

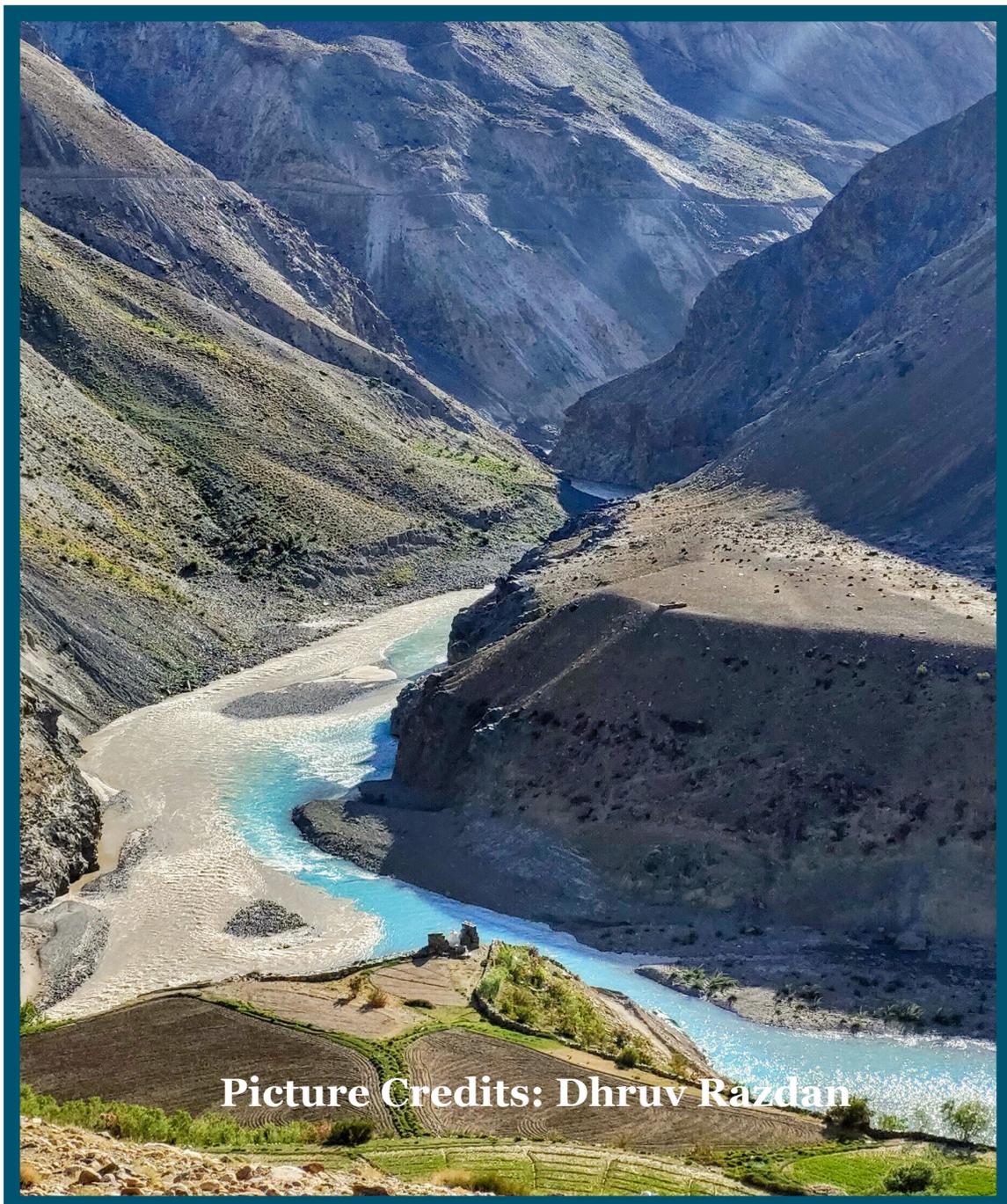
ISBUND

**NEWS, EVENTS AND
EVERYTHING IN
BETWEEN**



ISBUND

A Quarterly Newsletter from Kashmiri Pandit Association of Europe



Picture Credits: Dhruv Razdan

From the Editor's Desk

Happy Diwali (belatedly) to one and all. Hope this Diwali brought a little cheer to everyone's life.

Kashmiris have always been known as a community of career-orientated and ambitious people. Over the decades, post our exodus from Kashmir, we have continued to grow professionally and some of us have even ventured away from the traditional, tried and trusted, 'safe' professions of medicine, engineering, or civil services. In this issue of ISBUND, we showcase some of these professional journeys and kickstart a series of issues sharing our stories and expertise and focusing on our youth, so they can choose to learn a little more about what we do and we, in turn, can mentor them to support their growth. As expected, we have a plethora of professional journeys and stories to cover, ranging from success stories within conventional areas to those that have chosen the path less travelled and yet achieved heights of excellence.

We will open this with the illustrious and much celebrated journey of Dr Mohan Kaul and then present stories of diverse paths some of us have chosen. We would like to emphasise that these accomplishments are presented in no particular order- they are simply presented on the basis of the timing we received verbal or written input. There are many more interesting stories in our pipeline that you can read in our upcoming issues so do await all with bated breath! What does come through in this issue (albeit completely unintentionally) is how many women we have to celebrate. We can all be proud of our Kashmiri heritage, where women never came second.

In our last issue of ISBUND, we introduced the **AUGUST MILLION STEPS CHALLENGE**. We had such enormous positive participation that our initial target was knocked off in a few days and the revised target was exceeded. Needless to say, the challenge has ever since been rolled over each month with new fun bits added and enthusiasm has anything but waned. Collectively so far, we have amassed more than **24 million steps** and we are still going strong. Some of us have regularly clocked over **30,000 steps a day** and sometimes even a whopping **50,000 steps a day**. Physical and mental well-being is such an important aspect of our life and we could not be any prouder to have achieved this massive feat of encouraging and motivating our friends and family to keep going, even if the weather Gods have not always been on our side. **SO WELL DONE ALL !!**

Continuous improvement has always been our motto for life and ISBUND is no exception. We will be introducing some changes to how we communicate with the community and implement this in our media platforms too. Please watch this space in 2022 to see how this is rolled out. We are trying to not make everyone wait a quarter for the next issue. DIGITAL is the way forward and we are trying to embrace it as well which we are sure you will agree with. Needless to say, if you prefer your copy to be delivered to you in a different way, please let us know and we will always aim to cater to your requirements.

That takes me to our next big announcement. For us to embrace this digital journey we will need someone who leads the path for us and bring new ideas to the table. Shivani and I are happy to announce that Anjan Raina will be part of Team ISBUND and help us navigate this complex matrix. You can read more about Anjan in his own words in this issue.

Finally, it's that time of the year again!!! Time to spend with friends and families, to rejoice and rejuvenate, to introspect on what has been, to devour all things heavenly, and to bid adieu to the year that was so much better than the last but not our best yet.

Here's wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a very happy new year!

Best wishes

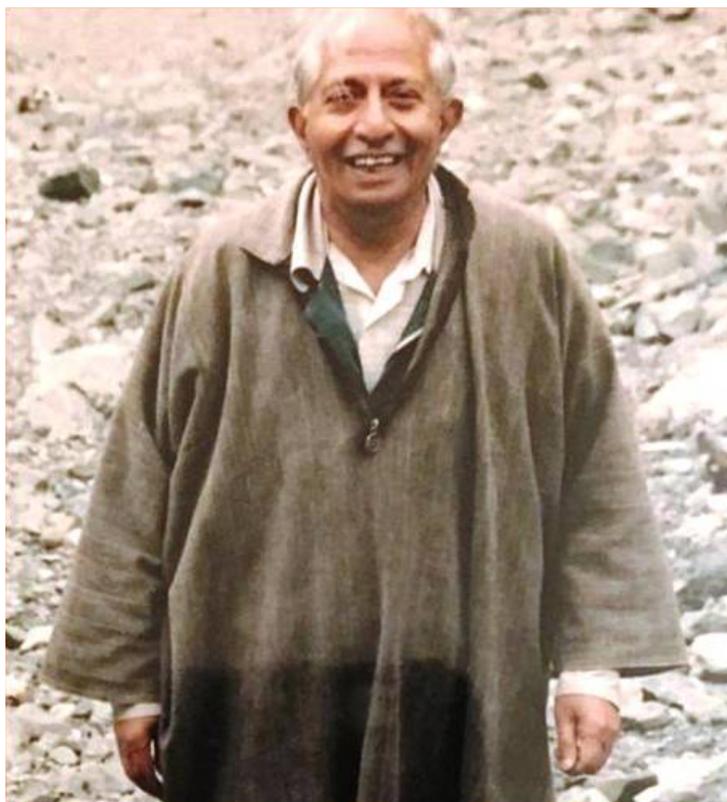
Sheetal, Shivani, Anjan

(Team ISBUND)

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Condolence Message



Dr Vijay Kumar Dhar

With profound grief and sorrow, we regret to inform the sudden demise of Dr Vijay Kumar Dhar. He left for heavenly abode in the morning on 8 November 2021. He is survived by his wife Smt. Shanta Dhar, son Vikram, daughter Meenakshi and grandchildren Armaan, Hari, Milo and Sacha.

Dr Dhar was one of the key member who laid the foundation of KPAE and has contributed a lot towards the growth of the organisation. He was a leading member of KPAE election committee. He always adored Kashmir and everything about it. He will be deeply missed by entire community.

Our deepest condolences to the entire Dhar family and may God give them strength to bear this irreparable loss.

In Conversation with Dr Mohan Kaul.....

