

# Beyond all boundaries

**This engrossing book is not just about an individual fitting into a larger canvas of cricket, but is also about the beloved sport's evolution and undercurrents, writes Madhu Jawali**



Cricket is a game that has seeped into India's soul. Seen here is a saree-clad woman confidently brandishing a bat at the Maidan in Kolkata.

**R**amachandra Guha is several personalities rolled into one. A historian and an academic of great repute, he is also an environmentalist, a social anthropologist and a chronicler of Bengaluru. Besides all this, if there is one thing that gives him immense joy, it is watching cricket, especially Tests and domestic first-class matches. His aversion to shorter formats of the game is evident, but that's a topic for another debate for, he may have been pleasantly surprised to see the IPL generation fashion India's Test series win Down Under recently. This eclectic mix of interests gets reflected in his authorship of books as diverse as India after Gandhi, Savaging the Civilized or his much-acclaimed A Corner of a Foreign Field. His latest offer, titled The Commonwealth of Cricket, blends his love for this particular sport and his intimate association with it.

**Delight and nostalgia**  
Even if there is self-referencing, this isn't an autobiography, but is essentially a memoir that juxtaposes cricket with his life, gifting him delight and nostalgia. Cricket is the

spine that links him to his roots in Dehradun, his college mates in Delhi and his uncle N Duraiswami, Durai to those familiar with Bangalore's cricketing landscape. And cricket is the guilty pleasure that inspires his conversations at cafes or bookshops in the southern metropolis.

Guha mentions that his latest book on cricket would be his last on the sport. In a sense, it is a culmination to all that he penned before on cricket: Wickets in the East, Spin and Other Turns or A Corner of a Foreign Field.

The recurring themes that bind these books together are evident in the latest one too, be it in the warmth exhibited towards the purveyors of cricket, the anecdotal style of writing, the pen-portraits of heroes and the anguish over the game's excess commercial muscle robbing it of its essential romance.



**THE COMMONWEALTH OF CRICKET**  
Ramachandra Guha  
HarperCollins  
pp 360, Rs 699

Guha starts with these lines: "I have no memories of the first cricket match I saw. Yet, I have heard so much about it since that I can write about it as if I did." What he mentions is so true about the game as most

of us acquire shared memories from our fathers, uncles and older cousins and even Don Bradman's average of 99.94 is drilled into our consciousness. But there is a quiet satisfaction that could be derived from live sport and the way that particular memory acquires its own garnishing over the years. Guha is adept in the art of drawing cricketing tales from the depths of nostalgia.

**'The failed one'**  
When he refers to his early years in Dehradun, you also get a vivid account of how cricket thrived there while the mighty Himalayas stood in the background. For Guha, cricket is never just about what transpires between the bat and ball; it is also about context, venues, historical time-frame and social churn. His gaze is one of admiration be it for a regular club player or the giants that did service for India or other nations.

A cricketer himself, with a self-deprecatory air, Guha refers to himself as the failed one despite the best efforts of Durai.

Even if he refers to instances in his life, be it in Dehradun, Delhi, Kolkata, overseas, or in Bengaluru, Guha sticks to cricket being his mirror. When talk veers towards college mates, former India opener Arun Lal finds mention. When veneration seeps in, it isn't linked to gods, but to classy practitioners of cricket, like a Bishan Singh Bedi or a G R Viswanath. And even as political discord slowly rears its head between him and Durai, Guha prefers to overlook it and keep cricket as their common glue. The game above all is the theme.

**Club-cricket culture**  
This isn't just about an individual fitting into a larger canvas of cricket, it is also an effort to paint the sport's evolution and its undercurrents. There are contrasts too to relish.

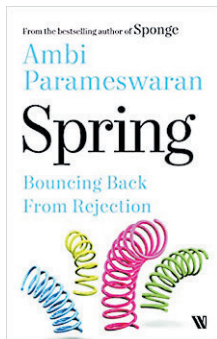
Guha advocates that nationalism has no role in the love for sport, but in the same breath, he doesn't deny his parochialism when it comes to provinces or the hyper local. Karnataka is an enduring favourite and Friends Union Cricket Club holds a special place in his heart. Read this book to know about the club-cricket culture in the Bengaluru.

But, this isn't entirely about an outsider enumerating about the game's luminosity. This is also about him briefly becoming a reluctant insider in the BCCI's Committee of Administrators (CoA) and getting an up-close view, warts and all. Despite his immense admiration for champions as varied as Sunil Gavaskar and Rahul Dravid, Guha does speak about conflicts of interest shadowing players and administrators, and that does leave him with a bitter-sweet experience.

Above all, this is a book that highlights how knowing cricket means that you could forge a bond with a Pakistani fan in Europe, and also partake in the reflected glories of a well-executed cover drive or a googly. This is about a historian finding his light touch while dwelling upon a game, which has gone beyond its British legacy and has seeped into India's soul.

## 'Just keep swimming'

**R**ejection and criticism are almost the same; both demotivate the weak, but motivate the strong. *Anon*  
Many books have been written on how to handle rejection. In fact, this theme has become rather hackneyed and a tad threadbare. But, as they say, there's nothing new except for the presentation. Ambi Parmeswaran's 'Spring: Bouncing Back from Rejection' presents this subject in such an adroit and altogether novel manner that you're bound to doff your hat to the man. Who hasn't faced rejections in his or her life? In reality, much more than the instances of acceptance, we all face a barrage of rejections. Lily-livered people succumb to them, but people with a steely character and resolve overcome them to emerge as winners. This pragmatic book by a super-achiever, who himself faced rejections in life and career, underscores the fact that only by facing rejections, can one become successful in life because rejections are actual stepping stones to success.



**SPRING: BOUNCING BACK FROM REJECTION**  
Ambi Parmeswaran  
Westland, pp 232, Rs 599

**Life lessons**  
'Rejection is an experience as to what not to repeat in your next endeavour,' was an invaluable piece of advice given by the legendary Hindi newsreader Devaki Nandan Pandey, when a lanky young man politely asked him why he was rejected by AIR as a Hindi/English newscaster in 1963. That young man took a lesson from his rejection and didn't let it dampen his zeal and resolve. He worked harder and today his voice is a metaphor for a perfect baritone! He was also rejected by SSB

(Staff Selection Board) and many directors didn't consider him to be an actor at all. So many rejections in so many spheres, yet he triumphed. Yes, I'm talking about Amitabh Bachchan. 'Rejection is an injection, injection of inspiration,' stated Ernest Hemingway in his Nobel acceptance speech. The manuscript of his 'A Farewell To Arms' was rejected by a number of publishers. But today, it is considered to be a classic and Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

With practical examples, anecdotes and solutions, Ambi Parmeswaran has dealt with the subject of rejection with utmost sympathy, nay empathy. Nowhere does this IIT-Madras-IIT-Calcutta educated topper sounds condescending or pontificating. He has chosen an apt metaphor 'spring.' Bounce back like a spring is his infallible mantra to the readers. Remember, there's no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

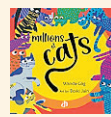
To encapsulate, this book by Ambi has an ambit of positivity and an orbit of excellence. It reiterates that rejection is not permanent eviction. Just the way a fighter pilot ejected from his aircraft bounces back immediately, a rejected person can soon spring back to his/her normal and ebullient self. A must for those who feel rejected, dejected and crestfallen.  
**SUMIT PAUL**



## BOOKRACK



**YUGANTAR**  
Raghavan Srinivasan  
Leadstart Publishing,  
pp 274, Rs 299  
The fourth century BCE is full of dangers and opportunities. Old republics are giving way to empires and cities. 'Naastik' sects are challenging the established varna system. The intellectual life of India is bristling like new shoots after the monsoon. The domination of the Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas is being challenged. State power is up for grabs. And the Macedonians are at the gates!



**MILLIONS OF CATS**  
Wanda Gág and Boski Jain  
(Illustrator)  
Katha Books, ebook, Rs 99  
This is a 90-year-old, award-winning story from American literature with doses of humour, kindness and love. Wrapped in the Indian flavours of delightful illustrations, this little bundle of magic will take you for a ride to places far and wide and elicit happy sighs and smiles.



**DEAR EARTH**  
Avvaiyar, Murali Nagapuzha  
(Illustrator) and Geeta Dharmarajan (Translator)  
Katha Books, ebook, Rs 99  
This is a delightful song from Tamil literature of 2,300 years ago, by the wise poet. Avvaiyar, in a child-friendly translation. This sumptuously illustrated 'Big Earthcarer' book hopes to help little children understand and appreciate our planet Earth.

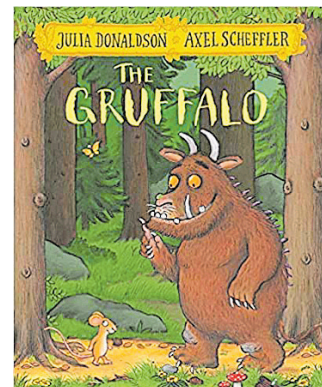
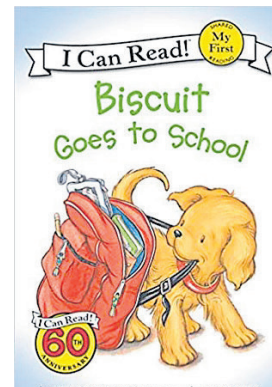
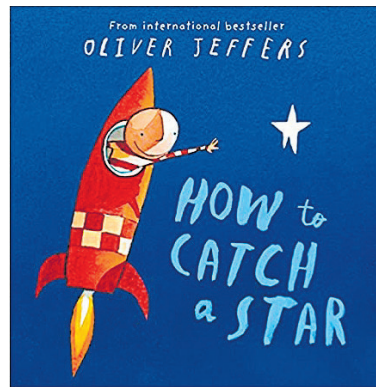


**FOR THE LOVE OF POETRY**  
Arnav Diwan  
Notion Press, pp 52, Rs 149  
These are a collection of poems by a 17-year-old. It contains 15 poems that talk about the simplest of things in the most elegant way possible. These poems are relatable and open to interpretation.



**THE LAST LIGHT OF GLORY DAYS**  
Avinuo Kire  
Speaking Tiger, pp 184, Rs 350  
Profoundly compassionate and a masterful storyteller, the author describes a world that is as breathtaking as it is shattering; where military occupation and magic co-exist. This is an exquisite unravelling of the tired tropes that cast Nagaland as another undistinguishable piece of the 'Northeast'.

## GOBBLEDYBOOK



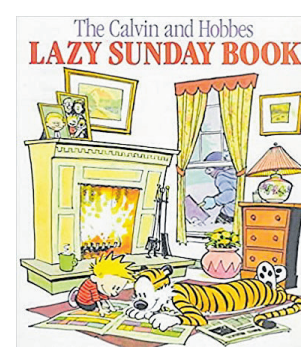
## The comfort of the familiar

Children love routine and familiarity. New books are exciting, but old books make them feel good. They understand the story, plot and concepts better with each read, says **Shruthi Rao**

**M**y nephew, who's nearly three, cannot read yet. And yet, he props his favourite book open, turns the pages, and "reads" out the entire book. Does that mean he has secretly learned to read? No, but he has asked for that book to be read out to him so many times that he knows it by heart. He's just reciting it from memory.

A lot of children do this. Even if they cannot recite the entire story, they know what comes next, and pounce on you if you make the inexcusable blunder of missing a sentence, or saying the wrong word. While we ooh and aah about the cuteness of the whole thing, let's spare a thought for the poor adult who is forced to read that book until they're sick of it. In the Calvin and Hobbes comics, Calvin's father has read out the (fictional) book Hamster Huey and the Goopy Kabloolie to him a million times. "You know how the story goes!" wails the father, clutching his hair, when Calvin asks for the same story yet again. "You've memorised the whole thing! It's the same story every day!" Seriously, is it worth all that trouble you go through to read a book to your child again and again? Well, it is.

**Comfort:** Children love routine and familiarity. New



books are exciting, but old books make them feel good. It's like meeting your old friends, whose company you know and love.

**Comprehension:** Just like when we re-watch a movie or reread a book, children understand the story, plot and concepts better with each read, and learn to make connections.

**Vocabulary:** Children's books have a lot of new words. Hearing a word multiple times ensures that the child registers the word and its usage, and is more likely to use the word (correctly!) in regular conversation the next time the situation arises.

**Confidence:** Once the child actually learns to read, it is easier for him to read a book that he's already familiar with. This makes him confident in

reading, and it's more likely that he'll try out a new book with new words that he doesn't know. I understand. The adult needs to dip into previously unknown reserves of patience in order to read the same book every single night, especially when you have emails to send and a sink full of dishes to wash. It can be frustrating. In fact, Calvin's father even rants: "Architects should be forced to live in the buildings they design, and children's book authors should be forced to read their stories aloud every single night of their rotten lives." Ouch.

Actually, authors do keep adults in mind when they write their books, and some are a lot of fun to read aloud. For instance, I didn't mind reading out Julia Donaldson's The Gruffalo no matter how many times my daughter asked for it. Wish you bucket loads of patience, and remember, it's worth it, and this phase will pass!

The author has written 10 books for children and can be reached at [www.shruthi-rao.com](http://www.shruthi-rao.com). **GobbledyBook** is a fortnightly column that gives a peek into the wondrous world of children's books. Hop on! Or as Alice did, plunge into the rabbit hole.

## READ OF THE WEEK

**P**art travelogue, part ancient history and part analysis of the fate of Buddhist heritage, Buddha in Gandhara is the saga of ancient Buddhist cities of Gandhara — a region that extended from north-western Pakistan to the eastern and north-eastern

Afghanistan. Written in a simple and accessible style, the book gives you a glimpse into a glorious as well as tumultuous past through the stories of cities that once dotted the highroad connecting India with Central Asia and China. It traces the network of

Asian trade routes that nourished these cities with goods, people and ideas and trains the spotlight on the magnificent art of Gandhara that still clings to the ruins of these heritage cities and also those that are showcased in the museums of Asia and Europe.

Sunita Dwivedi left her full time job as a journalist in the late nineties to pursue her passion for travelling and photography on the Silk Road through Asia and Europe. She has been retracing the Silk Road through China, Central Asia and India for over two decades now.

