

Raghu Rai is one of India's most accomplished photographers, commended by no less a person than the legendary French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. His collection of photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama since their first encounter in 1975 is a priceless pictorial record of the life and times of the Tibetan spiritual leader. The photographs are in black-and-white and somehow appear much more arresting than colour images would have been. They capture the many moods of an extraordinary human being, sometimes revelling in child-like laughter, sometimes deep in meditative reflection. There are images that convey his empathy with those afflicted with pain and suffering while others reveal the deep reverence and respect he inspires among his devotees.

The pictures tell their powerful tale without need for commentary. It is good that the captions are brief, only locating place and time. The photographs are interspersed with a few moving reminiscences recorded by Rai of his several encounters with the Dalai Lama over the years and the profound impact these have had on his own life and thinking. Rai's sentiments are deeply felt and rendered in simple words of unabashed admiration and respect for a special friend who is also a sage.

There are several photographs of the Dalai Lama's visits to different places of religious worship in Delhi in 2009 to pray for the welfare of India and her people. The event marked 50 years since his exile to India in 1959 from his beloved homeland under Chinese occupation. It was part of several events organised by the Tibetan community to thank India for providing shelter to the leader of Tibet and several thousand Tibetan refugees. I had the privilege of being invited by His Holiness to join him on this special and memorable journey along with a number of other well-known personalities. We accompanied him to a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara, a Christian church, a Jewish synagogue, a Muslim masjid and a Jain temple where we joined him in prayer and I thought of the powerful message he was delivering, reminding us of our common humanity though adhering to different faiths and creeds. Rai's pictures capture the mood of this extraordinary journey, festive and solemn in equal measure.

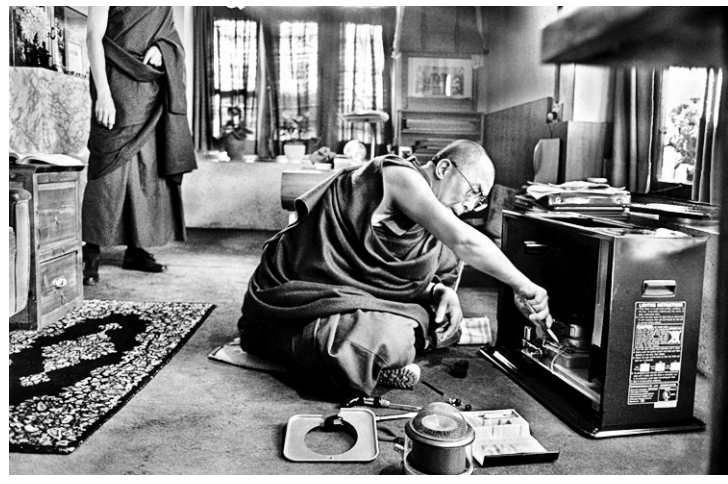
My personal favourites are a photo on page 54, where the Dalai Lama is sitting on the floor fixing a broken TV and by contrast, the two-page image on pages 60-61, showing him deep in meditation. Another arresting photograph on pages



PHOTOS: COURTESY RAGHU RAI / ROLI BOOKS

## The Dalai Lama in black-and-white

Raghu Rai's portfolio captures the many moods of an extraordinary human being, says Shyam Saran



42-43, is of an assembly of lamas in Ladakh, soaked to the skin in pelting rain but listening with deep reverence to the Dalai Lama preaching. On a lighter note, it is hard not to smile seeing photographs of him sharing a laugh with Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, a long-time friend, on pages 188-89. And finally, the very last photograph in the book, which captures the Dalai Lama blowing out candles on a cake to celebrate his 80th birthday.

The book has a very readable introduction by Jane Perkins titled

"Early Years Inside Tibet and The Escape", which is a biography of the Dalai Lama from his early childhood to his escape into exile in India in 1959. Jane Perkins is an author and journalist who has been based mostly in Dharamsala. Her write-up is accompanied by some rare photographs of the Dalai Lama as a young child with his family members, of his discovery as the 14th incarnation by a search party from Lhasa and his life as a monastic student in Lhasa. There are also photographs of the Dalai Lama with Chinese officials in Lhasa after their occupation of Tibet in 1950 and of his escape to India through the forbidding Tibetan countryside. These add value to the book.

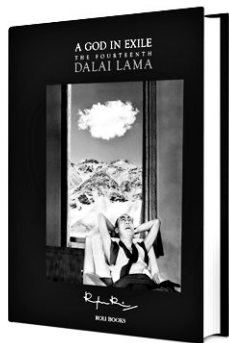
This introductory section concludes with a picture of Jawaharlal Nehru with a

young Dalai Lama at Teen Murti House in 1964 just before Nehru died. It is accompanied by the text of a letter by Nehru addressed to a Gopal Singh who, from the context, appears to have suggested that India take up the Tibetan cause at the United Nations. Nehru's words encapsulate the tragedy of Tibet and the sense of helplessness he may have felt after the defeat of Indian forces in the 1962 border war with China triggered by the events in Tibet:

"We are not indifferent to what has happened in Tibet. But we are unable to do anything effective about it."

That about sums it up. Even today.

The reviewer is former foreign secretary and currently a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research

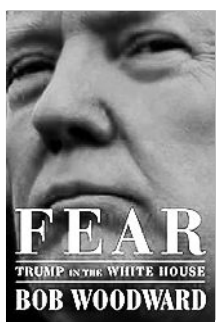


**A GOD IN EXILE: THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA**  
Author: Raghu Rai & Jane Perkins  
Publisher: Roli Books  
Pages: 192 Price: ₹2,995

### OUT NOW

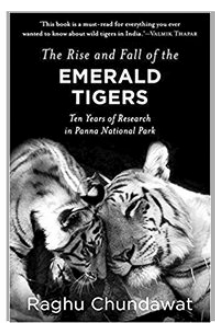
#### THE DIGITAL APE: HOW TO LIVE (IN PEACE) WITH SMART MACHINES

Humans aren't about to lose their power to robots, say a computer scientist and an economist. The manner in which we exercise control over technology determines our future.  
**Nigel Shadbolt & Roger Hampson**  
Amaryllis  
₹499, 354 pages



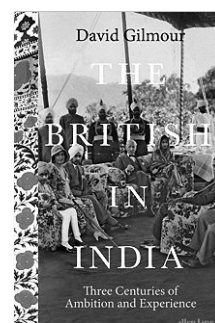
#### FEAR: TRUMP IN THE WHITE HOUSE

His reporting brought down one US president and this latest tome does the current incumbent no favours. Considered the most reliable of the inside stories leaking from the White House.  
**Bob Woodward**  
Simon & Schuster  
₹799, 420 pages



#### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE EMERALD TIGERS

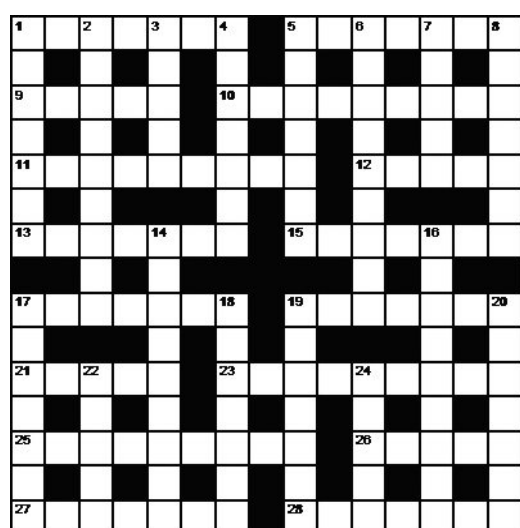
A respected conservation biologist, who played a seminal role in the revival of the tiger population in Panna, shares his findings from a ten-year study of tigers in the national park.  
**Raghu Chandawat**  
Speaking Tiger  
₹899, 356 pages



#### THE BRITISH IN INDIA: THREE CENTURIES OF AMBITION AND EXPERIENCE

The historian spent a decade researching the lives of colonial Britons to offer a portrait of a people who made the long journey to India as viceroys, officials, planters, businessmen, soldiers, doctors and missionaries.  
**David Gilmour**  
Penguin  
₹999, 640 pages

### THE BS CROSSWORD #3143



#### ACROSS:

- A layer of tar must make a difference (7)
- Pays a brief visit and asks for help (5,2)
- Again and again concerning "X" (5)
- Betray and defeat industrial workers (4,5)
- Drink before business - it's no joke without it (9)
- Constable, artist and oil-producer (5)
- Beam about law I breached: it's an essential for training (7)
- Persons out - on patrol? (7)
- Study loss involved in securities (7)
- One asking the questions may be odd, but pointless, at first (7)

- Dull, almost tangled in appearance (5)
- Dine out on hot food, going up to town (9)
- In agony - for quite a stretch? (2,3,4)
- Dead man was good, remarkable person (5)
- Felt one had mishandled things as a player (7)
- Moscow politician revolting in style (7)

#### DOWN:

- Soon the agent Short, will become an inquisitive person (7)
- Enter into arrangement for storage (9)
- Is the time out, then, a fraction? (5)

- Become confused by my unfortunate fits at end of day (7)
- Fail to win in sporting contest, short-range shot needed (5-2)
- New Feil Bike in full course of development (4,5)
- Be curious when no peace offering is brought round (5)
- The usual answer given by the French (7)
- Full grain for a complete repast (9)
- People leaving are streaming out (9)
- Minor role loudly succeeded (4,3)
- One is often at sea, serving on board (7)
- Swiftly name Shakespeare's mistress (7)

- It's capital here, rudely interrupting Brown (7)
- Add a measure in print, object of tribal veneration (5)
- In the saddlebag, Eleanor found a roll (5)

#### SOLUTION # 3142

BACKSUP BREATHS  
E O C O A N U A  
NEWPATRON GARED  
D E R T K R N I  
E N D I V E S S A U C E R S  
R E A S D T  
S T O W S L O C A T I O N S  
C U A U  
D E C O R A T E S M I T Z I  
I U E T E M  
G A I U M P H R O A D M A P  
E T O I A N Y E  
S A I N T D E T R I M E N T  
T S E E E N Y U  
S A T I R E S D I G G E R S

### MYTHIC MANTRA



ARUNDHUTI DASGUPTA

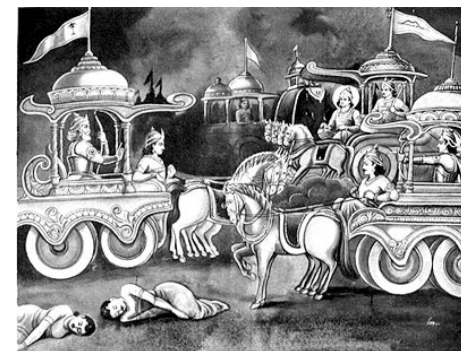
## Myths about gender

Last week, the five-judge Supreme Court bench unanimously overturned Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to decriminalise sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex. The spectacular 495-page verdict drew from a wide range of philosophical and literary texts to explain its decision and to interpret the issue of gender beyond the male-female binary.

Identity and sexual preference are a function of dignity and liberty, the judgement implied. One has the right to choose and it is only when the individual's choice is respected that we can emerge as a truly equal nation. This may seem like a remarkably bold assertion in today's context, but it is quite an ancient premise.

In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma tells Yudhishthira a story about a king who transformed into a woman and chose to remain one when he had the choice to return to his old form. King Bhangaswana knew life as both man and woman but preferred to retain his female identity because, he said, "In acts of congress, the pleasure that women enjoy is always much greater than what is enjoyed by men..."

Bhangaswana was tricked into becoming a woman when he incurred the wrath of the king of gods, Indra. For a bit of backstory, the king was childless and had sought out Indra's rival Agni for respite, and was subsequently blessed with a hundred sons. But Indra was seething and one day, he lured Bhangaswana during a hunting expedition into the deceptively calm waters of a magical lake. The king stepped out of the waters as a woman and, after dramatic encounters with former wives, children and courtiers, exiled herself. She found shelter in an ashram where she began life anew, with an ascetic as partner, and bore him another 100 sons. But Indra continued to inflict pain on the former king until she finally invoked his name in her prayers. Happy to have a new devotee, Indra offered to restore her identity as a male. Much to Indra's surprise, she refused.



**GENDER BENDER:** In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma (left) refused to fight Shikhandi

A similar story is commonly told in Gujarat about Bahuchara Mata, a goddess worshipped by eunuchs. Bahuchara was married to a prince who refused to spend a night with her. Instead, he would mount his horse and trot off into the jungle every night. One night, Bahuchara followed her husband only to discover that the prince would don women's clothes and spend the night frolicking in the forest. When confronted, the prince begged her forgiveness. He was not interested in women, he said, but his parents had forced him into marriage to father children. Bahuchara forgave him but on condition that he and those like him would worship her as their goddess.

Mythology and folklore certainly examined the issues around gender with a boldness that seems way ahead of its times. But to read the old tales to seek sanction or validation of sexual behaviour, as many have done to justify their opposition to the recent judgement, is futile.

In the epics, too, gender plays an important role. In the *Mahabharata*, when Arjuna opts to spend his year in exile as a transgender, he is signalling the diversity of human identity. Similarly, Amba reborn as Shikhandi indicates acceptance of the third gender even among the elite of the time. And when Bhishma refuses to fight Shikhandi, he stands up for the then prevalent male-centric moral code of behaviour.

The gods, too, were open about their gender-bending behaviour. Krishna is believed to have often paraded himself in women's clothes. Also he turned into a woman for a night to fulfil the last wish of Aravan, son of Arjuna and the Naga princess Ulupi. Aravan was to be sacrificed for the greater good of the Pandavas and he agreed, but lamented that he would never know marital bliss. So Krishna became his wife for a night. Krishna's son, Samba, is an incarnate of Shiva in his *ardhanareeshwara* (man-woman) form, and although the stories hold him responsible for the destruction of the Yadava race, Krishna never rejected him. As the Supreme Court judgement says, "We must realise that different hues and colours together make the painting of humanity beautiful and this beauty is the essence of humanity."