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A common voice

Many people who saw the July issue of Harmony asked me: “Who’s on the cover?” “Why did you feature him?”

His name is Dinkar Patkar, a 75-year-old retired engineer. He is everyman. He could be you.

It was a conscious decision to have an unknown face on the cover, just as the cover story, “Silvers and the State”, was a conscious decision to bring to the fore all the concerns of Indian silvers—financial, medical and social. We wanted to establish upfront that Harmony is not a recreational glossy, but a serious publication. We wanted to emphasise that the government and NGOs should work in tandem to bring about change. We wanted to say clearly that Harmony is about positive advocacy, not random political criticism.

It was almost a karmic coincidence that the issue hit the stands on July 8, the day of the inaugural session of Parliament. The magazine was distributed to parliamentarians—and received congratulations from both houses, and parties across the board.

We strongly believe in the need to move beyond platitudes. Before the budget, I had written to Finance Minister P Chidambaram with some suggestions. These included direct tax incentives to ensure that silvers would remain in a position to retain a minimum tax-free income; direct tax incentives to corporations, the business community and society at large to encourage them to contribute to welfare schemes; direct tax incentives to assess relatives on whom silvers are financially dependent; and tax-friendly investment avenues with better market returns. This apart, we suggested that medical expenses and house rent could be completely tax-deductible.

Of course, it was a fervent wish list. This year’s announcement of a Senior Citizens’ Savings Scheme offering an interest of 9 per cent a year is welcome. Though the scheme is for people over 60, we hope it eventually considers individuals above the age of 55 just like the Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana—one of the casualties of the Budget.

While we feel the government has not adequately addressed the issue of tax incentives, we recognise the limited time Mr Chidambaram had to bring out this budget—and the limited room to manoeuvre. But the government needs to act, sooner than later. I can only hope that in the time remaining till the final passage of the Finance Bill, the government will be able to consider more benefits.

I received a letter recently, praising Harmony for “transforming the elderly into silver citizens”. Transformation, though, is more than an editorial decision; it needs one vital element to succeed: You. It’s time for Indian silver citizens to get proactive about their rights, their needs, their expectations. Harmony is ready to amplify these concerns, ensure they are heard far and wide—but the voice has to be yours.

Finally, it’s Independence Day this month: India is 55 plus, just like Harmony readers, but still young, vibrant, full of hope, and going places. Join the club!

Tina Ambani
editor’s note

We are three issues old and it’s time to celebrate. Last issue’s cover story, grim in its presentation of the sorry state of affairs for silverers at every level, touched a nerve—letters and requests for support continue to pour in. Your voice will help us take forward an advocacy bid for better facilities.

This issue salutes five exceptional personalities whose energy and approach to life is, to put it in Assistant Editor Anuradha Kumar’s words, “astonishing”. Their career trajectory and zest for life exemplifies ‘wellness’ and its accompaniments: achievement, attitude and acceptance.

From Shobhaa De to Zohra Sehgal, from the 50s to the 90s, Kumar finds they are all “living each day with that thing called fun”. Let’s take a leaf from their books, and live life to the fullest.

First aid comes in various ways: reflexology, the gadget guide, and tips to grow your own patch of green. Along with the spoken words, we bring you unspoken nuances through photographs that zero in on the moment. Raghu Rai and Colston Julian have contributed to the big picture in our cover story. And our photo essay, in celebration of India’s 57th year of freedom, features Narayan Vinayak Virkar’s vignettes from another era. In keeping, we bring you a slice from Gandhian Kala Shahani’s life. Her voice echoes that of thousands of Indians who continue to abide by principles, despite odds.

Happy Independence Day.

— Anupa Mehta
Executive Editor

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people make the pictures. I just receive what they have to give,” is the dictum that lensman Suresh Natarajan lives by. He captures Zohra Sehgal, our cover girl, her many moods, her age-defying attitude, with unmatched verve. Natarajan, who works out of Mumbai, is also known for his pictures of Bollywood stars.

Call her a Mumbaikar, and Sharada Dwivedi, author, publisher, heritage conservationist and writer, is likely to shrug her shoulders in disdain. For her, it’s “Bombay, not Mumbai”. She has co-authored several books on the city with architect Rahul Mehrotra. Dwivedi writes for Indian and international journals and is a director with publishing company Eminence Designs. About the photo essay she’s curated for this issue, and Narayan Vinayak Virkar’s archival photographs, she says: “It’s a priceless legacy. We must preserve our heritage.”

Cover picture of Zohra Sehgal by Suresh Natarajan
It is heart-warming that you have brought out a magazine for the elderly, aptly named Harmony. I was happy to see your book review of Prophets of New India, a compilation of 20 articles from The Week about selfless social workers. The review was pungent, but then the world needs spice. I wish the magazine success.

Mammen Mathew  
Chief Editor, Malayalam Manorama

Thank you for supplying copies of Harmony to senior citizens’ organisations. The Indian Federation on Ageing (InFA), Mumbai, was set up in 1988-89 by Dada Saheb Rawal, whose mission was to help the elderly to enable them to die with dignity. Your magazine’s baseline, ‘Celebrate Age’, is very appropriate. We hope your initiative rekindles hope and the zest for living among seniors who have lost faith in themselves because of the indifferent and callous attitude of their own families, society and government. The get-up of the magazine is attractive and the content excellent.

I S Bawa  
Secretary General, InFA, Mumbai

I was glad to read Harmony; my grandson gave it to me. I found it informative. The magazine would be better if it were printed in bold letters so that it can be more easily read. To implement this, you can reduce the number of articles per issue so that the magazine does not become voluminous, and its cost doesn’t increase.

P Gupta  
Delhi

I wish to congratulate your team for bringing out a timely publication of such richness and variety. I went through most of the contents—the pictures are beautiful and the magazine makes for informative reading. It will be a challenge to keep it up and keep growing.

Mani Nedumattam S J  
St Xavier’s School, Delhi

I picked up Harmony from a stand in a petrol pump, and was hooked. The presentation is excellent. This is the first magazine I’ve seen for the 55 plus. The subjects covered are great, the write-ups informative and the point size really good. And thanks for carrying fewer advertisements. It’s time we started valuing our elders.

Mahendra Islania  
Mumbai

Society needs to ensure that its elders are not neglected. In this direction, the publication of your magazine is an encouraging and thoughtful gesture. Your June issue carries valuable information for seniors. With Harmony, society will become more aware of our needs.

P C Saxena  
Honorary Treasurer, Varishta Jan Sewa Mission, Lucknow

Thank you for a nice magazine. It makes for informative reading, without the presence of sleazy ads like most other magazines. You seem to have made a conscious decision to ban them from your pages and this is appreciated. Best wishes from a senior citizen.

Mary Ann Dasgupta  
Kolkata

Please accept my heartfelt congratulations on your initiative for silver citizens. I am proud to subscribe to Harmony.

Lalan Suresh  
Mumbai

Seniors need support, physical and emotional, from their family, friends and society. Harmony has come as a ray of hope into their lives. They can now celebrate age and live life—because you’ve made it possible for them.

Kiron  
Lucknow

I am very impressed with your concern for silver citizens; there has been little focus on them from the government and NGOs. Community centres like yours are welcome in this day and age, especially considering the breakdown of the joint family system.

P V G K Murthy  
Chairman, Snea Sandhya, and  
Chairman, Care for the Aged, Visakhipatnam

I am 67 and a member of the Sion Senior Citizens’ Association. Gordhanbhai Thakkar, 80, is also a member. Last year, he withdrew some cash from the bank and was walking back home when two youngsters tried to snatch it away. But he held them off till help arrived. Both were handed over to the police. We have felicitated him with a bravery award.

J B Mehta  
Mumbai

Your magazine, Harmony, for silver citizens is unique. It absolutely fills the need so long
felt by the elderly. The editorial very beautifully conveys the thoughts and mission behind this wonderful movement. I would most definitely and ardently love to be an active part of this movement. I’m a French interpreter and currently occupy myself with freelance assignments. And I do fall in the ‘golden age’ category—I am 53 years old.

S Krishnaiah
Mumbai

Note:
In the June issue of Harmony, we carried a write-up in our ‘Newsworthy’ section on Silver Line Park in Neral, Maharashtra, a residential complex created exclusively for silver citizens. For further information on the project, please write to G S Jadhav, C/218, Kailas Esplanade, LBS Marg, Ghatkopar (West) Mumbai-86 or call (022) 25002283, 25002285.

An invitation from Harmony
We are looking for contributions from our readers. Write to us if...

■ You had an experience related to money or finance which others can learn from
■ You faced a serious health problem and conquered it
■ You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
■ You want to share your hobbies and interesting travel experiences with others
■ You have a funny or insightful anecdote about your grandchildren

Mail us at 4th Floor, Maker Chambers IV, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400021. Or email at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org

Congratulations and many thanks for starting a unique initiative for silver citizens who are neglected by society. I found the magazine engrossing and informative, and have already subscribed to it for two years. However, I have a few suggestions to make. Harmony should talk about less-privileged silver citizens too; more people would read it then. It should contain more interactive sections and articles where readers could participate, like quizzes and crosswords. More articles like the one by Dr Anjali Chhabria would be very helpful—many seniors feel depressed after retirement. I also like your idea of establishing Harmony Interactive Centres. I would like to actively participate in such a centre and join your campaign of serving silver citizens.

B J Pandya
Rajkot

The letter of the month will receive an annual subscription to Harmony

Clarification
In our July issue, Kedar Nene shot the pictures of the Harmony launch and Sandra Khare created the illustration for the story, “Black Magic”.

Editor
Rest assured

Vishranthi, Chennai’s first old-age home, has paved the way for 85 others in the city, says Janaki Venkatraman

The soaring bhajan soundtrack coming from the hall behind Savithri Vaithi’s office takes her back to 1978, when Vishranthi was called the Monday Charity Club. From a rented house in the noisy Chrompet, to more spacious premises in middle-class Tiruvanmiyur, to a sea-facing, high profile habitat of Palavakkam, it couldn’t have been a road more travelled for Chennai’s first old-age home.

Today, Vishranthi (rest house, in Tamil) has 125 silver citizens living in, with 75-year-old Sabitha and 79-year-old Chellamal having been here the longest. The two siblings have been in Vishranthi’s care for the past 22 years, and are now in a state of somnolence.

The residency apart, the campus also houses an infirmary block; Nizhal, a temporary shelter for runaway women; Malarchi, a home for children from broken or abusive families; a hospice for dying destitutes; an 18-bed medical care unit for elderly patients discharged from hospital but still requiring care; and an eight-room short-stay home, for elders whose families are away on vacation or on an emergency. Intermediate care costs Rs 200 per day, and the facilities at Vishranthi’s short-stay home cost Rs 2,000 per month. Every other facility in Vishranthi is free of charge, with Vaithi depending on donations for the rest. “Over and above basic needs, we assure the elderly peace and happiness. We even try and fulfil their last wishes,” says Sundari Jayaraman, a Monday Charity club member, now treasurer of Vishranthi.

Vaithi, who is now 73, sees Vishranthi as an extension to her mantra of ageing gracefully: “Don’t think about it, just get on with the business of living.” A social worker from the age of 14, she took up a job with the Madras Corporation at the age of 16. At the time, girls from orthodox Mylapore families (conservative middle class Tamilian Brahmins) didn’t work. But Vaithi found the pay (Rs 80 per month) attractive. “That apart, I learned all the basics about welfare work from those slums,” she says.

After marriage, she left the job and led the life of a quiet housewife for almost a decade. Then, she and 20 friends decided to start a social activity club that soon morphed into the Monday Charity Club—it started on a Monday. A talk by the first
woman mayor of Madras, Tara Cherian, was the turning point. Cherian suggested they start either “a crèche or an old-age home”. Vaithi subsequently trained in geriatric medicine under Dr V S Natarajan, the father of geriatrics in India.

“Then, only Christian missions ran old-age homes,” says Vaithi, adding, “Besides, families didn’t desert their elders then. The only elders who needed shelter at Vishranti were childless people whom fate had forced out on the streets, especially women, as they had no education, no money, and knew little of the outside world.” The concept of a shelter for destitute elderly women was new to the city then.

The first funds came from selling Re 1 donation coupons. Later, schemes like funding a meal or sponsoring an elder were adopted. The going wasn’t easy, until the home shifted to Palavakkam in 1981, when state and private banks came forward with financial aid. “While the existing 85 old-age homes in and around Chennai (45 are paid homes, and 40 are charitable institutions) point to what a trendsetter Vishranti was, it also says a lot about a degenerating social set-up,” says Vaithi, adding how “competition” has also brought down the number of applicants to Vishranti—there are only three on the waiting list today.

“Earlier, the destitute were either poor or had no family,” says V S Vidyakar, founder of Udavum Karangal, a Chennai institution that shelters destitutes of all ages. “Now, many elders have money but their families don’t want them. By living alone, they invite exploitation by unscrupulous people, or become the victims of crime. It is wiser for them to move into a home for senior citizens.” Vidyakar feels Vishranti has set an example by taking in not only destitute elderly women but also those deserted by loved ones. Well-known Tamil writer Anuradha Ramanan, who often interacts with Vishranti in search of subjects for her stories, says, “For many of us, even one nagging grandma is an irritant. Here, there are dozens. But they are handled with patience. It’s good to see them finally secure, happy and relaxed.”

At Vishranti, there is none of the dreariness usually associated with an old-age home. Vaithi, Amma to all at Vishranti, encourages everyone to help out with the cooking and cleaning, or to look after those older than them. They celebrate every festival, attend daily puja and bhajan sessions, listen to discourses, watch TV and the occasional film, attend yoga and meditation classes, and read. “There are some elders who are not interested in anything, and some who are quarrelsome, but that is perhaps owing to the trauma they might have gone through earlier,” explains Vaithi.

“So many of us have learnt how to run a home for elders from Vishranti,” says N Kalyani, manager of Neyam Senior Citizens’ Home, Chennai, adding how it’s like going to university. In 1978, three major old-age institutions opened in Chennai: one was Vishranti, the second was the out-patients ward in the geriatric wing of the General Hospital, and the third was the local chapter of HelpAge India. “All three have gone from strength to strength,” says Dr Natarajan. Happy with the importance given to diet and medical attention, he thinks Vishranti’s strength is personalised care. Vaithi says: “It is wise to help an elder—tomorrow, you will be old too.”

### How to be a member
- If you have been abandoned and need a home, write to Vishranti
- Once short-listed, you may be interviewed
- Birth certificates to ascertain age are waived in the case of those very old or illiterate
- Elders with infectious diseases are not admitted

Contact: Vishranti, A V M Rajeswari Gardens, 4/227, MGR Salai, Palavakkam, Chennai-41. Tel: 044-24490972
Budget byte

What did the Budget bring for silvers? Just the Senior Citizens’ Savings Scheme, expected to come into effect from the first week of August 2004. Initially available through post offices, it will be non-transferable, and will have a maximum ceiling of Rs 15 lakh. The taxable interest of 9 per cent per annum will be non-cumulative and payable every three months. Sealed for five years, early withdrawal will be subject to conditions. Meanwhile, the existing small savings schemes available exclusively through post offices will continue. But we want more. And until the finance bill is passed, Harmony will keep requesting the government and the finance minister to do more for silvers. After all, you’re worth it.

The sun never sets

There is still no convincing scientific explanation to why Japan has the largest number of older people in the world. While life expectancy was about 45 in 1935, today it stands at 85 for women and 78 for men—the average life expectancy in India is 62. The number of centenarians in Japan has doubled in the past five years and now stands at just over 20,000. How come? Perhaps, ‘Healthy Japan 21’, launched 15 years ago, of which the elderly are an important part, has something to do with it. The national drive aims to achieve 70 public health targets by 2010. These include reducing salt intake (from the current 13.5 g to 10 g a day) by persuading people to cut down on salty staples such as miso soup (red soy paste and vegetables/pork) and pickled vegetables. Diet aside, a sound pension and lifetime employment, though under threat in post-bubble Japan, removes much of the stress. Some 4.8 million Japanese aged 65 or over are still part of the labour force. Is our government taking cues?

Get up and go

Advocating the cause of silver citizens, Varishtha Jan Sewa Mission (VJSM), in Lucknow, has recently completed its 10th anniversary. It was at the instance of VJSM that a Varishtha Jan Parishar (senior citizens’ complex) is being built in the city, at a cost of Rs 1.5 crore—it’s now nearing completion. With money donated by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Rajnath Singh, former union minister of Surface Transport and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, the complex will act as a leisure and day-care centre for silvers in the city, with facilities such as a reading room, lounge, canteen and recreational area to play carrom, bridge and pool.

Happily ever after

Old-age homes are no longer synonymous with basic accommodation for the economically backward. With more and more silvers choosing to live independently, senior citizens’ organisations and real-estate developers are jumping on the bandwagon, with projects that provide personalised services like housekeeping, catering and healthcare. Calling it “a largely untapped sector”, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) feels it’s the need of the hour—LIC Care Homes is developing 10 acres of land in Bangalore for the purpose—while organisations like Mumbai-based Dignity Foundation are ready to start specialised services for those who can pay. LIC Care Homes also plans to develop similar projects in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. And Pune-based Paranjape Schemes Construction has already launched its fourth project for silvers. Prices for all these projects range from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 10 lakh.
Include, don’t exclude

The ‘feel good’ factor. It’s time to revisit it. The recent elections have proved that unless the ‘feel good’ factor encompasses all sections of society, including the elderly, it will continue to ring hollow. Inclusion rather than exclusion, says the writing on the wall.

But we live in a world far from ideal. The other day, I took my 75-year-old mother to watch a film at a multiplex in Mumbai. Our cities are increasingly becoming a place only for the young and the rich. Sure, it’s hip to have granite flooring in multiplexes but it’s exceptionally unfriendly for people like her; it’s so slippery. And through the maze of popcorn stalls, greasy samosas and soggy nachos laced with cheese, there was not one thing I could get for her to eat. Does anybody care?

Admittedly, there are far greater woes. I remember the days my father Kaifi Azmi travelled by train to attend mushairas in far-flung moffusil towns. Dependent after suffering from a stroke, an attendant always accompanied him. The toilets, however, were not equipped for a person on a wheelchair. Nothing has changed in these 50 years. Each government has added more trains to the existing line-up, but none has come around to thinking about provisions for older people.

To begin with, there aren’t even enough wheelchairs on railway stations. Just the other day, I was at Old Delhi railway station, waiting to take a train to Dehradun. I saw an overweight man in his 60s, looking like he was having a heart attack, being pushed down the stairs by two young men. I presumed they were his sons. The man looked in need of immediate help.

Horrified, I intervened, only to be told off. They said they had a train to catch to Haridwar and would miss it if they didn’t move faster. I volunteered to arrange a wheelchair for the man. I made a mad dash, but there was only one available on Platform No. 12. By the time someone brought it on Platform No. 2, the three of them would have missed the train. It’s a scary story. You could be living it too.

What shook me was not only the apathy of the two young men towards their father—they were apparently taking him for his treatment—but also of the system towards the elderly. This was in the heart of a nation that’s galloping forward to a good economic growth. We are happy our elderly feature in the 2004-2005 Budget, now enjoying a 9 per cent rate of interest on their savings. But what about galvanising the machinery and introducing basic tools of comfort?

In the West, great priority is given to the elderly. Policy reflects the need to include them at all levels, provide them mobility, to give them visibility as equal citizens. In India, it’s the opposite. We think our parents should stay at home, mummified into passivity. Even though that’s not what they want. They would like appliances of convenience that encourage them to remain self-reliant. They want technology to address their special needs. So they can be free to move about, outside their homes, without terror.

We think our parents should stay home, mummified into passivity. But they would like appliances of convenience that encourage self-reliance.

What shook me was not only the apathy of the two young men towards their father—they were apparently taking him for his treatment—but also of the system towards the elderly. This was in the heart of a nation that’s galloping forward to a good economic growth. We are happy our elderly feature in the 2004-2005 Budget, now enjoying a 9 per cent rate of interest on their savings. But what about galvanising the machinery and introducing basic tools of comfort?

In the West, great priority is given to the elderly. Policy

We need to give my mother, and the elderly gentleman at the railway station, a reason to feel optimistic. The key word is ‘sensitivity’, and we lack it in all measures. How, then, can the government become more compassionate? The answer lies in low-floor buses, wheelchairs on stations and parking places, navigable pavements, specialised toilets in public places and trains, and easy-to-walk-on flooring at multiplexes. My mother would be very happy with that one.

Shabana Azmi, 53, is an actor, activist and former Rajya Sabha MP
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Highway to happiness

Meet and learn from five exceptional people who use a fuel called attitude for a car called life

Human beings have always paid good money to people who tell them that they’ll live longer and happier. Whether they are astrologers, apothecaries or Deepak Chopra. Nowadays, we also subscribe to science magazines that dish out hope with headlines such as “The Search for an Anti-Ageing Pill”. It’s probable that one day the war against ageing may take the form of a single pill. It’s already clear that men in white lab coats, our soldiers in this war, will win us the booty of extended youth and life. But the biggest breakthrough on age has already been made—more than a hundred years ago. And, you don’t have to pay a paisa for it.

As Mark Twain observed: “Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” For us, this is the last word on ageing. Think about it: 99.9 per cent of the time that humans have been around on this planet, the average life span has been no more than 20 years. Their 16 was our 60. By those standards, we have already solved the problems of ageing. But it hardly feels like that. If a time comes when, as some scientists say, man would live up to 150 years, would the first 100 years be called youth? And after that?

Some silvers are not waiting for the answers. They know that happiness is not the monopoly of youth. We met five of them: Shobhaa De, Adi Godrej, Indu Jain, Bhimsen Joshi and Zohra Sehgal, to find out what fuels their energy. And the answer all around was attitude—they see life as a gift to be unwrapped every morning. All of them are in different decades of life, but they’re not counting numbers. They are too busy doing what they want to do, living each day with wisdom, flamboyance and that thing called fun.

—Anuradha Kumar
“If someone says slow down as you age, just say, rubbish”
SHOBHAA DE

At 4 pm, Shobhao De, writer, columnist, mother of six, and media personality beyond compare, is seated at her round dining table, makeup, hair and smile all perfectly in place. A carefree disarray of books, papers and photographs cuts the table in half. This is her workspace, also the place where she breakfasts with her husband Dilip—she refers to him quaintly as “Mr De”—at 9 am each morning. Paintings, statuettes, silver bric-a-brac, framed photographs and fresh orchids from De Farms, Dilip’s flower enterprise, dot every nook and corner of the South Mumbai flat. “I’m a sucker for beauty,” she says, with a smile best described as gleaming. It’s a smile that helps register high cheekbones and the taut skin of her cheeks. Her tawny, sun-kissed shoulders are offset by a white ganji (vest) that could easily belong to one of her teenage daughters.

Looking back on a life filled with bouquets, brickbats and a few hard decisions, she muses, “I’ve never opted for the soft options, even though hard options are the ones that you might review and say, “oh God”. In my case, it’s always an “if only”. I live every day to the brim.” Quizzed about what gives her a rush, she stops short. “Well, I am stumped. Let’s see. Yes, I know. It’s words. And people, beautiful people. That’s what turns me on, contributes to my sense of wellness. But it could easily be a pebble, a moment, a sunset or a cloud formation.”

My body and I
Beaming at a compliment about her good form, she says, “I’m very comfortable with myself. My routine hasn’t varied from the time I was 18, and modelling. I do a set of exercises, callisthenics combined with very basic yoga which improve flexibility and mobility.” She doesn’t believe in dieting but advises moderation: “Food is among my passions, but I indulge without resorting to gluttony. I’ve eliminated deep fried food and limited sugar.” As for dealing with the inevitable signs of ageing—crows’ feet, wrinkles and strands of grey—she says: “Make your peace with age. That’s the best beauty aid.” De is not interested in bungee jumping or taking P T Usha on. “I know what my body can, and cannot do. I deal with my body with knowledge and intelligence.”

Inner circle
De’s relationship with her husband and children has served as fodder for many magazines but it is an area she guards zealously. All six children, hers, De’s and theirs, spanning age 15 to 30, continue to live with her: “I’ve told my daughters that they should only marry the right man for the right reasons at the right time.” On herself, she comments: “I’m a voyeur. I like to know what makes people do what they do. I’m intuitive.” About her relationship with her husband, De says she never refers to him by name. Neither does he. “But, when he says ‘Hello’ in a certain tone, I know it’s me he’s calling out for.”

Karma yoga
Following three decades of writing “just about anything under the sun,” De remains madly busy.
She’s “very superstitious”, but confides that she’s working on two new serials, two new books and busy selecting titles for Penguin, which will appear under her imprint: ‘Shobhaa De Selects’. It’s a natural progression for someone who’s perfected the fine art of sifting wheat from chaff, whether for *Stardust* and *Celebrity*, the magazines she edited “a few years ago”, or the three columns that she churns out weekly. De still writes in longhand. Yet, “There’s no second draft”.

Ask De about things like age and pace and she gasps: “Slow down? I hope that never ever happens! I’m a Type A personality. I want to go boom, boom till the day I die. Someone says that you are 50 and you must turn reflective—I don’t believe such things. My instinct tells me this is the most productive, creative and dazzling decade of my life. If someone tells you that you should slow down as you age, just say, rubbish.” De’s workday starts after Mr De leaves: “I work from 10.30 am till about 4, when my youngest daughter, Anandita, comes home. After she’s eaten, I go back to work until about 7.30 pm.” Tea is on the dot, at 5.30 pm.

**Colour of money**

“Money. Hmm. Frankly, it’s an interesting by-product of effort,” she says. “I have never been obsessed by it. It does not define my comfort levels, neither is it my security blanket. I find money very cold but it has its uses and, yes, I like my conveniences.” De finds richness embarrassing. “I also find it vulgar, a burden, and a bit of a bore.”

**On a high**

De’s turned believer recently. “A while ago, a friend gave me a *mala* from Mansarovar. I’d never held one before. But today, I turn the worry beads thrice over. It forces me to stop and look within.” She attributes much of the change to Mr De. “He’s interested in religious text. The more we read, the more our understanding of life has deepened. If you start buying into your own myth, that’s the end because, no matter how great your contribution, in the cosmic order you’re nothing but a dot. God? Honestly, I’m still searching. It’s an ambiguous and intensely personal area. But my search is sincere.”

—Anupa Mehta
“Grey hair allowed me to try Godrej Hair Colour”

ADI GODREJ

on his face should have been a warning. Suddenly, the nose of the boat rises, the camera is almost flying in the wind, and the waves feel like speed bumps taken at 70 km an hour. Afterwards, Godrej turns around, his face covered with spray, and says with a wide grin, “It can go faster, you know.” He loves the feeling of moving on water, “but never speed for speed’s sake”, he says. He is a man not known to lose his equilibrium. Even at work, he is described by a colleague as someone who “brings a lot of peace to the process at the time of a crisis. A very clear, uncomplicated man”.

My body and I

Turning 50, and then 60, did not really make an impression on Godrej besides the fact that he quickly deployed the unmistakable signs of ageing for professional purposes: “Our company is a manufacturer of hair colour. So grey hair allowed me to try our product,” he says with a smile. Then running a hand over his head, “I am also growing bald…and we make a hair restorer called Anoop.” Other than this, he’s a little unsure on the topic of age. “I have not really thought about it because it hasn’t affected my physical activity so far,” he says. “I still run quite fast. Then, two years back, I circumambulated Mount Kailash—a 42 km trek going up to altitudes of 19,000 ft—within a day. So I would say I am reasonably fit.” Besides water sports, he rides occasionally, does isometric exercises regularly and walks endlessly. “I don’t like to sit down much. Even when I am talking to my family, I pace and talk. They think I am odd, but it works.”

Karma yoga

Godrej loves his work so much that the few minor surgeries he’s had in life were all carefully scheduled on weekends so that “I could be back in office on Monday”, he says. “I enjoy my work tremendously. The phrase I use is ‘make your vocation your vacation’. And as the chairman of the Godrej Group of Industries, he says the most important philosophy he governs by is emotional
intelligence. “How you interact with people is the single most important factor in doing well. It is impossible to be a good leader without that.”

Colour of money
If Godrej products give value for money, Adi Godrej’s mother has played some small part in it. “When I was 10, my mother put me on an allowance, neither very extravagant nor stingy. Within that, I had to buy my own clothes, textbooks, toys, school fees, gifts...everything.” Godrej says that this early budgeting experience taught him to abhor wastage of money: “I learnt the value of money very well.”

Inner circle
For a man who uses emotional intelligence to drive a Rs 4,500 crore conglomerate smoothly, family relations can’t be difficult. That he thinks his family is “wonderful” also helps, as does great time management. The reason he’s at work every morning at 8 am is because, many years ago, his children used to leave very early for school. “So I would make sure I always had breakfast with them before that and, therefore, I started coming to work early.”

On a high
For Godrej, the cumulative effect of 62 years is greater peace. He says it has been a natural progression for him from being an agnostic young man to a believer who prays each morning. “As you grow older and face more difficulties, as you see friends and colleagues die, you do become a little more philosophical, a little more religious.” He also says that age has greatly increased his excitement for life. “I have more zest now than ever before. I realise there is less time for me ahead so I concentrate more what I enjoy—my work, travelling. I don’t want to waste any time on things which are not interesting.”

—Anuradha Kumar
I think I AM Venus

INDU JAIN

I blossom wherever I am planted. I was born like that.” Right now, she is talking animatedly about the recent Venus transit across the face of the sun. “Venus will bring tremendous positive changes for women,” says Jain, “it is femina in full force. I’m filled with happiness when I think of Venus... I think...I AM Venus.”

My body and I

As Indu Jain poses on the sofa, her face lit by the sun filtering through the Venetian blinds, she taps her right cheek with a forefinger. “My this side is better,” she tells the photographer, winking. Her skin glows with an inner wellness. “Spirituality makes you fit because the mind is very relaxed,” she says. “It makes everything perfect; eating, walking, talking, everything to do with your sweet little body.” Besides spirituality, she also depends on a strict food regime. “I can say that the world’s best food is found in my kitchen. Pure and pious satvik food.” Jain is thoroughly enjoying her old age. “I tell everyone that now’s my time to eat and be merry. Now’s my time to wear ‘see-through’,” she says. And winks again.

Karma yoga

The chairman is in her office in The Times of India building, in Delhi, “every day from morning to evening. My work basically consists of removing friction wherever it exists—from the smallest labour problem right to the top. Wherever there is a lack of communication, I come in.”

What was it like to go to work after years of being primarily a homemaker? “Work opened a whole, different dimension for me,” she smiles excitedly. “When I deal with top executives, brilliant CEOs and leaders with confidence, the biggest and greatest within me speaks.”

Colour of money

“Money? What money?” she looks at me questioningly. You know, the stuff you spend to buy things. Maybe it’s the wrong question to ask.

In a peach-coloured room, walls framed with muted Buddhist thangkas, we are waiting for the ‘Chairman’. Symbols of spirituality are everywhere. A huge floor-to-ceiling carved, lustrous pair of Mahavira’s feet on the wall, a red-thread halo circling a toe. A shivalinga the size of an ostrich’s egg, then another smaller one, with floating frangipani, on the huge glass table. There is a lot of reverence around. Even the word ‘chairman’ is uttered with reverence to address Indu Jain, the head of Bennett, Coleman & Co Ltd or the Times Group. She can be described variously as a spiritualist, entrepreneur, educationist, humanist, and a patron of art and culture.

Finally, the Chairman pirouettes in. She is slight, silvery and just a little fey. Alternatively earthy and ethereal, she shifts seamlessly from playful child to serious sage to, well, the Chairman of the Times Group. “I have never worked before this,” she says with a laugh. “When I was approaching 70, my sons suddenly decided to make me the chairman. So I became the chairman, what’s there?
“Money?” Now she stares at me incredulously, then relaxes. “My father was a very poor man but it never occurred to me that I couldn’t do something because we didn’t have the money. I had two frocks, maybe three. They grew short as I grew taller and my schoolteacher would pull my frock down from the back, like this... (She tugs at her sari). I enjoyed even that!”

So, is there a secret to making money? Ah, there she nods her head vigorously. At last, we are talking about the same thing. “It doesn’t come from grabbing,” she says. “I believe that if you have dedication, the cosmos will pour in money. A poor person is poor because he is thinking poor. Otherwise, he is capable of turning mud to gold.”

Inner circle
“All relationships are important to me,” she says. “If any relationship is not complete, enlightenment is not complete.” She is unquestionably proud of her sons, the reportedly reclusive Samir, vice-chairman, Times Group, and his turbo-force brother Vineet, a hands-on managing director. “I am very proud of their variety,” Jain says, suddenly pacing up and down the small room. And they are...? “They are brilliant, very brilliant,” she declares. “I don’t want to change them or their variety.”

On a high
Is spirituality something directly proportional to age? Jain interprets it differently. “It is not that it became more important, but that I have flowered. I had all that potential and each petal blossomed and matured.” For her, spirituality is not something that necessarily demands denial. “I am a very comfort-oriented person,” she announces. “If the smaller self is dissatisfied, how can I aim to satisfy my higher self? I like comfort. When death comes, I will say, ‘Wait, let me be comfortable.’ Everything will wait for my comfort as I leave my body on a comfortable, maybe satin, pillow.”

—Vatsala Kaul
“There is no car like the Mercedes”

BHIMSEN JOSHI

Mercedes,” he says categorically. A well-run engine is like music to him and he’ll pick up any off-notes in an jiffy. “Even if I am just sitting in a car, next to the driver, I can tell its mechanical faults immediately,” he says.

Though his knees trouble him a bit now, a younger Bhimsen, in the days when airplanes weren’t common, would press down heavily on the accelerator and drive dangerously from city to city to keep up with his chaotic concert schedules. “I think if I wasn’t a musician, I would have been a car mechanic,” he says quite seriously. Nowadays, his schedule is described as “araam and programme” by a friend. The araaam (rest) is a temporary addition in deference to a recent illness. Real life is during concerts. “An audience’s response still make me ecstatic,” he says.

My body and I
Some credit for Joshi’s power-packed performances should go to football. “I can perform for long hours without getting tired because physical exercise has sustained my faculties,” he says. “I was always passionate about sports and played a lot of football in my early years. My father was really into rigorous physical exercise and I inherited this fitness-consciousness from him.” But music always comes first. “Since riyaz is done in the morning, I zeroed in on exercises that are easily done in the evenings, such as pranayam and yoga.”

Karma yoga
Work is the wrong word to use for what Bhimsen Joshi does. Music is life and not livelihood for him. When he was 11, he ran away from home, angry with his father who insisted that his son also concentrate on other subjects besides music. Bhimsen’s biggest grouse was that though he was already 11, he knew only one raga. So he left Gadag, his village in Karnataka, and devoted himself fully to music, even working as a water-carrier to support himself.

Some of the world’s luckiest people live in a quiet bylane of Pune. For many years now, a voice that most of us hear live only in auditoriums simply floats in through their windows and fills the corners of their homes every morning. One would like to believe that they drop all their chores and simply stand and listen. For whenever Pandit Bhimsen Joshi sings, it is an occasion.

We are in his bungalow, which is a lot like him—grand but never imposing. For when you meet Bhimsen Joshi, it’s like meeting a very shy, amiable gentleman. He is sitting in his old world drawing room that has photos of vocalist Ustad Abdul Karim Khansaheb and Satya Shri Sai Baba—but none of himself. People describe him as the ‘Bhishma’ of Hindustani classical music and the doyen of the Kirana gharana, but the formality of these titles hides more than it reveals. At 82, Bhimsen Joshi is still a man who loves fast cars and knows them well. “There is no car like the
Joshi’s deepest belief has always been that he is meant to sing. He knew that as a child, and he knows it now. “A few years ago, I fell seriously ill and I was told I may not be able to sing again. But I was sure I would. If one has sincerity, genuine guru bhakti and an unalloyed affection for one’s work, God sees you through in any situation.” It was his love for music that helped him get better. He says singing gives him a high even now.

“Today, the number of my performances has been curtailed; from 10-12 a month to only one or two now. But the energy experienced from within is not curtailed.”

**Inner circle**

Bhimsen Joshi also finds music useful as a multipurpose metaphor for relationships. His family, wife Vatsala, his two sons and their wives and children, all live with him. “Like my music, my relationships have evolved over the years,” he says. “One must work towards strengthening bonds throughout life. And I must say that my family of friends is also very special to me.”

**Colour of money**

Joshi’s early experiences have given him a no-nonsense approach to money. “I think it is always better to set aside a certain booty. What’s the point in begging for small sums later when one is ailing in bed?” After he started getting paid well, his wife took up the financial management. He says, “Everybody should be financially sound. But without getting hysterical about it, of course.”

**On a high**

“I don’t think there is any formula for happiness,” says Joshi. “It is my continuous evolution over the years as an artiste that has brought me tremendous joy. You can believe in God or some shakti or destiny or whatever, but if your intentions are sound, you will always feel fine from within.”

—Rajeev Badve
“I have charmed you, haven’t I? But let me tell you the downside, I am a real miser.”

ZOHRA SEHGAL

have this fountain of energy in me,” she says in the lounge at the house of a London friend, after coming briskly up the stairs. And of course age has not withered her charm. “You get a lot being a woman, you can charm people. I have never been good looking. People say get a facial, but I say that with this ugly face, I don’t need it.”

My body and I

“As somebody said, age but don’t grow old. This body is an instrument; you have to keep it ready and strung to its pitch. I do my exercises for an hour everyday. Some from my training in Germany as an actor when I was 18. From dancer Uday Shankar, I learnt some movements that are very good for your arthritis, then I learnt some at a yoga course in Delhi. And some I have invented.”

Sehgal has a keen sense that much cannot be taken for granted. “You know how much it matters just that I can walk. I use a hearing aid, but I have my own front teeth. And I feel hunger, what a wonderful feeling that is! I can eat, and I can keep a morsel for someone else. Great.”

Karma yoga

Sehgal takes up one film at a time—with occasional theatre in between—but before she accepts a new role, she sits the producers down and talks to them about the risks of signing a 92-year-old. She’s funny, frank and charms the hell out of them. Humour has been her hidden weapon in a difficult career. “This August, I will complete 69 years in showbiz. It was not always easy. I am a dancer, then I was thrown on to stage. But I did not have the voice, so that I learnt from Papaji (Prithviraj Kapoor).”

And the fame now? “Oh, what shall I say, I feel just great about it. I lap it up. I keep looking out wherever I go. Has anyone recognised me? I smile my crooked smile, one eye going this way, one
looking that way. Then they say, we’ve seen you in films. I love it, I love it.”

**Colour of money**
Money is usually a natural partner of fame, and she loves this too—she has seen hard days. “The first 10 years after I came to England in 1962 were very hard. If something cost one penny less in one store, I would go there to buy it.” Sehgal returned to India in 1987 and then finally *Dil Se* happened. “Now, I open the cupboard to look for matching bags for my dresses,” she says with a laugh. Then she turns that glint in her eye upon herself. “I have charmed you, haven’t I? But let me tell you the downside, I am a real miser.”

**Inner circle**
Sehgal seems a woman who makes her inner self work more than an inner circle—she would be a natural member of any do-it-yourself society. But she is close to her family. “My son works with the World Health Organisation and is now posted in Brazaville, Congo. I live with my daughter Kiran, a famous classical Odissi dancer. Not my style though. Uday Shankar invented his own style, which is my style…” With Sehgal, conversations usually veer back to her work.

**On a high**
Does religion become a source of sustenance at some point? “Not at all,” Zohra says. Whatever else she turns to, it is not to God. “I don’t believe in God. Religion is just a hook. But there is some energy. Our brains are not programmed correctly to understand it. The power is within us.” Quite a change from growing up in an orthodox Muslim family. “No pork, no wine, namaaz five times a day. I was in purdah till I was 18, you know.” And then the purdah gave way to the screen.

—Sanjay Suri
Raising the alarm

The police is starting to get more proactive in the protection of the elderly in their homes and communities, says Smita Nair. It’s time for silvers to respond.

Devichandra Ranawat’s neighbours last saw him on a rainy morning in June at Mumbai’s Gateway of India. When the 70-year-old optician didn’t turn up at his shop for the entire day and couldn’t be contacted on his mobile phone, relatives decided to break into his house. Inside, they found him brutally stabbed with a kitchen knife. All fingers point to someone known to him—Ranawat lived alone and often hired a local masseur. The lanes of Colaba, where he lived, are still reeling from the shock.

Ranawat’s is not a singular case. This year, till June, there have been 12 reported murders of senior citizens in New Delhi and three in Mumbai—last year the figure was 12, with 21 murders in 2002; in Delhi, 21 seniors were murdered in 2002 and 18 in 2003. Many more murders go unreported.

Get registered
Behind the closed doors of Mumbai police headquarters, officials are in the process of upgrading the existing senior citizen security scheme. It’s based on the simple premise of registering yourself and your domestic help with the local police station. A proactive step, this aims to ensure that extreme situations like this don’t arise since statistics reveal that a majority of murders of silvers take place indoors, perpetrated by their domestic help.

The scheme was launched four years ago—and has not received adequate response. Ahmad Javed, joint commissioner of police (law and order), Mumbai, says: “Senior citizens, for some unexplainable reason, do not divulge details or register with the police. This leads to several bottlenecks during investigation.”

The need of the hour is a community effort. “During my tenure, I have had cases where silvers, former commissioner and director general of police, Mumbai. He favours a system where residents’ associations take an active part in the safekeeping of the elderly in their neighbourhood.

For its part, Delhi is beginning to wake up to the immediacy of the situation. The gruesome murder of Lieutenant General (Retd) Harman Singh Seth, 84, and his wife Roop Seth, 80, in June this year has prompted the revival of two help lines—these had been launched in 2002, only to become defunct soon after. Silvers in the capital can now call 1091 and 1291 in case of an emergency. In states like Kerala, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, help line 1090 reportedly works as the crime stopper cell. In Mumbai, though, the crime branch’s social wing phone number 22622775 works as an umbrella help line for senior citizens, largely counselling them in various aspects, including safety.

Create awareness
Delhi Police attributes the earlier failure of the help lines to weak publicity and the resultant lack
of awareness amongst the target group. Other initiatives that haven’t generated much awareness are preventive and community policing, the neighbourhood watch scheme and the two-year-old School Children Contact Programme, whereby students are motivated to pay weekend visits to the elderly in their neighbourhood.

Aware of the failure of its 25-year-old senior citizens’ registration and servant verification schemes for want of trust, Delhi Police Commissioner Dr K K Paul has assured that the police will be further trained for the needs of seniors. And Sudhir Yadav, additional commissioner of police (crime), has assured the extension of the School Children Contact Programme to all areas in the capital.

In fact, Delhi Police has decided to set up a special cell for the security of senior citizens. The new unit, headed by Yadav, will coordinate and monitor the efforts of all nine police districts. This would mean taking stock of complaints received on the two help lines, introducing a central registration system in place of a district-based servant verification system and appointing a nodal officer to manage all records.

The Mumbai police too is trying to strengthen its network. “So far, we have not been able to cover all senior citizens, as our prime focus was the elderly who stay alone,” says Javed. “Also, senior citizens need to take the first step and register themselves.”

Protect yourself
Javed’s concern, that silvers need to get more proactive, is shared by M Jadhav, assistant commissioner of police (crime branch), Pune, who feels that simple drives, like servant verification, are taken very lightly. “Our seniors need to come to terms with weakening reflexes with age,” he says—they shouldn’t think they can tackle intruders on their own. “Also, leading a retired life doesn’t mean one has to be a recluse,” he adds. “Calling up a neighbour or trying to catch up with a beat constable can go a long way in ensuring their safety.”

Through public awareness campaigns and local cable channels, the elderly in the city are being urged not to go out wearing heavy jewellery and to refrain from keeping a lot of cash at home. Pune is not known as much for murders as for chain-snatching incidents. Yet it’s been a very active city in terms of schemes for the safety of silvers.

Ever since the city’s help lines were launched on December 2003—24450067 and 24476150, aided by Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme (CASP), a 25-year-old NGO—they have fielded five
to six calls every day. In the first two months itself, attendants received 400 various complaints, not necessarily pertaining to crime. A recent CASP survey also reveals a 76 per cent response to the city’s servant verification drive—“good” compared to the metros.

The Pune police has also instituted safety committees at all its 85 chowkis. These invite the elderly for informal interactions every month to educate them about personal safety measures. One can also see beat constables patrolling around community parks every morning and evening. They’re on guard—it’s time for Indian silvers to do the same.

—with Rupam Khera in New Delhi and Anuj Chopra in Pune

Measures recommended by the police and NGOs

- Do not open your doors to strangers
- Ensure that your homes are guarded with locks and metal grills. Install peepholes instead of opening the entire door to outsiders. If possible, go in for an intercom or sound alerts
- Do not indulge in conversation with strangers
- Ensure that your immediate neighbours are aware if you are at home or going away
- Register the details of your domestic help with his/her photograph at your local police station
- Register your details with the local police station giving your contact address and phone number
- In case you have any security issue, feel free to talk to the beat officer on duty in your area
- If possible, keep a dog

www.harmonyindia.org

This is a unique space in the cyber world. www.harmonyindia.org is the face of Harmony, an initiative of the Dhirubhai Ambani Memorial Trust for senior citizens.

Created by a team of dedicated professionals and volunteers, www.harmonyindia.org is a portal that addresses the aspirations of the elderly. The young and the old alike have contributed to the initial content and the technical aspects of the portal. In time to come it is expected that elders will bring their wealth of valuable experience to the portal, enriching it further.

The portal covers a broad spectrum of subjects—from health to wealth, yoga to Siddha, and spiritualism to recreation. It aims to create awareness about the needs of the elderly, as well as highlight the resources and opportunities at hand for silvers in India and their NRI friends and counterparts overseas.

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Wired for health

Living with certain ailments can be easier with the help of modern gadgets.
Roshni Bajaj takes a look at what’s available in the market today

Hariben Sanghvi in Mumbai beams as she walks her granddaughter-in-law to the lift. The 82-year-old’s evident pleasure in small joys and her happy spirit are contagious. The affectionate “Aaji!” is loaded with blessing. Sanghvi walks back to her bedroom and settles herself on her favourite spot on the bench swing, sliding her walker against the wall. “This is what lets me walk,” she says. “Without it, I would not be able to do too much.”

Though a walker is a fairly simple device, it has changed Hiraben’s life. There are many other gadgets available, designed to make life easier for people with specific ailments—devices that can help your form match your spirit. Research in ergonomics—an applied science of designing products so that people interact most efficiently and safely with them—has worked to make many of these more user-friendly and comfortable. And a good buy has the potential to transform the way you live.

Here’s our guide to some of the most useful health gadgets that can easily be used at home:

Move well
Walkers, like the one Sanghvi uses, have become ubiquitous. But let’s not take them for granted. Dr Pradip Parikh, physician and cardiologist, and chief medical officer for the Tata Group, points out: “They prevent further accidents that would otherwise be quite likely. These devices enhance mobility, equipping people to take care of themselves completely, including essential matters like personal hygiene and meals.”

Walkers don’t need you to carry them around anymore. They will walk with you. The arms of the Taiwanese Foshang Dong Fang walker move independently of each other, thanks to flexibility built into the transverse rods. The left and right arm can be pushed alternately with each step; so quite literally, it steps forward with the respective foot. According to Medix

With the stool-cum-cane, left, and the Foshang Dong Fang walker, right, you can take longer walks

Healthcare, Foshang has been around for two-and-a-half years, but sales are still not high as only doctors prescribe these products. A prescription may not be necessary, but a discussion with the doctor about which one suits you best always helps. The Walking Walker is available only through Chinese or Taiwanese imports—no Indian manufacturer makes them yet although local versions are available across the country.

Dr Parikh says that walkers should be chosen on the basis of an individual’s ability. “The basic steady walker (without wheels) is good for someone who needs a person to support them while using it,” he explains. “Wheels at the base of the walker work for a heavy but stable person. The walking walker is one of the most advanced, and ideal for someone who has a leg problem but good hand control.”

Another neat idea is the tripod stool cane by Visco, an Indian company that manufactures and markets rehabilitation aids. The cane, which is about hip height, unfolds into a small tripod stool. The cane is still light, small and portable, so the stool is not likely to be your favourite seat. It
A blood pressure kit can prevent minor visits to the doctor

does help, though, when you’re done with standing in lines or all the places where seats are hard to come by.

Mumbai’s KEM Hospital’s physiotherapy department designs individually customised mobility aids based on lifestyle. Dr Indira Kenkre, professor and head of occupational therapy, says that while these devices are not commercially available in India, rehabilitation centres in any major hospital will provide them. She gives the example of a ‘reacher’, which helps people who can’t bend at the waist. This collapsible light metal cane with prongs at the end has a variety of uses, from reaching for a blanket at bedtime to wearing socks.

See bright

Bulky, clumsy magnifying glasses are passé. Your magnifying glass now comes in the form of a convex acrylic ruler or bar that you slide over lines of text for optimum magnifying properties for people who are long-sighted. “They’re simple,” says Dr Parikh. “One doesn’t need the steady hands and constant distance adjustment that hand-held magnifiers require.”

Sometimes all you need to see better is a bookmark. The sheet magnifier is a flexible, portable transparency engraved with concentric circles. Also called a Fresnel lens, this does the job of magnifying without the bulk of a convex lens. In handiness, sheet magnifiers win hands down. They’re available in credit card and A4 sizes.

Hear sharp

Is your hearing aid getting heavy on the ear? The DynaVox canal hearing aid is a tiny, skin-coloured knob that fits into your ear cavity and picks up frequencies that larger and older aids don’t through its bio-frequency system. It doesn’t need any wires, and the battery is the same one that goes in your watch—so, once it’s inside the ear, it’s near invisible. But, as Dr Parikh warns, speak to your doctor before switching hearing aids—don’t do it on hearsay.

Control pain

A portable device the size of a Walkman can keep pain in control while you’re on the move. The Trans-Cutaneous Electrical Stimulation System (TENS) passes a current through electrodes attached to your body. This electrical stimulation passes through subcutaneous nerves that block pain signals in
the spinal cord by releasing endorphins. Jai Bhatt of Jai Surgicals, Mumbai, says this works best for pain that is not normally relieved by heat, but needs effective yet safe intervention to stop the brain from receiving the pain messages. “This is best for sciatica, post-herpetic neuralgia, nerve pain (neuritis) or intractable pain,” says Dr Parikh. “Of course, a hot water bag is lighter on the pocket.”

Home health
Kits to check your blood pressure at home have been available in India across the counter for the past ten years or so, and are easier than a visit to the doctor. And now
digital thermometers have made mercury ones redundant. The digital oral thermometer from Citizen, Japan is all plastic, with a large, easy-to-read, 3-digit LCD screen and some degree of flexibility. If the oral one is uncomfortable and asks for an unbearable two minutes of feverish silence, Vitavocks ear thermometer gives you a reading within seconds and stores the last seven readings. According to surgical stores, silvers form the majority of customers for these thermometers, because they are so easy to use. Also safer, since they are unlikely to break in the mouth. They have been around for five to six years, but have recently gained popularity.

Diabetes management is about regularly monitoring blood sugar levels. “A glucometer works best for insulin-dependent diabetes which cannot be controlled with medication or diet,” says Dr Parikh. “It is especially useful for people who develop diabetes-related complications like the diabetic foot.”

The Accucheck Active portable glucometer is among the easiest to use in the market today. It works in two simple steps. One: use the pin prick (included in the set) to draw blood and apply it on a small card. Two, read. In five seconds, the large display gives you a reading that you can save to measure a two-week average. Chip coding ensures perfect accuracy, while a built-in infrared allows you to transfer your readings to a PC.

Latest technology aside, Dr Parikh points out that there are a few basic things that you should always have around, just in case. One is an alarm device, preferably built on a cane, to ward away attention of the wrong kind and get help when you’d rather not rely on your vocal chords. Another invaluable and often overlooked old favourite: a torch by your bedside.
Buyer’s guide

Mumbai

■ Medix Healthcare
Rehabilitations, Surgicals & Scientific stocks the Foshang Dong Fang walker for Rs 1,800. Address: 133, Princess Street, Gopal Niwas, Ground Floor. Tel: 022-22083239. Cheaper Indian versions are also available at major medical stores for Rs 650.

■ Ronak International Rehabilitation Aids sells the DynaVox mini hearing aid for Rs 14,000 and the Accuchek Active glucometer for Rs 3,550. Address: 99, Princess Street, Sancheti Bhavan, Ground Floor. Tel: 022-56334513.

■ Jai Surgical sells the TENS pain management system for Rs 1,500. Address: A-13, Shri Ram Industrial Estate, 13 Ambedkar Road, Wadala. Tel: 022-24135080.

■ All India Surgical Mfg Co stocks Visco’s cane cum stool at Rs 450. Address: 146, Princess Street, Opposite Bank of India, Round Building. Tel: 022-22084586/4891. This is also available at surgical stores around the country.

Delhi

■ Khosla Stores stocks walkers ranging from Rs 300 to Rs 2,500 and Visco’s cane cum stool for Rs 350. It also keeps a wide range of hearing aids from Rs 500 to Rs 8,000, a variety of glucometers ranging from Rs 2,000 to Rs 5,500, and TENS at Rs 3,400. Address: 47/B, Khan Market. Tel: 011-24615289, 30951360.

■ Nath Brothers sells Omron thermometers for Rs 300. Address: 2 G, Connaught Place. Tel: 011-23327284.

■ Hintek Electronics Pvt Ltd sells two models of TENS. XLY2 costs Rs 6,000 and XLY3 costs Rs 7,000. Address: A 10, Green Park Main. Tel: 011-26562567, 31019606.

Chennai

■ Pikay’s Medico Surgical stocks all the gadgets mentioned except digital

Kolkata

■ Hintek Electronics Pvt Ltd

Products on the web

■ Simple Abilities Inc
(www.simpleabilities.com/international_orders.html) offers worldwide shipping on the bar magnifier at US$ $9.95 (Rs 455) plus shipping. It also stocks other assisted living devices.

■ 3Dlens (www.3dlens.com/enter.html) sells sheet magnifiers starting at US$ 0.9 each (Rs 41), depending on the size and quantity of your order.

■ Indiatimes Health & Personal Care
(shopping.indiatimes.com) sells the Citizen Digital and Vitavocks thermometers for Rs 250 and Rs 1,700 respectively.

All the retail outlets mentioned here will ship nationwide on payment by DD/money order. Harmony does not accept responsibility for problems with orders and shipments. But do write to us with your complaints and suggestions.
Wordage

New words come up when people do new things. A significant number of the 357 new entries that the Oxford English Dictionary has added in the past four quarters have come from the world of science, a hothouse of activity, or from parallel cultures that thrive despite the straitjacket of the mainstream. One of the latest, most spirited subcultures is that of age. Across the world, people are living longer, forging original lifestyles for themselves and expressing their concerns more vociferously. As a result, a new culture of age, along with a brand new vocabulary of its own, is emerging. Here is the proof, in so many words.

Grey nomad. A retired person who travels extensively, particular in a recreational vehicle.

Example: Mr Jeffcock turned 70 last birthday. He is one of a generation of “grey nomads”, old in body but young at heart, backpacking its way around the world. Spurred on by greater life expectancy and better health in old age, they are travelling independently and sleeping in youth hostels.

— The Independent, February 27, 2000

Beanpole family. A family whose living members come from many generations, but with few members in each generation.

Example: With people having fewer children and living longer, the whole notion of family will change. Widely extended families of cousins of similar age will be replaced by ‘beanpole’ families of many generations.

— The Observer, May 12, 2002

NORC. acronym. Naturally occurring retirement community; an apartment building or neighbourhood where most of the residents have grown old.

Example: Niehl, who lives in a North Side NORC building, was happy to get some help from the program. Now on Mondays, a social worker and nurse visit the building.

— Chicago Tribune, May 26, 2002

Seachanger. A person who retires to a seaside dwelling.

Example: While many Australians flock to the coast as seachangers, they end up as cave dwellers just as they were in the crowded, polluted, crime-ridden cities they left behind.

— Sunday Mail (QLD), January 6, 2002

Elder. To share wisdom and knowledge with people who are younger than oneself.
Example: Thus, we affirm the success of eldering or “saging”, not aging. Although we admire our young, significant wisdom lies with our elders.
—Sun-Sentinel, April 7, 1995

Supercentenarian. A person who is at least 110 years old.

Example: Today, [Opal] Neerman and her family will celebrate her 110th birthday. There are only 45 people living worldwide who are verified to be as old as her. “I don’t feel 110,” said Neerman. “More like 99.” It’s an elite club she is joining, the “supercentenarians”.
—Orlando Sentinel, December 18, 2003

Grays on trays. Older adult snowboarders.

Example: Snowboarding is the fastest-growing sport among the 18 to 25-year-olds advertisers covet, and even has increasing appeal among older adults — or “grays on trays”, as snowboarders call them.
—The Wall Street Journal, February 13, 2002

Age heaping. In a survey result, the clumping of respondents’ ages on certain values, particularly those ending in 0 and 5.

Example: According to 2000 census information, there are more than 51,000 Americans who are 100 or older, among them about 1,400 so-called supercentenarians who top 110. The Census Bureau says the numbers are probably inaccurate, mixing human error with equally human wishful thinking. Researchers have found that some in their 90s succumb to a phenomenon called “age heaping”: rounding up their ages to end in 5 or 0.
—Chicago Tribune, August 30, 2001

And here are some terms that have come up in India:

Nana Nani Park. Parks for the elderly.

Example: The Nana Nani municipal park in Yamunanagar, Pune, inaugurated with much fanfare on Monday, was closed by the civic body the very next day. [People] who turned up to enjoy the park facilities were greeted by a locked gate.
—Times of India, October 3, 2001

Silver Citizen. People who are over 50 in terms of years, but ageless in terms of spirit.

Example: The Silver Citizens are people who raise cool eyebrows at wasted jargon like ‘twilight years’ and take up new vocations with an astonishing zest, turning their lives around dramatically in the process.

Except for the last two, all the words and phrases above are culled from www.wordspy.com, an incubator of new words till they find place in formal dictionaries.

—Compiled by Anuradha Kumar
A brush with Laxman

India has woken up to his work for the past 57 years.

Dharmendra Bhandari meets R K Laxman, a most uncommon man

When dream girl Hema Malini was once asked which man she admired the most, she said: “R K Laxman, of course.” Tell the cartoonist about it, and you get no comment. Just a sudden twinkle in his eye.

This subtlety characterises 81-year-old Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Laxman, a man just as unassuming as his most famous character, the dhobi and checked-coat clad Common Man. Simple cotton half-sleeve shirt—white and blue are favourites—and huge black-rimmed spectacles. A Mumbai apartment that’s sparse, almost spartan, with the only splashes of colour coming from a bright red child’s bicycle parked dead centre in the living room, and Laxman’s sketches dotting the wall—you spy Lord Ganesha, one of his granddaughter Rimanka, and lots of crows. “They are smart and have a strong survival instinct,” he once wrote. “As far back as I can remember, the crow attracted me because it was so alive on the landscape, standing out black against the green trees, blue sky, red earth and yellow compound wall. The common crow is really an uncommon bird.”

Just like Laxman is an uncommon man. On one level, he almost seems divorced from the world. For instance, in May this year, Bombay Times, the city supplement of The Times of India in Mumbai, quoted actor Rani Mukerji, in bold type, saying: “I wouldn’t mind marrying a Times of India cartoonist.” She was talking about her latest film, where she romances a cartoonist. A friend of Laxman, though, went to town ribbing him about being the focus of Mukerji’s affections. His family—wife Kamala, son Srinivas, daughter-in-law Usha and nine-year-old Rimanka—thought it was hilarious. Laxman just had two simple questions: “Who is Rani Mukerji?” and “What does she look like?”

Talk to Laxman, and at first glance, you see little of the wit
and dry humour that you would expect; just a dour, self-effacing exterior. But over a cup of 
*kaapi*—goodness-to-real filter coffee—he begins to come out of his shell, slowly. Kamala has a 
lot to do with it; she argues, cajoles, teases and pampers him constantly; her garrulity forces 
him to respond.

Ask him if he’s happy with the 
new government and he 
harrumphs: “I like all 
governments; they work for me. 
If there were no governments, 
there would be no cartoonists.” 
The Budget? “The Budget is a 
bore,” he snaps. “The papers, 
NDTV are still talking about it 
all the time. Remember Nani 
Palkhivala’s Budget analysis? 
Those were the days.” Laxman 
doesn’t spare any words when it 
comes to the media. “Things 
have undergone a sea change 
since my early days: packaging 
has become more important than 
content.” And he’s obviously not 
too thrilled with computer- 
generated cartoons. “With 
computers, where’s the depth, 
the personal touch?”

Laxman draws the old-fashioned 
way, and continues doing so 
despite the stroke he suffered 
last year which paralysed the 
entire left side of his body. This 
is the man who reported to work 
at *The Times of India* at 8.30 am 
sharp, every day. He now works 
out of his bedroom, but still 
never misses a day—at 3 pm, 
someone from *The Times* comes 
home to collect his cartoon. 
What keeps him going? 
Rimanika, aka “Kutilla, 
Mahalakshmi, Babydoll”. He’s 
taught her how to sketch. “She 
also sings, dances, everything. 
But these children are so 
overburdened at school. They 
never have time to develop their 
creative talents like we did.”

Laxman started developing his 
early on. Born in 1923 in Mysore, 
he started sketching on the wall 
when he was three. Crows, of 
course. “I tried to draw their 
antics,” he remembers. “My mother saw this and encouraged 
me. She told me that Lord 
Shanisvara used the crow for his 
mount. ‘If you draw His crow,’ 
she told me, ‘surely He will send 
you good luck’.” Maybe it 
worked. Laxman won his first 
rave review from a teacher, 
when he drew a peepul leaf on a 
slate. “You will be an artist one 
day,” the teacher said. Laxman 
wasn’t surprised. “Generally, 
people hardly see anything 
around them,” he says. “But I 
had a keen eye. I observed 
everything and had a gift for 
recalling details.”

There was never any formal 
training. His application to the J 
J School of Arts, Mumbai, was 
rejected—he was told the 
drawings he had submitted as 
part of his application “lacked 
the talent to qualify for 
enrolment”. There’s a dry 
chuckle when he tells you how, 
many years down the road, he 
was invited to the institution as 
a chief guest at its annual 
exhibition of paintings.

His first break came while he 
was still in college in Mysore, 
when big brother R K Narayan 
asked him to illustrate his short 
stories—they appeared in *The 
Hindu*. But his move to Mumbai 
made him. From a part-time 
assignment with *Blitz*, he moved 
on to a job at the *Free Press 
Journal*. Creative differences—the 
*Journal*’s proprietor banned him 
from making fun of 
communists—impelled him to 
move to *The Times of India* in 
1947. He’s been there for over 57 
years. And India continues to 
wake up to the common man.
When Laxman was asked whether the character would change in the new millennium, he shot back: “Change? Does the colour of the sky ever change?”

Laxman doesn’t take too kindly to change. He probably doesn’t need to. Khushwant Singh once wrote in a column: “Both R K Narayan and Laxman conceal enormous self-esteem and inflated egos. I have to concede, though, that neither has anything to be modest about. Laxman is the pillar that sustains The Times of India. The day his cartoons stop appearing on its front pages, Indians who start their day with a smile will have nothing left to smile about.”

Some people, though, feel Laxman needs to do more than just make people smile. “He doesn’t take the debate forward,” said cartoonist and Malayalam litterateur O V Vijayan once. “There is no political comment, only political statement,” echoed his nephew Ravi Shankar, cartoonist and Deputy Editor, India Today. But The Hindu’s cartoonist Keshav argued: “Laxman puts us on the spot. The common man is helpless in his country; he chokes with frustrations and fury. Laxman’s cartoons convert this rage into humour.”

This humour has won Laxman many awards, among them the Ramon Magsaysay Award for excellence in journalism in 1984. And the Padma Bhushan much earlier in 1973, despite his severe criticism of the establishment, and politicians, over the years. “A politician is one who talks, walks and behaves as though he is perpetually modelling for the cartoonist,” he says. “And cartoons can reduce them to clowns.” You start to ask him which his favourite cartoon is, but Kamala pre-empts you: “Please don’t ask him that. He’ll say he hasn’t drawn his best cartoon yet.”

Now, packaging has become more important than content.
— R K Laxman

He’s willing, though, to tell you about the politician he had the hardest time drawing: Rajiv Gandhi. “He was tall, young and handsome,” Laxman remembers. “There was nothing in his features I could exploit.” But he kept at it. “I was able to gather plenty of ideas from his style of functioning,” he says. “I managed to find points in his features for distortion. I made him look more rotund, I shortened his nose and tilted it upwards, and reduced the hair on his pate.” It worked — too well, according to Laxman. “After a few years, people started to say that Rajiv had begun to resemble my cartoon version. Maybe it was the pressure of work.”

And how does Laxman cope with pressure? Over the years, he’s been a Scotch and saadam (rice) man. After his stroke, the premium imported Scotch has been replaced by beer—doctor’s orders. “Everyone is taking to spirituality, meditation these days,” he suddenly says. “I can’t do it; my mind always wanders.”

Books? “Only at night. I just spent the past few days reading the most awful book.” He shows it to you: When We Were Orphans by Japanese Booker Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro. “See the back, the reviews people have written. You take it, read it and see. Totally unworthy chap.” Worthy, according to Laxman, is, well, R K Narayan. There’s a small smile here. “Also Graham Greene and Vikram Seth. But I don’t read as much as I used to.” It’s the same for travel: “No one has travelled as much as me, but I find aeroplanes very uncomfortable now.” Kamala jumps right in here: “You really enjoyed our trip to Amby Valley this year,” she argues. Another smile.

You hate to leave just when Laxman’s starting to open up, but it’s time for his physiotherapy. As you get up, he reminds you to take the Ishiguro book. He’s signed it—the writing’s a tad wobbly, but the ‘x’ in Laxman is as emphatic as ever. Some things never change.
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Fabric of freedom

Kala Shahani represents a whole generation of Indians whose principles formed the bedrock of a new, independent India, writes Nilanjana Sengupta

Kala Shahani remembers meeting Mahatma Gandhi for the first time in Karachi. Her eyes widened with pleasure when she heard he was coming to Rambaug to give a lecture. She was only 10 years old. “I was already reading his books and pamphlets,” says Shahani, now 85. “He spoke about his philosophies of simplicity, sacrifice and service.” She saw grown women so moved that they removed their expensive jewellery and donated it. “I was touched and determined to do something,” she recollects. She did only what a 10-year-old could do—she decided to wear khadi and nothing else for the rest of her life.

Shahani, in fact, fasted for three days till her distraught mother relented, buying her two white, coarse khadi frocks. “My mother thought if she bought me only two, I would wear them occasionally. But I used to wear one and wash the other everyday,” she recalls. Since then, for 75 years now, Shahani has only worn what she calls “the fabric of freedom”.

Like everyday, today too Shahani has been up since 4 am, reading some of the many religious books in Hindi, English and Sikh verse (Sukhmani) that are lined up on the windowsill and the bookshelf above her bed. She also likes reading stories by Rabindranath Tagore and other Hindi novels. “My children keep getting me new books to read,” she says.

Family photographs adorn the otherwise sparse walls of her room in the Colaba (Mumbai) flat she shares with her son and daughter-in-law. “Both my grandchildren are studying abroad. They love me too much and I miss them a lot,” she smiles and then, crinkling her eyes, she ventures, “They are very good students and too clever for me.” A wooden stick that she uses for walking lies against the wall. Shahani points out the spots on her limbs injured owing to a couple of falls in the past few years. “I am not weak,” she asserts. “It is just that I have grown old. I can still walk and do lots of work. But sometimes my hands shake or I just fall.” She’s not happy about not being able to hustle and bustle on her feet as before.

Never one to let tragedies, hurdles or disappointments of any sort stand in her way, Shahani has always surged ahead, giving ample demonstration of the independent streak in her. And there’s the satisfaction of keeping a promise—wearing khadi. Dressed in the white khadi gown that her daughter-in-law got for her, she says, “This is very good quality. In the olden days, I used to wear coarse fabric.”

Shahani, who brought up her son alone on a meagre income, refused the pension after her husband’s death because one cannot be paid for “serving the motherland”.

However, one long-ago night in January 1948, kindly Muslim neighbours in Karachi begged her to don a burkha for a few hours till the riots died down. “My husband Shanti Shahani was the secretary of Congress House. Terrible riots ravaged the city one day after he left for work. My son Govind was about two years old and running high fever. I was worried about what to do. When my neighbours asked me to wear a burkha, I told them I couldn’t. But they made me understand that I must wear one for the sake of my son,” she says, remembering that night of hatred and prejudice.

Shahani’s family of three was one of the last to leave Karachi. Her husband did not want to accept Partition, he wanted to remain in Karachi and serve all those who worked with the Congress. However, all their relatives had left for India and
on January 30, Gandhi was assassinated. The smell
of hatred again started to saturate the environ-
ment. Finally, in February 1948, they left for India.

Shahani never saw Karachi again. “It is like
Bombay,” she recalls, adding, “very
cosmopolitan”. Looking out of the window, she
says wistfully, “I don’t know why you are writing
about me. I am not a very clever or efficient
person.” Shahani is doubtless that, in today’s world,
her story will brook any ripples. In the face of the
bigger sacrifices and greater struggles that
characterised the pre-Independence era, she
believes her involvement was ordinary.

She did not even like participating in processions
where effigies of the British were burnt. “It was my
husband who went to jail for clandestinely printing
Quit India pamphlets at the press at home. I have
courted arrest just once, for publicly undertaking
the independence pledge.” The experience, she
says, was “good fun”.

Shahani’s experiences may be echoed by millions
of people of the time, but in her story lie values
and principles that evoke the struggle they went
through – and which, in turn, can inspire an entire
generation in independent India. For the lady who
lost her husband at 37, her mother 11 days later
and her six-year-old daughter soon after, who
single-handedly brought up her son on a meagre
income, and, in a stunning act of simplicity and
conviction, refused the pension after her husband’s
death because one cannot be paid for “serving the
motherland”, these ideals became a way of life.

Till 2000, she was working with a leading
Sindhi daily, Hindusthan. “Its foundation was
laid by Gandhiji,” she says. “Now it comes out
only on Sundays. I worked there for about 45
years, after my husband died, looking after their
sales, publishing and advertising. I still write for
them occasionally.”

The *charkha* may have long broken, the sari she
spun for herself tattered and torn, but the never-
say-die spirit of this frail woman burns bright,
signifying the strength and intensity of a
generation that continues to show the way even
today, 57 years after Independence.
Narayan Vinayak Virkar took it upon himself to chronicle the freedom movement in India. Sharada Dwivedi pays a tribute to the nation through a selection of photographs curated from his archive.

An exceptional man, Narayan Vinayak Virkar documented the Indian freedom movement from 1916 to 1947 through his incredible photographs. Born in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra on September 30, 1890, young Virkar was enthralled by the art of photography, which was introduced to India in the 1850s. He spent several years studying it in Lahore with his guru, renowned artist and Vedic scholar Pandit Shreepad Damodar Satavalekar. After a period of intensive training, Satavalekar advised his young student to settle in Bombay Presidency and begin his career. Virkar initially worked as an X-ray photographer on the hospital ship, Madras, for a year. In 1916, he opened his own studio at Girgaum Road in Bombay and subsequently another one at Nasik.

Although he soon became a popular society photographer, Virkar’s primary interest lay in an entirely different sphere. From the outset, he appointed himself the unofficial chronicler of India’s struggle for independence—a mission that gave him no monetary benefit but immense satisfaction. An ardent admirer of the Indian National Congress, established in 1888, he took upon himself the task of recording portraits of nationalist leaders and their activities on film.

Photography in those early years was not as effortless as it is today. Cameras were large and cumbersome, fixed on wooden tripods, and could not easily be carried around. Fragile photographic glass plates coated with emulsion also had to be handled carefully. The quality depended primarily on the personal judgement of the photographer, especially with regard to conditions of lighting. When lighting was poor, the photographer had to resort to the hazardous process of burning magnesium wire or powder in a metal tray. Undaunted by all these obstacles, young Virkar travelled with his heavy equipment to Lucknow, Calcutta, Delhi, Amritsar, Agra and other towns in the footsteps of the nationalists.

At each Congress session, he waited eagerly with his camera always ready, covered with a black or red cloth to prevent exposure of the photographic plates. On spotting leading personalities, he would request them to pose and, inevitably, his subjects obliged. Virkar’s astonishing portrait studies include almost all the leading political figures of the time.

Among his magnificent early portraits are those of Mahatma and Kasturba Gandhi, Pandit Motilal, Jawaharlal and Kamala Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Dr Annie Besant, Mira Behn, the Ali Brothers, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Chittaranjan Das, Subhash Chandra Bose, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Lalaji Lajpat Rai, B G Horniman and many others.

In addition to portraits of national leaders, Virkar documented key historic events and meetings held all over India during the freedom struggle, particularly those that took place in Bombay. These meetings were addressed by Mahatma Gandhi, B G Tilak, the Nehrus, Sarojini Naidu and other leaders and satyagrahis. There are group
photographs of the Indian National Congress, images taken on occasions like ‘Black Sunday’, Tilak’s funeral or the horrific scenes at Amritsar after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919.

Since Narayan Vinayak Virkar’s death in December 1968, his grandson Rajendra Virkar has preserved his work. There are over 1,500 glass plates and 1,200 large paper negatives in the collection, covering an incredibly wide range of subjects. In addition to images of the freedom struggle, Virkar also photographed scenic views of Indian cities, towns and forts, portraits of leading social figures, a series on the renowned theatre artist, Bal Gandharva and the vocalist Hirabai Barodekar, scenes from important Marathi plays and musicals, and portraits of popular religious gurus.

Over the years, a few photographs—some in the form of third-generation prints—found their way to archives such as the Nehru Museum in Delhi. Virkar’s photographs have also been displayed at exhibitions in the UK and Germany.

Narayan Vinayak Virkar (1890-1968)
poses for the camera with his son, Shriram.
A perceptive study of **Sarojini Naidu** (1879-1949). Known for her sense of humour, she referred to Gandhi as ‘Mickey Mouse’ and maintained that the Mahatma did not know how much the country had to spend to keep him poor! She maintained a permanent suite of rooms in Mumbai’s Taj Mahal Hotel in the 1920s, where she hosted freedom fighters, poets, writers, artists and friends.
A rare shot of a clothed Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) with Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) at a meeting at Ahmedabad in 1917. Soon after his return to India from South Africa at the start of the Civil Disobedience Movement, to symbolise his empathy with India’s masses, Gandhi restricted his daily apparel to a cotton loincloth and shawl.
In her younger days, the irrepressible Dr Annie Besant (1837-1933) had been tried in England for immorality after the publication of her pamphlet on birth control. She was President of the Theosophical Society from 1907 until her death.
Subhash Chandra Bose (born 1897) relaxes before Virkar’s camera. Elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1938 and 1939, Bose first proved his mettle working for the total boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Calcutta in 1921.
Jawaharlal Nehru once wrote of his wife Kamala Nehru (1899-1936): “She became a symbol of Indian women... What was Kamala? Did I know her? Understand her real self? Did she know or understand me?”
Virkar’s subtle portrait of Kasturba Gandhi (1869-1944) hand-spinning yarn. She was a great source of strength and inspiration to the Mahatma.

During the Irwin-Gandhi talks held in Delhi in 1931, Madeline Slade, who adopted the name Mira Behn, brought the Mahatma’s food, dates and milk each day to the Viceregal Lodge.
Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925), with his wife, Vasanti Devi, his daughter, and Sarojini Naidu, extreme left, in Calcutta. He coined the phrase: ‘Swaraj for the masses, not for the classes’.
A special session of the Indian National Congress held at Bombay in 1918 with Annie Besant presiding.

Freedom fighters display their injuries and pose for Virkar after a Raj period police action.
A group of Gujarati, Maharashtrian and Parsi women in Bombay display the tricolour in the 1920s. Gandhi encouraged women to join the movement, and said: “Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom, with him.”
Soon, you’ll think twice about using your soap.

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Ordinary soaps are harsh on your skin. If you hold a piece of litmus paper against a wet soap, you’ll see that the paper turns blue (The darker the shade of blue, the harsher your soap.) Now if you try this with Dove, the colour won’t change. This is because Dove is different. Dove has one-fourth moisturizing cream and it’s pH neutral, thus making it the mildest of all. So treat your skin with the care it deserves—the care only Dove can give.

Dove is now available for just Rs.25/- (MRP incl. of all taxes for 75g)
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Drawn into the Web

Proud new owners of a PC, the Purohits decide to get an Internet connection. Sachin Kalbag helps them take their first steps on the information superhighway

Last month, the Purohits bought their first computer, and they’re enjoying every minute on it. A couple of days after they bought their PC, they decided it was time to use it to communicate with their daughter in the US.

Ankita works in Redmond, a suburb of Seattle, an American city best known for two things: the hit Hollywood movie *Sleepless in Seattle* with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan— “I wish she were my daughter-in-law,” Mrs Purohit would say each time the movie was shown on television—and for being the headquarters of Microsoft, the world’s largest information technology company, where Ankita works. The Purohits also wanted to send their son and daughter-in-law in San Jose, California, one email everyday.

One world

To send an email, the Purohits soon discovered, you require an Internet connection. And there came the roadblock. “What really is the Internet?” they asked me. “And just how do we go about getting a connection?” “The Internet,” I said, “is an amazing tool.” I told them to think of it as their local network of senior citizens—every person in the neighbourhood is a storehouse of information, and when they meet each other, they tend to exchange that information. The Internet is exactly the same, except that instead of senior citizens, there are networked computers, and the network extends across the world. It’s like a spider’s web—every point or computer is connected to every other computer in the world whenever you are logged on to the Internet. Hence, it’s often called the World Wide Web. This is also the reason that most websites begin with www.

“But how do you get connected?” Mrs Purohit persisted. You need an Internet connection, I told her. And to get it activated, you need a small gadget called a Modem, short for Modulator Demodulator. It’s the device that actually transmits data from a PC in some corner of the world to yours. Most PCs these days come equipped with an internal modem, so you don’t really have to buy them separately. Thankfully, the Purohits’ PC has an internal modem.

Well connected

The next question: which connection to buy? “I saw an ad for broadband Internet in my newspaper the other day,” said Mr Purohit. “It promised me high speeds at a low cost. I think I’ll go in for that. I’ve even called their customer service executive home.”

“In India, what goes by the name of broadband Internet is not only laughable, it’s pathetic,” I responded with fervour. “And people like you and me end up paying much more than we would with a regular phone connection.” Mr Purohit was taken aback by my aggressive tone. I was, too. But my agitation was justified; every word I said was true—I had gone down that road myself.
The Purohits went by my word, and decided to buy a phone Internet connection. It would be simple—just buy a CD, load it, and it does everything for you, including dialling the number to connect you to the Internet after installation. They had several options—VSNL, BSES, MantraOnline, MTNL, Sify, Rottanet—all of them available nationally. They settled for one; it cost them about Rs 800 for 100 hours of access. They knew that you could pay through a credit card, but since they didn’t have one, they had to ask their neighbour’s daughter to pick up an installation CD on her way back from college.

The CD arrived in the evening; all they had to do on their own was type in their unique name and password with which they could access the Internet. The username and password work like a key to a back security locker—your bank account name is the username, and the key is your access password. Access between 11 pm and 8 am was free; since their chats with their son and daughter could only happen at that time because of the time difference, they were more than happy.

Net gains
The Purohits quickly began to show signs of getting addicted to the Internet. Gathering more knowledge was more than a pastime for the couple, it almost bordered on obsession—and with the Internet, they knew the sky was the limit. Email and chat took up most of their free time. They would also discover online dictionaries, knowledge directories, communities, news sites, the works.

What impressed them most was that they could now talk to their children over the Internet using a small microphone and headphones, just as they would over the telephone, and perhaps with the same amount of clarity.

The Purohits are on their way on the information superhighway. It’s only a matter of time before they go into top gear.

*Sachin Kalbag is Executive Editor of Digit, a technology magazine. Next month, the Purohits get more net-savvy, going beyond email and chats.*
TAX shelter

Save wisely and get maximum benefit from the provisions of the Income Tax Act, advises Arvind Pahwa

With the rapid improvement in healthcare, India’s demographic landscape has undergone an unprecedented change in the past 50 years. The number of those living beyond the age of 60 is rising rapidly. Assuming the average age of retirement as 60, a person needs to plan for a span of 24 years as against seven to 10 years after retirement.

We need to rediscover life – retiring from a 9 to 5 job does not mean retiring from life. But to enjoy life, we have to plan in advance. There are two key aspects to be considered: psychological, the need for a positive attitude; and physical, which includes financial and health management. Tax is one of the outflows from existing income that reduces liquidity to meet various expenses. Thus, it is essential that silvers are aware of relevant taxation provisions so that they can minimise taxation and enhance available funds.

These provisions are:

- Tax rebate up to Rs 20,000 under Section 88B
- Standard deduction against pension for retired employees
- Higher tax-free returns from investments
- Avoiding hardship of claiming refund with the help of 197A (1C) of the act

Matter of act

Under the Income Tax Act 1961, a senior citizen—defined as an individual who is 65 years or above—is entitled to a tax rebate of 100 per cent on the tax payable by him in the financial year, subject to an upper ceiling of Rs 20,000 for the relevant year. This rebate was restricted to Rs 15,000 for assessment year 2003-04 and was enhanced to Rs 20,000 from April 1, 2004 (assessment year 2004-05 and onwards). This exemption is available under Section 88B of the Act. This rebate is available irrespective of the levels of taxable income of the individual.

The effect of this relief is that a senior citizen does not have to pay any income tax on income of the level of approximately Rs 1,53,000 in a financial year. This could be higher if you have planned your investments (see illustration). Any pension received is taxable as salary income. However, a standard deduction under the provisions of Section 16(i) of the Act would be available to the individual, if his income from salary does not exceed Rs 5,00,000 per annum.

The said amount of deductions:

- If salary income does not exceed Rs 1,50,000, standard deduction u/s 16(i) is 33 1/3 per cent of the salary or Rs 30,000, which ever is less.
- If salary income exceeds Rs 1,50,000 but does not exceed Rs 3,00,000, standard deduction u/s 16(i) (B) is restricted to Rs 25,000.
- If salary income exceeds Rs 3,00,000 but does not exceed Rs 5,00,000, standard deduction u/s 16 (i) (C) is limited to Rs 20,000.
- If salary income exceeds Rs 5,00,000, standard deduction allowable is nil.

The choice of investment instruments depends upon the assessee’s tax bracket. There are 8 per cent RBI taxable bonds for low tax-bracket seniors and 6.5 per cent tax-free bonds for higher tax paying senior citizens.

Right claim

Under the provisions of subsection (1C) of Section 197 A of the Act, a senior citizen is entitled to give a declaration in Form 15 H to the effect that the tax on his estimated total income for the relevant year will be ‘nil’, in which case no tax deduction at source (TDS) will be made in respect of income earned by him through interest on fixed deposits, bonds, dividends from shares, mutual funds, etc.

Thus, in cases where the tax liability of the senior is going to be ‘nil’ as a result of tax rebate
u/s 88B, he can avoid the administrative problems of TDS initially and subsequent claim of refund from the Income Tax Department. This also provides better liquidity.

In order to claim standard deduction, there should be an employer-employee relationship, even if it is a former one, as in the case of payment of pension. Thus, for the Varishtha Bima Yojana pension scheme, which is to be scrapped, standard deduction cannot be claimed.

The illustration (see table) will show you how to plan your finances so that no tax would be payable up to an annual income of Rs 2.36 lakh. This approach would ensure liquidity of above Rs 2 lakh per annum while ensuring the enhancement of income by savings (through tax-efficient bonds).

**Take charge**

The Budget does not offer anything new for silverings, only a special savings scheme, yielding 9 per cent per annum. The Varishtha Bima Pension Yojana, which was giving a similar return, is to be discontinued.

While you are still earning, you must set aside or invest part of your earnings. Pass on to your heirs only the amount you deem appropriate in accordance with their needs. Consult a financial expert; many new opportunities are opening up and older ones are becoming irrelevant. To enjoy life fully, invest wisely when you are young. The best is still to come.

---

**How to plan your finances**

Assume that for assessment year 2004-05 (year ending March 31, 2004), you have attained the age of 65 years on March 31, 2004 and have a gross total income of Rs 2,36,000 as under:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures in Rupees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pension @ Rs 7,000 per month (pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent from property @ Rs 5,000 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dividends received from Indian companies (includes income received from mutual funds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from other sources, such as interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash flows:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total inflow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total outflow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property tax, maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charges @ Rs, 1,000 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments in bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eligible u/s 88 (2) (xvi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Flow</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Income tax computation for a senior citizen**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income from salary</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>84,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less: Standard deduction u/s 16 (i) (1/3 or Rs 30,000 whichever less)</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income from property</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less: Property tax</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less: 30% for repairs</td>
<td>48,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income from other sources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dividend</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less: Exempt u/s 10(34)</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other income</strong></td>
<td>72,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taxable income</strong></td>
<td>161,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross tax</td>
<td>22,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebate u/s 88B (additional tax rebate @100% of IT payable subject limit of Rs 20,000 for senior citizens)</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax payable</td>
<td>2,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebate U/S 88: 15% of the amount invested, Rs 16,600</td>
<td>2,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net tax liability</strong></td>
<td><strong>NIL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rebate u/s 88B is to be allowed before allowing the tax rebate u/s 88.

**Note:** FY: financial year; AY: assessment year
Take life in your stride

Dr Anjali Chhabria tells you how to cope with physical and emotional challenges

Q. I am a 67-year-old widow and live with my two sons. My younger son is going to shift out soon and wants me to come along. But his wife and I don’t share a great relationship. My elder son wants me to stay on with him. I actually want to go to my native house and live alone. What should I do?

A. Remember, you are lucky that both your children want you around. At times, due to minor conflicts, we find it difficult to stay with our loved ones. You must tell your family how you feel, and let them share their point of view too. Your decision to live alone should not be an impulsive one. Visit your native place for two to three months if your health permits and meet all your relatives and friends there. If you eventually decide to stay on, explain it to your family; but make sure you visit them often.

Q. I am a 53-year-old woman. Of late, my husband has become very aggressive with me and the children. He feels we want to take away his property and that we are poisoning him; he’s stopped eating at home. He refuses to take his medicines. He has also become more sexual; at times, he hurts me. I don’t know what to do.

A. Your husband seems to be suffering from a neuro-psychiatric illness and needs urgent medical attention. Sometimes disturbances in the brain are manifested as behavioural problems. Be patient, and persuade your husband to see a psychiatrist. If he refuses, consult one without him. Act now.

Q. I am a 54-year-old woman. Of late, I have frequent palpitations and perspire a lot. Occasionally, I also get slight pain in the chest, feel nauseous and have spells of dizziness. I don’t sleep well, get irritated easily and snap at others. Is this the onset of menopause? And does menopause mean I can no longer enjoy sex?

A. It could be menopause. Symptoms like you have described can occur even five to seven years before you actually stop menstruating. Consult a gynaecologist; there are safe hormonal and non-hormonal treatments available. Good eating habits, exercise, yoga and other relaxation techniques are also helpful. Menopause does not mean the end of your sex life. However, some temporary physical and emotional discomfort may need to be tackled. For symptoms of depression, consult a psychiatrist. Menopause is not an illness, just another phase of life. Take it in your stride.

Q. I am a 70-year-old man. Following a recent back surgery, I lack the confidence to do my daily chores, although there is no physical problem. My wife is taking care of everything for me, and each day I feel increasingly dependent on her. Now, she has to undergo a cataract operation herself. And my children stay abroad. I just don’t know what to do. How will we manage?

A. Your wife seems to be a source of great support. But now, it’ll be time for you to help her. Start doing your own chores; this will also make you feel independent. Begin with things where you don’t need anyone else’s help. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. So get up and do something new—and enjoy the surprise on your wife’s face.

Dr Anjali Chhabria is a Mumbai-based consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist. For advice, mail us or email at contact.mag@harmonynindia.org or fax at (022) 22852217
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Living room

The Harmony Interactive Centre serves as an antidote to boredom, loneliness and the craving for space, says Nilanjana Sengupta

Concentration writ large on their faces, the 50-odd members in the room at the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum, South Mumbai, follow the yoga instructors closely, step for step. Keeping in mind the age group of the participants, the instructors, from the Kaivalyadharn centre on Mumbai’s Marine Drive, keep the regimen light.

One of the more sprightly silvers of the class is 70-year-old Prabha Salve, a retired Food Corporation of India employee. “My husband and I are both members here and are thankful that the centre opened in our area,” she says. Salve loves the company. “In my house, there are just the two of us,” she adds. “Now that we come to the centre everyday, sometimes even twice a day, our circle of friends has grown.”

For the largely middle-class people that have joined as members here, the centre has been a welcome initiative. Sharing the confines of their modest homes with brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, grandchildren and spouses has left these silver citizens with hardly any space to call their own. Here, the availability of space overrides all the other factors.

“Sitting at home and trying to spend time on your own is a very difficult proposition,” explains 71-year-old shop owner Kantilal R Shah. He pauses to correct the angle of the striker before letting it fly across the carrom board. “How much time can I spend at home anyway? Everyone gets disturbed; my grandchildren are busy with their homework and school, the children with their own work. When I leave home now for the centre, everyone feels, ‘oh good, at least he is keeping himself busy’,” he says.

With the number of activities increasing gradually, and with more events on the cards, the smiles on the faces here seem to be getting wider. More than anything else, it is the satisfaction of being able to voice opinions and of being heard over a cup of tea or a game of chess that makes coming to the centre so fulfilling.

“I used to manage by going for a morning walk to Chowpatty or the S K Patil Udyan nearby. Since my shop selling silver articles ran into bad weather, the evenings posed a big problem. As the afternoon would draw to a close, I had to sit and think how to spend time. The desperation would scare me,” confesses 58-year-old Digambar D Pore. Armed with a novel from the library, he recalls the celebration in June when he cut a cake at the centre to ring in his 58th year. “I myself forgot about
meals (three chapattis, rice, dal, vegetables, salad and curd, all for Rs 10) in the afternoon here,” says Mrs Pednekar, who comes here twice a day. “I used to sit idle at home or watch those ‘saas-bahu’ serials. Here, I can leave my problems behind and read books. I wish I could get my grandchildren to see, but I don’t know if they will be interested,” she adds.

Loneliness is an experience few silvers like to speak about. Sometimes even living amid four generations of family renders seniors alone, craving for a place of their own. The Harmony Interactive Centre serves as an antidote. Pore puts it perfectly: “You know when you see your doctor smile, half your diseases disappear. It’s like that here. When we meet our friends everyday, almost all our troubles fly out of the window.”

To know more about the centre and its activities, call us at (022) 30976440/6441 or email at centre.thakurdwar@harmonyyindia.org

Spiritual talks
August 9-14; 4 pm to 5.30 pm; Brahmacharya Satvik Chaitanyaji from the Chinmaya Mission will talk on the goals of life, how to age gracefully, satsang (“Cool Company”), WOW (with or without), power of prayers and meditation, and dealing with worldly attachments.

Slide show
August 11; Representatives from the Reptiles Rescue Centre will dispel myths and blind faith associated with snakes, with special reference to Nag Panchami.

Doctor’s talk
August 19; Dr Deepak Namjoshi, cardiologist, City Care Hospital in Mumbai, will talk on ageing.

Common birthday celebration
August 28

The centre is planning a walkathon on October 2, 2004. Details in the next issue.
Power to execute

What is a power of attorney and how does it work? Legalpundits answers all your questions

The power of attorney is a convenient device for people who want someone else to legally handle their personal affairs. There are two kinds of power of attorney: special power of attorney and general power of attorney. Both of them grant a gamut of legal powers, but need to be stamped, with signatures attested by a notary public. The registration of a power of attorney is not always mandatory. However, if it relates to immovable property, it must be registered. Point of caution: be careful, as there have been numerous instances where such powers are misused.

Q. What is a power of attorney?
A. It is a legal instrument, delegating authority to act on one’s behalf. One who signs (executes) it is called the Principal. The other is called an Agent or constituted attorney, and acts on behalf of the Principal in matters relating to property, finance or other such legal matters. The power of attorney is frequently used to help in the event of a Principal’s illness or disability, or in legal transactions where the principal cannot be present to sign the necessary legal documents. A Principal can give the Agent broad legal authority, or very limited authority.

Q. For how long is it valid?
A. It is valid:
- Till the purpose for which it is given is accomplished
- Till it is revoked
- During the lifetime of the person who makes it. On the death of the Principal, it becomes invalid even if the purpose for which it was given is not completed
- Till the death of the Agent

Q. What are the two powers of attorney?
A. The special power of attorney relates to a specific or single act or transaction, while the general power of attorney relates to more than one act or transaction. The special power of attorney helps:
- Execute a document
- Sell immovable property
- A director of a company to sign a prospectus
- To prepare a layout and sell plots
- To sell shares
- To operate the banking accounts of a firm

- To demand, sue for and recover money
- Execute all acts in connection with a pending suit
- To raise monies and mortgage property
- To obtain letters of administration in ministerial acts, relating to the development of property in favour of developers

The general power of attorney is a combination of any of the above.

Q. What are an Agent’s obligations to a Principal?
A. An Agent must safeguard the Principal’s property, and keep it separate from his/her own personal property. Money should be kept in a separate bank account for the benefit of the Principal. Also, an Agent must keep accurate financial records for all money and property coming into his/her possession. The Agent must always act in the best interests of the Principal.

