snapped a few photos and finally rested on the wooden bench, waiting for the museum staff to arrive. It took some time for me to realise I was resting on the same wooden bench where Sergio and Pasternak had sat and conversed 60 years ago before exchanging the *Zhivago* manuscript.

'Autumn had already sharply marked the boundary between the coniferous and deciduous worlds in the forest. The first bristled in its depths like a gloomy, almost black wall; the second shone through the open spaces in fiery, wine-colored patches, like an ancient town with a fortress and gold-topped towers, built in the thick of the forest from its own timber.'

These lines from *Dr Zhivago* could have come only from the wilderness of Peredelkino, I thought as I waited impatiently for the museum staff.

When I entered the Pasternak Home, it had an air of frugal charm. Anna Koznova who holds a Doctorate in Linguistics from the Moscow State University led me through the *dacha*. We entered a spacious drawing room whose walls are layered with his father's pencil sketches and paintings. My guide explained that it was in this room that Pasternak celebrated his Nobel Prize win with his close friends. Three smaller rooms adjoined the drawing room.

Except for a century-old piano that Pasternak had inherited from his mother, the room was basic. We finally enter the famous study upstairs where Pasternak is supposed to have written *Dr Zhivago*. The study has a window that opens to the birch forests stand in front of the garden. It was an inspiring view. Koznova told me that during Pasternak's time, the view was better as no compound walls obstructed the view of the chapel atop a small hill. The Pasternak study had a depleted book shelf with very few books—mostly different editions of *Dr Zhivago* in different languages. Also on display in the study was a letter of Jawaharlal Nehru congratulating the writer on his winning the Nobel Prize. I am surprised when Koznova tells me that Pasternak read little of contemporary writers. He was afraid that reading contemporary works would cramp his style. Pasternak is also said to have had another curious habit—a rare sense of tidiness which was unusual for a writer. He systematically cleared the clutter from his desk after he was through with his writing at the end of the day.

The real Boris Pasternak was thus far removed from the contrived extravagance that David Lean ascribed to his alter ego, Yuri Zhivago in his film. His writings were about suffering, romance, villainy, faithlessness, helplessness and broken promises and not the effete love story that Lean had painted.

PASTERNAK'S CLOSENESS TO nature , his ability to conjure the most colourful images of the natural phenomena, and over and above all , his ability to endure and wait for the ultimate redemption casts him in the mould of a 'poet of patience'.

In Stalin's Soviet Union, popular tastes that were rooted in the classical tradition were recognised, with their religious elements purged. Soviet leaders like Khrushchev and Brezhnev read little and hence did not feel guilty about harassing writers who were dissidents. Andropov was a voracious reader, but read to detect non-conformity. It was only in the Gorbachev era, that the state freed popular culture from its grip. Soon the jarring decibels of heavy rock music drowned the symphonies of Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky. Stas Namin, the grandson of the old Bolshevik and veteran Soviet statesman Anastas Mikoyan, emerged as the top pop rock icon in Gorbachev's Soviet Union! Donald Trump was invited to build a state-of-the-art hotel in Moscow. Yoko Ono was surprised to see an excited Raisa Gorbachev abandoning her stately pretensions and awkwardly proclaim her mad attachment to the Beatles!

Yet, the glasnost phase was an equally good period for Russia's post-classical writers. The younger intelligentsia and students of the Soviet Union read *Dr Zhivago*, Nabokov's *Lolita* and the banned writings of Solzhenitsyn, Brodsky, and Akhmatova. Those were the times when (as Russian journalist Solomon Volkov says) reading was more important than living. Pasternak, the poet of patience was a celebrity in the Gorbachev phase. But he was not by any stretch of imagination, an apostle of upheaval. Boris Yeltsin and his followers needed the compelling and angry prose of Alexander Solzhenitsyn to uproot the Soviet system in 1992.

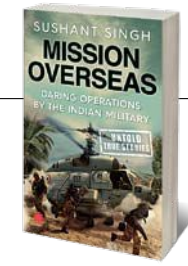
Pasternak's strength lies in his ability to endlessly linger in the Russian psyche. In his first decade as the ruler of post-Communist Russia, Vladimir Putin practiced a brand of narrow nationalism that had pronounced geopolitical overtones. Putin's regimented rule provoked deep dissent among sections of his countrymen. Popular culture (mainly pop rock groups), sections of the intelligentsia and Russia's *nouveau rich* form the bailiwick of the anti-Putin movement in Russia. Putin's hard measures against these groups damaged his image in his earlier years of power. Putin's real tragedy has been that he has inherited a Russia where people are restive since 'living has become more important than reading'. He had to change his tack to keep his position intact.

WHILE AT ONE LEVEL, PUTIN SEEKS TO POSITION HIMSELF AS THE NEW, NON-PUNK POP ICON OF RUSSIA, HE HAS ALSO SUCCESSFULLY PROJECTED HIMSELF AS THE CHAMPION OF RUSSIA'S HERITAGE

In recent years, Putin has had a complete image makeover. The crude nationalist overtones are muted—and a different game is on. Putin's declared 2017 to be the Year of Ecology, as he anticipated that his Communist rivals would celebrate the centenary of the October Revolution this year. These days the karate-black-belt Head of State uses his shooting skills to dart and rescue injured Serbian Tigers. He plunges into the depths of the Black Sea to discover the underwater heritage of Russia. The former KGB official proclaims his love for Omar Khayyam to create a new argument for his Iran policy and appoints Lev Tolstoy's great grandson, Vladimir Tolstoy, as his cultural advisor, to prove his credentials as a patron of heritage and culture.

Thus, while at one level, Putin seeks to position himself as the new, non-punk pop icon of Russia, he has also successfully projected himself as the champion of Russia's heritage. Now he is moving into an unexplored terrain. His recent statement, "Russia's border doesn't end anywhere," is mystical and lyrical. It was made a few months before he was credited with Donald Trump's victory. Russia's most successful head of State is now on the fringes of Zhivago territory. ■

A Damodaran is a faculty member at Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore



MISSION OVERSEAS: DARING OPERATIONS BY THE INDIAN MILITARY (UNTOLD TRUE STORIES)
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The Extra-Territorial Army

These untold surgical strikes add to Indian military history

By Srinath Raghavan

THE 'SURGICAL STRIKES' against Pakistani targets conducted last year touched off a discussion on the role of force in Indian foreign policy. While some commentators emphasised that such operations had been carried out in the past, others pointed to the scale and coordination of the latest strikes. Others still underscored the need to avoid overestimating the strategic—as different from operational—effects of such operations. Interestingly, much of this debate was conducted with scant reference to history. After all, this was hardly the first time India had used force outside of a regular war or insurgency.

Part of the problem is that Indian historians have seldom been interested in military matters. Worse, even scholars of strategic affairs have tended to refrain from serious historical work. On the flip side, our military too has only recently begun to make a proper attempt at documenting its involvement in various conflicts. The extent of our history deficit can be gauged from the fact that the story of India's intervention in Maldives in November 1988 is being told in some detail for the first time in Sushant Singh's *Mission Overseas*.

A former colonel in the Indian Army, Singh covers defence and strategic affairs for *The Indian Express*. His book is a fine account of three instances of force projection by India: Operation Cactus in Maldives; Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka; and Operation Khukri in Sierra Leone. The choice of overseas operations is important because it throws into relief the peculiar challenges of using force in such contexts. Drawing on his own military experience as well as interviews and access to unpublished documents, Singh provides well-paced and readable narratives of these little known operations.

The operations in Sri Lanka have some purchase on our public memory owing to the fiasco in which they ended. Singh reminds us of the extraordinary optimism with which the political and military leadership authorised an attack on Jaffna University—a known stronghold of the LTTE. This overconfidence contributed to shoddy operational preparedness. The Sikh Light Infantry unit went in for the operation with civil maps of 1938 vintage. Senior commanders on the ground were also slow in adapting to the rapidly shifting operational context *vis-à-vis* the LTTE. The upshot was a costly debacle that prefigured the collapse of Indian intervention in Sri Lanka.

Singh suggests that this larger failure arose from an inability to fuse political and military considerations, plans and initiatives. In the case of Maldives, though, the same government did rather well. When President Gayoom appealed for Indian assistance in the wake of an attempted coup, New Delhi was quick off the blocks and sure-footed throughout. On this occasion, Singh writes, 'Indian officials were able to swiftly put together a plan action.' Indeed, it is striking that much of the coordination and preparation occurred at the level of the civilian and military officials even before the question of intervention was taken up by the political leadership. Singh provides a gripping account of the strategic deliberations that ensued. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi apparently took a close interest in operational details, including troop numbers, arms and aircraft. Clarity of strategic aims and military means along with careful coordination enabled Indian forces to shore-up the Maldivian government.

SAURABH SINGH

The operation in Sierra Leone had additional layers of complexity. The Indian forces taken captive by the rebels were operating under the UN umbrella. The international context was therefore a complicating factor. Britain and the United States were sympathetic to the plight of captured Indian soldiers, but urged India to exercise restraint. Diplomatic efforts to secure their release without recourse to force took place on several tracks. Fortunately, there wasn't much coverage of the hostage crisis in the Indian media. So, the Government could take a well-thought out decision to attack the rebels and restore the credibility of the Indian force. Singh offers a crisp and informative account of the decision as well as the successful operation.

The brevity of these narratives, however, leaves you wanting to know more. To be fair, each of these crises deserves a book in its own right. Singh has uncovered a rich seam of recent Indian military history—one that is indispensable for any serious debate on the utility of force. ■

The Truth about the Bothering Berry

We can still redeem litchis from bad news—and how

Dr Ambrish Mithal

HAVING GROWN up in the city of Lucknow and spent most of my adult life in the plains of northern India, I dread the summer season, when the temperature soars to over 45° Celsius. One of the attractions that makes the scorching summer tolerable, even exciting, is the availability of numerous varieties of juicy summer fruits that delight the taste buds and cool the insides. Mango, of course, continues to be the king of fruits, but for me, as for many others, the luscious berry called litchi is high on the list too.

The litchi originated in southern China. The first descriptions of its cultivation dates to the 11th century, although it is believed that it was consumed in China as far back as 2000 BCE. Litchis reached India in the late 17th century via the Northeast and Myanmar. Presently, India is the second largest producer of litchis in the world (after China), and almost half of the produce is from Bihar, much of it from Muzaffarpur alone.

As a litchi lover, I read with consternation reports that started appearing in medical journals a couple of years ago that consumption of this fruit was associated with an encephalitis-like, often fatal brain disease in children in Muzaffarpur, the litchi capital of India. Initial reports authored by scientists from Vellore and Indian Institute of Toxicology Research, Lucknow, suggested a strong association between litchi consumption and the fatal brain disease. In January this year, a study by National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), India, and Centre for Disease Control (CDC), Atlanta, published in the *Lancet Global Health* confirmed this finding. The authors demonstrated the presence of toxins from litchi in the urine and blood of the affected children. Children under 15 years of age admitted to two hospitals during the months of May and June 2014 with seizures or altered consciousness were studied. Most children fell sick between 3 am and 8 am, and the majority had missed their evening meal. Common to them was the consumption of litchis. All signs of infection were absent; tests carried out for viruses were also negative. An intriguing finding was the low blood glucose level in the majority of the children—values as low as 8 mg/dl were reported. Tragically, like every year for the past 20 years or so, about one third of these children died. The administration of intravenous glucose in time was found to help reduce the likelihood of death.

Is the Muzaffarpur litchi toxicity story a unique finding? Outbreaks of a similar illness have been reported in Vietnam and Bangladesh. Although associated with litchi consumption, the exact relationship with litchi or its contents was never clearly established. It has been known since 1962 that litchi contains naturally occurring toxins called hypogycin A and methylene cyclopropyl glycine (MCPG), which lower blood glucose. Toxins are found in greater amounts in unripe fruit than in fully ripe ones. Litchi toxins cause a severe disruption of metabolism. When we starve, blood glucose levels tend to drop—the liver then pours out glucose into our circulation as a protective mechanism. Toxins in litchi block the liver's glucose synthesis and so the organ is unable to respond to food deprivation. In Muzaffarpur, many of the affected children were from economically weaker sections of society, and were malnourished. When poorly nourished children with limited liver stores miss dinner, their sugar level tends to drop even more. This drop in glucose leads to seizures or epileptic fits, loss of consciousness, and along with other metabolic disturbances, may prove fatal.

An increase in commercial litchi production, which has made the fruit abundantly available in areas like Muzaffarpur, has led to easy access. It is quite understandable that children preferred to quell their hunger by consuming delicious litchis in orchards and subsequently missed their evening meal.

For safe's sake, litchi consumption by children should be controlled by parents. This is especially true of those living in litchi growing areas. And children should never miss a meal, particularly dinner. In case of illness, the blood glucose level should be checked, and if needed, glucose given.

Does this mean the beginning of the end for litchis? Probably not. The fruit will continue to be enjoyed across India and the world—but yes, certain precautions in its consumption will become the norm. Urgent public education in this regard is a must.

And maybe a day will come when we will actually be able to extract these low blood glucose producing 'toxins' from litchis and use them to treat diabetes. ■

Dr Ambrish Mithal is chairman and head, Endocrinology and Diabetes Division at Medanta, The Medicity, Gurgaon

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RAJEEV MASAND

The Unknown Boss

Aditya Chopra and his famed reclusive personality have spawned many a joke, but at least on one occasion the *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* director must've regretted the fact that he keeps such a low profile. An insider at Yash Raj Films recounts an incident when Adi (as he's affectionately referred to by everyone) hopped into an autorickshaw from his home in Juhu on a day that he was having driver issues. On reaching the gates of YRF Studios in Andheri, Adi reportedly realised he wasn't carrying any cash, and asked a security guard manning the entrance to pay the auto driver on his behalf. The security officer's reaction was priceless: "*Aap kaun hain, aur main aapka bhaada kyun bharun*?" (Who are you, and why should I pay your fare?)

The irony of the situation could not have escaped Adi. Nevertheless, he promptly called a member of his team from inside the studio to pay off the auto driver and to convince the security guard to let him get past his own studio gate.

Time Management

Alia Bhatt has a few months off in between projects. After the release of *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* this weekend, the actress doesn't have a project lined up until she dives into **Ayan Mukerji's** Ranbir Kapoor starrer. As it turns out, that film's start date may be delayed again, which leaves Alia with a hole the size of a football field in her date diary.

According to well-placed sources, she's keen to squeeze in a 'quickie', and since **Zoya Akhtar's** film (co-starring Ranveer Singh) won't be ready to go just yet, she's leaning towards *Talvar* director **Meghna Gulzar's** next. The film is a spy thriller based on true events documented in Harinder Sikka's book *Calling Sehmat*, and it's centred on a Kashmiri girl who marries a Pakistani army officer in order to provide the Indian intelligence agencies with crucial information during the India-Pakistan war of 1971.

Although the film is set up at *Talvar* producers' Junglee Pictures, **Karan Johar** may jump in to co-produce it if Alia does commit herself to the project. But insiders are saying she has only read a slim story outline so far, and is still to pore over the full script.

One for the Masses

For over two years she's been working closely with a reputed art-house filmmaker to develop a passion project: the biopic of one of India's foremost female freedom fighters. It's an ambitious film to say the least, but one whose financing becomes easier to secure given her clout and popularity. Word on the street, however, is that the actress is having trouble convincing the filmmaker that the project needs to be a mainstream Hindi film, and not the English-language festival film he has envisioned.

Meanwhile, the leading lady has received another offer to star in a film based on the life of the same inspiring figure, but from an entirely different filmmaking team—this one, from south India. As it turns out, she is more inclined towards the second project, which has been conceived as a commercial Hindi film. The actress has reportedly told close friends that she has no interest in making an indulgent, inaccessible film; she is seduced by the idea of taking this rousing story to the largest possible audience, and hence is leaning favourably towards the second offer.

She will remain closely involved with the scripting and development of the new project too, which, she has said, takes an entirely different approach to the story than the one the art-house filmmaker is working on. The actress insists she sees potential in the story to lend itself to a wholesome popular film for a wide audience, and that's exactly the kind of film she wants to be associated with. ■

Rajeev Masand is entertainment editor and film critic at CNN-NEWS18

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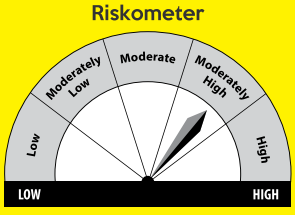

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