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Dr Rajesh Koppikar, consultant dentist at Kokilaben Hospital, sees “the classic front gapped-teeth” often. “And honestly, it’s not even a bad thing. I tell patients—why change something that looks good?”

Correction isn’t necessary unless there’s a health issue, such as improper chewing, jaw pain, or cleaning difficulties, he says. “If one has slightly yellow teeth, it’s not a health issue. But if teeth are yellow due to deposits or stains they need to be cleaned. Similarly when you have buck teeth due to tongue thrusting, you might need correction.” Still, most patients don’t walk in saying ‘I love my teeth and I want to keep them’. Body positivity in dentistry hasn’t quite arrived here. It’s always, ‘My smile’s not good enough.’ And that pressure starts early, often from family,” he adds.

As someone who has never seen a dentist, Dassani is okay with her teeth staying the way they are. “If I go and they say it’s medically necessary, I’ll consider it. But I’ve stopped seeing it as a flaw.”

Banerjee agrees, but adds a layer: “If it really affects your mental health, go ahead. But fix your self-worth first, not just your smile. Ask why you want to change—because of society or because of yourself?”

Both women agree on one thing—representation matters. “When I see

“Body positivity in dentistry isn’t quite there yet,” Dr Koppikar states.

PIC COURTESY/
DR RAJESH
KOPPIKAR



The throat hurts, the eyes hurt. You feel tired a lot more. And knowing how much it [pollution] reduces your life, heart and lung functioning capacity, it doesn’t make sense to live in Delhi

Sameer Sewak

someone like Aimee on screen, it reminds me I’m not alone,” says Dassani. “And I still get compliments on my smile—it makes me feel good. Normal teeth are fine, but mine make me stand out.”

So is society more accepting today? Banerjee isn’t so sure. “We’re still in that ‘80s headspace—perfect is still in. But your inner confidence will come through within you, whether or not you get work done on your body. And that’s magnetic.”

Dr Koppikar says he sometimes advises patients against braces. “If you’ve lived 30 years with a little gap and it hasn’t bothered you, why now? Unless it’s affecting your oral health or your self-confidence, you don’t need to fix it.”

Teeth have become more than tools to chew with—they’re aesthetic, expressive, even political. Whether someone embraces their overbite or books that orthodontist appointment, it’s personal. The key is agency. As Dassani puts it, “We’re all just trying to be okay in our own skin—or our own smile.”

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Why a music great locked herself away for decades

A film at the Parada Faash Film Festival explores the legacy of Annapurna Devi, a guru who trained the likes of Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, but shied away from the spotlight herself

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY



A still from 6-A Akash Ganga shows Annapurna Devi performing with her then husband Pandit Ravi Shankar. PICS COURTESY/FILM SOUTHASIA

THERE is a segment in the documentary 6-A Akash Ganga on the life and legacy of Hindustani classical musician and guru Annapurna Devi where vocalist and writer Sakuntala Narasimhan recalls watching the surbahar player and her then husband Pandit Ravi Shankar performing a concert. “Ravi Shankar would play something, then wait for Annapurna ji to reproduce. And she would reproduce first-class, even better than him,” relates Narasimhan who was then a student at The Music Academy in Chennai where the duo

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Halotherapy at the retreat



The Ninadika therapy

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tificial river is under construction, designed to host a Ganga-style aarti every evening. “We want guests to feel what they would in Rishikesh or Kashi,” a staff member explains.

Structure anchors everything here, from meals and therapies to wake-up calls and bedtime routines.

Mornings begin at 5.30 am, marked by a soft chant playing through hidden speakers. The rest of the day moves with quiet rhythm: sunrise yoga, Ayurvedic meals, doctor consultations, and therapies like halotherapy, aqua yoga, mud packs, and sound healing. Phones are discouraged, there is a flute perpetually playing, and there is little room for spontaneity. The only indulgence you can seek is a cup of herbal tea. But that too feels scheduled, as it’s always after a massage therapy.

The day continues in quiet rhythm: a nutrition-rich breakfast, followed by Ayurvedic doctor consultations, therapies, and blocks of

rest. Each guest is assigned a personalised schedule based on private consultations with doctors and a diagnostic analysis.

The therapies include a mix of traditional and modern treatments: halotherapy in a room lined from ceiling to floor with salt imported from Poland, aqua yoga in the pool, mud therapy, steam chambers, hot and cold plunges, and full-body oil massages. There are also reflexology walks, forest bathing trails, and sound healing sessions throughout the day.

Phones are discouraged, and there is little room for digital interruption. For some, the structure can feel rigid; for others, it’s a relief. Noor, a guest visiting from

Flautist Nityanand Haldipur, one of Annapurna Devi’s most devoted disciples who in her last years became a caregiver to the ailing musician, is the film’s sutradhar (narrator);

Dubai, says, “I just wanted to come to Pune. This place looked great in photos and it seemed new-age, so I decided to show up.” She was unable to book her stay, she says, but took a flight regardless and asked for a room. To her luck, one was available.

The campus is spread across 14 acres and divided into different zones, and each is designed by Manish Banker, the head of architecture and founder of TAOSTudio, with a purpose. Dhyan Vihar is the heart of meditative activity, with the dome-shaped Dhyan Mandir sitting at its centre. Ayu Vihar houses the therapy rooms, with a thatched roof, the kind you would expect to see at a wellness resort in Thailand. Sukh Vihar is where the residential villas are located, rows of cream-toned hobbit homes with arched doorways, balconies, and roofs all wrapped in vines, with wooden swings that open into green gardens. Anand Vihar adds a touch of lightness with its pool,

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was performing. "After the jhala, he started playing very fast phrases. And she played faster than him... They just went on. It was like a competition. When she played even faster than him, the whole hall burst out clapping. He got very angry... he took his hands off the sitar. Threw up his hands, saying—I accept defeat." We are told that it was the last time he played with her.

Voiced over a black-and-white photograph of the two musicians, we hear Annapurna Devi reminiscing about the concerts she played with Shankar in the '40s and '50s, how the papers began praising her performances over his, how such reports often upset him, and her decision to ultimately withdraw from the spotlight in a bid to save her marriage.

The documentary, commissioned by the Annapurna Devi Foundation and directed by Nirmal Chander, takes us to the address in the film's title, an apartment that the legendary surbahar player withdrew into—the home that she eventually turned into a sanctuary

Flautist Nityanand Haldipur, one of Annapurna Devi's most devoted disciples who in her last years became a caregiver to the ailing musician, is the film's sutradhar (narrator), letting "Maa's" story unfold through old photographs, diary entries, a visit to the house in Gwalior where she grew up, and through conversations he has with a host of people

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rooms for more relaxed activities like breathwork, sound healing therapy, an aerial yoga studio, and pebble painting.

The healing process at Swastik begins with a detailed intake consultation. Each guest meets an Ayurvedic doctor, who spends time discussing current imbalances, lifestyle, and symptoms, both physical and emotional. Skin, sleep cycles, digestive patterns, and energy levels—everything is discussed. The questions are expansive, and designed to be able to recommend the right therapies or even a diet if one needs it.

Based on these insights, a personalised plan is drawn up, one that includes a daily schedule of therapies, yoga sessions, movement, and even meals in some cases. "The idea is not to treat symptoms in isolation," says Swastik's wellness director Dr Milind Salunkhe, one night over dinner. "In Ayurveda, we try to understand the patterns behind them, how a person's body and mind are

of musical meditation and teaching. The film will screen at Parda Faash 2.0: The Poetry of Presence, a film festival being held on April 26 and 27 at The Little Theatre, NCPA, and organised by Asia Society India Centre in collaboration with Film Southasia.

Chander's research for this documentary coincided with work on another film he directed on Annapurna Devi titled *Guru Maa* (2019), which was produced by the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

While that film focused on her as a guru and helped put Chander in touch with several of her disciples, 6-A Akash Ganga, facilitated undoubtedly by the access to her home and her immediate surroundings, offers a more intimate look "of her as a guru but also as a woman, a mother, a daughter".

Even so, the film's team wasn't allowed to shoot inside her room or make recordings of her, an instruction that Chander says was strangely freeing. "Had she allowed me into her room, I might have pushed her unnecessarily... There were days when she was in her room and I was sitting outside in the drawing room enjoying the sea breeze. Those moments washed away all my pre-decided notions of making a film as a filmmaker. I realised that I would have to understand her position and her take on her art," observes Chander. He says that her firm decision to withdraw from the performing life brought the very public demands of his own medium to the fore. "Don't you think it would be so much easier if as artists you didn't have to worry about the audience's reaction?" he wonders.

