

— the female gaze —

Meghna Ghai Puri

The president of
India's leading
film school is
empowering a
new generation
of filmmakers



ART WITH HEART

Adittee Garg, Sahaya
Sharma and Rohini
Devasher blaze a trail

TRAVEL & FOOD

Dine out in Vancouver,
breakfast in Kerala,
lunch in Bengaluru

WAR EXPERIENCE

Author Taran N Khan on
travelling alone by foot
through war-torn Kabul



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is a feast for the senses

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NEW YEAR FEAST

The beginning of a new year is always a time of celebration and hope. This is an issue of gastronomical flavour as we take you on a culinary tour of India – with breakfast in Kerala (p.46) and lunch with the ladies at Bengaluru Oota Company (p.40) – and a slice of Vancouver's food scene (p.34).

But winter is also a time to reflect and take stock. Our UK contributor Kay Newton offers 10 very practical ways to make 2020 special (p.26) without making the usual resolutions – and I've already starting implementing them! Our Gurugram contributor Manvi Pant delves into the connection between creativity and mental health (p.56), and as India is wracked with protests against a controversial new law, I seek a spiritual solution in the Bhagavad Gita (p.65).

As always, we have inspiring women whose work deserves recognition – from our cover personality, president of Whistling Woods International, Meghna Ghai Puri (p.20) to artists Adittee Rao, Rohini Devasher and Sahaya Sharma (p.06), who are all blazing new trails. We also put the spotlight on women authors this month, so there's enough to keep you reading.

Here's wishing you all a joyful, flavourful, motivational and powerful 2020! ■



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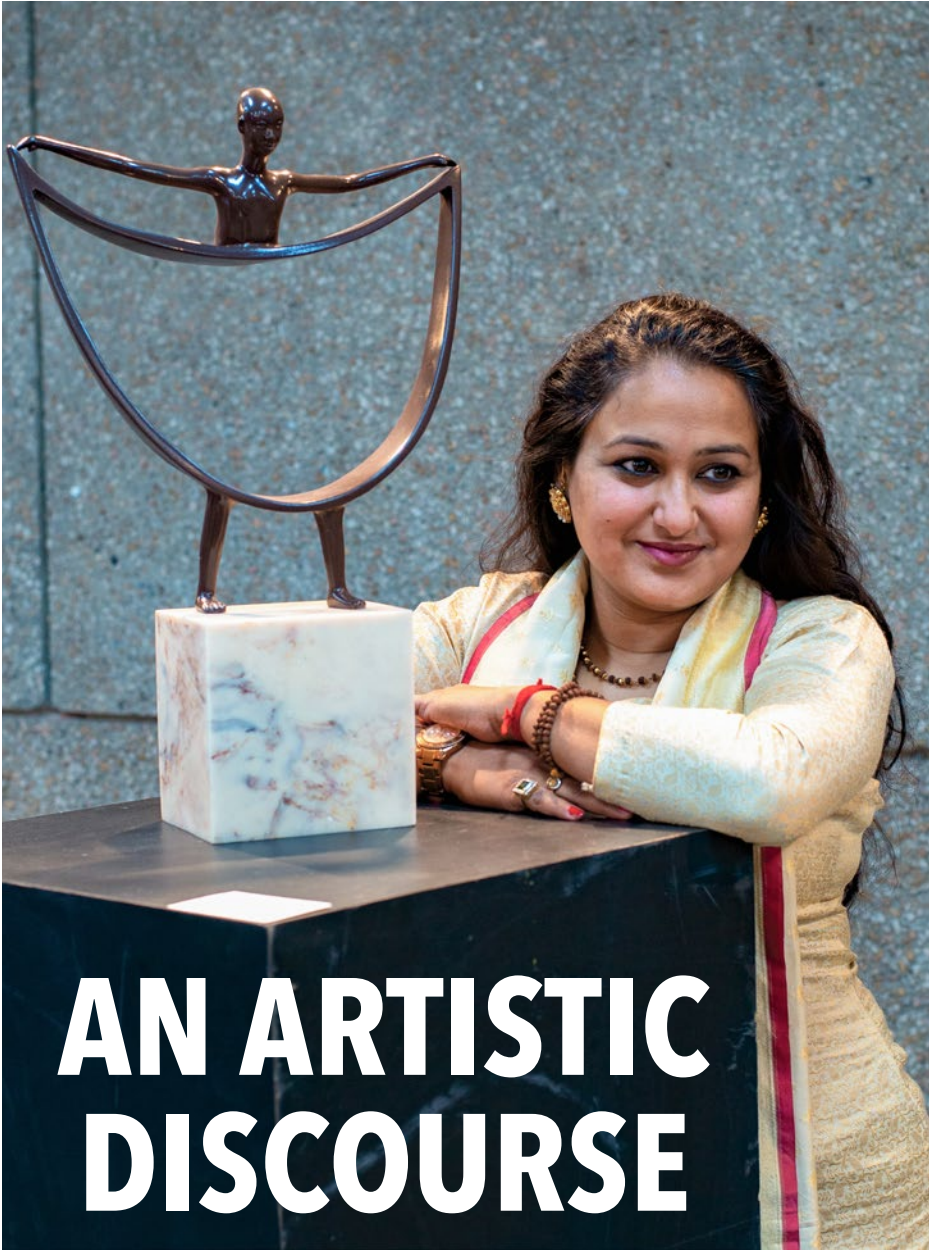
All Women's Trip
April 2020
BHUTAN



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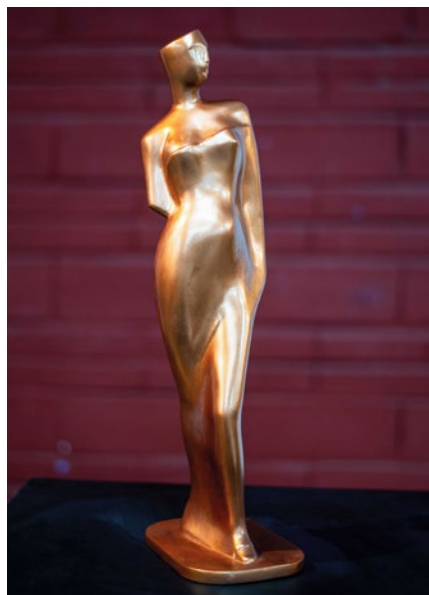
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AN ARTISTIC DISCOURSE

These three Indian artists are painting a modern perspective with their unusual, unique works of art

Adittee Garg's sculptures bring to the fore unnoticed aspects of day-to-day human life with the magic of clay



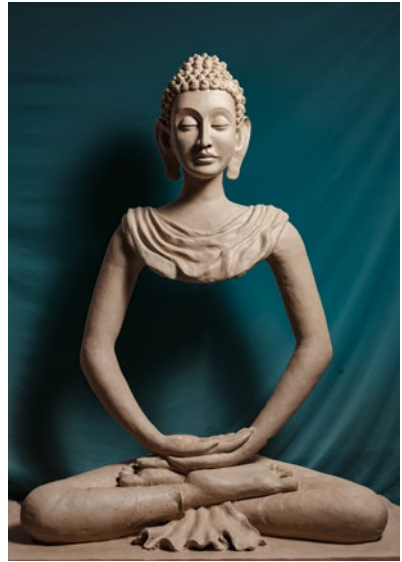
ADITTEE GARG

November 2019 saw the inauguration of the four-kilometre Kartarpur Corridor, which connects the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Punjab with Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur in Pakistan, where Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, spent the last 18 years of his life. The corridor allows Indian-origin pilgrims a visa-free entry into Pakistan, and is considered a landmark in Indo-Pak diplomacy.

Along this historical highway stand 13 sculptures recreating the valour of the Sikh community.

These are the works of Adittee Garg, a Delhi-based artist who led a large team of artisans and craftspersons in the project. "I am proud of being a part of creating history," says Adittee, whose previous projects included a Buddha head carved with Islamic details after the Taliban destroyed the monumental Buddha statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.

Born in a *haveli* that was situated near potters' huts in Delhi, Adittee was attracted to clay from an early age, watching as colourfully dressed men and women gave it form. Encouraged by their friendliness, she spent her playtime amongst them. "My mind revolved around forms



and colours and my fingers around different mediums,” recalls Adittee. After completing her Master’s in business administration, and as she puts it, “wasting five years of her life in the corporate world,” Adittee restarted her formal education, this time with a Bachelor’s in fine arts from Khairagarh University (now called Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya) and a Master’s from Banaras Hindu University.

Her journey as a sculptor taught the 42-year-old about the nature of humans, and she also found herself closer to nature in the wild. “My art gets its power from day-to-day life, which is also why it has the capacity to move and influence people,” she says. When she realised that polluting sculpting materials were gaining an edge over natural ones, she became

an activist and began popularising natural sculpting materials instead. “I prefer natural materials that are not mined. I have also been using old recycled and reclaimed metals and materials,” says Adittee, whose work has adorned Rashtrapati Bhavan, besides universities, colleges, hotels, and corporate offices across India.

In the course of her work, she has provided employment to hundreds of artisans, working with mediums as varied as marble, bronze and wood. “We become one family, stay together, eat together, laugh together and work together,” explains Adittee. She goes on, smiling, “People call me a hopeless romantic and dreamer. I have been told that I can create magic with clay.” It’s definitely the right career path for Adittee. ■



Abstract painter and pranik healer Sahaya Sharma infuses her work with psychological nuances and her desire to heal the world

SAHAYA SHARMA

The deeper message of Sahaya Sharma's art is that "we are all interconnected", and as the young artist grows in influence among the affluent classes of Delhi and Mumbai, she also spreads the essence of all the psychological and spiritual *gyaan* she has acquired through her journey as an artist and

pranik healer. "I seek to heal people through my art and my colours," she says.

Born to intensely creative parents, art made an early entry in Sahaya's life. Her mother is a fashion designer and her father a musician in a band that performs classic blues and rock and roll tunes. Born in Delhi, Sahaya spent her early childhood at the Vasant Valley School in the capi-

tal, moving to Welham Girls' School in Dehradun in her teens. Later, she did her Bachelor's in fine arts at Lassel College of the Arts, Singapore.

In 2014, soon after graduating, Sahaya discovered pranic healing. "Meditation changed my head-space. The best example I could use

with pranic healing influenced her creative process as well. "Pranic healing is about the science of energy and so are my paintings. Colour is energy and being an abstractionist who deals with colour, for me it is all about understanding various colours through their vibrations and frequencies and grasping their tone, hue, movement, contrast and physiological effects on the human body," she explains.

She goes on, "Pranic healing has also taught me the art of silencing, an important element in observing when and if a painting is complete and how to mute out the noise of unnecessary elements – a process that can be a little tricky since I use a maximalist technique for various entry and exit points in an artwork."

Essentially, Sahaya's art is an extension of how she copes, understands or fantasises about life. A painting can be over within a week,

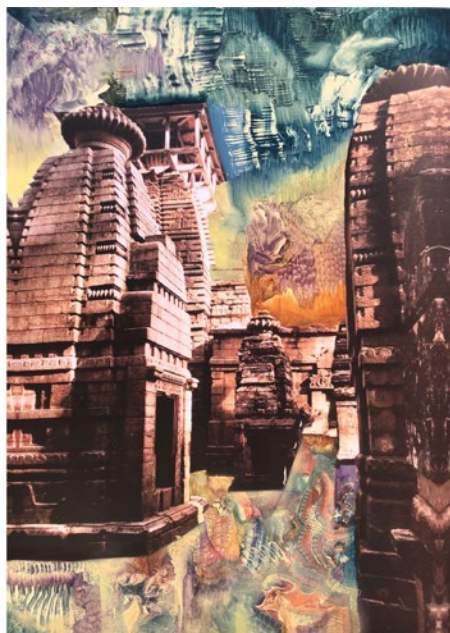
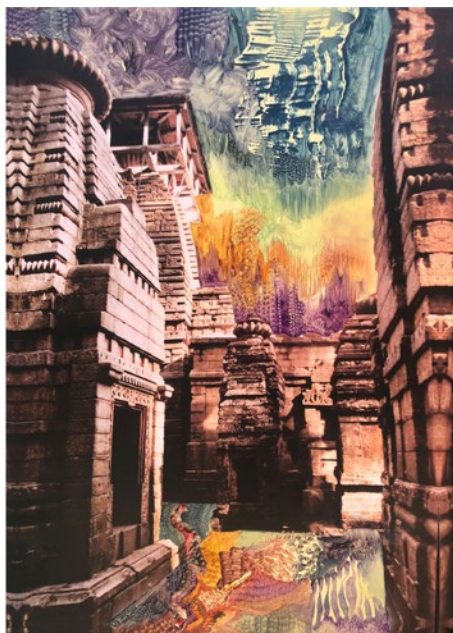
10 days or something that she keeps building up in layers over a year, she goes on. "Recently, I've cracked this technique using oil, enamel, acrylic paint and spray paint to create mythical landscapes that you can drown in or fly over!"

Popular on Instagram, Sahaya's patrons include the Ambuja Neo-



to describe its effect is that it creates a shield of *healthy indifference* around you – both etheric and mental – where negative thoughts and feelings both internally and externally arrive but do not persist. They bounce off and are replaced with love and kindness," she says.

An abstract artist, Sahaya's brush



tia Group, Tahiliani Homes, The Thapar Group, The Akoi Group, and many other top corporate houses, besides Delhi's old and illustrious families. She has also done commissioned paintings for a law firm in Delhi and a restaurant in Chandigarh. "I wish for my works to adorn the walls of Deepika Padukone and Alia Bhatt's home someday!" gushes the young artist.

Sahaya is currently working on her *Structure of Faith* series, which she says was born out of the need to belong, to feel rooted, grounded, whole and calm. "I happened to go through a Kodak family album from the 1990s. The pictures were from a trip my parents took in February 1992 to the Jageshwar Tem-

ples, a group of 100 Hindu temples in Nagara style of architecture dating between the seventh and 12th century near Almora in the Himalayan Indian state of Uttarakhand. My mother was six months pregnant with me at the time."

Sahaya felt "an immediate need to capture this moment in a more objective sense through mixed media paintings." She Photoshopped the sky and land out of the Kodak pictures, and transported them to another dimension with the help of enamel, oil, acrylic and spray paint. "I believe temples are spaces that carry the energy of faith." As an artist with an intuitive touch, Sahaya's work takes you into mesmerising realms of both energy and faith. ■



Painter and printmaker Rohini Devasher's work explores an interesting intersection of art and science

By Manvi Pant

ROHINI DEVASHER

Rohini Devasher has had an intriguing journey into art. Ten years ago, the painter and printmaker collaborated on a project with amateur astronomers in Delhi. What began as joint investigations, stories and conversations culminated into a chronicle of this almost obsessive group of people

whose lives have been transformed by the night sky. A matter of perspective building and self-reflexivity for her, she became curious and increasingly conscious of the role of 'observation,' and 'field' or 'site' in her practice as the work took shape and form.

Recalling that time, Rohini, who works in a variety of media, including sound, print and video, shares,

“My practice had engaged with the field both as a series of physical sites – skies, sea forts, observatories, telescopes, and so on – and also as a methodology, a space for an investigation that allows one to explore something unfamiliar. It presented an opportunity for one to decipher a multitude of relationships between the human and non-human.”

Rohini’s own work is a perfect combination of the empirical and the imagined. She did her BFA in painting from the College of Art, New Delhi, and received her MA in printmaking from the Winchester School of Art in the UK. If you ask her what connects her to art, she will share a diverse set of elements with you. For instance, she loves to dwell on nature as a construct, as a discipline, or time that acts as a catalyst for change, or the loss of empathy, wonder, hope and possibility.

Like every artist, the Mumbai-based 41-year-old has her signature style. She deep dives into realities like, what would it mean for a generation of children to grow up without the stars? Or, what is it like to be human? Her wall drawings are immersive, site-specific, temporary, and destroyable. What makes her work stand out is her penchant for precision and layering and how she adds naturality to every form.

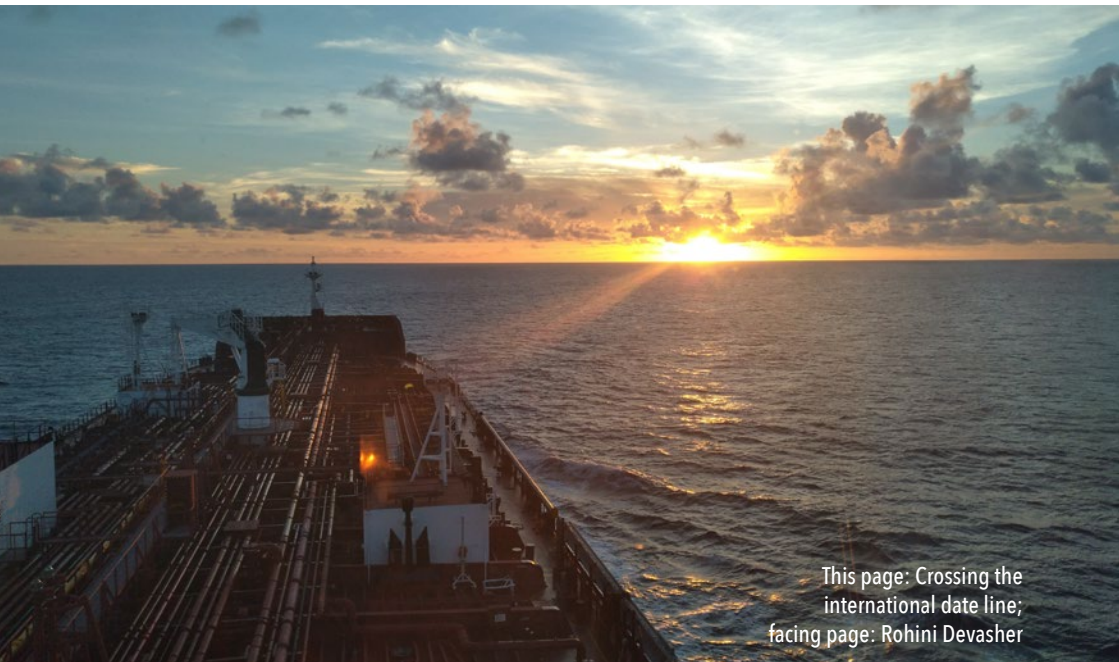
Rohini believes it is important stay open and curious. She keeps process above perfection by walk-

ing through her imperfections one day at a time. As an artist, her work promises a deep sense of connection, curiosity, and wonder to society at large. Irrespective of her taste, Rohini has a long list of artists that she deeply admires. “Raqs Media Collective have been a very important influence. As artists, curators, and thinkers, they consistently push boundaries of what practice is and



The Pacific Ocean at a depth of 4500 metres

can be. They have been a constant source of support and critique. Kiki Smith’s facility with material and the medium of printmaking is another, then Olafur Eliasson, James Turrell and Agnes Meyer-Brandis, they have very different approaches to the astronomical and cosmological. Other artists I admire include



This page: Crossing the international date line; facing page: Rohini Devasher

Bharti Kher, Susan Hiller, Helen Chadwick, and authors Jeff Vandermeer, Angela Carter, Arthur C Clarke, and AS Byatt,” she recalls quickly.

Looking at the fragile and polarised world that we co-exist in at the moment, what does Rohini have to say about being an artist today? “This is an important time for all of us. It is a time to stand up and be counted, to stand up for what is right, to fight for the world we want. Navigating an increasingly fractured world, and trying to make sense of it while inhabiting it with all the pressures that it entails, is never easy. The artist also simultaneously tries to stay true to what

art makes possible for her specifically. What helps is your belief in your work and yourself, and the patience with which you carry it. But at this moment I am a citizen first and everything else second,” she avers.

In 2009, Rohini opened her first solo, ‘Breed’, in Mumbai, comprising digital prints, drawings and videos. Since then she has participated in several exhibitions including at the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2012. As she puts it, new ideas emerge at their own pace. Sometimes, it also takes a life-transforming experience to serve as an inspiration like witnessing the longest solar eclipse crossing path. Recounts Rohini, “I got to know my position on this



planet like never before.”

Another experience that pulled her closer to the enormity of nature and earth was spending 26 days on an oil tanker as part of a unique artist’s residency program called the Owners Cabin. “The voyage took me from Suva (Fiji) to Singapore, via Apia (Samoa) and Pago-Pago (American Samoa). When I signed off in Singapore, I felt the most acute sense of loss. For one, those 26 days had forged an authentic bond between the crew of 25 and me, but also because experiencing the planet the way I did felt like the most incredible privilege. I saw horizon-to-horizon skies, not an aircraft in sight, and clouds of ev-

ery possible description. I saw the Milky Way arching overhead every night. I saw the Pacific Ocean at depths of 4500 metres, a blue so deep it was opaque, and at depths of 15 metres when crossing the Torres Strait, where the turquoise was blinding. I worked in the metal workshop in the lower engineering decks where the temperatures averaged 45°C and I was left with the smell of diesel in my nostrils for three consecutive days after I climbed into the ship’s cargo tanks, which were three-storeys deep.” For her, it was a perfect time to bridge a perspective on whether we construct the environment or it is the environment that builds us. ■



HANDMADE HERITAGE

Fashion label Inde' Loom has a mission to pay fair wages to artisans and weavers, while keeping costs and designs relevant for shoppers

By Manvi Pant

Travelling can stoke new experiences and strengthen one's perception of diversity in the world. Unfamiliar terrains, colourful city landscapes, thriving cultures and their native languages

make one richer in terms of perspective. For Tholi Sandhya, an avid traveller and the co-founder of Hyderabad-based startup Inde' Loom, every voyage has been a learning, an opportunity to have a wider world view. It was during one such expedition a few years ago that she discovered the grinding realities of the life of Indian artisans and, since then, made it her mission to empower them.

Sandhya says, "I met with different artisans and weavers in the interiors of Northeast India, Kashmir, West Bengal, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, saw their craft, and the effort they put into it. But I was appalled when I saw their living conditions. I spoke with them and realised that they were paid 50 per cent lesser than the standard wages. For instance, in Kashmir, for a unique embroidery work



Most weavers operate in craft clusters, geographically concentrated household units producing handlooms

Artisans are major contributors in India's non-farm rural economy. While the global market for art and craft is expanding, India's rich cultural heritage and its enormous potential in this sector have remained largely untapped. The reasons are several – from illiteracy to declining skills and exploitation by middlemen to difficulty in catering to new markets.

Talking of her experience,

in a pashmina shawl that requires woven expertise and precision, they were not even getting ₹200 as wages per day. And many of them were exploited by middlemen who bought the products at a cheap rate but sold them for a bomb. For these artisans, their art is their sole source of livelihood. That's when the thought of establishing a Maker-to-Market Fair Trade handloom collective crossed my mind and I



Tholi Sandhya, co-founder, handles offline sales and client interaction; facing page: Inde' Loom sari designs

discussed the idea with my business partner, Suren Chowdhary.”

Sandhya admits that several of these indigenous artisans have won awards and yet they struggle to make ends meet. Inde' Loom's intent is to uplift and upskill them at the grassroots level, and ensure they get due recognition for their art and labour.

Founded in 2018, the startup primarily manufactures and retails apparel online and offline through rack spaces in boutiques, display pop-ups at trunk shows, and leveraging a network of 40 resellers in India and USA. The USP of Inde' Loom is its eco-conscious approach. The organisation follows

an indigenous method of blending colours. Their fabrics are pure handloom, handcrafted out of sustainable substances.

As co-founders, both Sandhya and Suren believe in keeping their relationship with clients personal and not merely transactional, which is why they select their weavers after a detailed market study. “We do a background check of all the artisans we work with. Our team meets them to understand their art and craft. We shortlist them on the basis of their expertise, products and designs. As of now, we have 120 weavers pan-India.”

Many of these weavers operate out of craft clusters. Elaborating the



process, Sandhya says, “For instance, weavers who specialise in Kantha work, a popular style of embroidery that comes from West Bengal, work from their own place to minimise cost. We give them our designs and they deliver the end product to us. But in case of cotton or Jamdani saris, we manufacture them in our own looms.”

Dealing with the unorganised sector has its own set of roadblocks. According to Sandhya, identifying the award-winning artisans and weavers and then taking the proposition forward is a major

hiccup. “We don’t have any primary data that we can rely on like their phone numbers or permanent addresses. Also, if a team member from Hyderabad reaches out to an artisan in Kutch, they face language barriers. Another issue is lack of information; they are unaware of government policies, and don’t know much about technology. Due to unstable and irregular employment, they are also marked by low income,” explains Sandhya.

Despite all these roadblocks, the 12-member team has forged ahead, committed to its cause. ■

A full-page photograph of Meghna Ghai Puri, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a long, white, button-down dress with three-quarter sleeves and white leggings. She is holding a black smartphone in her right hand. The background is a bright, modern hallway with white walls and several framed posters or notices on the wall behind her.

CHARTING A NEW COURSE

*Daughter of a legendary
filmmaker, Meghna Ghai Puri
is spearheading India's top film
school Whistling Woods*

By Maya Lalchandani

Following in the footsteps of a legend can be daunting, but Meghna Ghai Puri has worn her mantle with dignity and re-

sponsibility. Daughter of Bollywood director, producer and screenwriter Subhash Ghai, Meghna has charted her own path as a change catalyst,

bringing together her immersion in the world of films with her passion for skilling and education.

The president of Whistling Woods International (WWI), ranked as one of the top 10 film schools in the world by Hollywood Reporter, Meghna has changed the way the industry works, by producing edu-

was two years old when the Hindi blockbuster *Karz* was released and her father's company Mukta Arts was formed. "When I was growing up, the type of luxuries I can afford to impart to my two children today were just not available," the 41-year-old mother of two recalls. She was schooled "just down the



Meghna with parents Mukta and Subhash Ghai, husband Rahul, sister Muskaan, and kids Aanya and Ranveer

cated trained talent to take over the next generation of filmmaking.

WWI began as her father's dream, but it took Meghna many years of hard work to lead it to its formidable position. As a little girl, she had a protected middle-class childhood, far from media frenzy and the glamour of today's Bollywood. She

road at a convent," she smiles, adding that people looked down on the film industry in those days, and she would only talk about movies to the peons and watchmen in her school, sharing free tickets with them.

As her father's name and fame grew, she completed her schooling and went to study business at Kings



Meghna with her husband Rahul Puri; both launched and run Whistling Woods International together

College in London where she met her husband Rahul. When she returned, her father insisted she take over the helm of his dream film-school project. “They wanted me to be super-independent before I tied the knot,” she says. Hesitantly, in 2001, she donned the mantle at WWI, afraid that it may just end up as the pipedream of a filmmaker. The couple got married in 2002.

In retrospect, Meghna says, “WWI was the best thing that happened to me at the time, because if I had come back and joined Mukta

Arts, which had already been running for 30 years with all the old timers, I would not have been able to add much value.” Launched in

2006 as a school run by the industry for the industry, WWI places a high emphasis on technical skilling. Built over 150,000 sq feet on five and half acres in Mumbai’s Film City, it started out with 82 students and now boasts of over

1100 and is considered Asia’s largest film, TV, animation and media arts institute.

“When anyone in the industry

**“THE YOUNGER
GENERATION
DON’T NEED MORE
INFORMATION;
WHAT THEY NEED
IS MENTORSHIP”**



Meghna receiving the Economic Times Award for her contributions to the fields of film and creative arts

sees WWI mentioned on the resume of an entrant or job applicant, they immediately sign up that student because they know the background that he or she comes from,” Meghna says with pride. The exposure kids get at WWI is unparalleled, as teachers and facilitators are often brought in from abroad. WWI offers programmes between one to four years in duration and, though it is not a University itself, it has partnered with the Tata Institute of the Sciences to ratify all its courses with BSc, BA and BBA degrees, and advanced and post-graduate diplomas.

“The younger generation is very difficult to impress, since everything is available on Google,” says

Meghna. “They really don’t need more information; what they need is mentorship. They need guidance more than facts.” As the head of academics at WWI and the MD of Mukta Arts, Rahul has played an equally important role in building the film school, and the couple have together written every handbook and rulebook needed for the courses. “We have pronounced roles and have built strong teams around us, empowering them to do what they do best,” avers Meghna, who is the recipient of various awards as a woman achiever.

It has not been smooth sailing. In their seventh year of operations, they were rocked with a lawsuit



L-R: Meghna Ghai Puri with her children Aanya and Ranveer; with her filmmaker father, Subhash Ghai

from the Indian government, and faced a shutdown. This was a tough time for them, but they didn't give up. Instead, WWI diversified into media and communication, fashion, music, design, animation and so on. Luckily, they got a stay order and remained functional, though things are still being worked out.

“The whole idea behind an educational system like WWI is to give back to the industry and also in a way to society. We have students from all kinds of backgrounds and we cater to all without discrimination. We are not subsidised, and yet we offer a lot of scholarships as I believe one should never restrict a student's education because of lack

of money,” says Meghna, who also supports street kids' education with scholarships through NGOs like Salaam Balak Trust and Vidhya.

A practising Buddhist, she believes that all WWI employees should be able to maintain a work-life balance, and staffers' children are welcome on campus. “Working parents have to be hands-on,” she says.

Today, Meghna encourages her heads of department to make their own decisions, while remaining their sounding board and managing damage control. “I don't think one can ever get *everything* right but the key is to pour your heart into whatever you are involved in,” says the change-maker. ■

BEAUTY UPDATE

Here's all the latest from the world of beauty this month



BATH AND BODY WORKS

Bath & Body Works has winter-ready offerings this month. Try the Winter Apple Candy, Vanilla Bean Noel, Snowy Morning and Coconut Mint Drop ranges, all of which smell delicious and are infused with luxuriously rich shea butter.

BIOTIQUE COSMETICS

Everyone's favourite homegrown bodycare brand Biotique has now forayed into colour cosmetics and launched its own line of natural makeup. With its roots in organic bases and active botanicals, the makeup not only makes you look pretty, but also nourishes your skin. It is available in three ranges, Diva, Star and Magic.



DR SHETH'S SKINCARE

An ideal gift for a skincare addict, Dr. Sheth's Festive Hamper has products to tackle pigmentation, ageing and dull skin, and protect the skin from tanning, pollution damage and blue light. It also has luxurious indulgences for weekend pampering sessions. *Price: ₹5850*

MAKING 2020 AWESOME

There's no point making New Year's resolutions that you will break within days! Here's how to make the next decade great without resolutions

By Kay Newton

January 2020 is the perfect time to plan for the coming 12 months. All you require is a small notebook. Reading it daily will keep you on track and change your life over the coming year.

Before you begin, write down, "You are the only person you will ever spend your whole life with." Many people are excellent at supporting others, yet not so good at

spending time alone on their own thoughts and feelings. Yet this is where the magic lies. Here are 10 ideas for 2020.

Do the basics

Start every day with a simple routine, breathe deeply and stretch. Keep to the basics through the day: drink enough water, eat healthy, watch what you say to yourself, surround yourself with those who



PHOTO: GERD ALTMANN / PIXABAY

inspire you, and be grateful for everything you have in your life.

Connect to nature

Connect to nature in some way every day, whether it is to feel the sun's rays upon your face for a few minutes or to watch an ant going about its business. Spend some time reflecting on nature's beauty and synchronicity.

Utilise the seasons

Plan the year according to seasons. Winter is a fabulous time to plant seeds (ideas) and nurture them under the ground to reflect and rest, whilst summer is a time of fire to act upon and accomplish your plans. Monthly lunar cycles can be used as a ritual space to clear out the things you do not want in your life, both mental and physical.

Meditate daily

Use your meditation time to find a 'nothing' spot, or to ask a burning question. Ask your higher self to share wisdom that will support your health, prosperity and mission. Be specific in what you ask for and be open to receiving answers.

Journaling

Write down three things you are grateful for each day or perhaps you prefer to 'verbally vomit' your thoughts onto paper without care for grammar! Either way, writing your thoughts helps you decide whether to keep or change them.

Know and live your values

What are your top three values?

Values are the stardust you were born with. They are unique to you and when you use them in everything you do and say, you connect your head to your heart, and are in alignment.

Your rites of passage

Every experience we have in life has a gift to offer no matter how hard it may seem at the time. These experiences make you who you are today and offer you skills that are unique to you. Making a history list of your rites of passage allows you to tap into these skills whenever you are about to do something new.

Know your why

Knowing why you get up every morning is the only way to get out of a bed with a smile. Check in with yourself on a daily basis and change your 'why' when you need to.

Make a rulebook

Reading these rules daily – the time you will get out of bed, your exercise routine, your diet, who you will speak to – allows your subconscious mind to notify you when you are off-track. (Note: This is one of the best kept secrets for losing weight!)

Affirmations

Create a daily affirmation or visualisation, and then spend time each morning chanting or picturing what you want to create as if it has already happened. Do this until you create the reality you want and then move on to the next goal. ■

Visit: KayNewton.com

NO GRABBING PLEASE

When we grab or snatch things away from our kids when we think it's not good for them, we set in motion undesirable patterns of behaviour

By Nidhi Chopra



As parents, would it be okay to quickly snatch away a phone, food, toy – or anything our child is currently engaged with – when we are convinced that it is not good for him or her? (I'm making a clear distinction and drawing the

line at 'dangerous'. That, of course, is non-negotiable.)

If we snatch things away from a child without warning or talking to them first, we are communicating to them three things: one, that powerful people get what they want by taking it away from less powerful humans; two, that they need to grab or snatch and hold on tighter to what they want by any means available; three, that they need to find manipulative ways to get what they want from people around them.

And these are just immediate consequences. Long-term ones can range from being constantly insecure of things in life being taken away from them to being deeply invested in performing actions that are singularly geared towards achieving what they want by any means available. Now, take a pause here and think of all the real-life scenarios where such an attitude could be potentially dangerous to themselves or others around them.

PHOTO: HUMPHREY MULEBA / UNSPLASH

As parents, we aren't just raising children but future productive adults of society. It is important to give children the power of choice. Taking that away makes them feel helpless and without agency. We have to encourage an active practice in negotiations and reaching collective agreements instead of lessons in full-blown aggression.

To treat consent as a living entity in our lives and practising it proactively with our children not only gives them the power of autonomy but also a clear sense that with power comes responsibility, accountability and consequence. It encourages them to think critically for themselves, make decisions by themselves and understand that they have the authority to change the consequences by prioritising their needs, wants and desires more rationally and less impulsively.

When we are told to "lead by example", it not only means by being "model" human beings that our children can look up to (which is exhausting even when no one is judging or imitating us) but also, by demonstrating ideal social interactions while dealing with them. We have to show them the *how* by doing it with them instead of depending on some kind of indirect learning of the same behaviour in a different, adult-initiated scenario that they don't necessarily understand or even pay

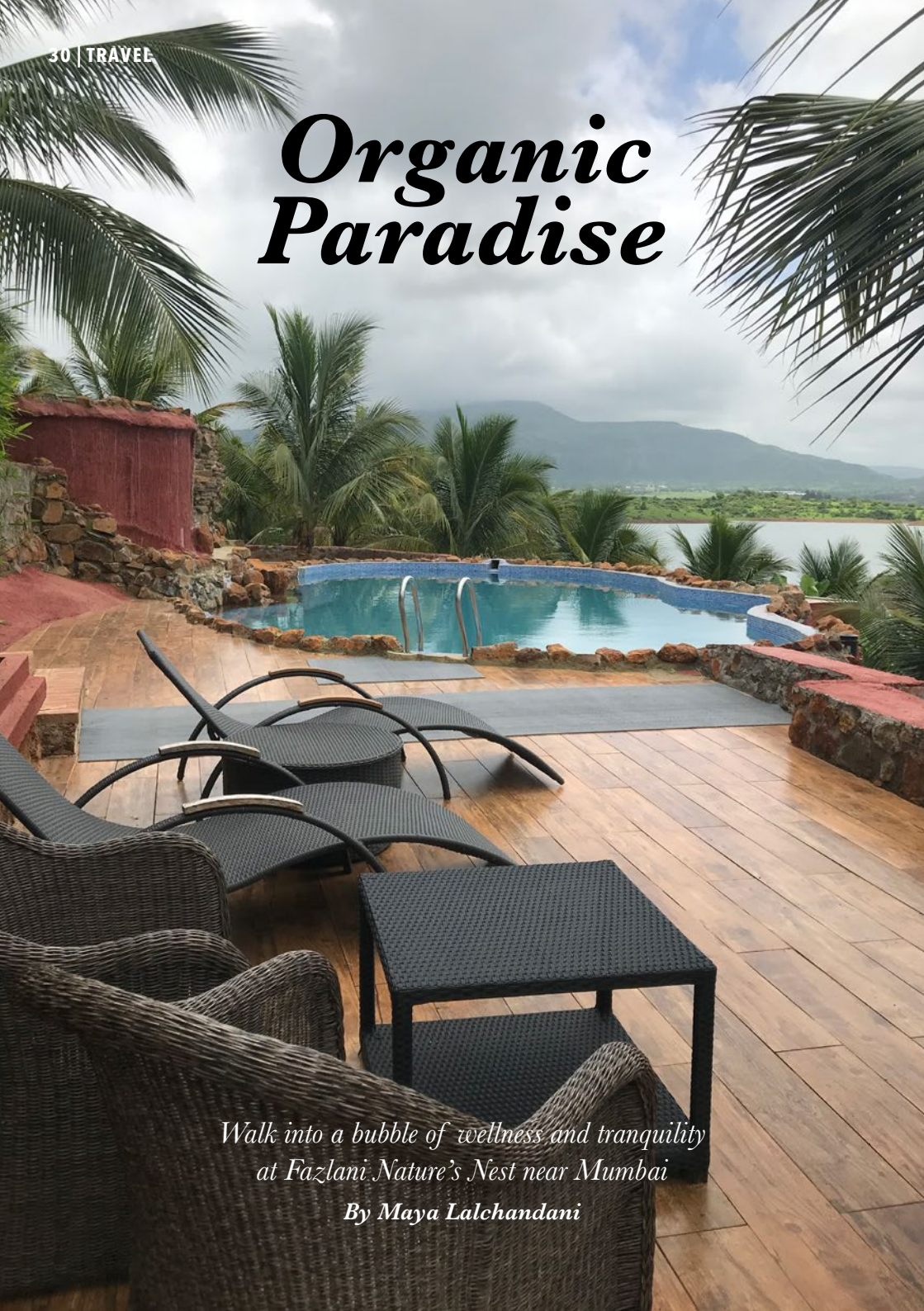
attention too. We have to accept that all the seemingly unimportant situations they deal with in their everyday lives are actually real-life simulations that they get to practise manoeuvring in a secure environment.

So, I go back to my original question: as parents, would it be okay to quickly snatch



away a phone, food, toy or anything our child is currently engaged with, when we are convinced that it is not good for him or her? Or, would the more time-consuming but smarter thing to do be to state the problem, the consequences and your own personal desire for them, and then allow them to reach a safe and secure decision on their own? ■

Organic Paradise



*Walk into a bubble of wellness and tranquility
at Fazlani Nature's Nest near Mumbai*

By Maya Lalchandani

Almost every big city in India invites detoxification centres close by. Mountains of stress deserve plateaus of de-stress, so to speak. Mumbai as a city has its fair share of lovely weekend spaces that offer more than just detoxification. One of them is Fazlani Nature's Nest Wellness Centre and Spa, just three hours' drive away from Mumbai, in Mawal Taluka, Maharashtra.

Nestled between Mumbai and

Most such getaways offer menus that do not really take the global lifestyle into consideration. Here, organic is the keyword that underlies all operations. A master chef who has researched the science behind healthy eating crafts the wellness cuisine here, keeping seasonal produce in mind. Starting with being a completely 'no alcohol' and 'no smoking' zone, the enforced discipline endorses Fazlani's core



Try an experiential therapy at the Stallion Castle, involving interactions between guests and horses

Pune, the spa has a great appeal for a global clientele, constructed as it is with a complete understanding of the five elements of nature. A beautiful ambience gives it the vibe of a holiday resort mixed with a med-spa. With an effective team of professionals in place, you are assured of a bouquet of experiences, both cultural and traditional. This mix helps people get exactly what they are there for.

belief – that wellness is at the epicenter.

Farm-to-fork is the theory behind the gastronomy, ensuring that ingredients are fresh and organic. The in-house orchards provide fresh fruits, and the restaurant, Hive, caters to all dietary needs. One can also visit the centre's Ahara Farm and handpick the salad selection to be served at the next meal. Yes, carrying a fancy basket and picking

your own vegetables does give you a different kind of satisfaction, not to forget a taste of the leisurely way of being.

Once you have the food all worked out and understand that the holiday is going to be devoid of all devices to encourage more of the slow life, the spa facilities are quite welcome. Spread over 25,000 sq ft, and following Ayurveda and naturopathy ideologies, the Amarine Spa is the star attraction at the centre.

With 24 treatments on offer, you are sure to uplift your mind, body and soul. The wellness centre has exclusive treatment rooms for men and women, a fully equipped gymnasium for the athletic types, three

outdoor swimming pools, and hydrotherapy facilities. One certainly does not have to worry about knowing the right thing to do, as there are well-qualified resident doctors, physiotherapists, nutritionists and fitness guides.

Clients come here for diverse reasons: some to de-stress and cleanse, or for deep relaxation, anti-ageing or weight loss. The result for everyone is mental and emotional wellbeing. Simply hanging around in the available spaces – like the pristine lake, the lush lawns – and partaking of the maintenance of the beautiful flora and fauna on the property, the birds and animals that live there such as peacocks, geese, ducks, even





turkeys, all contribute to the natural way of life. This is nature in all its splendour, inviting and nourishing to say the least. An idyllic location to regain one's composure and return to one's busy urban life.

The accommodation is simple if you choose it, but you can also go for suites or villas donned with Italian furniture, fitted with a private jacuzzi and all the modern amenities, a spa-style bathroom, a personal butler and a counselling session with a lifestyle expert. Whatever you choose, you still wake up to the same birdsong and brilliant views from all angles.

Eat healthy, take early morning

leisurely walks or bicycle around the property, follow the geese and the clouds, explore the orchards and the rose garden, pick your own salad, make amazing friends for life, ride a horse and indulge in some pottery. Yoga with a personal trainer at the amphitheatre overlooking the lake will be the high point of your day as the setting sun brings in calm and comfort at twilight.

The philanthropic Fazlani Group first set up a school on the premises for the less fortunate. The resort was built later to sustain the children's education. What better way to help others than to give of yourself? Nature looks after its own. ■

A TASTE OF VANCOUVER



From delicious food to flavourful wine, the Dine Out Vancouver Festival in January and February 2020 promises to be a feast for the senses, but it's only a sample of the vibrant Canadian city's dining repertoire and nightlife





While summer in Vancouver – considered one of the world’s most scenic urban destinations – is definitely worth your while, the city on the west coast of Canada is making sure tourists have reasons enough to come over in winter as well.

Now in its ninth year, Canada’s largest annual food fest Dine Out Vancouver Festival (DOVF) has grown from 57 restaurants way back in 2002 to over 300 participating outlets including wineries, craft breweries and suppliers. The 17 days of dining, food-forward events and experiences are designed to give local and visiting culinary enthusiasts the opportunity to taste the

best flavours of the city. So much so, even hotels and airlines such as Air Canada are offering special offers for those flying in from outside at this time!

To be held from January 17 to February 2, 2020, you can find everything from neighbourhood food truck fests, and from wine tastings to global guest-chef collaborative dinners. Produced by Tourism Vancouver, DOVF attracts over a lakh locals and visitors every year who step out to savour Vancouver’s multicultural influences along with immediate access to fresh ingredients from nearby oceans, rivers, valleys and fields.

PHOTOS: TOURISM VANCOUVER

The 2020 edition will see a kick-off on January 16 with The Great Big Taste, which is being organised in partnership with the Wines of British Columbia. The proceeds will benefit the BC Hospitality Foundation. A 'grazing-style tasting event' priced at CAD 89 per person, it features tastings from top Metro Vancouver restaurants, over 20 British Columbia (BC) wineries plus

lection of Vancouver's Street Food carts all in one convenient location. The street fest boasts a multitude of over 20 delicious cultural options from Indian to Mexican, and from pizza to grilled cheese. Balloons, picnic tables and music make for a festive mid-winter outdoor picnic!

