LUNCH WITH BS > AMITAV GHOSH | AUTHOR

Poppy fields and shifting mountains

A prolific writer, Ghosh talks to Chintan Girish Modi about eco-anxiety, his passion for cooking, and Waheeda Rehman

meet author Amitav Ghosh, 67, for a delicious lunch opposite the picturesque Bandstand Promenade in Bandra just a day after the Mumbai launch of his new book Smoke and Ashes at the Royal Opera House on July 18. Published by HarperCollins India, it is a work of non-fiction that traces the economic and cultural history of the opium trade, focusing on "the transformative effect" it had on Great Britain, India and China. The research for this book took him to Guangzhou and Mauritius, and also made him confront how the history of his own family intertwined with the journey of the opium poppy.

Ghosh's ancestors, who were

displaced from their *"IT IS GRATIFYING* ancestral village in what is now Bangladesh, settled in TO MEET PEOPLE Chhapra in the 19th century WHO COME AND as the town in Bihar was a major trading centre for the **TELL ME WHAT MY** colonial opium industry. We pick a table in a quiet **BOOKS HAVE MEANT**

corner of Vista, the multi-TO THEM" cuisine restaurant at the Taj Lands End hotel, and opt for the à la carte menu over the enormous buffet so that we can talk at leisure without any distractions. "What should we have for lunch," he asks. "What do you feel like having," I ask in reply. Since the Jnanpith and Sahitya Akademi awardee lives in New York, I wonder if pizza is his go-to meal on days when he cannot make up his mind.

"No, I am into home-cooked food and freshingredients," says Ghosh, who often posts photographs of food on his Instagram account. "I used to cook for

my children, Lila and Nayan, until they went to college. I would discourage all kinds of fast food, pizzas and

hamburgers in particular. Eventually they tried those on their own, and did not like them much," he says, pleased with himself. "They were so lucky to have their Baba cooking for them. There aren't very many fathers in this world who cook for their children," I say.

After a good laugh, Ghosh - who has written novels like The Circle of Reason, The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide, Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke, Flood of Fire, Gun Island, and non-fiction books such as In an Antique Land. The Imam and the Indian.

Incendiary Circumstances, The Great Derangement and The Nutmeg's Curse tells me that he is in the mood for a plain dosa and crisp medu vadas with piping hot sambar and coconut chutney. We decide to share the vadas, and I get a masala dosa for

myself. We realise we might need more food, so we also call for besan chillas stuffed with paneer. The order is ideal for the weather this afternoon.

With the fabled - and equally notorious - Mumbai monsoon in full swing, the rain lashes outside as Ghosh speaks about how grateful he is to readers who travelled long distances to make it for his event, hear him speak and get their copies signed. Sipping on Darjeeling tea, as we wait for our lunch to arrive, he says: "It is always gratifying to meet people who come and tell me what

my books have meant to them. What can be more rewarding for a writer than knowing that people are still reading a book like The Shadow Lines, which came out 35 years ago?" Taken back, I blurt out: "Oh, wow! I was three vears old then." He is obviously tickled by that disclosure, and says "Chintan, I am surprised you were even born."

Taking a few sips of the masala chai placed in front of me. Itell him that The Shadow Lines was part of a course on Indian writing in English that Itook in my college days. Though it was not a prescribed text, my professor loved Ghosh's writing and made us read the book It instilled in meagreat fondness for Calcutta (now Kolkata), the city Ghosh was born in, and also made me reflect deeply on the human impact of borders between nation-states. Chuffed to hear this, he says, "I think that the best teachers are always those who have their own passions, and communicate their likes and dislikes to their students. They don't just stick to the syllabus."

We polish off the dosas in a few minutes, but Ghosh reserves his most appreciative words for the medu vada. These are so good; easily the best I have had. My day is made," he says. Our server, beaming with pride, promptly brings us some more chutney and sambar. The



chillas do not seem to do much for Ghosh, but I enjoy the taste and texture.

I had glanced at his Instagram account before our meeting, so I know that actor Waheeda Rehman was also present at his book launch the previous evening. I ask him: "If you could cast her in a film based on any of your novels, which character would you want her to play?" His eyes light up at the thought. "I can think of so many, but let's go with Mashima from The Hungry Tide who runs a hospital in the Sundarbans," he says. "Do you think she could play Tha'mma, the school principal from The Shadow Lines?" I ask. "Why not? She'd be

excellent." he says.

I enjoy speaking with Ghosh because he is not obsessed with plugging his latest book or his stature in the literary establishment. He is polite to the staff, enquiring what is possible to do with the dishes rather than directing them to prepare them his way. People who are good cooks can, after all, be finicky that way. That is humbling to watch. He also asks about my life, education and work, and listens with genuine interest.

Because of the recent floods in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Harvana, our conversation shifts to his recent books, Jungle Nama (a graphic verse novel, his first such, in collaboration with Pakistani-American artist Salman Toor) and The Living Mountain, which talk about the environmental damage caused by human actions often rooted in greed. I am curious, among other things, about his thoughts on the connection between ecological disasters and mental health.

He says, "The intense eco-anxiety that young people are experiencing seems to be mainly a Western thing. Since childhood, they have been brought up on the promise of progress, on the idea that everything is always getting better. They have a kind of mandatory optimism built into their outlook."

He, however, was raised being told that life is hard and things will not always turn out well. When he pauses, and asks me to weigh in, I say, "The idea of karma is strongly present in our culture, isn't it? Even people who do not identify as religious seem to believe that actions will lead to consequences." He nods in agreement. "We have lost so much, thanks to colonialism and capitalism, but that idea still remains quite powerful in our psyche," he says

Before we delve further into existential questions, the server arrives with complimentary caramel pudding and pineapple pastry. We are quite full, but do not want to turn the offer down. The leisurely conversation concludes on a sweet note. Ghosh has to catch a flight to Goa, and his cab has arrived. We bid goodbye after I request him to sign my copy of Smoke and Ashes. He writes my name in English, and his own in Bengali The torrential rain shows no sign of taking a pause, so I walk out slowly with my umbrella, my head bowed to the power of nature, which we so often and so foolishly fail to acknowledge

Half of gig force for full-time job, stability: Report

A half of the gig workforce surveyed is interested in full-time employment with stability a major concern among them, according to a report.

Over 50 per cent of gig workers, also known as temporary

> workers, who were a part of the survey, said they would eventually pursue full-time employment according to a report by staffing firm Ciel HR Services, which was released on Friday.

The report

is based on a survey of 1,200 white-collar gig workers from over 400 organisations across sectors in the country. While gig work has gained popularity

24% workers said

that lack of social

security was a

key challenge

as an alternative form of employment, it appeared that a considerable number of them view it as a temporary or transitional phase in their careers, with the intention of eventually securing a permanent, full-time position, the report added. It said 41 per cent men and 40 per cent women respondents shared a strong interest in working on different projects. This suggested that gig workers, regardless of gender, appreciate the opportunity to engage in diverse work experiences, it added. The report found that 32 per cent of respondents find uncertainty of their employment as the biggest challenge.Lack of social security (24 per cent) was another key challenge flagged by those surveyed.

"We are witnessing a paradigm shift in the world of work, with gig employment becoming increasingly popular among employers due to its advantages, including cost-effectiveness, scalability, and access to specialised skills. However, gig workers are focusing on stability now more than ever," Ciel HR Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Aditva Naravan Mishra said. PTI

A suitable choice

In 1951, the newly independ-

ent Indian state conducted

its first general elections.

described by historian Ram

Guha in India After Gandhi

(2007) as "a massive act of

faith with few parallels in

the history of mankind".

India's first Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru's govern-

ment seemed to be in a tear-

UTTARAN DAS GUPTA



ing hurry to conduct elections as soon as the country gained freedom from British colonial rule in 1947. A new Constitution was made effective in January Sukumar Sen was appointed the country's first commissioner and April election in Parliament passed the Representation of sections devoted to matchmaking, domestic People's Act, giving the right to vote to everyone life, and childbearing, it has prompted frequent who was 21 years of age or older and had lived comparisons with *Pride and Prejudice*. But like within the post-Partition geographical limits Jane Austen's 1813 classic, marriage in Seth's of the country for the past 180 days or more.

constantly eroded our attention span; this summer, it took me much longer to re-read it.

The narrative of the novel focuses less on India's first election — though Nehru is mentioned more than 200 times — and more on the selection of a husband for Lata Mehra, the youngest daughter of the formidable Mrs Rupa Mehra. Seth gives her three choices, like Shakespeare gave Portia in The Merchant of Venice: Kabir Durrani, an amateur cricketer and Lata's fellow student at the university; Amit, the brother of Lata's sister-in-law Meenakshi and an England-educated poet; and Haresh Khanna, the pan-chewing shoe designer with great prospects in the Czech shoe-manufacturing company, Praha Shoes, a stand-in for Bata. The novel begins with the wedding of Lata's 1950; in March the same year, civil servant elder sister Savita to Pran Kapoor, a university lecturer and son of Congress leader Mahesh Kapoor Bookended by two weddings and large



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Website: www.modernindia.co.in; email: info@modernindia.co.in NOTICE OF 89[™] ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND **E-VOTING INFORMATION**

NOTICE is hereby given that the 89th Annual General Meeting ("AGM") of the Members of the Company will be held at 04.00 p.m. (IST on Monday, August 28th, 2023 through Video Conferencing ("VC") Other Audio Visual Means ("OAVM") in compliance with the applicab provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 ('Act') & Rules framed thereunde read with General Circular Nos. 10/2022, Dated December 28, 2022 ssued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (collectively referred as 'MCA Circulars') to transact the business as mentioned in the Notice of th AGM, without the physical presence of the Members at a common venue Pursuant to Section 101 of the Act read with Rule 18 of the Companie: (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, Secretarial Standard or General Meetings (SS-2) and in compliance with the MCA Circulars, th Notice of AGM along with the Annual Report 2022-2023 have been sen on August, 3rd, 2023 by email to those members whose email addresses are registered with the Company / Registrar and Share Transfer Agent Depositories. The requirements of sending physical copy of the Notice of the AGM and Annual Report 2022-2023 to the Members have be dispensed with vide MCA Circulars. Members are hereby informed the said AGM Notice is also available on the Company's we

एसजेवीएन लिमिटेड SJVN Limited (भारत सरकार प्र्वं हिमाचल प्रदेश सरकार का एक संयुक्त उपक्रम) (A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of H.P.) CIN No. L40101HP1988GO1008409 NOTICE					
(भारत सरकार एवं हिमाचल प्रदेश सरकार का एक संयुक्त उपक्रम) (A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of H.P.) CIN No. L40101HP1988GO1008409					
NOTICE					
With reference to Request for Selection (RfS) for "Selection of RE Power Developers for Supply of 1500 MW Firm and Dispatchable Power from ISTS- Connected Renewable Energy (RE) Power Projects with Energy Storage System in India under Tariff-based Competitive Bidding" published vide Ref No: SJVN/CC-Delhi/REIA/2023/FDRE-1 dated 20.06.2023 (TSC: SJVN-2023- TN000001), it is hereby informed that "GREENSHOE OPTION" of additional capacity upto 1500 MW has been incorporated in the above referred RIS vide Amendment No-1 dated 04.08.2023 to RTS Documents published in the websites www.sjvn.nic.in, www.eprocure.gov.in and the e-tendering Portal https://www.bharat-electronictender.com. The prospective bidders are requested to remain updated through the above websites for any clarification or notification concerned with this RIS, as no further information will be published in respect of this RIS through any other media. Dy General Manager (C&P)					
6th Floor, Tower1, NBCC Office Complex, East Kidwai Nagar New Delhi-110023 Ph 011-61901906/61901953					
Our Shared Vision: 5000 MW by 2023; 25000 MW by 2030; 50000 MW by 2040					
कार्यपालक अभियंता का कार्यालय ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रमंडल, दुमका (rdsddumka1@gmail.com)					

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ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Unlike Western democracies, where the money.

right to vote was first given to landed men, India introduced universal adult franchise right away. But it also faced serious challenges: Of the 176 million Indians who could vote in 1951, 85 per cent could not read or write. Getting all of them to register, to print ballot paper and assign party symbols, to build election booths - it was an unimaginably mammoth task that Sen and his team accomplished. As India prepares for its 18th general elections next year, it is perhaps the ideal time to return to Vikram Seth's A *Suitable Boy*, the singular novel that captured the hopes, fears, aspirations, the *zeitgeist* of the first one. A handsome new 30th-anniversary edition, published by Speaking Tiger earlier this year, is the perfect excuse — if one is needed — to reread this ambitious book.

First published in 1993, A Suitable Boy is one of the longest novels written in English. In most editions, it runs to more than 1,300 pages. A short review by The Kirkus Review at the time of its first publication described it as "Fat... but fatuous." Seth is not averse to taking jibes at the length of his novel — its epigraph has a quote from Voltaire: "The secret of being a bore is to say everything." But the book was an instant success. As The New York Times reported, Seth received an advance of \$1.1 million from publishers in the US, the UK and India, an unprecedented sum for an Indian writer then as it is now.

The current edition divides the book into three volumes of 500 to 550 pages each, with beautiful golden covers. The box set is a collector's edition that has been produced with great care. The font size is not too small, ensuring little strain on a reader's eves despite the long hours one has to commit to reading the whole novel. I remember setting myself the task of reading one part of the 13 parts — each as long as a novella — on 13 consecutive days during a summer vacation as an undergraduate student of English literature. That was before ubiqui- The writer is a New Delhi-based writer and journalist. He

novel is a metaphor for politics, power, and

In 2020, filmmaker Mira Nair adapted the novel into a six-part series for the BBC. It sparked a controversy, with several Hindu groups describing a kiss between Lata and Kabir as an example of "love jihad", a conspiracy theory that claims that Muslim men seduce Hindu women to force them to convert to Islam. Comparisons with Austen's novel were also very common. British journalist Chitra Ramaswamy wrote in The Guardian: "It does not get more Pride and Prejudice than a girl being chivvied into mar-

The 30th-anniversary riage by her mum." A reviewer edition of Vikram Seth's for the Irish Times described it landmark novel A as "Pride and Prejudice in a Suitable Boy is a timely sari", while Nair herself described it as "The Crown in reminder of India's nascent democratic brown", referencing the highly popular, multipart Netflix series aspirations on the British royal family

Sintable Boy

VIKRAM SETH

under Elizabeth II.

Such comparisons, however, erode the true political potential of Seth's narrative, where large sections are devoted to Nehru's attempt to prevent India from turning into a Hindu state, represented through his constant conflict in the Congress's right wing led by the party's then president PD Tandon.

The question Seth seems to ask is what kind of a state do Indians want? Is it the Nehruvian secular and socialist state, or a feudal, casteist, exclusionary one? And what kind of freedoms can this state guarantee? Does Lata - based on Seth's mother, Justice Leila Seth, the first woman to become the chief justice of an Indian high court — get to choose a life partner beyond considerations of her religion, caste and class? Does Maan Kapoor, Pran's younger brother, get to explore his non-heteronormative sexuality? (Seth has been one of the strongest advocates of queer rights in India.

The novel is an urgent plea for the preservation of the democratic dreams and aspirations of Lata's generations - they remain poignant even now.

tous mobile phones and streaming services teachesjournalismat OPJindal Global University, Sonipat

the website Jentral Services (India) Limited ('CDSL') at www.evotingindia.com.

Pursuant to Section 108 of the Act read with Rule 20 of the Comp (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, as amended from ti time and SS-2, the Company is providing its members the e-voting fa to cast their votes on all the resolutions set out in the AGM Notice by an electronic voting system from a place other than the venue of the (i.e. remote e-voting). The Company will also provide a facility of e-v to members during the AGM, who have not cast their votes by remo voting on such resolutions. The Company has entered into arrangement with CDSL for providing the remote e-voting and e-ve during the AGM.

A person whose name appears on the Register of Members / Bene Owners as on the cut-off date i.e. Monday, 21" August, 2023 shall on entitled to avail the remote e-voting facility or e-voting during the AG The remote e-voting period shall commence on Friday, August 25th at 9.00 a.m. (IST) and ends on Sunday, August, 27th, 2023 at 5.00 (IST), after which voting shall not be allowed. During this period member(s) of the Company may cast their votes electronically on i mentioned in the AGM Notice. The remote e-voting module sha disabled by CDSL for voting thereafter. Once the vote on a resolution cast by the Member, the Member shall not be allowed to char subsequently. Members who have cast their votes through remo voting prior to the AGM may also attend the AGM but shall not be er to cast their votes again on such resolutions. The voting rights o members shall be in proportion to their shares in paid-up share cap the Company as on the cut-off date i.e Monday, August 21st, 2023 detailed instructions relating to remote e-voting and e-voting during AGM are provided in the Notes forming part of the AGM Notice.

Any person, who acquires shares of the Company and becomes me of the Company after dispatch of the notice and holding shares as cut-off date, may obtain the login ID and password by sending a reat service@satellitecorporate.com., instructions for login method voting and joining virtual Meetings are mentioned in the AGM Noti the Company.

Members who have still not registered their e-mail ID are requested to their e-mail ID registered on or before Monday, 21st August, 202 follows:

- a. Shares in Physical Mode: please provide Folio No., Nam shareholder, scanned copy of the share certificate (front and ba PAN (self-attested scanned copy of PAN card), AADHAR (self-atte scanned copy of Aadhar Card) by email to Registrar and Trai Agent at service@satellitecorporate.commail service@satellitecorporate.com/ Company info@modernindia.co.in.
- .Shares in Dematerialized Mode: please get the details updated in demat account for future purpose. In case of queries/grievances regard to e-voting, contact:

Login type Helpdesk details

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Individual Shareholders holding securities in Demat mode with CDSL	Members facing any technical issue in login can contact CDSL helpdesk by sending a request at helpdesk.evoting@cdslindia.com or contactat 022- 23058738 and 22- 23058542-43.					
Individual Shareholders holding securities in Demat mode with NSDL	Members facing any technical issue in login can contact NSDL helpdesk by sending a request at evoting@nsdl.co.in or call at toll					
Registrar and Share Transfer Agent	Shri Harish D, email id; service@satellitecorporate.com. Tel No. 022 28520461/463					
	By Order of the Board of Directors Sd/-					
Date: 04/08/23 Place: Mumbai	Parind Badshah Sr. V.P - C.S & Legal					

FCS 5414

