

#MUSIC

The Royal Secret

The Royal Secret that kept India's Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana alive under British Rule



The Nawab family.

When we think of classical music, Europe's grand orchestras and maestros often come to mind. Yet, long before Europe formalized its classical traditions, India had already nurtured an intricate, deeply expressive musical heritage, exemplified by the Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana. This gharana wasn't just a style; it was a full-fledged academy that cultivated ragas, rhythms, and the profound emotions at the heart of Indian classical music.



Hamid Ali Khan of Rampur Nawab of Rampur.

What is the Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana?

Emerging in the late 19th century in the princely state of Rampur, this gharana (musical lineage) is renowned for its emphasis on clarity, precision, and emotive expression in vocal music. It built upon the rich traditions of the Gwalior gharana, emphasizing strict adherence to the structure of ragas while bringing fresh interpretations to them. Unlike the orchestral format of European classical music, the gharana system functions as a living school, knowledge is passed down orally from guru (teacher) to shishya (student). It trains musicians in not just technical mastery but also in understanding the spiritual and emotional essence of each raga and tala (rhythm cycle).



Ustad Rashid Khan of the Sahaswan Gharana.

The Role of the 'Lazy' King Who Saved a Culture

Here's where the story takes an unexpected turn. During British colonial rule, many Indian cultural practices faced decline, with royal patronage waning and artists struggling to survive. Rampur, however, had a peculiar protector: Nawab Hamid Ali Khan, the ruler often nicknamed "the lazy king."

Contrary to what the nickname suggests, Nawab Hamid Ali Khan was a secret guardian of Indian culture. While outwardly indifferent to politics or administration, he quietly and consistently supported musicians and artists. His palace became a sanctuary where the Nawab Hamid Ali Khan could thrive, shielded from the cultural erosion sweeping the subcontinent. His 'laziness' was actually a clever disguise, allowing him to avoid British scrutiny and interference. By focusing on preserving the arts rather than engaging in political resistance, he ensured that a crucial part of India's intangible heritage survived.

Why Does This Matter Today?

The Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana represents more than a musical style; it embodies the resilience of Indian

culture under colonial pressure. Its survival and flourishing demonstrate how art can persist and adapt even in adverse circumstances. Today, musicians from this gharana continue to perform and teach, carrying forward centuries of knowledge about ragas, rhythmic cycles, and the delicate balance of emotion and discipline. They remind us that classical music isn't just notes and scales; it's a living, breathing expression of history, identity, and soul.



Nawab Hamid Ali Khan had build a separate station.



Prakash Bhandari The writer is a senior journalist

our voice matters. Because the world doesn't just need loud voices, it needs our voice, our story and our perspective and the right to be known and heard. Simply put, there is no greater solace than owning your unique story. This was the precise thought that has gone behind the first-of-its-kind unique initiative in Jaipur, an all women-led Durga Puja, that starts from September 27 and ends on Oct 2, with Vijay Dashmi. The meaning of Durga Puja lies in its celebration of the triumph of good over evil and the more important reason of acknowledgement of



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feminine power. With the themes that run concurrently, let every voice be heard and that just empowering women would not work unless men are equally empowered to think of respecting women, which would eventually change attitude and change lives, Jaipur's Anandoprabha Cultural Society (ACS) is organising the Durga Puja this year at Chordia Outhouse on Takhteshahi Road.

"A small effort but a big leap in



The Pujo Rhythm : Even as the team work hard to get the puja organised, they don't forget to indulge in a lighter moment, practising the right moves of dhunuchi nrityo (Rakhee, Arpita and Sudarshana in pix).

#TEXTILES

Fair Use or Appropriation? The Seersucker Debate

From 'Juto Shelai to Chandipath'

The focus is most importantly on the puja rituals. Ma Durga, which is being built painstakingly by sculptor Amit Pal from Kolkata, has a traditional touch and the team bearers want the idol to remain as a standard-bearer of tradition. It is going to be ek-chaali, her eyes elongated, her face Bangla-mukh, broad and flat, ideally the iconic traditional image of the Goddess. And Anjali or serenading the deity and dhunuchi dance with lit bowls of incense amidst the beats of dhaak, would be a big part of the small effort. "For us the Sindur Khela, would represent the bonhomie between women from all walks of life and represent sisterhood and inclusivity," say the team members.

#DURGA POOJA



The women force behind the pujo : Arpita Chatterjee, Pronoti Ray, Rakhee Roytalukdar, Mandira Das, Ramona Mukherjee and Sudarshana Chakraborty.

terms of women empowerment," says Pronoti Ray, president of ACS. "The genesis of the idea started when a few women professionals got together and thought that an all-women team can definitely go ahead if we believe in ourselves and our abilities firstly. So, the idea is not just to stop at a one-off puja and then lull all the year round. But we thought of beginning with Durga Puja, which showcases the epitome of courage and the strength of female power to end all evil and certainly is Bengal's biggest festival." The team comprises a retired banker Sudarshana Chakraborty, teachers Arpita Chatterjee, Mandira Das and Ramona Mukherjee and journalist Rakhee Roytalukdar. It is a self-funded puja as there was consensus on not going asking for donations this year. "Whatever we have earned as pro-

feSSIONS can definitely be put into the good cause of real women empowerment, beginning with the puja." Hearing about our initiative, many people have come in the team's support, on their own. "Chordia's have been gracious enough to recognise the idea of Durga Puja by an all-women team and have given their premises for conducting the auspicious occasion on their premises. They are the first ones who understood that women and their opinions matter," says Roytalukdar. "It has not been an easy task but all of us have taken it into our stride," says Chakraborty, a retired assistant manager with SBI. "All decisions, from smallest to biggest, are being handled by us, like we say in Bengal from 'Juto Shelai to Chandipath'. But all our decisions are arrived at after debate and discussion and nobody takes

single-handedly. We strongly abide by the guideline that 'dissent is the safety valve in a democratic set-up'.

Ray says that society wants all other women who have minds of their own and want to make a difference, think of ideas that will bring women and also men together and revolve around inclusivity, and are welcome to join the club.

Meanwhile, one can enjoy the five days of festivities with blog of khichuri, labda, payesh and cultural programmes including sitar recital, an all-women poetry and storytelling project Ahaavan, and musical bands which would showcase the mellifluous songs from Bengal and also Bollywood songs inspired from Bangla culture.

"For us, Ma Durga with her children comes to enjoy five full days and we want to make the most of the



Celebrating the Power of Punctuation

ational Punctuation Day, observed every year on September 24, celebrates the importance of correct punctuation in writing and communication. Often overlooked, punctuation marks bring clarity, rhythm, and meaning to sentences, preventing misunderstandings and enhancing expression. From the humble comma to the emphatic exclamation mark, each symbol plays a vital role in shaping our thoughts into coherent language. The day encourages people to pay attention to grammar, learn about lesser-used marks like the semicolon, and even have fun with punctuation-themed activities. Beyond rules, it's a reminder that strong communication starts with attention to detail, precision, and creativity in language.



For us, Ma Durga with her children comes to enjoy five full days and we want to make the most of the time," says Das, a Business Studies teacher. "When we bid adieu to her, we feel empty, sad but we know her spirits, her strength would keep us afloat all the year round, till she descends on earth next year."

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team bearers want the idol to remain as a standard-bearer of tradition. It is going to be ek-chaali, her eyes elongated, her face Bangla-mukh, broad and flat, ideally the iconic traditional image of the Goddess. And Anjali or serenading the deity and dhunuchi dance with lit bowls of incense amidst the beats of dhaak, would be a big part of the small effort. "For us, the Sindur Khela would represent the bonhomie between women from all walks of life and represent sisterhood and inclusivity," say the team members. And as the dhaak starts reverberating and the Kash flowers blow under blue-sky filled with white, fluffy cumulus clouds, the exclusive women team in Jaipur with their first initiative is sending out a strong message that "start believing in the endless possibilities which women are capable of, especially when they choose to bond together and put out their unique story."

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Every Bengali's hallmark : The quintessential Bengali adda just before each team member gets down to the nitty gritty of the pujo (Rakhee, Mandira and Sudarshana in pix).

Fair Use: Creative Inspiration or Cultural Exchange?

Fair use in cultural contexts refers to borrowing or drawing inspiration from existing cultural elements in a respectful, transformative way that adds new meaning or value. Fashion designers and artists often draw from diverse cultures, blending styles and fabrics to create fresh designs. When seersucker is used as a fabric in new collections, many

argue it falls under fair use, an example of cultural exchange rather than exploitation. The key is respect, acknowledgment, and transformation. Designers, who research the fabric's history, credit its origins, and create innovative works, can help keep cultural traditions alive while introducing them to new audiences.

Appropriation: When Borrowing Crosses the Line

On the flip side, cultural appropriation happens when elements like seersucker are used without understanding or respecting their cultural significance. This can be especially problematic when the borrowed culture is marginalized or historically oppressed, and the appropriation benefits dominant groups commercially

without giving back. Critics argue that using seersucker purely for aesthetic value without acknowledgment risks erasing its cultural roots and commodifying heritage. Worse, when designers or companies profit from such designs without benefiting the communities where the fabric originated, it feeds into systemic cultural exploitation.

The Grey Area and Responsibility

The debate is rarely black and white. With seersucker, some designers embrace its history, collaborating with artisans from South Asia or donating to cultural preservation efforts. Others use it superficially, reinforcing stereotypes or stripping the fabric of context. For consumers, awareness is key. Asking questions about where materials come from, who makes them, and how cultural heritage is treated helps foster ethical fashion choices.

Respectful Cultural Exchange

The path ahead lies in mutual respect and transparency. Fair use is possible when designers approach cultural elements like seersucker with curiosity, care, and collaboration. Appropriation can be mitigated by recognizing history, compensating communities, and promoting cultural education. In the vibrant dialogue around seersucker and beyond, the conversation is evolving, pushing the fashion industry and consumers alike to think deeply about the stories behind what we wear.

#HIGH

Wild Parrots Addicted to Opium

A Bizarre Phenomenon in the North-West missing from Southern India

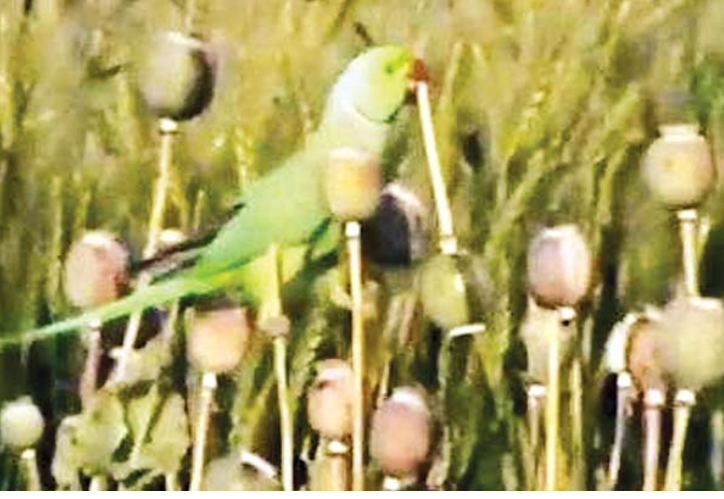


In the rugged heartlands of central and northwestern India, a bizarre and troubling phenomenon has taken root: wild parrots, particularly Indian ring-necked parakeets, have become addicted to opium. These birds have learned to raid licensed poppy fields, tearing into the pods to sip the milky, opiate-rich latex that oozes from them. Farmers have been left exasperated and helpless as their legally cultivated crops are pillaged, not by thieves on foot, but by flocks of winged junkies.



Reports of this strange behavior first emerged in regions like Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh and Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh in Rajasthan, states where the cultivation of opium poppies is legal under government regulation. What began as an occasional nuisance has now evolved into a full-blown agricultural headache, with flocks of parrots returning to the fields up to 30 or 40 times a day, according to local farmers. Once the pods are carefully lanced by cultivators to release the opium-rich latex, a critical step in harvesting, the parrots swoop in, feast on the substance, and sometimes fly away with entire pods.

The birds' behaviour after consumption is even more disturbing. Many are seen flying erratically, crashing into trees or lying dazed on the ground, high on the effects of the narcotic. Some parrots, when deprived of access during the off-season, reportedly show signs of withdrawal, refusing food, exhibiting lethargy, and even dying, possibly from dependency-related health issues.

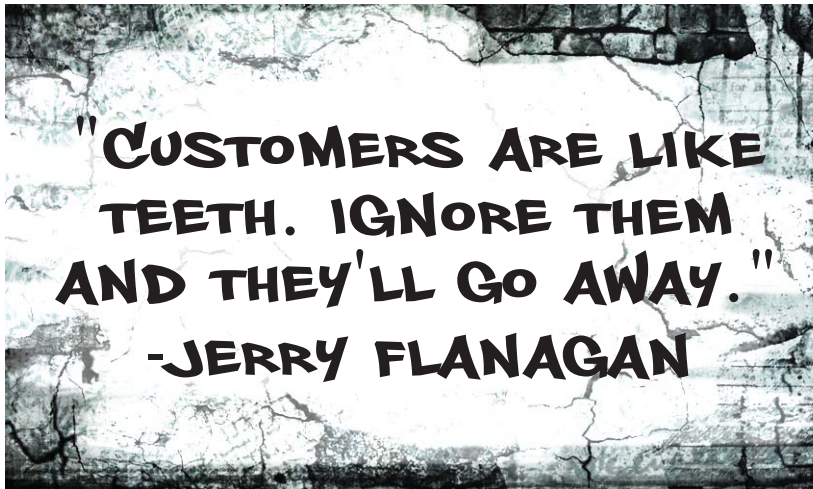


different cash crops, spices, rice, coconut, and rubber, offering no comparable opportunity for parrots to encounter and adapt to opium use. Scientists and wildlife experts are still debating whether the parrots' behaviour constitutes true addiction or is simply opportunistic feeding driven by taste or nutritional needs. Some researchers compare the behaviour to how humans develop a caffeine habit, starting with small doses for energy, only to become dependent over time. In contrast, other ecologists suggest that the parrots may be after the seeds or other components of the pods, and that the intoxicating effects are a secondary consequence rather than the primary goal.

Regardless of the underlying biology, the impact on farmers is very real. Opium cultivation in India is closely monitored, and farmers are expected to account for every gram. Losses due to parrots can jeopardize a farmer's license, pushing them into bureaucratic and financial turmoil. Traditional deterrents, such as scarecrows, firecrackers, or loudspeakers, have proven largely ineffective, as the birds appear both fearless and relentless in their quest for a fix.

In the end, this strange intersection of wildlife behaviour, agriculture, and narcotic substances paints a surreal picture: wild parrots, possibly addicted to opiates, raiding state-regulated poppy fields under the open Indian sky. For now, this phenomenon remains confined to certain districts in central and northwestern India, but it serves as a potent reminder of how human activity, even in tightly regulated forms, can produce unforeseen and sometimes disturbing ripple effects in the natural world.

THE WALL

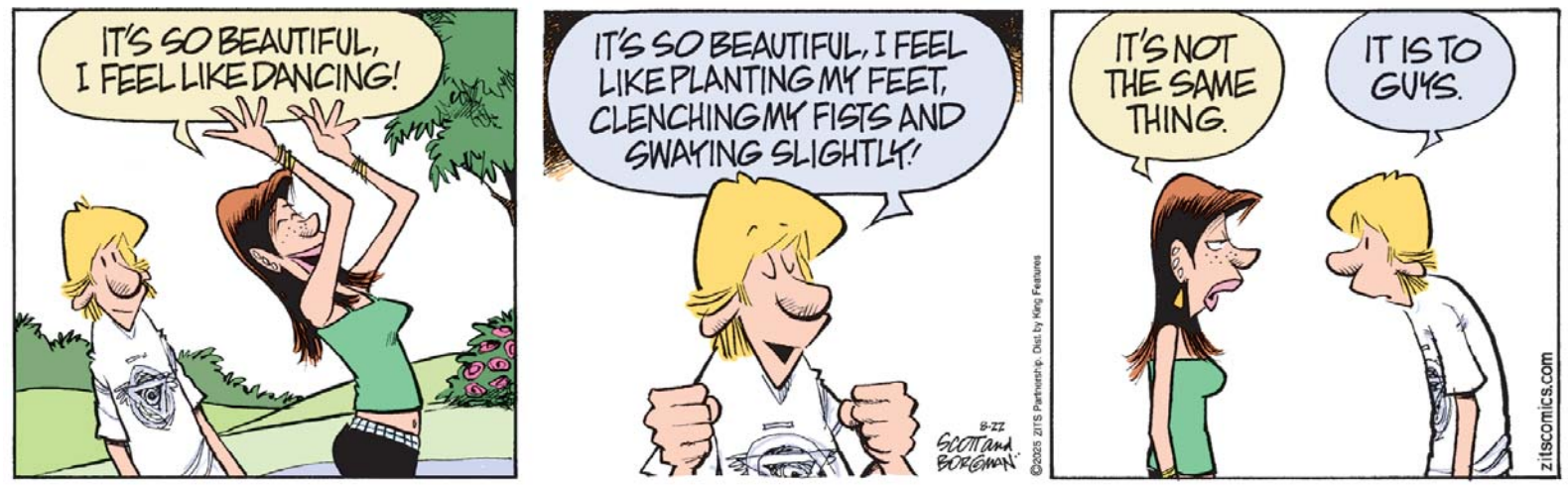


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman