

Hash#ag

December 2021

INDIA

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HUNGRY?
Popular food creators

"I WANT
TO BE A DIVA"

*Malaika
Arora*

Jaipur's

Best Kept Secrets...

Vegetarian diet

for PCOS

Sushmita Sen

Jewellery must be timeless



REVIEWS
TRAVEL
FASHION
& MORE

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From the **E**ditor

BON APPÉTIT!



Is our cover making you hungry? Rightfully so! After having featured some of the country's top stars on our cover since the inception of our magazine, we wanted to do something different this time. An important question arose: Is there anything that can challenge a hot body or a good pair of abs? Well yes, certainly! A good plate of food!

Food is a philosophy in itself and we realised that if there is one thing that unites the world seamlessly, it is a plate of edible options. Besides, isn't there is something addictive in scrolling through food blogs on social media? With so many delicious mouth-watering recipes and creations, reading up about cooking, and checking out new tips and cooking techniques is like a hobby in itself.

The pandemic has been many things. A positive that has emerged is the boost experienced by amateur chefs around the world. Almost everyone picked up a ladle, and bravely entered the kitchen. From kitchen hits and misses to someone's failed attempts at baking, social media was abuzz with food posts. Almost two years later, recipe creation and blogging have become a whole new ball game. It is now a constant lifestyle that involves creating quality content, fine-tuning recipes, detailed plating, HD photography and so much more. This competitiveness is why, although we have

thousands of food blogs and bloggers, only a few manage to catch the right eyeballs.

Hashtag scouted for recipe creators who have continually wowed us with their dedication and creativity. While one creates vegan recipes, another offers simple everyday vegetarian recipes with a twist. While one specialises in delectable eggless desserts, another offers the best of international recipes. Each of them is unique; if there is one thing common between them all, it is their perseverance and passion for food. Armed with stunning photography and detailed recipes, they have managed to meet the exacting demands of virtual food lovers.

Without a doubt, the world is a better place now they are in it – and definitely a more delicious one. So while you ditch the cookbooks that are stuffed in your kitchen cupboards and get following these food bloggers for a huge slice of inspiration, you can also browse through our magazine for everything that is trending. From celeb interviews to fitness, fashion, and travel, it's all in here.

Wishing everyone an enjoyable and sumptuous December...

SINDURI VUPPALA



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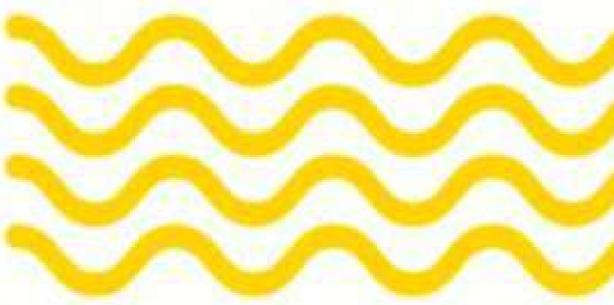
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**THE
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**DELICIOUS
AND
CRUNCHY**



UPCOMING EVENTS

DECEMBER 2021

Sunburn Goa

Asia's largest music festival, Sunburn Goa, returns for its 15th edition. This year's festival complies with all COVID safety regulations. It's time everyone engages in the pool of love, music and dance.

Date: 27 December 2021 – 29 December 2021

Time: 2 pm

Venue: Hilltop Vagator, Goa



Maya Bazaar - Get Set Goa

A one-of-a-kind mystical platform, Get Set Goa aspires to provide the greatest goods and services from 40+ queer owned businesses. Food, titillation, as well as other delights are available nonstop and are juxtaposed with live performances, open mics, music and dance, stand-up comedy, and artwork displays. The market strives to present creative, eccentric and aesthetic items created with care and compassion by the LGBTQIA+ community for the wider world.

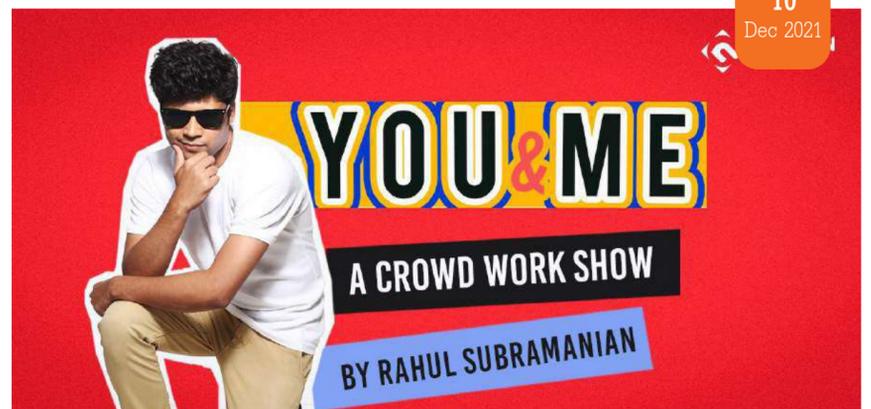
Date: 3 December 2021 – 4 December 2021

Time: 2pm – 11pm

Venue: Uddo Sunset Kitchen and Bar, Siolim, Goa



You & Me - A Crowd Work Show



Rahul Subramanian's crowd work presentation is fully improvised. With spontaneity bringing a fresh theme to his shows, audience engagement is at an all-time high. Prepare to see a hilarious frenzy with this vivacious guy who makes each contact worthwhile.

Date: 10 December 2021

Venue: Bhaskara Auditorium, Birla Science Center

Time: 5:30 pm and 7:30 pm

Ben Böhmer : Live



German prodigy Ben Böhmer presents a massive live concert in Hyderabad. This prolific musician brings India onto his map of the world by hosting a show here for his album *Begin Again*. Join him on this momentous trip to witness his magnificent abilities as he weaves fantastical experience throughout his musical concert.

Date: 25 December 2021

Venue: Prism Club and Kitchen, Hyderabad

Time: 5 pm

Hot Air Balloon Festival

The most notable example of adventure sports in India is the Hot Air Balloon Festival. Travelling well above the ground in a giant multicoloured hot air balloon is the focus of this celebration. The event also holds a few stalls selling aesthetic souvenirs. If you are someone who commemorates photography, don't forget to pack your DSLR. Let everyone take to the skies and enjoy everything it has in store!

Date: 1 December 2021 – 31 December 2021

Venue: Bidar, Hampi and Mysore, Karnataka



1-31
Dec 2021

New Year Cruise



31
Dec 2021

It's time for another wonderful, amusing, and one-of-a-kind cruise extravaganza for all the party animals. This New Year's Event-Dinner Cruise would undoubtedly provide everyone with a spectacular New Year celebration, with outstanding dance and DJ evenings, entertainment, tourist spots, photo booths, and other attractions. In addition to the non-stop music and overall partying, there will be a show of explosions and sky lanterns following the New Year's Eve descent to lend a little playfulness to the event.

Date: 31 December 2021

Venue: Mandovi River, Panjim, North Goa

Time: 9 pm

Hornbill Festival

Hornbill Festival is an enthralling celebration from India's north-eastern provinces. This is an indigenous social holiday celebrated by the state's communities. The event celebrates cultural experience, traditions, gastronomy, and creative works, among other things. Historical battle dances, local rice brew, flea markets, headhunting ceremonies, and a meal served during the celebration are among the event's standout attractions.

Date: 1 December 2021 – 10 December 2021

Venue: Kohima, Nagaland



1-10
Dec 2021

Cochin Carnival



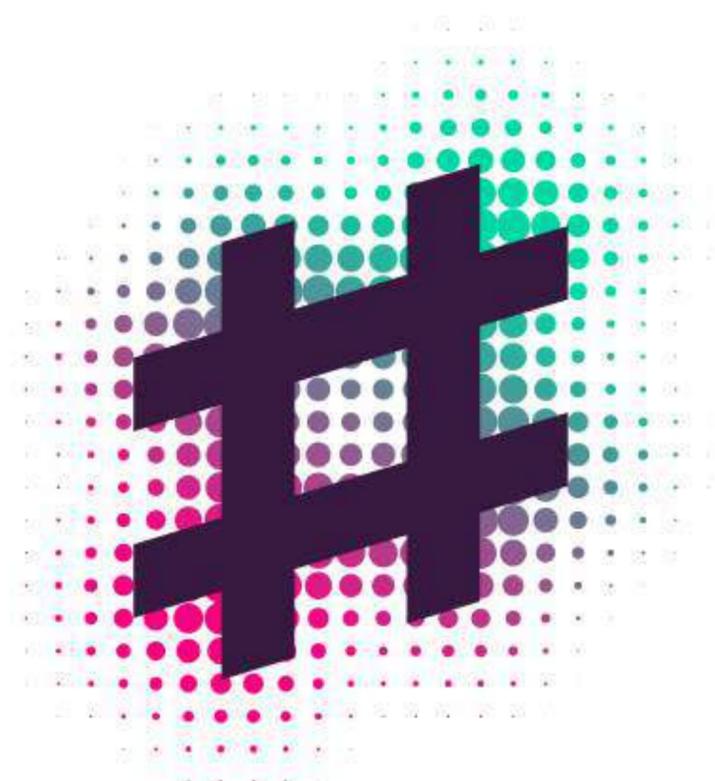
25 Dec-
01 Jan

A celebration of the good times, the Cochin Carnival attracts both residents and visitors. The festival's major goal is to bring people closer, and it is held around the Christmas holidays to encourage more people to partake. Among the highlights are indeed a beachfront bike race, beach volleyball, beach soccer, an elephant show, and parades.

Date: 25 December 2021 – 1 January 2022

Venue: Fort Kochi, Kerala

To get your events featured mail us at contact@hashtagmagazine.in



h a s h t a g

TRENDING NOW

TRENDING
NOW

The Digital Foodie's Trail: *Popular Food Bloggers to Follow*

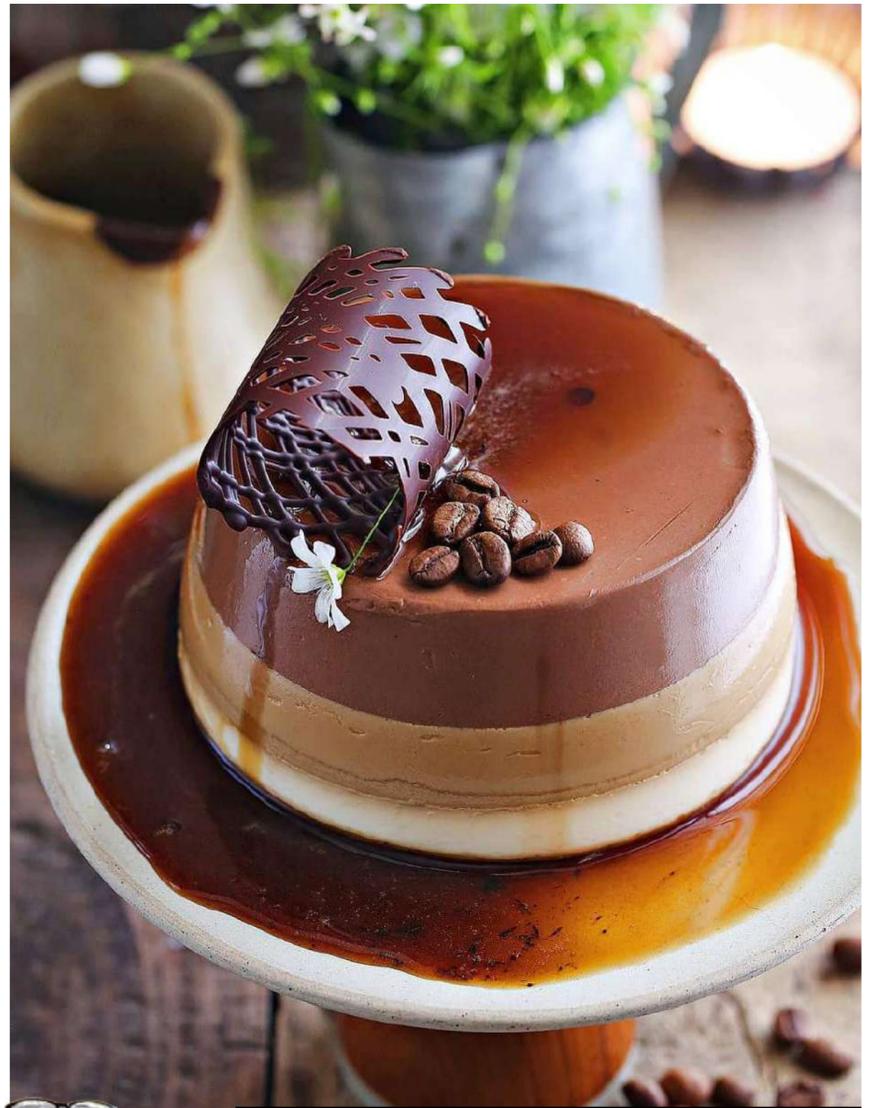
MALLIK THATIPALLI and DIVYA VALLABHANENI interview food bloggers from across the country on what makes them tick.

Nothing brings people together like good food. Reminiscing about food and trying out new recipes has always been the intriguing part of food blogging. We bring together India's popular food bloggers, sharing their blogging journeys.



TRENDING
NOW

Deeba Rajpal



Ombre Coffee Chocolate Panna Cotta

Instagram : @passionateaboutbaking
Followers : 211k
Known For : Eggless Desserts

Deeba Rajpal started her food journey over a decade ago. Originally from Delhi, being a child coming from an armed forces family meant she moved all over the country during her childhood. Prior to starting her blogging journey, she worked with British Airways as a passenger services manager.



Her blogging journey began when she started to take pictures for a blog to feed the content; this slowly developed into a passion for baking. Later, she ventured into baking with whole grains, new ingredients, and seasonal produce.



Petite Eggless Triple Chocolate Orange Cake



Strawberry Orange Cream Trifles



Spicy Chocolate Garam Masala Fruit Cake

She creates content for brands, having styled and shot cookbooks for Vikas Khanna and Pamela Timms. Deeba also does styling for brands like TeaBox, Hyatt, SoulTree, Borosil, Big Bazaar, The Oberoi, Gurgaon and occasionally hosts food styling workshops. She styles food with the use of handcrafted elements, shot in natural light.

Her first dessert cookbook with Penguin Random House released in October 2021. Not a plan sort of person, she goes with the flow, enjoying what she does.



Chocolate Coffee & Vanilla Eggless Ombre Cake



Chocolate Buckwheat Dessert Cake

Quick Bytes!

"Mutton-do-pyaza, Galawat-ke-Kebab, Khao Suey, sourdough pizza, NY-style bagels, and gnocchi are a few favourites. My all-time favourites are of course Indian Street Food! Gol-gappas, Matar-kulcha, Papdi Chaat, Vada Pav, Pakoras – I can have these anytime!"



Vanilla Rose Posset with fresh cherries

Sia Krishna



Instagram : @siakrishna (Monsoon Spice)
Followers : 47.2k
Known For : Exploring vegetarian recipes of India with a twist.



Aloo Methi Curry

What do you do when you can't find a solution to something you are struggling with? Sia Krishna came up with the idea of blogging when she couldn't find a recipe she had scribbled on a piece of paper. Instead of frantically searching for these scattered recipes, she decided to blog about them.



Thai Green Curry



Pav Bhaji



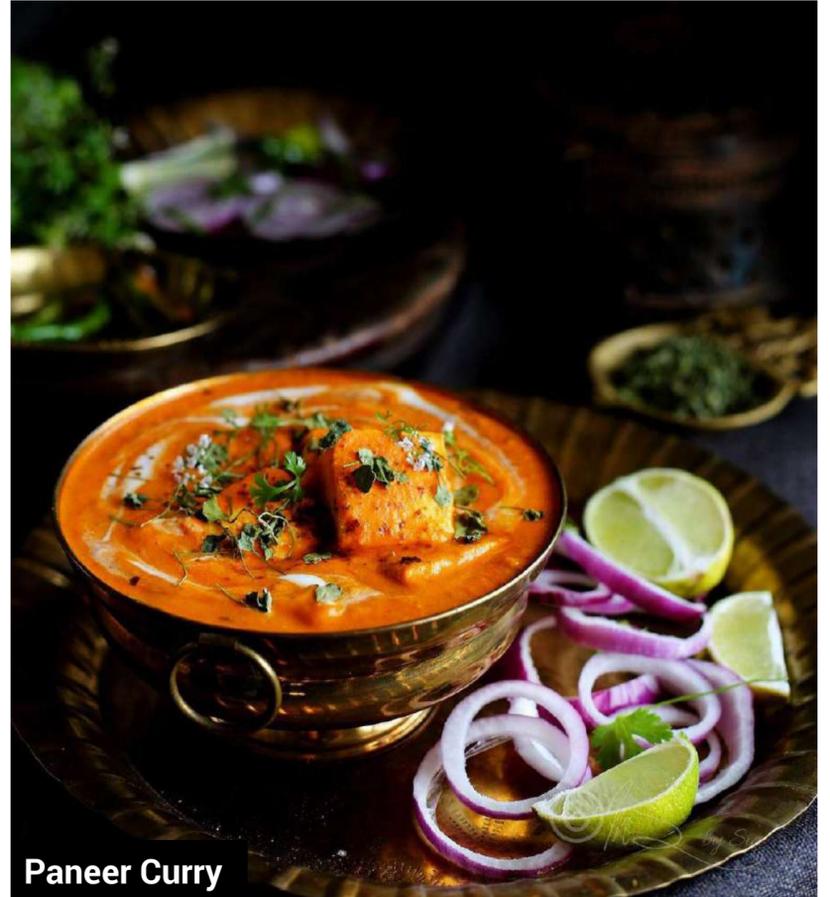
Karahi Mushrooms

It was more of necessity than passion, that made her start the food adventure. “I do feel the necessity to introduce good Indian food to the people who think Indian food is all about dumping loads of spices in a red, greasy gravy with at least an inch of oil floating on the surface,” she says.



Aloo Tikki Chole Chaat

She finds cooking to be therapeutic and relaxing after a busy day at work. The aroma of herbs and spices in a bubbling pot of food calms her instantly. “Years of all these wonderful recipes written down on scraps of paper and food-stained diaries have finally found a permanent home on my blog,” she says. She quit her full-time job in the IT industry and is now a part-time blogger, enjoying life to her fullest.



Paneer Curry

Quick Bytes!

“My favourite will always be Indian cuisine, especially the Udupi-Mangalorean cuisine which favours coconut, fresh herbs, local vegetables and just a handful of spices. Some dishes I adore are *Idli* and *Vada* with *Udupi sambhar* and coconut *chutney*, *Masala Dosa*, *Dharwad Jolada Roti Oota*, Thai red curry and Moroccan chickpeas tagine loaded with vegetables.



Tomato Soup

Archit Agarwal



Shami kebab

Instagram : @
Followers : 46.9k
Known For : Age-no-bar approach to cooking and recipes.

Archit's blog started as a pet project and soon grew to an extension of his creative abilities. Today the blog has a sizable following with content that comes in the form of articles, videos, and even a podcast! The 26-year-old went to college at Denison University, a liberal arts college in Ohio, United States where he got a double degree in Communication and Biology.

"I started cooking in college to make homemade food and cut down on carbs. In the US portion sizes were huge and I was gaining way too much weight. I started easy, by making sandwiches and pasta," recalls Archit and adds, "But soon on, it expanded to a huge variety of meals. Once I graduated from college in 2017, I moved right back home because of the changing political scenario in America."



Burrito Bowl

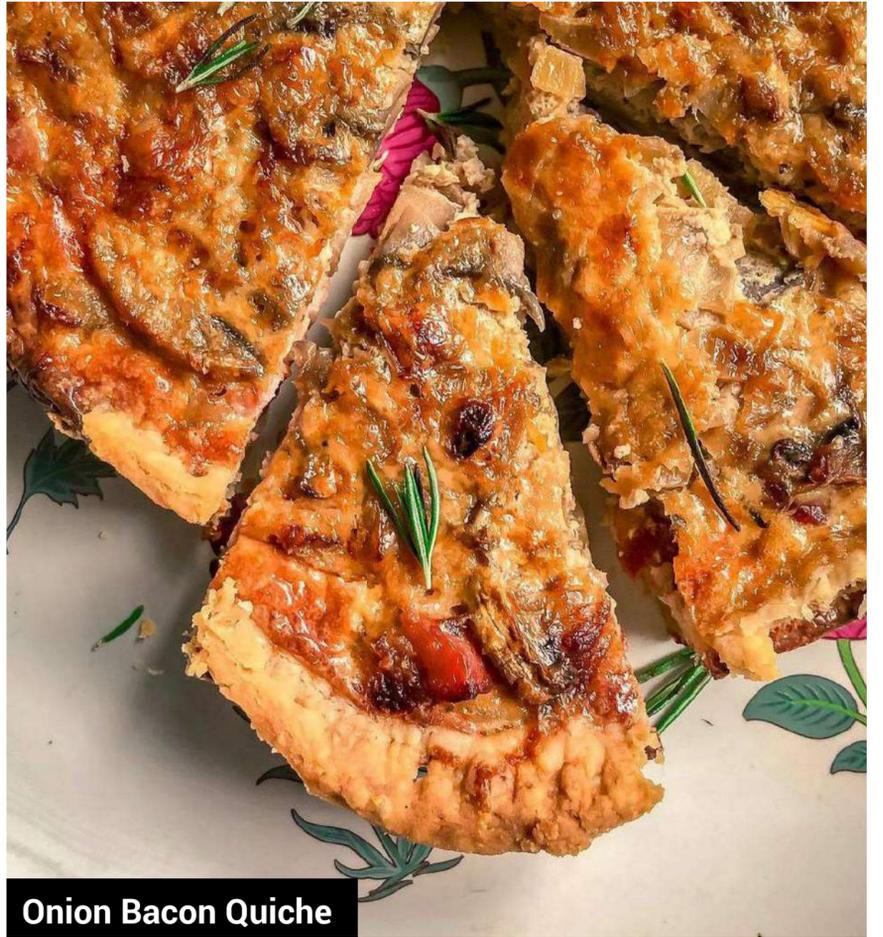


Orange-infused kheer



Tandoori hasselback potatoes

The Instagrammer loves to try anything new. “My aim is to bring content to an amateur audience. To break down recipes that I would love to eat and show my audience how they should be making them. This takes a lot of the pressure off,” he notes.



