THE HINDU

Magazine

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MUMBAI

Sunday, June 14, 2020



LITERARY REVIEW

Samit Basu's new sci-fi novel, *Chosen Spirits*, is an act of rebellion in the very future it conjures up p4



WIDE ANGLE

Hundreds of UPSC aspirants have been thrown out of their homes in Delhi, despite orders barring eviction p6



QUIZ

On this day in 1942, a little girl started writing a diary that would inspire millions around the world p7



BACK PAGE

I can understand why Indians enjoy watching the U.S. be rude to China, says author and commentator David Frum p8

ILLUSTRATION: KANNAN SUNDAR

COVER

Down by the river

The fishing out of 84 lead cubes with Devanagari inscriptions from the River Sowe has sparked intrigue. What are they and why were they at the bottom of an English river? **p3**

last week

Corona-free

New Zealand, which went into a stringent lockdown on March 25, lifted most restrictions after it became officially COVID-19-free with no active cases. Schools and workplaces can open, social distancing is not required any more and public gatherings can take place. "While the job is not done, there is no denying this is a milestone. So can I finish with a very simple, 'Thank you, New Zealand'," said Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.





Court support

The Supreme Court on June 9 ordered States and Union Territories to bring all stranded migrant workers home within 15 days, while instructing the railways to provide 171 more Shramik Special trains. It also urged States and UTs to withdraw prosecutions against migrant workers who have been charged with violating lockdown rules by walking home. It asked for counselling centres be set up to direct returning workers to rehabilitation and employment schemes.



Slowly slowly

India and China reached an "agreement" as a result of ongoing talks on the tense border situation in Ladakh, with the two countries working to "ameliorate" the situation, according to China. No details were forthcoming and India made nos tatement, though there were reports of de-escalation as troops were withdrawn from some — not all — of the stand-off sites.



Doctors with borders

Delhi's hospitals were forced to navigate chaos as the AAP government ordered them to admit only patients who could provide proof of residence in the capital. This provoked much criticism and was overturned by Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal. Baijal also struck down an order that limited the scope of COVID-19 testing, and directed the government to test more contacts of confirmed cases.



Roar

A survey of India's lions found that their numbers in and around Gir National Park have grown by 29%, from 523 in 2015 to 674 now. The lion's range has also expanded to 30,000 sq. km in Gujarat. This is particularly good news for the prides, which were affected by an outbreak of Canine Distemper Virus in 2018 that killed 36 lions.



Doped out

Indian 800m runner Gomathi Marimuthu, who won gold at the 2019 Asian Championships, was stripped of her medal and banned by the Athletics Integrity Unit after she tested positive for a banned steroid. Meanwhile, India's National Anti-Doping Agency suspended basketballer Amritpal Singh, shooter Sharvan Kumar, and boxer Neeraj Phogat.



Anti-trans

J.K. Rowling came under fire for a tweet that many saw as transphobic. Commenting on an article titled 'Creating a more equal post-COVID-19 world for people who menstruate,' Rowling tweeted: "'People who menstruate.' I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?." In response, *Harry Potter* star Daniel Radcliffe wrote, "Transgender women are women. Any statement to the contrary erases the identity and dignity of transgender people."







Toppling the past

Protests against police racism triggered by the death of George Floyd continued across the U.S. and internationally, while authorities responded with promises to revamp police forces. The Democrats rolled out a legislative package of police reforms. Protesters worldwide targeted and defaced statues of historical figures associated with racism and slavery. In Richmond, Virginia, a statue of Christopher Columbus was dumped into a lake.

Crossing a line

Crossfit founder and CEO Greg Glassman was forced to resign after being lambasted for offensive comments about George Floyd, including a tweet in which he characterised the protests as 'FLOYD-19'. The next few days saw the U.S.-based fitness brand plunged into crisis as it lost partnerships, including its official outfitter, Reebok, and over 1,000 affiliated gyms. Glassman's subsequent apology had little effect.

Op-ed offence

After an op-ed by U.S. Senator Tom Cotton, advocating 'an overwhelming show of force' against protesters by deploying the military, was featured on *The New York Times* website, acrimony ensued as many of the newspaper's own journalists publicly criticised the decision to publish the piece — which, it turned out, had been commissioned from Cotton by *The Times*. Editorial page editor James Bennet had to resign as a result.

The pandemic is a springboard

Appreciate our capabilities to re-energise the survival instincts and rise once again

T.T. Srinath

In the past four months, as COVID-19 has caught many of us in its vice-like grip, holding almost all of humanity hostage, social scientists have been searching through history to uncover a similar situation that human beings may have faced in "remembered history".

Unfortunately, there are no occurrences that compare to what is happening now; nor are there parallels to draw inferences from.

When the Great Plague struck the world in the late 18th century or when Spanish Flu hurt our psyche around the turn of last century, the world as we now know did not exist or did in a far less intricate and interrelated manner than it does today.

This pandemic, even if attributed to human error, has surely overwhelmed all of humanity in a way that its tentacles are spreading far and wide and at a pace that is difficult to contain.

If this is true and gains resonance with those who recognise the irreparable damage we have been caused or subjected to, what may we do as a race that will help us self-preserve?

Some of the simple lessons that life is offering may help: we have only finite time in this world and therefore procrastinating will numb us into believing we have endless amount of time for our projects. Recreating ourselves by how we wish to use our time and energies will distract us from self-obsession.

When an illustrious former Indian cricket captain, the Nawab of Pataudi, who scored a century against fiery pace bowlers of his time and with only one eye in which he had sight, the other having been lost in an accident, was asked, "How he was able to bat and bat well with only one eye?" He responded, "I have lost my sight, not my vision."

We have to understand people through the eyes of those immersed in the tragedy, travails and troubles

Isolation is impossible

Another lesson is that the novel coronavirus has unequivocally established the truth that we are in the world with others and isolation is simply impossible. So the requirement is to psychologically and emotionally cradle and embrace one another. We as human beings need a shared appreciation of what is going on, and we have to understand people through the eyes of those immersed in the tragedy, travails and troubles they are experiencing. Awareness of this is what we need to cultivate, nothing can be taken for granted any more. We cannot make claim to a static or fixed understanding of any phenomena, particularly one like the virus that is impacting us, and must preserve our own sane approach whatever is happening around us in a state of "unknowingness", thereby helping us combat fear and anxiety.

We do not see things as they are but tend to see things as we are. Our options are limited by our existential situation. The assumption that we are "free" can only be exercised by taking a stand against what is meeting us in life. We have little control over the circumstances that is overwhelming us, and we can only respond as best as we can.

The antidote to combat our psychological brittleness may be available in a quote offered by the French existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, "Today we are having a hard time living because we are so bent on outwitting death."

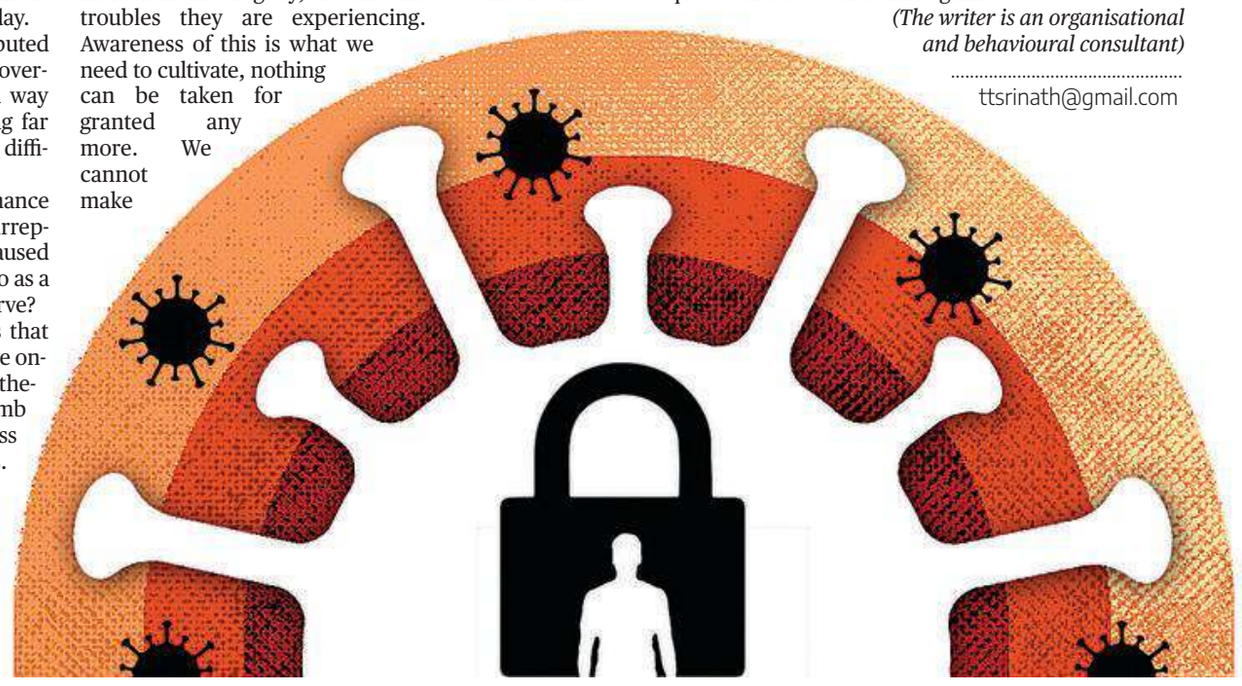
My mother who is 86 and housebound owing to age and also the possibility of what health workers mean by "co-morbidity", shared a thought with me kindling my belief that I can recreate myself If I so desire.

"A door is smaller than a house, the lock on the door even smaller, the key being the smallest, yet it is the key that unlocks the door into the house," she said.

If we appreciate our capability and recall and remember crises that we have handled and overcome, perhaps we may be able to re-energise our ability to survive and with that rise once again.

(The writer is an organisational and behavioural consultant)

ttsrinath@gmail.com



Long train on a small platform

Sarangapani Bashyam

I visited the U.S. for the first time in 2000 at the age of 60. Since my hosts were a working couple, there was no question of a guided metro tour or outstation visits. But I decided to explore New York, with their guarded approval. They would drop me at one of the metro stations in the morning and pick me up from the same spot in the evening. I was asked to keep my distance from local people and be careful at city centres.

But a problem arose when my friend in Long Island, one of the suburbs some 65 km from New York, invited me for dinner. After quite a bit of persuasion, my host agreed to my night-out. I took the Amtrak train from the New York Penn station at 5 p.m. My friend would receive me at a station called Glen Cove around 7 p.m. The ride was comfortable, and I enjoyed the scenic landscape *en route*.

As Glen Cove was announced on the screen, I reached the exit door, but could not open it. I went to the next compartment through the vestibule. Here too the door could not be opened. There was no other passenger to alight. I got panicky. My worry was if the train resumed its journey, I would not know how to reach my destination from the next stop at night. One passenger came to me and said, "My dear friend, the train will not leave without disembarking you. The conductor knows you are listed to get off at this station. Please go to the next compartment."

As I did so, the conductor greeted me and guided me to the door. It was a relief to see my friend waiting on the platform to receive me. "Just a few commuters use these stations. The platform is built small purposely to save resources. Passengers will come to the one compartment whose door will open," he said. The country which has enormous resources shows how to manage them wisely.

lakshmibashyam@yahoo.com



Gentleman in flannels and fatigues

How colonel-cricketer Hemu Adhikari dealt with 'indiscipline' in his ranks

S.G. Vombatkere

I learned my lesson on military discipline from a cricketer when I was a Gentleman Cadet (GC) in the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, which I joined in January 1961.

GCs were granted "liberty" on certain days to leave the academy on condition of being properly dressed in the regulation "mufti", not visiting out-of-bounds areas and reporting back in time. Most GCs, and this writer for sure, could only think of food, and there were prescribed city restaurants for us.

Mess food is tasty and nutritious, but everyone needs a change once in a while. I "discovered" a Konkani family living on the adjoining Forest Research Institute campus. I am a Konkani, and my initial foray in search of "home food" was met by their unstinted hospitality, and my visits became quite regular.

Over the months, the daughter of the family became an added attraction. She had passed her Senior Cambridge exam in December 1961, and had a six-month break before joining college. Our friendship grew, and we decided to go to the movies, followed by eating out. It was unconventional for those times, and even more unconventional that it was she who treated this ever-hungry GC! That outing sealed our bond – we married and we have just marked our 55th anniversary.

Custodian of discipline

One day, I was dressed in regulation "mufti", and as we walked to a table in Kwality restaurant, we passed the table at which the Academy Adjutant was seated. I politely wished him, but the Adjutant, the custodian of discipline, glared at me. Unperturbed, we had a leisurely meal and cycled back.

The next morning, I was summoned to the Orderly Room for disciplinary action. With no clue why, I was marched up before my Company Commander, who was Major H.R. (Hemu) Adhikari, a world-famous cricketer.

The charge against me was that I had been out-of-bounds, as observed by the Adjutant. Asked what I had to say, I said that I had been to Kwality restaurant, which was not out-of-bounds. My Commander told me that the Academy Daily Orders had placed the city out-of-bounds for all ranks following a measles outbreak, and I was therefore guilty as charged. My plea was that I hadn't seen the order, and that is when Major Adhikari gently gave me the lesson that in the Army, ignorance of orders was no excuse for breaking rules. He then asked who the girl with me was, probably fearing a complaint from her family. I explained and, ever the gentleman, he just harrumphed!

Having been found guilty, next came the sentence. He asked me why I should not be punished with relegation (loss of six months of service seniority). I don't know how I blurted out that if it was out-of-bounds for me, it was out-of-bounds for others too. He was annoyed at my impertinent logic involving the Adjutant, and I was marched out!

I wasn't relegated, thanks to the fair-mindedness of an icon of the gentleman's game. Most important, I was fortunate and blessed to have learned a lesson in military discipline from an officer and gentleman.

sg9kere@live.com



Straight bat Former Test cricketers Hemu Adhikari (left) with Mushtaq Ali (right). ▪ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

On the stump, at wits' end

How a much-awaited school election speech ended up as a laugh riot

Mini Krishnan

It was election time in Baldwin Girls' High School, Bangalore, in 1966. Who might be the next school captain or "president", as she was called? Every candidate had to be nominated and promoted by a fellow student. One of the best and brightest girls (and too modest for her own good) I knew was my classmate T. Rajalakshmi, and a group decided that I campaign for her.

For about 10 days, I reached school earlier than usual and spoke to small groups who either listened patiently or told me to buzz away and bother someone else. I changed tack and talked to influential gang leaders, ending my election mode remarks with "tell your friends". My next post was the bicycle stand where I waited to ingratiate myself with seniors and house captains. By and by even my best friend began to show some reluctance to accompany me. So I plodded on alone. Came the day when we were supposed to introduce our candidates to the whole school after assembly time and talk about them. What a chance! With my brother's help, I prepared what we both thought was a brilliant speech. Rajalakshmi read what I showed her and said, "I am none of these things. Looks like you want me to win more than I do," puncturing my optimism a bit. There might have been some truth in that.

On the big day, I tucked my speech into the pocket of my blazer and waited for my turn. Everyone else said mundane things about their candidate and how "nice" she was. "Even if I don't win, they'll remember your speech," whispered Rajalakshmi. Finally, it was our turn and as we stood up, a teacher asked me to leave my blazer on my chair. Only when I reached the mike did I remember that my speech lay in my blazer pocket.

That empty feeling

I stood in front of the mike with Rajalakshmi on my left. As I looked at the sea of faces before me, my confidence vapourised and ice filled my brain. I took a deep breath and said, "Ladies and gentlemen!" Laughter rippled through the hall because there wasn't a single man in the audience. I couldn't recall two words of what I had written. To jiggle my memory, I said "Ladies and gentlemen" a second time. There followed a good deal of merriment. My teachers fell forward to muffle their laughter in sari *pallus* and handkerchiefs and even the bored office maids waiting on the veranda outside popped their heads in to see what was happening. I don't clearly recall what happened, but Rajalakshmi herself was suppressing her mirth.

Suffice it to say that I opened and closed with the same sentence: "Please vote for T. Rajalakshmi because she is the best candidate."

Rajalakshmi lost the election but I retained her friendship .

minioup@gmail.com



FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in



Cover story
No one has ever had to teach India's rural communities to be self-reliant and humanistic. It is endogenous. ('Running in the Community'; June.7) The pandemic has brought out the best in them.
E.S. CHANDRASEKARAN

■ Guidelines were issued in 1978 by the RBI asking all banks to provide institutional credit to artisans, village and cottage industries in rural areas. The District Industries Centre (DIC) in each district can also sponsor loans under this scheme, besides loans sanctioned by the bank managers themselves. All Indian scheduled commercial banks including Regional Rural Banks should provide increased finance for the entire rural community, including self-help groups engaged in livelihood activities.
K.M.K. MURTHY

■ It is an undeniable fact that self-reliance needs to sprout from the bottom of the ladder and then move upwards. It is time we shifted focus towards localisation and creation of rural livelihoods.
V.L. ADHITIYA KAARTHIKHEYAN

■ This is a timely article and articulates the true meaning of self-reliance. Local governance with real decentralised power and money at the community collective level is the key.
ANURADHA

■ Itwas heartening to read about reverse migration in Kutch. Grassroot-level sustainable livelihood generation is essential as demonstrated by some village communities generating comfortable revenues.
PAVAN SWAROOP

■ The city of Almere in the Netherlands has built ReGen Villages,self-sufficient in food and electricity. The Indian government should aim for the same.
KUMARIKA ROY

■ Gandhiji famously said that the soul of India lives in its villages. Yet, apathy towards farmers and villages continues; both the Centre and the States have washed off their hands and remember rural India only during elections. When the people of villages can be helped to become self-sufficient and rely upon their traditional livelihoods with just a little intervention, where is the need to bring them to cities? The pandemic and the ensuing lockdown is a good opportunity for the government to begin afresh and rework its rural strategy. Economic jargon and development packages must not end with the cities.
JAYASEKHARAN V.P.

Handmade livelihood

■ Initiatives like repurposing of waste or promoting GI tags have the ability to bring in revenues for craftspeople. ('100% handmade needs 101% support;' June 7) More skilled youth should look towards the village as a place of entrepreneurship.
PURNA SARKAR

Love & hate

Janaki Lenin's columns are a real treasure, both informative and educational. ('A gentleman named mugger'; June 7) I look forward to her gentle and compassionate pieces on the non-stereotypical behaviour of animals and humans. G. Sampath's sharp satire and the brilliant Green Humour are other features I enjoy.
J. DAHIYA

■ You publish 'Letter from a Concerned Reader' each week. As a reader of your paper for the last seven decades I find the letter not at all interesting. I don't understand why you are wasting valuable space.
G. JAYARAMAN

More on the Web

thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Social media and cybercrimes

Crowd-reporting mechanism used by platforms has proved to be inefficient in addressing offences
GIREESH KUMAR J. & ARJUN PHILIP GEORGE

Bus journeys of yore

The vehicles ran on steam, and huge logs of firewood would be fed to a furnace at the rear
NAGARAJAM DEVARAJAN

Music and the mind

Do you select all the songs you want to listen, create a playlist, and start listening?
PAVAN KUMAR

Rethinking vulnerabilities, priorities

The confinement has given us a chance to rediscover our world with new eyes
AMIT JAVALGI

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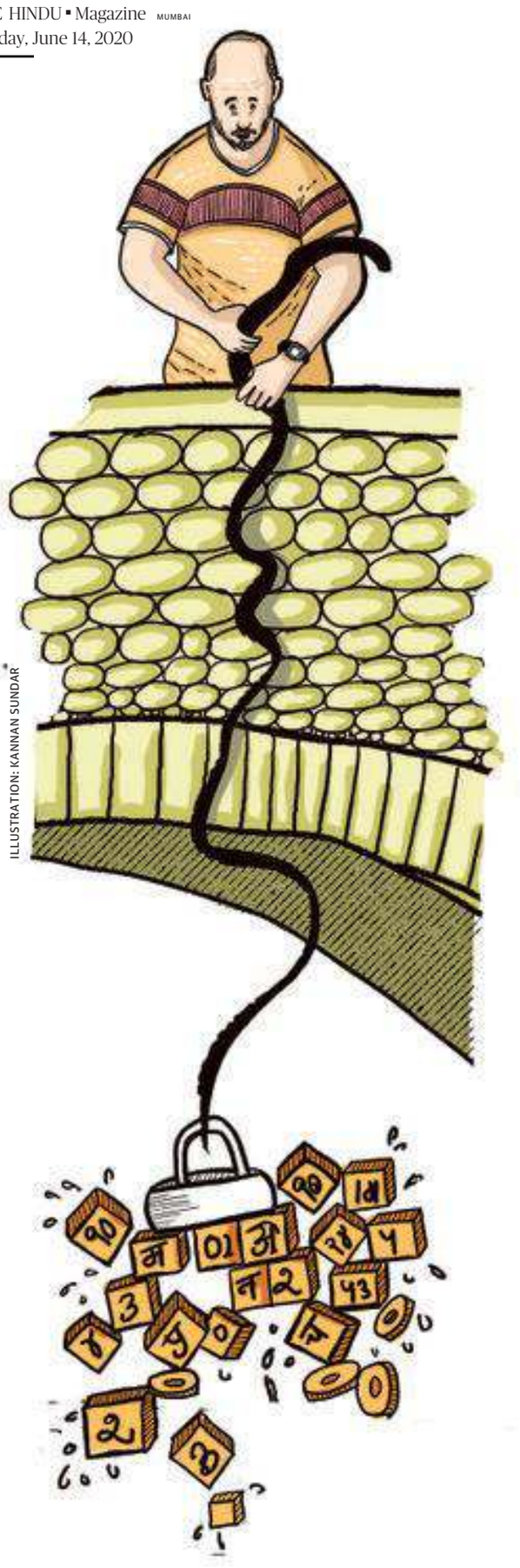


ILLUSTRATION: KANNAN SUNDAR



How did 8 kilos of lead cubes with Devanagari inscriptions end up at the bottom of a river in England?

FISHING

The Tantric cubes of Coventry









Anil Menon

Like all treasure stories, the story of this treasure, found at the bottom of an old English river, is made up of at least three stories. There's the quest, the story of how the treasure was found; then there's its history, the story of how the treasure ended up where it did; and in a few delicious cases, there's the enigma, the story of just what exactly has been found. This story has all three elements. Let's begin with the easiest part, the quest.

On May 8, Will Read, 38, set off with his sons, Jackson and Benjamin, for Baginton Bridge over the River Sowe to do some magnet fishing. Regular fishing, regardless of its pugnacious fans, is an unpleasant business. Not only are you at the mercy of the fish, and not only are fish dim-witted and uncooperative, and not only do you have to wait for the fish to find you, you reliably snag plenty of non-fish. Magnet fishing, which involves using a metal detector, solves all these problems. It redefines what counts as fish (anything with metal) and puts you squarely back in charge. It's not as heroic, perhaps, but it's certainly less likely to drive you to drink.

Read and his two explorers were novice mudlarkers – as some magnet fishermen call themselves. They'd been at it for just two weeks and had chosen Baginton Bridge for much the same reason Willie Sutton had robbed banks – it makes sense to go look where things are expected to be found. People often use bridges to chuck stuff into rivers, and mudlarkers use them as starting points.

Baginton Bridge is just a few miles from a much more famous bridge, the Stoneleigh Bridge over the River Avon, commissioned by the Rev. Thomas Leigh, owner of Stoneleigh Abbey. Leigh was Jane Austen's first cousin and the Abbey was the architectural inspiration for Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Coventry is Austen country and Shakespeare country. It's more English than England.

Toubled waters

The mudlarkers didn't have to look for long. At first, Read thought he'd snagged metal junk, but then as his senior assistant explorer Benjamin, 7, and junior assistant explorer Jackson, 5, took a closer look, they realised they'd found something quite peculiar. Will Read told me over the phone that their haul eventually consisted of 64 lead (or lead-alloy) cubes. Each of the six faces was inscribed with strange rune-like markings arranged in a 3-by-3 table, captioned by an inscription.

Forty-seven of the cubes weighed approximately 125 gm each and were 2 cm in length. They could be picked up by a forefinger and thumb. The remaining 13 cubes were smaller and seemed more crudely made. Read and the boys also found about a dozen pennies, all punctured with a square hole at the centre, and a coin with the goddess Durga inscribed on one side and 'Shri' on the other.

Read had been livestreaming the mudlark expedition on Facebook, and a friend helped him post the images on Reddit's /r/whatisthisthing. It soon generated 600-plus comments, until member u/hermit-the-frog decisively settled the issue. The 3-by-3 table on each cube face was an *ankh-yantra*, specifically the Rahu *yantra* in Devanagari script. In Roman, it reads:

15 08 13
10 12 14
11 16 09
Om Rahave Namah

The sum of the numbers in each row adds up to 36, as do the numbers in each column and the numbers in the main diagonals. In mathematics, such an arrangement of numbers is called a magic square. A *yantra* is a magic square presumed to have tantric effects. At the bottom of an English river, Read and his team had found tantric India.

The Rahu *yantra* isn't depicted the way it is depicted on the lead cubes. Based on every book I've had a chance to consult, the Rahu *yantra* is depicted this way:

13 08 15
14 12 10
09 16 11
Om Rahave Namah

That is, the *yantra* on the lead cubes is the reverse of the Rahu *yantra*. This isn't analogous to inverting the swastika or worshipping an upside-down cross. I think it is a fallout of lead printing. Lead is very easy to inscribe; any sharp iron tool will do. But I don't think these were inscribed with a sharp tool. Normally, *yantras* are drawn on 2D surfaces, like a lead plate or coin. Unlike the ancient Greeks, who associated the planets with 3D objects like spheres and tetrahedrons and cubes, the ancient South Asians associated the planets with 2D objects like lines and triangles and squares.

What I think happened is that the lead cubes were heat-softened and each of their faces imprinted using a coin with a Rahu *yantra*. Such coins are easily purchased. The result is an inversion of the columns of the table, the kind of image reversal that happens in reverse-glass painting. The process would have been fast, inexpensive, but it resulted, alas, in an incorrectly oriented *yantra*.

Cry me a river

In any case, what were these cubes doing at the bottom of the river in England? In all likelihood, they were meant as remedial measures, votive offerings, intended to offset 'Rahu *dosha*', the malefic influence of Lord Rahu in a horoscope. Such offerings are found in other rivers as well. Lara Maiklem mentions in her book *Mudlarking* (2019) that "...by far the most common religious objects found in the river are Hindu. For the Hindu community, the Thames has become a substitute for the Ganges... I've found strings of prayer beads, small flat metal *yantras* to ward off evil, and lots of coconuts... Just this year, a friend found one that had been cracked open and filled with rice, into which was pressed a small statue of Ganesh made from 1.9 ounces of solid gold..."

