

# eShe

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— the female gaze —



## *Amy Chua*

The original 'tiger mother' and Yale law professor on family, Indian students and immigrant experiences

### **GURU COOL**

How educationist Tristha Ramamurthy is redefining learning

### **ECO-SHOPPING**

Environmentally healthy buys for fashion, beauty, home - and menstruation!

### **SUMMER SPIRIT**

Five fruity cooling cocktails + how to drink whisky right

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# SHE SAID IT

**“Students don’t have to worry about anything. We are with them”**

Anita Karwal, CBSE chairperson, after it was announced that students would have to repeat the board exam for Class 10 mathematics and Class 12 economics due to a leak. Aggrieved students and parents called for her resignation, saying, “The leak was done by the CBSE, not the students, then why punish them?”

**“I’m just 20 years old but I’ve seen so many things in life”**

Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai in tears on her return to Pakistan six years after she was shot in the head by Taliban gunmen

**“We women are always compelled to be nice and polite. And you know what? Fuck nice and polite!”**

Mona Eltahawy, Arab feminist and author of *Headscarves & Hymens*, who initiated the hashtag #WhyISayFuck

**“It sucks to be a woman in tech”**

Loretta Lee, an ex-Google engineer who has filed a lawsuit against her former employer

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# PERFECTLY FLAWED

**T**wo American authors have been on my mind lately. The first is, of course, cover personality Amy Chua. When I first read her phenomenal bestseller *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, I’d felt both relieved and queasy. Relieved because I could identify with the parenting techniques the Chinese-American ‘tiger mom’ used with her daughters – my own mother had used them with me. On the other hand, I was queasy because I felt like a ‘cow mom’ myself: I was too laid-back, I gave my girls too much freedom, never took them to piano lessons – would they amount to *nothing*?

But as Amy herself found, no two children can be alike, and parents have to continuously adapt. Her daughters have grown up into successes, and she’s now off defining new terms for global readers to mull and debate over, like ‘political tribes’ (p.26).

The other author I’ve been recommending to everyone and their aunt is Mark Manson, whose book *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck* moved me deeply. It says adversity is good, and we need not seek positive experiences all the time. “Growth is an endlessly *iterative* process. When we learn something new, we don’t go from ‘wrong’ to ‘right’. Rather, we go from wrong to slightly less wrong,” he writes. “We are always in the process of approaching truth and perfection without actually ever reaching truth or perfection.”

Our fallibility is our strength; it pushes us towards growth, says Mark. Accepting that we are ‘losers’ lets us shed unnecessary trappings, and instead do our *real* life’s work – cow moms included.



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# DANCE OF LIFE

*Former lawyer and Kathak maestro Shivani Varma weaves history, politics and technical innovation in her performances*

**O**n a pleasant spring evening in Delhi, the stage inside India Habitat Centre's Stein auditorium reverberates as three pairs of *ghungroo*-laden feet thump continuously in sync with accompanying tabla beats. A single beam of light focuses on the trio – the effect is ethereal and haunting. The *chhann-chhann* sound of their *ghungroos* and the *thap-thap* of their feet go on unchanged for a suspenseful few minutes – evoking the rhythm of a train heading steadily towards its destination. At the end, the leading lady in the centre between two male dancers turns around and faces the audience, her light eyes lit with fire, and launches into the next part of her performance without pause. The audience releases its collective breath.

This is one of the many memorable pieces of technical and creative innovation in Shivani Varma's Kathak performance *Champan Ke Bapu*. She conceptualized and choreographed the dance-drama after

educationist Sukanya Bharat Ram first suggested the idea of presenting an ode to Mahatma Gandhi.

With her nimble grace and mastery over the ancient classical dance, Shivani depicts slices of history in fluid motion: Gandhi's first step off the train on to the platform at Champan; the peasants' rising an-

**"KATHAK IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST DANCE; IT TEACHES YOU HISTORY, LANGUAGES, PHILOSOPHY, CULTURE"**

ger at the tyranny of the British; and the pain of Partition. And yet, this is a story of courage, not loss.

Politics, history and fights for justice are topics close to Shivani's heart. A political science graduate, she completed her LLB from Delhi University's Faculty of Law and practised at Delhi High Court. She

For her show *Champan Ke Bapu*, Shivani wore a khadi stole over a Kerala sari instead of the typically ornate Kathak costume, and wore no jewellery in keeping with Gandhian values



even married a lawyer, Vedant Varma, who has his own legal practice.

But Shivani always had another love. Having learnt Kathak from the age of three, she grew up to become a disciple of Guru Shovana Narayan and was mentored by danseuse Sharmistha Mukherjee. While in college, she was noticed by filmmaker Muzaffar Ali who gave her opportunities to perform in leading roles in many classical projects including the Sufi festival, Jahan-e-Khusrau. She has also performed at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Commonwealth Games 2010 and has given recitals at a number of literature and art festivals, even fashion weeks.

“Gradually, my legal practice became secondary and dance went from passion to profession,” says Shivani, seated in her family’s legal office in the basement of their South Delhi home. Alongside the office is her dance studio, where she conducts Kathak classes for kids.

Shivani regrets that classical dance does not find patronage today from government or private sponsors. “I wish more Indian parents sent their children to learn classical dance; it would help revive an interest. Kathak is so much more than just dance; it involves history, poetry, languages, philosophy, culture,” she avers. This feisty dancer herself is an inspiration to try it. ■



Clockwise from top left: At a recital; with her husband Vedant; with her students; striking a pose

## TRISTHA'S TRYST WITH DESTINY

*Thousands of Indian schoolchildren owe their happy childhoods to Tristha Ramamurthy, who has redefined the education space in India*

**T**ristha Ramamurthy was brought up with tall role models. Her mother Sabitha, passionate about quality education, had started a school for five children in the family’s guava orchard when Tristha was a little girl. Over the years, the school grew larger until it became a secondary

school and later a college, and then several more.

Tristha’s father, a former IPS officer, who retired as Inspector General of Police, Bengaluru, having won several awards for meritorious service, had also served as Registrar of Bangalore University.

And so, Tristha’s destiny in educa-





L-R: Tristha during a conference; with her husband Tushar Vashisht and their Golden Retriever

tion was already etched out for her.

Having grown up in her mother's school, Tristha completed her Bachelor's in political science and entrepreneurship from Singapore Management University. She then did her Master's from Stanford University School of Education, and is currently pursuing her doctorate from Kings College London. Along the way, she founded Ekya Schools in 2010 "to bring research-based learning experiences to India".

In over two decades, her family's CMR Group has grown into several schools and nearly 22 colleges. As founder and executive director, Ekya Schools and vice president, CMR Group of Institutions, Tristha spearheads the K-12 (kindergarten to class 12) initiatives, overseeing eight state board, CBSE, ICSE and pre-university institutes. That's an

overall student strength of nearly 9,000 in the age group of two and a half years to 18 years old.

Ekya's 350 teachers and educators follow the principles of inquir-

### **"WHAT IS LEARNING? THERE'S SO MUCH RESEARCH COMING OUT THAT CONTRADICTS EXISTING FRAMEWORKS"**

ry-based learning and 'design thinking', which Tristha adopted from her experiences in Reggio, Italy, and from Stanford's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design. Tristha's brother, an architect and MBA from the UK, designs the group's campuses.

Along with technology partners



Front row: Tristha, her mother Sabitha, and sister-in-law Shreya Reddy. Back row: Her husband Tushar Vashisht, father KC Ramamurthy, and brother Jayadeep KR

from the US, Ekya is one of the few schools in India to introduce tech-based teaching. "What is learning? Everyone feels they know what education is, but there's so much research coming out that contradicts existing frameworks. At Ekya, we are flipping the way education looks like," says the 32-year-old.

In 2011, Tristha met University of Pennsylvania alumnus Tushar Vashisht, a former Wall Street banker. The couple tied the knot in 2013. An early team member in the UID project, Tushar experimented with living on the poverty line of Rs 32 per day, a story that made it to the *New York Times*. He then launched his health startup, HealthifyMe, one of India's top rated weightloss apps, which has just raised \$12 million in series B funding.

Besides the atmosphere at home, living in the city of Bengaluru has also helped in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset in Tristha. She loves setting up new ventures and often makes investments in ed-tech startups. "I have an understanding of the ecosystem and so I can guide them – everyone is going through the same challenges," says Tristha, who unwinds by "fermenting her own home brew" and travelling.

Seeing her mother stand her ground with determination and grit has been useful for Tristha at the toughest times. "If you're trying to redefine a space, you need to have that kind of strength to stay on track for a long time," she says. With thousands of students and educators looking up to her, she's certainly here to stay. ■



# LOVE OF THE EARTH

*Consumer culture isn't that bad if your shopping leaves the world a better place. These seven brands make products that are high on quality, low on price, while also protecting the planet and uplifting the underprivileged*

## ECOWARE

### *Biodegradable disposables*

**R**hea Singhal was 19 years old when her mother was first diagnosed with breast cancer. By the time the disease struck a second time, the entire family had changed their lifestyles, given up plastics and switched to an organic diet. Brought up in Dubai and London, the young pharmacologist also resolved to do something about India's addiction to plastic.

Giving up a lucrative career in the UK, where she had handled brand launches for Pfizer's oncology port-

folio, Rhea and her ex-banker husband Nishant moved to India in 2009. Shocked by the indifference to waste disposal and the lack of dustbins in public areas, she came up with Ecoware, a range of 100% biodegradable disposables.

Since her family had been in the sugar industry for long and Rhea had access to sugar mills, she worked out a way to use agricultural waste such as sugarcane bagasse to make tableware, birchwood to make cutlery, and cornstarch-based biodegradant to make garbage bags.

Over the next few years, she worked diligently to tie up with food chains such as Haldirams and

Cinnabon, cinemas, offices and schools along with the export market and retail outlets online and offline. Affordably priced and USDA-certified, her products soon found 25 wholesale distributors to supply to the smallest of towns and the largest of metros.

Ecoware can resist temperatures from -20° to 180°C, so it is safe to freeze, bake and microwave. After disposal, it turns to compost in 90 days. There is no plastic coating or lining, and – unlike paper – no trees are cut in the process. The products are bleached white using chemical-free methods, and can be cus-

tomized in bulk on request.

Hailing from a 'foodie' family, the 36-year-old Rhea wants to create awareness about living close to nature, and she's leading by example. Her home is almost plastic-free – the family uses bamboo toothbrushes and wooden *moodas* instead of plastic stools. They use only glass containers to store food, and segregate, compost and recycle all waste. "We cannot control our genetic factors but we are 100% in control of our lifestyle choices," says the eco-warrior.

**Buy on:** Amazon.in, Ecoware.in

**Facebook:** @EcowareIndia



Rhea Singhal



## MOOL CREATIONS

### Upcycled cloth jewellery

**T**hese delicate pieces of jewellery have a solid root in sustainability and social empowerment. This Delhi-based fashion label reuses discarded material and applies traditional crafts to make fashion accessories. Each piece you buy also supports women artisans from the slums of Delhi and Pune with a regular livelihood.

Founded almost a decade ago by Paramjeet Bernad, who has a background in theatre and social work, along with Kshitij Amodekar, an

architect and environmentalist, the model for the organization is to make it self-sustaining and focus on reuse and recycling to recreate fresh, innovative designer products. Underprivileged women or victims of abuse are engaged and their financial security is a top priority.

The artisans meticulously collect waste cloths (*katrans*), colour-sort them and turn them into an eclectic range of jewellery, which is soft on the skin and goes well with contemporary clothing.

**Buy on:** Jaypore.com, Avishya.com, Emailhar.com, Worldartcommunity.com and People Tree stores

**Facebook:** @MoolCreations



Clockwise from top left: Earrings by Mool Creations made of cloth; models posing in Mool cloth-based necklaces; the team at work in Delhi; a customer trying out products at a crafts festival



## CHAMPA AUR CHINTI

### Lifestyle products

**F**ounded by NIFT alumnus Siddhartha Patnaik to promote Odisha's rich heritage of sustainable handicrafts and handlooms, Champa Aur Chinti is a lifestyle label that fits well in contemporary urban homes.

Created with ethical fair-trade principles and based on a philosophy of cooperation, the products not only brighten up your home with their eclectic, cheerful designs

but also support entire artisan communities with a source of livelihood.

Based in Bhubaneswar, the brand's forte is handloom textiles from Odisha's Kotpad Mrigan community, Pipli appliqué and Patachitra art along with associated crafts like palm-leaf engraving, papier mache and wood carving.

The range includes high-end apparel (for men, women and children), fashion accessories, home furnishings, wall art and table linen.

**Buy on:** Champaaurchinti.com

**Facebook:** @ChampaAurChinti





## CHHOTI SI ASHA

### *Sustainable merchandise*

**R**egistered in 2009 as a non-profit, Chhoti Si Asha (CSA) makes trendy handbags, conference merchandise and home decor. They use materials like hand-printed cotton, jute, canvas, denim and leather. Their range includes personal accessories such as jewellery, scarves, wallets, and so on, and home accessories like pouffes, cushion covers, table mats and coasters.

They offer over 200 designs of handbags and retail in India, USA and UK. They also make women's

wear and supply conference merchandise to universities. A fair-trade organization, they pay their workforce above-market wages, and re-plough 100% of their profits into growing the business and on community activities.

CSA was founded by Gagan (Liza) Chawla, a former IT professional from Silicon Valley. In 2005, she and her husband relocated from California to India to do things "closer to their heart". Liza started CSA to build sustainable livelihoods for women in Chandigarh's slums.

**Buy on:** Itokri.com, Shopo.com, Rhope.org, Greenthemap.com and People Tree retail store

**Facebook:** @ChhotiSiAsha

## TARAGRAM

### *Paper products*

**L**ooking for quirky homeware that also gives livelihoods to rural women? Look no further. Launched in 1995 by Development Alternatives, TARAGram is a platform that trains and skills women from the Sahariya tribal community and other marginalized groups in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh. These women learn to make paper products that are sold under the brand name TARAGram in cities and online. The brand is much sought-after by its urban customers, especially mothers looking

to invest in sustainable and safe stationery for their children.

TARAGram paper and paper products are specially handcrafted after much quality control. One tonne of TARAGram recycled rag paper saves three tonnes of wood and 100 cubic metres of water, giving us six trees. They have also started supporting women weaver clusters, enabling them in all varieties of handloom techniques.

Development Alternatives is the brainchild of award-winning environmentalist Dr Ashok Khosla, who holds a PhD in experimental physics from Harvard University.

**Buy on:** Amazon.in

**Facebook:** @TARAGram



Clockwise from top left: TARAGram products; women artisans at work; the TARAGram head office in Delhi



## LAST FOREST

### *Home-ware and edibles*

**T**heir products tell stories of the Nilgiris, the wide variety of flora and fauna of Kotagiri and the traditions of the tribal groups who have lived there for centuries. Last Forest is a profit-hybrid institution that was launched by the NGO Keystone Foundation to serve as a marketing platform to help indigenous groups and social enterprises in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. Their eco-development initiatives generate employment and are fair-trade certified.

They have a large range of products, their flagship item being wild honey from the Giant Rock Bee. They also use ethically sourced beeswax in a large variety of personal care products like soaps and lip balm, and home-ware like beeswax wrappers as an eco-friendly, reusable alternative to aluminum foil.

Traditional techniques are combined with modern design and quality-control procedures. They retail online and offline through stores and exhibitions, and also take orders for corporate gifting.

**Buy on:** LastForest.in, Amazon.in, Green Shop outlets

**Facebook:** @LastForest



Clockwise from top left: Honey extracted using traditional methods from the Nilgiris is their flagship product; lip balm made from beeswax; a bag made with Toda embroidery; the team at work in Kotagiri



Clockwise from top left: A model wearing naturally dyed and hand-knitted products; only natural dyes are used during production; women make up 85% of Avani's employees; co-founder Rashmi Bharti at work



## AVANI

### *Textiles and art supplies*

**T**hough they follow traditional production techniques, Avani products are designed to compete and scale on international platforms. So you will find stoles made of luxurious silk and wool blend, and all-natural water colours made from a blend of natural dyes and essential oils.

An NGO based in the Kumaon hills of Uttarakhand, Avani seeks ways of livelihood generation for

local communities while encouraging sustainable production. Using only natural dyes and eco-friendly materials, they make textiles, toys and art supplies.

Co-founder Rashmi Bharti has been working in the field of rural development for over two decades. Today, a majority of the artisans the organisation employs from the local communities are women, and they have touched the lives of thousands of people so far, spread across more than a hundred villages.

**Buy on:** Avani-earthcraft.com

**Facebook:** @AvaniKumaon1



# ECO-FRIENDLY PERIODS

*Why must your sanitary napkin leave a plastic burden on the earth? Opt for these biodegradable and reusable versions instead*

Only about 58% of Indian women use hygienic menstruation products; leaving the rest at a risk of infection. But pushing more Indians to adopt commercial sanitary napkins – which are loaded with dioxins, plastics and chemicals – will only harm their bodies and the planet. Used sanitary napkins contribute 9,000 tonnes of waste in India every year, are a health hazard for waste-collectors, and their plastic takes 500 to 800 years to decompose. So what's the solution? Eco-friendly sanitary pads.

Made from natural products, these decompose within months and are kinder to your body too. And if you'd like to go further, there are also cloth pads, which can be washed and reused for years. But do Indian women know about these?

In a recent online survey of 503 urban women done by students from youth organization Enactus (at Sri

Venkateswara College, Delhi), 62% women were *not* aware of harmful chemicals in commercial sanitary napkins; 42% had never heard of eco-friendly options – even though 90% had faced discomfort while using disposable pads at some point, and 74% were concerned about their environmental impact. The good news? 87% said they would be willing to try reusable cloth napkins, or use them already.

## 74% URBAN WOMEN WERE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF DISPOSABLE NAPKINS

This Women's Day, our government launched biodegradable sanitary napkins called Suvidha, to be sold at a cost of ₹2.50 each at 3,200 drug stores across the country from May. Until they arrive, there are other low-cost options such as Anandi and Saathi in rural areas.

Last month, *eShe* featured Carmesi biodegradable pads. This month we bring you more brands, including cloth pads that can be washed and reused. You now have no excuse to keep polluting the planet!

