WOMENSHINE

SHINE GLOBAL
Achia Nila

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Archana
Bhatnagar

SHINING STAR
Namrita Chandi

CELEBS
Begum of
GulaboSitabo

ABHA SINGH
THE FEARLESS

VINTRA COMPATIBILITY

ZODIAC

ARTISTS GALORE
I am extremely thrilled to launch my dream in the form of a wonderful collection of various themes weaved together as ‘Women Shine’.
This global e-magazine salutes all women across the globe for the amazing work they have been doing in their respective fields.
We will present to you every month, a lovely platter donning a celebrity, yummy recipes, travel tales, home remedies and interesting write-ups on beauty, fashion, entrepreneurship and many much more.

#SHELEADS is the main segment of the e-magazine; we will feature a personality who is famous, humble and passionate about impacting lives Women. This month, read about Ms. Abha Singh & Ms. Isha Singh.

‘Shine Global’ segment will feature a personality from around the world who is doing amazing work in their genre. This month, read about Achia Nila from Bangladesh.

‘Celeb’ of the month is Farrukh Zafar, a truly multifaceted personality.

With a plethora of articles to read, subscribe and be a part of my beautiful Initiative. I look forward to seeing you all every month.

You are most welcome to share your suggestions on womenshinemag@gmail.com. This will help us to design this e-magazine in a better way.

Let’s impact the lives of women, their families and their communities.
Till then take care & shine always!

Shine Aways
Aparna Mishra

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Carrying my 8-month-old, I was out for a casual stroll when I met a bunch of familiar middle-aged women. Immediately, the question about my baby's age popped out. "Oh, she must be crawling now", said one, while the other said, "she must have started teething by now".

"Nothing as of now," I said. Suggestions started pouring in about what and what not I should feed her, the tone of their opinions, visibly judging me as a careless mother. Even though I was already giving a wholesome diet to my baby, I pretended to take a note of their suggestions and ended the conversation.

Every time I venture out, I have people asking me about rejoining the office. "Not so soon", is my reply, which surprises them as if they are sponsoring my extended maternity leave. Being an IT professional, I am expected to join the corporate world immediately, thrusting a 6-month old into daycare. A break in a successful career signifies delay in climbing the corporate ladder. Not that I resent those who make such decisions, but for me spending time with my baby, watching her grow and do all her chores is a pure joy which no amount of promotions or hikes can match with. It is 'my choice'.

It astonishes me as to how quick we are to judge someone when they don't follow a certain society-laid time frame. There is a time frame within which you are expected to get a job, get married or have children. Anyone who doesn't fit in this mould is looked down upon. If a girl decides to be independent, have a career, tour the world before getting married, she is judged. If you are married, you are judged if you don't have children within a time frame. If you have children and still continue with a full-time job, you are judged again. Many abusive marriages are dragged just for the fear of society. The hampering of self-confidence and the emotional burden it causes to the individual is neglected.

Why can't we as a society, respect an individual's opinion on what they choose to do with their own life rather than speculating things?

Children learn from the happenings in their atmosphere. They should be taught about empathy and their innocence should be nurtured. What's the hurry of little scientists, little chefs and little engineers? The percentage-based rat race combined with peer pressure seldom gives space to students to think about what their real passion is.

Liberty to choose one's clothes, career, life partner, age of getting married or having children should not be a taboo.

Society will judge you anyway. But you need to differentiate between what really matters to you, makes you happy and follow your heart rather than getting pressurized by norms. Success shouldn't be overwhelming, nor failures disheartening. Those who don't learn this, eventually succumb to the pressure.

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Follow Your Heart
How many times have you promised yourself that you will take care of yourself from this day on? How many times have you been told that self-care is more important than caring for others because if you are feeling on top of the world, you can take better care of others? How many times have you heard that in the entire scheme of things, ‘you’ are the most important and always must come first?

But do you follow it? Or even if you want to, can you?

Time is such a fleeting thing that no matter how much of it you have, it just seems to slip away. At times when we have time, motivation plays hide & seek and when motivation is at its peak, time is not at our disposal. What never ever fails us is discipline. It ensures that you do not depend on time or motivation to do the things you want to do.

So even before you get down to self-care, you have to cultivate discipline. The beast inside is tough to tackle at first but once you see the results, you will be raring to go. Doing the same thing every day at the same time without distractions not only builds concentration and focus but also takes out the nasty surprises that otherwise flood your days. With discipline, you can control time and not vice versa.

A good way to start is to sleep and wake up at the same time every day. This will keep your body cycle in control and ensure a routine which will help you plan everything accordingly.

Say, your ideal cycle is sleeping at 11 pm and getting up at 7 am, stick to it. I know, I know, Netflix and Amazon seem to take away all your time and that cliffhanger at the end of the episode beckons us to sacrifice the much-needed sleep. Now is the time to call upon our friend, discipline.

So let’s start with the morning routine. You wake up and you pick up your phone. Don’t do that. The first thing you should do is give yourself 5 minutes of absolute silence. Just close your eyes and sit on your bed, listening to the world waking up outside your window. Birds chirping, bicycle bells, traffic catching up, trees rustling, brewing of coffee in the coffee machine, the aroma of cinnamon or ginger being crushed, everything that is happening around you, soak in everything.

Now say the following things aloud or whisper to yourself.

“I am enough.”

“There is enough.”

“We have enough.”

“This day is mine to become the best possible version of myself, to achieve the things I want to, to spread smiles, give and receive love and be joyful and peaceful.”

You can even create your own set of lines. Notice the above lines, enough signifies abundance. Your words have the power of setting your intentions for the day. Once you have set your intentions for the day, say a small thank you to the universe. If anything specific has happened the day before that invites thanks, do that. Thank the universe for all that you have and keep getting.

Intentions and gratitude done, now make your bed. Yes, make your bed. This is the secret mantra of most of the successful people around the world. Making their beds makes them feel in control and organized. Isn’t that a super way to start your morning?

Remember the world might take lots out of you but it’s up to you to do things in your pace and schedule without losing your peace of mind and yet achieving all that you want to. Self-care is possible if you create time and pockets for it in your daily schedule. Once you start seeing the results, you will be motivated to do it every day. The day motivation fails, discipline will get you by.

That’s where you start – DISCIPLINE.

Now you are ready to start your day!

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We, human beings, should never stop learning. While we learn through our experiences, successes and failures, it is important to remember that there is no age bar to learn something new. If you have tried your hands on something new in this lockdown, you are doing good. But hey, did you find yourself grinning and bearing at the negative remarks someone made at your effort? If yes, you are not alone.

I am a self-taught painting artist and I have been experimenting in a form that is not known to many – Pop Art. I have been exhibiting for years now and have met all sorts of people, those who have appreciated, those who have condemned and those who have questioned my choice of form. While I realized it early that every person will have his interpretation of my artwork, some people can annoy you with their interpretation of not just the work you do, but your life and lifestyle. While I grin and bear those remarks, it often makes me ponder about why people dwell assumptions when they know nothing about the other person’s life?

Do not let anyone’s assumptions belittle you. Don’t hesitate if you are learning to cycle at 30. If you made tea for your mother or wife for the first time, you have a reason to be excited. If you made your child sleep for the first time, you did a good job, be proud of yourself. Sometimes, pursuing the simplest things can enrich your soul.

So the next time, when you upload pictures of anything of your firsts and someone laughs at that or tells you that it isn’t any special, remember why it was special to you. The world around us is ours to make. Don’t let others decide how to adorn it for you. If you have something on your mind, go and experience it to the fullest. You’ll make memories to cherish in those experiences.

Make wishes and believe in the stars.
Dream and lose yourself in the lands afar.
This world is a sordid mess, sing them your favourite lay on your guitar.

Daman Singh
1. Tell us about yourself and 'Women in Digital'.

I was born and raised in a village and peri-urban area in Bangladesh. I was good in studies and went ahead to study computer engineering. Joining the University, I was shocked. Unlike school and college, I was the only girl in the classroom. So I started looking for senior female students. There were two women, one had already quit and another was about to quit. In the entire country, there were hardly any women in the digital space. This is where my days of struggle started. Then, people didn't take women seriously and women were not considered to be good at something like coding.

During my second year, I applied for my first job. There, I saw that women were only accepted for graphics. Hardcore coding was a complete 'no-go' zone for girls. I had to fight for my first job and I got it. I was again the only girl in the coding department. I had to face many challenges. Let's not get into that, it will be a very long story. But in short, the more time I spent, I became more aware of the challenges women face. It broke my heart. It was not only about judging women in a certain job but the entire society was judging our existence, our capacity; our dreams based on our gender. I knew I had to keep fighting but now, it was not just for my own acceptance. Coding is something I love and enjoy. And there is nothing about being a man or woman that affects coding.

This became a bigger vision for me. I wanted to bring more Bangladeshi women in technology; to empower women through technology. This is how 'Women in Digital' was born.

In the year 2013, I started with a group of 5 women. Today, we have trained more than 5000 females in technology, of which, more than 3000 are actively working. In the beginning, it was a challenge to convince the girls and their parents. Another challenge was, we needed women with a good education. We mostly work with girls from middle-class backgrounds. We all know that low-income families or rural areas need bigger help. This is why we started running training programs in the villages as well. Today, we have many success stories of women from different backgrounds. We have a woman who could not continue her higher studies because of the family's poor financial condition. Today, she supports her family financially.