Q. Do you need your signature witnessed on a power of attorney?
A. Yes, by a notary public.

Q. How can a power of attorney be revoked?
A. A power of attorney would stand revoked:
- If the Principal wishes so
- If the Principal dies or becomes of unsound mind
- If the business of the agency comes to an end
- If the Principal is adjudged insolvent

Contact: www.legalpundits.com
(Harmony takes no responsibility for advice offered in this column)
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Pressure points...72
The balance sheet

Loss of balance is a common ailment that strikes many people in their 50s and 60s. But timely physiotherapy can help you steady yourself, says Roshni Bajaj

Walking and standing on two feet is rare behaviour on this planet. It is a complex posture that only human beings use extensively to get around. Though we take it for granted, a lot of intricate biological mechanisms must function properly so that we can walk straight. But as we age, sometimes these mechanisms go haywire, leading to a medical condition called ‘loss of balance’. It is an ailment that commonly strikes many people between the ages of 55 and 60, and its effects are not limited to an unsteady gait. It includes slow reflexes, dizziness, reduced coordination, difficulty in manoeuvring slippery floors and problems in getting up after sitting or lying down. The patients also slowly lose strength in their lower limbs, are more prone to falls and eventually lose the confidence to even step out of their homes.

“In most cases, loss of balance can be rectified,” says Dr Sumit Saxena of the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, New Delhi. “But if help is not sought soon enough, it will gradually lead to a vegetative existence and then total dependence on others.”

On shaky ground
There are many causes of loss of balance. As the years catch up on us, our nervous system deteriorates inevitably, causing
our neural pathways to slow down; messages from our sensory inputs reach the brain later than usual and make our reflexes slower. Other causes are degenerative diseases like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s; a stroke; inner ear disease; or a history of injuries over a period of time. Certain combinations of drugs and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle as we get older also contribute to a loss of balance and eventual falls. In most cases, though, it is a combination of factors.

“The brain has 42 centres to maintain balance, gait and posture,” says Dr Nandu Chhabria, senior physiotherapist at Sir HN Hospital and Dr Bacha’s Hospital, Mumbai. “All of these work like an orchestra. With age and disease, if any of these get affected, we lose our rhythm. While this process starts at 37, it is most common in people over the age of 50.” But diabetics, heart patients and those with renal problems, hypertension and blood clots can be afflicted at any age. Also, loss of balance, a gradual process, is often brushed off by patients and their family as a normal part of ageing—which is not true.

This is exactly what happened with Sudha Krishnan, a 55-year-old Chennai housewife, who has always done all the housework on her own, from sweeping, swabbing and washing clothes to cooking. She suffered neck pain for many years, which gradually worsened and, more recently, she also started experiencing giddiness upon waking up and while doing some chores. But

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Kolkata: 033-2444723/1124, 4834/0122

**Dr Bacha’s Hospital Rooms,**
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**Indian Institute of the Physically Handicapped,**
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**Indian Spinal Injuries Centre,**
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26894884, 26898448,
www.isiconline.org

**Sir Harkissondas Hospital & Research Centre,**
Mumbai: 022-23855555

**Vijaya Health Centre,**
Chennai: 044-24830147/148

**Vimhans,** New Delhi: Tel. 011-26310510, 26310520,
www.vimhans.org

Krishnan simply put it down to the ageing factor and ignored it. Until one day, she keeled over and fell to the ground, losing consciousness for a few minutes.

Her family immediately took her to a neurosurgeon who, after ruling out other factors, referred her to a physiotherapist. Krishnan, it turned out, was suffering from spondylitis and vertigo, which had affected her sense of balance. A Shricandra, chief physiotherapist at Apollo Hospital, Chennai, who treated Krishnan, says: “Giddiness, especially early in the morning, headache, nausea, vomiting, disorientation, double vision and, in severe cases, loss of consciousness are some of the most common symptoms of loss of balance.”

Sometimes, loss of balance itself is a symptom, as Mumbai-based Latha Vishwanathan discovered. Her mother, Ananthalakshmi Parmeshwaran, 69, was coming back after one of her frequent trips to Ohio, USA. She had prepared her mother’s favourite homemade rice noodles for lunch. But Ananthalakshmi didn’t end up having any. After many difficult attempts at getting to the vermicelli, she gave up. “I just can’t eat them,” she exclaimed, bewildered at the sudden inability. Latha also noticed that her mother was sitting on the chair at a slant.

It was uncharacteristic behaviour for a woman known to be very active. After her husband’s death in 1988, Parmeshwaran has started spending long periods of time with her son in the US where she studied computers and American English to keep herself busy. She returned from her last trip to the US in 2003—which is when Latha had prepared her favourite vermicelli. “Till then, I thought she was merely jet lagged,” says Latha. “But at that moment, I realised something was wrong.” Parmeshwaran was diagnosed with Parkinson’s soon after.

**Straight talk**
Loss of balance has far-reaching consequences. A few months after the diagnosis, when
Parmeshwaran was crossing the street, her unsteady gait and weakened reflexes caused a minor accident with a taxi. Upset, she stopped stepping out of her home alone altogether. In the next few months, her posture progressively deteriorated and she was unable to perform even simple tasks like pleating her sari. Soon, the woman who used to fly overseas all on her own, lost the confidence to even move out of her own house.

For people with this ailment, though, even staying home is no guarantee. The most dire and common result of a loss of balance is a fall. “A third of the population over the age of 65 falls every year,” Dr Chhabria says. “After the age of 85, the ratio rises to 75 per cent, and then these falls are often fatal.” Low bone density coupled with extremely long recovery periods can mean that an aged patient might never recover at all.

Many factors contribute to our sense of balance. The feet (ankles and joints included) tell us about the nature of the surface, firm or soft, moving or still. Our inner ear balance centre (vestibular system) has a nerve connected to the brain, which transmits balance messages. This tells us if we’re upright or leaning, moving or still. Our eyes tell us if the world around us is in motion or static. Our brain processes these sensory messages and our muscles and joints coordinate to maintain this sense of balance. Normally, these systems are on autopilot but a disorder in any of these systems can cause disruption and lead to a fall. However, it needn’t come to that if you go to a physiotherapist soon enough. A fall can be prevented because a poor sense of balance can be corrected.

**Steadying yourself**

A physiotherapist can identify and isolate the problem through a series of balance tests. Once that has been done, the weakened sense is challenged to strengthen it through a series of exercises that are essentially evolved versions of the test. The exercises vary depending on the source of the problem and the patient’s progress. After that, it’s
a matter of practice, much like learning how to bicycle.

“The chances of cure obviously depend upon the nature and cause of the problem, and the state of the cerebellum,” says Dr Saxena of the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre. “If there is no damage to the brain cells, it can be completely rectified by training muscles through exercises.”

As it happened with Sudha Krishnan, in Chennai. Her physiotherapist, A Shrichandra, realised that with regular exercises, Krishnan could get her earlier life back. He recommended a whole range exercises from neck and eye movements to exercises that would improve her balance and coordination while walking and standing. Today, she is fully fit and is back to doing all the house work on her own.

But once a loss of balance occurs, exercises have to done throughout life—you can’t ever say that you are cured and stop doing them. “And if you continue with the balance programme, you remain risk-free,” says Dr Chabbria. Exercises also help in the case of irreversible conditions. “We cannot stop the progression of Parkinson’s disease, but exercises can delay it,” explains Dr B J Damani, neurosurgeon and consultant at Hinduja Hospital and Sir H N Hospital, Mumbai.

There are perhaps 50 to 60 progressive variants of the Posture & Gait Program of exercises, depending on the sense affected. For example, if a patient is highly visually dependent, the other two weakened senses are challenged by making him close his eyes and stand on one foot, on his toes or on an uneven surface. He is gradually forced to develop stability through the others.

The basic exercises include standing on one foot or on the toes, standing on an uneven surface like thick foam, standing on a tilt-board with a convex base and lying prone or sitting on a vestibular ball. The duration of these exercises can be increased gradually or they can be done with eyes closed to increase the challenge. Repeated in various combinations over time, with the guidance of a physiotherapist, they give remarkable results.

“It is very important to have the right doctor to lead you,” advises Latha Vishwanathan in Mumbai. “Don’t assume that you can watch the exercises and do them by yourself. I would give half the credit to the physiotherapist and half to my mother. She moved out to live by herself three months ago and now visits the temple everyday and does her own grocery shopping. Her confidence is back.”

Ananthalakshmi Parmeshwaran recently gave edged embroidered handkerchiefs to her physiotherapist. Her first attempt in two years.
From mom’s kitchen

I grew up on a staple diet of osaman-lachko dal and bhath (tur dal in differing consistencies mixed with rice), a basic food preparation considered ‘comforting’ in the parlance of Gujarati joint families. Typically, food occupied a central place within the scheme of our lives. The kitchen—presided over by Ba, my grandmother, two full-time cooks, and a visiting chef for nastas and mithais—was second only to the puja room. A separate ‘standing counter’ and a sit-down rasodu (kitchen) bustling with blazing sigris, which glowed amber as the day wore on, ensured that my days remained redolent with the tang of asafoetida and fresh vaghar (tempering). From that cavernous kitchen to my stand-up kitchenette—it overflows with fresh herbs, oils, sauces, a variety of breakfast cereals and cheeses which my grandmother would be appalled to see—it’s been a long and flavourful journey in pursuit of comfort, through food.

Lest one believes that comfort food is what we turn to when ill or depressed, perch the thought. It’s food for all times; simple, no frills food, made up of humble, but entirely satisfying ingredients known to soothe both stomach and heart. Comfort food is best equated with the words ‘reassuring’ and ‘familiar.’ A bowl of cornflakes steeped in warm milk, a moist Spanish omelette oozing with fresh cheese and black olives, or just mung dal khichdi: it’s the simplicity of flavours that stirs and satiates the inexplicable craving that surfaces each time life’s grind gets to you. At such moments, food, particularly ‘familiar’ food, can help console you and keep you grounded.

After 9/11, Western researchers have focused on the idea of ‘nesting’, linked with the human need for comfort and the psychological underpinnings behind people’s food preferences. A recent study conducted by the University of Illinois reveals that
nearly 40 per cent of comfort-giving foods include healthy main courses and soups. Brian Wansink, who headed the research team, says comfort foods are those whose consumption evokes a pleasurable state for a person. Drawing from surveys, the studies concluded that comfort food preferences are formed at an early age and are triggered, in addition to hunger, by conditioned associations and gender differences.

Indeed everyone I know associates comfort food with childhood memories. We all have our favourites, both recipes and a repertoire of stories that accompany each dish. For instance, New Delhi-based culinary consultant Jiggs Kalra, 56, still recalls the flavour of his mother’s khichdi tempered with curry leaves. Kalra, who continues to add curry leaves to his own khichdi recipe, says: “There’s nothing egalitarian about comfort food. To each his own. It’s something that makes you feel good, is easy to cook and great to taste. Traditional Indian kitchens churn out a rich variety of comfort foods.” His favourites: pongal (dal-rice mix) from Andhra Pradesh, payasam (tapioca puddling with jaggery) from Kerala, thueer sadham (curd-rice) popular across South India, ksheer birinj (rice and milk-based pudding) from Hyderabad, menasu saaru bhath (pepper rasam with rice) from Karnataka, and mishki doi (sweet curd) from Bengal. Don’t miss Kalra’s recipe for Punjabi khichdi below.

Eating, we know, is among life’s pleasures. And eating simple foods that bring you comfort is an added pleasure. Enjoy. —Anupa Mehta

Gourmet bite

New Delhi-based cookery consultant Jiggs Kalra shares his star recipe for Punjabi khichdi

Khichdi is a classic dish. Don’t forget to have it with khichdi ke chaar yaar... dahi, papad, ghee, achaar. Though, if you want to keep it light, eat it sans accompaniment. I indulge each time I return from a foreign trip.

Punjabi khichdi
Serves 2

Ingredients
- Dal (yellow) mung dal: half cup
- Basmati rice: half cup
- Water: 4-and-a-half cups
- Clarified butter (ghee): 1 tsp
- Cumin seeds (jeera): 1 tsp
- Black peppercorns: 6
- Cloves (lavang): 4-5
- Onion: 1, finely chopped
- Ginger: 1/2", grated
- Garlic cloves and curry leaves: 6-7
- Salt according to taste

Method
Wash rice and dal in running water and drain. Heat the ghee in a pan. Add cloves and black pepper, followed by cumin.

When it crackles, add onion, ginger, garlic and curry leaves (they’re good for the heart and add to the flavour). Stir it until golden brown.

Then, add rice and dal, followed by water—thrice the quantity of rice and dal. Let it boil, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally until the mixture is thick and viscous and of porridge-like consistency.

Send us your recipes for comfort food. The three best recipes will feature in the next issue of Harmony and win a lunch or dinner buffet for a couple from Sarovar Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts. The voucher will be redeemable in the city from which the winner is selected.
The comfort factor

There’s nothing to beat the comfort of home-cooked fare.
Silver moms share delicious and easy recipes

Personal favourite: *Tahiri*, a traditional rice preparation of Uttar Pradesh

Recall value:
“My childhood memories are all about *tahiri*, rice with peas and *aloo-gobhi*, during winters, and *badhi* (gram flour dumplings) during summers—prepared by my mother

Progeny speak:
Elder daughter Amita Gupta says: “My mother loves to experiment. I simply look forward to her *mathri*, and the traditional *khoye ki gujiya* she makes during Holi.”

Sookhi dal

Serves 2

Ingredients
- Dhuli (yellow) *mung dal*: 1 cup
- Water: half cup
- Oil: 2 tsp
- Cumin seeds (*jeera*): half tsp
- Salt according to taste
- *Garam masala* powder according to taste

Method
Soak the *dal* in water for two hours. After that, heat two teaspoons of oil. Add cumin to it and when it starts crackling, rinse off the *dal* and put it
in the pan. Add water and salt according to taste. When the water becomes fully absorbed, sprinkle a dash of garam masala powder. Then, garnish it with chopped green chillies, coriander leaves and lime juice.

**Kerala mutton stew**

**Serves 4**

**Ingredients**
- Mutton: 1 kg, cut into small cubes
- Onions: 2 medium sized, sliced very fine
- Potatoes: 2 large
- Coconuts: 2 large, grated
- Ginger: 1” piece cut into thin strips
- Green chillies: 4, slit lengthwise
- Fresh pepper powder
- Salt; oil
- Cloves (lavang) and cardamom (elaichi): 2 pieces each

**Method**

Extract the first milk from the coconut and keep aside. This should be approximately two cups of very thick milk. Then, extract more milk—referred to as the second milk.

There should be at least six to seven cups of this milk. In a large pan, put three or four tablespoons of oil and fry the sliced onions till very crisp.

Remove most of the fried onions and keep aside. In the same oil, put all the mutton and fry for just a few minutes, till the raw look disappears. Then, add the ginger, green chillies, cloves, cardamom, salt and the second coconut milk. Cover and cook till the mutton is half done, then add the potatoes cut into four pieces each. Continue to cook till the mutton is tender.

Keeping the stew on a slow fire, add the first milk and cook for a few minutes. If you find the gravy too thin, mix one tablespoon of flour in a little water and add to the stew to thicken it.

Take it off the fire, and add lots of pepper and the fried onions. This stew is usually served with appams or fried ghee rice but is equally delicious with pav or gutli (breads).
Sole therapy

Harmony invited 75-year-old Kamlavati Shreeyan, who was unable to walk due to knee pain, to try out reflexology, an acupressure therapy done on the feet but said to benefit the entire body. Anuradha Kumar tells you Shreeyan’s story

In a suburb of Mumbai called Goregaon, Kamlavati Shreeyan has lived for the past 50 years in a tiny bungalow built on reclaimed salt marsh land. Seventy-five now, she’s been a familiar figure in the neighbourhood, walking through the narrow lanes every evening to buy red hibiscus garlands for Tirupati Balaji—her favourite among gods. Some months ago, these walks stopped. Her right knee suddenly got engorged to almost twice its size. Shreeyan blamed it on an old pain gone bad—the result of a fall she had taken once while cleaning the house, “even before my husband died.” It was perhaps the last calendar event of her life. That injury, if it’s the cause, has to be at least 14 years old.

When Harmony first got in touch with her to ask if she would volunteer for reflexology sessions, she wasn’t on any medication. She was a little distrustful of doctors in general but she hadn’t heard of reflexology either.

Most easily explained as a form of acupressure done on the feet, reflexology is known to lead to a cure or bring relief for ailments occurring in any part of the body. To understand it, think of the feet as a secret diary that records the history of your body. Every indulgence, injury or illness travels downwards through the nervous system and, if not fully cured, lodges itself there as a gritty milestone. Sinusitis, for instance, is described as tiny “needle-like crystals” on toe tops that reflexologists can feel while working on that area. Malfunctioning of the liver or the kidney feels like a “pea” lodged inside the foot. Reflexologists say that such build-ups occur when toxins produced due to a prolonged illness or injury sink to the feet where some 7,200 nerves end.

Reflexology is based on the zone therapy developed in 1915 by an American doctor called William H Fitzgerald, an ENT specialist. He noticed that some of his patients would clutch their hands in certain spots during treatment and that helped them bear the pain better. Experimenting over the years, he came to the conclusion that the body’s energy flows in through 10 equal longitudinal zones, five in each half of the body. If there is congestion in any part, the entire zone is affected and, conversely, pressure on a reflex point in the appropriate zone can clear the blockage. Eunice Ingham, an American physiotherapist, developed this into foot reflexology in the 1930s. Since all 10 zones are found in the feet, she concurred that application of pressure on the right spot will stimulate the entire zone. Corresponding reflexes for each body part are also more easily located on the feet, than on the hands, which are far smaller.

Reflexology is not a cure though. “Working on the feet helps to dislodge the toxin build-up-
there. And that kickstarts the body’s natural cleansing system. It is more accurate to say that it helps the body cure itself, says Ranjana Saklani, a Delhi-based reflexologist. Neither does reflexology have any side-effects. On healthy people, it works like a pleasurable foot massage and they usually doze off in the middle. Each session lasts approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

Shreewayan agreed to volunteer. The first session was held on April 27, 2004 by reflexologist Fareeda Mehta. At that point, though she would hobble around to do the housework, Shreewayan wasn’t able to go out on her own. She also complained of weight gain, loss of appetite and listlessness. In many cases, reflexologists can also detect which part of the body is not completely healthy because if there is a problem, pressing the corresponding reflex on the foot would hurt.

Mehta noted in her diary that Shreewayan’s knee, hip and leg points had hurt, as did the stomach area. The kidneys and bladder points were tender while the intestines and liver were absolutely fine. But her thyroid point was extremely painful. Mehta suspected hypothyroidism. She felt that a test to confirm her prognosis was essential—if Shreewayan really did have the condition, she needed to be on medication.

We had no idea how long she might have had this problem. Reflexology can help even in old cases of hypothyroidism, but requires continuous sessions over a long period of time. And with something like chronic diabetes, “reflexology can work as an adjunct to medicine. If continued, the quantum of dosage can decrease but it will not lead to a full cure,” says I P Bahl, president of the All India Association of Acupressure Reflexology. In chronic arthritis, again, he says, it can bring tremendous relief for some time, but the disease won’t go away.

In Goregaon, there was still no feedback from Shreewayan even during the second session on April 30. Usually, many patients have an immediate response. Either they start sweating, get very thirsty or feel sleepy. By the
third session, on May 4, Mehta noticed that the swelling was down. But Shreeyan herself did not register the difference. Though she once again reiterated her apology about her nails, a little gnarly and now yellow with age. Almost till the end, she did not see reflexology as a treatment. “She was just very thankful and grateful that somebody was coming to attend on her,” says Mehta. This was despite the considerable pain that she felt when certain points were pressed. Chanting “Shri Ram, Shri Ram”, she would bend forward to stop Mehta, but would never actually do it.

The fourth session was a milestone. It was Shreeyan’s first response to the treatment—she told Mehta that the swelling was down and that the pain was less. The sessions were also something that she was beginning to look forward to immensely. The “lady who comes in an auto to press feet” had become the talk of the neighbourhood. People started dropping in for a look and would hang around to chat. One day, seven-year-old Ashok, a neighbour, walked in, looked at what was happening and finally hazarded a guess: “Oh, I see, shoe polishing is going on.” Shreeyan loved that extra buzz in her life.

In the fifth session, on May 11, swelling in the left knee had also subsided and Shreeyan was sleeping much better now. She was also beginning to walk more too but complained that she couldn’t walk as fast as she would have liked to, which was a good sign. She also appeared far more relaxed. Usually, the kitchen conflict between the vegetarian daughter-in-law and non-vegetarian mother-in-law would have left her irritated. Mehta says some of the sessions in the middle were really enjoyable for her too. She would arrive to find Shreeyan bathed, dressed and waiting very cheerfully for her. And one day, tired of her apologies, Mehta finally cut her nails—Shreeyan felt even more comfortable after that.

At Shreeyan’s last reflexology session, the general trend of overall improvement seemed reaffirmed. She beamed and said she was definitely walking once again.

There was a slightly long gap between the fifth and the sixth sessions and Shreeyan took to regularly walking to her neighbours’, who would set up the sessions for her, to ask them when the next one would happen. It took place on May 25, when Mehta noted that the right knee had come down to the size of the left. The knee and thyroid points were also paining less.

On June 4, the last session, the general trend of overall improvement seemed reaffirmed. Shreeyan beamed and said she was definitely walking once again. Her granddaughter added clarity: “She walks only a little distance to her friend’s house where she goes and sits again.” She was back on her feet but not as active as she used to be. On her part, though, Shreeyan simply told Mehta: “I wish I had found out about reflexology much earlier.”
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Fighting fit

Despite two decades with cancer of the urinary bladder and 27 surgeries, P C Singhi refuses to slow down, says Suruchi Yadav

An 18-hour workday, travelling through semi-urban and rural India, galvanising people to fight for their rights sounds more like the lifestyle of a 30-something strapping activist—certainly not that of a 78-year-old, with a 20-year history of cancer of the urinary bladder. But P C Singhi, a retired IAS officer from the Rajasthan cadre now settled in Mumbai, takes pride in being a nonconformist, and vows to remain one all his life. The cancer, he says, is just a minor detail.

When Singhi first saw blood in his urine, he knew it was bad news. A medical check-up at SMS Medical College, Jaipur, revealed cancer of the urinary bladder. Singhi, then 58, had never been a smoker and did not have a family history of cancer—the two main risk factors. A practical man, he followed the advice of his doctors, but amazed them with his attitude. He treated his condition as an aspect that needed due medical attention, but refused to let it rule his life. Each time he was operated, he bounced back within two months.

Twenty-seven surgeries later, he’s more active than ever before. Recipient of the Gujarat Sahitya Academi Award for his...
Bladder cancer: an overview

The urinary bladder, located in the pelvic cavity, stores and discharges urine. Urine is filtered by the kidneys, carried on to the bladder by ducts called the ureters, and discharged from the bladder through a tube called the urethra. Bladder cancer accounts for approximately 90 per cent of cancers of the urinary tract (renal pelvis, ureters, bladder and urethra). Incidence of bladder cancer increases with age.

Risk factors

- Cigarette smoking contributes to more than 50 per cent of cases
- Exposure to second-hand smoke
- People over the age of 70 develop the disease two to three times more often than those between 55 and 69 years
- Chronic bladder inflammation (recurrent urinary tract infections, urinary stones)
- Family history of bladder cancer (several genetic risk factors identified)
- Men are more prone than women

Symptoms and prevention

- Primary symptom: blood in urine
- Bladder cancer cannot be prevented
- The best way to lower the risk is not to smoke

Leading hospitals for treatment

- **Tata Memorial Hospital,** Mumbai: 022-24177000, 24154379, www.tatamemorialcentre.com
- **Lilavati Hospital,** Mumbai: 022-26421111, 26552222, www.lilavatihospital.com
- **All India Institute of Medical Sciences,** New Delhi: 011-26588500, 26588700, 26589900, www.aiims.edu
- **King Edward Memorial Hospital,** Mumbai: 022-24131763, www.kem.edu
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travelogue *Maine Duniya Dekhi* (I’ve seen the world), Singh also has several poetry books to his credit. His book on medical negligence in India, *Market: Medicine and Malpractice,* emerged as a result of his wife Leela’s death from cancer in 1989—he says a doctor operated on her against the advice of a US-based medical expert. Singh has been fighting a long-drawn battle against the practitioner and has received several landmark judgements in his favour, including one on the admission of foreign-based experts’ testimonies through videoconference in 1999.

Still awaiting final justice, Singh founded the Society for Public Health, Awareness and Action in 1995. As part of the initiative, he travels extensively to meet doctors and lawyers for those at the receiving end of medical negligence and malpractice. It’s expensive—he only has his pension to rely on. Yet he manages to commit 20 per cent of it for the needy. He does not even own a house and stays with his two daughters when not travelling. “A positive frame of mind is the key to a blissful life,” he says. “Age and well-being are states of mind, and I am proud to have a very strong mental constitution.”

Singh feels winning the mental battle is the key. “The ailment doesn’t require many changes in lifestyle or diet,” he says. The discomfort is not so much on account of pain, but frequent surgical procedures—the last one was two years ago; since then, it has been medication and regular check-ups for him. “Control over anxiety and a positive mental attitude help patients fight the battle against cancer,” says Dr M R Kamath, consultant oncologist, Jaslok Hospital, in Mumbai, who has been treating Singh. “There may not be another surgery but fear of the cancer spreading to the intestine will always remain.”

Singh refuses to dwell on it. An ardent advocate of physical fitness, he walks relentlessly and does all his work without the help of a caretaker. Of late, he has also added yoga to his routine. He is never bored, never tired of life. His take: “Any wastage of time, money and energy are criminal.”

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In yoga, seeing well is about perception and not just vision, says Shameem Akthar.

In the Mahabharata, master archer and teacher Dronacharya is pleased with his favourite pupil Arjuna’s focus. While all his other disciples get distracted by myriad sights around them, only Arjuna hits the target.

Sight is not just about the mechanics of the eye. Yoga realised long ago that vision included the brain’s input. Perception is the key. People not trained to see certain things will never notice them, even if they’re right in front of them. This is what magicians bank on! Yogic shatkarma (cleansing practices) for the eye, also called trataka, are both preventive and proactive. On the mental level, the exercises are designed to rein in the tricky mind. Physically, they work out all the muscles intimately involved with eye movement. They also relax them, making them flexible and responsive.

Yoga believes that eye problems have both emotional and physical triggers. Mental strain can be as damaging as the disuse of the external eye muscles and the slackness of the internal ciliary muscles. Since these muscles do not get used in the same fashion as those of our limbs, they age faster, turning flaccid and affecting vision.

Before science woke up to how all our senses orchestrate our vision, yoga suggested several exercises to reboot our perception skills. These include walking barefoot on dew-drenched grass early in the morning since our sense of balance or feeling of where we are in space is linked largely to the sensory input from our feet. Walking on grass re-sensitises this aspect of our perception.

Shameem Akthar is a Mumbai-based yoga acharya. If you have any queries, mail us or email at contact.mag@harmonymag.org. (Please consult your physician before following advice given here.)
Heart restart

HeartStart OnSite, an AED (automatic external defibrillator), jolts arrhythmic heartbeats back to regularity. Launched in India this June-end by Philips, the device delivers an electrical shock to a heart that has fibrillated (developed an irregular rhythm) due to sudden cardiac arrest. Ideally delivered within five minutes of the attack, it stops the uncoordinated rhythm and restores regular pulse, helping the patient regain consciousness. It weighs around 1.5 kg, and Philips claims that even a layperson can use it on someone undergoing a cardiac arrest. It has two pads, attached to wires, which are placed on a bare torso. Voice commands in English lead you through the entire process. Sold for the first time as a community product, it costs Rs 2 lakh and can easily be installed in public places like railway stations, airports and restaurants—Delhi’s international airport already has one.

Beat the heat

We’re at higher risk for heat-related illness as we get older because our internal heat sensors and discharge systems don’t work as well. Medication, limited mobility, chronic disease and lack of means may add to the problem. Mark Supiano, chief of Geriatric Medicine at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, Michigan, warns that if left untreated, heat exhaustion can rapidly lead to heatstroke and a fatal coma. The warning signs are fatigue, aches, nausea, clammy skin and a rapid pulse. Sitting in the shade, using fans, air-conditioning and having cool baths, drinking plenty of fluids or electrolytes and wearing loose clothing will help you have a cool, and healthy, summer.

Bone up

Bone thinning is not usually detected until the first fracture. By then, osteoporosis has already eaten into bone mass. Women are worst hit due to post-menopausal hormone dips. In India, over 50 per cent of women above the age of 65 are at risk, while an eighth of senior men are likely to suffer it. But early detection and treatment can save a lot of pain, says Dr Sachin Tapasvi, orthopaedic surgeon at Jehangir Hospital, Pune. Detection with the DEXA scanner—more precise and flexible than a regular X-ray machine—has recently become the most widely accepted method to test bone density. The latest treatment in India is the Parathyroid Hormone Treatment (PTH)—hormones secreted by parathyroid glands regulate calcium levels in our blood, kidneys and bones. Controlled doses of the hormone can help bone formation and therefore boost bone strength. The DEXA scan costs about Rs 1,000 and the PTH treatment around Rs 8,000. Both are usually available in major hospitals.

Cherry cheer

Arthritis is painful, but there’s a yummy way to beat the aches. Fresh cherries for breakfast reduce levels of nitric oxide and C-reactive protein levels—both markers of inflammatory pain. A study at the University of California, Davis, isolated the fruit for gout and osteo-arthritis pain, according to a report published this May this year. Initial test-tube studies were conducted in 2003 and then, with positive results, the first live studies were conducted. Eighteen healthy volunteers (but with elevated levels of C-reactive)—mostly women between the ages of 22 and 40—were picked and tested for a 64-day period. Pain chemicals were significantly lower mere hours after a treat of 45 cherries per volunteer. Even urate levels, a key marker for gout pain, were significantly lower after the experiment.

—Compiled by Roshni Bajaj
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The ‘O’ spot

The Osho Meditation Resort promises to jumpstart the tired and ageing. Aparna Pednekar checks it out

The metal arch over the main gate says Osho International. But frequent visitors and residents of Pune’s affluent Koregaon Park still call it the ashram, or commune. The ambience remains unmistakably retro-hippie: international visitors in trademark maroon robes talking about the ‘Booda’ (the Buddha) and Kundalini Yoga, and stores brimming with sequined wooden chappals, beaded bags and antique silver jewellery. Dial the reception and ask for the ashram, though, and the cultured voice on the other end is not amused. It is—you are told emphatically—the Osho Meditation Resort.

The grand tour
A wellness centre oozing global urban chic—that’s how the resort has positioned itself today. After zipperng through a mandatory HIV test and registration, you step into the 40-acre campus set against a background of bamboo groves, wild jasmine and rippling waterfalls. The tour begins with the 250,000 sq ft resort area. At the new 60-room Osho Guesthouse, the rooms are small but well appointed, affording privacy and silence. There are also some equipped for the physically handicapped. Adjoining the guesthouse is the 20,000 sq ft kitchen with self-service and a landscaped outdoor eating area. With 5,000 international recipes, this is vegetarian gourmet heaven. There’s pasta, salads, soups, steamed organic vegetables, tofu, curds, fresh fruit—and even pao bhaji and rice pulau. Unlike most health resorts, tea and coffee are on tap. Nearby stands the Osho Auditorium, a pyramid-shaped meditation hall reaching 84 ft in height, flanked by a 90 ft expanse of water with a central walkway. Osho had his reasons: “Crossing the bridge will remind people to leave the mind and to go in.”

Crossing the Osho Meera gate—the entire campus is divided by three gates—you flash your pass at a smiling blue-eyed man perched on the high chair. Gate duty is voluntary like most staff duties here, including the registration desk, kitchen and library. The maroon robe dress code breaks down age-class-nationality barriers, creating a relaxing uniformity.

Ashram’s avatars
The campus dates back to 1974 when Bhagwan Rajneesh’s motley bunch of sanyasis came to occupy rooms 17 and 33 in Koregaon Park. As his empire grew (750 centres in 80 countries), his Pune campus swelled, attracting a swarm of
devotees fascinated by Osho’s simple philosophy that merged spirituality and commerce, free love and free stay. In 1981, Osho left Pune to set up Rajneeshpuram in Oregon. After being expelled from America, he eventually returned to Pune in 1987, before passing away in January 1990.

During his absence from India, the management of the commune passed over to his personally selected coterie, the 21-member Inner Circle. Under its direction, the commune has evolved into its present avatar.

Activity and alchemy
“Osho did not want meditation to be a boring affair,” explains Amrit Sadhana, editor of Osho Times and Inner Circle member. “He offered active meditations coupled with relaxation techniques for transforming your inner self. Other places don’t have this alchemy.”

You ask Sadhana what’s in it for the elderly, and she explains: “Seventy per cent of the health problems the elderly face are psychosomatic; only 30 per cent are purely medical. When you heal the mind, you heal the body. Most of us here are over 40. There are no doctors, no hospital, yet we’re so happy. Most elderly people feel they’re not wanted anymore. Osho’s meditation techniques slowly cut away old experiences and baggage and rejuvenate self-esteem.” She adds that out of a total of 20,000-25,000 visitors each year, Indians comprise 50 per cent—of this, about a quarter are over the age of 50.

Osho on ageing

...He (the old man) should be freed from all bondage so he can start new adventures. The old have to defeat the young—there is no need to be defeated...In fact, it (old age) has to be more beautiful than the first phase, because the first phase was only a preparation for the second. And the second is the preparation for the eternal.”

Excerpted from Sermons in Stones
Copyright: Osho International Foundation

Like 57-year-old Krishna Arora from Delhi, who has just completed a long-awaited 15-day stay. “There is so much to do,” she says. “You can meditate, play tennis, attend parties and go to the disco, sit and talk to the plants...they do respond when you talk to them!” She maintains that the stay revs up her spirits. “Women my age get tired and complain even when they have to work for two hours. I can now work for eight to nine hours continuously, and still feel energy and joy.” Arora has been coming here for the past 24 years—she was sold after
From April to November 2004, the resort offers visitors a special package from any Friday to Sunday. For Rs 5,000 (single) or Rs 7,500 (couple), visitors get:

- A registration and participation pass
- Three days and two nights at Osho Guesthouse
- All meditations in Osho Auditorium
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Health facilities like swimming pool, Jacuzzi, sauna, gym, tennis, volleyball
- Daily classes at the Buddha Grove
- Evening events and parties
Who decides
when you should stop
being young?

Growing old doesn’t mean
you stop growing. Now is
the time to pursue all those
dreams that you had kept on hold.
To discover the world. To discover
yourself. We have over 250 daily
flights to 41 destinations in India,
so you can explore all those
wonderful places that you have
in mind. To make travel even more
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and 30 day Apex fares. So you
can purchase your tickets well
in advance. Come, fly.
Now what’s stopping you?

Now, we offer daily direct flights to Colombo and Kathmandu. For more details on our flights and services, visit www.jetairways.com
Terrace tryst

Madan Gopal Kohli is passionate about his plants, and shows his green thumb to Rupam Khera

Let’s go and meet them,” says Madan Gopal Kohli. “They respond to my presence by dancing. I just go and hug them. They are like my family.” He’s referring to the greens and flowers blooming across his terrace.

An ardent nature lover who enjoys cooking and sports, Kohli, 61, is known in his neighbourhood in Keshav Puram, Delhi, as the garden willah. The former employee of Greaves Cotton has transformed his tiny terrace into a green haven amidst the concrete jungle, swamped with plants of all shapes and sizes, growing out of everywhere—polythene bags, broken vessels, plastic containers, even Diwali diyas.

There are 200 plants here: varieties of creepers, palms, bonsai, croton and cacti, rubber plants, aerogara (‘Christmas tree’) and flowers like roses, champa, football lily, petunia, hibiscus, jasmine, bougainvillaea and carnation. You even see saffron, neem and teak pop out of poly bags. The pride of Kohli’s garden, though, is the Egyptian lotus (nymphaea caerulea) blooming in a metal container—in the past three years, it has borne 300 flowers. His personal favourites are rose, aerogara, and palm.

The terrace is also home to a kitchen garden: okra, tinda and torai, eggplant, lemon, mint and coriander rubbing shoulders with chikoo, guava, pomegranate, mango, strawberry and black grapes. There is a glint in his eye as he leads the way to the balcony and animatedly introduces you to his mango tree with its ‘longest leaf’—6 inches long and 6 inches wide—which may soon find mention in the Limca Book of Records. Kohli dotes on his...
After his retirement, Kohli is now able to spend four to six hours a day with his plants. The acute water shortage in Delhi doesn’t deter him. His plants are watered twice a day, even if Kohli has to buy the water. During summers, he buys 10 to 12 buckets for Rs 50 to 60, two to three times a month. At times, he and his wife even skip their bath to quench the thirst of their green family. And if ever they go out of town, he hires someone to water them.

Kohli has gardening down to a science. He uses only natural fertilisers (bone meal and neem khali)—the quantity varying with the season—and the plants are “fed” as per their needs.

Balanced placement of the plants, without heavy planters, has ensured that there has never been a leakage. Fog, said to be a plant-killer in the winter, is kept at bay through night watering. While cats and birds take care of the rats, turmeric, tulsi and neem on the terrace act as natural insect repellents.

Fertilising and replanting begin in late July, following a couple of heavy showers, and continues for a month. This is a tough time for him, when his hands typically swell with sores—but Dettol and coconut oil come to the rescue.

Maintaining the garden costs Kohli about Rs 500 a month. He thinks it’s a steal, considering the payback: sweet fragrances, birds aplenty, and fresh air in the midst of a much polluted city. “Plants like shyama tulsi release oxygen 24 hours a day and have a healing impact,” he proclaims. “Since I took to terrace gardening, my cervical and palpitation problems have vanished.” Kohli is now busy urging all his retired friends to take up the hobby: “Time just flies in the company of plants.”

**Terrace tips**

- Beginners should go in for inexpensive plants
- Jade, champa, bougainvillea and chikoo are hardy and require less maintenance
- Use good quality, organic manure
- A water-connection on the rooftop is extremely important
- Those interested in an elaborate layout should get the structure checked for stability and waterproofing
- If you want a lawn, go in for professional help. Be prepared: it’s a messy and lengthy process
- Terrace gardening can also be a commercial avenue worth exploring—the Karnataka Horticulture Department even conducts training programmes in commercial terrace gardening. You can grow three commercial crops in a year: vanilla, anthuriums and orchids
- Drip or trickle irrigation is both economical and efficient: it provides each plant with near-optimal soil moisture and cuts down on water, fertiliser and labour requirements

*Terrace tips*
Between the lines

Fiction

*The Kite Runner*
Khalid Hosseini
Bloomsbury;
Rs.285; 324 pages

Set against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in the 1970s, this debut novel is a story of invasion and abuse; the leitmotifs are sodomy and rape, repeated and savage, chilling for the quiet despair of its victims. However, despite the matter-of-fact brutality humming just below the surface, *The Kite Runner* comes through also as a story of love and longing, separation and coming together, guilt and redemption.

Almost a memoir, the story is that of Amir, an Afghan migrant and writer, who eventually finds asylum in the land of plenty, and his relationship with Hassan, a Hazara servant boy. Amir is plagued with unending guilt for having stood by and watched as the neighborhood bully rapes Hassan. By a strange quirk of fate, Amir finds himself back in Kabul to complete the circle, rescue Hassan’s child Sohrab—it turns out that Hassan was his half brother and Sohrab his nephew—from the clutches of the same bully, now a Taliban. Despair aside, Hosseini paints sunny California with as much attention and affection as he does bleak Kabul.

After you’ve turned the last page, you are left with a single thought: it requires a rare combination of intelligence and intuition to speak of the incidental ravages of history in much the same cadence as poetry. Hosseini has that ability.

—Anupa Mehta

Short Fiction

*A Place to Live*
Edited by Dilip Kumar and translated by Vasantha Surya
Penguin; Rs 250; 276 pages

Short stories may be easy to read, but writing them is harder. “It spurs the author to attain maximum perfection within minimum space,” writes Dilip Kumar, editor of *A Place to Live: Contemporary Tamil Short Fiction*, and award-winning Tamil short story writer.

From 1960 to 1990, the short story emerged as the definitive genre of modern Tamil literature and this collection of gems, translated with vigour by poet Vasantha Surya, pays tribute. Twenty-nine authors, including Rajanarayanan, Paavannan, Sujatha, Thi Janakiraman, Na Muthuswamy and others, examine the peculiarities, uniqueness and challenges of life in Tamil Nadu.

The Tamilian can ‘adjust’—a ‘Tamilised’ term—to almost anything, writes Surya in her note. Class, caste, religion and gender, potentially incendiary topics, are handled with a sensitivity that douses the embers of bitterness and rancour with soft rain. There are some beauties here, like “The Bonds of the Day” by Jayanthan, which deftly probes the man-woman dynamic; Sujaatha’s “City”, all about apathy in ‘big city’ Madurai; and “The Plastic God Box” by Ambai, on one woman’s search for “a realm of her own”.

A bittersweet, funny-sad ode to survival.

—Arati Rajan Menon
Briefly...

As you slog through My Life by Bill Clinton (Hutchinson; Rs 895; 957 pages), you wonder what the fuss is about. Sure, there are a lot of heart-warming anecdotes—about everyone in Arkansas and a few in the White House. There’s the motivational story of the boy from Hope who hit big time. The insider’s view on steering the world through various crises, and the paens to wife Hillary. But all the controversy is whittled down to nothingness. Whitewater—glossed over. Infidelity—hey, I had a rotten childhood; the real jerk here is Kenneth Starr. “...it became a struggle for me to find the right balance between secrets of internal richness and those of hidden fears and shame,” he writes. Yeah, right. Don’t look for the cigar; it’s been safely tucked away.

Add Mannmohanomics: Journey to South Block (Manas Publications; Rs 495; 241 pages) by Vivek Garg and Ravish Mishra to the list of instant ‘political biographies’ now doing the rounds. This one charts his life and career of Prime Minister Mannmohan Singh, from his childhood days spent in Gah village (now in Pakistan) to the present day. There is some insight here into what makes the man tick and today’s political scenario. But you have to wade through some truly boring, and ungrammatical, writing to get there. Unless you want to know more about the man, let this one be.

Jug Suraiya goes globetrotting in Where on Earth Am I? Confusions of a Travelling Man (Penguin; Rs 150; 148 pages), and it’s a fun ride—for the most part. From the Scotland whisky trail to Copacabana beach in Rio, Rajasthan, Kerala and Nagaland to Bali and Ireland, this collection of travel stories spans almost three decades and several continents. There’s interesting information on each destination, local quirks and some clever titles—“You’re No Great Sheikhs, Charlie Brown” and “Kerala in a Coconut”—but Suraiya’s peculiar brand of humour begins to pall after a while. Best read in small doses.

Game for a laugh? If you enjoy Priiya Raj’s ‘Mr Bakshi’s View’, exclusive to Harmony, check out his latest, Business Cartoons and Corporate Cartoons (both Vision; Rs 75; 96 pages), where mundane, everyday situations—offices, boardrooms, seminars, presentations—take on comic avatars.

River of Gods August 15, 2047—Happy Birthday, India (Simon & Schuster; Rs 500; 583 pages) by Ian McDonald has an interesting premise. In a nation before the nation before this one (2047), we can only imagine that. The author designs 10 characters to draw a picture for us and together, they perform the dance of the millennium—with technology at their beck and call. But between fierce asceticism, Marutis feeling their way between bicycles and a gene-modulated India, the idea is lost. Antiseptic descriptions of metallic Bharatiya jawans functioning on tungsten-modulated methane reaction, and gyroscopic cocktail glasses, take away the fun. And what’s the term ‘tweens’—certainly archaic by 2047—doing among a bindi-cam and visual cortex?

Suffering from information overload, he is the most hardworking knowledge worker in the company!
Blowing the whistle

Controversies, scandals and exposes

The red mirchi cover on the Best of Tehelka is intriguing, and you don’t come away disappointed. This has all the excitement and bite of non-fiction with the flavour and literary voice of fiction. Not a book to devour in one sitting—take in one essay, interview, poem, play or report a day. Amitav Ghosh, Amrita Pritam, P T Usha and K P S Gill, to name a few, make for reading that makes you think. Not all scandalous, but always stimulating.

Buffalo Books; Rs 300; 299 pages

Wicked Women of the Raj starts out simply enough, with factoids about how European women showed up in India, the draw of “Milton’s gorgeous east” and the consequent derision they received for marrying pagan brown princes. Coralie Younger then goes on to tell us the tale of 20 such women—here’s where the racy bits about money and sex rev up, making this a spicy read. Riches, power, lust, concubines and harems, nawabzadas and maharanas: gossip at its most royal.

HarperCollins; Rs 295; 260 pages

Carnage by Angels follows the good guy as he struggles in the world of bad guys in the Indian police force. It’s an insider’s story by IPS officer Yogesh Pratap Singh, a whistle-blowing tale of corruption, greed, sex and power brokers. It’s fiction; if the reader finds familiarity in the smaller tales that unravel, it’s because art often imitates life. The narrative has tons of drama and racy language. An interesting sidelong: Singh suffered for this book. He has since given up his job in the force and is now writing about corruption in the civil system.

Samarpushp Books; Rs 250, 365 pages

Saddam: The Secret Life is well titled. Con Coughlin takes you to the vortex of Hussein’s personal and political eddy and drops you to swim your way out. It traces the former Iraqi dictator’s hard childhood, rise to power, bewildering personality, inclination towards murder, blind political ambition and hunger for power—a journey from orphan to idol. Of course, the book stops at mid-2002, and history has taken some turns since.

Pan; Rs 330; 350 pages

Love & Death in Kathmandu by Amy Willessee and Mark Whittaker is a bundle of investigative reporting and travel writing tied up together. It explores the 2001 massacre of the royal family in Nepal, picking up strands of history in the 14th century and juxtaposing them with the modern day. Don’t let the complex family trees daunt you; as neighbours we listen with an easier ear against the wall. Guns and goddesses, love story and political thriller, it takes you from breathless page-turning anticipation to a somewhat better understanding of the drama as it played out.

Rider Books; Rs 395; 320 pages

—Roshni Bajaj

hit list

N Radhakrishnan, publisher and editor, Man’s World, on his favourites

1. The Shades of Sword by M J Akbar
2. The Life of Indira Gandhi by Katherine Frank
3. Journey through Babudom and Netaland by T S R Subramaniam
4. All the President’s Men by Bob Woodward & Carl Bernstein
5. Plan of Attack by Bob Woodward
Who’s the boss?

Single parenting is no walk in the park, especially if someone else is holding the leash, says Anish Trivedi

You’d think things would improve with age. That, over the years, a certain trust would enter a marriage. Well, into my second decade of holy matrimony, I’m finding this isn’t quite the case. No, this has nothing to do with infidelity. It is all to do with parenting.

As I write this, I have been a single parent for a little over a month. My wife has moved to the town where our teenaged daughter goes to school to help incapable of parenting—it’s genetic. With the passage of time, we get worse. Younger, we changed diapers and played with the kids. Now, with our energy levels flagging, we’re more inclined to look over the book we’re reading, and allow our teenage daughters to twist us around their fingers. She is leaving nothing to chance.

Grandparents have been instructed to take over his life. To make sure he makes it to school, makes it back, doesn’t miss football, doesn’t bunk swimming claiming he has a cold when all he wants to do is play more football. Cars have been organised, with drivers in three homes told to ignore my instructions should they conflict with the kid’s timetable. I can walk to meetings in the middle of a monsoon shower, but there will be two cars parked there for the heir. Just in case one doesn’t make it in time because of the earlier mentioned monsoon shower.

Tutors have been recruited to help with homework. It seems I am incapable of explaining simple sums to a fourth grader. And a calendar has been tacked up, onto which his schedule is duly filled in by the maids. God forbid I should maintain this in my digital diary. That may be good enough to run a business. Not a young boy’s life.

And then, to top it all, she entrusts me into his care. On leaving, she gave him clear instructions, many of which had to do with bathing, brushing teeth and the benefits of a good breakfast. But the rest were about the responsibility he was taking on. That he was now the man of the house. And that she was counting on him to look after the dog. And his father. To add insult to injury, she warns him that I am now at an age when I may not listen. And that if he has a problem with me, he should call her right away.

He’s taking it to heart. Just last night, he asked me if I’d finished writing this article. Then took the glass out of my hand. Marched me to the computer. And watched over me while I wrote. My wife has trained him well. Now if only I could remind him who pays the bills. Not that it ever worked with her.
Go Goa

Imagine a quiet stroll on the beaches of Goa among swaying palms. Throw in a short, relaxing boat cruise complete with live music, and see some exquisite bungalows built in Portuguese times. Tempted? Well, if you are above 62 (that’s the cut off age for senior status on airlines), you can have all this and more. Select Holiday Resorts (formerly known as Sita Holiday Resorts) is offering a great package to silver, at its first all-inclusive boutique resort, Heritage Club Goa. You can enjoy four nights and five days at Rs 14,760 per person on twin-sharing basis, 30 per cent less than their usual charges. This includes airport transfers, accommodation in a standard room, all meals, snacks in between meals, beverages (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic), sightseeing tour with boat cruise, day-long entertainment activities and taxes. Available till September 30. For details, contact: Gopal Vaiteswaran (022-56953082) and Manisha Sharma (011-51518888, 23351123/25); or email gopal@resorts.com. Website: www.selecthotels.co.in

Water power

The Ionika alkaline water system from Mumbai-based Shapewell Enterprises goes one step further than a traditional water filter or purifier. It ionises your water, making it rich in calcium for your bones, potassium for your pancreas, sodium for your lungs and magnesium for your liver. As we grow older, these alkaline reserves get exhausted. Water from Ionika is billed to replenish these minerals, which help neutralise accumulated acidic waste, thereby maintaining body balance. Installed at the oncology and paediatric departments of Nanavati Hospital in Mumbai, it’s recommended for those with acidity and constipation by Dr Arvind Kulkarni, consulting oncologist at Bombay Hospital.

Dr Kulkarni, however, doesn’t confirm Ionika’s abilities to fight either cancer or age-related complaints like blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes, as Shapewell claims. For Rs 17,990 (including courier charges), it’s expensive, but a good buy for old-age homes and those who can afford it. You can order online from anywhere in India at health@ionika.info or call Amol on 9820079306.

Walk easy

Have diabetes? Take extraordianary care of your feet, for loss of sensation can cause calluses and foot ulcers. The MV Hospital for Diabetes in Chennai has developed a range of specialised footwear, with help from Shoe Design and Research Centre in the city. These slippers use soft insole material and foam, with elastic bands on top to accommodate swollen feet. They can either be bought off the shelf or ordered by those suffering from acute ulcers and consequent deformities. Priced between Rs 600 and Rs 1,200. Those not living in Chennai can send a sketch of their feet or a mould to the hospital. Dr Vijay Vishwanathan, a diabetes specialist who thought of the idea, is developing a prototype which, once ready, can be manufactured and sold across the country. Until then, contact: M V Hospital for Diabetes and Diabetes Research Centre, No.4 West Mada Church Street, Royapuram, Chennai - 600 013. Phone : 91-44-25954913 / 14 /15 Fax : 91-44-25954919.
Songs from Santiniketan

Every Sunday evening, Nalinee Madgaonkar’s Mumbai apartment in Hindu Colony, Dadar, reverberates with Rabindrasangeet. Called Nabashruti, this 16-year-old ritual includes many students in their 60s. Sincerity and love for music are the only criteria for enrolment—and there’s no fee.

Say Aiwo

When the Chinese say aiwo, it means love yourself. But when Tamilians say Aiwo, they’re talking about the new health boutique in Chennai, which has an apple for the ‘O’ in its name. It’s the first restaurant in India where rice and wheat are avoided in 85 per cent of the food, with only 15 per cent of the food using them as secondary ingredients. Instead, the restaurant uses barley, soya and tofu, to bring down the glycemic index—something that makes people sleepy after a meal. So tandoori roti is made of barley. And ‘mind it’, there’s no sugar in the desserts—only low cal substitutes. At Aiwo, they also use foods rich in antioxidants, which help to slow down the ageing process. The cooking medium is olive oil, and they call their menu “Indianised international food”. A meal for two costs about Rs 400—and your order is delivered, not by a steward, but on a conveyer belt, encouraging you to serve your companion first. For details, contact: Aiwo, at G N Chetty Road, T Nagar, Chennai. Tel: 044-28158414.

Little wonder then, that one finds Tamilians, Gujaratis and Maharashtrians among the Bengalis who gather to sing away their blues. Nabashruti is gearing up for a programme on Tagore songs—Borsha Mangal—heralding the rains, in August. For details, call 022-24141594.

Rabindrasangeet in your city:
- **Mumbai**: Indrani Acharya, 022-26702536, 022-26105489; Prangan, Ambalika Bhattacharya, 022-23806514
- **Kolkata**: Rabitirtha, 033-24662589
- **Bangalore**: Amar Lahiri, Nandini Mukherjee, 080-23443904; Samita Mukherjee, 98454-45927, samitamoony@yahoo.co.in
My grandpa is a great storyteller. He begins every sentence with “Once upon a time”...

Oh, so you call it ‘retro’, the latest thing… it has been in since my childhood days!

God is great! All my life I have loved curvaceous figures… now He has given me my own!

I too feel young… young at heart!
Everybody’s MP

Ramchandra Veerappa, the oldest member of Parliament in the country, died at the age of 96 in Hyderabad on July 19 from kidney failure. In a political career spanning six decades, he had been a freedom fighter, fought for independence from Nizam’s rule and was elected MP from the Bidar constituency seven times. A popular leader, he was always affectionately called “MP sahib” by everybody, whether or not he was in power at that moment. He is survived by his wife, three sons and four daughters.

Cat man

The 60-year-old retired as the director of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, but is nowhere close to putting his feet up. All of July, he walked some 30 km everyday through the park, in the thick of preparing a special report so that the park with its surrounding human dwellings could become a safe place. In June alone, 12 people were killed. But Savarkar is not blaming the cats. “If the leopards were truly man-eaters, the victims would have been in multiples of the existing number,” he says. “People have been careless.” His report, released end July, recommended capturing the cats and eventually rehabilitating the encroachers in the long term. The animal lover continues to teach at Bhartiya Vidyapeeth and Modern College, both in Pune. He is also writing two books — *Trucks & Signs and A Practitioner’s Guide to Wildlife Management*.

The dream run

South African Philip Rabinowitz is officially the world’s fastest centenarian. On July 10, this 100-year old did the 100 m sprint in 30.8 seconds, breaking the previous record by almost six seconds. Already recognised as the world’s oldest competitive walker, ‘Rabinobitz’, as he is known, says: “Everytime I go, I break my own record. I get younger and younger.”

From bad to verse

This is a bedside story with a punch. In July, Amrita Pritam, 85, was awarded the Padma Bhushan—it came to her callously; a piece of paper delivered by the postman. After media criticism, Home Secretary Dhirendra Singh personally went to hand it over to the ailing writer on her bedside. Later in the same month, Pritam released a book of poems, *Mein Tumhe Phir Milangi*. These were written in August 2002 for her partner Imroz, just before a hip fracture and a subsequent botched surgery left her bedridden. Weak and in pain, she has not written since, and is now asking for cyanide. Imroz brushes off her requests, saying that the spurious version available would only make her more ill. “There are very few tough people like Amrita, who live life on their own terms,” says Imroz. “When she was working in radio, she would make just five rupees a day. And that is all that she would spend on herself.”

—Compiled by Rekhi Bajaj
When the challenged are asked to face challenges, the indomitable spirit takes over. As a child, I was inspired by Florence Nightingale and wanted to be a doctor or an administrator; today, I am both. I dream of an India where people with disabilities will be able to share a platform with the non-disabled.

— Uma Tuli

Photo: Rama Studio
Coordination: Rupam Khera

Delhi-based Uma Tuli, 61, is the founder and honorary secretary of Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust, a non-profit voluntary organisation dedicated to ‘mainstreaming’ the differently abled through inclusive education, vocational training for self-employment, a barrier-free environment and medical assistance for mobility and meaningful existence. She is currently Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Government of India.
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