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celebrate age

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stories of loss and hope

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Arundhati Nag

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Act of POWER

It took almost three years but justice is finally here for silvers in Maharashtra.

On 23 June, the state government approved the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act. Passed as early as December 2007 by Parliament, the Act makes children and heirs legally responsible for the maintenance of silvers. Elders will have the right to redress at maintenance tribunals at the subdivision level, and appellate tribunals at the district level. The Act also calls upon state governments to establish old age homes in every district.

It's astonishing that it took the Maharashtra government so long to come on board, considering that Parliament instructed states to implement the act within six months. What makes the delay even more disturbing is the fact that elders are the fastest growing segment of the population in the state—with the oldest old being the fastest growing among them. Indeed, Maharashtra ranks fifth among all states and union territories in terms of the highest population of elderly. According to the 2001 census, silvers constituted around 8.7 per cent of the state's population; this figure is expected to rise to almost 13 per cent by 2020.

These are significant numbers; significant silvers with significant concerns. And in the face of the government's apathy in approving the Act, it took the resolve of some of these very silvers to get the job done. As Mumbai newspapers reported, over 400 silvers from the suburb of Bandra banded together and invoked the Right to Information Act (see 'First Aid - Legalease'), thereby fuelling the momentum that eventually impelled the Maharashtra government to ratify the Act.



Donald Woodrow

This is not just a victory for silvers in the state but across India as it is a tangible example of silver power in action. Over the next few months, you will read in *Harmony* magazine how silvers have mobilised the Right to Information Act to improve the quality of countless others. It takes this sort of commitment and courage of conviction to be a hero. And once again, Harmony for Silvers Foundation is preparing to honour the most committed and courageous silvers in India as part of the fourth edition of Harmony Silver Awards. Our nominations—chosen with care and diligence—are ready and with our distinguished jury, which includes filmmaker Shyam Benegal; editor of *Hindustan* Mrinal Pande; MD and CEO of ICICI Bank Chanda Kochhar; Executive Chairman and Creative Director, Ogilvy & Mather, India and South Asia, Piyush Pande; and director of United World Colleges Smita Parekh. I thank them for their valuable time and effort.

Next month, we will tell you a little more about Harmony's bravehearts—their toil and travails, their stories of perseverance and grit. For them, silver is not a colour; it's a badge of pride. Wear yours with honour.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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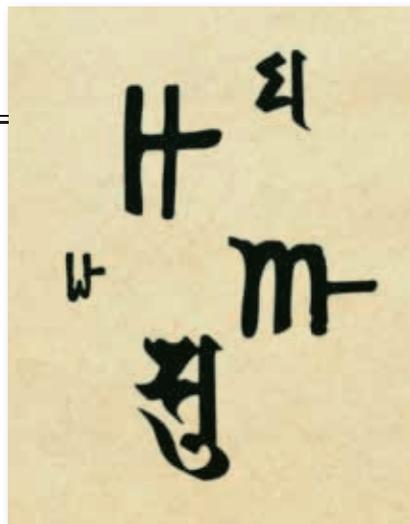
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VULNERABLE VOICES

A close look at the threat facing our languages and the efforts to preserve them

Cover illustration:
Jit Ray



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www.harmonyindia.org



NEVER SAY RETIRED: Dr P C Raju believes life should always be meaningful



KNOWLEDGE SEEKER: Dr Saroja Ramanujam's thirst for learning remains unquenched

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column one

There's the shrouded possibility that in a hundred years we will be speaking languages distinctly different from existing ones. It may seem absurd but it's true. Indians who immigrated to Fiji to work as contract labour in the late 1900s speak a Hindi that's alien to the Hindi-speaking population in India. If that's the change that can occur in a century, the next century might throw up new languages and dialects leaving behind the present. Extinction is a prospect as well. Inspired by the recently set up 'Bhasha Van' near Vadodara—comprising plants representing endangered Indian languages—*Harmony* presents "Vulnerable Voices", a tribute to vanishing languages and individual and organisational efforts to save them. Set up by writer-activist Dr Ganesh Devy, who was a winner of Harmony Silver Awards 2009, 'Bhasha Van' initiates dialogue on the continued existence of tribal languages and strives to give it a larger platform.

The effort to save age-old traditions, ethics and emotions is central to our readers' lives. This month, we present Arundhati Nag's endeavour ("Curtain Call") to save theatre as she and her late husband Shankar Nag knew it. There's centenarian (and an original Israeli Jew) Shahi Abraham's love for India and her trunk-full of memories ("The Cinderella Story"). And Dr H P Maheshwari ("Speak"), who is helping restrict the use of plastic, and hence saving the environment, by recycling old pieces of cloth. Every effort is important, every step essential. It's not a race—every person who takes a step is a winner. This will soon be proven by way of Harmony Silver Awards 2010. It won't be long before you meet this year's 10 winners, people who will light the torch for *Harmony*.

—Meeta Bhatti

I learnt about *Harmony* after I was featured in your 'Second Careers' section ("Urbane Planner", May 2010). I was particularly happy to note you had organised a seminar to make seniors aware of the Reverse Mortgage scheme. I learnt about Reverse Mortgage on a trip overseas. After my return, I wrote a few articles on the desirability of introducing the scheme here.

I also wrote to the National Housing Bank, who informed me that the scheme would be launched soon. It is heartening to note that seven senior citizens were sanctioned their loans at your seminar—I hope the scheme catches on in India considering our 'inheritance culture'.

M P V Sheno, Bengaluru

ERRATUM

The seniors' home mentioned in Dr Indira Jai Prakash's column ('Concern' - "Room for Improvement") in the June 2010 issue was inadvertently misquoted as Abhayashram. The intended seniors' home was Ashaktha Poshaka Sabha. Dr Jai Prakash sincerely regrets the error.

CLARIFICATION

In the May 2010 issue, M P V Sheno ('Second Careers' - "Urbane Planner") was wrongly mentioned as M V K Sheno. And in our cover feature in the July 2010 issue, we omitted to acknowledge that the photo shoot took place at J W Marriott Hotel, Mumbai. We regret the errors.

—Editors

CONTRIBUTORS



Anagha Tendulkar's column ('Exclusive': "The Retirement Myth") in this issue offers a thoughtful perspective to the long-standing debate over the age of retirement. "Retirement creates a void, leads to a loss of one's social role and professional identity, and problems emerge as a consequence of that," she says. Tendulkar is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology of Sophia College for Women, Mumbai. At present, she is associated with the Department of Sociology in Mumbai University as a doctoral candidate.



Prof G Uma Maheshwar Rao's resume runs over 13 pages, throwing light on his impressive work and accomplishments in the field of Indian linguistics. His column ("Changing Voices") in this month's cover feature examines the fragile, yet defining, equation between our language and individuality. "The extinction of a language also leads to the loss of a plethora of cultural and other knowledge systems," says Rao, who is professor and director, Centre for Applied Linguistics & Translation Studies in University of Hyderabad.

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YOUR WORLD

HARMONY told you about it in May 2010 ('Exclusive' – Jane Barratt). And in late June, the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched the much-anticipated **Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities**. New York became the first city to join the network, which aims to help create urban environments that allow older people to remain active and healthy participants in society. As the WHO announced in a media release, the Age-Friendly Cities Initiative began in 2006 by identifying the key elements of the urban environment that support active ageing. Research from 33 cities confirmed the importance of access to public transport, outdoor spaces and buildings, as well as the need for appropriate housing, community support and health services. It also highlighted the need to foster the connections that allow older people to overcome ageism and provide greater opportunities for civic participation and employment. Building on these principles, the Network requires participating cities to commence an ongoing process of assessment and implementation to create a better environment for silvers. The WHO sent out invitations to cities across the world to join the network in December 2009.

Capital care



The national capital may be prone to crime but silvers may just be better off living there. According to a survey conducted by HelpAge India among silvers in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Patna, Kolkata and Hyderabad, **Delhi reports the least percentage of elder abuse:** 15.4 per cent. The worst of is Bhopal, at 79.3 per cent, followed by Chennai (59 per cent) and Kolkata (44 per cent). Another notch in the capital's belt: silvers here are most aware of existing laws to

protect them (53.8 per cent), followed by Mumbai (44.7 per cent) and Kolkata (40.3 per cent)—Bhopal stands at a dismal 8 per cent. Across the country, silvers face maximum abuse from their own children (53.6 per cent), apart from domestic help (19 per cent), with the bone of contention generally being property (35.4 per cent). What's truly alarming, though, is that across the country, 92 per cent of silvers had not registered a complaint against their abuser.



For more information, go to www.helpageindia.org/pdf/Report-on-Elder-Abuse-in-India.pdf



A NEW connection

Here's a fine example of how public policy can harness technology to help silvers. In June, **the Manipur state government launched an SMS-based information service for pensioners.** Part of the government's plan to use mobile technology for delivery of mobile-based Government to Citizen (G2C) Services, the initiative will reduce time and effort for elders who spend so much time in long queues to enquire about the status of their pension and other related queries from bank and treasury staff. As *The Imphal Free Press* reports, in the first phase, the service will operate on what the Manipur government terms the 'Pull' method—the pensioner dials a prefixed number followed by the pension number; a return SMS on the status of the pension is sent back. Soon, it will graduate to the 'Push' method, where the service will be enhanced to automatically broadcast dispatch of pension information to all registered silvers.

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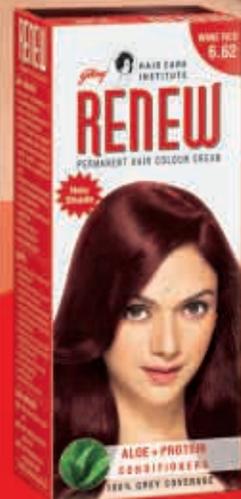
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O»ANALYSE THIS

The centenarian test

WILL YOU LIVE TO 100?

Forget the neighbourhood astrologer; you may soon be able to get the answer from a simple genetic test. Researchers at Boston University claim to have found “**genetic signatures of exceptional longevity**” that can predict whether a person can live beyond the age of 100. According to them, an analysis of 150 DNA variants common to people who have enjoyed a long lifespan can predict longevity, to an accuracy of 77 per cent. These variants—known as single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs)—can be broken down into 19 groups, or genetic signatures. “Some signatures correlate with the longest survival, other correlate with the most delayed onset of age-related diseases such as dementia or cardiovascular disease,” writes study leader Professor Paola Sebastiani in journal *Science*. “The



accuracy rate shows that genetic data can indeed predict exceptional longevity without knowledge of any other risk factor. This information,

apart from predicting lifespan, can be used to customise treatment and prevention of life-threatening diseases in younger people.”



Internal warfare

Reams of research in the past have informed us that damage to DNA—and, consequently, shortening of lifespan—occurs owing to oxidation, stress, radiation, even caloric intake. Now, a surprising new theory argues that above all these factors, **damage to DNA comes from archaic retroviruses (like HIV) that exist within DNA itself**. The theory is advanced by Timothy McCaf rey, professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at The George Washington University in the US, along with researchers from Brown University. “This is a potentially new component for further consideration and examination,” writes McCaf rey in the May issue of journal *Mechanisms of Ageing and Development*. “Evidence suggests that DNA damage may be a final common pathway linking several proposed mechanisms of ageing. Our theory supposes that there is an additional ageing pathway that involves modes of inherent genetic instability. In essence, the same force that has allowed humans to evolve and adapt could be bad for us individually, and ultimately be the force that is causing us to age.”

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»»ANALYSE THIS

Boxed in?

Does this surprise you? **Silvers in the US actually watch more TV than teenagers.** Researchers at the Stein Institute for Research on Ageing at University of California - San Diego (UCSD) studied over 3,000 Americans, aged 15 to 98, using an innovative, diary-like assessment strategy called the Day Reconstruction Method, where participants measured how they spent their time and described their experience of everyday activities. They found that the time spent by people over 65 years of age watching television was thrice as much as younger adults. More disturbing, silvers didn't report the same stress-busting effects from TV that younger viewers did—in fact, for them, it was related to lower life satisfaction.

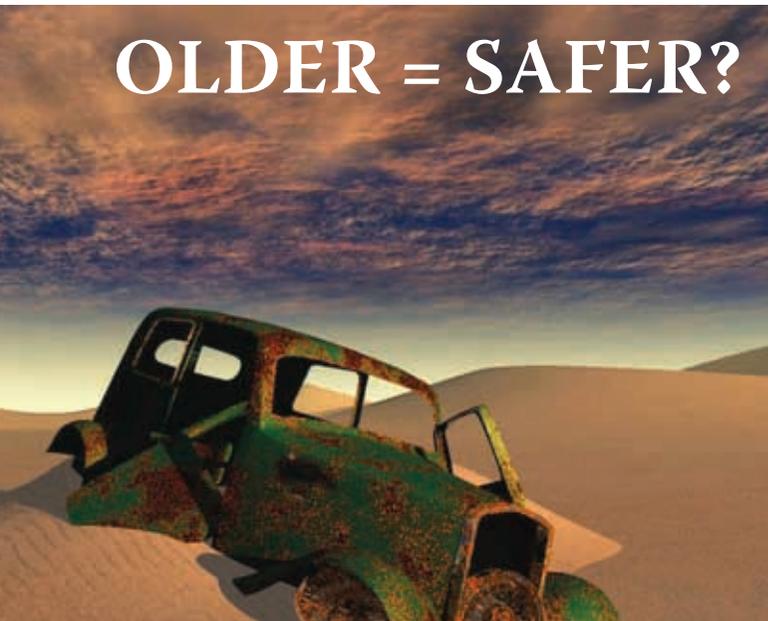
"We found that older people spent a great deal more time watching TV than younger people did, yet they enjoyed the experience less," writes Professor Colin A Depp from the Stein Institute in the *American Journal of*



Preventive Medicine. "The study clearly underscores that alternatives to television as entertainment are needed, especially in older adults." Sedentary activity, such as watching TV, is

associated with negative changes in cardiovascular and bone health and cellular function as well as obesity and Type2 diabetes and increased risk for dementia.

OLDER = SAFER?



GOOD NEWS FOR ALL YOU AUTOGENARIANS out there: silver drivers aren't necessarily road hazards. In fact, according to a survey by the American Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, **elder drivers are not causing more traffic accidents than younger drivers on the road.** As Associated Press reports, fatal crashes for licensed silver drivers have declined over the past decade, along with the number of serious car accidents reported to police. Even more heartening, silvers are less likely to get hurt in the accidents in which they are involved. In fact, they are faring better than their younger counterparts, as the data reveals. Between 1997 and 2008, the number of people over the age of 70 in the US rose to about 28 million from 24.4 million and the percentage of licensed drivers among them rose to 78 per cent from 73 per cent. Despite the rise in numbers, fatal crashes per licensed driver declined about 37 per cent. And among drivers over the age of 80, the rate fell by almost 50 per cent. By contrast, the fatal crash rate for drivers between 35 and 54 years of age fell by only 23 per cent.

O»ANALYSE THIS

Growing love

It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that, like fine wine, **family relationships and friendships get better as we grow older**. Still, a team at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, USA, is telling us why. According to their research, an ability to control one's emotions better with age, a greater willingness to forgive, and the 'life's too short' theory all contribute to stronger emotional ties. What's more, silvers tend to avoid conflict, and be more patient. "Older adults report better marriages, more supportive friendships and less conflict with children and siblings," writes study leader Karen Fingerman in journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. "Also, people vary their behaviour with social partners depending on their age. While younger people are generally more aggressive and confrontational with their peers, they tend to be more accommodating to older people. We've also seen how adult children don't want to confront their elderly parents or discuss negative things with them because they feel there is little time left with them. These behaviour patterns foster even deeper intergenerational bonds."



WORKING ON IT: THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT MAY RAISE THE STATE PENSION AGE FOR MEN TO 66 (FROM THE CURRENT 60) BY 2016. IT IS ALSO CONSIDERING RAISING THE RETIREMENT AGE FOR ALL TO 68 (FROM THE CURRENT 65).

O»TRENDS

VIRTUAL VILLAGE

For three years after his wife died, Jerry Lee sorely missed his evening constitutional—the 72 year-old resident of Northeast Seattle in Washington, USA, suffers from a form of Parkinson's disease and is afraid to walk alone. Help arrived this year in the form of his neighbour Jerald Forster, a sprightly 74 year-old who walks with Lee every evening and helps him out around the house. The two were brought together by Northeast Seattle Together, or NEST, a non-profit that aims to help silvers 'age in place' as long as possible. NEST is **building a 'virtual village' that serves as a stand-in for family members or friends who can't be there to help**

all the time with little things. As *The Seattle Times* reports, members pay an annual fee of \$ 600 (about Rs 28,000; \$ 900 or about Rs 42,000 for two people in a household) for neighbours to help with everyday tasks: cooking, cleaning, and escorting them on walks, doctor's appointments and social events. Over 40 virtual villages have opened around the country in the past eight years, and 60 more are in the works. The first one—Boston's Beacon Hill Village—was created in 2002 and now has over 400 members.



To know more, visit www.nestseattle.org



O» MEDIA WATCH

Nature's SILVERS

When Rachel Sussman uses the word 'old,' she's not kidding! The photographer from New York, travels the globe to seek out natural species that are hundreds and thousands of years old for her ongoing project: *The Oldest Living Things in the World*. None of her subjects—plants, coral, lichen, desert shrubs—are younger than 2,000, writes *The Wall Street Journal*. Take, for example, the 3,000 year-old *Rhizocarpon geographicum*, or map lichen from southern Greenland; they are about 3,000 years old; the 400,000 to 600,000 year-old Siberian actinobacteria; or a 12,000 year-old creosote bush in California's Mojave Desert. Still on her agenda are trips to Spain, the Antarctic Peninsula,



Tasmania, Sri Lanka and Iran, after which she plans to publish a book and hold an exhibition. "I wanted to get people thinking about the arbitrariness of the fact that we consider it to be 2010 right now," she says. "Physiologically, it's hard for our brain to hold onto anything other than human

time, so anything that gets you thinking outside of it can only help. I want people to step into the experience of the natural sublime."

To know more about the project, visit www.rachelsussman.com



OVERHEARD

"I've never felt the lack of good roles at my age. You have to create your life, and go to directors you love, and go with unexpected risk and stories—it's that or write yourself; you cannot always blame others. I went to see directors who understand, who want to shoot human beings and not ideas of women. I think that we are all creative and we have to explore possibilities."

—Oscar-winning French actor Juliette Binoche, 46, to Reuters

O» LOVE THAT

To sir, with love

Forget Maradona, Dunga and Loew, here's the coach with the mostest: **Ivor Powell, who trained more than 9,000 players in a career spanning 73 years, was the oldest football coach in the world.** The 93 year-old Briton, who worked in the mines before he turned to professional football, finally hung up his boots on

31 May, when he retired as coach at the University of Bath, his hometown, reports *The Daily Mail*. One of the finest players of his generation—he played for Queen's Park Rangers, Blackpool, Aston Villa—before turning to coaching in the 1950s. He entered *Guinness World Records* as the oldest football coach in 2006 at the age of 90.



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DESIGNING CHANGE: THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT IS SEEKING SUBMISSIONS FOR ITS ANNUAL GLOBAL AGE-FRIENDLY DESIGN AWARDS (GADA)—THE DEADLINE IS 26 SEPTEMBER 2010. ORGANISED BY >60 DESIGN CENTRE, THE COUNTRY'S NATIONAL DESIGN CENTRE FOR AGEING, THE COMPETITION AIMS TO MOTIVATE DESIGNERS WHO CAN CATER TO THE LIFESTYLE OF SILVERS. THE THEME FOR THIS YEAR'S COMPETITION: 'REDEFINING AGE'.



O»OFFBEAT

Silver surrogates

In an increasingly youth-centric world where the traditional joint family has been considerably devalued, here's an intriguing story.

Dong Ni, a 30 year-old resident of Danyang in China's Jiangsu Province, and her husband, have advertised for a silver couple to live with them as 'parents'.

"After my husband's parents died in 2004, we really miss the presence of elders at home," she tells news agency Xinhua. "My own parents live with my brother in Beijing so they can't relocate to Danyang. I believe a healthy and childless elderly couple would be a blessing for our home and our young daughter. I want the chance to be filial and to have a truly happy family." No takers yet, though.



O»WILD SILVER

RIP

Parkinson's can strike the animal kingdom too. In May, 22 year-old Rani, the sole lioness at Indore's Kamala Nehru Zoo, died after a prolonged, four-year struggle with the disease, reports news agency ANI. The last few months were especially bad for the paralytic lioness as she was plagued by bedsores. Six months earlier, the zoo lost its only lion, 21 year-old Akbar—he had cirrhosis and cysts in his liver.

ACTION PLAN FOR AUGUST



Get on your bike. Medically proven to improve cardiovascular strength, lower blood pressure and increase flexibility, cycling is also an eco-friendly way to explore new places. In June, over 4,200 cyclists took part in the 18th Chinese Cycle Touring Show, held in Hohhot, in northern China. Among them was 86 year-old Wei Lian, who has been exploring the country on his bike for the past 18 years. "Cycle touring is the best way for me to keep healthy," he says. Zhao Baohua, executive deputy president of China's Gerontological Society, echoes the sentiment: "We believe cycling creates a pleasant life for the elderly and raises their quality of life."

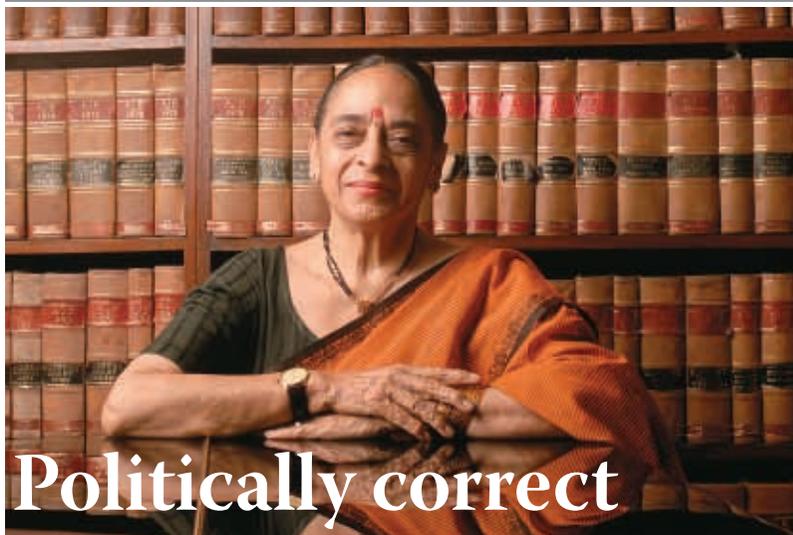
BIRTHDAYS

- Tibetan spiritual guru **Dalai Lama** turned 75 on 6 July
- Beatles drummer **Ringo Starr** turned 70 on 7 July
- Italian fashion designer **Giorgio Armani** turned 76 on 11 July

IN PASSING

- Nobel prize-winning author **Jose Saramago** died of multi-organ failure on 16 June in Spain. He was 87.
- Bihar MP **Digvijay Singh** died of brain haemorrhage in London on 25 June. He was 54.

O»H PEOPLE



Pablo Bartholomew

Politically correct

The first woman chief justice of a high court in India, Leila Seth has recently authored an unusual book for children, *We, The Children of India: The Preamble to Our Constitution*. The 79 year-old tells *Harmony* why it's important to make civics more fun and engaging for the younger generation

How different is the book from what is taught as civics in school?

Civics is taught in schools to children who are about 12 years old. My book is intended for children in Class II or III. It's also a fun book, full of pictures, illustrations and tidbits that children enjoy, like Pandit Nehru signing the Constitution first and not leaving any space for President Rajendra Prasad. When very young children learn about liberty, equality, justice and secularism, they become part of their consciousness.

How challenging was the experience?

The book made me think a lot about what children like and understand. In that sense it connected me to my childhood. I used my grandchildren as sounding boards. When I told my eight year-old granddaughter that the book was being written to make her a good citizen, she asked me: 'What is a citizen?' I had to find a

simple way of explaining it. Eventually, I told her it was 'someone who belongs to a country'. I also had to put on my thinking cap while explaining concepts such as socialism, secularism and fraternity.

What prompted the idea of writing a children's book?

Children are not given any moral science or value education in schools. I thought it would be good for children if they imbibed the spirit of the Constitution that is contained in our preamble. If every child imbibes the spirit of the preamble, we will be a wonderful country.

Are you toying with the idea of writing children's fiction?

I am not planning to write another book for children—fiction or otherwise—just now. However, I am committed to Oxford University Press to collate my earlier lectures and submit them for publishing as a book.

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

THIS IS THE PLACE TO DO IT. REACH OUT TO FELLOW READERS WITH INTERESTING ANECDOTES, INSPIRING STORIES AND HEARTWARMING MOMENTS FROM YOUR LIFE. WRITE IN WITH FULL CONTACT DETAILS, AND MAKE THIS SPACE YOUR OWN.

A SACRED MEMORY

Some people leave a lasting impression on our minds with their depth of character. To me, one such person is my schoolteacher Shri Mansaram Sharma. *Guruji*, as we would call him, taught us Hindi in Class IX and X in SBM Inter College in Uttarakhand.

Today, even after 52 long years, I can vividly remember *Guruji*. A gentle-



Arora shares the best lessons of life

man of medium height, fair complexion and curly black hair, he was barely in his early 30s then. Always clad in a pure white *dhoti* with a cream colour *kurta*, he had a serene smile on his saintly face. He was 'Sahityaratna' (a postgraduate qualification in Hindi from Sahityasammelan, Allahabad) and his command over Hindi language and literature, his eloquent delivery, and his humility endeared him to everyone. He poured his heart into everything he taught us and his wise words were uttered with love and gentility. He inculcated in us a deep appreciation for life, literature, ancient Indian wisdom and culture. Students were free to meet *Guruji* anytime. Once I even saw him teaching a student in an otherwise empty classroom during pre-exam preparation leave. And he would often help students after working hours with debates and plays.

Guruji was the chief editor of the college magazine, *Jyoti*. As I had a flair for writing, I was elected as one of the student editors. I still treasure a notebook that contains a Hindi short story I wrote with suggestions for improvement by *Guruji*, marked in his beautiful handwriting. He used to encourage

me to read literature and express my creativity through writing. I always felt I was his favourite student—I am sure every student felt the same!

I can never forget the forenoon of a Saturday in June 1959. Our high school results were already declared. I had gone to my college to meet my teachers and take my school leaving certificate; I was heading to Dehradun for further studies. When I met *Guruji*, I touched his feet. He embraced me, took me to his office room, and typed out a letter elaborating my potential. While giving me the letter, he placed his right hand on my head and simply gazed into my eyes. I felt as if I was being blessed by his silence.

I am over 60 years old now and more than half a century has gone by since my last interaction with *Guruji*. I have tasted and enjoyed worldly success. But still today, whenever I am depressed or not able to write something good enough to be published, I take out *Guruji's* letter from my file and read it. And whenever I do, I feel his presence by my side—encouraging and inspiring me. His sacred memory is enough to make me stronger.

—R K Arora, Ahmedabad

WAITING TO EXHALE

What better way to overcome pain than to transform it into beauty? Fortunately for me, I have both the muse and the means—nature is my inspiration and my penchant for writing my canvas.

Born in 1948 in Halowagoan village in Central Assam, I grew up amid stunning natural beauty. We lived on the banks of the Nonoi River with a hill called Bamunipahar close by. And with my imagination bursting like the

Nonoi, I began writing at a tender age. I won my first prize in Class V for a poem I had written on Jawaharlal Nehru in a competition organised in the village.

But there is another wellspring that drives me to write. I've been afflicted with asthma since an early age. Despite the difficulties the illness posed, I worked my way up to become a senior professor in the Department of Assamese, University of Guwahati. Even today, after every breathless bout, I draw out my pen and vent my innermost feelings.



Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

Bora infuses creativity in every breath of life

Asthma dealt me a double blow because my husband, Jatin, was also asthmatic. Surprisingly, the ailment strengthened the bond between us as we understood each other's suffering perfectly. Unfortunately, Jatin, a public relations officer with the Assam government, passed away in 2005.

I have always had a passion for academics and managed to blend my love for writing with my vocation as a teacher. It wasn't easy. I sometimes recall how I wrote most of my examinations from a sick bed. Yet I passed my matriculation in the first division, won a gold medal at my graduation, and secured a Master's degree with a first class first! In 1986, I completed my doctorate from the University of Calcutta, despite severe health problems. I like to think that life has taught me to look at the positive side of misfortune. Sometimes, I have to spend several days in a hospital bed. Here's a verse I wrote about what it felt like to yearn for fresh air:

*In this way
I have been living,
Every moment I have to confront death.
Death comes and retreats.
I often swim
Like a swan,
In the sweet-smelling pond full of blue lotuses.*

Today, my only daughter lives in Delhi and I live on the Guwahati University campus, busying myself with teaching, editing books and, of course, writing. I live alone but I am not lonely. I know now that we are never really lonely as long as we tap into the creative wellspring that each one of us is blessed with.

—Dr Lilavati Saikia Bora, Guwahati

GRANDPA 'COOL'

I retired from Air India in 1983 from the personnel department. One of the lifelong perks of working with an

airline is subsidised travel fare to almost any part of the world. Last year, I visited my daughter who lives in Jami-son, Pennsylvania, for a couple of months. My wife and I were eagerly looking forward to the trip as it was also a chance to spend some time with our two adorable granddaughters Anisha, 13, and Anjika, 9. Around the time of our visit, Anisha was awarded a certificate of 'Outstanding Academic Excellence' duly endorsed by US President Barack Obama. It was a moment of great pride for my wife and me when I heard the roaring applause in the school auditorium when Anisha walked up to the stage to receive the honour.

A few days later, both our granddaughters made us proud again, when they received medals for best reading in class. When they came home, Anisha was wearing hers around her neck while Anjika had it in her hand. She just walked up to her mother—my daughter Samhita—and put it around her neck.

I guess my daughter deserves the honour. I am proud of Samhita for inculcating the right values in my grandchildren. Both my granddaughters speak fluent Konkani—our mother tongue—at home. She has also taught them to read and write Hindi, so they are in touch with their national language. Like all grandparents from my generation, I used to worry if my grandchildren would be permanently alienated from their culture, having been born



Bhatt with his granddaughters, daughter and wife

and brought up in the West. But thanks to their parents, I am happy they are getting the best of both worlds: the liberal values and opportunities of the West, and the traditional values of the East. My wife and I chat with Anisha and Anjika almost everyday on the Internet using a Web camera. At 85, I enjoy being what the young generation refers to as the 'cool' granddad.

—A S Bhatt, Mumbai



THE RETIREMENT MYTH

Silvers should choose how they wish to retire, says **Anagha Tendulkar**

The dictionary meaning of retirement is to retreat, to recede. It also means to withdraw from society, active life, business or profession. At a broader level a retired individual is looked at as being unproductive, useless and worthless. It echoes exclusion, dependence and even redundancy. In a regular discourse, being retired and being old are taken as being synonymous with each other. In the present situation, this blanket image of retirement needs to be re-examined.

Several studies have been conducted on the post-retirement syndrome. Very few researchers, academicians and journalists have explored the phenomenon of retirement itself. It is interesting to note that retirement is neither a universal nor a uniform phenomenon. It is of a fairly recent origin. With the advent of industrialisation, standardisation, quantification and valuation of work became essential. Entry into the labour force, selection, promotion and superannuation became imperative; but certainly not for everybody. Those who sold labour or services in a defined industrial setup took up jobs and retired in due course of time. Farmers continued to work; artists didn't stop working; professionals were not compelled to count years of work; and poor people didn't have the luxury to retire. Even now, retirement is part and parcel of the lives of certain categories of people.

Though it is understandable that different countries have different cut-off points as the age of retirement—it ranges from 55 to 70—in India the central government has 60 years as

a cut-off, whereas the state government has 58. Though these ages are in the process of being amended, the discrepancies in different sectors and professions continue to exist. In fairly advanced urban settlements, where people are considerably fit and healthy, their expulsion from the labour force using a chronological

Retirement has to be formulated in stages, in a way that an individual does not feel the brunt of getting displaced from his work environment

yardstick (whether it is 60, 62 or 65) appears illogical and non-scientific. Many who retire are not emotionally, mentally and socially prepared for it. In a city where most of the working population believes in what German sociologist Max Weber described as 'Protestant ethics'—work is a calling, a sacred duty, one's identity and the prime purpose of existence—retirement is deemed as a disaster.

In 1961, Cumming and Henry presented a theory about disengagement being universal and mutually satisfying for the ageing individual and society. Many use this as a justification to mandatory retirement. Another serious justification is about 'making way for the young'. Sometimes retirement is justified by the argument that certain occupations are too demanding in terms of physical vigour or too

risky for senior citizens; if that is so, the arbitrary age cut-off will not serve any purpose. The careful and objective scrutiny of the physical capacities of an individual with his/her consent to continue or discontinue work will be required.

Many factors hold the potential of influencing an individual's decision to retire: financial position; health status; responsibilities; and family dynamics, to name a few. Our system has to be redesigned to treat retirement as a process, not an event. It has to be formulated in stages in such a way that an individual does not feel the brunt of getting displaced from his work environment. If complete retirement is the requirement of a situation, it should follow an individual's engagement in other desirable activities or hobbies. A better alternative is to opt for a differential retirement that can also be called a staggered retirement. This implies reducing the burden of demanding work in a way that a gradual retirement is possible. Or seniors can opt for selective retirement, which implies choosing a new arena of work that is lighter than the previous one.

Redirection is a better alternative than retirement. The continuity of the work culture will be maintained along with total utilisation of the wealth of experiences that senior citizens have accumulated.

Anagha Tendulkar is a senior Sociology lecturer at Sophia College, Mumbai. You can write to her at anaghatendulkar@gmail.com

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VULNERABLE VOICES

sanskrit

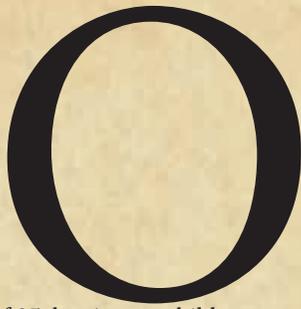
WE ARE MUTE WITNESSES TO A STEADY YET MENACING EROSION OF OUR LANGUAGES THAT CAN EITHER DILUTE OUR CULTURAL IDENTITY OR SPAWN NEW VOICES AND SHAPE A NEW CULTURE. **CAROL LOBO** EXPLORES THE CONDITION OF LANGUAGES THAT ARE POISED ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

pali

gondia

bo

ahom



On a cool, windy day in February, a small island archipelago in the Indian Ocean wrote the epitaph for a language—the last surviving person in the world speaking the ancient language of Bo had died in the Andaman Islands. Boa Sr passed away at the age

of 85, leaving no children or relatives.

According to the US-based non-profit organisation, Living Tongues for Endangered Languages, a language dies once every 14 days. (But it is not often that the phenomenon leaves a recordable date.) And with the death of each language, a “cultural memory” passes into history, says anthropologist Shiv Vishwanathan, who points out that language is much more than a means of communication. It reflects a community’s worldview.

Indian languages have always imbibed word stock and linguistic structures from other languages, explains literary scholar and cultural activist Ganesh Devy, who has plumbed the depths of linguistic intricacies as the series editor for Sahitya Akademi’s project on Indian Literature in Oral Traditions and Tribal Languages. “Languages all over the world thrive on these borrowings, which should be seen as healthy,” he insists. “In the past, Indian languages have borrowed heavily from Turkish, Arabic and Persian and from the languages of China and Burma. During colonial rule, they borrowed from English, Portuguese and French.”

Experts say these influences should not be seen as ‘pollution’. Rather, the process of embracing new elements during

natural assimilation only adds to the cultural and linguistic vibrancy of a community or a nation as a whole.

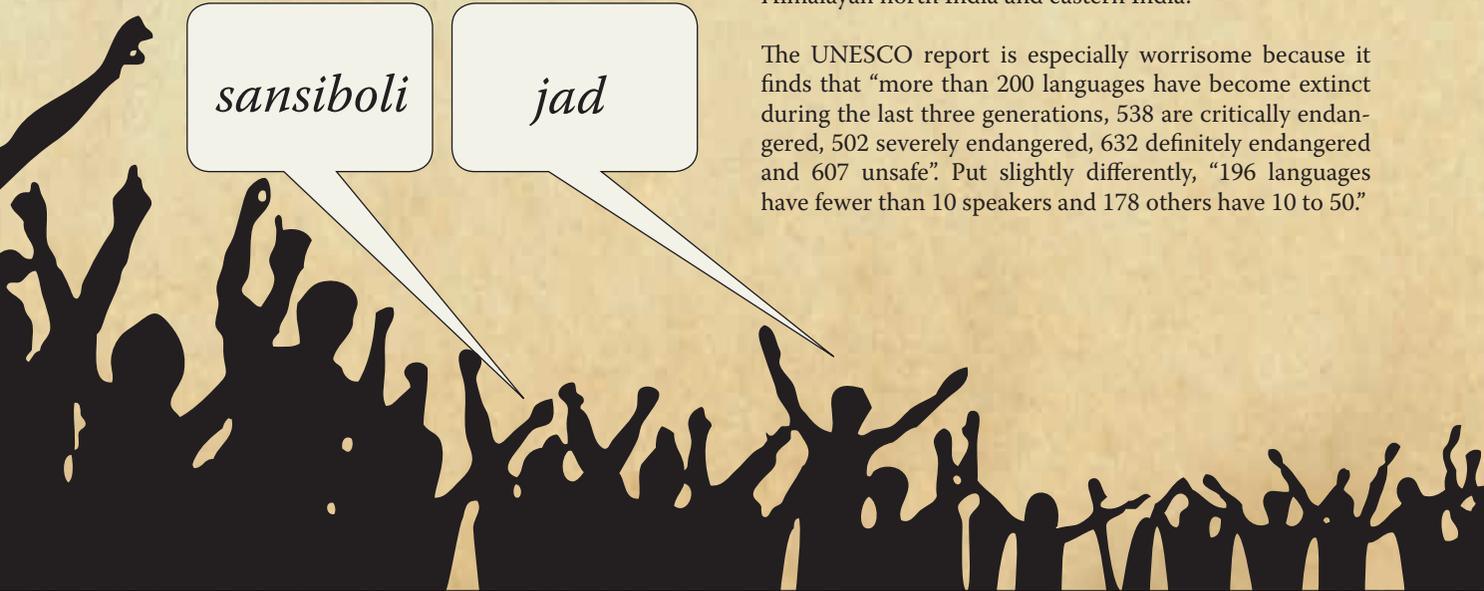
Rajesh Sachdeva, deputy director, Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), makes a poignant observation, “In our quest for unity, we fail to appreciate our unique diversity that can be traced back to our historical differences. We undermine our very democratic right to differences.”

Home to 16 per cent of the global population, India, more than any other country in the world, celebrates its linguistic diversity and is home to four major language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman and the Austric group. More than 74 per cent of Indians speak Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Haryanvi, Rajasthani and Marathi; 24 per cent speak one of four major Dravidian languages; just over 1 per cent speak Austro-Asiatic tongues such as Munda and its tribal variants (eastern and southern India), while a miniscule 0.62 per cent speak Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Burman (spoken in the northeast).

“We are a singular country with plural expressions,” observes Udaya Narayana Singh, former director of CIIL and currently director, Rabindra Bhavana and Tagore Research Chair. Naturally, it was a shocker when UNESCO published its *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger 2009*, moving India to the top of the list of countries with endangered languages, pegging the figure at 196.

Here’s another way of looking at it: while 96 per cent of the population speaks 122 languages, 2 per cent accounts for 20 Austric and 98 Sino-Tibetan languages. While the total number of languages that have been officially enumerated is a matter of debate, the fact remains that languages spoken by the smallest number of people are in greatest danger, mainly tribal tongues. Topping the extinction hit-list are the northeast, Andaman and Nicobar islands, parts of Himalayan north India and eastern India.

The UNESCO report is especially worrisome because it finds that “more than 200 languages have become extinct during the last three generations, 538 are critically endangered, 502 severely endangered, 632 definitely endangered and 607 unsafe”. Put slightly differently, “196 languages have fewer than 10 speakers and 178 others have 10 to 50.”



SURVIVAL OF THE DOMINANT

Language is a dynamic, living, breathing entity and 'weaker' tongues have always been assimilated or swallowed by dominant ones. And if linguistic metamorphosis in ancient India was largely because of the decimation of kingdoms and the forces of colonisation and migration, in recent times, trade and commerce have powered changes in language patterns. Now, economic prosperity, globalisation and the digital and electronic media are fast crashing through language barriers.

Take Hindi, for example, spoken by the largest majority in India. Derived from Khari Boli—a dialect spoken in Delhi and northern Uttar Pradesh in ancient times—Hindi also borrowed heavily from Sanskrit as it spread rapidly across northern and western India as a language of the masses. Thus, in its wake, Hindi assimilated and eclipsed many local dialects such as Braj Bhasha. Climaxing its relentless journey, it was eventually crowned—amid vigorous protest

from the country's Dravidian quarters—India's official language by the Constitution in the 20th century.

Hindi had also received a major push by the British, who encouraged its spread as they needed a common local language to conduct trade and commerce seamlessly among the rural populace. This has taken Hindi way beyond northern India in the past 400 years.

As it continues its march across the country, Hindi continues to gobble up smaller languages such as Jad, spoken by only a handful of people of the Rong Ba community in Uttarakhand today. Of Tibetan ancestry and alienated from their roots by the 1962 Indo-China war, the Rong Ba converted to Hinduism, appropriated Hindi names and learnt to speak Hindi to integrate with India. As a result, only 200-odd families speak Jad today.

Just like Hindi, English is the second-most dominant language in India today and one that endows its speaker with a

Language of the Vedas

"*Namaskaram,*" says a polite voice when you call up this organisation in Delhi. Even though you answer in English, the conversation proceeds in Sanskrit. Until you give up and accept sheepishly that you know next to nothing of this ancient Indian language. The voice at the other end finally switches to a language of your choice but not before giving you a golden piece of advice: "Enunciate while you speak."

Your brief but practical lesson over the phone tells you just why Samskrita Bharati, an NGO, has been so successful in its efforts to revive the language of the Vedas. The organisation was started in 1981 in Bengaluru by Chamu Krishna Shastry. A Sanskrit scholar from Tirupati Sanskrit College, Shastry, along with five friends, decided to "spread the richness and beauty of this language and make it relevant in the modern world", explains Shreesh Devpoojari, all-India secretary, Samskrita Bharati. The organisation also has an international centre headquartered in Bengaluru.



The idea has turned into a revolution of sorts, with the NGO converting two generations in at least five villages from their native tongue to this ancient language. The idea was to bring Sanskrit back into the mainstream and rid it of its elitist tag. "We wanted to teach anyone who is interested the literary and scientific truths hidden in Sanskrit scripts," adds Devpoojari.

The noble cause was a daunting task. But the NGO was up to the challenge. With 148 full-time workers and 3,000

part-time volunteers across the country, the NGO organises Sanskrit-speaking camps at 10,000 venues across India. "Our main programme is called the Samskrita Sambhashana Shibiram (Sanskrit Conversation Workshop), where we select a village or a district for a 10-day course in spoken Sanskrit, which we conduct in schools and colleges," says Devpoojari. "Everyone is free to join."

The first village 'adopted' for this experiment was Mathur near Shimoga

Every **14** days

The planet sees the demise of a language

Over **200** languages

have become extinct in the last three generations

fair and intangible measure of perceived 'sophistication'. In fact, English has witnessed the fastest and most widespread growth among all languages on Indian soil. Imported by

the British in the 17th century, the colonists deliberately educated a section of Indians in English so they could help administer the country.

While Hindi has always had the government as its main benefactor, the popularisation of English is an altogether different story. The era of economic liberalisation that opened India to global finance and commerce required Indians to speak an 'international language', especially in the 1990s. A decade later, the communications and Internet revolution along with the era of business outsourcing made English almost a must-know among the younger generation.

The current digital push with increasing penetration of cell phones, radio, television and the Internet into small towns and even relatively remote areas has led to the perception of English as a language associated with prosperity and employment. Not surprisingly, non-English speaking families in smaller cities and towns across the country are going to

in Karnataka. The experiment began in 1982 and 25 years later, the present generation is fluent in this ancient tongue. "This was a largely agricultural society. We started our classes every evening as the men and women finished work by noon. We mainly recited the Vedas and other Sanskrit prayers," recounts Devpoojari.

To make the language practical and improve reading skills, the NGO peppered the village with slogans in Sanskrit, such as 'Keep the village premises clean', 'Trees are a nation's wealth' and 'Keep the river clean'. It worked!

Next, Sanskrit was made compulsory in the local Sarada Vilash High School, till Class VII. From Class VIII to X, it is taught as the first language. This was to ensure that the language was not lost to future generations. "We teach individuals as well as teachers in various schools and educational institutes," emphasises Devpoojari. "We encourage schools, colleges and universities to teach Sanskrit through Sanskrit. So far, we have taught about 3.5 million people to speak the language and trained 12,000 teachers."

Once it took root in Mathur, the NGO fanned out across the country with

its one-point agenda. Other villages where the organisation has successfully revived the language en masse are Jhiri and Birajpur in Madhya Pradesh and Gonda in Rajasthan.

Though the response has been enthusiastic in rural pockets, the NGO has had to use a different strategy in urban India. For instance, it conducts correspondence courses where candidates can learn Sanskrit through Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi and English. It also conducts seminars and workshops in educational institutes and corporate houses.

For instance, in July 2010, a workshop was conducted at the Tata Consultancy Services office in Pune, where software techies gave the ancient language a resounding thumbs-up. "Today, a lot of Indians are looking inwards and are interested in our own ancient arts, science and languages," explains Devpoojari. "Sanskrit, with an ocean of knowledge in these subjects, has caught the fancy of the young and yuppie like never before."

Jayatu Samskritam is all we can say!
—Dhanya Nair Sankar



Only 450 ethnic Ahoms

of the 8 million in Assam speak their ancient tongue

10,000

is the minimum number of speakers required for a language to be officially recognised

great lengths to educate their children in English-medium schools as insurance for their future. This has turned Gen Next into a bilingual generation, many of them in metro cities barely speaking their own mother tongues!

However, Sachdeva points out that technology can be a double-edged sword. "Today, technology can be a great way to revitalise our relationship with our language," he says. "I may be far removed from my Punjabi roots but I can still switch on the television and watch a Punjabi channel. So let's not lose hope. We just need to allocate resources at our disposal equitably."

Adds Ramakant Agnihotri, Professor and Head of the Department of Linguistics, Delhi University, "The normative homogeneity in terms of English growing to become the dominant language is still very superficial. It is limited to areas of market economy and call centres. In rural India, people still prefer to communicate in their own language." He adds, "Though the unhealthy domination of English is undeniable, technology does not merely empower English. Today I can play a Bhojpuri song on the Internet which I couldn't a decade ago. The great new technology of unicode has empowered every script, not just English."

However, aiding and abetting the forces of globalisation is India's demographic profile, explains Udaya Narayana Singh. More than one-third of Indians are aged below 15, while more than 70 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. This means there's a huge chunk of young people thirsting to join the global mainstream with English as their vehicle. And the digital media is happy to oblige.

Southern India is the only region that has not embraced Hindi, though English is widely spoken in urban centres, thanks first to the British and, much later, modern business, finance and then the era of outsourcing. But language

synthesis and assimilation are universal phenomena and an exquisite example of both these processes working in tandem in ancient times is epitomised in the Arwi language. A blend of Tamil and Arabic, this language was developed by the Arabs who landed on the shores of Tamil Nadu from the Middle East to trade. Extinct as a distinct language today, Arwi has been assimilated back into local Tamil dialects, from where it originated.

ALL IS WELL

Amid the gloom over the disappearance of indigenous languages, hope is alive in some quarters. There are stories of revival of ancient tongues (*see profiles*) and preservation of languages that are precariously poised.

The CIIL, for instance, is engaged in 30 language documentation projects all over the northeast. Sachdeva says the institute is involved with the audio and video documentation of dialects in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. "We record not just phonetics and grammar but also socio-linguistic parameters in terms of placement of language in society," he says. "Three years ago, we hosted a convention of 250 people from 80 communities from all over the northeast where we undertook video documentation of various dialects. We also work closely with educational agencies and schools to incorporate tribal grammar and phonetics in the curriculum."

"We need to give a standing ovation to Nagaland, where all 17 tribal languages are taught in schools," he further adds. "Preservation efforts have been successful because the Nagas take immense pride in their tribal identity. They are willing to transcend their individual tribal identities to forge a singular identity as Nagas." On a larger canvas, he says the Ministry for Human Resources is planning to kick-start the Bharat Bhasha Vikas Yojana to resurrect minor and endangered languages across India. Sachdeva will be part of a select clique chosen by the 21-member committee, which will drive this collective effort forward. "We plan to get cracking soon and have a road map in place in three months," he says.

CASE STUDIES IN EXTINCTION

Going, going, gone! Extreme isolation and then a population and linguistic imbalance when the British and then mainland Indians arrived in the late 1800s, have spelt the death-knell of many dialects in the Andaman Islands.

The migration of the Karen-Burmese from nearby areas further diluted the culture and language of the Great Andamanese, who have dwindled from 5,000 in the mid-19th century to an alarming 52. Researchers studying the Great

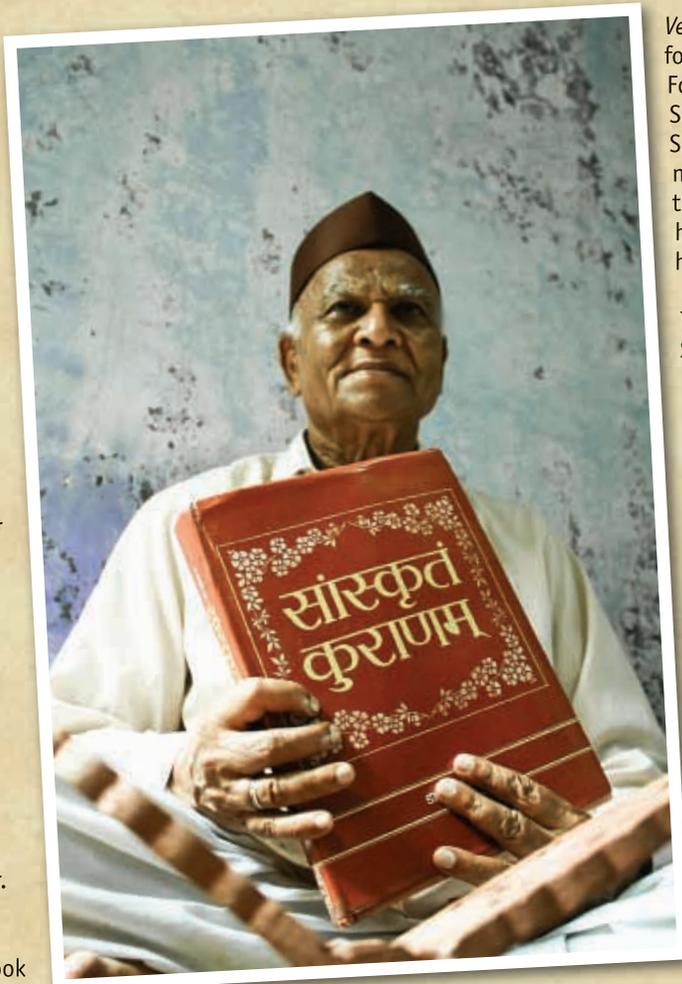
Two religions, one language

Clad in a simple cotton kurta and topi, Pandit Ghulam Dastagir Birajdar looks like any other villager who has lost his way on the streets of Mumbai. But the paradox doesn't end there. This 75 year-old is a Muslim scholar trying to revive the language of Hinduism and the *Vedas*: Sanskrit. More intriguing, he's working towards translating the *Quran* into Sanskrit. Birajdar is also a member of the Maharashtra state advisory body for Sanskrit education.

After you assimilate all this, you get down to unravelling his amazing love affair with the language. "The government formulated its education policy in 1968 and made three languages mandatory to learn: Hindi, Sanskrit and English," explains Birajdar.

"But over the years, various mother tongues took precedence and Sanskrit eventually returned to the pages of the *Vedas* and other Hindu religious texts."

Paradoxes seem to follow Birajdar in his unusual quest. For if Sanskrit acquired its 'elitist' tag from its use among Brahmins, making it inaccessible to the common man, it was a Brahmin teacher who taught Birajdar the language in his hometown Solapur in Maharashtra. "The Solapur Mahanagar Palika night school was the only school which used Sanskrit as the medium of communication. I was apprehensive to sign up for the course as the teacher was a Brahmin. But my teacher said we should leave religion



at home and not bring it to school. That made a profound impression on me. That's how I became a teacher of the language," recounts the scholar, who believes learning Sanskrit was in his destiny. "It has changed my life and opened the door to attaining perfection in other languages," adds Birajdar who is also fluent in Marathi, Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and English. Why, he's even translated the popular children's comic series, *Amar Chitra Katha*, into Sanskrit.

But what does the future hold for the language? Birajdar feels interest in Sanskrit is on the rise. "More and more people today want to learn the

Vedas, which are nothing but a form of science," says Birajdar. For instance, he points out that Sanskrit is widely spoken in Shreengiripeeth district in Karnataka as schools there teach the language. The district also has many temples, which has helped preserve the language.

The heightened focus on Sanskrit has encouraged many linguists to work on spreading the language worldwide and Birajdar has definitely done his bit in India. After retiring in 1993 from Maratha Mandir School in Mumbai as a Sanskrit teacher, Birajdar has travelled across the country as visiting faculty in schools to teach Sanskrit. He also conducts literary meets and awareness programmes on how the language is a treasure trove of information on literature and science. He has also made sure his children—a son and two daughters—speak Sanskrit fluently. He even printed their wedding invitation cards in Sanskrit!

"If you attempt to read the language, you will see how easy it is to understand," explains Birajdar inviting us to rise to the challenge. "It is very similar to Hindi." You believe him instantly, considering this scholar spends hours reading the *Quran* and the *Vedas* to his willing students. He adds, with a touch of the philosophical, "Having studied both religious texts I can assure you that both the *Quran* and the *Vedas* convey the same message, which is the good of humanity. They both have the same teachings but in a different language. I hope with my work, I am able to erase some communal differences."

—Dhanya Nair Sankar

Andamanese family of languages say that two dialects became extinct as recently as November 2009 and February 2010. No wonder Great Andamanese is high on the endangered list.

Dead but not buried: Isn't it ironic that of the 8 million ethnic Ahoms in Assam today, only 450 speak their ancient tongue? The keepers of this language are the priestly class, who use it to recite the scriptures and in their prayers.

Ahom, once widely spoken in modern-day Assam, flourished among the Ahom people between the 13th and 16th centuries. With Assamese becoming the dominant language in the 16th century and with the Ahom Kingdom finally wiped out by the invading Burmese in the early 19th century, Ahom became completely defunct with the absorption of Assam into India in 1826.

Here today, gone tomorrow? Officially classified as 'endangered', Sansiboli is spoken by the Sansi community mainly in Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Delhi. According to the 1891 census, 90 per cent of the total Sansi population of 5,915 spoke Sansiboli, whereas the 2001 Census states that only 10 per cent of a Sansi population of 60,000 speaks the language today.

The disappearance of Sansiboli is attributed to the nomadic nature of the Sansis and their migration to urban areas, where their language has acquired strong local flavours of Hindi, Punjabi and Gujarati.

POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Enumerating languages is a tricky issue and considering the vast discrepancies in statistics over the decades, experts say it is time for a new linguistic survey. For the first 50 years of the 20th century, the government relied on the *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1923) prepared by a British administrator, Sir George Grierson, who collected data for his work in the last decade of the 19th century. Grierson had then identified 179 languages and 544 dialects.

Calls for a new survey went ignored by the government, which was intent on establishing Hindi as the national language. In a sense, it wanted to minimise, not maximise, diversity. That's why the 1961 census was a huge shocker. A few questions on 'mother tongue' had been added to the census, which threw up as many as 1,652 languages in that year. In 1977, the CIIL proposed another language survey but this and other attempts to more accurately document languages in India have either languished or been deliberately ignored. Thus, the government's political motives, its casual approach to language, varying definitions of language (did you know that Hindi alone has 49 speech varieties?), the geographic remoteness of some communi-

49

is the number of speech varieties in Hindi alone

196 Indian languages

are endangered according to the *Atlas of World's Languages in Danger 2009*

ties, and arbitrary parameters such as a minimum of 10,000 speakers being required to count a language as a language have sabotaged an accurate count.

Here's a snapshot of what official apathy and the resultant confusion looks like.

Census 1961: 1,652 'mother tongues'

Census 1991: 114 languages

Census 2001: 122 languages (10,000 plus speakers); 1,576 rationalised languages and 1,796 other 'mother tongues'

Post-Independence, language has been a politically charged issue in India. Hindi was recognised as the official language; English continues to be the authoritative, legislative and judicial language, albeit unofficially; and there are 22 'national' languages.

Any language not included in the Eighth Schedule therefore is in jeopardy, like so many other languages not taught in schools any more. Alternatively, Vishwanathan says, each state should make not just one or two languages mandatory but teach children two other languages and a local dialect as well. "We should also have multilingual notions of creativity, which means public and school libraries should promote books and literature in other languages, not just English and Hindi."

Casting his vote for multilingualism is Agnihotri. "The multilingual repertoire in a classroom should be addressed as a resource that can provoke a supremely powerful teaching strategy," he argues. "Research shows that multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking and social tolerance in children. We

Language of peace

If you walk across the campus of Satyagraha College of Commerce, Management and Information Technology in Khargar, Navi Mumbai, on a Saturday or Sunday, you're most likely to be embraced by chanting and prayers in the literary language of Pali.

This is not a secret cult ceremony straight from the pages of a Dan Brown thriller but a Pali language class in progress. Yes, this forgotten language, the popular dialect of the ancient city of Magadha in present-day Bihar, is witnessing signs of revival.

Spoken in many parts of North India in 6th century BC, Pali is one of the languages of ancient India. Originally a mere provincial dialect, it attained the status of a classic language thanks to none other than Gautama Buddha, who used it to spread his teachings. Pali then spread further because of Emperor Ashoka, who embraced Buddhism and made it the state religion around 250 BC.

With the decline of India's great Buddhist eras, Pali has been dead for more than 2,000 years and now occupies the same status in Buddhism as Sanskrit does in Vedic Hinduism. "Ancient Pali texts show us that the language was widely used to propa-

gate Indian culture. But Pali, like Sanskrit, started languishing after the 13th century. Though Sanskrit was still used in temples, Pali was suddenly lost in the pages of history," rues Professor Dr G K Dongargaokar from the Rahul Shikshan Prasarak Mandal which runs the Satyagraha College in Khargar.

In an effort to revive the language, the college started a diploma course in Pali in 2004. It offers a three-month certificate course, six-month diploma course and a one-year comparative religion study course in Pali for teachers. "There are about 10 million Buddhist people in our country who are not just interested in learning the language of their religion but more about the doctrine of peace as propagated by Buddha," explains Dongargaokar. "Given this interest, we decided to start these courses."

Classes are open to anyone who is interested. There are three levels—elementary, basic and advanced. "Students at the elementary level are usually aged between 10 and 15 years while those who take the basic level are aged between 15 and 25, and so on," says Dongargaokar. "The only eligibility to join our courses is that candidates should have passed their Class X and XII."

Here, you learn Pali through Pali and through chanting the doctrine of peace. Hence it is not easy. But Dongargaokar is quick to point out that training teachers in the language has definitely helped. "All teachers from all faculties in our college are required to know at least basic Pali," he reveals. "They were initially hesitant but are now warming up to the idea of learning an ancient Indian language and getting more attuned to their roots."

To make sure students remain interested, the college also invites gurus of Vipassana meditation to teach the doctrine of peace in Pali. "We have had renowned Vipassana gurus like Dr Dhamma Mahatera coming here as guest faculty," says Dongargaokar. We also try to invite professors from the Mahabodhi Buddhist Open University in Bengaluru. The university specialises in teaching Buddhism, and of course Pali."

There are also other institutes that teach this ancient language in India. The University of Calcutta offers a one-year certificate course in Pali while the Nav Nalanda Mahavira in Bihar, a state government institution, offers certificate and postgraduate diploma courses in Pali and Buddhism. —*Dhanya Nair Sankar*

should move away from homogenising our curriculum through Hindi and English and look at pedagogy rooted in multilingualism."

Sachdeva shares his own experience with promoting local languages in Arunachal Pradesh. "Some years ago, the CIIL met the chief minister, education minister and people from 108 language subgroups," he recounts. "There was a lot of enthusiasm to emphasise the importance of one's mother tongue but somehow it was sidelined by the government's desire to integrate Arunachal Pradesh with the rest of India. Hindi suddenly became the state's official language, perhaps thanks to the army's strong presence in this

state. But I see a lot of churning in the people at the steady erosion of their mother tongue." That's because languages that are imposed are not as culturally and emotionally charged as local tongues, Devy points out. "Anyone who picks up a language develops an emotional bond with it. Even the millions of Indians who argue in favour of English as the medium of instruction at the primary level have bonded with the language as they grew up with it. But the psychological inroads made by English and Hindi are not as deep as those made by the languages of tribal communities. Hence, one likes to believe that this bonding is far deeper. Alas, 20 years from now, this argument will most likely appear flawed."

CHANGING VOICES

Prof G Uma Maheshwar Rao explores how languages shape our world and ultimately our existence

The extinction of a language may mean not only the loss of language but along with it a plethora of cultural and other knowledge systems that we have accumulated in the last few millennia. Therefore, it should be preserved and passed on to the next generation for the survival of the human race.

Census figures of languages in many countries are unassumingly conservative. India has stopped reporting the census figures of languages with less than 10,000 speakers. The total number of the world's languages is about 6,500, or anywhere between 6,000 and 7,300. It is estimated that 90 per cent of the world's languages may face extinction by the end of this century. According to rough estimates, newspapers may report the death of a new language every Monday, i.e. 52 languages a year and 5,200 languages by the end of the 21st century—a disturbingly high rate of attrition hitherto unknown to this world.

Changing demographics owing to globalisation, increased migration and rapid urbanisation, work culture, and nuclearisation of families have increasingly become a menace to not just minor but many major languages of India as well. Two hundred years of British rule have had a more lasting effect on our languages than 2,000 years of dominance of Sanskrit. The latter had not been able to displace our mother tongues. But English, unlike Sanskrit, is continuously making inroads into various domains of linguistic use, whether it is family, market, academic institution, polity or public life.

According to the experts at the Tribal Research Institute (Ranchi), 25 per cent of speakers of tribal languages lose their language when they migrate to urban centres, and about 50 per cent have only a passive knowledge of their language. Children of modern families growing up without the company of grandparents have no access to their native language. The rich linguistic diversity is fast becoming a mirage on the superhighways of modern India. The economic prosperity dubiously linked to knowing English has had a strong impact on changing linguistic trends.

Even in a small community, a tremendous amount of linguistic variation is observed. Often terms like accent, idiom, jargon, register, argot, dialect, and vernacular are used to indicate sub-language variations. In fact, multilingual individuals are more common. Group identity and nationalism play a crucial role in bringing together different dialects/languages under one umbrella. This process of homogenisation inherently has an agenda of eliminating dialects and languages.

The extreme change that can affect a language is extinction. In many instances, the loss of a language followed the physical elimination of the communities as in the case of many tribal languages in India, Australia and the Americas. The linguistic history of a community may involve change of language, expansion or contraction of the frontiers of an existing language. Every language known so far either diverged or converged with its neighbouring language so much

that sometimes the new one is drastically different from the old one. It is also a well-known fact that there were more languages than there are today in most parts of the world. When there were no express highways and Internet communication networks, smaller populations living in isolation separated by geographical boundaries like rivers, mountains, long stretches of uninhabitable land masses and absence of proper transport and communication must have given rise to a number of independent languages.

In the modern world, larger and fast growing communities, agricultural and industrial economies and highly mobile and integrated complex administration assisted by military power all have a negative impact on the existence of smaller communities with independent languages. Particularly, the languages of mobile groups equipped with political power supported by the military, when introduced into an area where a large number of local languages exist, have become the lingua franca. The lingua franca of an alien culture has now become the voice of nationalism, thus strengthening its hold on local languages. Such regions have fast become the killing fields of a vast number of languages from the face of the earth. Examples can be drawn from the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Australia, and the Americas in modern times, but similar things have also taken place in ancient times repeatedly in India, and other parts of Asia and Europe. An endangered language is a vanishing language moving towards extinction. Unless adequate steps are taken these languages are certain to disappear.

G Uma Maheshwar Rao is professor and director of Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad

Language warriors

Though anything even remotely associated with the Maoist movement immediately suffuses the mind with images of blood-soaked outrage, in the tribal heartland of Chhattisgarh Maoist rebels are staging a fresh new revolution, the derivative of which might well be the revival of the Gondi language. One of the key Central Dravidian languages, Gondi is the mother tongue of 2.7 million Gond tribals in India across Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. Unfortunately, now, only half of them actually speak the language.

Gondi is spoken in many dialects such as Dorla, Koya, Maria, Muria and Raj Gond; none adequately recorded. However, though there is no spine of written literature to prop it up, Gondi boasts a wealth of folk literature comprising ceremonial songs and narrations. Soon, much of the neglect and absence of linguistic identity will be a thing of the past if the Maoists have their way—in their camp schools, for Classes I to V, the Maoists have published textbooks for mathematics, social sciences and politics in Gondi. Efforts are also on the anvil to roll out textbooks of history,

biology, culture and general sciences in the endangered language. Much of the text is hard to decipher as no one outside the tribal heartland understands the language.

The major milestone in the passionate revival movement will be the development of the Gondi script, an experiment that is already underway in the Maoist camp. At present, Gondi has no script of its own, having relied on either Telugu or Devnagari for expression. Though critics of the Maoist effort may argue that the revival movement is not entirely without an ulterior motive—to attract and recruit more tribals into their volatile cause—the underground linguistic revolution has nudged the Madhya Pradesh government out of its lethargy and neglect of the tribal voice. In a suddenly charged attempt to lure the tribals away from the warm clutches of the Maoist influence, the state has recently launched textbooks to teach Gondi, Chhattisgarhi, Halbi and Surgujia in classes III, IV and V. A desperate move but one that is imperative when you see the census data: two out of three tribals do not speak their native tongue.

Tribal king

As this article goes into print, a forest of languages is defining its shape in the soil of Tejgarh, 90 km off Vadodara. The 'Bhasha Van' comprises 320 plants each representing an endangered Indian language, all planted on 10 March 2010 at the conclusion of the three-day Bhasha Confluence, a gathering of 1,120 experts including linguists, social scientists, anthropologists and activists of tribal welfare initiated by writer-activist Dr Ganesh Devy. "I wanted a place in India where the memory of languages is made visible," says Devy. "It was necessary to send out a strong signal that if we lose our languages, we will also lose our understanding of ecology." The Bhasha Confluence offered a platform for engagement and dialogue on a variety of issues that concern the survival of our languages: the need for a linguistic survey of India; the need for public institutions sensitive to language environments; the place of Indian languages in primary education and inter-lingual conversations; and Diaspora and the status of Indian languages outside India among migrant Indian citizens.

Though the saplings in Bhasha Van are still tender and nascent, Devy's passion for preservation and revival of languages and oral traditions of marginalised communities has deepened and strengthened over a decade. A former English professor at Maharaja Sayaji Rao University in Vadodara and a PhD from Leeds University, he quit his job in 1996 after a series of interactions with tribals enlightened

him about the rapid erosion of tribal culture. He set up the Bhasha Research and Publications Centre (BRPC), which has been working to gain constitutional recognition for tribal languages and seeks to re-energise the culture and language of the adivasi and the nomadic and denotified communities. Today the BRPC publishes journals devoted to tribal languages, and has even devised scripts for little known languages such as Ahirani, Chaudhari, Dehwali, Dungri Bhili, Gor Banjara, Kunkna, Pawri and Rathwa that were originally confined to oral expressions. A special wing, Purva Prakash, has been set up for publication of adivasi literature written by adivasi writers.

The Adivasi Academy established by Devy offers post-graduate courses in tribal languages and culture. "A language—any language—is a complete worldview," says Dr Devy. "It defines one's relationship with the divine, nature, the society and the self. Therefore language is at the very heart of culture. We should never overlook the fact that it is the most crucial factor that differentiates humans from other animals." Bhasha's work is not confined to Gujarat alone. Devy and his team have also set up Himlok, an institute of Himalayan studies at Kalpa in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. Himlok works towards the conservation, documentation, research, and cultural and ecological conservation of the Himalayan environment and communities.

—Rajashree Balaram



Cinderella story

Globetrotter, ballerina and teacher Shahi Walter Abraham, an Israeli Jew, reminisces about the City of Dreams that made all hers come true. **Dhanya Nair Sankar** listens

She lives in a small, one-room kitchen apartment at the Bombay Hospital nurses' quarters in Mumbai with her adopted daughter Florence, who is also her best friend. Entering their world, you feel like an unannounced guest but you banish the thought as soon as Shahi Walter Abraham walks in. She greets you with a warm smile; for a centenarian, her handshake is surprisingly firm. You soon realise that her soft voice is at odds with her colourful past—that of a foot-tapping ballerina and piano teacher.

Abraham is one of the few surviving members of the Ashkenazi Jews, a community of priestly lineage also known as the original Israeli Jews. Abraham chose to stay back in Mumbai even though most of her family and friends returned to Israel in the 1980s. But they still visit Abraham on special occasions. "My family is spread across the globe," says Abraham. "My younger sister lives in London. I visited her a few years ago and she was here last year on my birthday. I regularly talk to my relatives in Israel over the phone." And no, she has never felt any cultural alienation. "India, with its rich vibrancy has always been home," she says.

Born and brought up in Kolkata, where her father was a trader and mother a homemaker, Abraham has fond memories of her childhood. "In Kolkata, we had a tennis court at home. I spent my days studying, playing, learning the piano and ballet," reminisces Abraham, lost in a sea of memories. "Dancing gave me the greatest happiness." And thanks to some well-connected family friends, the young Abraham also had the chance to travel across India to places

like Mussoorie, Darjeeling and around Kolkata. "The travel bug bit me when I was a teenager. At the age of 15, I visited Mussoorie and was awestruck. I had never felt like an outsider but I was convinced I was home."

This was also where the ballerina-to-be had her first Cinderella moment, while she was studying. "The Prince of Mussoorie was a handsome man and a great dancer," says Abraham, reliving those special moments. "I was taken by his dancing. I unwittingly entered his circle and we danced the ballroom dance, matching step for step. It was

Abraham has survived two bouts of cancer. Though she has the usual aches and pains, she doesn't let anything get her down

wonderful." But the young ballerina paid a price. "I was severely scolded by my hostel warden and told that women were not supposed to gallivant with strange men. That baffled me as my parents had never made any distinction on the basis of gender." Abraham explains, "In Jewish households, the mother is the ultimate boss. I had grown up seeing my mother manage every bit of the house. She taught me how to run a tight ship."

Being the eldest of five sisters in a middle-class family, Abraham decided to discontinue her studies after two years in college so that she could look after her family. "My first job saw me

working as a secretary at D J Keemer, a British company in Kolkata," she remembers. "There, I learnt the nuances of bookkeeping." Indian history paints a patriarchal picture, where women played second fiddle. Yet Abraham is a refreshing contrast. "In the British era, and maybe even just after Independence, patriarchy was the prevailing norm. But when I was in my 20s, there were women who worked. The workforce in the British mills was largely female and most women worked out of choice."

Abraham doesn't have family in Kolkata any more and thus doesn't visit that city. But apart from being home, it was also where she met her late husband Walter Abraham. Memories of him make her face crinkle into a deep smile. "Walter was a rascal," she says. She then breaks into peals of laughter. "He was a very good-looking guy. He was a good swimmer, very athletic and such a charmer that he had women of all ages swooning over him." Walter was a year younger and was to marry another woman, his mother's choice. But one look at the young and beautiful Shahi and he changed his mind! "I don't know how I caught Walter's eye," says Abraham, with a coy smile. "He was very flamboyant while I was very shy. But some things are just meant to be."

The couple married after a short courtship when Shahi was 28. "We were more than husband and wife. We were each other's best friend," says Abraham, eyes moist. "Those were the good old days, when marriages meant a firm commitment. Today, a marriage is 'here today, gone tomorrow.'" Walter landed a job at a travel agency in Mumbai, where he went on



Abraham with husband Walter; with adopted daughter Florence

to become manager. The couple, who never had children, moved to southern Mumbai in the early 1960s and lived in a colonial building in the Fort area. In her late 40s, Abraham joined the Robby Shelam School in Fort as accountant and piano teacher.

The couple loved travelling and would paint the town red in their 'black beauty', an old Ambassador car. "We drove to places like Pune, Mahabaleshwar, Indore, Kerala and Dehradun. Petrol was so cheap, the roads were not crowded and driving was fun," recalls Abraham, who has also visited Israel, London, and the US among other places. She sold the car a few years ago: "Places have become so crowded now...travelling is not a pleasure anymore."

Abraham belongs to an era when history was not confined to the pages of books but was being made; she calls Bombay a 'City of Dreams'. "It was truly a melting point of cultures," she says. "There were Jews, Christians, Hindus all living together. We respected each other and celebrated diversity. There was no discrimination on the basis of language or region. I feel saddened by how language has been politicised."

A page turned in Abraham's life when Walter passed away at the age of 76. "Of course, at times I feel incredibly lonely but then we had a lifetime of

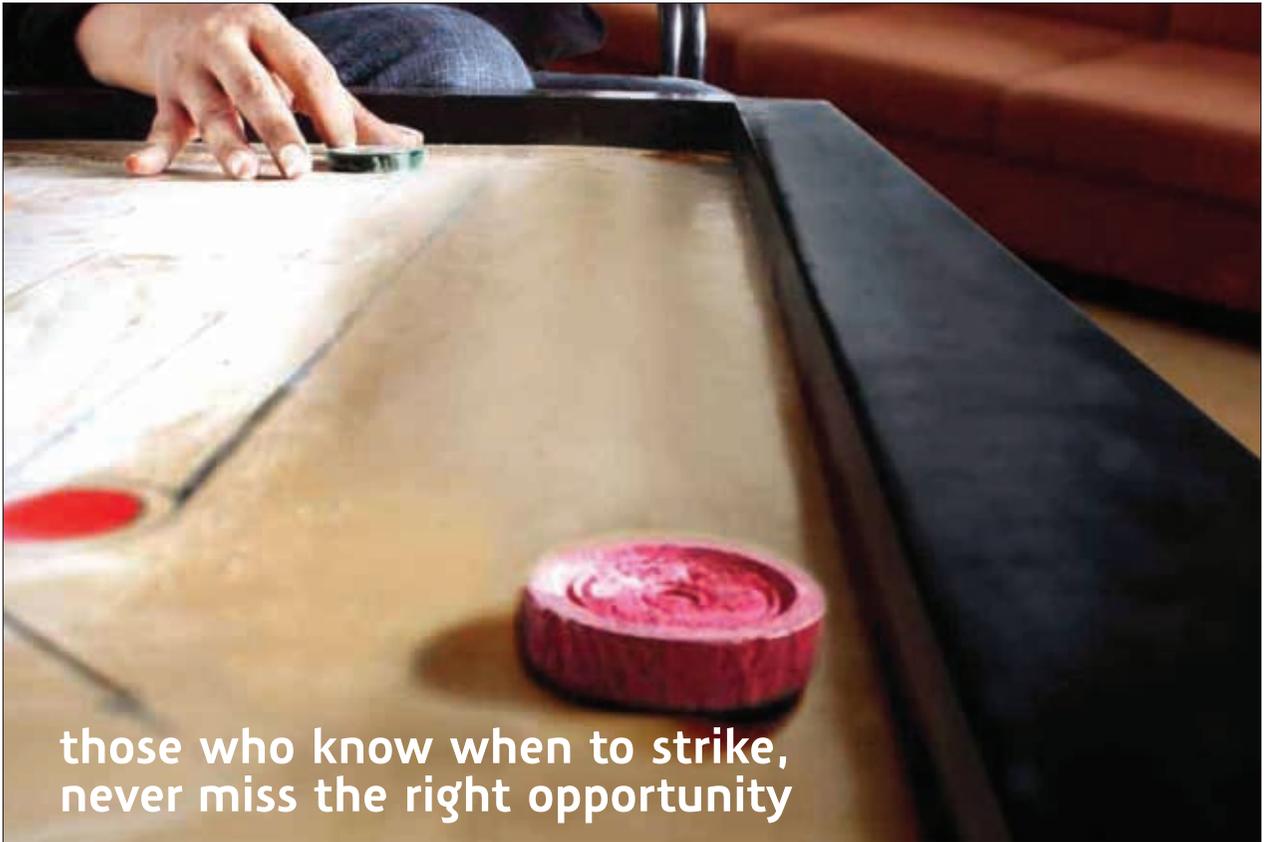
happiness and the memories still warm my heart," she says. At 100, age is etched on Abraham's face but she insists it's just a three-digit figure. She is clearly not daunted by it—she still doesn't use a wheelchair and has survived two bouts of cancer. Abraham fought off breast cancer in 1970 and secondary melanoma in the early 1990s. And though she has the usual aches and pains, she doesn't let anything get her down.

"Problems eventually pass," she says philosophically. No wonder her doctors affectionately call her a 'tough cookie'. She is still fastidious about everything, including her tax returns. "I am very meticulous about money matters. It is important to spend wisely and live within your means," explains Abraham; words of wisdom in today's materialistic world. She is also deeply religious and loves animals. Thrifty or not, she regularly sets aside a small sum to take care of street dogs, a habit she says she learnt from her husband. And she definitely doesn't like being treated indulgently. "Till last year, I used to fast during days of Atonement. But now Florence, who is also my nurse, force-feeds me," she says, screwing up her nose.

Florence, who is deputy director of the Nursing Department at Bombay Hospital, says she admires Abraham's chutzpah. "I came to Mumbai looking for work from Rajasthan in 1964 and

met the Walters in 1972," she reminisces. "I landed a post as a nurse at Bombay Hospital and the Walters became my local guardians. They readily let me into their lives and their hearts. Shahi and I have been inseparable ever since." For Florence, Abraham is not just a surrogate mother but a confidant. "Even at her age, she doesn't need any help to do her daily chores. I've seen her through many ups and downs but never has she lost her spirit or her faith in the Almighty. She is a sweetheart!"

As a former ballerina, Abraham used to visit the orchestras in Mumbai till only a few years ago. She also busies herself listening to old English songs and cricket. "I don't visit the orchestras or watch movies so much now as I feel both mediums have become loud," says Abraham. "But I rarely miss Amitabh Bachchan's movies. He still hasn't lost any of his charm!" She's a keen cricket fan too; Anil Kumble is her favourite. "Though I watch it less now owing to my health, I never missed a match when Anil Kumble played," she beams. Asked if she has any regrets, Abraham quickly replies in the negative. But after a pause, she shares her only unfulfilled dream. "I always wanted to be an actor," she confides wistfully. "If marriage had not happened, I could have been one." But she adds, "I have had a rocking life. At least, I am able to laugh at the small things."



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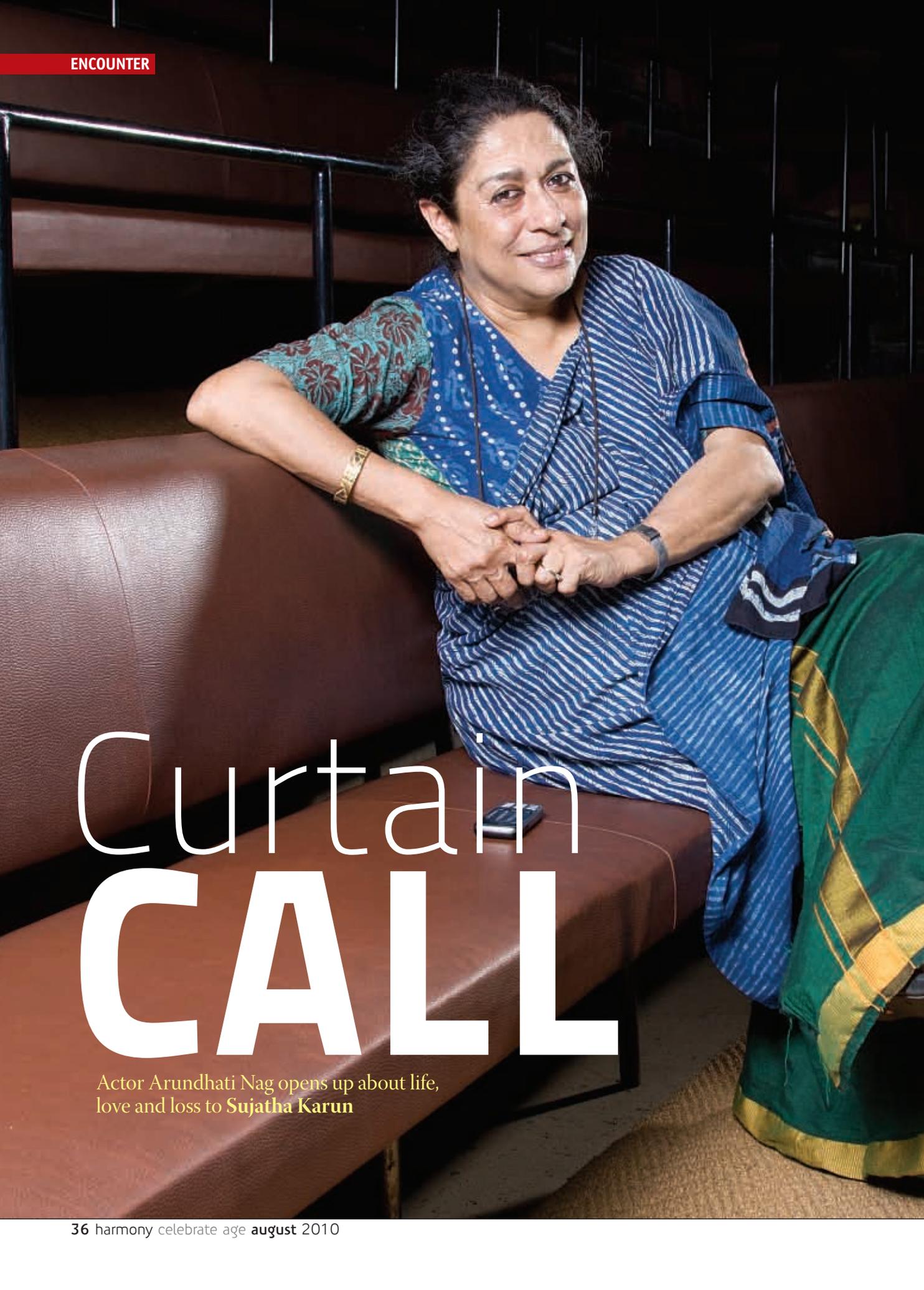
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Curtain CALL

Actor Arundhati Nag opens up about life,
love and loss to **Sujatha Karun**



Prasad Durga

It is 1989. On a quiet, hot day in interior Kerala, a shoot for M S Sathyu's Hindi serial *Kayar* is underway. Spirits are flagging and the unit seems dull and lifeless. Arundhati Nag appears for her shoot. Her vibrancy and *joie de vivre* infuse life into the proceedings. Suddenly, everybody seems more cheerful. Watching her quietly and indulgently from a chair is her husband, Kannada actor-director Shankar Nag. The two make a perfect picture of a talented couple proud of each other's accomplishments and in sync with each other's temperament. It would be another year before the serenity and beauty of their lives is marred irrevocably by a devastating tragedy. On 30 September 1990, 36 year-old Shankar Nag died in a road accident leaving behind his 34 year-old wife Arundhati and five year-old daughter Kaavya.

Fast forward 20 years and little has changed about Nag. The darkest chapter in her life has not been able to rob her vibrancy or exuberance. Having emerged greater and stronger than every adversity that life has thrown her way, she is now moving gracefully into her silver years. And as the curtain parts on the dramatic events in her life, it is evident that the acclaimed actor and Padmashri winner could pull it off because she is also the mistress of reinvention. At 54, Nag recalls how she cast herself anew each time the circumstances demanded it, yet never losing the essence of who she is.

Born in New Delhi into a Maharashtrian family and one of four children, Nag's family moved to Mumbai when she was 10. She found her calling on stage while still in school. Then at 17, while studying for her Bachelor's degree in commerce at Narsee Monjee College, she met Shankar Nag, a student at Lala Lajpat Rai College. They kept running into each other at inter-collegiate drama competitions, where Shankar invariably won the best actor trophy and Nag, best actress. As their courtship proceeded, they did a

Gujarati play, *Vairee*, together. Six years later, they were married and Nag followed Shankar to Bengaluru.

The shift in location was Nag's first trial by fire. Though the young couple was happy, it was a leap into the unknown for her. She had left her entire family, and large circle of friends and colleagues behind in Mumbai and moved to a new city—one that didn't even have a dedicated space for theatre. From doing 42 shows a season in Mumbai, she was now doing just two shows on the Bengaluru stage. Having been part of the Indian People's Theatre Association in Mumbai, and done various productions in Gujarati, Marathi and Hindi theatre, she landed at a point in life where she had to redefine herself all over again. However, she was determined to keep herself busy doing plays and the occasional film (she was fluent in Kannada). She worked as assistant director on two celebrated English films, David Lean's *A Passage to India* and Timothy Forder's *Indian Summer*.

It was during these years that Shankar and she began working on the still-acclaimed TV series, *Malgudi Days*. "We never imagined the cult status the serial would achieve," she says peeling back the years. "We simply loved the stories and followed our hearts while bringing them to life." Nag, Shankar and Kaavya were travelling for a shoot in rural Karnataka by car when they had an accident—one that claimed Shankar's life and left Nag heavily encased in plaster for six months, and in a wheelchair for the rest of the year. Close friend fashion impresario Prasad Bidapa recalls that it fell to him to inform Nag that Shankar had passed away. "She just looked at me and raised her hands to the sky in a gesture of total defeat."

Through the harrowing pain and anguish, Nag somehow tapped into the steel in her soul, which she attributes to the three most inspiring women in her life: her mother, her mother-

in-law and her aunt. Nag's mother, Radha Murthy Rao, was just 16 when she left her home in Nashik with only a steel *lota*, two saris and five rupees. Her father had been duped and the family had lost all their money. Radha had just finished school and decided to move to Mumbai to make a living. Here, she washed film at the Tata Institute of Cancer, did some tailoring, sold handmade cards on a pavement on holidays and cleaned houses. Gradually, she moved her family to Mumbai—always doing what had to be done, without a fuss. Another woman who inspired her to face the crisis with dignity was her mother-in-law, Anandibai Nagarkatti, a spiritual woman who “aged very gracefully” and taught her “how to live”. And then there was her aunt Malathi Rao, who lost her husband four years after they were married. Left to fend for herself and her children, Malathi took to teaching to earn a living. “It’s amazing how she always stayed positive and never once complained,” says Nag.

Drawing on these influences, Nag faced her own personal tragedy with a resolute strength, returning to the farmhouse she and Shankar had built on what was then the outskirts of Bengaluru. There, she leaned on her mother-in-law and friends in the theatre world for support. “We were all connected in our grief,” she recalls.

The key motivation, however, for her to get back on her feet was her daughter Kaavya. “I wanted to create a semblance of normalcy for Kaavya and show her that life is beautiful,” says Nag. “I still remember that terrifying afternoon when I was still in a wheelchair after the accident. Kaavya and I were alone at home, and I had toppled over and couldn’t get up.” Kaavya, still traumatised from the crash, started screaming and calling out for her mother to get up. Nag called her agitated daughter to her side and slowly calmed her down. “And so we both sat on the ground with the wheelchair next to us, as I strove hard to make

everything seem normal for Kaavya in that moment,” she remembers.

Nag had lost all her teeth and dislocated her jaw in the accident (“I had to learn to speak all over again”) and had to find her way through a maze

NAG'S MILESTONES

- 2005: Karnataka state Best Supporting Actress award for Kannada film *Jogi*
- 2006: Citizen Extraordinaire and Corporate Citizen Award from Rotary Club of Bangalore
- 2008: Sangeet Natak Akademi Award
- 2010: Star Screen Best Supporting Actress Award for *Paa*
- 2010: Nominated for Filmfare Best Supporting Actress Award for *Paa*
- 2010: Awarded Padmashri





“The last sentence Shankar and I shared was about theatre and my first act of sanity after his death was theatre”

of paperwork and loans to gain full ownership of the 10 acre of land on which her farmhouse stood. As she had a lot on her plate, she felt Kaavya would be better off in the residential section of her Bengaluru school. It was a decision that also involved a lot of self-flagellation and brooding. “I worried about what people would say,” she says wryly. “Then Kaavya asked me, ‘*Amma*, since when did you start caring about what people say?’” Her daughter’s words fortified her decision. Kaavya moved to the hostel soon after, but not without leaving a sudden vacuum in Nag’s life.

“It took death and departure for me to find myself,” says Nag. At first, she felt rudderless. “Then, I had an epiphany. I thought to myself, ‘Does your life depend solely on who is in it? Do you not do things because you want to? Where is your self-respect?’” No wonder her sister, Padmavathy Rao, also an actress and director, remarks: “She has tremendous spirit. She has been an inspiration to me, teaching me to take life in my stride with all its challenges.” Filmmaker M S Sathyu, who directed Nag’s first production in Hindi too holds her in high regard: “She is a very dedicated theatre ac-

tor and one of the few who can act in many languages.”

In 1999, with her property issues resolved and her health fully improved, Nag began to work on her dream to set up a theatre space in Bengaluru. “The last sentence Shankar and I shared was about theatre and my first act of sanity after his death was theatre,” she says. Two years after Shankar’s death, she set up the Sanket Trust with fellow thespians like Girish Karnad and M S Sathyu. After several visits to the chief minister’s office, the trust was allotted a plot of land on a 30-year lease. “From then on,” says Nag, “I began collecting money from anybody I was able to convince.”

Ranga Shankara finally opened in 2004, in memory of Shankar Nag, built in J P Nagar, a residential area in South Bengaluru. The facility is used exclusively for theatre and now mirrors Bengaluru’s cosmopolitan culture in terms of both content and audience, staging a play six days a week. It also holds its own productions and varied theatre activities. Over half the 60,000 children who have watched plays here have been from government schools and underprivileged backgrounds,

fulfilling Shankar’s and her dream of making theatre accessible to all. Collaborations, like the one with Germany’s Schnawwl Theatre, offer inter-cultural theatre for children and young adults. Her life’s dream is fulfilled, but she has no time to sit back. She plans to replicate Ranga Shankara in other parts of Bengaluru.

The year 2010 has been special for Nag in more ways than one. She has just finished acting in the 50th performance of the play *Bikre Bimb*, the Hindi version of Girish Karnad’s *Heaps of Broken Images*. Before that, she won a Best Supporting Actress award for her role in *Paa*. And she was awarded the Padmashri. On the personal front, Kaavya, a wildlife conservationist, is now married and lives in Mumbai. Nag says one of the reasons her life is “so full” is that she has “kept all her doors and windows open”. She has no regrets and counts neither victories nor failures: “It’s my *sahaj vrithi*, my particular earth that has made me so resilient.” She will undoubtedly navigate old age with equally grace. As she says: “Just be happy with what you have and nurture it. Take losses in your stride. Don’t let anything break you.”

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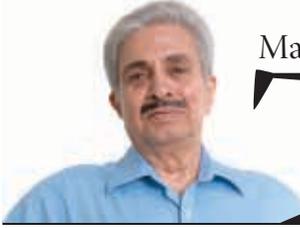
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Madhukar

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Joint control: Regular exercise keeps them fluid

I am 62 years old and have been exercising regularly since 2007. However, in 2009, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and prescribed medication. This has helped improve my mobility to a great extent. I would like to avoid surgery in future. Are there any specific exercises that will help strengthen my joints?

Regular exercise is one of the best favours you could do your joints. In fact, the benefits are manifold:

- » It can reduce overall pain from rheumatoid arthritis.
- » Thinning of the bones can be a problem with rheumatoid arthritis, especially if you need to take steroids. Exercise helps bones maintain their strength.
- » It maintains muscle strength.
- » It improves functional ability and allows you to do more for yourself.

Certain exercises have been proven to be safe for people with rheumatoid arthritis. You could follow a regimen comprising stretching, strengthening, conditioning and a range of motion exercises.

- » **Stretching** is the simplest and easiest. It consists of stretching and holding different joint and muscle groups for 10 to 30 seconds each. Stretching improves flexibility, and daily stretching is the basis for any exercise programme.
- » **Strength exercises** involve working the muscles against resistance. This can be either with or without weights. Resistance training strengthens muscles and increases the amount of activity you can do without pain.
- » **Conditioning**, also called aerobic exercises, improves cardiovascular fitness. There are countless benefits of aerobic exercises. Some of them include making your heart and blood vessels healthier, preventing disability and improving mood and well-being. Good conditioning for those suffering from rheumatoid arthritis includes low-impact activities like walking, swimming, bicycling or using an elliptical machine. Any of these activities will get your heart pumping.

» **Range of motion exercises** is one part of a comprehensive rheumatoid arthritis exercise regimen.

Range of motion exercise programme

1. Gently squeeze your fingers to make a fist; then stretch your fingers open and apart.
2. Rotate your wrists clockwise; then counter clockwise.
3. Bend and straighten your elbows.
4. Sitting with your forearms resting on your lap or table, palms facing up, turn the palms down, rotating at the elbow; then turn the palms up.
5. While sitting, straighten and bend your knees.
6. Flex and point your ankle.
7. Draw the alphabet with your foot.
8. Pendulum range of motion: Standing, hold on to the back of a chair with your right hand and bend over so that you are facing the floor. Allow your left arm to dangle straight down. Gently draw circles clockwise then counter clockwise, beginning with small circles and gradually drawing larger ones.

Exercises to avoid

Avoid exercises that require you to put a lot of stress on a joint, or are 'high-impact'. These include:

- » Jogging, especially on paved roads
 - » Heavy weight lifting
- Avoid doing exercise when the joints are stiff and painful.

Dietary suggestions for rheumatoid arthritis

Omega-3 fatty acids play an important role in controlling inflammation of the joints. Some foods that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids include:

- » Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel and herring
- » Fish oil such as cod liver
- » Soybeans and soybean oil
- » Walnuts and walnut oil

Regular exercise together with a proper diet can help us cope with rheumatoid arthritis more effectively.

Madhukar Talwalkar is chairman of Talwalkar's, one of India's largest chain of fitness centres with 78 branches across major cities. Website: www.talwalkars.net



Dr Anjali

Mukerjee

Eat Healthy: A proper diet can control diabetes

I am 66 years old. I have been diabetic for 18 years with high blood pressure and cholesterol. Besides taking regular medication, I walk daily and do *pranayama* and light exercises. My breakfast comprises fruits like oranges, apples and guava, while my main meals include two to three chapattis, vegetables and *dal*. I recently started taking a peg or two of whiskey at night to soothe the tensions of the day, often caused by domestic conflicts. Is this bad for me? Should I switch to something lighter, like beer?

Though you can enjoy the food being cooked for the family, correct planning to fit your favourite dishes into the meal plan will help manage your blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and keep your weight on track. People with diabetes (and on insulin and oral medications) have to take extra care to ensure their food is balanced; regular exercise is also necessary. Healthy eating includes a wide variety of foods comprising vegetables, fruits, beans, wholegrain, non-fat dairy products, chicken and fish.



DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR DIABETICS

Though there is no common diet that works for diabetic persons, one should adhere to certain important factors:

Eat a healthy breakfast: The best way to begin your day is to have a good breakfast. It boosts energy levels and provides satiety for a longer duration of time. Healthy choices can be either a bowl of oats that help control cholesterol and hypertension, regulate blood glucose level and are rich in fibre, or egg whites (boiled or scrambled) that will make you feel full for long. Other good choices include a small bowl of sprouts, *besan chilla*, and a small bowl of fruits with one brown bread toast.

Eat fibre-rich foods: Fibre is extremely important to keep blood sugar stable. As fluctuating blood sugar levels can cause feelings of hunger and irritability, low-energy, high-fibre foods such as wholegrain chapattis, whole wheat pasta and bread, brown rice and green vegetables will help you have a happier and healthier day. One tablespoon of *isabgol* (psyllium seed husk) daily can increase fibre intake. Studies reveal that people on high-fibre diets have lower total cholesterol levels. To control blood sugar, consumption of simple carbohydrates should be avoided. Stay clear of refined foods like white rice, *maida*, dessert, soft drinks, chocolates, sugar and foods rich in fat.

Distribute your meals: Opt for four to five mini meals at frequent intervals rather than three large meals. Skipping meals can cause fluctuations in blood sugar that can lead to complications pertaining to low and high blood sugar levels. Have a variety of fresh fruits and green vegetables as in-between meal options to maintain steady blood sugar levels.

Supplement your diet: You can take supplements of antioxidants like vitamins A, C, E and selenium. Minerals like zinc, chromium, selenium and magnesium help control blood sugar imbalances. Herbs available in pharmacies are particularly good for controlling diabetes. *Karneem* made from *karela* (bitter gourd) is one such excellent herb that can tame diabetes. *Jambukasav* syrup made from *jamun*

Diabetes is a nutritionally treatable disorder. Opt for four to five mini meals at frequent intervals rather than three large meals. Skipping meals can cause fluctuations in blood sugar that can lead to complications pertaining to low and high blood sugar levels. People with diabetes have to take extra care to ensure their food is balanced

(Indian blackberry) is another herb that helps control blood sugar.

Exercise regularly: Exercise combined with a healthy diet is one of the best ways to keep diabetes under control and reduce stress. Walking for half an hour can significantly lower both blood sugar and blood pressure. Swimming is another good option. You should exercise at the same time and for the same duration every day to get the best results.

Reduce stress: Stress upsets blood sugar levels. Adopt relaxation techniques like meditation, *pranayama*, yoga, listening to music or taking short holidays to manage stress.

Avoid alcohol: Reduce or preferably eliminate alcohol intake as it can increase blood sugar levels in diabetics. Avoid it completely if your blood glucose is out of control. If you choose to drink alcohol—and your diabetes is under control—have a moderate amount of dry red wine or light beer (5 ounces of red wine or 12 ounces of light beer) every other day. Red wine has blood thinning properties and helps raise good cholesterol. It is also rich in the antioxidant resveratrol, which helps prevent plaque build-up in the artery. However, you don't have to drink alcohol to soothe the tensions of the day. A cup of chamomile tea or the Ayurvedic herb Brahmi would help serve the same purpose.

Diabetes is a nutritionally treatable disorder. Follow these basic tips in consultation with your doctor, and create a plan that best suits your lifestyle and health status.

Dr Anjali Mukerjee is a nutritionist and founder of Health Total, which has 15 centres in Mumbai to treat obesity and other health related disorders. Visit www.health-total.com



If you have a question for Dr Mukerjee write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org

promotion

Dental Aesthetics



Dr Chandresh Shah
Email: all32intact@hotmail.com
Website: www.denticareindia.com

Q1. My upper front teeth are rough and slightly discoloured. It does not have good texture. I am an investment banker and my job involves frequent personal interactions with my clients. Considering the nature of my job, I need to have a bright smile. Can you suggest a minimally invasive technique to improve my teeth?

You probably have flourosed/hyapocalcified teeth which can attract lot of stains. Lack of reflection and refraction of light may lead to improper enhancement of smile. I feel Procera Laminates can offer your teeth unparalleled strength and beauty. The 0.25 mm Procera Laminates core of Alumina is bio-compatible; effectively masks discolouration; and minimises staining during bonding. It is also translucent and preserves the tooth's luminescence.

Q2. I had a root canal done and crown prepared in one of my upper teeth. Unfortunately the tooth broke and cannot be restored. How can I restore the aesthetics and function of the affected tooth without influencing my adjoining teeth?

The remaining portion of your tooth can be extracted atraumatically using special instruments which can preserve your bone and gum tissue. Immediate implantation using newer Noble Active having a good primary fixation can be done with immediate provisanalisation of crown depending on the situation. This will avoid wearing a Flipper or a Bonded bridge as a stop-gap arrangement till the definitive crown is restored.

Q3. I am 65 years old and completely edentulous. Recently I came to know about dental implants. I want fixed teeth with minimum number of implants. What can be done?

Noble Biocare has a concept of ALL ON FOUR. With the help of four implants, you can have a fixed denture in one jaw. This can also be done without opening your gums (flapless). Thus it will be a minimally invasive dental procedure with less number of implants and will offer the comfort of a fixed denture.



HAPPY teeth!

ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY CAN MAKE DENTAL PROBLEMS LESS TRAUMATIC, WRITES ANJANA JHA

Hareesh Patel

IN 2007, A REPORT PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN COLLABORATION WITH THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION REVEALED THE EMERGENCE OF ORO-DENTAL DISEASES AS A CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM IN INDIA. WHILE ABOUT 50 PER CENT OF SCHOOLCHILDREN SUFFER FROM DENTAL CARIES, MORE THAN 90 PER CENT OF ADULTS HAVE PERIODONTAL PROBLEMS. DENTAL PROBLEMS ARE, IN FACT, ONE OF THE MOST COMMON HEALTH CONCERNS, ESPECIALLY AMONG SILVERS—THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF TOOTH DECAY IS SEEN IN THE 65-PLUS GENERATION. A SURVEY ON CONSUMER USAGE AND ATTITUDES CONDUCTED ACROSS 233 CITIES IN 2005 BY SYNOVATE INDIA, A GLOBAL MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY, ATTRIBUTED THIS TO LOW AWARENESS LEVELS AND POOR ORAL HYGIENE HABITS.

ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Besides serious oral and dental infections, lack of regular oral care causes nutritional problems. With age, gums begin to recede and expose the roots of teeth. This causes cavities, leading to infection and tooth decay. Poor oral care—often owing to difficulty in arm, wrist or hand movement—also facilitates accumulation of food debris. The plaque build-up secretes acids that can cause gum disease and make teeth unstable. While tooth fractures become common with age, dry mouth is another major dental problem faced by seniors. With age, the production of saliva reduces. Saliva helps re-mineralise damaged dental enamel, and it is a natural mouth cleanser. By checking the growth of bacteria, saliva reduces acidity of waste products and limits dental decay. Dry mouth can also be caused by cancer therapy, medications like diuretics, antihistamines and antidepressants, or diseases. However, contrary to common belief, losing teeth is not a characteristic of ageing. Tooth decay and gum disease are key factors leading to tooth loss at every age.

DENTAL DECAY

With bacterial processes damaging major components of teeth—the enamel, dentin and cementum—there's progressive breakdown of tissues, causing cavities known as dental caries. "Worldwide, dental caries are one of the most common diseases," says Dr Anupama, cosmetic dentist at Chennai's Dentistree International Dental Hospital. "Cariogenic bacteria-producing acids from consumption of sugars cause local demineralisation of tooth surface. Early caries may not have any symptoms. But when the decay proceeds beyond the enamel, the teeth become more sensitive to sweet food, hot and cold food and beverages, and even hot and cold temperatures. After common cold, it is the second most common disease in India."

Of different types—surface, interdental, pit and fissure, cervical—caries may initially appear as a small chalky



DENTAL CHECKLIST

- » Ensure daily oral care
- » Heed signs of dental problem
- » Keep mouth moist
- » Have an annual check-up

area and then develop into a large cavitation. Though directly visible at times, radiographs are required to detect it if located in more concealed areas. According to Dr Anupama, besides regular check-up, oral hygiene and dietary modifications like reducing sticky, starchy and refined foods can help keep caries at bay.

RESTORATION

Dental restoration can be either direct (fillings) or indirect (fabricated inlays, onlays, crowns, bridges, veneers). Different materials are used for filling: amalgam, gold, composite resin, glass ionomer cement (GIC) and porcelain. Though one of the most commonly used material for direct restoration, amalgam tends to expand with age, corrodes teeth and requires repair and filling replacement. Composite resins match the colour of natural teeth and bond well. GICs bond well, release fluoride for a long period and do not require layering like composite fillings.

ROOT CANAL TREATMENT

Root canal treatment (RCT) becomes necessary when dental caries are very deep and reach the pulp of the tooth. In this restoration technique, the pulp of the crown and the root is replaced with inert materials. Besides protection from future microbial invasion, it helps retain the natural tooth. RCT involves a sequence of treatment, though advances over the past decade or two have reduced the duration.

CROWNS AND BRIDGES

A crown is a cover placed over the tooth and is used when a filling either fails to strengthen the tooth or replace the lost structure. It is usually made of zirconium, as the material has the translucency of natural teeth, great wear-tear resistance and is most biocompatible. A bridge, also called 'fixed partial denture,' is used to replace a missing tooth and requires the support of neighbouring teeth. While bridges can be made of porcelain fused to metal (PFM), ceramic or zirconium, PFM is mainly used for posterior teeth and ceramic and zirconium material preferred for anterior teeth.

GUM DISEASE

"The most common cause of losing teeth is not caries but the silent killer called periodontitis [gum disease]," says Dr Anupam Sinha, consultant



ORAL CARE

- » Brush your teeth regularly (after every meal, if possible) to remove food debris and plaque.
- » Use a small-headed brush to reach hard-to-access corners of the mouth.
- » Opt for a soft-bristle toothbrush. Hard bristles damage tissue and cause gums to recede.
- » Replace the brush every three months or even sooner if the bristles begin to fray.
- » Choose good toothpaste that will help remove tartar and reduce its build-up.
- » Floss daily to clean the crevices and gaps between teeth.
- » Use a toothbrush or tongue-cleaner to keep the tongue clean.
- » Swish a mouthful of water to remove food particles lodged in the teeth after eating.

Avoid mouthwashes with alcohol as they dry out the mouth; rinse with water instead

orthodontist at Orion Orthodontic and Dental Care Centre at Sukhda Hospital in Delhi. “This is an inflammatory disease affecting the tissues surrounding and supporting the teeth. It involves progressive loss of the bone around the teeth; if left untreated, it can lead to loosening and subsequent loss of teeth.” According to Dr Sinha, while plaque builds up on teeth allowing bacteria to develop, calculus (calcified plaque) allows the bacteria to flourish with more plaque build-up, leading to inflammation of the gums called gingivitis. This makes the gums appear swollen and red in colour, and usually causes bleeding of the gums while brushing or eating (especially fruits). Over a long period of time, gums detach from the surface of the teeth, causing what are commonly called pockets. This permits greater food accumulation, calcification, bad

breath and eventually develops into periodontitis or gum disease.

In severe periodontitis, flap surgery (periodontal surgery) is advised. This procedure removes the source of infection (calculus and necrosed bone tissue) and covers an area of exposed tooth root surface with grafted tissue. Covering exposed root decreases or eliminates sensitivity, decreases susceptibility to root caries, and improves aesthetics by reducing mobility of teeth.

DENTURES

“Dentures are removable replacements for missing teeth,” says Dr Anuradha Bose, consultant dental surgeon at Kolkata’s Apollo Clinic. “Of two main types—complete and partial—they are typically made of acrylic resin, incorporating porcelain

or, at times, metal for additional structural support. Dentures help strengthen expression-controlling muscles that require support of teeth, eliminate pronunciation problems and assist in chewing.”

A meeting with your dentist will help decide whether dentures are the best option; often, dental bridges or implants may be more suitable. The procedure for fixing dentures begins with a wax bite impression of the mouth. After a try-on appointment to fine-tune colour, shape and custom-fit, the final dentures are fabricated. In some cases, extraction of some teeth or surgery may be necessary to improve the bony ridges that stabilise dentures, explains Dr Bose. A **complete denture** is given to patients who have lost all their teeth whereas a **partial denture** is a treatment for those who have lost some teeth. Partial dentures can either be made of cast metal or acrylic. Cast metal partial dentures fabricated using metal framework with higher grade denture teeth are stronger, less bulky and offer the best fit. More affordable and bulky, the acrylic partial denture, is attached to natural teeth with small metal clasps.

The main advantage of complete dentures is that it helps the patient to chew and speak properly, restores appearance to a certain extent and makes the patient feel more confident. However, dentures accelerate the ageing process of the face as the distance between nose and chin begins to decrease as soon as natural teeth are extracted. Owing to bone loss, the denture tends to become loose and needs to be realigned.

MINI DENTAL IMPLANTS

The lower denture often presents difficulty for patients adjusting to dentures for the first time or even experienced denture wearers. Recently, a new procedure called **Denture Stabilisation System** to secure the lower denture has been introduced; it is referred to as **Mini Dental Implants (MDI)**. It consists of a miniature



Remove dentures before going to bed to relieve the pressure on the gums; store in fresh water to prevent warping and use fresh water every time

COST-WISE	
Implants	Rs 25,000 to Rs 40,000
Nobel Guide (computer-guided implant surgery)	Rs 50,000 per jaw (exclusive of implant cost)
Dentures (complete)	Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000
Porcelain-Base Metal Crown	Rs 3,500 to Rs 6,000
Procera: Crown & Veneer	Rs 13,000
Cercon: Metal Free Crown & Veneer	Rs 9,000
Whitening	Rs 7,500 to Rs 9,000
Zoom Whitening	Rs 15,000
Fillings	Rs 400 to Rs 600
RCT	Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,500
Ceramic Inlay	Rs 8,000 (per tooth)
Composite Bonding	Rs 1,500 (per tooth)
Gum Treatment (dental diode laser)	Rs 10,000 upwards
Scaling & Polishing	Rs 750 upwards
Deep Scaling (Curretage)	Rs 4,000 upwards
Gum Surgery	Rs 7,000 to Rs 10,000 (per quad)
* All rates are indicative	

titanium implant that acts like the root of the tooth and a retaining fixture that is incorporated into the base of the denture. A one-step procedure, it involves minimally invasive surgery with no sutures. "A discussion about dentures cannot be complete without mentioning **overdentures**," says Dr Bose. "Unlike a regular denture, where all the teeth are removed, some natural teeth are retained in an overdenture and used to anchor the denture. This fends off bone loss and provides a more stable denture."

IMPLANTS

"Complete dentures supported or retained by implants give the patient more confidence," says Dr Hrishikesh Pusalkar, consultant prosthodontist and implantologist at Kokilabhai Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai. "These prostheses do not move during eating and speaking. So, if there is adequate bone in the jaw to place

implants, it is definitely a better option." According to him, with implants it is possible to make fixed artificial teeth for patients who have one, more than one or all missing teeth. It's also a conserving procedure as teeth next to the gaps don't need to be trimmed down as in bridges. Another advantage of implants is that the bone around them does not atrophy.

THE PROCEDURE

After local anaesthesia, the gums are separated and the implant is drilled inside the bone. The gums are then sutured back in place. The implants are left to heal in the site for about three months. After three months the gums are uncovered and the artificial teeth are fixed on top of the implant. In some cases, a temporary crown can be placed on the implant immediately after insertion. The entire dental surgery can be planned on the computer and, with the help of guided drills, the

implants can be inserted with pinpoint precision, explains Dr Pusalkar. Thus, the procedure has become less invasive, facilitating faster healing.

THE CURRENT SCENARIO

"Implants can treat cases that are untreatable with conventional methods like dental bridges and dentures with superior aesthetic results," says Dr Smriti Bouri, head of dentistry at Delhi's Max Dental Care. They are the best solution in case tolerating a denture is difficult, and if loss of back teeth makes a bridge impossible; they also help avoid damage to the remaining teeth.

The use of **lasers** on the gums was first approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the early 1990s and on the teeth and jawbone in the mid-1990s. According to Dr Bouri, the radiation-emitting laser acts as a cutting instrument or

SAVE THE TOOTH

DENTAL COVERAGE IS NEGLIGIBLE UNDER HEALTH INSURANCE POLICIES. AN ANALYSIS BY SURESH K SETHI

Insurance companies are generally of the view that senior citizens are prone to lodging high claims, cannot pay market premium, and are always looking for a policy with low premium rates. They couldn't be more wrong. In India, senior citizens are the main investors in real estate, stock market, mutual funds, fixed deposits with the banking sector, and buyers of midsize/high-end automobiles. So it is unbelievable that they are only looking for low-end products when it comes to buying health insurance. The reality is that they have not been offered a product that fulfils their unique needs with respect to health insurance coverage or dental insurance coverage. A close look at the details of Apollo Munich Maxima Plan reveals an unreasonable limit of Rs 1,000 per year for dental care. What dental treatment can one have for Rs 1,000? And, in cities, is a claim or cashless settlement of Rs 1,000 worth the process involving time and effort?

The time has come when insurance companies should become realistic and start boosting their policies with



features in keeping with charges/fees/costs prevailing in the market. The middle class, upper middle class and HNIs (high net-worth individuals) are now looking for convenience and better treatment from service providers. They are looking for a policy that covers OPD as well as hospitalisation. At present no insurance company offers stand-alone dental insurance to any age group. In most policies issued by insurance companies, dental treatment is in the permanent exclusion list. Policies offered by life insurance companies are health saving plans (similar to

a vaporiser of tissues during surgical procedures. While it helps strengthen the bond between the filling and the tooth when used for curing a filling, it acts as a heat source and enhances the effect of tooth bleaching agents.

In laser dentistry, there is minimum bleeding and swelling during soft tissue treatment. Causing less pain, it may reduce the need for anaesthesia and the anxiety and discomfort drills might cause. However, the use of the dental laser remains limited because of cost constraints (much more expensive than drill) and effectiveness (it cannot be used on teeth with a filling already in place, for cavities located between teeth or to prepare teeth with bridges). The traditional drill may still be used for adjusting the bite and shaping the filling. During a **zoom whitening** procedure, the peroxide-based gel applied to teeth is activated with ultraviolet and blue

visible light. However, it may cause discomfort to patients who are sensitive to chemicals. Veneers or crowns may also be a better choice in case of serious tooth discolouration.

“Cone beam computed technology (CBCT) is an X-ray technology that produces 3D images of the structure being scanned,” says Dr Bouri. “This technique uses X-rays at a much lower radiation dosage and captures a large volume of area within 10 seconds. The CT scan contains all the volumetric data acquired from the scan for assessing bone health and placement of teeth in the jaw bone.” Still expensive (about Rs 4,000), CBCT is being used in some hospitals including Tata Memorial Centre in Mumbai, Christian Medical College in Vellore, Meenakshi Ammal Dental Hospital in Chennai, Galaxy Cancer Institute in Ghaziabad, and Mahajan Imaging Centre in Delhi.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Dental care is one of the most overlooked aspects of preventive health maintenance. Estimated figures for the last financial year show that the health insurance sector collected Rs 810 million in the field of oral health. Unfortunately, at present, most health insurance policies that are available do not cover OPD and dental check-ups. Of course, there are exceptions like ICICI Lombard, Apollo Munich, Life Insurance Corporation and Birla Sun Life, ICICI Prudential that reimburse a fixed amount for OPD and dental expenses. However, the reimbursement limit is minimal. Unless more initiatives are taken to rectify this anomaly, the growing number of dental hospitals and clinics offering comprehensive dental services will remain unaffordable for most silvers.

—*With input from Swati Amar in Chennai*

ULIP, where term insurance is given and the balance is invested in units)—here, your own money is available to you for withdrawal and payment of health/dental costs.

We at Insurance Foundation of India—a not-for-profit organisation working towards spreading the message of insurance and protecting the interests of insurance customers—believe ideal dental insurance should be developed in association with the Indian Dental Association where all members (dental surgeons) offer their services to support it. The policy will have two dental check-up coupons for every insured person. The insured gets a full dental check-up and cleaning on presentation of this coupon (prepaid, for which no claim form is to be filled and the dental surgeon gets payment on the same day from insurance companies). After six months, the insured can undergo another check-up. Any treatment required will be part of the insurance policy with co-payment of 10 per cent (contribution by the insured and balance 90 per cent paid by the insurance company). A regular check-up will result in early detection.

In the US, annual dental insurance premium is approximately 20 per cent of the sum assured. Let us make the

beginning in India with an individual sum assured of Rs 50,000 and a fixed premium at Rs 5,000 (irrespective of age). All family members should be covered in the same policy (this ensures higher premium collection, distribution of risk and no additional cost for issuing the policy). The definition of family can be broadened to include grandparents, parents, children (even earning members), and siblings. Even the faithful domestic help or driver who has been serving the family for many years can be included in this policy. (Family discount: Two to five members—10 per cent; six to 10 members—20 per cent.) So a family of seven will pay Rs 35,000 less 20 per cent i.e. Rs 28,000. Every member will be eligible for two coupons for a dental check-up. The dental surgeon will get Rs 250 per check-up, which means he has an assured Rs 3,500 from this family. Instead of receiving patients when they are suffering with dental pain, dental surgeons can become proactive and increase their customer base with this approach by inviting the insured for a regular check-up. They get potential customers as well as revenue (by collecting the coupons). Early detection and treatment of dental problems will result in lower costs, and satisfaction for the insured. It is easier and better to prevent rather than cure after the condition becomes complicated.

Suresh K Sethi is vice-president of Insurance Foundation of India (IFI) and chief executive officer of RIA Insurance Brokers Pvt Ltd. For more information, visit www.healthinsuranceindia.org



Vandana

Luthra

Defer ageing: A holistic approach to make you look and feel younger

It's all in the mind." Those who say this about age are right. Looking and feeling young has a lot to do with the right attitude, a positive outlook, not being stressed and, of course, a combination of balanced diet and exercise. All these contribute to making you stay fit and feel young as the years go by.

Being fit is half the battle won when it comes to fighting ageing; the other half is your outlook to life. Exercise not only keeps the metabolism going well, but tunes the heart, muscles and other body parts. One main reason that active people usually look and feel so much better is that their hearts are better able to pump blood, nourishing the body cells with oxygen. An older person who exercises regularly can achieve the maximum oxygen intake of a person 15 years younger. In a sense, the more active we are, the younger we become.

DIET AND EXERCISE

'Watch what you eat, and strike a balance' is the mantra. By all means indulge your taste buds once in a while, but maintain the balance by consciously choosing the next thing you eat and your physical activity pattern for the day. Foods that are low on fat, high on fibre and low on cholesterol help fight age, disease and dangerous free radicals in your body. Include fruits, fresh vegetables, whole grains and legumes in your diet. You've heard this many times before, but you must drink at least eight to 10 glasses of water a day; and sleep for eight hours every day. There's a reason why it's called beauty sleep—getting proper

rest ensures proper blood circulation, which is so essential for healthy skin.

Some forms of exercise strengthen the back muscles, making them less prone to injury and strain. Other types of exercise help prevent bone loss by strengthening the bones and keeping them from becoming brittle. Exercise also improves cardiovascular fitness, slows bone loss that occurs with osteoporosis, helps lower blood sugar in people with diabetes, and helps control cholesterol. In addition, exercise promotes weight loss, muscle strength, and a general feeling of well-being. Studies suggest that lack of exercise contributes to frailness and weakness in elderly people.

An older person who exercises regularly can achieve the maximum oxygen intake of a person 15 years younger

The best types of exercise to start off with are low-impact; some favourites being walking, bicycling, weight training, yoga, workplace exercises, and stretch exercises.

HEALTH FOODS

Health foods such as spirulina, alfalfa, tofu and wheatgrass have proven health benefits. Typically, these are foods that have micro nutrients, antioxidants and phytochemicals but, more important, do not have high sugar, salt or fat content. With the

availability of varied labelled products, one must be able to differentiate quality products from misleading alternatives. For example, a label reading 'no added sugar' could translate into 'no added sugar, but plenty of invisible sugar'; or a label reading 'fat free' could actually mean 'fat free, but full of sugar and chemicals.'

It is important for people to be aware what foods are best suited to their body requirements in various health and therapeutic conditions. More significant, they should know the contraindicated conditions for the particular health foods they may be consuming. It is always best to consult a qualified expert to know which health foods are beneficial, and in what quantities and manner they must be consumed. At VLCC, we have always advocated healthy and holistic weight management under the guidance of qualified doctors and nutritionists, with a scientific approach to achieve overall wellness. This is what sets us apart and has helped in the phenomenal growth of the brand in the wellness segment.

ANTI-AGEING PROCEDURES

Technology has advanced tremendously. There are fantastic anti-ageing procedures and treatments available to make you look younger. At VLCC, we have married scientific treatments and traditional therapies to create anti-ageing programmes that are highly effective. These programmes stimulate the structure and properties of skin fibres to give firmness and elasticity. We use concentrated oxy-enriched plant extracts to give

extra hydration to further firm the skin texture. These are preventive and restorative treatments that visibly improve fine lines, wrinkles and crow's feet. The products used are Ayurvedic and free from side-effects.

Other anti-ageing solutions available include anti-ageing facials such as micro-biolifting and Lifting C, and a whole range of dermatological procedures like chemical peels, micro-dermabrasion, Botox and collagen fillers, which are administered completely by qualified doctors and experts. There is also the Supreme DHE-AGE skin revitalising treatment that works wonders on maturing skin, giving immediate and visible results.

Whenever you opt for anti-ageing treatments, you must ensure that the person performing the treatment is an expert and qualified to do so, and that the treatments themselves have no side-effects.

5 MUST-DOS TO STAY YOUNG

- Keep your mind active and young—take time out to enjoy the things you really love, or take up a new hobby; brain games, crosswords and puzzles are also a fun way to exercise the mind
- Learn to handle stress; organise your day so you minimise the tension
- Get physical; exercise every day: start walking or swimming, or both if you can manage
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet that is high on fibre and low on fat
- Be positive and cheerful.

And, of course, do remember to get your health checks done regularly. Enjoy your silver years; look good and feel great.



Vandana Luthra is founder-mentor of VLCC, a leading slimming, beauty and fitness brand with over 225 centres in 90 cities across India, UAE, Nepal, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar. Her vocational training school, the VLCC Institute of Beauty & Nutrition, has 43 campuses in 35 cities. If you have a question for her, write to contact@vlcc.co.in



Shameem

Akthar

Waging a war: Yoga can help control herpes zoster

Herpes zoster is a skin rash that erupts when a latent chicken pox virus revives in a nerve. Though it affects all age groups, it is more common among silvers, with the neuralgia (post-attack nerve pain) being more chronic and lasting longer.

