



Brew Monday

Brew Monday, observed on the third Monday of January, is a day dedicated to mental health and community connection. Originally inspired by "Blue Monday," often called the most depressing day of the year, Brew Monday encourages people to reach out, share a cup of tea or coffee, and check in with friends, family, or colleagues. The day highlights the power of conversation and companionship in combating loneliness and stress during winter. By fostering small, meaningful connections over a simple brew, it reminds everyone that even a short chat can uplift spirits and support emotional well-being.

#DYNASTIES TO DEMOCRACY

Beyond Forts And Palaces

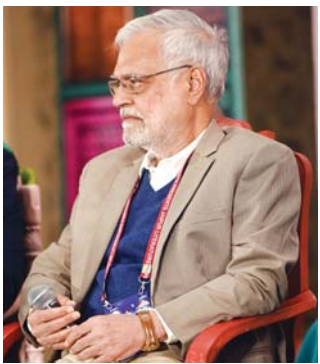
About cyclical change of government every five years, BJP leader Satish Poonia said the public of Rajasthan does not spare any, if you haven't worked, one pays



L-R Tabeenah Anjum, Deep Mukherjee, Anish Gawande, Satish Poonia, CP Joshi.



Tabeenah Anjum.



CP Joshi.



Rakhee Roytalukdar

There is so much beyond the magnificence of forts and palaces of Rajasthan. The desert land is state of contradictions, has interesting people, whose political acumen needs to be appreciated because it strongly believes in the 'revolving door policy', having not repeated its government between the period 1993 to 2023. It actually isn't a state which just votes on the basis of caste, so said the young authors and journalists, Deep Mukherjee and Tabeenah Anjum of their newly released book 'From Dynasties to Democracy: Politics, Caste and Power Struggles-Rajasthan'.

The book was launched by Congress leader C P Joshi and BJP's Satish Poonia on the third day of the Jaipur Literature Festival being held here today. The session was moderated by Anish Gawande, author and national spokesperson of NCP.

Tabeenah, while talking about the idea of the book, said both of them have been reporting and doing ground reports since the last 16 years, and hence, they thought of collating their work in the form of a book in 2026, when the state was going through political turmoil. "But it has taken us five years to complete it as we researched thoroughly and deeply and tried including our field notes, read up the Assembly proceedings by kings and jagirdars to a dynamic electoral democracy. They delve beyond common perceptions to chart Rajasthan's political journey from 1949 to 2024 and writing it has not been an easy task. We have examined and analysed caste, power struggles and also talked to people, politicians who have given us fresh insights and rich anecdotes."

While talking about political maturity and contradictions of the desert state, Deep said, "It can be seen that Rajasthan has had an Opposition since 1952, unlike other states where there has usually been a majority party dominance. Despite talks of caste-driven politics of Rajasthan, it has had chief ministers, not always from the dominant castes. During research, we also found that some of the issues which impact us now have their roots in the past. And that we have to connect the contempo-



Amrita Mahale.



Rakhee Roytalukdar

wo intriguing real-life crimes. And two racy, gripping crime thrillers. Stories that make you edgy and uneasy as the police force unravel the mysteries step by step in the books. But their authors, Rudraneil Sengupta and Anirban

Bhattacharyya, made it a fun-filled session, interspersing with crime and witty quips on the fourth day of Jaipur Literature Festival here on Surya Mahal, when they asserted that there can be no such thing as a perfect crime and it isn't possible in the present day.

The session titled 'The Murder Duo: A Crime and a Mystery' was moderated by Anish Gawande, author and national spokesperson of NCP. Congress leader C P Joshi, talked about a unique tradition in the state, started by Mohan Lal Sukhadia, who believed there may be difference of opinion between leaders and parties but that should not derail the personal relations making it democratic process and without malice. And this continues till today.

On a question about cyclical change of government every five years, BJP leader Satish Poonia said that the public of Rajasthan does not spare any party or any leader, if you haven't worked, one has to pay the price.

The book takes a look at Rajasthan's political evolution from a feudal state ruled by kings and jagirdars to a dynamic electoral democracy. They delve beyond common perceptions to chart Rajasthan's political journey from 1949 to 2024 and writing it has not been an easy task. We have examined and analysed caste, power struggles and also talked to people, politicians who have given us fresh insights and rich anecdotes."

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small town called Falna in Rajasthan's Pali district, who came to Jaipur and wanted to turn rich easily. She conned around 1000 men through dating apps like Tinder and websites and ultimately murdered one of them Dushyant Sharma and left him packed in a suitcase. "It is a human story of greed, of how four people wanted to reach beyond what was in their grasp and which culminated into this heinous crime."

On why such crimes happen and on the choice of the victim, Anirban said, "I am a strong believer of serendipity and things that are sometimes fated to happen. And this is something I noticed when writing my first book on India's serial killers. Why was that one person chosen to be killed out of the thousands or why a six-year old was killed, questions for which answers are difficult to find. There is no justification for this. And it was simply destiny that the lives of four people in the Jaipur Tinder murder case collided and led to destruction. And that is what gets me excited as a non-fiction writer because as the saying goes, 'fact is much stranger than fiction' and you don't know what is waiting for you."

Real life observations made their way into their book. Rudraneil used to do long form reporting for newspapers and worked on topics like how crime affects society. His "The Beast Within" taps on years of embedded reporting with the Delhi Police, crafting a gripping narrative following the mysterious death of a young domestic worker.

Sengupta said, "And so while reporting, I met police officers, and I went back to them, not as a reporter but as someone who wanted to know more about their lives, how they spoke, how they moved and looked at not just the police procedures while working on cases. Thankfully, I found some police officers who agreed to my proposal and I shadowed them for some months and all of that is in my book. A lot of dialogue and observations are in my book, real-life situations. I even went on raids with police."

Bhattacharyya revealed that he got help from the police all through while writing this thriller. "I got access to the cop, Sardar Bhupendra Singh, who solved the case, that is from the horse's mouth. I got access to the

Saavdhaan! There's A Beast Within!

Anirban said, "I am a strong believer of serendipity and things that are sometimes fated to happen. And this is something I noticed when writing my first book on India's serial killers. Why was that one person chosen to be killed out of the thousands or why a six-year old was killed, questions for which answers are difficult to find. There is no justification for this. And it was simply destiny that the lives of four people in the Jaipur Tinder murder case collided and led to destruction. And that is what gets me excited as a non-fiction writer because as the saying goes, 'fact is much stranger than fiction' and you don't know what is waiting for you."



Anirban Bhattacharyya.

#THE BEAST WITHIN

crime scene and I could smell blood. Many believe when the accused gets arrested, it is the end of the mystery but actually it is the beginning when the police have to prove the crime in the court of law. They have to create a water tight case, forensics. One has to harden oneself up to write such crime cases."

Talking about Priya Seth, the

murderer, Anirban said, "She was a big fish in a small town, celebrated in her town but when she came to Jaipur, she found herself to be a small fish in a big town, she was also attracted to the audience and wanted to earn money so that she could live a lavish life. Once she tasted chicken tandoori, she yearned for more and did not want to go back to square one. But she



Rudraneil Sengupta.

was brainy and had the acumen to pull off the con job." Rudraneil

says he was tired of the crime reportage where one can only write only what is told to you on record. "I wanted to put a bit of myself in the story and I wanted to show the readers the things I see them as they were. Often, there have been situations where your sources have told you things far more interesting off the record but you could not pen them in your report. I didn't want to be restricted by off record and on record. And I thought fiction would work better than non-fiction in such a case."

For Bhattacharyya, also an actor and creator-producer of Savdhaan India and producer of Crime Patrol, it worked the other way around. He said, "I had to stick to the facts. I decided to take the approach of fictional narrative, like Syed Hussain Zaidi, an investigative journalist. That is the way I



L-R - Amrita Mahale, Rudraneil Sengupta, Anirban Bhattacharyya.



chose, I had my facts and research and decided to tell it in the form of an interesting story for the reader to enjoy, so that you do not get caught up in dry facts. And tread between lines and decipher emotions and that gives one the joy of reading."

On the sensation title especially "The Beast Within", and who exactly is the beast, is it the beast within all of us or is it the corrupt, indifferent, cynical system or is it the honest, upright individual who refuses to adapt to it and shakes it up from within, Rudraneil says. "My protagonist, Inspector Prashant Kumar doesn't think of himself as somebody who can shake things up. He thinks of himself as someone dull and all other characters in my book are fighting personal battles like pain or grief that drags them down or past events they haven't gotten over, so that is the beast within each. We think of criminals as a different class of people but it is true that all of us have an ability to commit crime depending on our circumstances and what is triggering us. I actually wonder there is not so much more crime considering we have so much poverty. Probably, there is some innate goodness still left amongst people, that is why we don't have more crimes."

Bhattacharyya echoed, "There is a beast within us. One of us needs just one trigger, on the surface, we are all novel people and then, there is that one moment we lose the part. And that is the grainiest moment, and inside, we all flip and in the book, I have drawn up a chart that if they had not killed the boy, they would have got seven years for kidnapping."

About tech-driven crimes which are on the rise, Bhattacharyya said, "This crime could have not taken place in 2010 or 2015. The face of the criminal has changed, criminals have become faceless. And at least in the Tinder case, we knew who we were dealing with but with cyber crime, we do not even know with whom we are dealing. I got conned myself transferring a large sum of money. And when I went to the police, they mocked me, saying 'You make Savdhan India,' making the audience erupt in laughter."

On a question about what kind of feeling they would want their readers to feel after reading the book, Bhattacharyya stressed it should make them more aware and cautious while for Rudraneil, "The readers should feel moved by the characters, their joy, their pain. If readers can feel them, my point is made."

But both crime fiction writers were emphatic that a perfect crime is not possible, especially in these interconnected and tech-savvy days. Rudraneil said, "I don't think there can be a perfect crime as there are surveillance and phones' exact locations can be determined. But there is a good way to get rid of bodies. Strip off clothes and anything which can be identified later, burn it and throw it in the canal. The body is likely to float up only after six to seven days, erasing all the forensics and any clues of identification. And that could possibly be by far 'the perfect murder.'"

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

#A CONTINENT IN CRISIS

Russia, Ukraine and the European Story

Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, Radoslaw Sikorski said, "Putin wants to achieve his ultimate aim of controlling all of Ukraine and its resilience is the real problem for him"



Radoslaw Sikorski.



Abha Sharma

Russia Ukraine war has continued longer than anyone expected and there doesn't seem to be an immediate hope or sign of a ceasefire.

Russian President Vladimir Putin thought he would defeat Ukraine in three days and US President Trump thought his 28 point plan would end the conflict. But the conflict continues.

Discussing the evolving situation in Russia and Ukraine, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, Radoslaw Sikorski said, "Putin wants to achieve his ultimate aim of controlling all of Ukraine and its resilience is the real problem for him. It is not just about territory, it is also about the geo-political orientation."

He was in conversation with former diplomat and accomplished author Navtej Sarna at the 19th Jaipur Literature Festival on Saturday. Sarna cited Sikorski's essay in the New York Times where he had mentioned that Putin's long-term goals have not changed. He wants to regain the Russian empire, undermine security guarantees and weaken the US. There was a time when Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed Ukraine as dear brother, part of the same nation and now Ukraine is being bombarded

every day. Sarna further asked him if there was a moment in history, perhaps in the days of Yeltsin and early Putin, that Russia would probably engage with the West-a different landscape of the United Europe. The Russia-Ukraine war has meant loss of human lives and immense financial cost to both, he said. Some Ukrainian cities are facing a terrible time in the biting cold, where the temperature is as low as minus 20 degrees without electricity and hundreds of Ukrainians have been rendered homeless and living as refugees.

The Polish minister discussed Poland's role in responding to the crisis and said that they were lending all logistical support to Ukraine by way of tanks, fighter jets and aid to refugees as compared to many other European countries who have spent less on helping Ukraine. But Poland has so far refrained from sending any troops to Ukraine's aid, he added. He also expressed concern over Russia's hybrid warfare. He said how can Putin be trusted? When the head of a state publicly lies; when a state signs a treaty solemnly to respect the border like done in the 1994 Budapest memorandum. Russia had agreed to respect the independence, sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine but broke the agreement by waging a full-scale invasion. He added,

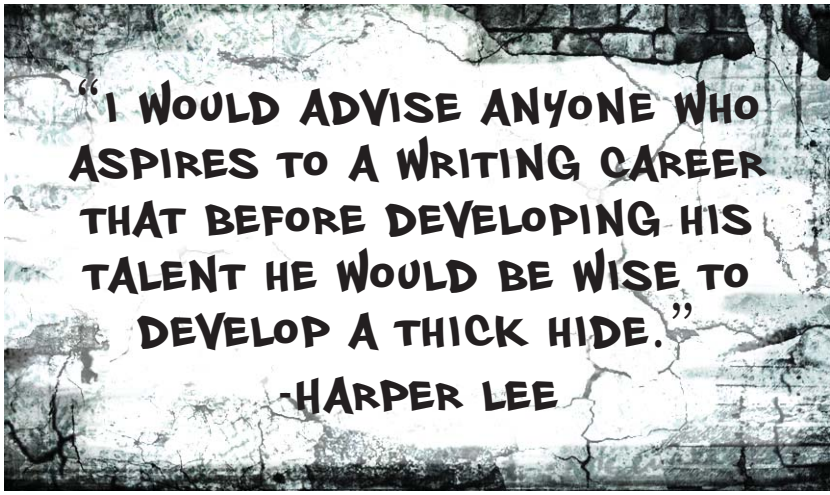
"There have been fractured relations between Ukraine and India and among the European nations, India trusts Russia the most. Ukraine has opposed India in the UN at least on six occasions."

Radoslaw Sikorski said barely three and a half decades ago, Poland embarked on a peaceful political and economic transformation - from a centrally planned system to a democratic, market-based economy. Since 1990, Poland's GDP per capita has increased more than eightfold. We have had our share of conflicts, insurrections, and wars, and we have never avoided taking up arms when necessary. Yet, the past 35 years have taught us a lesson: peace, predictability, and political order - when given a chance - can work miracles.



L-R - Radoslaw Sikorski & Navtej Sarna.

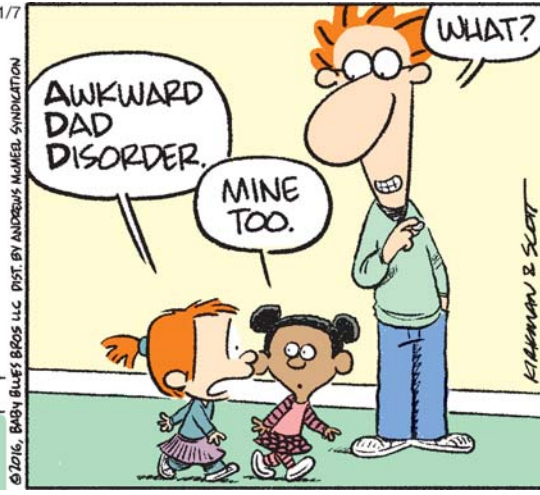
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