There are several other food events scheduled. Those who love beer and barbeque will love the



DOV's kick-off, The Great Big Taste, is a grazing-style tasting event featuring top restaurants and wineries

more samples from BC craft breweries, distilleries and cideries. DJ beats will keep up the atmosphere while guests sample offerings and bid on culinary-themed items at the silent auction for charity.

Once you're high enough, the Street Food City to be held every day from 11 am to 5 pm outside the Vancouver Art Gallery definitely deserves your attention. With free entry, you can sample from a col-

three-and-half-hour BBQ, Fried Chicken & Brewery Tour. Your journey begins with some delicious free-range chicken and more at Juke Fried Chicken – voted number one for Best Chicken in the Georgia Straight Golden Plates Awards 2019. Next on down the line is another award winning pit stop at Memphis Blues for some messy, low and slow-cooked barbecue (napkins required!). And finally, you will visit

Vancouver's newest craft brewery Container Brewing to wash down all those tasty meats with a flight of beer and a behind the scenes tour that includes some brewing 101 and more.

Those looking for a fine-dining experience can splurge at the Hawksworth Long Table Dinner Series. Offering a five-course tasting menu paired with local wines, guests will be able to enjoy this experience guided by Chef Antonio Sotomayor and wine director Bryant Mao. Priced CAD 152, you will enjoy fresh and vibrant carefully sourced organic and oceanwise ingredients crafted into enticing, wholesome dishes.

There's also the Mashup Beer,

Wine and Distillery Tour, giving you a sneak peek into the tastes and flavours of three Vancouver-based establishments, and the Coffee Roast & Delightful Bites Tour, when you can explore why the city's coffee scene is seen as top tier on the world stage. Throughout the minibus tour, you will learn about the roasting process, how different coffees are made as well as try a few drinks with paired snacks.

Combine a bit of tourism with gastronomy with the Dim Sum Chinatown Tour. Learn a little about the historic Chinatown in downtown Vancouver while you walk from the Chinese Cultural Center to a couple of dim sum restaurants to start the tasting part of the tour.



The bustling Granville Village located on a waterfront is a must-visit for any foodie tourist in Vancouver



The Street Food City boasts a multitude of over 20 delicious cultural options from Indian to Mexican

You also get to try Chinese BBQ as well as a tea ceremony.

Those who wish to try an authentic farm-to-table experience must go for the themed pop-up Farm in the City. Featuring live country music, you get to taste the best of BC farm goodness such as duck raised without antibiotics, Fraser Valley pork, wild-caught salmon, and organic vegetables and berries.

Vancouver-ites love their natural produce, and the public market at Granville Island is proof. In the 1970s, the former industrial wasteland transformed itself into Vancou-

ver's premier artistic and cultural hub, located in an urban, waterfront location and steeped in a rich industrial and maritime heritage. Today, this unique destination attracts millions of visitors each year from Vancouver and around the world, and is a must-visit.

If you're in for a fun drive, try the Secret Supper Soiree, a best-selling road tour that takes you to the city's best-kept culinary secrets. Be warned though, tickets sell out very quickly for all events, so book your seat well in advance. Visit Dineout-vancouver.com for more. ■

Bengaluru on My Plate



L-R: Vishal Shetty and Divya Prabhakar

Bangaloreans are now closer to their culinary heritage thanks to Vishal Shetty and Divya Prabhakar's Bengaluru Oota Company

By Manvi Pant

Besides being a compelling source of nourishment, food is the bearer of our roots, geographical landscapes and traditions. Taste preferences used to act as a

great unifier of cultural identity, but a lot has changed in this digital-first era. That longing for roots has been replaced with quick fixes, and eating in isolation has become a norm.

Meet Vishal Shetty (52), co-founder of Bengaluru Oota Company, an experiential dining space that is bringing Bangaloreans closer to their culinary heritage.

Vishal was introduced to the culinary world by her late father, Sanjeev Shetty, who was an outstanding cook and the owner of an iconic restaurant in Bengaluru, Hotel Udyavan. Vishal spent her childhood watching him bring soul to the recipes and serve them with a lot of love. This sparked in her a desire to follow the same path as her father, but she did not know when and how. “I got married, did various corporate jobs. But that longing to have my restaurant kept me waiting for the right moment. And then, the universe conspired,” confesses the mother of two.

The idea to start Bengaluru Oota Company (*oota* means food) arrived one afternoon in Vishal’s kitchen over glasses of gin and a delicious home-cooked meal that Vishal had cooked for a group of friends. “My childhood friend and business partner, Divya Prabhakar, and I were both on sabbaticals from work. She saw my love for cooking. One conversation led to another, and we realised that we both wanted to do this. That’s how it all started!”

Since Divya is a Gowda, and Vishal is from the Bunt community of Mangalore, the food served is a delectable mix of both heritages.

Far from being a typical restaurant or a joint around the block, it’s a place of experiential dining where one gets to be oneself, slow down and relax. One needs to book a table days or even weeks in advance,



and the premises themselves are unassuming. The food is customised for each guest, and there’s a new menu every day.

“We have a large bank of recipes that we turn around. And we are always mindful of customers’ preferences or allergies before we



The homely tasting room has a seating space of 30 to 32 people

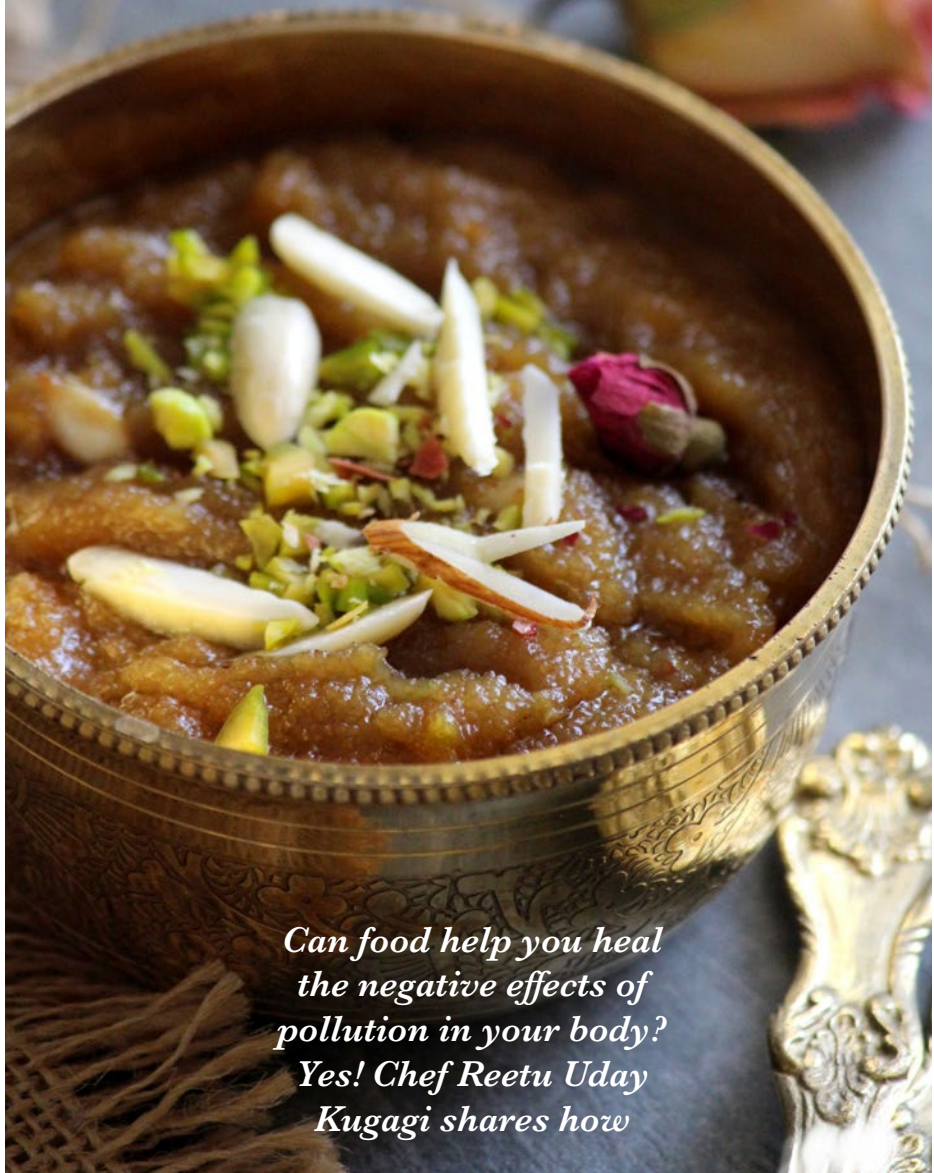
curate a menu for them. When you walk in, you are made to feel at home. We also educate people on how to eat a certain food in a certain way, with one of us always around to host you and narrate stories of how the food has travelled to where it is today. We also teach people the forgotten history of this food,” explains Vishal.

Ranked 17th at the Conde Nast Traveller & Himalayan Top Restaurant Awards 2019, the restaurant caters to diverse segments. “We provide end-to-end service. We do parcels by kilos and portions. Recently, we have started the OOTA Gaadi, which is a food truck with a concept of minimal wastage and fresh food.”

Vishal loves to experiment and add hints of nostalgia to every meal. The restaurant kitchen is home-style in appearance and the cooks are mostly single women with children to support, who live nearby.

Over two years, Bengaluru Oota Company has not only grown wider in reach but also tried innovative formats to keep up with cooking trends. Indeed, the partnership has been incredibly rewarding for both Vishal and Divya, but the secret ingredient behind their palpable chemistry is their contentedness with less. “People ask us, don’t you want to expand and go bigger? But both Divya and I know where to draw a line and be content. We both strive for flexibility and balance.” ■

FOOD TO FIGHT POLLUTION



*Can food help you heal
the negative effects of
pollution in your body?
Yes! Chef Reetu Uday
Kugagi shares how*

Air pollution in Indian cities and towns does not only trigger asthma and bronchial problems, it has also been linked to increased risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes. It is therefore extremely important to consume foods that boost your immune system. Citrus fruits in your diet act as great antioxidants and are a good source of vitamin C. Other immunity-boosting fruits are Indian gooseberry, oranges, kiwi and strawberries. Lycopene is a phytonutrient with a list of remarkable benefits, including protection against respiratory diseases. It is most commonly found in tomatoes.

Also opt for vitamin D-boosting foods like mushroom, oysters, eggs, dairy products and cod liver oil. Consume more of drumsticks, amaranth leaves, fenugreek leaves, spinach, kale and lettuce. Broccoli is a great cancer combatant, and also protects you from air pollution.

Include clarified butter, olive oil, turmeric (known as the golden spice of India) and jaggery in your food; these help reduce inflammation. Jaggery is also very effective in many respiratory problems such as asthma and bronchitis. One can eat this natural sweetener with sesame seeds and dry ginger powder for effective results. Ginger, anise and fennel are natural decongestants. Honey increases immunity against smog. Tea prepared with basil and ginger

soothes sore throats, while green tea acts as a natural bronchodilator.