Scientists are still scratching their heads as to why a latent chicken pox virus, possibly part of childhood legacy, should rear its head so much later in adults. But they have discovered through much diligent analysis, that it normally takes place when there has been immunosuppressant therapy (for auto-immune ailments) or even stress. As failing immunity could well be the cause, yoga can help control the problem. The main focus in yogic therapy is to boost immunity and rework the diet.

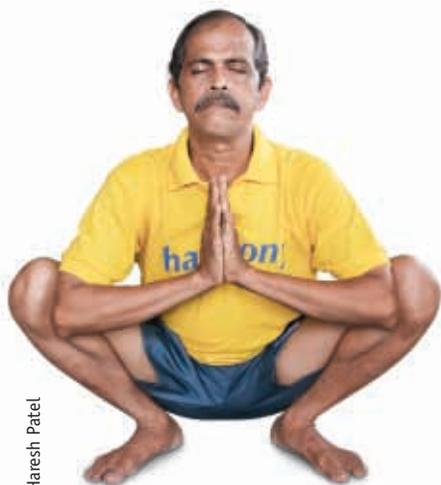
Eating more fruits, vegetables and well-structured vitamin and nutrition supplements can contain future episodes as can caloric restriction during acute attacks. To boost

immunity, the main line of treatment includes sun salutation (*surya namaskar*); joint-releasing poses that help relieve stress and toxins; leg raises (including all variations); squats like the goddess pose (*kaliasana*); and abdomen-twisters like the lying abdomen twist pose (*supta udarakarshansana*), among others. Breathing practices (*pranayama*) that help you relax and harmonise the body-mind complex like energy channel purifier (*nadi shodhana*), humming bee (*bhramari*) and victory breath (*ujjayi*) are all recommended. Including soothing meditations like sleep of yoga (*yoga nidra*) will also help remove stress from the system completely.

Even if the practice is short, it must be done daily to have an impact. In fact, regular sun salutation is known to boost immunity like no other practice in yoga. And *ujjayi pranayama*, by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, restores the body's homeostasis (repair and recovery of the nervous system) after stress.

YOGIC MOVES Goddess pose (*kaliasana*)

Squat fully on the floor, with feet flat on the ground, about a foot-and-a-half apart, flared outwards lightly. Bring hands together in a gesture of prayer or *namaste* at the chest, elbows between knees. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhaling, press knees together, so elbows are pushed inwards. Inhale. Exhaling, push elbows out so knees separate. This is one round. Do up to 10 rounds. Avoid if you have knee problems. **Benefits:** This pose improves stamina and uses resistance training to boost body strength and muscular coordination. The opening action works on the entire chest region, boosting heart strength and thymus gland activity, which is directly linked to immunity.



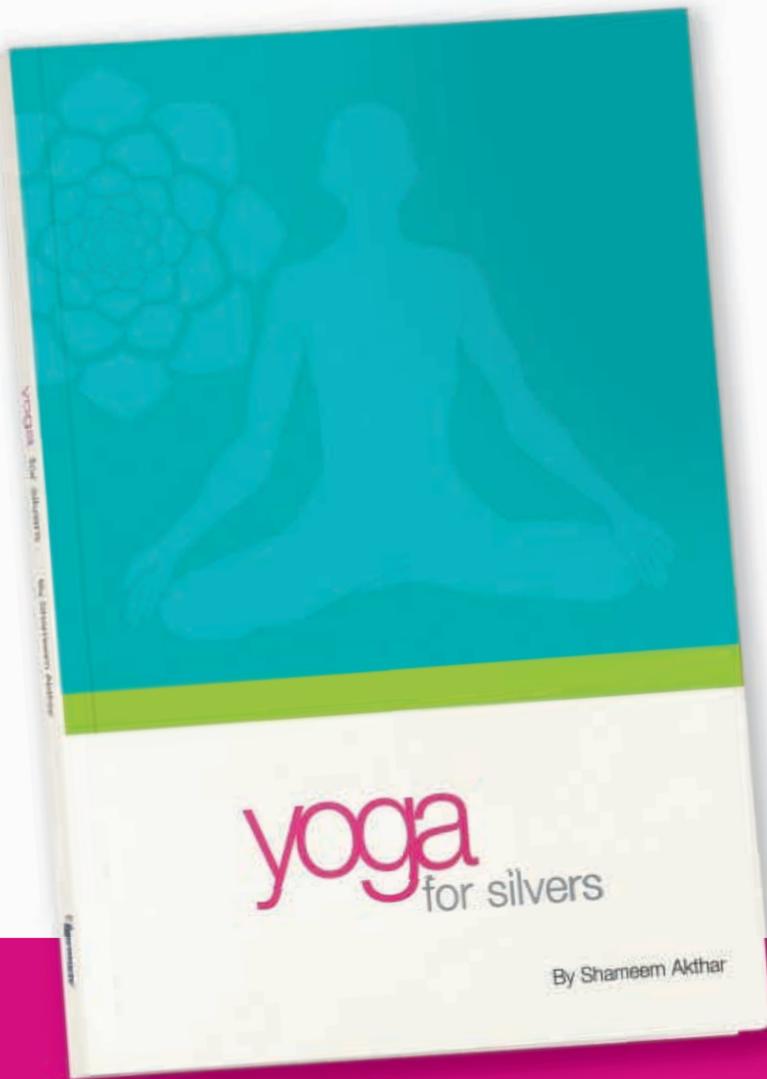
Haresh Patel



Shameem Akthar is a Mumbai-based yoga acharya



If you have any queries for her, mail us or email at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org
(Please consult your physician before following advice given here)



yoga for silvers

Yoga shiromani and acharya **Shameem Akthar** urges the elderly to heal body, mind and soul with ancient yogic habits that are easy to learn. From the philosophy behind practices and poses to step-by-step instructions with illustrations, this is a comprehensive guide written especially for Silvers.

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BLOODLESS COUP



A new non-invasive surgical procedure known as Magnetic Resonance guided Focused Ultrasound Surgery (MRgFUS) can treat uterine fibroids. Fibroids—the most common benign tumour in women—are usually evident during the later reproductive years and can cause problems like pelvic pain, incontinence and abdominal swelling. Jaslok Hospital in Mumbai has recently begun to offer the procedure. “MRgFUS is a breakthrough technology that utilises magnetic resonance imaging to visualise tissues in the body and high-intensity focused ultrasound waves to heat and thermally destroy

diseased tissue in case of fibroids, breast cancer, bone metastasis, prostate cancer and liver tumours,” Dr Shrinivas Desai, director of imaging and interventional radiology at Jaslok Hospital, tells *Harmony*. “The treatment can save patients from having to undergo hysterectomy. It also helps plan and monitor treatment. This is the best thing that has happened to medicine since the scalpel!” The procedure is not very time-consuming either; it takes only two or three hours and does not require a hospital stay. However, it is still fairly expensive—the cost ranges between Rs 50,000 and Rs 100,000.

BE HAPPY!

According to a new American study, **apathy and depression may increase an individual's risk of progressing from mild cognitive impairment (MCI) to dementia**, including Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia. Identifying 358 individuals with MCI, researchers used a questionnaire to collect data on depression and apathy (both neuropsychiatric symptoms). The findings reveal that while risk of developing dementia was 66 per cent higher in individuals with depression compared to those without depression, the risk increased to 99 per cent in individuals who suffered from apathy. Though it is unclear if depression causes dementia, various factors can impact and increase its risk—inflammation of brain tissue,

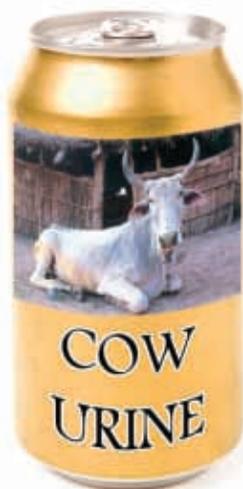


increase of certain proteins in the brain that occur with depression, and lifestyle factors related to long-term depression like diet, exercise and social interaction. The next logical step is to undertake research to verify whether treatment of depression or apathy in MCI may delay the onset of dementia. "A lot of people over 60 suffer from MCI," Dr B R Madhukar, consultant psychiatrist at Manasa Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Bengaluru, tells *Harmony*. "When a person suffers from depression, his attention and concentration go haywire. Lack of family support to cope with stress is an added cause. Ultimately, all these factors have an effect on brain function and memory—at times, reducing it almost by 10 per cent—and the chances of silvers suffering from depression getting dementia increase."



Men pause, too

According to researchers in Europe, **male menopause occurs in less than 3 per cent of all men who have reached middle age**. Delayed compared to women, the onset of male menopause is usually between 60 and 70 years of age. Though testosterone (male hormone) levels reduce between 1 and 2 per cent approximately every year after a man crosses 30, a more drastic fall after the age of 45 is termed as late-onset hypogonadism or male menopause. During the study, testosterone levels of 3,369 men aged between 40 and 79 were measured and details regarding their sexual, physical and psychological health were recorded. Besides the three sexual symptoms—decreased frequency of morning erection, decreased libido and erectile dysfunction—other symptoms included depression, fatigue, anxiety, poor concentration, forgetfulness, and sleep disturbances. "While women go through menopause owing to a drop in the oestrogen hormone, men undergo a similar phenomenon because of decline in androgen—the male testosterone that stimulates and controls development and maintenance of male characteristics," Dr Prabha Eliya Singhan, senior gynaecologist at Eliya Prabha Maternity Centre in Bengaluru, tells *Harmony*. "During this phase, which is medically referred to as perimenopause or male menopause, men experience symptoms like fatigue, weakness, depression, and sexual problems. A natural process, it usually happens when they are in their 70s. Though hormonal replacement therapy can help, it should be done with caution, as it can lead to undesirable side-effects including prostate cancer."



Holy cow!

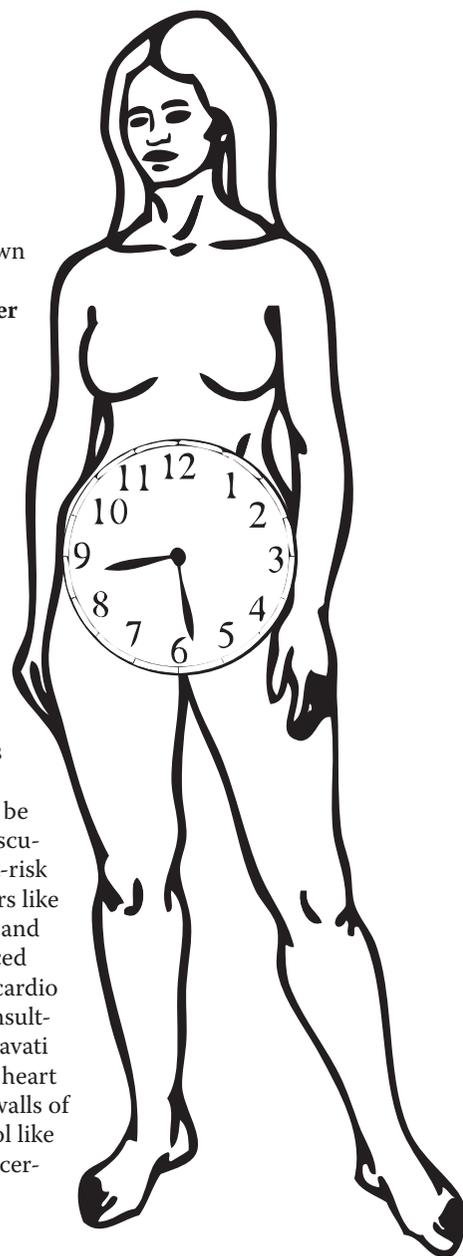
Working in collaboration, two Nagpur-based organisations—Go-Vigyan Anusandhan Kendra and the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)—have developed ‘Gomutra Ark’, a new anti-cancer drug, from cow urine. Redistilled Cow Urine Distillate (RCUD) is a composition that acts against genotoxicity (the deleterious action on a cell’s genetic material). Containing benzoic acid, hexanoic acid and ammonia in quantities ranging from 5 ml to 15 ml per litre, it helps protect and repair DNA from oxidative damage. Oxidative DNA damage is a leading cause of ageing, cancer and other diseases. Research conducted on three patients—two suffering from throat and uterine cancer—showed that RCUD resulted in tremendous improvement (earlier, chemotherapy treatment had not yielded much benefit). “Cow urine has medicinal properties,” Sunil Mansinghka, coordinator at Go-Vigyan Anusandhan Kendra tells *Harmony*. “It removes toxins from the body and makes us stronger. Several cancer patients who came to us reported that Gomutra Ark had increased their treatment efficacy by 60-80 per cent.” Patents for the drug were received from China in April 2009 and the US in May this year.

Double JEOPARDY

RESEARCHERS IN THE US have shown that women who experience early menopause before the age of 46—either naturally or surgically through removal of both ovaries—run twice the risk of heart attack, stroke or other cardiovascular events in later life.

According to the study, women who undergo hormone replacement therapy (HRT), prescribed to reduce the risk of heart disease or osteoporosis common after menopause, are also at similar increased risk. Previous research had found a link between early menopause and cardiovascular disease mostly in white and European populations, but the new study of more than 2,500 participants aged between 45 and 84 has a multiethnic representation of women.

Concluding that the menopause age can be used as a marker for future heart and vascular disease risk, the researchers advise at-risk women to improve modifiable risk factors like cholesterol and blood pressure, exercise and follow a healthy diet. “Oestrogen produced during every monthly cycle has natural cardio protective factors,” Dr Kiran Coelho, consulting senior gynaecologist at Mumbai’s Lilavati Hospital, tells *Harmony*. “It protects the heart from accumulation of plaque along the walls of arteries and helps to keep bad cholesterol like low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and triglyceride levels in control.”



A cancer awareness and screening campaign launched by the Meghalaya government in collaboration with UK-based MKC Roko Cancer Trust in April this year is expected to benefit around 100,000 people in the state. Two state-of-the-art mobile cancer detection units and a team of doctors and volunteers will provide free detection facilities and further investigative tests. The project will cover seven districts of Meghalaya by December 2010.

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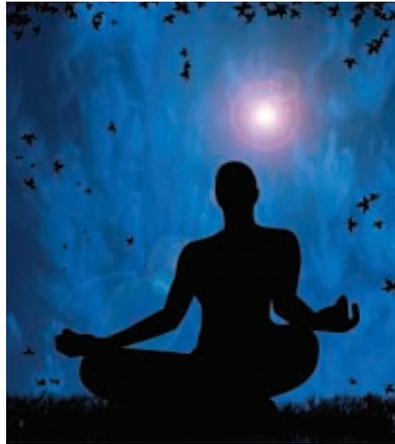
Be still, my lips

Silence speaks volumes if only you listen, says Osho

Socrates was given the opportunity that he could choose either death or remain alive but not preach his message to the people...he could remain alive only on one condition: that he will not talk about his truth. Socrates laughed and rejected the whole thing immediately. He said, "There is no need for me to be alive then. If I cannot say my truth, if I cannot live my truth, if I cannot convey my message, then what is the need for me to live? Then I would rather choose death."

The magistrate was surprised. He said, "You need not answer right now. You can have time, you can think over it. Don't be in such a hurry! Life is precious—how can you be so easily ready to die?" Socrates said, "There are only two possibilities. If I die, then these are the two possibilities: either I die completely or only the body is left behind and something of my essential core still lives. Both are perfectly good. If I die completely, there is nobody left to be afraid, to suffer, to be miserable. So why I should be afraid if I die completely as the materialists say? Perhaps they are right. But then there is no fear, because I will not be here, so who is there to be afraid of? Or, the second alternative is as the spiritualists say: that I will not die—then why be worried about death? Only the non-essential will be gone, the essential will be still alive. It is worth risking the non-essential for the truth."

My own feeling is that Socrates knew perfectly well that he was not going to die. The moment you understand that you are eternal, all fear disappears.



Silence can be profane too. Silence can be sacred too. Silences has as many nuances, as many dimensions as your being has

And society exists through exploiting your fear; hence, it teaches you from school to university, it devotes almost one third of your life to learning words, language, logic. It is not concerned at all that you should understand silence. That's the function of a Master: to undo all that society has done to you, to help you to go beyond words.

And you can experience it happening here—you can hear the silence. And when you hear it, there is immediate understanding. Understanding comes like a shadow following silence. To understand words and to hear words

is very simple. Anybody can do it; just a little education about language is needed, nothing much. But a tremendous transformation is needed to hear silence and to understand silence.... Silence is the basic requirement of understanding God, the basic requirement to know truth. Father Ryan and Anderson, one of his parishioners, were playing a friendly round [of golf] together. The priest had been having trouble all day. At the 17th hole, his ball fell into a deep sand trap. Several times he whacked away; sand flew, but each time the ball rolled back into the hazard. Still silent, but with his lips compressed and his eyes burning with frustration, Father Ryan stared at the ball for a long time. "Father," said Anderson, "that's the most profane silence I have ever heard."

Silence can be profane too. Silence can be sacred too. Silence has as many nuances, as many dimensions as your being has. It is multidimensional, and it is tremendously pregnant. Being here with me, being a *sannyasin*, can be defined very simply as learning to be silent—sitting in silence with me. I am using so many words for the simple reason so that words can give you the gaps. I can simply sit here... one day I am going to do that, when I will be just sitting with you. It is really a torture for me to talk. I would like as quickly as possible just to sit silently with you. But if you are not ready to understand it, you will fall asleep: you will start dreaming, you will start dozing away. My words keep you awake, and just between the words I give you gaps. And those are the real, essential things. Waiting for another word, you have to listen to silence.

Excerpt from The Wild Geese and The Water (Westland; Rs 350; 344 pages) by Osho. Osho was a Indian spiritual guru whose talks blended Eastern philosophies of inner transformation with insightful perspectives on Western science and technology

“Helping parents better communicate with their children gives me enormous satisfaction”

DR YOGINI PATHAK, 70

GUIDING LIGHT

Samir Pathak

Growing up in Surat and Vadodara, I moved to Mumbai and completed my graduation from Wilson College in 1955 in English, Philosophy and Gujarati. I returned to my native place, Olpad in Surat, to do my post-graduation from Gujarat University. Married in 1958, I was lucky my husband C H Pathak, a professor in botany, was always very supportive and encouraged me to study further. The following year, I did my diploma in early child education—a subject that always interested me—from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MS University).

I began my career in 1960 as part-time supervisor of municipal schools in Vadodara. Both my children were very young and a full-time job was not feasible. In 1975, I joined as su-

perintendent at the department of human development and family studies at MS University. Each day of the 20 years I spent there was a challenge and gave me the opportunity to learn something new. After I became associate professor, my responsibilities included supervising teachers, guiding postgraduate students in their thesis, and being in charge of village placements aimed at sensitising students about rural communities.

Following my retirement in 1995 at the age of 60, I became honorary convener of the Women Scientists' Association in Vadodara and held the position of general secretary (outstation) of the Indian Science Congress between 1995 and 1998. It was a challenging role and involved a lot of networking with teachers.

As the field of parental guidance fascinated me, I decided to combine my work experience with my knowledge of child education. I now work as a consultant and parent counselor for a playschool. I oversee the administration of the school twice a week and help appoint and train teachers. I conduct sessions with parents and guide them about the importance of positive parenting.

Nowadays, with both parents working in most families, children tend to exhibit a lot of behavioural problems. My advice to parents emphasises the importance of positive communication with their children rather than giving them instructions. It gives me great satisfaction when I know that my counselling has borne results.

—As told to Dhanya Nair Sankar

PASSPORT TO SUCCESS

EXPERTS ANSWER YOUR QUERIES AND CONCERNS ON JOBS AFTER RETIREMENT

I am a retired bank employee. The surge of students opting for overseas education has given me the idea of starting a visa facilitation centre. How should I go about it?

The number of Indian students going abroad for studies is growing by leaps and bounds. Thus, starting a visa facilitation centre is a sound idea. This is a profit-sharing business and you need to identify and partner with a government-recognised visa application and facilitation centre in India. Set up office in your house initially. About Rs 30,000 should be sufficient to acquire a computer, high-speed internet broadband connection, printer and phone connection. Advertising your services is necessary to get business. You can put an ad in local newspapers, organise seminars in schools and college and put banners and posters outside educational establishments. Once approached by a customer, you will need to contact your partner to go ahead. Each successful visa application can earn you a commission of about 50 per cent of the total fee. Good service will get you word-of-mouth publicity and boost your success rate. Just two to three clients are adequate to recover your investment amount.

—Ram Kumar

Kumar runs a UK student visa facilitation centre in Malappuram, Kerala



I recently retired as an arts and crafts teacher. Do you think I can start classes to teach embroidery and tailoring at home?

Tailoring is a good source of income—you just need a skilful pair of hands and good eyesight. Though you may be approached by homemakers round the year, you would also get students to learn tailoring during school and college vacations. Invest in a couple of good automatic sewing machines. They cost around Rs 20,000 each. Besides the usual ruler, scissors, measuring tapes and chalk, stock up on a variety of threads, decorative beads, buttons, and lace. Work out a schedule where students are first taught to draw the basic design on brown paper, then cut and stitch the material. Take lessons on how to use the sewing machine and its embroidery options. You can teach both hand and machine embroidery. Next, progress to different designs and patterns for dresses, salwar *kameez*, *kurta-pyjama*, shirts and blouses. I charge Rs 3,000 a month for two-hour classes held thrice a week. To start, advertise through friends and relatives. Distribute leaflets if you want more business.

—Purvi Parmar

Parmar conducts tailoring classes in Virar, a Mumbai suburb

I will retire next year. After dabbling in animation and Photoshop, I have developed an interest in Web design. How can I develop myself as a freelance Web designer?

It is best to do a Web multimedia course from a reputed school like Animation & Digital Media Education Centre (ADMEC), Maya or TG Multimedia in Delhi. These institutions not only train you but also assist you with placements, and generally do not have any age limit for joining. Once you complete the course, you can get work from sectors like IT, advertising and banking. Designing a simple Web page can get you up to Rs 100, whereas the use of flash and animation will fetch you anything between Rs 350 and Rs 500 per page. You can also design logos for corporate houses. Designing a complete website can get you around Rs 10,000—even more if you are dealing with a big brand. However, it is best to start with smaller brands, build a good portfolio and then go for more established ones. Though you can work from home, you need to contact your clients regularly and keep their requirements in mind while designing.

—Urmil Sharma

Mumbai-based Sharma is a successful freelance web designer



Courtesy: Sony India

SINGING IN THE RAIN!

A study conducted last year in Britain's Brunel University revealed that syncing the pace of one's exercise with the beats of a song can increase the efficiency of the exercise. According to the same study, music also helps block out that little nagging voice in your brain that prods you to quit exercising. Despite such scientific reasons, if you have still abandoned your exercise regimen because it's pouring outside, here's reason for you to step outside again. Sony India has introduced the Walkman W Series that is totally rainproof—so much so it can even be cleaned under running water.

Besides a wire-free ergonomic design, the Walkman W Series comes with a friendly music navigation interface,

ZAPPIN, for speedy music browsing. When ZAPPIN is activated, the Walkman plays the main chorus of each song as you sift through multiple playlists and folders in your music library. And the music doesn't run out of breath too soon either—you can enjoy up to 11 hours of playback time on a full charge of 90 minutes. At 43 gm, it's also a rather lightweight companion for your daily brusque walks. Go ahead, play all your favourite songs and burn some serious calories.

Price: Rs 4,990

Available in pink, black and white at all Sony Centres across India

Right is might

The Right to Information Act introduced a revolution in transparency and accountability in public agencies. Anand Patwardhan tells you how it empowers you. From next month, *Harmony* will begin a series on silvers mobilising the RTI Act for society at large

Which territorial area does the Act cover?

It extends to the whole of India except Jammu & Kashmir.

What does 'information' mean?

'Information' includes records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, circulars, reports, etc, relating to a public body and any private body that can be accessed by a public authority.

What information can be exempted from disclosure?

This concerns the strategic, scientific and economic interests and sovereignty of the country; information that a court prohibits from disclosure; and information that would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or a State Legislature, etc. Organisations that deal with such information are excluded from this Act but are bound to provide information pertaining to allegations of corruption and human rights violations.

What is a 'public authority'?

Any authority or body or institution constituted under the Constitution or by any other law of the State.

Who is a Public Information Officer (PIO) and what are his/her duties?

PIOs are officers designated in all administrative offices to provide information under the Act. A PIO must comply within 30 days or the application is deemed as rejected. Information concerning life and liberty of a person must be provided within 48 hours. When an application is rejected, the PIO must state his/her reasons for doing so. A PIO who fails to provide a decision within the specified period shall be deemed to have refused the request.

Who are appellate authorities?

The Appellate Authority describes various authorities senior to the PIO. These may include an officer within the organisation or the Central Information Commission (CIC) or the State Information Commission (SIC). There are also various provisions for appeal including a first and second appeal.

How is the Central Information Commission (CIC) constituted?

The CIC includes one Chief Information Commissioner and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC). The SIC is similarly constituted. The Chief IC of the CIC and SIC and other Information Commissioners are appointed for a term of five years. They must be persons of eminence in public life and they must not be members of any legislative body or hold any other office of profit or be connected with any political party.

How can one apply for information under the Act? And what is the reporting procedure?

Citizens must apply in writing or through electronic means in English or Hindi or in the official language of the area to the PIO, specifying particulars of the information sought. Reports prepared by the CIC and SIC every year, containing all relevant details of RTI applications received by each public authority and ministry, are tabled in Parliament and the State Legislatures.



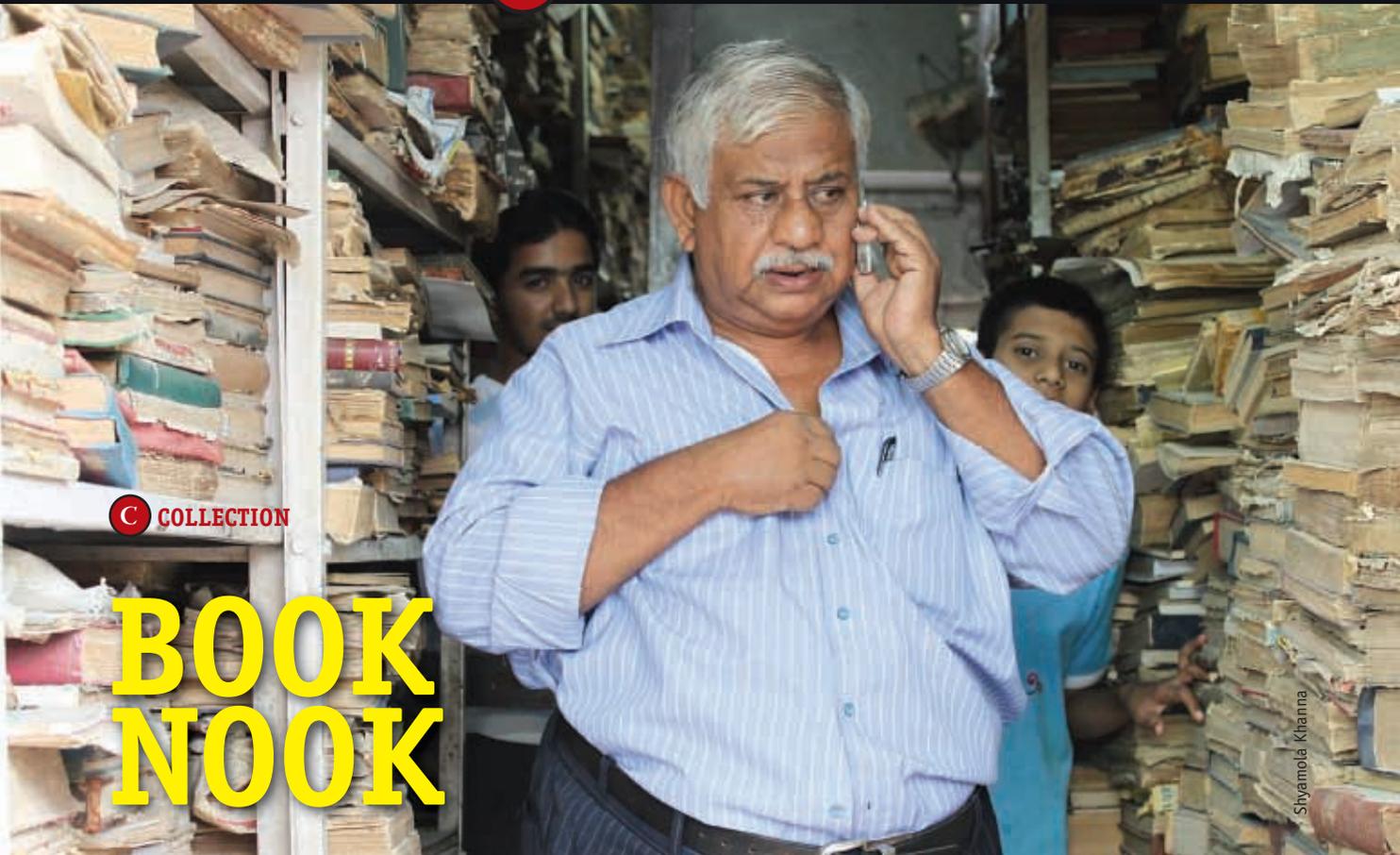
What are the various powers and functions of the Information Commissions?

The CIC/SCIC have the powers of a Civil Court such as summoning and enforcing attendance of persons, compelling them to give oral or written evidence on oath and produce documents and other relevant material, and issuing summons.

Information Commissions receive complaints from any person who:

- has not been able to submit an information request because a PIO has not been appointed.
- has been refused information that was requested.
- has received no response to his/her information request within the specified time limit.
- thinks the fees charged are unreasonable.
- thinks the information provided to him or her is incomplete, false or misleading.

Anand Patwardhan is a senior lawyer in the Consumer Court and honorary treasurer of the Bar Association of Consumer Courts



C COLLECTION

BOOK NOOK

Shyamola Khanna

On a rainy July morning, when we meet Ahmed bin Mohamad Bafanna, his brows are creased with worry and dread. The rising water levels on the street are threatening to do some serious damage to the 3,000 rare books in his bookshop, Haziq & Mohi Rare Book Sellers. The shop is easy to miss—being not much larger than a closet, nestled in a crowded lane near Chowk Masjid in Hyderabad. For scholars, authors and librarians from around the world, though, it's a treasure trove where they expect to covet literature dating back a few centuries.

When we visited the shop, we came across original editions of books commissioned by the Nizams and written by British writers: *Glimpses of the Nizam's Dominions* by A C

Campbell published in 1898; Major James Renell's 200 year-old book with the unbelievably long title, *Memoirs of a Map of Hindustan or the Mughal Empire with an Examination of Some Positions in the Former System of Indian Geography*; *Hyderabad under Sir Salar Jung* by Maulvi Chiragh Ali, published in 1888; *Hyderabad Affairs* by Maulvi Syed Mehdi Ali, revenue and finance secretary to the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad; and many Arabic and Persian manuscripts, some dating back to the 16th century. It's not surprising then to know that author William Dalrymple bought a trunk full of books from Haziq & Mohi when he was doing research for his bestseller *The White Mughal*.

For 50 year-old Bafanna, his fascination for books developed early in his

childhood when his grandfather would tell him to fetch the 'red book on shelf two' or the 'green one on shelf three' from the book case in their house. After studying Islamic history at Nizam's College, he worked at his uncle's bookshop, which he later inherited. He started out selling textbooks and then stocked up old books, sourced from the libraries of erstwhile aristocracy. The regal lineage probably explains the steep price—some of the relics are priced as high as Rs 3,000.

Though he fumigates his shop often to keep paper-devouring insects at bay, he is still worried about his legacy: "My son is not interested in taking over," he laments. We hope the museums and libraries listen to Bafanna's silent plea.

—Shyamola Khanna

PET PROJECT

Three generations of a family in Pune train dogs in obedience and etiquette. Khursheed Dinshaw braves the barks





Hemant Patil

C LEGACY

A boisterous group of Labradors, Dalmatians, Bull Mastif s, German Shepherds, Alsatians and Dobermanns stare curiously at you when you enter the Patil Dog Training Centre on Kondhwa Road in Pune. The attention can be overwhelming and slightly unnerving if you are not used to canine enthusiasm and inquisitiveness. All the dogs, though, are surprisingly well-behaved thanks to the stern command of one man: Sidram Patil. A former police officer, the 65 year-old opened the centre after his retirement two decades ago. Today he is assisted by his son Shivraj, 40, and grandsons, Prabhu, 16, and Deepak, 14. There are 15 to 20 dogs residing at the centre at any given time of the year. They come from all over Maharashtra and are mostly part of the police force, which explains the rigorous security and obedience training they undergo. “A crucial part of the training is the analysis of the mind of the dog, his likes and his fears. You have to playfully teach him and respect his moods,” says Patil. Each generation of the family shares a unique bond with the dogs, one that is shaped by their interactions with them. While Patil trains the dogs and also goes on outdoor training, Shivraj supervises their food, bathing, exercise and correspondence with their masters. “I stay at the training centre while Prabhu and Deepak help me with these daily activities,” he adds. The centre also has a pet hostel, and the number of dogs goes up to 40 during holidays and festivals. Here, the phrase ‘it’s a dog’s life’ gains whole new meaning. There is overhead lighting and bedding during winter; special coolers in summer; separate bathrooms for toilet-training; hygienic kennels; wholesome food; and a vet on call. The range of facilities has only kept growing over the years. And with the youngest generation poised to take over the family outfit, the dogs can look forward to living it up in even more style. Both Prabhu and Deepak are confident they want to follow in their grandfather’s footsteps. “I love these dogs like my family,” says Prabhu, “but know when to let go of my attachment when they have to go back to their owners after their training is complete.”

THE GREAT MAKEOVER
NIZAMMUDIN, THE HERITAGE HUB OF DELHI, IS GOING THROUGH A SPIFFY MAKEOVER. THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (AKDN) IS HEADING THE INITIATIVE IN TIES WITH THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA, THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI AND THE CENTRAL PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT. ONE OF THE FIRST TO GET A MAKEOVER WAS THE 16TH CENTURY HUMAYUN’S TOMB. NEXT IN LINE ARE 100 MONUMENTS LOCATED IN THE 180-ACRE SPRAWL. JUDGING BY THE SUCCESS OF AKDN’S EARLIER EFFORTS—RENOVATION OF MIRZA GHALIB’S HOUSE AND THE 17TH CENTURY CHAUNSATH KHAMBA—ONE HAS MUCH GRANDEUR TO LOOK FORWARD TO.

1857, REVISITED

The National Archives and the India International Centre (IIC) in Delhi are digging up the past and unearthing some amazing treasures. Recently, many documents connected to the Great Indian Revolt of 1857 were displayed at an exhibition held at the IIC, including the original copy of the letter declaring the trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar; a lithograph of the siege of Kashmiri Gate; the original seal of the Rani of Jhansi; and the most sensational of all, the judgement papers awarding Mangal Pandey a death penalty. This exhibition is first in a series titled *Making of Modern India*. Next in line are exhibitions featuring literature from the life and times of Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad and Dadabhai Naoroji.

Bonding over poetry

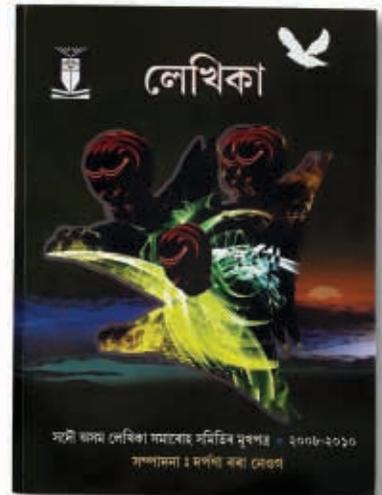
In the past three decades, 76 year-old Sheela Bar-

LITERATURE

thakur has helped 40,000 women discover the poetry buried deep in their hearts. In 1971, Barthakur, then a college lecturer, turned to social work and started an organisation called Mahila Shilpanusthan, through which she gathered a handful of women to impart handloom and handicraft training to poor women. Two years later, the movement picked up momentum and Barthakur established five adult education centres in and around Tezpur, through which 200 women gained literacy. Inspired by the indomitable spirit of her sister-

hood, in 1978, Barthakur started the Sadau Asam Lekhika Samaroh Samiti, a

modest convention of women writers of Assam that soon burgeoned into a mass movement across the state. At present, the Samiti has 300 branches including one each in Mumbai and Delhi. Women from all walks of life—mostly housewives—contribute stories, poems, ceremonial songs, folk songs, hymns and prayers to the Samiti's hefty annual publication *Lekhika*. Each branch of the Samiti prints its own annual. Though Barthakur rarely makes any literary contribution to the annual, she continues to evaluate



written works sent to her. The membership fee is delightfully low: just Rs 20. For more information, contact Binita Dutta on 09435352965.

BALANCING ACT

AT 80, he hangs upside down from a rope, dances with lit candles balanced on his head and palms, and performs complex yoga *asana* with the ease of a 20-something. And no, Mumbai-based Shantilal Shanghvi doesn't consider himself a poster boy for silver fitness. He enjoys the myriad contortions of *malkhamb* for it challenges his physical and mental vigour. "*Malkhamb* is a great way to exercise your whole body in the least possible time," explains Shanghvi, who started practicing the fading art at the age of 70. "As your entire body gets twisted, it also gets massaged, thus rejuvenating each cell."

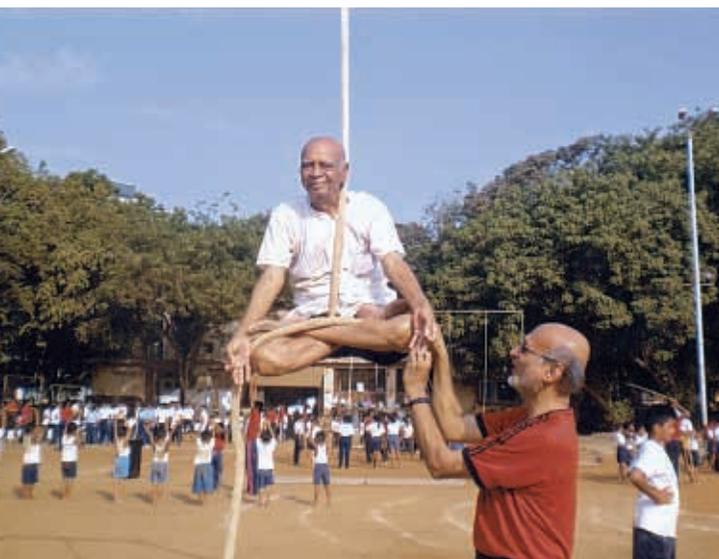
MEDLEY

The traditional Indian gymnastic sport caught Shanghvi's attention when he witnessed a training session at Shivaji Park in Mumbai. "All the other students in my batch in the training camp were youngsters," recalls Shanghvi, who retired as a cloth retailer at the age of 65. "I was slightly apprehensive at first, but I knew I had to let go of my inhibitions if I wanted to master it."

Today he practises *malkhamb* relentlessly. "I wake up at 4 am and perform *suryanamaskar* and other yoga *asana*," explains Shanghvi, who has a rare sense of discipline and concentration. How else can you explain an octogenarian doing a complicated dance with candles balanced precariously on his palms and forehead? Very often he adds more 'twist' (literally) to his performance—he balances himself on a steel plate and moves around the room, turning the plate clockwise with his toes. And all this, while the candle flames flicker calmly. At time, he even somersaults! Not surprisingly, he has an enthusiastic audience. He routinely performs in schools, at community centres and functions hosted by NGOs. *Malkhamb*, though, remains his favourite stress-buster.

Shanghvi is worried about the survival of this art form. "All children should be trained in this martial art," he avers. "It helps with concentration, speed and flexibility. What better way to combine fitness and fun?"

—Dhanya Nair Sankar



WHERE ELSE
WOULD YOU FIND
SOMEONE ABOVE
55 YEARS
WHO'S PERFECTLY
IN TUNE WITH YOU?

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MAN vs. MACHINE

Timeri Murari gets paranoid about 'home conspiracies'

Recently, I have begun to experience some dread at leaving home. It has nothing to do with travelling—crowded flights, departure delays, lost luggage, terrible food, security checks and rude immigration officials. They are now par for the course when we decide to take a holiday even within the country, let alone abroad. It's the return home that worries me the most. When I'm strapped in for the landing, I start to worry about what's happened in my home during my absence. I've now begun to become paranoid about home conspiracies. I am certain that my house, noting my absence for a couple of weeks, starts plotting against me the moment it sees the taillight of the taxi leaving the compound.

The first signs of the conspiracy began a year ago. My refrigerator, which had worked perfectly well until the moment I came home, blew a gasket (or something). Then the washing machine hurled out the dirty laundry as if we'd insulted it by daring to soil its pristine interiors. When I needed a drink of water from the Reverse Osmosis gadget that pours out 100 per cent pure water that has been zapped by many exotic rays—and run through more filters than an obstacle course—it refused to even let a drop pass through its complicated intestines. As Donald Rumsfeld, the American secretary of state, once said, 'stuff happens'; and I just assumed that machines do have nervous breakdowns.

So, I called the products' telephone numbers to send their specialists to fix the problems. Now, if you have tried calling these people you'll

notice India has introduced the free 800 dialling code. My manufacturers are somewhere else in India, as far away as they can get from my city where I bought their machine. And they use the computerised answering machines that ask many questions with alternate choices, and ask you to press the correct button. One of the reasons I left the US was to escape these automated telephones as I longed to hear a human voice. But they have searched me out in backward India. At the end of an hour I ended up with the manufacturer's service agencies 'just around the corner'.

I am certain that my house, noting my absence for a couple of weeks, starts plotting against me

At last, a human voice, but a reluctant one, as they don't want to repair the machine but sell you a new one as 'your machine old sir, buy new one; no parts available'. Anything past its one-year guarantee period is obsolete in their view. It's only after cajoling and pleading do these men agree to make the house call. Soon, like doctors, they will stop this practice and insist you take your machine to their clinics. Naturally, it cost me a few thousand rupees for parts to fix the machines, and a service charge for their visit.

I thought no further on my recalcitrant equipment until I left home

again. This was a longer trip and I was glad to be home again. The fridge, water purifier and washing machine were delighted to have me back and purred happily to life. But the audio refused to even swallow a CD and spat it out in disgust, my wife's desktop computer sat in sullen silence, not even deigning to respond to my punching the start button repeatedly, and the geyser sprayed me with cold water. I went through the same earlier routine of calling distant numbers and begging mechanics to show up and repair the equipment. This time when I came home I was prepared. I was aware the machines were taking their revenge on my leaving them at home. I entered warily and went around switching the equipment on and off just to check they were all working. I sighed in relief. However, when I turned the key for my car, it didn't even click.

I know, I know, in another age all this would never have happened as we didn't possess such machines in our home. We had *dhobi* (unreliable men who vanished for weeks and returned with someone else's clothes); we boiled and strained our water; and, as we didn't have fridges, we ate everything immediately. We had wind-up gramophones with black records and typewriters that didn't need power. Cars were repaired with a hammer and screwdriver. But those good old days are long gone. I worry now about my next trip. Will my house still be there when I get home—and will it let me in?

Timeri Murari, 65, is an author and screenplay writer living in Chennai

PASSAGES

Carved in stone

EXCERPTS FROM EMPEROR ASHOKA'S LANDMARK THIRTEENTH EDICT...

When King Devanampriya Priyadarsin had been anointed eight years, the country of the Kalingas was conquered by him.

One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence; one hundred thousand in number were those who are slain there, and many times as many those who died.

After that, now that the country of the Kalingas has been taken, Devanampriya is devoted to a zealous study of morality, to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality.

This is the repentance of Devanampriya on account of his conquest of the country of the Kalinga.

For, this is considered very painful and deplorable by Devanampriya, that, while one is conquering an unconquered country, slaughter, death, and deportation of people are taking place there.

But the following is considered even more deplorable than this by Devanampriya.

To the Brahmanas or Sramanas, or other sects of householders, who are living there, and among whom the following are practiced: obedience to those who receive high pay, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives, to slaves and servants, and firm devotion—to

these then happen injury or slaughter or deportation of their beloved ones.

Or, if there are then incurring misfortune the friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives of those whose affection is undiminished, although they are themselves well provided for, this misfortune as well becomes an injury to those persons themselves.

This is shared by all men and is considered deplorable by Devanampriya.

And there is no place where men are not attached to some act.

Therefore even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kalinga,

would not be considered very deplorable by Devanampriya.

And Devanampriya thinks that even to one who should wrong him, what can be forgiven is to be forgiven.

And even the inhabitants of the forests which are included in the dominions of Devanampriya, even those he pacifies and converts.

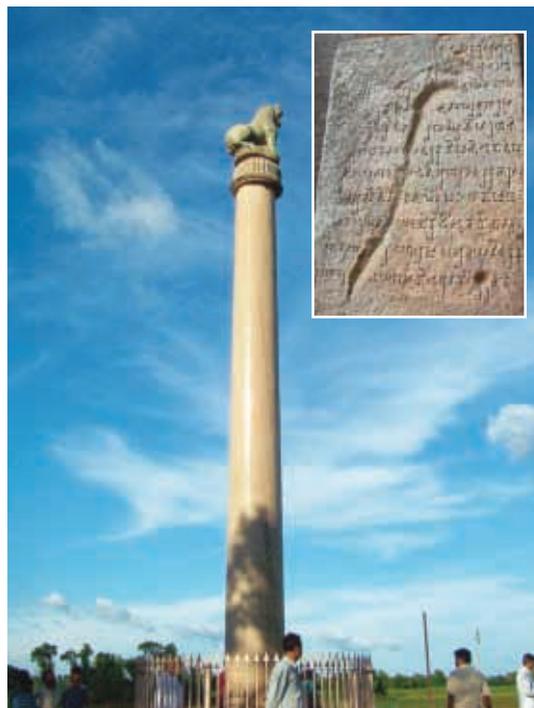
And they are told of the power to punish them which Devanampriya possesses in spite of his repentance, in order that they may be ashamed of their crimes and may not be killed. For Devanampriya desires towards all beings abstention from hurting, self-control, and impartiality in case of violence.

And this conquest is considered the principal one by Devanampriya, with regard to the conquest of morality.

And for the following purpose has this re-script on morality been written, in order that the sons and great-grandsons who may be born to me, should not think that a fresh conquest ought to be made, that if a conquest does please them, they should take pleasure in mercy and light punishments and should regard the conquest of morality as the only true conquest.

This conquest bears fruit in this world and in the other world.

And let there be to them pleasure in the abandonment of all other aims, which lead to immorality.



NOT THE OTHER CHEEK

THE SLAP

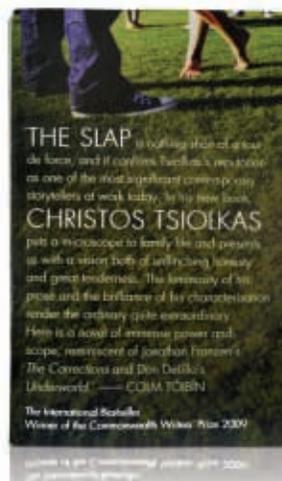
BY CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS

TUSKAR ROCK LONDON; RS 499; 483 PAGES

Hector loves his Indian wife Aisha, but can't seem to fight off his obsession for younger women, especially Connie, who assists Aisha at her veterinary clinic. Connie's friend Richie is a young gay boy in love with Hector. Hector's cousin Harry loves his sea-facing bungalow and his wife Sandi and son Rocco. That he is given to violent temper only his wife knows... until he slaps a child at a family-and-friends get-together. Then on, the lives of everyone at the brunch go into a spin, for the child is Hugo, Aisha's friend Rosie and Gary's son. It's a crime to hit a child. Fighting her difficult middle-class background and

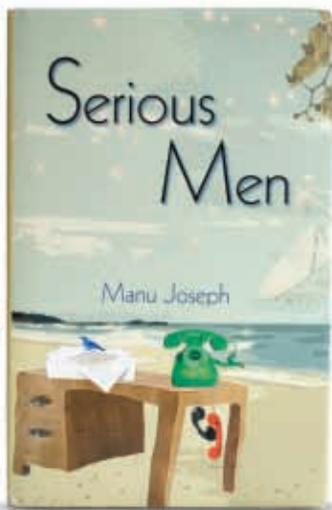
existence, Rosie refuses reconciliation. It doesn't help that Hugo is an uncontrollable four year-old breastfeeding child who could have cruelly hit Rocco if Harry hadn't intervened. It doesn't help either that Hugo is lonely between a drunkard, under-employed Gary and so-called child-focused Rosie. No one has the right to hit a child.

In the telling of a universal story, Tsiolkas lays bare the souls of Australians and Greeks settled in a foreign continent. He visits new shores and revisits the old—the bridge that societies are forever trying to build between



generations. At one point Hector's father Manolis reflects whether his children's generation is mad. "Was it that they had so much money they didn't know what to do with it? Was it his generation's fault for spoiling them? Had they spoiled them?" *The Slap*, which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize 2009, answers questions about self-righteousness, the pleasure in others' misfortune, greed, and other human failings.

