

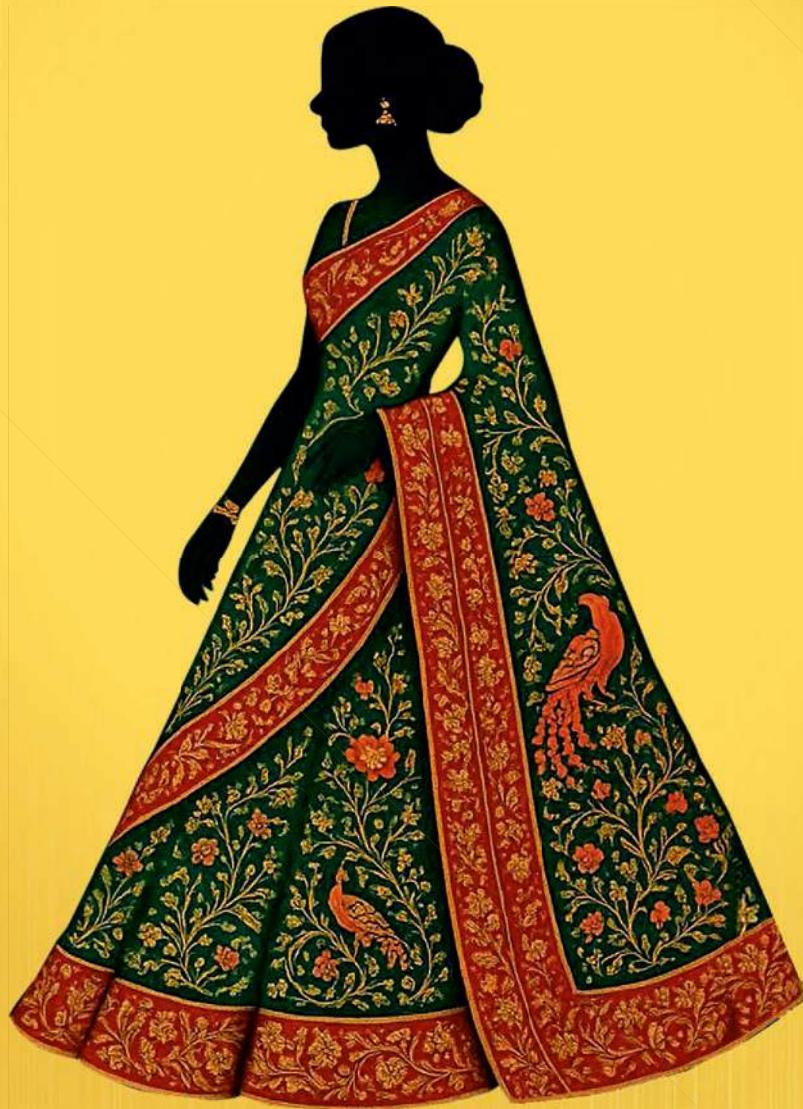


July 2025

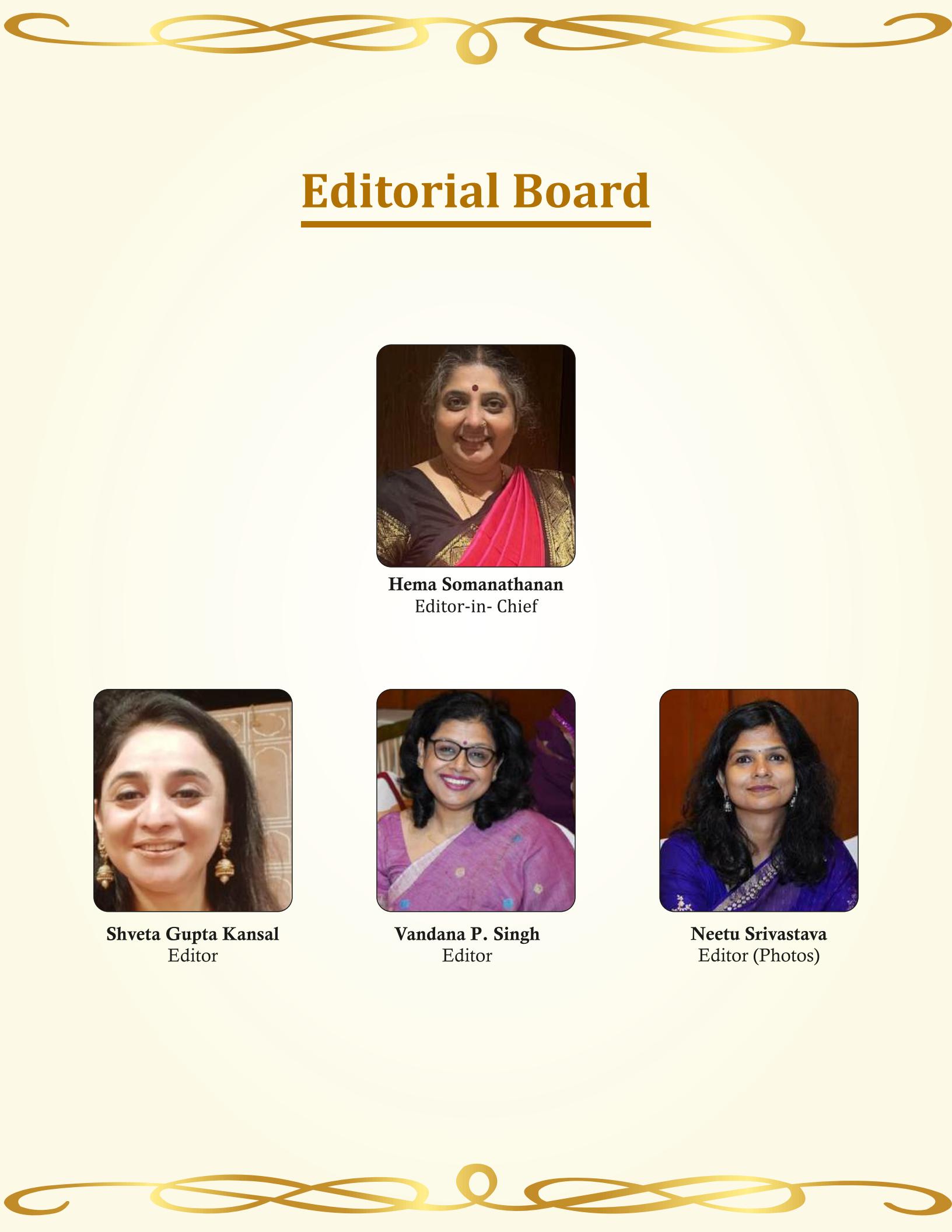
preerna

inspiration to excel

(Embracing Elegance)



ICS-IAS OFFICERS WIVES ASSOCIATION



Editorial Board



Hema Somanathanan
Editor-in- Chief



Shveta Gupta Kansal
Editor



Vandana P. Singh
Editor



Neetu Srivastava
Editor (Photos)



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President's Message



Dear Friends

The year since the last publication of Prerna has been one of continuity and change. On the one hand, there has been continuity in the activities of the association. It has continued to be a source of comradeship and constructive collaboration for the wives of the current and retired officers of the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Civil Service. It has also continued its diverse set of activities to help the community we live in, and particularly for the benefit of those less fortunate than us.

On the other hand, if I may quote Tennyson, “the old order changeth, yielding place to new”. This has also been a year which has witnessed a change in leadership. I had the privilege of taking over as President of the Association. My predecessor, Dr. Pammi Gauba, was the longest serving President with a tenure of five years, during which she accomplished much and took the Association forward. At the time of writing, we are also seeing a change in the other office bearers of the Association and a new set of office bearers are taking charge. I want to thank Dr. Pammi Gauba as well as the other outgoing office bearers (Mrs. Nishi Shrivastava, Mrs. Shibani Mishra and Mrs. Arpita Bharti) for the excellent work that they did over the last few years. I also take this opportunity to wish the new office bearers every success in their endeavours.

The Cadre Representatives are the backbone of our Association. They were a source of strength in their continuous engagement with the members as well as retired members. The Association relies on them for the success of our programmes, and they did not disappoint us. Here too, some of the representatives are leaving and new representatives are joining us.

I wish our members a successful and rewarding year ahead.

With warm regards,
Hema Somanathanan
President



Secretary's Message



It is both an honor and a privilege to contribute to Prerna once again this year. Over the past months, we have achieved several significant milestones, with the consistent and successful organization of our monthly events standing out as a reflection of the collective dedication, passion, and hard work of our members.

Our unwavering commitment to social values has been the driving force behind our initiatives. A highlight of this year was the launch of the Prerna Beauty and Wellness Centre - a proud step forward in our continuous journey toward women's empowerment. I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to our President for her visionary leadership and steadfast support, which have been instrumental in bringing this vision to life.

As my term comes to an end, I reflect with deep satisfaction on my tenure. It has been a fulfilling experience to contribute my efforts toward the growth and success of this organization, and I leave with immense pride in what we have accomplished together. I extend my best wishes to the new team, and trust that we will remain firmly anchored in our mission, with renewed energy and a shared commitment to taking IASOWA to even greater heights.

With warm regards,
Nishi Shrivastava

Executive Committee 2024-25



Hema Somanathanan
(President)



Nishi Shrivastava
(Secretary)



Shibani Mishra
(Treasurer)



Arpita Bharti
(Joint Secretary)

Cadre Representatives



Bandita Sahoo
(AGMUT)



Neetu Srivastava
(AP & Telangana)



Savita Bhutani
(Assam, Meghalaya &
Sikkim)



Parinitta S Kumari
(Bihar & Jharkhand)



Arti Pandey
(Gujarat)



Devika Chauhan
(Himachal Pradesh)



Shveta Gupta Kansal
(J&K -Ladakh)



Nuti Namita Tiwari
(Karnataka)



Ragini Singh
(Kerala)



Sapna Agarwal
(Madhya Pradesh -CGH)



Vandana Agrawal
(Maharashtra)



Vandana P Singh
(Manipur Trip.
Nagaland)



Suman Varma
(Odisha)



Venus Garg
(Punjab)



Neetu Singh
(Rajasthan)



Sanjna Nayar
(Tamil Nadu)



Archana Kumar
(Uttar Pradesh -UKD)



Neeti Pandey
(West Bengal)

Executive Committee 2025-26



Hema Somanathanan
(President)



Shveta Gupta Kansal
(Secretary)



Archana Kumar
(Treasurer)



Ragini Singh
(Joint Secretary)

Cadre Representatives



Ruhi Danish Ashraf
(AGMUT)



Neetu Srivastava
(AP & Telangana)



Priyam Krishna
(Assam, Meghalaya &
Sikkim)



Parinitta S Kumari
(Bihar & Jharkhand)



Arti Pandey
(Gujarat)



Charu Singh
(Himachal Pradesh)



Namami Barua
(J&K -Ladakh)



Ritu Yadav
(Karnataka)



Ragini Singh
(Kerala)



Sapna Agarwal
(Madhya Pradesh -CGH)



Pooja Mital
(Maharashtra)



Vandana P Singh
(Manipur Trip.
Nagaland)



Garvita
Odisha



Jyoti Singh
(Punjab)



Neetu Singh
(Rajasthan)



Rajshree Paatil
(Tamil Nadu)



Romi
(Uttar Pradesh)



Neeti Pandey
(West Bengal)



IASOWA SOCIAL INITIATIVES

IASOWA Social Initiatives



पचास वर्षों से अधिक के अपने सफर में, इंडियन एडमिनिस्ट्रेटिव सर्विस ऑफिसर्स (Indian Administrative service officers Association (IASOWA) ने दिल्ली में सामुदायिक सेवा एवं नारी नेतृत्व की भावना को जीवंत कर रखा है। जो कभी एक सीमित समूह के IAS अधिकारियों की पत्नियों का संगठित प्रयास था, आज वह “प्रेरणा” प्रेरणा स्कूल, प्रेरणा सिलाई केंद्र, प्रेरणा कंप्यूटर केंद्र और नव-स्थापित प्रेरणा ब्यूटी एवं वेलनेस सेंटर के माध्यम से वंचित महिलाओं व बच्चों के लिए नए अवसरों के द्वारा खोल रहा है।

प्रेरणा स्कूल केवल एक शैक्षणिक संस्था नहीं है, यहाँ बच्चों को गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा के साथ-साथ पौष्टिक मध्याह भोजन,



नियमित स्वास्थ्य जांच और जीवन-कौशल प्रशिक्षण भी मिलता है। समर्पित शिक्षक और IASOWA स्वयंसेवक प्रत्येक बच्चे की प्रतिभा को निखारते हैं व उनमें नैतिक मूल्यों एवं जिज्ञासा का संवर्धन करते हैं। वर्ष भर गणतंत्र दिवस, दिवाली-क्रिसमस जैसे उत्सव और वार्षिक खेल दिवस जैसी रंग-बिरंगी गतिविधियाँ आयोजित होती हैं, जहाँ IASOWA की अध्यक्षता उपहार व पुरस्कार वितरित कर बच्चों को आत्मविश्वास से भर देती हैं।

प्रेरणा सिलाई केंद्र (आर.के. पुरम) में आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर वर्ग की युवतियाँ छह माह के प्रशिक्षण के दौरान कुशल प्रशिक्षकों के मार्गदर्शन में तकिया कवर, मेज रनर और अन्य



हस्तशिल्प बनाना सीखती हैं। पाठ्यक्रम पूर्ण होने पर IASOWA अध्यक्ष द्वारा प्रमाण-पत्र प्रदान किए जाते हैं, और सर्वश्रेष्ठ प्रतिभागी को सिलाई मशीन भेंट की जाती है, जो उनकी आत्मनिर्भरता का पहला कदम होती है। इनके बनाए उत्पाद IASOWA आयोजनों में बिक्री के लिए रखे जाते हैं, जिससे स्वरोजगार को बढ़ावा मिलता है।

प्रेरणा कंप्यूटर केंद्र में 18 कंप्यूटर वर्कस्टेशन और एक NIIT-प्रशिक्षित प्रशिक्षक विद्यार्थियों को बेसिक कंप्यूटर





साक्षरता से लेकर Tally जैसे व्यावसायिक सॉफ्टवेयर में दक्ष बनाते हैं। पाठ्यक्रम के अंत में आयोजित परीक्षाओं में सफल होने पर प्रमाण-पत्र प्रदान किए जाते हैं। उत्कृष्ट प्रदर्शन करने वाले छात्र को IASOWA अध्यक्ष द्वारा एक व्यक्तिगत कंप्यूटर भेंट कर उसकी मेहनत की सराहना की जाती है।



अगस्त 2024 में महिलाओं के सशक्तिकरण के हमारे संकल्प को आगे बढ़ाते हुए, IASOWA ने प्रेरणा बूटी एवं वेलनेस सेंटर की शुरुआत

की। यहाँ सौंदर्य, त्वचा-देखभाल और वेलनेस थेरेपी के द्वारा वसाई के प्रशिक्षण से महिलाएं न केवल नए कौशल सीखती हैं, बल्कि आत्मविश्वास और उद्यमशीलता भी प्राप्त करती हैं—ताकि वे गृह-आधारित सैलून शुरू कर सकें या ब्यूटी इंडस्ट्री में करियर बना सकें।

हमारी प्रमुख “प्रेरणा” उपक्रमों के साथ-साथ, IASOWA



वर्ष भर विभिन्न कल्याणकारी गतिविधियों में सक्रिय रूप से योगदान देती रहती है। शैक्षिक छात्रवृत्ति, स्वास्थ्य शिविर, स्थानीय एनजीओ के साथ सहयोग या आवश्यक सामग्रियों



का वितरणकृजहाँ भी सहायताकर्ता की जरूरत होती है, हमारे सदस्य मदद पहुंचाते हैं। हमें अपने समर्पित स्वयंसेवकों और दाताओं का हृदय से आभार है, जिनकी उदारता हमारे हर कदम को प्रेरणा देती है।



हम सभी मिलकर आशा और संकल्प के साथ आगे बढ़ते हैं—एक ऐसे समावेशी दिल्ली की ओर, जहाँ हर बच्चा सीख सके, हर महिला कमाई कर सके, और हर समुदाय प्रगति कर सके।

अर्पिता अग्रवाल भारती
संयुक्त सचिव (IASOWA)



Our Volunteers



Usha Srinivasan
(Prerna School)



Gita Sarup Mehta
(Prerna School)



Sneh Prakash
(Prerna School)



Vandana P Singh
(Prerna School)



Neetu Srivastava
(Prerna School)



Devika Chauhan
(Prerna School)



Venus Garg
(Prerna School)



Shveta Gupta Kansal
(Prerna Beauty & Wellness Centre)



Aparna Bansal
(Prerna Stitching Centre)



Shameela Malhotra
(Prerna Stitching Centre)



Archana Kumar
(Prerna Computer Centre)



Ragini Singh
(Prerna Stitching Centre)



IASOWA DIARY OF EVENTS



Diary of Events



As I look back at this exciting tenure, being a part of the Executive Committee tirelessly committed to serve IASOWA makes me feel proud. Their precious presence made me transform into a happy, self-assured individual. We overcame many hurdles to provide well-organised, purpose-driven programs, and for that I am immensely grateful to Hema Somanathan Madam, our President, Nishi Shrivastava, our Secretary, Arpita Bharti, our Joint Secretary, Cadre Representatives, volunteers, and all members. It has not been easy to ideate interesting events for our members, who are some of the most intelligent, talented, and accomplished women known to me. Your support and affection have enabled us to strive towards our aims, to create a space to explore and experience our plethora of interests.

Jubilant July

Commencing our new session, the first event was a soaring success, with the launching of the Prerna Magazine and displaying the IASOWA website. This event was graced by the legendary artiste, Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee, Smt. Rama Vaidynathan, along with her troupe, who performed a musical drama based on the theme of Ardhanarishwara. The artists enthralled the audience with a soulful showcase of Bharatanatyam dance. All our members were dressed according to our theme of vibrant purple. The high tea began with our yearly ritual - the

Head Chef of Hotel Ashoka demonstrating his signature dish for our members.

Captivating Krishna Leela - August

IASOWA organised a performance of the world-famous annual Krishna Leela of the Shri Ram Bhartiya Kala Kendra. It is the enactment of the life of Radha and Krishna in Vrindavan, and Krishna's role in the Mahabharata. The play takes place around the festival of Janmashtami. First begun at the centre in 1957, the play was helmed by talented directors and choreographers, resulting in the marriage of dance and storytelling making it a true musical extravaganza. The performance captivated the audience, who were in awe of enactment of the life of Krishna. This performance proved to be the best pre-Janmashtami celebration for the IASOWA family.

Fabulous Folk - September

IASOWA is a beautiful amalgamation of all cultures of India. In an attempt to celebrate the timeless cultural diversity of our nation, IASOWA members performed on the theme – Folk Dances With A Twist. The performers left the spectators spellbound with their graceful yet powerful moves of Punjabi, Rajasthani, Marathi, Bihari, Bengali, Assamese,

The special attraction of the event was the sweet performance of our Prerna School children, who spread happiness and childlike innocence in the event.

Delectable Dining - October

The much-awaited annual dinner of IASOWA was organised in the month of October. Hosted by IASOWA, in the sprawling lawns of the residence of Hon'ble Cabinet Secretary, Dr. T.V. Somanathan and President IASOWA, Mrs. Hema Somanathan. This year, the theme of the dinner was based on the unparalleled cultural heritage of Uttar Pradesh. The competent IASOWA team was entrusted with this mega responsibility, who worked with perfection in all spheres. From decorations to stage and stalls, the cultural performances were a treat while the menu had delectable delicacies from the host state. The guests enjoyed the hospitable ambience in the company of their spouses and friends. Our members looked ravishing in Banarasi sarees.

Chalchitra Talkies - November

An exclusive screening of the latest movie Bhool Bhulaiyaa for our prestigious member-audience at Siri Fort Auditorium. The film is the third installment of this franchise, with new characters, a suspenseful storyline, and shocking revelations. The movie blends horror, drama, and comedy to entertain audiences in a fresh way. The film had beautiful music, vibrant costumes, grand setting and nuanced performances by actors. The audience enjoyed this spectacular experience, making new memories with each other.

Cheerful Carnival - December

IASOWA organised a carnival to provide a platform for women and small entrepreneurs from various states of India. The carnival was organised on 21th December 2024 in PSOI ground, Vinay Marg. The carnival had 100 stalls offering a variety of products, food court and environment friendly food products. The stalls showcased beautiful sarees and dresses from

renowned state emporiums and designers, wooden and brass artefacts, resin art, silver and oxidised jewellery. Guests enjoyed delicious food from different states of India. The cultural extravaganza was a delight to behold. The CRPF band with their melodious tunes, a Raas Leela, Manganiyaars from Rajasthan among other superlative performances.

Traversing Travancore House - January

IASOWA organised a heritage walk to the historic Travancore House, New Delhi. Constructed in the 1930s as the Maharaja of Travancore's city home, it boasts a central veranda, exquisite Corinthian columns, and a unique butterfly-shaped neo classical design.

The building was acquired by the Kerala government after India's independence, and the New Delhi Municipal Council granted it official heritage status. Travancore House has transformed into a thriving cultural complex in recent years. Today, it has several art galleries, seminar rooms, a digital library, a restaurant, a café, and a contemporary amphitheatre that holds exhibitions and light and sound performances. Our members had a wonderful visit, filled with fun and frolic.

Lavish Lunch - February

IASOWA's annual lunch in February was an extravagant and vibrant affair with Maharashtra as the host cadre. It was a quaint sight to see the grandeur of Paithani sarees, Warli paintings and Marathi cuisine. Another major attraction was a showcase of Maharashtra handloom stalls with Paithani sarees, hand painted jewellery and artefacts. The pleasure of watching outstanding performances was simply exquisite. Scrumptious and authentic Marathi meal was relished by our esteemed members along with their spouses.

Hearty High Tea - March

IASOWA organised a high tea especially for the wives of retired officers and retired lady officers as a tribute to our alluring, elegant and stylish mavens. The gorgeous women were dressed in retro-themed outfits, while the EC members looked ravishing in orange. They also enjoyed fun-filled games and delicious snacks. The ladies were presented with a handmade potli, crafted by the children of Prerna Stitching Centre as gifts. This added to the warmth and significance of the occasion.

Soulful Sufi Sama - March

IASOWA hosted a soulful, spiritual Sufi night by inviting the legendary Nizami Bandhu. Nizami Bandhu are a legendary Qawwali group known for their soulful Sufi music. They belong to the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi and have been performing for over 700 years, carrying forward the legacy of classical Qawwali, tracing their lineage from Hazrat Amir Khusau himself. The group is led by Ustad Chand Nizami, along with his nephews Shadab and Sohrab Nizami. They are known for their powerful voices, traditional style, and deep devotion. Held in the auspicious month of Ramadan, the performance touched the heart and soul of each listener. Famous compositions like Chaap Tilak, Rashq-e-Qamar and Kun Faya Kun left the audience speechless. The highlight of the event was the gifting of the Bhagavat Gita by the Nizami Brothers to the Hon'ble cabinet Secretary, Dr. TV Somanathan.

Holistic Health Talk - April

A happy and meaningful life is built on good health, which affects all facets of our existence, including our mental and emotional states as well as our physical vitality. One of the most

important yet commonly overlooked organ of our body is the skin. To emphasise the importance of skincare, IASOWA invited renowned dermatologist Dr. Deepali Bharadwaj for the annual health talk. Dr. Bhardwaj emphasized the importance of a holistic skincare routine—covering both external care and healthy daily habits. Dr. Bhardwaj highlighted that skincare isn't just about beauty—it's about health. A personalised skincare routine combined with hydration, diet, sun safety, and good daily habits helps maintain strong, vibrant skin, which, in her words, is “our visiting card to the world.” All our members received complimentary consultation coupons with Dr. Bharadwaj and some lucky winners received skincare goodies from her skincare brand. The talk was extremely informative and helped the audience debunk myths and get clarity about skincare.

As I conclude this report, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the executive committee, fellow office bearers, and all members for their unwavering support and cooperation throughout the year. It has been an honour to serve as the Treasurer of this esteemed organisation. Together, we have raised the bar of IASOWA by ensuring the responsible use of our resources to further our shared goals. Looking ahead, I am confident that the next session of IASOWA will surpass all past standards and do more

Shibani Mishra



IASOWA Invites its Members for
The Grand Opening Session
on
3rd July 2024
Wednesday

Release of Prerna Magazine
Prerna Stall
Dance Troupe (Ganesa Natyalaya)
Recipe by Ashoka Chef
High Tea

4 PM

Ashoka Hotel, 3rd Floor, Banquet Hall

Dress your best

Team IASOWA

President: Dr. Pammi Gauba

Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava

Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti



The Commencement



The Commencement





The Commencement





IASOWA invites its members for a Dance Drama

“KRISHNA”

Presented by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra



22nd August 2024 , Thursday

6.30 PM - 9 PM

(2 Companions are allowed)

📍 Kamani Auditorium

Copernicus Marg, New Delhi

Welcome the festive season in your Lehariyas and Bandhanis

..... Team IASOWA

President: Dr. Pammi Gauba

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava

Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti





SHRI KRISHNA LEELA







IASOWA cordially invites its members to a spectacular dance extravaganza, featuring our incredibly talented fraternity members!

Get ready to be dazzled!

Join us for an unforgettable evening as we bid farewell to our guest of honour

Dr. Pammi Gauba

and welcome IASOWA President

Mrs Hema Somanathan

Date : 25th September 2024

Day : Wednesday

Time : 4 pm

**Venue : CSOI Auditorium
Chanakyapuri**



**Adorn yourself
in your most stunning
attire**

Team IASOWA

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava

Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti

FOLK DANCE DAZZLE





FOLK DANCE DAZZLE



FOLK DANCE DAZZLE





FOLK DANCE DAZZLE



FOLK DANCE DAZZLE





IASOWA INVITES YOU TO

ANNUAL DIWALI DINNER

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2024

AT 7:45 PM

CABINET SECRETARY'S RESIDENCE
12 MOTHER TERESA CRESCENT, NEW DELHI

HIGHLIGHTS:

UP Dance Troupe

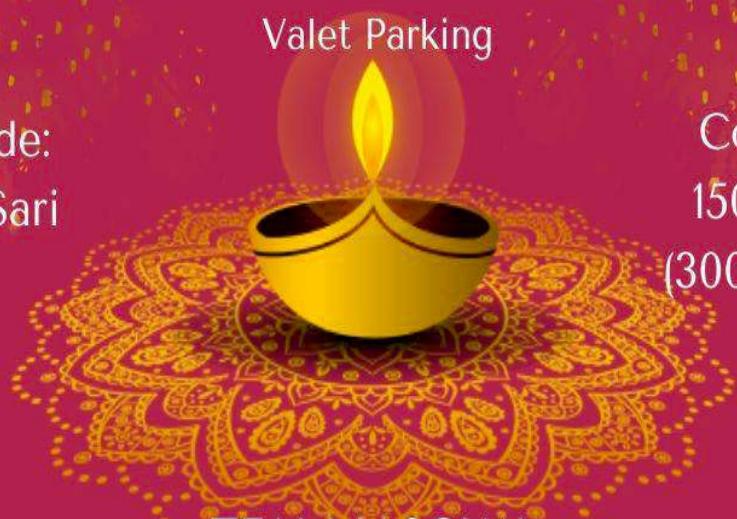
Akanksha Stall

Games

Valet Parking

Dress code:
Banarsi Sari

Contribution:
1500 per head
(3000 per couple)



TEAM IASOWA

President: Hema Somanathan
Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava
Joint Secretary: Arpita Bharti

❖ ☆ DIWALI DINNER ☆ ❖





DIWALI DINNER





DIWALI DINNER





IASOWA INVITES ITS MEMBERS FOR THE SCREENING OF THE MOVIE

Bhool Bhulaiya 3



IASOWA membership
is still open @ 3500 rupees.
counter open from 2.30 PM

Tuesday, November 19th, 2024 | 3PM-6PM (10 Min Tea Break)



AUDI 2, SIRI FORT COMPLEX

One companion (+12 Yrs.) Allowed
(Eatables and drinks not allowed inside)



Team IASOWA

President: Hema Somanathan

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava

Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti

Dress code - Smart casual



MOVIE MANIC





MOVIE MANIC





IASOWA invites you with family & friends to

IASOWA CARNIVAL

Saturday, 21st December 2024

10AM-8PM

Dance
show



Free
Entry



ATTRACTI0NS

- Shopping extravaganza
- Cultural Bonanza
- Culinary Delicacies
- Exciting Games & Prizes

Prizes

Live
Music

Palika Services Officers Institute Chanakyapuri

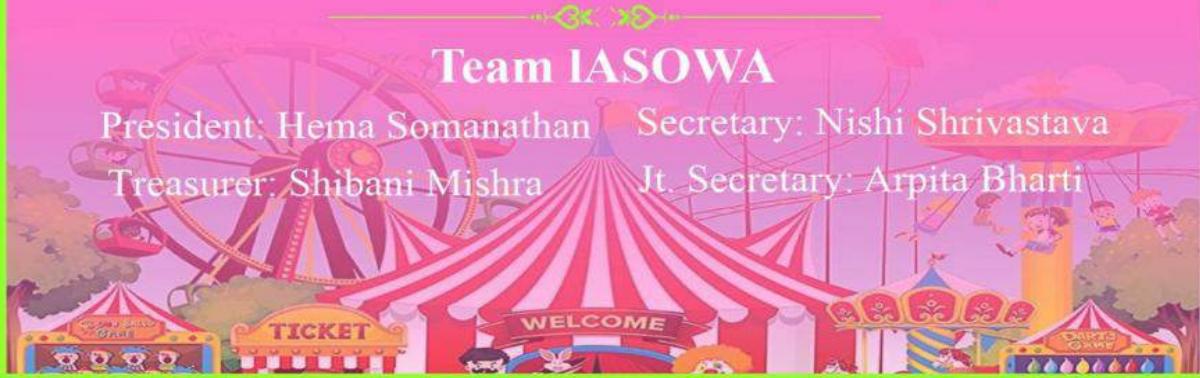
Team IASOWA

President: Hema Somanathan

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava

Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti





Carnival Circuit ☆

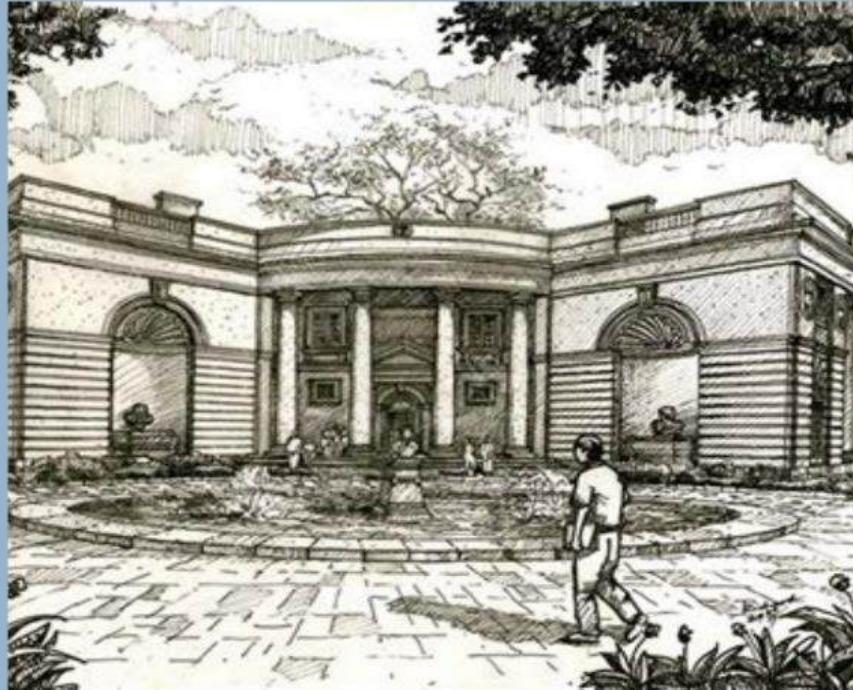


Carnival Circuit





IASOWA invites its members for a 'Heritage Walk'



ENGAGING GAMES

DELICIOUS SNACKS

WARM SUNSHINE

Details:

Wednesday,
22nd January, 2025
Time: 12 Noon



Venue:

Travancore Palace,
Kasturba Gandhi Marg,
New Delhi

President: Hema Somanathan
Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

**TEAM
IASOWA**

Secretary: Nishi Shrivatsava
Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti

Dress Code: Saree/Suit and comfortable footwear





Treasure Trove Travancore House





TASOWA

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE
TO

**THE
ANNUAL LUNCH
16TH FEBRUARY, 2025**

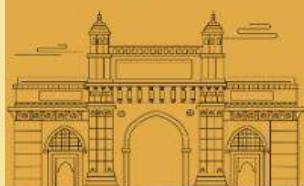
AT

CABINET SECRETARY'S RESIDENCE,
12, MOTHER TERESA CRESCENT

TIME: 12: 30 PM

THEME: MAHARASHTRA

CONTRIBUTION
PER HEAD RS.
1,300
COUPLE RS.
2,600



Dress Code:

Paithani Sarees

PRESIDENT: HEMA SOMANATHAN
TREASURER: SHIBANI MISHRA

**TEAM
TASOWA**

SECRETARY: NISHI SHRIVATSAVA
JT. SECRETARY: ARPITA BHARTI



Luminous Luncheon



Luminous Luncheon





Luminous Luncheon





IASOWA HIGH TEA

FOR OUR BELOVED SENIORS

Retired lady officers and retired officers' wives



WEDNESDAY, 5TH MARCH, 2025

TIME : 3:30 P. M.

