

Sunday Chronicle

“IMMORTALITY IS JUST A SYNONYM FOR WHOLENESS. BY RECOGNISING THAT THE REALLY BIG THINGS LIKE MIND, CONSCIOUSNESS, THE ORIGIN OF LIFE AND THE BIRTH OF THE COSMOS REMAIN VERY OPEN QUESTIONS, WE WON'T FALL INTO THE SIMPLISTIC CLOSED-MINDEDNESS THAT SCOFFS AT IMMORTALITY.”
— DEEPAK CHOPRA

DECCAN CHRONICLE ■ 25 APRIL 2010

AN OTHER REALM II



The road to happiness

HEARTTITUDE III



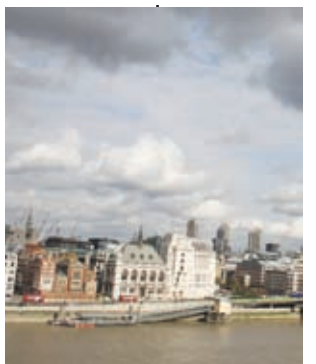
Guided by strong women

SHOWBIZ V



Bollywood's maverick

TRAVEL VI



Walking by the river Thames

PRESENTING THE PAST

■ BIJOY BHARATHAN

The late American novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. had once said, “History is merely a list of surprises. It can only prepare us to be surprised yet again.” And it seems there’s a renewed interest among Indians to surprise themselves with a rediscovery of sorts. Many of them are now on a quest to reconnect with their past and find out more about their heritage, where they come from, what their ancestors looked like...

From building an archive of photographs dating back to the pre-independence era, to helping people of Indian origin settled abroad get in touch with their relatives in the homeland, to conducting heritage walks aimed at giving participants a living, breathing and evolving understanding of the history of the land, its people and everything that makes up the so-called personality of a particular region — history seems to be the flavour of the hour.

Spearheading the youth brigade in one such ‘historical’ initiative is Anusha Yadav, a photographer based in Mumbai, who has come up with an online archiving portal called The Indian Memory Project. The aim is to document the nation’s past with respect to the social scenario prevalent at a certain point of time in its history. She accomplishes this through sepia-toned and black-and-white family portraits and photographs sent to her by eager beavers from across the country.

Explaining the genesis of the project, Anusha says, “I was always interested in old photographs. One day it just dawned on me that I could tell the tale of a city by using merely 20 pictures or so, which would depict a cultural timeline of sorts. Most of the pictures I receive are family photos taken on a special occasion. During those times, you did not have the convenience of digital photography, so every frame counted. Some of the photographs are amateur shots taken by family members. But that is what gives the images an air of authenticity and captures the exact mood, time and space of a particular era.”

From the clothes that the people wore to their body language, the places where they posed and those who accompanied them in the frame, the photographs speak volumes. The pic-

tures are accompanied by mini footnotes from the senders, which indicate the context in which the photograph was taken. Anusha elaborates, “Our country has been invaded by several emperors and there are remnants of their heritage in every nook and corner of India. Also, there is so much history lying untapped in the images preserved by thousands of people across the country. An archive of such images could serve as a legacy for the coming generations, who would have an idea of how their ancestors lived.”

But the search for one’s roots is barely limited to fading photographs. Other enterprising initiatives like Indiroots, a non-profit NGO, are attempting to reconnect People of Indian Origin (PIO) living abroad, with their long lost relatives in India. Dr Chandra Shekhar Tiwary, the man behind the Indiroots project, says, “I set off on my quest in 1996 when I came across a particular name — Elvin Kalicharan, in West Indies. For a minute I was stumped as I wondered how names could get so hybrid. In fact, about 10 to 15 per cent of those send-



Anusha Yadav, creator of The Indian Memory Project, an online archiving portal that documents old photographs

ing us requests from Caribbean countries originally belonged to the then Madras Presidency.” Emperors and noblemen have long been charting out family trees, which allowed their descendants to keep track of their ancestors and heritage. But no such facility was available to ordinary Indians who migrated to foreign nations in pre- and post-independence eras. And that’s exactly where Dr Tiwary scores.

Having tied up with the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Dr Tiwary’s organisation takes requests from people who have contacted the ministry attempting to trace their lineage in India.

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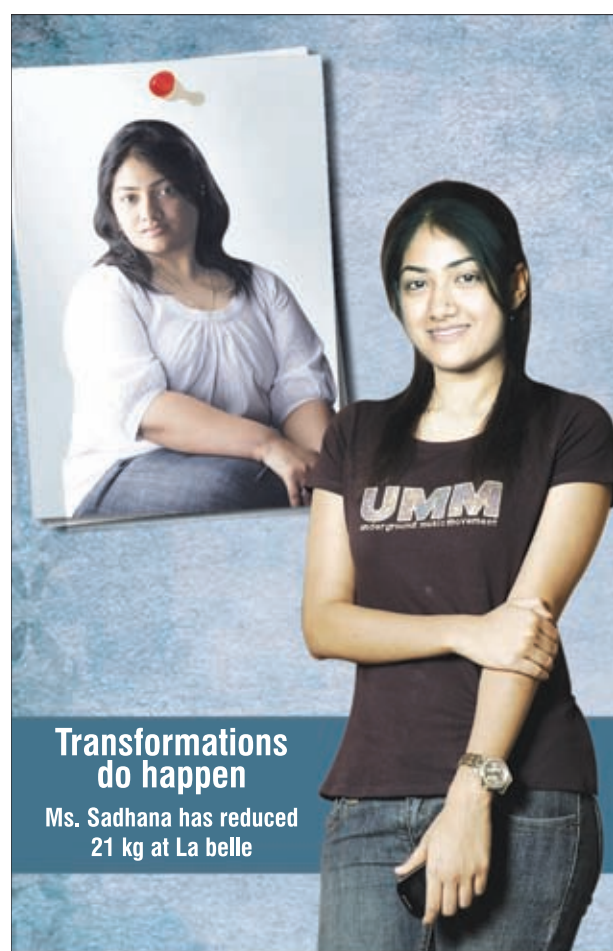
Shanta Bhandarkar, with her husband Dr S.S. Bhandarkar soon after they were married. Mumbai 1935

HISTORY IS RIDING A NEW WAVE OF POPULARITY AS MANY PEOPLE ARE ON A QUEST TO TRACE THEIR FAMILY TREE, REDISCOVER THEIR HERITAGE, FIND OLD FAMILY PORTRAITS, RETURN TO THEIR ROOTS...



Kusum Pandey, with her daughters-in-law at a wedding reception, Kolkata, 1964

More pictures on page 11



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