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PRAGNYA WAKHLUI, an independent singer-songwriter hailing from Kashmir, talks to PEER-ZADA MUZAMIL about her inspirations, musical journey, and why she never adheres to a particular stereotype.

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In over a decade-long journey in Bollywood, ANUSHKA SHARMA has worked in myriad genres of films and also donned the producer's hat at the age of 25. As an artiste, she says, she has always backed 'disruptive content' throughout her career. She talks about her journey as an actor and a producer.

Stalin's bodyguard 28



ALEX HALBERSTADT recalls travelling from his home in New York to Ukraine in 2004, to meet his grandfather who survived countless rounds of purges and recriminations to live into his 90s, writes JENNIFER SZALAI.

German giants 32



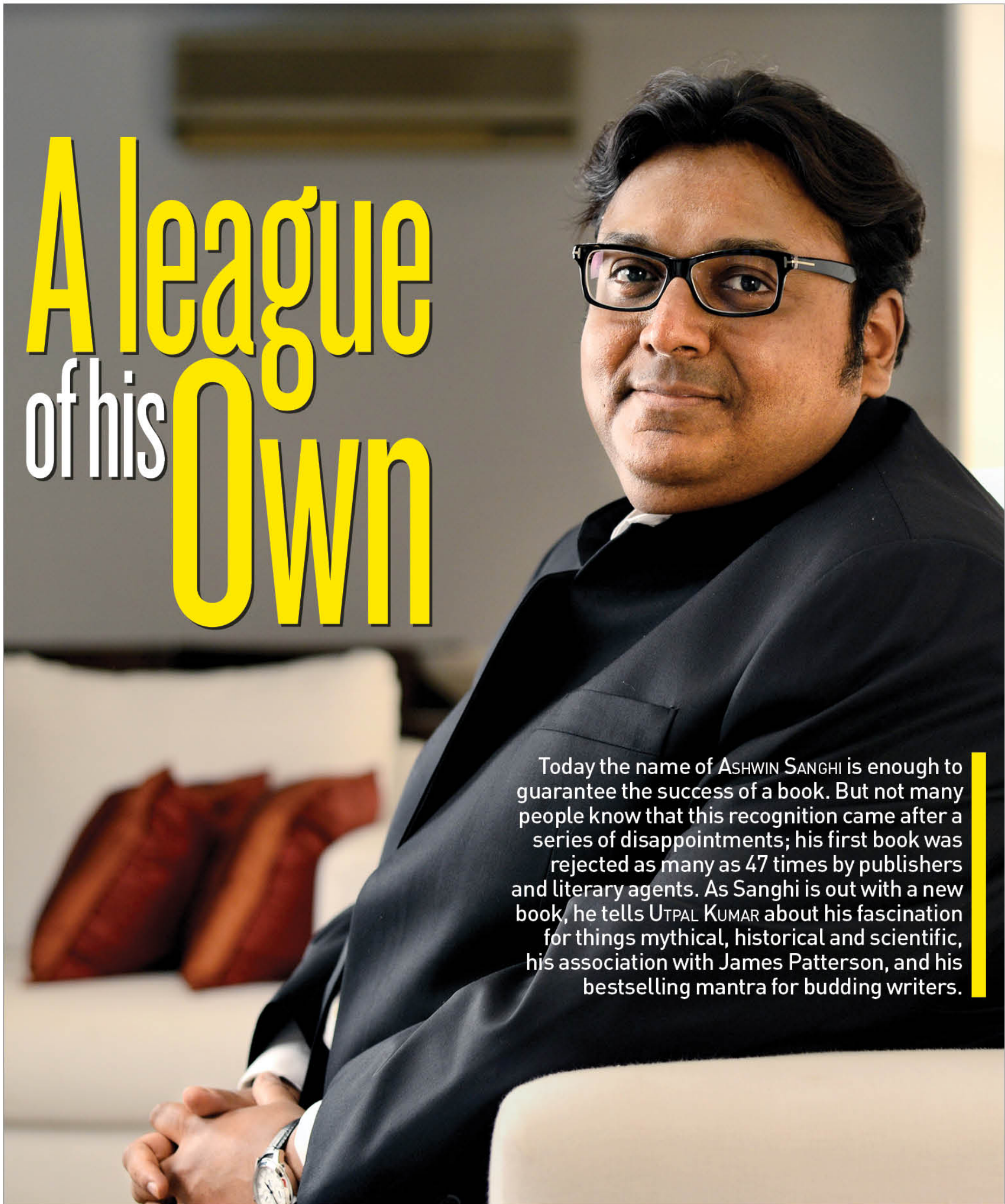
Two new German carmakers—BMW and Volkswagen—launch their first cars in India for the new decade. Priced very close to each other, the big difference between the new BMW X1 and the Volkswagen Tiguan Allspace is that while the former is a 5-seater the latter comes with 7 seats.

Carnival of colours 34-35

A collection of Holi photographs, by VISHAL GAHLAUT, depicts multitudes of experiences articulated through emotions, expressions and colours. While colour depicts the emotions, framing and composition add to the drama. Barsana, the place where the portraits have been captured, is the birthplace of Radha. These portraits, therefore, also explore different facets of love.



A league of his Own



Today the name of ASHWIN SANGHI is enough to guarantee the success of a book. But not many people know that this recognition came after a series of disappointments; his first book was rejected as many as 47 times by publishers and literary agents. As Sanghi is out with a new book, he tells UTPAL KUMAR about his fascination for things mythical, historical and scientific, his association with James Patterson, and his bestselling mantra for budding writers.

Ashwin Sanghi is one of India's most successful writers today. For many, he belongs to the country's elite trinity club, with Amish Tripathi and Devdutt Pattanaik being the other two, giving a new dimension to fiction writing in the mythological section. But this was not always the case and,

if Sanghi is to be believed, he was rejected as many as 47 times by publishers and literary agents.

"I was rejected no less than 47 times. All this happened in the space of a year and a half," the author said in an interview with THE SUNDAY GUARDIAN during the release of his new book, *The Vault of Vishnu*. "Once I realised that no one in the publishing

industry was even ready to hear my name anymore, I decided to self-publish my first book, *The Rozabal Line*," he recalled, adding how we all must, as a kid, be taught 'The Power of Failure'. "Our kids are often taught how to succeed. But we never teach them how to handle failures. The problem is our kids, especially coming out of elite institutions, believe they

should succeed. But that doesn't always happen. Sadly, we have not made them ready for failures."

Sanghi also tells us about his new book, sixth in the Bharat series, his obsession with mixing **mythology with science**, and why the role of an author is no longer confined to just writing a book. The following are the excerpts of the interview:

Q. *The Vault of Vishnu* is your sixth book in the Bharat series. How did the idea to write this book come to you?

A. The idea came from a documentary that I was watching about a person called Bodhidharma. In India if you ask anybody who Bodhidharma was, he or she would be clueless. Bodhidharma was a Pallava king who

travelled from Kanchipuram all the way to China. When he reached China, he made his way to a monastery on Mount Song. He sought admission, but the abbot denied it. So, Bodhidharma sat outside the monastery for nine years in meditation, to the point that his shadow got imprinted on the wall.

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The Best of Your Week Ahead

15TH SUNDAY



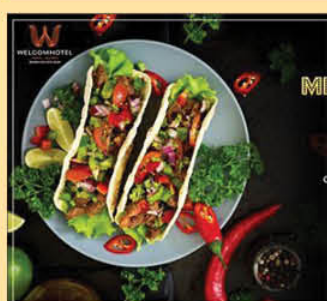
KAHWA SPEAKS ENSEMBLE
THE PIANO MAN JAZZ CLUB, GURGAON
12:30 PM
Kahwa Speaks Ensemble is going to debut its audio-visual show at the fabulous Piano Man Jazz Club in Gurgaon. The band will be playing original Kashmiri-English folk music accompanied by a never-seen-before audio-visual performance that features custom animation videos, curated photographs and music videos of the project (while the band performs).

16TH MONDAY

APPARITIONS NOCTURNES
ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE, DELHI
10 AM
Sky is not only full of stars but also full of mysteries and spiritual manifestations. Since 2001, Georges Roux has been observing the stars in the sky and filming it with his camera. During the exhibition he would like to show few short films as references which can be commented by the audience.



17TH TUESDAY



MEXICAN FOOD FESTIVAL
WELCOMHOTEL DWARKA, DELHI
07:30 PM
Once Virginia Woolf said, "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well." During the fest, guests will be able to savour Mexican gastronomic treats curated by Chef Tania. The fest will last until Sunday.

18TH WEDNESDAY

HOLDING THE FRAME
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF DEVELOPING SOCIETIES, DELHI
5 PM
'Holding the Frame' is a lecture by William T.S. Mazzarella, the Neukom Family Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He'll speak about Freud's arguments about authoritarian leadership, and how the psychoanalytic concept of 'transference' may be useful in better understanding the authority of leaders and people's willingness to follow them.



19TH THURSDAY



ENGLISH COMEDY MIC WITH AMAR
COFFEE & CHAI CO, GURGAON
8 PM
Enjoy an evening of laughs with noted Gurgaon comedian Comedy Wala Amar. Amar is an author and stand-up comedian and has been doing for a long while, since before he was born. In this show, he will come with a lineup of his friends who are also social outcasts.

20TH FRIDAY

JASHN E ADAB 9TH POETRY FESTIVAL
INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, DELHI
4:30 PM
Jashn-e-Adab is will be celebrated from 20th to 22nd March, 2020 in association with Hamdard University at India International Centre, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi. There will be spectacular sessions for the promotion of art, culture and literature like Panel Discussions, Classical Music, Sufi Singing, Ghazal Singing, Qawwali, Grand Mushaira, Kavi Sammelan, and much more.



21ST SATURDAY



OPEN MIC | NUTS HUMOUR CLUB
SPRING HOUSE COWORKING, DELHI
4 PM
Nuts Humour club is a stage where you get to live your dream. So if you have any talent they have the right platform for you! Don't hesitate to go because a stage never judges. Open mics facilitate you with a launchpad to shoot your career as a stand-up comic.

A league of his own

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Bodhidharma, while he was inside that cave, not only perfected what we today known as Zen Buddhism, but also developed a physical routine that helped keep his limb and blood circulation moving. The physical routine was a combination of two ancient Indian martial arts — Silambam and Kalaripayattu. He perfected it by aligning it with yogic breathing. Nine years later, the abbot allowed Bodhidharma admission. And the latter started teaching this physical routine to other monks. This, in due course, became what is today known as kung fu. If you go to China and visit Shaolin, the birth place of kung fu, you will see the statue of Bodhidharma. In all their texts and literature, they talk of Bodhidharma as great hero who introduced martial arts into China. But in India, sadly, we don't remember him at all. Through this book, I want to bring this story to the public.

Q. Like most of your previous books, this one too is a mix of myth, science and historical facts. What explains your fascination with the three?

A. For me the research process is the most fun part of writing a book. But research for each book is different. If you take *The Rozabal Line*, for instance, the research was all about reading about the possibilities that Jesus might have survived the crucifixion. For *Chanakya's Chant*, the readings were two primary-sourced documents — *Arthashastra* and *Nitisashtra* (what Chanakya actually wrote), and *Mudraraksasas*, a Sanskrit play written on him. Beyond them, I didn't need to do any research. When I was writing *The Krishna Key*, I did read *Bhagavad Purana* and also travelled to places like Dwarka, Bet Dwarka, Somnath, Vrindavan, Mathura, etc, which allowed me to create the narrative. When I was researching for *The Silalot Saga*, my research was mostly confined to the study of modern India, especially related to Partition, but more importantly talking to people who had lived in Bombay and Calcutta of the 1950s and 1960s, for being able to create the atmospherics of the two cities. *The Keepers of the Kalachakra* required a lot of reading of quantum physics. I spent almost six months with an IIT Engineer who taught me quantum theory. For *The Vault of Vishnu*, I had to spend almost two months in China, to be able to pick up all the finer details of the places. So, the nature of research changes from



According to Ashwin Sanghi, every philosopher has to be a scientist and every scientist has to be a philosopher.

one book to another, but the rigour remains the same.

Q. How difficult is it to weave and interweave science with *maya* and mythology?

A. I believe that every philosopher has to be a scientist. And every scientist has to be a philosopher. The two are not disconnected. If you read some of the diaries of scientists like Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrodinger and Albert Einstein, they have references to the *Upanishads*. Niels Bohr says that quantum theory would not look odd to someone who has read the *Upanishads*. So, there is a lot of overlap in those spaces. It is we who have created these boxes and compartments. And it is no longer fashionable to talk about the overlap between these compartments. The *Upanishads*, for instance, talk about *vrutti*, which, literally translated, means mind waves. And the *Upanishads* say that an individual doesn't exist; he exists because at that moment there is a *vrutti* that tells that the person exists. The quantum theory tells that an object is observed by an observer but the behaviour of the object changes because of the observer. Because the observed object can behave as both wave and particle. These concepts were deeply deliberated in our philosophies and now scientists are trying to figure out a way to be able to explain that. So, in that sense, what I am doing is not very unique.

Q. Our ancient texts also talk about the relativity of time, just like the recent Hollywood film *Interstellar*. Your take.

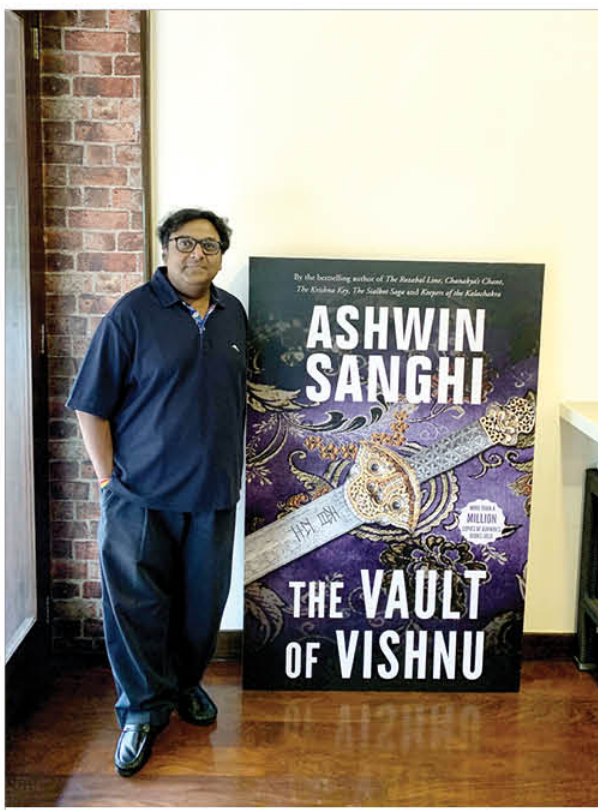
A. There is a story in the *Upanishads* about a king with a daughter in a marriageable

age. He has a list of suitors and wants to discuss about them with Lord Brahma. So, he travels to Brahmaloak and finds the God watching a dance recital. The king decides to wait. After a few minutes when Brahma emerges and the king tells him the reason of his visit, the God starts laughing. The king is not amused and Brahma says that for these few minutes that the king waited for him, a few million years have passed on the earth. None of king's men exist anymore. When I was reading this story, I wondered how it's talking precisely the same thing that *Interstellar* shows: the relativity of time.

We have to understand that myths were often created to explain a concept. Like this story of the king to explain the relativity of time. Through a story it's easier to explain that time works differently on different realms.

Q. Your new book travels from India to Southeast Asia to China. What's your impression of China, which is also, like India, an old living civilisation.

A. To my mind, what really needs to be done, and I hope this book does that to an extent, is a deeper appreciation of how these two civilisations evolved and borrowed from one another. Take the example of sugar. The Hindi word for sugar is 'chini'. It got named so because some time in the 18th century, one of the first immigrants to Bengal from China set up a sugar refining unit. But the funny thing is during Hieun Tsang's time, the Chinese traveller talks about hard candies made from sugarcane plants and confesses about never tasting anything like these before. He further informs



Sanghi believes that myths were often created to explain a concept and, therefore, should not be taken literally.

that these candies are made out a plant called sugarcane. Hiuen Tsang collects these candies on his way back to China to gift them to the Emperor. It's a fascinating story of sugar which was not known to the Chinese in ancient times, was carried from India to China by Hieun Tsang, got perfected there, and eventually came back to India in the 18th century to be called 'chini'. Similarly, Buddhism entered China from India and later from China spread to East Asian nations, including Japan. I hope this book helps understand that our current understanding of China is very limited and mostly confined to our experiences since the time of Chairman Mao and Jawaharlal Nehru. **Q. How do you look back at your collaborations with James Patterson?**

A. One thing that I learned

from James was that less was more. I would send him a manuscript running into 90,000 words, and he would send me back having brought it down to some 60,000 words. Think about M.F. Husain: He uses thick, broad brush and within a couple of hours that painting would be done. Now visualise a village *karigar* who is doing a very intricate miniature and would sit probably for a month to get all the fine details. Both are equally pleasing and beautiful in their own ways but the art is different. I am like a village *karigar*, while Patterson is the one using broad brush, much like Husain.

Q. But I believe the atmospherics matter too. No?

A. Yes, it does. But then Patterson is a one-man industry. No one sells the way he does. He has so far sold 300 mil-

lion books. When someone picks up a Patterson book, he knows exactly what to expect. So, within 70,000 words, large font-sized text, the book moves very quickly. There's nothing to slow you down. No speed-breaker, no deviation. That explains why he land up with 19 consecutive New York Times best-sellers.

Q. With the advent of social media, how do you feel writing and book marketing are changing?

A. There was a time when writers were almost faceless. The longest time I didn't know how Geoffrey Archer looked like. As a writer you were not expected to do anything else except writing. Today, the entire universe of books has changed. Google has found that 129 million books is the universe. And we are roughly adding four million books every year. Self-publishing has also changed the nature of the industry. In India itself, we are publishing about 82,000 books a year, out of which 28,000 are in English. This translates into 200 books a day. Imagine if we had 200 Bollywood releases a day! Somewhere along the day what has happened that the bandwidth available for every book has become limited. In an average Landmark or Crossword bookstore, the stocking cannot be more than 2,000 individual titles. Which means out of 28,000 books, not even 10% would find space in bookstores. This is where the change has happened. Now it is not just about getting your book written and published, but also about getting people to read it. So, for me a typical Bharat series takes two years to finish. If I can invest two years writing, then I owe it to myself to invest another three months to market it.

Q. Among the contemporary writers in the mythological fiction genre who you look up to and why?

A. This list will have Amish, Devdutt... I would also include Ashok Banker. For, had it not been for Ashok, I don't think this entire bandwagon would have got started.

Q. Last but not least, what would be your bestseller mantra for a budding writer?

A. It will be a bulleted list of five things: One, start writing. Two, write without being worried of what people would say. Three, forget about failure as it is going to happen. Four, don't give up on your day job. Five, if you become successful, keep your feet on the ground and remain humble.

THE BIG MIND

NEELIMA MATHUR

It's time to learn the art of listening

It has become like an epidemic. We hear but do not listen. If we listen, it is in a pre-occupied state that is rooted in the self, the individual. The ramifications seem to impact almost all aspects of life.

Dictionary meanings for 'hearing' and 'listening' are interesting in themselves. Hearing is the faculty of perceiving sounds. Listening is giving attention to a sound, taking notice of and acting on what someone says, making an effort to hear something. The last, 'making an effort', is critical because listening may be at nil or low levels in a pre-occupied state of mind. The result can be half-baked, incorrect or harmful reactions.

Why bother with this concept of hearing and listening at all? Think about how it affects our capacity to perceive the Other and it gets thought-provoking. This is no treatise on the concept of phenomenology in its formal form. Just a hint on how we humans are treating, responding to, bypassing or eliminating every Other in our daily lives.

There is a simple recent example that set me thinking. A link for a video went out on WhatsApp. It was a little under two minutes long. In about 30 seconds, there was a 'thumb-index-finger wonderful' posted back. The person had clearly not viewed the full video but had an opinion and reaction. Imagine this in context of the different kinds of information that encircle us.

It's differently similar in routine telephone conversations. People either constantly react to half the spoken sentence before listening to the full. Or speak in unstoppable sentences, without listening to the Other's reactions. It makes for a peculiar circumstance of communicating without fully giving space to the Other in the conversation.

Personal relationships and social interaction have their own kinds of hearing-listening phenomena. Spouses, parents, children hear but don't listen. In this not listening, the self can drive the ego to a degree that obliterates the Other. Reactions brink on the ugly and irretrievable, resulting in stress-causing daily clashes, rifts, divorces, family break-ups... and worse.

The hearing-listening in social situations, where we interact in public spaces or in groups, functions at another level. In a shop, it can lead to bizarre conversations between the buyer and seller. Each is locked in the spaces they, as persons, belong to, where each is hearing but often not listening.

Gently ask for Haldi-kanti soap in a shop. The chances are, the guy is going to bring a pack of haldi powder back for you. Ask for a pure cotton top in a garment shop. What comes back could well be a polyester mix. The seller thinks this is a difficult buyer, the buyer thinks this is a useless shop. Depending on circumstances, it can get acrimonious.

Noises in a cocktail party in a jet-set metropolitan home are revelatory. Every other person picks on half a phrase and animatedly responds to it. There is no flow of conversation. Just an unseemly James Joycean association of words leading to mindless chatter. Blabber culminating in nothing.

Noises in a cocktail party in a jet-set metropolitan home are revelatory. Every other person picks on half a phrase and animatedly responds to it. There is no flow of conversation.

Hearing-listening in hierarchical situations can be alarmingly harmful. Are bureaucrats listening to anything? The moment you declare who you are and what your intent is, the pompously informed 'self' of the bureaucrat paints a pre-conceived picture of the Other across the table. His / her answers are pre-determined on that basis.

There was an occasion when a very senior bureaucrat, known for his arrogance, was to be interviewed by a lady journalist on a serious aspect of climate change. As soon as she sat down and introduced herself, the bureaucrat said, "Oh, these days, all women are journalists." [1980s]. You don't need much imagination to know how seriously that interview could have transpired. The bureaucrat heard everything and listened to nothing in the lady journalist's questions.

The corporate world has fine-tuned its feedback mechanisms and specialise in out-of-the-box practices to keep harmony between different levels of management. Yet, the rate at which employees change jobs speaks volumes in itself. It is, in fact, more a case of there being nothing to hear and therefore, listen to. Individuals keep mum out of fear of internal politics that can affect their status or promotion. Employers still have to master the art of listening to this silence of the Other.

It gets worse in the development aid sector. The entire highly-qualified United Nations system and aid agencies in the northern hemisphere are in the business of bettering lives in the southern hemisphere, the developing world. By and large, they hear about the poverty, the malnutrition, et al, via data. They do not listen to the real voices of the poor and the malnourished on their high-flying mission travels.

The prism of elaborate and fanciful analytical logical frameworks, output numbers, scalability, pre-determine their responses to human conditions. The failure level of the erstwhile Sustainable Development Goals and the limping achievements of the Millennium Development Goals speak for themselves. Massive spends in the aid industry, decades of modified West-driven 'development models' in a vacuum of listening...and the divides continue.

From individuals to groups to systems, this hearing-listening phenomenon is at its worst in politics. And well-exploited to create unwanted infamous situations in nation states across the world. People are taking action on just the sound they hear with their rooted individual selves. They are not making 'an effort to listen' before resorting to action that is increasingly causing harm to the social fabric of nations.

From the individual to a nation, it is an era of a big divide between hearing and listening to the Other. We need to transit to mindful hearing of other voices, so that we are truly listening to the Other.

People of different generations are equally lonely, says a new study

LONDON: People of different generations are equally lonely, but for different reasons, say researchers, adding that living alone increases the risk of loneliness in older age whereas in midlife feeling isolated is more linked to personality traits.

The study, published in the journal *Psychological Medicine*, found emotionally-resilient people—those more able to adapt in stressful situations—are less at risk of loneliness at any age, and outgoing middle-aged people are less likely to feel lonely.

«The use of machine learning in this study allows us to identify and replicate differences in what risk factors are linked to loneliness in middle and older age people,» said study researcher Drew Altschul



The study was published in the journal, *Psychological Medicine*.

from University of Edinburgh in the UK.

«Loneliness is a growing public health issue, identifying the things that precede loneliness is difficult,

however, contemporary machine learning algorithms are positioned to help identify these predictors,» Altschul added.

For the findings, the research

team examined data from more than 4,000 people older than 45 for loneliness, personality traits, and living circumstances.

According to the researchers, people were asked to rate how lonely they felt. Their personality traits were also tested using a framework called the Five-Factor Model.

The research team used machine learning—which uses data to make predictions—to examine the data for relationships between personality traits such as emotional stability, and social variables such as living alone, as causes for loneliness.

Results were compared between people in midlife—from 45 to 69 years old—and those in their 70s.

A major strength of the study is that two separate samples represented each age group, and the

same effects were found across samples in each age group, the researchers said.

The researchers found similar levels of loneliness in both groups.

According to the study, on average, people with a strong capacity to maintain emotional balance under stressful circumstances were 60 per cent less likely to be lonely, regardless of their age.

Middle-aged people who were more extroverted were, on average, 55 per cent less likely to be lonely. Social isolation was not significantly associated with loneliness in the 45 to 69 age group.

The study found that people over 70 who lived alone were more than four times more likely to feel lonely than those who did not live alone.

IANS