ARBiT
it happens here...

Canoeing the Waters

There is a special day for just about every hobby nowadays, and canoeing doesn't miss out on the fun, with its very own day of aquatic paddling celebration. Canoeing is a fantastic hobby, and along with being environmentally friendly and relaxing, it is also a great form of outdoor exercise that's suitable for all ages.It's no surprise that canoeing gets its own day of celebration, with so many fans around the world. Canoeing is an easy activity to learn, and with some basic safety gear anyone can hit the water and enjoy this healthy hobby.

राष्ट्रदूत
FRIDAY
26 June 2026
A-B

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The path took a dip and then went up a slight incline and over the top, down to the riverside. I was at the bottom of the dip walking up the incline, when in the gathering dusk, I suddenly saw a Chital stag come up the path from the other side and crest the rise. The wind was blowing in my face, so, he had no idea that I was on the same path as he was. I can't say who was more surprised, but I snapped the carbine to my shoulder and fired. The shot hit him in the center of his chest. I saw the dust fly out of his hide. He snorted loudly and spun around and disappeared.

PART:2

I shot a Chital stag

Leaves fully cover the floor of the forest.

Mirza Yawar Baig
Naturalist and Wildlife Conservationist

I was very fortunate in that I had very strong male role models when I was growing up. Just to illustrate how that worked, here is a true story from my childhood.

It was 1972 and I was 17 years old. As usual, I was in Sethpally, Adilabad. A remote little village without electricity, road, post office, bank or hospital. I was with Uncle Rama, with whom I used to spend my summer and winter vacations. Uncle Rama lived in a cottage on the bank of the Kadam River, with three huge Tamarind trees in front of it, between the cottage and the river. Tamarind has the cooled shade of any Indian tree and these three provided thick shade which combined with the effect of the river, reduced the temperature under them by several degrees. On days when I was at home in the day, which were very few, I would sleep after lunch on a cot under those trees.

To get to Uncle Rama's place, you had to walk through fields and patches of forest for about two miles or so. The house was rectangular in shape with a central room which was also a passage to go from the veranda in front to the veranda behind at either end of which was the kitchen and a bathroom. A room you bathed in, in the winter. Not a toilet. In the summer, you had the option of bathing at the well, where you stood on the apron and someone drew water from the well in a bucket and upended it on your head. Thoroughly delightful way to have a bath in the very hot summer.

This central room had a square table with four chairs around it. It was supposed to be the dining room, but we never ate there. The table was used as a surface to put anything we wanted handy. To one side in this room was a Westinghouse kerosene refrigerator in which we sometimes made ice cream. On either side of this central room were two equal sized rooms with windows on the outer walls. One looking out to the veranda in front and the other to the side of the house. In the front was a wide veranda that ran the whole length of the house. There was a two feet wide and three feet high parapet wall that enclosed the veranda. It acted as additional seating and a place to rest your feet and lean back in your chair, balancing it on its hind legs. On one side of the dining room door opening into the veranda was a long table with a bench on one side and the parapet wall as the seating, on the other. There were some rope cots on the other side of the veranda. All our meals, and most of our conversation was around this table on the veranda. It was also the place where anyone who came to see Uncle Rama sat, and stories were told and problems solved. Uncle Rama would talk to me late into the night and tell me stories from his life, his opinion on various matters, his commentary on politics, stories of great hunts, stalking predators, and stories that had some worthy message for me to learn. He never preached or pontificated, never spoke top-down. I was a friend and my age was not a barrier to our friendship. He spoke to me man-to-man and it was up to me to measure up and be worthy of that trust. I can say with great satisfaction that I never let him down.

It was summer and I had been out the whole day. My usual routine was that I would leave the house at first light, having eaten a hearty breakfast of chapattis, eggs and a large mug of tea laced with plenty of sugar (I used to take sugar in my tea in those days) and go across the Kadam River into the forest. I would usually walk, but on occasion, Shivaiyya would take me in his bullock cart. The bullock cart is the most versatile vehicle known to man and can do everything except climb trees. Of course, it doesn't have springs or shock absorbers and that is hard on your back and bones, but not when you are 17. On that day, Shivaiyya and I set off walking early in the morning and took a long route that was a huge circle which would bring us back to the river in the evening. Summer days are long, and so, we had plenty of time. I was carrying a 7.62 Mauser bolt action carbine rifle with a 5-shot magazine and Shivaiyya was carrying a .22 BRNO rifle.

Shivaiyya was a Gond (his tribe) and was my gunbearer, guide and pal, all in one. I usually took two weapons, alternating between the 7.62 (which we called '9mm' for short) and a 12-gauge shotgun, depending on what I planned to look for that day. The .22 BRNO rifle was always with me because it was useful for almost any small game. The 12-guage shotgun was mostly for duck and the 7.62 was for larger game like Sambar, Bluebull or Chital. Hunting was never my priority. But we were walking in a forest that was home to all big cats and so being armed was simply necessary, whether one shot anything or not. I almost never did.

.22 BRNO Rifle.

#RAISING SONS

A gond tribal man.

The Forest

It was a very hot day in the summer. Summer in the Sahyadris can be extremely hot with temperatures more than 45 Celsius. The deciduous forest in the foothills leading to the Kadam River is mostly teak, with a sprinkling of other species. In some places, there were large clumps of bamboo. All these shed their leaves in summer, and so, the forest floor is carpeted with dry leaves. That makes moving noiselessly impossible. As you walk, the leaves crumble loudly and make a racket loud enough to wake the dead. I walked ahead of Shivaiyya, who sometimes guided me from behind. Either he would speak in a very low voice, just a word or two to ask me to either be careful or to turn one way or another. Or he would click his tongue or whistle if there was some animal or bird that he had seen but which I had missed.

That didn't happen very often, as I was very alert and had been trained in woodcraft by the greatest experts that I have ever known; Nawab Nazir Yar Jung and Uncle Rama (Mr. Venkat Rama Reddy). From them, I learned above all respect for the forest and all those who live in it. Respect is the most important thing to learn, because it enables you to appreciate your surroundings. That means that you are not careless but take care to ensure that you don't cause any damage to anything animate or inanimate. When you act like that, you automatically keep yourself safe.

> The problem is that when an animal is shot with a high velocity rifle firing a solid bullet straight through the chest, it is entirely likely that the bullet goes through the animal, damages internal organs but does not break any bones. That means that often, given the massive flush of adrenaline in the animal, it could run for several hundred meters before it falls due to blood loss. There have been cases of large animals running for a couple of miles and some that perhaps lived for more than two days, before they eventually succumbed to the wound.

We walked all day, bathing in the atmosphere of the forest, filled with its sounds, none of them disturbing and every one of them telling a story to those who could understand. I used to play a game with myself, identifying each sound and then confirming that understanding with anything else, sound, smell, track, or sight that I happened to encounter thereafter. After midday, we sat on the bank of the Dotti Vaagu, a tributary of the Kadam, which made an oxbow in which remained some water. This had a thick clump of bamboo on both banks, and so, it was markedly cooler. Shivaiyya and I sat with our backs to large Ber bush which had no fruit at that time but is a thick and very thorny bush. When you are in the forest, you secure your back first because both tigers and leopards attack from the back. Normally, they won't attack humans because they don't eat junk food, but nevertheless, you secure your back because that's the right thing to do. You survive in the forest and in life, by knowing the rules and following them for your benefit and the benefit of others who share the space and time with you. Then, Shivaiyya opened the tiffin box that he was carrying which was our lunch. Chappatis, flat omlettes, and mango pickle. We each ate two chapattis each with an omlette, dipping the pieces we broke off into the pickle until it was finished and the container wiped clean.

Then, we drank the water we had brought, though the water in the riverbed was also clean enough to drink. But since it was not flowing at that time, I preferred not to drink it. Once we were 'fully fed up and fulfilled,' as my dear friend Berty would say, I would meet him twenty years later, we took turns to take a nap. That is another thing you learn in the wild. You always keep a lookout. Shivaiyya, though he was an illiterate farm worker/shepherd, was my teacher and mentor and I treated him as such. He reciprocated by teaching me things that I could never have learnt, if not for him, and which, in some cases, saved my life. In every case, they enhanced how I experienced the wild and reinforced my love for the wild places and those who inhabit them.

It was evening, and in the tropics, darkness comes quickly and we had a fairly long way to go, we started on our way back home. We had walked for perhaps three miles on a narrow winding footpath, made primarily by wildlife going down to the Kadam River to drink. Even in the hottest weather, the river had some pools in shady loops of its course which were visited by animals from all over the forest. There was no other water anywhere close, except the backwater of the Kadam Dam which was miles away. So, these pools were a very good place to see wildlife. The path took a dip and then went up a slight incline and over the top, down to the riverside. I was at the bottom of the dip walking up the incline, when in the gathering dusk, I suddenly saw a Chital stag come up the path from the other side and crest the rise. The wind was blowing in my face, so, he had no idea that I was on the same path as he was. I can't say who was more surprised, but I snapped the carbine to my shoulder and fired. The shot hit him in the center of his chest. I saw the dust fly out of his hide. He snorted loudly and spun around and disappeared.

I was thrilled that my day was going to be successful after all and I would come home with some meat. Shivaiyya and I ran up the incline, expecting to see the Chital stag lying on the ground. I was in a hurry also because according to Islamic food laws, I had to slaughter the stag in the ritual way before it died, if I was to be able to eat the meat. But to my utter surprise and intense disappointment, there was no sign of the animal. It had simply vanished. Shivaiyya and I searched high and low in the rapidly falling dark to no avail. I knew I had hit him. There was some blood on the path, but it was light pink and frothy, meaning that it had been hit through the lungs. His heart was intact and obviously no major bone was broken and his spine was also undamaged.

The problem is that when an animal is shot with a high velocity rifle firing a solid bullet straight through the chest, it is entirely likely that the bullet goes through the animal, damages internal organs but does not break any bones. That means that often, given the massive flush of adrenaline in the animal, it could run for several hundred meters before it falls due to blood loss. There have been cases of large animals running for a couple of miles and some that perhaps lived for more than two days, before they eventually succumbed to the wound. A very painful way to die. Placing the shot is therefore very critical to successful hunting. In my surprise and hurry, that was the mistake I made.

By then, it was completely dark and there was no chance of our finding the stag. Shivaiyya and I wound our way home, sad that we were returning empty-handed. Uncle Rama would understand what had happened, I was sure. I was not thrilled about returning with a story instead of a quarry, but that was how life was sometimes. Or so I thought. I had no idea of the turn events would take to make that night one of the most memorable of my life.

We crossed the Kadam River, which was almost totally dry near the house, with a small trickle against the far bank which we could easily jump across without even wetting our feet. A far cry from the raging torrent filling the entire bed from bank to bank that it would become in the monsoon. As I climbed up the slope leading to the house, Uncle Rama was on the veranda and he called out in greeting to me, "Yawar baba, welcome back. Kya maray (what did you shoot)? I heard the shot."

"I shot a Chital stag."

"Shabaash (congratulations). Kahan hai (where is it)?"

"I lost it," I said. And told him the whole story.

He listened in silence and said, "You are telling me that you wounded an animal and left it to die and you came home?"

"It got dark Uncle Rama. I couldn't see anything. What could I do?"

"I am sorry, that doesn't work. You never leave a wounded animal. You shoot straight and kill the animal outright or you follow up and finish it off. You never, ever leave an animal to die in pain because you couldn't shoot straight."

Well, I thought that was a bit hard, but he was the Boss, so I didn't say anything. He said, "Right, now wash up and have your dinner and then go and get that Chital back."

I was not sure that I had heard him right. It was almost 9 pm. By the time I'd had my dinner, it would be 10 pm. He was telling me to go out into a forest with dangerous wild animals in the middle of the night to find and bring back an animal that I had wounded. Was I going to obey?

To be continued...

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7.62 Mauser bolt action carbine Rifle.

#ICONIC MEAL

From Fields to Fire

The name dalcheeni may have evolved from phrases like "dal al Cheen," reflecting its association with China in trade circles

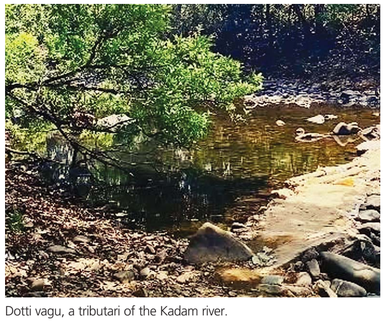
Ask anyone about the soul of Punjabi cuisine, and the answer comes quickly: *makki ki roti with sarson ka saag*. This humble yet hearty pairing, corn flatbread served with slow-cooked mustard greens, is often described as Punjab's "national dish," rooted in the rhythms of rural life and winter harvests. But behind its rustic simplicity lies a surprising truth: many of its key ingredients are the result of centuries of global exchange.

Take makki (maize), the star of the roti. Maize is not native to India. It originated in South America and made its way to the Indian subcontinent roughly 350 years ago, likely through European traders during the age of exploration. Over time, it adapted beautifully to the soils of Punjab, eventually becoming a staple grain in the region's agrarian culture.

The story doesn't stop there. The fiery heat in many Indian dishes comes from chillies, another import from the Americas. These arrived in India around the 16th-18th centuries, gradually replacing or complementing older spices like black pepper, which had been used extensively during the Mughal era. Similarly, groundnuts (peanuts), now common in Indian cooking, were introduced much later, around the early 20th century.

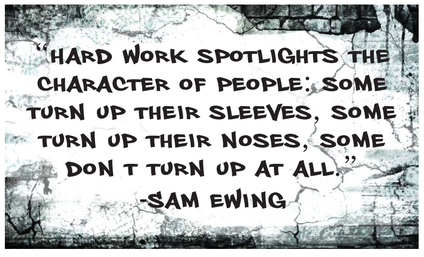
Even the spices that feel deeply "Indian" often have international roots. Cinnamon, known locally as *dalcheeni*, is believed to have traveled from Indonesia through ancient trade routes. From there, it moved across China and eventually reached India via the famed Silk Road. Arab traders played a key role in this exchange, and some accounts suggest the name *dalcheeni* may have evolved from phrases like "dal al Cheen," reflecting its association with China in trade circles.

What we now call *garam masala*, a blend of warming spices, also reflects this layered history. While the blend itself is distinctly South Asian, its ingredients tell stories of migration, trade, and cultural fusion. The kitchens of the Mughal courts, in particular, were melting pots where Persian, Central Asian, and Indian culinary traditions intertwined. So, when you sit down to a plate of *makki ki roti and sarson ka saag*, you're not just tasting Punjab, you're tasting a history shaped by continents, caravans, and centuries of exchange. What feels local is, in many ways, global. It's a reminder that food traditions are rarely static. They evolve, absorb, and adapt. And in that evolution lies their richness, not just of flavour, but of story.



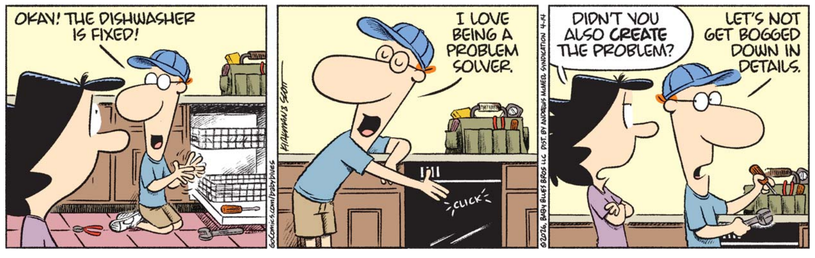
Dotti vagu, a tributari of the Kadam river.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman