



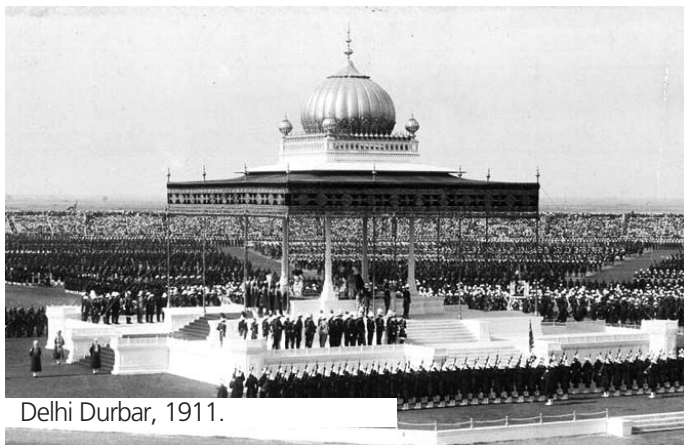
Knowing about National Insurance Awareness Day

There's something that most people don't talk about, don't think about, and when the end comes, it snaps right around and hits them square in the face. Their homes and cars remain unprotected, and there's nothing to save them when the hammers come down. National Insurance Awareness Day reminds you that taking the time to talk to an insurance agent and get a policy on your life, car, or home can save you and your family at the worst times, that the future can hold. It ensures that people are reminded to go over their insurance plans on this date.

#POWER

A Capital Choice

Why was Bombay never in the race to become India's capital during the British Raj?



In a world increasingly consumed by fast news and fleeting trends, history can offer a much-needed lens of perspective. That's the premise behind 'A Century of Stories: India,' a newly launched conversational series that delves into the pivotal, and often overlooked, stories that shaped the subcontinent as we know it today. Hosted by the ever-curious and

charismatic Kunal Vijaykar, the series marks a fresh, engaging format for storytelling, rooted in dialogue, informed by expertise, and accessible to everyone from casual listeners to history buffs. In each episode, Vijaykar sits down with prominent historians, researchers, and cultural commentators to explore the decisions, dilemmas, and debates that played a role in India's evolution over the past century.

A Tale of Three Cities

The inaugural episode sets the tone for the series by exploring a critical yet little-known moment in Indian history: the British colonial administration's decision to relocate the capital of British India. When the British were deliberating on where to establish the new seat of power in the early 20th century, Delhi and Pune were considered the leading contenders. Each had compelling advantages. Delhi, with its rich imperial past, was sym-

bolically powerful, the historic seat of several empires, including the Mughals. Pune, on the other hand, had been a key administrative and cultural center of the Maratha Empire, and was seen as a peaceful, climate-friendly alternative for colonial officials. But conspicuously missing from the list was Bombay (now Mumbai), a city that, even at the time, was rapidly emerging as a commercial and industrial powerhouse, home to major ports, businesses, and institutions.

Why didn't Bombay make the cut?

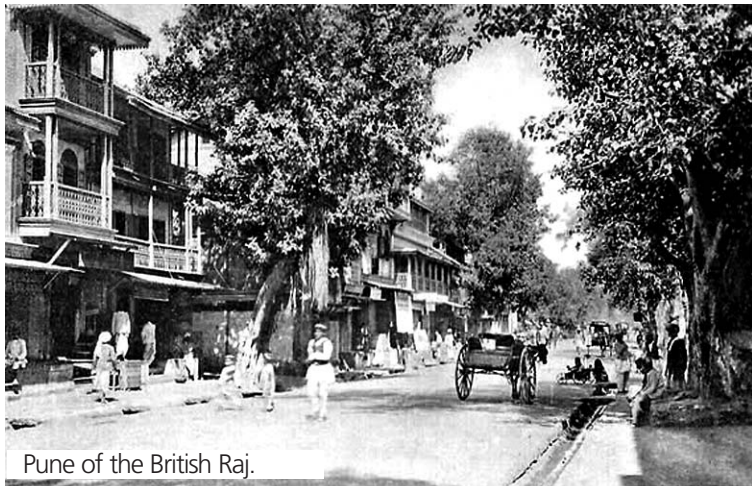
To unravel this mystery, Vijaykar is joined by Bharat Gothoskar, a renowned heritage expert known for his work in demystifying urban history. In their discussion, Gothoskar reveals that while Bombay was undeniably significant as a financial center, several factors worked against it in the eyes of the British establishment. "Bombay was viewed more as a mercantile colony than a seat of power," says Gothoskar. "It was too cosmopolitan, too commercially driven, and lacked the imperial gravitas the

British were seeking." In contrast, Delhi's symbolic continuity with India's imperial past offered a compelling narrative for the British to place themselves within a longer lineage of rulers. In 1911, this culminated in the grand Delhi Durbar, where King George V announced the transfer of the capital from Calcutta (Kolkata) to Delhi, setting in motion the construction of New Delhi, a city meticulously planned by architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker to embody colonial power.

What the Decision Meant for Bombay, and India

Although Bombay wasn't chosen as the capital, it continued to thrive in other ways, as the commercial engine of British India and later independent

India. Ironically, being passed over for political leadership may have allowed the city to flourish more freely in trade, finance, arts, and cinema.



Nikhil Inamdar, Anjali Sharma and Anakha Arikara

In Indian classical tradition, music is as much a science as an art. It is also a pulsating being, with moods and tones and colour. The Monsoons for instance is the time for Raga Malhar, resonant of the first rain and the flushed countryside. This raga is also steeped in history and traces its fame to the Court of Mughal Emperor Akbar, as Nikhil Inamdar explains.

The otherwise liberal musical tradition of northern India is modulated by a stubbornly sanctified, but sophisticated theory of time. Specific melodic forms (or ragas) are performed only during apportioned stretches of the day called the prahars. Subtle aesthetic nuances, such as the underlying tonal skin of a raga, or the mood it evokes, decide time of the day it is sung. Adherence to this ritual is expected, and it is believed, a performer can truly discover the pinnacle of a raga's melodic splendor, if the time tradition is practiced scrupulously.

RAGAS ARE PERFORMED ONLY DURING APPORTIONED STRETCHES OF THE DAY CALLED THE PRAHARS.

A bulk of the raga universe is codified by this time theory. But a select few have an alliance also with the changing cycle of seasons. The melodic scales of Basant and Bahar, for instance, are associated with the bloom in early spring. Deepak is sung at the time of the blazing hot summer and Hemant when the early winter chill begins to set in. The myriad Malhars, meanwhile, invoke the countless moods of the monsoon, when empty, listless skies across the Indian peninsula get swallowed by exploding gray clouds, flashes of lightning and raging tempests, drenching the desiccated earth. Historians have traced the

beginnings and development of Malhar and its derivatives (there are at least 30 variants, if not more in the family, named after its various creators or formed as combinations with other ragas) all the way back to the early 15th century. But it was Mian Tansen, the legendary musician in Emperor Akbar's court, who gave it the exalted stature that it commands today. The enduring legend has it that Tansen, one of the nine crowning jewels (navratnas) of the court of Akbar, was deeply taught by the other courtiers, for the great friendship that he shared with the emperor. So, when word got to them that Tansen could set his surroundings ablaze in a towering inferno with his rendition of Raga Deepak, they planned to destroy him in his own musical prowess, ensuring that the emperor ordered Tansen to accomplish the feat before his own eyes.

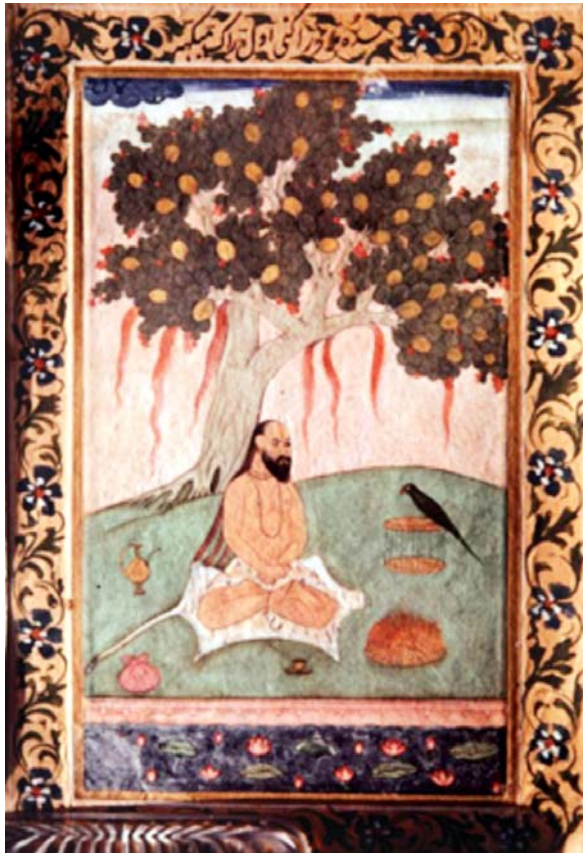
Unable to disregard his master's command, Tansen, as the myth goes, taught his daughter to sing a melody beckoning the dark clouds to come down in torrents, and douse the flame that would burn him to ashes. That melody was the raga Megh Malhar.

Symbolic of the romance and rejuvenating power of the first showers, as a long sweltering summer beats a sluggish retreat, this powerful allegory has, over the years, come to be interpreted literally rather than as a metaphor. One can find it depicted on ancient Mughal miniatures, hear it from the excitable tourist guide showing credulous visitors around Fatehpur Sikri, or watch it as a torrid drama unfold on celluloid in films such as the eponymous Tansen (1943) or Baiju Bawra (1952). Although it was Mian Tansen, the legendary musician in Emperor Akbar's court, who gave raga Megh Malhar its exalted stature, and it would seem to be a hard task to get a modern-day musician to attest to the magical facility of a raga in influencing natural meteorological phenomenon. But Mian Tansen's passing hasn't left the legend of Malhar completely bereft of a living legacy. When in 1948, a famine struck

The Many Legends of a Monsoon Melody

When in 1948, a famine struck the region of Surat in South Gujarat, Pandit Omkarnath Thakur, one of the greats of the Gwalior gharana, was summoned to appeal to the rain gods. "A stage was set up at Kila Maidan, outside the Surat Castle. For three days, the town was soaked in the stalwart's voice. On the evening of the third day, it started drizzling. Finally, Surat experienced monsoon."

#MALHAR



Shudha Malhar, as depicted in Ragamalika.

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music. A skeptic may rightly scoff at the idea, but for anyone with a keen ear, it is hard to dismiss the astounding virtuosity and strength of Hindustani classical music and its ragas in manifesting the diverse moods of nature. An excerpt from B. R. Deodhar's book Pillars of Hindustani Music, reproduced by Rajan Parrikar, on his website recounts how a turbulent sea and pouring rain got Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan so charged up that he got out of a taxi in the middle of Marine Drive in Mumbai to do his riyaz. He writes,

"Whenever a particularly massive wave broke and water spouted up, Khansaheb's tana rose in synchronization and descended when water cascaded down. Water rose in a single massive column but split at the top and fell in broken slivers; so did Khansaheb's tana in raga Miyan Malhar. Sometimes, if his ascending notes failed to keep pace with the surging water, he was



Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan.

angry with himself but tried again till it synchronized perfectly with the surging water." The story depicts how the fury and drama of the rain is interpreted through the abstractions of a raga. If the tanas characterize the crashing rain, Chanchal Uberoi, a musician and physicist writes, that the use of 'two positions of the note ga, both flat and sharp, consecutively in a swinging, heavy tone' make Mian Ki Malhar reminiscent of thunder. The interplay between the natural and flattened ni meanwhile is said to evoke running water.

In the land of the mystical, the question of Malhar's rain bringing abilities is unlikely to be settled anytime soon. But no one can deny the sublime capacity of our great music in depicting the essence and atmospherics of a beloved season with such vividness and creative imagination. Monsoon is upon us and we have learnt to take the showers in



Poster of the film Tansen (1943).

our stride, almost missing out on the wonder of Nature. So, let's stop and once again share in the wonder that these drops revealed for the maestros who raved in them to a refinement. One really special is Tansen.

Tansen is a complex enigma in Indian history. The tales of greatness that surround this person include incredible anecdotes of elephants that were tamed by his music, rains that poured when he sang in raga Megh Malhar, and extinguished lamps that were lit by his rendition of raga Deepak. To top it all off, they claim that he could produce any sound, from a lion's roar to a bird's chirp!

In fact, it is difficult to confirm which part of his life was fact, and which a fairytale.

Some reports claim that Tansen was born with the name Ramtanu, to a prominent poet and musician, called Mukund Pandey. He showed an extraordinary prowess for music as early as the age of 6 and was taken to Swami Haridas, an accomplished musician, to learn the art. It is rumoured that his education in the arts took place in Gwalior.

Other stories claim that Tansen was born deaf and dumb, and it was only after he was blessed by a saint that he gained hearing and speech.

Either way, popular sources agree that he spent much of his life as the court musician of Raja Ramchandra Singh. Here, he flourished, and his talent earned him the recognition of Mughal emperor, Akbar, himself.

Tansen, who at the time was close to 60 years of age, considered retiring to a life of solitude, but at the encouragement of the Raja, was sent to Akbar's court. The emperor bestowed upon him the title 'Mian,' meaning 'learned one,' and he became one of Akbar's Navratnas.

His ragas brought forth melodies that are still sung today, and his legacy continues through his music.

Here are five ragas that are believed to be associated with the legend that is Mian Tansen. This is by no means an extensive list, but all these ragas hold a significant place in the myths that surround Tansen.

1. Miyan ki Malhar

Perhaps, the most famous story which surrounds Tansen is that when he sang Megh Malhar, the skies would pour with rain. His alleged wife, Husseini, is believed to have sung this raga as an attempt to save her husband as he was being engulfed in flames. His own version of the Malhar raga is known as Miyan Ki Malhar.

The Malhar family of ragas in Hindustani classical music includes a variety of forms, each with its own unique characteristics.

Some notable versions include Miyan Ki Malhar, Megh Malhar, Gaud Malhar, Ramdasi Malhar, and Sur Malhar. These ragas often share the signature Malhar phrase (m)R(m) but differ in their melodic movements and ornamentation. Additionally, some Malhar variations are created by combining elements of other ragas, such as Bilawal Malhar (a blend of Bilawal and Gaud Malhar) and Basanti Malhar (a blend of Basant and Gaud Malhar).

Miyan Ki Malhar

This raga, attributed to Tansen, is known for its emphasis on the lower octave and lower tetrachord of the middle register.

Megh Malhar

This raga, also known for its connection to rain, is similar to raga Megh but incorporates more Malhar phrases.

Gaud Malhar

This raga is associated with the Khamaj that is often performed in the late evening.

Ramdasi Malhar

Named after the saint Ramdas, this raga has specific melodic phrases that distinguish it.

Sur Malhar

Another raga attributed to a saint (Surdas), this variation is also part of the larger Malhar family.

Nat Malhar

This raga is a combination of Raga Nat and Raga Malhar.

Other variations

The Malhar family also includes less common versions like Adana Malhar, Anand Malhar, Arun Malhar, and more, often created by combining different ragas or by musicians developing their own unique interpretations.

The variations in Malhar ragas showcase the creative flexibility within Hindustani classical music, allowing musicians to explore different moods and expressions associated with the rainy season.

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#ECHIDNA

Zaglossus Attenboroughi is not Extinct!



The long-beaked echidna had not been documented since the 1960s.



Biologists have confirmed the existence of a 200-million-year-old species of egg-laying mammal that has been assumed to be extinct. Suspected footage of Zaglossus attenboroughi, the long-beaked echidna named after famed English broadcaster and naturalist David Attenborough, was initially captured in 2023 by Oxford University during an expedition to the Cyclops Mountains, a rugged rainforest in Indonesia.

By combining modern technology with indigenous knowledge, researchers recently confirmed that the long-beaked echidna had been found, according to a paper published in the journal NPJ Biodiversity last month.

The species hadn't been recorded for more than 60 years, when a dead specimen was found in the region, the researchers said. However, evidence of the echidna's existence was found throughout the region in recent decades.

In 2007, a team of researchers found 'nose pokes,' trace signs that the echidnas make when they forage underground for invertebrates, in the Cyclops, according to the paper. Indigenous groups have also reported sightings of the species in the past two decades. In 2017 and 2018, researchers combined participatory mapping with

indigenous and other knowledge to assess the probability that echidnas still existed. Camera trapping also played a key role in confirming their existence. Camera traps deployed in the Cyclops in 2022 and 2023 garnered the photographic evidence, 110 photos total from 26 individual events, needed for researchers to continue pursuing the lost species. The photographic evidence was published in the paper.

The long-beaked echidna is one of just five egg-laying mammals in existence today, including the platypus and two other species of modern echidna, the researchers said.

These mammals are the 'sole living representatives' of monotreme, or egg-laying, lineage that diverged from therians, or marsupials and placental mammals, more than 200 million years ago, according to the paper. The long-beaked echidna once also lived in the Oenaka Range of Papua New Guinea. But the Cyclops Mountains are the only location where the long-beaked echidna has been recorded in modern times.

There are currently more than 2,000 'so-called lost species,' species that have gone undocumented for sustained periods of time, according to the paper. "Rediscoveries offer hope that others survive, especially in places where biological research has been limited," the researchers said.

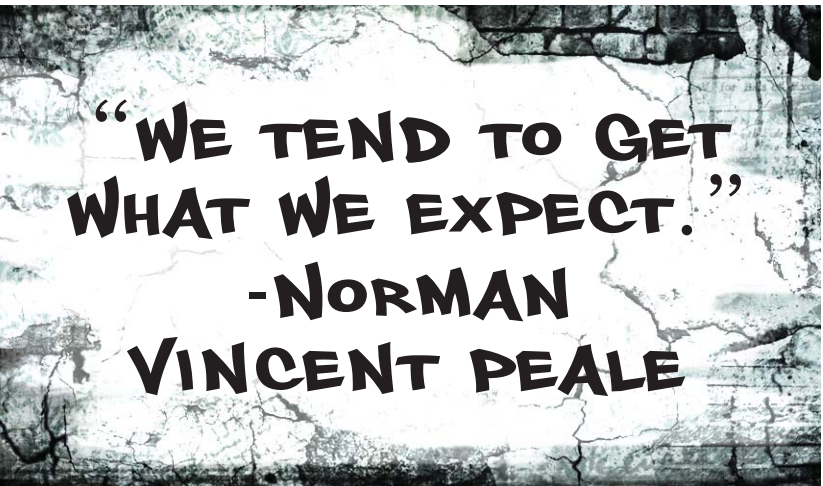


By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

