

the next ▼ Hasina's here ▼ The CAT is out ▼ Chak de ▼ Bengal beckons ▼ Kite runners

the next DAYS
Bangladesh Prime Minister **SHEIKH HASINA** will visit Tripura on Wednesday. This would be the leader's maiden visit to the state

CAT 2011 TEST CENTRE
Anxiety for nearly **TWO LAKH ASPIRANTS** who wrote the Common Admission Test in 2011 ends on Wednesday when the results are declared

Chak de
Indian **WOMEN'S HOCKEY** team plays a four-match test series against Azerbaijan from Sunday at the National Stadium in New Delhi as a run up to Olympic qualifiers

Bengal beckons
A 6-day investors' summit, **BENGAL LEADS 2012**, begins on Monday in Kolkata to showcase the state as an attractive investment destination

Kite runners
The 5-day **INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL** begins in Ahmedabad, by the Sabarmati, on Tuesday. About 74 foreign kite flyers will take part

Conflict & Canvas

The law may have decriminalised homosexuality, but showing it in art is still taboo in the minds of many. The attack on gay painter Balbir Krishan just rubs the uncomfortable truth in

Archana Khare Ghose | TNN

In 1955, when Akbar Padamsee, now 84, mounted his first exhibition in Mumbai, the police charged him with portraying vulgarity and dragged him to court. One of his canvases showed a nude couple with the man's hand on the woman's breast. Padamsee fought and won the case but he had also been permanently impacted. Just a few years ago, he expressed his reservations about exhibiting his nude art and photographs in India's most cosmopolitan city.

More than half-a-century since that incident, Balbir Krishan was attacked at the Lalit Kala Akademi in Delhi last Thursday. Nothing, it seemed, had changed in 50 years. Krishan, an artist from Bijrol village in UP, was assaulted by an unidentified man for portrayal of erotic art — homo-erotic motifs to be precise — which the assailant labeled 'un-Indian.' The fact that Krishan walks on artificial limbs as he lost both his legs in an accident in 1996 did not deter the man who charged at him. One doesn't know if Krishan being gay had anything to do with the attack. If it did, the incident is even more shocking.

The episode makes us appear like a priggish country, which we actually are, that cannot exactly decide its status on sexuality — open, shut, a bit of both or none of the above. It is as if the country's artists have just begun to discover a new idiom of art involving frontal nudity and homosexuality and should be prevented from doing so even if it requires force.

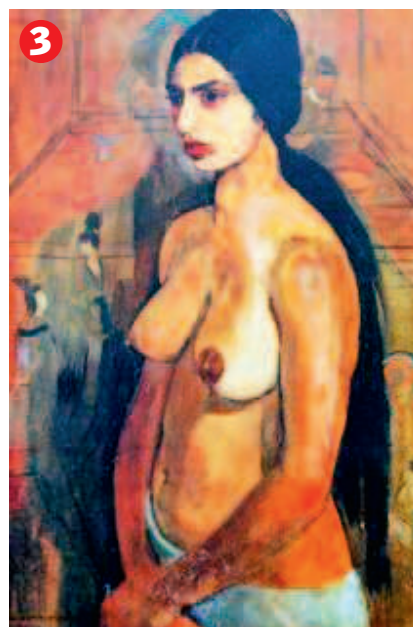
"Erotica has existed in India, not just in fine art but in poetry and dance as well since ancient times. And its depiction has never faced such violent attack as is the case now, which points that these attacks are politically motivated and being done for publicity," says artist and Sahmat activist Ram Rahman. Arun Vadehra, gallerist and a consultant with the Christie's, says artists have become targets as art has assumed greater importance in contemporary India, thereby serving the purpose of the publicity-hungry.

Art critic Kishore Singh says that intolerance to free expression in art is as old as art itself but has become alarming now. "It's a reflection of growing intolerance in general and in politics in particular. Otherwise, what's such a big deal about a nude painting or sculpture? It is a part of our heritage," he says.

The fact that erotica in our arts has survived centuries proves that tolerance levels were higher in an India that came and went before us than what we see now. The erotic sculptures on some temples of Khajuraho are oft-quoted examples on this subject. But even about a hundred years ago, the society was not as prejudiced to nudity in art as it became over the years.

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), for instance, painted a nude self-portrait besides other nudes. Art historian Yashodhara Dalmia, who has written one of the most exhaustive books on Sher-Gil, says, "I don't know of any opposition to Amrita's paintings, even for the canvas *Two Girls*, which shows frontal nudity." Similar was the case with FN Souza (1924-2002) who made some of the most explicit art in modern India — his work was censored a few times but he was never physically attacked. The controversies surrounding MF Husain's art, too, crop up in one's mind at this juncture but he was a case of hurting religious sentiments through erotic art.

Opposition to the erotic art of Baroda's Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003), however, could be considered a pre-cursor to the antagonism for homo-erotic art. Krishan's exhibition, incidentally, is dedicated to Khakhar, India's first gay artist to come out



NO OBJECTIONS: Nude art by Amrita Sher-Gil (1 & 3) didn't face any opposition though the same cannot be said of the erotic art by Bhupen Khakhar (2) and FN Souza (4)

of the closet, though a little late in life, despite exploring it through his art. Khakhar, too, had faced censure at the hands of authorities.

May be the intolerance for erotica in general has coalesced into fanaticism for homo-erotic art. This could be a reflection of our inability to engage with the issue of homosexuality with maturity, even after its decriminalisation by law. Gay rights activist Ashok Row Kavi feels that the reason could be that our society believes homosexuality to be un-Indian. "One should avoid going out of the way to blaspheme, but the self-styled custodians of Indian heritage do not have the sole right to decide what is Indian and what is not," he says.

Besides our puerile understanding of the issue of homosexuality, there is also the difference between male and female nudity that makes those dealing with the former more vulnerable. Says Rahman, "We are still a highly masochistic and voyeuristic society and don't get as disturbed with female nudity as we do with male nudity. Surprisingly, male nudity and homosexuality on canvases seem to be more incendiary than anything that you see in Hindi films."

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Filmdom's firangi chroniclers

They can tell little details about SRK and differentiate between the Tamil and Hindi "chumma". Foreigners blogging about our films are a serious, growing lot

Kim Arora | TNN

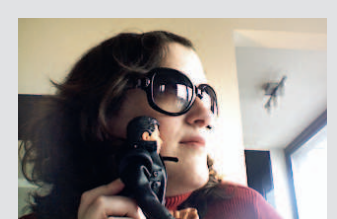
For New Zealand-based Vanessa Barnes, Shah Rukh is love. It was when she watched *Om Shanti Om* two years ago that her romance with Indian cinema began. Today her blog 'Shahrukh is Love' has reviews of over 130 films and other Bollywood posts. From *Kal Ho Naa Ho* to *Paap Ko Jala Kar Raakh Kar Doonga*, she has seen it all. The newest in her bag are Telugu and Tamil films. Of course, for her friends it is as an obscure hobby. But she is undeterred.

The filmy blogosphere today has enough non-Indian writers to fill a Sooraj Barjatya film. There's French Chez Isabel who runs 'Perdue in Bollywood'. A US blogger's 'Dances on the Footpath' features Indian and Pakistani films, mostly from the black and white and Eastman color era. We also have an 'Eastern European movie addict' from Canada who has been blogging about Indian films since 2010 in 'Dolce and Namak'.

Their choice of films may leave you startled, though. No spunky, GAP-wearing, Riverdale-like characters. Instead, a toposh Govinda in a metal skirt from the '80s does it. And they love the tears, the romance and the comedy. "I love the sense of 'go big or go home,' not just in a splashy song but in the emotions, the expressions, the attempt to offer up many kinds of entertainment in one package. There's a big-heartedness in these films that I appreciate," says Beth Watkins, whose 'Beth Loves Bollywood' has over 600 subscribed readers.

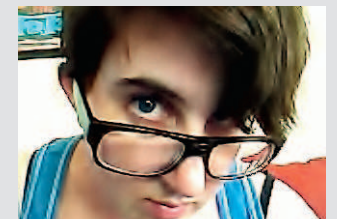
The blogs largely follow a familiar format. Film screenshots with subtitles and YouTube links to the songs accompany posts. All the details of the story are served with side comments. Watkins even writes on Hindi cinema for the *Wall Street Journal*. Nicki, of 'Hmong chick in love with Indian cinema' realises how Bollywood has changed from the days of Mithun blockbuster *Disco Dancer* to *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*. Nicki calls Telugu superstar Allu Arjun her "biggest crush e-v-e-r". Unlike the minispace of an average Indian film buff, her blog features Hindi, Tamil and Telugu cinema among others. "My parents watched Bollywood films and I grew up watching them. The first Bollywood film I remember watching was *Seeta Aur Geeta*. After learning that some of my favourite Hindi films were Tamil remakes, I started to watch the originals," writes Nicki.

Though the blog posts show enough enthusiasm to match Gabbar's as he watched Basanti dance on broken bottles, it's no holds barred during what can be called 'blog fests'. That's when bloggers come together to write on a subject — 'Deol Dhamaka' has posts on the Garam Dharam clan and Sriveepalooza has posts on favourite *nagin*. "The best thing about the 'blog fests' is that you always learn something fantastic,



I love the sense of 'go big or go home,' not just in a splashy and sparkly song but in the emotions, the expressions, the attempt to offer up many kinds of entertainment in one package

Beth Watkins | USA



Any DVDs and CDs I have bought in New Zealand have been through little dairies run by Indian people who cater to a niche market. In the town where I live, Bollywood is not a popular thing at all

Vanessa Barnes | NEW ZEALAND

unexpected and new," says Vanessa Barnes, who has participated in Govinda Week and Nag Film Festsstival.

Questioning looks often come their way, and Barnes says that a number of times she is "the only white face in the audience" in theatres close to her town. But once the lights are off and the film is on, it is an experience like no other. "When I went to watch the Mahesh Babu film *Dookudu*, I was amazed to see men throwing pieces of paper like confetti at the hero's entrance," says Watkins, who has to drive two hours to reach a theatre screening Indian films.

It is only natural for these film buffs to pick up Hindi, Tamil or Telugu — enough to catch erroneous subtitles. Learning the difference between the Tamil and Hindi "*chumma*", writes Barnes over email, was "enlightening". A blog called 'Pagal Subtitle' collects submissions from readers to make a collection of funny subtitles. *Bollymeaning.com* will break down your favourite Hindi song into English. It seems we'll soon have people across the world who can "talk Hindi, walk Tamil, laugh Telugu and run Marathi". No "phunny" matter, this.

'The assault made me realise my vulnerability'

Balbir Krishan, still shaken after the attack on him earlier this week at the Lalit Kala Akademi, tells *Sunday Times* that though his family accepted his homosexuality, he tried to commit suicide when he first realised his "gayness" was irreversible

Did you anticipate any attack on your art or yourself given the content of your work?
I had been getting threats by nameless individuals for a few days but I had not expected a physical assault. A few visitors had accused me of spreading 'dirt' in society. That was the last day of my show at the Lalit Kala Akademi, and now it will be on view at the Triveni Kala Sangam till January 15. I've asked for police protection and filed an FIR as well against the attackers along with video evidence.
Though you've been painting male nudes for a long time, this is your first show that also explores the theme of homosexuality. How did it come about?

I belong to Bijrol village in Baghpat district of western UP, which is 60 kms from Delhi. Ever since I became sexually aware, I have been conscious of my homosexuality. While learning drawing in my BA, I was



Rajesh Mehta

introduced to a book on human anatomy and got drawn to male nudes. But I still could not come to terms with my sexual preference and in Agra, where I was pursuing MA, I tried to commit suicide. A doctor then made me understand that it was normal to be gay. Only when I completely came to terms with my status was I able to do this show. Earlier, I had only attempted male nudes in exhibitions. I'm fortunate to have my family's support in what I do and who I am.

Has the physical assault on you, given your status of being a double amputee, shaken you in any permanent way?
Yes, it has to the extent that it has made me realize my vulnerability. I've been thinking that if there were to be another attack, I wouldn't even be able to get up and run. But thankfully, my partner — we've both legally named ourselves Balbir Krishan — and my friends and senior artists have stood by me and I hope to continue doing the work I'm doing.

—Archana Khare Ghose

Where has the family doctor gone?

The Medical Council of India will soon introduce a new course — MD in family medicine. But the question is, will it have many takers?

Atul Sethi | TNN

Remember the familiar, comforting figure in the neighbourhood clinic? You went to him for advice on that nagging cough, persisting cold or sudden fever. He knew your allergies, the year you had typhoid or jaundice and which medicines suited you the most. His treatment was based not just on a battery of diagnostic tests, but on an intuitive knowledge of what worked for you and your family. More often than not, the cure was simple — medication along with reassurance. And you felt better.

But this was in an earlier, simpler time when doctors were not super specialists with a penchant for over-prescribing. In today's scenario — where there are far greater ailments and the family doctor with a holistic view is required more than ever, his breed is vanishing rapidly. Why? Those in the medical fraternity say the reasons are many. "The root cause is the over-emphasis on specialists in our country," says Dr VK

Narang of the Indian Medical Association (IMA). "Students in medical schools think that unless they specialize in a good area after finishing MBBS, they won't get high-paying jobs."

Each year, only about 20 per cent of the 34,000-odd MBBS graduates qualify for the highly competitive post-graduate courses leading to specialisation. Among the rest, very few are inclined to take up general practice. Even though the Medical Council of India has recently notified introduction of a new three-year postgraduate course — MD in family medicine — the question is, will it have many takers? A survey in a leading medical school last year found that only 2 out of 100 students were considering becoming general practitioners. This is in stark contrast to countries like the UK, where most students aspire to become a GP.

Some blame it on the way the Indian medical system is structured. "Ideally, a patient should first go to a GP, like it happens in the UK. Most problems can be tackled at his level," says Dr Sushil Sharma, a senior



Neelabh

orthopaedic surgeon based in New Delhi. "But in India, since there is no proper referral system in place, even people with minor ailments go directly to a super specialist. For instance, I have people with mild back pain coming to see me, even though they should be coming to me only if they required surgery."

Studies have revealed that an effective primary care system — with the family physician as its backbone — can bring down health costs drastically. Last year in the US, medicine costs were reduced by 40%

and hospitalization costs up to 33% by primary care physicians. Clearly, the family physician, then, is a vital link in the health-care chain. And if he had been vanishing, why wasn't anything done about it? Narang says that the IMA has been pursuing the issue with the ministry of health for a long time. "We have been asking the ministry to create a chair for family medicine in medical colleges around the country. As our own initiative, we have started the IMA College of General Practitioners, that offers a diploma in family medicine in association

with Colombo University."

But the real challenge is in convincing students to take to family medicine as a lucrative career choice and at the same time provide patients access to trustworthy family physicians. Perhaps recognizing the huge opportunity that exists in this sector, a team of Bangalore-based doctors — who have worked with the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK — have started the Nationwide Primary Healthcare Services that is corporatizing the family physician concept. "The company says that it is putting in place a chain of 'personal physician' centres throughout the country, manned by GPs trained in family medicine.

"The key thing for a family doctor is 24 x 7 access," says Dr Shantanu Chattopadhyay, co-founder of Nationwide. "As part of our health plans, each patient is assigned a personal physician who can be consulted anytime. Also, we prepare a detailed medical history record of our patients which is available online. The personal physician, based on these records, advises the patient comprehensively and also periodically reminds them of any tests or medical check-ups that they may be due for."

For doctors, the incentive is specialised training on the lines of NHS, in association with the Royal College of General Practitioners, UK. Plus stock options as the con-

MISSING IN FILMS TOO

Like real life, the family doc has disappeared from reel too. In old Hindi films, especially of the '60s and '70s, the good doctor made an occasional appearance, often on a home visit, to administer a crucial injection to the family patriarch or to attend to the hero's ailing mother. Besides his black bag (that was always carried by our leading man), he also had, in his arsenal, a few stock lines that he mouthed dutifully: i) the optimistic "*Injection de diya hai, thori der mein hosh aa jaayega*", ii) the dreaded "*Ab sab oopar wale ke haath mein hai!*", iii) or the melodramatic "*Inko dawa ki nahin, dua ki zaroorat hai!*" As he was escorted out, the hero hesitatingly asked him that vital question: "Doctor sahab, aapki fees?" To this, the affable reply was: "*Iski kya zaroorat hai?*" No wonder, we miss you, Doctor sahab.

cept catches on. "Personal physician centres are the way forward now as the standalone GP is not economically viable anymore," says Chattopadhyay. "Patients expect their doctors to be accessible round the clock and also be up-to-date with their knowledge — which is possible only in a group setting. This is the future face of the family physician in the country."

Will this prescription revive the family doctor?

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