

ISBUND

NEWS, EVENTS AND
EVERYTHING IN
BETWEEN



ISBUND

A Quarterly Newsletter for the Kashmiri Pandit Community



Vatuk Puza Set up by Shivani Kaul

From the Editor's Desk

Namaskar to all! On the auspicious occasion of *Mahashivratri* (referred more popularly as *Herath*), we would like to wish you a very warm "*Herath Poshte*".

Herath indeed marks the most significant day in our Calendar (on *Trayodashi*), with preparations beginning in full swing weeks in advance. Families around the world come together to celebrate the festival's rich traditions and rituals with a lot of zest and zeal. This can be making the household sparkling clean, buying special utensils, gathering pooja *Samagri*, and also a shopping trip for new clothes. The festivities are held to invite "*Vatuknath*" to our homes as a guest and can typically last for three days.

The main "*Vatuk Pooja*" includes fasting during the day and performing a "*Yaga*" or fire sacrifice in the night time. This entails worshipping of two large vessels (*Kalash* and *Gagar*), which are filled with walnuts and beautifully decorated with flowers and holy thread. The vessels are marked with the symbol of *Om*, each one representing Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Walnuts are commonly grown in Kashmir, and each one of the four quadrants of the seed is said to represent one of the four "*Vedas*". We fondly remember sitting down for hours to make our offerings in the pious fire and later blowing of *Shankh* (Conch) when concluding the Pooja, which sometimes included a friendly competition. A day after Herath Pooja, children and young adults get a chance to fill up their money pots with "*Herath Kharch*", which they look forward to with much excitement. The "*Kharch*" is a small token of money, representing blessings from elders in the family. The festival truly brings our culture's positive values of remaining connected with one's family.

With reducing number of Community COVID-19 cases and easing of lockdown rules, we eagerly look forward to sharing the joy of festivities with our friends and family. The Kashmiri Pandit Association of Europe (KPAE) annual Diwali event was held in December 2021; many of us reconnected with warm hugs and danced the evening away. The next community function is the Annual Herath/Navreh Celebration on 26th March, to be held in Birmingham – please see further details in the "Event section".

Last year we released three Issues of the ISBUND Newsletter. We sincerely thank all the Biradiri members for their support and contributions, without which this would not have been possible. We continue to use your feedback to keep improving the newsletter, so please do share your views and comments with us.

Following on from the last Issue, this issue will continue with the theme '*The Paths We Chose*'. We showcased the diverse nature of talent within the KP diaspora in the UK, of which we are immensely proud. It is in such abundance, that one edition would not suffice to capture it all. We hope that you will enjoy reading stories from the vast array of career paths taken by our community members. No doubt, these will inspire the next generation to identify and build on their future aspirations.

To mark the special occasion of *Herath*, we will open the edition with a very special article: *A rendezvous with Mrs Phoola Warikoo*, which is filled with nostalgic memories of celebrating *Herath* before in the valley. Sanjla Misri and Rekha Tukra ji will also take us back to *Herath* times in Kashmir with their writing. Following on from there, we have an interview with Mr Amit Kotha, who is a stalwart in the financial sector, an *Ode to our Teachers* to celebrate three wonderful KP women in the education sector, an interview with a young KP novelist, Mr Rahul Raina, among other articles that are featured.

We also send you our greetings for upcoming Navreh in advance and end this note with the following text translated from the *Chandogya Upanishad* 5.19.1-2:

Inner Homa, body as temple

*Therefore the first food which a man may take,
is in the place of Homa.
And he who offers that first oblation,
should offer it to prana, saying svaha!
Then Prana is satisfied.
If Prana is satisfied, the eye is satisfied.
If eye is satisfied, the sun is satisfied.
If sun is satisfied, heaven is satisfied.*

Best wishes,

Sheetal Raina, Shivani Dudha, Anjan Raina



Pic Credit: Save Bhat @diyminiatures (included with permission from the artist)

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A Rendezvous With Mrs Phoola Warikoo

Team ISBUND met (virtually) with Phoola ji to chat about Herath festivities with her and relive her memories of celebrations in Kashmir when she was a little kid. A brief excerpt of our long chat is here. *Herath poshte* to all!

Take me back to the days of Herath in Kashmir? What was your favourite part?

Back in the days when we were young kids in Kashmir, life was not as easy as it is today. Electricity was limited, winters were harsh and there were no electrical appliances or home help to make life easy. *Herath*, therefore, was a time when the entire household spent days cleaning up every nook and corner of the house, washing all those heavy winter clothing, and generally sprucing up the entire homes. Children of the household played with cowries '*Harre*' while the elders were busy with Herath preparation. I have very fond memories of those days playing with cowries.

Our Herath or Shivratri as it is mostly known outside of Kashmir is strikingly different, more elaborate, more festive, a perfect combination of devotion and festive. One thing that is very prominent is the ritual of 'vatuk barun'. I have vivid memories of sitting by my grandfather's side while he got the elaborate vatuk set up. For those of us who never experienced this tradition first-hand in Kashmir or even outside, what does it entail and what is its significance?

On the day of Vatuk barun, the ladies of the household were busy preparing the many dishes which would be offered to Lord Shiva. The setting up of Vatuk and getting puza materials ready was an elaborate affair. In many households, the family priest 'Guruji' would arrive and complete the puja. As he used to be a very busy man on the day, needing to attend many houses, his puja would be a quick one, lasting no more than an hour. In our home, it took much longer and was conducted by my father and his three brothers. The men of the house used to fast until after the puja had completed. The children would be up way past midnight, enjoying the food, playing with cowries and generally having fun.

Shivrati is considered a celebration of the union of Shiva and Shakti. The vatuk set up in essence depicts the marriage party of Lord Shiva. The *Vatuk* comprises of a large earthen or metallic pot which represents Lord Shiva, a smaller pot representing Ma Parvati, 3 *Sanivaris*, *Sanepatul*, 3 *Rishi Duljis*, *Dhupazoor* etc. representing Shiva's dwarf pals, and *baratis*. The pots are filled with walnuts and fresh water and decorated with marigold flowers and placed on mats made from grass.



Picture credit: Munoji Sumbly

Growing up I have always wondered why some Kashmiri families didn't partake in celebrating with others. I understand these families, called Gurit follow different rituals for Herath. Please may you help explain what the differences are and how they celebrate it?

Gurit families were mostly Kak's or Razdans. They generally do not cook meat or fish during the festival and do not visit other families. They used to cook daal with nadur and dumaloo, the daal tasted so divine that people will forget their roganjosh. Some *Gurit* families used to prepare fish on Doon mavas but it is not a tradition followed by all.

Why do we call Shivratri 'Herath' and why the day that follows is called 'Salaam'. Can you tell us a little more about it?

There is a story that reflects our belief in Shivratri and the power of Lord Shiva. It is said that a ruler of Kashmir known as Jabar Khan was so annoyed with this deep rooted faith that he ordered Pandits to celebrate Shivratri in July instead of the Phalgun season. As they didn't have a choice, they assented. To everyone's surprise, that day in July when Pandits celebrated Shivratri, it snowed. People were not happy with the ruler as their crops were destroyed and livelihoods were lost. Muslim neighbours, therefore, came visiting the following day offering their 'Salaam' to acknowledge this unseen power of Lord Shiva. Since this event surprised ('Hairat') everyone, the festival was thereafter, also referred to as Herath and the day when Muslim friends came visiting is popularly known as 'Salaam'. The ruler was also given a new nickname 'Jabar-Janda' and the saying goes... 'Jabar Janda Haras auw vande' meaning winter came in July because of the rag man Jabar.

Salaam festivities has its own variations across families with the food differences. How did your spread look like?

All families follow a set of rituals that were started many generations before them. On the day of *vatuk barun*, most Pandits offer a vegetarian spread but on Salaam, the spread is mostly non-vegetarian featuring Roganjosh, matsch, dumaloo, nadru etc.

Doon mavas, we have this lovely sequence we say when we get the vatuk back into the house, what is its significance.

The 15th day of Phalgun is known as 'Doon Mavas'. On this day, the water (*nirmaal*) from all the pots from vatuk is drained out and immersed in the nearby river or well or under the trees. The walnuts are washed and brought back home. When the party arrives home from the river, they knock at the door and announce that they have brought 'ann' and 'dhan' (food and wealth) with them and are welcomed inside.

The walnuts and rice pancakes are offered as 'Naveed' to everyone and distributed among neighbours and relatives.

The first Herath after marriage has its own festivities attached with the girls parents sending gifts with walnuts to her house. Her in-laws would then distribute these walnuts and bread among their own relatives and neighbours.

What do you miss the most, and how is you Herath different now?

I miss celebrating Herath with the extended family the most. But I am happy to celebrate it with my son and his family, passing on the tradition to them and imparting this knowledge of culture that I have to my granddaughter. We don't get all the *samigiri* we need, like 'bael patir' for the puja here but it doesn't matter. You need to offer your prayers with *shraddha* and that is all that matters. May Lord Shiva bless you all.

