

eShe

July 2017
Vol 1 Issue 1

— the female gaze —

Alankrita Shrivastava

The director
of the controversial
film *Lipstick Under
My Burkha* ignites the
discussion around
female sexuality



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a storm in the ocean
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Editor: Aekta Kapoor. Printed and
published by Aekta Kapoor on behalf of
the owner Coral Content. Published at
C3/1 GF, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi 110057.
Phone: +91 9818166621.

To buy a copy, WhatsApp 'eShe' to
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WELCOME TO YOUR INNER WORLD

There's a real-life story in our book of the month (p.72) about a woman called Lesley Pyne. At 47, she'd had enough of jobs that compromised her values. At the same time, she had to face the crushing truth that she could never have children. She wanted to become a life coach to help others, but that would mean sharing her own story, and it frightened her.

Then she heard American scholar and author Brené Brown talk about “owning your story and writing a brave new ending for it”. It jolted her. She realised that being childless did not define her, but not being able to have children *did* give her the experience required to help someone else cope with it. That was her purpose in life.

So, while the fear of sharing her story was so immense that she wanted to back out, she couldn't. Because it was her purpose.

For years, I've wanted to start a magazine that inspires women, ignites hope and celebrates our common humanity. Fear always held me back – where would I get the resources for it? – but I also realise my life's experiences have put me in exactly this place at this time for a reason. I can't *not* do it. Because it is my purpose.

I hope *eShe* will inspire you to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Thank you for joining me.



Aekta Kapoor
Founder Editor, *eShe*

AROUND THE WORLD

A spotlight on women in the news and news of interest to women

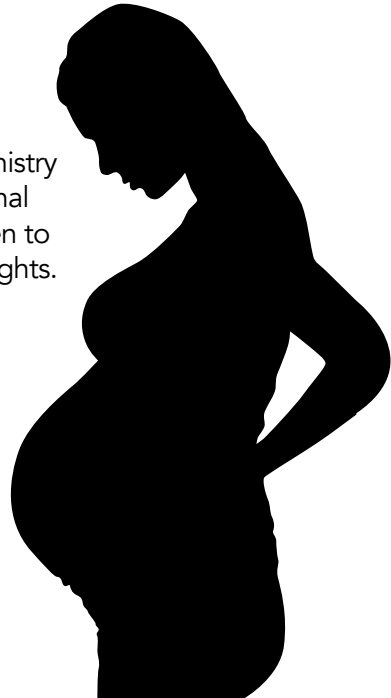
INDIA'S OLDEST CARDIOLOGIST TURNS 100!

Dr Sivaramakrishna Iyer Padmavati, who received the Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan for her pioneering work in cardiology, turned 100 on June 21. Born in Burma in 1917, she trained in UK and the US in the late 1940s and the early '50s and was India's first woman cardiologist. She is credited with not just training several of India's best cardiologists, but she also set up the country's first cardiology clinic, created the first cardiology department in an Indian medical college, and founded India's first heart foundation meant to spread awareness about diseases of the heart. Happy, hearty birthday, doctor!



PREGNANT WITH MEANING

A booklet released by the Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy, part of the Ministry of Ayush, created a storm just ahead of International Day for Yoga (June 21). It advised pregnant women to abstain from non-vegetarian food and lustful thoughts. While international media poked fun at the Indian government's fuddy-duddy rules, Indian doctors voiced their concern at the consequences on maternity health. The ministry later clarified that the tips were taken from traditional yoga wisdom and that certain phrases had been selectively highlighted by the media. It had also advocated abstinence from white flour, fried food, and feelings of anger, hatred and attachment.



THE COMFORT OF FITNESS

While we're on the subject of Yoga Day, Reebok announced a new line of yoga-wear with actress Malaika Arora as brand ambassador. Known for her fitness fetish and workout videos on Instagram, she looks suitably hot in Reebok separates. What got our attention, however, was a 'Fit India' survey done by Reebok, which showed that "56% women opt for comfort while choosing their workout gear." We're now highly intrigued about what the other 44% opted for.



FREE HONEYMOON ALERT

We know you love special offers so we thought we'd share with you the latest scoop from Jordan. In an effort to promote the Western Asian nation as a wedding destination for Indians, Jordan's tourism board is offering a free honeymoon for seven nights for booking a wedding at any destination in Jordan – whether it's one of the luxury resorts around the Dead Sea, or closer to the ancient city of Petra. It appears our *desi* penchant for big fat weddings has won us a deal.



WOMEN'S CRICKET GETS A PRIZE BOOST

The ongoing ICC Women's World Cup comes with a 10-fold increase in the prize fund, up from \$200,000 in 2013 to \$2 million this year. Of course, that's still only a fraction of what men's World Cup got in 2015: \$10 million. Even so, it's heartening to note that ICC has shown an "intent to move towards equality across the game within 15 years". A recent study by BBC Sport found that 83% sports now reward men and women equally, up from 70% in 2014.



WONDERING WOMAN

Hollywood's new feminist icon Wonder Woman has left Indian female audiences puzzled. What is the big deal, we ask?

By Aekta Kapoor

Much has been made in the West about how Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman* has done in one wham-bam what an illustrious lineage of superheroes could not do – ignite a sense of empowerment in little girls and grown women by giving them a strong heroine to look up to. A heroine who does not need a man to be powerful and whole, who can fight better than the men, and look marvellous while at it.

In India, however, cinemagoers like myself found the idea quaint. “The film is entertaining but meaningless,” I said to my teenager after leaving the multiplex, telling her about all the hoopla in the Western media. “It’s all make-believe, so it’s not empowering really. I’m rather more inspired by movies that show regular women doing extraordinary things,” she replied, referencing Aamir Khan-starrer *Dangal* inspired from a real-

life story of two village girls from Haryana growing up to become international wrestling champions. We watched the film twice in the same multiplex, then again on TV.

None of my friends could fathom the greatness of *Wonder Woman* either. It was just another fantasy film, wasn’t it? Gal Gadot looked very pretty, no doubt. But why was a so-called goddess so clueless all the time? How come she didn’t recognise the other god? It was funny how she rejected women’s clothing, but her body-baring outfit was hardly an ode to feminism. Oh, and the boy didn’t have to die.

Later, chancing upon an Ola driver’s picture of Goddess Durga stuck to his car’s dashboard, it finally struck me. The difference in reception lies in the fact that, here in India, we’ve had superheroines for a long time. Far longer. And so many of them. There’s Mahadevi, of course, the original mama

with a 108 different names. She's the ultimate amazon. The all-encompassing power that drives the universe. The legendary *shakti* who permeates every star in the sky and every cell in your body.

We've grown up seeing so many different goddess avatars and superpowers that modern Hollywood heroines can barely hold a feeble LED light to them. Our wonder woman can turn you to dust with her gaze, raise you to the heavens with her palm. She thunders and roars, and turns the blood of men to water. She has eight hands, an all-seeing third eye, and the ability to shower all the world's wealth and knowledge on you – if you're nice. She has no need to live up to any cultural notions of womanhood, no need to wear a shiny vest or short shorts, no need to 'behave like a woman'. Indeed, she needs no man – she is the *baap* of all men.

Oh and can she slay, slay, slay. Real heads with blood and matted hair too. And smile sweetly while riding lions.

Interestingly, our goddess is also human. As Parvati, she throws tantrums for impossible demands. As Kali, she is fierce and violent. She cries, she swears revenge, she laughs hysterically giving everybody goose bumps. She is unpredictable like the weather – sunny one day, stormy the next.



You don't mess with the *devi*.

She's also a love so powerful, so unyielding and constant, that even the gods worship her.

You can move the universe with love like that.

It's no wonder, really, that Indian women were left wondering at Hollywood's new feminist icon. While ordinary Indian women can only dream of the kind of freedoms Western women enjoy, our goddesses throw the ball out of the park. Wonder Woman has a long way to go before she wins our devotion. ■

I WENT **PARAGLIDING** FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE AGE OF **61!**

There's no age limit – or weight or fitness level – to have an adventure of a lifetime. All you need is the will and enthusiasm to defy naysayers!

By Archana Raj Singh

It was on a Shatabdi train to Jalandhar from Delhi that I met Promila for the first time.

She would be my roommate at a spiritual retreat we were both heading to in Bir, Himachal Pradesh. I was a retired college dean with my last posting in Bikaner, she was a businessman's wife from Delhi. I had osteo-

arthritis and was overweight. She was fit, with years of yoga and Pilates behind her. We didn't have much in common except our age, 61, and the fact that we were both grandmothers.

She told me that, even more than the workshop we had signed up for, the main attraction for her was the paragliding that Bir is famous for. She hadn't told her family about it – they would be scandalised – but it was non-negotiable for her.

I marvelled at her resolve. Later, when the paragliding instructor came to our hotel to count the number of participants in our group, I raised my hand. He was skeptical and asked my weight. "Just 92 kilos," I said. He appeared even more doubtful, so I added, "I used to run when I was younger," and demonstrated a wobbly jog. My fellow retreat-members broke into delighted claps and laughter. "You're amazing!" said one. "Your





Archana (left) and Promila bonded at a resort in Bir

enthusiasm is so inspiring!" said another. So I insisted, and finally, the instructor broke into a smile, and said, "You are old in age but young at heart."

Instantly, four more women in their 30s and 40s signed up. "If you can do it, so can we!" they said. Finally, our contingent of 11 aspiring paragliders tumbled into jeeps for the journey up

He asked my weight. "92 kilos," I said. He appeared doubtful so I demonstrated a wobbly jog.

the hill to Billing, where dozens of paragliding operators cater

to thousands of adventure seekers every year, boosted by the Paragliding World Cup held there in 2015.

I have always been adventurous. Born into a family of doctors

and brought up in Rampur, I completed my B.Sc from GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology in Pantnagar,

and at 22, went off all alone on a pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi. After doing my M.Sc from MS University in Baroda, I got my first job at Rajasthan Agricultural University. There, I fell in love with a Rajput from Rajasthan, and married him much to the angst of his family. He was a good man, a strong and supportive partner. We both completed our doctorates while in service, and had two children. We travelled all across middle India for work, and eventually landed up in Bikaner

He had his first heart attack in 2000, and retired from service in 2010. A year later, just before I was promoted to the position of dean of the college of home science, he died. I lived alone until my retirement last year, and then decided to move to Faridabad to live with my son.

Loneliness is a strange beast. It uncovers old wounds and bestows new longings.

It took some courage for me to sign up for this spiritual workshop in Bir with complete strangers. My children encouraged me; they figured it would give me an opportunity to meet new people and find a new purpose in my life.

But paragliding was not really on the agenda.

On the drive up to Billing, the cab driver insisted I was making a mistake, that I should have

considered my age and health. He punctured my confidence somewhat, but Promila and the others cheered me up.

I decided not to let him ruin my day. Even so, as we put on our harnesses at the top of the hill, looking down thousands of feet at the green Kangra valley below, I had a moment of doubt. My guide hitched up the wings, and commanded me to run downhill – “Don’t sit unless I tell you,” he

The cabbie insisted I was making a mistake, that I should have considered my age and health. He punctured my confidence.

shouted above the strong mountain wind. Other guides held my gear tightly – I was a high-risk client for them because of my weight and arthritic limp. My heart wavered; I ran a few steps and sat back before the instruction came.

We all fell.

“It’s okay, it’s okay!” my guide called from behind me. They lifted me up and walked me a little further downhill. I asked him his name. “Vasudev,” he replied. Lord Krishna. I let out a sigh of

surrender. “If Vasudev is with me, I need nothing else,” I told him, and steeled myself. I would fly today, even if I died trying.

We took off the second time without a hitch.

It was dusk. The air was cold, and the wind in my face was exhilarating. My stomach lurched as we swerved close over pines

down the slopes, the Buddhist monasteries of Bir sitting sagely thousands of feet below us. We flew for over 20 minutes, landing into the orange sun amidst the cheers of my teammates.

I told my children about it. My grandson showed my paragliding pictures to his friends. “That’s my *nani*,” he said, proudly. ■



Archana and her guide Vasudev flying thousands of feet above Bir-Billing in Kangra Valley

THE GENDER OF DANCE

Odissi danseuse and Padma Shri awardee Aruna Mohanty is out to challenge gender stereotypes with her dance

By Anita Panda Mishra

Why are male dancers called gurus and female performers called merely dancers? A guru has no gender. In the performing arts, gender does not exist, affirms Aruna Mohanty, one of the finest Odissi dancers on the Indian stage. Known for her phenomenal talent and personal charisma, she is a rebel in poetic disguise, whose unconventional dance and choreography is an attempt at shattering stereotypes. “On the stage, your gender is neutral. We are the *sutradhars* – narrators of a story. I sometimes play Radha, sometimes Shiva, or Shikhandi, who was neither male nor female,” says the award-winning vice president of the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi, who was awarded the Padma Shri this year.

Watching Aruna speak is a lesson in grace and humility. She considers dance to be the essence



Padma Shri Aruna Mohanty

of her soul, and, while giving a speech during Nari Chetna 2015, admitted that she is more eloquent with her hand or eye movements rather than the words she speaks. Even while being careful to preserve the basic structure and aesthetics of the ancient art form of Odissi, the international dance mentor uses her intimate knowledge of *bhava*, *bhangi*, *taala*

and *abhinaya* to create innovative performances that provoke and inspire global audiences with their contemporary cultural sensibilities.

“The stage is a temple for us as performers, and as a dancer I celebrate life through my performance,” says Aruna, who was a student of the legendary Guru Gangadhar Pradhan and started training at the age of 10.

The “thinking danseuse” says that a *nari*, or woman, has eight *vashisthas* or forms. “She can shed tears through her eyes, smile through her lips and if required, stand up like Goddess Durga or Shakti with her eight limbs. She has the power and confidence to be a multi-tasker,” explains Aruna, opining that a woman is quite capable of excelling in all her roles both inside and outside the home. “Every woman has her own dreams, desires and talents. If she has the power to generate another universe and new life within her, she can also achieve everything else. It is unfair to force her into certain roles and expect her to ‘tolerate’ her limited freedoms,” she adds, her spirit fiery but her tone moderated after years of rigorous training in the arts. Her unlined face and bright eyes defy her 57 years, and her hands move about in unconscious mudras as she speaks, “I tell my mother-in-law that dancing for me is not a profession but my passion. It is the oxygen for

me to live. Every woman must be allowed to pursue that passion.”

As someone who has defied the conventional portrayal of women on the dance stage, Aruna says she choreographs her dances from “a performer’s point of view, not just from a woman’s perspective.” For instance, in her portrayal of Sita’s *agni pariksha* (test of fire), her character tells Lord Rama, “It is

**“EVERY WOMAN HAS
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not my fault that I was kidnapped by Ravana. This test of my character is a deep humiliation for me! I strongly protest and would rather go back to Mother Earth. I am a woman with the right to live life on my terms and conditions. Not with anyone’s permission.”

It is a potent and powerful message in a misogynistic society that, even now, blames the victim in cases of gender violence and domestic abuse. A rare gift, indeed: Aruna Mohanty’s dance speaks a thousand words. ■

Scuba Does It

00RJA GONEPAVARAM, 17, PUNE



My south Indian dad and north Indian mom met while in college. Dad was an officer in the Indian Navy, but that has nothing to do with my love of the sea. We lived till 2006 in Delhi and then moved to Pune. Till last year, my brother and I studied at Pune's Orchid School. I had a very high score in my 10th boards and was brainwashed into thinking science would be best for me. But by the end of class 11, I realised it was a terrible idea. I wasn't allowed to change my subjects, so I left school and joined the Drivechange Learning and Resource Centre, where I now study business studies, history, thinking skills, psychology and English. This suits me much better since I know exactly what I am going to do next: scuba dive.

I got my junior license in 2013, and am now an advanced open-water scuba-diving license holder. I had to crack the advanced theory and dive tests in 2015 in Phuket, Thailand. After completing my 12th, I plan to graduate in business studies with a scholarship to a foreign university and then join my mother's travel company and start a scuba-diving holidays vertical along with her. It's sorted.



Rescued by a Lifeboat

and Other Lessons in Handling Stress

It sometimes takes an extreme event to teach you about your own capacity to handle stress, understand it, and survive it

By Kay Newton

A young woman is sitting holding onto a VHF radio; she is wearing a life jacket. Around her waist is a piece of rope which, if followed, leads to two men on the bridge who both look terrified. The motorboat has no engines and is slowly being pushed towards the east coast of Britain. If it doesn't capsize before it reaches the rocks, it will be smashed to pieces. The woman is talking into the radio, slowly counting backwards from 10 in order that the lifeboat crew

can locate the vessel. Despite being thrown around the cabin as the waves get bigger and stronger, she still carries on in the same methodical manner. She has been doing this for four hours...

That was me 30 years ago, sitting in the main salon of a 20m private yacht, furiously bobbing up and down on the ocean. The storm was a force 8 on the Beaufort scale at the time. I remember looking down at the rope and thinking, if we capsize, this is going to do me a s**t lot of good!

Well, I wouldn't be writing this if we had.

Recently, life has thrown lots of stressful situations my way: downsizing, moving from our 30-year luxury lifestyle in Spain to a small two-roomed tin-roofed house near a pristine beach in Zanzibar. (The beach part, actually, wasn't too hard!) I have dealt with nautical emergencies, running businesses, bringing up a family, looking after parents remotely, hormonal hell (andropause, menopause and adolescence all at once!), empty-nest syndrome, my husband's bouts of depression, and becoming an orphan.

How do I deal with stress and stay reasonably calm despite what life throws at me? One of the things is my stress philosophy. We have been told a lie about stress. Yes, stress can kill, yet you do not have to take a pill or potion to calm stress. Your response to stress is part of you; it's inbuilt and serves a purpose. You only need to learn how to harness it. Write down what stresses you, how you respond, and what's good about it. Then share it with someone else.

There are different types of stress and if you listen to your body, you can use them to your advantage. You often cannot take yourself

Kay Newton was born British but spent most of her life in Spain. She now lives by the beach in Zanzibar



away from the circumstances you find yourself in (I certainly wouldn't have tried to swim against those huge waves), yet you can choose how to tap into your natural stress-coping mechanisms.

Avoiding stress allows it to come back and bite you even harder in the bum! It will make you ill. Instead, deal with stress head on. You can learn from experience and hardwire yourself to cope with even further stressful situations.

Think of the learning a pilot has to go through to hardwire herself for all the stress she may encounter whilst flying a commercial aircraft. Dealing with stress is no different; it takes time and practice. The more you face stress successfully, the more immune you become.

Knowing thyself is important when dealing with stress. At 16, I was given a list of my 'core values' whilst attending an Outward Bound course. I still refer to them; I use them to manipulate stress to my advantage. For example, I hate exams, I get extremely nervous, yet I know that this 'stress' serves a higher purpose. One of my highest values is knowledge, so exam stress is worth it.

Stress can also be conquered by using the care-giving side of you. It strengthens your social relationships, helps you become more resilient, find hope, and meaning. It allows for growth and

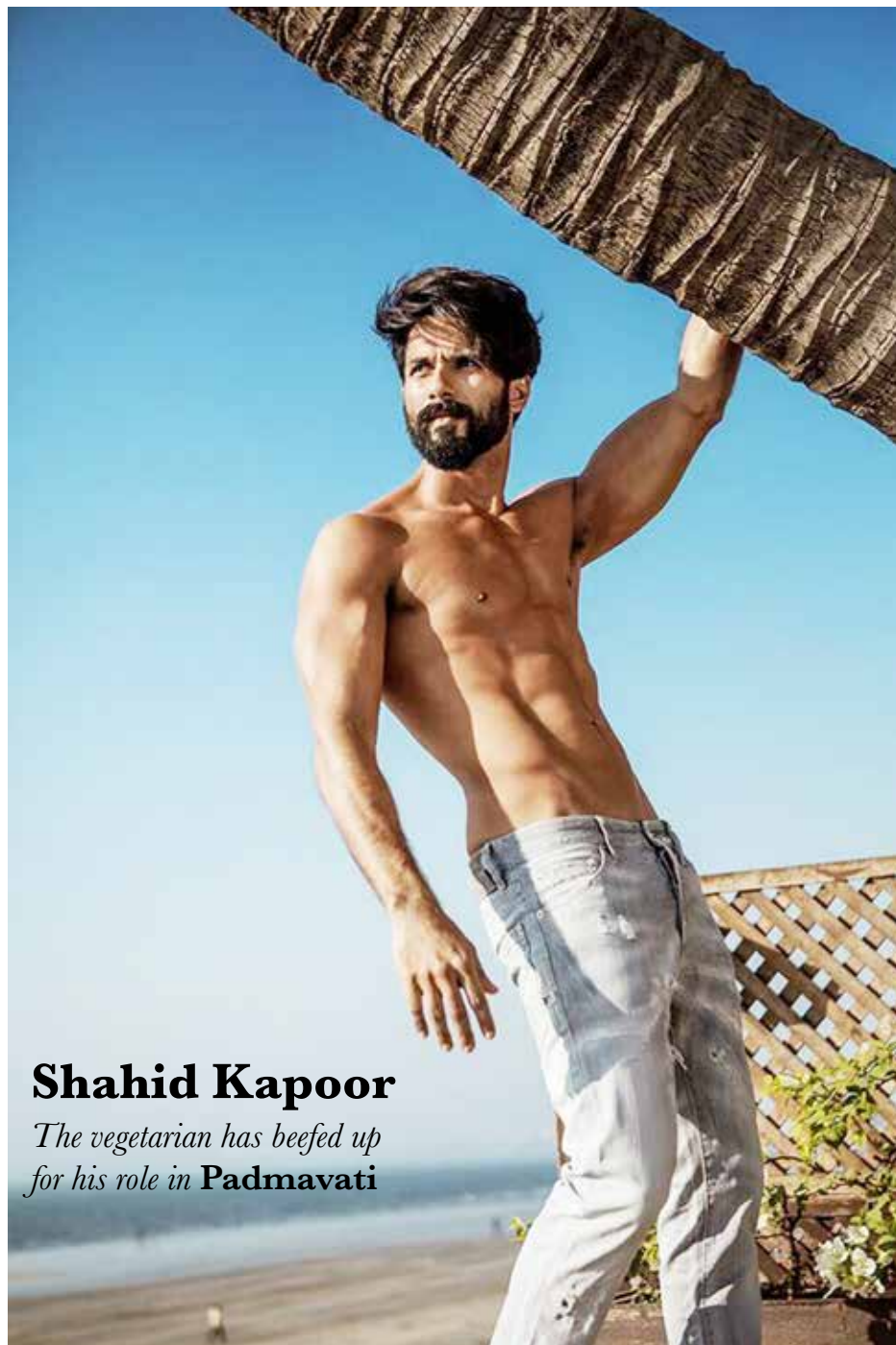
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strength. When dealing with my father's cancer, the local doctor said I was an inspiration: "Not many people in today's Western world drop everything to help a dying parent," she said. Yet family is a high value for me; it was the least I could do.

Conquering stress requires you to have an open mind. Stress is a great time to learn another point of view. It also increases your physical resilience, enhances your focus, deepens your relationships and strengthens your personal values. Stress challenges you to find your meaning in life. A happy life will not be stress-free.

I got a commendation from Lowestoft Lifeboat for staying calm under stressful situations. Face your stress head on, and you can have that commendation too. ■

If you need help dealing with stress and/or anxiety, you can find the author at www.Kay-Newton.com.



Shahid Kapoor

*The vegetarian has beefed up
for his role in **Padmavati***



Thrice voted ‘hottest vegetarian’ in India, Shahid Kapoor has hired Canadian chef Kelvin Cheung to help him achieve a ‘warrior-like’ lean, ripped body in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s upcoming Bollywood flick, *Padmavati*. Shahid’s daily diet will now eat three meals and two snack packs – all vegetarian, of course. The diet involves a lot of greens, high protein grains and legumes, and healthy carbohydrates. According to Kelvin, it will give Shahid “an energy boost to survive the long working hours of his arduous schedule, and efficiently give him stronger muscle mass while maintaining the aesthetics of

his look”. Very important, that.

The 36-year-old star’s diet also comprises a lot of Asian style of cooking, given that he is completely off salt. The spices used in Asian cuisine give the meal a certain flavour despite the absence of salt. His treats are usually small, sweet nuggets made of coconut milk as he doesn’t consume any artificial sugar. A bowl of cut mangoes is a summer indulgence.

“Fitness has always been a part of who I am,” says Shahid, who is father of a baby daughter. “Even though it can be tougher for me as a vegetarian, it’s completely worth it at the end of the day.” Seeing these pictures, we think so too. ■

LET'S TALK ABOUT **SEX**



*Alankrita Shrivastava's award-winning new film **Lipstick Under My Burkha** created a storm of controversy when the censor board blocked its release, deeming the subject of female sexuality unfit for public consumption. But the feisty filmmaker wasn't going down without a fight*
By Aekta Kapoor



The film has a stellar star cast including Konkona Sensharma, who plays an unhappy housewife

As an 11-year-old in Welham Girls' School in Dehradun, Alankrita Shrivastava attended a screening of an audio-visual made by her seniors for the school's annual-day function. It was held after dark in an open space on the campus. The students watched in silence as the images unfolded on screen, the soft cool breeze of Uttarkhand's foothills casting a magical spell in the darkness. "It was beautiful," says Alankrita

more than two decades later. "I had goose bumps seeing that amateur AV for the first time. That's all I wanted to do in my senior year – make a film."

In fact, she made many films, the most recent of which managed to get under the skin of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). Directed by Alankrita, *Lipstick Under My Burkha* won 10 awards at film festivals around the world from November 2016 till June 2017 – including the



Ratna Pathak Shah is one of the four protagonists in the film, which is set in a small town in India

Oxfam Award for the Best Film on Gender Equality at the Mumbai Film Festival, the Spirit of Asia prize at the Tokyo International Film Festival, the Best Film at Glasgow Film Festival, and the Grand Jury prize at Films de Femme, Creteil, France.

But its Indian release was struck down by the censorship body earlier this year.

With a stellar cast including Konkona Sensharma, Ratna Pathak Shah, Aahana Kumra, Plabita Borthakur, Sushant Singh, Vikrant Massey and Shashank Arora, the film revolves around four women from small-town India on a quest to express their desires and dreams within the confines of their

restrained lives. The censor board, while refusing to certify the film, said, “The story is lady oriented, their fantasy above life. There are continuous sexual scenes, abusive words, audio pornography and a bit sensitive touch about one particular section of society, hence film refused (*sic*).”

But Alankrita, who did her Bachelor’s in journalism from Lady Shri Ram College and Master’s in mass communication from Jamia Millia University in Delhi, was not one to take it lying down. “There is no nudity in the film. To use the word ‘pornography’ is just ridiculous. There are hundreds of other films that pander to the male gaze –

in fact, many mainstream films blatantly sexualise and objectify women – but those films are cleared for release while a film that presents the female point of view is not,” argues the 37-year-old.

She adds that the censor board’s decision stems from its discomfort with the film’s portrayal of women whose needs are not fulfilled in conventional relationships and who take control of their sexuality through small acts of courage. “That threatens the patriarchal order of society,” maintains Alankrita, who, along with the film’s producer Prakash Jha, appealed to the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) to overturn the CBFC ruling.

Alankrita is no stranger to

challenges. Having spent her formative years reading about literary heroines at her progressive all-girls boarding school, Alankrita entered college with a sense of empowerment. But personal troubles pushed her to look for a deeper meaning in life. Alankrita’s mother battled cancer twice while Alankrita was studying. Her father too suffered severe illnesses when young. Alankrita says she had to grow up very quickly, in order to be the pillar of support for her parents and her younger siblings, especially her brother who is 18 years younger than her. Right from the first film she made, it was clear that she was deeply drawn to the stories of women finding strength and courage and happiness. “In



The film portrays women who take control of their sexuality through small acts of courage

fact, my diploma film was based on my mother's battle against cancer," she says.

Encouraged by her mother to pursue her dreams, Alankrita moved to Mumbai as she was finishing her Master's. Both her parents were recovering by then, and she found she was able to shift base. She began working as a trainee assistant director on Prakash Jha's *GangaaJal* earning barely Rs 5,000 per month and living in a redeveloped slum. But she grew steadily

in her career, moving from assistant director to chief assistant director on *Apaharan* (2005) as executive producer on *Khoya Khoya Chand* and *Dil Dosti Etc*

(both 2007), and then as associate director for *Raajneeti* (2010). She wrote and directed a short film featuring Tisca Chopra about a woman in an abusive marriage.

As a single girl in Mumbai trying to make a life for herself, her experiences were echoed in her first feature film *Turning 30!!!* Released in 2011 starring Gul Panag and Purab Kohli, it was set in an urban milieu that Alankrita herself identified with: an upper middle-class, English-speaking

single woman dealing with relationships and social and career issues around the time she turns 30.

Even after a decade of work in the industry, Alankrita found the lack of female voices disconcerting. "Our film industry has a very narrow view of gender dynamics, politics of representation, the context of the gaze, alternative narratives," she says, adding that it is vital for a society to allow the female perspective and have more women making films. "I feel like I

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THE BACK FOOT IN TERMS
OF NOT FITTING INTO
MAINSTREAM CINEMA"**

am always on the back foot in terms of not filling into the paradigm of mainstream cinema. There is a need to be defensive about the films I make."

In 2012, Alankrita wrote the first draft of

Lipstick Under My Burkha. She then applied for and was selected for a screenwriter's lab at the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC), and was able to hone the script there. "The screenwriter's lab was a turning point for me. It enabled me and helped me figure out my voice, and I had a fantastic mentor in Urmi Juvekar," she says. "My previous films and my new scripts all have a consciously female gaze. They are about women finding



The story of women trying to defy social constraints was too inflammatory for the censor board

courage, happiness and freedom in the depths of their lives,” she adds.

By the time she finished making the film, however, tragedy struck. After battling illnesses for three years, Alankrita’s father passed away in March 2016, when he was 61.

Alankrita says it was a very difficult period for her, but she just carried on with her life and work as best as she could. Her father’s memory alive and raw, she travelled with the film to festivals around the world – Tokyo, Stockholm, Miami, Paris, Glasgow, Tallinn, London, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, New York, Cairo, Dallas, Washington, Athens, Hawaii, Seoul, Shanghai, Geneva, Spain.

In December 2016, she applied to the CBFC to certify her film for public exhibition in India. “But the story of four ordinary women trying to steal a little freedom from the claustrophobia of their lives was deemed unfit for public exhibition,” she says about CBFC’s February ruling, which triggered a public outcry with hundreds of women and women’s organisations taking to social media to voice their indignation. #LipstickUnderMyBurkha was the most trending hashtag in India for several weeks.

In April 2017, based on Alankrita’s appeal, FCAT directed the censor board to grant an ‘A’

certificate to the film and clear it for release, with a few 'voluntary' cuts of certain Hindi words and scenes. "The Examining and Revising Committee of the CBFC have misdirected themselves in denying certification on the ground that the story of the film is women-oriented. There cannot be any embargo on a women-

film. "Rarely do we have credible entertainers that stimulate the mind and are peppered with spunk and humour," the media baroness told *The Indian Express* about Alankrita's film, adding, "*Lipstick Under My Burkha* signifies a rebellion of the mind. I believe that this is story that needs to be told and wanted to put all the muscle



oriented film or one containing sexual fantasies and expression of the inner desires of women," observed the Tribunal in its order. However the certification for the film finally came through only on June 3. The film is now slated for a July 21 release with Ekta Kapoor's Alt Entertainment as presenter and pan-India distributor for the

behind a film like this."

Alankrita's life experiences have led her to this point, believes Alankrita, to be able to fearlessly challenge gender stereotypes in popular culture, and to speak up for the right of women to express themselves. "I think obstacles in life have to make us stronger, they have to make us grow," she sums up. ■

Flying Mama

NK MRIDULA, 68, KANNUR, DELHI, HONG KONG, UK



Born in a family of doctors in Kerala, I got my Master's in zoology in the early 1970s. My eldest sister, who was active in politics, arranged my marriage with a young Parliamentarian, one of Kerala's most promising leaders of the time. He made a loving husband. We had twins in 1973, and then our third child in 1975, just days after Emergency was announced in India.

Those were dark times for Opposition leaders – and their families. When Emergency was lifted, my husband was elected to Kerala's legislative assembly by a large margin and got back to work. One day, he came home after giving a speech, spoke to me about his day, and then had a sudden cardiac arrest. He died within seconds even as I watched.

At 29 with three small children, I worked as a professor, and two decades later, was selected to the Kerala Public Service Commission. I retired after serving a full term.

In the meantime, my children moved to different parts of the globe – New Delhi, Doha, Sussex and Hong Kong. I now visit them in turns, a few months at a time, with stopovers in Kannur to check on the mail. It's been an eventful journey. ■



POLITICS OF TALAQ

Divorce in Islam is at the centre of a heated tug-of-war between political parties and religious bodies. Is anyone listening to the Muslim woman?

By Zain Anwar

The practice of triple talaq – in which a husband can divorce his wife by uttering “talaq” thrice – is back in the news, causing turbulent debates on prime-time television in India. But it is plain for everyone, Muslims or otherwise, to see the political opportunism on all sides disguised as women’s empowerment. First ignited in the late 1980s by Rajiv Gandhi whose government intervened in the Supreme Court’s decision on the Shah Bano case, the topic of triple

talaq was picked up by the poster boys of Hindutva politics, led by BJP, who gained political mileage by blaming the Congress party of minority appeasement.

Ever since, the debate over triple talaq has been low-lying fruit for the BJP. Most recently, it came up before the elections in Uttar Pradesh. Though the practice is banned across several Islamic theocracies in the world, India’s Muslim Personal Law Board came out in defence of it. The counter argument was led by the Narendra

Modi-led BJP government, who also garnered support from several liberal and feminist organisations.

In the midst of these vehement views, the most ignored voice is the one that the debate aims to empower: that of Muslim women.

Systematically denied a space in religion, women grow up internalising a patriarchal interpretation of Islam, which they are forbidden to question. They do not even dare ask whether the practice of oral talaq was actually a part of Quranic traditions.

“My husband divorced me through a letter. I had two sons to bring up. My elders tried to mediate but my husband wouldn’t take me back. So I lived with my brother for a while, and then remarried for the sake of my children,” says a Lucknow resident requesting anonymity, adding, “It is too big a system for us to challenge. We do as the elders say.”

Ambreen Fatma, a student from Agra, has her own theory on why Muslim women defend the practice of triple talaq despite suffering for it. “The movement has been started by a political party we suspect of damaging our cultural values. We have been constantly fed that our identity is under threat, and this appeared like yet another instance.”

Her sister, Arsheen, has the opposite viewpoint. With fury, she says, “Women can no longer give

any excuse for their ignorance. They have access to radio, television and internet. If nothing, they have their own intellect to rely on. Should we not stand against what we feel is unjust?”

Sumbal, an Indian based in Melbourne, offers another perspective. “We do need changes, but we don’t need them forced down our throat. Genuine change has to come from within. If the debate was started by a Muslim woman, I would have lent my

“SINCE THE 1980s, THE DEBATE OVER TRIPLE TALAQ HAS BEEN LOW-LYING FRUIT FOR THE BJP. MOST RECENTLY, IT CAME UP BEFORE THE ELECTIONS IN UTTAR PRADESH.”

voice to it. Why should I support somebody’s political strategy?”

Indian Muslims are not a monolith body. Divided by culture and education, Muslim women present a vivid thought-spectrum. They are not afraid of change; it is only the game-changers they suspect. Indian history is filled with examples of common people who took it upon themselves to start a revolution. But Muslim women are still searching for a revolutionary they can call their own. ■



Shreya takes care of every little detail for her clients

PARTY PRINCESS

A bride-to-be's response to a successful mehendi party triggered off a new career for Shreya Mohan, and led to the creation of Mor Punk

Two years ago, Shreya Mohan arranged a birthday bash for herself with a guest list of about 50. The Delhi-based marketing professional began planning for the pool party months in advance – personally stitching the initials of each guest on towels she had bought as party favours. The same year, she hosted a Diwali party with a village theme. So each table had steel tiffins laden with *chana chor garam*, and her 80 guests sat on charpoys in little huts having *matka kufi* and *desi hookahs*.

Her imaginary village was called Mohanva Gaon, and the most imaginatively dressed 'villagers' were given prizes.

An alumna of London School of Economics (LSE), Shreya was soon beset by requests from friends and family to organise parties. Having worked several years in corporate jobs, she realised it was time to do something new, something of her own. And so her party and events firm Mor Punk was born.

Born and brought up in Delhi to a businessman father

and homemaker mom, Shreya completed her schooling from Convent of Jesus and Mary but had not expected to do very well in her 12th boards. “Surprisingly, I scored very well, and managed to get into St Stephens for a degree in mathematics,” laughs the vivacious 30-year-old. After interning a year at Pepsico, she headed to London for the “best two years” of her life.

Armed with a Master’s in management from LSE, Shreya worked in various roles across industries, starting with luxury label Chanel in Mumbai and moving on to e-commerce fashion brands based out of Delhi. She even started her own app, which was meant to serve as a directory and review platform for online shopping portals, but after a year gave it up since several online

fashion stores had begun shutting down. The lessons she learnt in her career journey helped hone her people management and organisation skills.

“I’m inspired by the good things in life. I am extravagant and love to party,” says Shreya of her attraction to event planning and hosting. “I love having more and more work to do; sitting still just doesn’t suit me.” Confident and driven, she also loves the challenge of doing something new with each event – “Everyone asks for a unique theme, and I personally too hate repeating something that has already been done. Challenges inspire me.”

Shreya’s very first client was her younger sister’s best friend. Not satisfied with the way her *mehendi*-party preparations were going, the young woman turned to Shreya for help. “I was surprised to realise that I had just as much passion and interest in organising her event as my own,” recalls Shreya, who organised an ‘Alice in Wonderland’ theme for the *mehendi* function, a few days before the client’s wedding. Shreya took care of every little detail, from the furniture to the décor and table settings, and added party games for the guests, who were mostly young adults and had plenty of energy to expend.