Onion Bacon Quiche

Admitting that social media has taught him a lot, he adds, “The one thing that I am grateful for is how much I learnt about professional-grade creative tools through my blog. From learning HTML coding to video editing—all of this has been a skill that content creation has helped me cultivate.”

Platforms like Instagram are demanding, he asserts, adding, “It is more so now with video content being ever so popular. It can be challenging but my content is quite evergreen, unlike lifestyle or comedy content. This means that I can make a content calendar and repurpose old recipes as cyclical content. This helps fill my profile more so than other content creators.”

Ankit picture-perfect feed is a joy to look at and is all the result of hard work. “Content production is long; from ideation to publishing it can take me anywhere from a week to 3 weeks.” He adds, “Since I work full time, all my shoots take place on the weekend. Once a shoot is over, the following week is spent on video edits on two formats: Reel and Long format. Then the videos go for a voice-over, the static images get edited, and then a blog post is written and published. Lots of moving pieces to get one recipe out to the public.”

Ask about his long-term plans and he smiles, “I would love to publish a cookbook with my long format blog articles. I am also in the process of starting my own line of merchandise.”



Bru-shetta



Fried chicken

Quick Bytes!

Viral hits from his blog have been the two-ingredient Chocolate Mousse and Natasha’s Coffee Pudding.

Surabhi Sehgal



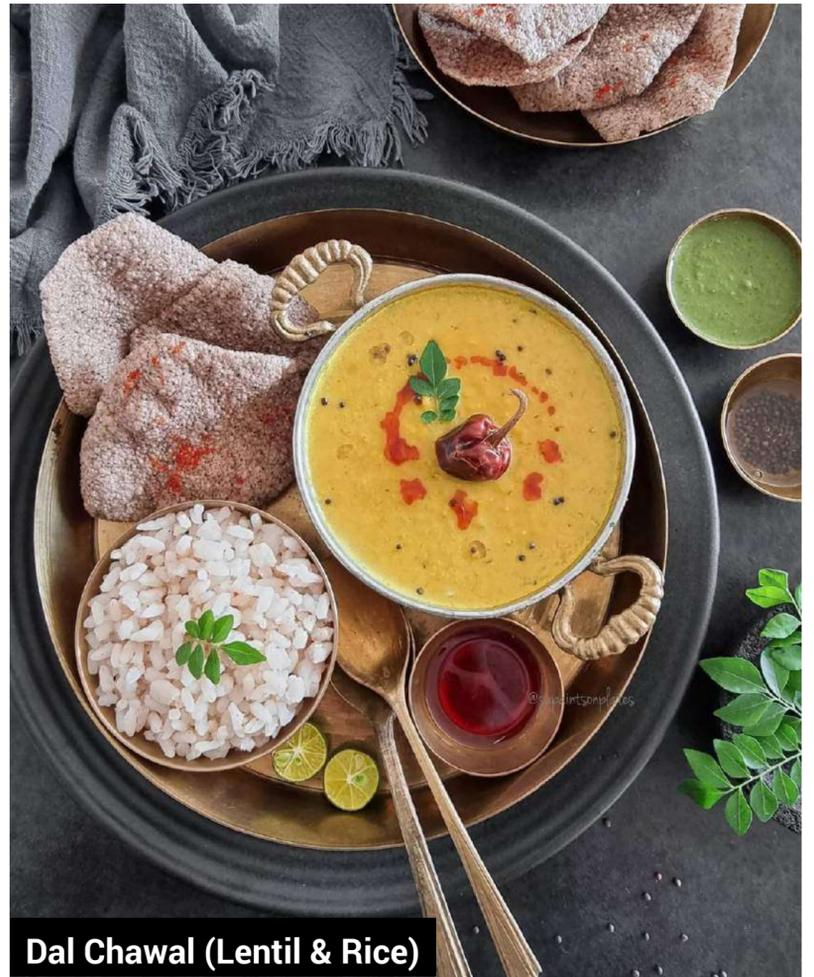
Instagram : @supaintsonplates
Followers : 63.8k
Known For : Vegan cuisine

Be it her pretty-as-a-picture beetroot hummus or a reel showing the exquisitely neat assembling of a beautiful Caprese salad or even the humble *rasam*, presented as a royal dish and posted on the request of a young girl wanting the recipe for her mother ailing from COVID, Surabhi's food styling is the stuff sheer creative genius is made of.



Idlis with Beetroot Sambar

The food stylist and recipe developer grew up in the green environs of Dehradun, admiring her grandmother's cooking skills and trying to help her in the kitchen from the young age of nine. Born to Punjabi parents—an engineer-poet father and a teacher-painter mum—she was raised in a creative environment. Marriage to childhood sweetheart and well-known hospitality professional Girish Sehgal meant moving across cities and continents.



Dal Chawal (Lentil & Rice)

Family and friends had always encouraged her culinary adventures and five years ago, when she was in Abu Dhabi (where her husband was posted) she started missing the energy of India. On her brother's advice, she opened an Instagram account and posting her food creations. "We had just moved from Hyderabad, and I was missing my social life there. There was a distinct void, which the love and adulation I received from my Instagram followers definitely helped fill up."



Carrot Hummus



Idlis with Beetroot Sambar

Since then, there has been no looking back. Brands like Nestle, FabIndia, Hamilton Beach and a host of other Gulf-based brands have approached her for developing recipes. One of her favourite areas of work has been vegan, plant-based recipes which are wholesome and fulfilling, while ticking all the right nutrition boxes, and which she believes firmly will be the future of food. "My vegan recipes use clean ingredients, with no cluttering around with vegan butter and cheese, which actually means a whole lot of trans fats. I prefer using nuts, seeds and other plant-based ingredients to make vegan cheese," shares the 45-year-old mother of two.

On the future of her blog, she comments, "I want to continue to upload unique recipes on my blog. In the future, I hope to have an option where my audience can order my food through my website. I've had innumerable requests from everyone regarding this and truly hope to see this come true."



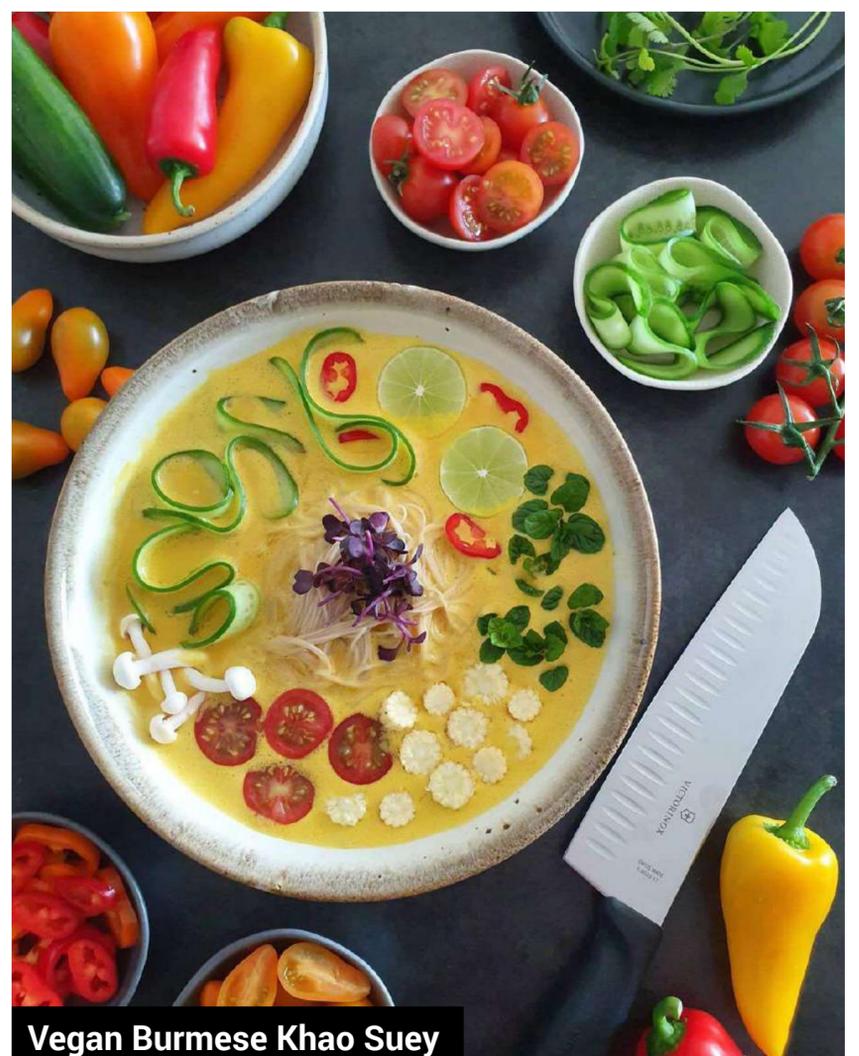
Falafel

Quick Bytes!

"My kind of food? That would range from Hummus to Ragi Dosa, Som Tam (raw papaya salad), Fattoush and my mom's Rajma Chawal."



Dark Chocolate Raw Tart

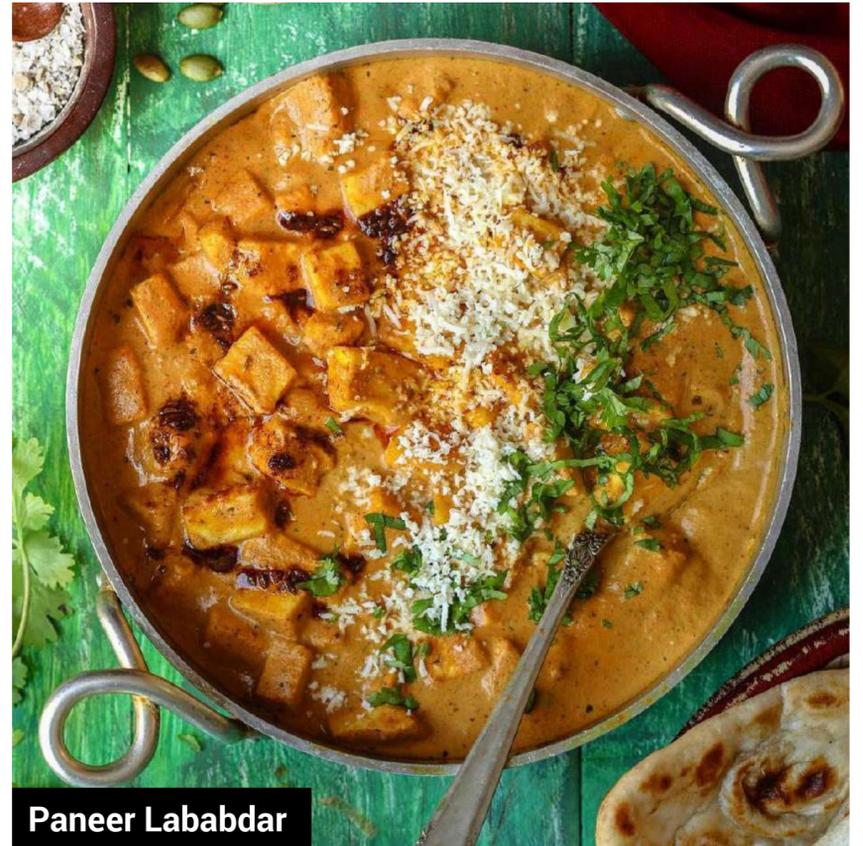


Vegan Burmese Khao Suey

Asha Shiv



Her cookbook *Masala and Meatballs* was released in 2018 and was a bestseller for two years straight. The book features Indian recipes with a twist. Commenting on her blog, she says, "My followers, I consider them as friends. They are the main source of my motivation, hands down. I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing without their support, love and their love for my recipes."



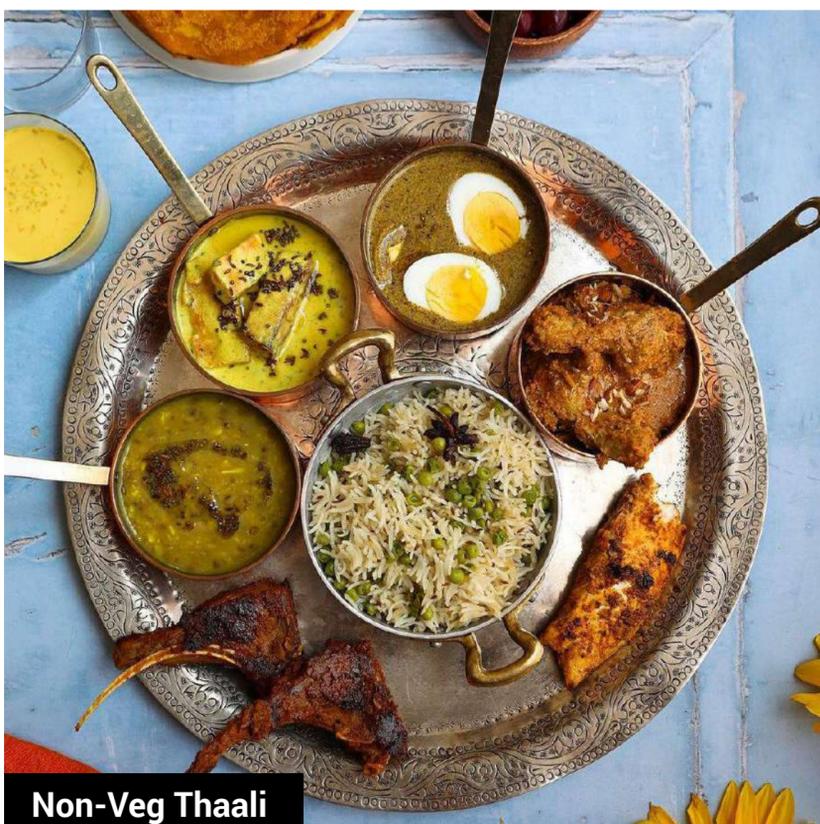
Paneer Lababdar

Instagram : @foodfashionparty

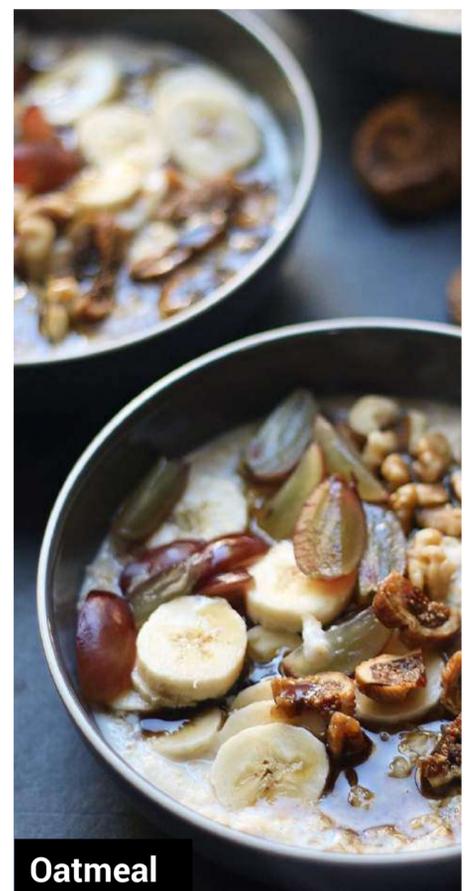
Followers : 117k

Known For : Modern Indian cuisine

Food has always an integral part of Asha Shiv's life, right from the days of her childhood. A native of Bangalore, she currently works in San Francisco. Although she couldn't manage a cup of coffee when she got married, she knew food. After years of being in US and getting comfortable with cooking she decided to share what she knew. That's when she started her blogging journey, 11 years ago. "I started this small blog to share my love for food and stories that were connected to it," she says.



Non-Veg Thali



Oatmeal

Quick Bytes!

"My favourite would always be biryani. I can have it every day. Chandrakala in sweets, my mom's noodles, and tomato biryani."

Teja Paruchuri



Instagram : @vismaifoodies

Followers : 261k

Known For : Easy recipes one can try

Teja's food journey began when he was approached by a person for recipes and later was unpaid for the work he did. Having had so many recipes shot already, Teja decided to start a food blog where he can use these recipes and post content.

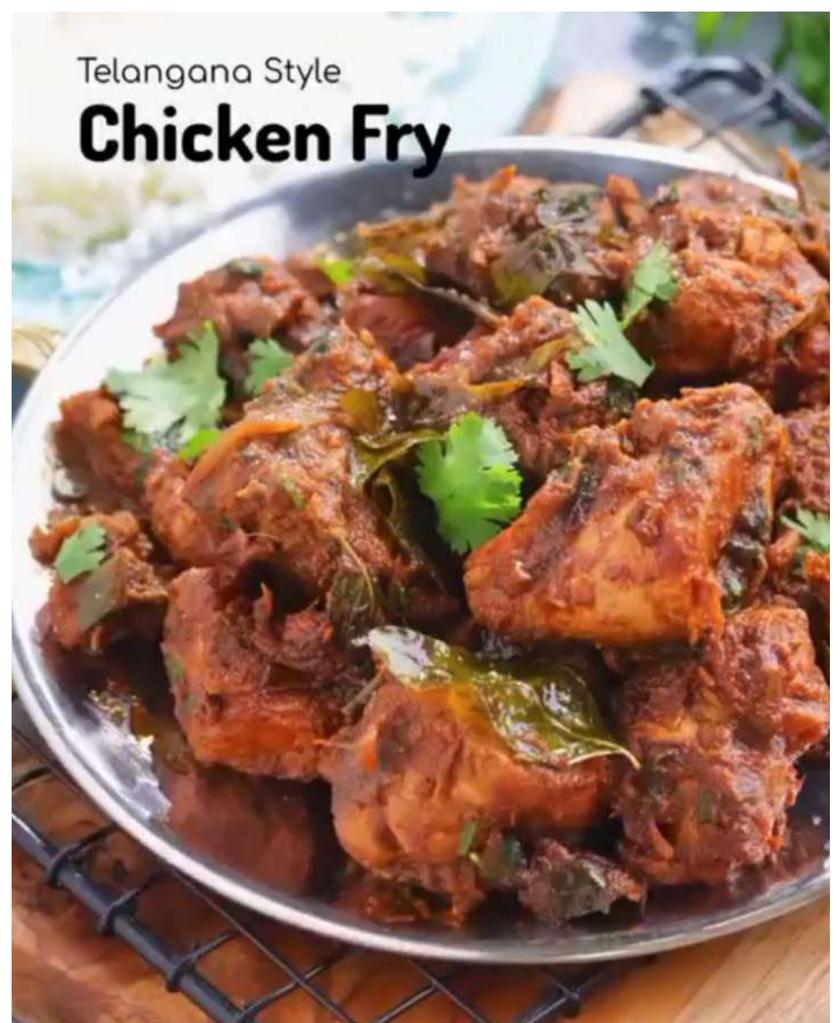


Teja comes from a family that has close relationship with cooking. Cooking was thus something that was always present in his genes, and it is this that made him continue onto the path of blogging, alongside his aspirations to be a film director one day. Travelling, he believes, has allowed him to understand diverse heritages and cultures and this continues to inspire him to try different kinds of recipes.



Quick Bytes!

"I love Avakaya, Pizza, Thai green curry, Sambhar, Gulab jamun, and Tiramisu."



Nidhi Bothra



Instagram : @naturallynidhi
Followers : 6k
Known For : Plant-based recipes

Born and brought up in Jaipur, Nidhi Bothra moved to Chicago in 2001, a few years after getting married. She ran an event-planning business prior to blogging, setting up parties for special occasions. "I'm also a mom to two boys and love being able to spend time with them at home," she says.



Dal Baati Fondue

Her blogging journey started when Nidhi's friend pushed her to create a food blog to share her recipes. Her recipes created a taste of home, and she was the go-to-person for all her friends and family.



Vegan Korean Chili Potatoes

"My goal with *Naturally Nidhi* is to share healthy, realistic recipes that draw on those traditional Indian flavours I grew up with. You'll see that most of my recipes are a fusion—infusing some new cuisine or presentation with a classic dish—and most of that stems from being exposed to new types of food in the US and from traveling. Since the inception, I've shared over 200 diverse recipes from cakes to *thalis* and pastas to *kebabs*," she concluded.



Nepali Kwati Daal

Quick Bytes!

"Recently, I've been really loving Asian cuisines including Thai, Korean, and Chinese dishes. Growing up in Rajasthan, I also love classic Indian recipes with a western touch. My top five favourite fusion recipes would be *Daal-Baati Fondue*, *7 Layer Dahi Chaat*, *Thai Paneer Satay*, *Vegetable Badam Tehri*, and *Millet Soup with Achari Flatbread Crackers*."

Neha Mathur



Rajma Masala

Instagram : @whiskaffair
Followers : 143k
Known For : Everyday recipes and international cuisines

A dentist who became a blogger, Neha has come a long way from her childhood in Banda, a small town of UP to becoming a popular food influencer. "My husband had a traveling profile in his job and with him I got to travel and live in many different countries," Neha explains. "I got exposed to different cuisines and tastes which I started to replicate on my own. Whenever a recipe turned out perfect, I would list it down, which eventually became my blog *Whisk Affair*."



Malabar Chicken Curry



Sweet Potato Hummus.



Kadai Paneer

As someone active on social media, is it tricky to stay ahead of the curve and experiment with new dishes and ingredients? "It is fairly detailed work to decide on which recipes to make; I still feel that I've only scratched the surface and there are many recipes still waiting to be made. It's not tricky to find a new recipe; it's more important to research and then try it in my own kitchen before I can share it," states the food maverick.



Golgappe Ka Pani

As content creators cater to an ever-increasing populace, is there a lot of pressure to post content regularly? "I believe if you need to excel at anything you need to do it passionately and consistently. There are no shortcuts and it's the same with blogging or social media." Neha says and adds, "I see it more as a way of doing professional work than pressure to post something. I've been making 3-4 recipes every day for the last 10 years. All these recipes go on my blog and my social media channels."

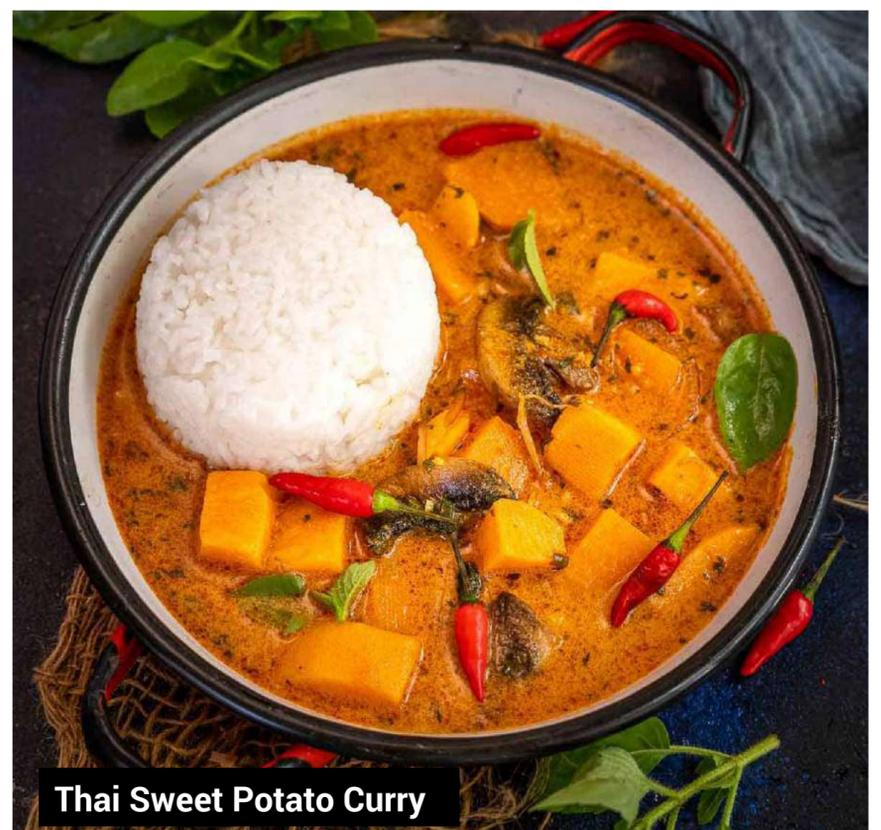
The Instagrammer shares the most challenging thing about being a social media star. "Being consistent might seem straightforward but it is the most challenging thing in maintaining an Insta handle. Also, keeping yourself updated with the latest trends and features is another thing to keep in mind."



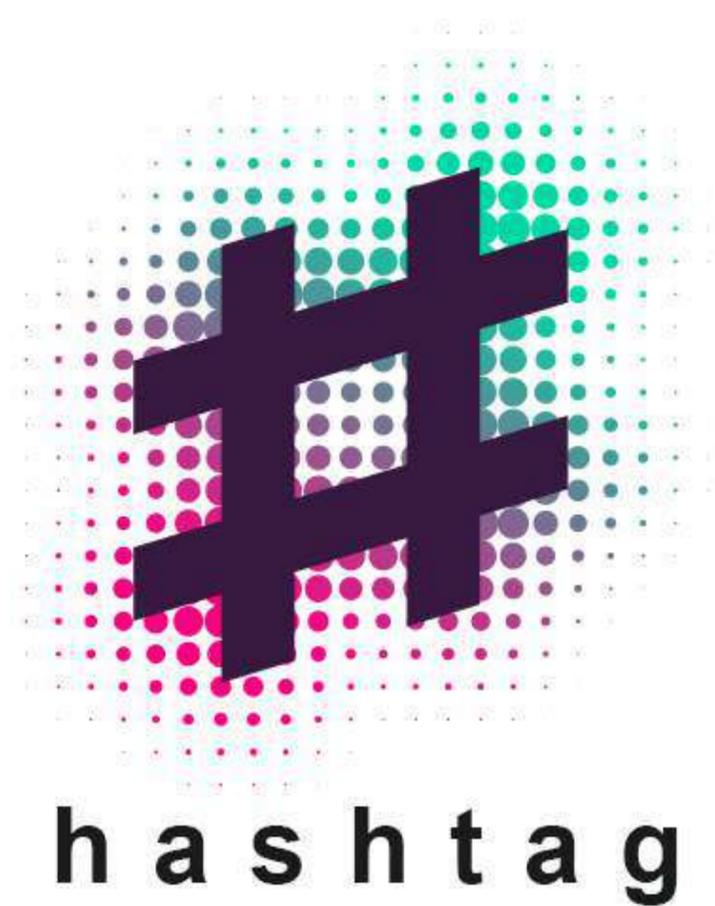
Andhra Style Peanut Chutney

Quick Bytes!

Some of the most popular of her recipes are her renditions of *Butter Chicken*, *Rajma Masala*, and *Dal Makhani*.



Thai Sweet Potato Curry



CHANGEMAKERS



SACREDLY SINFUL: SEXUAL FREEDOM AND THE WOMEN IN INDIA

Mehak Walia in conversation with Apurupa Vatsalya, a sexuality educator and POSH trainer, on the trajectory of sexuality in Indian society.

Although the constitution of India grants men and women equal rights, gender disparity continues to exist in every aspect of our lives; from laws all the way to sexual freedom. Trying to undermine the sexuality of women and other gender minorities has been the norm in our nation for as long as we can possibly imagine.

We were able to get in contact with Apurupa Vatsalya (she/ they), who is a lawyer-turned-sexuality educator, POSH trainer, and the founder of Bibliotherapy—a safe space for healing through reading and psychoeducation. She has been researching, creating modules and teaching CSE workshops in addition to conceptualizing and facilitating courses that address themes of pleasure activism for women for over 4 years. Through her work, she aims to encourage and promote the ideology that we are all born free and it is our fundamental right to remain free in every aspect of life.

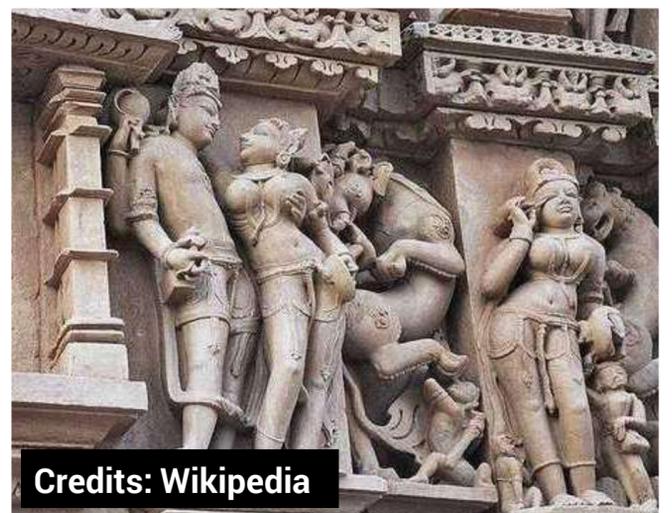


Apurupa Vatsalya

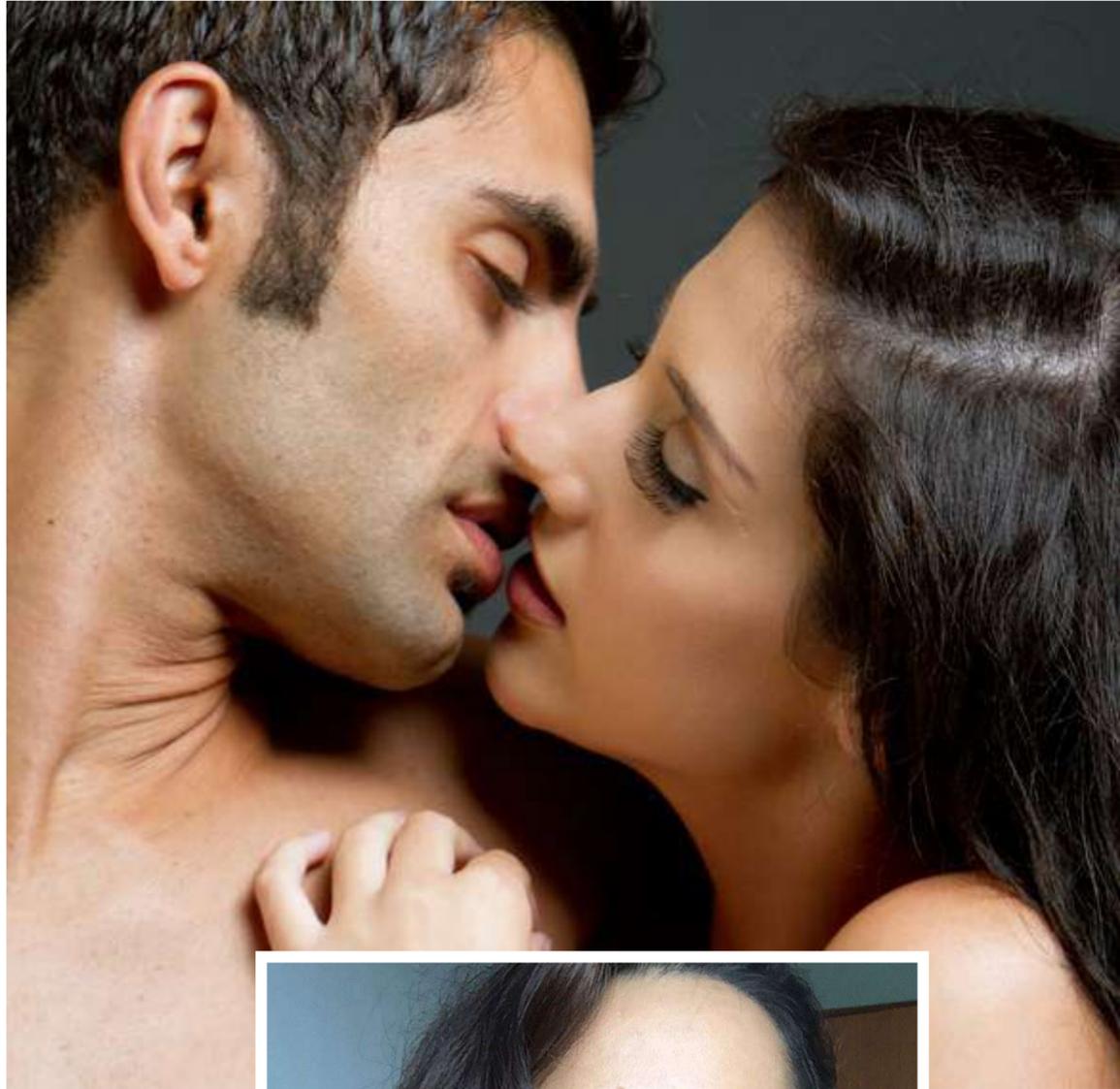
Our India Today

It is painful and ironic that the very land that gave birth to *The Kama Sutra* is now home to awful, derogatory, and discriminatory sexual beliefs. Thankfully, times are slowly changing and small, yet significant changes can be seen occurring, slowly but steadily.

“Intersectionality helps us understand and recognize that there are people with more and less privilege within marginalized groups. Oppression (and freedom) are compounded based on our privilege. Sure, in a certain slice of society—your upper caste, upper class, able-bodied women (and so on), there is a positive change. But even within this group we see a weaponization of sexual freedom. Most of us have experienced slut shaming (for being ‘too liberated’) and prude shaming (for being ‘too regressive’),” Apurupa comments.



Credits: Wikipedia



She adds, “True freedom would be when choices aren’t policed and are honoured as an individual’s expression of their sexuality. Having said this, what is truly marvellous is how women and gender diverse folks continue to take up space, resist, fight and demand for this freedom in big and small ways. For instance, I’d argue that influencer culture wherein largely womenfolk use their sexuality and sexual expression to build their personal brand and businesses as a way for us to take this power and agency back. Therefore, it isn’t surprising to me that it gets a bad rep.”

Unfortunately, women taking charge of their own sexuality is still considered a ‘western’ concept and therefore, it’s shunned and considered a sin. This probably dates to times when women were considered the second sex and treated like baby-producing machines.

The Historical Status of Women in Our Country

For centuries now, there has been anxiety around women’s bodies targeted as metaphors for nation, family, or community, where they not only signify honour but also purity and piousness. Women have always been taught that they belong in the kitchen and well-covered behind *ghungats*, *burqas* and drapes.

Women have long been considered as the secondary gender, conditioned to behave so as well from the very beginning. It is as Simone de Beauvoir wrote: “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.”

Apurupa work contests these ideologies by working at the intersections of gender, sexuality, safety, body neutrality, and identity. Commenting about the interplay with emotional well-being and social justice, she says, “The historic treatment towards women is violent and dehumanizing and we are owed reparations. We also continue to be treated as second-class citizens and we continue to carry our gender as a burden. In our English-speaking, college-educated, urban circles we tend to say things have gotten better because we see so many strong, successful, and articulate women around us. That is selection bias, which occurs when we make a generalization based on an observation of a homogenous group as opposed to random selection. We must ask ourselves who are these women and what are their identities? And what about women who aren’t as privileged?”

She further adds, “What this does when it comes to a person’s sexuality is that it disallows them autonomy over their own bodies, identities and expressions. It also enforces gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality. Our fight for sexual liberation forms a part of our fight against patriarchy and a resistance which benefits ALL women and gender diverse folks. To paraphrase Audre Lorde, we are not truly free while others continue to remain unfree.”

“[Women] continue to be treated as second-class citizens and we continue to carry our gender as a burden.”

A Sexually Free and Equal Future

Apurupa expresses, “We are all born free, and it is our fundamental right to remain free—in expression, association, individual freedom and freedom to lead lives of dignity. Sexuality (not to be confused with sex) is a part of our personhood and as long as there are 5 Cs - consent, communication, comfort, care and access to contraception, there’s no space for control or censorship.”

Close the Gap!

“We need more nuanced conversations when it comes female sexual liberation that needs to move beyond how it will benefit men. What I mean to say is—close the orgasm gap because the orgasm gap should not exist. Period.”

“A person’s sexuality doesn’t operate in a silo or in isolation.”

A sexually free future would ensure that everyone is happy, satisfied, and well-adjusted. Such a world would be kind, carefree and probably even more safe than the world that we live in.

Apurupa smiles, “Such a world, it would look VERY different for different people, and it would be safe (in every sense of the word). I cannot and should not give you a universal definition of such a world; I personally envision it to be inclusive, diverse, and celebratory, not just accepting or tolerating of differences. In such a utopia, education wouldn’t mean book-ish knowledge or fancy degrees, it would mean curiosity and space for dissent. A person’s sexuality doesn’t operate in a silo or in isolation. For it to be a sexually equal and free world, it would first and foremost have to be an equal and free world.”

Can We Ever Build Such a World?

Yes, we can. However, seeing the kind of world that we live in, it would take serious efforts to make the same possible. For those who try, a lot of challenges await them on their journey towards educating people.



“I’ve been working in the field of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for nearly five years. While there are many cultural, structural, and logistical challenges to being a sexuality educator in India, the toughest of the lot has been a personal challenge of not having a career script since it is an ‘offbeat’ path. Most people don’t understand nor respect what I do—they think I teach kids how to have sex—and some don’t take my expertise seriously because I’m young, female, unmarried and have visible tattoos,” Apurupa explain with a sigh.

She further elaborates, “The other challenge is how to invite all stakeholders into the conversation that doesn’t feel threatening to them, their religious and their cultural beliefs and is instead liberating and meets them where they are at, as opposed to imposing my understanding of it onto them. For example, how can we build the know-how of parents and educators regarding conversations on sexual health and pleasure with young people? How can we enable them to challenge their own biases and include them in these narratives, to bring about a cultural and behavioural change with respect to how we view sexuality, identity, pleasure and agency?”

We need to start somewhere, make changes in what we teach our children, include sex education in our educational patterns and start building a more open and healthy conversation about sex.

Let’s understand the fact that pleasure is a necessity and not something to be ashamed of, hidden and buried away in the pages of history. We, as a society, can together build a future based on acceptance that is equal and fair for everyone, without any differentiation, bias and judgement.



“How can we build the know-how of parents and educators regarding conversations on sexual health and pleasure with young people?”

Pink Soil Organics – An Unconventional Approach to Farming



Shraddha Reddy delves into the details of organic farming and environment-friendly practices with **Chakrapani Singh Rathore**.

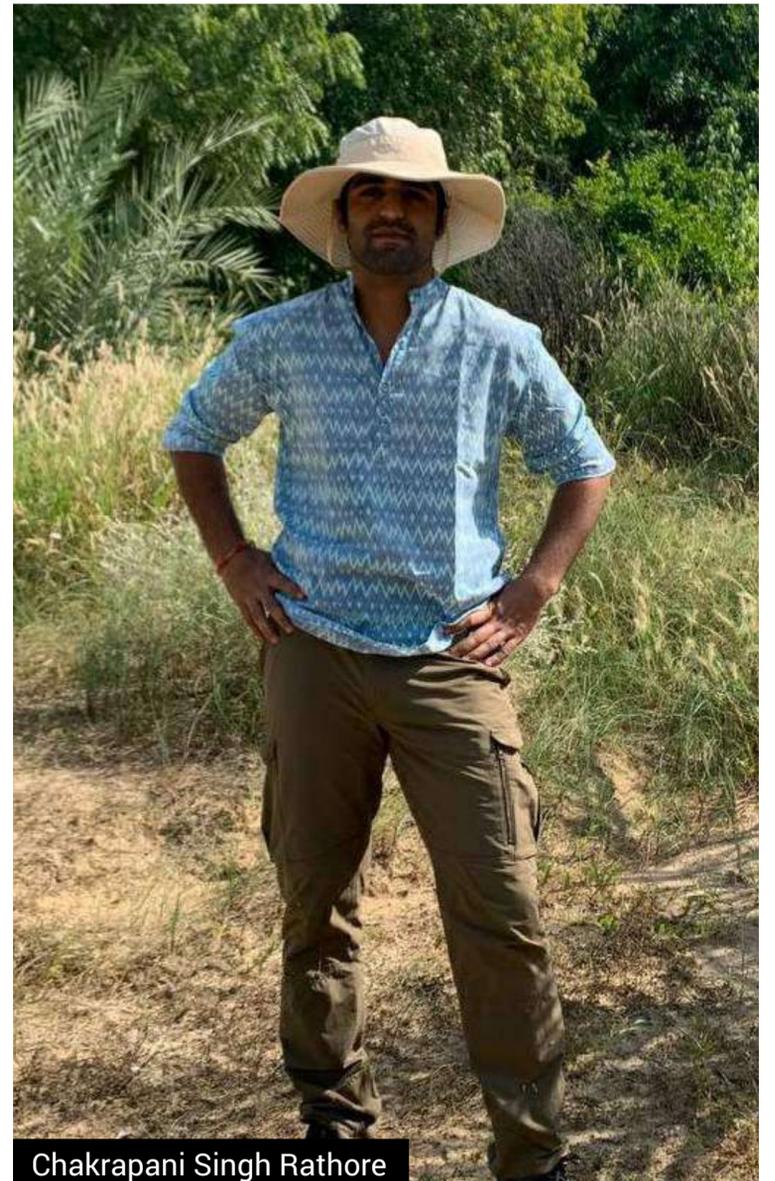
A lumni of Mayo college and a graduate of St. Stephens, Delhi, 26-year-old Chakrapani Singh Rathore has set about revolutionizing farming practices in Bikaner. Soon after the pandemic hit, he shifted back to his paternal village from Spain to start organic farming in a region that is typically very old school and conventional. Shraddha Reddy gets him talking about his passion project and how he is going about it despite much resistance.

What gave you the nudge to start organic farming in your village?

Coming from a noble family, my forefathers were into farming all their lives, but I grew up in a city with no knowledge of farming whatsoever. During lockdown, when I went back to my ancestral home, I realized that what I perceived as farming was in fact mono-cropping agriculture that does more damage than good by depleting the soil of nutrients and organic matter and causing significant erosion over time. It was during the lockdown when I came across the concept of permaculture that I realized how exciting and limitless farming can be. I immersed myself in researching the effects of chemical pesticides and weedicides on human and environmental health and educated myself about organic models of farming. In a nutshell, my love for the environment and a sense of duty towards the community was my motivation to start this venture.

What are the main obstacles you've faced in terms of infrastructure and the support/criticism from other farmers in the region?

The infrastructure at our farm was in tatters as the land has been leased out for the past 30 years. Our pump and motor burned out within the first few months, there was a shortage of good pipes and sprinklers, and there was no proper fencing around the farm. To add to all that, the nutrition in the soil had depleted with there being virtually no organic carbon left in it. The farmers in the region are very sceptical about my approach and they have made no effort to hide their doubts. But, seeing is believing, and I hope witnessing the many benefits of organic farming will change their minds soon, one farmer at a time.



Chakrapani Singh Rathore

How has your family helped you in this venture?

When it comes to the support of family, my father has been the staunchest critic of them all as he doesn't find farming financially viable. He eventually got on board, albeit reluctantly. That being said, this project would not have been possible without him. My brother and his wife have been hands-on in terms of brand identity and marketing, so it definitely feels good to have them on my side.



Seed treatment with cow dung, cow urine, and lime powder concoction

Tell us how you are going about executing the operation?

I've only just started the operation in May 2021. For this first year, I've decided to share half the yield with the farmer as I'm putting in the capital and he's putting in the labour. In terms of farming, I am incorporating 3 models simultaneously. The first is cow-based farming propounded by Mr. Subhash Palekar. This is a low-cost farming method that involves the application of a mixture of fresh indigenous cow dung and urine along with jaggery, pulses, and flour on the soil to be cultivated. The second method is the waste decomposer application of Mr. Krishan Chandra; lastly, we're using organic fertilizers by this excellent company called Terra Agro Biotech. We're also mixing the leftover crop residue into the soil as opposed to other farmers who sell it off as fodder or firewood to brick factories.

What do you eventually hope to achieve with this risky but brave venture?

The goal is to change the farming practices of my village and those around us slowly yet surely. I hope our organic model motivates farmers to take the leap and make the change that is needed so desperately for our environment. The fact of the matter right now is that over 80% of farmers in my village have debt on their lands and struggle to make ends meet. This only goes to show that the current system of farming has clearly failed financially and environmentally, while also having adverse effects on the health of consumers.



People have these set notions about organic farming. Tell us something interesting that people may not typically know about organic farming.

The classic argument against organic farming is that it is too expensive a proposition and that it does not yield as much as conventionally grown crops with chemical fertilizers. These arguments couldn't be further from the truth. After the initial few years of improving the soil health and using heirloom varieties of seeds, growing costs reduce drastically, the soil and crop become resilient to pests and diseases, and yield becomes at par, eventually growing to be better than conventional farming. Not to state the obvious, but the joy and fulfilment experienced when you're doing your bit to keep your family, community, and immediate environment healthy is priceless!



The food forest concept that Chakrapani is designing

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CULINARY CREATIONS



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Custard Powder



Icing Sugar



Corn Flour



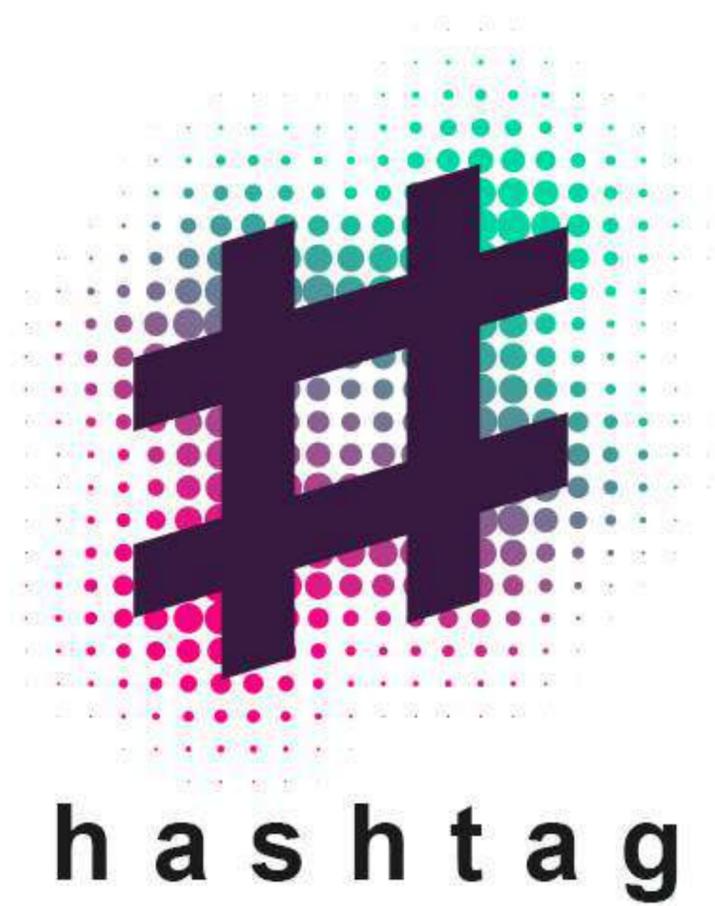
Cocoa Powder



Drinking Chocolate



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+91 91 00 33 33 90



DUSK TO DAWN

Striking A Chord With *When Chai* *Met Toast*

In a conversation with AAKANKSHA BAJPAI, members of the popular indie band WHEN CHAI MET TOAST share the inner workings of how their creative juices flow and get turned into the music that we all love.



How has your musical journey been during this pandemic?

We have been keeping ourselves busy, writing new material and doing music videos whenever possible. Live shows have definitely taken a hit, but there have been a few online events, interspersed with private events that we performed at. We also took it as a time to hone our skills, learn new things and be with family.

The band was recently recognized as part of Spotify RADAR's rising artists. How did this achievement feel?

The team at Spotify has always been very kind to us and we are grateful to have been one of the first artists part of the RADAR rising artists. More than an achievement, we feel that the programme was, and continues to be, a great opportunity for independent music in India to gain global attention.

"we are grateful to have been one of the first artists part of the RADAR rising artists."

A blend of genres, multilingual yet soulful lyrics and tunes that you just have to hum under your brain. Yes, we're talking about the band When Chai Met Toast.

Founded in 2016, the band consists of Ashwin Gopakumar (vocalist), Achyuth Jaigopal (guitarist), Palee Francis (keyboard player) and Pai Sailesh (drummer). The members met in the musical circles of Kochi, Kerala. The rest, is history.

Already well-known due to the breakout song 'Khoj', the band has recently reached new heights, making their way onto Spotify RADAR's rising artists with their recent releases and acoustic versions of previous songs. We learn from the makers of music how they feel about rising recognition.





"we are touring band, and a lot of our songs stem from experiences on the road."

Your series *Nature Tapes* and album *When We Feel Young* have been garnering attention. What was the creative process behind them?

There's no particular process that we follow. We keep a bank of voice recordings containing rough ideas, be it a lyric idea, vocal melody, or instrumental hook. We are a touring band, and a lot of our songs stem from experiences on the road. A few originate from jam sessions and sound checks. We take these ideas and develop them at Palee's studio in Kochi. *When We Feel Young* talks about the emotions of love, nostalgia, and celebration.

What was the experience of being on stage post-COVID-19 restrictions?

We did a small, limited capacity tour in March, and were overwhelmed by the response, selling out nearly every city. We were also playing the songs from the new album live for the very first time, and it felt great to have everyone sing back even the new songs word for word.

What motivates the band to keep their creative juices flowing?

Just the four of us, who we are as people, and the dynamic we've built within the group over the last five years or so that the band has been active. Also, the aspiration to continue to experiment, learn and try new things.

What was the biggest challenge for the band in the recent past?

Every song, show and project brings its own set of challenges, so it's difficult to point out a single biggest one.



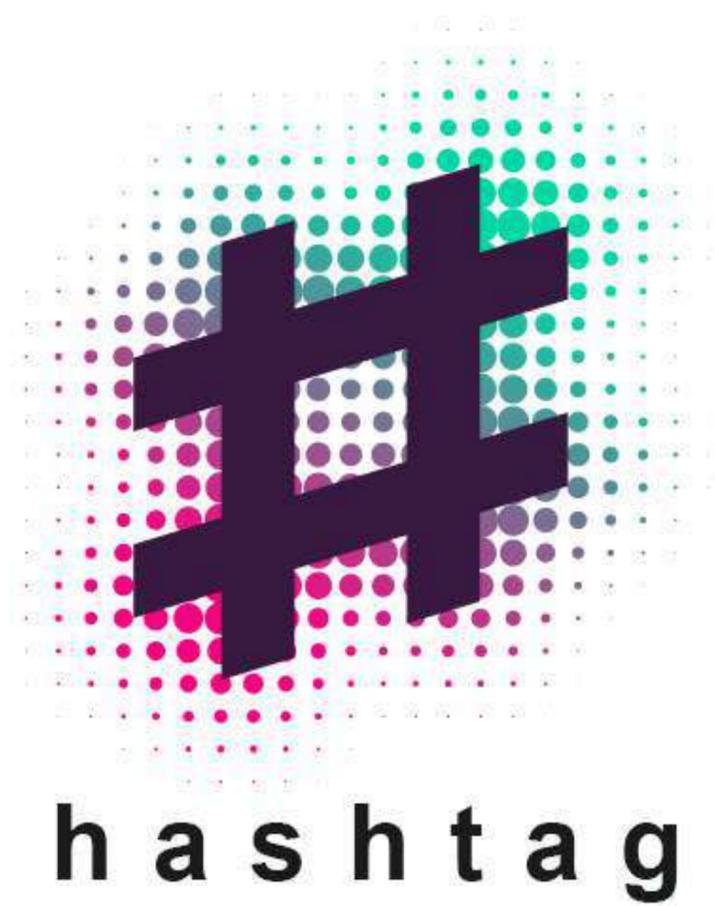
What will you say about the future of indie music in India?

Independent artists are slowly gaining mainstream attention in India, and we feel the future looks very bright. The future of the live industry remains to be seen, but we feel there will definitely be an upward trend of people listening to independent Indian music.

What can we expect next?

There's new music, and possibly a larger tour. There are a few exciting undisclosed projects we are currently part of, and we are looking forward to these projects taking shape.





RETAIL THERAPY

SHOP EARLY! 25



TANISHA KOCHETA on the season of joy, cheer, and gifting draws near! Our gift guide has you covered, with the best in the market. From all new edgy tech to luxurious accessories, feel good gifts to meaningful ones, we have it all!

GADGETS & TECH

1

iPhone 13 Pro

Price - Starting at

₹ 1,19,900

Starting with the most celebrated thing, the iPhone 13 Pro, in the most festive colour of sierra blue.



4

Next-Gen Kids Smart Watch

Price - Starting at ₹ 14,999

This WatchOut Wearables smart watch is the best gift for kids. Equipped with video calling and a savvy GPS tracking system, it covers both entertainment and protection.



2

Fujifilm Instax Mini Instant Camera

Price - Starting at ₹ 3799

One can never go wrong with this item! Capturing memories for a lifetime, this Fujifilm camera comes in the quirkiest colours and is truly a dream gift.

3

Apple AirPods

Price - Starting at

₹ 18,500

Ever evolving, always stylish and everyone's favourite – Apple AirPods. The latest in this line is the third of the series and is highly favoured as a gift choice.



5

Amazon Echo Dot

Price - Starting at

₹ 3999

Ever evolving, always stylish and everyone's favourite – Amazon Echo Dot. The latest in this line is the third of the series and is highly favoured as a gift choice.



FEEL GOOD GIFTS



6

Wellness Spa

Price - Starting at ₹ 1500

Nobody can go wrong with a Wellness Spa experience for their loved ones, to make all the post festivity blues go away.



7

BodyCafé Gift Set

Price - Starting at ₹ 2699

BodyCafé's gift sets are the ultimate skin care companion. Boosted for skin repair and radiance for the festive season, this will prove to be a good pampering session for your loved ones.

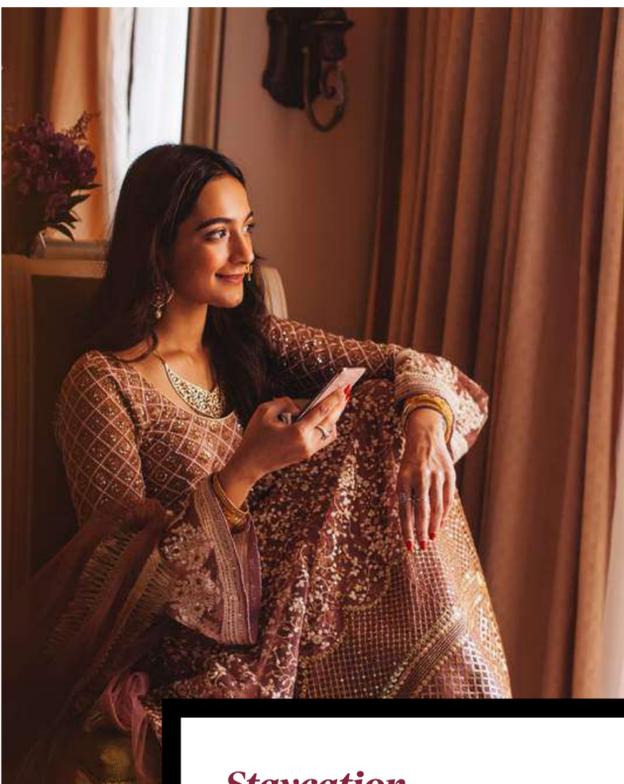


8

Manicure-Pedicure

Price - Starting at ₹ 2200

Nothing is more relaxing or fun like a mani-pedi session! Gifting someone an experience to a nail salon to get their nails done is the best way to pamper them!



9

Staycation

Price - Starting at ₹ 9999

A staycation experience at a retreat or a luxurious property can be an amazing idea to make your loved ones happy.



10

Royce' Celebration Basket

Price - Starting at ₹ 7770

The Royce' Celebration Basket is the epitome of extravagance. Who doesn't like to receive some delectable, creamy chocolates?

LUXURY GIFTING



11

Designer Belts

Price - *Sabyasachi* at ₹ 16,900
Gucci at ₹ 34,000

Talk of the town, these are some of the most wanted and adored accessories. Belts are here to stay, a bold statement with any outfit, and unisex.

12

Designer Handbags

Price - Starting at ₹ 1,00,000

A designer handbag is a style statement like no other! With handbags being one of the most invested products in luxury items, it makes for the perfect gift.



13

Daniel Wellington Watch Set

Price - Starting at ₹ 26,998

A classic timepiece to always cherish and adore can be nothing but perfect.



14

Perfume by Tom Ford

Price - ₹ 7900 for 50 ml

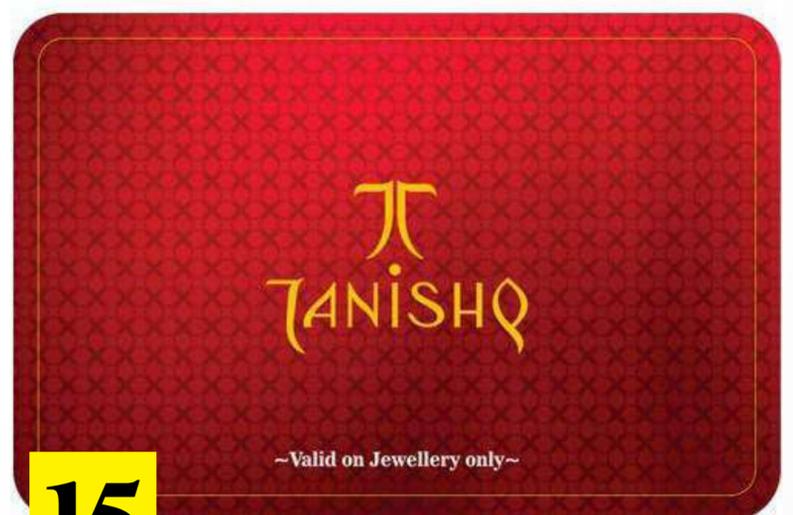
Ombre Leather by Tom Ford carries hints of floral notes enveloped within its smooth leather texture. It is available in 50ml and 100 ml editions.

15

Tanishq Gift Items

Price - Range at ₹ 1000 - ₹ 10,000

Give your loved one the gift of choice of stunning jewel pieces from India's most loved jewellery brand!



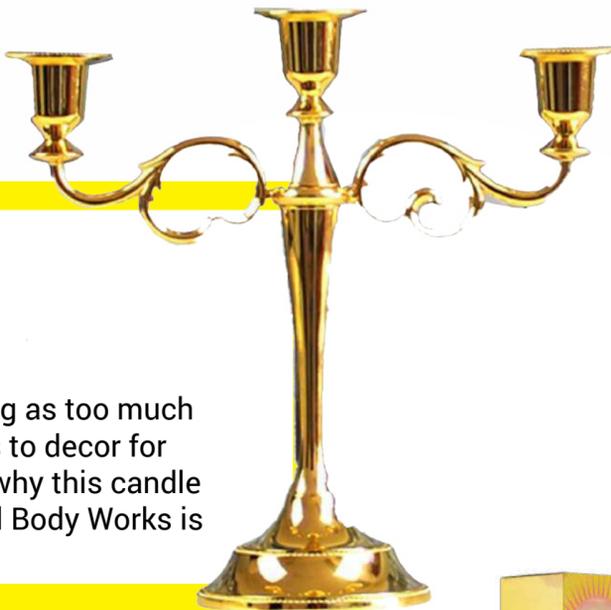
POCKET FRIENDLY GIFTS

16

Candle Holder

Price - ₹ 1399

There is no such thing as too much glitter when it comes to decor for Christmas, which is why this candle holder from Bath and Body Works is perfect!



17

MAC Gift Sets

Price - ₹ 2950

It's time to get festive with MAC! Grab the new Limited Edition Kits and treat your loved ones with a flawless glam look this festive season.



18

Forest Essentials De-Stress Therapy

Price - ₹ 1750

This gift set includes a Tranquil Sleep Spray and a Stress Relief Spray, making for a very thoughtful gift.



19

Bombay Shaving Company

Price - ₹ 1670

Their 6-in-1 Complete Beard Care Kit is every man's ideal gift.



20

mCaffeine

Price - ₹ 1156

Gift a whole caffeinated experience in just a moment with the Coffee Moment Gift Kit.



A PERSONAL TOUCH



21

Flower Arrangements

Price - ₹ 1795

Invest in some personalised gift hampers from Interflora.



22

Jewellery

Price - ₹ 2190 and ₹ 6590 respectively

Alphabetical pendant and zodiac pendant chain set from Swarovski.



23

Décor

Price - Starting at ₹ 4,000

Neon signs from Neon Attack are the trendiest of personalised gifts, be it the name of office board or a design!



24

Name A Star

Price - ₹ 1950

Make your next gift out of the world by naming a star after your loved one. Choose from Oye Happy's various options!



25

Hampers

Price - Starting at ₹ 349

A wide range of personalised gifts from Ferns N Petals can be your quick, easy and pocket friendly last-minute gift.





Thumka
by
Anisha | Sonali

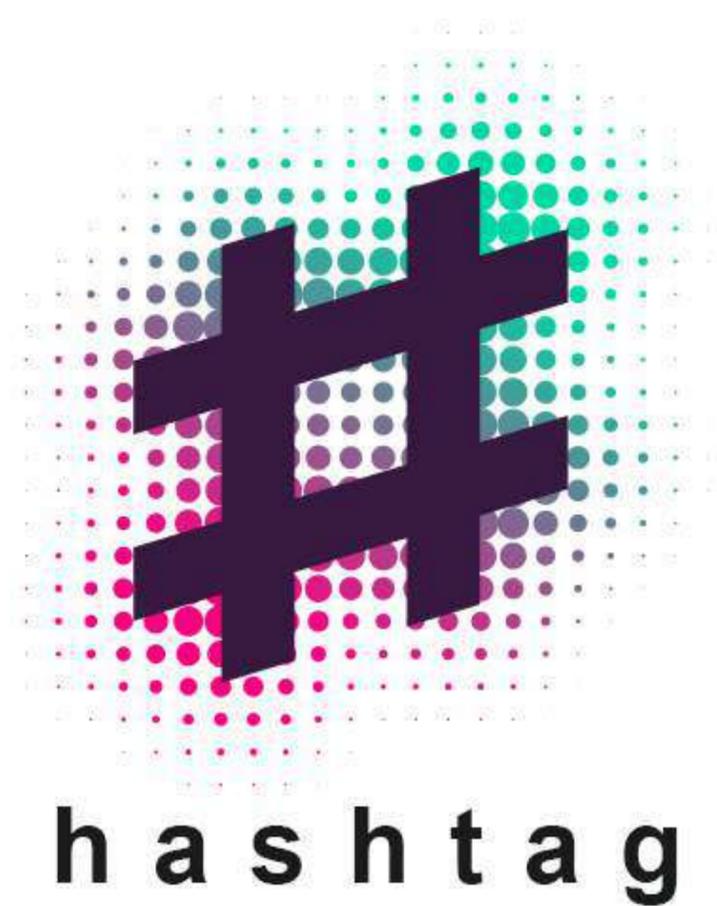


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FASHION FORWARD

Sushmita Sen: Studded with Diamonds

Hashtag Magazine catches up with **SUSHMITA SEN** at the launch of luxury jewellery brand store **Zoya** in Mumbai. The diva, who is known for her diamond collection, gets talking about jewellery, her independent personality and more.



You are recognised for the bold choices you have made in your life. Where do you derive this self-conviction?

Your genetic makeup is different from everyone in the world, and there is a reason for that. I believe that every person is born to be unique. Forge your own identity, follow your heart and go forward with your own flow—that is how you build conviction. The greatest success you can ever have is to be yourself.

What is your relationship with jewellery like? Any special jewellery piece handed down from your mother or grandmother?

For me jewellery has always been meaningful. I often associate a piece with a special place, or a situation, or person. I've always been a big fan of diamonds. As I started growing up, my tastes started to include more colour; I discovered emeralds, and I'm a big fan of Burmese rubies and opals, they are a favourite. My earliest memory of jewellery is a pair of my *Maa's* thin gold bangles. She wore them on her right hand, and I remember them making the prettiest sound, telling me exactly where *Maa* was! Bengali brides traditionally wear a choker and then layers of gold chains. My mum, for some reason, had those chains melted down to make something new! I was like, why would you do that when you have a daughter and a daughter-in-law in line, who'd love them! So I went to Dubai, and from her locker I took the choker and a bracelet that she had worn as a bride, before she melted those, and yes those are very special to me, and will be in my collection forever.

You have always been an independent thinker when it comes to your personal decisions. Where do you derive the strength?

My mother always said, "If you don't try, you will never know." It pushed me to give my best to everything, to give life a shot. Everyone around me—especially my parents—has been very supportive and made this journey a wonderful and fulfilling one. Today, we are talking about living in the flow. For me, a lot of that is about acceptance. When you accept things around you, you can flow forward, unapologetically.

What is authenticity to you? Why is it important to you to be your authentic self?

Authenticity is about being true to yourself. We hear this often, but it's very easy to become someone else because that's how the world sees us. You're born unique; if you become one of the herd, you'll be lost! The greatest success is in being yourself.



When it comes to jewellery, how would you describe your personal sense of style?

For me jewellery must be timeless and unforgettable. It has to be pieces that you can wear often, not just ones you wear once in your life. Even if I did ever get married, I'd like to pick jewellery that I can repeat, rather than something big and different, that I never get to wear again! That's also true for my clothing, my bag collection, everything—it has to be timeless. Occasionally, I'll experiment, I'll be very outlandish, and I'll say I love that! But experience has taught me that jewellery like that stays in my locker, or I gift it to somebody, I don't end up wearing it.

Do you have any treasured heirloom pieces that you have worn on repeat over the years?

My ring—it's 22 carats and I wear it everywhere! But it is something that represents hope for me, it's something I gifted myself, to empower me, to remind me that I don't need a man for that! But I love the sparkle of a diamond, it's so full of hope!



Today, do you shop for jewellery keeping your daughters in mind?

Renee has a beautiful collection of her own now, but my younger one Alissa, who's only 12, she's discovering solitaires if you please...dangerous sign! She says she doesn't want too many pieces, just want one diamond that can be worn as a pendant. I had once bought a 22-carat diamond, an 11-carat one, and lastly a 14-carat yellow diamond. Renee and Alissa say, so one is for each of us... who is the third one for! And I have to remind them that—excuse me, it's for me! So yes, they also have picked up my love for jewellery.



Rapid Fire

What would be your advice to women?

My advice to all women would be to always be financially independent.

How have you instilled independent thinking in your daughters, Renee and Alisa?

I tell them to be true to themselves. It's an oft-repeated statement because that's how the world perceives us.

Your fitness regime?

I work out regularly; I am quite serious and strict when it comes to workout schedules; I make it a point to never skip my sessions.

Your beauty mantra?

Beauty is so many little things. But mainly, being beautiful is about being innately happy. You have to evolve, grow and accept everything about yourself—the good, the bad and the ugly. My beauty mantra is to stay happy and live a fulfilling life.

If you had to edit your jewellery box down to a few must-haves, what would those pieces be?

Has to be my rings and the pieces from my mum!

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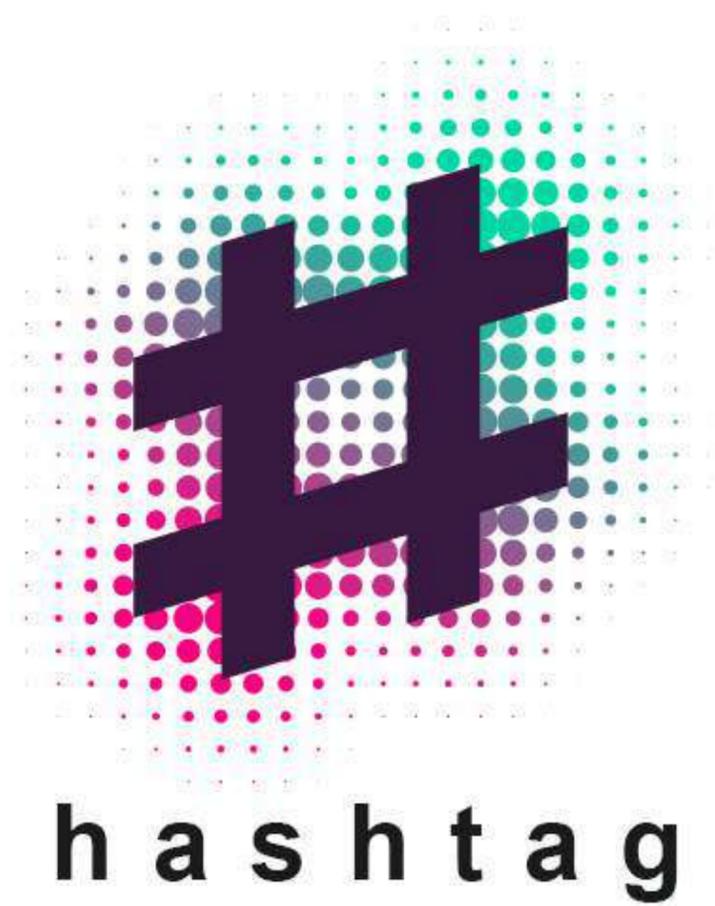
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HEALTH & WELLNESS



COMBATING PCOS: The Ideal Indian Vegetarian Diet

Hashtag India speaks to **Dr Shweta Goswami** on how PCOS can be brought under control and the role of a good diet in one's health.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, widely known as PCOS, is a condition that causes hormonal imbalances and creates problems with your metabolism. A study conducted by AIIMS shows that 20.25% of Indian women of menstruating age (ages 15 to 44) are suffering from PCOS. PCOS can lead to serious health conditions such as diabetes, depression, cardiovascular problems, and affects the ability to conceive as well, sometimes transgressing to endometrial cancer.

For women with PCOS, the subsequent hormonal imbalance causes skips in menstrual periods and makes conceiving



all the more tough. Solutions for control however, exist. One's diet is the steppingstone to better health. Good food choices are good investments. There is no definite cure or medication for PCOS. Yet switching to a healthy lifestyle that is based on a better diet and regular exercise can help you fight the disorder by manifolds.

Dr Shweta Goswami, Senior Consultant IVF for Jaypee Hospital and Medical Director at Zeeva Fertility Clinic, Noida, gives some prime tips to combat the condition.

• **Fiber - Rich Foods**

Fibre keeps you full, improves health, and aids weight loss. Good sources include barley, oatmeal, beans, nuts, and fruits. Broccoli, cauliflower, beans, almond, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin are also full of good fibre content.

• **Green Leafy Vegetables**

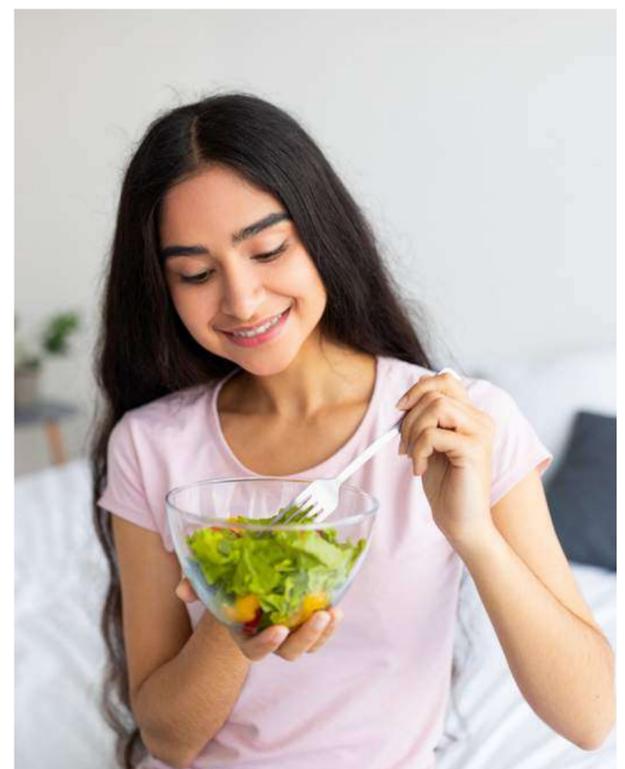
These are particularly recommended for a woman struggling to lose weight due to PCOS. They are rich in iron, potassium, calcium and Vitamin K, C, E, and B.

• **Anti-Inflammation Food and Spices**

The anti-inflammatory diet carries plenty of probiotics, fibre, antioxidants, and omega-3s, which means a diet rich in vegetables, whole fruit, whole grains, legumes. Tomatoes, spinach, almond and walnuts, olive oil, turmeric, and cinnamon also serve the purpose.



Dr Shweta Goswami - Fertility Specialist



• **Fruits**

Some may hesitate to consume them due to the fructose content; however, fruits have several minerals, poly nutrients, and fibre. Consume fruits with a low glycaemic index like guava, pears, strawberries, blueberries, kiwi, apples, oranges, and watermelons.

• **Healthy Fats**

To most people, the word 'fat' does not seem to go hand in hand with PCOS, but you need to eat healthy fats to provide essential fatty acids. This includes seeds, olive oil, avocado, and nuts.

• **Low Glycaemic Index or GI Diet**

The GI measures how quickly any food raises blood sugar levels. A low GI diet helps prevent insulin spikes by raising blood sugar levels slowly. The low-GI diet consists of eating whole lean protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and healthy fats. Moreover, the advantages of consuming a low GI diet are clinically backed by lots of studies and surveys.



Avoid:

- Sugar and involved snacks/drinks such as soda or juice.
- Food that is high in refined carbohydrates such as white bread and muffins.
- Avoid high consumption of dairy products, as they tend to cause an increase in testosterone levels.
- Caffeine in general affects fertility in women.
- Any stuff made with white flour.
- Starchy vegetables like potatoes, corn, and peas.
- Sugary foods like cookies, cakes, and candy.
- Avoid packaged, processed food, junk, and fast food.



Pro-Tips :

- Have lots of fluid and low calorie (chana, fruits, sprouts) snacks throughout the day.
- One can balance out the imbalance of hormones in PCOS by making breakfast the biggest meal and dinner the smallest.
- Reducing your carb intake may improve the hormonal imbalance linked to PCOS and boost weight loss in women with PCOS.
- Keep stress at bay. Try to peacefully go through the diet plan or medication along with exercise.





Where mothers meet -the mom communities striving to grow for the better

Nobody said parenting would be easy! It takes more than labour pains and sleepless nights to raise a child. As such, community groups for mothers are gaining increasing importance. Saba Ladha looks into the top mom communities in India right now.

It takes a village to raise a child. The old African adage rings true to this day. Yet, we find the village has faded away in the face of the modern nuclear family. The village is now reduced to the parent couple or the single parent; none exempt from the fast-paced lifestyle of today. How then can a child get the attention they deserve? It is proving to be especially difficult for the mother to raise her child amongst the hustle-bustle of the everyday. This is where the need for a community arises; technology is proving to be the tool bridging this gap close.

Parenting communities have cropped up across the globe, a modern village for the modern child. Such communities in India have proven to be a boon for mothers across the country, who have been able to find support as well as avenues for their careers! Here are the most popular of these platforms...

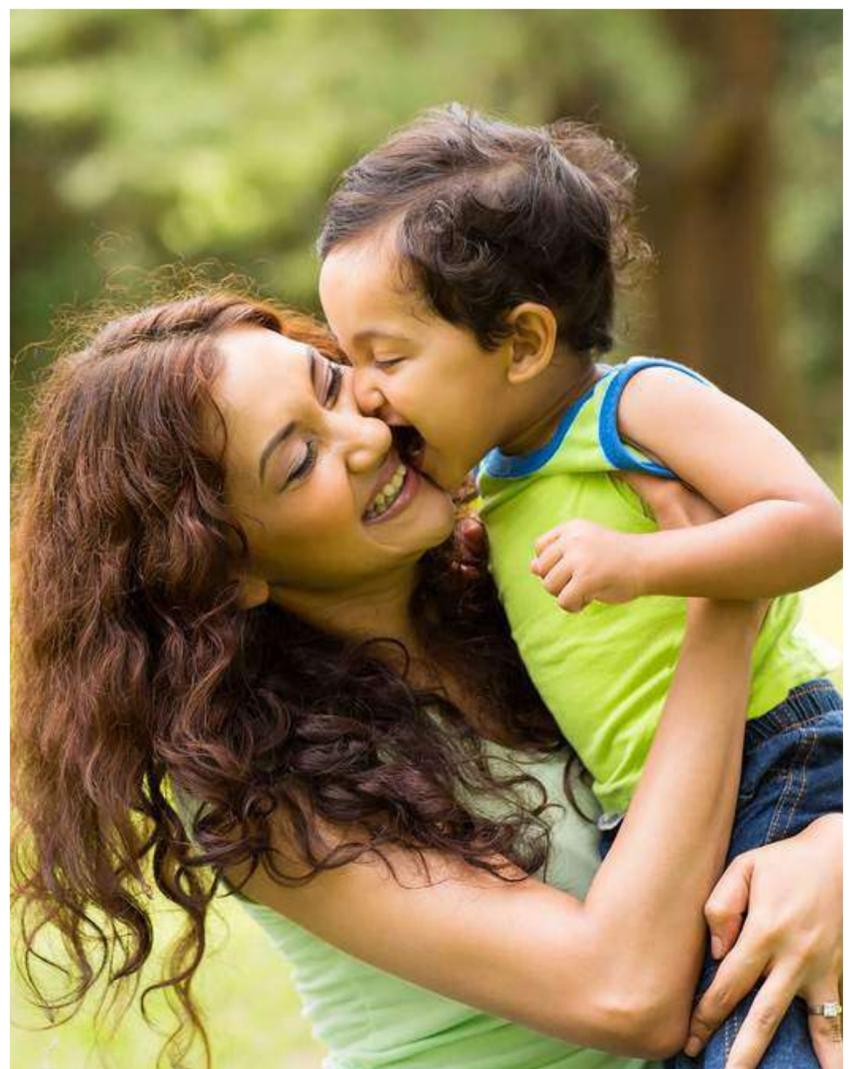
refreshment for themselves as well. With chapters across the world, the community currently boasts of 3.25 lakh members. Whether its job recruitment, providing coaching for a variety of things, or just getting together to take a break from the regular mommy responsibilities, this community has certainly been successful in making both parenthood and growth possible for mothers.



Neha Kare Kanabar

UNIMO – Universe of Moms

India's largest online community of mothers began in 2016 as a social media group. Founded by Neha Kare Kanabar, the community is built on the tagline 'ek break toh banta hai'. With the focus on 'me time for moms', the platform slightly diverts the concern of mothers from only raising their child towards growth and



Mompresso

This decade-old platform is one of the first of its kind. The whopping reach of Mompresso within just a year of its foundation got it an incredible flair. Ten years down the line, it has become one of the largest mom communities of India, with millions of mummies joining the wagon each day. Their innovative blogs, helpful vlogs and informative posts have kept the platform on highlight. They are now looking into empowering mothers financially, by leveraging brand collaborations for their members through their new app 'MyMoney'. That they are spread across states and provide services in various languages has only made them more popular! With more than 90 million page views pouring in on their website and apps constantly, the success of Mompresso speaks for itself.



JAMMs

JAMMs, better known as Journey About Mast Moms, was started as a small community by Ritu Gorai to alleviate her own anxieties with parenting. What began as a 20 member group is now an enormous community of more than 40,000 moms. JAMMs not only helps mothers to strive better as a parent, but also in conducting various workshops and sharing their skills and talents on a common platform. They have also been successful in helping entrepreneurial moms grow profoundly via this community. As a parent, you can find many wonderful opportunities through JAMMs, whether that is shaking a leg with your mommy friends to attending informative workshops and meet-ups, and even finding opportunities and guidance to commence or continue your career.



Ritu Gorai



Naiyya Saggi

BabyChakra

As a parent, don't you always require urgent medical help for your child? Imagine being nervous when going for the labour ward and finding no one around? Don't you wish you had support or a selfless helper to guide you through the journey of motherhood? Such questions prompted the birth of BabyChakra. Naiyya Saggi, the CEO and founder of BabyChakra, began the platform after noticing the struggles of her sister as a parent and how difficult it was for new mothers to get relevant and verified information on childbirth and upbringing. BabyChakra is a unique parenting community that customises each mother's journey as per her preferences and provides her with content as per her requirements. With 2 million families served, 50 million-plus content views on their platform and a 100 million-plus minutes spent by parents on this platform, it surely emerges as a fantastic name in mom communities. They have recently launched a custom line of verified and safe baby products, easing the anxieties of moms everywhere!

Malaika Arora :

“I just want to be known as the Diva.”



India's Best Dancer is back on our screens with its second season and how! Hosted by Maniesh Paul, Sony Entertainment Television's popular reality show returns with renowned personalities Malaika Arora, Geeta Kapoor, and Terence Lawrence helming the mantle as the judges. With the show set on finding #BestKaNextAvtar this season, we are only too eager to learn more.

In a gracious interview, Malaika Arora talks to us about the finer nuances of dance, including the role fitness plays in it.

We have seen you as a judge across different shows over the past few years. As a seasoned judge and professional, how does it feel to return to *India's Best Dancer*?

Even now, I get scared to judge. I have understood the ways a lot more and can judge much better compared to earlier times. I'm in a better space and a better position to be giving that judgement because I enjoy it more than anything else. I think it's a journey. Our contestants must go through this journey together, have fun and enjoy it together...that's how it should be.

LIPIKA VARMA, in conversation with the svelte MALAIKA ARORA, on dance, fitness, and *India's Best Dancer*.

Having been part of the industry for so long, what kind of changes stand out to you?

I'm happy and proud to be part of the entertainment industry. There have been a lot of changes over the years. Earlier I don't think it was even recognized as an industry. The foremost change is how it's a recognised industry now. This has led to there being a lot of footfall.

You began your career with the now classic 'Chaiyya Chaiyya', making your mark as a dancer. Looking back, how do you feel about it now?

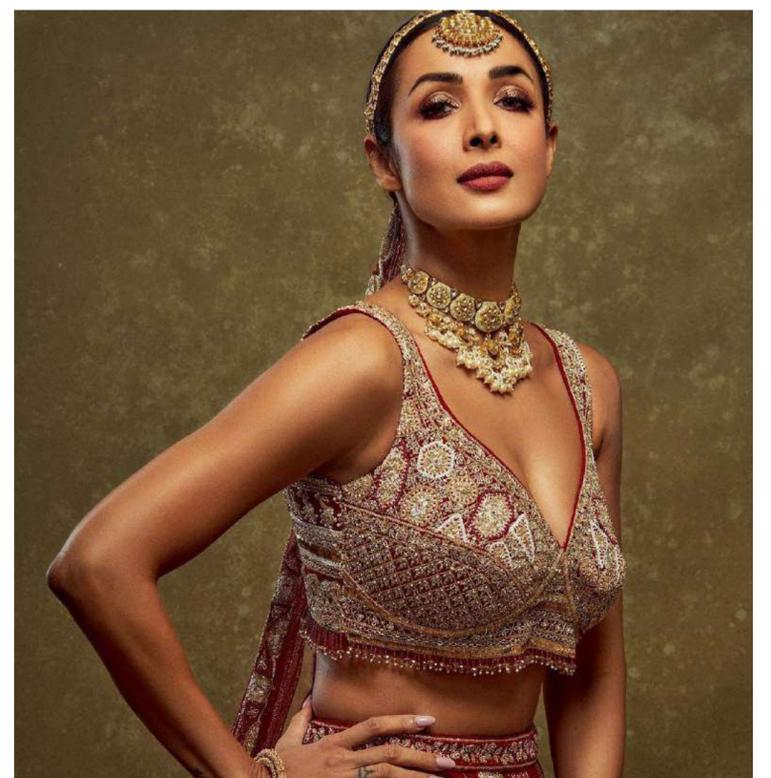
Receiving fame, name, and recognition with my first dance number 'Chaiyya Chaiyya'...it was an amazing, beautiful and path-breaking experience for me and a wonderful feeling. I had the opportunity to give my best performance. I'm so glad I did it and said yes instead of shying away.

What would you be liked to be known as: 'Dance Diva' or 'Fitness Diva'?

Dance diva? Fitness? Or a fashion diva? Put me in any category, be it dance, fashion, or fitness. I just want to be known as the Diva.

What is fitness to you?

Fitness to me is very important. I need to wake up every single day and motivate myself. It's never easy for an individual to get up and motivate themselves, to do things irrespective of whatever one is going through. I love the fact that I can wake up and push myself. Every day for me should be a day to remember. I don't like to wake up feeling dull. I shouldn't be feeling like I don't want to do my fitness regime today. I want to wake up feeling, "Chalo, sab karte hai saath mein."





What is your fitness mantra?

I think everybody has a different approach to fitness. How I perceive fitness could be different from how others perceive fitness. For me...I tell everybody, "Start toh karo." To reach your goals you have to begin somewhere, so start. Try and make it a habit of some sort. Slowly and eventually, you will reach that goal.

Do you still rehearse dance regularly?

I rehearse dancing whenever I get a chance to do it. I enjoy and love it; it's a great stress buster. Dance is something that I'm good at.

Dancing has evolved from the 90s to the present day. What are the kinds of things you have learned while being on the show?

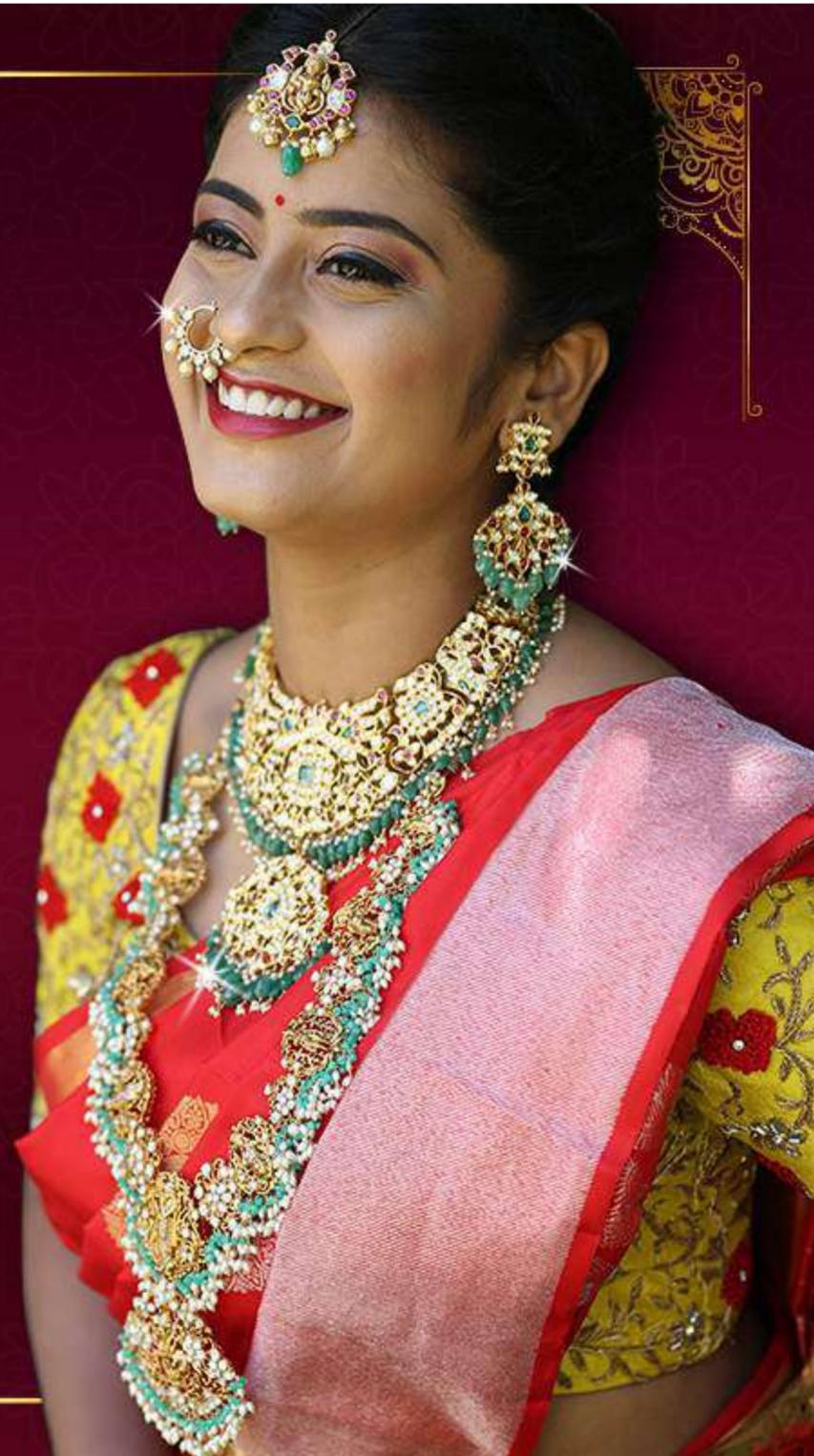
I have learned a lot of dance styles while being on the show, some of which I didn't even know existed. So yes, it's been very educational for me as well. What is more remarkable for us to see is the number of women participants on the show. Earlier, it used to be a majority of boys dancing. To every 10 boys dancing there were only 1 or 2 girls seen. Now, the ratio and the equation is changed, with girls participants taking things to the next level.



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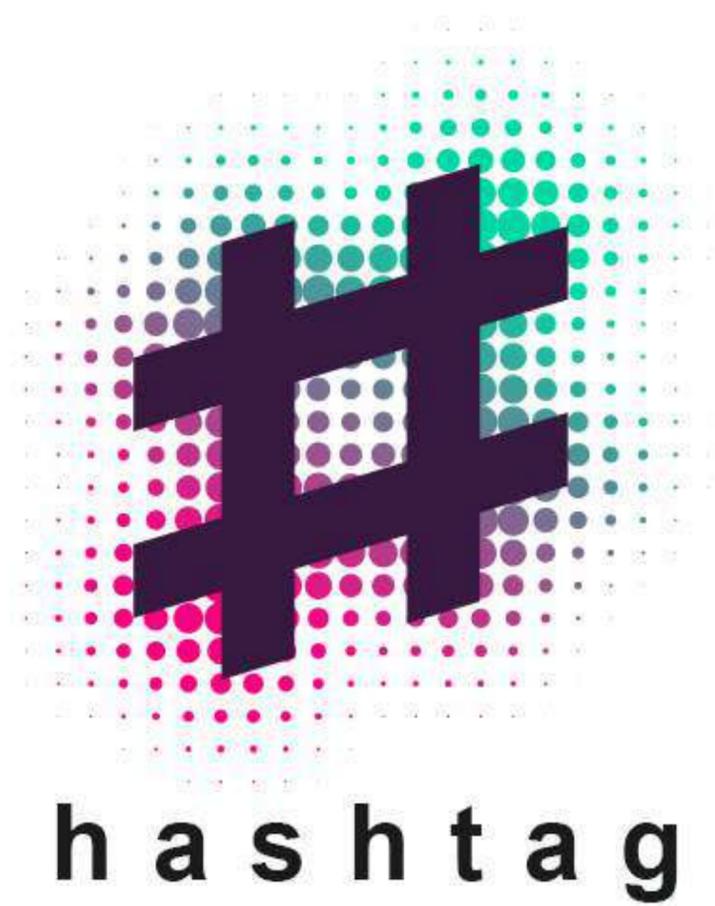


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AUTO & TECH

Digital Investments: The Best of Tablets

Browse through the latest tablets in the market, reviewed by **Aniket Pande** from BlazeTechnica



Work from home, online classes, and the aesthetic of working purely digitally has led many to consider adding tablets to their electronic shelf. The options available however, can leave anyone dizzy with confusion. We review the best of tablets in every price segment.



Source: realme

Realme Pad

Price - Starting at INR 13,999

Features - The first tablet from Realme is well budgeted, given its provisions. The tablet supports a 10.4-inch Full HD IPS LCD screen and comes equipped with quad speakers for Dolby Atmos. It has some options – one can choose WiFi only or Cellular. Storage can be 3/32 GB and 4/64 GB, along with RAM options. The processor used is the Mediatek Helio G80, making the tablet able to handle everyday tasks as well as casual gaming. With an 8 MP rear camera and another 8 MP front camera, it is capable of shooting videos at 1080p 30fps. The tablet has a battery capacity of 7100 mAh and supports 18W fast charging.

USP - If you are looking for a great media consumption experience within a budgeted price, the Realme Pad is the best pick.



Source: Samsung

Samsung Galaxy Tab A7

Price - Starting at INR 17,999

Features - This tablet comes with a 10.4-inch Full HD TFT LCD screen along with quad speaker for a stereo experience. It comes in 3/32 GB and 3/64 GB storage, with RAM options and has two variants – WiFi only and LTE. Powering this tablet is the Qualcomm Snapdragon 662 processor, which can handle everyday tasks with ease. There are two cameras, an 8 MP rear camera and a 5 MP front camera, enabling recording of videos upto 1080p 30 fps. The battery capacity is at 7040 mAh and has support for 15W fast charging.

USP - For someone looking for a budget tablet from a tier 1 brand, Samsung Galaxy Tab A7 is the right choice.



iPad (9th Generation)

Price: Starting at INR 30,900

Features - iPads have always been the best option in tablets due to the great software experience, making it a product that gives the most value for money. Apple's recent launch of the 9th-generation iPad brings some minor improvements to the previous model. It comes with two storage options – 64 GB and 256 GB – along with options for WiFi only or Cellular. Similar in design to the previous iPads, the latest display is a 10.2-inch Retina screen with two speakers and support for the 1st-generation Apple Pencil. Powering this iPad is Apple's A13 Bionic processor which can deliver some great performance. This tablet comes with an 8 MP rear and 12 MP ultra-wide front camera which can record videos up to 1080p 60fps.

USP - Well-featured, this tablet provides a great performance and software experience at its price.



Samsung Galaxy Tab S7 FE

Price - Starting at INR 41,999

Features - Yet another Samsung pick, this tablet may be higher in price but comes well-equipped for professionals. The display is an admirable 12.4-inch TFT LCD screen with full HD resolution. The stereo speakers are tuned by AKG, providing a great sound quality and audio experience. Storage options are 4/64 GB and 6/128 GB with RAM options, along with provisions for both WiFi only and Cellular. Powering this tablet is the Qualcomm Snapdragon 750G processor, usually found in some mid-range smartphones, thereby offering sustainable performance. Tab S7 FE also brings some Samsung specific software features like the Samsung Dex which provides a small laptop like experience. It comes with an 8 MP rear and a 5 MP front camera which can record videos up to 1080p 30fps. Battery capacity is at 10090 mAh, with support for 45W fast charging.

USP - Samsung Galaxy Tab S7 FE comes with a S Pen inside, which is handy for all professionals, aiding tasks from note taking to sketching.



iPad Air (4th Generation)

Price - Starting at INR 50,900

Features - Another powerful tablet, the iPad Air comes with a 10.9-inch Liquid Retina (IPS LCD) display with a full HD resolution, along with stereo speakers. It comes in two storage variants – 64 GB and 256 GB – with both WiFi only and Cellular options. This iPad uses Apple’s A14 Bionic processor, which is the same as found in the iPhone 12 series. The new iPad Air is compatible with 2nd-generation Apple Pencil. It comes with a 12 MP rear camera which can record videos in 4k 60fps and a 7 MP front camera which can record videos up to 1080p 60 fps. The battery capacity on this iPad is 7606 mAh.

USP - For someone looking for a tablet with the best performance in this price range, the iPad Air 4th Generation is currently the best option.

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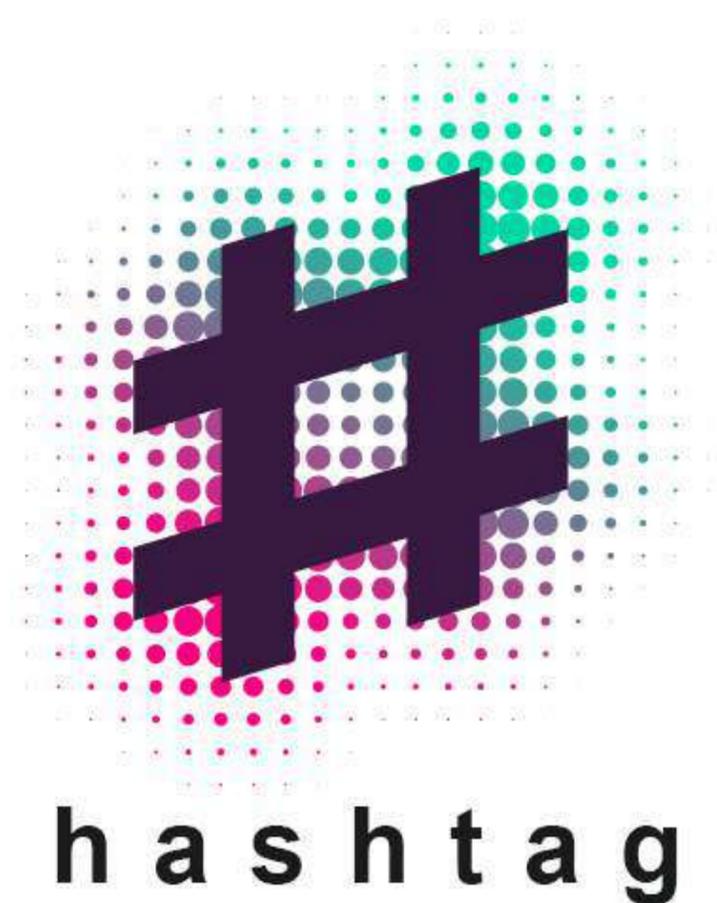


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ARTS AND THEATRE

Ballet Beckons- Shivani Mistry

Canta Dadlaney talks to Miss Twinkle-Toes, as Shivani Mistry likes to call herself, to understand her interest in this graceful dance form which many admire but few pursue.



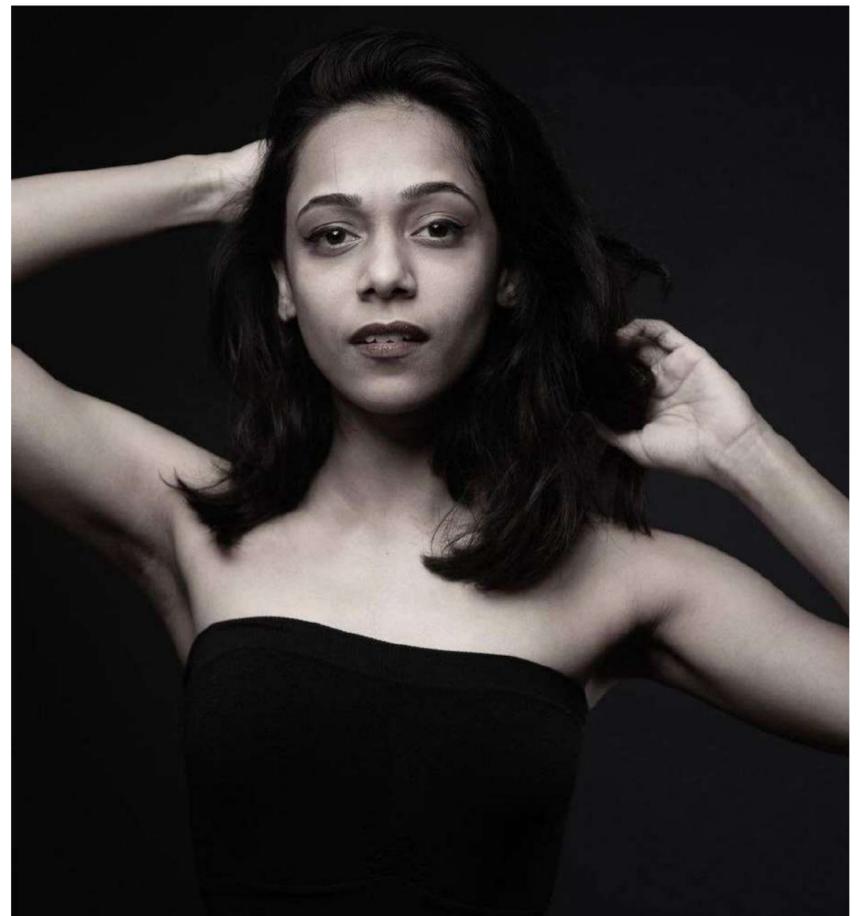
Shivani translates to follower of Lord Shiva; it is perhaps this that impacted Shivani Mistry to pursue the dance form of ballet at the tender age of 5 years. A degree in biotechnology and a career in ballet could baffle anyone. She's been featured in the ISTD International Dance magazines for being one of the youngest to accomplish a lot in the field of Modern Theatre, Ballet and Latin American. She has also been featured in the anniversary edition of *Vogue's Blurred Lines* as a physical and mental health activist and influencer. We learn more about her fascination with ballet, and what inspires her to dream.

How It All Began

How does the dream for ballet begin? Says Shivani, "I was only 5 years old when my parents noticed me walking constantly on my *demi pointes*. My Dad learnt of Tushna Dallas and The School of Classical Ballet and Western Dance for young kids through one of his clients. My parents contacted Tushna and secured a place for auditions. Since the fees were too steep, my parents decided against it. Tushna however, was determined to train me. She believed I was a prodigy and offered a scholarship. That's how I started my incredible, long, dedicated journey in this dance form. At first, I pursued ballet as my only extra-curricular activity. I enjoyed it immensely. With time I found myself becoming adept at it. The challenges were many, but I never stopped."

To be endowed with a scholarship at the age of 5 is no mean task. No wonder then, that Shivani started teaching at the age of 16 when most teens are at crossroads about career paths. An innate passion made this precocious teenager start saving as much as she could from her nominal earnings from the age of 18. Every time the savings accumulated, she would enhance her skills with a 3–6-month training schedule, overseas. Gifted yet humble, this amazing danseuse makes no bones about her family's inadequacy to fund this expensive dance form.

"My parents have been pillars of support; why else would they have taken a 5-year-old for auditions. Ballet training entails many expenses and beyond a point there was not much they could do," says Shivani, who never fails to express her gratitude to her parent's initial support which she says shaped her future.



Core Learnings

Dance Science, as she calls it is an inherent part of her teaching. "Science is around us. Our bodies and minds function on the fundamentals of science. Dance science is an aspect where you research, understand and discover things required or related to movement. You must understand the anatomy, the mechanics as well as the physics behind a movement. There are so many other factors like the usage of breath, movement across the floor, injury prevention, and even safe teaching. I love to incorporate everything that science has taught me in dance and dance has taught me in science," notes Shivani.



My parents have been pillars of support.





ee
Dance science is an aspect where you research, understand and discover things required or related to movement.



Going Forward

Change is the only constant goes the adage. Shivani's choreographies are always inspired by change. Her efforts at creating an awareness of the many things that require change inspired her to produce works like *Plastic Pollution*, *Survivors*, *Social Man Kind*, *Apocalypse*, and *Riyaz*, among others. Shivani believes that in a country with a rich, diverse culture, the concept of dance as a career has many prospects in India. "I truly wish to uplift the entire artist community because I believe that India and Indian artists have a lot to offer; the world has only witnessed the tip of the iceberg." An inspiring ballet dancer, Shivani is ready to take on new challenges and embrace as many as possible, in her passion-filled community.

A Vibrant Career

Not one to be content only with teaching, this poised young lady has performed at numerous stage-shows, corporate events, and has enjoyed performing on stage in Israel and Australia. It has been a decade of teaching for Shivani. Teaching at the same school which gave her a break at 5 is something she plans to do always. In addition to that, she has taught at Shiamak Davar's institution (Joy program and OYPs) and the Goa Dance Residency. From choreography to modelling and teaching, Shivani has achieved a lot at 27 years. Her visit to Israel in 2019 saw her train with the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company for 6 months.

Ask her what ballet has taught her in her journey of life so far and this is what she has to say: "Ballet for me has been a learning about everything that life holds for us. My incredible teacher, Tushna Dallas, taught me patience, humility, kindness, optimism, gratitude, and the art of respecting all. I have truly applied these in my life and continue to better myself every single day. I did not allow my challenges to dissuade me even once. I never looked back."

NATOYA is Shivani's entrepreneurial online venture which she founded during the pandemic phase. "I had never come across any stores which sell ballet-wear and accessories. I decided on this online store to encourage as many dancers as possible across the country to access this merchandise at reasonable prices."





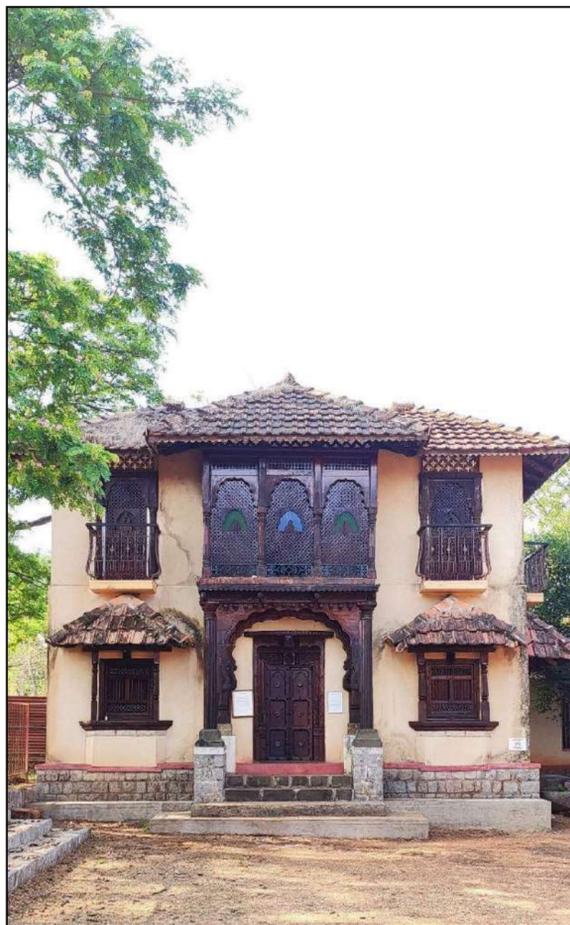
Sustainable tourism meets architectural marvels at the HASTA SHILPA HERITAGE VILLAGE. ADITI PAUL visits this re-structured hamlet in coastal Karnataka.

A walk through history –

THE HASTA SHILPA HERITAGE VILLAGE

Tucked away in an idyllic corner of Karnataka is the small town of Manipal. Host to a vibrant student community and a quaint getaway destination, the coastal region is home to the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village, which seeks to preserve the architectural and cultural wonders of India in a time of rampant modernization.

Spread over 7 acres of land, the internationally recognised heritage site was started as a passion project in the 70s and 80s by Vijayanath Shenoy, a renowned heritage conservatist and antique collector. The now open-air museum was first an attempt to conserve and protect the historical generational homes that can be found across India. Dipping into his savings, Mr Shenoy sought to relocate and restore traditional homes and palaces from across Karnataka, resulting in the establishment of a village that now hosts 26 such structures, alongside art galleries of cultural artefacts.



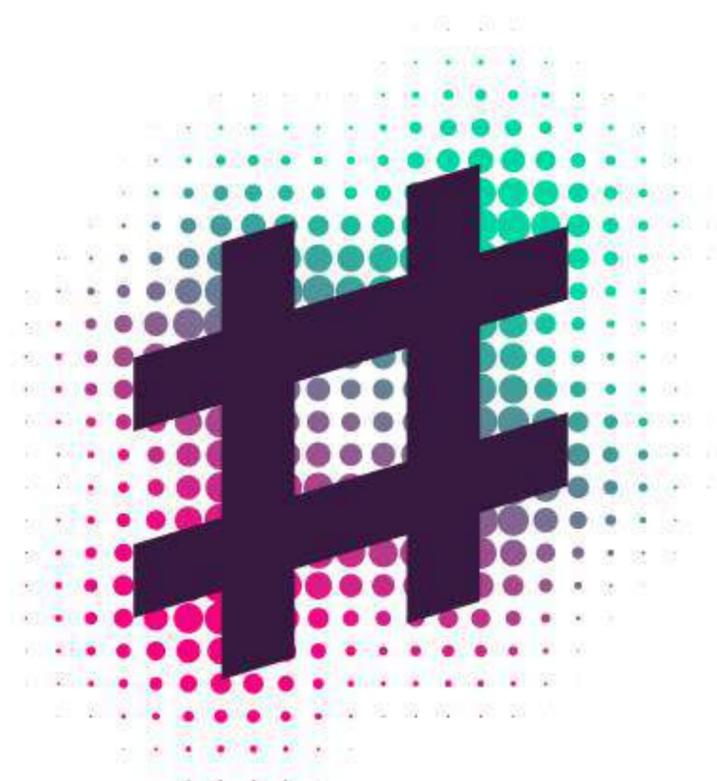
The heritage village and the Hasta Shilpa House are currently managed by the Hasta Shilpa Trust, which provides unguided as well as guided tours for cheap to all. The area truly resembles a picturesque hamlet, with walking lanes resembling village streets, and a Bazaar Street for reconstructed shops 'selling' vessels, pickling tools and jars, toys, cloth, and other scavenged treasures. Pan-Indian architectural styles are the real drawing factor – ranging from Rajasthani opulence to Maratha simplicity, or an echo of the Deccan region and the Vijayanagar kingdom. You can also see early Portuguese designs, as seen at the Mangalorean Christian House. Although the village is open throughout the year, summer and winter are the best seasons for a visit. Take a couple of days to truly immerse in the time-stuck village and explore widely the forgotten styles of Indian architecture.

How To Get There: To get to Hasta Shilpa, one needs to go to Manipal. The closest airport lies in Mangalore, from where you can get a cab or bus to the town. Udupi is the closest railway station, from where you can board a bus or take a rickshaw to the heritage village. Manipal also offers budget stays at its numerous hotels.

Cost: Guided tours at the village are available only on the weekends and cost INR 500 per adult, and INR 300 for children between 10 to 14 years. Unguided tours can be taken on all days except Mondays, at the cost of INR 200 per adult, and INR 150 for children between 10 to 14 years of age.

By focusing on preservation, the late Mr Shenoy aimed to provide visitors with an experience of times bygone – thus, all antiques and objects are displayed in the open air, and one can enter some of the homes on display. One such ethnographic structure is the Hasta Shilpa Heritage House, which was previously Mr Shenoy's residential space. Now, the home is partially open to the public, and displays within its rooms the different toys and playthings that have been rescued over the years. By far, this village sets an example of what sustainable tourism in India could look like, should efforts be taken.





h a s h t a g

TRAVEL



Siddhant Vashistha takes us on a spell-binding trip around Jaipur, traversing through the little-known spots of the vibrant pink city.

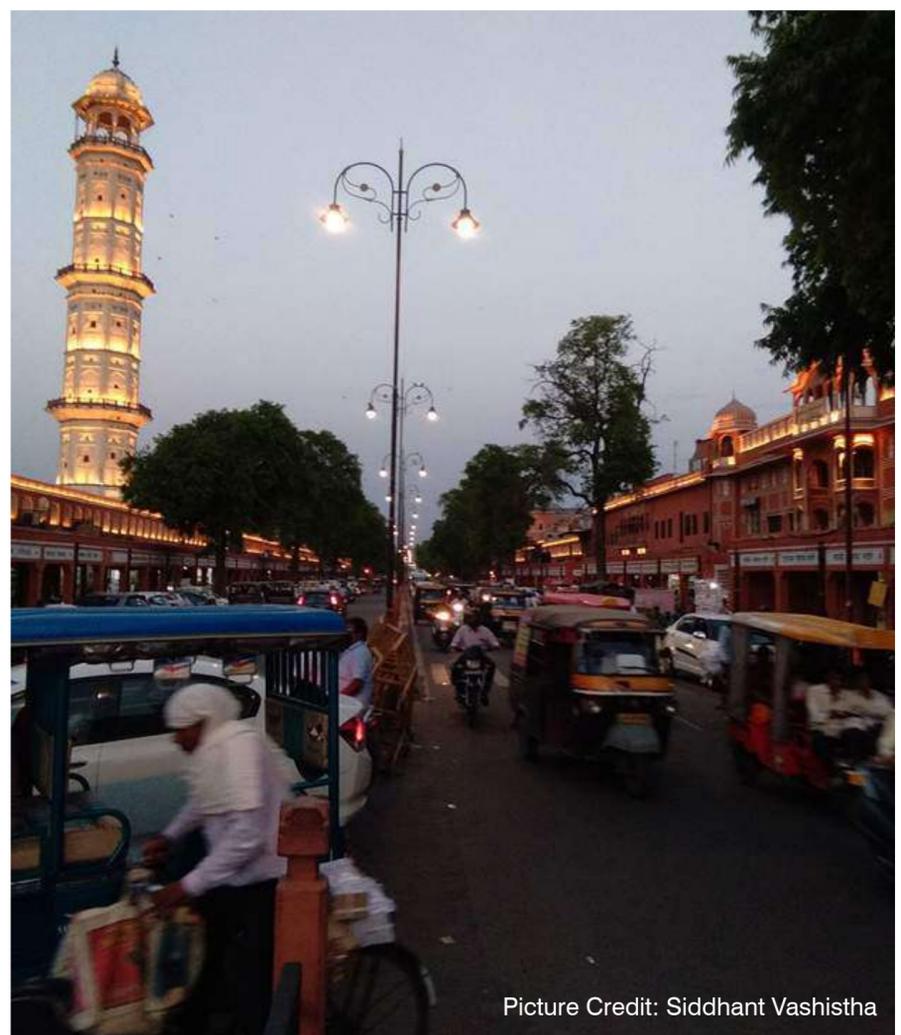
Nooks and Crannies

JAIPUR'S HIDDEN MARVELS

While Jaipur is known for its forts and palaces, and there's an itinerary that exists in every visitor's handbook, there are a few places in the city that are often overlooked by the rushed traveller. We introduce you to these little-known wonders in Jaipur, which might come in handy on your next trip to Rajasthan.

Sargasuli or Isar-lat

Isarlat was built by the eponymous king Ishwar Singh after his wins in three wars, as a victory memorial in 1749 AD. It is the tallest minaret in the walled city of Jaipur and is inspired by Delhi's Qutub Minar. The tower is a vibrant light-yellow, which paints a beautiful contrast to the pink sandstone of the city. Isarlat is a wonder of the Mughal and Rajput schools of design. The faces resemble beams in a fort, and the *Chhatri* or umbrella like roofing are inspirations from Rajput styles, whereas the four corners of the structure are similar to those in a mosque.



Picture Credit: Siddhant Vashistha

Feast Your Eyes

The tower top has a magnificent view of the entire city. Previously restricted, it is now possible to go inside the minaret, with a ticket costing only Rs 70.

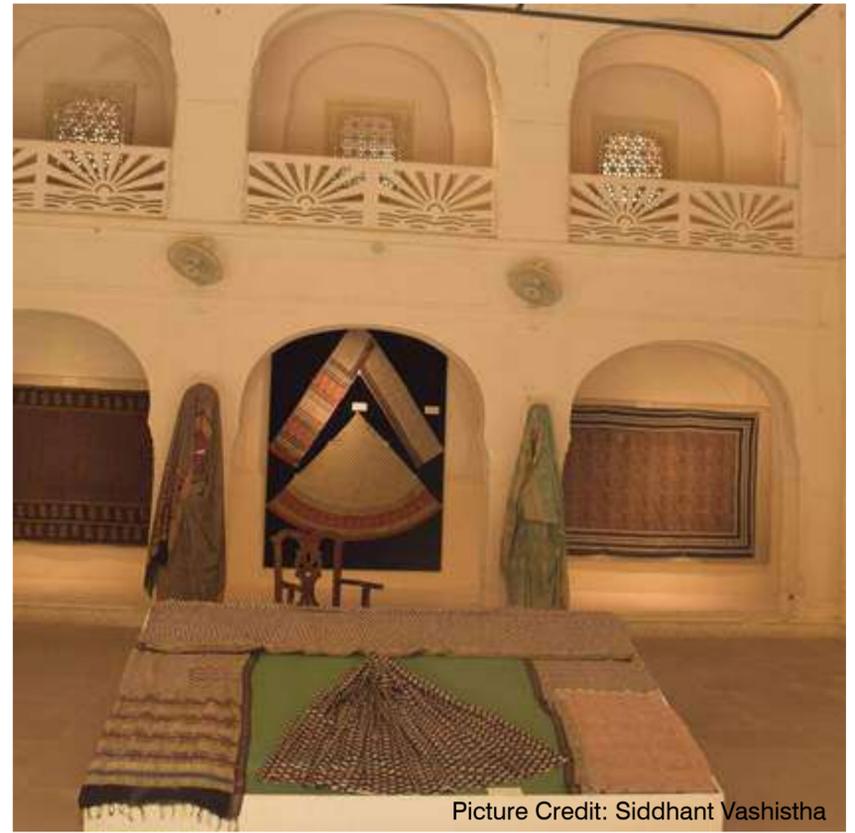
Address:

Aatish Market, Gangori Bazaar, J.D.A. Market, Kanwar Nagar, Jaipur, Rajasthan 302002.

Maharaja School of Arts and Crafts

Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II started this college for the promotion of indigenous art and craft forms in 1857. The school offers courses for painting, applied arts, and sculpture. Although the school has faced financial cuts and shortage of teaching staff, it doubles up as a fantastic art gallery and a place for exhibitions.

A book exhibition organised by the Urdu Academy on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi is presently on display. All the books are in Urdu and are a delight for anyone interested in the language.



Picture Credit: Siddhant Vashistha

Ram Kishore Chhipa's prints on display.

Feast Your Eyes

Dabu (printing on traditional cloth fabric) by the acclaimed artiste Ram Kishore Chhipa, from Bagru, is also on display here. The use of natural colours and conventional printing methods make this craft unique.

Address:

253, Kishanpole Bazar Rd, Modikhana, Jaipur, Rajasthan 302002

Ajmeri Gate

Ajmeri Gate is one of the entrances into the walled city of Jaipur as you move ahead of the MI Road. It posits itself as one of the most aesthetic gates in the entire city. A recent beautification drive included a repaint, the installation of lights for night tourism, the construction of a fountain on the side and more greenery.

This is an example of Jaipur's restoration and preservation efforts. The city still preserves the old 18th century walls which are 'guarded' by seven gates, one of which is the Ajmeri Gate. The gate was recently in the news for having been closed after decades due to the COVID-19 lockdown. That the gates used to be closed at night, before independence, is a fact worthy of notice here.



Picture Credit: Siddhant Vashistha

Ajmeri Gate at night

Feast Your Eyes

The three arches, which are located in the north of the city, are richly painted with floral themes and mythical characters above the centre door and three entrances.

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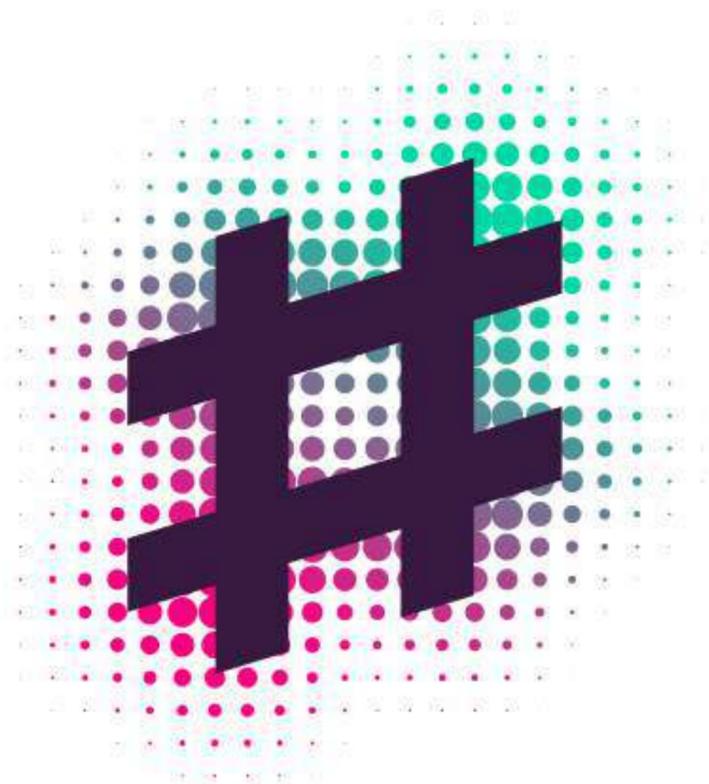
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PETS

JAPALOUPPE EQUESTRIAN CENTRE

Where animals and children learn to be compassionate to each other

Lorraine More grew up around her furry and feathered friends. Now, she seeks to foster ties between animals and the next generation. It's a worthy and exhilarating experience for both parents as well as children, shares **Dinesh Raheja**.

I would have missed the turning into a muddy, bumpy lane off Talegaon on the old Mumbai-Pune highway but fortunately, I had switched on the GPS, so I made it to the Japaloupe Equestrian Centre.

Run by spry 66-year-old Lorraine More, Japaloupe began as an equestrian farm where children of all ages came to learn horse riding. 7 years ago, she added a picnic and petting farm that has become a magnet for animal lovers and city children. Visitors are actively encouraged to meet, greet, and interact with an assortment of tame but lively animals.

Lorraine is an avowed animal lover who describes her parents as "very animal people." She says, with a tinge of jocularity, "While growing up, my five siblings and I had chickens and ducks scrambling around in our yard and a goat who had breakfast with us. We would rescue a squirrel who had fallen out of a nest or nurse a bulbul and feed it till it was ready to fly on its own. It is so wonderful to grow up with animals; it moulds your perspective of animals and increases empathy."



When I visited the farm, I was greeted with open spaces and a bunch of children running excitedly between the separate animal and bird enclosures. I watched as four-year-old twins Jaanu and Natasha broke into peals of laughter as rabbits and guinea pigs sat on their laps and nibbled on the cabbage leaves offered to them. The twins caressed the napes of the horses, let a cockatoo perch on their shoulders, and wanted to know why the pigs, named Peppa and George, were not pink like in their story books. They complained good-naturedly about Candy the donkey not playing with them but were quickly distracted by Baa Baa, the black sheep about whom they had only seen pictures in their nursery rhyme class. They did not know whether to spend more time with Sheldon the baby bull, or Edison the billy goat, or the red-eared turtles from Singapore.

"It is so wonderful to grow up with animals; it moulds your perspective of animals and increases empathy."



Compassion and empathy are the inconspicuous benefit of this experience. Lorraine says, “We tell the children to be gentle with the animals and the birds, and not to alarm them by screaming or being rough with them. They learn to be compassionate because they see that it works better with animals. If you are rough with them or yell at them, the animals wriggle out of their hands and scuttle away. When you expose children to animals, they become more caring and sensitive, not only to animals but other human beings too.”

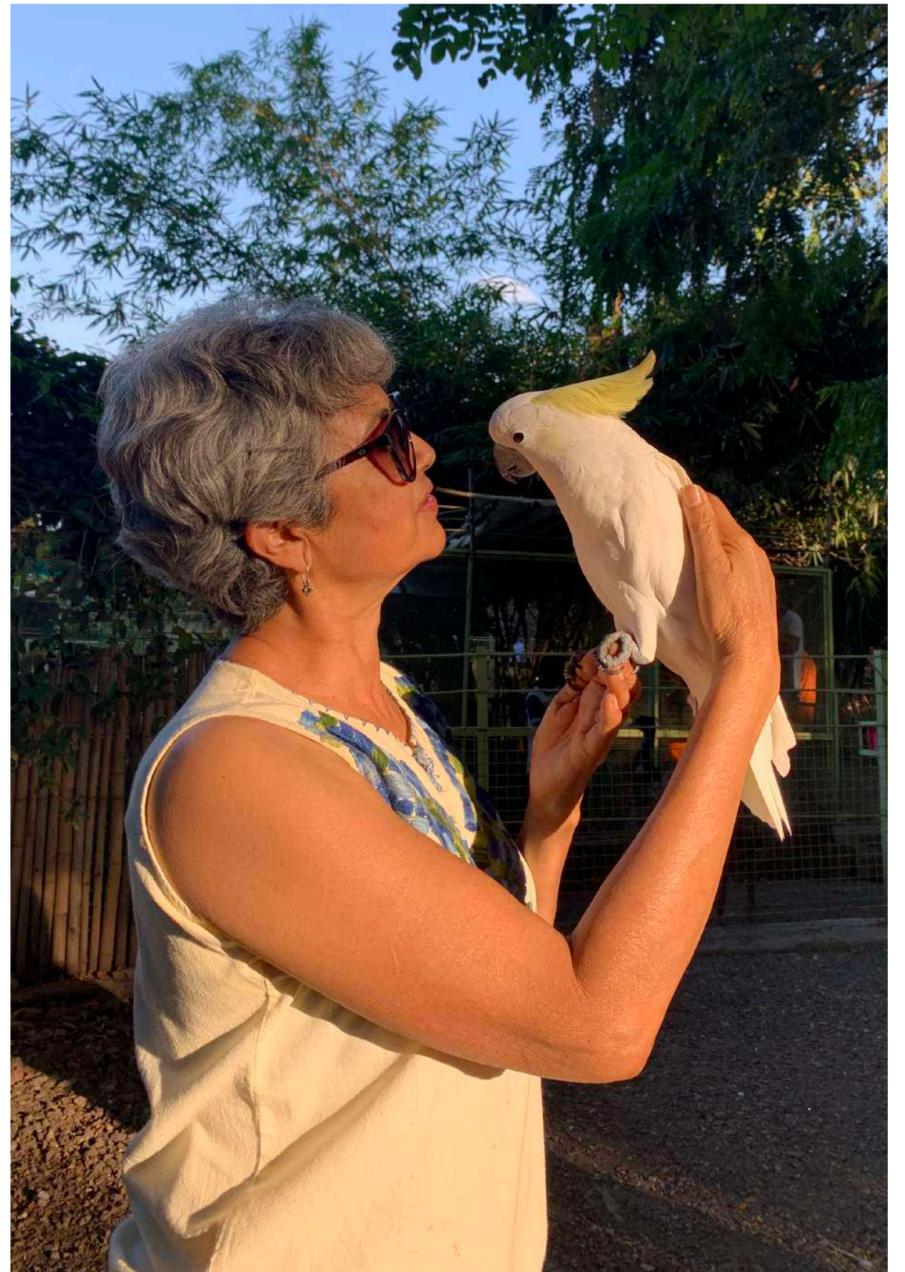
On my way to the car, I see the twins grinning from ear to ear—their mother has given her consent for waffles while Jaanu waits for his turn at the pony ride.

“When kids hold a guinea pig or a rabbit in their lap, they ‘feel’ the difference between a stuffed toy and a live animal.”

Lorraine says, “Parents tell me that their child forgets the birthday party organised by them at a restaurant in five minutes but a visit to Japaloupe has them in a thrall and they keep talking about it for days on end.”

The petting farm is also an effective way to rid children of their fear of animals. Lorraine points out, “Before coming here, some children are apprehensive of going near an animal; maybe because they have picked that up from the adults at home. There are also city children who have had no exposure to animals. On their first excursion, they may hide behind their mothers but by the second visit, they themselves lead their parents to the animal pens.”

Underlining the importance of touch, she says, “When kids hold a guinea pig or a rabbit in their lap, they ‘feel’ the difference between a stuffed toy and a live animal.”



Visitation Details

- Open for all six days of the week; Wednesdays closed.
- For the 3.30 pm to 5 pm slot on a weekday, the rates are Rs 560 for ‘big’ people (10 years and above) and Rs 336 for ‘l’il’ people (2 to 10 years). It includes a tour of the Centre and high tea.
- **Address** : Japaloupe Equestrian Centre, Off Old Pune Mumbai Highway, NH-4, near Somatne Toll Plaza, Talegaon Dabhade, Maharashtra 410506

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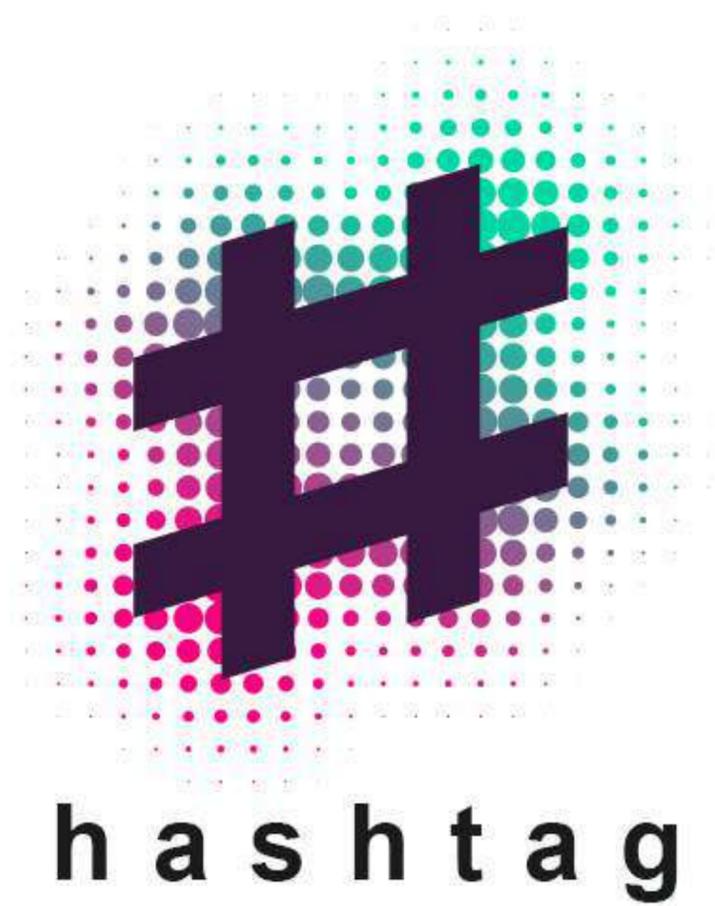


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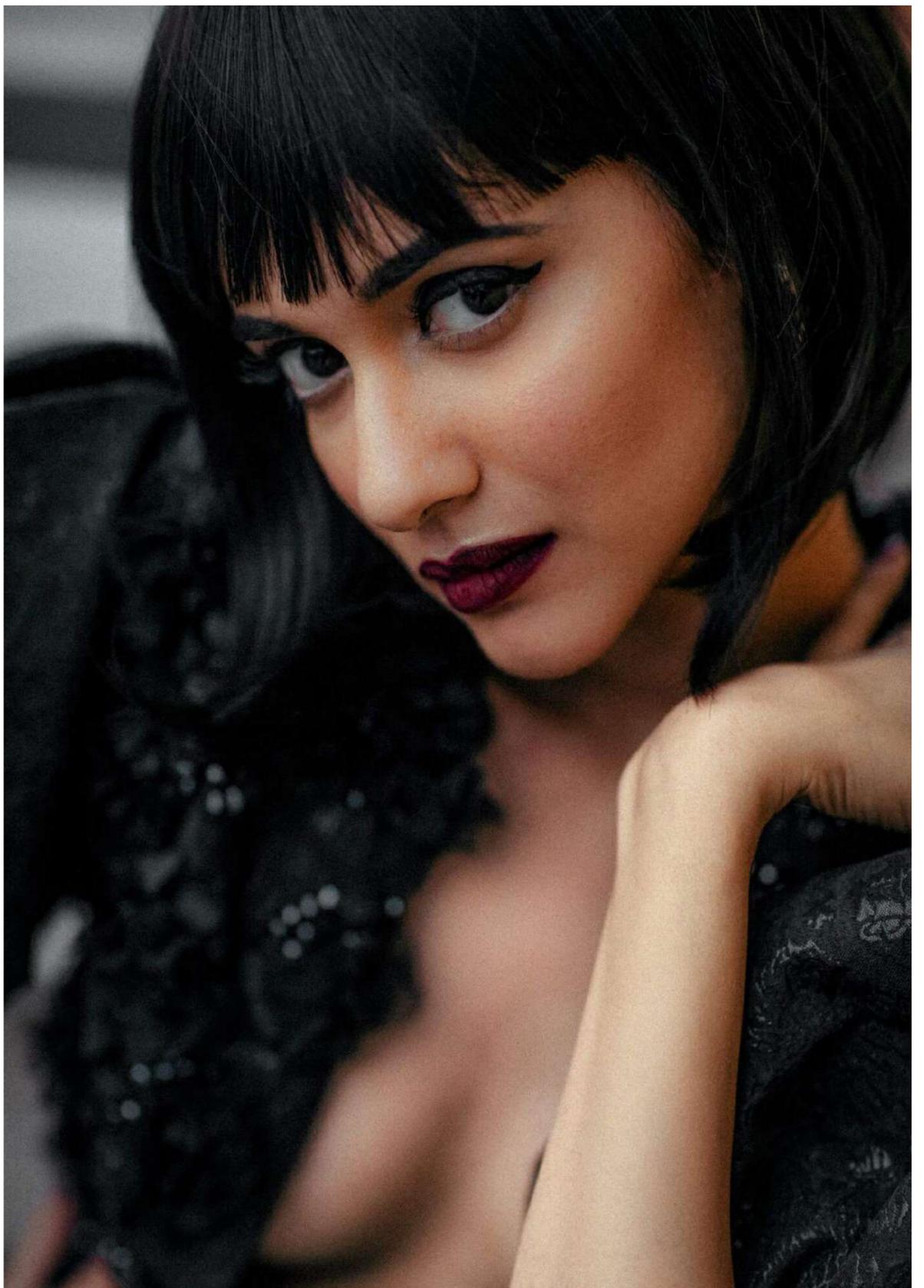
“I am
certainly
not in the
rat race”

HASHTAG INDIA catches up with rising star SHIV JYOTI RAJPUT in a candid interview, learning more about her journey into the industry.

Having debuted with *Bebaakee* alongside Kushal Tanon, Shiv Jyoti Rajput is back on our screens with the highly anticipated web series *Special Ops 1.5*, starring opposite Kay Kay Menon. A student of Foreign Trade, she talks about her journey into the industry and what's brewing on the horizon...

From *Bebaakee* to *Special Ops 1.5*, it has been quite eventful. Tell us about your journey into acting.

It was a fairy-tale ride, totally magical and clearly unexpected. What more can I say? I'm not sure if people ever get to have a platform like this, which is full of learning and unimaginable experiences.



A student of Foreign Trade, you made a career switch to acting. What drew you to this industry?

Peace. Working in a corporate world is very challenging. It's crazy, the amount of internal politics that happens. Focus on development is less and people are willing to eat one another for their success. I wanted to create a world of freedom and acceptance, which I found in acting.

How do you choose your scripts?

I think a lot before taking up a project. I am certainly not in the rat race; I want to work on good projects that people would like to watch and admire for generations to come.



Your role in *Special Ops 1.5* is completely different from your previous roles. What kind of preparation went into this role?

Honestly, there was no preparation. My co-actor in the series was Kay Kay Menon. They say acting is all about action and reaction. So, my performance was purely how a person would perform in theatre. Reaction to every action.

How was your experience working with Kay Kay Menon? Any special experiences on the set?

It was wonderful. I used to take acting tips from him for my future projects. He used to pull my leg on different occasions during shoots. It was quite fun altogether.



DIVYA KHOSLA KUMAR:

“As an actor you need to connect to the audiences”

Lipika Varma, in an interview with Divya Khosla Kumar, on her latest release, her work with T-Series, and how family shapes into her life.

Indian actor, producer, and director Divya Khosla Kumar is back on our radar! Having signed her first film at the mere age of 17, she has since gone on to work in music videos, has explored her options as a singer, and worked behind the camera as a director for several popular music videos. Her latest film, *Satyameva Jayate 2*, has her slipping on her acting shoes again. The venture has been produced by husband Bhusan Kumar, along with Krishan Kumar (T-Series), Monisha Advani, Madhu Bhojwani, and Nikkhil Advani (Emmay Entertainment).

Anxiously awaiting reviews on the recent release, she spares us a few moments for a gracious interview.

Her Latest Venture

How do you look at your comeback with *Satyameva Jayate 2*?

I had done only one film earlier, *Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyo*. I have been busy directing music videos and movies such as *Sanam Re*. I don't think I had gone out somewhere at all. I was always on the sets. Whether you work in front of the camera or behind it, it is one and the same. I will not call it a comeback. First of all, audiences have not seen me acting as I did only one film. And that time I was just 17 years old. I was very small, almost like a kid. Thus, I feel like this is the beginning of my acting career because over the years, I feel I have learned a lot. I have grown a lot and whatever experiences I have learned, I try to put in my film in all aspects.

Do you feel acting is easy in comparison to directing?

Look! I have been into direction, so if I compare direction, it is way more difficult and strenuous. Acting is easy eventually. Ultimately though, you guys will need to tell me after watching this film. I can't give my own judgement. Director Milap Zaveri is happy with my performance, and he has written a very strong character for me. I am happy that I got this opportunity to work with John [Abraham] in an action film. I believe my strong character will give me space build my place in the industry as an actor.



“I will not call it a comeback.”



Were you intimidated by John?

No, I wasn't intimidated by John at all. We were very comfortable and before starting the shoot we got to know each other and are now sharing a great friendship. He is down to earth and humble. He does not behave like a superstar and does not have any airs. He is a nice and warm person and a very hard-working actor.

***Satyamev Jayate 2* was shot on site, at Lucknow. What was your experience like, shooting just after the pandemic?**

We have indeed had quite a good time. We had no issues shooting videos and *Satyamev Jayate 2*. During our shooting schedule, we were all in a comfortable state, all were protected, and we followed the protocols very strictly. It was a happy phase for all of us. Thus, none of us contracted COVID-19, although we were shooting in Lucknow.



“I sang songs for him while we were at home.”

How does your husband, producer and head honcho for T-Series, Bhushan Kumar, look at your acting career? Does he criticise or support you?

Bhushan [Kumar] does not criticise. We seldom discuss work at home; maybe only sometimes. Yes, the entire family extends me enough support.

Industry Secrets

Rumour has it that you have signed a three-film deal with your home production, T-Series.

Let me clarify – I haven't signed a three film deal with my home production. I actually got this film as I went to the Emmay Entertainment offices met Milap and Monisha. Only after Milap [Zaveri] narrated the role to me and things got finalised did they join T-Series. Since T-Series is doing most of the films, how could they not join hands for this venture? I hope I get more offers and opportunities and filmmakers acknowledge my work. Honestly speaking, for T-Series, on the home production front we are doing 40 films. I'm just doing just one film.

What is your outlook on nepotism in the industry?

If you ask me about getting more work at the behest of nepotism, I feel as though I have not benefited from being a part of T-Series. If it were so, I would have been doing 4 to 5 films at least in a year. Frankly speaking, your work breaks that myth. We live in a time where projection is seen more than your talent, but if you are talented you will sustain in your profession for a longer time.

T-Series is known to provide a platform for new, budding talent. How has it been, working with newcomers?

T-Series is known for introducing new talent, be it actors, writers, or directors. I myself believe in the same mantra. Throughout my career, I have tried to give opportunities to budding new talent. In *Yaariyan*, we introduced Rakul Preet Singh and Himansh Kohli. With Neha Kakkar too... her talent was recognised, and we gave her the first break.

Would you like to work with big banners like Dharma Productions or YRF?

Why not? I would love to work with these production houses.

Would you ever choose to approach producers and directors directly to cast you in a certain role?

Reaching out to the makers...I have not done that. I hope they approach me after watching my films; I'm waiting for ample opportunities to be working ahead as an actor.

Do you think audiences will have a different outlook to your work, as they have preconceived notions about married actresses?

Now, things are open a lot. Alongside family support, audiences also showed a lot of connectivity with my latest hit song numbers. I think as an actor you need to connect to the audiences, and they will not judge you based on marriage. Overall, things have opened up for women and continue to empower. Actresses can be married and still work – Deepika [Padukone] and Anushka [Sharma] are both married and working in production as well as acting. That is a healthy sign.

Family Ties

What is your son's reaction? Did he ever visit you on the sets of *Satyameva Jayate 2*?

My son came on the sets on my birthday. He feels very proud. His face just lights up when he sees me performing. I feel so happy, as he keeps asking me 'mamma, *Satyamev Jayate 2 kab release hogi?*' I can see a twinkle in his eye. He is waiting impatiently for the release of the film. I enjoy my motherhood. We both love each other. A mother-child bond is precious, and we share a great mother-child bond.

How did you spend the pandemic times?

We all at home were happy as all of us lived in the house together. This allowed the family members to grow closer to each other. I was very happy, as even Bhushan stayed back at home. Usually, he is so busy, running to the office and his other meetings. No sooner did it get over I was like.... *arre yeh khatam hi kyun hua?* Very happy though, and very busy times. I don't cook, so I didn't cook any food for Bhushan (*laughs aloud*) but I sang songs for him while we were at home. I believe in being patient and positive as they are the key to living a happy life. (*Smiles*)



WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY READING?

As we head into that time of the year when literary awards become the talk of the town again, **Arushi Dusaj** speaks to book bloggers about their recommended reads.



Vidhya A. Thakkar (Mumbai)

Book Blogger and Digital Marketer

"I read *Urmila* by Pervin Saket. It is the story of Sita's sister, Lakshman's wife. Currently, I have been reading *Valmiki's Women*, by Anand Neelakanthan. The book chronicles the stories of Bhoomija, Shanta, Manthara, Tataka, and Meenakshi. I have always loved reading mythology and these powerful women shaped *Ramayana*."



Moumita (Kolkata)

Blogger

"I enjoy historical fiction, classics, literary works and mystery thrillers. There are many on the favourite list, right from *The Paris Library* by Janet Charles to *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchet and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. These are some that I read when I need a stress buster."



Nupur (Pune)

Book Blogger

"My reading month started with a big book of around 700 pages. It is a book that has taken readers by storm – *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara. Yanagihara's fluid writing has me invested in the book, and with every part I finish, I am eager to know more about the story, its characters, and how it would end. With the Booker winds flowing, the enthusiasm to read a few titles was unmatched. Currently, alongside *A Little Life* I am also reading *Pnin* by Vladimir Nabokov. For my first Simone De Beauvoir, I have locked my weekend."



Shumaila (Kolkata)

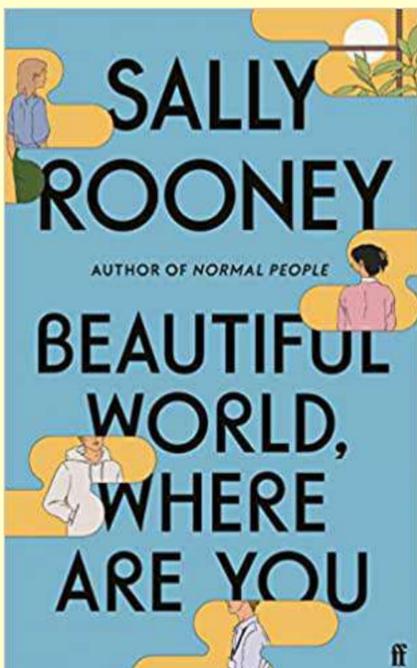
Writer and Editor

"I recommend *Minor Detail* by Adania Shibli, which has been translated from Arabic into English by Elisabeth Jaquette. It draws a strikingly horrendous image of the ramifications of war, of violence and dispossession, and of state brutality. *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamont, which is for aspiring writers, makes you laugh and cry while teaching you a thing or two about the art of writing."

We hope you enjoy these reads!

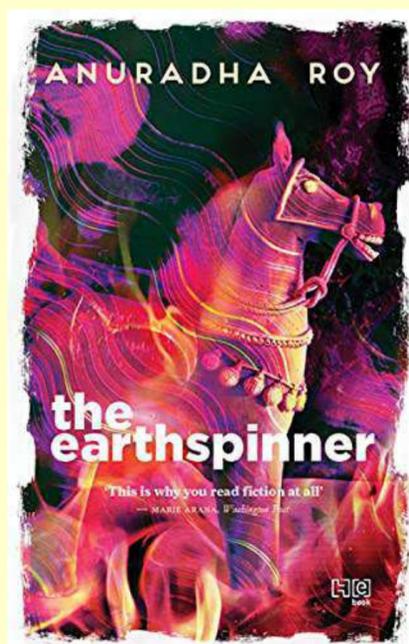
HOT ON THE STANDS!

The freshest reads of the month, brought to you by **Mallik Thatipalli**.



Beautiful World, Where Are You by Sally Rooney

Arguably the most sought-after new book of the year, Rooney is back with a story of young people and the many things about life that plague them. Alice, Felix, Eileen, and Simon are young but rapidly growing older. "They desire each other, they delude each other, they get together, they break apart. They have sex, they worry about sex, they worry about their friendships and the world they live in." Rooney writes about the inner workings of youth like no other, and this one seems to already be a winner.



The Earthspinner by Anuradha Roy

The Booker Prize-longlisted author is back with a story switching between Sara, a student at a British university trying to battle her loneliness through pottery, a craft she has honed since a young age; and Elango, Sara's former pottery teacher, a Hindu who fell in love with a Muslim woman. Jumping through time, this searing novel takes us through themes of immigration, prejudice, art, and love, and shows us the eternal struggles between ideas of East and West, fanaticism and reason, creativity, and destruction.

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