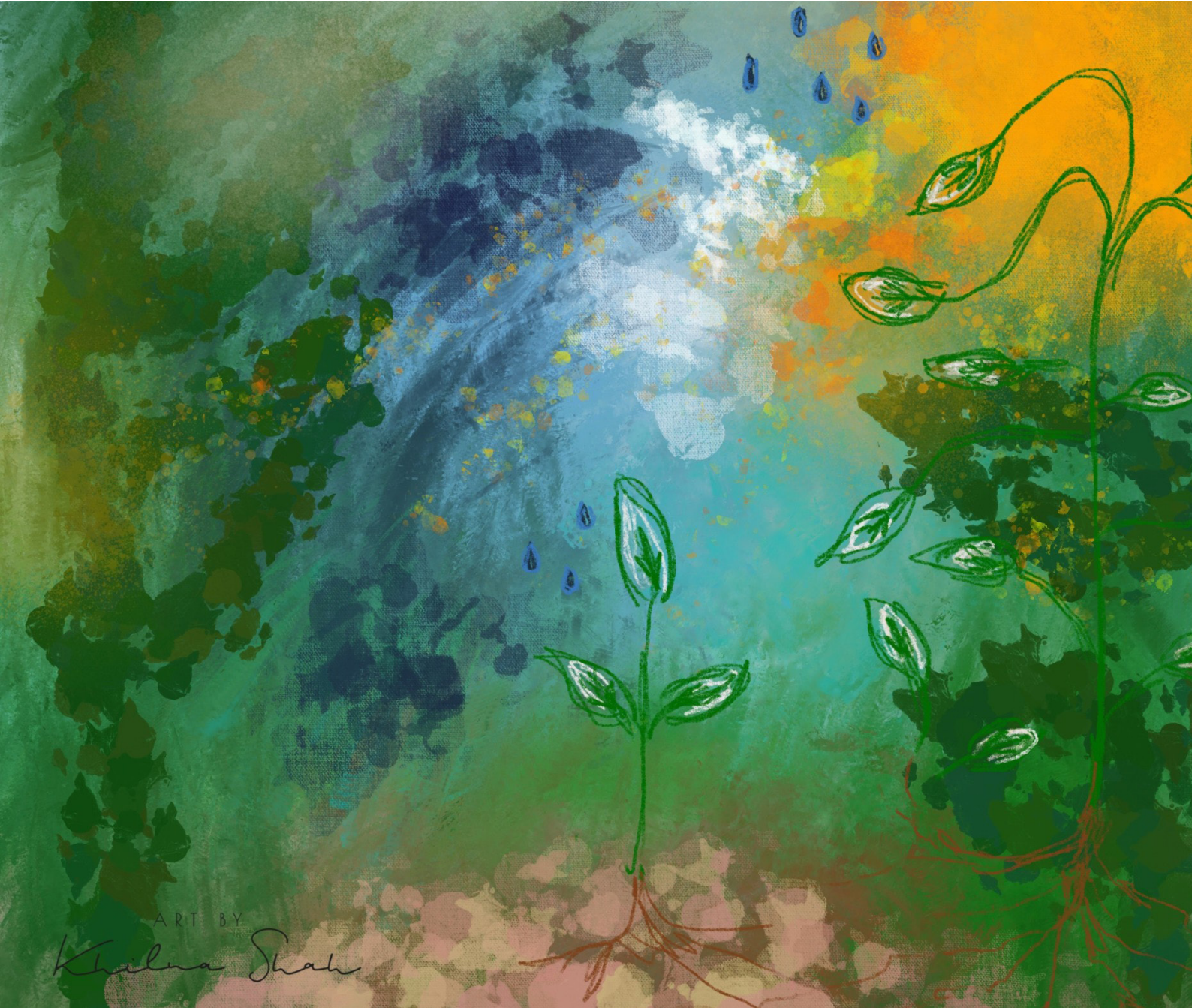




OSHWAL NEWS

Hidden Treasures: Dharma, Earth, Health

PARYUSHAN 2024



ART BY

Khilna Shah

In their own words

Stories of success
and passion

57 - 70

Senses:

How do they
impact us?

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Jain Environment

Save
the Earth

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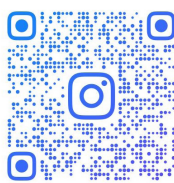
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Reg. Office: Coopers Lane Road, Northaw, Herts. EN6 4DG. Office telephone number: 01707 643838

Registered in accordance with the Charities Act 1960

Charity Reg. No. 267037

Cover Artwork: Khilna Shah

Editor's Note

As we approach Paryushan, the most significant time in our Jain calendar, we are reminded of the hidden treasures within our religion that guide us through life's many challenges. This issue of our magazine delves deeply into these treasures, highlighting how they resonate with the issues and opportunities we face in today's world.

In this issue, we draw attention to the profound connection between Jain principles and the natural world. Jainism teaches us to live in harmony with nature, and this issue explores various facets of that relationship. From insightful articles on the critical role of soil in our ecosystem to discussions on how our religious beliefs can help address modern environmental concerns, we find that our ancient wisdom is more relevant than ever.

We also learn about new senses - an informative and heartfelt piece that provides a unique perspective on sensitivity and awareness, enriching our understanding of how we perceive and interact with the world around us. Additionally, our health section addresses important topics that are often not spoken about such as eating disorders and fertility, offering guidance on how we can nurture our bodies and minds in alignment with our values.

Our young learners contribute their vibrant voices from their Gujarati classes, reminding us of the importance of preserving our language and culture. We also celebrate the achievements of community members, including a newly published author and two actors excelling in non-traditional careers, proving that our values can lead to success in diverse fields.

As we reflect on our community's strengths, it's crucial to acknowledge the challenges some of our members face. Topics like ADHD, separation, and domestic abuse can be difficult to discuss, but sharing these experiences can provide much-needed support and solidarity. I encourage members to contribute their stories, helping to create a network of understanding and compassion.

In this issue, I hope you find warmth, inspiration, and a soulful connection to our shared values. Enjoy every page of this magazine, discovering the hidden treasures that lie within.

On behalf of the Editorial Team, I wish you all a peaceful Paryushan.
Micchami Dukkadam.

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President's Message

Dear Oshwal Member,

Jai Jinendra & Pranam!

A big thank you to all the members who voted the new Executive Committee in at the AGM on 28 April 2024. I began my second term with a visit to 10 Downing Street on Monday, 29th April 2024 to celebrate Mahavir Janma Kalyanak. It was a truly historic and proud day for all Jains.

The Association has built up very successful external relations and is continuing to do so. The Association is now recognised as an important community organisation by other external organisations and institutions and is invited to many external events including the above visit. We have also had many dignitaries visiting Oshwal Centre including the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss and some twenty of his Deputy Lieutenants.

Look at where the Association is today! There is so much positivity and vibrancy out there – all the Areas are thriving and participation by all age groups has increased; all our centres are being used by members on a very regular basis; the footfall at the derasar has increased significantly; our primary objective of promoting Jainism has now become the focus of the community with regular new initiatives like the choir, last rites course, etc. The reconnection with the members has been truly remarkable. We need all our Areas to work together to carry on with this.

The new derasar lift is now operational and work has begun to carry out the refurbishment of the caretaker's cottage, roof repairs on Oshwal House, the extension and refurbishment of Shakti Centre and the planning of the development of the new centre at Wallington. This will be followed by the refurbishment of Oshwal House. Obviously, funding is required for these projects. Please see more details on the various funding schemes set out in the article by Nirmalbhai, our fund-raising Chairperson, in this magazine. We look forward to receiving your generous support for these.

I would like to thank all those involved in the process and getting the acquisition over the line. 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.

I wish you all a joyous Paryushan and on behalf of the Executive Committee I ask for forgiveness if we have hurt you in any way. Michhammi Dukkadam.

Jai Mahavir

Rumit Shah
Hon. President

The Oshwal Experience

Calling the Pioneers of Oshwal Association of the UK

"Great achievement is usually born of great sacrifice, and is never the result of selfishness"

Napoleon Hill

Oshwal Association of the UK (OAUK) is just over 5 decades old. The heroic efforts of many visionary individuals resulted in the birth of OAUK on foreign soil.

In 2015, at the 10th anniversary of our Derasar at Oshwal Centre, we had created a small exhibition - Oshwal Experience which charted the journey of Oshwals. It is our aim to create a true and first-hand account of the early Oshwals who settled here in the UK and were part of building Oshwal Association of the UK.



The First Working Committee of OAUK in 1968

We are looking to update the video of the Oshwal Experience which depicts the history of Oshwals. We would like to hear from all pioneers especially in the UK so we can incorporate their experiences in the video. Please contact Nirmal at nirmal.c.shah@oshwal.org in the first instance or share your details with the office at Oshwal Centre.

Our present and future generations will be delighted to hear these early accounts and recognise the efforts of these early pioneers through the Oshwal Experience.

Fund Raising for Oshwal Capital Projects

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



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.

Current Projects:

- Extension and Refurbishment of Oshwal Shakti Centre, Hounslow (Work has started on this project in May 2024)
- Repair and Refurbishment of the Caretakers Cottage at Oshwal Centre (Work has started on this project and is expected to be completed in June/July 2024)
- Roof works, Replacement of Windows, completion of the works in the extension and refurbishment of Oshwal House, Oshwal Centre (Roof Works commenced May 2024 to be completed in June 2024 and other works to commence in the near future and completed by end of 2024)
- 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:

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

All centres will also have additional plaques:

<i>Silver Plaque</i>	<i>£25,001</i>
<i>Gold Plaque</i>	<i>£50,001</i>
<i>Platinum Plaque</i>	<i>£75,001</i>

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

NEWSROUND

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

RELIGION

Jainism classes on Zoom continue with beginners' classes fortnightly on Thursdays. More advanced classes on Tuesday recently hit their 80th session!

The book club (fortnightly on Thursdays) completed their first book, *The Jailer*, and are now working on the second book, *Walk With Me*.

Our Last Rites service has now been available for 6 months, and several people, and their families, have benefitted from the spiritual upliftment in those difficult final hours.

We have collaborated with the Arihant Institute of offer two free online Jainism courses. Nearly 200 members have taken these up!

And, the various initiatives that have now been in place for several months continue. This includes our world-famous Sunday satsang, monthly Samuh bhakti at the Derasar, Jayeshbhai delivering sermons or bhakti in different Areas. It increasingly feels like the Derasar is visited more regularly by a larger number of people (and thank you to the volunteers who are available at weekend mornings to guide members to do their pooja).

The Ayambil festival goes from strength to strength, both in numbers of members attending and online viewers listening to Jayeshbhai's sermons. The spiritual upliftment from the sermons is evident as the days pass. So many volunteers help, from 5.30am, to prepare the Ayambil menu daily. The highlight is always the Nav Pad pooja where all sponsors take part and embrace the occasion with positive vibes.

We have had several eminent speakers this

year. Atmaprit Kothariji from Dharampur spoke about triumph over fear. Bal Brahmachari Shree Sureshji from Koba delivered a great Sunday sermon following his visit to Oshwal Centre in 2023. Nilaben Shah from Nairobi delivered a series of talks on the Bhaktamar Stotra and its healing powers. Several members have now joined her class to learn more. Dr Vinodbhai Kapashi MBE and Dr Mehool Sanghrajka OBE also delivered excellent talks to our classes.

EDUCATION

Enrolments at our Gujarati schools have increased significantly. Student numbers at South Area school (Croydon), have increased by over 50% and a second Baal Mandir class has been opened. NW area school (Stanmore), has increased numbers by 61% and has introduced three new classes: Little Munchkins (for 3-4 years olds), a Baal Mandir Class (for 4-5-year-olds) and an Adult Gujarati class.

The teaching of Jain principles and festivals is a key part of the school syllabus. We have strengthened this using child-friendly teaching materials and NW area school has introduced Jainism classes for children. Extra-curricular and cultural activities continue to be popular, and include dance, tabla and singing lessons at North Area school (Finchley), and yoga and games at West Area school (Hounslow).

ENABLING NETWORK

We are continuing to gather information from those with a disability / neurodivergence of any kind to be able to provide a more inclusive community for members. Please scan the QR

code below to access the survey.



On 6th October 2024, we are holding a workshop at Oshwal Centre to hear from those with disabilities on the support that the community can provide them, how they can engage with the community as well as providing a forum for all area members to learn how to make their events more inclusive.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

We are very pleased to report that there has been a huge increase in the number of Health & Wellbeing activities being delivered in our areas, covering portfolio themes of

- MIND (health talks, webinars, meditation, mindfulness and focus on mental health)
- BODY (fitness, sport, yoga, health screens, nutrition)
- SOUL (art, music, dance, bhakti, social events, outreach).

The EC portfolio team has also continued its partnership with the Jain Health Initiative and delivered two excellent webinars covering sensitive topics: "Body Image and Disordered Eating" with speaker Reena Gudka on 24th Feb 2024 and "Fertility-let's banish the Myths and Taboos" with speaker Rakhee Shah on 7th April 2024. You can view recordings of these and previous health talks at <https://oshwal.org.uk/health>, or on our YouTube channel.

NORTH AREA



Regular activities - luncheon club, coffee and companion club, social club, youth club and the Gujarati school continue to run very successfully. The popular youth club is a great place to learn teamwork skills, and in May featured a self-defence class. We hold bowling, trampolining and inflatables regularly - they're always a hit with all ages. We have a few places left for Under 12s - sign up quickly!

NORTH EAST AREA

Regular activities of the youth club, badminton and chair yoga continue. House of Cards is our monthly board games and cards event - our regulars like catching up with one another, learning new games and, of course, enjoy the delicious, freshly cooked dinner!

NORTH WEST AREA

We started the monthly Luncheon club nearly 2 To add to the long list of activities at Ekta Centre, in May, we started Samuha Samayik at 10am on the first Tuesday of each month. Samayik is a cultivated practice in the Jain faith which involves us engaging in 48 minutes of concentration/meditation. Whilst practicing this meditation we seek to be at one and in harmony with ourselves and others around us. We start with darshan in the derasar, Samuha Samayik with Jayeshbhai giving a discourse, followed by a delicious lunch cooked by our volunteers. We had 88 people join in the Aaradhna with Jayeshbhai covering the subject of "The Life and Times of Shree Shantinath Bhagwan."



We also held a Jainism Workshop and dinner for families (an event for all ages) entitled "Illusion vs Reality", about looking at situations from a spiritual lens, not just the way we normally do.

SOUTH AREA

On 24th March, we graced our new home at Wallington with a colourful extravaganza to celebrate Holi. More than 200 fun-loving members splashed coloured powder all around, fuelled by an abundance of refreshments.

On Sunday 12th May 2024 on a sunny afternoon, around 40 volunteers gathered for a massive clean-up of the Wallington grounds and the pavilion, bringing enthusiasm and a positive spirit to the task.

On Saturday 25th May 2024, several young members devoted their time to design and construct an adventurous and exciting outdoor messy playground. They built the structures using a mix of new and recycled materials. Throughout the summer, there will be outdoor stay-and-play sessions for children under five every Friday morning, encouraging them to explore the mud kitchen and sandpit and make new friendships.

WEST AREA

Redevelopment of Shakti Centre is underway. We're excited to see this project through and the opportunities it will create for members! In the meantime, we have hired facilities to carry on with our regular weekly/monthly activities of Yoga, Cards clubs, Dal Rotli as well as our Gujarati school.

So far this year we have held a Remembrance Day, a day where families and relatives remembered and celebrated the lives of the departed souls of close family members by dedicating stavans and songs in Gujarati. This was then followed by a delicious full dinner prepared by our volunteers.

We also hold weekly Sewing classes for members to learn this vital skill! Our ever popular Elderly luncheons feature live golden era songs, and are loved by everyone!

KEY UPCOMING DATES IN THE OAUK CALENDAR

31 August - Paryushan starts

8 September - Parna

15 September - Dhaja Din

9 October - Ayambil

18 October - Ayambil Parna

31 October - Diwali

2 November - New Year's Day
(Bestu Varas)

6 November - Gyaan Pancham

15 November - Kartaki Poonam
- Palitana Pat Yatra





Fireside chat

with the Executive Committee

Hiten Savla is a Trustee of OAUK, with a key focus on Governance, Legal & Membership.

Tell us a bit about yourself.



I moved from Kenya to Croydon in 1983 where I resided with my nani and family whilst studying for my A Levels and then university. Shortly after, my mum was diagnosed with Leukaemia and came to London for treatment.

I would spend my time between university and seeing her whilst she was in hospital. Sadly, she passed away in 1986 at the age of 39. I met my wife at the Oshwal Youth Club in South London (many moons ago!) and we now have two children, who have missed on seeing either of their grandmothers. I fell into the education sector and currently work as a deputy principal at Barking and Dagenham College.

What inspired you to become an OAUK trustee?

I have been involved with the Oshwal Association for several years, initially as part of the youth club and Oshwal Yuvak Sangh and then as local area committee secretary. I stepped down from the being the secretary when the Windmill Road property was being purchased in South London as I felt this was

being driven by one individual who was not willing to listen to the opinions of others and at this point I felt the governance of the Association was totally broken. In 2021, I was contacted by some of the current trustees on whether I would be willing to take up the role of a trustee. This gave me the opportunity to be part of the team leading on change to ensure we could put processes in place which would never put our Association at risk.

If you want to make a change it is better done from within than from the outside.

Tell us about the key responsibilities you have within the EC. What have some of the key challenges and achievements over the last two years been?

My portfolio incorporates Governance, Legal and Membership. I have been privileged to have been given this portfolio; it is an area of most interest to me! Over the past two years, my biggest challenge was how we, the trustees, managed the reputation of our Association which was being dragged through the mud by some individuals who had been intent on damaging the integrity of the trustees. It was imperative that the trustees provided a consistent message during this time with a clear process of an investigation being carried out. Overall, the outcome of the result was as expected once the members had a clear understanding of what had occurred. We needed to ensure the

process was done correctly and reported to the Charities Commission to prevent any further fallout. Therefore, this could also be deemed as a major achievement in managing the situation. Behind it, the most important thing to do as a trustee is to deal with issues with a cool head and clear thought before response.

When you think about governance, what organisations or charities do you admire? What could we learn from them?

Good governance is a process by which an institution conducts its business free of abuse and corruption and with due regard to rule of law. You can see effects of governance within healthcare and education sectors, where there is good governance in place. Generally, institutions within both of these sectors tend to do well with an outcome of 'Outstanding' or 'Good'. I use these to guide me how we can do better.

We have seen so much change over the last few years; global events such as the pandemic and geopolitical changes affect us all. To what extent do you find that the OAUK's own governance needs to evolve with this?

The last few years have changed the way everyone thinks! There is increased use of digital means of communicating and I think better use of online facilities, including digital voting during election years would allow us to have stronger community engagement. I think members should also be provided with profiles and vision of the Office Bearers in advance of Annual General Meetings (AGMs).

What would you (individually) like to achieve over the next two-year term?

We had looked to make some amendments to the constitution which would have improved the governance of the association and make it more inclusive. I would like to bring changes to the constitution which allows for better control over major projects,

changes to voting methods and "opening up" membership to younger members of the community as well as integrating individuals (non-Oshwals) who have formed partnerships with our community. There needs to be a better strategic vision for the medium term and getting our members to move away from area-based affiliations which creates unnecessary divide amongst us to a more universal affiliation where we think as one.

We've heard from other EC members who we've interviewed in the past few issues of Oshwal News that being a trustee takes a lot of time and effort. What do you do to maintain your own energy and motivation?

Being a trustee can take up a lot of time and effort but as a community we are really blessed to have support of our volunteers who are the main heroines/heroes in how our Charity has progressed so far. The motivation for me is being able to see the increased level of engagement from all ages of our community across majority of the areas which sadly over the past fifteen years had been declining. It is energising to see younger members being given the opportunity to organise and run events and learn from their mistakes - this will allow us to create the leaders of tomorrow.

We then heard from Nipun Shah, Chairperson of South Area.



Nipunbhai, tell us a bit about yourself and how you got involved with OAUk.

I am the son of Premchand Mulji and Kanchan Premchand Shah. I am married to Parul and we have three children. I was born in Mombasa and emigrated to the UK in 1976 and since 1986 I have been involved with running our family business. I've lived in Croydon for the last 48 years, and through time have witnessed and experienced huge changes in our community. From seeing the challenges, a group of us started having conversations which led me to joining the area committee about 8 years ago.

Could you share some of the key challenges and achievements you've experienced since you joined the committee? What has your experience as South Area Chair been like?

Eight years ago, the biggest challenge was the declining state of the South Mahajandwadi. This was the first Oshwal area community centre that was acquired in 1982, and it was very sentimental to the members who had devoted incredible time to make it our home. It brought our community in the South together and the issue of selling it was very sensitive. We persevered to get approval to sell the site and still to this day, I feel it was the right decision. Although it has taken time, we have now acquired a fantastic site at Wallington.

One of my best experiences from being on the Committee was with our Gujarati School. The numbers of children attending had been dropping year after year. Some people would say that the best option was to shut the school down; that was always

the easiest option. But, after seeing my own children go through the school and witnessing the dedication and commitment the teachers devoted to the school, I always felt it is an important part of our community. The teaching practices had not evolved with time; children whose first language was now no longer Gujarati found it quite difficult. So, we started changing and today the school is flourishing again.

Eventually, my experiences over the years inspired me to take on the position of Chair two years ago. At that time, we were all coming out of the Covid pandemic. The community had naturally fragmented, young adults had not been engaged and restarting activities was a challenge. The committee of nine had six members with no previous experience as an area committee member! I was blessed with having this team who persevered, developed and gelled together to restart activities with their own initiatives. We re-engaged members and volunteers started coming forward to assist. Seeing the restart of Youth Club in collaboration with Gujarati School was a game changer and this link has resulted in new activities and programmes for children and parents.

Like education, religion is also an important part of our community. Opening the derasar and witnessing members celebrating key festivals has also enhanced my beliefs that we need to continue to make Jainism a focal part and start engaging more members with new initiatives.

The acquisition of the Wallington site sounds like a fantastic opportunity for OAUk and the South Area in particular! Can you share your dreams for that site with us?

This site represents a fantastic opportunity for all of us to start addressing the challenges facing us. I would say there are four key areas that this site can help us address:

1. A space to engage all members and develop new and dynamic leaders

2. Provide care and support to our elderly members
3. Promote the Jain dharam, particularly to young children
4. Support our members' health and wellbeing

I believe Community Centres of the future need to evolve. They need to become hubs where families can access a wide variety of activities and where care can be accessible for those who do not have a support network.

Accessibility is particularly important for the elderly. I think we can create an iconic Centre at Wallington that not only becomes a landmark for the community, but also leaves a great legacy and propels OAUUK forward positively.

What is the biggest message you would want to give to all our members?

We should be very proud of what we have - a great community, fantastic centres, a wonderful Jain derasar and energetic trustees, committee members and volunteers. Let us keep our unity because unity is strength, and it will guide us to new heights.

The rise of social media represents a huge challenge, and my wish is that we should not be using this platform to spread false ideologies and making derogatory remarks which create ill-feelings and certainly dissuades members from coming forward to serve us. Let's instead use these platforms positively.

What have you achieved for yourself through your experience as an Area Chair?

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to devote my time to serve our community. Meeting and communicating with our wonderful members, having a brilliant

committee and being part of a talented Executive Trustee team to deliver a fresh vision has been inspiring for me.

I was recently diagnosed with Amyloidosis and my treatment has distracted me from my obligations. I am very grateful to my family, our community, committee members and trustees for unwavering support and taking over my obligations - it has really kept me going.

There is unfinished work which I am determined to see through with the talented team of members around me and fulfil a part of my vision.



CHARITY GIVING

Over the last decade, there has been a 40% increase in the number of people in the UK who choose to leave a portion of their estate to charity. This growing trend reflects a broader awareness and commitment to supporting worthy causes beyond one's lifetime. In fact, legacy giving has become a crucial source of income for many charities, accounting for up to 40% of some charities' total income. This generosity helps ensure that charities can continue their vital work, providing services and support to those in need.

Leaving a gift to a charity in your will is a profound way to create a lasting legacy. It is a testament to your values and a way to make a lasting impact on the world. Importantly, such gifts can be structured in a way that ensures your loved ones are still well cared for. Many people choose to leave a specific percentage of their estate to charity, which means that the amount adjusts relative to the total value of the estate, ensuring that family members are not left without. Additionally, including a charitable donation in your will can help reduce the inheritance tax on your estate. Gifts to UK charities are exempt from inheritance tax, and if

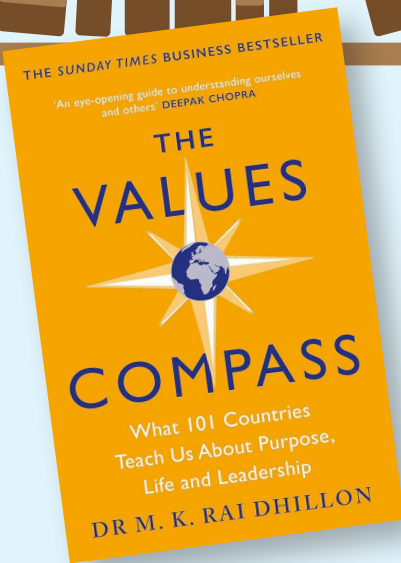
you leave 10% or more of your estate to charity, the inheritance tax rate on the rest of your estate would be reduced from 40% to 36%. Not only can your gift support important causes, it can also offer financial benefits to your heirs.

Please do consider charity gifting, including to Oshwal, as part of your estate planning. Your support, whether large or small, makes a tremendous difference. It helps to fund crucial research, support vulnerable communities, and provide services that might otherwise be unavailable. Most importantly, it carries forward a legacy of compassion and generosity, embodying the values that mattered most to you.

We understand that planning your estate can be a complex and sensitive matter. Rest assured, leaving a gift to charity is a flexible and thoughtful way to make a difference without compromising the financial security of your family. By doing so, you can take comfort in knowing that you are helping to build a better future for all, leaving a lasting legacy that reflects your commitment to making the world a better place.

BOOK REVIEW

By Poonam Shah



Across diverse cultures, religions, countries and professions, one constant remains: our values define our directions. We are inherently born with a core set of values

that deeply reflect our being. Along the way, we inherit some from our parents, surroundings and experiences. Importantly, these values influence how and what we see in the world.

In an era where the political, economic, environmental, cultural and technological landscape has never been as volatile, our values provide us with an anchor to navigate these challenges.

Dr. Mandeep Rai, based on her travels round the world, explores how values define countries, organisations and people. Her thought-provoking book centers around the key values that profoundly impact countries globally.

She groups the values into five sections, which reflect different areas of our lives with the intention for these to help us make decisions and find direction. The five groups are:

1. **Change values:** How nations and people respond and adapt to change.
2. **Continuity values:** Values that keep traditions and memories alive.
3. **Connection values:** Values defining our personal and professional relationships.

4. **Communal values:** Values that define behaviours in communities, companies and countries.

5. **Core values:** Our deepest values which define our core personality.

Often, we are unconsciously “programmed” with values due to the experiences of others. It’s important to be aware of these and be mindful as to how much they guide our lives and define us. Dr. Rai shares five reasons why it is important to reflect on our values. These reasons span from helping us understand ourselves and others better, navigating conflict, understanding our own lives and perhaps most importantly, working out what we want in life.

She focuses on a single value from each country that she feels is the pre-dominant one. Whether it is the efficiency of Estonia, courage of Pakistan, Swiss precision, Vietnamese resilience, friendship of Croatia, trust in Qatar, togetherness in Kenya, devotion in Tibet or the passion in Argentina, what I found heartwarming was how fluid these values are. Many of you will chuckle as you read the stories from her travels to India and Kenya!

As I read through the book, I was encouraged to think about which values reflect my own, which ones would I aspire to and which may have been violated or overlooked. I noted down the ones I related to the most, which turned out to be about twenty, and then narrowed them down to five key values which I would like to practice in my daily life.

As I reflected, my thoughts naturally turned to the Oshwal community and how the values of past and present generations have shaped our togetherness, success and brotherhood globally. As we set out on this period of reflection during Paryushan, it’s ever more important for us, individually and as a community, to spend some time reflecting on our core values - those we’d like to practice more of and let go of those that may not reflect our authentic selves.

The hidden treasure

we are all
born with,
yet is so
elusive



By Dr Mukul Shah

Dr Mukul Shah is an emergency medicine, intensive care doctor, with deep curiosity about the Jain dharma. He has a Diploma in Ayurveda and Jyotish (astrology). He volunteers within both OAUk and Young Jains, delivering numerous workshops around our Jain Religion. He describes himself a devotee of Bhagwan and Jain saints. A son, husband, and a father, he has found Jain principles to have contributed immensely to his life. In this article, he touches on some of the links between the Jain religion and our day-to-day lives.



Once at a crossroads there was a man who used to beg for pennies every day, at the same spot. One day he passed away and the people of the town decided to bury him exactly where he used to sit. As they dug, they came across a case with lots of money and precious jewels, directly beneath this spot. This is a simple metaphor for one of the biggest treasures we have all been born with but have never truly understood.

To me, Jainism is one of the most scientific, logical, and complete philosophies out there. I have set out below some of links between Jainism and our day-to-day lives. Have a read and the reflect on how much of this holds true for you...

Global issues

Two of the biggest problems that face us as a global community are global warming and inequality (in several forms). They are complex issues with multiple causes.

The Jain principle of Ahimsa for not just humanity but all 8.4 million species of life is a philosophy that, if even partially followed, provides a solution for many of these issues. I see Ahimsa as a bird flanked by the wings of:

- **Aparigraha** (nonviolence of things - vastu) and
- **Anekanta** (non-violence of thought - vichar).

Considering an issue from multiple angles is the first step to resolving disagreements or stopping wars.

Jain Saddhus and Saddhvis are the highest example of non-violence of things (Aparigraha / non-possessiveness). I do not expect that we can all live life to the same extent, but I do think that we can actively bring their attention to Aparigraha. This can be found via charity and also practising restraint

Mental Health

Mental health is one of the biggest issues of the modern world.. We all know a positive mindset is so important, but how do we stay positive? We tend to overthink into the future and worry about things that may not exist or are temporary. (Reflect on that for a moment...)

The Jain philosophy gives us the tools to attain and achieve this positivity. The twelve deep reflections or 12 Bhavna are core to the Jain dharma.

These reflections help us develop an inner strength that can help us to understand what is permanent versus what is temporary.

The reflections allow us to understand the permanent and the transient and not pin all our hopes on the impermanent and building resilient mindsets.

Relationships

Global and local wars, divorce, generational disagreements... these are examples of where people struggle to be at peace with one another.

The Jain principle of Anekanta, at its basic level, means that "truth" is not always binary. It is quite complex; different viewpoints may define truth in different ways, depending on the conditions and limitations of each person's position. So, how does Jainism help us to deal with this? Firstly, just the knowledge of 4 additional reflections:

Maitri - friendship with the world at large;

Pramod - praising and learning good from others and avoiding jealousy;

Karuna - compassion for all life;

Madhyasta - neutrality without anger.

The deeper understanding of karma philosophy enables us to accept any situation with glad acceptance. Within the OAUK book club, we have had the chance to explore a book entitled Jailer which is all about Karma and the practical application of karma philosophy in life. Solutions from disagreements can be found when we understand the nature of anger, where it comes from and what it can trigger in different people.

Science

"Science is fact, religion is faith" I hear some say. Hear me out...

My view is that science and religion do not go against each other but complement each other fantastically (note that I am a medical doctor and also a devotee of God). Several aspects of the Jain diet, lifestyle and way of life have been proven and adapted by modern day science. This includes intermittent fasting and avoiding eating late at night, which have featured several times in research into diabetes, obesity, gastroenterology, and peptic ulcer disease. Moreover, scientific research supports environmental benefits of plant-based diets, including lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduced resource consumption, which resonate with the Jain principles of environmental stewardship and sustainable living.

Yoga

Globally, yoga is an increasingly popular practice. Did you know that even the word Yoga in its original sense refers to salvation? The asanas and pranayama we commonly practise today are two of the eight steps mentioned in Patanjali Yoga sutra. The ultimate aim is to still the mind and disentangle us from whatever stops us from feeling free - to attain moksha. Many ancient Jain texts such as Haribhadrasuriji's writings refer to yoga in an even wider context than we may appreciate today.

Many of us have come to these movements through other sources but our own ancient sages and texts refer to many of these which we can use to understand a greater truth for physical, mental and spiritual health. This is why I refer to this treasure that was given to us at birth, but we never realised we had.

I could go on and say more about the links between the Jain dharma and our lives. I wanted to highlight how this ancient philosophy can help us navigate modern day living. In my experience, Jainism is my guide to not keep chasing the ever speeding up treadmill, but pressing the stop button on the treadmill and introspecting and finding the treasure that was always there within.

With all humility, in the process of doing this if I have said anything wrong or against Jin Shaasan or disrespected anyone, Micchami Dukkadam.

JAIN ENVIRONMENT

Save the Earth

By Kishor B Shah



Jainism is one of the most environmentally conscious religions in the world. The religion is based on the principal of non-violence towards all living beings. Jainism is a religion of ecology, of a sustainable lifestyle, and of reverence for life. The entire emphasis is on life consonant with ecology.

Living organisms of all sizes surround us, collectively forming the ecosystem. Air, water, soil and other natural elements play crucial roles in sustaining this system. In nature, nothing goes to waste; through biodegradation everything is eventually recycled back into the environment.

Everything in nature exists for the benefit of others. Rivers do not flow for themselves and plants do not grow for their own sake. They provide resource for other life forms. Every species, by its activities, supports the environment in which it lives. This harmony is the fundamental law of nature.

Jain ethics consider all forms of life - including air, water, fire, vegetation, and earth. Mahavir and Jain Acharyas have consistently emphasised a non-violent lifestyle that respects all living beings. Jainism teaches that all forms of life are interconnected and interdependent. It advocates for restraint in the consumption of material goods and promotes a simple lifestyle.

Jainism teaches us to respect nature and live a life, which not only supports but also nourishes the environment.

The following is a summary of an article I recently read by N S Dedhia.

"Jainism provides practical solutions for mankind to follow and live. Jainism is a religion of love

and dharma of truth.

Jainism teaches love, compassion, and respect for all living beings, big and small.

Self-improvement is at the core of Jainism. Selfishness, greed, and violence have no place in the minds of true Jains. Jains are required to show generosity and compassionate nature to other beings.

For Jains, ecology is as much about action, identifying and solving problems, as it is about introspection. Ecologically, Jainism is thus about stewardship, requiring human diligence, human conscience, and human love. Ecological principles of Jain philosophy are to conserve and preserve our environment through the principle of non-violence."

Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bountiful nature. We, human beings need to derive sustenance from the earth; not to deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. In a world with billions of people, it really matters how much natural resources we use. What we eat, how we travel, and even the clothes we wear all make a difference. Even if it doesn't feel like it, little things do add up.

"Act as if what you do makes a difference ... because it does"

During Paryushan and especially following the conclusion of the Samvatsari Pratikraman, we are supposed to make a small vow to observe for a limited period. This Paryushan, let's consider making a Pledge to adopt sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in our daily lives, in line with our ecological ethics.



Examples of Pledges to make this Paryushan

I pledge to: Turn the tap off when I brush my teeth / shave

Why: Using less water helps keep the environment healthy. It also reduces waste water treatment costs and the amount of energy used to treat, pump and heat water.

I pledge to: Turn my T.V off at the set, and not use the remote and leave it on stand-by.

Why: Because all that wasted energy is damaging our environment

I pledge to: Walk or ride a bike instead taking the car when making shorter trips.

Why: To reduce my carbon footprint and get some exercise at the same time.

I pledge to: Take a shower rather than a bath.

Why: Because it takes lot less water to take a shower instead of a bath. Aside from the environmental benefits, in these days of rising costs, it saves money on water and energy bills.

I pledge to: The three 'R's' - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle as much as practically possible.

Why: Because it helps to cut down on the amount of waste which helps the environment.

I pledge to: Give life-changing presents

Why: Because billions of pounds are wasted yearly on unwanted gifts. Through certain charities, one can buy packages that deliver beautiful cards to our loved ones and friends as well as food, medical equipment, or a goat to a family in the developing world. We can only care for the planet if we also care for its people.

I pledge to: Plant at least one tree by next Paryushan.