—Meeta Bhatti



LOVE RETOLD

SERIOUS MEN

BY MANU JOSEPH

HARPERCOLLINS; RS 499; 326 PAGES

Much like the disgruntled waiter who likes to spit in the soup before serving it up, our anti-hero Ayaan Mani believes in small acts of subversion. A Dalit who feels the weight of centuries of oppression, he is the personal assistant to astronomer Aravind Acharya, the leader of a band of Brahmin scholars "who think deep, expensive

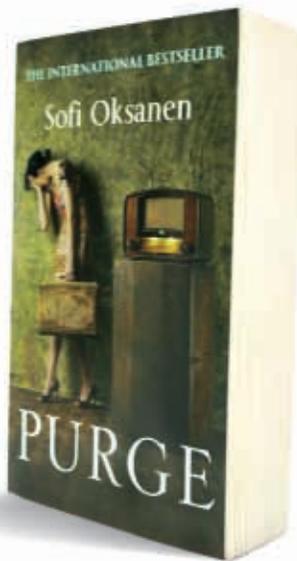
thoughts" at the Institute of Theory and Research, Mumbai. There, he withholds or grants access to his boss on a whim; pens fictional quotes; and eavesdrops compulsively. To make life more liveable in the cramped room he shares with his wife and 10 year-old son, Mani invents a tale of the boy's genius; harmless, at first. Meanwhile, things heat up at the Institute—the "war of the Brahmins" between Acharya, who wants to investigate his theory about microscopic aliens falling to earth, and his colleagues; sexy newcomer Dr Oparna Goshmaulik's seduction of Acharya and its repercussions; and the collision (and collusion) of the chalk-and-cheese worlds of Acharya and Mani.

First-time author yet seasoned journalist Joseph weaves it all together without ever losing the plot. His gift: the ability to really *see* people; his words a delight. Like Mani's walk along Marine Drive when he encounters "furtive lovers...with new jeans so low that their meagre Indian buttocks peeped out as commas." It's true that this is a book that explores caste, gender, tokenism and inequity with delightful irreverence, and without a whit of political correctness. It is also a book about men of science, where the science is remarkably sound. But ultimately *Serious Men* is not so much any of these things as it is a story—a seriously funny one.

—Arati Rajan Menon

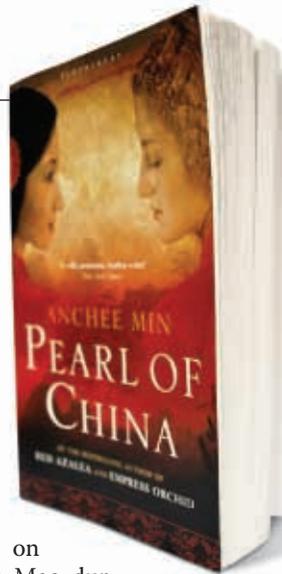
BRIEFLY

“Footsteps of a fly across the cheek” and “burning darkness” is all they felt in the room behind the cupboard in a countryside house in a village called Koluvere in Estonia. ‘They’—nationalist Hans Peck in the 1940s and then his granddaughter Zara in 1992—met the same fate, but had different battles to fight and fought them originally (or did they?). A story of three generations (Aliide Truu, her sister Ingel and brother-in-law Hans, Ingel’s daughter Linda and granddaughter Zara), Finnish writer **Sofi Oksanen’s PURGE**



(Atlantic Books; Rs 299; 356 pages) doesn’t reveal itself until the end. It’s about love, war, and the attached unreasonableness; how both bring hope and hopelessness. Stares, sniggers and stones, Aliide has fought them all but can’t forget the militia’s chrome-tanned boots on her neck. And will not have any of it any longer, certainly not in her old age. So when the goons come looking for a girl on the run, she looks after her, just the way she looked after her only love, Zara’s grandfather Hans, 50 years ago. Blood, silence and death—*Purge* is as vivid as it gets. Whatever life there is, it’s in Ingel’s and Aliide’s recipes; the only thread that connects them forever.

An act of repentance doesn’t merely purge us but sometimes wrings out a thing of delicate beauty. **Anchee Min’s PEARL OF CHINA** (Bloomsbury; Rs 650; 278 pages) is wrought from both pain and atonement. Min, who blindly denounced Nobel Prize winning author Pearl S Buck on the orders of Madame Mao during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, realised the magnitude of her folly when she read Buck’s *The Good Earth* 20 years later. *Pearl of China* is the author’s plea for forgiveness and reconciliation. It focuses on the enduring friendship between Buck and a poor Chinese girl Willow. A skilled thief, Willow who lives with her rudderless father and ailing grandmother near the Yangtze River



in Southern China, forges an unshakeable bond with Buck, the offspring of Presbyterian missionaries. Their friendship endures trials of childhood, separation, unhappy marriages and, finally, love for the same man. The book is not without its share of irreverence and funny moments though, all mostly centred on religion. Buddhism and Christianity struggle for one-upmanship in the dialogues between Buck’s father Absalom and Willow’s father as they go around converting poor Chinese farmers into devout Christians. Using a fairly engaging blend of humour, tenderness and emotion amid political ferment Min tries to show us the softer side of the fuming dragon.

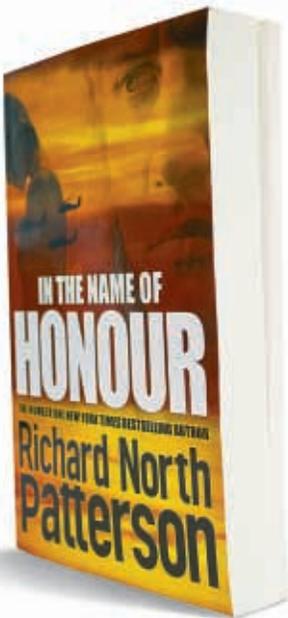
When Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw didn’t make it to medical school, her father advised her, “Failure is temporary; it’s giving up that’s permanent.” She listened—and went on to start India’s largest biotech firm, Biocon. Indeed, the right counsel can change your life, says the team from *Business Today* as they serve up a compendium of golden advice received by India’s finest: **THE BEST ADVICE I EVER GOT** (Collins Business; Rs 150; 142 pages). The 55 personalities from the worlds of business, science, politics, medicine, literature and entertainment include former president of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, whose mentor Acharya Mahapragya urged him to work to evolve a system of peace where “nuclear weapons will be ineffective, insignificant and politically inconsequential,” a year-and-a-half after the Pokharan nuclear tests in May 1998. And cardiac surgeon and philanthropist Dr Devi Shetty who was advised by Mother Teresa to help others and make the world a better place. If you’re looking for insight in dealing with personal and professional challenges, this tiny volume of inspiration may just be the ticket.



Yishey Doma's soulful literary effort **LEGENDS OF THE LEPCHAS: FOLK TALES FROM SIKKIM** (Tranquebar; Rs 200; 137 pages) encapsulates 22 mythological tales of this mountainous region. The stories start from the time when “there was nothing but vast emptiness on earth and in the sky” and Itbu-moo, the Mother Creator, shaped mountains, rivers and lakes before creating the first man and woman. Centred on gods and goddesses, demons and fairies, humans and the animal world, this slim volume gives readers an insight into many of the traditional customs and beliefs followed by the



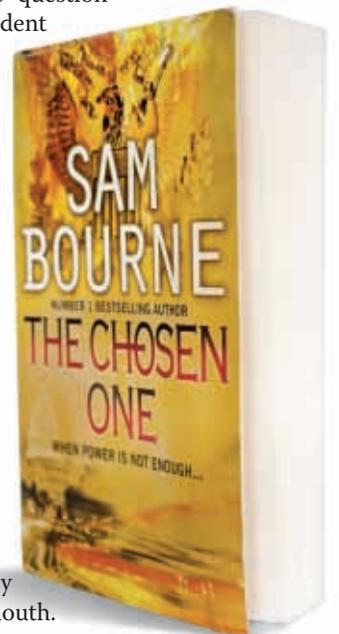
Lepchas even today. In “Death of Lasso Mung Puno”, the 12 years it took the Lepcha warriors to kill the demon king Lasso Mung Puno taught them the concept of time, dates, months and years. The 10 titles given to them by the ‘bongthing’—a powerful shaman created to destroy demons—was the origin of their patrilineal clans. The ancient lore weaves a sense of timelessness, imbuing familiar places in Sikkim—Daramdin, Rangpo, Chumbi—with a touch of ethereal magic. An enchanted world brought to life by Pankaj Thapa’s black-and-white illustrations that accompany each story. Fascinating.



In his last book, *The Spire*, **Richard North Patterson** took a break from being America’s conscience by writing a simple campus murder-mystery. But with **IN THE NAME OF HONOUR** (Macmillan; Rs 499; 401 pages), he’s back doing what he does best. After dealing compassionately—and skilfully—with incendiary issues like abortion, race and gun control, he turns his pen to war, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder that wrought havoc among Vietnam vets a generation ago, and is now taking its deadly toll on young Americans who have returned from

Iraq. The military runs in the DNA of the McCarrans and the Gallaghers, two families inextricably bound together. But this bond is caught in the crosshairs when Lt Brian McCarran comes back from Iraq and shoots and kills his commanding officer Capt Joe D’Abruzzo—who just happens to be the husband of Kate Gallagher, Brian’s childhood friend. When ace lawyer Capt Paul Terry sets out to defend Brian in a court-martial, aided by Brian’s sister Meg, he stumbles into secrets stacked like musty old newspapers in the darkest family closets. Even as he tells a gripping story, Patterson exposes the apathy of the military establishment and puts the focus firmly back on the devastatingly high cost of conflict. A book for our times.

It’s refreshing to see **Sam Bourne** ditch the done-to-death Templar/religious sect/medieval secret genre of fiction he has specialised in thus far and write a simple tale of power and politics centred on the office of the president of the United States in **THE CHOSEN ONE** (HarperCollins; Rs 250; 438 pages). It’s also extremely appropriate considering Bourne is a pseudonym for award-winning journalist and broadcaster Jonathan Freedland, who has covered five US presidential elections (including Obama’s). All that experience has been put to good use in this thriller: presidential foreign policy advisor Maggie Costello goes to bat for her embattled boss when he is accused of a series of scandals by a man, who is subsequently murdered. The question before her: is the president sinner or saint? As she searches for the answer, a presidency and the balance of power in the US lie at stake. So does her life as she begins to uncover a nefarious scheme with its roots deep into the past. Bourne’s characters may not be memorable but they do their part to keep the plot chugging along and the pages turning on auto-pilot. The real sting lies in the tail—an ending with the perfect twist to get conspiracy theorists foaming at the mouth.



BIKE BOX

n. A traffic light intersection feature that creates a designated area for bicycles to stop in front of cars when the light is red.

Example: Located at the entrance of the intersection, a **bike box** is a demarcated area that straddles the bike lane plus one or two vehicle lanes, and is basically designed to give cyclists a headstart when the light turns green. Well-used in Europe, bike boxes can't work without right-on-red restrictions.

—John Lorinc, "Toronto's worst intersection?," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 June 2010

tenpercentery

n. A talent agency.

Example: Author Nick Hornby, an Oscar nominee this year for adapted screenplay for *An Education*, has signed with WME for representation in film and TV. Hornby has not previously signed with a **tenpercentery** on this side of the pond.

—Cynthia Littleton, "WME signs Hornby," *Variety*, 9 March 2010



RIDE EASY

BEST buses in Mumbai will now have more exclusive seating for silvers, women and handicapped citizens. Where senior citizens earlier had two reserved seats, from 1 August, there will be four. The reservation will be implemented in single and double-decker buses as well as air-conditioned BEST buses. In double-decker buses, seniors will now have three reserved seats, and in midi buses, the seating has been increased from one to three. BEST was motivated to increase the seating following the deluge of requests from silvers. It's proof that you have a voice that can change your world.

Virtual volunteering

pp. Performing charity work online.

—*virtual volunteer n.*

Example: **Virtual volunteering** can be an efficient and cost-effective way to help organisations, said Gordon Mayer, vice president of Community Media Workshop, which provides communications training for Chicago-area nonprofits.... Some organisations have found that virtual volunteering lets them harness the talents of people who have only a few intermittent hours to give.

—Pam DeFiglio, "Virtual volunteering carries real benefits," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 December 2009

auto-eating

pp. Eating without thinking or without being hungry.

Example: Women can munch their way into a bigger dress size in weeks by **auto-eating** the calorie equivalent of a Big Mac a day.... Boredom is the main reason for auto-eating.

—Jo Willey, "Boredom makes women put on weight," *Daily Express*, 24 May 2010

NUTRITARIAN

n. A person who chooses foods based on their micronutrient content.

—*nutritarianism n.*

Example: There are flexitarians, who eat a little bit of meat, and pescatarians, who skip meat but consume seafood. Raw foodists don't believe in cooking. And now come the **nutritarians**. Central to nutritarianism is the understanding that fruits and vegetables contain thousands of vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals—substances they believe are not found in any other food source.

—Douglas Brown, "Nutrition ambitions: nutritarian diet is easy; just try to eat a rainbow", *The Denver Post*, 7 June 2010

“Sports do not build character, they reveal it.

—American journalist Heywood Broun



Forgive many things in others; nothing in yourself.

—Roman poet Ausonius

tkday

n. A person's 10,000th day since birth. Also: 10K day

Example: Approaching his **tkday**—or 10,000th day on Earth—Horne decided he wanted to leave a permanent mark on history, and as a lover of language and devout *Countdown* fan, he decided that the best way to do that would be to get a new word into the dictionary.

—Steve Bennett, "Wordwatching by Alex Horne," *Chortle*, 14 January 2010

SEXSOMNIA

n. A sleep disorder in which a person engages in sexual behaviour while asleep.

Example: The phenomenon, called **sexsomnia**, is a form of parasomnia, a disorder in which people who are asleep but in a state of semi-arousal engage in behaviours they are not conscious of. **Sexsomnia** is defined by the International Classification of Sleep Disorders and may take place during a sleepwalking episode.

—Roni Caryn Rabin, "No sex, please: you're sleeping," *The New York Times*, 8 June 2010

daycation

n. A day trip or other short vacation that does not require an overnight stay. Also: day-cation.

—daycationer *n.*

Example: If you don't have the time or the money for vacation this summer, maybe you can spare a few hours for a **daycation**. Somewhere between the staycations of 2008 and the nycations of last year there's the daycation trend of 2010.

—Christopher Elliott, "6 tips for taking a summer daycation," *MSNBC.com*, 6 July 2010

PINATUBO OPTION

n. A proposed technique for reducing global warming by injecting reflective particles into the stratosphere to mimic the effects of a volcanic eruption.

Example: One of the least crazy possible methods is the **Pinatubo option**, in which we would somehow cloak the Earth's atmosphere in a layer of reflective particles, which would block the sun and cool the planet just enough to maintain some kind of climatic equilibrium.

—Bill Gifford, "Books on geo-engineering," *The Washington Post*, 13 June 2010

frohawk

n. An afro styled as a mohawk. Also: **fro-hawk**.

Example: Back at work, Mr Tulloch combs and shapes 13 year-old Gregory Caesar's hair, ploughing an ever-shorter furrow with his clippers.... If there's anything that unites the cultures, Mr Tulloch said, it's this hairstyle. Call it the mohawk, the faux-hawk or, as Mr Caesar does, the **fro-hawk**, everyone wants it.

—Joe Friesen, "Hip-hop barbers break the race barrier," *The Globe and Mail*, 11 June 2010

VIRTUOPSY

n. A virtual autopsy performed using medical imaging devices that create a detailed, three-dimensional image of a body.

Example: Professor Thali and his team carried out an autopsy on the woman, but not the kind we're used to seeing in television shows such as *CSI* and countless police dramas. This was a scalpel-free, virtual autopsy, or **virtopsy**—a radical new approach to forensic investigation, in which Professor Thali is one of the pioneers.

—Laura Spinney, "Body of evidence: a radical new approach to forensic pathology," *The Independent*, 31 May 2010

Cradle to gate

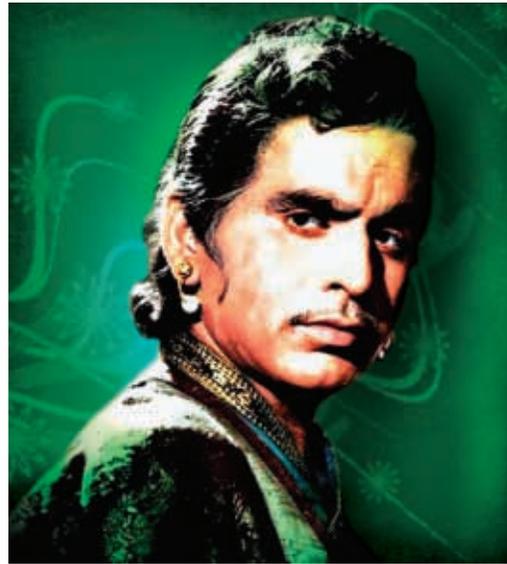
n. The portion of a product's lifecycle from inception to the point where it leaves the manufacturer.

Example: Salt Spring Coffee's French Roast Nicaragua is carbon neutral from **cradle to gate**. This means that the company has bought enough carbon credits to offset all the carbon produced until the consumer buys the coffee. That's only 37 per cent of the carbon created by one bag of coffee. After that, it's up to the consumer to pick up the slack.

—Rebecca Lindell, "You want cream, sugar or carbon credits with that?," *The Globe and Mail*, 29 June 2010

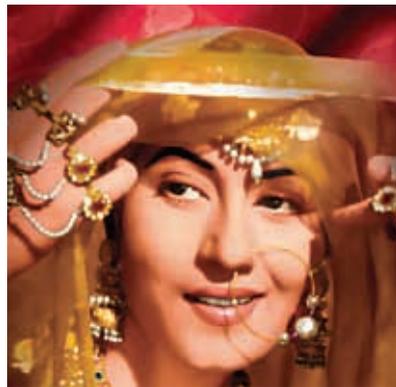
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1960: A love story

Though countless memorable love stories have enjoyed their stipulated three hours of fame on Hindi film screens, there never was—and perhaps never will be—one as visually riveting and magnificent as *Mughal-e-Azam*. Made at a cost of Rs 10.5 million over nine years, director K Asif's opulent and intense period drama is still counted among the most extravagant movies ever made in India. It continued to be the highest grosser for 15 years till *Sholay*



was released in 1975. Magnitude and aesthetics apart, *Mughal-e-Azam* remains entrenched in public memory by dint of its unforgettable performances. No other on-screen pair has been able to portray the angst of doomed love with such aching subtlety and intensity than Salim and Anarkali, played by Dilip Kumar and Madhubala. Though the movie was re-launched in a digitally coloured avatar in 2008, diehard romantics still sigh over the black-and-white version.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: **AUGUST 1960**

- On 12 August 1960, Echo I, the world's first communication satellite, was launched by NASA.
- On 16 August 1960, Cyprus gained independence after 82 years as a British colony.
- On 19 August 1960, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 5 into orbit, with dogs Belka and Strelka, 42 mice and two rats. The medley gained the distinction of being the first living animals to return safely to earth after being sent into orbit.



Then: Cola bottle Now: Herb pot

Instead of trashing a cola bottle after use, recycle it into a wacky upside-down herb pot for your kitchen garden. Cut off the bottom of the cola bottle, wrap a swathe of cello tape around it leaving enough unglued to wrap over the edge of the bottle. Punch three holes on the cello-taped edge. Take herbs (parsley or mint) that have been planted in a temporary container a few days ago, so the soil is stuck around the roots like a small solid ball. Push the herbs upside down through the neck of the bottle. (Wrap cellophane or paper like a cone around the herbs to push it through the narrow neck or you may damage the tender shoots.) Loop a plastic cord through the holes and hang the pot on a hook near your kitchen window.

FACTS

- » It takes about 450 years for one plastic bottle to break down into the ground.
- » Recycling a single plastic bottle can save enough energy to light up a 60 W bulb for about six hours.
- » Thousands of marine animals and over 1 million birds die every year owing to plastic pollution.

Jit Ray

MORE RECYCLE IDEAS...

Cut a plastic bottle off in the centre and use it as a vase or as a nifty pot for your money plants. Or use it as a pencil or pen holder.

“Senior citizens have the required time and wisdom to devote to the environment. They have the power to make the world a better place.”

Dr H P Maheshwari, 62, for helping to curb the use of plastic



Courtesy: Kamakshi Maheshwari

It started with a simple, personal resolve—to avoid using plastic bags. But looking at how plastic had polluted the River Kalpi in Gwalior, retired professor of history Dr H P Maheshwari soon sprang into action. In 1997, he started collecting pieces of cloth from home and converting them into bags. This green warrior, who is also a governing council member of the NGO INTACH, says he next employed poor women to make cloth bags. Spreading awareness, however, was the biggest challenge. He and his daughter Kamakshi, 25, started visiting schools

and colleges in Gwalior, encouraging people to use paper or cloth bags or plastic bags above 20 microns. Since 2006, the 62 year-old has distributed over 6,500 cloth bags and 10,000 paper bags, a feat that earned him accolades from the mayor of Gwalior and a place in the *Limca Book of Records*. Now, the mayor has made it mandatory to use only plastic bags above 20 microns in the city. Maheshwari is now busy introducing the eco-friendly cause to Sualkuchi, Chandmari and the Pan Bazaar area near Gwalior.

—Dhanya Nair Sankar

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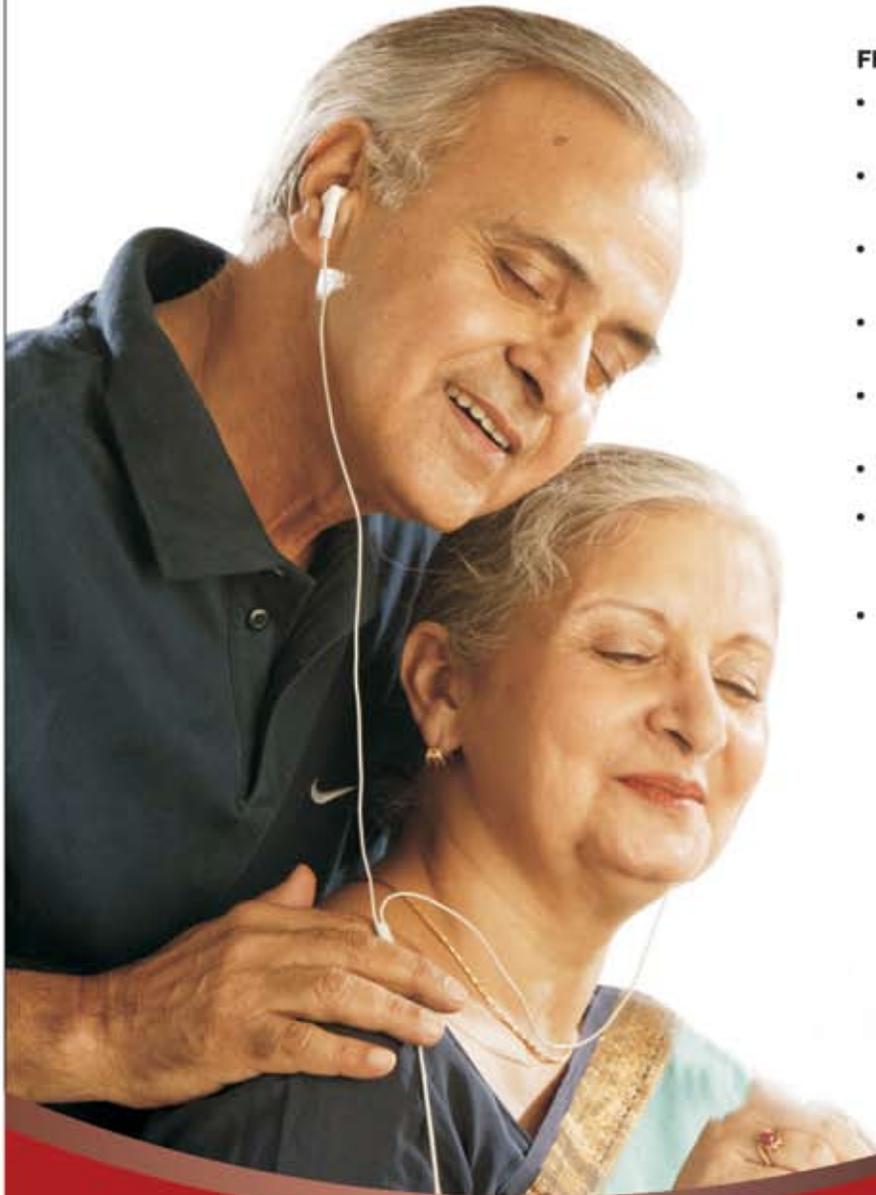
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