### NURTURE

These disposable pads come with a 100% cotton cover for maximum comfort. They are chemical-free, hypo-allergenic and have a silver ion chip with anti-fungal and anti-bacterial benefits. They come in XL size. **Price:** ₹14 per pad onwards. **Shop at:** [Naturalmantra.com](http://Naturalmantra.com), [Amazon.in](http://Amazon.in)



### HEYDEY

Made of corn and bamboo fibre, which have natural sterilisation effects, Heyday disposable pads are antibacterial and eco-friendly. Both napkin and cover decompose in six months after disposal. Completely chemical-free, these very popular pads have seven super-absorbent core sheets and wings. They come in two varieties and are available on subscription. **Price:** Rs 11 per pad onwards. **Shop at:** [Heydaycare.com](http://Heydaycare.com)



### SAATHI

These use agro-waste like banana fibre, are highly absorbent, unscented and decompose six months after disposal. Every time you purchase a Saathi pad, you also help women in rural communities via their #OneMillionPads program in Jharkhand. It is available only in XL size. **Price:** ₹22.25 per pad. **Shop at:** [Saathipads.com](http://Saathipads.com)





## PURGANICS

Designed in India and made in Italy with GOTS-certified organic cotton, these disposable pads are biodegradable, ultra-thin and highly absorbent. They have a plant-based waterproof back-sheet and wrapper. **Price:** Rs 35 per pad onwards. **Shop at:** Flipkart.com, Purganiclife.com



## SOCH

Soch reusable pads are made of combed cotton, high-quality microfibres and a leak-proof layer. The side wings have buttons to keep the pad in place. They come in various sizes for petite to plus-sized women, and can also be used for postpartum bleeding and light incontinence. **Price:** ₹175 per pad onwards. **Shop at:** Hygieneandyou.com, Amazon.in



## ECO FEMME

These reusable pads made of organic cotton can last for years if used well. Made by a women-led social enterprise in Auroville, they not only help you consume less plastic but also give you an avenue to help less fortunate women. Eco Femme pads and pantyliners come in various packages. **Price:** ₹245 per pad onwards. **Shop at:** Ecofemme.org



# WHY MORE WOMEN HAVE CANCER THAN MEN IN INDIA

*Despite a reverse global trend, a new study has found more Indian women with cancer than men. We dig around to understand why*

Seema Malik had a heart attack in 2014. The busy, healthy mother of three grownup daughters had taken her two-year-old grandson downstairs to play. After climbing three flights of stairs back up to her flat, she felt uneasy. Her daughters rushed her to the hospital where she was told two of her arteries were 90% blocked, and two stents were inserted in an emergency operation. (“I was in the hospital just two nights, and the bill came up to ₹6 lakhs,” rues the 68-year-old retired matron.)

Though the surgery was pronounced successful, Seema de-

veloped a severe pain in her right shoulder. Her doctor suggested physiotherapy. Despite several months of therapy from all kinds of clinics – from an ashram to a celebrity sports physiotherapist – Seema’s pain was unrelieved and she was miserable, even wailing in agony at times. Then, in 2016, one doctor conducted an MRI scan and indicated she may need an oncologist.

The subsequent lung biopsy was the “most confusing and worst thing” in Seema’s life. “I could not take the tube down my throat and my doctor kept blaming me for not doing it right,” she gesticulates hotly in



PHOTO CREDIT: HUSH NAIDOO ON UNSPASH.COM





recall. She isn't even sure if the doctor got any tissue sample from her lungs at all. Even so, the report came back depressing: she had advanced-stage lung cancer.

"I don't understand. How come no one noticed it during my heart surgery in 2014?" says a bewildered Seema, who insists no one in her family has ever had cancer. "How can cancer reach the third or fourth stage in less than two years?"

Ten days of radiation relieved Seema's pain, and she was then put on a long-term anti-cancer treatment with an imported medication that costs her close to ₹50,000 per month. But what upsets her the most is her doctor's indifference and refusal to be honest with her: "Will I die if I stop this medication? He evades my questions. In-

stead he speaks to my husband over my head, and points at the other five patients seated in his room, telling us my time is up."

Seema is one among more than 1.5 million new cases of cancer that are reported in India every year. Of the reported cases, only about 30% survive the next five years. According to a new survey published in *The Lancet Oncology*, more women in India are diagnosed with cancer than men, even though men report a 25% higher incidence of cancer than women all over the world. The report has suggested that more research needs to be done to figure out why.

Doctors have a few theories. One of them is late diagnosis of disease. Dr Punita Bhardwaj, senior consultant (unit incharge) of gynaecology

endoscopy and robotic surgery at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi, believes women only come forward to get themselves screened when their day-to-day functioning is affected. "Marriage is a big hindrance to women's health," she opines, only half-joking. "Single women are afraid a negative diagnosis may affect their chances of marriage. And married women are afraid of disturbing the family's home machinery." No wonder that the *Lancet* study also found that breast cancer is most often diagnosed in the third or fourth stage in Indian women, versus first or second stage in the US.

The other hindrance is fear of doctors and surgical procedures. With only 1.2% of GDP being spent on healthcare; several media reports related to hospital deaths such as the newborns in Gorakhpur; doctors being beaten up by patients in Delhi and Mumbai; and cases of overcharging – such as Medanta Hospital charging ₹16 lakhs from the family of seven-year-old Shaurya Singh who died of dengue after three weeks in the hospital – there is a massive trust deficit between doctors and patients. Cases such as Seema's are also typical – when doctors are

overworked, and lose the personal touch with individual patients.

The high cost of cancer treatment is also a deterrent for many women, who don't want to be a burden on their families. According to one report, the cost of a single hospitalisation exceeds the average annual per capita expenditure of more than 60% of the population.

But one of the greatest problems is lack of awareness, especially when it comes to cervical cancer, says a study in the *Indian Journal of Cancer*. About 1.3 lakh women are diagnosed with this form of cancer every year, and half of them don't survive more than five years – even though cervical and breast cancer can be cured

if detected early and given proper treatment. Shyness and lack of hygiene education prohibit women from bringing up symptoms with their family or doctors.

"This negative attitude towards medical intervention is taking a toll," rues Dr Bhardwaj, adding that those who are mentally prepared and optimistic about treatment benefit the most from it, regardless of their education level. "Do not ignore your body's signals," she warns. "It's not worth your life." ■

### **"WOMEN ONLY GET THEMSELVES SCREENED WHEN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY FUNCTIONING IS AFFECTED"**

PHOTO CREDIT: LUIS MELENDEZ ON UNSPLASH.COM



# THE BEST OF AMY

*She has sparked off global debates on race and parenting, sold millions of copies and made 'tiger mom' a household term. And now Yale law professor Amy Chua is out with her new theory on political tribes*

*By Aekta Kapoor*

In fourth grade, Amy Chua was short, chubby and had a strong Chinese accent, endowed by her ethnic Chinese parents who had migrated to the US from the Philippines. One day in school, she pronounced the word 'restaurant' with the emphasis on the second syllable. "A boy named Jeremy hooted with laughter and went wild making fun of me," the bestselling author recalls. "He ran around the playground making slanty eyes, saying, 'resTAUrant, resTAUrant, haha!' I vowed at that moment to get rid of my Chinese accent. I also vowed to show everyone on that playground someday."

Amy did both.

The daughter of a college professor, Amy went on to graduate *magna cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard College. Three years later, she obtained her J.D. *cum laude* from Harvard Law School, where

she was the first Asian American officer of the *Harvard Law Review*. After several years in law practice, she turned to academics, and has been a professor of law at Yale Law School since 2001.

Along the way she wrote five books, all of which were profoundly successful, but none as much as *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), a witty and provocative memoir of her parenting journey, which was translated into 30 languages. It shook up parents, academicians and social scientists worldwide with its radical ideas that having high expectations from one's kids was better than overprotecting them, and being strict – even dictatorial if required – was better than unstructured parenting.

"The ensuing firestorm definitely changed my life. I love being able to write on two tracks, one more personal and humorous, and

Amy Chua's new book *Political Tribes* talks about how group loyalty often trumps ideology





the other more serious in my areas of academic expertise,” Amy tells *eShe*. Her new book *Political Tribes* (Bloomsbury, 2018) brings together Amy’s foreign policy background with her interest in social, political and cultural movements.

Looking back, however, Amy admits she applied to law school only because she didn’t want to study medicine or physics, which is what her parents wanted for her. “I wasn’t a natural in law school, but in the end I got so lucky. Yale values interdisciplinary and unconventional approaches, and it’s been a perfect fit for me,” she says.

Amy met Jed Rubenfeld in law school, and they married a few years later. When her daughters Sophia and Lulu were born, she confesses she tended to do most

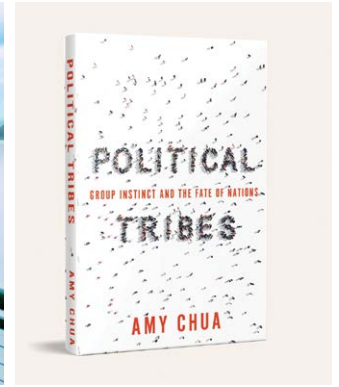
of the “hardcore parenting”, overseeing homework, music practice, driving them to class, enforcing rules and so on, “probably because I found myself more reliable and competent, and not afraid to have my girls mad at me!” she jokes.

But then – like many working mothers around the world – she would often find herself exhausted since she had a full-time job, and would resent Jed for not doing more. “A great thing for our marriage was when I decided to *help him help me*,” she shares, describing how she figured out stuff that Jed could do, often more effectively than she could, freeing up more time for herself. “Enabling him to be more of a real partner as opposed to be heroically doing everything myself was a great move.”



L-R: Amy with husband Jed Rubenfeld on their wedding day; with her three sisters

PHOTO CREDIT: BATTLEHYMNTOHETIGERMOTHER.COM



L-R: Jed and Amy when Sophia and Lulu were little; Amy’s new book *Political Tribes* (Bloomsbury, 2018)

*Battle Hymn...* not only put Amy in the spotlight but also her family. Every academic move her daughters make is watched closely – especially by opponents of Amy’s ‘tiger parenting’ style. (“I actually didn’t intend for *Battle Hymn...* to be a parenting book. I had totally different hopes for the book,” says Amy.) Yet, the public limelight has only brought them closer as a family. “Both my daughters have stunned me with how brave they are; they both happily do interviews and seem comfortable to be in the public eye. And they’ve been incredibly loyal to me. They’ve grown into strong, kind, funny young woman with huge personalities,” shares the super-proud mom.

A fan of classic literature and thoughtfully made movies such as the recent Oscar winner *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, the 55-year-old’s own work has dwelled on immigrant issues and

the question of ethnic or tribal affiliation in a world of fluid boundaries. *The Triple Package*, a book she co-authored with her husband Jed, posits that there are ingrained cultural traits that explain the success of certain groups, such as the Indian and Chinese, in America.

### “A GREAT THING FOR OUR MARRIAGE WAS WHEN I DECIDED TO ACTUALLY HELP MY HUSBAND HELP ME”

Considering conservative Indian parents are less likely to send their daughters for higher education to the West, we ask her how such social limitations play out in terms of immigrant women’s success?

“In my experience teaching at Yale Law School, many of my most original, vibrant and successful students have been young



women who are the daughters of Indian immigrants (the young men are great too, but still!)," Amy responds, adding, "The Chinese have this unfortunate bias too. I come from a family of four daughters and no sons, and all I can say is, I'm so happy that my parents made me feel that I could literally accomplish anything if I just aimed high, worked hard, and never gave up."

In *Political Tribes*, Amy uses wealth as a general parameter of success but admits she has not accounted for 'happiness'. We ask her what a more holistic definition of success would be, which would ensure a more equal, humane world for future generations? "Good morals. Self awareness and self-reflection. And, above all, generosity of spirit," she signs off.



### THE TIGER MOM'S LAST WORD

*Seven years on, Amy Chua still stands by the beliefs she expressed in Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother:*

It is best to assume strength rather than weakness in one's children.

True self-esteem and inner strength must be earned.

The most important thing a

parent can do is to always convey unconditional love.

Keep in mind that children can be very clever and know exactly how to manipulate you! So just listen carefully and be willing to adjust, but also be willing to stand your ground. Once kids sense weakness, it's over.

Parenting is not a science; it's more of an art. Or maybe a circus. ■



## Six Years of TRANSFORMATION

*Loss and grief transformed diffident homemaker Saumyashree Nayak to a confident professional and brave single mother*

**J**uly 2012. Sailesh Das, a 41-year-old from Delhi, was working out in a gym when he suddenly began to vomit. He was rushed to a hospital, but didn't make it. Doctors said he'd had a cardiac arrest. He died within 30 minutes.

All of a sudden, life turned upside-down for his wife, Saumyashree Nayak, who went into shock.

She didn't know what to tell their eight-year-old son Priyanshu.

She didn't know how to process the trauma herself.

Born and brought up in Nowrangpur district of Odisha, Saumyashree had plenty of degrees from Berhampur University to her credit – Master's in Economics, Bachelor of Education, a diploma in computers. But after moving to Delhi in 2002



following her wedding, the small-town girl found Delhi's culture intimidating. She was hesitant to socialize, and became "something of a shadow" to her husband.

When their son was born, she devoted herself to his care. Over the years, she became an introvert, low on confidence. She depended on Sailesh to take care of everything outside the home – she didn't even know how to operate an ATM.

Sailesh often prodded her to do something of her own, to keep herself busy and occupied. Once her son was old enough, Saumyashree began giving tuitions and running art and craft classes to children from a location close to home. Things were going smoothly in the family's life. Until it all turned upside-down, of course.

The first words that American author Joan Didion wrote after the death of her husband were just this: "Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends." In her heartbreaking memoir, *Year of Magical Thinking*, she recounts the events leading up to her husband's death: "A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty." And so it happened for Saumyashree.

"Soon after his death, my family insisted I return to Odisha," she remembers. But having lived in Delhi for 10 long years, she didn't want to disrupt her son's life and education.

"Give me some time to think," she told her parents.

Those were dark days for Saumyashree, when rivers of grief ran down her face at the slightest provocation, and when the future seemed bleak and uncertain. For six months, she shuttered herself at



Saumyashree with her son Priyanshu

home, neglecting her son, drowned in her own abject hell. Then in the seventh month, she was shaken out of her stupor: "I realised what I was doing to my son."

It was then that Saumyashree encountered Buddhism. "I remember going for my first meeting and crying my heart out, but everyone was

so kind and gentle and supportive," she narrates. "After that, my life changed." She began chanting and found the courage to start her life again. She approached her husband's employer for help in finding a job. The good man offered her a position on his own team.



Saumyashree Nayak: "Life goes on"

It was challenging at first: Saumyashree could not even read a newspaper without crying. But gradually, with strong moral support from her boss, she learnt how to Google for information and how to operate the latest computer software. From one client, she moved up to two and can now handle five on her own.

"When my husband used to discuss things about work with his colleagues, I would look on clueless. Now I can understand what's going on," smiles the gentle-faced 42-year-old. She enrolled her son in guitar classes, and feels happy that she is still able to give the 14-year-old the same quality of life he had when his father was alive. Aided by her husband's life insurance policy, Saumyashree earns enough to pay the rent and manage their old lifestyle independently.

It's not easy to be alone. The soft-spoken woman is often hounded by calls and messages from not-so-gentlemanly suitors, but her inner transformation has endowed her responses with a quiet strength. A woman brought up with traditional values, someone who was conditioned to think of widowhood as the ultimate calamity that could strike a woman, the biggest lesson she has learnt is that loss is not the end of life. On the contrary, we owe it to our beloved dead to live to our fullest. "Sailesh wanted us to live in Delhi. He always wanted me to go out and learn new things and make a career for myself. We are now finally living his dream," she says with a sad smile.

"Life changes in the instant. The ordinary instant," Didion wrote.

The ordinary instant – that contains within it a seed of extraordinary transformation. ■



# DADDY BLUES

*A reader asks our in-house clinical psychologist Smriti Sawhney Joshi how to resolve her past with her father*

**M**y parents got divorced when I was eight. I live with my mother, who remarried some years ago. I am now 22. My mom and her partner are happy together, and I have a good relationship with both. However, there are many days when I feel a lack of a real father in my life. My biological father was alcoholic and violent with me and my mother, and so she has

never let me stay in touch with him. But I keep feeling that he was misguided and someone needs to help him get out of his spiritual abyss. My mother says it's a bad idea since he hasn't changed, and that I will only feel worse about my broken childhood. But I fear that I'll have issues with my own relationships unless I resolve my past. What do you think?

**D**ear reader, I appreciate your strength in writing about your concerns and seeking help. The feelings you have for your biological father are absolutely natural. Even though he was violent and cruel with you and your mother, the hope for a happy family and your father transforming into a gentler man stays alive.

Parental divorce is a turning point in a child's life, no matter what the age. Experiencing the bitterness, being a witness to the loss of the bond between parents, adjusting to living without one of the parents or living with a new parent (as in your case) all create a challenging new family circumstance.

Some parents who get divorced make efforts to provide for a joint presence at least for special occasions to help their child adjust. But it may have been difficult in your case as the divorce happened following cruelty and violence. You may be experiencing guilt of recreating a decent relationship with your stepdad, enjoying closeness with your mom, and also seeing your mom happy with her new partner, and feeling that your biological dad may be alone and missing out on this "family closeness".

Alcoholism can have a multi-pronged impact on a family. It damages psychological balance and physical functioning of a person, affects behaviour and mental abil-

ities, leads to financial losses, mood disorders and partner or child abuse. Alcoholism of any of the spouses may become a serious reason for permanent misunderstandings often leading to a separation.

Your mother divorced your biological father when you were eight, so she may have given him chances to improve or seek professional help for alcoholism too. The unpredictability of an alcoholic turning to alcohol again is high and maybe your mother does not wish for you to witness more violence and trauma of seeing your father indulge in unhealthy behaviours. That's one reason she may be wishing for you to not revisit and reconnect for the fear of your getting hurt again.

I understand this longing to resolve your issues with your biological father. If left unresolved, it may have an impact on your relationships; you are right about this. You seem like a thoughtful person and I'm sure you will be able to work through your feelings of guilt or any traumatic childhood memories with a professional therapist. ■

*Smriti Sawhney Joshi is one of India's first certified telemental health providers. She is a clinical psychologist with over 15 years of experience in the field of mental health.*



REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO CREDIT: MARINA KHRAPOVA ON UNSPLASH.COM

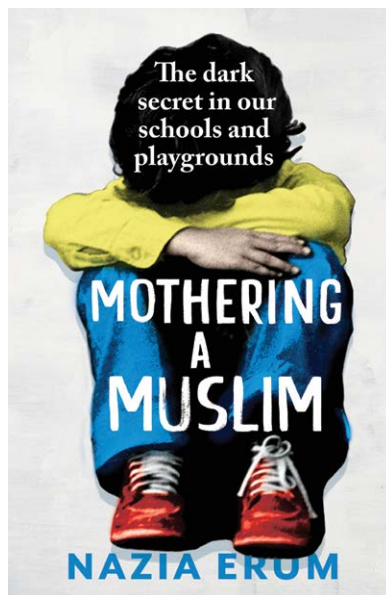


# SCHOOLS OF HATE

*Nazia Erum's hard-hitting new book Mothering a Muslim is an eye-opener about what religious polarization in national politics is doing to innocent children in schools. An excerpt*



Nazia Erum



**A**re we Pakistanis?” Raiqa Saulat Khan felt her eyebrows rising in confusion and anger. Had her son, Faizan, asked this in person, those arched eyebrows would have been all the answer he needed. But they were on the phone, the mother in Bhopal, her son 200 kilometres away in Daly College, Indore.

Raiqa discerned the slight trem-

ble in the voice of her son across the school landline. She repeated each word with a weighed pause. “Are – we – Pakistanis?” Then added, “Why do you ask?”

His dorm mates at the prestigious boarding school had said that day, “Yeh toh atankwadi hai... Yeh toh Pakistani hai... ise maro. [He is a terrorist. He is a Pakistani. Hit him.]”

The boys had ganged up against

Faizan. He was the only Muslim boy in his dorm and he faltered when the sharp accusations came his way. He felt insulted, embarrassed and unsure of how to respond.

This was not something he had ever been accused of before. There was no reference point to weigh this against. Why was it said? What did it mean? Why had the word terrorist entered this conversation? Did the boys know something he didn’t? Why did they sound so confident?

Raiqa Saulat Khan is an elegant lady in her late forties. She belongs to the extended royal family of the erstwhile state of Bhopal. She lives in a large, old, stone-walled house with high ceilings and fireplaces, located on the grounds of the Ahmedabad Palace.

Daly College, Indore, is steeped in history and family heritage. It was established with donations from ruling families. Today children of the elite from all over the country study here. Raiqa was only following family tradition by sending her son: Faizan was the third generation of his family to go to this school.

At 10, Faizan was under tremendous pressure to conform, make lasting friendships and be part of this legacy. Yet in a flash he had been branded, made to feel like an

outcast. He could sense all eyes on him as he made his way back to his room. He felt anxious, even a little ashamed of committing some unknown crime. It was then that he called his mother. “Are we Pakistani?” he asked, in a tone laced with anguish and anger. Why had this information been denied him?

Raiqa’s outburst left him even more confused. She thundered that they had no ties with Pakistan and she had never even thought of setting foot in the country. Faizan was

**RAIQA THUNDERED THAT THEY HAD NO TIES WITH PAKISTAN AND SHE HAD NEVER EVEN THOUGHT OF SETTING FOOT THERE**

ready to respect her words and move on but there was a second, more troubling, question. “Am I a terrorist?”

Raiqa became even more incensed. Had he

lost his mind, she bellowed into the phone. How could they be terrorists? They came from an aristocratic family. How could anyone say this to him? The situation was both absurd and deeply painful. At a loss for words, Raiqa reassured her son that she would visit him as soon as possible and continue the conversation in person, and ended the call.

Then she broke down and cried.

Shortly thereafter, Faizan was withdrawn from the school and brought back to Bhopal. ■

*Excerpted with permission from Mothering a Muslim (Juggernaut, 2018).*





## ALL THE SINGLE LADIES

*Author Sreemoyee Piu Kundu on the social stigma of single or divorced in India and why single women live in fear*

**D**elhi and Kolkata-based author Sreemoyee Piu Kundu wrote three successful works of fiction before her non-fiction *Status Single* came about. Written over one year of intensive research, the former journalist and senior PR professional interviewed 3,000 single women – divorced, widowed, LGBT, single mothers included. The 40-year-old

Jadavpur University alumna shares her findings with us.

***As your book says, single women face a lot of social prejudice in India. How does this affect them in professionally and psychologically?***

Being single is a huge professional problem – in larger organizations, single women are assumed to have “slept their way to the top”. They

are also afraid of attracting the attentions of horny old men or male bosses asking for sexual favours in return for salary increments. If they’re divorced, there’s gossip. So these women often keep their single status a secret or pretend to be married or in a relationship. They live in fear – of parents, society, bosses, relatives. No one wants to be single. Marriage is the normative in India, and being single means something is “wrong” with you somehow.

***Were your interviewees comfortable being named considering the subject is taboo?***

Last year, 35 women backed out from the book after giving me interviews. They were worried about the impact on their careers or their current relationships. Many others agreed to give their stories but changed their names. It was very disturbing. Many didn’t turn up for the launch, and even when they did, they requested to remain anonymous and not be introduced. Such social double standards are nauseating.

***How did this book change you?***

It became like some sort of an underground movement. Strangers started writing to me. A lot of trans-

gender and disabled women reached out to me with their stories. It was a huge revelation for me as a writer. We need a movement to empower single people. One can have companionship that is not necessarily a heterosexual romantic one.

***You’re one of few Indian writers to write about sex and erotica. Have you ever had to face any ostracism due to this?***

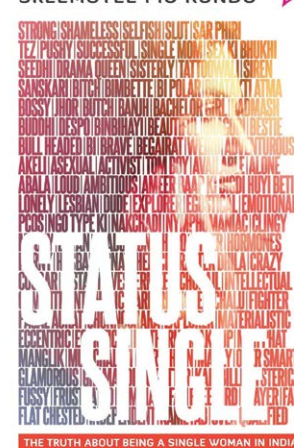
Bigots and trolls always attack women who are outspoken on social media. I constantly get dick pics from men. And rape threats. It’s as if women who speak up deserve punishment, and sexual intimidation is how they must be kept in line. There’s a huge pressure to conform as a writer too. No one publishes brave books. Only

commercial clichés make their way through. Our best authors are published by international publishing houses. It’s a vicious cycle.

***What’s next for you?***

I’ve written a 10-act play that’s coming out later this year. With every book I write, I feel like I have been chosen for it. I want to influence thought and bring about change. I don’t want to be famous; I want to be remembered. ■

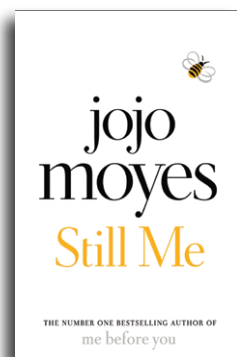
SREEMOYEE PIU KUNDU





## THE ROMANCE EDIT

*Love, actually, is the theme of our top three books this month*



### Still Me

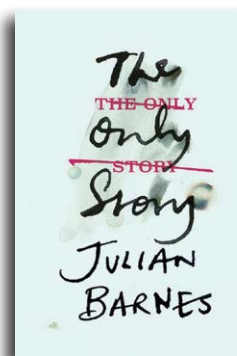
*Jojo Moyes (Penguin Random House UK, Rs 599)*

Jojo Moyes' 15 romantic novels have collectively sold 30 million copies worldwide, been translated into 44 languages and topped the charts in 12 countries. But the author's past laurels have not swayed our opinion. No, we declare this book an addiction on its own merit. With its lovable protagonist Louisa Clark, interpersonal relationships that sparkle with honesty, and its funny yet poignant portrayal of the life of an Englishwoman in New York, this one's destined to be another winner.

### Eleven Ways to Love

*(Penguin Random House India, Rs 499)*

These essays are meant to portray the different voices of love – love that cannot be “boxed in and easily defined”. They cover a large and even brave range of issues – transgender romance, body image, racism in the city, disability, polyamory, class and caste differences, and loneliness. But some pieces clearly stand out and linger in your mind, while others lose themselves in abstract visuals and uncontrolled trains of thought. All in all, though, the book's heart is in the right place.



### The Only Story

*Julian Barnes (Jonathan Cape, Rs 699)*

The book is told in three voices – the first, second and third person, all with the same protagonist, who gradually grows older as the book progresses. The literary technique leaves you marveling at its brilliance and yet also immensely sad. A 19-year-old boy from small-town England falls in love with a 48-year-old homemaker and mother of two grown-up daughters. They run away to London but romance isn't as simple as all that, and life is complicated, innit? A heartrending love story, devastatingly told.

## NATURE-BASED BEAUTY TREATS

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



### KRONOKARE

For those looking for a good karma product that is also high on active ingredients, here's Kronokare. Their products are free of sulphates, silicones and parabens. Instead, they contain essential oils, botanical extracts and precious seed oils, and are not tested on animals. Try their aromatherapy range, which includes body lotions, shower gels, hair products and soap. Their 'Let's Face It' range includes an excellent City Detox Face Wash (₹495) and Flower Power Face Toner (₹245).

### BARE NECESSITIES

Launched by Sahar Mansoor, a University of Cambridge alumna and environmentalist, Bare Necessities champions waste-free living. All ingredients are organic, local and fair trade. Their products are non-toxic, non-GMO, and cruelty-free – even the packaging is 100% recyclable and eco-friendly. We love their luxurious Busy Bee lip balm (₹235).





# LABEL OF LOVE

*Mahima Gujral's new label Sui by Sue Mue brings together her love for travel, thoughtful production and slow fashion*



**M**ahima Gujral was brought up amidst the rustle of silk and the genteel conversations of a bespoke clothing studio that goes back five decades. Her earliest memories are of her stately grandmother or her amiable mother smiling in their gracious way as to-be brides lingered over swathes

of satin and ran their fingers over delicate embroideries.

What struck Mahima even back then was how a successful business can only be built on trust, and how long-lasting luxury can only ensue after compulsive attention to detail.

This month, as she launches her label Sui by Sue Mue, she has kept those values in mind while trans-

lating them into a new language of sustainability and modern living.

The third-generation entrepreneur in the family that founded and runs the luxurious Sue Mue label, known for its couture, prêt and fusion styles, Mahima was exposed to creativity and commerce early on. After studying fashion management at Singapore's Lasalle College of the Arts, she returned to India and joined Christian Dior for three years. She followed this up with a Master's from SDA Bocconi, Milan.

Armed with invaluable experience in luxury retail, she took over Sue Mue's branding and marketing. After her wedding last year to Singapore-based marketing professional and musician Aman Wadhwa, she straddled two countries. An avid traveller, it was on one of her trips that the idea for Sui by Sue Mue was born.

"Travel teaches you to appreciate the little things in life. For me, it was the core path to find more meaning," says the entrepreneur, who runs the show mostly from Singapore with a strong team in India.

She named Sui's first collection 'The Palm Stories'. "There's a sense of calm in the sea and so much beauty in those palm trees that always remind you to hold your head up high," she shares. Comprising comfortable, breezy dresses, tops, gilets and two-piece sets, the clothes are designed keeping today's

global traveller in mind. Like Mahima herself, her target customer is a go-getter: "She needs clothes that are light, chic and versatile."

In keeping with the 28-year-old's love for the environment, her label uses only GOTS-certified organic cotton and hemp fabrics, sourced from networks of ethical producers. Each piece is azo-free dyed. The brand uses minimum plastic in its packaging, and is upcycling fabric



Mahima Gujral

scraps as far as possible. Available made-to-order on her online store ([suibysuemue.com](http://suibysuemue.com)) and at the Sue Mue store in Delhi's Green Park, the silhouettes are practical and the separates can be styled in various ways to go from work to leisure.

"This is slow fashion," says Sui's Chief Green Visionary, who believes luxury lies in love – for the earth one inhabits, for the product one is making, and for the customer who will eventually wear it. ■



## IN HER OWN SPACE

*Masumi Merwarwalla went from child star to fashion designer, but one thing's the same – her grand designs on life*



**W**hen Masumi Merwarwalla was three years old, she took part in the Gujarati stage drama *Jalpari*, which left quite an impact on one particular viewer. He introduced her to then leading TV actor Smriti Irani, now Union minister.

And so, at the age of five, Masumi was cast in her first TV role playing Smriti's daughter. Smriti then went on to introduce the confident little lass to the producers of *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* – one of the most successful TV shows in Hindi. Masumi was selected from an audition of over two thousand other aspiring child stars. It was the defining moment of the little girl's life.

For the next 10 years, Masumi was a regular face on Hindi TV shows, playing a role in almost all 'K-serials' – street lingo for TV

soaps made by Balaji Telefilms, all of which start with the letter 'K'. Accustomed to long hours, the grandeur of sets, and hanging out with well-known television icons, she developed a strong entrepreneurial streak early on in life.

While still in her teens, she stopped acting and started her own catering services – “It was something I really loved”. With just a small team, she managed official events catering to hundreds of people. She also started conducting dance classes in schools and colleges, gradually moving up to choreographing weddings. All this while doing her post-graduation in commerce!

Then Masumi got an opportunity to show off her creativity in more sartorial ways: she designed a sari for her mother. “It was a gift for their wedding anniversary,” recalls





the 26-year-old. It was such a hit that her parents encouraged her to try her hand at fashion design.

Masumi set up a workshop and boutique in Lower Parel, Mumbai. She also began retailing from online multi-brand stores and from her own e-store under the label Pink Peacock Couture three years ago. With a price range from ₹20,000 to ₹8 lakhs, her clothes are made-to-order. "Almost 85 per cent of our customers are brides; the rest are attendees," she laughs, adding that being a former wedding choreographer and TV personality with a foothold in the social circuit was definitely a business strength she

started out with.

Today, Masumi employs around 35 persons, has shown at three fashion weeks, and is worn by the who's who of Bollywood and the TV industry. She has managed to balance the need to express herself creatively with designing as per her clients' needs. "Doing my own thing is important for me but so is my clients' sensibility," she explains.

Next on her agenda is a ready-to-wear casual line for men and women, an accessories line, a lingerie label and "maybe even a food business, hotels..." she shrugs. "I want to be in the Forbes 30 Under 30 list. I still have four years to go." ■



Masumi's designs are modern and comfortable to wear, embellished with 3D flowers and her trademark rose-gold embroidery.

## THE SUMMER HOUSE

The label was founded by Shivanigini Padhiyar and Rekha Datla who "made a choice to say no to the easy way of sourcing materials". They promote traditional weaves and use organic cotton sourced from GOTS-certified units, and mostly leave fabrics undyed, using only azo-free natural dyes when required. **Visit:** [Thesummerhouse.in](http://Thesummerhouse.in)



# FASHION CONSCIOUS

*These two ready-to-wear brands are moving against the tide of fast fashion by ensuring ethical production and environmental responsibility*

## KORRA



Environmentalist and actress Jean Miyoshi Goto shot by Ashish Shah @SOMMWHERE

Founded by ex-Levi Strauss professional Shyam Sukhramani, Korra chooses natural or recycled raw materials with an emphasis on sourcing each element locally. They use only raw selvedge denim that consumes no water in the making process. Metal accessories like buttons, rivets and zipper tabs are made entirely of brass and assembled by hand. Each pair of jeans is made from start to finish by a single tailor to ensure traceability and a sense of integrity in the process. **Visit:** [Korra.in](http://Korra.in)



# STYLE AND SUSTAINABILITY

*Sonya Vajifdar began creating conscious couture out of natural materials and upcycled waste after encountering Buddhism*

*By Anupam Dabral*

**S**onya Vajifdar's take on couture was always a little different from the rest. But the path of spirituality added a new dimension to her design sensibility, and today, recycled soda cans, X-rays and mobile wires are a part of her creative canvas.

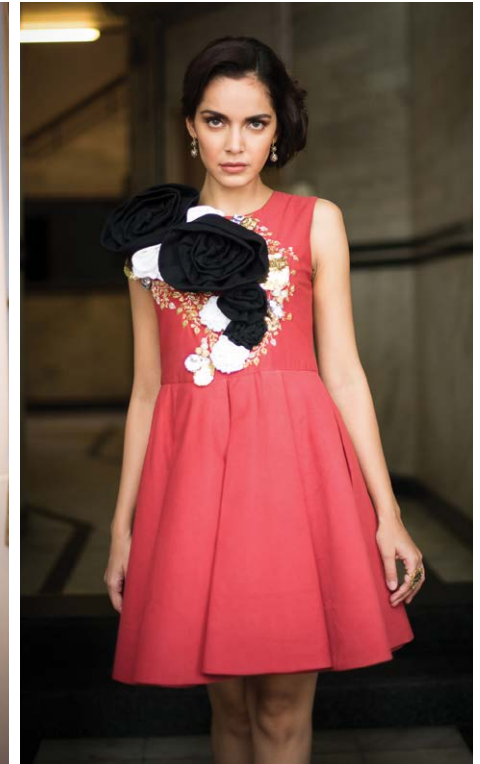


Sonya Vajifdar

While growing up in Mumbai, Sonya was crazy about *Archie* comics and often redrew outfits of her favourite characters Betty and Veronica. "The more I drew, the stronger the passion for designing became," she says. She went on to pursue her degree in design and textile at Istituto Europeo di Design, Milan, Italy, following it up with a stint at the French Company Estrele before returning to India.

In 2009, she launched a range of designer raincoats, not only for women but for kids and dogs as well! She soon graduated into gowns, dresses and creating her own prints. Several unique experiences followed, such as designing 20 looks for Indian and British jockeys at the Pre Derby event in Mumbai and creating two lines for UK Next Top Model. The former model also presented shows in London, Singapore, Dubai and Norway.

The move to sustainability happened three years ago when she began practising Nichiren Buddhism, as a result of which she became



more aware of herself and her environment. Sonya decided to bust myths and sell eco-couture, even if it was the road less travelled.

She revamped her brand – from creating plastic raincoats and using satin and georgettes, now organic and natural fabrics are a priority. She started to recycle plastic into her garments instead using it as a material – everything in her label is either recycled or natural. "The workshop floor is always clean as no fabric is disposed of," she smiles. The dyes used are also organic.

