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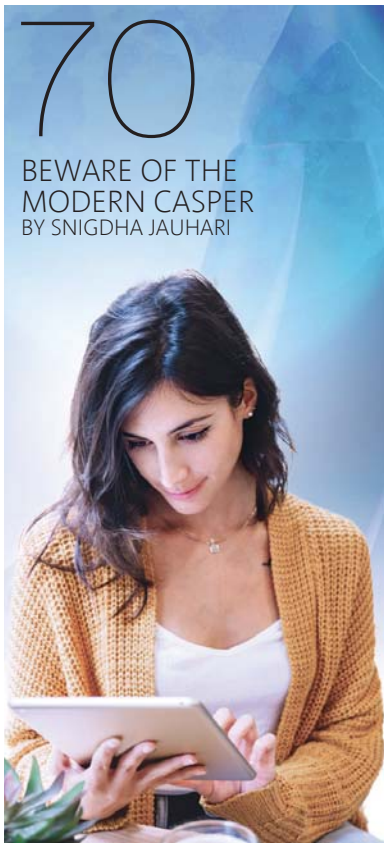
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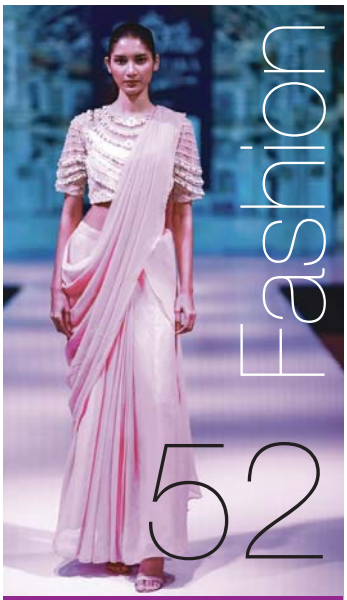


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Woman's era

EDITORIAL

The political turmoil that has inundated the nation thanks to BJP's wherewithal towards both the electorate as well as the judiciary has reached epic levels. Most of the political regimes around the world practise similar strategies but being in India with this large a population and a number of political parties, the proportion of its effect is quite different. The way the NCP has been broken down similar to Balasaheb's Shiv Sena, gives an effect and feel that the Maharashtrian politics was all about money and not about the electorate. If the electorate could have been broken so easily, with first the Shiv Sena and then within the year NCP, both of which are the largest, (most powerful) political parties of the West, and controlling a substantial amount of revenue of the country at the state level, as well as the clout, such an inference seems to be rational.

Further, the consolidation of 39 political parties along with the BJP versus the 29 political parties including the Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, and the Shiv Sena, with NCP appearing in both fractions, may not be a formidable alliance against the BJP. Their common minimum agenda is the eradication of PM Modi, which is not on the cards for the Indian democratic populace at the moment but stands defeated at its inception. The term I.N.D.I.A. coined as an acronym for such an alliance is a mockery. Even if it is not struck down by the courts, intelligent media is not going to use it, and even the political party workers are not going to refer to it due to patriotism imbibed in all political campaigning.

The news that female foeticide is once again striking Haryana, and what is happening in Manipur, is quite disdainful in urban India with Manipur rape victim videos going viral. After the *Nirbhaya Hatyakand* in Delhi, there has been no reform in Indian society vis-à-vis the status of women. They continue to hold the plight, whether it is at jobs, at homes and from whichever strata they come from. It seems like India and Asia will never reform, in favour of women who do drive these economies also. In urban India, working women have their plight since their working age is limited and the job opportunities, even if they are well qualified, are not very many. Such is not the case in the West. It is the age-old mindset of the Brahmin-dominated caste society, which is imbibed in our very DNA. It will be difficult to change this mindset within India. Even the government has left out the *'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Abhiyan'* after Smriti Irani had taken over. There was some speed when Maneka Gandhi was the minister of the Ministry for Women and Child Development. The agencies like DCW and NCW or mere spectators usually. Anyone who enters their premises for help and report has to first enter names three times, from the gate to the reception. How would a woman, who is already roughed by society, go to the functionaries of such setups?

Changing climatic conditions in the northern Indian peninsula is a cause for concern. Back in the 50s when the dams were being constructed rampantly in India for irrigation and flood water control, right after the division, where the focus was to control the water flows from the Indus River and retain it for irrigation, was criticised within India as well as around the world that it will become catastrophic some day. And the same has happened in China also. However, at that time, there was no question of footprint and global warming, which is now. The water on hills usually flows through mountain and hill valleys. For the sake of the site and a beautiful view, man has started building on the floodplains, right up to the apex or crest of hills, which is the way of the water. Further, the dams restrict the flow of water to the plains. So technically, in the recent floods, water has found its way, aided by gravity, to flow into the sea. It is not water's problem that housing has been built along its way. Here in Delhi, there is a highway which adjoins Noida. About 10 years back, one of the star campaigners, Sri Sri put up a big show on the floodplains of Yamuna, with a huge structure that was almost like a mini township, to host his personal event. The event was graced by dignitaries no less than the President and the Prime Minister at that time, leading to a sanction that this was a done thing – to put up a structure in the middle of the floodplain. On the other side of this floodplain is a host of unauthorised colony houses, which are as high as 6 to 7 storeys, and no municipality official dares to go there for investigation. Then, we have Akshardham, one of the largest temples in north India being built right on the bank of Yamuna, which is the riverbed. And then we complain about a flood. Global warming definitely has an effect since there has been a rise in temperature leading to more rainfall and heavy rainfall within a short period of time. But such has been happening on the planet for a very long time. There was a time when the rains did not stop for 1 million years in the life of this planet. So, rains are nothing new, and heavy rains are also nothing new. It is only the way the population has exploded on the planet and where it has decided to live, which is the most recent development. Government authorities have little control over any floods, as they can only watch and inform when the water recedes, and they keep the population informed of it.

editor@womansera.com



CINEPLEX

Vicky Kaushal-Katrina Kaif Steal The Spotlight In Stylish Looks At The 'RARKPK' Premiere Night

Vicky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif, one of the film industry's most popular couples, were spotted at the 'RARKPK' premiere night. The duo was simply unmissable, as usual. Vicky wore an all-denim ensemble that included a denim blue shirt and a pair of classic denim blue jeans. Katrina, on the other hand, looked stunning in a pristine white gown. She wore a dress from the Acler racks.





Sharvari Wagh Joined Alia Bhatt in Highly-Anticipated YRF Spy Thriller!





With Alia Bhatt donning superpowers, YRF's female-led spy film sets the stage for a captivating addition to the Spy Universe. The untitled film will witness Alia Bhatt as a formidable super spy, joined by Sharvari in a crucial role. Fans can expect an explosive combination of talent, action, and intrigue in this much-anticipated YRF Spy Universe installment.

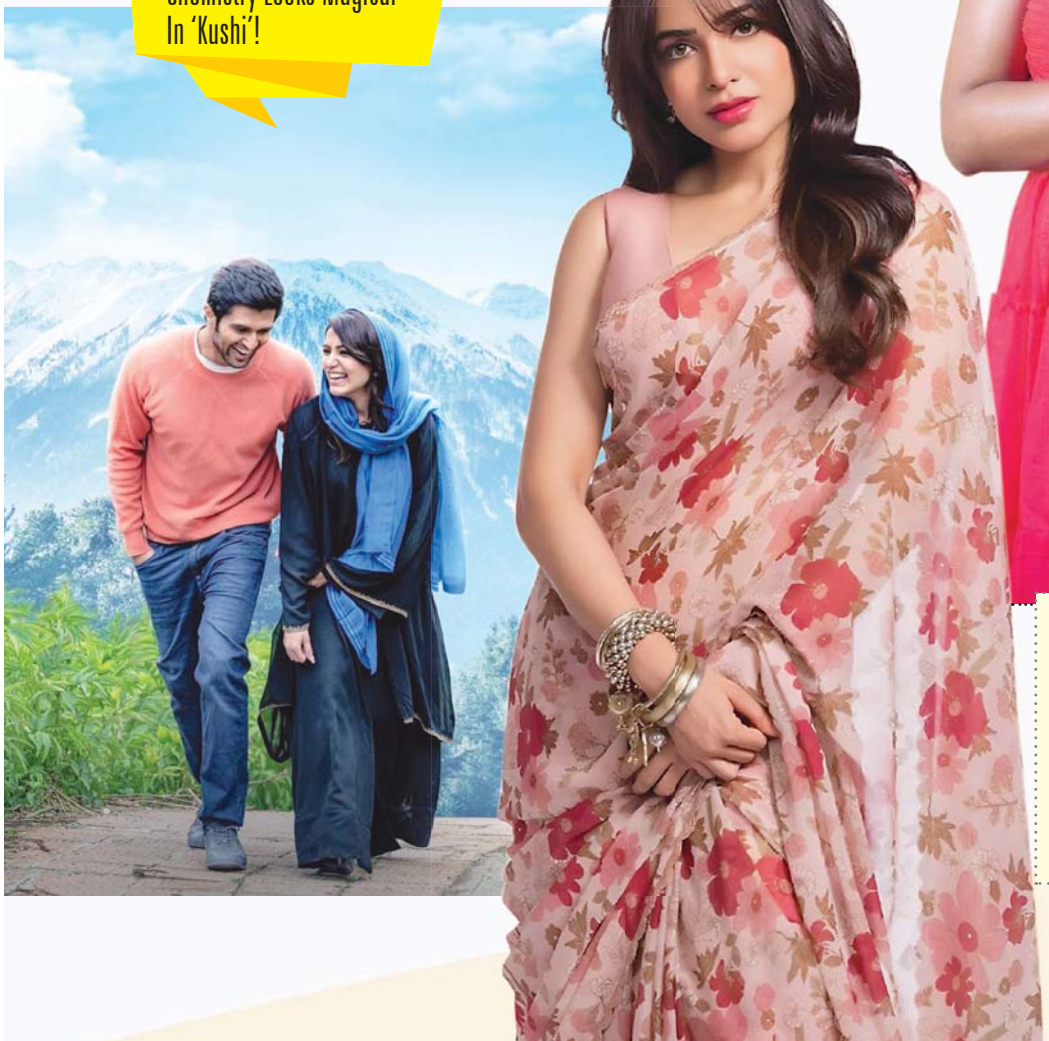


Drishyam-Fame Ishita Dutta Welcomed A Baby Boy With Vatsal Seth, Shared First Pic Of Newborn!

Popular couple Ishita Dutta and Vatsal Seth are on cloud nine, after the arrival of the little munchkin. Ishita and Vatsal became parents to a baby boy. Amidst all this, the duo had dropped the first glimpse of their darling from the hospital on the social media.



Vijay Deverakonda And Samantha's On-Screen Chemistry Looks Magical In 'Kushi'!

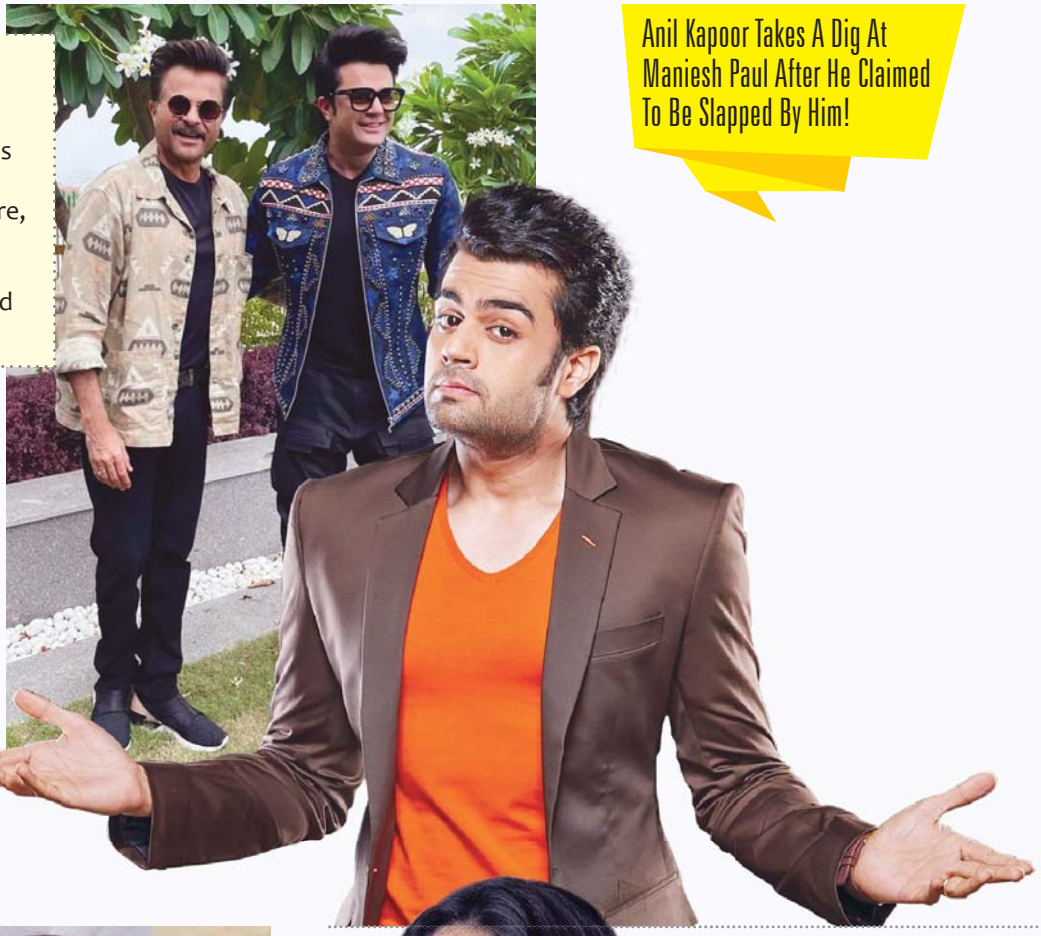




Vijay Deverakonda sparked excitement, sharing a sweet clip from *Kushi.* The on-screen couple cuddles in bed, exuding love beyond the screen. Vijay expressed his longing for such affection in real life, leaving fans swooning.

Anil Kapoor Takes A Dig At Maniesh Paul After He Claimed To Be Slapped By Him!

In an interview earlier, Maniesh had shared his working experience with Anil. The actor told how he was literally pinching himself while shooting with Anil. Furthermore, he said that while filming the first scene, Anil Kapoor got so irritated that he almost slapped him in real.



Janhvi Kapoor's Pastel Yellow Embellished Mini Dress Was Packed With Minimal Glitzy Glam!





Janhvi Kapoor worn a mini dress in her recent look. The eye-catching outfits for the promotional tour included printed mini dresses and denim co-ord sets, as well as bodycon fits. The sparkly details on the dress were the key component that increased the glam factor. We

BHAKTI SYNDROME IN THE MODERN GENERATION

An outward sign of a rotten society.

By Bandana Kanak



Bhakti syndrome is an ailment of society in which people follow single hero-worship practices. It is quite common in India to witness people, especially today's youth, blindly worshiping their ideal politician, cricketer, or actor.

Indians have the belief that if their idol is doing something then, it must be correct and they can never be wrong. The outrage in staunch supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party seen when anyone speaks against PM Narendra Modi is what '*Bhakti* Syndrome' is.

The fights of individuals for their favourite political parties are not leading towards a progressive society.

The modern generation, especially youth under the influence of political leaders, have started indulging in communal riots in various parts of India. In the recent turn of events, stone pelting was witnessed on a community by another community in Nalanda and Sasaram of Bihar on the occasion of Ram Navami.

Most of the people involved in such violent incidents were youth. Political leaders are in no way going to build the youths' careers but they can play a major role in ruining their future.

The question here is: Why Indians are so obsessed with hero worship?

Various fan clubs have been floated on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to support their favourite leaders and stars. Celebs' names are often seen in trending lists on Twitter. Do Indian youth have left with only this task to make the already famous celebs trending every day?

Recently, fans of Virat Kohli and Shah Rukh Khan were seen indulged in a digital war abusing each other's star in order to prove who the real king of India is. The war eventually turned ugly when hate trends against Kohli and Khan started trending on Twitter. Well, the majority of the fans who were fighting with one another for the two already established kings of their respective fields were youth. In the age when they ought to build their career, students are busy in nonsense fandom wars just because they worship their favourite cricketer or actor.

Few psychologists believe that the majority of Indians work hard to earn their daily bread and thus they need someone to see as an ideal from whom they can take inspiration. As a result, they start treating their idols as God.



RECENTLY, FANS OF VIRAT KOHLI AND SHAH RUKH KHAN WERE SEEN INDULGED IN A DIGITAL WAR IN ORDER TO PROVE WHO THE REAL KING OF INDIA IS. THE WAR TURNED UGLY WHEN HATE TRENDS AGAINST KOHLI AND KHAN STARTED TRENDING ON TWITTER.

Another psychologist says that Indians feel a soft corner for people who make India proud with their talent and action.

For example, Shah Rukh Khan is taking Bollywood to an international level. Sachin Tendulkar is known as the God of cricket. Thus, worshiping them is a way of showing nationalism and showing gratitude to them.

Dr B R Ambedkar once said that it is not wrong to be grateful to leaders who have contributed to the country's growth but there must be a limit to gratefulness. He was worried about *bhakti* or hero worship being the reason behind promoting inequality in politics. The possibility he had seen in blind *bhakti* eventually leading to dictatorship is quite proven right in recent times.



While *Bhakti* in religion provides solace to the self, *Bhakti* in politics is dangerous.

Hero Worship

Another reason for hero worship is that heroes are shown in larger-than-life characters in films. Indians, including youth, easily develop a feeling of attachment towards the larger-than-life characters shown in the cinema and feel that they are part of their families.

For example, children born in and after 2000 have seen Shah Rukh Khan in the ideal role of the son in *Main Hoon Na,* an ideal coach in *Chak De India,* and an ideal lover in the film *Veer Zara.* Extended families watch these film characters on their television screens which leave a lasting impact on their tender mind.

On the other hand, foreigners mostly have nuclear families so they



don't mostly watch a movie together to feel that the reel characters are part of their families. People, including those in the past and modern generations, still struggle to differentiate between reel stories and real stories. This made them worship the actors as real-life heroes and gods. Those who are well aware of imaginary life and real life don't fall in love with the characters' acting. Researchers say that the blind *bhakti* syndrome originated in politics in Gujarat, a state of India. In 2002, when the famous Gujarat riots broke out, the media was blaming the then chief minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi and figured out his government's failures. Even the PM Vajpayee criticised the Gujarat government for mishandling the riots.

However, Modi with his effective speaking turned the tables and converted the criticism for the entire riot incident into an attack on the pride of Gujarat. Hence, the number of supporters to speak in defence of Modi outnumbered his critics.

This is the influence of blind *bhakti* on people which snatches their wisdom to figure out what is right and what is wrong.

The blind *bhakti* syndrome has led to several suicides in India as well. The numbers of deaths by suicide are not that dangerous but a grave matter of concern.

FAN OF A SOUTH INDIAN ACTRESS, KHUSHBOO, WORSHIPING HER BUILT A TEMPLE FOR HER IN TAMILNADU. HOWEVER, WHEN HER CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT ON AIDS AND PREMARITAL SEX MADE HEADLINES, HER ANGRY FANS DEMOLISHED THE TEMPLE.



According to the data of National Crime Bureau Records, there were 2395 suicides related to *bhakti* syndrome between 2001 and 2014. On average, 171 suicides take place every year due to blindly worshiping a hero. Most suicide cases are from South India, especially Tamil Nadu.

In 2020, when the Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput died, it was reported that 2-3 of his fans also died due to depression caused by the actor's death. This is the level of obsession with heroes in India which can take someone's life, too.

However, India has seen blind *bhakti* of people broken under various circumstances. People don't need to keep worshiping a celebrity their whole life.

For example, the South Indian actress, Khushboo had such a crazy fan following worshiping her that a temple was built for her in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu. However, when her controversial statement on AIDS and premarital sex made headlines, her angry fans demolished the temple.

Shattering Images

Similarly, actor Rajkumar, the Kannada superstar was regarded as God by the Kannada people. He was shown fighting 50-100 villains at the same time in movies. However, when Rajkumar was abducted by gangster Veerappan in real life, all his images of heroism shattered. The Kannada superstar was shivering with fear like a normal human being. Thus, what is shown in cinema is often far from from reality.

Despite secularism mentioned in the Indian Constitution, religious differences have created a boundary between the two communities and their political ideologies. Religion has a big role in promoting blind *bhakti* among Indians.

The majority of Hindus believe BJP is the superior political party. They have the belief that they are true Hindus only if they support BJP. Due to this belief, people who follow staunch Hinduism will be often seen supporting BJP rallies as well as in communal riots supporting BJP.

On the contrary, the majority of the staunch Muslim community members believe in any party but BJP. They feel they are cheating with their religion if they will support BJP and not Congress or any other party than BJP.

The religious approach of communities towards politics is not a natural creation but has been built deliberately by political leaders over the years. It has been stuffed in the minds of the people that BJP means 'Hindu' and Congress means 'Muslim'.

Indians, without analysing whether it is true or not, start believing what political leaders preach to them and thus eventually land themselves in a blind *bhakt* group.

As the use of mass media is increasing, the modern generation is more hypnotised by their idols' doings and is less focused on their progress. They are no longer thinking independently but in a predetermined manner.

No matter what content Tik-Tok stars Jannat Zubair Rehmani and Faisal Sheikh aka Faisu will put on their social media handles, a section of youth will find it worthy to watch. If a famous star or politician gives a controversial remark on a public platform, fans will defend him or her on social media because they can't hear anything against their favorite stars.

This is the effect of *bhakti* syndrome which is making society oblige their reel idols regardless of whether they are wrong or right

The political leaders, actors, and cricketers also don't leave a chance to influence the youth through impactful advertisements. Since India is moving fast towards becoming a digital country and Western culture is also in a race to acquire people.

It seems difficult to mitigate the impact of advertisements on youths. TV advertisements with the theme '*Aaj Kuch Tufani Karte Hain*' influence youth to try dangerous stunts at home without precautions. The matter of concern is that few youth and children try it just because their favorite superstar Salman Khan is doing this on TV.



MODI WITH HIS EFFECTIVE SPEAKING TURNED THE TABLES AND CONVERTED THE CRITICISM INTO AN ATTACK ON THE PRIDE OF GUJARAT. HENCE, THE NUMBER OF SUPPORTERS TO SPEAK IN DEFENCE OF MODI OUTNUMBERED HIS CRITICS.

The amount of resources wasted in publicising the reel heroes is also a major concern. The huge banners and hoardings of politicians and Bollywood stars and their countless posters which can be represented in a modest way or simply through articles cost too much.

Even celebrities' events cause traffic jams and disturbance in public transport. But the question is who is noticing these cons of celebrities' events and ads; youth are indeed busy hooting at these events and getting mesmerised by their ads.

The progression of society in terms of reducing political *bhakti* is also unnoticeable. According to the data from NCRB, communal riots cases in India rose almost 95 per cent from 438 in 2019 to 857 in 2020. The majority of these communal protests have taken place in Delhi.

The shocking truth is that 32 per cent of these protests were instigated by political leaders. As religion-based politics is at its peak, it seems there will be an increment in the number of communal riots in the time to come

Positive Criticism

In comparison to India, foreign countries have more limits in showing *bhakti* to their idols. For example, American singer Bob Dylan has many fans but a huge number of his critics are also present in the USA.

Similarly, if citizens in the UK worship British Tennis player Andy Murray, they also criticise him in some situations. However, the case is not the same in India. Critics of Lata Mangeshkar and Sachin Tendulkar will hardly be found in India.

The people who apply their education in practical life for the welfare of society are revered more in America rather than illiterate leaders.

George Washington is considered one of the greatest leaders because he always put the facts at the face value and practically dealt with them without dreaming and misleading people. Apart from Washington, American writers also consider Abraham Lincon, Grant, Davy

Crockett, and Lee as heroes because they converted a practical defeat into a spirit of win.

Those who have faced hardship in life and then turned failure into success have a hero image in America.

Hero worship has been a topic of debate for the past many years for the people of America. Some Americans argue that hero worship is unethical because it disobeys the democratic rule that "All men are equal". Others believe that America needs a hero and a proper culture to promote harmony in the country.

One reason Americans don't believe much in hero worship is that they don't have a long tradition of hero worship in the past. The history of America starts with the establishment of the country by breaking the European powers and ends with it.

Raymond Carney, a contemporary critic, has termed America as a nation of fatherlessness and kinglessness. Thus the lack of a father figure for the Americans has made them practically believe that there is no greatness in a man or woman but all are equal.

The blind *bhakti* is lacking among Americans than Indians but its presence cannot be merely denied in the country. Once America's ex-President Donald Trump was quoated as saying that even if he shoots a person at Fifth Avenue, he would not lose a single voter. The shocking scenario was that Trump fans still supported him for his controversial statement.

The USA is known for its military power in the world. Military worship is witnessed more in Americans than in the worship of heroes. However, few scholars believe that military worship can be harmful, especially for veterans. They argue that the US military has not touched the level of greatness which it pretends to touch.

Blind *bhakti* makes a debate biased and conflicting views are termed as disloyal. If the media loses its objectivity and goes to support a political party then it is the humiliation of freedom of the press.

In India, how news channels are obliged to show the present government in a good light and refrain from showing any wrongdoings is a major concern. The same scenario was observed in America when it had become a difficult job for the American media to show any news which brought President Obama in a bad light.

The Indian Constitution provides fundamental rights to every citizen so that they can independently speak up and express their opinions about someone. However, *bhakti* syndrome has somehow vilified the people who speak up against the Modi Government, which is a degradation of Freedom of speech and expression mentioned in the Indian Constitution. A leader who works for the growth of the country should always have its citizens' support and respect but one should not overdo this. Indians should have true information about the leaders so that they can wisely vote for them and choose for their society's development.

HOW NEWS CHANNELS REFRAIN FROM SHOWING ANY WRONGDOINGS OF GOVERNMENT IS A MAJOR CONCERN. IT WAS OBSERVED AS A DIFFICULT JOB FOR THE AMERICAN MEDIA TO SHOW ANY NEWS WHICH BROUGHT PRESIDENT OBAMA IN A BAD LIGHT.



However, at the same time, people should develop an understanding that if a leader is not down to earth and is distracting them from actual issues towards unnecessary expensive fuss and glamour, then they don't need to worship him or her forever.

Role Of Literacy

Education can play a major role in reducing the number of blind bhakts in India. The more educated and career-oriented the youth will be, the lesser will they indulge in the blind *bhakti* of political leaders and celebrities. Political leaders, at the same time, should understand their responsibility to work for the welfare of society and not to poison the minds of the youth. What a great message public figures can give their audiences by establishing schools and institutions in their name for economically weaker students and sponsoring new talents rather than inviting attention to their lavish lifestyle.

The youth need to come out from the shell of a narrow mindset and should showcase unbiased behaviour. Youths are the future of India; they need to be strong, unbiased, wise, and intellectual and should be able to distinguish between right and wrong.

One does not need to support Salman Khan if he is accused in a black buck case just because he is his or her ideal superstar.

Similarly, it is not necessary to support the three farm laws of Modi if your inner feeling says that these laws will negatively impact the farmers. An individual can support his or her favourite leader even without being biased.

In the end, people should remember, "Humans are humans and not God." They are not flawless, so deifying them must stop. We



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A Pioneer In Indian Healthcare

Trailblazing leadership with enduring commitment.

Dr Upasana Arora is a seasoned and one of the few women leaders in the Indian healthcare industry. She has inspired Yashoda Hospitals throughout. She has been a person who had always been in quest of excellence, in whatever she does. She has taken the oath of excellence in healthcare from the day she started her career with Yashoda Hospitals, Ghaziabad in 1996.

Dr Upasana's educational and professional journey is a remarkable one, marked by a deep commitment to patient safety and a passion for entrepreneurship. She holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in arts and political science.

However, her passion for patient safety and her willingness to contribute to society led her to pursue a Fellowship from ISQua in 2015, making her the first Indian to be awarded this honour in India. She also completed a Quality Leadership Program from Harvard Medical School, USA, and various management programs from IIM Ahmedabad, India, to enhance her leadership abilities and stay abreast of the latest healthcare trends. She has earned an Honorary Doctorate in Hospital Administration from National American University. In her constant endeavours of excellence, she has been maintaining NABH accreditation for the hospital since 2010, and Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital is now on the NABH Board, NABL accreditation of the Laboratories since 2012 and has also taken strides in learning best practices from NHS hospitals in the UK and Harvard Medical School, USA.

She has been acknowledged as one of the esteemed members of the G20 Healthcare Working Group representing India on all National and International platforms. She is also nominated as one of the esteemed advocates of the G20-W20 alliance for the Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation (EMPOWER) in 2023. She has been very active in the healthcare industry and is holding various national and international positions. Her current positions are, Managing Director - Yashoda Super Speciality Hospitals, GZB, Regional President of the North India Council Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, Chairperson of Special Olympics Delhi Chapter, Co-Chairperson of FICCI Medical Tourism Committee, Co-Chair of CII Northern Regional Committee on Healthcare, Panel Member - Medical Tourism, Emirates International Accreditation Centre (EIAC), Brand Ambassador NABH, Member NABH Accreditation Committee, FICCI - Medical Tourism Committee Member, Fellow - ISQua, Member - EPiHC.

Her previous positions were, Chairperson - SEPC Healthcare Sector, Chairperson - Indo-US Chamber of Commerce Healthcare Division, Co-Chairperson - ASSOCHAM Women Forum, Co-Chairperson - Healthcare Committee (North Region), Indian Chamber of Commerce, Chairperson- ASSOCHAM Empowerment Council & Co-Chairperson - ASSOCHAM Healthcare Council, President - AHPI UP & Uttarakhand Region, Member - NABL Board, Member - Ethical Committee AHPI, Board of



Dr Upasana Arora
Director, Yashoda Super Speciality Hospitals, Delhi–NCR

Governor - National Odour Research & Management Institute, Assessor - NABH, Assessor - CII Healthcare Business Excellence.

She in her role as Regional President of the North India Council Indo - American Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in strengthening the relationship with USAID which resulted in the signing of an MoU between USAID and IACC to focus on Mental Healthcare and hence the American and Indian business groups have set themselves for five years of productive cooperation to attain their mutually held global development aspirations. As part of further fostering relationships, she has organised the Summit for US-India Trade (SUIT), scheduled to be held from August 28th to 31st, 2023, in Washington DC, United States.

She as Co-Chairperson of the FICCI Medical Tourism Committee is promoting Medical value tourism in India. She had partnered in "ADVANTAGE HEALTH CARE" INDIA 2023-ONE EARTH, ONE HEALTH held on 26th-27th April 2023 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi to boost Medical Tourism in the country. She has been a Guest Speaker on MVT at various platforms at national levels, such as in the NABH program on Implementation of Medical Value Travel Facilitator (MVTF) Empanelment Program and many others.

As the previous Chair of Healthcare of the Central Governing Council of SEPC which encompasses entire healthcare services including services by nurses, physiotherapists and para-medical personnel, she have been actively involved in participating and promoting Medical tourism in Healthcare by focusing on Super-speciality medical services and alternate systems of healthcare.

As Managing Director of Yashoda Super Speciality Hospitals, she looks upon the administration, and strategic business growth of the hospital. This would entail overseeing the functioning of the entire operations, marketing, quality and management team. The KRA's that she looks after are, leadership to the hospital operations, optimising cost controls, developing business strategy and targets and monitoring actionable plans leading to business aligned budgets and finalising monthly and annual revenue targets.



She has been acknowledged as one of the esteemed members of the G 20 HEALTHCARE Working Group representing India on all National and International platforms.

She has been a forerunner for excellence in healthcare which is apparent by the hospital being the First NABH Accredited Hospital in Ghaziabad in 2010. It has been her underlying ethos in providing quality healthcare to the masses that every person gets a bed which they can afford. She has balanced her hospital beds in a manner to make them available for people of every socio-economic class. She has covered people belonging to lower socio-economic strata by having 40% of beds for them. She had empanelled her hospital under *Ayushman Bharat* Scheme and has more than 200 corporate empanelments and empanelment with over 50 insurance companies. Hence, she is catering to all sections of society and thus providing seamless services to all sections of society. With this underlying motto, she has planned to start a 1200 bedded Medicity in Indirapuram, Ghaziabad with state of the art technology and infrastructure catering to all sections of society in Delhi NCR and UP.

She is an avid speaker and orator and has been acknowledged on the cover of many magazines besides being acknowledged at various national and international platforms. Few of her accolades are Emerging Women Entrepreneur of the Year 2023, Visionary Leader for her exemplary contribution to the field of Healthcare by Financial Express 2022, "EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE" presented at Women Economic Forum 2022, Women Entrepreneur who has transformed Indian Healthcare through Quality & affordable healthcare service as being one of the top 10 Alumni Women Leaders from IIM Ahmedabad, "WOMEN LEADERSHIP AWARD IN HEALTHCARE 2022" on New Normal Healthcare – Leadership Summit & Awards 2022, "BUSINESS ICON AWARD" in Business Fair 2021, "FICCI FLO AWARD 2022" in 7th Flo Up Women's Awards as Outstanding Woman in Medicine & Healthcare and acknowledged By Forbes India 2021 July edition as one of the Leading Women Entrepreneurs in India.

She is close to the launch of her new company, Yashoda Mediworld, in London, UK with the mission to facilitate medical tourism and revolutionise Global Healthcare through world-class medical services and medical value travel. Yashoda Mediworld will be dedicated to delivering exceptional healthcare solutions with a patient-centric approach with a priority on comprehensive healthcare, cutting-edge technology, and internationally accredited facilities to ensure world-class treatment and personalised attention for the patients. The launch of Yashoda Mediworld in London positions her to make a significant impact on the global healthcare landscape using the arms of medical excellence, advanced infrastructure and seamless coordination, with which she aims to attract patients worldwide who seek high-quality healthcare services.

