

# THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

ISSUE #3

**Watcha-ever!**

**A Clockwork Orange!**

**Run Exotica**

**I Speak!**

**... Miles to go before I sleep**

**Roger That!**

**Women on the Road!**

**Doc Talk**



**THE**  
**RUNDOWN**  
AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS



## Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

**T**wo months into a brand new year! And, one of my favourite months is here! For every member of the Chennai Runners, the core founding group in particular, this month – the anniversary month – marks the birth of an initiative that has grown to assume a life and character of its own; one that is making rapid strides – both in terms of numbers and quality of runners – and is becoming a force to reckon with, in the dynamic and blossoming running community of the country.

For me, as a woman, and a woman journalist at that, having developed content and produced feature supplements that interestingly consolidated and celebrated causes and celebrities – only women, please – March is a month that I like to dedicate to women! Not that a month is enough to do that! But you see, what I mean, right?

It is in the backdrop of this month – March 8 being International Women's Day – the cover story of this edition is an exploration of the dynamic of the growing women populace that is hitting the Indian road with passion, grit and glamour alike. More importantly, the story examines this surge in the context of a country that is increasingly touted as unsafe; rape in India, has been "described as a national problem" by the United Nations' Human Rights' chief. Every morning, we wake up to gritty and gory stories of rape; of eve teasing; of sexual harassment – on the roads, in a bus, on a local train, at home, at the workplace.

Yet, every morning, across every corner of India, women – across age groups, professions and socio-economic backgrounds – wake up well before the crack of dawn, slide into a pair of shorts (or tracks) and a tee, and do what they love doing the most – run! Some run to lose weight; for some, running gives them a sense of self-worth; some run alone; some others, like the camaraderie of a group; some run to deal with trauma; some others run to feel successful. Almost everyone recognises the hazards of road running in India from a safety point of view but nearly everyone will not let that affect what they consider their mojo, their ammo!

Our cover story – Women on the Road – unravels these many, multi-faceted layers and chats up an array of women – experts, novices – who shed light on the why and how of women and running. Sharing space with women, is a story that attempts to chronicle the story of a Chennai-based runner, who, for the last 29 years, has been doggedly hitting the road to run, and win!

Yet another favourite story is Run Exotica, a photo-driven story that will allow you to not only be amazed at the varied landscape of India but also the manner in which, these terrains are becoming spots for runs and running. Four runners from across India detail their experiences of running across these myriad landscapes.

Variety, after all, is the spice of life, ain't it? Try changing your running route; you'll know what I mean!

Cheers to Women Runners, and the Rest!

Editor



Akhila Krishnamurthy

## Did You Know?

### Second in Command!

**F**or the first time, in the history of Chennai Runners, a new role has been created – RD Position 2. Wearing this hat, with elan is Harishankar Krishnaswami, an advocate and Partner at Chennai-based law firm, HSB Partners. As an Associate Race Director, this runner, who recalls running with the group since May 2011, avers it's an honour to be "picked by the core team" to handle what is rather a Herculean task. "The event, you see," he says, "has grown in size and magnitude over the last two editions; as a result, the



Harishankar Krishnaswami

organisational responsibilities have also increased considerably." Aside ensuring an "enjoyable marathon experience", Harishankar is hoping to work closely with VPS (V P Senthil Kumar, as he is known in the Chennai Runners' circles) in co-ordinating with "external agencies and most importantly, to liaison with the authorities to secure permission for a smooth and successful goings-on of the event". That's a great start, Harishankar!

## Meet The RDs...

And you think The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM), '14, is a good nine months away! Well, for the Chennai Runners' core team, work is already underway

### Back, and With A Bang!

**H**e is back! And how! Say hello to the new Race Director (RD) of The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM) '14 - V P Senthil Kumar! A Chennai-based entrepreneur, who has been associated with the Chennai Runners, for the last seven years, and who has donned the RD's cap for two events in the past – ECR (East Coast Road) '11 and The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM) '12, Senthil, needless to say, is excited to step back into the RD's avatar. And why not, it's a challenging pair of shoes to wear, after all, right? "Honestly, the word challenging is an understatement



V P Senthil Kumar

to describe what this role entails," Senthil says, with a smile, "Every day and every moment leading up to the D-day and the time until the last runner crosses the finish line, is filled with challenges. One never knows from which direction a new challenge will crop up!" However, he admits that the support of the (Chennai Runners) group and the volunteers' team are among the biggest strengths that allow him to sail through this challenge.

With experience under his belt and list of firsts to speak of – for instance, at the ECR 11 '09, for the "first-time ever, goodie bags were given away to all the runners who participated", at the TWCM '12, WIPRO walked in as the title sponsor; Apollo Hospitals came on board as medical partners; Showspace, as event partners. For the first time, in Chennai, timing chips were introduced and both TNAA (Tamil Nadu Athletic Association) and AAI (Athletic Association of India) recognition were obtained for the event. "We also organised a grand expo on the previous day of the run," Senthil adds.

At this moment though, Senthil is looking ahead. "We are hoping to increase the number of runners to 12,500 from 10,000 last year," he says, "We are proposing the possibility of increasing the prize categories for the half and full marathon events. The idea is to really make the run a celebration of the city of Chennai; the idea is to make it as participatory as possible." We hear you, Senthil!



# CONTENTS



## A Clockwork Orange! 08

Because we like to celebrate the past as much as the present and the future, here's a quick look at The Wipro Chennai Marathon that went by!

## 10 ... Miles to go before I sleep

An injury may hamper his timing but the spirit remains unshakeable; Akhila Krishnamurthy spends a Sunday evening listening to the story of Chennai-based Lourdes Irudaya Bosco



## Women on the Road! 13

In a country with a growing crime rate, it is interesting to note that there is a rising community of women runners; The Rundown conducted a survey with women runners and groups from across India and Preeti Aghalyam collated and coalesced why and how women, every morning, across India, get up, get dressed and well, go run!



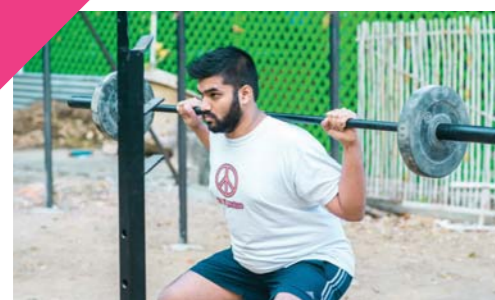
## 21 A Free Spirit & A Few Causes...

This quintessential runner has been a fixture in Indian marathon events for over a decade now. An exclusive interview with Milind Soman



## Roger That! 24

B C (Boot Camp, for short) is the buzzword in Chennai's fitness fraternity. Akhila Krishnamurthy goes B C hopping and returns feeling, inspired!



# CONTENTS

## 29 Run Exotica

In a country like ours, diversity in cultures and landscapes, have paved the way for marathons that marry the mystery and magic of nature... Four runners from India share their experiences of running on red earth, along a river bank, in a muddy, slippery trail and in the mountains...



## Tending to Tendinosis! 34

For most people, the words, Achilles Tendon, will bring to mind stories of Greek mythology. Not for us, runners. Dr Madhu Thottappillil sheds light on Achilles Tendinosis, easily among the most common running-related ailments...

## 36 Watcha-Ever!

Harish Lakshman sheds light on the best and the latest in the world of GPS watches



## I Speak! 38

Roshni Rai, a Gorkha girl who lives in Mumbai, has been running, and running to raise awareness about Gorkhas and the need and importance to recognise them as one among us, Indians

Editor:  
Akhila Krishnamurthy

Editorial Team:  
Preeti Aghalyam, Ashwin Prabhu, Niranjan Sankar

Editorial Co-ordinators:  
Divya S and Payal Chhabria

Design:  
Crazypencilz

Published by:  
Chennai Runners Association

Printed by:  
Rathna Offset Printers,  
Chennai



# A CLOCKWORK ORANGE!

Because we like to celebrate the past as much as the present and the future, here's a quick look at The Wipro Chennai Marathon that went by! Dressed in bright orange, the marathon 2013, witnessed a participation of nearly 10,000 across categories; of these, 1,500 were women. What's even more interesting is the marathon had a small but significant representation from runners across the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, Sweden, USA, Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In an effort to recognise deserving runners, the core team identified 50 star runners from across India (rural parts of Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore, Thanjavur, Uttar Pradesh and Darjeeling) and sponsored them. Not surprisingly, most of the prize winners belonged to this Star Runners' programme that was sponsored by Chennai-based retail store, Nalli's. If you didn't run last year, 2014 may be a good year to begin! Stay tuned to this space as we reveal the colour of the tees this year!

A sea of orange covered the streets of Chennai on this special day, as enthusiastic runners replaced the usual honking cars and unruly drivers!



The volunteer teams toiled tirelessly through the day & ensured that TWCM was a grand success!



No marathon is complete without its share of bling! Participants were proud to display the beautiful TWCM medal, featuring several Chennai landmarks!



The grit and determination of the blade runners and the wheel-chair bound participants of TWCM warmed everyone's hearts.



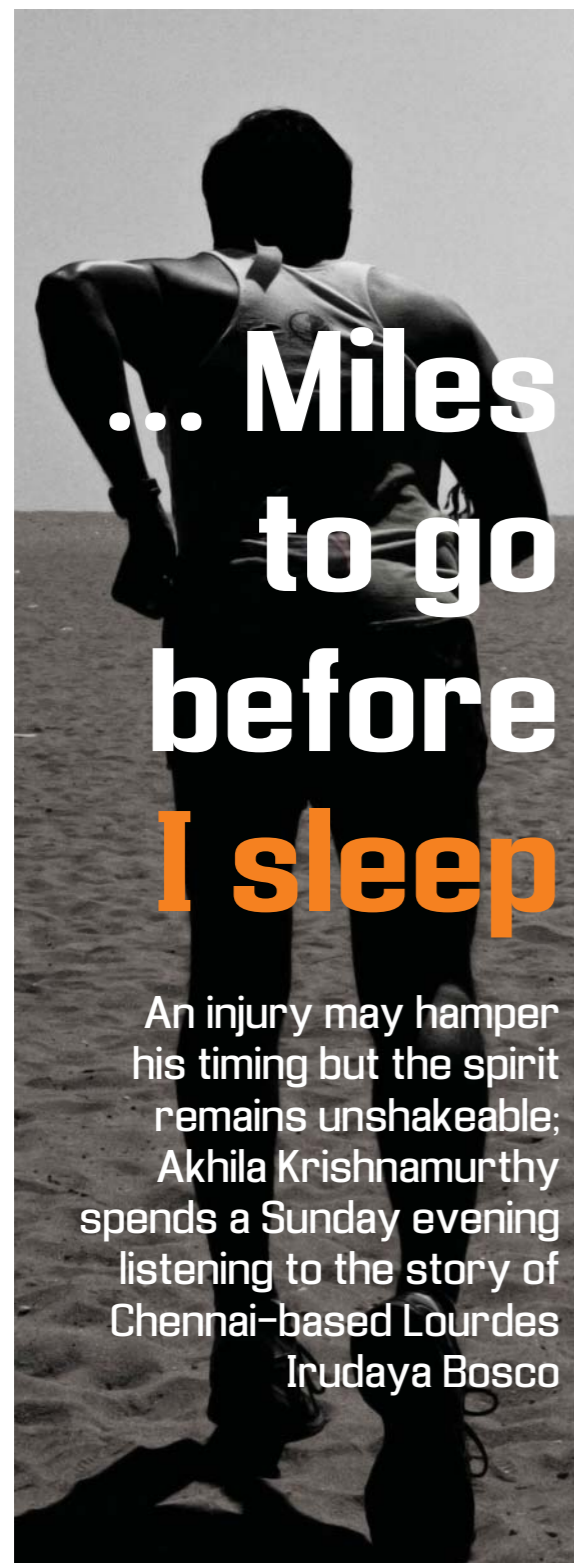
Full Marathon winner (men) - Ismail Ssenyange - receives his prize money from the sponsors while the Chennai Runners team looks on.



Full marathoners stretching at the start line of TWCM '13 - Elite runners rub shoulders with local running enthusiasts.



## Profile



# ... Miles to go before I sleep

An injury may hamper his timing but the spirit remains unshakeable; Akhila Krishnamurthy spends a Sunday evening listening to the story of Chennai-based Lourdes Irudaya Bosco

It's a corner house; huddled deep inside; there's a long, narrow pathway dotted with potted plants and creepers that paves the way into a home that sparkles with humility – literally and metaphorically speaking. On this passageway, somewhere amongst the plants and the bushes, is a sturdy black tyre; it hangs loosely from a not-so-tall ceiling. That tyre, supported by an iron chain on both sides, may well be, his nemesis.

18 months ago, leading up to a season full of marathons, and filled with focus and fervour, Chennai-based Lourdes Irudaya Bosco, procured that tyre from a spare parts' shop in his locality, in Mahalingapuram. Every third day or so, on the sand of the Marina (beach), in an effort to build endurance, Bosco would run with the tyre trailing him, supported by a rope that he tied around his waist. "I fear, I may have overdone that bit," he says, very quietly. He did; the nerves around his right heel got pinched and more than a year later, that injury continues to bother him, physically and emotionally.

On August 25, 2013, at the Airtel Hyderabad Marathon, at the 20th km, he almost collapsed. "I alternated between walking and running every 500 metres and completed the marathon in 3:41," he adds. Two months later, in October, in home-ground Chennai, at the Chennai Trail Marathon, Bosco came first in the Veteran category,



Lourdes Irudaya Bosco

His first full marathon in 1989 was the YMCA Marathon at the Race Course Stadium in Madurai; he came sixth and finished at an amazing 3:50. He was 22

and was placed third in the Open (category). At the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon (SCMM 2014), despite pinching nerves, Bosco crossed the finish line of the full marathon in 4:00 hours. "It's not my best," he says, but thankfully, the smile is back.

And most importantly, the spirit remains. In a way, Bosco's personal story is a reflection of the two integral aspects that form the core of marathon running – pace, and endurance. It's also a story of consistency, a story of commitment, a story of competitiveness, a story of loneliness, a story of sacrifice, a story of doggedness and determination, a story of tenacity, a story of training, a story of struggle, a story of challenges and most importantly, a long story with no ending in near future.

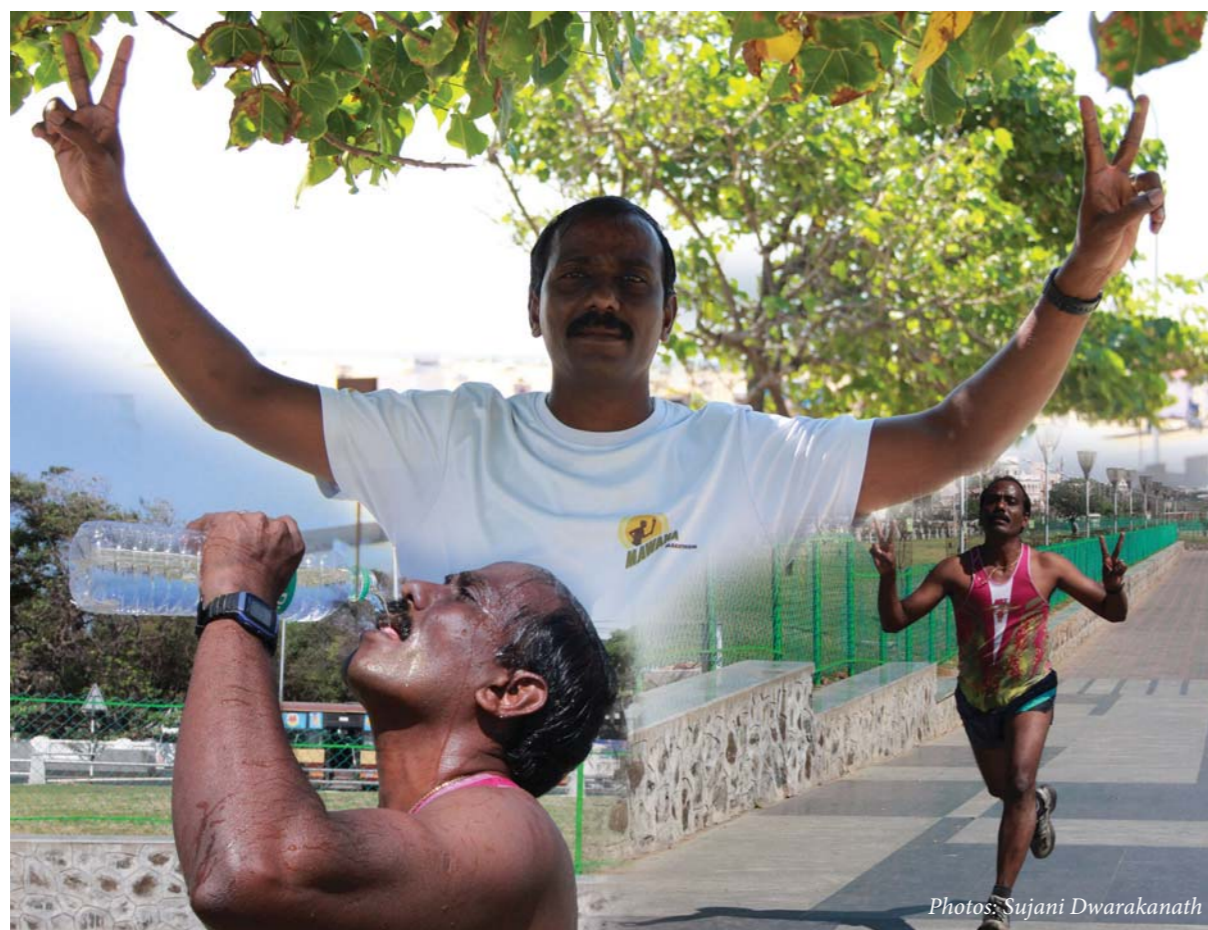
Thank God for that! "I'm hoping to better my timing," he says on an optimistic note. He is 46 years old; he knows that. He has, behind him, 29 years of serious marathon running but his spirit to succeed, win, and better his own timings, remains unfazed by the ravages of time. He still wakes up at the stroke of 2(am) and at 3am (sharp), sets off on his lonely journey along the city's (hazardous) roads, battling with ease, the many challenges of that hideously unearthly hour – lorry traffic, uncouth dogs, poor lighting... "I run on the centre of the road," he says, with a sheepish grin, "The median on the road is often my best companion..."

Isn't that utterly dangerous, I shriek? "Well, it is," he acknowledges, "But I've figured my way around; I know it is risky but what can we achieve in life without hard work and moreover, how can we run in this city after 6am?" It's true but Bosco confides these are among the many sacrifices he has had to make to get where he has. The lack of sleep – he goes to bed only at 11pm, and most days, even after getting home at 5am, he is sucked into the routine of daily living. The near-midnight runs, affected his eyes and two years ago, he had to undergo a laser treatment for both eyes, for better vision.

But sacrifices, in his scheme of things, are only mentioned in passing; only as a repartee to my provoking questions. Running he knows, is his life; a sport that allowed him an escape from the drudgery of academics – "I wasn't very academically inclined," he confesses – an activity that bestowed on him a sense of identity and recognition, across India, and among international runners. Born into a family as the youngest among six siblings, Bosco was initiated into running by his elder brother, Maria Xavier, soon after he completed his class 10. What began as casual running in and around the United







Photos: Sujani Dwarakanath

Two windows in his home are proud frames for his many medals; facing the windows, in a glass showcase, there are many trophies that constantly remind him of his success

India Colony area in Kodambakkam and the beach, bloomed into a full-fledged career that won him medals and accolades, aplenty.

Two windows in his home are proud frames for his many medals; facing the windows, in a glass showcase, there are many trophies that constantly remind him of his success. He wears them with pride; maintains his certificates and records with an orderliness that is almost enviable. The moment I walk in, he presents me with an A3 size print-out that chronicles, in detail, his many achievements; categorized clearly according to year, date and month, name of the competition, place, event, timing and position, the two-page-long list is admirable for Bosco's fabulous journey in the world of marathon running. Somehow, the list tugs at my heart; it makes me wonder about

a talent perhaps not duly recognized, not tapped to its full potential. A quiet, lonely, individual story doing its own number, unharnessed by sponsorship and therefore the possibility of a life of glitz and glamour...

As an employee of the Southern Railways, Bosco, needless to say, found the flexibility to train and pursue his running but perhaps he could have done more! Between 1986 and 1998, he ran barefoot. His first full marathon in 1989 was the YMCA Marathon at the Race Course Stadium in Madurai; he came sixth and finished at an amazing 3:50. He was 22. In 1998, at the Trivandrum Marathon, two well-wishers, Shivadasan and Chinnadurai, bought him a pair of shoes. "I think they were a pair of Nike," he remembers vaguely. Unfortunately, his feet, untrained to the comfort of shoes, gave way, at the very last minute

and Vijay Singh from the Army beat him to the first place. "I came second," he says, "But I was the only civilian in a group of Army men."

He won Rs 50,000 from that marathon and much of it went into funding the expenses of his own marriage to a vivacious young girl named Jenacious Priya. Sixteen years later, Priya allows him to pursue his passion; never whining about his gritty regimen but ever-concerned about him "over-doing his training. It's important to be passionate," she says, "But we need to know our limits, no?"

Yes, we do. "I trust in God," Bosco says, "It's really His faith that has kept me going." And of course, there is his hard work and willpower. After all, come on, God helps only those who help themselves!

Re-Search & Analysis

# Women on the Road!

In a country with a growing crime rate, it is interesting to note that there is a rising community of women runners; The Rundown conducted a survey with women runners and groups from across India and Preeti Aghalyam collated and coalesced why and how women, every morning, across India, get up, get dressed and well, go run!

On January 19, 2014, nearly 2,500 women lined up for the full and half marathon distances at the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon (SCMM). Earlier, on December 2, 2013, at The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TCWM) event in Chennai, 1,500 women ran various distances, on a humid Sunday. As a percentage of the total participants in the marathons, these are still small. But looking back at the number of Indian women runners just a few years ago, a movement is clearly underway, and is phenomenally inspiring.

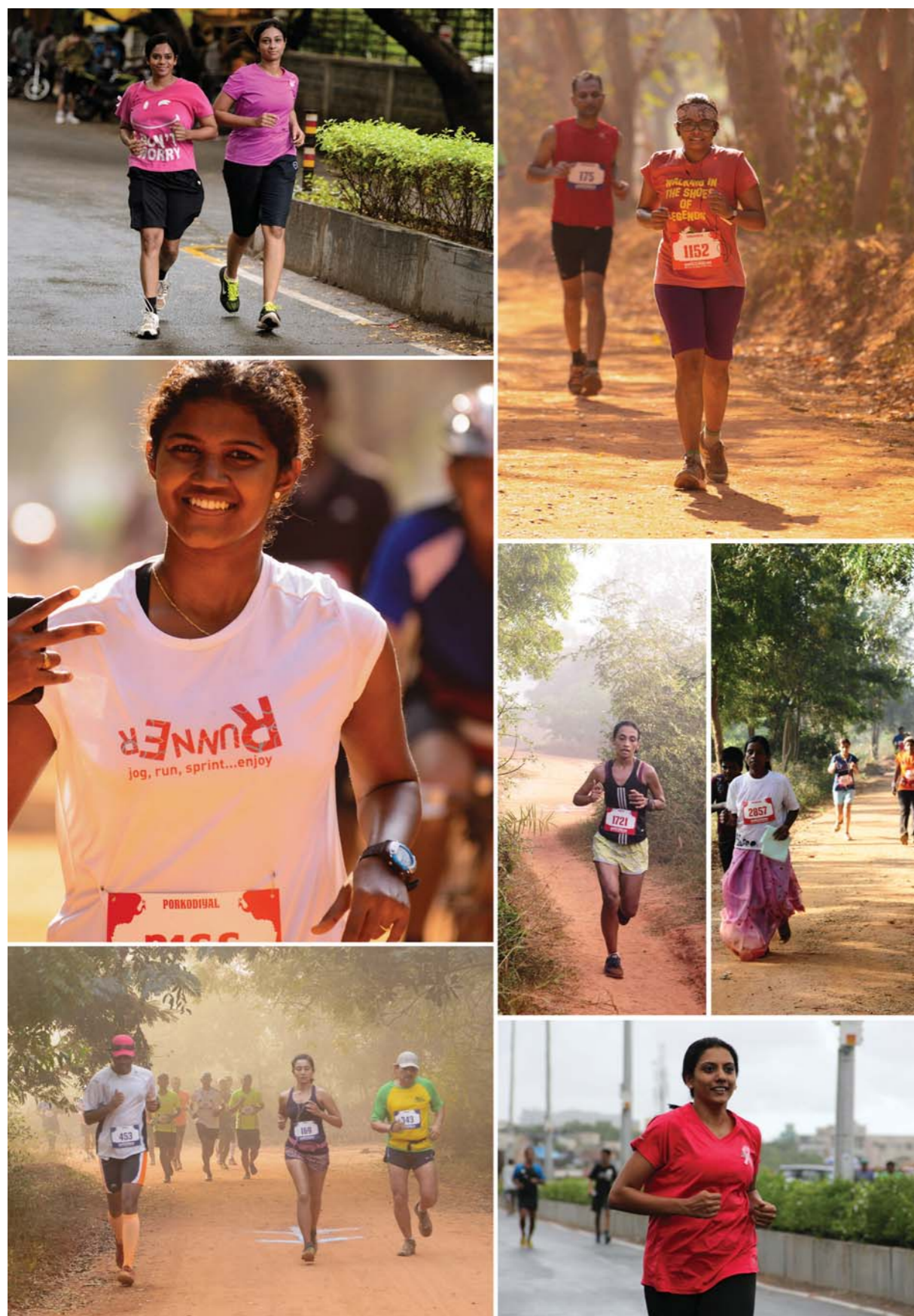
In Chennai, for example, the Chennai Runners' ECR Run, even as recently as 2010, saw 10-15 women runners. Most of them ran the 5km distance. It's not just that more women are now into running. Events like Milind Soman's Pinkathon and the Contours Women's Day run do see good participation - but what has been really remarkable is the fact that Indian women runners are now tackling the longer distance, endurance challenges with aplomb. Kavitha Kanaparthi, of Globe Racers (a company that organises 100km and more runs in remote areas with interesting terrains across the world), recently organised a Women Only ultra marathon (a challenging 50km run) in hilly Nilgiris. Sumedha Mahajan has run 1,500 km from Mumbai to Delhi; Roshni, Vineeta, and Neepta have successfully completed the Comrades Marathon (90 kms) in South Africa; and this list keeps growing every year.

The Rundown conducted a survey among women runners recently, to get them talking about various aspects of road running that didn't bear thought earlier. Back when only men ran in the city streets and parks, many things could be taken for granted, as opposed to a few Sundays ago when the Chennai Runners' casual Sunday group looked like a political rally, and had a phenomenal number of women tackling various distances. We received responses from across the country; and our spreadsheet quickly filled up, each runner sharing her experiences with a lot of passion and joy, and not a little frustration.

As runners, our readers understand runner-quirks and requirements very well. Battling the vagaries of weather, setting alarms for unearthly hours of the day, the beauty of having an understanding running group, and peaceful places to run in, are just some things on runners' minds. As a woman runner, it is obvious that in addition to the stress of sticking to a training regimen and feeling







A collage of women runners from runs across Chennai and India  
 Photos' Courtesy: Nithin Kunde, Nizhal Rasigan, Karthikeyan Guruswami, Aravind Balaraman



As a woman runner, it is obvious that in addition to the stress of sticking to a training regimen and feeling mentally ready for grueling races, the struggles and accommodations to ensure personal safety during a training run are foremost on the mind

mentally ready for gruelling races, the struggles and accommodations to ensure personal safety during a training run are foremost on the mind.

“I have been nearly shoved down a flyover by motorists,” a feisty young lady from Delhi tells us. She managed to escape the hooligans and continue her long run that day, and now chooses roads and routes, carefully. Most of the women we surveyed agree that the roads are not safe for women runners – “not alone, not during the slightly dark early morning hours, not if you want to wear a running skirt or shorts, not in a new area that is not familiar to you. And most times, even in familiar areas, there is cat calling, comments and rude/lewd gestures, by both men and women, and the occasional slaps by passing motorists. Just because it’s strange, you are strange, and just because they can”.

So, every early morning then, as the alarms buzz in Chennai and Pune and Bangalore and Mumbai, what do women runners do? Get up, Get dressed, and Go Run, of course. Some, like Sudha, choose to run around their own apartment complex, near their homes, where they know it’s safe. But many hate running in loops and prefer to cover longer stretches. “I get in touch with the Runner Girls India group – a

pan-Indian 2007 initiative by Naina Lal and Sabine Tietge – and run with them,” says Priya, referring to when she visits India. “Ever since I heard a gory incident about a friend of mine involving a band of strange men at the beach, I run with a group, always “says another enthusiastic lady runner.

Many of the women feel that it would be convenient to just be able to go out and run – whether we follow a specific training plan or just run to clear our heads – without a lot of planning. Having well-lit, pot-hole free, safe roads to run near our homes would be so great! Instead, we are forced to coordinate with local running groups or urge our friends or partners to join us. It is no wonder then that running groups have exploded on the scene in India – from the Mumbai Runner Girls (MRG) to Runner’s High in Bangalore – you will find companionship for running, for sure!

In 2013, the Chennai Runners launched an initiative aimed at promoting running in various neighborhoods of the city. Today, in K K Nagar, at least 30 women are part of the Pillar Pacers and are strongly encouraged and guided by the more experienced members of the group. The

Bessie Flyers are a colourful bunch of young fast runners; while the Marina Minnals, Alwarpettai Rappers and other interestingly named groups are all active not only in propagating the CR credo of Do More, Start Running but also in identifying safe routes for running and training, in the locality.

Running is unique among all sports in that it is a lot more about yourself – your ability, attitude, and investment. With consistent and sensible training, everyone, of all ages, can see improvements. Be it the distance they can cover comfortably, the pace they can hold, or even the times they can post in various races. It gives a sense of freedom and a perspective into oneself that is invaluable. Runner safety is a big concern worldwide – and more so in our city and country. Women runners are a hardy bunch with wonderfully positive attitudes and a willingness to overcome barriers and obstacles – but much is needed in terms of awareness in the community. With our collective efforts, the day may not be far when our roads are safe, for women and men runners, in light and day; and we can hold our heads high and our form correct, and just find our inner happiness.



## Meet the Elite!

Her full marathon best is an impressive 2:51, her half marathon timing is at 1:20; she has already won many local races in Australia and has just started running in international ones; Preeti Aghalyam runs with and chats up Brisbane-based elite athlete, Aarthi Venkatesan

How does one go about asking inanane questions to an elite athlete? Having bravely signed myself up for the task of interviewing and writing about Aarthi Venkatesan, I worried for days. Where do I even start, will she remember me, what questions should I ask, will I be invading into her personal space, what is okay, what's not? You get the picture? Over the course of several conversations with her, I realized though that I was being ridiculous. Aarthi is a warm and extremely approachable person, whose every word makes you comfortable, and conveys her humility and compassion. Her visit to Chennai for a few short weeks during the run upto the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon (SCMM) in January, 2014, created a big stir and sensation in these parts, even as people stopped and stared (not in an obvious, annoying way, I promise) and admired her beautiful, fluid running strides. And I dare say she has become my friend now, and all I am doing, is chatting with her.

Aarthi lives in Brisbane, Australia, and has been running 'seriously' for about three years now. She is not new to competitive sport though, having played

tennis for Australia (imagine that!) and during her college days in the USA (at the uber-prestigious NCAA tournament), winning numerous accolades. While her tennis accomplishments are no mean ones, for a relative newcomer, her running achievements have been just phenomenal! Her full marathon best is an impressive 2:51, and her half marathon timing is at 80:20 at this point of time. She has already won many local races in Australia and has just started running in international ones. Daughter of legendary tennis player and local Chennai luminary, Rabi Venkatesan (Davis Cup, '66 and '67), this young lady is a fighter and surely it is only a matter of time before Aarthi betters her own records and scales new heights!

"I am here to try for a place on the podium at SCMM," she said to us, one fine Sunday morning at Anna University, matter-of-factly. The Mumbai Marathon - especially the half marathon - is a highly competitive race and we were taken aback. It was dark, and the Chennai Runners had turned up in large numbers for the Sunday morning 'Classic' - the usual 16 km run around the city - but of course, none could match her pace (not for

want of trying). "I loved running in Chennai," she said later, "Meeting the Chennai Runners was such a rewarding experience for me. Hari Shankar (one of the founders of Chennai Runners) really took me under his wing and showed me the awesome running community you guys have built."

Running an extremely focussed and aggressive race, Aarthi lost out a podium spot by just a few seconds this year in her first international race, but promises to be back in India again real soon!

We think wistfully about running in Australia, as Aarthi tells us about her training regimen. Depending on the upcoming race schedule, she trains every single day, sometimes, even twice in a day. Her weekly mileage is around 140 km! Probably not wanting to hurt our feelings, she says that running in Chennai was good, though better street lighting and fewer pot-holes would have been helpful. My ears perk up as she adds, "I was initially nervous about how a woman dressed in running attire would be perceived in Chennai, but it did not seem to pose a problem." Clearly, our city roads are no match

for either the convenience of her home training ground or the beauty of the many trails she has access to in Australia, but she smilingly took it in her stride, and perhaps rather irrationally, we feel proud to have played a small part in her training this year.

We plunge into the typical conversation topic then. Family, work, balance, the juggle, the fine line. "I am a driver, cook, cleaner all-in-one," she admits, managing to train around her kids' schedules, adding, "Of course I could do nothing without Brock (her husband)'s full and complete support and love." She admits that as a mother, the most precious commodity is time. And that she runs a real-estate firm and works six days a week at her job. And runs those hundreds of kilometers every week. At that pace! It is very hard not to be awe-struck by this dedicated sports-woman, who says that she is "barely

hanging on" at the end of a gruelling training/work-week! Listening to her, looking at her broad smile (she so clearly enjoys this challenge), puts so many things in perspective, and has totally added that extra spring to our step these days.

So what motivates her to keep at it? What is it about running that it is able to weave its magic around us? "I run because it gives me a sense of who I am," she says, "It teaches me to hold on, push through pain. It mimics life really, in that not everyday is perfect, but you have to go forward, find something, a tiny piece, that's positive..." The pain is evident, just below the surface. She started running after the excruciating, indescribable pain of a still born baby boy several years ago. Running, to get hold of a peace that she sorely missed. Focussed in races, methodical in training, running is almost a need

today. The pain is personal, private, but the essence, well, we understand it, somewhat. Because of the magic dust that's running.

Give us a message, Aarthi, I beg. For Chennai. India. Women. The readers. Me. "You can be anything you want to be; don't let anyone take away your dreams. Ability is what you are capable of doing. Motivation is what you do and attitude determines how well you do it. I live on a day-to-day basis, wake up every morning, be thankful for the opportunity to run and then make most of every session," says Aarthi, a star with whom we tried to match strides recently. She stops me, and tells me she is grateful to her "parents and brother who always nurtured in her a love for sports, her coach, Australia's leading distance running coach, Richard Telfor, for believing in her, and her husband and kids for loving her to bits".

## A Street Called Freedom!

"We shouldn't," writes Anupama Srinivasan, "give up or compromise on our right to use public spaces, freely and joyfully..."

Whenever I tell someone I work on gender violence and sexual harassment, the standard response I get is: "Oh but Chennai is so safe, what's there for you to do?" I respond by saying that "safety isn't relative and it isn't about Chennai vs Delhi" (the usual smug comparison). This feeling has been reinforced by the literally hundreds of young women and girls who have told us stories of harassment they've experienced on the streets of this city. The bottomline? Even one instance of rape or harassment is one too many.

But what is safety? Isn't it more than the right to not be raped? Isn't it also the right to walk freely on the streets without the fear of not just physical attack but also catcalling, whistling, staring or groping? Isn't it the right to go for a run at 4am or midnight, wearing shorts and a t-shirt, without the fear of being followed or leered at? And most of all, shouldn't we be able to do all this without being told that we're being foolish, taking risks and that we have no one to blame but ourselves if 'something happens'?



Anupama Srinivasan

So what can we do to make our cities safer for ourselves? Quite a few things actually. We can document and report instances of street harassment (read about Hollaback! Chennai). We can learn self-defence techniques like Kravmaga (also great for fitness!). We can stop using phrases like eve-teasing which trivialise the problem. Let's call it harassment, for that's what it really is. Language has power.

We can carry out safety audits - in our neighbourhoods, campuses, on the streets we walk. A safety audit is designed for use by communities, to understand how safe a particular space 'feels' and is usually done by users of that particular space. So for instance, if you have a specific running route, it is worth the time and effort to audit that route and take stock of various factors







A Kravmaga session in progress  
Photo Courtesy: Prajnaya

that contribute to how safe or unsafe they make you feel – lighting, the condition of pavements, how wide/narrow roads are, whether there are shops/hawkers, whether it is a busy or isolated road, etc. After all, safety is also about perception; you don't need to be harassed to fear harassment.

What we shouldn't do? Give up or compromise on our right to use public spaces, freely and joyfully. Happy running!

*The writer is Programme Director, Prajnaya, a Chennai-based, non-profit centre for research, public education and networking, working on issues relating to peace, justice and security*

## Run's Worth!

"Running has multiple positive effects on a woman's psyche.."Akhila Krishnamurthy in conversation with Rekha Sudarsan, a psychologist, a child birth educator and breast feeding consultant, oh, and a marathoner!

**R**unning is my "me time". It's my time to think and also be with "no thoughts"; there are times when I introspect, times when I dissect. I look at my watch and time my run some days and sometimes, I have completely lost track of "time". My runs have been cathartic and many a time, they have been soothing. I love my "solo" runs as much as I enjoy running with a "group". The potpourri that it offers is my "runners high"...

**Do you agree that more women are now starting to run, and professionally?**

Yes, I agree more women have started to run. A lot of us are recreational runners and very few have actually taken it to a professional level. If running marathons is considered professional, then many may qualify. It's a beautiful sight to watch women gliding!

**What, according to you, has infused this surge in women running in India?**

On introspection, you find that health and fitness, like many other areas, go through phases and now I guess, it is the running phase in India. Running is showcased well and



Rekha Sudarsan

recreational running is not bound by time and money. It fits like a glove in a multi-tasking women's lifestyle. And add to it the health benefits; so women are grabbing it happily.

**As a psychologist's point of view, what are among the prime reasons that women are pursuing running?**

Neurotransmitters help in alleviating the mood and it does come

in handy during phases of PMS (Pre Menstrual Syndrome). Endorphins do induce a feel good factor. Running elevates a woman's perception of her attractiveness and this increases her self-worth. This activity also decreases her anxiety. Her ability to inspire others by her discipline and her achievements is self-motivating and her role as a role-model is ego fulfilling. Running has multiple positive effects on a woman's psyche.

**In what is essentially a male-oriented world, is running also a very liberating experience for many women?**

Running is reflective of the society we live in. I am not a feminist but I don't want to hide behind the age-old facade of a male-oriented society. I, for one, believe that both men and women have their respective roles and responsibilities, and if done well, this becomes a cohesive, equanimous society. Integrating women running into this trail of thought is yet another area where we have infiltrated and proven that running is not all testosterone-driven. It is a liberating experience for sure and running shoulder-to-shoulder or sometimes even a few steps ahead of men, is a big high for the ego.

**How do you think running affects and shapes women's behaviour and attitude?**

Running proves to a woman that she is also physically strong. Running helps her to push herself beyond her comfort zone and gives her yet another platform to showcase her mental strength that she is already known for. The threshold and discipline that she exhibits in running percolate to her personal and professional life too. The accolades that running get her, boosts her self-confidence tremendously. Lastly, running is an activity she does for herself and this self-pampering in combination with other benefits listed above, definitely shape her attitude towards life in a very positive way. Running after all is a micro of the macro called life.

**A lot of women are starting to run, as late as in their 40s. Do you think women are increasingly turning towards running from a health perspective or is it really from the point**

**of view of finding a space of their own and reinforcing their self-worth? Your thoughts**

I ran my official full marathon at the age of 39. It's a sight to watch the number of women veteran (40 years and above) runners hitting the road and also completing full marathons, and more. The health benefits do motivate us to run but adherence to this form of discipline and long periods of sustenance goes beyond the physical health benefits. Though 40 is just a number, it does come with a lot of physical and mental changes in a woman's body and mind. Running helps a woman transit through this phase smoothly. It is an activity that gives her a feeling of worth on "bad" days, when her hormones act up. Running is also the in-thing now and whatever age we are, we, women, like to be in sync with it!

## Female Bonding

"No question on the RGI forum, really goes unanswered," avers Naina Lal, Co-founder, Runner Girls India (RGI, for short), that was founded seven years ago and has grown to house 480 members with five chapters across India

**What do you think has been the integral reason for the growth and sustenance of RGI for the last seven years or so?**

Well, I'd list the following as reasons: an interest in running as a healthy way to live, as a good way for weight loss and/or tone up; inspiration and motivation from runners in the group; constant knowledge sharing through blogs and posts and of course, an increasing number of running events.

**Since inception, have the reasons for why women become members of RGI changed?**

Some members are inactive or have taken to another sport but the reason for joining RGI is still the same - to meet other (women) runners and share experiences. Finding running buddies and to run with them on a regular basis or for training for an event, continues to be the greatest lure factor.

**Do you think female bonding is among the founding philosophies of RGI?**

Very much so; and that remains a very strong reason why women join RGI.

**Do you think this factor, also given the current crime climate of the country, is another important reason that has worked in favour of the group?**

I can't say that; running in a group may not be everyone's style but it certainly works for most women runners. Some runs start very early, especially during training months for an upcoming event. Those times, it is highly recommended to run either in a group of girls or in a mixed group.

**Mentorship, you say, is another important aspect of RGI. Could you explain?**

Sharing experiences and exchanging little notes and valuable

tips from co-members is very healthy and the way of life at RGI. One always seeks guidance and inspiration from senior members - be it basic advice on which running bra to buy or complex advice on how to train for a marathon. No question really goes unanswered. So there is no assigned mentor - it's all out on RGI's Facebook page and members post their queries/ask for guidance and typically sharing happens online or when we meet up.

**Existing as an active social media platform, does RGI also transcend the mere physical aspect of running and address it as a forum for sharing knowledge and experience, challenges, etc?**

Yes; there is nothing like sharing experiences. It is inspirational and comforting to know that you are not alone or that you are not the first one to go through the pain/pleasure of a run.



## Pillar to Post

From 3 to 45; that is the way the Pillar Pacers' women force has grown since inception in March last year. Payal Chhabria tells us its story and the stories of women who maketh the group



A few women from Pillar Pacers strike a pose  
Photo Courtesy: Karthikeyan Guruswami

The struggle to rise before the sun; the urge to run those compelling errands; the tiresome execution of a food menu; the long drive to the spot; and then of course, the darkness; the unruly creatures; the palpitation; the breathlessness; the quickening of the heartbeat; the cold stares; the uncomfortable state of being! All this, over a cosy bed, a warm blanket and a few more minutes of sleep... It surely must be worth her toil.

Friends, partners, companions, co-runners, call them whatever, the 45-odd women from the KK Nagar chapter of the Chennai Runners, Pillar Pacers, gather at the Sivan Park or the Ashok Pillar, each morning, to run, together. "It is amazing," says Dr Radha Kumar, 45-years-old and a Pediatrician, who has been running now for the last one-and-a-half years, "how running with another woman triggers a renewed, inspired energy in me, and I am able to cover distances faster, and with a lot more ease. Running alongside a friend you can chat with, helps a great deal in distracting you from your own thoughts of giving up that come naturally while running alone. In fact, last year, 5 of us successfully completed the 10 X 10 challenge, only because of the constant encouragement from the other women in the group."

In the last one year or so, since its founding in March 2013, Pillar Pacers has grown its women runners' community from 3 to 45; easily the largest group of women runners in the city. Praveen Giriya, co-founder of the chapter, says, "It is very safe for women to run here. They run in a group most of the times. That apart, a couple of us keep going back and forth during the run, so that we are around them, and can ensure their safety." Among the 45 are Prajakta Karthikeyan, Ambili Menon, Radha Kumar, Nandini Ashok, Harini Krishna, Sandhana Arumugam and Jaya Vaidhyathan, a regular and committed lot, who have made running an inevitable part of their day, and lives.

Prajakta Karthikeyan, currently Project Manager at Cognizant, moved to Chennai two years ago and took to running with the intent of breaking away from the mundane. "When I first ran, I felt lonely and apprehensive. I was tired, breathless and drenched in sweat; I had definitely overestimated myself, I thought," she says, "Over the years, however, running has changed my life. Today, when I am in a crowd, on the road or at the mall, I feel stronger, more confident and certainly more positive. Besides that, I have found friends for life in the women I run with. Now, even my husband and son run with me, and we have begun planning our holidays based on the marathons' calendar."



Nandini Ashok  
Photo Courtesy: Keshav Ashokumar

In the life-stories of these women, running has played different roles - for some, it has been that faithful companion; for some others, a solace from the hustle and bustle of daily life; and for some others, a source of identity. Ambili Menon's is one such story. After her second baby, she sunk into depression; the weighing scale showed 82, and that meant saying goodbye to a career in Mohiniyattam. In a year or so, after she began running, she lost a good 10 kilos, and is now able to manage a career in law, pursue her passion for dance, and bring up two little kids, simultaneously, and most efficiently.

After a 15-year-long break, 36-year-old Nandini Ashok, resumed running. "My only hindrance was the street mongrels; even at the sight of them, I would take a detour. But very surprisingly, they don't bother me anymore; perhaps because they now recognise me as a regular runner."

## A Free Spirit & A Few Causes...

Interview

This quintessential runner has been a fixture in Indian marathon events for over a decade now. His evolution as a runner is followed keenly across the map, and on Facebook - and not just by his legions of female fans. In our chat with him, we discover the other side of Milind Soman, the "crazy-about-running" side; the "I'll-do-anything-for-running" side. Read on to hear about his learnings, his mantras, his causes, and heck, even his favorite running outfit... Preeti Aghalyam meets him over the phone!

*When did you start running? How was your first brush with a marathon?*

For the longest time, I just hated running. I was a swimmer - a competitive swimmer - from the age of 10. All of us on the team hated running - in fact, we always cheated on the running part of our daily workouts. Despite representing India in swimming, since 1998, I did nothing. No sports. No gym. Nothing. Then in 2004, the Mumbai Marathon came along, and I thought "Why not?" Mostly because I thought a marathon is a life-time experience, something to tick off from the bucket list. I trained for four months for the half marathon, and I hated it, it was like sheer torture - going from 5 kms to 10 kms and beyond.

When I finished the race though, and it sunk in that I had just run 21 kms without pause, at a stretch, I was so euphoric! I felt like having done this, there is nothing



Photo Courtesy: Flickr.com



I cannot do – almost like it was a miracle. Still, I did not step directly into full marathons, I ran half marathons for many years, feeling more and more comfortable and confident, and enjoying myself incredibly. I ran my first full marathon in 2009.

*There has been no looking back since then, has there?*

The full marathon is a completely different animal. It is much tougher than a half. If you ask me, 35 kms, that's the limit of the human body – what a person can run without any training or whatever. Now those extra 7 kms you have to run in a full marathon, those are just so damned difficult!

I didn't feel the same elation as when I finished my first half marathon, but still, when I crossed the finish line in 2009, I felt really good, because I had encountered such a big challenge and been able to meet it head on.

I ran a 60km race later that year, and a 100km event in 2010, and then it was the Ahmedabad-Mumbai run (1,500 kms) in 2011. It's almost as if now my body wants to take on bigger and bigger challenges; and to keep pushing at the limits.

*Ahmedabad to Mumbai – that's a long distance to run. You must have picked up a lot of life lessons along the way. What did you discover?*

My goal in every run is to get comfortable and efficient. So my exploration has been to find that – the distance or time or pace that I, a normal human being without any special athletic ability, can indulge myself in, happily, without feeling terrible or spending days on recovery. And my

discovery has been that there is really no such limit. If you want something, and are willing to focus mentally and physically on achieving it, well, then you can.

*"It's not about the shoe" obviously, despite what everyone tells you. You are the poster child for barefoot running in India, a big voice for this minimalism. Tell us more about it, for the unbelievers among us...*

See, it's not some big statement or anything. I wasn't consciously thinking about a shift to barefoot or making a splash about it or anything. As I went on running I kept learning this – that you can run effortlessly – just by keeping it all simple. It was a logical next step, you could say. When I run barefoot, the feeling is just so spectacular; there's something so primal about it. When my bare foot lands on the ground, it is really the ultimate running experience. Of course running is never just about the feet or legs – it's about your whole body being in motion, sensing, responding.

I love this feeling so much now – just cannot wear shoes! I walk barefoot or run barefoot wherever I can. I don't care any more – about things that might poke the sole or garbage or whatever. Look I don't like to talk about it too

I ran a 60km race in 2009, and a 100km event in 2010, and then it was the Ahmedabad-Mumbai run (1,500 kms) in 2011

much (despite all I have said). I guess one has to feel it... Your core lifts you up when you run, not your feet. I don't know why you need shoes then, you need to work on strengthening your core, rather. Of course, if you want to take it up, here is what I recommend. Start with barefoot exercises, as part of your routine. Add it in there, weekly maybe, along side your tempo or fartlek run. And take it from there.

*Pinkathon and Megapink are your initiatives to promote women's running in India. They have exploded on the scene now and become an integral part of our calendar. Tell us what's behind these, Milind*

Well, all of us runners have a streak of evangelism. We want to bring this awesome feeling to others – who may not have experienced it before. I believe that I had a huge advantage of having been in sports at a young age. This culture of sports and fitness or even regular exercise is missing in India. I want to spread it to every corner of the country.

Of course, women control the lifestyle of the family as a whole, be it diet or exercise, so we target women, first-time runners, and get them to join us. Give them a platform to contribute to society via these events.

I have another advantage I guess. As a public figure, people listen when I talk. So I started Pinkathon in the major metros. Then people came up and said, how about the smaller cities.

So we now have Megapink, which we campaign for via social media, and through ambassadors identified in each city. The idea of Megapink is to focus on the family unit as a whole – to have all

of them register and run, and reap the benefits of the sport.

*You are a strong voice for a variety of important causes – from Breast Cancer awareness to Sports to the Environment. What's your motivation, how do you choose them?*

First and foremost, I think that the face of running in India needs a paradigm shift. It's the simplest and easiest of exercises, but the benefits are so far reaching. What do you need to run? Pretty much nothing! Second, I am a firm believer that health and well-being of individuals are of immense importance. Third, I understand that I enjoy the advantage that people are willing to pay attention when I stand up and speak.

So, I support causes that fit into these ideas of mine. I run the Mumbai Marathon and raise money for Multiple Sclerosis work; I ran the NDTV Greenathon to do my bit for awareness about the environment, and am heavily involved in spreading the message that women, and children, and middle aged people, and first timers – people who have never in their life exercised – can just get out there and run. Not to set records or win prizes, but just to become healthier, and happier.

*What's your training schedule like? From a 4:47 debut in 2009 to a "comfortable" 4:06 barefoot debut this year, with a scorching 3:45 PB in between. What's the secret?*

Haha! There is no schedule, no training, no sprint workouts, no tempo runs or cross training, no drills, a whole lot of nothing! I run a few times a week, whenever I can. And I just enjoy the experience. I like running in the sun (plus, so not a morning person!!) so I run at 8am or the afternoon or evening, whenever! For the Mumbai Marathon, which is the only timed run I do every year, I just increase my weekly mileage from October onwards every year. Normally, we are looking at 40 km/week; but in October I slowly start increasing the mileage till I reach ~120 km/week at the peak.

I think the biggest preparation I need for race day is in waking up

early! I also try to rest the day before the race, actually not a race, a run, that's what it is, but anyway it never happens as I am so insanely busy that day every year. I think I just got faster because I started figuring out running efficiently and not depending on things. It's no big deal. Men are running marathons in, what, 2:20, 2:30, comfortably? If you are running a 3:30 marathon, you have a whole hour more than them!

*So, who is the lucky person who gets to run 120 kms a week with Milind Soman?*

I run alone! Especially because I run whenever and don't mind the sun, it works out best. I go out and enjoy a nice delicious outing, taking in the sights, garbage or high-rises, doesn't matter, by myself.

*There must be one very memorable run? Something that is very special to you?*

What? No way! Every run is memorable! I am never competing very hard or trying to run my personal best or anything. So, I always enjoy it!

*Best place to run?*

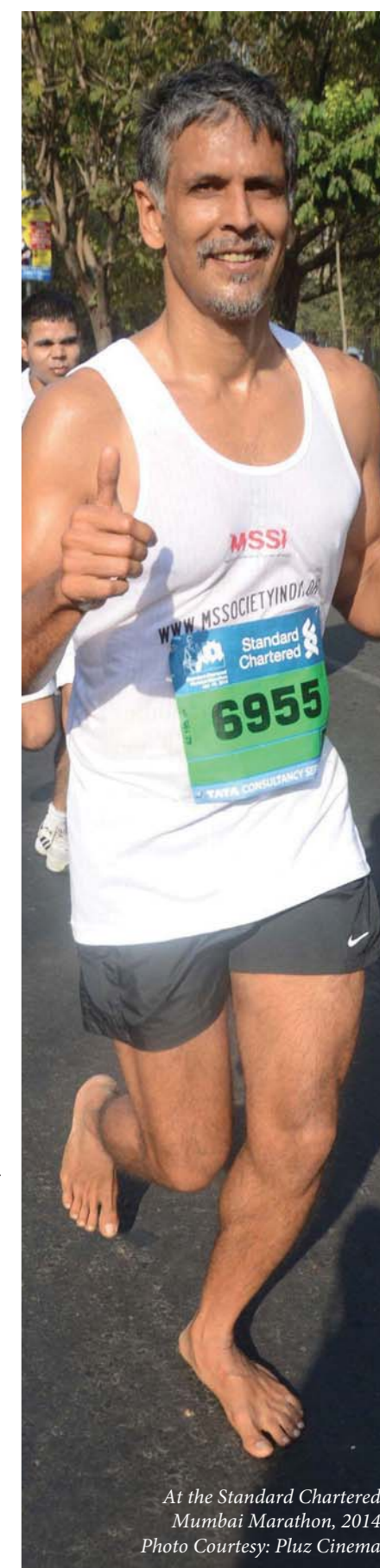
Truly, it doesn't matter to me. I run anywhere. But if forced to choose, London or Paris, somewhere in Europe, with the sun shining bright but the temperatures low. I like running in new places, I have run all over India, but yes, if it's cool and sunny, I like it extra.

*Favorite outfit for running?*

Gosh, anything, I don't care! No shoes of course, a random pair of shorts, oh yeah, a t-shirt. Just because people stare otherwise! No garmin or ipod or any of that stuff.

*Would you like to run in Chennai?*

Of course! April 13th, Sunday, is the Chennai Pinkathon. I am looking at you guys to put on a terrific show! In fact, I am visiting soon to do a press conference to make the announcement, and also a promo run for the Pinkathon. Looking forward to it!



At the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon, 2014  
Photo Courtesy: Pluz Cinema



A screenshot from Youtube.com



Trend-O-Metre

# Roger That!

B C (Boot Camp, for short) is the buzzword in Chennai's fitness fraternity. Akhila Krishnamurthy goes B C hopping and returns feeling inspired!

In the sprawling lawns of the Alumni Club, housed in a quiet corner, in what has loosely come to be known as the (Madras) Boat Club Area in Chennai, a mixed group – gender, age, fitness levels – is busy pumping its heart rate (almost always above 140) with a high intensity routine that comprises a slew of exercises; each exercise has reps (repetitions) aplenty, there is very little break between a variation (in exercise) and recovery time is near insignificant. It's a Wednesday and the time is 6.45am; fifteen minutes have gone by and the group is busy getting into the zone. There is an intense energy – both personal and shared – that is really raising the group's performance bar.

Calling the shots and in a sense, overseeing every member, is V Mariappan, Mari, as he is known in the fitness circles. He is firm, focussed, a keen observer and assessor of each person's individual strength and capacity, and believes in the importance of working on people's joint range and their core before throwing them into wild fire. "For



Photo: Aadhithya Sharan

It's the buzzword in Chennai's fitness frat, the new exercise glam quotient, the subject of conversation over drinks and coffee... The coolest gang to belong! Boot Camp!

example, I'll ask a few people who have worked on their strength and flexibility to jump," he says, "some others, I'll say, walk. There is no compromise on reps but the intensity may vary from person to person."