Why: Trees are vital source of oxygen - trees are a source of beauty, inspiration, and solace.

Start a discussion within your family and friends - make Jainism even more relevant to today's world.



The Secret Life of Soil:

Fun Facts and Top Tips for Keeping It Healthy

By Rishi Shah

Ever wondered what's going on beneath your feet? Soil is much more than just the ground we walk on—it's a vibrant, living ecosystem that supports all life on Earth! Whether you're a gardening novice or simply curious, join us on a journey to discover the secret life of soil. I've also shared five easy and fun tips you can use to keep your garden soil healthy and thriving.

Soil is a mix of minerals, organic matter, gases, liquids, and organisms that together support life. Think of it as Earth's skin, performing essential functions like filtering water, recycling nutrients, and providing a habitat for countless creatures. Soil has layers, called horizons, each with unique characteristics. The most important is the top layer, rich in organic material, is where plants grow and most soil organisms live.

Fun Facts About Soil

One Teaspoon of Soil Hosts More Microorganisms Than There Are People on Earth!

That's right! Soil is teeming with bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms that help decompose organic matter and recycle nutrients.

Soil is a Carbon Sink

Soil can store more carbon than the atmosphere and all plant life combined, playing a crucial role in regulating climate change.

Earthworms are Nature's Plows

These little critters aerate the soil, making it easier for roots to grow and for water to penetrate.

Soil Can Take Thousands of Years to Form

It can take over 500 years to form just an inch of topsoil, making it a precious resource we need to protect.

Mycelium: The Underground Network

Mycelium is a huge fungal network that extends for miles in the soil. These networks connect plant roots - like the internet for plants! If one plant is low in nutrients, it can use the network to ask other plants for those nutrients it needs. Plants can even warn each other when they are being attacked which allow the other plants to prepare their defences. The healthier the soil the more mycelium can grow and work its magic!

The Importance of Healthy Soil

Healthy soil is the foundation of a healthy planet. It provides essential nutrients, retains water, and supports plant growth. Beyond our gardens, healthy soil prevents erosion, filters water, and supports biodiversity. By taking care of our soil, we contribute to a healthier environment and a more sustainable future, which in turn impacts economic and societal wellbeing.

Unfortunately, human activities are taking a toll on this vital resource. Intensive farming practices, deforestation, and urban development are leading to soil degradation. The excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides harms the beneficial organisms in the soil, while overgrazing by livestock and improper irrigation methods cause erosion and salinization. These actions reduce soil fertility, disrupt ecosystems, and contribute to

climate change. It's crucial that we adopt more sustainable practices to protect and restore our soil.

Top 5 Tips for Keeping Soil Healthy

Grow Your Own Food Organically

Start a small garden at home and grow your own fruits, vegetables, and herbs. By gardening organically, you avoid the use of harmful chemicals and pesticides, promoting a healthier soil ecosystem. You don't even need an outdoor space, you can grow herbs on your windowsill or balcony.

Buy What You Can't Grow from Organic Sources

Supermarkets put lots of pressure on farmers to keep our food costs low but this comes at a cost to the soil and the farmers. Support farmers by purchasing organic produce. Organic farming practices are better for the soil and don't use toxic chemicals. There is more biodiversity in organic farming and this ends up giving us better quality food. Farmers are usually given better wages for their work so it's a win-win for all!

Create Compost from Kitchen Scraps

Turn your food scraps into nutrient-rich compost. You can do this in your garden or in an indoor composting bin. Composting reduces waste and adds organic matter to your soil, just as we need food to live, so does the soil and compost is the perfect food source!

Keep Soil Covered

Rain and wind can be damaging to soil, it does not like to be exposed. Cover your soil organic materials such as compost, leaves, grass clippings, or straw. Mulch helps keep water in soil, stops weeds from growing, and gradually adds nutrients to the soil as it breaks down. You can also use cover crops during the off-season to protect the soil from erosion and enhance its fertility.

Spend Time Outside and Observe

Spend time in your garden observing the plants, soil, and wildlife. Not only will this help you better understand your garden's needs, but it will also allow you to notice any changes or issues early on. Plus, it's a great way to relax and connect with nature.

Soil is a fascinating and vital part of our ecosystem, and keeping it healthy is easier than you might think. By following these simple tips, you can improve your garden's soil and contribute to a healthier environment. If you don't have access to a garden then there are lots of local community projects you can volunteer at. So go ahead, get your hands dirty, and discover the joys of nurturing your very own patch of earth!



Cooking Corner

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

NUTRITIOUS FLAT BREAD (Vegan, Gluten-Free, Nut-Free)

Recipe prepared by Seema Shah

With Paryushan coming up, here is a recipe that uses dry ingredients, yet is full of nutrition and satisfies the taste buds.

Ingredients

2 cups Gluten-free oats
1 cup raw Pumpkin seeds
1 cup raw Sunflower seeds
1 cup Chia seeds
1 cup Flaxseeds
Seasoning of choice (like sea salt, ground pepper, turmeric powder, dried herbs)
1 tbsp Olive oil
3 Cups water

Method

1. Mix all the dry ingredients, then add olive oil and water.
2. Let the mixture thicken at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.
3. Preheat oven under 100 degrees centigrade (the lower the temperature, the more nutrients are preserved).
4. Spread the thickened mixture on a baking tray lined with parchment paper.
5. Bake until the flatbread is crisp, crunchy and golden brown in colour on both sides (turn it over once the top part is crisp to ensure the bottom part dries out completely).
6. Once baked, cool down the flatbread before breaking it into smaller pieces.
7. Store in an airtight container.

Serving Suggestions

This flatbread can be eaten on its own, with dips like hummus and guacamole, with soup and also broken into small chunks and added to salads or on yoghurt.

Enjoy this nutritious and tasty flatbread.





SENSES:

How do they impact us?

By Minal Shah, a parent to a child with Autism and other neurodivergent conditions



How many senses do you have? Did you answer 5? Most people do!

We have 8 senses. Let me tell you about the other three...

Interoception affects many people with autism and people with other learning disabilities too. This is the sense that allows you to know:

- *Whether you are full or still hungry*
- *Whether your bladder is full or not (whether you need to use the WC or not)*
- *Whether your heart is racing or not (whether you should be scared, calm or angry, whether to flee or not)*
- *Whether your body is parched, thirsty or not*
- *Whether it's hot or cold (should I be wearing a warm coat or not, should the heating be switched on or not)*

Many people who are on the spectrum also have sensory processing disorder and lack this sense of interoception. So, they are unable to tell when to stop eating. Sometimes they incorrectly interpret sensations from their tummy as being hungry.

They will not remember or feel the need to drink fluids, making them dehydrated which in turn reduces their tolerance levels to deal with everyday life challenges, makes regulating their emotions more difficult.

They may not utilise the WC when available and then may suddenly need the toilet when there is not one available.

Children who are on the spectrum can receive unkind treatment due to their inability to stop eating, or recognise when they need to go toilet, or interpreting signals from their heart incorrectly that may make them act differently.

Another sense is called **Proprioception** and involve receptors in our joints, muscles and skin that send messages to the brain about changes it detects, for example the evenness of the ground. Normal proprioception allows us to move freely without consciously thinking about our environment. It is the reason we can put food straight into our mouth without trying to find our mouth! It is the reason we can walk on an uneven surface without falling. It allows us to know how much force to use when writing with a pencil or when pulling a door shut.

People with Autism and some people with learning disabilities or conditions like multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease may have abnormal proprioception. They may press a pencil too hard when writing, thereby repeatedly breaking the lead and then find the task too frustrating. The sensory receptors in their feet may not be able to detect or send messages to their brain about the unevenness

of the ground thereby not able to maintain their balance. This happens to my child when she plays certain sports that involve sudden movements like racquet sports. Sometimes, others will think that those affected are being heavy handed - a door may slam because too much force was used in shutting it, or what is meant to be a gentle tug may feel like a slap as too much force is applied - however this is far from deliberate and more an inability to judge about the appropriate amount of force to use. They may end up getting labels such as 'heavy handed', rough, boisterous.

A third sense is called **Vestibular**. The vestibular system senses head movement, speed, and direction. It helps to adjust balance, posture and movement for example when we are turning or moving fast. It lets us know our body's position - are we lying down, sitting up, spinning, etc. Some people with autism and other conditions may experience an impairment of the vestibular system by being oversensitive to motion. My child experienced motion sickness often, especially if there were bumps in the road. It would be difficult to manage school trips, made worse by not being able to relay the feeling about her nauseousness. Train and bus journeys can feel unpleasant.

The other 5 senses are sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing. People with autism may be oversensitive or under-sensitive with these senses - they process sensory information differently. My child can hear noises which I cannot hear like the bubbles in her hot chocolate bursting or the scribbling noises when someone is writing. This can cause severe distractions for example in the classroom environment. Noises can cause stress, anxiety and difficulty with managing in big groups.

Certain textures are intolerable. People with autism usually need consistency with the colour, texture, smell, flavour of the food, otherwise they will reject it. They may have a favourite such as steamed asparagus, but if it is not the exact same texture every time, they will reject it - this can be incredibly frustrating as a parent! Some people cannot tolerate the feel of water on their skin so may find it very difficult to have a bath, shower or shampoo. Washing hands may be very difficult. They may not be able to tolerate mehndi, nail varnish, face paint/bindis, the feel

of glue or paint. It's important to remember that they are not 'dirty' or fussy, eating an asparagus that is softer than normal would make them very nauseous, washing hands may feel like having a hundred spiders crawling all over their hands.

You may see someone in the same clothes all the time - this is because those clothes help them feel relaxed and comfortable. They may have other clothes which just do not help them feel relaxed when they are out of their safe zone.

Rooms with bright lights may not be calming and can cause stress and anxiety. They usually are oversensitive to light so falling asleep may be problematic. If the person has become stressed, offering things that are sensory appealing such as a soft cushion to stroke may help calm them down; reducing noise, being in a room with pastel shades, wearing noise cancelling headphones can all help to reduce sensory overload.

So, there you have it, we have 8 senses! As a parent of a child with autism, I am raising awareness of these issues. If you are a parent, it is important that you explain autism and how it affects someone to your child. It is important to explain that a child with autism is not doing these things on purpose, their body lacks the tools to help them to do these things.

If you are interested to read further look at:
The 8 Senses Explained: Unravelling the Mystery - Your Kid's Table (yourkidstable.com)



ઓટીઝમ શું છે?

મોટાભાગના લોકો માને છે કે આપણી પાસે પાંચ ઇન્દ્રિયો છે પરંતુ આપણી પાસે 8 ઇન્દ્રિયો છે.

ઇન્ટરોસેપ્શન ઓટીઝમ ધરાવતા ઘણા લોકોને અને અન્ય શીખવાની અક્ષમતા (learning difficulty) ધરાવતા લોકોને પણ અસર કરે છે. ઘણા લોકો કે જેઓ ઓટીઝમ સ્પેક્ટ્રમ પર છે તેઓ સંવેદનાત્મક પ્રક્રિયા ડિસઓર્ડર ધરાવે છે અને ઇન્ટરોસેપ્શનનો અભાવ ધરાવે છે. તેઓ ક્યારે ખાવાનું બંધ કરવું તે કહી શકતા નથી, તેઓને ખ્યાલ નથી હોતો કે તેઓ ભૂખ્યા છે કે નહીં તેમને પ્રવાહી પીવાની જરૂર લાગતી નથી અથવા અનુભવશે નહીં, તેઓ ડિહાઇડ્રેટેડ થઈ શકે છે. આ રોજિંદા પડકારોનો સામનો કરવાની તેમની ક્ષમતાને ઘટાડે છે અને લાગણીઓને નિયંત્રિત કરવાનું મુશ્કેલ છે. શૌચાલય (toilet) ઉપલબ્ધ ન હોય ત્યારે તેમને અચાનક શૌચાલયની જરૂર પડી શકે છે.

તેમને પ્રોપ્રિઓસેપ્શનમાં તકલીફ છે જે સંવેદનાત્મક રીસેપ્ટર્સ મગજમાં સિગ્નલ પસાર કરવામાં સક્ષમ ન હોવાની સમસ્યા તરફ દોરી જાય છે. તેઓ પોતાનું સંતુલન જાળવી શકતા નથી. એવું લાગે છે કે તેઓ ઘણા બળનો ઉપયોગ કરી રહ્યા છે.

અન્ય સેન્સ વેસ્ટિબ્યુલર કહેવામાં આવે છે. તે માથાની હિલચાલ, ગતિ અને દિશાને અનુભવે છે.

તે સંતુલન, મુદ્રા અને હલનચલનને સમાયોજિત કરવામાં મદદ કરે છે. જે બાળકોને અસર થાય

છે તેઓ ઘણીવાર ગતિ માંદગીનો અનુભવ કરે છે, જ્યારે રસ્તા પર ઉપર અને નીચે હોય છ અને શાળાની સફર, ટ્રેન અને બસની મુસાફરીનું સંચાલન કરવું મુશ્કેલ લાગે છે.

દૃષ્ટિ, ગંધ, સ્વાદ, સ્પર્શ અને સાંભળવાની અન્ય 5 ઇન્દ્રિયો પણ પ્રભાવિત થાય છે. ઓટીઝમ ધરાવતા લોકો આ સંવેદનાઓ પ્રત્યે સમસ્યા હોઈ શકે છે. મારું બાળક એવા અવાજો સાંભળી શકે છે જે હું સાંભળી શકતો નથી, જેમ કે તેના હોટ ચોકલેટમાં પરપોટા ફૂટતા અથવા જ્યારે કોઈ લખતું હોય ત્યારે સ્ક્રિબલિંગ અવાજો. ઘોંઘાટ તણાવ, અસ્વસ્થતા અને મોટા જૂથોમાં સંચાલન કરવામાં મુશ્કેલીનું કારણ બની શકે છે. અમુક ટેક્સચર અસહ્ય છે. ઓસ્ટિઝમ ધરાવતા લોકોને ખોરાકના રંગ, ગંધ અને સ્વાદ સાથે સુસંગતતાની જરૂર હોય છે, અન્યથા તેઓ તેને નકારશે.

સોફ્ટ કુશન તેમને શાંત કરવામાં મદદ કરી શકે છે, અવાજ ઘટાડવામાં, પેસ્ટલ શેડવાળા રૂમ અને અવાજને રદ કરતા હેડફોન પહેરવાથી સંવેદનાત્મક ઓવરલોડ ઘટાડવામાં મદદ મળી શકે છે.

ઓટીઝમ ધરાવતા બાળકના માતા-પિતા તરીકે, હું આ મુદ્દાની જાગૃતિ વધારી રહ્યો છું. જો તમને આગળ વાંચવામાં રસ હોય તો સમજાવેલ 8 ઇન્દ્રિયો જુઓ; yourkidstable.com

Abridged Gujarati article by Dr Anuja K. Shah (based on article by Minal Shah)

For further information in Gujarati, please see: <https://www.bdct.nhs.uk/autism-factsheet-gujarati/>

FERTILITY: *Breaking the Silence*

By Rakhee Shah



Fertility and egg-freezing are often under-discussed. As more individuals seek to balance their personal and professional lives, understanding these options becomes increasingly important. Rakhee Shah, a multi award winning holistic fertility therapist, integrated functional nutrition practitioner and coach, sheds some light on how to navigate conception hurdles, flourish in mind-body fertility, and ignite your journey of transformation toward parenthood.

Approx 1 in 6 couples will struggle with infertility. Are you falling into that category?

We try so hard not to have babies when we are not ready to become parents and then often struggle to have them when we want them.

Here are things to consider when navigating your fertility journey if you are struggling:

For her

- Blood Tests
- Day 2/3 Blood Test (FSH, LH, Estradiol)
- 7 days after ovulation (progesterone)
- Prolactin, Full Thyroid Panel (TSH, T4, T3, FT3, TPO, TPA), Vitamin D, Folate, B12, Liver Markers, CRP, Iron (Ferritin and Haem), SHBG, FBC, HbA1C, AMH, Testosterone
- Hycosy scan to check for blocked tubes
- AFC to check how many follicles you have showing

For him

- Comprehensive Semen Test
- Blood Tests (Thyroid, HbA1C, Liver Markers, Cholesterol, FSH, LH, Testosterone)

Nutrition

- Cut out the CRAP – caffeine, refined sugars, alcohol, processed foods. You may also need

to consider going gluten free and/or dairy free depending on any health issues you are presenting with

- Add in lots of healthy protein, good fats and fibre
- Hydrate with water (ideally plain and filtered but not from plastic bottles)
- Speak to a nutritionist about what supplements you may need – don't go in blindly and don't supplement with poor quality supplements. You could be overdoing it without realising and then it can have a knock on effect of other minerals becoming imbalanced.
- Ensure your gut health is optimal especially if you have any autoimmune conditions.
- For the female, it is imperative your liver health is in optimal condition too.

Lifestyle

- Get 7-8 hours good quality sleep (ideally between 10.30pm and 5.30am)
- Have digital detox downtime before bed
- Reduce your stresses where possible – do fun activities that bring you joy and relaxation
- Make time to eat properly, sit at a table and chew each mouthful of food at least 10 times. Have no distractions when eating (e.g watching TV or working away on your computer).
- Exercise but not excessively.
- Don't make having sex a chore, bring the passion back into it. Remember, babies are made out of love and not sex.

Allow at least 3-6 months of the above to be implemented before trying to conceive to allow the mind, body, egg and sperm to be in the best of health. You are creating the most important thing in your life, so it deserves to have the best start in life.

Doing the above will also allow for a better pregnancy, delivery and recovery post-partum.

Living in South Asian Bodies:



Reflections in a Cultural Mirror

By Reena Gudka

"Gosh, Reena, I've seen more meat on a dog."

- My uncle, unintentionally representing a large number of South Asians who share similar triggering and dangerous views on body image, not mincing their words.

Little did he know that when he made that throwaway comment, I was in the depths of an anorexia relapse. In my first article on eating disorders in the Spring 2024 magazine, I touched on the prevalence of negative body image experiences amongst South Asians, including being body shamed. This time, I want to zoom in what lies beneath. Why did my uncle make that comment?

Western ideals

Many of the ideals we have in our minds of how we should look are rooted in our colonial past. The colonisation of South Asian countries resulted in a preference for the thinner frames of women, the muscular and toned frames of men, and the fair and lovely skin of both. And although progress is being made with recent TV shows such as *Never Have I Ever* on Netflix, there is still a lack of South Asian representation in mainstream media. Where representation does exist, it more often than not tends to fit the Eurocentric ideal. All that time I spent watching serials on Zee TV just to see more people who looked like me, probably did more harm than good.

Savita Bakshi and Anna Baker wrote in their 2011 study on British Indian adults' perceptions of physical appearance ideals, that despite

many South Asians knowing that Western ideals of beauty are unattainable for any race, some people still strive for those impossible standards at great risk to their health. This might be because they believe those ideals will lead to marriage, social status, and success. For instance, many people continue to use skin whitening creams despite knowing the ingredients could physically damage their skin.

Meeting others' expectations

In South Asian communities we're preoccupied with what other people think and tend to prioritise the needs and expectations of those around us. Our elders, many of whom were raised in South Asia, were pressured to have the ideal body types which were thought to impress or please other people, for instance to find a suitable partner. Not doing so would result in family disappointment and gossiping in the community.

Much of this pressure has been passed down from generation to generation and internalised, leaving us constantly asking, "log kya kahenge?" (what will people say?) if we stray too far from those expectations. With our communities so close and intertwined, our bodies become everyone's business and many people think it's their right to chime in; unfiltered comments are thought to be justified simply because they are well-intended. It's no wonder my uncle felt the need to tell me my body was far from ideal. To him, I was too thin, thinner than the ideal. To me, it seemed like there was no winning.

In striving to meet the unrealistic expectations of others, it's quite common for people to feel guilt and shame if the way they look or what they have achieved isn't 'enough'. It shouldn't come as a surprise that many South Asians develop negative body image, disordered eating, and eating disorders as a way to cope with those difficult feelings. In fact, hospital admissions for eating disorders in the UK have been increasing at a faster rate for ethnic minorities. The Guardian's analysis of NHS data found a 53% increase for ethnic minorities (51% specifically for Pakistanis, 49% for Indians) and 31% for white ethnicities, between 2017/18 and 2019/20.

When my own eating disorder started in my teens I became consumed by goals to have what the South Asian community told me would make for a perfect body, perfect grades, and would allow me to become a perfect person by helping others in need. I fasted during the Jain festival of Paryushan, mistakenly thinking that it was a way to punish myself for being the bad person I thought I was because I wasn't perfect by others' standards; I didn't think I deserved food. Comments, such as that from my uncle, on one hand made me feel ashamed, but on the other hand gave me the validation I wanted - that I looked thin - but was dangerous to give me.



TOP TIPS

Finding out what feels right for you, body shape or otherwise, and living life to serve yourself is no mean feat, but it is possible (she says whilst feeling guilty for being on a career break in South East Asia, instead of saving for a mortgage or looking for a husband on Dil Mil like she apparently should be). In addition to the tips I included in my last article, below are a few more you might find helpful.

1. Set boundaries with those around you. If you're uncomfortable with someone's comments, let them know what topics you would prefer not to discuss. Don't force yourself to tolerate triggering situations - you don't deserve that.
2. If setting boundaries feels uncomfortable, especially if you're worried about coming across as disrespectful, change the subject and keep the conversation moving. If you're an ally to someone who feels triggered, help them to do this.
3. Avoid making critical comments about other people's bodies, even if well-intended. You don't know what that person is going through behind closed doors and your comment could have a negative impact on their physical and mental health.
4. Practising self-care, even if just for a few minutes a day, can support you in building a sense of self so you're not preoccupied with others' needs 24/7. This might include a creative activity, a sport, or meditating.



Khaa, beta, khaa (eat, my child, eat)

Food is central to most South Asian communities; it's the key ingredient that brings family and friends together at any and every occasion. Happy occasion? Food. Sad occasion? Food. But the pressure to eat the food is often relentless. If you've figured out a way to refuse the food that has been offered to you 10 times without leaving your aunty feeling disrespected, you might be a genius - please send tips.

Navigating those social situations which revolve around food, where the people who feed you

are also the ones to criticise you for the way your body looks, can be tough. People with negative body image, disordered eating, and eating disorders often choose to avoid these social situations as they include too many triggers. I remember being 15 years old and hiding under my desk in my bedroom in the hope that if no one could find me, I could get away with not going to a relative's house where I would either be pressured to eat, interrogated for not eating, or criticised for how I ate and my body shape. I ended up getting all four at some point that day.



Below are a few tips on how to navigate difficult social situations.

- 1. If you've offered someone food/drink and they've said no, respect their response. They have their reasons for saying no and that's okay.**
- 2. If you're having a gathering which involves food, consider putting the food in one area so that anyone who finds it triggering can avoid the area if they want to.**
- 3. Social gatherings do not always need to revolve around food. Playing games and looking through photo albums, for instance, are additional ways to spend quality time with people, and might help to shift the focus away from food and body image.**

The issues I've written about are complex and take time to unpack. Asking South Asian communities to change the way they think about bodies would be a pretty tall order. But, there are small changes we can collectively make for our communities to be more inclusive and less judgemental. The above tips, however, are not replacements for professional help that you or someone you care about might need.

Do visit www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk for support.

Our Gujarati Schools

"The rhythm of my body is the same as my mother tongue. It is in this rhythm where I find sanctity, that I can return to my mother who is everywhere in the universe."

Kim Hyesoon, South Korean poet

OAUK Gujarati schools have attracted more parents (and children, of course!) recently. We hear below from students and parents at each of our Gujarati Schools about their experiences.

Zarna Shah, 5 years old,
with **Kewal Shah**

North West area



Zarna: I am learning Gujarati because my mum and dad speak Gujarati, and I enjoy coming to Gujarati school. To practice, I sometimes speak in Gujarati with my dada and dad. I also learn French at school and it's harder than learning Gujarati because the sounds are difficult. Recently, at Gujarati school, we learnt about the Indian flag and one new word I learnt is thadiyo.

Kewal: It is important for my daughter to learn her mother tongue to stay connected to her roots, culture and heritage, which is why I wanted her to learn Gujarati. I also wanted her to be able to communicate with her grandparents and great grandparents. We try to practise Gujarati at home but it has been challenging, especially given how easy it is to revert back to English. I've found it helpful to use some great resources online, including many videos and stories!

Nayan Neal Shah, 11 years old,
with **Neal Chunilal Shah**

West area



Navan: I am learning Gujarati because it is my mother tongue and it will help me talk to family from India and my grandparents. It was hard at first, but I am understanding it more and it's now fun. To practise, I try to speak it a few times a day with my parents and grandparents. When I speak with my Gujarati friends, it feels like I have a special bond with them, and our common mother tongue unites us. I also feel like I am carrying on my culture for future generations. At the moment, in the classes, we are learning past, present and future tenses. One new word I have learnt is zaad which means tree. I'm also learning Spanish which is easier to learn as it is similar to English, but I think they are both fun to learn!

Neal: It was important to me for Nayan to learn Gujarati so that he can integrate with our community better and make friends with children who share the same culture. Before

Nayan started the classes, we spoke in Gujarati at home but did not do any reading and writing. We prefer that Nayan goes to class as it is more social for him. One challenge we face is finding the time - there is a lot going on with school, other activities like sports and music. To make it easier for any kids that are learning we should try to expose the children more to Gujarati at home and maybe organise a trip to Gujarat soon!

Aria Anand Green,
8 years old,
with **Neeta Anand Green**

North area



Aria: I'm learning Gujarati to be able to speak to my mum's side of the family. I really enjoy it and I feel proud of myself. Recently I've learnt about drinks like chaas. I practice with my Mummy and I speak with my sister too, but I find the writing difficult. I'm also learning Spanish, French and Italian - they are super different!

Neeta: It's important for Aria to learn Gujarati so she can learn a different language and be able to engage with our family in India. I tried teaching her before, but only how to speak. It can be challenging as it isn't widely spoken and there aren't many movies, activities and songs to keep people interested. I find that there aren't many resources out there. We try to find dot-to-dot books and watch some movies, although these are mainly Hindi movies. The school's interactive activities like garba, Diwali and important festivals make the learning easier.

Aaruhi Dodhia,
and **Jeeger Dodhia**

South area



Aaruhi: I speak in Gujarati with my grandparents and everybody in India. If I didn't speak Gujarati, I wouldn't enjoy India as much. I am now slowly learning how to read and write. I also get to meet my friends at Gujarati school!

Before, I only knew the names of fruits, vegetables and animals; now, I've learnt how to describe them in detail. It's also sometimes easier to explain something in Gujarati as I can't always find the English words for what I want to say (e.g. *mane pet ma maja nathi avti*). It is difficult to remember how to write some letters that are quite similar, like t,tha,d,dha,sh,shha,sa. It's fun learning new words; a funny word I learnt recently was "*kudka mare*" (*saslu kudka mare che*)!

I learn French at school. In French, the words are difficult as I have never used or heard them before and I forget them easily. We speak Gujarati all the time and so it is very easy to remember the words and how and when to use them.

Jeeger: More than just a language, Gujarati is embedded in our cultural identity; our mothertongue connects us through generations and is something to preserve at all costs. Language is deeply rooted in all our traditions and customs; our religion and festivals. Translations can rarely do justice in conveying the essence and spirit. To learn Gujarati is more than to merely learn a language, it opens the door to learn about our origins. Extensive

studies have proven that the skills acquired in learning languages are transferable and carry extensive advantages over monolinguals resulting in robust academic outcomes. Having learnt, taught and publicly examined Gujarati through to A-Level, it is my firm view that every effort and dedication should be made in ensuring Gujarati is learnt and embraced. I tried teaching Aaruhi first and I will continue to do so; however there is an unrivalled benefit in being around other children and in a playful and inspiring environment, which Oshwal Gujarati School provides. Fostering friendships, participating, performing and working with peers all contribute to and energise the learning process. Aaruhi looks forward to Gujarati School and attends with excitement, which is testament to the nurturing and enjoyable environment created.

We have always made a conscious effort to ensure that we only converse in Gujarati at home. Before she began Nursery, Aaruhi had negligible exposure to English. Since immersing into mainstream education, we continue to insist that only Gujarati spoken at home. Regular interaction with relatives across generations both in the UK but particularly India reinforces this.

As is the case with any skill, if one begins to neglect it, the confidence, fluency and fluidity quickly dissipates. At a tender age, a child has the capacity to absorb an astounding amount and it is therefore imperative to provide them the exposure but also create the surroundings for them to use and sharpen their skills.

What can be challenging is that here are a multitude of competing activities that offer varying advantages and are beneficial for children to pursue. Every parent wants to provide opportunities and exposure. Inevitably many of these offerings are on the weekends

leaving parents needing to prioritise. We went through similar conundrums but when we went back to first principles, the choice was made easy. We found alternative slots through the week for a host of other activities, which often meant travelling further but preserved Saturday mornings for Gujarati School as the bedrock of Aaruhi's extracurricular schedule. Forgoing it now in her youth would make it very difficult to spark her interest in the future or justify its importance to her. South Area also has a fantastic new Bal Mandir for younger children to attend and this has been so popular! This is also flanked by SAS, so children participate in sporting activities straight after Gujarati School.

There are extensive resources to help children learn Gujarati, particularly online, which makes learning anything very accessible and enjoyable. There are an abundance of animated stories, often with morals, which can be enjoyed at leisure. As technical ability increases, listening to short, selective news stories is a great way to begin exposing to different accents and speeds of communication.

It's important to make learning enjoyable and effortless. Anything that is worth learning is rarely easy. The Gujarati School uses technology and interactive methods, so children often think they are simply playing, where really they are developing their vocabulary, engaging in comprehension, translating and, critically, beginning to speak with confidence. To support their child's journey in learning Gujarati, parents play an essential role. Whilst not all will have had the opportunity to learn or for many, it will have become a distant memory, to retread or begin that path will be a step you and your child(ren) will cherish forever. Disha and I actively participate in the School; for Aaruhi, there is a reinforced sense of community - that this is our school. Where children are initially reticent, if parents are able to offer some time to participate themselves, this will help the children acclimatise and prosper.

North West

AREA

Digital Classes for the Elderly

NW area is proud to offer digital classes for the elderly every Monday at Ekta Centre. The classes, which started in February 2024, cover a wide range of topics designed to empower seniors with essential digital skills and give them confidence to navigate the technology-driven world. Participants have learned about navigating YouTube, WhatsApp, digital safety, online banking, the NHS app, and how to use smart phones.



We have had the privilege of hosting experts from the NHS, various banks, and other organisations to deliver the most current and practical information. A special thanks to Nilesbhai, one of our volunteers, for his dedication in teaching a comprehensive 12-week course on Excel and Word. His expertise and commitment have greatly enriched our program.

During the holidays, we were delighted to see teenagers stepping in to run the workshops! Their enthusiasm and patience have helped bridge the generational gap and make the learning experience enjoyable for everyone involved. More workshops are planned for the summer holidays.

Thanks also go to Shaileshbhai Malde (another volunteer) for his unwavering support behind the scenes to ensure smooth delivery of these sessions. If you would like to volunteer and contribute to this important program, please contact Bansi Shah on 07958 559972.

Little Munchkins at Gujarati School

In January 2024, we introduced Little Munchkins – Gujarati classes for 3 & 4-year-olds every Saturday morning. Jignaben leads the teaching and Rahulbhai has joined as a parent helper. Children have been learning our beautiful language through songs, actions, stories and pictures.

At each session, Jignaben and Rahulbhai finds a good song to teach and share the link with parents. Some of the short songs are created and sung by Jignaben herself! The session starts with the register being taken - with a song આજે કોણ કોણ આવ્યું છે? and a prayer મારા પ્રભુજી નાના છે sung with actions. Then, they begin learning through the various prompts, stories and games – in a very positive, happy and lively atmosphere!

This term, the children presented a song, 'માયું, ખભા, પગ' – a great achievement and the start of being comfortable and confident in speaking Gujarati, even for those who have only been learning for a term!





In their own words:

Stories of success and passion

We are thrilled to highlight the remarkable journeys of three inspiring members of our community! We sat down with a talented author, and two gifted authors to explore their careers, challenges and triumphs. Their stories are a testament to the passion and perseverance that define our community's talent.

Anneka, from the Editorial Team, spoke to **Neema Shah**, about becoming an author and her debut book, **Kololo Hill**, which tells the story of a family's experience during and after the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda, under Idi Amin's rule. The story is one that reflects many Oshwals' heritage, but one that some of us may not know that well, which inspired Neema to write the book.

Tell us a bit about yourself and how you became interested in writing.

I was brought up in North London after my parents moved from Kenya and Tanzania in the seventies. I was always really interested in English and even studied an English Literature 'A' level but decided to study a Law degree as I knew this would make my parents happy! I realised quite quickly that I didn't want to be a lawyer, so I went into marketing until my mid-thirties. All that time, I didn't write, never really thought about it, and didn't know any writers. Then, one day, the company gave us 'Me Money', which we could use towards picking up any class that we were interested in. I chose creative writing as I'd enjoyed this when I was younger, and also because I thought it would be helpful with the communications aspect of my job. I did a short online course and as soon as I completed the first task, I had a huge adrenaline rush! I found writing so exhilarating, so I began writing stories. Now, looking back on it, I was always really interested in writing, especially

when I was younger (my mum has dug out all the stories I wrote as proof!), and perhaps I lost touch with it as I became an adult.

Tell us a bit about your debut novel, *Kololo Hill*.

It's set in 1972 and is about a couple of recently married Ugandan Asians, Asha and Pran, who are given ninety days to leave the country. It is based on the real-life events where President Idi Amin expelled Ugandan Asians, allowing them to take only £50 with them - that's worth about £1000 today. They had to leave their businesses, homes, and everything behind. The story follows them leaving and coming to settle in the UK, which is a reality that many of our families would have experienced but hasn't yet been written about. It is called *Kololo Hill* as it is set in one of the main hills in Kampala. 'Kololo' also means alone in one of the local languages, Acholi, and I really liked the link of this word to the themes that come up in the book - family, belonging, and home.

What inspired you to write this story?

As a young adult, I read books like Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight Children', Arundhati Roy's 'A God of Small Things', and Zadie Smith's 'White Teeth'. These authors were all a mix of first- and second-generation immigrants in the UK, writing about their experiences of multicultural England and the subcontinent. I was also interested in world fiction and other cultures and read authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez. But I found that there weren't any stories about people like me. We are twice migrants – our families didn't just go from one place to another, they went from one to another to another (India, to East Africa, to the UK). That brings an even more complex but interesting culture, in terms of food, language, and more, which I really wanted to explore.

My story has the perspective of multiple characters. I wanted to give a voice to people who didn't traditionally have voices. Historically, prior to the nineties, a lot of books were written by males or focussed on the male lens. The women's stories in my novel are paramount to me because they are not the ones we usually hear. For example, one of my main characters is a 50-year-old woman. Asian families can be quite patriarchal, or often Asian women can be stereotyped as quite meek and quiet. That was not my experience of the women I grew up around, so it was particularly important for me to bring that across in the book.

As you said, the book is based on real-life events – how did you go about researching this historical moment of our history?

That was hard because there is very little written about that period from the perspective of Ugandan Asians. There are historical records from the British Government, but there aren't many personal stories. I did manage to find this amazing resource from SOAS – the 'Exiles'

Project. They conducted hours and hours of interviews of Ugandan Asians, in English and Gujarati, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the expulsion. That resource was a goldmine to me as it was much richer than me just asking a few people I knew about their experiences, and it allowed me to craft multiple main characters, who each had their own point of view.

I also read some articles from the BBC news archives and visited Uganda (albeit after writing two drafts of the novel!). I also showed my drafts to my parents, who were able to add in some other details about growing up in East Africa. I would never have known about some of these – for example that they studied Shakespeare and Dickens at school! From a personal point of view, connecting with them was one of the most amazing things to come out of writing this book.

Aside from the focus on women's stories, are there any other themes that you felt were particularly important to bring across in the book?

The references to food are particularly special to me. I hate it when I'm reading a book and the text reads 'and then they ate dinner', as I'm always left questioning and wondering about what they ate! I included foods that are authentic to East African Asian and British Asian cuisines in the book such as mandazi and baked beans curry and wanted to showcase things that some readers may not have heard of otherwise.

We are coming up to Paryushan – tell us about the role of religion for your characters and the book.

There are scenes set in temples and they create a shrine once they come to the UK. The family are Hindu, and I explore some interesting themes such as the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma is the god of creation, Vishnu the god of preservation, and Shiva the god of

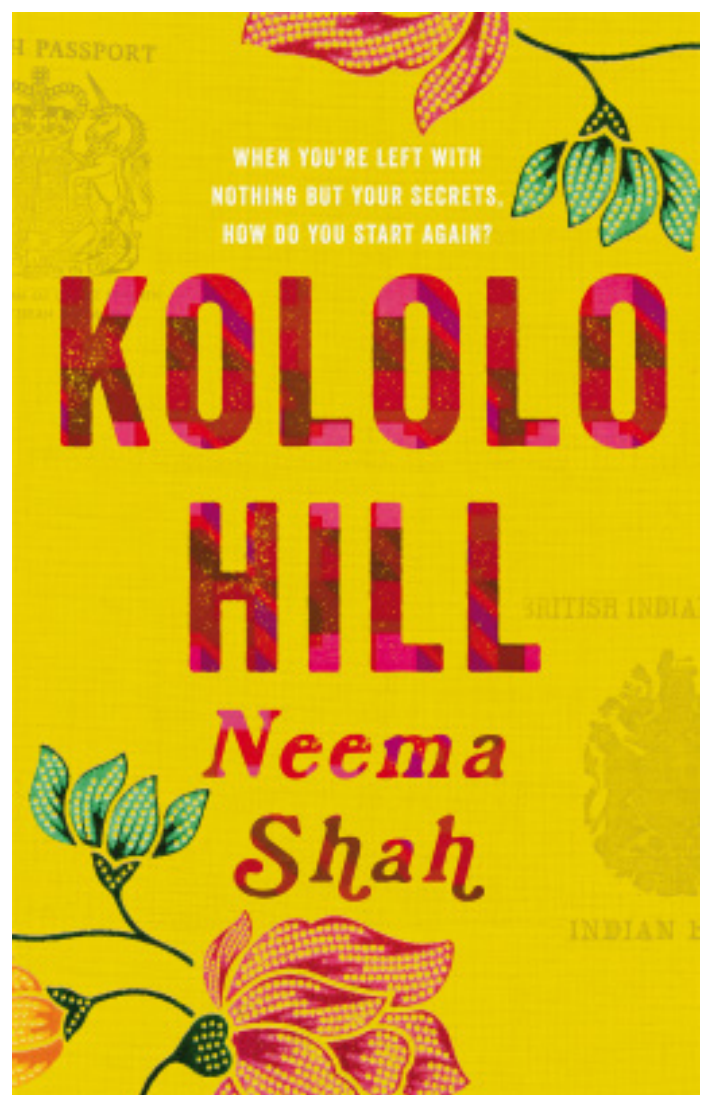
destruction so I thought it was a good reflection of what the family were going through and how renewal is an inevitable part of life. It is also very reflective of that generation and the older generation in my book, as our communities were so connected to religion at that time.

What advice do you have for Oshwals interested in becoming authors?

It is a tough industry in some ways, but all you need to start is a pen and paper! Skills to write can be learnt, especially through free information out, including on social media. I don't have any formal education in writing and whilst a university degree in Creative Writing can be helpful, it's not essential. Doing a short online course was helpful for me to meet other writers. You build a community, they can become your 'beta readers', and they are great for moral support as you go on the journey to getting published. And of course, practising writing is critical. You can get bogged down in learning, but the more you write, the better you get. Reading is also important - you can learn about what works and doesn't work this way. Whilst I didn't write for many years, I think all the reading I did in my early years set me up well for writing my book.

What can you tell us about your next book? Will it follow the characters we met in Kololo Hill?

My next book isn't a sequel to Kololo Hill. I feel that I have told the part of those characters' story that needed telling and even though we won't know what happened to them next, I know they are still out there somewhere, living their lives. I knew that I wanted to write more about British Asian history for my next book and this will continue to be a focus for my writing. I can't reveal too much about it yet - but it is set in the UK, at the time of World War II and the story is about the Indian independence movement that took place in the forties.



કોલોલો હિલ

અનીકાની લેખિકાશ્રી નીમા શાહ સાથે મુલાકાત

ભાષાંતર: સોનલ શાહ

અનીકાએ લેખિકા નીમાબહેન શાહ સાથે તેઓના પ્રથમ પુસ્તક કોલોલો હિલ વિશે વાત કરી હતી, જેમાં ઇદી અમીનના શાસન હેઠળ યુગાન્ડામાંથી દક્ષિણ એશિયનોની હકાલપટ્ટી દરમિયાન અને તે પછીના એક પરિવારના અનુભવની કથા છે. આમ તો વાર્તા એવી છે જે ઘણા ઓશવાળોના વારસાને પ્રતિબિંબિત કરે છે, પરંતુ આ એક એવી વાર્તા છે જે આપણામાંના કેટલાકને કદાચ તે સારી રીતે ખબર નહીં હોય અને જેણે નીમાબહેનને પુસ્તક લખવાની પ્રેરણા આપી હતી.

અમને તમારા વિશે અને તમને લેખનમાં કેવી રીતે રસ પડ્યો તે વિશે થોડું કહો.

મારા માતાપિતા સિત્તેરના દાયકામાં કેન્યા અને ટાન્ઝાનિયાથી સ્થળાંતર થયા પછી મારો ઉછેર ઉત્તર લંડનમાં થયો હતો. મને હંમેશાં અંગ્રેજીમાં રસ હતો અને મેં અંગ્રેજી સાહિત્ય 'એ' લેવલનો અભ્યાસ પણ કર્યો હતો, પરંતુ મેં કાયદાની ડિગ્રીનો અભ્યાસ કરવાનું નક્કી કર્યું કારણ કે મને ખબર હતી કે તેનાથી મારાં માતાપિતા ખુશ થશે! મને ઝડપથી ખ્યાલ આવી ગયો કે મારે વકીલ બનવું નથી એટલે હું ત્રીસીના દાયકાના મધ્ય ભાગ સુધી માર્કેટિંગ ક્ષેત્રમાં લાગી ગઈ. તે સમયે, હું લખતી ન હતી, ખરેખર તેના વિશે ક્યારેય વિચારતી ન હતી, અને કોઈ લેખકને જાણતી પણ ન હતી. પછી, એક દિવસ, કંપનીએ અમને 'મી મની' આપ્યા, જેનો ઉપયોગ અમને રસ હોય તેવા કોઈપણ વર્ગની પસંદગી માટે અમારે કરવાનો હતો. મેં સર્જનાત્મક લેખનને પસંદ કર્યું કારણ કે હું જ્યારે નાની હતી ત્યારે મને એનાથી આનંદ તો મળ્યો જ હતો, પરંતુ સાથે એટલા માટે પણ કે મને

લાગતું હતું કે તે મારા કામના સંદેશાવ્યવહારના પાસામાં મદદરૂપ થશે. મેં એક ટૂંકો ઓનલાઇન કોર્સ કર્યો અને જેવું મેં પહેલું કામ પૂરું કર્યું કે તરત જ મને ખૂબ જ ઉત્સાહ જાગ્યો! મને લેખન ખૂબ જ આનંદદાયક લાગ્યું, તેથી મેં વાર્તાઓ લખવાનું શરૂ કર્યું. હવે વિચારું છું તો લાગે છે કે મને હંમેશાં લેખનમાં ખરેખર રસ હતો, ખાસ કરીને જ્યારે હું નાની હતી(મારી માતાએ પુરાવા તરીકે મેં લખેલી બધી વાર્તાઓ કાઢી રાખી છે!) અને કદાચ હું પુખ્ત વયની થઈ ત્યારે તેની સાથેનો સંપર્ક ગુમાવી દીધો હશે.

તમારી પ્રથમ નવલકથા, કોલોલો હિલ વિશે અમને થોડું કહો.

તે ૧૯૭૨માં સેટ કરવામાં આવી છે અને તે તાજેતરમાં જ પરણેલા યુગાન્ડાના એશિયન, આશા અને પ્રાણ વિશે છે, જેમને દેશ છોડવા માટે નેવું દિવસનો સમય આપવામાં આવ્યો છે. તે વાસ્તવિક જીવનની ઘટનાઓ પર આધારિત છે, જેમાં પ્રમુખ ઇદી અમીને યુગાન્ડાના એશિયનોને હાંકી કાઢ્યા હતા, અને પોતાની સાથે ફક્ત પચાસ પાઉન્ડ લઈ જવાની મંજૂરી

આપી હતી - જેની કિંમત આજે લગભગ ૧૦૦૦ પાઉન્ડ છે. તેમને પોતાનો ધંધો, ઘર અને બધું જ પાછળ મૂકી દેવાનું હતું. વાર્તા તેમની યુગાન્ડા છોડીને યુકેમાં સ્થાયી થવાની સફરને અનુસરે છે, જે એક વાસ્તવિકતા છે. જેનો આપણા ઘણા પરિવારોએ અનુભવ કર્યો હશે પરંતુ હજી સુધી તેના વિશે લખવામાં આવ્યું નથી. તેને કોલોલો હિલ કહેવામાં આવે છે કારણ કે વાર્તા કમ્પાલાની એક મુખ્ય ટેકરીમાં સેટ થયેલ છે. 'કોલોલો'નો અર્થ સ્થાનિક ભાષાઓમાંની એક, અચોલીમાં પણ એકલા જ થાય છે, અને પુસ્તકમાં જે - કુટુંબ, માલિકી અને ઘર જેવા વિષયો પર ચર્ચા કરવામાં આવી છે તેની સાથે આ શબ્દને જોડવાનું મને ખરેખર ગમ્યું.

તમને આ વાર્તા લખવા માટે પ્રેરણા કેવી રીતે મળી?

એક યુવાન વયે, હું સલમાન રશીદની 'મિડનાઇટ ચિલ્ડ્રન', અરુંધતી રોયની 'અ ગોડ ઓફ સ્મોલ થિંગ્સ' અને ઝેડી સ્મિથની 'વ્હાઇટ ટીથ્સ' જેવાં પુસ્તકો વાંચ્યા છે. આ બધા લેખકો યુકેમાં પ્રથમ અને બીજી પેઢીના ઇમિગ્રન્ટ્સનું મિશ્રણ હતા, જેમણે બહુસાંસ્કૃતિક ઇંગ્લેન્ડ અને ઉપખંડના તેમના અનુભવો વિશે લખ્યું હતું. મને વર્લ્ડ ફિક્શન અને અન્ય સંસ્કૃતિઓમાં પણ રસ હતો અને ગેબ્રિયલ ગાર્સિયા માર્કેઝ જેવા લેખકોને વાંચ્યા હતા. પરંતુ મેં જોયું કે મારા જેવા લોકો વિશે કોઈ વાર્તાઓ નથી. અમે બે વાર સ્થળાંતર કર્યું હતું - અમારા પરિવારો માત્ર એક જગ્યાએથી બીજી જગ્યાએ જતા ન હતા, તેઓ એક જગ્યાએથી બીજી જગ્યાએથી ત્રીજી જગ્યાએ ગયા હતા (ભારત, પૂર્વ આફ્રિકા, યુકે). જેથી ખોરાક, ભાષા વગેરેની દ્રષ્ટિએ, એક વધુ જટિલ પરંતુ રસપ્રદ સંસ્કૃતિ સાથે લાવી આવતા

પાસાને હું ખરેખર તપાસવા માંગતી હતી. મારી વાર્તામાં બહુવિધ પાત્રોનો દૃષ્ટિકોણ છે. હું એવા લોકોને અવાજ આપવા માંગતી હતી જેમની પાસે પરંપરાગત રીતે અવાજ ન હોય, ઐતિહાસિક રીતે, નેવુંના દાયકા પહેલા, ઘણાં પુસ્તકો પુરુષો દ્વારા લખવામાં આવતા હતા અથવા પુરુષદૃષ્ટિ પર ધ્યાન કેન્દ્રિત કરવામાં આવતું હતું. મારી નવલકથામાં મહિલાઓની વાર્તાઓ મારા માટે સર્વોપરી છે કારણ કે તે એવી વાર્તાઓ નથી જે આપણે સામાન્ય રીતે સાંભળીએ છીએ. જેમ કે, મારું એક મુખ્ય પાત્ર ૫૦ વર્ષની મહિલા છે. એશિયન પરિવારો તદ્દન પિતૃસત્તાક હોઈ શકે છે, અથવા ઘણીવાર એશિયન સ્ત્રીઓને તદ્દન નમ્ર અને શાંત તરીકે બીબાઢાળ બનાવી શકાય છે. હું જે સ્ત્રીઓની આસપાસ ઊછરી હતી તે અનુભવ મારા માટે સરખો નહોતો, તેથી મારા માટે આ પુસ્તકમાં આ બાબત રજૂ કરવી ખાસ અગત્યની હતી.

તમે કહ્યું તેમ, આ પુસ્તક વાસ્તવિક જીવનની ઘટનાઓ પર આધારિત છે - આપણા ઇતિહાસની આ ઐતિહાસિક ક્ષણ પર તમે કેવી રીતે સંશોધન કર્યું?

આ કામ મુશ્કેલ હતું કારણ કે યુગાન્ડાના એશિયનોના દ્રષ્ટિકોણથી તે સમયગાળા વિશે ખૂબ જ ઓછું લખાયું છે. બ્રિટીશ સરકાર તરફથી ઐતિહાસિક રેકૉર્ડ્સ છે, પરંતુ ત્યાં ઘણી વ્યક્તિગત વાર્તાઓ નથી. હું સોઆસના - 'નિર્વાસિત' પ્રોજેક્ટમાંથી આ અદભૂત સ્રોત શોધવામાં સફળ રહી. હકાલપટ્ટીની ૪૦મી વર્ષગાંઠની ઉજવણી પ્રસંગે તેમણે યુગાન્ડાના એશિયનોના કલાકો અને કલાકોના ઇન્ટરવ્યુ અંગ્રેજી અને ગુજરાતી ભાષામાં લીધા હતા. તે સંસાધન મારા માટે સોનાની ખાણ હતી, કારણ કે તે મારા કરતાં ઘણી વધારે સમૃદ્ધ હતી. હું

તો ઓળખાતી હોઉં એવા થોડા લોકોને તેમના અનુભવો વિશે માત્ર પૂછી રહી હતી જ્યારે આ ખજાનાએ મને બહુવિધ મુખ્ય પાત્રો રચવાની તક આપી હતી, જેમાં દરેકનો પોતાનો દૃષ્ટિકોણ હતો. મેં બીબીસીના ન્યૂઝ આર્કાઇવ્સમાંથી કેટલાક લેખો પણ વાંચ્યા અને યુગાન્ડાની મુલાકાત લીધી (અલબત્ત, નવલકથાના બે મુસદ્દા લખ્યા પછી!). મેં મારા ડ્રાફ્ટ પણ મારાં માતાપિતાને બતાવ્યાં હતાં, જેઓ પૂર્વ આફ્રિકામાં ઊછર્યા હોવા વિશેની બીજી કેટલીક વિગતોમાં ઉમેરો કરી શક્યાં હતાં. આમાંના કેટલાક વિશે હું ક્યારેય જાણતી ન હોત - ઉદાહરણ તરીકે કે તેઓએ શાળામાં શેક્સપિયર અને ડિકન્સનો અભ્યાસ કર્યો હતો! વ્યક્તિગત દૃષ્ટિકોણથી જોઈએ તો, આ પુસ્તક લખવાથી તેમની સાથે જોડાણ થવું એ સૌથી આશ્ચર્યજનક બાબતોમાંની એક હતી.

સ્ત્રીઓની વાર્તાઓ પર ધ્યાન કેન્દ્રિત કરવા ઉપરાંત, શું અન્ય કોઈ થીમ્સ છે જે તમને પુસ્તકમાં લાવવા માટે ખાસ કરીને મહત્વપૂર્ણ લાગે છે?

ખાસ કરીને મારા માટે ખોરાકએ લગતી બાબતો વિશેષ છે. જ્યારે હું કોઈ પુસ્તક વાંચું અને લખાણમાં એવું આવે કે 'અને પછી તેઓએ રાત્રિભોજન લીધું', તો મને હંમેશાં તેઓ શું ખાય છે તે વિશે પ્રશ્નો પૂછવાનું મન થાય છે! મેં પુસ્તકમાં પૂર્વ આફ્રિકન એશિયન અને બ્રિટીશ એશિયન વાનગીઓ માટે અધિકૃત હોય તેવા ખોરાકનો સમાવેશ કર્યો છે, જેમ કે મેન્ડેઝી અને બેકડ બીન્સ! હું એવી વસ્તુઓ પ્રદર્શિત કરવા માંગુ છું જે કેટલાક વાચકોએ અન્યથા ન સાંભળી હોય.

હવે પર્યુષણ નજીક આવી રહ્યા છીએ - તમારા પાત્રો અને પુસ્તક માટે ધર્મની ભૂમિકા વિશે અમને કહો.

મંદિરોમાં દ્રશ્યો સેટ કરેલાં છે અને એકવાર તેઓ યુકે આવે ત્યારે તેઓ એક મંદિર બનાવે છે. આ કુટુંબ હિન્દુ છે અને હું ત્રિમૂર્તિ જેવા કેટલાક રસપ્રદ વિષયોને તપાસું છું: બ્રહ્મા, વિષ્ણુ અને મહેશ. બ્રહ્મા સૃષ્ટિના દેવતા છે, વિષ્ણુ સંરક્ષણના દેવતા છે, અને શિવ વિનાશના દેવતા છે, તેથી મેં વિચાર્યું કે કુટુંબ કેવી પરિસ્થિતિમાંથી પસાર થઈ રહ્યું છે અને નવીનીકરણ કેવી રીતે જીવનનો અનિવાર્ય ભાગ છે તેનું આ એક સારું પ્રતિબિંબ છે. તે મારા પુસ્તકમાંની પેઢી અને જૂની પેઢીને દર્શાવે છે, કારણ કે તે સમયે આપણા સમુદાયો ધર્મ સાથે વધુ જોડાયેલા હતા.

લેખક બનવામાં રસ ધરાવતા ઓશવાળોને તમે શું સલાહ આપશો?

આ ક્ષેત્ર કેટલીક રીતે અઘરું છે, પરંતુ તમારે માત્ર પેન અને કાગળથી જ શરૂ કરવાની જરૂર છે! લખવાની કુશળતા શીખી શકાય છે, ખાસ કરીને સોશિયલ મીડિયા સહિત, મફત માહિતી દ્વારા. મારી પાસે લેખિતમાં કોઈ ઔપચારિક શિક્ષણ નથી અને ક્રિએટિવ રાઇટિંગમાં યુનિવર્સિટીની ડિગ્રી મદદરૂપ થઈ શકે છે, પરંતુ તે જરૂરી નથી. ટૂંકો ઓનલાઇન અભ્યાસક્રમ કરવો એ મારા માટે અન્ય લેખકોને મળવા માટે મદદરૂપ હતું. તમે એક સમુદાય બનાવો છો, તેઓ તમારા 'બીટા વાચકો' બની શકે છે, અને જ્યારે તમે પ્રકાશિત થવાની યાત્રા પર જાઓ છો ત્યારે તેઓ નૈતિક સહકાર માટે અપૂર્વ છે. અને અલબત્ત, લેખનની પ્રેક્ટિસ કરવી અત્યંત જરૂરી છે. તમે શીખવામાં રૂબી જઈ શકો છો,

પરંતુ તમે જેટલું વધારે લખશો એટલા વધારે સારા બનશો. વાંચન પણ મહત્ત્વનું છે - તમને આ રીતે શું કામ કરે છે અને શું નથી કરતું તેની જાણકારી મળે છે. જોકે મેં ઘણાં વર્ષો સુધી કંઈ લખ્યું નથી, પણ મને લાગે છે કે મારાં શરૂઆતનાં વર્ષોમાં મેં જે કંઈ વાંચ્યું હતું તે બધું જ મારાં પુસ્તકો લખવા માટે મને સારું કામ લાગ્યું હતું.

તમે તમારા આગલા પુસ્તક વિશે અમને શું કહી શકો? શું તે કોલોલો હિલમાં મળેલા પાત્રોને અનુસરશે?

મારું આગલું પુસ્તક કોલોલો હિલની સિક્વલ નથી. મને લાગે છે કે મેં તે પાત્રોની વાર્તાનો એ ભાગ કહ્યો છે જેને કહેવાની જરૂર હતી અને જો કે આપણને પછીથી તેમની સાથે શું થયું એ ખબર નહીં પડે પણ હું જાણું છું કે તેઓ હજી પણ ક્યાંક છે અને તેમનું જીવન જીવે છે. હું જાણું છું કે મારા હવે પછીના પુસ્તક માટે હું બ્રિટિશ એશિયન ઇતિહાસ વિશે વધુ લખવા માગું છું અને ભવિષ્યમાં તે જ મારા લેખન માટેનું ધ્યેય રહેશે. હું હજી તેના વિશે વધારે ખુલાસો કરી શકું તેમ નથી - પરંતુ તે વાર્તા યુકેમાં, બીજા વિશ્વયુદ્ધના સમયે સેટ કરવામાં આવી છે અને ચાલીસીમાં થયેલી ભારતીય સ્વતંત્રતા ચળવળ વિષેની છે.



A Career in Acting

Interviews with Amit Shah and Kiran Shah

Amit Shah was recently nominated for a BAFTA award. The Editorial Team had an exciting conversation with him about his career.

Amit, thanks for being with us. Tell us a bit about yourself.

My grandparents were originally from Gujarat, and they then migrated to Kenya. My parents were born in Kenya and moved to the UK in the late 60s. They bought a house in Southgate, and we've lived on the same road ever since!

My dad became an accountant, and mum worked at Chase Farm Hospital. In the late 80s, my parents both joined the family coffee business. Most of my extended family members were also business owners. I was very much aware of that when I was growing up and it seemed to be the norm. It's accurate to say that a similar career path was expected of me.

So, where did the interest in acting come from?

Until the age of 15/16, Drama was part of the school curriculum. And I remember, just before we had to choose our A level subjects, I was performing an improv exercise in a drama class (improv or improvisation is a form of performance or story-telling that is unplanned and unrehearsed), and the rest of the class just started to laugh! I felt connected and free. That one lesson convinced me to choose Theatre Studies for my A levels - I believe I was the only

Asian on my course.

My drama teacher suggested I audition for the school play, and I got the lead role at the age of 17. My interest in drama as a career choice started developing from that point. I was specifically interested in film but wasn't convinced that a career was a possibility. I asked my parents if I could apply to study Drama at university. I'd say they were surprised, rather than concerned or worried but they were comforted by the fact that, at least, it was a degree!

So, smooth sailing from that point onwards?

Well, not entirely! I didn't achieve the A Level grades I was expected, and subsequently felt disappointed and to some extent looked down on by some extended family members. But nevertheless, I threw myself into the University course, keen to prove them wrong. When I wasn't studying, I was involved in the Drama Society and I was loving life.

One of my tutors then asked me if I had considered attending the drama school - LAMDA in West London. I attended the audition which did not go exactly as I had hoped but somehow, I was offered a place - I was once again the only Asian on the course.

One day, my sister, Seema, saw an advert in the Metro newspaper for Bombay Dreams, a musical playing in the West End. It was already in its first year of shows. I applied and was selected to audition. There was quite a bit of work to do. After an initial audition, there was a dance audition, then a singing one... 7 auditions later, I was offered the role! I was given permission to graduate early from LAMDA so that I could attend rehearsals.

Later, I found an agent and the next adventure was working for about two and a half years at the National Theatre. It was not clear to anyone where my career was going. My mum and dad were still in a surprised state. I would work with my parents during the day, then travel to the theatre to perform in the evening, and that was my routine. It was hard work, but I had some very special experiences at the National Theatre and learnt so much in that space of time. During those years, I was nominated for an Ian Charleston award.

How did you make the transition to work in film and TV?

Screen acting is a hard medium in which to find work. Profile and having a name are huge factors. I had to be really patient. There was not a lot of work for Asian actors in film and TV at the time but thankfully that has changed in the last 20 years.

From a technical perspective, TV is very different to theatre – you’re surrounded by so many factors – crew members, equipment – and you have to block all of that out, and just focus on playing the scene.

My biggest break was a part in a Steven Spielberg produced film, called the Hundred-Foot Journey, starring Helen Mirren. Om Puri (who I loved) was playing my Dad! I got on really well the Lasse Hallström, the film director. He really trusted me (and the other actors) and encouraged me to improvise during scenes and slowly the part became bigger and bigger. This role gave me a platform to build my profile for screen acting.

From Theatre to Movies, you must be kept very busy in those roles! What do you do when you’ve not got a role you’re working on?

Careers in theatre and film are not linear, like they may be in the sciences / business. The trajectory is very different for each individual, and you can experience big highs and lows. It is much easier when you have one role after another – you can build momentum but it’s not unusual to be out of work for a long time. During those times, I try to keep working on being creative, so that I’m ready for the next big audition.

Tell us about your role with the hit BBC show, Happy Valley.

Happy Valley is a crime drama TV series, set in Yorkshire. This has been the most wonderful experience. I play the role of a bumbling, somewhat-geeky pharmacist who is completely out of his depth when he gets involved in criminal activity that endangers him and his family. It has been quite a journey playing such a complicated character! I put myself forward for the Best Supporting Actor category as part of the BAFTA TV Awards, not expecting anything but somehow, I was nominated. I’ll never forget when I found out. I was filming a Netflix film, Bank of Dave: The Sequel, and I needed to step away from set for 5 minutes and take in this huge moment.



Amit, as Faisal Bhatti in *Happy Valley*

So, so proud of you, Amit! You've worked your way around this industry, without having someone in the family or community to guide you. Who were your role models throughout your career?

I had no mentor that I personally knew, and that was a real challenge for me. I was the first one doing this, and there was no one to turn to. I did feel isolated and alone, and had to push forward on my own. But I was inspired by other actors I watched on screen. Goodness Gracious Me was very popular, I looked up to Meera Syal, and I got to work with her later on. East is East was another great inspiration – I was blown away by Om Puri's performance – I thought he did a brilliant job of balancing the sweet spot between being funny and also portraying a character who was very dislikeable! It was quite an achievement to play his son a few years later. Beyond that, I really admire Aamir Khan, for his roles in films like Lagaan and Dil Chahta Hai. He's so different from anyone else in the Indian film industry. He's very naturalistic and has really reached for bigger projects. Lagaan

was so exciting – a crowd-pleasing underdog story! Aamir Khan knew someone in the cast of a Shakespeare play I was doing in 2004 and had come to see it. Once the show was over, I went up to him to tell him how much I admired his work. He invited me to join him and his friends after the show for a drink. The venue was showing a boxing match at the Athens Olympics, and I ended up explaining to Aamir Khan (the actor) that we were watching a match involving Amir Khan (the British boxer). Ultimately, it's the people I've worked with who have become my role models.

You mentioned that things are different now. What's your role in opening up this industry to others?

I do a lot of mentoring through my old university and other contacts. And I'm not the only one doing this – there are many more actors giving their time.

There is still some prejudice and fear amongst younger people to consider any kind of creative



In Mr Bates vs The Post Office

career. For me, a fixed schedule seemed very dull; I wanted a job that had variety and involved make-believe and playing games and being creative. I'd encourage younger people who have a passion or an interest to have a go. You'll find out quickly enough if it's not for you. But if it is, you may have an interesting and exciting career ahead of you.

What can someone start to do easily to get going in a career in the arts?

Firstly, keep doing something creative all the time – music, art, write a journal – but just keep at it.

Secondly, watch other people's work – a film, an episode as often as possible, and not just for the fun of it, but try to analyse it, and learn. Go to the theatre, cinema. Watch films in other languages (not just Indian languages), to really stretch out your imagination and creativity.

What would you say to people / families with a fear of the insecurity of this career path.

In a sense, it's good to recognise that you have someone around you who shows concern but a career as an actor could be exactly what you are looking for. We spend so much of our time working – more than family-life, or social activities. So, why not do something in which your heart is completely invested. It will improve who are as a family member, a partner, a friend. When I'm working, I'm content with my life – I'm doing something I love!

Having a career you love has so many mental health benefits. I know countless people who can't wait for the weekend, and then are too exhausted to enjoy those two days.

Sure, I might be less well off financially than a Hedge Fund Analyst but I don't care. I'd rather have the experience I've had. And by the way, you CAN make money as an actor – I have. I would encourage parents to give their children varied extra-curricular activities. Don't close doors, and give them the space to develop skills in whatever activity they show interest in. You don't know where it will all lead to.

It is also important to recognise that our generation is privileged to have this opportunity. Our previous generations would not have had this option.

Amit, some final words then. What are you most grateful for?

In terms of my career building, I have been in a very fortunate position; I hadn't even finished my education and I landed a 12-month contract. But, above all, I'm thankful that I didn't have pushy parents. Yes, they had concerns, but they trusted that I was hard-working no matter what. My parents gave me the space to find my way.





Kiran Shah

A celebration of Oshwals in Arts and Media would be incomplete without hearing from one of the most talented, humble and successful actors and stuntmen in Hollywood. According to the Guinness World Records, he is the world's shortest stuntman. Some of his most notable and famous works include Superman, Return of the Jedi, Titanic, Bullseye, The Lord of the Rings trilogy and The Hobbit. His most featured role was as Ginarrbrik in Chronicles of Narnia. In June 2024, Kiran Shah was honoured with an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours list for his contributions to the film industry.

Kiranbhai, tell us a little about your childhood and early years.

My childhood was a happy one. I was born in Nairobi in 1956 to Jethalalbhai and Muktaben Shah. I have an older brother, Hasmukh, and had another brother, Nilam, who passed away before I was born. I attended Visa Oshwal Primary School.

My growth was different from others; this made me both popular and a target for bullies. I had many friends to play with, including my brother

Hasmukh, who taught me cricket and football. I would spend time with my best friend, Pankaj; his family had a television, so I would visit their house often. His sisters taught me how to use the library and read from an early age. During long holidays, my mother, brother, and I would visit Mombasa to be with my grandmother, uncle, and his family. Growing up in Kenya was lovely!

At what point did you feel you might be a bit different to others around you? What was it like for your parents?

At the age of five or six, I realised I was different from other children. When I was six months old, my parents noticed that I was not growing like other babies. They took me to the hospital, but no issues were found. They sought opinions from other doctors and tried various treatments, to no avail. In 1970, at the age of fourteen, when we moved to London, my GP arranged for a thorough examination. It was discovered that I had low growth hormones and I was put on hormone injections. However, by the time I turned fifteen, I stopped growing, so I stopped taking the injections.

How did the journey into acting and being a stuntman come about?

It all began in Kenya when I was seven years old. I used to imitate my uncles' mannerisms and walking style, exaggerating them to be funny! Seeing people laugh with me made me think I could become an actor. Watching television at my friend's house and films in cinemas further fuelled my ambition to be like those actors. In 1973, while still in school in London, I picked up a magazine called Time Out. In the back of the magazine was an advert page with a specific section called the theatre board. I saw an advert for a Japanese theatre group called The Red Buddha Theatre Company. They were looking for several types of actors, from tall to small, thin to fat, mime artists to clowns, jugglers to dancers, etc. I called them and was invited to an audition. Later, I received a call confirming that I was in! In 1976, I ventured into films, with my first film being Candleshoe, which also marked the beginning of my stunt career.

Did you face discouraging comments or scepticism from family and peers when you decided to pursue acting?

I did not. My family has always been very encouraging and supportive of what I am doing. In fact, my nephew, Chaitan, has been my manager and agent for over twenty years!

What role did support networks or mentors play in your journey, especially considering the lack of precedent for success in the arts within the community?

The mentor who played a significant role in my journey was an actor named David Niven. In my first film, he was the lead actor. One morning on location, while we were filming, he approached me and said, "Young man, come with me." He took me aside and said, "Young man, you have a twinkle in your eyes. I see the hunger in your eyes that shows you really want to be in this industry. I can see you going further, so learn everything. Talk to people on set, find out



Kiran, as Main Elf in *There's Something in the Barn*

what they are doing. If you get a chance, look through the camera and see what the camera is capturing. Ask questions about lenses and their functions. Do not, as an actor or performer, retreat to your trailer between setups to take a nap. Observe what's happening around you and learn; you will go far." That was the best advice I ever received, and I am still learning. This industry is challenging, and you must constantly push yourself.

You've worked in some very well-known films. But, along your journey, did you face any unique obstacles or prejudices within the industry due to your background or cultural identity?

I have been very fortunate to have done all these films throughout my journey. I have not faced any obstacles or prejudices within the industry due to my background or cultural identity. However I can only speak for myself.

How do you think your life journey might have been if you were born in this day and age, where digital and AI solutions seem to be used so widely in the film industry?

My life journey would be exciting! Social media provides incredible opportunities for visibility and connection. The advancements in digital technology and AI open new creative possibilities. While CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) can make things look incredibly smooth, many directors are finding the perfect balance by combining practical effects with CGI, resulting in stunning visuals. The integration of AI offers new tools and techniques that can enhance storytelling and production, paving the way for innovative approaches in the industry.

You worked on the sets of some of the greatest blockbusters such as Star Wars & The Chronicles of Narnia; can you give us a glimpse of life on such enthralling sets. What would a typical day on set look like?

In almost all the movies I have done, my typical day starts at 4am or 5am in the morning, sitting in the makeup chair to have prosthetic makeup applied. This can take three to five or more hours. Around 8am, while I am still in the chair,

I have breakfast. Once the makeup is finished, I wait to go on set. When I get to the set, we go through a few walk-throughs of the setup for what we are doing. This allows the director and D.O.P. (Director of Photography) to see where the camera will be and for actors to rehearse their movements and dialogue. Then we wait for the cameras to be set up and the D.O.P. to light the set. Once that's done, we start filming takes. There is a lot of waiting from one setup to the next, so during this time, we play games, read books, or go through our lines. This continues throughout the day. We usually finish around 6pm in the evening, but sometimes it goes over by two or three hours. Then I go back into makeup to have it removed, which can take another two to four hours. By the time I get home, it is around 10pm or 11pm at night.

What is your most memorable moment in your professional career so far?

I've been fortunate to have many memorable moments in the industry. I have so many that I don't know where to start. When I'm talking to people, that's the best time for those stories to come out!

What career advice would you give to anyone who is less able and might feel constrained on their choice of career?

Keep pushing yourself, network whenever you can, and explore what's out there. Contact Chaitan; he knows the industry well and can always point you in the right direction and give you lots of ideas.

Any final words?

I am immensely proud and humbled to be recognised in the King's Birthday Honours for services to the film industry.

અભિનયમાં કારકિર્દી

અમિત શાહ અને કિરણ શાહ સાથે મુલાકાતો

ભાષાંતર: નીલમબેન જાધવ

અમિત શાહ

અમિત શાહને તાજેતરમાં બાફ્ટા એવોર્ડ માટે નામાંકિત કરવામાં આવ્યા હતા. સંપાદકીય ટીમે તેમની સાથે તેમની કારકિર્દી વિશે રોમાંચક વાતચીત કરી હતી.

અમિત, અમારી સાથે રહેવા બદલ આભાર. અમને તમારા વિશે થોડું કહો.

મારા દાદા દાદી મૂળ ગુજરાતના હતા, અને પછી તેઓ કેન્યા ગયા. મારા માતા-પિતાનો જન્મ કેન્યામાં થયો હતો અને 60ના દાયકાના અંત ભાગમાં તેઓ ચુકે ગયા હતા. તેઓએ સાઉથગેટમાં એક ઘર ખરીદ્યું, અને ત્યારથી અમે એ જ રસ્તા પર રહીએ છીએ!

મારા પિતા એકાઉન્ટન્ટ બન્યા, અને માતાએ ચેઝ ફાર્મ હોસ્પિટલમાં કામ કર્યું. ૮૦ ના દાયકાના અંતમાં, મારા માતાપિતા બંને ફેમિલી કોફીના વ્યવસાયમાં જોડાયા. મારા મોટા ભાગના પરિવારના સભ્યો પણ બિઝનેસ માલિકો હતા. જ્યારે હું મોટો થઈ રહ્યો હતો ત્યારે હું તેના વિશે ખૂબ જાગૃત હતો અને તે સામાન્ય લાગતું હતું. તે કહેવું સચોટ છે કે મારી પાસેથી સમાન કારકિર્દીની અપેક્ષા હતી.

તો અભિનયમાં રસ ક્યાંથી આવ્યો?

૧૫/૧૬ વર્ષની ઉંમર સુધી, નાટક શાળાના અભ્યાસક્રમનો ભાગ હતો. અને મને યાદ છે, અમારે અમારા A સ્તરના વિષયો પસંદ કરવાના હતા તે પહેલાં, હું એક નાટક વર્ગમાં ઇમ્પ્રુવ એક્સરસાઇઝ કરી રહ્યો હતો (ઇમ્પ્રુવ અથવા ઇમ્પ્રુવાઇઝેશન એ પ્રદર્શન અથવા વાર્તા કહેવાનું એક સ્વરૂપ છે જે બિનઆયોજિત અને અનહર્સલ છે), અને બાકીના વર્ગ

માત્ર હસવા લાગ્યો! મને કનેક્ટેડ અને ફી લાગ્યું. તે એક પાઠ્ય મને મારા A સ્તરો માટે થિયેટર સ્ટડીઝ પસંદ કરવા માટે ખાતરી આપી - હું માનું છું કે મારા અભ્યાસક્રમમાં હું એકમાત્ર એશિયન હતો.

મારા નાટકના શિક્ષકે મને શાળાના નાટક માટે ઓડિશન આપવાનું સૂચન કર્યું, અને મને 17 વર્ષની ઉંમરે મુખ્ય ભૂમિકા મળી. કારકિર્દીની પસંદગી તરીકે નાટકમાં મારી રુચિ તે સમયથી વિકસિત થવા લાગી. મને ખાસ કરીને ફિલ્મમાં રસ હતો પરંતુ મને ખાતરી નહોતી કે કારકિર્દીની શક્યતા છે. મેં મારા માતા-પિતાને પૂછ્યું કે શું હું યુનિવર્સિટીમાં ડ્રામાનો અભ્યાસ કરવા માટે અરજી કરી શકું? હું એમ કહું છું કે તેઓ ચિંતિત કે ચિંતિત થવાને બદલે આશ્ચર્યચકિત થયા હતા પરંતુ તેઓ એ હકીકતથી દિલાસો પામ્યા હતા કે, ઓછામાં ઓછું, તે એક ડિગ્રી હતી!

તેથી, તે બિંદુથી સરળ સફર?

સારું, સંપૂર્ણપણે નહીં! હું A લેવલના ગ્રેડ હાંસલ કરી શક્યો ન હતો જે મને અપેક્ષિત હતો, અને પછીથી નિરાશ થયો અને અમુક અંશે પરિવારના કેટલાક વિસ્તૃત સભ્યો દ્વારા નિરાશ થયો. પરંતુ તેમ છતાં, મેં મારી જાતને યુનિવર્સિટીના અભ્યાસક્રમમાં નાખી દીધી, તેમને ખોટા સાબિત કરવા આતુર. જ્યારે હું

ભણતો ન હતો, ત્યારે હું ડ્રામા સોસાયટીમાં સામેલ હતો અને હું જીવનને પ્રેમ કરતો હતો.

ત્યારે મારા એક શિક્ષકે મને પૂછ્યું કે શું મેં પશ્ચિમ લંડનમાં નાટક શાળા - LAMDA માં હાજરી આપવાનું વિચાર્યું છે. મેં ઓડિશનમાં હાજરી આપી હતી જે મારી આશા હતી તે બરાબર ન હતી પરંતુ કોઈક રીતે, મને એક સ્થાનની ઓફર કરવામાં આવી હતી - હું ફરી એકવાર કોર્સમાં એકમાત્ર એશિયન હતો.

એક દિવસ, મારી બહેન સીમાએ મેટ્રો અખબારમાં બોમ્બે ડ્રીમ્સની જાહેરાત જોઈ, જે વેસ્ટ એન્ડમાં મ્યુઝિકલ વગાડતું હતું. તે પહેલેથી જ તેના શોના પ્રથમ વર્ષમાં હતો. મેં અરજી કરી અને ઓડિશન માટે પસંદગી પામી. કરવા માટે ઘણું કામ હતું. પ્રારંભિક ઓડિશન પછી, એક ડાન્સ ઓડિશન હતું, પછી એક ગાયન... ૭ ઓડિશન પછી, મને રોલ ઓફર કરવામાં આવ્યો! મને LAMDAમાંથી વહેલા સ્નાતક થવાની પરવાનગી આપવામાં આવી હતી જેથી હું રિહર્સલમાં હાજરી આપી શકું.

પાછળથી, મને એક એજન્ટ મળ્યો અને પછીનું સાહસ લગભગ અઢી વર્ષ સુધી નેશનલ થિયેટરમાં કામ કરતો હતો. મારી કારકિર્દી ક્યાં જઈ રહી છે તે કોઈને સમજાતું ન હતું. મારા મમ્મી-પપ્પા હજુ પણ આશ્ચર્યચકિત સ્થિતિમાં હતા. હું દિવસ દરમિયાન મારા માતા-પિતા સાથે કામ કરીશ, પછી સાંજે પર્ફોર્મ કરવા માટે થિયેટરમાં જતો, અને તે મારો નિત્યક્રમ હતો. તે સખત મહેનત હતી, પરંતુ મને નેશનલ થિયેટરમાં કેટલાક ખૂબ જ વિશિષ્ટ અનુભવો થયા અને તે સમયની જગ્યામાં ઘણું શીખ્યા. તે વર્ષો દરમિયાન, હું ઇયાન ચાર્લસ્ટન એવોર્ડ માટે નામાંકિત થયો હતો.

ફિલ્મ અને ટીવીમાં કામ કરવા માટે તમે કેવી રીતે સંક્રમણ કર્યું?

સ્ક્રીન અભિનય એ કામ શોધવાનું મુશ્કેલ માધ્યમ છે. પ્રોફાઇલ અને નામ હોવું એ મોટા પરિબળો છે. મારે ખરેખર ધીરજ રાખવાની હતી. તે સમયે ફિલ્મ અને ટીવીમાં એશિયન કલાકારો માટે બહુ કામ નહોતું પરંતુ સદનસીબે તે છેલ્લા 20 વર્ષમાં બદલાઈ ગયું છે.

ટેક્નિકલ પરિપ્રેક્ષ્યમાં, ટીવી થિયેટરથી ખૂબ જ અલગ છે - તમે ઘણા પરિબળોથી ઘેરાયેલા છો - ફૂ સભ્યો, સાધનો - અને તમારે તે બધાને અવરોધિત કરવા પડશે, અને ફક્ત દ્રશ્ય રમવા પર ધ્યાન કેન્દ્રિત કરવું પડશે.

મારો સૌથી મોટો વિરામ સ્ટીવન સ્પીલબર્ગ નિર્મિત ફિલ્મમાં ભાગ હતો, જેને *હર્ફ્ડ-ફૂટ જર્ની કહેવાય છે*, જેમાં હેલેન મિરેન અભિનીત હતી. ઓમ પુરી (જેને હું પ્રેમ કરતો હતો) મારા પપ્પાની ભૂમિકા ભજવી રહ્યો હતો! હું ખરેખર સારી રીતે લાસ્ટે હોલસ્ટ્રૉ ઍમ, ફિલ્મ નિર્દેશક પર પહોંચી ગયો. તેણે ખરેખર મારા પર વિશ્વાસ કર્યો (અને અન્ય કલાકારો) અને મને દ્રશ્યો દરમિયાન ઇમ્પ્રુવાઇઝ કરવા પ્રોત્સાહિત કર્યા અને ધીમે ધીમે ભાગ મોટો અને મોટો થતો ગયો. આ ભૂમિકાએ મને સ્ક્રીન એક્ટિંગ માટે મારી પ્રોફાઇલ બનાવવાનું પ્લેટફોર્મ આપ્યું.

થિયેટરથી લઈને મૂવીઝ સુધી, તમારે તે ભૂમિકાઓમાં ખૂબ જ વ્યસ્ત રહેવું જોઈએ! જ્યારે તમે જે રોલ પર કામ કરી રહ્યાં છો તે ન મળે ત્યારે તમે શું કરો છો?

થિયેટર અને ફિલ્મમાં કારકિર્દી રેખીય નથી, જેમ કે તે વિજ્ઞાન/વ્યવસાયમાં હોઈ શકે છે. દરેક વ્યક્તિ માટે માર્ગ ખૂબ જ અલગ છે, અને તમે મોટા ઊંચા અને નીચા અનુભવ કરી શકો છો. જ્યારે તમારી પાસે એક પછી એક ભૂમિકા હોય ત્યારે તે ખૂબ સરળ છે - તમે ગતિ વધારી શકો છો પરંતુ લાંબા સમય સુધી કામથી દૂર રહેવું અસામાન્ય નથી. તે સમય દરમિયાન, હું

સર્જનાત્મક બનીને કામ કરવાનું ચાલુ રાખવાનો પ્રયત્ન કરું છું, જેથી હું આગામી મોટા ઓડિશન માટે તૈયાર છું.

બીબીસીના હિટ શો હેપ્પી વેલી સાથેની તમારી ભૂમિકા વિશે અમને કહો.

હેપ્પી વેલી એ કાઈમ ડ્રામા ટીવી શ્રેણી છે, જે યોર્કશાયરમાં સેટ છે. આ સૌથી અદ્ભુત અનુભવ રહ્યો છે. હું એક બબલિંગ, કંઈક અંશે ગીકી ફાર્માસિસ્ટની ભૂમિકા ભજવું છું જે જ્યારે તેને અને તેના પરિવારને જોખમમાં મૂકતી ગુનાહિત પ્રવૃત્તિમાં સામેલ થાય છે ત્યારે તેની ઊડાઈથી સંપૂર્ણપણે બહાર હોય છે. આટલું જટિલ પાત્ર ભજવવું તે ખૂબ જ પ્રવાસ છે! BAFTA ટીવી પુરસ્કારોના ભાગ રૂપે મેં મારી જાતને શ્રેષ્ઠ સહાયક અભિનેતાની કેટેગરીમાં આગળ ધપાવી છે, કંઈપણ અપેક્ષા ન રાખી પરંતુ કોઈક રીતે, હું નોમિનેટ થઈ ગયો. જ્યારે મને ખબર પડી ત્યારે હું ક્યારેય ભૂલીશ નહીં. હું નેટફ્લિક્સ ફિલ્મનું શૂટિંગ કરી રહ્યો હતો, અને મારે ૫ મિનિટ માટે સેટ પરથી દૂર જઈને આ વિશાળ ક્ષણનો લાભ લેવાની જરૂર હતી.

તેથી, તમારા પર ગર્વ છે, અમિતા! તમે આ ઉદ્યોગની આસપાસ તમારી રીતે કામ કર્યું છે, કુટુંબ અથવા સમુદાયમાં તમને માર્ગદર્શન આપવા માટે કોઈ ન હોય. તમારી સમગ્ર કારકિર્દી દરમિયાન તમારા રોલ મોડલ કોણ હતા?

મારી પાસે કોઈ માર્ગદર્શક ન હતો જેને હું અંગત રીતે જાણતો હતો, અને તે મારા માટે એક વાસ્તવિક પડકાર હતો. હું આ કરનાર પ્રથમ વ્યક્તિ હતો, અને તેની તરફ વળવા માટે કોઈ નહોતું. હું એકલતા અને એકલતા અનુભવતો હતો, અને મારી જાતે જ આગળ વધવું પડ્યું હતું. પરંતુ હું સ્ક્રીન પર જોયેલા અન્ય કલાકારોથી પ્રેરિત હતો. ગુડનેસ ગ્રેશિયસ મીખૂબ જ લોકપ્રિય હતી, મેં મીરા સ્યાલ તરફ જોયું અને

પછીથી મને તેની સાથે કામ કરવાનું મળ્યું. ઈસ્ટ ઈટ ઈસ્ટ એ બીજી એક મહાન પ્રેરણા હતી – હું ઓમ પુરીના અભિનયથી પ્રભાવિત થઈ ગયો હતો – મને લાગ્યું કે તેણે રમુજી હોવા અને ખૂબ જ નાપસંદ ન હોય તેવા પાત્રને દર્શાવવા વચ્ચેના મધુર સ્થાનને સંતુલિત કરવાનું એક તેજસ્વી કામ કર્યું છે! થોડા વર્ષો પછી તેમના પુત્રની ભૂમિકા ભજવવી તે એક સિદ્ધિ હતી.

લગાન અને દિલ જેવી ફિલ્મોમાં તેની ભૂમિકાઓ માટે ખરેખર પ્રશંસા કરું છું. ચાહતા હૈ. તે ભારતીય ફિલ્મ ઈન્ડસ્ટ્રીમાં અન્ય કોઈ કરતાં ઘણો અલગ છે. તે ખૂબ જ પ્રાકૃતિક છે અને ખરેખર મોટા પ્રોજેક્ટ્સ માટે પહોંચી ગયો છે. લગાન ખૂબ જ રોમાંચક હતી – ભીડને આનંદ આપનારી અન્ડરડોગ વાર્તા! આમિર ખાન 2004માં શેક્સપિયરના એક નાટકના કલાકારમાં કોઈને ઓળખતો હતો અને તે જોવા આવ્યો હતો. એકવાર શો પૂરો થયા પછી, હું તેના કામની કેટલી પ્રશંસા કરું છું તે કહેવા માટે હું તેની પાસે ગયો. તેણે શો પછી મને તેની સાથે અને તેના મિત્રો સાથે ડ્રિંક માટે આમંત્રિત કર્યા. સ્થળ એથેન્સ ઓલિમ્પિકમાં બોક્સિંગ મેચ બતાવી રહ્યું હતું, અને મેં આમિર ખાન (અભિનેતા)ને સમજાવ્યું કે અમે અમીર ખાન (બ્રિટિશ બોક્સર) સાથે સંકળાયેલી મેચ જોઈ રહ્યા છીએ. આખરે, મેં જેની સાથે કામ કર્યું છે તે લોકો જ મારા રોલ મોડલ બન્યા છે.

તમે ઉલ્લેખ કર્યો છે કે હવે વસ્તુઓ અલગ છે. આ ઉદ્યોગને અન્ય લોકો માટે ખોલવામાં તમારી ભૂમિકા શું છે?

હું મારી જૂની યુનિવર્સિટી અને અન્ય સંપર્કો દ્વારા ઘણું માર્ગદર્શન કરું છું. અને આ માત્ર હું જ નથી કરી રહ્યો - બીજા ઘણા કલાકારો છે જે તેમનો સમય આપી રહ્યા છે.

કોઈપણ પ્રકારની સર્જનાત્મક કારકિર્દીને ધ્યાનમાં લેવા માટે યુવાન લોકોમાં હજુ પણ થોડો પૂર્વગ્રહ અને ડર છે. મારા માટે, એક નિશ્ચિત સમયપત્રક ખૂબ જ નીરસ લાગતું હતું; મને એવી નોકરી જોઈતી હતી જેમાં વિવિધતા હોય અને તેમાં મેક-બિલિવ અને ગેમ્સ રમી અને સર્જનાત્મક બનવું હોય. હું એવા યુવાન લોકોને પ્રોત્સાહિત કરીશ કે જેમની પાસે જુસ્સો હોય અથવા રસ હોય. જો તે તમારા માટે ન હોય તો તમે ઝડપથી શોધી શકશો. પરંતુ જો તે છે, તો તમારી આગળ એક રસપ્રદ અને ઉત્તેજક કારકિર્દી હોઈ શકે છે.

આદેસમાં કારકિર્દી બનાવવા માટે કોઈ વ્યક્તિ સરળતાથી શું કરવાનું શરૂ કરી શકે છે?

સૌપ્રથમ, હંમેશા કંઈક સર્જનાત્મક કરતા રહો - સંગીત, કલા, જર્નલ લખો, પરંતુ ફક્ત તેને ચાલુ રાખો.

બીજું, અન્ય લોકોનું કામ જુઓ - એક ફિલ્મ, એક એપિસોડ શક્ય તેટલી વાર, અને માત્ર તેના આનંદ માટે જ નહીં, પરંતુ તેનું વિશ્લેષણ કરવાનો પ્રયાસ કરો અને શીખો. થિયેટર, સિનેમા પર જાઓ. તમારી કલ્પના અને સર્જનાત્મકતાને ખરેખર વિસ્તારવા માટે અન્ય ભાષાઓમાં (માત્ર ભારતીય ભાષાઓ જ નહીં) ફિલ્મો જુઓ.

કારકિર્દીના આ માર્ગની અસલામતીનો ડર ધરાવતા લોકો/પરિવારોને તમે શું કહેશો.

એક અર્થમાં, તે ઓળખવું સાડું છે કે તમારી આસપાસ કોઈ એવી વ્યક્તિ છે જે ચિંતા બતાવે છે પરંતુ એક અભિનેતા તરીકેની કારકિર્દી તમે જે શોધી રહ્યા છો તે જ હોઈ શકે છે. અમે અમારો ઘણો સમય કામમાં વિતાવીએ છીએ - પારિવારિક જીવન અથવા સામાજિક પ્રવૃત્તિઓ કરતાં વધુ. તો, શા માટે એવું ન કરો કે જેમાં તમારું હૃદય સંપૂર્ણપણે રોકાયેલું હોય. તે કુટુંબના સભ્ય, ભાગીદાર, મિત્ર તરીકે કોણ છે તે

સુધારશે. જ્યારે હું કામ કરું છું, ત્યારે હું મારા જીવનથી સંતુષ્ટ છું - હું એવું કંઈક કરું છું જે મને ગમે છે!

તમને ગમતી કારકિર્દી હોવાના ઘણા માનસિક સ્વાસ્થ્ય લાભો છે. હું એવા અસંખ્ય લોકોને જાણું છું જેઓ વીકએન્ડની રાહ જોઈ શકતા નથી, અને પછી તે બે દિવસનો આનંદ માણવા માટે ખૂબ થાકી ગયા છે.

ચોક્કસ, હું હેજ ફંડ વિશ્લેષક કરતાં આર્થિક રીતે ઓછો સારો હોઈ શકું છું પરંતુ મને તેની પરવા નથી. મને જે અનુભવ થયો છે તે કરવાને બદલે હું ઈચ્છું છું. અને માર્ગ દ્વારા, તમે એક અભિનેતા તરીકે પૈસા કમાઈ શકો છો - મારી પાસે છે.

હું માતાપિતાને તેમના બાળકોને વિવિધ અભ્યાસેતર પ્રવૃત્તિઓ આપવા પ્રોત્સાહિત કરીશ. દરવાજો બંધ કરશો નહીં, અને તેઓ જે પણ પ્રવૃત્તિમાં રસ દાખવે છે તેમાં કૌશલ્ય વિકસાવવા માટે તેમને જગ્યા આપો. તમે જાણતા નથી કે તે બધું ક્યાં લઈ જશે.

આપણી પેઢીને આ તક મળવાનો વિશેષાધિકાર છે તે ઓળખવું પણ જરૂરી છે. અમારી અગાઉની પેઢીઓ પાસે આ વિકલ્પ ન હોત.

અમિત, પછી કેટલાક અંતિમ શબ્દો. તમે શેના માટે સૌથી વધુ આભારી છો?

મારી કારકિર્દીના નિર્માણની દ્રષ્ટિએ, હું ખૂબ જ નસીબદાર સ્થિતિમાં રહ્યો છું; મેં મારું શિક્ષણ પણ પૂરું કર્યું ન હતું અને મેં ૧૨ મહિનાનો કરાર કર્યો.

પરંતુ, સૌથી ઉપર, હું આભારી છું કે મારી પાસે દબાણયુક્ત માતાપિતા નથી. હા, તેઓને ચિંતા હતી, પરંતુ તેઓને વિશ્વાસ હતો કે હું ગમે તેટલી મહેનત કરું છું. મારા માતા-પિતાએ મને માર્ગ શોધવા માટે જગ્યા આપી.

કિરણ શાહ

હોલીવુડના સૌથી પ્રતિભાશાળી, નમ્ર અને સફળ અભિનેતા અને સ્ટેટસમેનમાંથી એકની વાત સાંભળ્યા વિના કલા અને મીડિયામાં ઓશવાલોની ઉજવણી અધૂરી ગણાય. તે બીજું કોઈ નહીં પણ કિરણ શાહ છે, જેને પ્રેમથી નાની કિરણ તરીકે પણ ઓળખવામાં આવે છે. ગિનેસ વર્લ્ડ રેકૉર્ડ્સ અનુસાર, તે વિશ્વનો સૌથી ટૂંકો સ્ટેટમેન છે. તેમની કેટલીક સૌથી નોંધપાત્ર અને પ્રસિદ્ધ કૃતિઓમાં સુપરમેન, સુપરમેન II, રિટર્ન ઓફ ધ જેડી, ટાઇટેનિક, બ્રેવહાર્ટ, બુલસી, ધ લોર્ડ ઓફ ધ રિંગ્સ અને ધ હોબિટનો સમાવેશ થાય છે. કોનિકલ્સ ઓફ નાર્નિયામાં ગિનારબ્રીક તરીકેની તેમની સૌથી નોંધપાત્ર ભૂમિકા હતી. જૂન ૨૦૨૪ માં, કિરણ શાહને ફિલ્મ ઉદ્યોગમાં તેમના યોગદાન માટે કિંગ્સ બર્થડે ઓનર્સ લિસ્ટમાં MBE થી સન્માનિત કરવામાં આવ્યા હતા.

ઓશવાલ ન્યૂઝની ટીમે કિરણ શાહ સાથે ફિલ્મ ઉદ્યોગમાં તેમના જીવન વિશે માહિતી મેળવી હતી. નીચે તેમની વિચારપ્રેરક અને પ્રેરણાદાયી યાત્રા વિશે વાંચો.

કિરણભાઈ, તમારા બાળપણ અને શરૂઆતના વર્ષો વિશે થોડું જણાવો.

મારું બાળપણ સુખી હતું. મારો જન્મ નૈરોબીમાં 1956માં જેઠાલાલભાઈ અને મુક્તાબેન શાહને ત્યાં થયો હતો. મારો એક મોટો ભાઈ હસમુખ છે , અને મારો બીજો ભાઈ નીલમ હતો, જે મારા જન્મ પહેલા ગુજરી ગયો હતો. હું વિસા ઓશવાલ પ્રાથમિક શાળામાં ભણ્યો હતો.

મારી વૃદ્ધિ અન્ય કરતા અલગ હતી, જેણે મને લોકપ્રિય બનાવ્યો અને ધમકાવનારાઓ માટે લક્ષ્ય બનાવ્યું. મારી સાથે રમવા માટે ઘણા મિત્રો હતા, જેમાં મારા ભાઈ હસમુખનો પણ સમાવેશ થાય છે, જેમણે મને ક્રિકેટ અને ફૂટબોલ શીખવ્યું હતું. હું મારા ખાસ મિત્ર પંકજ સાથે સમય વિતાવીશ, તેના પરિવાર પાસે ટેલિવિઝન હતું, તેથી હું વારંવાર તેમના ઘરે જતો. તેની બહેનોએ મને નાનપણથી જ પુસ્તકાલયનો ઉપયોગ અને વાંચન કેવી રીતે કરવું તે શીખવ્યું. લાંબી રજાઓ દરમિયાન, અમે મારા દાદી, કાકા અને તેમના પરિવાર સાથે મોમ્બાસાની મુલાકાત લેતા. કેન્યામાં ઉછરવું સુંદર હતું.

કયા સમયે તમને લાગ્યું કે તમે તમારી આસપાસના અન્ય લોકો કરતા થોડા અલગ હોઈ શકો છો? તમારા માતાપિતા માટે તે કેવું હતું?

પાંચ કે છ વર્ષની ઉંમરે, મને સમજાયું કે હું અન્ય બાળકો કરતાં અલગ છું. જ્યારે હું છ મહિનાનો હતો, ત્યારે મારા માતાપિતાએ નોંધ્યું કે હું અન્ય બાળકોની જેમ વધતો નથી. તેઓ મને હોસ્પિટલમાં લઈ ગયા, પરંતુ કોઈ સમસ્યા મળી ન હતી. તેઓએ અન્ય ડોક્ટરો પાસેથી અભિપ્રાય માંગ્યા અને વિવિધ સારવારો અજમાવી, કોઈ નિષ્ફિત. ૧૯૭૦ માં, ચૌદ વર્ષની ઉંમરે, જ્યારે અમે લંડન ગયા, ત્યારે મારા GPએ સંપૂર્ણ તપાસની વ્યવસ્થા કરી. એવું જાણવા મળ્યું કે મારામાં વૃદ્ધિના હોર્મોન્સ ઓછા છે અને મને હોર્મોનના ઇન્જેક્શન આપવામાં આવ્યા હતા. જો કે, હું પંદર વર્ષનો થયો ત્યાં સુધીમાં મેં વૃદ્ધિ કરવાનું બંધ કરી દીધું, તેથી મેં ઇન્જેક્શન લેવાનું બંધ કરી દીધું.

અભિનય અને સ્ટેટમેન બનવાની સફર કેવી રીતે શરૂ થઈ?

કેન્યામાં હું સાત વર્ષનો હતો ત્યારે અભિનય કરવાનું મારું સપનું શરૂ થયું હતું. હું મારા કાકાઓની રીતભાત અને ચાલવાની શૈલીનું અનુકરણ કરતો, તેમને રમુજી કહીને અતિશયોક્તિ કરતો. લોકોને મારી સાથે હસતા જોઈને મને લાગ્યું કે હું એક્ટર બની શકીશ. મારા મિત્રના ઘરે ટીવી અને સિનેમાઘરોમાં ફિલ્મો જોવી એ કલાકારો જેવા બનવાની મારી મહત્વાકાંક્ષાને વધુ બળ આપે છે. ૧૯૭૩ માં, લંડનમાં સ્કૂલમાં હતો ત્યારે, મેં ટાઈમ આઉટ નામનું મેગેઝિન લીધું. મેગેઝિનના પાછળના ભાગમાં એક જાહેરાતનું પૃષ્ઠ હતું, ત્યાં ખાસ કરીને થિયેટર બોર્ડ નામનો વિભાગ હતો. મેં ધ રેડ બુક્ક થિયેટર કંપની નામના જાપાની થિયેટર જૂથની જાહેરાત જોઈ. તેઓ વિવિધ પ્રકારના કલાકારો શોધી રહ્યા હતા, જેમાં ઊંચાથી નાના સુધી, પાતળાથી લઈને જાડા સુધી, માઇમ કલાકારોથી લઈને જોકરો સુધી, જાદુગરથી લઈને નર્તકો સુધી, વગેરે. મેં તેમને બોલાવ્યા અને ઓડિશન માટે આમંત્રણ આપવામાં આવ્યું. પાછળથી, મને એક ફોન આવ્યો કે હું અંદર છું. ૧૯૭૬ માં, મેં ફિલ્મોમાં ઝંપલાવ્યું, જેમાં મારી પ્રથમ ફિલ્મ કેન્ડલશો હતી, જેણે મારી સ્ટેટ કારકિર્દીની શરૂઆત પણ કરી.

જ્યારે તમે અભિનય કરવાનું નક્કી કર્યું ત્યારે શું તમને કુટુંબ અને સાથીદારો તરફથી નિરાશાજનક ટિપ્પણીઓ અથવા શંકાનો સામનો કરવો પડ્યો હતો?

જ્યારે મેં અભિનય કરવાનું નક્કી કર્યું ત્યારે મને કુટુંબ અથવા સાથીદારો તરફથી કોઈ નિરાશાજનક ટિપ્પણી અથવા શંકાનો સામનો કરવો પડ્યો નથી. હું જે કરું છું તે માટે મારો પરિવાર હંમેશા ખૂબ પ્રોત્સાહિત અને સહાયક રહ્યો છે. હકીકતમાં, મારો ભત્રીજો ચૈતન વીસ વર્ષથી મારો મેનેજર અને એજન્ટ છે.

તમારી મુસાફરીમાં સપોર્ટ નેટવર્ક્સ અથવા માર્ગદર્શકોએ શું ભૂમિકા ભજવી, ખાસ કરીને સમુદાયમાં કળામાં સફળતા માટેના દાખલાના અભાવને ધ્યાનમાં રાખીને?

નિવેન નામનો અભિનેતા હતો. મારી પહેલી ફિલ્મમાં તે લીડ એક્ટર હતો. એક સવારે લોકેશન પર, જ્યારે અમે શૂટિંગ કરી રહ્યા હતા, ત્યારે તે મારી પાસે આવ્યો અને કહ્યું, "યુવાન, મારી સાથે આવ." તેણે મને એક બાજુએ લઈ જઈને કહ્યું, "યુવાન, તારી આંખોમાં ચમક છે. મને તારી આંખોમાં ભૂખ દેખાય છે જે દર્શાવે છે કે તું ખરેખર આ ઈન્ડસ્ટ્રીમાં આવવા માંગે છે. હું તને આગળ જતાં જોઈ શકું છું, તેથી બધું શીખો. સાથે વાત કરો. સેટ પરના લોકો, જો તમને તક મળે, તો કેમેરા દ્વારા જુઓ અને જુઓ કે કેમેરા લેન્સ અને તેમના કાર્યો વિશે પ્રશ્નો પૂછે છે નિદ્રા લેવા માટે સેટઅપની વચ્ચે જુઓ કે તમારી આસપાસ શું થઈ રહ્યું છે અને તમે ખૂબ આગળ વધશો." તે મને મળેલી શ્રેષ્ઠ સલાહ હતી, અને હું હજુ પણ શીખી રહ્યો છું. આ ઉદ્યોગ પડકારજનક છે, અને તમારે સતત તમારી જાતને દબાણ કરવું પડશે.

તમે ઘણી જાણીતી ફિલ્મોમાં કામ કર્યું છે. પરંતુ, તમારી મુસાફરી દરમિયાન, શું તમે તમારી પૃષ્ઠભૂમિ અથવા સાંસ્કૃતિક ઓળખને કારણે ઉદ્યોગમાં કોઈ વિશિષ્ટ અવરોધો અથવા પૂર્વગ્રહોનો સામનો કર્યો હતો?

મારા સમગ્ર પ્રવાસ દરમિયાન આ બધી ફિલ્મો કરવા બદલ હું ખૂબ જ ભાગ્યશાળી રહ્યો છું. મારી પૃષ્ઠભૂમિ અથવા સાંસ્કૃતિક ઓળખને કારણે મેં ઉદ્યોગમાં કોઈપણ અવરોધો અથવા પૂર્વગ્રહોનો સામનો કર્યો નથી. જો કે હું ફક્ત મારા માટે જ બોલી શકું છું.

જેઓ ઓછી સક્ષમ હોય અને તેમની કારકિર્દીની પસંદગીમાં અવરોધ અનુભવતા હોય તેમને તમે કઈ કારકિર્દી સલાહ આપશો?

હું કોઈને પણ સલાહ આપી શકું છું કે તમે તમારી જાતને દબાણ કરતા રહો, જ્યારે પણ તમે કરી શકો ત્યારે નેટવર્ક કરો અને ત્યાં શું છે તેનું અન્વેષણ કરો. ચૈતન્યનો સંપર્ક કરો; તે ઉદ્યોગને સારી રીતે જાણે છે અને હંમેશા તમને યોગ્ય દિશામાં નિર્દેશ કરી શકે છે અને તમને ઘણા બધા વિચારો પ્રદાન કરી શકે છે.

જો તમે આ દિવસ અને યુગમાં જન્મ્યા હોત, જ્યાં ડિજિટલ અને એઆઈ સોલ્યુશન્સનો ફિલ્મ ઉદ્યોગમાં આટલો બહોળો ઉપયોગ થતો જણાય છે, તો તમારી જીવનયાત્રા કેવી હશે એવું તમને લાગે છે?

જો હું આ દિવસે અને યુગમાં જન્મ્યો હોત, તો મારી જીવન યાત્રા રોમાંચક હશે. સામાજિક મીડિયા દૃશ્યતા અને જોડાણ માટે અકલ્પનીય તકો પૂરી પાડે છે. ડિજિટલ ટેકનોલોજી અને AIની પ્રગતિ નવી સર્જનાત્મક શક્યતાઓ ખોલે છે. જ્યારે CG વસ્તુઓને અદ્ભુત રીતે સરળ બનાવી શકે છે, ઘણા નિર્દેશકો CG સાથે વ્યવહારુ અસરોને જોડીને સંપૂર્ણ સંતુલન શોધી રહ્યા છે, જેના પરિણામે અદ્ભૂત દ્રશ્યો છે. AI નું એકીકરણ નવા સાધનો અને તકનીકો પ્રદાન કરે છે જે વાર્તા કહેવા અને ઉત્પાદનને વધારી શકે છે, જે ઉદ્યોગમાં નવીન અભિગમો માટે માર્ગ મોકળો કરે છે.

તમારી વ્યાવસાયિક કારકિર્દીમાં અત્યાર સુધીની તમારી સૌથી યાદગાર ક્ષણ કઈ છે? કૃપા કરીને શા માટે શેર કરો.

હું ઇન્સ્ટ્રીમાં ઘણી યાદગાર ક્ષણો માટે ભાગ્યશાળી રહ્યો છું. મારી પાસે ઘણા બધા છે કે મને ખબર નથી કે ક્યાંથી શરૂઆત કરવી. જ્યારે હું લોકો સાથે વાત

કરું છું, ત્યારે તે વાર્તાઓ બહાર આવવાનો શ્રેષ્ઠ સમય છે!

જેમ કે તમે સ્ટાર વોર્સ અને ધ ક્રોનિકલ્સ ઓફ નાર્નિયા જેવા કેટલાક મહાન બ્લોકબસ્ટરના સેટ પર કામ કર્યું છે, શું તમે અમને આવા રોમાંચક સેટ પર જીવનની ઝલક આપી શકો છો. સેટ પરનો સામાન્ય દિવસ કેવો દેખાશે?

મારો સામાન્ય દિવસ કૃત્રિમ મેકઅપ માટે મેકઅપ ખુરશીમાં બેસીને સવારે ૪ કે ૫ વાગ્યે શરૂ થાય છે. આમાં ત્રણથી પાંચ કે તેથી વધુ કલાક લાગી શકે છે. સવારે ૮ વાગ્યાની આસપાસ, જ્યારે હું હજી પણ ખુરશીમાં છું, ત્યારે હું નાસ્તો કરું છું. એકવાર મેકઅપ પૂર્ણ થઈ જાય, હું સેટ પર જવા માટે રાહ જોઉં છું. જ્યારે હું સેટ પર પહોંચું છું, ત્યારે અમે જે કરીએ છીએ તેના માટે અમે સેટઅપના થોડા વોક-થ્રુમાંથી પસાર થઈએ છીએ. આનાથી દિગ્દર્શક અને ડીઓપી કેમેરા ક્યાં હશે તે જોવાની અને કલાકારો માટે તેમની હિલચાલ અને સંવાદનું રિહર્સલ કરવા દે છે. પછી અમે કેમેરા સેટ થવાની અને DOP સેટને અજવાળવાની રાહ જોઈએ છીએ. એકવાર તે થઈ જાય, અમે ફિલ્માંકન શરૂ કરીએ છીએ. એક સેટઅપથી બીજા સેટઅપ સુધી ઘણી રાહ જોવી પડે છે, તેથી આ સમય દરમિયાન, અમે રમતો રમીએ છીએ, પુસ્તકો વાંચીએ છીએ અથવા અમારી લાઇનમાંથી પસાર થઈએ છીએ. અમે સામાન્ય રીતે સાંજે ૬ વાગ્યાની આસપાસ સમાપ્ત કરીએ છીએ, પરંતુ કેટલીકવાર તે બે કે ત્રણ કલાકથી વધુ થઈ જાય છે. પછી હું તેને દૂર કરવા માટે મેકઅપમાં પાછો જાઉં છું, જેમાં બીજા બેથી ચાર કલાકનો સમય લાગી શકે છે. હું ઘરે પહોંચું ત્યાં સુધીમાં લગભગ ૧૦ કે ૧૧ વાગ્યાનો સમય થઈ ગયો હોય છે.

કિરણભાઈના અંતિમ શબ્દો: ફિલ્મ ઉદ્યોગની સેવાઓ માટે કિંગના જન્મદિવસના સન્માનમાં ઓળખાવા બદલ મને ખૂબ જ ગર્વ અને નમ્રતા છે.