Flautist Nityanand Haldipur, one of Annapurna Devi's most devoted disciples who in her last years became a caregiver to the ailing



Annapurna Devi was trained by her father Ustad Alauddin Khan who was a musician at the court of Maharaja Brijnath Singh of Maihar State and who founded the Maihar gharana

musician, is the film's sutradhar (narrator), letting "Maa's" story unfold through old photographs, diary entries, a visit to the house in Gwalior where she grew up, and through conversations he has with a host of people, from tabla player and researcher Aneesh Pradhan and Ravi Shankar's biographer Oliver Craske, to Annapurna Devi's loyal disciples Hariprasad Chaurasia, Basant Kabra and Hemant Desai. We learn that on Ravi Shankar's request, she had once allowed Beatle George Harrison to sit in on her riyaz, even as Haldipur wishes that

she had occasionally allowed some recordings of her music to be made.

While Chander believes that Annapurna Devi would have chosen the performer's life had her relationship with Ravi Shankar been better, he argues in favour of her having built a quieter and equally valuable legacy nonetheless. "It's much easier to be a performer, more difficult to be a guru because the guru doesn't get the applause," he points out. "You have to give so much more as a guru. Imagine Hariprasad ji [Chaurasia] arriving at her house to train at 2 in the

morning and she would still open the door, feed him and teach him. She may have stopped performing, but she never stopped giving back to the world of music."

One only needs to look at her disciples, reminds the director. "Even if you can create one good disciple as a guru, that is enough, but she managed to nurture so many. Isn't that a huge legacy? We are brought up on certain ideas about the performing arts but music can be a quiet solo thing too."

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The Ayurvedic thali at the retreat

interacting with their environment, and where the dissonance is," he says, explaining that it is key to know the doshas in Ayurveda and treat them accordingly.

The therapies themselves are carefully sequenced. Some are designed to detox and release,

others to nourish and restore. On any given day, a guest may experience two to three sessions ranging from abhyanga (warm oil massage) to halotherapy. The massage therapists explain treatment in detail before it begins, if asked, and they are well-trained, careful, and de-

termined to help you relax in the setting.

The food is one of the more surprising elements of the experience. Designed in tandem with Ayurvedic principles, the kitchen follows strict satvik dietary guidelines: no onion, garlic, refined sugar, or caffeine. But the meals are anything but bland. Instead, they arrive as plated artworks, course by course and are equal parts colourful, inventive, and satisfying. "We want guests to experience satvik food in a unique way, with ample variety," explains executive chef Arvind Joshi. Each day, the menu changes with each meal and celebrates vegetables beautifully—whether it's the savoury broccoli cake, baked medu vada and sambar, beetroot tortellini, the carrot-orange soup, or flaxseed tacos filled with avocado, sautéed vegetables, and microgreens, or the chef-recommended chlorophyll roll, which is a roll of veggies wrapped in a cabbage leaf and served with a drizzle of jus. Even the desserts, although crafted to be healthy, hold a kind

of indulgence, like a tomato halwa that echoes the flavour of gajar ka halwa, which the sceptic in us refuses to believe was made using tomatoes.

The kitchen runs like clockwork, but at times the service feels excruciatingly slow. Each meal, before it's served, begins with a prayer played through a speaker placed on your table. And it ends with a digestive shot created with the likes of ginger. You might miss your daily cup of tea or coffee, but that quickly fades away as the body adjusts to the new rhythm.

There's a noticeable contrast between the Ayurvedic foundation of Swastik and its global design sensibility. Therapy rooms use white linen and wood, and the overall aesthetic recalls wellness spaces in Bali or Tulum. A trip to Swastik is rooted in Indian healing traditions but accessible to a contemporary, global audience. It's not overtly spiritual, and the stillness is designed, but the surroundings add to its calm.

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WHERE: Peacock Valley, NDA Rd, Khadakwasla, Kудje, Pune

PRICE: ₹40,000 for two per night