The use of flat-metal *ankh-yantras* as remedial measures goes back at least to the age of classical India, and was practised in other civilisations, including China and post-12th-century Europe. In more recent times, especially in North India, the *locus classicus* for all these remedies is the *Lal Kitab*, the Red Book, a collection of five volumes in Urdu, allegedly written by Pandit Roop Chand Joshi between 1939 and 1952.

The book has a red cover, which symbolises its intent to be an account book of a person's life. It combines a radically simplified astrology with the South Asian schools of body reading (palmistry, face reading, and so on), and provides remedies (*upaya*) for various *doshas* in your astrological chart.

Compared with more secular placebos, the remedies are cheaper and probably just as effective. Half the problem with many of life's problems is the feeling of helplessness. Remedial astrology reduces this sense of helplessness. People who believe in astrology aren't any more fatalistic than people who rely on pandemic models are.

These people just want to do something about their futures. The underlying assumption is that to control the future, we need to be able to predict it. And prediction in hand, one can consult the *Lal Kitab* for remedies. From the astrologer's point of view, it's a win-win. If the predicted event does not come to pass, the remedy worked. If the predicted event comes to pass, the prediction worked. Like government policies and literary criticism, it is refutation-proof.

What sort of affliction prompts this remedy? In Indian astrology, Rahu's "associated" metal is lead. In the *Lal Kitab*, people with an afflicted Rahu in the 1st house are advised to drop lead in some form or the other in flowing water for a certain number of days, in unbroken sequence. There's uncertainty about the exact amount of lead needed and the exact number of days. The *Lal Kitab* seems to require a period of 43 days, but older Hindu remedies – such as the chanting of *mantras* – are often only for a period of 21 days.

A few days after Read and I had talked over the phone, he emailed to say he'd found 20 more lead cubes in the river, as well as "a lot more coins with holes in them." As of writing, he and the boys have found 84 cubes, with a total weight of about 7,463 gm. He isn't sure if he has found all there was to find. I suspect he is right. There might be a few more. Some books call for 4 kg of lead to be dropped over the remedial period. Read has found close to 8 kg of lead, suggesting that they were dropped over *two* remedial periods. In any case, it is a lot of lead.

Who did it?

What can we infer about the person or persons who dropped all these lead cubes into the water? First of all, the lead cubes are inscribed in Devanagari. The numbers 5 and 8 are written in what is known as the 'Calcutta' variant, common in North India, but not other areas. The use of Devanagari tells us they can't be any older than the 11th or 12th century AD. Since there weren't too many Indians wandering around Coventry during the Black Plague centuries, we can move the date another 300 or 400 years ahead.

Then there's the location. The Baginton Bridge is a sandstone ashlar bridge with three semi-circular arches and rectangular piers at each end. A version of the bridge was around in the 1460s, but the current version originates from the 1930s. No bridge, no person on the bridge.

Then there's the matter of the dozen punctured pennies also recovered from the Sowe. Some of these pennies are 2p coins minted in 1981. Pennies can be older than when they were thrown, but they can't be later. Whoever threw these coins from the bridge, threw them in after 1981. Feng Shui coins have square holes at the centre, and the practice of Feng Shui really took hold in Britain only in the 1990s.

In short, the cubes were most likely dropped by a North Indian Hindu, probably a middle-aged, first-generation British resident, sometime between 1981 and 2000. Why middle-aged? Because these remedies cannot be done on another's behalf, and elderly parents of immigrants are not only more reconciled with life but also less mobile. Why pre-2000? Because people, even Indians, have become a lot more conscious of what they chuck into waterbodies. In the UK, the campaign against the use of lead in pipes and paint started in the 1980s. And a lot of lead – almost 8 kg – was dropped into the Sowe. It must have happened in the last century.

Perhaps the oddest aspect of the whole affair is that *yantra* cubes were found and not *yantra* plates or coins. On account of the weight (over 6 kg), it's unlikely the cubes were brought over from India. From a Tantric point of view, it is overkill – there are far simpler measures. Whoever dropped these items from the Baginton Bridge must have felt themselves to be in real trouble.

If detectives act as clearinghouses for secrets, then bridges act as accumulators. As mentioned, Stoneleigh bridge over the River Avon is within walking distance of Baginton Bridge. Recently, Judy Stowe, an academic affiliated with the University of New South Wales, Australia, trawled old British court records and discovered that labour conflicts during the bridge's construction may have led Chandos Leigh, who'd inherited Stoneleigh Abbey, to murder two local workers, Billinges and Forbes, and have them buried in the bridge's foundations.

Lord Leigh was a schoolmate of Lord Byron's and Austen's relative, her junior by 15 years. Byron lived a life of scandal, but it's hard to believe that the life of one of the most composed of English authors was touched by so melodramatic an event. But just as *yantras* are supposed to channel strange energies, bridges channel coincidences, until events self-cascade into rigid facts and a seemingly impossible connection is spanned between nations, ages and people.

Read's good fortune was partly the consequence of someone attempting to end their misfortune. When I spoke with Read, he said his friends had joked that he'd probably never find anything this interesting again. I'm not so sure. There are plenty more bridges.

The writer's novel, *Half of What I Say*, was shortlisted for the 2016 Hindu Prize.

Unlike the ancient Greeks, who associated the planets with 3D objects like spheres and cubes, the ancient South Asians associated the planets with 2D objects like lines and triangles

Finders keepers In all, Will Read (above) and his sons found 84 lead-alloy cubes, more than a dozen punctured pennies, and a coin with the image of the goddess Durga inscribed on one side and the word 'Shri' on the other. WILLREAD8888/IMGUR

SCIENCE FICTION

Joey and the guardians of the data galaxy

Chosen Spirits, set in a Delhi 10 years from now, is torn out of today's headlines and channels the anxieties that vex the Indian liberal intelligentsia



▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Jaideep Unudurti

In recent months, hundreds of cellphone masts have been burnt down by vigilantes all around the world. The arsonists were driven by viral videos propagating conspiracy theories that radiation from 5G networks causes the spread of the novel coronavirus.

You could call this an allergic reaction that the human race has developed to the future; a symptom of what sociologist Manuel Castells called "informed bewilderment," the hallmark of our age. It is also a sign that we live in a science-fictional reality now. Only the literature of the imagination can capture what is happening all around us.

Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits*, set in a Delhi 10 years from now, therefore is a welcome addition to the ranks of Indian science-fiction. It is torn out of today's headlines and channels the anxieties that vex the Indian liberal intelligentsia.



Chosen Spirits
Samit Basu
Simon & Schuster India
₹499

Years not to be discussed

We follow Bijoyini "Joey" Roy, a 25-year old "Associate Reality Controller" of something called the Flow. She manages the channels of a "Flowstar," a kind of social media influencer on turbomode. The Flow is what would happen if Dr. Frankenstein decided to merge his Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram accounts, and threw in some Augmented Reality as well.

Joey meets Rudra, the dispossessed scion of a business house and soon they are plunged into a vortex of corporate espionage, feuding oligarchs, illegal medical tech, and hostile takeovers, all under an authoritarian overhang. Basu plays up one of science-fiction's greatest strengths – it is a genre where world-building also forms a narrative, a relentless accretion of details like pixels forming the image on a HD display.

In a casual aside we learn that JNU has been demolished and replaced with a giant mall with the "world's largest air-conditioner"

Staying just ahead of the bow-wave of the present means carefully following trends, to see which ones will persist. As Frederik Pohl once said "A good science fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile, but the traffic jam."

In a casual aside we learn that JNU has been demolished and replaced with a giant mall with the "world's largest air-conditioner," we see that RWAs have been weaponised, and American diners replaced with Sino-futurist-themed restaurants signalling shifts in global power. At a social gathering, a character meets "a neuromarketer, a flying warehouse distributor and a cognitive linguist, a memorial monument optimiser, a detention centre designer and a friend-renting social maven."

Basu makes full use of the vantage point that sci-fi enables. Our now is their past, referred to as the "Years Not To Be Discussed". We learn that Joey as a teenager attended the protests at Shaheen Bagh, "which now exists only in memory."

Jugaadpunk aesthetic

There are encrypted kolams repurposed as QR codes, protests that come with bloodshed ratings (the worst kind of protest is "blood and no cameras"), a "Lakshman Rekha" firewall has sprung up around the country's Internet, an AI assistant called Narad sends "lovable dog GIF blasts" depending on your mood. There are "augrels," micro religions which, like a karmic Fitbit, track good deeds and enable you to unlock utopian cult retreats.

This is the territory of "Cyberpunk", which emerged in the 1980s, boosted by the publication of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Just as the Space Age was spluttering, the genre turned inward. Instead of the grand panoramas of space opera, there were now computers talking to each other, packets of data whispering across the lines, with the darkness between the stars lit up by "constellations of data."

However, Basu's cyberpunk milieu is firmly rooted in the culture which generated it. In the Western tradition, the lone protagonist, usually male, investigates a neon-drenched city; the *Blade Runner* films are an example of this template.

While here, it is a middle-class family, complete with domestic help, facing the usual problems – ageing parents, a younger brother who isn't 'settled'. Basu even posits a kind of "jugaadpunk" aesthetic in his depiction of the semi-formal cyberbazaars of Delhi. The novel brims with ideas though the narrative drives over some clumsy exposition dumps now and then.

Still there are lots of themes below the surface; one is that of "surveillance capitalism," as defined by Shoshana Zuboff. The future, far from an utopia to aspire to, has itself become a commodity, "the behavioural futures market", where our lives are recorded, then bundled and sold as data.

Basu is clear that "this book is set not in a dystopia, but in a best-case scenario," which isn't very comforting. But that is the job of science-fiction. Sometimes the very act of imagining a future is an act of rebellion.

The reviewer is a freelance journalist and graphic novelist.

▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK



THOUGHT FOR FOOD

Nixon's paneer mashup

Everything you wanted to know about milk but were afraid to ask

Like railway timetables, which I like to read even if I am not travelling, I enjoy going through recipe books – whether or not I actually try them out. For, as historian Mark Kurlansky tells us, recipes are invaluable artefacts: "They teach us about societies and the social order in which they were created."

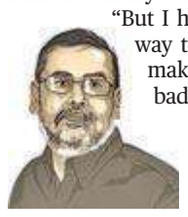
He encourages readers to try out some of the 126 recipes that he mentions in his book, *Milk: A 10,000-Year History*. But he is conscientious: "That said, I would avoid Richard Nixon's cottage cheese recipe."

That, of course, piqued my interest. So even before I'd read the book – recommended and conditionally lent by a physicist friend who clearly devotes as much time to the thought of food as he does to physics – I went through Nixon's recipe.

Milky way

Cottage cheese, Kurlansky writes, came to be known as a diet food in the U.S. and most people ate it without really liking it. In 1968, Richard Nixon's campaign managers decided that he needed to be made more "endearing", for he was "one of the least cuddly of all politicians". So there were television interviews where he, I suppose, tried to appear 'cuddly'. Once he was asked by an interviewer how he kept his weight down. By eating cottage cheese, he replied.

"I eat cottage cheese till it runs out of my ears," he said. "But I have learnt a way to eat it that makes it not too bad. I put ketchup on it. At least that way it does not taste like cottage cheese."



Most Indians would baulk at that. There would be a loud argument over how to eat cottage cheese or paneer, one of the most popular milk products in India. And that wouldn't surprise Kurlansky, for he tells us that milk is the most argued-over food in human history.

"Here is a food fight that gourmets, chefs, agronomists, parents, feminists, chemists, epidemiologists, nutritionists, biologists, economists, and animal lovers can all weigh in on," he comments.

His book tells you everything that you wanted to know about milk but were afraid to ask. The old debate over which animal's milk is the best continues. Most vouch for cow's milk, but the buffalo has its legion of fans too. Ibn Battuta praises a porridge prepared with buffalo milk that he'd had during his India sojourn in the 14th century. Then there are people who are passionate about goat's milk (which, incidentally, has triple the amount of protein found in human milk).

Ibn Battuta praises a porridge prepared with buffalo milk that he'd had during his India sojourn in the 14th century

Monkey's milk, Kurlansky tells us, is in its composition most similar to human milk, while camel's milk is akin to cow's milk. Then there is donkey's milk, which has far less fat than human milk: "Donkey's milk has also retained a following, especially since it has been determined that people who are allergic to other milks have no problem with donkey's milk."

Bubbling saucepan

When Francis I of early 16th century France fell ill, a physician prescribed donkey's milk. "He recovered and thereafter drank donkey's milk whenever he was feeling ill," Kurlansky writes.

The book is full of little-known gems such as this. He mentions that the halwa came to India with the Mughals, but it was in India that it became a dairy dish. The gajar ka halwa was invented sometime in the 16th or 17th century, he says.

"It was also in the sixteenth century that the Dutch, through the use of carotene, developed the first orange carrot. Previously, carrots were either pale yellow or purple, varieties that still exist. But the orange carrot was sweeter. According to popular folk mythology, the orange carrot was developed in the mid- to late-1600s to honour King William of Orange, but, in actuality, it already existed before he was born. When the orange carrot appeared in Mogul India, there was great excitement. Vegetable halwas had started to become popular, and if there is one thing Indians truly loved, it's bright deep colours. Carrot halwa became, and remained, a popular dessert."

The book is an encyclopedia of milk as well as a bubbling saucepan of trivia. Did you know, for instance, that Nixon learnt the trick of adding ketchup to cottage cheese from his grandmother, who lived till 91? One lives and learns, drop by drop.

Rahul Verma likes reading and writing about food as much as he does cooking and eating it. Well, almost.

Shelley Walia

ESSAY

Chronicles of death foretold

Pestilences tend to bring out the best and the worst in us and literature keeps the tally



We all fall down Pieter van Halen's oil depicting the plague of the Philistines at Ashdod (1661). ▪ WIKI COMMONS

In this period of isolation, one turns to literature and art to come to terms with reality, and place it in the context of history. As I continue to stay indoors because of the pandemic, spring has given way to summer. I follow the turn of seasons with elation – I look out of my window and see flowers blooming and the changing shades of green on trees. Yet this tranquil radiance invites dark thoughts as scenes of pandemic recorded in literature – bodies piled sky-high waiting for burial, cries of pain searing through the London smog – crowd the mind.

This worldwide pandemic is certainly not the first. Nor will it be the last.

In denial

The work that comes most readily to mind is, of course, Camus's *The Plague*, that bleak parable illustrating the human condition. Like the French army marching into Algeria, the plague descends on the Algerian town of Oran, where one "never hear[s] the beat of the wings or the rustle of leaves." The plague "rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views". Although people "fancied themselves free", the novel tells us that "no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences."

But *The Plague* is not merely an allegory; it is also the tale of a devastating natural calamity. Dr. Bernard Rieux decides to stay back in Oran to tend to the sick, accepting a life of "exile and imprisonment" that is the inherent fallout of every pandemic. Camus writes at the beginning of the novel that "everybody knows... pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our head from a blue sky."

Indeed, the initial response to any pandemic has always been denial, with the state machinery playing down the number of fatalities to conceal the seriousness of the situation. This happened in the early days of the Great Plague in London in 1664 – Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* testifies to the common practice of the state spreading misinformation and manipulating the media to suit its interests. From our own experience of the way some states round the world have reacted to the COVID-19 crisis, we know this all too well by now.

One can trace a few patterns: the U.S.'s recent denunciation of China echoes the efforts of the KGB to hold the U.S. responsible for the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Nearly two millennia ago, Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius held the Christians culpable for the smallpox affliction in his empire. During successive plagues, Jews were accused of poisoning the wells of Europe. Defoe underscores the bigotry and xenophobia that underlie this tendency. Racist bias is apparent in the haunting figure of a hooded man surreptitiously contaminating public places.

Racist bias is apparent in the haunting figure of a hooded man surreptitiously contaminating public places

Living to tell the tale

Pandemics spare no one, rich or poor. "The vast cities of America, the fertile plains of Hindostan, the crowded abodes of the Chinese, are menaced with utter ruin," writes Mary Shelley in her dystopian sci-fi novel, *The Last Man* (1826). This is the story of the plague in Constantinople in 2092, lasting a year and returning in spring in a more virulent avatar. People rush to churches and mosques to appease the gods. While legislatures vacillate on taking suitable action, human achievements in the fields of arts, commerce and agriculture gradually decline. Modelling his plot on Mary Shelley's, Jack London wrote the post apocalyptic novel, *The Scarlet Plague*, in 1912.

The protagonist here, a professor of English literature, is among the handful who live to tell the tale. His grandsons have no idea what money is: he finds it difficult to explain to them how, as the plague arrived in the world run by capitalists, trains stopped, stores were looted, and huge swathes of population starved and died while the wealthy fled to their farms or islands.

If we come through this pandemic, many would perhaps be inspired to write about their personal tragedies and future fears. "All a man could win in the conflict between plague and life," says Camus, "was knowledge and memories." History repeats itself, with none growing wiser with experience. Only literature continues to fight for a more equitable world, where healthcare is a right not a privilege and transparency in governance is a justified expectation not a pipe dream.

The writer is Professor Emeritus and Fellow, Panjab University.

BROWSER

The Book of Longings
Sue Monk Kidd
Viking
$14.99 (Kindle price)
This is the story of a rebellious young woman named Ana, sister of Judas and wife of Jesus. They have a happy marriage in Nazareth till the family gets embroiled in the conflict in Israel against Roman occupation. Ana flees to Alexandria, where revelations and greater dangers unfold.



The Four Colors
Ankur
Hawakal Publishers
₹350
The poems in this slim volume are grouped according to colours corresponding to states of mind and stages of growth — Green (birth), Yellow (disillusion), Purple (rebirth) and Red (self-realisation). The poetry is touched with a limpid wistfulness and a clear-eyed acceptance of change.



Little White Secrets
Carol Mason
Lake Union Publishing
₹129.00 (Kindle price)
Emily Rossi has a picture-perfect life till her 14-year-old daughter, Zara, brings home a toxic new bestie. Suddenly Zara is staying out late, taking drugs and keeping bad company. Emily's husband seems too wrapped up in his job to care. Then a dark secret comes to light.



What We Forgot to Bury
Marin Montgomery
Thomas & Mercer
₹129 (Kindle price)
When Charlotte Coburn is putting her tragically dark past behind to start a new life, teenager Elle knocks at her door looking for shelter. She knows all of Charlotte's secrets because they ruined her family. It is time that everyone else knew. But Charlotte is also concocting her own vile plans.



TRAVEL

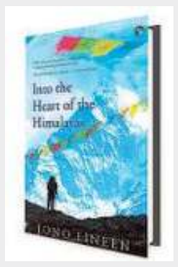
Walking the mountains in silence

To cope with his grief, a writer undertakes a personal journey across 2,700 km of the Himalayas

Bishwanath Ghosh

As someone who has done travel books himself, would it be fair – even ethical – on my part to comment about someone else's travelogue? That was the first thought that struck me as I finished reading Jono Lineen's *Into the Heart of the Himalayas*. There's no rulebook that stops me, but why should I judge another writer's labour of love?

Then it occurred to me that there's hardly any common ground. I can never come close to doing what he has done. I am an Indian, that too belonging to a generation that cannot even imagine backpacking in the mountains of Pakistan in the foreseeable future. While millions were direct victims of Partition, an event that took place more than 70 years ago, successive generations continue to pay the price for it in numerous ways, one of them being their inability to access some of the most majestic parts of the Himalayas, which today lie in Pakistan.



Into the Heart of the Himalayas
Jono Lineen
Speaking Tiger
₹499

Tumultuous landscape

In other words, you are unlikely to find a present-day Indian writer beginning his book with these sentences: "The jeep taxi dropped me at my starting point, the confluence of the Indus and Astore rivers in the Northern Areas of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. It is a tumultuous landscape, where three of the world's greatest mountain ranges – the Himalayas, the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush – collide."

While Lileen brilliantly sets the tone of the book with these very first two lines, he also establishes, quite early on, that he is a nice, likeable sort you can trust as you trek the 2,700 kilometres along with him – from the 'Muslim Himalayas' of Pakistan to the 'Buddhist Himalayas' of Ladakh and Spiti and finally into the 'Hindu Himalayas' of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

He wanders through the Himalayas for pretty much the same reason that Indian sadhus do: search for self and spirituality. In his case, the trigger was the death of his younger brother Gareth, who had drowned in the icy waters of Elk Lake in British Columbia the day before he would have turned 19. The recurring mentions of the death make it clear that the arduous trek was not an attempt to walk away from the tragedy but a tool to come to terms with it; as if in enduring the hardship he is seeking to lessen the pain caused by his brother's death.

Meditative trek

Lileen's modesty and honesty shines through in his prose, which is lucid and precise. Not for a moment do you feel intimidated by or envious of his feat: time and again you are reminded that he is a human just like you and me, someone who grew up in violence-scarred Belfast and who lost his teenage brother.

What's most endearing about his account is that he keeps pretty much to himself almost throughout the journey, even when he encounters temptation in the form of an Anglo-Pakistani woman in the middle of nowhere.

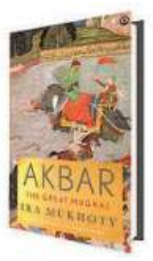
Reading him is not just travelling with him; by the time you reach the end of the book you realise you've been meditating all along.

PROFILE

Light from many faiths

In Ira Mukhoty's narrative, Emperor Akbar is an able reformer, the earliest advocate of inter-religion dialogue, and marked for greatness because of his quality of empathy

Rakhshanda Jalil



Akbar The Great Mughal: The Definitive Biography
Ira Mukhoty
Aleph
₹999

Charismatic, curious, catholic, compassionate – Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) has long exercised the imagination of Indians of all hues. For the lay person, he is the lumbering giant with the booming voice and grand moustache as depicted by the actor Prithviraj Kapoor in K. Asif's magnum opus *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960); while ostensibly a love story between Akbar's son, Salim, and Anarkali, the film belongs to the father in the eponymous role of the Great Mughal.

For the liberals, Akbar is the embodiment of pluralism, multiculturalism and the earliest advocate of inter-faith dialogue.

For the right-wing ultra-nationalists he is the most 'tolerable' of all the Muslim rulers for his reverence for all faiths and abolition of the religious tax, *jiziya*, from non-Muslims.

'An Indian icon'

From school textbooks to the Akbar-Birbal *qissa-kahani* to popular culture, Akbar has consistently remained an Indian icon.

Several books too have been written on him, both by the professional historian and by non-academic but extremely engaged and passionate writers. In the latter category are two recent books, both eminently readable and both written by journalists: the simply-titled *Akbar* by Shazi Zaman and *Allahu Akbar: Understanding the Great Mughal in Today's India* by Manimugdha Sharma. Ira Mukhoty's gargantuan book is nevertheless a welcome addition.

However, her assertion that "few full-length biographies have been written in recent times" is not entirely true. One is also wary of the subtitle; "definitive" biography sounds like a publisher's overkill, for a book's size alone (over 600 pages) cannot define its scope nor ward off any future explorations on the subject.

Given the absence of Endnotes, Bibliography and Index in the uncorrected proof copy sent for review, one is unable to fully gauge the extent of sources and primary texts studied by the author and whether, if at all, she has accessed Persian sources that have largely been beyond the reach of non-academic writers relying as they do on English translations.

One is, however, struck by two curious omissions by the author. One: footnotes to indicate where quoted matter is sourced from.

Two, a similar omission in the photographs of Mughal miniatures; more detailed captions and information about sources would have been helpful given, especially, that the book focuses on the role played by the royal ateliers (*tasvir khanas*) in chronicling the lives of the royal patrons and leaving behind a vast visual archive of Mughal history, a rich load that is now being mined by art historians as a supplement to recorded history.

None like him
A young Akbar.
▪ WIKI COMMONS



Access to a king

Mukhoty's strength as a writer lies in her ability to recreate a scene, flesh out characters, find the human element, in a word, narrate history.

Her previous book, *Daughters of the Sun: Empresses, Queens and Begums of the Mughal Empire*, contained ample evidence of her sophisticated prose and her felicity in providing a luminous account of the many women who lived in the shadow of their men yet led remarkable lives during the Mughal period. Here, too, she impresses with her ability to make history accessible in ways that professional historians sometimes don't, or can't.

Turn of events

Mukhoty shows her mettle as a narrator virtually from the opening paragraph where she describes two young hostages, a young Akbar and his sister, on their way to meet their uncle Kamran: "In the frigid midwinter of 1544, two children were sent north from Kandahar to Kabul, 500 kilometres away. While the snow fell silently and relentlessly on a desolate landscape, the small party stumbled on through the mountain passes and ravines, their horses' steaming breath loud in the night."

She goes on to chart the growth of that terrified child upon whom the weight of being Emperor of Hindustan is thrust at the tender age of 13 when his father, Humayun, dies unexpectedly: "In fact, Akbar was a distracted, undisciplined, rambunctious child and youth who, in the parlance of the twenty-first century, may have suffered from an attention-deficit disorder. So unruly and self-willed was Akbar that no tutor was able to hold his attention and he grew up effectively unschooled and practically illiterate."

Pioneering genius

And yet this young emperor would evolve into a fine human being, a patron of the arts, initiator of some of the greatest works of translation not to mention a pioneer in ship-building, metallurgy, alchemy, military technology as well as administrative reforms. Mukhoty shows us the man behind the emperor who brought in the largest territory – after Ashoka and his Mauryan empire – under his control.

Despite Akbar's intellectual curiosity, his epiphany at the age of 36, his visionary idea of *sulha kul* (universal peace), it is his compassion and empathy that marks him for greatness. As he said in one of his proclamations: 'The best prayer is service to humanity.'

The reviewer is a writer, translator and literary historian.

RELIGION

The ambiguity of the RSS and its complex worldview

In its march towards building a 'Hindu' nation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh struggles with ideological incoherence on Muslims and caste

Varghese K. George

Decoding the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been a preoccupation of academics and journalists alike for decades, and there is no dearth of writing on it. In recent years, as the Sangh Parivar moved to the centrestage of politics in India, there have been several new tomes.

Dinesh Narayanan's *The RSS and the making of the Deep Nation* steers clear of predictable courses. Not in a hurry to dismiss, eulogise or vilify the RSS, this book captures various facets of the Sangh in a rather dispassionate manner, sometimes at the risk of sounding sympathetic.

The author is wary of conclusive statements, while he curiously examines the RSS' vacillations, contradictions, and its unwavering and patient march towards turning India into a Hindu rashtra.

Growth of a power centre

Acting through numerous fronts and speaking in multiple tongues, the RSS grew immensely powerful over nearly a century but it ferociously preserved a certain insularity from public inquiry.

After its political front, the Bharatiya Janata Party, won a parliamentary majority in 2014, the RSS began to open up a bit more. Its chief Mohan Bhagwat held a three-part lecture series in 2018, in which he also appeared to abjure the Sangh's declared hostility towards Muslims. Despite its recent, tentative transparency, the RSS' genetic code still retains a lot of mystery. Or, as the author suggests, it may be still evolving.

The book's title is a play on 'deep state,' a phrase that initially alluded to the hold of the secular military establishment on Turkish politics.

It has been used to denote the grip of the Pakistani military and the ISI in the country's society and politics; and in recent years popularised by President Donald Trump and his allies to call into question the American security establishment which they accuse of undermining the democratic will of the people. Deep state, in essence, alludes to a power structure that operates under the radar, and sways the course of the nation in unseen ways.

Again, the author is not conclusive, though he drops enough hints. For instance, the RSS has a mechanism to train civil service aspirants, and at least 4,000 currently serving civil servants came through it. This constitutes a permanent influence of the Sangh within the instruments of the state, but when the BJP is in power, they are also the preferred ones for staffing crucial positions. The RSS continues to hold on to fantasy eugenic projects, meanwhile.

Sangh's animosity

There is remarkable continuity in the Sangh's animosity towards Muslims; the writer notes this and also the occasional efforts at reconciliation.

Founding RSS sarsanghachalak or chief B.G. Hegdewar believed that calling Muslims traitors would imply that they were part of the nation and preferred to refer to them as enemies.

There has been a spectrum of understandings within the Sangh on Muslims, and the author suggests the more strident voices often get the better of moderate ones.

Where it stands

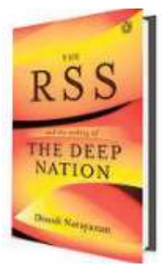
Though it is bound by a broad notion of promoting Hindu Rashtra, significant ideological incoherence remains the Sangh's hallmark.

Its struggles are not restricted to its views on Muslims, but also in its views on caste and economic policy.

If one is curious about the seeming contradiction in the current attempts of the Centre to promote local products and global supply chains at the same time, this book outlines the long and difficult history of the Sangh's engagement with economic liberalisation and globalisation.

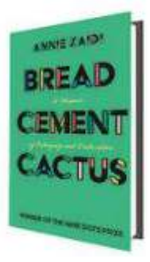
For all its fretting and fuming against Enron in the 1990s, the 13-day government of the A.B. Vajpayee government in 1996 tried its best to appease the American company. That was how a power fixer, the late Pramod Mahajan, upended the BJP's swadeshi agenda overnight, the author notes.

Narayanan has had significant access to several current and former functionaries of the Sangh. This book is a valuable and readable addition to the literature on the RSS.



The RSS and the making of the Deep Nation
Dinesh Narayanan
Penguin
₹699

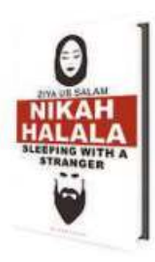
Bread, Cement, Cactus: A Memoir of Belonging and Dislocation
Annie Zaidi
Cambridge University Press
₹980
In this exploration of the meaning of home, Zaidi reflects on the places in India from which she derives her identity. She finds what it is to forge a sense of belonging as a migrant in places where other communities consider you an outsider.



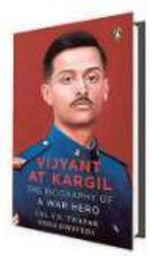
Getting Competitive: A Practitioner's Guide for India
R.C. Bhargava
HarperBusiness
₹599
Why does Indian manufacturing contribute so little to the GDP? The chairman of Maruti Suzuki draws upon his experience of more than 60 years as a policymaker and industry leader to give suggestions on how Indian industry can be competitive.



Nikah Halala: Sleeping with a Stranger
Ziya Us Salam
Bloomsbury
₹550
This book presents the sordid reality of 'nikah halala', mock marriages in Muslim society against the background of Koranic injunction, and exposes the departure in practice from the teachings that give divorced women freedom to follow their path.



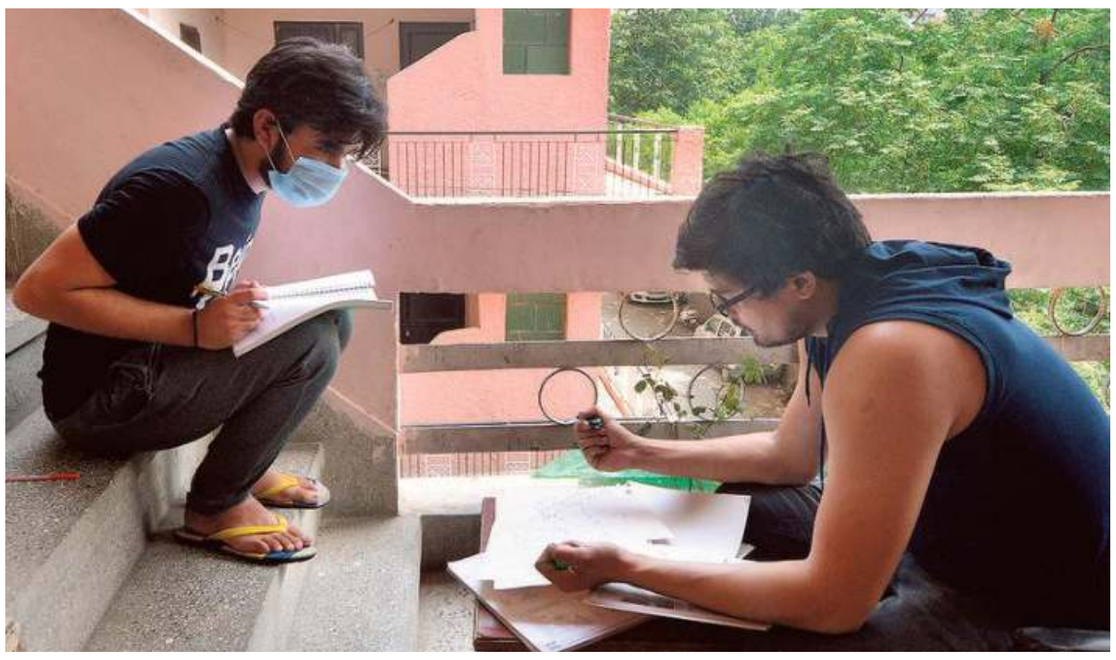
Vijyant at Kargil: The Biography of a War Hero
V.N. Thapar, Neha Dwivedi
Ebury Press/PRH
₹299
Captain Vijyant Thapar died at 22 in the Kargil War. A fourth-generation army officer, Vijyant dreamt of serving his country even as a young boy. In this biography, we learn about the journey from his father and Neha Dwivedi, a martyr's daughter herself.







Help! (Clockwise from below) Aspirants study during the lockdown in a Mukherjee Nagar flat; a student in his tiny rented room; a student walks past a gate pasted with leaflets advertising PGs in the area
▪ R.V. MOORTHY, MONICA TIWARI & RAMESH SHARMA



FIELD NOTES

No room for Anmol

Students, says the MHA order, can't be evicted for defaulting on rent. Yet hundreds of UPSC aspirants in the capital are being thrown out by their landlords

Srishti Lakhotia

The narrow streets of central and north Delhi are cramped with dingy, greying coaching centres, the Mecca for thousands of UPSC aspirants from across the country who want to take a shot at a job in the prestigious Indian administrative services. In the lanes abutting this area are hundreds of rooms and barsatis housing these candidates. Klesh, 28, is from Maharashtra and he had taken a room on rent in Old Rajinder Nagar. He lived a modest life here, studying and working, until the extended lockdown changed everything.

Klesh had somehow managed to scrape together rent for two months but in May when his funds ran dry, he was forced to vacate the room. This, despite orders from the Ministry of Home Affairs on March 29 and the Delhi government on April 22 that said landlords evicting migrant labourers and students are liable to action under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Landlords, the orders said, cannot demand rent for a period of one month from workers and migrants.

Running dry

"I had no choice but to leave," says Klesh, as he prepared to depart for Amravati, his home town in Maharashtra, where his family lives in the shanty town of Belpura. He had exhausted every avenue: he had gone twice to the temporary police booth in Old Rajinder Nagar, set up soon after the government orders, but they would not issue a guarantee of rent waiver. Klesh then collected an e-pass to travel back. Klesh's father is a tailor in Amravati. He used to send his son ₹14,000 a month for rent while Klesh funded other expenses by means of a part-time job as a content writer in a coaching centre nearby. "I spent ₹14,000 on rent, ₹2,000 for the reading hall, ₹3,000 for study material, and ₹5,000 on living expenses," says Klesh. When the lockdown was declared, his father's income dried up, and so did the rent money. "I skipped meals to save money for rent," says the student, but with the lockdown extension in May, he ran out of money entirely. "I felt reassured because I had the Delhi government circular in hand," he says.

Same boat brothers

Reality, however, was very different. The landlord denied that the government had made any such claim and refused even a discount on the rent. "On May 7, when he called his tone was lawyer-like; he picked loopholes in the government order," recalls Klesh. One such loophole was that since UPSC aspirants were not studying in an educational institution, landlords decided they need not be treated as 'students'. Another ambiguity was whether a clause in the orders that waived a month's rent for migrants applied to students or not.

Delhi's Patel Nagar, Old Rajinder Nagar, Karol Bagh, Mukherjee Nagar and Lakshmi Nagar are filled with hundreds of students who are in the same boat as Klesh. Young men and women, whose parents are small farmers or who run small businesses and whose earnings have been lost. Rooms in these areas carry high rents but students flock here because they are strategically located near bookstalls and coaching centres and there's a sense of camaraderie among all the UPSC aspirants.

My landlord has said I can pay rent after three months, but where will I get the money even then? My father is a farmer in Bihar who is now forced to sell watermelon at ₹1 per kg. Where will he get the money to send me?

Confusing order

"In Amravati or Pune, I cannot get the kind of help one needs to prepare for these exams; that's why I came to Delhi," says Klesh. In fact, he cannot even afford the ₹1 lakh or more required for a formal 10-month course and gets by because in this community he can learn by osmosis.

Amisha Gupta is an UPSC aspirant from Kolkata, who lives in a room in Old Rajinder Nagar. She believes the Delhi State government order was not clear enough. "Yes, the police booth did help me avoid eviction. But even the officials there seemed confused by the order," she says.

As many as nine FIRs have been filed against landlords in Mukherjee Nagar alone for forceful eviction, yet the government has taken no action. In protest, 1,899 aspirants came together on a Telegram chat group called 'United Students Front' to counter the pressure from landlords and brokers. Later, students filed a petition in the Supreme Court. The petitioners, including Anmol Singh and Chetna Mishra, said that lakhs of students were stranded in Delhi due to the lockdown and "are facing harassment at the hands of their landlords on account of their inability to pay rent". They sought a waiver on rent payment for four months from April to July. Despite the MHA order, their plea was rejected.

Being inhuman

Infuriated and frustrated, the UPSC aspirants have now decided to organise themselves through Google forms and list out 'blacklisted' properties for post-COVID times. "Students can fill in the forms and we will countercheck and classify the properties not just for current aspirants but for future students as well," says Singh, a student from Haryana who lives in Old Rajinder Nagar.

Meanwhile, the students have mailed Aam Aadmi Party MLA Raghav Chadha, State Education Minister Manish Sisodia, and other officials for help and clarifications. A meeting was fixed between students and the Residents' Welfare Associations of Old Rajinder Nagar and Mukherjee Nagar. Deepak Pathak, a member of the RWA in Old Rajinder Nagar, says students did approach him and he had suggested that they have an informal meeting with the landlords. But, says Pathak, "one also needs to think of the landlords, most of whom are elderly people with rents as their only source of income."

A compromise has not yet been reached. Landlords like Madan Mohan Mehta in Old Rajinder Nagar claim to have waived a month's rent. "But I can't do so any longer. I am retired and the rent is my only income. The State needs to compensate us as well," says Mehta. Many students agree with Mehta.

Abhinaya (name changed on request), another UPSC aspirant in Mukherjee Nagar, says she empathises with her landlord but questions the State's rent policy. "My landlord has said I can pay rent after three months, but where will I get the money even then? My father is a farmer in Bihar who is now forced to sell watermelon at ₹1 per kg. Where will he get the money to send me?" she asks.

The crisis has made Chetna Mishra, one of the students who drafted the petition, even more determined to give the civil services a shot. "There are no humanitarian grounds in the administration. I will study to be a civil servant, even more so now that I have seen how many loopholes there are," she says.

The author is a freelance journalist based in Kolkata.

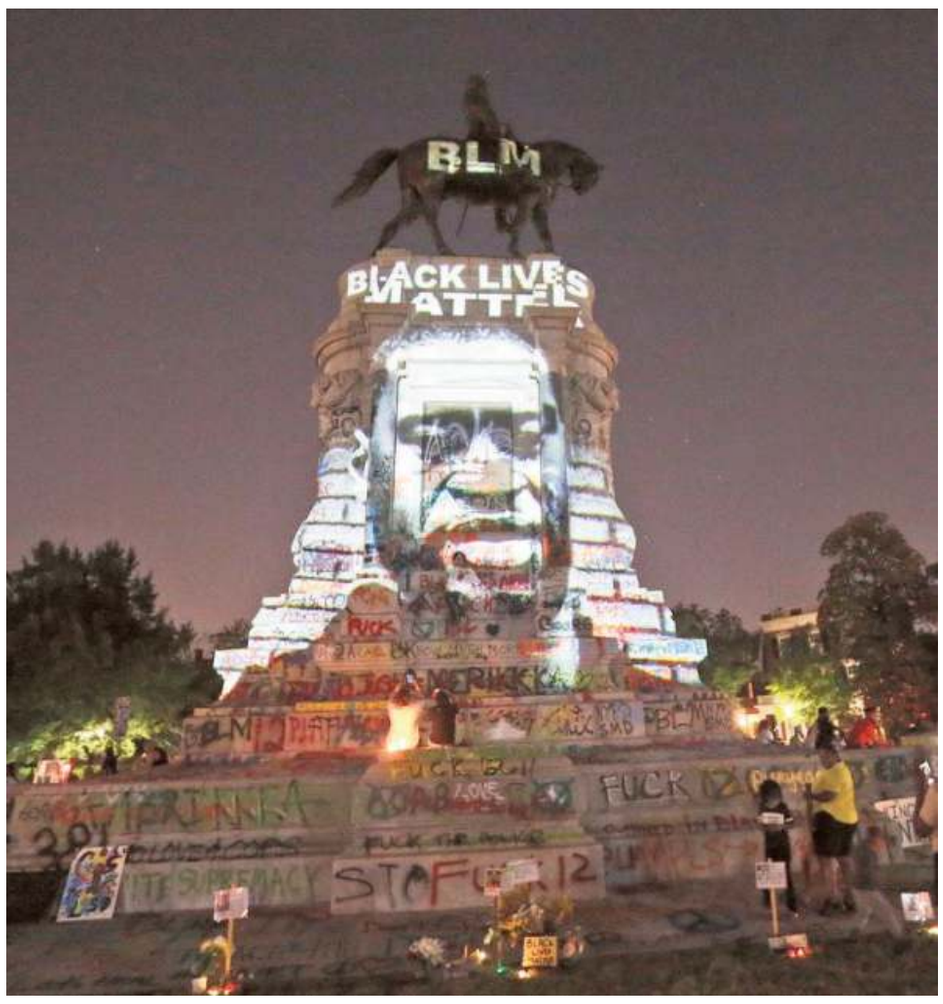
GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY



PASSING BITE

Let the statues fall

Especially if they are of those who devoted their lives to enslaving and trading people of a different ethnicity



Giving offence
An image of George Floyd is projected on the base of the statue of Robert E. Lee on June 8. ▪ AP

In 1989, I was visiting the city of Richmond, Virginia, in the United States. I'd known my friends T and P since my time in college in Vermont and we were here in T's hometown to help him with a video project.

We were driving around at night in a city which had been the capital of the Confederate States during the Civil War. At some point, we turned into Monument Avenue. As we passed the equestrian statues and columns, T, an African-American, read out the roll-call of names of the Generals represented, with P, a white guy from New Jersey, replying, "That guy's got to go!", "Take him *down*!", "And him too!". We finally stopped near a statue where both my friends vented simultaneously, "This one first! This one's gotta go, first of all!"

This divisive symbol

The statue commemorated Robert E. Lee, the Commander of the Confederate Armies and the general who fought some of the bloodiest battles of the civil war while defending the 'right' of whites to own slaves. In 1989, nearly 125 years after the supposed emancipation of people of African descent, we were looking up at the statue of a figure around whom white supremacists had built their racist myths while continuing to discriminate grotesquely, and at every possible level, against Americans of colour.

The presence of these statues of slavery-supporting generals in Richmond and other southern cities was equally outrageous for my black American friend and my white American friend, but it has taken another 31 years for the current Governor of Virginia to even attempt to remove that statue of Lee – 'this divisive symbol' as he put it – from the centre of the State capital. Just after Governor Ralph Northam gave the order, a State judge issued an injunction against the removal, based on a deed signed in 1870 that the State of Virginia would "perpetually care for and affectionately protect" the statue.

A couple of years ago, in Baltimore, statues of Lee, of Confederate icon Stonewall Jackson, and of Roger Taney, the Supreme Court judge who gave a judgment upholding slavery, were all removed overnight by the administration.

Moment of elation

The recent removal and disposal in the river of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol, England, has triggered debates online. Some arguments are framed thus: Can any one group of people be allowed to pull down statues and architectural symbols that they find offensive? If yes, then how can you stop others from defacing or destroying other statues and buildings that *they* find offensive, even if you hold those targets to have archaeological or artistic value? If the group pulling down the Colston statue was "caught up in a passion" set off by the police murder of George Floyd, then could one not say the mob that destroyed the Babri Masjid was equally beset by passionate anger? What about the Bamiyan Buddhas – if we feel outrage at the Taliban destruction, should we also not feel outrage when a group yanks down the statue of Colston or defaces statues of Robert Clive or Winston Churchill? What about the IS's destruction of ancient sites that offend their version of Islam? Couldn't the pulling down of the Colston statue be compared to those extreme actions?

We finally stopped near a statue where both my friends vented simultaneously, "This one first! This one's gotta go, first of all!"

Well, no. The Taliban shelled the Bamiyan Buddhas in a spectacle aimed at Western governments, destroying the region's own ancient heritage, blasting away sculptures that had no bearing whatsoever on the Afghan people's current situation. The 'passion' which led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid was manufactured carefully over many years by ruthlessly amoral politicians. The IS's destruction of archaeological sites has been consistently connected to the sale of artefacts from those sites – sales to Western collectors who knowingly or otherwise have funded IS's horrific campaigns.

On the other hand are these statues, of those who devoted their lives to enslaving and trading people of a different ethnicity; Colston or the mass murderer Leopold II of Belgium or Cecil Rhodes or Robert Clive, or indeed Winston Churchill, whose 'finest hour' of about four months can be weighed against the darkness of 70 years of adult life as an indefatigable white racist who often held great power while having nothing but contempt for 'inferior races'.

Whether these people's statues are removed to a back lot such as Coronation Park in Delhi or Barrackpore near Kolkata, or occasionally burnt or brought down and thrown into a river, their removal has to do with circumstances of racism and discrimination that are current and based on the foundations laid by these men.

A few months after my encounter with the statue of Lee, the Berlin Wall was brought down. It was a moment of massive elation, even for someone like me who had never seen it or experienced suffering because of its existence. I tend to think the bringing down of the Colson statue or the burning of the Leopold likeness or the removal of Lee + horse is akin to that wonderful, historical dismantling.



Ruchir Joshi is a filmmaker and columnist.

CULTURE MULCH

Horoscopes in the time of Corona

There will be no future without the insistence and imagination of a future for all

In these trying times of much death and many obituaries, one such last month of the non-Corona category caught my eye. Astrologer Bejan Daruwalla of the weekly astrology column 'Ganesha Speaks' fame passed away of pneumonia and lung infection, but not before predicting that the current epidemic would fade away by the end of May. Alas.

My memory of Bejan Daruwalla goes back many years, when the reading of a newspaper on Sundays was a cherished family ritual. In the 80s, coming to modernity necessarily meant being a good, newspaper-reading citizen. As historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson informed us, the modern nation is an imagined community made possible because we imagine ourselves as part of the same nation, through acts such as reading the newspaper. Except that my act of imagination included not just my nation, but the imagined nation of those that shared my Sun Sign.

Along with development and debt, violence and sport, the Olympics, floods and drought, I read my horoscope as predicted by this man with that delicious name destined in other worlds perhaps to launch a thousand speakeasies. In those Sundays of always sepia sunshine, my future shone bright and the world seemed achievable.



▪ GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Fear & frenzy

In the midst of frenzied, daily discussions on masks, vaccines, ventilators and medicines, when I heard of Daruwalla's passing, it seemed to be another sign that the world as we know it is truly coming to an end. I mourned, just a wee bit.

The act of mourning, as most of us well know by now is never about anybody but ourselves and our vanishing sense of memory and temporality. We rely on friends, family, and celebrities, to preserve for us our childhood, our youth, our tremulous possibilities, and the many other lives we could have and have led. Every now and then we turn to them to recover the *joie de vivre* of an assumed immortality and vigour. And mine seemed connected to this childhood act of reading horoscopes in the newspaper. No more Sun Sign mumbo-jumbo for me, I thought.

The world, however, doesn't seem to agree. Even as a *New York Times* headline asks if the coronavirus will kill astrology, other reports of robust optimism are noting the increasing rise in those consulting astrologers, tarot readers, numerologists and the like. The business of quelling uncertainty, is apparently not just the domain of epidemiologists and virologists. And why ever not? The promises of modernity, globalisation and 'progress' have produced radical disenchantment, misery and increasing violence travelling through the bodies of the world's most marginalised citizens. The world erupts in protests as I write, and there is no end in sight. So why not astrology for whatever it can offer as respite and repose?

Lest you think that I'm moving eggplant-like from one end of the reason/ unreason binary to another, let me try something else here.

Anthropology, when studying cultural change, ferment, and radical breakdown, occupies itself with understanding cosmologies. Unlike the theoretical physicists, anthropologists understand cosmology as a set of understandings, beliefs, and practices of a culture vis-à-vis the origin of the universe, and the role that humans are seen to play in the furthering of such a plot. In other words, cosmology refers to the study of a whole and complete structure of meaning, a world.

Lies put to test

At a time like this, when the modern and the non-modern worlds (if there be any benefit at all in thinking in this bifurcated fashion) seem to be struggling, and all the lies of the universe are being put to the test, we need new cosmologies.

And I, for one, can see the possibilities of a common minimum programme as it were, between all cosmologies alike. For they all agree that the myths we have functioned by will not hold us in good stead.

We cannot prosper forever at the cost of the lives of others. The health of all is needed for the health of one. And there will be no future without the insistence and imagination of a future for all.

So now when I read my horoscope, in honour of a future yet to come, I will expand my imagination to include everyone born under the same sign as me, deserving therefore of the same promise of life as mine, and the same hopes, possibilities, futures and lives. In this meeting of cosmologies, the sun and the stars rise for all, and the bell tolls for thee.



Mathangi Krishnamurthy teaches anthropology for a living, and is otherwise invested in names, places, animals, and things.

LETTER FROM A CONCERNED READER

No news is good news

Respected Madam/Sir,

Shall I tell one thing? Okay actually two things. Please listen carefully. Don't take it personally.

First thing, there is too much news. Newspaper is full of news. Website is full of news. TV is full of news. Radio is full of news. WhatsApp is fullest of the full of news. Whether I can spend even one day without looking at news nonstop? Never. Not even five minutes. Wake up from bed in the morning and within 30 seconds news will start coming and coming through ears and eyes and mouth and nose and all.

You are thinking old man, news is most important item. If not means how you can be member of society?

Stop it madam/sir. Stop it this moment itself. Whether you are just making news every day in office of our esteemed newspaper or you are also reading any news? From morning to night tension. Here problem, there problem, top problem, bottom problem. America problem. Russia problem. U.K. problem. What about India? One channel will say India full problem. Other channel will say what nonsense India is one big Disneyland everyone happy, ok little bit Corona is there, not a big issue.



▪ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

People are waking up, having tiffin, then sitting in front of news till bedtime. Whether any use is there? Zero. Dr. Shankaramenon will call everyday about 4 p.m. He will say Mathrubootham have you seen latest problem in U.S.? Something must be done. I say 100% something we must do. Then he will say have you seen latest issue in China? Things have to change. I will say 100% things have to change. Like that like that. And then? Then nothing. We will say good night, wake up next day morning, all previous news forgotten because new 15 numbers news items on TV that morning.

At least can we take one news and fully concentrate on that for few months until there is some solution? Never. No entertainment in that. Everyday new drama should be there as if TV serial.

So two days ago I decided enough. So much news means mental problem will happen. I decided that I will only watch news for 20 minutes after dinner. But whether world will allow? Never.

At 11 a.m., Mrs. Mathrubootham came and asked have you seen latest news item. Immediately I said yes Kamalam I just saw it. She said can you believe it? I said, it is unbelievable. She said I am very angry. I said I am boiling with anger. She said hopefully things will improve, let us pray. I said yes we must. Then she went.

Whether I have any idea what was news? No idea. But tension is gone no? This is Mathrubootham technique. Everyday I am using this technique to avoid tension. Just now Mohammed Usman is putting phone call asking have you seen the news? I said, yes yes I am seeing right now. (Actually I was reading superhit novel *Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* by Jamyang Norbu.) He said, isn't it shocking? I said, my whole body is vibrating from shock. I am angry like anything. He said, why? News is good no, why you are angry? I quickly said, I am angry because we have to wait till 2020 to hear such good news. Shameful. He said, absolutely correct Mathru. But at least it is happening now. I said, yes, god is hearing our prayers. He said, bye. I said, bye and returned to novel.

Do I have any idea what is the good news? No.

Yours in satisfaction,
J. Mathrubootham

GOREN BRIDGE

Use the scissors

East-West vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones



NORTH
♠ 10 8 6 2
♡ A K 10 7
◇ 6 3
♣ K 10 2

WEST
♠ Void
♡ J 9 8 5 4
◇ K Q J 9
♣ 8 5 4 3

EAST
♠ A 5 3
♡ 2
◇ A 8 5 4 2
♣ J 9 7 6

SOUTH
♠ K Q J 9 7 4
♡ Q 6 3
◇ 10 7
♣ A Q

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	All pass		

Opening lead: King of ◇

South was happy to accept North's invitational bid and was pleased with the sight of dummy. The contract looked to be rock solid until the defense took an ominous turn. East overtook the king of diamonds opening lead with the ace and fired back the two of hearts.

What could this be but a singleton heart? South captured West's jack of hearts with dummy's king and took a moment to plan the play.

East would not have defended this way with a singleton trump, so it was pointless to lead a tru mp as East would get his heart ruff regardless of who held the ace of spades.

In fact, East almost certainly held the ace of spades for this defense. East was planning to win his ace of trumps and cross to partner with a diamond for a heart ruff.

Could anything be done to prevent this? Yes! South led a club to hisace and then overtook the queen of clubs with dummy's king. He led dummy's 10 of clubs and was happy to see East cover this with the jack.