‘Women in Digital’ focuses on three areas –

1. Women in Digital Agency: Here, women engineers develop IT products for international clients mostly from Australia and the USA. Recently, we developed a water billing software for our local govt. (www.luminadev.com)

2. Women in Digital Tech School: This is where we provide computer training to girls to be ready for the job market. (www.moshtor.com)

3. Women in E-commerce: Focusing on rural women, here, we create an international market for their handicraft products through our social media and website. The entire team, from craftswomen and photographers to digital coders, all are women.
With the help of the Spring program since last year, we have been able to develop a financial model for the training centre. Starting February 2020, we will have four Tech Schools in different areas of Bangladesh - Dhaka, Ramgonj, Kurigram and Mymensingh which will run like permanent institutes.

Bangladesh is probably one of the best countries in South Asia to encourage women in the digital space. Because of the government's initiatives like Digital Bangladesh, we have the opportunity to reach even the most remote regions, train the girls and also find them international jobs. There is a huge opportunity. I am proud of training 5000 women but we have the potential for millions.

‘Women in Digital’ is not only a dream, it is a reality and a platform for a better future for women and girls in the country.

2. What was the most challenging part of your journey till now?

The first challenge was “I am a woman”, the second being “I am a Tech woman” and the third challenge was “I am a female entrepreneur”. In our society, people love to think that women can only manage their home but times have changed and people should admit that women can manage both home and work. ‘Women in Digital’ will constantly work on this.

3. What has been the most transformational moment for you in your journey?

In 2019, the Facebook team came to Bangladesh to make a documentary on my company and in the same year I was selected for the IVLP from the USA State Department and Acumen Academy fellowship.

4. If you are given a magic wand with three wishes to be granted, what will be your three wishes?

My three wishes would be:

1. Tech education compulsory for all.
2. Women leading IT companies.
3. Involving more women in leadership, decision making, policymaking positions.

5. What is your message for women or those aspiring to be something different?

Be confident with your own strengths and know-how to sell yourself first, then your product.

6. One sentence that defines you?

My empowerment is making other women financially empowered.

-By Team WS
A dynamic and fearless person, always ready to help others, Abha Singh, a former civil servant, a social activist, an author and a practising eminent lawyer talks with Aparna Mishra, the founder of Women Shine.

Excerpts of the interview:

Q. A large number of rape cases are not reported to the police in our country. What is your take on it?

The women face a lot of challenges when they decide to go on a legal route from the moment they report the person who raped or sexually assaulted them. They are called to the police station many times to identify the person or record their statement which is traumatic for the victim. Also, they are subjected to hostile questioning. Due to such terrible experiences, women stay away from taking legal action. Also, society pressures, poor conviction rate, NCRB figures say that only 32 per cent rape accused are convicted and rest go scot-free. The victims and witnesses are openly threatened. Long trials are another reason people are losing faith in the criminal justice system. Hence a lot of rape cases are not reported because they know they won’t get justice.

However, efforts are on to bring in reforms not only in the police but also the judiciary. We need to eradicate corruption if we want things to improve. Judiciary is finally taking the help of technology. But this would still take time as lakhs of cases are pending and we need speedy trials.

Q. As you deal with rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence cases. How do these cases affect you as a person?

These cases affect me both emotionally and mentally. An 11-year-old girl was raped - she used to go to her friend’s house in the neighbourhood to play and there she was raped by her friend’s father. The cases are heart-wrenching. I was extremely moved by Sapna Shukla’s case. Sapna Shukla lost her balance and fell under the train at Kurla station in Mumbai after being attacked by a teenager who tried to steal a gold chain around her neck but no action was taken because the convict was juvenile. You feel bad but I am a soldier, I have to fight back. I had a government job, the best one I would say, the civil services. I wanted to help the underprivileged and the marginalized so I left the comforts of a prestigious job and became a lawyer to be the voice of the silenced millions as well as where the women have misused the law.
Q. You have launched a book ‘Stree – Dasha aur Disha’. Tell us more about it.

The book promotes women empowerment. I have highlighted real-time cases and their legal recourse with an aim to educate women of their rights. At the launch, many celebrities including Gul Panag, Bhagyashree and other important personalities praised the book. All legal rights about women were translated into Hindi so that women in rural India could benefit. Such was the appreciation and demand that I had to get the book translated in Urdu for the Muslim women. A lot of readers have got back to tell me that they felt empowered after reading my book.

Q. You are the President, founder, & trustee of your NGO - Rannsamar Foundation. Tell us more about it.

Our vision and mission are to ensure that quality legal aid is available to people who are helpless, destitute and unable to fend for themselves. Those violating the rule of law get emboldened in the face of victims’ helplessness and we must end that. We have already launched a free legal aid centre in Lucknow and Dharavi. The NGO also provides computer training to convicts of Lucknow and Jaunpur jails. We have adopted a village called Dadaura in Barabanki where the NGO is working for women empowerment. Girls who had to drop out due to poverty have been re-admitted in schools. The NGO is looking after their fees, books and uniforms.

Q. How would you define the real Abha Singh?

I am a strong, sensitive and resilient person. I am hundred per cent genuine and I don't believe in pretences. I stay true to myself and my principles. I walk the extra mile to help people who suffer injustice because I believe God has given me the ability to do so. My quest for justice and truth have often-times put me at odds with the powerful but this in no way deters me from achieving my goals.

Q. You wear multiple hats - a lawyer, an author and an activist. Which role do you enjoy the most?

I am very passionate about all of them. I have authored a book ‘Stree Dasha aur Disha’ on Womens’ Rights in Hindi which was released in Lucknow, Delhi and Mumbai. Now I am writing it in English. You have one life but you can play multiple roles and I make it a point to do as much as I can and to the best of my abilities. Nothing satisfies me more. The beauty of the legal profession is that it allows me to speak against wrongdoings, fight in courts and bring a smile on the faces of the victims. If I have to choose one, I would say my life as a lawyer is the best.
Q. What are your interests?

I love watching movies. I am a regular walker; I walk daily for one hour. My NGO is my passion. I hold a lot of talks. I guide my interns and the youth and hold legal awareness seminars so that people may get to know what the laws are. I am organizing computer classes in jails for convicts as well so that when they are released, they have a fresh start and they can use the skills imparted by RannSamar Foundation and contribute positively to society. I am very involved with my children, both are lawyers and help me with my Public Interest Litigations.

Isha, Abha Singh's daughter, a brilliant mind and a fearless person.

Isha is a graduate from the National Law School, Bangalore and is now practising in the Bombay High Court. Instead of treading the path of a corporate law firm life, she has chosen to work for the rights of the marginalized. One of her cases involves securing compensation for the families of the deceased manual scavengers. Despite the Supreme Court ordering Rs. 10 lakh compensation for such families in the Bombay High Court, the Maharashtra Government has not given compensation in even a single case, although hundreds of deaths have taken place in Mumbai's sewers.

"Such inhumane practices have no place in modern India", Isha says. She is particularly passionate about the rights of women and was the co-founder of the NLS Feminist Alliance in her college. She is also working with her mother, to challenge the loopholes in the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013, which allows cases of sexual harassment in private companies to be stifled. Apart from this, she is deeply committed to spreading legal awareness because she feels a lot of exploitation takes place because people are not aware of their basic rights. This was the idea behind ‘The People's Lawyer.’

She says that both her parents have had a profound influence on her outlook in life. "From a young age, probably since the year I was born, I witnessed my father, an upright and honest police officer in the CBI struggle against a corrupt system. I was 9 years old when he tendered his resignation. His unwavering commitment to his principles taught me that strength of character and our duty towards society should never be compromised. My mother, through her life's work, has taught me the value of compassion, optimism and fearlessness. From them, I have learnt that if you believe in yourself and your principles, anything is possible."

Q. What is your message to our readers?

I want women to fight against injustice and fight for their fundamental rights. Be brave. Please don't suffer in silence. You have a right to be happy and fulfil your dreams. I want to see an equal world to live and grow. I want to tell everyone, irrespective of gender, believe in yourself and work hard for it. There is no shortcut to success.
She remembered who she was and the game changed!
- Lalah Deliah

Women are expected to change with every phase of their life and no matter who they are, women are expected to act in a certain manner. Despite the societal norms, one woman chose the path of acting to add glory to what she is. This octogenarian started her journey with being the first radio presenter at Vivid Bharti in Lucknow. The way she describes her passion for acting is simply magical. I am referring to the internet sensation, the character of Fatima Begum that stole the limelight in the recent Amazon Prime Video Film, Gulabo- Sitabo.

Yes, the magnanimous, charming and magical, Farrukh Jaffar!

