

BIRADARI

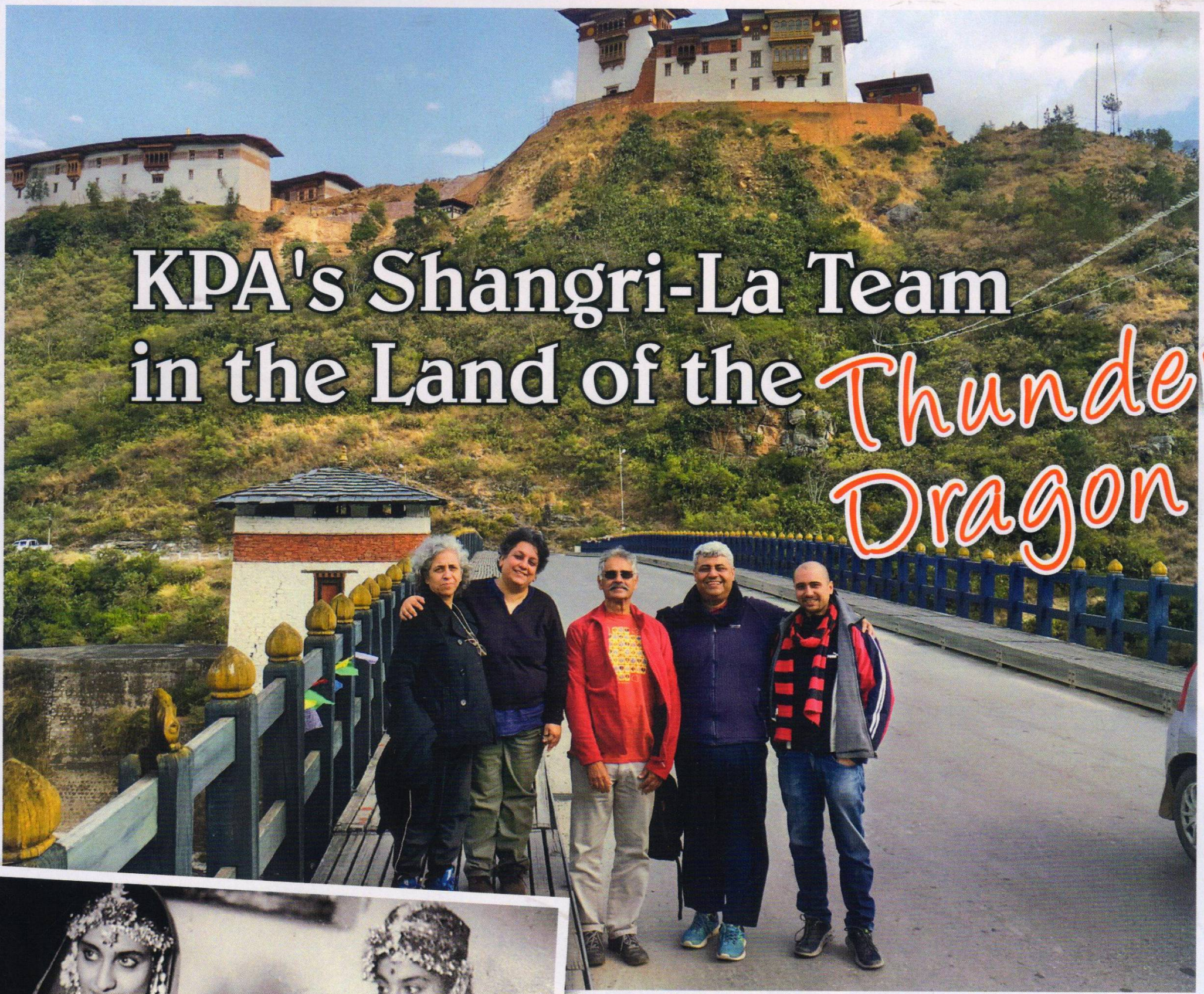


Issue: A Biannual Newsletter

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KPA's Shangri-La Team in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

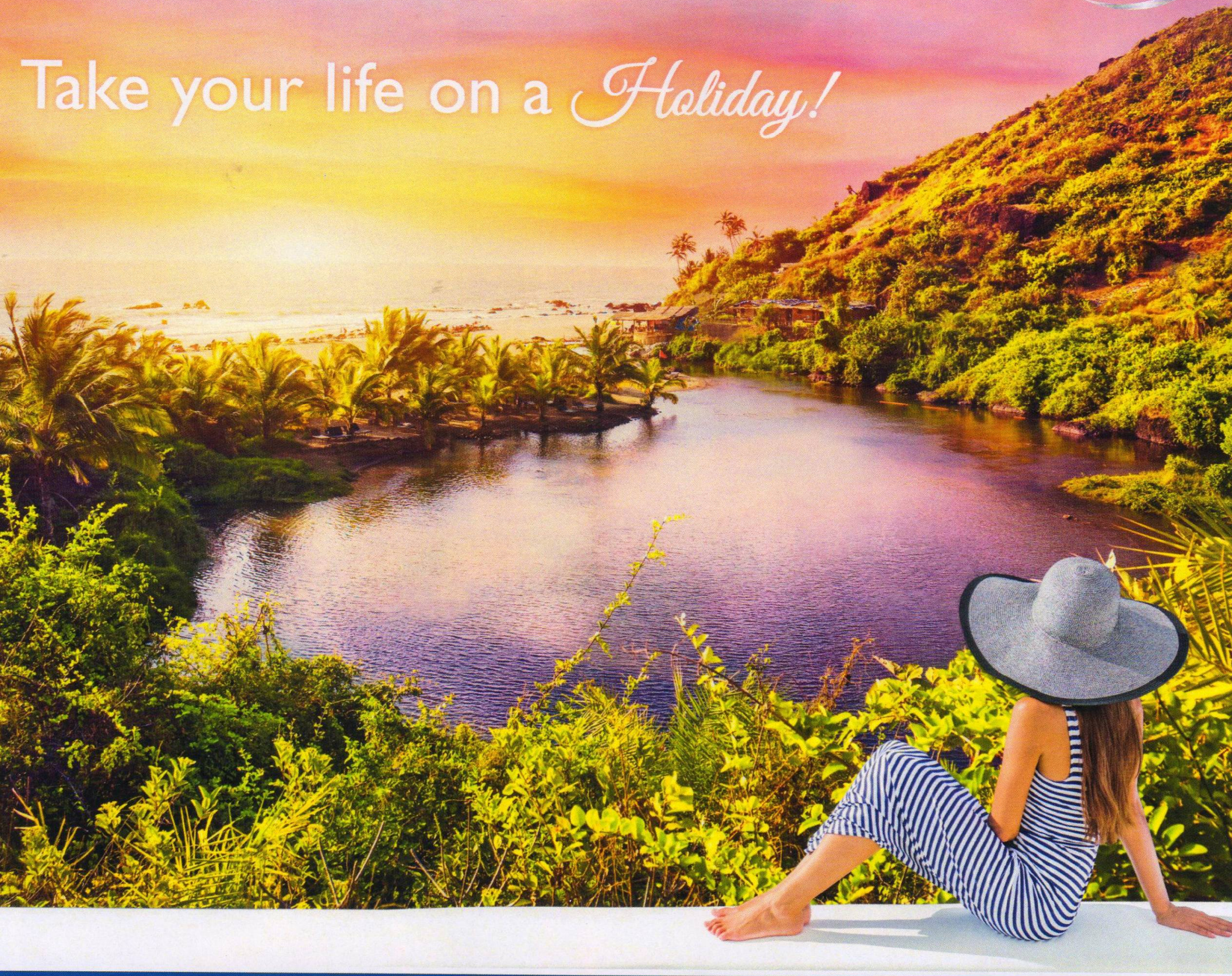


Vintage
Studio:
Beautiful
Memories

- Panjeeri, the Way Ammaji Made it!
- Poets' Pages

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Col Valmiki Katju

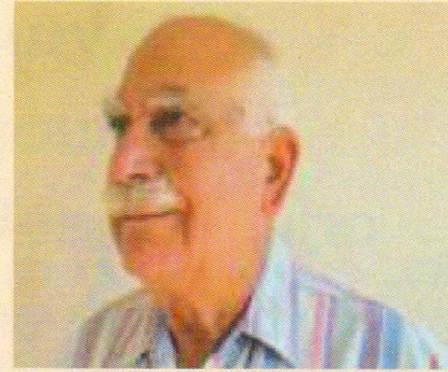
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Mrs Swaroop Dar

FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR EMERITUS



The KPA Biradari is indeed fortunate to be enjoying the hospitality of Mr Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, who has been providing us the wonderful, spacious lawn of his residence as the venue to hold our functions. We are also grateful to our president Vivek Kaul to have agreed to take on the responsibility for another two-year term in leading us and making our Association more robust while simultaneously increasing our membership.

The Biradari has joined in various outdoor activities like picnics as well as visits to places of tourist interest both within the country and abroad, and we shall be grateful for suggestions for such excursions in the future.

Those members who have a talent for putting things in writing are requested to contribute to the Biradari Newsletter. An interest has been shown in the field of culinary skills on the informal WhatsApp group of the KPA and much enthusiasm has been generated in the art of making *panjeeri*.

We once again request all members to make efforts to join the two yearly functions in large numbers for that is the only time when we can all meet and exchange notes.

Wishing you all a happy New Year!

— **Col Valmiki Katju**

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Our Sojourn in Shangri-La:

Bhutan



Bhutan is a place where all your imaginings of beauty and bliss come true! Here is a delicious day-by-day account of five adventurous KPA members – the ‘Shangri-La Team’ – who explored and discovered the best of the ‘roof of the world’.

SWAROOP DAR

I woke up at night, turned to my left, and with sleepy eyes saw the Himalayas, heard the sound of whistling trees and the gurgling of water from a waterfall.

Was I dreaming or was it for real?

It took me a few seconds to realize that I was back in my bed in the comfort of my home.

That’s how the breathtaking beauty of Bhutan gets under one’s skin. Lying in the eastern Himalayan mountains, landlocked between China in the north and

Facing page: from front right, clockwise: Vandita Kaul, Swaroop Dar, Utsav Dar, Vivek Kaul, Ajay Gurtoo;

Below: The sublime majesty of Mt Everest and Mt Kanchenjunga from the Drukair plane

India in the south, with a population of about seven lakh, Bhutan is also known as the Land of Druk or the Land of the Thunder Dragon (Druk is a mythical animal).

Spending eight days and nights in Bhutan with the KPA ‘Shangri-La Team’: Ajay Bhai (Gurtoo), Vivek and Vandita Kaul, and my son, Utsav, was exceptionally wonderful, the memories of which I shall cherish. Each day was unique. Come, experience Bhutan with me!

DAY 1 (11 NOVEMBER)

All packed and ready for our sojourn, my son Utsav and I reached Terminal 3, New Delhi airport, a little after 9 a.m. to board our 12.10 p.m. Drukair flight. It was a little behind schedule and we boarded our aircraft for a 2 hour 15 minute



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TEAM SHANGRI-LA

journey to the only carbon-negative country in the world, the land where Happiness is on the national agenda.

During our flight, we saw the magnificence of Mt Everest and Mt Kanchenjunga above the clouds to our left. After a perfect landing through the mountainous terrain, we arrived at Paro International Airport where we were warmly welcomed – with ‘*Kuzuzangpo*,’ the local greeting – by our guide, Namgyen, and driver, Dorji. They were dressed in their traditional attire, which they wore throughout our trip.

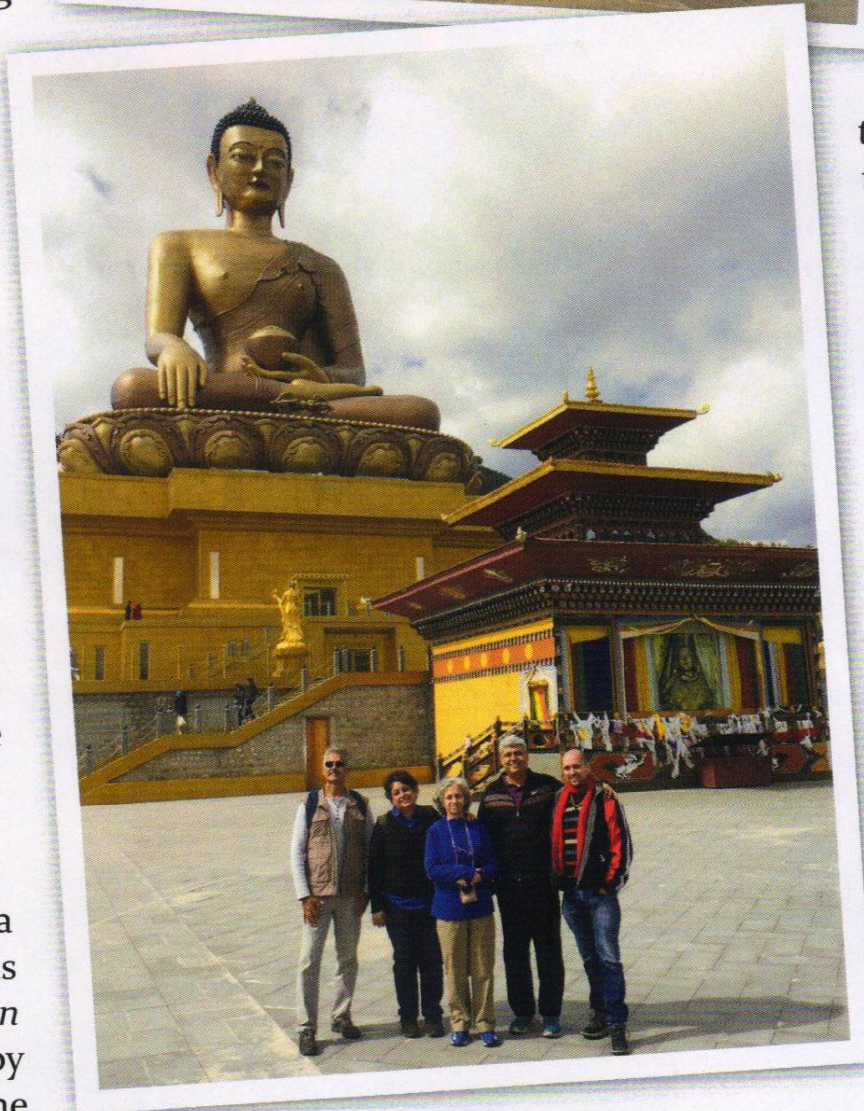
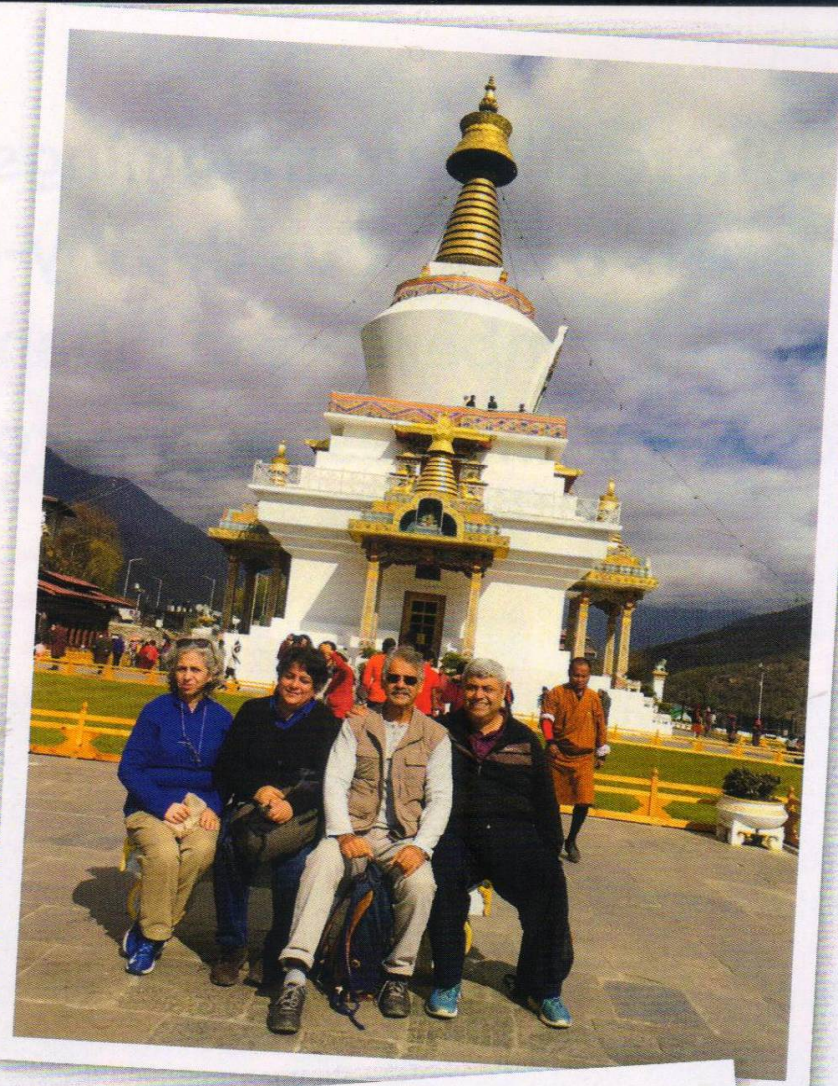
Our first stop was at Thimphu, which is just over an hour’s drive from Paro International Airport. Breathing in the fresh air and with the clear sky above us, passing through the winding road and stopping by the Wang Chhu (*chhu* means river in Bhutanese), clicking a few photographs, we reached our hotel, Jumolhari. Located in the heart of Thimphu city at Clock Tower Square, the hotel overlooked the Changlimithang Stadium and had many shops selling Bhutan’s handicrafts. Post a quick round of the surrounding area by foot, we got back to the hotel for a buffet dinner and retired to our rooms for a good night’s sleep, so that we would be fresh and ready for the next day’s explorations.

DAY 2 (12 NOVEMBER)

Starting off from the hotel after a good breakfast, our first stop was the Memorial Chorten (*chorten* means stupa in Bhutanese) built by the Queen Mother in memory of the third king of Bhutan, who died in 1972. It is approached through a small garden and a gate. Large prayer wheels are located to the left and many Bhutanese come here daily to circumambulate the *chorten* in the traditional clockwise direction, whirl the large prayer wheels and pray at the shrine. Mounted on the top floor there is a gallery, which offers a spectacular view of the entire city.

Our next stop was to see the Buddha statue, the Great Buddha Dordenma, in the

From top to bottom: Memorial Chorten; The imposing statue of the Buddha; Bhutan’s national animal - the takin



mountains of Bhutan. Its construction commenced in 2006 and was supposed to be complete in ten years, but isn't yet. This bronze statue is 169 feet tall and gold-plated. It is believed that when the Buddha attained Enlightenment, no one was present, so the statue sits in a position with the Buddha's right hand touching the earth in a gesture that symbolizes the earth witnessing his Enlightenment. Inside the statue are housed ten thousand similar statues of the Buddha. The whole compound looked magnificent, and it has been built to bestow blessings, peace and happiness on the world.

Our next interest was to see the national animal of Bhutan, the takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*). Legend has it that in the 15th century, a Tibetan monk named Drukpa Kunley – known as the ‘Divine Madman’ – created this unique animal, a cross between a goat and a cow. It was indeed a unique animal – with a goat’s head and a cow’s rear!

On our way back to the hotel we did a bit of shopping from the crafts market, which is a row of tiny shops, made from eco-friendly bamboo. Local women sold handicrafts; some women were knitting alongside dealing with customers. Tired but happy, we returned to our hotel for the night.

DAY 3 (13 NOVEMBER)

We set off for Gangtey from Thimphu. Although it is generally a five-hour drive, it took us longer as we stopped en route to enjoy, appreciate and absorb the beauty of nature. We also took a break for a cup of steaming hot coffee and cookies in the restaurant at the Dochula Pass, a mountain pass at an elevation of 3,100 metres in the snow-covered Himalayas. A hundred and eight Memorial Chortens were built here by

Queen Dorji Wangmo (the eldest Queen Mother) in 2003. These *chortens* are dedicated to the memory of the Bhutanese soldiers who died in a military operation. It is also dedicated to the fourth King of Bhutan, who led the army and was successful in driving the enemy away.

We also stopped at the Wangdue Bridge on the Punatsang Chhu, on our way to the Observatory at the Crane Information Centre in Gangtey. At the Observatory, we saw the rare black-necked cranes through telescopes and also watched a short documentary on them. An injured crane named Karma was kept in an enclosed area. The Bhutanese musically call the stately four-foot-tall birds 'Thrung Thrung Keh Narp.' It is also called the 'divine' bird, said to bring good luck to the people of Phobjikha Valley. Each winter, the people of this valley await the return of the cranes that migrate from their breeding grounds in the upper Tibetan Plateau to this remote timber-lined bowl surrounded by massive Himalayan peaks, and roost there until spring amid the wetlands. To the Buddhists of this tiny kingdom, the birds are heavenly emissaries, avatars of long-gone ancestors and lost loved ones, signifying longevity, peace and prosperity. The graceful birds are culturally so important that they are painted on the sides of homes and businesses throughout the country. In Phobjikha, farmers believe that the birds' presence ensures healthy crops, and tourists travel to this remote valley from around the world to see these cranes.

DAY 4 (14 NOVEMBER)

Excited and all set for a natural trail in the beautiful Phobjikha Valley, we first went to visit the ancient Gangtey Monastery under the Piling Linkage. Beautiful architecture, lots of colour and wood carving... so very peaceful. The monastery traces its history to the early 17th century. We were also able to see craftsmen doing some amazing carving. It is also said that the black-necked cranes circle this monastery thrice so as to offer their salutations to God before roosting in the Phobjikha Valley. This monastery is one that is still in daily use by the locals and visitors alike. We saw many young and older monks residing here.

The breathtaking Phobjikha Valley



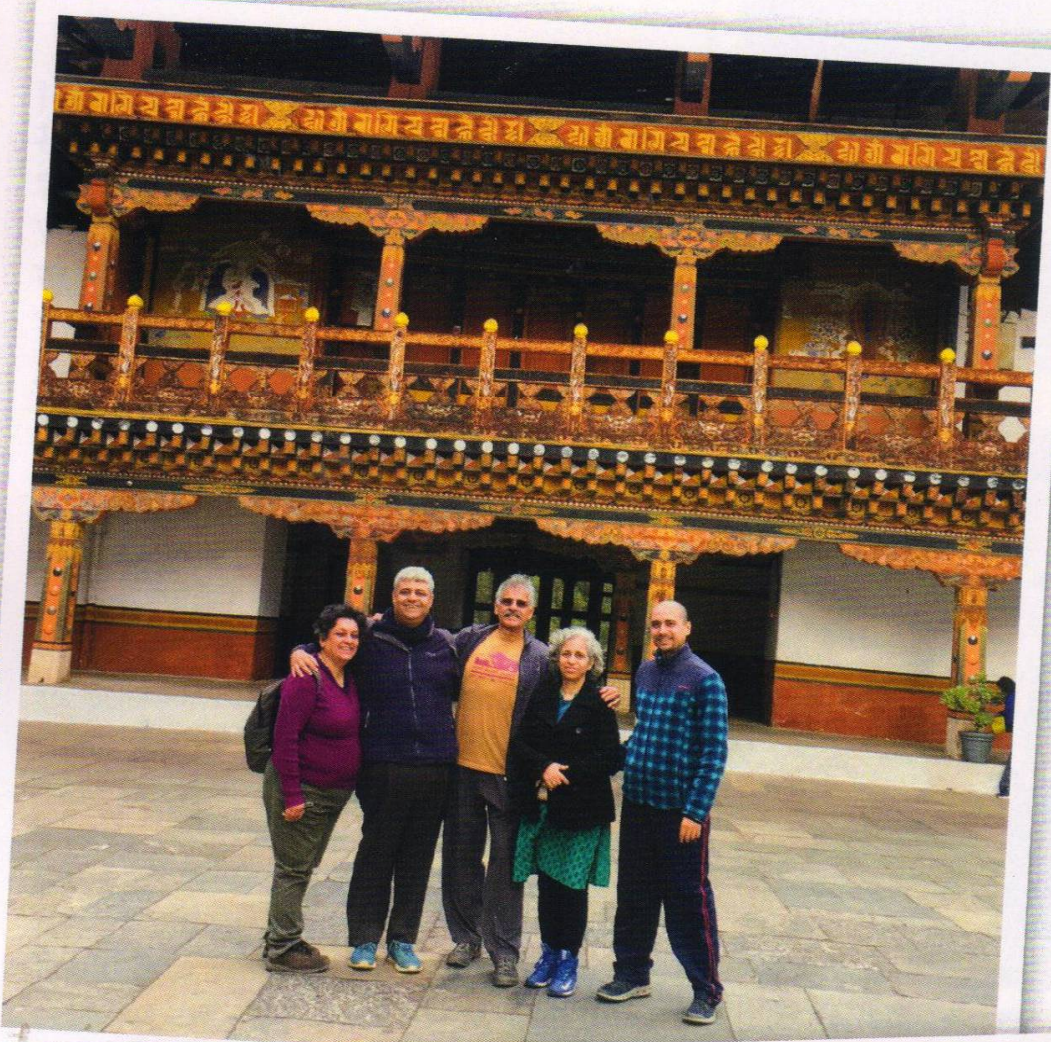
Then, we set off for the Nature's Trail which is a 4 kilometre (approx. 2 hour) trail to explore the magnificent valley. It took us four hours as we meandered through dense forest, tiny waterfalls and meadows (not as lush green as they would have been in spring) with cows grazing happily in the sun. The views, as we walked through, were spectacular and breathtaking, and at each turn we got a different view, ultimately reaching the expansive and amazing valley, to find a few black-necked cranes flying right above our heads and a few landing with great precision in pairs or groups in the marshlands. The valley is like a bowl in the centre of tall Himalayan mountains and is indeed a special valley where one can sit for hours at a stretch. However, as evening set in, it became chilly, and we headed back to the luxurious Dasang Resort where we were putting up for the night.

DAY 5 (15 NOVEMBER)

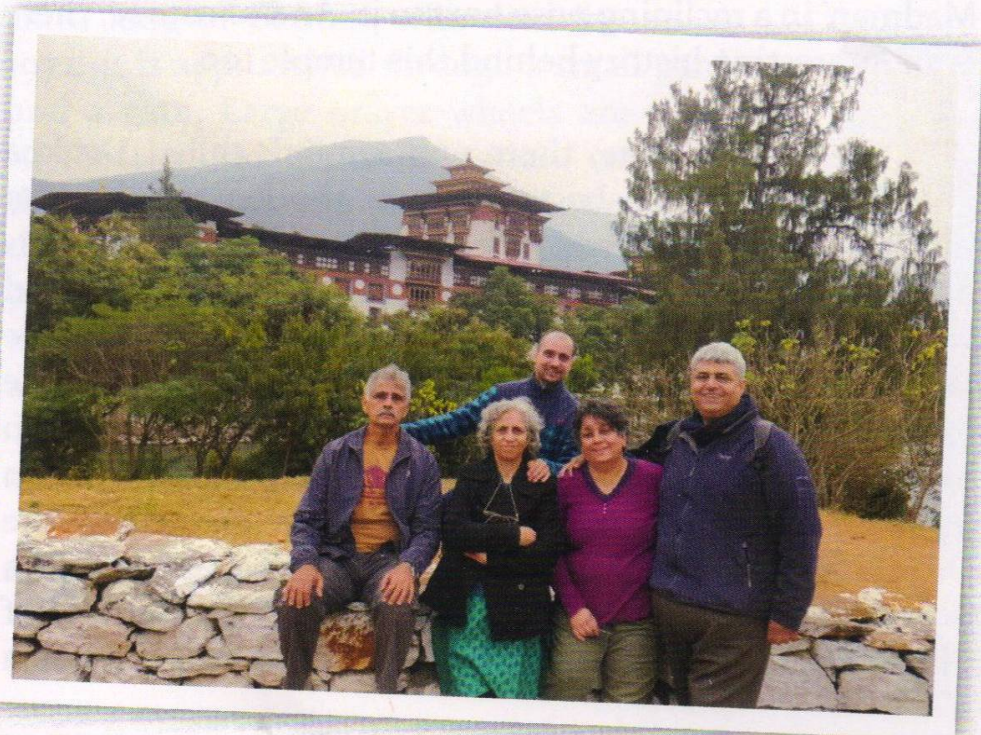
Next on our itinerary was Punakha, a two-hour drive from Phobjikha Valley. Our drive was really memorable as not only did we see horses with shining black manes and black cows lazily grazing in the half-green meadows but we also alighted from our vehicle to watch a big herd of yaks sitting in the sun by the side of the road. While Utsav did venture a little closer to them to feed them bananas, the yaks kept a close watch on him, and turned away, being a little wary. The high point of our drive was to witness the inauguration of a newly constructed stupa by the 9th reincarnation of Guru Rinpoche (Second Buddha; the monk after the Buddha), who is at present the Head of the Gangtey Monastery. If we had more time on our hands, I would have certainly stayed on to watch the complete ceremony and to seek his divine blessings.

Our first stop at Punakha was the Fertility Temple, also known as the Chimi Lhakhang temple. The words 'Chi Mi' mean 'No Dog' and 'Lhakhang' means 'temple.' The temple itself is an elegant structure with its brown and golden roof. The white colour of the building is further enhanced by the gold medallions stuck at regular intervals on a brown band. The temple is a brilliant example of beauty in simplicity. The first thing that we encountered as we walked up the little incline was a huge prayer wheel and a little drinking station. Going past it, just outside the main temple, was a black *chorten*. A large statue of Guru Padmasambhava stood at the centre of the altar along with one of the 'Divine Madman' in a reclining pose next to it. And of course, there is an interesting history behind this temple too.

Once upon a time, there was a monk called Drukpa Kunley. In fact, he was one of the key monks who brought Buddhism from Tibet to Bhutan. Known for his unusual methods of teaching, and his crazy songs lined with humour and sexual connotations, he soon became famous as the 'Divine Madman.' This Divine Madman came to Punakha to get rid of a demon from Dochula. The demon took the form of a dog and fell dead as he was struck down by the 'Flaming Thunderbolt of Wisdom' created by the Divine Madman. This Flaming Thunderbolt of Wisdom is what they say was the phallus and, thus, the symbol of Chimi Lhakhang. The stricken demon was captured in a



All three pics: Punakha Dzong, where the present Bhutanese king and his wife got married



chorten, said to be on top of a mountain, by the Divine Madman and he uttered the words 'Chi Mi.' It is at this sacred spot that the fertility temple was built. It beckons visitors from not just Bhutan but also across the world for it is believed that any childless couple who visits here is blessed with a baby.

After this, our next stop was at the Punakha Dzong. The word 'Dzong' means a 'fortress' and it houses the administrative and the Monk Body. The Central Monk Body shifts its residence in the winters from Thimphu to Punakha. In fact, Punakha is the old capital of Bhutan. This Dzong was built during 1637-38 by Zhabdrung and the first king was enthroned here in 1907. In fact, all of Bhutan's kings have been crowned here. The King of Bhutan, His Majesty King Jigme and his beautiful wife, the current Queen of Bhutan, got married here in October 2011.

Punakha Dzong is 180 metres long and 72 metres wide, and the Central Tower is six storeys high. The Dzong is located at the confluence of two major rivers in Bhutan, the Pho Chhu (*pho* means 'male') and Mo Chhu (*mo* means female). Therefore, the only way to access the Dzong is to cross a bridge, which was rebuilt in 2008 after the original 17th-century bridge was washed away during a flood in 1958. There are steep, wooden stairs and we crossed a heavy wooden door to enter. It has three courtyards: the first, featuring a Bodhi tree, is for administrative functions; the second houses the monastic quarters; and the third is the temple where the remains of Zhabdrung are preserved and where no one is allowed to enter. At the southern end is the assembly hall, which has massive gold statues of the three icons of Buddhism: the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche and Zhabdrung, and the fourth, the Future Buddha. The elaborately painted gold, red and black carved wood adds to the visual beauty of the Dzong. It is the second oldest and largest Dzong in Bhutan, and definitely one of the most impressive buildings around in the world.

After viewing the awe-inspiring Dzong we started off towards the Meri Puensum Resort, Wolakha, where we were to spend the night.

Situated on a hilltop, offering panoramic vistas across the river and the valley, Meri Puensum, it is one of the first resorts to come up in the serene and culturally rich valley of Punakha.

DAY 6 (16 NOVEMBER)

The next morning, after having a sumptuous breakfast, we set off on the five-hour drive to Paro, where we stayed for three days: the last lap of our stay in Bhutan. Our first stop was at the Royal Botanical Park, which was inaugurated by Her Majesty the Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck on 22 October 2008, commemorating a hundred years of the Wangchuck Dynasty and the Coronation of His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. However, we did not go in to have a look as our guide told us that the best time to visit the gardens is between April and July when the rhododendron trees are in full bloom. Instead, we chose to spend some time by the side of the Pa Chhu

(the river Paro). Hesitantly, following the others, I also took off my socks and shoes, sat on a small rock and put my feet in the freezing-cold water. Enjoying the feel of the cool, clean water, we all sat there for about half an hour rejuvenating ourselves and soaking in the beauty of our surroundings.

Back in the car and on our way to Paro, we once again stopped at the Dochula Pass, but this time at the restaurant on the other side, and feasted on mushroom patties, delicious chocolate éclairs and yummy butter biscuits along with a cup of hot cappuccino. Happily stuffed, we resumed our journey only to stop after some time by a roadside shop to buy apples, guavas, walnuts and peanuts for our trip to the Tiger's Nest Monastery the next day. Strings of yak cheese hanging in these little shops fascinated me and I did buy one. In Paro, we all shopped after lunch before going on to the Metta Resort and Spa for the last three days of our stay in Bhutan. The word 'Metta' means 'loving kindness' in Pali and is a name rightly earned by this resort nestled in the hills of Paro.

The resort has traditional cottages, blending harmoniously into the surroundings, with a touch of contemporary style. The living spaces present enchanting panoramic views, away from the hustle of daily city life. It is very close to the oldest Kichu Monastery, the airport and to the base of Tiger's Nest. They served a good choice of cuisines, including Indian – one morning for breakfast they served us puri-aloo! The local sweet dishes served for breakfast and dinner were really mouth-watering.

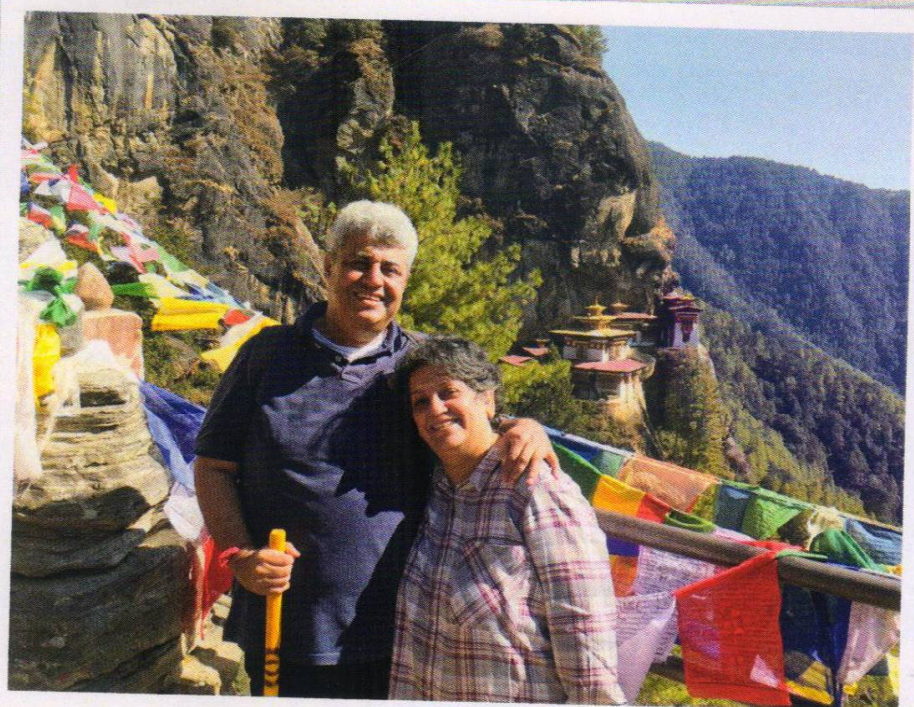
DAY 7 (17 NOVEMBER)

The trek to Taktsang or Tiger's Monastery will always remain etched in my mind. The structure was built in 1692 by one of the rulers of Bhutan and is atop a cliff. The trek is a combination of muddy path and steps. Enthusiastic and energized for our trek, we were at the base of the monastery by 8.30 a.m. With a stick in one hand and a light knapsack on our backs (I did not carry one, though), we were ready to go! We started our trek with enthusiasm and energy. On reaching the highest point of the trek, there were still more than 750 steps to reach the monastery.

There is a cafeteria halfway, where some people halt, but the five of us in the KPA Shangri-La Team made it on foot right up to the amazing Tiger's Nest Monastery. However, each one of us made it in his or her own time and at his or her own pace. All along the way, there are many colourful prayer flags that impart a lot of vibrancy to the trek. A short walk down a stone staircase, across a bridge covered in prayer flags, over gushing water from a waterfall and then a slightly strenuous climb up to the monastery... and once there, we did a tour of the two main temples. The surreal view leaves you gasping for breath.

It is believed that in the 8th-century Guru Rinpoche came here riding on the back of a tigress (hence the name), that he meditated at a cave here for three years, three months, three weeks, three days and three hours, and that the statue of the great Master spoke once.

The descent seemed somewhat more difficult for us except for Utsav whose speed was slowed down only



Top and above: The trek to Taktsang

because of helping me. We reached the base tired but happy at having completed the whole trek. A hot shower later, we sat down for dinner and decided to take the next day at an easier pace.

DAY 8 (18 NOVEMBER)

A little more relaxed on the last day, we started out at a little after 10 a.m. instead of our usual 9 a.m. with a visit to one of the oldest temples, the 7th-century Kichu Lhakhang in Kichu village. The temple was built by the King of Tibet to overcome a giant ogress that lay across Tibet and the Himalayas, preventing the spread of Buddhism. The king is believed to have built the temple at the left foot of the enormous ogress.

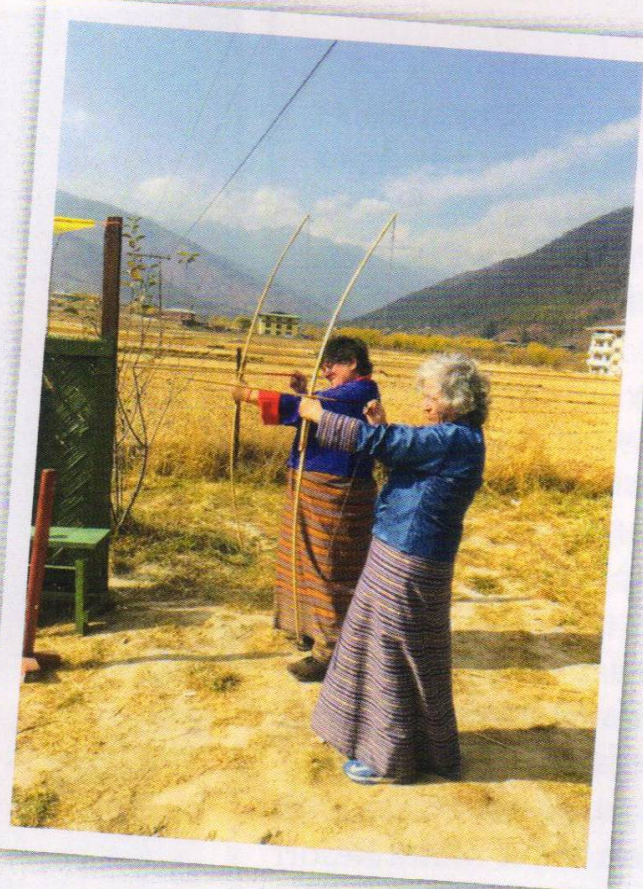
On the outside of the temple, there are two orange trees that bear fruit throughout the year and no one is permitted to pluck the fruit. In case a fruit falls while one is standing under the tree, one can take it as a blessing.

TAKTSANG TREK FACTS

DISTANCE: 4 miles round-trip

ELEVATION GAIN: 1,700 feet

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 10,232 feet



Above: Dressed in the traditional Bhutanese dress, the adventurous five try their hand at archery, the national sport of Bhutan

The floor of the main temple, constructed with wood, is decorated with turquoise and other precious stones and gems. It is a fantastic ancient monastery where one finds elderly pilgrims walking around the temple as they spin the prayers wheels. Inside the Lhakhang is the statue of Jowo Shakyamuni when he was eight years old. Holy water was offered to us, which we took with humility. We sat down and relaxed in the sun, on the benches outside the temple, for some time. Rejuvenated, we decided to get playful and go for a round of Bhutan's national sport, archery. After a cup of tea, a young Bhutanese girl helped all of us wear the national dress (*kira* and *toego* for women, and *gho* for men) before we ventured to try our luck with the traditional bow and arrow at an archery range.

Gho is the national dress for men in Bhutan. It is a long robe hoisted up until it is knee-length. The hoisted-up cloth is held in place with a woven cloth belt called *ker*a, wound tightly around the waist. The hoisted-up cloth forms a large pouch, in which items are kept. The national dress for Bhutanese women is the *kira*, which looks like an apron. It is generally made of fine woven fabric, adorned with traditional patterns, and is mostly worn in bright colours. It is a floor-length rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around the body and held from the shoulders by brooch-like hooks called *koma*. The intricately woven

kiras enhance the beauty and the graceful manners of the women of Bhutan, and compliment their looks perfectly. Women wear it over a blouse called *wonju*. They use a cloth belt called *ker*a to fasten the *kira* around the waist. They also wear the *toego*, which are short and open jacket-like garments, along with *kiras*.

After archery, we returned to our resort early to relax and pack our bags for our short drive to the airport and our flight back to New Delhi at 9 a.m. the next morning. The usual checks completed, Ajay Bhai, Vivek, Vandita and I embarked the plane (minus Utsav who stayed on for another week), viewing the magnificence of Mt Kanchenjunga and Mt Everest once again – this time to my right. We reached New Delhi, said our goodbyes to each other and went to our homes, enriched with a bundle of great memories of our time spent together in this mystical land, Bhutan.

- ◆ Red chillies dry on top of most houses.
- ◆ A popular scene often found as wall paintings in Tibetan religious buildings represents an elephant carrying a monkey, a rabbit and a bird, standing under a fruit tree. The bird represents the Buddha. The rabbit and the monkey represent disciples of the Buddha. The elephant represents Ananda, a friend of the Buddha. The tree represents the Dharma Tree, which symbolizes respect for elders. These are the four friends of peace, harmony and goodwill.
- ◆ *Datshi* is a typical Bhutanese dish served at all restaurants, along with Himalayan (red) rice. It is a dish made of fresh and dried green/red chillies slit longitudinally into a cheesy base and is called *ema* (which means chilly) *datshi*. The chilli can be replaced by slices of boiled potato and you get *kewa* (potato) *datshi*. It can also be replaced with mushroom, adding more flavour to the food, and is then called *shamu* (mushroom) *datshi*.

Bhutan Highlights

- ◆ *Suja* or butter tea, which is the staple drink of Bhutan, is traditionally made with yak butter and salt.
- ◆ Tiny shops on the roads sell packets of fruits, apples, oranges, guavas, dried vegetables, paan and strings of dried yak cheese cubes, all packed and ready to be sold. No bargaining, no weighing.
- ◆ You can use both Ngultrum and Indian currency in Bhutan as it is of the same value.
- ◆ Receiving and giving of money is done using both hands and with humility. Bhutanese are extremely courteous and polite people.
- ◆ All Bhutanese men and women are dressed in their traditional attire, be it at their workplace or out in the market. The children are very cute and friendly, happily waving out at tourists.
- ◆ And last but not the least, one has to use the zebra crossing for crossing the road, and all vehicles stop and wait for you till you reach the other side safely. That's called Happiness!

Amidst the Conflict

There is no end...
Chinar and tulips
heavy with tears of blood and anguish
pouring down the leaves...
earth sucking.

Woven in pashmina, papier mâché
with ache
apples, almonds born and reborn
with colour of war, killings
and bloodshed.

Dal – a shattered mirror of untold grief
cobweb of haze
giving birth to lotus, lilies
colours of life half blooming
wry with pain
silent sobs
amidst the conflict...

—MEENAKSHI KHAR

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

To Tulips I Bloom...

Nature's cycle
rejuvenates with life...
out of death.
Divine offerings
Letters from God
cascading soft murmurs
resonating deep.

Turbulence
stormy death, destruction.
Sounds
jarring, bizarre.
In despair
stretching arms
alms for riddance.
Distraught humanity
eye for an eye.

I bloom...
Shadow of your inner eye.

—MEENAKSHI KHAR



Humanity

Humanity is shaken!
Humanity is shattered!
Humanity on the brink of extinction!
Will there be any humanity left in the world?

When God created the human,
He was proud of this race,
As He provided not only more
Intelligence, endurance and emotions –
The human traits within;
But ecstasy, determination and hope too,
To survive in the most unfit surroundings,
And lend a helping hand to those
Who found it difficult to survive.
Such was the human!

But the gradual disintegration was inevitable,
Who can stop the wheel of Time?
The human that was created
With a clear difference from other creations,
Erased that line of status quo
And brought the race to shame;
In Delhi, it is raped,
In Kargil, it is killed,
Other places too have their own fill,
When nations run places like the Guantanamo mill.

Why does the stronger victimize the weaker,
Rich the poor, provider the needy?
Where has the old chivalry disappeared?
When knights for lady's one stare
Would put their lives in Death's glare?
Is this faulty education,
Or lack of religious practice?
A wish to be better than the rest
Whatever way; to acquire the treasure chest,
Murder, bloodshed or horrendous acts?

A race to be won without running –
A game to be played with the interest of only winning.
Peer pressure, overexposure to mysteries –
We should blame; for low moral standards,
Genes, parents' lack of interest and time
In raising their offspring – over time,
Who in turn blame the bureaucracy,
The laws and substandard lifestyle,
If these are the causes –
What are the solutions?

Could a prophet find redemption,
Some perspectives or plebian thinking
That needs be remodelled and redressed,
To make men a race of humans again?
A place where people breathe in fresh air,
And society helps Daminis to roam freely,
Where Hemantis are not exploited,
And Aarushis not killed at home,
Where young girls are not pushed to degradation,
And lust does not separate happy couples...

On the border Indian soldiers are not found headless,
Refugees get their home status,
No compulsion is made to participate in jihad,
Small Afghan children not forced to tackle big guns,
Where parents don't exchange their babies for bread,
Shunning solidarity, siblings do not succumb low;
We are living in a time where there is no cure!
A son gets his father killed,
A husband; wife, a mother; daughter,
What relation remains pure?

The race has fallen this kind of abyss,
How much more it can fall suffice ?
As no signs appear for it to redeem
The past glory and position esteemed.

Oh! Poor Humanity!

—DR MEENA WANCH

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

THE SWASTIKA SYMBOL

Good or Evil?

GAUTAM KAUL

The symbol of the Swastika still circulates in some parts of the world with regular frequency. In parts of Asia not covered by the lands of the erstwhile Soviet Union, the ancient symbol is scattered rather liberally in homes, marketplaces, and even cast in bronze for sale as trinkets with therapeutic value to be worn around the neck, touching the skin.

Contrary to popular belief that the Swastika is an Aryan symbol of worship with a tradition of yore from India, the symbol may be traced back 6,000 years to the Neolithic Era, depicted in cave paintings

in West China. While the well-known images from ancient cave paintings are found in Spain, India, China, Egypt, France and elsewhere, it is the Swastika symbol which has an unbroken tradition of time transfer. It moved across lands, through the ancient trade routes, and spread a positive message of reassurance to whomsoever accepted its visual form. A Harappan seal has been found with a Swastika from 3,000 BCE. The symbol is found in China, Japan, Tibet, India and the whole of south Asia where the original teachings of Gautam the Buddha were embraced.

The Swastika is generally considered an Aryan symbol, but there is NO mention of it in any Aryan Sanskrit text. This clearly suggests that the popular notion about this symbol is a myth created in the past by an ill-informed author.

The word 'Swastika' means 'well-being' and should be interpreted as a good-health charm in modern usage. To all Hindus and Buddhists, it is a mark of auspicious beginnings, whether they be rituals, vital decisions, investments or undertakings. For this, the Swastika is drawn on the ground, altar, a new machine or vehicle, using rice flour, turmeric and vermilion powder.

The Swastika symbol might have crept into common usage sometime around 1870. We may safely surmise that perhaps it was the German scholar Max Mueller, the

translator of Hindu holy scriptures from Sanskrit into German, who succumbed to its charm and introduced it as a talisman without adequate research on its origin.

Nazi scholars in the mid-1920s seem to have chosen this so-called 'Aryan' symbol and misappropriated it for their flag. Their subsequent anti-Semitic purge under the Swastika symbol sullied its intrinsic meaning by the havoc they wreaked in some parts of the world on their maniacal mission of annihilation. The Herculean task of restoring the honour and sanctity of this benevolent symbol can be

fulfilled only by informing and educating the entire world about its salience.

To the uninitiated, the Swastika is a geometrical figure, a cross with four perpendiculars tipped with little extensions in a clockwise direction and converging at right angles. The foremost difference between the ancient Swastika and its Nazi misappropriation is the colour. The true and benevolent Swastika is always red (never black). Secondly, the figure of an authentic Swastika is never inclined at an angle of 45 degrees. The squares drawn on a base of cloth, ground, wood or metal by the outswinging four arms are dotted in

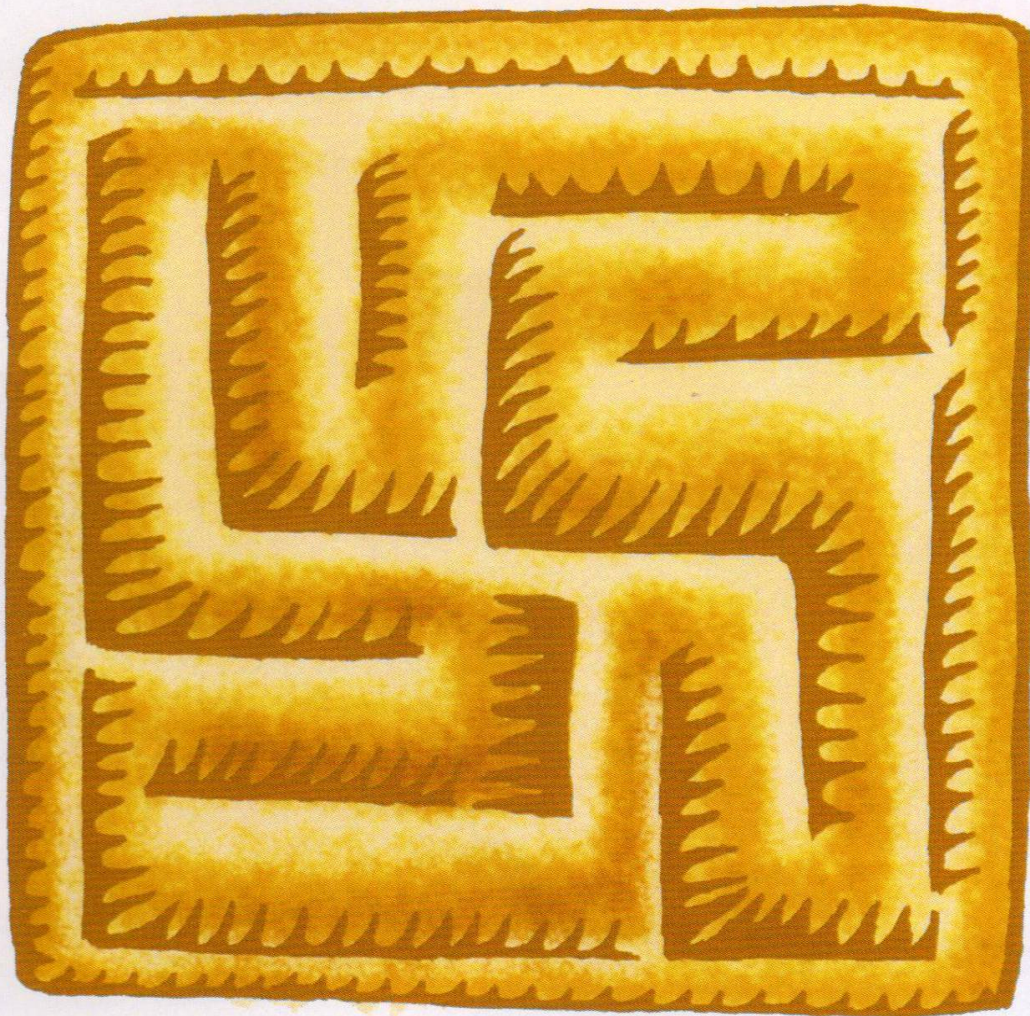


ILLUSTRATION BY MISTUNEE CHOWDHURY

A Swastika-like symbol found on a Harappan seal

red for good fortune. In pendants forged from metal or clay, the dots are etched or stamped.

The Nazis were truly ignorant of the significance of the Swastika. Had they consulted ancient texts and long-time believers, the Chinese Buddhists or the Hindus, they would have realized that the Swastika fails to work its charm if displayed at an angle of 45 degrees as it appeared on the Nazi flag. The Nazi downfall was destined because they fell under the collective curse of the two most ancient religions of the world and their hapless victims, the Jews.

Faith in the Swastika's benevolence stems from the belief that mankind is one and meant to co-exist without hate or rancour, to move forward. Even materialism could benefit from the magical charms of the Swastika!

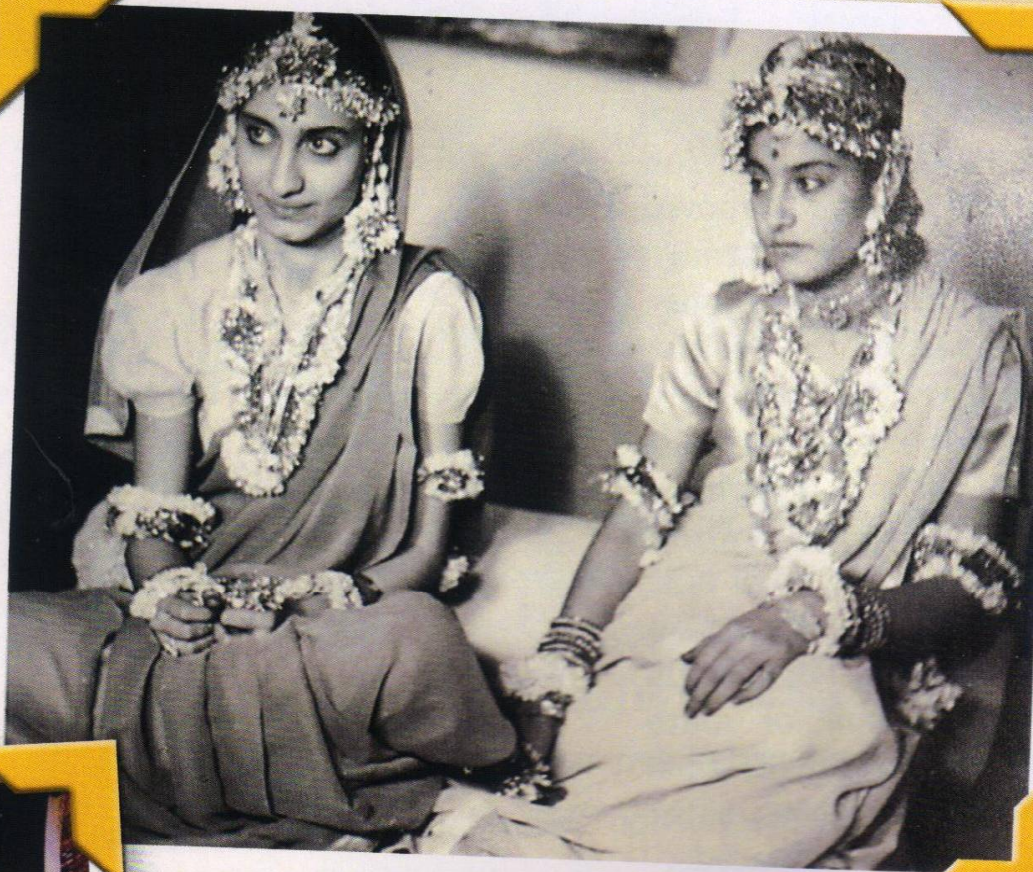
A Wedding to Remember

You can almost smell the fragrant blossoms of the *phoolon ka gehna* and hear the lilting *posh puja* song in the deep of the night, and yet this wedding took place nearly 70 years ago! Go on, surrender to nostalgia; no one can blame you for mooning over them.

MEENAKSHI BHUJWALA

These photographs have been lovingly preserved by my family and they archive the wedding of my parents: Colonel R.K. (Raja) Tikku and Rita (as was customary in those days, her name was changed from her maiden name of Mohini Bamroo) – better known in the community as Chunno!

And because we love genealogy, here it is: my father Raja Tikku (1919–85) was the son of Dr H.L. Tikku, C.M.O. of erstwhile Kashmir State. He had only one sister, Raj (1916–2011) or Rajjan, who married Swaroop N. Channa. Rita Tikku (b. 1927, née Mohini Bamroo) is the daughter of Shyam Sunder N. Bamroo of Gwalior. She and her sister Kamini (1925–2017) had a double wedding on 3 February 1949! Kamini married M.G. Kaul, ICS (1920–77). Both ladies were considered beauties of their time!



▲ FLOWERY, STARRY NIGHT

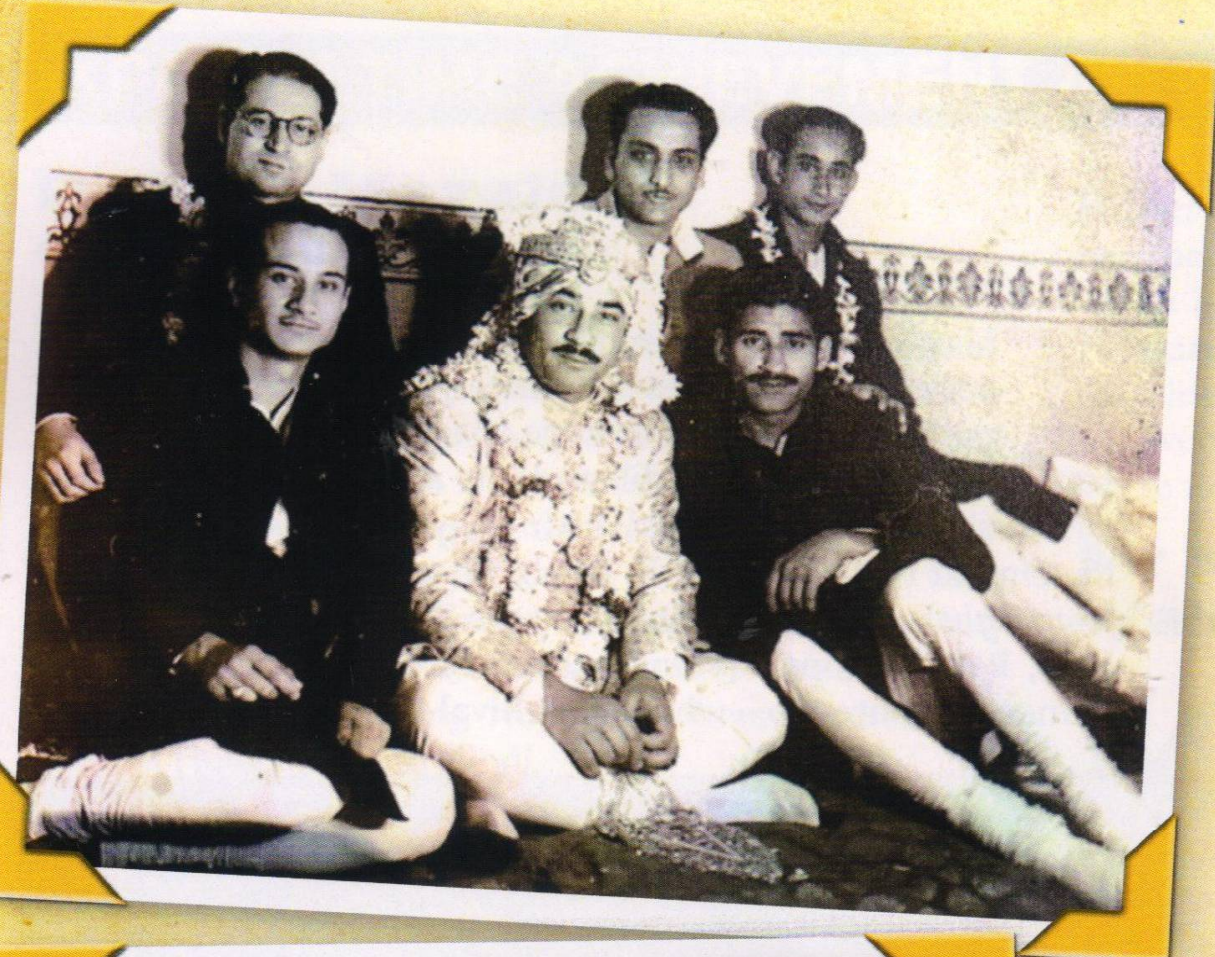
Natural and beautiful, and beautifully natural... my masi – Kamini and my mother – Chunno, at the *phoolon ka gehna*.

It has my mother (*right*) wearing a traditional headdress, the *taranga*: this was a muslin cap along with a muslin veil draped on the back – worn with a separate *gota* head-band.

◀ SIMPLY STUNNING

The sisters, Chunno and Kamini, at the *deogun* ceremony.





◀ **BROTHERS**

From left to right, front row: Vijay Kichlu, my father – Raja Tikku, Puran Tikku; Rear: Swaroop Channa, Jaggan Muttoo, Ravi Kichlu

▼ **SISTERS**

Seated in front (children): Anuradha (Kaul) Sapru and Chitrlekha (Kaul) Buckshee, flanked by Pammi Razdan and Lalita Dar; Behind Anuradha Sapru are Nimmo (Nirmala) Gurtu and Saroj Kaul, all daughters of Mahendra Nath Tikku and RajKumari (née Madan); Behind the groom's head: (left) Dhanno Kaul (wife of General Bijji Kaul; (right) Rajjan Channa, my father's sister; On either end: sisters Kunti (Kunno) and Pushpa née Muttoo.



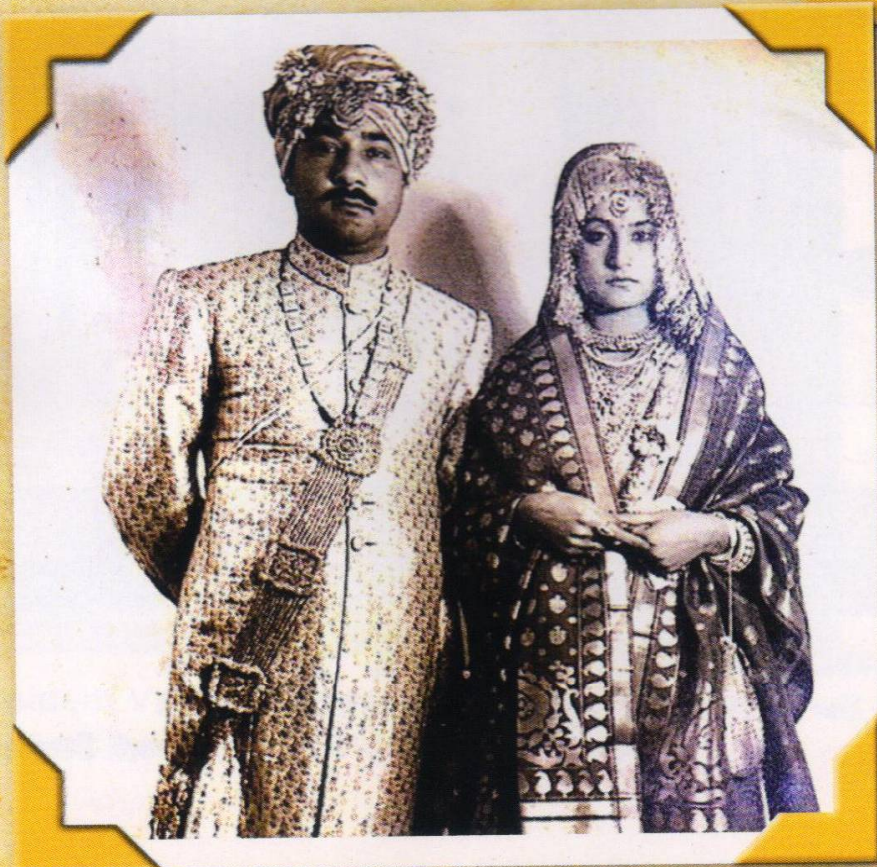
▲ **THAT SPECIAL MOMENT**

The evocative posh puja.



◀ **HAPPILY MARRIED!**

My parents – Raja and Chunno.



A Piece of History

This photograph, shared by Mr **VIJAY VATAL**, is like a page from a priceless chronicle, an eyewitness image of the educational heritage of a generation past. This set-piece of Kashmiri Pandit students at the Banaras Hindu University in 1930-31 includes Mr Vijay Vatal's father - Late Pt. Omkar Nath Vatal (IAS, Retd., Bhopal) [*standing, third from right*] and his elder uncle - Late Pt. Kailash Nath Vatal (IAS, Retd., Bhopal) [*standing, third from left*]. Everyone's names are there too - what an archival treasure!

KASHMIRI STUDENTS.

1930-31.

BENARES HINDU UNIVERSITY.



Standing :- M. Kaul. L. N. Kaul. K. N. Vatal. J. N. Tankha. O. N. Vatal. T. N. Tankha. P. N. Tikku.
Sitting :- J. K. Kaul. R. K. Kaul. P. N. Mulla. Prof. S. L. Das. M. N. Kaul. S. N. Atal. H. N. Shivpuri.

Chakraverti Studio, Benares

KPA LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2018

Dr Indu Mazaldan: One of a Kind

Dr Indu Mazaldan retired as Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Delhi. She has been involved in the learning, teaching and translation of Hungarian literature for the last two decades. She started learning Hungarian in the Department of Finno-Ugrian studies, University of Delhi, and subsequently went on scholarship to the University of Budapest and University of Debrecen (Hungary) for further studies. She developed an interest in translating Hungarian literature from the original Hungarian into Hindi.

Her first book of translation, published in 1998, was a collection of Hungarian love poems, ranging from ballads to 20th-century love poems. This was followed by a book of short stories and then came the translations of some of the gems of Hungarian classics, popular not only in Hungary but all over Europe.

In 2002, Hungarian writer Kertesz Imre was awarded the Noble Prize for his book *Fatelessness*. The credit for making this book available to Hindi readers goes to Dr Indu Mazaldan. The translation was very well received.

So far, she has translated sixteen books: *Prem Raag* (collection of love poems); *Vitt Mantri Ka Nashta* (collection of short stories); *Hungarian Folk Tales*; *Pariyon Ki Kahaaniya* (collection of Hungarian legends); *Pyari Anna* (a novel); *Rishtedar* (a novel); *Chakori* (a novel); *Darwaza* (a novel); *Rung Aur Varsh* (a novel); *Safed Baadshah* (a novel); *Esti Kornel* (a novel); *Rani Ka Lehenga* (short stories' collection); *Badsoorat Larki* (short stories' collection); *Niyatiheenta* (Noble-Prize-winning novel); *Raahgir Aur Chandni Raat Ka Safar* (a novel); and *Shamayen Khaq Hone Tak Sulgati Hain* (a novel).

She is the only Indian who translates directly from the Hungarian language. For her contribution to the popularisation of Hungarian literature in India, the

Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Hungary awarded her their highest civilian award, Pro Kultura Hungarica, which is given to foreigners who work towards spreading Hungarian literature and culture in the world. Dr Indu Mazaldan is the first and only Indian to receive this prize.

Every year, the Hungarian Translators' House invites her to work on her translations in Hungary.

Mr Madan Mohan Kishan Wali: A Bureaucrat with a Difference

Mr Madan Mohan Kishan Wali is not only an upstanding member of the Kashmiri Pandit community, but has also always been a humanitarian with a tremendous sense of responsibility and devotion to duty.

Born in 1927 in Sialkot (now in Pakistan), he was always a bright student, both in school and college, having passed MA and LLB with flying colours. As a young student in Lahore, he bravely faced the horror of the burning city after Partition to rescue the family valuables.

Despite having qualified for the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), he chose to join the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) to support his widowed mother and sisters. In his career as an IAS officer, he always worked with compassion and an unwavering work ethic, thus earning the respect and trust of everyone.

Mr M.M.K. Wali was chosen to take over as Lt Governor of Delhi during the horrific anti-Sikh riots that followed the assassination of Late Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1984. His warning on television, seen all over the country, had an instant impact and helped to halt the killings. At the same time he ensured that no survivor went without support, and developed schemes for their housing and rehabilitation.

He looks back on a long and successful life and career, content in the knowledge that he gave his best, providing succour to whomsoever's life he touched.



KPA President Vivek Kaul presenting the Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr Indu Mazaldan (left)



KPA President Vivek Kaul with Mr M.M.K. Wali (left)



A PAEAN TO

Panjeeri

PHOTOGRAPH BY KIND COURTESY OF MRS NITI MUBAYI

Kashmiri Pandits are alert to the centrality food has in their culture and, therefore, its centrality sparks off our quest for understanding individuals and our culture. It's a selective process that not only entails producing a diversity of food preferences, but also the numerous social and cultural conventions associated with food. Special preparations for special foods at special times are other ways in which occasions are demarcated.

Panjeeri, one such special preparation, is eaten to end the fasting in celebration of the birth of Krishna, Janamashtami. The seed vessel of a lotus symbolizes Vishnu. *Euryala ferox*, the water lily, the lotus, the kernel of its seeds, the *makhana*, that contains protein, phosphorous, magnesium, iron, zinc and fibre, is *panjeeri's* main ingredient. So, while *makhana*s were available in Kashmir, the early migrant Kashmiri Pandit community found its source from the east, in Bihar, the land of Mithila, with close political ties to Kashmir. The light *khuskhus* seeds from Kashmir, the coconut from the southern lands of Kanyakumari and the nutritious calcium- and iron- rich *chhuaara*, a date fruit well dehydrated to extend its shelf life, carried over the Hindu Kush ranges, the land of Draupadi, together marked the occasion of Janamashtami.

Childbirth or '*jachcha*' became such an occasion when *geeli panjeeri* with haldi was offered to new mothers. *Panjeeri* was distributed to close relatives, connecting food to social memories of sharing good fortune. Haldi, with a greater portion of ghee, adds to the subtlety of *geeli/patli panjeeri*, as does *sonth* (dry ginger powder). *Ajwain* or

The delicious secrets of this unique, lavish dish. **VANDANA CHAK**

Trachyspermum ammi is a perennial medicinal plant that originates in India and also features in the dish.

Kashmiri Pandit culinary conventions define each of us, and food represents an intersection of biology and culture, nature and society, the individual and social life. Our biological make-up demands that we eat to sustain life, but matters including what we eat, how it is prepared, how it is served, how and with whom it is eaten are historically and culturally variable. As migration of Kashmiri Pandits led them to several regions of India, some recipes were put into writing to preserve their genus, and sent to print. We pay homage to Late Pandit Chuni Lal and his father for cooking the cuisine to perfection and preserving its palate with generations, and now Shiv Chand Topa-ji, for doing so. We stand ever indebted to the recipe books such as *Kashmiri Cooking* by Krishna Prasad Dar, *Ruchika* by Saraswati Mushran, *Dastarkhan* by Malini Khanna and *Multiple Flavours of Kashmiri Pandit Cuisine* by Annapurna Chak. In the *Biradari*, we thank Ms Vani Bhan, Mrs Saroj Tikku Razdan, Ms Meera Raina, Mr Vivek Kaul, Mrs Vibha Kaul and Mrs Niti Mubayi for building a dialogue on the memory of the Kashmiri Pandit palate, and together settling the *panjeeri* recipes and their cooking methods given on the facing page.

Panjeeri ki Patti

INGREDIENTS

	Method 1	Method 2
1. <i>Chhuaara</i> (pitted)	300 gm	500 gm (seeded, cut into small pieces, using a <i>sarauta</i>)
2. <i>Gola</i> (dry coconut)	1	250 gm (cut slim, small squares and soak in water)
3. <i>Makhana</i>	250 gm	73 gm (cut into pieces)
4. <i>Kharbuze ke beej</i>	250 gm	60 gm (bhuno lightly and clean)
5. <i>Khuskhus</i>	200 gm	60 gm (wash and sun-dry or <i>kahaar</i> in pan)
6. <i>Badaam</i>		50 gm (remove skin by soaking in warm water and cut into slivers)
7. Ghee	100 gm	30 gm
8. Sugar	200 gm	250 gm
9. Water	2 cups	1½ cups
10. <i>Ajwain</i>		1 tsp (optional)

PREPARATION

For *chhuaara* and coconut pieces soaked for an hour, use the recipe that uses 1½ cups water and for unsoaked, use the recipe that indicates 2 cups of water.

Method 1:

- ◆ On low flame, bhuno lightly all ingredients (except *chhuaara*) in ghee without sugar and water.
- ◆ Separately mix sugar and water, and stir over low heat to form the thickness of one-*taar chashni*.
- ◆ Mix together the bhuna ingredients into the *chashni*, mix and spread a layer on a tray to form a *patti*.

Method 2:

- ◆ On low flame, in 30 gm ghee, bhuno soaked *chhuaaras*. As they begin to shrink, add the coconut and bhuno a bit.
- ◆ Add badam and 1½ cup water and *ajwain*, and let it cook. When a light amount of water remains, add 250 gm sugar and stir repeatedly.
- ◆ As soon as the sugar thickens (test by placing a bit of the mix in a setting tray), add all the other ingredients and meld in firmly. Spread a layer on a tray to form *patti*.

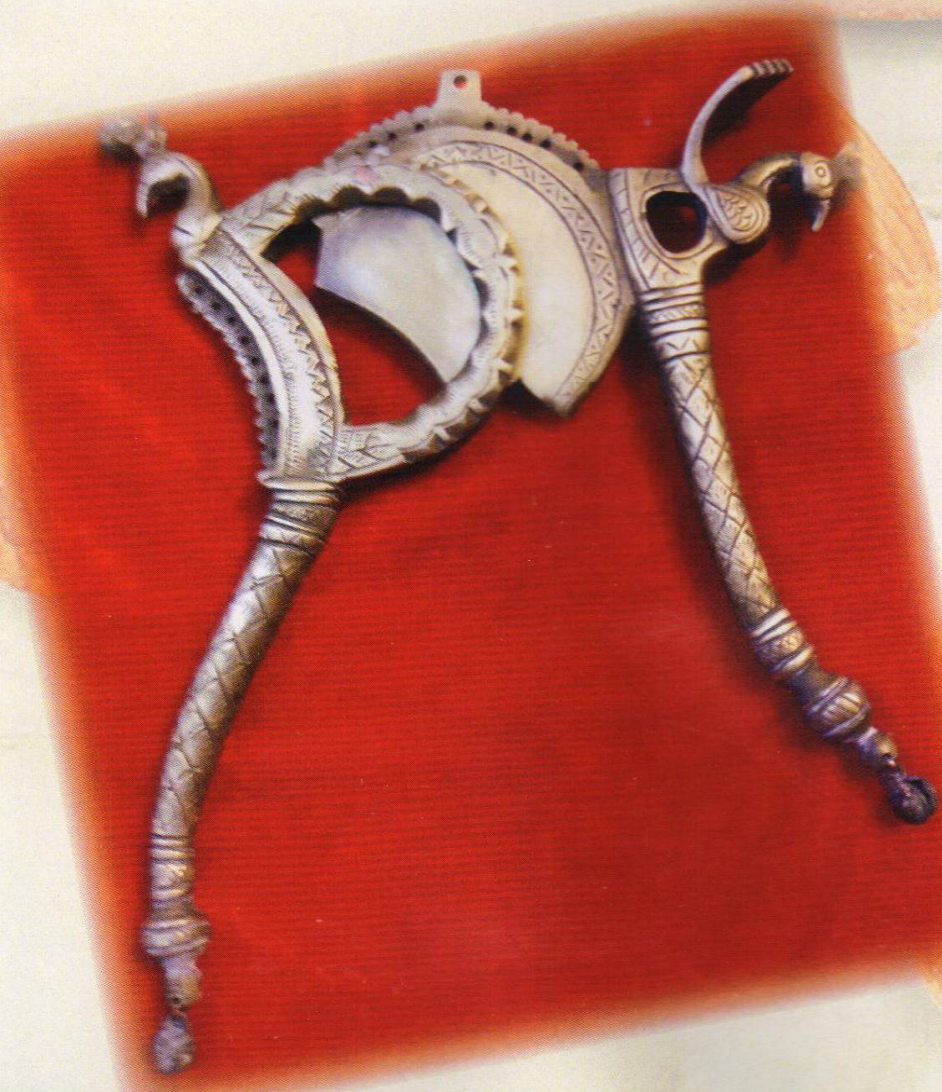
Kahaar lo: To spread out momentarily in a hot vessel and remove.
Bhuno: Brazing or browning.

Panjeeri (Geeli/Patti with haldi and ajwain)

Follow the above recipe but add 3 times the quantity of ghee to bhuno *chhuaaras*; add 4 tsp haldi, 2 kg sugar, 1 more cup water and 2 tsp *ajwain* in a syrupy *chashni*. Add *sonth* to the mix as desired. Warm the *panjeeri* to eat.

▼ **SILVERY SARAUTAS:** *Sarautas* are central to *panjeeri* and take pride of place among Kashmiri Pandit family heirlooms. Below are *sarautas* from (left) the family of Mr Vinod Bhan and (right) the private collection of Mrs Niti Mubayi.

Editor's Note: According to our expert, Mrs Niti Mubayi, as a gourmet dish, *panjeeri* is best enjoyed without haldi and *ajwain*. Mrs Mubayi adds saffron; some recipes include *kewra*; other recipes for new mothers include *gond*. Arrive at your own happy recipe!



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