



AFGHAN MUPPET

The first muppet from Afghanistan made her debut in Season 5 of *Baghch-e-Simsim* (*Sesame Garden*), Afghanistan's *Sesame Street*. She is called Zari, which means 'shimmering', is six years old and curious about the world.

ON THE LOOSE



LEHER KALA

Teen Style

The battle over dress codes

STUDENTS OF National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore, have taken on a senior faculty member for his derogatory remarks when a female student wore shorts to class. The university has no prescribed dress code. In a statement posted on the college's Facebook page, the students have emphasised: "It is not our intention to colour the professor as sexist. Our point is no teacher should say this to a student."

There can never be universal agreement on appropriate dressing, which is where uniforms come in at the school level. After more than a decade of adhering to the rules set by parents and the institution, students on the cusp of adulthood are discovering their freedom in college. Naturally, they would want to experiment with their looks and attire which goes into shaping their individual personalities. It should be encouraged. This professor sounds woefully out of touch with young people if he was offended by a pair of shorts. From what I see around me, tattoos, piercings, spiky haircuts, fake eyelashes and distressed jeans are all the rage in this age group. No one even comments on body art anymore. Tattoo studios have come up in Delhi malls adjacent to shops like the Home Store.

The world would be a very boring place if everyone was forced to dress in a painstakingly correct way, all the time. It's bad enough that as adults in the workplace we have to adhere to a company's code of conduct. Student life is the only time where you can afford to be a little crazy and hope not to be judged for it. When we were growing up over two decades ago, a boy sporting an earring or long hair was the ultimate in defying the establishment. Doomed to end as a wayward hippie. A girl was judged by the length of her skirt. Nobody bats an eyelid at men in earrings now but not enough has changed for girls who want to bare arms or some leg (let's not even get into midriffs and cleavage). No allowances are made for how much India has changed since those pre-liberalisation days. Zara, H & M and Gap make skinny jeans and bikinis for toddlers. There are leather jackets and black boots available for three-year-olds. If anyone's really concerned about overt sexualisation at the teen level, they should first attack the children's stores which are overflowing with faux sexy baby wear.

My four-year-old daughter's favourite song is *Baby Doll* and her favourite actor is Sunny Leone. It sends her into a trance. She will not be caught dead in a one-piece swimsuit and loves spaghetti straps. Maybe it would reflect better on me as a parent if she liked Bhimsen Joshi and salwar kameezes if I didn't strongly believe that what you wear (or don't) doesn't matter. Like so many older students, her appearance is influenced by popular culture and a liberal home. The teachers at colleges like NLSIU have a mandate to educate students on law and they do a great job of it. On the wardrobe they should either establish a dress code — or let the students decide.

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Home Is Where The Community Is

A research on architectural forms in Mumbai questions the approach to affordable housing

SHINY VARGHESE

NEARLY A year ago, a developer approached Sameep Padora and Associates (SP+a) for an affordable housing project in Navi Mumbai. "We started looking for references to understand the nature of affordable housing models in Mumbai," says architect Sameep Padora, who led a nearly 50-member team (from his studio and volunteers from architecture schools in the city) as they studied architectural forms across the city. Their research ranged from squatter settlements to SRA projects, some of which have evolved over 100 years. The six-month study compared 11 projects, with unit sizes from 10 to 40 sqm, looking at open spaces, social area, circulation, built areas and densities. The intensive project provided many unique solutions to live, play and work.

For homemaker Manjula Shah, it is a belief in community cohesion. The 57-year-old, a resident of Khetwadi's RK chawl, lives in this predominantly Gujarati neighbourhood in Mumbai. The four-storey rectilinear block encloses an open courtyard in the centre, which allows residents to interact without leaving their homes. Shah's front door is always open, even when she is alone after her husband leaves for work. "I am never lonely because my neighbours walk in and out. We exchange food and share our lives with each other," she says.

Mumbai, known to be the city with the largest slums, faces the challenge of affordable housing. The state government recently announced the construction of nearly 1.1 million low-income affordable homes. However, since the '80s, the state had taken a step back as it allowed private developers a freehand in redeveloping slums, which had no mandate on the physical environment. Many such projects came under the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) programme. With little or no sensitivity to the social fabric, apartment blocks were built taking away the comfort of common spaces.

SP+A met Mayuri Merchant, of Bhatia Chawl in the bustling innards of Bhuleshwar, who suffers from arthritis but prefers walking up four floors. The central courtyard, like a metaphorical bridge, keeps her connected to her neighbours. "I only need to call out for help if I have a problem," she says. "Many of them were born, and grew up in this building. While they wouldn't mind more area added to their individual units, they are clear it cannot be at the expense of the common space," says Padora, who has documented this research into a book called *In The Name of Housing: A study of 11 projects in Mumbai*. Published by the Urban Design Research Institute, Mumbai, it is due for launch next month. An exhibition by the same name was part of the three-month-long State of Architecture programme.

These projects testify to what American architecture critic Jane Jacobs calls "unslumming slums". Such housing has been catalysts for diversity, nurturing lively streets, and preventing "taxidermy cities" or dead, stuffed cities.

From dining tables that collapse to become cabinets, window sills that cantilever to tilt water pots, to tripartite windows with ventilators, which afford air circulation and privacy, Mumbai's slum dwellers have found



(Clockwise from above) Bhatia Chawl; Charkop Courtyard; Bhatia Chawl Kitchen Kunal Bhatia

smart ways to live. It turns the idea of Smart Cities on its head, changing the Internet of Things to mean more than just a circuit of signals. "In these housing projects, courtyards, corridors, and stairs have all been appropriated to extend the social fabric. For instance, the intimate height-to-width ratio in the courtyard in Bhatia chawl is designed to facilitate communication across its floors,"

says Padora. Charkop in Kandivali in north Mumbai only reinforced this idea. The team found that even after 30 years of its construction, even as it had become an applique of varying heights and character, the central courtyard remained untouched. "This idea challenges the assumptions of regulatory frame-

works, which segregate common spaces from everyday living, for fear of encroachment," says Padora. It's these native design interventions that show the way forward for better housing policies, that allow for "eyes on the street", reducing crime rates in these areas, and making neighbourhoods richer and more vibrant.

SNAP SHOTS



Seams Like That

TRUE TO the Proustian definition of travel affording "new eyes", writer Ulla Lenze's (pictured) residencies in Mumbai, Venice and Istanbul have afforded her cues for hidden meanings. "Commuting between cities made me notice how much freedom is allowed in a landscape and how much is determined. In a German city, it is very clear where a building, a road or a pavement starts and ends; you find sharp lines. In Mumbai, it overlaps. Istanbul combines the planning as well as space for improvisation," she says.

On an India tour, as part of a pre-event of DWID (German House for Research and Innovation-New Delhi), the Berlin-based author will read from her latest novel, *The Endless City*, on April 11 at the Max Mueller Bhavan, Delhi. With journalist and social theorist Amrita Shah, who will read from her book *Ahmedabad: A City in the World*, the event will highlight issues of growing urbanisation.

Lenze's novel stitches narratives from Istanbul, Berlin and Mumbai. Seen through the eyes of two women, a German artist and a German journalist, these cities become a presence in *The Endless City*. "The two main storylines go together like a zipper or a slide fastener. The novel is about the beauty and horror of globalisation, the role of art and journalism today (also their limitations), and it is a love story, depending on how you define love," says the award-winning author, deemed a promising young voice in Germany. The cities are seen through their triumphs, power and pleasures.

Lenze's earlier rendezvous with Mumbai happened when she arrived in India in the early '90s to enroll in Fergusson College, Pune. She soon gave it up to pursue yoga, sitar and Marathi. As she melds poetry, philosophy and urban issues in *The Endless City*, it becomes a means of discovering cities as much bigger than our postulated definitions of them.

SHINY VARGHESE



Srinagar Countdown

WORKING TOWARDS a deadline they have set for themselves — 17.01.17 — organisers made arguably the first official announcement of the Srinagar Biennale at the Max Mueller Bhavan in Delhi on April 6 (pictured). The core group — comprising artists such as Inder Salim, Showkat Katju, Syed Mujtaba Rizvi, Veer Munshi, Gowhar Fazili, Vivek Raina and Maria Hearty — stressed that the Valley is probably mere inspiration for the event; the actual work ideated under the banner of the Biennale might not represent the region or its concerns or even be exhibited there. "With a node in Srinagar, it is best served by the appearance of other nodes, in other places, ranging from the most unpredictable and inhospitable landscapes, to the most enlightened and hospitable of locations," said Salim. Nodes have already been identified in eight locations, including Ahmedabad, Munich, Srinagar and Leh, and the organisers have invited artists to submit projects that will be screened by them.

Home Again

ONE OF the high points of the emotionally-charged finale of *American Idol* featured one of the most disliked figures in television. Reuniting with his former co-judges Randy Jackson and Paula Abdul, was Simon Cowell, the template for the "bad-cop" judge that has been followed by many others, including Gordon Ramsay. Not only did Cowell joke and compliment the current judges Jennifer Lopez, Keith Urban and Harry Connick Jr, but his group hug with Abdul and Jackson was one of the "aww" moments of the series finale.

Arise, Signora Knight

Designer Sanchita Ajjampur receives Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy

JAGMEETA THIND JOY

THE TERM "global citizen" would be a perfect introduction to Sanchita Ajjampur. The fashion designer, who works out of Bangalore, Milan, Paris and London, is being honoured with the Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy by Italian President Sergio Mattarella.

The Order of the Star of Italy or the Ordine della Stella d'Italia was instituted by the Italian government in 1947 to "recognise expatriates and foreigners who made an outstanding contribution to the reconstruction of Italy after World War II". It was later modified to recognize individuals who have been instrumental in "preservation and promotion of national prestige abroad". "I am privileged to receive this prestigious accolade by

Italy, a place that not only was the starting point for my career but also home for many years," the designer has said in an official release.

Mumbai-born Ajjampur, who moved to Europe when she was three, has been honoured for her work both as a fashion designer and an entrepreneur. Educated in Vienna and the UK, Ajjampur studied arts in Paris and earned her fashion degree at the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture Parisienne. She completed a post-graduation in Fashion and Technology from Domus Academy in Milan in 1990 and went on to work with iconic brands such as Romeo Gigli, Moschino and Gucci under cre-



Sanchita Ajjampur; designs by her

to facilitate business and cultural links between the two nations," reads Ajjampur's statement. Her signature label Sanchita made a de-

but at Lakme Fashion Week in 2007. It is a reflection of the designer's globetrotting and global fashion acumen. Her Spring-Summer 2016 collection has an unmistakable nomadic spirit. "It is influenced by abstract impasto paintings, graffiti and contemporary patchwork," says Ajjampur.

The designer recently launched her brand of footwear and ready-to-wear apparel across the world. The label is present in stores such as Harvey Nichols (UK), Saks Fifth Avenue, Intermix (US), On Peddar (Hong Kong) and Galeries Lafayette (Beijing), among other.

