

# Biscuit Is a Real Treat

Pet parent to Biscuit and mum to two kids, aside, Poonam Mahajan the MP from Mumbai's North Central constituency and National Secretary of BJP, does much else that keeps her spinning. Says **Farzana Contractor**, "This charming dynamo balances her roles as wife, mother, animal lover and politician with admirable flair!"



PHOTOGRAPHS: FARZANA BEHRAM CONTRACTOR

**P**oonam Mahajan came as a very pleasant surprise. Warm, ebullient, down to earth, very spontaneous. And to the point. Hardly any of what one would expect of a person in politics for a decade. Yes, it's been that long since she lost her father, the very promising political star Pramod Mahajan, in tragic circumstances. The nation was shocked at his untimely demise, particularly those in Maharashtra who said he was the kind of politician who could have made a huge difference to Maharashtra politics, had he lived longer.

Let's just say Poonam was Daddy's little girl when politics was thrust upon her. Then all of 24 and married for a couple of years, Poonam's world had crumbled. But today it is a different story. Poonam has arrived. Two children, a supportive husband, a loving dog and brimming with enthusiasm, Poonam has now made peace with destiny and is on the go. "Yes," she asserts, "I have accepted the reality. I have become strong, I have moved on."

And one can see that in her positive demeanour. She is confident of herself. Her goal is set. She wants to make a difference. And she is. She works with many NGOs and credits her commitment to working on social issues, to her father who shared the same sense of empathy towards those less fortunate.

Her mainstream core areas of focus include Urban Infrastructure, Safety and Empowerment of Women and Environment.

She has raised several issues in Parliament including provision of free legal aid, need to expand work of national translation mission, community based programmes for malnutrition and atrocities against women and children among other things. She has specifically raised issues relating to Mumbai such as the issue of rehabilitation of slum dwellers living on airport land, rejuvenation of Mithi river as well as issues relating to Mumbai's suburban rail.



Biscuit was Poonam's lifesaver when her father Pramod Mahajan passed away





She has also been at the forefront of making Mumbai an International Financial Services Centre, with a first-of-its-kind event, *Mumbai Next* followed by setting up a task force for the implementation of Mumbai as an IFSC.

Which is all very wonderful. But what is even more so is that Poonam



is an animal person. And among her choicest of portfolios is Animal Protection.

Her deep interest in environmental issues is apparent in her work with *People for Animals Foundation*, where she is a trustee. Being a lover of nature and animals, Poonam has raised many issues relating to the

protection of animals including ban on import of rabbit fur, retirement homes for dogs and horses in army and police forces and banning the entry of elephants in municipal areas among others. She has moved the state government to allot land for a first-of-its-kind animal hospital in Mumbai. She has also been appointed as Chairman, Animal Welfare Board, Maharashtra State.

She feels compassion for all animals, and would go to any lengths to lend support to causes related to animals. Add to that, she is crazy about dogs. Which is why I was at her home. I had gone to meet 'Ajoba'.

No, that's not the name of her 10-year-old Beagle, just that she teases him so. Because in human life he is as old as a grandfather! "And I want to show him some respect!", she laughs as she lovingly grabs him in a hug.

Biscuit, that's what his name is, is the quietest dog I have ever

encountered. And it has nothing to do with his advancing age for I have seen 12 and 14-year-old dogs prance around with great zest, just that that's how Biscuit has always been. Quiet and obedient and not in the least noisy. In fact he rarely ever barks, I am told. Come to think of it, I didn't hear him bark even once.

"Honestly, He is just an amazing dog," says Poonam, and adds, "no, not because he is mine, but he really is the best. He takes away my sadness when I feel so and is always around me when I am down and out. I am so lucky to have him."

So how did Biscuit come into her life?

Poonam enlightens, "You know, I used to be rather afraid of dogs. It was Rahul (her brother) who liked dogs. He had picked one from the streets when I was three or four years old and I remember jumping from sofa to sofa whenever Sweetie came into the room. I just could not get



The quiet Beagle got a bit excited when Poonam brought out one of his toys, a rare sight



Aadya, Avika and Biscuit are Poonam's world, her three little musketeers



## COVER STORY | Poonam's favourite Biscuit

over my fear of dogs. But mind you kittens were different. When I was six or seven, my friends and I were always on the lookout for abandoned kittens, who we would feed milk soaked in little cotton balls. At that time we lived in Chembur and there were many birds there, too, many of which we were always trying to save, the ones that had fallen off a nest or were hurt or something."

"And so after we shifted to Worli, I would notice many strays around and my heart would go out to them, but I had still not overcome this strange fear for dogs. Then one day, six months after Papa had passed away and I was really low, I was sitting in my mother's apartment when the doorbell rang and the servant opened the door. Before anyone knew what was happening, something darted in, like a flash and before I knew it, there was this little pup which had jumped on my lap and was licking me all over my face, jumping on me, nipping me, wanting me to get up and play with it!"

"It was so sudden, I had no chance to feel fear or anything and soon I noticed, Dheeraj Deshmukh standing there, laughing away."

So, it was Dheeraj, the late Vilasrao Deshmukh's son and actor Riteish Deshmukh's elder brother, whose idea it was to present Poonam with a gift in the form of a treat, to uplift her grieving spirit and so, gave her Biscuit, a name he chose. "You know, I can't thank Dheeraj enough. It is the best present I have ever received. I was in a state of clinical depression and it is Biscuit who pulled me out of that state. I owe him a great deal."

So while Biscuit was not a nosy pup, he certainly was a very playful one and actually got Poonam to do many things for him, thus distracting her from her unhappiness, becoming the very centre of her life.

"He was quite crazy. Very independent. For example, if the main door of the flat was open, he would slip out and run down

12 floors, get out the main gate of the building and wander around Worli. Different people in the neighbourhood would bring him home. The first time he ran away, I was so anxious, then I got used to it! He was a nomad who liked to roam around and return at will."

Biscuit is also known in the house as the Biryani Boy. That so, 'coz Poonam's husband Anand Rao, hails from Hyderabad from where, very often some good *biryani* made its way home. The smell of which drove our Biscuit pretty mad. That's the only time the noiseless dog would become a bit unsettled. So Biscuit had to be served *biryani*, spices and all, which went on to become his favourite food. "Gosh, that food drove him mad, I used to give him buttermilk after the *biryani* to settle his tummy!" She laughs at the memory. We speak in the past tense for all that Ajoba now gets is Royal Canin nuggets! And saffron-infused water and vanilla ice-cream, which keep him happy!!



Biscuit enjoys a chewy bone, probably wondering when his favourite dish biryani will be served

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Inside  
Pawsome  
Poster #35  
Siberian  
Husky

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## Breed Profile

Siberian Husky

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Canine Diet  
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# Biscuit is Good for Her

Poonam Mahajan's daily dose of delight