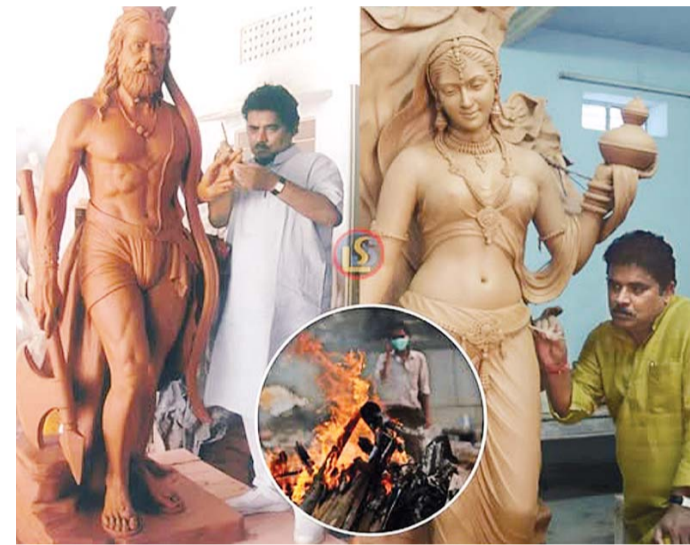


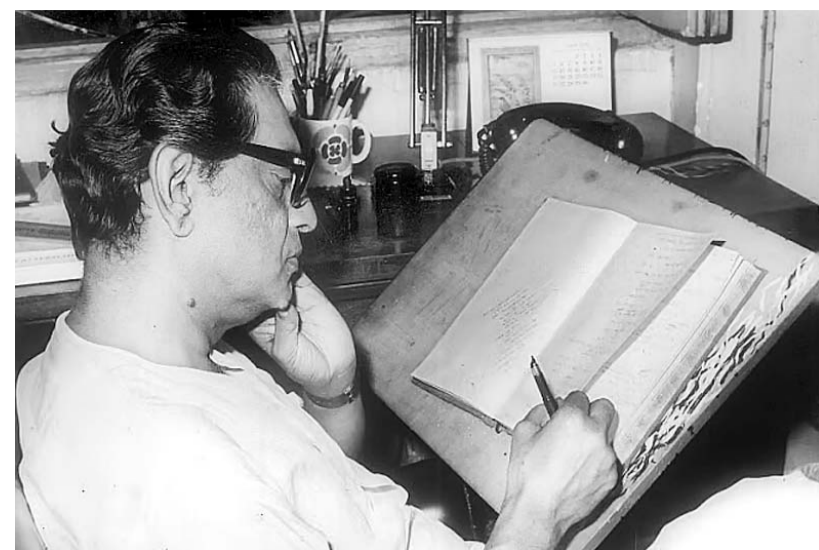
#SCULPTOR

"Clay Maestro of Rajasthan"

One of his most celebrated creations is the beautiful statue "Arjun Ki Bani Thani," a delicate clay sculpture portraying a woman with a veiled face



Arjun Prajapati, a renowned sculptor from Rajasthan, earned widespread recognition for his extraordinary mastery of terracotta and stone sculptures, which led many to call him the "Clay Maestro of Rajasthan." Born in 1957, Prajapati developed a deep interest in art from a young age. Even though his path did not follow the conventional academic route, his passion for sculpture guided him towards gurus and refining his skills. Through dedication and years of practice, he became one of the most respected figures in modern Rajasthani sculpture. One of his most celebrated creations is the beautiful statue "Arjun Ki Bani Thani," a delicate clay sculpture portraying a woman with a veiled face. The piece is admired for its intricate craftsmanship,



Satyajit Ray writing with a fountain ink.



Kaushik Maitra with new range of Sulekha inks.

Bubul Joshi

In the story of India's freedom movement, people often remember marches, speeches, prisons, and revolutionaries. Far less remembered are the quieter acts of resistance, the making of paper, cloth, salt, and even ink. Yet, one of the most fascinating industrial stories of the nationalist era began with something as ordinary as a bottle of writing ink. According to popular accounts from Bengal's nationalist circles, Mahatma Gandhi was deeply uncomfortable with India's dependence on imported British products, including writing ink such as Stephens. During the freedom movement, when every symbol of self-reliance mattered, the idea that Indian writers, lawyers, students, and revolutionaries still relied on foreign ink felt contradictory to the spirit of *swadeshi*.

Fountain pens may be a rare sight today but there was a time, not too long ago, when a Bengali gentleman of letters would be incomplete without the quintessential fountain pen in his coat or shirt pocket. And all of the pens had India's first hometown ink, Sulekha, flowing through them. Fountain pens were found everywhere, with teenagers

returning from school with ink-stained hands and ink-blotched shirts, in the vanity bags of ladies, in government offices, hospitals, business establishments, you name it! And the ink in all of those fountain pens was, you guessed it, all Sulekha. Post globalization, thousands of ink companies have flooded the Indian market but to date, none has left a more indelible mark than Sulekha. Sulekha, an almost century-old ink company, has a rich history with its roots in Bangladesh. It is a tale of an old successful ink company that has been used by legendary revolutionaries, dignified poet laureates, and the common folks of India and Bangladesh. Sometime between 1930 and 1934, when the Swadeshi Movement was at its peak, Indians were responding to the calls of Mahatma Gandhi to boycott foreign goods. But at one crucial juncture, Gandhi found himself in troubled waters. During that time, there was no concept of local inks.

Practical problem. British-made inks were generally formulated for machine-produced European paper, which was smoother, chemically treated, and more durable. Indian handmade and locally produced paper of the time was very different, often fibrous, absorbent, and less chemically processed. The acidic nature of many imported inks caused the paper to deteriorate rapidly over time. Letters faded. Documents became brittle. Ink literally ate into the page. The issue reached the attention of Satish Chandra Dasgupta, a brilliant Bengali chemist associated with the nationalist movement and known for his scientific work and commitment to indigenous industry. Dasgupta believed chemistry could serve the freedom struggle just as much as politics could. Dasgupta was an activist in the revolutionary liberation movement and also had ties to Bengal Chemicals. He had once prepared his own ink named "Krishna Dhara." He handed over its formula to two brothers from Rajshahi (a city in present-day Bangladesh), Nanigopal and Sankaracharya Maitra and encouraged them to open an ink factory that would outperform any foreign ink brand. The two brothers also managed to secure a heavy



Sulekha Ink.

The Ink of Independence

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To pen down any document, one needed to use foreign ink. Gandhi thought to himself that it would be rather ironic if he had to write a manifesto banning foreign goods using foreign ink. It was then that he decided that India ought to have its own, locally-manufactured ink.



The new bottles of Sulekha Ink.

#SULEKHA

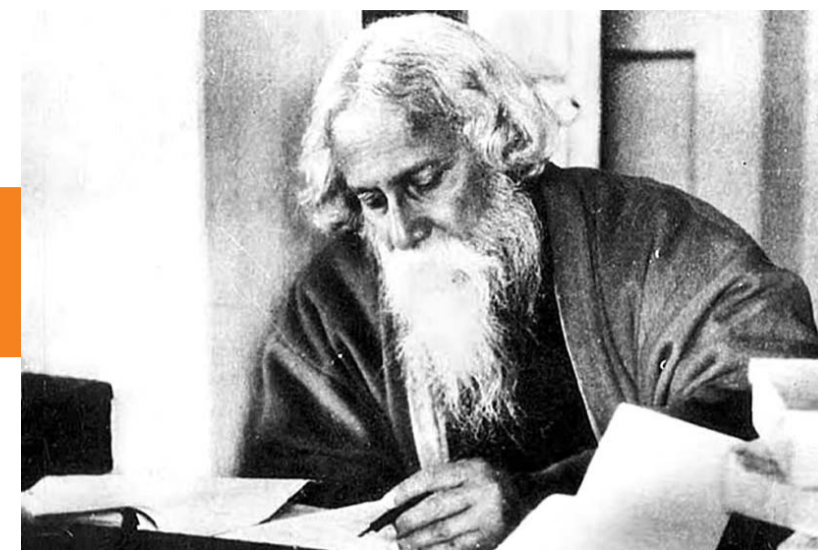


A Sulekha Ink poster.

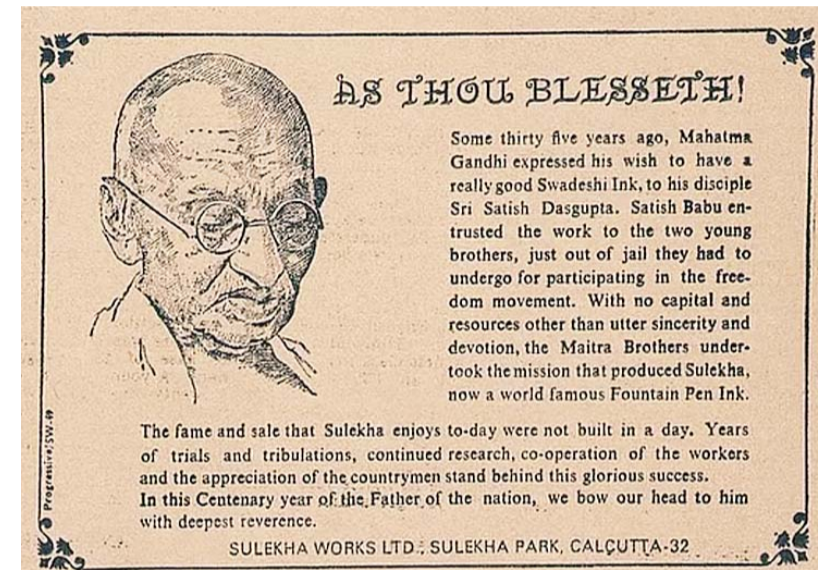
investment from their father. Ambikacharan Maitra, who poured his lifelong savings into the Swadeshi dream. The company began humbly: a tiny room, a single stove, improvised equipment, and immense determination. It was not born in a grand factory but in the atmosphere of anti-colonial self-reliance that defined Bengal during the nationalist era.

Sulekha Ink's slogan was "Swadeshi industry is the backbone of a nation, foreign factories are adverse to independent India." The ink company became synonymous with India's struggle for independence. In a short span of time, Sulekha Ink gained mass popularity. The two brothers quickly realized that there was a huge demand for swadeshi ink in Calcutta, and so, in 1936, Sulekha Ink opened a showroom at the Mahatma Gandhi Road in Kolkata. In 1938, a new Sulekha Ink factory was opened in the Bowbazar region, which moved subsequently to Kasba and Jadavpur in the coming years, in relation to demographics and demand. In 1946, Sulekha became a private limited company, and by the end of 1948, its annual turnover exceeded one lakh rupees, which was an incredible amount of money back in the day.

The name Sulekha is a Bengali word which literally translates to 'good writing.' Although there is no official document supporting this claim, the Maitra family says that the person behind the naming of the ink company was none other than the great Rabindranath Tagore. There are some who claim that it was Gandhi who came up with the name. As India's freedom movement intensified, indigenous ink gained symbolic importance. Students, activists, journalists, lawyers, and underground revolutionaries used locally produced writing materials to create pamphlets, manifestos, letters, and banned political literature. Ink became part of resistance. One of the enduring claims sur-



Rabindranath Tagore writing with a fountain pen ink.



A newspaper clipping about Mahatma Gandhi's request to start Sulekha Ink.

ration that Indians could design for Indian realities.

And in countless fading archives, notebooks, prison letters, and revolutionary pamphlets, traces of that declaration may still survive. Quickly, Sulekha became a household name. Several dignitaries have fashioned fountain pens while endorsing Sulekha. Legends such as Gandhi, former prime minister Morarji Desai, former West Bengal chief minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, and legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray wrote with pens with Sulekha's ink. The ink bottles of Sulekha Ink even made cameos in Satyajit Ray's renowned stories about the exploits of the great Bengali sleuth, Feluda. Ask any Bengali about Sulekha, and they will recall it with fond nostalgia. Sulekha Ink reached its zenith during the 1980s to the '90s, selling almost a million bottles per month.

It came as harsh news when Sulekha shut down in 1989. However, as the whole world was wrestling with the fatal pandemic, amidst the lockdown in 2020, something miraculous happened. Some Sulekha loyalists opened a Facebook group named Sulekha Ink Lovers and started pushing the authorities. The group shared their nostalgic memories with the ink and received an overwhelming response from Greece, Australia, the UK, the USA, Bangladesh,



A Double Decker Bus in Kolkata with a Sulekha Ink advertisement.

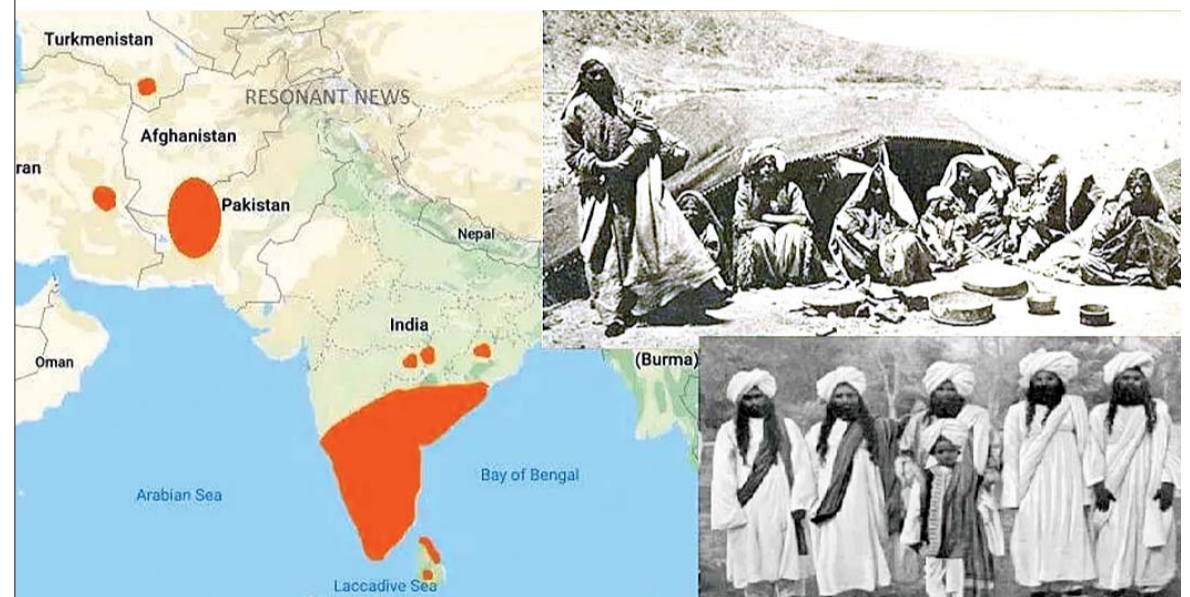
Nepal, and undoubtedly, India. Orders began to pour in and so much so that the stakeholders of Sulekha Ink realized the potential of the market, and decided to bring it back in 2020, that too in Sulekha's classic Swadeshi-themed packages. The news spread like wildfire and has delighted fountain pen aficionados all across the globe. Sulekha has once again returned to its birthplace, Rajshahi. Currently, Sulekha Ink is imported to Bangladesh by only one person, Mizanur Rahman Mizan. On the ground floor of Gausul Azam Super Market in Dhaka's Nilkhet area, Mizan has a shop named "Dolphin International" where the ink is available for purchase. He also takes orders through his Facebook page "Pen Bazar BD" and offers a home delivery service. History has a way of repeating itself, and somehow, the past has a way of catching up to you in all sorts of new ways. If one knew the story of Sulekha, they would agree with me. We are seeing a considerable rise in the popularity of fountain pens more than it was even five years ago. No one knows what the future holds in store. Maybe, Sulekha Ink will once again be restored to its glory days, and in the streets, you will find people sporting a de rigueur fountain pen in their shirt pockets.

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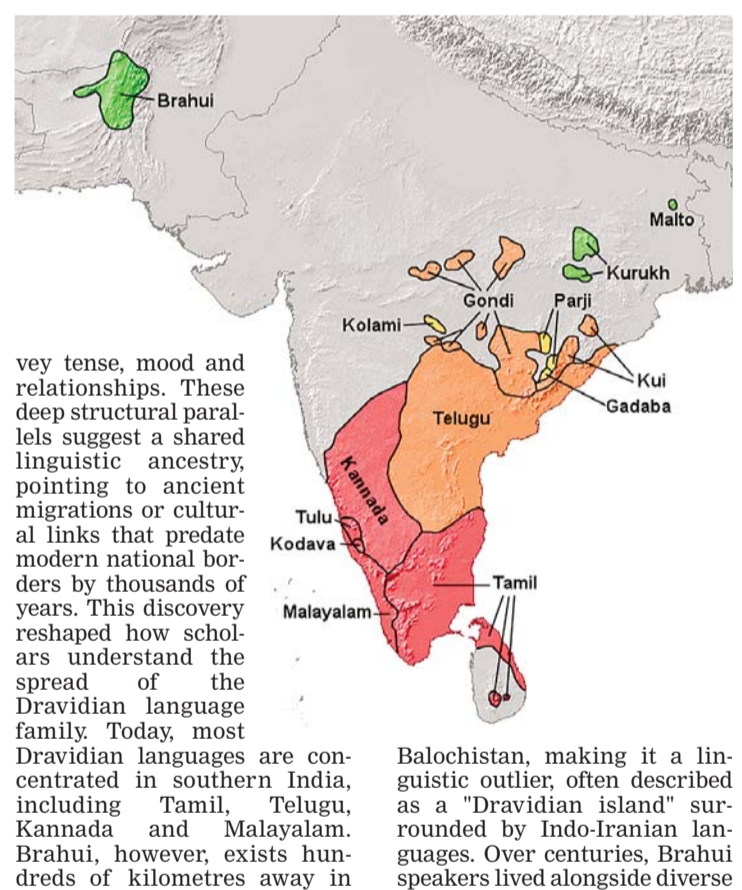
#BRAHUI

The Dravidian Echo of Tamil in Pakistan's Balochistan

Brahui exists in Balochistan, making it a linguistic outlier, often described as a "Dravidian island" surrounded by Indo-Iranian languages

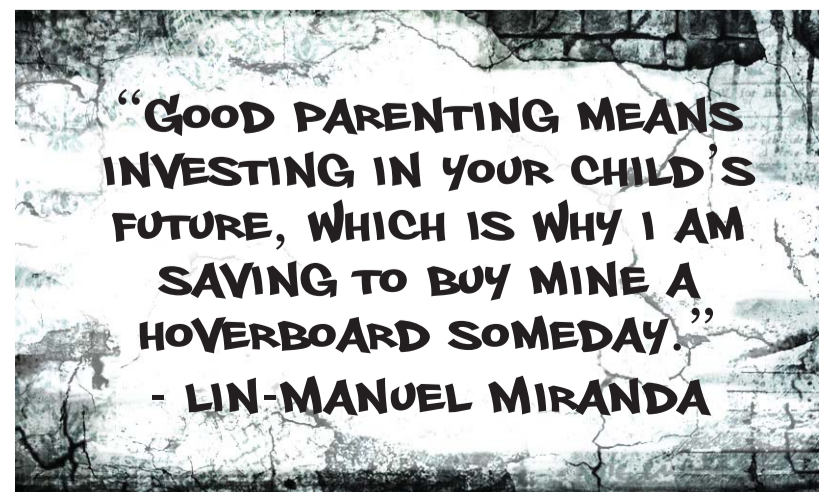


Languages often reveal unexpected stories of migration and connection, and one of the most fascinating lies in Pakistan's Balochistan region. Here, communities speak Brahui, a language that has intrigued linguists for decades because of its deep structural relationship with Tamil and the Dravidian language family of South India. At first listen, Brahui does not sound like Tamil. Its vocabulary carries strong influences from neighboring languages such as Balochi, Persian and Sindhi, reflecting centuries of cultural exchange in the region. Yet, when linguists began to analyse the language more closely, they discovered something remarkable: beneath the borrowed words lies a grammatical framework strikingly similar to Tamil and other Dravidian languages. The connection goes far beyond shared vocabulary. Brahui and Tamil share complex grammatical structures, including similar sentence patterns, verb formations and ways of adding suffixes to con-



vey tense, mood and relationships. These deep structural parallels suggest a shared linguistic ancestry pointing to ancient migrations or cultural links that predate modern national borders by thousands of years. This discovery reshaped how scholars understand the spread of the Dravidian language family. Today, most Dravidian languages are concentrated in southern India, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Brahui, however, exists hundreds of kilometres away in Balochistan, making it a linguistic outlier, often described as a "Dravidian island" surrounded by Indo-Iranian languages. Over centuries, Brahui speakers lived alongside diverse communities, and the language gradually absorbed local sounds and vocabulary. This process explains why Brahui no longer resembles Tamil in everyday speech. Its pronunciation and word stock reflect its environment, while its grammar quietly preserves a much older heritage. The survival of Brahui highlights how languages evolve while still carrying traces of their origins. It stands as a living reminder that South Asia's linguistic history is deeply interconnected, shaped by movement, trade and cultural exchange across vast landscapes.

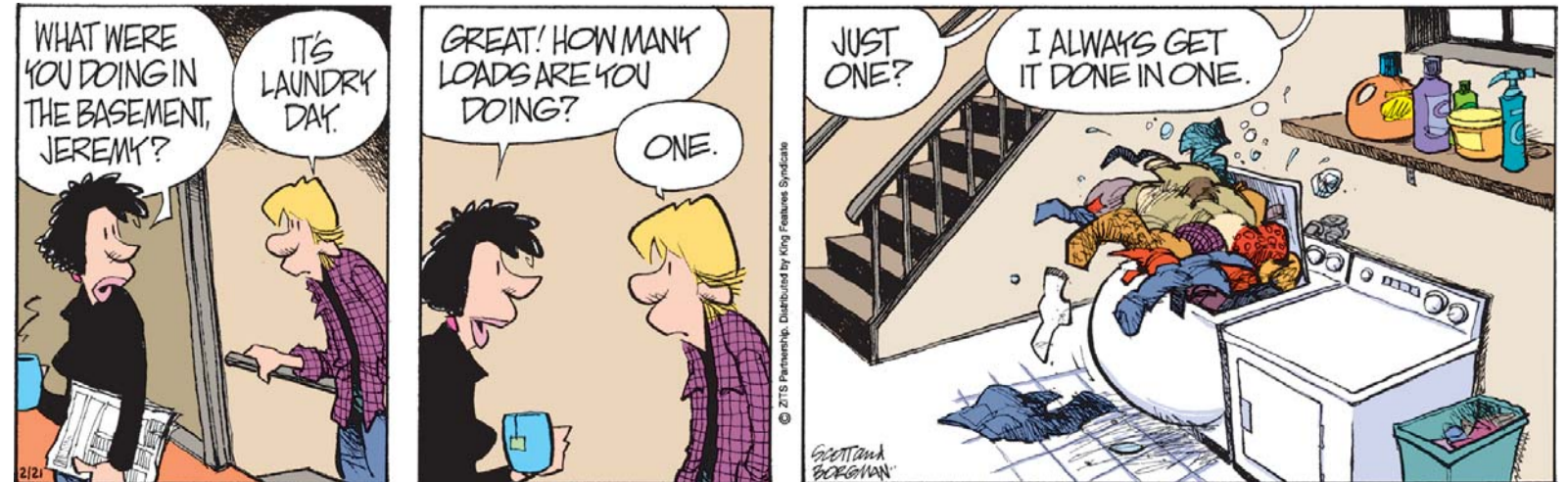
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman