

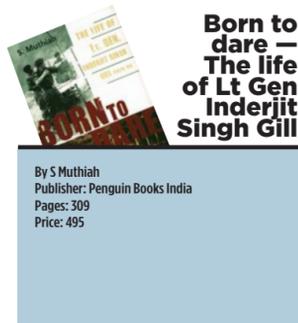
Section 2

i.witness

The profile of the officer who headed the Directorate of Military Operations during the 1971 War fills a critical gap in the annals of Indian military history, says Gen S Padmanabhan

soldier's soldier brought to life

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Born to dare — The life of Lt Gen Inderjit Singh Gill

By S Muthiah
 Publisher: Penguin Books India
 Pages: 309
 Price: 495

General Inderjit Singh Gill (Inder Gill) has been an iconic figure to the Parachute Regiment and, indeed, to the Indian Army. He served for six years (1941-47) in the British Army — a little over one year in the ranks and the rest as an officer in the British Corps of Royal Engineers (RE). While in the RE, he saw active service in occupied Greece and in the Italian Campaign. For his wartime performance in Greece with the nascent resistance movement and in Italy for the execution of combat engineer tasks, he was awarded the Military Cross and mentioned in Despatches. He was also wounded in action twice and carried some mine splinters in his body for the rest of his life.

Inder Gill served in the Indian Army from 1947 to June 1, 1979. During his army career he served for about three years in the J&K Militia and Bihar Regiment. He transferred to the parachute regiment in 1951 and served in 2 PARA (Marathas) and 1 PARA (Punjab), which he commanded. He raised and commanded 71 Mountain Brigade and later 50 (Independent) Parachute Brigade with distinction. He commanded 17 Mountain Division in Sikkim after which he became GOC of the Tezpur based 4 Corps.

At the peak of his career, he was appointed GOC in C of Western Command for four years. He retired on June 1, 1979, having been awarded the Param Visisht Seva Medal as a Major General. A grateful nation also awarded him the Padma Bhushan for his exceptional work as Director of Military Operations in the 1971 War against Pakistan.

Inder Gill, on retirement, settled down in Chennai as desired by his father. During the next 22 years he took over progressively, trusteeship of various institutions founded by his father in Chennai, such as the Punjab Association, Guru Nanak Society, the Guru Nanak College and other educational institutions. He streamlined the administration of these institutions, improved the pay scales of their staff and instilled discipline among students. He introduced Defence and Strategic Studies in the college and set up a research institute in it. He took great interest in the library of the Madras Club and kept himself updated on matters relating to the Army. He passed away on May 31, 2001.

What manner of man was Inder Gill? The

author has carried out detailed research in order to answer this question. Clearly, the historian in him would have been challenged by his subject's failure to keep a diary or such other papers that may help in studying his life and works with some facility. Yet, since he believed that "there is much in Inder's life that is worth emulating — and remembering", he embarked on his research from books, official records, regimental histories, interviews with those who had worked with him or were related to him or otherwise knew him and the few rare comments Inder might have let slip about his actions. Despite the difficulties involved in the research, S Muthiah has succeeded in making Inder Gill come alive to the reader through this masterly book *Born to Dare*. No praise is considered too high for him for this achievement, specially as it fills a critical gap in the annals of Indian military history.

Returning to our question as to what manner of man Inder Gill was, physically we may describe him as a short, very tough and adventurous person who had a high tolerance for pain and physical deprivations and lived a Spartan life. He could face grave danger squarely and carry out his mission regardless of the perils ahead. He had a high degree of physical endurance and often worked under sustained pressure for prolonged periods. He had the ability to 'let his hair down' when it was possible to do so and relax with his friends over a drink or two (or more). However, his mind was never clouded or dulled nor was ever found wanting in any way as a result of any 'saturnalia' he may have engaged himself in. So much for his 'physical' attributes.

Morally, he was blessed with the highest integrity and righteousness of conduct. He was

sensitive to the pains and sufferings of others, specially his subordinates and kinsfolk. He was the kind of person who would stop his car to give a lift to some jawans waiting by the roadside and take them to their destination except on those occasions when the jawans, overawed by the proximity of their commander, failed to disclose to him that they were desirous of travelling in the opposite direction! He had an excellent sense of humour and could see the funny side of even a tense situation.

As a commander, he led by example and derived the maximum from his team. He was willing to be forgiving, even kind, to a subordinate who had made a mistake, but he would not stand for 'waffling' or prevarication. He followed all the canons of financial propriety and stuck to his principles and work ethics. He was normally terse in his speech, but used to speak to his juniors with greater freedom. His courage of conviction was legendary.

Inder Gill, the son of a Sikh doctor and Scottish mother, inherited from his parents sterling qualities of head and heart. He revered them and would have grieved their passing — his mother in 1983 and his father, 93, in 1988. He was happily married and his wife, Mrs Mona Gill, lives in Chennai.

Overall, Inder Gill was a 'soldier's soldier' and a great officer and gentleman. One could be forgiven for borrowing what Antony said of Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act V, Scene V) "His life was gentle and the elements

So mixed in him that Nature might stand up And say to all the world 'This was a man!'"

So was Inder Gill. Thank you Mr Muthiah for a wonderful expose of this great soldier.

The reviewer is a former Chief of the Army Staff



DIFFERENT MOODS: (From left) Lt Gen Inderjit Singh Gill being presented a photo of *H. Gills*, a species of insect named after him; the Gills with President Zakir Hussain after the officer was awarded the PVSM in April 1969; Inderjit Singh Gill with Mona at their golden wedding anniversary celebrations



regional writing

Premia Jayakumar

a writer-columnist, lives in Kochi and has translated the works of many top Kerala novelists and poets into English
 prembmenon@gmail.com

reprints and signs of fresh life

Vishukkalamalle, kanikkonnayalle, Pookkathirikkannikkavathundo?

So asked the poet. We are just into the Malayalam New Year and Kerala has heralded it with the golden hues of the Vishukkani. The couplet from Dr K Ayyappa Paniker sums up the mood. However, the literary scene does not reflect the brightness of the season.

When all the critical activity is centred on commemorating anniversaries and re-evaluating the virtues of old books, and the publishers are busy bringing out reprints, it does leave one with the impression that nothing much is happening in the literary scene in that language. The books celebrating jubilees were certainly pathbreaking in their day and still wonderfully readable after so many years. The birth centenaries are also certainly well worth celebrating. However, surely so many pages in the periodicals could be more profitably focused on what is being written in the here and now.

The notable novels that have come out in the recent past are by established writers. Right now, two novels being serialised in *Mathrubhumi Weekly* are Sara Joseph's *Ooru Kaval*, which looks at the story of the quest for Sita from a different angle, and T P Rajeevan's *Paleri Manikyam Kollakkes*, which combines the detective genre with the history of a place. One misses new names and new themes.

However, in the field of poetry and

The notable novels that have come out in the recent past are by established writers

short stories, Malayalam shows signs of fresh life.

Though nothing like the great excitement of the late sixties and early seventies is visible, there are young poets and not quite so young poets writing, and writing good poetry. The same is the situation with short stories.

Two books of poetry that came out recently hold one's attention. Poems written by K G Sankara Pillai from 1997 to 2007 have finally been gathered into an anthology that is well worth the wait. P P Ramachandran's poem about the Kalamkari, which could perhaps be called a dramatic poem, differs from other long poems as it consists of small units that can be sung or even performed.

Two deaths have left the language infinitely poorer. The first was the death of K T Mohammed, a humanist and dramatist, whose plays such as *Ithu Bhumiyanu*, *Achanaum Bappayam*, *Srishi*, and *Sithi*, have highlighted social issues and helped keep the dying professional stage in the state alive for decades.

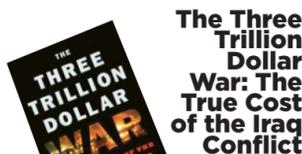
The second was the death of Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, poet extraordinaire, who made Malayalam poetry dance to the beat of a different drummer. He called himself the worshipper of a dark god and wrote about the Kattalan and the Kurathi. Imbibing the rhythms of his native Padayani, he wrote poems that could be sung. He wandered up and down the state singing his poems in his gruff voice, leaving them on the tongues of illiterate people as well as the minds of the educated readers.

Both these writers, who used 'words that had forked lightning in them', would, I am sure, have raged against the dying of the light.

This is the first in a series of columns on the regional language scenario.

With dubious practices and financed by debt, the Iraq war has benefited no one, least of all the countries directly involved in it, according to Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes

going bust over a murky war



The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict

By Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes
 Publisher: Norton
 Pages: 311
 Price: Rs 595

BY MOUSHUMI GHOSH

The United States went to war in 2003 against Iraq, or more specifically the Saddam regime, on grounds of it harbouring weapons of mass destruction. Five years on, the war is far from over. On its way, like a juggernaut that no one expected it to be, it has swallowed precious lives, resources, and money. Bilmes and Stiglitz take on the Herculean task of calculating the cost of the Iraq war and succeed.

What was presented to the Congress and the American public almost as a free lunch has since run up costs that will burden the next generation of US taxpayers. The authors point out several glaring flaws in the accounting.

First, the finance department's murky accounting practices, which have failed every audit for the last decade, make it difficult to keep accounts. Second, there has been a lack of foresight in calculating current and future health costs of the veterans. Third is the lack of funds. The authors clearly state that the war was "financed by debt". The costs of repairing military equipment were not taken into account.

Projected as a \$200 billion war, it has metamorphosed into a many-headed economic monster that affects oil prices, increases inflation, impacts trade, creates refugees not just for the US and the "coalition of the willing", but also Iraq's neighbours and the entire world. Other than a few oil exporters, contractors hired by the US government, and private security agencies, no one has benefited from the war. Least of all, the countries directly involved.



The authors calculate the projected budgetary costs, the interest on borrowed money, past, present and future inflation, as well as look at counterfactuals and opportunity costs to arrive at more than the three trillion dollar figure. The calculations look at two best case and realistic-moderate estimates. Both are stressed as "conservative".

The authors also cover the macroeconomic effects of the conflict, the negative impact on America's image, the worldwide impact of this war, and suggest reforms. On the way, they bust some myths such as wars being good for the

economy, which started with WWII. All these claims are then substantially backed up with detailed endnotes.

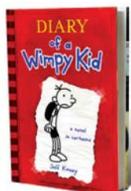
The authors of this detailed dynamite of a book boldly go where no economist has gone before and come back with solid answers. They agree that counting costs may not help the human lives lost but say it might help the survivors and future generations. The humane concerns, conviction, and the reasoning of this book make it a must-have for policymakers and others. It's a book that reaches out to those who want answers to facilitate change.

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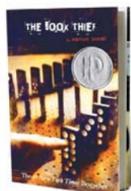
The bestsellers of the week in children's fiction



Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules
 by Jeff Kinney



Diary of a Wimpy Kid
 by Jeff Kinney



The Book Thief
 by Markus Zusak



The Mysterious Benedict Society
 by Trenton Lee Stewart



The Invention of Hugo Cabret
 by Brian Selznick



The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian
 by Sherman Alexie



Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines
 by Nic Sheff



The Big Field
 by Mike Lupica