Ridhi Bahl
A Maestro of Wise Words

Two decades of professionalism and research in vastu and astrology.

Ridhi Bahl is highly qualified and holds a PhD in Vastu and Astrology. She is an accomplished authority on Indian ancient sciences, Vastu and astrology. She was recognised, by the President of India, for her contribution to this field in 2018. This accolade, in particular, apart from the others, reposed the faith and trust that she has garnered over the years. She has experience of two decades in not just Vastu and astrology as a professional but also as a researcher. She has been part of more than 500 research cases related to Residential Vastu, Commercial Vastu, Industrial Vastu, and Vedic astrology. Very few women in the country opt for a technical subject like astrology, especially industrial Vastu, as it requires a lot of precision, observation and knowledge. Ridhi is Vastu-partner with MagicBricks, Tech Mahindra, JSW and Tata Steels. She has been invited as a speaker at various national and international forums to speak on astrology, its functioning and contribution.



Ridhi Bahl
Vastu Expert and Consultant

Coming from a background of a Royal astrologer, how was your early life?

My great grandfather, Pt. Madhu Sudan Ojha was an astrologer to Raja Madho Singh ji, the former king of Jaipur. He wrote around 200 books on astrology in his lifetime. His books are widely read and are a part of the syllabus of many universities in India and across the world. While growing up, I would see researchers come to my house to discuss my great-grandfather's work on astrology. Astrology has had a great impact on me since childhood.

Education was given a lot of importance in our family. My grandmother was a graduate woman. It was a big thing in the back 1940s. My mother was also highly qualified. It was expected of me, too, to excel in education.

How did you end up choosing it as a full-time career?

I did my schooling at Maharani Gayatri Devi Girls School, Jaipur. Then after doing an MBA from Symbiosis Institute of Management, Pune, I got a well-paid corporate job. I was with the corporate sector for a few years. Then I got married and shifted to Delhi. I was blessed with a son. It was a turning point in my life as I had certain health complications, but they were not hampering my day-

to-day activity. Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with an ovarian tumour after my son was born. My health conditions were worse and affected my regular functioning. Apart from health issues, I was facing emotional issues and financial issues. To find the solutions to my problems, I started visiting astrologers. They would tell me to do baseless stupid remedies, and I did all of them. But nothing worked for me. So, I was frustrated in life. I had so many questions. I decided to learn astrology to get the answers to all my whys. My husband supported me and told me that if I wanted to learn, I should pursue it from credible sources; rather than from here and there or by some crash course of a few months.

So, I pursued a two-year degree in Astrology and Vastu under the guidance of Sri K N Rao from Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan and acquired the degree of Acharya. After completing this course, I started my journey of research in astrology. These researches update the age-old principles of astrology by applying them in the modern context. For example, there was no word like divorce in ancient astrology, but now, many divorces happen. I have been a part of research on modern concepts like divorce, childlessness, relationships, career, etc.

Astrology is a guiding science and can be very helpful if used properly. For that, research helps us to deepen our studies and guide a person. I have been part of such research for more than 18 years now.

Do you face any difficulty in convincing people about astrology as a science?

I am not here to change the mindset of people. To believe or not to believe in astrology is their personal choice. Astrology is definitely a form of science. It's all about making people understand it with relevant logic. When I speak logically, people agree with me and appreciate the same. As my guru, K N Rao would say, "Everything happens for a reason. With the help of astrology, these reasons can be explained." If something cannot explain the 'why', it is not astrology. Astrology is a very logical science, and it is not difficult to convince people with logic.

How well is astrology connected to the modern lifestyle?

Astrology is an ancient science. People generally think that its applications are related only to ancient times, but that is not the case. As a researcher of astrology, I have been part of research done to evolve the subject by giving a modern perspective and a new outlook to astrology. If you apply age-old principles of astrology in the present context, it works very well.

At times, predictions can fail if the astrologer is unwilling to accept change and is stuck on old-age principles only. One has to change with changing times. Astrology is still very relevant and valid in modern times.

RIDHI BAHL HAS EXPERIENCE OF TWO DECADES IN NOT JUST VASTU AND ASTROLOGY AS A PROFESSIONAL BUT ALSO AS A RESEARCHER. SHE HAS BEEN PART OF MORE THAN 500 RESEARCH CASES RELATED TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF ASTROLOGY.



What challenges have you faced in dealing with the competition in your field?

Honestly, there isn't any competition. Besides, self-claimed astrologers with half-baked knowledge are the real challenge to astrology. People, stuck with age-old traditional principles and unwilling to accept change or experiment with the old ways, are putting the prestige of the subject at stake.

Practising astrologers should not scare people with negative comments. They should not suggest baseless and stupid remedies to extract money. This will hamper the name of the subject and portray it in a bad light. Astrologers should help people with their knowledge of astrology and their wisdom.

What is the future of astrology in terms of the younger generation?

Astrology has always fascinated people as it talks about the future. If we explain astrology logically to the younger generation, they will certainly understand it, pursue it, and follow it in the right way.

Once, at a session in Mumbai, a lady approached me after the session was over. She said, "My daughter wanted to pursue astrology professionally. I was always doubtful if this would work or not. Listening to you, I'm convinced completely to encourage and support her decision. Astrology is really a relevant and logical subject to pursue." It was an overwhelming moment for me.

For now, portraying the right picture of astrology is the need of the hour, and I am working on the same.

Neelam Nanda
Timeless Wisdom Guided by Family Values

Crafting a fulfilling life embracing perfection and commitment.

In an interview with Woman's Era, Neelam Nanda, partner Coloressence and her husband Raj Kumar Nanda, delves into the remarkable journey of their company. What once began at the dining table of their residence has now evolved into a thriving enterprise with a widespread distribution of makeup products pan India. Today, their company boasts large manufacturing units at Sidcul, Haridwar and employs a big workforce at manufacturing units and market. Mrs Nanda skillfully manages both her business and household, upholding her cherished family values and principles.

Could you recount the transformative moments that set the course of your life's journey?

My childhood was totally influenced by my parents and grandparents. My teachers encouraged me to explore my thoughts, which created an aura of positive attitude in every aspect of life.

Discipline and perfection was nurtured by NCC instructors in college days. I got an opportunity to participate twice in the Republic Day Parade in the years 1972 and 1973. The medals and rewards earned during this period still cherish the memories alive in my mind.



Neelam Nanda
Co-Founder
Coloressence

From your perspective, what are the essential qualities that contribute to a fulfilling and meaningful life?

In my belief, perfection and commitment are the key factors. Every task, whether related to studies, home management, job, or business, deserves our complete attention and utmost respect. Striving for perfection in every aspect of life is paramount.

Reflecting on your own experiences, do you think principles and values play a pivotal role in crafting a life?

Of course, principles and values are fundamental in shaping one's life.

Credit goes to my parents in choosing a loving and caring life partner who encouraged me to make independent decisions in life.

My husband established two brands vis-à-vis 'Nature's Essence' and 'Coloressence'. I supported him in setting up the manufacturing units right from identifying the land and managing the day to day operations.

These values of mutual support and commitment laid the foundation for a harmonious atmosphere in factories.



Whose role has been most instrumental in shaping your life?

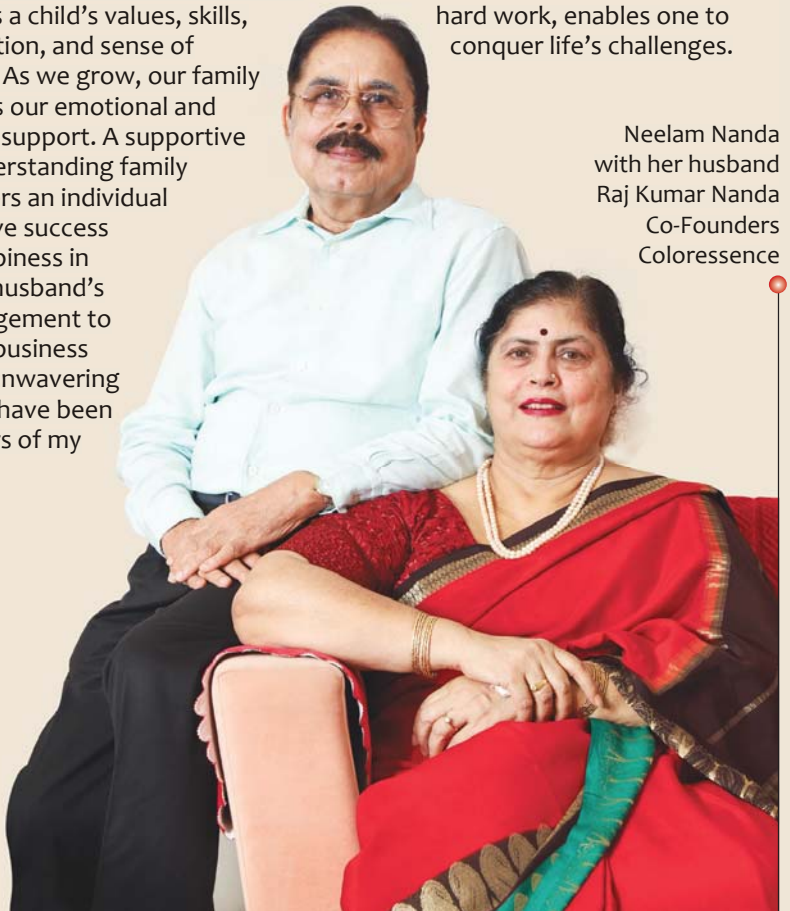
My parents and teachers were instrumental in developing my personality but the transformation impact was reflected after my marriage. Mr Nanda played a vital role in enhancing my hidden qualities by guiding and encouraging me in my routine life.

To what extent does the family unit influence personal growth and development?

The family plays a paramount role in an individual's growth and development, regardless of gender. It shapes a child's values, skills, socialisation, and sense of security. As we grow, our family becomes our emotional and financial support. A supportive and understanding family empowers an individual to achieve success and happiness in life. My husband's encouragement to join the business and his unwavering support have been the pillars of my growth.

How do you approach challenges and setbacks in life? Can you share an example of overcoming a difficult situation?

We encountered numerous challenges during the initial phase of our business journey, but we remained hopeful and positive. Giving up was never an option for me. I firmly believe that hard work and perseverance yield favourable results. Our consistent efforts and patience paid off, and our business flourished, achieving an impressive sales target of 200 crores. A positive mindset, along with unwavering family support and consistent hard work, enables one to conquer life's challenges.



Neelam Nanda with her husband Raj Kumar Nanda Co-Founders Coloressence

"IN MY BELIEF, PERFECTION AND COMMITMENT ARE KEY FACTORS. EVERY TASK, WHETHER RELATED TO STUDIES, HOME MANAGEMENT, JOB, OR BUSINESS, DESERVES OUR COMPLETE ATTENTION AND UTMOST RESPECT. STRIVING FOR PERFECTION IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE IS PARAMOUNT."

Balancing personal and professional aspects can be complex. How do you navigate this challenge to ensure both thrive?

For me, family always takes precedence, and effective time management is the key to managing both family and business with finesse. In today's fast-paced world, some individuals may become engrossed in their careers, inadvertently neglecting their families. It is crucial to strike a balance between personal and professional aspects, as the ultimate source of happiness lies within family. Partners and family stand by each other through thick and thin, supporting each other's personal and professional growth.

If you were to offer advice to young individuals, what mindset shifts or practices would you consider crucial for attaining success and fulfillment in their lives?

To achieve true success and fulfillment in life, it is vital to invest quality time in family and strike a balance with one's professional pursuits. Remember that we work to provide a better lifestyle for our families, and they are the ones who bring us true happiness and support. By cherishing and nurturing these family bonds, one can find both success and fulfillment in life.

Pragati Jalan Sureka

Empowering with EaR for Emotional Well-being

Nurturing emotional intelligence for a balanced life.

Pragati Sureka
Clinical Psychologist and Author



"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

- Viktor Frankl

In a world that often overlooks the significance of emotional well-being, Pragati Sureka stands as a changemaker, tirelessly working to shift the narrative. With an exceptional educational background and a passion for nurturing emotional intelligence, she has dedicated her life to creating a mindset where emotional well-being takes centre stage. Her remarkable body of work focuses on empowering individuals with innate emotional abilities and building mental health reserves, leading to a transformative impact on a large scale.

Her endeavours go beyond personal growth; she envisions a society where mental health care is integrated into mainstream educational curriculums and organisational cultures. Pragati's relentless pursuit of this goal is driven by a commitment to equity, generalisability, and raising public health social awareness about the importance of daily mental health care. Her pioneering efforts have redefined the conversation around emotional well-being, destigmatising mental health issues, and encouraging open dialogue about our emotions.

With her new book set to release this month, Pragati Sureka is poised to revolutionise the self-help genre. Titled "Emotional Ability Resources," this game-changing work unravels the intricacies of our emotional landscape and offers invaluable insights into the way emotions shape our perception of the world and our interactions with others. She explores the influence of personal experiences, traumas, and self-narratives on our emotions, inviting readers to embrace emotional vulnerability and engage in meaningful conversations about their inner world.

"Emotional Ability Resources" is her third book, a testament to her expertise and deep understanding of the human psyche. Her earlier works, "Musings: An Insight into Me" and "Hope" a fictional piece published by Scholastic, have already captivated readers with their poignant storytelling and thought-provoking themes. This new book of hers is set to be a game-changer in the realm of self-help literature Additionally, she has shared her wisdom and insights through articles published in reputable magazines, focusing on diverse topics such as parenting, mental health, and overall well-being.

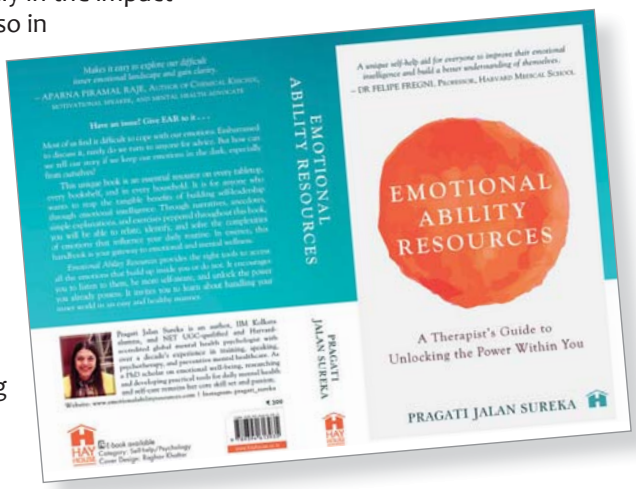
While her accomplishments in the field of psychology and literature are undeniably impressive, she humbly attributes her success to a continuous quest for knowledge and personal growth. As a licensed

Clinical Psychologist, she has dedicated fifteen years to the realm of mental health, positively impacting countless lives. Her professional credentials from esteemed institutions further exemplify her commitment to excellence.

In the words of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, "We can lift ourselves out of ignorance, we can find ourselves as creatures of excellence and intelligence and skill." She echoes this sentiment, encouraging budding writers to embrace their potential, nurture their emotional well-being, and fearlessly pursue their passion. She reminds us that the power of storytelling lies not only in the impact it has on others but also in the transformation it brings to the writer's own life.



In addition to her impactful book, she has established herself as a prominent figure in the mental healthcare space through her website and workshops. Embracing the concept of Emotional Ability Resources (EaR), she has introduced a game-changing, scalable, equitable, and cost-effective approach to global mental healthcare.



Through her website, 'EaR,' individuals can access a wealth of resources, tools, and insights to enhance their emotional intelligence and mental well-being. The EaR concept provides a collaborative platform for individuals to navigate their emotions, fostering self-awareness and personal growth.

Recognised for her contributions to preventive mental healthcare, she has conducted workshops and addressed schools, reaching over 30,000 students, parents, networks, and organisations. Her workshops include sessions for notable companies and institutions like BlackRock Investments, ACI, Equitable Health Access Consortium, Rotary, FLO, BNI, EO, YPO, Dragonfly Technologies, ISB, VisionSpring, ICICI bank, Indian Oil Corporation, and many others, where she delivered impactful sessions.

She has been invited to speak at TEDx talk, where she shared her insights on a compelling topic, namely, "Using EaR: Moving from sidelines into prominence." She was also invited as a speaker to Raffles Hotel in Udaipur, Bookaroo Literature Fest in Delhi, Kukdukoo Literature Festival in Bangalore, Scholastic Literature Fest in Jabalpur, YPO event in Kolkata, DPS school in UAE, and the FICCI House in Delhi for thought-provoking discussions on mental health.

Her passion for writing led her to contribute articles to the school chronicle, and journal, and explore various writing forms.

Pragati Sureka's contributions to the field of mental health, both through her book and her engagements, have made a lasting impact on individuals and communities. Her dedication to empowering individuals, facilitating discussions, and promoting preventive mental health care has positioned her as a thought leader and catalyst for change. With her website, workshops, and influential speaking engagements, Pragati continues to inspire and educate people from all walks of life, fostering emotional intelligence and well-being on a broader scale.

You can find her on various social media platforms to stay connected and get more insights:

YouTube: PragatiSureka

LinkedIn: pragati-sureka-64935916

Facebook: OHPPragatiSureka

Instagram: @pragati_sureka and @emotionalabilityresources

Twitter: @PragatiSureka

Website: emotionalabilityresources.com

Prerna A Jhunjhunwala

The Visionary Founder

Creative Galileo: Redefining Early Childhood Education Through Technology, Gamification and Personalised Learning Journeys.



Prerna A Jhunjhunwala
Founder & CEO- Creative Galileo

Prerna Jhunjhunwala frequented her father's jute mills during her school days. While teaching the children of factory workers in India's Tier 2 and 3 cities during her mill visits, she became mindful of the country's significant disparity in educational opportunities. Her travels across India only confirmed this divide. It was then, as a teenager, Prerna decided to ensure access to quality education for children residing in the most remote regions of her homeland- India.

Despite geographical divides, Prerna's unwavering desire to support education remained steadfast. After graduating from New York University, she moved to Singapore. There, she set out to modernise and elevate early education, founding her first preschool, Little Paddington. Beyond textbook learning, she was determined to nurture impeccable social, cognitive, and leadership skills in every child, showcasing her entrepreneurial flair. The outcome was remarkable; Little Paddington quickly became a leading preschool in the country, expanding to include seven preschools nationwide.

While Prerna's preschools were a huge success, she yearned for a more significant global impact, reaching millions of children worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic was a pivotal moment of realisation, and she decided online platforms could be the key to achieving her goal. The new venture wasn't arduous for the preschool founder adept at leveraging technology for

experiential learning. After extensive market research, she embraced the opportunity and launched the Edutech startup, 'Creative Galileo', currently a sought-after brand name in the early learning space.

She made a bold and strategic decision to entirely focus on her larger vision and channel her time and energy into building the platform she had envisioned to revolutionise education on a global scale. She exited the pre-schools business, selling it to a leading private equity firm Affirma Capital for $35 million – a 35x return on capital.

Prerna is committed to making high-quality early childhood education accessible to all children. In tandem with this, she envisioned Creative Galileo, which has been redefining early childhood learning for children ages 3-10 by utilising advanced technology, gamification, and personalised educational solutions. She firmly believes these tools can help children learn more effectively and efficiently because technology can bring textbooks to life!

Encouragingly, Creative Galileo's flagship product, the Kids Early Learn App, quickly gained traction and achieved remarkable milestones. Within a year of its launch, the app garnered over 3 million downloads and currently has over 11 million users and secured funding of 13.5 million SGD at a valuation of 53 million SGD in a short span of 2 years from prominent South-east Asian and Indian venture capitalists, including Kalaari Capital, Affirma Capital, and East Ventures. By combining education and entertainment, the app provided children with personalised learning experiences that improved their knowledge across various domains, including numeracy, language, arts, social and emotional learning, motor skills, and the discovery of the world.

For Creative Galileo, the biggest differentiator was incorporating beloved Indian and international characters like Little Singham, Bal Ganesh, Chhota Bheem, and Curious Kemi – Discovery of the world, Tell me! Tell me, Ping and Pong and many more into the learning experience. These characters not only allured children but created an emotional connection with them held onto their attention, and thus, made learning fun and engaging. Prerna gauged the importance of relatability and cultural context, ensuring children could identify with the characters and their stories.

PRERNA IS COMMITTED TO MAKING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL CHILDREN. SHE BELIEVES THESE TOOLS CAN HELP CHILDREN LEARN MORE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY.

The success of Creative Galileo's character-based learning model opened newer possibilities for the future of online learning. As the pandemic prompted a shift in education paradigms, Creative Galileo was at the forefront of leveraging technology to bridge the gap in early childhood education. By gamifying learning, personalising educational content, and incorporating familiar characters, the edutech startup tapped into the potential of technology to create a blended learning environment that resonated with today's digital-native generation.

Moving ahead, Prerna continues to make significant strides. At the beginning of 2023 she launched Creative Galileo's second learning app, Toondemy. With a focus on continued innovation, gamification, augmented reality, and data analytics, her venture aspires to enhance learning experiences and contribute to the evolving edutech sector. She has tied up with over 2,000 schools across India over the last five months.



Prerna's startup made a strategic move by partnering with CBSE to showcase its expertise in interactive learning. Additionally, Creative Galileo holds a unique position as the exclusive provider of interactive content tailored for the age group between three to nine years on the platform DIKSHA (DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING) - An initiative of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (Ministry of Education, Govt of India).

Prerna Jhunjhunwala's journey with Creative Galileo exemplified the courage and determination required to disrupt traditional educational norms and bring about positive changes previously unheard of. Her passion for education has remained unwavering from her early days of teaching the children of factory workers to founding a successful chain of preschools and ultimately launching Creative Galileo. Through her innovative approach and commitment to personalised, gamified learning, Prerna aims to revolutionise early childhood education while providing children with a strong foundation for their future.

Lakshmi
Woman Leading The Way

Empowering and skilling India's workforce through Solvix Focus.



Lakshmi, Founder
Solvix Focus India

In recent years, the role of women in business has evolved, with many now taking up leadership roles and making a significant impact in various industries. Peddu Rao Lakshmi, the founder of Solvix Focus India, serves as an inspiring example. She is from the small city of Allahabad and after marriage shifted to Hyderabad. With an impressive background in Chemistry and HR, she worked at Maruti Suzuki, received the Best Employee award, and served as the Director of Strategic HR at a CMML-3 IT company. Her passion for helping students gain skills in the pharmaceutical industry and secure top placements showcases the importance of perseverance and determination in pursuing one's aspirations.

What motivated you to create Solvix Focus India? Tell us about the company's core principles and some of its main areas of expertise.

During my professional tenure, I frequently interacted with freshers, many of whom were struggling with unemployment. In some families, it was even considered taboo for women to pursue jobs. Witnessing this societal issue firsthand motivated me to take action, and in 2009, I embarked on a journey to combat unemployment by establishing a small proprietary company. Three years later, the company transformed into a private limited entity. This was especially challenging for me, considering that even within my own family, working

outside the home was frowned upon.

Nonetheless, I persevered. We began offering skilling services in 2012, and over the years, we onboard major players such as HCL and Mphasis. In the pharma sector, we have trained and placed candidates at top companies like Workhardt BKC Mumbai. Today, we continue to provide top-notch skilling services to the pharma and life science sectors.

What are the most pressing difficulties you face as a business leader? How do you get to overcome the challenges you encounter?

When women initially speak out, they are often dismissed or ignored. Similarly, when I introduced the concept of a water ATM in 2009-2010, many banks and investors rejected it. However, I persisted, and today, the idea has become widely accepted. When we first began offering skilling services, people often questioned the need for it, arguing that their children had already graduated from reputable universities or colleges. Moreover, financial assistance was difficult to come by. Despite these challenges, I invested my own savings and persevered, refusing to give up. I firmly believe that patience is essential when pursuing one's goals. Half-hearted efforts are simply not enough. If you're going to do something, commit to it wholeheartedly and strive for a 100 percent result.

What are your main areas of concentration when it comes to driving growth for Solvix Focus?

There is no recession in the pharmaceutical industry, and young individuals who have graduated can find training and employment with Solvix.

Tell us about some of the significant key events in your professional career. What has been the key to your success?

Several things I did as a live example still need to be done by many others. I would say there is no mantra to learn by heart; all that is required is persistence, interest, and a commitment to quality. Even with a formula, only those who succeed can run the show. The milestone and gratification for me are when students I've placed call to inform me that they're now at a higher level.

Awards of Recognition

- Best Corporate Woman of The Year, Best Employee in Maruti Suzuki.
- Best Personality Award and Most Prestigious Mrs India 2016 National Level.
- Pageant Mrs Asia International Crown.
- Runs own NGO AAWAZ (aawaztrust.com).

Drawing from your personal experience, what advice would you give to young women/girls who aspire to become business leaders and entrepreneurs in the future?

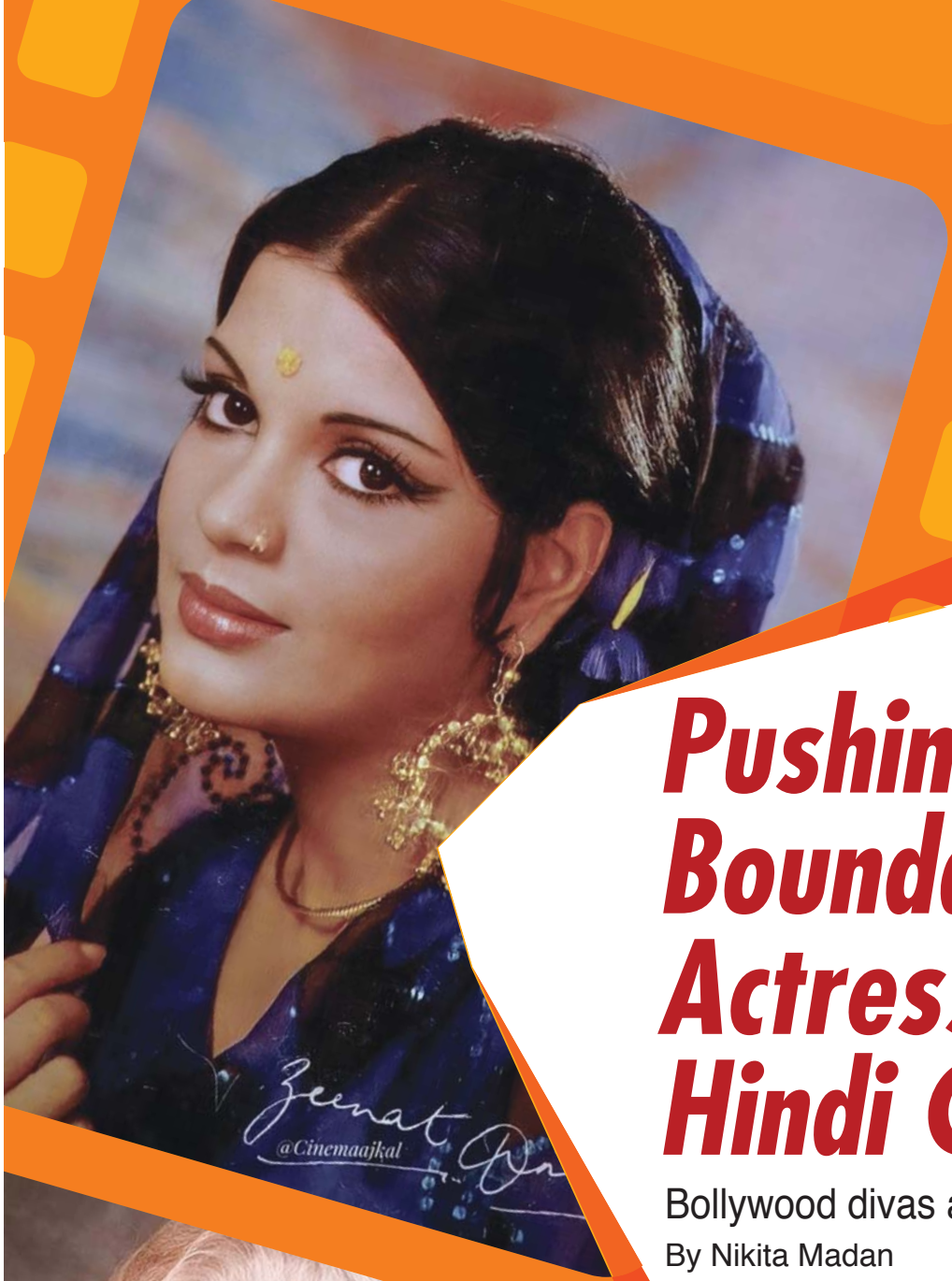
People often overlook the importance of working smart, rather than simply working hard. With advancements in technology, the work culture and systems have evolved, and it's important for everyone to embrace these changes. Personally, I'm eager to expand my business within my state, and I'm on the lookout for individuals who share my vision and can help me provide opportunities to others.

In this digital age, with well-organized infrastructure and advanced technology, women have more opportunities to explore and excel. Despite facing many hurdles as women, we must not give up and move forward by stepping out of our comfort zone. It's essential to gain knowledge and experience before starting a business. Ups and downs are an inevitable part of life, and with patience, we can achieve great things. Having an inner drive to do something unique can make you stand out in the crowd.





Her passion for helping students showcases the importance of perseverance and determination in pursuing one's aspirations.



Pushing Boundaries: Actresses in Hindi Cinema

Bollywood divas are taking bold steps.

By Nikita Madan



Bollywood, the largest film industry in the world, is known for its glitz and glamour, and its stars often serve as role models for millions of fans across the globe. However, behind the dazzling facade, there exists a darker reality of body shaming and unrealistic beauty standards that impact women who want to portray on sreen.

The pressure to conform to societal norms of physical appearance can take a toll on their mental and physical health, leading to self-esteem issues and even eating disorders.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement towards promoting body positivity and self-acceptance, challenging these beauty standards and pushing for greater representation and diversity in the industry.

This article delves into the intersectionality of gender with other identities such as race, ethnicity, and class, and explores the impact of societal pressure and traditional gender roles on women in Bollywood.

It also highlights the efforts being made to address these issues and the importance of promoting body positivity and self-acceptance, particularly for actresses.

Expected Modesty

This industry has always been known for its conservative outlook towards actresses, with strict expectations on how they should behave and present themselves on and off screen.

Actresses like Sharmila Tagore, Asha Parekh and Zeenat Aman were among the first to challenge these norms in the industry. They portrayed bold and unconventional roles on screen, often challenging the patriarchal *status quo* prevalent at the time.

Despite their contributions, these actresses faced backlash and criticism for their choices.

For example, Sharmila's bikini-clad appearance in *An Evening in Paris* caused a stir among the audience and was deemed unacceptable by some. Similarly, Zeenat Aman was criticised for her portrayal of a sex worker in *Manoranjan*.

In the 1990s, actresses like Sridevi, Madhuri Dixit, Kajol, Karishma Kapoor, and Manisha Koirala continued to break barriers by portraying strong female characters on screen. However, they too faced controversies for their on-screen portrayals of sexuality, with critics deeming some scenes too provocative for audiences.

Many actresses from the 2000s decade onwards have challenged these expectations and embraced



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more modern and unconventional roles.

For example, Kangana Ranaut's portrayal of a strong and independent woman in movies like *Queen* and *Tanu Weds Manu* challenged traditional gender roles and earned her critical acclaim.

Deepika Padukone's openness about mental health and her own struggles has also broken barriers and helped to break down stigma surrounding mental health issues in India.

Priyanka Chopra's success as an actress and producer in both Bollywood and Hollywood has shown that actresses can be more than just pretty faces, and can take on powerful roles behind the scenes as well.

MALLIKA SHERAWAT'S PERFORMANCE IN THE FILM GURU WAS WIDELY CRITICISED FOR ITS SEXUALISATION OF RELIGIOUS IMAGERY. SIMILARLY, BIPASHA BASU'S PERFORMANCE IN THE FILM *OMKARA* RECEIVED BACKLASH FOR ITS EXPLICIT CHOREOGRAPHY.

Despite the industry's evolution, there are still expectations for actresses to maintain a certain level of modesty and decorum in their personal lives. Actresses are often scrutinised for their personal choices, with the media frequently commenting on their weight, relationships, and even clothing choices. The double standards in the industry are apparent. The need for a more equitable and accepting industry is essential, and actresses like these have paved the way for future generations to continue pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in Bollywood.

Public Performances

Public performances and dance sequences have always been an integral part of Bollywood movies, for decades, and they often come with their fair share of controversies regarding the depiction of women in dance sequences.

The depiction of women in these sequences has been a point of contention, with some critics arguing that they perpetuate objectification and male gaze.

The semi-classical and semi-nude dances performed by Vyjaythimala and Hema Malini were met with criticism, with some accusing them of being vulgar and inappropriate.

In the 2000s, actresses like Mallika Sherawat and Bipasha Basu challenged traditional notions of modesty by performing bold and provocative dance sequences in films. Mallika Sherawat's performance in the song *Maiyya Maiyya* from the film *Guru* was widely criticised for its sexualisation of religious imagery. Similarly, Bipasha Basu's performance in *Beedi Jalai Le...* from the film *Omkara* received backlash for its explicit choreography.

These controversies surrounding public performances and dance sequences in Bollywood highlight the ongoing tussle between artistic expression and cultural sensitivity.

