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THE MAESTRO

PT BHIMSEN JOSHI
BIRTHDAY: FEBRUARY 4, 1922

The young genius who followed processions of musical bands forgetting to return home, who led a nomadic life in pursuit of a 'guru' and sang bhajans to entertain ticket collectors while travelling ticketless in trains...

The first Hindustani vocalist to receive the Bharat Ratna (2008), he emerged as the face of *khayal gayaki* with a prolific musicianship that resonated with connoisseurs and laypersons alike. Perhaps this was one of his biggest feats, where he upheld gharana music without giving in to gimmicks, while riding the crest of popularity with dignified ease and charisma. Traversing two worlds was a constant in his life, as he travelled from Karnataka in South India to embrace the aesthetics of Kirana gharana vocalism of the north.

His father Gururaj Joshi was a teacher and Sanskrit scholar who was stationed in Gaya, Bihar, for some time, and his own travels may have influenced young Bhimsen's curiosities for the world beyond home. Bhimsen was the eldest of 16 siblings, his grandfather was an established kirtankar. Mother Godavaribai was a spiritual person, and the early years were accompanied by a constant flow of devotional music.

From Bijapur to Pune, then to Khandwa and finally to Gwalior, the nomadic years were filled with hope, peril, and persistence for the enterprising youngster.

FUN FACT!

He was the first musician from India whose concerts were advertised through posters in New York city, United States. The ability to blend elements of various gharanas and adapt to diverse performing spaces made him a successful performer in the 1950s. The cultural shift from baithaks to big sangeet sammelans along with the rise of radio and recordings became prime factors in his rising popularity.

LOVE FOR WALKING

Dickens walked a lot and found great psychological release in his walks, noting: "If I could not walk far and fast, I think I would just explode and perish." His friends viewed this activity with extreme skepticism, one commenting: "He developed a mania for walking long distances, which almost assumed the form of a disease."

REBEL GIRL

ROSA PARKS
BIRTHDAY: FEBRUARY 4, 1913

Rosa Louise McCauley born in Tuskegee, Alabama, was American civil rights activist whose refusal to relinquish her seat on a public bus precipitated the 1955–56 Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama, which became the spark that ignited the civil rights movement in the United States.

For much of her childhood, Rosa was educated at home by her mother, who also worked as a teacher at a nearby school. Rosa helped with chores on the farm and learned to cook and sew. Farm life, though, was less than idyllic. The Ku Klux Klan was a constant threat.

Rosa and her family experienced racism in less violent ways, too. When Rosa entered school in Pine Level, she had to attend a segregated establishment where one teacher was put in charge of about 50 or 60 schoolchildren. Though white children in the area were bused to their schools, black children had to walk.

THE DAY WE ALL REMEMBER

On December 1, 1955, Parks was riding a crowded Montgomery city bus when the driver, upon noticing that there were white passengers standing in the aisle, asked Parks and other Black passengers to surrender their seats and stand. Three of the passengers left their seats, but Parks refused. She was subsequently arrested and fined $10 for the offense and $4 for court costs, neither of which she paid. Though achieving the desegregation of Montgomery's city buses was an incredible feat, Parks was not satisfied with that victory. She saw that the United States was still failing to respect and protect the lives of Black Americans. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been brought to national attention by his organization of the Montgomery bus boycott, was assassinated less than a decade after Parks' case was won.

DID YOU KNOW?

She was the first woman and the second African American to lie in honour at the Capitol, a distinction usually reserved for Presidents of the United States

SOCIAL REFORMER

CHARLES DICKENS
BIRTHDAY: FEBRUARY 7, 1812

Charles Dickens (Charles John Huffam Dickens) was born in Landport, Portsmouth, on February 7, 1812. Charles was the second of eight children to John Dickens (1786–1851), a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and his wife Elizabeth Dickens (1789–1863).

TRYST WITH POVERTY

The defining moment of Dickens's life occurred when he was 12 years old. His father, who had a difficult time managing money and was constantly in debt, was imprisoned in the Marshalsea debtor's prison in 1824. Because of this, Charles was withdrawn from school and forced to work in a warehouse that handled 'blacking' or shoe polish to help support the family. It gave him a firsthand acquaintance with poverty and made him the most vigorous and influential voice of the working classes in his age.

WRITE START

At fifteen his formal education ended, and he found employment as an office boy at an attorney's, while he studied shorthand at night. From 1830 he worked as a shorthand reporter in the courts and afterwards as a parliamentary and newspaper reporter.

Dickens's first book, a collection of stories titled 'Sketches by Boz', was published in 1836. Although Dickens's main profession was as a novelist, he continued his journalistic work until the end of his life. During his career, he wrote 26 major works and hundreds of other minor works, including short stories, sketches, articles, speeches, plays, poetry, and letters. Through his major novels, he introduced the world to hundreds of captivating characters with droll and evocative names — Copperfield, Cratchit, Fezziwig, Havisham, Micawber, Pickwick, Scrooge, Squeers, Turveydrop and Twist to name just a few. The total number of words used in all of Dickens's work is an astounding 4.6 million. He introduced many original words to readers around the world:

1 **BOREDOM:** The state of feeling disinterested. First appeared in Bleak House (1852).
2 **DOORMAT:** Used metaphorically, a person who is treated poorly. ('Great Expectations', 1861).
3 **DEVIL-MAY-CARE:** Reckless; careless or jovial and rakish in manner; seems to come from the saying, "The devil may care but I don't." — "Not that this would have worried him much, anyway — he was a mighty free and easy, roving, devil-may-care sort of person. ('The Pickwick Papers').
4 **ABUZZ:** Characterised by excessive gossip or activity.
5 **GONOPH:** Gonoph is slang for a pickpocket or thief. The word comes from 'gannabh', the Hebrew word for "thief." Dickens seems to be the earliest recorded usage of the word in English.

FATHER OF SCI-FI

JULES VERNE
BIRTHDAY: FEBRUARY 8, 1828

EERILY ACCURATE PREDICTIONS

Jules Gabriel Verne was a French novelist, poet, and playwright. Verne has been the second most-translated author in the world since 1979, ranking below Agatha Christie and above William Shakespeare. He is sometimes credited with creating the science fiction literary genre, though others give that credit to English writer Mary Shelley. Verne wrote imaginative tales that often revolved around futuristic inventions. His stories are often read and enjoyed by children, but they are not strictly speaking children's literature and can be enjoyed by readers of all ages.

Throughout the French writer's varied oeuvre, he imagined a variety of incredible technological advances. Verne was noted for writing about space, air, and underwater travel before air travel and submarines were actually invented, and before practical means of space travel had been devised. Many of these have come to fruition since he depicts them in the 1860s, 70s, and 80s. They include computers and the Internet, suburbs, developments in railroad transportation, and other technological advances.

One prime example comes from 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea', published in 1867. The novel depicted a battery-powered submarine — the Nautilus. Less than twenty years later, similar submarines came into use, and some are still used today. In his lesser-read novel, 'The Twentieth Century', Verne wrote about skyscrapers, cars with internal combustion engines, electric lights on city streets, elevators, and more.

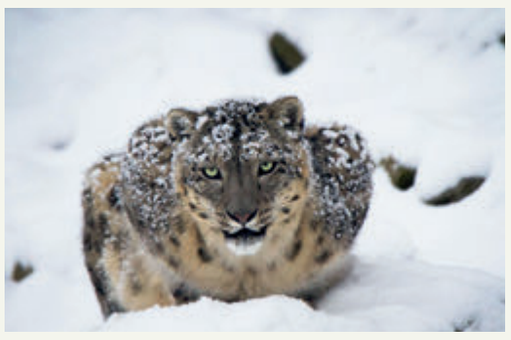
HIS WORK CONTRIBUTED TO THE RISE OF STEAMPUNK

- Verne's body of work heavily influenced Steampunk, the science fiction subgenre that takes inspiration from 19th century industrial technology. Some of Verne's characters, as well as the fictional machines he wrote about, have appeared in prominent steampunk works.
- Steampunk imagines a past that never existed. The term was coined in the late 1980s to describe a science-fiction subgenre of Victorian-set fantasy. It's since tentacled out into something between a hobby and a movement.

TELL ME

ABOUT

THE ELUSIVE GHOST OF THE HIMALAYAS



There is a cat that lives in the high mountains of Asia, where few humans ever venture. This cat is the snow leopard, a species of large cat that lives in the mountain ranges of Central and South Asia. It is also known as the ounce and has a thick fur coat that helps it camouflage with the snowy landscape. The snow leopard is classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as its population is estimated to be fewer than 10,000 mature individuals and is expected to decline due to poaching, habitat loss, and climate change.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

The snow leopard is a medium-sized cat, with a body length of about 100-130 cm, a tail length of about 90-100 cm, and a shoulder height of about 60 cm. Weighing 35-55 kg, males slightly surpass females in size. Cloaked in a thick, smoky grey to yellowish-tan fur, adorned with black rosettes and spots, the snow leopard adeptly camouflages in rocky and snowy landscapes. Its plush coat not only serves as insulation against the cold but also conceals it from its surroundings. The long, bushy tail aids in balance and doubles as a face and body cover while resting. Large paws act as snowshoes, preventing sinking, and powerful legs enable remarkable horizontal leaps of up to 15 meters and vertical bounds of 6 meters.

TRACKING FOOTPRINTS

In January 2024, India announced the results of its first-ever survey of the snow leopard population in the country, which covered about 13,450 km worth of trails across six states and union territories. The survey, called the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI), estimated that there are 718 snow leopards in India, accounting for about 10-15% of the global population. The survey also identified the regions where the maximum number of snow leopards were found, such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

WHY

DOES BLACK MOON OCCUR?

A black moon is a rare astronomical phenomenon that occurs when there are two new moons in the same month. A new moon is the phase of the moon when it is not visible from Earth, because it is aligned with the sun and the Earth. A black moon is the opposite of a blue moon, which is when there are two full moons in the same month.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

A black moon occurs because the lunar cycle, which is the time it takes for the moon to go through all its phases, is slightly shorter than the calendar month. The lunar cycle is about 29.5 days, while most months have 30 or 31 days. This means that sometimes the new moon can fall at the beginning and the end of the same month, creating a black moon. Alternatively, a black moon can occur when there is no new moon in February, which is the shortest month.

A black moon can also refer to the third new moon in a season that has four new moons, or a month that has no full moon at all.

The black moon can also affect the flora, who depend on the moon phases for germination and blooming. This can alter quality and quantity of the crop.

THE SIGNIFICANCE

A black moon has no special significance for astronomy, but it may have some environmental impacts, such as affecting the tides, the animal behavior, and the plant growth. The unusual moon can cause lower tides than usual, as the gravitational pull of the sun and the moon are aligned. This can affect the marine life and the coastal erosion.

This moon can also affect the nocturnal animals, such as owls, bats, and insects, who rely on the moonlight for navigation and hunting. It can make them more active or less active, depending on their biological clock.

WHICH

IS MOST EXPENSIVE GEMSTONE IN THE WORLD?

Did you know that the most expensive gemstone in the world is not a diamond, but a pink diamond? The Pink Star, a 59.60-carat fancy vivid pink diamond, sold for a whopping $71.2 million in 2017, breaking the record for the highest price ever paid for a gemstone at auction.

WHAT MAKES IT SO SPECIAL?

The Pink Star is a gemstone of extraordinary beauty, rarity, and value. It is one of the few natural pink diamonds that have been discovered and the largest of its kind. It has been admired by celebrities, royalty, and collectors alike.

ORIGIN OF THE PINK STAR

The Pink Star was mined by De Beers in 1999 in South Africa and weighed 132.5 carats in the rough. The diamond's unique colour results from "plastic deformation,"

which occurs during the diamond's formation. This process involves intense pressure and heat that alter the crystal structure of the diamond, causing some of the carbon atoms to be displaced and creating defects that absorb certain wavelengths of light. In the case of the Pink Star, the defects absorb the blue and green wavelengths, leaving only the pink hue visible.

WHAT

IS BIOLUMINESCENCE?

DID YOU KNOW?

While some animals in the ocean emit light, some organisms absorab light, transform it, and eject it as a different colour. This phenomenon, called biofluorescence, may be used in communication and mating.

Bioluminescence is a natural phenomenon that occurs when living organisms produce and emit light. It is usually seen in marine animals, such as plankton, fish, and jellyfish, but it can also occur in some terrestrial animals, such as fireflies and fungi. Bioluminescence is caused by a chemical reaction that involves a molecule called luciferin and an enzyme called luciferase. The reaction releases energy in the form of light, which can vary in colour and intensity depending on the species and the environment.

DOES IT CREATE SEA SPARKLES?

One of the most spectacular displays of bioluminescence is when it rains on the ocean. The raindrops disturb the water surface and trigger the bioluminescent plankton to glow. The result is a dazzling show of blue-green light that looks like sparks or stars. This phenomenon is also known as "milky seas" or "sea sparkle".

A MYSTERY

Bioluminescence is one of the wonders of nature that can awe and inspire us. It is not only a visual spectacle but also a scientific mystery. Scientists are still trying to understand why and how different organisms produce bioluminescence and what its functions and benefits are. Some possible reasons include camouflage, communication, attraction, repulsion, and defence. Bioluminescence can also be used as an indicator of the health and diversity of marine ecosystems, as it reflects the presence and activity of plankton and other organisms.