

Initiating a dialogue

NEHA SAINI

Punjab has always been in the eye of the storm, facing some of the toughest battles and never losing in spirit. While it undergoes yet another trying time, with rising COVID-19 cases and a possibility of economical fallout post the lockdown, its soul thrives with its people, a few men and women, who are creating, nurturing and encouraging creative discourse beyond the confines of the walls, inward and outward. Majha House has come up with two new initiatives that aim to highlight, think and start a dialogue on the issues that Punjab is facing these days.

BECOMING INDIFFERENT TOWARDS OUR CULTURE, OUR HERITAGE AND MOVING ABROAD IN SEARCH OF GREENER PASTURES ARE SERIOUS ISSUES, WHICH NEED TO BE ADDRESSED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

AMANDEEP SANDHU
AUTHOR

Lifting up spirits, Majha House creates safe online spaces where alternate and mainstream voices are explored at this critical time



Punjab - A shared heritage

Sanjha Punjab is an online platform on which writers, artists, poets and musicians come from across the border to talk about the shared culture, history, language, music, poetry and food in the two Punjab. The first session of this series had four eminent voices from Pakistan - Afzal Saahir, Madiha Haneef Arsalan, Sughra Sadaf and Raza Rumi, who discussed various aspects of the current situation and the shared threads between the two countries. The session was curated by poet Arvinder Chamak from Amritsar. Despite the growing political hostilities between India and Pakistan, the panel sounded hopeful, building their case on the strong cultural and artistic ties between the two countries.

Afzal Saahir, a noted poet and journalist, said, "We are all joined by our common history and culture; no one can take that away from us." Seconding this thought, Madeeha Haneef Arsalan,

who is a writer and educator, said, "As people, we have experienced only warmth and love between us. We should all beware of divisive policies, which are aimed solely at sowing seeds of dissent among the innocent citizens who share much more than just a border."

Not to forget the stand-off between the two countries that started with the abrogation of Article 370 in Kash-

mir and continues despite the COVID 19 pandemic, Madeeha was critical of the political intent of the two governments towards a peaceful solution, as she pinned her hopes on people-to-people interactions.

While discussing the current pandemic situation in both countries, Madeeha said that the situation of the pandemic is much the same for both the Punjab. "The

government has issued directives for the people, instructions and guidelines to observe, which the people are doing. The difference is that we don't have a full curfew imposed; the mosques are open."

For the love of Panj-aab

Ideas need a fertile ground to take root and providing that ground online, Majha House in collaboration with

two other virtual spaces Sanjhi Sikhya and Kirrt, The Panjab Dialogue was created. The online series aims to bring together people from across the state and beyond to talk about the burning issues of Punjab and work towards a solution.

"The idea behind this programme is to start a dialogue about things that really concern everyone living in this state," said Preeti Gill, founder, Majha House. "In these sessions, we are going to talk about what is happening to our culture, our language, our development and our environment."

The first guest speaker of the series was Amandeep Sandhu, author of *Panjab: Journeys through Fault Lines*. Amandeep had a healing journey while writing a part autobiographical, a part contextual reportage and a part memoir of contemporary Punjab.

Jasdeep Singh, founder of Kirrt, an online platform for promotion of art and craft, has been working in Punjabi cinema as a script writer. Simranpreet Oberoi and Ankit Chhabra, the brains behind Sanjhi Sikhya, pan Punjab virtual education platform, started the Punjab Young Leaders Program (PYLP) to develop 100 young leaders, who will be committed to transforming Punjab into a land of hope, courage and possibilities over the long term.

The first session with Amandeep Sandhu shared his understanding of Panjab as a post-conflict state. It enumerated the myriad issues that face the state and these range from faith, land, water, education, health, caste to Sikh masculinity, gender roles, Dalit perspectives, drugs, migration, Hindu anxiety and more.



PUNJABI BY HEART

Hanging on there!

MANPRIYA SINGH

COVID-19 has been a major 'oops' moment for the world. With far serious repercussions than the disappointment usually reserved for the missed goal in the finals. Who knows this better Mandy Takhar?

Raised in London but currently under lockdown in Chandigarh, the Bollywood actor completes her decade in the industry but never had she anticipated the fate of the four films, namely *Television* with Kulwinder Billa, *Challe Mundiyan* with Ammy Virk, *Yes I Am Student* with Sidhu Moosewala and *Mera Viah Karwa Do* with Dilpreet Dhillon.

"This lockdown has been a big shock to my system, especially since my life was on the go for the past three years," says the actor, who has been following the lockdown 'pretty much', save for a meeting with a friend. "But then I know she too had been in quarantine for fourteen days before we met."

Life in the times of quarantine

I don't believe in following a routine or being disciplined these days. That's the whole idea, to go with the flow. So, I wake up at nine or ten and then onwards I give into what I feel like doing, binge watching, reading, yoga or keeping connected via YouTube videos.

Date with OTT

Usually I don't watch television at all or get time to catch up on anything. But now, I have watched quite a few series like *Stranger*

Thoughts of savouring *chatpatta* food and re-union with family in London are keeping Punjabi actress Mandy Takhar upbeat

Things, Breaking Bad; re-watched Narcos and Orange is the New Black, though I left the latter halfway.

A homebody or not?

Since the past two-three years, life has been all about work, shooting and travelling. So, staying in has been a complete reversal.

One Punjabi trait you can't shake off...

Wherever I go and settle, even for a few days, there's always a tendency to look for a gurdwara nearby. That's just me, my sense of community and also the *karah parshad*.

If you have to be quarantined with someone...

Among Hollywood heroes, it would have to be Leonardo DiCaprio. What would I say to him? I think I'll ask him to enact some of his famous scenes. But on a serious note, I'd ask him about his philanthropic endeavours. His association with the cause of environment.

A loner or a people's person?

Honestly, I would have to be madly in love with a person to be quarantined with him. Even then I'd like my own space as I am too much of a loner.

First thing after the lockdown?

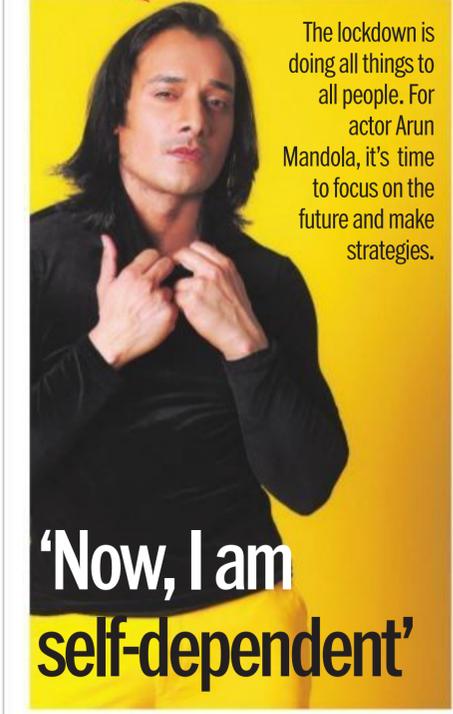
I love *chatpatta* food, so probably head to street food corners. But on a serious note, head back to London, to be with my family. Then onwards it'll have to be at work because bills need to be paid.

What will you say to the world?

Just hang in there.



ONE-TO-ONE



The lockdown is doing all things to all people. For actor Arun Mandola, it's time to focus on the future and make strategies.

'Now, I am self-dependent'

How did your journey in the TV industry begin?

When I came to Mumbai, I got a few offers for TV commercials and print shoots but later on, no work came my way. Then suddenly, my journey started with the Sony's historical show *Sankat Mochan Mahabali Hanumaan*. Later I did another show for Sony TV show, which was *Vighnaharta Ganesha*.

Who is your inspiration?

My parents and siblings are the people who inspire me the most. I belong to a lower middle class family. When I was struggling in Mumbai, my parents supported me. My mother used to tell me, 'if there is any financial problem, tell us, we will send you the money'. Listening to those words, I would cry because I knew that they didn't have the money.

What is keeping you occupied?

During these quarantine days, my focus is to learn things and make future plans and strategies.

Has lockdown changed your perspective towards life?

Coronavirus has made me more punctual and more hardworking. Now, I am self-dependent. I am doing all the chores and without any complaints. I think I've become more understanding and more sensitive towards people.



The Year Ahead
MADAN GUPTA SRATI

If your birthday is on May 8

The sum of year 2020 and your birth number don't give good vibes. Most people born under this sign must exercise moderation in all activities. June will be good for you in terms of health, but you will need to be careful in the following months. Be practical. You will need to be patient when it comes to a relationship. You are a romantic person. Your view of the

world will change as you become somewhat less stubborn. Your psychic abilities will be enhanced and your imaginative power will soar to an all-time high.

Positive colours: Black & chocolate

Select days: Sunday & Tuesday

Favourable numbers: 1,4&8

Gems recommended: Diamond & emerald

Charity on birthday: Donate food packets.



You share your birthday with **Anurag Basu** (May 8), who is a director, actor, screenwriter and producer. Basu achieved initial success with his films such as *Life in a... Metro, Kites, Gangster* and *Murder*. He has a long innings to play in the industry but will be courting controversies due to the *Rahu* and *Mercury* combination.

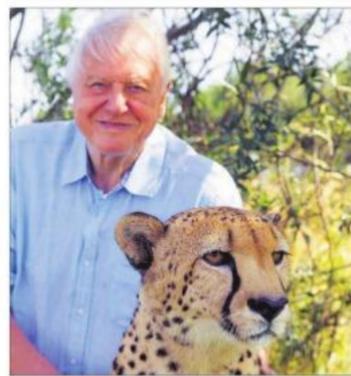
Long-distance assistance

Vikas Khanna does his bit to help the needy

Chef Vikas Khanna, who stays in the US, has been extending help to those in need during the time of crisis and organising rations for old-age homes and orphanages in India.

Vikas says, "I came across a family in Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh), who had no ration. I promised them that before iftar, I will make food available to them. However, I failed miserably. Later, someone approached me saying that a particular old-age home was in need of money. After I transferred money to the needy, I came to know that I got duped."

These incidents made him realise that he needed to help those who are in need, and so taking the responsibility on his shoulders, he catered to the NGOs and other people who approached him.



To Sir, with love

Sir David Attenborough is more than a national treasure. He has been a staple on natural history programmes for over six decades, transporting generation after generation to far-flung corners of the world. As he turns a year older today, Sony BBC Earth is giving us an opportunity to celebrate his legacy and the stupendous body of work with a special tribute to him.

A great line-up of shows on him is scheduled to air, which includes *The Hunt, Blue Planet II, Planet Earth* and *Attenborough's 60 Years in the Wild*.



We miss you...

Last week turned out to be a dark phase for the Indian cinema as two iconic actors, Rishi Kapoor and Irrfan Khan, left for their heavenly abode. Saluting the greatest men of the industry, Colors is set to air a special musical concert—*Dard-e-Dil: A musical tribute to*

Rishi Kapoor and Irrfan Khan on May 10 at 12 noon and 5 pm. It will have popular artistes uniting to celebrate the achievements of the superstars. While the artistes will perform from the confines of their home, they will come together in spirit to pay homage to the stalwarts.



Step up for Dance Deewane 3

'Dance away your lockdown blues' seems to be the catch-phrase these days. But to turn this into a reality and to pump up your spirits, Colors is gearing up for the third season of their popular reality show, *Dance Deewane*, and the auditions have begun virtually!

While maintaining social distancing and staying safe at their homes, participants can audition by uploading their video entries on VOOT to keep the deewangi going. With Madhuri Dixit, Shashank Khaitan, Tushar Kalia coming back together as judges, Bollywood's dancing queen, Madhuri Dixit, recently kick-started the audition phase by shooting the season's first promo from home.



Madhuri Dixit