Bare-chested, barefoot marathoner **Vishwanathan Jayaraman** spins his running shorts out of khadi on his own charkha

Meet the Gandhian Runner

MARATHON MAN

Name: **VISHWANATHAN JAYARAMAN**

Age: **53**

Occupation: **Railway Officer**

Height: **5 ft 10 inches**

Weight: **58kg**

Daily distance covered: **35km**

Time taken: **3.5 hours**

MILESTONES

➤ 2014 Ooty Nilgiri Ultra Marathon (100km)

➤ 2011 Bangalore Ultra Marathon (100km)

➤ Has participated in the Hyderabad, Chennai and Mumbai marathons and such races across the country

BORN TO RUN: Vishwanathan Jayaraman on the lanes of Nungambakkam during his 35-km run. The Gandhian (below) weaving yarn on a charkha bought from Sabarmati Ashram
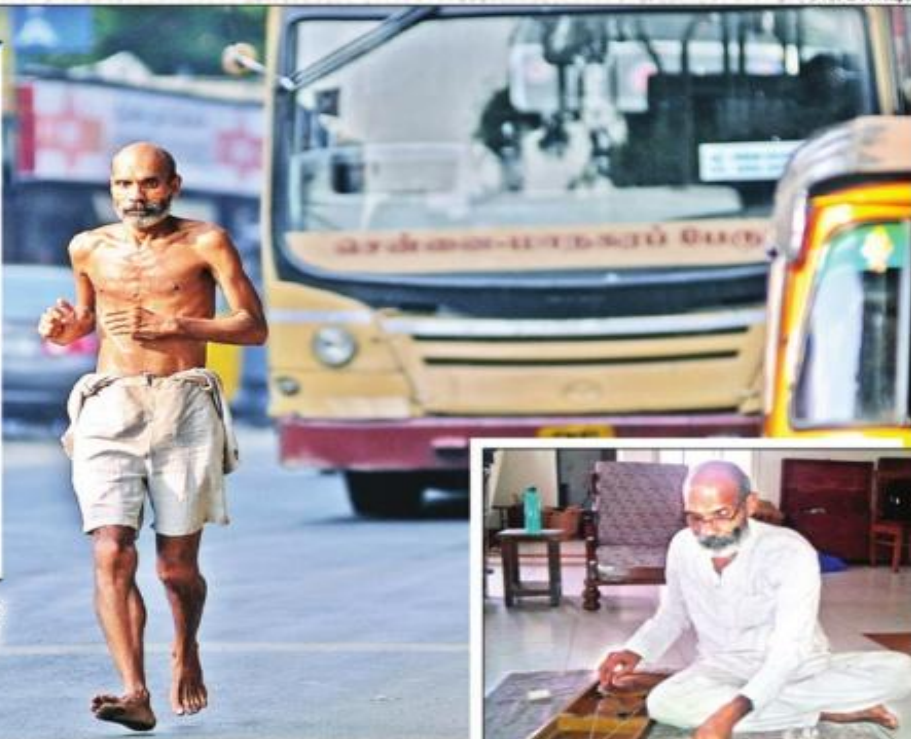
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There's a reason Vishwanathan Jayaraman is called the 'Gandhian runner'. Every day, the 53-year-old ultra-runner wakes up at 2am, and, with a cup of green tea, sits down for the next two hours, to spin a charkha to make yarn from cotton. At 4am, he puts the spinning wheel away, and sets off on his daily 35-km run between Sterling Road, where he lives, and Napier Bridge — bare-chested and barefoot, wearing only a pair of khadi shorts crafted out of his hand-spun yarn.

"Running is the mother of all addictions," says Jayaraman, financial advisor and chief accounts officer, construction, at Indian Railways, who began running 15 years ago, after he took the most testing decision of his life — to quit smoking.

"Once you're hooked on running you cannot afford to be addicted to anything else," he laughs, and adds that his wife Banu Vishwanathan and daughter have been extremely encouraging, while his dog Biscuit ensures sure he never misses a day.

Jayaraman – also called 'the legend' by his fellow runners, who are clearly inspired by his persistence and passion -- has completed more than 100 marathons across the country, and now participates in ultra-runs (usually 50 kilometres or more).

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FRONT RUNNER

forms of meditation that help me get through the day," says Jayaraman, who bought his charkha in 2009 from Sabarmati Ashram, one of the homes of his hero Mahatma Gandhi. "That was the year I decided to follow the path of Gandhi," says Jayaraman, who also turned vegan in 2013.

Jayaraman, an ex-IITian from Kanpur, extends his Gandhian philosophy to every aspect of his life. He takes an MTC bus to work every day, and always pairs a khadi shirt with formal pants. "I think I was drawn to this way of life because I come from a middle class family and we were always taught to be frugal," he says.

It was in 2012 that Jayaraman decided to run bare-chested and barefoot. "The best way to not be conscious of your nakedness is to look people in the eye," he

says, and adds that he decided to stop running in shoes after listening to a talk by Ted McDonald, a barefoot running instructor from the US, who also features in best-selling book Born To Run.

Jayaraman, who moved to city from Bangalore in September last year, says Chennai has a vibrant running culture, with runs being organized almost every weekend. "Even at 4 am, I see people out walking or jogging, but in Hubli (Karnataka) I used to be the only one on the road at that time of morning," says Jayaraman, who did his first 100km run at the 2011 Bangalore ultra marathon.

"I would say the most exciting ultra for me has been the 100km Nilgiri Ultra Trail run. I was running in my hand-spun clothes, barefoot for most part of the run. Running at night in the cold of the hills was a moving experience. I completed the race in 13 hours," says Jayamaran, who terms the experience "spiritual".

On top of Jayaraman's ultra wish-list is the Comrades marathon in South Africa, an 89-km run between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, for it would mean walking — or in this case running — in the footsteps of his "hero Gandhi", who transformed from "lawyer in South Africa to Mahatma in India".