CABINET SECRETARY'S RESIDENCE

12, MOTHER TERESA CRESCENT

ATTIRE : RETRO



President: Hema Somanathan

Secretary: Nishi Shrivastava

Treasurer: Shibani Mishra

Jt. Secretary: Arpita Bharti





Vintage Vivacity



Vintage Vivacity

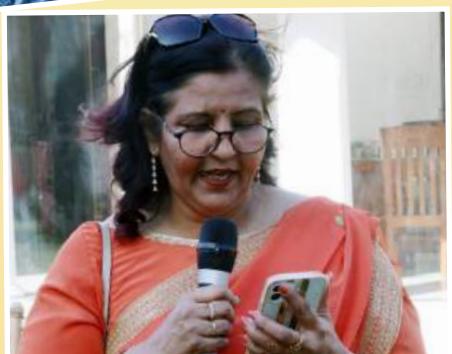




Vintage Vivacity



Vintage Vivacity





INVITING ALL IASOWA MEMBERS
FOR A

Sufi Mehfil

Nizami Brothers

AUDITORIUM, KAUSHAL BHAVAN,
NEW MOTI BAGH

MARCH 26TH, 4 PM

DRESS CODE: ELEGANT FORMAL

ONE COMPANION ALLOWED

PRESIDENT: HEMA SOMANATHAN
SECRETARY: NJSHI SHRIVASTAVA

TREASURER: SHIBANI MISHRA
JT. SECRETARY: ARPITA BHARTI



Sufi Songs





Sufi Songs



Sufi Songs





IASOWA invites its members for a
HEALTH TALK

Glow with confidence, embrace your radiance



Dr. DEEPALI BHARDWAJ

Senior Consultant-Dermatology
(Max. Super Speciality Hospital, Saket)

30th April 2025
(Wednesday)
3:30 PM



Tamil Nadu House
Chanakyapuri

Let your attire bloom like poetry in petals

Dress Code :Floral

One companion allowed

Team IASOWA

President : Mrs. Hema Somanathan

Treasurer: Mrs. Shibani Mishra

Secretary : Mrs. Nishi Shrivastava

Jt. Secretary : Mrs. Arpita Bharti

Derma Discussion





❖ ★ Derma Discussion ★ ❖





THE ELEGANTS



IASOWA (IAS Officers Wives Association) : OUR PRIDE

Feeling of Togetherness, Belongingness, Friendship,
Camaraderie, Celebrations



THE BEGINNING:

Smt. Kalyanikkutty Amma, the great grand lady of our fraternity—our inspiration and pride

An erudite scholar, widely read (very fond of books), she got married to Shri. Gopala Menon,



*Shri. Gopala Menon and Smt.
Kalyanikkutty Amma*

ICS (1942 batch) in 1944. Like all bureaucrats, they had numerous transfers and postings and she cherishes the memories when Mr. Menon was posted as Collector, Dindivanam and later In Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. They moved to Delhi in 1954. She shared her exciting experience of doing a course in Sanskrit at Harvard University, during Mr. Menon's stint at Harvard in 1966-67. Back in India, he was posted as Chief secretary, Kerala in 1967.

That is the time she felt that officers met each other in office meetings and parties, whereas their spouses hardly knew each other. So she started the IAS Officers Wives Association in Kerala in 1967.

They came back to Delhi when Mr. Menon was posted in the ministry of personnel and later in the cabinet secretariat. Retired in 1976 and settled down in Delhi, Smt. Kalyanikkutty Amma lived in Delhi with her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.



*Smt. Kalyanikkutty Amma with
her grand daughter*

We were fortunate to have met her and her family. As we walked into her house, we saw the walls lined with black and white and sepia photographs and paintings, it had an old world charm. She walked into the room with a warm smile and grace. She had a special message for all of us :

"Dear members of IASOWA, I am delighted in speaking to you today. We started IASOWA in

Kerala in 1967. I am happy that IASOWA is doing good work, bringing together all of us. Wishing you all the best in all your future endeavours."

We express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for her pioneering work and inspiration.

REMINISCENCES

For me, personally, since the time as a girl just out of teens (moving from Delhi to Kerala)-joined the fraternity and been there for over five decades.



*Celebrating ma'am's hundredth birthday,
with homemade cake and tea in her
favourite tea serviette*

It was the year 1969, Trivandrum: The first IASOWA meeting that I attended: I walked into the house very hesitantly with trepidation and I heard the most warm welcoming words" Varu kutty" (come in child) from the hostess who introduced me to the ladies (attired in beautiful sarees and Kasavu Mundu neriyal) already present in the room for the meeting, "This is Usha Srinivasan, our new member" - welcomed with applause and warm smiles, no formal introduction of members, but informal chats in English (with sprinkling of a few Malayalam words) - made me feel so much at ease. We used to have our monthly meetings in our homes, had

lots of fun, games and also enjoyed the delectable spread of home-made (made by members) snacks. It was like being a part of a large family!

Wow, This is IASOWA!

BEGINNING IN DELHI

THE YEAR 1968 saw the beginning of IASOWA in Delhi, under the Presidentship of



*Veena Kumar and Usha Srinivasan with
Smt. Kalyanikkutty Amma*

Smt. Sushila Joshi and other stalwarts, Smt. Chandra Govind Narain (Vice president), Smt. Janaki Ramachandran(secretary) and Smt. Krishna Satish Chandra (treasurer), who laid the foundation and paved the way for what and where we are today.

Since its inception in Delhi, IASOWA chapters have been started in other states and union territories.

For some of us, moving to Delhi from our home cadre or state has been a challenge despite our capabilities of adapting to the transfers and



Smt. Mridula (one of our Prerna students, started with the stitching course, on completion was inspired to join the computer course and after completing the course, plans to enrol in the beautician course also) receiving her certificate from Our Chairperson, Smt. Hema Somanathan

postings. IASOWA ,Delhi provides that comfortable space for us by playing a great role in helping in smoothening out the transitional issues to a large extent.

The monthly meetings brings us all to meet, chat, enjoy cultural programmes, thought provoking presentations, sharing and showcasing of expertise and talent of our members and enjoy the delectable cuisine of various states.

In the pre computer, email, smartphones, Whatsapp times, we sent the invites through post cards and invited our members over telephones(landlines) and took special care to

make reminder calls to our seniors, retired officers' spouses. To be part of the committee was a privilege, pleasure and responsibility. I am sure all of us have fond memories...

Since its inception, over the years, it has evolved and it has become a forum for not just coming together, but also work towards empowerment of underprivileged women

by providing training and opportunities and also in the field of educational assistance for children through our social outreach programmes:

Prerna Stitching course, computer course and Beautician course and the Prerna school.

Now with the advent of smart phones and tablets and social media platforms of face book, whatsapp, Instagram , chat GPT, AI and also move towards skill development, entrepreneurial start ups etc., we from IASOWA are rethinking and redesigning our approaches and programmes with the changing times.

*Usha Srinivasan
Kerala*

Food Art



A Michelin list of the best restaurants in a magazine threw up an unexpected surprise and brought back a warm memory- that of an exclusive meal prepared by a chef, whose



signature restaurant figures, yet again, in the hallowed list!

Every culture celebrates its food with enthusiasm and vigor. Come to think of it, food is culture. My work allows me to travel occasionally, sometimes overseas. I sometimes also get the opportunity to take out a little time from my work engagements and sample what the host state or country has to offer. My only (some might say, huge) limitation is that I am a 'pure vegetarian', which limits my

sampling to a large extent. Even so, I have succeeded in accumulating a treasure trove of memories, both for my taste buds, and for my affable soul.

One such sweet memory is that of a trip to France a few years ago. Every meal offered clearly showed the effort gone into serving a balance of tastes to the not-so-adventurous Indians. After all, cooked and presented the way the French do it, the humble baingan assumes the epicurean stature of the Ratatouille!

The icing on the macaroon was a brief visit to the city of Lyon. Settled around the confluence of the Rivers Rhone and Saone, the city, historically an important centre for finance and trade, is



dotted with Roman architecture. Overlooking the city is the Notre-Dame de Fourvière basilica; standing tall, is the Tour métallique de Fourvière, a smaller replica of its famous Parisian cousin,

the Eiffel Tower; and the Fourvière, along with portions of the Presqu'île, and La Croix-Rousse, have since been designated as UNESCO World



Heritage sites.

Our sojourn in Lyon was made even more memorable with our gracious hosts having treated us to a dinner, made and presented beautifully, by a celebrated chef - Christian Tetedoie. While his signature dishes are something to do with lobsters and heads of calves, I was happy with the asparagus and mushroom creation he artfully presented as our entrée. The restaurant itself was perched on the Fourvière hill, and provided a magnificent view of the city of Lyon at night. The chef's fame was such that the 'gastronomique' restaurant itself was named 'Tetedoie'. The greatest indulgence of the evening for us was the chef himself, who came and sat with us and chatted. He confessed that he was a little depressed because he had lost his mentor and guide, the famous chef, Paul. We chatted amicably, mostly around Indian spices, and his experimentations with food.

The next day, as I settled down in my seat on our

train back to Paris, I courteously nodded at my neighbour. He was a distinguished gentleman, with greying hair, dressed in a flamboyant grey suit, which, even to my untrained eye, seemed to be hand sewn, and of the highest quality. His leather-trimmed fedora, resting casually on his knee, and his checkered green scarf seemed to have been homed, recently until then, in a high end store on the Champs-Élysées. As the train sped smoothly towards Paris, we struck up a conversation. He was in Lyon, he told me, to attend the funeral of the celebrity chef, Paul Bucose. Ah! Tetedoie's 'Paul', I realised. Are you in the food business yourself, I asked. No, he replied, a little taken aback. He, it turned out, was a businessman, having travelled to Lyon to pay obeisance to an artist par excellence, like thousands of other fans.

My neighbour pointed to the colourful pin he was sporting on his lapel. The pin had the figure of a chef, the name, Paul Bucose, and the French



colours on a banner in the backdrop. Intrigued, I asked him if Bucose could be the same person who Tetedoie was alluding to. Of course, he said, the whole nation is in mourning. The whole



country was mourning the passing away of a chef? He then handed me a small booklet. It was the schedule of the funeral service of Paul Bucose, with an obituary published by the UNESCO, with tributes from heads of states, celebrities, and chefs from all over the world. Bucose remained the most decorated chef of the country, revered by master chefs and patrons, and lovingly called the Pope of French Cuisine. The restaurant where he exhibited his art, and the culinary institute founded by him remain pilgrimage places for lovers of food from all over the world.

I left the country with a deep appreciation for a culture where food, and its creators are accorded the same reverence and appreciation as given to those in the performing and visual arts. Intangible heritage - to be celebrated, revered, mastercraft replicated with due credit, not plagiarised, and cherished for generations.

Pallavi Jain Govil
Madhya Pradesh

Mathura – Tales and Tailcoats



Mathura is an old and a large cantonment, with brigades, a corps and divisions. Since the offices of the district administration are technically within the precincts of the cantonment, a courteous engagement with the army has been a long-standing tradition. However, the civil and the army administration move along in polite parallels, careful not to step on each other's toes. Each is also extremely poorly informed of the other, which became clear when my husband got transferred to Mathura many decades ago.

Our arrival in Mathura in the summer of 90, also included a round of courtesy calls to the august seniors of the armed forces with promises of meeting more informally. Caught up in the whirl of daily work, it was October before Rajive could accept a formal invitation to the Corp Raising Day.

October or rather 'Kartik' is a lovely month in Mathura, after the monsoons have receded and the evenings are drenched with the cool breezes of Braj. Armed with sufficient information on the battle victories of the illustrious Corp, and accompanied by the newly arrived Superintendent of Police, we arrived at the venue. The venue was a large marquee, suspiciously looking like a series of giant parachutes strung together. Beneath it, numerous long tables were laid out on which crystal gleamed, cutlery glinted, uniforms were stiff with starch and shoes were burnished to perfection. My astonished face reflected perfectly in the shiny shoes of the young staff officer who escorted us to the head table.

Anticipating some of the spit shine of the military, I had ensured that the better half had donned his stiffest and starchiest shirt that could sit by itself. Our good friend, the newly transferred SP had been sufficiently primed of the event and had outdone himself by stringing all the well-earned medals on his chest. We were received warmly by the General and his equally gracious spouse and sat at the table among a sea of white heads who had earned their place through 30 years of well fought and rigorous service to the nation. In contrast we had been married only a couple of years, and this was my first exposure to the district life.

One of the peculiar situations in the district is the presence of young District Magistrates and their spouses, who are expected to wear the mantle of older people and appear wiser than their years. While the young officers and their pretty spouses jived on the adjacent dance floor, we struck to the conversation at the table, with stories of hair-raising valour being discussed gravely. All this while, I could perceive that our good friend SP was getting restless and eager to share equally hair raising tales of valiantly maintained law and order in the districts by the police force. He launched bravely and had the table in the palm of his hand narrating the machinations and battle of maintaining peace in tough districts. Everyone loved the tales as they flowed; the officers hung on to his words and a crowd gathered around the table. In the infinitesimal pause for breath which the officer took to continue, a silver headed



matriarch asked boredly, “and where exactly is this district you are speaking about?”.

Well, after this setback, we had to retrieve the glory of the administrative office and host a dinner for the top brass. Those were simple days, where the sanctioned budget was just enough to keep the grand old buildings from crumbling and our dignity barely intact. The bungalow was grand and reflected bygone splendour, furnished frugally by us temporary occupants who had till recently, been living in small flats in the state capital. The burden of organizing the dinner, as always, fell on the shoulders of the woefully unprepared spouse-me.

We got going. The ragtag staff was astonished to be pulled to order and over the next fortnight went through rigorous grilling and training on army etiquette of serving and catering. Teetotallers grappled with making soft drinks into palatable mocktails and vegetarian menu exotic. The entire process was supported by the mint new probationer who dived in with enthusiasm into the assignment, as my chief advisor.

The grand day arrived and the guests in the brilliant uniforms and partners in chiffons and pearls were ushered in to the imposing drawing room.

Everything sparkled and things were progressing better than expected as officers valiantly knocked back mocktails and vegetarian snacks.

Meal was served in the large dining room. As the dishes were being served in grave silence and stilted conversation, the head jamadar dressed top to bottom in white, and almost strutting with pleasure and success, brought in the platter of chapattis. Like a senior, serious, caring retainer he went around lovingly putting a chappati in each plate with his gloved hands. Except that the snow-white gloves had now darkened to a grey shade, with so much work through the evening. As the grey chappati served by an equally grey gloved hand slid into the quarter plate of the chief guest, he gave it a deep stare and then smiled.

It was a wonderful moment; the weight of maintaining formalities lifted and there was a visible lightening of mood at the table. Everybody smiled and the evening became noisy and memorable.

Preeti Kumar
Uttar Pradesh

Make Mine Elegant



I chanced upon an OTT series on Netflix “A New Look” about Christian Dior and Coco Chanel. It made me realize that simple cuts and straight lines make for the most graceful look. Also, whatever the era, however different the times, nothing makes a statement like a well-dressed woman.

When I look at myself in the mirror to check my look, I do ask if my look is the traffic stopping look? No, but definitely a head turning look, a graceful and sophisticated look. Exuding a certain charm, having a signature style to call my own and standing out in a crowd. Not the odd one out, not jutting out like a sore thumb but a reflection of taste and refinement.

Going for a wedding and deciding what to wear. The option is to choose between an elegant, timeless classic and a trendy, glitzy ensemble. I choose grace as I have over the years done so in my personal and professional development.

I chanced upon a film on OTT recently, The Intern. This featured Hollywood megastars such as Robert De Niro who is the protagonist here as well as Anne Hathaway and Rene Russo. Here values of an era gone by have been advocated. The new generation, in the film, find it awkward initially but gradually learn to value and appreciate it. The golden olden values include the formal well-groomed look at work, the business suit, neatly combed hair, the compact briefcase, which acts as a hold all and surprisingly the skill of driving a car. All very graceful, tasteful and

having a signature style.

In a world of technology and economic activity, grace is now a rare phenomenon. I do recall a childhood where grooming was stressed upon. Pronunciation and manners too were important and this was in an era when nobody had heard of the term soft skills. I am not advocating that we go back into the past but we carry forward some things of the past which are valuable and adapt them to current times.

Not just apparel but an overall wellness quotient speaks volumes about an individual. Morning walks allow for the cool breeze to brush against your cheeks. Vitamin D is absorbed from the morning Sun. Barefoot on a green carpet of grass is very good for eyesight. The moist dew is cool on the feet and has anti- inflammatory properties. Yoga stretches the muscles and assists the practitioner in building immunity.

Within the folds of wellness also comes a healthy and balanced DIET. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are just right for you. Non communicable diseases are finally being brought out of the closets. Gladness of the heart cannot be quantified but the lilt of your feet and the smile on the face can say it all.

Though maximalist has been advocated in OTT series such as” Emily in Paris “and “The Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives”, minimalist comes with a certain grace, an advocacy of simple yet elegant. An over the top ensemble may overshadow the core personality.



ensemble may overshadow the core personality.

You can win over someone by the sheer dint of personality. Your grace and elegance can be example for others to copy. It does feel very nice to be remembered as an example to be followed.

With a traditional saree, you can't go wrong. Also there is no need to keep up with dynamic fashion trends as a saree is always trending. Paisley and handloom prints too look good at all times, be it in Indo-Western fusion wear or indigenous wear.

Good communication skills, writing ability, creativity and innovative ideas is what people remember. It feels so good when students tell you they want to be like you. In the impressionable age, they look up to you as a role model. The qualitative values of a person are not measurable in numbers but does make its presence felt.

They say that simplicity is the ultimate sophistication and always remain hi -fashion. Some things never fade and elegance is one of them. Trends may come and go but as something like what Lord Tennyson said in his poem “ The Brook”, some things go on forever.

A reflection of my personality is what my style is all about. Sassy yet suave, standing out in a crowd yet merging in, cool yet understated.

Refinement not just in apparel and outer appearance but from the inner core. Poise should not be deliberate from within. Keep it simple yet make a statement.



Rupam Jha
Haryana

A Birthday to Remember



Birthdays are occasions to be celebrated with family and friends, a re-affirmation of being there with them; a moment of being grateful to God, as also a time to introspect.

This was seventh year of my marriage. My husband, Atul, was posted as the Deputy Commissioner in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka. Uttar Kannada is a fairly large district in the north-west of Karnataka, bordering Goa in the north. The district, thinly populated, comprises of talukas on the Arabian sea coast as well as those on the Western Ghats-a most beautiful amalgamation of sea on one side with dense forests and hills and numerous waterfalls. Karwar, the district headquarters, just 18 km from the border of south Goa, is an absolutely enchanting place with the Arabian Sea on one side and verdant western ghats on the other, with



the Kali River meeting the sea.

It was November of 1999; Diwali was just round the corner and my parents-in-law, along with my

brother-in-law had come to visit us. My daughters were cute toddlers. With no digital devices and limited internet connection, their main means of enjoyment was to wander around in the gardens of the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow. And what a bungalow it is! Perched atop a hill covered with dense forests of teak, overlooking the Arabian Sea, it was a classic example of Portuguese colonial architecture. Nobel Laureate, Rabindra Nath Tagore had spent some months in this bungalow, when his elder brother, Satyendra Nath Tagore, had served as the district judge in Karwar in 1880s.

My in-laws were captivated by the beauty of the place. To enthrall them further, Atul, decided to take them to Dandeli, a picturesque, small town in the midst of a lush green forest with the Kali River crisscrossing it. It was a drive of three hours uphill from Karwar on meandering mountainous roads. We were staying in a well-appointed, right in sync with nature, quaint jungle resort. The resort boasted of several interesting activities, right from coracleing on the Kali River (infested with crocodiles) to a jungle safari in an open jeep in the morning. I was doubly excited as it was my birthday the next day. After partaking of a sumptuous dinner in front of a roaring bonfire, we decided to retire early for the night, as we were supposed to go for jungle safari early next morning. I went off to sleep dreaming of celebrating my birthday in the midst of the jungle.

It was a beautiful morning, with perfect weather for an outing in the jungle. We got ready in comfortable clothes and set off for the safari in an open jeep. It was a wonderful ride, though we couldn't sight anything apart from a few deers. All throughout, I was expectantly waiting: maybe once we finish our safari, everyone will wish me



birthday, and we would then celebrate over a meal. The safari ended, no one wished me. It was clear that that my birthday was forgotten! I was crestfallen, but I kept quiet as I didn't want to spoil the enjoyment. Whole day passed in the hope that someone would remember my birthday and wish me. To my disappointment nothing of that sort

happened. The day came and went and next day we were back to Karwar. Life was back to normal; Diwali preparations were going on.

Next evening, Atul suddenly decided to go for an evening cruise in the Arabian sea on a motorboat. My in-laws were excited, a whole new experience for them-to see the breathtaking sunset from the boat while sailing in the sea. While we were cruising in the middle of the sea and crossed the Kurumgad island, the boat stopped, and my husband surprised me with a cake and candles! There amidst the dolphins, Atul most sheepishly, wished me Happy Birthday and apologized for forgetting it! It was on the deck of the boat in the open sea that I happily cut the cake with my daughters on my side, as the sun was setting and mild breeze was blowing, in the company of family members, making it an unforgettable evening.

We have been married for 32 years, and no one in the family has ever missed wishing me on my birthday. Atul avers that he may miss his own birthday but never mine. He wouldn't!

Dr. Nuti Namita
Karnataka



THE WONDER STARS



Lakhi née Lakshmi



As I complete more than half a century of my terrestrial existence, I wonder how gracefully and elegantly have I lived my life! No doubt I have looked after the family well, have tried to be good, kind and compassionate to others but then, I think I have been well endowed too.

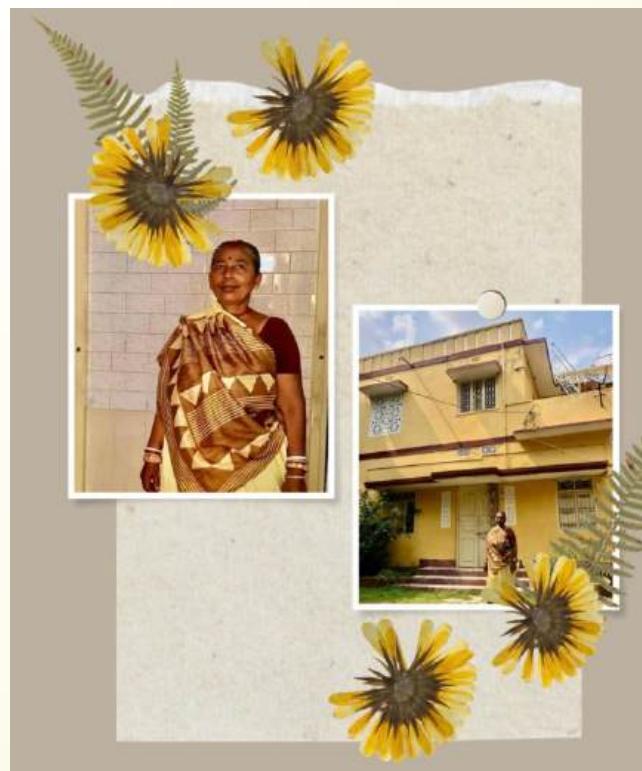
My thought takes me back to more than three decades ago when I came as a newly wed bride to my husband's ancestral home. As I sat quietly in my room, I could hear multiple voices...'Lakhi...is the Pooja thali ready'....'Lakhi, I am yet to get my morning tea Someone else....'when will breakfast be ready?'....all at the same time! Each of these different queries was answered by one single soft and chirpy voice...'oh Dadi...here is you pooja thali and Bhaiya your morning tea too...by the way Payal, garam - garam breakfast is on the table.'

I thought who is this Lakhi....must be a demi goddess gleefully attending to so many people all at the same time...surely, she must be having 10 hands. And what a beautiful name she had, Lakhi née Lakshmi...the goddess of wealth. She must be wealthy too!

I was awakened from my day dream by her soft voice....'Choti Rani, (what a beautiful way to address a new bride) this is your first day here, come I will get you ready for the rituals. ' She was slightly older than me, a fairly dark complexioned lady with a very pleasing demeanour and an infectious smile. As I held out my hand to hers, I

instantly knew that this was a lifelong bonding.

Slowly I got to know that Lakhi Di, as I addressed her, came from a very poor family, and that her husband had abandoned her long ago but the fighter that she was, she did not lose heart. She instead started doing small chores at people's homes to support herself and her aged parents. Gradually I also learnt that, a year back, she had found an abandoned new born baby boy whom she adopted despite strong opposition from her immediate family. At least now she had someone to call her own!





For the few days that I spent as a new bride in that remote village, she was my only companion and I discovered that though Lakhi Di was only 8th class pass, she was a store house of stories from Indian mythology. One of the qualities that I most admired in her, was her deep sense of gratitude and goodness despite living a very challenging life herself.

Time passed and we got busy in our own worlds. Once in a while we got news of her and gradually got to know that Lakhi Di now worked as a helper in a school with a fairly decent income. She was also extended some monetary support from us for looking after our ancestral home. We had been in touch over the phone (....those were landline phone days) on and off and each time I recall she had emphatically said, 'Bhabhi now I am happy and content, don't worry about me. God has given me enough!'

'How is your son?'

'Oh what a brat he is turning into. He keeps me busy all day.'....she used to laugh off.

What a happy soul she is; God has indeed been very kind to her.....I used to think!

After a few years I happened to visit my husband's ancestral home once again and who else but Lakhi Di was there to receive us; radiantly smiling and emanating so much warmth and positivity!

'So, Lakhi Di how are you? And how is your sonmust be earning and supporting you now.'

'You don't know, my son is mentally challenged....it is I who has been taking care of him all these years. God gave me an opportunity to take care of him or else what would have happened to that orphan,' she replied smilingly.

I was completely speechless. How could she

appear to be so happy and content in life when life had been nothing but challenging for her. It was extremely hard to imagine that beneath her calm and elegant demeanour lied layers of hardships and struggles.

That day I realised, that it's only one's attitude that changes the worst of situations into a pleasant experience. Any other person in her circumstances would think twice before nurturing a specially abled orphan as her very own. I truly feel humbled when I see women from such modest backgrounds face life's challenges with so much dignity and grace. For me, she is truly an embodiment of Lakshmi ; she has wealth of goodness and attitude in her for It is not easy to feel and appear content when life has been harsh on you. Over the years now, in the most demanding of situations, I have always remembered her and drawn inspiration from her. I truly feel that Lakhi Di has lived her life with much more Elegance !

Amita Das
AGMUT

GAURI



Asha tai stopped near the Mahalaxmi temple at the signal. She took a deep breath recovering from the busy morning haze of getting her daughter Pinky ready for school. She now sat next to her dosing lightly. Just then, a girl of Pinky's age came to the door of her car. She held a basket of freshly blossomed Mogra flowers. Asha tai rolled down the windows and their sweet fragrance wafted in cutting through the AC air.

"Aunty, take some flowers!" she called out.

Asha tai smiled. "How many for ten?".

"100 for ten tai", she said.

"What's your name?" Asha made conversation as she counted out the change.

"Gauri", the girl answered her eyes already scrounging for the next customer. She lit up as Asha tai handed her the money.

It would be a good day for Gauri, half her stock was over. The next moment her eyes fell on girl beside the kind tai. Her crisp pressed blue skirt and popped collars made her wistful. Sometimes, when she imagined herself in it, she could sometimes feel the fabric. Today tears threatened to fall.

But she couldn't wait long, bleary eyed her practiced feet crossed the road and made their way to the patch of the footpath with a familiar red cloth roof.

She kept the gajra bunches neatly hanging to the

stick of roof. She buried her head between both knees and started crying. She could see her school, its courtyard, her friends Bandya, Akki, Bani and Pushpa before her eyes. Competing to call out math answers and doing Patil Sir's wonderful experiments. She recounted her days to her mother as she cooked out on the hillock.

Inspired by the 'Wings of Fire' her principal had recommended, she had participated in the district level science competition and had also won the second place for her solar cell project. She wanted to go back and win first place. She wanted to become like Kalamji, and become a scientist. She could make her country proud!

But that monsoon, the Panchganga river began flooding. The fields filled with water but the rains didn't stop and the river kept overflowing! In fifteen days the lush green landscape had turned into brown mulch. The trees were left as stump, animals struggled, families clung onto branches for their dear life.

Then came the rescuers in boats wearing uniforms, bearing food packages. In the days of destruction there were sorrow and despair. Her family left with a bundle of cloths and four utensils.

After the travel Gauri woke up at the Mahalaxmi temple. Her parents tied a cloth on the nearby footpath as a roof. Their new home. The next morning, her parents went out to seek work. In a



nearby hotel her mother now scrubbed dishes and her father floors. But it filled only half their stomachs. So Gauri started working. All day long near the signal, selling flowers and gajras.

The Panchaganga that gave life to the valley, in her fierce incarnation swept away the lives of all her children and Gauri's dreams with them.

But the tears in her eyes couldn't wash away the fire in her heart. It would forge the wings of achievement and spread through the sky.

After all the fragrance of the blooming Mogra overpowers all.

Rajshree Paatil

Tamilnadu



Remembering an Icon: A Tribute to Madame Smita Shah



I met Smita Shah Madam at my first IASOWA meeting, feeling like a freshman on the first day of college—unsure of protocol, decorum, or even where to stand. Then, like a beacon of social grace, she appeared—immaculately dressed, jewellery sparkling, hair coiffed to perfection. With a radiant smile,



she stopped me in my tracks and did what she did best—radiated warmth and welcome. She asked my name, my husband's name (as IASOWA events often necessitate such details), and in turn, introduced herself with the easy confidence of a woman who had spent a lifetime knowing exactly who she was.

I was immediately impressed by her vibrance, her energy, and her seemingly effortless ability to put people at ease. At the time, I had no

idea she would become a much-loved friend. We crossed paths frequently at IASOWA meetings, social gatherings, and most significantly, in our "Friends Forever" group—an initiative that was supposed to be a casual circle of friends but turned into something akin to a sacred sisterhood.

On our WhatsApp group, she was a prolific contributor, regaling us with tales of her children and grandchildren, sharing their achievements as if she was their most ardent biographer. And indeed, she was! There was no pretense of modesty in her pride—why should there be? Her children were nothing short of remarkable, and she, their devoted narrator, ensured that their milestones were celebrated with the grandeur they deserved.

When she released her book "Leaves from a Bureaucrat's Diary" at the India International Centre, it was clear that Smita Shah Ma'am had not merely lived a life—she had curated it, documented it, and presented it with characteristic charm. Her stories—drawn from a life rich in experience, from the early days of her husband's postings as an SDM to encounters with the great, the good, and the gloriously eccentric—were told with wit, wisdom, and an enviable clarity of recollection. I was in awe. Here was a woman who had lived a full life—one rich with experiences. Her storytelling was delightful, filled with humour, warmth, and a generosity of spirit that made even the most mundane details sparkle.

Then there were her travel chronicles. Ma'am and her equally adventurous husband, Rajeeva Ratan Shah, IAS (Retd.), were indefatigable explorers, their itineraries packed with visits to family, historic landmarks, and places of curiosity. She recounted these journeys with enthusiasm and the detail of a travel writer. One could almost hear the rustling of her beautifully starched sarees as she swept through international airports, her suitcase no doubt packed with the same precision she brought to every other aspect of her life.

And then there was her legendary hospitality. Teas, lunches, dinners—each a carefully orchestrated affair where no detail was



overlooked. Ah, to be invited to a meal at Smita Madam's! It wasn't just a dining experience; it was an event. Every detail—from the floral arrangements to the carefully curated menu—was an exercise in aesthetic perfection. The table was always elegantly set, the conversation lively, peppered with wit, warmth, and an insistence on making sure everyone ate just a little more than they should. It was the kind of old-world hosting that has become an endangered art, and she did it effortlessly, making

each gathering feel both special and spontaneous.

Of course, even the most poised among us have their share of misadventures. Smita Ma'am, in her later years, had an unfortunate tendency to become gravity's favourite victim. Toes were stubbed, arms were fractured, injuries were collected like an accidental hobby. And yet, none of it ever seemed to dim her spirit. She would heal, reappear, and arrive at the next gathering looking as polished and impeccable as ever—even if it was in a smart wheelchair.

Perhaps what truly set Smita Ma'am apart was her complete and utter lack of malice. She had an extraordinary gift for seeing the best in people, for energising rather than undermining, for celebrating rather than critiquing. She never spoke ill of anyone, always choosing to highlight the best in people. Her words were full of praise and an infectious positivity that made one feel uplifted in her presence. There was no trace of pettiness or gossip in her interactions—only praise, encouragement, and boundless warmth.

She was, quite simply, irreplaceable. They don't make them like her anymore, and that is our collective loss. And while I mourn her passing, I like to imagine that wherever she is now, she is hosting yet another beautifully curated gathering, surrounded by those lucky enough to be in her orbit, dazzling everyone with her stories, and making sure no one leaves without a second helping of dessert.

Dearest Smita Ma'am, may you find eternal peace; your cherished memories will forever warm our hearts, in loving remembrance.

**Poonam Khaira Sidhu
Punjab**



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MUSINGS

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The Nest of the Recluse

Excerpts



And look and behold! The air was suddenly filled with the sound of the feet of the speeding flock which was coming back from nearby bani, the bleating of calves; hustling together of cows, buffaloes and oxen and the sound of the tiny bells around their necks. The shepherd boy marched ahead of them, carrying a stick in his hand and singing folklore. Shubhjojit could see the dust rising from the feet of cattle, the sun going down slowly towards the other end, the humming of the folklore and the haunting time of the dusk. It reminded him of the pastoral landscape and how it was passing through in time and before his own eyes.



He could also hear the barking of dogs somewhere at a distance, fighting perhaps for their own territory or ensuring it, and also the mooing of a cow, perhaps left behind and looking for some company. A bullock cart was passing by carrying the daily needs of the farmer and his flock. A day of struggle and hard work would

make the moments of his homecoming sweet and pleasant, thought Shubhjojit. Perhaps a feeling of anticipation lingered at his home too, as they waited anxiously for his return. The sound of the evening train, at a regular time every day, symbolised the concept of the homecoming...

This was his favourite time of day for a sojourn with the elements of Nature ...

This was his time to communicate with the earth and listen to the haunting melodies present in his surroundings. The air was rife with expectation and a melodious rhythm present in the universe.

The forest was slowly coming alive with different sounds of Nature and an all -pervading light. Shubhjojit became aware of different sounds coming in from all directions --- a flutter of wings above and he saw a sparrow, or perhaps a nightingale, take wing and perch itself somewhere amongst the branches, causing the branches to sway a little.

There was a twitter and a number of birds flew from one branch to another and then soared into the sky with their trademark squeak. He noticed a pigeon, somewhat timid but with alert eyes, sitting on a low branch and uttering a faint, irregular sound. A low whistling sound was occasionally rising and then sinking, trying to keep rhythm with the cool breeze that blew carelessly in the forest.

‘Maybe it’s a redbreast or a hedge cricket



somewhere at a distance,’ thought Shubhojit.
somewhere at a distance,’ thought Shubhojit.

His attention was soon caught by the antics of the squirrel who was as much in a hurry to climb up the trunk of a tree as climb down it, with the mouth quivering constantly.

A mongoose appeared next, suddenly. Thin, frail and narrow in body structure, it had a quick gait and didn’t want to wait for an encounter and eye contact. It looked up for a few seconds, looked ahead, as if measuring its path and determining its speed, and then ran forward, almost at a sprint.

Shubhojit felt the fresh breeze and inhaled the fragrance of the soil and foliage of the forest.

‘Does solitude also need a companion in the woods,’ wondered Shubhojit.

‘Oh, yes,’ thought he, ‘perhaps in the dark and old trees, the mossy and green patches, the flutter of

the wings, the wild growth of the shrubs, the smooth flow of water, the sound, smell, taste and touch of all the elements that go into the making of this universe’...

Shubhojit marvelled at the hand of magnanimity of the world of Nature that kept mankind nourished and contented. He looked around at the fading sun, the rising of the moon, the enveloping darkness, felt the play of a cool breeze, the prosperous flora and fauna and symphony of insects, birds and animals present in the air.

“Where would one find such sympathy, health, cheer, benevolence and innocence, if not in the lap of Nature?” thought Shubhojit.

“I would not give up such abundance for all the material riches of the world!”

Shubhojit clearly enjoyed his trance.

Suchita Malik
Haryana



बुरा जो देखान में चला

किसी के बारे में लिखना चाहो तो समझ नहीं आता कहाँ से शुरू करें और जो साथ में ज्यादा रहा हो उसका तो असंभव ही प्रतीत होता है, लगता है कुछ तो छूट गया है! स्कूल में हिन्दी पाठ्य-क्रम में कबीर, रहीम, मीरा और रसखान के दोहे व पद्य भरे रहते थे शुरू में उन्हें याद करना बहुत कठिन लगता था फिर तो ऐसा क्रम चला कि धीरे-धीरे सब कुछ याद होने के साथ-साथ अच्छा भी लगने लगा और लगा अरे ये तो हमारे जीवन का ही हिस्सा हैं, कितने सच्चे हैं और बस उसके बाद हम सहेलियाँ उन्हें अंताकक्षरी में भी प्रयोग करने लगीं, यह तरीका याद करने का भी आसान हो गया और वाकई हम सबको उसमें मजा भी आने लगा, याद का याद और खेल का खेल। पर तब नहीं लगा कि ये दोहे मेरे जीवन का ही हिस्सा बनते चले जायेंगे अनजाने में।

“ऐसी बानी बोलिये मन का आपा खोये औरन को शीतल करे आपहूँ शीतल होय” इस दोहे को तो सुन-सुन कर और डॉट खा-खा कर कान ही पक गये थे, मीठा बोलो शादी के बाद क्या करोगी?

सबकी परवाह करना और आगे-आगे काम करना उसकी आदत में शामिल था। सबकी परवाह तो ऐसे करती थी कि आश्चर्य होता पूछने पर कहती कि सोचो तो सब अपने ही तो हैं, घर में कोई नौकर गलती भी करे तो कुछ ना कहना, निकालना तो दूर की बात है उसकी यानि मेरी सहेली “गीता” की theory ही अलग थी, वह कबीरदास की भक्त थी उनके दोहे उसमें रचे-बसे थे या यूँ कहो वो उनमें समायी हुई थी। हर बात पर दोहों का उदाहरण उसकी आदत बन गई थी। कभी-कभी हम सब चिढ़ भी जाते थे, कहते आजकल के जमाने में सीधों को बुद्ध समझा जाता है और जमाना भी tit for tat का है, पर वो नहीं सुनती कहती...

“बुरा जो देखन मैं चला बुरा ना मिलया कोई, जो मन देखा आपना मुझसे बुरा ना कोई” यह कह कर वो हम सबको चुप कर देती...

कि अच्छा घर मिला, साल भर के सारे त्यौहार भी बड़े धूमधाम व प्यार से मनाये गये, खूब मिठाईयाँ व उपहार भी दिये गये। साल खुशी-खुशी निकला तो हम सबको लगा सब ठीक है घर परिवार कितना अच्छा ख्याल करने वाला मिला है, पर अंदर की बात उस बिचारी ने कभी नहीं बताई कि उसके साथ ससुराल में क्या होता रहा कि कहीं मेरी माँ जो बीमार है उसे कुछ हो ना जाये पिताजी की इज्जत मिट्टी में मिल जाएगी, इस जमाने में इस तरह की लड़की मिलना मुश्किल है।

वह दिन पर दिन कमजोर होती गयी मायके में धीरे-धीरे आना बंद कर दिया सबको लगा लड़की का अपना घर तो ससुराल ही है नहीं भेजते, कोई बात नहीं खैर खबर तो मिल ही जाती है। नौकरों की तरह घर का काम करते-करते शरीर जवाब देने लगा। एक दिन शायद मेरी तकदीर अच्छी थी कि मुझे वो कुछ सामान खरीदती हुई मिल गयी, पहले तो बड़ी मुश्किल से पहचान में आई फिर दो शब्द प्यार के सुनते ही गंगा-जमुना बह निकली, मुझे संभालना मुश्किल हो गया पर किसी तरह उसे चुप कराके अपने बचपन की यादें ताजा कीं, कब एक घंटा निकल गया पता ही नहीं चला, उसे डर लगने लगा कि घर में डॉट पड़ेगी, मैंने उसे हिम्मत दी और थोड़ा हंस के बोला कहाँ गई तुम्हारी पुरानी आदत दोहों वाली? बेचारी रुआँसी होकर बोली तुम सब ठीक कहते थे मेरी ही सोच शायद गलत थी। मैंने कहा छोड़ दो, जब कोई सुधरता नहीं जुल्म भी कब तक सहोगी, ये सुनकर वो तो घबरा गयी, नहीं-नहीं यह ठीक नहीं, अगर सुधरते भी नहीं और छोड़ना भी नहीं तो तुम अभी मेरे साथ चलो थोड़े दिन मेरे साथ रहना पर वो उसको भी तैयार नहीं हुई, बोली अब घर जाकर पता नहीं क्या होगा आज, मैं समझ गई ये नहीं सुधरेगी, अपना फोन नंबर दे कर वापस आ गयी।

कुछ दिन मैं भी बहुत व्यस्त रही नया शहर था घर-गृहस्थी में थोड़ा समय लग गया। एक दिन अचानक उसी का फोन आया प्लीज आओ मेरे पास समय नहीं है तुमसे मिलने का मन है, भाग कर गयी shock लगा देखकर, ये तो आज का

मन है, भाग कर गयी shock लगा देखकर, ये तो आज का दिन भी अच्छे से निकाल दे तो बहुत है, मेरे आँसू रुकने का नाम नहीं ले रहे थे अब वो ही मुझे डॉफस देती रही, यही लिखा था शायद मेरे भाग्य में।

मैं वापस तो आ गयी पर मेरा मन नहीं मान रहा था यह उसका भाग्य नहीं था फिर क्यों? मैं सोचने लगी जो लड़कियाँ नौकरी करती हैं वो अपनी कमाई की धौंस जमाने लगती हैं, लव मैरिज में भी समस्याएँ होती हैं पर उसमें लड़की सबको खुश करने में लग जाती है इस कारण सबकी अच्छी बहू बन जाती है। जहाँ कभी लड़की सामंजस्य नहीं बिठा पाती नये घर में गलती किसकी होती है पता नहीं, हर कोई दूसरे पक्ष की बताता है, बाकी सब हाथ झाड़ते हैं और कहते हैं अंदर की बात है क्या पता....

मैं सोचने पर मजबूर हो गई ऐसा क्यों???

ये हमारे तो ऐसे संस्कार नहीं थे कभी बड़ों को पलट कर जवाब नहीं दिया घर के सभी सदस्यों के साथ प्यार से निभाया, बच्चे भी जो देखते हैं, वही सीखते हैं यही सोच कर बड़ों का सम्मान किया, लिहाज, परवाह व समर्पण ही हमें शांतिपूर्ण जिन्दगी बिताने में लाभकारी रहा, क्या वो गलत था?? ये नहीं कि कभी लड़ाई ही नहीं हुई पर लड़ाई को दूसरे दिन का मुद्दा कभी नहीं बनाया। ये हमारे संस्कार ही हैं जो हमें सिखाते हैं प्यार से रहना। जब हम बाहर वालों के साथ अच्छा व्यवहार करते हैं तो घर वालों के साथ क्यों नहीं? सबके साथ अच्छा व्यवहार जब आदत बन जाता है तो संस्कार कहलाता है।

हर किसी को अच्छी संस्कारी लड़की व लड़का चाहिए शादी के लिए चाहे अपने बच्चों में वो संस्कार हैं या नहीं, तब समाज को दोष देते हैं, समाज भी हमने ही बनाया है और हमसे ही परिवार है। हम सब अपनी बेटियों को बड़े लाड़ प्यार से पालते हैं, जैसे संस्कार देंगे वैसे ही वो ससुराल में व्यवहार करेंगी, तभी तो पुराने समय में कहा जाता था क्या यही सिखाया है तुम्हें?? पर आजकल इस वाक्य को बोलने की हिम्मत किसी सास में है क्या?

हम लोग धीरे-धीरे पाश्चात्य की नक़ल तो कर रहे हैं पर अपनापन और प्यार खोते जा रहे हैं, जानवर से तो प्यार हो जाता है पर आपस में बड़ा मुश्किल है। कामवाली बाई तो सबको प्यारी लगती है उसका बिना डाँटे स्वागत होता है हमारा दिन भी उनसे ही निकलता है। आजकल किसी की शादी होती है तो लगता है कितने दिन चलेगी पता नहीं, दस में

से पाँच तो जरूर टूटेंगी ही, कारण कोई भी हो, या तो कोई शादी ही नहीं करेगा डर के मारे कि कैसा साथी मिले या परिवार मिले, सबसे अच्छा इस झंझट में ही मत फँसो। झंझट ही है जो चीज पसंद ना आये वो झंझट व मुसीबत ही तो होती है जैसे- “आ बैल मुझे मार” पर सब यही कहेंगे तो हमारा समाज कैसे बढ़ेगा।

कुछ काम के साथ-साथ घर की जिम्मेदारी भी निभाती हैं उनके पति संस्कारी हुए तो उनकी कद्र होती है नहीं तो “सभी करते हैं” तुम क्या अलग करती हो, सुनने को मिलता है। अगर किसी का साथ चाहिए तो आधी चीजों पर ध्यान देना छोड़ना पड़ता है। कहाँ तो हम मानते हैं “वसुधैव-कुटुम्बकम्” पर परिवार ही बन जाये और साथ बना रहे बड़ी बात है। कहीं सास को बहू पसंद नहीं तो कहीं बहू को सास, दस बार मिलते हैं तब शादी होती है फिर भी समस्या है, कुछ अच्छाई देख कर ही तो शादी की थी फिर सारी बुराईयाँ ही क्यों नजर आती हैं शादी के बाद?? क्योंकि सारी अच्छाईयों पर एक बुराई भारी पड़ती है, ये अपने आप से भी पूछना चाहिए कि तुममें क्या सभी अच्छाईयाँ ही भरी पड़ी हैं। क्या एक भी बुराई नहीं जिससे सब परेशान हैं, पर अपनी तरफ तो देखना ही नहीं है क्योंकि हम तो perfect हैं, यही तो घर की राजनीति है, बाहर की राजनीति से देश परेशान घर की राजनीति से परिवार। यही तो कारण है अगर हम देश की सोचें तो देश उन्नति करेगा उसी प्रकार अगर परिवार की सोचें तो परिवार। अच्छे बोल, सुंदर शब्द, वार्तालाप, सब्र, सबका साथ व प्यार वापस आ जाये तो भला हो, तब शायद हम सोचें- “बुरा जो देखन मैं चला बुरा ना मिलया कोय..”

शैलजा दत्त
कर्नाटिका



तुम अपने हृद वादे पर मुकर्दर रहे

तुम अपने हृद वादे पर मुकर्दर रहे,

ना जाने क्यों मैं ही उन्हें शक और सवालों में उलझाती रही..

हर सवाल बेवजह मन में बुनती गई,

ना जाने क्यों जवाब रख्यालों में तुमसे ही ढूँढती रही...

पता था—पता है मुझे,

कि उन सवालों का न कोई जवाब है,

न ही शक की कोई गुंजाइश...

फिर भी उम्मीद तुमसे ही रखती रही...

आज भी तुम अपने वादों पर अडिग हो,

मैं भी खुद से सुलझाती गई...

अब शक और सवालों के जवाब नहीं तलाशती...

मगर ये मन...

अब भी कभी—कभी पुराने पलों की किताब खोल बैठता है...

उन अधूरे सवालों के कोनों में दर्ज दबी हुई उलझनों को पढ़ने लगता है...

कभी यूँ ही रिकड़की से से झांकता है और सोचता है...

क्या वकृत सच में वैसा ही था, जैसा मैंने समझा था?

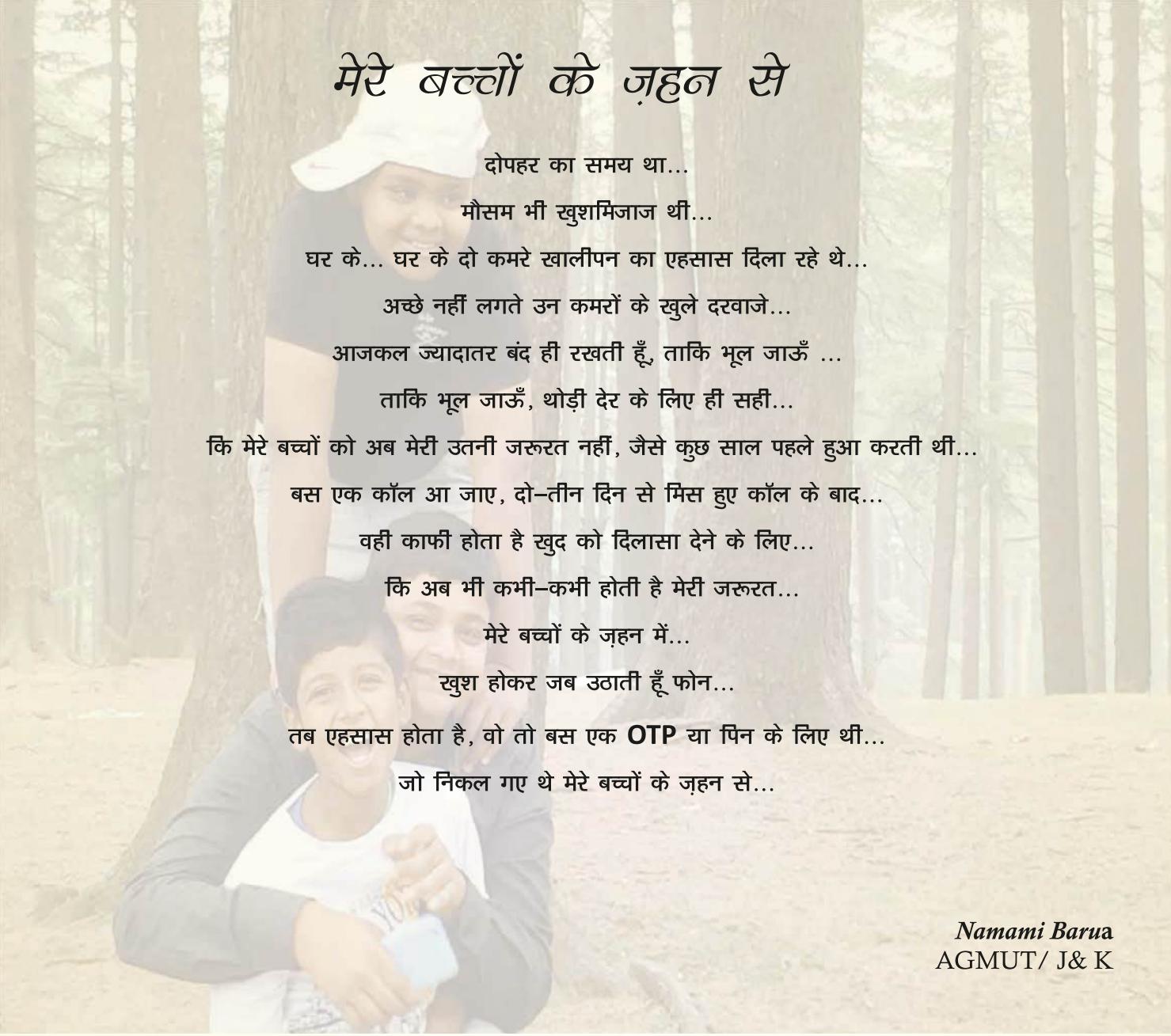
पर अब...

वो सवाल बस किसी पुराने खत की तरह रखे हैं,

जिन्हें अब पढ़ती नहीं, बस महसूस कर लती हूँ...

अब मैं शब्दों में नहीं, खामोशियों में जवाब ढूँढती हूँ ...

अब मैं तुम्हारे वादों पर नहीं, खुद पर यकीन करता हूँ ।



मेरे बच्चों के ज़हन से

दोपहर का समय था...

मौसम भी खुशमिजाज थी...

घर के... घर के दो कमरे खालीपन का एहसास दिला रहे थे...

अच्छे नहीं लगते उन कमरों के खुले दरवाजे...

आजकल ज्यादातर बंद ही रखती हूँ, ताकि भूल जाऊँ ...

ताकि भूल जाऊँ, थोड़ी देर के लिए ही सही...

कि मेरे बच्चों को अब मेरी उतनी जरूरत नहीं, जैसे कुछ साल पहले हुआ करती थी...

बस एक कॉल आ जाए, दो-तीन दिन से मिस हुए कॉल के बाद...

वही काफी होता है खुद को दिलासा देने के लिए...

कि अब भी कभी-कभी होती है मेरी जरूरत...

मेरे बच्चों के ज़हन में...

खुश होकर जब उठाती हूँ फोन...

तब एहसास होता है, वो तो बस एक OTP या पिन के लिए थी...

जो निकल गए थे मेरे बच्चों के ज़हन से...

Namami Barua
AGMUT/ J & K



A Message To My Granddaughter

Nearly thirty years ago, my son and daughter-in-law decided to settle down in the United States of America. I remember hiding my grief, pretending what a wonderful opportunity it would be for them as they would be looking forward to pursuing their doctorates and then embarking on a full-time career, a definite step towards a promising future. But in the deepest recesses of my heart, I knew I would miss them, and all of us would be living in different corners of the world, celebrating festivals (or maybe not at all) while families all over the country come together in joyous reunion.

My granddaughter, Gia, was born in the United States, a sweet little cuddly bundle, less Indian and more American. She grew up learning in a Jewish school called Neve Shalom, and then she switched to an all-American institution; she is an American citizen now, a Freshman at Tufts University, pursuing a course in Economics and International Relations. I am pleasantly surprised, in fact, I became quite emotional to know she has not lost touch with her roots : History interests her, and she seems to be drawn towards India and her past. As an eight year old with an enquiring bent of mind, she was advised by her teacher to visit the Taj Mahal during her Indian trip although, on returning, when she was asked which place she liked best, she promptly replied "Khan Market" because her aunt piled her with gifts from there!

I've mailed her information about a few Indian states, hoping to get some feedback. I've regaled

her with daring exploits of Rajput warriors and their women. I sent her pictures of some of Rajasthan's palatial monuments, and she was quite fascinated, as I gathered, from her message :

" Loved reading your article on Rajasthan , " Gia typed . " Seeing the pictures and reading about the Hawa Mahal and Lake Palace reminded me about my last trip to India...

"The historical narrative was much more interesting to read than my history textbooks (here, two emojis were inserted indicating smileys). I love the type of ancient history with royal families , so reading about the Rajputs was so much fun !

" Thank you for writing to me about Rajasthan !"

I then decided to tell her about Bengal , about her cultural past when great writers, poets and artists flourished, and how brave men and women fought and died for India's independence. It was the first time that she had heard about Subhash Chandra Bose, the candidate chosen for the Civil Service yet gave it up to fight for the nation. I mentioned that he secretly escaped from British-held India to raise an army with help from Hitler, then Germany's dreaded chancellor. Germany, Italy and Japan were at war with Britain, USA and the European countries. It was the 2nd WW . With Hitler's help he could get Indian POWs released. He thus raised the Indian National Army as a counter challenge to the Brits. Gia calls me 'Dida', the Bengali equivalent of grandmother .



"Hi Dida! Wow!!!" Gia sent a message within a few days. "It was so nice and interesting to hear about the history of Bengal. I had no idea that Hitler and India were connected during WW2, even though we just learned about WW2 in History class last year. (Gia was probably a ninth grader at the time she messaged me.)

"I want to visit West Bengal and Bangladesh some day. Thank you for teaching me more about India's history !!!"

Kashmir was another item on the agenda. Known for its idyllic charm, its scenic beauty, but,



more important, for its troubled past, I made sure Gia knew how peaceful it was once upon a time, when Hindus and Buddhists lived amicably for hundreds of years, pursuing arts and crafts.

"I've sent you pictures of their beautiful carpets and shawls.

"Wow, Dida !! I had no idea of the rich history of Kashmir. It was captivating...the beautiful Himalaya mountains ! It was thrilling to read her

history !

"Speaking of history, "she typed, "I finished writing my final essay for my History class this year, and I got an A+ !"

I was thrilled too ! At the back of my head I thought, 'Did I have something to do with it ? (Gia could put a winking emoji next to my thoughts - ha ha !)

There was another question from her, "What are some major Indian inventions or discoveries that changed the world ?"

" Well, for one, it was the Indian astronomer Aryabhatt who used the symbol 'zero' in astronomical calculations. Later, Brahmagupta, a mathematician, described 'zero' as a number in arithmetic .

"Besides these men, Indians were among the first ancient people who discovered the nutritional and medicinal value of herbs and have recorded their uses in tablets and Ayurvedic texts. Ayurveda is popular in India even today.

"During the reign of the Gupta emperors, sometime between the 4th and 6th centuries AD, Indians discovered the game of chess.

"India has, to her credit, a number of eminent scientists who were pioneers in their field. You might find their names in science journals .

"An important fact to be noted is that Indian companies did a lot of research work and came out with high quality yet low-cost vaccines and drugs, leading the world in treatments that were affordable. I believe that the vaccine for Covid was a big achievement .

"I hope you aren't bored reading this?" (My emoji was of a face with upturned lips)

Very sincerely she said, "Not bored at all, Dida ! This is all fascinating (This time my emoji

showed a figure dancing with joy) I had no idea it was an Indian who first described the number zero arithmetically. And chess? I can't imagine a world where strategy games never evolved past tic-tac-toe---thank you, ancient India , for saving us from that fate !

"And I'll never forget India's groundbreaking



work in vaccines --leading the world in affordable treatments is no small feat. The Covid vaccine alone was a game-changer !

"So no, I wasn't bored for a second --if anything , I feel like I just unlocked a whole new level of appreciation for Indian discoveries ."

Well, I felt it was up to educational institutions all over the world to improve upon their facts and not

present a distorted image to the young generation, because, by remaining in ignorance, it is not we who have anything to lose, it is the present set of youngsters who will be inserting emojis with questionable faces for the rest of their lives. And if this isn't done fast enough, it is quite possible that India's contribution to the world will be buried deep down in the debris of civilization, erased from our minds forever !

Mimi Ghosh
Gujarat

आईना



क्या कहूँ मैं अब तुमसे,
ए आईने.. ये तू ही बता..
दिए जो जख्म जिंदगी ने मुझे ...
जमाने को वो तू यूँ न दिखा !

तन्हाईयाँ जो मैने सहीं,
रोशनी से उन्हें अब तू ही भर दे ..
उम्र की थकानों को ..
ताजगी से जरा ... तू ही भर दे !

चला ऐसा कोई जादू ..
बनती झुर्टियां भी मिट सी जाए !
जिम्मेदारियों के निशाँ सारे ..
बिन श्रृंगार, खत्म हो जाए !

उम्र के तकाजे तू ,
ना बता यूँ जोर जोर से ..
परतों के ऊपर परत को..
यूँ न दिखा तू जोर शोर से !

नए जमाने के चलन में ..
शौकिया मैं अब हो रही !
उम्र भले हो पचपन की ..
पर बचपना, मैं अब जी रही !

पर तू मुझे अब क्यों रोकता है ?
ताल ठोककर क्या सोचता है ?
मैं तो अब भी, वही, मैं ही हूँ !
मेरे होने को क्यूँ तू टोकता है ?

माना की एक लंबे दौर से, गुजर आई, मैं इस छोर
तक !

कई टुकड़ों में टूट कर भी,
जुड़ते आई, खुद को जोड़कर !
तेरे अलावा ना दिखे किसी को ..
मन की उलझने, तन के आंसू,
कितने शिकवे शिकायतों को..
दफन करती आई हर मोड़ पर !

हाँ होंगे जख्मों के निशाँ ...

हाँ होंगे जख्मों के निशाँ,
जो जिंदगी ने मुझे दिए!
बालों में सफेदी के निशाँ भी...
एक नहीं, कई हुए !

तो क्या हुआ जो..
कमर मेरी अब, कमरे सी हो गई..
नजरें भी जरा अब, कुछ कमतर सी हो गई!
सुराहीदार गर्दन तो अब...
गुजरे जमाने की बात है!
बढ़ते वजन की चिंताएँ भी...
हर पल मेरे अब साथ है!
वो भोलापन, वो अदाएँ,
वो निश्छल मुस्कुराहटें कब की गुम हो चुकी...
जिस्म की कसावट भी तो...
साथ कब का छोड़ चुकी!!

पर तू क्यों किस बात पर,
यूँ मुस्कुरा के हँस रहा??
जब भी देखूँ तुझे,
कुछ व्यंग करता क्यूँ दिख रहा?

जीवन के मेरे,
हर रंग का, हर रूप का..
गवाह मेरा तू ही तो रहा!
देखा जिसने सुंदर तन और मोहक मन को ..
फिर आज कुटिल सा तू क्यूँ बन रहा??

साथ दे ए आईने मेरे ..
तू ही मेरा सखा, मनमीत बन ले!
जिंदगी के हर मोड़ पर,
तू ही मेरी अब प्रीत बन ले!
तुझे देख अपनी छवि पे...
थोड़ा अब इतराऊँ मैं!
जिंदगी की कदमताल पे..
थोड़ा अब मुस्कुराऊँ मैं!
कमर न सही, कमरा सही..
स्याह बालों की जगह, थोड़ी सफेदी ही सही ..!!
अनुभवों की लंबी दास्तां से..
निकल के आई हूँ जीत कर.,
गुनगुनाना सीखा बमुश्किल
अपने ही कुछ गीत पर!!

खुद को देखने के दिन तो ..

अब जाकर आए हैं!

खुद को देख, हर्षाने के दिन भी, अब जाकर आए हैं!
खुद में एक विश्वास लेकर, जग में अब मैं खड़ी हुई हूँ !
खुद की एक पहचान लेकर, खुद में ही मैं निखर गई हूँ!

फिर क्यूँ ना ओ आईने मेरे..

अब खुद पे ही कुछ गर्वित हो जाऊँ मैं !!

अब खुद पे ही क्यूँ ना इतरा जाऊँ मैं !!

विनीता खंडेलवाल

झारखण्ड



बचपन के अमीर



बचपन के अमीर

बचपन क्या गया, हो गए गरीब
बच्चे थे जब दिल के थे अमीर
बारिश की बूँदों से खेलते थे हम
घर में ही नदी बहती थी हमारी
तैराते उसमें कई नाव हमारी
नाव में भरते कल्पना का खजाना
तेजी से दौड़ती तब नाव हमारी
नदी नाले पार करती जाती वो
जिंदगी के नाव ढोते-ढोते
हो गए अब दिल के गरीब
सपनों के महल खो गए कहीं
रेत ही रेत है अब चारों ओर
पैर धंस जाते हैं उसमें कहीं
दूर कभी दिखता है फूल कहीं
जाते ही पास मुरझा जाता वो
बचपन था फूलों का गुलदस्ता
ना थी दुश्मनी ना थी दोस्ती
नफे की तराजू में तोलते हैं अब
दोस्ती का पल्ला रहता हल्का
प्यार मोहब्बत ले गया बचपन
हो गए आज दिल के गरीब



स्नेह मोहन

तोफ़ा प्यार का

सुंदर सजा बड़ा सा पैकेट,
भेजा था किसी ने बड़े प्यार से,
कौतूहल जिज्ञासा थी मन में कहीं,
किसने भेजा होगा इतने प्यार से,
लिखा था ऊपर-एक अधूरा सपना-
पैकेट खोला, अन्दर एक और पैकेट,
कितने सारे, एक के अंदर एक पैकेट,
आखिर में एक सुंदर छोटा सा पैकेट,
रखा था उसमें, एक सूखा फूल,
महक रहा था उसमें एक प्रेम पत्र,
लिखा था प्यार से - अधूरा सपना-
पढ़ता था कभी मैं साथ तुम्हारे,
प्यार करता था तुमको दिलो जान से,
रह गया प्यार सिर्फ़ ख़्यालों में कहीं,
प्यार अब अधूरा ख्वाब बन गया
ख्वाब मैं भेज रहा हूँ आज तुम्हें,
विचित्र था मगर मन को छू गया,
यादें रह जाती हैं सासों में कहीं,
पंख लगा उड़ जाता है दूर समय
छोड़ जाता है - एक अधूरा सपना -

Sneh Mohan
Uttar Pradesh



THE SAVOURIES





Lasagne Baked with Meat Sauce

(A delicious lasagne dish made with meat sauce and béchamel sauce)

This is a super tasty Lasagne dish. It is delicious and healthy too specially for children. It is served as a main course for lunch and dinner.

Ingredients for meat sauce:-

1. Mince meat (kid's meat) or any meat . 800 grams
2. Well flavored tomatoes blanched peeled and roughly puréed preferably without seeds. 800 grams - 1 kg
3. Finely chopped onion. 2 cups
4. Very finely chopped garlic. 1 1/2-2 tbsps
5. Bay leaves. 2
6. Crushed allspice (Kabab chini). 1 tsp
7. Freshly grated nutmeg. 1 tsp
8. Freshly ground black pepper. 1 1/2 tsps or to taste
9. Oregano fresh. 2-3 tbsps or If not available dried oregano. 2 tsps
10. Fresh Basil leaves. . 3 tbsps or If not available use dried or mixed Italian herbs 2 tsps
11. Salt. 1 1/2 tsps or to taste
12. Olive oil 1/4 cup
13. Butter. 2 tbsps
14. Lasagne sheets. 14-16
15. Parmesan cheese (grated) for sprinkling between the layers and topping . 90 -100grams
16. Eden cheese grated. 3-4 tbsps
17. Cheddar cheese grated. 3-4 tbsps

Ingredients for béchamel sauce:-

1. Flour (all purpose) 5 tbsps
2. Butter. 7-8 tbsps
3. Milk. 4 1/2 cups
4. Freshly ground black pepper. 1 tsp or to taste
5. Fresh grated nutmeg powder. 1 tsp
6. Salt. 3/4 tsp or to taste

(Grease a big tray for keeping the boiled lasagne sheets. Keep a big pan full of cold water by the side of boiling water for lasagne



Heat plenty of water in a big pan with 1 tsp salt Add 2-3 sheets at a time and boil for 3-4 minutes or instructions on the package.

Transfer them into the cold water for a few seconds Remove on to a towel with a slotted spoon and pat dry them with cloth or towel and then place them onto a greased tray in a single layer Boil all the sheets in a similar manner Keep them aside).

For making meat sauce:-

Heat olive oil in a pan on medium heat Add garlic and bay leaves and fry for a minute Add onion and butter to it Fry for 2-3 minutes or till it becomes translucent Add mince meat and stir continuously to avoid clotting Fry it for 4-5 minutes Add tomatoes and mix thoroughly Cook it till the gravy becomes thick and meat is well cooked Now add crushed Kabab chini (allspice) black pepper powder chopped oregano chopped basil leaves and salt to it Mix thoroughly But the gravy should not be very thick .

Switch off the heat.

Transfer the meat sauce into a bowl Keep aside.

For making béchamel sauce :-

Melt butter in a pan Add flour to it and fry or stir continuously for 2 minutes on medium heat Add milk (preferably cold) to it Stir thoroughly with a whisker till it starts boiling Reduce the heat Cook for 2-3 minutes Add black pepper powder grated nutmeg and salt to it Mix well Switch off the heat.

Transfer the béchamel sauce into a bowl

Take an ovenproof rectangular or square in shape baking dish for assembling meat sauce béchamel sauce cheese and lasagne sheets We can make up to five layers but should not be less than three layers.

Preheat the oven at 200 degree celsius on baking mode.

Take the dish and spread a spoon full of meat sauce on the surface of the baking dish Arrange the lasagne sheets in single layer all over it If it is bigger than the dish you cut the extra sheet with sharp knife and keep it aside Use it in some gap.

Spread some meat sauce over it and then one layer of béchamel sauce over it Sprinkle some grated parmesan cheese over it Repeat it three times more In second layer sprinkle grated eden cheese over it In third layer sprinkle grated cheddar cheese over it On last layer spread only the béchamel sauce and sprinkle good amount of grated parmesan cheese over it.

Place the lasagne dish in the preheated oven for baking.

Bake till the cheese becomes golden brown Turn off the oven.

Remove the baked lasagne from the oven and allow it to stand for some time on a wire rack.

Garnish as you like.

Serve hot as you wish

Serves:- 6-7

Note:- If you don't have allspice use 1 tsp powder of cloves mace cinnamon and nutmeg mixture

Sarita Lal
West Bengal

Shami Kabab and Goli Kabab of Masoor Dal

(Shami Kabab and Goli kabab or ball kabab made with red lentil)

It is a vegetarian Kabab made with red lentil It is delicious and healthy It is full of protein It is highly liked by vegetarians Even non vegetarians love it In texture and in look also it is just like meat Shami Kabab You can call it vegetarians's delicacy or delight Simple to make and ingredients are easily available.

Ingredients for Shami Kabab and Goli Kabab:-

1. Masoor dal (red lentil whole) 1 1/2 cups
2. Finely chopped onion. 1/2 cup
3. Ginger paste. 1 tbsp
4. Garlic paste. 2 tsps
5. Whole red chilies seedless 2 or to taste
6. Black cardamom. 1 piece
7. Cinnamon stick. 1 3" piece
8. Peppercorn. 12-15
9. Salt. 1 tsp or to taste
10. Oil for toasting the Shami Kababs 2-3 tbsps
11. Oil for deep frying the Goli Kababs
12. Flour for dusting the Goli kababs 3-4 tbsps
13. Flour for making the slurry. 3-4 tbsps
14. Bread crumbs. 1 -1 1/2 cups

Ingredients for mixing in the Kabab dough :-

1. Finely chopped onion. 2-3 tbsps
2. Finely chopped coriander leaves. 2-3 tbsps
3. Garam masala powder. 3/4 tsp or to taste
4. Crushed Kababchini 1/2 tsp
5. Tomato ketchup. 3-4 tbsps
6. Malt vinegar. 1 tbsp
7. Fresh breadcrumbs of crushed removed. 5-6 slices
8. Salt 3/4-1 tsp or to taste



Ingredients for the stuffing of Shami Kabab and Goli kabab:-

1. Finely chopped onion. 1/2 -3/4 cup
2. Finely chopped ginger. 1 1/4 tbsps
3. Finely chopped green chilies. 1 tsp or to taste
4. Finely chopped mint leaves. 2 tbsps

Mix all these four ingredients in a bowl and keep aside.



Soak the masoor dal for 4-5 hours

Drain the water and add the dal to a pan with 2 1/2 cups of water Put the pan on heat Now add chopped onion garlic paste ginger paste red chilies black cardamom cinnamon stick pepper corn and salt to it Mix well Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to medium heat Cook the dal till no extra moisture is left in the pan In between stir frequently to avoid sticking and burning of the dal Turn off the heat.

Transfer the dal to a plate and remove the whole grains of spices Discard the cinnamon stick Peel the black cardamom and crush it with black pepper corn Keep them aside Allow the cooked dal to cool for some time.

Now transfer the cooked dal into a grinder and coarsely ground it.

Transfer the ground dal into a big bowl and add chopped onion chopped coriander leaves garam masala crushed Kababchini tomato ketchup vinegar fresh bread crumbs crushed pepper corn and black cardamom seeds from cooked dal and salt to it Mix thoroughly Check the salt and adjust to your taste.

Up to this point everything is common including the stuffing of the Kababs Divide the dough into 20-21 portion.

If you want to make Shami Kabab you take a small portion of the dough Flatten it on your fingers and put some stuffing over it and shape it into a Shami Kabab Keep it on a plate Now make all the Kababs in a similar manner.

Heat a frying pan on medium heat Pour little oil over it Gently place the Kababs in small batches over it and toast till the Kababs turns golden brown Flip over the kababs and toast the other sides in a similar manner Remove onto a plate.

Now transfer the Kababs on to a serving dish Garnish as you wish.

Serve hot with tomato ketchup and green Chutney Serves 7-8.

Now if you want to make Goli kabab with this dough take a small portion of the dough Make a ball and press with your thumb to create a space for stuffing Put some stuffing in it Cover the gap with the dough around it and shape into a ball.

Put the ball on to a plate Make all the Goli kabab in a similar manner Keep them aside Make a slurry with flour and some water in a bowl.

Transfer the breadcrumbs on to a plate Transfer the flour on to a different plate.

Now lightly dust each Goli (ball) with flour and keep them aside.

Now dip each Goli (ball) in the slurry and then coat evenly with breadcrumbs Keep them aside.

Heat plenty of oil in a frying pan on medium heat Add 2-3 Goli (balls) (in small batches) at a time and fry till light golden brown Remove on to a kitchen towel Fry all the Goli Kababs in a similar manner.

Transfer the Goli Kababs on to a serving dish Garnish as you wish.

Serve hot with mustard sauce and tomato ketchup Serves 7-8.

Note- Both the Kababs taste different from each other Although the ingredients are same The difference is made by the breadcrumbs coating of the Goli kabab and deep frying of the Kababs Both the versions are equally tasty and awesome.

Sarita Lal
West Bengal

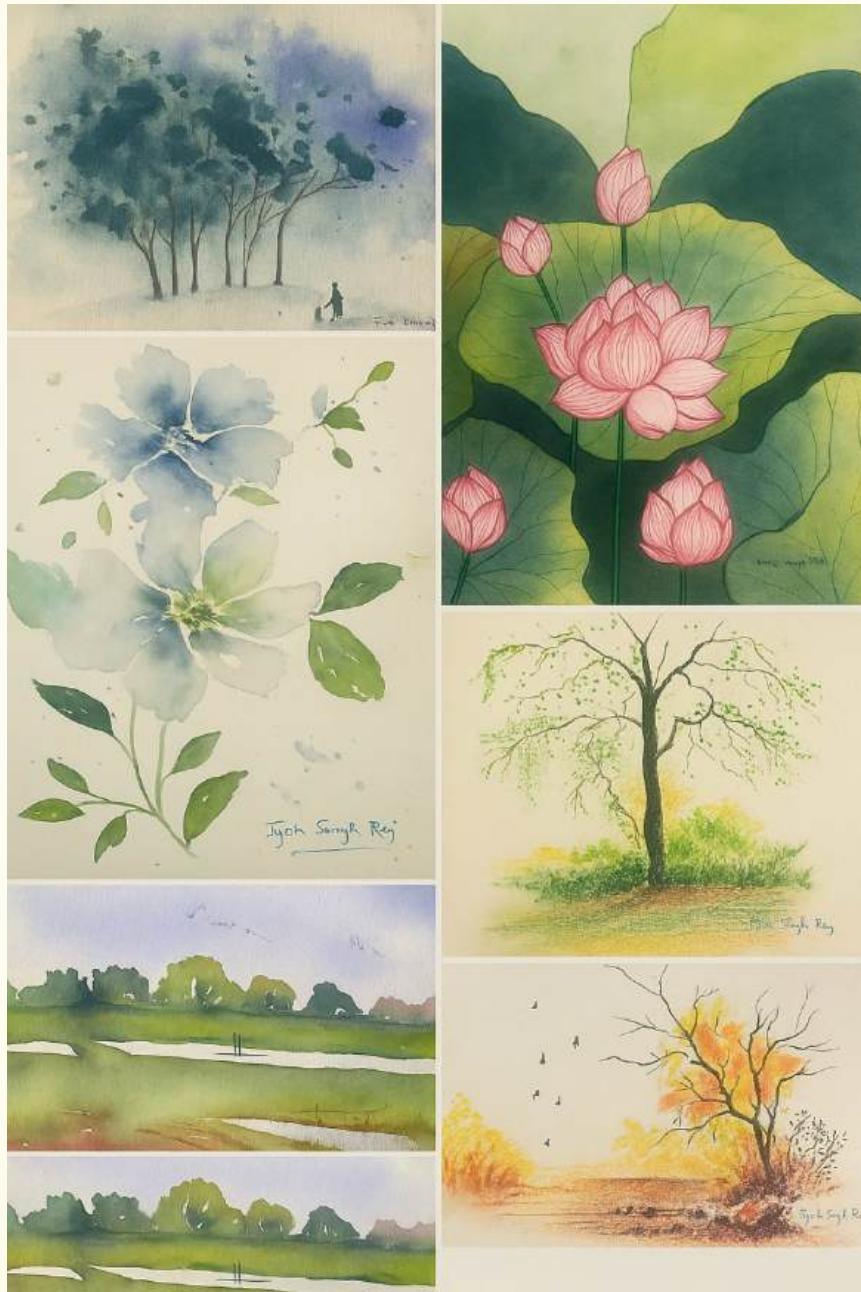


AQUARELLES





Mystic Meadows



Jyoti Singh
Punjab



A Glimpse into My Latest Paintings



BLISS OF SOLITUDE

Set against a wooden backdrop with rusty nails, at a bench in the majestic Chashme-e-Shahi, Shveta's Bliss of Solitude harmonizes natural beauty with rustic charm. The soft white petals of the daisies contrast beautifully with the dark wood of the weathered bench, creating a balanced composition that blends delicacy with ruggedness. The dancing daisies evoke nostalgia as well as joy, celebrating the unrefined beauty of nature and becoming the poet's Bliss of Solitude.

FIERY

Much like its habitats in Kashmir, The Snow Leopard is powerful yet graceful; rugged yet vulnerable. Shveta's Fiery depicts the snow leopard found in Kashmir's high altitudes. The artist's use of subtle shading and texture are not just a reminder of the big cat's graceful yet powerful presence but also a clarion call to preserve them before it is too late.



HELP

The Kashmir Stag, popularly called the Hangul is Kashmir's state animal. Primarily found in the Dachigam National Park near Srinagar, it is a critically endangered species. Shveta's HELP is a call for help, a plea to save this magnificent and gentle creature. Done in acrylic on canvas, this piece in deep earthy browns is finely rendered with rich tonal layers and textured brushwork evoking warmth and depth and reminding us of the cry of this animal to save it before it is too late.



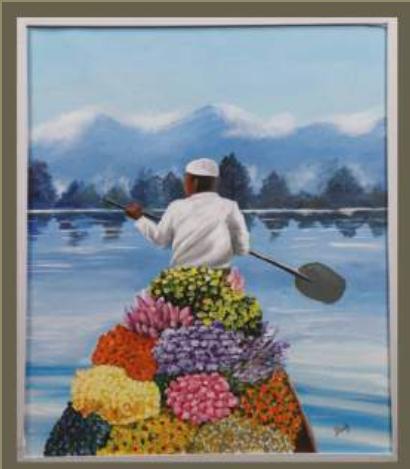
THE FLAMING CHINAR

Fiery shades of red orange and yellow, fallen leaves carpeting pathways, The Flaming Chinar captures the enchantment of autumn in Kashmir. A dilapidated boat, abandoned near the lake's edge is a metaphor for the loss of spring, nostalgia for what has been.

THE VALLEY OF FLOWERS

Set of 5 Paper machie Plates

Kashmir, often called the paradise on earth, is home to a breathtaking variety of flowers that paint its landscape with colour and fragrance. They are not just natural wonders but are living artifacts, woven into the cultural and artistic fabric of Kashmir, inspiring poetry, embroidery and tradition. The vibrant tulips of spring, summer Sunflowers with their golden faces turned to the sun, the pristine lotuses in the Dal, the purple hues of saffron in Pampore and the fiery red poppies of the wild- all represent the unique floral symphony that Kashmir is- resplendent, yet soothing, regal yet tranquil. Shveta's depiction of the many hued flora of Kashmir is a tribute to the beauty of a land she loves dearly, a celebration of a grandeur that is as timeless as evocative.



THE SOLITARY RIDER

Soft muted tones of blue and grey blend seamlessly, capturing the ethereal stillness of the fog, the vibrant hues of flowers & sharp contrast to the misty backdrop. Shveta's The Solitary Rider glides through the misty waters of the Dal Lake on a foggy morning. The timeless charm of Kashmir's lake life comes alive- the mystique of the Shikara and its rider etched permanently on the viewer's mind, long after it will be seen no more.

Shveta Gupta Kansal
AGMUT/ J& K



THE NATURAL ELEMENTS



Whispers of a Delhi Winter



A hush descends on Delhi's streets,
As winter hums in foggy sheets.
The amber lamps, a ghostly glow,
Flicker soft where cold winds blow.

Mornings wrapped in mist so tight,
Hazy veils obscure the light.
Tea stalls breathe in curls of steam,
Waking hearts with warmth and cream.

In Lodhi's gardens, leaves turn dry,
Crisp beneath a pale blue sky.
Children run in sweaters bright,
Laughing through the golden light.

By India Gate, as night turns deep,
Lovers linger, secrets keep.
Roasted nuts and ice cream carts,
Hold the taste of Delhi's heart.

The air is thick with scent and song,
Bonfires crackle all night long.
Winter here is cold yet sweet,

A fleeting chill with memories deep.

Tea cups warm in frozen hands,
Smoke swirls up from roadside stands.
Chai and peanuts, tales retold,
In Delhi's winter, hearts unfold.

Ruhi Danish Ashraf
AGMUT

Health, Yog and Nutrition



ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ।
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।

Above Shlok has been taken from Brihadaranyaka Upnishad.

Where in we wish for health and happiness for all. However this leads to other question, how to remain healthy?



If we look at human history we notice that average life use to 30-35 years around 150 years ago. People used to die because of war and communicable diseases, however now, average age of person now is more than 75 years. The challenge is that how to live enhanced life healthy, for which humanity has no experience!

If we look at rise of lifestyle diseases like BP, Diabetic, hypertension, heart attack, brain stroke, renal failure and mental stress around, we can say that humanity is suffering, rather than enjoying longevity.

if we observe the health ecosystem which has

evolved in USA we will find that broadly two factors are responsible for present health scenario.

1. Excessive consumption of processed food which are designed to consume more and are nutrition deficient. Mostly it contains sugar, preservatives and fat in abundance. There is strong food lobby in USA which hides the harmful effects of foods and sells processed food as healthy food (protein supplement , gluten free, cholesterol free, fortified with vitamins and mineral, boosts immunity etc).

2. Medicine: modern medicine treats the symptoms and not the root cause of symptoms, Its long term use always have side affects and leads to new diseases like organ failure and strokes, This lobby is very strong, barring few, all medical institutions in USA are owned and financed by pharma companies. No wonder there is no curriculum on nutrition in UG and PG medical courses.

We have to understand that how modern science has changed the life style in last 200 years and we are given impression that there is no easy way out to healthy living. If we consider the evolution of human being as 500 page book then last 200 years can be considered as last paragraph of the book!. And there lies the solution.

Our body has evolved in certain way and we have to go back to old ways of diet. What body needs is nutritious food and not junk food.Nutrition:



processed food is highly unhealthy and we should resort to natural wholesome food, our food should have plenty of green leaf vegetables and salads. Plant based whole food is what body needs, it's works on principal that our body has inherent recovery mechanism to bounce back provided we provide nutrition to body. There are emerging evidence that if person takes vegetables juice in sufficient quantity daily than 90 % of lifestyle diseases goes off in 2 months.

Fasting: Once Buddha disciples asked him what to eat? Buddha replied that you eat any thing, but eat before noon. Recently two Nobel prizes have been given on work which showed that fasting actually improves the health. Taking cue from Buddha teaching an experiment was conducted on mice. Two sets of healthy mice were taken. One group was give food from 6:00 am to 2:00 pm (with no control on consumption by mice). Second group was fed with same quantity of food which was consumed by first group, however quantity was divided to make food served every two hours through out day/night. It may be noticed that both group were fed with same quantity of food. However results were dramatically opposite. First group remain healthy while second group developed all lifestyle diseases like BP hypertension and diabetes, and they died early.

Second experiment was conducted on prolonged fasting and it was proven that long fasting (more than 16 hours)burns organ fat and makes cells to recycle the cell material and by doing so unhealthy cells are discarded. Hence for healthy living we must adopt Intermittent fasting.

Yog is nothing but a journey from physical body to subtle body (sthul to shuksm).

Yog.

- 1) Yam-not to steal, no violence, no lust, not to lie, humble.
- 2) Niyam-compassion, frugal food, patience, steadfastness.
- 3) Asans-stable and comfortable posture-stabilises the mind.
- 4) pranayam-expansion of prana (life energies) through breath control.
5. Pratyaahaar: pulling back life energies which are flowing out through five sense organs and karmendriyas.
6. Dharna-focusing the life energy on certain physical or mental objects.
7. Dhyan-prolonged focus of life energy for longer durations.
8. Samadhi-detaching oneself from physical and mental body and merging with supreme.

There is lot of misconception about yog, most of seekers start with asana and want to jump to Dhyan/samadhi by passing eight steps mentioned above. This is what makes them frustrated and they never learn/practise properly. Hence it should be learned from Gurus and also it should be practiced daily.

Kindly take out at least 45 minutes for yog, it should be done in neat and clean place, preferably in natural surrounding and where man made disturbances are least.

West has started doing research on yog and before they start teaching us our own knowledge, it's time to learn yog and improve our well being. Have blissful life .

Om औ shanti.

Ragini Singh
Kerala



THE CATALYSTS



ASTHA KA MAHAKUMBH



The great Mahakumbh, which was recently going on in Prayagraj has just ended. Kumbh is normally held every 12 years and ardh kumbh is held every six years. This year there was a special significance as it was supposed to be after 144 years! Such was a special constellation of planets this year, so they called it Mahakumbh. Kumbh has always been held very sacred by people and the age old belief is that the soul gets salvation, if a person has had a dip in the holy river on the auspicious dates even otherwise all days during the Kumbh period are good.



The story about Devasur Sangram is very well-known when Samundra Manthan happened. Mandar Parvat was the grand post and Vasuki Serpent became the churning rope. 34 gems came out of the ocean, which were divided between the two parties of Devas and Asuras. Then came vish or poison, which no one wanted so Lord Shiva drank it and he came to be known as Neel Kanth after that. Then came the Kumbh or urn or pot that contained Amrit, which everyone craved for. Devas ran with it, but during this race drops from this dropped at four places, Haridwar, Prayagraj, Nashik, and Ujjain. That's why Kumbh happens in these places, in Hardwar at river Ganga, the Triveni of Ganga Yamuna and the mythical or lost Saraswati in

Prayagraj, Godavari in Nashik and Shipra in Ujjain. This race went on for 12 days. Now one celestial day is like one year on earth. That's why it is held every twelve years on the four rivers where the nectar dropped.

What makes it tick to this day? it's not a joke that for thousands of years this practice has been going on without being questioned. The remarkable thing is that it gets bigger and larger every time and the crowds keep simmering. From lakhs the crowds have jumped to crores! This time it was 68 crores, highest ever congregation anywhere on earth! With more travel means and other amenities, it's easy for people to take up Pilgrim trips. Earlier they must have travelled on foot! The answer lies in our faith and beliefs of the people. The strength of our religion is such that I have even seen agnostics and non-believers coming to these events and taking a dip.

My earliest memory as a child is that Kumbh is a very bad thing. In my book "Leaves From a Bureaucrat's Diary" I have mentioned about the infamous Kumbh of 1954, where the stampede occurred and more than 800 people died. My house was full of 50 guest, relations and their relations who had made my house their comfortable haven.

My most fearful memory of childhood is being left at a friend's place and her mother consoling me as my parents, too had gone for a dip in Sangam. I heard servants talking about the terrible tragedy that had happened in hushed voices. Finally, my parents returned at night, safe and sound and a traumatised little girl was so



relieved to see them !

My next experience of Kumbh happened when my husband was posted to Haridwar Mela Officer Incharge of Kumbh Mela of 1974. It was then that I understood what all goes into organising such a mammoth task ! It becomes the job of administration to prepare in advance for the arrival of pilgrims and take care of their amenities. My husband's report to Government after the mela makes a nice reading of what all went into it. In fact, he devoted a whole chapter to this in his book "Foot Prints on the Sands". Of course, it's not so exhaustive as the report.

For one thing, normally mela officer is posted a year in advance. That year they changed him midstream. We went to Haridwar in December and main Mela days were in mid April, but the first snan was beginning barely two months later. Understandably it was a race against time ! My husband was very busy literally day and night to organise the mela which he did successfully. This is the time of my life, I came in contact with lots of saints. I visited many ashrams. I came across charlatans but many real saints too. In Part 2 of my book I have written about saints I have come across from very close quarters.

I was barely 25 and 1/2 with two small kids to take care of, when I went to Hardwar. I tried to understand what all is meant by these melas. There were special camps of Akharas and on the main snan days their baths were special before public was allowed. These Akharas were formed by none other than Adi Shankaracharya in the eighth century to take care of religion. They were two kinds, the militants were called Astradhari. The other were the ones who taught scriptures various sub-groups. Then there were the famous

Naga sadhus. I was so naive and thought that they were sadhus from Nagaland ! It came as a big shock to me when I attended an event where these naked men marched before us in hordes ! Oh my I was shaken with embarrassment that day !

Mela for me was quite a learning experience. I took my kumbh snan with my mom-in-law on Har ki Pauri on main day without escort. My husband had prohibited any special arrangements for VIPs on main days. We walked from our camp in Laljiwala, which was on the other side of Har ki Pauri, on a pontoon bridge with milling crowds and took the dip of salvation. An article in a famous foreign journal was entitled "30 Seconds to Salvation". My husband saw us from his watchtower, where he was glued to it for three days and nights without even changing or taking his shoes off ! I had been sending food and clothes from our camp. He had no time ! Of course he himself couldn't take a dip of salvation as he was devoted to taking care of lakhs of people ! The main Mela days were Baisakhi, 13th 14th April, I could go and on about the Mela. Six years back in 2019, in Prayagraj on Ardh kumbh my husband and I took a dip on a non snan day.

Such is the power of Kumbh Mela which has been going on since time memorial. One may or may not be a believer, but one cannot dismiss the Aastha or faith of milling crowds, which one has been seeing on TV every day throughout the period. What is the secret one would wonder ? I would say it's the belief which has been ingrained in us through our Sanatan Dharm !

Smita Shah, Uttar Pradesh

**We pay our heartfelt tribute to Mrs Smita Shah by
printing her last article without any omission**

Sambhaav Makes It Sambhav

From Pulwama to Prayagraj via Poonch: crafting Dreams, Showcasing Heritage.



Sambhaav Utsav, is a pioneering initiative taken by the Resident Commission of Jammu & Kashmir in 2024 at a time when I was posted as the Principal Resident Commissioner. This initiative brought together artists, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs offering a unique platform to showcase the rich cultural diversity and entrepreneurial capacity of the region. Through traditional art, music, dance,



and cuisine, the Utsav succeeded in providing a unique glimpse into the rich and unique heritage that defines India's northern most state. Sambhaav Utsav was conceptualized and initiated in a record time in the month of February 2024, with an array of activities spanning over a period of ten days. Based on the success of Sambhaav Utsav 1.0 and having established the proof of concept, Sambhaav 2.0 was successfully organized in month of July 2024. The aim was to provide opportunity to several promising artisans from remote areas and belonging to SC, ST and minority community as well as women entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their handicrafts and agriculture produce besides promoting the vibrant culture, craftsmanship and cuisines of Jammu and Kashmir.

Visitors to the festival were captivated by the melodious tunes of Kashmiri folk music, the

graceful movements of traditional dance forms, and the rich flavors of local delicacies. This immersive experience fostered a deeper appreciation for Jammu & Kashmir's cultural diversity, reinforcing the values of unity and harmony among different communities. Through Sambhaav Utsav the J&K Resident Commission, re-oriented itself exploring its own potential to preserving the region's artistic legacy while also creating economic opportunities for local artisans through ongoing cultural exchanges. Located in the heart of a bustling city, this maiden venture transformed the Resident Commission into a vibrant hub of artistic expression. With ample



space, and civic engagement generated through our social media campaigns, artists were motivated to unleash their creativity, resulting in a stunning showcase of both contemporary and traditional art forms. A unique highlight of the event was the live painting sessions, where spectators could witness the evolution of blank canvases into breathtaking masterpieces.

Themes of nature, unity, and human emotion were intricately woven into the artwork, reflecting the festival's emphasis on harmony and cultural

exchange. The use of bold colors and innovative artistic techniques left a lasting impact on visitors, establishing Sambhaav Utsav as a cornerstone event in the artistic calendar. To further its reach, the J&K Resident Commission decided to



promote the festival's vision through outreach programs in RWAs and various exhibitions, ensuring that Jammu & Kashmir's rich heritage continues to inspire audiences across the country. "Sambhaav Manthan Satra" covering five engaging sessions was a unique element that involved large number of experts in contributing to knowledge sharing and cross pollination of ideas.

Most importantly, Sambhaav could also expand its reach to Mahakumbh Prayagraj through presence of women SHGs from J and K at the Akanksha Pavillion organised by Akanksha Samiti. development wing of Indian Administrative Service Officers' Wives association (IASOWA) of Uttar Pradesh.

Thus Sambhaav initiative has expanded beyond Delhi to historic and spiritual city of Prayagraj at a time when the global focus was on this unique convergence of humanity at a single place at one time. Prior to this, Sambhaav team carved a niche for itself at an event in Lucknow at Akanksha Pavillion organized by Akanksha Samiti where women SHGs from different parts of J and K besides young artists representing "Stirngs of Baramullah" had the opportunity to showcase their craftsmanship on a larger stage. The Self Help Groups(SHGs) from Jammu and Kashmir facilitated by the Akanksha Samiti made a significant impact at the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025

in Prayagraj. Their participation not only highlighted their entrepreneurial spirit but also provided them with a valuable platform to showcase their craftsmanship on a larger stage besides integrating the women from J and K with other women who had come from different parts of U.P.

With 20 SHGs showcasing over 185 unique products (SKUs) across six slots from January to February 2025, the stalls at Mahakumbh attracted more than thousands of visitors. This remarkable engagement translated into revenue of over Rs 10 lakh besides long term networks and connects opening for the women entrepreneurs. The initiative successfully demonstrated the skills of women artisans from Jammu & Kashmir, empowering the financially while promoting traditional crafts.

The products ranged from intricate handicrafts, traditional Kashmiri embroidery and sozni work to organic food items such as saffron, rajma, pickles, and herbal products. Many of the SHGs achieved a near complete sell out of their stock, with several groups reporting 100 percent product sales. The success of SHGs at Kumbh Mela 2025 stands as a testament to the resilience, skills and determination of women entrepreneurs from Jammu & Kashmir. Their participation not only generated significant revenue but also provided them with exposure and valuable networking opportunities.

With such initiatives, Sambhaav plays a crucial role in fostering self reliance among women by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities and preserving traditional crafts. And organizations like State IASOWA are well positioned to support ventures like these in the overall interest of promoting women's economic leadership.

Dr. Rashmi Singh
AGMUT



थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं

मेरी कविता में शब्दों का चयन अत्यंत साधारण है । यूँ कहें, एक पल्ली का बहुत ही सरल भाव से अपने पति के लिए अभिव्यक्त होता है । मेरे पति सरकारी मुलाजिम रहे हैं, दौड़ने भागने की आदत रही है । हमेशा तैयार अपनी ड्रूटी को पूरा करने के लिए । इस दौड़-भाग में कभी - कभी गृहस्थ जीवन के कई महत्वपूर्ण और प्यारे क्षण छूट जाते हैं जिन्हें महसूस करने का मौका ही नहीं मिलता.....कभी - कभी ऐसा क्षण भी आता है, जब समय थोड़ा थीमा या रुका हुआ सा महसूस होता है । वे व्यक्त करें न करें हमें महसूस होता है । ऐसे ही कुछ पल आपसे साझा करना चाहती हूँ । पल्ली कविता में अपने पति को ये कहना चाहती है कि यहाँ सब कुछ रुका नहीं, सफर अभी बाकी है

थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं,
ठेढ़ी भेढ़ी है डगर, अनजान है सफर,
घनघोर बादल हैं, बिजली भी कड़क रही है,
देखें, बारिश में भीगेंगे,
थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं ॥

वहाँ पेड़ की छाया है,
बादल भी छंट गया है,
रिमझिम सी छोटी-छोटी बूँदें हैं
आसमा भी साफ दिख रहा है,
थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं ॥

कहीं पहाड़ ये विशाल,
तो कहीं नदी का उछाल,
उठ रहे हैं कई सवाल,
पहाड़ पर चढ़ना होगा,
नदी में उतरना होगा,
देखो ना छोटी सी पगड़ंडी है,
नदी और पहाड़ के बीच
वहीं से निकल लेंगे ।
थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं ॥

वहाँ देखो सूरजमुखी के फूल कितने सुंदर हैं,
पर भौंरे भी बहुत हैं,
यहाँ इस पेड़ के नीचे चिड़ियों को देखो,
अपनी चौंच का दाना बच्चों को खिला रही है
यहाँ ठहरकर चिड़ियों की चहचहाहट सुनते हैं,
फूलों का रस भौंरों को चूसने देते हैं,
थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं,

शाम ढल रही है,
गाय बैल भेड़ बकरियाँ सब धर लौट रहे हैं
इनके गले में बंधी धंटियों की आवाज कितनी मधुर लग रही है,
देखो दिख रही है कोई बस्ती,
शायद अपना भी कोई आशियाना हो वहाँ,
पक्का नहीं तो कच्चा घरौंदा बना लेंगे ।
जीवन की सुख-दुख से सजा लेंगे ।
थोड़ी दूर और चलते हैं ॥

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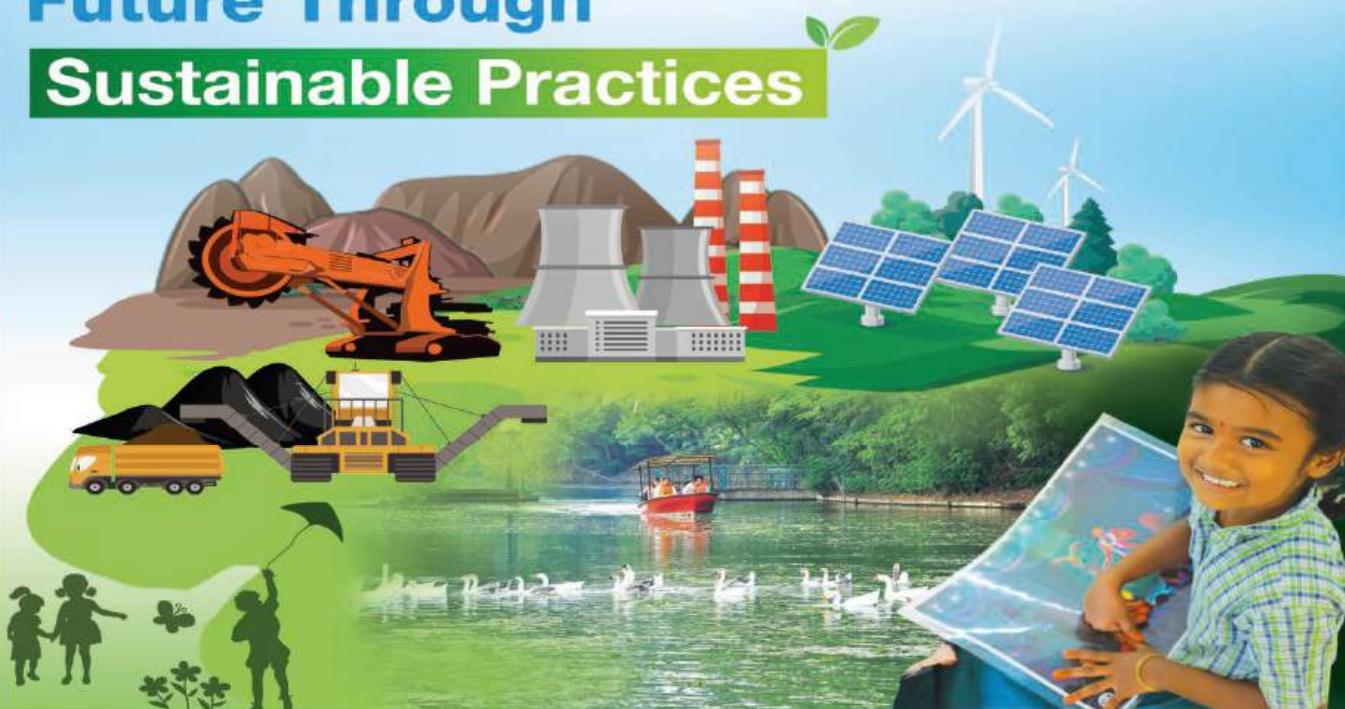
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- Reaching a Mining capacity of over 100 Million tonnes when Machhakata and Patrapara coal blocks come into operation.
- A major thrust to Renewable power projects - a 2000 MW capacity Solar project in Rajasthan and 1000 MW capacity Solar power project in Assam along with a pilot-scale Green Hydrogen project in Neyveli.
- Unwavering support through physical relief works at flood-affected cities / areas including de-watering inundated areas with high capacity industrial pumps and providing food packets to the needy during floods.
- Unflinching commitment to large-scale CSR initiatives in Education (construction of classrooms and provision of educational aids) to schools in and around Neyveli, conduct of Health camps in surrounding villages and distribution of Aid and assistive devices to the differently abled.
- Collaboration with NPTI to provide job oriented Post-Diploma and PG Diploma courses to Project Affected Persons (PAPs) of NLCIL, enabling them to get employment opportunities in premier companies.

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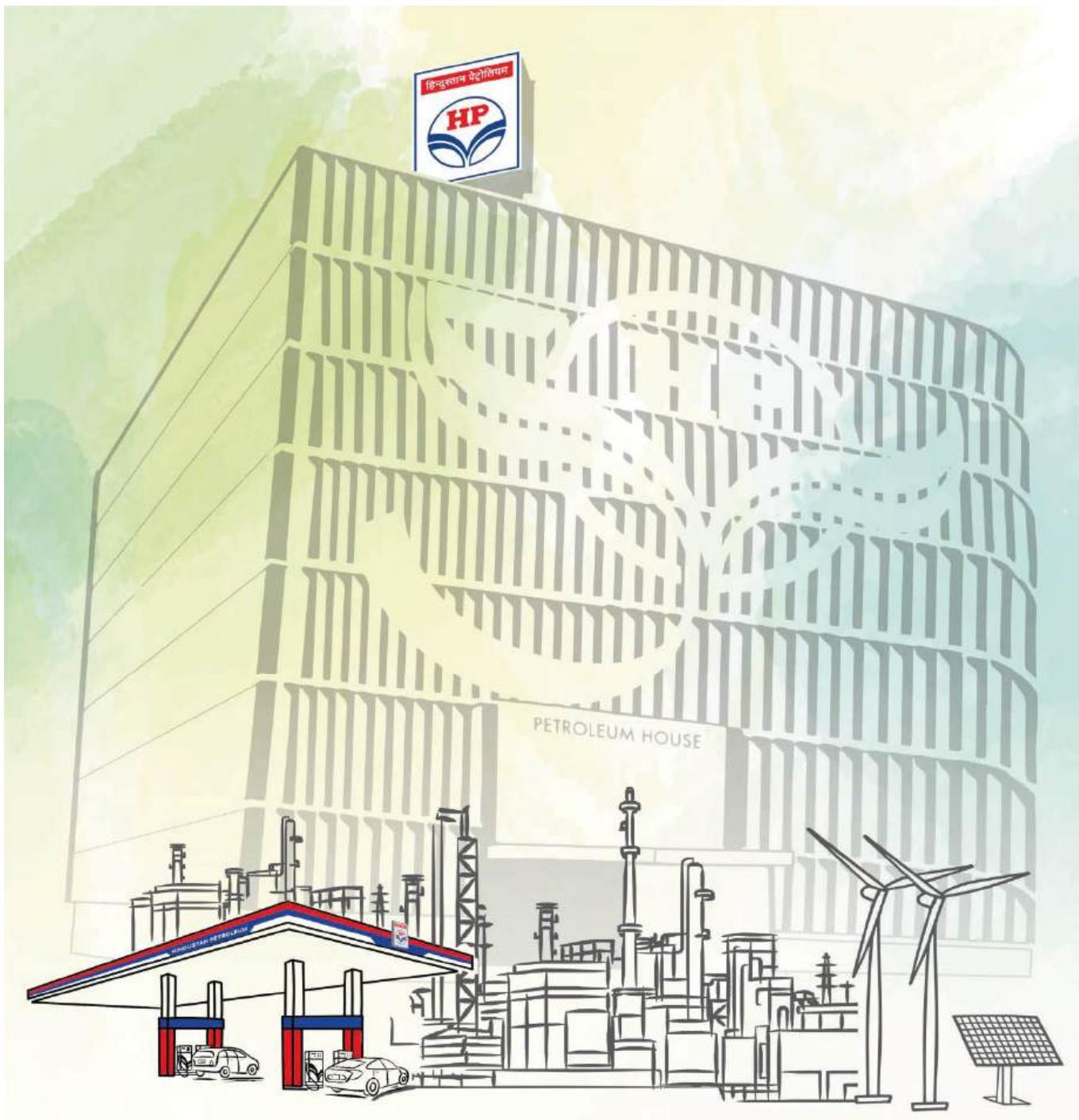
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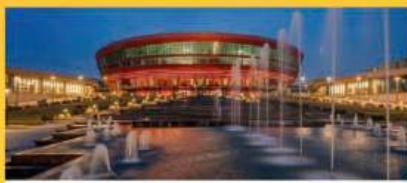


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