

— the female gaze —

Aditi Mittal

The f**king
awesomeness
of comedy



WHO NEEDS BRAS?

Indo-Canadian media personality Devina Kaur on why she goes bra-less

LIFE AFTER LOSS

Sanmeet lost her little son but turned her tragedy into motivation for others

COCKTAIL NIGHTS

Light or lit, heavy or haute, here are 5 looks to choose from



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DECEMBER 2017

eShe.in

VICTORY IN DEFEAT

There is a phrase, 'snatching victory from the jaws of defeat'. It makes one believe that rising up out of loss or failure or grief is a dramatic event, an overnight breakthrough, a momentary act of heroic courage. In real life, however, it is a slow, deep, agonizing, uphill journey, and it takes great courage to just show up every day.

Cover girl Aditi Mittal uses everyday sexism and uncomfortable personal truths as food for laughter, and stands up day after day challenging mindsets with the power of her comedy (p.18). Working mother of two Sanmeet Kaur's perfect life underwent a debilitating tragedy when she lost her nine-year-old son to cancer (p.14) but her grief found vent in helping others cope with their own. The founder of Fem Care, one of India's most successful personal-care brands, Sunita Ramnathkar had to reluctantly relinquish her self-built enterprise in a Dabur takeover. But nine years later she is back with a potent skincare range based on the skin-rejuvenating properties of the lotus seed (p.48).

There is victory in defeat, just like there lies a tree in a seed, and a lotus in a muddy pond, except you have to nourish it with your positive intention and acts of everyday valour. Don't give up. Your breakthrough is just around the corner.



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GF, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi 110057, India. Phone: +91 9818166621. To buy, advertise or for any other queries, visit eshe.in or send an email to mail@coralcontent.com. To subscribe to the free digital edition, visit eShe.in

DECEMBER 2017

AROUND THE WORLD

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

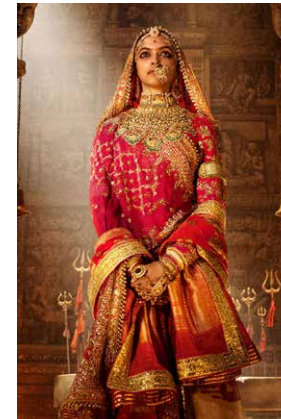
WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?

It's been a tough year for Akhila aka Hadiya, a 24-year-old from Kerala, who had her marriage annulled when the Kerala High Court suspected she'd been brainwashed into converting to Islam. She was kept under 'house arrest' for six months, and has now been allowed to go to college, but not meet her husband-not-husband. Personal freedom isn't free.



MUCH ADO ABOUT PADMAVATI

Indian politicians and TV channels have got their knickers in a twist over Sanjay Leela Bhansali's upcoming flick *Padmavati*. Based on folklore with no basis in history, the film's theme has given various unemployed sections of society fuel for mindless agitation and a chance to score their 15 minutes of fame. The hullabaloo has done what the insipid trailer never could: got Bhansali crores worth of publicity and marketing. No wonder other filmmakers are seething in silent envy.



DIVORCE ADVICE ON HAND

Divorce lawyer and author Vandana Shah has launched a new app Divorcekart for estranged couples who are unsure of their legal rights. The app offers free immediate legal solutions, instant chat 24X7, and total confidentiality. But you do have to figure your life out yourself.



In a League OF HER OWN

It takes back-breaking work to be the best, says Gitikka Ganju Dhar, who has had a stellar career as a professional anchor and moderator

Her army childhood instilled in her qualities of discipline, flexibility and hard work, and her personal quest for perfection took Gitikka Ganju Dhar on a career path that would defy boundaries set for women in her field. An award-winning anchor and show host who is known for her intelligent, well-researched presentations and never using a prompter while on stage, Gitikka has challenged conventions quietly, studiously outperforming her peers.

“Women have a shelf-life in this industry. I’m competing with younger, sexier girls,” she says, matter-of-factly. “But you can’t replace hard work, and if coupled with talent, it’s you who decides how long your career will last, not others.”

Hailing from Kashmir, Gitikka spent her childhood in army schools across India before moving to Delhi to study business management. While doing her Master’s in mass communication from Jamia Millia University, she would often spend time at the institute’s large studios

learning film production.

One day, she was spotted by a TV crew and was offered her first gig as a TV anchor for a Bollywood songs show. Curious, she took it on, earned a good sum of money and decided this was something she was “decent at”. Soon after, she was offered a job hosting an automobile

**“YOU CAN’T REPLACE
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IT’S YOU WHO DECIDES
HOW LONG YOUR CAREER
WILL LAST, NOT OTHERS”**

show with leading anchors of the time. A debating champ and accomplished dancer in school, she was a natural on stage, and more jobs began coming her way. By 2005, she was hosting about 20 prestigious TV and stage shows a month sponsored by global corporate giants, and had a formidable reputation as a ‘thinking person’s anchor’.

Gitikka Ganju Dhar is a veteran of more than two dozen TV shows and more than 3000 live events across the globe





L-R: Gitikka has won several awards as best anchor; she was featured in a book *The Decade of Transformation*

But by 2007, she was exhausted. She needed a break.

Gitikka decided to get married. She'd fallen in love with a Kashmiri banker on a flight, and the two tied the knot in 2009. A year later, they had a daughter. "My ship had docked," recalls Gitikka. "My husband brought stability into my life, and gave me strength and confidence."

By 2012, the Bharat Nirman Award-winner was ready to get back in the game. Though it isn't easy for a woman anchor to get job offers after a five-year hiatus, Gitikka still had a certain standing, and a healthy relationship with those she had worked with in the past. Arm-

ing herself with hours of reading, writing, research and practice, she gave her "150% to every event", never having to resort to gimmicks or "skimpy clothes" to get attention. "I worked patiently. Soon, people realized that if they had a large-format show with a lot of content, I was the best in the field," she says with quiet conviction.

Gitikka has learnt to be kind to herself. She divides her day between work, spending time with her daughter and catching up with the news. And she does not stress out before going onstage: "I do my preparation, and then I let go of all worry. I know I will handle it." That's a pro talking. ■

COOKING UP A PHENOMENON

Acclaimed chef, restaurateur, author, TV personality and artist, Zarmig Haladjian is a woman of many talents, and she's getting even better

I love everything to do with art, says Zarmig Ohannes Haladjian, visiting chef at the Novotel Hotel in Delhi's Aerocity. A multi-faceted woman, she has not only taken Lebanese and Armenian cuisine to the world, but has also established herself as a TV personality

with plenty of advice on cooking and etiquettes to offer Middle Eastern viewers. She has written several books, runs a chain of restaurants in Doha, and is the founder of the Armenian Culinary Association.

If that wasn't enough, she is now also a professional artist. "Cuisine





L-R: A dish made by Chef Zarmig at Novotel Hotel's Armenian food festival; on her TV show *With Zarmig*



is an art but it is cleaned away after every meal. I wanted to create something that is permanent so I took to painting,” explains the certified Master Chef and television celebrity, whose only artistic tools are her fingers.

“EVEN IF A GUEST ARRIVED UNEXPECTEDLY, THERE WAS ALWAYS EXTRA FOOD AND OUR HOME IN LEBANON WAS ALWAYS WARM AND WELCOMING”

Zarmig was born into a modest Armenian family and brought up in Lebanon, imbibing the roots of both cultures. She loved cooking even as a child, and was influenced by her mother's gracious hospitality. “Even if a guest arrived unexpectedly, there was always extra food and our home was always warm and welcoming,” she reminisces.

Zarmig graduated from Al Kafaat University in Lebanon with a Bachelor's degree in hospitality, and an associate diploma in science. She then headed to Liverpool University for a Master's in business management and is now wrapping up another Master's degree in public health management from UK's Roehampton University through online courses. Her first job was as an executive chef at the US Embassy in Lebanon, after which she joined a five-star hotel as a kitchen artist chef.

Success came quickly to her, and awards followed. Since 2001, she has been seen on many TV network channels in various countries, the longest running of which is a cooking show she hosts on Qatar TV and an etiquettes show on Al Jazeera. Zarmig also began setting up her own eateries in Beirut, and became an ambassador for Armenian cuisine abroad. Along the way, she worked as a food consultant, food safety lecturer, a diabetic con-

sultant, and a cooking show judge. She also wrote 24 books on cooking and Armenian cuisine.

Eight years ago, she moved to Doha, Qatar, and her career touched a new high. She set up Mamig, a Lebanese and Armenian restaurant, which serves 3,000 customers a day with a staff of 150. She was thrice awarded Qatar Chef of the year in 2014, 2016 and 2017, Queen of Armenian Cuisine 2015, Qatar Woman of the Year 2016 and Best Armenian Entrepreneur Worldwide.

With homes in Lebanon, Armenia, US and Qatar, Zarmig has made two trips to India this year, the first to judge an event and the second to

host a Lebanese Armenian food festival at Novotel in late November. For the festival, she brought along special ingredients from her homeland. “Armenian food includes a variety of green leaves because we have a lot of sun in our country. We also use a lot of pomegranates, basil, oregano and cheese made with sheep milk and buffalo milk,” informs the svelte chef, while describing the menu she has designed.

Fond of reading biographies and books on philosophy, Zarmig says she loves Indians. “They appreciate tradition.” With a career in upholding culture and tradition herself, it's a trait that gets her thumbs up. ■





CARD OF FAITH

Ashtar Tashi was drawn to meditation and mysticism after a long career in fashion, and believes joy is the only true path

Though Ashtar Tashi enrolled for BA in psychology at Hindu College, Delhi University, her father, a pioneer garment exporter who knew of her desire to run his business, suggested she study fashion instead. Ashtar's experience at her father's business – where she worked her way up from spot cleaning to folding and packing clothes and then thread-cutting – helped her score a seat at National Insti-

tute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), and she graduated in 1990 with the likes of Narendra Kumar Ahmed, Sonam Dubal and Ritu Beri.

Ashtar then worked freelance for design houses while also assisting her father. When she was 21, she met her life partner Vishal at a wedding, and moved from Delhi to Pune post marriage. She made a name as a fashion designer while also writing on fashion and styling shoots for

publications. The upcoming School of Fashion Technology then invited her on board as visiting faculty, and she taught creative thinking and trends there for 15 years – till she found her true calling.

Ashtar had a good life, blessed with a daughter after a son, and all the creature comforts she could ask for. But after her daughter turned two, she experienced a vacuum. “My moods went from severe highs

transcendental experiences followed that validated for Ashtar the power of a higher power in life and how she would become a channel to carry the energies forward to serve humanity.

Ashtar's began exploring oracle cards and also did courses in crystal healing and chakra work. She now teaches the same herself. Her heart-felt compassion draws people in. “I cannot heal anyone, the divine does



L-R: Ashtar's journey began when she was drawn to a box of oracle cards in a bookstore; with her new book

to lows,” she recalls. Her husband suggested she go for meditation.

Ashtar met a lady who facilitated crystal-healing sessions in Pune and also taught meditation. “I started going into very deep trances,” she says. Initially, she stopped meditation, worried that her mental state was affected. “But I realized slowly that I was being pulled into another dimension far greater than what we understood as this universe.” Many

that,” says Ashtar, whose new book, *Keep Shining! Find Your Happiness Quotient*, focuses on issues like self-love and drawing boundaries.

She advises, “Don't do, feel or say anything that doesn't create joy within you – whether it's a relationship, a job or a life-altering decision. If doesn't give you joy, just drop it. We are all spiritual beings having a human experience. Let's make it a joyful one!” ■

THOSE WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND

Sanmeet Kaur went through an experience no mother ever should: losing her nine-year-old son to cancer. Yet she turned her life's greatest loss into a catalyst for her life's grandest work

Sanmeet Kaur was a bright student, but the advent of mobile phones messed up the precocious girl's performance in high school. Her father, a businessman, suggested she could do a secretarial course. Her mother, a government employee, encouraged her to complete her BA through correspondence too.

Along with her studies, Sanmeet took up a job and conducted tuitions at her west Delhi home. Her arranged marriage at 21, however, ended her career aspirations. A year later, in 2001, she had a baby girl, whom she named Tavleen Kaur.

When the baby was a few months old, the new mother itched to work again. When the opportunity arose, she took up a job as secretary to a reputed firm's managing director.

Robust, outspoken and energetic, the young Sanmeet accepted all roles and assignments that came her way. Her peers jokingly referred to her as JMD because she took on her

MD's role in his absence. In 2005, she had a baby boy named Gaganjot Singh. At the same time, she began to supervise and manage the company's factories, travelling even vast distances with enthusiasm.

One day, a senior at work made



Sanmeet Kaur



L-R: Gaganjot Singh was a bright, talkative boy before he fell ill; Sanmeet and her family on holiday

an unkind jibe at Sanmeet for not being well educated. That's it, Sanmeet decided: "I will get an MBA."

With a seven-year-old daughter, a four-year-old son, and a full-time job, Sanmeet's decision to further take on a part-time MBA left

pected quarter: her mother-in-law. The older woman was impressed with the idea of Sanmeet becoming the first woman in the family to do her MBA. At the end of three years, Sanmeet had her degree from IMT Ghaziabad, and a 50% salary increment to show for it.

After nearly a decade in the same company, Sanmeet resigned in July 2013. In a prescient moment, she decided to spend time at home with her kids. She had missed their childhood. She began taking Tavleen and Gaganjot to the park, sharing tender moments. The family travelled together. It was a lovely time.

And then, two months later, their perfect life started to unravel.

Gaganjot began vomiting. The medics diagnosed a brain tumour, and said the little boy needed an immediate brain surgery. For three days, he lay unconscious while on ventilator in the ICU. After a sec-

THE FAMILY TRAVELLED TOGETHER. IT WAS A LOVELY TIME. AND THEN, TWO MONTHS LATER, THEIR PERFECT LIFE BEGAN TO UNRAVEL.

her family perplexed. "You have a worm in your brain!" her husband Sarabjit Singh chided her. But Sanmeet rubbished him: "You may be happy in the same business for so long, but I want to learn and grow."

She got support from an unex-

ond surgery, he regained consciousness but his left side was paralysed, and the tumour was persistent.

The doctors advised radio therapy and chemotherapy, the best doctors for which were available only at All India Institute of Medical Sciences in south Delhi. And so Sanmeet, her brother and her mother-in-law took Gaganjot all the way daily, all through winter, spending six



Sanmeet at the birth of her second daughter

hours a day travelling and waiting in queue for 10 minutes of therapy.

Sanmeet took to watching motivational videos on YouTube for strength. All the while, the boy became weaker and paler. Due to paralysis, he could not walk properly. The doctors said he didn't have long to live.

Nine months after his first surgery, Gaganjot was admitted to hos-

pital and put on ventilator again. He could not eat, and had a high fever. "Don't leave the room," he implored his mother. "You'll be home soon," she promised him. Then he fell unconscious.

Doctors made last-ditch efforts. "My child cannot eat," Sanmeet scolded her husband through tears. "What was the use of your feeding cows and beggars all these years, what was the use of holding *langars* for hundreds of poor people, when my child cannot eat?"

And then Sanmeet went quiet inside her. "*Maine mamta chhod di*," she explains with a straight, damp gaze. "I let go of my motherhood so that I could set him free of his pain."

At 3 am on June 8, 2014, Sanmeet was in the hospital waiting room when she got a call from the ICU. "Something is wrong," she said. Her husband told her to go in and see.

A tiny shadow in the large hospital bed, her child lay still.

Sanmeet – the bravest one in the family, the stoic and motivator – could not cry, for that would mean her soft-hearted family would suffer further. "I hated it when old ladies came to mourn at home; they made me more depressed," she says, admitting, "but they were right about one thing. They said having another child would heal me. It did."

On June 2, 2015, almost exactly a year after Sanmeet's son passed away, her second daughter was born.



L-R: Tavleen, who is now 16, with Sanmeet, Sarabjit and their younger daughter Kavleen

They named her Kavleen Kaur. "She looks just like Gaganjot."

Never one to sit at home, Sanmeet soon took up a job in a nearby industrial zone as a manager. Gradually, she began conducting motivational workshops for private companies, government departments, NGOs, schools and management colleges. Her aim was to make each and every person understand their real strength and move forward in life. Her reputation as a corporate trainer and speaker grew.

The 36-year-old now gets calls from people all hours of the day, sometimes even desperate cries for help at night, and she counsels them

on the phone for free, whether it's a relationship issue or a career glitch.

"I am finally putting my life to good use," says the large-hearted

**"THEY WERE RIGHT
WHEN THEY SAID HAVING
ANOTHER CHILD WOULD
HEAL ME. IT DID."**

woman, who preaches mindfulness. "Why worry about circumstances outside your control? Leave sorrows aside and focus on the good things in life. You cannot change destiny. Why cry over it?" ■

COMEDY CRUSADER

One of India's most successful standup comedians, Aditi Mittal uses laughter as a tool to further a deeper agenda – an equal world

By Aekta Kapoor

In the first of her Hindi-English comic web series *Dollywood*, in which she plays the role of a star-struck, voluble film reviewer, Aditi Mittal cracks a joke about androgynous Sikh names: “I was born at a very young age. My father was then posted in Phagwara. He got the news that a child has been born, and the child’s name is Gurpreet. He thought I’m a boys (*sic*). That is why my female infanticide did not happen.” The background refrain pipes up: “Punjabi!”

It’s an Aditi Mittal classic: a larger-than-life character, a social cause casually thrown in, a bright, hilarious rendition. One of the most popular faces in the Indian comedy scene, Aditi has used humour in many ways – to deal with personal crises, to cheer others up, to dress up like an old woman and talk brazenly about sex – but through it all, she’s had an ulterior motive: she is

driven to raise awareness about social inequalities and gender bias.