South elegantly discarded his last diamond and allowed East to win the trick. East led a diamond, but South ruffed and led the king of spades.

There was no heart ruff available for the defense and South couldn't be prevented from drawing the trumps and claiming his contract. Nice play!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

'I keep my ideals, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.'

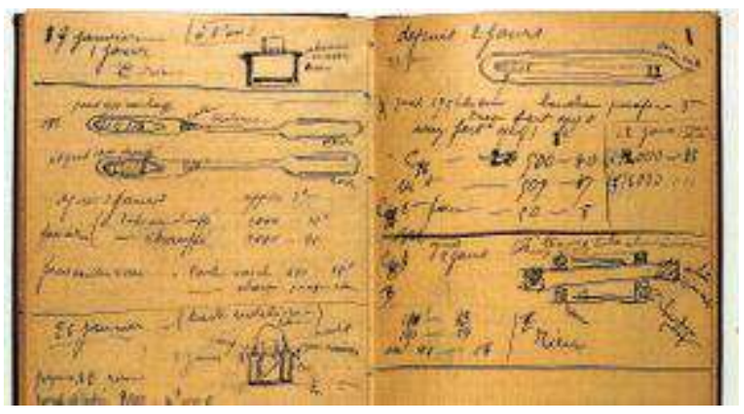
Berty Ashley

1 On June 14, 1942, this young girl started writing in her diary. The first entry was: "I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support." Her diary is where she voiced her hope, vented her frustration and protested the injustice around her. She wrote till August 1, 1944. Who was this brave little girl whose diary inspired millions around the world?

2 Samuel Pepys' diary is a wonderful collection of first-hand accounts of some of the most important events that shaped and built this historically significant city, such as the return of the monarch after civil wars, the great plague and the great fire. This day-to-day portrait of 17th-century life gives us an amazing insight into the history of this city. Which city did Pepys so beautifully capture in his diary?

3 R.F. Scott's diary told a tale of epic bravery. A group of adventurers had to return crestfallen because a Norwegian adventurer had beaten them in a race to a very inhospitable place. His anguish is seen in his entry: "The worst has happened […] All the day dreams must go […] Great God! This is an awful place". The final entries written while hopelessly trapped in a tiny tent by a raging blizzard are among the most poignant and haunting passages ever written. Scott's diary is an account of which bleak place on Earth?

4 This person's diary entries were published as a book called *Conversations With Myself*. It shows the inner workings of one of the most inspiring leaders in human history. He says, "There is universal respect and even admiration for those who are humble and simple by nature, and who have absolute confidence in all human beings irrespective of their social status… it is such good men and women who are the hope of the world." From his travails with imprisonment to becoming a leader of a free country, his intimate thoughts and ideas cover his life in wonderful detail. Who was this dynamic diarist?



Noble notes This lady's diary-cum-lab journals are now contained in a lead-lined case. ▪ WELLCOME LIBRARY

5 This person wrote his diary from the perspective of a fictional narrator. He gives an extraordinarily vivid account of the Great Plague of 1665 and catalogues the rising death toll, the transformation of the city and the despair of those affected. The author would later find fame from his book about a shipwrecked sailor who spends 28 years on a desert island off Venezuela. Who was this diarist and what book did he eventually write?

6 Pliny (the Younger) was a lawyer who maintained a diary which tells us a lot about everyday life in the ancient Roman empire. His most enduring entry is from 79 AD when through his writing we learn about one of the most infamous events in world history. He writes of what he observes happening in a town across the bay. His detailed descriptions of the event led to a certain feature, the umbrella-shaped cloud that is formed, being named after him. His diary account is regarded by many as the first 'vulcanologist' report. What event was this and which town did he observe?

7 This lady's diary eventually became her laboratory journal. Her first few entries are written alone but soon her husband joins as well. One entry which tells us she had the same problems as us is when she complains about the temperature in the lab followed by 10 exclamation marks. Who was this diarist, and what was she researching, which is the reason these diaries are now contained in a lead lined case?

8 Born on June 14, 1928, this person's career began as a doctor but he later played a major role in a revolution in South America, becoming a global cultural symbol of rebellion. Though he maintained a diary throughout his life, there's one portion which he wrote as a medical student, when he and a friend covered more than 8,000 km on a bike crossing the Andes, Atacama Desert and the Amazon river basin. Who was this person who ends this diary stating that he would fight and die for the cause of the poor?

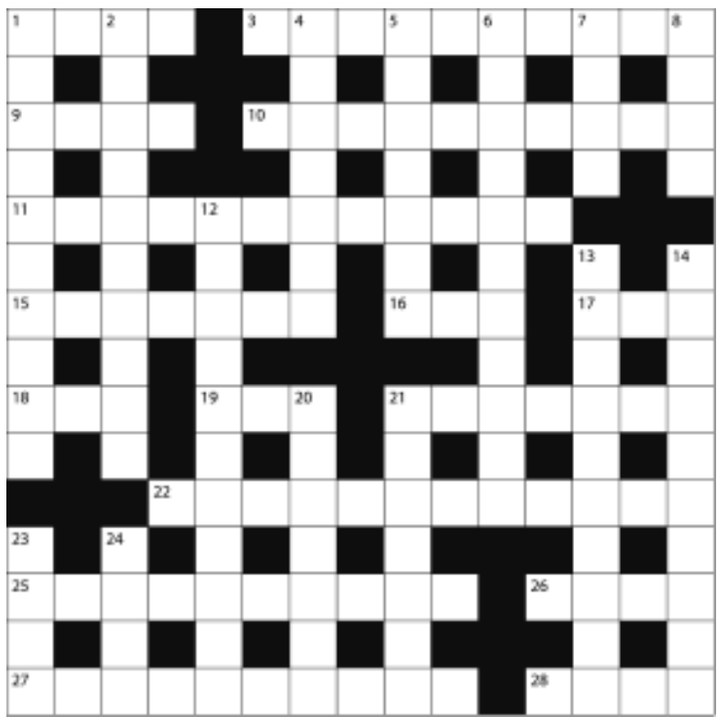
9 This person started writing his diary at 29, then wrote of his younger life in retrospect and updated it till his death. This diary became important because of the entries between 1831 and 1835. He meticulously noted down all his observations, especially about birds, animals and plants, which would later form the foundation for his theory that would change biology forever. Who was this diarist whose diary of his voyage to South America started a new field in science?

10 This diary is of Greg Heffley who lies, cheats and does whatever he can to live through his day. His biggest problem is his big brother. He also can't understand why his little brother is adored by his parents. He isn't particularly good at anything and has no heroic abilities, still his diary is read by millions of children, maybe because there is a little bit of Greg in all of us. How better do we know Greg's diary?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers
1. Anne Frank
2. London
3. South Pole/ Antarctica
4. Nelson Mandela
5. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
6. Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius; Pompeii
7. Marie Curie; radium
8. Che Guevara
9. Charles Darwin
10. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO.3104



Across
1 Volcano in Vietnam (4)
3 Wind around heart of wild flower (6,4)
9 Singer performed before ball (4)
10 Perennial turbulence of rapids, I say (5,5)
11 Cure in resort - in resort - offering newlife (12)
15 Makes unrea dable poem, *Eunuchs, Oddly, Coming Round* (7)
16 Playground's destruction reported (3)
17 Tabloid regularly ignored sporting champ (3)
18 Primarily, refreshment using molasses? (3)
19 Conscientious objector suppresses cry of remorse (3)
21 José's pan is heated, accommodating this kind of omelette? (7)
22 Fashionable short hairdos, they're seen around now (3,5,4)
25 Regionally variegated flower (6-4)
26 Reports of Madagascan somewhere in Peru (4)
27 Leap over moving water at this time of year (10)
28 Hasty exam reveals eye problem (4)

Down
1 Senior rock 'n' roller finds source of wine (10)
2 Where holidaymakers are barely seen? (6,4)
4 Plaza leaseholder hides showy bloomers (7)
5 Laugh about start of written communication for a lark, perhaps (7)
6 They're hard. Coolest? Not exactly! (3-3,5)
7 Bit of colour in the *Eye* identifying Murdoch perhaps (4)
8 American version of *'Allo 'Allo!* perhaps provides distraction for children (2-2)
12 Travel, but don't drive in a car, offsetting most of droughtiness (4,7)
13 Expert in digital enhancement? (10)
14 Plant's dark colour (10)
20 According to Spooner, want something boring to be illuminated from behind (4-3)
21 Rotten, rotten old pies (7)
23 Treated sore deer (4)
24 Prime minister, not bold, in retreat (4)

Solution No. 3103

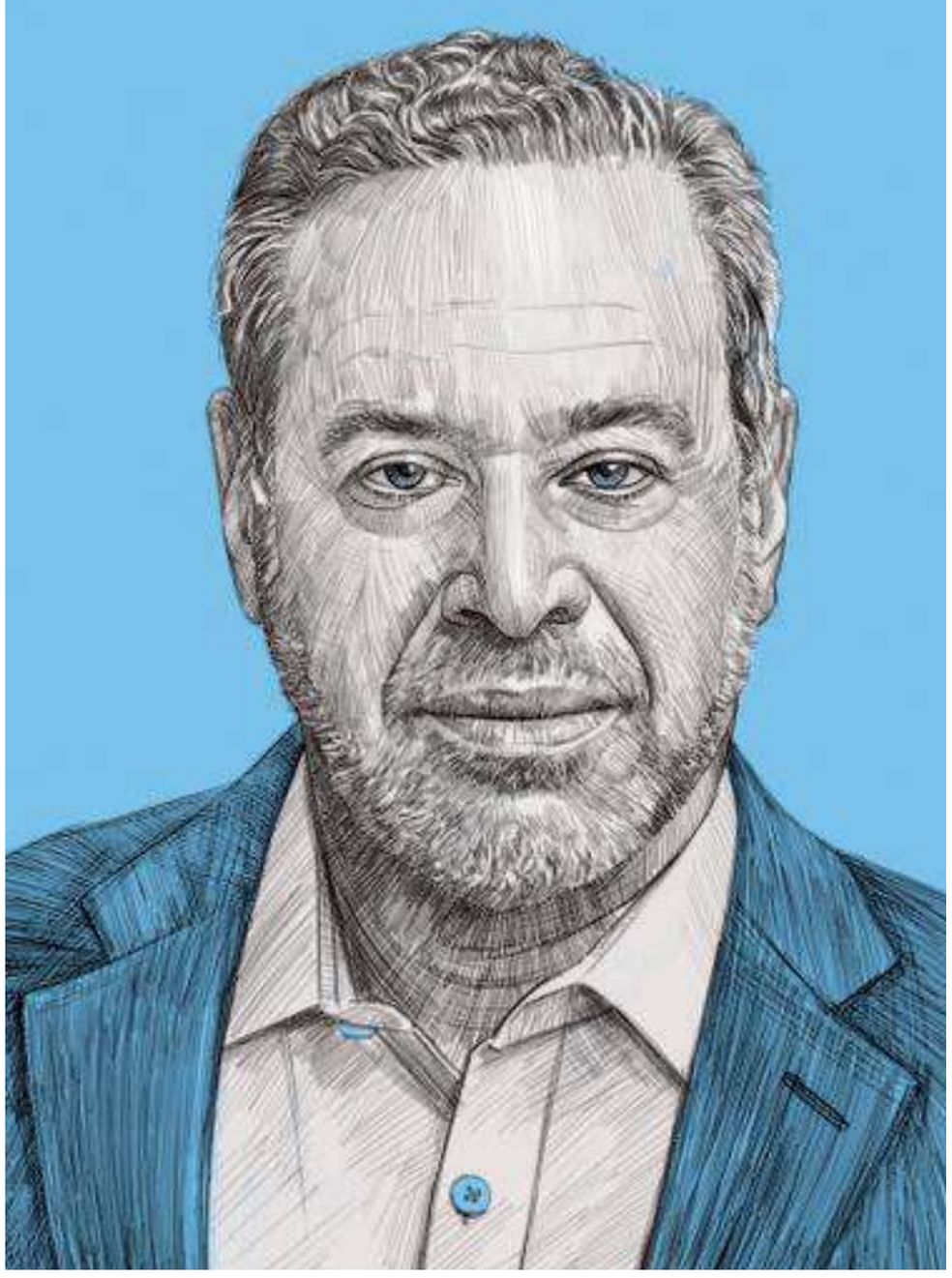


▪ ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

60 MINUTES WITH DAVID FRUM

‘Where it counts, Trump has been weak, not strong’

A ‘Never Trump’ Republican on how the weaknesses of U.S. institutions have been exposed, and the need for reform and renewal in a post-Trump world



- Born and raised in Toronto. Degrees in history from Yale and law from Harvard.
- Worked as an editor and columnist for several publications and is now a senior editor at *The Atlantic*
- Author of numerous books on conservative politics and history as well as a satirical novel, *Patriots*
- Reportedly coined the phrase ‘Axis of Evil’ while speechwriter for George W. Bush

Varghese K. George

Canadian-American author and commentator David Frum has been at the forefront of a Republican resistance to President Donald Trump’s politics and style since 2016. In 2001-2, he served as speechwriter and special assistant to President George W. Bush. *Trumpocalypse: Restoring American Democracy*, which came out last month, is his 10th book and the second one on Trump. Excerpts from an interview

Your book is unsparing in its criticism of President Donald Trump and generally critical of the U.S. system. Do you think Trump is an ailment or the symptom of an ailment?

■ Trump is both ailment and symptom. A truly healthy political system would of course have been resistant to him. Once in power, Trump has exploited pre-existing vulnerabilities in the U.S. system, weaknesses that formerly seemed only theoretical. Trump has exposed that the “checks” and “balances” of which Americans speak are only metaphors. Once Trump departs office, there will be a large work of reform to do. The U.S. political system of the 21st century is hobbled by features remaining from the 19th century. For example, electoral boundaries are drawn by politicians for their own advantage. No other advanced democracy tolerates such behaviour. *Trumpocalyse* offers feasible and incremental plans to edge the U.S. away from rural minority rule towards more honest representation.

Is the upheaval in the U.S. today different from previous ones? Will it lead to a fundamental remaking of U.S. society and politics?

■ The upheavals of 2020 are sometimes compared to 1968. That comparison could not be more wrong. At their worst, the disturbances of 2020 have been infinitely milder and less violent than those of 1968. It took the city of Washington DC almost 25 years to rebuild neighbourhoods burned out in 1968. In 2020, the damage is a few broken windows and some graffiti. Hundreds of people died in the riots of 1968; the highest estimate of the toll from 2020 is maybe 10 people. These protests have become more peaceful, more orderly, and more likely to draw a cross-section of the population, white and black.

The 1968 disturbances pushed the country to the political right. The era of major civil rights legislation came to an end; an era of Republican dominance of elections began. Of the six elections from 1968 to 1988, a Democrat won only one. In 2020, polls show the public moving toward greater sympathy with the demands of the protesters. Cities are legislating major police reforms. President Trump’s poll standing is crumbling.

How do you assess President Trump’s response to the situation ? How are both parties dealing with the fallout?

■ At the time of the killing of George Floyd, May 25, the U.S. had nearly 100,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths and Great Depression levels of unemployment. President Trump’s grip on events was already shaky. His response has been marked by panicky lurches from one extreme to the other. He and his administration ordered violent repression of peaceful protests. The president tweeted bloodthirsty messages about shooting protesters and setting vicious dogs on them. This is the authentic Donald Trump. The president has since discovered his political mistake. As the crowds have grown bigger and more middle class, Trump has sought to position himself as a voice of conciliation and sympathy. The trouble is, he just cannot do it credibly.

Trump has instead cancelled the Trans-Pacific Partnership, alienated South Korea, lost public opinion in Canada and Australia, and treated the European Union as a hostile power

As for the Democrats, they have problems of their own. Yet Biden has had the political strength with black America to be able to offer a promise of reform while repudiating radical slogans like “defund the police.”

You write that Trumpism will outlive the Trump presidency. Could you elaborate?

■ Hyper-nationalism will persist after Trump. Mistrust between ethnocultural groups will persist after Trump. Social media that accelerate hoaxes and disinformation will persist after Trump. The political resources exploited by Trump will remain to be exploited by future politicians – and maybe future politicians less impulsive and less lazy than Trump. If we want to harden the American political system (and all democratic systems!) against Trump-style kleptocratic authoritarianism we have to realise that we are dealing with something bigger than just one bad man.

To restabilise American democracy, we need the Republican Party to recommit to the democratic norms it jettisoned during the Trump years. I’ve spent my life inside the Republican Party. I worked in a Republican administration. A lot of *Trumpocalypse* is written with an eye to cleansing that party so it can again play a positive role in American democracy.

You focus on Russia as an irreconcilable adversary of the U.S.. There is a view that the excessive focus on Russia has blinded U.S. thinking so much that it loses focus on China, which might be a more consequential rival.

■ China is a richer and more powerful country than Russia. Russia is more adventurous and reckless than China. The Chinese economy now nearly equals that of the U.S. in size. If the U.S. is to contain China peacefully, it will need to assemble a coalition of partners, market-minded democracies that can agree on a code of proper international behavior. Russia’s successful raid on the U.S. presidency in 2016 helped install a President who despises partners, who doesn’t understand coalitions. Trump is waging trade wars on half the world. Which means he deals with China alone, unaided. You’ve seen polls where three-quarters of Europeans wish to stay neutral in any dispute between the U.S. and China.

So, yes, I agree that China is the larger challenge. But Russia’s direct interference in our democracy to impose the Trump presidency has for three years prevented us from dealing with China in a rational and effective way. In 2020, Russia is trying again, and again Trump is welcoming it.

Many Indians think the President’s willingness to confront China head-on is reassuring.

■ To prevent bad behaviour by China, the world needs an effective coalition for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Yet Trump has instead cancelled the Trans-Pacific Partnership, alienated South Korea, lost public opinion in Canada and Australia, and treated the European Union as a hostile power rather than an indispensable friend. I can understand why Indians enjoy watching the U.S. be rude to China. But rudeness is not a strategy. Where it counts, Trump has been weak, not strong. He got himself into a losing trade war with China in 2018. To avert an election-year recession in 2020, he began frantically offering concessions in 2019..

You have outlined a politics that could replace Trumpism. Do you think Joe Biden is capable of pulling it off?

■ *Trumpocalyse* offers ideas to heal the terrible social divisions that Trump has exploited to gain power: rural versus urban, young versus old, native versus immigrant, white versus non-white, men versus women, rich versus poor. We need to renew national cohesion inside the country – and international cooperation outside. American leadership in the 21st century will be leadership by consent. That consent must be regained. Can Biden do it? He’s the only available alternative, so let’s hope so!

OFF-CENTRE

Are you a #Liberal?

The Amy Cooper incident shows why we need to return to some original liberal values, such as the need for objectivity and due process

Joseph Antony

On the day George Floyd was killed, another incident in New York’s Central Park went viral and led to a furious social media backlash. We must consider it because it offers some important insights into not just racism but also the paradoxes of today’s man-woman relationships, and the need for situational analysis.

Christian Cooper, a birdwatcher, cited park rules and asked Amy Cooper, a white woman, to leash her dog, which appears to have enraged her. The video footage, taken by Christian, shows an infuriated Amy threatening to call the police and report that an “African-American man” was threatening her life, indicating that she is all too conscious of the relationship between black men and the police. And when she calls the police, she is heard affecting a shaky voice. The video sparked widespread outrage, forcing Amy to apologise, but she was later fired from her job.

Two things strike me. One was the extraordinary understanding with which Christian responded to the backlash against Amy. In an interview with *The New York Times*, he condemned the death threats to Amy, saying her life need not have been torn apart. “Any of us can make, not necessarily a racist mistake, but a mistake,” he said.

Christian’s anxiousness not to have Amy’s life picked apart by social media was heartening; it is the sound of empathy, something very different from the political shibboleth of the Twitter Left. According to Christian, Amy’s apology was sincere. She said she isn’t racist, and Christian seems to think that it’s true. And this is the second thing that strikes me about the incident: Amy most probably is not racist but it is the opportunity racism offers that compelled her to take that wild swing in the park.

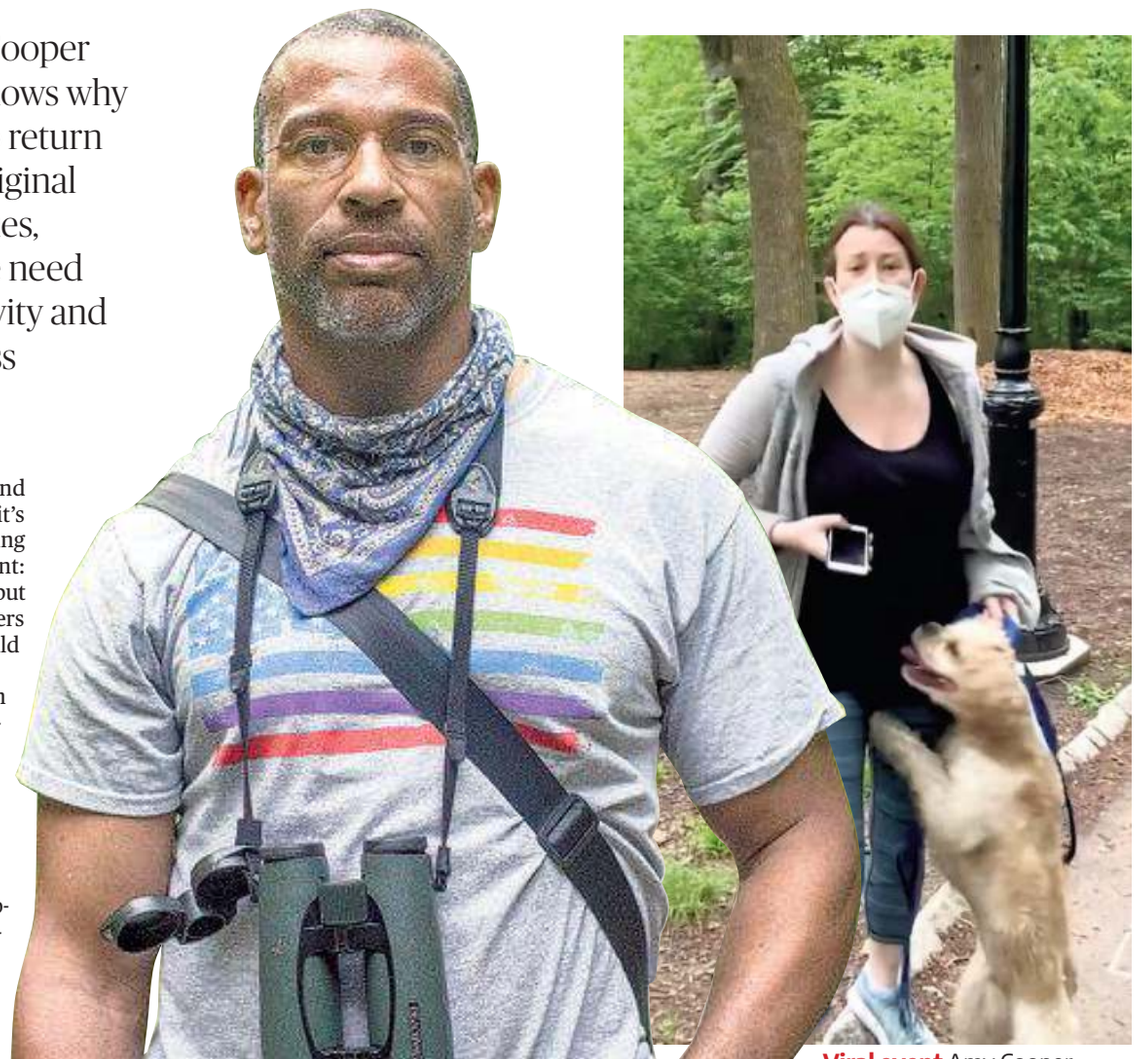
“She went racial,” Christian says, “There are certain dark societal impulses that she, as a white woman facing a conflict with a black man, thought she could marshal to her advantage.”

The opportunity

The incident proves that in an illiberal world one cannot trust oneself to be good; to not exploit certain chinks in culture and law to victimise one’s opponent. Because, often, it’s the opportunity of crime that compels crime, and not a criminal mind in itself. More importantly, it shows that if one can’t trust oneself to be good, far less can one trust another person’s word. The Central Park incident advocates for a return to some old-fashioned liberal values – objectivity in law and temperament, or at least faith in (a pretence of) objectivity.

One might examine some fiercely guarded slogans of the women’s movement in this regard, not merely because they are illiberal and Amy could have easily used them against Christian with as much power, but curiously because they are ignorant of black history. For example, #BelieveWomen, a woke slogan now used widely in India, has its origins in the West, but seems incredibly unaware of the long history of white women falsely implicating black men on sexual assault charges.

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Viral event Amy Cooper in Central Park; and Christian Cooper. ▪ AP & NYT

One among the many victims in this history is Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American boy who was kidnapped, beaten up and shot in the head in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly being “menacing and sexually crude” towards a white woman, Carolyn Bryant. Years later, Bryant confessed that parts of her testimony – especially where she accused Till of verbal abuse and of touching her inappropriately – were fabricated.

That black men threaten the bodily integrity of white women was a widely believed theology of the racist South. It was the moral force behind several lynchings. A similar belief was used against Indians during the British Raj – it influenced E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, where a white woman accuses an Indian man of sexually assaulting her in a cave and nearly ruins his life.

If a woman can frame a man on a sexual assault charge motivated by racism, why would she not do so for personal and, therefore, more intensely felt reasons like jealousy, envy or malice? Similarly, if a man can frame false charges against a woman knowing he will get away with it, what prevents him from doing so?

Credible danger

This is in no way to imply that any women might have lied in the #MeToo movement. On the contrary, the high risk of misuse of #BelieveWomen comes *from* its high credibility. If a woman accuses a man of sexual misconduct, it is likely to be true, which is why #BelieveWomen can be a potent weapon in the wrong hands. Say you are the CIA and you want to smoke a man out of an embassy where he has taken asylum, what is the most cost-effective way to do so? Do I hear a sexual assault charge?

The man’s reputation would be ruined – as advocates of #BelieveWomen rightly point out, there is overwhelming historical evidence of women being true with such charges. The man’s case of being a persecuted political prisoner will suddenly pale in importance to the sexual assault charge because the latter will come with the whole weight of women’s experience behind it, just as Amy’s spontaneous ‘racist mistake’ had behind it all the weight of knowledge of how the scales can be turned against a black man by a white woman. History can be a potent weapon to wield, even more so when you are aware of its power, as Amy probably was.

Maybe this is why we must bring back the faith in the original values of a liberal order, in due process, objectivity and situational analysis, no matter how frustrating they can be. If the liberal faith is bad, every other faith to hang your belief on will be worse, because in an illiberal world one cannot trust oneself to be good.

The Mumbai-based author writes on literature, culture and film.