

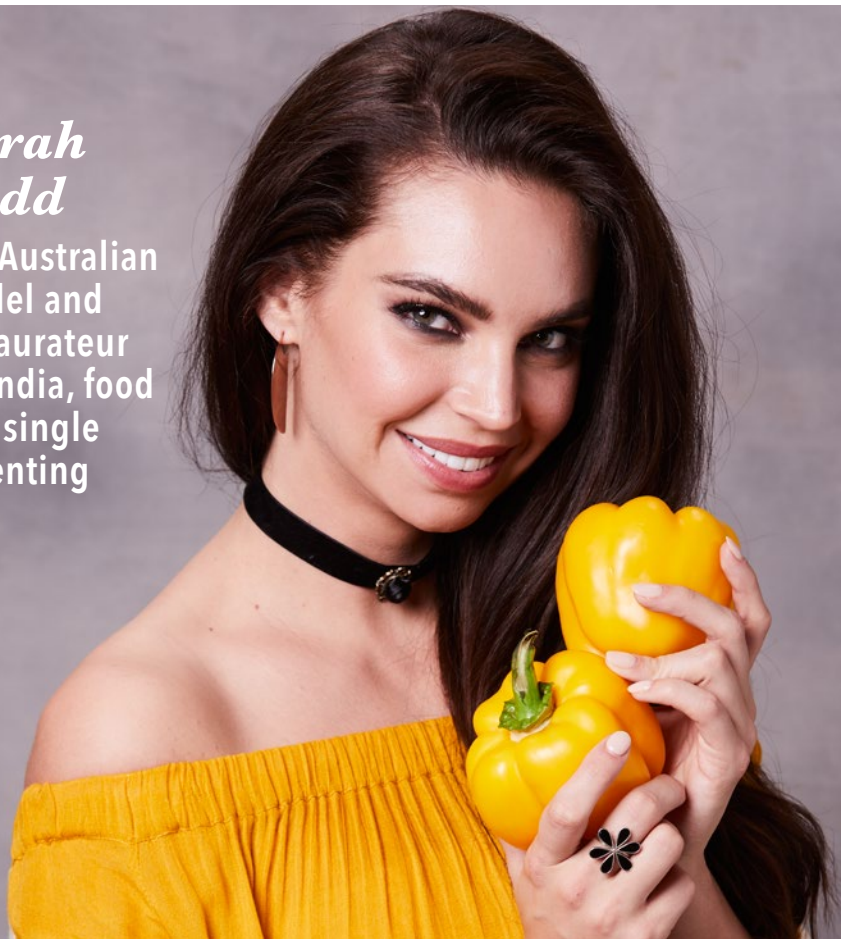
eShe

October 2019
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— the female gaze —

Sarah Todd

The Australian model and restaurateur on India, food and single parenting



SONGS OF HOPE

3 music therapists on how Indian classical ragas can heal

THE CHEF'S TABLE

5 culinary divas share their secret sauce for happiness and growth

SECOND INNINGS

2 midlifers offer effective tips for a new career post-50

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FOOD FOR THE SOUL

My mother and mother-in-law are both excellent cooks. While I, with my rather useless kitchen skills, must be a disappointment for them, I tell them to take heart in the fact that my husband has some talent in that department, so there is *someone* to take their legacy forward.

This is the month of fasting and festivals in India and International Chef Day around the world, and either way food is on our minds. Perhaps due to my own lack of cooking acumen, I tend to idolise chefs and people who understand temperature, quantity, hydration, spices and everything else required to convert raw produce into sensorial delights on a plate. Which is why this current issue had me spellbound. Starting with the reality TV star and restaurateur Sarah Todd (p.22) and then reading the stories of five more outstanding culinary artists from around the world (p.28), this is definitely an inspiring issue for gastronomes.

But the performing arts can also be food for the soul. Which is why we spoke to three music therapists on the healing powers of Indian classical music (p.12) and to a dance entrepreneur on how dance and theatre contribute to happiness (p.09).

Rejoice, my dear readers, and savour the spread of soul-food ahead. ■



Aekta Kapoor
Editor and Publisher
aekta@coralcontent.com

Editor and Publisher: Aekta Kapoor

Business Director: Kaveri Jain

Marketing and Research: Nyamat Bindra

Executive Sales Partner: Karishma Makhija

Contributors: Kay Newton, Manvi Pant, Maya Lalchandani, Neha Kirpal

Mentor: Kul Bhushan

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STANDING UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

She received the Human Rights Hero Award at the UN this year, but actor and activist Sheena Chohan believes her work has only just begun

When Sheena Chohan spoke at the 16th International Human Rights Summit at United Nations in New York this summer, her speech concentrated on the call for mandatory human-rights education in every Indian school. “How can we compete against world powers when so much of our country is living 100 years in the past?” says the actor and activist, who received the Human Rights Hero Award at the Summit.

“It’s easy to sit in Delhi or Mumbai and pat ourselves on our backs for being so progressive, but this is not even a tenth of the nation. Every Indian child must know their rights and every Indian must work to ensure that everyone’s rights are respected – that’s the only way to have a fair and just society that we can be proud of,” she says.

As someone who is accustomed to being on screen and in the spotlight, being an activist for the rights of the youth felt like the next responsible step. “I love educating children, teens or young adults by

visiting schools and universities. My main goal is to get people to truly understand their rights, not as words on paper, but as concepts that become a part of their understanding of life,” she says.

By learning about their rights, children immediately have a shield around them to protect them from violations, she adds. “Once you know something is wrong according to international standards, it’s much easier to say it’s wrong and stand up for yourself,” says Sheena, who was nominated for the Best Actress award at the Shanghai and Dubai Film Festivals for her Netflix-featured Bengali film *Ant Story*.

Her acting journey, in fact, began very young. “I first went on stage at two years old, playing a baby (probably my most natural performance!) and grew up around these wonderful artists who encouraged me and made me believe their small, dark, damp theatre was the warmest, most magical secret in the world,” says the Kolkata-born actor, who made her debut in Malayalam film



Sheena receiving the Hero Award from Dr Mary Shuttleworth, president of Youth For Human Rights International

The Train alongside three-time National Award-winning movie icon Mammooty.

Losing her father when she was just 13 left an indelible mark on Sheena's life. "As is typical in many north Indian families, my mother had never been allowed to work while my father was alive; in fact she had been denied her own desire to go into acting. When my father died, my mother had to work to support us and watching her tireless efforts to ensure that my brother and I didn't suffer formed much of my work ethic. I grew up watching all that a strong woman was capable of – the business results a man is so often admired for, at the same time as raising two young children and managing a home," she narrates.

Sheena was crowned Miss Kolkata while still in high school, and was selected by Bollywood star Sushmita Sen to participate in the Miss Universe pageant. She went on to act professionally in almost 30 theatre plays with eminent directors including Arvind Gaur, from whom she learnt the impact that a well-made work of art can have on individuals and society.

An avid reader of books on subjects as varied as philosophy, logic, administration, and human behaviour, Sheena believes the more she learns about people and life, the better actor she becomes. "I am always learning. Of course, one must also work hard, concentrate on your craft, choose meaningful roles, and seek out wonderful people!" ■



OUT ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Besides dance instruction, Vidisha Anand's academy All That Jazz is also helping people express emotions and become happier

One of the oldest participants in Vidisha Anand's dance academy All That Jazz was a 58-year-old grandmother. "She walked in saying, 'I love theatre', but she never had the platform to perform all her life," narrates the 29-year-old dance teacher and entrepreneur. "She joined our centre and regularly came to classes for six or seven months until the final musical performance. It was *Alad-*

din, and she thoroughly enjoyed her role," Vidisha says.

Her eyes mist over as she goes on: "Soon after the finale performance, I was told she passed away in her sleep. Her daughter called me to say, 'Thank you for letting her live her passion before she left this world.' I get goosebumps even now thinking about it."

Changing lives and impacting people is all in a day's work for

Vidisha, who founded her dance academy eight years ago in Gurugram and later expanded to Delhi. Born in a business family in Delhi, she was still in college when she got the opportunity to become a dance teacher at an American school. “I took up the job only because I was very impressed with the principal! She would high-five

dancing since I was eight; it helped *feel* and release emotions, and I wanted to share this with others,” says Vidisha, who trained in musical production from Trinity College London. She designed her jazz and contemporary-dance workshops as a form of musical theatre, with a grand performance at the end of each semester. “It’s a space for



her students and was completely approachable, unlike other schools where fear is used to discipline,” says Vidisha, who ended up working there for three years, became the most popular dance teacher the school had ever known, and was cited as an example for others.

Then Vidisha’s business instinct kicked in and she launched her own dance school. “I had been

amateur performers to showcase their acting talent using dance. Otherwise, theatre in India doesn’t give much chance to amateurs.”

Starting with 35 kids in 2011, her academy’s most recent performance had 120 people of all ages. The personal transformations she has observed over the years have been remarkable. “Introverts open up, those who aren’t able to socialise

give up their inhibitions, and one breaks through one's internal boundaries. I also had a case when a man began growing in his career after joining the dance class as it helped him become more confident and accustomed to being in the limelight," she narrates.

In fact, she goes on, "Men need dance more than women. They are

so. But in our musicals, we do the opposite: through the performance, kids train their parents [in the audience] to accept them for their imperfections, and express why comparisons with others are a parenting failure, and how to forge one's own path," says Vidisha.

Dance is therapeutic, says Vidisha, who believes repressed negative



Facing page: Vidisha Anand; this page: Vidisha conducted a session at eShe's Shine Your Light for teens

usually not socialised to express their feelings but dance gives them a way to release pent-up emotions."

Though a lot of students face barriers in their personal lives or are inhibited due to being shamed for their bodies, they turn into different beasts the moment they step on to the stage at Vidisha's classes. "People live for society. They train their kids to win and offer them rewards to do

emotions—including fear or inability to forgive – can lead to all kinds of ailments. "Dance teaches you about yourself, both physically and mentally. You find yourself through dance; it makes you comfortable in your skin, and breaks all the barriers you have created within yourself against happiness," she says. As Marquez said, "No medicine cures what happiness cannot." ■



A SOUND APPROACH

Music not only uplifts, it also heals. Three music therapists tell us how they are using this power to help children and adults



STUTI CHANDHOK, DELHI

We are intrinsically a creative race and the digital world is part of that creativity, says clinical music therapist Stuti Chandhok, who sees no conflict between the exalted, spiritual world of art and music and the rush of modern, hyper-connected lifestyles. “Art will always be relevant. How we use technology depends on us,” says Stuti, founder of the Madhur

Mann Music School in Delhi and Gurugram.

Belonging to a family of music lovers in Delhi, Stuti trained in Hindustani classical vocal music before starting out on a career in education. “Life is about constantly evolving and the degrees of awakening get brighter,” she says.

As a music therapist and teacher to young children, Stuti has learnt to harness music’s inherent power to heal. “To learn or perform any-

PHOTO: ATHARV NANDRA

thing, one has to be completely present in the moment. When one sings, the breath plays a very important role. To be in the present focusing on the breath is meditation. Through that to then create music and offer it to the universe elevates the spirit – that's my ever-deepening relationship with music and my spiritual growth," she explains.

According to Stuti, who has her

At the same time, she cautions that the issues addressed or the changes one hopes to see in behaviour, in thinking and in our life state are part of a continuous process. "It needs constant work and addressing," says the single mother of a 20-year-old daughter.

Stuti has created activities for children using music in a way to encourage turn-taking and respecting



L-R: Stuti Chandhok with her partner Seemit Bhargava; Stuti with her 20-year-old daughter Suhani

own YouTube channel, music is an instinctive way to express emotion. "Words can limit the magnitude or depth of the emotion," she says. "When we are troubled, recognising and expressing our inner world can be challenging. Music in its most natural way helps our feelings be heard. That in itself helps one feel acknowledged and stronger. A burden of emotions is lifted off and one is ready to face the situation."

one another. "It helps increase focus and builds confidence. For example, children who stammer find social contact challenging. But music is very beneficial for them," she avers.

"I try to create value in everything I do," says Stuti, referencing her mentor, Daisaku Ikeda, a Buddhist humanitarian. "Not everyone is fortunate enough to make one's passion into a profession. Life can be blissful when that happens." ■

MEENAKSHI RAVI, HYDERABAD

A stalwart in Indian classical music, therapy, rehabilitation and counselling, Meenakshi Ravi says humbly, “Music has been my breath. It is an integral part of my life; not a day is spent without singing and teaching.”

Born to a family of musicians and raised in Mysore and Bengaluru, Meenakshi began learning Carnatic music at age three. A bright student, she took a keen interest in psychology even in school. With a Bachelor’s in English literature, a Master’s in social work, and several years in the development sector, she began working as a gazetted officer in the Karnataka government. However, the rampant corruption

in the system left her embittered, and she gave up her job. She then became a trainer for *anganwadi* workers and often used music to heal and help them in their work.

Along the way, she got married to a musician and went through a trying time in her new joint family. Even then, music was her succour, and she went on to complete her Master’s in music. With all the necessary qualifications, she was hired by the Karnataka State Advisory Board as its family counsellor, and helped set up 18 counselling centres across the state as part of her work. “I would listen to their problems, and would always find the meaning and all answers in music,” says Meenakshi, who now has two children and two grandchildren.





She set up Meera Music School in Bengaluru in 1987, along with her work as the State's family counsellor. She also started work on her PhD based on the psycho-social profile of women with marital discord and counselling intervention, which she was awarded in 2002.

11-year-old boy with cerebral palsy, diabetes, hearing problems and blindness. No other music school would accept him. But Meenakshi taught him shlokas, bhajans and other music lessons. Today, her student is 23 years old, holds a diploma in music, and teaches music at a school for the blind.

“Such is the power of Indian music therapy. Classical Indian music is not just entertainment; it



L-R: Meenakshi Ravi conducting a group music therapy session; she is the recipient of several awards

“I use music to address non-musical goals in five to 22-year-old youth; it is used as supplementary intervention for psychological and neurological issues,” explains Meenakshi, who has done individual therapy for over 80 special-needs children in the past few years. “Special kids have special learning powers also,” she avers.

She mentions the case of an

is a higher cause. But to take this to the global scenario, we need evidential proof. We need to make it a science, the way it is practised in countries like the US,” she says.

“I become one with the music whenever I sing; there is an elevation to another level,” says Meenakshi, who has combined both her disciplines – music and psychology – in her service to society. ■



NITHYA RAJENDRAN, MUMBAI

Music was till around 15 years ago a silent yet persistent and powerful ally to Nithya Rajendran's spiritual journey. She was born into a musically endowed family – her grand-uncle is famous for his musical compositions for over 500 ancient Tamil poems called *Thiruppugazh*, her mother is a gifted singer and music teacher, and she has several relatives who are either musicians or connoisseurs. It was no wonder that the Chennai-raised girl won numerous accolades in her school and college years at various state and national competitions, and grew up to give performances at prestigious platforms around India.

Ironically, it never struck Nithya – who had earlier worked in advertising and photography – to take up music full-time till life prodded her over a decade ago. “Challenges came in different forms in my life,” she explains, referencing her struggle with debilitating anxiety issues including an eating disorder, agoraphobia, career and financial uncertainty, and a sense of peer alienation in her earlier professions. “Despite outward success, I was still very anxious and unhappy within. They were very trying years,” she admits in retrospect.

Slowly but surely, Nithya edged towards eventually taking up music full-time. “One of my gurus one told me, ‘If you don’t do jus-



tice to music, you will feel a dagger in your heart at age 80. And you can only blame yourself for putting it in.' Those words stay with me," she says.

That's when she set up Music Vruksh, an umbrella of learning through which Nithya teaches music, conducts workshops, lectures and concerts. Music Vruksh reaches out to anyone in distress, from working mothers, new mothers or teenagers to older people with physical or mental ailments.

According to Nithya, who is mother to a five-year-old daughter, the growing need for life coaches and mindfulness practitioners points to a greater awareness in society about spirituality and personal growth, and that's where classical music can play a role. "Indian classical music sets the stage and prepares the stage for many beautiful attributes to emerge, including patience, persistence, humility, gratitude, emotive awareness and therefore catharsis, and ability to recognise divinity even in things considered mundane." She adds that the quiet, the calm and the beauty of Indian classical music have made her meditations deeper, her spiritual enquiry stronger and her answers easier to find. "Music and my spiritual prac-

tice are symbiotic now," she says.

Psychiatrists have linked music to the release of many good brain chemicals like dopamine and endorphins, making all your troubles feel much lighter. "Music is a total brain workout because of its ability to mobilise our whole physiology, including the brain, into positive



action," says Nithya, whose husband S.Venkatesh is a successful novelist.

Also, music is a great leveller, she says. "A *raag Hamsadhwani* will please any soul journeying through rough patch in life. It disarms you, melts you, and makes you unite with something larger and more profound than your limited existence as an individual, until all one is left with are the building blocks of the soul – humility and compassion – a perfect internal environment for profound spiritual change!" ■

A GATHERING OF MINDS



What happens when humans share their true stories in a safe space? Andaleeb Qureshi activated the Human Library in India to find out

By Maya Lalchandani

Fifteen years ago, a Danish journalist called Ronni Ab-ergel founded the Human Library Organization, where instead of books, real people with real stories were given on loan to readers. It's now an international

undertaking that exists in 60 countries around the globe. A series of events – including the Indian general elections of 2014 – led to India's very own chemical engineer Andaleeb Qureshi to do the same for Mumbai a few years ago.

Andaleeb was on a sabbatical from the corporate world when she chanced upon the idea and it immediately hit a personal chord. “I come from a liberal Muslim background of salaried army people, simple but progressive, and I take my values very seriously. It’s very important for me to think of what drives us all of the time. Education and independence were always encouraged in my family, and my paternal grandmother called the

working with some of the biggest players in the pharma industry. “My work life has always been eventful,” she says. “I lacked nothing except the fact that I increasingly could not stand up for anything that was unethical.” Even at 22, she wrote to then Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam about a child who was burnt in the forest hoping the authorities would take action. Such was her passion for change.

Then the Babri Masjid demolition



L-R: A human ‘book’ shares his experiences as ‘readers’ listen attentively; Andaleeb Qureshi

shots having lost our mother young,” she narrates.

One could say she had a relatively privileged childhood, oblivious of religious differences, with a convent education to boot. After completing her Master’s in engineering from Syracuse University, New York, and social entrepreneurship from University of Oxford, Andaleeb lived abroad for several years

happened in 1992, and Andaleeb started questioning her purpose. Doubt began eating away at her mind, and it proved to be one of the defining times in her life.

Andaleeb woke up to the inherent injustices in Indian society, and how vulnerable human lives can be. She realised Indians need to be open to bigger and better life experiences, and not just judge one another on



Andaleeb Qureshi

outward labels. That thought led to the first-ever Human Library event in Mumbai, a quest to change people's minds.

Being a people's person – and understanding that her working in the corporate world was only contributing to the financial wealth of the corporate world – this empath moved into a new career. She realised that people exercised their inherent power only when they actually wanted to fix something. So in 2016, she quit her job and started out on a whole new path.

"The 2014 elections in the country completely polarised everyone," says Andaleeb, who even began to shun the newspapers, since there was an outrageous

difference between what was being written and what the actual truth was. Disillusioned, she made up her mind to do something for women in the education sector, and Googled 'living stories', which led her to The Human Library.

"That was it – the universe brought an end to my search. I connected with Ronni, the licence (to start up as an NGO) was acquired, and in a record time of three weeks, I had put together a team of volunteers and 'human books' ready to share their stories," she narrates. The first event was at Title Waves in Bandra on May 28, 2017.

The outcome was a sheer miracle of sorts! Over 300 'readers' aged 20 to 60 signed up for the completely

free, curated event where absolutely no money changed hands, everybody was a volunteer, and all that took place was the therapeutic and non-judgmental exchange of knowledge.

The idea caught up even though people were still grappling with the idea of sharing and accepting each other. After a dozen more editions in Mumbai, Indore was next to host a human library event and Hyderabad followed suit. It has

remains anonymous – the book and the reader – for expected reasons. Since many of the topics are taboo in Indian society – such as bisexuality, sexual abuse, rape, molestation, alcoholic parents, sex work, childhood issues, and social stereotypes – the only demand of the ‘book’ is to be honest and for the ‘reader’ to be non-judgmental!

Clearly, the 34-year-old Andaleeb has found the mission of her life, but she is yet young and has put



‘Books’ are asked to be honest, and ‘readers’ are asked to be non-judgemental. Everyone stays anonymous.

since spread to Delhi, Pune, Surat, Chennai and Bengaluru, and now Tibet is on the map too.

So what is the requirement to be a ‘human book’? “They can be from varied backgrounds; they get to share their story for 20-30 minutes with five to six ‘readers’ at a time,” explains Andaleeb. After a quiet time, the listener gets to come back and ask questions. Everyone

into motion an idea that will never be old. She expects to find herself back in the corporate world to understand more of life, raise funds, partner with her sister for her fashion apparel company that promotes body positivity for full-bodied women, and as a quintessential social entrepreneur, she will continue with more such projects, she says. ■

COOKING UP HAPPINESS

Model, reality television star, author, mother and restaurateur, Sarah Todd is redefining the face of gastronomy in India

By Aekta Kapoor

Sarah Todd's journey, from fashion model to one of the most popular faces on reality television to now one of India's most glamorous restaurateurs, begins when she was first 'discovered' for her stunning good looks as a teenager.

"I was 18 when I got my first international modelling assignment in Germany," narrates the 32-year-old gastronomist. "I stayed at a house in Hamburg. My hosts and the other models spoke very little English and I felt overwhelmed. Then one night someone cooked an incredible dish. Despite the language differences, we felt very comfortable in each other's company and it made me realise that food has no language. And, since it is universal, it brings people from various cultures and backgrounds together," she says of her initial interest in the culinary arts.

Since then, Sarah has earned

a Diplôme de Cuisine from Le Cordon Bleu, gained experience alongside Michelin star chefs Neil Borthwick and Angela Hartnett, worked at well-known eateries in London and Australia, and contested in *MasterChef Australia Season 6*. She has also published a cookbook, *The Healthy Model Cookbook* (Penguin), raised her son, and set up a 400-seat fine-dining restaurant in Goa called the Antares Restaurant & Beach Club. This year, she went a step further and launched another eatery in Mumbai.

"Most people don't believe that wine can successfully be paired with Indian food," says Sarah about her new venture The Wine Rack in Mumbai, which boasts over 300 varieties of wine from across the world. "The complex nature of Indian food and the complexity of wines, both Indian and international, pair exceedingly well together."







Sarah with her son Phoenix who is now eight years old; she divides her time between India and Australia

Becoming a mother eight years ago also directed the course of Sarah's professional life. She was modelling full-time before Phoenix was born – and in fact, she continued modelling maternity wear until she was 38 weeks pregnant! “Having children gives you a different perspective on life. You become less selfish. This little bundle is solely dependent on you for his every need,” she says.

That's also when she became conscious of nutrition, she says: “When I started introducing solids, I decided to prepare his food myself, not wanting him to have packaged or processed food. I always ate health-

ily but only really began cooking after he was born. This is when I became obsessed with the culinary world.” And the rest is history.

Sarah, who loves reading biographies, believes raising her son as a single mom was about making the best decision for herself and her son. “A child deserves to grow up in a home where there is harmony, whether it's with one or two parents. It wasn't an easy decision and life was difficult for me, particularly in the first couple of years. I was lucky to have a support network of friends and family,” says Sarah, whose own mother is her role model in hard work and discipline.



Sarah has authored one cookbook, and is now working on a second on healthy Indian dishes with a spin-off

A fan of *Suits* and *Succession* on Netflix, Sarah adds, “Divorce or separation can have a toll on children, so it is important to evaluate the situation. As parents we play an important role in helping children to form respectful and trusting relationships of their own. How can we do that when we are not demonstrating those qualities as parents?”

From 2016 to 2018, Sarah starred in her own six-part television series *My Restaurant in India*, which broadcast her life’s journey to 156 countries around the world. She also starred in *Serve It Like Sarah* (2016 – 2018), a 10-episode adventure, travel and food series shot in Goa; *Grilled* (2017), in which she was the host and judge of a new

restaurant-startup series; and the one-hour documentary, *Awesome Assam with Sarah Todd* (2018).

A fan of Japanese cuisine – “they have spent centuries perfecting every technique” – Sarah’s favourite dish to cook and eat is “hands down keema”. She is busy writing her next cookbook with healthy Indian recipes, and is going to be one of four female chefs on the Australian Open Chef Series in 2020. Her food will take guests on a journey of flavours from across India while incorporating native ingredients from Australia. “I feel like I have a huge responsibility to showcase to tennis fans that this event has way more to offer than what meets the eye,” she says, smiling. ■



CHEF'S TABLE

Five culinary masters tell us what inspired them to follow their passion, and their secret sauce for happiness and growth

By Manvi Pant

Ayurvedic chef Smita Daya is taking Indian wellness recipes and nurturing to American dinner tables

SMITA DAYA, ATLANTA

Gifted with the right mix of knowledge, skills, and an exemplary spirit, Chef Smita Daya was born and raised in Zambia but calls Atlanta her home for more than 30 years now. An Ayurvedic chef and the founder of Olea Oliva!, a popular store in Marietta, Georgia, USA that retails the finest extra virgin olive oils and balsamic vinegar from all over the world, her consistent desire to enhance herself in every aspect of cooking and delivering the best has been an essential determinant in her success.

Smita holds a plant-based nutrition certificate from the T. Collin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies and Cornell University. Her husband Dilip is a certified Olive Oil Sommelier from the University of California-Davis. Their label Olea Oliva! means 'The Olive Tree'.

For Smita, it was a monumental shift from a 25-year career in Wall Street to creative and healthy cooking. "I wanted to bring new ideas and a healthy way of cooking for my community. We always talk about the mind and body connection. By doing my cooking workshops, I wanted them to experience the foods that would bring high-

er awareness and focus on a lifestyle that will last forever. When I opened Olea Oliva! in 2016, I had



the vision to carve my niche, my own identity. It was very consuming, in the beginning, to ensure that vision for the store and the cooking workshops was planned out correctly," she explains.



Smita was invited to present a culinary demonstration at Atlanta Foodservice Expo, hosted by the American Culinary Federation for two consecutive years. She was also twice invited to teach at the Hospitality Education Foundation of Georgia.

“I am always learning; it’s a continuous process for me to evolve. I prepare myself for challenges that could be elementary to this process. I always look forward to bringing meaning to my business and offer the services of what I discover,” says Smita, who was recently certified as

an Ayurvedic chef.