And yet, the 32-year-old refuses to call herself an activist, for she believes that would take credit away from those who are really out there making a difference: “The hallmark of comedy is that it intersects with the truth. One of its elements is that of surprise, its truth telling. Compared with my friends working in NGOs, I’m in a position of privilege. I just express the truth. And the truth is dire for women and the marginalised. There is so much truth to laugh at.”

Drawing fodder for laughter from uncomfortable truths is a recurring theme in Aditi’s life. Born in Mumbai, she lost her biological mother when she was just three. Her mother’s sister Rajkumari aka Raju adopted Aditi and her older brother, staying unmarried for their sake. “She told us she got ready-

Rated one of the top 10 Indian comics, Aditi Mittal’s last special, *Things They Wouldn’t Let Me Say* is available on Netflix, and she is currently working on her travelling show *Global Village Idiot*.



PHOTO CREDIT: BHARGAVI MANI



made children so she didn't need marriage," Aditi shares. A powerhouse of energy and courage, and an outspoken feminist – "the filter on her mouth is so fucking off" – Raju would become Aditi's permanent role model.

Young Aditi was sent to boarding school for a few years before she returned to Mumbai to complete higher secondary from Sophia College. She's "super-grateful" for the all-female environments of her youth, where she was free to be the "smelly, homeless class idiot" making everyone laugh. "In co-eds, the class clown is usually a boy, and expressions of humour from girls are more penalized than rewarded," she says, explaining why she

now cherishes being punished and sent outside class: "I got practice in making up stories."

But the greatest influence in Aditi's life was her father. A security director at a large Indian corporate house with a wicked, sarcastic sense of humour, he yearned to send his children abroad. He urged Aditi to apply to a college in the US. When she earned a scholarship from Fairleigh Dickinson University, he was even happier than her.

Aditi tried her hand at a few jobs after graduation, and then found herself jobless in the middle of the biggest recession the world had ever seen. "Moonh kala kar ke, I had to return home in shame," she says with exaggerated woe. Her heart



L-R: In the documentary film *Stand Up Planet* with Mpho Poppo and Hasan Minhaj; on *Bachelor of Comedy*

was broken, and she felt like she had let her dad down. "I was in depression from nine to five, and then in the evenings, I watched standup comedy," she says. "My American dream was wrecked. So I thought I may as well follow my passion while I am in Mumbai."

It was a kickass idea. Aditi's "fucking high level of *nautanki*" got an excellent outlet in imagining punchlines, waving her arms about, making faces and drawing laughter from random strangers. She soaked up her failures, and showed up night after night after night, until she finally figured out she was made for this. India had a new female standup comic.

Aditi did shows in the US, UK and all over India. Her comedy was featured on every English network in India, BBC World, BBC UK, and BBC America and she was featured in several documentary films, including *Menstrual Man* and

Stand Up Planet. Two years ago, she found herself on Forbes' *30 Under 30* list. She started the comedy web series *Bad Girls*, and got her own standup show on Netflix, *Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say*. She also created two unforgettable characters, Dolly Khurana with her Pun-

"MY AMERICAN DREAM WAS WRECKED. SO I THOUGHT I MAY AS WELL FOLLOW MY PASSION"

jabi quirks, and Dr Mrs Lutchuke, who talks about sex with a grave face and a funny accent.

Where does a comedian find jokes? "By digging into your shittiest experience."

"The most frightening thing is also the funniest," says Aditi, who has taught standup comedy in London. "Are you hurting inside? No?

PHOTO CREDIT: XANDRA CASTLETON, KONNECT FILMS; EAST INDIA COMEDY

Then it's not funny."

2017 was that kind of a year for Aditi. In August, she had 31 back-to-back comedy nights at Edinburgh's Fringe Festival, followed by 21 nights in London – a tremendous opportunity to perform in front of a mature audience. On the day she left for Edinburgh, however, her dad was unwell. He



had been suffering from cancer for a while. Aditi spoke to him on the phone from Edinburgh, telling him to get better soon so that he could teach her his recipes. Hours later, her brother – who is now settled in New York – called to say their father had passed away. He was 69.

Aditi was distraught, but her brother comforted her: "Do you

understand how proud he must be? One child coming from the US, other from the UK for his funeral. His dream for us came true." The siblings laughed through tears. They travelled to Mumbai, and at the prayer meeting, everyone recalled their father's sense of humour. "He would want you to keep laughing," Aditi was told.

Within days, Aditi was back in the UK, cracking jokes from her uncomfortable truths.

"Because, work."

These days Aditi is busy getting her eggs frozen ("just in case"), learning the Afro-Brazilian martial art capoeira ("three times a week"), reading *Raag Darbari* by Shrilal Shukla ("Hindi lends itself so beautifully to humour"), and musing over Manto's *Why I Write* ("Art should destroy the creator of said art. You are incidental to the process."). She shares a flat with her mom and cat ("the cat is named, wait for it, Pussy"), and walks daily in Shivaji park ("I get my exercise slipping over dog poo"). Unlike her real-life playful self, she is rather 'serious' on Twitter, outspoken about politics and women's issues.

The world is a crazy place, says Aditi. "That's why comedy appeals to me. There's no substitute for a belly laugh and creating a memory with a loved one by your side. The joke and the joke-teller are incidental. It's an awesome feeling." ■

PHOTO CREDIT: LUV ISRANI FOR THE SINDHIAN

Working Happiness

RENU CHOUHAN, 27, DELHI



belong to a lower middle-class segment of society where education is not considered important, especially not for girls. My parents run a small dry-clean shop. But they forced me to study and seek a meaningful career. This is the biggest gift they could have given me. I am the only girl in my family who completed her Master's and is a professional.

And, yes, I am the only one to have reached the age of 27, and am still unmarried by choice.

After doing my BA in Hindi, I did my post-graduation in journalism and later MA in mass communication. For the next six years, I worked with top Hindi dailies as a writer and social-media editor. But my job is not my entire life.

I always wanted to be an entrepreneur, so I started my online venture Kuch Creative, retailing ethnic jewellery, last year. I work Monday to Friday in my paid job and spend weekends on my business, shooting pictures, sourcing, packing, handling social-media, maintaining records and accounts.

It takes work to follow one's passion. But don't underestimate yourself. This is the simplest path to happiness. ■



THE QUESTION OF TRADITION

Instead of the festive season being a happy time, it's often a stressful nightmare as you try to please everyone. Why not just reinvent tradition?

By Kay Newton

I can still vividly remember the physical panic and dread the month of December would create in me every year from when the kids were born until they left home. It was usually followed by spending January in bed with flu.

My goal was to create the perfect traditional festive celebration for the family, to be the perfect daughter,

mother and wife, yet there was never enough time to do all the chores leading up to Christmas. In truth, I hated it.

I would spend many weeks before making endless gift lists. These gifts then had to be wrapped correctly in the customary elaborate fashion. There was also the Christmas card list, all handwritten with a personal

message, as well as the customary round robin letter full of boasts and ego about each member of the family and their achievements that year. It used to take forever.

The worst of all was the huge food list, items bought just for that 'one' day of the year, which the credit card confirmed was more appropriate to a year of prepping for World War 3. On top of this, the house needed to be spring-cleaned from top to bottom and decorated as per English custom: gigantic Christmas tree and all its baubles, homemade X-mas wreaths, table decorations and mantle-piece dressings. This was my traditional Christmas.

We all have customs and beliefs that are passed from generation to generation, no matter where we are

in the world, yet when I look back, I am not sure where all my traditions came from. Some I remember from my childhood, for example, the making of the Christmas cake and pudding in October, which I used to do with my grandmother, followed by the weekly ceremony of pouring a small glass of sherry over it in order that the fruit would be just right on the day. Having brandy butter with the Xmas pudding was something my husband's family insisted upon, whereas in Yorkshire we always had cheese with our cake, something he had to get used to!

No matter where you are in the world, your society will have traditions and beliefs. If we like them then they are joyous events; if we don't, they can weigh us down.



PHOTO CREDIT: MAGGIE POO ON PIXABAY

PHOTO CREDIT: RAWPIXEL.COM ON UNSPLASH

But it is obvious that, at some point, somebody instigated the custom or belief and others followed. In other words, nothing is written in stone, you have the power to change and create your own traditions and beliefs in the same way others have done so before you.

For the past five years, I have ditched all my old traditions in favour of a more simplistic festive season. I am much happier now. I do not feel guilty about contributing to landfill and wasting the valuable resources of the planet, which is in a serious state. For example, and this is embarrassing, I remember buying a wall-mounted fish that sang and moved to 'Don't worry be happy' complete with batteries. I bought it for a friend, who on opening his gift looked at me despairingly. It was thrown in the rubbish a few weeks later. How sad is that?

Overeating rich and unhealthy foods at Christmas meant January became compulsory dieting month. Not any longer. There are also many more trees on the planet as I no longer send greeting cards. My husband loves me more too: we are no longer paying the bank for our overspend well into June of the following year!

In fact, living simply has become somewhat of a year-round passion. I call it being 'KISSED': Keep, It, Super, Simple, Every, Day. I like this tradition; it creates space, peace and

harmony. If something doesn't save time, money and my environment, keep me happy, healthy and grateful it isn't included.

The one thing that remains constant even with my new KISSED tradition is the people I share it with – my close family and friends. That's it. Laughter, hugs, time to talk and reflect upon the year in the com-



pany of those I love. The memories we create together will be mine to keep for my lifetime.

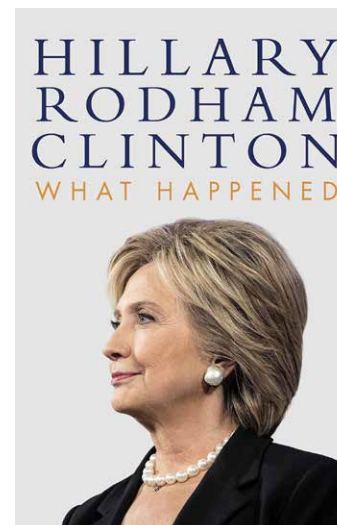
As the year draws to a close and 2018 is just around the corner perhaps you may wish to be KISSED and to pass these new traditions to others. I wish you all happiness whatever you choose. ■

Follow me on www.Kay-Newton.com

PHOTO CREDIT: JENNIFER PALLIAN ON UNSPLASH

ON THE BOOKSHELF

If you haven't read them already, these are your must-reads for this month



What Happened

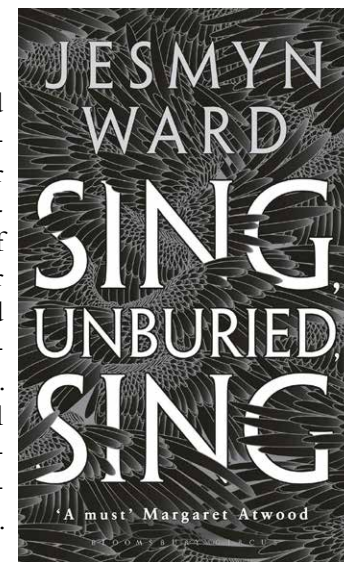
Hillary Rodham Clinton (Simon & Schuster, ₹699)

Now available in India, Hillary Clinton's tome about the 2016 US Presidential elections presents her side of the story, starting with her thoughts and feelings after losing. Probably the most closely watched global event of recent times, her every public action was recorded and replayed several times over in the media, but this book takes you inside her mind during those crucial moments. Hillary came excruciatingly close to being America's first woman president, and after her historic loss, she appears to have learnt a massive lesson in politics and humility. This book is a confident, self-aware and frank account of it.

Sing, Unburied, Sing

Jesmyn Ward (Bloomsbury, Rs 419)

Jesmyn Ward is now two-time National Award winner in the US, with *Sing Unburied Sing* winning the 2017 top American literature award for fiction, after having won it six years earlier for *Salvage the Bones*. The new novel dwells on the lives of a poor Black family in southern America. Rather bleak at first, its protagonist Jojo is a 13-year-old boy whose drug-addicted mother Leonie is married to a White man, who is currently in prison. Their lives scarred with violence, abuse and racial injustice, the book makes for a sorrowful read until Jojo's grandfather begins his tale about a teenage boy he met in prison many decades earlier. And then the magic begins.





MEETING THE MUNSHI

A new version of Shrabani Basu's book Victoria and Abdul is now out after it was made into a film featuring Judi Dench. The book offers fascinating glimpses into the British queen's relationship with her Indian assistant

The Queen fussed over her Munshi and was always keen to show him off to her European relations. In the summer of 1892, when her granddaughter, 16-year-old Princess Marie (Prince Alfred's eldest daughter), arrived in Windsor with her fiancé, Crown Prince Ferdinand of Romania, the Queen insisted they meet her Indian secretary [Abdul Karim].

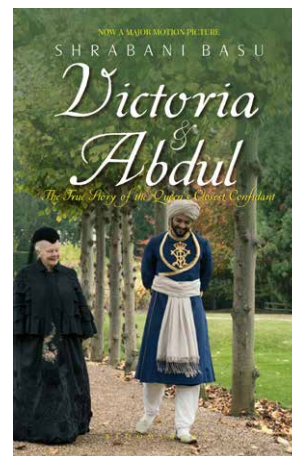
Marie, anxious that 'Grandma Queen' might disapprove of the match, waited nervously for her in the Great Corridor at Windsor. The Queen entered on the arm of her turbaned Indian attendant, smiled at the shy young couple and spoke to Prince Ferdinand in perfect German, asking him about his father. The next day, the awestruck couple were told that "the Munshi would

like to make Ferdinand's acquaintance". It was arranged that they would come to the Queen's private sitting room to meet him.

As Ferdinand entered, he saw the Queen sitting at her writing table. On an easel beside her was an oil portrait of Ferdinand's mother, a beautiful Portuguese Infanta. "Wunderschön," said the Queen. "Wunderschön," replied the tongue-tied Ferdinand. The young Princess recalled

stare at this vision in silk and gold. No one spoke for several minutes. The Queen – evidently pleased with the effect the Munshi had had – continued to smile.

The Munshi remained standing at the door, manifesting, as young Marie said, "no emotion at all, simply waiting in Eastern dignity for those things that were to come to pass". Ferdinand remained frozen and stared at the Munshi. Finally, Marie



L-R: The cover of Shrabani Basu's book; a still from the film *Victoria and Abdul*

how the silence was broken by the click of the door handle and the tall figure of the Munshi who stood in the doorway. He was dressed in gold with a white turban.

Without moving from the doorway, he raised "one honey-coloured hand to his heart, his lips and his forehead. He neither moved into the room nor spoke."

The young couple could only

decided to take the initiative and walked over to Karim and shook his hand. Her fiancé followed. The Queen, satisfied with the encounter, and pleased to have indulged her Munshi with a glimpse of the royal bridegroom, finally allowed the couple, "who were only too pleased to escape", to leave the room. ■

Excerpted with permission from Bloomsbury

Monogamy Does Not Exist

One of the few women authors from India to write erotic novels, Shradha Singh holds pragmatic opinions about extramarital sex

Shradha Singh



She grew up reading Mills & Boon novels tucked inside her physics textbooks, and couldn't fathom why erotica was considered a 'sinful' genre. On the contrary, Shradha Singh wished more women would pen down their fantasies, because, she believed,

erotica written by women would always have a "different aroma of sex and liberation".

So she decided to do it herself.

Born in Ranchi, Shradha studied in Delhi University's Miranda House before heading to MICA Ahmedabad, one of India's top B-schools, for post-graduation. Always interested in theatre in her college days, she began her career as a programmer in a TV channel. She also tried her hand at writing scripts for TV, and went on to win two Indian Telly Awards for her work in Halla Bol and MTV Exit.

She now works as the programming head for Ishq 104.8 FM, an apt position considering she loves everything to do with romance, including romantic erotica, as long as it has some intellectual quotient.

"Everyone in India is kind of struggling with sexuality," says the mother of a nine-year-old daughter. Her first novel, *Guilt Pass*, is the story of a couple who give each other an unusual gift on their 10th

wedding anniversary: the chance to have an extramarital affair, just once. The book explores the complexities of marriage and relationships, and delves into polyamory, which is the desire for intimate relationships with more than one partner, with the knowledge of all partners – call it 'ethical or responsible non-monogamy', if you will.

Interestingly, Shradha herself has been married for 10 years; her husband Pankaj Dubey was her college

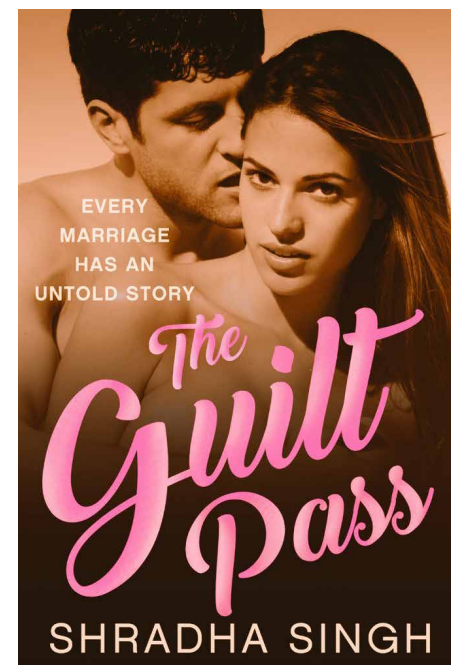
"IF YOU MEET SOMEONE FOR A DRINK WITHOUT TELLING YOUR PARTNER, ISN'T THAT CHEATING? BUT IT'S COMMONPLACE."

sweetheart, and both are professional writers. And he was the first one to support her decision to write an erotic novel. "When I shared the news about my book on my family's WhatsApp group, everyone went silent," she laughs in recall.

Though she's enamoured of all things romantic, Shradha has a sensible approach to extramarital relationships. "Let's be honest. Monogamy doesn't exist. Humans created marriage to civilize ourselves and to create a sanitized environment to raise kids," she says, questioning

the general definitions of 'cheating'. "If you chat with someone of the opposite sex and then delete it, or meet someone for a drink without telling your partner, isn't that cheating? But it's commonplace."

At the same time, the 37-year-old agrees that extramarital relationships do have repercussions. "Monogamy isn't natural but we need it for our



own sanity. You have to choose the life you want: simple or complicated". Having multiple partners may be exciting, but there's much to be said for emotional stability, she says. The 'guilt pass' is expensive. ■

Shradha Singh's Guilt Pass is available as an app book on Juggernaut

WHO NEEDS A BRA ANYWAY?

Most women hate how bras make them feel and yet we subject ourselves to them every day because we believe they make us look better. But who made these rules?

By devina kaur (intentional lowercase)



Whatever size breasts we have, we see them through society's eyes. We can't even say the word "breasts" opting for the more acceptable "boobs". I'm so done with this.

Born and raised in India, at 21, I moved to Canada where I finished university. My Punjabi upbringing, replete with expectations of what a woman should be, clashed with my personal values. I remember my conservative Punjabi mother who scolded me when I chose to nurse my daughter for more than the acceptable three months. To support her argument, she warned of un-

sightly sagging breasts – as if other people's opinions were that important. She did what so many other mothers do; she passed on her own conditioning and upbringing. I admit she tried her best to instill the values of a 'good Indian woman'. I just couldn't relate to her logic.

After my university studies, I worked in the corporate world where a bra was the accepted dress code. Not that I liked it. After work, I couldn't wait to get home to feel free to be me.

Wearing a bra is unnatural, yet we women are frowned upon for being free in our bodies, our spirit and our thinking. I ask you why? Why?



Do I ever wear a bra? Yes. On occasion, I do when I am on Hollywood Television or at a Canadian event because big saggy breasts tend to get a lot of attention. A bra gives much appreciated support in active sports like martial arts or running. Who wants flabby, jiggley breasts getting in the way of the game?

DO I EVER WEAR A BRA? ON OCCASION, YES, I DO, BECAUSE BIG SAGGY BREASTS TEND TO GET A LOT OF ATTENTION

Simply put, it all depends on the clothes we wear and how we feel about our body. Yes, some bodies are fat, but the body is a divine gift so choose to see yourself as the beautiful #SexyBrilliant being you are rather than a fat woman with sagging boobs.

After years of experimenting with going bra-free, this is what I've learnt about breasts and bras:

- It's pointless to fight ageing and gravity. Saggy breasts are easily disguised with a well-designed, properly fitted bra – unless you are like me and have no problems going *au naturel*!

- Wear a bra for contact sports if you want to feel better. Then again, you are free to do as you wish.



- Do yoga without a bra. I like my swinging breasts!

- About breast reduction and/or uplift, I say, well, whatever makes you happy. Choose to love and accept every #SexyBrilliant part of you. Approval not necessary!

Ladies, it's time to applaud the Goddess that resides within each of you. Listen to your inner divinity. Remember the power of change is within us. All we have to do is change our mindset. How about a bra-less world, then?

Devina Kaur is the founder of The Sexy Brilliant Revolution. A flamboyant straight-talker and mother of an eight-year-old, she's an author, entrepreneur and media personality. Follow her on www.sexybrilliant.com.

Taste of Stardom

SOUMYA SOFAT, 18, DELHI



Even though I belong to a family of doctors and academicians, my interests always lay in the creative side of things. Born in Lucknow, my early years were spent travelling around India as my father was a cardiologist in the army. Ten years ago, we finally moved to Delhi.

Music was the most significant part of my school life. I won numerous competitions and performed at various venues. I also did Grade 8 in Vocals, Trinity College of London. I was always encouraged by my parents and my elder sister to make music more than just a hobby.

This year, I auditioned for the reality music show *The Stage* on Colors Infinity. There were thousands of aspirants from all over India and I was thrilled to make it to the top 50. I travelled to Mumbai to perform in front of the judges, Vishal Dadlani, Ehsaan Noorani, Monica Dogra and Devraj Sanyal.

And then I made it to the Top 25! It was a great experience to meet such incredible singers and musicians, and to be appreciated for my performances that aired on TV. I now have a clear vision for my future. I've realized that if we have a dream and a strong passion for something, we shouldn't be afraid to go after it. The possibilities are endless. ■

Super Girl Diary

Clad in the nonchalant dress code of Delhi models – sneakers under a long skirt, crossbody bag – Bandana Sondhi cuts an attractive figure as she walks towards a coffee shop in the tony Vasant Vihar market. It is evident that she loves fashion – not the oppressive, brand-obsessed sort of love, but a purer respect for the possibilities it possesses.

“Fashion can be used to express one’s personality or to make a statement, even to rebel against norms,” says the stylist and personal shopper, who



From banker to model and stylist, Bandana Sondhi’s career has taken unexpected turns, but she’s come to believe anything is possible

specialises in helping people resolve their dressing woes. She conducts workshops on appearance and style for multinational corporate houses, and also models for print and TV commercials. You may have seen her in ads for Coca Cola, HP, Samsung Note 8, DLF Mall of India, Amway and whole host of other brands, besides designers such as Joy Mitra. She has been handling PR and branding for fashion designers and brands, and curating pop-ups and trunk shows.

And all the while, she chronicles her life on her Instagram handle @SupergirlDiariess, where her 12000-plus followers can get behind-

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the-scenes glimpses of her modeling career. But this is not what Bandana initially set out to do.

She started working at the age of 20 at American Express Bank, and later moved to HSBC. Then her father’s work compelled her to leave India. The move shifted her thought process: she realized banking did not interest her anymore.

At the same time, friends started approaching her for grooming and fashion advice. Bandana gave them complete makeovers that changed their outlook and lives. “My career in styling started from there. Though it was never the plan, I

realized I’d found my true calling,” she recalls.

After styling came modelling, and now, 50-odd advertisements down the line, Bandana is able to look back with wonder and see that she has really lived her dream. “Anyone can do that if they just believe in themselves and find their hidden talent, their ‘superpower’. We all have the potential to be superheroes,” says Bandana who is also a successful columnist for a weekly paper and has a book in the pipeline. “Believe in yourself and be original in your choices. Nothing can stop you from conquering the world.” ■

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STATEMENT Jewellery

Former operations manager Sushma Mehta Shah channelled her creative energies into her own jewellery label after a chance statement triggered her to be a successful entrepreneur

Sushma Mehta Shah is an out-and-out Bombay girl. Born on Napean Sea Road, she moved to nearby Marine Drive after marriage. The only time she left the haloed confines of south Mumbai was when she lived with her husband in New York for a few years while he did his MBA. But even a high-paid job working on the 75th floor of Empire State Building in New York could not take away the allure of *amchi* Mumbai, and so she convinced her husband to move back.

The couple then had two children, a daughter who is now 12 and a son who is eight, and Sushma had her arms full with childcare. Five years ago, however, she began to miss work. She had accepted the fact that she could not go back to a nine-to-five job as before, but she itched to do something.

She began writing poetry and even published a book of poems.

Then a random comment by a male acquaintance triggered her off. "He said, 'Oh, you're just a housewife', in a way that made it seem like being a housewife is nothing," she recalls indignantly. "A woman's work at home is never valued, even though she puts in 24x7 for the family."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KINNARI GAIKWAD OF VARIOUS VISION VENTURE



Challenged and charged up, Sushma decided she would start her own business, from home.

Born into a family of Zaveri Bazaar jewellers, the Jai Hind alumna always had a creative bent of mind, and her work experience as an operations manager had taught her how to manage large teams and logistics. She was interested in designing a line of high-quality fashion jewellery that could bridge the gap between street-side 'junk' jewellery on one hand and precious gold jewellery on the other. And so, in 2013, she launched Rejuvenate Jewels.

Initially, she converted one room in her flat into her workplace, with two *karigars* (artisans) coming in daily to conjure her designs into reality. Gradually, her business grew. She priced her products in the range of ₹500 to ₹15,000, with most items in the lower range. Today, she retails from top multi-designer stores across India – from Atosa in Mumbai to Nimai in Delhi – besides online from her own website and on e-stores such as Jaypore and Pernia's Pop Up Shop.

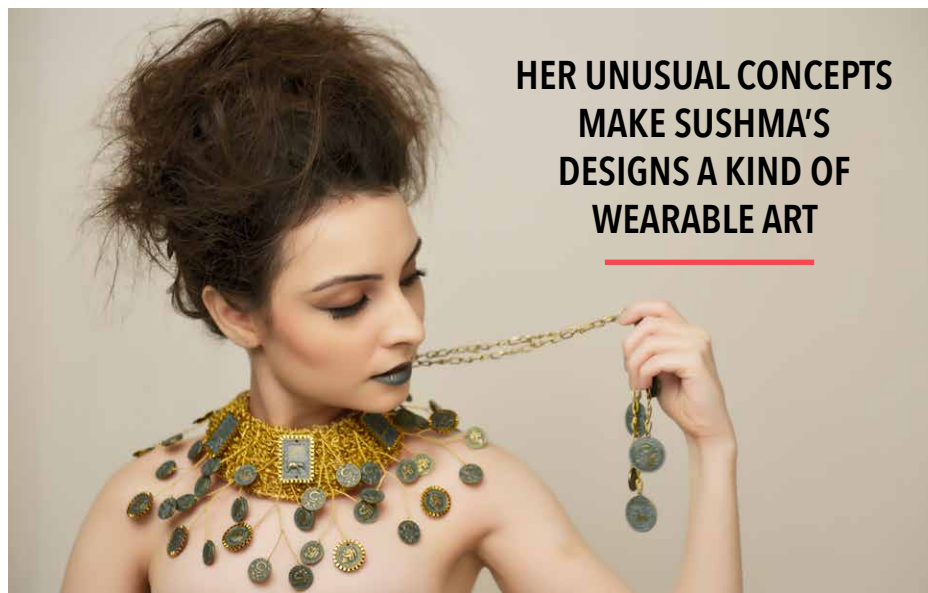
But the best response she's had so far has been through pop-ups and

exhibitions where she can do the sales herself. “People can’t say no to me,” she smiles, “I’m so passionate about my jewellery, it shows.”

Now five years old, Rejuvenate Jewels comes up with a new collection inspired by unconventional items every year. The ‘Heritage’ collection used old coins and keys. The ‘Timeless’ collection saw the use

and Bollywood – Shraddha Kapoor, Vidya Balan, Swara Bhaskar, Mouni Roy, Mandira Bedi, and Hrishita Bhatt to name a few.

Sushma also showcased her collection at Pune Fashion week and was a jewellery partner in the film *Phuntroo*. When she’s not busy with her label or family, she has tied up with the NGO Drishti, and is



**HER UNUSUAL CONCEPTS
MAKE SUSHMA'S
DESIGNS A KIND OF
WEARABLE ART**

of old clocks and timepieces. And the ‘Sawdust’ collection was literally made of recycled wood. Her unusual, flamboyant concepts make Sushma’s designs a kind of wearable art. They also make for excellent statement jewellery when one is attending an important event, so it’s no wonder that her customers include the who’s who of fashion

working to get street children into school, especially girls, and teach them how to use computers. “I’m a feminist,” says Sushma. “I want to prove that whether she’s working outside or at home, every woman contributes as much as a man, and should be respected equally. Don’t challenge her; support her.” The feisty Sushma is walking her talk. ■

MODEL: ORVANA GHAI



TWINNING ACTUALLY

Twins Sheetal and Shilpa Chadha have an identical style sensibility, and it’s easier for them to wear the same thing rather than argue over it!

Being a twin is like being born with a best friend, says Sheetal Chadha, who is older than Shilpa by seven minutes. The 30-something sisters are a treat to observe; they bicker one minute and click selfies the next. Born in Delhi to parents who worked in the government, with an older brother in the US, the twins were brought up doing everything together. In fact, they have been told by an astrologer that they have identical horoscopes too.

Their personalities are different – Sheetal, an HR professional, is laid-

back and enjoys experimenting with fashion and interiors, while Shilpa, a business manager, is more disciplined and pushes them both toward fitness and personal growth. But they have an identical taste in just about everything, from men and movies to food and clothes. Their wardrobe is full of twos of everything, and they avoid last-minute fights over what to wear by simply wearing the same thing, even if that fetches them curious looks!

“We enjoy being twins,” says Shilpa. “Sometimes miracles come in pairs.” ■

COCKTAIL NIGHTS

Get light and lit or heavy and haute, take your pick!

By Shreya Mohan

So it's that time of the year when you have a bunch of weddings to attend, from your best friend's to a distant relative's. The conundrum looms, "What should I wear?" Now you can't really be fully decked out for all, so how do you pace yourself?

Many big fat Indian weddings these days include a 'cocktail night', which attendees consider the best of them all: that's where all the excitement is! You'll be dancing the night away, so think layers, flowy fabrics, plenty of twirling, can-can and the right accessories.

Before you go on a search for the perfect outfit, rummage around your mom's closet and convert a vintage sari into a gorgeous lehen-ga or pair an anarkali suit with your grandmother's antique zari dupatta.

Family heirlooms make for great accessories to complete an ensemble. In recent times, vintage styles of jewellery have also made a comeback and are becoming popular amongst brides-to-be and their families. In fact, borrowing my grandmother's jewellery has become my go-to way of refreshing a look.

But if delving into heirlooms isn't your thing and you are looking to create a whole new look for yourself, I've put together five complete looks for you, ranging from the lightest to the flashiest, along with suggested accessories. You'll find a mix of traditional and modern outfits. Depending on whether you are a bridesmaid or the 'friend of a friend' of the bride, you can pick the look that you think would work best, given your relationship!



EYE CATCHING

Who says wedding outfits have to be super heavy on the pocket? Rent this hot-pink Vidhi Wadhwani crop-top and skirt for just ₹3,499 (stage3.co). Perfect for your classmate's cocktail.



Ritika Sachdeva
gold crescent
maangtika, ₹3,100
(ogaaan.com)



Studio Accessories brown
beaded potli bag, ₹8,000
(perniaspopupshop.com)



Coral Haze gold hand-
embroidered silk and leather
juttis with embellishments,
₹3,200 (jaypore.com)



MINIMAL MAXIMUS

Don't be fooled by this light look. The perfect accessories uplift this Jhunjhunwala zari-embroidered flared gown, ₹28,000, making it perfect for that distant cousin's wedding. Black is always *en vogue*! (perniaspopupshop.com)



Earrings from Gioielli by Praneet Thukral, ₹7,000



Be Chic gold clutch with long chain, ₹13,500 (azafashions.com)



Nidhi Bhandari rose-gold hand-embroidered wedges, ₹8,799 (azafashions.com)

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MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

Pick this glamorous jewel-toned gown by Huemn, ₹39,900 (azafashions.com) for your cousin's cocktail. Blingy accessories give this look celebrity status. Emerald green is definitely the colour of the month.



Ring from Dwarkadas Chandumal Jewellers, price on request



Clutch'D bag with beads and branches, ₹5,550 (rocknshop.com)



Steve Madden Gertie pumps, ₹4,999 (stevemadden.in)

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BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING

This Anamika Khanna navy top and skirt with long jacket, ₹1,65,000, is the perfect Indo-Western outfit to wear to your best friend's wedding (azafashions.com). If out-of-the-ordinary cuts and silhouettes are your calling, this jacket set is sure to make you stand out.



Ring from Dwarkadas Chandumal Jewellers, price on request



Edie Parker Lara backlit clutch, ₹120,000 (rocknshop.com)



Jimmy Choo Emily 85 glittered leather sandals, \$770 (net-a-porter.com)

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HEAVY DUTY

Go all out for your sister's wedding and flaunt this beautiful Malasa ice-grey tasselled lehenga, ₹2,24,000 (ogaan.com). Just the right amount of bling and bomb!



Art Karat silver-finish zircon stone jaal earrings, ₹7,500 (perniaspopupshop.com)



Art Karat silver-finish zircon ring, ₹6,900 (perniaspopupshop.com)



Manolo Blahnik silver cut-out sandals, ₹94,700 (rocknshop.com)

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MAKING INDIA BEAUTIFUL

The founder of the popular Fem range of personal care products, which was bought out by Dabur, Sunita Ramnathkar is now back in the beauty business with her new brand Mitchell USA



She launched India's first facial bleach, Fem, in 1981 and made it into a product range so successful, it made larger FMCG players uncomfortable with the shelf space the little company was taking up in stores. Twenty seven years later, she watched ruefully as one of India's largest conglomerates

took over her brand, and put a five-year, non-compete clause in the contract.

But nine years later, Sunita Ramnathkar is back in the game. And this time she's eyeing not just India but the world.

Brought up in Mumbai, Sunita did her Bachelor's in chemistry with

botany, and then her post-graduation in advertising and PR. "That came in useful later when I started Fem Care," says the amiable Maharashtrian. Egged on by her brother Sunil, an IIT graduate, the 22-year-old newlywed set out to make a product that would help Indian women with their facial-hair woes.

Fem bleach was such a miraculous product that Sunita began making a profit from year one itself. Within two decades, Fem Care was

SUNITA WAS BLOWN AWAY BY THE ANTI-AGEING POTENTIAL OF THE LOTUS SEED. "THE BRAHMI KAMAL WAS HISTORICALLY SEEN AS A MAGICAL BEAUTY POTION"

one of the most formidable names in the personal care market, offering a range of facial bleaches, liquid soaps, and hair removing creams. Godrej and Marico made offers to buy them. "Like fools, we went public," says the mother of two in retrospect. The constant attempts by larger companies to swallow them left her drained. And so, in 2008, when Dabur bought out Fem Care for Rs 203 crore, she let it go.

Her new range, Mitchell's USA, however, builds up from where she left off (see box). It isn't over yet.



THE POWER OF SACRED LOTUS

In 2009, Sunita Ramnathkar was approached by a US skincare brand that specialized in developing cosmetics for women of colour, Mitchell USA. Convinced by their ideology and products, Sunita picked up a stake in the brand. Initially, she only helped them manufacture their products for global sale. But they were "keen on an India story", and invited Sunita to check out their latest research on an ancient 1,228-year-old lotus seed discovered by UCLA scientists.

Sunita was blown away by the findings and the anti-ageing skincare potential of the seed. "The *brahmi kamal* was historically seen as a magical beauty potion," she says. This year, she launched a new range of skincare specifically for Indian skin with the power of the Sacred Lotus backed by scientific research. Potent and luxurious, the Mitchell USA skincare range is a new chapter in Sunita's book. No doubt, it will be a bestseller. ■

SCENT OF A WOMAN

For Indo-French perfumer Jahnvi Dameron Nandan, fragrance is a touchstone for memory and self-discovery

By Juhi Baveja



Perfumes are more than fashionable currency or social emblems – they are personal, powerful and poetic. There are stories behind each ingredient, and it is these stories that Indo-French perfumer Jahnvi Dameron Nandan seeks to chronicle and keep in her library of fragrances.

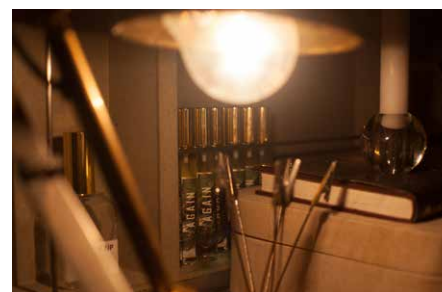
The Paris-based scent-maker is a unique blend in herself – a PhD in architecture, an expert Bharatnatyam dancer and a lover of travel, her interests reveal a quest for sensory indulgences and meaning. And it is this fusion – of structure, composition and pleasure – that defines her perfumes.

It isn't just perfumes she blends; she also creates spaces for them, a library for fragrances that she founded in 2014. This is why her brand The Perfume Library is more than a label – it is a journey, a record of Jahnvi's experiences and stories she wishes to share.

Trained under famous French perfumers at the renowned ISIPCA in Versailles, Jahnvi spent over a decade perfecting her smells. "In perfumery school, my mentor asked me to re-create Chanel No. 5. I had to guess its composition by smelling its various ingredients; there are

perhaps around 70 to 80 of those and the composition is top secret. So I tried to guess it," she narrates, adding, "I was completely lost. Then my mentor said that in every broken smell there is a good smell; keep that."

The 40-year-old perfumer has now retailed and showcased her aromas across the world, from Delhi, Mumbai and Goa to Florida and Athens. To her, perfume is poetry. "A fragrance is an expression of desire and love, a way of peace and forgiveness,



a wholeness of form. A perfume is more; it is an amazing gesture, an aesthetic product that can be enrobed with design," she explains.

The association of memory with smells is primal, she says. "You recognise people through their smells, whether it is your parents or friends. In fact, it is this realisation that I can attribute to the beginning of my fixation with scents." It also led her to start the 'Memory Pod Project', which asks people to share their first memory of smell.

It is this nature of perfume, the ability to translate beauty, memory and emotions, and to distill it all in a vessel with exactness and art, that Jahnvi gravitates towards. ■

NATURE-BASED BEAUTY TREATS

Why look anywhere else when Indian beauty shelves these days have the best of natural and organic beauty ware?

JUST HERBS

If you're looking for really effective, natural personal care products but also value scientific research and modern production values, Just Herbs is your brand. There's just one word to describe their range: perfect. We highly recommend their bestseller Herb Enriched Skin Tint (₹1025), which is essentially a healthy foundation. Also try the No-sun Sunscreen with Jojoba and Wheatgerm (₹645), and Silksplash Face Wash (₹445).

ORGANIC HARVEST

Launched in 2013 with the concept of safe skincare, Organic Harvest is true to its name. Using only pesticide-free plants in their preparation, their very large range of skincare and essential oils are ethically made and not tested on animals. Try their Pollution Defence Serum (₹1095) or Cream (₹1495) for protective, earthy, wholesome moisturisation.



FIRST WATER SOLUTIONS

Launched this year by a Parsons School of Design graduate who wanted to help her grandmother heal her chemotherapy pigmentation, First Water Solutions has heavenly face mists (₹350) that smell amazing and leave your skin well hydrated too.



SOULTREE

You'll be hooked to this brand once you start using their products. Made with high-quality ingredients, beautifully packaged and yet very reasonably priced, SoulTree is on top of our favourites this year. Try the bestselling Apricot Moisturiser (₹450) for light and non-greasy hydration. The Methika, Bhringraj and Virgin Coconut Hair Oil (₹550) assures thick tresses, and the Indian Rose Face Wash with Turmeric and Honey (₹375) is light and fragrant to use. Just pick any product and enjoy the results.



AZAFRAN

Made using plants grown on an organic farm near Ahmedabad, Azafran comes from a company that has ISO, USDA and ECOCERT certification. Try their excellent sunscreen lotion, D'fend SPF 30 Creme (₹700) made with organic soya butter, which protects you from not just the sun but also pollution and signs of ageing.





PUSH YOUR BOUNDARIES

If you want to rediscover yourself, and then go a step further towards inner transformation, put on your hiking shoes and go on a trek

By Ritu Goyal Harish

On my first trip to Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, I was told that climbing to Triund Top was a “must do”. So one morning, I packed my spirit of adventure and set forth to complete the 9-km hike to Triund from McLeod Ganj. I had surprised myself by taking the decision because throughout my childhood or even as an adult, climbing or trekking was not appealing at all; it had

seemed like hard work!

At 38, being a first-timer who wasn't exceedingly fit, climbing to Triund wasn't easy. I wasn't used to the altitude, I was wearing the wrong kind of shoes and I hadn't packed any high-energy food for the way. But I huffed and puffed and didn't give up. In a few hours, I reached the top.

Triund, a picturesque hill top located approximately 2900 metres

above sea level in the Dhauladhar mountain ranges, was a revelation: pristine landscape proffering majestic views of the ranges, surrounded by an eerie silence. I loved it so much that I stayed at the top that night, in a new guesthouse run by two Himachali men. They cooked me a meal of *roti* and *subzi* and shared their rum too. I sat around a bonfire, shivering under the December sky, with two stray dogs for company, listening to my iPod and basking in the silence: this was an adventure I had not planned, but I was hooked.

Over the years, I have undertaken long treks that have pushed my boundaries, and it's not just the sense of achievement that drives me or others like me.

Treks can transform you.

A day of climbing could have

many hurdles and after you've pushed your body physically, it is your mind that helps push yourself just that little bit more.

On a trek, you forget who you are – a CEO, a housewife, a mother – it's just you and the path ahead. There is no other goal for the day and you reach your potential with every tough elevation, every steep descent and with every breath you take in the oxygen-depleted air. Every bruise is a milestone, every slip, or fall, heals you from inside.

They say, in the everyday routine of life, all of us forget who we really are. Being on a trek is one of the very few times when we actually remember! ■

A former journalist, Ritu Goyal Harish has reinvented herself as a travelpreneur. Her firm Ease India Travel specializes in unusual escapades.

PHOTO CREDIT: RITU GOYAL HARISH

ENDLESS INDULGENCE

Dubai is a luxury wonderland for the world's rich to lounge and unwind, and a stay at Anantara The Palm Dubai is an epicurean fantasy



You are floating face up in a shallow lagoon, a pristine pool that winds its way through villas dotted with palms and bushes. There's a little bit of sand along the edges to allow you to pretend you're on an actual beach, albeit a very clean one. It is late at night, and you can quietly observe the sky with its blanket of stars. The sounds of laughter float towards you from a distance; perhaps a family is on its way back after dinner. It is a dry, windless evening, the water is just right. A warm sense of security and the delight of 'doing nothing' lull you to a blissful daze. This is what you imagine heaven must look like.

The parameters of luxury change with time zones and the landmarks in one's life, but one of its most enduring qualities is trust. You trust that attention will be given to every detail, that your needs will be met and exceeded, and that you will receive exceptional value for money.

In that context, Anantara The Palm definitely checks all the boxes. A luxury resort located on the eastern crescent of the iconic Palm Jumeirah, an incredible archipelago of man-made islands connected to mainland Dubai, the property is an interesting cross between Thai architecture with an Arabian character. The idea is to offer visitors 'an urban escape', and with its unique location overlooking the iconic

Burj Al Arab on one hand and the Palm Jumeirah on the other, this getaway is one of its kind.

BUILDING AN URBAN DREAM

It is rather unbelievable how the city of Dubai has metamorphosed from a quaint Middle Eastern village just a few decades earlier to becoming a synonym of new-age luxury replete with glass-enclosed skyscrapers, world-class highways and the most exorbitant creature comforts money can buy. One of its unique aspects is its cosmopolitan and multi-cultural character, as there are more expats in residence than UAE nationals. This quality lends itself to a variety of influences in cuisine, interiors and lifestyle.

With a multitude of hotels vying for the attention of the world's richest families, one of the traits of Dubai hospitality is its element of surprise. Unless you offer something completely unexpected, you're just run-of-the-mill here in this land of diamonds and fast cars.

AN OASIS IN THE DESERT

This is where Anantara The Palm scores. Though constructed on a patch of land that did not even exist a few years ago, it has an understated aura of old money and discreet luxury. With 260 rooms and 33 villas, it can boast of the only 'over-



Clockwise from top left: The resort has three lagoons that wind through its villas; a villa overlooking the Persian Gulf; the bathroom of an over-water room; the walkways around the beach villas and rooms

water' villas in the UAE, giving you a sense of being in a Far Eastern luxury resort even while you're on the Persian Gulf.

Seven speciality restaurants – offering everything from Asian to Mediterranean cuisine – ensure you have enough to savour, and three swimming lagoons and an infinity pool give you reasons to stay longer. The resort also has tennis courts, gyms, jacuzzis and the famous Anantara Spa for seekers of well-being. And if you've had your full of the water sports and Turkish hammam, you can head over to Spice Spoons for Thai cooking lessons.

For those looking to have a destination wedding, the resort also has

a ballroom, six meeting rooms, and a poolside bar where you can create special memories.

A 45-minute drive from Dubai International Airport, the resort is within easy reach of Aquaventure Water Park, Mall of the Emirates, Ski Dubai and Dubai Marina, and has its own kids club and teens club, all of which make it a magnet for families with children.

The resort is now offering special New Year's Eve rates so that you can begin 2018 on a luxurious note, starting from ₹15,800 per person for a dinner at Lotus Lounge and going up to ₹32,500 per person at Crescendo and the Beach House. Spectacular fireworks included! ■

MEAL UNDER AN HOUR

Guests have announced they are dropping in, you have an hour to get things together. What will you dish up? Try this wholesome meal!

Text and recipes by Kavari Jain. Photography by Ananya Jain



Delhi winters always entice me to make soups for early evening pangs of hunger. And they can then can be served at dinner too. Last Friday, I decided to stay indoors as the kids were going out to their grandma's and our man was travelling for the weekend. I prepped for a warm green soup and got into my cozy quilt for a relaxing evening. Five minutes into my ultra-comfortable and chilled-out zone, my phone rang. On the other end was my long-lost school friend. She was on her way with two others and expected a full-course homemade dinner. Of course, she was bringing

along her favourite wine.

With just an hour in hand, I rushed to the kitchen, quickly drawing up a menu in my head. The green soup would do, along with a quick pasta, maybe something with mushrooms as I had lots of them sitting in my fridge. And my friend had a sweet tooth so how could I not do dessert?

A bit of multi-tasking lay ahead. But this four-part meal for the four of us was ready in precisely 55 minutes. How glad I was to find myself washed up and ready just when my doorbell rang!

Read on to see my recipes, and try them out for yourself.



SPINACH AND PEAS SOUP

Ingredients (for 4):

2 teaspoons olive oil
4 spring onion, chopped
300 gms boiled potatoes, chopped
4 cloves of garlic, chopped
200 gms spinach, chopped
250 gms boiled peas
Vegetable stock 500 ml
4 tablespoons fresh cream
1/2 teaspoon white pepper
Salt to taste

Instructions:

1. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the onions and garlic till transparent. Add potatoes, peas and the vegetable stock, and let it simmer for 3-4 minutes.
2. Add the spinach and cook for another 5 minutes. Take it off the heat, and add 2 tablespoons of cream, salt to taste and white pepper. Blend with a hand blender. Serve hot with a swirl of cream on top.

PASTA IN TOMATO AND SHALLOT BUTTER SAUCE

Ingredients (for 4):

100 gms butter
2 large shallots, finely sliced
4 cloves of garlic
600 gms cherry tomatoes, cut into halves
4 tablespoons tomato purée
400 gms pappardelle pasta (fettuccine or tagliatelle will also work)
A bunch of chopped basil leaves
Salt to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to cook the pasta as per instructions on the packet. Heat the butter in a pan, cook the shallots and garlic for 5 minutes.
3. Add the cherry tomatoes and purée and cook for 7-8 minutes. Stir in salt and chopped basil.
5. Toss the pasta in the sauce, add a splash of pasta water. Cook for another minute. Serve hot!





MUSHROOM AND DILL STROGANOFF

Ingredients (for 4):

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cloves of garlic, crushed
2 chopped onions
300 gms assorted mushrooms (chestnut, shiitake, button), sliced
30 gms dill, chopped
Fresh cream

100 ml water
Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the onions for 4 minutes. Add the mushrooms and garlic and cook for another 5 minutes.

2. Add cream and some water, let it simmer for another minute. Add the chopped dill and finally season with salt and pepper.

3. Serve as an appetizer along with garlic bread or as a main course with some wild rice or any other rice of your choice.

NUTELLA ORANGE MOUSSE IN A JAR

Ingredients (for 4):

1 ripe avocado
2 eggs
25 grams shredded mozzarella
Butter to cook
Salt-pepper to taste
Chilli flakes (optional)
Herbs and parmesan cheese for topping

Instructions:

1. Chill the cream and whip it adding the icing sugar till stiff peaks emerge. This should take 10 to 12 minutes.
2. Divide the cream into half. Add Nutella to one half and mix.
3. Add the orange juice and zest to the other

half and mix.

4. Layer in the jar. First layer will be of the crushed cookies. Top it up with a layer of orange cream and then a layer of Nutella mousse. You can make 3 or 6 or even more layers.

5. Chill in the fridge till you serve it! ■





To the Man Who Told Me I AM MORE OF A MAN THAN HIM

Someone I have been politely pulling the disappearing act on, told me, when I finally picked up his phone, that I am more of a man than him. This open letter's for you, mister.

By Unsanskari Stree

PHOTO CREDIT: YOANN BOYER ON UNSPLASH

If this had been 1970, I would have taken your comment as a compliment, and felt highly empowered. It's 2017, and I don't see either the humour or the compliment in it. Instead, I'm putting this comment through my over-analytical female mind and dissecting its components till we all come to some interesting conclusions about me and you.

A. I'm a man because I know what I want (your words, not mine): But even if they were my words, what's wrong with knowing what you want? Am I supposed to become a simpering mess every time I'm asked where my life is going? Actually, I know where my life is going. Shouldn't every sane adult in the world know that, irrespective of gender?

B. I slept with you and left you: Let's decode it in the most respectful way possible: the sex was eminently forgettable! I have better options and I moved on because you offered me nothing beyond.

C. I run my own company: Wow, wow, wow. I'm so sorry I'm not a destitute single mum, bar dancer or hooker. I'm not even a school teacher. I actually run my own company, which I suspect really riles you because you are a corporate slave.

D. I don't like to cook: Not for you, I don't. Enough said?

E. I externalize everything you

say to me about me: Your small, warped mind is assigning qualities to me I don't even have. You have an innate desire to take a normal woman and turn her into some sort of ice-cold masculine profile because you can't deal with a human being who is independent, invulnerable and who actually doesn't give a shit about what you say.

Who decides what is a male quality and what is a female quality? Does being responsible for your life, taking financial decisions, or reject-

**DOES BEING RESPONSIBLE
FOR YOUR LIFE, TAKING
FINANCIAL DECISIONS, OR
REJECTING A MEMBER OF
THE OPPOSITE SEX, ALL
MEAN YOU ARE A MAN?**

ing a member of the opposite sex if they don't suit you, all mean you are a man? Then I am afraid, the negation of these qualities in the rest of the population means that they are mindless slaves.

I'm 100% woman, and I also run a company, think for myself, take my decisions, financial, personal and social, and yes, sleep with men and reject them, if they don't appeal to me. I'm not a man, I'm just a real human being. Deal with it. ■

Never Retire

GITA NAIR, 73, KOCHI



I was born into an accomplished family in Kozhikode, Kerala. My parents and relatives were either bookworms or custodians of hundreds of books. My birthplace, then called Calicut, was home to giants in Malayalam literature and literature-loving connoisseurs. My passion for the subject grew as I gorged on classics and took part in cultural activities in college.

Later, I pursued my Master's in English language and literature. After marriage, I had the option of staying home which, back then, was par for the course for women with successful husbands. My husband Kunhananthan Nair was a lawyer with a flourishing practice. Yet, I chose to work, including at prestigious institutions such as Providence College in Kozhikode and Vimala College in Thrissur.

My husband, who was politically active and had to spend time in jail during Emergency, passed away in 1984 when I was just 40. My active life helped me cope.

At an age when people typically hang up their boots and spend more time with their grandchildren, I am glad I have adapted to new challenges. These days, I train boys and girls in giving the IELTS test. One should never give up. There's no retirement age for a life well lived. ■

Every woman has a story. What's yours?

eShe.in

July 2017
Vol 1 Issue 1

August 2017
Vol 1 Issue 2

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

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING Jennifer Winget

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