

INSIDE

Overseas overture 23



Artist UNNIKRISHNAN C. comes from a small town in Kerala, and his work deals with hyper-local themes. Now, thanks to the patronage of a couple of Swiss collectors, he is hosting a solo

show in Switzerland, writes BHUMIKA POPLI.

Level playing field 24

The latest book by architect MADHAVI DESAI tackles the problem of gender bias in her profession, and guides us through the history of modern Indian architecture viewed as a narrative of male domination, writes RISHITA ROY CHOWDHURY.



Tribute to the greats 29



India's oldest classical music fest, the Shriram Shankarlal Music Festival has been around since the birth of independent India. The 71st edition of the annual event will be held in Delhi later this week, writes PRIYA SINGH.

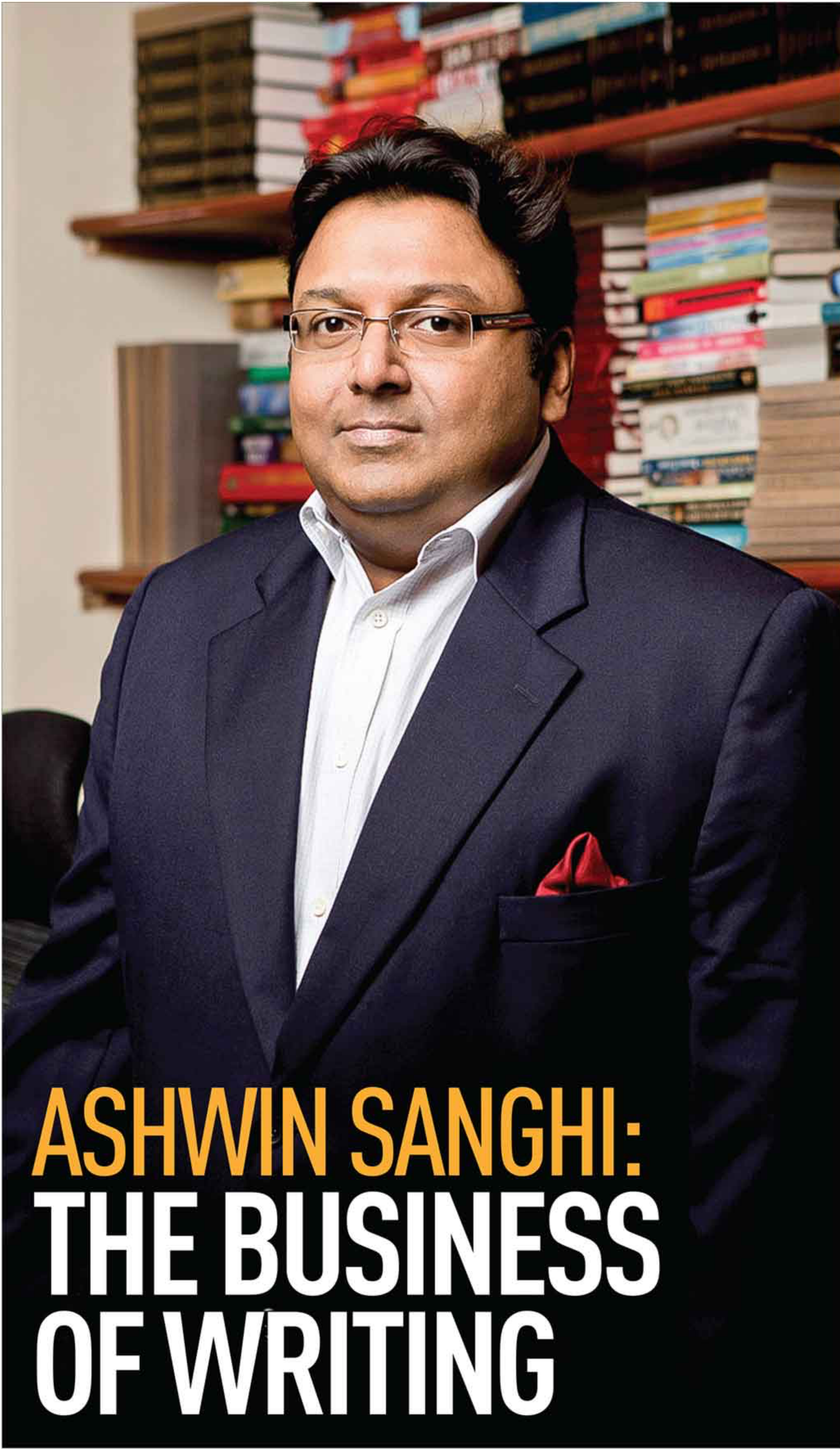
Farewell, superstar 35



Bollywood superstar Sridevi's death sent shockwaves across the film industry, leaving her many fans and admirers distraught. BULBUL SHARMA looks back at Sridevi's immensely successful acting career, which redefined Indian cinema.

Just the right mix 37

A good whisky is all about creating the right blend. *Guardian 20* caught up with Scottish master-blender and mixologist CAROLINE MARTIN for a chat about her passion for whiskies, and her understanding of food science.



ASHWIN SANGHI:
THE BUSINESS
OF WRITING

Author ASHWIN SANGHI, who has numerous bestsellers to his name, speaks to LATHA SRINIVASAN about writing mythological thrillers, reading contemporary fiction, and telling stories that have an instant connect with the masses.

Your 2012 book *The Krishna Key* is set to be made into a movie and a web series. How exciting is that for you as the author?
A. Every storyteller hopes that his story will reach as wide an audience as possible. Book translations, eBooks, audio books, movies, television and digital series do precisely that—widen the audience. But the true thrill lies in creating the story. Also, having been a writer for over a decade, I am acutely aware of the fact that projects move slowly and sometimes even get stalled. But yes, I will be very excited once the project is executed.

Q. Tell us what inspired your latest novel, *Keepers Of The Kalachakra*.
A. The inspiration came from a dream—a nightmare to be more specific. I awoke that morning feeling exhausted owing to that particular dream. I told my wife that the dream had felt incredibly real. The question that popped into my head was this: could my dreams be an alternative universe, my true reality? Was it possible that my daily life was actually someone else's dream? It was the key notion that inspired *Keepers of the Kalachakra*.

Q. The mythological thriller is your genre. How did you choose this particular style of writing?
A. Genres and topics are never really chosen by their writers. Often, it is the writer who is chosen by a topic. I visited Srinagar sometime around 2004. The town has a tomb in the old quarter dat-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

The Best of Your Week Ahead

4TH SUNDAY



JASHN-E-TALAT
INDIA ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE, LOOHI ROAD, NEW DELHI
6:30 PM
It is a multi-performance tribute to the legend Talat Mahmood, with special guest appearance by Talat Aziz and performances by Radhika Chopra, Vidha Lal and Sanjeev Choudhury along with young college talent hosted by RJ Sachin at 6.30pm on Sunday.

5TH MONDAY

KARAOKE NIGHT
ESCAPE TERRACE BAR KITCHEN, GURUGRAM
8:30 PM
All of us have a singer in us. Come and sing your favourite Bollywood and Hollywood songs. Escape Terrace Bar Kitchen presents karaoke night every Monday. A perfect destination to party, celebrate birthday, anniversary. With beautiful interior and tasty food with a Karaoke night and get 15% discount on Ala Carta menu.



6TH TUESDAY



CULTURAL SHOW
STEIN AUDITORIUM, INDIA HABITAT CENTRE, NEW DELHI
7:00 PM
Shivani Varma is a performing artist trained in the Indian classical dance form, Kathak from childhood. She is the disciple of Kathak maestro, Guru Shovana Narayan. Her upcoming performance, Champaran se Babu, is a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha movement.

7TH WEDNESDAY

WOMEN TALK
RAASTA, AUROBINDO MARG, GREEN PARK, NEW DELHI
5:00 PM
Love Matters India is celebrating the theme "Women talk about sex...get over it!" as a way to normalise the fact that women can and do talk about sex, pleasure, desire, pain, love, loss, and relationships and ought to create more spaces for women to have more of such conversations in order to reduce the stigma and shame around women's sexuality.



8TH THURSDAY



THE ART-SCAPE
LALIT KALA AKADEMI, NEW DELHI
12:00 PM
Calling all art lovers to witness fine visual storytelling through the stimulating artwork showcased by Abhinav Chowbey. A graduate of the Goldsmiths and then from Wimbledon London is holding his second exhibition in New Delhi.

9TH FRIDAY

VIBRANT RAJASTHAN
CONVENTION CENTRE Foyer, INDIA HABITAT CENTER, NEW DELHI
10:00 AM
It is an exhibition of paintings by artist Priyanka Banerjee. Rajasthan remains one of the most intriguing places in India. Different mediums like watercolor on paper, acrylics on canvas, soft pastels on paper have been used to execute the artworks.



10TH SATURDAY



SWAG FEST
LEISURE VALLEY GROUND, GURUGRAM
5:00 PM
India's leading FM network- RED FM, is "back with a bang" with Swag Fest Reloaded with Mika Singh, Sharry Mann, Hardy Sandhu & Akhil. After two back-to-back massive swag fests in Delhi/NCR, it's time to take the swag level up a notch.

The business of writing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

ing back to 112 AD. There are two bodies buried there, one from the 14th century—an Islamic burial in the north-south direction; the other of much greater antiquity, buried in the Jewish tradition of east-west. The popular folklore surrounding the tomb was that Jesus had survived the crucifixion, travelled to India and lay buried there. I was utterly fascinated by this incredible story and spent the next 18 months reading everything about the subject that I could lay my hands on. Even while I was reading I had no idea that it would evolve into a book. At the end of this hectic research period, I had mountains of information swimming inside my head and my wife suggested that I pen it down. When that first novel, *The Rozabal Line*, emerged, I became known by several labels including “mythological”, “historical”, “theological” and “conspiracy” thriller writer.

Q. Is it challenging to appeal to the contemporary Indian reader if you're writing, or re-writing, mythology?

A. I don't think that India ever strayed away from mythology. So the appeal is permanent. The only difference is in the pattern of consumption. When I was growing up, I eagerly looked forward to reading my quota of *Amar Chitra Katha* comics from the neighbourhood library. I also looked forward to the weekends when I would visit my grandmother and she would narrate tales from the epics. In later years, I began to look forward to the Sunday morning dose of *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*. In the last few years, TV cartoons have recreated for our kids the stories of Krishna, Ganesha and Bheema. The point that I am making is that Indian youth have always had mythology surrounding them, but in different forms. The trend of mythology being re-told in contemporary fiction is simply one more medium that has caught on. What I do is repackaging to make mythology more relatable. I also draw connections between mythology, history, science and philosophy.

Q. You've been hailed as India's Dan Brown. Any thoughts?

A. I am flattered by the comparison because he has sold over 200 million books and I have been one of his earliest fans. But the comparison is misplaced. I cannot be Dan Brown. He is in a different league altogether. Nor can I be Jeffrey Archer, Sidney Sheldon or Stephen King. I am simply trying to narrate stories that could possibly hold your attention. I keep reminding myself to keep my feet firmly planted on



Ashwin Sanghi.

the ground whenever those comparisons arise because it is easy to allow your ego to get the better of you.

Q. Who are some of the Indian authors you like reading?

A. Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, R.K. Narayanan, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Devdutt Pattanaik, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amish Tripathi, Hussain Zaidi, Ravi Subramanian... there are others too. My all-time favourite book is *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie because it's everything that I will never be. I know that I will never be a brilliant writer—simply a good storyteller.

Q. What is your take on Indian writing today?

A. Commercial fiction writing in India did not take off primarily because of our

“Commercial fiction writing in India did not take off primarily because of our snobbish attitude towards commercial writing. Most Indian authors were busy churning out literary fiction and publishers continued actively searching for the next Salman Rushdie.”

“India's book market, which is currently worth Rs 261 billion, is the sixth largest in the world. It is also the second-largest market for English language books. This market is expected to grow to Rs 739 billion by 2020 at 19.3% per year. So this is definitely a growing market.”

snobbish attitude towards commercial writing. Most Indian authors were busy churning out literary fiction and publishers continued actively searching for the next Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, or Jhum

pa Lahiri. They could hardly be bothered with finding the Indian equivalent of Robert Ludlum, Frederick Forsyth, Jack Higgins or Tom Clancy! Satyajit Ray would not have given us Feluda if an Indian market for mysteries, sus-

pense, adventure and thrillers did not exist. It's sad that we allowed ourselves to cede space to foreign authors in these genres. I'm happy to see that this is changing rapidly now. We should have our own versions of Miss Marple, Nancy Drew, *Hardy Boys*, Sherlock Holmes, and Hercule Poirot. There are many more opportunities in India for aspiring writers today than there were a decade ago. Just look at the bestseller lists that used to be dominated by foreign authors. These are ruled today by Indian names. I do believe, however, that our writing and editing needs to improve. This could easily happen if publishers decided that the bar needs to be raised.

Q. You have a background in marketing. Has that helped your writing in any way at all?

A. Sure. There has always

been a bit of elitism in the writing world... authors are not expected to sell their books. Frankly, why should you invest two years in writing a book if you are not going to market it? I tend to get my hands dirty in every aspect, including cover design, video trailers, social media, distribution and promotions. This has only been possible because I have been used to doing all of that in my business avatar. I often joke that a decade ago, I was a businessman trying to be a writer; now I'm a writer trying to be a businessman!

Q. Tell us about your collaboration with the author James Patterson.

A. Overall a terrific collaboration. Writing thrillers is not only about inspiration and imagination, but also about the craft. This is something that one realises working alongside James. There are a few simple rules that make a good thriller: amplify character traits—make them larger than life; eliminate fluff; build twists and suspense ever so often; never compromise pace; build conflict until the very end. Achieve these few objectives and you should have a delicious thriller. Research and plotting are my strengths. With James, it's about further refining the story so that it is almost Zen minimalism. But with that comes a certain darkness that is perfect for thrillers.

Q. Are there any other international writers you would like to collaborate with?

A. Unfortunately, most of them are dead: Sidney Sheldon, Irving Wallace, Arthur Hailey, Stieg Larsson... Among today's living authors Dan Brown would win hands down.

Q. Have you decided on what you are writing next?

A. I will start work on my next book in the Bharat Series in a couple of months. In the meantime, there are three manuscripts in my non-fiction self-help “13 Steps Series” that still require my attention. I hope to have these completed before embarking on the next big project. The topic for that is not yet firmed up because there are three ideas that are in the running. So I am carrying out initial research for all of them before I make up my mind.

Q. Is the habit of reading on the wane in contemporary India?

A. It can't be. India's book market, which is currently worth Rs 261 billion, is the sixth largest in the world. It is also the second-largest market for English language books. This market is expected to grow to Rs 739 billion by 2020 at 19.3% per year. So this is definitely a growing market. What has changed is the fact that we have many more activities competing for a share of the reader's wallet. Success is getting up from a failed book and immediately getting cracking on the next one. Success is about ignoring critics when they are unkind and when they are kind. Success is about everything other than what the world defines as success.

Q. As a successful author yourself, how would you define success?

A. Success is being able to tell stories that you want to tell. Success is having the ability to keep your feet on the ground when others tell you how great you are. Success is getting up from a failed book and immediately getting cracking on the next one. Success is about ignoring critics when they are unkind and when they are kind. Success is about everything other than what the world defines as success.

NEXT LEVEL

AZERA PARVEEN RAHMAN

This African tribe made India their home centuries ago

It was a much-awaited trip to the Gir National Park, abode of the majestic Asiatic Lions. At the end of the two-day visit, not only did I come back enthralled at having spotted a pride of lions feasting on their kill in the wild but also fascinated at learning more about India's little known African-origin tribe, the Siddis, living right outside its periphery.

At first, nothing seems out of the ordinary. Ashif, our guide for the jeep safari in Gir, was a friendly youngster, eager to answer questions and speaking fluent Hindi, while breaking into chaste Gujarati every now and then with the driver. There was no giveaway whatsoever.

As we drove through Talala, a little town nestling against Sasan in the Junagadh district of western Gujarat, it was hard to miss the marked difference in physical features among sections of the ordinary folk on the roads. A group of young school-going girls with their curly hair in braids, confirmed that they belonged to the Siddi tribe and pointed at some others—women in saris; young men on bikes, lounging near shops—as belonging to their tribe as well. If it was the difference that first made them stand out, it was the extent of assimilation with the local culture that was even more striking.

Ashif, who later confirmed that he too belonged to the tribe, however slayed my reaction. “Why should it be surprising? We have been here for centuries,” he said.

And it's true. Siddis are believed to be the descendants of the Bantu people in East Africa. According to Census 1931, they were brought to India by the Portugese towards the end of the 17th century, possibly as slaves. Some believe they were brought by the Arabs even earlier, dating back to the 7th century. When slavery was abolished, they fled into the thick jungles, fearing re-capture and torture.

An isolated and reclusive community, the Siddis are spread along the coast of Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Their main population is, however, concentrated in Junagadh district. With an estimated population of 50,000-60,000, they are mostly practising Muslims, although those in Karnataka are Catholics.

As Ashif says, Siddis follow a way of life that is a mosaic of their roots and of the place which they have called home for the last couple of centuries. The community's folk dance, Dhamal, for instance, is a unique dance form in which male dancers, with their bodies and faces painted, move energetically to drum beats. The acrobatic moves, the style and the rhythm

Siddis are believed to be the descendants of the Bantu people in East Africa.

According to Census 1931, they were brought to India by the Portugese towards the end of the 17th century, possibly as slaves.

indicate resemblance to African folk dance. Artistes performing Dhamal are usually viewed with great awe at dance festivals, both in India and abroad; the community dance troupes also give performances for tourists in and around Junagadh. The Siddi community is mainly agriculture-dependent, although it's hard to find many landowners; most of them work as labourers in the fields instead. Largely ignored by the government and hardly known by their fellow countrymen, their socio-economic condition is poor. Those who migrate to bigger towns or cities find odd jobs; others, like Ashif who works as a guide, or Juje Jackie Harnodkar who has a government job in Mumbai, are relatively better off.

“Even then, finding acceptance among our fellow countrymen is difficult,” Juje said. “I often face racist comments from fellow passengers on the train and on the road; I have to keep reinstating my Indianness. This is why most of us prefer staying away from the cities and closer to nature.”

Juje is a former athlete whose life took a turn when, in 1989, he was selected under the Sports Authority of India's (SAI's) Special Area Games Scheme. The programme, which took off in 1987, aimed at scouting for and training members of the Siddi community to represent India as athletes in the international arena. If one were to go back in history, you would find many young, enthusiastic athletes from the community—like Kamala Babu Siddi, who was the national record holder in junior girls pentathlon—who performed extremely well in international competitions. In 1993, however, the scheme was suddenly stopped.

It was a depressing moment for the community, especially because they were only inches away from escaping the bubble of oblivion in their own homeland. Two years back, however, things started looking up once again, as SAI revived the scheme for the community and former Siddi athletes are at the helm of affairs, training younger members with passion. An Olympic medal for India in 2024 is possible, Juje says, confident that sports will pave the way of acceptance for this small community in the country they have called their home for centuries. **IAN5**



The Siddis are believed to be the descendants of the Bantu people in East Africa.