Farrukh Jaffar’s movie career backtracks to 40 years. She has worked and gained recognition through films that have gained critical acclamations. The actress is thrilled with all the love and success her character and the film has been receiving from all over. She is overjoyed with all the appreciation that is coming her way.
This brilliant actress was seen in the following movies in the following roles:

1981 Umrao Jaan - UmaraoJaan's biological mother
2004 Swades - Fatima Bi
2009 Peepli Live - Mrs Manikpuri
2015 Barefoot to Goa
2015 Jaanisaar - Moore's grandmother
2015 Parched - Jaanki's grandmother
2016 Sultan - Sultan's grandmother
2017 What Will People Say? - Bestemor
2017 Secret Superstar - Badi Apa
2019 Photograph - Daadi
2019 Ammaa Ki Boli - Ammaa
2020 GulaboSitabo - Fatima Begum

The actress who waded the displeasure from the family made her mark in the movies. The zeal and enthusiasm she has in her even beats her age in front of the camera. Her unadulterated love for acting shines through easily and makes all her conversations extremely candid. She simply has to put herself in the character's shoes and the magic wand works its wonders on its own. When she was questioned about her upholding 40 years in the movie industry, she simply said, it's always her characters and the camera doing the magic.

Women have always had it difficult. It doesn't matter what profession they are in. Farrukh has been strong and brave to pursue what she believed in. She reminisces her earlier days and speaks about the hurdles she overcame to make a mark for herself. Her honesty is childlike and she simply cannot stop smiling, when she describes her little anecdotes about working with the Khans.

Despite being married at an early age, she didn't let the then world conditions dampen her spirits. She was always chirpy, optimistic and star-struck as she herself admits. She was always fascinated by the idea of being adored by people and hence she worked with the radio, theatre and movies too. Her vivacity is what makes her so lovable. She has this never give up attitude which is commendable for her age.

Her energy and aura are sure to please everyone as her character has pleased everyone with her values that she portrays in the movie. She has been happy to play a character that hails from the same city as hers. Farrukh was married to the eminent freedom fighter and journalist, Syed Muhammad Jaffer. She has two beautiful daughters. She enjoys her time with her family and talking to her grandchildren. She strongly feels that women need to carve a stage for themselves. She advises the women of all generations to live life to the fullest without worrying about their age or economic situation.

Sabiha Gulrays
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After attending a training program on Entrepreneurship in India, I pondered about how I could turn my passion for helping the community into a business. It’s all about making a difference.

A lot of us think about quitting our jobs and becoming entrepreneurs. And why not? Being an entrepreneur has its perks; you get to be your own boss and earn as much as you want. It has to be noted that on an average about 60% of small businesses fail within the first year. This is because most aspiring entrepreneurs focus on rewards rather than on long-term success or making the business a success. This becomes the case when you are not passionate about what you are doing.

It is important to understand what passion is and how can one find or recognize their passion. Passion is more than your determination, desire or your love for something. It is an emotion to be acted upon. The important thing to know is that when you are passionate about something, you love it even when you hate it. A desire fueled by passion will bring about the greatest results.

1. **Overcome the fear of failure.**
   As an entrepreneur, you are taking a risk at every step on the way. Hence the fear of failure is inevitable. What really matters is how well you move past the stumbling rocks and challenges along the way. When you are passionate about something, positive thoughts are second-nature to you. The fear of failure will only lead you to work harder to realize your dreams.

2. **Persevere and stay motivated.**
   Creating a business is an overwhelming experience. There are no short cuts to success. At times, you might feel like giving up. However, what you must remember is that the results produced from working hard, staying up late and forgoing the short term pleasures in favour of your long-term success would turn out to be wonderful.

“Passion is one of the most effective motivators when it comes to launching a business—and often one of the strongest predictors of whether an idea will lead to success.”

- Richard Branson
3. Attract more clients.
Your clients or customers will easily notice the difference when you are selling just for money versus when you are providing a great solution to their problems. The best way to acquire customers is to believe in and have a passion for providing unique solutions to their problems.

4. Be a catch for the investors.
Investors hear ideas from people who believe that they have created the next big thing. For an investor, the most important thing is whether you are following an idea to be lucky or whether you are truly passionate about what you are doing. This is mainly because unless you are emotionally invested in a business, you will not be able to build a successful business.

5. Ensure long-term success.
When you work with passion, your main focus will be on success. This means that your entire focus will be on producing long-term success for your business, rather than experiencing short-term results that can never be regained.

Passion is what drives you. It keeps you going despite the difficulties that your business will inevitably come across. Let me highlight a few things as to how being passionate will help you in creating a successful business.

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According to the United Nations (UN), the global economy could shrink by up to 1% in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, a reversal from the previous forecast of 2.5% growth. The world has now begun to witness the severe impacts of the pandemic on the global economy. The UNESCAP-SANEM South Asia Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) Model suggested that as many as 132 million people could be pushed into extreme ($1.9/day) poverty in South Asia, the bulk of them being in India followed by Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. We have already sensed the immeasurable impact in the lives of women caused by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis comes with an ominous economic outlook, especially in the context of Nepal because of its strong reliance on foreign remittance. This has unfairly impacted women. According to the World Bank, in 2019, the remittance rate in Nepal was equivalent to 27.3% of the GDP, of which 8.5% was accounted for by women. As per World Bank estimates, remittance to Nepal is expected to drop by 14% this year. As a result of the pandemic, women migrant workers are at higher risk of returning to Nepal, thereby limiting their employment status, sources of income, and purchasing power.

The National Labor Force Survey (2018), in Nepal, states that 90.5% of women employment is centred in informal sectors. Women are often dependent on public space as street vendors to earn a living, which is now being restricted to contain the spread of the pandemic. The lockdown has exacerbated weakness in informal workers and food security is a growing concern for them.

It appears that COVID-19 has reversed the substantial growth and improvement in terms of women’s economic empowerment impacting women-owned businesses, market supply-chains in SMEs, thereby disturbing the livelihoods of women and their families. The Department of Industries, MEDP Report 2019 states that out of total 923,356 operational SMEs in Nepal, only 247,880 (29.8%) is owned by women entrepreneurs. With the continuing spread of COVID-19, both the demand and the supply side of the SMEs have been altered dropping the credit level at the financial markets.

After COVID 19, it will be a tough journey for women entrepreneurs to move ahead with their pace, hence development organizations should come together with the government to pave their path to circumvent financial inaccessibility and gain the confidence to restart their business. To support women entrepreneurs, we need to bring a gender and diversity lens to our responses, or else decades of hard-won gains will be lost. In this context, the much needed PPP model could be taken wherein the government, private sector and development partners could support and invest to revive the toppling women entrepreneurship.
South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF), a regional organization representing national women entrepreneurs’ associations- federations and chambers has been working towards the economic issues of women in South Asia. SAWDF has been bringing together a consortium of women-led institutions and facilitating in taking forward the deliberations and recommendations to develop women SMEs policies through SAWDF Chapters in South Asia.

Realizing the urgency, the forum has collaborated with its chapters in the SAARC region to measure the impact and develop sustainable strategies/programs for their business recovery as women SMEs employ a fairly big number of semi-skilled workers in Nepal. As a building block to identify how businesses are currently coping with post-COVID crisis, SAWDF in partnership with development partners - ICIMOD has been initiating an online survey for women entrepreneurs across the South Asian region and few ASEAN countries to assess impacts and design present and future measures from an economic and policymaking perspective to build resilience and adaptability.

SAWDF is in the process of undertaking the government’s support focusing on women migrant returnees to bring out sustainable strategies to help their income avenues adopting agro-based skills, production, manufacture from agro by-products to set up agro-enterprises. The agriculture sector accounts for 24% of economic growth as per Nepal Development 2019, World Bank. In this context, commercial farming can be economy-boosting in the context of Nepal and the use of technology can be value addition. Specific strategies can be adopted to increase trade and diversification of products such as the establishment of herbal hubs processing centres on agro products, to commercialize agro by-products, etc.

More than ever, post-COVID 19 has been critical to upholding deliberate focus for women entrepreneurs to nurture their fledgling SMEs and retain their business for the long run. While there can be sustainable initiatives to integrate the strategies to cover up the economic downfall, Nepal still has a long way to go on its journey to bounce back in the national economy.
At 20 years of age, I was armed with a Chemistry Honours degree from Mumbai & a husband who promised to let me live my dream. At 23, I had a 1-year-old son & Rs 500 to start a business. I shifted from Delhi to Jabalpur to set up a kitchen unit in the backyard of my in-laws house.

I did not know the ABC of business (Accounts, Business and Costing). All I knew was I had to start a business and earn money. My son and Rs 500 were my assets with the technical and moral support of my husband who was a 1000 km away, in his job in Delhi. We could only communicate through the phone in the neighbour's house.

My manufacturing process started with the manual mixing of chemicals in a plastic bucket and packing it for use as X-Ray developers and fixers. My arms ached with the continuous shaking of the bucket but the pains vanished as I got repeated orders. Next, my husband suggested was to apply for a loan.

I was horrified. My army officer father had taught me to never borrow money. But as I approached the bank for a loan I was thrown out by the bankers. I felt humiliated for the first time in my life; the humiliation changed into a challenge. I raised money for qualifying for a bank loan by recovering silver from waste X-ray fixer solution. I call it ‘resourcefulness’.

I was able to get a business partner and secure a bank loan of a sum of Rs 15000 by mortgaging my in-laws’ property of Rs 15 lacs. I had to take ‘calculated risks’. I travelled the length and breadth of the country with my son. With the technical support of my husband, I started manufacturing chemical formulations for Offset Printing Presses. The word ‘entrepreneurship’ was little known and women entrepreneurs did not exist.

I was the Production Manager, the Accountant and the sales girl but my products and branding were so professional that the clients thought I was working for a big firm. My competition was MNC giants like Kodak & Dupont. My visiting card never had my designation printed on it. Keeping start-up expenses low, the perseverant and persistent attitude helped my industry to flourish. With only one employee, who cooked, babysat and also helped me in the factory, my business started to grow. My husband and partner, both left their jobs to join me.

For us, with the birth of my second son, both, family and business grew. Bringing up sons and working full time, I realized that the challenges faced by my employees, especially women. So post lunch, my office changed into a creche with children completing their homework or dozing off on the office couch. I had an office family now. My business was growing rapidly. Customers and press coverages, I was receiving appreciation. As with my business partner, the male ego took its toll; he could not handle a strong woman in business.

After 14 years of hardwork, giving all I had to Bromide Chemical Industries, I was forced to walk out of my own office and business, one which I had built. I was heartbroken and my life became miserable. I was not allowed to take a single penny of my capital or even an employee. My husband and partner were to run the business without me, a woman. My partner challenged me to start a new business if I had the guts, which should have nothing to do with my old business.

With the moral support of my husband and sons, in 1992, I started a business of manufacturing photo colour processing chemicals and Haylide Chemicals was born. Armed with degrees of experience, I got a bank loan without a mortgage. The ability to make my own business decisions took my business soaring to new heights. Haylide Chemicals was to compete with Fuji, Konica, Agfa, Kodak among others. I introduced incentives like foreign trips for distributors. Life was colourful and I was riding the high seas.
The competing MNCs decided to weed out small competition like us. For colour photography, they started giving free chemicals if the client used their equipment, film and photography paper. Nothing is cheaper than ‘free’.

Being versatile and resourceful was the need of the hour. I started to reach out far away and rural markets. Unfortunately, it resulted in high marketing costs and low turnovers. I had to face heavy losses. That was ‘negative resourcefulness’. But I never let my bank accounts and loans go bad. Though my goodwill and business integrity were never at stake, I was in the dumps, both morally and financially.

When in pain, help the vain. I decided to help other women entrepreneurs grow with my experiences. MAWE: Madhya Pradesh Association of Women Entrepreneurs, established in 2000, now supports thousands of women across the country to be self-employed and have access to finance, technology and international markets.

My practical approach and years of experience on the ground invited me to contribute to policymaking for gender and trade starting for the government of India and international agencies like WTO Geneva, United Nations New York, World Export Development forums, China, Brazil, Rwanda and more, who took me across the globe.

The spirit of entrepreneurship never dies. This time around, the idea was to manufacture value-added products and green chemicals for cleaning and sanitizing - for house keeping, laundry, kitchen, industry and personal care. The B2B model was started using the old premises, machines and employees.

My firstborn, now a Chemical Engineer, joined forces with me and infused youthful ideas. My husband again helped to fund and provide technical expertise. Using inhouse strengths, Haylide Chemicals, within 5 years, we were able to build a brand new spanking factory, with world-class facilities for exports and domestic market, introducing green laundry and washroom products. Haylide Chemicals, today is a vendor to the big global brands. My pride and success lie in giving livelihood and improving the lifestyle of the many workers and education of their children, almost at par with my own children.

With my Green Business, I may not have made millions to buy solitaires or expensive cars but I consider myself successful for taking hundreds of people along with me to try and make their lives green and hence sustainable.

After 40 Years of entrepreneurial experience, I strongly feel that if other people can benefit from my practical experiences in life, I am there to share and guide them. I am focused on encouraging sustainable entrepreneurship in women.

Keep learning, especially from people younger than you. They keep you energized and up with the latest in all spheres. However dire the circumstances are, never let your credit history go bad; your business loan EMIs determine your future. Sell to those who value your products and services, where your payment is secure and do not make distress compulsive sales.

Perseverance, persistence, resilience and learning from failures, will lead you to success.

-Team WS
I was a girl with stars in my eyes (quite literally). Every night, as I sat on the veranda of my father’s farmhouse, I watched the stars and even had a special one. I often asked my star to guide my destiny as I wanted to do something different. But how far that star would take me, I did not know it then. My life and that of my sister, Supreet, was very humdrum. We were daughters of a farmer and we lived and went to school in the mofussil town of Rudrapur in Uttaranchal. Doing something special in life for girls was not only unheard of but almost impossible. But the fire burned slowly, yet steadily, inside me. Every day my special star would counsel me to dream big and to relentlessly pursue that dream.

I left for Chandigarh to pursue my collegiate education. I joined a postgraduate course in IT and joined the first batch for M.C.A. at Panjab University, Chandigarh. Years went by and I stood at the threshold of being a postgraduate in informatics but fate had other plans for me.

One day, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper by the Indian Air Force asking for women recruits to train to be pilots. My sister and I filled in the application out of curiosity and to our surprise, we were selected. It was perhaps the most exhilarating moment in our lives. Together, we featured in the Limca Book of World Records as being the first sister duo in the world to fly as a pilot and co-pilot.
Flying in Siachen was a challenge where records for human endurance, flying and technical competence are set nearly every day. The area was more beautiful than I could have imagined. As I started flying, I realized that we had to brave temperatures as low as -50º C, strong winds, lack of oxygen and flying in poor weather conditions close to hills. Helicopters at Siachen fly at the edge of their flight envelope where the power margin available is small, if not negligible. Any miscalculation or mishandling of controls could result in a catastrophic accident. The landing on the matchbox-sized helipads had to be precise. The motto of our unit was 'We do the impossible as a routine, the possible may take a little longer'. This posting for me was a dream come true and I was very fortunate to have experienced and enjoyed every moment of it. I hold the World Record for being the first lady to have operated in Siachen and landed at the highest ALG in the world.

My experience as a helicopter pilot has enabled me to get an education in a very specialized field. I have had to take responsibility far beyond my imagination. I also got the opportunity to do the para jumping course with the Air Force and become a paratrooper.

I have received many awards, the most prominent amongst them has been the ‘Woman Achiever of the Year’ awarded by the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare in the year 2007. I was on the cover of India Today and that brought me a lot of name and fame as a representative of the ‘Woman of Tomorrow’. I am told that my picture is in the museum of flying in Texas, USA.

My passion for the empowerment of women has made me the Chief ambassador of the international initiative ‘The Successful Women’ where along with my partner Joanna James, I aim to reach out to women across the world to provide holistic world-class success education to achieve the life and lifestyle they truly desire.

I am also an author, a motivational speaker and a transformational leader.

I think I am quite close to my special star, in winking distance!
MISSION – “TO BRIDGE THE GAP WHEREVER POSSIBLE WITH THE ART OF SPREADING POSITIVITY”

This is the true story of Dr Geetha Masilamani, a post-graduate from Madras School of Social Work. With the above-mentioned mission that lies close to her heart, Dr Geetha started her journey to drive growth in the field of sports through her foundation. AKF encourages the youth to join the AKF Sports Academy which focuses on the growth of individual athletes and builds each individual’s needs as per their request in whatever sports they are involved in. She is deeply involved in the societal services and activities and helps the ones in need (especially the ones unable to make ends meet) to receive the utmost care and grooming - training and coaching related to their respective sport. AK Foundation concentrates in the field of sports, counselling to all the sectors of the people who are in need and carries out Anna Dhaanam to the Orphan Children on every New Moon day.

Dr Geetha was recognised and awarded by the honourable President of India. Dr Pranab Mukherjee gave away the 100 Women Achievers Award, on January 22, 2016, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre. The Ministry of Woman and Child Development nominated 25 lac women, out of which 100 were selected through Facebook voting. Among the 100, from 8 were selected from Thamizh Nadu and Dr Geetha Masilamani was blessed to receive this award in the field of sports.

AKF’s latest activity has been uniting a sold cow and oxen. The oxen went running back to the sold cow for nearly one kilometre. This scene was telecasted in TV Channels and AK Foundation took the help of the Madurai collector who was kind enough to cooperate and got the details of both the seller and the buyer of the cow. With his office influence, both the animals were untied after a separation of 24 hours.

"The work of AKF would not be complete without the mention of our Little Angel Sharanya Triloch Arumugam. She has been a great support in our endeavours."

Recently, AKF represented and took part in organising the International Conference for Sports Management and Women’s Role in Sports and Entrepreneurship, which was held on 11th and 12th of March, 2020 along with the Department of Physical education and sports (Pondicherry University).

-Team WS
Try this SUPER SKIN GLOW JUICE

Summer is at its peak and if you are wondering about how to detox your skin, this skin glow juice is all you need.

This super skin glow juice is packed with vitamins, minerals and powerful antioxidants. It contains all the fruits and vegetables that can benefit your skin - oranges, ginger, carrots, cucumber and apples.

Easy to make, the juice gets ready in 5 minutes. Drink this daily for at least a week and your skin will look healthy, glowing and beautiful.

**Ingredients:** (serves 3-4 glasses)
- Apple - 1
- Orange - 1 (halved and peeled)
- Carrots - 4
- Cucumber – ½ (peeled)
- Ginger – 1 inch (peeled)
- Lemon – ½ (peeled)
- Water to dilute (if needed)
- A healthy sweetener of choice

**Instructions:**
In a blender jar, add all the ingredients and blend. Add water if you think the juice has to be diluted. Also, add healthy sweetener of choice. Enjoy!

Tanya Sahni
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Before March 2015, I had never heard the name of Chitradurga. When I got elected as the National Vice President of Inner Wheel Clubs in India, I got a call inviting me for the Golden Jubilee of the Club a year later. My curiosity about the place evoked. That one year was the most challenging yet enjoyable and enriching period of my life as I travelled all over the country, to known and unknown places. The comfort of having Inner Wheel members to provide hospitality, care and affection, removed any nervousness of new places.

I took a flight to Bangalore on June 24th from Kolkata. On researching, I found out that Chitradurga, located in the heart of the Deccan Plateau, is recognized as the land of courage and chivalry. From Kolkata, it was a three-hour ride southwards. It was evening and the sunlight was giving way to the beauty of dusk and mysterious darkness. I paid divided attention to the conversation within the car and the scenery outside!

Before we entered the town, we could hear it (you must be wondering how can one hear a town). But you can hear this one! It has 1500 windmills. The whirr of the huge fans welcomes you to the town. Chitradurga is known to experience wind currents throughout the year making it a suitable place to set up windmills and wind farms. There are several wind-power based power plants located around the town and most of the hills are embellished with windmills which can be seen while entering the city.

The town is named after the Fort Chitrakaldurga, which means 'picturesque fort' in Kannada. Such is the charm of Chitradurga Fort in Karnataka that tourists gaze upon the beauty of the compelling architecture of the relic with awe. Once home to Tipu Sultan, the fort has various passages to several parts like its warehouses, mosque, ancient temples and water reservoirs. Originally built by Chalukyas and Hoysalas and later expanded by the Nayakas of Chitradurga, the fort houses 18 temples in its upper territory. We started for the Chitradurga Fort at 6 a.m. As we neared the fort, we passed through two huge gates. The fort has 7 levels of fortification (hence the name 'aelu suttina kote' in Kannada) and each of this gate is the entrance into a level of fortification. The old city of Chitradurga is located within the first two levels of fortification. Hence, in reality, we enter the third level of fortification when we enter the actual Fort entrance that is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. It was a morning of revisiting history.
We looked forward to seeing the monkey man, Jyoti Raju, but could not. We heard that he earned himself the title ‘monkey man’ by climbing the tall stone structures and walls at Chitradurga Fort, Karnataka, without the help of ropes with a technique he learned from monkeys. He does not climb for sports but to entertain the visitors to the fort.

At a distance of 4 km from Chitradurga, lies a natural marvel called Chandravalli Hills. An archaeological site formed by three hills – Chitradurga, Kirbanakallu and Cholagudda, Chandravalli was once ruled by Chandrahas and thus the name. There was a time when several belongings were discovered at Chandravalli during excavations which included coins, earthen pots and painted bowls from the time of Vijayanagar, Hoysalas and Satavahana dynasties. Surrounding rolling hills with a stream in the of this archaeological site, lie the Chandravalli Caves, also referred as Ankali Mutt. These caves take you 80 ft. below the ground where you get a chance to witness the great ancient wall art, consisting of carvings and paintings. Adjacent to the cave is Chandravalli Cave Temple which houses a Shiva Linga under a massive stone.

The next place I was taken to was Sri Jagadguru Murugharajendra Brihan Mutt in Chitradurga. Adjoining it is a beautiful garden. For children, the garden is a treasure house of education and entertainment. Huge mouths of whales and gorillas are installed in the garden and the kids enjoy walking through them. The tabloid depicting the evolution of human beings is pretty impressive. You can also get a first-hand experience of villagers and their daily life through statues depicting them. Every aspect of their lifestyle, from their attire to hunting expeditions, to their daily life is represented in great detail. The tableau of tribals with their dwelling and distinct costumes and activities is imaginative and catches your eye.

For a natural touch, you can head to the giant lotus plants and mushrooms. The garden also has natural rocks that have been carved into cave-like structures and this excites the little kids. If you are tired by all the walking around, take a breather sitting on the benches.

The small town is based on agriculture and agriculture-based industries related to groundnut, betel nut, maize and cotton. I remembered my Geography lessons in school, Deccan plateau soil suitable for these crops. It is fascinating when such incidents help you recall your bookish knowledge of 40 years ago.

The world’s best computer is our brain. The delete button is rarely used and the recycle bin too can bring back memories.
We have all grown up reading Linda Goodman and other books and magazines, reading our horoscopes and finding our perfect match, for friendship, love affair or even to do business with. If you always have questions on the secrets of compatibility, we are here to help.

**In this section, we will share insights from our Tarot reader about zodiac incompatibilities. Find out how you fare now.**

**Virgo**

*Virgo put logic to almost everything, they feel life is like a method and we should live up to our standards. They need to feel valued and useful around. A Virgo person can happily take plenty of responsibilities and do it effectively. When it comes to compatibility, Virgo is most comfortable with earth signs or sometimes, water signs.*
Virgo & Cancer

Both the signs are very different from each other but it follows a very old saying, “opposites attract”. Cancer is generally emotionally driven and needs security in a relationship and Virgo makes it a point to show it practically. Each one brings something different to the table, making for a balanced and even relationship. Both Cancer and Virgo are very caring. They ensure that the other person feels special with compassion and love.

Virgo & Capricorn

If you see them together, you will notice that they are almost the same concerning the method of living life. Both are hard-working and diligent individuals who place a strong degree of importance on intellectualism and conservative living. When it comes to being around people, they both are drawn towards intellectual and caring people. Rather than being open to all, they spend their time outside responsibly.

Virgo & Taurus

Comfort friendly people, both Virgo and Taurus would any day choose home rather than going out to socialise. Virgo’s attention to detail compliments Taurus’s focus on security and vice versa. Overall, this match can be a very unique one, of comfort and harmony, but have patience and talk about things.

Kopal
Tarot and healer
Fashion has been a tool of privilege, power and presence since it was discovered and evolved. Our dressing style decodes our personalities and makes for our first impressions. Our clothes also define our personas. Especially at the workplace, apparel styling holds the key to the position we enjoy, the authority we command and the respect we get.

This whole concept of fashion as a tool of the assertion of position has led to a highly commercial and in-demand category of formal wear, whereas concepts like ‘power dressing’, ‘friday dressing’, ‘fashion formals’, ‘uniform wear’ and others keep getting launched to keep the segment relevant.

Uniforms: a great Fashion and Power Leveller

This makes for an interesting study. Uniforms as a clothing category aim to create an identity and a sense of belongingness to an organisation and bring uniformity to the staff irrespective of where they come from. Hence, the uniform culture of an organisation serves as a great leveller and builds a work environment of bonhomie, equal say and equal opportunities among the colleagues. It adds to the horizontal work culture of a place and puts all the employees at equal footing. Many organisations use their uniforms to make their brand’s style statement too (as in aviation and hospitality sector). Some going on to patronising our handlooms and artisan sector by sourcing exclusive textiles while on the other hand, some may engage the services of reputed designers to design their uniforms. Sports' team's uniforms too are a great opportunity for making a style statement, be it the IPL teams or soccer clubs or brands like Nike and Adidas designing for sports stars like the William sisters. Certain organisations/ professions prefer to keep their uniforms gender-neutral to keep the bias from the office environment at bay.

In the education sector too, uniforms today are no more just the conventional navies and whites. The management has woken up to the fact that our clothes' comforts and colours both impact the state of mind, not only of the wearer but also on the surroundings as well. The latest trend in uniforms in the education sector is also going the gender-neutral way. It is also getting a bit relaxed by doing away with neck accessories like ties and bows. The styling of the uniforms also contributes to the decision making factor of the student joining the school/ college and hence it has become increasingly important for an educational organisation to have a signature uniform. A monogrammed uniform is an ideal way to mark one’s signature.
Power Dressing and Fashion Formals (men):

On the other hand, Senior Employees at the higher rung of the ladder use their individualistic style of dressing to make a significant impression across the table, be it a regular workday, an all-important board meeting or an international conference, one is being noticed and judged for how one turns out. Even a politician or the head of a state too is being reviewed for what they wear on what occasion and meanings are drawn from the choice of the garment to the relevance of colour.

Power dressing brings to mind sharp, well fitted tailored suits, mostly bespoke in formal shades of navy, blue, charcoal, grey, steel, black and ash while fashion formals add a little bit of quirky fashion twist to the staid ensembles. This could be done with a hint of bright or neon lining or piping at the lapels, quirky designer neckties or even dropping the necktie for a bandhgala, a contrast or printed pocket square, use of handcrafted or precious/semiprecious/monogrammed buttons, cufflinks, brooch, pocket watch, formal metallic wristwatch, handcrafted or limited edition eyewear and belts, all these elements add class to formal dressing. Another noticeable element is to team the regular formal suit with a pastel/ contrast shirt instead of the regular whites or off whites. Sometimes one could ditch the blazer for a waistcoat with a necktie to get a refreshed look from everyday wear. Playing with choice of fabrics, checks and stripes makes for wider choices which can further be made impactful by choosing unconventional colours for suits like taupe, teal, olive, beige, crème, off white, powder blue, rust, terracotta or neons.

The Indian alternatives like bandhgala, formal kurta with sadri/jacket or stole/dushala bring a welcome change to one's presentation.

Formal Shoes are a huge and compulsory segment of this category where bespoke shoes make a mark of the wearer coming in various styles, finishes, textures and colours, even going on to be handcrafted, hand-painted or inked shoes, done beautifully by 'Toramally', an emerging brand to look out for, besides the veterans in the market.