Later, the bride-to-be walked up to Shreya and said, “You’re the best decision I ever made.” For Shreya, it was just the beginning. ■



FROM LOSS TO LOVE

Singapore-based journalist Swapna Mitter took a brave decision after the death of her husband...

By Anita Panda Mishra

Swapna Mitter quotes John Lennon's iconic lines to describe her journey: *Life is what happens to you when you are busy making other plans*. Momentous events happened 'in the blink of an eye', as she puts it, throwing her into uncharted waters, forcing her to change, take risks, lose a partner, and find a new purpose to live again. "The show must go on," she says, stoically.

Born and raised in Kolkata, Swapna's secure, happy childhood could not buffet the shocks life would throw her way later. The pampered only child of a homemaker-mother and a father who was a High Court judge, she imbibed from her parents the principles of honesty, fairness and compassion. At 15, however, she was forced to mature overnight when she lost her mother to an illness. The vivacious teenager

was at a crossroad after finishing college, and the need to become independent led her to journalism.

After an arranged marriage with IIT-IIM post-graduate Mayukh, she shifted base to Mumbai, a move that opened up an entirely new world to her. The exposure to metropolitan corporate life, global travelling and meeting new people through her jobs in national newspapers enhanced the young woman's confidence. The couple then moved to Singapore after Mayukh got a job there; to the USA for five years; and back to Singapore again. On returning, Swapna worked with a Singapore women's magazine, and then freelanced as a journalist, writing for Singapore's top publications on a variety of subjects. Currently, she co-runs a company that caters to the writing and editing needs of various clients.



Raised in Kolkata, Swapna's happy childhood could not buffet the shocks life would throw her way later

From her modest middle-class Kolkata upbringing to cruising American highways and shopping at Orchard Road in Singapore, life with Mayukh was exciting and stimulating. They travelled to exotic destinations on holidays, attended concerts and sporting events, and went out for fancy dinners and movies.

But Swapna's cosy world came crashing down in 2011. Mayukh suddenly developed deep vein thrombosis and passed away. He was just 45. Shattered, Swapna battled grief, anger and numbness, read books and went on a spiritual quest to fathom the meaning of

life and death. Support from her friends and family in Singapore and India helped her come to terms with her loss, though bitter court battles kindled by his death showed her the worst extremes of human behaviour. The blissful memories from her time spent with Mayukh gave her solace every time she despaired. "I did not want to become a recluse," says Swapna. Surrounding herself with caring people helped her survive that turbulent phase and emerge stronger from it.

She immersed herself in her writing and reporting, but an old desire resurfaced as Swapna

entered her late 40s: motherhood. Influenced by reports of girls being abandoned and trafficked in India and around the world, she decided to adopt a girl child. The rules for adoption in Singapore are simpler than in India, and she introspected over the “right reasons” before going ahead. “I was not looking for a replacement for a companion in my life. Instead, I felt enabled

**“I WAS NOT LOOKING
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OFFER A GOOD LIFE
AND ALL MY LOVE TO
A CHILD.”**

to offer a good life and all my love to a child,” she explains. In 2015, an adorable three-month-old baby girl ushered in a joyful new phase in her life.

Does she wonder whether her little girl will ask her one day about the absence of a father? “Of course,” says Swapna pragmatically. “One of the things we were told at the adoption briefings is to be honest with our children. There will be times when she may miss

a father figure but I am confident of making her believe that she can thrive and be whoever she aspires to be irrespective of that.” Swapna feels fortunate for the presence of support groups to ease the adjustment and to help cope with the challenges of adoption. “My aim is to inculcate in my child the values taught by my own parents,” says the 50-year-old.

She believes one must dwell on the positives even though it is hard at times. Experience has taught her that while grief never goes away, one learns to live with it. On a more practical level, women must plan for their future and finances, and execute a proper Will to “ensure your kids know who to turn to if something were to happen to you.”

Swapna’s story is one of admirable strength and determination. “If someone had told me this is how my life was going to be when I was young, I would’ve probably fainted. But here I am.” The single mother alludes to Shakespeare as she concludes on a philosophical note: “All the world’s a play. It’s just my role to play and how I enact it is up to me.”

Right now she is happy playing loving mom and keeping her husband’s memories alive through an annual quiz in his name that has created a buzz in Singapore. ■

AARIV'S First Haircut

Taking an autistic child for his first haircut promises to be an unexpected experience. A mother shares her experience and learning

By Pallavi Shankar



Parents with small children know how herculean a task it is to take your little boy or girl to the salon for a haircut. The situation is trickier when the child in question has autism, and when you are a single mother with no companion around to lend a helping hand (or ear). My first such attempt with my six-year-old son Aariv ended in

a disaster so much so that I didn't have the guts to try it for another couple of years. I am hoping the hairdresser is not scarred for life. I had to tell him that it's not his fault, nor Aariv's, nor mine.

There is very little awareness in India about ASD (autism spectrum disorder) – a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties in social interaction and communication and repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour. So people in stores, salons and other public places usually have little or no idea about how to react to kids on the spectrum.

I don't blame them as popular mass media hardly focuses on these problems unlike in the first world – yes, I will say so even if it is not the most politically correct thing to say; the facilities there are way better and people more aware. National TV and newspapers in the West do quite a bit to create awareness for health conditions that are not typically mainstream.

Coming back to the topic of

haircuts, it's a tough job because spectrum kids have many sensory issues that magnify pain in their mind. They are not playacting. It's real – the pokey hair that falls on the nape of our neck and mildly irritates us affects them 10 times more and this usually leads to meltdowns. Plus, autistic kids are skeptical and sensitive about anything they don't clearly understand.

Things get better as the child grows up but there are no shortcuts and preparation is the only way out. There are three things needed to make haircut easier for these kids – planning, planning and planning. I tried the following tips to make my son Aariv's first (real) haircut as hassle-free as possible and tasted success. Mission impossible is possible!

1. Brush up: Occupation therapists (OT) will tell you how brushing your child's hair with a special sensory brush (you can order online) helps in de-sensitising the crown of the child. Check with the OT therapist on how to get the process right and do that every day for five minutes.

2. Show haircut videos: Play YouTube videos of fun haircuts a week in advance before the haircut appointment day. Do this every single day to prepare your child mentally for the 'big snip'.

3. Choose a friendly salon:

Make sure you choose a friendly hairdresser for the job. Meet him or her and explain all the details about your child's condition and his challenges. An impatient person will find it hard to manage a hyperactive and scared child. Also, the salon staff should be kept in the loop so that they are able to inform other clients who may not like it if a child screams and cries.

4. Take along a favourite

toy: It is always a good idea to carry your child's favourite toy (car or gadget or a soft toy) to the salon because that may help in distracting him from the process of the haircut.



Spectrum kids have sensory issues that magnify pain in their mind. They are not playacting



Pallavi had to research and work out different ways to deal with her son's day-to-day issues

5. Make him/her sit in your lap and guard the eyes:

To make the child feel comfortable, make him sit in your lap while the hairdresser chops off his unruly locks (they usually are so because hurried haircuts done by mom at home are far from neat). Put your arms around him and hold his head tight to make the job easier – this way you can also guard his face and eyes if he moves or jumps without any warning. And carry a fresh pair of clothes for him to change into after the haircut is completed because prickly bits of hair can aggravate your child's sensory problems.

6. End the haircut with a reward:

Once it's all done, pat your kiddo's back and gift him his favourite food – ice cream, chocolate, burger, a toy, or even a visit to a particular shop or park – anything he is really fond of. Say you are proud that he was patient – a “well done” compliment along with a hug and kiss goes a long way in assuring the child that he will be appreciated in both tangible and non-tangible ways if he cooperates now and in the future. All the best! ■

Read more about Pallavi and Aariv's journey on her blog autismadapted.wordpress.com.



Swimming Lessons and **SEEING MORE**

People make instant assumptions about others within seconds of meeting them. But what we do next can change our lives and those of others

By Annemarie Shrouder

When we meet someone, we make some assumptions and decisions about who we think they are. It is automatic – some of it conscious and some unconscious. What we do with

those first seconds can shape our responses, our words, our treatment of them, and ultimately our connection (or lack thereof). They can also shape outcomes and possibilities. I learned this as an athlete, and it changed my life.

I was an athlete in high school. Despite my height of six feet, it wasn't basketball or volleyball I excelled at, it was track and field. I was a 100m sprinter, a hurdler, and a high jumper. In my final year, my school in Toronto started a swim team, which I joined and enjoyed. Being an athlete was an important part of my identity.

When I moved on to University of Toronto, I discovered to my dismay that there was no track team. My only option was to swim.

I showed up for tryouts in a pink and black leopard print bathing suit with a scooped back. All the other girls were wearing swimsuits: criss-cross backed blue or black Speedos. Not me. In addition, I was the only non-white person on the deck – so not only was my bathing suit a beacon for my inexperience, my skin colour attracted attention as well. Contrary to track and field, in a North American context, swimming was (and continues to be) a very white sport. I did not know this. All eyes turned and conversations stopped momentarily as I walked out of the change-room. I had a moment's pause, and tried to make myself as small as I could – not easy when you're six feet tall. I was thankful when it was time to get into the pool.

But things got worse. I didn't know the rules of swimming etiquette, I couldn't execute a proper flip turn, and I was slow.

By the end of the tryout, I had moved from the fast lane (where my track experience suggested I should be) to the slow lane, made a lot of swimmers angry, and was still trying to catch my breath at the edge of the pool. I was embarrassed and I wanted to disappear.

That could have been the end of my swimming career, but it wasn't. I bought myself a swimsuit and went back for tryout part II.

I could feel the stares and the questions when I showed up the

"I WAS THE ONLY NON-WHITE PERSON ON THE DECK – NOT ONLY WAS MY BATHING SUIT A BEACON FOR MY INEXPERIENCE, MY SKIN COLOUR ATTRACTED ATTENTION AS WELL"

next day. But I did my stretching, put on my cap and goggles, and got into the pool. Sadly, but predictably, it was just as bad as the day before; I was still slow, still in the way, and still not a 'real' swimmer. But at the end of the tryout, something magical happened: the head coach, Alan Fairweather, took me aside and told me that although he couldn't put me on the competitive team, if I was serious about swimming, he could put me on the B team; I



could come to morning practices which were much less crowded, and he would work with me.

I took him up on his offer.

Four years later my 50-freestyle time qualified me to swim in the Canadian Inter-University Athletic Union competition – where my swim landed me in the top 10!

Although I didn't continue with swimming, 13 years later (in 1996) I decided to train for the first international OUTgames in Montreal. When I qualified, I returned to the University pool for a check-in with my former coach, who helped me correct a few key things in my stroke mechanics. I competed in many events at the OUTgames, winning gold medals in six, including two relays.

My takeaway from that experience was profound. My coach saw everything the swimmers did at those tryouts, but he also saw my potential. And his ability to see more meant that I was given the opportunity to not only learn something new, but excel at it – and contribute.

That experience changed my life, and taught me a very important lesson about what we think we see and know about each other, how that can get in the way, the consequences of it, and how important it is to see more. It has shaped how I live, and how I do my work.

In every blog post I write, workshop I facilitate, speech I deliver, or consulting project I lead, my passion is to challenge people to see more – more of themselves, each other, and situations. So that we can be open to opportunity, possibility and people's brilliance, so that we can create spaces where people can thrive.

Seeing more is like a muscle – if we practise, it gets stronger.

If this is of interest to you, please sign up for my weekly Inclusion Insight on my homepage: www.annemarieshrouder.com. Once you sign up, it will arrive directly in your inbox, give you something to think about in a different way, and a challenge for the week so you can practise seeing more. ■



JEWELLERY

Across Borders

Silver jewellery designer Puja Bhargava Kamath talks about the differences in doing business in the US versus India

It all started when Fabindia came out with a jewellery range in 2009-10. They knew me as someone who had worked in the jewellery and craft sector, and wanted me to design a collection for their silver jewellery line – mere sketches would not do; they needed me to make the

final product for them. That's how I got into jewellery production. And now, next month, I will be presenting for the first time at one of the world's largest trade shows in New York, as part of a small group of artisanal designers specially handpicked for the event from around the world.



Puja Bhargava Kamath

It wasn't the plan, of course. Born in Delhi, I completed my schooling at DPS Mathura Road and then headed to National Institute of Fashion Technology to major in accessories. I had planned to travel around India researching leather crafts – an excuse, really, to step out of the urban landscape and bask in the cool, unpolluted breeze of inner, innocent India for long stretches of time.

I began taking part in Dastkar's bi-annual craft fairs where artisans from all over India display their wares, and where young designers like myself can also express our talents. It did pretty well, and soon I realised I had to become selective about where I invested my time and energy. I zoomed in on silver jewellery that I could make from Jaipur. Not only was it close to

home, it is an incredible hub of old techniques and a great place to source gems. There are pockets around Jaipur that offer different kinds of enamelling and other techniques; it's really a one-stop shop for a jewellery designer.

Then I got married and moved to Bengaluru with my husband. I named my jewellery label Lai, which is Sanskrit for 'the beloved one'. My silver jewellery has an Indian soul but appeals to global citizens. I started a Facebook page for my baubles, and soon orders began pouring in from friends around India. It didn't look professional to tell them, "We don't deliver to Chandigarh," so I began delivering to Chandigarh, and Delhi, and Mumbai, and everywhere else. One thing led to another and I was in business.

Four years ago, my husband, who works in IT, got a transfer and we moved to Bay Area, California. By then I was already retailing from India's top multi-designer stores so I had to travel back and forth from US to India for my jewellery production and sales. Gradually, our American friends began showing interest in my designs, and I decided to set up an e-store to cater to a global audience.

There is of course a sea of difference in the way the two countries receive new designers. The US is a more mature market,

and designer startups like mine are a dime a dozen. It's very difficult to get through to a merchandiser at a store such as Barneys or Anthropologie, for instance. And once you do, it is near impossible to make yourself heard and seen above the din of designers who write to them from around the world. Also, production and

happy to feature new designers who do good work. Most stores go by a commission system, which is both good and bad for the designer. It's good because it's easier to find an outlet, but the flipside is that the cost of the inventory is yours and the store doesn't have much incentive to push your product above others.



branding expectations are very high, and unless you have your act together in terms of product finishing and professional services, you won't get very far. It's very challenging for a bootstrapped label to make their presence felt.

In that sense, it's easier in India. I was able to approach designer stores in just a single call and magazine editors are only too

At the moment, I'm gearing up for the NY Now 2017 trade show. About 2500 exhibitors are expected and I was one of just 20 design entrepreneurs picked for a curated segment called 'Innovation Showcase'. Being shortlisted means a lot and I'm very excited. My husband says I'm a workaholic. But it doesn't feel like work when you're building a dream. ■

WEAVING POETRY IN SILK

Sari aficionado Srishti Madhav returned from London to work with weavers in Varanasi. Her mission? To revive the gorgeous Benarasi drape



As a young girl in Delhi, Srishti Madhav was intrigued by colours and styles and how they could be married together to create the perfect look. “Initially I just put together outfits for myself, but eventually I started doing it for others too and this sparked



my interest in fashion design,” says the attractive 26-year-old, who particularly remembers the first time she went to Varanasi. “I visited some weavers who were creating a sari from scratch. I was so fascinated by this genesis that I just could not stop thinking about this immense talent and skill hidden in Varanasi,” she narrates.

Having studied fashion styling and designing from London College of Fashion, Srishti started her own venture called Shree by Srishti to put a spotlight on the artistic prowess of Benarasi weavers. “Art alone cannot help these immensely talented craftsmen attain a livelihood,” emphasises Srishti, who studied in Delhi’s prestigious Vasant Valley School.

Starting out with saris and *dupattas* retailing from India and UK, the label has now also expanded to a range of ethnic ensembles. Their new line of outfits was unveiled in Manchester, UK, this May. Srishti has also held solo exhibitions in several Indian cities from Delhi to Visakhapatnam, and her pieces are available at select multi-designer stores in Raipur



Srishti Madhav



“I just could not stop thinking about this immense talent and skill hidden in Varanasi”

and Nagpur. “During winter, our collection leans more towards royal silk creations while for summer our focus is on bringing together comfort and style with fabrics such as chanderi, summer silk and so on.

Since we directly source from the weavers, our price points are very competitive,” shares Srishti, whose customers are successful, progressive women who enjoy investing in timeless classics.

Srishti credits her husband, who is a sports buff and an investment catalyst, for his unstinting support in her venture. She’s also driven to make her label bigger by her parents-in-law, and finds strength from her mentor and spiritual guru.

Ultimately, Srishti’s work is all celebrating the beauty of Indian crafts while also enabling the creators. “Our constant endeavour has been to allow these weavers to earn a living and showcase their talents through our designs,” she says. ■

Secret Passion

SANYA GULATI, 23, DELHI



I've been shy and timid since I was child, never assertive or vocal about my feelings. During my teens I had this inexplicable desire to be a model. I looked up to Naomi Campbell and Tyra Banks. I was glued to the TV whenever *America's Next Top Model* aired. However, given how nervous and camera-shy I was, I thought it more practical to make a career in writing. I joined Pearl Academy to study fashion media communication. As a part of a project shoot, I had to pick a subculture and its clothing. I chose 'Teddy Boys', and it struck me that this was a look I could pull off myself. After much self-counselling and contemplation, I gathered the courage to model for this shoot. And yeah, I thoroughly enjoyed every bit of it. I now work as a full-time fashion writer. But the secret passion for modelling lives on.

THE SARI RENAISSANCE

She creates down-to-earth saris for the high and mighty. Anavila Misra's latest collection takes forward her love affair with linen and India

By Anupam Dabral

Who would have thought to make saris in linen? By going where no designer has ever gone before, Anavila Misra stands tall among a number of 'back-to-the-roots' fashion enthusiasts, her creations evoking a sense of pride and reaffirming one's faith in 'made in India'. While her vision as a designer is to dress 'real Indian women', the glamorous world of Bollywood leaves no opportunity to be seen in her designs – from Sonam Kapoor and Konkona Sharma Sen to Vidya Balan.

Daughter of an agricultural scientist father and a fine artist mother, Anavila Misra was exposed to art early on. She learnt painting, knitting and sewing under the guidance of her mother at their home in Karnal, Haryana. Her travels to different villages – from Bhuj in Gujarat to working with Santhal tribals in Jharkhand –

played a major role in shaping her design philosophy.

A NIFT graduate in knitwear design, Anavila worked closely with the Ministry of Rural Development on their craft cluster projects. She launched her first collection in 2011 with the help of a few weavers from Phulia in West Bengal. She took it to Artisans in Kala Ghoda, Mumbai. All her saris were sold out in no time.

Sustainability is an inseparable part of Anavila, the brand. Women are allowed to work from home, and a strict zero-waste policy is followed during production. Her work ethic is in sync with her design philosophy, and her creations reflect the change Indian fashion has gone through in the last few years. With a subdued colour palette and free-falling drapes, she has pushed the humble Indian sari into every fashion-conscious woman's wardrobe. ■

Anavila's spring-
summer 2017
collection 'Hello
Spring' takes breezy
linens outdoors.



Anavila's latest collection is a tribute to all the elements of spring, marked by a clever colour scheme and use of florals on saris.



Her signature fluid and
easy drapes exude a
free-spirited vibe.



Besides her signature prints and patterns, Anavila has infused interesting patterns of leno stripes and ribbed checks and has used net-like weaves to create a sensual illusion.



Hand-block printing has been Anavila's signature from the past and this collection is also replete with delicate, summery block prints.





The collection does not
only consist of saris, but
there are light and easy
separates too.

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is walking in profile on a paved path. She is wearing a white and beige sari with intricate applique work. The background features a metal railing and potted plants.

The saris display an artistic use of delicate applique work against whites, off-whites, beige and greys.

Photographer:

Manasi Sawant

Hair and makeup:

Kritika Gill

Stylist: Nidhi Jacob

THE ONLY **FIVE** THINGS YOUR SKIN NEEDS THIS **SUMMER**

When it comes to summer beauty, less is indeed more. Here's how to look gorgeous when the heat and humidity touch an all-time high

By Hansa Makhijani Jain



When the temperature is on the wrong side of the 30s and 40s (and we mean Celsius), looking good and as fresh as a daisy can be a challenge for the best of us. Even celebs frequently need their makeup dada for a 'touch-up' between shots and at events. As a beauty, makeup and spa junkie, I can vouch after several years of going wrong with my products that less is truly more at this time of the year. So clear your dresser and keep these five things in easy reach at all times to put your best face forward when the heat and humidity ruin your makeup game.

1. A BLOODY GOOD SERUM

Ever slathered your face with your fave day cream on a hot summer day only to have your skin reject it with sweat in the next five minutes? Just the thought is disturbing. Nourish your skin with a serum instead – it's instantly absorbed into the skin. If sun protection is a concern, follow it up with a matte sunscreen gel. If you can't do without coverage, try a BB cream with sunscreen.

Try: Vichy Aqualia Thermal Dynamic Hydration Power Serum

2. A TRUSTY SMUDGE-PROOF KOHL PENCIL

Line just the rim of your eyes (top and bottom inner lash lines) and avoid those heavily defined eyes.

Even smudge-proof kohl liners have limitations at 45 degrees – and then there's the humidity, and let's not even talk about the pollution. So keep it light.

Try: Maybelline Colossal Kajal

3. A BRIGHT MATTE LIPPER

Nothing livens up your face like a pretty pink, soft coral, perky peach or hot red on those summer days. But remember to stick to matte textured lipsticks and lip crayons; you can save the gloss for winter.

Try: Kiko Milano Velvet Passion Matte Lipstick in Warm Pink

4. A STASH OF BLOTting PAPER

Oil or sebum production can go into overdrive in the summer – even if you have dry skin. So control blotchy skin with some handy blotting paper – it takes the least space in your bag and can even fit into your wallet!

Try: Oriflame Optimals Oxygen Boost Face Blotting Tissues

5. A LASH-LENGTHENING WATERPROOF MASCARA

Not defining your peepers heavily doesn't really mean bad news. Keep your eye makeup game strong by following up kohl with lash-lengthening waterproof mascara. Avoid volumising lashes as they can often lead to clumpy lashes – and that's unforgivable.

Try: Innisfree Skinny Waterproof Microcara ■

APPS THAT MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR BUSY WOMEN

From groceries to waxing, here are the best apps that will bring the most essentials services to your doorstep – and make you thank God for technology!

We get it. You barely even have the time to read this piece. There's too much to do today, a hundred things on your mind, your phone's constantly buzzing with WhatsApp messages, work-related emails and Snapchat posts. Well, sometimes you have to invest in the right things now that pay you back with *more* time (and even money) later. And these apps promise to do so.

LIFESTYLE SERVICES

Urban Clap: They are a 'one-stop destination for all urban lifestyle services' and boast of thousands of professionals to take care of your lifestyle needs, from yoga trainers to wedding photographers to electricians and party caterers. You will most likely find exactly what you're looking for at any time, and

their prices are pretty reasonable too. We're impressed with the way these guys are growing and organising the unorganised sector;

SALON SERVICES AT HOME

There are so many options for salon services at home these days, one feels rather guilty about ditching that 'parlourwali' who came home to do your eyebrows while chit-chatting about recipes and in-laws. Today's *parlourwalis* use timers on smartphones and a suitcase with everything from wax strips to electric pedicure tubs. We've tried At Home Diva (Quikr), Vanity Cube (VLCC) and Urban Clap, and found all their services professional, well-priced and hygienic. There are plenty of offers too, so it works out cheaper than visiting a salon. Even cheaper than your old *parlourwali*.

GROCERY SHOPPING

Big Basket: This is your local *sabzi mandi* or neighbourhood market, except it's in your phone. These guys make you offers you cannot refuse, and we're talking discounts on everything from olive oil to vegetables. They also give sweet discounts on larger orders. Here's a tip: go for their expedited same-day delivery, which comes with a nominal charge. The free



delivery is sometimes late and their fresh produce is stale by the time you get it.

Amazon Pantry: Your delivery is sent in a box, which Amazon encourages you to fill up by showing you how much percentage is still empty (but don't feel pressurised!). We love the 10% discount you get if you spend more than Rs 1500, and the 24-hour guaranteed delivery (it usually comes in less than 16 hours

in certain areas). But Amazon still doesn't stock as many products as Big Basket, and offers no fresh produce. You'll still need to head to your *sabzi mandi* for that.

Amazon Prime Now: Amazon has also launched a two-hour delivery service in certain neighbourhoods by tying up with big local businesses in the vicinity. However, all products are not yet available – it may be easier to instead download your local business's app or call them directly, and get your goods within *one* hour!

DINING IN

Zomato: There are days you want to have nothing to do with cooking. That's when Zomato comes to your rescue. With a huge variety of restaurants delivering to your doorstep, we've found their online ordering to be

very efficient and their deliveries on time. We also appreciated their flexibility in payment options during those dark days of demonetisation, and their founder's fabulous response to the hacker who broke into the company's user database. Such gestures do matter.

Swiggy: It works like a giant online menu card from hundreds of eateries in your area, so you just have to tick the right boxes and your dinner's ready. Easy as pie. ■

EAT SHOOT FEED

Food isn't just fuel for the body, it's a relationship – one can turn to food for comfort or for the joy of feeding others. A foodie shares her gastronomical romance

Text and photographs by Ruchira Hoon



I am not a glutton. In fact, I don't even eat that much. But I know that each time someone meets me, my size betrays me. I won't lie. I love food. Correction, I love good food. Food that makes me want to touch it, to smell it, to eat it and more so, to create something with it.

The yearning for good food made me want to cook since I was almost nine years old. As a latch-key kid in Delhi, my sister and I would often have to eat things that my mom put together in a hurry before rushing off to work. Her experiments were hits and misses of sorts. Which is why the need to eat something I liked was very strong. I remember picking up that cheese knife from the drawer, cutting off a chunk from a tin of Amul cheese, and throwing it on to a hot tawa to melt, only so that I could mop it up with

some bread. It is, perhaps, the one taste I have never forgotten. It was, perhaps, that moment that changed my life forever. Because ever since then, I haven't stopped cooking.

I have had a very emotional relationship with food. It was my anchor through my parents' divorce. It was what I turned to when I barely passed my boards and, as a journalist for over a decade, I realised I turned to food writing every time I found myself lost. The one thing that was constant was that I loved trying out new recipes.

Then I realised that I didn't have to eat to enjoy food. Feeding people was what actually gave me pure joy. I love the looks on people's faces when I feed them something unexpected. I love the satisfaction of having cooked something that someone actually likes. I live for those moments.

That's why I started throwing

dinner parties. By the time I was 14, I'd ask my parents to sit back and relax while I made a meal for them and their friends. At 17, when I moved to Chennai, I was making dinner every night for my family of six – which included my grandparents, my aunt, my

sibling and step-mom, plus we'd have friends dropping almost every night, so I'd always cook a little bit extra. By 18, I could make lasagna from scratch with my eyes closed. By the time I was 20, I was making five-course meals for a party of 20.

The more I cooked, the more requests I'd get. Chocolate

cake, some would ask for. Mexican please, others would say. By the time I was married and had moved back to Delhi, the list grew endlessly: quiches, desserts, Italian, Pan-Asian and – if it were up to my husband – fresh cream pineapple cake every week. The



Ruchira worked as a
journalist for over a
decade before the call
of cooking and feeding
people became too
insistent to ignore



THE SIGHT OF SEASONAL PRODUCE AND NEW PRODUCTS ON THE SHELVES GETS THE JUICES IN MY BRAIN RUNNING

more I cooked, the more I learnt. The more I learnt, the more I wanted to feed people. It was a cycle I loved.

At every party back home in Chennai, I'd be asked to make something special. My chocolate pudding pie and savoury galettes are still top of the demand list there. I've savvied up so much that I now discuss the menu with my family before I go to meet them and carry all the tools and equipment so I can give them a totally professional experience.

Okay, you get it now, I am slightly obsessed with food. Which is why the people who knew me pushed me to blog about my experience. That was five years ago. Since then I not only cook but also style, photograph, and then feed people what I make. Two years ago, I decided to switch careers completely – from journalism to food. And today, I head a bakery out of Gurugram that lets people eat all things I love. I also host pop-ups at home, showcasing dishes that I love cooking.



Ruchira Hoon

Now at 37, I'm hyper organized when it comes to cooking. I know exactly how much time it'll take me to prep, cook and serve. Going to the market is such fun for me. The sight of seasonal produce and new products on the shelves gets the juices in my brain running.

Peaches and mangoes in the summer, apples in the fall, strawberries in the winter – it's as if I can't catch up with the seasons. Peach crisps, apple pies, strawberry tarts – the thought that I can make something new, something delicious, with these things keeps me going. Cookbooks are my nightcap, Pinterest my styling guru. It's pretty pictures of food that I fall asleep to each night – that's what gives me the sweetest dreams. ■

SUMMER COOLERS

Looking for a tasty twist to keep you cool this summer? Physiotherapist turned food stylist Shaheen Ali shares the recipes for her favourite cold beverages



What do physiotherapy and cooking have in common? Well, the first was the subject of Shaheen Ali's Master's degree, and the second is her all-consuming passion. Born in Rourkela, Odisha, to a mechanical engineer father from Rajasthan and a social activist mother from West Bengal, Shaheen grew up with an appreciation for a variety of cultures and cuisines.

The family moved to Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, where Shaheen completed her schooling. She moved to Bhopal for college and post-graduation, and then married a banker there. "I practised physiotherapy for three or four years after marriage but I wasn't happy. So I quit my job and decided to follow my passion – cooking! I set up a food blog in 2014 (www.spoonforkandfood.com), and gradually, food styling and photography became my profession," says the 38-year-old mother of a young son.

"I was born and raised in a gastronomic family where conversations revolve around food and cooking is most relied on approximation and eyeballing the ingredients or proportions," smiles the foodie, who has recently moved to Bilaspur due to her husband's job. "Cooking completes me; it's not just a passion, it's therapy for me." Flip the pages to check out her simple, delightful summer cooler recipes.

ICED GOLDEN MILK LATTE

Ingredients:

2 cups almond milk or coconut milk
1/2 tsp turmeric powder
1/2 tsp cinnamon powder
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1 pinch black pepper powder
4 tbsp honey or maple syrup
1 tbsp vanilla extract
2 cups ice cubes

Instructions:

1. Whisk together the milk, turmeric powder, cinnamon

powder, ground ginger and black pepper in a saucepan. Set it to heat on high and boil the mixture, whisking frequently.

2. Once it starts to boil, lower the heat for 3-5 minutes.

3. Remove the pan from the heat, and add in maple syrup or honey along with vanilla extract, and whisk again.

4. Cool the golden milk and later store in the fridge up to 1 week. Serve chilled over a handful of ice.





RAW MANGO SPICED CHHAAS

Ingredients:

400 gms thick yoghurt
2 raw mangoes (peel, grate and squeeze the juice)
3-4 drops ginger juice (peel, grate and squeeze the juice)
1 tsp cumin
4-5 black pepper corns
1 dry red chilli
1/2 tsp chaat masala
1/2 tsp black salt
1 sprig fresh coriander chopped
5-6 fresh mint leaves
Salt to taste
2-3 cups distilled water

Instructions:

1. Take thick curd in a pitcher and add chopped coriander, ginger juice, raw mango juice, black salt, chaat masala, few mint leaves and salt. Mix it well, and then add water and mix again.
2. Refrigerate for 10-15 minutes.
3. In a pan, dry roast the red chilli, cumin and pepper corns, and cool. Grind to make a dry powder.
4. Add ½ to 1 tsp of spice powder in the serving glass along with ice.
5. Pour the cooled chhaas (spiced buttermilk) over the ice and stir.
6. Garnish with spice powder and fresh mint leaves. Serve chilled.



PINK LEMONADE

Ingredients:

600 ml water / soda
4 tbsp lemon juice
6 - 7 tbsp sugar
2 pinch salt
2 tbsp rose syrup
Mint - few fresh leaves
4 - 5 lemon slices
Pink rose petals (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a large pan, add water, sugar, salt and lemon juice and stir till

sugar dissolves completely.

2. In a separate bowl, take 1 tbsp of water and some mint leaves and crush with a mortar.

3. Add the crushed mint extract to the lemonade and stir well. Then add the rose syrup and stir again.

4. Pass the lemonade through a sieve and collect it in a pitcher. Refrigerate.

5. Add some ice cubes in a glass, and pour the pink lemonade into it. Garnish it with some lemon slices and fresh mint. Serve chilled!



MANGO LEMONADE

Ingredients:

2 cups fresh mango puree
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
1/2 cup sugar – adjustable
2.5 cups water
Ice cubes – a handful
Fresh mint leaves for garnish

Instructions:

1. Blend mango puree, lemon juice and 2 cups of water; keep aside.
2. Mix sugar in 1/2 cup of warm water till dissolved. Keep aside to cool.
3. Add in the sugar syrup to the mango mix and stir well.
4. Garnish with fresh mint leaves and serve chilled.



WATERMELON COSMOPOLITAN

Ingredients:

- 2 cups watermelon pieces
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp chopped green chilli
- 8 - 10 mint leaves
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper powder
- 1 cup crushed ice

Instructions:

1. Blend watermelon pieces (with or without seeds), lemon juice, mint leaves, finely chopped green chillies, salt and black pepper powder along with some crushed ice in a blender.
2. Strain the watermelon juice through a colander. Discard the extract.
3. Add 1 tbsp of lemon juice again and check the salt. The salt actually helps out in bringing the sweetness of the watermelon.
4. Take a martini glass and wipe a squeezed lemon on the rim to hold the garnish.
5. Now coat the rim with salt and black pepper and keep aside.
6. Pour the juice over crushed ice. Garnish with a mint leaf and serve chilled.

HOT WOMEN ROCK

Motivational writer and speaker Pat Duckworth's latest book will give you an impetus to turn entrepreneur

For 32 years, Pat Duckworth worked in UK's public and voluntary sector. By the time she was 50, she had an MBA and had risen to the dizzying rank of deputy director in the Senior Civil Service. But she also came to the realisation that she wasn't happy. So she retired from work, and turned entrepreneur. In the next five years, she set up a practice delivering courses and workshops, wrote three books, developed online programmes and was invited as a speaker to five countries. Her USP is inspiring people to follow their dreams. And her latest book *Hot Women Rock* is all about helping them discover their 'midlife entrepreneurial mojo'.

Using tools from neuro-linguistic programming, the book guides you through the six neurological levels (NLLs) that guide and motivate human beings in their day-to-day lives. These go from environment, behaviour, capabilities and resources, values and beliefs, identity to finally one's spiritual purpose. Kay explains that to make effective changes in one's life, it makes sense to involve all



the NLLs and to make sure they're all aligned. "People who have well-aligned neurological levels are emotionally and mentally strong," she writes. "Their values and beliefs support their identity. Their behaviour helps them to develop the capabilities and resources they need to pursue their purpose. When you meet them, you feel their purpose shining through. They are totally congruent."

The book also features the inspiring stories of 21 women who turned entrepreneur midlife. They are heartening tales of struggle, doubt and finally finding one's true purpose. For those who think something is 'missing' in their career and are seeking something more from life, this book may just tip you over the other side of your mental boundaries. ■

ON THE BOOKSHELF

This is what the editor loved reading this month



The Windup Girl

By Paolo Bacigalupi (Hachette India, Rs 395)

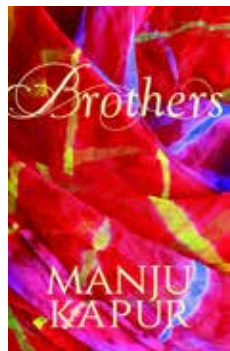
This book was first published in 2009 but is still doing the rounds. For a reason. It's a kind of George Orwell's *1984* set in the distant, even more dystopian future. Strange viruses abound, bio-engineering has led to a spate of new crops and diseases, fossil fuels are unheard of. Then there's the windup girl – an uncannily human-like robot trained to serve. Windups are not supposed to have souls, but one of them, Emiko, decides she wants a life. Her actions lead to unexpected consequences.

Brothers

By Manju Kapur (Penguin Viking, Rs 599)

Manju Kapur's books move you deeply and leave you uncomfortable mostly because they're so close to home. Her sixth novel *Brothers* begins with the story of Tapti Gaina, whose relationship status is definitely complicated – imagine being in love with your husband's older brother.

The book traces her husband's family history from the time of the freedom struggle to the present day, when one brother kills the other. But over everything else, *Brothers* is an insightful sketch of the urban-rural divide and the uneasy coexistence of the two Indias.



Swing Time

By Zadie Smith (Hamish Hamilton, Rs 599)

Brought up in a middle-class British neighbourhood, the unnamed protagonist of this book is obsessed with her fellow brown friend Tracey, who dances like a dream. But our heroine has more noble aspirations – she wants to study, be an assistant to a legendary pop star, and help save children in Africa. Life, however, puts surprising lessons and people her way, and no matter how far she runs away from her past, it always manages to catch up. Yet another evocative read from Zadie Smith.

Blo by Blo

SARGAM CHOPRA, 37, NEW DELHI



I grew up in a middle-class family in Abu Dhabi. After school, my dad insisted on sending me to the US. Soon after, I got married at 23, and was told my husband would be “head of the family”. My main role would be to throw fancy Diwali dinners, keep a lovely home and raise two lovely children.

Quite contrarily, I spent eight unsuccessful years trying to make a childless marriage work while still throwing Diwali dinners, hoping they would ignite some love and intimacy. They didn’t, so I walked out. Five more years of soul-searching followed. Finally, six months ago, I found the courage to pack up my life and move to Delhi.

BLOBAR then came about: India’s first blow-dry bar that believes in the transformative power of a simple blowout. It was created out of a need to have a place for the ladies to hang out and exchange ideas. It is set up like a ‘bar’ to encourage conversations. Bring a girlfriend or make a new one.

Not everyone is meant to have a child to have something to nurture. There are other ways to leave behind a legacy. ■

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