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Wellness : Alternative therapies for healing



Wellness according to Ayurveda

Homeopathy for five common ailments

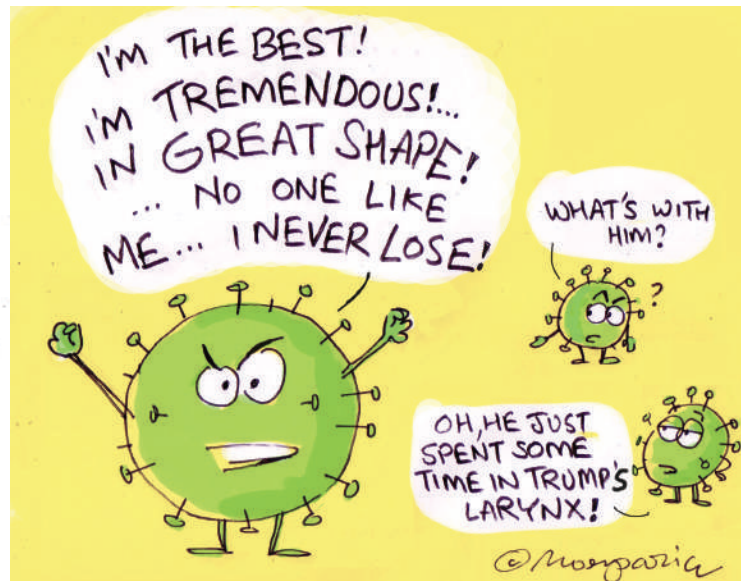
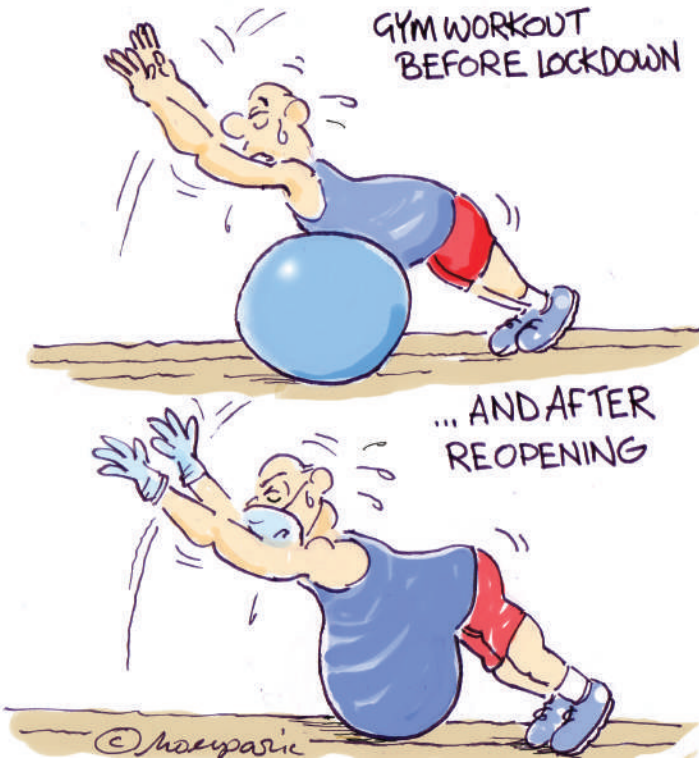
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Face to Face

Sairam Iyer



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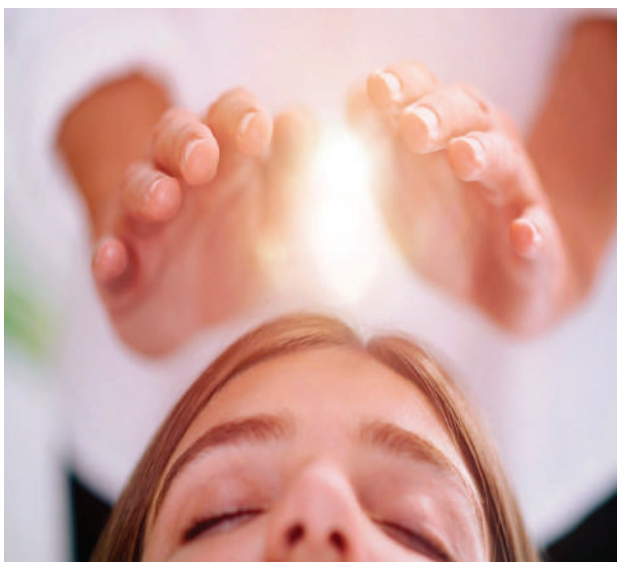
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Alternative medicine: Back to the future

Mind-body concepts have not only re-emerged in the 21st century, they have also established themselves as much as they were set forth by our ancients — Plato, Aristotle, Galen, and Paracelsus — who suggested that health is a balance of the body, mind and spirit and that illness is as much caused by emotional factors as much as disease. Dr. Rajgopal Nidamboor gives us a lowdown on the broad domain of complementary and alternative therapies available to us, today.



When Bernie Siegel, MD, the renowned paediatric surgeon and best-selling author of *Love, Medicine and Miracles*, documented his medical experiences he underlined the fact that there was apparently a connection between the palpable, visible, audible human body and the mysterious forces and mechanisms interpreted as “mind.” Other eminent physicians who have reported that their findings support such a concept include Drs Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, C Norman Shealy, Larry Dossey, Andrew Weil, Deepak Chopra, Dean Ornish, Richard Firshein, and Mark Hyman.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), which epitomises Siegel's insightful synthesis, is a broad domain of healing resources. It includes all alternative health systems, modalities, practices and their accompanying theories.

The fundamental fulcrum of CAM is its approach to whole body healing, as also prevention and treatment of the underlying causes of diseases and conditions, while looking at the whole individual, as one unified whole, not just the parts of the whole, but the sum and substance of the whole. This is evidenced to significantly improve the individual's —

or, the patient's — overall health and quality of life.

CAM therapies include ayurveda, homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy, herbal medicine, new-age healing, chiropractic, acupuncture, massage, music therapy, among several others. What's more, with the rising costs of prescription drugs, or medicine, and the increasing number of reports of the dangers and side - or after-effects associated with them, more and more people are now seeking alternative therapies. Most CAM therapies are considered to be safe and useful — especially in trained, professional hands.

The foundational principles of CAM

The principles of complementary therapy date back to 4,000 years. Picture this. In ancient India and China, it was accepted that wellness and illness were opposite forces, wherefrom wellness held illness in balance. Our ancient physicians, viz., Suśruta and Charaka, observed that achieving balance and harmony of the body, mind and spirit were as much related to good, optimal health — in other words, wellness — as also keeping illness at bay.

This is what CAM aims to achieve, while regulating homeostasis, or harmonious balance.

You have heard of the word, holistic therapy, right? By definition, holistic therapy is any treatment, or therapy session, intended to treat the individual as a whole at all levels — mind, body and spirit. Most complementary, or alternative, therapies bid fair to such a principle.

It may also be mentioned that when a given alternative medicine, or therapy, is used alone, or in place of conventional medicine, it is called “alternative.” When treatment, or therapy, is prescribed along with, or in addition to conventional medicine, it is referred to as “complementary medicine,” as the two practices complement each other.

There is yet another element. Alternative medicine, or therapy, is suggested to be outside of the area, or perimeter, of conventional (modern) medicine — albeit most of the practices are derided by conventional physicians as being unscientific, “snake oil” balderdash.

CAM therapies in a nutshell

Mind-Body/Spiritual: This relates to the emotional and psychological aspects of the individual, or patient's health. Examples of mind-body or spiritual therapies include hypnosis, breathing techniques, dance, music, art therapy, yoga and meditation

Oriental Medicine: This category of medicine aims to accomplish natural balance by restoring the body's natural energy flow, called prana, or chi (pronounced "chee").

Examples:

Acupuncture: stimulating certain pressure points with needles

Acupressure: massage technique of pressure points

Qi gong: a mind-body-spirit practice that integrates posture, movement and breathing techniques to improve one's mental and physical health

Reiki (Universal Life Energy): involves the channelling of spiritual energy through the practitioner to help heal, or harmonise, the body.

Ayurveda: India's ancient, or traditional, system of medicine, Ayurveda means "science of life." Ayurveda emphasises on the body, mind, and spirit "connect" to help restore harmony in the individual, or patient. This

includes special diets, exercise, meditation, herbs, massage, exposure to sunlight and controlled breathing, among others.

Homeopathy: This Western therapy is based on the idea that a patient may be treated by using small doses of a medicine that produces the same symptoms as the patient's illness. Homeopathy uses extremely diluted extracts from herbs, minerals, animal substances, and so on, as potent remedies for illness, or disease.

Naturopathy: This is a natural approach to healing naturally through diets, herbal remedies, nutritional supplements, homeopathy, exercise, massage, spinal and soft tissue manipulation, acupuncture, hydrotherapy (use of water to promote healing), counselling, light therapy, and other techniques.

Aromatherapy: This therapy uses special scented oils to treat physical and emotional problems. The oils may be inhaled, or applied topically on the skin, sometimes in the form of massage. Types of oils used during aromatherapy include eucalyptus, lavender, rosemary, and thyme, among others, aside from several exotic oils and fragrances.

Biological therapies: This form of therapy uses vitamins, minerals, botanicals, or herbal supplements, nutraceuticals (coenzyme Q10, alpha-lipoic acid), and phytonutrients (curcumin, resveratrol). This is often used in conjunction with conventional and CAM therapies.

Herbert Benson, MD, the pioneering mind-body physician, and author of the landmark book, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief*, summed it up aptly: "Alternative medicine is given serious due in light of the traditional practice of Western medicine." He observed, "Writer Luigi Barzini suggests that Americans (for instance) are compelled to act because we believe 'the main purpose of a man's life is to solve problems.' Despite the fact that the body is the grandest problem-solver there is, quietly and perpetually sustaining life, overcoming billions of obstacles without our conscious imperatives for it to do so, we don't

trust it. Instead we turn to our medicine cabinets. Our doctors' first impulse is to prescribe something for us, and we fully expect to emerge from these visits with a prescription in hand. But, at the same time, record numbers of Americans (as also millions of people worldwide) are spending record numbers of their healthcare dollars on unconventional healers — chiropractors, acupuncturists, herbalists, and so on — who they trust will care more about them as individuals than as sums of parts. While some studies show that patients are generally happy with their own doctors, managed care, with its provider lists and required numbers of patients a doctor must see each day, makes this relation-

ship between doctor and patient harder to preserve.”

Healing, a personal evolution

To paraphrase Rudolph Ballentine, MD, author of *Radical Healing: Integrating the World's Great Therapeutic Traditions to Create a New Transformative Medicine*, the integration and interaction of Western and Eastern medicines make for an exciting path: ‘Radical Healing’ is built on these unifying concepts; they are the practical essence of a medicine that is simple and universal, rooted in the perennial principle of healing as personal evolution. Ballentine adds, “Each of the great healing traditions has arisen in its own culture to help resolve problems peculiar to that setting, so each — e.g., Ayurveda, homeopathy, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), European and Native American herbology, nutrition, and psychotherapeutic bodywork — has its weaknesses as well as strengths. By integrating them, superimposing one upon another in layer after layer of complementary perspectives and techniques, we can arrive at an amalgam that is far more potent and thorough than any one of them taken alone.”

C Norman Shealy, MD, PhD, author of *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Natural Remedies*, underlines yet another facet. He avers that the physician's role is to be a ‘triage officer,’ one who quickly assesses the status of patients and what immediate treatment they need. Triage is usually associated with victims of accidents, war, or natural disaster and is geared to saving as many people as possible. A triage officer would stand at the door when a patient is significantly ill and advise when medicine, or surgery, is truly needed to save life, or function. As Eugene A Stead Jr, MD, Shealy's professor of medicine, highlighted. “When life and function are not at risk, as in the vast majority of symptomatic illnesses, the patient should ‘go into the department stores and choose that which most appeals.” The “department store,” of course, was his analogy for all the alternative methods of healing that are now available to us.

Focus on the individual, not just the disease



Laughter is the best medicine

The late author Norman Cousins, most renowned for his bestselling *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*, and *Head First: The Biology of Hope and the*

Healing Power of the Human Spirit, and teacher at the UCLA School of Medicine and contributing essayist for *The Power to Heal: Ancient Arts & Modern Medicine*, put it so succinctly, “(Clearly), in our modern age, treatment for any disease requires the best that medical science has to offer; all the emotional determination in the world usually falls short without prompt and consistent medical intervention. But, just as clearly, treating physical illness without paying corresponding attention to emotional needs can have only a partial effect.” He also observed, “More than 2,000 years after the death of Hippocrates, we are coming back to the original Hippocratic ideal of the patient not as a passive vessel into which the physician pours therapeutic skills and medicaments, but as a sovereign human being capable of generating powerful responses to disease. These powerful responses won't reverse every incidence of disease or illness; otherwise, we would live forever. But, by beginning to recognise these powers, we are enhancing vital elements of the recovery process,” while looking at the individual as one integrated whole, and not just parts of the whole.

Cousins, who was a high-profile American proponent of combining conventional and alternative medicine for years before his death in 1990, at age 78, was afflicted (in the early 1970s) with ankylosing spondylitis — a life-threatening degenerative spinal disease. When he was given a gloomy prognosis, he decided to take massive doses of vitamin C, in addition to his physician's treatments, and introduced laughter as the best medicine of all. He deluged his days with Marx Brothers' films, *Candid Camera* episodes, humorous books — anything and everything funny that elicited belly laughter for at least ten minutes at a time. After each laugh session, Cousins' doctor tested his blood sedimentation rate — an indicator of the status of inflammation in the body — and, it was found that it dropped consistently, until 1976, when Cousins recovered from the disease. The first published account of Cousins' experience appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and Cousins received an honorary degree in medicine from Yale University. Since then, laughter has actually been scientifically measured and shown to reduce stress and pain — this outcome, in essence, being initiated, or created, by changes in our hormonal and also immune systems.

This isn't all. Just think of increased antibody production in the upper respiratory tract, amplified lymphocytes, or cells that fight tumours and viruses, lung “expansion” and also augmented heart rate “engineered” through a pleasurable exercise called laughing. This not only encourages people, but also makes it imperative for them to heed to the fundamental tenets of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) as also the Holy Bible's Proverbs 17:22: “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”



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Wellness according to Ayurveda

*Optimal health in Ayurveda focuses not only on physical wellness, but also mental and spiritual well-being, says **Ambika P. Nayak**.*



Ayurveda is gaining global attention and fame today, not only for its herbal wonders, but also for its preventative finesse. Realistically speaking, Ayurveda is beyond herbal shampoos, soaps and oil massages. It is a way of life. Apart from treating disease and preventing illness, certain timeless, also fundamental aspects, such as post-illness care and recovery, are also an essential part of Ayurveda.

Yathaa pinde tathaa brahmaande, yathaa brahmaande tathaa pinde — this is the concept of the macrocosm and microcosm. Both the universe and the human body are made up of the same basic elements — *panchamahaabhoota*, viz., earth, water, fire, air, space. Hence, all that is available in the greater universe constructs the smaller universe called the *Homo sapiens*. In the same way, any imbalance can also be repaired using substances available naturally. This is *Loka purusha saamya siddhanta* of Ayurveda.

The main aim, or purpose, of Ayurveda as propagated in one of the most celebrated treatises, *Charaka Samhita*, is — prevention first. *Swasthasya swasthya rakshaanam, aaturasya vikaara prashamanam* — preservation of health and prevention of diseases is just as important. Popping a pill, or consuming various decoctions, does not achieve prevention.

It is a continuous process and it needs to be carried out every single day. Watching what we eat and what we do can give insights of our health status. Daily regime (*dinacharya*) and seasonal regime (*rtucharya*) are

unique concepts of disease prevention through Ayurveda — they highlight what one needs to inculcate in day-to-day practice to stay healthy, as also dos and don'ts with regard to food and activities of each season (*rtu*) to avoid seasonal exacerbations, or incursion of disease.

The Ayurveda way of life

There are various factors that form an integral part of assessment in the Ayurvedic way of life. The most important among them are — a person's body type (*prakrati*), metabolism (*agni*), imbalance in dosha causing the illness (*vata, pitta, kapha*), and the system involved in the occurrence of disease (*dhaatu*).

Agni (warmth) is what differentiates the living from the non-living. The source of energy in humans is derived from the food that one eats — while digestion, or metabolism, is a continuous process taken care of by the 'digestive fire' in the gastrointestinal tract, which, in turn, nourishes the body and releases energy that is responsible for all kinds of activities at gross and minute levels. Hence, *aahaara* (food) is taken as one of the three pillars of life, according to Ayurveda; the other two being *nidraa* (sleep) and *brahmacharya* (abstinence from anything bad, or untoward). The beginning of every disease except injuries at some point of time starts with impairment in one's *agni*.

It is, therefore, imperative for us to maintain *agni* at its optimum level for good health. Assessment of one's *agni* is foremost for any Ayurveda physician.

The treatment principle of almost all diseases in Ayurveda literature is keyed to treating this *agni* first and other treatment plans follow. If metabolism is maintained, the body's capacity to heal naturally is accentuated. Also, for medicine, or food, to help the body rejuvenate, it has to regulate digestion and be readily absorbed by the body — the prime functions of *agni*.

Agni holds the key

What plays a role in maintenance of *agni*? The principal factor is the food that we eat. Eating balanced and the right kind of food in right amounts in accordance with one's *prakrati* (body constitution), *vikrati* (disease state), *desha* (the place to which one belongs — traditional food), *kaala* (time — seasonal and day-to-day), *saatmya* (wholesome to the body) is important. Indulgence in wrong eating habits directly affects the *agni* and such continuous insults trigger imbalance in the *tridosha* (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*); it also paves the way for illness.

Knowing the body type gives an idea about dietary and lifestyle corrections required for maintaining equilibrium in the body. It also checks the progression of pathogenesis.

Treating disease through Ayurveda happens at multiple levels. It doesn't stop at symptomatic relief, but it goes into identifying the causative factors, nullifying the same and reversing the damage, if any, to the body tissues such that recurrence is avoided, while paving the way for disease prevention in the future.

Care after recovery from illness is often neglected in the present dispensation. Yet another unique concept of Ayurveda is *rasaayana*, which covers care during convalescence. There are different kinds of *rasaayana* — everyday practices like consumption of healthy fats and micronutrients in the food for better nerve and brain health, drinking plenty of water for good, healthy skin, disease-wise *rasaayana* like *Ashwagandha* for neurological disorders, *Guduchi* (*giloy*) for arthritis and so on. Ayurveda as a medical science not only explains in great detail the benefits of different food items, it also promotes the use of food as medicine — for the prevention of disease and also treatment.

More than gut cleansing

It may be noted that inducing bowel movement by

use of *triphala*, *nityam*, *kayam*, *isabgol* and other products with laxative effects causes only gut cleansing, but not detoxification. One wrongly understood concept of Ayurveda is *Panchakarma*. It is not just oil massages and relaxation techniques; it is a process of systemic detoxification to taking control over disease-forming entities, much before or after the emergence of a disease.

Eating balanced and the right kind of food in right amounts in accordance with one's prakrati (body constitution), vikrati (disease state), desha (the place to which one belongs — traditional food), kaala (time — seasonal and day-to-day), saatmya (wholesome to the body) is important.

There is a misconception about the use of heavy metals in Ayurvedic medicines. These heavy metals have also been used in various other forms, most commonly in pipelines, vaccines, personal care products, fertilisers and pesticides. When metals are used in Ayurvedic formulations, they undergo an elaborate process of purification and are used in the right combinations such that the beneficial effects of such heavy metals are well received. Also, the caveat that needs to be emphasised is simple — such herbo-mineral preparations ought to be used judiciously. It is, however, worth mentioning that not all Ayurvedic formulations contain heavy metals.

Optimal health in Ayurveda focuses not only physical wellness, but also mental and spiritual well-being. It is, thus, holistic. Our body, mind and soul are so well interconnected that to feel healthy it is important for all the factors to be balanced. Ayurveda emphasises on the

perspective, more so on a customised, individual-centric, or bespoke basis, because each of us is as unique as our signature, or fingerprint.



Ambika P. Nayak, MD (Ayurveda), is Founder & Managing Director of Ayurvedeeyam, a speciality Ayurveda clinic in Bengaluru. Her passion for the ancient, yet “completest” natural medical system, and professional clinical skills are keyed to raising

awareness for Ayurveda as a first choice of treatment for illness and healthy living, just as much as her axiom — Svasthasya svāsthya raksanam — the age-old, fundamental principle of Ayurveda. Nayak, who has presented papers and participated in national and international symposia, is also a strong advocate of panchakarma, thanks to its fully holistic and proven therapeutic efficacy in the treatment and prevention of illness, or disease.

Homeopathy for five common ailments

*If you'd want to take it into our own hands and deal with common problems, you can do so by correctly following homeopathy's principles and carefully listening to the language of symptoms, writes **Barbara Etcovitch**.*



We have all experienced times of ill-health that, for the most part, have been addressed by a variety of trained medical professionals. What many of us do not know, however, is that we can deal with some common complaints by ourselves if only we use a safe and inexpensive form of medicine — homeopathy.

Homeopathy is a holistic system of medicine founded over 200 years ago by Samuel Hahnemann, MD, the renowned German chemist and physician. The essence of homeopathy is dealing with health problems by stimulating and rebalancing the body's own energy principle, or "vital force," which can get disturbed by different causes, viz., injuries, stresses, violent emotions, dietary indiscretions, etc.

The disharmony in the vital force is often manifested through symptoms — which are primarily deviations from the norm and language of the vital force.

If we want to take matters into our own hands and deal with health conditions, we can do so by correctly following homeopathy's principles and carefully "listening" to the language of symptoms.

There are hundreds of homeopathic remedies derived from a variety of sources, and it is by matching the symptom-picture of the substance closest, or

most "similar," to the symptom-picture produced in an ill individual, that a cure is achieved. This process in homeopathy is known as "like cures like." This is the foundational principle of homeopathy.

The following is a selection of conditions that respond well to homeopathic medicines, or remedies. When the remedy is properly chosen, the imbalance in the vital force would be resolved quite easily and within a few doses of the medicine.

It should be noted that any condition which appears to be complex, any condition in which the symptom-picture is confusing, or severe, and any illness which rapidly worsens, or goes on for more than a couple of days needs to be addressed by a trained homeopath. Of course, in an emergency, the patient should be taken to a hospital immediately.

The following are cases which were addressed and resolved by carefully observing and matching the symptom-picture of the patient and the symptom-picture of well-known homeopathic remedies.

Case 1: Indigestion

Homeopathy came to the rescue when Patient A returned from a night of heavy eating and drinking to find himself

feeling terribly ill with indigestion.
 Patients A's symptoms included —
 A distended abdomen
 Offensive flatulence (gas)
 Pain and tenderness (sensitivity to touch) in the pit of the stomach
 A strong desire for fresh air
 Symptoms better sitting up
 Symptoms temporarily improved by belching
 The homeopathic remedy prescribed was Carbo vegetabilis (vegetable charcoal), in the 30c potency, as the substance produces the same symptom-picture that Patient A was exhibiting. The prescription was given every 3-4 hours as needed and repeated only as long as the symptoms persisted.

Case 2: Heatstroke

Homeopathy triumphed in a case of exposure to the elements when Patient B was affected badly by heatstroke at a soccer match.
 Patient B's symptoms included —
 Hot, flushed face
 Throbbing, bursting headache
 Dizziness, light-headedness
 Nausea; vomiting
 Lack of sweating despite the heat.
 It was most important that Patient B's body temperature be cooled down and so she was immediately moved to a cool room.
 She was given Glonoinum (nitro-glycerine) in the 30c potency, every 30 minutes, until there was obvious improvement after which the remedy was stopped.
 It should be noted that the symptom-picture includes —
 Dilated, fixed pupils
 Dry (not sweaty) skin
 Delirium.
 The remedy most similar would be Belladonna (deadly nightshade) 30c, taken immediately and repeated at 2-3 hour intervals, or as needed till full improvement is achieved.

Case 3: Anticipatory anxiety

It was exam time again and the anticipatory anxiety experienced by Patient C was running high. Fortunately, homeopathy was able to intervene to balance things out.
 Patient C's symptoms included —
 Lurking anxiety and preoccupation with exams
 Anticipation and nervousness
 Impulsiveness, a desire to do foolish things
 Hurriedness
 Bouts of diarrhoea
 The homeopathic remedy prescribed was Argentum nitricum 200c (silver nitrate), at 3-4 hour intervals. The doses were spaced further apart on improvement and the patient weaned off from the medicine completely.

Case 4: Insomnia

Patient D returned from another stimulating meeting at the

Environmental Club. He was flying high on the challenging ideas of the night and replaying much of what had been so stimulating during the meeting. It was late and he went to bed only to find that it was impossible to sleep. His mind and body were hyperactive.
 Patient D's symptoms included —
 An overactive mind
 Wide awake
 A rush of ideas playing over and over again
 Restlessness and nervousness.
 The homeopathic remedy prescribed was Coffea cruda 30c (unroasted coffee), every 30 minutes, until sleep ensued.

Case 5: Acute injury

One of homeopathy's best known and extremely fast-acting and effective remedies was prescribed to Patient E following a nasty fall from his bicycle which resulted in damage to the soft tissue, severe bruising and a bump on the forehead.
 Patient E's symptoms included —
 Bruises over much of his body
 Bump on the forehead, not yet discoloured
 Sore, bruised and beaten feeling
 Fear of being touched
 The remedy prescribed was Arnica montana (leopard's bane), in the 30c potency, every hour initially, and spacing the doses further apart upon improvement. Arnica reigns supreme in injuries where the soft tissue is involved. It ought to be also considered in head injuries in which a bump that has not yet discoloured manifests. Its action is extremely swift.

Summary & results

The five cases illustrated, in this article, were resolved with a few doses of the prescribed homeopathic remedy. All remedies were given either in the 30c, or 200c, potency, created through the process of "potentisation." This procedure continually dilutes the original substance and then "succusses," or shakes, it a specified number of times between each dilution. The process produces safe, energetic, non-toxic homeopathic medicines, or remedies.



Barbara Etcovitch, BA, MA, DHom (UK), RSHom (NA), CCH, AIEM, is a classical homeopath, interfaith minister, freelance writer, and lecturer. She has a BA, from Sir George Williams University, a MA in Literature, from the University of Ottawa, and a Diploma in Classical Homeopathy from the School of Homeopathy, Devon, UK. She was ordained by the All Faiths Seminary International in New York City in 2004. She offers her classical homeopathic consultations and services from her office in Montreal, Canada, and worldwide via Skype.

Beating stress, naturally!

The best answer to stress is to avoid it as far as possible. If this is not possible, don't despair. Just go for mindful, or focused, relaxation — your natural stress-buster, says Dr. Rajgopal Nidamboor.



— “fight-or-flight” response. The idea has served us well for thousands of years, although the form of stress we encounter today is starkly different from what our ancestors faced. In earlier times, if one faced a deadly animal, they would be ready to fight, or flee, in a flash. Once the threat was over, one would return to one's normal state — a state of balance.

In today's world, the types of stress we face are not direct, or physical. Contemporary stress is more often related to, or caused by, emotional and psychological factors. So, you may well guess that the “fight-or-flight” response of yore is not appropriate to our times. You cannot, for instance, “blast” your manager if you do not agree with their line of thought on a given project, right?

A certain amount of stress is part of our condition. It is a contributory factor in several disorders — and, a direct cause of illness. Stress also, likewise, motivates us to reach our goals faster. Stress is related to changes that occur in the body when the mind sees a threat, or challenge. The threat can be real, or imaginary.

The changes that occur in the body, due to stress, are caused by the release of chemical messengers, into the blood stream, and by nerve impulses. This is famously called as the “fight-or-flight” response — a survival mechanism.

You'd divide the stress response into three components.

Preparation: The hazard, or danger, is distinguished and assessed in the brain. This is involuntary; almost instantaneous. It does not require conscious control.

Resolution: As the subconscious brain prepares the body for “action”, a specialised part of the nervous system — the parasympathetic — stirs the body with impulses. In the process, the body produces catecholamines to be carried in the bloodstream to receptors located in various glands.

Explosion. In this state, the brain is fully alert. As the muscles get charged with energy, they push the body to take crucial “action” — with full adeptness.

You sure know the term that best describes stress

What's more, the stresses we encounter today are continual. They are also cumulative. However, our body is intended to function and react adequately to stress. Naturally. At the same time, it is not uncommon for most of us to stay in a continual state of “stressful” readiness. Reason: we are not always fully relaxed, or physiologically active, to liberate our stress levels. This is unlike what happened to our ancestors who would release their physical reactions for a definitive outcome — end of the battle, or escape from a perilous beast. On the contrary, the stresses that we face today may over time, or cumulatively, trigger hypertension (high blood pressure), diabetes, digestive disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) muscular tension, emotional or psychological problems and immune dysfunction.

Why relaxation

Relaxation is the bright as also the other side of the spectrum. It reflects the “normal state” to which our ancestors would return soon after overcoming a known threat, or danger. They would also achieve such a relaxed state of mind because the stress of their fight, or flight, response with danger was constructively offset by physical action. The situation is different today. Yet, there are ways to dealing with stress just as effectively. Physical activity, or exercise, in any form, for example, can help scatter your stress hormones. This can help your body to relax and ease

your stressful distress.

You may feel a wee bit stiff following a work-out though, all right, but the overall effect is relieving. Any activity — a game of tennis, running, or brisk walk — can reduce your stress levels. It is a different thing that most people find it difficult to get the time, or interest, for regular exercise. In such a case, or otherwise, it is important for you to use relaxation techniques, such as meditation and yoga — they help you dissipate your stress levels. This will help you, in turn, to maintain good health and energy. As the adage goes, you can do your best only when you are relaxed. Not when you are tense.

What is relaxation?

Relaxation is a state of the mind. It is also a state of the body. When the mind is tranquil, the body is calm, and vice versa. A tense mind activates a tense body and vice versa. When the mind and body are relaxed, the body is able to maintain good and/or optimal health and well-being. This, in turn, powers the immune system and helps repair tissue damage, which takes place in the body in the wake of stress.

Relaxation is a “must-do” to dealing with psychological stress as much as physical stresses of everyday life. When the mind is relaxed, the heart and respiratory rates slow down; they are steady too. Our blood pressure is healthily fine. The muscles are relaxed. The internal organs have adequate supply of nutrients and also blood. Our feel-good chemicals, or endorphins, are also in adequate supply when we are relaxed. Endorphins affect our moods. They also give us a feeling of well-being, besides donning the role of natural pain-killers.

Exercise helps to release endorphins. This is reason enough why exercise, or a good bout of laughter, is suggested to be one of nature’s most celebrated stress-busters.

The technique

You may call the quintessential practical “how-to”, or keynote, of this article, as mindful or focused progressive muscular relaxation. It is easy to learn and practice at home. It entails the contraction and relaxation of the large muscle groups in the body, one after the other. Start at your feet and end up with your face, till each part is free of tension. It is not simple for some people to “unchain,” or learn the art of muscular easing swiftly. With persistence, this can be learned and with good effect.

The basics

All you need to first do is look deeply within — into yourself. Not your surroundings. Make sure you are not disturbed by your kids, spouse, telephone, or noise, when you practice the technique. Use comfortable clothes. Also, make sure the room is softly lit. Comfortably cool in the tropics; warm in cold climes. Lie down on your back on a firm bed, or cozy mat.

You may place a thin, soft pillow under your head. Or, below your knees. Place your arms by your side. Alternately, you can put them across your stomach. Either way, try to remain comfortable. Find out what suits your comfort level best.

But, remember — you need time to master the technique. Have patience. When you have mastered the technique, you will be amazed to “let go” at will — anywhere. You will delight in the fact that you are able to stay calm and relaxed even in the face of stressful situations. Over time, you will also know how you can stay in tune with your body and also locate where you “accumulate” stress, especially when you begin to get tense.

Making relaxation work for you

Close your eyes. Let your mind go “blank.” Take a few deep breaths. Exhale s-l-o-w-l-y. Relax completely.

Start with your right foot. Twist your toes tight. Crunch your foot. Count up to 10. Let go. Relax. Now, shift your focus to your left foot. Repeat until your foot feels warm and droopy.

Tense the calf muscles of your right leg. Hold for a count of 10. Let go. Relax. Focus on the calf muscle of your left leg. Count up to 10, and relax.

In like manner, move up to your right thigh. Count up to 10. It will take time for you to feel relaxed at this stage. Not to worry. Repeat the step with your left thigh. Let go. Relax. Repeat the process until you feel your legs are heavy and immobile.

Now, clench your buttock (muscles) as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10. Let go. Repeat the process with your stomach muscles. You should now feel as if you are sinking into your bed, or mat.

As you move up to your chest, take three deep breaths. This will help you work on the muscles around your chest. It increases the level of oxygen in your blood. Exhale s-l-o-w-l-y and visualise your mental tensions being dispersed away.

Move to your right arm. Make a fist and “grip” it tightly. Hold for a count of 10. Let go. Repeat until your arm is warm and immovable. Repeat with your left arm. You may also tense your arms together, if you can. Now, “work up” your forearm, on either side, like you did with your thigh.

You now reach the most important part of the exercise — your shoulders and neck. Since most of the tension in the body is housed in the shoulders and neck muscles, it may take a little time for you to relax them fully. So, calm down — if you can’t get it right the first time.

(continued on page 14...)

Yoga, as more than therapy

*When people shift their attitude towards yoga and start looking at it as their special time with themselves and not just a health therapy, it can be a life changing experience, avers **Shameem Akthar**.*

So, if you shift your perspective towards yoga as your special time with yourself – which it really is – you begin to look forward to it.

If I gave you a spoonful of medicine, however sweet, and a cup of icecream, which will you choose?

This has been my goad, for all those who say, they lack the discipline to do yoga. There is no need for discipline. We overrate it. It is really about shifting perspective. If you see yoga as a therapy, then you will resist it. Anyone would. Why do you judge yourself harshly for it, or demean yourself as indisciplined. Instead, see yoga as your own Me-time. Fun time. Choose a style of yoga which engages you in such a fashion, then you will look forward to your practice.

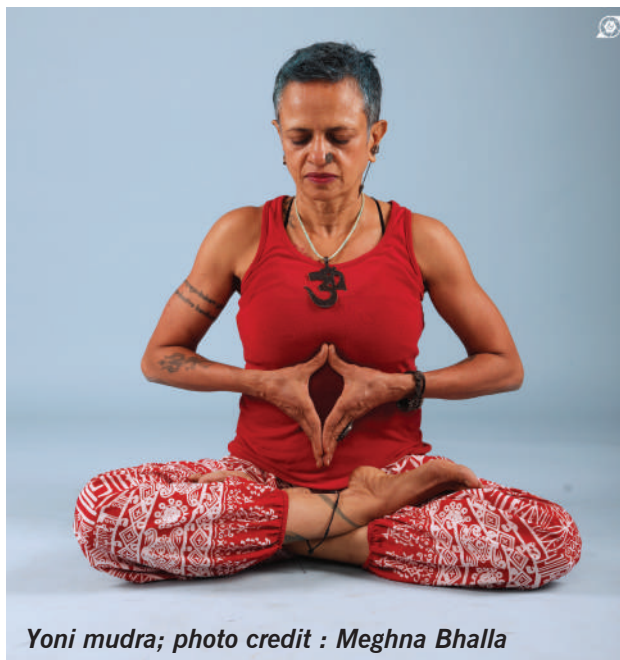
Make yoga your me-time

I have taught yoga for over two decades, after dunking an exciting career as a journalist/feature writer, with freedom to explore my love for writing. To turn over, and become a yoga teacher when it was neither paying, nor glamorous (as it is now) was difficult. I loved to practice. But teaching is not the same thing as practising. And to teach to a bunch of people who most often suffer it, can be tough. This is where I realised, that for me personally, the idea of discipline needed to be re-examined. Come rain, or shine, I had to be up before everybody else, and do my sadhana before the class, and then plunge head on into the class. No matter if there was a personal disaster, no matter if I had a physical issue, I just had to land up. I realised being disciplined would make me a stoic, even a sere teacher. Instead, I need to look forward to the class, bring in a huge amount of energy to be able to reach my enthusiasm to people who still lacked my love for the subject. So I realised that I need to make the idea of teaching fun.

I ritualised the entire business of waking up predawn (after being a night owl all my life, and choosing a profession that allowed night shifts, this was a huge hurdle). I kept out a colourful set of clothes, decided on accessories that matched it, all done the night before. In the morning, I would finish my meditation first, then sit by just enjoying the rare moment of stillness as the world hushed, before it began to clamour.

This moment of hush was and is a vital part of joy I feel, as I look forward to waking up early.

I realised, thanks largely to my yoga practice, that it is not the external, but the internal, labels that can lead to a



Yoni mudra; photo credit : Meghna Bhalla

sense of contentment and joy in our choices and activity. That way anything difficult or boring can be fed into our brain as exciting. And lo, it becomes that.

So, if you shift your perspective towards yoga as your special time with yourself – which it really is – you begin to look forward to it. Psst: you also begin to enjoy your own company... which, in turn, makes others enjoy your company too!

A sadhana that can change your life

If this shift happens there are so many positives:

- 1) You will be more regular with your practice, therefore gain all those benefits of yoga... health, high energy, and youthfulness.
- 2) When we redirect attention back to ourself (why is this so tough, has been a big puzzle to me) we actually create a biological condition for more release of dopamine, chemical that makes us feel calm, good and content. The lack of which makes us seek it, vainly, in external addictions.
- 3) If you learn to go for your practice with keenness you will also allow room for further growth in it. And once you immerse in it, you will appreciate, how it begins to improve upon other areas of your life, such as improved hand-limb co-ordination, cognitive skills, intuition, improved confidence, and better self-esteem.



Pose: nirlamba sirsasana / unsupported headstand;
photo credit : Meghna Bhalla

4) For the fun of it, then for any purpose, is the best way to learn something significant in your life. Children learn most things that way, till adults start imposing their warped values into their little heads. Not to compete, to be better than someone, or because it is a paying profession, but just because you enjoy it.

Here are other ways to relook your practice:

If there is something that you really do not like or

avoid on the mat, most likely it is what both your body and mind needs! This may seem odd, especially with most yoga classes (actually they do that for their own convenience!) insisting that you stay within your comfort zone. But let's not forget yoga's most important rule: *yogasch chitta vritti nirodah* ie yoga is the movement against the movement of your mind. It does not mean you immediately rush in where angels fear to tread, but examine things that you are avoiding on the mat, and see why, and seek a way around, to reach them safely, but surely.

Do not stay static. Keep an interesting trajectory of growth and create its own momentum of attraction that draws you to the mat.

Include all aspects of the practice. This idea reconnects back to the first one mentioned here. For instance, I have had so many students who tried to tell me they do not like pranayama or meditation, and wish for me to cut those aspects down. But yoga is a composite practice. This is as silly as putting a child in a school with just language and sports because it does not like maths or vernacular. Somewhere along the line all the subjects create your child's education and give it a wholeness, never mind its individual aptitude. The same rule applies for yoga as well.

So, instead of wistfully saying you wish you did more yoga, all you need to do is tweak your attitude. The sadhana will then fall in place.

This can change your life.



Shameem Akthar is a yoga teacher and author of three books on the subject, proprietor Spandana Studio

Beating stress, naturally!

(continued from page 12...)

Now — hunch your shoulders as far as possible. Hold tight and let them drop back to bed, or mat. You can even push your shoulders hard up to your ears, if possible. Hold. Let go. Repeat the sequence 8-10 times, or as many times as possible.

Once you have finished with your shoulders, rock your head from side-to-side. S-l-o-w-l-y. This will help loosen your neck muscles.

Focus on your face. You may smile, grimace, sulk, or bare your teeth, and so on. Hold for a few seconds. Let go.

Try to take a few more deep, even breaths. Imagine your tensions ebbing away into the distance. Recite a mantra: "I feel more relaxed; and, I'm calm." Now, imagine

your body sinking deep into your bed, or mat.

You may sure feel sleepy at this point in time. Don't go to sleep. Rest and unwind — for about ten minutes.

Come back into your own, s-l-o-w-l-y, or "shake" yourself before you get up and start your work, or chore, or anything else you were doing, or wish to do.

You are transformed and liberated — you will feel fresh, de-stressed and relaxed too.



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Flower power

*Flowers not only mesmerise us with their beauty, enhance mood and trigger off good vibes, but have the magical power to heal many ailments, says **Anuradha Pittie**, as she highlights the innate qualities of some of the flowers and their therapeutic uses.*

“God grows a plant for every disease. Look around nature and draw from God's pharmacy", said the mediaeval physician and philosopher Paracelsus.

Flowers, the crowning glory of every plant, mesmerise us with their sheer beauty and effortlessly convey a host of human emotions --- joy, sympathy, friendship, gratitude, love, admiration and so much more. Their decorative and therapeutic attributes were used by ancient civilisations and continue to play an important role in modern times.

Floral gifting



Flowers bring in good vibes

Flowers are powerful catalysts in triggering off good vibes. Studies show that a person receiving a bunch of flowers or even a single bloom, responds with surprise, joy or gratitude. In this way, flowers help to connect and bond, and the positive feelings evoked continue to benefit the recipient for a few hours. In the Chinese culture, chrysanthemums are gifted to the elderly for good health and longevity. An exchange of roses in various hues, representative of the many nuances of love, peak on St.Valentines Day and carnations

witness a boom on Mother's Day. Gifting flower bouquets reached its pinnacle in the Victorian era, where the floral visual vocabulary came in most handy to communicate in an otherwise restrained culture and secret messages were decoded depending on the variety, combination, number and colours of the flowers sent, along with their manner of presentation.

Floral tincture



Arnica gel - relieves pain and swelling

In 1796, German physician Samuel Hahnemann introduced Homeopathy, based on the 'Law of Similars', using the principle of 'like treats like'. Some tinctures and ointments were made from flowering plants, such as calendula to treat cuts, burns and other skin conditions, bellis perennis to heal wounds after a surgical procedure, pulsatilla (meadow anemone) for women's health issues and bryonia (devil's turnip) to settle down irritable patients. The potency and dosage were adjusted according to the intensity, frequency and nature of the ailment.

Floral aroma

The concentrated essential oils of aromatic flowers like lavender, rose and jasmine, rich in minerals and vitamins, are extensively used in massage blends with Base carriers such as olive, jojoba and almond oils to improve circulation, ease sore muscles, relax and rejuvenate. A few drops in a facial steam, or a foot soak is very effective. Even pets respond favourably to these subtle scents. Generally dogs go berserk during thunderstorms or loud noise and hide under furniture. A few drops of pure lavender oil, rubbed gently behind the ears and at the base of the skull, will soothe sufficiently to induce sleep. Lavender is a powerful



Rose - mood enhancer

The Moghul emperor Jehangir (1569-1627), in his biography 'Tuzuki Jehangiri' referring to the fragrance of the rose, says "there is no other scent of equal excellence...It lifts the spirit and refreshes the soul". The rose, a mood enhancer, helps to heal the heart, quite literally and figuratively.

Kannauj, in Uttarpradesh has historically been the 'Perfume capital of India'. The Indian traditional perfume is known as '*itr, itra, itar or attar*', and references of this are found in the seventh century biography 'Harsh-charit' written by Emperor Harsh's court poet Banabhatta. The 'Deg-bhapka' an eco friendly but complex hydro-distillation process, fired with wood and dung cakes, was used by highly skilled perfumers. Flowers were plucked in the wee hours of dawn to ensure maximum freshness and sandalwood was the base oil. Four tonnes of handpicked roses (*Rosa bourbounais*) produced a kilo of rose *itra*. The best quality *Ruh al gulab*, requires eight tonnes of rose petals to produce a kilo and costs over a lakh in rupees.

Floral culinary preparations

Many flowers are edible and lend themselves to the local cuisine. They add flavour and colour to salads, entrees and beverages. Deep red banana flowers are turned into a tasty oriental vegetable. Artichoke, broccoli and cauliflower are technically flowers, and widely used in main courses and fritters. Sipping a freshly brewed cup of floral tea does wonders -- Chamomile calms the nerves and relieves menstrual cramps, holy basil flowers increase immunity and rosebuds act as pelvic decongestants. The Thai make a decoction called Blue Tea using butterfly pea flowers (*clitoria ternatea*) – an excellent destresser that boosts brain power and combats premature ageing.

Rosella hibiscus and honeysuckle are used in sherbets; and lavender, sweet violets and bright orange

nasturtiums to garnish cakes and confectionery. Saffron (the stigmas and styles collected from '*sativus linne*', a variety of the crocus flower) aids digestion and is added to sherbets and especially to sweets cooked with milk.



Primrose oil- dietary supplement

Country wine is made combining flowers with seasonal fruits, berries and herbs. Rose petals bring in a whiff of romance to the wine, dandelions combined with ginger act as a liver tonic, ox-eye daisies assist with coughs, and elderberry flowers boost immunity. Some flowers are added to regular wine made from grapes, to add an enticing floral note, such as the apple-blossom, sweet acacia, iris, peony, magnolia, tanga orange blossom, and peppery lilac. Unwittingly, the charming innate qualities of each flower also reach out to affect the drinker, at a subtle level.

Floral essence

Dr. Edward Bach, a British physician and casualty medical officer, after extensive research, found a system to balance mental and emotional disturbances. Around the 1930s, he had developed 38 flower remedies and grouped them under seven predominant negative emotions, including grief, fear, envy, indecision, rigidity, fatigue and selfishness. A floral essence is the liquid infusion of a flower's life force or 'chi', and a few drops taken internally bring about changes in our thought patterns and emotional reactions. The tiny yellow rock rose gives the courage to face and tide over severe challenges; gentian to dissolve despondency, wild rose (this five-petalled beauty is the grandmother of all cultivated varieties) for apathy, and honeysuckle to let go of the past. He combined five flower essences, namely 'Star of Bethlehem' for shock, rock rose for panic, impatiens for agitation, cherry plum for loss of emotional control, and clematis for bemused feeling and fainting, to form the *Rescue Remedy* which is useful in any emergency or crisis situation, such as an accident.

(conitnued on page 28...)



Splendours of SIKKIM

The small mountain state of Sikkim in the North East is a favourite tourist destination for its breathtaking beauty of the Himalayas, its exotic flora and fauna and the many monasteries. Kanchengjunga, the patron goddess of the state and the third highest mountain in the world can be best viewed from Pelling, a lesser known destination, a five-hour drive from Gangtok city.

Text & Photographs: Katie



Foxtail Orchid



The widest range of orchids in a variety of hues grow in Sikkim

Heat! Sweltering, muggy heat and no respite; sweaty, sticky and sun-burnt is the fate of the Mumbaikar for most of the year. Respite comes only from air-conditioning. So one remains cooped up in a room, terrified to step outdoors. To beat the high temperatures of the city, we headed northwards into the Himalayas; our destination – Sikkim in the northeast of India. In retrospect, the choice of our first stop in Sikkim, makes me smile. City folk must head to another city! So, Gangtok, the capital city of Sikkim is where we began our sojourn.

The land of exotic flora and fauna

A part of the Eastern Middle Himalayas, Sikkim is a small mountain state with an area of 7,096 square kilometers, at an elevation of 28,169 square feet. Altitude and topographical variations that occur from the mountain base to its summits, foster unique flora and fauna. It hosts over 4000 plant species of which 523 are orchids. Moreover, 22 species of orchids are endemic to the state. Among the 574 bird species, ten of the eastern Himalayan species are native to Sikkim and of the total seventeen are threat-

ened. Its lush and diverse vegetation includes both the alpine and the sub-tropical and this in turn is the home of an exotic variety of fauna; the snow leopard, red panda, musk deer, blue sheep and the Shapi, a rare mountain goat with a long white mane also belongs here and is an endangered animal as well. Almost thirty-five percent of the state is covered by the Kanchenjunga National Park, a biosphere reserve. In July 2016, UNESCO declared it as the first *Mixed Heritage Site* of India and it owes name to the mountain – Kanchenjunga which it surrounds.

Kanchenjunga is the third highest mountain in the world with an elevation of 28,169 feet.

The change from the chaotic traffic and noise of Mumbai to the cool and equally chaotic, clogged roads of Gangtok is not all that much. Shops line the narrow roads with people weaving in and out of motor traffic, cars and buses parked along the very edge of the precipice had made my heart lurch and remains an indelible sight. When a traffic jam occurred, as it often did along those ribbon roads, the driver peaceably turned off the car engine and relaxed, unfazed.

The city of Gangtok

Gangtok, means hill cut and this is evident. Gangtok has been cut into the hillside, along the western side of a long ridge flanking the Ranipul river. Its origins are that of a hamlet, but with the building of the Enchey Monastery it became a Buddhist pilgrimage centre. The monastery was first built in the 1840s by the eighth Chogyal at the exact location where Lama Druptub Karbo had his hermitage. However, what is seen now was re-built in 1909, imitating a Chinese Pagoda and is one of two in Gangtok.

In 1894, The Sikkimese monarch who was under British protectorate changed the capital from Tumlong to Gangtok. It became the capital of what was left of Sikkim after an English conquest in the mid nineteenth century. After the defeat of the Tibetans by the British, Gangtok became a major stopover on the trade route between Tibet and British India. Following Indian Independence in 1947, Sikkim became a nation-state under the suzerainty of India, with the condition that it would retain its independence, according to the treaty signed between the Chogyal and the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In

1975, after years of political uncertainty and struggle, including riots, the monarchy was abrogated and Sikkim became India's twenty-second state.

Like every other hill city, Gangtok has grown by leaps and bounds in an ad hoc manner, trying to keep up with the modernism of the world. The city that began with single storied dwellings integrated into the pine covered slopes, now has seven to eight storey structures mushrooming all over its slopes. To add insult to injury, the new buildings are painted in the most startling colours - garish shades of indigo blue, dazzling yellow or chalky green, that is jarring and completely incongruous with the surrounding mountainside, which offers stunningly beautiful views. Aesthetics apart, there is a lot on offer in this mountain city with its narrow roads dipping up and down steep slopes, over which the Sikkimese race both ways with light steps. We decided to limit our exploration of the city to the relatively flat Mall Road and the mall itself, reminiscent of the British who once occupied this land and rooted their culture here as well. The Sikkimese have preserved it as a pedestrian zone. Brightly lit shops with a variety of wares and multi-cuisine hotels line both sides of the road. One can



A bird's eyeview of Gangtok city, the capital of Sikkim



Brightly lit shops and multi-cuisine hotels line both sides of the Mall Road in Gangtok

stroll along unhindered. Sitting on the street bench, we watch the ladies, traditionally attired in their *Khos* moving gracefully around.

A spectacular view of the Kangchenjunga

Next morning we moved higher up into the mountains to a little known destination – Pelling. Leaving Gangtok at 10 a.m., we had motored over slender, curvaceous roads and reached our destination at 3 p.m.

A buffeting Himalayan wind had engulfed us as we had alighted from the warm comfort of our jeep, pricking my half-clad arms with icy spikes. Hugging myself for warmth, I had dashed through the entrance door of the hotel. In the dimly lit lobby of the hotel, I had felt better, but, stunned by the chill, had remained shivering by the doorway. Suddenly, a little fellow had materialised. Bending forward correctly and formally, one hand behind his back, a tray balanced in the other, he had offered, “Ma`m, welcome drink, Cherry Brandy”. My face must have betrayed me and my hand shot out for the glass, for the waiter’s mouth had cracked into a smile, dimpling his cheeks. Then, we were escorted to our room. Immediately, its wide window had attracted us like a magnet. Framed perfectly within its square had been a panorama that kept us glued to the spot. The Khangchenjunga, crowned with snow, stood before us in all its majesty.

Wrenching ourselves away from the window view had been difficult. We had then decided to drive to Yuksom, forty kilometers from Pelling. Wending down the slim mountainous road with its treacherous curves and hair-pin bends our driver had kept the pace slow, obeying the sign on the road that said ‘Be gentle on my curves’. (Local drivers fortunately leave their egos at home, being responsible for the lives of the passengers and their own.) The sky was already overcast and a thin drizzle had begun to leak through the clouds, adding sheen and sparkle to the dense vegetation that covered every inch of the steep slopes that rose laterally along the inner side of the road. I had realised with a jolt that on the outer road-edge we were motoring along the line of tree tops; nothing could be glimpsed of the drop below! My heart had thumped a distress signal. It would have been a very short cut to a green heaven, if the car skidded off the road! Concentrating on the happier aspect of the journey, I had noticed that cardamom plants formed dense clumps. Here and there would appear some plantains, great clumps of bamboo, gigantic ferns and numerous other plants in multitudinous shades of green. Interspersed among these were the delicate whites of orchids, dangling shyly from the forks of mossy trees, wild daisies and other dainty little flowers that had found some space in the crevices of the road wall and stood out sharply. We stopped ecstatically to photograph, trying the patience of our driver who, simply could not understand our obsession to click pictures of one flower after another in multiples.



Spectacular view of the Kanchenjunga with its snow-capped peaks.

Midway, it was a waterfall, winking mischievously in the sun that halted us, its source- a pin point a few hundred feet above us. The stream rappelled down, jumping on to large boulders in steps and finally smashing itself into a small holding pool at the base of the slope with a shower of sparkles. Shedding inhibitions, I had removed my shoes and waded into the pool of cold water. Childish delight! Splashing and yelping in the icy water, ignoring remonstrations, I had cupped the crystal liquid and taken a few gulps of this manna from heaven, before we moved on.

The sacred landscape of Yuksom

Yuksom, is perhaps better known for its connection with the Bollywood star of yesteryears, Danny Dengzongpa, than for its history. Along its main street the only major structure was that of a hotel belonging to Danny. The rest were simply shacks or makeshift tents beneath which locals spread out their wares, mostly clothes and shoes that came across the border from China. Yuksom means “meeting place of the three learned monks” and its monastery Dubdhi, is a landmark in Sikkimese history. Legend states that three monks from Tibet converged here to select Phuntsog Namgyal as the first King of Sikkim, giving him the title ‘Chogyal’-- “the king who rules with righteousness” and crowned him king in 1641. Yuksom is part of a sacred



Padmasambhava painting in a monastery



A modern café on the mall road, Gangtok



Prayer wheel

landscape consisting of four religious sites that have been blessed by Guru Padmasambhava and which are supposed to be the four plexuses of the human body. Yuksom represents the 'third eye'. Yuksom, became the first capital of Sikkim. Dubdhi monastery was built later in 1701 an hour's trek away from Yuksom, deep in the forest. Of the thirty to forty monks once housed here just a few remain. It still holds valuable paintings and manuscripts along with the statues of the three lamas who anointed the first Chogyal. Half a century later, the capital shifted to Rabdentse near Pelling, but Yuksom is still a revered site.

Pelling, at 6800 ft. is remote. Even in the 21st century it is just one street with single storey homes and now, a few hotels coming up. Pelling draws people today because it stands face to face with the patron Goddess of Sikkim – Kanchenjunga. Perhaps, in the remote past, that would have been exactly what would have propelled the king to have his summer palace here. Today, the palace is a heritage hotel, the only one with a frontal view of the high Himalayan range.

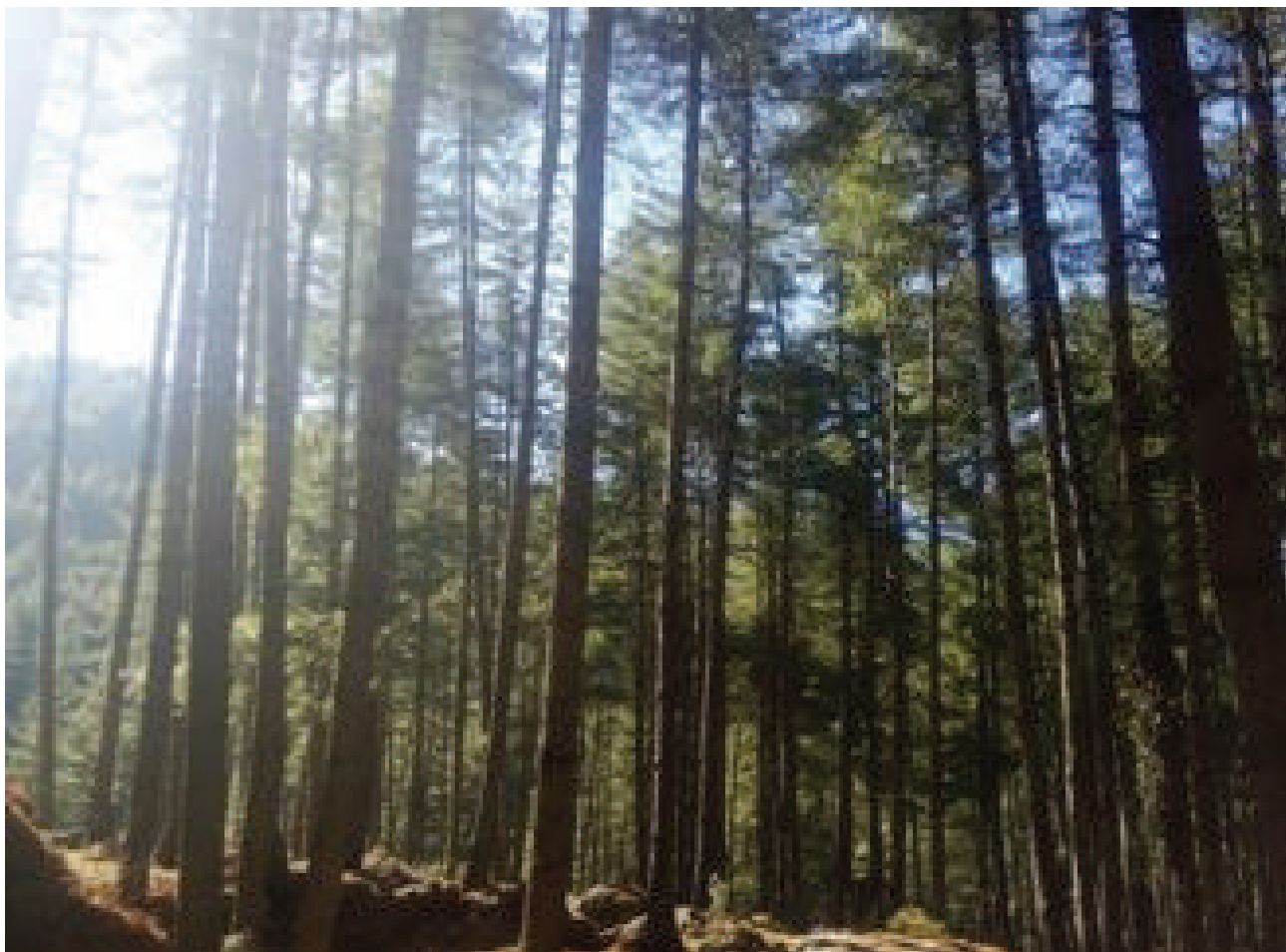
Kangchenjunga means the "Five Treasures of Snow," and refers to Kangchenjunga's five snow clad peaks. It holds tremendous religious significance for the Sikkimese and hence no one has ever been allowed to put a foot on its summit. The climbers who got close to the peak in 1955, halted way beneath the summit, honouring the promise given to the Chogyal.

The alarm shrilled insistently at 4 a.m. I jumped out of the bed and groggily ran to the window drawing the curtains apart. A thick curtain of cloud greeted me. The high Himalayas were shrouded. "Get up" I urged my partner, "people have already gathered in the garden". "Oh, the keen types", he quipped. "Is it clear?" he asked. "Not yet". I kept anxious vigil by the window open to the frigid morning air. 4.30 a.m. Anxiety struck my heart. If the clouds did not roll away, sunrise on the peaks, for which we had traversed hundred and thirty-five kilometers, would be lost. My prayers were answered. A minute or two later, a solitary peak loomed above the clouds. The piercing rays of the rising sun shredded the cloud curtain. Enclosed perfectly within our window-frame, close enough to touch, stood some of the highest mountain peaks of the world, draped in dazzling white snow. The distinctive pyramidal shape of the Kangchenjunga towered above the others around it. 5 a.m. The light got a bit stronger and out of a pale grey-blue sky, a pencil thin beam of golden light shot out. It beamed straight on to the pyramidal peak, torching it into a gold-dusted beacon. By the minute, the light spread rapidly moving along the range, torching each peak in turn like a taper put to candles and they flared up radiantly, blushing mildly. The scene in front of us was ethereal, awesome and enchanting. Our cameras clicked frenetically. We were

watching the rapidly changing scene through the lens only, in single pointed concentration, aware that this was a never to be repeated show. We tried to capture every millisecond of this dramatic moment conscious that it would soon be over and sure enough it was in the next few minutes, as the sun climbed higher.

All good things must end.

We turned our attention to our next destination, Pemayangtse Gumpa or monastery, a short distance from our hotel, which is the second oldest monastery of Sikkim founded in 1705. Pemayangtse too, stands aloof on a hilltop ringed protectively by the mountains it venerates. As we entered the courtyard we heard the sound of chanting from within the hall, the sound floating melodiously on the crisp air and saw the customary prayer flags, attached to a pole flutter in the whispering wind. We waited patiently until the monks had finished their ritual and only then did we enter. To the left of the stairs is housed a large prayer wheel in its own enclosure. Buddhists first put the prayer wheel in motion to release the efficacy of the mantras written on it and only then enter the monastery. Pemayangtse is a three-storied wooden structure. The main prayer hall on the ground level holds a massive statue of the



Dense vegetation, bamboo and a variety of trees cover the slopes of the hilltown



The wildside of Sikkim

Buddha flanked by his other incarnations and teachers of the sect. Butter lamps, in deep brass bowls are kept burning in a row at their lotus feet. The walls have painted mandalas, one for each of the gurus of Buddhism. The first floor has more idols of the stalwarts of Buddhism, glass-encased and massive. The hall is empty and serene. On the third floor is a unique floor to ceiling structure the ‘Sangthokpal-ri’ a seven tiered painted structure the *Heavenly Palace* of Guru Rimpoche that encompasses all that is on earth and ascends to heaven. Fascinated, I had silently saluted the monk who had given five years of his life to this single handed creation as a measure of his devotion. Then, I

descended to the main hall, the Lakhang. The vibrations were sublime. I sat quietly on a low bench facing the Buddha, absorbing the peace He bestowed. After a while, I heard my name being called out. The world had prevailed and I left the monastery to re-join it.



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Our Last Six Issues

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“With no sisters in my family, I guess the desperation of getting a female in the family got into my system through my vocal cords.”

He is a gifted singer with a dual voice. His cherubic countenance perpetually sports a million dollar smile. For more than a decade, he has performed semi classical and light music with elan.

During the time of music videos in Indian television content, a video ‘Aisa Bhi Kabhi Hota Hain’ surprised viewers as the young singer had this unique ability to switch male and female voices, with both tuned to perfection.

Mumbai-based artiste **Sairam S. Iyer** in conversation with **A.Radhakrishnan** on music and his special talent as a singer.



How would you describe yourself?

I am quite an easy-going person, with a carefree, live in the present kind of an attitude.

Tell us about your family and the influence they had on you.

I hail from a typical Thanjavur TamBram family. My parents have passed away. Dad was an artiste on stage -- acting, singing and dancing and so I guess I inherited those genes from him. My mom was a housewife but also liked singing to some extent.

My dad, an academician never forced me into anything but insisted that we three brothers should have a degree just to fall back on in case of any hassles in life. Very encouraging, as far as art forms are concerned, he never stopped me from pursuing any art form. I was the only one who took the plunge. With no sisters in my family, I guess the desperation of getting a female in the family got into my system through my vocal cords. I decided to be singly happy and I'm sure it shows.

What does music and singing mean to you? How many languages do you sing in?

It might seem clichéd but I can't think of life without music. I've sung in Kashmiri, Oriya, Bangla, Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Konkani, Marathi and Gujarati. I can sing English songs and I have even won prizes at the University level.

When did you discover your dual voice talent? Was it a natural transition? Can this be cultivated or is it inborn?

As a kid I had a very sweet voice and probably sounded like a girl singing. Even when singing the male song, a Rafi or a Kishore. So, this went on till my adolescence where every boy goes through voice change transition.

For about a year and a half or so, my voice was quite shaky. I would go to my pooja room, sit and cry to myself and my God, asking when He had to take it away, why did He give it to me? And I used to croak and record into a tape recorder. I had those recorded Walkman then. I would play it to myself

and this went on.

But I guess this process of trying to rediscover yourself and trying the various facets of your vocal abilities is a point in time. I have to thank the Almighty because I could somehow tap that part of my throat from where I could get back the sweet voice as well, while I was getting the base of my voice intact, which you can hear me talking in.

Are both the voices tuned to perfection? Is it strenuous?

To sing right, especially after you are a grown-up is a challenge in itself. As a child, you have no inhibitions; you just try to replicate and sing but the more you learn about music, you are expected to sing it right. You will be naturally in tune but the minute you get to know what is *sa re ga ma pa*, and the science behind it; that's when you get a little conscious.

How long can this dual voice last? What do you do to maintain it?

Irrespective of your age or time of your singing, if you are not hurting your voice; if you maintain the right amount of rest and have practice sessions and are at ease with yourself and your surroundings, I think the longevity of your voice also is assured and the overall health also matters.

Who were your gurus?

Apart from my father, I learnt my initial music from the late Smt. Sita Rao. I learnt choir conducting from the late Kanu Ghosh, the legendary choir conductor and went on to learn a little from late Pandit Ramesh Nadkarni, who encouraged me to sing in both male and the female vocals.

Then I learnt light vocal from Marathi music director late Kamlakar Bhagwat and Achyut Thakur at the University of Mumbai. At Sangeet Maa Bharati, I did classical diploma under Pradeep Chatterjee and did light vocal under late Pandit Drubah Ghosh, a well-known *sarangi* player. Now I learn from gazal singer Ustad Moin Khan who calls himself Mohan Khan.

Your singing inspirations, both male and female?

My greatest inspirations are Lata, Asha, Mohd. Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Manna De, in that order.

Your albums?

BMG Crescendo signed me up for my first formal solo album *Aisa bhi kabhi hota hai* released in 2000. I was chosen as the *Ubharta Sitara*, the rising star for the new month of the millennium by MTV.

How did MTV help?

MTV added the glam quotient. At that point in time, when it came to music channels, B4 u music and MTV were happening and essentially dedicated to music. Pop music was getting popular in India when my album got released, but unfortunately BMG Crescendo, had their own internal issues

and had to wind up. I was unfortunate that I had signed up during the tumultuous times of the company and couldn't reap the benefits of my album.

They couldn't promote my album much, but MTV played my song for a month and I guess my song was even chosen to be played in the entertainment channels of the flight. That was huge. Though many companies wanted my song on their list, BMG could not match up with those demands and I had to lie low. My other songs with beautiful compositions from the album too went unnoticed, but MTV did their bit when I was the *Ubharta Sitara*.

How much riyaz do you do?

For me riyaz (practice) is not a one-time affair during the day and it doesn't have a specific time because my schedules are also very haywire. Whenever time permits and I'm in the right mood I start off. I put on my *tanpura* on my mobile even when I am driving. I use it on my Bluetooth device. It's playing and I am singing... so that's the best part of it.

How would you describe the audience here and abroad?

I have performed over 2500 concerts all over the world. India has many States, with their own individual cultural background and tradition. It is not homogeneous. All over the country the reception and the kind of songs they expect from you are different. But it is nice. The audience abroad is comparatively a little more polished I would say. All the audiences overall have been very kind to me.

As a performer, how important is it to play to the gallery?

It is very important. People have come there spending time and money for you. They have come there specially to listen to you and to enjoy. For an artiste to be in tune with the audience, you need to know how to balance the act of the classes and the masses. So though I have a set of songs which I would prefer and I love to sing those, at the same time I have also learnt the knack of playing to the gallery.

Are you religious or spiritual? How has Satya Sai Baba of Putaparthi helped you in life and career?

I wouldn't say I'm religious; I'm spiritual. People get confused between the two. Religious is more to do with austerities and stuff which is stuck to a specific religion.

For me Satya Sai Baba is God. He is my anchor. I don't want to try and force anyone into it but for me my own personal experiences have been nothing but divine. Essentially it has helped me understand myself more than I would have otherwise. It helps me so much to stay grounded in life and to understand every day, that this life is extremely fragile. So, I have learnt to live in the present and enjoy every moment of it.

What is happiness and passion to you?

Happiness is to be able to do what I love to do best. Happiness is now. Looking at the twinkling stars, the flight of birds or spending time with like-minded friends.

My passion is my music and the art forms that I have



indulged in. I'm passionate about everything that I do.

Do you believe in fate?

Yes. I can't deny it because you see there are many people who are good at something but it's not that you are always successful by the standard of the masses. So, I believe in the law of karma and fate does work there and you never get more than what you deserve.

What is humility to you? How humble should a singer be?

I think it is the essence of an artiste. It helps you relate to people. The minute you start thinking you are above somebody means you are demeaning someone else.

Do you keep expectations in life and profession?

I used to but then again life had its own ways of teaching me to accept things as they come. If you don't keep expectations, you are a lot lighter. Life taught me, do your best and leave the rest.

How important are promotions and marketing?

They are very important for an artiste. There are so many platforms which are coming up every other day. So, if you want to be presented before the masses, promotion and marketing do play a role, but then if you don't have the basic

content, then it doesn't matter.

Are you your own critic?

I am my biggest critique and I don't forgive myself for my faults.

What is the best compliment you have ever received?

There are many, but something that touched my heart was when the celebrated film music director, Anil Biswas called me the *Eighth Wonder of the World*.



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, short story writer and poet.

Flower power

(continued from page 16...)

Flower therapy known as 'Pushpa chikitsa' has a distinct place in Ayurvedic and Siddha systems of medicine. The Jain monks are avid followers of this, as it is based on the principle of *ahimsa* or non violence. Floral essences or *pushpa ark* are made by the transfer of the energetic vibration of the floral material such as marigolds, lotus and jasmine, and often accompanied by charging the water with powerful chants of invocation, and gratitude during the process. In many cases, where the flowers are linked to a specific god or goddess, that particular deity is invoked with special rites. Devotees believe that this increases the efficacy of the healing properties of the flower essence. (For example, the red hibiscus is offered to lord Ganesha and goddess Kali, and the swallow wort to lord Hanuman). *Gulab jal* or rosewater cools inflamed eyes, Ashoka flower dispenses grief, ixora encourages sexual expression, *rakta pushpa* (*bauhinia purpurea*) corrects urinary disorders, *athibala* (*abutilon indicum*) settles down nervous system ailments, and *kadam-ba* (*anthocephalous cadamba*) helps lactation.

The lotus essence as a potential healer for extreme psychological problems is being researched by psychiatrist and flower essence practitioner Dr. Marina Angeli. This may benefit patients whose natural defense mechanisms have deteriorated because of prolonged or multiple trauma, resulting in a build-up of emotional toxicity. It would help patients, even those suffering from cancer, who have lost their inner sunshine and feel life has become a burden. Flower essences help to unblock unhealthy energy pockets and rebalance and restore harmony.

Floral vibration



Lotus - inner transformation

"Life must blossom like a flower, offering itself to the Divine" said Mirra Alfassa, (also known as Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry). She continues that "Flowers bring a touch of eternity, joy and beauty which lie beyond the sorrows and cares of the human world. A conscious and intimate relationship with flowers can give an experience of communion with the divine and awaken true consciousness in us". She studied 900 flowers and has compiled their spiritual significance, after experiencing each one. Flowers are living entities with a distinct soul vibration that can only be perceived by a meditative mind. By tuning into their frequency, we can awaken those same qualities within us, by subtle vibrational resonance. This leads to our inner transformation and healing. Hibiscus displays power, chrysanthemum - vital energy and roses of different types in varying shades cover the entire spectrum from friendship, romance, passion, parental affection, protective tenderness, compassion to the highest frequency of pure unconditional love.

Often, the ethos of a country get reflected in its national floral emblem. The alpine regions of Switzerland and Austria sport edelweiss- a star-shaped, pristine white flower denoting purity, nobility and patriotism; Singapore's orchid represents exotic beauty and sophistication; Japan's cherry blossom or sakura symbolises hope and renewal; South Africa's protea stands for courage and transformation. (Protea has prehistoric origins and gets its name from Proteus, the son of the Greek god Poseidon, who would frequently change his appearance to avoid detection, so he could enjoy a carefree time). Egypt and India, sport the lotus, symbolic of purity, perfection, and spiritual enlightenment.

The therapeutic properties of flowers are widely used in healthcare and beauty products ranging from creams, lotions, balms, salves, to herbal potions, poultices and potpourri.

Flowers are indeed precious signatures of heaven's artistry, that heal with their myriad colors, fragrance, and medicinal properties. Their unique energetic blueprint brings in unbelievable transformation at the cellular and subtler levels. As Oliver Wendall Holmes said, "The Amen of Nature is always a flower." So, let us open ourselves to letting their magic work.



Anuradha Pittie is a freelance interior designer, floral decorator and creative arts enthusiast.

A celebration of art, love and renewed hope

Whether it is the ordinary idol maker or a celebrated artist, Durga Puja celebration is about artistic expressions where the artists and the artisans evoke respect and love, writes Manjira Majumdar.



Durga idol sculpted by artist Sanatan Dinda; Durga as migrant worker with her children by artist/sculptor Rintu Das and Pallab Bhowmik

Over the years Durga Puja celebrations have changed. At the core it is all the same – new clothes, gifted or purchased, community celebration, five-day feasting of vegetarian and non-vegetarian cuisine and variocultural programmes funded by donations and sponsors. At the centre of it remains the *pratima* or Mother Goddess Durga, with her four children Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh and Kartik housed in a beautiful *mandap*.

Earlier the idols were very much the same; draped with rich silk brocades, colours of which defined their identity. If Durga was clad in flaming red, Lakshmi was in pink and Saraswati in lime green. As crafted in clay by the *kumour* or potters of Kumortuli, in north Kolkata, they were

in the *ekchala* style; that is, all in one frame or decorated with *shola*. As budgets grew due to corporate sponsorship, and a sense of competitiveness crept in – Durga Puja became a spectacle – a carnival as it were. Trained artists and sculptors gave a blueprint vision and executed these respectively. Interior designers then gave a “total look” of the *mandap* or *pandal* as it is known here.

Social themes inspire artists

It would be difficult to pin down the year in which one began to notice a change. Some puja associations started innovating with themes, materials and creativity. Various designers got involved and artists first did the blueprint and then executed these projects with the help of lights, artisans and decorators.

Some stand alone artists such as Alope Sen had started sculpting Durga idols in the mid-eighties, which depicted several social themes. His depiction of corrupt politicians surrounding the main image of Durga was one. Similarly, where earlier the *mandap* was extraordinary craftsmanship of ordinary craftsmen, who created minarets, domes and spires of bamboo and cloth, today these are turnkey projects with budgets running into lakhs of rupees, even crores.

Sanatan Dinda is an artist who shot to fame having sculpted the statue of Mother Teresa. He has done a very traditional image of Durga this year. Rupchand Kundu is another trained artist and he has caught the imagination of the public in a big way with some outstanding work. Since these idols are immersed on Dussehra



Goddess Durga created by acclaimed installation artist Rupchand Kundu; An old north Kolkata mansion designed as mandap by Kundu in 2018

or Vijaya Dashami, the 10 th day of Navratri festival because it is believed keeping back idols bring bad luck, the structures too need to be dismantled. But for five days or more there is unbridled joy in enjoying these for which you do not require to buy a ticket to view.

Kundu who graduated from Kolkata's Government College of Art, says, "I have to first survey the area and space to see what can be done." His replica of an old house of North Kolkata was a big draw in 2018. The mansion was so realistic that it showed dirt and grime on the walls and the look was brought about by artisans under his supervision.

Kundu who has designed the seven wonders of the world in the new Ecological Park, Kolkata, has been an art/set designer for several well-known serials. He has even made two films on the entire process of idol crafting. Watching these, one wonders how little we know of the craftsmanship hiding behind poverty of such artisans. While the city sleeps, the wet clay is gathered from the banks of the River Ganga and ferried across in boats to the Baghbazar ghat or the river bank, close to which is Kumortuli. The sculpting begins thereafter. However, thanks to this annual festival stretching up to include Lakshmi Puja and Kali Puja coinciding with Diwali, the artisans are seeing better days. Idols

are shipped outside the city as well.

Virtual tour of mandaps

This year there is a ban on entry into the *mandap* but work was commissioned earlier hoping that the corona vaccine would be discovered. But for now, everyone has to settle for a virtual tour or pictures.

"This year, I am not working on a single project due to budget cuts," says Kundu, who is primarily an installation artist. His inspirations are many. Admirers still recall the installation works in *mandap* he did a few years back. He had used steel chairs, locks and keys in his work. What makes his structures unbelievable is that they are replicated with such precision. The effect of marble and stone are brought about by thermocol, fibre glass, cloth and jute, when not clay.

Connoisseurs of art look forward to their work as they would for exhibitions of well-known artists. Every year, the inspirations change for the artist. For those who are socially conscious, they work on social themes that are topical. Like Rintu Das this year. He is one artist who is inspired by Bikash Bhattacharya's canvasses of Ma Durga and has created the look of her as a migrant woman labourer. With one child on her lap and two others in tow, another one is in the lap

of one girl as is usually the scenario. We recognise Goddess Lakshmi holding a toy owl in her hand. The sculptor here is Pallab Bhowmik.

Whether it is the ordinary idol maker by profession or someone like Kundu who has been an artist for over three decades, Durga Puja celebration is about artistic expressions. Whether you look upon HER -- the Goddess as a divine force or the girl next door, the artists and the artisans evoke respect and love. Says activist and writer Sudarshana Chakraborty, "Durga Puja, Bengal's biggest carnival, is beyond a religious event. It is inclusive and marks the homecoming of the daughter and is a celebration of womanhood and motherhood."

To that one may add it is all about, renewed hope, beauty, love and art in life.

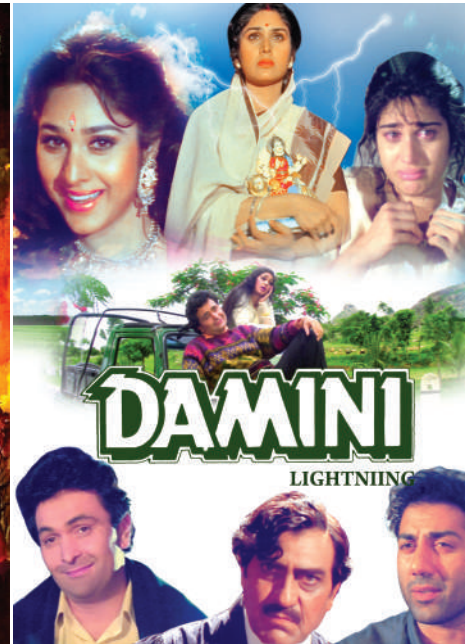
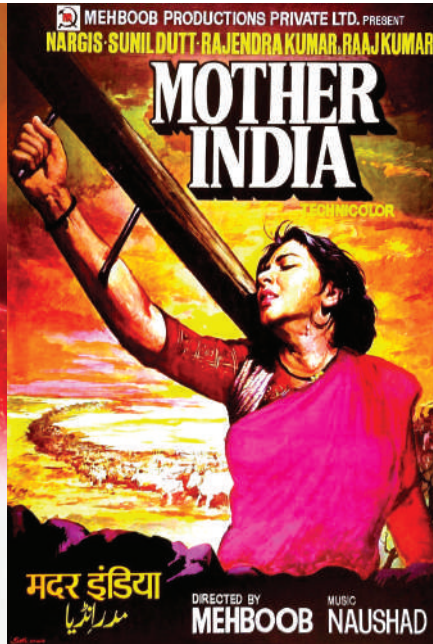


Having worked as a full-time journalist, Manjira Majumdar today is an independent journalist

combining writing with part-time college teaching and media advocacy. She is also the author of 3 children's books: Ten of Us, The Story of Anjana and Ghost Stories from Bengal & Beyond.

