

Rights of spring



by Avtar Singh

There is a passage from Sheila Dhar's luminous "Here's someone I'd like you to meet" that is worth rereading in this season. Ustad Bundu Khan, a legend both for his mastery of the sarangi and his otherworldliness, has gone missing in the writer's capacious childhood home. The household is mobilised to track down the gentle maestro, who is deemed unfit to wander even that cloistered haven alone, never mind the city without. He is finally tracked down by his music, which is found to emanate from a bed of sweet peas in which he is lying, eyes closed and perfectly at peace, his instrument balanced on his chest. Her father contrives to wake him as gently as possible, upon which the master offers this: "It is spring time, and I was playing for the flowers." It is a complete explanation. The sweet peas are indeed in bloom and fragrant. The raga is Bahar.

Forget, if you can, the tantalus of a home big enough for a man,

no matter how eccentric, to go missing in, when most of us live in houses where the disappearance of underwear is immediately remarked. Consider the synaesthetic beauty of the scene Dhar so effortlessly conjures. There is beauty. There is warmth where previously there was winter. There are nice smells. And in between it all lies a man lost to the world we know but tuned to one he sees, to which he pays homage and his homage is music itself.

In one of my favourite shabads from the Guru Granth Sahib, Nanak writes, "blessed, blessed is that month of months, when rises eternal spring". Like all his poetry, both theme and payoff

are spiritual, but I'm content with the earthy context. Who isn't glad to give thanks for a spring that doesn't look likely to end? Delhi is in the northern Indian plains, characterised by two seasons of great ferocity. A

harsh dry summer, where even the breeze is hot and offers no solace; and a short, sharp winter, where frost is a danger and people without shelter die outside. The poets of North India have always celebrated the monsoon that brings an end to the first, just as they sing of the spring that ends the second. Especially after the winter we've just had this past year, don't you feel like lying in a flower bed and singing to the blooms as well?

Water and warmth are life itself. You don't have to be a peasant or a

saint to know that. But we have our warmth in heaters and our water comes from taps. We all know, at some level, that the availability of energy and hydration is just as fickle now as it was centuries ago. Then, the sun: now coal and gas and oil; and water forever a mirage. But that knowledge hasn't tempered our profligacy and we still squander the heat and the light and the moisture as if they'll never run out. As if the season won't change. But spring, unless you're a spiritually awakened saint, isn't in fact eternal.

So Bundu Khan, that otherworldly sheheri from Suiwalan, knew enough about the world to take his pleasures where he could. Most of us probably don't have access to a colonial-era bungalow in Civil Lines. But that shouldn't stop you from exercising your inalienable right to step outside and enjoy the season that shows our difficult city in its

best light. The flowers in our parks are still free, as will be the new leaves in the trees in a few short weeks. There are rhythms our old city beats to that people have been following, enjoying and celebrating for centuries – including basant panchami this fortnight. To enjoy things in their time and place isn't hopelessly anachronistic. It is necessary, so we learn anew our own place in this threatened world. And so, when you raise your head to the sky and you see the geese heading north, you won't feel bad. Because that too is spring.



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METROPOLIS Strange tales from our international brethren

Time Out New York



As novelty gifts go, this may be one for the record books. A pop-up 3D print store organised a rather special Valentine's day gift for the

ladies this year: a replica of their significant other's genitalia. Now this isn't just some cheap imitation: the item in question is photocopied using their 3D scanner and copier, the pictures stitched together to form a plastic replica and later moulded into a "usable" silicon model.

Time Out London



Commuters along Blackfriars Bridge got used to an unlikely travel companion – a beige-and-white barn

owl. The bird caused quite a stir for a week, due to its predilection for perching on people's heads, and snapping at furry hats. It mysteriously disappeared one morning, and the city's Barn Owl Centre said that it might have very likely become a victim of the harsh winter. Last we heard, London commuters used to the friendly neighbourhood winged creature were very morose indeed.

Time Out Hong Kong



Easter may still be a while away, but some rather special eggs are on display at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum.

Created by master jeweller Peter Carl Fabergé, these jewelled eggs from the Romanov dynasty are made from precious gems, gold, silver, onyx and other expensive materials, and were designed for Russian royalty as special gifts. Though the museum refuses to disclose the value of the eggs, a piece similar to the four displayed went for a whopping £8.9 million.