

# @She

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— the female gaze —



## *Lisa Ray*

The actor,  
author, cancer  
survivor, and  
mother of twins  
on courage,  
success and  
spirituality

### **MENTAL HEALTH**

Bollywood's star-family  
kid Shaheen Bhatt on  
battling depression

### **WOMEN IN FILM**

The heroines behind  
the screens - writing,  
filming and organising

### **MISSING GIRLS**

Leena Kejriwal is using  
art and technology to  
fight sex trafficking



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# NO ORDINARY ISSUE

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**T**his issue of *eShe* is going to production at a time when my city Delhi is seeing its worst ever case of mob violence ever since the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that killed thousands. As I write this, the US president and India's prime minister are showering one another with words of praise in the capital of India against a backdrop of people being murdered in cold blood, being denied medical assistance, ignored by police, their businesses burnt down and looted, all while mobs are incited further by political leaders.

During the day, I shut off social media as far as possible so that I can focus on my work. Then, all night, I scourge the news like an addict, have nightmares, and pray for the poor fallen souls and the ones they left behind.

It is purely my position of privilege that I can do that. That I belong to a religion, caste or class that is not under attack, and I do

not have to face discrimination, intimidation and violence because of the circumstances of my birth. That I can sit here and work while some other mother or wife or daughter like me is at a funeral or searching for her loved ones in mortuaries.

I've said it before: Majoritarianism is unjust and inhumane. An evolved society is inclusive; it makes space for minorities and it thrives in diversity. We must correct the mistakes of history, not repeat them, if we want to move ahead.

This issue is dedicated to the women of Delhi: the ones who fight, the ones who protest, the ones who lost their loved ones, and the ones who will live with the pain of February 2020 embalmed in their hearts. May there be justice and peace. *#StopPoliticsOfHate* ■

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# A HAPPIER STATE OF MIND

*Being born to one of Bollywood's most famous families couldn't shield Shaheen Bhatt from chronic depression; she bares all in a candid memoir*

*By Neha Kirpal*

**M**ost famous for being Alia Bhatt's sister or Mahesh Bhatt and Soni Razdan's daughter, Shaheen Bhatt grew up amidst all the drama of Bollywood. But she has also shouldered all its sordid secrets through her own trajectory of pain and personal growth. She talks to us about her tryst with depression, which led her to write a book *I've Never Be (Un)Happier* (Penguin India), and her Instagram campaign to spread awareness about mental health.

*When and how did you first realise you were undergoing depression?*

I was 12 years old when I first experienced depression, but I didn't realise what it was. Even though the word depression was a part of my vocabulary, I didn't associate it with myself. I just thought that I was "weird" and different from everyone, because I couldn't be happy the way everyone else seemed to be. It wasn't until I was 18 that I finally went to a psychiatrist and was told I was dealing with clinical depression.

*What do you think led you to the state when you even tried to attempt suicide?*

By then, I had spent almost five years dealing with depression on my own. I was also going through all the mental and emotional upheavals that come with being a teenager. I was convinced at one point that the empty, hollow, constant pain I was feeling was never going to end. I was convinced that the only way out for me was to stop being here.

The moment I realised this was something out of my control, I told my mother and she took me to a psychiatrist. Then on, I started medication and went to see a counsellor once a week. I've been on medication on and off for the past 15 years, and I find that the combination of that with talk therapy really helps me. My family has been my biggest support – they always make sure I have a safe and loving space to come back to.

*How did you finally overcome it?*

Getting through chronic depression has involved a lot of trial and





Shaheen with her sister Alia Bhatt

error for me. It hasn't gone away completely – it comes back from time to time at varying degrees. So, I keep my medication going when I need it and I make sure I talk to my therapist when I have things to work through. I've figured out my triggers and I'm in a place where I can manage my symptoms a lot better than I could earlier.

*Was writing your book, in a sense, a process of catharsis for you?*

I never set out to write this book. It just sort of happened. When I opened up about my depression on social media a few years ago, the responses I received were very positive, and many people shared their own stories with me. I realised then

that this is something so many of us are dealing with. When Penguin approached me to write about my experiences, I felt I almost needed to say yes. Writing this book was both difficult and very rewarding. It was hard delving back into painful past memories. But in the end, it has given me a deep understanding of myself. I've also made profound connections with people as a result of writing this.

*How hard was it to write about your dad's addiction with alcohol, your troubles with food and alcohol as well as your insecurities to do with Alia's fame?*

To be honest, I didn't find any of that hard. A certain emotional transparency is something we've





(L-R): Mahesh Bhatt, Soni Razdan, Shaheen Bhatt, Pooja Bhatt and Alia Bhatt at the launch of Shaheen's book

been raised with, and I didn't see the point of writing about my experiences in half measures. All these things are a part of who I am, and I wanted to be as open about that as I could. My mom and sister Alia are my best friends and they're how I get by on a day-to-day basis.

*How has this incident in your life changed you as a person?*

Depression has changed me in so many ways. It has given me a profound sense of empathy, which I think is one of my biggest strengths. I understand people a lot more because of it. I make deeper connections with people. It has also given me an immense amount of gratitude for the good things in my life. I

appreciate the good things so much more, because I know what it's like to feel your worst.

*Tell us more about your Instagram campaign Here Comes the Sun, and the impact it has brought about.*

Here Comes the Sun is an online awareness campaign that I started in October last year on World Mental Health Day. With it, we want to spread awareness and disseminate as much information as we can, including lists of psychiatrists and counsellors. If I had had access to information in a way that I understood when I was younger, I would have been a lot further along in my treatment by now. ■

*Read the complete interview on eShe.in*

# A FEW GOOD WOMEN

*Only a fraction of cinematographers in Mumbai's film industry are women – how does the skewed ratio play out in their career growth?*

*By Shweta Bhandral*



One would think making films is a matter of skill, talent and aptitude, and not one's gender. But when one's gender dictates opportunity, it is perhaps no surprise that women are still a minority in a creative industry like filmmaking. Only five to seven women make to the list of the top 100 cinema-

tographers in India working in the commercial cinema space, doing big-budget or advertising films. Yet, for the young and old women behind the scenes of the thousands of films made in Mumbai every year, there is a ray of hope.

A cinematographer, or director of photography (DOP), makes

each frame of a film come to life. This person is the crew chief who heads the camera and light crews on a film or video production, and works closely with the director to create what we see on-screen. The work is demanding, physically and otherwise, but also creatively fulfilling, which is why women are drawn to it even if the industry has not been very welcoming so far.

she awaits that one big commercial project to move up the ladder.

With the influx of various digital platforms, the availability of work in the industry has increased several-fold. “There is enough work for all of us. But it’s about persistence and finding the right people,” says Nusrat Jafri Roy, 39, who has been in the industry since 2005, and was DOP for *Kuchh Bheege Alfaaz* by

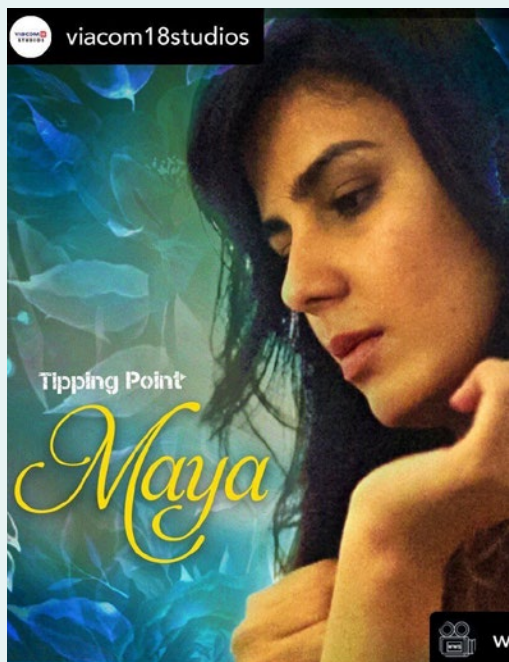


Facing page and above: Nusrat Jafri Roy in action on set; the poster of one of her projects on Amazon Prime

“Every day, I look forward to my work, even if it’s challenging to get,” says Mumbai-based Priyanka Singh, 35, who has been working behind the camera since 2011. Driving all her life decisions around her career, she is clearly in love with their work and has several documentaries and short films to her credit. Yet,

Onir, and the Amazon Prime series, *Chacha Vidhayak Hain Humare*.

According to some counts, there are about 2000-odd DOPs in the country of which only about 80 are women. Not many in the industry even know that they exist! This was reason enough for a collective to be formed in 2015, the Indian Women



L-R: The poster for one of Priyanka Singh's projects; Priyanka in action for a short film

Cinematographers Collective (IWCC), which has helped these women build comradeship.

Pooja Gupte, 35, who has been in the industry since 2009 and looks after the IWCC website, is of the opinion that a lot of hard work is still required to create opportunities for women. One of the ways the cinematographers do so is ensuring that they include other women in their teams. "In my last project, I made sure we were all girls on the three cameras that we were operating," she says.

It's not just India, women cinematographers the world over are coming together and

helping each other with work and techniques. "There is a sister code that's developing," says Pooja, who has just got back from the 16th Indian Film Festival in Stuttgart Germany, where she was the only woman DOP from India.

With more than 1,600 commercial films released in India every year, the Indian film industry beats even Hollywood in terms of the quantity of films produced. It is expected to grow by 40 per cent by 2024. But most of the women DOPs in the industry are being left out of this growth spurt.

"If the project is commercially viable, then it is talked about and

there is visibility. The men we work with do recommend us, be it DOPs or the directors,” says Pooja, “but as long as we only work on private films, which have a very niche audience, widespread recognition will continue to elude us.”

The industry is shy of giving commanding roles to women, and there appears to be a mindset problem at play. No wonder only a handful of women DOPs are known

Priyanka adds, “Out of 10, only two producers or production houses take women seriously. Our names have to pop up in conversations for the industry to know about us.”

The situation is no better outside India. In the US, of the 250 top-grossing films of 2018, only 4 per cent had a woman cinematographer. Last year, for the first time in the Academy Awards’ 90-year history, a woman was nominated for



Pooja Gupte behind the camera in a Madhuri Dixit Production; she handles the IWCC website

in the commercial film circuit. The rest bide their time while shooting documentaries, short films and digital series, waiting for the “one step-up project” that they need, as Nusrat puts it. “Women helping women also have a long way to go. Not many women directors go out of their way to hire a woman DOP. They also might not know that there are so many of us around!”

cinematography. Rachel Morrison got the nod for her work as DOP for the movie *Mudbound*. Though she didn’t win, the nomination itself was historic.

Back in India, these girls from small towns without any godfather in the film industry watch the Oscars news with hope. Against all odds, they are doggedly optimistic about change. ■



*Author of three novels, **Parinda Joshi's** latest novel *Made in China* was adapted into a Hindi feature film starring Rajkummar Rao. She shares the experience of writings books versus screenplays*

**A** writer should concern himself with whatever absorbs his fancy, stirs his heart, and unlimbers his typewriter, said award-winning American writer EB White in the early 1900s. Timeless as that little nugget may sound, Mr White would perhaps have to rethink that if he were alive today and writing for the screen.

For one, the only use a writer can find for a typewriter in the current digital age is perhaps as a prop for a distinctive old-world charm kinda Instagram photo. More importantly, it can be argued that writing a

screenplay is perhaps the antithesis of 'whatever absorbs your fancy'. There are rules to be learnt and formats to be followed. Ironically, one of Mr White's books, *Stuart Little*, was adapted into a movie series, but well after his death, so my argument still holds.

Assuming one can write a screenplay because one is experienced at the writing a book is like assuming one can ski because one knows snowboarding; both sports require familiarity with navigating the snow but the similarities end there. Essentially, an entirely new

art form needs to be studied for a novelist who wants to venture into screenwriting. It's not all just about tools and techniques either. It's a personality thing; some people are just better suited for a specific type of craft. Screenwriting, for instance, is more dialogue heavy and requires a knack for it.

There's an age-old debate on whether books are better than the movies they inspire. The jury is still out on that but we can all agree that the two mediums of storytelling have different aspects and prerequisites for what makes them good. Books allow the reader to be a part of the story, giving insight into the character's thoughts and emotions. There's more detail, more focus on character development and more depth. On the other hand, the great thing about movies is their ability to show, and the overall experience of watching one. Books allow readers to employ their imagination to make their own flights of fancy, whereas movies are a director's interpretation of a writer's creation; they immerse you into the story in a different way including with music and visual effects.

For a writer to be a part of both

mediums (that is, when a book gets adapted for screen) can be exciting but confusing and challenging as well. For starters, you often go from being the solo pilot of your aircraft to multiple co-pilots. It can easily get crowded. And writers are opinionated. Imagine those razor-sharp opinions flying at breakneck speed in that tiny cockpit.

With the screen medium, while the heart of the book will be retained, everything else can and may be developed or modified. Certain changes may be for the better, others because you were out of luck. Which means the apple can potentially fall far from the tree. Really, really far. But it will still be your apple. Except that it won't look like the apple that you originally created. The more the apples differ in taste and aesthetics, the more they'll be compared. And guess who the spotlight will fall on when it comes to answering those questions?

On the bright side, this transition will bring financial rewards and may open up a new world of opportunities. Just make sure to embrace both the apples. ■

*Find the author on [Parindajoshi.com](http://Parindajoshi.com) and on Instagram @parindajoshi*



# FOR THE LOVE OF CINEMA

*Artist director of the prestigious MAMI Mumbai Film Festival, Smriti Kiran has turned around its fortunes in the past few years*

*By Maya Lalchandani*

**W**hile the 22-year-old Mumbai Film Festival has seen a spectacular rise in the past five years, only a few would recognise the faces heading MAMI (Mumbai Academy of Moving Image), an academy and not-for-profit trust, who have run the prestigious film event since 2015 and turned its fortunes around since then.

MAMI's artistic director, Smriti Kiran, is one of those faces whose hard work is visible to all. She is the creative force leading and building the legacy of MAMI's original founders Hrishikesh Mukherji and Shabana Azmi, and the vision of its current board members including Deepika Padukone (chairperson), Neeta Ambani (co-chairperson), Anand Mahindra, Zoya Akhtar, Kabir Khan, Kiran Rao, Rana Daggubati, Vishal Bharadwaj, Rohan Sippy and others.

Full of passion for her work, Smriti has been with MAMI since 2015. "Getting a gig that actually terrifies you and gives you purpose



Smriti Kiran

is rare after 20 years. I get to build this crazy ship with some of the best professionals I have ever come across," says the Delhi University alumna, adding, "Every waking moment of my life is consumed by





Smriti Kiran with the team behind Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival 2019

MAMI, and I love it. The sense of responsibility that comes with my position drives me.”

Daughter of now retired IAS officer Dr Vinod Prakash Gupta and a National Award-winning educationist Shashi Kiran, Smriti’s progressive upbringing shaped her into an outspoken individual and fierce feminist. “I didn’t become aware of patriarchy till pretty late because in my immediate family there was none at all. My father was and is my biggest champion. My brother and I were treated equally though I do think at times my father was a tad partial to me!” jokes Smriti, who launched the very popular hashtag #WarriorsNotPrincesses.

She goes on: “My father supports my mother in everything she does. But then, I got lucky. Dad is

one-of-a-kind. I feel grateful for my parents because a patriarchal and misogynistic environment kills women even before they die.”

After graduating in philosophy, Smriti studied law and then joined NDTV in the late 1990s when media houses were booming. Her 10-year stint took her from being a production assistant to head of special projects in entertainment. She helmed iconic shows such as *Jeena Isi Ka Naam Hai*, *Night Out*, and later *Picture This*, the show that launched the television career of film critic Anupama Chopra. It also sealed their friendship. “I have deep respect and tremendous love for Anu. She is generous and secure. Once you work with someone like her, you are spoilt for life,” she says.

In 2008, Smriti took a segue and



L-R: With British actress Tilda Swinton; with actor Ranveer Singh and TV personality Anupama Chopra

joined the film industry, working with directors like Ram Madhvani, and writing screenplay books for films like *3 Idiots*. In 2011, she and Anupama reunited to produce *The Front Row with Anupama Chopra* for StarWorld. In 2014, they co-founded *Film Companion*, which is today one of the most credible film journalism platforms in India. The same year, the duo joined the Mumbai Film Festival. “Our lives can be divided into two parts. BM and AM: Before MAMI and After MAMI,” she laughs.

Smriti’s career choices are spontaneous and that is probably the reason her trajectory is rich and di-

verse. “What I am doing currently doesn’t make business sense to a lot of people; it is not lucrative and the work is relentless. But this makes me happy and I am working with people who inspire me,” she says with her trademark candour.

She is still more comfortable behind the scenes than walking the red carpet in a shimmery dress. “At heart and in action, I will always be the girl in overalls, sitting with my partners-in-crime in the back alley post the party drinking beer, laughing at all that happened, and plotting what to do next. Someone once called me a *mazdoor* (worker),” she smiles. “They were bang on.” ■

# GIRL POWER

*These organisations are standing up for women in the film industry*

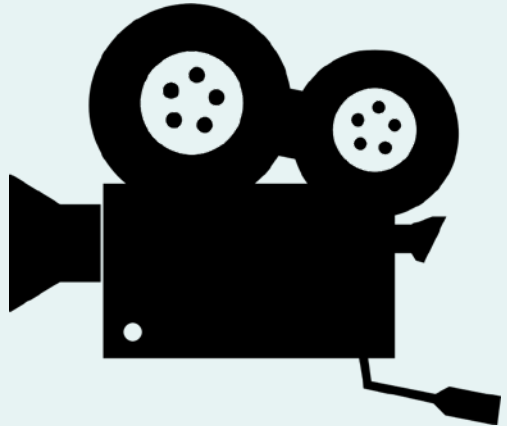
## WOMEN IN CINEMA COLLECTIVE

Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), an organisation for women in the Malayalam cinema industry, was formed in 2017 after a popular actress was waylaid and raped in a car at the behest of powerful Malayalam actor Dileep. Led by prominent female film personalities, WCC submitted a petition to the state chief minister for action

on the sexual assault, which led to his eventual arrest. WCC also held a year-long awareness drive on workplace exploitation and gender discrimination. The group is campaigning for equal pay and welfare schemes for women in the industry.

## HIP HIP HERRAY STUDIOS

A new startup in the media and entertainment space, Hip Hip HERRay Studios is India's first digital content studio dedicated to women-only web series and filmmakers. With the backing of prominent names from the industry, it will collaborate with women from diverse regions of India. With



its own earmarked budget, the new-age boutique will produce short and long form episodic series and films, helmed by women storytellers.

## INDIAN WOMEN CINEMATOGRAPHERS COLLECTIVE

IWCC is a forum for craftswomen and technicians in the Indian film industry, including non-cis male technicians and workers. The collective aim to promote talent and creates opportunities in industry,

and is a space for contemporaries to showcase their diverse body of work. IWCC hopes to “inspire girls and those breaking out of the gender binary to consider roles behind the camera as viable professions.” ■



*Artist and photographer Leena Kejriwal is raising awareness about sex trafficking through her art and technology project Save Missing Girls*

*By Neha Kirpal*

**L**eena Kejriwal found herself confronting a unique problem when NGOs working in the field of prostitution and human trafficking reached out to her as a fine-art photographer. They were up against a frustrating fact:

prostitution is demand driven. “As long as the common man on the streets continues to come and buy sex, it’s difficult to keep the girls out,” explains Leena, who decided to bring another language to the fight against sex trafficking.

And so the Kolkata-based artist launched Save Missing Girls, a project that aims to raise awareness about sex trafficking through art installations, photography and technology. Coming from a traditional Marwari family, she had grown up in a patriarchal structure, which she thinks strengthened her understanding of the role society can play in a girl's life. Further,

their lives, and then fighting to make it better. "Why should we wait for a girl to get trafficked to save her?" questions Leena, who has developed a systematic school programme for municipal, public and private schools.

They are also empowering helpless victims of domestic or alcohol abuse in West Bengal. "These girls are totally vulnerable to trafficking. We



Save Missing Girls includes a systematic school programme for municipal, public and private schools

being an artist, she believes in the power of the graphic language to connect with the public. "So, when I set out to create a public artwork, I wanted it to be so graphic, minimal and easy to grasp that it should have the ability to cross all vernacular boundaries to engage the masses on the issue of sex trafficking," she says.

The project makes girls go from disempowerment to feeling empowered to taking agency for

provide them skill training as well as a market for the goods they create, so that we can empower each one of them and shake the status quo in remote Sundarbans, which accounts for 44 per cent of India's trafficking victims," she informs.

Leena set out to first make the public aware of an issue they are responsible for. "Art was the only language I knew. I wanted to create an artwork that was simple

to understand and would move people enough or raise curiosity about what it was trying to say,” she says. It was with this focus that she created the Missing Girls silhouette, an integral part of their awareness programmes. Constructed around a very visual medium and storytelling narrations, wherein missing stencils have been left behind on the walls of the community and schools, it is made with the intent that people never forget what could happen and their importance as changemakers.

Leena believes that public art has the potential to create user engagement and social change beyond just adding beauty to the city. The ‘Missing Girl’ silhouette has now become a part of a bigger

guerrilla art movement. “It’s proving to be a very powerful medium. It has also served its purpose for an initial dialogue and is a silent yet powerful argument in a public space,” she says.

Recently, the team conducted a school awareness programme in 15 states, including the Sundarbans. A few months ago, a girl on the verge of becoming a child bride came upon the artwork. She called up the police and told them that she was being forced into marriage. They were able to stop it. “Curbing a grave issue such as child marriage plays a very important role in curbing the demand for trafficking girls,” says Leena.

Leena has also developed a one-of-



The Missing team has conducted school awareness programmes in 15 states, including the Sundarbans



The 'Missing Girl' silhouette has now become a part of a bigger guerrilla art movement on walls in cities

a-kind interactive smartphone role-playing game called Missing. The award-winning game is designed to allow players to experience what a missing person goes through when trafficked into prostitution. In it, the player is actually put in the shoes of the girl. Her main quest is to escape.

With one million players across the world in more than 70 countries, the game has received a tremendous response. Players from across the world have been shaken by it, and the team has received many requests from volunteers who want to help their cause. It helped them build an

army of thinkers and do-gooders. They have also now launched 12 vernacular versions in India. These will give them insights into behavioural patterns of the Indian population, which will further their research on how to address various pain points in society.

“People need to understand that they are, consciously or unconsciously, creating a world that enables sex trafficking. Till we don't make any change in the demand, there will be supply,” she cautions, adding, “Awareness equals prevention.” ■

# AN INSTINCTIVE JOURNEY

*Actor, author, cancer survivor and mother of twins Lisa Ray bares her story – with its little and large successes, failures and leaps of faith*

*By Neha Kirpal*



**A**ctor, columnist, model, social activist, performer, philanthropist, television star and theatre personality – Lisa Ray is all this rolled into one, and then some! She has also made a recent debut as an author. In her touching memoir *Close to the Bone* (HarperCollins India, 2019), she writes about finding herself, healing from cancer and

with your mental state, and they are very difficult to overcome. The world also doesn't support your healing, particularly today with the imagery that we see and the beauty standards that women are subjected to. Eating disorders are very much an emotional, psychological and mental disease, and is very hard to manage on your own.



Lisa Ray and her husband Jason Dehni are parents to twin daughters, Sufi and Soleil

navigating the world of glamour. This year, she stars in AR Rahman's musical *99 Songs* and in Season 2 of *Four More Shots Please*. She's also working on three more books. We talk to her about her journey so far. *How difficult was it for you to overcome eating disorders and body-image issues in your formative years?* All these are very much connected

*Your memoir swings between two fascinating extremes – the glamorous world versus the deeply spiritual – and you've been authentic and even compassionately self-critical at times in recounting it. What does it take to look back with such objectivity at oneself?*

To be honest, it was challenging to write a book even though it's one of my greatest accomplishments



"Motherhood has taught me a lot of patience and love. It's a beautiful practice of love," says Lisa.

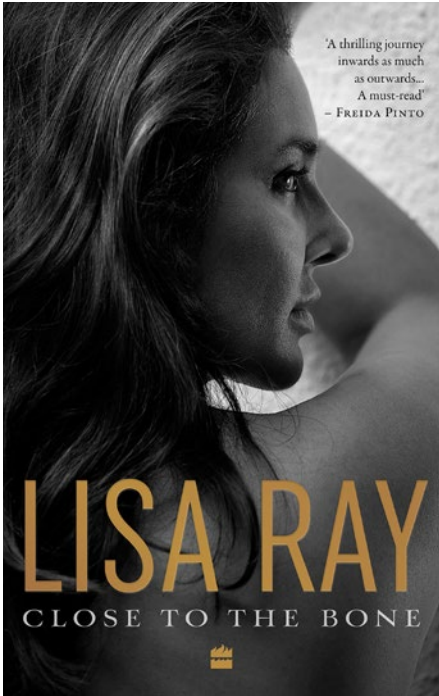
today. Fortunately, I have kept a lot of diaries my entire life so I had some actual material that I could refer to in terms of facts, dates and incidents. I often write about conversations that I hear, maybe about the patterns of a curtain in the room, things like that. It's very sort of impressionistic. It's still very challenging – you have to draw on memory. You're telling it as you remember it, or as you believe the truth to be.

But I also use my training as an actor by applying a particular discipline or technique by which you can actually travel to a particular

room or relive an experience using sense, memory and action. That was sometimes painful, and sometimes exhilarating to do. I don't really see my book as a memoir; I see it as my writing debut. So, the language and the writing is as important as anything else. It's not just a narrative of my life, and it is talking about my inner life as well. Moving from subject to object is also fairly significant for a woman as well.

*What have you learnt about the 'divine dichotomy' (the parallel existence of two opposing truths), and of keeping a balance between life's material and spiritual pursuits?*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM



L-R: Lisa's first book *Close to the Bone*; Lisa at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January 2020

That's a great question! We talk about balance in so many contexts in today's world; it's a real misnomer. I think there's no such thing as balance – there are priorities. Life is never perfect, it's never meant to be. There are forces or circumstances that will take our attention at certain periods of time. It's like a tide, ebbing and flowing.

We have to be a little gentler with ourselves, and listen to the call. For me, there was a very deep

**"LIFE IS NEVER PERFECT, IT'S NEVER MEANT TO BE... IT'S LIKE A TIDE, EBBING AND FLOWING"**

spiritual call at one time and I dedicated myself to that. Today, it is a bit of prioritising my life as a householder – because I'm a wife and a working mother on top of everything else. My spiritual practices are now integrated into my worldly life. I don't necessarily have the compulsion anymore to just go off into the

mountains like I did literally for six months at some point. But at the same time, that was very valuable in my life, and I'm glad that I did it,



L-R: Lisa posed for Rohan Shrestha in a campaign to raise awareness about breast cancer; with Jason

because it provided me a foundation from which I can draw on now. I can actually access that peace, because I worked on it already.

So, I don't think there's really any formula. My journey has been very instinctive, and I've fallen – it's not even been linear progression. Sometimes, you succeed; sometimes, you don't. And it's all okay. I think it's more about the acceptance of everything that happens in life.

*What's the most important lesson about love and relationships you've learnt?*

Love is the most important thing. But one should be able to step back in order to distinguish love from

attachment – two very different things that are normally entangled in our lives; and when they are entangled, they can create havoc.

*It takes fearlessness (or is it courage in the face of fear?) to bare your story. At what point did you decide to write and publish a book of your experiences?*

I think this book has been in the making for about 35 years – I'm just a very late bloomer! Circumstances came together. But even writing this book has taken a few false starts and stops. But here we are. Now that I'm on this trajectory, I'm very committed to it. ■

*Read the complete interview on eShe.in*

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM



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# How I Beat Cancer, Thrice

*Delhi-based author and entrepreneur Anita Kumar shares her emotional, physical and spiritual battle with cancer*

It was not the first but the third tumour that shook the very ground I stood on. Floods of memories were revived of my grandmother's suffering as the cancer consumed her together with my paternal aunt's that besieged her stomach eventually taking residence there before the cells proliferated and permeated every other organ. My father passed away the same way: cancer.

I was determined to live and that, I realise today, was a prerequisite to my recovery. I was 46, still had life force in me and an enthusiastic to-do list.

After my second tumour, I visited a nutritionist who made me more aware of what foods had an acidic effect on my body, and I learnt to avoid them as far as possible. For an entire year, I only ate foods that were low in fat and were essentially alkaline. My body was still recovering from the fatigue of 32 radiation sessions. My eyes revealed the struggle to keep my body and

soul together but my spirit was determined to arrive at a place of zest and zeal for life after virtually being at death's door.

After consuming my organic



Anita Kumar



Anita Kumar with her two entrepreneur daughters at the launch of her book *Turning the Page* (Om Books)

green juice, I would go for an hour-long walk and even incorporated pranayama into my routine of recovery. I drank six to eight glasses of water. The long and short of it is that I lived by the book of healthy living; physically, that is.

Then came the third tumour. Just when I thought I had figured out a sure way to cure any further threats, life cast a shadow on my hopes.

At a social gathering, I happened to meet a holistic doctor who asked, “What are you carrying besides the cancer cells that you haven’t yet released? Let go, Anita.” He advised: “Kill them before they kill you. Life is precious and it’s not worth holding on to the weight of your resentment or anger or whatever

else you are carrying in terms of your emotion.”

I wasn’t even aware that I was carrying such heavy baggage. I had indeed achieved happiness outwardly in my life after years of unhappiness but clearly I was walking through life with the weight that I should have dropped.

It is all about the ‘inside out’, and when we allow ourselves to embrace the wisdom behind our illness, then we are in a position to arduously work on healing our soul that impacts our physical body. Wisdom married to knowledge can often remove the power the cancer has over us.

Though I have a strong spiritual streak in me, I have never been a

meditator. I began sitting in silence in the ease of my living room, shutting my eyes and visualising those who had deeply and irrevocably hurt me. I did this regularly to forgive them as I asked for forgiveness for the hurt I may have inadvertently caused them. I would then cut the cord and release them from my system with love and light.



This was a lengthy process as it had been years of hoarding onto emotions that no longer served me. In effect these hoarded emotions were disrupting my bio-chemistry throwing my system out of balance.

I listened to innumerable podcasts on self-love and healing the past. Affirmations and positive self-talk became part of my healing

process. Our cells respond to our words spoken and unspoken besides responding to our emotions.

Merely saying, “I am healthy and happy” is not enough but rather proactively matching our actions to our words is what brings about an enduring change.

All women are creative so learning what makes us an individual is an essential part of our personal and spiritual growth. I have been teaching calligraphy for over three decades but once I was struck with cancer, my focus shifted from my creativity to my condition. It was only when I was reminded that we are not our illness – it is not something I owned and it was an unwanted visitor – that I disallowed it to distract me from my real purpose.

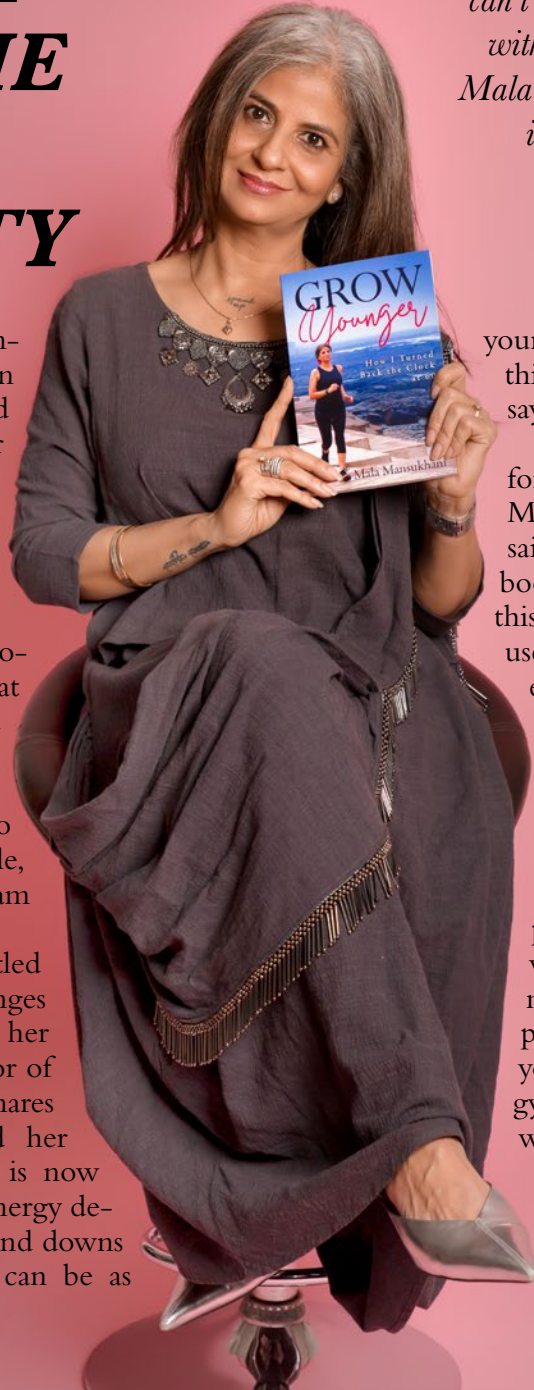
Detoxifying our body is merely a fraction of the process; detoxifying the mind and heart is equally indispensable. I have battled with cancer three times in my life and I have no guarantees for the future but what I can ascertain is that I no longer hand over my power to cancer. I have made a paradigm shift in my attitude towards myself taking absolute responsibility for my every negative thought, word and action. At the point when negative emotions settle within me I make a positive shift soon after. I consume thoughts and ideas that nourish me to enable me to flourish. ■



# SIXTY IS THE NEW FORTY

**T**his dynamic woman has donned many roles in her life – a daughter, mother, widow, grandmother, fashionista, trendsetter and even a philanthropist. Yet, today, at age 60, Mala Mansukhani says, “I might be different things to different people, but one thing I am not is OLD!”

Having battled various challenges while chasing her dreams, the author of *Grow Younger* shares how she turned her life around, and is now full of youthful energy despite all the ups and downs she faced. “You can be as



*Who says you can't grow younger with age? Author Mala Mansukhani is certainly an example!*

**By Maya Lalchandani**

young as you think you are,” says Mala.

No wonder former athlete Milkha Singh said of her book, “I think this book is a useful read for everyone, not just those who think they are getting older.”

Most people are awed when they meet Mala in person, full of youthful energy and glowing with health and radiance, but to hear her story is another



L-R: Mala with her twin grandchildren; she ran her first marathon at age 47, and continues to run regularly

level of inspiration. When she was a little girl, her mother Vindri left her errant husband and moved with four daughters to Mumbai, where she worked hard as a seamstress, single-handedly raising her kids. No doubt young Mala's memories of deprivation shaped the course of her future choices.

Mala's early marriage to a man 13 years older was probably her first act of rebellion. For a while, she sailed through her new life, bearing three daughters, but sadness crept in. Her own beauty became a source of misery. "Here comes the black and white TV," people ridiculed the couple. Though they were comfort-

able financially, she found her husband distant. History repeated itself, and she cried herself to sleep every night hoping things would change.

She finally opted out of a loveless marriage, moving back with her mother. Divorce followed when the girls were old enough. She hated the thing people called beauty; it had not served her well.

A year later, a friend told her about Mrs Gladrags beauty pageant. She wanted to participate even if it meant being married again; maybe it was a yearning for respectability or some sort of validation. Her ex-husband agreed and they had a secret second wedding but contin-

ued to lead different lives. A strange friendship ensued; they even married off their daughters together. Had the divorce cured the rift?

She was the only grandmom to participate in the beauty pageant, and winning the Mrs Courage title proved to be a life-changing experience. She made a career as a boutique owner and became more spiritually aware of herself.

side note stated the entire truth, thus absolving her of any responsibility, and ensuring she had a right to the house. Now left with a home full of women, Mala felt life had come full circle, her mother's story ran before her eyes, but only this time she resolved to do it differently, the best she could.

She ran her first marathon when she was 47 and continues to run the



L-R: Mala with her three daughters; she conducts Grow Younger workshops for women above the age of 40

But life was not exactly kind. Three months after her second daughter's marriage, her husband committed suicide due to financial strain, which Mala was unaware of. In 2006, her life came to a standstill once again. His family blamed her. She shares, "I lost everything, my husband, all the money and societal respect. My mother went through depression. But I rose above it all."

To her relief, her husband's sui-

five km race today. She studied yoga and first aid. At 50, she climbed Kalsubai Peak in the Western Ghats. She also helped others while she discovered more for herself.

A believer in ageless living, she runs a nonprofit called Grow Younger, which encourages midlife women to lead healthier and stronger lives. If anyone says to her, "Age catches up," Mala replies, "Why not stay ahead of it?" ■



# MAKING HEADLINES

*Journalist Francesca Marino's report confirming the number of casualties in India's Balakot strike in Pakistan had everyone asking, who is she?*

**E**ver since she reported that Pakistan had lost 130 to 170 terrorists including 11 trainers in the Balakot strike orchestrated by India last year, Francesca Marino earned herself a new position of respect in the power corridors of India. Of course, the Italian journalist

was already being watched closely by Indian intelligence after she wrote *Apocalypse Pakistan: An Anatomy of 'the World's Most Dangerous Nation*. The 2014 book, for which she also interviewed Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafeez Saeed, led to her being detained by the Federal Intelligence Authorities in Pakistan overnight in a cell without a lawyer, and then deported back to Italy. She is now on Pakistan's list of unwelcome journalists.

India, however, is both welcoming and a welcome destination for Francesca, who is an Indophile inside out. From rubbing shoulders with Indian politicians, to collecting saris, to adopting an orphan girl from Banaras as a soul sister, she's more Indian than many who have lived here all their lives.

Having studied economics and management in Rome just because she wanted to show her father she could do what was perceived as a 'male' career, Francesca even worked in his law and accountancy firm, but finally left to pursue cultural



Francesca Marino

anthropology, art and literature. Now an independent journalist writing for prestigious publications in Italy and around the world, she specialises in terrorism and politics with a focus on South Asia.

We talk to her about her exciting life and career.

*What was your childhood like, and what did you want to be when you grew up?*

I was born and raised in Cosenza, a small town in Calabria. My father

Growing up, I started hating my town and the backward mentality of the society there. I felt like I was a citizen of the world. Strangely enough, I wanted to be exactly what I've become: a journalist and a writer. The Plan B, as a child, was to be a ballet dancer. I even trained in ballet for 10 years, but then gave it up.

*When did you start your writing career?*

*What was the first big break for you?*

I started writing on culture and an-



L-R: In Italy; with Praveen Swami and Beniamino Natale at the release of her book, *Apocalypse Pakistan*

was an avid traveller and reader, and mine was an upper-class privileged family. I'm conscious I've been a privileged child in terms of exposure to art and culture. My father would take me in winter for the opening of the season at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome or at La Scala in Milan, and in summer at Arena Verona. He helped me develop a love for music, art and for other cultures and countries.

thropology. My first big break and my debut in press was when a religious sect in USA committed mass suicide. My interview with a scholar was published by one of Italy's main newspapers then. I had only written essays before that, and I was terrified. Nobody gave me tips and it was my first real article. But it went well, they liked my style, so I started writing regularly for a news agency and other publications.

*What do you find most fascinating about India?*

My fascination with India started as a child, reading Emilio Salgari's books. Then, as soon as I could, I bought an open ticket and landed in Delhi. It was like falling in love. The first few years, I did nothing but travel. Everywhere, with no real



direction or purpose. Real journeys, the slow ones made with trains and buses, often with two dusty baskets under my feet, a sack of onions stuck under the seat and a couple of children in my arms. Wanderings that left you physically exhausted, but with a heart full of light. My In-

dia, more than a geographical place, is the sum of the faces and voices of the people I met.

*What's your most memorable experience of living in India?*

Selling bangles and *prasad* at the Durga temple in Banaras. I went there often and stayed for months.

*Tell us about your love for fashion and your lovely sari collection. What are your favourite brands?*

I was seven the first time I tried to wrap myself in a sari. Back then Italian film director Roberto Rossellini's wife, Sonali Dasgupta, had a famous shop in Rome and was featured in many publications, even in a kids' magazine where they gave tips on how to wear a sari. I took a tablecloth and tried doing it. Buying a sari was more or less the first thing I did when I arrived in India, and spent hours in Assi Ghat watching the pilgrim ladies, trying to understand how they tied it correctly. I thank all the women who, over the years, have shared tips and tricks to help me master the art and taught me about fabrics and handcrafts. I do prefer traditional saris, and in summer mainly Bengali cottons, but I love Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Raw Mango. I treasure also my Ritu Kumars. I style saris with Western accessories, mainly Prada or Miu Miu. I take care to always be impeccable because, as Coco Chanel said: "Be shabby and they'll remember the dress; be impeccable



Francesca in her own Max Mara bridal dress at the wedding of her Indian soul sister Sandhya in Rome

and they'll remember the woman."

*How do you ensure your own personal safety while reporting from the hinterlands of Pakistan and Afghanistan?*

I never bothered too much about my personal safety, but I guess I've been lucky. Many people I knew ended up killed or kidnapped. I've been detained in Pakistan, found myself in potentially very dangerous situations but there's not that much you can do to ensure your safety if you want to do your job.

*What inspires you?*

What compelled me to be a journalist was reading, when I was 12, the books of an Italian journalist called

Oriana Fallaci. She had reported from Vietnam during the war. On the book cover was a picture of her wearing protection plates and a helmet and I thought: "God, I want to be her." What inspires me every day professionally is something Albert Londres said once: "There's only one line a journalist should follow: the railway line." What inspires me as a human being is what a great judge called Paolo Borsellino, who was killed by the mafia, replied to journalists asking him whether he was afraid to die or not: "If you live in fear, you die every day. If you are fearless, you die just once." ■

Actor, singer and producer Lindsay Lohan's career has been checkered with jail time, car crashes and substance abuse



# *Why Do Smart People Make Bad Decisions?*

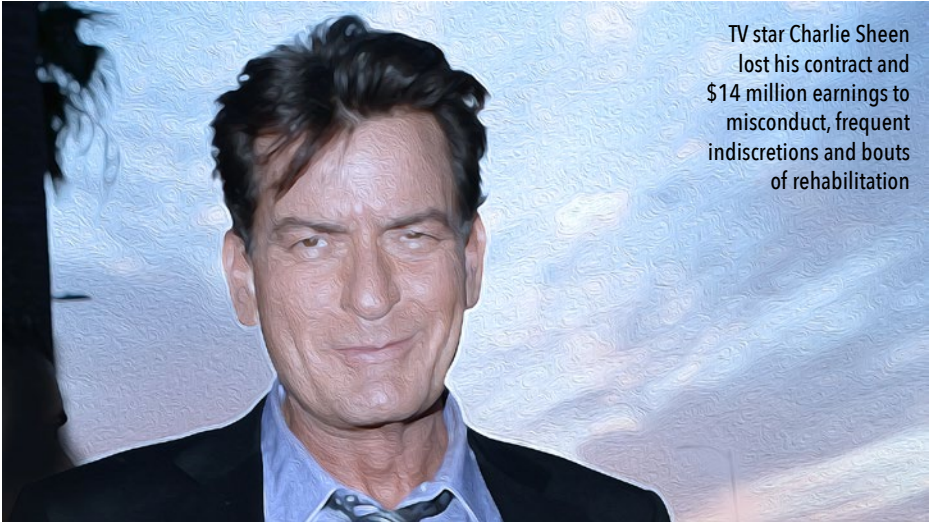
*Despite having everything going in their favour, why do smart and talented folks often give in to poor judgement and impulsive behaviours?*

*By Manvi Pant*

**D**o you recall the fateful night of November 2009 when a phone text busted golfing legend Tiger Wood's serial infidelity? What about tech businessman

Phaneesh Murthy's sexual misconduct that eventually led to his ugly exit first from Infosys and then i-GATE? Or the troubled timeline of pop icon Lindsay Lohan,





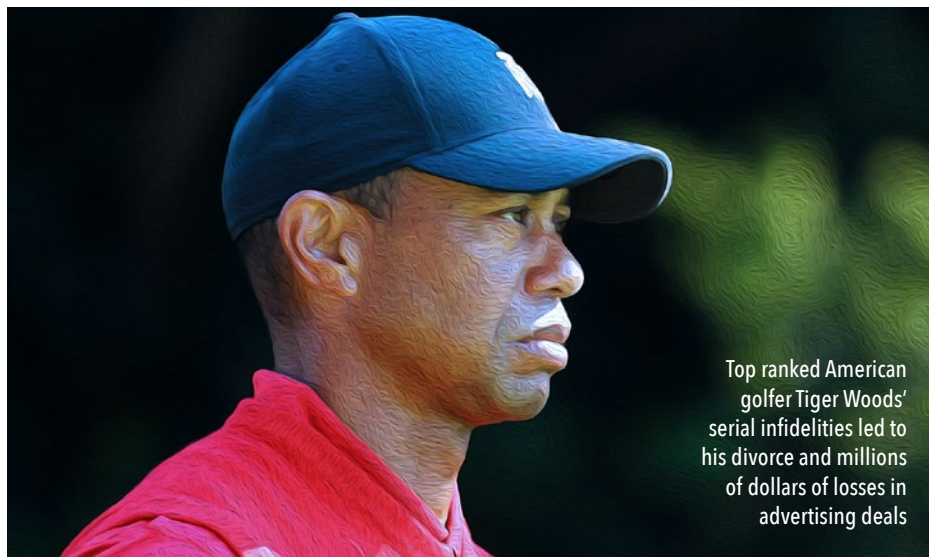
TV star Charlie Sheen lost his contract and \$14 million earnings to misconduct, frequent indiscretions and bouts of rehabilitation

the drug-riddled fall of WeWork founder Adam Neumann, and other incidents like these?

They come from different arenas, but what they have in common is bad decision-making and poor impulse control. In 2013, Dr Vivek Benegal, professor of psychiatry, Centre for Addiction Medicine, NIMHANS, explained how some people are more at-risk of compulsive gambling, addictions, high-risk sexual behaviours and other impulsive acts. Popular self-help author and personal development coach Mark Manson says that self-control, or our ability to override our impulses, is an illusion. For instance, when people refrain from doing anything that may throw them off the wheel or into a downward spiral, in most cases, they end up doing exactly that, more aggressively.

The psychological reason is that for an individual to respond in a controlled manner, the alignment of their two brains – ‘feeling’ and ‘thinking’ – needs to be in place. Both our two brains have a bearing on our decision-making. Daniel Kahneman explores this theme vividly in *Thinking Fast and Slow*.

I know of a person who is an emotional eater. Such people eat to soothe their anxiety or stress or negative emotions. If you see her just before she has a deadline or a presentation, you will be shocked. She is one of those kinds who stands first in class and wins all races, but still fears that she will fail and her world will fall apart. On the day of her deadline, her thinking brain tells her to calm down and gives her reasons to believe that life is going to be “just fine” even if she doesn’t



Top ranked American golfer Tiger Woods' serial infidelities led to his divorce and millions of dollars of losses in advertising deals

get to hold that victory trophy. Her feeling brain, on the other hand, attaches emotional and subjective elements like “value” and “judgement” with the reward. As a consequence of this, she sees herself as “unworthy” if she fails to accomplish her goal. Conclusion? Anxiety, stress, and hence, a sudden urge to binge eat. But what follows after that is even worse – loads of regret. “I ate so much, I’m a failure.” All of this originates from our two brains not being in sync.

For our brains to be well-aligned, they need to have a common focus or a point of pursuance. Does that come naturally to us? No. Psychologists Keith Stanovich and Richard West call ‘System 1 and System 2’ as alternative terms for the feeling and thinking brain, respectively. Going by *Psychology: Second Europe-*

*an Edition* (2015), System 1 or the feeling brain operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control, whereas System 2 or the thinking brain allocates more attention to taxing and mental activities often driven by logic, analysis and concentration.

Perhaps my friend is more of a feeler than a thinker. Her System 1 is more active than System 2, which is why she has a lower sense of controllability over her actions and hence a need for immediate gratification to satisfy her impulses. Talking of which, the ancient Greek researcher Herodotus, often recognised as the world’s first historian, says, “Make big decisions by discussing them twice: once while drunk, once while sober.” In modern terms, one could say the idea is

to maximise the use of both brain systems – feeling and thinking.

Time and again, our decision-making abilities fall victim to ignorance, impulse and short-sightedness, and our longing for immediate gratification tends to disrupt rational thinking during complex situations. So, why does this happen? Why do people make unwise decisions despite being fully aware

the feeling brain goes unruly and throws at you all a strong impulse, take a pause, interpret it, challenge it, analyse it and accept it. Instead of self-loathing, allow your thinking brain to engage with those impulses and work along with them in a constructive manner.

It's not easy, and it never will be, but don't let hopelessness seep into you. No matter what you do or how



Corporate geniuses and honchos Adam Neumann (L) and Phaneesh Murthy both had falls from grace: the first due to irresponsible behaviours including drug use, and the other due to claims of sexual harassment

of the possible consequences?

Professor of psychology at Harvard Daniel Gilbert says our brains are hard-wired to make irrational and poor choices. He also emphasises our obsession with morality, which discourages us from taking pragmatic solutions.

This doesn't mean we all are doomed to injudicious decision-making all our lives. When

hard you try, at some point in life, you will make mistakes and give in to your impulses. Remember not to beat yourself too hard. Discipline is empowering but start with self-regulation first. It takes time and several attempts to condition oneself to respond in a controlled manner.

Finally, you are accountable only to yourself. Pat yourself for the successes, and dust off the slip-ups. ■

# A Cause Greater Than Herself

*Michelle Evans in Canada and Heather Garbutt in the UK have set out to heal the world in their own unique ways*

**By Kay Newton**

**T**he Dalai Lama said the Western woman will save the world. These two ladies are on a mission to do just that. They have different stories yet both speak of determination, consistency and overcoming odds.

## **MICHELLE EVANS, CANADA**

Based in Yukon, Canada, Michelle Evans doesn't like labels but her clients call her a spiritual mentor or energy healer. To get here, though, she had a tough journey, especially a childhood full of trauma and abuse.

Her father, a drug dealer, was incredibly violent. "He would go take care of business with a sawed-off shotgun. I learned how to cook crack cocaine in the microwave when I was 13. He broke three of my ribs at 14. I didn't talk to a lot of people – what happened at home stayed at home. To this day, he is an active heroin addict," says the Whitehorse-based life coach.

From a young age, she took on the role of protector to her younger



brother, even caring for him and her father's girlfriend's two children when her father was in prison and his girlfriend in the hospital. "I was 12 years old. The authorities asked if I was okay and the kids could stay with me, or if I was not and they would go to foster care for the

night. I was okay. I was always okay.”

Early on, Michelle knew what kind of a mother she would be. “When I got pregnant at 16, my sole focus was on being the mom I wish I had. As my sons grew, I was able to teach them things I had not grasped for myself.”



But once her own kids were grown up, she realised she had no idea who she was if she wasn't “supermom”. “Knowing I was about to have an empty nest was the catalyst in finding out who I truly was,” says Michelle, whose sons are now 20 and 25.

As a young child, Michelle was fascinated with magic (or energy as she now calls it) but she “turned the magic volume down and ignored it, thinking I must be making things

up.” Then 10 years ago, she began practising energy healing. Initially, she stayed in the “spiritual closet”, practising only on her sons, whose innocent acceptance encouraged her. Now, she has been working globally for the past four years.

She shares, “When you work on healing yourself, everything around you begins to heal too. The ripple effect is amazing. Healing all that trauma over the years has allowed me to also heal the relationships with my family. Which in turn allows me to have incredible relationships with my clients. When you heal yourself, you do not have to do anything to change anyone else, it automatically happens. Whether it is the cashier in the local shop or your children. When you connect to the being you were born as, everything changes.”

Now as a midlife woman who had to be invisible as a child, Michelle is becoming more visible all of the time. “I love this and at the same time feel awkward. My whole goal now is to help people remember who they were before the world got their hands on them. You still are an amazing connected being, there is no need to find yourself, you were never lost. It is simply a matter of remembering. You may not always recognise it, yet you are never alone and you are always loved.”

Visit [www.rocksolidlove.ca](http://www.rocksolidlove.ca)



### HEATHER GARBUTT, UK

Heather Garbutt is a modern-day empath and coach living in Wiltshire, UK, who is thoroughly enjoying the second stage of her life. “My current relationship is so very different from my earlier ones. My partner and I are both in our 60s and we are both learning to love. We are very much opposites so we live in two homes during the work-week and come together at the weekend! It works perfectly well for us.”

Heather’s life has always been different from the crowd. As a defiant teenager she refused to

follow the usual academic route. Instead, she took up art and art therapy, which led her to mental health and a job in UK’s National Health Service. “I ended up working with many women who had suffered from the effects of childhood sexual abuse and it shifted my view of the world and really made me want to support women even more,” she says.

In 2013, she co-founded the Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre in Old Town, Swindon, which now has 40 therapists on board. Stimulated by the training Heather received in California, she began to develop her career in love and relationship coaching. “Along with Marilyn Williams from the US, we are developing a 10-week programme for couples who want to enrich their relationship or are disappointed in love. I love seeing how people who come in with fog and distress go out with clarity and power.”

A lot of things affect midlife relationships, such as kids leaving home, health changes, losing the lustre in your relationship, retirement and career changes. Heather says, “There has to be a sense of ‘we’, yet it cannot be at

the expense of 'I'. There will always be tensions and differences, so you need to be able to acknowledge those and work with them."

Conscious uncoupling is another aspect of Heather's work. She works with couples who are parting ways or people who have baggage from old, toxic relationships that still affect them in the present day. "If they are getting divorced, we help them save tens of thousands of pounds in lawyers' fees or emotional

committed love. She says it is such a joy to see people come alive and be in a position to choose a partner from a stance of relaxed confidence and clear discernment. Watching women move into the second half of their life with a new partner and zest for living is a magnificent reward, she says.

Heather calls her work 'deep coaching'. "It allows time for the psychotherapeutic process. If there has been trauma, we allow time for the grief and hold the necessary space. We take time to look at where

the blueprints come from, the core beliefs that lead you to the ways of thinking and behaving."

Heather's new podcast series 'Revolutionise Your Love Life' covers all things to do with relationships and self-empowerment including abusive relationships and how

to survive them. "We look at power and control relationships, myth-busting, how to leave safely and find sources of support that will hold you. Even if it may mean that you have to live a double life for a while, where you keep secrets and build your life outside before you make the move." ■

Visit [www.heathergarbutt.com](http://www.heathergarbutt.com).



harm to their kids. The aim is to part sanely and kindly, and to still have a relationship at the end. This leads to cooperation, kindness and respect."

The programme closest to Heather's heart is 'Calling in the One'. In this, she helps women in midlife who have been disappointed in relationships to find true, happy,

# Quest for Freedom

*Social and religious structures systematically deny Indian women their rights and freedom, says activist Kavita Krishnan in her new book*

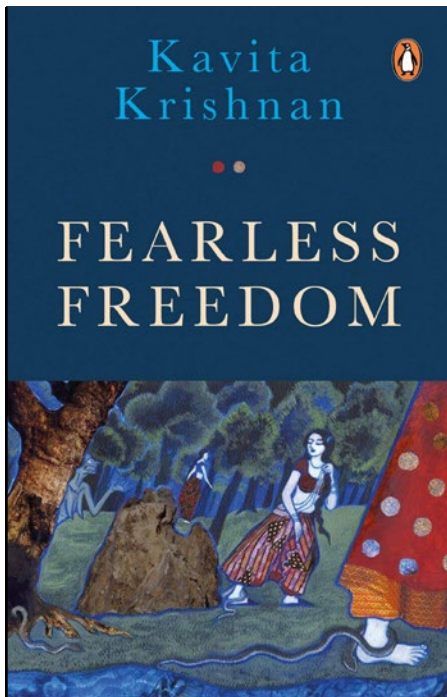
*By Akta Kapoor*

**H**as the dream of freedom been truly achieved by the female population of India? They may be free to vote but are they free to choose a partner, or when or not to have children, and do they have a say in their own education and earnings? Can a woman in India aspire to *bekhauf azaadi* (fearless freedom) – the freedom to roam public

spaces at will, at any time of the day or night, to live the way she wants?

These questions – which are remarkable only because we are still asking them in the 21st century – are tackled by women’s rights activist Kavita Krishnan in her new book *Fearless Freedom* (Penguin Books, ₹299). It looks at the several systemic reasons that deny Indian women their basic human rights, beginning with the fundamental right to autonomy. Giving examples from laws, literature and religious texts, the author points out how social structures ensure that women are confined to the four walls of the home. Once a woman’s freedom to move has been restricted, other freedoms are easy to snatch away.

The patriarchal argument that it is better for women to be ‘safe’ than be ‘free’ is used time and again even in the modern day as an excuse for gender discrimination at all levels. Instead of putting the onus on men to change behaviours, the threat of sexual violence is used to frighten women into submission and confinement within homes. Further, using case studies of recent





brutal ‘honour’ killings, the author demonstrates the role of caste in the denial of female agency – all restrictions on women’s freedom have one subversive goal in mind, she says: to eliminate the possibility of inter-caste couplings and ensure ‘purity’ of bloodline.

She also looks at discrimination in workplaces, and how social patriarchy is perpetuated even in corporate environments.

A large chapter of the book is



Kavita Krishnan

to do with sexism powered by religion, and the role of Hindutva in denying female agency. The author is univocal in her criticism of the BJP-RSS model of governance and indoctrination that normalises gender violence, so much so that even its female proponents internalise their subjugation.

While the book is an eye-opener and makes for essential reading, the author’s over-zealous striking down of anything to do with

religion strikes a discordant note. While one agrees that ancient texts like *Manusmriti* and many Hindu customs are horribly demeaning to women, it is one thing to reject misogyny and another to reject religion itself. It is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Buddhist educator Daisaku Ikeda says, “People do not exist for the sake of religion; religion exists for people, to enable people to become happy.” As thought-leaders and social activists, one must contribute to the evolution of religion instead of perpetuating ancient definitions that no longer serve us today. For instance, the author interprets the word ‘svadharma’ in the Bhagavad Gita as ‘caste-ordained duty’ while I prefer Sri Aurobindo’s definition of it as one’s ‘calling’ or ‘law of action’. Similarly, while I reject Hindutva, I would be wary of rejecting Hinduism – or any religion – itself, for then one closes one’s doors to a vast spiritual resource to understand humanity and oneself.

All said, the author’s feminist intentions are in the right place. She does her job effectively of bringing to the fore the deep and malignant cancers in society that keep women oppressed and deny them that most elusive of freedoms: *bekhauf azaadi*. Awareness is the root of change, and this book serves well as the roadmap marking where the corrections must take place. ■

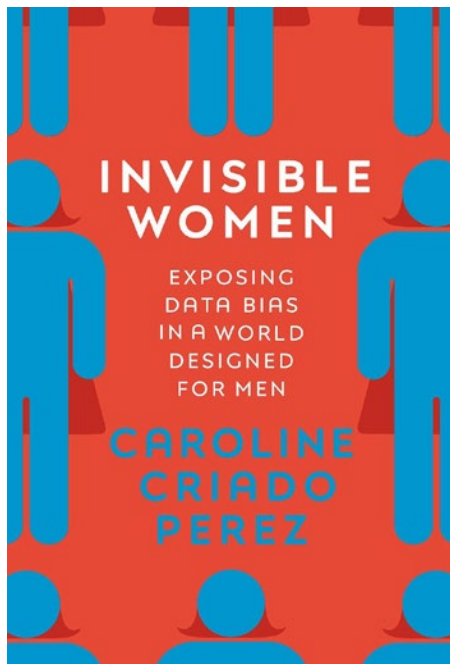
# A MAN'S WORLD

*Caroline Criado Perez's data-supported book explains how women face risks to their careers, lives and health due to systems and designs that see the default human as male*

*By Manu Prasad*

**T**he irony of a man reviewing a book that is about the under-representation of women, in a women's magazine, is not lost on me. But while this is indeed about gender, it is also about mindset.

In the past few years, I have tried to be more conscious of the challenges that women face at the workplace and in their everyday lives, and be more aware of how the world works differently for them in things that men take for granted. Despite my efforts, I continue to be regularly surprised. But why should I have to be conscious in the first place? One would think that when products, services, spaces and so on are being designed, the creators



would keep in mind the needs of a segment which constitutes 50 per cent of the users. If you're a woman, you know the answer. And that's what this book is about.

As the blurb of *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* says, imagine a world where your phone is too large for your hand, where the safety of the vehicle you travel in has not been designed with you in mind, and the medicine you have been prescribed is wrong for you because you weren't adequately represented in trials! In essence, a world in which the default human is male.

Caroline Criado Perez uses data and studies from multiple domains



Caroline Criado Perez

to highlight how women have not been fairly represented, and in many cases to also show how correcting this could lead to a better result not just for women, but for humanity overall. Public transport, urinals (ever wondered why there's always a queue for women while men saunter in and out?), workplace practices, product design, medicine, disaster relief – the pain is everywhere. Some made me say, “Oh, I didn't think of it that way”, many made me grimace, and most are just appalling.

And that is why, I believe, this is a book that men and women should read, for different reasons.

For women, it will probably

serve as an insightful articulation of many things that they have thought about, talked about, or attempted to change. It would give them information on how women around the world have taken them up as challenges and sometimes succeeded in setting things right.

For men, the best way to explain it is with a story from David Foster Wallace's unforgettable speech: Two young fish swimming along meet an older fish swimming the other way, who asks, “Morning, boys. How's the water?” The two young fish swim on, but after a bit, one of them asks, “What the hell is water?” Men, my friends, are the young fish. The invisibility is all around, it manifests itself in many ways, and it is by definition, invisible to us because men built it for other men. Some of it is intentional, and some unconscious because we have never questioned why. We didn't need to because we are privileged.

I think we will see the world differently after reading this book. The challenge for us would be to remain conscious of the inherent bias in our thinking, our behaviour, and the way we design objects and systems. One really doesn't have to be a genius to understand the impact better representation can make, at an individual and societal level. ■

*Manu Prasad is VP Marketing at Scripbox, Bengaluru, and writes on Manuscripts.com.*

# BREAKFAST DELIGHTS

*Turn up the yummy-ness and still keep your breakfast healthy with these four recipes that abound in both nutrition and taste*

*Recipes by Kaveri Jain. Photography by Aadi Jain*



## SPICED HOT CHOCOLATE

### **Ingredients (serves 2):**

350 ml milk  
 50 ml cream  
 100 gms chocolate (chopped)  
 Spice mix: cinnamon + star anise +  
 nutmeg

### **Instructions:**

**1.** Boil the milk for 5-7 minutes with the spice mix.

**2.** Heat the cream and add the chocolate, mix till no lumps are left.

**3.** Add this liquid chocolate to the milk and simmer for another 2-3 minutes.

**4.** Strain and pour into cups.

Optional: Add 30 ml of rum/vodka to the mug and top it up with the hot chocolate. Add mini or large marshmallows as per your liking.



## CHIA SEED PUDDING

### **Ingredients (serves two):**

1.5 cups milk of choice (cow milk, almond milk, oats milk or coconut milk)  
 4 tbsp chia seeds  
 2 tsp honey or stevia  
 Fruits and chocolate for topping

### **Instructions:**

**1.** Divide the three ingredients equally

and pour into two jars.

**2.** Mix each jar well and let it sit for a few minutes; mix again making sure there are no lumps.

**3.** Cover the jar and store in the fridge for 2 – 12 hours.

**4.** Top up with your favourite fruits/ chocolate before eating. Enjoy chilled!



## MUSHROOM AVOCADO AND FETA OMELETTE

### **Ingredients (serves one):**

- ½ ripe avocado
- 1 cup greens (spinach, kale, cress)
- 100 gms sliced mushrooms
- 40 gms feta cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

### **Instructions:**

1. Add half the olive oil to a non-stick pan/skillet and heat over medium heat.
2. Add the mushrooms and cook for around five minutes till they are tender and brown.

3. Remove from pan and keep aside. Wipe the pan clean; add the remaining oil and heat on medium.
4. Whisk the eggs in a bowl. Add salt and pepper and pour the eggs on the heated pan.
5. Cook for a few minutes till the eggs are set (no runny liquid in the middle). Once the bottom starts browning, carefully slide the eggs onto a plate.
6. Layer half the omelette with the sautéed mushroom, greens, cheese and avocado. Fold over the other half, and enjoy hot!

## OPEN SOUR DOUGH SANDWICH

### *Ingredients (serves two):*

A slice of sour dough / any bread  
Tomatoes, sliced  
Onions, sliced  
2 tsp feta cheese  
1 tsp butter  
30 gms Halloumi / cottage cheese  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Micro greens for garnish

### *Instructions:*

1. Toast the slice of your favourite

bread, sour dough or any other.

2. Heat a grill pan, add butter and grill the Halloumi / cottage cheese for a few minutes.

3. Spread the soft feta on the hot toast; top up with sliced tomatoes and onions.

4. Sprinkle salt and pepper. Finally add the grilled cheese.

5. Garnish with some micro greens.

Enjoy! ■



# Cappadocia Calling

*In a world that seeks perfection sits the odd, imperfect  
fairy-tale cave town of Cappadocia in Turkey*

*By Kaveri Jain*





**M**y adventure to Cappadocia, a miracle of nature in the heart of Turkey, began in the airplane itself, flying down from Istanbul to Nevsehir Capadokya airport. With my face stuck to the window, I was like a little child spellbound with the views of the honeycombed hills, fairy chimneys and towering boulders.

Cappadocia, created from a series of volcanic eruptions, is a world

no less than a palace. There are plenty of cave accommodations in Cappadocia for travellers of every budget – from cave hostels to luxury hotels. Don't miss the experience!

A bustling local market lay a short distance away, with all sorts of dried herbs, flowers, pottery, household goods and foodstuff like dried fruit and teas on sale. I bought five varieties of teas and a bag of pistachios from a hazel-eyed girl



L-R: An open-air museum in Cappadocia; souvenirs for sale in the shape of the unusual rock formations

heritage site and a must-visit for any travel enthusiast. My first steps along the pebbled road leading to an enchanting cave hotel were just the beginning of an unimaginable adventure. A 30-room property dating back to the fifth and sixth centuries, a large part of the hotel was actually a Greek mansion from the 19th century. Six of the largest cave houses have been luxuriously renovated here, and mine was

who pulled out a bottle of syrup when I told her I love cooking. She said the syrup was called *pekmez*, its grape molasses made in Cappadocia, and is used to make a chewy dessert similar to the Turkish Delight.

Before it got too hot I decided to visit the Goreme open-air museum. This museum has eight of the best-preserved churches in Cappadocia. My favourite was Karanik Kilise with its beautiful Byzantine frescos.



I stopped for a bite at Old Cappadocia café where I tried the ever popular pottery kebab. *Testi* is an Anatolian specialty made in a clay pot or jug, usually with lamb, beef or chicken and vegetables like carrots, celery, onions, garlic and potatoes. It was a spectacle to watch the blazing hot jug being brought out and cracked right onto my plate. Next up was a Rose Valley hike, where I stood over oceans of rippling red, rose and white rocks watching the sun go down.

The next morning, I was up at 5 am, heading out for a once-in-a-lifetime hot air balloon ride. I fall short of words to describe what I felt as I sailed higher and higher to a height of nearly 6000 feet. The endless vastness of Cappadocia's

breathtaking landscape engulfed my very being. I ended the ride heady with exhilaration.

The same afternoon, I set off on a hike with a couple I'd met during the ride. We started down the narrow canyon walls of Pigeon Valley, and in about two hours reached Uçhisar Castle, a tall volcanic-rock outcrop that is one of Cappadocia's most prominent landmarks. Riddled with tunnels, it was used for centuries by villagers for refuge during enemy attacks. You can also view Mount Erciyes in the distance.

My next stop was the Kaymakli Underground City, an unimaginable habitation that descends eight levels into the earth. The construction of this cave city happened between the seventh and eighth centuries BCE,

A potter's  
wares on  
display



again as a refuge from invaders. Finishing my day with a glass of wine at the Top Deck Restaurant here, watching the sky change hues, was the cherry on the cake.

On my third and final day in Cappadocia (I kicked myself for planning such a short trip – you need four or five days at least!), I set off early to the Pasabag or Monk Valley. Standing amidst the most striking fairy chimneys and mushroom-topped formations in the area was jaw-dropping. The Monk Valley was once home to a community of hermits. In one of the three-headed fairy chimneys, there is a chapel dedicated to St. Simeon with antithetical crosses decorating the entrance. About a kilometre ahead is the Zelve Valley

Open Air Museum, which houses about 15 churches, tunnels, houses, monasteries and mills and is a great example of Byzantine art.

Around the corner is Devrent Valley, but to my surprise there were no large chimneys or churches to be seen. Rather, all I could see were animal-shaped rocks – in the shape of dolphins, snakes and even camels. Strange, small fairy chimneys seemed to form a lunar landscape. It was an enchanting experience, bringing out the child in me.

Lunch at the Organic Cave Kitchen and dinner at the Turkish Ravioli restaurant were both excellent picks for my final day. I can't wait to go back in winter and see this magical land in a new light, dusted with light snow. ■



# COZY IN COORG

*Set in a tranquil little hamlet in southern Karnataka, the Ibnii Coorg is the ideal destination if you're looking for an eco-luxury getaway*

*By Maya Lalchandani*

**T**here's an interesting fact about the people of Coorg in south Karnataka: The Kodavas, an ethnic warrior people who speak the Kodagu language, are the only community in India who are permitted to own firearms without a license. They claim it's because they are very brave and responsible,

but the historical context goes back to the days of the British Raj when the Kodavas were allowed to have firearms in return for their services to the Empire. A loophole in the law allowed this exemption to continue in independent India.

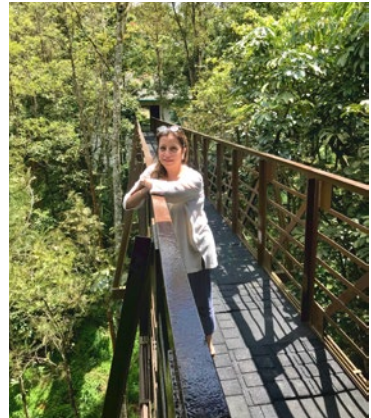
No doubt the Kodavas are a very valorous people, but one really

wonders why anyone would need firearms in a quiet little hamlet in the hills dotted with coffee plantations and harmless animal life. A three to four-hour drive from Mangalore airport, I arrived at the paperless lobby of the Ibnii in Coorg, where I was welcomed with a traditional greeting of chukka coffee with *kadumbuttu* (rice ball with jaggery).

This is a seven-star property, including a cool 125 acres of coffee

private plunge pool, the works.

My morning view was of lakes and mists and the cacophony of the cicadas. I was gently reminded that Ibnii in Kodugu means ‘dew’. Each villa seemed almost a mile away, separated by green forest. There are 22 villas like these and then some wooden cottages along with some premium suites. Catering to a global traveller, all the trappings spell luxury, but the resort has limited



The Ibnii in Coorg is a seven-star eco resort known for its sustainable and energy-efficient luxury

plantation. The air was heavy with the smell of pine and petrichor as I was transported by buggy to my 1200 sq ft villa in the middle of evergreen woodland. It felt like the lines had already blurred, like nature and man were no longer separate. The magic of Ibnii had already enveloped me. The villa, Kopi Luwak, was pure refined luxury, comprising everything one ever needed – including a jacuzzi, a

its carbon footprint. The founders have been careful not to disturb the delicate balance of spaces, and have kept a harmonious balance between architecture and nature.

Most of the meals are served at the multi-cuisine restaurant, The Fig, situated at a level where one can overlook a beautiful water body and a huge expanse of green. The cuisine boasts of the resort's own jams and pickles, even oven-fresh

bread. The greens and vegetables are grown organically here. A vegetarian menu is offered at the Ballale, where the décor represents the spices grown in-house and used by the chefs. One can also opt for the all-barbequed meals at Masi Kande, and try a novel way of barbequing on one's own table.

Early evenings are filled with activities like fishing by the fresh-

Manja, the spa, is named after the medicinal herb turmeric and the therapists entwine tradition and science to create temporary bliss. The most interesting part of the Ibnii resort is the way it supports the eco-system. The resort has a large water catchment system that not only saves huge volumes during the monsoons, it also takes good care of their fauna and flora. A state-of-



Relaxation and being one with nature is what Ibnii is all about, whether outdoors or indoors

water harvesting lake. The resort encourages responsible fishing, so caught fish can be let go again. Painting on canvas is another way of connecting with nature through art. Kaldi Kappee, the picturesque coffee shop, allows you to brew your own cup. Views of a planter's life are also shared. But there's nothing like an actual walk through the plantations, hearing of their natural cycles and grading processes.

the-art water-treatment plant also recycles all used water into fresh water. They also have an advanced waste management system, and interestingly, they fine guests for food thrown away! The amount collected goes to an NGO that feeds orphan children in Madikeri.

It's no wonder this resort is the first in India to bag the prestigious IGBC Platinum Certification for sustainable luxury. ■

# GIRLS' DAY OUT

*iLeap Academy and celebrity wellness consultant Deepa Khanna Rupani announced a new initiative for women with eShe as media partner*



Left: (L-R) Nicolette Bhojwani, Preetika Saluja, Deepa Khanna Rupani, Uma Sangal and Parul Banjara; below: (L-R) Deepa Khanna Rupani, Anita Panda and Kitty Khanna; below left: the event was hosted at True Tramm Trunk, Juhu, Mumbai, by iLeap, a comprehensive after-school curriculum

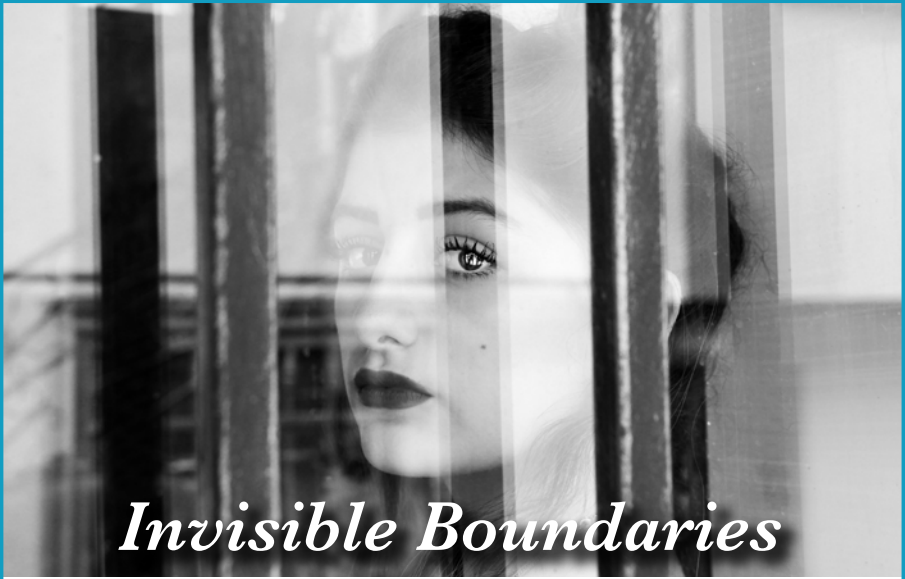




Clockwise from top left: Shweta Rao being awarded a lucky draw hamper by Nicolette Bhojwani, CEO of iLeap Academy; iLeap founder and chief mentor Noopur Kanchan; an Impasto workshop; (L-R) Bhavani Kumar, Ritu Gupta, Deepa Khanna Rupani, Khushbu Gupta and Rhea Kalra







## *Invisible Boundaries*

*A pervading Lakshman Rekha reins in women from affluent families*

*By Aekta Kapoor*

**T**he situation is so common that no one notices it is a problematic one. Over green tea and sugar-free biscuits served on a silver tray, hints of suffocation begin to show. A forced laugh here, a pair of pressed lips there. “He says he earns enough, there is no need for his wife to earn,” says one woman, an MBA and mother of two teenagers, who has so much time on her hands she has begun to sprout seeds of sadness that rise above her blonde highlighted hair like a cloud and follow even the Audi she drives.

The second woman has dark patches under her eyes, and the

dermatologist is being a pig about it. “The doctor says it’s just stress, and refuses to give me anything for it,” the 38-year-old svelte yoga addict mourns. She craves some kind of a career, but her husband thinks she would be neglecting her home duties if she stepped out to work, and besides, there was really no point in her working unless she earned several lakhs a month, at least.

The third woman, a few years older, wiser, a gold medallist in her post-graduate years, advises the others to follow her example. “At the time of my wedding, my in-laws had a condition: they

did not want a working girl. But I wanted to do something of my own. Yes, it took me two decades but look at me now.” She runs classes for children at home twice a week in their large, tastefully decorated basement that also hosts the frequent parties her in-laws like to host.

It could be a scene anywhere in India – in swish gated neighbourhoods in Delhi or Mumbai, or a palatial bungalow in Bhopal or Lucknow. There is an insidious, pervading *Lakshman Rekha* drawn around women in affluent classes, or those on their way up the socio-economic ladder. Its perks flow generously inward – fancy cars, diamonds, international holidays, foreign education for the children, decadent homes – but it allows no step outward.

The job profile is stringent: the candidate must remain silent, subservient to the needs of the family, suppress her own ambitions, be fit and impeccably groomed in appearance, gracious in public, and imperiously efficient in running her army of domestic helpers. Transgression is swiftly dealt with insults, violence or material restrictions, perhaps a reduction in ‘pocket money’ or an additional benefit bestowed on some other candidate, the competitor, in the home.

Not everyone can reject the situation and walk away, like I did. Not everyone wants to. It costs too much, and besides after a while there is no longer any desire for an alternative life and the *Lakshman Rekha* lulls you into a drowsy sense of security. This is a comfort zone. You are safe here, your every need served

### WOMEN @ WORK:

India’s female Labour Force Participation Rate fell to a historic low of 23.3% in 2017-18.

The rate is lowest for Muslim and upper-caste Hindu women.

An increase of just 10 percentage points could add \$770 billion to India’s GDP by 2025.

on a platter. What is the need to struggle, to earn your own way, to lose honour and respect in society just for the sake of personal fulfilment? We must be happy for what we have, God is great.

Even so, once in a while, a tell-tale sign slips through. An angrily wiped tear here, a hug held longer than usual there. Then the walls close in and only a bright lipsticked smile can be seen. ■

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