



Save the Snow Leopard: A Call for Conservation

celebrated on October 23, International Snow Leopard Day shines a spotlight on one of the world's most elusive and endangered big cats. This day aims to raise awareness about the threats snow leopards face, including habitat loss, poaching, and climate change, while promoting conservation efforts to protect these majestic creatures. Wildlife enthusiasts, researchers, and communities come together to advocate for sustainable practices, preserve mountain ecosystems, and support anti-poaching initiatives. By celebrating International Snow Leopard Day, people across the globe are reminded of the importance of safeguarding biodiversity and ensuring that future generations can marvel at these silent, powerful predators in their natural habitats.

#GEMSTONES

Emerald, Ruby, Diamonds And Jade

Precious Gemstones and Their Unique Characteristics: Emerald, Ruby, Pink Diamond, Jade, and Blue Diamond



Precious gemstones have fascinated humanity for centuries, prized for their beauty, rarity, and symbolic significance. Among the most admired are Emerald, Ruby, Pink Diamond, Jade, and Blue Diamond, each with unique characteristics that distinguish them in the world of luxury and jewellery.

Emerald is celebrated for its lush green colour, ranging from deep forest green to lighter yellowish-green hues. Known as the stone of growth and renewal, emeralds often contain natural inclusions called 'jardin,' which add character and authenticity. While they are softer than rubies or diamonds, their vibrant colour and historical prestige make them highly sought after for rings, necklaces, and high-end jewellery.

Ruby stands out for its vivid red hue, symbolizing passion, vitality, and power. The most prized rubies, known as 'pigeon's blood,' exhibit a deep red with a subtle blue undertone. Rubies are extremely durable, second only to diamonds in hardness, making them suitable for everyday wear. Their rarity and historical significance in royal jewellery contribute to their enduring appeal and value.

Pink Diamonds are among the rarest and most luxurious gemstones. Their delicate pink shades are caused by distortions in the diamond's crystal lattice, making each stone unique. Extremely scarce, pink diamonds command astronomical prices at auctions and in private collections, prized for their beauty, rarity, and exclusivity.

Jade, one of the oldest gemstones in human history, is treasured particularly in East Asian cultures. It comes primarily in nephrite and jadeite varieties, with jadeite being rarer and more valuable. Known for its soothing green tones, jade symbolizes purity, wisdom, and protection. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, jade has been used historically in carvings, ornaments, and ceremonial objects, making it culturally and spiritually significant in addition to its value as a gemstone.

Blue Diamonds are among the rarest and most coveted gemstones in the world. Their deep blue color results from trace amounts of boron within the crystal lattice. Blue diamonds are extremely hard, brilliant, and rare, with famous examples like the Hope Diamond achieving record-breaking auction prices. Their combination of scarcity, historical significance, and striking appearance makes them the most expensive among this group.

In terms of market value, Blue Diamonds generally top the list, followed closely by Pink Diamonds. Jade, while highly prized culturally and for its beauty, usually does not reach the astronomical prices of rare colored diamonds but remains invaluable for its historical and spiritual significance.

Overall, Emerald, Ruby, Pink Diamond, Jade, and Blue Diamond each offer a unique combination of colour, rarity, symbolism, and beauty. Collectors and jewellery enthusiasts treasure them not only as ornaments but as enduring symbols of luxury, heritage, and natural wonder.

South Asian Dance has remained hidden and ignored, until now



A close look by Sheema Kermani into Pakistan's male Kathak dancers and their struggle with social bias and the disapproval of both the clergy and the state. Elsewhere, there is Kuchipudi dancer Yashoda Thakore's journey of discovery where she stumbles on the bloodlines that link her to Amany, the Devadasi who swept Europe like a storm in 1838 at age 17 and was an ancestor of her guru. In one essay, Lubna Marium explains why a folk form in rural Bangladesh is vilified as 'wicked,' and in another, Malaysian Odissi dancer Ramli Ibrahim looks back at how the form found a home in his country over the last four decades.

● Bulbul Joshi

Even the fading sepia tint of the image, a dancer airborne in a leap, like a flying *apsara*, with improbably long arms and legs stretched in elegant lines and angles. It is a photo that goes back to a time when Sri Lanka was still Ceylon and Vajira Chitrasena was beginning to captivate audiences across the globe.

Vajira made a historic contribution to Kandyan dance, once a little-known ritual form of Sri Lanka's central highlands that became a performance art in the 1950s. It was her pioneering effort in building the pedagogy and choreographies of Kandyan dance that crystallised the work begun by her partner, Chitrasena.



#DANCE



Urmimala Sarkar Munsi, a scholar of theatre and performance studies, believes that SADI sets right the skew in writings on South Asian dance, which have tilted disproportionately to West-based scholarship. "There is a certain neo-colonialism in how foreign journals regulate the writings of non-English speaking scholars," she said. So, vernacular scholarship, no matter how good, is less seen.

Dance Intersections, but it is also Punjabi for ours, a word that befits

the journal. Because what SADI does is amplify the research of scholars and dancers from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan working in their own regions.

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ly to find a platform that will publish and publicise your work on dance. We, at SADI, believe in the need for inclusion of these voices who are less known, do not have that edge, but who have unbelievably rich, rare material. SADI is an important assertion of their right to be heard."

But this pushback, the editorial team maintains, is not just against the monopoly of West-based scholarship, it is also aimed against the hierarchies and privileges entrenched within South Asian cultures and societies.

In its pages, for instance, you will find a close look by Sheema Kermani into Pakistan's male Kathak dancers and their struggle with social bias and the disapproval of both the clergy and the state. Elsewhere, there is Kuchipudi dancer Yashoda Thakore's journey of discovery, where she stumbles on the bloodlines that link her to Amany, the

Erasing divides

Exactly what is South Asian dance? Theoretically, it includes all dance forms, classical, folk, popular and ritual, from the South Asian nations of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. But so high is the perch occupied by Indian classical dances in the hierarchy, especially by Odissi, Kathak and Bharatanatyam, that they overshadow all else, says Munsi.

Indian classical dances acquired the South Asian tag only in the 1980s, argues dance scholar Avanthi Meduri in her essay *Labels, Histories, Politics: Indian/South Asian Dance on the Global Stage*. The shift happened first in the United Kingdom, where state and institutional support for the Indian forms necessitated a more global profile, she says. There is also the undeniable fact that the UK, and the world at large, is now a free space for the creative intermingling of the South Asian diaspora and its arts. You could, for instance, be a Sri Lankan trained in Bharatanatyam, which informs your contemporary work, or a Pakistani or Bangladeshi dancer trained in Kathak and teaching an Indian student.

One of the best illustrations of these linkages is in the work of young Kathak dancer Sushant Gaurav, who specialises in the rarely seen Lahore Lucknow ghazana. In an interview tracking the style in SADI, he speaks of his London-based guru, Faiz Ullah Rehman, who was tutored by the Lahore-based Ghulam Hussain Kathak, himself a student of the legendary Achhan Maharaj. Their ultra slow (*ati vilambi*) and very sensual Kathak with flowing curves and bends has now traversed several cities, nations and continents to come into its own.

Another remarkably nuanced essay comes from Odissi dancer and scholar Aadya Kaktikar, who argues that the principles of traditional dance forms can coexist with modern notions of egalitarianism. "Hard boundaries like these serve

Devadasi who swept Europe like a storm in 1838 at age 17 and was an ancestor of her guru. In one essay, Lubna Marium explains why a folk form in rural Bangladesh is vilified as 'wicked,' and in another, Malaysian Odissi dancer Ramli Ibrahim looks back at how the form found a home in his country over the last four decades. Although SADI is an academic journal, it is hosted on the website of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and its essays are blind and peer reviewed, it allows space for varied kinds and styles of writings. There are straight historiographies, interviews, photo and video essays, sharp political analyses and reflective personal essays. And the essayists include dance practitioners, academics as well as those who straddle both worlds. What this diverse harvest of ideas also yields along the way, Sethi says, are unexpected archives and small histories.

neither the art nor the artist, either that all that is classical is rubbish or that all that is not sacred should be thrown out," she said. "Odissi is the form my body knows and gives it joy, so, I don't want to step out of its grammar. But I also have a cognitive understanding of the history and politics of dance. I have to negotiate my own way past any kind of gatekeeping by tradition or modern thinking."

Kaktikar's arguments hark back to the creative struggles her guru faced in the 1950s, when Odissi was evolving. The old was dead and the new was still invisible. "My guru's work is considered canonical in Odissi, but as a young man, he had to negotiate with the unequal modernity of his time, new audiences and forms of patronage," she said.

SADI and its attempts at 'decolonising dance writing' in a way is an ideal platform for scholars like Kaktikar, especially since it invites both worldviews, of performers and scholars. "Academic writing on Indian dance is mostly cornered by scholars at American and European universities," she pointed out. "But living, working and writing here needs a different kind of tenor. The problem here is that we have a sharp divide between performance and scholarship that you don't see anywhere else. The written word ignores the oral tradition and the reverse too. Dancers have set the discourse around dance in India but they never talk of its troubled history; and scholars have to initiate any and all critical discourse."

SADI, in that sense, is a fledgling attempt at erasing these divides. Interestingly, a part of the effort is mentorship of writers who may not have the necessary academic tools or language. "We are not looking at papers with a regulatory mechanism or that 'I can destroy you' approval," said Munsi. "If you need help, we are here to offer it."

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#TRADITIONS

Why Do We Do This At All?

Why Do We Blow Out Candles, Throw Bouquets, and Shake Hands? The Hidden Histories Behind Everyday Traditions

From blowing out birthday candles to tossing bouquets at weddings, or sealing deals with a handshake, human culture is full of rituals so embedded in daily life that we rarely stop to ask, why do we do this at all? These actions feel natural now, but many have ancient, symbolic, or even superstitious origins. Here's a closer look at the surprising roots and evolving meanings behind some of the most common traditions.



Blowing Out Birthday Candles: A Whisper to the Gods

Today, it's a lighthearted moment, you close your eyes, make a wish, and blow out the candles on your birthday cake. But this practice is far older and more symbolic than most realize.

Historians trace the origins of birthday candles back to ancient Greece, where worshippers would offer round cakes to Artemis, the goddess of the moon. These cakes were often adorned with lit candles to mimic the glow of the moon, symbolizing a connection between humans and the divine. The rising smoke was believed to carry prayers and

wishes to the gods above, a custom not unlike making a silent wish today.

Later, in medieval Germany, a similar tradition called *Kinderfest* involved placing a candle on a cake to represent the 'light of life.' Over time, the number of candles grew to match the celebrant's age, and the practice became more widespread. The idea of making a wish while blowing them out may have evolved from the belief that blowing out all candles in one breath ensured that the wish would come true, a test of luck, willpower, and breath control!



The Bride Throwing Her Bouquet: Escaping the Crowd

At weddings today, the bouquet toss is a fun, photo-worthy moment, but its origins are rooted in chaos, superstition, and self-preservation.

In medieval Europe, being a bride was considered so lucky that guests would literally try to tear off pieces of the bride's dress, flowers, or veil to take home as tokens of good fortune. This often resulted in crowds swarming the bride, tugging at her gown in a frenzy. To escape this, brides began throwing a decoy, their bouquet, to distract the crowd while they made a getaway.

Over time, the custom transformed. Catching the bouquet became a symbol of love in love, with the idea



that whoever caught it would be the next to marry. While modern weddings are (thankfully) less chaotic, the bouquet toss continues to carry the energy of excitement, competition, and romantic superstition.

The Handshake: From Weapon Check to Welcome

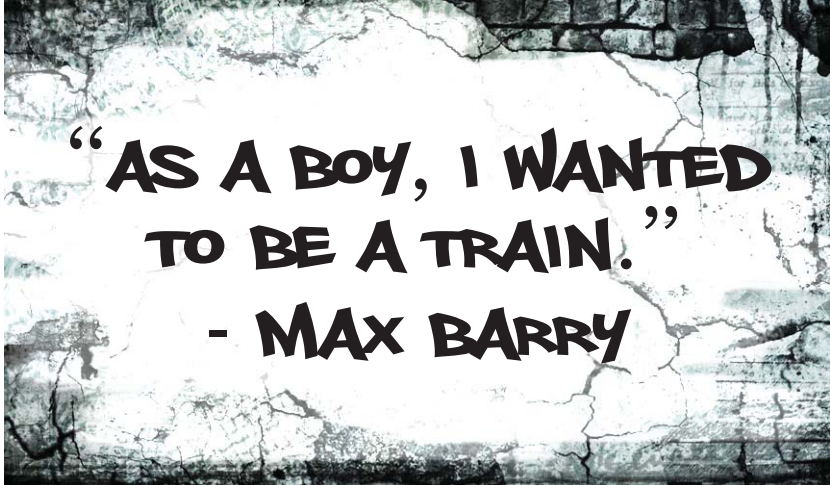
Arguably, one of the most universal social gestures, the handshake seems simple, two people clasp hands as a greeting, farewell, or agreement. But its origins lie in suspicion, not sincerity.

The handshake dates back to ancient times, when strangers would extend their right hand, the hand most people use to wield weapons, to prove they were unarmed. It was a gesture of peace, signalling trust and the absence of hostility. In some cultures, the shaking motion was meant to dislodge any hidden daggers or blades.

As societies evolved, so did the handshake. The Romans added their own variation: clapping forearms rather than palms, further ensuring no weapons were concealed in sleeves. Eventually, the handshake took on more symbolic roles, sealing agreements, confirming contracts, or simply conveying mutual respect.

Today, while it remains a common form of greeting, especially in the West, the handshake's meaning has evolved yet again, especially during times of health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced people to reconsider physical contact altogether. Still, its core idea, of openness and goodwill, persists.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman