



# AMHS CONNECT

MARCH '21

# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Modernites,

The koyal is back. Her Lalit alaaap begins with dawn. Whether the early to bed and early to rise practice has made her wise or not, who knows, but has certainly kept her matchlessly melodious. And coupled with her call, is the lovely spring breeze. Gentle, almost caressing, making the freshly blossomed Radha and Krishnachura dance to its tune with gay abandon. In just a few months, this very wind will turn tempestuous and turbulent, howling its way through dark, stormy skies. The one we call Kalboisakhi.

Aren't we women much like nature in all its glory and fury? Gentle as a nurturer, fiery as a protector, the feminine Shakti continues to energize and balance the world, almost imperceptibly. One day in the calendar to celebrate its possibilities and layers is far from enough. But sometimes, you do need one demarcated day for a voice to build, for a motion to carry and for a mindset to change.

In this issue, we bring to you the stories of some Modernites who've done their alma mater proud. They are spread across batches and have made their mark in diverse fields. We hope you'll find their tales interesting and inspiring.

Together, let's keep walking...

- Supriya Newar  
Batch of 1994



# CULTURAL CAULDRON

**1. What kind of a school student were you? How do you think MHS has affected you and contributed to your life?**

I was a very positive, happy, normal sort of a student. MHS was an Institution that shaped and helped us build values and principles. Both my school and home and later my husband and children and now my grandchildren have helped me stay updated and ever evolving. I learn every day.

**2. You are regarded as a successful woman today and looked up to by peers and others. Is there a message you might have to those younger and aspiring?**

Nothing comes without hard work, consistency, passion, commitment and expressing gratitude to all who have supported and encouraged you on this path called success. So, find your calling, the strength and conviction to turn it into a passion and follow your heart. Remember, as you sow, so shall you reap.

**3. Who were the people / figures/ ideals you looked up to during your growing up years?**

My parents, a few teachers who were unconditional in sharing their vast knowledge, a few family members and friends who understood me. And of course, my parents' blessings that continue to be with me even after they have gone.

**4. What have been some of your key guiding principles and motto, especially during difficult times?**

This too shall pass. Amen.

**5. What does it mean to be a 21st century citizen and woman?**

To feel empowered, you need to act. Today, I am able to share and make a small drop in the ocean difference through my Alka Jalan Foundation which is a not-for profit trust with the mission statement to garner talent, nurture creativity, support the less privileged and bring to the public domain holistic programs that build inner strength and a spiritual mindfulness.

I feel empowered and blessed to be the Founder of the Alka Jalan Foundation and have my immediate family support each act of faith to celebrate goodness. Our Foundation is not only women oriented; it is human oriented!



**Alka Daga Jalan  
Batch of 1964**

“  
There is no **limit** to  
what we, as women, can  
accomplish.

✧  
MICHELLE OBAMA

”

# ACE GAME

## 1. What kind of a school student were you? How do you think MHS has affected you and contributed to your life?

I was an enthusiastic and a diligent student. I took all my school responsibilities seriously. MHS has affected my life in all the positive ways. It has taught me the essence of time management and work-life balance.

## 2. Who were the people / figures/ ideals you looked up to during your growing up years?

I looked up to my parents and my younger sister during my growing up years.

## 3. What have been some of your key guiding principles and motto, especially during difficult times?

I have been a staunch believer of the fact that whatever happens, happens for the good. I was taught to never give up and to always do the right things even when things were not working out for me.

## 4. What does it mean to be a 21st century citizen and woman?

To me it means being resistant, unapologetic and empowered.

## 5. What are some of your future plans and goals?

I am currently an undergraduate student. I plan to graduate with an economics degree and create a place for myself in the corporate world.



**Tanaya Parakh**  
Batch of 2020

Currently studying in the University of British Columbia, planning to major in Economics and Computer Science. During my school days, I was a national and Asian level squash player. In school, I was the school prefect, Jasmine house committee member for 3 consecutive years, library squad, and the drum player in the school band. One of my fondest memories was when we went camping to Nainital and Manali from the International Award for Young People (IAYP) Club in Class 10. My other interests include, swimming, playing the piano and art.

Life is tough,  
my darling,  
but so are you.



STEPHANIE BENNETT-HENRY

# IN THE PINK OF HEALTH

## 1. What kind of a student were you in school? How do you think MHS has affected you and contributed to your life?

I was a student who was all round interested. I was part of everything that went on, and there was a lot that did! Plays, guides, Independence Day, basketball, inter house activities, fetes, drill display for sports day, visits to museums, debates! Looking back, I wonder when we actually found time to concentrate on our books, but somewhere we must have, because so many MHS girls did so well. There were tests in some subject almost every day, as well as exams, and we took everything in our stride – we obviously learned to multitask long before that became a widespread aspiration!

## 2. You are regarded as a successful woman today and looked up to by peers and others. Is there a message you might have to those younger and aspiring?

When I had to choose a career, there were a few exams that led to a limited range of career options. In fact it is the younger and aspiring of today who need to teach the so-called successful, to stop us from being too set in our way of thinking! If there is one thing to say it is to find something that interests you, and follow it through. Don't let anyone tell you what you should do or what route to take in your career. As you go along things may not work out the way you thought, but be willing to look at new ideas and take on new challenges as they appear.

## 3. Who were the people / figures/ ideals you looked up to during your growing up years?

There were different things I saw in different people, and it is difficult to break them down into their separate parts. The figures in my mind today are multicoloured amalgams of all those people, and I really don't want to name some individuals and not others. MHS in my time had some amazing and charismatic teachers, and many of them make up part of those mysterious figures. Most of the influential women taught me other things, not the facts of science that I obviously needed for exams – an interest in literature, thinking broadly, being prepared for challenges. Many of the biggest influences in my life of course came later, from my years of medical college and surgical training. If you ask about ideals the most important would probably be honesty and pragmatism, and at the same time being always open to new ideas.

## 4. What have been some of your key guiding principles and motto, especially during difficult times?

My guiding principle in everything in my life is to be straightforward and direct, and to try to have a practical approach to whatever I do. In difficult times I try not to be overwhelmed by the big picture, and take one small step at a time - and before too long a way forward will appear.

## 5. What does it mean to be a 21st century citizen and woman?

Something that comes as a shock in the 21st century is that some of the wonderful things that we took for granted 20 years ago suddenly seem to be moving away, just beyond reach. I think it is important that we stand up for what we believe in, for freedom, but multiculturalism, for our right to make our own choices. And particularly in the 21st century we need to remember our place on this planet, and each of us needs to try to contribute to a sustainable environment. As I see it, a 21st century citizen has to be a team player first, and I believe women make excellent team players! A women's team needs to continue to challenge the power hierarchy that still exists in almost every profession and institution.

## 6. What are some of your future plans and goals?

My professional plan has been work-in-progress for the last 10 years, to establish a department where women with breast cancer can come with confidence, and expect to get the best possible treatment. I believe that setting a system in place is something far larger than the individuals who work in the system, and my goal is to establish something which will make a difference to women with this disease for many years to come. The next thing is to work on will be public awareness, as the disease is not really as deadly, nor is treatment as devastating, as women think it will be. Personally, I would like to find time to get involved in things outside medicine which interest me, all of which aim at a more sustainable and equitable world.



Dr. Rosina Ahmed  
Batch of 1981

After I left Modern High in 1981, I joined Medical College, Calcutta, and graduated in 1986. I chose to train in surgery, and later worked in England for more than 12 years. It was a very busy period of my life, with operating, emergency duties, surgical research and one exam after another, leading to the MD (Sheffield) and then FRCS. My two children were born in Sheffield. I came back to India as part of a group of doctors that set up a new multispecialty hospital in Howrah, called Westbank Hospital. In many ways it was the first of its kind for Kolkata, with a focus on a team approach to patients, and high quality at moderate prices. Tata Medical Centre opened in 2011, and since then I have been a senior consultant surgeon there, leading the Breast Oncosurgery Unit, a very busy department that deals with the diseases that many women fear most. We treat almost 1000 new patients each year, and focus on an integrated clinical and research program to ensure precise and personalised treatment.

# ARTISTIC STROKE

## 1. What kind of a student were you in school? How do you think MHS has affected you and contributed to your life?

I was considered to be a 'diligent' and 'responsible' student at school. I tried to be involved in as many co-curricular activities as possible, while managing my studies. As a part of the Student Council, I closely worked with many peers and juniors – that helped develop my communication and leadership skills. Being the President of the Social Service Club helped instil an undying sense of compassion and fire to bring about a change in any small or big way possible. My sense of loyalty and commitment came from being a part of a very warm and loving 'house system'. Being a part of the school magazine editorial board helped me pick up some vital skills such as designing and photography, that has been an integral part of my life ever since. MHS pushed us to always give our best attempt and a one hundred percent to anything we did. Being a part of the Modern High family, helped develop a sense of moral and social conduct, basic professionalism and mannerisms that will be certain lessons that will stay with me forever. The importance of working hard was also a lesson I picked up in school.

## 2. You are regarded as a successful woman today and looked up to by peers and others. Is there a message you might have to those younger and aspiring?

I'm extremely grateful for our MHS family. School has always been extremely appreciative and supportive of my journey, which has just begun. I think some of the valuable lessons I've picked up along the way include learning the importance of patience, persistence and honesty. Knowing that it is okay to make mistakes and going home with lessons learned - are some of the valuable assets I've learned along the way and continue to learn on a daily basis. It's a constant learning curve and while the fear of failing never goes away, the tiny "just-do-it" moments of courage keep on increasing. For anyone who feels that they're on a rollercoaster journey of ups and downs, it helps to have an anchor – for me that anchor is doing something I am extremely passionate about that helps me put one foot after another.

## 3. Who were the people / figures/ ideals you looked up to during your growing up years?

Growing up, we had the fortune to be mentored and nurtured by some very strong women – respectfully our teachers Mrs. Amita Prasad, Ms. Priyadarshini Guha and Late Mrs. Sutapa Roy. These three have always been figures I've looked up to. Right from little things to the greater lessons in life – they always found a way unique way to let us spread our wings while keeping our feet firmly planted on the ground. They nurtured us in a way in which we became independent, yet never once did we feel they left our side. They taught us how to politely yet firmly voice your opinion and stand up for what we believe in.

## 4. What have been some of your key guiding principles and motto, especially during difficult times?

"No rain, no rainbow."

In nature, I find inspiration that in order to see a beautiful rainbow, one has to get through the storm first. My obsession to see this rainbow is so intense that it often helps me push through the dark times. As a child I've always been fascinated with colour – this obsession of mine has helped me throughout many years. Another powerful motto has been that we essentially gain something from every situation in our life – no matter how hard it may be. As ultimately one ends up going home with some valuable lessons learnt that help make one the person they are today.

## 5. What does it mean to be a 21st century citizen and woman?

21st Century will be the century of girls and women. The tide is turning slowly but surely. This is however a social, economic and political revolution that cannot happen without men and boys. For gender equality and women's empowerment are only part of a larger journey for social justice and democracy. A journey for which our generation is better equipped than any generation before. Our generation IS the wired generation, the first to grow up with the whole world available at the touch of our fingertips and in front of our eyes. Through your use of technology, we can change the way we live and work and change the world we live in. We have at our disposal unprecedented tools, which allows us to learn new things every day, respond to things that are going on, connect with people around the world, and make great things happen—even change the course of history. Access to knowledge and opportunities have never been more free – and it is up to us what we make of them!

## 6. What are some of your future plans and goals?

My mother and I founded Art Rickshaw with the motto of making art accessible to all - to create a safe space where like-minded individuals could come and freely express themselves freely, irrespective of any differences. Not just to cater to a specific section of the population but rather to make art available and enjoyable to the larger populace as well.

To help simplify art, and make it more relatable, I focus on the story of the viewer. The common themes of my interactive art installations are self-awareness and self-appreciation. I believe art is a tool that gives people a chance to express themselves freely. To open a channel for communication between individuals, and for individuals to tell their own story - using art as a medium. In order to further this goal, I'll be pursuing a 2 year Masters degree in 'Information Experience Design' at the Royal College of Art, September 2021 onwards. After which I hope to take Art Rickshaw to different parts of the country, and make our annual cultural event Kalfest - into a travelling street art festival. We aim to slowly start building a nationwide brand image by doing workshops all over the country with corporates as well as other interested parties.



Devanshi Rungta  
Batch of 2015

Hey, I'm Devanshi Rungta, the creative director at Art Rickshaw, an art school & gallery based in Kolkata, India. Founded by mother & me in 2016, the school has grown to become the premier destination for art enthusiasts in a city that is often called the cultural hub of India. Though I was occupied with pursuing a full-time degree in Mass Communication & Videography for the first two years of its functioning, the attention I paid to its development never wavered. For the last three years, I've spent a large part of my time in curating & creating a one-day street art festival that takes place in the 1000-feet long lane that houses my gallery. The three editions have been roaring successes, drawing a cumulative crowd of over a hundred thousand people. But, along with the development of the festival, I have managed to keep an observant eye on the progress of both my creative process and that of my entrepreneurial abilities. Growing up in a family of entrepreneurs, the latter has always come naturally to me, but the former has been a product of endless experiments with photography, videography, and finally three-dimensional art installations.

# CHANGE AGENT

## 1. What kind of a student were you in school? How do you think MHS has affected you and contributed to your life?

I was always an excellent student. Academically I ranked at the top of my class and also enjoyed extracurricular activities such as sports, needlework and art. MHS recognized my potential as a leader and I held many positions of leadership such as Head girl, Rose House Captain and Vice-Captain, Prefect, Monitor and more. Leading and championing issues was ingrained in me from a very early age. I am still connected to my community of friends and they are my biggest support system as I continue to lead the fight for gender equality and systemic equity.

## 2. You are regarded as a successful woman today and looked up to by peers and others. Is there a message that you may have to those younger and aspiring?

My message to the next generation is that I am here to light your torch as you forge your own path to leadership. As you do so, be authentic in knowing who you are and what you are passionate about, hold close a vision of the change you want to see in the world and approach it from a curious and expansive mindset. You will never have all the answers but if you are open to learning from your mistakes and listening to differing opinions, your ideas and work will be much more robust. Finally, you don't have to have a fully crafted plan to get started. Just start from where you currently are and allow for growth. Trust yourself to be a changemaker.

## 3. Who were the people/figures/ideals you looked up to during your growing up years?

We stand upon the shoulders of powerful role models who went before us. I learned about love and empathy from volunteering at Mother Teresa's orphanage as a child growing up in Calcutta. When I came to study in the US, I admired Gloria Steinem and her feminist work and today am lucky to call her a friend. I looked up to classmates, professors and teachers who shaped my intellect and pushed me to explore my dreams, many who were at MHS and at Smith College.

## 4. What have been your key guiding principles and motto, especially during difficult times?

Gandhi's famous words "Be the change you want to see in the world" has been my guiding principle. If you do not show up as authentic and living the change you wish to champion, then you will never succeed. I also believe in a model of shared leadership and both men and women championing equality. Access and opportunity to thrive must be a fundamental human right for everybody. The core principles of equality, trust and equity ground me in the field of social justice.

## 5. What does it mean to be a 21st century citizen and woman?

To be a 21st century citizen and woman, let's amplify the lessons we have absorbed from our history. Let's amplify the women who wrote our constitution and were never recognized, let's lift up the women who were genius mathematicians and scientists and were forgotten. Lead with strong feminist values of empathy, collaboration and community. Women are creators and builders. We are linked not ranked (Gloria Steinem). We can embody both visibility and humility. We can make change in small ways and big. Each and every one of us can lift someone up each and every day. If we are to build a sustainable future, let's root ourselves in equality, in protecting our planet and being an example to our sons, fathers and brothers that everyone can be a changemaker.

## 6. What are some of your future plans and goals?

My work is nowhere near finished. The path to equality is long and often hard. My goal is to persevere. I celebrate the victories and learn from the failures because they are two sides of the same coin. My vision is that one day we will have a gender equal world where every human can not only survive with dignity but can thrive. It is going to take everybody to champion this movement for it to become reality. I invite you to join me!



### Mona Sinha Batch of 1984

Sharmila (Mona) Sinha is a globally recognized advocate for gender equality in business and society. She has parlayed a career in finance, marketing and restructuring, to work at the intersection of social justice and women's economic empowerment and leadership.

Mona is co-founder of Raising Change which develops strategies to close the critical funding gap in mission-driven organizations.

She is currently the Board Chair of Women Moving Millions, a community of women who fund big and bold (\$1 million+) to create a gender equal world. She is also the Board Chair of the ERA Coalition Fund for Women's Equality which seeks to codify the 28th constitutional amendment of equal rights on the basis of sex. She is an Executive Producer of Disclosure, a documentary film on the representation of trans people. She has been recognized by Columbia Business School, Smith College, Breakthrough, Apne Aap, Women's eNews, and was the 2015 recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

# WOMAN OR SUPERWOMAN?

International Women's day is mostly celebrated by recognising and applauding women achievers....those who come out victorious despite all odds being stacked against them.

We highlight the accomplishments of women who break glass ceilings and prove to the world that they are no less than men. In other words we celebrate the superwoman.

The feminist groups lap up these stories to further their cause and use them to lobby for gender equality related issues. While there is absolutely nothing wrong in doing this, (after all these women are worthy of all the accolades they get) we also need to stop and think about ordinary women whose contributions go unnoticed. They may seem ordinary but they too are fighting their battles. Sometimes they win and sometimes they don't but they are almost never appreciated.

There are many women who are just as educated as their husbands if not more, and just as capable of being financially independent but they are unable to break the shackles of the deep rooted patriarchy in our society and are forced to settle for a life of domesticity and suppression. Their woes are invisible as they are well provided for by their chauvinistic husbands.

Then there are those who somehow manage to pursue their passion but at the cost of being constantly badgered with societal barbs.

The not so privileged women work, not to prove their self worth but because they need to. Either their husbands do not work at all or do not earn enough to support the family. These women work as much outside the house as inside. They work tirelessly without any respite, reward or appreciation.

All these so called ordinary women are invisible because they are not doing anything path breaking or earth shaking but simply what is expected of them; because they are just women and not superwomen. What we need to recognise and appreciate is that even their ordinary lives are fraught with extraordinary struggles.

This women's day, let us do something different and get together to celebrate the contributions of all these unsung heroes in our lives.

- Smita Agarwal  
Batch of 1988

## FEEDBACK CORNER

Enjoying the Alumni monthly newsletter? Share your feedback and comments and we'll publish the best ones in our next edition. Write to us at [amhsconnect@gmail.com](mailto:amhsconnect@gmail.com)



We welcome ex-students to share their thoughts, memories and articles with us. Write to us at [amhsconnect@gmail.com](mailto:amhsconnect@gmail.com)



Designed by: GraphicsQue - 9874891891  
Harshita Goenka (Batch of 2010)