

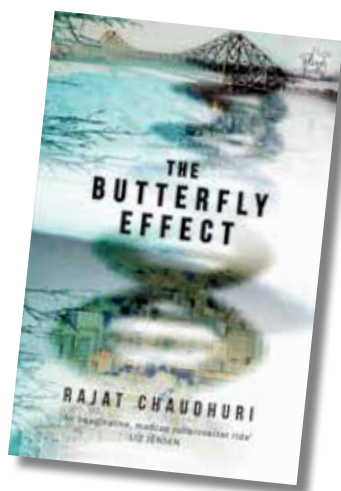
READING CORNER

HISTORY | LITERATURE | ART | ARCHITECTURE | CULTURE | HERITAGE | BIOGRAPHY | TRAVEL | WILDLIFE | ENVIRONMENT | RELIGION | SELF-HELP | FICTION | TRANSLATION | CINEMA | FOOD | CHILDREN



Climate Change & Literature in India

A few years ago, I had been speaking with Liz Jensen, the bestselling writer of climate fiction and adventure stories, about climate novels and my recently published book, *The Butterfly Effect*. Liz asked me whether I believe that in the near future, all kinds of fiction would have to engage with the climate crisis. We both seemed to agree that they would.



This is hardly surprising. There has been a flowering of literature and cinema in moments of crisis, the best example of which would be books and movies dealing with the nuclear holocaust during the Cold War. This has now been happening with climate and literature—often called cli-fi.

Climate fiction is still in its nascent stages in India despite the fact that right from the time of Kalidasa, through the period of modernism and to the experiments of the present, nature and the environment have been taken up as themes by Indian writers in different languages. So, we have the great river novels in Bangla, the works of Tagore and Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay,

stories and poems of writers like Haldhar Nag, Anita Agnihotri, Amar Mitra and Sadhan Chattopadhyay and Sugathakumari, among many others.

There are, however, differences between much of this writing and works that can be

narrowly defined as climate fiction. Many of these works can be better categorised as ecofiction or

ecopoetry. This is because though they sometimes, consciously or otherwise, deal with the effects of climate change, they do not necessarily make explicit connections between unsustainable production and consumption leading to different manifestations of the climate crisis.

In many earlier works, nature is considered to be sacred, and the destruction of nature informs the plot. Newer works deal with environmental issues and their interactions with other social problems. As postcolonial writers, we tend to approach our material using the lenses of power, exploitation, equity, migration, urban decay, scarcities, politics, gender and other cross-cutting concerns without commenting on how planetary climate change can and does have a bearing on these. This is, however, changing as writers begin to address 'climate justice' in their work.

Anthropogenic climate change is but one manifestation of a series of planetary crises triggered by humans, and the stories that we tell today or tomorrow will do well to cultivate this awareness while also being sensitive to the ground-level issues that affect the people of our postcolonial nations.

Amitav Ghosh's climate novel, *Gun Island*, is perhaps the best example of a book by an Indian writer where postcolonial concerns and myths neatly dovetail with a climate story. Beyond this, with respect to Indian writing in English, novels by authors like Prayag Akbar, Nilanjana S. Roy, Janice Pariat, Sarnath Banerjee, Varun Thomas Mathew and stories by Shweta Taneja, Rimi B. Chatterjee, Priya Sarukkai Chabria, to name a few, engage with different aspects of the climate crisis.

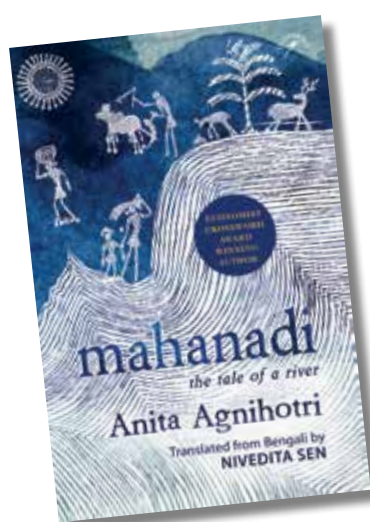
Anthropogenic climate change is but one manifestation of a series of planetary crises triggered by humans, and the stories that we tell today or tomorrow will do well to cultivate this awareness while also being sensitive to the ground-level issues that affect the people of our postcolonial nations. After that, it is a matter of choice, material and sensitivities of the author. Whether they wish to write post-apocalyptic dystopias, realist-hybrid stories of climate disaster or solarpunk tales of the future focused on climate solutions, it is for them to decide. But whatever climate imaginaries they fashion, these will definitely help Indian readers understand, prepare and perhaps change their perceptions and beliefs about the specificities and generalities of this existential crisis that we all face today.

We already have indications from studies that climate fiction is popular among millennials and young readers. To further energise this kind of writing, authors, readers, reviewers, publishers and academia—in fact, all participants of the literary ecosystem—have roles to play. Till the time a Chetan Bhagat of climate fiction appears on the scene, there is an urgent need to grow out of the mindset that climate fiction is an insignificant genre on the bottom shelves of stores and libraries and embrace the understanding that this is an all-encompassing, genre-agnostic umbrella of new writing that absorbs various forms and styles—from the speculative to the realist and from literary fiction to high fantasy. Climate change won't wait for us to make up our minds.



RAJAT CHAUDHURI

Writer, Translator
& Climate-change Activist.

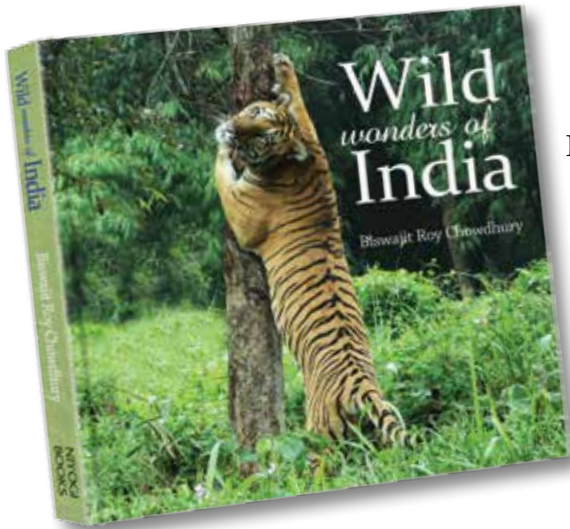


FLORA OF THE SOUTHERN WESTERN GHATS AND PALNIS

This book has been on author Pippa Mukherjee’s mind since the 1980s when she became aware that it was virtually impossible to identify the trees and plants of the southern Western Ghats and the upper Palni plateau with any degree of ease, as there was little relevant and topical material available for the visitor or interested novice.

Her interest led to the publication of this book that lists more than 200 species of trees, herbs, and shrubs that can be found in the region. She takes great pains to provide the scientific names as well as common English names alongside the local names of the species in various regional languages of India.

Pippa Mukherjee was on the committee of the Bombay Natural History Society and worked as nature education officer.



WILD WONDERS OF INDIA

Blessed with immense biodiversity as well as geographical and cultural variety, India—surrounded by the majestic snowcapped Himalayan mountains in the north, the vast expanse of the Thar Desert in the north-west, the Bay of Bengal in the south-east, the Arabian Sea in the south-west and Indian Ocean in the south—is truly a treasure-trove of Nature’s magnificent bounty.

Wild Wonders of India takes the reader through a visually delightful voyage across India’s many-splendoured forests, their wildlife specialities, and India’s precious national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and tiger reserves—all the while tackling more serious matters such as the rapidly growing list of India’s endangered wildlife species.



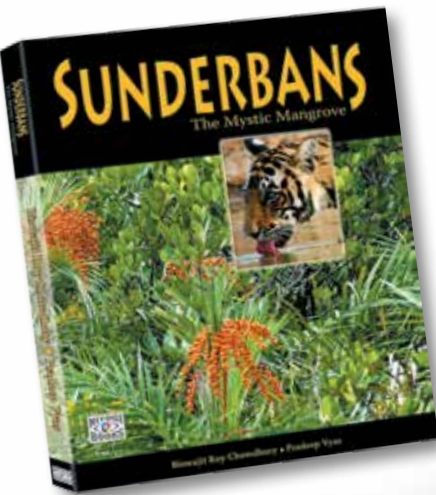
Biswajit Roy Chowdhury is the Founder Secretary of Nature Environment & Wildlife Society.

SUNDERBANS

Sunder in Hindi and Bengali means ‘beautiful’ and *Bon* means ‘forest’. Located at the southernmost fringes of Bangladesh and West Bengal is the pristine delta of the Sunderbans.

Though the Sunderbans have been explored time and again, the deltas still retain an uncanny aura of mysticism. Numerous references to the Sunderbans have been found in ancient Hindu literature such as the Upanishads, and

the epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—reinforcing this aura of mysticism. Being the world’s largest mangrove expanse with a unique eco-system, it is also home to the Bengal Tiger as well as numerous fauna including species of birds, snakes and crocodiles. Two high tides and two low tides every day make this terrain very difficult to negotiate where both man and animal have learnt to adapt to the environment. The Sunderbans, as this book documents, is a treasure trove for nature lovers and wildlife photographers and a wonderland for tourists from all over the world.



A DECADE WITH TIGERS

The apex predators of Indian forests, tigers are the pride of India, but have been victim of overpopulation, shrinking forest cover and human greed. Yet, they have survived for centuries, carving their own path against all odds. Much like humans, each tiger is unique and so is the terrain and habitat it dwells in.

The last 10 years have been revolutionary for tigers in India owing to a surge in photographers thronging tiger reserves. With the rise in popularity of social media, the daily lives of tigers are now monitored and publicly documented with photographs. This book is a unique tribute to the tigers who have played a vital role as ‘brand ambassadors’ of Indian wildlife.



Shivang Mehta is an avid traveller and nature photographer.



Pradeep Vyas is an officer of the Indian Forest Service.



WILD TREASURES & ADVENTURES



From close encounters with tigers, elephants and other ferocious beasts to daredevilry with timber smugglers and poachers of Rajasthan, Sunayan Sharma recounts tales from his life in the service of the nation's wildlife reserves. Through these real-life episodes, readers will witness an all-encompassing human–non-human interactive ecosystem—from old hunting tactics to developing innovative habitat infrastructure, from encouraging community participation and awareness to relocation of endangered keystone species like the tiger.

Wild Treasures & Adventures: A Forester's Diary is a series of thrilling episodes from the author's life as an Indian Forest Service Officer.

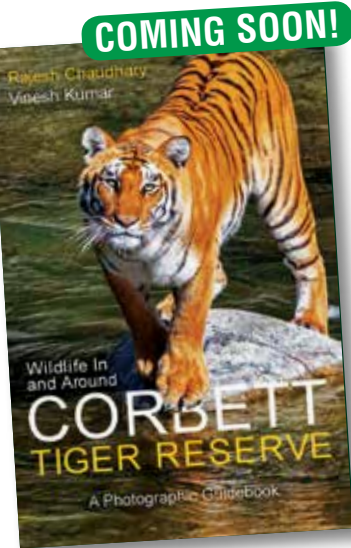


SARISKA

Sariska, one of the finest nature reserves in India, dazzled Sunayan Sharma with its rich diversity of flora and fauna. Tiger, of course, was the star attraction.

However, it had lost its entire tiger population to poachers a decade ago, sending shock waves not only throughout India but also abroad. After much discussions, apprehensions, arguments, legal battles, and interference of the Prime Minister, a few tigers were shifted from Ranthambhore to Sariska. This was the first such experiment anywhere in the world which turned out to be a grand success.

In this book, the author, then the field director of Sariska, describes the thrilling first-hand experiences of confrontations with villagers, local politicians and other stakeholders.



WILDLIFE IN AND AROUND CORBETT TIGER RESERVE

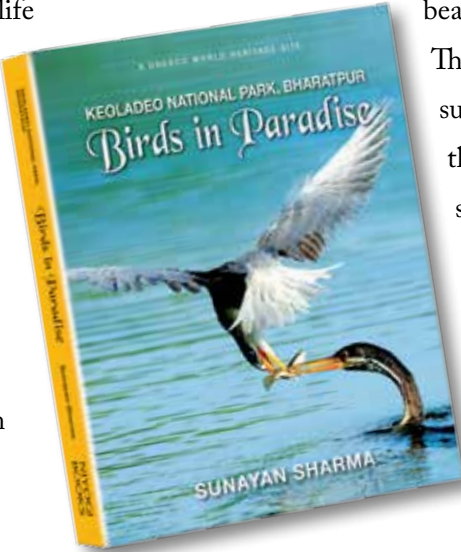
The forests of Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) are among 32% of the planet's forests which are called 'Primary Forests' or 'Virgin Forests'. In the popular

sense, primary forests are naturally grown forests that have never been significantly disturbed by human activity since their origin, possibly hundreds, thousands or maybe even millions of years ago. Unfortunately, Primary forests have shrunk by over 80 million hectares since 1990.

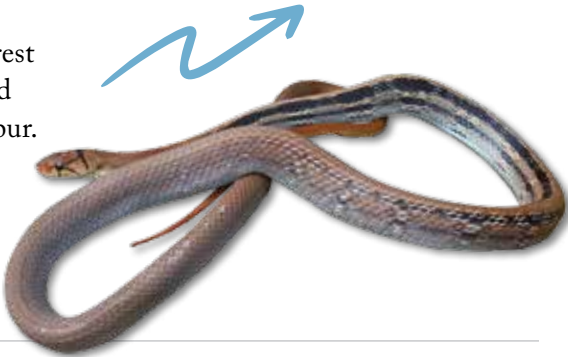
This photographic guidebook, through more than 1500 high-quality pictures, helps readers to identify about 700 species of animals and plants found in Corbett Tiger Reserve and its neighbouring forests. It also provides a glimpse into the secret life of animals and plants, assimilated from the latest scientific publications, curated and presented as easy-to-understand text to augment the experience of those visiting Corbett Tiger Reserve.



BIRDS IN PARADISE

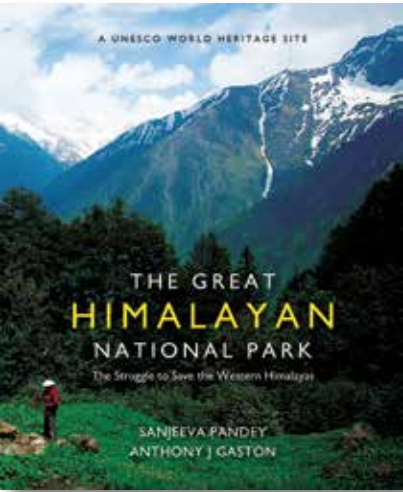


Author Sunayan Sharma's fascination for nature turned him into a forester even though he trained as an engineer. His first visit to the Keoladeo National Park amazed him with lakes full of beautiful multi-coloured ducks, geese and fish-eaters. The sudden take-off by the hundreds from the water surface on the approach of an eagle or a harrier, and their landing back after taking a few rounds in the sky—all a breathtaking drama. *Birds in Paradise* will inspire you to visit this park, or else, you can simply lose yourself in the pages of this delightful book and let your imagination take flight. This book is the first-hand account of the challenges faced by the sanctuary and its revival, by this veteran wildlife manager and former Director of the park, complemented with more than 280 spectacular images of the birds found here.



Sunayan Sharma, formerly a member of the Indian Forest Service, was Wildlife Warden at Jodhpur, Rajasthan, and later, Director at the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur.

THE GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK



The Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on 23 June, 2014, is one of the most important protected areas in the Himalayas, one of the world's great biological realms. The book is intended both as a history and an ecological overview of the Park and as a plea for continuing conservation of the rich legacy of Himalayan plants and animals.

In addition to descriptions of the ecology, the book includes local history and culture and a review of current development in the region. The pictures, taken by the authors and their collaborators, vividly illustrate the grandeur and diversity of the area.



Sanjeeva Pandey (left) has served as Director of the Great Himalayan National Park from 1998 to 2006. **Anthony J Gaston** has studied Indian wildlife, especially birds, since 1969.



Rajesh Chaudhary holds a Ph.D. in Biological Science, has been observing, photographing & documenting nature for more than 20 years.



Vinesh Kumar, (left) a nature enthusiast & a burgeoning nature photographer.



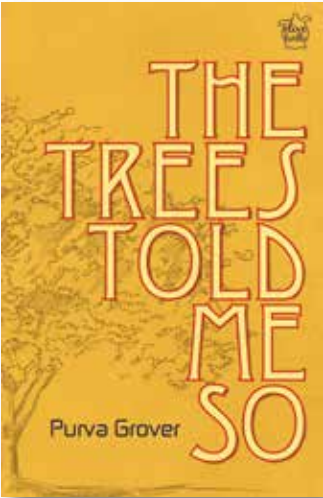
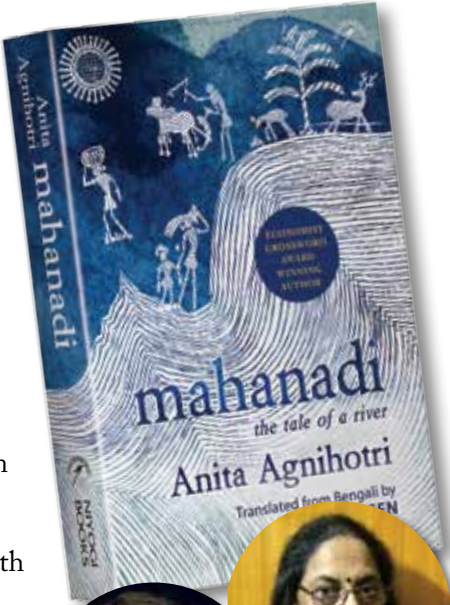
MAHANADI

The journey of the Mahanadi that starts from the plateau of Chhattisgarh ends at Jagatsinghpur on the Bay of Bengal. At every new turn or change of course, it leaves behind innumerable villages and settlements that have their own tales full of the clamor of people in markets and towns, the solitude-filled lives of isolated villages, their struggle for survival, their joys and their perils.

The river is the main thread in this narrative, as it moves into changing landscapes and people stay where they are. In this novel, the tale of the river is entwined with the people through vignettes of their dynamic lives that are infused with myths, legends and archaeological anecdotes

Anita Agnihotri’s (left) literary oeuvre spans across all genres– poetry, novels, writing for children, and critiques of development.

Nivedita Sen teaches English Literature in Hansraj College, University of Delhi.



Purva Grover is a journalist, poet, playwright and stage director. She is the founder-editor of *The Indian Trumpet*, a quarterly digital magazine for Indian expats.



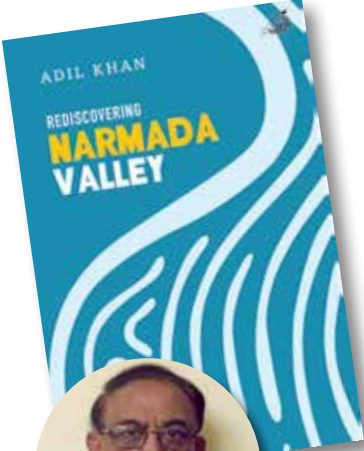
THE TREES TOLD ME SO

My eyes were now almost shut, but I could see the tree above me; it was huge. The green spread covered the whole sky above it and also what happened beneath. I couldn’t see the stars. The breeze was shaking the branches—its many branches. You do remember that tree, don’t you, Mum?

If trees could talk, they’d have so much to tell: the story of two broken hearts, that stolen first kiss, those last words of a mother to her son, endless cups of tea and never-ending chatter, of nostalgia, an act of brutality and a tale of passion.

In *The Trees Told Me So*, author Purva Grover, tells stories of faith and funeral; of dads and dreams; of growth and greed; of sins and secrets; of chai and confessions; of relationships and reflections; of lives, loves and living. And the common thread running through the stories is nature (read: a tree)—standing witness like an old soul—full of wisdom and compassion. A silent observer, a keeper of secrets—the tree is always an integral part of the character’s very being.

NARMADA VALLEY



Adil Khan is a Senior Executive in Narmada Valley Development Department in Madhya Pradesh.

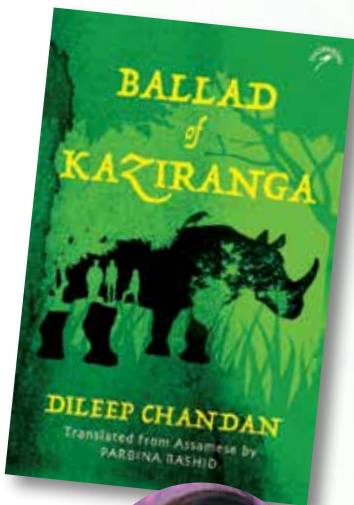
Wildlife, birds, tribes subsisting on forests, or cultivators growing food-grains on lands—Narmada catchment provides, as a mother does, shelter and bounty to all who seek refuge in it.

Considered to be one of the holiest rivers in the country, Narmada winds its way through four states of India. However, it has always remained a conflict zone, be it for disputes between the states for water share, the raising of concerns by social activists and environmentalists about the ecological degradation caused by the projects, or the arresting issue of displacement and rehabilitation. *Rediscovering Narmada Valley* is the author’s unbiased account of the past and the present-day Narmada Valley.

BALLAD OF KAZIRANGA

With plans to open an eco-sensitive resort, a bored, middle-aged businessman, Amal Duara, shifts his focus from the concrete jungle of Guwahati to the pristine environs of Kaziranga, and involves three people in his core team. His cousin, Arunava, a correspondent from Bengaluru; Arunva’s childhood friend Rishi, a musician; and Hridayananda, a range officer. What follows is a riveting story with unpredictable twist and turns. As Amal constructs the foundation of his resort, brick by brick and Kaziranga reveals itself, layer by layer.

It is not the Kaziranga that is shown to tourists but a battleground where fierce fights between forest guards and poachers most often break out, a political arena where nobody can be trusted, an ecosystem where people and animals do not always live in harmony.



Dileep Chandan (left) is a senior journalist working in Assam, and is also a popular novelist and writer in Assamese language.

Parbina Rashid is working with The Tribune and is based in Chandigarh.

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

The Butterfly Effect, which has been variously dubbed as sci-fi, cli-fi, speculative and biopunk, is author Rajat Chaudhuri’s attempt to visualise his activist work through a creative lens—as an unique way to engage people about the dangers posed by science without precaution and the neo-liberal dream of endless growth disregarding the environment, planetary well-being, equity and the future.

From utopian communities of Asia to the prison camps of Pyongyang and from the gene labs of Europe to the violent streets of Darkland – riven by civil war, infested by genetically engineered fighters – this time-travelling novel crosses continents, weaving mystery, adventure and romance.

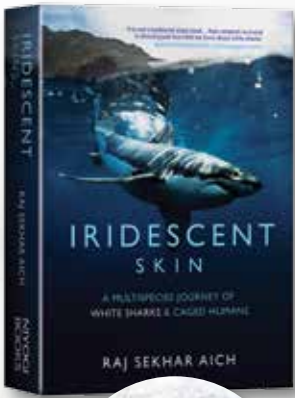


Rajat Chaudhuri
Writer, Translator
& Climate-change Activist.

IRIDESCENT SKIN

The premise of *Iridescent Skin* is the author’s expedition as a marine anthropologist/social scientist living and working among the great white sharks in New Zealand. His intention was a holistic exploration of the interconnected lives of humans and white sharks, created from the practice of cage diving. Based on an immersive fieldwork, this was the first extensive white shark cage diving ethnography in the world.

Raj Sekhar Aich, with PhDs in marine anthropology and applied psychology, has been recently appointed professor at the Sister Nivedita University.



DELIRIOUS CITY

Delhi. Old and dying, yet reborn everyday in a new skin. An old, wrinkled woman painting her nails. This great city I call home belongs neither to history nor to the imagination. It is described instead by dimensions.

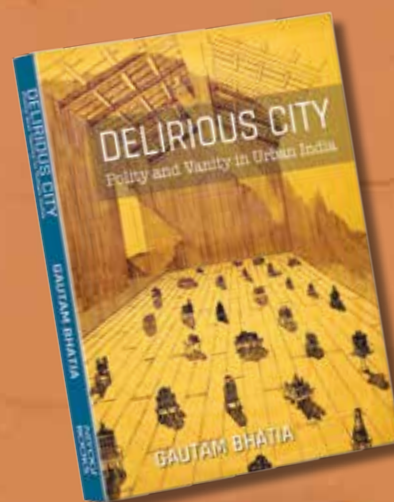
One day a small town, then a suburb, eventually a megacity. And to the people of Mumbai, always an overgrown village. Delhi radiates outwards like water from a broken drain, stretching its bounds into reclaimed countryside, swallowing everything in its path—villages, roads, fields, and even small towns, like Rohtak and Sonapat in the north, beyond Gurugram and Sohna in the south. It leaches into the surrounding states. Its present promptly swallows the past, and hope lives in a future that never comes. Inconvenience is regretted. Once open wheat fields sprout row houses, mustard fields disappear under imitation villas, garbage appears on yet unmetalled roads, and electricity and phone lines are dug. Makeshift hotels rise in imitation colonial arches; smoke from illegal suburban factories settles on winter gladiolus blooms; morning defecators line the historical arcades of Mughal monuments in private relief. People move about without fear or restriction. Without care or pride of ownership. The city has become a desperate, merciless parasite, shamelessly overgrown but without heart or centre. Stand on the upper parapets of Humayun's Tomb and let your eyes wander to the horizon: Delhi appears as a cubical maze of incomplete structures; a place perpetually choking, smoking, and smouldering, as if a people at war have retreated behind a broken line of brick encampments to regroup for the next day's battle.

The battle starts as early as a pre-dawn army parade, as much a change of guard as a charge of sounds. In a park, old men dressed in quilted parkas over kurtas debate noisily a Cabinet reshuffle,

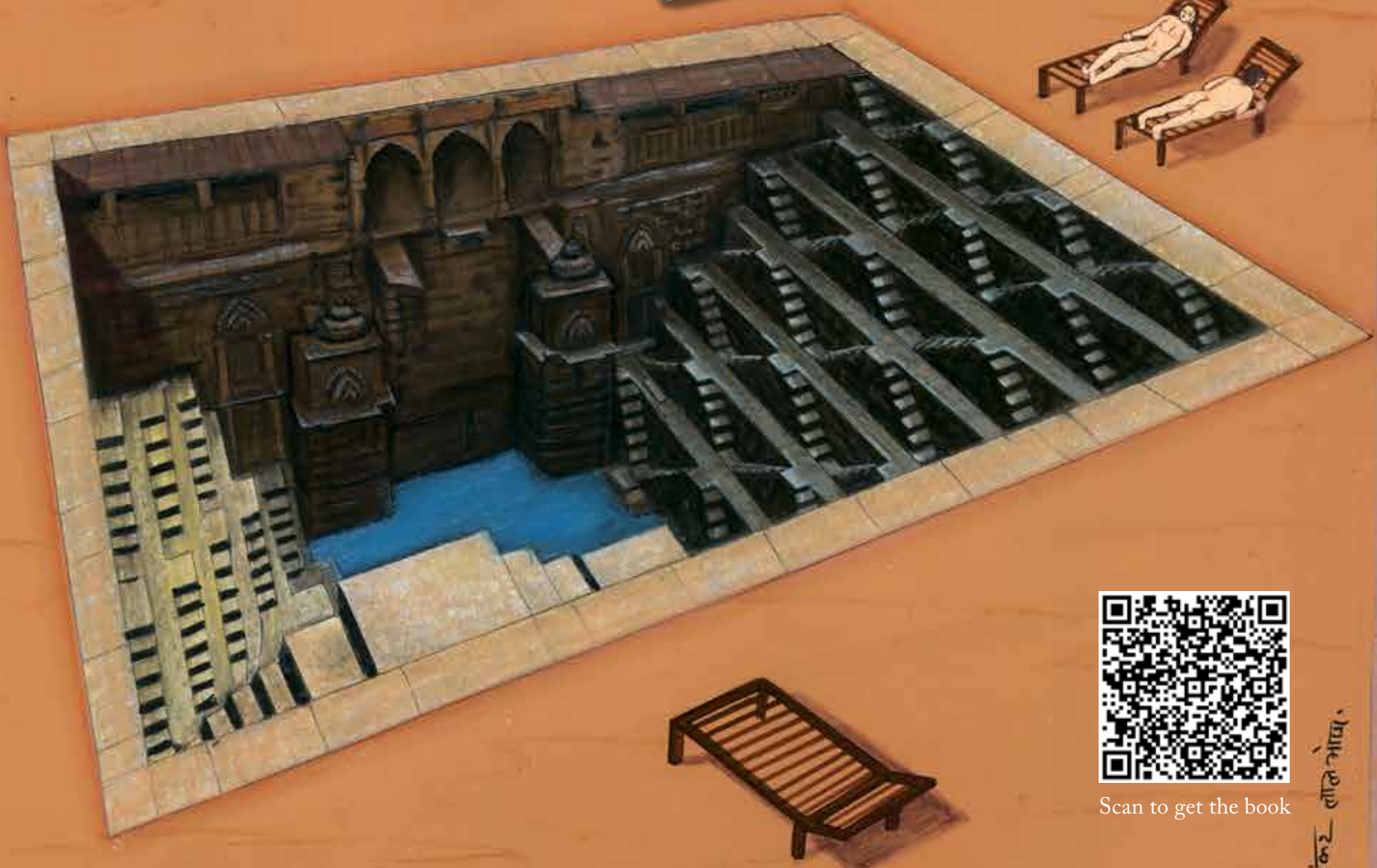
scrubbing with and spitting bits of neem twigs. An older group tosses up their arms in a yogic fit of hollow, raucous laughter. Retired army colonels click their sticks on the concrete while on their morning walk—more parade than walk. Horns blare on open, trafficless roads out of habit. All across a waking winter town, stonefaced fathers on scooters ferry wool-wrapped children to school in the early morning mist; housewives pick up scented motia for the puja room from the flower stand behind the market urinal. A shop owner raises the shutter and places goods on the public verandah; an old woman piles a heap of garlic on the sidewalk. In the steady clamour, autorickshaws seat passengers on the driver's seat, while bottoms emerge from side windows in makeshift seating arrangements. Grimy workshops are kept busy duplicating German machine parts for the local market. A business executive reclined in the back of a Jaguar races past, flipping through the Wall Street Journal. The car disrupts neighbourhood pedestrian patterns—flyovers cut concrete swathes through dense quarters—experiments are tried in rapid transit. People ride and jostle for space, an endless spectacle of growth and decay. The line between the posh colony and squalid slums blurs. As day progresses, buses overrun pedestrians and motorcycles invade pavements. Life begins and ends without protest or proclamation.

Extracted from

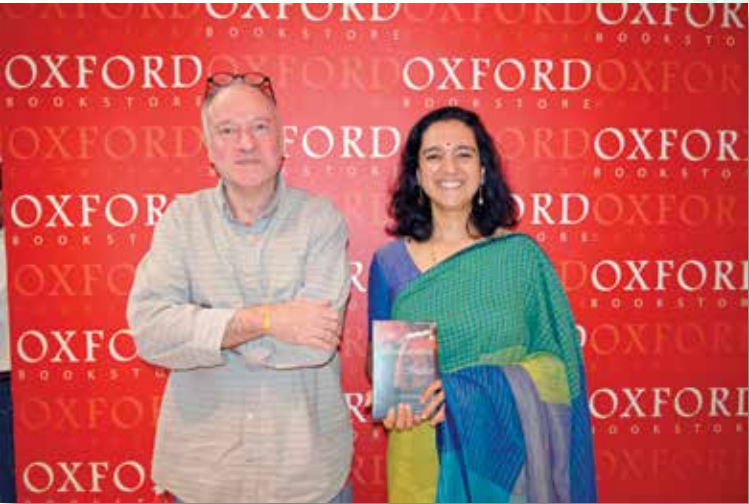
Delirious City: Polity and Vanity in Urban India



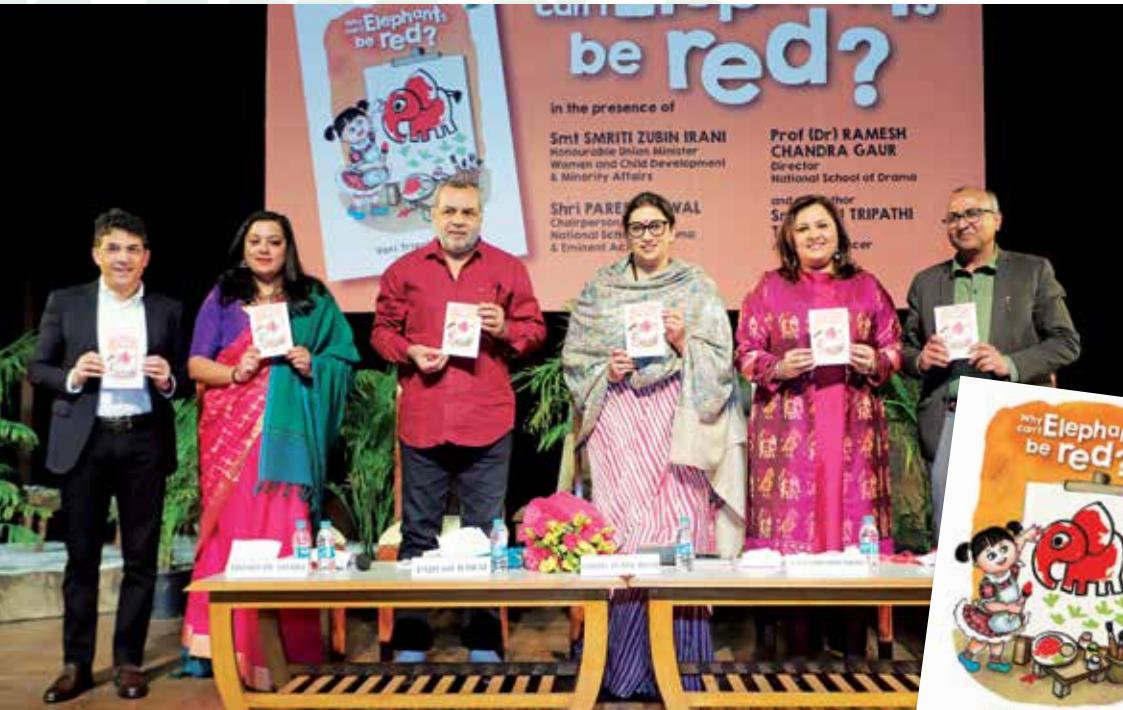
Gautam Bhatia, a Delhi-based architect and artist, has written extensively on architecture, and has received several awards for his artwork and buildings.



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Book Discussion: *Like Barbarians in India* at Oxford Bookstore, Connaught Place, New Delhi
L-R: Jean-Claude Perrier, journalist & author of the book; Aditi Sriram, academic & writer.



Book Launch: *Why can't Elephants be Red?* at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi.
L-R: Arvind Tikoo, Trisha De Niyogi, COO & Director, Niyogi Books; Paresh Rawal, Chairperson, National School of Drama & Eminent Actor; Smriti Zubin Irani, Honourable Union Minister Women and Child Development & Minority Affairs; Vani Tripathi Tikoo, author and producer; Prof (Dr.) Ramesh Chandra Gaur, Director, National School of Drama.



Book Launch: *Medical Maladies* at Chittaranjan Bhavan, New Delhi
L-R: Dr. Preethi John, Associate Professor, UCL; Dr. Haris Qadeer, Assistant Professor, Delhi University and editor of the book; Trisha De Niyogi, COO & Director, Niyogi Books.

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