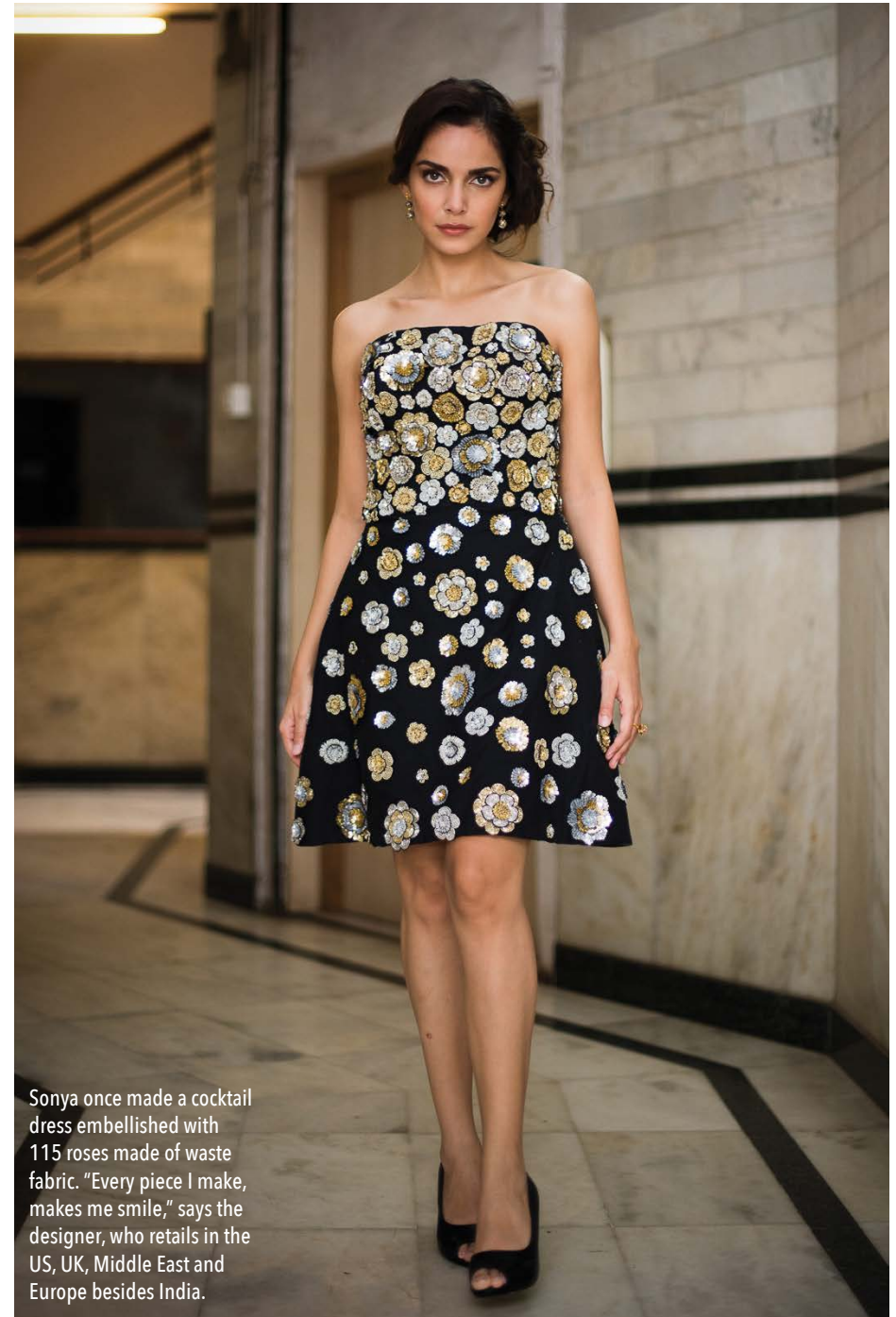
Sonya, who is also course direc-

tor of the fashion styling course at Parsons Mumbai (ISDI), has adapted to the ever-changing market but convincing people to opt for responsible fashion has not been easy. "People still want the glamour of my old line of pure georgette and satin garments. They are not aware of the damage the fashion industry is doing. Eco-friendly lifestyles are still developing," she says.

Often the concept of sustainable fashion is only limited to making a statement. But Sonya is walking her talk: "Anything can be beautiful if made the right way!" ■



"I make sure nothing I use is hurting the environment. If a piece does not sell, I revamp it. All my old beads are re-dyed and reused," says Sonya Vajifdar.



Sonya once made a cocktail dress embellished with 115 roses made of waste fabric. "Every piece I make, makes me smile," says the designer, who retails in the US, UK, Middle East and Europe besides India.





## AMBITION IN THE DETAILS

*Sonal Garodia achieved her childhood dream of becoming a globe-trotting businesswoman powered by ambition and a desire to generate business for India*

**G**rowing up in the beautiful town of Dibrugarh, Assam, Sonal Garodia was very sure about one thing – she would not waste her education only to get married, sit at home and have babies. The young girl decided she would travel the world and make a name for herself.

The youngest of three siblings, Sonal got through into NIFT Mumbai after school. Four years later, she graduated with a gold medal. She began working for an Ameri-

can company, but the global meltdown of 2008 put an end to that. “I got a pink slip in the first year of my job,” the 32-year-old recalls.

But she has no regrets – her job had taken her around the world to Dubai, Kenya, Tanzania, Thailand, China, South Africa, Egypt and several other destinations. Sonal’s childhood dream of travelling the world had come true.

After working for a few years in Bengaluru and Mumbai, she got a job with Temperley London. The



L-R: Sonal (in blue) with her team at Temperley London; a look from Sonal Garodia's fashion label Kiaan



UK brand, which makes garments for the likes of Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, opened up a world of opportunities for the young Sonal, who realised just how big a fashion business could be: “I got inspired to start something of my own.”

Observing the global demand for hand embroidery, Sonal decided to revive it among craftspersons in India. “It’s a dying craft – the younger generation is moving to other professions. And yet this is India’s USP, we have to keep it alive,” she avers.

By this time, Sonal had married an old friend, Pritam Pritiraj Mohanty. With his constant encouragement, she took a personal loan of ₹5 lakh and set up an export house in Mumbai to supply hand-embroidered pieces to influential designers

worldwide in 2013.

The business grew quickly and, by 2016, Sonal felt established enough to plan a family. “New mothers in full-time jobs struggle to manage baby-care, so I made sure I owned a company by the time I had a baby,” says the pragmatic boss lady.

Sonal’s son was born in 2016, and motherhood only inspired her to set her targets higher.

A year later, she set up her own fashion label Kiaan, which now has stockists in Australia and India. She makes a turnover of ₹2 crore every year and has won several women entrepreneur awards. And she’s already thinking of a third venture.

“Mine is a story of ambition,” she says. There are no limits except the ones in our own mind. ■





## IT'S ALL IN THE BAG

*Shivani Suhag bagged awards from the very first year of her accessories brand Avocadoe's launch but sustaining the momentum is where her craft lies*

**N**ot everyone gets an international award in their very first year of launch. Shivani Suhag's brand new leather accessories label Avocadoe got off to a sparkling start when it won the 5th Annual Independent Handbag Designer Award in New York, soon after its launch in 2011. She also bagged a six-month collaboration with American label Isabella Fiore selling through multi-brand retail outlets in New York and Los Angeles, before returning to India and starting her own studio in Delhi's quaint Shahpur Jat market.

But before you rush to write it off as beginner's luck, know this: Avocadoe won the Independent Handbag Designer Award in June 2017 for the *second* time and the winning bag was featured as the 'it bag' on fashion website *instyle.com*.

It's obvious that there's something very delicious about Avocadoe.

Brought up to enterprising parents – Shivani's dad is ex-Army and now runs his own business; her

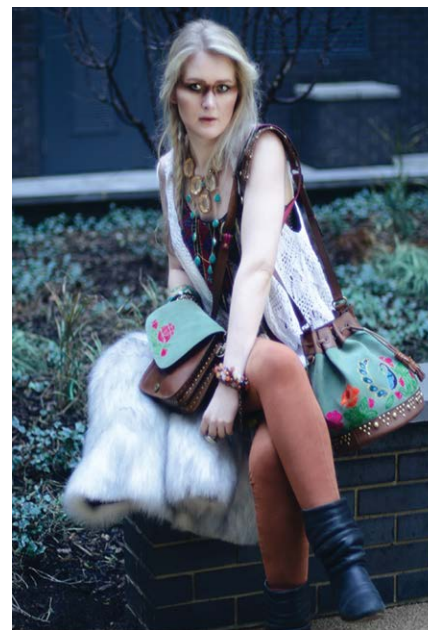
mom has her own logistics company – Shivani completed her schooling from Delhi's prestigious Vasant Valley School, and then headed to NIFT Chennai to study footwear and lifestyle accessories design.



Shivani Suhag

"They really make you work out there!" she laughs.

After a six-month exchange programme in the UK and a brief stint



Clockwise from left: A model with Avocadoe bags; her award-winning bag design; her store in Shahpur Jat

at an export house, she set off on her own. "Everyone advised me not to give up my stable job," the 32-year-old smiles in recall. "But I wanted to do something of my own."

Soon after her phenomenal first year as a bag designer, she headed to London to do her Master's, leaving a strong team behind to take care of her production. On her return, she invested all her attention into her brand, working on developing its quality and unique hand-crafted, bright and funky character.

Most of her customers are expats who understand the value of quirky details and hand-made leather goods. "We do limited-edition pieces because we don't want

to kill the design in favour of mass production," says the designer.

Priced in the range of ₹5,000 to 35,000, the brand retails bags, small accessories, scarves and footwear from its online and offline store. Each piece, for example the 'dhurrie and leather bag', reflects the elements of its home country India: you'll find the vivid colours of Indian textiles and time-tested weaves and fabrics.

Shivani handles all aspects of her brand's production and marketing. "There will be lows when you're an entrepreneur," she admits, "But the key is not to give up; I have been consistent." She's in this for good, bag and baggage. ■



# THE WHISKY CONNOISSEUR

*India's first qualified woman whisky ambassador Tanvi Rustagi is out to break a few stereotypes about the drink that is labelled 'liquid gold'*



**D**uring a break in her career, Tanvi Rustagi attended the wedding of a friend whose father was a whisky-lover. He offered Tanvi a glass, but she refused. "He kind of took offence and decided to give me a crash course. That's when my love affair with whisky began," she says.

Tanvi was intrigued to know that Indians drink about half of the world's whisky and yet don't know much about it. So she launched a knowledge blog called The Whisky Works, which is now a whisky experience and consulting company. She also went on to become India's first woman whisky ambassador.

But that was never the plan.

Born and brought up in Delhi, Tanvi did her B.Com from Symbiosis University Pune and post-graduation in journalism from Mumbai. But after working at top media organisations for a few years, Tanvi grew increasingly jaded about journalism. Personal compulsions forced her to move to Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, where her parents lived. She spent the next few years travelling and exploring new careers.

And then whisky happened. Tanvi delved deeper into the subject, and it took her to Scotland. There

## INDIANS DRINK ABOUT HALF OF THE WORLD'S WHISKY AND YET DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT

she studied the first level of distilling and completed the Whisky Ambassador course.

"On my return to India, I realised that I am the only woman from India to have done the course," she recalls. "I love what I do and I especially love how much my guests and I learn during each one of my tastings and curations," she says.

The 34-year-old notes that most brands still prefer bringing a man on board to promote whiskies. But with time and patience, she hopes to help break these stereotypes.



## HOW TO DRINK WHISKY

**F**irst things first: when you're drinking whisky and not tasting it, you can drink it whichever way you want. With water, ice, neat or in the form of a cocktail. There is no right way to drink whisky. It's all about how you like it. Of course, there are some whiskies we should just be respectful of because of their age. Literally. Other than that, it's a free 'whisky' world.

But when you taste a whisky, there are certain rules to follow.

Find a wide bodied but small-rimmed glass, something like a wine glass. Add about half an ounce of whisky to it.

Swirl the glass like you'd swirl during a wine tasting and nose the whisky from a little bit of a distance.

Add a few drops of water to open up the whisky and then take a sip.

And voila! You're tasting whisky like a connoisseur. Whisky is a spirit full of flavours if you're willing to appreciate it. And anybody can appreciate it. *Slàinte mhath!* ■





# SUMMER COCKTAILS

*Five refreshing alcoholic beverages made with seasonal fruits to keep you cool this month*

*Text and recipes by Kavari Jain. Photography by Ananya Jain*

**S**pring is nearing its end and giving way to the hot, hot Indian summer. If you're hosting a summer party or just want to cool off after a long, hot day, a delicious cocktail recipe is always good to have on hand.

We've put together five chilled

refreshing cocktails full of seasonal flavour this month. Gin, vodka, tequila or wine – whatever is your calling, get ready to experiment.

Have a chilled out summer!

*Kavari Jain is a food blogger, vodka connoisseur, and mother of two. Reach her at [kaverijain24@gmail.com](mailto:kaverijain24@gmail.com).*

## MANGO JALAPEÑO MARGARITA

### **Ingredients (serves 1):**

60 ml jalapeño tequila  
60 ml lemon juice  
60 ml mango syrup  
1/2 mango, peeled and chopped

A few jalapeño peppers, sliced

Salt for the rim

Cubed mangoes for garnish (optional)

### **Instructions:**

#### **For jalapeño tequila:**

Add 2 sliced jalapeños to a large jar or container

and cover with 1 and a half cups of tequila. Let sit overnight or if possible for 24 hours, then strain before using. Keep in a sealed container in the fridge.

#### **For mango:**

Combine 1 cup sugar syrup + half mango (peeled and cubed) in a blender and blend until combined.

#### **To serve:**

1. To make the margaritas, rim the

ridge of your glass with a lemon wedge and dip in salt.

2. In a cocktail shaker, combine the jalapeño tequila, mango sugar syrup and lemon juice with ice, and give it a good shake.

3. Add ice and two slices of jalapeños to your glass and pour over the tequila blend.

4. Garnish with mango cubes (optional). Cheers!



## SUMMER SANGRIA

**Ingredients (one pitcher):**

750 ml white wine  
750 ml sparkling white wine  
100 ml ginger ale  
200 ml sugar syrup  
1 red apple thinly sliced  
1 orange thinly sliced  
200 grams blueberries

**Instructions:**

1. Place all the fruit in a large pitcher (what's a sangria without a gang of friends?) then top up with the remaining ingredients.
2. Give it a quick stir. Refrigerate for an hour or two. Serve chilled!



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## WATERMELON SLUSH WITH ORANGE COINTREAU

**Ingredients (serves 2):**

4 cups frozen watermelon  
20 ml sugar syrup  
Few mint leaves  
Squeeze of lemon  
60 ml gin  
30 ml orange Cointreau

**Instructions:**

- Blend all the ingredients in a mixer and serve.



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## STRAWBERRY CUCUMBER CHILLED VODKA CUP

### *Ingredients (serves 1):*

1 handful of fresh mint  
4 cucumber slices  
4 strawberries, sliced  
4 lemon slices  
60 ml vodka  
60 ml ginger beer / ale  
90 ml club soda  
Some lemon juice  
Strawberry and mint for garnish

### *Instructions:*

1. Fill your glass with ice. Add half the strawberries, cucumber slices, fresh mint and lemon slices. Then add some more ice, layering in the remaining ingredients.
2. Pour in the vodka and squeeze in the lemon juice.
3. Stir the mix and pour ginger beer on top
4. Finish with the club soda. Again give it a gentle stir.
5. Garnish with mint and strawberry.



## COCONUT MARGARITA

### *Ingredients (serves 1):*

45 ml tequila  
25 ml Cointreau  
30 ml coconut cream  
30 ml coconut milk  
1 tsp lemon juice  
30 ml sugar syrup  
Lemon wedges for garnish

### *Instructions:*

1. Mix all the ingredients together in a shaker.
2. Give it a good shake, and then strain into a glass
3. Serve on the rocks.
4. Garnish with a lemon wedge.





# The Rocking Chair of CHANGE



*There is nothing to fear in change, it is part of life. Try the 'rocking chair test' to see if you have lived your life to the fullest, without regrets*

**By Kay Newton**

I vividly remember the day in my 20s when I told my friends I would be getting on a private yacht with three male strangers and travelling from Hull, UK, to Mallorca, Spain. Even with no ties and a sense of youthful adventure, this was something “you just did

not do”, yet it never stopped me.

My send-off farewell party was very brief and full of looks of disdain. I lost a lot of friends. Many were jealous and wished for their own freedom. The friends that stayed in contact always ask the same question: “When are you coming back

home?” Home is where the heart is, I tell them; it is an internal state of mind, not a physical attachment.

Again in my 50s, I took the plunge to move continents and lifestyle. This time from Europe to East Africa. Again, everyone thought I was mad, going through a real “midlife crisis”. How could someone who had “it all” – a six-bedroomed house with swimming pool – just leave it behind? Did I understand the consequences of going to a third-world country? Why would I want to do something so rash at this stage in life, is it not time to retire and take things easy?

People also wanted to know how I would cope with just 20 kg of luggage, living in a two-roomed, tin-roofed house, not being able to visit the local supermarket, bank, medical centre or even just have a coffee with friends.

The answer to all the above is simple: you do. Provided you are willing to adapt and make peace with your new surroundings, change is good. In fact, living with just a few possessions in a small home gives me lots of time to connect with others and walk on a beautiful beach.

Life is all about transformation and evolution no matter in what way that happens. New experiences help you to understand yourself, how you function, what you are passionate about. Learning and adapting to change is key.

As you get older and the ‘rocking chair test’ becomes closer to reality, it is important to not have regrets. This test is a simple visualisation that anyone can perform no matter what stage you are in your life. Just sit relaxed and close your eyes; take a few deep breaths and imagine that you have reached the ripe old age of 120. You are sitting in your favourite rocking chair surrounded by children. They are all listening to every word you tell them about all the wonderful experiences you had, the happy stories and the sad ones. Some of the stories will come from the past. For the stories that still have to happen, create imagery that is vivid in detail and colour, using as many sense as you can; sight, sound, touch, emotion, taste and smell. Take time, in the end, to congratulate yourself for a beautiful life.

Making peace with change makes for a happy and fulfilling life. I can't wait to hear about your rocking chair of change. ■



Kay Newton is a personal development coach based in Zanzibar. She's an author, confidante and Tai Chi instructor. Follow her on [www.Kay-Newton.com](http://www.Kay-Newton.com)

PHOTO CREDIT: AARON BURDEN ON UNSPLASH



# Looking for Lagom

AMRITA MENDONZA, 33, MUMBAI



**M**y mother passed on her ambition to me. After completing my graduation from St Xavier's college, Mumbai, I did my Master's in fashion marketing. And then for eight years, I worked at the same celebrity management company. I prioritized work over all personal needs, even family. It was a crazy job, with late nights and lots of socializing, but I loved it.

Eventually the love ran out. I quit my job and travelled around the world for nine months – it was the best time of my life. I slept, cooked, watched movies. I taught art to children. Then, refreshed, I started my own consultancy.

As a single woman, there is immense social pressure to be married and have babies, but I don't want to end up with a bad relationship under duress. I don't want to party every night in search of 'Mr Right', or bend over backwards to mend a broken relationship. On the contrary, I make healthier choices when I am by myself.

I once came across the Swedish word *lagom*. It means balance, moderation. It's become an important word for me – balance between work and holiday, between companionship and singlehood, between loving others and myself. I'm still seeking many things but I've at least found my direction. ■

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