‘लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान’

Sanjla Misri Nautiyal



हाय वालान कूनव कूनव, लेफवोरि मसलंद त पर्दअ छलान
तअरि गटकारस मंज घर शूबिरावान, डुवान शेरान त बान् सुरवान ।
हवन सामग्री, डूइन, कंद सोमब्रान, असि अय्स पोशन माल करान
वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

डोन्यन छल्लुक श्रौज कनन गछान ओस, नोशि माजि छलिथ घर अय्स चानान
अन्न ह्यथ आय ह्यथ सोख त सम्पदाह ह्यथ राम बोर बरस प्येठ ओस प्रारान ।
बूजिथ सु ठुक ठुक जयिठ घरिक अय्स यिवान, लोल सान घर की बर मुचरान
वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

वटकयच जाय सो गंडिथ अ्स, वागिर बाह दोह गोडिन लिवुन फश दिवान
पुत डोन्यव बरिथ गागरि त सोनपोतिल, दरबस त आरि पयठ अय्स थवान ।
वटक मसाल सय्त थाल बरान अय्स, हवन कुंड ज्ञन ओस खूब शोलान
वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

सेंद्रि टयेकि सय्त असिस ओमकार बनावान, डूइन दोध, कन्द मूल बरि बय्यर बरान्
वुसिर अ्सिस लोल सान गंडान, पोश माल असिस नय्त त्रावान ।
रोप वरखव सीत असिन सजावान, वटुक राज ओस ज़ोतान त प्रज़लान
वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

क्याह अय्स व्यस्तरिथ वटख पूजाह करान, उमा शंकरस रतनदीप आवलान
गंटाई टंकार त शेंख शब्द दिवान अय्स, तुम्बकनारि ह्यथ भजन ग्यवान् ।
रीथ हयन्द सयिन-गाड्, नाना प्रकार व्यंजन्, वटकस श्रदाय सान भावान
वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

किशमिश, बादाम, काजू त नाबद, शौक सान डूइन त चोच व्यर खयवान
 शुरि अय्स बडड शौक सान गछान, मोहस त अशिनावन डूइन बअगरान ।
 नचुना त गिन्दनाह सरीय करान अय्स, खान्दर गरस मन्ज ओस बासान
 वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

इक्ववटई हारन त तासस गिंदान अय्स, गिंदान गिंदान अस् राथ रावान
 हेरथ खर्च खअत्र कूत अय्स प्रारान, कअर कअर कर्विन अय्स नोट मेलान ।
 गौरी शन्कर् पान ज़न यिवान अय्स, अन्न, धन, अही ह्यथ, सथ पनिन थवान
 वारियाह मश्योम त वारियाह मशरोवुम, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

अज़ ब यति छस पगाह ब हुति छस, गंडिथ जाय वटकिच स्वपुन वय्न बासान्
 तोतयि में थव्मन्न रीथ छ जअरी, घर सफाई छस करान त वटुक छस ब बरान ।
 हेरथ खर्च शुरेन दिवान छस ब, डूइन त चोच व्यर छस बनावान
 यि करान हु करान सअरिय व्यवहार करान छस, लोकचारिच सो हेरथ, छम न मशान ॥

Sanjla has kindly translated this beautiful Kashmiri poem for those of us who need a little help understanding Kashmiri. You can find the translation [here](#).

A beautiful recitation of this poem can be accessed [here](https://youtu.be/62bd7TwKwoo) (https://youtu.be/62bd7TwKwoo).

Salaam Mubarak, Smell the Marigold.....

Nipa Charagi

The day after Shivratri, Kashmiri Pandits celebrate Salaam. Till three decades ago, it was a day when their Muslim friends and neighbours would greet them. All that has changed now.

Herath is the biggest festival of Kashmiri Pandits, marked by a night of praying followed by a day of feasting. Some say “herath” means the night of Shiva, others say the word comes from the Persian word *hairat*, which means to be surprised.

In Kashmir, which the Pandits were forced to flee three decades ago, the preparations would start a fortnight earlier in the lunar month of *Phalguna* and usually marked the end of intense winter, called *chilai kalan*. The first week was devoted to washing, dusting and cleaning the house, like the intense flurry of activity leading up to Diwali. All the windows in the house would be flung open, as if to dislodge the winter from its cosy corners. Every rug and carpet would be dusted, slicing the sharp, cold winter air with a whack sound. In traditional houses, the earthen floors and stairs would be swept with a fresh coat of earth.

Next, the paraphernalia required for the puja, called *vatuk puja*, would be collected. A vital element of this is the earthen/metal pots, which are filled with dry walnuts, flowers and water. The big pot denotes Shiva, the other one Parvati. These are surrounded by an assortment of vessels, also filled with water and walnuts. These pots and vessels are draped in marigold flowers, *bael* (wood apple) leaves and red thread.

Unlike most other parts of the country where Shivratri is celebrated on the 14th day, Kashmiris offer puja on the 13 night of *Phalguna*. The 14th day is Salaam, a Persian word which means “hello”. It is the day to socialise, greet your relatives and neighbours.

Read the full article on [livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com).

Without Beginning Ever Existing

Rekha Tukra

Happy Herath Days are here again, night of 'Hara' - The Shiva

At the crack of dawn awoken by seagulls, nudging me with their squawking from seashore,
it drove me 'sleepyhead' out of my bed directly to balcony to peek at pristine turquoise sea,
full of waves henceforth led seagulls out of inland to far water gradually they disappeared and sped.
Whilst chuckled gazing into those currents, my mind effectively traversed ahead,
the fog gate conjuring up another period in time, decades prior,
suddenly all said characters came alive,
elsewhere I saw parched birds slurping water holding twig in their beaks,
above water their head frosty on an icy day and wet grey clouds overhead.

Once the ferries, the sailing boats anchored on harbour suddenly got replaced by wooden boats,
then I saw houseboats tied to its moorings instead of coast, I found myself drifted afloat in river,
reaching to edge of riverbank of Downtown Srinagar,
seagulls had taken form of ducks and ducklings in a row paddling wavy water following their mother
duck and drake with quack and trout

"Lily and lotus flowers in nearby moat, kaleidoscope hues of flowers were a sight to behold and dote.
Over the river was intricate carved wooden bridge on which *horse tonga* and passers-by in long coats"

Various small floating market boats were selling stock of mainly fresh Collard greens, where I
overheard my grandmother and other ladies bargaining with the lady vendor to lower price of big
bundles of lotus stems and clearly could hear vendor replying loudly with a grin, "*these are Herath
festival days, what do you expect. Demand of these vegetables are soaring so is the price*". "*I know
Shivratri is around the corner, but these are mere lotus stems not gold!*" said my grandma in a high
note.

I caught sight of children, teens and women accompanied by relatives, all cleaning their brass pitchers
and filling it with fresh water from the river then soaking whole walnuts into it. Afterwards, they also
immersed handful of flowers plus let tea-light candles and *diyas* float in river fully lit, my Grandma
yelling "*come on, give me a hand and hurry up, it is pre celebration day of Herath*". I admit, we had to
take pitcher/pot akin to God Shiva back home on auspicious time to install it in its ambit."

"Best wedding of all eras, a big bash, splendour and opulence of Shiva - the lord of Lords
with Parvati Goddess of fertility, power, epitome of beauty, daughter of Himalaya's God."

Amid all the hullabaloo we followed our grandma like her entourage through busy narrow lanes,
through the alleyways to reach the front gate of our dwelling with exponentially high excitement and
furore. On entering, I directly saw my Mommy and Aunt mopping front veranda with special clay soil
on eve of Shivratri, we could smell the earthy scent of wet clay similar like petrichor, when rain falls on
dry soil. Special cleaning and adorning were underway with ground rice flour and turmeric powder, a
specific pattern was drawn on the floor. Strict warning was issued not to step on the wet floor which all
had to adhere to and not to be reprimanded later if found in breach.

“The Holy Trinity, Lord Brahma himself discharged the duties of the divine priest while God Vishnu, undertook and coordinated preparations for 7-star banquet feast.”

Even though temperature was sub-zero, the ladies of our big joint family were tirelessly completing chores, preparing, and making arrangements for the mega festival of the year with tremendous fortitude and meticulousness. Today when I am myself at that juncture, being the lady of the household and in the same shoes as them, I can assimilate what it encompasses to do that quantum of work painstakingly. It was not fantasy or nuance of illusion but real reel rolling, and I was on the scene in all sequences.

Thereupon, we were giving rousing welcome with *chants* and *mantras* on threshold to announce with trumpet of *conch*, signifying the beginning of big epic fat wedding day celebrations of Lord Shiva and Parvati. All the floors of house mainly living, reception, sitting rooms were fully plush carpeted readied to host all our large joint family members and guests as it was almost like mini marriage gathering.

The kitchen which stood on the second floor was well equipped with cooking clay hearths on the right corner and gas burner hob/stove on other side with crockery, silverware and brassware nearby on shelves. Firewood logs burning underneath the hearth, on it traditional big bronze utensils simmering, in it different food and sideways mom sauté stir frying in a brass wok.

Honestly, we all were blown over by whiff of wind infused with aroma of luxurious regal delicacies coming to our direction amplifying our insatiable appetite.

“Maha Shivratri being a lavish affair in families celebrated it with enormous zeal and zest; Shiva shakti were invited invoked worshiped and installed like supreme deities, VIP guest.”

Meanwhile in addition to overseeing the arrangements, my Daddy’s another entrusted job was to buy Shivratri Pooja material from potteries, groceries, and ration etc and to bring from Gulmarg *Bilva* triangular green leaves specially for offering to Shiva. Whilst all kids had a clique, were vivacious to take responsibility of peeling off petals of flowers, bulbs dry rose petals, winter roses, we girls made *garlands*.

“The ordained Guru ji conductor of veneration must admit was no less than a pope delivering Christmas mass sermon; children then had no remote to press the fast forward button instead control mounting impatience to avoid called out moron.”

On the day of Shivratri, the waiting for the priest of our family clan *Guru ji* was the pivotal part of festivity and significantly compounded our restlessness by every minute, ultimately when he arrived it stoked the euphoric atmosphere, hiatus when he finally showed up hereafter plan was set to fruition. Elders, children alike bursting with happiness asked the priest to begin conducting veneration henceforth priest persuasively made us to *chant hymns* wholeheartedly.

The intriguing, best part of Shivratri festival was to visit “*Shankaracharya Temple*” on “*hur Ashtami*”, following morning in the wee hours a rooster broke the dawn by its crowing. Likewise one of our ‘early bird’ cousin volunteered to wake us up for trekking to the temple as it was a ritual and customary to pay visit. Due to enthusiasm and earnestness we were unable to sleep besides not to miss new day adventure, subsequently asleep were woken from slumber by shouts “*wake up time to get up and go*”.

The *Shankaracharya Temple* nestled in a hill, surrounded by stunning countryside with fantastic views of the Dal Lake on the other side. Completely smitten, marching en route in twilight, we witnessed flock of birds flying away from withered trees to far sky, few hawkers in thick fog, milk maids and passers-by were cruising in the area to commence mundane day. After reaching the summit of hill we saw sunrise with rare phenomenon sight projecting Lord Shiva standing with his trident spear in hand on snow cladded Kailash mount in background solar rays halo nimbus appeared like a disc and crown. In the temple we poured pure water since God shiva is pleased with water and paid our obeisance.

“Receiving gifts and cash wrapped in envelope (*herath kharach*) was like you hit the jack pot and gave tremendous joy and gratitude;
we will never grow out of the way that Salam Herath day made us feel, it was fervour fiesta event sort of carnival magnitude.”

Distribution of rice chapati with soaked walnut kernels as a sacrament culminating to completion of epic festival. The generation of lineage, moreover, it was all our prolific elders whose ardent faith was extremely paramount to keep these customary rituals continuing and paradigm of its essence.

It is difficult to envisage this day when our elders, forefathers who lived all their lives in their own homes in fact would have been reluctant to ever vacate or go anywhere, were actually coerced, forced to renounce their flourished lives afterwards fearfully as a last resort relinquished their inheritance apparently everything collapsed like a house of cards, now our future remains murky.

It is surreal, I can't forget and will not forgive, those axe wielded vile nemesis who slashed our big blossomed huge tree, caused turbulence uprooted it from soil, sliced its branches which oozed blood, destroyed numerous nests, trembling fallen birds whimpered like fish out of water, underneath dead pile of leaves caught fire and burning ambers of dry wilted leaves doused our hopes, hearth and homes. It was inclined to trouble me to see deserted houses in dilapidated condition, emotions were running high because it was tell-tale sign of darkness to infinity, now it seems irreversible situation.

I yearn to venture out to hover over once again on my homeland Kashmir just to follow trails of my grandparents and matriarchs, scrutinise my ancestral house for their marks, in case from those windowsills of second floor “*Kaeni*” they usually set out their eyes in our wait, probably their spirits are still present there waiting us to return. Particularly I want to glance at shelves of our living rooms, supposing I can locate family photo frames, wall mount God Shiva of the family because in chaos and turmoil, they couldn't gather or carry those souvenirs for keepsake.

“To shake a leg, playing games rolling sea shells cowries (*Haare*) singing was fun, donning brand new clothes was kind of mandatory;
neither our towering personalities, kith and kin to guide nor homeland hearth now barely any enjoyment only tales, story of *Herath's* glory.”

At current when we are all scattered and spread all over the world, personally I feel without family priest we hardly can perform veneration properly or accurately, moreover the essential steps, nitty gritty of rituals are compromised and some discrepancies remain.

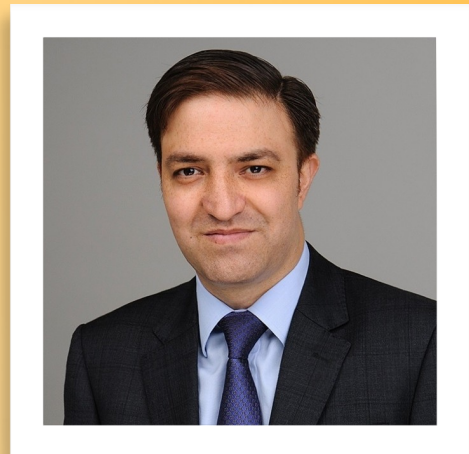
Lastly, it is worth considering, to be seriously self-reliant, learn and then emphasise like a protagonist how to teach our children under tutelage of head of family and request them to necessarily attend these festivals, so they can carry legacy and our Kashmiri culture norms and unique customs to fore.



Creating Your Own Benchmarks

Amit Kotha

Amit Kotha, a stalwart banker, set up Beryllus Capital in March 2021 in a joint venture between Focus Financial Partners and the Hinduja Group. Over the past two decades, he has served some of the most prominent families and ultra-high net worth clients advising them on a range of integrated wealth management solutions and corporate matters.



For someone who hasn't read about you, tell us a little bit about your journey ?

I did my graduation from Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi followed by an MBA in Marketing. My dad was posted in the High Commission of India in London; however, I was reluctant to join my parents here. As luck shall have it, I agreed to visit them for a few months which later on translated to the start of my professional journey in the UK. My first banking job was with ICICI Bank UK which focused on NRI clients and since then there has been no looking back.

Within a year and continued success, I got headhunted to Citibank as a Relationship Manager. The NRI business at Citibank did exceptionally well and I moved up the ranks within five years to become one of the youngest VPs.

During the Credit Crisis of 2008, I decided to move on for the right reasons i.e., flight to safety for clients. This led to a new opportunity when I was headhunted to Royal Bank of Canada (RBC). Eventually I ended up being with RBC for 12 years, holding various positions; from Head of NRI to Head of Global South Asia, then Head of Ultra-High Net worth business and finally managing Enterprise Strategic Clients.

In 2021, I started a challenging entrepreneurial journey when I moved to set up Beryllus Capital, a joint venture between the Hinduja group, which is one of the richest families here in the UK and Focus Financial Partners, which is a NASDAQ listed company to set up a multifamily office. We cater to ultra-high net worth clients, providing an open architecture system where we help them navigate financial solutions by being an independent provider and a trusted adviser.

What were the challenges in these journeys that you faced? And what did you learn from them?

I love challenges and I believe there's only one constant in life and that's change. Coming from a background where my father and grandfather were in government services, to become an entrepreneur, it was a tough and challenging decision. But I took it because I thought that is the right thing to do. I firmly believe in passion with purpose, I am very passionate about work, but it's got to have a purpose attached to it as well. During the course of my career, there have been many ups and downs and I have learnt to have the right attitude to succeed and move ahead.

With all start-ups the initial challenges are always there, but if you have a great team and a strategy which can be executed well, then things will start to fall in place.

Are there any flagship deals or events you want to call out as one of your favourites?

I have been associated with high profile transactions in both the wealth management and capital market space. However, due to confidentiality I am unable to share specific details. I have been highlighted as one of the top 10 UHNW bankers by Spears500 for many consecutive years.

Where do you think you're going to go next? What's next for your career?

I founded Beryllus Capital with an intention of making it as one of the largest global multifamily offices in the world. It's full of challenges but I always like to aim high, and create my own benchmarks and then leaving the rest to hard work and destiny.

What advice do you have budding professionals in our community?

For me discipline is one of the key drivers for success. I have always believed in being punctual in everything I do, be it personal or professional. I would encourage youngsters to always keep pushing their own boundaries, it takes time, effort, and patience for people to become successful. There are many deviations that the next generation faces i.e., peer pressure, stress relating to grades, friends etc. However, my advice would be to stay focused and believe in yourself.

Actions Can Speak What Thousand Words Cannot

Dr Anita Sharma Raina

MBBS; FRCGP; DFRSH; Diabetes (Dip); MSc (Edu)

It started with a small step in the summer of 2003 when I moved with my husband and our three young children to the UK from Istanbul after a career break of nearly 3.5 years. An invite to an enhanced NHS induction workshop as a motivational speaker to share my top ten tips of success as an International Medical Graduate (IMG) was not only a humbling moment but also allowed me to pause and reflect on the years gone by.

It has been a long & beautiful journey both professionally and personally for us as a family for each one of us got wings to fly and realise our dreams. Here is a snapshot of top ten tips to other IMG graduates from someone who graduated from Dr SNMC medical College in Jodhpur, India in 1992 and MBBS was the only professional degree I had when I came to the UK, which, had in fact become rusty.

What do I do?

Clinical

- i. GP Partner Smallfield, Surrey
- ii. Senior Clinical Advisor for Covid-19 111
- iii. GPSI in Diabetes with insulin initiation
- iv. Minor surgeries and joint injections in Primary Care
- v. Coils and Implants Fitter

Educational

- i. Programme Director for CRESH GP Training Scheme (HEEKSS)
- ii. Family planning Trainer
- iii. Horley PCN Educator Lead
- iv. GP tutor for East Surrey CCG
- v. Honorary Examiner at Brighton and King's Medical School
- vi. Academic mentor & PGCERT Marker

Professional

- i. Appraiser for NHSE
- ii. CRESH Equality & Diversity Lead

Voluntary

- i. Dementia Champion
- ii. Infant Feeding Champion
- iii. Community COVID Support worker

Top Tip 1# Life That Balances my Work

It is vital to find one's motivation. My motivation was threefold:

A passion to be a good doctor and I am still trying to be one. The second motivation were the two men in my life who believed in me when I did not, my father and my husband. The third motivation was to set an example of hard work for my children and keep us thriving together as a family.



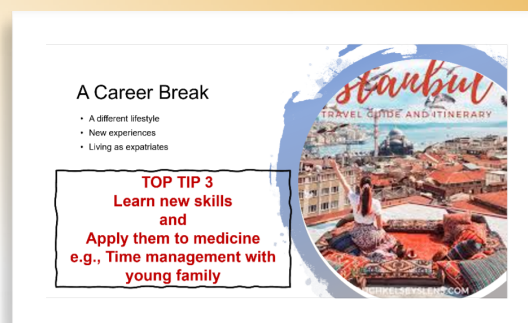


Top Tip 2# Medicine is Universal

The experience of working in a busy Government hospital in Delhi taught me to work with limited resources, think on the feet and be flexible. Safdarjung Hospital never slept just like the NHS. The challenges the healthcare system faces are the same in every country. The solutions are thus the same too.

Top Tip 3 # A Career Break

Living the life of an expat in Istanbul showed me a glimpse of a different lifestyle, a new culture, and an opportunity to mingle with the international community. It taught me to keep my own culture alive whilst participating in celebrations of others. Those communication skills are the cornerstone of my work as a GP.



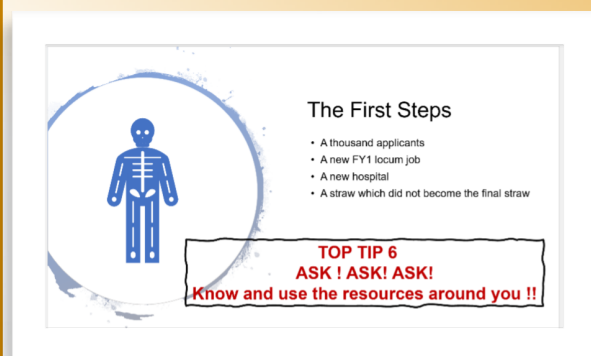
Top Tip 4 # The United Kingdom of Exams

Temptation leans on the door but opportunity knocks once. I have taken nearly 16 exams in this country, most of which, when the children were taking theirs. My revision strategy was opportunistic learning, e.g., getting through a few MCQ whilst waiting for a child to finish her dance class or sitting on the edges of a football field.

Top Tip 5 # My First School in UK

Beneath the language sits the culture. I learnt what do families really do in their homes, what they eat, how do they communicate and what means most to them. Apart from a strong mum network, the Primary school in Dorking was indeed my first school too.





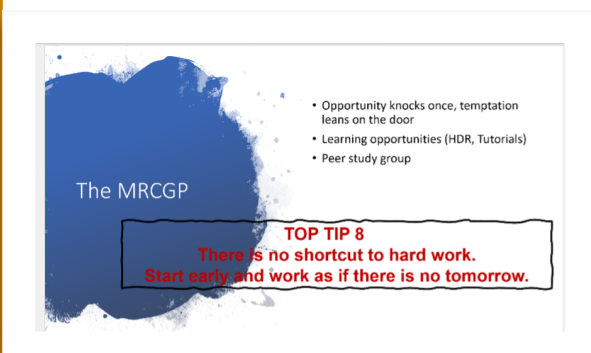
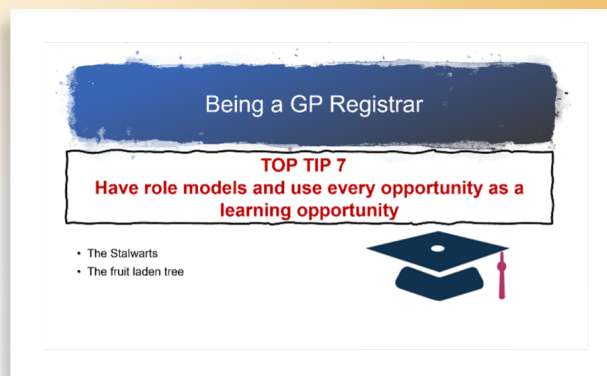
Top tip 6 # The First steps

NHS was flooded with doctors at the time. It was a routine to submit 100 applications daily and expect not even to be shortlisted till a day when I got voluntary work experience in my local hospital. I was taught how to look up blood results on a computer which, incidentally, is not a complex task. On a ward round, when I had to do it independently, I failed. In just a few moments my self esteem & the confidence hit rock bottom till a helpful ward clerk told me that the computer was faulty. This taught me to ask for help. People are generally willing to help.

Top Tip 7 # Role models and learning opportunities

Role models are important but even more important is to choose the right people. A fruit laden tree will always bend, and such were the doctors I was fortunate enough to learn from. They aspired to perfection and encouraged me to do too.

It was thus an honour to be nominated by a role model to be the Fellow of Royal College.



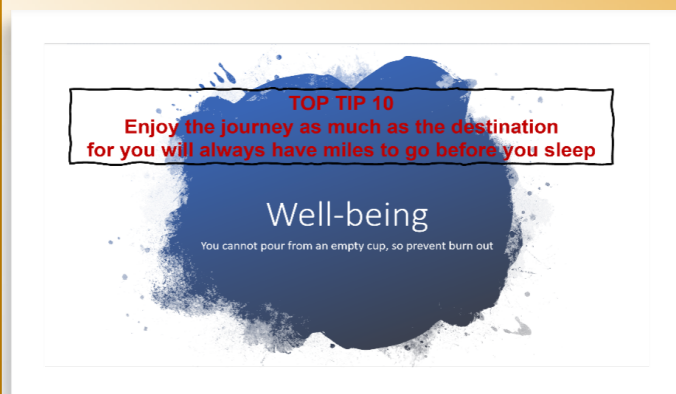
Top Tip 8 # No shortcut to hard work

There are no shortcuts in life. Our home was akin to an educational institution where all of us were studying and working hard towards one exam or the other. My favourite companion was my little dog Snowy who would sit through the nights under my study table as I wrote my dissertation.

Top Tip 9 # A lifelong learner

The fire of learning burns bright within me and I take out time to stoke the flames. There is always another thing to learn, a skill to master and a lifetime to share my learning. This is a land of opportunities. I am currently working towards an ILM Level 5 qualification as a coach.





Top Tip 10 # Well-Being

Nobody can pour from an empty cup, so one needs to find time to stop and pat oneself on the back. My eternal gratitude to the biggest healer of all who has always sent angels whenever my path to being a good doctor has been met with challenges.

I leave you with this poem which I dedicate to all the healthcare professionals and especially our new junior doctors who had a baptism of fire when the Pandemic started:

*Today I woke up to see the dawn
Every trace of darkness had gone
The sky had a peaceful hue
Fresh and pure like the morning dew.*

*The pandemic has taught us a lesson
To treat, to care, in every fashion
The road is long with many a bend
Your resilience will see you to the end*

*These are footprints on the sands of time
Your role is nothing short of divine
Now is the time to rise & shine
To say each day: everything is just fine!*

*As you touch many a life
You heal those in pain or in strife
With the patients you share a bond so deep
Work as you do tirelessly from waking to sleep*

*It takes courage to answer a call
It takes courage to give your all
You tread on a noble path with grace
Every challenge you bravely face*

*Shivratri is here my friend
Warm wishes I want to send
Happiness and peace I wish you
Pure joy like the morning dew*

*Time with family I hope you spend
Soon you will be back, to heal and to mend
To a new start, to Navreh, a new year
To wipe away many a tear*

*"No candle loses its light while
lighting another candle. Never stop sharing, caring, and Helping others, smile because it makes our life
more meaningful."
——— Anita Raina*

Make Sure You Learn to Ignore Your Parents

Sumran Kaul

If you're an age where you're wondering what path to take in the future, I'd like to share five lessons from my journey with you. My goal is for you to reflect on your current thinking (rather than take the title literally :)

First, some background on me. I grew up in London and studied Economics and Management at Leeds Business School a few hours away from home. I turned down better universities in London because I wanted to move away for a 'fuller' experience because the truth is I wanted to go to university to live, not study. I've now spent the past 15+ years in a number of leading companies within media and marketing. It's an interesting 'industry' because we all interact with it every day, but very few know much about it behind the scenes where the rich, powerful and influential across society are pulling the strings.

My own work has essentially revolved around understanding why we behave the way we do, how we're influenced by the world around us, and then using these insights to help companies (or the Government) make decisions that quietly impact everyday lives across society. The work is varied, the people eclectic ranging from mad creative geniuses to data scientists, from hot shot 25-year-old entrepreneurs to 60 year newspaper editors. The best parts are the close connection it has with the wider world and it's fast-paced nature, where the biggest companies today might not exist in ten years, while the biggest companies in ten years might not even exist today. Its changing nature is driven by accelerations in technology and so it's always been ideal for young people. It was when my own journey started aged 21 and it is even more now.

My actual 'career' started at a leading 'global professional services' company called PwC. You're Kashmiri so you've probably heard of it. It started as work experience during the final year of my studies thanks to my dad, this led to summer employment during university and eventually a graduate job offer. Great company, status and pay but I found the work boring and so I declined. It was an opportunity the likes my dad's generation could never imagine turning down (...but then they would never even be asked on account of being Indian). A generation on, even feeling I had a choice was a privilege I didn't initially recognise. I left with no plan B and spent the next few months researching possible industries, while making modest amounts of money travelling up and down the country playing in five-a-side football tournaments where the winners won money (I was a good player in a good team). I eventually stumbled across 'media'. It felt fresh and different to the usual paths tread in our culture (...you know the ones).

I applied for a graduate job at a TV broadcaster called ITV, which is the biggest 'commercial' group in the UK. I landed a role in their commercial team which involved identifying and negotiating with big brands who wanted to advertise on TV. You didn't think much of it at the time but every day you played with choices about how to fill 'airtime' (aka advert breaks) which had a collective value of millions.

After a few years of this, I got bored and managed to 'blag' a 'market research and intelligence' role at an organisation called Ofcom, which helps regulate many media industries (e.g., TV, Radio, Mobile networks, postal services) on behalf of the UK Government. It has wide ranging powers but essentially looks to ensure people's interests are protected and that competition remains healthy. In practise, the work was very varied. In a single week I could be speaking to the public about their thoughts on sex and violence on TV, helping set rules on the delivery of news, how to help get broadband in a remote village in Scotland or trying to make progress on impossible tasks like how to help protect peoples' privacy online.

I learnt a huge amount there. I also had no right to be there. I didn't have the experience or skills needed, but said I did in the interview. They believed me, hired me, very quickly saw I didn't know what I was doing (!) but because they liked me, stuck with me, I learnt and progressed really well to the point they often ask me to come back now. (A good example of what matters is not how you start, but how you end up!).

After a few years I wanted to move back into the 'private sector' where salaries are higher (Ofcom was a non-profit making organisation). I landed a 'strategy' role at a global publishing empire called News Corporation. They own many leading newspaper brands like The Times & The Sunday Times and The Wall Street Journal (as well as other well-known but less respected ones). Again, I didn't have the right experience, but this time they knew, and I'd learnt from Ofcom how to bring value when you're an 'outsider'. My work here was broad but involved helping re-shape a business which makes most of its money from printed newspapers but now had to find new ways in a world where people read them less and less.

It was an environment where the ambitions were ridiculous and unrealistic - which meant many people didn't last long and failure was frequent, but one where incredible achievement became routine.

Nearly a decade on I knew I needed a new challenge and looked for a smaller company where you can influence more decisions. By good fortune and timing, an ex-boss headhunted me to join him at a Swedish-based technology 'start up' which helps advertisers understand how effective their marketing has been. I joined Brand Metrics nearly two years ago, and in this time, we've rapidly grown to now be working with leading media companies across 17 countries. As usual I walked in knowing little, and now know...well, about the same :) So that's pretty much my journey. Different companies, different cultures, different challenges. Instead of specific achievements, I'd like to share five some lessons from along my way.

1. Hold your goals lightly, not tightly

As the saying goes, you make plans and then life gets in the way. Many people overly struggle from setbacks, not because of the actual experience, but because they were too fixed in their expectations.

2. Define what success means to you

The younger you are, the more you define success by what the wider world does (especially your parents). But only you live your internal life, so learn to find, build and listen to the voice of the 'real' inner you.

3. No one cares about you

The best career advice I received was "Remember, no one cares about you". Brash, but helpful. Schools and parents teach you to be obedient, but in the 'grown up' world, it is those who take initiative who do best.

4. The difference between the best and the rest is audacity

I've got to know some incredibly successful people. The sort movies are made about. What sets them apart is rarely talent, hard work, or access to opportunity but 'audacity'. The school system and our culture (over) values rational and practical thinking. There is good reason for this, and it helps nurture successful people. But the truth is, the exceptionally successful are often irrational, impractical and dreamers. All children have boundless imagination, then the adults around us 'educate' it out of us. They work off evidence and from what they know and have seen. But the eternal fact of social progress is the world you are growing into is different to the one we are from. ***You can be more than we can see and be more than we could be.***

5. Character is the best predictor of success

I've interviewed, coached and mentored talent at all companies I've worked at (including people much more senior and experienced than me) and have done similar in the world of football where after many years as a semi-professional player I am now a qualified coach. What I've seen time and time again is when it comes to predicting long term success, the best indicator is not talent (or academic records), but mentality. Who thinks for themselves? Who wants to win vs wants to grow? Who faces their fears? Dare I say it to a Kashmiri audience, but who has the courage and conviction to analyse and challenge authority?

And who embraces failure? If you've not failed much, then I wonder how much you have stretched yourself as a person. Character grows from experience.

So, ***explore different things, test yourself, fail, learn. Repeat.***

So, there you have it. 1) Don't have goals; 2) ignore what parents tell you; 3) remember no one cares about you; 4) please be irrational and 5) keep failing.

As I said, I hope this gets you reflecting on how you think.

If you have any feedback or want to find out more about anything, please feel free to contact sumran.kaul@hotmail.co.uk

FinTech Marketing Guru

Payal Raina

Payal is a Founder of [FinTech Marketing community](#). She is a pioneer in founding the very first B2B FinTech Marketing community which is built for and by FinTech marketers breaking the silos between Financial Services firms and Technology providers. She is also Global Head of Marketing at Torstone Technology, a leading FinTech company, provider of cloud-based post-trade technology to financial institutions.



In her role, Payal oversees planning, development and execution of Torstone's marketing, PR and branding initiatives – across global markets – in UK and Europe, Nordics, Asia and North America.

Payal has been in the financial technology industry since 2004. With over two decades of experience in B2B marketing for global financial and technology companies (Microsoft, General Electric, Barclays) in Europe and North America, Payal has a wealth of experience implementing successful marketing strategies.

Building brands and subsequently increasing revenues of global businesses, in 2019 Payal was highly commended as 'Best Leader in Marketing' by the prestigious Global Women in Marketing Awards. Most recently, Payal was recognised in the Innovate Finance Women in FinTech Powerlist 2020. Also she has been recognised for the Editor's Choice Award at the FTF News Technology Innovation Awards 2021. The award was given to honour the enduring spirit of innovation by founding the FinTech B2B Marketing community. Payal has also served as a judge for the Global Festival of Media Awards in 2021 and Women in Marketing Global Awards in 2020.

Outside her corporate role, Payal serves as a mentor, and has lectured in marketing and has delivered Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) certified courses to marketing professionals. As an influential thought leader, she also writes blogs, marketing insights pieces and is a frequent keynote speaker at industry forums and public events. She also works as a judge at Global Marketing & FinTech awards around the world across a variety of categories has provided her with a unique view on what is required for FinTech marketers and women marketers to be successful over the long term.

Payal holds a Marketing Post Graduate degree from Canada and an MBA & BBA in Marketing and Marketing Management from India.

An Ode to Our Teachers

Salman Khan, not the Bollywood actor but the founder of Khan Academy (a much better role model) switched gears right at the top of his game from Hedge Fund manager to an educator. Many of us acknowledge that it was a brave move and in fact quite altruistic of him to let go of all that money could afford him and start an online platform for teaching children across the globe for free. Like him, some of our community members trained as engineers or scientists and enjoyed the adventures of a corporate life till a moment came in their lives where they decided to give it all up and opt for teaching as a profession. Like everything else in life, change is not easy but rewarding in its own way. In my conversation with three energetic and enthusiastic educators, I get a glimpse of their journey that is amazingly fulfilling with each day bringing on a new adventure.

Archana Warikoo Nagpal enjoyed her life as a Project Manager for a multinational company in India before moving to UK in 2000. Although, she had an offer to continue her role with the company in the UK, she chose to take a break and concentrate on raising her young daughter. It was a conscious choice, to take a step back and learn the ways of a new country and give her daughter the best start in her growing years. With that in mind, she enrolled her young one in many toddler groups so she can build social relationships with her peers and stimulate her little mind. It was these toddler groups, where Archana found her calling and developed her passion to teach by playgroup intervention.

She started volunteering at a local school where her daughter's nursery was located, initially a few hours and building up to almost volunteering full time. Her passion to teach and help didn't go unnoticed and the Headteacher offered to help her train formally as a teacher. It did come as a shock to Archana as she had never expected to train as a teacher but subconsciously, she was ready for this challenge. The rest as they say is history. Archana is now a certified IB Coordinator.

Preeti Bhat studied Masters in Chemical Instrumentation and worked as a Research Fellow in Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in Pune, India before moving to United Kingdom. Preeti was influenced by Montessori teaching philosophy when her daughter started attending a Montessori nursery in London. She took the decision to enrol for a diploma in Montessori education and enjoyed the learning experience thoroughly. She has now been teaching children 2 to 5 years of age for the last 12 years. During this time, she has gained wonderful experience of teaching children from various ethnic groups including children with special needs. There are times when she finds it challenging especially when working with children with English as an additional language (EAL). But acknowledges that it is very rewarding to see these children leave nursery as fluent English speakers to join Reception. Preeti feels proud to be part of these foundation years and contributing in one of the most important phases of a child's development.

While working with children with additional needs, Preeti became curious to know how the Early Years system works to support Special Educational Needs (SEN) children and gained additional qualification to work as qualified Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). It is a very stressful job with lot of paperwork involved but very satisfying to get a positive outcome because of early intervention and providing the right support to these children. Working in early years settings is not just about teaching or playing with little ones but also about being aware of safeguarding and child protection. Children in this age group are innocent and might not be able to express if they are suffering from any kind of abuse at home. Hence, early years practitioners must be vigilant and capable to look out for any signs of concerns. Being a Manager and the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Preeti has experienced dealing with child protection cases and admits there is so much to learn.

Tanya Dhar Kaul also trained as an engineer but decided to move into teaching so she can spend more time with her children and be actively involved in their learning journey. Tanya moved to Scotland after her daughter's birth and whilst pursuing an opportunity in engineering she found her calling during those playgroup sessions her toddler attended. She re-trained as a Montessori teacher and equipped herself with Montessori techniques and pedagogy that she believes has helped her both at work and at home raising two young kids. She worked at various recognised Montessori setups for few years implementing the newly acquired skills. Seeing the benefits these techniques imparted to kids, she additionally volunteered to help kids within the local community in Milton Keynes. Her work and mentoring opportunities helped her bridge the gap between her learning, understanding and working independently in a Primary school set up. Tanya currently teaches children in Key Stage 2 and enjoys the opportunity to work with children of all abilities by implementing interventional lesson plans and tailored mentoring for children to achieve their full potential.

What characteristics are critical for a successful educator?

As with any other profession, to succeed one needs to love what they are doing, be passionate about it and for teaching additional qualities like patience, compassion and empathy are very important. We live in a world where we don't know what is happening in the homes of these kids and as a teacher you may be the only person they may share things with, or who makes them smile. So remember to be calm and listen patiently. You also need to understand when you should withdraw from a certain situation or get them additional support.

What does an ideal day in teaching look like?

An ideal day in teaching is a lot different than the image people have. It's not an 8 to 3 and term only job. It's more like a corporate day where you need to prepare for the day, not just turn up a minute before the kids. There is a lot of background preparation behind each lesson and term. You can prepare for a day or week all at once, it depends on how you want to approach it. Whatever you choose, remember to look after yourself and aim to finish your day at a decent time so you can spend the rest of the time with your family doing things that matter the most. Don't burn yourself, remember you can't give from an empty cup.

What would you define as the highest and lowest points in your teaching career?

When you are a newly qualified teacher, you want to be perfect and with age you realise we are harsh on ourselves. Every lesson can't be the best lesson, we learn from our mistakes too. We need to juggle a lot of things and maintain a balance, thinking you are not good enough isn't ideal. To succeed, you need to have a good mentor, someone who will identify your deficiencies and help you develop. You also need strong support system, both at home and at school. You need someone who believes in you, pushes you to go that extra mile.

Your high points are unique too, sometimes you are excited about one of your pupils learning a new word and at other times its something big like a place at a prestigious university or your school getting the recognition that you have strived very hard for. No two days are the same like they say.

Has teaching changed your outlook of raising your own children?

Yes, it has. Every parent wants to do the best for their children and that brings a certain level of stress in parenting. Training as a teacher has equipped us with tools and techniques to understand the child psychology and behaviour and adapt our parenting style to suit our children. Every child is different and each phase in their lives is different. The techniques that worked with one of my children, doesn't go far with the other. So we need to constantly adapt to help bring out the best in them.

Would you propose teaching as a profession to young adults who are making career choices?

It's a very cultural thing. We as parents have opened up to professions other than the traditional choice of medicine or engineering but teaching especially early years education is yet to become appealing to a Kashmiri pandit parent. We need to work a little bit harder to get there.

Would you be willing to mentor young aspirants?

We would be happy to mentor anyone who has an interest in teaching. There is a general shortage in secondary school teachers qualified to teach STEM subjects. More male teachers tend to take up STEM subjects and we would love to see our girls fill this gap up. If you can bring about a change even in a single child's life, you have achieved so much in life.

There are challenges to teaching, especially early years. But then again, it is more rewarding and fascinating at the same time.

What are the various routes to teaching in England?

There are a number of routes to get into teaching. The School Direct scheme (formerly known as Graduate teacher program) allows you to train towards Qualified Teacher Status while being employed and is one of the most common routes of entry. Some of the Graduate routes to teacher training

include: Assessment only route and Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) university-led teacher training. More information can be accessed here.

For a detailed list of options to train as a teacher, please visit: www.prospects.ac.uk.

Rapid Fire With Rahul Raina

Rahul Raina's (27) debut book *How to Kidnap the Rich* is a wonderful, original, hilarious and biting sweeping satire of modern-day India that has received rave reviews and already been optioned by US film and TV network HBO. It has been sold into translation into numerous languages. His writing is high on entertainment value and a free-flowing writing style that connects with a wide cross-section of readers. He runs his own consultancy in England for part of the year and works for charities for street children and teaches English in India during the low season.



How does it feel to be an author at an unconventionally young age?

Personally, I feel good for myself because it's quite rare to be an author in our community but more importantly because it's good for the community. There aren't many Kashmiris who write books so I feel it's nice to bring our stories into the mainstream because we need to talk about the community.

Is writing something that you do on the side or full time?

Right now it's on the side but then I think eventually it could turn into a full-time job. When I talk to people in the publishing industry, they advise never do it as a full-time job to begin with, because it's very risky. One day your book could sell for a fortune and the next one could sell for pittance.

Did you always know you wanted to be an author or did you discover writing along the journey?

Along the journey because I'm very practically minded. If it doesn't make sense financially, I would be cautious. I picked up writing as a hobby to de-stress myself from working and now it's built-up overtime as a profession.

Did you have a creative flair growing up and could you or those around see you as budding author?

No, not really. I was at a school where everyone was White British. So the stuff I wanted to talk nobody else was really talking about. I felt on my own, and nobody would understand. They were writing stories radically different from mine. I wanted to but I just didn't know how to do it in the right way.

Do you want to capture things in your books that perhaps were not expressed when you were younger?

Yeah through conversations between characters in your books. Obviously like there weren't very many Indian or Kashmiri families. It's nice to be able to talk about things in a new and different way because the voices of immigrants in this country are slowly coming out. We now know how to work our way through the industry. There are people who have forged bridges before us and so that's what I find interesting that slowly we can move as the generations come down.

When did you get that shift in your mindset that writing was what you wanted to focus on?

About 3 or 4 years ago. It was more of a I think it just comes with age. At first you feel a little bit insecure and wonder if anybody would care about what I had to say and then after a while you begin to place trust in your creativity.

How do ideas come to your head? And how do you put them into words?

I use 'Google Keep'. I just write everything down that ever occurs to me so it's right there on my phone, so it's always in my pocket whenever I need it. I think pretty much everyone does have these sorts of creative ideas, but they just don't write them down and it is important to make sure that all of those ideas are down on paper somewhere so that you can refer to them.

How does it feel now to have one of your books amongst that list of authors that you often read? Where do you want to go from here?

It feels good. This is a good start and I'd like to push on now and do something bigger and better. Immigration is an interesting thing about kind of meeting different cultures and mixing different things together. So that would be this sort of stuff that I will be interested in talking about. Hollywood and publishing are starting to realize that India has a strong consumer base and a lot of people in it who are interested in this kind of thing. And they want to tell new stories about themselves. After coronavirus, the whole world has been brought together that I think is an interesting time to tell stories that go across the globe rather than which are just narrow. I think KPs see themselves as making our way, of forging our own path in this world.

Do you feel you would ever write about Kashmiri Pandits?

I would, but I think I need more time and more expertise and more training. It's not something that I would take on in the immediate future. I want to because I just feel that I would be unworthy for it. I wouldn't be good enough to do it like I think I need a couple more underneath my belt to be able to tackle that properly.

As an author, do you want to focus on fiction or non-fiction?

Fiction. I want there to be a distance between myself and my writings. Fiction allows you to do that.

Are you considering topics related to KPs into your books in the future?

One of the best things about doing this book was that I got to write an article for the Guardian about Kashmiri cuisine so that was something I really enjoyed doing. That's the sort of thing that I mean to talk about, our life, our culture and our community, but not in the context of bombs and police and barbed wire and people getting shot. That's the sort of thing that we should talk about. The positive aspects of our culture, what brings us together.

What do you like to read like in your free time?

Non-fiction. I like to read travel guides and cookery books. That for me is just the most interesting way of seeing the world without actually having to go there. And especially in the last two years, I haven't been able to go anywhere. Lonely Planet is good and nonfiction about people traveling places like Jan Morris, Ryszard Kapucinski; people who are writing about the world and experiencing new cultures and places.

What message do you have for the readers of our community?

I think it's important to tell our stories and tell them in a positive way. We should not turn our story and history merely into political messaging or activism. We should talk about poetry, our art and culture, because I think that we have a lot to give. It's important to believe that doing creative things doesn't have to be a full time job but to just think about them as an outlet for expression.

My Life: What an Emotional Rollercoaster!

Rinku Raina

My life. What an emotional rollercoaster it has been! Writing this article has brought back so many memories, my parents, my professional struggle, and moving to a new country. Therefore, I hope you will enjoy the story of my life.

As a teenager, unlike my two older sisters, I was ambiguous about my career and where life would take me one day. I was not a very academic person, but I went with the way life took me.

The values of my parents, even after migration, of not giving up- valuing every relationship, staying calm in every challenge life threw at them- changed the way I looked at life. Their aim in life was to provide the best education to their daughter, even if it dealt a blow to their own careers. The mantra of my life has always been 'to do my best in whatever I do'. These values have kept me going for all my life, and even now, living in England, working for University of Cambridge, I never let that get ahead of me and hinder who I really am.

After my graduation, my friends had all worked out the journey of their life and I sat- wondering what I wanted to do in my life. As my older sister is my role model, I followed her advice of getting into Management, without being fully aware of what was I getting into.

I completed my post-graduation in Human Resources (HR) from Pune University and it clicked and felt like a missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle. I have been privileged to work for one of the best manufacturing companies in Pune - Forbes Marshal. I had started enjoying life in HR and what appealed to me about this profession other than helping people grow, is that it's constantly growing, changing and evolving. From compliance with new laws and legislation, to technology and employee expectation, one never experiences a dull day at work. At Forbes Marshal, I grew from a Management Trainee to an Assistant Manager in HR, honing new skills each day.

A few years later, married with a little child, our family immigrated to the United Kingdom for better job prospects. Even though, I loved the place in many ways, it brought a huge obstacle to my professional life.

It took 5 years for me to find a role that I liked and aligned with my experience and interests and at the same time allow me to focus on raising my little children. I completed my CIPD Level 5 qualification needed for HR roles in the UK. I wanted to focus on career pathways where I could use my passion for helping people develop new skills and a career in Learning and Development (L & D) seemed to provide me with that opportunity and a bonus of a healthy work-life balance. So here I was after around 30 rejections, accepting an offer from the highly coveted University of Cambridge. Initially, a 9-month project, later evolved into a full time L & D role. I currently work as L & D Manager at Cambridge University Information Services.

My life: L&D and Human Resources

My role is about creating the right culture and environment for individuals and organisations to learn and grow. It knows the current and future capability needs of the organisation, as well as how to create a learning culture that drives engagement in ongoing professional development.

The advice I would give someone considering a career in L&D is - do not just think about it, make the career move into L&D, as you will not regret it!

Plan your route into L&D, research what type of role you want to work towards, undertake some qualifications that will help prepare you for the transition and then search for a role within an organisation that you think you can add value to as an L&D professional.

Having a degree in HR can come in handy when applying for L&D jobs, but what is even more valuable is a professional qualification from the CIPD - **in fact, many L&D job adverts specify a CIPD qualification as an essential or desirable quality.**

CIPD qualifications are recognised internationally as the gold standard in L&D and they will allow you to prove your professional credibility and commitment to high standards to potential employers.

If you are completely new to Learning and Development, you can start with the Level 3 Certificate or Diploma to get to grips with the basics and develop the essential skills you will need.

If you've had some experience dealing with L&D as part of a managerial role or have a university degree, you might be more suited to starting with the Level 5 Certificate or the Diploma which delve deeper into the core functions of L&D. Make sure you choose the right course for your education and experience level by consulting an experienced CIPD course advisor before enrolling.

Later in your career, you may wish to study a Level 7 Qualification, which will prepare you to transition into the most senior roles in L&D such as Head of L&D or L&D Director.

Lastly, I strongly believe that the values my parents embedded in me, of never giving up when times are hard; having a seeking attitude and, arguably, most important of all, keeping *all* relationships strong is helping me to lead my life.

Travelling to Kailash: The Shiva's Abode

Dhruv Razdan

In this article, I write about how one can reach Mount Kailash/Mansarovar, a highly significant mountain to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and specifically Kashmiri Pandits.

Kashmiri Pandits celebrate the festival of Shivratri a bit differently than mainstream Hindus in the form of "Herath". The mountain *Kailash* is situated in the most beautiful part of the Land of Snows, Tibet. It is considered highly sacred by all Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. Indeed, it seems to be an essential element in their beliefs.

Visiting Shiva and Parvati's home must have been in our bucket lists, considering how significant it is to us KPs. Hence, on that note, I thought I shall share some options to travel to help you with your research in case you were planning.

How to reach from India via Nepal by Road

Probably the most adventurous way, going overland from Delhi to Mount Kailash is an epic excursion of more than 1,838 kilometers.

The initial segment of the course is from New Delhi to Kathmandu, which is moderately simple as Indian nationals have unhindered admittance to going into and around Nepal.

From Kathmandu, you should take a vehicle to the boundary with China at Gyirong Port. Once across the boundary, you will be met by our aide and driver to make the long excursion to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar.

From Kathmandu, it is an excursion of around 846 kilometers to get to the sacrosanct mountain, an excursion of only five days.

This course takes you direct from Kathmandu overland to Kailash, crossing the line at the now-well known Gyirong Port. The excursion requires 2-3 days, contingent upon how quick you travel; however, it is smart to stay a night in Gyirong Town as you are moving from a somewhat low elevation in Kathmandu (2,700 meters) to Darchen (4500 meters.) This helps your body acclimatise better and reduces risk of Altitude Sickness.

After acclimatising in Gyirong Town, it is then a drive up through Gyirong County to the G219 National Road, which takes you the whole way to Darchen.

The outing is long, requiring 8-9 hours to get to the sacrosanct mountain, yet takes you through the absolute most incredible meadows loaded up with a plenty of level untamed life and a huge number of lakes and mountains.

(Independent travel in Tibet is prohibited, hence, a booking with an authorised tour operator is mandatory.)



How to reach from India/Europe via Nepal by Flight

The quickest method for getting to Kailash is by flight. First you will have to take a flight to Kathmandu. From Kathmandu, you will then have to travel to Lhasa, and then afterward catch a flight to Ngari Gunsa Airport, another 2 hour journey.

There is no non-stop trip to Gunsa Airport from Kathmandu.

There are a few day-by-day non-stop departures from Kathmandu to Lhasa, which takes around an hour and a half and flies straight over the culmination of Mount Everest in transit to Lhasa.

Flights are not modest, however, beginning at more than 500 dollars for an economy ticket, hence, it very well may be a costly course to take.

From Lhasa, the corresponding flight takes you to the recently built Ngari Gunsa Airport, at Shiquanhe.

There is just one flight each day to Gunsa from Lhasa, which leaves at around seven AM. The flight requires only 2 hours to get to Ngari, and costs from around 380 US dollars.

It is to be noted that traveling by flight doesn't allow you to acclimatise as well as you would while traveling by road, which leaves you at a higher risk of getting altitude sickness.

The flights shorten your trip of days to a mere few hours, though if you have the time, I will certainly recommend traveling by road as I firmly believe it is the journey, not the destination, that enhances your travel.

Do note that traveling to Tibet requires extensive paperwork and permit arrangements, hence, it is recommended that you plan your travel much in advance.

For any requirements, you can reach me at dhruv.razdan@razdanholidays.com



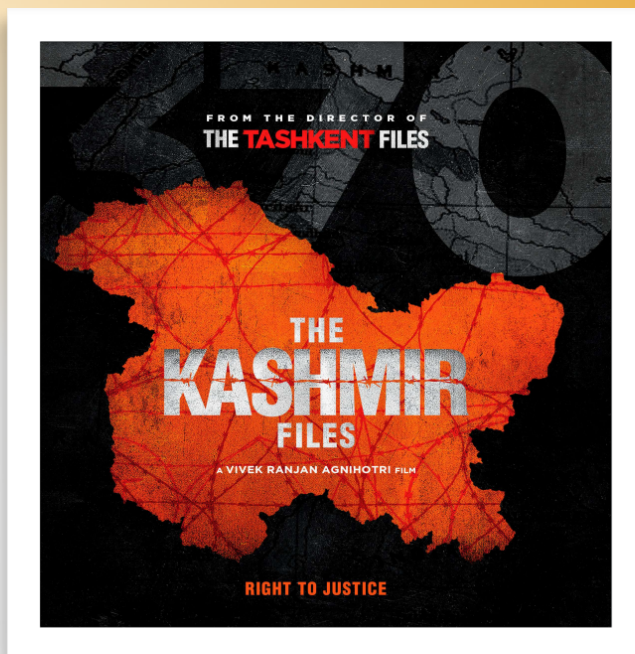
Mount Kailash

Achievements

Kaul siblings Shirin and Neil Kaul rocked the Milton Keynes Festival of Arts by bagging one Gold medal each in 'Humorous Verse' category. Shirin was awarded the 1st position in Grade 5 and Neil in Grade 1. Many many congratulations to both of them.



The Kashmir Files: Call for Action



The Kashmir Files throws light on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990s that led to the forceful emigration of numerous Hindus from the Kashmir valley. As many of you know, this story of terror has never been told before.

The fact that KP's didn't pick up any guns, does not mean the fight was lost. The movie is an opportunity to get recognition of the Kashmiri Hindu genocide in 1990's. We humbly request every one to step up and commit to action by watching the film and making a donation to support a series of key impact events being planned in the UK, following the release. All donations are to be made to:

Name: Amit
Account Number: 88938685
Sort Code: 608371

The **Kashmir Files — UK project Team** has a message for you here ([at this link](#)). Please do consider making a donation and spreading the word.

The winter of 1989-90 was when Kashmiri Hindus were rendered homeless from the land of their ancestors. The lives and stories of hundreds and thousands of Kashmiri Hindus lost to acts of terrorism was never given the respect it deserves, until now.

The film has been written and directed by Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, who previously helmed The Tashkent Files. The Kashmir Files is a true story, based on video interviews of the first-generation victims of the Genocide of Kashmiri Hindu Community. The film stars Anupam Kher, a Kashmiri Hindu and well known actor of Indian cinema best known for his work in Bend It Like Beckham and The Boy with a Top Knot, for which he received a BAFTA nomination. The stellar cast also includes National Film Award recipients Pallavi Joshi and Mithun Chakravarty.

The UK events are tentatively programmed from the last week of May — until 10th June'22. The project team is currently working on finalizing the program details. Your valued support, encouragement and guidance is critical to the ongoing struggle to keep our stories alive. Please contact the project team on thekashmirfilesuk@gmail.com for any further queries.

So please join in. As Tracy Chapman says - 'If not now, then when'

घर - बस है एक एहसास

Archana Warikoo Nagpal

घरक्या है ये!!

मकान है या एक एहसास

तो कहां है ये घर आज

क्यों खो गया है घर फिर

एक आवाज़ आई ज़ोर से एक दिन

छोड़ दो ये घर अपना तुम

पल ना लगा हमें घर छोड़ने में

जान पे जो बन आई थी

तो आज क्यों ढूंढ़ रहे हैं घर

बचपन बीता घर की तलाश में

कह ना पाए किसी मकान को अपना घर

घर तो छूट गया था, बाकि तो सब मकान थे

मकान भी तो अपने नहीं थे

घर को फिर संवारने में लगे थे हम

फिर लगने लगा वो एहसास - घर का सा

जवानी निकली इस एहसास को अपना बनाने में

जवानी खो गए हम इस एहसास में

फिर एक आवाज़ आई ज़ोर से एक दिन

छोड़ दो ये घर अपना तुम

पल ना लगा हमें घर छोड़ने में

तो आज क्यों ढूंढ़ रहे हैं घर

बचपन से जवानी हो गई

ढूंढ़ रहे हैं हम घर आज भी

कहां है ये घर, कोई मकान है या एहसास

आज भी वही सवाल है

घर.... क्या है यह!!

मकान है या है एक एहसास

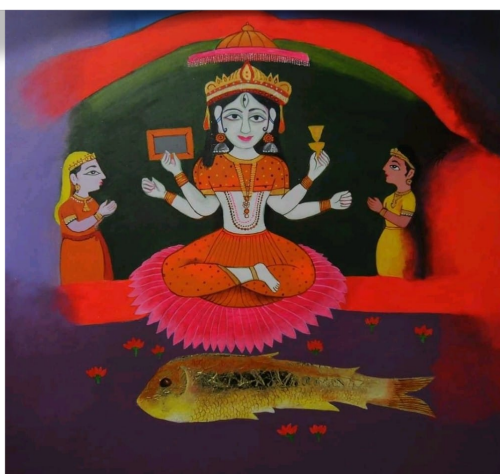
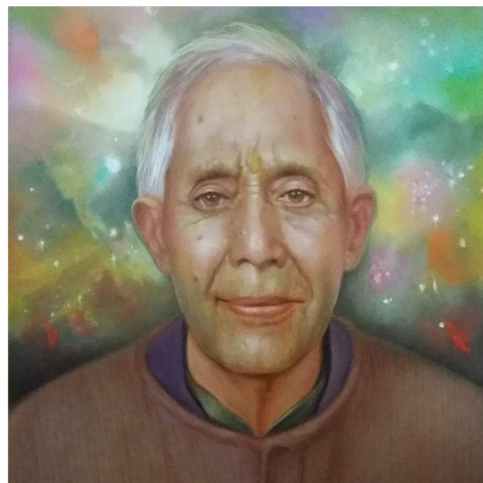
हमें तो बस आज भी है तलाश!!

अर्चना वारिकू नागपाल

Artist Profile

Vijay Koul ji is a Kashmiri born and raised artist who loves to paint oil on canvas portraits, mostly of Hindu Gods and saints. He is based in Delhi and available at +91-9811882211 or vijkoul@gmail.com.

Some of his art is presented below and a portrait of Shiva playing Santoor in Gangbal, Kashmir adorns the back of this newsletter.



Pictures from Diwali Celebrations









Upcoming Event

KPAE Herath and Navreh function

Saturday 26 March 2022

Timings: 11am to 5pm

Venue

Shree Geeta Bhawan

107-117 Heathfield Road

Birmingham, B19 1HL

(Kindly note the parking in the mandir is limited so we will purchase a secured school car park nearby. Details of the car park location will be communicated close to the date.)

Many events have been planned to make it engaging and exciting throughout the day with special consideration to get our children and youth involved.

The highlights of the event are as follows :

1. Havan in the Mandir
2. Bhajans and songs by the community members
3. Activities for children (board games, charades, colouring, quiz etc)
4. Annual General Meeting

Considering the feedback of members from the last Herath function, we have decided to stick to Phirsaal for authentic Kashmiri food. To partially cover the costs, we would kindly request the following contributions please:

Paid Members = £25 per family

Non Paid Members = £35 per family

Single adult = £20

Kindly make the payment by **19th March 2022**

Details for payment:

Barclays Bank; Account Name: KPAE; Account Number: 50544124; Sort Code: 20-07-89



ISBUND next issue will be in June 2022.

Please do get in touch with us at isbund@outlook.com

Picture credits: Vijay Koul