

# Of black excellence and Serena



AMITAVA KAR

**IN OTHER WORDS**

HERE is a problem with doing something well for a long time. There comes a time when people start to think it's easy. I worry about this with Serena Williams. I worry that people think that what she does - winning Grand Slams by the handful, a record-breaking 23 after taking her seventh Australian Open singles title on Saturday - is easy for her. It isn't. It's overwhelmingly difficult. It requires a combination of focus, agility, stamina, speed, endurance, range and humility, and more than an occasional helping of luck. It demands that one turns the page immediately after good days and, more importantly, the bad ones. It requires the strength to summon parts of oneself that none of us probably quite understand, because no one has ever done this before.

Her feat in Melbourne was hardly a swan song. At 35, Serena is at the pinnacle of her game. Perhaps the most incredible thing about her is the length of time she has been winning Grand Slam titles. The first came on September 11, 1999 in New York; the 23rd on January 28, 2017 in Melbourne. And the journey of these eighteen long years has not been a bed of roses.

There have been so many bad calls against her that she was given as one reason why instant replay needed to be introduced on the court. She has had to compete with critiques of her body that perpetuate racist notions of black

women being masculine and unattractive. President of the Russian Tennis Federation, Shamil Tarpishev, once described her sister and her as "brothers" who are "scary" to look at. I have seen many Americans cheer for her European opponents in the US Open. How does one cope with that? By refusing to accept it. She refused to accept the unwritten script that

swear to God I am (expletive) going to take this (expletive) ball and shove it down your (expletive) throat."

And in doing so, she proves that she is only human. She not only shows us her joy, her humour but also her rage. She has managed to free herself from the burden of becoming perfect. There is nothing wrong with her, but surely there is something wrong with the

How does one do that? I think she learnt it from her father and longtime coach Richard Williams who used to beg tennis clubs to part with their old balls when he started to put his daughters through their paces in the Los Angeles district of Compton. In his autobiography, *Black and White: The Way I See It*, he describes toughening the girls' "skin" by bringing "busloads

released its list of the most marketable sports stars, it was revealed that Maria Sharapova who ranked way behind her had a financial advantage off the court. Forbes listed Sharapova as the highest-paid female athlete, worth more than USD 29 million to Serena's USD 24 million. Chris Evert, one of the greatest players of all time said, "I think the corporate world still loves the good looking blond girls."

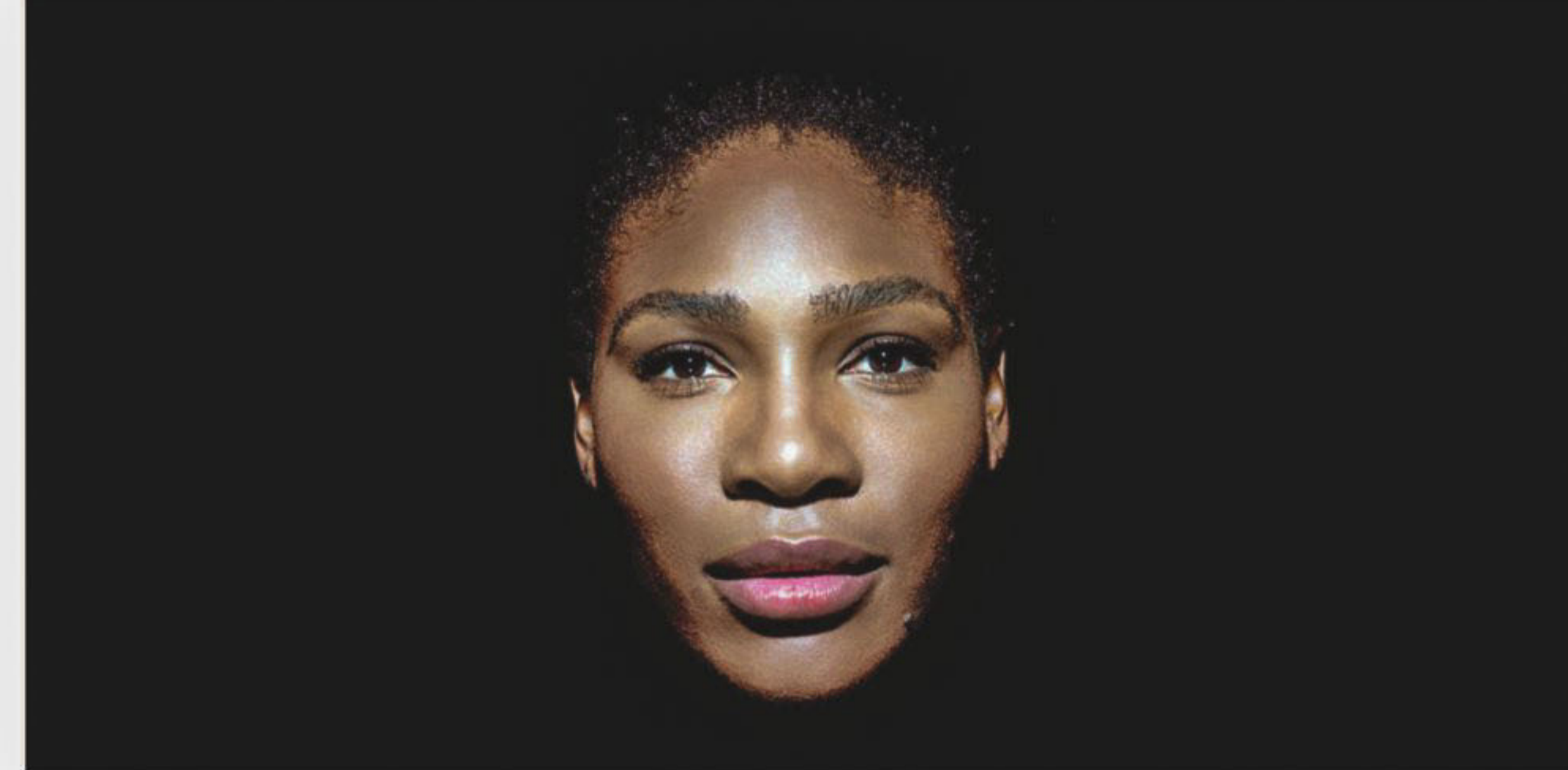
So despite being the best, she is only superficially allowed to symbolise that in contemporary culture, at least the marketable one which decides who is desirable and who can be associated with the good life. But Serena couldn't care less. "We have to be thankful, and we also have to be positive about it so the next black person can be No.1 on that list," she said. "Maybe it was not meant to be me. Maybe it's meant to be the next person to be amazing, and I'm just opening the door for the next person."

Serena comes out of a long line of African-Americans who fought for the right to be outstanding in an arena that attached its value to its whiteness and worked overtime to keep it segregated. The private tennis clubs in the US remained off limits to minorities well into the second half of the twentieth century. Her distinction thus comes with the ability to imagine herself achieving a new kind of history for all of us.

I know that her winning won't end something that she didn't start. But she is rewriting the script, one in which winning is not burdened with the task of curing racism, in which one wins just to win and is unafraid to show the emotion that comes with it.

The writer is a member of the Editorial Team at *The Daily Star*.

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Serena Williams

PHOTO: AFP

demands the humble absorption of racist assaults in the United States. At Wimbledon last year, for example, in a match against the home favourite Heather Watson, Serena, interrupted by the deafening support of Watson, flashed her index finger at the crowd and said, "Don't try me." And at the US Open in 2009, she told the lineswoman following a bad call, "I

expectation that she be humble while achieving excellence. Why should she not respond to racism? In whose world should it be answered with good manners? In a world where Donald Trump is the president of the United States of America?

And yet she has shown considerable restraint while being subjected to racial discrimination on the court.

of kids from the local schools into Compton to surround the courts while Venus and Serena practiced. I had the kids call them every curse word in the English language, including 'Nigger'," he writes. "I paid them to do it and told them to 'do their worst'."

This training hardened not only her skin but also her soul. Last year when the London School of Marketing

## Tulip Siddiq and our MPs

*Our MPs congratulated Tulip on her election as MP by passing a thanksgiving motion in Parliament in 2015. In the discussion on the motion, they said that they were proud of her. We can only wish that they would all follow her example of how to stand by the people.*



SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE Labour Party leader announced that he would force his front-bench team to vote in favour of a government bill to leave the European

their party, and to question and challenge their counterpart in the cabinet-led by the prime minister. It is the shadow cabinet's responsibility to criticise the policies and actions of the government, as well as offer an alternative programme. In this way, the Official Opposition seeks to present itself as an alternative government-in-waiting.

Members of a shadow cabinet are

Corbyn changed the situation. The vast majority of Tulip's constituents last year voted to remain in the EU. And to her, representing the constituents in the parliament was more important than pleasing the party leader. She decided to stand by her constituents, not the party leader in Parliament.

In doing so, she resigned from the shadow cabinet. She did it because, as she said, she could not "reconcile"

Can we imagine such an example in our politics?

In 2009, we witnessed a parliamentary stand-off over allocation of some front bench seats in the House. The then outgoing speaker allocated some more front bench seats to the then main opposition MPs. But the ruling party did not accept it. And the new speaker rearranged the seating arrangement by giving the main

Unfortunately they blindly support the party line in all issues, not only in casting votes. They think little about the people they represent. Take the example of a discussion on the proposed budget during which the ruling party MPs blindly supported all the proposals while the opposition MPs opposed all of them.

They do not dare oppose the party line, fearing loss of the party high command's blessing they enjoy in politics.



Taking a stand for the people.



often but not always appointed to a cabinet post if and when their party gets into government. Tulip was appointed as Shadow Minister for Early Years Education in the shadow cabinet led by the Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn in October 2016. And she got a front bench seat in the Parliament. Being a first time MP, this was a huge achievement for Tulip.

But the three-line whip imposed by

herself to her position after the shadow cabinet chief imposed a three-line whip for MPs to support the bill. The resignation cost her dearly as she lost her front bench seat and now must sit in the back bench.

She, however, can now speak freely in the House of Commons during the discussion to vote against the bill and represent the sentiment of the people in her constituency.

opposition a few seats in the front bench. Both AL and the main opposition BNP locked horns over the issue.

The fact is that our constitutional provision imposes strict restrictions on MPs to vote against party decision in the Parliament. One will lose his/her membership in Parliament if s/he votes against the party's decision. According to a High Court verdict, this has made our MPs prisoners of the party.

Tulip, on the other hand, did not seek any favour from the party leader in Parliament. She rose to the present position with her hard work and qualifications. Living in West Hampstead, Tulip has been an active campaigner since she was 16, fighting to save local hospitals, fire stations and post offices. Prior to becoming Labour's candidate in West Hampstead in the 2015 parliamentary election, Tulip worked for Brunswick Group LLP in corporate social responsibility, working with major British manufacturers and transport companies to strengthen their use of apprenticeship schemes and build links with local communities and schools. She worked for the people who, in return, elected her as MP and sent her to the House of Commons to represent them there.

In her letter to Corbyn, Tulip strongly pronounced that she does not represent the House of Commons in her constituency, rather she represents her constituents in Parliament. Tulip proves that if one works for the public wholeheartedly and sincerely, they know well how to honour such a leader.

Our MPs congratulated Tulip on her election as MP by passing a thanksgiving motion in Parliament in 2015. In the discussion on the motion, they said that they were proud of her. We can only wish that they would all follow her example of how to stand by the people.

The writer is a Senior Reporter, *The Daily Star*.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

MAYA ANGELOU  
AMERICAN POET, MEMOIRIST, CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

*It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

ACROSS

- Sign of freshness
- Open square
- Hawaiian port
- Like TV's Steve Austin
- Stench
- Remove bandaging from
- Kids' puzzle type
- One after another
- Uncertain
- 2016 Olympics setting
- Espresso order
- Mona Lisa feature
- Cry of insight
- Feeds the furnace
- Zone alternative
- Evenly matched
- Oil unit
- Roving team
- Zoo resident
- Doily stuff
- Brat's opposite
- Fraternal group

DOWN

- Not barefoot
- Beach resort
- Heaps
- Omen
- Wine grape
- State game
- Santa -- winds
- Energy
- Tennis feat
- Pal
- Formerly
- Composer Satie
- Khartoum's river
- Performs
- Chowder bit
- "Very funny!"
- impass
- Sports figure
- Eyeglass
- Bouquet
- Crooner Mel
- "Love Story" actor
- Uttered
- Bottle part
- Lamb's mothers
- Lamb's mutter
- Abby's sister
- Outfit

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

COPS KICK  
RURAL GENOA  
UTICA RECUR  
ELM TEENAGE  
TEEMING SAN  
TREND HER  
MOUSE  
TOO SEATS  
SIN TEETHES  
TEETERS RAP  
ADDON ALONE  
BYGOD WINCE  
SEEK DEED

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

WHY DOES SARGE KEEP DOING THIS TO YOU?  
I THINK IT'S BECAUSE I BEAT HIM AT TENNIS, GOLF, HANDBALL AND BOWLING.  
MAYBE YOU SHOULD FIND DIFFERENT WAYS TO INSPIRE HIM.  
HOW ABOUT CHECKERS?  
GREAT MORT WALKER

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

LOOK AT THE SCARF BEETLE MADE FOR ME!  
I THOUGHT HE WAS LAZY.  
I'M KNITTING ANOTHER SCARF  
ONLY YOU COULD FIND A HOBBY YOU COULD DO IN BED.