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JUST FOR WOMEN

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Aishwarya Rajesh
ON DARING TO DREAM

5 PAYASAM RECIPES FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

A CHARMING NARRATIVE WITH *SILLU KARUPATTI* DIRECTOR HALITHA SHAMEEM

4 WEEKS NOTICE
Beat the sweets with our fitness chart

BUILD YOUR FESTIVE WARDROBE WITH
THE Pride SHOP

Ring in the festivities!
PUT UP THE LIGHTS, IT'S TIME FOR CELEBRATION!

PLUS LUXURY HOME BUYS, GOLD MAKEUP, HANDY CLUTCHES AND MUCH MORE!

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Mailbox

LOVE WHAT YOU SEE?
Don't forget to share your thoughts and suggestions. Tag us, drop us a comment or just email us at **jfw@optionsmediagroup.in**







Shraddha
on Fashion | LookBook
The 'Pinn Kossavam Drape' technique explained was very interesting. Good resources to insta links of these designers for further browsing.

Shruti R.
on People | Rendezvous
The lineup of people featured this month was truly inspirational. Nice!

Keerti
on People | Rendezvous
Achievement stories always offer positive vibes (much needed at this hour!). Fighting the odds and pursuing what you believe in is something we all need to learn. Roopa Moudgil is my strength for the month!

Soha, Kochi
on Fashion | Trend Alert, Home | Smart Buys
These are websites I'm sure to check soon enough. Good variety JFW!





Amitha, Chennai
13 Years! Hats off team JFW for unearthing meaningful and engaging content. All the best for the road ahead!

Sheeba Paul, Chennai
No matter what the schedule, I have always managed to sneak a peek of your magazine for several years now. Congrats JFW for staying strong and marching ahead.

Hi Amitha & Sheeba,
We are elated to have readers like you as part of the JFW family. We hope to keep you engaged through every edition. Happy reading!

Let's Celebrate Ethno-Fusion!

Don't blow your savings by assembling a passé, traditional look from scratch. Use pieces from your existing wardrobe to snazz up a combo of styles! By ***Sruthi Ravinder***



Gaurav Gupta



@alaya.f



@sonamkapoor

Benaras

Considering that weddings and festivals grabbed the most eyeballs in terms of fashion, if there's one thing that stood out, it was Benarasi in the form of sarees, lehengas, and salwar or just shawls/dupattas. The richness of colour, the extravagant jacquard, or the versatility of the cloth, we love it all. Greens, blues, reds, purple, and of course black, these colours were a major fix this year.

Style Tip

Any lehenga skirt you own, when paired with a white shirt and sneakers will give you an edgy new-look, and make you feel like you're wearing the skirt for the first time.

TEAM IT WITH

White shirt

Whether it's a benarasi skirt you own, lehenga, pants, or even a saree, team it up with a crisp white shirt. If you are using it as a blouse you can either button-down the shirt and tuck it into the saree or choose to tie a knot and tuck into the shirt.



Mint Blush Kalidaar Skirt



Rotate Kim high-neck blouse

@stylebyami



Zerokaata Rajasthani Peacock Jhumki

Riana Jewellery Hues of Green Tasseled Earrings

Brocade pantsuit or jacket can work wonders for trendy festive wear

The festive season is here and so is our longing desire to shop more. But let's take a minute to think what the year has taught us, to make the best with what we have. Applying 2020's mantra for the festive season ahead here are ways you can mix-up, swap-up your festive wardrobe to give yourself fresh fashionable ethnic looks of the season. All while not having to step out or spend too much!

Pantsuits

A tricky trend to style, pantsuits were 2019's wardrobe staple. Now you can bring them into your festive wardrobe.

TEAM IT WITH

Ethnic Jewellery

Pair it up with heavy ethnic jewelry. Think – oxidised silver jhumkas, chaandbalis or colourful tassels, chokers, chunky bangles complete with your occasion wear clutch or potli pouches.



@masoomminawala

Saree

No festive season passes without the mention of the six yards. Pick your favourite saree from your closet and get ready to give it a whole new look.

TEAM IT WITH

Pants

We've seen different variations of this trend. You can choose either a palazzo or tight fitted pants or even denim. You can also add a belt if you want to.

Style Tip

Go for sarees that have a relatively shorter length. Make about five to six pleats from the non-pallu end of the saree and secure with a safety pin. Tuck them into your pants at the center. Take the other end of the saree and drape the remaining saree around your waist. Toss the end on your left shoulder, make pleats if required.

Statement Blouses

From bows to back-baring, fringes to flared, a statement blouse can easily bring alive your ensemble, be it a saree or a lehenga. Go for power shoulders, deep backs, and off-shoulder.

TEAM IT WITH

Monochromes

Match your blouses with the same colour pants and palazzos and dupatta. If you own a sleeveless blouse you can wear it atop a tunic to give it a whole new look.



@thechiquefactor

When it comes to your arm-candy, experiment with geometry and shapes in bags, like an arc sling or a cube box bag.

Accessories

When it comes to ethnic jewellery there are varied options in the market. Pair your kurtas with delicate silver jewellery, tribal jewellery, or even the ever-popular circular hoop earrings. Choose your accessories strictly based on the occasion you are dressing for. While light jhumkas can be worn for daywear, you can save your shoulder-grazing hoops and crystal droppings for the night. For the footwear, give slides, mules, jutties, or platforms a shot. ■

Raina Jewellery Blue Sequins Tassel Earrings

Guna Sahni Black Metallic Sequins Belt

From Left: Rara Avis Yellow Leather Corset Belt; Be Chic Handcrafted Metal Clutch; Tarun Tahiliani Handcrafted Sling bag; Embroidered Sling bag; Coral Haze Embroidered Juttis

Pink Tide

Ah, the versatility of pink. Choose from its vibrant spectrum to channel edgy, sexy, flirty, feminine, bold or simply jazzy. Make a statement with a singular magenta ornament or go regal with a mild, blush-coloured lehenga.

Pink quartz kundan choker by **Paisley Pop** *₹6999*

Strawberry Pink Embellished Priyata Long Jacket Set by **Sva**

Hand Embroidered Big Jhumkis by **Qbik x Fooljhadi** *₹7000*

Blush Tulle Lehenga With Raw Silk Blouse Embroidered Dupatta by **Papa Don't Preach**

Tiered Applique Work Lehenga by **Vvani by Vani Vats** *₹65500*

Pink embellished clutch by **Aanchal Sayal** *₹4256*

Rani pink marigold studs by **Hyperbole Accessories** *₹3000*

Hot pink embroidered kolhapuri flats by **Preet Kaur** *₹2124*

Hand painted kalamkari bird clutch by **Crazy Palette** *₹4256*

Pink floral embellished juttis by **5 Elements by Radhika Gupta** *₹4000*

Prices as displayed in respective official websites





Sunny side UP
ANU HASAN







In with my heart Out with my head

Ends and beginnings – sometimes you don't know which is which. Is the end of a chapter what you need to focus on or the beginning of the next that needs your attention?

I would say both. I believe in proper endings – somewhat akin to a neatly tied up box to be put away. As for beginnings I tend to just jump into things and see where it takes me. Like my friend Abe said to me once, I get in with my heart and get out with my head.

As I came to wind up things in the UK for the foreseeable future (obviously during Covid it wasn't going to be practical for me to be shuttling frequently across continents) I felt a twinge of sadness. This was the place where Appa breathed his last and I knew that once I sold it, I would never be able to come back again inside this house. (I mean, not without people thinking I am some kind of weirdo).

The fourteen day quarantine proved quite useful. I was one of the few people who followed the UK quarantine rules to the letter. I stayed inside for the entire period and used it to pack and sort and clean and discard.

As I approached the end of the quarantine period I was congratulating



myself on two things. One – for doing a phenomenally demanding job single handedly. Two - for not getting maudlin while doing it. After all I did have to sort through some of Appa's things that I had held on to. An old vest, a face wash, his shaving kit -you get the picture.

I suppose the universe decided to let me have my moment of triumph before it decided to show me who was boss. As I went into my cupboard which had all my company papers, out fell a printout of a crossword puzzle. I looked down to see the words filled with alternate letters. That was the way Appa filled the crossword so Amma could use his help and solve it herself too.

The grief hit me like a sledgehammer. In a flash I recalled the day I had printed this out. Amma had passed away a few weeks earlier and Appa had come with me to the UK and he was missing his crossword: "Your country doesn't have paper delivery, huh? How does a man get his crossword?" he said, mockingly emphasizing the "Your country" and I remember pretending an outrage and telling him that that was a problem solved easily enough. I went online and printed out the Times crossword puzzle for the day. I remember clipping it on to a board and giving it to him.

> AS I READ THAT, A SMILE EMERGED. EVEN AFTER HE WAS GONE, APPA WAS STILL FINDING A WAY TO DISPENSE HIS SPECIAL BRAND OF WISDOM ACROSS TO ME. I RAN MY FINGERS ACROSS THE PRINTED WORDS AND SENT HIM MY SILENT THANKS.

But these were not the memories that brought the pain. What hit me was the fact that even after Amma's passing, Appa continued to fill crosswords the way he used to do for her. And I thought how much he must have loved her. I choke a bit even now as I write this but at that point, I struggled for a good forty five minutes trying to fight it. Then I realized that if I was going to win, I was going have to let this pass through me. I gave in to it and acknowledged it. It took some time but emerge I did from it.

I took a deep breath and went back to the cupboard to clear the rest of the papers. There was a part of me that was now worried about what else I would find and how I would react to anything I found.

An old copy of JFW fell out. Out of curiosity I checked the article that I had penned. It was from the year Appa had passed away and the paragraph that caught my eye was towards the end of the article.

"I got hit on the first ball and I faced 20 balls after that and I missed only one." I proudly claimed. And then wanting sympathy, I added "But my palms are bruised cos of the fielding:"

Appa's response was "That's to be expected. You WILL get bruised. It is only when you are afraid of what's coming at you, that you end up fumbling and hurting yourself."

Not an ounce of sympathy or even the slightest trace of worry. And I realized what a great attitude for a father to have. And it struck me that he may not be talking just about cricket."

As I read that, a smile emerged. Even after he was gone, Appa was still finding a way to dispense his special brand of wisdom across to me. I ran my fingers across the printed words and sent him my silent thanks.

What a perfect way to end this chapter here in Wiltshire - with a reminder that being afraid of what life is going to throw at you is a surefire way to fumble and end up hurting yourself.

I sit here now in an almost empty house – it seems empty of memories too for some reason. I realise that that is because they have all been boxed and neatly put away. To be pulled out and reminisced- with a smile, a tear, joy and maybe a bit of pain. But never with fear.

And I now need to turn my attention to the beginning of the next chapter – what that chapter is – I don't know but I am just going to jump right in.

I smiled again. Abe was once again proved right. I got into this place in England with my heart and now I was getting out with my head. ■

Connect with Anu Hasan. Send in your suggestions and feedback at *www.facebook.com/anuhasan.india* or mail her at *anufbpage@gmail.com*



HOW TO GET THAT

FESTIVE GLOW

After staying home in PJs, and going around with face masks for months now we'll take any reason to doll up even if it means to stay indoors. With the festive season just around the corner, here is your trusty guide to getting your Indian ethnic make-up right! By ***Sruthi Ravinder***

GLAM GOAL #1

Getting the Base Right

While putting on makeup yourself, you might always run the risk of making the foundation look too flat. Remember that the most prominent features are the nose and eyes. Apply the base makeup on the nose and work it sideways, into the eyes, then the cheeks. The base should be the brightest on the forehead and the nose, lighter on the eyes and cheeks, and lightest on the end curves of the face such as chin, ear, and corners.



@glo_by_rushali



For the eyes, apply colours to the darkest on the parts near the bridge of the nose and lightest towards the ear.

GLAM GOAL #2

Artsy Eyes

Eye makeup is one of the biggest highlights of 2020. From what continued from 2019's Europhia effect with exaggerated eye shapes, glitter and colourful eyeliners to this year's fall favourite: long lashes and Insta-hit eye paints. Eye makeup became extremely popular especially over the lockdown phase, where many bloggers took to Instagram to turn their eyes into a canvas. Mixing bright eyeshadows in colours of purples with yellows, greens with bright blues, and more. So if you haven't tried the trend yet, hop on it this festive season.

GO FOR SUBTLE EYES FOR PROMINENT LIPS OR SUBTLE LIPS IF YOU PREFER TO FEATURE THE EYES. BRIGHT EYES AND BRIGHT LIPS DON'T WORK WELL TOGETHER IN MOST CASES.

@makeupforever





GLAM GOAL #3

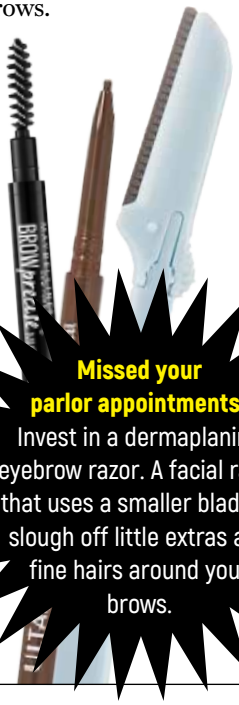
Lush Lips

The lips can be a fresh colour of pink, peach, or coral with a lavish coat of gloss; you can never go wrong with these colours whatever the tone of your skin may be.

GLAM GOAL #4

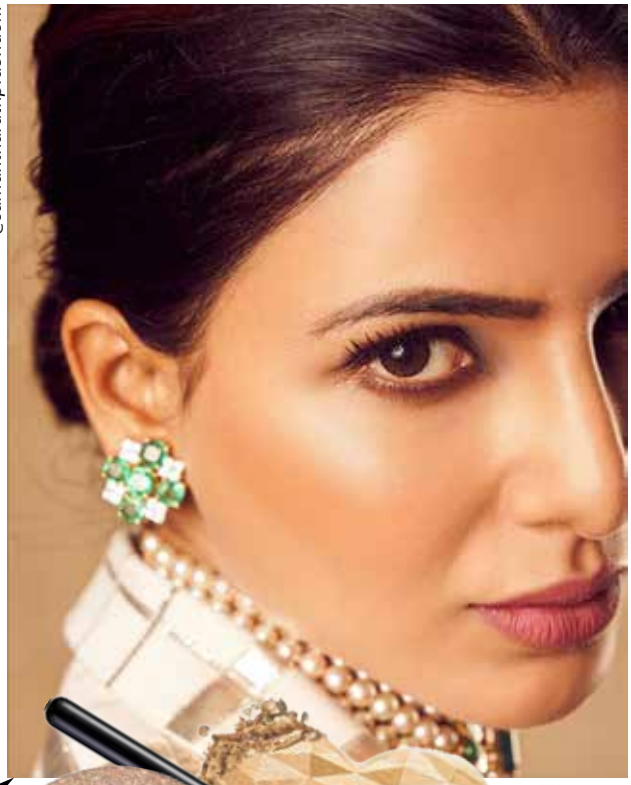
Brown the Brows

Pull out your favourite brow enhancing products and fill in your brows in the exact shape that you want them. Don't use the colour black as fillers, use a brown pencil to draw in your strokes. They blend more naturally into your brows.



Missed your parlor appointments?
Invest in a dermaplaning eyebrow razor. A facial razor that uses a smaller blade to slough off little extras and fine hairs around your brows.

@samantharuthprabhuoffl





GLAM GOAL #5

Cheeks on Fleek

Use a blending brush or your finger tips to apply gold highlighter over your cheekbones. Dust off a little at the tip of your nose, chin, and forehead. The cheekbone shimmer ensures continuity in make-up, without seeming distinctly made up. Gently stroke the highlighter on the top of the cheeks below the eye (not to be confused with the apple of your cheeks), the temples, bridge of the nose, and Cupid's bow. You will now have covered the T-zone of your face evenly.



How you can prepare your skin before you apply heavy makeup

Pre-mask Exfoliate
It's important that you rid your face of dead skin before applying makeup. For this, you need to exfoliate your skin with lactic or glycolic acid. Glycolic acid is one of the most efficient exfoliants; it removes the outermost layer of dead cells revealing brighter, fresher skin.

Hydrate
Before you layer up your face with foundation and BB crèmes, it's very important to moisturize no matter what your skin type.

Massage
Use oil to gently massage your skin. Facial massage is important in skin stimulation. ■



All that Glitters is Gold

No biggie... just a little gold dust to reign in the festivities this season. Subtle shimmer or bright glam - totally up to you!

1. Ombre Interdite Cream Eyeshadow in Gold Spirit by **Givenchy**; **2.** Magnetic Nude Glimmer 24K Goddess by **Nudestix**; **3.** Oil Infused Lip Tint by **NARS Cosmetics**; **4.** Honey Dew Me Up Primer by **NYX Cosmetics**; **5.** Advanced Soundarya Age Defying Facial Serum With 24K Gold by **Forest Essentials**; *6.* Glitter Pop Eyeliner in Gold by **Too Faced**; **7.** Powerchrome Loose Eye Pigment in Shimmering Rose Gold by **NARS Cosmetics**; **8.** Highlighting Powder in Moon Glow by **Bobbi Brown**; **9.** Gold Rush Blush by **Benefit**; **10.** Duo Eyeshadow in Frosted Ginger / Shimmering Copper by **NARS Cosmetics**; **11.** Gel Stylist Nail Colour in Treasure by **Lakmé**; **12.** Eyes And Shine Shadow Crayon in Citrine Crackle by **Sugar Cosmetics**



BEYOND THE LIME-LIGHT

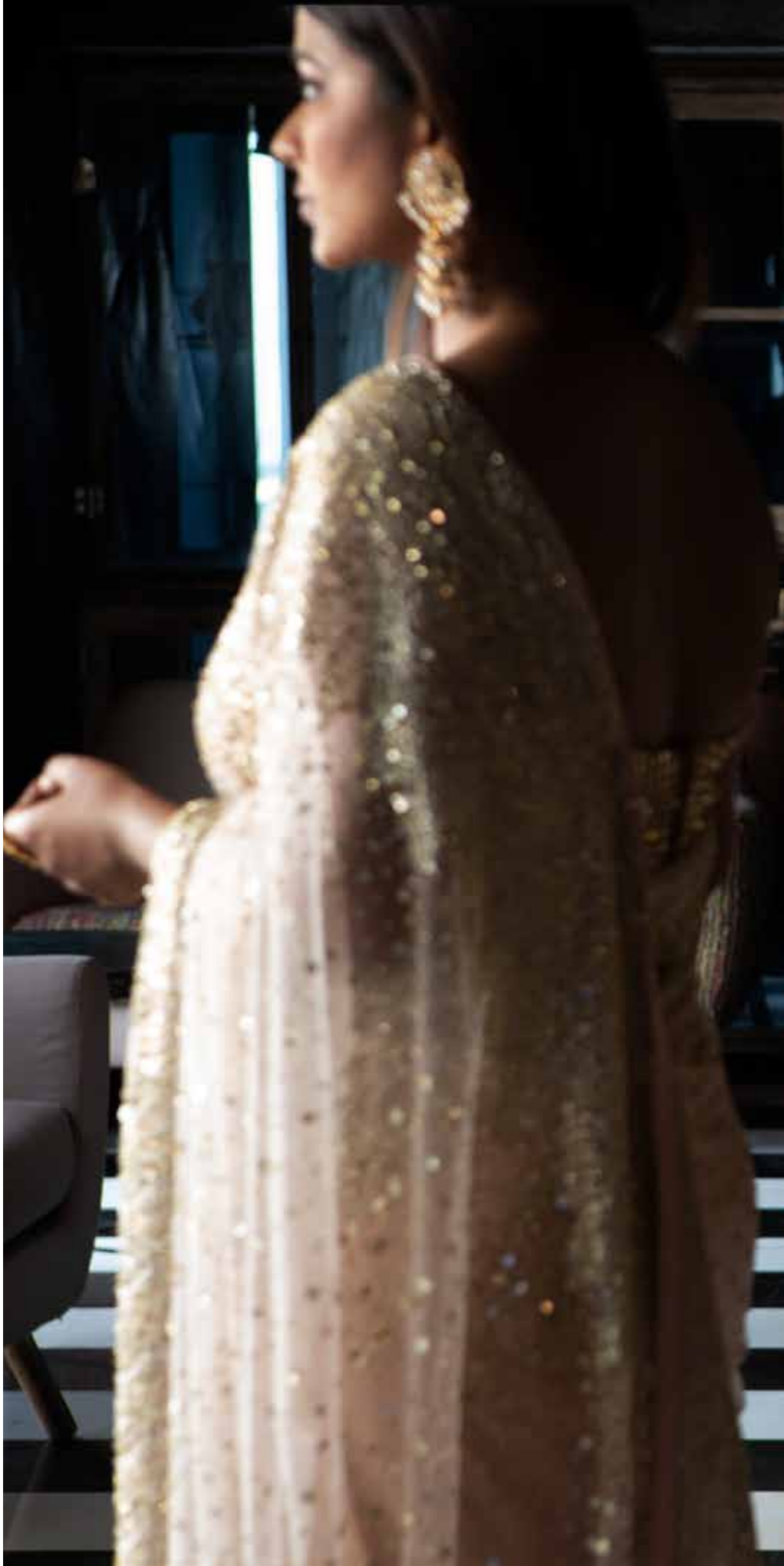
AISHWARYA RAJESH REFLECTS THROUGH THE LENS OF SHOW BUSINESS, AS SHE SITS DOWN WITH **SRUTHI RAVINDER** TO REVEAL THE TRUTH ABOUT WORK EXPERIENCES AND LIFE BEHIND-THE-SCENES.

PHOTOGRAPHY **SUNDER RAMU**

STYLIST **AMRITHA RAM**
HAIR & MAKEUP **PRAKRUTHI ANANTH** | LOCATION **THE PARK, CHENNAI**
WARDROBE

THE Pride SHOP

Her on-screen roles have been delightfully robust, showcasing a lovingly welcomed anti-thesis of the stereotypical heroine.





Aishwarya adorned in an embellished silver and gold saree. A timeless piece that can see you through the festive season and celebrations in the years to come!

When choosing to break free from clichés, disciplining one's talent into (what Aishwarya defines as) "fitting the role" is what it takes to stay in the film industry; the entry to it is barred by conventional expectations that are hard-hitting. This year, the Covid-19 outbreak ensured Aishwarya was away from the camera for six months until she turned cover girl for our October issue. Now with things slowly moving towards the new normal, she's back to being busier than ever, juggling between her shoots and promotions for her upcoming film.

"Feels like going back to school after a long break. It is a nice feeling though, to be back shooting," she says excitedly. "We are on screen after six months and it will take at least a couple of days to settle. The first day for me felt different. I wasn't getting my shots right. But over the day, I got better and I'm sure tomorrow will be great!"

Aishwarya is currently shooting for Thittam Irandu directed by Vignesh Karthik which is touted to be a female-centric film. With the current scenario, a lot of precautions are being taken on set. "Everybody is wearing their mask. Apart from the actors, no one is allowed to be without a mask on set. Everything feels different, and yet the same."

During this interview, Aishwarya's movie Ka Pae Ranasingam's release was only a week away. And just like everything else, this felt unfamiliar too as it is a DTH release and not a theatrical one. "We've done a fair share of promotions and there is a good buzz for the movie. I thought this movie would be a lot of fun to watch in the theatre. It has that theatrical content. But yes, this is a pandemic and we can't do anything about it," she admits.

Although the actress misses catching films on the big-screens, she is optimistic about her film. "In our lockdown period we have gotten used to consuming quick small content. This movie will be a refreshing break from that. It's a three-hour film that you can sit and watch with your family."

Directed by P. Virumandi, the Vijay Sethupathi and Aishwarya Rajesh-starrer narrates the tale of a village and its people, who stand against industrialisation. "It is a raw and emotional film, but has great heart. It has a refreshing storyline based out of real incidents."

"We faced a lot of challenges but it was all a new experience and helped us connect better with the movie."

"We shot for about sixty days for this film. Shot in the arid grounds of Ramanathapuram, we there was no escaping the heat; no trees and rampant water scarcity. Even in the hotels, we stayed in there was only saltwater available for drinking. We faced a lot of challenges but it was all a new experience and helped us connect better with the movie."

This movie is Vijay Sethupathi and Aishwarya Rajesh's fifth collaboration, after the recent Chekka Chivantha Vaanam (2018). "Working with Vijay Sethupathi was great. We are already friends and we have worked well together previously. He brings a lot of good improvisation to the scenes. He



A dramatic pastel-green gown with ruffles and layers that brings out the playful and beautiful personality in her!



is not just a good actor but also a very humble human being, a very positive person to be around."

"I enjoyed shooting the film and I loved my role."

"I portray Aryaanachi a beautiful character fighting for a cause and I could feel her pain a few days into the shoot," she reveals.

This is not the first time Aishwarya has taken up the role of a strong, tough woman. Every single one of her roles has been relatable and oftentimes raw. When it comes to picking scripts, she has a clear mantra:"I don't prefer any style. It's not about how big or small the project, it's about how good the script is and how good the director is. If you look at it this way, some big films can't sustain themselves in the box office. But some small films end up doing well," she points out.

Aishwarya Rajesh lives the life of different women through her roles.

She was Kousalya Murugesan, a passionate sportsperson, she was Padma, a bold north Madras girl, she was Suvarna, a naïve lover to a village man, she was a playful sister in Vaanam Kottatum and a mother of two in Kaaka Muttai. Aishwarya Rajesh lives the life of different women through her roles. And doing justice to these personalities comes through not just practice but mostly connection. "Characters you play are not real people. In real life you are this one person, you don't keep changing. But films like Kaaka Muttai, Namba Veetu Pillai, Vada Chennai and Kanna taught me that the roles I play are real people. It is only after I understand and connect with the character; I perform better and become one with the script and film," she believes.

"No matter how good the content is you can never really predict if it'll do well."

From the get-go, choosing scripts, adapting a different personality on cue, bringing a character to life, and performing – Aishwarya believes that the process of making a film takes everything you've got. But the cine industry is such where all your hard work and efforts do not always guarantee success. "Every time before a movie releases, it is nerve-wracking, really! No matter how good the content is you can never really predict if it'll do well. Although I was sure about movies like Kanna and Kaaka Muttai before the release, only after seeing the audience's response did we get breathe relief," discloses Aishwarya. "If the reviews and responses are good only then the mood for celebration begins. Generally, I celebrate my movie success more than festivals," she smiles.

Characters you play are not real people. But films like Kaaka Muttai, Namba Veetu Pillai, Vada Chennai and Kanna taught me that the roles I play are real people.

"Everything you do does not always have to lead to success and blockbusters. One failure will teach you a hundred lessons."

Along with success come a few failures, a few hits, and misses. While she has had her fair share of roles she loved, there are a few she regrets playing. "There are a handful definitely, but I don't want to mention it. Everything you do does not always have to lead to success and blockbusters. Even the biggest of the biggest actors have failed movies. One failure will teach you a hundred lessons, just like one bad relationship teaches you a hundred life lessons, nah?" she laughs.

"I had many directors tell me that I was not heroine material. I didn't get any opportunity for two-three years at the start of my career."

Now at the top of her game, with big films in her kitty and bigger projects in the pipeline, she is aiming to soar high! But she didn't storm into fame. In fact, her journey into cinema is far from glamourous. It took hard work, persistence and courage; but it was her talent that grabbed the industry's attention.

"Sexual harassment, snide comments on my complexion, my personality, my dressing sense, I even got rejected because I could speak Tamil. I had to face so much criticism for my looks, colour, for not knowing how to carry myself, and I had many directors tell me that I was not heroine material," says the actress about her journey in her famous Ted Talk that took the internet by storm recently.

"A lot has changed and for good!"

A decade into the showbiz and Aishwarya feels a lot has changed for the good. "Of course, there have been a lot of positive changes. Compared to when I entered the industry, what I'm seeing now is completely different. There are a lot of new directors, new actors who are giving more importance to talent and performance. More than just glam roles, there





Sexual harassment, snide comments on my complexion, my personality, my dressing sense, I even got rejected because I could speak Tamil. I had to face so much criticism for my looks, colour, for not knowing how to carry myself, and I had many directors tell me that I was not heroine material.

Here Aishwarya dances to the beats of a fun, festive, maroon mirrored lehenga! The versatility and the jazz of mirror work has helped it become a favourite in most millennial wardrobes.

are more meaningful roles now for actresses. Corporates have come in for productions and they are going for talents who can perform."

"There is something called "Fit the Role".

"Sometime before, say about five years back, a lot of actors who don't fit the role of a script were chosen for the movie. For instance, the role of a middle-class girl would be portrayed by someone wearing a lot of makeup, sporting high-end brands, and carrying a Louis Vuitton bag. In our city or anywhere else that is not how a middle-class girl looks, right? A lot of them weren't able to lip-sync either."

"But now you don't see that happening much. A lot of new directors are particular about depicting sound roles and casting talents, actresses who speak Tamil, with a natural flair for performance. Even commercial films are infused with the essence of reality. Heroines are getting more meaningful roles even if it is not a full-fledged women-centric film."

"I will never lose myself in the process of changing."

A lot around you does not change without changing a bit of you. Aishwarya welcomes changes, but only the positive ones. "Changing something about oneself is a personal choice. If the change is for the better, then we should embrace it without any ego. For a fact, I'm very short-tempered and I feel I should change that about myself."

"But I've also been asked to change things I don't want to. I've had people ask me to change my style of talking. 'Don't be too casual, talk more like an actress.' They would say. And that's where I put my foot down. I would never lose myself in the process of changing. Change is fine, but pretentiousness isn't." As we start to wrap up our conversation Aishwarya takes a minute to reflect on the year that has been. "The uncertainty the year has brought forth is scary. We have started shooting but we still don't know when theatres are going to open. People have lost jobs, livelihoods, the economy is crashing. The world lost so many legends this year. I don't want a 'takeaway' from this year, I just want to forget it. Here's to hoping 2021 will be better and even great maybe!" she signs off.



There are a lot of new directors, new actors who are giving more importance to talent and performance. More than just glam roles, there are more meaningful roles now for actresses.





Covered in pretty pink blooms, Aishwarya wears a breezy blush-and-gold lehenga that was made for celebrations.





QUICK 5

Word of wisdom
Be bold, independent, stay strong, and face whatever it is. If you want to do something, believe in yourself, and fight for it.

Favorite food
Briyani, mum's Meen Kolambhzu, Curd Rice

Makeup must-haves
Balm, nude lipstick, cheek tint, sunscreen

Top 3 Favourite Actresses
Banu Priya, Sri Devi, Manorama Aachi

Top 3 Favourite Actors
Rajinikanth, Vijay, Shahrukh khan

First thing you notice in a person
Their smile. ■

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ARE YOUR INTERIORS CHIMING WITH THE SEASON?

Let the aura of good omens adorn your home.

Festivals bring a breath of fresh air and an upliftment in mood, especially during the ongoing uncertain times. The situation is such that there is limited interaction with friends and extended families, so here are some easy ways in which we can bring the festive season home.

Play with bold & vibrant colours

Vibrant colours instantly create a joyful and inviting space, though this doesn't mean that you have to repaint the entire house in a bright shade. Colour blocking with bold and vibrant colours on upholsteries is a good idea. Pair a bold coloured cushion or a throw with a neutral coloured sofa for an inviting and vibrant ambience.

Adding some golden glitter

Gold never grows old. What better time than the festivals to bring in the gold accents. Gold vases, centerpieces or golden candle holders add glamour to your décor! Try draping sheer curtains with a dash of gold embroideries to add some jazz! If you are daring enough, go for an all gold furniture piece, like this centre table. It will surely be the focal point in all your celebrations and get-togethers.

Decorate with fresh or faux flowers

Flowers hold a very essential place in Indian festivities and celebrations. Marigold or genda is traditionally offered to deities, hence using it in home décor and styling is considered to bring in auspiciousness. Style them in malas on doors and windows or place them in a vase, the bright beauties add a splash of optimism in any environment.

Welcome your guests with a Rangoli

The intricacies of a rangoli are captivating and colourful. Adorn the entrance of your abode with floral and colourful patterns of rangoli. If you think that the art of rangoli is not your cup of tea, then there are ready-made rangoli stickers available in the markets. Place them at the entrance and adorn it with diyas for added glamour.







About the writer:
An innovative interior designer and blogger, Rituja Khan has décor tips for and ideas for days! Follow her unique creativity on Instagram @ritujakhanvilkar









Floating flowers and diyas in a large bowl makes for an attractive centerpiece. Use flowers in rangoli and for decorating the mandir. If sourcing real flowers is not possible, then go for faux flowers, they look equally charming, long lasting and quite easily available in a wide variety in markets.





Light up your Dwelling

Festivals and lights have always been an inseparable pair. Be it any festival, Diwali, Dussehra, Christmas or Eid, home décor is incomplete without hanging a lantern at the window. It is true though, that now-a-days traditional diyas have widely been replaced with fairy lights and pendant lamps. Use fairy lights in bottles and jars and place them in a quiet cosy corner, or wrap them around your indoor plants, or use them in strings to decorate a wall, they look magical in any setting. Style your home with pendant lamps and sconces to make it festival-ready.. Use scented candles for a refreshing as well as an aesthetic appeal. It is the season of cheer, remember to use more warm yellow lights rather than whites, as warm tones have a more festive feel.



Beautify your Dining table spread

Festivals are times when we do not hold back on gorging on some sweets and homemade delicacies. Why not spread them in an aesthetic manner on the dining table itself for the family to relish? It is that time of the year to bring down the antique brass crockery from the almirahs. Brass has been traditionally used in religious ceremonies and special occasions in India since ages. Ceramic, glass, bone china or steel crockery can also be used in place of brass.



A bright and floral tablescape looks perfect for a festive setting. A bright coloured table cloth or table runner can be used as a base. If you are willing to go a bit crafty, use a bright coloured saree or dupatta, stitch it as per the size of your dining table, and your easy peasy DIY table runner is ready!



Bring in your 'Greens'

Plants have infinite décor possibilities. Plants such as areca palm, rubber plant, aloevera, peace lily and snake plant help in purifying the indoor air by soaking in the toxic gases. Plant them in gold accent pots or hang them in a macramé plant holder. Create an indoor oasis with a cluster of pots of different shapes and sizes in one corner. Have a memorable festive season!

Arm Candy

The festive season calls for standout ensembles and beautiful accessories. Here are our favourite festive picks of best clutches, minaudières, and minibags to put the finishing touch on any party outfit. From vintage-inspired shape, metallic, embroidered, embellished, these must-have classics, are definite conversation starters.



Satin Flap Clutch

Embellished Clutch by **The Right Sided** *₹19500*

Brown Single Tassel Clutch by **Duet Luxury** *₹15000*

Orange 3D Rose Clutch by **Tarini Narula** *₹3780*

Embroidered & Printed Oval Clutch by **Rocky Star** *₹9950*

Embroidered & Printed Square Clutch by **Rocky Star** *₹9950*

Triangle Yellow Grasshopper Clutch by **Duet Luxury** *₹12000*

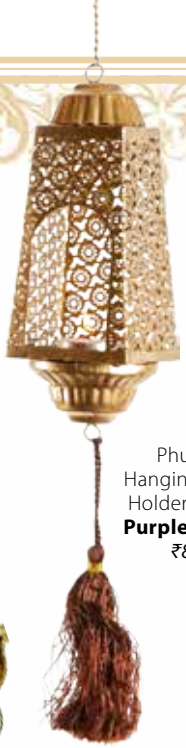
Satin Flap Clutch by **Fuchsia** *₹3388*

Prices as displayed in respective official websites



Lotus Leaf Ceramic Wall Sculptures (Set of 4) by **Home Artisan** *₹11390*

Golden Leaf Ceramic Wall Sculpture - Small (Set of 2) by **Home Artisan** *₹5790*



Phulkari Hanging T light Holder by **The Purple Turtles** *₹846*



Nysa Filigree Lantern by **Good Earth** *₹3800*

Fit for Royalty

Bring home some strong 'Deewani Mastani' vibes with these ornamental pieces. They can stay long beyond the festive weeks as well! Here are our favourite picks of décor add-ons that will help maximise your space and ring in the festive vibes.



Artimesia Candle Holder by **Good Earth** *₹16000*



Hibuscus by **Artisera** *₹134,400*



Verde Gold Tripod Table by **Sammsara** *₹5999*



Kya & Ariana Large Ceramic Jar by **55Luxe** *₹8000/ ₹8500*



Mayur T Light Holder by **The Purple Turtles** *₹1790*

Mysore Bathroom Set by **Sammsara** *₹3999*



Aubrey Rose Gold Circular Tray by **Sammsara** *₹1899*





Auramaroon Glass Votive by **Ellementary** *₹490*



Pomegranate by **Nestasia** *₹650*

Gingko Decor Leaf by **Good Earth** *₹11000*

Reza Maroque Lanterns by **55Luxe** *₹19000*

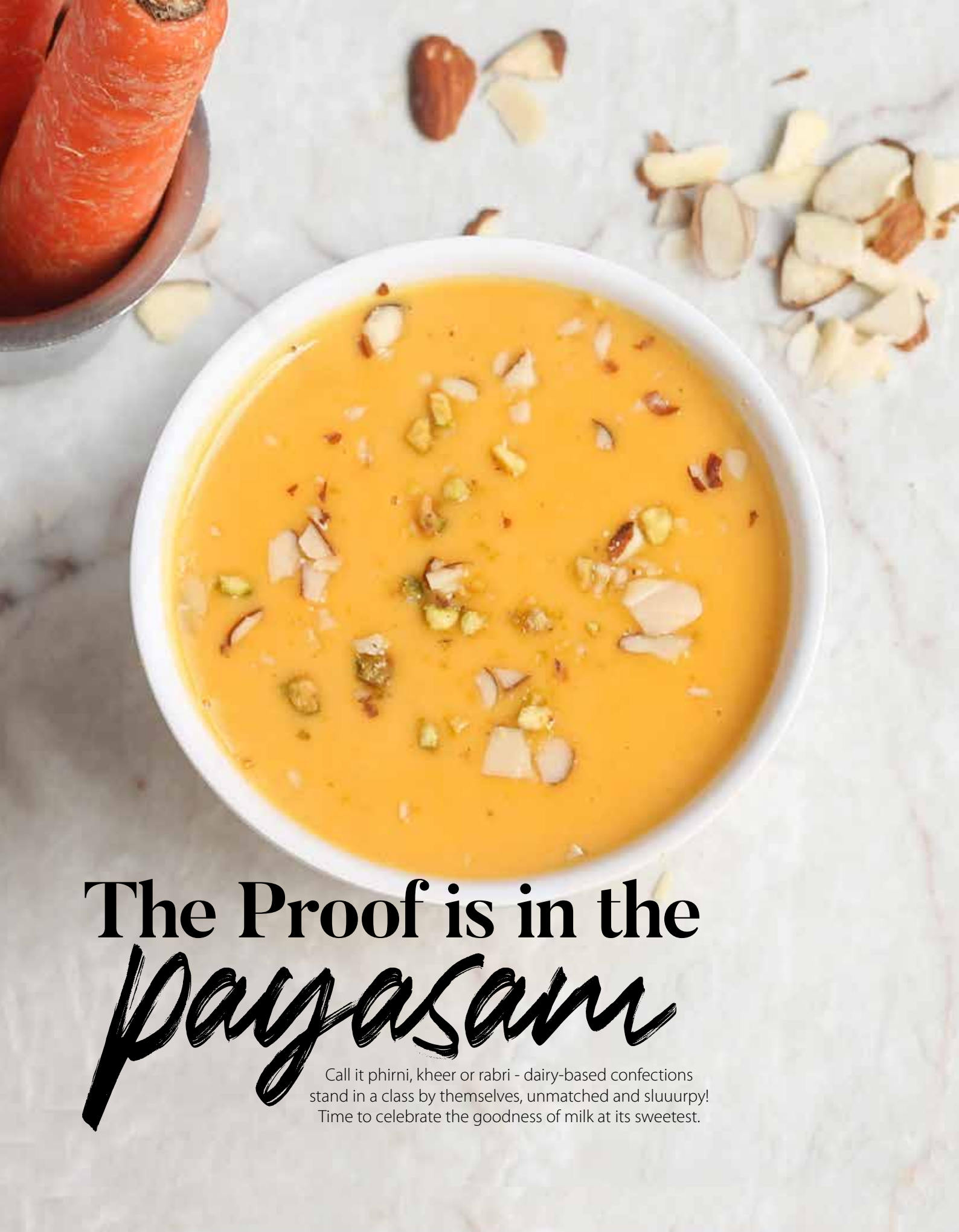


Deco Teal & Gold Applique & Heron Embroidered Blush Pink Cushion Cover by **Address Home** *₹3000/3500*

Vincent Van Gogh Vase by **Artisera** *₹40850*

Lotus Candle Stand by **Good Earth** *₹5500*

Prices as displayed in respective official websites



The Proof is in the *payasam*

Call it phirni, kheer or rabri - dairy-based confections stand in a class by themselves, unmatched and sluuurpy! Time to celebrate the goodness of milk at its sweetest.



About the writer:
Vidya Srinivasan, author of the blog "traditionallymodernfood.com", is from Chennai, currently living in the USA. Having enjoyed cooking since her childhood, her culinary style is traditionalist with modern twists – as reflected in her blog. You can visit her handle @tradtionallymodernfood on Instagram and YouTube for more recipes.



CARROT PAYASAM

INGREDIENTS

3	Carrots - medium sized, peeled, cut into big chunks)
15	Almonds
3 cups	Milk
3 tbsp	Condensed milk
1/2 cup	Sugar
2 pods	Cardamom
	Almonds, few for garnish
	Saffron, pinch
	Salt, pinch

PREPARATION

1. In a pressure cooker, add carrots, almonds, cardamom, and 1 cup of milk, cook for 3 whistles and switch off.
2. When it cools down to room temperature blend them into a fine purée.
3. In a saucepan on medium flame add carrot purée and remaining milk, let them boil for 10 minutes.
4. Add condensed milk, salt, and soaked saffron; Boil for 10 more minutes or till it becomes thick. Add sugar and cook for 2-3 minutes, or till it is dissolved. Garnish with some sliced almonds. Serve hot or cold.

CARAMEL PAYASAM

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	Sugar
1/2 tbsp	Butter
1+1/2 cup	Whole fat Milk (hot)
	Pistachio, few
	Almond flakes, few

PREPARATION

1. In a heavy-bottomed pan add sugar and sauté for 10 seconds.
2. Add butter and cook in medium flame, keep mixing continuously.
3. Sugar will start melting down and change color.
4. Keep mixing, and simmer the flame to low.
5. Sugar melts down completely and sugar syrup changes color (like jaggery syrup), that is the caramel.
6. Switch off the flame and add hot milk carefully (watch out for splattering).
7. Milk will rise and become frothy.
8. Mix well and turn on the flame to medium.
9. Boil the payasam for 5 minutes.
10. Add Pista and almonds, mix well and switch off.



DATES PAYASAM
(NO ADDED SUGAR)

INGREDIENTS

12 cups	Dates, pitted
3	Cashew
	Cardamom powder, pinch
2 cups	Whole fat milk
	Roasted almond flakes, few

PREPARATION

1. In a pressure cooker add dates, cashews, and 1/2 cup of milk.
2. Pressure cook for three whistles and let the pressure release naturally.
3. After the cooker settles down, let the mixture cool down completely.
4. Grind the mixture into a fine paste and transfer it into the pressure cooker
5. Add remaining milk to the pressure cooker and mix well.
6. Add a pinch of cardamom powder and let the payasam boil.
7. Cook for 2-3 minutes till the payasam boils well and turns frothy; switch off.
8. Add toasted almond flakes and serve the payasam warm or cold.



PASTA PAYASAM

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	Macaroni
3 cups	Milk
1/2 cup	Sugar
	Cardamom powder, generous pinch
1/2 tbsp	Butter/ Ghee
	Raisins, few
7	Cashews, split
	Salt, pinch

PREPARATION

1. In a heavy-bottomed pan add ghee and when ghee is hot, add cashews.
2. Sauté the cashews till they become golden brown. Add raisins and mix well. Transfer them to a small cup
3. In the same pan sauté pasta for 30 seconds.
4. Add 1 + 1/2 cup of hot milk and cook the pasta.
5. Stir in between and cook till the pasta is fork-tender.
6. Add 1 cup + 1/2 of milk and cook for 15 minutes, stir in between.
7. Payasam boils well and comes together.
8. In this stage add cardamom powder, salt, and sugar mix well.
9. Finally, add roasted cashews and raisins and let the payasam cook for 5 minutes.
10. Switch off and serve immediately or chill for a few hours and serve cold.



ALMOND KHEER

INGREDIENTS

1+1/4 cup	Whole Milk
3 tbsp	Almond flour
2 tbsp	Sugar - 2 tbsp
1/8 tsp	Cardamom powder
	Saffron, few strands

PREPARATION

1. In a mixie jar add 1/2 cup of milk, almond flour, sugar, and cardamom powder and grind into a fine mixture.
2. Add saffron and transfer into a pan. Add remaining milk to the mixie jar and shake the jar well. Transfer into the pan.
3. On medium flame boil the milk. Once it starts boiling switch off. Badam paal is ready. ■



Vocally Vibrant

Pragathi Guruprasad has come a long way from being a cheerful chirpy little girl in the reality-based singing competition almost a decade ago. In conversation with ***Sruthi Ravinder***, she looks back at the roller-coaster journey that has been and what the future holds.

Pragathi Guruprasad, who just turned 23 last month, has already performed across five continents in the world, sang over 12 commercial songs in Kollywood, and has made her official Hollywood debut. She also helped raise more than 7500USD for COVID relief and is among the first few South-Asian faces of beauty brands like NYX and Colour Pop cosmetics!

She was born in Singapore and brought up in the US. She grew up in California and did her schooling there and graduated from UCLA in Los Angeles this past June. Since graduating, she is juggling between pursuing her career in music, modelling, acting, and social media work full time.

"Singing was something I always wanted to do since I was a child, but never thought it was possible as a full-time career. Acting was not something I pursued since I was a child and I never personally thought I would be good at it."

One of her favorite memories growing up even today revolves around her earliest recall of singing. "The first singing competition I competed in was when I was around 4 years old. I sang "Chinna China Aasai" and my mom even taught me a dance to go along with the lyrics. I was the youngest to compete and won that competition."



> It was truly a dream. For my first acting experience on the screen to be on such an iconic show was truly the best debut I could've asked for.

A lot of us especially in India remember Pragathi from her days in Airtel Super Singer Junior in 2012 as a young sensational singer who finished as a runner-up in the third season of the reality-based singing competition. "Super Singer was a total accident. My mom was in Chennai one summer and happened to see the ad on Vijay TV. She submitted a CD of songs I had sung in classical concerts just to see what would happen and didn't tell any of us. The last thing we expected was a callback," she says looking back.

Super singer opened up several unexplored avenues for the young enthusiastic teenager she was. "Life post Super Singer has been amazing. It not only gave me a break into the music industry within and outside India, but it opened up many doors for my career and otherwise. I was given the opportunity to travel and perform for audiences all over the world, start working in social media, start modelling, and get introduced to the world of acting as well!"

After Super Singer, Pragathi started getting a lot of offers in Tamil cinema. At the time, her parents felt she was too young and not trained well enough to get into it. "I was certain that it was something I wanted to try at the right time. Moving to LA for college helped me do that. I was able to



enroll in a prestigious acting school here while being in college and one thing led to another, and I was signed to a management company and agency in Hollywood. I started going out for auditions and Never Have I Ever was my first booking."

It was a pleasant surprise to watch Pragathi's cameo in Netflix hit teen series Never Have I Ever. "It was truly a dream. For my first acting experience on the screen to be on such an iconic show was truly the best debut I could've asked for. I said earlier that acting was never a part of the plan, and I have to say that a lot of it was because I never saw South Asian actors watching American television or movies. I didn't know that someone who looked like me could be on television. To see a Tamil-American family portrayed on Netflix and to be a part of it was very exciting," she says, the elation still fresh on her face.

> I have an incredible group of people around me including my family and friends who keep me grounded and help me through tougher times.

With over 540K followers on Instagram, Pragathi is also a social media influencer. But with blue tick comes responsibilities and it is not always easy to have your life under public scrutiny. "Toughest part of being an influencer I would say that say is that the "work" never ends. There are no hours, no weekends, no days off." Being in the spotlight sometimes you are targeted with negativity and rumors. "It is hard. Everyone has something to say about everything, no matter how well you do something. I have an incredible group of people around me including my family and friends who keep me grounded and help me through tougher times. I wouldn't say there is one specific thing that helps me always get through it, but having a support system has been my biggest blessing."

There is a lot to look forward to for this young artiste in life and career and she is more driven than ever before. "I hope to release my independent EP (Extended Play/Album) by next year. Many more projects are also slated for release, the details of which I can't disclose just yet. This journey has been the biggest rollercoaster and something I never planned for. I hope to stay on this rollercoaster ride for the rest of my life and enjoy every moment that I am given. I will take it as it comes!" she exclaims confidently, as she signs off. ■

Lights, Camera, Talent!

From cinematography and editing to costume designing and direction, her talents only continue to grow. ***Halitha Shameem*** who made it look easy, reveals to ***Radhika Ramesh***, the actual grind behind it all.













Born to supportive parents, Halitha's career was an open road from the jump. She began learning and understanding about direction from the age of 16, worked as an assistant director under several magnificent directors and today, stands tall with her own style well developed. After Sillu Karupatti, Halitha is ready to treat her audience with some of her finest works yet.

Picking up the pen

With 2 working parents, Halitha found a lot of time to write and soon realized her love for composing poetry. "I think poetry provided me with a lot of strength. Writing always does that to you, right? I was in boarding school, mostly a loner and I would utilize my time to write. My thoughts have been my only companion," quips Halitha.

She says that this time that she had for herself made her creatively strong, which has helped her in her journey as a director. "I was well aware of my thoughts and I would use this awareness to my advantage.

> "I was very young and fragile. So, on a set if a director was shouting and swearing, I would just flee the sets. All that came to a standstill when I joined as an assistant director under the director duo Pushkar and Gayathri for the film Oramm Po.

I remember my first poetry; it was about a tongue. Eventually my teachers started noticing my writing capacity in Tamil. I studied in a school dominated by Malayalam and my principal, would take my help to write down his speech in Tamil despite having Tamil teachers in school. I was looked at like a celebrity," says Halitha smirking.

This made Halitha decide her next stop – Chennai.



> I would call up various production houses and directors' offices in the hope of getting hold of an opportunity. Many would insist on me acting but direction was my sole passion





Crossroads and choices

Halitha came to Chennai to pursue her dream as a filmmaker after all the encouragement she received. "The time I reached Chennai was the time when huge radio channels like Radio Mirchi, Suryan FM were all setting up. So, I would request the radio jockeys to permit me to write content for them. These RJs would in return encourage me to do better and do more," she reveals.

Halitha's parents, however, wanted her to earn a mainstream degree to secure her future if her writing dreams were to fail. However, Halitha was bent on pursuing a degree that would help her career, so she completed her Bachelor's degree in Visual Communication. "I simultaneously tried joining as an Assistant Director. I would call up various production houses and directors' offices in the hope of getting hold of an opportunity. Many would insist on me acting but direction was my sole passion," says Halitha.

The AD experiences

Halitha joined director/actor Samudhirakani's team as an assistant director. "I knew he would not take me in as an assistant director. So I informed them I was a lyricist and became a part of the team. When I was given an opportunity to read out my so-called lyrics to him, he had a very straight face and absolutely no reaction to it. He was too sweet to say anything to discourage a young girl but I sensed that and finally broke



open the truth to him, that I wanted to join his team as an assistant director," Halitha recalls.

The major league directors whom she approached suggested alternate career options for her within the film industry. "I was very young and fragile. So, on a set if a director was shouting and swearing, I would just flee the sets. All that came to a standstill when I joined as an assistant director under the director duo Pushkar and Gayathri for the film Oramm Po. They would involve me in some serious discussions, take in my suggestions and made me feel like an integral part of the team," says a grateful Halitha.

> My idea of Sillu Karupatti was to not romanticize anything that usually is. I wanted to showcase love as blooming in normal places like a doctor's house or a park, someplace which doesn't seem outlandish

Eventually she assisted Samudhirakani in the film Nadodigal and director Mysskin for the film Nandalala. "They are all directors with different schools of thought and each of them taught me something very valuable," says Halitha. Mirchi Siva's Va Quarter Cutting was the last film Halitha worked on as an Associate Director.

Captain of her own ship

After taking up complete charge as an Associate, Halitha was confident to now become an independent director. Poovarasam Peepee was her first film but it took her sometime to understand her audience and her first film did not perform well. "It unfortunately did not receive the mileage it should have. But the young talent from that film deserved another chance, given their performance. That is when I decided that once they turned young teens, I would do the film Minmini with them," admits Halitha.

Picking up momentum

"My idea of Sillu Karupatti was to not romanticize anything that usually is. I wanted to showcase love as blooming in normal places like a doctor's house or a park, someplace which doesn't seem outlandish," says Halitha. Meanwhile, cinematographer Abhinandan and actor Siddharth persuaded her to write a story and Halitha had decided to come up with just one episode back then which was The Turtles starring Leela Samson. Halitha says, "They, however, felt that the intensity was very strong. That is when I decided that maybe I should channel this intensity into a commercial film for my audience. Initially I had written only two episodes, this and The Pink Bag. Eventually it developed to two more."

A big banner

Sillu Karuppati was produced by 2D Production which is the home banner of superstars Suriya and Jyothika, a power couple the south loves.

Jyothika had talked about how she truly loved and believed in Sillu Karupatti at the JFW Movie Awards and Halitha says there's more to it: "Apparently, they loved the film and had said so to my team, but I wanted to personally hear from them. I was busy shooting Aeley when the screening happened so I was unaware of their reaction."

She continues, "Finally Jyothika ma'am spoke to me and told me she enjoyed the depth of these love stories. At the 50th day success party, I met Suriya sir and realized that he too was a huge fan of the film. He had also been keeping up with my Aeley-related progress! I was humbled, to say the least."

Coming soon...

Halitha has some brilliant projects lined up for her. Her next film Aeley will have a theatrical release. Further, her film Minmini has 20 days of shoot left but she has an ongoing OTT project she wishes to finish before she resumes the shoot of Minmini. ■



THE FESTIVE FIT

4 WEEK GUIDE TO FESTIVE FITNESS

You're looking at weeks of ghee laddoos, badam halwa and coconut barfi. In your haste to celebrate, don't forget this strategic 4-week plan to keep your muscle tone intact, even after all the gorging. By ***Sruthi Ravinder***



WEEK 1

Diwali is round the corner, so is Dussehra and before you know, it will be time for all the sweets, late nights, late mornings and holidays from work. The one thing that seldom features in anyone's agenda during festivals is keeping fit. This is a common issue with people who have worked hard to lose weight, only to succumb to the temptation. These simple workouts can be done from within the comforts of your home if you do not want to hit the gym.

Most weight-shedding routines are looked up and experimented within the fortnight leading up to D-day. However, it pays to know how early you should begin your workout regimen to reach your target fitness level. For the first week start with cardio and strengthening. Allocate about 45-50 minutes in a day truly dedicated to workout and choose to workout six days a week and have one rest day.

cardio

Start with a 15-minute brisk walk. You can take a stride in the streets, walk in your terrace, or on your treadmill. You could choose to jog, just make sure you feel your heart rate increasing.

cardio combo



Jumping Jacks
30 jumps
High Knees
15 each leg
Alternative Floor Touch
15 each side

Do 30 repetitions of each exercise to complete one round, follow it by 30 seconds break. Do a total of four rounds and take a minute's break before you move on to strengthening.

strength training



Bicycle Crunches
You need to do a total of 100 crunches. Divide it as a set of 4 with 25 reps in each set.
Superman
Do 10 reps, holding for 2-5 seconds each.
Plank
Do three reps, holding for 30 seconds each.
Bridge
Do three reps, holding for 30 seconds each.
Push-ups
Do three sets of 10 reps each.

WEEK 2

cardio

Keep your walk or jog to 15 minutes and your cardio combo going. Try increasing your pace and intensity to build up the heart rate. Try adding an extra 10 reps of each of your cardio.

strength training

This week, you'll add two new moves and increase the reps or duration of the exercises from the first portion of the plan.

Crunches
Do 25 reps of a basic crunch, 25 reps on each side of a bicycle crunch with a hold to complete one set. Do two sets so that's a total of 100 crunches.

Flutter kicks work on your lower abdominal region, plus the hip flexors.

Flutter kicks
You can perform them by sitting in the chair, using your elbows to support your back, and extend your legs to flutter. You can alternate this with in and out, which involves extending your legs back and forth.

First, get into your high plank position. To start the move, lift the right arm off the floor and tap your left shoulder; while you are jumping out, staying in a high-plank position, jump back in by bringing your legs together. Do the same on the alternate side to complete one rep.



High plank jacks with shoulder tap
Do 15 taps each side.
Superman
Do two reps, holding for 30 seconds each.
Plank
Do three reps, holding for one minute each.

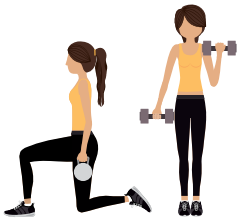
Lie down on your mat and fold your legs in front of you. Balancing with your hands raise your hips and squeeze your glutes, exhale, and hip down.



Bridge
Make sure your core is engaged. Do 3 reps, holding for one minute each.
Push-ups
Do three sets of 15 to 20 reps. If you are a beginner start with a knee-down push-up.

WEEK 3

Upper arms are the most common area that one should work out. Toned arms including shoulders, triceps, and biceps will also add to the look of the body structure. Continue Week 2 routine and add weight training post the two rounds.



upper body exercises

Two sets of compound exercises (exercises that use more than one muscle group) such as a chest press and lat pull down. Chest press targets the chest area and the tricep.

Biceps curl with high knees
Three sets with 10 reps each exercise alternatively.
Push Press with jumping jacks
Three sets with 10 reps each exercise alternatively.

Use a tri-set of shoulder presses, lateral raises, and front raise. Use 2.5 kg dumbbells if you are a beginner or 5 kg dumbbell. Alternatively you can also use heavy water cans if you do not have dumbbells.

WEEK 4



Start with mobility exercise for the first 5 minutes.

Cobra to mountain
T-Spine Rotation
Chest Opener
Each exercise for 30 seconds and a total of 2 rounds. This will be followed by the week 3 workout plan.

You have reached your final week. Use this week to focus on a more holistic health fitness routine. Give more importance to your mental wellbeing and sit through 15-20 minutes of guided meditation every day. ■

4 Simple Ways To Create A Routine & Stick To It

The rise of this pandemic has evidently resulted in various alterations to our lifestyle. We have been used to a certain kind of 'schedule' or 'regime' that we have been sorely lacking. Here are 4 simple ways to maintain a semblance of a routine for our well-being during these trying times.



1. MAINTAIN A FIXED SLEEP CYCLE

Since the majority of us do not have to live by a fixed schedule due to the effects of lockdown, we can clearly notice the concerning changes in our sleep cycles. It is imperative to get this under control as it can take a toll on your physical and mental health.

2. REGULATE INTAKE OF FOOD

It is imperative that we ensure the consumption of meals at proper times and with fixed intervals so as to remain healthy. This will also serve as a routine lifestyle and provide us with a semblance of normalcy we desperately need now.

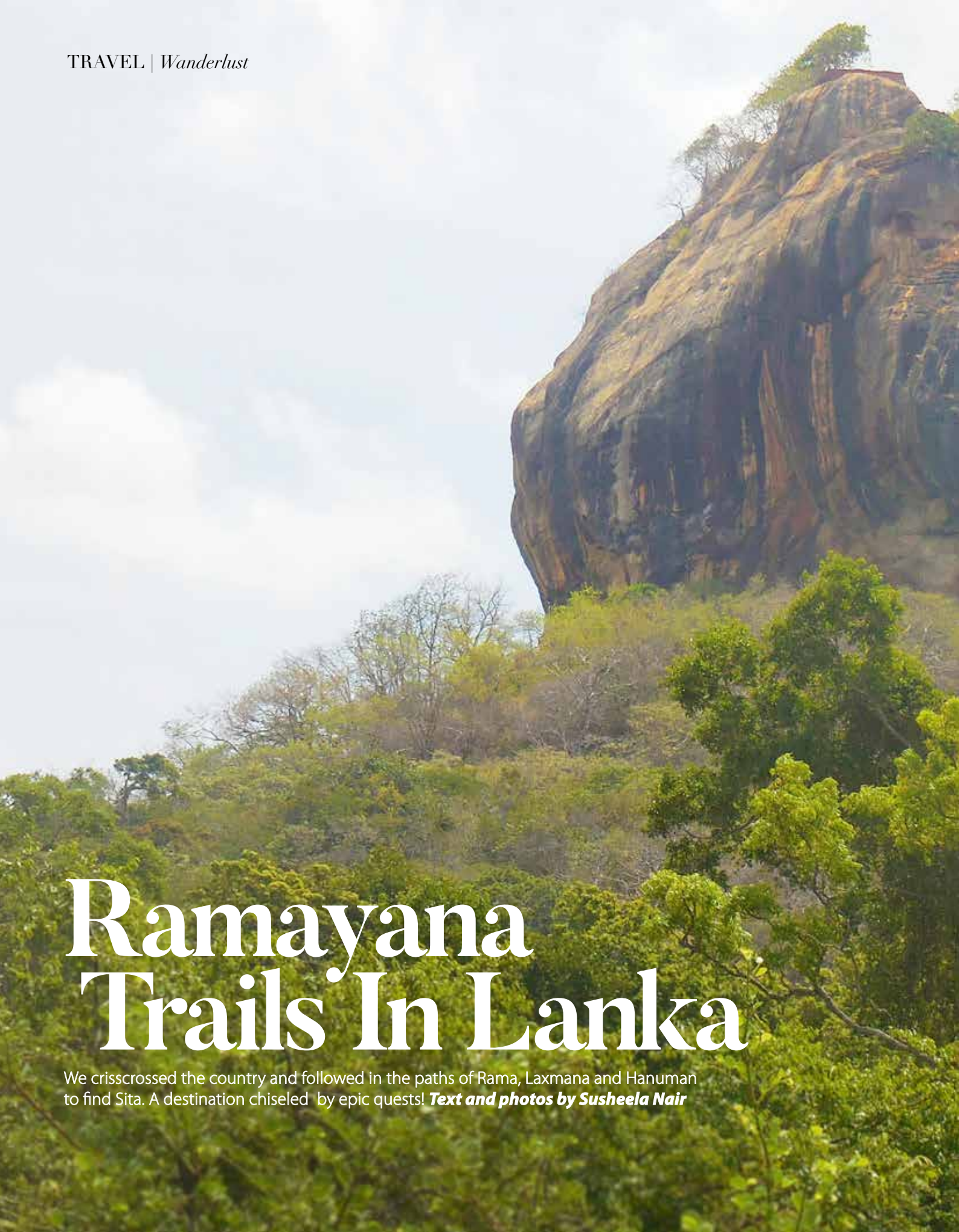
3. GIVE YOURSELF A "TASK OF THE DAY"

Assigning one task per day helps provide yourself with a purpose and a sense of routine as well. The task can be one as simple as rearranging your bookshelf or tidying up your cupboard; one you have not had the time to do until now such as furnishing your art and writing skills or reading that novel you have been putting off. The 'task' is not what is important here but the purpose it serves and gives you is.

4. MAINTAIN A JOURNAL

Make a definitive but flexible list of things that you wish to accomplish each day as soon as you wake up. Alongside, maintain a journal keeping track of the time spent on these activities. This can be done using apps like Pomodoro or even by setting alarms for when you would like to regulate your progress on the tasks.

These steps might seem overwhelming at first but if we choose to maintain a balanced lifestyle during these unbalanced times, they will definitely help. ■



Ramayana Trails In Lanka

We crisscrossed the country and followed in the paths of Rama, Laxmana and Hanuman to find Sita. A destination chiseled by epic quests! ***Text and photos by Susheela Nair***



The legacy of sites which connect and identify with the great epic, Ramayana include significant events like the imprisonment of Sita, the torching of Ravana's kingdom and the final triumph of good over evil. There are organised or bespoke Ramayana tours around 40 important sites in all. Here is a pick of the some of the fascinating Ramayana-related destinations and trails.



MANAVARI & MUNEESHWARAM TEMPLES IN CHILAW

The first halt in our Sri Lankan sojourn in the footsteps of Rama started with two temples in Chilaw. These temples are not architecturally great but look akin to Dravidian style temples with a plethora of colours and statues within. What intrigued me was the legends associated with them. It is believed that while Ram and his coterie were returning victorious from Lanka after slaying Ravana, a Brahmahasthi Dosham followed them as they had killed Ravana who was himself a Brahmin and an ardent follower of Lord Shiva. To get rid of this dosha, and atone the sin of having killed a Brahmin, Rama stops here, prays to Shiva and establishes a Shiv Linga with sand. The linga stands today in the neighbouring Manavari Temple.

THESE TEMPLES ARE NOT ARCHITECTURALLY GREAT BUT LOOK AKIN TO DRAVIDIAN STYLE TEMPLES WITH A PLETHORA OF COLOURS AND STATUES WITHIN. WHAT INTRIGUED ME WAS THE LEGENDS ASSOCIATED WITH THEM.

DAMBULLA

We explored the cave temples of Dambulla before heading off to Sigiriya. It marks the geographical centre of the island and the Cultural Triangle. It holds its own treasures – a magnificent temple, which is a series of five caves established as a monastery, in the 3rd century B.C. It is the largest, best preserved cave-temple complex in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist mural paintings are of particular importance as are the 157 statues.

SIGIRIYA

We visited Sigiriya, a gigantic rock formation on top of which a complex capital city was built by King



Previous Page: Sigiriya Lion Rock
From Top: Diruvumpola in Sri Lanka, Lord Hanuman statue at Rumassala

Kashyap. The rock gets its name from its structural resemblance to the paw of a lion. Subsequently this was occupied by King Ravana after defeating the king. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage site with the remains of a fortress. The royal citadel is punctuated with ramparts, moats, gateways, and a well-laid out city, complete with bathing pools and gardens.

RAMBODA

We had a brief halt at the Bhakta Hanuman Temple at Ramboda. This temple marks the spot where Hanuman stopped to meditate on the great and difficult mission he had undertaken – to find the queen consort of Lord Rama and take her back to safety. Built by Chinmaya Mission of Sri Lanka, the temple houses a granite statue 16 feet tall, of Lord Hanuman as the presiding deity on this hill. On every full moon day, special poojas are conducted and witnessed by thousands of devotees.

NUWARA ELIYA

After a sojourn covering some of the important sites on the Ramayana Trail in Negombo and Tricomallee in Sri Lanka, we decided to take a break as temple fatigue had set in. Braving 200 km of winding roads we reached Nuwara Eliya in central Sri Lanka, home to some of the world's most exquisite tea varieties. From the sweltering heat of the coastal plains, it was a welcome relief to experience the cooler climate of this hill station situated about 6199 feet above sea level. The Anglican churches dotted along the verdant confines and British colonial bungalows lulled us into believing that this is a part of 'Ye olde England'. We passed by a meticulously tended 18-hole golf course, and a horse-racing track which evoked memories of Victorian times.

From Top: Dambulla Cave Temple in Sri Lanka; Bhakta Hanuman Temple at Ramboda











FOOT PRINTS AKIN TO LORD HANUMAN ARE FOUND ON THE ROCKS ALONG THIS RIVER AND SOME ARE OF LARGE SIZE, WHICH INDICATES THE IMMENSE POWER OF LORD HANUMAN TRANSFORMING HIMSELF INTO ANY SIZE.

SEETHA ELIYA

Resuming our Ramayana Trail, we drove to Seetha Eliya where the demon Ravana is supposed to have imprisoned Sita. The Seetha Amman temple is built in the typical South Indian style, with stucco images of the Puranas and scenes from the Ramayana. Three idols were discovered here a century ago, one of them being that of Sita. We saw the sanctum for Hanuman, the monkey God who vowed to return Sita to Lord Rama. We descended down to the rocky stream below to have a look at the footprints akin to Lord Hanuman before we left Nuwara Eliya. It is interesting to note that Sitadevi bathed in this stream by the side of the temple. Foot prints akin to Lord Hanuman are found on the rocks along this river and some are of large size, which indicates the immense power of Lord Hanuman transforming himself into any size.

From Top: Rolling hills carpeted with tea plantations in Nuwara Eliya; International Peace Pagoda built by the Japanese; Seetha Amman temple in Nuwara Eliya

BUDDHIST TEMPLE & AGNI PARIKSHA

When we reached Diruvampola, it was a delight to see little girls prancing around a small Buddhist temple filled with statues of Buddha and walls adorned with paintings. Diruvampola means a 'marketplace of oath' in local parlance and it was the venue to settle disputes between parties. This is the place where Sita underwent the 'Agni' test. She came out unscathed and proved her innocence and purity.

RUMASSALA

In the popular weekend destination of Unawatuna, we came across the interesting statue of Lord Hanuman in Rumassala, located next to the International Peace Pagoda built by the Japanese.

KELANIYA TEMPLE

Last stop on the legendary trail was Kelaniya Temple, the abode of Lord Vibhishana who supported Lord Rama in his quest. Vibhishana Palace is believed to have been gifted to Ravana's brother after the defeat of Lanka by Ram. It is currently a Buddhist Temple with myriad statues, murals and paintings of Lord Buddha gracing the walls. The place resonated with sounds of gongs and synchronised chants of devotees and we experienced a meditative calm before we culminated our trip. ■

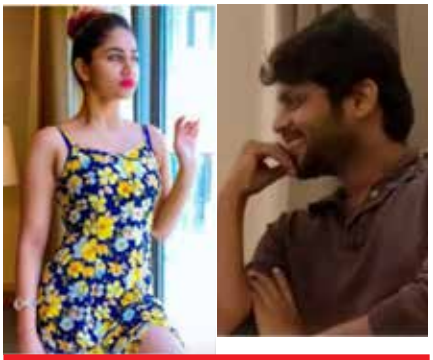
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CINEMA CHRONICLES

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RAIZA WILSON ADDRESSES THE ONGOING NEPOTISM IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

Raiza Wilson rose to fame after her brief entry into the Bigg Boss and then won the audience over with her performance in her debut film Pyaar Prema Kadhal alongside actor Harish Kalyan. After her debut film, Raiza was not seen much onscreen until Caarthik Raju's The Chase she got busy shooting with a skeletal crew throughout the lockdown keeping safety in mind. Talking about Nepotism and being an outsider, Raiza stated, "I am an outsider, but got my fame through Bigg Boss Tamil. The show gave me a lot of screen time and people knew me well when I made my film debut. I got one offer and then slowly other projects started coming my way. In fact, I am not even aware of this issue in the Tamil film industry. Nepotism is not a problem in the film industry; non-performance is. We need to be concentrating on inefficiency."

ACTOR SAMYUKTA HEGDE HARASSED BY A WOMAN AICC MEMBER

Actress Samyukta Hegde and two of her friends went out to a park near Agara Lake situated near the HSR Facility, Bengaluru to exercise and workout. Eventually a group of people led by AICC member Kavitha Reddy Moral Policed the friends for wearing a sports bra in a public place. They allegedly abused and threatened them for their attire.

In her Instagram live, Samyukta Hegde was quoted saying that the crowd around her accused her for taking drugs because she was an actor. In fact the AICC member called the Police while the crowd asked her to be booked for Public Indecency. "This is so wrong. I had my pullover on. We came here and I removed it and did my warmup. We were just exercising with hoops and this woman (referring to Kavitha Reddy) came up to us and started saying that we were being indecent for wearing a sports bra in a public place. We were just exercising by ourselves. Now the people here are saying that we consume drugs. Just because the drug case is being talked about, they are accusing us of consuming drugs," she stated. Kavitha Reddy later apologised for her ruthless behaviour of publicly harassing the women.

"I have always opposed Moral Policing. I realize that my actions were construed as such. An argument ended up in me reacting aggressively as well, it was a mistake. As a responsible citizen n progressive woman, I own up to n sincerely apologise to @SamyukthaHegde n her Friends," wrote Kavitha in her apology note.







SAI PALLAVI AND NAGA CHAITANYA RESUME SHOOT

Naga Chaitanya's last film Venky Mama may have not been a blockbuster but his previous film, Majili was a huge success. Had Sai Pallavi agreed to reprise the role of Malar in Tollywood's Premam, she and Naga Chaitanya's onscreen chemistry would have been something to look up to. Looks like the time has come as the duo are all set to be a part of director Sekhar Kammula's next. Produced by Sunil Narang, 80% of the schedule was shot before the lockdown. The story revolves around emotions set behind an inter-caste love-story. The film will address important issues like the societal equations with respect to community egos. Stills and songs from the film are already winning hearts. It has also been revealed that Sai Pallavi's role will have something to do with professional dancing. The shoot is underway and the team is hoping to release the film on the 14th of February, 2021. The first single from the film Ay Pilla received a lot of appreciation for the duo's onscreen chemistry. If rumors are to be true, the teaser of the film will be released on Akkineni Nageswara Rao's birth anniversary but there has been no confirmation from the makers yet.



MALAYALAM ACTRESS MIYA GEORGE TIES THE KNOT

Miya George debuted in Malayalam films with Oru Small Family. She then debuted in Tamil with the film Amara Kaviyam after which she starred in Indru Netru Nalai with Vishnu Vishal. The actress had earlier confirmed that she has been engaged to her long-time family friend and businessman Ashwin Philip. The couple wanted to throw a grand engagement party in Ashwin's native Kottayam. However, due to the lockdown, the couple tied the knot in a private ceremony at a Church in Kottayam.



RAPE CASE FILED AGAINST BOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR ANURAG KASHYAP

Payal Ghosh had in an interview, detailed her experience with Anurag, which happened around the time he was making Bombay Velvet. Anurag had later tweeted and denied all charges against him. Ever since the interview, a lot of people spoke about the misuse of the Me-Too movement. Responding to it, Payal had tweeted: "People who are saying that it's for politics and that I am misusing the situation. Imagine (god forbid) your sister or daughter in my position, it can even be the mother... and then let's talk. You would go to war against such men. Isn't it? PERIOD!!" She had continued, "People blame women for everything and post smash the patriarchy. It's time to stand with the women. Let them be heard. A voice suppressed is a generation of women oppressed. It is 2020. Come on, India! #MeToo." Actress Kangana Ranaut and BJP leader Roopa Ganguly also came in support of the actress. Eventually after several from the film industry including the director's ex-wife and actress Kalki Koechlin, Kaala actress Huma Qureshi and Sacred Games actress Elnaaz Norouzi came in support of Anurag Kashyap, Payal Ghosh has filed a rape case against him.

SUPERSTAR AMITABH BACHCHAN'S BEAUTIFUL SOCIAL MEDIA TRIBUTE TO SP BALASUBRAHMANYAM

It came as a shocker when legendary singer SP Balasubrahmanyam passed away as a result of cardiac arrest. Several including the Prime Minister and President of Indian expressed their grief. On social media, Amitabh Bachchan shared a beautiful picture and a touching post along with it. "The pandemic claims yet another gem... the voice of great divinity and soul. In the middle of the work schedule, the mind works at a tangent that brings emotion for the departed – SP Balasubrahmanyam, the God gifted voice gone silent... and day on day the very special have left us for the heavens. and as they would often say 'to a better place'. the pandemic claims yet another gem. the voice of great divinity and soul. Long years ago, at a function I had had the honour of meeting him. a simple modest human, despite the immense celebrity he was bestowed with. But the work continues ... life needs the momentum to keep moving ...and so we do," wrote Senior Bachchan in his blog.





SHAH RUKH KHAN'S DAUGHTER SUHANA KHAN ADDRESSES COLOURISM

Shah Rukh Khan's daughter Suhana has opened up about being trolled and abused for her skin tone. In her recent social media post, she said,"There's a lot going on right now and this is one of the issues we need to fix!! This isn't just about me, it's about every young girl/ boy who has grown up feeling inferior for absolutely no reason. Here are just a few of the comments made about my appearance. I've been told I'm ugly because of my skin tone, by full grown men and women, since I was 12 years old. Other than the fact that these are actual adults, what's sad is that we are all Indians, which automatically makes us brown — yes we come in different shades but no matter how much you try to distance yourself from the melanin, you just can't."

DEEPIKA PADUKONE, RAKUL PREET SINGH, SHRADDHA KAPOOR AND SARA ALI KHAN QUESTIONED BY THE NCB

It came as a shocker when Deepika Padukone's alleged social media conversation with her manager Karishma asking for illegal substances released on news channels and social media. The Narcotics Control Bureau is yet to prove if the actress is guilty or not only after a thorough investigation. Indian 2 actress Rakul Preet Singh, Deepika Padukone, Shraddha Kapoor, and actress Sara Ali Khan have been summoned by the NCB for further investigation and while that is about to begin, here is a question. How did the NCB get hold of Deepika Padukone's alleged "Drug Chat"? News channels that first accessed WhatsApp chats between actor Rhea Chakraborty and others have now shifted attention to a conversation which was part of a group chat from 2017, allegedly between Deepika Padukone and her manager Karishma.



BARRY JENKINS TO MAKE A PREQUEL TO THE LION KING

The Academy Award winning director is getting us all excited about yet another Disney Prequel and it is none other than that of The Lion King. It has been reported that Disney is very excited for this franchise after the humungous success the first film saw. In fact, writer Jeff Nathanson has returned to write a first draft for the film. As for Jenkins, it must represent an interesting creative opportunity, to say the least. Whether this is the project you'd hope for him or not, having this man in the world of blockbuster filmmaking presents some intriguing possibilities.





GIGI HADID AND ZAYN MALIK WELCOME THEIR FIRST CHILD

One of Hollywood's most famous couples Gigi Hadid and Zayn Malik have officially become parents. The duo welcomed their first child, a baby girl and bother the mother and the child are hale and healthy. Confirming the news on social media, Zayn wrote, "Our baby girl is here, healthy & beautiful. To try put into words how i am feeling right now would be an impossible task. The love i feel for this tiny human is beyond my understanding. Grateful to know her, proud to call her mine, & thankful for the life we will have together x." Gigi and Zayn have been together on and off for the past five years and the couple announced the pregnancy early this year.



JUSTIN AND HAILEY BIEBER CELEBRATE THEIR FIRST WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Justin and Hailey tied the knot at a New York courthouse surprising the fans in the year 2018. In the year 2019, they tied the knot yet again at a star-studded lavish wedding in South Carolina. The couple shared their anniversary wishes to one another on social media. While Hailey wrote, "1 year ago we had the best wedding. Wish I could live this day over and over." Justin wrote, "Hailey Bieber. I am so lucky to be YOUR husband! You teach me so much every day and make me such a better man!" the Grammy winner wrote. "I am committed for the rest of our lives to empower you to be the woman God has called you to be!" ■

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