Rape doesn't sell anymore

In contemporary cinema, rape as a ploy to draw audience has faded into obscurity, which is a good thing. It would be better if the mainstream cinema handles the subject with more sensitivity to highlight the violence and crime against women, and the role of law-makers, police and courts positively, writes Shoma A. Chatterji.



Films that tackled the subject of rape sensitively

The gang-rape of a young Dalit girl in UP's Hathras preceded and followed by several rapes of little girls by their cousins, of a teenager by an uncle, a student by her tutor, throw up the ironical reality of contemporary Hindi cinema where rape as a marketing strategy to draw the crowds through titillating frames, or, using it as a plot strategy to pull audience has faded almost into obscurity.

It would be interesting to look at the presentation of rape in Bollywood cinema of the 1980s and 1990s to try and discover how this is no longer a presence in contemporary Bollywood cinema today.

Rape is one of the many manifestations of violence against women placed in a much wider continuum of socially and politically inflicted violence which includes within its canvas, systematic

violations of women's economic and political rights. Society has castrated women in every which way and rape is just one dimension of this castration. A means by which she is politically manipulated to harbour and nourish feelings of guilt, fear, distrust, anger and frustration. The law, ironically, chooses to harass and distrust the victim rather than give her justice. In all rulings on rape cases, people conveniently forget that rape bears a direct relation to all power structures in a given society.

This relationship is not a simple, mechanical one but involves complex structures reflecting the interconnectedness of gender, caste and class oppression that characterises society. If we refuse to understand the nature of sexual violence as is mediated by caste, class, race and state power, we have no hope of developing strategies that will eventually allow us to purge our society of

oppressive, misogynist violence. The main problem lies in that we do not realise that to grasp the true nature of sexual assault, we must place it within its larger political context. If we wish to understand the true nature of rape as experienced by women as individuals, we must be aware of its social mediations. The high incidence of casteist rape, incestuous rape, marital rape and communal rape in India against the backdrop of a corrupt and tottering democracy, heightening poverty, ethnic terrorism and other atrocities like war and terrorism all of which involve women caught in no-exit situations because rape is used as a weapon of revenge.

Rape in cinema, has certain unwritten specific functions: fragmentation of the scene by camera movements, construction of the representational space by depth of field, deffraction of light, and colour effects --- in short, the process of fabrication of the

film from decoupage to montage. It all happens as if a long-drawn-out sequence of rape places cinema on trial, converting every film depicting rape graphically and voyeuristically into a soft-porn product placed for sale in the open market.

Rape projected in cinema of 80s and 90s

No Indian film on rape has ever evoked the kind of controversy *Insaf KaTarazu* (1980) did. It created controversy over the Censor Board's clearing the film with an 'A' certificate. But there were reports about some of the censored scenes having been later inserted in some theatres. Feminist readings and analysis of filmic texts were unknown in India then. This is precisely why hardly anything came out of the critical attacks on the film. Today, with the rise in 'wholesome family entertainment' in mainstream Indian cinema, rape seems to have lost its box-office value, which is a good thing.

Insaf KaTarazu set a new trend in the mainstream at that time in which some films pretended to portray the evils of rape. But the medium of cinema managed to produce just the opposite effect which was actually the film-maker's intention. Plagiarised from the Hollywood film *Lipstick*, B. R. Chopra's film unfolded the story of two sisters wrongly raped by the same man (Raj Babbar), distanced through place and time. Though this formed the crux of the narrative, the image produced through visuals, sound, characterisation and context revealed the clever use of the medium of cinema to play up to the sexual fantasies of the males in the audience, which automatically ensured a full house for each show.

Films that tackled rape sensitively

But there have been films where rape was not only a part of the story, but was treated with great subtlety and finesse. In Gulzar's *Mausam* (1975), one of the most brutally frank essays on prostitution, Kajri (Sharmila Tagore as the daughter) makes her way through the woods

on her way back from the dispensary carrying medicine for her ailing mother (Sharmila as the mother). Instead of focussing on Kajri, the camera pans on the wall where Kajri, in her struggle with the rapist, (the proverbial village 'uncle'), drops the bottle of medicine. Her piercing scream fills the sky, superimposed with the sudden burst of bird cries in the air. The upturned medicine bottle on the parapet shows the liquid trickling down the wall, ever so slowly, red in colour, like blood.

In Mehboob's *Mother India* (1957), Radha visits the lecherous money-lender. The next shot cuts to a scene showing Radha (Nargis) staggering back home, her hair awry, her *bindi* a diffused blur, the *mangalsutra* torn off her neck. In retrospect, the signs appear cliched, but the cliché is undercut by the anger in Radha's eyes, which spells out the desperation and the vulnerability not only of being a woman, but also of being a woman who is poor, young, beautiful and alone. Another brilliant tackling of rapes of the same woman came across in Shekhar Kapoor's controversial *The Bandit Queen* based on the true story of Phoolan Devi. But this was an off-mainstream film.

Raj Kumar Santoshi's *Damini* (1993) offers a unique perspective on rape. The rape victim here is economically and socially so weak and vulnerable, that she is forced to accept the violation of her body by a gang of young boys led by her employer's son. She is a housemaid in an apparently modern, affluent business family. But help comes from a totally unexpected quarter: a daughter-in-law of the family, who is of lower-middle-class upbringing, rises to her cause, even while the girl is dying on a hospital bed.

The picture is changing

Is this fade-out of rape in cinema the result of too many brutal, cold-blooded and calculated gang-rapes in real life? Or, is it because the very trend, perspective and treatment of plot, cinematography, narrative and editing have changed over time and the

audience is not interested in titillating rape scenes? Or is it because rape has been replaced by countless item numbers in mainstream cinema that have perfected themselves to an aesthetic expression that is now the subject of scholastic research across the world? Or, maybe, the trend of Bollywood cinema has evolved itself into a more globalised expression to reach out beyond Indian borders? Perhaps, today's leading ladies who are very bold in their approach to cinema, are unwilling to feature in rape scenes? The lone exception in very recent cinema is *Pink* which is attempted rape and not rape. Think about it.

The OTT platforms with serials such as *Delhi Crime* have explored the more significant areas surrounding rape such as offering a positive image of the police in trying to nab the culprits in the terrible Nirbhaya case. *Guilty* deals also with the subject of rape within a college campus and though there are brutal scenes of rape that suggest that the girl was asking for it, the film offers a moral lesson on how young college girls and boys should not always throw caution to the wind to be trapped in no-exit situations that could lead to rape. Mainstream cinema that draws a massive audience can do a lot of good by handling the subject more sensitively so as to highlight crime and violence against women and also project a more realistic role of the law makers, courts, police and the media.

1. YannLordeau, 'Le sex froid (du porno dela),' *Cahiers du cinema*, (No.289, June 1978), pp. 49,52 and 61.



Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and author. She has authored 17 published titles and won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema, twice. She won the UNFPA-Laadli Media Award, 2010 for 'commitment to addressing and analysing gender issues' among many awards.

Last relic of the golden era

*The composer of ‘Guzra hua zamana’, S Mohinder, created a niche for himself in the galaxy of greats with songs that stood competition with the best. **Raju Korti** pays tribute to the genius, whose tunes were simple, hummable and yet very catchy.*



The golden period of film music between 1950 and 1970 has a number of icons dotting its desktop. In this galaxy of myriad geniuses one name that will remain incommensurate under the super-incumbent weight of some maestros who won a much wider acclaim will be that of Sardar Mohinder Singh Sarna, popularly known in the fraternity as S Mohinder.

In an era dominated by titans like Naushad, Shankar-Jaikishan, Madan Mohan, C Ramchandra, O P Nayyar, S D Burman, Salil Choudhary, Sajjad Hussein, Khayyam Anil Biswas and others, S Mohinder remained under their long and superior shadows but his compositional genius was never in question. It is a measure of the quality of music routinely produced by stalwarts that S Mohinder got labeled as perhaps less-than-a-second-line composer – in the bracket of Ravi, Hemant Kumar, Sardar Malik, Chitragupt, C Arjun, S N Tripathi and many more. That doesn't take away from the brilliance of the 50-odd films he composed in a career

spanning almost 20 years.

His roots from small town Sillianwali in the then undivided Montgomery district of Punjab and being a son of a police sub inspector, were no indication of the niche that he was to carve for himself in the quick sands of film music. His father's frequent transfers was a sore point in pursuing his passion but that proved to be a blessing in disguise. It was during one such transfer that he was occasioned to meet Sikh religious vocalist Sant Sujana Singh under whom he honed his classical skills. The pious atmosphere of Sheikhupura (now in Pakistan) close to Nankana Sahib – the birth place of Guru Nanak – was just the atmosphere that his musical hunger sought to satiate.

Somewhere during the tumult of Partition, Mohinder moved to Benares, the Mecca of Indian classical music where he groomed for a while before boarding a train to country's film industry of Mumbai without ticket. His tryst with the film music began in 1950, the year which is believed to have spawned what is believed as the

golden period of film music. But for him, big time recognition was still away.

Breaking stereotypes

Mohinder knew how to blend classical skills with film music. He started composing tunes that were light but had a strong aesthetic appeal to them. Many people are not aware that when he composed for *Sehra* (1948), its producers were Arun and Nirmala Ahuja, parents of actor Govinda. The combination worked wonders and the film made ripples if not waves. What boosted his prospects was the unabashed admiration singing star Suraiya had for him. She put him on to director-producer Chandulal Shah to sign him on for *Nili* (1950) where Suraiya's co-star was her beau Dev Anand who was also finding his moorings. Its success attracted him to Raj Kapoor whose *Paapi* was in the making. The film was a visual disaster but the audience that slept through most of the film, would suddenly come alive to Mohammed Rafi's foot-tapping *Tera Kaam Hai Jalna Parwane*. It made him a house-hold name but Mohinder who also nursed singing ambitions until then, gave them up after hearing Rafi's voice.

Although his popular *Shabad Gurbani Mittar Pyare Nu*, also sung by Rafi became a benchmark, he often broke stereotypes to create something totally diverse. Asha Bhosale, another of his favourite, sang *Re Man Aiso Kar Sanyasa*, set in Raag *Kalavati* for *Nanak Naam Jahaz Hai* (1969) that won him national recognition. Among his enduring memories was how Madhubala acknowledged his *Shirin Farhad* qawwali *Ankhon Mein Tumhare Jalwe Hain* by kissing his hands. In *Naata* (1955) and *Shirin Farhad*, Mohinder reached the zenith of his career. Lata's *Guzra hua zamana aata nahi dobara* made him a

part of national consciousness. It was here that he made a famous team with lyricist Tanveer Naqvi like Naushad did with Shakeel, Shankar-Jaikishen did with Hasrat and Shailendra and Madan Mohan with Rajinder-Jaikishen or Raja Mehdi Ali Khan.

Mohinder didn't carry any particular stamp of his own when it came to composing. He didn't have the classical mindset of Naushad, nor was his orchestration heavy like that of Shankar-Jaikishen. He did not lean on folk music or Rabindra Sangeet as S D Burman or Salil Choudhary did. His tunes were simple, hummable and yet very catchy. His USP lay in the simplicity of his tunes.

Mohinder composed for a host of films and true to his caliber, he was a revelation in each of them. Unfortunately, most films he composed for sank at the box office without trace. That never affected his compositional mindset. He cherished his association with contemporary

composer Ghulam Haider and Lata. Pyarelal played violin for *Zameen Ke Taare* (1960) when he was yet to hit the national scene with fellow composer Laxmikant. Mohinder later forayed into production in the 70s. His Punjabi film *Nanak Naam Jahaaz hai* bagged the National Film Award for Best Music Director in 1970 beating SD Burman's *Aradhana*. What he missed in Hindi, he got it in Punjabi.

Just one *Guzra hua zamana aata nahi dobara* catapulted him to the Hall of Fame. And made him immortal but many of his songs were lost to public administration like *Phir teri yaad naye geet sunane aayi* (Bekhabar/1966) and *Shama se jaa ke kehdo* (Mukesh-Suman/Jai Bhawani). Mohinder, however, never sulked. In the post 1970s when the character of film music changed from sober to brash, Mohinder decided to bid adieu. Towards the end of the millennium, he chose to settle in US. It was only some time recently that he came to Mumbai to stay with his

daughter.

After Khayyam, he was the last of beacon lights of Hindi film music. His passing brings to an end, an epoch of music that will have his name etched on it. The greatest of singers of the last century, including Amir Karnataki, Surinder Kaur, Geeta Roy-Dutt, Lata Mangeshkar, Suraiya, Shamshad Begum, Asha Bhosale, Rajkumari, Mohd Rafi, Mukesh, Talat Mahmood, and Hemant Kumar lent their voice to the compositions of this rather under-celebrated music director. S Mohinder is no more. Long live S Mohinder.



The writer is a prolific journalist with 40 years of experience and has to his credit hundreds of articles and

blogs touching upon a variety of subjects.

WHO AM I?

*I am a proud Indian,
citizen of the world community,
inhabiting this lonely ...
but lovely little ... ★
planet...*



Earth...



The age of sustainable development

Jeffrey D Sachs, professor-economist-author-advisor would consider the usefulness of this labour of love of his narrated by Bob Souer in his crystal-clear voice, as a whole as his greatest reward. The gist – making economics happen in a socially-inclusive and environmentally-friendly manner. He combines his erudition, experience and understanding to help you understand the ‘quo vadis of sustainable development’. He is able to communicate with listeners effectively by providing anecdotes and analogies.

Looking beyond numbers

Numbers and statistics, when shorn of their ability to mislead, are powerful aids for convincing and coercing readers and listeners to do the right things. As Sachs warns, though trade, finance, social networks, migration and technology have changed the world to a great extent (from the steam engine in the mid-18th century to the marvels of ICT), they have also brought in their wake broken families, environmental degradation, crime, depression and disease and inequality (between rich and poor) never seen before.

Sachs is of the firm belief that history and geography (and, culture) need not be destiny to a ‘sustainabilist’ with a realistic mindset and a belief in the ability of holistic solutions to challenges. He alludes to the 10 planetary boundaries which mankind needs to respect, and refrain from exceeding the safe operating limits, while focusing on economic growth/development and improvement in social welfare. ‘Business-as-usual’ approaches will put mankind on a slippery slope, going forward, making the transition to the sustainable development approach a Hobson’s choice. He stresses on the indispensability of good governance here to ensure that the inevitable negatives do not overwhelm the desirable positives of strategies adopted. After a long period of almost stable global output, in the 17th and 18th centuries, courtesy scientific develop-

ments and the Industrial Revolution in England, economic growth took off like nobody’s business. The next great wave, Sachs says, must be one of

sustainable technologies — fed and nurtured by the developments in ICT technologies. Economists and ‘sustainabilists’ must be willing to go the extra mile, the long-winding paths to find and test holistic and specialised solutions to problems well-understood. He has emphasised the important role of good health and well-being in ensuring sustainable development and progress towards meeting the sustainable development goals unveiled by the UN in 2015.

All’s not well ...

For sustainable development to be realisable, gender inequality needs to be eradicated from the surface of the earth. Economic discrimination may happen not just on the basis of gender, but also on the basis of race, sexual orientation, caste (this is specific to India) and religion; leading to exclusion and consequent poverty. Here is where ‘duty ethics,’ ‘utilitarianism,’ ‘virtue ethics’ and compassion preached and advocated by the likes of Confucius, the Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jeremy Bentham, need to be imbibed by people in general and decision-makers in particular. The Green Revolution which enabled India to cultivate food for its fast-growing population post-independence, needs to be replayed, this time with an up-gradation and value-addition, bearing in mind the planetary boundaries which were not really a concern in the 1950s — nitrogen and phosphorus loading of waters, ocean

(Audio: 12-CD Set. Run Time: 15 Hours)

Author : Jeffrey D Sach

Foreword: Ban Ki-Moon

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acidification, chemical pollution etc.

Sachs refers to China and South Korea, which started off as recipients of overseas development assistance, used the assistance well, and now are among the leading donors in the world. He lucidly explains how a rise in economic growth will result in a rise in tax revenues and thereby expenditure on healthcare in the years to come.

Let me stop here...Believe me, there is a lot in the dozen CDs you can share with your intellectual friends over a cup of coffee and add value to the conversations.

(Thanks to my late wife Varshita for gifting me with this CD-pack in September 2019, when I took up a new assignment related to the SDGs in Trondheim, Norway)



G. Venkatesh is Associate Professor, Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences, Faculty of Health, Science and Technology, Karlstad University, Sweden. He is also a freelance writer for several magazines around the world. The author has set up Varshita Venkatesh Girls' Education Fund with Plan USA in memory of his wife. ...

JANAKI AMMAL

India's pioneer botanist (1897 – 1984)

Dr. E.K. Janaki Ammal was the first Indian woman botanist who worked on plant breeding, cytogenetics of a range of plants and phytogeography. She is credited with putting sweetness into India's sugarcane varieties.

Janaki was born in then Thalassery, Kerala on 4 November 1897. Her father, Dewan Bahadur E.K. Krishnan, a sub-judge in the then Madras Presidency, a man with a keen interest in the natural sciences, corresponded regularly with scholars and maintained descriptive notes about his developing garden. He also wrote two books on birds in the North Malabar region of India. It was in this environment that Ammal found her affinity. She embarked on a life of scholarship shunning matrimony, and obtained a bachelor's degree from Queen Mary's College, Madras and an honours degree in botany from the Presidency College in 1921. She then taught for three years at the Women's Christian College in Madras before receiving a unique opportunity-- to study abroad for free on Barbour Scholarship. Joining the Botany department at Michigan in 1924, she had a Master's degree in 1925, was the first woman to obtain a PhD in 1931, and one of the few Asian women to be conferred honorary doctorate (DSc. honoris causa).

Moving back to Thiruvananthapuram, she was professor of Botany at the Maharaja's College of Science from 1932 to 1934. India's native sugarcane crop, though produced in abundance was not as sweet as the ones grown in the Far East. As Geneticist from 1934-1939 at the Imperial Sugar Cane Institute, her work was to make sugarcane hybrids indigenous and develop and sustain its own sweet sugarcane varieties. A single woman, she faced wide criticism, caste and gender-based discrimination among her male peers and hence in 1940, Ammal moved to Norfolk, England, to begin work as Assistant Cytologist to C.D. Darlington at the John Innes Horticultural Institution in London. The pair in 1945 coauthored the Chromosome Atlas of Cultivated Plants, a compilation, still a key text for plant scientists today. Continuing her phenomenal research at a time when German planes were bombing London, the

courageous woman would dive under her bed during the night bombings, but continue with the research work the next day. Impressed by her passion, in 1946, the Royal Horticulture Society at Wisley, near Kew Gardens offered Janaki a paid position as a Cytologist, its first salaried woman staff member, where she met some of the most talented cytologists, geneticists and botanists.

In 1951, the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru personally invited her to return to India to improve the botanical base of Indian agriculture and restructure the Botanical Survey of India (BSI). Janaki felt the need to value the indigenous knowledge about Indian plants and pioneered both indigenous and gendered environmental approaches to land use. After retirement she worked briefly at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Trombay and then settled down in Madras at Maduravoyal in November 1970, working as an Emeritus Scientist at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) in Botany. Here she developed a garden of medicinal plants with great zeal and dedication.

One of the first women scientists to receive the Padma Shri way back in 1977, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Government of India instituted two awards in her name in 1999: E.K. Janaki Ammal National Award on Plant Taxonomy and E.K. Janaki Ammal National Award on Animal Taxonomy. The John Innes Centre offers a scholarship to PhD students from developing countries in her name. There is a herbarium with over 25,000 species in Jammu Tawi that is named after her. There is even a flower named after her, a delicate bloom in pure white called Magnolia Kobus Janaki Ammal and a rose hybrid named E.K. Janaki Amma.

An inspiring role model, at 87, she passed away in Madras on 7 February 1984. Decades after her death, her work still remains largely unknown within the country and outside academic circles.

- **A.Radhakrishnan is a Pune-based freelance journalist, short story writer and poet.**



S P BALASUBRAHMANYAM

The quintessential entertainer (1946 - 2020)

A voice that mesmerised millions of music lovers across the globe for over five decades fell silent with the passing away of reputed playback singer, S P Balasubrahmanyam on the 25 September 2020. SPB to his legion of fans, and Balu to his friends and the film fraternity waged a relentless battle against the dreaded coronavirus for nearly a couple of months before succumbing to post-Covid complications.

Sripathi Panditaradhyula Balasubrahmanyam was born on 4 June 1946 in a village named Konetammappetta near Nellore in Andhra Pradesh. SPB developed an interest in music at a very young age and though he did not undergo any formal training in music he avidly participated in music contests and then took to singing in concerts. A lifelong fan of the Bollywood legend, Mohamed Rafi, SPB would regale audiences with Rafi numbers at concerts while his associate, the late Malaysia Vasudevan would concentrate on songs from Tamil films. During these performances, Ilayaraja and his brothers would accompany him on percussion instruments. Ilayaraja and SPB would later collaborate on hundreds of Tamil films and reach supreme heights in their respective careers.

SPB got his first break in cinema thanks to the Telugu composer S P Kothandapani who gave him a number in the film Sri Sri Sri Maryadha Ramanna. He would later name his recording studio after the composer in remembrance of the man who launched him. SPB's first recorded song in Tamil was Iyarkai Ennum Ilayakanni, a duet with P Susheela for the film Shanti Nilayam but it was Aayiram Nilave Vaa in M G Ramachandran's (MGR) Adimai Penn which hit the screen first and is considered as SPB's launch pad in Tamil.

A turning point in SPB's career was the Telugu hit Shankarabharanam which had the acclaimed music director K V Mahadevan as the composer. The movie had as many as ten songs and all of them were challenging for SPB who had no grounding whatsoever in classical music. The film fetched SPB the first of his six national awards. The Ilayaraja-SPB combination and later the A R Rahman- SPB combination

ruled the roost for several decades. Balu sang three numbers in A R Rahman's debut film 'Roja' with 'Kathal Rojave' and its Hindi version 'Roja Jaaneman' turning out to be chart busters.

SPB was first introduced to Bollywood by the famous composer duo Lakshmikanth-Pyarelal in the film 'Ek duje ke liye' directed by K Balachander. The SPB-Lata combination proved to be an instant success and the film also netted SPB his second national award. He was later roped in for Salman starrer 'Maine Pyaar Kiya' and 'Hum Aapke Hain Kaun' where he excelled in duets with

Lata. Although the singer worked his magic in films like Ramesh Sippy's 'Sagar', Bollywood composers had nothing much to offer him.

Bollywood's loss was a gain for other industries like Kannada cinema where SPB became a favourite of topnotch heroes like Vishnuvardhan and Ambareesh among others. He also won a national award for the best playback singer for the film Panchakshara Gavai. In Telugu cinema too, SPB was the ghost voice of most of the leading stars and Rudraveena with mega star Chiranjeevi in the lead fetched him another national award. The

Telugu film Sagara Sangamam for which Ilayaraja wielded the baton and

Minsara Kanavu for which Rahman composed the music were the other films that accounted for SPB's National Awards tally. SPB has sung in Malayalam films as well but it was the Tamil film industry which tapped his talents to the full.

SPB also composed music for around 45 films and even acted in over 70 films. He wore many other hats in his long and illustrious career and also earned name and fame as a dubbing artist. SPB was also a recipient of the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awards. He also holds a Guinness Record for rendering over 40,000 songs and his recording 21 songs in a single day for a Kannada film remains unsurpassed to this day.

- C.V. Aravind is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.



KADRI GOPALNATH

A saxophone wizard (1949-2019)

It was a chance visit to the Mysore Palace at the age of eight that kindled in a young Kadri Gopalnath an abiding interest in the musical instrument, the saxophone that was being played by the Palace Band. He pursued his passion right through life, earning name and fame and plaudits galore for adapting the saxophone, an instrument most suited for jazz music, to Carnatic music.

Kadri Gopalnath was born in a village named Sajeepea Mandi in the Bantwal district in Karnataka on the 6 of December 1949. His father Thaniyappa was a nadaswaram vidwan of repute and Kadri took to music like a duck to water at a very young age. He was put through his paces initially by Vidwan Gopalakrishna Iyer but his musical career received a distinct fillip after he shifted to Madras (now Chennai). Fortunately for the young Kadri, the accomplished mridangist and vocalist T V Gopalakrishnan took him under his wing and it was under his tutelage that Kadri really picked up the ropes and mastered the ragas and kritis that would eventually enable him to take rapid and giant strides in the firmament of classical music. Kadri Gopalnath was one of the earliest vidwans to adapt the saxophone to Carnatic music. The task was doubtless an onerous one and Kadri took over two decades to study the intricacies of the instrument and to attain enough proficiency to mould it to belt out Carnatic tunes. After that his career began to touch the dizzy heights. Senior musicians who had carved their niches in classical music watched with awe and admiration the rise of Kadri Gopalnath and no less a person than a doyen of Carnatic music, the late Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer hailed his accomplishments and rated him high dubbing him a true genius. Kadri's first concert was at the Chembai Vaidyanatha Iyer Festival in 1980 and after that he never had to look back.

The artiste gained immense popularity in Tamil cinema after he collaborated with music director A R Rahman in the Tamil musical 'Duet' directed by K Balachander. The story of the film revolved around a saxophone player and both Balachander and Rahman felt that the only musician around who could do justice to the score was Kadri.

Kadri however had a tough time in coming up with the right tune and raga that would impress Rahman but his invaluable contribution to the chartbuster Anjali Anjali Pushpanjali vindicated the faith that both Rahman and the director had placed on Kadri. His career having reached its peak, Kadri Gopalnath travelled extensively and participated in highly prestigious concerts across the globe. He became the first Indian classical music exponent to be invited to play at the Royal Albert Hall, London in the BBC Promenade concert in 1996. Kadri was an integral part of several international Jazz festivals. He also collaborated with musicians from the West and his album with jazz

flautist James Newton 'Southern Brothers' and the US based saxophonist Rudresh Mahantappa 'Kinsmen' won plaudits for their originality and the rhythm and lilt of the music. Kadri's genius was also amply evident in an audio visual presentation wherein he had juxtaposed the classical kritis of the revered composer Saint Thyagaraja with the compositions of Beethoven. Closer home his jugalbandis with ace flautist Pravin Godkhindi turned out to be a major draw. Among his accompanist Kadri Gopalnath always rated the reputed violinist Kanyakumari very high and she remained a regular at most of his concerts in India and abroad. Kadri Gopalnath served as the asthana vidwan of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt, the Sarada Sringeri Mutt and the Ahobila Mutt as well. He was also the recipient of several honours and titles including the Padma Shri. The highly acclaimed musician also attracted attention with his sartorial tastes which contrasted sharply with most of his contemporaries. Colourful designer kurtas, several bead necklaces round the neck and the gold nuggets suspended from his saxophone characterized his appearances at concerts.

Kadri Gopalnath passed away on 11 October 2019, leaving a legion of fans to mourn his loss.

- C.V. Aravind is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.





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