Not far from where Mari commands and trains, is The Unit, a 14-month-old Boot Camp whose captain is Jyotsna John, and whose military mantra is "strength and health". Over a nine-year career in Information Technology, Jyotsna managed to find time and inspiration to add twelve

fitness certifications (fitness-related) that eventually liberated her from a 9am to 5pm routine, primarily in the US and the UK, to return to hometown, Chennai, and create and develop The Unit. Today, The Unit has nearly 105 members, who work across three sessions in the morning and two in the evening; Jyotsna is simultaneously training two coaches who will assist or sometimes replace her during the sessions. "Honestly, I really enjoy being in the class," she says, "I like the spirit of a group session and it feels great to lead a group that is varied but that goes home convinced that they worked as hard as they can."



Jyotsna John

It's the buzzword in Chennai's fitness frat, the new exercise glam quotient, the subject of conversation over drinks and coffee... The coolest gang to belong! Boot Camp! Within a radius of six kilometres, in Chennai's Alwarpet/R A Puram and Mylapore area, there are nearly four bootcamps that are drawing people from across

age groups and walks of life. Drawing inspiration from what was originally a US-style military recruit training that eventually journeyed to the UK in 2005 and is now finding fans, and a foothold in India Boot Camps are among the coolest gangs to belong, at the moment! As is the case with most forms of exercise, most seekers, while signing up for a three-month programme, are invariably seeking "weight loss". Fortunately though, the constructors of these camps are conscious and committed to structure and design the routine in a way that strength, stamina, health and flexibility are among the larger benefits and weight loss is incidental.

"I like the spirit of a group session and it feels great to lead a group that is varied but that goes home convinced that they worked as hard as they can"





V Mariappan

To give you an example, at The Unit, Jyotsna explains, “I work consciously to take the focus off aesthetics and re-focus on strength. If you work on your strength and keep coming back for more, you’ll realise that everything is ultimately doable.” Boot Camps are also cutting teeth for their two inherent social advantages – companionship and camaraderie. “It’s hard for people to keep themselves motivated on their own,” Jyotsna adds and Marie chips in, “Plus, the workout varies every class.” An athlete, who is currently pursuing his doctorate in Exercise Physiology at the Tamil Nadu Sports University, Marie recognizes the possibility of fatigue setting in with monotony in exercise. Which is why, an array of equipments and programmes keep the group energy consistent and sustained through the year. “Functional training is very important in my scheme of things,” he says, showing

“I believe in the importance of working on people’s joint range and their core before throwing them into wild fire”



Photo: Aadhithya Sharan

us the many props that dot his camp landscape. There is a slide board, a Bosu ball, a plyometric ball, a medicine ball, kettlebells, sandbags, variable resistance tube... you get the picture, right?

Among the most recent entrants in the Boot Camp bandwagon, is the Blue Movement Circle, at whose helm is Mrinalini Sekar, a fitness expert and a movement therapist, who has drawn on several years of research, training

The constructors of these camps are conscious and committed to structure and design the routine in a way that strength, stamina, health and flexibility are among the larger benefits and weight loss is incidental

At the Blue Movement Circle, a single prop becomes the centre point for a series of workouts

and experience, to design a camp wherein a single prop becomes the centre point for a series of workouts. Drawing on the principle and the growing attraction towards body weight training as against a machine-dependent workout, Mrinalini has two trainers, Ganesh and Rajan, who lead a small but growing group through a gradual but explosive routine where the heart rate keeps spiking and performance is key. On the day we visited, the group was being lead through a workout using lorry tyres. “The



Mrinalini Sekar

“The workout has been formulated in a way that they are constantly getting better at what they do, and are making progress”



Photo: Aadhithya Sharan



Experientia

# Run Exotica

In a country like ours, diversity in cultures and landscapes, have paved the way for marathons that marry the mystery and magic of nature... Four runners from India share their experiences of running on red earth, along a river bank, in a muddy, slippery trail and in the mountains...



Photo Courtesy: 136.1 Yoga Studio



Yashwant Saran

Chennai-based yoga studio, 136.1, in 2012, launched an exclusive and unique Yoga Boot Camp

workout has been formulated in a way that they are constantly getting better at what they do, and are making progress," Mrinalini says.

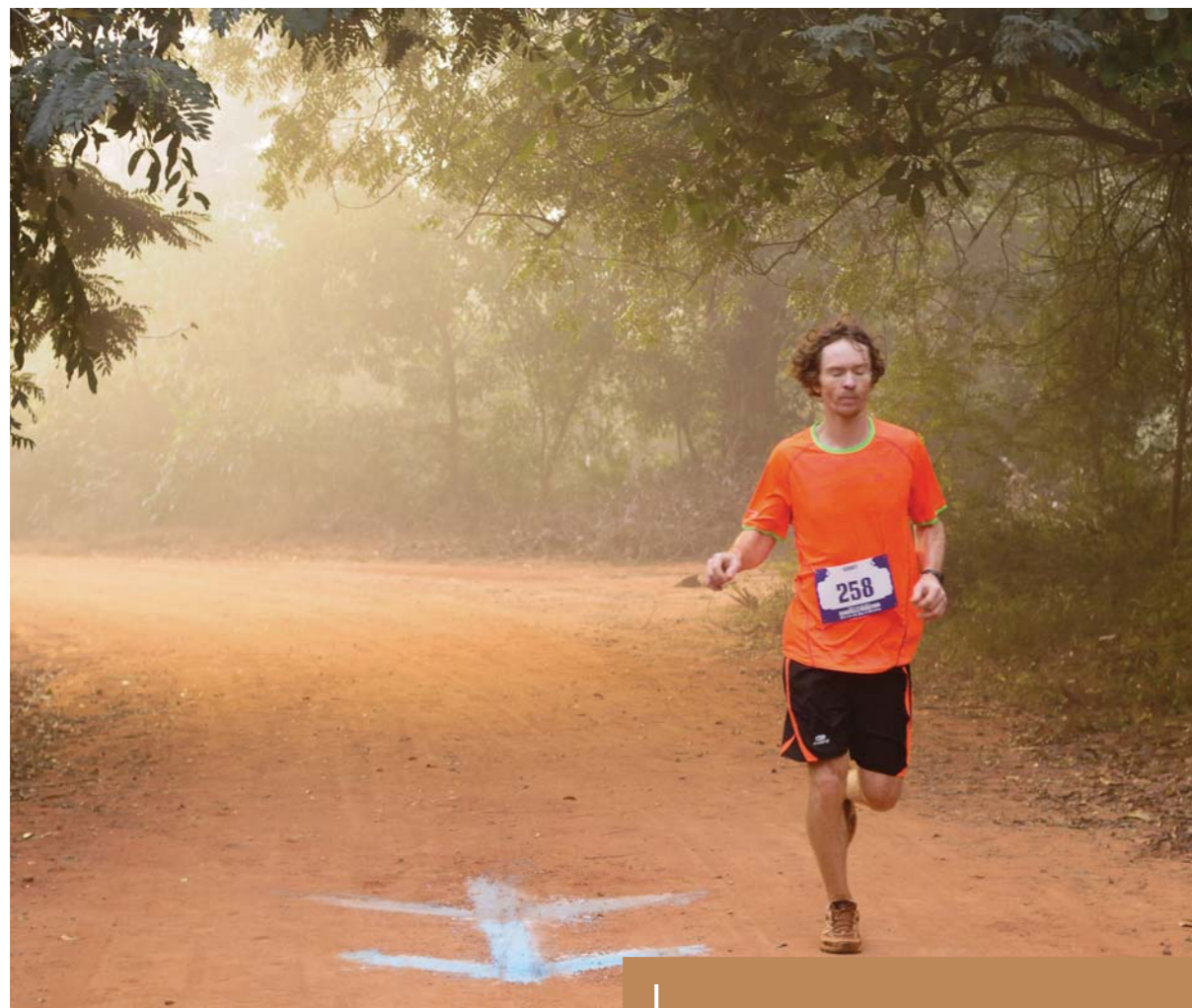
Taking the cake of course is a unique six-day ninety-minute long, Yoga Boot Camp that Chennai-based yoga studio, 136.1, launched in June 2012. Designed by one of its founders, Yashwant Saran, a familiar face in Chennai's fitness industry, the Boot Camp, to quote Yashwant was meant to "introduce people to a Shaolin temple monk lifestyle in what is typically an urban setting. The Yoga Boot Camp, was not a punishing physical routine but a training regimen that allowed its participants – 40 applied, 26 were hand-picked – to experience the various dimensions of yoga, physical, mental, emotional, psychological and of course spiritual," Yashwant explains. In a sense, though

the entire experience was rigid, and regimental. Failure to comply and attend class resulted in a fine of Rs100 per day. The highlight of the camp though was the "spiritual diary which every participant had to maintain. It factored into its pages, details like waking up time, eating habits, time you went to bed, how well you practised mindfulness, how aware you were of your positive and negative actions in a day. Foundation, form, function and fun were among the four guiding principles and over three months, two yoga teachers, Joshna Ramakrishnan and Ramanan, guided its participants to a realm of excellence".

That, in many ways, must be among our biggest aspirations; to do what we do, and well! With a group of people who are like-minded. After all, the more, the merrier, right?

"The Yoga Boot Camp, was not a punishing physical routine but a training regimen that allowed its participants to experience the various dimensions of yoga"





## Red Earth

Ashwin Prabhu returns from running the Auroville Marathon and pens an ode to this pristine running trail in Auroville

All I could see from a distance was a train of tiny orange lights bobbing up and down in synchronised fashion in the darkness of the night, like a family of animated fireflies, heading slowly towards where I stood at the bend of the Matrimandir, the magnificent golden orb that defines the very nucleus of the landscape I stood in.

This is how the Auroville Marathon unfolds every February, in the wee hours of the morning, when the sun is more than a couple of hours away from rising and when the small pack of full marathon runners don their miners' lamps on headbands and set out to weave their 42.195 km journey through the sprawling forests of this magical land.

There is no imposing start line arch, no celebrity chief guest from the tinsel world or a corporate honcho or a representative of the government to flag off the race. No 'It's the Final Countdown' blaring from the loudspeakers as

The mist-shrouded run through eucalyptus-scented thickets, the quaint handmade finishers' medals and the piping hot Pongal and Vada at the finish line, merely make the Auroville Marathon unique

the first of the runners take off. I would argue that it is this ethos that sets the Auroville Marathon apart from all other distance races in the country. In an unavowed mission to combat the forces of gross commercialisation and vulgar merchandising which seem to be overwhelming this sport of ours, the Auroville Marathon chooses refreshingly to focus on the fundamentals - a pristine running trail, a competent and tightly organised event and best of all, a warm and welcoming host community.

The mist-shrouded run through eucalyptus-scented thickets, the quaint handmade finishers' medals and the piping hot Pongal and Vada at the finish line, merely make the Auroville Marathon unique. It is the dogged determination to remain sponsor-free and prize money-free and to put the community first, front and centre before all else, which makes it original.

It is of little surprise then to know that the very first Auroville Marathon organised in 2008, had its roots in something which had precious little to do with the act of running itself. Auroville was celebrating 40 years of its existence as an international commune and someone thought about organising a small, celebration run to mark the occasion. Almost as an afterthought, runners from a few running clubs in Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, were invited to come and run along with the Auroville community that Sunday morning. The reception to the event from the community residents and the runner feedback was so overwhelmingly positive and joyful that it was decided to make the run an annual affair. In the six years hence, the run has been embraced by runners from across the country and has kindled an unrivalled loyalty and affection that has helped carve a niche for itself in India's annual running calendar.

It should be mentioned that the hardy, entrepreneurial spirit of the race was put to test in 2012 when the Cyclone Thane ravaged the Villupuram district where Auroville is located. It left in its wake, thousands of uprooted trees, decapitated roofs of houses, mangled roads and broken spirits. Not for long. Even as the community residents picked up the pieces and wondered if there would be a 2012 edition of the event, support poured in from all quarters and runners actively contributed towards the rehabilitation efforts. In a show of resilience and 'can-do' spirit, the show did go on and the Auroville Marathon 2012 attracted 1,800 runners across the three race events - 10K, 21.1K and 42.2K.

This year's event continued to have the staple ingredients which make it one-of-a-kind - a hearty pasta dinner the evening before the run, cooked and served by the community residents in the Auroville central kitchen, a thoughtfully charted out running route which wound its way through the entire diversity of the local ecological landscape, cheering families with little children setting up their lemonade and fruit stations along the route, a truly international and diverse runner pool and most importantly, the irrepressible and impossibly cheerful announcer at the finish line who continues to win everyone's heart every year with his warm encouragement and quick humour.

Having made this event a must-do on every recreational runner's calendar, the organisers now have a worthy challenge ahead of them - how does one remain sensitive to the local environment in the years to come? How does one preserve the small-town vibe and carefree camaraderie of the event? How does one cater to the burgeoning and insatiable demand of the runner population and allow for an inevitable expansion without undermining the very tenets on which the event was built. This and many other related questions will continue to keep the community of Auroville busy and occupied even as they bring down the curtains on yet another happy year of running the Auroville Marathon.



Auroville Marathon  
Photos' Courtesy: Nizhal Rasigan



## Hit Trail-er!

Preeti Aghalyam avers the Chennai Trail Marathon, is here to stay; here's why!

The Chennai Trail Marathon (CTM) was launched last year on Sunday, October 20. Organised by the Chennai Trekking Club (CTC), an intrepid group of extremely enthusiastic and warm people, it was bound to be a great outdoorsy event. The incessant rain all Saturday did nothing to dampen our spirits as we drove to the Gojan College of Engineering, the start point of the Marathon. Despite the various setbacks faced (including a big part of the running route getting washed away in the overnight rain!), the CTC put on a great show, as I expected.

If location is everything, CTM definitely hit this one out of the park! We have our full of dreary road running through the year. Trails are not so accessible to us, although it's probably just that we are not adventurous enough. 30 kms out of Chennai, the Cholavaram



Chennai Trail Marathon  
Photos' Courtesy: Muthu, Dinesh Kumar

lake bund, that we ran on, proved to be a sight for sore eyes indeed! The uneven trail and mud presented a super challenge to runners even as our breath was taken away by the pristine and natural surroundings. The route passed through some really grand vistas, and a village, and looped back past the lake to the finish point at the college.

The CTC promises that this run is here to stay, on the India Marathon Calendar, to be held in October every year. A surprise may await us this year as the group is using the next few months to explore other trails – maybe even some hilly ones – close to Chennai. I, for one, can hardly wait for October 2014, and the Chennai Trail Marathon!

## Aww River!

Along the river bank, and through paddy fields... Sivaram Kannan remembers his first full marathon at the Kaveri Trail Marathon (KTM)



Kaveri Trail Marathon  
Photos' Courtesy: Runners for Life

I was tricked into running my first full marathon a few years ago by Harishankar (who is famous in the Chennai Runners' circles for this and other such). Along with some of the stalwarts (all experienced marathoners), I reached Mysore on a Saturday and then went over to the race start point – at nearby Srirangapatna – for the bib collection. The next morning, watching everyone's elaborate preparations was unnerving! With butterflies in my stomach, I reached the start line.

The race starts approximately at 6am – after day break; the place is really so beautiful – with luscious green paddy fields, the gushing Kaveri river, and tons of gardens and greenery for as far as the eye can see. The narrow running trail is along the river bank, and through paddy fields. It also passes through a few villages. Farmers going about their daily work seem to derive a lot of amusement looking at us huffing and puffing along in the sun!

They say that a marathon truly starts at 32<sup>nd</sup> km. This was definitely true for me at Kaveri Trail Marathon (KTM). The route is a 10.5 km out and back with half marathoners doing the loop once and full marathoners, twice. By the time I reached the turnaround point for the second time, the sun was out in full force. Despite the enthusiasm from seeing my friends along the route at various points, I hit the wall hard. Running alone in the final stretch, battling with the sun and the humidity, I somehow managed to wind up at the finish line in 5 hours and 27 minutes.

People say the first marathon is very memorable, and the Kaveri Trail Marathon (KTM), is truly wonderful, and tough, especially for a first timer. I have run many marathons since, but KTM will definitely remain an unforgettable once-in-a-lifetime experience!

## Run in Heaven

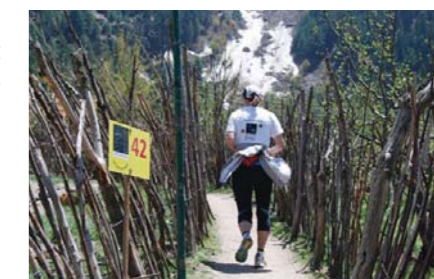
Rahul Verghese highly recommends you add the Himalayan Running and Living Marathon to your bucket list

What do you get when you are enjoying a run, are out in nature's lap, in one of the most scenic parts of the country and are running at over 11,000 feet with some family, friends and local villagers cheering you on? As I glugged down some fresh mountain spring water and slowed down in places to soak in a run in heaven, I would say I got a runners' high plus plus.

I have run this marathon – The Himalayan Running and Living Marathon – twice – in 2012 as my 42<sup>nd</sup> marathon and 2013 as my 48<sup>th</sup> marathon, in two differing seasons and both have been phenomenal experiences.

Getting to the start at Bhatseri village in Sangla valley, six hours from Shimla, is an adventure in itself, going along the raging Sutlej river and then finally up the twists and turns along the Baspa river to reach the base camp at 9,500 ft. Then begins the acclimatisation and the picnic walks amidst the crisp cool Himalayan environment. Some flowers had started to peep out from the sides of the rocks and some were yet to emerge with some snow cover still on the ground.

By the second day in the Sangla Valley, I was feeling very much more at home with the altitude and I could actually run a bit. The 10km acclimatisation run for the marathon participants was an experience like no other. We ran along

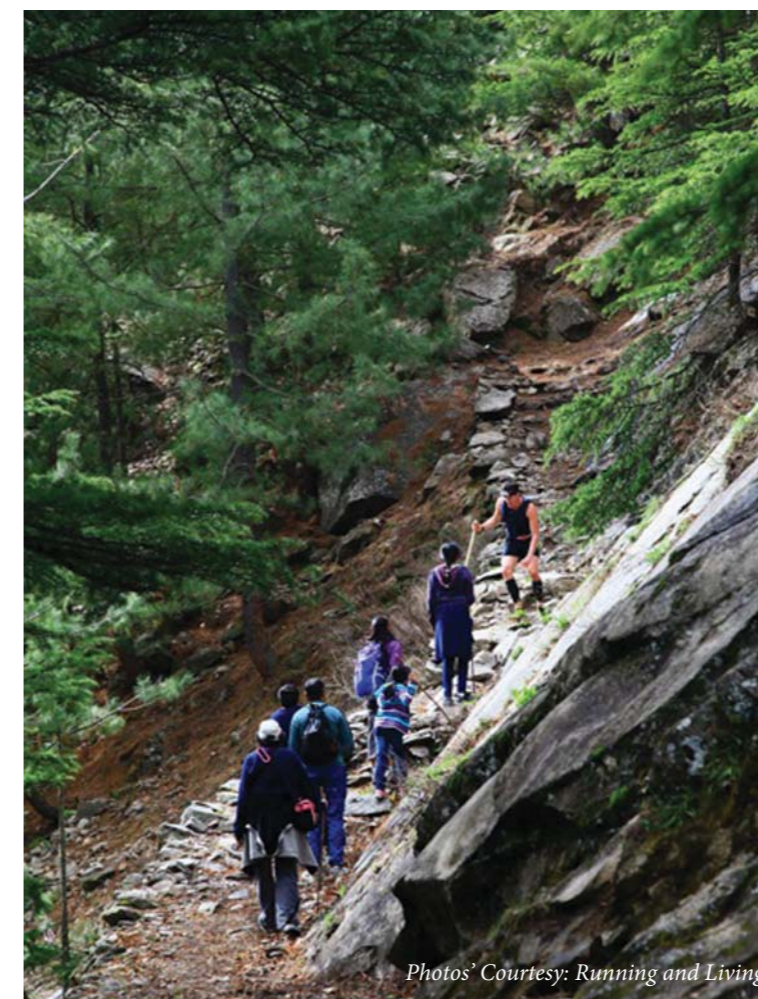


a mountain trail, mule track and then no track, and then over three small to large ice fields. I definitely was a lot more confident now about being able to run the marathon two days later.

The full marathon and the half marathon kicked off at 7am and we had a few 'relay' participants too. The first 3km was a steady climb up from Banjara Camps to the main road which was tough but like starts of most marathons, did not feel all that bad; later that day, coming down, seemed like an endless journey!!

Finally, I hit the semi-tarred road to the next village Raksham at 10,500 ft from where onwards the valley kept opening up a bit more at every turn almost teasing me onwards for a better and better view. There were many times when I stopped not out of tiredness but just to take in the breathtaking beauty of the Kinner Kailash range with fresh snow at such a close range. Babbling brooks were where I re-filled my water bottle, and chomped on a chocolate and then chomped down some boiled potatoes and eggs and this salty 'magic potion' sports' drink at the aid stations, and carried on.

At the U turn point, I just wish we did not have to turn back, but turn back we had to. I clicked loads of snaps of fellow runners, the views and some selfies. This was heaven. And I want to get back there this year. If you ask me, I'd definitely recommend you had this to your bucket list.



Photos' Courtesy: Running and Living



# Tending to Tendinosis!

## Doc Talk!

*For most people, the words, Achilles Tendon, will bring to mind stories of Greek mythology. Not for us, runners. For us, these two words, are inextricably linked with heel pain and niggling worries about whether we've gone on to permanently injure ourselves and if we can ever run, pain-free, again! Fortunately, Dr Madhu Thottappillil, Chennai-based orthopaedic with a specialisation in sports medicine and the founder of the National Sports Medicine Centre, in this first of a series of articles on running-related injuries, says there's hope, and sheds light on Achilles Tendinosis, easily among the most common running-related ailments...*

The Achilles Tendon is the strongest and thickest tendon in the body. It connects the calf muscles (Gastrocnemius and Soleus) to the posterior part of the heel bone (Calcaneus). Most of the force that is generated during the "toe-off" phase of the run, is transmitted through the Achilles Tendon. These forces can be considerable, and are increased especially when running faster, during uphill runs and when one uses a forefoot strike style of running.



## Eccentric strengthening exercises of the Achilles Tendon:

The exercise begins with the runner standing on a step with his/her ankles plantarflexed (as in the top part of a "calf raise"). While shifting all of the weight onto the injured leg, ensure the calf muscles slowly lower the body down, dropping the heel beneath the forefoot. To return to the "up" position, use the non-injured leg. Once the sets can be performed without any discomfort, a backpack with weight can be used to progressively increase the load.



Model : A.Manjuka  
Location : Transform Fitness  
Photos : Sujani Dwarakanath

Achilles Tendinopathy is one of the most common issues that I encounter in runners in my clinic in Chennai's Mylapore area. In this condition, there occur micro tears in the body of the tendon and the structures around it

Some other factors that contribute to Achilles Tendinopathy are tight calf muscles, forefoot weakness, poor footwear and a rapid progression to minimalist footwear, which is the rage among runners these days.

Achilles Tendinopathy is one of the most common issues that I encounter in runners in my clinic in Chennai's Mylapore area. In this condition, there occur micro tears in the body of the tendon and the structures around it. There are very rarely any inflammatory changes in the tendon, hence the word Tendinitis is not used to describe this condition these days.

This is a condition where the runners initially start having a feeling of stiffness of their Achilles Tendon. This stiffness is followed by pain when they continue to run. The pain usually starts off by being a very dull ache and can gradually progress to a sharp stabbing pain around the midpoint of the Achilles Tendon, a few inches above the heel.

This is a condition, which, if not treated with care in the earlier stages, can become chronic and can persist for months and years. One of the reasons I tend to see a lot of chronic cases of Achilles Tendinosis is that during the acute phase, the runner is able to continue running in spite of a slight discomfort and most runners tend to ignore the early signs and continue to run and eventually aid its progress to a chronic state.

### Phase 1

The first few steps are to stop running and to ice the area of the tendon that feels sore and to start using shoes that have a slightly elevated heel. The logic of using the heel raise is that the pressure on the Achilles Tendon is immediately relieved and this in turn, reduces the stress on the tendon and thereby accelerates the healing process. It is imperative though to follow this for at least four days, consistently.

### Phase 2

The next phase of the management of Achilles Tendinosis is often neglected and is the key to a pain-free Achilles Tendon. One of the most common causes of the condition is a shortened or a tight Achilles Tendon. Steps that focus on tackling this issue need to be incorporated into the rehabilitation schedule at this point. A combination of stretches with soft tissue mobilisation (using a foam roller) will help. The stretches for the calf and the Tibialis Anterior stretches (illustrated in box on the left) need to be incorporated into the rehabilitation schedule.

### Phase 3

The next and the final phase of rehabilitation for Achilles Tendinosis, is strength protocol; it consists of eccentric strengthening exercises of the affected Achilles Tendon. These exercises should be done with a straight knee and a bent knee. Three sets of fifteen repetitions of both exercises, done twice daily, for twelve weeks, is recommended. Eccentric muscle contractions cause the muscle fibres to generate more tension than either concentric or isometric contractions. Hence, eccentric muscle contractions appear to be associated with greater muscle strengthening, which may protect the Achilles Tendon and thereby prevent recurrent Tendinosis.

Strengthening exercises for your ankles and forefoot are also indicated if the cause of the Tendinosis is related to these factors. The runner is advised to consult a healthcare professional if the pain persists for a period of time and conservative treatment methods described above, do not improve the pain or relieve the discomfort. If the Achilles Tendinosis is diagnosed to be directly related to altered biomechanics of the foot, a custom orthotic may be prescribed in addition to strengthening exercises and stretches.



# Watcha- Ever!

Harish Lakshman sheds light on the best and the latest in the world of GPS watches



Gizmo-Sis!

A beginner, but now hooked to running? Now is the time you start to want to know more details about your runs. What distance do I run? How long does it take? Is my pace or speed consistent? If these questions come to your mind - you need a GPS watch for answers! If you are a runner and don't own one, I am sure you have seen many runners wear one. Many runners use a smartphone with GPS and a running app to do this. You can also use a pedometer/accelerometer based device like the Nike Fuel Band, or the iPod Nano, even basic pedometers.

But for sheer convenience, accuracy, multiple data points, ruggedness, etc., a GPS watch is hard to beat. Hence the GPS watch is perhaps the most important tool for someone serious about running. But when there are so many GPS running watches with prices ranging from \$69 to \$449, which one should you get? As always, that depends on what you need and how much you are willing to spend.

All GPS running watches regardless of price will have the following features - ability to show current Time, measure the Distance of your run (the accuracy is + or - 15 metres, which is very good), measure the Time it took for the run and measure your Speed (Kms/ Hour) and Pace (Minutes/ Km).

If this is all you need and really don't care about other features, you should not spend more than \$130 for your watch. The Garmin Forerunner 10, Timex Marathon GPS and New Balance GPS Runner are good models to consider in this budget.

But what if you want more information about your runs - can I get my timing splits for every Km/Mile? Can I measure my Heart Rate when I run? What about Calories? During my run, what is my Average Pace for the run so far and what is my "current" pace?

If answers to these questions are important to you, it will cost more! Depending on what you want the cost will vary. Below are brief reviews of several popular GPS watches at different price ranges. Hope the reviews will help you decide what you want!

Lastly, most watches have the ability to sync your data to the cloud either on the watch maker's website or on a 3rd party website. It is very useful to store all your data and to compare and analyse to help improve your runs.

## Timex Marathon GPS - \$69.99 on Amazon.com

Probably the most basic and lowest priced GPS watch in the market. This watch can measure your distance, time and speed/pace. In addition, it has a chrono feature in case you want to use for indoor purpose like a regular sports' watch. All the data is stored in the watch but unfortunately cannot be transferred or uploaded to a website. As the watch reaches its full memory, it will automatically erase the first run (in chronological order) and so on.



## Garmin Forerunner 10 - \$129.95

One of the best "basic" running watches available in the market. Launched in 2013, the watch has all the basics - speed/ pace, distance and time features. A nice feature that is not available in most other basic watches is the Run/ Walk alert. A lot of runners like to follow Jeff Galloway's Run/ Walk methodology for their runs - you run for a set distance or time and then walk for another distance or time and then run again and so on.

The data stored in the watch can be synced to the Garmin Connect website where you can see details about your run, laps, the map etc. The same data can also be seen in your Android or iPhone through the Garmin Connect App. But no upload of data is possible directly through the phone.



## Garmin Forerunner 620 - \$399.99 / \$449.99 (with Heart Rate Monitor)

If budget is not a constraint or you want to splurge on yourself (perhaps as a reward for having completed a successful Half Marathon or Full Marathon?), this is the one to get. It has all the advanced running features that any athlete will want - Heart Rate, Calories burnt, Average Pace, Instant Pace, etc. The Heart Rate Monitor is the most advanced and can even track your cadence (steps per minute), the calorie measurement is more accurate. It can also measure your VO2 Max (an important metric to track for elite and performance athletes) and your recovery time for the next run.

The phone has a beautiful colour screen, and Touch features. The best part of the watch is the mobile connectivity using Wifi and Bluetooth. All data will directly sync to the Garmin Connect App in your iPhone. The ability to sync with Android is set to be available soon. The watch looks sleek and can be worn as a regular day watch.



Incidentally, if you don't mind compromising on the Touch feature and some of the advanced features like VO2 max etc. you should seriously consider the Garmin Forerunner 220. At \$249.99, it is perhaps, the best value for money watch you can lay your hands on considering the extensive feature set.

## Garmin 910xt - \$399.99 / \$449.99 (with Heart Rate Monitor)

If you are a Triathlete or aspire to be one, this is the best one to get. In addition to all the running features, the watch can be used for cycling and swimming.



For swimming, the watch can be used in open water to measure distance and time as well as in a pool to measure the time and number of walls. The sensors in the watch can even identify if your stroke is freestyle or breast stroke.

The watch also has an amazing 20 hour battery life - double that of any other watch in the market. So if you are an ultra runner and running 10 hours or more is your cup of tea, you might want to look at this watch even if you don't cycle and swim.

If you want to access very detailed product reviews on all the watches mentioned above as well as other watches, head over to this very good site - <http://www.dcrainmaker.com/product-reviews>

The writer is a Chennai-based entrepreneur, an avid runner and a fitness and gizmos enthusiast

Disclaimer: All watch prices are US prices from Amazon.com. These are also available (at a premium) at Garmin dealers : <http://www.garmin.co.in/distributor/> or websites which ship to India, like [ebay.in/globaleasybuy](http://ebay.in/globaleasybuy)



# I Speak!

Roshni Rai, a Gorkha girl who lives in Mumbai, has been running, and running to raise awareness about Gorkhas and the need and importance to recognise them as one among us, Indians



We are Gorkhas and proud to be Indian. Jai Gorkha, Jai Hind. This slogan has helped us bring awareness about how Nepali-speaking people are also Indians

My name is Roshni Rai. I am a Gorkha girl from Pedong, a small village in the district of Darjeeling, West Bengal. By profession, I am an advocate, working with an MNC in Mumbai. Long distance running is my passion. I have run thirty eight (38) races, which includes 10km races, half marathons (21km), marathons (42km) and ultra-marathons of 50km, 75km and 89km.

I have represented India in three international marathons, viz the Prague Marathon 2010 (Czech Republic), The Comrades Marathon 2012 (South Africa) and The Maidenhead Half Marathon 2013 (England). The longest distance, I have run till date is 89km, the Comrades Marathon in South Africa. Till date, only three Indian women viz Nipa Sheth, Vinita Sharma and I have completed the Comrades Marathon; the criterion for that being to complete the race within 12 hours. Else, you will be declared DNF (Did not Finish)!

Touching the finish line of the Comrades Marathon with India's flag flying high in my hands, which was handed over to me by my parents, is undoubtedly the proudest moment of my life. I have dedicated my Comrades Marathon as a tribute to all the Gorkha soldiers, who have sacrificed their lives for India.

In 2011, I started a project called Run with Roshni to support runners from economically backward families in Darjeeling. Until date, more than thirty (30) Gorkha runners from Darjeeling have participated in five marathons, viz the Mumbai Marathon 2012, 2013, 2014, the Hyderabad Marathon 2013 and the Chennai Marathon 2013. Runners from all over India are supporting me in raising funds to help these runners.

While running all the five marathons, team Run with Roshni wore the t-shirt with a slogan that read, We are Gorkhas and proud to be Indian. Jai Gorkha, Jai Hind. This slogan has helped us bring awareness about how Nepali-speaking people are also Indians. There is no awareness in India that Nepali is one of the official languages recognised under the constitution and one of the languages mentioned on the Indian currency note. The moment we say our mother tongue is Nepali, people assume that we are migrants from Nepal. Through our running, we are hoping that Nepali-speaking people become more included in India. We are not migrants but along with our land, we became a part of India, and we are proud to be Indians.

Run with Roshni is a platform through which Gorkha runners will represent India in Olympic marathons. As of date, three runners from the team have been recruited in the Indian Army, which is one of the pathways for the team to reach the Olympic Marathon.





## Cardia Olive Oil, Ensuring a Healthy You in the Long run!

There's nothing like a cardia olive oil bottle in your good health list for a wholesome care of your body. It contains 72% MUFA (Mono unsaturated fatty acids) which helps in better blood circulation, boosts HDL cholesterol levels & reduces the risk of heart attacks considerably. Cardia, for an efficient running of your heart!



Cardia is produced from 100% olive oil in its purest, most essential form. Olive oil is the most preferred cooking oil all over the world.

Net Contents : at 30°C 1L (910g)

Follow us on:  | [www.kaleesuwari.com](http://www.kaleesuwari.com)

Available in 500ml, 1ltr in PET, 2 ltr / 5 ltr in Tins  
For free home delivery within city limits call: 1800 3000 3999



**cardia**  
olive oil

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEART