

#THE RUH

India's Living Legacy

Attar

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India holds one of the world's oldest and most layered histories of fragrance, where scent has long transcended the realm of mere cosmetics. The very language around perfume reveals this difference. The English word *perfume* comes from the Latin *per fumum*, meaning "through smoke," while attar derives from the Arabic-Urdu word *itr*, meaning "essence" or the distilled soul of something living. The distinction is not merely linguistic, it reflects two entirely different cultural relationships with fragrance.

In South Asia, scent has historically functioned as something infrastructural, devotional, medicinal, seasonal, erotic and even political, flowing across caste and class. In Sanskrit, *gandha* (fragrance) was understood as transformative, akin to *vidya* (knowledge). Aromatics were not simply smelled, they were seen, touched, worn and absorbed. Unlike alcohol-based sprays that evaporate quickly, attars were meant to merge with the body and environment.

Nature provided the palette. Sandalwood was ground into cooling paste for skin and rituals. Roses were distilled into *Ruh Gulab*, agarwood darkened into the deep resinous luxury of *oudh*, and *khas* (vetiver) yielded a green oil that cooled homes and bodies in summer. These scents altered temperature, texture

and mood. Fragrance structured sacred spaces: idols were adorned with sandalwood and kunkum, while homes and temples were perfumed with *dhoop* and *sambrani* smoke. Names such as *Ruh-e-Gulab* and *Jannat-e-Firdaus* positioned itr as a medium of divine proximity.

Even desire was imagined through fragrance. In mythology, Kamadeva's arrows were tipped with blossoms, marking the stages of longing. Jasmine worn in a *gajra* signified intimacy, marigolds signalled devotion, and even the scent of rain on parched earth, mitti attar, was captured and worn. In this culture, fragrance was never separate from life.

At the heart of attar lies the ancient *deg bhapka* distillation method. Copper stills are heated over open flame, with temperature guided by sensory skill rather than machines. Through this patient alchemy, the ephemeral becomes enduring: attar preserves the spirit of flowers long after they fade. Each batch responds to soil, season, trade and taste, making it a dynamic, living art.

Today, houses like *Boond Fragrances* continue this elemental tradition of fire, copper, flower and time. With notes such as *genda* and *saptaparni*, attar exists not as a relic but as a living continuum, an enduring reminder that in India, scent has always been a way of knowing, remembering and belonging.



Whatever the explanation, Agatha and Archie divorced. She continued to write novels, plays, and stories, many of which were adapted, and her popularity exploded. She was, and remains, the best-selling author of all time. (My favourite Agatha Christie quote is "An archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her.") Between traveling and expeditions, Agatha continued to write novels. She also developed a love of surfing, and is often credited with being the first woman to bring worldwide attention to the sport.

● Bulbul Joshi

The autumn air in Torquay, England carried a chill in 1914. On the streets stood a young woman named Agatha, watching an endless column of exhausted people pass by. They carried everything they owned in battered suitcases, blankets, and worn bags. Their coats were too thin for the cold. Their faces were hollow with grief and uncertainty. They were Belgian refugees.

Germany's invasion of Belgium had driven them from their homes. Some had lost their possessions. Others had lost parents, children, husbands, wives, or friends. They walked into an uncertain future with little more than hope.

As Agatha watched them, she wasn't just witnessing a humanitarian tragedy. She was unknowingly watching the beginning of one of literature's greatest detectives.

Two years passed.

The First World War still raged across Europe, and Agatha was working long shifts in a hospital. She later qualified as an assistant in the hospital pharmacy after passing examinations from the Society of Apothecaries. Every day she handled medicines and learned about chemicals and poisons, their effects, their dangers, and how easily they could hide behind ordinary life.

Those long afternoons sometimes brought back the teasing words of her sister.

"I bet you couldn't write a good detective story."

Instead of arguing, Agatha decided to prove her wrong.

She already had one advantage. Few aspiring writers understood poison as thoroughly as she did, and she knew it could become the perfect weapon for a mystery. But every detective story also needed a detective.

Her thoughts returned to those Belgian refugees she had watched years earlier. Among them she imagined a man who had once been respected in his homeland, a meticulous Belgian police officer whose life had been uprooted by war and who was rebuilding it in England.

The detective who first appeared as a refugee fleeing war would become one of the most famous fictional investigators ever created.

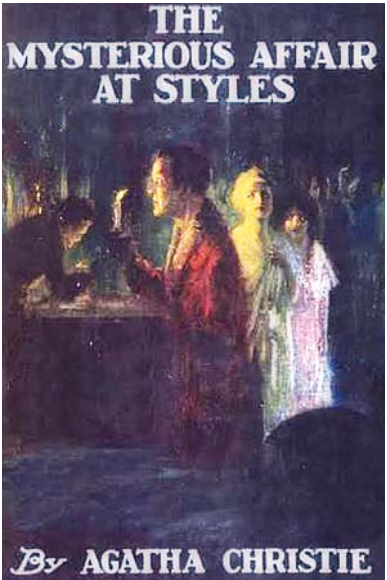
That man became Hercule Poirot.

He wasn't created as a fearless action hero. He was a refugee. Intelligent, dignified, displaced by conflict, and armed only with his extraordinary powers of observation.

Soon, the story consumed her. Her mother noticed that Agatha

The Murder Mystery Woman

#AGATHA CHRISTIE



books have sold over two billion copies worldwide, making her one of the best-selling authors in history. Only the Bible and the works of Shakespeare have reached more readers.

She was born Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller in Torquay, Devon, in the United Kingdom, the daughter of a wealthy American stockbroker. Her father died when she was eleven years old. Her mother taught her at home, encouraging her to write at a very young age. At the age of 16, she went to Mrs. Dryden's finishing school in Paris to study singing and piano. In 1914, at age 24,

she married Colonel Archibald Christie, an aviator in the Royal Flying Corps. It was while he went away to war, she worked as a nurse and wrote her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). When her husband came back from the war, they had a daughter. In 1928, he divorced her husband, who had been having an affair.

In 1930, she married Sir Max Mallowan, an archaeologist and a Catholic. She was happy in the early years of her second marriage, and did not divorce her husband despite his many affairs. She travelled with her husband's job, and set several of her novels in the Middle East. Most of her other novels were set in a fictionalized Devon, where she was born. Agatha Christie is credited with developing the "cozy style" of mystery, which became popular in, and ultimately defined, the *Golden Age* of fiction in England in the 1920s and '30s, an age of which she is considered to have been Queen.

Her Own Disappearance

The Queen of Mystery literally disappeared at one time, turning her life into a mystery straight out of her novels and creating theories about what happened that persist today, almost a century later. Here's what we do know: In 1926, Agatha's husband, Archie, asked her for a divorce. He had fallen in love with a younger woman, Nancy Neele. (Remember that name.) A few months later, on December 3, 1926, the couple had a big fight, which ended when Archie went to spend the night with friends. The next morning, he reported his wife missing. She wasn't in their home, and a quick search turned up her car, abandoned above a chalk quarry, with her license and clothes inside.

Suspicion immediately turned to Archie, the last to see Agatha alive. For eleven days, the police turned up the pressure on her husband, while continuing to search the area for her, until they received a call: Agatha was spotted in a spa in Yorkshire, registered under the name, wait for it, Nancy Neele. You have to remember that this was before the internet and cell phone cameras. While the news of her disappearance made headlines across the world, it still wasn't the informa-

tion dump we are used to today, which is probably why it took so long for someone to recognize her. Now, here's where the real-life mystery gets murkier: Agatha claimed amnesia and said that she didn't remember how she got to the spa. Some people thought she was in a fugue state, a temporary memory

lapse due to the stress of her impending divorce. Other people speculated that she staged the whole thing to embarrass her cheating husband that would make her the original Gone Girl. In her memoir, Agatha barely devotes a page to the event, still claiming amnesia. Her famous disappearance has been the subject of several books and films. There's a movie, *Agatha*, with Vanessa Redgrave and Dustin Hoffman, in which the author has an affair with a reporter during her disappearance. There's also an episode of *Doctor Who* about it, in which Agatha's disappearance is the result of giant alien wasps. (While this is the coolest explanation, it pains me to admit it is the least probable explanation.) And just a few months ago, Marie Benedict released a new novel about the author's missing days: *The Mystery of Mrs. Christie*.



Agatha and her husband Max Mallowan at one of their archeological digs.



Albert Finney plays Poirot.

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Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India entered into a trade agreement with the Soviet Union. The arrangement was distinctive. Instead of relying on scarce foreign exchange like U.S. dollars, the two countries agreed to trade using the Indian rupee.

An account was established through which India could purchase oil and industrial machinery from the Soviet Union. In return, India exported goods such as tea, jute, spices, and notably, Bollywood films. This system allowed both

#INDIA AND USSR

When Bollywood Fueled Diplomacy

Indian cinema of that era often carried themes of social justice, equality, and the struggles of the common man, ideas that aligned closely with socialist values



In the years following independence, India faced a pressing challenge, fueling its economic development. By the early 1950s, industrial growth required oil, machinery, and strong international partnerships. In 1954, an unusual and fascinating solution emerged: a trade relationship between India and the Soviet Union where Bollywood films became part of economic diplomacy.

A Unique Agreement

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nations to bypass currency constraints while strengthening economic ties.

Cinema as Currency

At the time, Hollywood films were largely banned in the Soviet Union. Yet, Soviet audiences had a strong appetite for international cinema. Indian films filled this cultural gap. Through the Soviet state film agency's office in Mumbai, Indian filmmakers gained access to affordable film stock and equipment. In exchange, a steady stream of Bollywood films was exported to Soviet audiences. These films were not just entertainment, they were cultural ambassadors.

Stories That Resonated

Indian cinema of that era often carried themes of social justice, equality, and the struggles of the common man, ideas that aligned closely with socialist values. This made Bollywood particularly appealing to Soviet viewers.

One of the most iconic examples is *Azara*, starring Raj Kapoor. The film's portrayal of

poverty, morality, and destiny struck a deep chord with Soviet audiences. Raj Kapoor became a household name, celebrated as a hero far beyond India's borders.

A Cultural Phenomenon

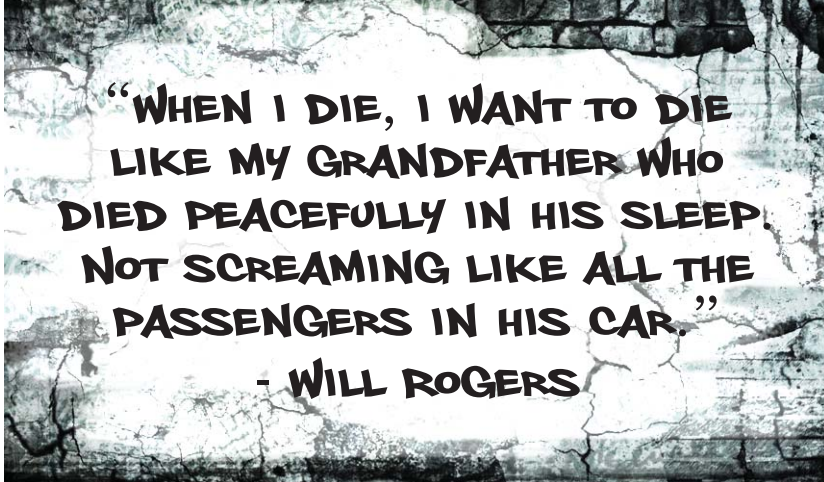
The popularity of Indian films in the Soviet Union reached remarkable levels. Songs were sung in the streets, and film dialogues became widely recognized. Hindi, as a language, gained unexpected prominence, becoming one of the most familiar foreign languages among Soviet citizens. So profound was this influence that some families even named their daughters after Hindi film characters and actresses, reflecting a deep cultural connection forged through cinema.

Quiet Contributors to Economic Growth

While industries like steel and agriculture often dominate discussions of India's early economic development, the role of cinema in international trade is rarely highlighted. Yet, Bollywood played a subtle but meaningful part.

By participating in this barter-like system, Indian films contributed to securing vital resources for the country's growth. They also strengthened diplomatic ties and fostered cultural exchange on a massive scale. The story of India and the Soviet Union in the 1950s reveals an extraordinary moment when cinema became more than art, it became a tool of diplomacy and development. Bollywood didn't just entertain; it helped power a nation's ambitions, bridging two cultures through storytelling, music, and shared ideals. In doing so, it quietly left an imprint not only on global cinema but also on the economic history of modern India.

THE WALL

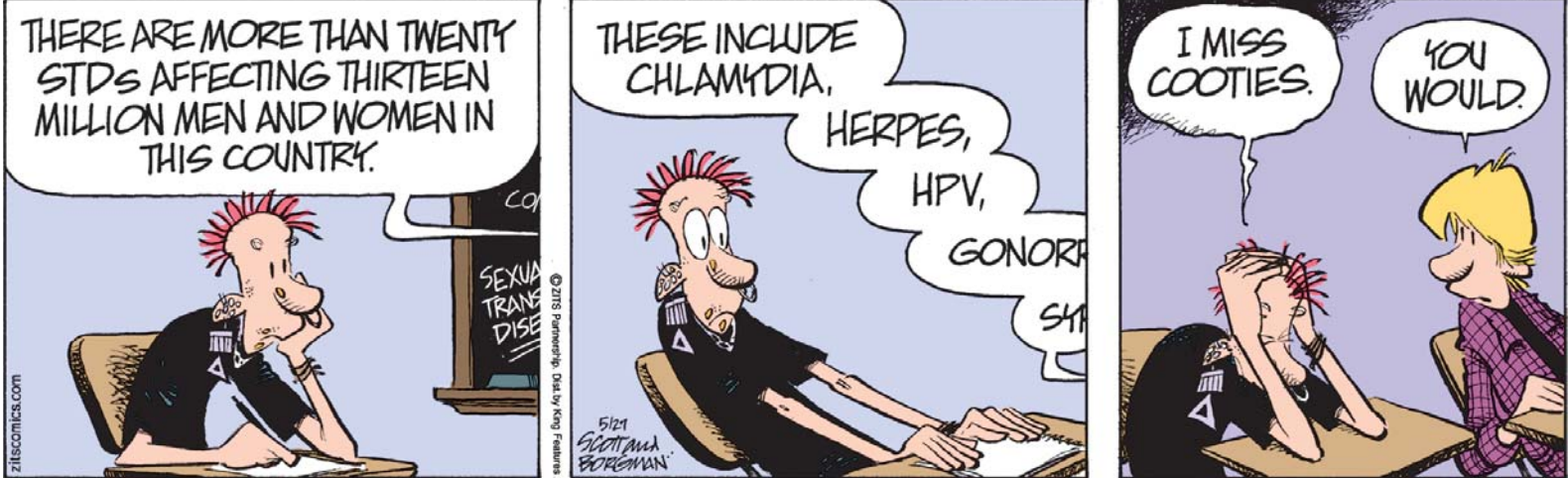


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman