

development programme for minorities which has now been renamed and expanded. Renamed as Pradhan

Mani's Sadbhavna Yatra that he undertook as Gujarat CM to connect with Muslims. The ministry has also

these centres. Officials have been spent on this till now, while the entire scheme has an outlay of

Julian

Minister said.

structions from his client.

CHIEF

What Goes Around Comes Around: A Few Lessons

The Needle's Eye



CHAITANYA KALBAG

Spain has embraced and subsumed its Islamic past, and this holds lessons for India, where we are debasing our historical sites – a few months ago the Taj Mahal was seen turning green, literally...

History is fascinating. It always circles around. A lot of history is about culture and knowledge. It is also about the gaining and losing of power, the rise and fall of empires, and the cruelty that human beings have inflicted on one another. The sad thing is that we forget that we will also be part of someone else's history, and that everything we do will form part of a narrative. Will that tale be a peacable continuum, or will it consist of short, jerky, and angry instalments? This is something we should reflect on as we leap from email to Facebook to Twitter to Instagram and Snapchat.

Everything is discoverable. So what will we leave behind?

Last week we celebrated Raksha Bandhan in India; it was the start of the annual festival season. You are reading this column on Janmashtami, which marks the birth of Lord Krishna on a rainy night many, many moons ago. It is good to be happy and optimistic. Some economists predict our gross domestic product (GDP) will grow by 8.1 per cent in 2016/17. The rains have been good, government salaries are about to go up, the Goods and Services Tax will finally see the light of day.

Out there, on the edges of our camp-

fire, there are some disturbing rustles and noises in the dark: Dalits and Patels who refuse to quieten down, cow-protectors who are getting a hard time even from the prime minister, ever new examples of sedition – and there is the minor irritant of curfews, pellets and stone-pelters in a distant valley.

A Pew Research survey recently found that Indians are among the happiest in the world about their economic situation. 80 per cent of Indians believe the economy is doing well. In contrast, 86 per cent of Spaniards think their economy is very weak.

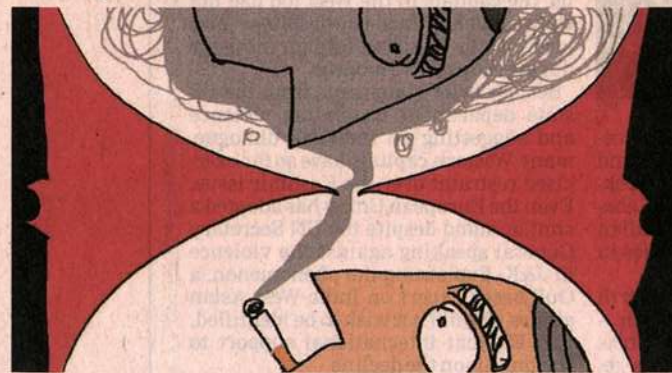
So it was that I returned from a trip to the unhappy land of Spain feeling distinctly bewildered. Throughout August, as does most of Europe, Spain takes a vacation. The temperatures soar – in southern Spain in particular it can get hotter than Delhi in June. The streets of Valencia, Sevilla, Cordoba, Ronda, Marbella and Granada were chock-a-block with tourists. Many of the streets especially in the older towns are very narrow and cobbled. There was music, food, colour and laughter. Nobody seemed to be thinking about the economy.

A total of 2.4 million tourists visited Spain's Andalusia region in 2014.

World Bank data show that foreign tourists to India totalled 7.7 million in 2014; the same year Spain drew 64.99 million. Latest tourism data

Preserving Past

The huge Sevilla cathedral and the cathedral at Cordoba are mosques converted into cathedrals by the Catholics while preserving large parts of the original structures



ANIRBAN BORA

show that between January and July, India attracted 4.9 million tourists. Most of them were from Bangladesh. On the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, India's rank among 141 countries has improved to 52nd in 2015 from 65th in 2013. India ranks 136th in airport density and 76th in terms of quality of roads.

Nitin Gadkari is doing a great job speeding up the construction of roads in India. In Spain the average speed on a two-lane highway is 120 km per hour. Normal trains between Madrid and Sevilla travel at an average speed of 250 kmph.

Andalusia is a good example of the

synthesis of history and religion. For over seven centuries, from 711 to 1492, the Muslim Moors ruled the region. The Reconquista, or the centuries-long fighting between Christian and Muslim forces to gain control of Spain, eventually ended with the conquest of Granada in 1492.

Everywhere in the region you find streets, architecture and magnificent structures that bear strong Islamic influences. The huge Sevilla cathedral and the cathedral at Cordoba are mosques converted into cathedrals by the Catholics while preserving large parts of the original structures. The Alcazaba citadel and the palace complex of the Alhambra in Granada have been pillaged and partially built over by Catholic monarchs. Starting in 1238, for two and a half centuries, the Nasrid rulers built beautiful palaces, distinguished by marble, alabaster, stained glass and water. Running water, including an imaginative water channel descending alongside a balustrade, mark the Generalife, derived from the Arabic Jannat al Arif – a garden lush with flowers, pomegranates and oranges that is a centuries-old precursor of the kind built by Mughal emperor Babar in places like Jalalabad, Samarkand and Kabul. The Nasrid kings and the Mughal

emperors built their most enduring gardens in arid regions, creating shining jewels in the midst of a sere landscape. Spain has embraced and subsumed its Islamic past, and this holds lessons for India, where we are debasing our historical sites – a few months ago the Taj Mahal was seen turning green, literally, under the onslaught of droppings by insects swarming in from the polluted Yamuna. We squabble about whether the Yamuna's floodplains near Delhi have been destroyed by a religious jamboree, but we are oblivious to the heritage that we should be preserving and enhancing for the world to see and enjoy.

I said earlier that history comes around. This is best illustrated by the story of Christopher Columbus's body. We all know that the explorer set out for his fateful 'India' voyage and ended up discovering the New World. That was in 1492, the year the last Nasrid ruler Muhammad XII surrendered the Alhambra to the Catholic rulers Isabel and Ferdinand. After his death in 1506, Columbus's body was shifted from Spain to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, then Havana in Cuba, and finally returned to Sevilla's mosque-cathedral in 1898.