



It is Public Service Day

Did you know that every year, we have a special day to thank those who dedicate their lives to serving us all? That's right! It's Public Service Day. This day is like a big "thank you" card spread across the globe for everyone working in public service. Imagine giving a high-five to firefighters, teachers, healthcare workers, and all those amazing folks who work behind the scenes to make our lives better. Celebrating Public Service Day offers an excellent opportunity to recognize and honour public servants' hard work and dedication in our communities.

#KNOW IT

Agra's Leather Industry Has Roots in *Hing*!

To preserve its strong aroma, hing was transported in animal bladders and hides.



When people think of Agra, the image that instantly comes to mind is the awe-inspiring Taj Mahal. But beyond the white marble and grand Mughal architecture lies another fascinating legacy, Agra's world-renowned leather industry. What many don't know is that this legacy doesn't begin in India at all. It actually stretches back to the bustling trade routes of Iran, Afghanistan, and even involves a pungent kitchen spice: *hing*, or asafoetida.

Yes, you read that right. Join Sohail, a local historian and storyteller, as he traces the surprising journey of how Agra transformed into a leather powerhouse during the Mughal era. The story begins centuries ago, when Central Asian artisans, particularly from Persia (modern-day Iran) and Afghanistan, began migrating to northern India. They didn't just bring goods; they brought traditions, skills, and a deep understanding of leather tanning and craftsmanship. These techniques blended with local practices and found fertile ground in Agra, a city that quickly grew under Mughal patronage.

But here's the twist that few history books mention: the humble *hing*, Asafoetida was a valuable commodity brought to India via trade caravans from Iran and Afghanistan. To preserve its strong aroma and prevent spoilage, hing was often transported in dried animal bladders and hides. This unconventional packaging introduced Indian traders and artisans to new ways of treating and preserving leather. Over time, the techniques evolved, were refined locally, and laid the foundation for what would



become one of India's most robust leather industries.

Under the Mughals, Agra flourished as a cultural and economic hub. The royals demanded high-quality saddles, tents, shoes, and armor, much of which was crafted from leather. Local workshops, known as *karkhanas*, buzzed with activity, producing everything from royal *mojris* (embroidered leather shoes) to practical goods for trade.

Even today, Agra's leather industry is a major contributor to India's exports, known globally for its craftsmanship and quality. The legacy of those ancient routes and unusual methods still lives on in every stitched product. So, next time you're in Agra and see a handcrafted leather bag or shoe, remember: it's not just fashion, it's centuries of cross-cultural history stitched together by trade, tradition, and a little bit of *hing*.



The Stonewall uprising galvanized the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement, challenging systemic oppression and inspiring activism worldwide. First Pride March: On June 28, 1970, the first anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, the Christopher Street Liberation Day March was held in New York City, considered the first Pride parade. Similar marches in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco followed, establishing June as a time to commemorate Stonewall and advocate for equality.



Meet Your June Pride...

#PRIDE MONTH

Globally, Pride Month is celebrated with diverse events.

**Parades and Festivals:** Cities like New York, London, and Sydney host massive pride parades, drawing millions. In 2025, WorldPride will be held in Washington, D.C., emphasizing global solidarity.

**Legal Advocacy:** Countries like Canada and Germany use Pride Month to push for policies like marriage equality (legalized in 2015 and 2017, respectively). In contrast, nations with restrictive laws (e.g., Uganda) see Pride Month as a time for underground activism.

**Corporate and Social Support:** Global brands and organizations, such as Google and the United Nations, promote Pride Month campaigns, though critics note the risk of 'pinkwashing' (superficial support for profit).

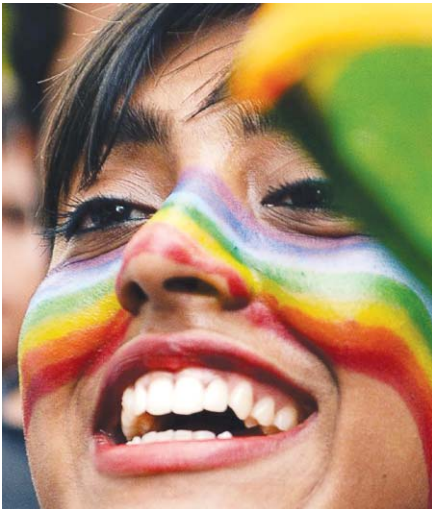


Pride Month in India

In India, Pride Month is a vibrant blend of celebration and activism, reflecting both progress and challenges.

**Legal Milestones:** The 2014 NALSA judgment recognized transgender individuals as a third gender, and the 2018 decriminalization of Section 377 marked a turning point. Pride Month amplifies calls for further reforms, like marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws. Major cities host pride parades (e.g., Delhi Queer Pride since 2008, Chennai Rainbow Pride since 2009), while smaller towns like Bhubaneswar and Guwahati have seen growing participation. The Kashish Queer Film Festival, held in June, showcases films like *Badhaai Do* (2022) to promote inclusivity.

**Challenges:** Despite legal gains, societal stigma persists, particularly in rural areas. Transgender individuals face violence, and queer couples lack legal protections for marriage or adoption. Pride Month serves as a platform to address these gaps.



**Cultural Context:** India's ancient acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, evident in the *Mahabharata* (e.g., Shikhandi) and temple art, contrasts with colonial-era stigma from Section 377. Pride Month reclaims this heritage, celebrating figures like Anjali Ameer, a transgender actor.

Transgender Trailblazers in Indian Politics, Cinema, and Justice

INDIA'S TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY HAS MADE REMARKABLE STRIDES IN BREAKING BARRIERS ACROSS POLITICS, CINEMA, AND THE JUDICIARY, CHALLENGING SOCIETAL STIGMA AND ADVOCATING FOR EQUALITY. HERE ARE PROFILES OF FEW TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ACHIEVED SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES IN THESE FIELDS, HIGHLIGHTING THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS, STRUGGLES, AND IMPACT ON QUEER JUSTICE IN INDIA.

Shabnam Mausi Bano: India's First Transgender MLA

Shabnam Mausi Bano, a hijra activist, made history as India's first transgender Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), elected from the Sohagpur constituency in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol-Anuppur district from 1998 to 2003. Born visibly intersex, she was abandoned by her father, a police superintendent of the Brahmin caste, to protect his social image. With only two years of formal schooling, she learned 12 languages during her travels and is a trained classical dancer. She was elected in 2005 Bollywod film *Shabnam Mausi*, directed by Yogesh Bharadwaj, with her role played by actor Ashutosh Rana. She faced significant discrimination, including being denied Congress party membership twice due to her gender identity. In 2023, she was booked for violating the model code of conduct for failing to deposit a pistol during elections, highlighting ongoing scrutiny.



with NGOs, challenging the marginalization of hijras, who were traditionally relegated to roles like dancing, begging, or sex work. Her life inspired the 2005 Bollywod film *Shabnam Mausi*, directed by Yogesh Bharadwaj, with her role played by actor Ashutosh Rana. She faced significant discrimination, including being denied Congress party membership twice due to her gender identity. In 2023, she was booked for violating the model code of conduct for failing to deposit a pistol during elections, highlighting ongoing scrutiny.

Joyita Mondal: India's First Transgender Judge

Joyita Mondal holds the esteemed distinction of being India's first transgender judge in a National Lok Adalat, a remarkable achievement that is poignantly depicted in the highly acclaimed documentary 'I am Joyita'. This film, garnering widespread acclaim on the National Geographic Channel on the OTT platform, beautifully portrays Joyita's journey from her birth name, Jayant Mondal, to her transformative role as Judge Joyita Mondal.



Born into a traditional Hindu household, she faced severe discrimination, dropping out of school after class 10 and resorting to begging on streets. She later pursued a law degree through correspondence. She became India's first transgender judge, appointed to a Lok Adalat (civil court) in Uttar Dinajpur on July 8, 2017.

"The transgender community is subjected to derogatory labels such as 'Chhakkha', 'Hijra', or 'Kinnar', further exacerbating

our marginalized status as untouchables. Despite the legal recognition of transgender individuals as the third gender following the NALSA judgment by the Supreme Court in 2014, our lives have remained largely unchanged. Even today, if I seek to relocate, it would take an arduous two months to find a new residence since landlords are reluctant to offer rentals, financial institutions do not give loans to us," Joyita states with sadness in her voice. Joyita founded *Dinajpur Notun Aalo* (Dinajpur New Light), an organization supporting thousands of marginalized individuals, including transgender persons, sex workers, and trafficking victims.

Anjali Ameer: First Transgender Lead Actor in Indian Cinema



for the community in mainstream media.

She worked in Tamil and Malayalam cinema, advocating for authentic transgender representation and challenging the casting of cisgender actors in trans roles. Anjali's break-

through role in Perambu shifted perceptions of transgender individuals in Indian cinema, emphasizing the need for authentic representation. The lack of roles written for transgender actors remains a barrier, with Bollywood often casting cisgender actors like Akshay Kumar (*Laxmi*, 2020) or Vijay Raaz (*Gangubai Kathiawadi*, 2022) in trans roles. Her presence in mainstream media has bolstered queer justice by showcasing transgender talent and resilience, inspiring future generations of actors.

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#ADDICTIONS

Comfort In Food

Potatoes were the 1970s original "comfort food," when the phrase still appeared in quotation marks in newspaper lifestyles sections

● Anuradha Narula

Let's pause to give a moment's thanks to Liza Minnelli. In 1970, the young actress was perhaps the first-and certainly the most glamorous-to coin the modern usage of the now-well-worn phrase, comfort food. "Comfort food is anything you just yum, yum, yum," she told syndicated newspaper food columnist Johna Blinn, smacking her lips together. She was daydreaming of a hamburger with all the fixins.

Potatoes were the 1970s original "comfort food," when the phrase still appeared in quotation marks in newspaper lifestyles sections. Minnelli preferred hers baked with sour cream, pepper, and butter. Philadelphia Inquirer food writer Elaine Tait opted for boiled with bacon, slices of hard-boiled egg, and ripe tomato. And Gerry Brown, a home economics teacher in a small town in Oregon, told the Capital Journal that she swore by potatoes mashed with plenty of butter and cream. Chicken soup also quickly earned the title, a soothing meal with appeal that cut across demographic divides. But from there, tastes diverged.

People confessed to craving butter and sweet onions on rye, sardines straight from the can, brown sugar sandwiches, salted peanuts and milk, and soggy cornflakes. In the pages of Bon Appetit, M.F.K. Fisher rhapsodized about milk toast, a dish that "seems to soothe nerves and muscles and mind all together." She published the only recipe for comfort food anyone will



ever need. You can debate the merits of buttered toast drowned in warm milk seasoned with salt, pepper, and paprika, but not the final step in its preparation. Before eating, she writes, "walk gently to wherever you have decided to feel right in your skin."

Giving these sometimes-unusual dishes the label comfort food was a bit of permission to admit to one's indulgences-at least until the diet industry tried to claim the term. Their idea of comfort had always been a little bit different. In a 1966 book titled *The Thin Book* by a Formerly Fat Psychiatrist, Theodore Rubin listed tea as his top comforting food. Now the diet-conscious warned of the dangers of eating for emotional gratification, ensuring that our favorite dishes would henceforth be served with a side of guilt. It might have been the wrong tactic: By the turn of the decade, "mood food" swung from savory to sweet. The country sought sinful solace in ice cream, pudding, pie, and, of course, chocolate.

The 1970s and early 1980s gave us plenty of foods we've all but forgotten-fondue, bread bowls, raspberry vinaigrette-and at first, comfort food followed the same trajectory: from popularity to commodification to backlash.

Next came the restaurants. For years, countless diners and cafeterias had been serving the type of 1950s middle-class, Midwestern cuisine that was, by the mid-1980s, what people meant when they said "comfort food." By the early 1980s, the country's top chefs wanted a taste. The Los Angeles Times marveled at the attention lavished on rice pudding by kitchens better known for their ceviche.

Meanwhile, the food writer Jane Stern despaired at the phone calls from high-end restaurants she and her husband, Michael, fielded after publishing their cookbook on the

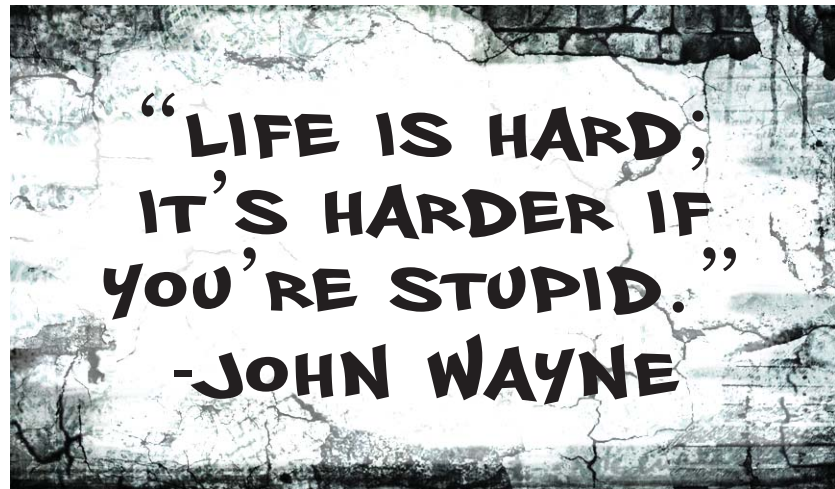


topic. These dishes didn't belong in fancy dining rooms, especially not at twice the price. "The point is that food is more than food-it's heart strings-it's memory," she said. In 1988, the decidedly upscale Food & Wine magazine declared comfort food to be "hot."

The dueling diet trends of the 1980s should have spelled the end for comfort food. The decade began with low-fat and then no-fat products crowding the supermarket shelves and ended with its mirror image: the low-carb dictates of Atkins. The 1993 debut of the Food Network, too, should have doomed the trend. Bobby Flay and Emeril Lagasse turned every home cook into a professional chef, experimenting with new ingredients and creating picture-perfect plates. Gerry Brown's monochrome mashed potatoes had no place in this new world. And yet, in the aftermath of 9/11, we found ourselves reaching for the same foods we relied on in the weeks after Black Monday in 1987. We rallied around comfort food again during the 2008 financial crisis, and we are stocking up on it today.

Science has tried to explain this persistent draw. One straightforward answer offered by a team of food scientists writing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences credits comfort food's appeal to its nutritional make-up. Many dishes are high in fat or sugar, substances that the body can process into temporary stress relief. Psychologists have explored a more complicated connection between food and individual memory, theorizing that well-loved dishes can evoke the same feelings of security or contentment they did when the diner was younger.

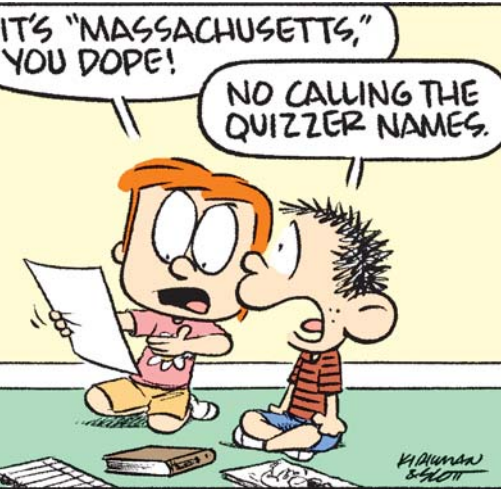
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

