



OSHWAL NEWS

Celebrations and Achievements!

SPRING 2024

OAK SOUTH LONDON
PROPERTY ACQUISITION

BOOKER PRIZE
NOMINATION

50-YEAR
AREA
ANNIVERSARIES

OAK
SPORTS DAY

MARATHON
RUNNING

RECOVERY FROM
ADDICTION &
EATING
DISORDERS.



ART BY

Khilna Shah

Health & Wellbeing

My journey through
drug addiction

38 - 44

Volunteers

Oshwal Youths' Evening
at the Funfair

14 - 15

Voice of the Youth

Oshwal
without borders

59



Contents

NEWS

Editor's Note	Page 2
President's Message	Page 3
Constitutional Reform	Page 4
OAUK Capital Projects	Page 6
Oshwal Welfare Fund	Page 8
Newsround	Page 9
Oshwal Youths' Evening	Page 12

FEATURES

Fire-side Chat with Trustees	Page 16
Book Review - <i>Breath</i> , by James Nestor	Page 18
Health & Wellbeing Fair	Page 19
An Introduction to Eating Disorders	Page 22
Living Through a Terrible Accident	Page 25

My Journey Through Drug Addiction	Page 30
Book Review - <i>Western Lane</i> , by Chetna Maroo	Page 37
Cooking Corner	Page 38

AREAS SPOTLIGHT

East Area	Page 40
Leicester Area	Page 42
Luton Area	Page 43
North Area	Page 45
North East Area	Page 46
North West Area	Page 47
Voice of the Youth	Page 49

SPORTS PAGES

OAUK Sports Day	Page 51
Run Around the World	Page 55

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the latest edition of our vibrant Oshwal News magazine! Get ready to embark on a journey of celebration and inspiration as we delve into the remarkable achievements and uplifting stories that define us.

From thrilling sporting victories that showcase our resilience and teamwork, to commemorating the golden milestones of our cherished members who have been the pillars of our community for five decades, there's no shortage of reasons to cheer and rejoice.

But our community's triumphs extend far beyond the sports grounds and anniversaries. We shine a spotlight on the courageous individuals who have triumphed over adversity, bravely navigating the challenging paths following life-changing accidents, drug addiction and eating disorders, inspiring us all with their strength and resilience.

In the realm of literature, we celebrate the remarkable achievement of one of our own whose book review has earned a prestigious nomination for the Booker prize, a testament to the depth of talent within our community.

And let's not forget the pulse of our community - the exciting events and gatherings that bring us together, fostering bonds and memories that last a lifetime. From dance and sport to cultural events to health seminars, there has been something for everyone to engage and connect with.

As always, I'm so grateful for the numerous people who contribute to this magazine; I'm particularly pleased to have had contributions from so many younger members for this edition.

So, grab a cup of tea, find a cozy spot, and immerse yourself in the pages of our magazine. Let's celebrate our community's achievements, honour our resilience, and inspire one another to reach greater heights. Together, we are stronger, brighter, and bound by the spirit of celebration. Enjoy the journey!

Micchami Dukkadam.

Rikhav Kirit Shah

EDITOR

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SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

We would love to have your feedback about the magazine. Please scan the QR code to take part in a quick survey. It's running all the time, so if a thought or idea pops into your head that you'd like to share then please fill it in.



Oshwal News Editorial Team: Poonam, Khilna, Anneka, Basanti, Rikhav



President's Message

Dear Oshwal Member,

Jai Jinendra & Pranam!

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I hope the new year is going well for all of you and all resolutions that you made are being followed with vigour. Let's continue with the positivity in the community; all Areas have a significant increase in activities and all our centres are now being used by members on a regular basis. There is a real buzz around the community!

We have reached a new milestone in the history of Oshwals in the UK by acquiring Wallington Sports & Social Club in South London. This is an 8-acre site with huge potential. We should be proud of this achievement. It will enable us to transform the community in being able to create a centre to cater for members of all ages. It will enable us to tap into generation next (especially the millennials) and the youth, look after the elderly and the middle generation. Above all it will enable us to impart the values of our unique religion and also address health & wellbeing and spirituality. Ultimately, it will help in bringing the community together so we will all be part of a larger family and will be an asset for all members. I would like to thank all those involved in the process and getting the acquisition over the line. The transformation of the Association has already begun by making changes to the election procedures recommended by the Board of Advisors and will also require Constitutional reform. The Executive Committee is proposing some constitutional changes that are required to be made at the Special General Meeting to be held on 6 April 2024 as per the enclosed notice and more details on the next 2 pages. These changes will strengthen governance, proper succession planning and will help achieve active participation by our younger members in the management and running of the Association.

Work will begin shortly at Oshwal Centre on the installation of a new lift at the derasar, the refurbishment of the caretaker's cottage and the refurbishment of Shakti Centre. Funding is required for these and other projects. Please see more details on page 6. We look forward to receiving your generous support for these.

We have been very successful in building external relations with other organisations and with the political parties. In November, we had a very short impromptu visit to the Derasar by the Rt. Hon Oliver Dowden, Deputy Prime Minister.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Executive Committee, the Board of Advisors, all the Area committee members, all our staff and volunteers for all their hard work and dedication. I would also like to thank all the members, sponsors and donors for their unwavering support at all times.

Rumit Shah

Hon. President

Constitutional Reform



As you will see from the enclosed notice of a Special General Meeting to be held on 6th April 2024, the Executive Committee is proposing some constitutional changes that are required to transform the Association and to ensure proper succession planning and active participation by our younger members in the management and running of the Association.

Changes in membership

These changes are designed specifically with a view to engaging Oshwals from a younger age and without making it conditional on parents being members to engage in Oshwal activities, for example, youth club, Gujarati school, etc. It will also ensure that the membership numbers of the Association are bolstered. The changes allow any Oshwal over the age of 11 years to be a member. Members will only be eligible to vote once they are 17 years of age and over. Ancillary changes are also required for Associate members.

Changes in management

These changes are designed to ensure there is a regular refresh of leadership and therefore ensuring there is a smooth succession. This will enable fresh and new ideas for the running of the Association resulting in the longevity, progression and change required for the Association. This will encourage active participation by our younger members. We should not have the scenario of stagnancy which is created as a result of the same few members being able to manage the Association for a long period of time.

Also, the idea is that the proposed changes allow the Executive to focus more on vision and the big picture issues affecting the Association. Hence the changes which are proposed are as follows:

1. No member will be eligible to be a trustee if they have or will have served as a trustee in whatever capacity (office bearer or executive committee member) for more than a period of 6 terms (i.e. 12 years) in total.
2. A member can serve as a President for no more than 2 terms (either consecutively or at separate times).
3. An office bearer (other than the President) cannot serve as an office bearer for more than 2 terms (either consecutively or at separate times) except that they can serve as a President subject to 1 and 2 above.
4. Reduce the number of elected trustees (other than the office bearers) from 12 to 8. This will mean that the Executive Committee will comprise 4 office bearers, 8 committee members and 9 Area Chairpersons.

Property Strategy Committee

Given the expansion of our property portfolio and to ensure an effective maintenance of the properties using due process, we are proposing the creation of a Property Strategy Committee which will comprise of 4 elected members and a representative of the Executive Committee. The Property Strategy Committee will be responsible for delivering on the estate strategy and vision of the association. It will be sitting outside of the executive committee. The role of this committee will be:

1. To maintain operational activities of all the Oshwal properties
2. To create a strategic vision for the Association with respect to the Association's requirements
3. To report to the Executive Committee

Board of Advisors

To ensure the Association has a fully independent body of advisors all advisors should be elected. Accordingly, the changes proposed are that, as of the date of the change the board of advisors should comprise only of the elected advisors. Of course, the Board of Advisors are always at liberty to consult with anyone (including the past presidents) who they feel can assist.

Electronic notices

As you will be aware, we have been trying get all members to opt in to receive notice of meetings electronically thereby saving the Association a large amount of money by not having to print and then post these notices. This would also lead to environmental benefits, primarily of saving paper by not having to print the notices. Unfortunately, the response of members opting in to receive the notice by electronics means has been disappointing. We are grateful to those members who did opt to receive the notices by electronic means.

Therefore, we are now proposing to change that all notices will be sent by electronic means unless members opt to receive the notices by post. We will, of course, check and confirm the email addresses we hold.

Questions / Further Information

We are planning to hold meetings in all areas where members can ask questions and receive further information on the changes proposed in this constitutional reform. Details of these meetings will be sent by e-shot or WhatsApp.



Fund Raising for Oshwal Capital Projects



By Nirmal C Shah,
Vice President, CIO and
Fund-Raising Chair

***“What should young people do with their lives today?
Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable
communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”***

Kurt Vonnegut (American writer)

Our centres today welcome so many people through their doors, be it private functions or community events. Today, we are a vibrant community. COVID taught us all some important lessons, and emphasised our need for safe spaces for members to meet, in order to succeed as a community.

With the recent acquisition of Wallington Sports and Social Club in South London, Oshwal Association of the UK has invigorated the community spirit and lit a beacon of hope for our next generation.

The Executive Committee is making huge strides in making our centres a focal point for our community, focusing on all our members, the young, elderly and all those between these segments. Usage and footfall of all our centres has increased significantly.

History of our Properties:

1979 - Purchase of Oshwal Centre, Northaw (New Potters Bar)

1982 - Purchase of Oshwal Mahajanwadi, Croydon

2012 - Purchase of Oshwal Ekta Centre, Kingsbury

2013 - Purchase of Oshwal Shakti Centre, Hounslow

2018 - Sale of Oshwal Mahajanwadi Croydon

2018 - Long Term Rental of Oshwal House, Croydon

2018 - Purchase of Windmill Road, Croydon

2022 - Lease of Windmill Road, Croydon

2024 - Purchase of Wallington Sports and Social Centre, Sutton

At present, we are also working on the sale of Windmill Road, Croydon property.

With all these centres, there is a regular need for maintenance and upkeep and refurbishment as and when necessary.

Current Projects:

- Installation of a new disabled lift for our Derasar at Northaw near Potters Bar (Lift ordered and expected to be installed in early April 2024)
- Extension and Refurbishment of Oshwal Shakti Centre, Hounslow (we are in the process of receiving tenders with completion of works expected in the second half of 2024)
- Repair and Refurbishment of the Caretakers Cottage at Oshwal Centre (Works to commence shortly and expected completion by the end of April 2024)
- Roof works, Replacement of Windows, completion of the works in the extension and refurbishment of Oshwal House, Oshwal Centre (Works to commence in the near future and completion expected by the end of 2024)
- Installation of Solar Panels at Oshwal Centre and Oshwal Ekta Centre (Awaiting proposals for review)
- Resurfacing the carpark at Oshwal Ekta Centre
- Development of the site at Wallington Sports and Social Centre, Sutton
- Kitchen Refurbishment and modernisation of both Oshwal Centre Kitchens

These are but a few in a long list of Capital projects.

These projects are being prioritised based on the immediate needs of the community and work required. As you will appreciate, there will be a significant requirement for additional funding to complete these and future projects. The fundraising team has been working closely with us to review the requirements of each of the projects.

All centres will follow a uniform fundraising scheme as noted below:

Oshwal Community Tree:

Bronze Leaf	£1,001
Silver Leaf	£1,501
Gold Leaf	£2,501
Fruit	£5,001
Branch	£10,001
Trunk	£15,001

All centres will also have additional plaques:

Silver Plaque	£25,001
Gold Plaque	£50,001
Platinum Plaque	£75,001

In addition to the above, each centre will have naming rights to specific Halls, Rooms, Kitchens, Foyers, car parking spaces, etc. These will all be centre-specific. Where these have already been donated currently, we will review these with the current donors.

For more information on the above, please contact **Nirmal Chandrakant Shah** - nirmal.c.shah@oshwal.org

For more information on the projects, please contact **Minesh Venichand Shah** - minesh.v.shah@oshwal.org

We want you all to see these centres as your own and help develop and manage them for our generations to come, with the values that have made us the envy of a lot of other communities out there. Your generous support will help us build this community and allow you to create a legacy within it.

Jai Oshwal

Oshwal Welfare Fund



By Nirmal C Shah,
Vice President and Fund-Raising Chair



As a community we have come a long way from the early struggles our parents, grandparents and great grandparents endured to create Oshwal Association of the UK. Our forefathers emphasised on Good Education, to form the foundation of our community. With that, the landscape of the community has changed significantly from those early days of struggles to an affluent community today.

As we migrated from India to East Africa to the United Kingdom, our society has started to fragment. The concept of joint families which were the backbone of our success in India and Kenya, changed as we moved to the UK. Situation and conditions changed the nucleus of our family structure. Today a household will seldom exceed the second generation. Families are connected through social media and our busy lives leave little time for maintaining core family relationships. Grandparents are disconnected due to distance and technological obstacles. Our social circles are changing and family connections fading as commitments and resource restrictions force us to reduce our reach.

Core values that helped build our successful community are not passed down to the next generation, and the generational gap is creating isolated and deprecating communities. Yes, education can be attained much more easily than it could in the past, but life challenges can come from anywhere (some of the articles in this magazine bring this to light).

Creating a strong community allows us to provide support to our fragmented households – today and in the future. We also want to ensure that our rich culture and heritage is preserved; this was the backbone of our success in India and East Africa.

Significant efforts have been made to support the vulnerable who have been victims of our fragmented households. But, we need to do more. We need to provide safe spaces for our elders to meet, learn and improve their connectivity with this fast-moving world. We also need a place where our younger members can learn about the determination and sacrifices that made our forefathers very successful people. Our community needs to provide support for any one of us who needs to retrain and build skillsets for our families' futures. And at a time when our health service is strained, helping members manage health and wellbeing is vital.

To achieve this our community must be strong. It must have resources that can allow it to support its members. This can be achieved, only if start believing in shared success, where rather than the individual, the whole community starts its journey to affluency.

In mid-2022, Oshwal Association of the UK re-purposed its £120 scheme and started the Oshwal Welfare Fund. The aim of the fund is to ensure that our 9 Oshwal Areas focus on delivering services for our members based on the above 'strong community needs'.

Take that step today and complete the Oshwal Welfare Fund form. You will be able to make change with just £10.00 per month.

Oshwal Welfare Fund



Please scan this code if you wish to donate to the Oshwal Welfare Fund



Here are our top stories on what's been happening in our community of late:

RELIGION

Our highly popular Sunday satsang, often with special guest speakers, continues to attract audiences globally via our YouTube channel.

We are seeing more and more people attend the Derasar. There is a dedicated team available at weekend mornings to guide attendees. It has been lovely to see lots of new faces attend.

Our monthly Samuh Bhakti at the Derasar is now a regular feature for many members.

Oshwal Association of the UK's "Last Rites" service is now available. We have 30 fully trained volunteers from most areas. This can be hugely spiritually uplifting for those in the final hours of life. Please see the Oshwal website for more information.

Jainism classes on Tuesdays continue. In addition, a new Beginners' Jainism class launched in February.

Also in February, we launched the Jainism book club, which allows members to learn about our dharma through reading, debating and discussing thoughts.

The Oshwal Community Choir was launched in January.

YOUTH

Oshwal Youth Sports Day was held in December 2023, with 400 Oshwal participants playing a range of sports together. Congratulations to North West Area for winning (and retaining) the overall trophy.

OSHWAL BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONALS NETWORK (OBPN)

In December we took away some key learnings from our guest speaker, Serena Shah, during our webinar "Jainism & the Climate Crisis" (available on our Oshwal Association of the UK YouTube channel in case you missed it!). The key takeaway being that even a small action taken by each of us can have a huge impact and consequence for the future of our planet. We implemented some of this in our "Design your own tote bag" workshop, hosted by Uma Shah, where we upcycled excess materials to create some beautiful new pieces. Keep an eye out for future networking events.



EAST AREA

East Area participated in sports after a long break and came home with several medals and trophies in darts, swimming, netball, and boccia. We even had Liya Jiten Gosrani of our

U16's team coming home with the humungous achievement of Sports Girl of the year! Well done to the entire East Area team, with a special thanks to Hinesh and Nirma Shah for your drive in ensuring we had as many teams as we did after such a long time!

LEICESTER AREA

Our monthly programmes have continued successfully. Our first monthly programme was a picnic at Thornton Reservoir. We've then had a boat trip in Loughborough, a trip to Blackpool, a cards tournament, a talk on sustainable lifestyle, bingo and many more.

LUTON AREA

Luton Area celebrated their 50th Anniversary on 4th November 2023 at Cassel Memorial Hall in Lilley. Everyone who attended enjoyed live music over a delicious meal, singing songs, and dancing Raas Garba. Photographs and trophies won by our members were displayed to share fond memories from over the years. We also marked the special occasion with a picnic in the park on a beautiful summer's day in June 2023.



NORTH AREA

We started the monthly Luncheon club nearly 2 years ago. It's been a huge success with over 60 members attending each month.

In December, we launched a new initiative to combat loneliness. Members enjoy masala chai/coffee with snacks and get to talk to and make new friends.

NORTH EAST AREA

Garba Exercise classes have started, and take place at Ashmole School on Fridays from 7pm - 8pm!

Our badminton and youth clubs are continuing to attract more people at all levels.

Chair Yoga sessions are held every Tuesday from 10.30am to noon at Oshwal House. The classes are conducted by NE Area Treasurer, Dilipbhai Shah. It's an hour and a half of gentle exercises, including stretches and Pranayama to keep us physically fit and mentally relaxed.

For more information, please contact dilip.g.shah@oshwal.org

NORTH WEST AREA

We're really proud to have turned our pledge to reconnect and engage the community into a reality. The very vast range of activities that were being held at Ekta Centre has continued, and more have been added. The number of people attending all activities has increased so much for example, we have seen more than double the number of children attending Gujarati classes, triple the number attending Bhukhar evenings regularly! And literally hundreds of people attending weekly events that fit with their interests!

Paryushan was a busy period with two events held daily, and followed by the Samvantsari Bhojan, which is one of the biggest events in our calendar. Members thoroughly enjoyed the unique Mahavir Janma Kalyan performances. We hosted hugely successful concerts by Kabir Café and Vicky Parekh - an OAUK first!

A special mention to our Embracing All Abilities (EAA) team who have worked really hard with EAA participants. The EAA team's recent performance at Watford Palace Theatre received a standing ovation!

SOUTH AREA

On Saturday, 23 December 2023 (Day of Maun Vrat), the South Area Community vacated the Deraser at Oshwal House, which had been our home for over forty years.

On a cold morning, we moved the Pratimas from Oshwal House to Paxton Academy. This is now our temporary home until the completion of Wallington. Although it was a challenge the transition was smooth; everyone present participated and the Pratimas were placed in their new home.

We held Chaityavandan at Paxton Academy. Later, Priti Bhojan was served at our old home, Oshwal House. We would like to thank all the volunteers and participants who helped make this a successful move.



WEST AREA

2023 marked 10 years of Shakti Centre - the home of West Area. Since the acquisition, members have benefitted from the various events and activities which have taken place at the property. This is all thanks to our members who have made this achievement a possibility without whose determination and hard work this would not have been possible.

To commemorate this milestone of Shakti Centre, the committee organised some special events like Yoga/Pilates session, Bukhar

competition, Youth social & board games night among others. These events were free of charge to members. In addition, all the regular weekly activities were free to members for the whole year, which has made it a more inclusive community.

As well as the above, various other events have been organised like Family Fun Day and Elderly Luncheons for the members to enjoy.

Shakti Centre also hosts the ever-popular monthly Dal Rotli evening. As the name suggests, attendees enjoy a delicious meal over a social conversation followed by card and board games. These sessions are always well attended.

Another popular event is the Elderly luncheons which are always oversubscribed due to the capacity of the hall. Please make sure to register your name as soon as the date is advertised to avoid disappointment.

KEY UPCOMING DATES IN THE OAUK CALENDAR

24 March - Palitana Bhav Yatra

15 April - Ayambil starts

24 April - Ayambil Parna

31 August - Paryushan starts

8 September - Parna

15 September - Dhaja Din

Oshwal Youths' Evening at the Funfair



On 30 September 2023, the first Young Adult OAUK Social Event took place at Fairgame - an indoor funfair, in Canary Wharf. 80 young Oshwals attended the event and enjoyed some food and a round of competitive fair games. After having a lovely evening at the event herself, Anneka Shah, spoke to Maya Savla, who organised the event alongside other young Oshwals from South Area.

Tell us a bit about yourself, Maya.

I am from South London and have been here my whole life. I am a university student in my final (4th) year, studying MSci Wild Animal Biology at Royal Veterinary College. My Masters degree takes up lots of my time at the moment. But when I have time, I try spending it with my German shepherd dog, gaming, binging on TV shows, and learning Swahili. I am currently volunteering for the South Area Sports and Social club. I am looking forward to joining the South Area committee once I graduate.

The first OAUK young adult social was a huge success! Tell us a bit about the event.

Members from South Area and I organised a social event at Fairgame in Canary Wharf for young adults. We sold out all 80 tickets. The event included an area to socialise with other attendees, and 8 games to play in total: Whack-a-Mole, Skee-ball, Shoot the Clown, and more. We also provided pizza and other food. We gave everyone little goodie bags for their journey home, and gift prizes for the top 3 winners - the Fairgame teddy bear being my personal favourite!

So, why did you decide to organise the event?

Over the past few years, I have constantly heard people within my age group say that they would love to have an event exclusively for our age group, so that they could make friends across areas. I recently turned 22, and I have noticed the lack of dedicated events, and understand why many of us may feel disconnected, so I decided to take the initiative. At the start, I thought that planning and leading an event was out of my comfort zone. But having done the event, I found that it really improved my social qualities and leadership skills.

What was the feedback on the event? Having so many young Oshwals come together is quite a rarity - why do you think so many people wanted to attend?

Everyone really enjoyed it as it was so different from what Oshwal normally organises. I planned this event with all areas in mind, so the event being in central London made it a lot easier for people to attend. As Fairgame is competitive and engaging, I think it was something that everyone would feel eager to participate in. Also, we tried to make it as inclusive as possible, allowing friends to join in.

I agree, you didn't have to know lots of people or be from one area, and that really appealed to me. What other events have you been involved in and tell us about your other volunteering work for Oshwal?

My parents have been part of Oshwal for a long time and I joined the Youth Club, which has meant that I've been engaged in Oshwal activities from a young age. I help out with South Area events when I am free, whether it is related to the sports club, the social side, such as the recent Holi party, or community events, such as helping to serve food.

Do you have any more youth events lined up?

Currently we do not have any plans set in stone but are thinking of something happening towards Easter. It may be similar to the Fairgame event; there was lots of excitement about another event. I am also considering something more unique. I am also very open to others' ideas!

I look forward to seeing what you come up with! Going forwards, what else would you like to see provided for young Oshwals?

This event showed me that very few younger individuals lead events in Oshwal. Being more open and helping guide young Oshwals in how

to successfully lead an event would make our generation more prepared to take over these roles in the future.

It is also important to allow events catered for the relevant age group. A bit more consideration when planning events should go towards young adults, as evidently from the Fairgame event, they are likely to participate in events when they know events are specifically catered for them.

Thanks for sharing your experiences Maya - is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

I would really encourage everyone who has the slightest inkling of wanting to plan an event to just be creative and go for it!

Don't worry if it does not feel like a (traditional) Oshwal event. Think more broadly and see it as an opportunity to create friendships across the community. Contact any of the the Area committees for help and try to be as realistic and inclusive as you can when planning. When we all work together to do something different, our community will grow and feel more connected, along with creating a better future for young adults and the next generation of Oshwals.



Fireside chat

with our Trustees

For this edition, we interviewed two of our Area Chairs - women who have taken on important roles within the Community and made a huge difference.



First, we spoke to **Avni Jayantilal Shah**, Chair of the East Area.

Avni, tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm Avni. I have been living in East London since we came to this country from Kenya in 1975. I lived and studied in Romford, Essex.

We then moved to Ilford in 1986, and I've been here ever since. Leadership for me started in the girl guides, where I achieved my Duke of Edinburgh award at the age of 15 and also won a trophy for being the best girl guide!

What involvement did you have with OAUK before you became Chair of the East Area in 2022?

My dad, late Jayantilal D Shah was on the East area committee so had some knowledge about our community in East London. I also decided to join the committee at a very young age in 1984.

I joined the Mahila Mandal committee as secretary for 4 years, and then served as Chair for 4 years, before joining the main committee as Secretary which I

did for another 4 years. I then served as Chairperson of the East Area for 2 years from 1994. At that time, I was the youngest Chairperson on the OAUK Area committee. Working side by side with my dad was quite an experience! That generation had a lot of patience and tolerance. My dad always said that if you did voluntary service for a community you had to be tolerant and thick skinned. I know exactly what he meant when we went door to door to raise funds for the £120 scheme and for Oshwal Centre. I am so proud that I was part of this when Oshwal Centre was purchased - it was hard work, but also lots of fun.

What has the experience been? Can you talk us through some of the specific highs and lows.

Whilst I was on the Mahila Mandal Committee we organised a Saree competition at Picketts Lock centre, with participants across our Areas. This was a very huge task which we had taken on for the first time. The event was so successful - it was worth all the hard work and dedication we had put in. We were also the first area to host the all-areas Raas Garba competition which took place for nearly 7 years. The highlight of this event was when we came first beating North West area! We organised a fashion show at Oshwal Centre in 1998 with nearly 70 participants between the ages of 5 and 70. Ultimately, this was an experience of trying new things all the time - which makes OAUK really special for me.

I think the biggest achievement the OAUK has made over the years is having our beautiful derasar and our own Oshwal Centre. We have achieved a lot. East Area has many challenges to face, the biggest one being having our own property. Hiring halls over the years has proven to be very difficult.

We are becoming a bigger and more diverse community in many ways. In your opinion, what are the new skill sets that will become very valuable to have on OAUK Trustees / Area Committees / Board of Advisors?

Unity and understanding each other will be more important as we become a bigger and more diverse community. We all believe in the same principles; one cannot do this alone. Women who were always sidelined in the past have now started coming forward as leaders. More women still need to come forward and be heard.

Any personal big achievements that stand out?

Since becoming the Chairperson for the second time in 2022, we have achieved quite a lot although there is still a long way to go to bring East Area to where it was. Above all, I am delighted to have my son, Nikhil join the committee - that's huge for me!

If you have one (or 2 or 3) key messages that you would want to send to our members (across all Areas), what would that be?

It's quite simple. Please remember that all committee members are volunteers who give up their own time to serve the community. Most of us are in full-time employment. We sacrifice a lot of time and sometimes neglect our own passions.

To the few who are busy creating rifts in the community, please stop this. Use your energy positively. Stop all the bickering

and animosity and move on. This nonsense not only stops us from doing what we were elected to do but affects our family lives too.



We also spoke to **Jayshree Shah** - Chair, North West Area, who has led quite a transformation in the NW Area.

Tell us a bit about yourself

I was born in Nakuru, the early 60s and we moved to England, settling in Luton in 1973. At the time, girls in Luton weren't actively encouraged to go to university so I went to college and became a medical secretary which I loved for a while. Once my children were old enough (in the late 90s) I ventured into different roles within the NHS working my way up to becoming a service manager for Vascular Surgery at Northwick Park Hospital where I manage a team of surgeons, junior doctors, nurses and administrative staff.

Inspired by my parents in Luton where my father was the chairperson in the late 70s, I joined OAUK and led the Youth Club and was the Secretary for a while. We moved to London in the mid-80s and soon after, I led the NW Youth Club (hugely different from today!). I was part of the Oshwal Yuvak Sangh (an all-area platform for Oshwal Youth lead) and we organised the first ever Oshwal Games (called OYLimpics).

Shishukunj has played a major part in my charity work. I was the head of the Parents Association called SHiPA which supported the activities run by the youngsters. Fundraising has also played a significant part in my life. I've run and walked several

marathons and led teams on several fundraising events. I've also been part of the Sansaar's performing team and play the part of Tametu for over 10 years. I continue to support its valuable work.

The OAUk membership for the NW Area is huge, and becoming Chair can appear quite daunting. What (or who) got you thinking about taking this on?

I had been out of OAUk for quite a few years and felt it was time to give back. A new EC had been appointed, and I felt it was a good time to join so took the plunge! I met most of the other committee members for the first time at the election!

You and your committee transformed the level of activity - both in popularity and variety. Tell us - what were the main factors that created such success?

I feel it was a combination of a brand-new committee, lots of new ideas and young fresh energy. We've also been backed by a core, stable group of volunteers. We've encouraged new ideas and grown what was already there. The backbone of all of this is, of course, Ekta Centre, managed by Umesh (PMC Lead) and the Ekta Tigers.

What challenges did you come across in executing the ideas?

It would have to be the time and resource to get dedicated volunteers to run the new activities and encouraging members to attend. I'm lucky with our great Media and Communications team, led by Sanjeev; they are constantly working hard in the background promoting events.

What did you do to keep the Committee's enthusiasm and momentum going for such a long period of time? Have some of them experienced fatigue?

Enthusiasm comes from giving back to the community. It is, of course, really hard work (this is all voluntary time) but seeing and experiencing the fruits of our labour

has made it all worthwhile. There is fatigue, politics (I've definitely had my fair share of this!) but at the end of the day, we must look at the bigger picture - are we making a difference? Yes, we are. People are social creatures and we all like to connect with others. I feel blessed that my committee, volunteers and I have had the opportunity to be part of this.

You're a busy person at work, at home, and the OAUk role has been time-consuming too. How have you managed your own energy and motivation?

I have no idea! But I suppose, I have great support from my family, I can survive with little sleep, but mostly because I do like the team I work with and the support I have from them.

Of the numerous new initiatives you and your team brought in, what has given you the biggest sense of achievement, and why?

A few things... whilst Garba Fit sessions and Bhukhar surpassed all our targets, I feel the best achievement is our Youth Club and particularly our new 'Embracing All Abilities' activity which we run on Friday evenings at Harrow Leisure Centre. Seeing this group of people, carers and parents coming together is absolutely heart-warming. We are making such a lovely difference to this group; I am so proud that NW is at the forefront of pushing this agenda. One of my proudest moments was to see this group receive a standing ovation at a Bollywood dance performance at the Watford Palace Theatre!

What have you achieved for yourself over the last 2 years (as a result of being an Area Chair)?

I'm a decade older (started in my 50s and will end in at 60! Lots of wrinkles! But joking aside, I've really enjoyed reconnecting with our community and feel so proud to be an Oshwal!

What key message would you give to our members (across all Areas)?

It has been difficult to engage the youth, but for our beautiful organisation to grow, we need to encourage more to come forward. We need to constantly change with the times and allow openness without compromising on our Jain values. In our fast-paced lives, learning to be patient and resilient in serving our community is important.

We are becoming a bigger and more diverse community in many ways. In your opinion, what are the new skill sets that will become very valuable to have on OAUk Trustees / Area Committees / Board of Advisors?

Good IT, organisation and excellent communication skills are key. Working within a team dynamic and being flexible is equally important. A good understanding of the organisation, its history, constitution, regulations also help when leading an organisation so vast. Be prepared to graft hard!

As your term comes to an end what would you like to see in NW Area, or OAUk more generally in, say, 5 years' time?

For Ekta Centre: working with local council to source more parking spaces Activity-wise (and I think this would apply to all OAUk areas):

- to see our over 60s community have greater digital literacy.
- A weekly dementia café
- Regular advice and guidance sessions on general welfare

At Exec level: clear strategies for all key portfolios, particularly around youth engagement and welfare. I would also like to see a 'sewa' portfolio at EC level.

10 Years of Shakti Centre fun Quiz:

The West Area Committee thanks everyone who entered the quiz (published in the Spring 2023 Oshwal News). Below are the answers to the quiz:

1. Who was the President of OAUk when Shakti Centre was purchased?

Raaxeet Harakhchand Shah

2. Who was the Chairperson of West area when Shakti Centre was acquired?

Bhikhubhai Devchand Shah

3. What was the property formerly known as before owned by OAUk?

The Salvation Army Citadel

4. What was the first OAUk event that took place at Shakti Centre?

Savantsari Bhojan

5. How many West area chairpersons have there been since acquisition of Shakti centre?

Three

6. What is the single biggest change in the internal appearance of the property since the purchase?

Removal of stage and laying new flooring in its place

7. What was the colour of the original entrance doors before the new replacement?

Blue

8. When was the official 'Dwar' opening ceremony held?

29th May 2016

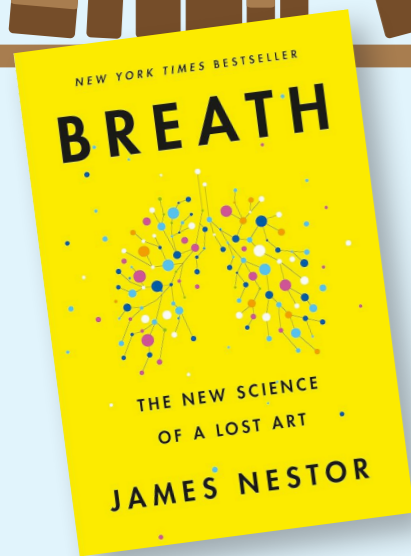
9. How many Donors plaques are currently displayed (as of March '23)?

Seven

10. What is the name of the main hall?

Mitesh Premchand Shah Hall

BOOK REVIEW



By Rikhav Shah

James Nestor's 'Breath' takes us on a fascinating journey into the often overlooked world of something as fundamental as breathing. Nestor

illustrate the profound influence of breathing patterns on oral health.

One of the book's strengths lies in Nestor's ability to connect the dots between breath and various aspects of our lives. He delves into how altered breathing patterns can influence everything from sleep to athletic performance. The author's exploration of diverse cultural practices related to breath, including those from the Indian subcontinent, adds a rich layer to the narrative.

As a person of Indian origin, I found the section on pranayama, the ancient Indian practice of breath control, particularly enlightening. Nestor sheds light on how these traditional techniques are not just spiritual exercises but have tangible physiological benefits. He respectfully intertwines these practices with scientific evidence, offering a holistic perspective. His scientific study favours slow breathing - taking 5.5 breaths a minute (that's 5.5 seconds to breathe in, and 5.5 seconds to breathe out) balances the nervous system and other important body functions. He then connects this with prayer; each spoken phrase in several prayers in different cultures take 5.5 seconds with the same amount of time breathing in before the chant starts again. Nestor highlights how our cultural backgrounds influence the ways we breathe and how this, in turn, impacts our health. It's a reminder that practices rooted in ancient traditions continue to hold relevance in our modern lives.

In conclusion, 'Breath' serves as a wake-up call, urging readers to reevaluate something as basic as the way we breathe. The book is not a cure for all illnesses! But, breathing properly is a good start. Whether you're a health enthusiast, a yoga practitioner, or simply curious about the science of breathing, this book offers valuable insights that could potentially transform some aspects of your health by the way you approach something as fundamental as taking a breath. After all, breath is life.

explores the profound impact that conscious breathing can have on our health, well-being, and even our cultural practices.

The book weaves together science, personal experiences, and cultural insights. Nestor's engaging storytelling makes complex scientific concepts about breath accessible to a wide audience. From ancient breathing techniques to modern research findings, the book provides a comprehensive overview.

Nestor discusses how our modern lifestyle, characterized by breathing through the mouth instead of the nose, can contribute to dental issues. He describes an experiment on himself where he blocks his nose for several days and breathes through his mouth only. The result - poor sleep, an increase in stress levels, higher blood pressure and higher risk of stroke. Soon after he does the opposite and breathes through his nose alone, the opposite happens - he's happier, sleeps well and health signals are restored.

In "Breath," James Nestor delves into the surprising connection between breathing and dental health. Nestor explores how mouth breathing can lead to a range of problems, from misaligned teeth to an increased risk of cavities. He discusses the impact of breathing on the development of the face and jaws, citing real-life cases and scientific studies that

OAUK Mind, Body & Soul Health & Wellbeing Fair

By Poonam Shah

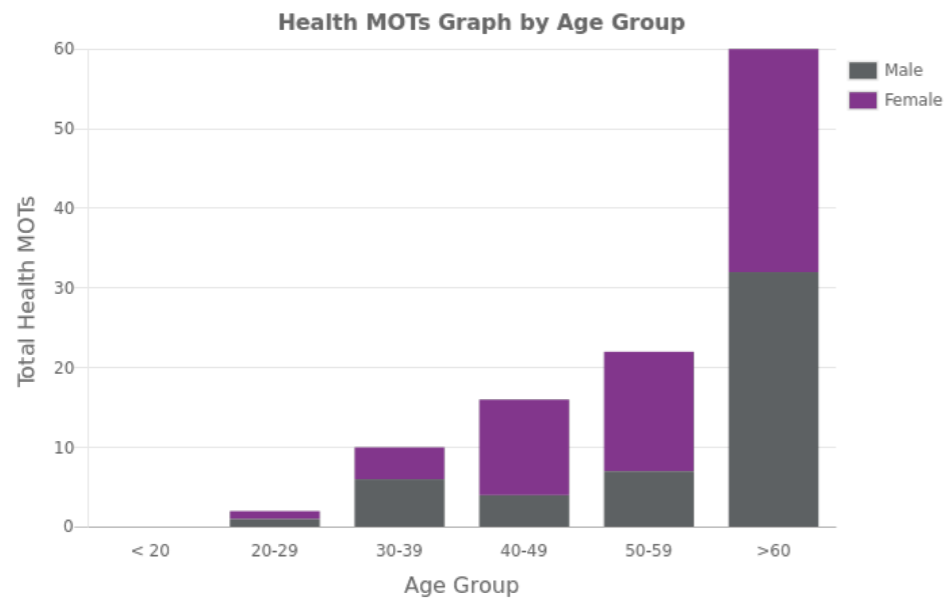
Our greatest asset is our health. An unknown author once wrote, *'The mind and body are not separate. What affects one, affects the other.'* We would go further and integrate the soul into that. It's all connected and that's what led us to set our vision for the health of the Oshwal community when Rajvee Shah-Punatar and I took on the role of the Health & Wellbeing trustees for OAUK. Our vision for the Health and Wellbeing Fair in June 2023 was:

- To empower people to take responsibility for improving their own health & wellbeing;
- Encourage people to participate in interactive, holistic and educational activities;
- Help people make changes to their lifestyle;
- Showcase the talent in our community and highlight Health and wellbeing activities already happening in our 9 areas.

Oshwal Centre was buzzing with activity on the weekend of Saturday 10th June and Sunday 11th June. More than 150 volunteers from our 9 areas had signed up to deliver this fantastic challenge. The fun began on Saturday with the setting up of the Seven zones focussed on education, indoor and outdoor activities, screening, nutrition, alternative therapies and bhakti.

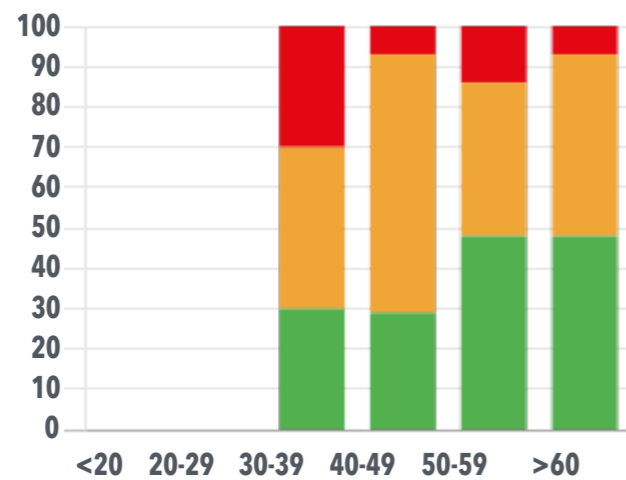
On the Sunday, more than 750 people attended the fair and the most popular zone was the Alternative therapy zone with more than 400 treatments delivered on reflexology, reiki, accupressure, massage, pranic healing, Master Sha Tao healing and Terahertz Frequency healing. This shows the shift in healing mindsets that has occurred within the Oshwal community as we start focussing on our external and internal wellbeing in a holistic manner.

Close to 150 Health MOTs were carried out with some interesting statistics for the Oshwal community which are shared on the next page:



	Oshwal Association of the UK			Wellbeing People Average		
	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green
BMI	11%	45%	44%	21%	40%	39%
BFC	12%	47%	41%	24%	39%	36%
Blood Pressure	22%	40%	38%	32%	35%	32%
Pulse	17%	0%	83%	8%	0%	92%
Wellbeing Age	42%	29%	29%	40%	35%	25%

BMI by Age Group, showing Health MOTs and Percentages



Many have heard of the fantastic Lifesaver's course being delivered by Saileshbhai Shah at Ekta Centre. Saileshbhai kindly volunteered his services for the health fair and more than 75 individuals took part in his CPR training course. The falls assessments for the elderly were again a huge benefit to our members. More than 100 people got the opportunity to undergo a detailed ear examination.

Topics on gut health, power of the subconscious mind, neurodiversity and many more were hugely popular with close to 200 attendees in each session. The offsite treks by the fantastic Oshwal Trekkers were a huge hit as people took the opportunity to explore the woods in Northaw and likewise the guided walks around the grounds of Oshwal Centre by young Oshwal, Chandni Shah were eyeopening for all.

Overall, the shift in the mindset of our community as a whole towards health and wellbeing is overwhelmingly positive.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the volunteers, speakers, therapy practitioners, activity leads and all those who attended for their time and dedication to such a worthy cause.

Finally, our sincere thanks to all our sponsors, Sonia Estates, Shaneel Enterprises, Top Op & Sigma Pharmaceuticals, who wholeheartedly supported this event.



Living in South Asian Bodies:

By Reena Gudka

An Introduction to Eating Disorders

A few years ago, on Eating Disorders Awareness Week, my friend asked me, "if you could give your teenage-self a message, what would it be?"

Filled with guilt, I said, "I'd tell her I'm sorry. Sorry for all the things I'm about to put her through. And not just to teenage Reena, but to Reena five years ago too, five months ago, and five days ago too."

As a south Asian woman who has had anorexia on and off since being a teenager, I know exactly what it's like to strive to be perfect in every way possible, by any means necessary, regardless of what damage it may do to your own health. It's no surprise I keep apologising to my former selves.

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions with potentially life-threatening impacts. They have the highest mortality rates amongst psychiatric disorders. UK charity BEAT estimates that 1.25-3.4 million people in the UK currently experience eating disorders, with a further 4-5 million people indirectly affected through supporting and caring responsibilities. However, they are unfortunately still shrouded in stigma, misunderstanding, and silence. This can make it difficult for those with eating disorders to speak up. Thinking of my eating disorder as a dirty secret has only made it fester for longer, and I've experienced first-hand the naming, shaming, and gossiping about mental health that continue to be commonplace in south Asian communities.

While not everyone will have an eating disorder, so many of us have shared experiences of negative

body image or disordered eating habits. We just don't talk about these experiences enough, leaving a lot of us feeling ashamed and isolated. How many of us have at some point spent a lot of time rummaging through our wardrobes trying to find the right item of clothing that we hope will make our bodies look more 'X' or less 'Y'? How many of us have felt immense pressure to accept the food being offered to us by a relative, at least to avoid being disrespectful, to later be criticised for the way our bodies look by the same relative?

Body image: how we think and feel about our bodies.

Everyone has body image, be it positive, negative, or in between. It's normal to feel different things about each body part, and normal to feel differently every day.

Normalised, non-disordered eating: when someone mindfully consumes food when they are hungry and can stop when they feel full.

Disordered eating: when someone has various abnormal eating behaviours that do not yet fit the criteria for an eating disorder. Someone with disordered eating may eat when they are bored, eat out of stress, or eat to cover up their emotions, for instance.

Eating disorder: someone with an eating disorder may have or engage with a lot of the same behaviours as someone who has disordered eating, but at a higher frequency and higher level of severity. There are several types of eating disorders, and they are not actually about food or exercise itself; those symptoms tend to be ways in which the person will try to cope with a deeper underlying issue they may not have worked through



There are many misconceptions about eating disorders and few people know about their severity. For instance, many people assume that eating disorders only affect young, white, heterosexual, able-bodied women. Actually, at least one in four people affected are men. And, clinical research has found that eating disorders are just as common, if not more common, among people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Similarly, a lot of people think anorexia is the most common eating disorder. A lot of this misconception is down to the stereotype set in our minds of what someone with an eating disorder probably looks like - a very thin, pale person who doesn't eat much. In reality, you can't tell if someone has an eating disorder just by looking at them and in fact, most people will be within a 'healthy' weight range (as per NHS criteria). Anyone can be affected by an eating disorder, disordered eating, or negative body image. Mental health issues do not discriminate.

'Other specified food or eating disorder', as described in the box below, is the most common eating disorder, and accounts for 47% of diagnoses. This is followed by binge eating disorder (22%), bulimia (22%), anorexia (8%), and avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (5%). Lesser-known, but equally serious, eating disorders include, orthorexia, pica, rumination disorder, and diabulimia.

Anorexia:

when someone attempts to keep their weight as low as possible through various behaviours including, restricting food, exercising excessively, or using laxatives.

Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID):

when someone avoids certain types of food or restricts their intake. They may be sensitive to the taste, smell, texture, or appearance of food. They may also be worried about the consequences of eating that food such as choking or vomiting, because of a past experience. Some people with ARFID have a low interest in eating and do not feel hunger like others might.

Binge Eating Disorder (BED):

when someone eats a lot of food in a short period of time, without feeling in control. This is called a binge.

Bulimia:

similar to BED, a person will binge on a lot of food, but then follow this will behaviours to compensate, which is known as purging. This can include fasting, vomiting, taking laxatives, or exercising excessively.

Other Specified Food or Eating Disorder (OSFED):

this means that a person's symptoms do not fit exactly the criteria for anorexia, binge eating disorder, or bulimia. OSFED is not a less serious eating disorder.

Many of the misconceptions about eating disorders have made it harder for me to open up about my own experiences. I was often described as a fussy and stubborn eater who didn't appreciate having the food that many people around the world don't have access to; it couldn't possibly have been something deeper. When I did muster the courage to say that I had an eating disorder, many people brushed it off with, "but you look fine." Irrespective of how I looked, I was anything but fine and will probably live with some of the damage for years to come.

I was awarded a British Empire Medal as part of the King's New Year Honours List 2023 for my services to Civil Servants affected by eating disorders. My colleagues and I created a safe space that is full of empathy and free of judgement where individuals can access the resources they need to get support and sometimes to simply make it through a difficult week or even day. Not only has this volunteer work been the most fulfilling thing I have ever done, but it has also helped me in my own recovery. By finding people with similar experiences I no longer feel like I have a shameful secret and I can now quite comfortably tell my work colleagues, "I'm logging off at 5pm today because I have a therapy session".

Although these are very complicated issues, **here are some of my top tips on getting support and how you can support someone you're worried about.**

For you

1. Get in contact with your GP, a mental health professional, or visit www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk. BEAT offer several online support groups, 1-2-1 web chats, as well as a directory to access professional help.
2. If you feel comfortable confiding in someone about what you're experiencing, think about what kind of support you want from them. You might find it helpful making notes ahead of the conversation.
3. If you're worried about seeing calorie information on restaurant menus, take a look at BEAT's advice on how to manage any difficult

thoughts <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/get-help-for-myself/advice-for-eating-out-with-calorie-labelling/>

4. Remember that you are not alone and that there is plenty of support available. What you're experiencing is temporary and it will pass.

For someone you care about

1. Educate yourself through books, podcasts, and the BEAT website. BEAT have an online learning platform dedicated to people in supporting roles.
2. Ask the person you're worried about what kind of support they want. Listen and don't make assumptions about what they're going through.
3. Do not make comments about their appearance before, during, or even after their recovery. Commenting on someone's weight, size, or shape is not helpful, even if it's coming from a well-intentioned place. A comment such as, "you look healthier/well" can be interpreted negatively by the person, cause a lot of anxiety, and make the problem worse. Focus on how they are feeling instead.
4. Be an ally by challenging inappropriate comments or behaviour about that person's appearance, food, or exercise habits.
5. Don't forget to look after yourself. As you're instructed to on a plane, put your own oxygen mask on first. If you look after your own wellbeing, you'll be in a better position to help others.



INCLUSION & DIVERSITY:

Living through a terrible accident

By Shilpa Shah

Shilpa - a young girl was living a happy life in Kisumu, Kenya. Her childhood was ignorant bliss - a happy family, friends who lived close by and lots of time playing outside. The family happened to be in Nairobi, staying at her Nana's house in Ngara. For some reason she and her younger brothers were at home alone, playing Monopoly, when they smelled some gas leaking. She thought, "I'd better turn the gas off." Not trusting her younger brothers, who might have cheated in the game, she dragged them along with her. As she got to the gas cooker, she turned the knob around - she had done this many times at her own home in Kisumu. It turned out that this hob went round in the opposite direction to the one she had used before. A flash of fire hit them - Shilpa, at the front, her brothers behind her. And it was gone in an instant. Here, Shilpa talks us through the accident and its impact on her relationship with the Community.

The door blew open. The domestic worker heard us and got us out. My grandfather's neighbour took us to hospital and then went searching for my parents - this was the days before mobile phones. What we thought were superficial burns turned out to be third degree burns. We went through recovery which, in itself, was quite a journey. We were in hospital for over a month.

How were things for you as you got on with your life?

We went back to school and things were ok. My friends had been writing my notes for me! And I guess we had the benefit of being a small town where everyone knew each other. People knew what had happened to us and were just happy to help. It was a blessing to have such a community around us.

What was it like for your parents?

As kids, we just got on with it. But now, and having had my own family, I realise more what a parent goes through when a child goes through such an accident. In Kenya, while the accident was still fresh, it was a nightmare. During the day, my parents were strong and got on with what they had to do. But, when my mum had her private moment, she would break down. With the three of us in

hospital, they were often too exhausted to really think about their own feelings.

We were so lucky to have so many family and community members who were genuinely keen to help, and that was truly a lifeline for my parents. There were no filters within the community - my parents could be open and honest.

So, if the community support was great, what brought you to the UK?

It was easy in the small town of Kisumu when we were children. Going to anywhere in Kenya as teenagers was quite different - we were always stared at and made to feel "different". Whilst we got used to this, our parents didn't want our confidence to drop as a result of people's questions and comments. So, my parents moved - they made a big sacrifice for us.

Moving countries was not easy, but we felt we weren't stared at in the same way - we felt like we were in a more open society, and we needed that. My parents' actions, which showed confidence (without guaranteed solutions) helped us grow our own confidence. Over time, we got much more thick-skinned about what had happened to us.

How did all of this carry through as a young adult, including meeting your husband?

I didn't have many traditional Indian friends. I knew some Oshwals who were perhaps somewhat rebellious, and so they became my friends. I carried on with my sporting adventures with my friends. At one point, I happened to be on a rafting trip. Chetan was on one such trip and couldn't believe that there was an Oshwal girl who had such interests at that time! And we clicked! But, it stopped there. A lot of his family struggled to understand why he would have wanted to marry someone who had such a scarred face. I got called a lot of names. Even after working so much on confidence, this broke me somewhat. I became more reserved. Thankfully, Chetan has stood by me ever since, and continued to be more interested in everything else about me. And over time, I can comfortably be "me" again.

You play a big role within the OAUK Enabling Network. Talk us through your and your parents' experience and how this relates to the families you meet at the Enabling Network.

It's all the things that parents do. Soon after our treatment in Kenya, I had mobility issues - the skin grafting had not been done properly. Luckily, my parents found a doctor in the UK, and were able to spend 4 months here to get better treatment. My mum had never lived here, and moving from Kisumu to the UK - quite suddenly - must have been so hard. But they just got on with it. My parents probably gave up so much - only they will know what they gave up. To be fair, I see this with all parents - parents do so much for their children. But, what I find with the parents in the Enabling Network goes beyond anything else that I witness.

For my parents, the emotional stress was deeper and lasted longer, way longer than our physical recovery. And I see this over and over again, with all members of the EN - the parents go through a lot. Yet they also carry incredible fortitude and positivity. That ability to just focus on someone in need and leaving almost everything else aside is extraordinary.

What's the biggest difference you find between your story and that of a child born with disability.

On the whole, people knew us as "normal" before the accident and so were very accepting of us. I think that, as a community, we are less accepting when people are born with a disability.

You were lucky to have so much community support. Our society now, in the UK, is very different.

My kids often say to me, "It's incredible what we do for our families - not just our immediate family, but also our wider families." That is a part of our culture that is so powerful. Look, you can pay for support and health services, but an evolved society needs to go beyond transactional thinking - it doesn't have to be give and take for every single action - you don't know when you will need the community.

Caring for the community also does not need to mean that you need to follow every single rule and spend your life around Oshwal. But, have a few rules when you will show up for the Community no matter what; the closest and most successful communities have that trait, and their members get so much more out of it. OAUK and all our Areas organise a lot of events on a regular basis - try attend something on a regular basis and see where it takes you.



ભયંકર અકસ્માતમાંથી પસાર થવું

શિલ્પા - કેન્યાના કિસુમુમાં એક યુવાન છોકરી સુખી જીવન જીવી રહી હતી. તેણીનું બાળપણ અજાણ્યું આનંદ હતું - એક સુખી કુટુંબ, નજીકમાં રહેતા મિત્રો અને બહાર રમવામાં ઘણો સમય. પરિવાર નૈરોબીમાં હતો, નાગારામાં તેના નાનાના ઘરે રોકાયો હતો. કેટલાક કારણોસર તે અને તેના નાના ભાઈઓ ઘરે એકલા હતા, મોનોપોલી રમી રહ્યા હતા, જ્યારે તેમને ગેસ લીક થવાની ગંધ આવી. તેણીએ વિચાર્યું, "હું વધુ સારી રીતે ગેસ બંધ કરીશ." તેના નાના ભાઈઓ પર વિશ્વાસ ન કરતા, જેમણે રમતમાં છેતરપિંડી કરી હશે, તેણીએ તેમને પોતાની સાથે ખેંચી લીધા. જેમ જેમ તેણી ગેસ ફૂકર પર પહોંચી, તેણીએ ધૂંટણ ફેરવ્યું - તેણીએ કિસુમુમાં તેના પોતાના ઘરે ઘણી વખત આવું કર્યું હતું. તે બહાર આવ્યું છે કે આ હોબ તેણીએ પહેલાં ઉપયોગમાં લીધેલી વિરુદ્ધ દિશામાં ગોળ ફર્યો હતો. આગનો એક ઝબકારો તેમના પર પડ્યો - શિલ્પા, આગળ, તેના ભાઈઓ તેની પાછળ. અને તે પળવારમાં જતો રહ્યો. અહીં, શિલ્પા અકસ્માત અને સમુદાય સાથેના તેના સંબંધો પર તેની અસર વિશે વાત કરે છે.

દરવાજો ખખડાવ્યો. ઘરેલુ કામદારે અમારી વાત સાંભળી અને અમને બહાર કાઢ્યા. મારા દાદાના પાડોશી અમને હોસ્પિટલમાં લઈ ગયા અને પછી મારા માતા-પિતાને શોધવા ગયા - આ મોબાઈલ ફોનના પહેલાના દિવસો હતા. અમે જેને સુપરફિસિયલ બર્ન્સ માનતા હતા તે થર્ડ ડિગ્રી બર્ન હોવાનું બહાર આવ્યું. અમે પુનઃપ્રાપ્તિમાંથી પસાર થયા, જે પોતે એક ખૂબ જ મુસાફરી હતી. અમે એક મહિનાથી વધુ સમયથી હોસ્પિટલમાં હતા.

તમે તમારા જીવન સાથે આગળ વધ્યા ત્યારે તમારા માટે વસ્તુઓ કેવી હતી?

અમે શાળામાં પાછા ગયા અને વસ્તુઓ બરાબર હતી. મારા મિત્રો મારા માટે મારી નોંધો લખતા હતા! અને હું માનું છું કે અમને એક નાનકડું શહેર

હોવાનો લાભ મળ્યો જ્યાં દરેક એકબીજાને જાણતા હતા. લોકો જાણતા હતા કે અમારી સાથે શું થયું છે, અને તેઓ મદદ કરવામાં ખુશ હતા. આવો સમુદાય આપણી આસપાસ હોવો એ આશીર્વાદરૂપ હતું.

તમારા માતાપિતા માટે તે કેવું હતું?

બાળકો તરીકે, અમે હમણાં જ તેની સાથે મળી. પરંતુ હવે, અને મારો પોતાનો પરિવાર હોવાથી, મને વધુ સમજાયું છે કે જ્યારે બાળક આવા અકસ્માતમાંથી પસાર થાય છે ત્યારે માતાપિતા શું પસાર કરે છે. કેન્યામાં, જ્યારે અકસ્માત હજી તાજો હતો, તે એક દુઃસ્વપ્ન હતું. દિવસ દરમિયાન, મારા માતા-પિતા મજબૂત હતા અને તેઓએ જે કરવાનું હતું તે સાથે આગળ વધ્યા. પરંતુ, જ્યારે મારી માતાએ તેણીની અંગત ક્ષણ હતી, ત્યારે તે તૂટી પડતી હતી. હોસ્પિટલમાં

અમારા ત્રણેય સાથે, તેઓ ઘણી વાર તેમની પોતાની લાગણીઓ વિશે ખરેખર વિચારવા માટે ખૂબ થાકેલા હતા.

અમે ઘણા બધા કુટુંબ અને સમુદાયના સભ્યો માટે ખૂબ નસીબદાર હતા જેઓ ખરેખર મદદ કરવા આતુર હતા, અને તે ખરેખર મારા માતાપિતા માટે જીવન રેખા હતી. સમુદાયમાં કોઈ ફિલ્ટર્સ ન હતા - મારા માતાપિતા ખુલ્લા અને પ્રમાણિક હોઈ શકે છે.

તેથી, જો સમુદાયનો ટેકો મહાન હતો, તો તમને યુકેમાં શું લાવ્યું?

જ્યારે અમે બાળકો હતા ત્યારે કિસુમુના નાના શહેરમાં તે સરળ હતું. ટીનેજરો તરીકે કેન્યામાં ગમે ત્યાં જવાનું તદ્દન અલગ હતું - અમને હંમેશા જોવામાં આવતા હતા અને "અલગ" અનુભવતા હતા. જ્યારે અમને આની આદત પડી ગઈ હતી, અમારા માતા-પિતા ઇચ્છતા ન હતા કે લોકોના પ્રશ્નો અને ટિપ્પણીઓના પરિણામે અમારો આત્મવિશ્વાસ ઘટે. તેથી, મારા માતાપિતા સ્થળાંતરિત થયા - તેઓએ અમારા માટે એક મોટો બલિદાન આપ્યો.

દેશોમાં સ્થળાંતર કરવું સહેલું નહોતું, પરંતુ અમને લાગ્યું કે અમે એ જ રીતે જોવામાં નથી આવ્યા - અમને લાગ્યું કે અમે વધુ ખુલ્લા સમાજમાં છીએ, અને અમને તેની જરૂર છે. મારા માતા-પિતાની ક્રિયાઓ, જેણે આત્મવિશ્વાસ દર્શાવ્યો (બાંધધરીકૃત ઉકેલો વિના) અમને અમારો પોતાનો આત્મવિશ્વાસ વધારવામાં મદદ કરી. સમય જતાં, અમારી સાથે જે બન્યું હતું તે વિશે અમે વધુ જાડી ચામડીના બની ગયા.

તમારા પતિને મળવા સહિત એક યુવાન વયે આ બધું કેવી રીતે પસાર થયું?

પરંપરાગત ભારતીય મિત્રો નહોતા. હું કેટલાક ઓશવાલોને જાણતો હતો જેઓ કદાચ કેટલાક બળવાખોર હતા અને તેથી તેઓ મારા મિત્રો બન્યા. મેં મારા મિત્રો સાથે મારા રમતગમતના સાહસો ચાલુ રાખ્યા. એક સમયે, હું રાફ્ટિંગ ટ્રિપ પર હોવાનું બન્યું. ચેતન આવી જ એક સફર પર હતો અને તે સમયે કોઈ ઓશવાલ છોકરી હતી જેને આટલી રુચિઓ હતી તે માની જ નહોતું રહ્યું ! અને અમે ક્લિક કર્યું! પરંતુ, તે ત્યાં જ અટકી ગયો. તેના ઘણા પરિવારજનોએ સમજવા માટે સંઘર્ષ કર્યો કે તે શા માટે આવા ડાઘવાળા ચહેરાવાળી વ્યક્તિ સાથે લગ્ન કરવા માંગતો હતો. મને ઘણા નામોથી બોલાવવામાં આવ્યા. આત્મવિશ્વાસ પર આટલું કામ કર્યા પછી પણ, આનાથી મને કંઈક અંશે તૂટી ગયો. હું વધુ આરક્ષિત બન્યો. સદભાગ્યે, ત્યારથી ચેતન મારી પડખે ઊભો રહ્યો છે, અને મારા વિશેની દરેક બાબતમાં વધુ રસ લેતો રહ્યો છે. અને સમય જતાં, હું ફરીથી આરામથી "હું" બની શકું છું.

તમે ઓશવાળ સક્ષમ નેટવર્કમાં મોટી ભૂમિકા ભજવો છો. તમારા અને તમારા માતા-પિતાના અનુભવ દ્વારા અને તમે સક્ષમ નેટવર્ક પર મળો છો તે પરિવારો સાથે આ કેવી રીતે સંબંધિત છે તે વિશે અમને વાત કરો.

તે બધી વસ્તુઓ છે જે માતાપિતા કરે છે. કેન્યામાં અમારી સારવાર પછી તરત જ, મને ગતિશીલતા સમસ્યાઓ હતી - ત્વચાની કલમ યોગ્ય રીતે

પિતાને યુ.કે.માં ડૉક્ટર મળ્યા, અને તેઓ વધુ સારી સારવાર માટે અહીં 4 મહિના પસાર કરી શક્યા. મારી માતા અહીં ક્યારેય રહી ન હતી, અને કિસુમુથી યુકે જવાનું - તદ્દન અચાનક - ખૂબ જ મુશ્કેલ હતું. પરંતુ, તેઓ હમણાં જ તેની સાથે મળી ગયા. મારા માતા-પિતાએ કદાચ ઘણું બધું છોડી દીધું - ફક્ત તેઓ જ જાણશે કે તેઓએ શું છોડ્યું. સાચું કહું તો, હું આ બધા માતાપિતા સાથે જોઉં છું - માતાપિતા તેમના બાળકો માટે ઘણું બધું કરે છે. પરંતુ, એનેબલિંગ નેટવર્કમાં માતાપિતા સાથે મને જે મળે છે તે હું સાક્ષી આપું છું તે અન્ય કોઈપણ વસ્તુથી આગળ છે.

મારા માતા-પિતા માટે, ભાવનાત્મક તાણ વધુ ઊંડો હતો અને લાંબા સમય સુધી ચાલ્યો હતો, અમારી શારીરિક પુનઃપ્રાપ્તિ કરતાં વધુ લાંબો સમય. અને હું આને વારંવાર જોઉં છું, EN ના તમામ સભ્યો સાથે - માતા-પિતા ઘણું બધું પસાર કરે છે. પરંતુ, તેઓ અવિશ્વસનીય મનોબળ અને હકારાત્મકતા પણ ધરાવે છે. જરૂરિયાતમંદ વ્યક્તિ પર ધ્યાન કેન્દ્રિત કરવાની અને બાકીનું બધું લગભગ છોડી દેવાની ક્ષમતા અસાધારણ છે.

તમારી વાર્તા અને વિકલાંગતા સાથે જન્મેલા બાળકની વાર્તા વચ્ચે તમને સૌથી મોટો તફાવત શું છે.

એકંદરે, લોકો અકસ્માત પહેલા અમને "સામાન્ય" તરીકે જાણતા હતા અને તેથી અમને ખૂબ સ્વીકારતા હતા. મને લાગે છે કે, એક સમુદાય તરીકે, જ્યારે લોકો અપંગતા સાથે જન્મે છે ત્યારે આપણે ઓછા સ્વીકારીએ છીએ.

તમે ભાગ્યશાળી છો કે આટલો બધો સમુદાય સપોર્ટ મળ્યો. યુકેમાં હવે આપણો સમાજ ઘણો અલગ છે.

મારા બાળકો વારંવાર મને કહે છે, "અમે અમારા પરિવારો માટે જે કરીએ છીએ તે અવિશ્વસનીય છે - માત્ર અમારા નજીકના પરિવાર માટે જ નહીં, પણ અમારા વિશાળ પરિવારો માટે પણ." તે આપણી સંસ્કૃતિનો એક ભાગ છે જે ખૂબ શક્તિશાળી છે. જુઓ, તમે સમર્થન અને આરોગ્ય સેવાઓ માટે ચૂકવણી કરી શકો છો, પરંતુ વિકસિત સમાજને વ્યવહારિક વિચારસરણીથી આગળ વધવાની જરૂર છે - દરેક ક્રિયા માટે તમારે આપવું અને લેવું જરૂરી નથી - તમને ખબર નથી કે તમને સમુદાયની ક્યારે જરૂર પડશે.

સમુદાયની સંભાળ રાખવાનો અર્થ એ પણ નથી કે તમારે દરેક નિયમનું પાલન કરવાની જરૂર છે અને તમારું જીવન ઓશવાલની આસપાસ વિતાવવું જોઈએ. પરંતુ, જ્યારે તમે સમુદાય માટે બતાવશો ત્યારે થોડા નિયમો રાખો, પછી ભલે ગમે તે હોય; સૌથી નજીકના અને સૌથી સફળ સમુદાયોમાં તે લક્ષણ હોય છે અને તેમના સભ્યો તેમાંથી ઘણું બધું મેળવે છે. ઓશવાળ અને અમારા તમામ ક્ષેત્રો વાસ્તવમાં નિયમિત ધોરણે ઘણી બધી ઇવેન્ટ્સનું આયોજન કરે છે - નિયમિત ધોરણે કંઈક હાજરી આપવાનો પ્રયાસ કરો અને જુઓ કે તે તમને ક્યાં લઈ જાય છે.

My journey through drug addiction



This is the story of an Oshwal who has gone through drug addiction for over 20 years. Now, sitting on the other side, and turning over a new leaf, the person spoke to Oshwal News' Editorial team. The individual had only one objective in having this story feature here - if this helps even one person or family beat addiction, that will be a mark of success.

So, tell us your story. How did all of this start?

My journey with addiction actually started as a young child. I was addicted to food. Often raiding my mum's nasto cabinet would provide me with the hit of happiness I was seeking. As I grew older however, I entered the world of gambling. My parents started to take note and asked me where all the money was going, and I couldn't lie; I admitted that I had a gambling problem. With the help of my family, I went to Gambling Anonymous ("GA") - they help people deal with their addiction. I attended 5 meetings there and got so frightened by the stories I heard about the implications of gambling that I stopped.

Looking back on my childhood, something was missing. I know my parents loved me, but I didn't really feel the love. I had low self-worth, didn't really feel that I fitted in anywhere, and I buried my feelings inside me. I just tried to please people, make them laugh, and talked a lot so they could like me; I pretended to be someone else. I kept burying my feelings; gambling or eating was an outlet - this served as a distraction and whatever was missing inside me was being filled temporarily.

I was still a teenager when my father's health had a setback. This was really quite overwhelming and was also the point at which my addiction took a

new form. I was out with a few friends, when they offered me some cocaine. I didn't really think about it - I just said yes. And wow, that hole inside me that needed to be filled, got filled. This is it - this is what was missing in my life.

I enjoyed the drugs for a couple of years. I was a functional addict - able to carry on with a fairly normal life (at least in the eyes of others) whilst using drugs. I didn't really acknowledge it at the time, but I was already addicted. I lost my job and didn't really care about anything else, other than drugs. I owed drug dealers a lot of money - trouble was brewing. I came to a point where I had no option but to tell my parents. As you'd expect, they were deeply disappointed. With their help, I left the UK and lived abroad for just under a year. I had really hurt my parents, but at the time I was only able to blame others for the consequences of my actions. At the start, I stayed in touch with my friends, but, as time went on those friends distanced from me. I felt angry - they were the ones who got me onto drugs, and now they weren't even there for me. "Right, I'm going to sort myself out," I said to myself. I came back to the UK, and for 10 years I was clean; I didn't use drugs.

Excellent! But, I sense it didn't stay that way?

I had gone back to work, and whilst at a work Christmas party someone offered me cocaine. Again, I didn't even think - I just said yes. I tried it,

and I loved it. I started off once a week, believing that I wouldn't let cocaine control me, I would control cocaine. However, it wasn't before long that once a week became every day. I was still able to work, but everything around me was falling apart. My character was awful - I was lying, dishonest, stealing money - doing pretty much anything it would take to buy drugs. I didn't take responsibility for my actions; I blamed others to make myself feel better.

Then, things got worse. My dad suffered a major health issue. I went off the rails completely. My dad and family were going through a very testing time, I remained reliant on drugs - 7 days a week. Cocaine was my best friend; it loved me.

I lost my dad a year later. And this was the point at which my brother gave me an ultimatum - sort your life out or go to rehab. So, I went to a rehab centre in Portsmouth. It was very welcoming, and I knew straightaway that this was it; this was my fresh start. After that, I continued going to Cocaine Anonymous ("CA") meetings in London. The meetings showed me that others accepted me as I was, and they taught me to love myself. I got my thinking back and stayed off drugs for a few months.

However, despite the positive outcomes from going to rehab, an ego remained inside of me. I thought I knew everything and felt like I had done what I had needed to do to recover from this addiction. I relapsed and started using drugs again. I wasn't being honest to my family any more, and I was forced to leave the family home.

I stayed at a friend's house for a week, then at a shelter for a few days. My brother then found me a shared house which I moved into. Even after all of this, I still believed that I could control cocaine; I could still do this. The old ways were back in, and I did everything to make sure I was able to get hold of drugs and feel the love it gave me. Little did I know that I was just about to hit rock bottom.

I had stolen £150 from my workplace and got caught. I was sacked from my job and simultaneously evicted from the house share. I was distraught. This was the lowest point of my life. I was spiritually bankrupt - I had lost my moral values; my moral values had gone out of the window. And for the first time in many, many years, I prayed. I prayed, on my knees, with all my heart. "God, I'm done. I can't carry on living the way I am.

I've ruined a lot of lives. Please help me!". It was then that my sister called me, and asked if I wanted help, and the answer straight away was "yes". I was not going to solve this without help. While my sister was finding a rehab centre, I contacted someone I knew who was going through rehab in Birmingham, desperate to know more about what I was going through. That friend put me in touch with a different rehab centre. I contacted this place - they interviewed me and accepted me.

What is rehab, really?

Many recovery programs use "The Twelve Steps", originated by Alcoholics Anonymous. It starts from honesty and admitting being powerless over addiction, and then using faith to accept that there is a way forward. Step 4 involved making a moral inventory of myself. I got asked a lot of questions on different topics that helped me understand my ego, pride, self-worth, etc. Growing up, I had a lot of secrets which haunted my whole life - I couldn't tell anyone due to the fear of being judged. Now, I can share my feelings openly in recovery meetings. I don't need to hide, and it's helped me to really learn who I am. And I love myself for who I am. In our community, we are often reluctant to express ourselves fully, because people-pleasing is such a big part of our reputation/culture. I have learned the hard way that holding things within us can be extremely harmful.

The Twelve Steps get us to be specific about what harm we created, seek forgiveness, and improve our contact with God to discover His plan for our lives. In rehab, we refer to God as your Higher Power. Coming into rehab, I now believe this was my Higher Power's plan for me. I had to destroy my life to be able to rebuild it properly. Rehab has helped me to really strengthen my spiritual self. I have a strong belief in a Higher Power, and I pray every day, in a three-step approach:

1. The serenity prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.
2. Thank you, God, for keeping me clean for another day. I surrender my will to God - (remember, living my own will was destructive to me). I pray to God to keep my family safe, and to help people around the world who are suffering.
3. God, thank you for being in the driving seat.

I'm in the passenger seat. Whether the road is bumpy or not, I know you'll always be by my side.

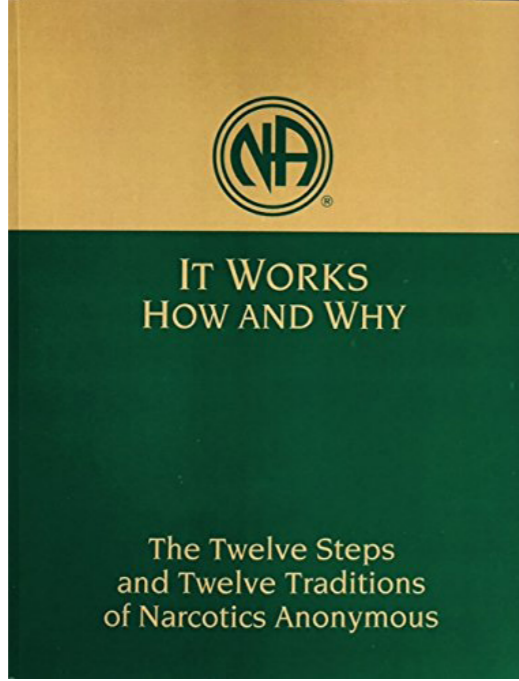
The last of the Twelve Steps is all about Service - helping others who may be struggling with addiction. That's why I'm talking to you now!

One of the really important features about recovery is that it's not like going to a doctor, where you get prescribed a treatment. I've been surrounded by lots of people in rehab itself and going to regular meetings - and I tell you, it's been so so valuable to have so many people around me.- they interviewed me and accepted me.

What is life, now?

I have a lot of gratitude for everything I have in my life. I realise fully all the harm I caused over the years, and I seek forgiveness every time I have done wrong.

I am back in college, studying. I now have strong goals of what I want to achieve in all aspects of my life. I have my family backing me. Every day, I'm working hard to make this work. I'm not hurting anyone, not manipulating anyone. If people don't want to accept me, that's ok - my focus is to make sure that I'm now doing the right thing. I do get looks when I'm in community places, and sometimes I'm nervous if I'm being judged? Now, as long as my family and I know that I'm doing the right thing, that's all that matters.



What would you like our members to know?

Addicts are not bad people; we are suffering from an illness that unfortunately takes hold of us. In my case, I hurt a lot of people along the way, and I can see why drug addiction might be seen to be worse than any other. But, food, sugar, alcohol, shopping - there's a long list of things that people, including Oshwals, are addicted to. Even co-dependence - over-reliance on one person for a long period of time - can have damaging effects. Let's

start by acknowledging that what you see on the surface is not the whole story.

If you're struggling with addiction, then asking for help is a good thing. It's ok to tell your family. There are a lot of resources and support networks available - Gambling Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous - and I can say from first-hand experience, they really do help. I said earlier that I had tried rehab previously and relapsed. The reason why it's working this time, is that I believe from deep within me, that this will work - I'm doing it for me, not for anyone else.

For the families and friends of those who know someone going through addiction, take a look at AL-ANON and Famanon (www.famanon.org.uk). You will meet people in similar situations, and your understanding of addiction will improve massively, and you'll get some direction on how to help someone, and yourselves.

Ultimately, we are all seeking love in some way. Start by loving yourselves for who you are and love your neighbour - everything else is secondary.

એક ડ્રગ વ્યસની તરીકેની મારી સફર

આ એક ઓશવાલની વાર્તા છે જે 20 વર્ષથી નશાની લતમાંથી પસાર થઈ રહ્યો છે. હવે, બીજી બાજુ બેસીને, અને એક નવું પાન ફેરવીને, વ્યક્તિએ ઓશવાલ ન્યૂઝની સંપાદકીય ટીમ સાથે વાત કરી. અહીં આ વાર્તાની વિશેષતા રાખવા પાછળ વ્યક્તિનો એક જ ઉદ્દેશ્ય હતો - જો આ એક વ્યક્તિ અથવા કુટુંબને પણ વ્યસનને હરાવવામાં મદદ કરે છે, તો તે સફળતાની નિશાની હશે.

તો, અમને તમારી વાર્તા કહો. આ બધું કેવી રીતે શરૂ થયું?

વ્યસન સાથેની મારી સફર ખરેખર એક નાના બાળક તરીકે શરૂ થઈ હતી. હું ખોરાક માટે વ્યસની હતી. ઘણી વાર મારી માતાના નાસ્તો કેબિનેટ પર દરોડા પાડવાથી મને તે ખુશીનો હિટ મળશે જે હું શોધી રહ્યો હતો. જોકે જેમ જેમ હું મોટો થતો ગયો તેમ તેમ મેં જુગારની દુનિયામાં પ્રવેશ કર્યો. મારા માતાપિતાએ નોંધ લેવાનું શરૂ કર્યું અને મને પૂછ્યું કે બધા પૈસા ક્યાં જઈ રહ્યા છે અને હું જૂઠું બોલી શકતો નથી; મેં સ્વીકાર્યું કે મને જુગારની સમસ્યા હતી. મારા પરિવારની મદદથી, હું જુગારની અનામી ("GA")માં ગયો - તેઓ લોકોને તેમના વ્યસન સાથે વ્યવહાર કરવામાં મદદ કરે છે. મેં ત્યાં 5 મીટીંગોમાં હાજરી આપી અને જુગારની અસરો વિશે સાંભળેલી વાર્તાઓથી એટલો ડરી ગયો કે મેં બંધ કરી દીધું.

મારા બાળપણ પર નજર કરીએ તો કંઈક ખૂટતું હતું. હું જાણું છું કે મારા માતા-પિતા મને પ્રેમ કરતા હતા, પણ મને ખરેખર પ્રેમનો અહેસાસ નહોતો. મારી પાસે સ્વ-મૂલ્ય ઓછું હતું, મને એવું લાગ્યું ન હતું કે હું ક્યાંય ફિટ છું, અને મેં મારી લાગણીઓને મારી અંદર દફનાવી દીધી. મેં ફક્ત લોકોને ખુશ કરવાનો પ્રયાસ કર્યો, તેમને હસાવવા અને ઘણી બધી વાતો કરી જેથી તેઓ મને પસંદ કરી શકે; મેં કોઈ અન્ય હોવાનો ડોળ કર્યો. હું મારી લાગણીઓને દફનાવતો રહ્યો; જુગાર કે ખાવું એ એક આઉટલેટ હતું - આ એક વિક્ષેપ તરીકે સેવા આપે છે અને

મારી અંદર જે ખૂટે છે તે અસ્થાયી રૂપે ભરવામાં આવી રહ્યું છે.

મારા પિતાની તબિયત લથડી ત્યારે હું હજુ કિશોર વયે હતો. આ ખરેખર ખૂબ જ જબરજસ્ત હતું અને તે બિંદુ પણ હતું કે જ્યાં મારા વ્યસનને નવું સ્વરૂપ લીધું હતું. હું થોડા મિત્રો સાથે બહાર હતો, જ્યારે તેઓએ મને કોકેઇન ઓફર કરી. મેં ખરેખર તેના વિશે વિચાર્યું ન હતું - મેં ફક્ત હા કહ્યું. અને વાહ, મારી અંદરનું તે છિદ્ર જે ભરવાનું હતું, ભરાઈ ગયું. આ તે છે - આ તે છે જે મારા જીવનમાં ખૂટે છે.

મેં થોડા વર્ષો સુધી દવાઓનો આનંદ માણ્યો. હું એક કાર્યાત્મક વ્યસની હતો - ડ્રગ્સનો ઉપયોગ કરતી વખતે એકદમ સામાન્ય જીવન (ઓછામાં ઓછું અન્યની નજરમાં) સાથે ચાલુ રાખવા સક્ષમ હતો. હું તે સમયે ખરેખર તેને સ્વીકારતો ન હતો, પરંતુ હું પહેલેથી જ વ્યસની હતો. મેં મારી નોકરી ગુમાવી દીધી હતી અને મને ડ્રગ્સ સિવાય અન્ય કોઈ બાબતની ખરેખર પરવા નહોતી. હું ડ્રગ ડીલરોને ઘણા પૈસા આપવાના હતા - મુશ્કેલી ઉભી થઈ રહી હતી. હું એવા સમયે આવી ગયો જ્યાં મારી પાસે મારા માતા-પિતાને કહેવા સિવાય કોઈ વિકલ્પ નહોતો. જેમ તમે અપેક્ષા કરશો, તેઓ ખૂબ જ નિરાશ હતા. તેમની મદદથી, મેં યુકે છોડી દીધું અને માત્ર એક વર્ષથી ઓછા સમય માટે વિદેશમાં રહ્યો. મેં ખરેખર મારા માતા-પિતાને દુઃખ પહોંચાડ્યું હતું, પરંતુ તે સમયે હું મારા કાર્યોના પરિણામો માટે અન્ય લોકોને દોષી ઠેરવવા સક્ષમ હતો. શરૂઆતમાં, હું મારા મિત્રો સાથે સંપર્કમાં રહ્યો,

પરંતુ સમય જતાં તે મિત્રો મારાથી દૂર થઈ ગયા. મને ગુસ્સો આવ્યો - તેઓ જ હતા જેમણે મને ડ્રગ્સ તરફ દોર્યું, અને હવે તેઓ મારા માટે ત્યાં પણ ન હતા. "ખરેખર, હું મારી જાતને સોંટ કરવા જઈ રહ્યો છું," મેં મારી જાતને કહ્યું. હું યુકે પાછો આવ્યો, અને 10 વર્ષ સુધી હું સ્વચ્છ હતો; મેં દવાઓનો ઉપયોગ કર્યો નથી.

ઉત્તમ! પરંતુ, મને લાગે છે કે તે તે રીતે રહેતું નથી?

હું કામ પર પાછો ગયો હતો, અને કામ પર ક્રિસમસ પાર્ટીમાં કોઈએ મને કોકેઈન ઓફર કરી હતી. ફરીથી, મેં વિચાર્યું પણ ન હતું - મેં ફક્ત હા કહ્યું. મેં તેનો પ્રયાસ કર્યો, અને મને તે ગમ્યું. મેં અઠવાડિયામાં એક વાર શરૂઆત કરી, એવું માનીને કે હું કોકેઈનને મારા પર કાબૂ નહીં થવા દઉં, હું કોકેઈનને નિયંત્રિત કરીશ. જો કે તે લાંબા સમય પહેલાં નથી કે અઠવાડિયામાં એકવાર દરરોજ બની ગયું. હું હજી પણ કામ કરવા સક્ષમ હતો, પરંતુ મારી આસપાસની દરેક વસ્તુ તૂટી રહી હતી. મારું પાત્ર ભયાનક હતું - હું જૂઠું બોલતો હતો, અપ્રમાણિક હતો, પૈસાની ચોરી કરતો હતો - ડ્રગ્સ ખરીદવા માટે જે પણ જરૂરી હતું તે કરી રહ્યો હતો. મેં મારી ક્રિયાઓ માટે જવાબદારી લીધી નથી, હું મારી જાતને વધુ સારું લાગે તે માટે અન્યને દોષી ઠેરવતો હતો.

પછી, વસ્તુઓ વધુ ખરાબ થઈ. મારા પપ્પાને સ્વાસ્થ્ય સંબંધી ગંભીર સમસ્યા હતી. હું સંપૂર્ણપણે રેલ બંધ ગયો. મારા પિતા અને પરિવાર ખૂબ જ કસોટીના સમયમાંથી પસાર થઈ રહ્યા હતા, હું ડ્રગ્સ પર નિર્ભર રહ્યો - અઠવાડિયાના 7 દિવસ. કોકેઈન મારો શ્રેષ્ઠ મિત્ર હતો; તે મને પ્રેમ કરતો હતો.

મેં એક વર્ષ પછી મારા પિતાને ગુમાવ્યા. અને આ તે બિંદુ હતું કે જ્યાં મારા ભાઈએ મને અલ્ટીમેટમ આપ્યું હતું - તમારું જીવન ગોઠવો, અથવા પુનર્વસનમાં જાઓ. તેથી, હું પોર્ટ્સમાઉથમાં

પુનર્વસન કેન્દ્રમાં ગયો. તે ખૂબ જ આવકારદાયક હતું, અને હું તરત જ જાણતો હતો કે આ તે છે; આ મારી નવી શરૂઆત હતી. તે પછી, મેં લંડનમાં કોકેઈન અનામિક ("CA") મીટિંગમાં જવાનું ચાલુ રાખ્યું. મીટિંગોએ મને બતાવ્યું કે બીજાઓએ મને મારી જેમ સ્વીકાર્યો અને તેઓએ મને મારી જાતને પ્રેમ કરવાનું શીખવ્યું. મેં મારું વિચાર પાછું મેળવ્યું અને થોડા મહિનાઓ સુધી ડ્રગ્સથી દૂર રહ્યો.

જો કે, પુનર્વસનમાં જવાના હકારાત્મક પરિણામો છતાં, મારી અંદર એક અહંકાર રહ્યો. મેં વિચાર્યું કે હું બધું જાણું છું અને લાગ્યું કે આ વ્યસનમાંથી બહાર આવવા માટે મારે જે કરવાની જરૂર હતી તે મેં કર્યું છે. હું ફરી વળ્યો અને ફરીથી દવાઓનો ઉપયોગ કરવાનું શરૂ કર્યું. હું હવે મારા પરિવાર પ્રત્યે પ્રામાણિક ન હતો, અને મને કુટુંબનું ધર છોડવાની ફરજ પડી હતી.

હું એક અઠવાડિયા માટે મિત્રના ઘરે રહ્યો, પછી થોડા દિવસો માટે આશ્રયસ્થાનમાં રહ્યો. પછી મારા ભાઈએ મને એક સહિયારું ઘર મળ્યું જેમાં હું રહેવા ગયો. આ બધા પછી પણ, હું હજી પણ માનતો હતો કે હું કોકેઈનને નિયંત્રિત કરી શકું છું; હું હજી પણ આ કરી શકતો હતો. જૂની રીતો પાછી આવી ગઈ હતી, અને હું ડ્રગ્સને પકડવામાં સક્ષમ છું તેની ખાતરી કરવા માટે મેં બધું જ કર્યું, અને તેણે મને જે પ્રેમ આપ્યો તે અનુભવ્યો. મને બહુ ઓછી ખબર હતી કે હું હમણાં જ રોક બોટમ હિટ કરવાનો હતો.

મેં મારા કાર્યસ્થળમાંથી £150ની ચોરી કરી હતી અને પકડાઈ ગયો હતો. મને મારી નોકરીમાંથી કાઢી મૂકવામાં આવ્યો હતો અને સાથે જ ઘરના હિસ્સામાંથી કાઢી મૂકવામાં આવ્યો હતો. હું પરેશાન હતો. આ મારા જીવનનો સૌથી નીચો મુદ્દો હતો. હું આધ્યાત્મિક રીતે નાદાર થઈ ગયો હતો - મેં મારા નૈતિક મૂલ્યો ગુમાવી દીધા હતા; મારા નૈતિક મૂલ્યો બારીમાંથી બહાર નીકળી ગયા હતા. અને

ઘણા વર્ષોમાં પ્રથમ વખત, મેં પ્રાર્થના કરી. મેં મારા ઘૂંટણ પર, મારા બધા હૃદયથી પ્રાર્થના કરી. "ભગવાન, મારું કામ થઈ ગયું. હું જે રીતે છું તેમ જીવી શકતો નથી. મેં ઘણું જીવન બરબાદ કર્યું છે. મહેરબાની કરી મને મદદ કરો!" . તે પછી જ મારી બહેને મને બોલાવ્યો, અને પૂછ્યું કે શું મારે મદદ જોઈએ છે, અને તરત જ જવાબ "હા" હતો. હું મદદ વિના આનો ઉકેલ લાવવાનો ન હતો. જ્યારે મારી બહેન એક પુનર્વસન કેન્દ્ર શોધી રહી હતી, ત્યારે મેં બર્મિંગહામમાં પુનર્વસનમાંથી પસાર થઈ રહેલી વ્યક્તિનો સંપર્ક કર્યો, હું શું પસાર કરી રહ્યો છું તે વિશે વધુ જાણવા માટે આતુર હતો. તે મિત્રએ મને એક અલગ પુનર્વસન કેન્દ્રના સંપર્કમાં મૂક્યો. મેં આ સ્થાનનો સંપર્ક કર્યો - તેઓએ મારો ઇન્ટરવ્યુ લીધો અને મને સ્વીકાર્યો.

પુનર્વસન શું છે, ખરેખર?

ઘણા પુનઃપ્રાપ્તિ કાર્યક્રમો "ધ ટ્રવેલ્સ સ્ટેપ્સ" નો ઉપયોગ કરે છે, જે આલ્કોહોલિક અનામીસ દ્વારા ઉદ્ભવે છે. તે પ્રામાણિકતાથી શરૂ થાય છે અને વ્યસન કરતાં શક્તિહીન હોવાનું સ્વીકારે છે, અને પછી વિશ્વાસનો ઉપયોગ કરીને સ્વીકારે છે કે આગળનો માર્ગ છે. પગલું 4 મારી નૈતિક ઇન્વેન્ટરી બનાવવાનો સમાવેશ થાય છે. મને જુદા જુદા વિષયો પર ઘણા બધા પ્રશ્નો પૂછવામાં આવ્યા જેણે મને મારો અહંકાર, ગર્વ, સ્વ-મૂલ્ય વગેરે સમજવામાં મદદ કરી. મોટા થયા પછી, મારી પાસે ઘણા બધા રહસ્યો હતા જેણે મારા આખા જીવનને ત્રાસ આપ્યો - ડરને કારણે હું કોઈને કહી શક્યો નહીં ન્યાય કરવામાં આવે છે. હવે, હું પુનઃપ્રાપ્તિ મીટિંગ્સમાં મારી લાગણીઓને ખુલ્લેઆમ શેર કરવા સક્ષમ છું. મારે છુપાવવાની જરૂર નથી, અને તેનાથી મને ખરેખર હું કોણ છું તે જાણવામાં મદદ મળી છે. અને હું જે છું તેના માટે હું મારી જાતને પ્રેમ કરું છું. અમારા સમુદાયમાં, અમે ઘણીવાર પોતાને સંપૂર્ણ રીતે વ્યક્ત કરવામાં અચકાતા હોઈએ છીએ,

કારણ કે લોકોને આનંદ આપવો એ અમારી પ્રતિષ્ઠા/સંસ્કૃતિનો એક મોટો ભાગ છે. હું સખત રીતે શીખ્યો છું કે આપણી અંદર વસ્તુઓને પકડી રાખવી અત્યંત નુકસાનકારક હોઈ શકે છે.

બાર પગલાંઓ આપણને શું નુકસાન પહોંચાડ્યું છે તે વિશે ચોક્કસ બનવા માટે, ક્ષમા માંગવા અને આપણા જીવન માટેની તેમની યોજના શોધવા માટે ભગવાન સાથેના સંપર્કમાં સુધારો કરવા માટે આપણને મદદ કરે છે. પુનર્વસનમાં, અમે ભગવાનને તમારી ઉચ્ચ શક્તિ તરીકે ઓળખીએ છીએ. પુનર્વસનમાં આવીને, હવે હું માનું છું કે આ મારા માટે મારી ઉચ્ચ શક્તિની યોજના હતી. તેને યોગ્ય રીતે પુનઃબીલ્ડ કરવા માટે મારે મારા જીવનનો નાશ કરવો પડ્યો. પુનર્વસન મને ખરેખર મારા આધ્યાત્મિક સ્વને મજબૂત બનાવવામાં મદદ કરી છે. મને ઉચ્ચ શક્તિમાં દ્રઢ વિશ્વાસ છે અને હું દરરોજ ત્રણ-પગલાંના અભિગમમાં પ્રાર્થના કરું છું:

1. શાંતિની પ્રાર્થના: ભગવાન, હું જે બદલી શકતો નથી તે વસ્તુઓને સ્વીકારવા માટે મને શાંતિ આપો, હું કરી શકું તે વસ્તુઓને બદલવાની હિંમત અને તકાવત જાણવાની શાણપણ આપો.
2. બીજા દિવસ માટે મને સ્વચ્છ રાખવા બદલ ભગવાનનો આભાર . હું મારી ઇચ્છા ભગવાનને સમર્પિત કરું છું - (યાદ રાખો, મારી પોતાની ઇચ્છાથી જીવવું મારા માટે વિનાશક હતું). હું ભગવાનને પ્રાર્થના કરું છું કે મારા પરિવારને સુરક્ષિત રાખે, અને વિશ્વભરના લોકોને મદદ કરે જેઓ પીડિત છે.
3. ભગવાન, ડ્રાઇવિંગ સીટ પર હોવા બદલ તમારો આભાર. હું પેસેન્જર સીટ પર છું. રસ્તો ઉબડબાબડ હોય કે ન હોય, હું જાણું છું કે તમે હંમેશા મારી પડખે હશો.

બાર પગલાંઓમાંથી છેલ્લું બધું સેવા વિશે છે – વ્યસન સાથે સંઘર્ષ કરી રહેલા અન્ય લોકોને મદદ કરવી. તેથી જ હું હવે તમારી સાથે વાત કરું છું!

પુનઃપ્રાપ્તિ વિશે ખરેખર મહત્વપૂર્ણ લક્ષણો પૈકી એક એ છે કે તે ડૉક્ટર પાસે જવા જેવું નથી, જ્યાં તમને સારવાર સૂચવવામાં આવે છે. હું પુનર્વસનમાં ઘણા બધા લોકોથી ઘેરાયેલો છું અને નિયમિત સભાઓમાં જઉં છું - અને હું તમને કહું છું કે, મારી આસપાસ ઘણા બધા લોકો હોવા એ ખૂબ મૂલ્યવાન છે.

હવે જીવન કેવું છે?

મારા જીવનમાં મારી પાસે જે કંઈ પણ છે તેના માટે હું ખૂબ આભાર માનું છું. મને વર્ષોથી થયેલા તમામ નુકસાનનો સંપૂર્ણ અહેસાસ થાય છે અને જ્યારે પણ મેં ખોટું કર્યું હોય ત્યારે હું માફી માંગું છું.

હું કોલેજમાં પાછો આવ્યો છું, અભ્યાસ કરી રહ્યો છું. મારા જીવનના તમામ પાસાઓમાં હું જે હાંસલ કરવા માંગું છું તેના માટે મારી પાસે હવે મજબૂત લક્ષ્યો છે. મારો પરિવાર મને ટેકો આપે છે. દરરોજ, હું આ કામ કરવા માટે સખત મહેનત કરું છું. હું કોઈને નુકસાન પહોંચાડતો નથી, કોઈની સાથે છેડછાડ કરતો નથી. જો લોકો મને સ્વીકારવા માંગતા ન હોય, તો તે ઠીક છે - મારું ધ્યાન એ ખાતરી કરવા પર છે કે હું હવે યોગ્ય વસ્તુ કરી રહ્યો છું. જ્યારે હું સામુદાયિક સ્થળોએ હોઉં ત્યારે મને દેખાવ મળે છે, અને જો મારો ન્યાય કરવામાં આવે તો ક્યારેક હું નર્વસ છું? હવે, જ્યાં સુધી મારો પરિવાર અને હું જાણું છું કે હું યોગ્ય કામ કરી રહ્યો છું, એટલું જ મહત્વનું છે.

તમે અમારા સભ્યોને શું જાણવા માંગો છો?

વ્યસનીઓ ખરાબ લોકો નથી, આપણે એવી બીમારીથી પીડિત છીએ જે કમનસીબે આપણને પકડી લે છે. મારા કિસ્સામાં, મેં રસ્તામાં ઘણા

લોકોને નુકસાન પહોંચાડ્યું છે, અને હું જોઈ શકું છું કે શા માટે ડ્રગ વ્યસન અન્ય કોઈપણ કરતાં વધુ ખરાબ જોવામાં આવે છે. પરંતુ, ખાંડ, આલ્કોહોલ, શોપિંગ - એવી વસ્તુઓની એક લાંબી સૂચિ છે કે જે ઓશવાલ સહિત લોકો વ્યસની છે. સહ-નિર્ભરતા પણ - લાંબા સમય સુધી એક વ્યક્તિ પર વધુ પડતી નિર્ભરતા - નુકસાનકારક અસરો કરી શકે છે. ચાલો સ્વીકારીએ કે તમે સપાટી પર જે જુઓ છો તે આખી વાર્તા નથી.

જો તમે વ્યસન સાથે સંઘર્ષ કરી રહ્યાં છો, તો મદદ માટે પૂછવું એ સારી બાબત છે. તમારા પરિવારને કહેવું ઠીક છે. ત્યાં ઘણા બધા સંસાધનો અને સપોર્ટ નેટવર્ક્સ ઉપલબ્ધ છે - જુગાર અનામિક, આલ્કોહોલિક અનામિક, નાર્કોટિક્સ અનામિક, કોકેન અનામિક - અને હું પ્રથમ હાથના અનુભવથી કહી શકું છું, તેઓ ખરેખર મદદ કરે છે.

મેં અગાઉ કહ્યું હતું કે મેં અગાઉ પુનર્વસનનો પ્રયાસ કર્યો હતો અને ફરી વળ્યો હતો. આ વખતે તે શા માટે કામ કરી રહ્યું છે તેનું કારણ એ છે કે હું મારી અંદરથી માનું છું કે આ કામ કરશે - હું તે મારા માટે કરી રહ્યો છું, બીજા કોઈ માટે નહીં.

વ્યસનમાંથી પસાર થઈ રહેલા કોઈને જાણતા લોકોના પરિવારો અને મિત્રો માટે, AL-ANON પર એક નજર નાખો. તમે સમાન પરિસ્થિતિઓમાં લોકોને મળશો, અને તમારી વ્યસનની સમજમાં મોટા પાયે સુધારો થશે, અને તમને કોઈને અને તમારી જાતને કેવી રીતે મદદ કરવી તે અંગે કોઈ દિશા મળશે.

છેવટે, આપણે બધા કોઈને કોઈ રીતે પ્રેમ શોધી રહ્યા છીએ. તમે કોણ છો તેના માટે તમારી જાતને પ્રેમ કરીને પ્રારંભ કરો અને તમારા પાડોશીને પ્રેમ કરો - બાકીનું બધું ગૌણ છે.



BOOK REVIEW

Western Lane by Chetna Maroo

Review written by Dr Hinesh Ramnikal Shah

A stunning, restrained but potent debut novel by Chetna Maroo which has been nominated for the prestigious Booker Prize. An amazing achievement for a first-time novelist!

The novel is set outside London following the aftermath of a mother's death. The repercussions this has on her daughters and husband form the crux of the novel.

As the family grapples with coming to terms with their grief, they are in part supported and hindered by their wider community. Squash played at the local decrepit Sports Centre called Western Lane is seen as an outlet for this grief where the father channels his remaining energies into furthering the athletic ambitions for his daughters. As the sisters become increasingly unmoored from their emotionally unavailable and reserved father, squash serves as the family's only common language.

The repetitive nature of squash and the familiarity this brings plays against the emotional upheaval that the family is facing. Squash exposes the family to outsiders; the father seeking solace with a fellow female parent, the daughter befriending a good-looking Muslim boy and the narrator's budding friendship with a fellow player. These relationships offer relief from the bereavement, but the disdain shown by the wider community is palpable.

The story is narrated through the youngest daughter Gopi who, despite her age, seems to be the glue tethering the family together. The game becomes, for Gopi, a form of deliverance from her family's bewildered state of loss. Playing on the squash court instantly transports her to a state of energized

bliss where she feels in control and, most importantly, experiences the longed-for warmth of her father's love and attention. But Ultimately Gopi sacrifices her own happiness for the sake of her father who is lost in his own loneliness.

There are references in the book that the Gujarati/Jain reader would find amusing, the aunt making Shrikhand, the mother wearing Scholl shoes and the daughters being invited to be "Goyni's". This sense of belonging to a community provides much needed material support but is also a barrier to overcoming their grief.

I thought this book is beautifully and compactly written with a slow unfolding narrative. What is left untold is often more important in this novel than the things expressed with words.

I found the meditation on the myriad ways we process grief, and the complexity of family dynamics thoughtful, easy to read, and at times affecting. The depictions of an entire family dealing with grief over the loss of a mother/wife/sister felt so real! The resentments, the sadness, the interpretations of what they think the mother would have wanted, and the roles that were assumed as these changes progressed seemed like realistic progressions in filling the void around them.

Gopi's grieving family uses Squash as a lifeline to guide them out of the grief. The game becomes like an allegory to life, and each choice made is a life choice. The discipline in the game is the discipline in life. Continuing with the game is continuing with life itself. Their grieving journey through the game is leading them ultimately to find their own paths.

Cooking Corner

...because we all love some sweet and spice!

COCONUT, ORANGE, AND RASPBERRY PIE (Vegan. Gluten-Free)

Recipe prepared by Seema and Sonal

After the Christmas season, where many of us may have indulged in a variety of sweet food, below is a healthy dessert recipe to satisfy a sweet tooth without feeling guilty. This coconut, orange and raspberry pie is vegan and gluten-free, and is best enjoyed with earl grey tea, berry tisane or citrus herbal tea.

Ingredients

For the crust:

- 3 cups Gluten-free oats
- 1/2 cup Coconut (desiccated)
- 3 tbsp Sunflower seeds
- 6 tbsp Flax seeds (ground)
- 3 tbsp Hemp seeds
- Maple syrup or sweetener of choice (to taste)
- 3 tbsp Coconut oil

For the garnish:

- Raspberries
- Orange peel
- Coconut chips



For the filling:

- 2 cans Coconut milk/cream
- 2 tbsp Agar-agar powder (to thicken)
- 2 tbsp Rice flour
- Maple syrup or sweetener of choice (to taste)
- 1/2 tsp Orange essence (food grade)

Method

Mix all the crust ingredients into a hard dough-like consistency. Roll the dough to flatten and press into a pie pan to form the base of the pie. Set in the fridge for 2 hours.

When the crust is almost set, prepare the filling, starting with heating the coconut milk. Once it comes to the boil, add the rice flour and agar-agar powder, stirring in until the mixture thickens. Turn off the heat and let the mixture cool down slightly before adding maple syrup / sweetener and orange essence.

Pour mixture in the set crust in the pie pan. Garnish with raspberries, orange peel and coconut chips. Place in the fridge until the filling is fully set (2 - 4 hours). Serve chilled.

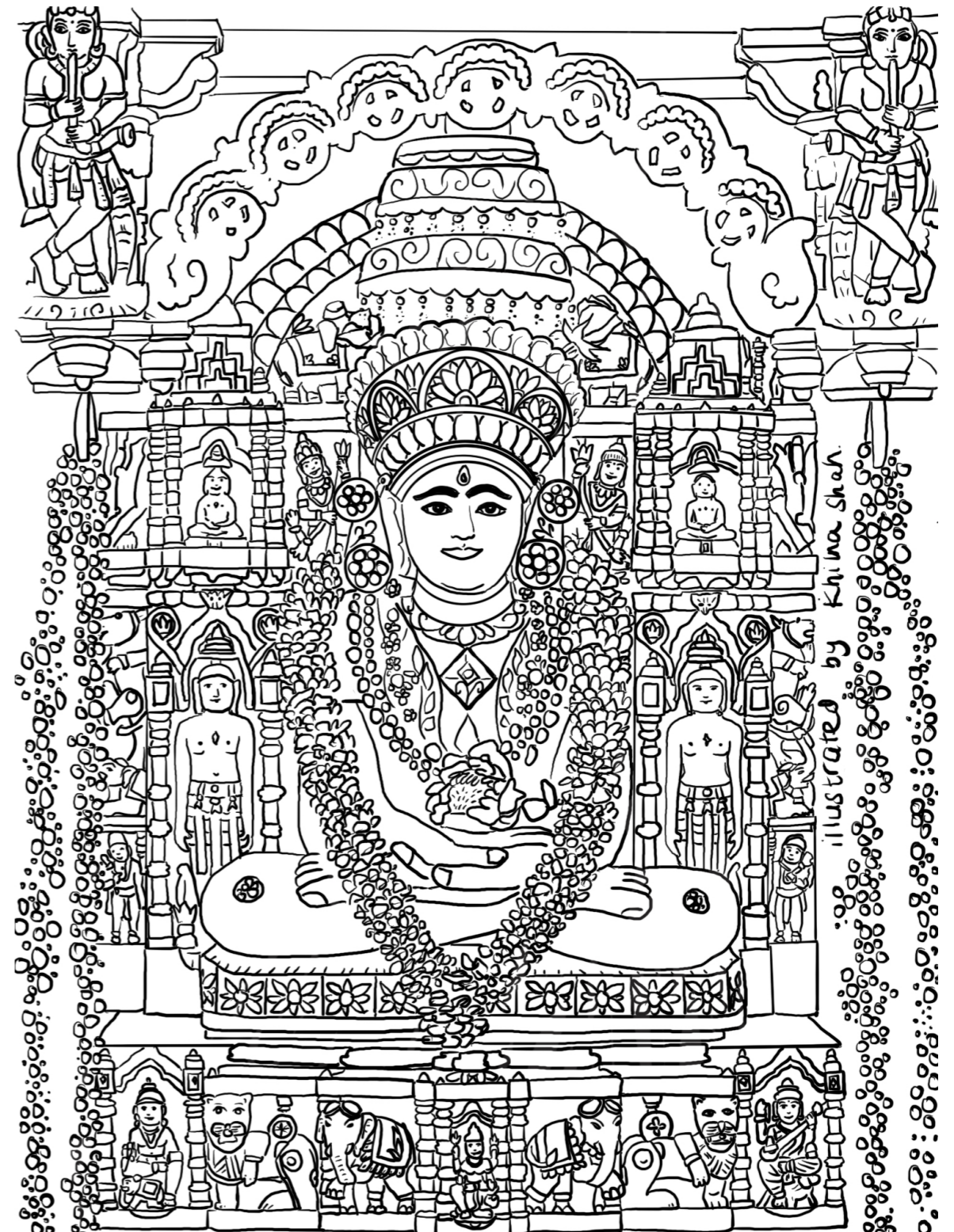
Enjoy this pleasing pie!

Sonal and Seema



CALM TIME

Find some tranquility as you immerse yourself in this feature of Mahavir Bhagwan. Khilna Shah has prepared an intricate drawing below to help you to escape the hustle and bustle of your day and indulge in the therapeutic act of colouring. Grab your favourite markers or pens, and let the peaceful journey begin!



By Nikhil McGeoch



East Area Gujarati School Play 1980's



Oshwal Sports Tournament Champions 2000



The East Area celebrated 50 years in 2023. The Committee reflects on this below...

How did it all start? Who were the pioneers in your Area?

The East London & Essex branch of OAUk was inaugurated at Hindu Sanatan Mandir, Stratford at the Savantsari celebration in August 1973. The very first committee was led by Mulchand Mepa Shah, and supported by Zaverchand Raishi Shah (Vice Chairman), Mahendra Vershi Shah (Secretary), Himatlal Mulchand Shah (Treasurer), and also Shantilal Pethraj Shah, Taraben Govindji Shah, Induben Lalit Shah, Subodh Mulchand Shah, Nathoo Punja Shah, Nathalal Bharmal Shah, Sunitaben Raishi Shah. Our very first Savantsri Bhojan in the area was attended by over 300 people, and sponsored by Mrs Kanchanben Zaverchand Raishi Shah who, to this day, still attends all the area events.

What have been the biggest accomplishments over the last 50 years?

We have had many successes over the years including a huge fashion show back in 1998. We have won the Oshwal Sports Tournament, hosted and won many a raas garba and sari competition, and of course we have reached this huge milestone of 50 years!

How did you celebrate your Area's 50th year?

We had a huge celebration at the Oshwal Centre, attended by local members past and present, as well as members of the current executive committee. The evening began with a drinks reception, followed by an absolutely delicious three course meal (there was chilli paneer and rasmalai involved!) led by our local chef extraordinaires; Chandanben, Jaivantiben and Pragnaben. Whilst all of this was going on our very own Chair put on her sales-person hat and made sure every single person had a raffle ticket! The draw was next on the agenda, and the partners of various ex-chairpersons were called upon to present the various prizes (thank you for those donations!). We then enjoyed a very nostalgic presentation of the last 50 years, which was carefully curated by Hiten Shah. The evening could then only end one way... dancing to songs old and new - nobody wanted to leave!.

What would you like the Area to achieve in the next 50 years? There is so much to achieve, but some of the key areas we'd like to grow include; reviving our Gujarati school, expanding the sports club, more youth participation, providing more welfare for the elderly, and hopefully we can fit in some daytrips and overseas trips too. However, the biggest ambition that remains is to finally have our own area property to host all these wonderful initiatives.

What would you like to see change in your Area? One thing we've slowly started to see but feel there is still much further to go is having more women and young people as leaders on the committee. Let the current committee be the encouragement you need to see that this is possible for all you!

What should we definitely not change in your Area? Our regular daal-rotlis!

Do you have any requests to members in your Area? Please continue to come and support us in all the events, and bring your families; we're really keen to understand what future events to put on that appeal to all ages. And remember, anyone is welcome to volunteer; this association belongs to us all.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO CLAIM YOUR COMPENSATION!

We've already recovered £millions for our clients for mis-sold life policies and investments/bonds and £millions more could be due:

These are just some of the thousands of the clients we've helped claim compensation for over the years. We simply have too many to list. Most of our clients had no idea they were due compensation for plans sold to them as far back as the 1980's and some even stopped their plans years ago, so it is worth contacting us to find out, even if you no longer have the plan number/details. It costs nothing to ask and you could be due a nice payment like so many of our clients.

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(there are too many to list them all!)

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MI Group
Zurich
St James's Place

Windsor Life
Barclays
Santander
Lloyds
Halifax

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"Mr B was awarded **OVER £23,000** for a mis-sold Barclays Pension Mortgage"

"Mr J was paid **OVER £6,000** for a mis-sold Lincoln Financial plan"

Please note that we cannot consider the following types of claim or where you have already made a complaint

- Persons sold pensions (unless it was taken out to repay a mortgage)
- Endowment mortgages (unless the endowment was surrendered before 2000)
- Persons sold term assurance policies (mortgage or non mortgage related)
- If you applied for the plan without advice (e.g. through a newspaper or through the post)

We've claimed compensation for many different types of products such as life policies, savings plans, pension mortgages, investment bonds/portfolios etc. We have a very high success rate with Abbey Life so if you were sold a plan with this company contact us immediately. We work on a no win, no fee basis* (our fee is 20% plus VAT of any compensation we secure for you up to £50,000, for compensation over this sum our fee is 15% plus VAT (subject to a maximum fee of £12,000 including VAT per claim), it is as simple as that - no other charges. For example, if the compensation is £1,000 our fee is £240 and you keep £760.

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Leicester

AREA

In October 2023, Leicester area celebrated 50 years since its formation! Leicester Oshwal was formed between October 1973 and December 1973. The first President was Navin Bhimji Jetha Shah and the secretary was Chimanlal Meghji Haria.

On 1st October 2023 we held our Savantsari Bhojan alongside the 50th Anniversary celebration. At this event, Shri Jayeshbhai and group conducted bhajans we had over 350 people attend the lunch.

Members had sent in photographs of past events and achievements, and these

were displayed on a projector screen for everyone to see and reminisce. Lots of hard work was put in by the Committee and Community, and the event was a major success - it was great to see such strong attendance.

In continuation of our 50 year anniversary, in November 2023 we organised a Diwali event which had free entrance for Oshwal members. At this event there was dinner and dance, as well as a rangoli stand where people could come and make their own rangolis.

Luton

AREA

In 2023, Luton Area proudly celebrated our 50th Anniversary. Nita Pankaj Shah, Committee member, shares some of the Area's highlights from over the years.

The first person to settle in Luton was Dipchand Manekchand Shah in the 1970s. Since then, Oshwals continued to migrate from East Africa and India, settling in Luton and its surrounding areas. The pioneers of Luton Area were Dipchand Manekchand Shah, Ratilal Devraj Shah, Keshavji Mepa Pethad, Jethalal Manekchand Shah, Shantilal Devraj Shah and Chandra Dhirajlal Shah. These founding members planted the seeds for a connected Oshwal community in Luton.

Over the past 50 years, the committees and their subcommittees have arranged a variety of activities and events for the community to enjoy.

Religious

Pratikraman was first held at a member's residence in 1973. Initially, only 8 people took part!

Jinendra Bhakti Mahotsav (JBM) was one of our biggest religious events and was held annually from 1984 to 1994 in the Queens Way Hall in Dunstable. Oshwal members from all areas attended and took part in pooja, enjoyed singing stavans followed by delicious meals cooked by members. Students from Gujarati school performed prathnas, plays and raas garba.

Satsangs were held regularly for many years, mostly at members' homes. We are very fortunate that we currently have a Ghar Derasar at Ranjanben Kantilal Sumaria's

residence where we can do Darshan.

Mahila Mandal

The monthly Mahila Mandal involved cookery demonstrations, talks on health and Dal Roti programmes. A Friday Luncheon club saw members enjoy activities such as yoga and playing cards before a delicious meal.

Gujarati School

Gujarati school was run for over 20 years on Saturday mornings. Students participated in Diwali Cards and Rangoli Competitions, Raas and Garba, play performances, singing and sports competitions. Students took part in functions at Oshwal Centre and at programmes held by Gujarati Mitra Mandal in Bedford. They also enjoyed trips to the seaside, parks, temples and to Oshwal Centre. In addition we are so proud that many students passed their Gujarati GCSE's with excellent grades.

Youth Club and Friday club

The Youth Club which was held every Sunday afternoon at Lealands Primary School. Members enjoyed playing various sports. Competitions were also held with other Areas taking part. Youth Club was only possible due to the commitment and support in opening and running the club by Mukesh Shantilal Shah, Mahendra Meghji Haria and Bharat Meghji Shah. Our Friday Club (on the first Friday of every month) is still active. Here members come to socialise, play cards, darts, table tennis and carrom and enjoy a cup of chai and biscuits!

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Donations

Donations have been made to local charities, particularly covering health care, animal welfare, suffering and disaster appeals. During the covid pandemic, food and drinks were provided to the courageous frontline staff at Luton and Dunstable Hospital.

We are incredibly proud and honoured to have celebrated Luton Area's Golden Jubilee. What we have been able to achieve in the last 50 years would not have been possible without the support and involvement of a great number of people. We would like to express our appreciation and thanks to all the previous Committee members, Oshwal members and volunteers for all their commitment, passion and generosity in serving the Luton Oshwal community. With continued support, we hope to create many more memories in the years to come.

Luton Area's Longest Serving Committee Member

By Irene Ajnis Shah, Chairperson Luton Area

Nita Pankaj Shah has dedicated over 30 years to serving the Luton Oshwal community, working selflessly and tirelessly in various roles within the Luton Area committee which includes being chairperson and secretary.

Nita was inspired to become a volunteer by her parents and grandparents when she lived in Leicester in the 1970s, initially joining the Leicester Area Youth Committee as a teenager. Although Nita was incredibly

shy in her youth, she was able to develop greater courage and confidence after moving to the Luton Area and joining the Oshwal Committee there.

During her time in the Luton Area Committee, Nita has had the pleasure of being involved in numerous functions which included Jinendra Bhakti Mahotsav, Paryushan, and the inauguration of the Derasar at Potters Bar.

Nita is incredibly proud of her involvement with Gujarati school in Luton. She gave tremendous commitment to Gujarati school for over 15 years, holding various roles such as Administrator and teaching Gujarati from a beginners to GCSE level. Nita was well liked by the students and regards this as one of her most rewarding experiences and is proud to have had the opportunity to have made a positive impact on the lives of so many children.

Despite her work commitments, teaching in an infants' school and to her family and at home, Nita has devoted an inspiring amount of time and energy to serving Oshwal. Nita has always been kind, thoughtful and supportive to all those around her and we are incredibly grateful for her valuable contributions to Oshwal.



We have lots of spaces for children between the ages of 7 and 12 in our Youth Club. In the words of Devan Shah a current U12 member "I like playing as part of a team at youth club, My favourite sport is football! But we play lots of other sports like dodgeball, benchball, circuits, basketball drills and even badminton." Details of some of the regular events are below:



OSHWAL ASSOCIATION OF THE UK

NORTH AREA REGULAR EVENTS

FRIDAY YOUTH CLUB U12 6-8PM O12 8-10PM (term time only)
SOCIAL CLUB 7.30-10PM
VENUE : WOODHOUSE COLLEGE N12

SATURDAY GUJARATI SCHOOL 9.15AM -12.30PM (term time only)
VENUE : WOODHOUSE COLLEGE N12

LUNCHEON CLUB ONCE A MONTH ON WEDNESDAYS £5pp
VENUE : SCOUT HALL, 104 GROVE ROAD, N12 9EA

Note: Photos & videos may be taken during the event. By attending you are giving permission to OAUk to use these in any post-event publicity
Oshwal Association of the UK | Charity No: 267037 | <https://oshwal.org.uk/events-terms/> | Management reserves the right to make any necessary changes

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We want more Under 10's!**

Contact
yc.north@oshwal.org for
more info



OSHWAL ASSOCIATION OF THE UK

YOUTH CLUB




**Football
Kho kho
Benchball
Dodgeball
Runders
And much more!**

**Woodhouse College Sports Hall
North Finchley, N12 9EY**

18.00 - 20.00 - Under 12's

Management reserves the right to refuse admission and to make any changes due to unforeseen circumstances.
Oshwal Association of the UK is a registered charity (No. 267037)

North East

AREA

North West

AREA

NORTH EAST AREA OF OAUK

YOUTH AND SPORTS CLUB

FROM 4 YEARS OLD

FRIDAY 6PM TO 7PM: 4-6YRS
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YOUNG MAN!

MORE INFO: AASHNI.S.SHAH@OSHWAL.ORG

and more!

T&Cs Apply: www.oshwal.org.uk/event-terms
Oshwal Association of the UK | Oshwal Centre, Coopers Lane Road, Hertfordshire, EN6 4DG | Charity Reg. No. 267037.

NORTH EAST AREA OF OAUK

BOLLYWOOD GARBA DANCE EXERCISE CLASS

WITH SATISHBHAI

ASHMOLE SCHOOL, N14 5RJ
FRIDAYS - 7PM - 8PM

CONTACT: POONAM.A.SHAH@OSHWAL.ORG

T&Cs Apply: www.oshwal.org.uk/event-terms
Oshwal Association of the UK | Oshwal Centre, Coopers Lane Road, Hertfordshire, EN6 4DG | Charity Reg. No. 267037.



Garba: A cultural heritage

The NW Area Committee wanted to bring in an activity on a regular event to help our elders connect with each other. The idea behind this was simple. Give our elders something to enjoy together that:

- they have an affinity with,
- encourage them to come out of their homes during the day,
- get fitter and healthier,
- make new friends after the Covid-19 Pandemic.

And so it started...

In February 2022 OAUK North West area applied for a grant from Brent Council's Brent Health Matters - this was awarded in June 2022 to run garba classes for elders of the community. Over 100 people attend Garba Keep Fit sessions each Thursday with expert coaching from Satish Shah.

Recently garba has enjoyed a cultural renaissance: in December 2023, UNESCO recognised Garba by including it on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Of course, by this point, we were way ahead of the curve!

The classes are enjoyed by all who attend - there's a positive and energetic atmosphere throughout the event. So eager are they to attend, some arrive at Ekta Centre an hour before the class starts and

North West

AREA

demand is so high, there is a waiting list of many who still want to join. The exercises - in the form of traditional and modern garba plus a twist of Bollywood - are not high impact but effective and have already helped so many to feel better both physically and mentally. For some, this is the only time they leave their homes each week. At the end of the session, members get to chat with each other over a cup of chai and some nasto, and the chit-chat afterwards has helped so many members make new friends!

Every week participants learn new moves. Some have performed at other NW events including Independence Day Celebrations at Ekta and Paryushan 2023 at Avanti School. The group visited the SOAS Pure Jain exhibition in June 2023 and performed garba outside the School in Central London. This might seem normal for many people, but for most of our elders performing at this age is far from ordinary, and it has really helped strengthen their social confidence.

Led by NW Area Secretary, Prafula Shah as part of the Health & Wellbeing portfolio, the activity is delivered with strong support from volunteers, without whom it would be impossible to do this week after week.

In December 2023 the Mayor of Brent visited to see for herself and enjoyed the garba to the tune of 'Jingle Bells'. The project is funded by Brent Council's Brent Health Matters grant and such is the success of garba keep fit that a second year grant has been applied for to continue the classes. We're also delighted to see that North-East Area has also started similar activities.

आवो तो रमवाने...



Voice of the Youth



Oshwal without borders

Over the last few editions of Oshwal News, we have repeatedly seen the message for more young Oshwals to participate in community events. For this issue, we asked a group of young Oshwals to share a few things that might make them reluctant to do so. Their thoughts are set out below. This article does not intend to create argument about what is right or wrong, but simply for everyone to understand how our next generation thinks. A better understanding hopes to improve how our community progresses.

As a young Oshwal, I am and have been part of many communities throughout my life, from family to school to university to work. In some of these cases, my community has been in close proximity to me. For example, my university community all lived near our campus. In other cases, proximity has not been so important. My family, like most Oshwals, are scattered across the world and still belong to one community despite the mountains, seas and land between us.

If we go back to our forefathers' migration from India or Kenya to the UK, location was key. I would imagine that the existing of some Oshwal presence in Leicester, Luton or Northampton would have given others a reason to choose to

migrate to that city. So, of course, having locations / Areas as the key definition of the community made sense. Well, things are different today - not least because there's so many Oshwals in the UK, but increasingly our younger members are willing to choose to live in different areas, regardless of whether there is Oshwal presence or not. So, is our community defined too heavily by location? Are we enabling each and every one of us to have the experience of a true community? Or do the "borders" take away from what the generations before us set out to do when first migrating to the UK?

Area events are great and obviously practical. For the Oshwals who live in London, Leicester, Luton or Northampton, there are smaller communities within our larger community. When people come together at their events, they aim to give people all of the feelings of community - a sense of belonging and connection, a place of support and acceptance, an opportunity to learn and share ideas, and a chance to build success together.. However, for people like me that live in other areas of the UK, the sense of belonging to the larger community is smaller and the feeling of alienation is greater because of the smaller groups that exist. I think of community as a group of people that

have particular characteristics, certain attitudes and specific interests in common - my postcode doesn't always form my sense of community. So, in my effort to feel more a part of the Oshwal community, I stumble between area events, hoping to make connections with many Oshwals, but somehow end up making connections with none. I leave feeling that I need to choose one Area (over another)...

And so, I begin to wonder... If the borders between areas were removed, there might be more opportunity to meet new people of different ages, geographical areas with a whole range of passions and interests. Perhaps, this would allow Oshwals to learn more from each other, share ideas and resources, and work together to build one larger and more successful community, rather than unknowingly competing against our own.

I want to connect with Oshwals with whom I have a lot of similarities - and there are a lot of you out there! Several aspects of who I am can be most related to by other Oshwals. We eat the same food, watch the same films, speak the same language (or in my case, attempt to), and have the same heritage. Other people might not understand why I have so many old ice cream tubs stacked in the cupboard, why my grandma does not eat potatoes, or why I have been to Kenya more times than India. These are a few examples of the things that bring us Oshwals together and do not rely on where we choose to live. As our postcodes drift further apart, the way our community is organised might have to change in order to keep us together.

With an ever-expanding community, eliminating boundaries could be logistically challenging. It



would be impossible to bring everyone together at one event on one date in one location, which might mean that people have fewer chances to interact with their community than they already do. But, I do think that there are small steps that can be taken to break down the barriers that currently exist and make everyone feel more welcome. The Oshwal Youth Fairgame event held last year was an example of this - it was organised by individuals from one area, but never advertised like this. There have been many events organised in a similar way, so it feels as though the journey

to removing divisions has begun. However, whilst many might argue that everyone, including non-Oshwals, are always welcome to events, sometimes putting an area name on an event advertisement or having to fill in a form disclosing which area you belong to is enough to make someone outside of the M25 feel unsure about whether they should join or not.

As I try to get more involved with Oshwal and my heritage, I hear the older generations talk about the future of our community and the importance of getting the youth involved. Some have said that this is hopeless, which may be the case with the current model. So, when Oshwals are already a minority group in the UK, why would we continue to divide ourselves further? Instead, build a community that is united in body, vision and success, no matter where you come from... Oshwal without borders.

The Editorial Team will be delighted to hear from other Young Oshwals who would like to share their ideas on the changes that they would like to see. Please contact **Rikhav**: rikhav.k.shah@oshwal.org



Across December, Oshwals of all ages were busy participating in the 38th annual sports tournament. The tournament took place across 5 days and included several sports. The tournament came to a close with the Awards Presentation at Oshwal Centre, at which North West Area were crowned the winners. We spoke to some participants who shared their experiences of taking part in Area Youth Clubs and improving their sporting abilities, and the excitement of the Sports Day itself.

Aryan Malde, 11, Northampton

What tournaments did you play in and what did you enjoy?

I took part in Football, Dodgeball, Bench Ball & Circuit Training. I like the encouragement that people give me, which makes me want to win. I feel very privileged that people watched me play. Another memory which I take pleasure in is making new friends; I like socialising with other members from Oshwal areas.

Who do you look up to in sports?

My dad. He plays a lot of sports too and has lots of experience. I like it when he offers me advice on how I can improve next time.

What have you learned about teamwork?

Teamwork helps me communicate to other players depending on their position and tactics in the game. It helps me understand players' weaknesses and strengths.

Riaan Malde, 9 years old, North East area

What sports did you take part in?

I played in the U12 dodgeball team and U12 circuit training at sports day this year. For dodgeball, we had two rounds against North and then East. In the first round, I was the last one standing but ran out of breath towards the end and eventually got caught. In the next round, I was out so quickly! I really enjoyed taking part in the games and it was so much fun cheering for my team!

What other sports do you enjoy playing?

I regularly play sports at youth club and also enjoy playing football with friends at school. I also do Taekwondo.

Who is your favourite sportsperson?

My favourite sports person is Son Hueng-Min ("Sonny") who plays for Tottenham Hotspurs. He is brilliant and always scores (well, most of the time)!





Kimi Shah, 13 years old, North west area

What sports did you take part in?

I played Netball for East area and dodgeball, basketball and football for North West.

What was the toughest moment of the games, and what was your favourite moment?

It was tough when we were losing in basketball and trying to do everything we can to stay in the game to win. The best part was simply playing all the sports with my friends!

Do you regularly play sports?

Yes, at Oshwal I play dodgeball, football, basketball and kho. I also enjoy tennis, netball and lacrosse.



Alisha Shah, 18 years old, North area

What sports did you take part in?

I was the North Area captain, and played netball and basketball. In both sports, we played against all other areas' ladies teams. I would say the toughest match was definitely against West ladies in both. Some of the favourite moments were how we pulled through together as a teams and improved as time went on.

What other sports do you enjoy playing?

I also play golf and represent Middlesex county junior girls golf team.

As captain, are there any of your teammates you'd like to say a special well done to?

As part of the north area youth club committee, we voted Rian Shah to be sports boy of the year; he showed good sportsmanship throughout. He played exceptionally well when playing in the mens and U16 team in various sports whilst only being 14 years old.

Meera Shah, 21 years old, North West area

What tournament did you take part in?

I played Boccia. My favourite moment was getting some of my throws accurate, and eventually winning!

Do you regularly play sports with Oshwal?

I don't but I enjoy swimming and boxing.

What would you say to anyone thinking about joining your sport with Oshwal?

It is fun and you can participate in different games. Boccia is a disability sport, and in Oshwal it has been adapted so all ages and abilities can play. There is no other adapted and inclusive sport like it in Oshwal. As somebody with a learning disability, it is my opportunity to participate with others at the sports day.



Riki, 9 years old, North West area

What sports did you take part in?

I played circuit training for the East area and Boccia for the North West area. In circuit training there was 1 round and in Boccia there were 5 rounds.

What was the toughest moment of the games, and what was your favourite moment?

The toughest moment was when it was my go in the circuit training. I had to run as fast as I could so the next person could start. My favourite moment was when we came third in circuit training. I did not think we were going to come in the top three, but we did so I was very happy!

Do you regularly play sports?

Yes, at Oshwal I play dodgeball, benchball, football and kho which I thoroughly enjoy. I also enjoy playing table tennis, tennis, cricket and football.

Who is your favourite sports person?

Ollie Watkins from Aston Villa. I think he's the best striker in the Premier League.

MY OUTSTANDING OSHWAL SPORTS EXPERIENCE

Arjun Malde, 11 years old

I participated in the Oshwal Sports Day and played for the Northampton Area. My Dad, Vivak organised all the teams for Northampton and without him I wouldn't have taken part, thank you so much daddy! I participated in football, dodgeball, circuit training and benchball. I wanted to share with you my emotions through the tournament.

I was in awe as we walked to the sports hall. I saw a wave of people coming together from different areas to compete in wide varieties of sports. I instantly recognised a few familiar faces when I stepped in; this was reassuring - I was not alone. As team captain, I was starting to feel a bit nervous - I really wanted to do well for the team.

Upon seeing the equipment and the set-up of the hall, I felt a sense of adrenaline as I couldn't wait for what the day had in store for me and the team.

Our first sport was Dodgeball. Once the game had started, all of the nervousness I felt was replaced with focus, determination and the urge to win. And we won the first round! I was now hungry to win more matches. Sadly, this wasn't the case. In the semi-finals, we lost in the last 10 seconds. I felt a sense of disappointment as it was mainly my fault.

That night as I lay in bed, I reflected on the day. I had to learn from my mistakes in order to succeed.

The next day, we played Football. This is not one of my strong sports, but I gave it my all for the team. The first match against North West was a very close game and went to penalties. I had a chance to win us the match, but I missed the target by a fraction and hit the post instead. This was my shot to win it for the team, but it wasn't to be. **This was another important lesson for me - not to focus on winning, but to focus on myself in that moment.**

We then won all our games, and in the final we played North West again. This was a chance for us to redeem ourselves. This was a brilliant win for us and it showed us that if we put our minds to it, we can achieve anything!

As I reflected on the day again, I realised how eventful it had been and the highs and lows of the day. Next was Bench ball, I was not expecting us to get very far since all the other teams had very good players, but we tried our best and we game 3rd. We got knocked out. I let emotions get the better of my and broke down in tears. My dad then had to console me and calm me down.

The last sport I played was Circuit Training. My team and I were determined to get a medal for this sport. Circuit training is an individual sport meant to push you to your limits. I felt that everyone in the Northampton team did exactly that but unluckily we came 4th. At that point, I felt a surge of pride as I had been the captain of a really good team. I enjoyed making new friends, playing in a team, getting to know my team mates and working together to plan our tactics. Importantly, I had learned a lot about managing myself and my own emotions.



Run around the World

An interview with Piyush Gudka

Piyush Gudka has run over 120 marathons, in over 30 countries and on all 6 inhabited continents of the world. We met him, curious to find out his motivation and get some inspiration...

Tell us a little about your childhood

I was born in Mombasa, Kenya. Sport was my passion from a young age. I am told that my mother couldn't keep up with my energy level so to get some housework done, she tied my leg to a chair and guess what? I would still crawl and drag the chair along... ah, defeated my mum! I did my GCSE ('O' Levels) in Kenya. My school, Allidina Visram High School, was excellent for academics and sports. I played many sports and swimming was a daily activity in the sea water near the old Nyali Bridge.

What got you interested in running? And talk us through what happened that made you sign up for your first marathon?

The weather in Mombasa is not conducive for running, hence that never appealed as a sport for me. That was all to change in UK after I qualified as a Chartered Accountant. I started running with my colleagues at lunch time. After one such run, my boss, who had run a couple of marathons himself,

convinced me to apply for the daunting 26.2 miles (42.2 km) London Marathon. I wasn't successful in getting a ballot entry, but I managed to get a charity entry with Childline for the London Marathon in 1994. I crossed the finish line and said to myself, "Been there, done that, never again!"

Never again?!

Well, things changed! In those days, we needed to go round signing people up to sponsor us, then run the race, and then collect the funds from sponsors. Childline was struggling to get the participants to collect the money. So, I suggested to them that perhaps they could hold a competition to encourage the participants to collect money from the sponsors. They liked the idea and invited me to a reception



with a raffle. To my surprise, I won the first prize, which was ... a flight to New York with an entry to the 25th New York City marathon! So, there I was running my second marathon, and raising funds for Childline again in less than 6 months after London.

Amazing, and obviously you didn't stop there?

I didn't! There were very, very few Asian runners at the time. Even at the Childline dinner, I was the only non-white person there. I had a few conversations with the London Marathon organisers that I would be very happy to promote running to the non-white community. They took me up and gave me 3 Golden Bond Entries - meaning that I could run again and encourage/train other runners with me. That was the start of my journey helping more and more people run.

What are your biggest accomplishments in this field?

- Over 30 years, I have run over 120 marathons, and 3 ultramarathons
- Earned the coveted 6 Stars Medal for running the World Marathon Majors (Tokyo, Boston, London, Berlin, Chicago and New York City) in 2019 and 2023. When I completed this for the second time, I was one of less than 100 people worldwide to have done it more than once.
- Presented a memento by Tony Banks (UK sports minister) in 1998 for completing a major marathon on each continent in under 11 months
- I am an overseas ambassador of a Japanese charity ACE (Action against Child Exploitation) for the Tokyo Marathon since 2020.
- In 2011, I ran as an iconic role model - Mahatma Gandhi. Every detail of the costume was authentic except the running shoes (a modern-day Mahatma Gandhi with a mobile in his pocket!)
- I achieved my best marathon time (3:29), ran 2 ultra marathons, 80% of all my marathons, RideLondon 100 bike ride and running as Mahatma Gandhi in my 50s

What impact has marathon-running had on other dimensions of your life?

Running marathons often changes your outlook. Marathon running is as much physical as mental. Time and again, runners will say that they had not realised what they were capable of doing physically and mentally, until they run a marathon. The runners

already had the capability and I have only been a catalyst in getting them out of their comfort zone and realising their potential.

You must have had days / periods of low motivation to train. How do you turn those around?

There will always be the highs and the lows in everybody's lives. The key thing to remember is that nothing is permanent in life, both the highs and the lows. When you're on the ascendancy, the highs, remember to stay humble and be true to your morals. When you're on the decadency, the lows, the first thing is that it's a matter of time before this will turn around. I use it as a lesson, try to think of the time I was happy and importantly be happy for the others I have trained.

Serving the community and giving back through my experiences is humanity to me. It's not always easy when you're low, but to an extent it helps me forget my "pain". And remember there is both the physical element and psychological - the feel-good factor of achievement and charitable work.

Can you share with us one of the most painful experiences you've had to go through.

One of the most painful experiences was during my 100th marathon. There were 55 runners, friends and family who joined me in Cyprus to celebrate, and I had a lot of excitement. But mentally there were other things going on which took my focus away from myself and my energy was spent on matters that I shouldn't really have cared about. I didn't heed my own view that nothing is permanent in life. Your body and mind (and some say soul) have to be in sync - otherwise, you just can't perform well.

Many people say that running, particularly long-distance running, can damage your knees. What's your response to that?

We, Indians, are generally not into high impact sports like athletics and especially road running. The Kenyans, Ethiopians, etc. have been running from a young age and their joints have experienced impact running, not necessarily all on the road. However, there is no reason for us not to develop our body gradually to such sport. Our bodies are a remarkable piece of creation and through the generations and ages have developed into what we are today. We can

develop our joints for impact sport through strength training and flexibility.

I wasn't a runner until I came to UK, and I have been running marathons for 30 years. I have had some injuries, but none that has stopped me running for any length of time. If one trains sensibly with a good programme, there's no reason one can't run.

I would advise runners to see a good physiotherapist at the outset to check the body alignment and get advice on exercises to strengthen joints and muscles.

Have you made changes to your diet over time?

I am vegetarian and my diet has generally been quite good and simple. Hence, the changes I have made are minor. I consume a lot of milk (1 to 2 pints a day) and try to get a lot of Vitamin D through natural means (sunshine), whenever possible, to keep my bones strong.

As my diet has been a good, vegetarian one I have not had to cut out on any fatty stuff, nor do I use glucose gels or protein shakes. Elite runners would need to make more changes to their diets. I rely on water and sports drinks like non-fizzy Lucozade for hydration on runs, and dates instead of energy bars; unfortunately, none of the marathons provide dates - I think they're the best source of energy!

Training for an endurance sport can be draining on your time. How do you balance the hours with family, work, friends, etc.

This is where commitment and focus have to be absolute. A good training for marathon requires around 16 - 18 weeks and it also depends on your fitness level. Marathon is a big commitment, but also a huge achievement. Waking up early on cold winter mornings to train is not easy, but committing yourself, you must, for an achievement of a lifetime. Having appropriate gear for the weather conditions also helps. And having a running buddy goes a long way!

Which athlete (not necessarily a runner) do you look up to most?

There are several athletes who are really the top of their sport. A sportsman who, in my opinion, was the best characteristically, physically, psychologically and a true inspiration is Muhammad Ali. He had the courage to stand up for himself and be true to himself.

What would you say to anyone who is considering taking up running?

Start with slow short runs and gradually build up to longer distances. Saturday Park Runs are great for complete novice runners. Many people will be able to get to half marathon (13.1 miles / 21.1 km) without major issues or injuries, but it's the second half that requires a lot of endurance stamina. Set it up like a ritual, no matter the distance, so that you keep progressing.

The most important equipment in running is proper shoes. Getting your gait analysis done at a good running shop is very important. The shoes that the shop will recommend will be according to your running style and will not necessarily be the same as your friend's. Everything else such as clothes, although must be good fit, is not as important as shoes.

Another thing that is often overlooked, and I would reiterate, is one visit to a good physiotherapist at the outset. A good physio should be able to see your body alignment and recommend certain exercises, if necessary, to avoid injuries. The one visit, hopefully, could save you a lot of money and agony further down the line if were you to get injured.

Step number one - just go out and run!