Unconventional Beauty

The idea of traditional beauty standards has been a topic of controversy in Bollywood for decades. The industry has historically favored actresses with fair skin, Eurocentric features, and slim figures. This has resulted in a limited representation of diversity and inclusivity in terms of physical appearance.

However, actresses like Nutan, Sadhana Shivdasani, Rekha, Juhi Chawla, and Kajol have challenged these beauty standards and redefined what it means to be beautiful in Bollywood.

Rekha's dusky complexion and fuller figure set her apart from other actresses of her time. However, she

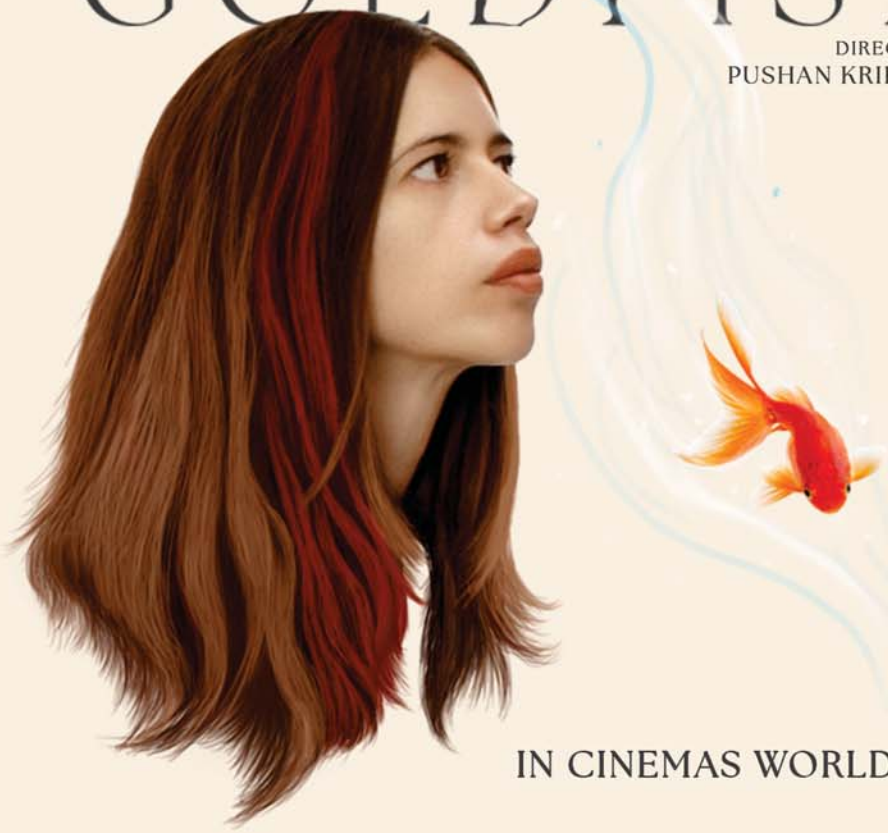
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COSTUME DESIGNERS KELLY TOODE & SEEMA IQBAL RANI PRODUCTION DESIGNER RUBY TODD LYRICS BY KAUSAR MUNIR LINE PRODUCER SURABHI BHATNAGAR

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PUSHAN KRIPALANI WRITTEN BY PUSHAN KRIPALANI & ARGHYA LAHIRI EXECUTIVE PRODUCER POOJA CHAUHAN PRODUCED BY AMIT SAXENA











IN THE ’90S, RAVEENA TANDON WAS INVOLVED IN A CONTROVERSY WHEN A VIDEO OF HER DANCING WAS CRITICISED FOR BEING VULGAR. MANISHA KOIRALA, KNOWN FOR HER POWERFUL PERFORMANCES ALSO FACED CONTROVERSY WHEN SHE WAS INVOLVED IN A HIGH-PROFILE DRUG SCANDAL.

faced backlash for not fitting the traditional beauty standards, with some critics labelling her as “too dark” or “too fat”. Despite this, Rekha became an icon of beauty and elegance in the industry and still continues to inspire generations of actresses.

The 2000s decade till now has seen a shift towards a more inclusive idea of beauty in Bollywood, with actresses challenging traditional beauty standards and celebrating their individuality. In recent years, there has been a growing trend in Bollywood towards promoting nonconformity to traditional beauty standards, with actresses like Vidya Balan, Sonakshi Sinha, and Kangana Ranaut leading the charge.

By promoting diverse beauty standards, these actresses have helped to break down traditional stereotypes and pave the way for greater inclusivity in the industry. However, their success has not come without controversy, as many have disapproved them for not conforming to traditional beauty standards. The nonconformity to traditional beauty standards in Bollywood is a positive step towards greater inclusivity and representation, and it is important for the industry to continue promoting diverse beauty standards and challenging discriminatory attitudes.

Controversies And Scandals

Bollywood has had its fair share of scandals over the years involving some of its most prominent actresses. Sharmila Tagore, a trailblazing actress of the ’60s and ’70s, created controversy when she appeared in a bikini for a magazine cover shoot.

In the ’70s and ’80s, Parveen Babi, known for her glamorous and sensual roles, became embroiled in several controversies, including rumours of drug abuse and mental health issues.

Hema Malini, one of the most popular actresses of the ’70s and ’80s, faced backlash for her marriage to Dharmendra, who was already married at the time.

In the ’90s, Raveena Tandon was involved in a controversy when a video of her dancing at a wedding went viral and was criticised for being vulgar. Manisha Koirala, known for her powerful performances in the ’90s, also faced controversy when she was involved

in a high-profile drug scandal. For example, Kareena Kapoor faced backlash for her portrayal of a sex worker in the film *Chameli,* with some critics arguing that the role was vulgar and exploitative.

These criticisms, however, have often overshadowed the achievements of these actresses, and serve as a reminder of the intense scrutiny and pressure they face in the industry. Their ability to overcome these controversies and continue to thrive in their careers is testimony to their talent and resilience.

Outspoken Feminists

Throughout Bollywood's history, there have been several actresses who have been outspoken about their feminist beliefs and advocated for women's rights.

Jaya Bachchan, another popular actress from the '70s and '80s, has been vocal about gender inequality in the industry and has advocated for more substantial roles for women. Shabana Azmi, one of Bollywood's most respected actresses, has been an outspoken feminist and activist for decades, and has used her platform to address issues such as violence against women and gender discrimination.

In the 2000s decade and beyond, many actresses in Bollywood have become outspoken feminists and advocates for gender equality. One such actress is Vidya Balan, who has openly criticised the industry's gender bias and the objectification of women on screen. She has taken on roles that challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, such as in *Kahaani* and *The Dirty Picture.*

Despite facing backlash and criticism for their frankness, these actresses have continued to push for progress and challenge patriarchal structures in the industry and society as a whole.

Their efforts have helped to create a more inclusive and equal industry, and have inspired many young women to speak up for themselves and their rights.

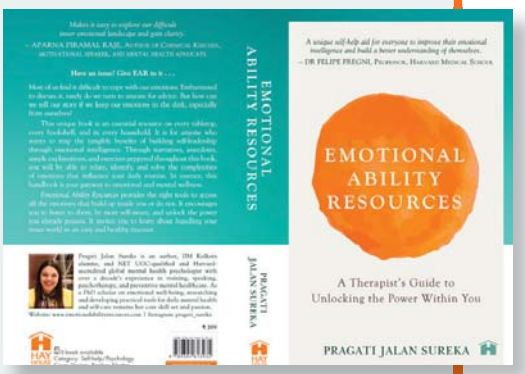
Overall, the portrayal of women in Bollywood has undergone significant changes over the years. Actresses have broken traditional stereotypes and pushed boundaries, both on- and off- screen.

However, the industry still faces challenges. Issues such as body shaming, sexism, and discrimination are still prevalent. It is important for the industry to continue promoting diversity and inclusivity, and to support actresses who choose to speak out on important social issues.

While scandals and controversies may continue to arise, it is crucial to hold the industry accountable for promoting positive and respectful treatment of women. Ultimately, the evolution of women's roles in Bollywood reflects the changing attitudes towards women in society at large. As such, it is essential to continue challenging norms and pushing for progress towards a more equitable future. We



"Emotional Ability Resources" Transformative Guide to Self-Discovery



Pragati Jalan Sureka's "Emotional Ability Resources" is a transformative self-help gem, challenging societal norms by encouraging readers to embrace emotions with courage. With engaging narratives, anecdotes, and practical exercises, it fosters self-awareness and empowers individuals to navigate their emotional landscape effectively. Sureka's compassionate approach and deep expertise in emotional intelligence make this book a beacon of light in a world that often overlooks emotional well-being. A must-have companion for anyone seeking greater self-discovery and emotional wellness, "Emotional Ability Resources" is a powerful resource that resonates deeply, offering the tools needed to cultivate a more balanced and fulfilling life.

Short Story

The Well

Irony of the mindless modern development. By Sundar Rajan

I live in an apartment in Chennai, a city which is dependent on rains for recharging its water resources. Monsoon failures result in acute water scarcity and severe drought.

A couple of years ago, Chennai experienced the rainfall of the century, followed, next year, by a cyclonic storm with very high wind speeds that uprooted many trees across the city. The reservoirs overflowed. On both the occasions, in several localities, people had to be evacuated by boats; many lost their lives, too.

Instinctively, all the citizens joined hands in providing support and relief for those who were stranded or were in distress.

In many apartments, the ground floor was flooded. Household articles, including vehicles were washed away. The fury of the storm treated the rich and the poor alike.

While the people were coming out of this traumatic experience, the scorching summer followed. This resulted in the reservoirs drying up, leading to a drought and severe water scarcity. Water was now dearer than gold.

It was in such a situation that I struck gold, not in my backyard but in my bedroom. To put your curiosity to rest, let me narrate further.

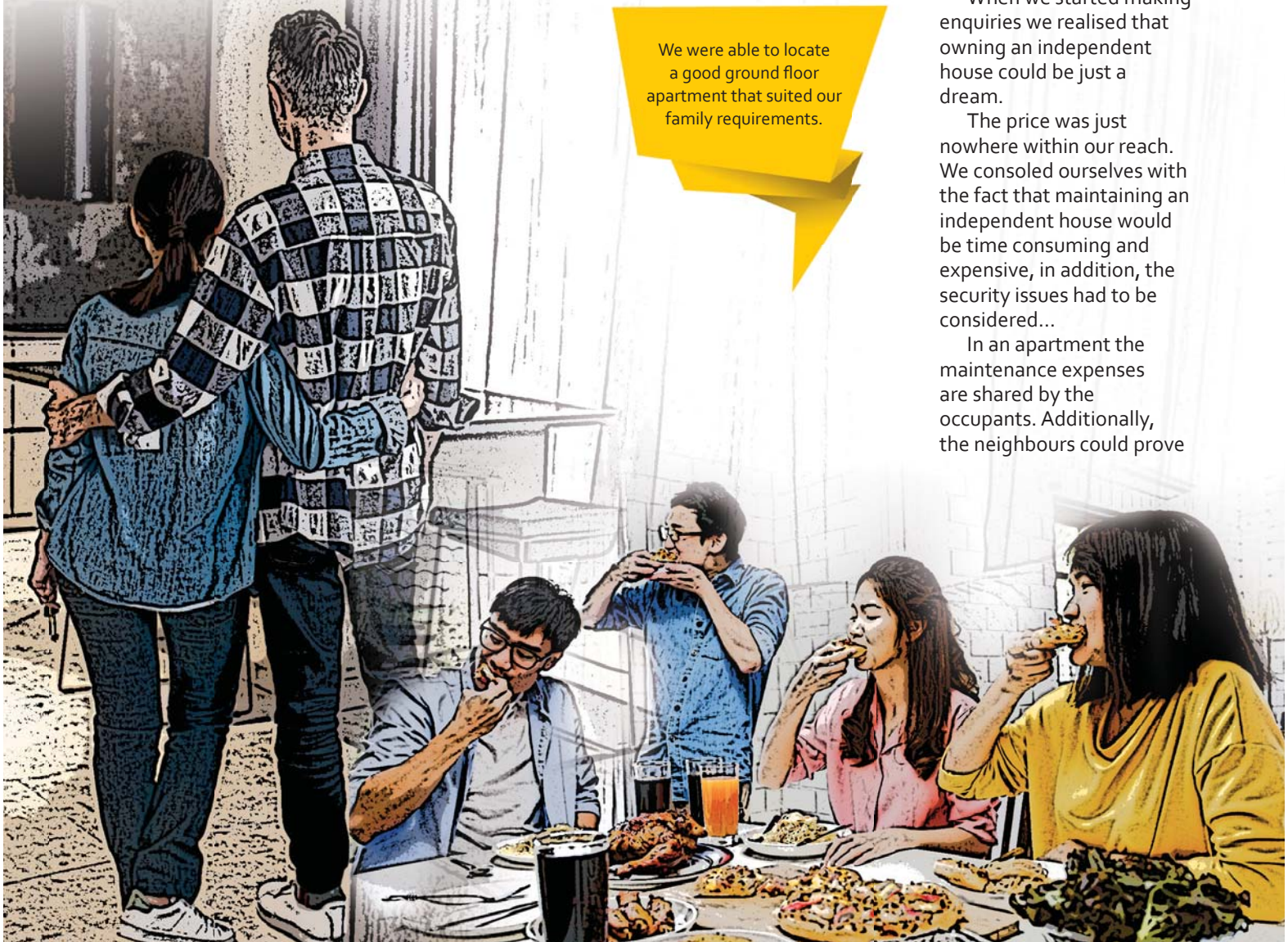
At some point in our lives each of us cherish the hope of owning a house. Not to be left behind in this, my wife and I started discussing on whether to go in for an independent house with a well and a nice garden or opt for an apartment.

Obviously, the location was also a key factor in our discussion.

When we started making enquiries we realised that owning an independent house could be just a dream.

The price was just nowhere within our reach. We consoled ourselves with the fact that maintaining an independent house would be time consuming and expensive, in addition, the security issues had to be considered...

In an apartment the maintenance expenses are shared by the occupants. Additionally, the neighbours could prove



We were able to locate a good ground floor apartment that suited our family requirements.

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useful in terms of company and the security factor also would be taken care of.

In right earnest, we started to look out for an apartment in our locality itself that would meet our budget. We were able to locate a local builder who was quite prominent in our neighbourhood... He had constructed several apartments in the locality.

On checking out with people who had purchased from the builder, we understood that his pricing was competitive without compromising on the quality. All were his satisfied customers.

We met the builder who showed us a few apartments that were readily available. We were able to locate a good ground floor apartment that suited our family requirements.

The cost was also within our budget...I had already arranged a housing loan from a reputed bank. Over the years, I had also built up a good saving which I could draw to meet the preliminary margin money requirements of the bank.

I paid an advance of one lakh rupees and signed an agreement for the purchase of the property. I assured the builder that I would complete the full payment and registration formalities in three months time.

We consulted our local community priest to provide us an auspicious date for the registration of the property. After referring to the almanac he provided us with a few auspicious dates. After discussion we selected an auspicious date.

We duly completed the registration formalities with the builder. We performed the *grihapravesh*, the house warming rituals. We invited all our relatives and guests for the function and proudly showed them our house. Finally, we happily moved into our own house.



We duly completed the registration formalities with the builder. We performed the grihapravesh, the house warming rituals.

The house was easily accessible from any part of the city and convenient in all respects. In the initial months, we had a good supply of water and we settled down quickly in our new home.

With the onset of the summer the water supply got regulated and slowly tapered off. So much so, when we opened the tap instead of water flowing out, we could hear the sweet music coming out of the tap in the form of air gushing out. We now had to wait for the lorries to supply water to our area. We patiently stood in a serpentine queue to collect our quota of water supply for the day. The buckets for the water were also kept in a neat line by each resident.

One evening, while waiting in the queue for my turn, my eyes fell on the buckets lined up for the water.

My mind rolled back to my childhood days in my village where I had grown up. For a moment I wished I could turn back the clock and bring the wheels of time to a standstill.

We had a small river flowing through our village which never went dry. We carried earthen pots to the river to bring water for household requirements. I was reminded of how we used to keep the pots on the shore, to take a dip in the river and came back really refreshed. Some of us, the brave-hearted, would climb a ledge and jump into the river for a swim. The current in the river was not very strong while the water was crystal clear.

We could see the fish swim in the river and some of us would even have fun trying to catch them. But they always gave us the slip since they were too fast for us.

On the other bank of the river some of the residents washed their clothes. Some cattle would also come to the river after grazing to have a fill of water.

I found someone tapping my shoulder gently. The queue had moved forward and I had not noticed it until my neighbour's tap on my shoulder brought me back to reality.

As the days passed, the situation became acute and the supply became erratic. At times we used to keep

awake past midnight to get the water supply.

After collecting the water late that night, I did the usual mopping of the floor, then bolted the door and went off to my bedroom to catch up on my sleep. I was suddenly awakened by a sudden rattling noise and my bed began to oscillate.

Even before I realised, I was pulled into an abyss with a free fall. This was soon halted by a splash of water all over me. It was too dark to see, where I was. I was so scared that I started to yell at the top of my voice.

Soon I heard voices above me that initially seemed like a whisper but in a few minutes became audible. My good neighbours must have heard me yell and had come to know of my plight.

Soon, I heard anxious voices discussing, on how to rescue me. Suddenly a thin bean of light was focused on me. I soon realised, I had fallen into a pool of water. The water was fresh and cool.

I heard voices calling out to me. I looked up to see a long stretch of sari neatly rolled to form a rope, being sent down for me to hold on to, so that I could be taken out of the pool. I clung on to it in despair for dear life and found myself being hauled out.

There was a sigh of relief all around when I was on safe ground. My family members hugged me although I was drenched completely on account of the holy dip in the water.

After this incident, none of us could sleep a wink and we were worried beyond words at the happening.

My family members told me that initially they were bewildered at the turn of events and wild cries escaped their lips.

Hearing their cries some of our neighbours had rushed immediately to our house to give a helping hand.

In the morning, I called up the builder to lodge a complaint for the poor quality of construction.

He gave me a patient ear and started to speak. He told me that originally there had been a well when he had purchased the property for the construction.

While designing the apartments, he could not retain the well because it was not located at any corner of the plot.

Hence, he had it closed when the construction of the apartment began. The soil being loose, it might have given way.

I, now, started counting my blessings. What a miracle! I was safe and so were the other articles in the bedroom.

Needless to say, I now have an apartment with copious supply of potable water from a well inside my house.

A well in an independent house is common. But owning an apartment with a well in the bedroom is unbelievable, but true! We

Riding for Remembrance

Women Motorcycle Rally Marks Kargil Vijay Diwas





The Indian Army marked the 24th anniversary of its victory in the Kargil War by launching a Tri-Services 'Nari Sashaktikaran Women Motorcycle Rally.' Commencing from Delhi's National War Memorial on 18th July 2023, the all-women Motorcycle Rally was flagged off by General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff. The 25-member team, including Veer Naris, serving



Indian Army Women officers, representatives from the Indian Air Force, Indian Navy, and Armed Forces spouses, embarked on a challenging 1000-kilometer journey. Traversing through Haryana, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh, the rally culminated at the Kargil War Memorial in Dras on 25th July 2023. Along the route, they interacted with NCC Cadets, students, Veterans, and Veer Naris, inspiring all with their courage and determination. The 'Flag In' ceremony at Kargil War Memorial was graced by Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi, Ati Vashisht Seva Medal, concluding the event on a successful note. TVS was one of the major sponsors of the event.



THE UNSPOKEN SISTER CODE

A sister is both your mirror and your opposite.

By Utkalika Priyadarshini

Sisters before Misters – the line truly justifies what exactly a sister means in a girl's life. Girls do have bae (before anyone else) the one who is the other pair of the shoe if it is not there then the pair is incomplete. The person who stands for us, never judges the decision we took and above all never puts a why? on any sentence or work we do.

The world always normalises boys' friendships, gives a 'thumbs up' to whatever guys do with their gang. But when the same situation comes for the opposite gender, it raises eyebrows and always puts a question mark why they wanted it to happen?

We are actually over-rating bro code. But to be honest, girls do have sister-code, which we actually never want to bring in front to everyone. Let's say we always have a new *bahana* (excuse) to not attend parties or functions, the not so interesting look that we exchange with each other when it's a boring get-together, which everyone can't understand other than the soul-sister, the that guy seems interesting stare we share when surrounded by many people.

And the king of all excuses when we are not in a mood for anything to do, 'I am on my periods', simply disappears when we see our sister. A girl can survive without a guy but honestly, we cannot survive without our sister.

Like to whom we can share our new found love interest, and also whom to share the guy we thought charming and handsome turnout to be a walking headache. As a woman we always need a perfect partner, not to get married but to bitch about everyone. Like a guy will never be interested in listening how horrible a person is dressed up as they themselves are pathetically dressed up.

It's not always about girls only need someone to be father of their child and a perfect life partner but they need a sister to whom they can say what's happening in her life without using any filter as she won't judge. If, at all, she judges, she will judge better than the mister.

Mister always expects us to be sober and calm but the sister will figure out the pain or misery behind that calm and soberness. To be honest, we may need a man to handle our mood swings but it's always the sister to whom after seeing or even talking our mood-swings.

Man can be an important piece of puzzle in a woman's life but the sister or bestie is the one who is the last piece of puzzle without which the puzzle or life is incomplete. They make the long journey of life tolerable. A girl can only take her bae's opinion on which dress looks perfect which looks tacky and which one is not that bad. Even they never get confused with different shades of a particular colour.

We cannot involve the Men in our life to say which lipstick will go perfect with a black dress, but that is another thing we will end up changing the attire just to go with the perfect lipstick shade.

As a girl for us a perfect life is not choosing a perfect life partner but choosing perfect jewellery that will complement the OOTD/OOTN we choose to wear on our wedding. And anyone can help us to choose a life partner but only the sister will choose the perfect nail-paint to go with the wedding dress.



IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT GIRLS ONLY NEED SOMEONE TO BE FATHER OF THEIR CHILD AND A PERFECT LIFE PARTNER BUT THEY NEED A SISTER TO WHOM THEY CAN SAY WHAT'S HAPPENING IN HER LIFE WITHOUT USING ANY FILTER AS SHE WON'T JUDGE. IF AT ALL SHE JUDGES, SHE WILL JUDGE BETTER THAN THE MISTER.

Sometimes, she is the only person who can really have the audacity to tell us we are looking fat or pathetic, as a boy can never dare to tell us such as this may decrease his percentage of impression on us.

So yes, she is the only truth-speaker we have in our life in terms of our appearance also. It's not always choosing or being there for us. It's like two different souls living the same life but in different terms.

Sometimes, as a girl we cannot be opinionated as it will then term us



as a maleficent person. But that doesn't mean we cannot share that with anyone, it's always our sister with whom we give opinion on every single thing happening around which not even required.

Even the Bollywood is showing and delivering the contents in which it's the sister is more important than a mister. Let's take the example of some movies to prove the statement:

Queen: A movie where the protagonist gets abandoned by the guy who was madly after her to get married. But the real twist came when she planned not to cancel her honeymoon in Paris and went alone without listening to the society and there she met with Bijaylaxmi who actually taught her how to enjoy the moment without thinking what had already happened and she never even judged what happened with her because that was not her mistake that the groom didn't want to marry her.

Veere Di Wedding: The movie revolves around four friends. Basically how adulthood has changed their life completely, why marriage is the only solution for a girl to survive in this world or be happy in life. Even after all these tragedies the friends are always, they're for each other to support and eventually making new way for them to survive.

BUT THE ONLY RELATION WE HAVE IN OUR ENTIRE LIFE THAT IS NOT CONNECTED TO US BY BLOOD BUT BY OUR OWN CHOICE IS THE CHOICE OF FRIENDSHIP. AND THAT ALSO NOT A FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN A GIRL AND BOY AS THAT IS EVEN QUESTIONED BY SOCIETY OR EVEN BY FAMILY.

Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani: We have always talked about the friendship between Bunny and Abhi but never gave a thought on how Naina and Aditee maintained their bond. How a hypie and doctor have continued their friendship without any fail, and even in the movie it was shown Naina is the one who can notice Aditee's jealousy and offered her paratha's just to make her forgot the sorrow. It's not always showing that you care it's like if you care genuinely then it will last forever.

Cocktail: How in an unknown city the girl, who doesn't have anyone got a friend who made her independent and also protected her and even taught her how to stay for yourself, as it's always you who make the changes there is no one who will take a stand for you. Veronica might be a spoiled brat but she knows how to maintain a proper friendship, and even how to be happy if at all you are alone.

As a woman, we have so many responsibilities or roles to play like a daughter, wife, big-sister, daughter-in-law and mother and we cannot even complain about these responsibilities to anyone as somehow or the other. These relations are connected with us by blood may be directly or indirectly.

But the only relation we have in our entire life that is not connected to us by blood but by our own choice is the choice of friendship. And that also not a friendship between a girl and boy as that is even questioned by society or even by family. This relation is between girls as they are the ones who know what exactly can be the problem as they must have been through that once in their life also.

As a person, you may be an obstinate wall for everyone, but there always is this person in front of whom you can cry like a baby, complain like a fool, and act like an idiot as with this person the fear of getting exposed is never there.

So, a sister is someone who is like the morning coffee without which the entire day may be dull. We can have it three-four times but not having it causes headache. And even a sip of it is at least okay to boost your mood. It's not like a girl don't need a man but she will always be incomplete without a sister who can be her personal advisor and even the most loved enemy.

If mister is life partner, then sister is life saver. For a girl it's always "*sister hai toh mister hai*" (if there is sister then there is mister). We

IDEMIA Foundation
Driving Positive Change

Manisha Dubey, Head of IDEMIA India Foundation in conversation with Woman's Era.



Manisha Dubey
Head of IDEMIA India Foundation and the Vice President of Marketing and Communications at IDEMIA

Manisha Dubey is a seasoned professional with a wealth of experience in the industry. Currently serving as the Head of IDEMIA India Foundation and the Vice President of Marketing and Communications at IDEMIA, Manisha brings over 22 years of expertise to the table. Here is an excerpt of her exclusive conversation with Woman's Era:

What is the mission and the key focus areas of the IDEMIA Foundation's work?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a major priority for IDEMIA. We recognize that a commitment to CSR must be enduring—in essence, CSR is a marathon, not a sprint. The IDEMIA India Foundation was created for the sustained impact of our CSR activities focused on empowerment via skilling with a special focus on women and creating a greener and cleaner environment. Through the IDEMIA foundation, we are striving to facilitate renewed capabilities and improved employable skills for those who are often marginalised in society and want to create a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities.

How does the IDEMIA contribute to promoting digital inclusion?

At IDEMIA digital inclusion involves ensuring that everyone has equal access to and opportunities to use digital technologies and participate in the real world. The IDEMIA Foundation conducts periodic Digital Skills Training programs aimed at enhancing digital literacy and skills among marginalised individuals or groups. These initiatives involve organising workshops, courses, or mentoring programs to educate participants on essential computer skills, and more advanced digital competencies like data management and IT services.

How does the IDEMIA Foundation engage with local communities?

IDEMIA impacts communities with products and services that make the world more equitable, secure, and better connected; by encouraging education through innovation; and by forming close relationships with local communities as an employer and corporate citizen. At a global level, IDEMIA is a member of the Global Alliance for YOUth—a business-driven movement of like-minded organisations passionate about working together to help young people around the globe get the necessary skills to thrive in the world of work, today and tomorrow. Our INDIA skilling centre is working to empower marginalised youth by equipping them with renewed capabilities and enhanced employable skills. These are young individuals who often lack proper exposure and guidance on how to improve their employability after completing basic education.

What types of projects and initiatives does the IDEMIA Foundation undertake?

We accept graduate students and, in some cases, high school graduates for our technology and data management courses. What sets us apart is our collaborative approach with corporate recruitment teams in developing the curriculum. In addition to subject matter expertise, we prioritise essential marketable skills, including effective communication, email etiquette, soft skills, and knowledge of workplace norms. This comprehensive approach gives our students an edge during job interviews as it boosts their confidence levels.

Can you provide examples of specific programs or initiatives supported by the IDEMIA Foundation?

We are very proud of the impact we are creating for society, honestly, we have gained as much. It has given a sense of pride and purpose to IDEMIA employees. Our employees have higher job satisfaction by volunteering to handhold students in resume creation, preparing them for interviews, and enhancing their communication and other skills. For International Women's Day, women in IDEMIA mentored students, and they walked together for a walk of equity. The skilling centre has given us a sense of pride and belonging. We were able to place 96% of the students. We create a ladder to a better life not only for the students, but for their families too. That is a display of IDEMIA's core value which is CARE.

The Cohesive Bond

A Tale of Unconventional Friendship. By Bindu Saxena

Life gives choices. We take the best decisions according to the access to resources we have. This story is about a cohesive bond between two women who never married and are happy they did not.

It does not purport to same-sex friendships among lesbians or similar to cross-sex interactions, nor it highlights that same-sex friendships are the only pick. It is one of the selections under free will, alternate decisions, or the circumstances that may lead to such relationships.

Fictitious names are used to describe a real-life incident, here.

Why she did not marry – no one knows, but the fact is, she never did.

One may or may not. It is an individual choice. To have kids or not is another choice. To have children without marriage is yet another thought. Cherishing a live-in relationship and never marrying or giving birth to a love child is up to them. Are they monogamous, polygamous, gay, or lesbian? Boy! Who has given you the licence to interrogate?

If you did, you'd better be aware it is NOYB - none of your businesses.

This conversation boils down to one thing: it is purely a choice-based decision. Who the heck are you to even frame that question? Go rest.

Her four sisters chose to marry, but Balwinder did not. She was endearingly addressed as Billu Masi, maybe because her nieces and nephews addressed her thus. The neighbourhood kids followed suit, and so did I.

She taught Geography and retired from the post of Principal of a higher secondary school in Mehrauli, a suburb of the capital city of India.

I had not entered my teens when I met her. It must be the first time I raised an eyebrow upon seeing something that day. I felt awkward. (I will get to it soon.) Complex gestures



such as these appear only after a certain age.

Billu Masi led a solitary existence after her mother went for eternal rest. She lived in the same 12-by-12 room on the first floor of a bungalow in Daryaganj in Central Delhi. As kids, we called it our second home and the only place that meant Delhi. We would go shopping at Rajghat with Masi. She would take all neighbouring kids to a Badami Alu, and Coca-Cola treats en route to the library.

There was a big *Chhaja* (balcony) outside her tiny kitchen. From that facade arose a cemented ladder that would take us to the terrace of the adjacent bungalow. That was where Parry lived with her parents and four sisters.

She was barely 22 and the youngest member of the family. Parry's father was a renowned astrologer. He predicted that none of his daughters was fit for marriage due to *doshas* (fault or defect) in their horoscopes, so the girls were supposed to have believed that their palms were devoid of marriage line.

Billu Masi was a next-door neighbour of my maternal aunt. It was usual for us to spend our summer vacations with our aunt and meet cousins. That is how I knew her.

Billu Masi and Parry grew friends through a process of osmosis. They both were neighbours. She cradled Parry when she was born. They had one thing in common. Both were self-partnered.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang! Parry appeared with a *Katori* of some sabzi. They raised their hands, and a high five was supposedly born. That moment, I had a typified gesture by a fleeting raise of the brows upon eye contact. The tone of my face conveyed my mood when I saw a twenty – something Parry greeting a sixty-year-old Billu Masi in that manner.

I was over and done with it within one-fifth of a second! It didn't go down well with me. I looked at Masi and then at her. Nothing seemed to be in sync between the two – from the age and gesticulation difference



IT WAS USUAL FOR US TO SPEND OUR SUMMER VACATIONS WITH OUR AUNT AND MEET COUSINS. BILLU MASI AND PARRY GREW FRIENDS THROUGH A ROCESS OF OSMOSIS. SHE CRADLED PARRY WHEN SHE WAS BORN. BOTH WERE SELF-PARTNERED.

to the sartorial sense. I would describe Billu Masi with one word: Minimalist. She was always clad in white salwar, ditsy print shirts, and cream-coloured silk *dupatta*, while Parry was a young modern gal in minis, skirts, and crop tops. It grew on me that they were soulmates. I wondered what prompted their friendship till Parry shared.

Whatever Masi cooked, the aroma would waft from her kitchen chimney and go to her rooftop where the sisters would often sit, laugh and make merry in the evenings. Their appreciation of the mouthwatering aroma had won Masi's affection, and she would climb the stairs and offer a bowl of sabzi to them.

The Katori exchange started. They were brahmins and would not eat garlic and onion, but they swore by the fragrance emanating from her kitchen.

Billu Masi was a free spirit without any anchorage. Being a doctorate in Geography, her quest to tour globally took to wings. In between, she filled the days when she would visit her married sisters.

The years rolled by into two decades. The structure and circumstances of Parry's family changed drastically. An unfortunate air crash took away her entire family. Parry was the only surviving member. At that age and in this critical situation, Masi served as a rainbow in her cloud!

Parry rented out most of the bungalow and retained a small portion of herself. She crossed forty. Billu Masi was approaching 80. As they say, friendships are ubiquitous. The circumstances made them come together as one family.

Most people have had same-sex friends throughout their lives, but how people assume, overthink, conclude, and perceive friendship of the same sex can be strikingly different.

Shirley & Campbell (2000) quote, "Every known human society has same-sex friendships, and so people must view them within an evolutionary context." It further adds that friendships are an invaluable part of human life - the ultimate reasons why friendships exist are little known!

Talking about besties, they don't need a boyfriend or have their direct mate pairing indulgence.

With different pasts, Masi and Parry saw a long-lasting relationship developing between them. They moved on with their similar present and tended concerns for each other, meeting their needs and interests and satisfying theirs.

They would frequent each other or as time permitted them after their commitments. While in the same city, it would be theatre, drama, movies, fairs, and functions together. They would talk together for hours and never get bored, sharing things without being judgemental. But it was different! Generally, we choose friends of the same age group, but here we see them years apart yet on the same page.

Studies suggest, matching age is no parameter to closeness and quality of friendship.

Benefits Of This Pairing

The benefits seem much beyond the written word!

According to the theorists, such people, age regardless, are essential since these bring out mutual respect, equality, and the development of symbiosis. In Billu Masi and Parry, I saw the wisdom of a senior and the visual cheer and playfulness of the one who outlived her.

Isn't the view worth capturing when the Sun meets the shade?

This odd mix of effort and understanding had the hidden value of this relationship. Masi's age-old experiences, assertiveness, and endurance made her presence significant. Her speech was compact, devoid of trendiness, and less inclined to hype. Similarly, the words were bereft with waffles.

If ever Masi had post-retirement blues and a void of a life without work and routine, Parry's cheer was like stimulating sips that put a little spring on her frosty mornings. Together, they would magnify their joys, forget heartbreaks, traumas, and uneventful episodes, and find emotional security through affectionate ties in a continuously stimulating environment.

When compared to other non-kin relationships, it is less likely that anyone will leave the dyad. Such friendships fulfil the desires of both individuals and increase the sense of belonging and purpose in the two women. At least on an unconscious level, they will be more balanced and rooted in reciprocity in interpersonal association than friends who had apparent resources as the base.



Pitfalls Of Same-Sex Besties

It's good to presume not all such twosome stay forever. Like every relationship, this also has seasons. What is best today may not be so tomorrow. Here's a caution! Review silently.

If we keep working on caution lines, there isn't any reason we would be unhappy. It's similar to when our heels loosen. The cobbler mends our footwear, but now we walk with more caution. Similarly in this relationship where the emotional investment is high, it is suggestive to pave with caution. It's wise to take a silent stock of changing trends on this dais. A bestie is a bonus. If we are lucky to have "one" who fits the bills, it's a great return on investment!

I shared my self-introspection with you. While I reflect, you too can pause to rethink.

Coming Back To Masi And Parry

She maintained her fitness. Till the age of 90, she would clean her kitchen when the maid was absent. She would hitch a rickshaw, visit the library, issue or buy books, and medicines from her *Vaid* - the Homeopath, she trusted from her younger days. She was an avid reader and fond of Hindi literature. A small niche in her room wall was her library stacked meticulously with *Sarita*, *Mukta*, and books authored by Munshi Prem Chand, Mahadevi Verma, and the iconic *Madhushala*.

She would not expect Parry to drive her through the busy streets. Likewise, Parry would accompany her and help her in any pursuit her frail body would disallow - like shopping for her urgent daily needs. Masi would bring gifts wherever she travelled. At times they travelled

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together. The playfulness and vibrancy of Parry would soothe the seethings of old bones, dilating her pupils and nourishing her wrinkled skin with wonder.

Besides symmetrical reciprocity, they fulfilled all the characteristics exhibited in same-sex besties across cultures and age groups, such as inclusion, proximity, and homophily, and the best understanding to lend a comforting touch to each other on rainy days.

When the pandemic struck, their proximity was delimited. The digital connection was the only medium. Delta wave hit Billu Masi. She grew weak. It was a tough time for her to sustain. Parry convinced Masi and brought her home.

That was the first time they two were together under one roof. They shared subtle smiles, peals of laughter, long stories, short anecdotes, wild cheers, and dark miseries of their lives. They shared all that they could not pass for many months. Winter had set in. The epic recipe of badam milk with khuskhus and green cardamom was one that Parry swore by.

Masi prepared that night. They had it over a simmering discussion of the yesteryears and slept well. At around one in the morning, Masi woke up for a comfort break, and there was no return from the small room...

There was no sound, no voice, and no call either. She lay there unconscious. With every fibre of her being, Parry took her care. After five days in the ICU, Billu Masi had gone forever in peace, leaving an ageing Parry mourning.

Her single *takhat* (bed), a 14-inch black and white TV, a mini fridge, a steel almirah with chipped-off paints, five pairs of clothes, her cherished companions' books, a few vessels, and spices in the kitchen went for donation. The meagre saving duly bequeathed. The memories were still not faded.

Take Away

No relationship thrives if we put pressure and lack genuineness. Besties who are there for you during heartbreak and tough times are irreplaceable.

Masi and Parry lived up to all expectations by being themselves and presenting with honesty. That fetched the most desirable and the most virtuous admiration! It's the most gratifying when it comes naturally and mutually. Let it strike magically, come accidentally, and be with you automatically.

As life comes close to an end, it is the experience of this wholesomeness that matters much more than personal possessions.

We wouldn't know unless we came in contact with them. But these contrasting unions of two women had all the delicacies that the need to fill the spaces with men never arose.

All through their association, nothing came between – neither wounds nor blisters. We

IN-LAWS/OUTLAWS

My Dietary *Sargi*

During my first *Karva Chauth*, a traditional fasting ritual for married women in India, I was fortunate to experience the warmth and love of my in-laws in a truly touching way. The day began with me feeling both excited and nervous about observing the fast. However, as the early morning approached, my in-laws surprised me by waking up before dawn to prepare a sumptuous pre-dawn meal, known as *Sargi*, with utmost consideration for my dietary preferences. Their thoughtful efforts touched my heart and filled me with gratitude.

Throughout the day, they stood by my side, constantly encouraging and distracting me from the pangs of hunger. I felt like I had a pillar of strength in them, guiding me through the traditional customs with genuine care and affection. As the day progressed, I eagerly awaited the moonrise, which marks the time to break the fast.

In the evening, my in-laws surprised me once again by arranging a beautiful *thali* (plate) with all the traditional items required for the ritual. The *thali* was adorned with vibrant colours and delicate decorations, making it even more special. Their attention to detail and efforts to make the occasion memorable deeply touched my heart.

When the moment finally arrived to end the fast, they stood beside me with smiles of joy and love, reinforcing the idea that I was now an integral part of their family. Their genuine support and acceptance during my first *Karva Chauth* made it an unforgettable experience, and I felt immensely blessed to be embraced with such warmth and affection by my in-laws. This incident strengthened our bond as a family, and I will always cherish their exceptional behaviour with me on this auspicious occasion.

– Deepshikha

A Simple Act

Sometimes a gesture conveys more than words. Newly married I was a bit in awe of my mother-in-law. Would she resent me, find fault with me, feel I was taking away her son?

Then one day, we had to pay some visits. My husband was already in the driver seat of the car, waiting for my mother-in-law and me. Knowing that she had always sat beside her son in the front seat, I opened the back door, for myself to get in. I didn't want her to feel I was usurping her place. But she went into the back seat, and with a smile pointed me to the front seat, beside my husband. A simple act, but it made me feel that my mother in law would be on my side. In fact there wouldn't be a fence between us!

– Priya Manilal



I AM A 27 YRS OLD WORKING WOMAN and one month pregnant. This is my first pregnancy. I want to know about the nutrition in pregnancy.

Nutrition in pregnancy significantly affects maternal health and infant size and well-being. Pregnant women should have nutrition counselling early in prenatal care and access to supplementary food programs if necessary. Counselling should stress abstention from alcohol, smoking and recreational drugs. Caffeine and artificial sweeteners should be used only in small amounts. Empty calories should be avoided and the diet should contain the following foods: protein foods of animal and vegetable origin, milk and milk products, whole grain cereals and breads, and fruits and vegetables especially green leafy vegetables.

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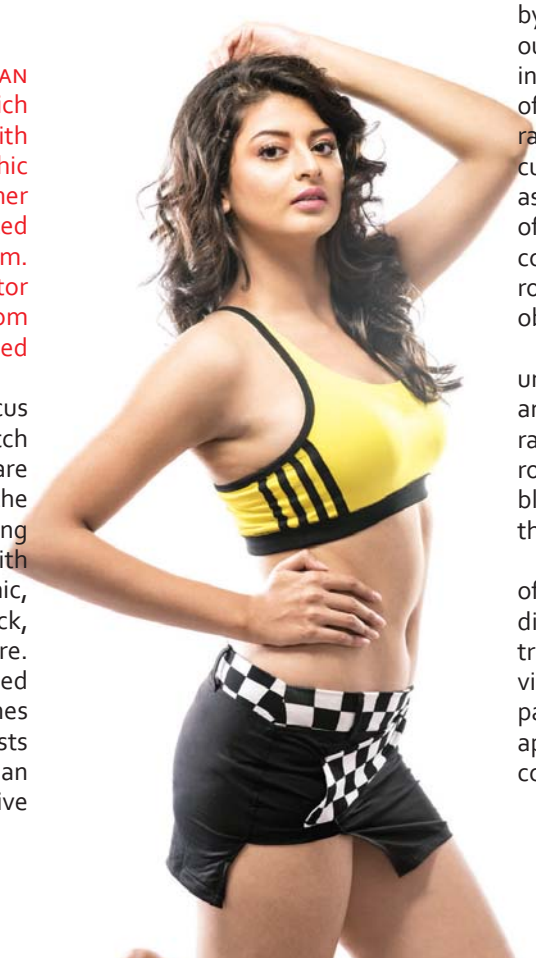
I AM A 40 YRS OLD WORKING WOMAN and suffering from itching, which is so intense that it interferes with sleep and dry leathery, hypertrophic plaques on the neck, ankles and other parts of the body. I have consulted a skin specialist for this problem. After the examination, the doctor told me that you are suffering from Lichen simplex chronicus and advised treatment. I want your opinion.

Lichen simplex chronicus represents a self perpetuating scratch itch cycle. Clinical features are intermittent itching that incites the patient to scratch the lesions. Itching may be so intense as to interfere with sleep. Dry, leathery, hypertrophic, lichenified plaques appear on the neck, ankles, perineum or almost anywhere. The patches are rectangular, thickened and hyperpigmented. The skin lines are exaggerated. Treatment consists of topical steroid ointments in an augmented vehicle that are effective without occlusion and are used twice daily for several weeks. In some patients flurandrenolide tape may be more effective since it prevents scratching and rubbing of the lesion. But any treatment should be taken with the advice of a doctor.

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I AM A 29 YEARS OLD WORKING WOMAN and mother of a two years old daughter. I want to know about the minimal brain dysfunction or damage syndrome.

Characteristic symptoms and signs which suggest the diagnosis of minimal brain dysfunction or damage syndrome are hyperactivity, poor attention span. Early distracted. Impulsive aggressive behaviour. Easily frustrated. Irritable anger, temper tantrums. Socially inept. Does not make friends easily.



Clumsy in dress and behaviour. Poor sleep habits. Mild speech disturbances with poor vocabulary. Isolated learning disabilities with full normal intelligence scores. Soft but subtle neurologic signs e.g. mild hemiparesis, asymmetry of muscle tone, tight heel cord, difficulty in hopping on one limb, dystonic flexed posture.

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I AM A 38 YEAR OLD WORKING WOMAN and suffering from hepatitis A. I want to know the environmental factors and causes of spread of the disease.

Cases may occur throughout the year. Poor sanitation and overcrowding favour the spread of infection, giving rise to waterborne and foodborne epidemics. Hepatitis A is more frequent among children than in adults in the lower socioeconomic groups.

In temperate climates, a peak is reported in late autumn and early winter. This may be waterborne, foodborne or direct spread. Waterborne transmission may occur when water contaminated by faeces is drunk. Foodborne transmission may occur when food contaminated by faeces is eaten. Common source outbreaks are most frequently initiated by faecal contamination of water and food. Consumption of raw or inadequately cooked shellfish cultivated in sewage polluted water is associated with epidemic outbreaks of hepatitis A. Direct transmission comprises an array or other faecal oral routes such as contaminated hands or objects such as eating utensils.

Direct infection occurs readily under conditions of poor sanitation and overcrowding. Hepatitis A is rarely spread through the parenteral route,if ever transmitted by blood and blood products or by skin penetration through contaminated needles.

This may occur during the stage of viraemia. But the fact that the disease is rarely transmitted by blood transfusion suggests that persistent viraemia is a rare event. In short, the parenteral mode of spread does not appear to be significant under natural conditions.

-Dr. Sanjay Teotia

Short Story

The Whimsical Flautist

Kickstarting a fairytale on a happy note. By Enakshi J

The mellifluous notes were blinding sweet. Deliciously enjoyable. So much so that I didn't realise that I had been sipping air from my Frooti tetra pack for the last fifteen minutes.

My eyes had found a resting spot. His face. Contortions spread across like the layers of tar on a new road, his nostrils flaring every time an ounce of energy was spent blowing into the flute. The music swelled my heart; it pierced through several layers of flesh and touched my soul.

Caught in a trance, I had lost control of my senses. And surprisingly, this joy that I felt was pure ecstasy. It wasn't love. It wasn't infatuation. It was just soul-stirring music playing cupid in this improbable story of getting to know each other.

Addiction is bad. And this music, just after one class of therapy, became my drug.

However much I convinced myself not to attend the live show again, my heart became an obstinate child who could throw tantrums about not being given importance. Consequently, there I was, seated in the second row, only this time a little closer to the flautist. There wasn't any air traffic between his gaze and mine.

I was mindful not to get carried away and give the benefit of the doubt because establishing eye contact with the audience would only help him perform better.

But my reasons were different. Vaguely genuine. Kind of ethical too. With a flutter in my stomach every time his gaze met mine, I pressed the gentlest smile upon my lips, making sure I did not let my guard down. He was kind enough to return the gesture with a subtle nod. This subtle reciprocation fuelled my desire to know this person more. Talk to him. Appreciate him. Maybe, over a cup of coffee?

Swiftly moving his fingers over the notches of the instrument, he tapped the right chord of my heart when the instrumental interlude was doing its job of enthralling the crowd. Keshav, the name that would now remain in my mind whenever I would listen to Indian classical music, had my soul in his grip.

What beauty he created with his music! It compelled my very being to beg for more. More of his music. More tranquillity. More of eternal bliss. For the first time, I realised how good music can make you its slave. I sat transfixed by the melodious notes and then he did what I hadn't expected him to do.

Raising his left eyebrow, he gestured a 'hi' my way. All while playing the golden flute. Frozen and startled, I couldn't respond. While my mind scattered ban at my helpless yet desperate heart, my hand took the reigns of my destiny and waved back at the person who had possibly been successful at sweeping me off my feet. But I was being way too filmy! I had to let this brew. More aroma, more encounters and more exchange of words might just add the right flavour.

Keshav, the name that would now remain in my mind whenever I would listen to Indian classical music, had my soul in his grip. What beauty he created with his music! It compelled my very being to beg for more. More of his music. More tranquillity. More of eternal bliss. For the first time, I realised how good music can make you its slave. I sat transfixed by the melodious notes.

Probably another visit would help. And yes, that's what I did. The third day of the week and I was like a diligent student sitting on the first bench, waiting anxiously for her new teacher to begin the class!

Expectations can often push you towards the very edge of the cliff, for their weight is so immense that it can drown you in the abyss. My experience with Keshav and his music had been good so far but I was expecting more. More of music, more of acquaintances and more of him. Even though my mother had shown signs of disapproval when I had suggested that she come along with me to this show for the third time, I knew that my decision had to be right. The gut feeling, as they say, was strong.

As the doors of the big hall shut close, I breathed in the cacophony of noises. And then, just within a flash second, he appeared on the stage. Wearing an uptight waistcoat, paired neatly with black trousers, he looked immaculate. His muscular hands held the flute tight.

How I wished I were the flute and that he was close. How I wished I knew him more! How I wished I had met him earlier! But wishes are not always granted, are they?

He took his spot, the same old corner with a spotlight, and then he began.

Shivers ran through my body as each note



of music brushed past my body. Hypnotising. Engaging. Magnificent. His medley of music made my heart crumble to bits like how one feels upon summiting a great height or finding an old memory box. I revelled in my own small achievement. The achievement of being able to see him again.

The reverberations encapsulated the hall. My constant gaze at him would have definitely landed me into trouble but he was no less. He reciprocated with a smile this time. Acknowledgement is important I know but smile? His lips curved into a crescent upon finding me in the front row and I'm not sure if I actually saw him mouthing something. It can't be.

He cannot possibly whisper something during the performance. I must be hallucinating! And then, the last bit of the interlude began. Poignance and grace became permanent residents of that hall as Keshav took over his flauto traverso, caressing every nook and corner of the wooden hollow with his bare fingers. Soon, everything else faded, drowned in a mystical realm that shouted peace.

That day, before I could mark my exit from the hall, I decided to give it a try by making a first move. Consequently, I waited with bated breath for the musicians to gather backstage, in the hope of getting fortunate enough to talk to him. As luck would have it, he was nowhere to be found.

"Can I have two minutes with the flautist, Keshav?" I enquired the giant man whose black overalls scared the daylights out of me.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, he's not here. He has left for the airport immediately after the show got over."

Alas! That seemed like a rushed conclusion to my story, didn't it? But I couldn't do anything about it. I was not Salman Khan or Hrithik Roshan to go to the airport and confess my feelings. I had no feelings *per se*. I wasn't sure whether it was his charisma or his music that acted as my magnetic field. Whatever it was, it was gone. And I was back to reality as if I had just come back from a luxurious vacation. Three months later, the balmy air of March wasn't helping much. Even though Bangalore was beautifully decked by florals all around, the musty atmosphere reduced the ease of working in an enclosed space. My second art gallery was up and live.

Bangaloreans were entering the large auditorium with zestful and eager eyes. I had prayed hard for this event to be successful; I could really use the money to replenish my art supplies. At 30, merely painting my heart on a white canvas wasn't really helping me pay the bills.

I would be lying if I said that I never thought of

reaching out to Keshav. In fact, I had stalked him for the longest time on all the social media handles yet some distinct apprehension had acted as an inhibitor. Probably I was scared of realising that all the reciprocation was a concocted tale of fancy events.

Often one gets jitters when it's time to learn the truth. I also felt the same. Yet there I was listening to his music on my earphones while munching the energy bar. After all, his music was my drug!

"Someone is looking for you, madam," the attendant tapped my door. "Who? A buyer?" I vacillated.

"Doesn't look like one. He seems to be more famous than just being a regular art enthusiast," deadpanned the attendant.

I was intrigued. Having someone well-known attend my gallery could bring brighter prospects. Hence, I headed out, carelessly wiping my mouth off the leftovers.

"Hi," is what I wanted to say. But the cat got my tongue. There he stood, as immaculate as ever, looking spatially all around himself, probably appreciating my work and nodding in wonder.

"Hello, Ms. Mysterious," he gently intoned.

"Ms. What?" I sounded ridiculous.

"Well, didn't you leave that day without meeting me? And all these three months I have been on my feet trying to figure out who you were. If it were not for your Facebook Event, I wouldn't have had a chance to meet you. I'm Keshav. I'm sure you remember me." He spluttered and bit his lower lip.

"Of course, I know you. How can I not? I attended..."

"...my live show thrice in a row. I know." He cut me short and smiled.

"I had tried to meet you backstage but you had left. Disappointed and helpless, I had let that moment pass."

"You should have shown some resilience. I'm quite active on social media. You could have found me there. Messaged me. Ringed me. Reached out."



My mind was caught in the spiral of the addictive musical interlude. My body had stopped cooperating. I didn't know what I was expected to do. Or say. My eyes found this temporary moment of paralysis enjoyable and rested upon his lips as he enunciated a few more words. All feeble whispers for me now. Here was the flautist who had stolen my soul with his music.

I didn't know how to respond. My mind was caught in the spiral of the addictive musical interlude. My body had stopped cooperating. I didn't know what I was expected to do. Or say. My eyes found this temporary moment of paralysis enjoyable and rested upon his lips as he enunciated a few more words. All feeble whispers for me now.

Here was the flautist who had stolen my soul with his music. And here was I, the mad artist who had already started painting a fairytale in my mind.

"You're freaking out. Don't freak out," he fretted.

"No, I'm not."

"I know I'm not supposed or expected to be here. Yet I wanted to know for myself. It is my faith that you were impressed by my music and that you might be slightly interested in knowing more about me."

"Your faith seems to hit the bull's eye. You're exceptional with your flute. There's a different kind of trance that I was transported to when I heard you for the first time. It was like being unintentionally drawn to you."

"So, you do speak your mind. Then I'm glad I came."

"I'm glad too," it was my time to reciprocate.

In casual blue jeans and a brick-coloured T-shirt, his charm was too much to handle already. I forgot the values of altruism and decided to bag the opportunity that had walked my way.

"Would you like to talk over a cup of coffee after I wind up here?"

"Actually, I was thinking of dinner. That would give us more time," he winked.

"Bring along your flute, for I might test your skills," I joked.

"I might not just be skilled at playing the flute, you know."

"Oh yes, absolutely. You're skilled at stalking. How else would you know where to find me," I tried hard to sound funny.

"That Facebook Event page had your picture pasted on the cover image. That's how I found you. You know, you could have played wisely." A smile escaped the corner of his mouth as if taunting me for flaunting my wit.

Failing miserably at concealing my surprise, I decided to hold my horses before blurting out something irrelevant. He took the lead and told me how he had noticed my presence on the very first day.

"There was something whimsical about the way you looked at me while I played the flute," he mentioned.

I expressed how deeply affected I was by his composition and that it had had a lasting effect on me. I became more aware about his world in the evening when we had dinner together. Things were just so easy with him. Seamless. Genuine. Vaguely liberating.

He was a patient listener to my incessant chatter and our worlds of art found solace in each other's company. Though he's originally from Mumbai, he promised to meet often because Bangaloreans rooted for his music.

Therefore, I proposed a joint venture - his concert and my exhibition together. He agreed. I applauded my luck for kick starting my (fairy)tale on such a note. I felt happy. We



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Short Story

A Daylight Murder...!

The funny truth unearthed in the end. By Sunanda Sankaran

As it was a Sunday afternoon, we were leisurely having our lunch, when a shrill shriek of a woman was heard from the neighbour's house.

"Oh dear! No doubt, this is the voice of their new bride, Vanitha. Even yesterday, I heard the same shrill voice from their house...! God knows how the tyrannical M-in-law tries to harass the young D-in-law, when the son is away in the office!" My wife speculated.

"Oh, no no! It may not be so!"

"What no? You don't know her. That old lady looks like a witch...! During her son's wedding, she had quarreled over with the bride's parents for more dowries and threatened them with dire consequence, I heard. She is the second cousin of the sis-in-law of my friend, Geetha. She warned me about the lady.....These people have come to stay here since two months. Have you ever seen the girl mingling with anyone? No! It seems the M-in-law would not let her. That girl Vanitha looks quite timorous. Rarely is she seen at the backyard. Never at the frontyard..."

"Well, but today is Sunday. Being holiday, the son must be at home. How dare his mother harass the young wife in front of him?"

"Why not? Suppose the son is a mom's boy, tied to his mother's apron strings? There are so many sons in our country, who would not cross the line drawn by their moms! They themselves would thrash their hapless wives at a signal from their mothers!"

"Leave it. Why bother about others?" I tried to put a stop to the argument.

"Yesterday, that girl was standing at the rear *verandah,* looking so forlorn. I enquired whether she was not feeling well. Before she could reply her Mom-in-law's voice was heard from within, calling her, and she ran away in a jiffy...I'm afraid, this girl also

Being holiday, the son must be at home. How dare his mother harass the young wife in front of him?



should not meet the fate of our dear Lalli!"

I felt there was some substance in my wife's concern for the girl. Her younger sister Lalitha, nick-named Lalli, expired of serious burn injuries due to the bursting of a stove, just six months after she got married and went to stay with her husband in Delhi. There was a rumour that her M-in-law ill-treated her and that was the cause of her demise. After lunch, I had a little nap. Suddenly, my wife's shouts were heard. "Oh dear...! Come here, quick!" I rushed out of bed.

"Look, smoke is emanating from our neighbour's bathroom. I can smell clothes burning smell also. We should not delay."

Minute after minute, the density of the smoke started increasing. Their backyard was locked from within. I rushed to the front yard. A huge lock hung on their main door. The wretched witch of a woman! She seemed to have set her hapless daughter-in-law afire, and had gone away locking the door!

Perhaps, to manipulate an alibi of absence for her, to create an impression of a suicide by the young girl! Upon the police...! My conscience warned me to act immediately. I rang up the local police station and informed them of the urgency of the matter.

Inspector Ramanan became alert on hearing that it might be a possible "dowry murder case."

Within ten minutes, the Police jeep halted before the house. In a trice, the lock was broken and the door was opened. I ran towards their bathroom. A bundle of soiled clothes had caught fire. Before the fire had spread to other things, it was extinguished quickly.

Within ten minutes, the Police jeep halted before the house. In a trice, the lock was broken and the door was opened. I ran towards their bathroom. A bundle of soiled clothes had caught fire. Before the fire had spread to other things.



But where was the young bride Vanitha? There seemed to be no one in the house. Foot-steps were heard at the front door. The crone had returned with a shopping bag full of vegetables.

"What is this? Who broke open my house? What business the Police have in my house?" She shot the questions indignantly.

"First you tell me, lady, where have you hidden your daughter-in-law?" Inspector Ramanan asked her in an authoritative tone.

"Why should I hide her, Sir? She may be sleeping upstairs. You may go and see for yourself."

True. Vanitha was sleeping soundly oblivious of the goings on in the downstairs.

"Our Vanitha is deaf by birth. She will not hear any knocking at the door. My son has gone on an official tour. Hence, when I went out, I locked the house and took the key with me."

So that was the reason! Due to the handicap, the girl had herself shied away from mingling with others and had led a withdrawn life! But how did the clothes caught fire?

"Vanitha is mortally afraid of the sight of cockroaches. As our bathroom is a bit dark, the menace of cockroaches is very high. Sometimes, when they take to their wings, she would scream at the top of her voice. There is only one remedy for this. By burning waste paper and dried neem leaves and twigs. Cockroaches could be kept at bay at least temporarily. She seemed to have exactly done that. But she seems to have forgotten to quench the fire out. The sparks have caught the clothes waiting to be washed and set them ablaze." Explained the mom-in-law.

"Anyway, thanks to you for the timely intervention and extinguishment of the fire. Otherwise, the entire house would have been burnt down!" We

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These tan leather pumps for women are a timeless addition to your wardrobe.





Step up your fashion game with these blue wedges for women.



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Elevate your look with the allure of embellished heeled sandals.



Discover the regal appeal of gold wedge heel sandals.



Walk tall and proud in these captivating beige heel sandals.

These slingback black chunky-heeled sandals are a strikingly bold and sophisticated combination.





These black leather sandals for men are an epitome of refined elegance.



Refined style redefined with these lace-up formal shoes for men.



Embrace classic elegance with these formal lace-up formal shoes for men.

These black casual loafer shoes are effortlessly cool and ever-trendy.





These tan casual sandals are a perfect blend of comfort and class.



These tan loafers formal shoes are the suave meets laid-back charm.

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New Launches

Introducing Kiehl's Midnight Recovery Omega Rich Cloud Night Cream



Kiehl's, known for its natural, science-based skincare, has launched the Midnight Recovery Omega Rich Cloud Cream in India. This night cream replenishes and rejuvenates the skin while you sleep. With 98.6% naturally-derived ingredients, it combines botanical oils rich in Omega-6 and Omega-3 with the effectiveness of the Midnight Recovery Concentrate. The unique cloud-like texture of the cream effortlessly melts into the skin, providing nourishing hydration and restoring the lipid barrier for plump, radiant skin by morning.

Website: kiehls.in **Instagram:** @kiehlsindia





Unveil Your Best Skin with The Derma Co's Newly Launched Skin Care Range

The Derma Co. introduced their latest range of Hyaluronic Sunscreen Stick and the Mattifying 100% Mineral Powder Sunscreen. The Sunscreen Stick offers convenient reapplication on the go, regulates oil production, and suits all skin types. The Powder Sunscreen provides UVA and UVB protection, and sets makeup with a soft matte finish. With its hydrating and soothing properties, this sunscreen stick suits all skin types, including sensitive skin, ensuring hassle-free sun protection that controls oiliness and delivers hydration.

Website: thedermaco.com **Instagram:** @thedermacoindia

Elevate Your Shower Routine With Aqualogica's Refreshing Body Washes

Aqualogica presents the refreshing Glow+Squishy and Radiance+Squishy body washes, infused with powerful ingredients for radiant and refreshed skin. The revolutionary Glow+Squishy body wash combines Vitamin C, Hyaluronic Acid, and Papaya to reveal radiant and glowing skin. The Radiance+Squishy body wash revitalises dull and dry skin with Watermelon extracts, Niacinamide, and Hyaluronic Acid, providing a refreshing experience. Embrace the joy of these body washes.

Website: aqualogica.in **Instagram:** @aqualogica.in







Introducing WhySoBlue: Redefining Customisation

WhySoBlue is a women-led sustainable brand by Jaya and Shweta, a mother-daughter duo. Specializing in customisable clothing, they curate elevated dresses made from soft cotton with indie prints. As a conscious fashion brand, each piece is exclusively made to order. Handmade in lush dyed cottons and hand-block prints, their outfits are designed for tropical weather and easy to style for any occasion. With versatile styling, their crowd-favorite soft cotton co-ords have even been worn by celebrities like Aditi Rao Hydari and Huma Qureshi.

Website: whysobluelove.com **Instagram:** @whysobluelove

Discover The Body Shop's Sustainable Vitamin C Beauty Range



The latest range of The Body Shop comprises four products, Vitamin C Microdermabrasion, Vitamin C Overnight Glow Revealing, Vitamin C Glow-Revealing Liquid Peel and Vitamin C Glow Revealing Serum that come packed with powerful ingredients such as vitamin C, bakuchiol, and Amazonian camu camu berry extracts to enhance the natural glow of every individual. The Body Shop is offering cruelty-free and vegan products. This range reflects the brand's efforts to support marginalised communities worldwide through their Community Fair Trade program.
Website: thebodyshop.in **Instagram:** @thebodyshopindia



Experience Radiant Glow With Kumkumadi Range of The Ayurveda Company

Unleash the magic of T.A.C Kumkumadi skincare line - where ancient Ayurvedic secrets dance with modern wonders. Feel the caress of Kumkumadi and Manjistha in the Face Wash, cleansing and cherishing your skin's dewy embrace. Embrace the golden touch of 24K Gold Dust in the Face Scrub, as it unveils a smooth canvas of radiance. Let the Face Moisturizer with real gold flakes be your elixir of nourishment, revealing a complexion that glows like the sun's embrace. Safeguard your beauty with the Kumkumadi sunscreen's celestial shieldff.
Website: theayurvedaco.com **Instagram:** @theayurvedaco

Introducing Dr G B3 Super Serum To Rejuvenate Your Skin

Introducing Dr G B3 super serum - a potent blend of niacinamide and zinc extract. Packed with antioxidants, this serum shields the skin from environmental stressors and locks in moisture. Experience its transformative power as it minimises pores, evens skin tone, and combats dullness, fine lines, and wrinkles. Niacinamide's anti-inflammatory properties reduce redness and irritation while regulating oil production and improving texture. Zinc extract provides UV protection and ensures lasting hydration. Reveal your skin's radiance with this super serum.
Website: skinbydrg.com **Instagram:** @skinbydrg







Discovering Elegance With Bunny Corset's New Victorian-Inspired Collection

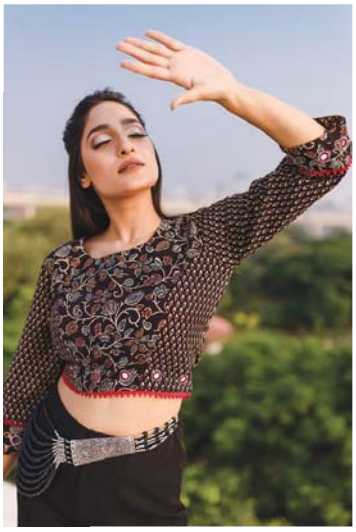
Witness the fashion phenomenon, Bunny Corset, a luxurious brand redefining custom corsets globally. Spearheaded by Suman Bharti, a revered designer and entrepreneur with 22 years of expertise, Bunny Corset reigns as the internet's foremost high-end corset retailer and designer. Exuding beauty and quality, their diverse selection ranges from timeless Victorian-inspired pieces to avant-garde designs. With a devoted international following, Bunny Corset's presence spans 32 countries and 2000+ retailers across four continents. Suman's personal oversight guarantees impeccable craftsmanship at every stage of production.
Website: bunnycorset.com **Facebook:** bunnycorsetindia
Instagram: @bunnycorsetonline and @bunnycorsetindia



Nidhi Arora and Neharika Sethi
Co-Founders, Tilohri

Tilohri Celebrating Crafts With A Modern Twist

Tilohri, with a deep-rooted philosophy, celebrates the essence of belonging and connection to nature's elements. Their focus lies in creating functional clothing that seamlessly blends Western and Indian silhouettes while championing size inclusivity. Working closely with skilled artisans, Tilohri embraces a comfortable and uninhibited aesthetic, combining a myriad of motifs and textures. Their commitment to preserving crafts strengthens their vision of promoting craftsmanship and unity within the fashion world.



Ajrakh blouse that doubles up as a gorgeous crop top made with Ajrakh fabric and accentuated fabric work.



Ajrakh Kalidaars elasticated long skirt effortlessly marries Indian artistry with contemporary silhouettes.



Elevate your style with Umrao Ajrakh Indo Western and blooming Fern Ajrakh crop top with handloom pants.

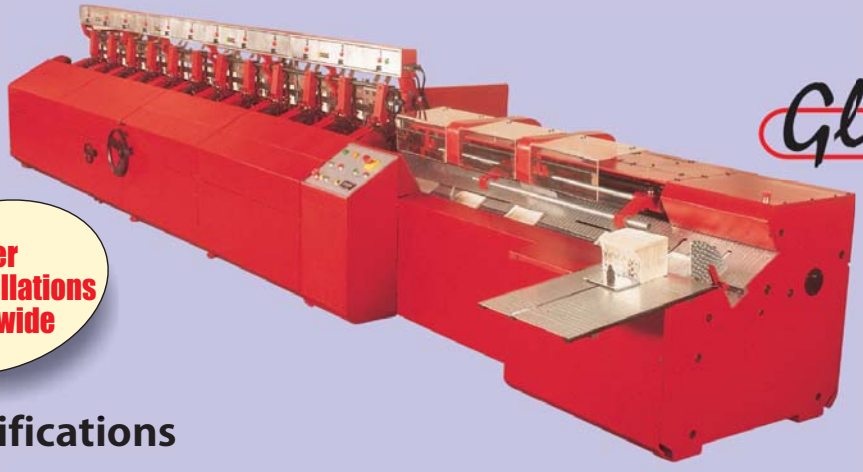


Indigo spaghetti top and handloom skirt, giving a feel of modern day outfit with the essence of Indian roots.



This co-ord set with size-inclusive design, embodies the essence of modern comfort and elegance.

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Glory Specifications

Formats - untrimmed	Maximum	Minimum	
	310 x 280 mm *	110 x 150 mm	
Speed	6000 copies per hour		
Power required	3.7kw, 440V, 3-phase, 50Hz		
Block thickness	Pressed - 55 mm	Unpressed - 70 mm	
Paper handling	42 gsm to 100 gsm	4 to 32 pages signatures	Single leaf-70 gsm
Vacuum pump	Subject to number of stations		
Wire stitching device (optional)	2 - head inline wire stitching station		



TrimStar Specifications

Mechanical diagonal cut	Maximum	Minimum	Trimming height
Specs	300 x 440 mm	100 x 140 mm	100 mm
Mechanical speed	25 cycle per minute		
Clamping system	Hydraulically-operated		
Clamping pressure	From 150 to 2000 kg/m2		
Knife material	Tungsten carbide		
Power	5kw, 440V, 50Hz, 3-phase		

* Add an existing cover gluer, perfect binder or a needle thread sewing machine to complete the perfect binding line.

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Ruh: The Glamourous Soul

Festive Collection: An Ethereal Feast for Eyes.

RUH, a treasure trove of timeless Chikankari luxury clothing, celebrates strong women who value emotion over trends. With a deep connection between the mother-daughter trio behind RUH, their creations possess a cross-generational appeal, and bringing happiness to all who wear them. Flora by RUH enchants with divine beauty and grace, designed for those who seek a touch of understated magnificence.



Elegance meets tradition in this lemon yellow green anarkali with exquisite chikankari odhni. Perfect for a regal look.

Step into a world of vibrant colours and modern style with these flora corset blouses and embroidered dhoti skirts. The stunning cape adds a touch of drama.





These beautifully hand-embroidered multi-coloured corset and sharara ensemble are a perfect blend of tradition and contemporary fashion.



These Evana sarees with chiffon ruffles and sequined embroidered blouses make for a captivating look.





Anju Malik, Anchal Aggarwal and Devika Anand
Founders, Ruh Clothing.

Channel your inner diva with this georgette double shaded saree, adorned with heavy hand metal embroidered badla tikki work.

Ruh

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Maintaining healthy and strong bones is vital, and ***NUTRILITE® Cal Mag D Plus*** supports this through a unique combination of Calcium, Vitamin D, Zinc, Magnesium, and Manganese. Derived from algal sources found in Icelandic waters, along with other essential nutrients, it helps prevent joint discomfort and bone issues.



Iron deficiency is a common concern among women, with 53% of women aged 15-50 being anaemic. **NUTRILITE® Cherry Iron** bridges this gap, providing a potent blend of iron from ferrous bis-glycinate, ferrous fumarate, and nature's rich source – mustard greens, ensuring optimal iron levels.

With aging, the body's requirements evolve, and women tend to require more care after crossing 30 due to several biological reasons. Hence, it is recommended to include some special and essential supplements in the diet after a certain age for holistic well-being, along with a healthy lifestyle, balanced diet and regular exercise.

amway.in | amwayofficialindia | @amwayofficialindia



Embrace elegance and trendiness with this cellulose organza saree adorned with floral prints and delicate cotton lace, creating a captivating and stylish ensemble.

Sahaa

A Fusion of Art, Architecture, and Passion

Sahaa, established in 2017, is a passionate amalgamation of art and design. They believe that good design forms the foundation for perfection. Sahaa upholds the value of following basic design principles, ensuring truly beautiful products. Led by architect Lakshmi Narasimhan, and S K Ravindra, the founders bring expertise from various fields, creating high-end residences and retail projects. With a keen eye for details and an eco-conscious approach, Sahaa refines its design processes and packaging choices. The essence of art and architecture intertwines, shaping their venture - Sahaa-The Crafters.



Exuding elegance and trendiness, this cellulose organza saree is adorned with a captivating floral digital print. Its exquisite craftsmanship adds a touch of sophistication.



This stylish and comfortable dress has been skillfully made with soft cotton fabric, beautifully adorned with vibrant floral prints, and features adjustable straps for added convenience.



The kaftan has been meticulously crafted using Gajji silk, known for its luxurious texture, and embellished with delicate cotton lace and shimmering copper sequins.



Indulge in elegance and trendiness with this cellulose organza saree, adorned with a mesmerizing 'mallipoo' digital print.

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Milap Cosmetics, an esteemed Indian makeup brand, was founded in 1985 by the visionary Sh. Ravi Chadha. The company is dedicated to providing affordable and medically safe products of uncompromising quality. They have earned accolades and gratitude from countless customers who have placed their trust in the brand. As a stalwart presence in the beauty industry, Milap Cosmetics continues to redefine elegance and sophistication with their exquisite range of products.

Dive into the realm of bold, dramatic lashes with True Mascara, the ultimate secret to intensified allure.

Mesmerize with Hypnot Eyes Kajal, an essential spellbinding tool for rich pigments, smooth enchantment, and waterproof allure.



Let her reign in vibrant, daring colour with Bold n Matte liquid lipstick, crowned with a velvety matte finish.





Embrace the bold and matte elegance of Urbane Lipstick, where vibrant, daring colour meets velvety grandeur.





Unleash the ultimate secret to flawless, blemish-free skin with 9to6 Pro Concealer, a weightless symphony of coverage and breathability.



Elevate her eye makeup game with The True Black Eyeliner, where intense, long-lasting colour takes center stage. Rain or shine, its water-resistant charm holds true.

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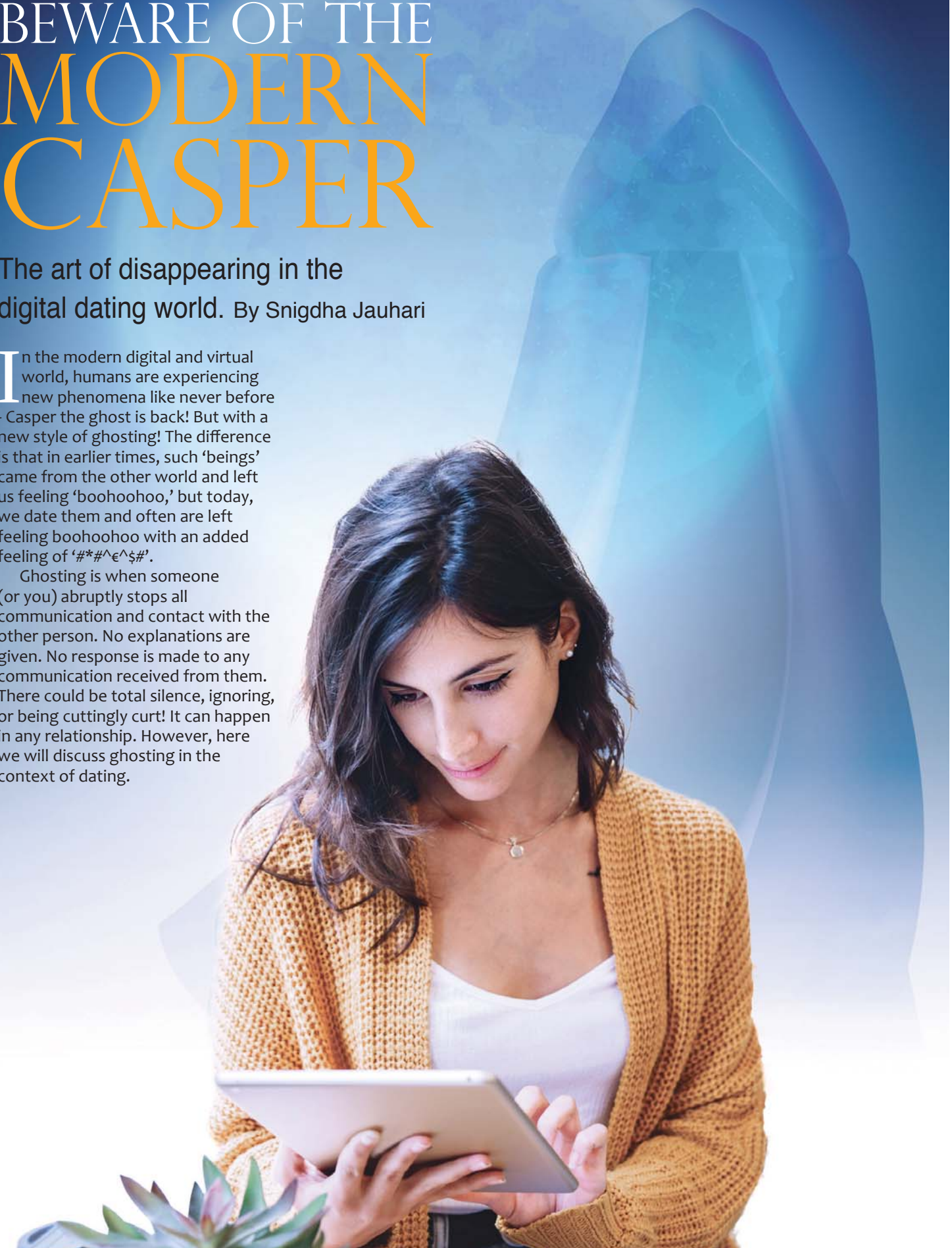
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BEWARE OF THE MODERN CASPER

The art of disappearing in the digital dating world. By Snigdha Jauhari

In the modern digital and virtual world, humans are experiencing new phenomena like never before - Casper the ghost is back! But with a new style of ghosting! The difference is that in earlier times, such 'beings' came from the other world and left us feeling 'boohoohoo,' but today, we date them and often are left feeling boohoohoo with an added feeling of '#*#^€^$#'.

Ghosting is when someone (or you) abruptly stops all communication and contact with the other person. No explanations are given. No response is made to any communication received from them. There could be total silence, ignoring, or being cuttingly curt! It can happen in any relationship. However, here we will discuss ghosting in the context of dating.



Signs of Ghosting

Such things are highly situational. You are likely to instinctively feel the silence. Only in some exceptional circumstances, i.e., if your girlfriend works on an oil rig or your boyfriend is travelling to Iceland, but in an otherwise normal situation, receiving no response for three days is enough to consider yourself ghosted.

However, a word of caution here: if several days pass and you do not hear from this person, don't jump to the worst possible conclusion. It is a good idea to reach out and let the person know that you enjoyed your time together and would like to see him or her again. Alternatively, you could send a "Hey, haven't heard from you. If you are not interested, that's okay. Just let me know." or simply ask humorously, "Haven't heard from you. Am I being ghosted out?" Your attempt to reach out opens the door for the other person to be receptive. If the person doesn't respond to your second message also or gives you a weak, watery response, then you may decide to hang this up for good.

Apart from receiving the silent treatment, other signs tell you that you are being ghosted. These are:

- The person regularly cancels plans to meet with you.
- The person consistently avoids making or honouring commitments.
- The person does not want you to meet their friends or family.
- The person does not like to share personal details.
- The person's response to your texts or calls is unduly delayed, inconsistent, or seems to be whimsical.
- Without any information, the person disappears from social media.

Why do we Ghost?

You could be ghosting or you are being ghosted... but why do we do so?

The reason is that humans prefer to ignore rather than confront. And even within confronting, 'confronting with grace' does not come naturally to us. It is a learnt response and not a natural response.

So, by not responding, i.e., ghosting, we are hoping that the problem will just go away. We want to avoid facing an uncomfortable situation.

Another reason is a kinder one (from the ghoster's perspective and not from the ghostee's), and that is that the ghoster believes that by not giving you reasons for rejection, he or she is sparing you the agony of 'rejection'. What the ghoster does not know is that it is far better to explain respectfully why he or she does not want to go ahead with you than to go silent.

IF SEVERAL DAYS PASS AND YOU DO NOT HEAR FROM THIS PERSON, DON'T JUMP TO THE WORST POSSIBLE CONCLUSION. IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO REACH OUT AND LET THE PERSON KNOW THAT YOU ENJOYED YOUR TIME TOGETHER AND WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIM/HER AGAIN.

Therefore, ghosting demonstrates a lack of respect for the other person's feelings and a lack of empathy. They assume that the other person will "get the hint," and ghosters use this belief to justify their actions.

Anyhow, the net result is that ghosting is cowardly behaviour. It is unfair and selfish. It shows that the ghoster either does not know how to manage relationships or does not care.

How Does It Impact?

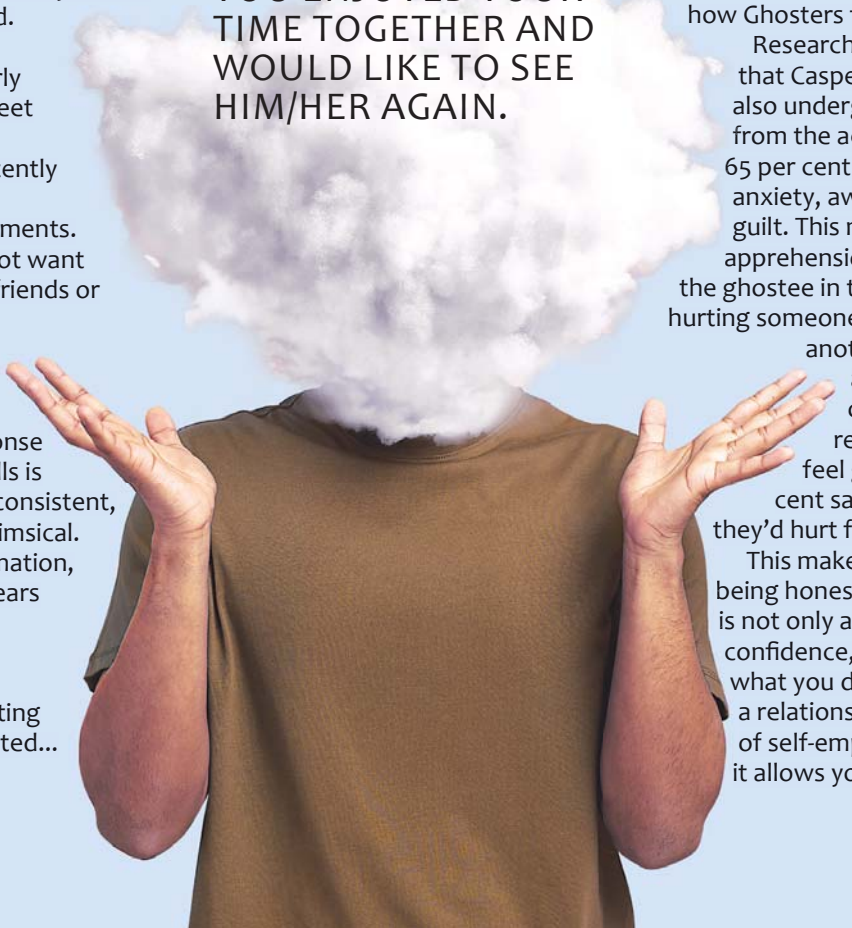
Well, plenty. And all negative.

Being a ghostee takes a toll on emotional health. Unless you are an exceptionally positive and emotionally strong person, you are likely to feel confused and burdened with self-doubt, anger, sadness, and frustration. Self-worth dips and self-doubt rises. Even guilt rears up – you start to believe that you did something very stupid.

On the other hand, one wonders how Ghosters feel about Ghosting?!

Research has thrown up data that Caspers, i.e., ghosters, also undergo a poor experience from the act. After ghosting, 65 per cent of Caspers feel anxiety, awkwardness, and guilt. This may be due to the apprehension of running into the ghostee in the future or simply hurting someone's feelings. In another research, about 50 per cent of Caspers said they regret doing so and feel guilty, while 35 per cent said they were worried they'd hurt feelings.

This makes one realise that being honest in a relationship is not only a positive aspect of confidence, which expresses what you do and don't want in a relationship, it is also an act of self-empowerment because it allows you to get to know



yourself better. You get to know how you are coming off to another person. That is insightful.

So, folks, ghosting is completely wrong. Instead, take the following route to call off a relationship, which could be at any of the following stages. (It is to be remembered that a long-held committed relationship is not being discussed here, but only those that are at an initial or a 'several-dates' stage).

Beginning of the first date: You could make your intentions clear right at the beginning of your first meeting. You could tell the person that, at present, you are not looking for an exclusive relationship or "I am not, at present, looking for a serious, committed relationship."

After the first date: Open and Upfront: Yes, honesty is the best policy, even in today's digital, virtual world. If you did not enjoy being with the person, politely and respectfully tell the person, "You are a nice person, but I would not like to take this further. I wish you the best." or say, "You're a nice person, but I am sorry, I do not feel the connection."

After a couple of dates: If you two have met a few times and you increasingly realise that he or she is not who you want, then it helps the other person if you were to say, "You are a nice person, but I am not feeling the romantic connection that I am looking for. I think both of us should allow ourselves to do so elsewhere." or, "I've enjoyed talking to you. And because I respect you, I will be honest with you. I do not feel a special connection."

"So, I would like you to move on. I should do so as well." or, "You are very nice, but I did some soul-searching and I didn't feel that we're compatible for the long haul." or, you can state your reasons as you wish, keeping in mind the following: Start by mentioning something you liked about the other person. Then say that you do not feel the connection and hence you'd like to call it off. If you wish to be 'friends only', then suggest so and ask for the other person's views. Conclude by saying that you are sorry because such situations do create hurt. Finally, wish the person well.

THIS IS THE TIME FOR MORE SELF-CARE AND FOR SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS. TAKE GREAT CARE OF YOURSELF AND HELP YOUR FAMILY DO SO TOO. FEEL THE LOVE YOU ALREADY RECEIVE FROM SO MANY PEOPLE.



Friend-zone: Many times, you start as friends and turn into sweethearts. Many times, you intend to be sweethearts but end up as friends. It may happen that you have known a person for some time and enjoy talking to him or her, which makes the person think that you are interested. However, you do not feel that fuzzy-tingling feeling even after several dates. In such cases, instead of ghosting them, speak to the person with a friendly smile and tell him or her that you'd like to be friends and not the 'love' of your life. (Remember Shah Rukh Khan and Karisma Kapoor in *Dil To Pagal Hai*? There, you got it!...)

Honesty is appreciated. Try it, and you will find it surprisingly pleasant. For one thing, your honesty does not leave the person wondering why you disappeared.

The only point to keep in mind is not to make disparaging or hurtful remarks about the other person's looks, habits, nature, profession, or family. The key word in every human interaction is respect. Everything else then falls into its proper place.

Life is not fair, and no one says so. What if you get ghosted? What should you do to keep and protect your peace?

Tips To Be Considered

Let him or her Go: The need to find out 'why' is very human. But respect yourself by not getting sucked into it. Instead, talk to a supportive friend and/or write a private journal – this would lighten your burden. But you need not request or beg him or her for an explanation. That person is not for you. And you are not for that person. Finito.

Do not put up a sad FB/ Insta/ WhatsApp status: The emotional outpouring on social media, in the future, will come to haunt you as no ghoster can ever do! You are not a loser. You are You – full of your type

of potential and learnings. Do not announce your emotional baggage to the world. The world does not need it, just like you do not need someone else's baggage.

Remember that it is not about You: His or her needs are whatever they are. It does not match/is compatible with who you are. Just like your needs are whatever they are. It will not match with many people out there. So, in the ultimate analysis, it's not about the person. It is about the right fit. So no blame game if compatibility is missing. No guilty or wrong person; except the one who is playing the ghost!

Self care and family: Sometimes, problems are blessings in disguise.

This is the time for more self-care and for spending time with family and friends. Take great care of yourself and help your family do so too. Feel the love you already receive from so many people. Eat well, and sleep well. Use your great potential to create a better version of yourself.

Connect and enjoy with friends: Have a fun night out on the town with your close friends. Take a weekend trip. Go for an amazing trek.

Explore: Even a short relationship can hurt when it ends, so make some exciting new memories. Make a list of things you've always wanted to try, and then start checking them off. Don't forget to put it all on your social pages!

Hobby: Start a new hobby. Record a madcap video of you and your friends playing, acting, spoofing, playing an instrument, doing stand-up comedy... whatever!

Confidence makes you attractive: It also makes you look attractive to others. A serene confidence develops within us when we are of help to someone. Help someone. Offer your service to an institute. Celebrate your successes and make others smile. It is okay if you don't feel confident all the time because no one does. Just do your best to fake it, and soon you will make it. Remember - Motion creates emotion. And emotion creates motion.

Cry, Get Sad, Mad? Do you want to? Well... a little crying may help because crying burns calories. You can feel sad and mad – punch a pillow, throw a dart at his or her picture, and call the ghoster by a cringe-worthy name. All these will help. But if being ghosted is overwhelming you, then you may need professional help. Being a ghostee hurts.

Studies show that a clean break-up is remembered as less painful than a ghosted one. So, if you feel you need professional help/ counselling, then seek professional help. It's the right thing to do.

Casper Returns

Now, a very significant development in this ghosting episode – what to do if Casper returns? By not officially ending things or giving you proper closure, it's easier for him or her to reappear in your life at a later time. Most ghosting scenarios are unforgivable, so whether to give them a second chance or not depends upon several factors. One significant one is honesty.

Honest Approach: If a ghoster contacts you again and right at the outset accepts mistakes, gives an honest explanation of his or her past behaviour, expresses renewed interest, and if you feel inclined to go for it, then you may do so. However, if the ghoster behaves as if nothing had happened, then it's better to not give them the satisfaction of a second chance.

Re-emergence: Ghosters sometimes re-emerge to keep you dangling for reasons they know best. It may happen that just when you start to begin afresh, Casper will pop up in your inbox with a "Hiiiii" or "How are you?"

This is called "breadcrumbing" because they're giving you little



morsels to keep you tethered. Ideally, your response should be to put a lid on this nonsense because you deserve a real person.

Another way is to unfollow his or her social media accounts so you will not be tempted to see what he or she is up to. Delete this person from your mental software.

Haunting: If you see Casper haunting your favourite jaunts or supermarket and if he tries to talk to you with a casual approach, say politely but indifferently: "Oh, sorry, I didn't notice you. I need to go. Take care!" or "Oh! Sorry, but what was your name? Yes, that's right! I have to run. Take care."

In general, it is best to move on, unless you've been dating for a month or longer. In that case, you might want to communicate to the person, saying, "I'm not sure what happened between us to make you go silent, but I'd appreciate a quick conversation so there can be closure."

Though we discussed dating relationships, ghosting can happen in any relationship or situation. The way to handle it is the same – communicate with honesty and respect.

Life is not easy. Emotions are messy. Thoughts can mislead, and living is an effort.

However, if the efforts are in the right direction, then even though living does not become a cakewalk, it at least becomes ghost-free.

Enjoy the journey... We

Short Story

Kalyani Maami and Rosikutty

The life moves on without any grudge. By Rosalind David



The railway compartment on this Coimbatore to Bombay train was almost empty. I was assaulted by the special smell of trains in India: last night's biriyani, stale urine and compensating for these, the fragrance of jasmine. There was just one rather solid person with his assorted possessions of small bags with names of saree shops taking up half of his sleeper seat.

One, a lurid red bag boasted the shop was the temple of sarees! He must have noticed my amused look for he smiled and said: "Not many will get in the sleeping compartment until Bangalore." But he did gather the bags together to make room for others.

I was not thrilled, for being alone with one person will necessitate a conversation. I had just finished reading *The Ending of Things* by Julian Barnes, a moving account of changing of memory amongst other things.

I wanted to ruminate over the way memories get mutated over the course of one's life. This sort of thing happens when you have been a Literature teacher for almost twenty years. The pages of books and characters are more interesting than real people sometimes.

The next ten minutes were quiet, he behind his newspaper *the Hindu* and I, concentrating on my crocheting or pretending to do so.

Some tiny flutter of a memory, the end of a gold border of a saree touching my cheeks. A lingering taste of sweet laddu. More than anything else, a blessed sense of warmth of love, being held lovingly. I looked at him again. A venerable looking Brahmin man, a priest perhaps. Broad lines of holy ash on his forehead with a bright red Kumkum.

Every time I stole a look at him our eyes met. He, too, had a crinkle on his face as if trying to put a shape to a nascent memory.

Suddenly, both together looked at each other, with smiles and affection on capturing the memory. "Rosie" he said not tentatively but with assurance. "Kitchu" I screamed jubilantly.

Just then another passenger entered the compartment and straightaway started a conversation with Kitchu. His monosyllabic replies and smiles in my direction must have roused the gentleman's suspicions since he gave a questioning look to Kitchu.

'What does this orthodox Brahmin have to do with this short haired rather foreign looking woman?' he must have wondered.

Kitchu gave one of his angelic smiles which wrinkles and grey hair had not dimmed and told him "childhood friends" and continued with his smile and shaking of head.

Then words tumbled out as we relived our joyful childhood. While we talked about our mutual families, games we played, our own present life, my heart was full of love for Kalyani Maami, Kitchu's mother, the only mother I have known.

After my parents' untimely demise my grandparents, Appacha and Ammachi took me under their wings. Their tremulous love for me was all consuming but always tinged with a fear, the result of a huge sense of responsibility.

Appacha was a real martinet while Ammachi, to make up for it, let me have my own way in everything. I found them boring and old beyond imagination.

In that remote tea estate, there were these two bungalows, sitting atop a hillock in a compound, ours and Kalyani Maami's. The row houses, where the labourers lived were quite far from our houses and we could hear squeals of laughter of children.

I longed to be carefree like them. However, we were not allowed to have anything to do with them though we attended the same school.

Kitchu's family was my adopted family. A young father and mother, an old grandmother who was always praying and three young girls with musical names Rukku, Meena and Kamala: such a complete and colourful family.

The girls became my beloved elder sisters, Ackas. Their father, Seshadri Uncle never took any notice of us children, and only spoke to Maami in a quiet voice. Once in a while, he would beckon me to his side and silently handover a peppermint to me. The girls giggled when that happened. Kitchu said it was because I was like his favourite Puppy.

So, no wonder I spent all my time in Kitchu's house.

Our favourite game was the "appa amma" game. We had two dolls, one of cloth made by my grandmother and the other we fashioned together with a stick and rags. Each time we put them away to sleep we had to wash our hands as Kalyani Memmi did not think they were clean.

Ammachi told me that was to avoid hurting my feelings. I don't think I understood. I just felt ashamed I chased their old grandmother around after her bath and touched her which meant she had to bathe again!! Only Kitchu got into trouble for not explaining to me.

In their house many things were not considered clean. We had to wash hands and feet all the time if we entered from outside.

In between all these memories one memory that of the pretty woman with rosy cheeks and big dancing eyes was pushing others away. Kalyani Maami. I called her Aunty at first but she asked me to call her by the Tamil equivalent Maami.

I liked it since it sounded like Mommy. She thought my name Rosemary was too long for my little self and gave me the pet diminutive Rosykutty. Baby Rosie! I thrived in their love. This strict orthodox woman just accepted me as one of the daughters, or did she? Why the doubt?

"Kapi... kapi... Kaaaaapi...!" screeched the coffee vendor.

The train had stopped in the middle of nowhere. I followed the train of my thought. Ha, ha, clumsy, the English teacher in me warned.

Anyway, at this time I spent all my time at their house. My grandmother, Ammachi, said people wondered how, in a Brahmin household, a Christian girl was given the run of the house.

Oh, there were unwritten rules: I wasn't allowed inside the kitchen or the puja room. But then her other children were not allowed either. Later, I realised these sacred precincts were forbidden to them only when I was present. I was bemused.

Ammachi told me that was to avoid hurting my feelings. I don't think I understood. I just felt ashamed I chased their old grandmother around after her bath and touched her which meant she had to bathe again!! Only Kitchu got into trouble for not explaining to me.

The screeching of the train on reaching Tirupur and the sound and sight of vendors of all sorts of goodies jolted me back into reality. I turned to Kitchu and said with a sigh:

"Those lovely hot onion, potato and green chilli bhajis she used to make and the tangy uppuma she made out of left over idli, you remember?"

"Umm. I True. Very much. My wife is not as good as her. I don't tell her

that, mind you."

"Remember the time you ate chicken at our place?"

"Did I? Shock horror!" He rolled his eyes comically.

"Oh yes, it comes to mind now, your Appacha made me wash my mouth with soap and dragged us up to my mother. He took a cane and gave it to her to hit you with but she just laughed." He smiled.

"Though, later she told me not to do it in no uncertain terms."

There was a pause. I remembered how I was much amused by the word vegetarians. I imagined them with bodies like carrots or drumstick.

Perhaps I loved her because I missed my own mother. Her love for me may be arisen out of pity for me. I didn't analyse it at that time. "Kalyani Maami?" I looked at him, almost knowing the answer. "She passed away a month after Appa. It is five years now."

I was happy that the compartment was now full. A very thin woman with small bright eyes got in holding a butterball of a baby who offered me a half-eaten rusk. I gave her a big smile and directed her hand back to her mouth. Disappointed, she gave a big sigh and put her head on her mother's shoulder and promptly went to sleep.

I could coax my mind gently to unearth the stubborn memory which was an aching one. The pain got stronger but the mind won't release it. Then with one painful lurch the shapeless memory slipped out. A drama unfolded. I watched the replay almost objectively.

Kalyani Mamma's family had been invited to the family of Engineer uncle. They were new arrivals. It was such an unusual occurrence to be invited formally that the whole family except Uncle were in a state of hysteria.

I watched the Ackas put on their silk skirts with gold borders and diaphanous half sarees. There were glittering earrings and



Kalyani Mamma's family had been invited to the family of Engineer uncle. They were new arrivals. It was such an unusual occurrence to be invited formally that the whole family except Uncle were in a state of hysteria.

drops. Maami wore a red saree with green border and she looked blooming with red cheeks and glistening eyes. Kitchu told me she put stuff on her face.

I watched with a heavy heart as they were getting into the rickety jeep. Maami saw my face and asked my grandmother who had been summoned to see and admire the family, to let me go with her. Taking her hesitant nod as acquiescence I jumped into the jeep.

Only half way through our trip I realised I was in my crumpled poplin home frock and looked a tramp next to the jewel coloured skirts and gold ornaments of the older girls. Oh, why didn't my grandmother say 'no'.

So, it was a much-chastened little Rose who followed the colourful jolly group. The Aunty of the house welcomed the group. What happened later was not clear in my mind. Then the fog clears and I relive the moment.

The picture which comes to my mind in all its cruel vividness is this:

All the children are seated on little mats with gleaming silver plates and tumblers. My Maami is helping Engineer Aunty to serve. The men are seated in the sitting room with glasses of golden liquid and are looked after by the cook.

On the kids' plate are golden blobs of kesari and some bhajis. I could smell the ghee and see the cashew nuts lying on the surface of kesari like some translucent gems. Maami always gave me an extra cashew. I am so hungry I feel like barging in and grab a bhaji from one of the kids.

I hear Meena acka ask what about Rosikutty. Host Aunty comes out and takes my hand in a vicious grip and asks me to sit on the floor. I ask tentatively 'mat?'

She ignores me. She goes in and comes back with an idli on a piece of banana leaf. No chatni. She put a droplet of oil in a hole on the idli. Kitchu from his vantage point looks at me pityingly but he does NOT do anything. Kalyani Maami looks so sad but she does not look at me.

I move away from the range of vison of the family. A wave of rebellion provoked by the betrayal of my beloved family rises up like bile. I take the idli and throw it into the ditch next to which I was seated. Just then the cook passes by and knuckle tapped me rather hard on my head.

I wondered whether my memory is painting the events with false, exaggerated, tragic colours. No, the tearing, searing pain the drudged-out memory gives is not a lie.

What happened afterwards?

Oh yes. I hear a car leaving. With an angry burning Screech. The estate jeep. They are leaving. Without me. I hear lots of giggles of the girls and the guffaws of the men. They have completely forgotten me.

With a vengeful thrill I imagine me dying and all of them crying. For the first time, I remember my loving Appacha and Ammachi and grasp of their warm hands even on short walks. Appacha coming to see me sleeping, first thing in the morning. Ammachi stroking my hair until I went to sleep. My mind longs to go to a place of comfort.

Comfort. Security. Warmth. The chill of the cement floor is freezing every bit of my body.

The sound of brakes screeching. The Jeep is coming back. Doors banging shut, footsteps. I am scooped up by strong arms and held close to a broad chest. I smell Uncle's peculiar smell of sandalwood and beetle leaf. Uncle who had never touched me is holding me tenderly.

He is followed by Engineer Aunty and kids of

various sizes and shapes. Uncle ignores everybody, marches to the car and slides into the driver's seat with me in his arms. He adjusts me on his lap and drives the short distance to his house; there was deathly silence in the car.

"What am I supposed to say to Phillip sir", he asks in a thunderous voice. I heard Maami sob. {Even now I have an evil satisfaction that she cried.] I say weakly, "Nothing. If you tell him he won't let me play with Kitchu ever."

The rest comes as a normal memory not the wrenching scene.

I don't know what Uncle told my grandfather. They took me home to their place. The kids felt the silence and slunk away. Maami brought a bucket of hot water and pulled away my frock and poured water over me. Oh, the blessed warmth after the chilliness in my body and my heart. Wordlessly Maami rubbed me with the towel and pulled over my head one of Kitchu's shirts. I giggled then for the first time that evening.

That night I slept between Uncle and Maami. So warm and consoling. I put my feet on Uncle's stomach while Maami held my hand. Somehow there was still a small tear in my heart. I think, though, that warm embrace somehow soothed my heart and kept me away from descending into a space of hatred and anger.

Soon after I had some sort of fever which lasted for a while, my grandparents shifted to the city, Coimbatore for the treatment and stayed on there for my education. Again, the fever time is a blank in my memory.

I found the thin lady with the butterball looking at me funnily as did Kitchu. Kitchu said in a quivering voice "Di. Don't cry di," using the childhood term for familiarity. I realised there were tears running down my chheks, tears for that little Rosikutty.

Does Kitchu remember that incident? Should I ask him? After all it hadn't scarred me. I was a caring teacher, I think, or at least that is what my students told me again and again. Was it this experience which made me sensitive to children's feelings almost to a ridiculous point? If that is so then I must forgive Maami and her family.

The hurt should go. Did they ever think they hurt a little girl?

Kitchu who always could read my mind said without any preliminaries.

"You know Ruckus was in love with Raghu, the eldest of Engineer family. We had to make a good impression in a way for her sake." He sighed. "We wondered whether you got the fever because of that incident, but then Meena also got it."

Soon after I had some sort of fever which lasted for a while, my grandparents shifted to the city, Coimbatore for the treatment and stayed on there for my education. Again, the fever time is a blank in my memory. I found the thin lady with the butterball looking at me funnily as did Kitchu.

"So," he shook his head helplessly and pulled a strand of hair falling on his sweaty forehead. I remember that gesture well. I laughed and imitated him, a childhood habit.

I asked hesitantly for I had no reason or right to ask. "I suppose Maami forgot all about me?"

"For quite a while she did not talk about you. But she told the grandchildren stories about you."

I had to control my tears. They had given me a family for however short the time may be, and the only real childhood I know. One small incident of thoughtlessness cannot wipe away that.

"Please tell the Ackas I remember them with great love and you have been my, well, best friend."

"Not angry?"

"No". I meant it.

The train screeched to a halt. Kitchu got up. I helped him collect the assorted bags. He smelled as he did when he was a child: Ponds talcum powder. Sandalwood?

We did not exchange phone numbers just a loving smile. Our memories are each other's gift. I just had a satisfying sense of .....an ending. We

NEIGHBOURS ALL

Friend or Something Else

Last year, I moved to Delhi from Bihar for my new job. I rented a single-room apartment for myself in a decent society. Everyone in the society seemed to be nice, and within a few days, I became familiar with almost each of them. But Ramesh, a guy from the first floor, became my new best friend.

We started sharing everything, he usually asked me about my hometown or the other places that I have visited till now. He was a big support to my living alone in the big city.

Every time there is a problem, he knows exactly whom to call. The only problem was the high price of their service.

Many times, Ramesh forced me to let him pay, but that didn't look good to me.

One day, my fan was not working, and Ramesh was also not at home, so I asked my other neighbour about an electrician. She called for an electrician, and I handed over a note of 1000 rupees. She asked me what this was for, so I told her this was for the electrician's service. But then she said, "I can repair almost four fans with this much money."

Then I told her about every time Ramesh has taken extra money from me. She told me that maybe he was lying to me about all this, and was keeping all the extra money. From that day, I never talked to him again and even started looking for people on my own for my services. Sometimes, it is tough to judge the real intentions of people.

– Annapurna Mahalakshmi

Multifarious Mimicry

The sincerest form of learning. By Ritu Kamra Kumar

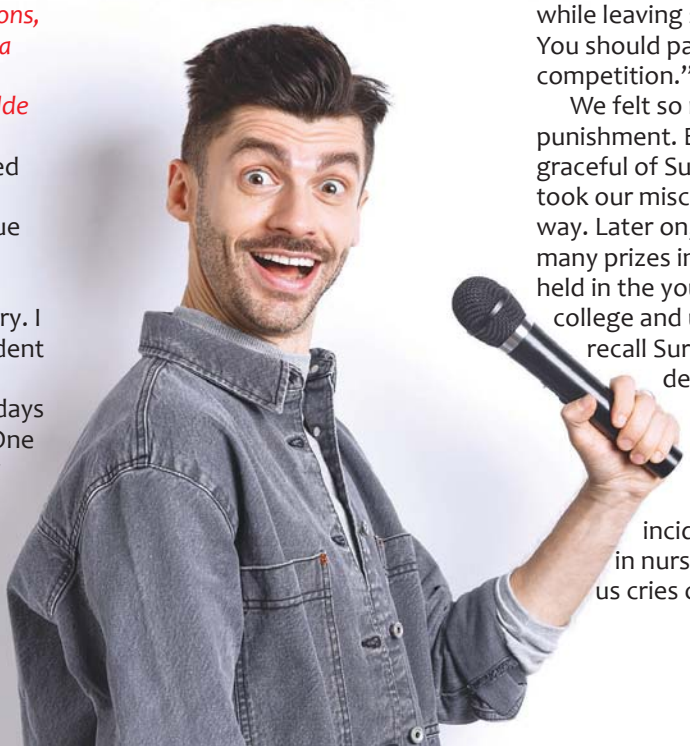


"Most people are other people.Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passion a quotation."

—Oscar Wilde

The other day, when I entered the classroom I found a student imitating a colleague of mine. How perfectly he was imitating the mannerism of Prof Gupta,w who teaches them History. I just smiled. The embarrassed student rushed to his seat.

I was reminded of my college days when we imitated our teachers. One day, a friend of mine was copying the authoritative mannerism of our English teacher during recess and the teacher happened to pass the classroom.



Annoyed, she scolded us but while leaving said, "Perfectly done! You should participate in the mimicry competition."

We felt so relieved as we feared punishment. But so generous and graceful of Suruchi Ma'am that she took our mischievous act in a positive way. Later on, my friend Sonia won many prizes in mimicry competition held in the youth festivals in college and university. We chums recall Suruchi Ma'am's genial demeanour with great esteem and how it helped Sonia nurture her latent talent.

I also recall a funny incident when our teacher in nursery class tried to teach us cries of different animals.

''How does a crow cry?"

Whole class shouted – "caw, caw…" and then it was a lion's "roar" followed by "braying" of ass. Back home I was cawing, roaring and braying much to the giggles of my siblings. This is how I imbibed mimicry and I often walked, talked and spoke imitating my teachers, cousins and others.

I have been a fan of accents. I loved to mimic voices of all sorts that I heard everyday whether it was birds or beasts or vendors selling ice cream or popcorn.

During our summer vacations when we visited our grandparents' home, we all cousins sat on the roof and exhibited our talent. When my turn came I often imitated my cousins, teachers and maternal aunts and uncles.

All of us laughed heartily till our stomach hurt and rolled on the mats spread on the roof till our elders came and cajoled us to come downstairs and have meals. Even while having repasts mimicry continued much to the annoyance of mothers and banter of cousins.

As I became a teacher, we friends often assembled at our friend Smita's place, who was the best imitator I have ever met. She compared a colleague's walk with ostrich, imitated him in her signature style and I bet that if an ostrich had seen her, it would applaud in appreciation. After her retirement, she has shifted to Delhi leaving us behind to miss her art.

My son Avinav, when he was a small boy of six, was once asked to handover bundle of clothes for ironing to a nearby washerman. Within minutes, I heard him mimicking vendors who come to sell suits and shawls in winters in plains.

He was shouting at the top of his voice "Suit *le lo*, Shawl *le lo*…" much to the amusement of our neighbours who afterwards often asked him to repeat the act. Maybe, he followed the footsteps of his mother. Yes, on serious note we all do mimic our parents. Gradually the joy of mimicry got lost in the mundane routine of life. Standing on the lecture dais that day the child in me wanted to relive the moments transfixed in the mind. I closed the textbook, decided to go beyond the book and asked the students who can do mimicry, and many hands rose.

There stood a boy imitating Dileep Kumar asking Amitabh Bachan– *"Har film mein tumhara naam Vijay kyon hota hai?"* Another mimicked Charlie Chaplin's imitation of Herr Fuehrer in *The Great Dictator*.

I enjoyed high level talent some students exhibited mimicry of famous political leaders - reading out limerick written on Mr Kejriwal by Shashi Taroor imitating Kejriwal sitting with his hands behind his head in a meeting.

I was surprised when an introvert student Sanjay beautifully presented Mr Bhagwant Maan's journey from parody to politics in the form of mimicry. Another imitated great leader Barack Obama who is master at grabbing and holding audiences' attention. And then Surbhi imitated my habit of raising a finger and telling students– "Look! This is how we need to understand." while putting stress on the word 'look', adjusting my dupatta. It was like I was meeting my own self.

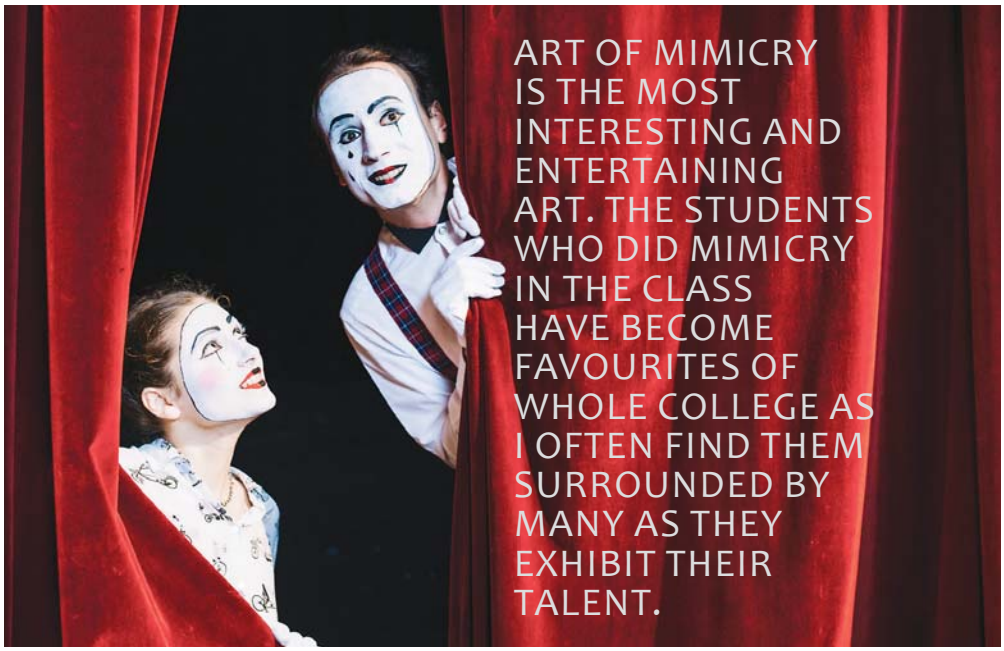
Well said the German writer Elias Canetti– "Every class has pupils who mimic the teachers particularly well and performs for their classmates. A class without such teacher - mimics would have something lifeless about it."

The Art Of Imitation

I realised that art of mimicry is the most interesting and entertaining art. The students who did mimicry in the class have become favourites of whole college as I often find them surrounded by many as they exhibit their talent. They imitate great personalities, somewhere it expresses their desire to reach those heights where these legends have reached, got their names written in the history books. I hope they imbibe the spirit of the lines–

Lives of great men remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sand of time.

Well! Imitation is the first form of art before it metamorphoses into innovation. True are the words of Laurence Olivier, the English actor: "We ape, we mimic, we mock, we act." Everyone has a one hidden mimic artist who comes out some time, performs and leaves an imprint on the mind which brings smile in vacant hours when we sit idle and recall their mimicry so kind. We



Short Story

Amamma's Secret Treasure

A reunion of souls in old age. By Namita S Kalla

The days drawing up to my return from a two-year camp-out in Hyderabad; I scour through different corners of the home I grew up in.

I entered my favourite person, my grandmother's room. While rootling around Amamma's room, I found a wooden box, among several other things, nestling under the bed.

I noticed that while all other things under the bed were coated in mud, this box was devoid of any dust; it was what I would call 'they cleaned me just a while ago' neat. Curiosity got the better of me and I crawled under the bed and pulled the box out. I was alone at home.

Everyone else in the family had gone to attend a puja in the nearby temple.

I sat down right there next to Amamma's enormous bed and opened the box.

There were a few photos of Amamma, Tatah, and their friends. I only focused on Amamma.

She looked so gorgeous. She still does. Age hasn't marred her grace and beauty.

Without bothering myself much about who's who in the photos, I continued digging the box.

I saw a small crochet bag that had a colourful string tied to it. I opened the bag and found a few letters covered in a handkerchief.

Though the handkerchief had attractive embroidery on it, something so beautiful that it cannot be ignored, I kept it aside and jumped onto the letters. I knew I had little time and now that I laid my hands on it, I wanted to read the letters before my family came home. I took a letter out and began reading.

Dearest...

As I sit down to write this letter to you, I am reminded of all the wonderful times we have enjoyed in each other's company.

Thank you for everything that you have given me all these years. As I have always said, you are the best thing that has happened to me in a long, long time and I hope this is a gift that promises to give both of us happiness



forever in our life.

We have survived the distance between us. Our yearning for each other has only increased with the distances.

We lust for each other as much as we love each other. We are as much hungry for each other's bodies as we are crazy for each other's company.

Every time before I meet you, I keep planning a million things that I want to do with you, but when I am with you I don't know what to do.

I then go with the flow and capture every moment in my mind, heart and memory, to relive the same when we are not together. You add so much glory to this relationship.

I miss you all the time, my love. It's a measure of my yearning for you. I am always thinking of you and the beautiful memories that stay with me every time we leave each other with the hope that we will meet each other soon and get to enjoy each other's companionship and our bodies.

I love you for everything that you have given me. For the countless ways in which you have made this relationship beautiful, for the scads of ways you've made me immensely happy.

Talking to you is so easy because you never make me uncomfortable. You are so good for my confidence that you make me believe that there is something that I could be doing right.

We share a bond that many couples don't and I do not see any reason why we both shouldn't be together—- forever.

Keep loving me just the way you do and keep missing me like I miss you, until we meet. I cannot ask for anything more than your hunger for me. I know that together we will be happy and keep seeking more.

Yours forever
J

My heart was heavy when I finished reading the letter. I was so touched. 'J' stood for Jaghdeesh Babu—my grandfather. I never knew he was so romantic in his yesteryear days.

As kids we all always saw him as someone who was very strict and fastidious. What I saw here was a completely different person.

Someone who is so drenched in love. Whose every word felt like an emotion that came straight from the heart. The admiration, the longing, the crisp desire to belong to each other; forever. I loved every bit of it. I looked at the clock on the wall and quickly began reading the next letter.

Darling!

I can already see your glowing face as you read this letter. I know you've been waiting to hear from me as much as I wait to hear from you.

It's been so long since I last saw you. I cannot explain in words what you mean to me or what happiness you give me every time you write to me or the time we are able to spend together.

Needless to say, the time we are making love to each other is one of the happiest moments of my life. You bring so much happiness to me, both with your company and your divine body; all this cannot be measured in any way, least of all words.

Thank you sweetheart for being there with me, even when you are miles apart. Your presence in my life has made a world of difference and I say it without hesitation that being with you has been the best time of my life. I miss you so much more than ever.

I miss you all the time, my love. It's a measure of my yearning for you. I am always thinking of you and the beautiful memories that stay with me every time we leave each other with the hope that we will meet each other soon and get to enjoy each other's companionship and our bodies.

I want all of you and I know for sure that this hunger for your body and your company is going to get worse in the coming years.

I am fully aware of the fact that you too find yourself longing for me and thinking of ways to squeeze the distance between us. Together we will find a way out. Until then stay hungry for me my love.

Yours
J

Just when I finished reading the letter I heard some noise at the gate.

I quickly wrapped everything up and placed the wooden box where it belonged; I left a part of my heart too. Everyone, including my aunts, nieces and grandmother looked joyous. Their giggles and chuckles had a ring that is patent to our family.

During lunch everyone relished the food cooked by Amamma. She was everybody's favourite, including mine.

Not because she cooked delectable food but because she had the warmth and understanding that no one in the family did.

Peace and calmness are the words that best describe her.

Today, when I read those letters I understood that she has always been amiable. At midnight, I sneaked into Amamma's room, tip toeing my way to pick that wooden box.

'Does she read these letters everyday?' I thought to myself. I successfully managed to bring the box to my room.

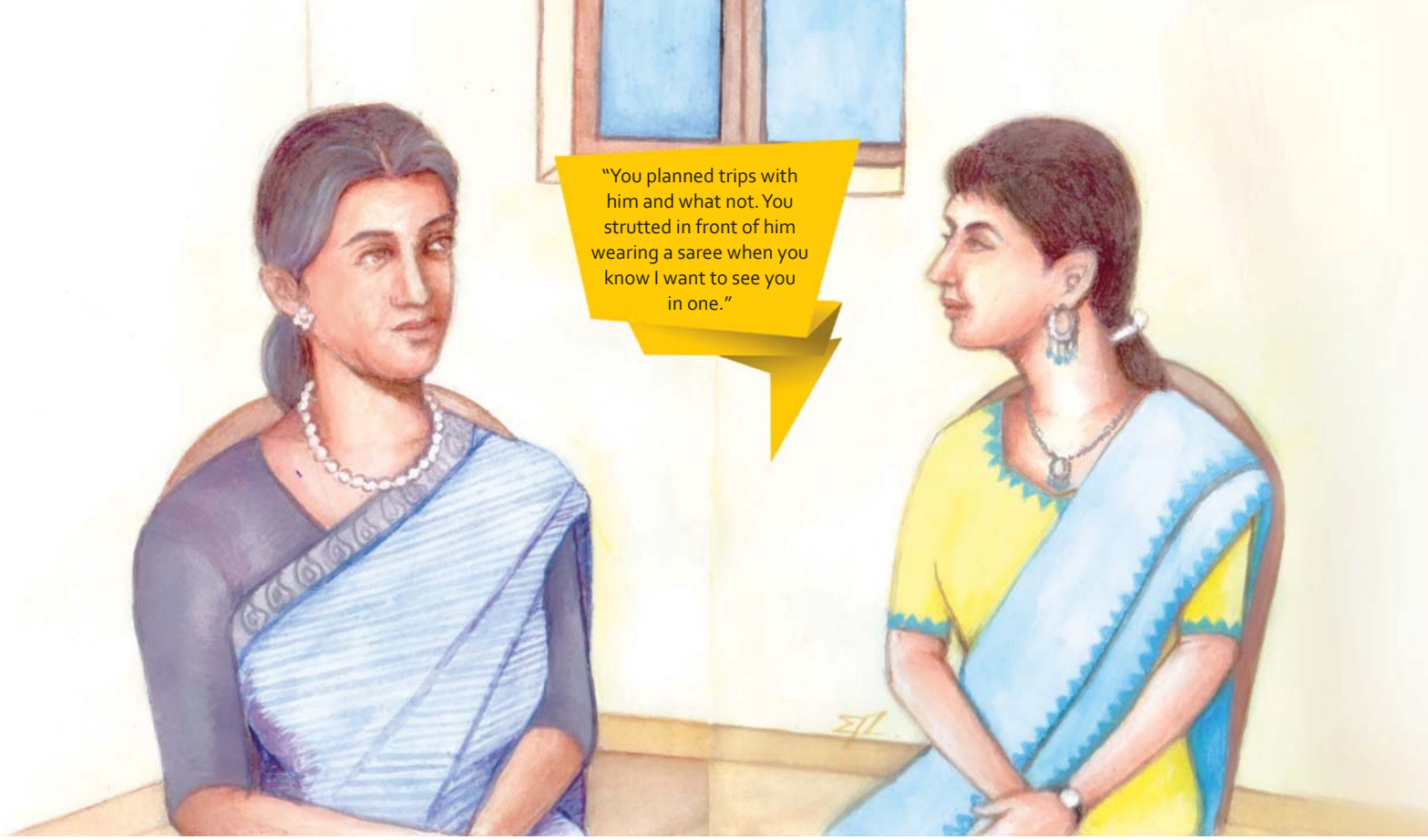
Being the eldest grandchild in the family I had the privilege of having a room to myself. I locked the door and began reading the other letters.

My love

I love you my baby. Wish we don't have to say these 'byes' every-time we meet. But then I know it's not possible any time soon. Hope it will happen some day soon. Till then let us continue writing to each other.

Always yours
J

With a huge smile on my face I picked another letter. Sadly, my smile lasted only for a few seconds. The next letter that I picked was heart wrenching.



I am so angry right now. The brief meeting with you has left me shattered. I always think of you. I will never erase you from my memory.

I have been the happiest with you. But it's just not permanent and I have been brought back to earth. Perhaps, it was not meant for me. I want you as a friend forever because I know that as lovers we have screwed everything. I respect you more than you can imagine. When I think of our time together there are millions of memories. But the heartaches take away everything and I don't want either of us to go though it again. I respect you more than you can imagine. But let's give each other more time.

Thanks

J

I could clearly read the intensity of the emotions expressed in the letter. What could have gone wrong? Just when I thought my grandfather had an affable side, I see this. Was it my evil eye?

Holding the letter in my hand and the words in my mind I picked another letter. I rubbed my eyes twice before I read the letter again. Each word piercing through my heart and the hurt getting deeper.

Dearest

Looks like I have lost the right to call you 'my dear'. Nothing will ever be same between us. Please don't think that I am being arrogant and not thinking about you. I have been thinking constantly about you and not able to forget and forgive what happened the other day when I visited your house. I am too disturbed and can't make myself think normally about anything. It's a struggle and I don't think either of us deserves to go through this heartache. I don't know where we stand currently. All that I can think of is that things are just not working out for various reasons, mistakes on both sides. Perhaps we expect different things from each other and therein lies the disconnect. Henceforth, I will not write to you because I can't be normal. Perhaps, I will try to write to you again soon when I am normal if at all. I know you too are going through this pain. You take care and try to be fine.

Fine? Hmmm! This word suddenly had a different meaning. Doesn't it?

Yours

J

Unable to join the dots I was getting anxious. From a fairy tale to a fatal mistake, the twist was too much to handle. I quickly picked the next letter.

H**ELLO!**

Why did you write to me? Even if you did why did you accuse me of being angry at you?

I am not angry. I am just hurt by the way you jumped at blaming me at a time when I was dealing with the hurt of you having a ball of a time just a day after we parted ways.

You planned trips with him and what not. You strutted in front of him wearing a saree when you know I want to see you in one. Anyway, I am not angry. But I need some succour to my hurt. So, let's not contact each other anymore. You have a happily married life; enjoy a family, while I suffer in silence.

By the time this letter reaches you I will have moved to another city. Don't try to find out my whereabouts, not that you will...

I'll always wish you well!

J

The pain in the tone was so clear but the story was blurring. If J did not stand for my grandfather Jaghdeesh Babu, then what did it stand for? My heart and my mind were at war; heartbeat competing with my thoughts. I sifted



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through the box and found a small pouch lying under the velvet base of the box.

I opened it and saw an earring, a toe ring, a nose pin and an anklet. I now picked up the photos once again and looked at them closely. There was this woman standing close to Amamma in all the pictures.

The same photos that I saw earlier I now saw them in a new light. Was I right?

I carefully put all the things in the box. While I was wrapping the letters in the handkerchief I looked at it closely. There were two names embroidered on it, Jagruthi and Rukhmini. Amamma was Rukhmini. Who was Jagruthi?

I thought I had solved the mystery but I desperately wanted to clarify.

Once again, I tip-toed into Amamma's room and placed the box under the bed. Next day, I sat down with Amamma on the pretext of spending time with her because I would be leaving in a few days.

"Do you know anyone at your new workplace?" Amamma enquired placing her hand on my head.

This was my chance. "Yes Amamma, the girl who recommended my name for this job, she is an old friend. A very good friend actually. Her name is Jagruthi."

Amamma's hand slipped from my head. Her mouth open. She paused for a few seconds, gathered her thoughts and said, "Okay."

"Did you ever have a friend by this name?" I asked.

"I have no time for friends. We have families not friends. Go finish your packing. Leave me alone I have so much work to do."

I had never seen my grandmother behave so cold. I had a feeling that my assumption was almost right.

Not intending to push things I gave Amamma time to process her thoughts. While I was in my room packing my stuff there was a knock at the door. "Ah! Come in Amamma. You don't have to knock."

"I am sorry, Kanna. I was rude to you," she said coming closer to me.

"I should be sorry. I should have known, you are dedicated to your family and have no time for friends," I said.

"S. Jagruthi Reddy. My best friend. My love. My dream. She was everything I wanted in a life partner but as much as we loved each other, the society would never accept our love. Both Jagruthi and I spent many years in hope of spending a life together someday but sadly the day never came.

Our families were close, therefore, it was easy for us to meet each other and spend time together. When my mother accidentally learned about us, she sent me to my aunt's place in Vijaywada. We communicated through letters and tried our best to keep the fire burning.

There were times when Jagruthi took a train to meet me. My aunt's son, who knew about us, promised to help us. He did in certain ways.

He would take me to college and drop me at his friend's place where I met Jagruthi.

Jagruthi was very possessive about me. She loathed the idea of my cousin helping me. We had several arguments over this. I was annoyed that she did not trust me. Despite several attempts, I could not convince her that there was nothing between my cousin and me. That day, the argument got heated and we decided to take a break, we parted ways.

That very day, Jagruthi learnt through her mom that my parents were planning my wedding with my aunt's son.

The next day, she dropped at my aunt's place without any prior information. She saw me talking to my cousin. We were making travel plans and I was showing him the saree that I wanted to wear when I meet Jagruthi.

Later, I wrote to her trying to make her understand that even if my cousin and I were married, it only meant that my relationship with her will be secure forever because that was the only way out, the society would never approve of a lesbian relationship.

Jagruthi saw all this from afar. The only words she heard were 'let's plan this trip soon'. She came up to us and began cursing my cousin. I took her aside and asked her to calm down but she was so insecure that she could barely see the truth. She ran away leaving me in shock.

Later, I wrote to her trying to make her understand that even if my cousin and I were married, it only meant that my relationship with her will be secure forever because that was the only way out, the society would never approve of a lesbian relationship.

In a fit of anger she broke all ties with me. I got married to my cousin, your grandfather and shifted to Vijaywada. Since then, I have never seen Jagruthi. I miss her everyday. I read her letters because that is all that I can do."

Tears welled up in Amamma's eyes. She was unable to speak further.

"Do you still miss her Amamma?" I asked.

"Of course, every moment, every second. Not a day passes by when I don't think about her." She said.

"Do you think she must've married and settled by now?" "No chance. I know her very well. She must still be clinging to my letters and spending life in celibacy," the tone in her voice was confident.

When Amamma walked out of the room, I began searching for S. Jagruthi Reddy on social media. Finally, I found a face that was very similar to the one that I had seen in the photos. I took a chance and sent a message. When the reply came, I ran towards my grandmother and showed her photo. After confirmation from both ends I made a call and let the two talk to each other.

My last days at Hyderabad were spent teaching Amamma how to use social media. The lovers were active once again. The traditional exchange of messages began, this time using technology.

The two women made the most of Instagram and WhatsApp. We



The summer season is here, also known for the raw mango panna and the sweet and cool sattu. But as people are being more aware of health benefits, barley water has replaced the former dishes. Please tell us more about this new cooler.

Yes, barley water is the new cooler with its nutty flavour, and creaminess is loved by many for its health benefits. It is not only refreshing and a body temperature regulator, but is rich in fibre, nutrients and antioxidants, which help to fight the free radicals in our body. Barley water can easily be made at home. Rinse barley grains thoroughly and soak them in water overnight. Boil in water for about 30 minutes. Strain the mixture and add lime juice or mint for flavour and jaggery for sweetness. It is best consumed in the morning on an empty stomach.



It is a known fact that salads are healthy, but now another fact is they are not so healthy. What does this mean? Please explain.

In the summer season, the weather does not allow us to cook and have full hearty meals. We usually depend on salads, which are supposedly refreshing, light on the stomach and easy to prepare. It all depends on the salad dressing to make the salad healthy or unhealthy. The salad dressings available in the market often contain a high amount of preservatives, sugar and salt. Adding yoghurt, mustard, jaggery, coconut oil, olive oil, lemon or orange juice, salt, pepper etc., which are easily available at home, make this salad flavourful and nutritious.

●

Please give us some diet tips for the summer season to stay healthy and hydrated.

Some people are glad that the summer season is here, but the season is not all that great! It comes with heat, sweat and dehydration. These are some essential nutrients that should be part of our diets- vitamin C, Magnesium, potassium, Zinc and Protein. All these nutrients are important, but we should not forget water, which helps control our body temperature, protects us from dehydration and helps the digestive system and skin to stay healthy. Drink as much water as you can comfortably and eat foods like watermelon, cucumbers and citrus foods.

●

How can we make spinach fun to eat?

Though winter is the best time to savour season-fresh spinach, it is equally nutritious in the summer season. A lot more can be done with spinach than the regular palak paneer or dal. Potato and bean stuffing can be replaced with spinach, corn or cheese in a quesadilla or sandwich. You can make spinach with paneer and various vegetables and spices, and bread rolls baked or grilled. Mix hung curd, garlic, spinach and a few herbs to get a perfect dip or raita. Making our traditional puri with pureed spinach can be quite interesting too.

●

Please give us some top tricks to make flavourful biryani at home.

Preparing biryani is an art. It is savoured all around the world for its vibrant colours, exotic aromas and delicate layers. It is rich with the choicest of ingredients- dry fruits, saffron, whole spices, basmati rice and veggies/meat.

Cook rice and veggies/meat separately on slow flame. Figure out the right cooking time as per the quantity, and put off the stove when the rice is semi-cooked. Also, pick brass or copper vessels to cook the biryani. Enjoy your biryani.

●

Why is Hemp called Hearty, Healthy and Heavenly?

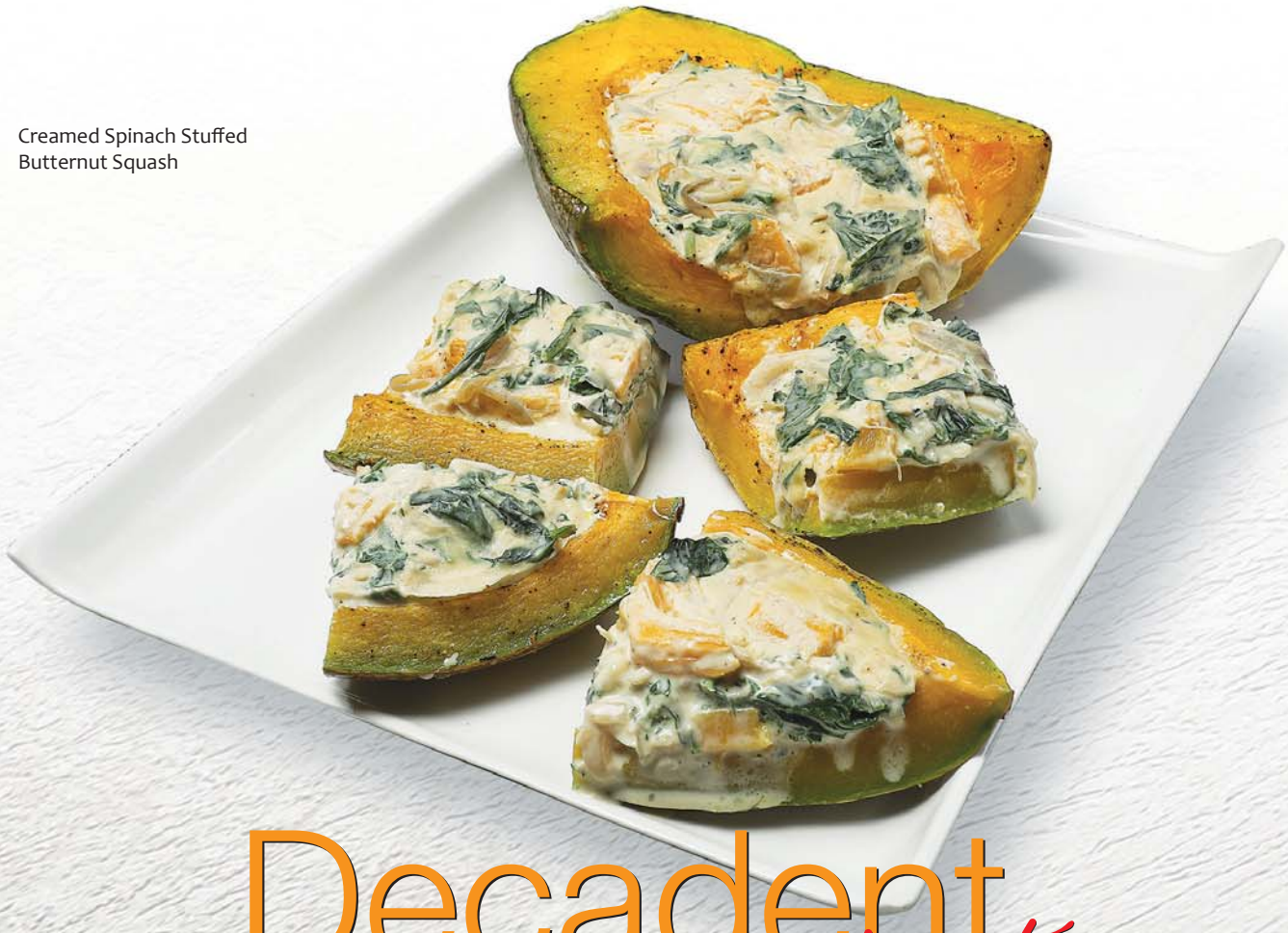
The heart-shaped Hemp seeds are a storehouse of nutrients. They are a great source of protein, iron, zinc and thigh sources of omega 3 and 6. It is an especially great source of nutrients for vegetarians, as they derive the same nutritional benefits found in meat. You can add the hemp hearts to salads, casseroles, cereal, baked goods or smoothie bowls. Hemp is also important because "plant-based foods are integral to a diet without plant foods, any diet is incomplete".

-Savita Bhargava

If you have any problem in cooking or kitchen, write to Woman's Era. We shall try to help you sort it out.

Address your queries to:

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Creamed Spinach Stuffed Butternut Squash

Decadent Cheesy Treats

A fusion of cheesy indulgence and delectable bites. By Kavita Nagpal

CREAMED SPINACH STUFFED BUTTERNUT SQUASH

INGREDIENTS

2 medium-sized butternut squashes
1 tbsp olive oil
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
1 tbsp butter
1 small onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
283g frozen spinach, thawed and drained
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 tsp nutmeg

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Cut the butternut squashes in half lengthwise and remove the seeds and stringy parts. Place the butternut squash halves on a baking sheet, cut side up.

Brush the butternut squash halves with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and black pepper. Roast the butternut squash halves in the oven for 40-45 minutes, or until they are fork-tender. While the butternut squash is roasting, make the creamed spinach filling. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat.

Add the diced onion and minced garlic and sauté until the onion is soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the thawed and drained spinach to the skillet and stir to combine with the onion and garlic. Pour the heavy cream into the skillet and stir to combine. Add the grated Parmesan cheese and nutmeg to the skillet and stir to combine. Cook the spinach mixture over medium heat until it's thick and creamy, about 5-7 minutes.

Once the butternut squash is roasted, remove it from the oven. Use a spoon to scoop out some of the flesh from each butternut squash half, leaving a half inch border around the edges. Add the scooped-out butternut squash

flesh to the creamed spinach mixture and stir to combine.

Spoon the creamed spinach mixture into the hollowed-out butternut squash halves, filling them to the top. Return the stuffed butternut squash halves to the oven and bake for an additional 10-15 minutes, or until the filling is hot and bubbly. Serve the creamed spinach stuffed butternut squash halves hot, garnished with additional grated Parmesan cheese if desired. Enjoy!

FRIED BURRATA OVER ROMESCO SAUCE

INGREDIENTS

For Romesco Sauce

1 large red bell pepper
1/2 cup almonds, toasted
1/4 cup tomato paste
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tbsp sherry vinegar
1 tsp smoked paprika
1/2 tsp salt

For Fried Burrata

2 balls of burrata cheese
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup bread crumbs
Vegetable oil, for frying

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Cut the red bell pepper in half and remove the seeds and stem. Place the red bell pepper on a baking sheet, skin side up, and roast in the oven for 20-25 minutes, or until the skin is charred. Remove the red bell pepper from the oven and place it in a bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the pepper steam for 10 minutes.

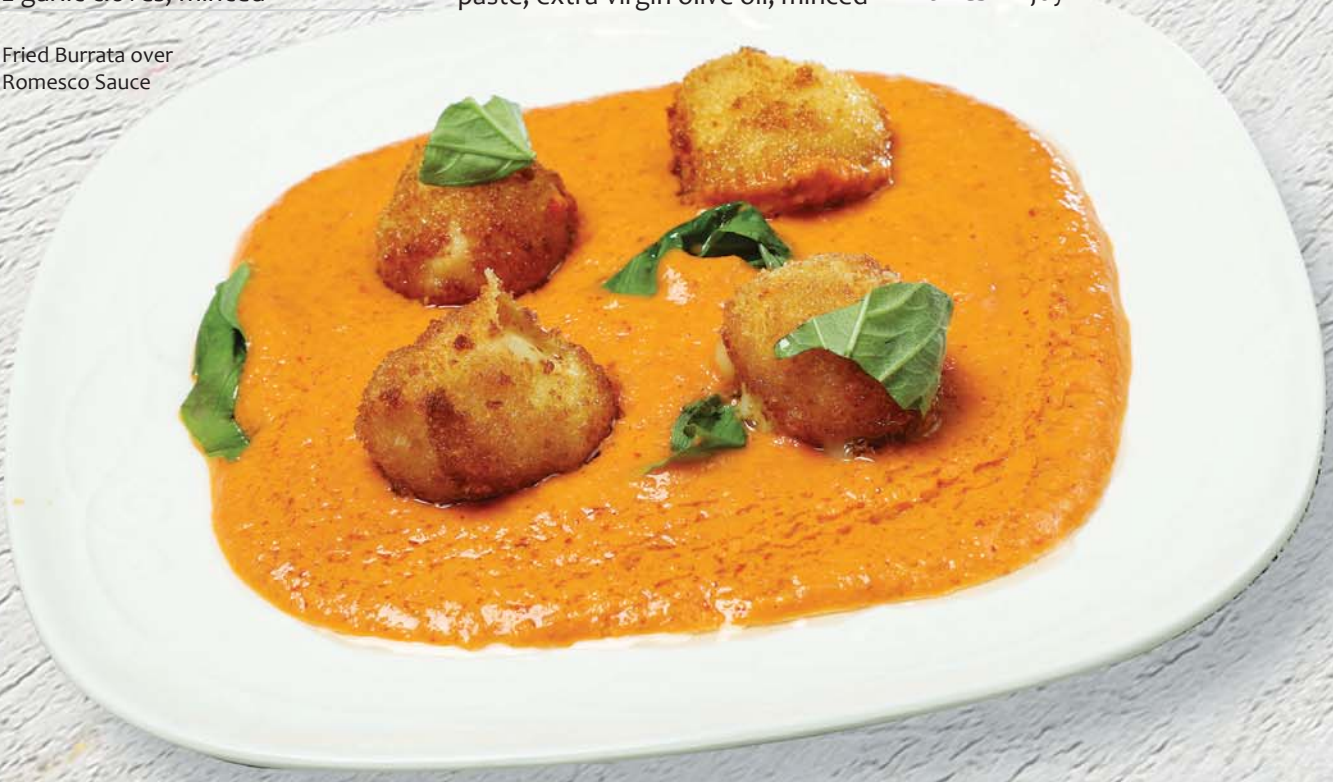
Remove the skin from the red bell pepper and chop the flesh into small pieces. In a food processor, combine the chopped red bell pepper, toasted almonds, tomato paste, extra-virgin olive oil, minced garlic, sherry vinegar, smoked paprika, and salt. Process until the mixture is smooth and creamy. Transfer the Romesco sauce to a bowl and set aside. Cut the burrata balls in half.

In a shallow dish, whisk together the all-purpose flour, salt, and black pepper. In another shallow dish, beat the eggs. In a third shallow dish, place the bread crumbs.

Coat each burrata half in the flour mixture, then dip it in the beaten eggs, and finally coat it in the bread crumbs. Heat about an inch of vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

When the oil is hot, add the burrata halves to the skillet, cut side down. Fry the burrata halves for about 2-3 minutes, or until they are golden brown and crispy. Remove the fried burrata from the skillet and place it on a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

To serve, spoon some of the Romesco sauce onto a plate and place a fried burrata half on top. Repeat with the remaining burrata halves. Enjoy!



Fried Burrata over Romesco Sauce



Caprese Stuffed
Portobello Mushrooms

CAPRESE STUFFED PORTOBELLO MUSHROOMS

INGREDIENTS

4 large portobello mushrooms, stems and gills removed
1/4 cup olive oil
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste
13g fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced
2 large ripe tomatoes, sliced
1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 400°F. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, balsamic vinegar, salt, and pepper. Brush both sides of each portobello mushroom with the olive oil mixture. Place the mushrooms on a baking sheet and bake for 10-12 minutes, or until they are slightly tender. Remove the mushrooms from the oven and top each one with a slice of fresh mozzarella cheese.

Layer the tomato slices on top of the mozzarella cheese. Sprinkle the chopped basil over the top of the tomato slices. Return the stuffed portobello mushrooms to the oven and bake for an additional 8-10 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and bubbly. Serve the caprese stuffed portobello mushrooms hot, garnished with additional fresh basil leaves if desired.

BROCCOLI AND CHEDDAR TWICE BAKED POTATOES

INGREDIENTS

4 large baking potatoes
2 cups broccoli florets, chopped
1 cup grated cheddar cheese
1/4 cup sour cream
1/4 cup milk
2 tbsp butter
Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Pierce each potato several times with a fork and bake them for 45-50 minutes, or until they're tender. While the potatoes are baking, steam the broccoli until it is tender.

Remove the potatoes from the oven and let them cool slightly. Cut each potato in half lengthwise and scoop out the flesh into a large mixing bowl, leaving about one-fourth inch of flesh in the skin. Mash the potato flesh with butter, sour cream, and milk until it is smooth. Fold in the steamed broccoli and grated cheddar cheese, and season the mixture with salt and pepper to taste.

Scoop the broccoli and cheddar potato mixture back into the potato skins, making sure to fill them to the top. Place the stuffed potato halves on a baking sheet and bake for an additional 20-25 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and bubbly.

Serve the Broccoli and Cheddar Twice Baked Potatoes hot, garnished with additional chopped broccoli or fresh herbs if desired. Enjoy!



Broccoli and Cheddar
Twice Baked Potatoes

GOUDA BISCUITS WITH SPRING ONION



Gouda Biscuits with Spring Onion

INGREDIENTS

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 cup unsalted butter, chilled and cubed
1 cup grated Gouda cheese
1/2 cup chopped spring onion
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 egg, beaten

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 400°F. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Using a pastry cutter or your fingers, cut in the chilled butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.

Stir in the grated Gouda cheese and chopped spring onion until well combined. Add the buttermilk to the mixture and stir until a dough forms. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead it gently for a minute or two.

Roll the dough out to about half inch thickness and use a biscuit cutter or a glass to cut out the biscuits. Place the biscuits on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, leaving about 1 inch of space between each biscuit. Brush the beaten egg over the top of each biscuit. Bake the Gouda Biscuits with Spring Onion for 15-20 minutes, or until they're golden brown and puffy.

Remove the biscuits from the oven and let them cool for a few minutes before serving. Enjoy your delicious Gouda Biscuits with Spring Onion!

Spinach Ricotta Rolls



SPINACH RICOTTA ROLLS

INGREDIENTS

453g pizza dough
283g frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
1 cup ricotta cheese
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
1 egg, beaten
Marinara sauce for serving

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Roll out the pizza dough on a floured surface to about one-fourth inch thickness. In a mixing bowl, stir together the spinach, ricotta cheese, Parmesan cheese, garlic, salt, and black pepper until well combined. Spread the spinach and cheese mixture evenly over the pizza dough. Roll up the pizza dough tightly, starting at one end and working your way to the other.

Slice the rolled-up dough into 1-inch pieces. Place the spinach ricotta rolls on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Brush the beaten egg over the top of each roll. Bake the spinach ricotta rolls

for 20-25 minutes, or until they're golden brown and puffy.

Serve the rolls with marinara sauce for dipping.



Smoked Cheddar, Broccoli And Walnut Tart

MEDITERRANEAN TOMATO AND HALLOUMI BAKE

INGREDIENTS

4 large tomatoes, sliced
1 block of halloumi cheese, sliced
1 red onion, sliced
2 cloves of garlic, minced
1/2 cup of black olives, pitted
1/2 cup of cherry tomatoes, halved
1 tbsp of olive oil
1 tsp of dried oregano
Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C).

In a large baking dish, arrange the sliced tomatoes, halloumi cheese, red onion, minced garlic, black olives, and cherry tomatoes. Drizzle the olive oil over the ingredients, and then sprinkle the dried oregano, salt, and pepper on top. Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until the cheese is golden brown and the tomatoes are tender. Serve hot and enjoy!

This dish is perfect as a side dish for a family dinner or as a main course for a vegetarian meal. You can also customise it to your liking by adding other vegetables such as zucchini or eggplant.

Mediterranean Tomato And Halloumi Bake



SMOKED CHEDDAR, BROCCOLI AND WALNUT TART

INGREDIENTS

For Pastry

1 1/2 cups of all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp of salt
1/2 cup of cold unsalted butter, diced
2-3 tbsp of cold water



Mozzarella and Feta Pita Crilled Cheese

For Filling

1 large head of broccoli, chopped into small florets
1 cup of smoked cheddar cheese, grated
1/2 cup of walnuts, chopped
1/2 cup of heavy cream
1 tbsp of corn starch
Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour and salt. Add the diced butter and use your fingers or a pastry cutter to cut the butter into the flour mixture until it resembles coarse crumbs.

Add 2-3 tbsp of cold water to the mixture and stir until a dough forms. Roll out the dough and line a 9-inch tart pan with it. Trim the edges and prick the bottom with a fork. Bake the crust for 10-15 minutes, or until it starts to turn golden brown. Meanwhile, blanch the broccoli florets in boiling water for 2-3 minutes, then drain and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking process.

In a mixing bowl, whisk together the heavy cream and cornstarch until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Layer the broccoli florets, grated smoked cheddar cheese, and chopped walnuts in the pre-baked tart crust.

Pour the heavy cream mixture over the filling, making sure it is evenly distributed. Bake the tart for 30-35 minutes, or until the filling is set and the top is golden brown. Let the tart cool for a few minutes before slicing and serving. Enjoy!

MOZZARELLA AND FETA PITA GRILLED CHEESE

INGREDIENTS

2 large pitas
57g feta cheese, crumbled
57g fresh mozzarella cheese, shredded
1/4 cup chopped fresh herbs (such as parsley, basil, or oregano)
2 tbsp olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

Preheat a grill or grill pan to medium-high heat. Cut each pita in half to form two pockets.

In a small bowl, mix the shredded mozzarella, crumbled feta, chopped herbs, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Open each pita pocket and stuff it with the cheese mixture.

Place the stuffed pitas on the grill and cook for 3-4 minutes per side, or until the cheese is melted and the pita is lightly charred. Remove the pita grilled cheese from the grill and let cool for a minute or two before slicing and serving. Enjoy your delicious Mozzarella and Feta Pita Grilled Cheese.

Twice-Baked Goat Cheese Souffle



TWICE-BAKED GOAT CHEESE SOUFFLE

INGREDIENTS

6 oz fresh goat cheese
1/2 cup whole milk
3 tbsp unsalted butter
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
4 large eggs, separated
1/4 tsp cream of tartar
Fresh herbs (such as chives or parsley) for garnish

METHOD

Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Butter four 8-ounce ramekins and set aside. In a small saucepan, heat the milk over medium heat until hot but not boiling. Remove from the heat and crumble the goat cheese into the hot milk. Let it settle for 5 minutes, then whisk until smooth. In a separate saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the flour, salt, black pepper, and cayenne pepper and whisk until smooth. Cook for 2-3 minutes, whisking constantly, until the mixture is lightly browned.

Slowly whisk in the goat cheese and milk mixture until well combined. Remove from heat and let cool for a few minutes. In a mixing bowl, beat the egg whites and cream of tartar with an electric mixer until stiff peaks form. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg yolks until smooth. Slowly add the cooled goat cheese mixture to the egg yolks, whisking constantly.

Gently fold the egg whites into the goat cheese mixture until no white streaks remain. Spoon the mixture into the prepared ramekins, filling them 3/4 of the way full. Bake for 20-25 minutes, or until the soufflés are puffed and golden brown on top.

Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Run a knife around the edge to loosen the soufflés, and then carefully invert them onto a baking sheet. Increase the oven temperature to 425°F and return the soufflés to the oven. Bake for another 5-7 minutes, or until the tops are crisp and golden brown. Garnish with fresh herbs and serve immediately. We

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Short Story

VIDYOTTAMA

Story retold with a tinge of modernity. By Purnima Atul Goyal

Irrespective of the circumstances of the country and time, the knowledge, skill and beauty of women were exploited in every era.

Eight hundred years ago, the beautiful women of the kingdom were held captive by the king's soldiers. These women were forced to serve as wives of all menfolk (city bride or prostitutes) in the kingdom.

King Bindusara had forced Vaishali's city bride – Amrapali – to give birth to a son from his sperm in the desire of a beautiful son.

The story of Purnima was similar to the story of Kalidas and Vidyottama of the same period.

Vidyottama had a vow that she would marry only the man who would defeat her in the Shastrarth (debate). In that era, the arrogance of men had become an obstacle for Vidyottama to find a suitable husband.

All the men, therefore, conspired and got Vidyottama married to such a foolish fellow who was cutting the same branch of the tree on which he himself was sitting.



Purnima created panic in the aristocratic society by bagging a gold medal in MBBS examination from Rani Laxmibai Medical College, Jhansi.

Vidyottama did not give up her insult; she took the initiative to educate her uneducated husband. "Shubhasya-shighram" means an auspicious work must start at once; Vidyottama became the first educator of Kalidas. Thanks to her efforts, her husband became a great litterateur of Sanskrit.

Purnima created panic in the aristocratic society by bagging a gold medal in MBBS examination from Rani Laxmibai Medical College, Jhansi. The chauvinistic community of men did not like this great achievement of the daughter of a lower-middle class family.

While doing her MS (Master in Surgery) in gynaecology, Purnima handled such a complicated case of childbirth that, too, before getting the degree she began be counted among the top specialists of the country.

Purnima operated a delivery case where the foetus was turned 90

degrees in the womb and entangled with the embilical cord. She succeeded in saving life of both the mother and the child. It was such a rare case that even the most accomplished doctors had raised their hands lest something untoward should happen.

Having been settled in career, Purnima's classmates started reading romantic novels of the great authors like Jane Austen, Tolstoy, Emily, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights,* etc, while Purnima was still busy reading the mythology of medical science like "Going to Heart", "Do No Harm" etc.

Purnima was one of the most accomplished doctors of this century. She had orally remembered the chemical compounds of all medicines. She had the skill to tell the condition of the patient's pulse barely looking at his face. She used to take the normal delivery so seriously that till the time of delivery, she started talking to the baby in eye's language.

Purnima was well-versed in surgery. Just as a goldsmith joins fine gold ornaments; she had mastered the ability to sew the uterus back like a virgin woman after childbirth.

One day, Purnima was reading *When Breathe Became Air*, biography of a neuro surgeon -Paul Kelenithi, lying on her bed, when her mother snatched the book and scolded her for not worrying about marriage. She started pretending to sleep shyly.

As soon as her mother went out of the room, she began to plan her own marriage by pulling the sheet and doing hand-practice. Unmarried people above the age of 35 easily get addicted to masturbation; Purnima was the master in self s-gratification. She had been trained by the senior girls of the hostel to run their work without boys or toys.

Soon, Purnima started dreaming about the qualities of her husband. Purnima was looking for a doctor more qualified than herself for her marriage. Purnima wanted to select such a groom who has the passion to cure diseases considered incurable till now, such as AIDS and cancer.

Such a doctor who could rejoin the dead body divided into two parts and give life to it, such a person only deserved to be the bridegroom of Purnima.

Those days, the chronicles of Rohit, a doctor of Indian origin in Australia, was in full swing. Rohit created history by removing a tumour trapped in the paraspinous S-1 nerve of an 11-year-old paralysed girl.

Rohit's lecture was scheduled at the "Center for Bloodless Medicine and Surgery" in New York, USA. Only selected doctors from around the world had been invited to the event. It was natural for Purnima to get an invitation for this event.

Purnima had earned a lot of fame through successful surgeries; she was being counted among the famous doctors of the country.

AIIMS, Max, Medanta, Index etc – there was hardly any famous hospital left where Purnima had not been not called and she would not have performed complicated operations. Top doctors of the country, wanted to make her their daughter-in-law, but she was in search of a doctor, who could surpass her in every aspect.

Soon, Purnima started dreaming about the qualities of her husband. Purnima was looking for a doctor more qualified than herself for her marriage. Purnima wanted to select such a groom who has the passion to cure diseases considered incurable till now, such as AIDS and cancer. Such a doctor who could rejoin the dead body divided into two parts and give life to it.

Ever since Purnima heard the news of Rohit's successful operation, she was desperate to meet him. On receiving the invitation of Rohit's lecture, due to rash, she couldn't even think that it might have been a conspiracy to trap her.

A mousetrap was being laid for her. The conspirators were veteran doctors of their respective fields, who till now wanted to espouse Purnima but met with failure only. Now, they were willing to take a revenge for not accepting their courtship request.

Before leaving for New York to attend Rohit's event, Purnima had prepped up at the beauty parlour as if she was going for her first date. On the advice of her friends, she made a complete effort to enhance her sex appeal by getting her hair removed.

Dressed in a black and blue, wrap-pencil robe, she looked less of a doctor and more of a corporate-executive.

A luxury car of Research Center waited for Purnima outside John F Kennedy International Airport in New York. Room number 118 of the Sofitel Hotel had been booked for her while room number 117 allotted to Rohit. She could not believe her good fortune. In her eagerness she was looking at this Chakravyuh (trap) as her luck.

Rohit was expected to reach the hotel half an hour later. Meanwhile, Purnima bribed ten dollars to the waiter to espy Rohit. She then came to the room to enjoy and also to drive away her cold with complimentary drinks and cigars.

As soon as she received the information about Rohit's arrival, Purnima sent her visiting card and Rohit's call came within two minutes.

Purnima quickly fixed her make-up and spread the top slightly, due to which she was now looking even more provocative. Mostly professionals take their personal life very lightly; they want to solve matters like marriage in a jiffy.

Purnima had a plan that after proposing Rohit today, immediately they will make their first love, but there were other guests sitting near Rohit. A handsome man of 5 feet 11

inches height, Rohit looked like a Bollywood hero.

His princely personality did not seem to suggest that this dude had studied hard medicine while living in a hostel. The six-pack-abs made in the gym was clearly visible from Rohit's skin tight shirt.

She beheld Rohit boldly, so much so that even his guests began to look at Purnima in awe. This made her very shy. With drooping head, she sat there for a while and then returned to her room.

On the second day, there was a presentation of medical equipment from different companies during the first session in the seminar hall. Purnima's eyes were searching for Rohit. At the front row, Rohit was sitting next to the chairman of the world's largest hospital group. He looked like a rockstar in a chocolaty-suit.

For a moment, Purnima's gaze met with Rohit's eyes, she felt embarrassed for staring at Rohit like this. Her cheeks turned pink in embarrassment. She could not dare to look at him again.

In the second session, the lights of the hall were turned off to show the presentation of the pharmaceutical companies. Purnima was already tired of this boring session.

Purnima was eager to have sex like a salacious as soon as the hesitation to remove her clothes was over; she had learned a lot from Hollywood movies. Seeing Rohit's clean and smooth body, Purnima broke down on him like a robber. Pouring Rohit on the bed, Purnima sat on his thighs.

Soon, she was off with Rohit into the world of dreams, on a yacht, fifty kilometers from land in the Pacific Ocean. She was wearing sky blue coloured lingerie while the only cloth on Rohit's body was taut like a tent. In few minutes, Rohit became salacious after talking romantically. Rohit held Purnima's black, thick and long hair like a bridle and forced her to become a mare.

Under the open sky, in the deep sea, in front of the fishes, their yacht was hiccupping. In sync with the rhythmic ups and downs of the waves, they both started merging into each other.

In the dirty dream, Purnima started caressing her valley and breasts while mumbling, "Fuck me... fast..." and ejaculated in her sleep-like orgy. Before the guests sitting next to her understood her actions, she had already come out of her dreams.

Thank God!

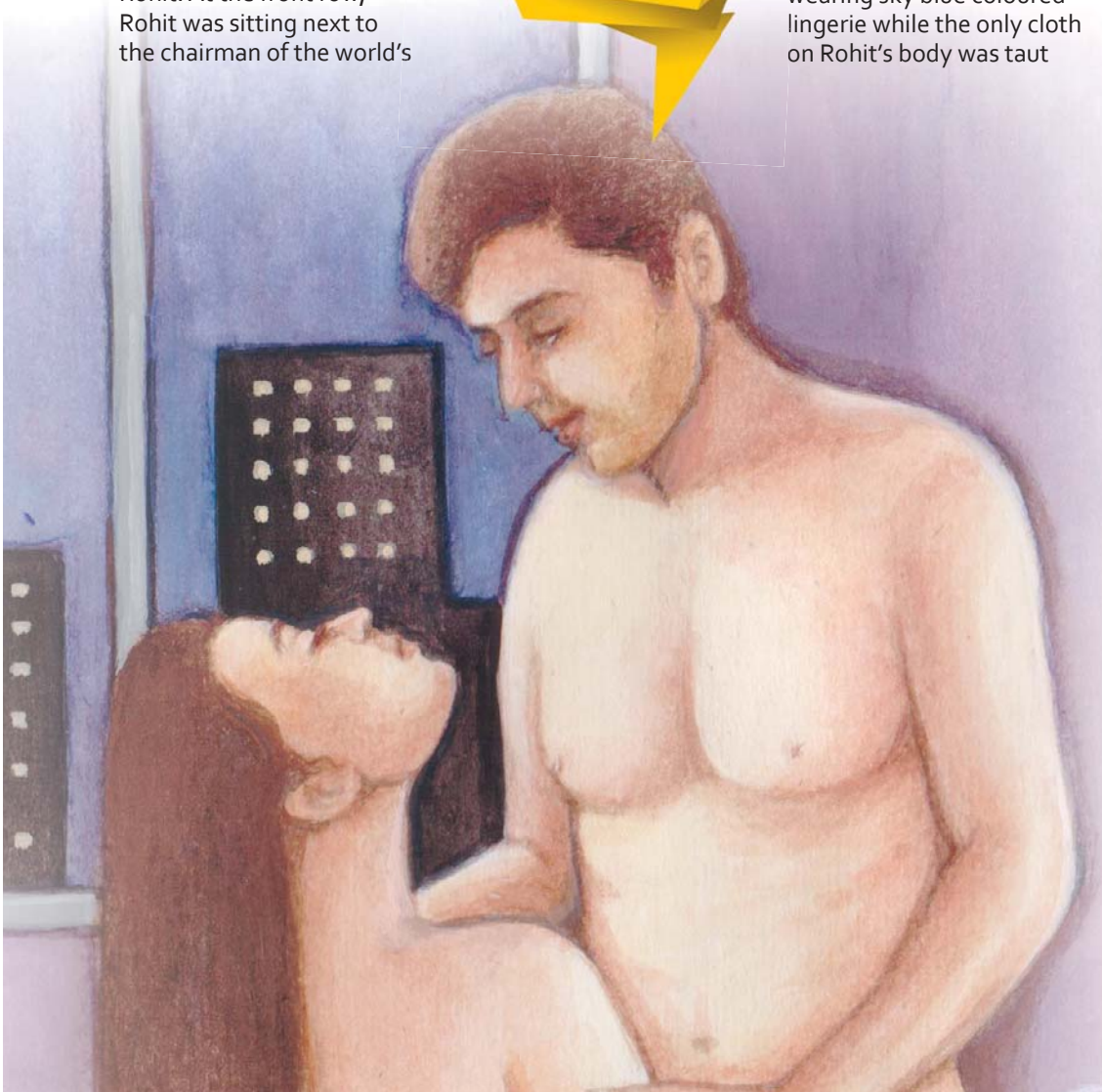
The hall lights were still off; Purnima covered her clothes with a shawl, reached the bathroom and got herself organised.

Rohit's lecture in the third session was not exciting at all; it seemed as if he was reading a written script. Purnima's friends had so confused her about Rohit's intelligence that she could not handle this failure.

In the lobby of the hotel, Rohit was standing with a bouquet of flowers to welcome Purnima. The Research Center had booked a honeymoon package for Rohit and Purnima, this too did not seem usual to Purnima. After Rohit's speech in the seminar, Purnima's entire crush on Rohit had ruined, but after two hours of hard work, Rohit again wooed Purnima's heart.

Both agreed to spend time together. Rohit

Rohit held Purnima's black, thick and long hair like a bridle and forced her to become a mare.



created such an illusion that Purnima agreed to marry him. After a few drinks, both agreed to be intimate.

Purnima was eager to have sex like a salacious as soon as the hesitation to remove her clothes was over; she had learned a lot from Hollywood movies. Seeing Rohit's clean and smooth body, Purnima broke down on him like a robber.

Pushing Rohit on the bed, Purnima sat on his thighs, tore the condom packet from her mouth and was about to apply it, Rohit snatched and threw it away. Under compulsion, Purnima had to have sexual intercourse with Rohit without precaution. For the next three days, in the five star hotel room Purnima kept checking the anatomy of her fiancé. Rohit had made a cool body even while living in the hostel and hard study.

Rohit's thighs and genitalia were as hairless as her own vale. Due to rampant lust, she started to give a mouth job to Rohit. Rubbing Rohit's 6-pack-abs with her bosom, Purnima noticed in a thin ray of sunlight that he had only few hairs on his chest. For a moment Purnima socked, she remembered what her grandmother had said - "Men who do not have hair on their chest are unreliable."

Before Purnima could ask anything, Rohit caught her buttock in 33 positions. Once again, they both started making love in "chair posture". Rohit had the large enough to enter from behind; he was really a play boy. Once again intoxicated with libido, Purnima could not ask anything.

Whenever Purnima tried to ask Rohit anything related to medical, career or job, he used to avoid it. Rohit immersed her so much in love, sex, lust and debauchery that she could not even inquire a penny about his study and wisdom.

At the time of returning to India, Purnima was carrying in her womb Rohit's child. Day by day, his option of refusing the marriage was ending. After marriage, Purnima came to know that Rohit was not the main doctor in any operation. All the operations were done by renowned neurosurgeon of Australia.

Rohit's father was a partner in this hospital, Rohit only got the name. Rohit's rich-politician father had created this fantasy world with money to trap Purnima.

Rohit had done a management course from a private college; he did not even have a license to open a dispensary at the city square.

Now, these things did not matter. Both were married, with the help of Rohit's money, they opened a maternity hospital in the posh area of the city. Expert (uttam) in modern lore – Vidyottama, i.e., Purnima had made a career for his unapt husband but no one knew about her own dreams.

Rohit does the work of management very well and his married life is going on happily. Only compromises are written in the fate of a woman. His whole day was spend in complaining but nights were erotic. We



The String of Music

I met my husband at a concert. I was a huge fan of a local band and had been looking forward to their concert for months. I went with a group of friends, and we were all excited to see the band play live. As soon as we walked into the concert, I saw him. He was standing at the bar, holding a beer and chatting with his friends. I couldn't take my eyes off him, and I knew that I had to talk to him. I mustered up the courage to approach him, and we started talking. We quickly discovered that we had a lot in common. He was a music lover like me and even played in a band himself. We exchanged numbers that night and started dating soon after. We would often go to concerts together and even started playing music together. We were a perfect match, and it felt like we were meant to be together. We got engaged after a few years of dating and had a beautiful wedding. We now have a happy family. We love to make music together. I am so grateful that I went to that concert, and I will always cherish the memory of the night I met my husband.

–Arushi Jha

The PETA Match

I met my husband at a PETA convention. I was a long-time animal rights activist and had been looking forward to that convention for months. I went with a group of friends, and we were all excited to learn more about animal welfare and how we could make a difference. As soon as, I walked into the convention centre, I saw him. He was standing at a booth, holding a poster and chatting with some volunteers. I couldn't take my eyes off him, and I knew that I had to talk to him. I mustered up the courage to approach him, and we started talking.

Although we discovered that we were poles apart, but as it is said that opposite attracts, we ended up having a great bond. We felt that we both shared a past connection. Our families were in disagreement of this relationship since we belonged to different castes. I know it was difficult for them to accept us. I couldn't resist the connection felt with him which was so profound and passionate. I finally made him meet my parents and after trying hard, both families were convinced. After a few years of dating, we got engaged and had a lavish wedding. Our families have accepted us as we share a great understanding.

–Bhawna Jain

NO LONGER WAITING FOR DIVORCE

Mandatory 6-month waiting period for divorce dispensed with by the apex court.

By Samir Ranjan Majumdar



In a significant judgment providing a great solace to the estranged couples, whose marriages have irretrievably broken down beyond any chance of salvation, passed in Transfer Petition (Civil) No. 1118 of 2014 (Shipla Sailesh vs Varun Srinivasan) on 1st May 2023 by a Constitutional Bench comprising Honourable Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Sanjiv Khanna, AS Oka, Vikram Nath, and JK Maheshwari.

The Supreme Court held that it can dissolve marriages on the ground of "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" by exercising its plenary power to do "complete justice" under Article 142 of the Constitution of India. It further held that the mandatory waiting period of six months for divorce through mutual consent can be dispensed with, subject to conditions.

The Supreme Court has further added,

"This Court, in the exercise of power under Article 142(1) of the Constitution of India, has the discretion to dissolve the marriage on the ground of its irretrievable breakdown. This discretionary power is to be exercised to do 'complete justice' to the parties, wherein this Court is satisfied that the facts established show that the marriage has completely failed and there is no possibility that the parties will

THE RECENT JUDGMENT OF THE APEX COURT PROVIDES A GREAT RELIEF TO ESTRANGED COUPLES, WHOSE MARRIAGES HAVE IRRETRIEVABLY BROKEN DOWN BEYOND ANY CHANCE OF SALVATION.



cohabit together, and continuation of the formal legal relationship is unjustified. The Court, as a court of equity, is required also to balance the circumstances and the background in which the party opposing the dissolution is placed."

It may be mentioned here that Section 13B of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (see box) has provisions for "divorce by mutual consent."

To this effect, both parties to the marriage must file together a petition to the district court "on the ground that they have been living separately for one year or more; that they have not been able to live together, and that they mutually agree to the termination of marriage."

As per section 13B(2) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the parties must move a second motion before the court "not earlier than six months after the date of the presentation of the first petition and not later than eighteen months after the said date, if the petition is not withdrawn in the meantime."

The mandatory cooling-off period of six months given by a family court to a couple seeking a divorce is intended to give the parties time to reconcile, save the marriage and withdraw their divorce petitions.

However, Section 14 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (see box) allows a divorce petition sooner in case

THE MANDATORY COOLING-OFF PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS GIVEN BY A FAMILY COURT TO A COUPLE SEEKING A DIVORCE IS INTENDED TO GIVE THE PARTIES TIME TO RECONCILE, SAVE THE MARRIAGE AND WITHDRAW THEIR DIVORCE PETITIONS.



of "exceptional hardship to the petitioner or of exceptional depravity on the part of the respondent."

With a large number of divorce cases pending before family courts across the country and the process of obtaining a decree of divorce generally becoming very time-consuming and financially burdensome, parties who have mutually settled between themselves and are financially sound often move the apex court to grant them divorce invoking its special powers under Article 142 of the Constitution of India.

Moreover, staying in an irretrievably broken down marriage is seen as a lingering form of mental cruelty silently suffered by both parties and their respective family members.

The case in which the above-referred judgment was pronounced by the apex court was originally filed in the year 2014, where the parties sought divorce under Article 142 of the Constitution of India.

DIVORCE IS NO LONGER LOOKED DOWN UPON BY THEM AS A FAILURE OR SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED OF. IT IS RATHER BEING VIEWED AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECLAIM PERSONAL FREEDOM AND START AFRESH.

The factors, as per the above-referred judgment, meriting consideration by courts to decide if a marriage has irretrievably broken down are:

- The Court should be fully convinced and satisfied that the marriage is totally unworkable, emotionally dead, and beyond salvation and, therefore, dissolution of marriage is the right solution and the only way forward.
- The period of time that the parties had cohabited after marriage.
- When the parties last cohabited.
- Nature of allegations made by the parties against each other and their family members.
- Orders passed in the legal proceedings from time to time.
- The cumulative impact on the personal relationship.
- Whether and how many attempts were made to settle the disputes by a court through mediation, and when the last attempt was made.

The apex court further observed that the period of separation should be sufficiently long, and anything above six years or more will be a relevant factor. But these facts have to be evaluated keeping in view the economic and societal status of the parties, including their educational qualifications, whether the parties have any children, their age, and whether the other spouse and children are dependent, in which event how and in what manner the party seeking divorce intends to take care and provide for the spouse and/or the children.

Question of custody and welfare of minor children, provision for fair and adequate alimony for the wife, and economic rights of the children

Section 13B of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

- Subject to the provisions of this Act, a petition for dissolution of marriage by a decree of divorce may be presented to the district court by both the parties to a marriage together, whether such marriage was solemnised before or after the commencement of the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act, 1976 (68 of 1976), on the ground that they have been living separately for a period of one year or more, that they have not been able to live together and that they have mutually agreed that the marriage should be dissolved.
- On the motion of both the parties made not earlier than six months after the date of the presentation of the petition referred to in sub-section (1) and not later than eighteen months after the said date, if the petition is not withdrawn in the meantime, the court shall, on being satisfied, after hearing the parties and after making such inquiry as it thinks fit, that a marriage has been solemnised and that the averments in the petition are true, pass a decree of divorce declaring the marriage to be dissolved with effect from the date of the decree.

and other pending matters, if any, are relevant considerations.

Though divorce is treated as a personal issue, it has far-reaching implications for society. It badly impacts the socio-economic and mental conditions of not only the estranged couples but also their respective families. The magnitude of the problem shoots up drastically if the estranged couples have children, who are forced to face shattering mental agony and a great sense of insecurity for no fault on their part.

Divorce: Not More A Taboo

In the past, estranged couples used to stay together despite being unhappy with one another or faced with several difficulties in their married life. This was mainly due to the societal expectations and pressure from family members, relatives, and close friends of both sides, who used to view divorce as unacceptable or shameful.

But, in the present-day society, the decades-old stigma of divorce is gradually fading away and women and men do not want to live any longer with an old-fashioned lifestyle or thoughts. Divorce is no longer looked down upon by them as a failure or something to be ashamed of. It is rather being viewed as an opportunity to reclaim personal freedom and start afresh.

Statistics and some research papers show that India is considered to have the lowest divorce rate globally, estimated to be around 1.1 per cent. But in the past few years, India has been witnessing a rise of 50 to 60 per cent in divorce rates, especially in the urban areas. The rate of divorce in urban cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru is more than 30 per cent. In cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Lucknow, divorce petitions have risen significantly in recent years, almost tripled. Northern states like UP, Bihar, Haryana, and Rajasthan, which are known to have patriarchal societies, have also relatively low divorce and separation rates.

The main causes of the increasing divorce rate in India are lack of communication, financial problems in the family, emotional breakdown of the relationship, lack of trust, lack of sharing, different values, unhappiness, insecurity, wanting to be independent, erratic work schedule, alcohol and smoking, women's growth financially, socially and economically and too-much and uncalled for interference in the life of the couples by parents-in-law and other close relatives of both sides.

Today's couples realise that marriage without love, affection, understanding, and mutual compatibility is a burden to be carried with and adjusted lifelong for no sensible reason. So they handle it amicably and get divorced. We

Section 14 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
No petition for divorce to be presented within one year of marriage

- Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, it shall not be competent for any court to entertain any petition for dissolution of a marriage by a decree of divorce, unless at the date of the presentation of the petition one year has elapsed since the date of the marriage: Provided that the court may, upon application made to it in accordance with such rules as may be made by the High Court in that behalf, allow a petition to be presented before one year has elapsed since the date of the marriage on the ground that the case is one of exceptional hardship to the petitioner or of exceptional depravity on the part of the respondent, but if it appears to the court at the hearing of the petition that the petitioner obtained leave to present the petition by any misrepresentation or concealment of the nature of the case, the court may, if it pronounces a decree, do so subject to the condition that the decree shall not have effect until after the expiry of one year from the date of the marriage or may dismiss the petition without prejudice to any petition which may be brought after expiration of the said one year upon the same or substantially the same facts as those alleged in support of the petition so dismissed.
- In disposing of any application under this section for leave to present a petition for divorce before the expiration of one year from the date of the marriage, the court shall have regard to the interests of any children of the marriage and to the question whether there is a reasonable probability of a reconciliation between the parties before the expiration of the said one year.

Global Divorce Rate in %	
Sweden	54.9
United States	54.8
Russia	43.3
United Kingdom	42.6
Germany	39.4
Israel	14.8
Singapore	17.2
Japan	1.9
Sri Lanka	1.5
India	1.1

Global Lowest Divorce Rate in %	
India	0.01
Mozambique	0.04
Kenya	0.06
Zimbabwe	0.07
Vietnam	0.2
South Africa	0.4
Brazil	0.4
Qatar	0.4
Libya	0.5
Peru	0.5



SHOULD I CONTINUE TAKING ORAL medication for my vertigo if I am planning to get pregnant? I have been diagnosed with vertigo, but I'm concerned about the effects of the medication on a potential pregnancy. I've heard that pregnant women should avoid oral medications. Can I proceed with the medication or should I stop? What should be my next steps?

It is important to consult with both the doctor who prescribed your medication and your gynaecologist to determine the effects of the medication on pregnancy.

Starting or stopping any medication without medical advice is not recommended. The appropriate doctors can provide guidance on whether it is safe to proceed with the medication while trying to conceive or during pregnancy. It's crucial to consult specialists and make informed decisions.

●

I'M A 40-YEAR-OLD FAIR-SKINNED woman, and I have an inferiority complex about my physical appearance. Additionally, I have excessive body hair from head to toe. I was previously married, but my husband passed away after just four years of marriage. I feel like life has cheated me, and I want to regain my confidence. What steps can I take to overcome these insecurities and build self-esteem?

Society often associates physical appearance and marriage with confidence, but true inner confidence doesn't solely rely on external factors. If your body hair causes you distress, you can explore various beauty treatments to address it.

However, it's crucial to recognise and appreciate your own unique qualities and merits to build genuine self-confidence. We often overlook our own admirable qualities. Make a conscious effort to acknowledge and embrace your strengths. Confidence starts from within, so begin your journey by valuing and celebrating yourself.

●

I HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MYSELF old-fashioned and wanted to marry a virgin. However, when discussing marriage with my girlfriend, she revealed that she had sex with her first boyfriend at the age of 18. I feel like my commitment to abstinence has been pointless, and I can't stop imagining her with her ex. What should I do in this situation? Should I continue the relationship or consider ending it?

Ultimately, the decision rests with you and depends on your beliefs and love for this girl. It is perfectly acceptable to value abstinence and seek a partner with similar values. However, it's worth noting that your girlfriend chose to be honest with you, which demonstrates trust. If you find it difficult to overcome the thoughts of her past, it might be best to consider parting ways. Remember, love and sexual experiences are separate aspects. Although she had a sexual past, she feels a sense of security and love with you.



I'M A 13-YEAR-OLD GIRL WHO recently moved to India from America. I have a crush on a boy in my class, and my best friends tease me about it. One of my friends played a prank on my crush by sending him a link to a website where he was asked about his crush, and he mentioned her name. I still have feelings for him, but I don't want to ruin my friendship over this. How should I handle this situation? I need advice and guidance.

At your age, crushes can feel intense, but it's important to remember that they don't always result in mutual feelings. Discovering that your crush has feelings for someone else can be disappointing, but it's not the end of the world. Over time, you will grow and develop new interests. It's commendable that you're not blaming your friend and wish to maintain your friendship. Stay sensible, and continue cherishing your friendship while allowing yourself to move on from this crush.

●

I HAD SEX WITH MY BOYFRIEND THE day after my period, and we are planning to get married in six months. I'm worried about the possibility of getting pregnant. Can I still get pregnant even though it was right after my period? Should I be concerned about the timing of our sexual activity? What should I do if I suspect a pregnancy?

While the likelihood is low, it is technically possible to get pregnant even right after your period. If you didn't take any precautions or use emergency contraception, there is no need to unnecessarily worry. If you're concerned, consider consulting a healthcare professional for a check-up. Stress and worry can also affect your menstrual cycle, so it's best to stay relaxed and seek medical advice if needed.

This column will tackle queries related to family, social environment and personality development.
Please address your queries to:

Woman's Era E-3, Jhandewala Estate, New Delhi-110 055.
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Art of Living

Summed up in seven ideas.

By Neha Bhatia



Namrata yawned and dropped the empty cup of coffee in the kitchen sink. In a sluggish, slow motion, she returned to her room and creaked open her wardrobe to pick out her office clothes for the day.

But while she was standing there, in front of her closet, her gaze shifted to the cupboard adjoining the closet. She stared at the stack of unused notebook journals and boxes of art supplies that she had been hoarding for years. Then, with a deep sigh, she turned towards to peep at the clock, quickly grabbed her clothes and towel, and walked away to take her morning bath.

The stack of unused notebook journals and untouched art supplies hovered around in their cupboard shelves, wondering when is their turn…

Namrata was a 30-year old woman and worked as a graphic designer in an IT organisation. She had been working there for four years. While during the initial period, she had been enjoying her job very much, in the past few months, the job had been adding nothing but oodles of stress on her body and mind.

Each morning, she would look at the unused journals and art supplies, and think that she would do something. But each day, the commitments of her work seemed to swallow up her time like anything. Even the weekends would pass like a jiffy, that she spent hanging out with her colleagues or friends.

Like Namrata, many of us desire and seek to live a life of wholeness, artfulness and relaxation, but our days seem to pass like a trigger of domino shots, leaving little or negligible time, if any at all, for nourishing the connection we have with our inner selves. Mostly, the greater probability is that we aren't living our best life. Nevertheless, isn't it true that we all deserve to live our best, creative life? We do, of course. So, if you think you do, browse through this list featuring some wonderful ideas you can employ to live an elevated life driven by mindfulness, creativity and art.

Have A Bookshelf

Reading is an activity that is not merely poetic and educative, but also a touchstone of the life lived well, of an individual, elite and elevated. Try to imagine a creative lifestyle without books. Impossible… right…? So, curate a bookshelf swinging with your favourite titles, paperbacks or ebooks, in fiction or non-fiction; create a reading journal and regularly indulge in a hearty reading retreat.

Practise Daily Journaling

Journaling every day is not only useful for organising your thoughts, but also for unfurling a variety of new ideas streaming through your brain. In her book *The Artist's Way,* Julia Cameron describes this practice as her 'Morning Pages'. In the field of personal development, this practice is fondly called by the name 'Brain dump'. But whatever be the terminology, the crux is, creative people the world over believe that journaling every day is a habit that opens up a smorgasboard of creative possibilities for the individual who delves into it with dedication. So, get yourself a journal, tune into your thought arena and jot down your innermost thoughts!



COOKING ALLOW US TO ACTIVELY BRING OUR ATTENTION TO THE PRESENT MOMENT. IT IS AN ACTIVITY THAT INVOLVES ALL OUR SENSES, AND THEREFORE, IS A FABULOUS INDULGEMENT, IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO LIVE A CREATIVE LIFE.

Make a Scrapbook

Putting together a collage from bits and pieces of scrap paper and materials is quite symbolic to assembling the plumes of stressful or restless emotions deluging our mind. The activities of scrapbooking and art journaling enable you to live this symbolism for real, and immerse yourself in assembling your scattered and wandering thoughts, thereupon, settle into calmness. Hence, put your phone away and take time to create something artful!

Participate In Activities

Dance. Paint. Skip a rope. Play a musical instrument. Go on a long walk. Listen to music. Engage in a hobby or craft. Watch a cathartic tearjerker. Whatever activity you choose to participate in, remember to be spontaneous. Follow the process with devotion while letting go of the outcome or result. The idea is to tune your life with the rhythm of the present moment, and live to the fullest one moment at a time.

Cook Your Favourite Meal

Stirring a pan simmering with hot curry; squishing the dough into balls; peeling and slicing fruits and veggies for a salad; blending a melange of spices to spill a certain flavour — activities like these may appear at first quite ordinary. However, when looking deeper, they allow us to actively bring our attention to the present moment. Cooking is an activity that involves all our senses, and therefore, is a fabulous indulgement, if you're looking to live a creative life.

Set Up A Daily Routine

Living a creative life means living a life of discipline. Quite unlike what it seems to be, discipline is not something that bounds us, but rather, something that frees us. While the activities and engagements of our daily life typically follow a non-linear fashion, having a structure for one's life is not only a great idea, but almost a mandatory thing for creatives. Plus, having a rulebook for your life is helpful a lot.

Add Depth To Your Life

Each action and activity and process makes up a sequence of scenes in the story of your life. Put your best creative self into designing it. Notice the miniscule details. Start by planning baby goals or miniature projects for any new habit, routine or lifestyle. Slow down, take a deep breathe and take it one piece at a time! We

Short Story

Beauty Lies Inside And not Outside

Appearance is a deception. By Bhanu Chandran



Umesh is coming tomorrow morning. I can't wait to see him," said Sumitra as Raghav sat down for breakfast.

"Looks like you are going to have a sleepless night," smiled Raghav.

"Do you have to go to work tomorrow? Can't you take a day off?" asked Sumi.

"You forget that he was here just six months ago. Where is he going to run away? I shall meet him in the evening."

"This time he is coming back for good. He is going to work here in Mumbai. He will be with us after so many years." Sumi was bursting with joy.

"Okay, I need to rush for a meeting." Ragahv walked out of the dining room.

Raghav was a big businessman in Mumbai and lived in the posh Breach Candy area. Umesh was their only son. He studied at the prestigious Cathedral School, went to IIT Delhi and then to IIM Ahmedabad. Needless to say that he decided to join his dad in his business and so was back with them.

Umesh was tall, handsome and extremely charismatic even though not as fair as his mother in complexion.

A week passed. Umesh got engrossed in his new job. Sumi started her usual bride hunting for her son.

"So many of your friends found their life partners in IIT or IIM. I can't still figure out how you didn't find anyone!!!" she would lament.

"That is because I was much busy studying and had no time to look at girls. I couldn't find a fair beauty like you. I also remembered that my mom is keen to locate a wonderful daughter-in-law for herself," he would laugh.

Sumi informed her entire circle of friends and relatives about her hunting for the bride. A few days later, one of her friends suggested a suitable girl for Umesh.

"My cousin's daughter Sakshi is a PhD in economics and working as a lecturer in a local college. She is very charming and her father is a senior executive in Hindustan Petroleum. Sakshi is a very talented Carnatic music singer and is famous in the music circle," she added.

Sumi was amused.

"Is there anything else that you have missed in her profile?" she asked her friend jokingly.

She spoke to Umesh and later contacted her friend. The meeting between Umesh and Sakshi was to take place in a restaurant. Both of them met accompanied by their parents. Though not a fair beauty, Sakshi was indeed charming. Sumi took an instant liking to the polite, sweet mannered girl. Both the families vibed well and promised to meet again.

"Umesh! Did you like her? I love her poise and politeness." started Sumi.

"Can we wait until we reach home?" asked Umesh.

She sensed that he was not very keen on proceeding with this alliance. As expected, Umesh said,

"Ma! I like everything about Sakshi but I always wanted someone fair and beautiful like you. She is not fair though not dark. Sorry ma. I didn't feel any chemistry with her," said Umesh.

Sumi tried to convince her son in vain. She couldn't understand the chemistry or physics.

Days rolled by. The family attended the wedding of Sumi's sister's daughter. It was there that Umesh met Shreya and was smitten by her. She was tall, fair, and beautiful and came from the same social stratum of society.

Umesh was reminded of a colourful butterfly. They were introduced to each other and Umesh felt a great chemistry between them.

Events took a terrific speed. They met practically every day and finally then D-day dawned.

It was a grand wedding befitting their status. All the 'who's who' in the city turned up for the wedding. Umesh was in seventh heaven. They went to Switzerland for their honeymoon. Umesh felt there was nothing more beautiful in life.

Finally, it was time for OFF WITH THE MINK AND BACK TO THE SINK. Umesh got very busy catching up with the back log at work while Shreya was lazing around. She never wanted to continue her work as an interior decorator.

For a few days, Sumi took it casually when her daughter-in-law would wake up after everyone would leave for work. Finally, unable to contain herself, she asked Shreya, "Why don't you get up by 7 o'clock at least so that you can help Umesh get ready for work?"

"He is not a school-going child that he needs to be helped. I am used to getting up late since I sleep late after watching movies. Please don't expect me to change now." was her answer.

Sumi was too stupefied to react. Shreya would go to clubs in the evenings, to movies with friends in the afternoon and go out with Umesh during weekends. She was rarely home.

She never entered the kitchen even once. Umesh wanted to correct her but kept quiet to maintain domestic peace. An incident that occurred one day during breakfast proved to be the saturation point for his patience.

Umesh and his father were sitting down for breakfast when Shreya came down in her night dress. Surprisingly, she had woken up early that day. She seemed to be totally oblivious of their presence. She sat down on the sofa and said–

Shreya would go to clubs in the evenings, to movies with friends in the afternoon and go out with Umesh during weekends. She was rarely home. She never entered the kitchen even once. Umesh wanted to correct her but kept quiet to maintain domestic peace. An incident that occurred one day during breakfast proved to be the saturation point for his patience.

"Jaya! get me coffee..."

Their cook Jaya was busy serving them .

"How long will you take to make a cup of coffee? I think we need to find some one more efficient," shouted Shreya.

"Just a minute memsab. I am finishing here," answered Jaya.

Raghav was a silent spectator. Finally, when the coffee came Shreya took a sip and banged the cup on the table.

"Is this coffee? It is lukewarm and there is no sugar," she shouted.

Coffee was spilled on the table and Jaya rushed to clean it.

Raghav couldn't contain himself.

"Shreya! Why can't you make a cup of coffee for yourself according to your taste? You saw that Jaya was busy serving us," he asked.

"Uncle! I have never entered the kitchen in my parent's house. I am used to servants," Shreya answered defiantly.

"Dad! We are getting late," intervened Umesh as he walked out followed by Raghav.

In the course of months, many such incidents occurred. Umesh and Shreya had minor tiffs which were threatening to become major ones. Two years rolled by. Shreya didn't make any effort to vibe with the family. Sumi's patience was wearing out. She started pestering her son to plan a family.

"Umesh! If she gets a child, she might become more responsible. I have seen motherhood changing girls completely. Talk to her," she said.

When Umesh expressed his desire for a child, prompt came the reply – "Umesh! I have no intentions of having kids. I neither want to lose my beauty nor my freedom. So don't push your luck," she said.

"Why didn't you tell me this before we got married?" asked Umesh angrily.

"We never discussed children. You should have asked me," she laughed.

Tears were brimming his eyes when he narrated this conversation to his mother. He was already tired of this marriage which was a complete farce.

A week later, Umesh

went to Delhi to attend some business meetings. There he met a college mate of his from his IIM days.

Suresh was top executive in a multinational in Delhi and had come to attend the meeting. They were thrilled to see each other after a gap of five years. Suresh insisted that Umesh visit his family and took him home.

Umesh stood stunned as the door was opened by a charming young woman. She was none other than Sakshi. She didn't show any reaction on seeing him. Suresh introduced them to each other. Just then a beautiful, cute 3-year-old came rushing into the drawing room.

Suresh insisted that Umesh visit his family and took him home. Umesh stood stunned as the door was opened by a charming young woman. She was none other than Sakshi. She didn't show any reaction. Suresh introduced them to each other. Just then a beautiful, cute 3-year-old came rushing into the drawing room.

"Meet my little angel Diya," said Suresh hugging the adorable child.

"Hi uncle! Are you papa's friend?" asked the little one.

That day Umesh ate the best meal after a long time. Sakshi joined them after the meal and Suresh wouldn't stop praising her.

"Umesh! I cannot describe how lucky I am. She is a PhD in economics working as a lecturer in Miranda House, college of Delhi University. She was on sabbatical for two years after the baby was born. I think teaching is the best profession for women since they get enough vacation to do justice to the work as well as home front. She is the best thing that happened to me in life"

"Please, don't take his comments on face value," laughed Sakshi.

Umesh looked at her. She hadn't changed much. She exuded the same dignity, charm and motherhood had added extra beauty to her. After catching up with all the news, he took leave of them.

On the way back in the flight, Umesh relived the day he met Sakshi.

"What made me refuse her? Why was I so enamoured by fairness and beauty? What have I landed myself into? Searching for these attributes in woman I have made a terrible choice and have lost a treasure. Now, I realise that beauty lies inside and not outside."

He vowed to make every effort to change Shreya into a beautiful person and start a new life. We

CAMPUS RUMPUS

THE CHALKBOARD CHRONICLES

As a student, I had the privilege of being part of "The Gang of Giggles," a mischievous group that turned our mundane classroom into a vibrant hub of laughter. Our proudest achievement was transforming the classroom chalkboard into a masterpiece of humour.

When Professor Sharma entered the room one fateful morning, his eyes widened in surprise as he beheld the riot of colourful doodles and amusing caricatures that adorned the chalkboard. Instead of reprimanding us, he joined in the laughter and encouraged our creativity. Word quickly spread, and soon, students from other departments flocked to witness the daily unveiling of the chalkboard surprises.

The tradition lived on, with each subsequent batch of students striving to surpass the hilarity of their predecessors. The chalkboard became a symbol of the unique spirit within our college, a testament to our ability to find joy even in the most unexpected places.

Years later, as alumni, we fondly recalled those unforgettable moments. The hilarious chalkboard chronicles had left an indelible mark on our college experience, teaching us to embrace laughter and humour as essential ingredients of life's journey. It was a legacy that would be cherished forever, reminding us to find delight in the simplest and most unexpected of places.

–Shikha Pandey

HUMOROUS ADVENTURE

At University, Professor Raghavan stood out with his unconventional teaching methods. One day, a mischievous prankster attached googly eyes to the back of his blazer, igniting laughter in the classroom. Unfazed, the professor embraced the humour and exclaimed, "I've acquired an extra pair of eyes to keep watch over all of you!" From then on, the classroom became a haven of pranks and laughter. Students devised clever tricks, and met with the professor's witty comebacks. In one memorable incident, they replaced his markers with invisible ink, prompting him to joke about a game of charades. The university buzzed with laughter, and the bond between Professor Raghavan and his students grew stronger. It taught us the power of laughter, camaraderie, and finding joy in education. Professor Raghavan left an indelible mark, reminding us that learning can be both enriching and filled with delightful moments.

–Roshani Desai

Do you remember any amusing, interesting, exciting incident in your college recently? Why not tell WE readers about it? Send it typed or neatly written, certifying that the incident happened in your presence, to:

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NEWS IN PICTURES

Francofolies de La Rochelle 2023: First concert for Sheila at the Francos
For the first time, Sheila performed on the Francofolies stage. A moment that the singer of *Spacer* or even *School is Over* has waited for 60 years. She was also promoted to Officer of the Legion of Honor in the July 14 class.



La Rochelle



Jane Birkin

A Tribute To Jane Birkin: Who Made The Simple Things Feel Luxurious
At 76, the actress and singer Jane Birkin was found lifeless in her Paris apartment. Many memories link the "ex-fan of the sixties" at the Francofolies in La Rochelle, where she had been at least six times.

Les Vieilles Charrues: Robbie Williams And Electric Deluge with Blur
Spared by the driving rain of the day, Blur, the flagship group of Britpop, released a beautiful electrical storm on the weekend nights at the Vieilles Charrues, a major French festival. Robbie Williams returned to France, a country with which he has a special relationship.



Les Vieilles Charrues

Haute Couture Shows Go Ahead After Riots

Thom Browne, for his debut couture show, turned an opera house into a wonderland full of fantastical suiting. Valentino showed ethereal gowns against the backdrop of the Château de Chantilly, a palatial property outside Paris and one of the most extraordinary venues. Cardi B, who sat in several front rows, was seemingly the must-have celebrity guest of the season.

Paris Fashion Week





The Honours Of Scotland

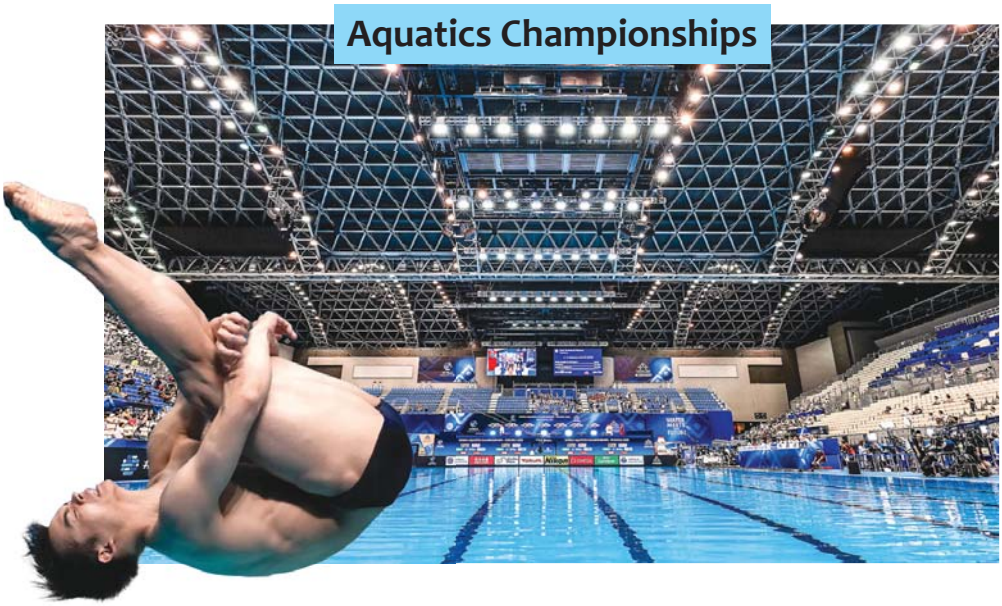
King Charles III Presented With Crown Jewels

The Scottish Crown Jewels, also known as the Honours of Scotland, consist of a crown, sword of state, and sceptre, are integral symbols of the monarch's authority in Scotland. Presented to King Charles III, these regalia represent the enduring connection between the British monarchy and Scotland.

Aquatics Championships 2023 Held In Japan

Twenty-two years after originally hosting this event, global excitement returned to Japanese waters. World Aquatics President Husain Al-Musallam opened this year's event with his memories from 2001 when athletes like Michael Phelps, Kosuke Kitajima, and Japan's gold-medal-winning artistic swimmers Miya Tachibana and Miho Takeda became household names.

Aquatics Championships



Wimbledon 2023



Carlos Alcaraz Dethrones Novak Djokovic To Win The Title

Carlos Alcaraz, the 20-year-old from Spain, outperformed the 23-time Grand Slam Champion Novak Djokovic, bagging his first-ever Wimbledon title. Alcaraz, the reigning world no. 1 ATP men's player, also became the third-youngest player to win the Wimbledon title and also the third from Spain, after Rafael Nadal and Manuel Santana (1966 - pre-Open era).

Marketa Vondrousova Beats Ons Jabeur To Win Maiden Grand Slam Title

Marketa Vondrousova became the lowest-ranked and first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon, defeating 2022 runner-up Ons Jabeur 6-4, 6-4. Ranked 42nd, Vondrousova is a 24-year-old left-hander from the Czech Republic.



Underwater Music



Underwater Music Festival Entertains Above And Below The Ocean Waters

The 39th annual Lower Keys Underwater Music Festival was held at Looe Key Reef, an area of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary south of Big Pine Key. The sanctuary protects the waters surrounding the entire Keys island chain.

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AS YOU SAY

THE DEBACLE OF THE BJP

Apropos the editorial *The Karnataka election, the debacle of the BJP* in WE--June 2023, the result is an


EDITORIAL

eye-opener to BJP that lack narrative and discourse and how they would evolve and position itself of giving practical shape to the governance philosophy during the campaign only gives rise to an antithesis to stability however much a party tries to defend. Where the state is steeped in corruption, opportunistic and appeasement politics, the announcement of freebies to please every section during the entire campaign with only an eye to win at any cost cannot be said a big setback to losers because the reverses are not the end-all and be-all because assembly results do not generally reflect the pattern of voting in the national elections. All said and done, the results are a wake-up call not only to BJP but also to all such opposition parties whose poor performance in certain states ruled by them to shed arrogance and improve its governance, otherwise, it will certainly meet its Waterloo at the hustings.

–R Srinivasan

THE YOUNG SAVIOUR

This is about the story *The Packet of Cigarettes* by Ramcharana Harshana, June 2023. The story beautifully unfolds a child's (Monty) design to prevent his father from smoking. It is a silent reminder of those innumerable instances of children showing the correct path to adults when they often walk astray. The simple fact that Monty knew cigarettes would be harmful to his father's health was enough to make him do anything to stop his father from smoking. Monty's unfound love made him even steal from his father for the latter's good health. The story underscores a secondary theme that the right path is not always shown by scornfully condemning your beloved's unhealthy acts, as was done by Sushma. This often leads to secrecy on the part of the person. But a silent act (like that of Monty) is enough to convey a deep, resounding message.


THE PACKETS OF CIGARETTES

–Serena Singh

CAMARADERIE OVER CHAI

Right from my teens to my thirties, the Woman's Era has been a steady friend, philosopher and guide. I can state with utmost pride that I haven't missed a single edition of yours! *Oye Women* (by Bindu Saxena, June 2023 edition) was truly a lifesaver. As a mobility-challenged freelance writer who has always worked from home; I find building personal connections challenging! Yet, like all humans, I yearn for company. *Oye Women* served as a step-by-step guide to shedding my inhibitions and attending an all-women tea party organised in our apartment. I listened as my sisters shared anecdotes and experiences, chipped in when I felt the need to remark, sang a little, and cheered for my sisters as they jigged and jived! And yes, did we gals weave stories over hot cups of chai? Another soothing read authored by Saranya Iyer, April 2023 edition.


OYE Women!

–Lasya Shashimohan

THE ART OF NEGOTIATION

Referring to the article, *Improving on your negotiation skills*, by Aditi Maheshwari, June 2023. Negotiation is an art that helps in achieving our desired goal. A negotiator must prepare beforehand for striking a deal with the other party. He or She should keep in mind that the deal is beneficial to both parties. He should exercise patience, be a good listener and allow others to present their points by nodding amicably in between the talks. He should never try to strike a deal to get the personal gains as he will be exposed sooner or later and he will be at a loss since trust is the major key in business dealings. If by chance the deal is not finalised in one meeting a negotiator should never show his feelings of resentment as he is likely to get the deal in the second meeting.


Savoir Faire

Many people have promoted their businesses through the art of negotiation and won others' trust to such an extent that people start trusting them blindly in the business sector. A negotiator who indulges in ethical practice is sharp-minded, insightful and sweet spoken and can be successful in striking any deal.

–Harinder Kaur

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