Friday Dressing is about going casually formal or semi-formal with some playful shirts, flat front trousers in colours which are not so coded. Prints or texture make for a great semi-formal look.

Power Dressing & Fashion Formals (women):

Though there are fewer women in the corridors of power and so they are under constant scrutiny for their sartorial choices. Be it the first wives representing their countries or head of organisations, making the right choice is imperative for these ladies in power.

Androgynous pantsuits, the classic YSL, is a go-to solution on one hand while on the other hand, formals like twin sets of sheath and jackets, shifts and shrugs, 3 piece skirt suits a la classic Chanel, tailored jumpsuits with Blazers or trench coats, collar, jabot or bow tie neck formal blouses in silks, khadi, chambray, cotton, rayon pair well with formal skirts and trousers. In women formal wear, the colours enjoy a wider palette from neutrals like navy, grey, charcoal, black, off whites, whites to various shades of blue, green, mint, pink, fuchsia, lime, ivories, mauve, olive, sap, rust and many more tones. Even classic red makes for a powerful presence for women. Pumps or peep toes complement the look well.

One simply cannot go wrong with the choice of a Saree in the context of Indian formal wear. Classics like handlooms with traditional printed or embroidered blouses teamed with or without a sadri make for a very formal women's look. Today this classic is also given interesting twists with formal shirts and blouses replacing the traditional saree blouses, belts thin as well as obi belts being worn on the saree, playing with saree drapes for a more chic and functional look. Salwar kameez is a staple formal wear across various offices, especially in the government sector. Some women even go on to mark a colour as their signature, which is a good fashion move, the latest in trend colour of the chosen colour family makes for the latest in the wardrobe besides making a significant presence. Choice of fabric and comfort are the decisive factors as discomfort in our clothing impacts our mood, concentration and productivity.

Fashion Formals are here to stay with more classics than trendy hence make for a good investment as we do spend most of our adult lives in our work wears!

-Shipra Anand

Womenshine.in | 26
Does this saying hold true for couples today, who meet, date, hate and then finally break away? Relationships have become like two-minutes instant noodles; you make and break them in minutes. It needs immense patience for a relationship to grow. Relationships get stronger when both are willing to understand mistakes and forgive each other. Facing the storms in life changed my perspective towards love and relationships.

Books and movies were my first sources which gave me an insight about love, romance and relationships. The protagonists of all my novels, from the handsome Darcy (Pride & Prejudice), high spirited Theodore Laurence (Little Women), witty and charming Rhett Butler (Gone With The Wind), earnest and passionate Oliver Barrett IV (Love Story) to the passionate lover Michael Hillyard (Promise) gave me the idea of handsome lovers who shook heaven and earth to get married to the girl they loved. Writers like Victoria Holt, Georgette Heyer, Barbara Cartland conjured up images of sweet and subtle romance where the heroes courted their heroines with posies, candlelit dinners, beautiful gifts and long billets-doux. All these romantic gestures made the heroines swoon and accept the heroes ending with lived happily ever after.
Fed on these mushy romantic stories, I believed I too would be hitched to a handsome knight proposing to me with a ring by going down on his knees. But the reality is different from fiction. I was jolted from my reverie when my beau neither courted me with gifts, serenaded me with music nor went down on his knees to propose marriage. He didn’t match any of my novel heroes. He was a reticent and pragmatic guy who abhorred the concept of romance. All my hopes were dashed to the ground.

We were strangers, exchanging glances, wondering whether we would be able to live together till eternity. I felt marriage without romance was as insipid as lentils without any tempering. But over the years, my views have undergone a paradigm shift. My knight in shining armour has helped me weather all storms in life due to his thoughtful and caring nature. Our relationship has stood a test of two decades and we have come out in flying colours.

Quoting a few lines from Nicholas Spark’s ‘Notebook’, “We fell in love, despite our differences, and once we did, something rare and beautiful was created.” All the beautiful memories are sealed in my heart.

It is said, “Relationships gets stronger when both are willing to understand mistakes and forgive each other.” Instead of getting bored and breaking off from a relationship, one needs to work on it to make it stronger. Couples need to work as a team to strengthen their bond for a rock-solid relationship.

Dr PREETI TALWAR
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Red Roses or a Solitaire? Not Enough!

As I was laying on my bed listening to some soothing music, my phone rang. The very familiar voice at the other end said, “I have resigned. Call you back in some time”. With that, the phone went dead. I double checked the name displayed on the screen with thousands of thoughts racing through my mind.

While I waited for her to call back, I allowed my thoughts to wander. I met Anamika at the induction program of a company 7 years back. She had been a top ranker throughout her academics. She is straightforward and does not hesitate to call a spade, a spade. Her first boss had not been very nice to her. After all, people seldom like the truth being spoken or mistakes being pointed especially in a corporate setup where subordinates pour tons of butter on their bosses. She is different, extremely good with her work and equally outspoken.

I knew of late, she wasn’t very happy with the workplace and she had been thinking of putting up her papers. But I had been asking her to think over it again. Bosses change, the profiles change. The phone rang again. It was her. I eagerly picked up and heard the narrative. At the end of the call, I respected her more than before. The key takeaways from the conversation were:

• She had started hating herself for bowing down and dragging her life. She said that she felt her self esteem was belittled every moment. The fight between self and office environment had started taking a toll on her mental peace. Whatever she did was simply not enough for them. Hence, she decided that it was enough for her. She needed to get up, take hold of her life and walk out of the place that made her feel so miserable.

• Her husband said, “Your happiness is above everything. If you are feeling suffocated, just let go”.

• It was an extremely difficult decision as it would have a monetary impact on both of them but she derived strength from his support.

As I brooded over the incident, what I realized was how important it was for her that her husband understood her situation and supported her decision. As spouses or as part of families, our lives are so intertwined that a decision by one can impact all. And this is when the others should step in and support. Anamika’s husband gave her the confidence that they will be able to manage and that she should choose happiness. Are spouses not meant for supporting and understanding each other? Love is not about bringing red roses on Valentine’s or taking out on a dinner date. Love is also not about that solitaire ring adorning the ring finger. Love is putting your partner above all and running that extra mile with that extra 10kgs of weight so that your partner can walk comfortably.
Let me begin this with a story I read from Big Magic.

There was a woman who went out every fortnight and got inked. Once the tattoo healed, she would be ready to get covered in ink again. The woman was not a teenager, wild and rebellious but a woman with a family and children.

One fine morning, out of curiosity, I asked her, “Hey Eleen, tell me what is it with your tattoos? You have your body inked all over.” Eleen replied, “Oh, they are just temporary.”

“What? Are your tattoos not permanent?” I asked surprisingly. To that, she said, “No Liz, my body is temporary. I have limited time here, so why not decorate the body in the best way I think I can?”

The story shook me in ways I can’t describe.

We tend to get so lost living out of other people’s lives that we forget the beauty we withhold inside of us.

The way Eleen chose a beautiful way to decorate her temporary body, we all can find our calling and decorate our body and mind. Most of us won’t know where to begin but you must know that’s the very beginning. Doubt creates curiosity and curiosity births consciousness.

I always ask myself, “why not?”

Give it a shot without worrying about the consequences. If your heart tells you to do it, believe and take the plunge. The heart usually knows the way. Let it lead because life is not your money, your goals, your emotions or your thoughts. It is right inside of you, throbbing beautifully. If the throbbing stops, everything else stops.

Decorate your already beautiful being, begin now. You have the tools, everyone does, you only need to search the right spanner to unlock and untie the rigid screws. You don’t have to always stand out, instead, become so ordinary that you become extraordinary.

Real chaos never makes a noise.

Nidhi Rashi Pidwani
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**Agedashi Tofu/Paneer**

**Ingredients:**
- Tofu/paneer – 100g
- Mushroom – 20g (sliced)
- Spring onion – 5g (chopped)
- Potato starch – 30g
- Soya sauce – 30ml
- Vegetable stock – 150ml
- White radish – 20g (grated)
- Ginger – 10g (grated)
- Coriander – 5g (chopped)
- Sugar – 10g
- Oil (to fry)

**Method:**
- Cut tofu/paneer in cubes and dust them with potato starch. Deep fry and keep aside.
- In a pot, put the vegetable stock, soya sauce, sugar and mushroom. Bring to a boil. When the sauce is boiling, keep it on medium heat and continue to cook for 5 minutes.
- At the same time, prepare a mixture of water and potato starch to thicken the sauce. Add this mixture in the simmering sauce. Make sure you keep the sauce stirring while putting the starch or it will form lumps.
- When the sauce is ready after thickening, add in the grated ginger and radish.

**To serve:**
- In a plate, put the fried tofu/paneer. Pour the sauce and garnish with spring onion and coriander.

-By Asian Chef from Mauritius
Vegetable croquettes with Mango Salsa

Ingredients:
- Potato – 3 (boiled and mashed)
- Carrots – 2 tbsp (chopped)
- Capsicum – 2 tbsp (chopped)
- American Corns – 2 tbsp
- Coriander – 1 tsp (chopped)
- Green chilly – ½ tsp (chopped)
- Salt – as per taste
- Black pepper powder – ½ tsp
- Gram flour – 2 tbsp (roasted)
- Refined flour – 2 tsp
- Corn flour – 2 tsp
- Bread crumbs – 100g
- Mango – 3 tsp (chopped)
- Lemon juice – 1 tsp
- Onion – 2 tsp (chopped)
- Garlic – ½ tsp (minced)
- Oil (to fry)
- Mint leaves (for garnishing)
- Tomato ketchup (for garnishing)

Method:
1) Take a bowl and add mashed potato, carrots, capsicum, corns, green chilly, coriander, onions and garlic.
2) Add salt, pepper, roasted gram flour. Mix it well.
3) Take 2 tbsp mixture in your palm and roll it into a cylindrical shape. Do the same with the whole mixture.
4) Make a slurry with corn flour and refined flour with a little water.
5) Dip the croquettes in the slurry and crumb the with the bread crumbs.
6) Fry the croquettes on a medium flame for approximately 2 – 3 minutes on both sides.
7) For the mango salsa, take chopped mango, salt, pepper and lemon juice in a bowl and mix well.
8) Serve fried crispy croquettes with mango salsa and mayonnaise and garnish with mint leaves.

Chef Nandini Diwaker
Nida started her artistic journey in 2012 as a hobby when she was expecting her second child. Little did she know that what started as a casual hobby to utilize her free time would turn into a full-time professional engagement. She started with acrylic paintings and clay modelling but later delved into watercolors. Nida's inspiration comes from nature - change in the seasons, the bloom of spring and the colors of autumn; she has captured them all beautifully in her artworks.

She paints bold and vibrant flowers and splendid landscapes in watercolors. She says, "the spontaneity and vulnerability of this medium (watercolors) have always intrigued and fascinated me". The focus of her work is to capture the mood along with the visual beauty of nature. Through her art, she aims to provide a moment of pause, stillness and reflection to enable a deep experience of nature's beauty and tranquility. She believes that art is a wonderful means to nurture, soothe and rejuvenate our souls.

Born in Lucknow, Nida's real name is Hajira but was called Nida by her beloved aunt and she chose this name for her artistic venture. She got married in 2007 soon after completing her B.Sc from College, Lucknow. Her husband's job required him to travel frequently. So, during the initial years of her marriage, she tried exploring teaching as a profession to keep her engaged but couldn't pursue it further after her first pregnancy. In 2012, her husband's professional commitments required him to shift to Delhi NCR which became her home for the next 6 years. Interestingly, this migration (hijrat), brought out the artist in her.
Picking up a brush and colours was easy for her as she always enjoyed painting and sketching during her school years. It was during her stay in Delhi NCR that she started painting and clay modelling. A friend suggested her to display her artworks in society exhibitions. That was quite a learning experience and the appreciation of her art at these exhibitions gave her the much-required fillip.

Taking time out for her painting was a challenge when she started. Being a full-time homemaker and a mother of two young kids, it was difficult for her to focus on painting initially. But she realised that apart from being a wife, a mother and a homemaker, she is also an individual. And that she needs to give time and nourish her soul too. She realised that she can be good at all of these roles that she has to perform as a woman; it’s just that she needs to fit in the role without affecting other roles in a way that each role complements every other role that she undertakes.

She started utilizing the mornings and afternoons during weekdays for her painting when her elder son was in school and husband at work. Weekends were days of break from painting and were meant for family and outings only. Soon the dull and lonely daytime turned into the most sought-after time for her and it was during this period, she painted one of her best work that received special mention and appreciation during an exhibition in Chandigarh in the year 2017.

Apart from Chandigarh, Nida has conducted several workshops and displayed her artworks in Delhi and Lucknow at various exhibitions. She is also associated with an NGO, which works on Mental Health Awareness and has conducted workshops on art therapy.
2) Humans relate more to the stories of vulnerability than stories of human success, they connect more with the storyteller who is comfortable with his or her imperfection and isn’t looking to hide it. What are your thoughts about it?

I cannot agree more. As Anne Lamott puts it, “Perfection is shallow, unreal and fatally uninteresting.” Once attained, it leaves us with no urge to look beyond, explore newer boundaries and push ourselves towards healing. We are all work-in-progress and shall always remain to be. Scars, bruises, failures, mishaps, mistakes, imperfection, the mess is what we are made up of. The art to ‘fixing up the mess’ is what truly defines who we become.

Naturally, we tend to relate with and draw inspiration from stories that sound similar to our own. Whether it is a story or poetry, it must have the ability to help the recipient get in touch with one’s inner self otherwise it just remains an appreciative piece of art.

Look at the stories of success. Do we get pleased about the achievements or is it the indomitable strength and ability of the achiever to turn misfortunes in their favour that stays with us like inspiration?

I think it is in the idea of accepting imperfections as humble vanity that unleashes our inner beauty. Remember what Shakespeare once said – “Things won are done, joy’s soul lies in the doing.”

3) What according to you is the state of contemporary poetry in India?

It has undergone a huge and heartening change having become far more encompassing for new writers across all categories. With the upsurge of technology, especially social media, a great piece of writing no longer rests at the behest of publishing houses or elite literary networks. Instead, the creators now have the opportunity to put across their work in public using social media platforms, self-publish and host their own work. Performative poetry and spoken word poetry has come a huge way in the last decade which was significantly absent in the country earlier.

Off late, we have gone one step beyond the traditional domain of poetry. We have recently seen a promising rise of cause-based poetry– Tribal, Dalit, Protest, Queer voices have made an impressive mark in furthering the movement by amalgamating it with art.

However, we do need to be a little watchful concerning the tsunami of content being generated online every day, a lot of which needs guidance and chiselling by mentors from the field. Also, there is a huge need for us to go back to reading more than writing. We need to understand that if writing is the fire, reading is its fuel.
4) What is the relationship between your speaking voice and writing voice?

Both my speaking and writing voices resonate the same thoughts. It speaks of breaking stereotypes, non-conforming to tedious traditions, feminism and a certain kind of rebellion against the mindless collective. It is also a lot to say about fixing up scars, imperfections and chaos, things I relate my life with. Nevertheless, the presentation of these two distinct voices is what creates all the difference.

Writing comes easier to me. I am most comfortable with penning my stories in words where it runs like a smooth flow of a river, at my own sweet pace, in my own sweet space. It also runs without the risk of receiving instant reaction, encouraging or discouraging, from the readers. It is a form of expression which may receive praise or flak much later than when it is being put into words and hence, extends a certain level of undiplomatic freedom in writing. Besides, it also leaves a cushion for edits before making the document public.

The speaking voice runs a lot more risk. While up on the stage for performing, it garners immediate reaction from the audience, which is why most performers keep playing with the script, rendition and improvisation depending on audience's emotional pulse until the performance lasts.

I treasure both equally.

5) What do you see as the role of a poet in modern-day society?

A poet is one who can sell dreams to a non-dreamer, inspire life in a lifeless person and get a lost one come back in touch with reality. The modern poets must understand that their art has the power to bring around a change, a spark or create a difference in someone's life. They must go beyond the race of popularity and beyond the count of likes-views-comments to create the craft they are uniquely gifted with. The society needs fearless writers who can challenge the evils around and dare to call spade a spade. They have the power to bring about a change of perspectives and hence, they must. Let us be remembered as the progressive poets who helped create a new order.

6) Do you have any particular audience in mind when you write?

When I write for a live storytelling performance, I do consider who I would have in the audience so that I can work on the tonality, diction, linguistics and art of telling a tale. For instance, what and how I would narrate to young students would be entirely different from what I would to an elderly audience. The context indeed affects the telling.

But when I write stories, columns or a novel (that I am currently penning), I strictly follow my inner voice. I don’t let anyone or any context colour my thoughts. Writing is as much a healing exercise for me as it is a task and hence, it must follow its flow.

7) What is your advice to mothers on inculcating a habit of reading in their kids?

Ah, now that you touch a mother's heart. Both my daughters are avid readers but follow genres of their choice. While the younger one is still up with classic English and Hindi books, the elder has graduated to contemporary titles in thriller, crime and romance.

A couple of tricks that worked for my family are as follows:

1) Make them start as early as possible. Let them fall in love with the feel of the books and the smell of the pages. Read to them when they are too young to read.

2) Follow a reading discipline, for instance, bedtime stories are a great way to begin.

3) Remember, children, emulate what you as parents do. There is no point in telling them the beauty of reading when as parents when you choose to binge-watch the television. In my home, the idea of leisure is that each one would pick up their kind of book and relish on words.

4) Do not thrust your favourite titles or genres or authors on them in the name of guided reading. While watchfulness is important, allow them the freedom to pick up the language, book and category of their choice. My younger daughter has recently picked up interest in reading old Hindi books and we could not be happier. The elder one has expressed her interest in reading crime thrillers while I have always been a Classics fan. I am rather grateful that her interest got me to explore newer titles.

5) Help them build a library. In due course of time, they'll be proud and happy to look back at their treasured repository.

6) Look for excuses to gift books to them. Whenever you want to reward them for a good deed, gift them a book with a personalised note. (We've gifted our books alongside their birthday presents). It conveys to them the value of reading and creates a special bond, the kind that readers have.

So many more! I could almost write an essay on this. There are several little ways by which parents can explain to them the power of reading and storytelling. Do it your way. But take the effort to do it. That's the key!
In earlier days, the role of women was limited to managing the family and house while men were in charge of finance. However, times have changed and women have made their presence felt in the field of politics, science, army, business, IT and more. Today, for women, financial independence is indispensable but the reality is still very different; men still do the investing and women do the saving. One of the reasons is because women are less aggressive when it comes to investing or personal finance and so are more reliant on the male members of the family.

Women need to realize that money management and taking care of finances is not only for men and they need to take the command in their hand for;
Women need to realize that money management and taking care of finances is not only for men and they need to take the command in their hand for;

1. **Financial Independence**: Like men, women need to realize the importance of wealth generation and make their money grow to face any unprecedented event in life like losing a job or walking out of a relationship. Women should have their own financial powers to manage their life and take care of themselves.

2. **Financial Goals**: We all have dreams and aspirations. Be it travel plans, buy a house or education, women should invest to meet their goals.

Money doesn't grow when kept under the bed or in the savings account. You are losing money due to the growing inflation unless the interest rate you are getting is higher than the inflation, which is very unlikely. Hence money needs to be put to work. So how do women start investing?

**Learn the basics**: Before you dip your toes into the waters, learning the basics is necessary. It is important to know and understand your own goals and where and how your money is performing. You can learn through various means and mediums - the internet, classes, books and more.

**Seek professional help**: You don't have to be an expert to invest and so are not most men who invest. And that's why we have AMC's (Asset Management Companies) and professionals who can help us with this. Seek help from them to grow your money.

**Know your risk appetite**: It is perceived that women are less aggressive and don't take much risk when it comes to investing and look for longer-term investment than short term gains. But if you have the appetite and the courage to take the risk and play short term, take the risk but play wisely.

So women, its time to change the flow of the tide and take financial matters into your own hands. Have a solid plan and stick to it without being swayed by the noise that others make. Don't panic when things don't go as the plan or be conceit when things are going well. Women are discerned to be more level headed, just stick to your investments and remember, it's the time in the market and not the timing of the market that matters.
Every year since 2015, 7th August is observed as National Handloom Day to highlight the importance of the handloom industry in India, which has had a long tradition of excellent craftsmanship and preserving the vibrant Indian culture. This living legacy should be protected and preserved for socio-economic development of the weavers, craftsmen and small manufacturers so that they can also become a part of nation-building.

Apparel exports have grown over the last three decades and today, India is among the top ten producers of textiles and apparel in the world. The Ministry of Textiles has taken some initiatives for promoting the handloom sector through schemes like Handloom Weavers’ Comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HWCWS), National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS), Weaver MUDRA Scheme and Yarn Supply Scheme (YSS). These schemes help in educating handloom weavers and their children, providing security for accidental or disability and credit at concessional rates.

Intellectual property plays a significant role in promoting the handloom sector and assists in the adequate protection of the rights of stakeholders. **Union Textiles Minister, Smriti Z Irani** emphasized on the need to introduce intellectual property (IP) protection for handloom weavers at Conference on Creating Handloom 2.0, “Every weaver has their unique designs and craftsmanship which needs to be protected and acknowledged. It is important to ensure a framework where intellectual protection rights can be introduced and ensured for handloom weavers.”

IP rights for the handloom sector exist both in the domestic as well as the international market in the form of trademarks, industrial designs and geographical indications. The textile and handloom industry mainly focuses on developing their own independent brands to market their products under specific trademarks e.g. Fab India, Jaypore, Chaak Maati and others. Also, any particular line or range of fabrics e.g kurts can be protected under a label mark e.g. Rangriti by BIBA, Rangmanch by Pantaloons, SRISHTI by FBB etc. Trademark rights help in creating and capitalizing business and brand equity, both in national and international markets.

Design rights help in protecting a pattern or design or weave that is typical to the fabric. It is widely used by the fashion designers to protect their exclusive designs which if replicated in bulk, would reduce their appeal. Some noticeable handloom designs are Ikat and Pattatchitra from Odisha, Bagru hand block print from Rajasthan, Batik and Bagh prints from Madhya Pradesh, Bandhani from Gujarat and Kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh. Their different appearances qualify the novelty criterion for ethnic designs.

The geographical Indications protect art, crafts, products and creations belonging to a specific geographical area, which is culturally recognised as coming from that area. The indigenous and intricate work done by Indian artisans and weavers represents the diversity and culture of Indian handlooms through the ages, using imagery, symbols and colours which have been appreciated globally. Geographical Indication rights have proved to be incredibly significant in providing recognition and optimum prices for products to weavers and artisans especially because they are provided to the Registered Association representing the rights of these weavers and artisans. The weavers get benefitted for their hard work when their products are protected under GI tags. Under the GI Act, the registered owner or authorized users can obtain relief in case of infringement. From Kancheepuram silk of Tamil Nadu to Lucknow Chikan and Sambalpuri Bandha of Odisha to Kota Doria of Rajasthan, many textile and handloom products have been covered under GIs. The Chanderi fabric of Madhya Pradesh, Pochampally of Telangana, Pashmina of Jammu & Kashmir, Mysore silk of Karnataka, are some more notable registered GIs in the segment. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) holds registration for the word ‘KHADI’ and a GI tag.

There is a need to educate the diverse handloom stakeholders regarding their IP rights and help them organise themselves as a society, trust or even a company so that they can procure and hold Trademarks, Designs and GIs. An example is Ruma Devi, who runs an NGO ‘Gramin Vikas Evam Chetna Sansthan’ in Rajasthan for rural women who earn a livelihood through handmade fabrics. They have their own line of cotton fabrics marked with “R”. It helps them in building up their brand and fetch the right price in national and international markets.

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If life offers you an opportunity to be independent, it is no less than bliss. For me, being independent, is more a feeling, a way of life. It doesn't keep me a brake-free person. My regulatory mechanism keeps me sensible and pushes me to behave more responsibly. Being independent is not opposite of constraint-free. It allows creating a blockage-free surrounding rather than going moody and having no sense of discipline in life.

We all are born independent but the social rules and regulations create a barrier rather than providing ambience to bloom to see n realize the beauty of life. How I take my independence? It is quite interesting. I exercise my decisions rationally. I take it as a right rather than a lost-and-found privilege given by someone. Society controls and creates mindsets. As a child, we decide on likings and disliking strongly, but as we grow older, we create a social version of ourselves. I find it quite funny. We try to fit in designs made by someone else, throughout life and end up sacrificing living. This is nothing less than a crime and a gross disrespect to life itself.

I am financially independent. Working with the State Government at a higher position comes as a strong accessory to my social independence. Emotionally, I do sacrifice some part of my freedom but that is an investment. I am not too fierce in my relationships, not too independent to push the other person in my ambit. I respect each person in my life.

Summing up, independence for me is the sublime form of living a mortal life. It comes with a deep sense of responsibility, to me. It keeps me grounded, and, push me to fly sky-high. I carefully choose ways to fulfil my dreams and decisions.

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AS A WOMEN WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO YOU
The stereotypical norms, the mindset which has no possibility of a cure, the atmosphere of more words than wisdom- amidst such an upbringing I was brought up. Wherein one never asks where and why my brother is going anywhere, I need to keep them assure about every fine detail. Nevertheless, I am still always supported everywhere!

Independence has different meanings for each one of us. For me, it is that plunge each one of us wants to undertake to overcome our own limitations but sadly only a few can do so and only those few attained that real freedom in actuality. For the thousand others including myself, just keep on crying about what we have not got; keep on aspiring for the position we want to achieve but we have at the last somewhere only found solace within the existing norms. It's not that we don't know what is right and what is wrong and what should be done but we belong to that section of the Universe who though are highly educated but still don't muster that courage to use their knowledge for a practical purpose; We have just silently accepted everything as if it were a part of our Destiny.

Thus, Independence for me is to reach that threshold, the point from which I could take that higher plunge for my self, for my own sake. Till the point I don't reach there, I will keep trying, I will keep falling and rise again for sure but I know its only today that I am bound within the clutches of society. The moment I will be able to imbibe that courage to break open these shackles, Independence will be solely mine.

- Nancy Gupta

When you are nearing sixty and want to express what independence means to you, people are bound to wonder, why now?

As a bright student, it was a foregone conclusion, I would have a successful career. Life brought me to a small town and gave me a kitchen, so I learnt to cook several cuisines well enough to be appreciated. Independence means making the choice to say I can do this and doing it, not whining, complaining, seeking sympathy.

I diverted my capabilities to serve society as an Inner Wheel member. The small-town gossips berated me but I believe that life runs on parallel tracks, do everything together. Prioritizing happens automatically. Being independent means ignoring the trolls and getting on with life.

Travelling solo since my early twenties or with my young boys across the country, co-passengers would always look questioningly. The struggle to be the mother that society wanted me to be and the mother that I wanted to be, I won! That is Independence. Seeing my boys respected by and respectful to women, capable of handling home and career without the ‘woman’ beside, I feel pride in my upbringing, of not letting other people hold sway over me.

Independence is about self-realization, breaking the age-old stereotypes, chasing dreams and feeling worthy, having an identity. A closet writer for decades, I have now started sharing my poems during the pandemic days. Freedom of thought, speech, being in control of my life and doing the small things that truly make me happy. Being independent means I have the confidence to make decisions and take responsibility for them. My independence depends on my strength, my energy, means being secure in my own person whatever my age.

- Prabha Raghunandan
See you in the next edition