Mohan Kaul, a much celebrated and strong advocate of international trade and investment has had an illustrious career and continues to influence businesses and policies across the globe. Born in *Habba Kadal* in Srinagar, Kashmir, he, at a very young age, decided to embrace change with an open mind. He chose paths less travelled by fellow Kashmiris and has never looked back or regretted his choices.

In our conversation with Dr Kaul, we set out to discover more about the man behind the name, his life mission, experiences and what his future plans were. It has been an absolute honour and a privilege to be speaking with him.



For someone who hasn't read your bio or read about you, tell us a little bit about your journey and take us through the transition of the boy that was to the giant that stands before us today.

I was born in Habba Kadal, the heart of Srinagar which was mostly an area inhabited by Kashmiri Pandits. I did my schooling mainly in Srinagar (DAV Public School) and in Jammu where my parents moved to during *Darbar move* (*Jammu and Kashmir until recently used to have 2 capitals, Srinagar the summer capital and Jammu as its winter capital. The entire government machinery used to move locations twice each year from Srinagar to Jammu in Winter and back to Srinagar in Spring as part of so called 'Darbar' move, literally meaning moving the 'court'*). After graduating from S P College, I was looking for my next adventure. Electronics engineering was very new those days, our parents didn't know about it at all, yet I decided to travel all the way to Madras (now known as Chennai). Those days it used to take four or five days to reach Madras. You had to travel by bus from Srinagar to Jammu to Pathankot, then you took a train from there to Delhi followed by another train from Delhi to Madras, which took about 45 hours. This was the first time I travelled this further out from Kashmir, and I could only travel home once in a year, but I enjoyed life in Madras and my engineering course.

I completed my engineering with specialisation in digital electronics. It was the era when computers were very new. I received a UNESCO scholarship to pursue my masters and PhD in Paris. It was an honour to have been selected for this scholarship and study in Sorbonne University which is a fantastic university. I hardly knew any French at that point. I studied with some friends at Alliance Française de Delhi but most of it I learnt by experience. As you can see, my journey has been a series of accidents, which I have taken advantage of.

It was so interesting to hear about the journey of a very sheltered boy from Kashmir. At that time, most Kashmiri Pandits opted for Civil Services, trusted engineering sectors like mechanical or civil engineering or medical. In fact those were the only three options or avenues that people had but you challenged that status quo. This nicely segues into my next question: What inspired you to take that path? Was there a role model that you followed, or was it something you had read or you wanted to emulate? What was the trigger for you to reject all that and to pursue engineering in electronics?

That's a good question. My cousins were civil engineers, yet I was choosing electronics. I am basically born a dreamer and I am dreaming all the time. I also read quite a bit and what others were doing at that time excited me. So, this idea of innovation and exploring something new was always in my mind. Imagine applying for engineering in Madras! I thought I would learn something new and that excited me. When I reached Madras, I was very comfortable. It didn't feel different or new to me somehow. I got comfortable quite quickly. Then during my 2nd Year of engineering, I challenged a Tamil Brahmin for the post of General Secretary, and I won by 7 votes. I don't know how! Even now, I am always trying to do something new, learn and explore something I haven't done before. If you visit my website, you will get that feeling that I am still actively exploring new opportunities or trying

my hands at something that I haven't done before. I believe it was this urge to learn and explore that pushed me towards electronics at that point rather than choosing a safe option like civil or mechanical engineering.

What's coming out of this, is the fact that you are comfortable in the unknown in a strange way and that this – change, a little disruption and challenging the status quo excites you because that is where you see innovation happening, that is where you see real change coming about. So even though you interestingly say that your journey is a series of accidents, you turned these around in your favour and made them work for you. Would that be fair to say?

Yes, absolutely. These accidents were not created by me, they just happened, and I took advantage of each of them. I can say my life is a series of happy accidents.

That would explain how you started from engineering and did your PhD abroad, and of course when I look at your journey it seems to me that your quest to explore the unknown charted a different path and lead you into becoming, a think tank, a policymaker, a person who advised world leaders. Take us through that second part of your journey.

I did my PhD at the Sorbonne University in Paris. My research was based at the Nuclear Research Centre, around 20 miles from Paris. It was one of the largest centres of nuclear research. My research was focussed on optimisation models, nothing to do with nuclear science but based within that department. It's here that a second set of accidents happened. I was quite happy, doing pretty well with my education and work and my parents were happy with my progress. I was in my early 20's.

So now the story. It was the early 70's and I was working at the computer centre within the Nuclear Research Centre. I was working on the second largest IBM 370 installed outside NASA. France at that time was developing a hydrogen bomb at the same centre and the team was using the same computer system. I had nothing to do with that. I was working on inventory modelling, but I got a call from centre administration. I was the only non-French citizen who had access to this system at that time and they wanted me to take up French citizenship so that I could continue working there. They were quite happy with my work and wanted me to stay. There weren't a lot of Indians in Paris those days. I used to come to London every three months to eat in Southall and then go back to Paris! When I met with the administrator, I wasn't sure about taking up French citizenship. I wasn't sure what my parents would think of it. I am a British citizen now but those days were different. So I took the application forms and went into my room - I didn't come out for many days! I decided not to become French at that point, took a month's leave and went to Canada and then to the USA. I thought I may be able to teach at the Montreal University as it has both English and French.

But then I went to Boston, and saw an advertisement for a new institute - Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad which was being set up by Harvard Business School. Vikram Sarabhai and his team were looking for young faculty to join IIM. So I applied and they loved me and I was offered the role. I completed an educational programme at Harvard Business school and moved to Ahmedabad. I didn't go back to Paris that time, all my belongings were still there.

I joined IIM as a faculty member. At that same time, the Indian Ambassador wrote to the Indian Air Force and briefed them about my PhD thesis on simulation. They offered me a role to work on simulation at their newly opened laboratory in Bangalore, but I chose the IIM role as I felt it was more prestigious. The Air Force personnel came to see me to understand why someone technical like me would want to take up a job teaching kids to sell. That was my second accident, but I was happy with my choices. I met my future wife at IIM, she was also teaching.

Some people we know have a very well charted path or plan for their lives and success. Others, as you say, get into a series of events, embrace them, and then one opportunity leads to another opportunity. So, what is really interesting for me, looking at your successful path is that you didn't have a defined plan and yet you made such a success out of it.

Once I decided to take a certain path, even if it was an accidental one, I totally immersed myself in it. I worked hard and gave it my 100%, to be honest a lot more than 100%. Whatever came my way, I worked extremely hard to achieve my goal, and tried to be innovative and create something good out of it. I have never looked back and regretted not doing something.

These are fantastic life lessons. Always innovating, looking at things differently, immersing yourself in whatever you do completely and having no regrets. These are definitely key reasons for how you have accomplished so much. I love that we are going through this like a little bit of a train journey, stop by stop and soon we will arrive at our destination. Please take us through to the next stop.

At IIM, I was one of the youngest professors and then the youngest Dean. I was very keen to become the director and when the post became available, I applied for it. But they chose a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, an eminent person of his time. I was in my early 30's and this actually hurt me, so I decided to leave. While at IIM, I had done a lot of consulting for institutions like the World Bank and a lot of people knew me. Many thought, I am committing a mistake by leaving IIM, and that may have been true. Nonetheless I decided to leave and joined the United Nations as an advisor.

Remember, we are now talking about the mid 1980's. Those days organizations and governments were all going through management reforms, and so were the United Nations and World Bank. I was tasked with changing management practices in the Asian countries. I was based in Washington, then in New York before moving to Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. I did advisory work in these Asian countries including China. One story that is very close to my heart is working with the Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus. He was setting up Grameen Bank, a community development bank that provided small loans to poor families in the villages in Bangladesh to help them earn a living through trade. I conducted the first evaluation for the World Bank for that project. That project was really effective. I spent 5 to 6 weeks with him, travelling between remote villages of Bangladesh, talking to young people about their ideas and how they would put this small loan to use. I continued with the United Nations role for about 5 years. My children were young, and I couldn't travel as much. I decided to take up a similar role in the Commonwealth Secretariat and became a Diplomat and Head of Government Reforms in late 80's moving to London.

That's amazing. It doesn't cease to amaze me that you finish working on one discrete project and a new project comes your way, which is quite different, but also interlinked. It's quite fascinating really to see that journey and what you did, and the level of influence you have had.

I've moved from one candle stick to the other, I should have stuck with one thing. Some people probably don't like it, some are not comfortable in that process, and some are.

It's very individual and this resonates deeply with me and my own professional journey. I love that you have owned every minute of your journey and have not gone back and wished things would have worked out differently. Now, I know you said you don't really have regrets, but if you could turn back time and talk to your 18 year old self, what would you tell him.

I think it's personal, but I would ask if you are happy with what you are doing then do it. In that sense, I was the happiest person when I was carrying out those roles, on reflection I loved the challenge. I enjoyed those roles, working at the Secretariat, reforming governments, travelling and I have fantastic stories to tell. The last stop of my journey before I retired was when I was asked to look at development in the private sector in the Commonwealth during the Tony Blair years. I created a number of entrepreneurs in Commonwealth countries, and the first investment in Tanzania first investment in Sierra Leone where nothing was happening. Now that I think of it, I should have documented these experiences when I was young, written more books. My advice to young people is to be happy, whatever you are doing, give it your 100% and don't worry if you lose an opportunity. There will be many more in future, but work hard and even if it is not your first choice, give it all you have and be happy.

Today people need instant validation. They are not looking for happiness, they're looking for validation, which is the wrong reason to pursue something. So it's a wonderful thing to remind people from someone like yourself that happiness is key. Immerse yourself, be patient because things don't happen overnight. I would like to end on one final question, which is to talk about the Kashmiri community if that's okay with you. We are a community of exceptionally intelligent, bright and enterprising people and yet, when it comes to taking risks, doing something different, challenging the status quo, we are not automatically inclined to do that. What advice would you give the community, and is this something where, under your auspices, we could create a forum or an opportunity for Kashmiri youth across the world, that could help them realise their dreams?

Coming to the second part of your question first, let's do it. Dr Ganju was very inspiring and he did a lot of work helping Kashmiris in the UK. We as a community have done well wherever we have gone to during the many exodus' from Kashmir. We are at a different point now. We have the best professionals in our community, who have established themselves in their chosen fields across the globe. We need to think of ways to use it to our advantage, to help younger people. I would love to be part of this project and we can get started in the UK and then make it available across the world. We can have virtual programmes, webinars by esteemed speakers talking about their experiences and build a network for our community.

Some of us have been doing a lot of brainstorming around this and certainly know that many people would like to come together. One of the things that I do bemoan is that we don't share between ourselves as much of the knowledge and the kind of experience that we have not because we don't want to share, necessarily, but life takes over, priorities shift and we just become engrossed in what we're doing but I do believe, if we have to leave behind a legacy we need to think about ways to help the community.

We are a very proud community, and we are not good at sharing our problems. We always talk about our successes but keep our problems hidden. We have to get the community to open up. Our children need to understand that it's ok to talk about problems, to find ways to solve them, and to ask for advice/help. That's how opportunities arise. I don't see this in other communities, they talk about their problems openly. I am happy to provide guidance and help if I can in any way.

What I personally would be really interested in seeing is that with people like yourself who have got so much knowledge, experience, and connections, can start to develop a Kashmiri pandit network. I firmly believe that ultimately it boils down to the quality of the network, because it's people that you have met and known that help you in your journey. I'm absolutely heartened and delighted that you are on board with this and we will come back to you with some thoughts. But can I just say it has been an absolute pleasure Mohan uncle, to have this conversation. Thank you for your time and thank you so much for sharing your insights, because it has been wonderful to have this conversation.

Dr Mohan Kaul

Vice Chair at Indo-UK Institute of Health and President of Indian Partnership Forum
To know more about Dr Kaul do visit his [webpage](#) or [LinkedIn](#)

My Career in the Pharmaceutical Industry.

Dr Pamposh Ganju

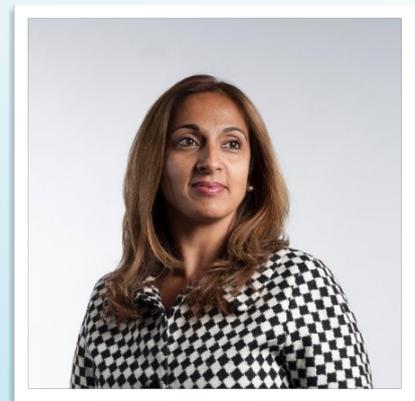
I have held many roles over the years, but my career has always been in pharmaceutical healthcare where I have been fortunate enough to work on life extending and life enhancing treatments. This has always given me a sense of purpose and motivation to work hard.

I trained as a Pharmacist in Kings College London, completed a PhD in Biochemistry at Imperial College and after a postdoctoral fellowship at the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, began my career in the neuroscience division of Novartis, discovering novel targets for the treatment of chronic pain. Moving to a medical affairs role in Bristol Myers Squibb, I was able to put my skills to good use supporting healthcare professionals with medicines used in the treatment of schizophrenia. From there I serendipitously moved to a commercial role with my current company, Eisai, where I picked up more skills rising to a Global marketing role for a breast cancer drug where I was privileged to oversee its use in treating over 200,000 patients worldwide, extending their lives cumulatively by more than 500 centuries, allowing these patients to spend precious more moments with their families and loved ones.

Currently I am doing two jobs, probably doing neither of them justice! The most recent job appointment is VP Alliance Management in the Oncology Division of Eisai's EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa, Russia and Oceania) region. As with most pharmaceutical companies today, working in a strategic partnership is less disruptive than undergoing a merger. My role helps my region navigate and forge a fruitful collaboration with our strategic partner whilst retaining our cultural ethos. Over the lifetime of the partnership, we hope to bring many more life extending treatments to cancer patients. The other role I simultaneously hold is that of Business Unit Director for the UK and Ireland Oncology Group. This role is more operational with the responsibility of commercialising our oncology portfolio in these countries and helps me keep my finger on the pulse.

As many young readers think about their career paths, I can say that the path is not always a ladder but more like a climbing frame where it is perfectly all right to go sideways, sometime down again before going up. Whatever your definition of a successful career, to paraphrase Cath Bishop in her recent book 'The Long Win', master the 3 'C's – have 'Clarity' of where you want to go or how you want to feel ultimately; have a growth mindset to 'Constantly learn' along the way and 'Collaborate' with all where possible.

Dr Ganju is Vice President, Oncology Alliance Management (EMEA) and Oncology Business Unit Director (UK & Ireland) at Eisai ([Linkedin](#))



From Medicine to Tax – an Unconventional Journey

Aniketa Khushu

"Who would like to palpate Mr X's kidney?" That's a sentence from my first year of medical school that will always stick with me. I was in a hospital with other medics from my college and our supervisor asked us the question. The first three years of the course were mainly concentrated on the science underlying Medicine, and they didn't usually set us free in a clinical setting until the last three years. But this was a rare occasion when we were allowed early patient contact.

Instead of embracing the opportunity, I stood near the back of my group and avoided eye contact with the supervisor so that I didn't have to examine the patient. That was one of the many moments I wondered, "why am I here?" Other moments included standing round a cadaver and doing everything in my power to not take the lead on that week's dissection; trying to stay alert for a 55-minute in-depth analysis of the workings of the knee joint; dragging my feet into the biochemistry department for another two-hour practical; multiple all-nighters while trying to write physiology essays. The list goes on and on.



So why was I studying Medicine, you may ask? Easy: I thought I wanted to be a doctor.

Spoiler alert: I'm not a doctor.

Looking back, I wasn't one of those children who always knew what I wanted to be. I'd dream about joining an orchestra or becoming a concert pianist at weekly music lessons and band practice. When I won a national writing competition, I toyed with the idea of studying creative writing. But as much as I loved reading, writing, and playing music, having to sit exams in these subjects was a very different concept. Music theory exams stripped away almost all the joy I got from piano playing. Analysing poetry was exasperating. Perhaps I was too quick to discount them, but I shoved music and literature firmly into the 'hobbies' box, and they never re-emerged.

Other ideas still floated around in the career box. When I was 14 and tasked with presenting a news report in our English class, I fleetingly decided that being a news presenter would be fun. When we started applying for work experience in Year 11, I wrote to various local law firms because I thought I wanted to be a solicitor. Peering into the dark tinted windows of the offices at the local Building Society every time I walked to the shops made me wonder whether banking would be an interesting job.

So how did I end up studying medicine? None of the previous ideas ever felt real or achievable. Instead, they felt like the images of a marble cake in a book without the accompanying ingredients or recipe. I didn't know how to get there. Medicine, on the other hand, was something familiar. My sister was studying Medicine at university. My father was a doctor, and almost all our family friends were in the medical profession. I'd been surrounded by doctors my whole life, and there were scores of people who could guide me through the process.

So, when I didn't hear back from any of the law firms to which I applied for work experience, I ended up at the local hospital where my school had an established programme. And I enjoyed it! The hospital was somewhere I could picture myself in the future because I already had a connection to it. I could see first-hand what everyone in my life did when they weren't at home. I was finally in the club, no longer watching from the side-lines. I suppose it's also inevitable that, with a doctor and a teacher for parents, the only professions I truly understood were theirs. Everything else was just an abstract concept. Not obtaining work experience at a law firm meant I was no closer to understanding what solicitors did in their job. How did people end up reading the 10 o'clock news or interviewing celebrities? And what did bankers spend their days doing behind their desks?

Perhaps the main reason I got sucked into medicine was that I was terrified to venture on unknown paths. I wasn't a risk-taker, and I didn't have the confidence to stray outside my comfort zone. But a combination of being away from home for the first time and being surrounded by students who were deeply motivated to become doctors sped up my realisation: I didn't want to study anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry.

By the time I reached the start of my second year at university, something had to change. Luckily, I was at a university that allowed us to switch degrees relatively easily. I was also lucky that I had a family who supported me through the change, who told me to choose what I wanted to do, not to follow what those before me had done. The move from Medicine to Biological Natural Sciences was a smooth transition because the first year for both courses included very similar content. Switching to Natural Sciences gave me more freedom to pick and choose the subjects that inspired me. At the time, I was inspired by anything to do with the brain, such as neuroscience and psychology.

That didn't mean the transition was easy. The scariest part was moving away from a career path I'd assumed I would continue following for the next 50 years. Although there are still choices to be made along the way in Medicine, my path had roughly been set, and I had known where I was going. When I moved to Natural Sciences, I ripped that rug out from underneath me. I wondered 'what if?' multiple times over the next couple of years. What if I had stuck with medicine? What if I had continued into the clinical years? What if I had been too hasty in making my decision to change courses? For the rest of my degree, I felt like I was floundering. Other people on my course were applying for internships and graduate jobs, and I was playing catch up. Everyone seemed to know what they wanted to do. I didn't know anything apart from science. After studying science continuously since A-levels, I needed to make a clean break. Especially if I was going to move forward and truly leave medicine behind me.

It was only after I graduated that I fully appreciated the breadth of choice available to me. I could choose research, publishing, editing, finance, human resources, sales, logistics, marketing, or consulting. And that's to name a few. At that point, I didn't even understand what most of those words meant. But the advantage of not knowing much about my options was that I applied for anything and everything without any preconceptions of what I thought I might like. I started revisiting my old fascination with law. Perhaps this was my second chance to figure out what lawyers did in their day-to-day roles. Finance was another avenue I wanted to explore, and it seemed to be a less daunting option with all the graduate schemes available. So, when I came across a job for a trainee Tax Adviser that was described as 'a mixture of law and accountancy', I applied immediately.

Six years later, I'm a Tax Adviser. I've completed two sets of professional qualifications along the way and progressed up to the role of Assistant Manager. I never imagined this would be my life, but I enjoy it: the office job, the structured hours, the work-life balance. I sometimes laugh at how eager my younger self was in my interviews for a Medical place at university, but then I remind myself that I was only 18 years old. How many people truly know what they want out of life when they're 18? Hindsight is always useful, but even if I could go back and give my teenage

self some advice, I don't think I would. I wouldn't change the decisions I made or the trajectory of my life and career.

Other people may find it strange, but I love the journey I've been on. When I see teachers and old friends from secondary school and tell them I left Medicine to become a Tax Adviser, I see confusion flash through their eyes before they nod and say, "Oh, that's interesting". It's understandable - I was the good student who did all the right voluntary work, got the highest marks country-wide in an A-level chemistry paper and participated in all the (non-sports related) extra-curricular activities. Medicine at Cambridge University was something they could reconcile with that image. 10 years later, I'm a science graduate working in tax who's entered a half-marathon race for the first time; not something they anticipated from the chubby teenager who left school excited to become a doctor. But it's ok to change. It's ok to evolve and become something other than what people expect you to be.

So, what lessons have I learned from my experiences that I hope to pass on to others?

1. It's important to be able to recognise when you need to change direction, to push through the fear of failing and aim for opportunities that seem elusive.
2. Choosing a different path doesn't mean you're giving up on something; it means you're looking for more opportunities and finding your way. If life is a journey, then changing direction every so often is a good way of gaining a different perspective, as many of us have found over the last 18 months.
3. Be brave and take that next step, wherever it leads you!

Aniketa is a Senior Tax Executive at CKLG Accountants ([Linkedin](#))

One Size Does Not Fit All!

Amita Raina

When I was asked about my professional journey. I didn't know where to start as most journeys start with a view of the destination. When I started this journey, I had not put down a destination name, instead just a process of learning.

I have trained as a Software Engineer and worked in the IT industry for 5 years, until I realised I wanted to do something more... to add value to myself and make a difference to society...

After spending a year of self-discovery, I came upon the Montessori Philosophy and researched a bit more in detail until the day I enrolled for a 1 year full time course in London.

I shall not go into details of what a Montessori Education is. In simple words it has given me the skills and tools to look at the child as a Unique Being and educate or nurture the Whole Child who can contribute to the society.

It's never an ideal day at my workplace because every day is guided by our children's interests and as a teacher, we have to constantly **EXPLORE** new pathways, **BE INNOVATIVE, CREATIVE** and **ADAPT** new methods or plans to continue the learning process. It could be an interest in dinosaurs and the next day it may lead to volcanoes! One has to be abreast with knowledge and open to learning, even from children.

I learnt more about dinosaurs when I first started my teaching career than I had ever in school !!

The only highs and lows while working with children would be one's own inhibitions to be **Involved, Inventive, Experimental, Improve and Adopt** new learnings in order to provide the children with the best and continuous provision of their educational journey. Challenge would be to try different methods and styles of learning to impart the knowledge in order to be an Effective Teacher / Guide. As a Teacher, one has to develop their capacity to understand and observe children individually. Its a constant learning process for the child and the teacher.



A child will teach you that there are 10 different ways to approach things and respecting each opinion will teach them to be kind & respectful individuals.

It's amazing and mind boggling how much a child can absorb.

I've heard children pronounce big words and dinosaur name with such ease, even an adult could find it a tongue twister.

Recently I had a child come up and say, "Do you know that the biggest number is 'googolplex'!" I said, "Thank you for sharing that, I didn't know until now." He says, "google it." Or sometimes as simple as "Hippos like mud baths!"

To be an **Educator / Teacher** ...

- ★ You have to have the ability to constantly **EVOLVE** and add to your knowledge.
- ★ The **HONESTY** to accept that we have made a mistake but teaching them how we can correct ourselves. children often say to me when i make a mistake, "Oopsy daisy, silly Amita, never mind, lets try again!!"
- ★ Children do not judge you, they judge **how you treat them** and remember you for that.
- ★ As a teacher, the most important gift you can give them is the **Power to believe** in themselves, the curriculum will follow!!
- ★ **Raise their self-esteem:** It's the most selfless but the most rewarding job at the same time
- ★ You have the **responsibility** and ability to make a difference in a child ... who will be an asset to the society !
- ★ **Be a role model** that will make you proud of yourselves for making that difference!
- ★ You have to be **physically fit, a Quick thinker** and **Compassionate**.

Working with children has further driven and inspired me to organise Career Webinars for older children who are in their crucial years of decision making. I welcome grown ups and youngsters to come forward to share their knowledge and ask more and more questions to know about what different careers entail!

Thank you for taking the time to read my professional journey and It would give me great joy and thrill to mentor anyone who is passionately driven to work with younger children thereby making a difference in their formative years.

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Reflection On My Journey

Dr Vitasta Raina

When you look back at your own life, there are moments that are identifiable as ‘turning’ points. Or if I was being dramatic I would call them ‘*life-changing*’. Rarely are those moments an individual action or a specific event. Rarely do we know the full impact of our decisions. It takes days, weeks, months and even years for actions to unfold and show their true consequences. Whether for the right or the wrong.

And so when someone asks me how I came to be a doctor, the easy answer is of course: I applied to medical school, sat through many years of hard work and got through the other side as a newly qualified doctor. But the longer, more complex answer is of course a lot more difficult to answer.

I could say it was a decision waiting to happen. I could attribute it to many events in my life that culminated into me being where I am today. And that is of course true for us all. But the key moments, if we keep to the dramatics, would probably be the following:

- The decision my parents took to move our family from India, where we were all born, to Turkey and then finally to England.
- The decision I took – on a whim- to work for a local clinical urgent care telephone service.
- The accidental friendships that formed in school and at university and later forged their way into shaping my personality.
- The political and social circumstances in the UK that allowed an under-confident, child of an immigrant family to believe she could also be a doctor in one of the world’s leading hospitals.
- The subconscious role modelling set about by my brothers – who showed us all that hard work and dedication are powerful tools.
- The day in, day out work my mum and dad did in keeping our family home a safe and happy place and yet paving the way for all three of their children to replicate the ambition and hope they brought with them when they immigrated.



So you see, it was less about the exams and the clinical placements or even the patients. It was more these factors that allowed me to become a doctor.

Obviously that wasn't the end.

I entered the NHS as a professional almost three years ago. I entered a workplace that was already succumbing to systemic pressures. Our resources were haemorrhaged out. Our clinicians were tired. Our bravado in the face of an NHS hanging on with sheer will was finally tested to its most when the Covid-19 Pandemic hit in 2019.

As a young doctor working in the hospitals, I suddenly was thrown into a world I hadn't prepared for or anticipated. And almost two years on, we are still recovering. Resilience is a big word in our industry. And a big word in the migrant community.

You must adapt to survive. You must move with the flow. You must stay alert, stay sharp and most importantly recognise if you're struggling.

And we were. Both as migrant communities in the UK and as the medical community. But there is a strange thing about resilience. In the face of adversity, communities come together. We re-learn a new normal. We re-learn to become whole in a world turned upside down. We learn to wear face-masks to cope. We learn new languages and foods. We see patients online. We go to local clubs to meet other locals and adapt. Migrating into a covid-era felt a little like migrating to a new country again.

Growing up I always had a sense of non-belonging. A feeling very common to those of mixed heritage, mixed nationalities and mixed-cultures, like many immigrants. Cultural differences and a mis-match between my home and the streets often made me feel insecure and unsure of my place in this world. My granddad once said to me in 2012: your culture is what you decide it to be. You belong to a place if you want to belong. And he was right. As I entered my twenties, I realised that being bilingual was a blessing. Easily flitting between two cultures both in my personal life and professional too. I realised that my love for theatre allowed me to connect to others in different ways. My love for writing and acting gave me an outlet to express my thoughts and emotions. And above all my true belonging started when I finally accepted that I was who I am and that was just enough. I belonged because I chose to.

Now I find it difficult to not feel confident and secure. It has been a long journey of imposter syndrome and identity crisis. But today I can and do introduce myself in a way that gives me the quiet confidence of a girl – who is now a woman – that knows where she belongs.

So here I am. Dr. Vitasta Raina. An Indian born British doctor who will correct you if you mis-pronounce her name. A woman with a lot of ambition who no longer worries about her identity or her place in this world. Who likes to write, and act in theatre plays and go to see musicals and is proud to say all that without the worry that somehow this will make her an outcast. Because I've finally decided that this immigrant girl does belong. And she belongs right here.

A Myth Busting Guide to a Career in the Arts

Shipra Ogra

I have worked in the arts sector for over 20 years, both in India and UK. I trained as an architect in Delhi, India and chanced upon the arts as a career option. And here I am still going strong – possibly one of the few Indians working in senior management roles in the culture sector in London.

So here's my myth busting guide for anyone who might be thinking of having a career in the arts:



1. *Myth: You need to be an artist to have a career in the arts*

Truth: No

It will certainly help if you have a love of the arts, just as it would help you become a better doctor if you actually loved science. I can't draw, sing, dance, act to save my life! In my previous role as a Theatre Producer I would always say (jokingly when asked what I did), "everything except being on stage. I am responsible for making sure the actors get on stage, and the audience has a great time".

So, what did that mean? The role of a Producer can be varied. For a large West End production a Producer might be negotiating contracts with actors who are doing TV as well as stage, they might be exploring options to take the show to other cities across the globe, they might be trying to attract sponsors for hundreds of thousands of pounds, etc. This is the fun stuff. They might also be overseeing any legal challenges brought upon the company for not following suitable HR policies. No prizes for guessing that there are not so fun things as well.

Akram Khan is a famous Asian *Kathak* dancer based in London. When he was touring South East Asia in 2001, I was working at British Council in Delhi and was responsible for producing the India leg of his show. I didn't know anything about the technicalities of staging a *kathak* performance and had to quickly learn to navigate the requirements – is the stage large enough for the performance? Does the venue have the technical capacity to run the show as per the artist's specifications? Will the technical kit get all the required border clearance for it to come from UK to India and travel onto Bangladesh? I also had to oversee all the travel and logistical needs of the entire troupe of almost 20 people. And run a marketing campaign with local venues to ensure the show sold well in all the cities it travelled to – Chandigarh, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata.

The role of a producer is fast paced and a bit of a 'Jack of all trades, master of none'. Go ahead and experiment with becoming a Producer if you enjoy making an artist's work come live!

2. *Myth: You will always struggle if you take arts as a career*

Truth: Not necessarily

Like any career, you will only excel if you are constantly learning, taking the right risks and pushing boundaries. Very few careers nowadays allow one to play safe and still succeed. Scrap that, no career worth doing will allow you to play safe. It will be demanding and rewarding in equal measure. Arts is no different.

There are loads of options if one is keen to make a career in the arts - from being an architect, an arts manager, an illustrator, a games designer, a fashion designer, a digital artist, to being a performing artist or a visual artist. You could even be a finance or legal expert who chooses to work in an arts organisation! Every organisation is run as a business and employ people in Finance, HR, Fundraising, Communications and Marketing roles and if you are at the top of the game you are paid well.

If you are keen to have a career in the arts, try the dream board exercise and set an aim as to where you want to be and work back the steps you will need to get to your dream role.

3. *Myth: You need to take only arts subjects for GCSEs/A Levels for a career in the arts*

Truth: No

You will need to be good at maths and physics to become an architect. Similarly, you will need excellent computing skills to become a games designer. Having good knowledge of finance will be a nifty skill as a Producer.

I took science for my A levels which allowed me to study Architecture. Even though my career as an architect was short lived, being good at maths helped me a lot with budgeting for projects and monitoring finances for programmes I managed.

I know a few colleagues who got pursued arts management after doing degrees in science, psychology, English. There isn't a fixed route to enter the arts. And breaking of rules will pretty much guarantee you success!

4. *Myth: A career in the arts is for losers*

Truth: An emphatic NO

It's really sad that creative arts on the curriculum has been deprioritised. It's the thing that we need more than ever. Everyone needs creative thinking, and everyone needs creativity. There is a perception that a creative career isn't a serious thing when one in every 6 jobs in London is in the creative sector and London's creative economy is worth £60 million. I currently work at the Greater London Authority as part of the Mayor of London's Culture team. What excites me about this role is that we are trying to find solutions to societal problems through culture. With the rise in mental health issues, social prescribing is one way we are working with the NHS to signpost patients to cultural activities that improves their health and wellbeing and saves the NHS time and money. Quite often these services are run by community organisations who do not understand the value they bring to society and part of our work is to ensure the right policies are developed to support these organisations to grow this body of work confidently.

So far from being a career for losers, the arts is a wonderful opportunity to break the template and carve a unique path for yourself. It allows you to continue learning and growing. Everything and everyone around you is inspiring. It's political (with a small 'p') as it tackles some of the world's biggest challenges from climate change to refugee crises and entertaining (with a big 'E').

What's not to like?

Shipra works as Senior Policy Officer, London Borough of Culture at Greater London Authority ([LinkedIn](#))

My Professional Journey

Sarchana Bakshi

I think it started the day when someone asked me what do I want to become when I am a grown up. And my answers kept changing from teacher to doctor to model to singer to full time mum and home maker to a chef. The little girl from the valley who had dreamt of being all this had to face the harsh realities of life. I learnt very early that life has its own plans, and you must manoeuvre accordingly.

The year of 1990 was the darkest year in my life and in the lives of more than 400,000 Kashmiri Hindus who, like me, had to leave Kashmir and move to different parts of the country because of terrorism in the valley. In one night, my whole world had changed – we were uprooted from our home and thrown into a big, disorderly world with no idea of what life was going to throw at us. From being used to living in a 4-storey house and having my own room, I was now sharing a 3-room house with my immediate and extended family in Jammu. Day in and day out, I saw how my parents struggled, having to start from scratch in the prime of their youth – they had to take care of their parents and grandparents and at the same time make sure that their own children had a secured future. In all of this, they had no time for their own life.

Education has always been important in our family and my parents made sure to give me and my sister the best education that they could possibly provide. Studying in one of the most premier schools in Srinagar, Presentation Convent, my parents could never imagine that a day would come when we would be visiting schools in Jammu trying desperately to get admission. Some of the schools didn't even have proper roof, toilets and water coolers and I remember while visiting one such school, my mum fainted. She could not tolerate that her child who had been taught by Nuns would be going to a school that did not even have the basic amenities. It was a complete shock for her – perhaps bigger than the migration. In me, she was seeing her future – the future that seemed a distant memory. That is when she vowed that no matter what, she would not let anything come between her daughter's education.

It was she who did all the research and asked around and managed to find the information about entrance exam for Nagbani school. This school was the best school of Jammu at that time and my parents were desperate to get me admitted there. With limited resources at my disposal, I prepared for the exam. I had to rely on my past learning and knowledge and off I went to sit for the exam with no idea of what would be served in the name of an entrance test. At that young age of 13, I learnt a very important lesson – life does not always give you a second chance. I was lucky that I had this chance – I had to grab it with both hands, I had to get through – it was, without any exaggeration, a do or die situation for me. I knew what it meant to my parents, and I had to succeed. When the results came, I was one of the top 3



candidates – my family was elated and my mum was the happiest with unstoppable tears in her eyes. That was the first time I was actually proud of myself as I realised my success was not mine alone.

Resilience and perseverance were two critical virtues that migration instilled in us and in later years became the cornerstone of my growth. I could not let the daemons of migration win and I had to make sure that I made the best use of the opportunity given to me. Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest had become my mantra. I realised how important education was and immersed myself completely into studies and sports. I cannot forget the proud face of my father each time he returned from parents' teacher meeting. I took up both maths and biology after my 10th exam to ensure I had more options available. I knew that now it was either engineering or medicine – nothing in between. I had to ensure my education would fetch me a lucrative career. Looking back to that time, I am amazed at how I managed to study for 10th and 12th board exams – whilst living in a small house with my parents, grandparents and my great grandmother. I would sometimes be studying in kitchen, sometimes in one of the bedrooms or sometimes in the verandah, many a times on the terrace – weather permitting. But I had no time for complaints – for me, more than the journey, it was the destination that was important. Looking at the plight of my community, I was grateful for what I had.

I managed to get through the engineering entrance and got admission in Computer science. Again, the choice of field was based on the perception around the bright prospects of this stream. I was living away from my parents and I wanted to make sure my time away was worth it. I was a meritorious student and after my engineering, I did my MBA in Marketing and Finance. I have not regretted my choice of field - when you love what you do, it no longer is a job for you. It's a journey that you enjoy and evolve with. My background from engineering and management provided me with the right tools to face the professional world. Time and again, I have relied on my education, my journey through the college and University life to brace the challenges in the professional world.

My education then led me to the world of advertising and brand management. All those ads that I had watched and listened to over the course of my lifetime had created a lasting impression in my growing up years. And here I was – working with big and small brands on their marketing strategy that included planning, communication, branding, positioning, messaging, pricing etc. I was managing ad campaigns for diverse products and industries – travel, lifestyle, consumer electronics, insurance, food etc. I was loving what I was doing as marketing is one of the few areas where you learn so much about other areas without having to be qualified in them. And yes, I am biased towards Marketing but hey it is a great place to be in. My work required me to work with models, celebrities, photographers, technical staff, film producers etc. and I thoroughly was enjoying being pulled in the whole gamut of marketing, that looks very glamorous on the surface, but requires a huge amount of hard work, perseverance, patience, resilience, teamwork and most importantly, creativity.

Then life took a major turn, and I moved to UK. Suddenly there was a new world that I wasn't accustomed to in terms of professional life. I was in a new country with no local experience and was just trying to start my professional life in a field that preferred local candidates. But thanks to my experiences, I knew it was only a matter of time before all this would work out fine. Forging ahead, I worked really hard in understanding and learning about UK demographics and bagged my first job in UK in online gaming. I had never played any games

online and here I was – responsible for marketing those games to the mobile audience. I still remember the words of my then hiring manager – “you may not have any UK experience; but you have the skills and the right attitude and that is what is important”. Those words have stayed with me ever since as that is something I keep in mind when I am hiring.

It was an exciting time in my career as I was slowly shifting to digital world whilst trying to acclimatise myself in the new normal. From the British (and Scottish and Irish too – yes that’s even harder!!!) accent to the way of communication and addressing your colleagues and seniors – it was a huge shift. The shift was also visible in things like; workplace culture, stakeholder management, level of communication, networking, overall presentation (how you show up), to name a few. The most tangible change was switching from an all offline (radio, TV and print media) to primarily online/digital world. I had to learn a lot of new things and unlearn a few things as well. My whole work world was transforming to digital and suddenly I found myself submerged in data and web analytics, UX, AI, ML – all these acronyms that you hear but aren’t always sure how they work. From my first job in UK till now, there have been several switches and each of those milestones have been an amazing experience. My work has involved regular interaction with the likes of Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and that has been an enriching experience. Digital marketing is at the forefront of the buyers’ journey today.

In my current role at SAP, a B2B SAAS company, I manage digital marketing globally, working with colleagues across 30 countries encompassing 15 languages. I work with different teams like Product marketing, R&D, Sales, Market research, PR/AR, Events, customer lifecycle, competitor intelligence, Marketing Ops, content writers, social media, project management, web developers etc. and it always amazes me how much there is to learn as the world around us is evolving. I interact with people at varied levels from CEOs, CMOs, Sales Heads, Finance decision makers and every interaction has taught me a lot. I am humbled and at the same time lucky to be working with a strong team that I can rely on. I’m not alone. As a leader, I’m as good as my team. Hence, bringing my authentic self to work is something I practice as well as preach.

Being part of a global company and leading digital has its pros and cons – whilst you have a global purview and access to the best-in-class tools and trainings, there are back-to-back meetings, monthly, quarterly and yearly targets, deadline fire drills, number crunching reports, budgets; to name a few and not to forget- I am perpetually time zone jet lagged. My work is a mix of art and science with a healthy topping of human psychology and no 2 days are the same - I like to spend time where numbers and ideas meet. Much as this seems daunting, it has been an amazing journey and still continues.

It would be remiss if I didn’t mention my husband and my 10-year-old son. They have been the backbone of my career and I wouldn’t be where I am without their unflinching support, patience, and love. I am able to dedicate time to my work and also manage business travel thanks to their constant support and understanding. Being a full-time mum and an ambitious career woman is not easy but I can say that I have been able to have that balance only because of my family’s support.

This little girl who wanted to be a lot of things, has managed to be some of those, and is ever grateful to God and her family for always being with her and wishing her well. Life can throw lemons at you and it is up to you what you make out of it - I chose lemonade and mojito as we all have one life – give your best and be sincere and focussed in your efforts. Success will surely follow.

Sarchana is the Global Head, Paid and Owned Media, SAP Concur ([Linkedin](#))

Food Heaven With Shweta Razdan



Editor's note: We take no responsibility for side effects such as stomach rumble and hypersalivation that you may experience.

Tucked away at the corner of a quiet street in an otherwise bustling Putney is UK's only restaurant serving authentic Kashmiri food, leaving no room for decadence. Since its inception in 2016, it has been owned and run by our star community couple, Shweta and Rohit Razdan.

Let's dive straight in and speak to the co-CURRY-tor, Shweta.

In your professional partnership, who is the strategic boss and who is the chef?

Rohit is the head chef and I am the creative and strategy brain – but at the end of the day, it is all team effort. We have a hand-in-hand partnership. If I have ideas to evolve the feasibility of our menu, Rohit works on implementing those ideas at the kitchen top.

Although I initially wanted to do something else, I saw more growth, enjoyment and sustainability in this career. We both love meeting people and find immense satisfaction in cooking delicious food every day.

Were you always interested in a career in hospitality? It's not a very traditional option for a Kashmiri Pandits, we seem to have boxed ourselves in few quarters. How did you come to choose this path?

When I first met Rohit, he was already in the world of hospitality, as opposed to my corporate job. The idea of starting something of our own was first born when Rohit was running a restaurant offering Japanese Cuisine in GK2, New Delhi. Why not showcase our own rich Kashmiri heritage through the medium of food? We started Saffron caterers in 1999, which was received very well from Kashmiris and non-Kashmiris alike (later renamed Razdan's Saffron).

In 2007, we knew we were ready to take the next big step but owing to the logistical challenges in opening a restaurant in India, we decided to relocate along with our dream all the way to Singapore. Our first restaurant was called Little India, which paved way for two more restaurants along the way. After that, we decided to make the move to London, where we could reach out to the taste buds of a larger population and attract more investors.

We don't see many authentic Kashmiri restaurants in India let alone in U.K. why do chefs and restaurant owners want to play it very safe and go for pan-Indian image and why did you not want to follow the Holy Grail?

At the heart of all these moves, the idea was to always popularise Kashmiri food. We didn't want to build something run of the mill, but instead globalise our kitchen and tell the world that Indian food is not just butter chicken and chicken tikka masala.

There is a big risk involved in trying to find the balance between running a business and staying true to your identity. Most people worry about sustainability of running the service and ease of navigating around business due to which authentic dishes are often not served in commercial line. For this reason, it is difficult to find other Kashmiri chefs who share the same passion.

You have run restaurants in India, Singapore and U.K. and all three are completely different environments. Does moving from one coast to another need a lot of change in your menu or adapting or altering to suit the changing tastebud?

We have always educated our customers about the vast variety of flavours in Indian food, and that it is not just about the spice and sweet. Not much changed with when moving from India-Singapore-UK, as we believed in maintaining the sanctity of the recipes at all restaurants.

Sure, there was some variations in locally sources ingredients that can influence the look, but as such, the recipe did not change to cater the population. We purposely left mainstream dishes out and only decided to serve authentic Kashmiri food in all the three countries. The common denominator is that majority of our ingredients from India – the good old INA market, Delhi.

How is the food different at Kashmir Restaurant?

The beauty of Kashmiri food lies in the spices that are very distinct compared to other parts of India in their flavour, texture, taste. Just like Mughlai food, there is unfortunately a common misconception that Kashmiri food has to be spicy – some customers are apprehensive and we try our best to clarify this when going over the menu.

The famous Lamb Rogan Josh that we offer is how you would have tasted it exactly in Kashmir – authentic spices and no onion, garlic or ginger. Most restaurants would compromise on ingredients to alter the taste, we do not.

Another example is that we use chicken thigh pieces. These are the finer differences, some of the Michelin star restaurants would not serve anything other than breast pieces.

What are your hottest selling dishes? (Pun not intended...)

Without a doubt, it is Lamb Roganjosh followed by a tie between Tchok Wangun + Aloo Bukhara kofta. Among desserts, our Firni is a much-loved item.

Covid hasn't been kind to hospitality sector in particular. How have you managed to keep up with the changing demands?

Things are still nowhere near pre-pandemic level. People are still careful about dine-ins but it is gradually picking up. We made sure to go above and beyond to ensure safety measures are strictly followed, which resulted in slightly reduced service – we had to update our opening hours due to staff shortage across the board (drivers, waiting staff, chefs). We overcame this by multi-tasking and sharing roles amongst ourselves.

Restaurants are meant to be a dining experience, although there have been some innovative takeaway platforms or services launched during Covid, do you believe people will want to come back to experience the experience like they once did? Do you feel a hesitation somewhere?

Just like other businesses, we had to also adapt during Covid so went on from being only a dine service to one doing take-away! We launched our own website and slowly improvised.

Putney community is very supportive and loving. Good personal relations with all customers is key for a family run restaurant. Many of our customers are elderly, so waiting for them to hesitate and return to dine-in safely and slowly is very much understandable.

What are your plans for future?

In the coming years, we might revive our large-scale catering and take wedding orders. Of course, only authentic Kashmiri food will be served even if the wedding is not Kashmiris :-)

Would you recommend someone aspiring to be a chef to start on their own?

Follow your dreams without fear. If you make a dish you love people will love it too. Even if you have to stand alone, come out of comfort zone because nothing grows there.

Visit us at:

[Kashmir Restaurant](#)

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Doing the Un-thinkable!

Anjan Raina

What my fall and rise at Public Speaking taught me about transformation, mentoring and giving back!

As a Sales Manager at Microsoft UK Public Sector, I build strategic partnerships with our customers and drive Digital Transformation for the good of UK citizens and civil service.

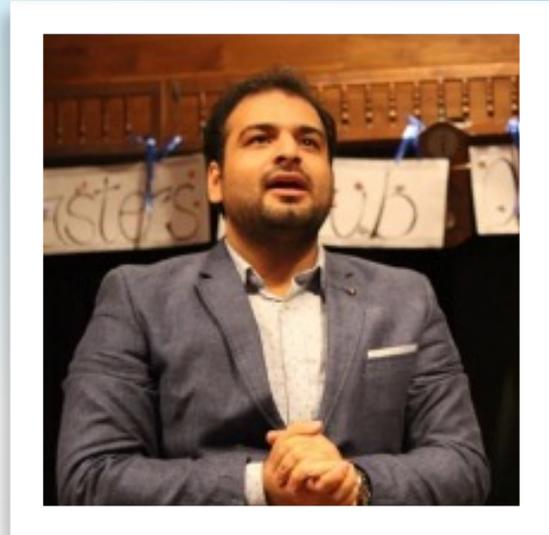
To ensure Microsoft's technologies are translated into meaningful business capabilities and outcomes involves delivering major transformational change programmes but my professional journey has been heavily influenced by the personal transformational 'Paths I've chosen'

I had never thought I would lead a public speaking group. On the contrary, public speaking was my worst nightmare. As an introvert, I had such a great fear of public speaking that when I had to speak in front of an audience, my eyes would be glued to my papers. A few years ago, disheartened by my inability to address a small audience, I resolved to overcome this fear and joined Toastmasters International. When I left India in 2017 to do an MBA, I was President of Toastmasters International's biggest Chapter in India (Delhi).

After a first few unsuccessful speeches, I dreaded being picked to speak during and stopped attending meets altogether, until the Chapter President cajoled me to re-join. My third speech was evaluated by a veteran speaker who gave me an honest appraisal, **"Young man, you need to start believing in yourself"**. That struck a chord and I steadied myself. Words when said and articulated in the right way can change someone's mind, alter someone's belief. Mentoring has the power to bring someone from the slums of life and make a successful person out of them.

For someone concerned about fitting in the Toastmasters arena of Eloquence, I received heartfelt acceptance and mentorship. Through consistent efforts the crippling phobia was replaced by manageable nerves, and I started enjoying public speaking, winning competitions and giving back to the Chapter by encouraging, mentoring and leading members in their journey towards becoming confident and skilled interlocutors.

My learning experiences in overcoming public speaking phobia helped me discover internal resources I didn't know I owned. During my MBA, I pushed myself out of my comfort zone through courses, internships and consulting projects across industries I'd never experienced and that enabled me to switch careers from Management consulting (pre-MBA) to Technology (Cloud) Sales at Microsoft UK, driving meaningful outcomes like enabling Data-driven



decisions by Cabinet Office on matters of National Security, Met Office to make better weather predictions, HMRC to track tax defaulters but most importantly helping all of you stay connected with co-workers, friends & family through Microsoft Teams in these 'unprecedented' times.

I am most proud that this transformative experience has helped me guide others and mentor them in conquering their biggest challenges. I love supporting & motivating peers, friends and early-in-careers on personal transformation, problem-solving and converting weaknesses into strengths. Ironically, I now leverage my public speaking capabilities to run a popular customer Podcast Series at Microsoft to build my sales pipeline (and hopefully meet unrealistic Sales Quotas)

Most importantly, my personality has been shaped towards being improvement driven and I have learnt to lead and to follow; abilities that empower me to accept greater challenges.

What's going to be your next think the un-thinkable and do the un-doable story?

Anjan Raina

Enterprise Sales Manager at Microsoft UK

Find more about my transformation, career journey and podcasts and here ([Linkedin](#))

Medical Writing: Navigating a Drug Molecule from Discovery to Approval

Dr Sheetal Raina

My life hasn't been any less of an adventure, lately!

Eleven years ago this month, I walked into the European headquarters of the world's largest pharmaceutical company to interview for a role I had no idea what it meant. With three degrees under my sleeve, a crisp suit, and a lot of enthusiasm, I was confident I had whatever it took to make it work. A decade later, I have not looked back and regretted that decision. There are many facets to this role that make it exciting and challenging at the same time.

Covid taught us many things, including our renewed interest in epidemiology, virology, medicines, and in particular regulatory pathways for drug approval. Many dinner table conversations included discussions focused on clinical research in 2020 and have continued to be an area of interest in 2021. Clinical research and roadmap to approving a drug have come a long way since the 1950s and 1960s. With extensive guidelines and regulations in place, medical writers play an essential role in navigating this matrix that takes the drug molecule through the finish line to approval and finally making the drug available to patients worldwide. As a medical writer, you are an integral part of a cross-functional team leading a drug molecule through these stages. On a daily basis, you will continue to strengthen your technical understanding of the drug molecule and the disease area as well as interact with an incredibly diverse and talented pool of individuals and together strive to make life better for millions of patients.

If you aspire for a career that impacts on lives of the patients, a career that gets breakthrough therapies to approvals or fulfils unmet medical needs, medical writing would do just right. To be a medical writer, you don't need to have a creative flair; you aren't writing a fairy tale.

All you need is a deep understanding of clinical data, outstanding attention to detail, and being a solid team player like any other profession. Depending on the nature and size of your organization, you may be involved in many aspects of drug development, from developing a protocol for the first-in-human trial to authoring the benefit-risk assessment for the complete submission package for evaluation by Health Agencies like the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK, European Medicines Agency (EMA) or Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency (PMDA, Japan) to name a few. In true sense, your role is global and encompasses a multitude of layers that you can excel in. You can be an expert in preparing a single specific document or try your hand at being a Jack of all trades. From CMC (chemistry, manufacturing, controls) to non-clinical/toxicology to clinical safety and efficacy, there are so many focus areas in between to specialize in that you will honestly be spoilt for choice.

I love to lead global submissions bringing new drugs to patients across the world. As a lead medical writer, I lead a team of authors who prepare the multiple components of the Common Technical Document (CTD or eCTD) evaluated by all major Health Agencies. I have had the privilege of being part of several new drug applications across multiple disease areas, mostly oncology, where I have spent most of my Pfizer years. Being part of the Covid-19 vaccine team and leading several applications to successful conclusions has been a personal triumph, with the most recent paediatric submission ranking right at the top of my *Karma chart*.

As Edmund Hillary once remarked

'You don't have to be a hero to accomplish great things- to compete. You can just be an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals.'

Sheetal is a Director, Medical Writing (Clinical Development & Operations) at Pfizer Inc.



A Paradise Lost, If we can Ever Regain

A Nomad, Rekha Tukra

Every place has its own distinct story to delineate and here is mine,

Nomad's enriching anecdotes of odyssey, eventually now I comprehend what it entailed to plod stretches, uncharted routes, swathes of land, what a trajectory

O! Nomad, first journey took me to valley, a land where Sharda inhabits, the Amarnath cave, meadows, willows, apple groves essentially spiritual environment implored me to halt;

So camped, picketed a tent in foothills called it home were my kindred felt at home and people homely by default;

"O Nomad, Whether it was freezing cold, frosty days, slippery roads, would walk extra miles in snow and blizzard;

Weather be it harsh would plough snow, bring in wood for fireplace, heal frost bites, warm cold feet, arrange "charar Kangri, special "pann" charcoal and Pheran fast paced like some wizard"

Uphill we stopped at "Leopard's Den" cottage in Gulmarg in farmhouse hereafter, Trekking through thick forests, creek with entourage of family, relatives to shrine "Baba Reshi" from Gulmarg to Tangmarg spent couple of nights in Huts in serenity surrounded by spectacular scenery and nourishing fresh cool air

"O! Nomad, only prominent memories which are engraved in my mind are of grandma sharing often real story about how they miraculously survived Wars with meagre potatoes and jaggery but who listened attentively to be precise;

Whilst I besotted tipsy like honey bee on nectar of saffron flower fields, joy of lotus in lakes and in siesta in lap of foothills of Valley, a heaven on earth, gliding swaying like bird to the sky soaring to new heights of paradise;

Whereas I was self immersed in ecstasy, power packed day doing mundane things hollering temple bells drove me out in dusk dawn accompanying Grandad twice;

thereupon queuing before local bakery the aroma of fresh clay oven baked breads magnetically pulling us, then playfully hopping on stairs towards bank of river Jhelum adjacent temple on river front, I couldn't detect impending friction of seismic scale, will itself suffice"

"O! Nomad, When you are high on life who gives a hoot, so carefree even normal daily multi activities simultaneously commencing in front garden, spreading on reed mat drying red green chillies, vegetables in the sun meanwhile elder ladies crushing crisp chillies in stone mortar with large wooden pestle to make spice;

nearby in the corner out of hen coop couple of hens were hoping and flapping like a free birds, other side we playing hop scotch with empty cheery blossom shoe polish tin as a lagger device"

“We like megalomaniacs lost in harmonic enchanting folklore music and sight of bountiful paddy and rice;

We couldn't track down horses hooves sound, howling, yelling of marching frenzy crowd towards us and their ominous voice;

We couldn't get wind in silence of the chillness of Cold War, it was predicament frankly, had no choice;

We were shell shocked hiding in attic it did daunt us, nobody could see paleness, fear behind our glowing face, between life and death, so took high road as per advice”

In medias res,

“O! Nomad, how alone went, laced shoes leaving behind part of us

that part still remains and pains ;

without a dime, no directions ,no road map or address just deep faith to follow our instincts, heart and driven enthusiasm searching land marks again;

We walked towards dazzling sun all day, slept under bare crescent crimson sky no blanket or quilt alongside cold crescent moon overhead following us all the way entering the lanes plus on plains !

“O! Nomad, when we first step out for our another journey just carried lightweight suitcase containing only pair of clothes and one way ticket

Later on we spotted troops their convoys passed highway headed to borders to Ladakh, Sospol Leh

Saluted to marching soldiers, bid them wonderful journey and “jai Hind”

While trekking different locations we saw majestic river Indus flow by and pristine pangong Lake

“O! Nomad, Rocky terrain, boulders, gorges, ravines and land slides on our route, got the foothold made our own milestone to evolve; hence laid the stepping stones paving the way for who seek to go too far to build dream life, piqued mind such dream revolve

“O Nomad, started afresh set foot in new place, Jammu, made strangers our own ones similarly on the move made friends and relation alike,
We rode with river Tavi with the its meandering flow along banks, our primary concern encompassed subsistence that became perquisite for building our future, furthermore acquired so many things on our path, left something behind, surely some footprints trails which are beckoning

“ O Nomad, wandered around the world but also took journey inwardly found more so inside peace further no better way to self discover and reinvent new you yourself;

My feet were always on the ground though was constantly roaming ,the more challenge the more better strong person I became above all myself

“O Nomad ,journeys are full of unforgettable memories so were our adventures , naturally all the journeys always come to an end, but the stories made will last a lifetime;

Time wheel keeps on spinning all the time;

Trodding to places exploring its nook and crannies never to stop at any time”

A Call For Contribution

Hi Everyone,

My name is Rushil Bhat, and I'm a recent high school graduate from London. I'm looking to compile an anthology of short stories, memoirs, poems and essays by Kashmiri Pandits in exile, and I'm reaching out for writers interested in contributing to it. In this anthology, I'm hoping to explore the history, cultural identity and existence today of Kashmiri Pandits while also presenting equally the views of three generations – those who haven't grown up in Kashmir, those who spent their childhood and teenage years in Kashmir and those who lived in Kashmir well into adulthood.

Pieces can be based on more or less anything: memories of growing up in Kashmir; interesting anecdotes about family incidents, celebrations and travelling; stories of your first visit to Kashmir or revisiting after a very long time; reflections on identity and heritage – almost all ideas are welcome. Ultimately, my aim for this anthology is two-fold: (1) to serve as a vestige of the memories of Kashmiri Pandits and (2) to provide a platform for otherwise unrepresented voices from the Kashmiri Diaspora.

If you are interested in contributing, please get in touch with me at **bhatrushil@gmail.com**.

Many thanks,

Rushil

Flaming Fury

Aria Raina Kumar (Year 4)

Girls like us were born
to slay dragons,
to value our ability,
to advocate fairness.

Girls like us were created
to change the world,
to possess strength and courage,
to cope with adversity.

Girls like us were given life
to shine bright and bold,
to trail blaze ingeniously with passion.

Girls like us were set a purpose
to explore space,
to invent robots,
to be themselves.

We won't let a king
or a prince
or a fairy tale
tell us we are not worthy,
because we can achieve anything.

Our Steps Challenge Journey

The *Steps Challenge* was born out of sheer determination to get active and imbibe a healthy lifestyle. The first goal of 1 million was smashed within 1 week, and by the end of August we reached an impressive >5 million! It was a humble beginning.

Come September, the group members submitted their daily step count as well as minutes spent doing a physical activity, which was then converted to steps and added to the total count. No stone was left unturned to keep motivation and energy levels all-time high with photos of step-count, scenic views along the way and sports/other activities being shared.

Since it's inception, we have together amassed over **24 million steps** - Go A team!!!

Fitness enthusiasts with varied interests, passions and personalities, continue to share their progress daily bringing our wonderful KP community together on one platform. It has been instrumental to help us feel more connected to each other whilst endeavouring to live a healthy lifestyle – be it walking, running, playing a sport or practicing mindfulness and yoga.

The challenge works for everyone, whether you are a beginner or an expert, so come join us by clicking on the [LINK](#) or scanning the QR code.

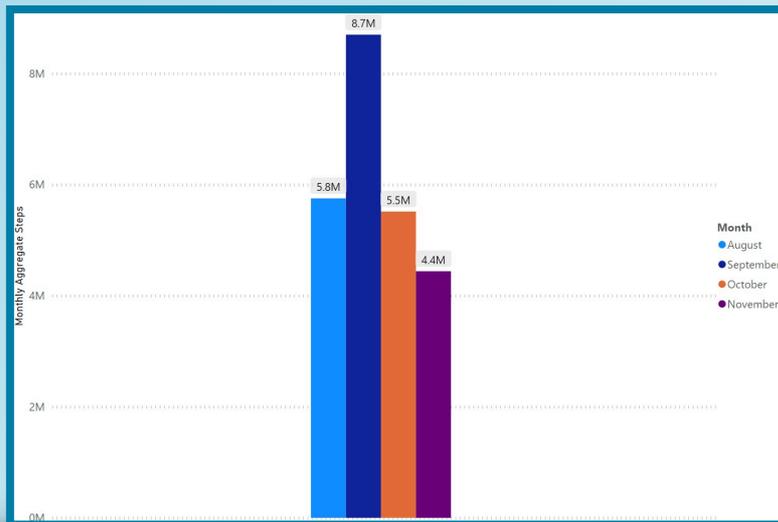
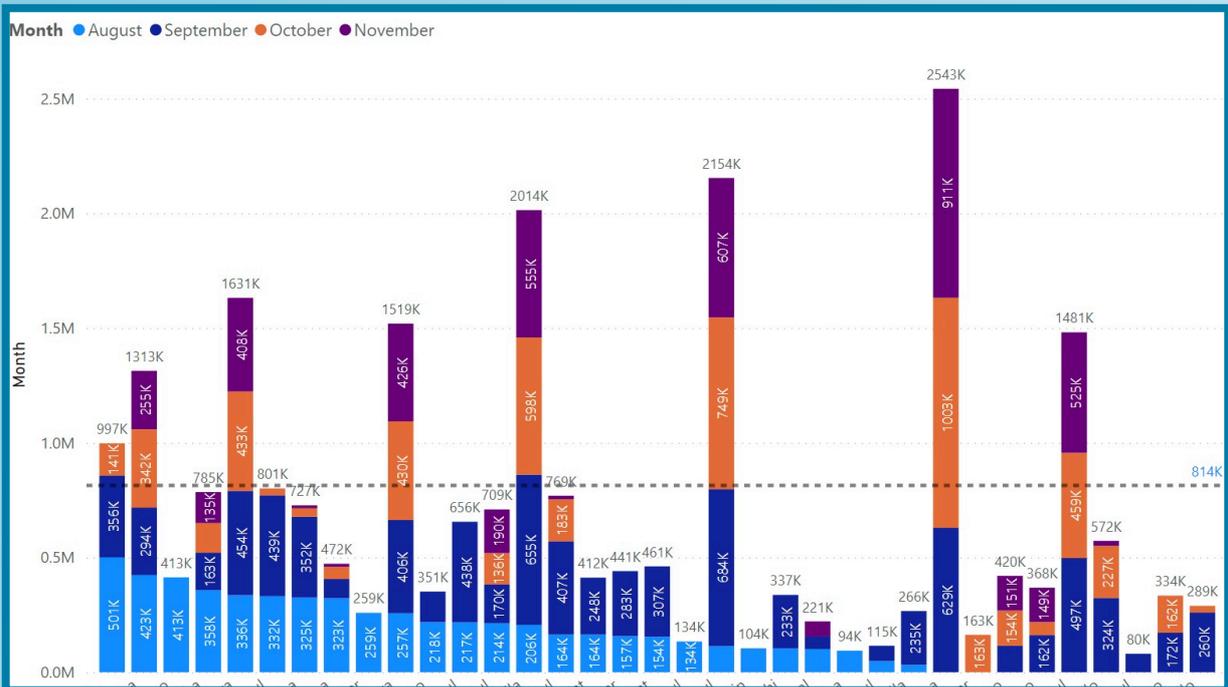


The group also has its own war-Cry - 'Every step counts so *Step Out To Step It Up*' (Credits: Mrs Rekha Tukra).



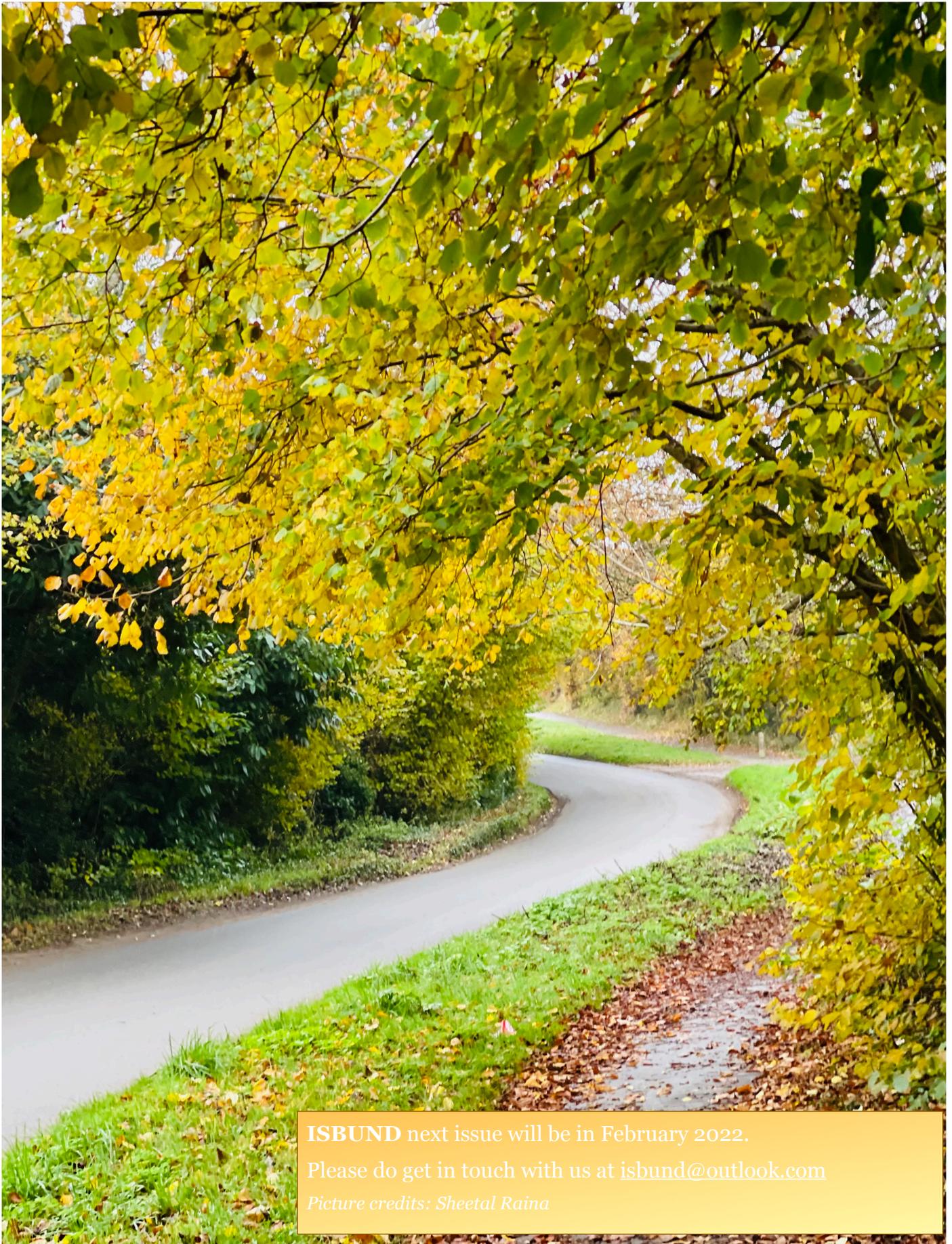
Personal Best for Dr Sundeep Kaul

Detailed Breakdown of Monthly Steps Challenge



A little snapshot of where our steps have taken us, literally!!

(Click on the [LINK](#) to watch)



ISBUND next issue will be in February 2022.
Please do get in touch with us at isbund@outlook.com
Picture credits: Sheetal Raina