

Abhikhya

Jan. 2023

The e-magazine of IAAOWA

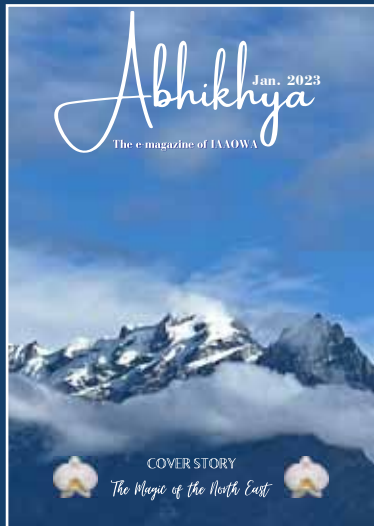


COVER STORY

The Magic of the North East



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Front cover by:
Dr. Vishal Desai



Back cover by:
Dr. Astha Giri

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Patron's Message



Dr Smita Murmu
Patron, IAAOWA

*Greetings to all IA&AS family and readers of IAAOWA's **Abhikhya**!!*

As we bring you this new edition, I hope all of you had a peaceful and restful 2022. Last year, something that I am personally quite proud of is how IAAOWA grew as a family. We have always wanted to remain connected with the IA&AS families posted across India and I would like to let you all know that as a start, IAAOWA inaugurated its state chapters in Odisha, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Through this edition, we share with you their activities too. We hope to continue expanding and remaining connected as the IA&AS family across the various states.

*This edition of **Abhikhya** also focuses on Northeast India. Each of the eight northeastern states - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim – is a traveler's paradise, with picturesque hills and green meadows which shelters thousands of species of flora and fauna... a juncture of various communities, faiths, and cultures; and a region so beautiful that one might think heaven and earth collide here...*

*As always, our members and readers have put their best foot forward and contributed to **Abhikhya** generously. We also share how IAAOWA is trying to do its bit in society while celebrating the diversities of our Indian culture.*

*I acknowledge the editorial team of **Abhikhya**, for producing such an engaging and mindful yearly magazine with pure perseverance and creativity and laud the dedicated efforts of all the members who have stepped forward to contribute for the magazine. I must also cheer the little wonders who have showcased their talents for this magazine.*

Every edition would not be as wonderful without the support of you dear readers – I hope you continue to support us as always. I leave you here with wishes for a blessed 2023.

Happy Reading all!

President's Preface



Ms. Vani Sriram
President, IAAOWA

Dear Friends, wishing you all and your families a very happy New Year 2023.

Welcome to yet another edition of IAAOWA's e-magazine 'Abhikya'.

We are delighted with the tremendous appreciation received for our second edition with 'Yarrows' as the cover story. In our endeavour to bring you stories that are close to your heart and trigger your imagination, in this edition, we focus on the incredibly beautiful north-eastern States of India and bring you a selection of places of breathtaking beauty and adventure across these States.

Although IAAOWA was set up in 1968, so far, its activities have been confined only to New Delhi. During the year gone by, we expanded the Association activities to the States for the first time and made a beginning in setting up local Chapters in some States. We plan to carry forward this initiative in the new year. The idea is to connect with our fraternity across the country, celebrate our shared values and work towards upliftment and empowerment of the underprivileged, a core objective of IAAOWA.

While ushering in the year 2022, IAAOWA was determined to continue its socio-economic outreach activities to help and support the underprivileged sections of society. With excited response from our members, IAAOWA helped the weavers and artisans of Jammu and Kashmir through an e-mela of their products, to sustain their disturbed lives and disrupted livelihoods during the pandemic; provided bed linen for young boys in a Remand Home; sanitary pads to young girls in an Orphanage, school bags and notebooks to children of disadvantaged sections at a Primary School, and provided sweaters to young girls in an orphanage during the year. We are elated to inform you that our Madhya Pradesh Chapter has also distributed hygiene kits to destitute girls in a Shelter Home in Bhopal on the New Year day.

In its bid to support and celebrate handspun and handwoven khadi, IAAOWA, in association with the Centre of Excellence for Khadi, presented a khadi fashion show, which, apart from showcasing the creativity and amazing diversity of this simple product, formed a perfect platform to bring the families of our members together.

Inculcating awareness about environment and well-being of women have been among the core priorities of IAAOWA. Our members and their children have participated enthusiastically in the tree plantation drive in iCISA; Women's Day celebration focused on leveraging technology for empowering and improving the lives of women; a breast cancer awareness session familiarised our members with the issues related to this health hazard that is affecting a fifth of the women in our country.

Tej brought the beautiful ladies of IAAOWA together for an evening of fun and traditional celebration involving rangoli, singing, dancing, poetry recitation etc. Diwali as always, brought the families alive with colour, tradition, love and verve. Thank you all, the IAAOWA family, for your enthusiastic presence at all these events and making them a success.

These initiatives would not have been possible, but for the encouragement and unstinted backing from our Patron Dr. Smita Murmu. IAAOWA is grateful to our Patron for the inspiration, guidance and constant support in all our endeavours.

We seek your continued support and effective participation in taking forward various similar socio-cultural initiatives in pursuit of the interests of the families of the IA&AS fraternity, as well as the larger community.

From the Editor's Desk

*Dear IA&AS family, 2023 is already here! So let's take a step back and see how 2022 went ... and as you take that moment, the Indian Audit & Accounts Service Officers' Wives Association (IAAOWA) would like to say that we are back again with another edition of your magazine **Abhikhya**! This time around, as the world slowly gets back to normalcy (will anything ever be 'normal' again?) we thought we would take a trip to the North East of India.*

Read on to discover interesting stories from the lives of officers and their families who were either posted in the land of Sikkim and the Seven Sisters, or who took a trip there. For those who haven't been there yet, we also have photos clicked by members of the IA&AS family. From a trip to Meghalaya, a visit to the national parks of Assam and the cultural feast of the North East, to places not on the common tourist trails, we have it all! We hope that these glimpses make you reminisce about your stay in the North East or push you towards making that one journey to the land where heaven meets earth.

*This e-edition of **Abhikhya** will also show how IAAOWA is growing as its branches got set up in a few states last year. Under the State Connect, you'll read how the IA&AS families are staying connected across India. We also share with you talents of poetry and storytelling; and have articles on baking and birdwatching to pique your curiosity too!*

Continuing with our tradition of giving back to society, IAAOWA's various committees, under the guidance of esteemed Patron Dr. Smita Murmu and President Ms. Vani Sriram, conducted activities throughout 2022, including charity events and a breast awareness session.

As always, through this magazine, we would like to reach out and bring closer all members of the IA&AS family. As a team, we are grateful to the contributors for their overwhelming response. We are also grateful to our Patron Dr Smita Murmu and President Ms Vani Sriram for their constant support and encouragement for making this magazine a reality.

Dear readers, do have a look at what's coming up in our next edition! We look forward to you sharing your musings and talents with us again. We also hope that you enjoy reading this edition as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you!

With the Warmest Regards,

Editorial Team

Editorial Team



Editor

Ms. Jeethu Elza Cherian

Professionally, Jeethu is a political communications and public policy analyst. With a Masters in International Relations from London Metropolitan University (UK), she has worked in varying capacities for the BBC, UNICEF and the US Embassy in India. She is currently working as the Research Officer with the Australian High Commission New Delhi. She is a full-time nerd with a love for country music, contemporary dancing and good food! She is the spouse of Mr. Deepak Mathews (Batch 2009).



Assistant Editor

Dr. Astha Giri

Professionally, Dr. Astha Giri is an assistant professor of Biochemistry at Deshbandhu College, University of Delhi. With a Ph.D degree in Microbiology from the University of Delhi, she has worked extensively on drug resistant tuberculosis (TB) and its implications on the Indian population. She enjoys travelling and dancing; and is passionate about painting! She is the spouse of Mr. Mrinal Chawla (Batch 2014).



Consulting Editor

Dr. Arpita Desai

Dr Arpita Desai is a Dermatologist, Cosmetologist and Trichologist from Mumbai with an experience of 14 years in this discipline. She is a member of various associations like Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL), Cosmetic Dermatology Society of India (CSI), and Association of Cutaneous Surgeons of India (ACSI). For her skills and dedication, the Kaya Skin Clinic presented her with the 'Business Excellence and Customer First' Award. She is also the Joint Secretary of IAAOWA. She loves travelling, music and good food; and has an awesome sense of humour! She is the spouse of Dr Vishal Desai (Batch 2010).

State Connect



The best way to start the new year...

On 1st Jan 2023, members of the IAAOWA MP Chapter ushered in the new year with an experience that is hard to describe. We gathered at the Nirbhaya Balika Grah (shelter home), located in Professors' Colony, Bhopal, for distributing personal hygiene kits to the destitute girls living here. Little did we realize that instead of the residents, we would be the ones benefitting more after this interaction.

It all began under the guidance of IAAOWA's patron, with a string of welfare activities undertaken at Delhi and we hoped to spread the noble initiatives at Bhopal as well. So here we were, loaded with enthusiasm and baskets



of some essential items.¹ Seeing the beaming girls- some smiling shyly, some giggling, we instantly felt overcome with the warmth they extended.

After a round of introductions, we were treated to two melodious 'swagat geet' (welcome songs) from two talented girls. The manager in charge- whose husband opened the shelter, told us that there were presently 20 girls, aged between 13 to 25 and an infant child. The residents included girls who were orphaned

during covid pandemic, survivors under POCSO² Act, etc. We got to know separately of the poignant story of one of the girls whose mother passed away due to covid and when her father was taking the ashes for immersion in river Ganges, he was killed in a bus accident, after which the girl was disowned by her grandparents. There were many other heart-breaking stories of the residents, but on their faces now we saw a ray of hope despite the adversities. The manager explained how their team plans and works to rehabilitate these girls, provides them counselling and tries to assess their plans for the future, so as to help the girls work on it. They make efforts to ensure that the girls do not spend their lives



with anyone's support in future and can stand on their own feet.

The manager then informed us that the girls are preparing a short skit on gender based issues – "Betaal ke Teen Sawaal" (The 3 questions of Betaal) for a programme on 3rd January and she requested us to see a part of the play to encourage the girls. We watched in amazement as the girls enacted their roles with confidence and in some parts with real-life emotions, reflecting the fact that they

¹ (including towel, soap, oil, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, tongue cleaner, comb, nail cutter, etc.)

² Protection of Children from Sexual Offences



had themselves been through gender related discrimination and yet were boldly trying to overcome the obstacles together. At the end of the act, all of us were unanimous in our appreciation for the tremendous effort of the girls.

Further, we got to know how some of the residents had earned gold/ silver medals in a Karate competition recently, including a 13 year old girl who was so shy and timid when she first arrived at the shelter, that no one could have ever imagined she will soon be a champion in martial arts. The manager also praised the girls for their sincerity in learning whatever classes (such as tailoring, embroidery, craft work, etc.) are arranged from time to time. When we interacted with the girls and, among other things, asked them what they aspired to become, it was heartening to hear their dreams like becoming a teacher, doctor, IAS, police officer, and so on and so forth. The girls then wanted to know about all of us and when

we told them about our respective education and careers, they seemed very inspired and eager to talk more!

At the end of the visit, we acknowledged the noble work being done by the management and assured them that we would be coming to the shelter regularly to mingle with the girls and also be happy to provide whatever support, guidance and counselling that we can. It was a tad bit of a low moment to bid farewell, however temporary it may have been. But as we began to move out and say our goodbyes, several cheerful voices chimed in, "Thank you Didi", "Phir aayiega Didi" (please come again)!

And we knew that very instant- this was just the start of a long, warm association with these wonderful young angels in a mutually enriching journey.....

(Priya Parikh)

IAAOWA MP Chapter, Bhopal





Towards the Welfare of Divyang

Distribution of toiletries and woollen items to Divyang Children

The Indian Audit and Accounts Service Officer's Wives Association (IAAOWA)'s Gujarat chapter, under its mission to contribute towards Health, Culture, Education and Livelihood visited the Apang Manav Mandal, located at Dr Vikram Sarabhai Marg, Amar Nagar, Ahmedabad, on 3 January this year. Since the last 63 years, the institute has been working deeply towards the welfare of Divyang, by providing education, training and rehabilitation.

Through the constant dedication and efforts of the Apang Manav Mandal, many physically challenged persons have learnt to become independent and self-employed. The organization also provides education from standard I to XII, along with complete assistance for higher education and other vocational trainings.

In pursuance of its objective of working for the welfare of Divyang, the IAAOWA - Gujarat





decided to distribute toiletries and woollen items to Divyangs residing in the Mandal. During the charity drive, IAAOWA team distributed items for daily use including bathing soaps, washing soaps, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hair oil, and shampoo. They also distributed scarfs and handkerchiefs to Divyang girls.

After the drive, the members and officers visited the school run by Apang Manav Mandal and interacted with the students and staff. They also visited the physiotherapy centre and the computer centre.





A Visit to Asha Kiran Foundation

Adding to Efforts to help Girl Orphans

The Asha Kiran Foundation in Niladri Vihar (Bhubaneshwar) is a voluntary organization, established in 2008 by Shri Pratap Pradhan, to provide care and protection to girl orphans. Inspired by the spirit of social service and the motto of 'Save The Girl Child', the Foundation runs an orphanage for girls between the ages of five and 18 years. It currently has 24 girl children under its care.

Its main source of income is voluntary public contributions, which are necessary to meet its monthly expenses of around INR 70,000. All the girls are enrolled as students at the Saraswati Shishu Vidya Mandir School, which is situated nearby. The school has waived off tuition fees for these underprivileged children and only charges an annual fee for promotion to higher classes.

The Foundation arranges for regular visits by doctors to examine the health of the girls and has tied up with a nearby pharmacy store to ensure availability of necessary medicines. For the safety of the girls, CCTV cameras are installed in the orphanage. Some of the girls were orphans, while others were abandoned by their families. The founder courageously strived to provide daily food to these children as well as those who resided in nearby slum areas, during the lockdowns imposed on account of Covid-19.

On 22 January 2022, IAAOWA Odisha organized a charity event at the Asha Kiran Foundation. The team interacted with the founder Shri Pradhan and advised how to apply for government grants and for support from the Odisha State Children Protection Society



under the Women and Child Development Department, Government of Odisha.

During the visit, the team were able to also interact with the girls. The girls sang beautiful spiritual songs which moved and touched the hearts of those present. Their indomitable spirits in the face of adversity were truly inspiring. The girls said that they enjoyed learning how to paint, sing, dance, and do yoga. They followed a daily routine which began as early as 5:30 am, with time allocated for yoga, studies, and even watching TV. A

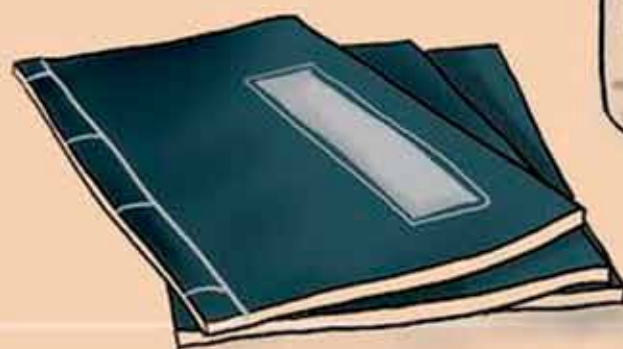
dance performance by a girl named Ahilya was a delight to watch.

The IAAOWA Odisha team also distributed chocolates and a kit containing some articles of daily use such as lunch bag, towels, soap and shampoo, hair oil and brush, toothbrush and nail cutter; and and some basic stationery including notebooks and pens. They hoped that the children would find these useful and it would supplement the regular procurement made by the Foundation towards their care.





IAAOWA *Activities*



The Pulse of Giving

Charity Events under the IAAOWA

Being a part of the IA&AS family, you must be aware that one of the major objectives of IAAOWA is working towards helping and empowering the underprivileged sections of the society within the sectors of health, culture, education and livelihood. IAAOWA has separate committees for each of these and carries out its activities throughout the year.

for Women; sweaters to Katyayani Balika Ashram; school bags and stationery items to the students of Sai Public school, Todapur, Delhi; and bed sheets to inmates of Boys Observation Home, Delhi.

If you would like to be a part of our next charity event, please do get in touch with Ms. Swati Singh, Secretary, swatti31@gmail.com and +91 70700 99364



This year, under the able guidance of our Patron, Dr. Smita Murmu and President Ms. Vani Sriram, IAAOWA conducted various charity events such as distribution of sanitary napkins to the girls of After Care Home



'For it is in giving that we receive' — You can donate as well as volunteer for the drive.... We leave it to you...





Charity Event at Observation Home for Boys

Some say that happiness and sadness go hand in hand. Many of us are fortunate enough to often take things like great parents, a safe environment, and the safety net of peers, friends, and family, for granted. So, it is even more heart-wrenching to witness an environment totally opposite to this. In a society, where kids as young as 10 to 11 years or even younger are witnessing and committing anti-social acts while also becoming exposed and addicted to drugs. Ensclosed in our plush homes we rarely spare our thoughts for 'that part' of society and presume that it is far away from our own.

But in a small attempt to bridge a gap between these two worlds, IAAOWA organized a charity event in an observation home for boys on 2 May, 2022.



The Home functions under the Department of Women & Child Development, Government of NCT Delhi.

The event was attended by IAAOWA Patron Dr. Smita Murmu, Secretary Ms Swati Singh, Joint Secretary Dr. Arpita Desai and members of various committees of IAAOWA. The children shared their hobbies, interests and their dreams. Many of the children shared their family background, why they were in observation homes, what they liked or disliked about the place and what they wanted to do once they were out. They also said that they

were generally happy with the arrangements at the observation home.

As a part of this candid conversation, some children also shared their aspirations - some



were inspiring such as having to get their own start-up and having their own restaurant. Some children also opened up about their disturbing past. The Patron also shared her experiences of working in the past with children who had drug addiction. She motivated them to never give up hope and to work on themselves to change their lives. Children shared a wish to have a television to watch movies together. IAAOWA team promised them, that they would try to arrange the same for the children to add to their happiness.

The resilience of these children was truly splendid. Their struggles and their aspirations to move beyond the limitations inspired the IAAOWA team to organise more such events. It reminded us of the power of mutual aid, and

the small acts of giving that start small but have the larger potential of changing the world, and helping people, one step at a time.

Although it was a “day of giving” organized by us for them, it felt the opposite, as it often does. What we took away from the event was more than what we could give them. It was one of those incidents where although we were in a relatively privileged situation of “giving” than them, we felt there was a lot more that they gave to us - their life experience and learning, their gratitude, their collective unity, their hope in adversity, and the power of dreaming. We all walked out of the observation home, richer, happier, and more content.

We hope through these pictures you get to be a part of the joy too...





The Gift of Safety

A Menstrual Hygiene Drive

The onset of menstruation means a new phase – and new vulnerabilities – in the lives of adolescents. Yet, many adolescent girls face stigma, harassment and social exclusion during menstruation. Transgender men and non-binary persons also face discrimination due to their gender identity, depriving them of access to the materials and facilities they need. Gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, cultural taboos, poverty and lack of basic services like toilets and sanitary products can all cause menstrual health and hygiene needs to go unmet.

As a part of IAAOWA's desire to do more, we took an initiative under guidance of our Patron, Dr Smita Murmu, to provide low cost sanitary napkins to the girls of After Care Home for Women, a center under the Department of Women and Child Development.

On 31 May 2022, we organized a drive for the distribution of sanitary napkins at the After Care Home. The entire team of After Care



Home, along with the 100 girls living there, greeted IAAOWA's President, Ms Vani Sriram and other members with a welcome speech and flowers. Girls enthusiastically shared their hobbies, interests in various activities and their future dreams. They shared about how they study, spend their leisure time in singing, dancing, playing and cooking. Few girls showed off their talents too. It was pure delight to watch them. Sanitary napkins were then distributed to each and every girl in that age group.

Next time, do join us in a small role in helping girls say ***"yes to tension-free periods!"***



Education Drive at Sai Public School

अन्नदानं परं दानं विद्यादानमतः परम् ।
अन्नेन क्षणिका तृप्तिर्यावज्जीवं च विद्यया ॥

These lines from the Upanishad means
“giving food to the hungry is a great donation,
however, donation of knowledge is considered
important among all other donations.”

With this spirit, IAAOWA organized an education drive which included the distribution of school bags and stationery to the students of Sai Public school, Todapur, Delhi, on 8th July. The event was graced by our patron Dr. Smita Murmu and President Ms. Vani Sriram, along with our association members.





A total number of 175 school bags along with stationery were distributed among the students in the presence of the Principal Sh.Ashwani. Dr. Murmu took a tour of the school and interacted with the children in their classrooms. She not only inspired the children to study but also encouraged them to do good for the society.

During the event, Dr.Arпита Desai, Ms. Hansha Mishra and Ms. Shubhangi interacted with the students and asked them to share their experience of online classes during pandemic as well as interacted with the teachers. The teachers told them the problems they faced at that time and how they are managing now after schools reopened offline classes.



Distribution of Sweaters to Katyayini Balika Ashram

As the temperatures dropped this year, IAAOWA - under the able guidance of our Patron - decided to distribute sweaters to children of the Katyayini Balika Ashram located near Gate No.4 of Jhandewalan Metro Station, New Delhi on 22 December. There were 50 girls between the ages of six and 16.

For those who made it to the orphanage, it was an enriching and humbling experience. Meeting and interacting with the precious souls of the orphanage was heart wrenching. The Secretary and the Joint Secretary of IAAOWA interacted with a few girls. While they were initially quite shy, soon they were eager to talk and tell their stories. Many of them shared about the circumstances which brought them to the orphanage. Some of the

girls also shared their rendition of a beautiful Bengali song that was soul stirring. One song gave courage to other girls also to find a voice. Their laughter was infectious and so was the twinkling of their eyes.

At the Ashram, there were girls who were rescued from human trafficking, but found a safe place in the orphanage. With the hope of returning and reuniting with their families, they had created a new life here. One girl had lost her parents in floods. Her uncle was unable to look after her and with the help of a kind soul had got her admitted in this orphanage. These lived stories of finding strength and happiness at such a young age, despite adversities, were heartrending and yet hopeful.





The matron who was in charge informed the IAAOWA members that to empower the girls, the orphanage organises taekwondo martial classes about once a week and special tuitions. She also informed about the other activities that were conducted to prepare the girls both physically and mentally. IAAOWA sends the very best wishes for the institute and all the girls.

In the season of generosity, the act of giving can fill us up with warmth. You know the feeling: that glow of connection to those around us that lights up a winter night. We look forward to taking up many more activities in the institute to help the girls and provide them basic facilities to fulfil their dreams.

A glimpse of the day...





E-Mela on Jammu & Kashmir

A Display of Ethnic Wear & Handicrafts

Jammu and Kashmir has a very rich heritage when it comes to ethnic wear and handicrafts. Kashmiri artisans have been practicing Sozni embroidery since almost 500 years ago. It's mainly done in woolen and silk fabrics and is very famous for its use in Pashmina Cashmere shawls. Tilla embroidery is one of the most celebrated Kashmiri embroidery, where the silver, golden or copper hues of tilla threads run magically into the fabric and embellish it with royalty; and Kashmiri papier-mâché is a handicraft based primarily of paper pulp, and is a richly decorated, colorful artifact, marketed primarily within India, although there is a significant international market.

All these skills are handed down traditionally through the family and the artisans have been in this trade for generations. But their sales dropped drastically as the COVID pandemic hit. In an effort to be a part of providing relief to the small-scale weavers and artisans from J&K, IAAOWA organized the e-mela of ethnic wear and handicrafts from 27 February to 6 March 2022.

Under the guidance of CAG Ma'am, Dr. Smita Murmu, who had served as the first lady of the state, and IAAOWA President Vani Ma'am, who was posted in J&K, some 18 catalogs of cotton, silk, wool and crepe unstitched suits, sarees,



kaftans, coats, jackets, shawl and bed covers; along with dry fruits, honey and saffron, and 925 antique silver jewelry, were put together by the members of the committee.

The response from the ladies of IAAOWA in the e-mela was very encouraging – with keen interest they browsed through the catalogs and purchased some 77 items - rugs, suits, sarees, phirens, kaftans, honey, silver jewelry, etc. raising an amount of 2.85 lakhs for the J&K artisans! When added to the 3.25 lakhs raised in the earlier Banarsi saree e-mela, IAAOWA raised a total amount of 6.1 lakhs during the pandemic!

The true value of the contribution can only be felt by the poor artisans and weavers and the Livelihood committee would like to most gratefully acknowledge the generosity and support of the members of IAAOWA. We look forward to your continued support in the future for similar endeavors.

Browse through...



International Women's Day Celebration

Every year, IAAOWA celebrates Women's Day as a space and an opportunity to express themselves and learn from each other. This year, IAAOWA celebrated Women's Day on 12 March, with the theme **Leveraging Technology for Gender Inclusivity**.

With Ms. Anitha Gurumurthy, founder member and executive director of 'IT for Change,' as the keynote speaker, the

discussion sparked new insights for all. In addition to this, there were speakers across the board, sharing their perspectives on what it meant to be a woman in today's digital world.

The session was followed by lunch and an informal interaction amongst the members of the association.

Have a peek...





Khadi Fashion Show - AHELI



Khadi, the traditional classic fabric, has been getting a makeover as a smart, classy option, in tune with global and desi innovative trends. In line with this IAAOWA

organized a Khadi Fashion Show themed 'AHELI - The Collection of Hand Spun and Woven Khadi' on 7th May, 2022.



The main objective of organizing the event was to promote Khadi and create awareness about the khadi. The KVIC (Khadi and Village Industries Commission) and the creative minds at Center of Excellence for Khadi, NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology) New Delhi had made remarkable efforts in this direction and deserved appreciation. The event showcased the versatility of Khadi clothings modeled by NIFT students.

The event was attended by our IAAOWA Patron Dr Smita Murmu, Shri G. C. Murmu, the C&AG of India and IA&AS officers and their families. The event was followed by dinner hosted by IAAOWA.

Here's a look at IAAOWA's small effort for the promotion of Khadi, a fabric so deeply interwoven with our pride, culture and history...



Breast Cancer Awareness



World Cancer Day is observed every year on 4th February to create awareness about the various cancers that affect us. But October is specifically the Breast Cancer Awareness month - an annual campaign aimed at raising awareness about breast cancer.

It is a sobering truth that the majority of breast cancers are diagnosed at a relatively advanced stage. This is mainly due to two reasons - a general lack of awareness of this health issue and the absence of a breast cancer awareness program. This is alarming for all of us!!

With the same motive of creating awareness, under the aegis of Dr Smita Murmu, IAAOWA conducted "The Breast Cancer Awareness Session" on 24th May, 2022.

The session was conducted by Dr Geeta Kadayaprath, Breast Surgical Oncologist from Max hospital. The doctor explained steps and methods of prevention, care and early detection of breast cancer. The session was attended by enthusiastic members from the department followed by an elaborate questionnaire. At the end of the session, all the members did a hands-on examination of lumps on a dummy provided by the doctor.

Enlightening snippets from the session...







Tree Planting Drive

As one reads in the Rig Veda,

दश कूप समा वापी, दशवापि समोहदह ।
दशहृदिह समह पुत्रो, दशपुत्रो समो द्रमूह ॥

One step is equal to ten wells, one pond is equal to ten step wells, one son is equal to ten ponds and one tree is equal to ten sons...

Keeping this ethos alive, another event to raise the awareness on environment protection - a tree plantation drive at iCISA, was organised by IAAOWA on 9th July, 2022. The drive was held under the presence of President Smt. Vani Sriram and attended by members of IAAOWA, and the residents and children of iCISA. A total of 25 saplings of different trees were



planted which included neem, mango, aloe vera, drumsticks, bael and hibiscus of different shades.

IAAOWA then wholeheartedly expressed its gratitude to Mr. Jehangir Inamdar (PD, iCISA), Ms. Hansa Mishra (Director iCISA) and Dr. Vishal Desai (Director P).

Let's have a look at the tree planting drive and hope we will relentlessly endeavor to carry on such events for the betterment of society and humankind...





Teej, Sawan and Everything Hariyali

This year, IAAOWA's tradition of welcoming the festive season began with the celebration of Teej, also called Hariyali Teej. This colorful festival that falls in the month of Sawan, is celebrated by women across north Indian states, honoring the union of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati.



refers to the period when Indian farmers sow their crops. Devotees welcome the monsoon season at this festival.

IAAOWA, under the patronage of Dr. Smita Murmu, celebrated Teej on 23rd July, 2022, with beautiful designs of mehendi adorning their hands; the tinkling of bangles and laughter filled the evening. There were also some amazing performances by children and IA&AS members, along with some games. To top it all off was the scrumptious dinner.



On this auspicious day, women pray for a blissful marriage and for the well-being of their families. Since 'Hariyali' means 'greenery', women often dress up in various shades of green. Also, it

Have a look!



Healthy Baking

A Workshop on Mindful Eating



We all love breads and cakes but always find it intimidating to try it making these at home. At the same time, we all are trying to be constantly mindful of what we eat including our attempts at reducing intake of processed food. So would it be possible to master the art of baking bread healthily? Well, IAAOWA did attempt to get this done by organizing a 'healthy' baking workshop on 27 August 2022 at CAG New Office, under the expert tutelage of Ms. Renu Amitabh, a senior IRS officer by profession, and a baker at heart.

During the session, she spoke about healthy baking and its importance. She shared how baking bread could also be therapeutic by helping ease anxiety and depression. She shared the tricks of baking a number of dishes

like buns, rolls, bread loaf and pizza. Her tips and methods were well appreciated by IAAOWA members who had familiarized with the seemingly difficult art of baking bread in a healthy way.

The event was held under the guidance of our Patron, Dr Smita Murmu and was graced by our President Ms. Vani Sriram along with enthusiastic members of IAAOWA.

As we share pictures from the day, let us leave you with these thoughts: "Your diet is a bank account and good food choices are good investments"...



Indian Audit & Accounts
Service Officers' Wives Association
(IAAOWA)

Indian Audit & Accounts
Service Officers' Wives Association
(IAAOWA)

Celebrating Diwali

Come every year, just before the harsh winter sets in North India, we all get ready to celebrate Diwali - that age old festival of lights celebrating the triumph of good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. For the IA&AS family, the annual Diwali dinner, held on the lawns of CAG's residence, is an endeavor towards community building and strengthening the feeling of camaraderie.

In this spirit, IAAOWA organized this socio-cultural event on 14 October 2022.

The lit up venue, great food, shopping stall and some amazing performances by the children and members turned a simple evening into a memorable event. Added to this were endless conversations and laughter, live music and enthusiastic performances by the IA&AS



family. As always, this event would not have been possible without the participation of our esteemed members and the presence of CAG Ma'am and Sir.

Here's a peek into the joy of that light and laughter filled night...





Kid Space

Creativity from the little hands

Green Rangers' Nature Hunt

We - the **Green Ranger Club kids**- keep doing some or the other activities in iCISA to connect with **Mother Nature**. This time around we requested the Mommy Rangers (aka our strict but sweet mothers) to organize a Treasure Hunt for us, as part of celebrating Earth Day (22nd April 2022)... and voila! They decided to organize a **Nature Hunt** (fitting in with the theme, I'd say!) on 30th April. We could hardly wait to participate in this new sounding activity and when the time finally came, all of us barely wanted to gather around the Mommies quietly to hear the rules. After all, we were a bunch of about 17 kids ranging from cute two year olds to teenagers!



Aashvi Parikh
10 years

Soon we were divided into two teams - the **Green Team** and the **Blue Team** (where I was put). But we were in for a surprise this time 'coz the clues weren't the usual paper chit hints..... Instead, we got eight pictures (as clues) of trees/ plants spread around iCISA, which we had to identify and from there we had to collect the chits which contained environmental messages. To win, the team had to collect all these messages and bring them back to the starting point.



Green Team Clues

Immediately, we set off in our respective teams to search for the landmarks in the pictures. Since it was a new kind of treasure hunt (and also becoz we didn't have the patience to hear the rules properly!!), we were a bit confused in the beginning but soon the collective team excitement took over and we got into the **superpower mode** to run from here to there, all over iCISA - from the basketball court to **Botanica**, from the palm trees to the mini golf course - just about anywhere and everywhere (while taking care of our youngest team members).



Blue Team Clues

Soon both teams (which had altogether different pictorial clues) had found all the messages - simple but important ones -

- ▶ Don't waste water;
- ▶ Protect plants and trees;
- ▶ Reuse & recycle paper;
- ▶ Reduce use of tissue paper;
- ▶ Switch off fans/ lights when not in use;
- ▶ Plant trees on birthdays;
- ▶ Reduce use of plastics;
- ▶ Don't waste food.

We were so happy to have worked together and finished the task that it didn't matter who won finally - and there were treats for everyone! Our wonderful Mommy Rangers rewarded us with a sumptuous snack party - pizzas, doughnuts and juices! It was a delicious end to a fun-filled evening. But most of all, it was one more opportunity for us to remember that we need to nurture Mother Nature if we want to have a (better) future.....!

Glimpses of our Nature
Hunt and earlier
Treasure Hunts



My Magical World!!



Aarav Desai
7.5 yrs

My Magical World is made of chocolates, cars, dinosaurs, godzillas, dragons, monsters and people. Once upon a time, there was a bad ghost who pushed all the islands up and the skies down. All the godzillas, dinosaurs, cars, dragons and monsters started fighting with the bad ghost. First, the godzillas tried to squeeze the bad ghost but the ghost made an electric bubble car and disappeared. Then, came the monsters, and they tried to kill the ghost but the ghost went inside the monsters and killed the monsters. Later, came the dragons, they too tried to kill the ghost but the ghost became invisible and hit the dragons till they were dead. And, then came the dinosaurs who also tried to kill the ghost but the ghost went inside their tummy and put a bomb to kill them too. Lastly, came the cars and they too tried to kill the ghost, but the cars had superpowers that made the ghost blind, deaf and mute but couldn't save themselves and the cars also died. After that, the people also got superpowers and they killed the ghost. People with those superpowers made all the cars, godzillas, dinosaurs, dragons and the monsters to get up and then all the godzillas, dinosaurs, dragons, cars and the monsters stayed happily and enjoyed their lives.

My World of Magic says that we should always protect the good ones and stop the bad ones from doing bad things.

Hoopa & Loopa in Yarrows

This is a story before the first story of Hoopa and Loopa when they went to Yarrows. Hoopa, Loopa and their parents went to Yarrows by train. When they reached Yarrows they realized that Skilly and Billy were also at Yarrows. They were also brothers just like Hoopa and Loopa. When they arrived they went straight to bed because it was night time. In the morning they all ate breakfast together. After their breakfast they realized that Shasa was there too. They went to the music room where they took chances playing the piano. After a while they went to the ground to play tag, by then it was lunch time. They all ate lunch together. After that they all went to their rooms to relax for a while.



Raghav Choudhury Shukla

8 years

Then they all had dinner together and went to sleep. The next morning they just stayed in their rooms until breakfast. They chatted and all that stuff. Then it was the same as yesterday but at night they went to a street with shops on both sides called The Mall Road. They had dinner there and walked back to Yarrows. They thought it would take five minutes because it took two minutes by car, but it actually took ten minutes (because of cars)!



The next morning, first thing after breakfast, they went for a nature walk. It took some time to get to the trekking area (like 30 minutes or so) but it was totally worth it because they saw lots of cool things like WATERFALLS, WILD ANIMALS and they even found a LIGHTER! When they

reached their rooms they started packing because it was their last day. After that they went back home.

When they got home they thought it was good to be home but they missed their friends. They asked their parents if they could go again next week but they said their summer holidays were ending so they could go again next year.

The Book Never Written



Ahna Jha
14 years

The moment Rishi stepped down from the train he was greeted at the platform by the people of his small town. They had gathered there with garlands and a band. Rishi had only expected his parents at the station, and now they were the ones nowhere to be seen. Finally, Rishi spotted them beside a camera operator and a woman interviewing his parents. He pushed through the crowd, reached his parents, and pulled them aside. "What is happening, why are so many people gathered here?!" Rishi asked in a state of panic. "Son, we are immensely proud of you! Your book 'The Seed of Life' has won the 'Akademi Sahitya' award. If you had published it, why didn't you tell us?", they inquired. Well, here Rishi was, completely unaware of a book he supposedly authored, and his parents were asking him about it. The irony. "Let's go home" was all he could think to say.

As soon as Rishi entered his room, he felt as if he was present in the house of a celebrity. There was so much fan mail, bouquets of flowers and god knows what. He shifted aside some of the things and made his way to his bed. He lay still for some time. After a few minutes, his grandpa entered the room. "So, Rishi, how do you

feel about winning this prestigious award?" he asked with a smile. Rishi replied: "Tell me about it! I didn't even write any book and suddenly I get awarded the country's most prestigious literature award". Frustration was clear on his face. "Come with me to the veranda, I want to talk to you", Grandpa told Rishi. He obeyed without questioning and they made their way to the veranda.

Rishi and Grandpa sat on the couch, facing the veranda which was grown with love in the care of Rishi's grandma. Remembering his sweet grandma, a tear rolled down from Rishi's cheeks. "It's been almost a few months. Since the award-winning book got published and youR grandma.....left us". Grandpa started the conversation, rather on a touchy topic, and confusing Rishi in case the two things might be related. He handed Rishi a letter. He took the letter in his hands. His heart started beating faster when he recognized his grandma's handwriting but written rather in a hurry.

'Dear Rishi, I know you love writing stories and consider a hobby of yours. I have read, and even today I find much joy in reading them with a cup of tea, looking at my garden. I have written a book, which shall only be published after I am no more. It will be published under your name- 'The Seed of Life by Rishi Rawat'. I want you to start your writing career, with just a little help from Granny. Love you, always.'

Now everything was clear to Rishi. He lay his head on Grandpa's shoulder. "Granny recognized my true ambition, which even I could not. I'll fulfil her dream..." Rishi said, and the only sound heard was the sweet call of the myna from the garden.

Health & Wellness





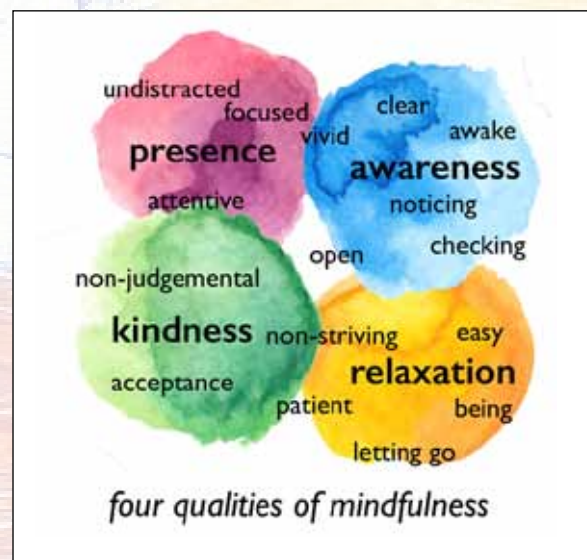
Priya Parikh (IAAS, 2006)
 Certified Meditation & Mindfulness Trainer

Mindful Happiness...

...a few tips for daily practice

Mindfulness¹ is the buzzword these days, not just for meditation enthusiasts but a wide variety of people, be it students, teachers, corporates or just about anyone who is interested in achieving a higher state of calm, contentment and living life to the fullest. Without dwelling upon its benefits too much (you will find many on the internet anyways!), let's just go through some simple ways to make mindfulness an integral part of our lives.

¹A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique



One, it's the cliché technique-to observe your breath. If you don't have time to meditate / do breathing exercises, the good news is that your breath (thankfully) always stays by your side and will patiently wait for your attention!! So, whenever you are waiting in a queue, travelling or attending a boring class / meeting, just about any time of the day, for a few minutes, focus your attention on your breathing (the air going inside and coming out, the feeling of air through your nostrils, etc.). Initially, you may remember to do it only once or twice a day, but continue with the same and gradually the moments of your focus will increase throughout the day. This helps in relaxing (almost instantly) and also slows down the wild pace at which our minds and bodies are functioning. As you do this, another thing will happen slowly, the tendency to breathe right (deep breathing) will also grow.



Third, whenever you are walking / travelling, try to notice the things around you on every journey-best is if the surroundings have trees/plants and you keep observing them every day, but even if there are man made (or mundane!) things (like buildings / shops / walls, etc.), still you can keep a track of these things on your path. Strange as it may sound, this helps in keeping us grounded and the daily connection with the surroundings enables us to stay in the present.

Fourth, and it may seem I am wrapping up with a seemingly dangerous (if not used sensibly!) technique.....this is all about increasing other senses by closing our eyes for a few moments while doing some routine activities, like drinking water, chewing food, brushing teeth and so on and so forth. Needless to say, this should be done only for a little while and in

safe-zone activities! This technique, as some of you may have guessed, ensures that we stay focused and aware while sharpening our other senses. Gradually you can use it for longer durations in these daily or other activities (except in the workplace please!) and reap its varied benefits.

Second, an interesting one, the 30 second-stop technique, which I try to use on mind-boggling days at work / home! In this, just stop doing whatever you are doing at that time for 30 seconds (except of course if you're driving a car or flying a plane, just kidding!!) You can simply do nothing or observe your breath for these 30 seconds; after that, resume the activity you were doing-these breaks not only help to increase focus and relaxation, but also make energy rise to work more efficiently. You can start with twice or thrice a day and the ideal is 6 times a day (three minutes in total, hopefully we can spare that much time in a day!).

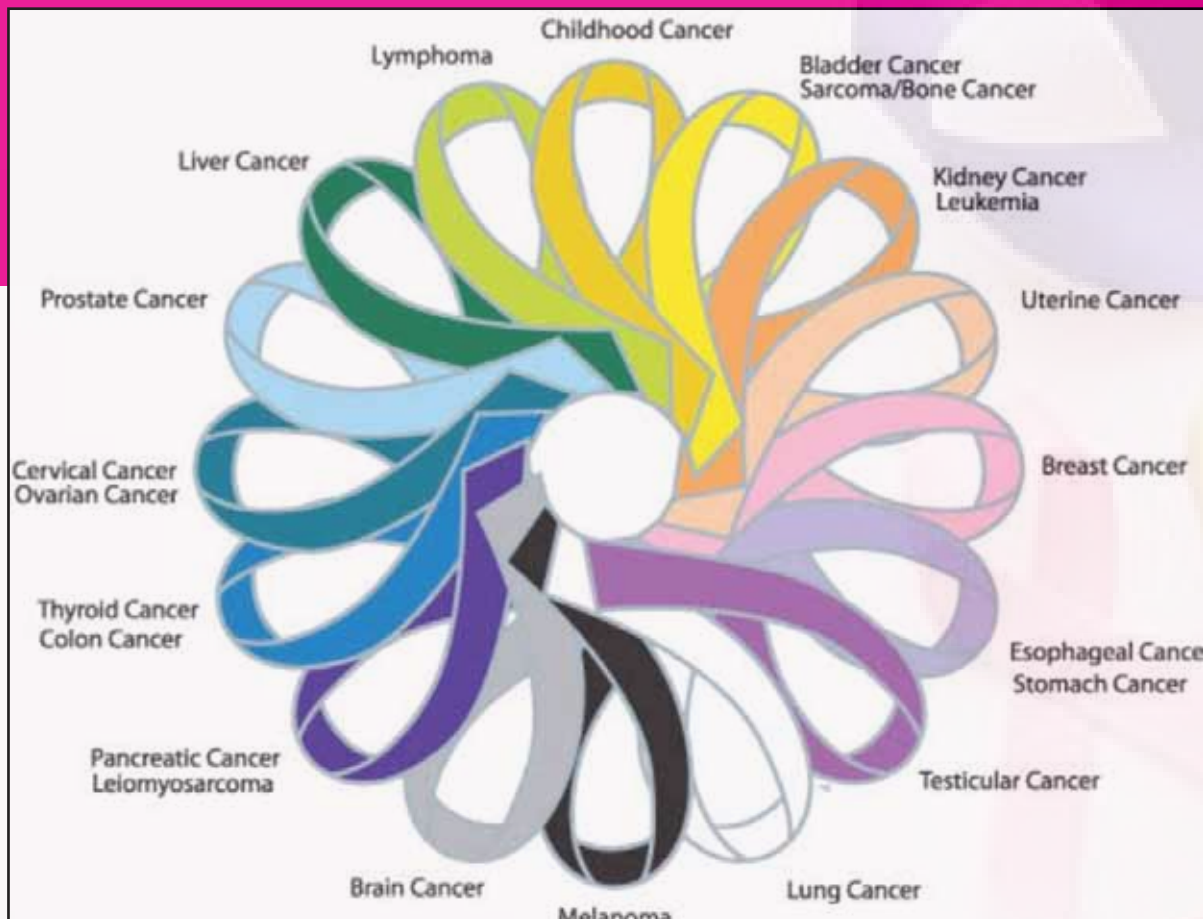
Friends, if we remember to use any (or all!) of these easy methods of increasing awareness / mindfulness, it would go a long way in ensuring a life full of balance, energy and happiness. Winding up as Master Oogway (of Kung Fu Panda movie fame) said-

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift...

.....that's why they call it present”

“What your mind doesn’t know, your eyes can’t see”

An Insight into Cancer Awareness



Dr Asmita Singh
MBBS MS (Obs and Gynae)

It's said that prevention is better than cure, but what if I say, this doesn't hold good in diseases which have both modifiable and non-modifiable (genetic) causes, obviously we can't prevent our genetic history, or the genes that we have from our parents.

So, what is the option in such diseases? Here, early detection is the best prevention, and for early detection, AWARENESS is the key.

In today's generation of automations and innovations, the disease for which there is the

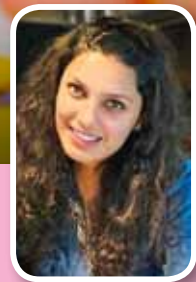
most elaborate screening / early detection programmes in the world, is Cancer.

Here is a precise chart for us, to use the advancements in the medical field in our favour and be better aware of the most common cancers that can affect women.

The four pillars	Symptoms / danger signs to be aware of	Doctors to consult	Modifiable risks	Initial tests to be done
Ovary	Loss of appetite/ weight loss/ abdomen fullness/ pain abdomen	Gynaecologist and Gynae- oncologist	Avoid obesity, restrict alcohol/ smoking/ inadvertent hormonal medications usage (A)	1) TVS – Transvaginal Ultrasound (internal scan) 2) Blood test – CA 125
Breast	Lump in breast/ Bloody discharge from nipple	Surgeon and Surgical oncologist	Encourage Breast feeding during reproductive years + A	1) Self breast examination 2) USG – ultrasound breast (if age < 40 years) 3) Breast mammography (if age > 40 years)
Uterus	Irregular periods / Sudden bleeding after 1 year of menopause	Gynaecologist and Gynae- oncologist	Control diabetes and hypertension + A	1) TVS – ET – which is an ultrasound for uterus lining
Cervix	Abnormal discharge / bleeding after intercourse	Gynaecologist/ Gynae- oncologist	HPV vaccination (Cervavarix after 9 years of age) + A	1) PAP Smear (every 3 years before 30 years, every 5 years after 30 years) 2) HPV testing – Human Papilloma Virus 3) After 65 years - can stop doing PAP Smear (If previous PAP smears are negative)

Hopefully by preventing the preventable, we can have an easy time being a woman.

At the end, it's always about focussing on the fight and not the fright.



Dr. Deeksha Puri Bhola
Medical Officer (Dental)

Early Childhood Caries

Taking care of dental health in children....

We are all aware, there are two sets of teeth viz. primary (milk teeth) and secondary (permanent teeth).

We usually grow up with an adage, “doodh ke daant toh toot jaenge” and thus, we become careless and do not take care of them, while the truth being, that our primary teeth:

- ▶ Act like a foundation stone for permanent teeth.
- ▶ Helps normal growth of jaw height and gives shape to the face.

- ▶ Helps in the first step of chewing and grinding food.

Hence, we need to take care of our mouth, the moment the child is born, even before, in the womb of the mother. Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is the most prevalent infectious disease amongst our children.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry defines ECC as the presence of one or more decayed, missing or filled tooth surfaces in any primary tooth in a child 71 months of age or younger. It not only affects the child's oral

health but also general health of the child; problems with eating; speaking as well as increased risk of caries development in the permanent teeth.

Teeth act as a host for microorganisms wherein bacteria ferments sugar to produce acid which further dissolves the tooth surface, thereby causing tooth to decay or causing caries. Window of infectivity is the time of initial colonization of an infant's oral environment with the primary cariogenic bacteria (viz. *S Mutans* and *lactobacillus*.)

How does it occur?

- ▶ How to take care of the child's teeth while the baby is still in the womb? Sounds absurd!! Rather not. Maternal oral health and caries status adversely affects infant's oral health as vertical transmission of *S.Mutans* has been well documented and the condition so caused is also aptly named as "Maternally derived *Streptococcus Mutans* disease".
- ▶ After birth, direct transmission of infection occurs from mother to child through means of infected saliva or sharing food. Studies suggest that mothers are the primary source of *S. Mutans*.
- ▶ Improper feeding habits:
 - Breast feeding: It has been generally observed that breast feeding for over 1 year old and at night (especially when the child falls asleep with the nipple in the mouth) may be associated with Early Childhood Caries. Nocturnal breastfeeding



should be avoided after the 1st primary tooth begins to erupt.

- Bottle Feeding: Children sleeping with bottles filled with sweetened milk are at a high risk as the salivary flow decreases while sleeping and hence the cleaning effect of saliva



decreases. It is recommended that infants should drink from "a cup" as they approach their first birthday; and be weaned from the bottle at 12-14 months of age. It is also known as "Nursing Bottle Caries". Parents need to be aware of the acidogenic and cariogenic potential of infant formulas. Bed time bottle feedings are to be discouraged especially after tooth eruption.

- Frequent ingestion of sugar sweetened medications is associated with dental caries in chronically ill children. To motivate children to have vitamins, many companies have made sugar containing jelly, gummies and candy like chewable vitamin supplements. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends an optimal quantity of vitamins and a well-balanced diet.



- Snacking in between the meals is also a reason; frequency rather than the quantity, must be taken care of.

Prevention:

First of all, mothers should be aware about dental hygiene (professional help may also be sought to understand the nuances of a healthy mouth). Improving expectant mother's oral health by reducing pathogenic bacteria levels in their mouth, will delay acquisition of oral bacteria and development of ECC in their children.

Eruption of primary teeth may go unnoticed or maybe stressful for the child causing irritation, restlessness and loss of appetite. This discomfort may be reduced by chewing on a hard or a frozen teething ring (sterilized ofcourse) and applying pressure over the gums.

Use of fluoride toothpaste: Usually a non-fluoridated paste is recommended for children less than 3 years of age. Parents should check the amount of fluoride on the toothpaste. No more than pea sized for children above 3-year-old with fluoride



Infant oral health care with professional intervention should start within six months after the eruption of the first primary tooth or no later than 12 months of age. Dietary and self-care habits must be initiated at home. Parents should clean the child's gums and teeth with a soft sterilized damp cloth after every feed. Parent/caretaker should not ignore any early visible signs like complaining of pain or any black spot on the tooth of the child; the child should be immediately taken to the doctor.

I am sure, the majority of the parents go through the issue of teething amongst children, a little care will help for sure.

levels of 500 ppm and upto 1500 ppm, if recommended, by the doctor in case of caries prone mouth. Fluoride varnish for high-risk children by a professional may be sought in case required.

It is pertinent for parents to know that the eruption of the first permanent molar can happen any time after five years of age. It is a permanent tooth, kindly take care of it, if damaged, it will not come again.

Good teeth and dental hygiene are imperative for holistic development of a child. A journey of the long way for the child is dependent on teeth, so do take care.

Musings

Reflections, thoughts, opinions
and much more...



Louis Vuitton

I really don't need to write that this post is not sponsored by Louis Vuitton. It doesn't require this kind of advertising and definitely not from a non entity like me. It can be the other way round, me getting some attention because of the name. I would also like to admit that this article is a true representation of the shallow, consumerist side of my personality, which yearns for accumulation of worldly goods most of which are beyond my purchasing power.

Let's begin from the beginning. A major chunk of my life was spent unaware of the existence of this brand. Yes, ignorant me. The other part was spent in knowledge of its existence, but in the absence of the knowledge of it's correct pronunciation. Finally half of my life later, I can boast of knowing the correct pronunciation, spelling and existence of this brand.

As life moved on from smaller towns to bigger and yet bigger cities, the brand seemed more available. Available in the sense, I could claim of seeing a store, staring at the windows, and



thinking or rather consoling, that the designs are not that great. Just like how you ogle at film stars knowing that they are so out of your league. Owning a Louis Vuitton by a person like me is akin to George Clooney proposing to me. Zero possibility, I know.

So now it must be clear that this brand had been something, way out of the limit of my existence. Something even outside the purview of "Not likely but still a possibility" category. But all this was about to change, the degree of separation between me and LV was about to shrink by an incomprehensible factor.

What happens when life, through its mysterious ways brings you in a

situation where you are the recipient of the unattainable! What are the odds!

By some twist of fate, a good friend of mine just happened to gift a Louis Vuitton bag. In fact, I should go back and change a good friend, a friend who gifts LV deserves to be the 'bestest friend'. Someone above all the other friends and family. After a couple of half-hearted "how can I take this", I finally acquiesced. (Who would not).

As it happens, the initial euphoria sunk and we were bogged down by questions like where do you keep this. I proposed my Godrej Almirah (one place where people like us keep their valuables). Where will we carry this. We don't even go to places deserving enough for this bag. Do we even have stuff worthy enough to keep in the bag. I doubt that.

What if we decide to travel with the BAG. You don't make a Louis Vuitton travel in economy class or anything less than a premier car. I really need to upgrade my car.

Sorry LV can't afford a business class for you.

Well these were the problems which will eventually govern my life. But the thing which was troubling me most was WHAT TO GIVE IN RETURN? I was economically challenged to return the favour. I was spending time not in rejoicing the gift and company of my friend but in taking account of my assets

and liabilities, to compensate for the return gifts. Now suddenly getting the bag didn't seem to be a good thing. As they say push the limits, so did I, after scouring the bank locker and account to at least return 1/1000th of the cost. I could find something. Nothing close to it but hopefully respectable enough.

The practicality of the situation took away the fun out of it. But still I was the proud owner of LV.

As the time came to bid good-bye to my good best friend. I was standing there waving, lighter by a couple of thousands and a gold pendant but heavier by the weight of an unattainable gift. I wanted to scream, "thank you my dearest friend, and don't hesitate to contact me in case you need a blood transfusion, kidney, heart or liver transplant or wish to be included in my will".

If in our future family photos, you see us in background and only a bag in focus, that is not new technique or style of photography, that's just us flaunting our LV.

P.S. Isn't normal to communicate with the bag at a deep down spiritual and mystical level. My husband thinks it is basically me communicating with myself and I should take some professional help but again what does he know.

au revoir

Anonymous

The Bagwatis



Dr. Astha Giri

The fast paced city life has its own ways of alarming and amusing us. This story is about what happened on one such 11 September evening, which me and my childhood best friend, Aastha (oh yes, we share the same name and yes our fathers' too share the same name 'Anil', oh wait!! we went to the same school, same class, same section and obviously the same school bus) will probably never forget even when we turn 100 years old.

It was 2013 and I was supposed to meet Aastha at Delhi's favorite hangout, Connaught Place to wish her a Happy Birthday. CP as we all call it, is a twenty minute metro ride from my workplace, the Delhi University, North Campus. With my wallet, cell phone and Aastha's gift in hand, I headed towards the ladies line of the security check after keeping my backpack under the scanner. But the lady checker was strict and made me go back to the scanner to put the gift under it too. Anyway, I did it and again got in the queue before collecting my backpack and of-course the cute little gift bag I had bought. Hurriedly I used the metro card in my wallet to get past the gates and happily boarded the metro at Vishwavidyalaya Station looking forward to an evening full of fun and chattering.

The Delhi Metro is the most sought after mode of public transport and as it happens, to find a seat especially in the evening, is a matter of great luck. Congratulating my good luck I took the seat and sat impatiently looking at the route map again and again as to when Rajiv Chowk would come. Finally, Rajiv Chowk came and along came a tsunami of people swarming in and out of the train onto the platform, towards the stairs and escalators covering every inch of space on the station. Looking at the rush I thought of keeping my beloved belongings, the recently bought phone and wallet into my backpack but then decided against it as

Aastha would be calling me shortly to ask my whereabouts. Making my way up the stairs and after some anxious phone calls, I finally met Aastha, the birthday girl. Bidding goodbye to her birthday-gifts-coolie of the day, her friend Shafique, we headed to the exit gates again making use of the smart and convenient 'smart card' which I had intelligently not placed back in my bag.

We decided to chat over a cup of coffee at Costa Coffee and went to take the escalators up the ground floor. Seeing that the birthday girl's coolie had left, I offered to carry her bags to which she said "no you have a backpack yourself". I said it's just my mini laptop or netbook as it is called and then we went on and on about how cute and comfortable netbooks are and how they've been replaced by tablets. Merrily we talked our walk to the destination, Costa Coffee, and sat down ignoring as well as disturbing the privacy of the couple sitting right behind us. We placed our order at the counter and came to our table. I presented Aastha with her gift and she delightfully unpacked it and we again started our banter.

A little tired from the metro station's hustle bustle and our walk, Aastha wanted water and so I readily opened my backpack to fetch my bottle only to find it missing. I looked a little more closely and realized my prized possession, the little blue Dell netbook was missing too but instead a bright and shining white Vaio was kept neatly, my folder full of papers was missing but a brochure of Delhi School of Economics was present. I gasped loudly as I realized what had happened, "Oh nooo... Aastha, I think my bag got exchanged at the security check".

The alarming part of city life had begun. The bag looked identical to mine from the outside

but little did I know I had lost my bag to someone in a city of millions. I imagined the tsunami of people on the station amongst whom any one individual could be carrying my bag and traveling to some part of the city oblivious to the fact that he or she had the wrong bag. We had clearly disturbed the couple sitting behind us as I found them both staring at me and my mind went blank for a split second. I did not care who got disturbed because I was disturbed to the very core for those few seconds before good sense and of course common sense prevailed.

Aastha quickly cancelled the order we had placed to move out and go back to the metro station and I scanned the 'exchanged backpack's' notebooks and DSE's brochure to find any clue as to whose bag it was. What followed were a series of 'oh yes' and 'oh no'. I found some phone numbers scribbled in one of the notebooks, "Oh Yes" but they belonged to companies ranging from Asian Traders to ICICI Banks, "Oh No". I dug into her bag and found a college identity card, "Oh Yes, it belongs to a girl named Reshu, who studies in D school" but there is no address or phone number on it, "Oh No". I found another number scribbled between the pages which had nothing to do with any company, a tired "Oh Yes", but I dialed it to reach another unrelated, unknown person, "Oh No".

Meanwhile Aastha was searching for some contact information on the 'exchanged bag's' laptop and I kept discovering useless passport size photos, examination fee slips from 'the' bag and also kept reminding Aastha that we could be politely kicked out of the coffee shop at any moment as we had cancelled the order. Just when I thought I should call up my dad and ask for his suggestions, Aastha gave a hopeful "Oh Yes", she had found the C.A exam form of Reshu's sister Aashna and again "Oh Yes" it had her contact number.

The amusing part of the city had begun. Taking a deep breath, crossing our fingers we called up the number hoping to get Reshu's contact from her sister. Luck was back by my side and Reshu herself picked up the phone. "Oh Yes" "Thank God" "Oh My God". As Aastha spoke to her I could truly understand how relieved Reshu was to hear from us. In an effort to find out whose

bag she had, Reshu had also switched on my dear netbook and after searching for some time, found my address on a scanned copy of voter identity card. She told us she had started for my residence because she couldn't find any contact number. But as luck would have it she was sweet enough to agree to meet us at CP itself and re-exchange the bags.

Our first expression was that of huge relief and within seconds we were back at the counter re-placing the order and laughing our heads off on the confusion and its control. Excited and energized by what had totally left me blank for some seconds, a fresh spurt of gossip and jokes began. As we waited for Reshu to drive her way through, we sipped our coffee and gobbled the delicious brownie. To pacify my anxiety, every now and then Aastha reminded me that Reshu's laptop was much costlier than my cute netbook, making it obvious that she would surely come to take it and we would again start laughing. Finally Reshu called up and we decided on Keventer's as the meeting point. We left Costa Coffee and strolled to our next destination, meeting Aastha's parents on our route.

Aastha had already briefed them about the bag adventure and they too expressed their relief that everything got sorted. I too had informed my dad about the happenings of the evening and he was coming to pick me up from the metro station to avoid any more confusion and delays. Waiting for Reshu to arrive, we clicked some pictures and chatted a little more. Finally recognizing Reshu from her passport sized photos, we met the lady herself. Sweet as she was, she explained how the bag must have got exchanged at the security counter, how she found it wasn't her bag and how she searched through my laptop to find my address.

Happily the Bagwatis, me and Reshu, exchanged greetings and finally took our own bags, deciding to put some unique tags and identity to avoid such fiascos in the future...

Such was the scenario on 11 September 2013 that luck left me and found me at the same time and at the same place saving me from endless worries and loss, giving me an experience of a lifetime.



बक्से

बात थोड़ी पुरानी है। उस समय की है जब घर के सदस्य मोबाइल के आगे नहीं आंगन में इक्कठे होते थे। जब छतें घर से ज्यादा दिल जोड़ती थीं। समय के साथ वो आंगन और छत फ्लैट में परिवर्तित हो गये। जैसे जैसे घर संकुचित हुए वैसे वैसे हमारे दिल भी छोटे हो गये। तब से अब तक कई बदलाव आए, ना वैसे घर रहे और न वैसे घरवाले। ऐसी ही एक तेजी से लुप्त होती चीज है बक्से। वो एल्युमिनियम की चादर वाले छोटे, बड़े और बहुत बड़े बक्से। हर घर में चार पांच तो आराम से पाए जाते। और इन्हें बस ऐसे ही मत समझियेगा, हर बक्से का अपना किरदार था, निर्धारित कार्य और जगह थी। किसी में बिस्तर, तो किसी में बर्तन, किसी में लड़की के दहेज का सामान तो किसी में पुराने कपड़े रहते थे। सब अपनी अपनी कहानियाँ और अपने सामान समेटें खड़े रहते। वो माँ ने जो अपनी शादी में गिलाफ काढ़े थे और वो जो महंगी वाली चादर पापा लाये थे, जो सिर्फ किसी खास मेहमान के आने पर निकलती, सब इसी में बंद रहती। माँ का मशीन की कढ़ाई वाले phase

से लेकर फ़ैब्रिक पेंटिंग वाला दौर सबके सबूत यहां उपलब्ध हैं। बड़े सम्मान से इन बक्सों को रखा जाता, कवर चढ़ा कर के तो कभी गद्दा चादर बिछा कर बिस्तर बना दिया जाता था। साल में दो तीन बार तो इन बक्सों को और इनके सामानों को धूप दिखाया जाता। बस फिर क्या हम बच्चों का तो खेल बन जाता। कुछ नया नहीं रहता था फिर भी उन पुरानी चीजों से पुरानी यादों को ताजा करने में बड़ा ही अच्छा लगता था। “माँ यह वाली फ़ॉक कबकी है”, यह वाली चादर क्यों नहीं निकालती हो। सब जवाब पता होते, लेकिन फिर से उन किस्सों को सुनने में मजा आता।

कब-कब के सामान रखे थे, कभी तो काम आएंगे कर के रखे ही रहते। Reduce, reuse, recycle जैसे शब्दों का बोध तो नहीं था, लेकिन घर आई चीजों को फेंकते नहीं हैं का संस्कार जरूर था।

इन सब में सबसे अहम था माँ का बक्सा। वैसे तो सब माँ के ही थे। लेकिन यह वाला जिसमें उनकी रंग बिरंगी साड़ियाँ, कुछ उनके पुराने कपड़े, कुछ

हमारे पुराने कपड़े, कुछ पुरानी यादें और बहुत सारी अनकही बातें बन्द रहती थीं। माइग्रेटरी बर्ड्स की पाबंदी सी, इन बक्सों को निकाला जाता। उनकी साड़ियों को धूप दिखाया जाता, और फिर सहेज कर मौसम के मुताबिक आलमारी में टांग दिया जाता। कितने ही किस्से गिरफ्त रहते थे और कितने लम्हे कैद थे इन चार परतों में। ये सब भी बस बक्से खुलने के इंतजार में रहते, और ढक्कन खुलते ही, बुलबुले से उड़ने लगते थे। इन बुलबुलों को फोड़ कर उस समय को याद करने का अपना ही मजा था।

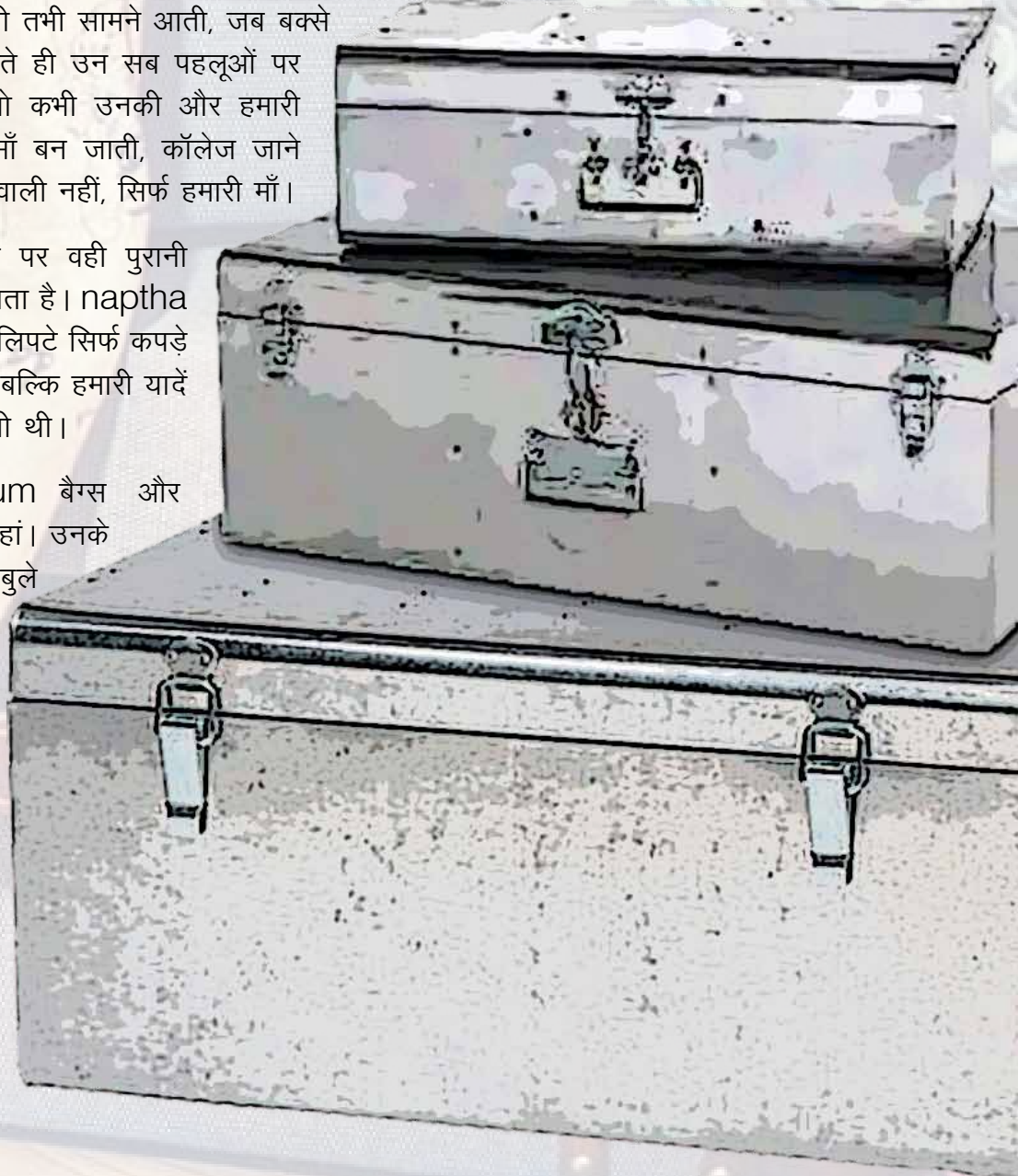
कितनी बातें पता चलती थी। माँ का जब bellbottom पहली बार देखा था तो यकीन ही नहीं आया कि यह भी ऐसे कपड़े पहनती थी। माँ, यह वाली हमारी माँ, हो ही नहीं सकता। हमारा मन शायद उनके माँ वाले aspect को लेकर बड़ा possessive था, इसलिए उनकी यह छवि देखने को ही तैयार नहीं था। वो माँ के ग्रेजुएशन सेरेमनी की फोटो भी हजम नहीं हुई थी हमें। माँ हमें पढ़ाती तो थी लेकिन क्या कभी खुद भी स्कूल कॉलेज जाती थीं, यह सोचने की क्षमता, हमारी पहुंच के बाहर की बात थी। इन बक्सों के खुलते ही जीवन के भूले बिसरे पहलू सामने आते थे। ऐसी बातें जिनके बारे में हम भूल गए हैं और सोचने की कोशिश भी नहीं करते

हैं। खैर, यह सब बातें भी तभी सामने आती, जब बक्से खुलते थे। बक्से बंद होते ही उन सब पहलूओं पर ताला लग जाता था जो कभी उनकी और हमारी पहचान थी। माँ सिर्फ माँ बन जाती, कॉलेज जाने वाली नहीं, सपने देखने वाली नहीं, सिर्फ हमारी माँ।

आज भी बक्से के नाम पर वही पुरानी यादों का पिटारा खुल जाता है। naphtha बॉल्स, और पॉलिथीन में लिपटे सिर्फ कपड़े ही नहीं सुरक्षित रहते थे बल्कि हमारी यादें भी preserve हो जाती थीं।

आजकल के vaccum बैग्स और strolley में वो बात कहां। उनके खुलने पर यादों के बुलबुले नहीं उड़ते हैं। न वो महक आती है, न वो किस्से याद आते हैं।

एक अदने से कारीगर ने पसीने में लथपथ होकर बनाये होंगे। दिखने में तो मामूली से लेकिन बड़ी ही खास यादें अपने में समंटे हुए। बक्से वो एल्युमीनियम की चादर से बने छोटे, बड़े और बहुत बड़े।





बिजली का जाना और उसके साथ का जाना बाना

Mom how could they do this. Why you are so calm about it. बच्चों का यह विषाद मेरी समझ के बाहर की बात थी। अरे! हुआ कुछ भी नहीं था, बस बिल्डिंग के WhatsApp group पर message आया था कि due to some repair work, there will be power cut from 10am to 12 noon.

पूर्व निर्धारित समय और पूर्व सूचना की बिजली कटौती पर इतना आक्रोश। नाहक ही अपने समय की याद आ गयी। वो समय जब सूरज के निकलने और अस्त होने के समान ही बिजली का जाना भी एक यथार्थ सत्य था।

जाने का समय निश्चित नहीं रहता कितनी देर के लिए जाएगी इसकी भी कोई निश्चिंता भी नहीं थी। निश्चित था तो ख़ाली बिजली का जाना।

दोपहर में तो कुछ खास फर्क नहीं पड़ता बस यह कह कर आगे बढ़ जाते कि इस समय बिजली चली गयी। असली रौनक तो शाम को होती थी। अब अंधेरे और रौनक का क्या मेल है यह समझने

के लिए सोशल मीडिया और २४/७ इलेक्ट्रॉनिक gadgets की इस दुनिया से निकलना पड़ेगा और पीछे झांकना पड़ेगा।

शाम का समय है, गोधूली बेला कह सकते हैं बच्चे पार्को में, गलियों में खेल रहें हैं। कुछ बच्चे पापा के आने के पहले घर पहुँचने की मंशा से घर वापस चल पड़ें हैं और कुछ निर्भयों को तो कान खींच कर ही घर लाना पड़ता है। घर में घुसते से ही माँ हाथ मुँह धुल कर बुक्स लाओ कह कर रसोई में निर्देश देने चली गयी। रसोई से निकलती खुशबू बता रही है कि आज आलू टमाटर के साथ लौकी खाने को मिलेगी।

पापा भी ऑफिस से आ चुके हैं। और अपना इन्वॉल्मेंट दिखाने के चक्कर में चौपाल और कृषि दर्शन जैसे रोचक tv कार्यक्रमों से नजर हटा कर कह देते हैं की लाओ देखें maths में क्या चल रहा है तुम्हारी क्लास में। खेल की सारी प्रफुल्लता तो यह सुनकर रफूचककर हो जाती है। और भारी मन और अदभुत धीमी गति से इवो लेकर हम

डाइनिंग टेबल पर पहुँच जाते। माँ पहले से ही मौजूद थी। पापा भी माँ की मुस्तैदी देखकर, आषाढ़ मास में फसलों का रख रखाव कैसे करें पर ध्यान देने लगे। माँ ने factorisation के rules समझाने शुरू कर दिए। अब ऐसे समय में ध्यान maths बुक पर होना चाहिए था परंतु बाल मन पर किसका जोर चला है। पंखे की घुर्र घुर्र भी Maths के आगे रोचक लग रही थी। गेहूँ, चावल में कौनसे कीटनाशक का प्रयोग करें सुन कर ऐसा लगा की पापा का जीवन कितना अच्छा है जब मन करे tv देख लो।

बताओ क्या पूछ रहे हैं। माँ की आवाज सुनकर मैं सीधे खेत खलिहानों से निकल के डाइनिंग टेबल पर औंधे मुँह गिर पड़ी। अब तो माँ डाँटेगी। क्या बोलें जब पता ही नहीं क्या पूछा है।



लेकिन किसी ने सत्य ही कहा है जिसका कोई नहीं होता उसका भगवान होता है। और हमारे केस में भगवान बिजली विभाग के रूप में अवतरित हुए। पंखे की सायं सायं चुई चुई में बदल गयी, कृषि विशेषज्ञ की बात बीच में ही बंद हो गयी, ghupp अंधेरा छा गया और बिजली चली गयी। जाते जाते बिजली अपनी गति हम बच्चों को दे जाती। और माँ के यह वाक्य ओपफोह, इसको भी अभी जाना था, पूरा होने के पहले ही भाग जाते। टॉर्च और मोमबत्तियाँ निकल ली जाती। चुस्त सिपहसलार की तरह petromax तैनात कर दिये जाते।

कहीं पापा और पड़ोस वाले अंकल देश विदेश की समस्याओं का समाधान ढूँढने में लगे होंगे। माँ भी पड़ोस वाली Aunty से कॉलोनी की राजनीति डिस्कस कर रही होंगी। हम बच्चे भी मधिम रोशनी में चिड़िया उड़ और अक्कड़ बक्कड़ खेल कर मन बहला रहे होते।

कोई ना कोई घर में ऐसा मिल ही जाता जिसे हम बच्चों को कहानियाँ सुनाने में मजा आता। बस फिर क्या वो हम बच्चों को इकट्ठा कर एक master

स्टोरी teller की तरह कुछ सच सी लगने वाली कहानियाँ तो कुछ कहानियों से लगने वाले सच को सुनाते।

राजा रानी, दुष्ट राक्षस जिसकी जान तोते में बस्ती थी, कितनी कहानियाँ सुन जाते थे पता हाई नहीं चलता। अब यह मत सोचिए की ऐसी ही shallow कहानियाँ होती थी, कुछ शिक्षाप्रद भी होती थीं। अब climate change और inclusivity जैसे शब्दों वाला ज्ञान नहीं। बस भोले भाले से ज्ञान कि प्लेट में खाना छोड़ोगे तो सियार रात में पेट टोयेगा।

बिजली का इंतैजार करते करते खाने का भी समय हो जाता और कहानियाँ सुनते सुनाते वो लौकी की सब्जी भी खा ली जाती थी।

बिजली तो पता नहीं कब आएगी।

चारपायी और बिस्तर भी आँगन में लग जाते। इसी सब के बीच कई बार बिजली आ जाती थी और ऐसा लगता कि पता नहीं क्या खजाना मिल गया। नहीं भी आती थी तो कोई बड़ी बात नहीं थी, दिन भर की खेल कूद से थके, एक और कहानी, अच्छा बस यह सेंज कहते कहते कब तारों की छाँव में सो जाते पता ही नहीं चलता। कोई ना कोई रात भर पंखा झलता ही रहता। ना स्पेस चाहिए था ना अपनी privacy। उस चिल पों में भी सुकून था। सुबह अपने बिस्तर पर पँखे के नीचे ही आँख खुलती।

Mom why are you smiling, बच्चों का स्वर कान में पड़ा तो यथार्थ में वापस आयी। उनको परेशान देखा तो लगा शायद यही जेनरेशन गैप है। इस जेनरेशन ने अपने को खुश रखने का काम delegate कर दिया है। और सबको responsibility दे दी गयी है चाहे बिजली विभाग ही क्यों नहीं हो। और हमने अपने बचपन में खुद को खुश रखने का जिम्मा खुद ही ले रखा था। खुशी बिजली के आने पर भी होती थी और उसके जाने पर भी।



Feathered Friends

Roopa Sunilraj



What makes birdwatching so enjoyable? Most youngsters today are not really interested in nature, let alone birdwatching. However, this appears to be changing, and I envision a future in which many more of our youngsters are enthusiastic about birds and nature in general. Let's explore why birds are fascinating and why you should begin watching them.

Birds are incredible creatures, and we rarely spend a day without seeing at least a couple of them flying around. These vibrant, intelligent, vocal flying creatures captivate us with their beauty and carefree nature. Getting to know them better can be a wonderful experience. They encourage us to learn about them and the habitats they live in by using their sounds, feather patterns, colours, and behaviours. You'll surely begin to pay more attention to nature if you decide to take up birdwatching as a serious hobby, which will almost definitely develop into a passionate habit.





Birdwatching, also commonly known as birding, is a fantastic hobby for a multitude of reasons. Birding allows one to become much more connected to nature. Birds are arguably some of nature's best ambassadors. On all seven continents, there are over 10,000 species distributed across numerous ecosystems. But birds do not exist in isolation. Each species interacts with a broad variety of different animals and plants, as well as non-living earth factors such as geological elements of the locations and weather systems. By paying attention to birds, one is able to understand and appreciate the links between the various constituents of nature.

You'll definitely find yourself increasingly driven to venture outside and experience new places and things when you do get passionate about watching birds out in the wilderness. The quest for birds can lead us to some spectacular locations, such as a hidden patch of forest down the street, rich foliage up the hills, or even a shoreline.

You'll always experience innumerable other natural treasures all along the path, and get better connected to our magnificent earth. If you're anything like myself and many other bird aficionados, you'll end up becoming a naturalist, someone who values and studies various elements of nature.





Birding is also beneficial to one's health as it gets you outside in the fresh air and moving. It is favourable for your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing to devote time and attention to identifying and observing birds. Even strolling about at a leisurely pace is considerably better for your health than binge-watching Netflix or sitting and working for hours. You might even end up travelling to distant locations or trekking for kilometres in search of fascinating birds. The most gratifying birding adventures are the ones that require the greatest deal of effort.

By becoming a birdwatcher, you are giving your brain a healthy boost. You must train your senses and learn to pay attention to small details such as birds' appearances, sounds, and patterns. Once you've become knowledgeable about these attributes, remembering and

identifying the names of numerous species and habitats will be second nature to you. All of this helps to keep your neurons firing and facilitates your brain establish new neural connections. For those of us who are perpetual learners, birding is ideal. Birdwatching can improve your emotional well-being. Birding can be a very enjoyable social activity, but even if you do it alone, you can find contentment in the slow but steady accumulation of knowledge, expertise, and species on your 'Lifer List.'

Birding, for instance, has been shown in studies to provide a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure.

"Inside us all patiently waiting, sits a tiny little adventurous bird...so get going and find yours".

Picture Credit: Roopa Sunilraj



Talent Corner

Creative corner for the art enthusiasts





Aahna Jha
14 yrs





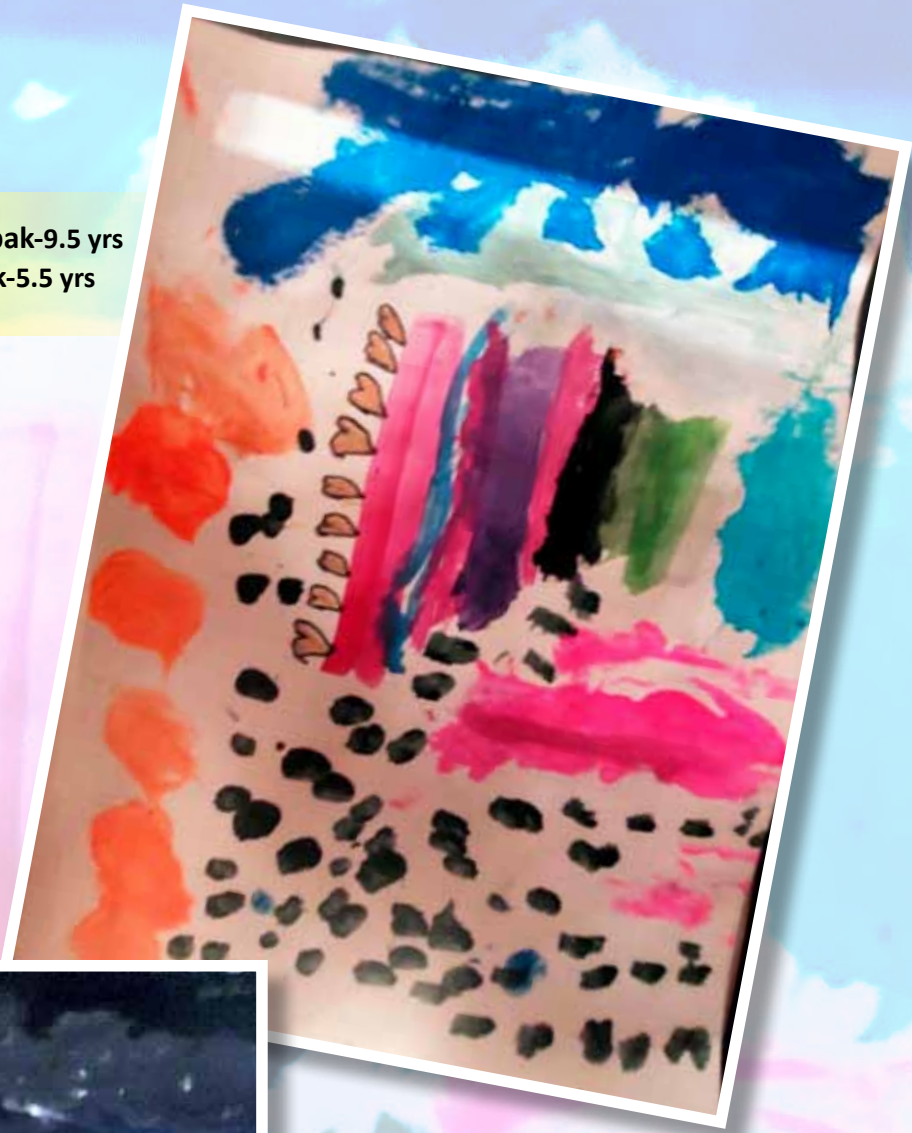
Aashna Jha
8 yrs



Ms. Anita Singh



Sanoha Maria Deepak-9.5 yrs
Sahana Jess Deepak-5.5 yrs





Aashvi Parikh
10 yrs





Mahira Pervez - 6 yrs
Ziyaan Pervez - 10 yrs



Ms. Varsha Shankaran





Dr. Astha Giri





Hooma Shabbir



Resin Art



Hooma Shabbir

Resin art is a unique painting style where instead of using typical brushes or acrylic/oil paints, patterns and designs are made using an epoxy resin. Epoxy resin is formed by mixing two-components – resin and hardener. A chemical reaction occurs between these two components that make liquid resin harden to the equivalency of solid plastic. This resin can be used to make a variety of artistic and unique patterns which can be moulded into coasters, trays, jewellery and various home decor items.

Here are some tips to make a resin art:

1. Take a mould of any shape of your choice.
2. Take resin and hardener in a 2:1 ratio. Mix them well.
3. Pour the mixture into the mould proportionately.
4. You can also add different colours or glitters or even dried leaves or flowers to make it more attractive.
5. Leave the mould for at least 2 days to dry completely.
6. Remove the component carefully from the mould.
7. Try this and add an extra decor to your house.



The Madhubani Saree Story



Ranjana Kumari

Sarees represent our country's strongest and most versatile style staple. Quite in vogue these days are the Madhubani sarees, which speak out the intellectual taste of the wearer. Wearing an artistic saree is a class in itself and every Madhubani sarees represent the rich artistic and cultural heritage of India.

The artist's brush strokes in magnificent colors and vivid patterns are an example of scintillating vision. Madhubani paintings are known for their intricate geometrical patterns depicting Hindu deities such as Krishna, Rama, Lakshmi, Shiva, Durga, and Saraswati, and heavenly bodies such as the Sun and Moon. The painting shows the psychology of the society to which it belongs. An interesting way through which the women of Mithila show their customs and beliefs. Apart from the mythological pattern, motifs like trees, flowers, fishes, bamboo, and many others, enhance the beauty of these sarees.

Madhubani hand painted saree is usually done with fingers, twigs, brushes, nib pens and matchsticks and this depicts the amalgamation of different styles and aspects of nature. From border painted saree to fully painted one, each Madhubani saree speaks a story in itself. The sarees are most commonly painted on fabrics like Tussar silk, Ghicha Silk, Crepe, Cotton and Chiffon.

Let's look at some basic points to keep in mind, before starting a Madhubani saree.

The first and most important step would be to select the fabric. One can choose between cotton or silk or any other fabric mentioned above. But, Madhubani painting on cotton is easier compared to others.

The second step would be to get one big and one small embroidery ring. Although such rings are not meant for this painting, it's a good hack and makes the work easier.

If you are a beginner, the third step would be to find the simplest possible design easily available over the internet or any Madhubani poster or calendar or painting around you. The Madhubani painting is a lot about repeating a design in a pattern. So while choosing a design, pick the one with more straight lines as compared to arcs or circles.

The next step would be to draw the design with a free hand, without using any scales or tracing. It's a good idea to make all the designs initially with pencil and then start painting using fabric paint. It is important to use only fabric paint as they can be retained on the fabric even after multiple wash or dry clean. To start painting your design you would require a nib pen or rotring pen and different sizes of painting brush. The size and type would depend on your selected design.



COVER STORY

North East

Where Heaven and Earth Collide



Serendipitous Shillong

Calling for a re-visit time and again...



Ms. Susan Rodrigues Viswanathan

'Seven Sisters' has been a phrase with interesting connotations for me since childhood, as it then meant a flock of perky brown birds, twittering merrily and hopping along the ground or low tree branches in search of grain - in groups of seven, of course. So, once we caught sight of one, my brothers and I would eagerly race about counting the other birds in the vicinity, till we got to the 'right' number!

As I grew older and learned more geography in school, I realised that this special phrase, 'Seven Sisters', also encompassed the North-Eastern states of India, each with a rich and unique culture. My exposure was indirect and varied - it meant the intricately woven puns or phaneks worn by my friends, a National Geographic feature on the Hornbill Festival, the sturdy yet elegant cane furniture in many fauji homes, the bamboo dance at cultural nights, the distinctive multi-strand bead necklaces in bright colours, the Naga thali at Dilli Haat,

the funny tales of the supremely smelly yet divinely delicious Axone/Akhuni, the gorgeous Assam silk sarees my mother wore and even my own Mekhla-Chador.

With this backdrop, it is not surprising that my husband and I were delighted at the chance of a week's holiday in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, along with our three adult children. And we found it a veritable feast for the spirit and senses, with serendipity abounding.

We missed the delight of having clouds actually entering our rooms, as described by a dear friend who had lived there, since the season was wrong for the experience. However, among the things we most enjoyed were the sweet and juicy little pineapples and the fiery hot bamboo shoot and bhut jolokia pickle available in the shacks lining the highways. We visited the sacred caves at Mawsmai, with its dark and cavernous interiors, an occasional



bright ray of daylight from gaps in the roof seemed like bright haloes of enlightenment streaming over us. At Dawki, we took a relaxed canoe ride down the clear-as-glass, sparkling Umngot river, all the way to the Bangladesh border, with local ladies fishing while perched on huge rocks along the river banks. The Living Roots bridge was a surreal vision, where the local Khasis have trained the roots of sturdy old rubber trees to grow intertwined, to form a unique natural platform for their travel across water bodies.

It was an exciting realization of childhood GK lessons to visit the wettest place in the world, Cherrapunji, only to be disappointed that its name has been changed to the much more prosaic "Sohra". And we also took the chance to see the "Cleanest Village in Asia", Mawlynnong, although since we saw very few people there, and no traffic other than ourselves, that may well have been the reason for its pristine condition!

Having seen photos and read rapturous reviews of "Ri-Kynjai-Serenity by the Lake" spa resort, spread over 45 acres and built on the banks of the serene, crystalline Umiam lake, we had hoped to stay there for a night. However, as an auditor's family, our hearts rebelled against the astronomical cost per night! Instead, we treated ourselves to a leisurely, sumptuous lunch on the verandah of their café, overlooking the lake, and soaked in the Ri-Kynjai experience over several hours.

Food was an adventure by itself. The dhaba type food joints on the drive from Guwahati to Shillong were small and crowded, with unidentifiable sausage-like meats being smoked over fireplaces in many of them. The

gentle, kind-looking staff generally spoke neither Hindi nor English, but helped us choose and enjoy several dishes including spicy pork and rice and assorted greens. However, once in the main part of Shillong, we discovered the iconic Shillong Café in the market, and after our first visit, went back every day. We missed the live music evenings, but my children worked their way through almost every dish on their delectable menu!

An enduring memory is of the breathtaking vista of rolling hills covered in green foliage stretching for miles in every direction and the majestic deep gorges literally at our feet in Laitlum. It's famous as the place where parts of the movie *Rock On* were shot, in particular the scenes where the hero thinks that hardly any fans have showed up for the climactic show, and then one sees vast crowds of people literally appearing over the undulating waves of the landscape to make the rock show a stupendous success. The family saw for ourselves that this was no cinematic trick photography, but actually the natural magic of the terrain, where we could lose sight of each other within a minute, just strolling over a space of a few meters.



Shillong, then, was a cornucopia of experiences packed into a very short time. We will go back sometime for sure, as there is so much left to see and do and explore in Meghalaya, "The Abode of Clouds"....so for now, Khublei, Shibun!*

(*Khasi for "Thank you very much, Bye")



Ms. Shubha Kumar
1985 (Retired IA & AS)

My Tryst *with the* North East

According to Vastushastra, positive and progressive energies can be created in the north-east direction. This direction belongs to Kuber and Lord Shiva is believed to reside in this direction. Most Indians might also be aware that this direction is considered purest of all and we place temples and tulsi plants in the north-east of our homes.

For me, the North East holds special significance because both my father and my spouse started their career from Assam, the parent northeastern state of independent India. My father joined his first job at Dibrugarh in Assam Works department as the first pass out of IIT, Kharagpur, though for a short period. Decades later, my spouse had a glorious spell of several years working at Jorhat and Sibsagar with ONGC. Even for me, the first date with a job began from this direction when in 1985, I was allocated to Tripura for joining my first field job in ONGC. It is a different matter that I continued at Kolkata and at the time I got selected for Civil Services and proceeded northwards for training.

In service, yes, once again I set towards the North East, though not exactly in the Brahmaputra plains. I had initially spent more

than five years at Kolkata but before that my first real visit to the North East fructified during our Bharat Darshan in 1987. Beauty of the region left us all spell bound and my geological lessons about the north eastern topography came alive. The subtropical climate typically in the months of November and December was pleasantly cold and the valleys dotted with flat hills and banana and bamboo vegetation appeared so different from the rest of the Himalayas that we had been traversing during our training. Tropical evergreen forests due to heavy rainfall and the diversified flora and fauna of the north east were a truly amazing experience!

To see the endangered one-horned rhinoceros all around us in Kaziranga sanctuary and capture their various poses was the highlight of this trip. Apart from visiting Numaligarh refinery and Kaziranga, we traveled to Cherapunji, the rainiest place in those days, and to the limestone caves in Meghalaya. While visiting the Kamakhya temple at Guwahati we were told that one can be assured of at least two more visits to the place because it is believed that if you visit the deity once, you would be coming twice more for sure.



My fourth visit came about in the year 2005, again to Guwahati, for an all-India performance audit workshop. This visit gave me an opportunity to appreciate the land of cultural heritage on a different plane and bring back some beautiful handlooms and handicrafts. The graceful mekhla silk sari was something worth possessing, as were the cane baskets, lamp shades and wall hangings. By this time, I had understood not only the beauty and charm of the region but their needs and problems too. My second visit to the temple of Kamakhya Devi was missed again due to tight schedule and flight timings.

My second visit to the North East came after nearly ten years when I visited Shillong to discuss some audit reports in 1996. But oh no! On this trip, I had no luck to visit the Kamakhya temple but just spent a night at the Lyndhurst Estate, a beautiful campus with lush green surroundings and warm hospitality of the then residents, Moushumi Bhattacharya and Pritam Phookan. What followed this visit was more and more of the North East or should we say constant flow of positive energy in my life from 1997 to 2002.

On my five- year-long deputation assignment with the Finance Ministry, I was holding a charge which predominantly dealt with the northeastern states. This opened up before me a world of challenges, potential, and much desired strategy for development faced by these hilly states. During those years, I had all the financial and development data for the North East not only stored in my computer but also tucked in mind. Remember, we did not have mobiles then, nor internet, wi-fi and 'cloud' to keep everything handy as in today's world... and so it was 'mind' that dwelled deep into the northeastern corridors.

With dozens of chances coming up to fly to the region during those years, I could just make it once in 1999 when I went as a part of a Central team for assessing damage caused by an earthquake in Sikkim, my first visit to the state. The freshness and beauty of the place was exhilarating. This was my third visit to the North East but two visits to Kamakhya Devi were still pending.

The next visit, the fifth one, was in 2014... another visit to Guwahati for another workshop. Two long days were spent on brainstorming implementation of a government programme in the North East. This time I was determined to visit Kamakhya temple for a second time. Walking along the river, absorbing clean fresh air, I noticed the beauty of the Assamese people who looked fresh and energetic. The women folk, mostly slim-built and adorned in mekhla-chadar, moved around relaxed and happy. I could revisit the Kamakhya temple to pay my obeisance to the deity for the second time.

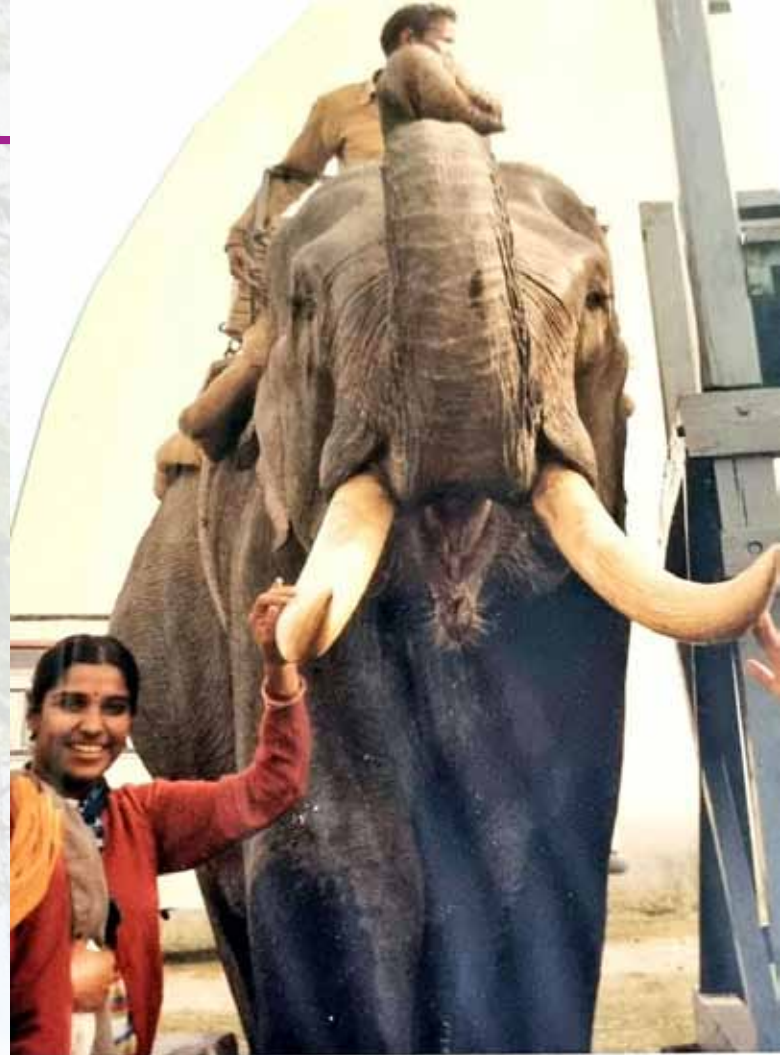
2016 to 2018, another deputation to the Project Monitoring Group of Government of India had more opportunity to think and work for the North East. The large projects were not moving at the expected pace. A little more



effort from our organizations and engineers, a little more timely flow of funds and bringing agencies together had begun to show results; but balancing development with preserving biodiversity and tribal culture remained a major challenge.

On my return to the department in 2018, half a dozen visits to the North East were completed as I de-planed at the Jorhat Airport and drove to Kaziranga for a senior management retreat. I was returning to this national park after 30 years. Getting to see the beautiful tea gardens for the first time with full appreciation, I noted that the fruits of development were yet to make a full impact on the ground.

As we moved on a not-so-well maintained road, looking around the most humble surroundings, one felt really remote from the hustle and bustle of Delhi. Vast expanse of tall grass, marshland and tropical vegetation, but, Kaziranga gave a dilapidated look this time. The mahavout who took us on an elephant ride in the park informed us that the park gets flooded and the animal count comes down after the rainy season. I thought that the scope for improving this most important *Ishan Kone** of my home country remains and a lot more was needed for adorning the divine direction. With the third visit to Kamakhya temple yet to be



completed, I am looking forward to returning to the region with more detailed peep into all the seven states in future when I can have my tryst with the North East accomplished.

**Ishan kone is the north east direction which is considered God's direction.*

Picture Credit: Ms. Shubha Kumar





Matthews Mathew
IAAS Officer Trainee (2020 batch)

Od-Ringai- The Devil's Wail

The Unseen Wonder of Meghalaya...

These wandering feet of mine are ever eager to explore new places, and I am lucky that my On-the-Job Training brought me to the pine-scented hills of Shillong. The North-East in general and Meghalaya in particular, is known for its

scenic beauty. A tourist visiting Meghalaya often goes through the standard tourist circuit of Sohra (Cherrapunjee), double-decker root bridge, Dawki, Shnongpdeng and Mawlynnong – the cleanest village in Asia. Though these are undoubtedly beautiful



places, there are many others which are not a part of the usual circuit and never find mention in any of the travel magazines... and so, I share with you one such place... It is called “Od-Ringai” or “The Devil’s Wail”.

Od-Ringai Falls

I came to know about this place, one day over lunch, from Frederick sir, my AG, in Shillong.

As the name of the place was hauntingly attractive, my friends and I decided to visit the place one weekend. This place is located near Mawkyrwat, around 74 km away from Shillong and takes about three hours’ drive to reach. On reaching Mawkyrwat, we had to trek for two hours to reach Od-Ringai.





Having spent some time in these hills, I learnt that it is always best to start treks early in the morning. So we drove to Mawkyrwat the evening before the trek, halted at the Circuit House and began our trek early the next morning. When we started, we asked for directions from the villagers and were surprised that most of them had never heard about the place. We finally met a young

lady running a tea stall who knew about Od-Ringai. She directed us to a village nearby, informing us that only the local youth of the village would know about the place and that it would be impossible to reach it without their help. An interesting fact about villagers in Meghalaya is that some of them have very peculiar names.





So, when we reached the village and met a young man, we were not surprised when he told us that his name was Fragrance. Fragrance was not a professional guide but a student at the local school; he graciously offered to take us to Od-Ringai.

The trek was an exhausting two-hour long downhill journey, but it was more picturesque than even the ever-popular David Scott Trail. Along the trek, we could see hills, mountains, valleys, forest patches, caves, rocks, and streams. It is a very isolated place, and even though we had a contour map of the area and a compass, we would have never reached the place without the help of our gracious guide.

But, perhaps because it was so isolated and required such an arduous trek, Od-Ringai was quite unknown even to the local villagers except for a few diehard anglers. It was only in 2020 when the boredom of the Covid-19 lockdown hit, that a few young people began

to explore this area, and this marvel was stumbled upon.

We reached Od-Ringai by noon, exhausted but exhilarated. It may be the Devil's Wail but it was certainly heaven to behold! The top of the waterfall looked like a natural infinity pool on the edge of a cliff. The pool was so crystal clear that one could see the stones at the bottom of the pool even though it is at least ten feet deep. The water was so inviting that it was impossible not to take a refreshing dip in the pool. The water from the pool falls from the cliff to make a rather haunting sound, from which it probably got its name.

There is a bit of a wanderer within each of us and an unspoken thrill in finding the unknown and reaching places where few had gone before. I hope your travel brings you to Od-Ringai which I am sure would welcome those wandering feet of yours.

Picture Credit: Matthews Mathew

Where The Storm Never Set



Ms. Ira Narain

A peek into my growing days in Manipur...

Much like how blank pages can be intimidating, the sapphire skies of Manipur were undoubtedly gorgeous, but threatening. They challenged us to step out as each day would be a gamble if we were to do so.

I used to be confined to the Indian Audit and Accounts' office building which had been converted to a guest house. We took such a decision (I say 'we' as though the 4-year-old me contributed even an ounce of credibility to that decision) because the building was given army protection, whereas our house would not have any. Having grown up, I can now relate those memories to the scenes of dystopian novels. Perhaps that is why I love fiction, I got to live fiction.

But Manipur wasn't a dainty hill town, it was in turmoil during the early 2000s. Terror attacks and crimes of all sorts were a daily occurrence. But I remained largely insulated. It is not considered a family station, but we decided to go together regardless. I was new to India, firmly believed that buffaloes were baby elephants and touched the feet of anyone I saw as upon our return I had seen my parents do it to our relatives in Jaipur. And, after having spent the first few years of my life in Muscat, I

expected every other city to have a beach and a lavish mall at least. I couldn't find any in the confines that we had to live in for the following year. But as a child, these expectations and preconceived notions are short lived as the wonder of the world almost immediately takes over, and if there's one thing the world can never cease to offer, it is boundless wonder. Maybe that is why even after being introduced to the beauty and the terror of India in the same breath, I managed to fall in love with it.

Despite all this, very soon, it was decided that I should be allowed to venture out of our home, under supervision of course! My parents accompanied me to the terrace and to the building compound where Tarun bhaiya (the cook of the guest house) joined us occasionally. His cooking skills were questionable though. Once, we asked him to feed us bhindi (okra) and the sabzi he made was okra cooked decadently in water sans any spice, he was rather proud of it. I wonder if that's why Papa called Mumma and I to Manipur? But Tarun bhaiya was my friend, something I craved for having only lived in campuses prior to this which always had kids of my age. My pink plastic scooter, a dark brown teddy that I still call Enzo, the blue octopus on the TV, and Poro the turtle (my

pet—not a stuffed toy, not a polymer vehicle, not a cartoon - but a living breathing creature), and of course, Tarun Bhaiya (live creature count at a staggering two now) were my only friends in Imphal.

The reminiscence of those times is frozen in photos, videocam recordings and anecdotes narrated by my parents, but some events were so impactful that they are still vivid memories.

Taking tiny steps into the world outside led me to the soldiers of the building. I was shy. I do not recall meeting young men before that, but Tarun bhaiya gladly played the mediator. My friend circle broadened one soldier at a time. I made them play stapoo (hopscotch) with me and purposely lose while they made me talk to their fiancés and mothers on the phone. We had long conversations. I never felt so unconditionally loved ever again. They all belonged to different parts of India. I could not go to school because of safety concerns but I would say my time was better utilised at home. With them. During their breaks, they would cut sugarcane into small pieces for me and I, overstepping my boundaries naively would ask them why their Mumma did not live with them, why I could not meet the love of their lives, why they did not live in the rooms of the office building and why did they spend the night awake. All these queries could have nightmarish answers but they responded with valiant optimism, one that I am afraid was not an attempt to shield me from the bitter truths but an answer they genuinely put their faith in.

The navy nightfalls were hard to endure. We could never tell for sure if it was a thunderstorm or the sounds of bullets firing. I could not help but fear walking down the stairs, thinking that one of them would not be there anymore. Thankfully, I did not lose anyone but regrettably, I cannot say the same for my friends. I remember seeing tears swell in their eyes, I would know instantly that a life had been lost. A life that was not known to me but was undoubtedly precious to somebody I knew. I did not know what to feel when they took my hands into theirs and cried. It used to puzzle me why they never shed a tear on the phone for the pain of the spells of distance they shared with their loved ones. I wonder if it is because the separation they chose by will led

to the loss that they had to deal with. I could sense the intense grief. I would lower my eyes and offer them my teddy bear to hug. They would clutch onto it. These were the strongest humans I have ever known.

But the next day, they would greet me with the brightest of smiles and bring some food cooked from a recipe from their hometown (Tarun bhaiya's culinary skills were world famous it seemed). On one of those days, between battles won and lost, Poro was gone. He wandered off the red tub he lived in and found his way into a driver's plate. I was devastated. My company, my gang, my peers who were well versed with this subject tried their best to comfort the inconsolable me. I squatted near the main door with sweater sleeves tear-soaked. I was not informed that he was consumed but I had lost someone nonetheless. If it were Enzo that had left, I would have felt the same. They gave me the one candy they had in their pocket, and they offered to play badminton. I chewed on the candy with eyes still leaking. But I recovered in about a week and life went on.

Today, I think about how people deal with one of the pivotal trials and tribulations life forces us to face—death. Until not long ago I thought that most of my soldier buddies were gravely desensitised to it, and I guess they were but aren't we all? We have to move on, some people take longer than others but, in the end, we have to free ourselves. I can't possibly compare the gravity of the weight they have to carry but I understand it is never easy... and the impermanence of life is arguably the only truth of life.

These jawans who introduced me to the value of living and the inevitability of death are all nameless and faceless now and I will probably never be recognised by them if we were ever to cross paths. They will always be the friend that I lost touch with. I fear that happening so much that I go to great lengths to be even remotely in contact with the people of my past. Nine postings later, it is an anxiety that persists. I am not sure if it is my gratefulness for their company or simply another attempt to hang onto dying bits of my waning history.

North East India in Myths, Folklore and Legends



Pavaki Kapoor

The many regions of Northeastern India find mentions in our ancient religious manuscripts and also abundantly in the Mahabharata. Most of them have been passed down through generations in the form of popular folklore. A couple of them are famed all over India, for example the genesis of the famous and important Shakti Peeth, the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, Assam, atop the Nilachal hills, while the rest needs to be shared. While the veracity cannot be vouched for in such mythological tales, they are just as worthy of being listened to, treasured as heritage and finally passed on for legacy.

"We the people of this region heartily welcome you to this beautiful land of seven

sisters, well known for their richness of culture and heritage. Assam, the land of blue hills and red rivers, is the land of Usha, who was enamored of Aniruddha, the prince of Dwarka. Meghalaya, abode of clouds, was the dreamland of Pramila. Arunachal, where the sun rises above the snow capped mountains, was the homeland of Rukmini whose beauty enchanted Lord Krishna. Manipur the dale of songs and dances was the land of Chitrangada and in Nagaland, the eastern sentinel of our country, Arjun's Ulupi was born. Tripura is the land of Queen Tripura Sundari and the damsels of the blue mountains of Mizoram are as colourful as the river Dhaleswari herself."



(Famous welcome speech by the then Chief Minister of Assam - Sarat Chandra Sinha - on the occasion of laying of foundation stone by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for the Kopili Hydro Electric project on 25th April, 1976 in Assam)

Northeastern Princesses in the Mahabharata

Usha

Sonitpur or the present day Tezpur, a beautiful town by the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra is steeped in mythology. One of its rulers, Banasura, was an ally of the Asura King Naraka and was instrumental in the infamous Hara-Hari war or the war of the two Gods Shiva and Vishnu.



Usha was the beautiful daughter of Banasura and by a quirk of faith, she developed a secret romantic liaison with Aniruddha, Lord Krishna's grandson. Banasura who was a Lord Shiva devotee captured Aniruddha and what followed was the Hara-Hari war, but Creation was saved from doom by the intervention of Lord Brahma - differences were sorted out and the young lovers were united.

You can visit the Agni Garh, a fort in Tezpur which is said to be Princess Usha's palace once upon a time, where the princess and prince Aniruddha used to have their secret rendezvous.

Rukmini

Arunachal Pradesh is said to be the kingdom of the King Bhismaka, whose daughter Princess Rukmini had eloped with Lord Krishna just on the day of her swayamvar. This resulted in a fierce battle between Lord Krishna and her brother Prince Rukma.



Again King Bhaluka, who was slain by Lord Krishna, was also supposed to be from Western Arunachal.

Pramila

Meghalaya has been mentioned as the Pramila kingdom in mythology and was a cursed land which was delivered when Lord Arjun stepped foot on the kingdom after the Aswamedha Yagya.

It is said that Goddess Parvati had cursed the land so that the women folk remain devoid of male partners. She said that the curse would be lifted only when Arjun would arrive in pursuit of the sacred horse of the Ashwamedha Yagya. Princess Pramila was sent to Hastinapur while Arjuna proceeded further on. She went on to become one of the consorts of Arjuna later.

Chitrangada and Ulupi

Manipur and Nagaland feature prominently in the Mahabharata, post the battle of Kurukshetra with Princess Chitrangada of Manipur and Princess of Ulupi. Their role was



pivotal in delivering Arjuna from the curse of the Astavasus, who were angered by the manner Bhisma was killed by Arjuna in the battle. In order to save Arjuna from the curse it was necessary for Arjuna to die in the hands of his own son Vavruvahana from Chitrangada, in a one to one fight, whom again Arjuna had failed to recognize as a part of the curse. Arjuna was brought to life by Ulupi after the battle.

Hidimba

Hidimba, Bheema's wife is said to be a princess of the Hidimb, now known as Dimapur in Nagaland. Their son Ghatotkocha figured in the Kurukshetra battle where he had a tragic end. It was on him that Karna had used the infallible and deadly Brahmastra which he had saved for Arjuna. In a way it saved Arjuna because had it not been for Ghatotkacha, Arjuna might have had to face Karna's Brahmastra.



Famous Religious Sites

Saraswati Dolma

Saraswati Dolma, founded in 1985, is one of Gangtok's more unusual temples. Housing both the Hindu Goddess Saraswati and the Buddhist Deity Jetsun Dolma, or Tara, it is popular with Hindus and Buddhists. Students especially flock here to worship Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, before exams.



Chaturdash Debta

Tripura is known as a land of fourteen Goddesses and the fourteen Goddess Temple in Tripura is known as Chaturdash Debta Temple. The temple gets its name from fourteen deities called Chaturdash Debta. The temple is located in Old Agartala which is almost six kilometers away from Agartala.



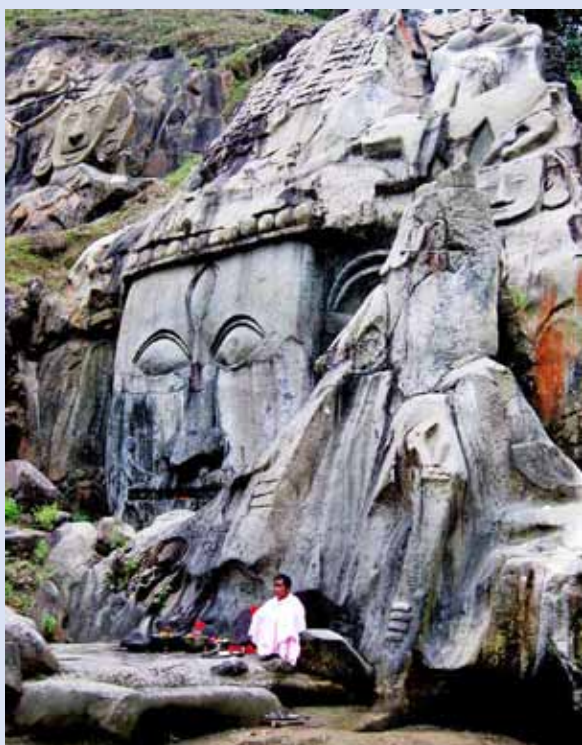
The temple was built by the Maharaja of Tripura, Govinda Manikyan between 1667–1676 CE. The roof of the temple looks like the dome of a village hut. The fourteen deities are built-in tribal design and are named in the local Kokborok language.

The temple has fourteen images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses which include Shiva, Durga, Han

or Vishnu, Ma or Lakshmi, Vani or Saraswati, Kumar, or Kartikeya, Ganapa or Ganesha, Brahma, Prithivi, Abdhi or Samudra, Ganga, Sikhi or Agni, Kamadeva, and Himadri. Every July, near the temple, the Kharachi Festival is organized where thousands of devotees as well as tribal and non-tribal communities attend.

Unakoti Hills

Unakoti Hills is a pilgrimage site for Lord Shiva located in the state of Tripura. There are several legends associated with this surreal place, which has massive rock reliefs commemorating the Hindu god. One among



them is that of a local sculptor named Kallu Kumar, who was a devotee of Shiva's wife Parvati. He wanted to accompany the deities to their abode on Kailash Parvat, but Shiva wasn't too keen on the proposition. It was then that Parvati suggested that Kallu Kumar carve out one crore (10 million) images of Shiva overnight to appease him. Even though he laboured tirelessly all night, the sculptor fell one short of said number and hence missed his opportunity. Unakoti, thus, can be literally translated to one less than a crore.

Tangra Kali

There is nothing different about the Kali idol at the Tangra Kali temple. But one look at the



bhog – noodles, chop suey, rice-and-vegetable dishes – and you realize this isn't just any Kali temple. In the heart of Kolkata's Tangra area – India's own Chinatown, stands this unique symbol of cross-cultural assimilation.

The Legend of the Lepchas

Sikkim's earliest inhabitants were the Lepchas. They originally followed the Mun animist religion. They believed in the chief Goddess Nazong Nyu, various other Divinities, rites of passage, festivals and ritualistic worship.

The Lepchas live in the Sikkim Himalayas between Nepal and Bhutan and in some adjoining Indian districts. Since they are a mountain people, subsisting mainly on agriculture and cattle breeding, the fertility of the fields and the cattle as well as the fertility of human beings is of paramount importance to their life and religion. Consequently, the goddess of procreation occupies a prominent position among their gods.

Their primogenitors Tukbo Thing and Nazong Nyu, equivalent to Adam and Eve, are said to have been created by the Mother Goddess from the pristine snows of Mount Khangchendzonga's peak. They were then sent to live in a utopian land nestled beneath the great mountain, which is Sikkim. According to the book *Khangchendzonga: Sacred Summit*, Lepchas have never left their holy mountain's shadow, which is why Mount Khangchendzonga can be sighted from every Lepcha village you visit.

Discovering an Abode in Clouds



Shefali S Andaleeb
(IA & AS, 1999)

I woke up to a magical morning on 11 August 2020. Azure skies, air fragrant with wild flowers and sparrows creating a ruckus! The previous night I had travelled from Delhi to my new posting in Shillong. It was a long and surreal journey from Delhi as Covid pandemic was raging and all normal routines had been cast aside. Air travel was as scary as a trip into space!



I encountered deserted roads and dark streets and my entry into Shillong was, made more ominous by strict quarantine protocols. “Authorities” over the phone, directed me to go straight to the Covid testing centre. “Do not stop anywhere and do not talk to anyone”, they said. After the test, I was whisked into a quarantine centre, and practically locked into a room. No human contact was possible. Needless to say, I went through a million emotions- family was far away, I had friends in Shillong but it was not possible to meet them. I felt shut out from the world in a strange place. Even food was kept on a stool outside the room. I did not sleep well that night.

But the vision that greeted me through the glass window of my quarantine room next morning swiftly allayed all doubts or misgivings. The clear blue skies and lush green cover of trees all around was the best welcome I could imagine, after having become used to the dull brown skies of Delhi for the last many years.

Before landing up in Shillong I had read innumerable articles and blogs on Meghalaya. The place certainly lives up to its various adages of “Abode in the clouds”, “Scotland of the East”, and many more. Before this, I only ever had a textbook knowledge about the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes belonging to the hills of the same names. However, over the months, the place started to reveal itself in slow and enticing ways. For example, I came to know from the Khasi lady who helps me in the kitchen, about Ka Khaddu, the Khasi term used for the youngest daughter in the family. This lady, being the Khaddu, took over the house and land of her parents as per traditional custom.

Tribal customs provide for the youngest daughter in the family to become the lawful inheritor of her parental property and it is this daughter who shall take care of parents in their old age. Thus, my help’s husband moved into her maternal home after marriage and her children were given the surname she uses. She is responsible for taking care of her parents and other family members who stay in the house with her.

However, her brother or the maternal uncle of her children has an important role to play. Though he too stays in his wife’s maternal home, he is required to contribute towards his share of responsibility, including providing monetary support, to his sister’s household. Not only this, all family decisions in his sister’s house are to be taken in consultation with him.

In practice, I was told that though the youngest daughter takes over her maternal household and responsibilities, it is her brother/s who has a bigger say in the decisions of the family. I found this to be an interesting insight, as all this while I had thought that Meghalaya is a matriarchal society. This also somewhat explained a similar dichotomy of gender roles in public spaces.

Meghalaya has a deep rooted tradition of traditional governance structures known as Dorbar Shnong in Khasi Hills, Dolois in Jaintia Hills and Nokmas in Garo Hills. There is one for every town and village with a headman at the helm of affairs. Majority of public land is

community land belonging to the clans of the village, and all activities are governed by the rules laid down by the Dorbar. The headman works closely with the formal government structures.

Women, however, do not have voting rights in Dorbar Shnongs, nor are they eligible to hold any posts. That seems discordant with the property rights women enjoy. Thus, it could be debatable whether the society is truly matriarchal. I guess we may think of the system as more matrilineal than matriarchal. However, notwithstanding the patriarchal nuances in the matrilineal system, it is evident that women play a far more dominant and visible role in the social and economic spaces in this state compared to the rest of the country.



Women working in a vegetable farm

Shillong, Cherrapunji (Sohra), Jowai, Tura, Willaimnagar largely represent the main cities and towns in the state. However, it is the villages of Meghalaya that provide the best microcosm of social life. Just a forty-minute drive outside the city of Shillong brings one into the folds of green meadows rolling into the oblivion, big and small waterfalls visible on the horizon, and amidst them are seen green potato fields, village dwellings, the lew (local market), schools, a dispensary, and Church buildings belonging to different Christian denominations. My favourite weekend getaway is a neighbouring village of Smitt known for fresh organic vegetables.

I made friends with a few locals with whom it’s a delight to enjoy traditional meals in cute little tea stalls. Everytime I go there I cannot but admire the impeccable cleanliness of these places. Local delicacies include Potharo (steamed rice cakes) which can be taken as a snack with tea, or as a meal with sesame chicken or vegetable curry. There are some incredible local herbs and greens that make for a delightful salad.



Traditional tribal thali



My friends in a village nearby

While Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos are the predominant tribes, there are many others who add a distinct flavor to the demographic profile – the Kochs, the Hajong, the Rabahas, the Mikirs and others. What emerges from this confluence of tribal cultures is a rich tapestry of food and crafts. The living roots bridge is a tangible object of indigenous knowledge handed down over generations. Indigenous crafts are observed in bamboo works, traditional Eri silk weaves and making of indigenous dyes. I was pleasantly surprised to discover a stall at a small fair, where the traditional Rabha weavers were selling sarees. The only English speaking person at the stall told me that she too is a Rabha, and that she was employed in the Office of the Textiles Commissioner. She was working with these weaver women, and experimenting with sarees. They had a few samples but these handloom sarees were a delight! You guessed it right – I picked up some and then some more until the gentle lady requested that I leave behind a couple as samples!!!

Dance is the way of life here. There is a rich repertoire of dances performed on various occasions. In fact, all major religious festivals are focused around a particular dance form. In April, skies of Shillong reverberate with pulsating music of drums and rhythmic dance

movements of young boys and girls from the Khasi clans, in their traditional finery. Shad Suk Mynsiem or “Moves of Cheerful Hearts” is the most important festival of the Khasi Clans of Meghalaya.



Rabha weaver displaying her art



Khasi boys in traditional attire during Shad Suk Mynsiem



Enjoying a moment with family participating in the dance Participants in Wangala Dance

The Jaintias celebrate Behdeinkhlam or “chasing away the Plague” every July with rituals performed by the Niamtre religion. A major festival and a true show stopper is the Wangala Festival – festival of hundred drums. Celebrated by the Garo clans at the end of agricultural season in November every year, it is a thanksgiving festival for the God of fertility. The occasion attracts thousands of people and tourists from India and abroad, who gather

to watch the mesmerising dance movements of men and women to the reverberations of special Nagaras and drums.

Meghalaya is rich in natural resources but I think its most valuable resource is the gift of music that people have. Before coming to Shillong, someone had once told me that the best part of Shillong was the sound of guitar and drums coming from practically every home on weekends. As a matter of fact, official functions are a delight as they invariably have melodious notes. I have been lucky to hear some of the best vocals and instruments from amongst the staff in my office and in other government departments.

Then of course, who has not heard of Lou Majaw, the iconic rock star from Shillong. Be it the rock bands like Soulmate, Plague Throat, and Aberrant who are big on international circuits or local bands, they simply rock your world once they get started. In the Autumn session of 2021 of the Meghalaya Assembly, the high point was the rendition of the National Anthem using unique musical arrangements of traditional musical instruments. But no talk about the musical scene in Meghalaya can be complete without mention of the iconic Shillong Chamber Choir (SCC) and its founder, the late Shri Neil Nongkynrih, popularly known as Uncle Neil.

During Covid lockdown, SCC started a home delivery service for food and essential items. In a fortunate stroke of serendipity, I submitted an online form expressing an interest in Uncle Neil’s home delivery service. Very soon, a lady with the sweetest voice, Patricia called up and I started enjoying home delivered breads, fresh vegetables and fruits. Patricia and I became great WhatsApp friends! I went on to discover that Patricia is one of the main choir singers in the SCC. It seemed like a personal loss when Uncle Neil suddenly passed away a few months back. SCC performed live this January on the occasion of fifty years of statehood of Meghalaya and I felt really fortunate to be there and finally meet Pat and her group. So yes, Meghlayan revelations continue !

Finally, how can any narrative on Meghalaya be complete without mention of our own

little piece of heritage that occupies a place of pride in the department. Lyndhurst Estate has stood as a stately and gracious witness to the more than hundred-year history - starting from being the office of the Comptroller Assam and eventually evolving into the residence of the IA&AS officers. It is said that the name Lyndhurst is the old English term for “wooded hill growing with lime trees”. Residents, past and present abide by the beauty and serenity of the place. In July 2015, the then CAG of India declared it as a heritage property, and the Government of Meghalaya enlisted it as heritage site under the State Heritage Act, 2012.

I can go on and on, but perhaps it is best to end with a quote from Rabindranath Tagore’s letter to little Ranu Adhikary, when the Nobel Laureate was on his maiden visit to Shillong a century ago: “There is bright sunshine this morning, with a few stray clouds clinging to the hills, as if basking in the sun. They appear too indolent to precipitate into rainfall. I can see the tall deodar trees trying to communicate with the clouds. The garden is resplendent with jasmine, chrysanthemum, rose and several unknown varieties of blossoms. I wake up before sunrise and walk along the path bordering the flowers; they are not afraid of my grey beard or flowing robes. They are full of merriment.”



Road leading to residences in Lyndhurst Estate



Facade of an Assam-type Bungalow

Picture Credit: Shefali S. Andaleeb

The Living Root Bridges of the Khasi Hills



Frederick Syiemlieh
IA&AS, 1999

Living root bridges are synonymous with the Khasi Tribe of Meghalaya. A simple google search with the key words, “living root bridge” will bring up the Wikipedia page on living root bridge with the words, “They are common in the southern part of the Northeast Indian state of Meghalaya” highlighted across.

The double decker living root bridge at Nongriat in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya graces the picture of both google search and the Wikipedia page.



Double Decker Living Root Bridge at Nongriat (Photo Credit –Thundershots – Instagram: @thunder11uchiha)



Plate showing a rendition of the Living Root Bridge at “Temshung in the Khasi Hills” in Lt. Henry Yule’s “Notes on the Kasia Hills and People”

Though these bridges have become famous fairly recently and have become a major tourist attraction, no one really knows about their genesis. The first written record on the living root bridges appeared almost 180 years ago - in the Journal of The Asiatic Society, published in 1844. It was penned down by Lieutenant Henry Yule, a Scottish Orientalist of the erstwhile Bengal Engineers in his “Notes on the Kasia Hills and People”. In it, Lt. Yule describes the first living root bridge he encountered as the most remarkable bridge that he saw in the Khasi Hills and he supposed it to be unique, even half accidental. However, he afterwards found it to be an instance of regular practice, seeing such bridges at every stage, no less than half a dozen within as many miles within Cherrapunjee.

The picture above, rendered in the Notes by Lt. Yule is described as having been measured at ninety feet in clear span, generally composed of the roots of two opposite trees, (apparently planted for the purpose), bound together in the middle.

Fast forward to the present, and the living root bridges, locally known as “Jingkieng Jri” (literally translated as “rubber bridge”) numbers at around 100 and are found in about 72 villages in East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia

Hills. Most notable are those found in villages such as Nongriat near Cherrapunjee (famous for getting the heaviest rainfall in the world), Pynursla and Mawlynnong (famous for being Asia’s cleanest village) in East Khasi Hills, while in the West Jaintia Hills, living root bridges at Shnongpdeng, and Kudeng Rim are tourist attractions.

It is said, necessity is the mother of invention. Perhaps this is what prompted the old generations of the Khasi Tribe to find a solution amidst the heavy rains of the monsoons, to safely get across strong river currents and avoid being stranded. Man-made bridges with the available technology of the time might not be able to withstand rough storms and would be prone to decay. A living root bridge, on the other hand, is formed by guiding roots of the Indian rubber plant or fig, scientifically known as *Ficus elastica*, across a stream or river, and then allowing the roots to grow and strengthen over time. This process takes at least a decade until the roots take shape and form a usable living bridge.

As long as the tree from which it is formed remains healthy, the bridge will naturally self-renew and self-strengthen as its component roots grow thicker. According to the National Geographic, “the rubber tree trunks are



Living Root Bridge at Mawkyrnot, Pynursla (Photo Credit –Thundershots – Instagram: @thunder11uchiha)

planted on each side of the bank to create a sturdy foundation, and over the course of 15 to 30 years, the Khasi slowly thread *Ficus elastica* roots across a temporary bamboo scaffolding to connect the gap. A combination of humidity and foot traffic help compact the soil over time, and the tangle of roots grows thick and strong. Mature bridges stretch 15 to 250 feet over deep rivers and gorges, and can bear impressive loads—upwards of 35 people at a time.” A living root bridge can withstand heavy storms, grow stronger with the passage of time and last for many hundreds of years.

The living root bridges in Meghalaya and the ingenious way that the local tribals bio-engineered the rubber tree to build these sustainable and eco-friendly bridges has fascinated the world. A Japanese TV Crew made a detailed documentary that was aired in Japan on 17th October 2004 by Ashahi TV. BBC Wales and BBC London have also made documentaries on the Living Root Bridges. Plenty of Youtubers and vloggers, especially travel enthusiasts, have also made videos on living root bridges which are readily available online.

Most recently in February 2022, the Jingkieng Jri: Living Root Bridge Cultural Landscapes of Meghalaya, has been included in the tentative list of World Heritage Sites of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organisation (UNESCO). With recognition of the profound ingenuity and tenacity of the indigenous Khasi community, living root bridges are said to represent the pinnacle of human-plant interaction. This recognition by UNESCO has come at a timely moment, considering the threats to these magnificent botanical architectures.

While some living root bridges that attract tourists provide an incentive to the locals for preservation and upkeep, root bridges that are either too remote or where modern conventional steel and concrete structures have replaced their usability are faced with the threat of neglect and eventual disappearance.

The fact that setting up new bridges would take decades before their usability, doesn't give the locals much incentive to invest their time and energy into making more living root bridges. Their survival, thus, depends much on the recognition and revenue generation through tourism which, fortunately, has seen steady growth in recent decades in Meghalaya.

Though living root bridges were originally thought to be unique to Meghalaya, there are similar such bridges found in Mon District of Nagaland and in Indonesia, though not as numerous and elaborate as those found in Meghalaya. While no record/research of the origins of the root bridges in Nagaland exist



Triple Decker Living Root Bridge at Mawkyrnot, Pynursla (Photo Credit –Thundershots – Instagram: @thunder11uchiha)

as yet, it is said that in Indonesia, the slowly growing Jembatan Akar root bridge, made entirely out of the naturally growing roots of two banyan trees that have been slowly cultivated to knit into a walkable span, was first conceived in 1890 by a local teacher who wanted his students from a village across the river to have an easier time getting to his classes. The bridge took 26 years of carefully tended growth to become sturdy enough to support anyone.

This is both a lesson and testament to the genius in harnessing nature's blessings in a sustainable way that can benefit both man and nature. Perhaps, this ingenious idea can be successfully replicated in other parts of the country and the world. Finding a way to build infrastructure in such an eco-friendly way, utilizing the genius of bioengineering can only enrich the country and its citizens, while ensuring sustainable development, which is a major focus of the United Nations at present. We have much to learn from each living root structure which, according to UNESCO, reveals a distinct ethno-botanical journey rooted in profound culture-nature reciprocity and synthesis.

Picture Credit: Frederick Syiemlieh

Living Root Platform at Umñiuh Tmar (Photo Credit –Thundershots – Instagram: @thunder11uchiha)



Adventures in the Land of the Dawn-lit-Mountains

A Mesmerising Trip to Arunachal



Ankita Choure

Arunachal Pradesh (AP) is one of India's most remote states and the first Indian soil to greet the rising sun. Located on the northeastern tip of India with its borders touching Assam, China, Bhutan and Myanmar, this beautiful land is endowed with enchanting beauty and rich biodiversity enough to allure any tourist or explorer. It takes you to heavenly abodes that enthralls you and leaves you wanting for more.

This state finds its mention in the literature of the Kalika Purana and the Mahabharata. It is believed to be the Prabhu Mountains of the Puranas. According to a Hindu mythological legend, Arunachal Pradesh was the place where sage Parshuram washed away his sin of matricide (a disgusting story), sage Vyasa meditated, King Bhishmaka founded his kingdom and Lord Krishna married his consort Rukmini.

We (Mom and I) visited Assam and Arunachal recently in the first half of May 2022. Our itinerary was very hectic and challenging but it all worked out for the best and endowed us with precious memories to our travelogue. From Delhi to Guwahati by flight and then a Shatabdi Train from Guwahati to Naharlagun in AP - this was the beginning of our great northeast escape. The train ride was beautiful

with its scenic routes of lush green paddy fields and tea estates all along the border districts of Assam. We spent the night at Yupia which is about an hour's drive from Naharlagun station, so as to gather all the energy for next day's road trip to Ziro town. Itanagar the state capital is just thirty to forty minutes' drive from the train station and so the point to be noted is that one can reach Itanagar the same day as one left the capital in the morning. This would have been impossible some years ago and it demonstrates how the connectivity to Arunachal has since improved.

We are indeed very grateful to our dear family friend who is now posted in Itanagar with the Border Police, who planned our entire itinerary and advised us on our travel plans, with such finer details that we could visit some interesting and exotic locales!! Any trip becomes more exciting and interesting with inputs from persons familiar with the place and hence we were indeed lucky that we received valuable guidance to make optimum use of the available time with us!

Ziro, one of the oldest towns in AP is a beautiful hill station located 1500 meters above sea

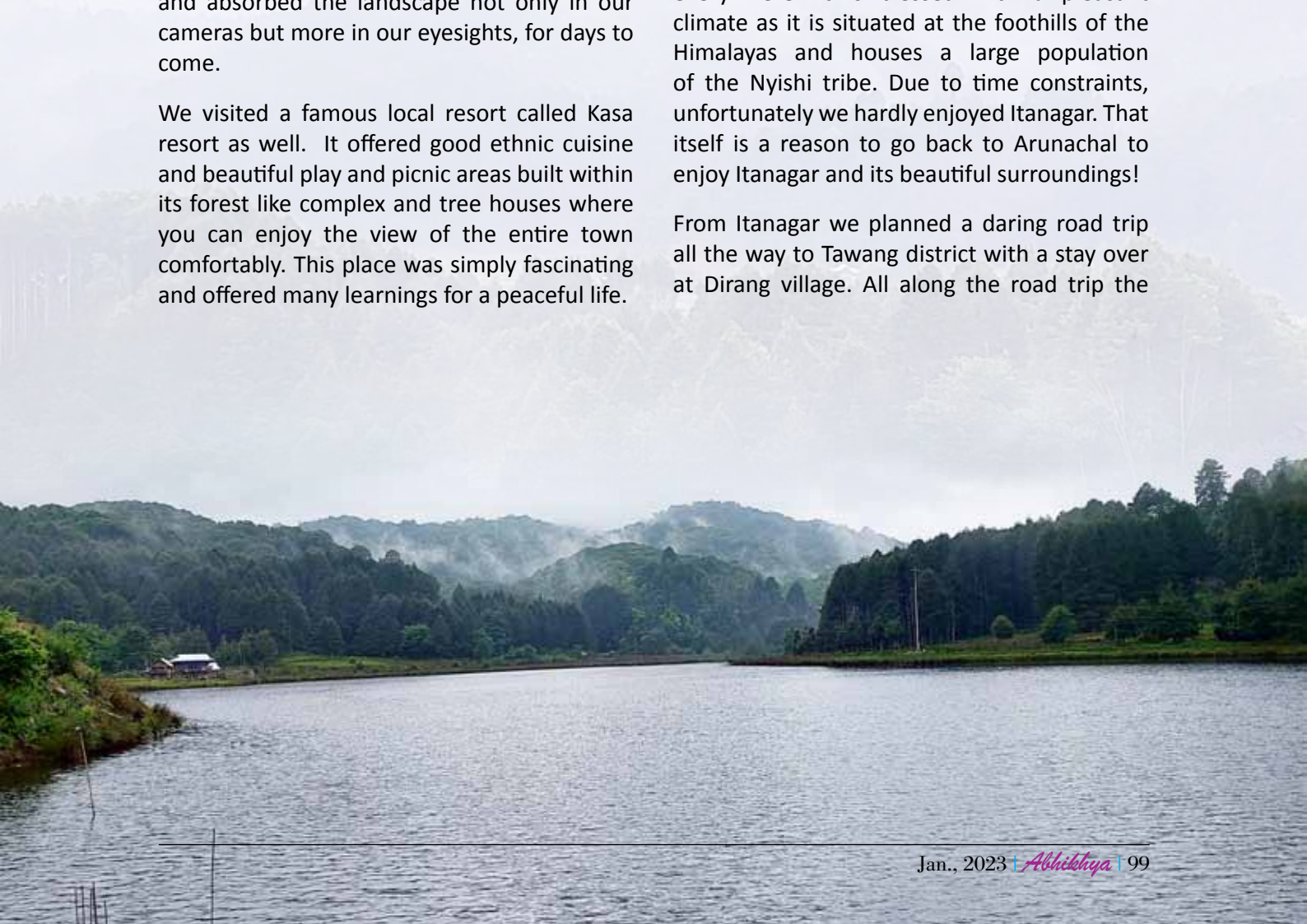
level. I was mesmerized with its topography of beautiful lush greenery all around, rivulets and elevated green patches of step farming. This place is renowned for the terrace paddy fields and kiwi orchards (kiwi season being from October to December). One will also observe a unique system of water management, rainwater harvesting, and pisci-culture amongst the locals. It was a unique feeling finding yourself in a bowl, more specifically a 'rice bowl' (in geographical terms a bowl is termed as phenomena when wetland/flat land is surrounded by mountains on all sides). So technically, Ziro is not a valley like many travel magazines would describe it to be, but a bowl! We spent our day in Ziro exploring the local town, the museum to know more about the state and its culture. We also visited a renowned natural formation of a Shiva temple which was in the woods and it was a unique experience making an offering at the shrine. The more I read and learnt about this state the more I started falling in love with it. We went on mini hikes around Ziro just to breathe in the fresh air Mother nature was providing us and absorbed the landscape not only in our cameras but more in our eyesights, for days to come.

We visited a famous local resort called Kasa resort as well. It offered good ethnic cuisine and beautiful play and picnic areas built within its forest like complex and tree houses where you can enjoy the view of the entire town comfortably. This place was simply fascinating and offered many learnings for a peaceful life.

From Ziro our road trip took us to a place called Kimin, (Papum Pare district) which is an important town known for its Administrative Centre and the training facilities for the security organisations. Another neat and clean small town with breath-taking locales. We visited a tea estate (Goodricke) that was simply magical and inspired us to enjoy our evening cup of tea. I was remembering one of Thich Nhat Hanh quotes "looking deeply into your tea, you see that you are drinking fragrant plants, that are the gift of mother Earth. You see the labor of the tea pickers; you see the luscious tea fields and plantations. You know you are drinking a cloud; you are drinking the rain. The tea contains the entire universe!" This is exactly how I felt! Felt the power of oneness with nature, just by having a cup of tea in the middle of a tea estate!

From Kimin we finally headed to the capital Itanagar and stopped for the day. Itanagar, as a capital city, has developed over the years significantly, very much commercialised with all local and global brand shops visible everywhere. It is blessed with a pleasant climate as it is situated at the foothills of the Himalayas and houses a large population of the Nyishi tribe. Due to time constraints, unfortunately we hardly enjoyed Itanagar. That itself is a reason to go back to Arunachal to enjoy Itanagar and its beautiful surroundings!

From Itanagar we planned a daring road trip all the way to Tawang district with a stay over at Dirang village. All along the road trip the





drive was lined up with beautiful green forests, waterfalls, small monasteries and the west Kameng river. Arunachal's biodiversity ranges to more than 500 rare species of orchids, protected species of birds including the state bird Hornbill and the lush green flora and fauna found in the dense jungles. I have promised myself that I would revisit Arunachal to spot the Hornbill Bird!

Dirang is an unexplored gem of a place hidden away in wilderness at some approx. 4000 feet above sea level. It is 42 kms away from Bomdila which is the West Kameng district's headquarters in AP. It is a quaint little stop over and gateway for many tourists who plan their way to Tawang. One finds a major influence of Buddhism and Monpa culture. It is a paradise for nature lovers, photographers and trekkers. We visited a new monastery (constructed 2-3 years ago) called the Thupsung Dhargye Ling Monastery. It is a Buddhist shrine blessed by a Dalai Lama, a secluded beauty with a stunning view of the village and the hills around. It's a perfect alternative if you can't make it all the way up to Tough Tawang. This place is heaven on earth!

On the way to Tawang, one has to go through Sela Pass and Jaswant Memorial, and pass through Army Camp units on the way. But mind you, the trip to Tawang is for the brave

hearted especially with the current status of the road leading to the town and the climatic conditions with rare oxygen. The temperatures are below freezing points in the winter months and we spoke to some of the armed forces personnel posted there at Sela. Our hats off to these brave men who guard our borders far away from civilization and their families, facing all adversities but performing their duties diligently for the Nation. Our respect and admiration for the security forces has grown manifold at the end of this trip!

Tawang, a district located ten thousand feet above sea level, shares a rich historical heritage not only with India but with the world. With its mesmerising natural beauty and closeness to the Tibetan border, this place is as mystical as some fantasyland. The Tawang Chu river, Sela pass and Tawang valley will enchant you with its beauty. The Tawang monastery is the largest monastery in India and second largest in Asia. Tawang Monastery is known in Tibetan as Galden Namgye Lhatse, which translates to "celestial paradise in a clear night". It was founded in 1680-1681 with the blessings of the 5th Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso. The structure is three stories high and enclosed with an approx. 200 m long compound wall. The library has valuable scriptures, mainly Kangyur and Tengyur. Torgya is one of the most colorful and widely celebrated locally

and enjoyed by tourists as well. We did not explore beyond Tawang, to see the Indo-China Border from there or a latest tourist attraction called Madhuri Lake named after the famous actress Ms. Madhuri Dixit who had shot a dance sequence near the lake. Ideally Tawang merits a stay of at least a day and night!

Overall Arunachal has a lot to offer. One can easily plan to stay here for over a month to imbibe the culture, cuisine and the natural beauty unique in every district.

The culture of Arunachal Pradesh is abundant with diversity. The state has 26 major tribes including sub-tribes. Every tribe has their own unique set of traditions and customs. The major tribes of Arunachal are: Adi, Galo, Aka, Apatani, Nyishi, Tagins, Bori, and Bokar etc. The sun and the moon are the presiding deities of the major tribes who follow the Donyi-Polo religion (the name stands for sun and moon). The Tibetan-influenced Monpa and Sherdukpen tribe mainly inhabits the West Kameng and Tawang district. In Lohit district it is the Khampati



and the Singpho tribe. All these four major tribes are followers of two different sects of Buddhism (Mahayana Hinayana). The other tribes are followers of ancient beliefs with animal worship being quite prominent amongst them.

Colourful festivals dominate Arunachal's cultural lifestyle. Since agriculture is the mainstay here, people generally celebrate festivals as a mark of

thanksgiving to the Almighty for giving them a good harvest. These festivals also highlight the artistic skills of the various local tribes. To experience the cultural festivals of the state, one should visit Ziro district, which is very popular for festivities. I have promised myself another trip to Arunachal to explore further, since the state is so huge and has so much to offer, including the capital Itanagar.

This State truly has my heart. It will inspire you to develop a new perspective for life, live in the moment and help you find the Buddha that lives inside you.

Picture Credit: Ankita Choure



KOHIMA, Flower of The North East



Ms. Anita Johri

We got a wonderful opportunity to explore the North-East when we were posted in Kohima, the capital city of Nagaland in 2005. Situated at a height of 1500 meters, Kohima is endowed with lush green hills and forests. Our house was on top of a hill, and it overlooked the valley – the view of the city was breathtaking, especially during the night when it glittered like a bed of stars!

Our views of the valley would become even more splendid during Christmas, when every house in the city would be lit up with lights and there was festive spirit all around. The famed

Hornbill Festival is celebrated at around the same time. All the Naga tribes come together to exhibit their colorful tribal wear and recreate their energetic festivals in one place in Kisama, the Naga Heritage Village. We had a great time visiting the local food, art, and craft stalls.

We have lasting memories of the beautiful flowers of Kohima, especially the orchids which are found in many home gardens in Nagaland.

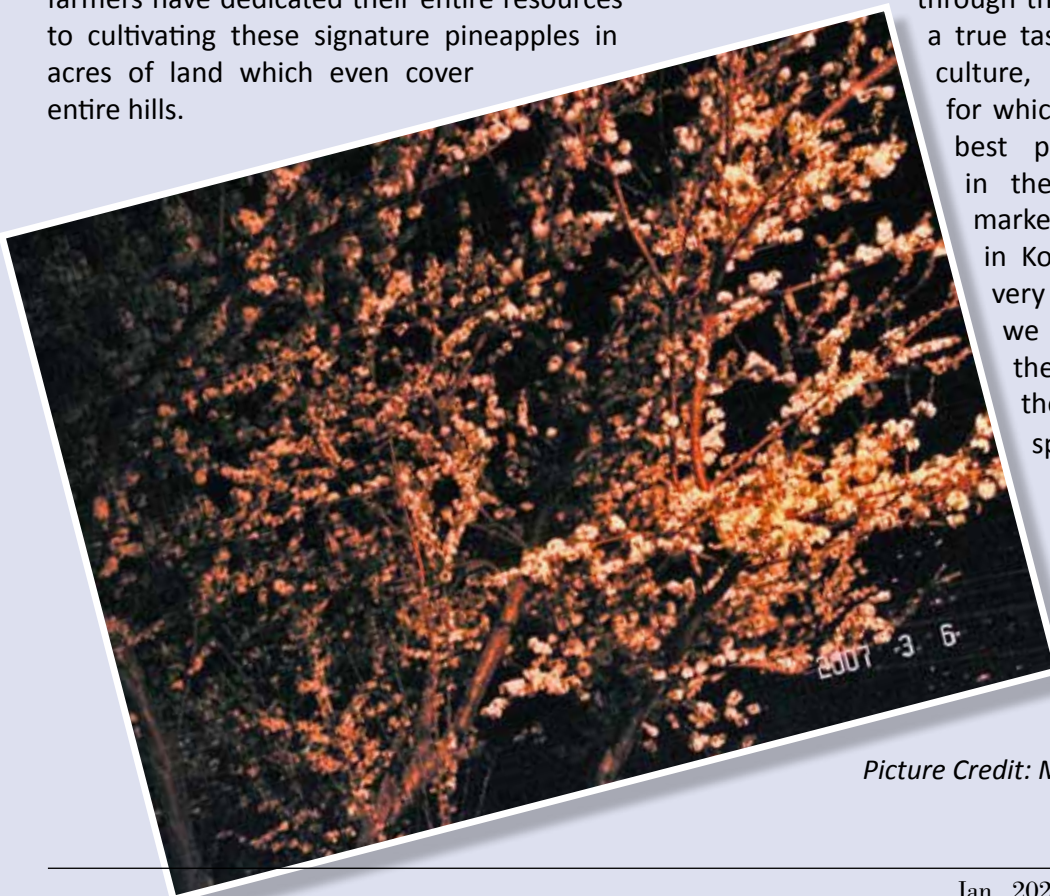




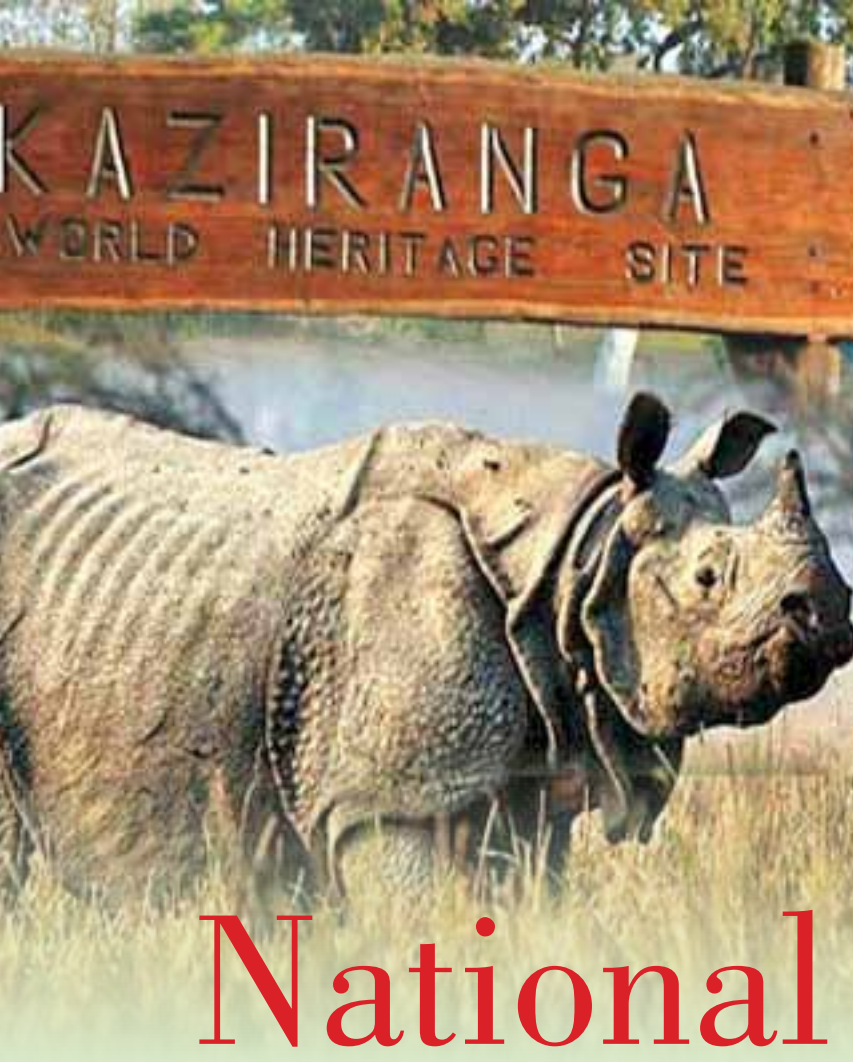
Naga pineapples are also a rare specialty and have a distinct sweetness that is perhaps found only in this part of the world. Many farmers have dedicated their entire resources to cultivating these signature pineapples in acres of land which even cover entire hills.

But perhaps the most amazing was the warmth and hospitality of our Naga neighbors! We spent delightful times together and it was through them that we got a true taste of the Naga culture, food, and tips for which would be the best places to shop in the colorful local markets. Our posting in Kohima was truly very memorable and we shall cherish the memories of the amazing years spent there!

**W/O Rammohan
Johri, IA&AS 89
batch*



Picture Credit: Ms. Anita Johri



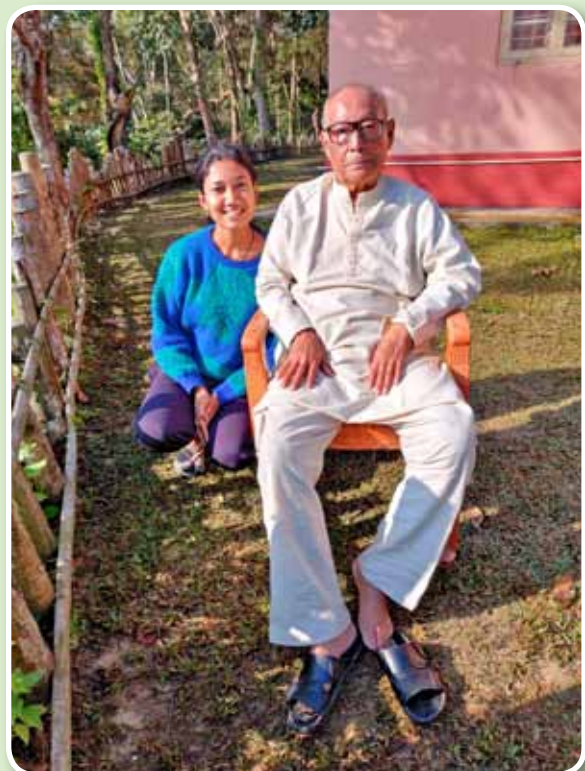
National Parks of Assam

A Trip Down the Memory Lane...

The national parks and wildlife sanctuaries of Assam hold a special place in my heart because that's where my grandfather – we called him Kaka – would take us whenever we visited my family in Guwahati during the school breaks.

The one place we most frequented was the Kaziranga National Park. It is only a couple of hours drive away from Guwahati and has a wide range of resorts to cater to visitors of all budgets. Besides, with a healthy population of more than 3000 one-horned rhinos, it also guarantees a fantastic safari experience, be it on an elephant or in a jeep.

I remember when we were younger, we would mostly opt for elephant safaris. The mahout (the elephant's owner) would make



Ms. Manalika Borgohain with her grandfather

the elephant go deep into the jungle where the grass grew as tall as the elephant, thus aptly earning its name of 'elephant grass'. The advantage was that you could see the rhinos right up close. On one of our elephant safaris, our adventurous mahout even made his elephant chase a rhino through the tall grass, which made the rhino somewhat angry and made all the rest of us very nervous!

As fun as elephant safaris are, they can be taxing on the body, and so, as we all grew older, we switched to jeep safaris. But the safaris are not the only attraction to draw tourists to Kaziranga. The various resorts scattered around the outskirts offer interesting, immersive experiences, which is a vacation by itself. One memorable experience that comes to mind is our river cruise on the Brahmaputra from Silghat. That trip was particularly memorable as we stayed in the same property where Prince William and Kate Middleton had stayed when they visited Kaziranga in 2016!

But, as much as I cherish all the memories of Kaziranga, our visit to the Manas National Park in 2018 will always be the most special family trip. We left Guwahati on the morning of 28th April with huge smiles on our faces as the UPSC Civil Services result had just been declared the previous evening and I had managed to secure a rank. Throughout the car ride we were bombarded with phone calls from journalists looking for a sound bite, and one TV news reporter even followed our car all the way to Manas!

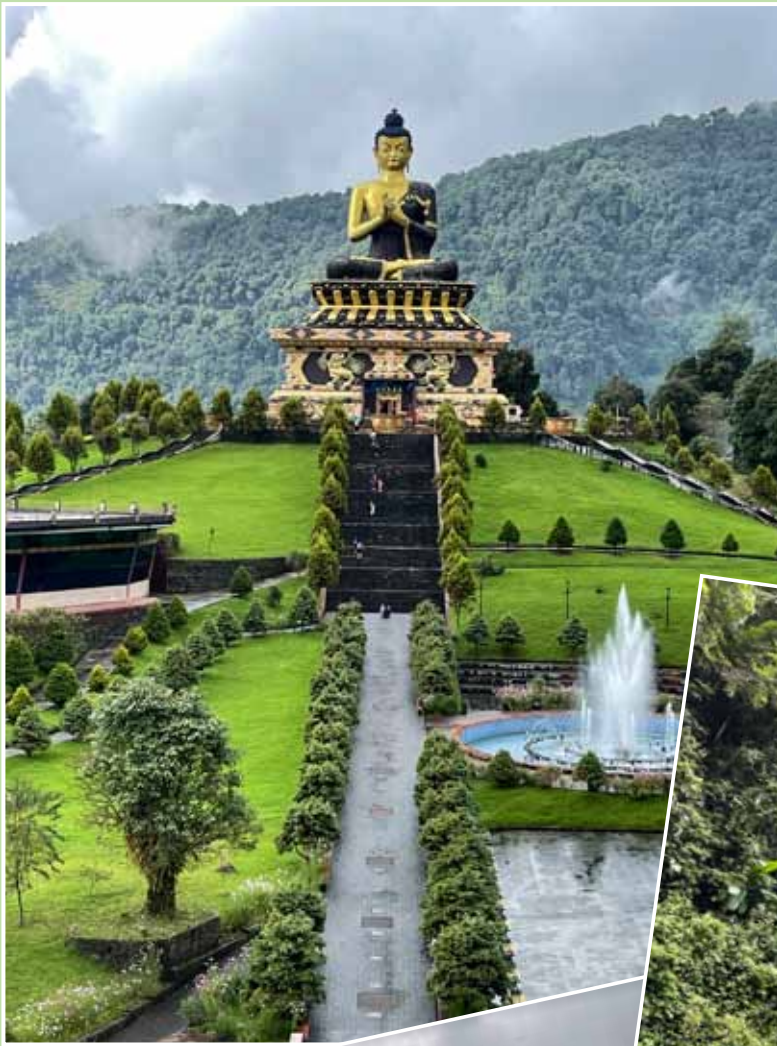
Manas is a lesser-known destination than Kaziranga but just as beautiful, if not more.

It is a UNESCO World Heritage site, as well as a tiger reserve, a biosphere reserve and an elephant reserve! On that trip, we spent a day at Mathanguri Forest Lodge, an inspection bungalow maintained by the Forest Department. It has an unbeatable location right in the core area of the Manas forest by the banks of the Manas River. From there you can see the contiguous territory of the Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan. This leads to inevitable comparisons between the 'Indian side' and the 'Bhutanese side', and the equally inevitable conclusion that the 'Bhutanese side' is a lush shade of green.

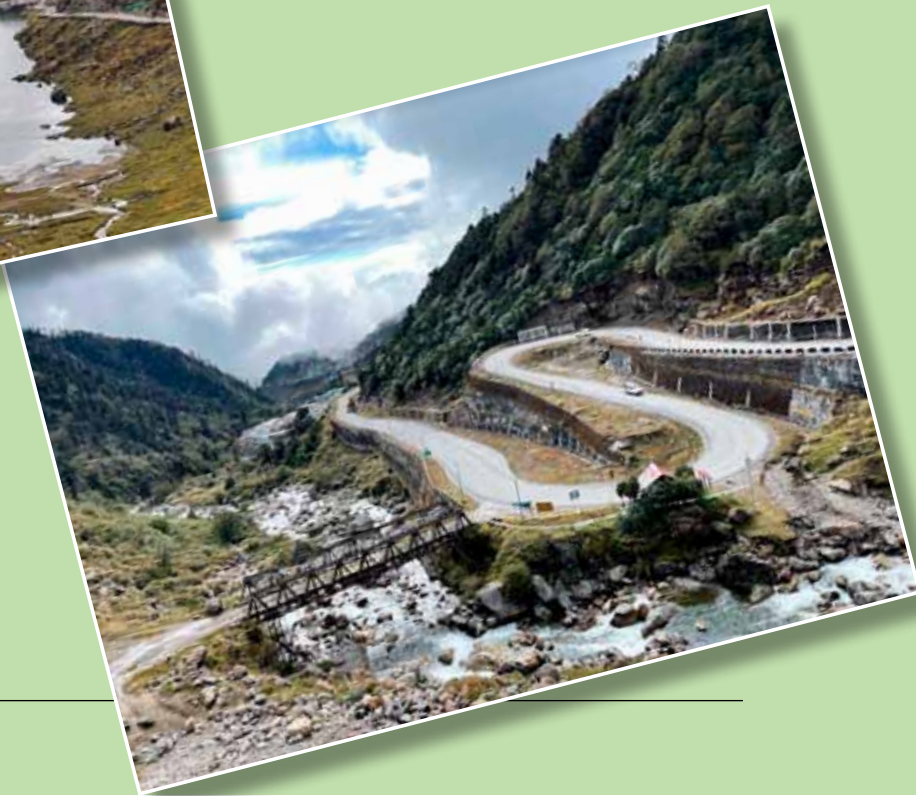
Another hidden gem of Assam is the Orang National Park near Tezpur. Known also as 'mini Kaziranga', the Orang National Park has similar landscape and a decent population of the one-horned rhinos. This was the most recent trip that we took with Kaka and this time around, we stayed in a forest rest house instead of a resort. The rest house was built at a height to protect from wild animals, such as rhinos and tigers. At night we could hear some animals at a nearby watering hole and convinced ourselves that they were rhinos. Of course, it was too dark to see the animals. We had a most memorable evening with a bonfire under the starry sky and the plaintive calls of unidentified wildlife in the background.

Orang was the last trip I was able to take with Kaka before he passed away. But he has left me with a treasure trove of memories. He opened a window for me to the rich natural heritage of Assam. My treasured memories of him and the unforgettable experiences of Assam's national parks will always be entwined for me.





Picture Credit: Dr. Vishal Desai (2010)



Picture Credit: Dr. Astha Giri





Picture Credit: Ankita Choure



Picture Credit: Anita Johri



What's Cooking





Dr. Richa Vatsa

My baking journey and few baking tips for beginners

Good day dear readers! I am a Doctor by profession, but I have always had a passion for baking. You know how hectic life gets and so though I really wanted to, I could not start baking for some or the other reasons.... But something changed as I went into my second maternity leave. By that time, I was settled in my career and I found that I could use this time to fulfill my hidden desire of baking. To be truthful, I failed a few times, but when did a few cakes ever make a baker?? I did not give up!

I started celebrating every month of my baby with a new baking experiment... and the guinea pigs of my experiments were of course my family and a few of my friends from iCISA. Well, whether they were fortunate or unfortunate, I will leave it to them to decide!

Now, I have been baking for almost two and half years, and I love it more than ever. Baking is like meditation for me and I enjoy it thoroughly. Here, I would like to share some baking tips which I gathered through my baking journey... But first and foremost, always remember one thing, a cake can't be both tasty and healthy at the same time, so don't try to make a healthy cake!

1. Follow the exact amount and sequence as described in the recipe.
2. Use OTG for baking, not microwave. If you have a microwave only, start with it and if you think that you are consistent in baking then buy an OTG.
3. A myth is that the more you mix the batter, the better the cake is. Don't ever do that, mix the all-purpose flour only till the point it's not visible.
4. Don't open the door of the OTG till at least 80% of baking is done. Doing so would make your cake sink.
5. Check your cake 2-3 minutes before the due time, because every OTG is different and even one minute of extra baking can make your cake dry.

6. There are 3 ways to check for the completeness of baking
 - a. Cake will spring back when you press it.
 - b. It will start retracting from the sides.
 - c. Toothpick inserted at the center will come out clean, but don't follow this last method very strictly, otherwise you will over bake your cake.
 7. Try to use unsalted butter to control the amount of salt in your cakes. Amul unsalted butter (blue pack) is easily available.
 8. Now a little bit about whipped cream frosting: I find this most stable in summer in Delhi and it is also easy to handle. Buttercream frosting and chocolate ganache often melt in the hot peak summers of Delhi.
 - a. For whipped cream frosting, don't try to whip cream with 25% fat content. This is the only cream available in almost all the shops. I tried to whip it
- multiple times with all the tricks and tips available on you tube, but could not do so. You can try your luck.
- b. Whipping cream can be dairy or non-dairy. The dairy one is costlier, almost 3 times the cost of non-dairy one. Setting cost aside, it's very difficult to get it either online or in shops.
 - c. non-dairy ones are also not available in the market but you can get them easily in online stores.
9. Always freeze your cake before frosting. It becomes easy to frost it and the cake will not break while frosting. So, try to bake your cake one day before frosting. And after frosting also keep it in the fridge for some time for the frosting to set.
- I hope these tips and tricks come in handy and you feel inspired to bake! I leave you with pictures from a few of my baking adventures... Happy Baking!!



Sharing a few of my baking adventures. (1) My younger son's 2nd Birthday Cake; (2) Elder son's 6th Birthday Cake; (3) Younger son's 1st Birthday Cake; (4) Husband's Birthday Cake



Home Style Masala Pav Bhaji



Ms. Varsha Shankaran

INGREDIENTS

- Cauliflower..... Cut into florets-3/4 cup
- Carrots..... Small sized - 2
- Potato.....Small sized - 1
- Onion.....Big sized (chopped) - 1
- Tomato....Big sized (chopped) - 3-4
- Garlic-ginger paste - 1 tablespoon (tbsp)
- Capsicum....Big sized (chopped) - 1
- Kasurimethi (roasted)-1 teaspoon (tspn)
- Pav bhaji masala - 3 tbsp
- Kashmiri red chilli powder - 1 tbsp
- Butter- 2 cubes
- Mustard oil - 2 tbsp
- Salt - As required
- Garam masala - 1tspn
- Coriander leaves - 1cup

Method of Preparation

1. Boil cauliflower, potato and carrot together in 2 glasses of water. Add 1 cube of butter, and cook at a high flame for 7-8 whistles. Then mash these vegetables. Put these aside.
2. Heat oil in a pan. Add chopped onion and ginger-garlic paste. When the onion turns brown, add chopped tomato. Stir and cook for 3-4 mins on a low flame. Then add Pav Bhaji masala.
3. After cooking for 3-4 mins, add capsicum, red chilli powder and salt. Keep cooking on low flame and transfer the mashed vegetables to the pan. Mix thoroughly.
4. Add kasuri methi, 1 cube butter and garam masala.
5. Turn off the gas and add lemon juice. Garnish with coriander leaves and chopped onion.
6. Enjoy the bhaji with pav.

Coming
up
Next



Coming up Next

Just as many traditional art and livelihood were destroyed with the British, so was India's handloom industry. This, despite the fact that handloom was responsible for weaving Indian wear for the longest time. Some say that the Indian handlooms have their roots in the ancient Indus Valley civilization and that the textiles produced there were exported to the distant lands of China, Rome, and Europe – a true international market since the days of very distant past!

However, the handloom industry which was destroyed by the British is slowly being revived today – actively encouraged and supported by the Government to grow into their full glory again. With diversity as rich as it is in India, it is no wonder that almost every state in India has its own particular weave. According to Isha Foundation, India is home to more than 136 unique weaves, mostly in the form of sarees – and that's no small number!

IAAOWA has always supported traditional weaves of India – check out our story in this edition on the Khadi fashion show we conducted! Continuing this tradition of tapping into our roots, **Abhikhya's** next edition will focus on the weaves and handloom of India...

So, go on! Tell us your story about your tryst with the weaves of India – be it Paithani, IKAT or Jamdani; tell us your story of how you got your first saree from your grandmother or as a family heirloom; tell us about how sarees like the Kanchipuram or Kalamkari made you feel powerful in a boardroom or a classroom; tell us about when you had to buy a Chanderi or a Bandhani for your spouse or daughter and you had no idea how to tell one weave from another ... tell us your story!

But just as always, we also welcome other articles from everyone! Poetry, your journey with your hobbies and your passions from your parents, spouses, children – we would love to feature all of them! Send in your contributions to editoriaaowa@gmail.com. We look forward to reading you!

Dear family, we at IAAOWA hope you enjoyed reading these pages of **Abhikhya!** We would love to hear back from you. Please drop your feedback at the link below:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdz3u5nWVOSISB3TPqGpqbF7P5YZ4GJ5GY8hX6AuUWROeYQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

Till we bring out the next edition, take care!

Kindest regards,

Editorial Team, **Abhikhya**



Indian Audit and Accounts Officers'
Wives Association
(IAAOWA)



Inspired by Empowerment, Committed to Success!