

# @She

— the female gaze —

April 2020  
Vol 4 Issue 4  
₹150



## *Anoushka Shankar*

The acclaimed  
musician on  
vulnerability,  
strength and  
speaking out

### **SURVIVOR STORY**

How Nidhi Chaphekar  
healed from the  
Brussels terror attack

### **UNITED WE STAND**

3 women creating  
career opportunities  
for other women

### **ON THE FRONT LINE**

The pluck and purpose  
that powers television  
correspondents



A PAN ASIAN DESTINATION

Bangalore | Chandigarh | Goa  
Udaipur | New Delhi

*kitty* | **10**

POP'S UP AT OKO

Featuring

**AAMISH**

**Every Friday**

**8 PM Onwards**

At The LaLiT New Delhi

# contents

ON THE COVER: Anoushka Shankar  
PHOTOGRAPHY: Laura Lewis



**26 All in the Family**  
Three generations of women  
behind the fashion label Sue Mue

- 06 Girl Jokes**  
Comedy collective Mahila Manch
- 10 United We Stand**  
3 women creating platforms for other women
- 16 A Vegan State of Mind**  
More Indians are turning to plant-based food
- 22 Of Strength & Vulnerability**  
Cover personality Anoushka Shankar
- 33 Her Reason to Breathe**  
When Sarah Ross found her 'why'
- 36 On the Front Line**  
TV correspondents share their journeys
- 41 Mommy Diaries**  
Two women on the mayhem of motherhood
- 49 Survivor Story**  
How Nidhi Chaphekar survived a terror attack
- 52 A Tribal Quest**  
A new book on six isolated tribes of India

# IN SEARCH OF HOPE

---

**T**he world is confronting an invisible enemy that has ravaged the fundamental systems of human life, codes that we took for granted. As Covid-19 makes its way around the globe, it only proves how connected we all are despite the social isolation we have imposed on ourselves. We may have locked ourselves in, or locked others out, but we still need to go on living together. And so we adapt. Who knows what lies on the other side of this? For sure, none of us will be the same again.

Like many other publications, *eShe* has suspended its print edition this month, and we are sure you understand. But as in all our past 32 issues, we continue to seek the bright side of life, the positive energy that powers the world even though at times it may appear otherwise. The gift of music (cover story, 'Of Strength and Vulnerability', p.22), the joy of working towards a shared goal ('United We Stand', p.10), or making more conscious lifestyle choices so that we don't hurt the planet ('A Vegan State of Mind', p.16).

We celebrate our shared humanity ('Her Reason to Breathe', p.33) and passion for the truth ('On the Front Line', p.36). For that is what enriches us and that is what powers our will to go on.

May you all be safe, and may you be blessed with inner growth even as there is a standstill outside. Let us support one another through this. ■



**Aekta Kapoor**  
Editor and Publisher  
[aekta@coralcontent.com](mailto:aekta@coralcontent.com)

**Editor and Publisher:** Aekta Kapoor

**Business Director:** Kaveri Jain

**Sales Partner:** Karishma Makhija

**Contributors:** Kay Newton, Manvi Pant, Meera Gandhi, Megha Khanduja, Neha Kirpal, Shweta Bhandral, Tania Chatterjee, Vaishali Sudan Sharma

**Mentor:** Kul Bhushan

All rights reserved throughout the world. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited. Published by Aekta Kapoor from Coral Content, C3/1 GF, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi 110057, India. Phone: +91 9818166621. Printed at Colourbar Communications, 44, Commercial Complex, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase - 1, New Delhi 110028. For queries, write to [mail@coralcontent.com](mailto:mail@coralcontent.com), or visit [eShe.in](http://eShe.in)



# MIRR™

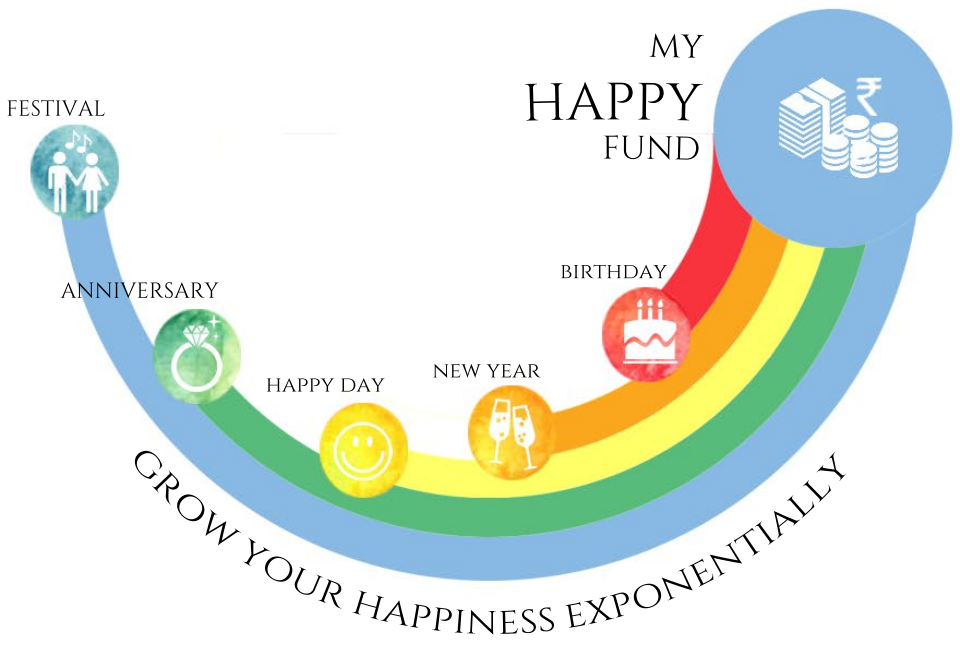
INDULGENCE  
IS FREEDOM



[www.mirrinvestments.com](http://www.mirrinvestments.com)

MOBILE: +919818018222

INVEST ON EVERY  
HAPPY OCCASSION



# GIRL JOKES

*Preeti Das and Shefali Pandey, founders of Mahila Manch, are using standup comedy to break stereotypes and confront social issues*

*By Neha Kirpal*

**B**efore doctoral scholar Preeti Das and entrepreneur Shefali Pandey met, Preeti had already been doing standup comedy for six years. She was annoyed that for every male problem there was a corresponding joke but women's problems didn't get the same attention. And, as someone who follows comedy in both the US and India, Shefali felt there were at least some female comedy voices in the West – even it was just “women being women, bitching about their dates, their boyfriends” – the “funny women” scene was really missing in

India around 2017.

“We wanted to just put our word out there and make people laugh on our topics – whether it was porn, masturbation, pregnancy, motherhood, sanitary napkins or mammograms,” says Shefali. Thus, the comedy collective Mahila Manch was born in their hometown Ahmedabad.

They began by hosting a monthly event humourously titled ‘The Period Show’. For the first show, one of the guest speakers was a transwoman who joked about her experiences at security checks and



how she got pulled into the men's lines all the time.

Since then, they have covered various controversial subjects such as LGBTQ, rape, #MeToo, female sexuality and body shaming, which often gets them into trouble. "Similar things have been done before by several male comedians, but they don't get a similar backlash from 'well-meaning' middle-aged uncles. But because we are women, we often get the comment about this being a family show," explains Shefali, 35, who lived in New York and Mumbai before she moved to Ahmedabad where she runs a digital agency.

One of the most memorable reactions they have got to their political and personal views was in January 2020 at the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters in Kerala. Preeti and Shefali had gone along with fellow comedian, Wasim. While Wasim talked a lot about his Muslim identity in Ahmedabad, 39-year-old Preeti talked about being a journalist and being a Bengali in Ahmedabad, and Shefali talked about politics because her family is a big supporter of the current government, while she is not. The reaction they got from the audiences there was brilliant, they say. About 200 people attended their shows, comprising mostly authors and litterateurs who cheered almost everything they talked about – identity, gender, caste. Post the show, they were treated like



stars, they laugh.

Shefali feels that women standup comedians in India like herself are pushing the boundaries and finally making their voices heard. “When you see someone with an open mind getting on stage or the big screen and talking about things – owning their feelings, their bodies, their sexuality and their lives – it definitely encourages others,” she says. Comedy used to be a boys’ club earlier, but the stereotype that women are not as funny as men is slowly changing. “A woman had to be either fat or a mimic (think Tuntun!) to be a comedian. Thankfully, we no longer have to rely on our physicality or how we appear in order to be funny. We can also be comics because of

our intellect, wit and ability to control minds with our words,” she adds.

Shefali has a problem with the portrayal of empowered women in pop culture: their strength is described with labels such as “activist,” “career woman” or even “bitchy”. “A girl or a woman should be seen as a whole, without having to be an Alpha type or a housewife, just like men are allowed to be themselves. There can’t be just two or three stereotypes for women,” she says.

Needless to say, the group finds its inspiration in laughter. “Being on stage is power, with everyone focused on you. The 150 or 200 people in the audience are there to listen to you,” she adds. “Of the 10

## COMEDY USED TO BE A BOYS’ CLUB EARLIER, BUT THE STEREOTYPE THAT WOMEN ARE NOT AS FUNNY AS MEN IS SLOWLY CHANGING





times you get on stage, twice you bomb. But the eight times that the audience is with you, it is difficult to replicate. It's a high that pulls you back again and again," she says.

**T**hey admit they also go on stage to speak their truth. "If I was telling my truth in any other way apart from comedy, I don't think I would get through to as many people as effectively. You get away with saying what you want to say while also making people laugh. In that sense, people are more receptive to what you have to say, and it stays with them longer," she explains. Further, the group is driven by the excitement to see what will work or not whenever they write something new.

The going is not always easy. Shefali recalls that once in a Karol Bagh street in Delhi, she was asked to get off the stage by a bouncer, because one of her jokes was a satire on the current government. "I've

become more careful now, so I don't do political jokes when not close to home," she says. While there have been stray incidents of criticism and even harassment, they have not been heckled while on stage. By and large, people have been supportive at least in Ahmedabad, where most of the audience comprises their friends and friends of friends.

Finally, Mahila Manch believes that comedy makes one more open as a society in a way that merely speaking or writing one's opinion cannot. "You start with a joke, do another joke, slip in a message somewhere in between, and again end with a joke," says Shefali of their tried-and-tested formula. The group also feels that comedy has a lot of scope for influencing minds. "Several comedians are now calling truth to power through the medium of comedy – it's charging up people and aligning them with the cause," she concludes. ■



# UNITED WE STAND

Motherhood triggered these three entrepreneurs to create jobs and opportunities for other women



TANU GANGULY

*The founder of food-review portal Mishry offers a platform for homemakers and moms to share their food-product experiences*

**F**ormer editor of NDTV Food Tanu Ganguly wanted to launch her own restaurant before she turned 40. Though that idea fizzled out, she did manage to set up her own enterprise in the food space. “I quit my job of nearly 20 years to set up *Mishry.com* in April 2019,” she says. Mishry is India’s first food product reviewing platform that empowers homemakers with a flexible job while engaging their

kitchen skills in driving well-informed purchase decisions.

The idea of creating a review platform exclusively for food products struck Tanu while shopping: “All my friends and family take food-related recommendations from me – what’s the best milk for kids? Where should we buy organic veggies from? Or is stainless steel cookware worth it?” For over a decade, she had informally played

the role of connecting people to the brands that she had tried and tasted herself. So the idea of a food-review website felt like a natural fit. “Your experiences shape your thoughts. And one of the most crucial aspects of being a startup founder should be domain expertise. That deep understanding of how food content works – both from the industry and the user’s perspective – has helped

received great traction from users, some days can be really *brutal!*”

What has kept Tanu going is her ability to stay calm even during the toughest moments of crisis, a skill developed after two decades in the television industry. “I have had many teary moments – but always after the storm is over!” Mishry’s employees are 90 per cent women, and most work flexi-hours.



immensely,” she shares.

Of course, she hastens to add, running a startup is a daily hustle. “You have to constantly manage resources, people and expectations to keep moving forward towards your vision. Every decision you make is a first! You don’t always have a template to follow – especially an idea like ours, which is unique,” she says, adding with candour, “While we have been fortunate to have

Both Tanu and her husband are “resilient fauji kids” who love to travel and explore local food. As a mom of a nine-year-old, Tanu had always seen women leave their jobs after having kids and so now she tries to consciously hire moms who are looking to get back into the workforce. “This is our small way of making workplaces more sensitive to women in general and moms in particular,” she says. ■



## SHALINI SHARMA

*The founder of MUMYU has brought together communities of 450 women for a maternity label*

**W**hen Shalini Sharma delivered her first child 10 years ago, she was given lots of advice by the older women in her family, which left her awestruck about the tome of traditional knowledge lying untapped. The former recruitment specialist was also frustrated about not being

able to find comfortable, functional maternity garments designed for Indian bodies. Raised in Himachal Pradesh, Shalini used her wide network of connections in the mountains and cities of India to develop a community-based clothing brand, MUMYU, which brings together rural craftswomen with urban consumers while solving a real gap in the market for practical maternity wear for Indian women.

The brand was launched two years ago after Shalini and her team conducted research on 150 pregnant women in Delhi and Gurugram. “The results were amazing,” she says. “Eighty-seven percent of women wanted to buy maternity wear but were skeptical as there was nothing in the market to suit an Indian mother’s body and needs; only foreign branded stores existed. This triggered the idea to create maternity wear for Indian mothers and infant essentials with the help of those who know it the best – the mothers themselves.”

Shalini insists that maternity wear is not fashion – it’s a necessity, a practical need. “It can never ignore or compromise on its function,” she opines. Having worked in the top management consultancies across India, skill-mapping and recruitment training came naturally to Shalini. That is how she managed to spot an opportunity among the women in Himachal. “These



women are extremely talented and highly skilled. They pass on this talent from generation to generation like a legacy. In each household, you will find at least one woman who can either stitch, knit or sew well. But a skill that goes untapped is like an asset wasted," she says.

Her past work experience also helped her tackle the various

one or two women with leadership skills selected to represent each one. "This way we created a few teams of 12-15 women and their team leaders," says Shalini, explaining that these team leaders were given training in product development. They then trained their respective teams. A similar solution was found for quality management.



L-R: 450 women workers in Himachal Pradesh power the brand; a MUMYU product in fabric packaging

challenges the startup faced in its early stages, especially logistics and quality. "We have about 450 women workers in 19 villages in and around Solan district registered with us; they are in the age group of 21 to 68 years. All have different skill sets, different work time preferences, and different challenges. How to get work done in synchronisation with the company's manufacturing targets was a challenge," she shares.

The solution lay in community management. Smaller villages were grouped into communities, and

"These women don't see each other as competition, they see each other as friends at work. They share stories, transport, food... This keeps them motivated and connected. This is the biggest strength behind MUMYU," says Shalini who believes India needs more women venture capitalists to help towards financial uplifting for women entrepreneurs. She avers, "Women-run businesses are not welfare entities and it's high time investors make that mental shift." ■



*The founder of JobsForHer.com is enabling women to restart their careers post-childbirth*

## NEHA BAGARIA

**A**n education entrepreneur and a finance and marketing strategist, Neha Bagaria took a career break of more than three years after her two babies were born. During this personal journey, the Wharton School graduate became aware of the various difficulties women face in order to re-enter the workforce. “I noticed that most of my female friends – all well-educated and experienced lawyers, architects, engineers or MBAs – were stepping out of their careers and not returning to the workforce. When I

delved into the reasons behind this female brain drain, it became clear that women face many re-entry challenges that need to be addressed in India. These range from requiring flexibility, regaining confidence, re-skilling, overcoming biases and changing mindsets,” she says.

Second careers are not as easy as the first. Neha was determined to enable other women to restart their careers after she learnt out that 50 percent of working women in India drop out of the workforce in three years. And that’s how her job-search portal JobsForHer was launched on International Women’s Day, 2015.



The Bengaluru-based entrepreneur has faced many stereotypes in her journey, “for example, being a female entrepreneur in tech, challenging the gender biases that exist for mothers in the workplace, being judged for taking career breaks, and then being judged for working full-time despite having little children,” she smiles wryly.

To succeed in the competitive business landscape, it was imperative for Neha to balance her career and other obligations. “For that, I had to build a thick skin and a strong support system, without which I wouldn’t have been able to create the ecosystem required to support this challenging journey to the top. I rallied my troops and got my backbone structure in place – parents, in-laws, extended family, friends, and yes, husband too. And I have been able to stand tall against all odds,” she affirms.

An avid reader and traveller, Neha has found her product-market fit and *raison d’etre* – to enable Indian women to restart their careers and achieve their full potential. “We are in the process of launching a new portal with deep technical functionalities to scale rapidly to reach out to women and companies across India. The future we envision and are working hard towards is one in which Indian women will be able to find both personal fulfilment and professional success,” she says.

Inspired by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, Neha is acutely aware how often women hold themselves back because of fears. “It is important to recognise our fears and to name them; only then can we find a path to overcome them. Ask yourself, ‘What would you do if you weren’t afraid?’ We must stride on, confident of figuring things out. Eventually.” ■



# A VEGAN STATE OF MIND



*Like the rest of the world, Indians are waking to the physical, ethical and economic benefits of plant-based, meat-and-dairy-free food*

*By Aekta Kapoor*

**T**his February, I attended a tasting session for an upcoming brand of oats milk. My table partner at the plant-based café Greenr in Basant Lok market was Bharat Goel, a 29-year-old consultant with a research firm who wore a badge saying ‘Vegan’. He talked about why we need to change our food habits if we are to save planet Earth. He shared that, at the age of 19, he had had various health issues, including obesity. But after seeing a documentary on the animal-foods industry, he decided to turn vegan.

In less than six months, he had

shed 30 kg along with all his health complications. And he has stayed fit since then. “Veganism changed my life. I have never been healthier,” he says. I’m a lacto-vegetarian like many north Indians, I told him. Aren’t milk, yoghurt, butter and ghee consumption an intrinsic part of our culture? He replied without batting an eyelid: “Culture is made by humans. We can change it too. What was applicable to society thousands of years ago does not hold true anymore, so why are we holding on to those customs?”

His words gave me food for



thought. I began reading up about veganism and exploring plant-based alternatives in my kitchen. I watched the 2014 documentary *Cowspiracy*, a ground-breaking investigation into animal agriculture, and the 2018 film, *The Game Changers*, in which the fastest and toughest athletes and soldiers in the world vouch for a plant-based diet as being the secret of their strength and agility, including former movie star and politician Arnold Schwarzenegger. Directed by Oscar-winner Louie Psihoyos, the film follows the story of James Wilks, an elite Special Forces trainer, as he travels the world to understand the science behind meat and dairy consumption, the human body's needs, and the optimum diet for health and strength.

The film was hailed by Indian

cricket icon Virat Kohli, who said, "Being a vegetarian athlete has made me realise what I have believed all these years regarding diet was a myth. What an amazing documentary... I've never felt better in my life after I turned vegetarian." Virat also gave up on dairy, thus joining the list of elite vegan athletes including tennis superstars Serena and Venus Williams and Formula 1 racing driver Lewis Hamilton.

The led me and my husband – a Kerala-born lover of fish, eggs and mutton – to try a plant-based diet for ourselves. He gave up on his beloved meats while I switched from cow milk to other alternatives such as soya and almond milk. We began enjoying plant-based health-food brands such as Urban Platter, True Elements and Monsoon Harvest,



L-R: Australian sprinter Morgan Mitchell in *The Game Changers*; Virat Kohli endorsed the film and veganism



A vegan community buffet organised by *Vegan First* at Darios in Pune; they host similar events across India

and checked out vegan recipes on [sharan-india.org](http://sharan-india.org). We even learnt to make oats milk at home. Though it's only been a month, I can confirm that our food bill and weight has been going down, while our energy levels and agility have gone up.

To know more about the vegan revolution in India, I reached out to Palak Mehta, founder, *Vegan First*, a three-year-old publication, and the organiser of the Vegan India Conference (VIC). Designed in collaboration with the World Vegan Organisation, VIC aims to provide a support system to vegan innovators, food technologists, investors, nutritionists, chefs, exporters and retailers. The first edition of VIC in 2019 in Delhi attracted 450 delegates from over 18 countries.

The 33-year-old Pune-based artist-entrepreneur turned vegan six years ago. In her search for milk alternatives, Palak began collecting information from across India and blogging about it. "The idea was to develop a neutral brand language," she says of her publication and website. She also began hosting dine-outs at the growing number of plant-based restaurants across India. They also certify vegan eateries.

"When people don't find a community of vegans to bond with, they go back to their meat-and-dairy consumption sooner or later," says Palak. "So I wanted to create that community in India." Their efforts have paid off. Not only have hundreds of individuals – from fashion designers like Anita



L-R: Palak Mehta with Ken Spector of Happy Cow, the world's top vegan restaurant guide; visitors at VIC 2019

Dongre to movie stars like Shraddha Kapoor – switched to veganism, even food businesses once skeptical of venturing into the vegan space have developed the confidence to take the leap, says Palak.

**G**lobally, too, pressure has been mounting on governments to endorse plant-based diets, especially since meat consumption has increased fivefold in the past 60 years despite world population growing only double since then. It's a wasteful industry: twice the world's population could have been fed with 2019's global harvest if humans consumed the yield themselves instead of feeding farmed animals.

American physician Dr Brooke Goldner, who suffered from lupus for 12 years until she turned vegan,

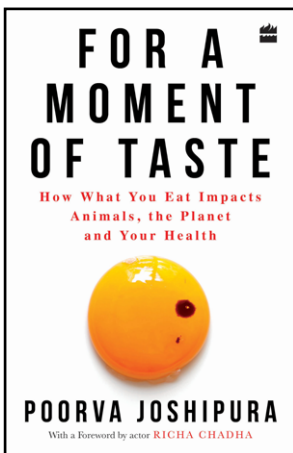
made a speech at the USDA 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Fourth Meeting this year. "I beseech you to take this seriously," she said to the room full of doctors and policymakers. "What's recommended to the public about what they eat should not be based on what's good for industry. It should be based on what's good for human health. The literature is clear: when you eliminate meat, dairy and eggs, people's health gets better."

The US and Australia are the world's largest consumers of meat, with over 120 kg consumed per person every year. India has the lowest per capita meat consumption after Bangladesh, at 4 kg annually, a number that has not risen since 1960 despite increasing prosperity,

perhaps due to cultural reasons.

That brings us to the morality factor. In her book *For a Moment of Taste* (HarperCollins) that exposes the violence behind India's meat and dairy industry, PETA activist Poorva Joshipura reveals how millions of hapless creatures are locked up in cruel conditions and tortured to increase their food yield – all because of a few 'moments of taste' for human tongues. "These animals'

But if meat and dairy drive certain parts of the economy, the growing vegan culture around the world is also a business opportunity. Aarti Gill, co-founder and CEO of OZiva, a retailer of plant-based nutrition products, set up her company in 2016 after seeing a gap in the market. With a B.Tech from IIT Roorkee and MBA from INSEAD, France, she had worked in top companies around the globe



L-R: Aarti Gill, founder of Oziva; Oziva's plant-based supplements; Poorva Joshipura's hard-hitting book

lives are unimaginably painful, miserable and lonely," she writes. She notes that though most Indians regard cows as 'mother', they think nothing of the trauma that cows are put through to make them lactate up to 10 times the usual amount, and of the fact that non-lactating and male cows feed India's thriving beef-export industry, the largest in the world after Brazil.

before she returned to India to promote healthier lifestyles among upwardly mobile Indians. Her Mumbai-based nutrition brand has seen sevenfold growth in the past one year and has buyers from over 2000 Indian towns and cities. "This is a profitable business," she avers.

Alex Malcolm, founder of London and Cape Town-based travel company Jacada, also sees an op-





Shreya Agarwal and her vegan brownie with raspberry fennel jam, açai cashew butter and walnuts

portunity for India: “With responsible travel decisions becoming prominent, we predict a rise in the number of people traveling on vegan-only trips, requesting vegan cooking classes or retreats. Countries like India, with 38 percent of the population being vegetarian, will benefit from a surge in travelers looking for vegan food that still packs the punch with unique aromas and flavours.”

This brings me back to Greenr, where my journey with veganism began, and with its Kolkata-born chef Shreya Agarwal. While doing her MBA in Madrid, Shreya gained 15 kg and hit rock bottom, mentally and physically. That’s when she switched to a whole-food, plant-

based diet, and overhauled her lifestyle, including doing her Master’s in food production and becoming a chef herself. “I want to demolish the idea that vegetarian food is boring,” says the 27-year-old, who was selected to work in New York’s famed ABC Kitchen before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted travel plans.

“Most people turn vegan for compassionate reasons – for sparing the lives of innocent animals,” says Shreya. “Others do it for their health. Some also do it for environmental reasons as veganism is eco-friendly. And now with more brands offering plant-based products, there are so many options available to cook up a variety of flavourful recipes.” That’s enough reasons, don’t you think? ■



# OF STRENGTH & VULNERABILITY

*Music icon Anoushka Shankar looks back at her incredible journey, her relationships, and how her diverse experiences have shaped her*

*Text by Neha Kirpal. Photography by Laura Lewis*



She is one of global music's biggest names, and an icon for other reasons too. From spreading joy with her music, to successfully battling substance abuse and opening up about sexual abuse, hysterectomy and depression, Anoushka Shankar is an inspiration for women the world over. And then there is, of course, her legacy. It is no mean feat carrying the burden of being musical legend and Bharat Ratna awardee Pandit Ravi Shankar's daughter. But over time, Anoushka has done more: the London-based mother of two has come out of the long shadow of her late father to earn widespread respect for her music and her strong views on life and career.

Which is why when she calls music a cathartic and healing experience, her words reflect the intense passion of a woman who is fiercely independent, and one who has been through intense personal struggle to reach this point.

Her latest EP *Love Letters* further establishes Anoushka as her own woman. It highlights female friendships and is a collection of songs that Anoushka wrote in collaboration with various female artists on a raft of topics: heartbreak, marriage and motherhood. "I wanted to include women on the technical side as well, and worked with female engineers and a mastering engineer," she notes. It is, in a way, her con-

tribution to the industry. "Women sadly do not have an equal playing field in life overall, so the music industry is no different," she says, adding that for systematic change across all levels of the industry, we need to have more women in positions of power to make decisions that trickle down to all areas. "I don't think gender equality is 'sweeping in'



anywhere. I think it's being fought for, by tooth and nail."

The 38-year-old, who was in India after two years for a concert this February, has had a life full of "beautiful and painful experiences", and it has helped her to share her human journey. "Sharing those vulnerable truths can help others



L-R: Anoushka's latest EP has soothing blends of cello and sitar; a photo of her fingers after intense practice

do the same. There is power and healing in that," she says.

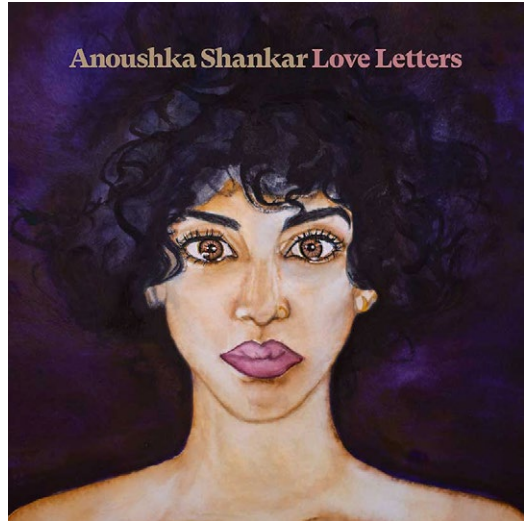
As part of the One Billion Rising campaign in 2013, Anoushka had revealed that she had been sexually abused for several years as a child by a trusted friend of her parents. She said then that sharing her story would be helpful to others and help push the dialogue around sexual violence. She also recently went through a hysterectomy procedure and chose to talk about that, too. She regrets that such experiences aren't talked about openly, leaving women at risk without access to information or suffering more than needed due to the stigma attached,

At the same time, she cautions that while speaking out has power, one should do it in a safe way: "I don't like putting that responsibili-

ty on women. You could really risk traumatising yourself even more if you do it when you are not ready."

She feels that going through hardships – as opposed to running away from them or numbing through them – gives one character, resilience, compassion and empathy. Her experiences have also served Anoushka as a sort of creative fuel. "Strong emotions compel me to write music. There is great strength in vulnerability, as it takes courage to push through the fear and share one's true self with others. In music, that vulnerability really speaks to listeners as it connects with their own hearts." In fact, many songs on *Love Letters* were written whilst her marriage to film director Joe Wright ended in 2018. "It is not all entirely biographical," she clarifies. "I sup-

PHOTO: TWITTER



L-R: Anoushka has won various awards and even has an asteroid named after her; the cover of *Love Letters*

pose, it's a different layer of personal for me to share music that's been influenced so directly from my own romantic experiences."

She takes her role as mother very seriously: "I'll be a tiger for my sons if need be. They, and parenting them, teaches me more about how to be a good human than anything else." There is also her relationship with her own mother Sukan-ya Rajan that she holds close to her heart. "My mother has been a key influence on me as a musician and person from birth. She continues to be one of the people I'm closest to, and I often go to her for support and advice," she shares.

### **"MY MOTHER HAS BEEN A KEY INFLUENCE ON ME AS A MUSICIAN AND PERSON"**

Her primary influence has remained her father, though. Her fondest memories are of watching him practising intensely before concerts. Every show was important for him even after decades of performing and thousands of shows, she says admiringly. "He was never casual about a smaller city, for example. That commitment and discipline was amazing," she states, adding that she was planning to perform for the first time

with her half-sister Norah Jones on their father's 100th birthday in London this month. Covid-19 has upset the plan, but it probably won't be too long before the sisters perform together. ■





# ALL IN THE FAMILY

*The fascinating story of three generations of dynamic women behind the bespoke fashion label Sue Mue in Delhi*

**W**ay back in the 1960s, while India woke to the global hippie culture and the fashions of Mary Quant and Jacqueline Onassis ruled the ramps, a dexterous homemaker in Delhi began hand-crafting dresses for her little daughters. No one could have foreseen then that this passion of

hers would one day build up into a label of bespoke handcrafted luxury, catering to the bridal and occasion-dressing needs of entire generations of women from around the world, including Bollywood fashionistas like Sonam Kapoor Ahuja.

Starting with lovely clothes for her own daughters and others in



A look from Sue Mue's latest *Sally-O* collection

her family, Narinder Mohan gradually began catering to a large group of fashionable women in Delhi. With a flair for colours and fabrics, an understanding of women's bodies and a commitment to quality, she soon built a strong base of loyal customers.

Her husband Surinder Mohan quickly realised her promising young venture would need professional intervention. And so he supported her with his business acumen and helped her launch Sue Mue in 1968. The couple spent the next few decades creating and nurturing what is now a heritage brand, located in south Delhi's popular Green Park market.

Their daughter Mohita Gujral,

who had grown up surrounded by the touch of Indian textiles, and who had come to love the beauty of custom-made clothing, joined her mother's business along the way. "My mother's perseverance, ethics and aesthetic sensibilities helped shape me both personally and professionally," says Mohita. A visionary in her own right, she set about taking bold approaches in Indian trousseau-wear, attracting a new set of clientele who cherished quality and tradition but also desired something modern and chic.

Gradually, Mohita entirely took over designing, sourcing and manufacturing at the firm with a commitment to upholding high standards in design, cuts and fine fabrics.



Over time, Sue Mue became a celebrated brand known for its subtle style statements, and was sought after by Delhi's crème de la crème. The store itself underwent a metamorphosis – spread over three storeys, its quiet, luxurious and tasteful interiors were designed to transport shoppers into a feminine fairytale.

And then came the third generation – Mohita's own daughters grew up. The elder of the two, Mahima Gujral Wadhwa, showed an inclination towards fashion from a young age. After completing her graduation in fashion management from Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore, she returned to India and joined Christian Dior. Three years later, she joined Sue Mue to help expand the operations of the

fashion house by strategising and executing a growth plan for the brand. "My mom's been an entrepreneur since she was 18. Her drive has inspired me all my life. She has kept the legacy of my grandparents alive," says Mahima, who spends her time between Singapore and Delhi. She has also launched her own vertical under Sue Mue called Sui, a label that offers environmentally conscious clothing.

**T**he service that the brand holds dearest is its bespoke design. Though the label comes up with new collections twice every year – both prêt and couture – everything you set your eyes on at Sue Mue can be customised exactly as per your body type and personal tastes. They also offer a large vari-





Facing page: The *Sally-O* collection; this page (L-R): Mohita and Mahima; Mahima and her grandmother

ety of high-quality textiles that can be used on any of their existing designs, or create a new look as per your requirements.

The bespoke services extend to their bridal range, which has clients worldwide. Take, for example, 25-year-old Toronto-based fashion designer Mashiat Faroza, whose traditional Bangladeshi wedding was spread out over a year and 13 events! After researching various bridal around the globe, she zoomed in on Sue Mue in Delhi to create her customised bridal trousseau. “I bought a lot of stuff from Sue Mue; their embroidery, customer service and customisation is the best I have come across,” says Mashiat. But her personal favourite was her *rukhsati* (or *bidaai*) lehenga. Made using

eight metres of fabric, the ensemble consisted of a deep maroon blouse in raw silk, a tulle dupatta in gold and maroon, a trail almost three feet long and a dramatic red lehenga with zardozi in gold and light gold. With embroidery inspired by Mughal fort architecture and embellished with sequins, the 25-kg lehenga took 13 months to create.

Sue Mue’s spring-summer 2020 collection *Sally-O* is inspired by the glamour and confidence of 1950s Hollywood. Featuring Indo-Western separates and fusion ensembles, it is feminine, dynamic and experimental. Mohita explains, “The collection celebrates each woman’s independence and strength.” No doubt those are values the Sue Mue ladies cherish themselves. ■



# FOLLOWING THE ROADMAP

*Realising that most women are left clueless about finances and paperwork after a spouse's death or divorce, Nancy Juetten created the perfect solution*

*By Kay Newton*

**W**orldwide, seven out of 10 women survive their partner, yet many do not know where to find relevant information

at the most crucial of times. To address this problem, Nancy Juetten came up with a simple solution to organise one's life.

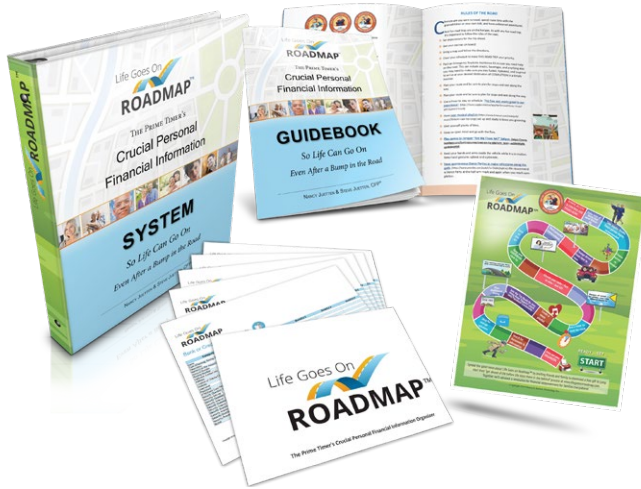
Based in Bellingham in the American state of Washington, the 58-year-old Nancy oozes youth and vibrancy as if she were still a teenager. As she bluntly puts it, "Most couples are not prepared for when the 'shit hits the fan', which it can do at any day. Most are caught with their pants down and it is such a disempowering place to be."

Nancy speaks from experience. Three years ago, three women in her life had their financial lives completely turned upside down by death, divorce and diagnosis, and it hit Nancy that she could be next.

"Luckily for me, my husband Steve is a certified financial planner professional and I had a birthday coming up. Instead of gifts, I asked him to create a roadmap that would unlock our financial life so we could both be in control if life got



Nancy Juetten



in the way,” she shares.

The couple created a system that made it easy to put one’s hands on everything needed to run the household. For example, how to get in contact with important people, access investments, wills, other documents, and even medications.

“After going through the process myself, I felt empowered and realised the rest of the world needs this too. And so ‘The Life Goes on Roadmap System for Personal Financial Information Organisation’ was born,” says Nancy.

Nancy knows only all too well how important having your paperwork is in a crisis situation. “In December 2019, my husband had a mini-stroke. I drove him to the hospital wondering if I was going to get him home again. At the hospital, the staff asked me about his medication, frequency and dosage. I

had never really paid any attention until that point. In a stroke scenario, the window of successful help is so small, just 30 minutes, and I was wasting time because I could not answer immediately. Now I have a medication list with me at all times.”

**N**ancy’s passion is to wake people up to the fact that the best time to get ready for any challenge is before it ever happens. “When you have accumulated years of life experiences and assets, it is time to think about how to protect them. We all anticipate making a big success or life yet we forget to take the next step which protects everything we have worked for and those that we love the most.”

The Roadmap is based on the American lifestyle, but substitutions can be made to apply to any country. Unfortunately, most people tend to avoid the process of collating life

information and especially avoid planning for a loved one's death.

To solve this problem, Nancy says, "The Roadmap is set out as a game in order to make the process fun. When you play the game, everyone wins. The system includes a game board, guide book and a simple digital organiser that captures 16 important aspects of your life."



Nancy Juetten and her husband Steve

Creating your roadmap may seem like a transactional process, yet it is also a transformational journey. "Doing this work causes you to have deeper conversations with the people you love," she says. "For example, you may ask, 'Are we on the path we want to be on in order that we can retire and accomplish goals?' 'What will happen if my life is cut short?' and so on. Everything is great until it is not! As we get

older, it is a shorter runway to recover from unexpected surprises."

She shares the case of a client who had been married for 35 years when she finally asked her husband what they spent their money on. They could not account for \$1500 per month, going on for probably decades. It turned out there was an extra spouse in the situation.

Nancy has a word of warning for those who think a wife's only role is taking care of the home and kids: "When husbands do not communicate and share the role, it is irresponsible. Women cannot honour the family when something goes wrong if they are missing information. Even if your husband does not want to share, create your own roadmap. It is better than having your head in the sand – you never know when someone may fall ill or a secret may be revealed."

Nancy's final words are useful to any woman: "Learn something new every day. Dream big with your eyes wide open and open dialogues so you know what's really happening. It is never too late to make a life shift. If what you have always done begins to feel like an itchy jumper that no longer fits, it is time to change. Find the courage to do something you can be proud of. Make it your finest hour. Do well, do good, get your act together and you won't regret it." ■

Visit: [bit.ly/KNRoadmap](http://bit.ly/KNRoadmap)

# Her Reason to Breathe

*Sarah Ross had set a deadline to end her life. Then, a dying girl and a boy without socks gave her a reason to live, heal and inspire others*

*By Kay Newton*

**S**arah Ross is the founder of ‘Your Reason to Breathe’, which helps executives and teams limit the impact of burnout in the workplace. And her journey to reach this point in her professional life has been deeply personal.

Before Sarah burnt out in the corporate world herself, she had the perfect Instagram life. She was jet-setting around the world, drinking champagne in business class (she just returned from her 103rd country), and had an amazing lifestyle. “Yet I was not looking after myself,” she admits. “My relationship started to suffer. I even gave up my dream job so that I could be with my partner but he repaid me by cheating on me and leaving me.”

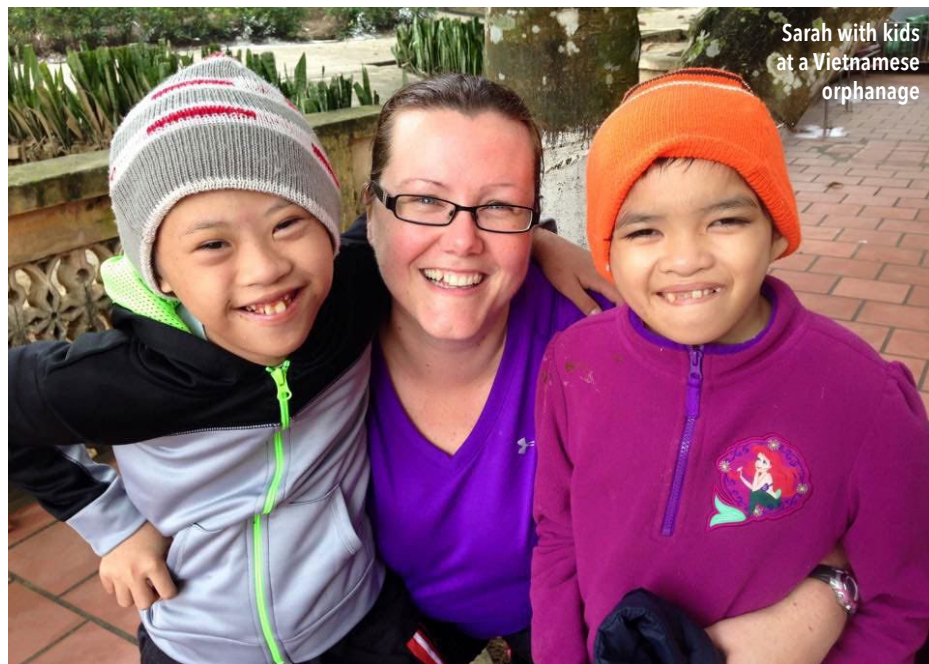
As Sarah grieved her lost job and relationship, her health declined. She dealt with the continuous stress by throwing herself further into work. “My body started giving me signs that things were not right and I began to have migraines for 25

days a month. It got to the point where I thought life wasn’t worth living. So I decided to choose a day on which I would end my life.”



Sarah Ross





Sarah with kids  
at a Vietnamese  
orphanage

Sarah chose a date six months in the future. “I made a plan to say goodbye to everyone though I acted as if everything was normal. I did a coaching qualification and went on personal-development courses. I also did the things that I had always wanted to do, yet never had the time. I saw the Northern Lights and then headed to an orphanage for disabled children in Vietnam. This was my last destination because even though my life was a mess, I could still paint nails and hug children – that was all they wanted.”

Then, on Christmas Day 2014, Sarah found her reason to breathe.

“I was in Vietnam for four months. The first two were a pretty

dark place and I was not a very nice person to be around. Then I had this crazy thought that if this was to be my last Christmas, it should be a fun one. I wore a Santa outfit and spent the day handing out sweets, giving hugs and having my beard pulled.”

Towards the end of the day, the orphanage staff told Sarah that one of the little girls would not make it through the night and it was time to say goodbye. Sarah headed into the child’s room and as she leaned over the crib, the little girl reached up and held Sarah’s fake beard. “I watched her breathe. At that moment she probably had just a few hours left of life and yet she was fighting for every breath.”

It was a wakeup call for Sarah. “There was me, educated, travelling the world, relatively healthy, with a family who loved me, and I wanted to give up. That little girl gave me the greatest gift as she passed on, that pure lightness of: ‘What if I did not give up? What if I had a reason to breathe?’ She gave me the courage to ask for help, to turn my life around,” says Sarah.

A few days later, on New Year’s Eve, a baby girl was put in Sarah’s arms. “For the first time I had this amazing feeling of unconditional love and it changed my relationship with every child I came into contact with. I began to see them as the individual they were, not their issues or their diagnosis. They were little people with quirks that made life a lot more fun.”

**D**uc was one such boy who just loved to dance. One day, Sarah was asked to put 20 pairs of socks on 20 children’s feet. It was not easy. “When I finished, I turned around to see that 10 of the children were sockless! I thought I would get in trouble, then I saw Duc had them all in the corner. He had realised that by putting on 10 pairs, his large shoes would fit and he could dance.”

The sock incident opened Sarah’s eyes to the importance of such a small item that never gets donated. At Vietnamese New Year, the orphanage got tons of clothes yet there were no socks. Socks turn

plastic sandals into winter shoes. And they are not just for feet; they can be used as hair bands, bandages, trousers, gloves, ties, mops and sanitary towels. And so, Sarah started the ‘Socks 4 Forgotten Feet’ project.

Five years on, Sarah makes sure no one burns out in the corporate world and no child goes to sleep at night with cold feet. “The biggest change for me in these five years is

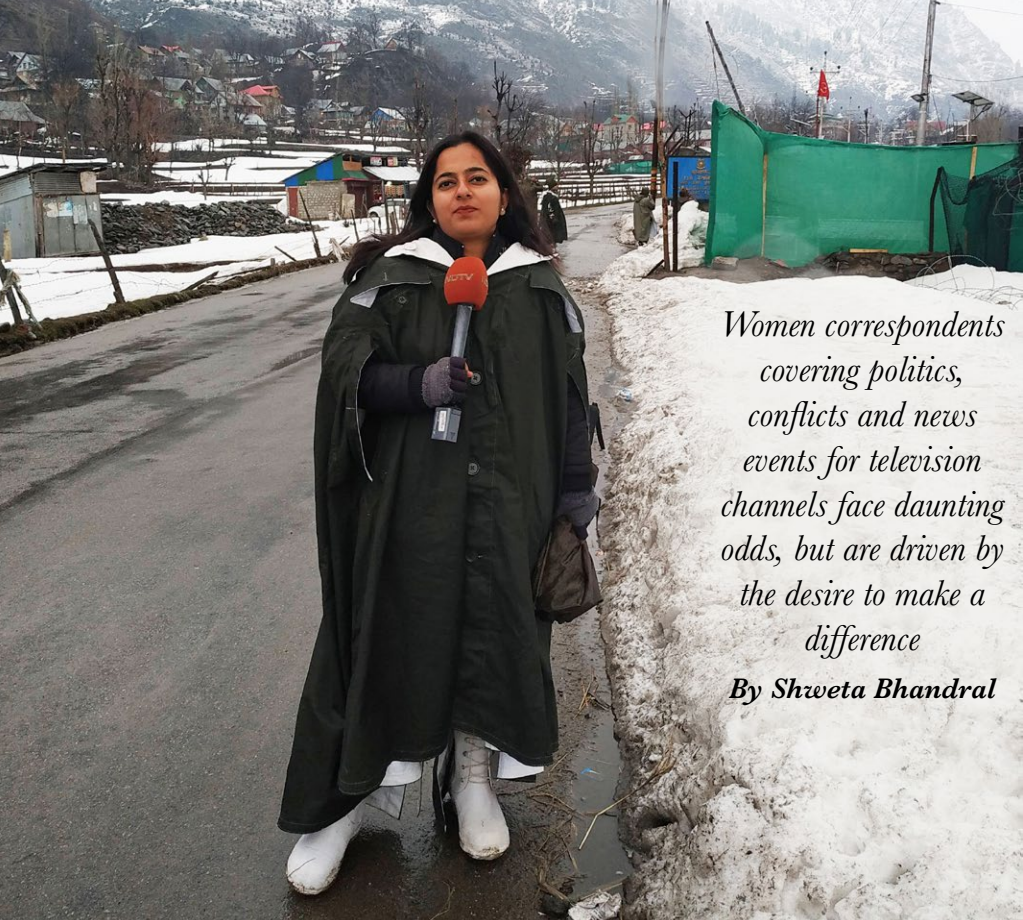


letting my body heal itself. Burnout masks itself as anxiety, stress, depression and all of those can be helped by turning on the body’s natural happy hormones such as smiling more or laughing regularly.”

She advises everyone to find their ‘why’: “Finding ‘my reason to breathe’ for me was so powerful and easy, things simply fell into place. Don’t give up, trust your journey and remember to breathe.” ■

*Visit [Yourreasontobreath.com/quiz](http://Yourreasontobreath.com/quiz)*

# ON THE FRONT LINE



*Women correspondents covering politics, conflicts and news events for television channels face daunting odds, but are driven by the desire to make a difference*

*By Shweta Bhandral*

**W**hen stone-pelting began in north-east Delhi's Maujpur area on February 23 this year, 26-year-old Sukirti Dwivedi was one of the first reporters – and

the only woman – on location. As multiple waves of bloodshed, property destruction and rioting were unleashed, and the police stood by doing nothing, all the television



correspondents there began to fear for their lives. “It was unsafe for everyone, not just girls,” says the firebrand NDTV correspondent. At one point, she found herself in the midst of a group of young boys, barely 17 or 18 years old, with stones and rods in their hands, their faces covered, and she noticed with a sense of foreboding that she was the only girl around. “That’s when I got scared,” she admits, adding that

have been children in there left me shuddering.” Seven days of covering this kind of crisis can take a toll on anyone. “In many situations, being male or female doesn’t matter,” says Sukirti, adding that many of her male colleagues covering the riots had sleepless nights just as she did.

Broadcast journalism has seen more women joining its ranks in the past few decades, with women reporters now in parliament,



Facing page and above: Sukirti Dwivedi, correspondent at NDTV, has covered news from across India

some senior citizens nearby came to her rescue.

After two days, as soon as the situation was under control, Sukirti – who was raised in Kanpur and had wanted to be a television journalist ever since she was a teenager – was back in the field. What she saw in the aftermath of the riots made her cry. “I broke down when I saw the school there completely burned down. The thought that there would

covering elections, rallies, crime, corporate affairs and travelling far and wide to the interiors of the country for human-interest stories. Most media headquarters are located in big cities, and while the job comes with its fair share of challenges even for seasoned metro-dwellers, girls from smaller towns appear to have more fire in their bellies.

Archana Shukla, associate editor



at CNBC TV18, was the first girl in her family to move out of Jamshedpur and start working as a journalist in Mumbai. It was a tough call for her parents 15 years ago when the microbiology student first made the move. “My parents had their doubts. It didn’t help that the Bollywood film *Page 3* starring Konkona Sen Sharma had just released and they were concerned about the safety of this profession,” she smiles. Over the years, Archana made it a habit to call her mother at least once a day wherever she was. The 36-year-old eventually made her parents proud by winning six awards for excellence in journalism.

But it’s one thing to allay your parents’ fears and another to deal with your own. A job such as this puts you in harm’s way more often than others, and Archana has learnt to keep her wits around her especially when she travels to the country’s hinterlands to cover social and political issues. Phone networks are often sketchy and places to stay are ill-equipped for women. “It’s there at the back of your mind, a little fear when there is unrest. But news-gathering in television is teamwork, and we move as a crew, which is safer,” she shares.

While covering stories in far-flung areas of Bastar and Marathwada,





Facing page and above: Archana Shukla of CNBC TV18 has won six awards for excellence in journalism

Archana also had the experience of being mobbed, with people outraging and saying, “*Media-wale kharab hote hain* (mediapersons are bad).” She has now devised her own way to deal with them: “I take time, I listen to them, and then I explain myself. I remain sensitive to their concerns even while I tell their stories to the world.”

**F**or correspondents covering politics, the playing field is still uneven. But Pallavi Ghosh, senior editor (politics) at CNN News 18, who has been covering Congress news for the past 18 years, sees positive signs of change. “From two or three female journos covering Parliament 18 years ago, there are about 25 now whenever Parliament is in session. It’s no longer lonely out there,” she informs. Besides broadcast, the digital medium has also given women more avenues to step out and report news. There are

now hundreds of women reporters across the country, working full-time or as stringers for websites, YouTube channels and social-media platforms, including bilingual ones.

For Pallavi, covering politics is exciting even if it’s not always smooth. “My first brush with a mob was in Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, at an election rally in 2004. It was a huge, unruly crowd, and they went crazy to see a woman reporter amongst them. Things went out of control but my cameraman pulled me out of it,” she narrates. After that, she says, she was not scared anymore.

On the day we speak to her, she is busy following Madhya Pradesh politics as former Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia joins the rival BJP. Quickly checking facts before going on air, she is collected and in control. Her years of experience have taught her a thing or two about dealing with male politicians.

“Some of the *netas* (political leaders) are very condescending and they think we women are just trying to earn some extra pocket money by stepping out to work!” says the 44-year-old indignantly. “They even ask me, do I earn so that I can shop? So, yes, initially it was tough, but



Pallavi Ghosh

over the years more women have come into the field and that has helped. Also I think it's important not to smile at their sexist jokes. You have to make it clear to them that you mean business.”

But the biggest challenge that on-

field reporters face in India is not mobs or sleazy politicians but toilets! While Sukirti has learned to control her bladder until she finds a petrol pump when she is travelling, Pallavi carries a packet of Pee Safe in her bag. In contrast, Archana, who often goes to villages, says, “Travelling has taught me lots of lessons in survival. Indians are hospitable people. I have made friends in several towns, and I use their toilets!”

The times are tough, and it's physically a challenge, but these ladies are out there with vigour and resilience. After years of reporting and seeing things for what they really are, do reporters still remain idealistic about the profession? “I was very idealistic when I began,” shares the young Sukirti. “I used to think, *sarkar sunti hai* (the government listens). For instance, if I report on street lights missing in a certain place, I thought the government would take action. But three years in journalism and my idealism is in pieces now.” The thought that journalists could make a big difference has faded over time, adds Pallavi. “I am more pragmatic and less idealistic now,” she says.

Despite their own disillusionment with the system, their value systems make them walk on the path of unbiased and credible reporting. As Pallavi puts it, “You should be able to look into the mirror and say, I did my job well.” ■

# MOMMY DIARIES

*Two young women share the emotions and insights of the most challenging moments from their motherhood journeys*

**M**otherhood is a roller-coaster of emotions, difficult decisions, and physical trials. But you come out stronger, better, wiser on the other side. Two moms share tales.

## MEGHA KHANDUJA

When I got pregnant for the second time, I was concerned about having a healthy delivery. My first baby had been born through a caesarean section (C-section). It was an excruciating experience as I was unprepared. I went to the hospital without contractions or labour symptoms. Doctors had to induce me to break water, followed by a few hours of contractions and labour. Then my doctor suddenly called for an emergency C-section as my baby's heartbeat dropped too quickly. I was too scared to question the doctor, which I now think I should have.

In the next few minutes, I was taken to the operation theatre. The anaesthesiologist administered a



spinal block. My husband wasn't allowed in the operating room. A curtain was placed at my chest, which pushed me into an avalanche of anxiety, completely unaware of the process. My doctor announced that she was making the uterine incision. After the absolute loss of



sensations due to the epidural, there was a lot of pulling and tugging and suddenly I felt my tummy light. My little one was out and all I could focus on was hearing his first cry. They held him up over the curtain, then whisked him away to check the vitals and clean him up.

I thought I would be emotional right away but I wasn't. Since I didn't see him come out, and barely even felt anything, it took about two or three days for it to sink in that my son was here. I had to consciously make the connection myself.

What followed next was torture. Getting out of bed to go to the bathroom was an hour-long process. Memories of rolling over to get out of bed in those first three weeks will always haunt me. I felt like every stitch was going to pop out. To make things worse, I suffered from postpartum mental health issues. Back then, I figured I was just angry and sad about the external circumstances. Luckily, I managed to get through that lonely struggle with depression.

At this point, Vedic chanting came into my life as I met my guru who elaborated the science behind chanting. It gave me a ray of hope, helped me channelise my emotions, and relieved me from the vulnerability of having a second child.

Though there would be a gap of 10 years between my children, my

husband and I decided to go ahead. This time, I kept myself informed about the whole process. I detested the idea of a second C-section. By default, I kept visiting the same doctor until my 30th week of pregnancy, but I also sought information on a health-care provider who followed natural-birth practices.



Here is where chanting helped me. The universe functions in a particular fashion and we as human beings can connect with its manifestations through spirituality.

So, at week 30, I got a call from a friend that she has been certified as a Lamaze childbirth educator and invited us to attend her class. I decided to do my research before

visiting her. I happened to pick up an amazing book, *Giving Birth with Confidence: The Official Lamaze Guide*. In my opinion, this is the first book every pregnant woman should read before she makes any decisions about her maternity care.

Influenced by the book, I enrolled in a Lamaze childbirth

I went into labour. By 9 pm, as the contractions got stronger and closer together, we left for the hospital. By the time we reached, the contractions were uncomfortable but I began walking around, which helped the baby descend. I used the birthing ball, did squats, ate a bit. When I got exhausted, they hooked me up to monitors but my baby was doing great. My labour went on for five hours. The final stage was very quick and only took two or three pushes. Finally at 3.50 am on April 2, our son was born.

Both my husband and I witnessed his pink-skinned entrance into the world. We asked the doctor to delay the cord clamping and to have immediate skin-to-skin contact. The baby latched on soon after birth, and it was a brilliant start to the breast-

feeding process. My dream for a natural birth had come true. It was one of the happiest and proudest moments of my life.

Expectant mothers are often conditioned to believe that once you have a C-section delivery, you have no choice but to keep having C-sections, but I managed to have a successful VBAC. Along with my spiritual lessons, it made me see the infinite potential that lies in me. ■

*Megha Khanduja is a Delhi-based recruitment specialist*



education class. It was all about preparing yourself for making the best decisions for you and your baby, and made me feel more relaxed and confident. During my last trimester, I switched to another healthcare provider, even though the institution was 30 km away from my home. My new doctor considered me an eligible candidate for a vaginal birth after C-section (VBAC). I prepared myself thoroughly for what lay ahead.

On the evening of April 1, 2018,



### VAISHALI SUDAN SHARMA

I'm battling the mental load of mommyhood. It feels defeating. Are you there too?

Most times when I'm away from him, I feel better and then some guilt about it. And then, when I'm driving back home, the thought of his kisses and warm hugs makes me feel worse and perhaps angry.

I am 36, a mom to a six-year-old. I'm battling the mental load of mommyhood. Can you feel me?

I wasn't born to birth or rear a child. At times I feel like I don't have a soul of a mother. But my feelings are my feelings. My shoulders are

mostly tense. I am often anxious and at times your heart might hear my heart weep. These are a few things your naked eye would miss.

But, I'm quite a fun person, from the outside.

Other than raising a six-year-old, I also work full-time. My husband is always busy with work. We never believed that it takes a village to

raise a child, so we never took the 'village' route.

The first few years of our marriage got us thinking that perhaps 'making a baby' could help us slow down. That never happened. Instead, what followed soon after... Well, let me describe it this way: it was like we were on the fast track to a roller-coaster ride that got our heads swirling, plus dizziness, plus-plus vertigo. Phew!

I have always wanted to be the best! Don't you want to feel the same? A good mom, a good wife, a good daughter-in-law, employee, no, best employee of the year?

I am not in this alone and I



know it. We are all so overwhelmed. Anxious, happy, sad, depressed, bored, busy... Most of us feel this way. We carry the invisible mental load of motherhood that we can't seem to break free from, even when we do have a strong support system or the lack of it, because the village does not sort of exist, really.

Do you have this constant nagging feeling or do you wake up in the morning thinking you are done doing what you have been doing for so long? Are you buying time all the time? Buying time for yourself? Have you forgotten what it means to take care of yourself or looking at yourself in the mirror and telling yourself, 'I love you, and I love you with all my heart'?

There's always someone or something that needs my attention. With the constant anxiety of what needs to be done next, how can

you even pay attention to yourself?

I'm battling the mental load of mommyhood. And, it's pretty ugly. If you don't feel me, you are very lucky.

But, I won't lose this battle. I won't let the goal of breathing go. I won't let the madness and

chaos of mommyhood get the best of me. I will continue to work at it. I want to be a fun person, from the inside.

The overwhelm – the exhausting mental load of being a mom – this soul of a woman-who-is-somewhat-tired, but still loves her boy's kisses and hugs, and the warmth of which drives her home every single evening from work, I won't give up!

Most times when I'm away from him, I feel better and then some guilt about it.

I'm 36, a mom to a six-year-old. I'm battling the mental load of mommyhood.

And I shall fight it! ■

*Vaishali Sudan Sharma is the Delhi-based founder of parenting blog The Champa Tree, and works with a healthy kids-food brand*



# SAVE THE KIDS

*Author Nandita Puri's latest book delves into the issue of inter-country adoption and child trafficking*

*By Neha Kirpal*



**N**andita Puri's recently released book *Jennifer: One Woman, Two Continents and a Truth Called Child Trafficking* (Rupa Publications) is the real-life story of Jennifer Haynes, a victim of inter-country child trafficking. Nandita's earlier books include two novels and a biography of her late husband, award-winning actor and Padma Shri awardee Om Puri, which many say led to their later estrangement. Despite their differences and the marital controversies that dogged Om till his death in 2017, Nandita attended his funeral, and the same year, launched the Om Puri Foundation at the 70th Cannes Film Festival.

The foundation sponsors the Om Puri Scholar and the Om Puri Fellow at his alma maters, Film and Television Institute of India and National School of Drama. Nandita also introduced the Om Puri Kisaan Scholarships for farmers' children and the Om Puri Kaarigar Scholarship for children of weavers and craftspersons.

She speaks to us about the extensive research that went behind her new book, and what needs to change for our children to be safer.

*Tell us about the kind of extensive research that went into your latest book.*

*How long did it take for you to write it?* International child trafficking and inter-country adoption is huge field

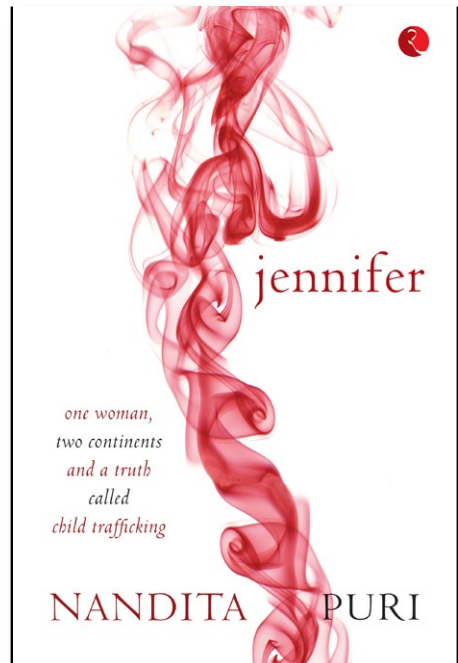
to cover and not exactly my forte. So, when I was first given the story of Jennifer Haynes and how she was trafficked out of India as an eight-year-old and her journey thereafter, I was initially apprehensive. But I'm glad I took the task, because it opened up a very different and challenging world for me. It took me five years of research, interviews and reading to complete the book. It has been my journey through inter-country adoption, child trafficking, the terrible US foster care system and the crack and meth hustling in India and the US as much as it has been Jennifer's journey.

*What do you think needs to be changed in order that stories such as Jennifer's do not happen in the world?*

Much as the system needs to be changed, our knowledge and perceptions also need to be changed. There will be thousands of Clarice D'Souzas who thrive on child trafficking but there should be no Meera Shankars in this world. How can an Indian ambassador like her, without bothering to know the legalities, sign away Jennifer's life by deporting her to India for no fault of hers? How can so-called educated people passing through civil services examinations have little or no knowledge of the posts they are paid for? This speaks sadly of our bureaucratic system. And most of all, we need to say 'no' to inter-country adoptions.

*Tell us about the movie based on the book whose screenplay you have written.*

The fifth draft of the screenplay is ready. We have based the story on Jennifer's life but tweaked it to the point where there is hope in the end, unlike the reality of her life. This is done to give hope to millions and inspire rather than deter.



*What inspires you?*

Life itself – the small pleasures, like cooking a meal, reading a good book, or seeing an engaging film, or listening to some nice music. And the greatest inspiration has been gratitude for life itself. It is such a blessing that it would be a shame to waste it. And that keeps me going.

*What have you learnt about life and working for a cause larger than yourself?*

One has worked hard but one also realises that one has been far luckier than the rest. I therefore think it is my payback time to society in whatever little way I can. Om said he did a lot of meaningful and socially relevant cinema in the 1980s and '90s for very little money, because

will find that five years of my life have been worth the while.

*In what ways does society need to change so that our children are safer?*

Society needs to be a little less selfish and a little kinder. Especially, in our country and other third-world countries (from where children are trafficked out for adoption), couples should adopt at least one child



Nandita Puri and her son Ishaan at the prayer meeting for her late husband Om Puri

he wanted those films to touch the hearts of people. When he became very successful, he used his standing for socially relevant causes. I learnt from him that your life and work should have a purpose. Om has set such a huge benchmark in this. Today when I work, it is not for money but to have a larger purpose. If through my book *Jennifer* even 10 Jennifers find their happy space, I

and have one biological child. That way child trafficking will be curtailed to a great extent and all our abandoned children will find happy homes within their milieu rather than being sent to faraway lands to be used as slaves and forced labour. But we need to change our mindsets first. And that is not a difficult thing to do in today's day of social-media awareness. ■

# Survivor Story

*Terrorism is nothing but a weakened mind trying to get quick recognition using destruction, says Brussels bombing survivor Nidhi Chaphekar*

*By Manvi Pant*

**O**n March 22, 2016, three suicide bombings left Belgium shut, shaken and displaced: two at Brussels Airport, and one at Maalbeek metro station in central Brussels. Thirty-five people were killed, and over 300 injured. One of those 300 was flight attendant Nidhi Chaphekar, lying on the floor of the airport in Zaventem.

Unsure of being alive, her body slipped into a slump as she struggled to make sense of the world around her from a haze of thick black smoke. Recounting the horror, Nidhi tells *eShe*, “I saw what was happening around me, for sure I was trying to collect myself, but my body wasn’t responding. I was unable to move my legs. The first thought that struck me was, ‘Thank God, I am alive. I need to get up and inform my family’.”

In the aftermath of the explosions, Nidhi suffered from 25 percent burns, ruptured eardrums, lost a heel bone on the right side, and underwent seven grafts and 22 surgeries. “I was broken into pieces, but I wasn’t shattered,” she says.

Four years later, healing from the pain, hopelessness and anguish, Nidhi has written a book, *Unbroken: The Brussels Terror Attack Survivor* (Amaryllis), a chilling account of how the devastating experience overturned her life, and how she picked herself up piece by piece.

The book draws an interesting parallel of how her life was before and after the attack. In some



Nidhi Chaphekar



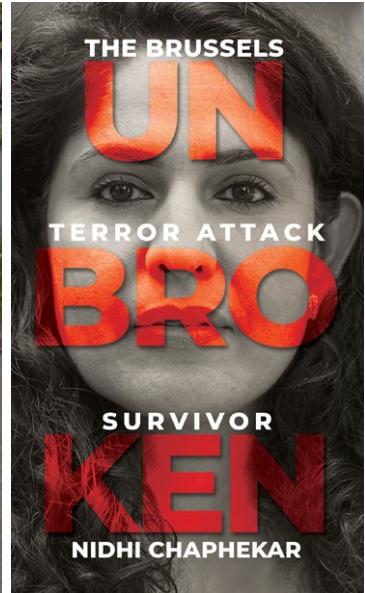


This post-attack photo of Nidhi, shot by Ketevan Kardava, made it to the front page of *The Guardian* and *NYT*

parts, one can see an inspiring demonstration of human resilience. Nidhi displays intense clarity as she expresses her inner turmoil and psychological exhaustion. Insightful anecdotes give a specific form to emotions that might have otherwise remained elusive. The memoir also illustrates Nidhi's unwavering faith in the divine power. She calls it 'positive energy' that comes to us through different channels. "For me, writing this memoir was like God's calling. After I returned to India, people asked me a lot of questions that left me wondering. I did not know the answers to any as a result of the induced coma I was put into. I started fixing the puzzle by questioning my family, calling my

doctors, or the nurses, and noted everything in the form of diary entries. Then one day, my mother prodded me, 'Why don't you write a book on your life? Tomorrow when you look back, you would be proud to see how far you have come.' Incidentally, around that time, a news reporter asked me the same question. I said, 'Yes, I will try writing about it'. The following day, the reporter's newspaper headline was that Nidhi Chaphekar would be penning down her story."

**N**idhi was born the fourth girl child of her parents in a small town called Rajasansi in Amritsar district, Punjab. Growing up amidst stark gender inequalities in her town, she always questioned what



L-R: Nidhi underwent seven grafts and 22 surgeries after the terror attack; the cover of her new memoir

it is that girls can't do. Despite her limited resources, she wanted to do something different with her life, and her mother, a teacher, lent her unwavering support. "In class six, I changed schools and faced a lot of trouble. At that time, my mother told me: it's just your fear, don't let it overpower you," she recounts.

"And I never did, even at the time of the attack. When the explosions hit Brussels airport, I was lifted off the ground. When I opened my eyes, everything had turned into debris. People were lying in pools of blood. At that moment, I had a choice – either I lost to the debilitating fear, or gathered strength to help others. I chose the latter."

With torn clothes, burnt skin,

crushed legs, and coming face-to-face with the worst of humanity yet fearlessly helping people, Nidhi displayed the power of her mother's words. After a few hours, paramedics took her to the hospital.

Nidhi's book gives one a better understanding of humankind, the way we see the world and our idea of 'being safe'. It turns us inward, generates empathy. This thoughtful and inspiring memoir tells us that victims are a weapon to wound society by those deeply wounded themselves. It evokes in us a sudden surge to make people understand that what happened that day in Belgium can happen anywhere if we fail to understand each other and don't stop discriminating. ■



The Marias  
of Bastar

# A TRIBAL QUEST

*Nidhi Dugar Kundalia's new book on six isolated Indian tribes gives us a fascinating glimpse into these most misunderstood communities*

*Text by Manvi Pant. Photo by Tania Majumder*

**W**hen Sukri, one of the singing Halakkis of the Ankola tribe in Karnataka, finds out that her father has chosen a boy for her, she is concerned about her future. All she wants is to go to school and use paper, pen and ink-pot to write long verses. She gets married, and after that, all that life

offers her is a void and a relentless struggle to find happiness. Her dreams silently dissipate too. She sings her grief away but at no point does she display loss of strength.

Other such anecdotes and stories dot Nidhi Dugar Kundalia's new book *White as Milk and Rice*, a compelling chronicle of six



tribal communities of India – the Halakkis of Ankola, the Kanjars of Chambal, the Kurumbas of the Nilgiris, the Marias of Bastar, the Khasis of Shillong and the Konyaks of Nagaland – with each chapter dedicated to one tribe. At the outset, the author shares her resolve to know more about these isolated tribes and how their lives have unfolded post-Independence. Each chapter paints several thought-provoking human portraits and tunes the reader to the vulnerabilities of its characters.

Written in a journalistic format with detailed and expansive narration sprinkled with an overlay of poetic language, the book is both enjoyable and educative. Expressions have been carefully chosen and woven into sentences. You read, and they fill you up, occasionally welling up your eyes too. In the background, the author draws a powerful landscape that places you right in the middle of their lives like an eyewitness.

Take these lines from the chapters on the Marias of Bastar: *“It is at night that the tree blossoms and at daybreak, each short-lived flower falls to the ground. It is not yet dawn, but the shadows have already lengthened by the time Birsu is in the forest.”* Or these ones from the chapter on the Kurumbas of the

Nilgiris: *“Each spring, as the wind dies down, and clusters of jacaranda flowers bloom on the trees, Kurumbas sense the spring in the air and start following the bees in the forest as they collect sap from the flower.”*

While it can be safely assumed that the concept of a tribe, or

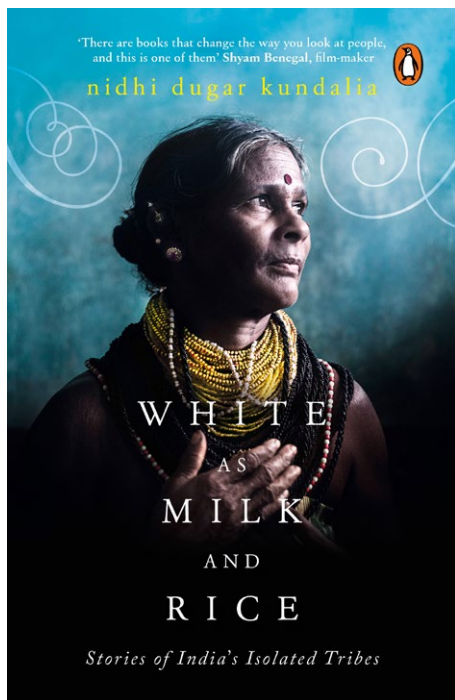


Nidhi Dugar Kundalia

a traditional community, may have evolved over generations, Nidhi’s writing with its poignant insights, satisfying subplots, and well-researched anthropological perspectives does not take the reader away from a universal fact: these isolated tribes have spent



their whole lives fighting for basics. Identity has been a matter of survival for them. These tribal folks have raised humans, the ones who were warriors for their culture and heritage. The ones who believed that their existence is because of their tribe and so it needs to be well



protected from any erosion.

One of the strengths in Nidhi's writing is the way she has woven the most fascinating facts into the narrative. For instance, did you know that the British first came into contact with the Nagas in 1832 and marched across the hills with their 700 soldiers and 800 coolies? When

the Nagas attacked the British, it flared into a war that continued till 1880 but they remained undefeated and finally the British had to give up. Tribes like the Khasis of Shillong, despite being dispersed and isolated, were propounders of matriarchy. In an old-fashioned Khasi family, male babies were welcomed but the birth of a girl called for a feast. The Khasis followed the matrilineal principle of descent, residence and inheritance.

Indeed, all through the book, India's tribal women have been shown to be the caretakers and nurturers of the family but in the same breath, they have been shown to have terrific resilience and courage as well.

Mesmerising from page one, this non-traditional and fascinating account of India's six isolated tribes manages to do a thoughtful examination of their lives, how they have largely remained in a bubble of wilderness, some out of choice, and some out of fear. It also looks at how they lost their lives to indifference and ridicule at the hands of the government and fellow citizens, and how those who remained still carry hope in their hearts and aspire to fight for better prospects while leading a marginalised life. Nothing is known of their language, yet they have a rich history, a civilisation that deserves to reach every human who has dominated over their land in the name of development. ■

# AMERICAN DREAM

*TV personality and philanthropist Meera Gandhi takes us behind the scenes of New York and LA's most happening events before Covid-19*



**M**eera Gandhi (above, centre, with Robert Francis Kennedy Jr, and top right) supported and celebrated the laureates at the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights 51st annual Ripple of Hope Gala in New York. Every year, the event is a gathering of activists, business leaders, policymakers, and celebrities to honour individuals who are advancing Robert F. Kennedy's vision of a more just and peaceful world.

The 2019 Ripple of Hope Awards went to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi; renowned author of the *Happy Potter* series and founder of the children's charity Lumos, JK Rowling (right); environmental activist and founder of Cool Globes Inc, Wendy Abrams; and executive chairman of Livongo Health, Glen Tullman.



Meera Gandhi, who is the founder of The Giving Back Foundation, also attended the Grammy Awards 2020 at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. "The Grammy event was an inspiring one on so many levels," says Meera (right, below). "Alicia Keys' performance and Billie Eilish's many Grammy wins are a clear indication that the world wants to live in peace and love undivided on all levels."

Meera was accompanied at the Grammy Awards by her daughter Kiran Gandhi (right, above), an American music producer and drummer who goes by the stage name of Madame Gandhi. Madame Gandhi also performed at VH1 Supersonic 2020 in Pune, India, earlier this year.

The Covid-19 pandemic has now put all such events on hold, not just in the US but around the world. "Every day when I meditate, I send love and positive vibes to all. These are times when, no matter who we are, we feel afraid of the unknown and the possibilities of physical and economic fallouts," says Meera whose bi-weekly video blog on Instagram sends out a message of positivity and love and hopefulness.

"We will get through this together," she says.







## *A Time for Babies*

*A section of the planet's beings are enjoying the Covid-19 lockdown*

*By Aekta Kapoor*

**C**ovid-19 has put a spanner in the world's works. Within weeks, the way we transact, live, work, interact and communicate has changed. The bustle of the marketplace has been replaced by a paranoid, mask-laden quiet. The buzz of office complexes is replaced by a restless silence. The sounds of children's laughter and vegetable vendors calling out in residential neighbourhoods has been replaced by the song of birds and the lazy bark of listless strays.

While the adults worry about their livelihoods and mourn their loss of freedom and socialisation, a quiet rejoicing is happening among some. There are living beings who are enjoying this,

even thriving.

The babies.

Our human offspring, our animal pets, our plants.

They are savouring every moment of the lockdown, the economic disaster and the medical pandemic that has caged us all in our homes.

Unconcerned about the lives affected and tragically lost around the world, they can only see what's right in front of them. And what's in front of them is their whole world.

Their moms and dads are with them. Their caregivers are with them. Their soul-mates are with them. Their world is complete. Virus? What virus? The unexpected presence of their beloveds



in the middle of the day is a gift from the gods, they could just die with happiness.

They languor, croon, delight in the hugs and belly rubs. They bloom with flowers and laughs of pure ecstasy. They sleep happily in the middle of the room, knowing their lovers are watching them, knowing that they are adored and cherished, and what greater heaven than this?

Even the bigger babies are not immune to this sudden avalanche of good fortune. My children are grownups, but they are still my babies. One of them insists that both parents do yoga with her each morning as she wants to lose weight during the lockdown, but in truth, as she sits with her eyes closed in meditation between the two of us, one can see all too clearly her innocently insidious goal and her success in achieving it — our undivided attention.

The other one, who has returned from ten thousand miles away before the lockdown began, is in a state of bliss too. “Was it worth it,” I ask her with all my adult exasperation. “Shouldn’t you have just stayed there? Was it worth paying three times the price, abandoning all your possessions behind in a panic, leaving college just before the final exams, traveling on a 16-hour

flight only to be stuck in an airport for another 11 hours with thousands of strangers, and now being self-quarantined in your room for 14 days when we can’t even hug you? Was it worth it?”

“Yes,” she replies, simply, through the closed door.

The journey may have been arduous but what makes it all worth it is that one potent, emo-



tionally charged word: home.

And it’s not the walls or the address that makes it so. It is the living beings in it. The humans, the old dog who grows younger every minute that you cuddle her, the plants that are thriving like never before. Home is in your cells, your DNA.

The virus has devastated the structure of human existence, the systems we made, the communities we built, the highways of our ambition.

But the babies are smiling. ■

# The Brand Concierge

The Brand Concierge provides your established business or brewing idea with a tailored key into the digital world. We are your one-stop shop for end-to-end creative and branding solutions.



BRANDING



LOGO &  
STATIONERY



SOCIAL MEDIA  
MANAGEMENT



UI/ UX



EMAIL  
MARKETING



PHOTOGRAPHY



PACKAGING



EVENT  
MANAGEMENT

[www.thebrandconcierge.in](http://www.thebrandconcierge.in)

[contact@thebrandconcierge.in](mailto:contact@thebrandconcierge.in) +91-9810140716 / +91-9899678811

# 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  
BY



MEERA GANDHI

EVERY SAT - SUN  
BETWEEN 8 - 9 AM

Follow Meera Gandhi on [@](#) [/](#)MeeraGandhiGBF



RISE  
WITH  
INDIA



ACTION  
BEGINS  
HERE