The inclination behind learning Ayurveda was to make a difference by educating, inspiring, and empowering people to heal in a way

**“AYURVEDA IS A
HOLISTIC MEDICINE
THAT FOCUSES
ON BALANCE AND
ALIGNING YOUR
BODY’S ENERGIES”**

that promotes happiness, connectedness, and heightened spiritual awareness. “Ayurveda is a holistic medicine that focuses on balance. It’s about aligning your body’s energies. When it comes to the dining table, that

means fresh, seasonal, and local ingredients combined to promote efficient digestion and harbour anti-inflammatory properties. It sees



the digestive tract as the ‘master system’ of the body,” says Smita, who is a mother of two daughters.

While exchanging notes on Ayurveda, she explains how mindful eating is healthy and engages all our senses in the process. “Food is natural nourishment; it has the power to heal and balance our physical health. So, it’s incredibly important that our bodies digest, assimilate, absorb, and metabolise meals. If we do not digest and metabolise well, the food remains as undigested matter and accumulates as *ama* (toxins) when then becomes a root cause of all diseases caused by low *agni* (digestive fire)”.

From incorporating six tastes in each meal to cooking according to

seasonal changes and balancing the plate with nourishing and grounding foods that give us vitality and energy, Smita strongly recommends eating a healthy, colourful and organic meal.

Ever wondered why it’s difficult to recreate a chef’s magic at home? It’s because every chef has a ‘secret.’ For Smita, preparing a dish or a meal is about infusing life-force (*prana*) in cooking and turning it into a therapeutic experience. “I prepare food with lots of love and gratitude. When you cook for others, you get the sense of nurturing. In your body, *prana* supports all of your organs and cells. So, when your *prana* levels are high, you experience good health.” ■



In an era of frozen and ready-to-eat foods, Reetu Uday Kugaji is out to revive the warmth of traditional home-cooked dishes

REETU UDAY KUGAJI, MUMBAI

With changing times, busier households, and evolving cultures, many age-old delicacies and cooking techniques have lost their charm, and grandma's Ras Bhaath, the treasures of a royal kitchen like Punjab's Phulkari Pulao or Awadh's Zameen Doz have disappeared. But Mumbai-based chef and culinary expert Reetu Uday Kugaji has taken it upon herself to give these age-old dishes a new lease of life.

Born in Chandigarh and raised

in Mumbai, Reetu is fierce about her choices and immensely proud of her roots. "I always wanted to become a chef, and my source of inspiration was my mother. She was an excellent cook who never believed in quick fixes. I have grown up watching her spend hours in the hot kitchen, preparing a meal with so much love and affection."

Nothing worth having comes easy. Despite belonging to a broad-minded Punjabi family, Reetu had to fight the odds to make her way to a culinary school. "The myth those days was that this profession

is not apt for girls and so, opinions flowed in from all directions. But my parents stood by me like a rock.”

In a career spanning more than 20 years as a chef and teacher, Reetu, who specialises in Indian and continental cuisines, never experienced a dull moment. An eternal optimist, she says there is no secret to success besides hard work and passion. Former programme head of culinary arts at the ITM Institute of Hotel Management, Navi Mumbai, Reetu says, “As a teacher or mentor, I sensed that our culinary students don’t know what they are missing. So, I designed modules to facilitate their understanding of traditional dishes, cooking techniques, and utensils. I introduced my students to the richness of our ancestral food, the abundance of medicinal value it has, and the preparation that goes into making it.”

Being a chef is a big responsibility that involves taking several ethical decisions daily, and any breach may have serious ramifications. Reetu lays out the ground rules: “Lead a disciplined life. Be punctual and strong. Be patient, keep your ego at the door because in this business, you are going to meet several people, and if you are opposed to learning, you will not grow.”

Another crucial element is food safety. “Pay attention to the essential aspects like right temperature, which metal to use for cooking, and

how to store and serve,” she says.

Having prepared cuisines for the former Indian president Pratibha Patil, and cricketing icons like Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid, the process of building and



working with a menu is now like second nature to Reetu. She also holds interest in food blogging and food photography.

For aspiring young chefs, Reetu’s life is her message: “If you have decided to do something, don’t look back. Nothing can stop you.” ■



The first Indian to train under the world-famous Chef Massimo Bottura, Akanksha Dean is out to set India's foodscape aflame with flavours

AKANKSHA DEAN, DELHI

Family experiences or traditions usually play a big role in the life of chefs. For Delhi-based Chef Akanksha Dean, the penchant for experimenting with food developed at an early age, and she too goes back to her roots for inspiration. “With my mother [Rupali Dean] being a food and travel writer and my father [Bakshish Dean] being a chef, I have always felt a natural affinity for food. As a child, I used to enjoy preparing Sunday meals with my father, who is also my inspiration, and that further ignited my interest

in cooking,” beams Akanksha.

However, one cannot disregard the fact that to offer the best and be called ‘an expert’, the struggle doesn’t stop at innovating recipes at home. Stepping out for experience is essential. Akanksha, who manages Imperfecto SHOR Café at Delhi’s swanky Aerocity, happily agrees on that. “Travelling for local food and culture has taught me to develop a completely original perspective on everything, by rewarding innovation and fresh thinking. Having had the opportunity to do some globetrotting, I have built quite a refined palate of my own,”

says the 23-year-old.

Being the first Indian to train under the famous Massimo Bottura, the chef-patron of three-Michelin-star restaurant Osteria Francescana in Modena, Italy, has undoubtedly added more nuance to her craft. Calling her stint extraordinary, Akanksha reminisces, “Never in my life have I come across a kitchen like Chef Massimo’s; it is world-class. Everything takes place efficiently.” And though it appears very organised, it is not as easy as it looks, for running such an establishment requires a lot of hard work and dedication.

One of the things unique to all chefs is their preference for a particular cuisine, and many even have their signature style of cooking. Akanksha’s is Japanese. “I find it simple yet complex at the same time. I love the use of fresh ingredients in this fascinating cuisine. I owe my interest in Japanese cuisine significantly to Chef Kondo Takahiko, fondly known as ‘Taka’, a senior chef at Chef Massimo’s kitchen,” she shares.

No industry is immune to the changes brought by technology or consumer preferences. Naturally, one has to adapt or equip oneself with new tools. Talking about the top trends driving change in the food industry, Akanksha says, “People now look for a wholesome experience. There is a noticeable

movement underway with guests now familiar with exotic cuisines; they want experiences that are new and different, authentic in flavour and reminiscent of some memory. As a chef, I put myself in the shoes of my guest and try to offer what



they like, sometimes with my twist and sometimes from the travels that inspire me.”

As a young chef carving her own unique path, Akanksha says, “Kitchen work is all about love, and it is essential to work at a place that makes you happy and helps you absorb everything like a sponge.” ■



Neeta never wanted to be a chef, but her snacks were so delicious that her friends turned into clients and got her label Naani Ki Matthi going

NEETA, GURUGRAM

Simple things are also the most extraordinary. They lie in front of our eyes, yet we see them only when the universe conspires. Neeta, the founder of Naani Ki Matthi, a label that makes delicious homemade savouries and snacks, certainly believes in cosmic intervention. “Naani Ki Matthi was never meant to be a business, but today we have 17 products and all

driven by customer goodwill,” she says. And, her story gets even more impressive when she adds she never had a penchant for cooking.

Born and raised in Delhi, Neeta grew up eating healthy, seasonal home-cooked food. She would often see her mother making *matthis* (a salted, fried, tea-time snack in north India) for the family, but it never sparked any interest in her. “I would run away when my mother was in the kitchen. I would only cook if

my family demanded; else I would stay out,” she smiles. But after her mother passed away, Neeta’s nephews insisted she make her mother’s famous *matthis*, and so, with her father’s help, Neeta learned to make them once again.

Just then, two underprivileged girls approached Neeta for part-time jobs to support their education expenses. “At the same time, my friends who loved my *matthis* were willing to buy them off me. And that gave birth to Naani ki Matthi (literally, ‘grandmother’s *matthis*’). Every day, the girls would come and help me for an hour to make *matthis*. I would sell enough to pay for their education.”

Two days later, Neeta’s close friend, who made pickles, called to say, “I am putting up a kiosk for selling pickles at an exhibition; why don’t you give me your *matthis*? I could sell them too.” And so began the journey of Neeta’s six-year-old business venture, which now has plenty of avowed fans in south Delhi and Gurugram.

Even though Neeta enjoys experimenting with her *matthis*, she is wary of being called a chef. “It sounds strange. I feel chefs should have some degree or background in cooking. But a chef once told me that what I do is what a chef does: innovate. I connect with what I do, and it tells me what needs to be done. I feel the texture and the

ingredients in my mouth and get going.”

Serving safe, healthy products is a top priority for Neeta. Despite operating from home, there are specific ethical and food safety measures that she ardently follows. “Each of my products is home-made and hand-made with little mechanisa-



tion. The raw material is branded, and we use Fortune products. I ensure that our women cooks understand the importance of hygiene.”

Self-belief can be a doorway to personal transformation. Neeta’s journey from “I don’t want to do it” to “I can do it” is a classic example of that. ■



One of Asia's most awarded and respected chefs, Thailand's Pim Techamuanwivit champions her community's fast-disappearing recipes

PIM TECHAMUANVIVIT, BANGKOK

One of the few women chefs to dominate the world of luxury gastronomy, Pim Techamuanwivit is all set to helm the iconic Nahm restaurant at COMO Metropolitan Bangkok from this month. For someone who champions traditional flavours from her childhood and crafts them into extraordinary, multi-layered dishes, Pim is rather modest about her

talents: “I think of myself as a cook rather than a chef. Cooking is the work of actually putting together delicious food and sourcing good ingredients.”

She believes cooking was always a woman's domain. “Cooking, when it's in the home, was always the work of women. It's only outside of the home that it became a profession, and it became a man's job. I'm not a professionally trained chef; I'm a cook who has been taught by other

women cooks in their homes.”

Coming from an award-winning chef, Pim’s surprising admission reflects her modest but genuine vision to see her restaurant as an experience of Thai hospitality no different than if you had been welcomed into her grandmother’s or aunt’s home. The women in her life have passed it on to her, teaching her how things should taste.

Pim admits that she only started to get interested in Thai food because she missed home when she moved to the United States at the age of 19. The Thai food she got in America – even at Thai restaurants – was unrecognisable to her. Consequently, learning how to cook Thai food became a ‘project’ for her, and she would often call home to Bangkok and ask her aunt how to make certain dishes.

“Every summer when I would come home, I’d go and sit in the kitchens and learn. If I knew someone’s family had a great recipe for something, I’d go over and watch in their kitchens. My parents thought it was quite cute, me sitting on the floor, pounding curry paste for hours and learning how to taste the difference in fish sauces,” she laughs.

Fast forward a couple of decades and her new menu at Nahm celebrates this heritage and nostalgia based on the finest artisanal produce and tradition. She’s also very particular about the ingredients: “I

can’t make good food without good ingredients – I’m a cook, not a magician! I find ingredients by going to markets all the time and tasting everything. If I’m looking for fish sauces, I will get everything I can find – up to 15 varieties – and I will taste each of them and understand what they are each saying to me.”



One dish she offers, for example, is *kanom jin nahm prik*, made by her grandmother. “My childhood Sunday lunch,” she smiles. “I’m not saying it’s the best in Bangkok, it’s just that this one is my grandmother’s version and special to me. Our heritage is just memories, which we pass on to the next generation.” ■

SAY IT LIKE IT IS

Eight years ago, Kavitha Garla enrolled for a public-speaking programme in her hometown Bengaluru by Ian Faria recommended to her by her sister. A former corporate professional whose two sons were grown up, Kavitha had been going through a challenging patch in her life at the time, and the idea of a workshop called Pep Talk drew her in. It also changed her life.

“My whole life turned around when I discovered that I could be the creator of my life and not just a bystander. I moved myself from play-

Communication isn't just what you say to others; it's also about what you tell yourself, says public-speaking trainer Kavitha Garla

ing victim to being the heroine of my life,” says Kavitha, who ended up joining Ian in his venture.

Realising how important communication skills are to a person's happiness and success, Kavitha signed on as business development head and trainer at Ian's company Talk Temple, and has over the past few years, helped transform hundreds of lives through leadership training and mentoring. “Our organisation believes that we are all born with infinite potential; we just need a catalyst to light the fire,” says Kavitha, whose



youthful looks and toned physique belie her 50 years of age.

Born in Bengaluru, Kavitha did her MBA from Clemson University, USA, and worked there as a marketing and public relations professional before returning to India, getting married and raising a family.

Now, over the past eight years of teaching communication skills at Talk Temple, Kavitha has interacted with corporates from entry level to CXOs, and has noted the biggest

own self-esteem and confidence to know that you are equal and competent to take on anyone,” she says. “Secondly, with globalisation today, it is important to improve one’s English speaking skills, especially grammar and word usage. And finally, in public speaking, less is more so you don’t have to have an extensive vocabulary and use complicated sentences – a crisp and simple message is far more effective.”

Having mentored hundreds of



L-R: Kavitha as a facilitator at eShe's Shine Your Light Bengaluru; with her husband and two sons

mistake people make about communication: “Most people believe that when they say something, the message is understood by all, but in reality the meaning of the message does not lie in what is said but in what is understood.”

She has also observed that the top qualities good speakers have are confidence, authenticity and passion. “First, you have to build your

women, Kavitha says the most important factor that women need to work on is their self-esteem and self-belief. “If you know who you are and what you stand for, there is no stopping you in expressing yourself,” she says. “You can use communication as a tool to not only express your ideas but also build your brand, and create a positive impact in the world.” ■



Pablo sits on Victoria's lap just after giving a political speech in Envigado (1982)

The Girl Behind Pablo Escobar

In this excerpt from her new autobiography Mrs Escobar: My Life with Pablo, Victoria Eugenia Henao writes about the last time she met her husband, the notorious Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar

I cried and cried. I'd got married at 15 in the Catholic Church, thinking it was for life. I was deeply in love with Pablo. I knew that his egregious behaviour over the past few years had unleashed this unfathomable madness, but I was still enormously pained that I

had to leave my children's father in order to save them. I understood there was no other option. It was here: the moment of separation, the moment of our final goodbye.

Pablo's next comment sounded like he was wrapping things up: "Tata, they're going to find a

country for you, so don't worry. Like I said, if you can get married somewhere, do it so you can get citizenship. But I swear, when I get out of this, I'll get a boat and cross whatever seas are in my way until I find you, my love."

For a few seconds, Pablo and I sat in a strange silence that seemed to go on forever. In those moments, I

we agreed that we'd tell Manuela we were going to take a trip to a really nice place, but that her daddy wasn't coming. Juan Pablo wouldn't be a problem – he understood how complicated things were.

We had to wait a few hours so we could travel at night. As the day wore on, the blue house seemed to become an even sadder place



L-R: Victoria was 16 when she was pregnant with Pablo's son; with Pablo on an outing from prison in Pasto

had no idea how I was going to live without him. Where was I going to find the strength to keep going and protect my children? Abruptly, Pablo got right to the point: "It's time, Tata. Let's not keep debating the subject. Please start packing and go with the kids to Altos, where you'll be safe."

Before we left the bedroom,

because we knew that fate was pushing us irremediably apart. With the sun setting on the horizon, I felt as if my heart might burst. I couldn't imagine life without Pablo – who would tell Manuela bedtime stories and sing her *La donna è mobile*, Giuseppe Verdi's classic aria?

The nearly 20 years I'd spent by Pablo's side passed swiftly before

my eyes as if they were a movie. All my life by his side had been a wild gallop. Things had happened so fast that I'd never had time to think about how to stop this madness. I enjoyed so few years of calm. And so many years fleeing or in hiding. This was the most difficult thing I'd ever had to do, leaving the love of my life right when the world was coming down on him. What a horrible situation.

What an impossible choice. Yet I had to summon the strength not to look back and instead look ahead so I could save our children. Still, desperate to prevent our separation, I made a last-ditch effort to bring a halt to our tragedy. I spoke with him again.

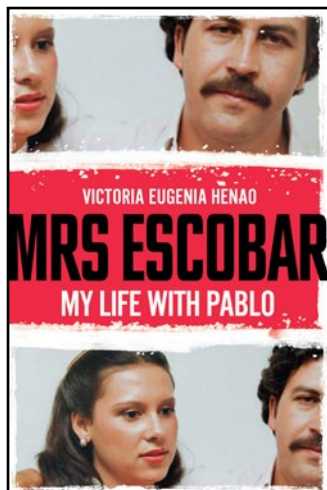
"I don't want to leave you all on your own, darling. I'd rather be killed," I insisted. "I'd truly rather all

of us die together, at the same time," I told him, with tears welling up in my eyes and my voice breaking. He looked at me sadly, and his eyes grew damp. As I saw it, given our situation, we ran just as great a risk of being killed if we turned ourselves in.

"We had two children together, but one of us has to take charge of them now – educate them, find a place where one day their lives can make sense again," he responded.

My tears weren't enough. Pablo hugged me hard, but he didn't say another word. We had to split up. Finally, at eleven at night, it was time for us to leave. While Angelito and El Gordo settled the few belongings we could carry with us in the car boot, we said goodbye. ■

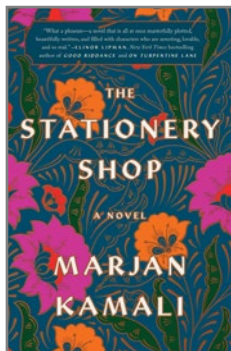
Excerpted with permission from Ebury Press / Penguin Random House



L-R: *Mrs Escobar* the book; with Pablo after he raced in the Renault Cup at Bogota's International Aerodrome

LATEST IN FICTION

Here are our top three novels of the month



The Stationery Shop

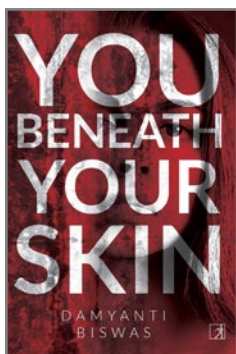
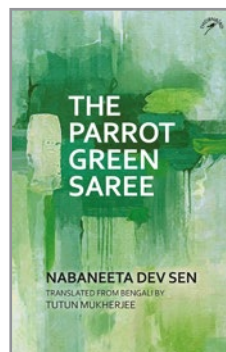
Marjan Kamali (Gallery Books, ₹699)

Set in the 1950s when Tehran was divided into three camps – pro-Mossadegh, pro-communists, and pro-Shah – with each hating the other two, there blossoms a love story, which ends with the boy and girl forced to part ways. The protagonist Roya moves to the US, marries another man and then, 50 years later, meets her first love once again to ask him why he had left. Marjan Kamali weaves political history with its personal impact in an uncomplicated way for today's generation. A gem of a book.

The Parrot Green Saree

Nabaneeta Dev Sen (Thornbird, ₹350)

Translated from Bengali by Tutun Mukherjee, this is the story of a mother and her daughter at odds with one another. Bipasha, a brilliant academic, just can't seem to get along with her grown daughter Rohini. It doesn't help that Bipasha has a penchant for younger lovers, towering ambitions for her career, and was a reluctant mother to begin with. Rohini also never recovers from her parents' divorce, and being forced to live with a "wayward" mother. The book is a feminist delight, exposing social hypocrisies.



You Beneath Your Skin

Danyanti Biswas (Simon & Schuster India, ₹399)

A piece of fiction that mirrors modern-day reality with all its uncomfortable grime can be a difficult one to read, especially when it's close to home. But *You Beneath Your Skin* manages to hook you till the end. An Indian-American mother of an autistic child struggles to raise him in cold, harsh Delhi. There is also the complication of being deeply attracted to her friend's married brother who is a police officer, and a spate of acid attacks on women across the city that ensnares her too in its hateful path.

THE LAST WORD

A new memoir, Tales from the Tail End, follows the ‘cheerful fight’ that Ananya Mukherjee had with cancer, before losing the battle

By Neha Kirpal



Ananya Mukherjee

Thirty-nine year old public-relations professional Ananya Mukherjee spent her childhood in Nagpur and Delhi. In 2012, she got married and moved to Jaipur. In 2016, she was detected with an aggressive form of breast cancer. While undergoing her treatment, she began writing about her thoughts and experiences with cancer – an intimate and inspiring

diary of her ‘cheerful fight’ – which resulted in this book, *Tales from the Tail End* (Speaking Tiger Books).

About 50 chemotherapy cycles later, though, Ananya lost her battle to cancer on November 18, 2018 – merely 18 days after submitting the manuscript to the publishers.

The book, interspersed with beautiful illustrations by Peeyush Sekhsaria, poignantly reminds one of life’s temporality, prompting the reader to live the moment. Ananya writes, “Broken or maimed by life; with a future or hair or without either; it’s always a good time to love.” Talking about the pain that comes with her illness, she notes, “But heartbreak and bikini wax still top my list in the ‘most painful’ charts.” “To be able to breathe, walk noisily, listen to a rooster crowing, scold a husband, laugh with a friend and look at something so beautiful, is in itself a miracle. This time I’m not banking on the hope of a better tomorrow. I’m just glad to have had

a beautiful spring day. A day of life is still life!” she adds brightly.

In one of the chapters, the author humorously compares her breast to Goddess Kali, “malignant and ravaging through my body in a terrible red rage”: “Maybe our aeons-old attitude of patronising the breast, ridiculing it and treating it like an object for pleasure or necessity has finally turned her into

In a chapter titled ‘Why Women Make Better Leaders’, Ananya writes about how some of her superwomen friends manage careers, homes, children and all other relationships with élan. She says that it’s unfortunate that our social construct demands men to be unidimensional, whereas women juggle multiple roles. “However, it is this challenge that a lot of wom-



an angry marauder. The breast as Kali demands her rightful respect and dignity. Who knows, only then she might stop her rampage.”

In another chapter, she discusses her larger-than-life dreams, ones with “bigger canvases, bizarre settings, technicolour effects and heightened drama.” The book also has anecdotes about her family, her fears (spiders!) and random musings.

en are able to turn into an opportunity for their own growth and those around,” she explains. She concludes by saying that the reason why women make well-rounded leaders and managers is because the one ingredient that completes skill, determination, creativity, intellect and hard work is compassion, “an invisible golden thread that holds it all together, richly, beautifully.” ■

If having your own business is something you dream of, a great place to start is listening to the advice of others who have done the same

By Kay Newton

SECOND INNINGS

OCTOBER 2019

Are you over 50 and thinking of moving away from a career or corporate work to set up your own business? Would you be ready for the challenges ahead?

The growth of new female solopreneurs over the age of 50 in the Western world just keeps on growing. They are stepping out from the shadow of their families and becoming leaders. Women at this stage in life are more passionate, engaged, take greater risks and therefore make a greater impact. Two midlife entrepreneurs share their business lessons with us.

SARAH SPARKS

“Choose to Thrive” is UK-based Sarah Sparks’ long-standing motto for the past 20 years. As a well-known public speaker, she advocates the concept of ‘thriving at work’, and teaches the skills of being an effective leader and a high-performance person for the long term, not just for life peaks.

Sarah says, “You need to have a sustainable strategy. I was a victim of burnout and there was huge collateral damage from not paying attention. Not only did it affect my work career, but also my finances and personal relationships. Successful entrepreneurs focus on some-

thing they are passionate about. It gives them the extra energy to get across their message. The burn-out experience was the making of me although it was painful to go through at the time.”

Sarah admits she found the shift from the corporate world into the entrepreneurial world a real shock to the system. “I did not appreciate just how much of the infrastructure I relied upon – whether it was the person who cleaned the bathroom, to the IT guy who could fix any computer glitch. When I worked at Goldman Sachs, all I had to do was turn up and do my job; the rest was done by others. Now I have to do literally everything. It takes time.”

Sarah shares three tips for startup founders:

Protect your sleep

Statistics say that entrepreneurs are four times more likely to burn out than the rest of the population. One of the reasons is the lack of sleep boundaries. Being an entrepreneur is tough; there is no pay when you are sick or on holiday, which causes more worry and stress.

Sarah says, “When you are responsible for bringing in the paycheck each day, extra hours seem compulsory. We all sacrifice sleep from time to time to get things

“THE BURNOUT EXPERIENCE WAS THE MAKING OF ME ALTHOUGH IT WAS PAINFUL”

done, yet doing it all of the time is the issue. Make it the exception to the rule, not the other way around. If you are sleep deprived, you cannot function well and it takes longer for tasks to be completed. Lack of sleep can also increase the chances of developing future conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or Alzheimer's."

Chase the Green

Know what you do with your daily 24 hours. Included in those 1440 minutes a day is a magic element called 'time out': time to breathe deeply, down tools and have a FAB break (Fluid Adjustment Break). Spend a moment in nature, stretch, sing, meditate, anything that allows you to switch off from stress. It's doesn't have to be long yet it will have such a huge impact on your mind, body and business.

Morning Routine

Says Sarah: "Be on top of your day, do not allow your day to be on top of you! Most people immediately pick up their phone upon waking up. Did you know you will be 26 per cent less productive than those that don't? Have a morning routine that allows you to reflect and ask yourself the WIN question (What's Important Now?). This allows you to realise that what was important yesterday may not be today, and then allows you to decide what must get done today."

Facebook.com/sarah.sparks.77964

MARJUT VALTANEN

Marjut Valtanen, originally from Finland, worked for years in the global corporate world. Now, however, she focuses on what she can give back to others. Her advice is simple: make goals, plans or phases, and break them down into doable actions.



Says Marjut: "If you really have the desire to change the work you do, listen to that feeling and have a go. This is the only way to have a life of no regrets. Most people stop right at this stage, because they have not created a plan to move forward. You may be afraid of how to pay the daily bills, yet planning helps calm these fears and find answers to your insecurities."

Phase One: Be Prepared

First, Marjut made a five-year plan for herself while still working for Nokia in Singapore. She began saving money by making lifestyle changes. “I carried on working and at the same time started a volunteer agency focusing on environmental conservation. With such a plan, I



was able to stop my consultancy work after two years,” she narrates.

She also built her network. “Contacts are what you make your business on,” she says.

Phase Two: Follow Your Passion

Marjut’s next plan evolved around the start of her own company. “Seven years ago, I came to Tanzania and loved it immediately. I saw an opportunity to create a business

and make a difference in other people’s lives,” she says. “Aid is not the answer to alleviating poverty in Africa; all it does is fuels corruption. I wanted to work in Africa, yet a new country meant new challenges.”

But Marjut’s first business attempt failed miserably. “Failure is good and an important part of being an entrepreneur. Failure is also where you confirm your passion. I persevered and found people I could rely on and together we designed handmade products suitable for export. Little by little, I began to make head ground.”

Phase Three: Ask Questions

“There are so many opportunities in Africa, it can be difficult to decide what to focus on,” says Marjut. “Who I will work with? How will I work and in which direction do I want this to go? Women need support in Tanzania to understand how to grow their business, so what is the best way to do this?”

With the help of co-founders Jen and Asya, her project ‘Wifi Zanzibar’ is taking form. It offers local women an opportunity to showcase and sell products as well as test the market with very little cost. “My phase three will be all about getting curious about all of the above questions. I can only do this if I put a time limit in place. I have given myself six months to find the answers. See you on the other side.”

Facebook.com/wifizanzibar ■



YOGINI DIARIES

Her troubled childhood didn't break Sariah Sizemore; on the contrary it triggered a lifetime of healing, teaching yoga and nurturing others

By Manvi Pant

A life coach, corporate trainer and yoga teacher based in California, Sariah Sizemore is a woman with a gift for helping people cultivate healthy, happy, and balanced lifestyles. But

interestingly, her deep wealth of knowledge about healing and wellness arose due to the obstacles she had to overcome in her own life.

Sariah grew up in a small town in Louisiana in southern United

States. Louisiana has a beautiful and rich culture, and at the same time, carries high statistics of racism, poverty and addiction.

From the beginning, life was less than ideal, and things were tumultuous in her home. The explosive arguments between her parents would leave her scared and confused. To escape the abusive environment, she sought refuge in the nature surrounding her home. “I started spending a lot of time outside communing with the trees, plants, animals, and earth. My mother taught me about God from an early age and I felt closest that energy there. My first recollection of actually praying was when I was about three or four. My parents were screaming at each other, I was terrified, and I needed help, so I ran out to my outdoor sanctuary to pray.”

Prayer helped Sariah stabilise her life, she says.

“I strongly believe that the creativity and consciousness of God is inside us and when we pray, we access our internal power to create what we intend in our lives. Prayer accesses and activates this positive life force, and faith sustains it.”

Without proper parental guidance, Sariah was tempted down a destructive path of rebellion, drugs,

alcohol and sex, which offered a temporary escape from her troubled home life. “When a lot of my peers were dreaming of college degrees and future careers, I could barely manage to get myself to school. But, no matter how bad it would get, my belief in something greater would get me through. It helped me survive the worst. The relationship I had with God was a grounding force for me, something I could hold on to in difficult times.”

At 21, with hard work and determination, Sariah landed herself a job at a software company in California, which allowed her to spread her wings and fly away from her troubled childhood. “I moved to escape Louisiana and make

a life for myself,” she recounts. But after overworking herself for several years in the tech industry, she started experiencing excessive stress and eventual burnout due to the high demands of the job. Finding Kundalini yoga was what ultimately saved her from total exhaustion.

“To re-energise my mind, body, and spirit, I learned and practised Kundalini yoga and meditation. It completely changed my life for the better, and I realised then that I’d found my true calling. I loved it so much that I started teaching

**“MY PARENTS WERE
SCREAMING AT
EACH OTHER, I WAS
TERRIFIED, AND I
NEEDED HELP”**



it myself.” As time went by, her affinity for wellness and her desire to help transform other people’s lives led her to learn and offer coaching, counselling, and various healing modalities to her students and clients.

We all have gifts and callings to be fulfilled in our lifetimes. For Sariah, a problematic childhood sparked the inspiration to create something better for herself and to offer healing to others. “I’ve always really liked the idea that our soul chooses our parents. From that perspective, my soul chose my path because I’m here to do this specific work. I’m

alive in this world to hold a space for others to heal.”

Murakami in *Norwegian Wood* writes, “What happens when people open their hearts? They get better.” Healing is a spiritual process and requires a deep connection with mind, heart and soul.

Sariah explains it well: “Healing is a human-spiritual process. We can’t spiritually bypass our humanity. We need a deep connection to both. The spirit is like the engine, or life force, that powers the human body. The stronger the foundation (the mind, body and spirit), the easier it is for us to heal. We must view heal-



ing as a holistic process where everything from our mental, physical, spiritual, and relational health must be supported.”

Have you ever wondered what leads you to faith when you find yourself deep in sorrow? Or when your negative emotions take a toll on you? Sariah says part of being human is being messy and having breakdowns. “Often, they happen as part of the healing process; they are vital to our transformation. It is important to understand that those moments are necessary for our evolution as a human. We must allow ourselves to cry, to feel angry, sad,

or other difficult feelings. Healing means accepting and feeling it all.”

Sariah found her *ikigai* and spiritual upliftment by allowing the compass of her life to point toward healing herself and being in service to others.

“One of my missions is to help people understand that healing is real and possible. We have a huge power to heal ourselves and our life. I want to spread the wisdom that it’s important to slow down, create more intimacy with oneself, and courageously commit to healing. I would like to see all people awaken and become their best selves.” ■



SNACK OF SURPRISE

In the mood for some delicious snacks? Rananjoy Banerjee, executive chef at The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa, Delhi, offers some lip-snacking recipes from their Indian restaurant, Chutney

MALAI SANTRA KABAB

Ingredients:

300 gm hung curd
100 gm grated paneer
50 gm roasted chana powder
10 gm garam masala
Salt to taste
2 gm white pepper powder
20 gm orange reduction
10 gm orange marmalade

30 gm desi ghee

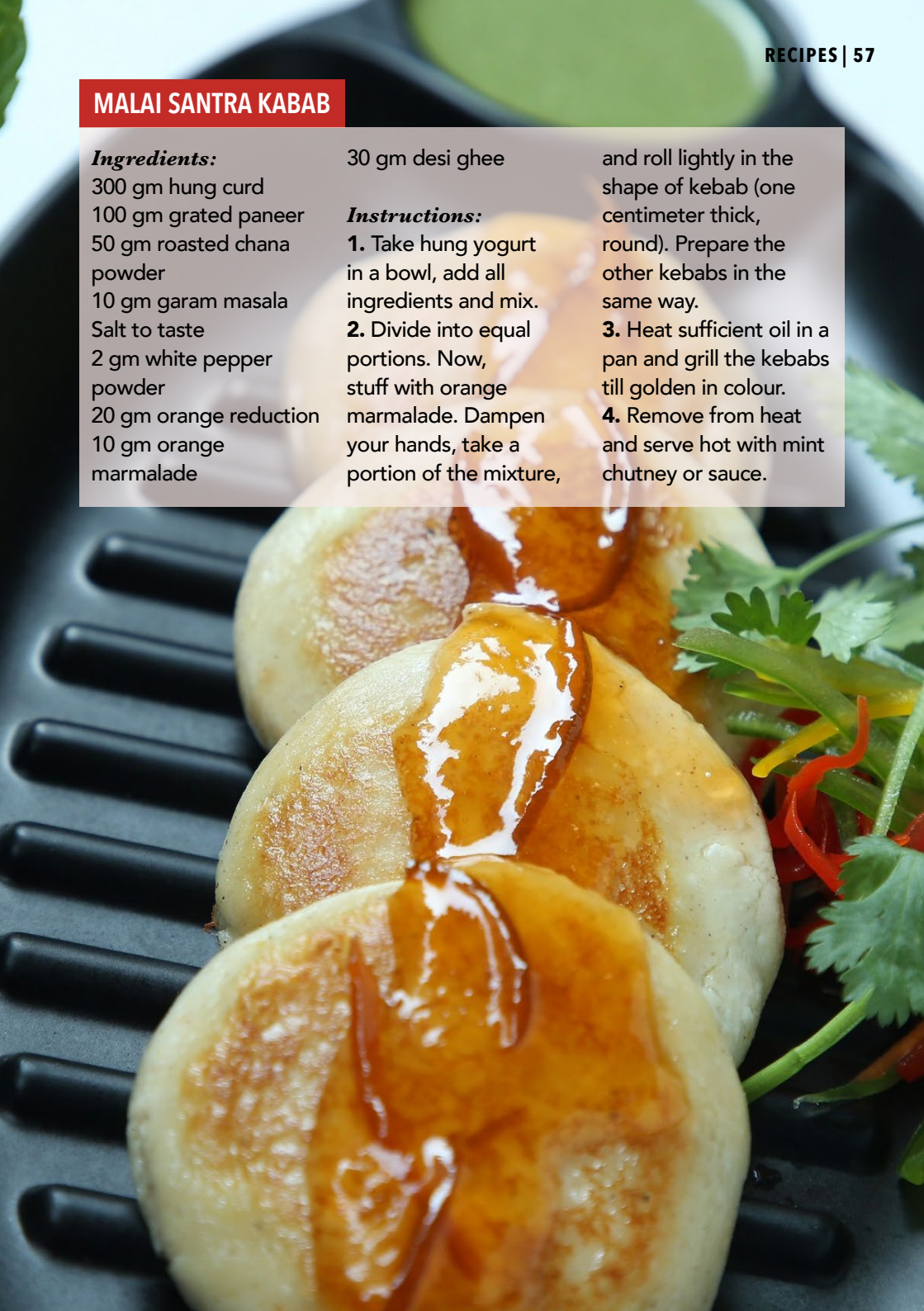
Instructions:

1. Take hung yogurt in a bowl, add all ingredients and mix.
2. Divide into equal portions. Now, stuff with orange marmalade. Dampen your hands, take a portion of the mixture,

and roll lightly in the shape of kebab (one centimeter thick, round). Prepare the other kebabs in the same way.

3. Heat sufficient oil in a pan and grill the kebabs till golden in colour.

4. Remove from heat and serve hot with mint chutney or sauce.





KARELE KI SHAMMI

Ingredients:

500 gm fresh bitter
gourd (karela)
100 gm roasted chana
powder
10 gm garam masala
10 gm chaat masala
5 gm roasted cumin
powder
Salt to taste
2 gm red chilli powder
20 gm grated cheese
30 gm desi ghee

Instructions:

- 1.** Wash fresh karela; cut into small pieces. Take out seeds and soak in salted water for 1 hour.
- 2.** Boil water and put karela into it until cooked. Remove from boiling water and keep aside. When cool, grind it in the grinder.
- 3.** Put karela mixture in a bowl and add all

ingredients into it, mix.

- 4.** Divide into equal portions and stuff with cheese. Take a portion of the mixture, and roll lightly in shape of a kebab. Prepare other kebabs in the same way.
- 5.** Heat oil in a pan and grill the kebabs till golden in colour.
- 6.** Remove from heat; serve hot with chutney.

KAKORI KEBAB ZAITOONI

Ingredients:

2 cups mutton/lamb
(minced)
1 tsp ginger-garlic paste
2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
2 tbsp green coriander,
chopped
Green chillies, chopped
2 tbsp raw papaya,
chopped
4 cloves
Chopped black olives
1 black cardamom seeds
1/8 tsp cinnamon,
powdered
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 black mace

1/4 tsp nutmeg, grated
2 cups onions (browned
crisp in ghee), sliced
1/4 cup bhuna chana,
powdered
1 egg
Ghee for brushing
Chaat masala, onion
rings and lemon wedges
for garnishing

Instructions:

1. Mix all ingredients
(except ghee and
garnishes) to marinate
for 4 hours, then grind
to form a thick paste.
2. Knead this mixture,

mixing in the roasted
gram and egg.

3. Cover and refrigerate
for another hour.

4. Shape the meat
around the skewers and
place the kebabs on to a
grill over a drip tray, or in
a 220°C pre-heated oven
(also on a drip tray).

5. Leave to cook for 15-
20 minutes. Brush with
ghee and cook another
2 minutes.

6. Serve garnished with
chaat masala, onions and
the lemon, and serve
with green chutney.



MACHCHI METHI DARIYA (FISH TIKKA)

Ingredients:

200 gm river sole fish fillets

1 tsp pickled chilies

1 tbsp lemon juice

2 tsp powdered red chilli

1 tsp garlic paste

1/4 tsp fenugreek seeds

1 handful chopped coriander leaves

1/4 tbsp yogurt (curd)

2 tsp butter

1 tsp fennel seeds

1 tsp ginger paste

2 tsp garam masala powder

1/2 tsp cumin seeds

1 tsp salt

Instructions:

1. Dry roast and grind fenugreek seeds, cumin seeds, fennel seeds and saunf to a fine powder.

2. Take the fish fillets in a large bowl.

3. Add the freshly ground powder, pickle, lemon juice, ginger garlic paste, salt, red chilli powder, garam masala powder, and yogurt.

4. Mix well until the fillets are evenly coated. Keep aside for

15 to 30 minutes.

5. Sprinkle a bit of coriander leaves and toss gently. Thread the fillets onto the skewers. Place them on a preheated grill pan over medium flame.

6. Grill the fish tikkas for 5 to 10 minutes on each side, turning them from time to time and frequently basting them with butter.

7. When the fillets are slightly charred and cooked through, remove and transfer to a serving plate.





BHARWAN ALOO TILNAAZ

Ingredients:

300 ml oil for frying
100 gm khoya
60 gm green peas
60 gm cashew nuts
30 gm ghee
3 large potatoes
5 gm cumin powder
30 gm sesame seeds
30 gm cottage cheese
5 gm red chilli powder

5 gm garam masala
Salt to taste

Instructions:

1. Take 4 large potatoes, peel them and slice the upper layer. Scoop out from the centre and deep fry until golden yellow.
2. For potato stuffing,

take a pan, add some ghee, put all ingredients and mix gently. Add cottage cheese, green peas and cashew nuts.

4. Stuff the potatoes with mixture. Divide it into halves and cook in tandoor for 10 minutes.
5. Serve hot with mint chutney. ■

SHINE YOUR LIGHT – BENGALURU

Here's what went on at eShe's Shine Your Light at Kitty Ko, Bengaluru

Photography by Bharath



Shine Your Light is a series of personal-growth workshops for women, organised by eShe magazine. The agenda is to learn, discuss, dance, introspect, network and eat!

The sixth edition was held on September 21, 2019, at Kitty Ko at The LaLiT Ashok Bengaluru, which saw a vibrant attendance of 47 dynamic women.

The four-hour workshop had five empowering sessions by powerful speakers: public speaking and effective communication by soft-skills

trainer Kavitha Garla; belly dance by Anusha Hegde; 'Are you ready to RECEIVE YOU?' meditation by energy healer Riitu S Bahri; 'Food and Mood' by culinnaire Kaveri Jain; and 'Touch of Love' by eShe founder Aekta Kapoor.

The chief guest speaker was Olympian swimmer Nisha Millet.

There was also a delicious buffet lunch hosted by Kitty Ko, fabulous gift hampers, and the chance to network with like-minded women..

Visit our website eShe.in for the complete coverage.



Clockwise from left: Belly dance instructor Anusha Hegde of Tarantismo; chief guest speaker Nisha Millet tries her hand (hip!) at belly dancing; Pallavi Pareek of UnGender mingles around; women in full bloom during Anusha's dance session



L-R: Minnku Buttar with facilitator Kavitha Garla; co-host Priyanka Gupta and facilitator Riitu S Bahri



Clockwise from top left: Participants listening attentively; *eShe's* Kaveri Jain and Aekta Kapoor; gift hampers by fashion label Rareism, sustainable lifestyle brand Cute Jute, handcrafted personal-care products Soapery and *eShe*; belly dance high; brainstorming during Kavitha's session



No Woman Likes Keeping the Karwa Chauth Fast

Why is it called a women's festival?

By Aekta Kapoor



Last month, as Chandrayaan 2's orbiter headed towards the moon, a spate of 'jokes' appeared on one of my WhatsApp groups. One showed a bunch of clueless rural Indian women wondering how they would break the Karwa Chauth fast if humans started living on the moon. (The day-long hunger fast, which north Indian wives observe to ensure that their *husbands* live long lives, can be broken only once the moon comes out around 8 pm.)

I forwarded the 'joke' to my husband, asking, "Do Indian men really think their wives are that dumb?" My previous message to him had been a list of instructions, since I was travelling for work and he had to – poor thing – manage the home on his own. The long message included precise locations of the new body oil and liquid hand-wash refills in the bathroom cabinet, and all the utensils he would ever need in the kitchen, including where we keep the egg beater for omelettes. I had also added a list of groceries he had to buy.

While my better half chose to abstain from responding to my belligerent message – he may be an Indian husband but he is not *that* dumb – another man in my WhatsApp group 'joked' that men should their wives to the moon after the fast begins: "Now break the fast!"

In essence, let the fools die of hunger out there on the moon as the hapless husbands have been tortured enough on earth.

Now, call me a human being but this triggered all sorts of memories in my head. I remembered having Karwa Chauth nightmares for a decade during my first marriage to a north Indian, when I'd wake up sweating because I had unwittingly eaten during the fast in my dream.

I remembered friends and cousins sharing their own personal loathing of this 'festival' and its associated superstitions, rules and the ghastly symbolism that you as a woman are nothing and that your

husband's life is more precious than your own. I remembered my aunts using sickness and old age to finally give up the hated fast. I myself gave it up as soon as I separated, and I never brought up the subject after marrying a south Indian. He and I prefer more efficient ways of ensuring each other's longevity.

Not a single woman I know *likes* keeping Karwa Chauth. Not one. It's not a choice, it's a rule enforced by patriarchy, and a ritual designed to 'show the wife her place'.

To then read a joke that made it seem like husbands are the poor sufferers, and wives are the ones who need to be punished triggered something violent in me.

"Why do Indian men make such cruel jokes about their wives?" I ranted at my husband on the phone. I thought of Photoshopping the reverse of every single 'wife joke' I had read on Teachers' Day on WhatsApp – visuals showing wives running behind husbands with a rolling pin to 'teach' them, or men reminding one another to thank their wives on Teachers' Day for all the 'lectures' they'd received.



Would it be funny if a meme showed a man running behind his wife with a stick, or shouting at her for not cooking right or not doing the housework or not sleeping with him when he wanted sex?

No. Those wouldn't be jokes. In an uncomfortably large number of Indian homes, they'd be the truth.

My husband heard out my rant with tactful assent. He agreed we need to speak up when we believe injustice is being done, and he agreed 'wife jokes' are unfair and hurtful. He then proceeded to ask me in which folder I had saved his passport-sized photo on the computer, where his passport was because he needed to apply for a visa, where does one buy dog food from, how much was he supposed to pay the milkman, and what should he say to the banker who had turned up at the door to coerce him to buy insurance?

Indian men are lucky that Indian wives never make 'husband jokes', though we have enough fodder. They should keep Karwa Chauth in gratitude to us instead. Then everyone can be hungry together. ■



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