You can also try these two recipes at home.

GOLDEN LATTE (TURMERIC MILK)

This golden mystic health drink is a medicinal milk that is Ayurveda-inspired. It cures cough, cold and helps reduce weight.

In a heavy-bottomed pan, heat five cups milk on a medium flame. Simmer for 15 minutes until it starts



boiling and reducing. Then add 3 teaspoons turmeric powder and ½ teaspoon crushed peppercorn. Stir it and simmer for another two or three minutes.

Pour it in the serving glass, and add three teaspoons honey or as desired. Serve it very hot.

Alternatively, you can use oats milk or unsweetened almond milk. Add ½ teaspoon of clarified butter (ghee) to cure cold. You can also add an inch of cinnamon stick while simmering the milk, but remember to remove it before serving. If you are a ginger lover, add ground ginger, but you definitely need to strain the milk before serving.

GUD KA HALWA (PREVIOUS PAGE)

This lustrous, divine and rich halwa (dessert) is prepared with loads of desi ghee, goodness of the humble gur (jaggery), suji (semolina powder) and besan (gram flour). Magaz or musk melon seeds give this melt-in-mouth halwa a crunch. It is garnished with nuts and helps strengthen the immune system to combat air pollution.

In a saucepan, add ¾ cup sliced jaggery and four cups water. Bring it to a boil stirring it. Then add ¼ tablespoon milk. You will find the dirt rise to the top of the syrup. Remove the froth and discard with the help of a round spoon.

Once the syrup thickens, strain it through a muslin cloth.

In a non-stick kadhai, heat ½ cup ghee, add ¾ cup semolina and ¼ cup gram flour. Over a medium flame let it cook, ensuring that you continue stirring it. Once it acquires a light golden colour and you can smell the aroma of cooked semolina and gram flour, add ¼ tablespoon slivered almonds and ¼ tablespoon musk melon seeds. Let it cook for few seconds.

Add the prepared jaggery syrup and stir continuously till it becomes thick and attains its desired consistency. You may have a ratio of 1:2 which is one part of mixed semolina and gram flour and two parts of syrup. Serve the halwa hot garnished with ½ tablespoon slivered almonds, ¼ tablespoon chopped pistachio nuts and dried and edible rose petals.

I don't prefer adding edible colour as I believe the natural colour of the dish is fantastic.

You may also add sugar in the jaggery syrup, or use organic jaggery. Saffron can be added as well. ■



Chef Reetu Uday Kugaji is a Mumbai-based celebrity chef, culinary expert and food blogger.

THE KERALA MODEL

Rice, coconuts and their variants are essential ingredients of a typical wholesome, vegetarian breakfast in a Kerala home

By NK Mridula



Breakfast in our north Kerala home was always an elaborate affair. This is my memory from 60 years ago and we have not broken this habit. Neither has it become boring. It continues to excite our palate even today, every morning.

Although we are mostly pescatarian, preferring sea fish for lunch, breakfast has always been an all-vegetarian affair, made with the indispensable rice flour, grated coconut and coconut oil. Appam, idli-dosa, puttu and iddiappam are the

most common breakfast preparations with numerous variants, often served with suitable accompaniments such as chutney, sambar, channa masala, vegetable stew and so on.

In the old days, we used toddy to let the appam batter ferment. Now we use yeast, yet most of the other raw materials used are from our home garden: from drumsticks to curry leaves to coconuts and potatoes to tomatoes to onions to garlic and ginger. We are net producers and net consumers! Here are three favourites.

RICE ROTI WITH VEGETABLE KURMA

Ingredients (serves 2):

For the curry: 2 tsp coconut oil; 1 chopped carrot; 2 chopped potatoes; handful of chopped beans; handful of chopped cauliflower; 1 big chopped onion; 2-3 sliced green chillies; 5 gm chopped ginger; 5 cashew nuts; 1 tsp poppy seeds; 2 cardamoms; 1 cinnamon stick; 2-3 cloves; few curry leaves; salt to taste; pinch of haldi (turmeric powder); 1 tsp red chilli powder; 2 tsp coriander powder; ½ tsp garam masala; 100 gm fresh coconut milk or 75 gm readymade coconut milk; a few fresh coriander leaves; salt to taste

For the roti: 200 gm rice powder; salt to taste; grated coconut

Instructions:

1. In a cooker, take the coconut oil. Add cardamoms, cinnamon,

cloves, curry leaves (optional), and fry for some time. Then add all the vegetables and fry for 10 minutes.

2. Add all the spices and mix well. In 3-4 minutes, add 300 ml water and close the cooker. After 3 whistles, turn off the flame.

3. In the meantime, grind cashew nuts and poppy seeds with a bit of water until it is a fine paste.

4. Open the cooker when cool, and then add the paste to the curry. Mix well and heat. Once it begins to boil, add coconut milk and coriander leaves, and turn off. Serve hot.

5. For the rice roti, make a batter with rice powder, grated coconut and a pinch of salt with water (hot or cold as per instruction on rice powder packet).

6. Cook it on a tawa, flipping on both sides, until it begins to brown.

7. Serve hot.



RICE PUTTU WITH BLACK CHICKPEA CURRY

Ingredients (serves two):

For the curry: 150 gm black chickpea (kala chana or Bengal gram) soaked overnight; 1 small chopped tomato; 1 small chopped onion; 5 gm chopped ginger, 2-3 sliced green chillies; ½ tsp haldi; 1 tsp red chilli powder; 1 tsp coriander powder; 1 tsp garam masala; 100 gm fresh coconut milk or 75 gm readymade coconut milk; salt to taste

For the tadka: 1 tsp coconut oil; 1 dry red chilli; pinch of grated coconut; 1 tsp rai (mustard seeds); curry leaves

For the puttu: 500 gm puttu podi (boiled rice powder); salt to taste

Instructions:

1. Mix puttu podi with cold water until it is moist and coarse in consistency

(see photo). Mix in the grated coconut. Put water inside the puttu maker (cylindrical steel device) or idli maker, and stuff in the puttu podi, alternating with layers of grated coconut. Steam for 10-15 minutes or until the puttu feels spongy. Remove and keep aside.

2. For the curry, cook all ingredients (except garam masala and coconut milk) in a cooker for five whistles.

Open cooker once cool, add garam masala and boil on low flame. After 15 minutes, add coconut milk and immediately turn off the heat.

3. Heat oil in a small pan. Add rai, grated coconut, red chilli and curry leaves. When the rai starts sputtering, remove tadka from heat and pour into the curry. Stir and serve hot with puttu.

RICE IDDIAPPAM WITH VEGETABLE STEW

Ingredients (serves 2):

For the stew: 2 chopped potatoes; 1 chopped onion; 1 chopped carrot; handful of chopped French beans (or peas); 5 gm chopped ginger; 4 chopped green chillies; salt; ½ tsp black pepper; few curry leaves; ½ tsp corn flour, 150 gm fresh coconut milk or 100 gm readymade coconut milk

For the tadka: 1 tbsp coconut oil; few curry leaves; 1 finely chopped onion; a pinch of rai (mustard seeds)

For the iddiappam: 300 gm rice powder; 75 gm grated coconut; water; salt. You will need an iddiappam press.

Instructions:

1. In a cooker, put all the chopped vegetables with 350 gm water and

salt. Cook for 3 whistles. Open when cool and add corn flour mixed in water. Bring to a boil and add coconut milk and black pepper. Turn off the heat.

2. Prepare the tadka by boiling oil in a pan with all the ingredients until rai starts sputtering. Add it to the stew.

3. For the iddiappam, prepare the dough by mixing rice powder with water (as per packet instruction) until it is one soft mass. Run it through the iddiappam press (a device that churns out fine noodles). Collect the noodles and place small quantities on idli maker (or steamer) in round, flat shapes. Add flakes of grated coconut on each. Steam for 10 minutes.

4. Remove by scraping with spoon or knife from idli maker. Serve with stew.





A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Are creative people doomed to vagaries of the mind, cursed by the tempestuous nature of genius? A creative writer delves into mental health

By Manvi Pant

I imagine this. You wake up in the morning with a heavy heart and your breath denser than usual. Your fingers are trembling with confusion, fear, anxiety... clearly, you are not doing well. Later in the day, you revisit this mob of emotions, contemplate, maybe you should cry

or scream, but an unfamiliar smile graces your lips. You don't know why and you try again – a noise, more like a shriek, is meddling with your peace of mind. You try again and this time you burst into a peal of laughter that hurts your jaws, followed by a stream of tears that hurt

your emotional balance and give you a pounding headache.

The past two years have been rough and messy. I went through all of the above not once but several times, especially on days when the sky was gloomy and I was reeling from an unexpected void. Also, around the same time I heard my favourite author Elizabeth Gilbert talk about how creative people fear their own elusive genius.

Hello! My name is Manvi and I am a writer. No matter how powerful or attractive this introduction sounds to others, there are layers of vulnerability beneath. For two and a half years, I was off the rails. I say this out loud because hiding never

really helped anyone. Every time, I tried to get back on track, I only got further disappointed because I grew up believing that being healthy and happy is our natural state of mind. But at this phase of my life, I was neither. And so, what we don't get inside, we look for it outside. I started finding happiness 'outside' and the extent of it was 'unhealthy' and 'addictive'. I lost meaning in life, a sense of purpose, a sense of identity. I felt like I didn't belong. Nothing excited me. To quench my deprived state of mind, I opened myself to further hurt by relying on

factors or people who were volatile themselves.

For sanity, I have been trying to recall and process my emotions by chronicling them every day on paper. I flip through self-help books. I have also spent a lot of time reading about famous researchers, scientists and doctors who have put in years helping creative people.

What I found is that there is a possible link between creativity and mood disorders. American neuroscientist Nancy C Andreasen, who compares her own academic journey with Sylvia Plath's, writes, "Our openness to new experiences, tolerance for ambiguity, and the way we approach life enable

"I WAS OFF THE RAILS. I SAY THIS OUT LOUD BECAUSE HIDING NEVER HELPED ANYONE"

us to perceive things in a fresh and novel way," and that creative people "live in a more fluid and nebulous world." Psychologist Perpetua Neo also links mental illness and creativity. "Artists can be pretty unhappy people," she says, "and they are often quite honest about that fact. With the tortured-artist identity, they believe their creativity is a form of therapy, to create a fantastical kind of world to the real one we live in. What if the therapy doesn't work, what then?"

Research on this phenomenon is not new. Dive into the archives

of *The New York Times*. In an article dated November 14, 1994, Kay Jamison, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University and the author of *Touched With Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*, says, “When we think of creative writers, we think of boldness, sensitivity, restlessness, discontent; this is the manic-depressive temperament.”

Does this mean that all creative folks are doomed to torment? Or, that they should be scared of their ever-elusive genius? I’d hazard a ‘no’. Our mental faculties, and what influences them, are strongly relative to our environment (both internal and external) and our ability and willingness to find a support system. Some navigate through the storm better than others. Some lose sight of the need for balance.

