

# “Good colours make me 😊happy😊” Mirandan Jaya Jaitly in 2017

*adapted* Mayank Austen Soofi Hindustan Times 23.03.2017

She lives in a world of handwoven saris. Even the blinds of her drawing room are, well, saris.

One Saturday afternoon, we enter the second-floor apartment of Jaya Jaitly in central Delhi's idyllic Nizamuddin East. We want to see her sari closet, said to be one of the most beautiful in the capital. Only a few people in Delhi are known for their great collection of handloom saris. The names that immediately come to mind are that of craft activist Laila Tyabji and thumri singer Vidya Rao. And, of course, Jaya Jaitly, the founder president of *Dastkari Haat Samiti*, an association of crafts people she founded in 1986.

Some of us might relate to Jaitly as the person who helped found the acclaimed craft market of Dilli Haat at INA. Many may remember her as a politician.



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No longer active in that tumultuous world, however, Jaitly steered her life towards her principal passion — crafts and textiles — and today, **along with Laila Tyabji**, she is acknowledged as the **connoisseur of the handwoven fabric**.

In her 70s, Jaitly opens the door herself. She is wearing a beautiful blue and green Sri Lankan handloom. The sari, an acquisition from Colombo, sits intimately on her nimble erect figure.

The drawing room is lit up with the sunny daylight but it is no match to the cheeriness of the Sri Lankan hues.

“Good colours make me happy,” says Jaitly. “I like what colours do to each other... but I don't wear embroideries.”

Jaitly feels that her attachment to minimalistic aesthetics might be attributed to her childhood in Japan — *her father was independent India's first ambassador to that country*.

Her daughter lives with her family just upstairs..., while her son also lives in the same neighbourhood.



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*Jaya Jaitly was crowned Miss Miranda: Miranda House was full of activity. There was a lot of interaction with boys from St Stephens'. **Mani Shankar Aiyer, Arun Shourie** would join us for debates and parties. Those were some of my best days, since I was crowned Miss Miranda.*

*Ashok made me feel special: I met **Ashok Jaitly** during my first year in college — at a Miranda House-St Stephens' play, titled “The Children's Hour”. It was never staged because parents objected to its lesbian theme — but we became friends nonetheless. We went on long walks together. Then, he asked me out for a cup of coffee. The great step forward came when we watched a movie together. The height of our romance was going to **La Boheme CP**, having coffee and sharing the bill, and then seeing a film at **Regal, Rivoli or Plaza**. After college, Ashok went to Cambridge and I went to Smith College in the US on a scholarship to study literature.*

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*One of oh-so-many ! Stephanian – Mirandan **Rishtey**, Jaya and Ashok Jaitly IAS consummated a 7 – year courtship across continents by marrying in 1965.*

*While Jaya entered very stormy Public life and continued refining her crafts - creative management skills, Ashok rose to be Chief Secretary J and K and has written a very warm and meaningfully etched narrative of his alma mater “St Stephen’s College : A History” This book is also in our **Alumni Authors Library**.*

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