But what I’ve learn for sure is that you are not alone, and it is never too late to talk about it. Time never heals; it rather pushes you to move forward with your sentiments in coherence with your learnings. But you begin to recognise what leads to what and you become more cautious, more aware of repercussions. In his book *Emotional First Aid*, psychologist Guy Winch talks about the unquestionable importance of self-care and why it is needed now more than ever and everyone should practise it.

There are several Japanese



philosophies that make you mindful of your presence and the difference you can make to this broken and polarised world. Concepts like *wabi-sabi*, *kintsugi* and *ikigai* talk about inner happiness and connection, and help you reinstate your present.

Despite having an internal dialogue with my subconscious mind almost daily, it took me very long to respond to these self-affirmations and take control. Even today, I do relapse, go down the drain and pick everything from scratch. I choke. But what I know for sure is I have welcomed healing with open arms by acknowledging my problems. From here, the only way can be up. ■

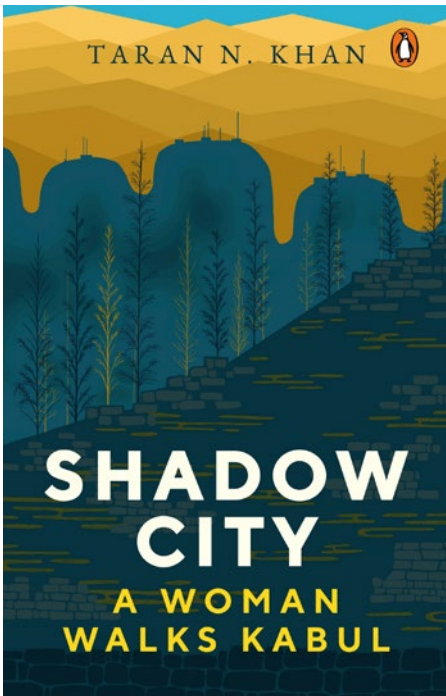
ALONE IN A WAR-TORN CITY

When Taran N Khan arrived in Kabul in 2006, she was earnestly cautioned never to walk. Her instincts compelled her to do the opposite

By Neha Kirpal

Taran N Khan's new memoir, *Shadow City: A Woman Walks Kabul* (Penguin India, 2019) is her personal account of traveling alone on foot through war-torn Kabul and penning down her experiences. As a Muslim woman

raised in small-town India who had to travel to Afghanistan over the course of her film-production career, Taran discovered that she had access to parts of Kabul uncharted by travellers before her. We asked her to shed light on her most memorable experiences in the country, interesting aspects of its capital and its people, and how fearful it was for her as a woman.



What was your most memorable experience working with filmmakers and media producers between 2006 to 2013 when you lived in Kabul? How did it change your perspective of the city and its people?

Each journey yielded its own special moments. In 2006, for instance, I worked with a group of media producers to make a series of short films. I remember their hunger to tell their stories, and their excitement about sharing their work with a wider audience. Over the years, as I returned to Kabul, I met several young filmmakers who worked at



Taran arrived in Kabul in the spring of 2006, five years after the overthrow of the Taliban regime

full-time jobs, and spent their free hours making short films or documentaries with whatever resources they could gather together. Such instances helped me realise how many ways there were to see the city, and the many stories it contained. It also revealed the resourcefulness of Kabul's creative community, and their commitment to their work, despite facing daunting odds.

Told from the perspective of a woman walking through Kabul, what are the different aspects of the city that you particularly want to share with readers?

The perspective of the book is one of intimacy and each of the chapters explores different spaces, and

different themes. One of the sections I particularly enjoyed writing was about wandering through the city's bookshops and also venturing into its public library, and seeing the old manuscripts that link Kabul to its literary history. [One of the anecdotes in the book is about the bookseller behind *The Bookseller of Kabul*, who sued Åsne Seierstad for her portrayal of him and then published the rebuttal which he displays proudly in his shop window.]

What was it like making films in a country where even cinema halls have been damaged?

Even though there are few cinema halls in the city, films are a big

part of life in Kabul. There were CDs and DVDs sold widely across the city, and images of Bollywood stars were displayed on beauty salons and gyms. Over time, I realised that there was a range of films being produced in Kabul. These included popular fare, as well as more experimental work by young filmmakers – many of whom had grown up as part of refugee communities abroad, and had returned to a city they did not know well, but considered home. They explored the city by making films there.

In your research, what were the trends or startling realities you found about love and marriage in Kabul?

It was interesting to see the codes and secret signs through which love and romance played out in Kabul – some of which seemed quite familiar, similar to what I had seen in India. Also like in India, wedding celebrations in Kabul tended to be quite lavish, with large numbers of guests invited to the festivities. After 2001, a number of wedding halls sprang up across the city to host these celebrations. These venues were very opulent and expensive. Often people ended up taking large loans and going into debt to be able to pay for these ceremonies.

How would you compare Kabul with other Asian cities you have lived in or visited?

I don't think this is a comparison I could make, as Kabul has faced a very different history from other places I have lived in. However, I did find a feeling of ease and welcome there as an Indian, thanks to our shared cultural connections.



Taran N Khan

Since you were told never to walk alone in Kabul, was it intimidating for you?

There was a constant awareness that things can change very quickly – that a situation can escalate from normalcy to insecurity quite rapidly. But within this reality, I found that people tried to continue with their lives and their work as far as possible. I was very fortunate to have people looking out for me. ■

THE INDIA OF MY DREAMS

Two acclaimed novelists pen down their unique vision of a 'perfect India'

"SEEN" (FICTION) - MILAN VOHRA

My father didn't come to see me for three months after I was born. My mother told me this when I was 18. I wasn't surprised. For 18 years, my father hadn't really even looked at me. I had lived in that household of men holding forth at the dining table at every meal, wondering if it was because there was something wrong with the way I looked or spoke. "It wasn't that," my mother told me much later. "It was because you were born a girl, Manasi."

No, no, don't gasp. It was true in India then. At least the India I grew up in. I remember the first time I had added something to the conversation at the table. I had just returned from school, excited about discovering that all those stars in the sky were possibly many different worlds like ours. That many of them had names and satellites like we had the moon. I was thrilled at the wonder of all this. Until then, the biggest word I knew was 'earth'. It was only five letters long. But that day I had memorised the spelling of

a big magical world. Planet – that was six letters! I had rolled the word around on my tongue all the way back on the school bus.

At dinner, my father asked what we were taught at school. My younger brother spoke about, "This is Jane. See Jane run. Can Jane run? Jane can run." My older brother



talked about learning the five-times table. My father beamed proudly at both of them. Right to left, left to right. I was sitting in between them. My father's eyes glazed over when they went past me like it was just wall-space that he saw between his boys. I piped up then about 'planet'.

"Do you know, Papa, the brightest star we see in the sky is actually a planet!" I had pointed to Mercury through the window with awe. "P-L-A-N-E-T," I spelled out, feeling a self-conscious pride at taking the spotlight. There hadn't been even a pause from the men to look at me or in the direction my finger was pointing. I thought then, I must be invisible.

I would never have known any different if it hadn't been for my friend Aaliya. One day, when I had sneaked back to her home after school, her father had spoken directly to both of us, asking about our day. I had looked around, not sure who he was speaking to. I had started to think maybe it wasn't just me who couldn't be seen. My mother, my grandmother, my aunts, all seemed to recede into some other zone when the men in the house were around. With Aaliya, I started to see, felt seen. But I still didn't have the courage to confront anyone. Not at home. I just felt grateful that my mother had asserted herself enough for me to keep studying, to meet my friends, especially Aaliya.

Until that historic December of 2019. You girls have of course heard about it from your history coaches. Aaliya and her family were worried sick about all the talk around. The mood in their home was charged with anger. Who were these peo-



ple to tell them if they belonged or didn't belong in this country? Why, Aaliya's grandfather had been among the volunteers who had helped so many refugees through difficult times.

Somehow, Aaliya and I had ended up as part of the crowd that kept gathering outside India Gate. It was a scary time to be out. There were reports that the police were lathi-

charging protesters. The crowd had started singing a song I had never heard before. We were in a large group of women, of all ages, standing together side by side with men, all holding up their phones, holding hands, forming a human chain that I couldn't see the beginning or end of, together singing, *Hum dekhenge, Hum dekhenge / Lazim hai ke hum bhi dekhenge / Wo din ke jis ka wada hai / hum dekhenge.*

That day, when I came home, my father said he had seen me on the news on TV. That he did not want

me to repeat this. Ever.

That was the day I knew there was no way anyone was ever going to treat me like I was invisible. I hope, girls, as you're listening to this, you and the whole world can see me – spacewalking the P-L-A-N-E-T I first ever saw.

~ From the space vodcast of Manasi Kumar, ISRO Mission Mercury, 2030 ■

Milan Vohra is the author of Our Song (Harper Collins), Tick-Tock We're 30 (Westland), and The Love Asana (Harlequin).

"IDEAL INDIA" (ESSAY) - KANCHANA BANERJEE



I live in hope that women would roam the streets without fear. That men wouldn't behave like rabid monsters and, most impor-

tantly, that society would be educated and aware enough not to mouth asinine statements like, "rape can be avoided if the woman carried

a condom,” “you can avoid getting hurt if you don't resist”.

It's an affront to basic intelligence and humanity to even utter such nonsense. We worship goddesses but treat women in society with so much disrespect. There needs to be a tectonic shift in the collective attitude of society towards women in general; outside on the roads, at home, in school, in colleges, in workplaces. Everywhere.

What is required is mass action; across schools, on the streets. This isn't something that will happen in months or weeks. It will probably take an entire generation of teaching men to behave and teaching women that we deserve respect.

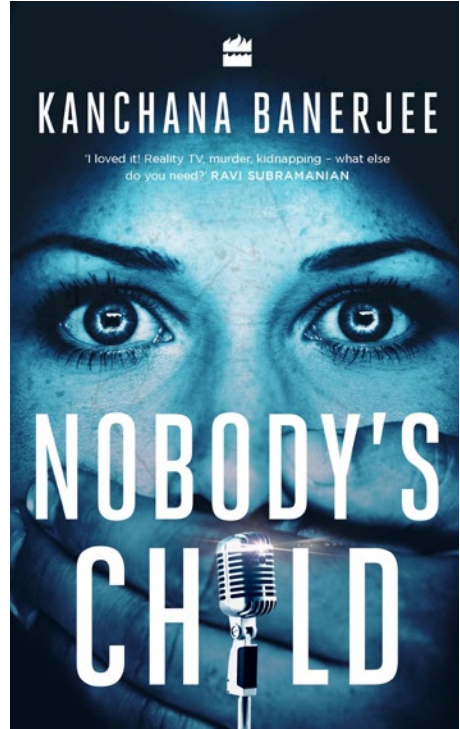
Along with this, the government needs to wake up from its slumber of apathy and inaction. What can be more horrific than seeing people rejoicing the cold-blooded killing of criminals! Yes, the Hyderabad rapists deserved to die but their death is also the death of belief in the judicial system, which in my opinion is the bigger of the two. If people lose faith in the system and believe they have to take action themselves, then it is just the start of an anarchy state.

Do we want justice to be dependent on mob sentiment?

What if tomorrow the same mob decides that a person who has eaten beef should be beheaded? That an unmarried couple who have had

sex need to be punished?

The mob knows no reason or logic. It is insane and dangerous. The mob can't be trusted to mete out justice. That is why a judiciary is set up, but if they are being ineffective, mobocracy is bound to gain



prominence.

I am also hopeful that people become more tolerant towards diversity. This is the time to focus on much larger issues than religion, caste and creed. ■

Kanchana Banerjee is the author of Nobody's Child (Harper Collins) and A Forgotten Affair (Harlequin)

PERIOD DRAMA

This new book explains why menstrual cycles are the perfect barometer of a woman's health, and how to 'biohack' one's period problems away

By Neha Kirpal

With more than two decades of experience researching and treating thousands of patients, health tech pioneer and women's health expert Kirsten Karchmer found that most period problems women experience are reflective of one's overall health and fertility, and are totally correctable. In 2000, Kirsten opened one of the first reproductive acupuncture clinics in the US, where she treated thousands of women with fertility and reproductive issues. In her new book *Seeing Red: The One Book Every Woman Needs to Read. Period* (Simon & Schuster), she writes:

"1.7 billion people on this planet menstruate. That means 4.2 million people are having their periods right now. And more than 80 percent of them



suffer from significant and life-interrupting health concerns such as premenstrual syndrome, cramps, endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and premenstrual dysphoric disorder. That seems like a really big deal for women and their health... so it's odd that no one seems to be talking about it."

The author begins by tracing the history of the period only to find that age-old attitudes towards this 'disease' have not changed in centuries. Since time immemorial, menstruating women were considered filthy, feeble and inferior, and periods were considered a curse to be endured. In India, the stigma for menstruating women to enter temples is well known, as is 'menstrual shame', as if it is something to be hidden and be ashamed about.



Kirsten Karchmer

In this practical data-driven guide to a woman's optimal health and wellness, the author explains the importance of a healthy menstrual cycle and how to achieve it, and why it matters to the progress of the women's movement. While breaking down many taboos and myths around menstruation, Kirsten draws the correlations between a woman's cycle and her overall health, so much so that she exclusively used the menstrual cycle as her primary diagnostic tool. The author illuminates that the period is a woman's most instructive feedback mechanism for her health and fertility. It's a sound barometer of one's overall health that arrives on schedule every month to give one a full systems check and provide beneficial clues

"IF OUR GOAL AS A SOCIETY IS TO REALLY EMPOWER WOMEN, WE HAVE TO START WITH WOMEN'S HEALTH"

about one's health.

The author also explains how it is possible to "biohack" one's period – through medicine, technology as well as simple and sustainable diet and lifestyle changes, such as enough sleep, water and exercise. Add to this healthy relationships and social support. Apart from this, she also emphasises the importance of having the right mindset, "where the mind goes, the body follows".

"If our goal as a society is to really empower women, we have to start with women's health. A woman's cycle is not a curse but possibly the most valuable, regularly occurring, and free feedback tool a woman can use to measure her overall health. It can also provide a road map for fixing it and improving her current and future health, as well as quality of life, and access to power, and freedom... It's time we broke the silence surrounding the messy, uncomfortable matters related to the female body. It's time we started SEEING RED." ■



ALIGNING WITH YOUR CENTRE

Sailaja Manacha's useful new book Step Up blends psychology and generative leadership practices to provide women with the necessary tools to become powerful leaders. An excerpt

I grew up in a home that placed a premium on doing well, being effective and efficient, as well as aiming high. I also grew up in Mumbai – a city where life is fast-paced and stressful. From a young age my body learnt to be tensed. My stomach was in a permanent clench – a clench that held this message: “I need to do more, I need to move

faster... I need to be better.”

When I began to learn presence practices, it was like learning a technique to relax this clench. I learnt to relax all of my body. I became sensitive to when and how the clench began forming in my body – almost always in response to threat, stress or fear. Learning to be mindful helped me see my habitual

PHOTO: SNAPWIRENAPS / PIXABAY

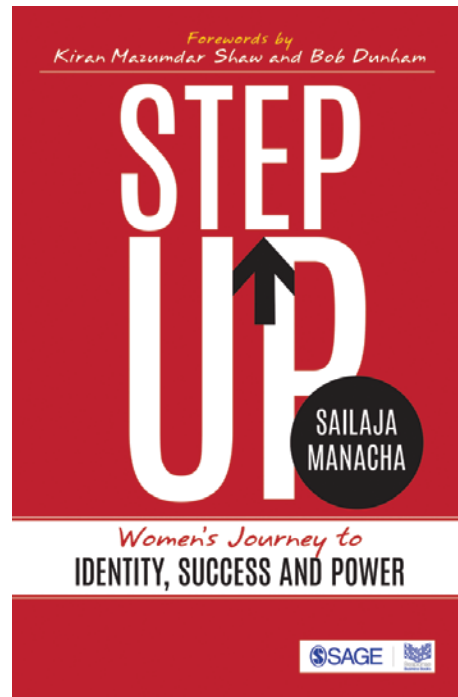
clenching pattern. My body had learnt and practised this clenching for long. I realised that I can never do away with stressful situations altogether. Things will not work the way I wish and that is a reality of life. With practice, I learnt to recognise what the clench felt like in my body and the triggers in the environment. With mindfulness I learnt to manage those moments and shift from the place of 'clench', by telling myself that a relaxed mind and body will perform better.

I had already been practising 'presence'-based meditations for a while. I heard the word 'Centring' first in the context of training with the Institute of Generative leadership, United States. "Centring is the process of collecting ourselves," says Richard Strozzi.

I have developed my own version of Centring from the various teachers I have learnt it from and I now introduce it to leaders as a way to keep our balance in a pressured environment. It helps keep us dignified during conflict. When we know our centre and are balanced, we can move any way we want from a place of choice.

We move from a place of choice, not reaction. When in conflicted or stressful situations, some of us tighten or contract our body. That is the natural fear-based response of our body. I was recently at an Alexander Technique special lesson

and the teacher told me that most of us will measure an inch lesser by evening when compared to the morning, as our spine would be compressed owing to the stresses of our day! It explained to me why many of us tend to complain of neck and back problems developed out of stress reactions.



Centre is not a permanent static place. It is a place we move out of and become off-centre, and then comes the moment where we notice that we are off-centre. From that moment comes choice to reorient and make a movement back to centre. It is a process that

we mindfully attend to.

Centring helps us find balance by becoming aware of our internal states while continually also sensing the external environment through our senses. Andy Bryner and Dawna Markova describe Centring as: "...a process by which you integrate the habitually fragmented aspects of yourself – body, mind, spirit, heart, power and common sense – back



Author of *Step Up*, Sailaja Manacha

into their natural state of integrity. Practically, this results in an increased awareness of the moment and your presence in it. Rather than becoming a victim to whom things are happening, you become an active agent of your life.”

Centring also helps us regulate our emotions and become deeply

aware of them. Emotions are an important component of good decision-making. Knowing our emotional state allows us to make a choice of what we wish to do and why. It prompts us to be more mindful in our actions.

Imagine a tall glass of water. If you pour water into it, put in some gravel and begin to swirl it around with a spoon, what do you think that glass will look like? A swirling brown mixture, perhaps with small and big pieces of gravel all turning around with the water. When one is overwhelmed or confused, our mind resembles this swirling brown glass of water. We experience myriad thoughts all at the same time and our mind feels murky and disturbed like the swirling water.

Imagine now that you stop stirring and allow the glass to ‘just be’. What do you imagine we will notice? The gravel settles, there is more clearness to the water, a stillness in which you can see through the glass with clarity and begin to notice in detail the nature and quality of the gravel inside. Centring as a practice allows us to do just this with our mind.

By observing our thoughts, we are able to see clearly the nature of our thoughts and what occupies our mind at the moment. It is a practice to be in the now and learn to have an undisturbed mind. ■

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Reclaiming Bhakti

What is the path of the true bhakta? Seeing the divinity in all, and being fearless in action

By Aekta Kapoor

When in doubt, I turn to my *ishta deva*, my guide and god, Krishna. So in these divisive times, when India is wracked with a modern-day Mahabharata of ideologies, I turn to the Bhagavad Gita for answers.

And my book turns open to the page when Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna in all his terrible greatness. Overwhelmed, Arjuna says: “*I behold Thee without beginning or middle or end, of infinite Force, of numberless arms, Thy eyes are suns and moons, Thou hast a face of blazing fire and Thou art ever burning up the whole universe with*

the flame of Thy energy.” (Chapter 11, verse 19)

Arjuna’s exaltation continues with each verse, until he begins to see the darker side of Krishna’s true form: “*Thou lickest the regions all around with Thy tongues and Thou art swallowing up all the nations in Thy flaming mouths; all the world is filled with the blaze of Thy energies; fierce and terrible are Thy lustres and they burn us, O Vishnu.*” (Chapter 11, verse 30)

And this is where I pause as a student. So the supreme god is not all comfort and radiance and love? So the beloved lord is also

a fire of destruction and fury? So one must accept the negative with the positive, as parts of the same whole that make up the universe? So we are to be nurtured, but we are also to be burnt in our seeking?

All through the Gita, Krishna counsels Arjuna to do his *dharma*, to stand up and do his duty even if it hurts him to fight his kin, and to be fearless in this fight: “*Be a doer of My works, become My bhakta, be free from attachment and without enmity to all existences; for such a man comes to me, O Pandava.*” (Chapter 11, verse 55)

Suddenly, I begin to see. The one who propagates divisibility is deluded, for we are all one in Krishna. The one who shies away from fighting injustice is wilfully blind, for we all have a *dharma*, our purpose in this lifetime. And the one who sees the Truth but still stays back in inaction is committing an *adharma*, going against one’s purpose, karma that sows pain and destruction (there is nothing as simplistic as ‘sin’ in the Gita).

Bhakti means unquestioning devotion but the true *bhakta* has to be discerning and courageous. Just raising the lord’s name is not *bhakti*, following the lord’s teaching is. Declaring one’s

love for the guru is not *dharma*, standing up for the guru’s guidance is. Shouting one’s god’s name is not religion, following its principles is.

I happen to be born into – and choose – the religion of Krishna, of courage, of oneness, of fearlessness, of standing up to injustice even if it hurts me to confront my kin.

Kin, who in modern India, invoke Krishna’s name to do the exact opposite of what he stood for, to spread hatred and disunity, to incite fear and loathing of ‘the other’, to torture the weak and draw a false sense of power by subjugating the powerless.

“*In the egoism of their strength and power; in the violence of their wrath and arrogance they hate, despise and belittle the God hidden in themselves and the God in man.*” (Chapter 16, verse 18)

I hereby reclaim the word *bhakta*. The true *bhakta* does not need an identity card, a religion, a caste, a place of birth, a parent, weapons of lathis and tear gas, or a cancerous government that devours its own citizens.

The true *bhakta* only needs her Krishna. To see the divinity in all beings, and – despite that knowledge, despite the cost – to stand up and fight when the bugle is sounded. God is a verb. ■



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LEARN THE ART OF HOLISTIC LIVING.

The essence of good health begins with joyful living, feels Meera Gandhi, Founder & CEO, The Giving Back Foundation. Join her as she sheds light on why it is important to maintain a balance in life and shares her 3 tips to lead a healthy, holistic life.

3 Tips
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