

harmony celebrate age

MARCH 2018 ₹ 40

The magazine for silver citizens

DESTINATION
Xi'an, a melting pot
of past and present

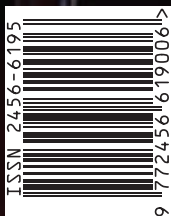
**NEW
HELPLINE**
Expert advice on
elder care and
positive ageing

The Women Issue

Shubha Mudgal

Rock 'n' Raga

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Dr Mahalaxmi Iyer's
medicare facility is
a boon for silvers

Hysterectomy
in older women

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menopause
through diet

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Waiting for the SUN

Can silvers ever strike gold in the annual Budget?

This year's edition came earlier than usual—with high expectations from silvers who are watching their nest eggs rapidly diminish following a lifetime of toil. And, to be fair, there was some cause for cheer, such as the enhancement of interest income exemption limit from ₹ 10,000 to ₹ 50,000 on deposits with banks and post offices (with no TDS deducted from this income); the hike of the deduction limit for health insurance premium and/or general medical expenditure to ₹ 50,000 from ₹ 30,000; a medical expense deduction limit of ₹ 100,000 in case of critical illnesses; and the extension of the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (with an assured 8 per cent return by LIC) to March 2020. Nevertheless, for silvers, the Budget still left a lot to be desired, as we report in 'Money Matters' (page 38)—read it and see how well you've been served.

Indeed, the chasm between promise and performance when it comes to policies for silvers is all too common, no matter the political dispensation. Just take the case of the languishing National Policy on Older Persons—following much deliberation and a host of expert inputs, it was revised as the National Policy for Senior Citizens and submitted for Cabinet approval in 2011. And while the current Government has made all the right noises about the imminent release of the policy, we continue to wait.



Dabbho Ratnam

On a more positive note, this past month has seen Harmony extending its presence in Southern India. When elder support service provider Integrated Eldercare Solutions Pvt Ltd (Care Finder) invited us to co-host a seminar on 'Trends and Challenges in Elder Care' in Chennai, with a focus on inclusive living for silvers with children with disabilities, we were honoured to participate. The seminar, held on 7 February, was a great success (*see H Event; page 14*) with an array of speakers, including our executive editor Arati Rajan Menon, and we thank P S Srikumar, director of Care Finder, for this wonderful opportunity.

Going forward, we intend to build on this association, forge new collaborations with like-minded organisations, and engage in more activations across the country to spread the message of active ageing. For Harmony, and our silver constituency, I truly believe the best is yet to come—thank you for sharing the journey.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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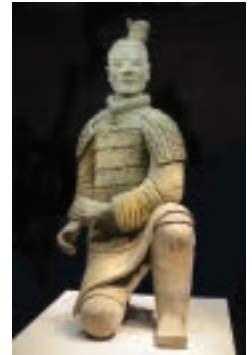
index

features

40 . Health: Post-menopausal hysterectomy and when it may be required

44 . Proactive:
Dr Mahalaxmi Iyer runs a unique eldercare facility near Mumbai

56 . Destination: Xi'an is a fascinating mix of ancient and contemporary cultures



columns

24 . NUTRITALK: Wellness consultant Naini Setalvad recommends foods that help you manage menopause

30 . YOGA RX: Shameem Akthar shows poses to deal with chronic skin conditions

35 . HELPLINE: Dr Harshbir Rana answers your queries on personal and social issues related to ageing, elder care and intergenerational relationships

38 . MONEY MATTERS: Economist Priya Desai analyses tax benefits for silvers in Budget 2018

68 . OFF THE CUFF: Rahul Dravid is a great cricketer and a greater human being, writes Raju Mukherji

70 . AT LARGE: Author Paro Anand discusses virtues that make women the superior gender

WEB EXCLUSIVE www.harmonyindia.org



THE SEED KEEPER

Dr Prabhakar Rao is reviving the biodiversity of fruits and vegetables near Bengaluru

48 cover feature

For veteran vocalist Shubha Mudgal, music transcends all differences

Cover photograph: Paddy Fields

every issue

9 . ORBIT: News, views, people, research, trends and tips from around the world

19 . YOUR SPACE: Reach out to fellow silvers with your inspiring stories

63 . ETCETERA: Culture, leisure, lifestyle, books, buzz and miscellany

82 . SPEAK: Thiruvengadam Veeraraghavan provides free medical care to the needy in Chennai

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Total number of pages in this issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, including covers: 84

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column one

It's that time of the year—our 'Women Issue' is here! And, most appropriately, it is headlined by the feisty and fabulous Shubha Mudgal. Her words as uncompromisingly resonant as her powerhouse voice, the vocalist-composer acknowledges the deep prejudices against women in India but warns against 'over-sensationalising the gender bias'. "Being a musician is tough for both genders," she asserts. "I cannot say my struggle is greater than those of men because I believe we are equals."

Another woman we are proud to feature this month is Dr Mahalaxmi Iyer, who threw caution to the winds and pursued her dream to set up a hospital-cum-home for silvers. Located on the outskirts of Mumbai, Balaji Healthcare is a unique facility where care and companionship go hand in hand—a place as exemplary as the commitment of its creator.

Elsewhere, in keeping with our theme, our experts serve up prescriptions for healthy living: dietary tweaks to chase the menopause blues away; yoga for problem-free skin; and a greater understanding of hysterectomy and whether you need one. Other highlights include a trip to Xi'an, one of the oldest surviving cities of the world, and an analysis of Budget 2018 (and its implications for your wallet).

This month, we are also delighted to welcome Dr Harshbir Rana to the *Harmony-Celebrate Age* fold—she will answer your questions on a gamut of ageing-related issues, from intergenerational relationships to legal and social concerns, in her new column 'Helpline'. Write in, reach out—help is at hand.

—Arati Rajan Menon

For the past 44 years, I have been visiting Borivali National Park for my daily morning walks. But since November 2017, walking has become a tedious task owing to vehicular congestion. And although, according to park authorities, vehicles are prohibited from entering the park before 7:30 am, I see vehicles entering as early as 5:30 am every day and plying up to Kanheri Caves. I recently witnessed a convoy of generator buses, vanity vans, cars, jeeps, tempos, workers of film companies and cine artists entering the park for the specific purpose of filming in the early hours. The littering such an entourage propagates is also quite disturbing, with their plastic plates, bottles and cups.

It is not just the park authority's responsibility, but also ours, as citizens who enjoy the environment, to keep our area of recreation pollution-free. I hope the park authority prohibits the entry of vehicles in the early hours and I hope we as citizens do our due diligence of not littering and disturbing the environment of the park. I have written a letter to the Ministry of Forests explaining my plight. Hopefully, *Harmony Celebrate Age* will help get the message to them sooner. God bless!

Harish R Yadav
Mumbai

There are three things we don't do enough of: we don't say 'sorry', we don't 'thank' enough and we don't 'smile' too often. These three things have been my life's maxim. When I read your February issue, I saw how appreciative Tina Ambani was of *Harmony-Celebrate Age* and the team in her article "Coming of Age" ("Connect") and I had to show my gratitude, too, for the



impeccably presented cover story, featuring Tinaji and Shobhaa De. I would also like to thank your team for bringing forward stories of such amazing seniors; they truly are an inspiration for everybody.

Satish Bhujle
Mumbai

Dr V S Natarajan Geriatric Foundation celebrated its First Annual Day with a programme on 8 February 2018. It is almost surreal to see that this important day has come so soon and that so many were present to share their joys with us. Along with our annual day presentation, we also released two books: *Let Us Take Care of Our Bones*, authored by me, and *Role of Nurses in Geriatric Care*, authored by Sr. Kousalya Sarathy. Keeping with our philosophy that 'old age is not a curse, but a boon', we invited an eminent panel of doctors to speak on osteoporosis, falls in senior citizens, and arthritis and its medical and surgical management. To further commemorate this auspicious day, we also launched the 'Caretakers Support Guild' and a 'Fall Prevention & Awareness Campaign'. Dr (Major) D Raja, former vice-chancellor, Tamil Nadu



Harmony-Celebrate Age GOES DIGITAL

Harmony-Celebrate Age

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India's premier magazine for senior citizens, *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, is now available on international digital news stand Magzter



The magazine can now be downloaded and read on a variety of digital platforms such as iPad, iPhone, Android, Windows 8 and tablets.

Download the free Magzter app or log on to <http://www.magzter.com/IN/Harmony-for-Silvers-Foundation/Harmony---Celebrate-Age/Lifestyle/> today to read the latest issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*.



Dr MGR Medical University, presided over the event and our co-founder and managing trustee Rajasekaran Manirama delivered the keynote speech and presented the annual report. I am hopeful that many more such celebrations will grace our lives in coming years.

Dr V S Natarajan
Chennai

My grandfather recently had his second stroke and it really shook us. He's doing much better now but it got me looking into senior safety sites, which is how I came across your site www.harmonyindia.org and the 'Useful Links' page. The information curated on the page is extremely informative and answered a lot of questions I was harbouring, related to strokes in seniors. I am thankful and I highly appreciate your services towards senior citizens.

Jenna Merritt
Via email

HITS OF THE MONTH

Our most-read stories in
February 2018 on



www.harmonyindia.org

1. The time of their life
2. I am not a rebel
3. Doctors in the house

CONTRIBUTORS



Our columnist in 'At Large' this month, **Paro Anand** is "a fearless writer and a performance storyteller with a big heart". She is the winner of Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Puraskar 2017 and the author of 26 books, including plays, short stories, novellas and novels. Her work has been recognised locally as well as internationally. She has helmed the National Centre for Children's Literature and The National Book Trust, the apex body for children's literature in India. Anand has interacted with children in difficult circumstances, and runs a programme, Literature in Action, which uses literature as a constructive and creative outlet. BBC Hindi listed her on their #100Women Project—a project highlighting the challenges and achievements of women in India.



This month, kicking off a new column, 'Helpline', is **Dr Harshbir Rana**. She is founder and CEO of Positive Aged (www.positiveaged.com), an organisation that provides consultancy services to individuals and families on elder care and healthy ageing. It also provides consultations for organisations and individuals working for the welfare of the elderly, apart from imparting training for caretakers.

Dr Rana's passion for understanding various aspects of healthy ageing first led her to study Delhi's old-age homes in 1988, when the Ministry of Social Welfare informed her that the findings would be incorporated in the National Policy for the Aged. A master's holder in community resource management and extension work from Delhi University and also in sociology from the Indira Gandhi National Open University, she received her doctorate from Delhi University in 2011 upon the completion of her PhD study titled, 'Socio-Cultural and Psychological Aspects of Ageing - A Study In Delhi'. A guest lecturer on ageing at the National Institute of Social Defence and Institute of Home Economics in New Delhi, Dr Rana also addresses issues related to ageing at various conferences and among senior citizens' groups.

AN INVITATION FROM HARMONY

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

- You had an experience related to money
- You faced a serious health problem and conquered it
- You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
- You have a hobby or an interesting travel experience to share
- You have a funny or insightful anecdote about your grandchildren
- You know about a senior citizens' organisation that is doing commendable work for a social cause or promoting active ageing through its activities... and we'll print it in the column 'Your Space'

Mail us at Harmony-Celebrate Age, Lower Basement - Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Four Bungalows, Andheri (W), Mumbai - 400 053. Or email at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org

inside

P16: Silvers rock the stage

P19: Colours of joy

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



↘ CUTTING EDGE

VIRTUALLY YOURS

Elder care homes across the US are cottoning on to the possibilities of virtual reality platforms—a prime example is Rendever. A start-up by graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), it proclaims that it “gives older adults a window to the parts of the world that they’re missing”. As website rendever.com tells us, the technology allows silvers to ‘relive’, ‘reconnect’ and ‘reinspire’. So, you can stroll down memory lane and revisit your old school or home anywhere in the world; take virtual travel tours to places you’ve always dreamed of (from Paris to Peru!); touch base with old friends and make new ones; and learn new skills, from languages to games—all in an immersive, interactive way. Incredible.

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SMART KITTY



Courtesy: Hasbro

A couple of years ago, you read in these pages about 'Joy for All', a robotic cat. Now, its developer **American Toy maker Hasbro and Brown University** have received a three-year, \$ 1 million grant from the **American National Science Foundation** to add artificial intelligence to the robotic 'companion' cat. Right now, it's pretty much a furry friend—it meows and purrs, snuggles up to you and even turns over for a belly rub. But now, as website *nypost.com* shares, the team will work on making the cat perform some basic tasks for silvers; such as reminding them to take their medication, helping them find their spectacles, and alerting them about a scheduled doctor's appointment. But don't get too carried away by the prospect! "It's not going to iron and wash dishes," Bertram Malle of Brown University tells the website. "Nobody expects them to have a conversation. But they're really good at providing comfort." Right now, the cat costs about \$ 100 (about ₹ 6,500)—the cost will undoubtedly go up in Version 2, although the team is determined to cap it at about \$ 200-300.

SHOP-LIFTING!

Innovation is more about ideas than technology. Here's an example. Recognising that silvers find it difficult to repeatedly bend down to unload their grocery shopping, Singapore-based start-up **LightWeight** has invented **ELLE**, an **automatic elevating platform for shopping carts**. It comprises a simple spring mechanism and a moveable platform; each time you remove a shopping bag, the platform moves up until the load is cleared. Buyers have two options: a readymade foldable shopping cart with ELLE installed, or a retrofit for an existing shopping cart. The project was successfully crowd-funded on website **Kickstarter**, where it reached its goal in late December 2017, paving the way for a market rollout.

ISRAEL GETS INNOVATIVE

It's being dubbed as the first of its kind in the world. **Israel has set up an 'innovation lab' to develop technologies for silvers in a real-life environment.** As website *www.timesofisrael.com* reports, the "living lab", established with a \$ 1.4 million investment by the National Insurance Institute of Israel and the Centre for Digital Innovation (CDI) in Beersheba in Negev, will offer four scenarios: a fully furnished living area to simulate homes and interactions with families; a medical area to simulate encounters with the health system; a welfare



area for silvers to interact with social service providers; and an education zone to create relationships through the educational system or across generations. The lab's goals, as elucidated by CDI, include finding ways to prevent falls, alleviate loneliness, administer pain medication, fight dementia, and empower active ageing. The first start-up products being road-tested include a TV platform to improve communications between silvers and their families; a wireless monitoring system to alert caregivers in emergencies; and a digital timeline platform where silvers can tell—and share—their life stories.

JUST A MYTH

Here's a study that debunks a long-held belief: Taking calcium and Vitamin D supplements to minimise the risk of osteoporosis may have no effect on bone health at all. Orthopaedic surgeon Dr Jia-Guo Zhao and his researchers at Tianjin Hospital, China, scanned 33 previous trials involving 51,000 participants aged above 50 that tested the usefulness of calcium and Vitamin D. **The data revealed no association between calcium or Vitamin D and the risk of hip fracture compared to people who had received no treatment.** The findings, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, suggest there is no substitute for a healthy lifestyle, which in this case means getting enough exercise and sunshine to get your daily dose of calcium and Vitamin D.

TAKING CALCIUM AND VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTS TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS MAY HAVE NO EFFECT ON BONE HEALTH AT ALL



123RF.com

LOSING SLEEP

Sleep apnoea could cause sleepless nights for reasons beyond this medical condition. The disorder, where collapsed airways disrupt sleep and cause the individual to wake up breathless periodically through the night, is now being associated with increased risk of Alzheimer's. Researchers at New York University School of Medicine have found that **elders who suffer from sleep apnoea show raised levels of amyloid beta**

in their brains. These are peptides involved in brain plaque build-up and cognitive decline of the kind associated with Alzheimer's. Although no causal link has been established, researchers point to other studies which suggest that sleep disturbances could contribute to amyloid deposits and accelerate cognitive decline in individuals at risk of Alzheimer's. The findings were published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.

Painful reality Popping painkillers, ibuprofen in particular, could result in reduced fertility in men. Bernard Jégou, director of the Institute of Research in Environmental and Occupational Health in France, and a team of French and Danish researchers have found that as ibuprofen is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, long-term use could lead to 'compensated hypogonadism'—a condition that typically begins during middle age and disrupts the male hormones. It is also associated with depression and increased risk of cardiovascular events, including heart failure and stroke. These conclusions are based on a research study where 31 male volunteers aged between 18 and 35 were tested. Of these, 14 were given 1,200 mg of ibuprofen daily and the others were given a placebo. After two weeks, the ones taking ibuprofen showed a decrease in luteinising hormones (hormones that stimulate the testicles to produce testosterone), leading to impaired fertility. The study was published in journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.



ANTIBIOTIC ALERT

Here's a red flag for those overusing antibiotics for minor conditions. Dr Saad Al-Shuhaib and his team at the College of Medicine, Saudi Arabia, warn against using antibiotics without a doctor's consultation for fear of the medicines losing their efficacy and causing side-effects. Such overuse has caused the spread of drug-resistant bacteria that can cause serious infections.

SEEING SMART

In the age of smartphones, spectacles are getting smarter too. Dynafocals is a wearable device that prevents nearsightedness, a common condition among silvers where one needs to keep moving one's head to adjust the angle of the gaze while focusing on an object. The **eyeglass frames are fitted with regular prescription progressive bifocal lenses that help you read clearly** while giving your neck a rest. The spectacles have a sensing chip built into the frames that detects the distance to the object and communicates with the glasses' nose pads. They then subtly inflate and adjust a few millimetres to lift the lens to the proper angle of the wearer. The science behind the device was published in journal *Optics Express*.



**Those treated
with Luxturna
showed remarkable
improvement**

Seeing is believing

Finally, light at the end of the tunnel for individuals suffering from an inherited form of blindness. Hope comes from the clean chit given by the US Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) for a form of **gene therapy called Luxturna in the treatment of retinal dystrophy**. The condition, caused by a genetic mutation, begins in childhood and progresses as total blindness in adulthood. The DNA-altering medication reverses this type of blindness by replacing the faulty genes with normal ones. During a clinical development programme, it was found that 1,000 to 2,000 people in the US inherit two faulty genes (RPE65). As part of the trial, 41 patients aged between the ages of four and 44 who suffered from this form of retinal dystrophy were tested. At the end of a year, those treated with Luxturna showed remarkable improvement in their ability to navigate an obstacle course in low light. The manufacturers of the drug are still to evaluate its long-term safety.



Courtesy: BTL Industries

THE MAGIC CHAIR

HERE'S A QUICK WAY TO PLUG A LEAK—no surgery, no tedious exercises. **A high-tech chair called 'BTL EMSella' can do wonders for individuals suffering from stress urinary incontinence or any kind of incontinence.** The chair, recently approved by the US Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), uses high-intensity electro-magnetic pulses that penetrate the targeted tissues

of the pelvic floor and create muscle contractions, thus strengthening the muscles. This achieves much more aggressive contraction during six short sessions resulting in enhanced results than what Kegel exercises can do. You just need to sit, fully clothed, on the chair and its electromagnetic technology will activate motor neurons in your pelvic floor.

The high-tech chair achieves the same result that Kegel exercises do, but in six short sessions



Towards integration and inclusion

After me, who?' This is a question that bedevils parents of children with disabilities. And it lay at the heart of 'Trends and Challenges in Elder Care', a seminar hosted by elder support service provider Integrated Eldercare Solutions (Care Finder) in association with *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, on 8 February in Chennai. An audience of about 150 people—representatives of NGOs, organisations for persons with disabilities (PWD) and concerned parents, healthcare organisations, senior citizens' forums and associations, members of academia, HR managers, builders and architects—gathered to hear experts deliberate upon this and other issues relating to elder care.

"Be proactive, be prepared." This message by K R Gangadharan, Chairman, Heritage Foundation, set the perfect tone to begin the proceedings. His inspiring inaugural address was delivered on his behalf by *Harmony-Celebrate Age*'s executive editor

Arati Rajan Menon, followed by the welcome address by P S Srikumar, founder of Care Finder, and the keynote address on 'Integrating Care to Living' by Col Achal Sridharan, managing director of Covai Care, which has set new benchmarks in creating retirement communities and is making a pioneering effort in integrated care for silvers and their dependent children with disabilities in its projects. In fact, Covai Care, which also sponsored the event, has developed a publication titled ***Master Document for Persons with Disabilities (Integrated Community Framework for Senior Citizens with Dependent PwD)***, which was released at the event by T T Srinivasaraghavan, managing director, Sundaram Finance Ltd—the first recipient was R Desikan, managing director, Hydrolite Industries.

Indeed, 'Integrating Care to Living Solutions' was the subject of the event's first panel, which was moderated by Col Sridharan. Participants included Sriram Narayan, managing director of The Amaze Chaitable Trust,



Above: Arati Rajan Menon addressing the audience;
opposite page: P S Srikumar, Col Sridharan, T T Srinivasaraghavan,
Sriram Narayan, R Desikan and Menon releasing the
Master Document for Persons with Disabilities

and founder member of the Autism Society of India in Bengaluru; Swaminathan Rajan, assistant general manager with the State Bank of India, who has leveraged social media to create a vast digital library of resources on autism; Sudha, parent of a 20 year-old with autism and managing trustee of Jayamangalam Foundation, a non-profit that aims to create and facilitate integrated solutions for communities; and Raghuraman of the Karna Vidya Foundation who champions the cause of the visually challenged (he, too, is visually challenged) through education, employment and counselling. Like Sudha, both Narayan and Rajan—who has taken a two-year sabbatical from his work to focus on this issue—have been impelled (and inspired) by their own children, who are now flourishing owing to a greater (and more personally targeted) understanding of their needs, aspirations and individual potentials.

In fact, it emerged that going back to one's roots—as in the case of Sudha who moved back from the US with her son—and activities like art and being among nature can work wonders and should, thus, be an intrinsic consideration in future efforts at integration and inclusion. Particularly moving were the remarks by professor Kanthi Vidya Sagar (a visually challenged silver who is a single parent, raising an adult daughter with severe disabilities) on the need to ensure that PWD are financially secure, and thus not exploited, after their parents' demise.

Following this, US-based technologist Ramu Muthangi, CEO of Apna Care, which provides homeware services

for silvers and relevant technologies, discussed how technology can be an enabler to better living solutions. Muthangi, too, was impelled to start his company based on his experiences with his own father, who was back home in India after he moved to the US.

Moving from technology to the human element, a short film, *Shared Cup of Coffee*, by Usha Rajeswari had the audience riveted; this poignant tale of two silver strangers who (fleetingly) find comfort, companionship and happiness in each other's company was a reminder of our eternal need for human contact.

Equally illuminating was the second keynote address of the event on 'Mental Health' by psychiatrist Dr Sridhar Vaitheeswaran of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (India), SCARF, who has worked extensively in the field of dementia and with families of caregivers. He had a very important message to share: "Seek help when you need it but do not medicalise social issues."

The second panel of the event was on 'The Fallout of Loneliness and the Need for Companionship', which was moderated by Menon from *Harmony*. The panellists included textile and craft expert, cookbook author, playwright and columnist Sabita Radhakrishna, who has founded Udhavi, where voluntary workers give their time to help silvers in Chennai; leadership coach and mentor Sadhana Somasekhar, CEO and managing director of Platinum Infosystems and Zeus, which connects industry stalwarts with young professionals; writer-author (and *Harmony* columnist) Pratibha Jain, whose focus areas are food and spirituality; and Pavithra Reddy, who heads HDFC Life's New Zeal initiative, which provides help and care to silvers. The conversation revolved around understanding the debilitating effects of loneliness and countering them through greater interaction among generations, greater social networking and, most significant, greater emphasis on the part of society and the corporate world on the relevance, experience and sheer potential of silvers to share their knowledge capital.

This was followed by a talk by Usha Sridhar from Sarada Foundation on 'Special Gratitude through Care'; her non-profit routes funds efficiently and systematically from social investors to meaningful social causes. The event ended with closing remarks by Menon, followed by a vote of thanks by Srikumar of Care Finder.

Clearly, the issues raised at the event require to be addressed more often, and more widely, by our silvers country. However, while the challenges are tremendous, the possibilities of intervention and hope are infinite. The inspiring speakers and initiatives at the event were testament to that.



UMANG 2018!

It's never too late to be whoever you want to be. Silvers broadcasted this message loud and clear with their ebullient performances at Umang 2018, the annual talent show organised by the Silver Inning Foundation in association with the Rotary Club of Mumbai, Nariman Point; Rotaract Club of Rizvi Law College; and Inner Wheel Club of Mumbai, Nariman Point. Over 115 participants between the ages of 50 to 79 enthralled a crowd of over 1,000 at Birla Matoshree Sabhagriha Auditorium, Mumbai, on 17 February.

In its 11th year, Umang has come a long way from when it first began in 2008. Along with the audacious silvers that performed uninhibited on the stage, the event also has grown to become boisterous with its 'love' theme—courtesy Valentine's week. "The performers have become more forthcoming with their talents and feel free in their own skin," affirmed Sailesh Mishra, founder-president of Silver Innings. His ease and rapport with all groups of silvers has truly been a driving force for this event; with each act, the cheers just seemed to grow louder.

Speaking of performances, the silvers set the stage on fire with their enthusiasm and chutzpah, sharing their





Clockwise from top left: P John serenading the audience with the banjo; Shantaram Chiplunkar grooving to *Hum kaale hain toh kya hua dilwale hain* with Umang host Hira Mehta; Primla Hingorani dancing to *Tu cheez badi hai mast mast*

Opposite page: Sailesh Mishra with choreographer Sneha Mehta Shah and team; Hansa and Bhaskar Mehta performing a duet

talents, their sentiments... their love. Married for 45 years, Hansa, 70, and Bhaskar Mehta, 73, charmed their way into the hearts of the audience with their 'forever and ever' love story portrayed through a series of dance numbers showcasing the different stages of affection. The members of Sneh Kala Kendra performed a special dance based on a book written by Mishra, titled *Remember Me: You Me and Dementia* (Krimiga Books, 2017). And Primla Hingorani, 73, who became somewhat of a celebrity at Senior Citizens' Run at Tata Mumbai Marathon 2018 for her cool moves, was there to "dance her boots off"—and so she did to the tune of *Tu cheez badi hai mast mast*, which definitely warranted some wolf whistles.

By the end of the event, we cheered, we laughed, we were awed and we were left longing for more. However, Sneha Mehta Shah, founder of Sneh Kala Kendra, comforted us with her words: "We are going to go back from this event and start planning our performance for next year!" We can't wait.



L-R: Vidya Shenoy, Dr Santosh Bangar, Dafin Muresanu, Sailesh Mishra-

Jaggi Gupta

Meeting of the mind

The 10th World Congress for Neurorehabilitation, WCNR – 2018, was hosted jointly by the World Federation for Neurorehabilitation (WFNR) and the Indian Federation of Neurorehabilitation (IFNR) from 7-10 February in Powai, Mumbai. Over 120 national and international stalwarts in the fields of basic and clinical neurosciences and neurorehabilitation participated in the event, which was attended by around 2,000 delegates, including students, doctors, nurses and paramedics from across India and overseas. WFNR's theme this year, 'From Neuro Technologies to Community Care', encompassed exciting and innovative technologies on neurorehabilitation that offer high-quality care at low cost for developing communities.

Harmony-Celebrate Age was present at the event to cover the international public forum session on dementia, co-hosted by the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARDSI) along with Mumbai-based Silver Inning Foundation.

Among the national speakers, Mumbai-based geriatric psychiatrist Dr Santosh Bangar began the symposium by explaining different types of dementia; covering anxiety and depression as some of the early symptoms of dementia while cautioning us of the capriciousness of these symptoms. "We have had Alzheimer's for over 100 years and we are still battling for a cure; suffice to say, neurobi-

ology/neuroscience is a complicated space," he remarked. Meanwhile, Vidya Shenoy of ARDSI presented a detailed analysis of dementia and the burden of dementia in developing countries like India, stressing that the need of the hour was to make dementia a national health priority. And Sailesh Mishra of Silver Inning shared the plight of caregivers in taking care of dementia-ridden silvers at his eldercare home A1 Snehanjali, and his own struggles and achievements with dementia patients.

Of the international speakers, Dafin Muresanu, president of the European Federation of Neurorehab Societies (EFNR), a non-profit organisation dedicated to research, spoke at length about the advancements in neurorehabilitation and gave an insight into the neurobiology of cognitive development, explaining the difference between degenerative cognitive impairment and vascular cognitive impairment.

Indeed, the overall programme showcased a multidisciplinary approach to neurorehabilitation that offers innovative, dedicated and reliable rehabilitation services, ranging from immediate care for nervous system injuries to long-term neurological care. With the burden of neurological disability being so high in the developing world with scarce services, one hopes this congress opens new avenues of collaboration between different stakeholders around the world.



COLOURS OF HAPPINESS

Creating rangoli designs does not just bring me sheer joy, it's almost my *raison d'être*. I discovered this talent when I was just seven years old, while growing up in my home-town in Tamil Nadu.

My first canvas was the street. I would spend hours bent over its tarred surface, while making the most beautiful rangoli designs on the road using rice flour. I graduated to being invited to create rangolis during festivals, and I can still hear my mother yelling at me, 'How long are you going to put rangoli?'

I did not hone this talent in a formal way and graduated in commerce. I went on to become a dutiful wife and a busy mother. Both these roles come with considerable responsibilities but I made time for my art by making rangolis and sewing. I have also made candles during Christmas, created glass paintings, and done the occasional canvas painting.

When I moved to Mumbai in 1973, a social worker chanced upon my rangoli design outside my neighbour's home. He was so impressed that he asked if I would create the same design for his community temple. The appreciation I received motivated me to start creating rangolis on a bigger scale and in more prominent places.

I don't accept payment for my work as it is an honour for me to be invited to create my designs in esteemed places. The only time I accepted payment was for a design I created for a professional event at the Godrej corporate office. Actor Vidya Balan had recommended me after she saw the rangoli I had created at her father's office inauguration. In recent times, I believe my

art has become quite bold. I create these designs all over town now, during festivals, showcasing them on temple stairs, roads, outside my front door, my neighbour's door... anywhere I find open space!

During Christmas, I set up nativity scenes, featuring multiple gods at home. I have made rangolis of Christmas trees and Santa Claus. I even made a peacock design when I visited my son in New Jersey—at his home, his friend's home, and in the community centre nearby. His friends who came over and saw the rangoli asked me to recreate the designs for them too. I think they all missed home and the rangoli helped them connect with their roots in a foreign land.

I am 70 now and will keep making these designs till my strength permits. My next assignment is a rangoli at Sharada Mutt in Chembur. I have received a text message from them saying my previous design has been washed away owing to cleaning and I am excited to try out a new one!

—Rajarajeshwari Ganeshan,
Mumbai



Photographs courtesy: Rajarajeshwari Ganeshan

IN THE LAST 3 YEARS,
YACHTING TO RIO FOR NAUGHTY ROMPS
COULD HAVE DROPPED 4.8%,
BUT SAILING INTO NEW TRAVEL EXPERIENCES
IN MAGAZINES HAS SURGED

IRS 2017 is here. And it reveals that in the last 3 years, the Total Readership of Magazines has grown by an incredible 95%*. Proof that magazines reach and engage with more Indian consumers, and brands that build customer loyalty with them gain even more. It's an unprecedented truth that will recalibrate every new media plan. Remember, magazines are now 95% stronger as an advertising platform. Period. Every other statistic is just fluff.



MAGAZINES ☐ REACH
☐ ENGAGE
☐ CONNECT

ACCORDING TO IRS 2017, TOTAL READERSHIP OF MAGAZINES HAS SURGED BY 95% IN THE LAST 3 YEARS, WHICH IS A WHOPPING 95% INCREASE.

35%

OF MAGAZINES HAS GROWN TO 78 MILLION FROM 40 MILLION IN IRS 2014,



Bruce Willis



Ratna Pathak Shah

BIRTHDAYS

Actor and filmmaker **Aamir Khan** turns 53 on 14 March.

Actor and director **Ratna Pathak Shah** turns 61 on 18 March.

American actor, producer and singer **Bruce Willis** turns 63 on 19 March.

Playback singer **Alka Yagnik** turns 52 on 20 March.

English singer, pianist and composer **Elton Hercules John** turns 71 on 25 March.

Filmmaker, actor and TV presenter **Prakash Raj** turns 53 on 26 March.

Filmmaker and actor **Nagesh Kukunoor** turns 51 on 30 March.

English guitarist, singer and songwriter **Eric Clapton** turns 73 on 30 March.

IN PASSING

Padma Shri recipient and veteran Bengali actor **Supriya Devi** passed away on 26 January following a cardiac arrest. She was 85.

American philanthropist **Ruth Ziegler** died of natural causes on 4 February. She was 98.

American actor **Reg Cathey**, known for his roles in *The Wire* and *House of Cards*, passed away on 9 February from lung cancer. He was 59.

Pakistani human rights lawyer and social activist **Asma Jahangir** died on 11 February after suffering a heart attack. She was 66.

OVERHEARD

“Ageism is pervasive in this industry. It’s not a level playing field. You don’t often see women in their 60s playing romantic leads, yet you will see men in their 60s playing romantic leads with co-stars who are decades younger.... I think about how few wonderful actresses of my generation are still doing viable, important film work. You go to television. You go to the stage.... You do whatever you can because you want to keep working.”

—American actor *Jessica Lange*, 68,
speaking to AARP The Magazine



Photographs by 123RF.com

milestones



Bachendri Pal



Surekha Yadav



Diana Edulji



Dr Punita Arora



Dr Indira Hinduja



Photographs from Harmony Archives

Subhashini Mistry



Arvind Gupta



Dr Radhike Khanna



Shyam Benegal

- President Ram Nath Kovind felicitated Indian women achievers with the 'First Ladies' award initiated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in January in New Delhi. The recipients include **Bachendri Pal**, 63, the first woman to reach the summit of Mount Everest [*Harmony*, June 2012]; **Surekha Yadav**, 52, the first woman train passenger driver; **Diana Edulji**, 62, member of first Indian women's cricket team; **Dr Punita Arora**, 72, the first woman lieutenant-general in Indian Armed Forces; and **Dr Indira Hinduja**, 69, gynaecologist and first IVF specialist [all featured in *Harmony*, March 2017].
- Senior journalist and former president of Assam Sahitya Sabha and chief editor of *Dainik Agradoot* **Kanak Sen Deka**, 84, was conferred the Republic

Day Journalism Award by the Assam government for his contribution to the field of journalism.

- Social worker and founder of Humanity Hospital in Kolkata **Subhashini Mistry**, 70, [*Harmony*, October 2008] was conferred the Padma Shri for her dedication to serve society, and scientist and toy inventor **Arvind Gupta**, [*Harmony*, October 2007] was conferred the Padma Shri for literature and education on the eve of Republic Day in January in New Delhi.
- Badminton legend **Prakash Padukone**, 62, was honoured with the first Lifetime Achievement Award by the Badminton Association of India for his contribution to the sport in January in New Delhi.

- Philanthropist, educationist and social worker **Dr Radhike Khanna**, 58, [*Harmony*, October 2017] was honoured with the Jijabai Achievers' Award initiated by Shivaji College, for her contribution to changing the lives of women, in February in Mumbai.
- Veteran filmmaker **Shyam Benegal**, 73, [*Harmony*, March 2011] was conferred the V Shantaram Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to the field of feature and documentary films in India in February, in Mumbai.
- **Karuna Kanta Nath**, 57, won the Dinanath Pandey Smart Idea Innovation award held by the Indian Council for Science Museum and National Innovation Foundation for his incense-stick making machine, in February in Guwahati.



Manage your menopause

The right foods and minor lifestyle changes can do wonders



Photographs by 123RF.com

Suffering from frequent night sweats, panic attacks, irritability, mood swings, forgetfulness, hot flashes, insomnia and other similar symptoms? Welcome to the world of menopause, a phase that comes with its own body cycle and thermostat. Life during and after menopause is often described as sweaty, itchy, bloated, weepy and leaky! It's a time when weight gain, body and joint pains, constipation, palpitations, vaginal dryness, decreased sex drive, hair fall and dull skin can drive you up the wall and sometimes prevent you from dealing with your day-to-day activities.

While many claim that one needs to slow down during this phase, I call it 'ME-NO-PAUSE': 'No pause for me'. This phase may be challenging but it is normal; you just need to take charge of your life, incorporate the required changes and add vitality to your body. Indeed, your diet can play a major role in helping you deal with menopause—incorporating the right foods can help you undergo this transition smoothly. For instance, foods that contain phytoestrogens are a must; these are plant hormones with a similar structure to estradiol (the major female sex hormone), as are bioflavonoids (a class of powerful phytochemicals) contained in fruits and herbs.

HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD INCLUDE IN YOUR DIET

- **Flaxseeds:** Flaxseeds are an important source of good quality fats. They are rich in phytoestrogens that reduce the menopausal syndrome and improve the health of bones, hair and skin owing to

their mild oestrogenic action. Phytoestrogens are also available in white butter, sesame seeds and vegetables such as beetroot, carrot, peas, beans and yam.

- **Fruits and spices:** Some fruits such as strawberries are rich in bioflavonoids and are also an

abundant source of phytoestrogens. Local fruits such as mango and papaya have them too! Other sources of bioflavonoids are garlic, spinach, red bell peppers and tea. The Indian masala *dabba* is a treasure trove of spices; the most commonly used condiments such as fenugreek seeds, mustard

RECIPES TO KEEP YOU HEALTHY DURING MENOPAUSE

PEANUT SAUCE RICE

Ingredients

- Rice: 150 gm; raw
- Green capsicum: 50 gm; cut into long strips
- Red capsicum: 50 gm; cut into long strips
- Yellow capsicum: 50 gm; cut into long strips
- Cucumber: 100 gm; cut into long strips
- Extra virgin olive oil: ½ tsp
- Salt to taste

For peanut sauce

- Peanut butter: 5 tbsp
- Water: 4 tbsp
- Red chilli flakes: ¾ tsp
- Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Jaggery: 1 tbsp

Method

Cook the rice, put in a bowl and set aside. Pour extra

virgin olive oil in a wok and sauté the red, yellow and green capsicums and cucumber in it. Add cooked vegetables to the bowl of rice. Then add salt and peanut sauce and mix well. Serve hot.

For peanut sauce

Add water, red chilli flakes and red chilli powder to the peanut butter. Then add jaggery and mix well. Put this mixture in a wok and cook on high flame. When it becomes a thick paste, take it off the flame.



BEETROOT DIP

Ingredients

- Beetroot: 200 gm
- Lemon juice: ½ tbsp
- Garlic paste: ½ tsp
- Walnuts: 5 tsp; crushed
- Salt to taste

Method

Boil the beetroot and mash it till it becomes a smooth paste without any lumps. Add lemon juice, garlic paste, crushed walnuts and salt and mix well. Chill and serve with vegetable crudité.

seeds, cinnamon, cloves, turmeric and red chilli powder contain a good amount of phytoestrogens that ease out the menopausal syndrome and make your life easier.

- **Coloured foods:** Red, yellow, orange and green coloured foods are filled with antioxidants that act as soldiers, protecting your body from damage by free radicals that come with air pollution, junk food, chemicals, pesticides, and stress and a poor lifestyle. Free radicals get attached to healthy cells and lower your im-

munity. Add carrots, pumpkins, tomatoes, peppers, leafy greens, watermelons, mangoes and other coloured foods to your diet to help you through this phase.

- **Coconut:** Coconut is revered as a superfood and its oil is often termed 'miracle oil'. Rightly so, as it is very effective in treating hot flashes and skin problems. The fat derived from the coconut helps enhance sexual intercourse for seniors. The easiest way to have it daily is to add a tablespoon of grated coconut in your soup, salad or vegetables.

- **Pumpkin seeds:** Pumpkin seeds are excellent during menopause as they are high in zinc and Vitamin E, which help women build up hormones that activate their sexual organs. The seeds are loaded with libido-enhancing vitamins and minerals that increase the flow of sexual fluid in the body. Pumpkin seeds also increase HDL (good) cholesterol and decrease blood pressure, headaches, hot flashes, joint pains and many other symptoms that affect the body adversely. Take a teaspoonful of these seeds every day to keep all these problems at bay.

COCONUT & ROSEWATER PUNCH

Ingredients

- Coconut water (of 1 coconut)
- Coconut cream: 1 tsp
- Rosewater: 4 tbsp
- Lemon juice: ½ tsp
- Mint leaves for garnishing

Method

Blend the coconut water, cream, rosewater and lemon juice in a blender. Garnish it with mint leaves and serve chilled.



- **Nuts:** Nuts and seeds are rich in essential fatty acids and omega-3 acids. Peanuts are a rich source of Vitamin E and are linked to a healthy heart. Considered a superfood, the fatty acids in walnuts assist in preventing hot flashes and mood swings. They are also vital in producing prostaglandins—a group of compounds with varying hormone-like effects.

- **Ghee:** I love calling ghee ‘liquid gold’. Just as gold has its monetary value, ghee has its nutritional value, especially cow’s ghee that is recommended for your daily diet. Ghee prevents back, knee and joint pains as well as vaginal dryness and lubricates the joints. It improves pre and post-menopausal problems related to mood, memory and digestion. This amazing liquid also works as a brilliant antidote.

- **Balanced diet:** It is essential to control and maintain one’s blood sugar levels during and after menopause. Low levels of blood sugar can cause palpitations, memory loss, irritability and fatigue whereas high levels can lead to the onset of diabetes. It is common for blood sugar levels to shoot up during menopause so you need to be very careful. Eat a

balanced diet comprising green leafy vegetables, protein and fats regularly to achieve a healthy blood sugar level.

Apart from tweaking your diet, you also need to get some fresh air and sunlight coupled with exercise, deep breathing and positive thinking.

AVOID THESE FOODS DURING MENOPAUSE

- **Salt:** Prevention is always better than cure so ensure you stay away from processed foods that contain very high levels of salt.
- **Caffeine/aerated drinks:** A standard rule for all menopausal women is to reduce or completely abstain from caffeine or aerated drinks. The stimulations in any caffeine drink are associated with an increase in hot flashes. If you absolutely require caffeine in your daily diet, have it an hour before or after your meals. Having it with your meals can have a binding effect on minerals that prevent them from getting absorbed.
- **Alcohol:** Women should generally abstain from alcohol as their bodies are not equipped to deal with it. They have a lower percentage of body water that

impairs their ability to dilute liquids in the body. Hormones also play a major role as they allow the body to get intoxicated faster and oestrogen slows down the elimination of alcohol content from the body.

MUST-DOS DURING MENOPAUSE

- Menopausal women have a higher chance of hypertension. So add potassium-rich foods like tomato, spinach, orange, banana and lemons to your diet to lower your blood pressure levels.
- Keep a check on your vitamin and mineral levels regularly so they are at optimal amounts and your body functions normally.
- Have a blood test every six months and consult your physician who can suggest additional supplements if required.

Setalvad is an obesity and lifestyle disease consultant who offers diet counselling at Health for You, a wellness clinic in Mumbai, as well as online. Visit www.nainisetalvad.com for more details or write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org if you have any queries for her



IT'S NEVER 2 LATE BY JACK YORK

A woman of quality

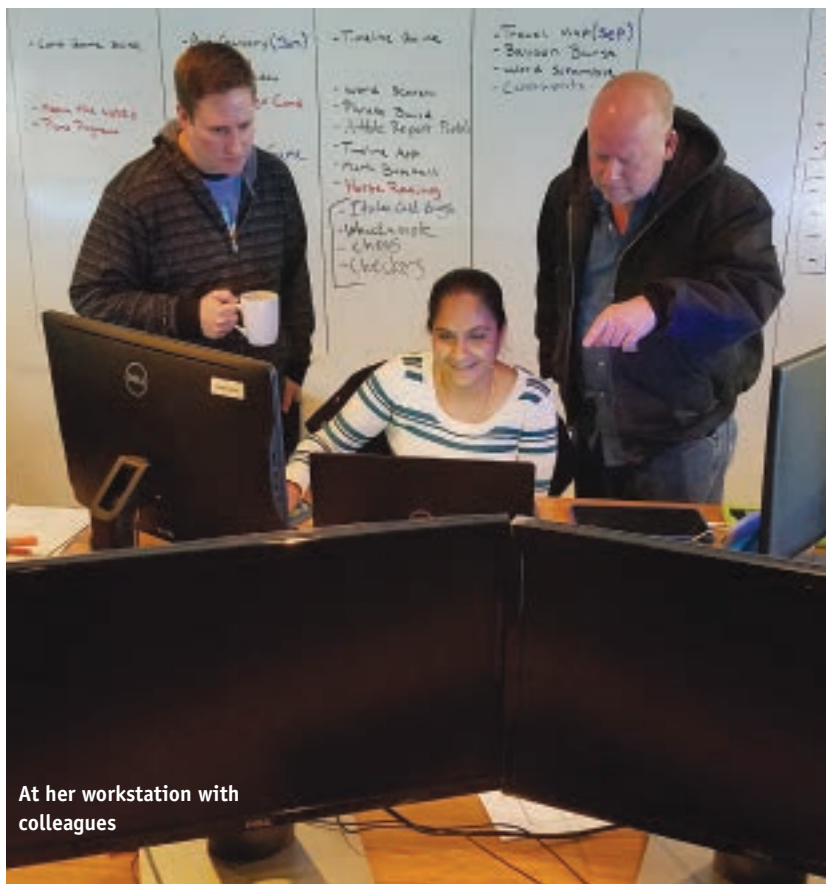
A salute to the journey of Rajasri Appana, born in the suburbs of Chennai, who has made her mark in Colorado with a new career in an all-male work environment

It's been an enjoyable ride that Arati and *Harmony* have had me on over the past year, trying to tell some interesting stories about individuals and organisations in the US that have a connection with India. So far I've travelled all over the country in capturing these stories, from Chicago to Phoenix to New Jersey, marvellous people doing marvellous things. This edition will entail a much shorter journey, a left turn out of my office for 15 ft, a quick right turn for about 50 ft down the hallway, a gentle nudge of an office door and, suddenly, I've found my story. A talented, polished, soft-spoken woman of Indian descent diligently does her work, quietly toiling in the technical boiler room of our company, It's Never 2 Late (iN2L), in Colorado. This exercise is a delight for me as it's an excuse to get to know someone who does brilliant work for us, the one and only Rajasri Appana. Truly a rose in a den of thorns!

Every story I've written for *Harmony* allows me to peel the onion layers of people's lives, the journeys they've had in their path to the US, assimilating into our culture without losing their Indian identity. Rajasri's story is no different. She was born in Ambattur in the suburbs of Chennai. With her father moving for work, she wound up spending her childhood in Andhra Pradesh. Her father had five brothers and six sisters; a joint family. Her childhood memories are vivid: visiting her grandparents' home in Ambattur, playing on a makeshift swing, hanging off one-handed from a big mango tree. She loves to share that she was born on Diwali day, and

always celebrates her birthday on that holiday irrespective of the date. She would tell her brothers and sisters that her birthday is celebrated all over India—just watch the fireworks! She did her pre-schooling in English medium but after Grade 1, was admitted into Telugu medium because of affordability. School was very far from home and the bus charge used to be 25 paise. She would walk instead; she used the money saved to help pay for college.

Like so many other immigrants, her journey to the US was full of twists and turns, never linear. She had older cousins who were doctors in New York; when they came home and told stories of the US, it ignited her interest in this faraway country. There's a love story here too! Her husband Srinivasu had no intention to migrate to the US. He had been working in a government bank for 14 years and was in a very comfortable position. But knowing it was her dream, he



At her workstation with colleagues

Photographs courtesy: Jack York

Srinivasu rearranged his own life and took computer courses to make him eligible for immigration. Ultimately, he moved to the US on an H1B visa; Rajasri, along with their kids Srikar and Srikala, came a year later, in 2000

selflessly rearranged his own life and took computer courses to make him eligible for immigration. Ultimately, he moved to the US on an H1B visa; Rajasri, along with their kids Srikar and Srikala, came a year later, in 2000. Today, Srinivasu is an Oracle ERP Functional Consultant and the kids are in their late 20s, successfully assimilating into the US with their careers but holding on to their Indian culture and upbringing. It's a heart-warming example of the American dream and why we as a country should fiercely oppose anything to discourage immigration—it makes us all stronger.

Rajasri's interest in technology came primarily after she moved to the US; until her husband started his courses, she had not even seen a computer! She first worked for the LPS (Lender Processing Services), the Federal Government (Mining Department), On Site and NOV (National Oilwell Varco) in Houston. She went back to India for six months to help plan her daughter's wedding, which occurred in December 2016. After she came back, she started looking for a job and came across iN2L—she joined us in April 2017.

Rajasri's story of working at iN2L is poignant, something I sadly did not know until writing this article. Her own life experience helped shape her interest in working for a company that lives and breathes to benefit older adults. Her father Gangadharam Bondu was bedridden for almost seven years; it started with high blood pressure and slowly affected his mind, ultimately causing him to virtually lose his entire memory. He loved his daughter and she has painfully lived with thoughts that part of his decline may have been owing to his worrying about her and her journey. Because of a delay in obtaining her green card, she was not able to be at his side when he died in November 2009.

The experience left deep scars and when she learned about the mission of iN2L, she knew she wanted to work here. She felt it was almost a way to honour her father as she was not able to be there at his passing. Other experiences moved her towards iN2L as well. She took care of an older uncle who had been diagnosed with brain cancer. He had forgotten everything and his mother was blind. As his wife was working, she used to go every day to their home



A file photo of
Rajasri and family

to help them out. These events impacted her on many levels and form part of the reason she enjoys working for iN2L, knowing the products she helps create improve the lives of older adults dealing with multiple physical and cognitive issues.

Serving as our only QA (quality assurance) analyst, her work environment at iN2L is unique, to say the least. As is true with many American technology companies, what goes on in the middle of the development rooms is kind of a deep, dark secret. The room is darker than the rest of the office; when you walk in, you see a handful of tech people, immersed in their projects and ear buds, look up at you with a bit of apprehension, not wanting the rhythm of their day to be broken by people (like me) who really don't have a clue about the work they are doing! Rajasri sits quietly in the middle of the think tank, flanked by an engineer to her left and developers to her right. She is not at all intimidated by the all-male work environment; she says teamwork is more important than gender. While at first it was a bit uncomfortable for her not to have other women in her department, she now feels she has helped shift the culture of the company—men and women are more comfortable collaborating since her arrival. We all agree!

Rajasri has made a tremendous impact on our company, especially on our internal culture. She likes making a difference. She does miss a few things from her native country. She misses the local mangoes in the summer.



For Rajasri, teamwork is more important than gender

She misses the jasmine flowers and gardening, always excitedly waiting for spring to start her gardening here. She is delighted to have her mother, brothers, grandmother and so many in the extended family living here in the US. She does miss many of the places and sites in India; her favourites are the Konaseema area in Andhra Pradesh, the Kerala backwaters and Srinagar. And while she likes her life in the US, her ability to be an individual, the opportunities that present themselves, she misses the diversity in India, each place so unique. She doesn't consider herself a trailblazer but she does have some words of wisdom for girls in India contemplating careers in technology: "Have confidence in yourself and success automatically comes. And always help others in whatever way you can; you never know in what way or from whom you would get help."

Her impact has changed the internal culture of iN2L. "Raj's work as the sole QA analyst for iN2L has been

While at first it was a bit uncomfortable for her not to have other women in her department, she now feels she has helped shift the culture of the company

excellent," explains Michael Gardner, her supervisor and the true iN2L tech guru. "Her attention to detail is remarkable. Her ability to communicate the 'what, why, and how' of the issues she finds to the developers has been an integral part in creating a productive and well-respected development team. Raj continues to learn and study and is constantly improving our QA processes. Our product is better because of her. And being a woman, and also from another country, she has somehow made us all more cohesive."

So there you have it. A remarkable woman, a remarkable story. Shame on me, as a co-founder of iN2L, for not knowing any of this until writing this piece. For all of you out there reading, do you know the stories of the people who work right next to

you? Ask them some questions; you might be surprised what you hear. And be the better for it.

Thank you, Rajasri. You make our company and our country better. I hope your kids will read this and realise how proud they should be of your success, and recognise the humility, selflessness and love of your husband to uproot his own life to allow you to fulfil your dreams. I know your heart breaks to have missed being with your father when he passed, but his spirit and soul honour you eternally; he smiles at you from a good place. In turn, you have honoured him in the most profound way, simply by how you have lived your own life. Take a second to be proud of what you have accomplished—and keep those guys around you in line!

York is co-founder of It's Never 2 Late® (iN2L), an American company dedicated to helping older adults realise the full benefits of today's technology



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

Skin sense

Yoga can help you put your best face forward

A chronic problem that bothers women more than any other, because it also affects self-esteem, is trouble related to the skin. Skin eruptions can happen at any age, affecting one very early in life and also around menopause. The triggers may not be just hormonal—allergic reactions to food, atmospheric triggers, chronic inflammatory conditions, weak and lethargic digestion and topsy-turvy metabolism can cause a cluster of problems.

Though some women may have a particular strain of problem—like eczema or dermatitis—others may have a cluster of problems that appear unrelated but are often piled up into the ‘sensitive skin’ category. As much as external treatments are essential, a lot of skin problems are

acknowledged to have psychosomatic triggers. In yoga treatment, therefore, poses for the treatment of skin issues as a rule are all similar; they include poses to flush the face with more blood supply (such as forward bends, inversions); poses that calm the mind (again forward bends, grounding standing poses); and meditative poses that curb the spiral of mental strain that leads to anger, anxiety or hurt. Finally, and not least of all, they include poses that are healing to the digestive tract because your skin is deeply affected not just by what you eat but how you absorb it (these include twists and forward bends).

To have a really responsive programme, you must practise daily. Include calming pranayamas like alternate nostril breathing (*anulom vilom*). Try not to rush through

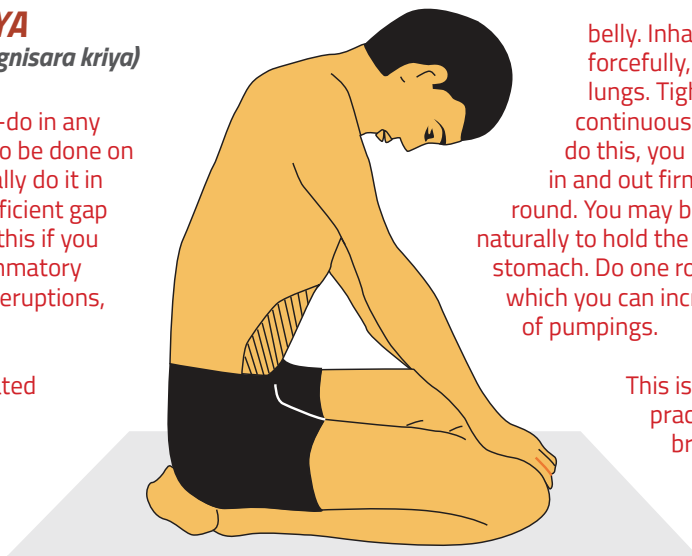
your practice because it will have a negative impact. Do less on days when you feel rushed but choose strong poses. And always conclude with a short meditation. In fact, meditation must be made an integral part of healing when chronic skin conditions trouble you. You need to simultaneously overhaul your lifestyle habits; you could involve a dietician to speed up the progress. Some basic yogic lifestyle habits include having regular timings for sleeping, waking up and meals; avoiding eating on the run; chewing your food thoroughly and ensuring adequate sleep. Most important, ensure you have some ‘me time’ and introduce regular physical activity in your life. These will have a positive impact on your blood circulation; robust blood circulation goes far in healing skin conditions.

KNOW YOUR KRIYA

Metabolic fire practice (*agnisara kriya*)

This is regarded as a must-do in any daily yoga practice. It has to be done on an empty stomach, so ideally do it in the mornings or with a sufficient gap between meals. Don't do this if you suffer from extreme inflammatory conditions, such as ulcers, eruptions, fever, etc.

This *kriya* may be done seated or standing. Lean slightly forward and cave your shoulders towards each other, creating a deep curve at the



belly. Inhale deeply. Then, exhale forcefully, pushing all air out of the lungs. Tighten the belly and pump it continuously for 10 to 30 counts. To do this, you must draw the stomach in and out firmly and rapidly. This is one round. You may breathe, though one tends naturally to hold the breath while tightening the stomach. Do one round for a few weeks after which you can increase the number of pumpings.

This is an ideal preparatory practice for pranayama/breathing exercises. Used in therapy for most chronic conditions, it is also said to keep you young.

YOGIC MOVES

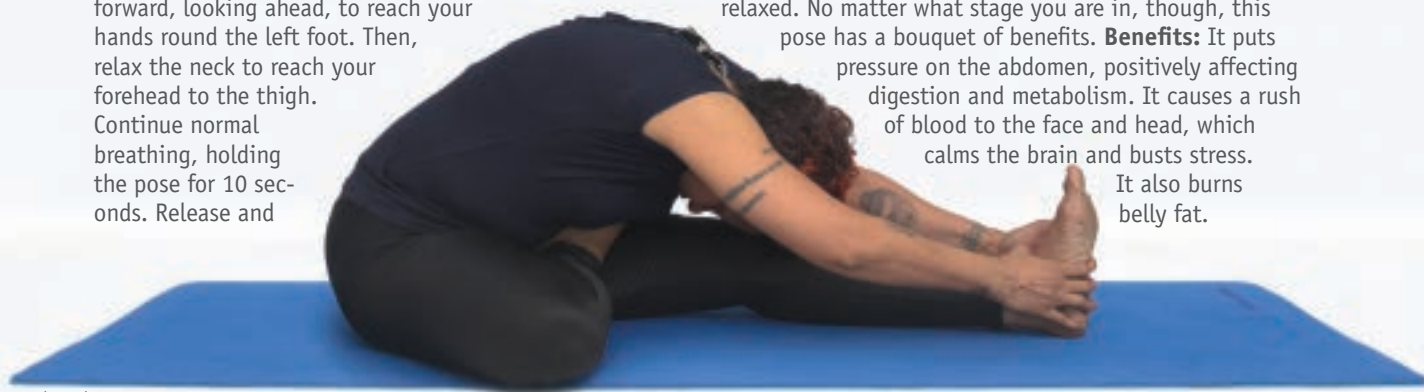
Half-lotus forward bend (*ardha padma paschimottanasana*)

This elevates the classic forward bend (*paschimottanasana*) into a more intense one. It also combines two poses (half lotus/*ardha padmasana*). To do this, extend your legs out in front. Fold your right leg at the knee, placing the right foot at the left hip joint. Raise both hands overhead, inhaling deeply. As you exhale, bend forward, looking ahead, to reach your hands round the left foot. Then, relax the neck to reach your forehead to the thigh. Continue normal breathing, holding the pose for 10 seconds. Release and

repeat on the other side. Initially, many aspects of this pose may be difficult for a beginner: the bent knee may not reach the ground (use a cushion or foam block till hip flexibility allows it); the hand may not reach around the foot, so hold the leg where your hands reach; and the forehead may not reach the thigh, but just keep the neck relaxed. No matter what stage you are in, though, this pose has a bouquet of benefits. **Benefits:** It puts

pressure on the abdomen, positively affecting digestion and metabolism. It causes a rush of blood to the face and head, which calms the brain and busts stress.

It also burns belly fat.



Haresh Patel

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



People do not slow down with age, it just takes them longer to recall facts because they hold more information in their brains, scientists believe. Much like a computer struggles as the hard drive gets full, so too, humans take longer to access information when their brains are full. This slowing down process is not the same as cognitive decline. According to researcher Dr Michael Ramscar, the human brain works slower in old age only because we have stored more information over time. The brains of older people do not get weak. On the contrary, they simply know more. Often we see older people entering a room to get something and when they get there, cannot recall the reason why they got there. It is NOT a memory problem, but is nature's way of making older people do more exercise.

SO THERE! Now when you reach for a word or a name, don't excuse yourself by saying you're having a senior moment. Just say, "My disk is full!"





HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

A series about silvers who believe nurturing the body and mind is the key to joy

The perfectionist

Neeta Raisurana • JAIPUR

As anyone from the Sheherwali community (also known as the Oswal Jains of Murshidabad) will tell you, while chopping vegetables or fruits, the knife should not leave its mark on them. Nothing is cut in a random manner. For instance, if a cucumber is to be chopped for *raikhatte ka kheera* (cucumber with spices), two cuts are made, dividing it into four pieces; then these are cut into thin, fine, slices. For *mirchoni* (a cucumber salad), the vegetable is held in one hand and countless slits are made up to one inch like a fine mesh. The cucumber is then sliced, allowing the finely chopped bits to fall directly into the salad bowl. Proceeding inch by inch, the procedure is repeated for the rest of the vegetable.

Neetaji Raisurana gave me this impromptu live demonstration of her knife skills when I met her at her residence in Jaipur. I was introduced to the 78 year-old by renowned chef Sameer Gupta, her ardent admirer who considers her a mother. During my recent stay at Sameerji's place, he mentioned Neetaji's name very often, whether we were discussing Hindi literature, seasonal mangoes, or forgotten recipes.

Neetaji is the wife of late Subodhchandji Raisurana. Her daughter Rachna, a former fashion designer, lives in Los Angeles, while son Siddarth, a board member in a recruiting company, lives in Mumbai. She is blessed with five grandchildren.

Here are selected excerpts from my conversation with Neetaji, translated from Hindi into English.

LOVE FOR LITERATURE

I inherited the love of reading from my father, Shubhkaraji Bothra. He was fluent in many languages, including Prakrit and Sanskrit. His work in Jain literature was so extensive that many Jain monks treated him

“Under my mother-in-law's training, I became so adept at chopping vegetables and fruits that whenever there was a function or wedding or any event in the neighbourhood, I was specially called over to assist with the chopping”

like a teacher. He encouraged us to cultivate a love for art and literature. As a youngster, I was often on stage reciting poems and speeches. I have sung at All India Radio, Jaipur. I was also a trained Kathak dancer and fondly recall performing the Rajasthani Gorbhandh dance in front of our former prime minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. To this day, I enjoy listening to classical music and old film songs and reading good literature. I have read the *Mahabharata* by various authors and pride myself on

knowing the answer to any question from this great epic.

CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

My life has been a confluence of three Rajasthani cultures: Marwari, Johari and Sheherwali. My maternal family hails from Jaipur; my husband's family is deeply influenced by the Johari Jains from Benaras; and my mother-in-law has grown up adopting the culture of the Sheherwali Jains. I enjoy the subtle nuances of each culture and pride myself on gaining the best from them. My exposure to a variety of cuisines and life in general happened after marriage. My husband was a connoisseur of food. His love for travel, sports and literature gave me wings to expand my knowledge and become a progressive thinker.

THE SHEHERWALI INFLUENCE

My mother-in-law's family came from Murshidabad, West Bengal. The Jain Oswals who settled in the region centuries ago were greatly influenced by the Bengali and Nawabi cultures of that time. They came to be known as Sheherwali Jains. Their distinct way of life, eating habits and sense of dressing portrayed the rich lifestyle of the place.

The Sheherwalis are known for their passion for mangoes, with over 100 varieties of mangoes available in Murshidabad. Many delicacies were



prepared with this fruit, including *sandesh* and *chakki*. My *jeth* [husband's elder brother] would sit down patiently and smell each one to predict the exact time it would ripen. This Sheherwali talent for identifying the perfect ripeness of each fruit was almost a kind of ritual.

My mother-in-law inherited the Sheherwali skill of cutting fruits and vegetables. Depending on the dish being made, each ingredient would have its own specific requirement for how it needed to be chopped. The rule to cut pineapples was to slice them so they looked like flowers. Certain mango varieties were peeled from top to bottom, while others needed to be peeled in a concentric circle. Under her training, I became so adept at chopping vegetables and fruits that whenever there was a function or wedding or any event in the neighborhood, I was specially called over to assist with the chopping.

Folding paan was another art form we were expected to master. A staple mouth freshener at every wedding and festival, it was our responsibility to make the paan ourselves, without any assistance from the domestic staff. I recall how six or seven of us would gather to fold hundreds and thousands of paans, each looking perfectly identical as if created by a machine.

SPECIAL INGREDIENTS

Saffron and rosewater are used frequently in Sheherwali cuisine. Saffron is added to most sweets and to *pulav*. When milk is set to make curds, a few strands of saffron are also added to make *kesar* dahi. In the summers, it is a common practice to eat leftover rotis with a cooling fruit salad, called *paana*. For this, we add a dash of sugar and rosewater to

Photographs by Zakir Hussain

KHEERE KI KACHORI

Savoury cucumber snack

Mention Sheherwali cuisine and one of the first dishes that comes to mind is *kheere ki kachori*. This recipe looks deceptively simple yet requires perfection at every step. The pleated edges give this *kachori* its distinctive look.

Ingredients

- Wheat flour or *maida*: 2 cups
- *Sooji* (semolina): ¼ cup
- Cucumbers: 2; grated
- Hung curd/yoghurt: 1 cup
- Red chilli powder: 1 heaped tsp
- Cumin powder: 1 tsp; roasted
- *Hing* (asafoetida) powder: a pinch; roasted
- Cinnamon powder: ¼ tsp
- Black salt: ¼ tsp
- Salt to taste
- Oil for binding and deep-frying

Method

Mix the flour with *sooji* and ¼ tsp salt. Add oil (about 3-4 tbsp) and mix well so that when a fistful of flour is pressed, it does not crumble easily. Add enough water to knead into a tight but pliable dough. Knead for a few more minutes and set aside. Cover with a moist cloth. Squeeze out excess water

from the grated cucumber. Set aside. To make the filling, combine the cucumber, hung curd, red chilli powder, cumin powder, *hing*, cinnamon powder, black salt and salt. Mix well. To make the *kachori*, divide the dough into small lemon-sized balls. Roll each ball into the size of a three-inch roti. Take one roti, spread some of the cucumber filling evenly on top and place another roti over the first one. Press the edges together and fold the ends into small pleats. Making the pleats is an art; if you are not adept at pleating, simply press the ends well so they do not open up. Heat oil and deep-fry 2-3 *kachori* at a time, on low flame. Flip them over to fry evenly and remove when they turn golden on all sides. Drain on absorbent paper. Serve hot with green and/or tamarind chutney.

Note: During festive meals, this *kachori* is also served with potato *sabzi* and chilli pickle (*kuti mirch ka achaar*).



chopped fruits like melons, mangoes or oranges.

QUICK LEFTOVER RECIPES

We prefer creating new dishes from leftovers rather than eating the same dish for more than one meal. This penchant for leftover recipes is most popular in Rajasthani culture. Let me share some of my favourite leftover recipes.

Chawal ki pakodi: Tie some curd [yoghurt] in a muslin cloth to drain away the water so you have hung curd. Mix leftover rice with salt,

crushed *saunf* [fennel seeds], and the hung curd. Pat gently into *pakodi* and set aside [about 20 minutes] until a dry layer forms on top. Deep-fry these in hot oil until crisp. Serve hot with chutney.

Roti ka upma: Tear leftover rotis into pieces. Prepare a rich gravy with onions, tomato puree and spices. Add the bits of torn rotis to the gravy, mix, and switch off the flame. Serve hot.

Roti ki chaat: Tear leftover rotis into pieces and allow it to dry for a day or two. Deep-fry the pieces in hot oil

until fully crisp. Use these as a base to make chaat, or simply crush coarsely, mix with chopped onions, tomatoes and seasoning, and serve as a snack.

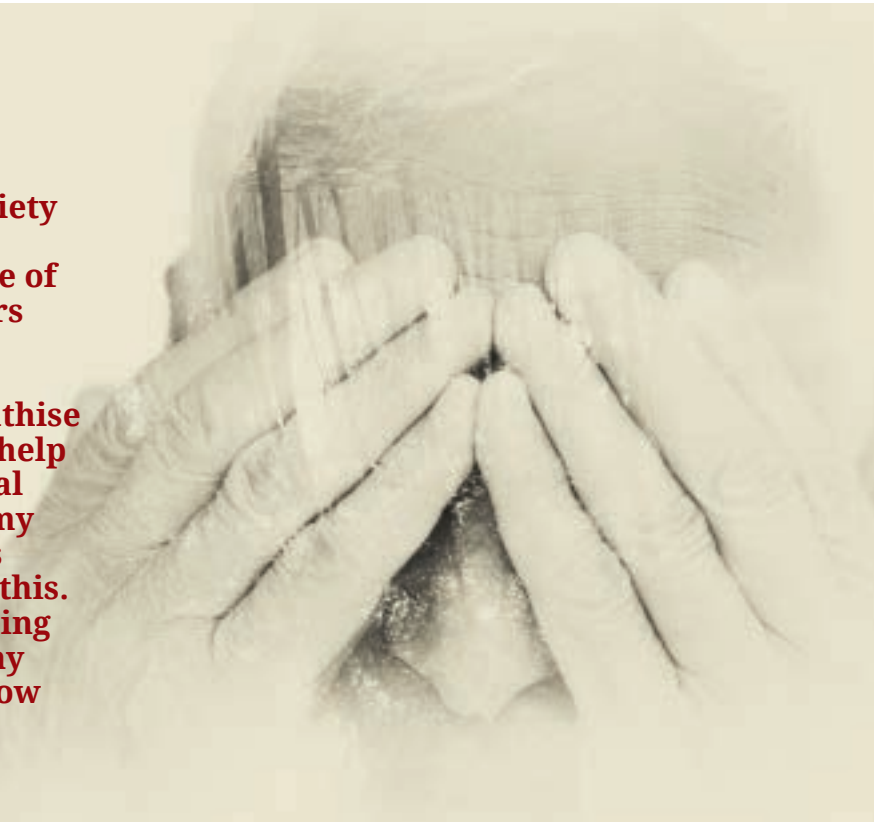
Pratibha Jain, an author and translator from Chennai, is the co-author of two award-winning books Cooking at Home with Pedatha and Sukham Ayu. Her area of specialisation is documenting Indian traditions through research, translation and writing



HELPLINE BY DR HARSHBIR RANA

Welcome to a new column where we answer your queries on personal and social issues related to ageing, elder care and intergenerational relationships

Q I live in a housing society in Mumbai. I recently came to know that one of our elderly neighbours has been physically harming his octogenarian sister, who is bedridden. Though I can empathise with the lady, I am not able to help her because I am not a personal witness to this abuse. In fact, my domestic help, who also works there, has informed me about this. Also, I feel I shouldn't be crossing my limits and intruding into my neighbour's personal space. How can I help her?



Photographs by 123RF.com

A Elder abuse is real and is recognised as a major problem faced by elders today. Before delving into this matter, let us first define abuse. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined elder abuse as “a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person”.

Elders can be abused in various ways. Physical abuse includes hitting, pushing or purposely injuring an elderly individual. Emotional abuse includes ignoring, verbally abusing, making fun of or isolating

the individual. Neglect would be indifference to the needs of the

aged—not feeding them, not taking care of their medical needs or not providing adequate shelter. Financial abuse could be making unauthorised financial withdrawals from their bank accounts

or changing the Will made by them. Sexual abuse would be non-consensual sexual contact of any type.

Elder abuse is most often inflicted by family members and caretakers. It is difficult to identify various forms of

abuse as it occurs mostly within the four walls of the home. As the abuser

It is difficult to identify various forms of abuse as it occurs mostly within the four walls of the home

is a known person, the crime is very often not reported. A silver woman once told me: “If my son is misbehaving with me, it must be my training. Telling outsiders about it will just make them gossip about

our family.” Sometimes the aged are isolated and won't have anyone to report to; there is also the fear of further abuse. Research shows that the abuser often suffers from mental health issues or substance abuse problems.

In your case, it is obvious that your domestic help has seen some form of physical abuse and, being concerned, she has told you about it. (Beware: Ensure the domestic help doesn't have a hidden/ personal agenda in reporting her neighbour's violent behaviour to you.) Depending on the gravity of abuse, you can choose from the following options:

- You can try to visit your neighbour on the pretext of striking up a conversation with the elderly woman. Look out for any signs of physical or emotional abuse and try to ascertain if she needs any help or intervention.
- If the nature of abuse is of bad behaviour, you can plan an intervention with a few neighbours from your housing society. Gather them together, explain the situation and plan how to



handle this crisis. Maybe someone will know the abused and could find out what was happening. Community pressure works very well in such circumstances.

- As you live in a housing society, you can take your domestic help to the person in charge of the housing society. She can explain what she saw and they can verify whether she has, in

fact, seen the abuse. Also living in the same building, the person in charge can gather information from other residents and service providers and, if satisfied, take appropriate action.

- Elder abuse does find redress under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007; although not knowing the full facts, I can't say for sure if it applies in this case. You can call the Mumbai Senior Citizen Helpline (1298) and report the incident.
- If abuse is of a criminal nature, it will be dealt under the Indian Penal Code, 1860. You can take your domestic help to the police station and get an FIR registered against the abuser. The Mumbai Police also runs a special service called Elderline where elders can dial 1090 and complain of any abuse.

Q. My parents are in their 60s. They have both movable and immovable property, accumulated over the years through sheer hard work. Both my sister and I are really proud of them. We are married and living with our families. But I am not sure if my parents have thought about a Will yet. Though I have tried to broach the topic quite a few times, they didn't seem to take me seriously. If my parents don't leave behind a Will, I'm afraid it may create a misunderstanding between me and my sister after their lifetime. How do I go about convincing my parents about the significance of leaving behind a Will?

A. The dilemma you face is a common one, with children wanting clarity on their inheritance and parents not wanting to commit by mak-

ing a Will. First, let us understand what a Will is. According to Oxford English Dictionary, "a Will is a legal document containing instructions as to what should be done with one's

money and property after death." When a person makes a Will, after their death, their property is given to their heirs in accordance with their wishes. This is called a Testamentary Succession. It is always better to have a registered Will. When there is no Will, the law governing the deceased steps in and determines how the estate will devolve. Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists are governed by the Hindu Succession Act; Muslims by the Muslim Law of Succession; Christians and Parsis by the Indian Succession Act, 1925.

There are various reasons why people are unable to pen down their Will:

- The first and foremost is that the Will is seen as an acknowledgement of the person's deepest fear: Death. The certainty of life is



that it will end in death. This is a fact many are unable to face and asking them to make a Will is forcing them to accept this harsh reality. Many a time, I have heard silvers saying, "I am not dying... why do I need a Will?"

The certainty of life is that it will end in death. This is a fact many are unable to face and asking them to make a Will is forcing them to accept this harsh reality

- Many elders are not keen to disclose information about their property and financial resources for a number of reasons, such as security or fear of leaking personal information. Making a Will would mean giving out this information.
- Many silvers do not want to offend any family members; they believe this may not be possible if they make a Will. In such cases, they prefer not making a Will or just keep postponing it.
- At times, the elderly don't want to face a scenario where children

fight among themselves for a bigger share. Many have told me, "They can fight for all they want after I am gone."

- Some silvers genuinely don't know how to go about making a Will or understand the importance of making one.

- Some silvers enjoy the power 'the guessing game' gives them over their children and relatives.

There are various ways to start a conversation with your parents:

- As you have stated that you have a sister, the first step would be to have a frank discussion with her on this topic. If you both feel similarly, you can visit your parents together for a family meeting. Have a serious conversation on why you would like your parents to make a Will and the consequences of not making one. Listen carefully to your parents' response and resolve their

fears as well. Please understand that anger has no place in this conversation.

- If you need to have this conversation alone with your parents for some reason, my suggestion is to do it promptly. There is no reason to stress about it and make it a bigger problem than it is. Call your parents and tell them you would like to have some time with them. Be honest and explain why you want them to make a Will. Explain the importance of their Will in your life and how not making one could spoil your relationship with your sister in the future. To make your point, you could cite incidences of your friends and relatives who are litigating in court. During this important conversation, please remember these are your parents and the discussion is about their property. Anger, force and threat cannot, I repeat cannot, be a part of this conversation.

I hope this information is helpful. Do write back and let me know how the conversation went.

Dr Rana is a New Delhi-based social gerontologist and Founder of Positive Aged. Email her with your queries at positiveaged@gmail.com or write to us at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org. Visit www.positiveaged.com



MONEY MATTERS BY PRIYA DESAI

A fatter wallet: Budget 2018 promises a smattering of tax benefits for silvers

An annual Budget is the harbinger of expectations and excitement; some good news and some not so good. Everybody—from the common man and corporate honchos to silvers—waits with bated breath for the Budget to learn what is in store for them, besides hoping it will rein in inflation. While taxpayers eagerly await the enhancement of tax exemption limits and tax-saving solutions, companies look for a reduction in the burden of taxes on industries.

In a break from routine, this year the Budget was presented on 1 February, a month before its regular date. Being the last pre-election Budget, it was expected to be peppered with a heavy dose of populism. Were the expectations of silvers fulfilled? Will they be able to reap the benefits? Let's take a closer look.

THE BACKDROP

The year gone by was replete with uncertainties and anxieties. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rolled in a lot of unease for virtually everybody—consumers, producers, marketers as well as distributors had reservations about this tax. It also meant a dip in the Government's tax collections, resulting in higher inflation, further adding to the woes of the common man.

It was natural for people to look for sops to help them fight the income versus expenditure battle. With incomes dwindling drastically and expenditures shooting through the roof, the fight was a tough one for silvers. Just imagine the plight and agony of those in their late 70s, who had to pay 25 per cent more than their existing mediclaim premium to ensure the continuity of their health cover.

Despite being a large voter constituency, silvers have always lacked

lobbying power. So, when Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said during his speech, "To care for those who cared for us is one of the highest honours", it was music to their ears.

WHAT IS ON OFFER?

The Budget introduces no change in the present tax structure of individuals. However, it has provided a standard deduction of ₹ 40,000 to senior pensioners. This is available to all salaried people in lieu of the present transport allowance and reimbursement of miscellaneous medical expenses' exemptions. With the lofty

In the current Budget, the scales are clearly tilted in favour of the Government; it has opened up avenues for it to earn additional revenue and achieve stated goals

intention of providing a life of dignity to silvers, the following incentives will be available while filing tax returns for the next financial year.

1. Interest income exemption limit enhanced

- The exemption limit on interest income earned on deposits with banks and post offices has been increased to ₹ 50,000 from ₹ 10,000.
- No TDS needs to be deducted from this income under Section 194A.
- All fixed deposits and recurring deposit schemes are covered under the ambit of this benefit. Therefore, the tax benefit can range from ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 12,000 depending upon the senior citizens' income slab and tax liability.

2. Medical benefits

- The deduction limit for health insurance premium and/or general medical expenditure has been raised to ₹ 50,000 from ₹ 30,000, under Section 80D. This translates into a tax benefit of ₹ 2,000 to ₹ 6,000 depending on the taxable income slab.
- In case of critical illnesses, all senior citizens will be entitled to a medical expense deduction limit of ₹ 100,000 under Section 80DDB.
- The earlier distinction between senior citizens (deduction limit ₹ 60,000) and very senior citizens (deduction limit ₹ 80,000) stands eliminated.
- Tax savings can extend up to ₹ 12,000 in case of use.

3. Extension of Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana

- A senior citizen savings scheme called Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana was introduced in 2017; it has now been extended up to March 2020.
- Under the scheme, Life Insurance Corporation of India provides an assured return of 8 per cent.
- The investment limit has been increased to ₹ 1,500,000 from ₹ 750,000. A small benefit in terms of assured interest is the highlight of this extension.

HOLES IN THE BUCKET

1. Imposition of Capital Gains Tax

The past two years saw a massive reduction in the interest rate on fixed and other deposits, which resulted in a hefty loss of regular income for most silvers. On the other hand, stock markets boomed. This encouraged some silvers to start dabbling in equities by resetting their asset allocation to make up for the lost income from fixed deposits. Many have been investing in equity-oriented mutual funds for a long time now. For

instance, many silvers have invested in Mastershares as a regular source of income as they ensure the possibility of gain with no tax on long-term capital gains. The dividend from mutual funds was tax-free too. The 2018 budget wrung out this flexibility from the tax scenario by introducing changes in capital gains tax aspects such as:

- Long-term capital gains from listed equities will be under the tax net from the next financial year.
- Long-term capital gains in excess of ₹ 100,000 will be taxed at the rate of 10 per cent.
- No indexation benefit will be available. The Finance Minister has offered a sop to investors by introducing the concept of grandfathering—an exemption that allows persons or entities to continue with operations that were approved before the new rule came into force. This means all gains up to 31 January 2018 will be grandfathered.

To quote from the speech, “If an equity share is purchased six months before 31 January 2018 at ₹ 100 and the highest price quoted on 31st January 2018 with respect to this share is ₹ 120, there will be no tax on the gain of ₹ 20 if this share is sold after one year from the date of purchase. However, any gain in excess of ₹ 20 earned after 31 January 2018 will be taxed at 10 per cent if this share is sold after 31 July 2018.” There is no change in the definition of short-term gains and the tax rates applicable to them will continue to stand at 15 per cent.

2. Dividends from mutual funds under attack

A tax of 10 per cent has been introduced on distributed income by equity-oriented mutual funds, which will result in the paring of mutual

funds’ dividends. This will have an adverse effect on this regular source of income for many silvers. They would also be liable to pay a long-term capital gains tax when a fund is sold after one year.

3. Upping the cess

The current 3 per cent education cess has been renamed ‘health and education cess’ with an additional 1 per cent. Now a total of 4 per cent is to be levied on the tax payable.

IS IT A ZERO-SUM GAME?

The Budget is a very complicated exercise; while it generously gives with one hand, it cruelly takes away with the other. In the current Budget, the scales are clearly tilted in favour of the Government; it has opened up avenues for it to earn additional revenue and achieve stated goals.

However, silvers have very restricted budgets with very limited components; their only objective is to determine how to make ends meet. Asset composition, allocation and sources of income vary from individual to individual, too, and there is no concept of one size fits all.

Here is an example to illustrate this point: A Mediclaim of ₹ 500,000 from New India Assurance Company will attract a premium of ₹ 42,000 (for a 78 year-old) in 2018 compared to ₹ 32,000 in 2017. The new premium

deduction limit will offer a tax relief of ₹ 2,000 for 10 per cent. But this does not take away from the fact that he/she will still be short of ₹ 8,000; also, the tax relief doesn’t compensate for the exorbitant increase in premium.

But there are also millions of silvers that don’t have Mediclaim cover for whom this holds no relevance. Those who invest in equities and mutual funds, too, will have to rework their investment arithmetic and how the gain-loss equation pans out for them. The low level of financial literacy will certainly be a hindrance in arriving at smart investment decisions.

A BETTER ALTERNATIVE

Something is better than nothing, goes an old adage. The smattering of relief doled out to silvers is definitely welcome. However, in an increasingly adverse financial environment, silvers need some tangible relief that allows them to live with dignity.

A higher income exemption limit of about ₹ 600,000 is one such alternative that may provide the foundation for a life of dignity for silvers in an environment where there is a yawning gap between income and expenditure. Life isn’t a bed of roses for silvers, but is it too much to ask for at least a whiff of those roses? A Budget that aims for this will bring smiles back on the faces of silvers.



123RF.com

The author is an economist based in Mumbai



Hysterectomy after MENOPAUSE

Dr Anshumalaa Shukla-Kulkarni, Consultant - Gynaecology, Laparoscopic and Robotic Surgery, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, sheds light on hysterectomy and when it may be required

Hysterectomy is the most commonly practised surgery in gynaecology, performed to remove the uterus with cervix, with or without tubes and ovaries. It is important to understand why the surgery is needed when the uterus is not functioning and be aware of the warning signs.

Menopause is the cessation of a woman's menstrual cycle for more than a year owing to the non-functioning of ovaries. It means the ovaries stop producing oestrogen and progesterone and the monthly cycle stops. The normal age for menopause ranges from 45 to 55 years. If one continues to have periods after the age of 56, it is advisable to undergo a hysterectomy as prolonged exposure to oestrogens can cause cancers.

If you are over the age of 60, you need to watch out for the red flags. If you experience any of the following warning signs, get your body checked immediately by a gynaecologist.

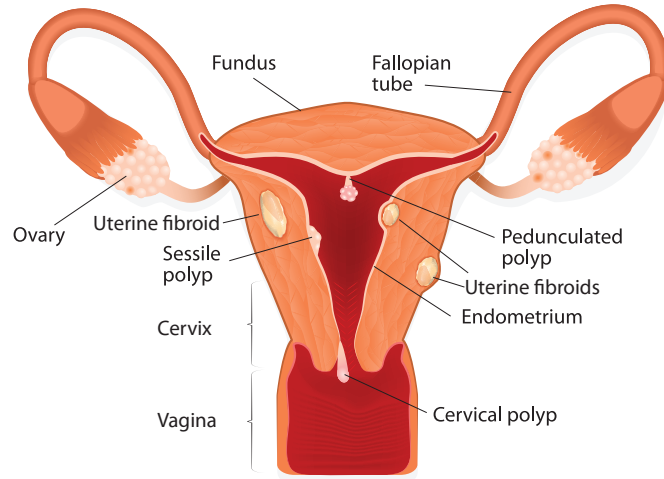
- **POST-MENOPAUSAL VAGINAL BLEEDING:** This is by far the most important symptom to report to your gynaecologist. When you have attained menopause, the ovaries and uterus cease to function and there is no bleeding. Hence any bleeding—spotting or heavy—needs a check-up. The reasons could range from a treatable infection causing bleeding to overgrowth of the uterus lining, which may lead to cancer. After

examination by a gynaecologist, you may need to undergo an ultrasonography of the uterus to check the lining and that of the ovaries. The acceptable limit of lining is 5 mm; anything more than that will need a small procedure called a hysteroscopy and endometrial biopsy. If you haven't had a pap smear done for cervical health, please ask for one.

- **THICKENED ENDOMETRIUM:** This condition could be owing to endometrial hyperplasia. Hyperplasia is excessive growth of the lining which may be pre-malignant; this will be confirmed with a biopsy. Then, depending on the grade of severity, you may be advised surveillance (ultrasonography every year) or a hysterectomy.
- **POLYP GROWTH:** Occasionally, post-menopausal bleeding may be a result of normal polyps (growth on the inside of uterus). This usually exists from the menstrual phase but gets detected after an episode of bleeding and also requires a hysteroscopy. The procedure is very simple; under anaesthesia, we introduce a 3-mm telescope to visualise the internal cavity of the uterus to identify the polyp and use scissors to cut it out.
- **PROLAPSE:** If you experience dysuria (painful or difficult urination), increased frequency of urination, burning micturition (urination) and difficulty in passing stools, or feel as if something is hanging down your vagina causing discomfort in walking, consult your doctor immediately. This could be owing to a prolapse or shift in the position of the uterus, bladder or rectum. The muscles that support the organs in your pelvis (uterus, bladder and rectum) are like a plate that runs from your backbone (sacrum) to the front bone (pubis) and is attached at the sides. With increasing age, this loosens and tends to hang down and causes the organs to shift. If the uterus remains out for longer periods of time, it causes difficulty in walking and, at times, cessation of urination. It may be just the urinary bladder or rectum hanging down that causes difficulty in passing urine or stools. In the initial stages, this condition can be treated with pelvic floor exercises; however, the second grade of prolapse or later requires surgical correction. At such times, it is advisable to remove the uterus and repair the defects, as it is easier to support organs without the weight of the uterus. This is done either through the vaginal route or a minimal access route (robot-assisted laparoscopy).
- **PERSISTENT OVARIAN CYSTS:** As menopause implies the cessation of ovarian function, any mass or cyst that grows in

WARNING SIGNS: POLYP GROWTH & INCREASE IN FIBROID SIZE

the ovaries after menopause needs to be checked and removed at the earliest. The chances of ovarian malignancy rise after 60; hence, anyone with a family history of cancer should get ultrasonography regularly. Routine check-up of the ovaries helps to detect ovarian cancerous or noncancerous cysts earlier. Ovarian cancer does not have specific symptoms; it is usually detected at an advanced stage.



● INCREASE IN FIBROID SIZE:

Fibroids are excessive growth of the uterine muscles and can be very troublesome during periods. After menopause, they generally shrink and do not cause any issues. However, if there is a sudden increase in the size of fibroids or you notice a new fibroid growth, it needs urgent removal. The incidence of cancer of the fibroids is low but in these cases an early surgery could be life-saving.

● RECURRENT VAGINAL

DISCHARGE: If you experience a recurrent foul-smelling vaginal discharge, visit the doctor immediately. Regular pap smears are highly recommended till the age of 65. As the incidence of cervical cancer is high after the age of 75, regular examinations are recommended.

● HISTORY OF CARCINOMA:

A family history of carcinoma of the breast, ovary, endometrium and colon with a gene-dependent cancer may also require hysterectomy with bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (surgery to remove the ovaries and fallopian tubes).

THE PROCEDURE

Hysterectomy can be done as an abdominal (through a large cut on the abdomen), vaginal (through the vagina), laparoscopic or robot-assisted (keyhole surgery) procedure.

Total laparoscopic hysterectomy and robot-assisted hysterectomy are the best options for prolapse and cancer cases. This involves only three 5-mm cuts on the abdomen, through which the surgery is completed. There is decreased intra-operative blood loss, morbidity and postoperative pain, less analgesia is required, recovery is faster and stay in the hospital is shorter. In fact, patients get discharged within 48 hours of surgery.

AFTER-EFFECTS OF HYSTERECTOMY

Perimenopausal women may experience certain changes owing to the low oestrogen levels in the body. This is most commonly seen when both ovaries are removed.

- Ninety per cent of surgically induced menopausal women experience frequent and severe hot flashes compared to the 40 per cent of women who undergo natural menopause
- Night sweats
- Breast and vaginal atrophy
- Urogenital changes (recurrent urinary tract infection)
- Sexual dysfunction and decreased libido
- Shrinking of vaginal canal in length and diameter
- Increase in the pH balance of the vagina (allowing more pathogenic bacterial colonisation)
- Decrease in vaginal lubrication

- Thinning of vaginal mucosa and loss of elasticity
- Reduction in the distance from the urethral opening to vaginal introitus (opening that leads into the vaginal canal) owing to tissue atrophy
- Cardiovascular diseases like heart attack
- Stroke
- Osteoporosis
- Depression

The above-mentioned changes are not prominent in postmenopausal hysterectomy as the ovaries are non-functional. The dominant hormone in menopause is androstenedione (male hormone) that helps to keep the bones healthy. Hence, supplements are advised to the patient after a hysterectomy to maintain good physical and mental health.

THE WAY FORWARD

Non-hormonal treatments such as dietary modification, lubricants, phytoestrogens (plant estrogens found in soya), calcium and Vitamin D supplements help combat the symptoms. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT), where synthetic hormones available in the form of oral tablets, local vaginal oestrogen creams or patches (in case of severe symptoms), is also advised. Note: In patients with osteoporosis, HRT should be taken only under a doctor's supervision.

After celebrating your 25th anniversary, celebrate your first.

The first time your eyes met.

The first time you mustered up the courage.

The first time you bared your heart.

The first time you heard "Yes".

The first date.

The first time you held hands.

The first fight.

The first time you made up.

Shouldn't you be celebrating, that first rush of love
before life

and the babies and the bills intruded?

Because for the first time

you're at an age when

you can fall in love with each other

all over again.





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HOME is where the HEART is

Dr Mahalaxmi Iyer's eldercare home-cum-hospital on the outskirts of Mumbai is a one-of-a-kind facility, where silvers can check in and stay indefinitely, reports **Sahil Jaswal**

While most people save up for retirement, a house or even a rainy day, Dr Mahalaxmi Iyer had other ideas. This gutsy doctor sold her home, used up her life savings and took a hefty loan to set up a facility where silvers could live on the premises while receiving medical treatment, round the clock.

This is not just an eldercare home with a doctor on call. Located in Vasind on the outskirts of Mumbai, Balaji Healthcare is a one-of-a-kind, 100-bed multispecialty hospital for elders. It offers medical treatment to seniors while inviting them to spend the rest of their lives in luxury.

“With old age come disease, ailments, fractures and so much more. So it is imperative that a senior care home has the resources to tackle such problems, as these problems are now an indefinite part of their lives,” says Dr Mahalaxmi Iyer, founder of Balaji Healthcare. The 20,000-sq-ft facility, nestling amid fields near Bhatsa River, is enveloped in an air of calm. Happy smiles and heart-warming conversations confirm that this is an eldercare home with a difference. Shamsheera Jussa, 80, a huge fan of John Grisham novels, was admitted here for congestive cardiac failure five years ago but stayed on after her Achilles tendon ruptured. As her son and daughter live overseas and she lived alone in suburban Mira Road, Jussa moved into Balaji as she felt more secure at the facility.

V Jaya, 82, also known as the unofficial mood-lifter of the home, is partially paralysed. She whizzes up to us in an electronic wheelchair and dreams of taking the other residents out to show them the beauty of Vasind in a wheelchair-accessible vehicle.

Jyotsana, 70, a former kindergarten teacher from Delhi, came here two years ago. Arriving in a wheelchair and

weighing a meagre 28 kg, she suffered from depression and hypothyroidism. Now, she is the picture of optimism. “My condition was deteriorating rapidly before I came to Balaji,” she says with a smile. “But with Dr Iyer available at just a moment’s notice, I have recovered considerably.”

Most of the residents at Balaji Healthcare are afflicted with chronic health conditions that are difficult to manage on their own. With their better halves either deceased or themselves ailing, or their children settled with their own families, many of them overseas, Balaji Healthcare has given these seniors an alternative home, a surrogate family and, most important, medical care.

Dr Iyer gives us an idea of what it costs to live here. A bed in the general ward costs ₹ 20,000 per month with television, laundry services, nursing charges, attached toilet and bath, a kitchenette with microwave and a small fridge, included in the costs; medicines costing extra. Triple sharing would set one back ₹ 23,000 per month; double sharing ₹ 25,500 per month; and a private room ₹ 30,000 per month.

Balaji Healthcare opened its doors in 2011 but only after Dr Iyer fought long and hard to make her dream come true. Between irregular financial disbursements from banks and the builder’s threats to vacate the premises for lack of regular payments, Dr Iyer had a colossal struggle on her hands. “In 2012, I sold my Pune house and in 2015, I had to part with my home in Kopar Khairane [in Navi Mumbai] to avoid a penalty on my loan,” says the doctor, who lives on the premises along with her husband. The tide began to turn in September 2015, when friends and family came forward with donations.

The 56 year-old doctor developed the concept of a hospital-cum-home from her previous place of work.



Left to right: Dr Iyer doing a routine check-up; the men's general ward



For Dr Iyer, ‘patient care’ is not only about providing adequate medical attention but making the facility feel like home. Clearly, what’s working here is not just the excellent medical care; the environment is also therapeutic

With a specialisation in general medicine and intensive care, Dr Iyer had worked at some of Mumbai’s biggest and best hospitals before taking the reins of a private, 40-bed hospital called Rajpal Hospital at Kopar Khairane in 2002. “I took charge of the administration of Rajpal Hospital, which became the only hospital in the area catering to medical emergencies 24 hours a day. I further opened an old-age care ward inside the hospital, on a no-profit, no-loss basis as social service to the community,” recalls Dr Iyer, who continued to oversee the facility till 2012.

Rajpal Hospital was thus a stepping stone to setting up Balaji Healthcare but the idea had been brewing for much longer. Dr Iyer admits that the loss of her parents and in-laws and the feeling that she had not done enough for them probably drove her to set up this unique facility.

Balaji Healthcare caters to both in-patients and out-patients. It boasts three operation theatres, an intensive care unit, a dialysis unit and a psychiatric ward, among other facilities. There is also an incinerator on the premises that burns over 300 adult diapers a day while kitchen waste is turned into compost, which in turn is used as manure for a kitchen garden. For Dr Iyer, ‘patient care’ is not only about providing adequate medical attention but making the facility feel like home.

A A Ramakrishna, 79, a former advocate who used to practise in Ulhasnagar Civil Court, and a permanent resident of Balaji, is enjoying the well-stocked library. He says he has read 23 of the 27 Robert Ludlum thrillers there. “I arrived here four months ago because of sleeplessness,” he shares. “I was in Jupiter Hospital, Thane, for seven months but I had to vacate. My daughter, who lives in London, found Balaji for me and I am happy here.” As he sees Dr Iyer walking in, he adds cheekily, “as long as the books keep coming!”

Shipra Badra, 72, who suffers from neurocysticercosis, was in utter distress when she was admitted to Balaji in 2016. She was brought here from Kolkata by her daughter for treatment. Uncontrollable convulsions and the threat of sepsis left her in a pitiable state. A year-and-a-half later, under Dr Iyer’s care, her convulsions are under control but she has stayed on at Balaji Healthcare while her daughter lives and works in Kharghar, Navi Mumbai.

Clearly, what’s working here is not just the excellent medical care; the environment is also therapeutic. “Most long-term patients suffer from dementia, schizophrenia or Parkinson’s; for patients like these, the atmosphere is really important,” says Mala, who heads all the caregivers. “We are lucky Dr Iyer is such a cheerful



Clockwise from top left: Sister Pramila administers medicine to Jyotsana; A A Ramakrishna engrossed in a Robert Ludlum book; patient Rinku Ganguly with her favourite soft toy

Opposite page: V Jaya zooming down the hospital ramp in her electronic wheelchair

personality herself, which is why she keeps the whole hospital happy.”

Dr Iyer invests as much in her staff as she does in the residents. One of the many ways she shows her commitment to them is by sponsoring her nurses for higher certification. While Pramila recently completed a course in auxiliary nursing and midwifery (ANM), Purnima, Jayshree and two other nurses also completed the general duty assistant (GDA) course.

To operate the dialysis machine, the hospital employs a technician from Navi Mumbai but, in a few months, Vrushali, a nurse and two, previously, office boys, but now candidates for certified hemodialysis technicians (CHT) will have completed their course.

Does Dr Iyer have any plans to expand her dream project? A large space for children with learning disabilities, perhaps. For the past two months, she has been organising sessions with these children, twice a week, within Balaji Healthcare and hopes to have a dedicated place for them soon. “The current class is 10-student strong and I have an occupational therapist coming in to tutor the children,” she reveals. “I hope to have more children coming in soon.” 🌸

P I T C H P E R F E C T

Renowned Hindustani classical vocalist, composer and fusion music exponent Shubha Mudgal is an artist with a diverse repertoire, writes **Rachna Virdi**

ROCKSTAR OF CLASSICAL MUSIC, queen of fusion and powerful songstress are just some of the epithets associated with Shubha Mudgal. Yet, none of these do justice to the versatile singer who has broken barriers with élan, winning hearts with pop and Hindustani classical music while anchoring her roots firmly in classical music. Known for her bold voice and mastery of Vaishnava and Sufi poetry, Mudgal's repertoire includes folk, pop and other forms of popular music. Indeed, versatility and adaptability are the hallmarks of her persona.

Harmony-Celebrate Age met the celebrated Hindustani vocalist after her enlivening performance at Paddy Fields—a two-day music festival held in Mumbai recently—where her power-packed rendering of *Dholna* had the audience on its feet. Clad in an earthy sari, her trademark kohl-lined eyes lighting up, Mudgal reflected on life, musical influences and causes close to her heart. “Paddy Fields focuses on the revival of folk music and gives talented musicians from rural and urban India a common platform,” she noted. “This time, the theme was ‘saluting women performers.’ It’s always a pleasure to share the stage with colleagues, more so this time as we had only women voices.”

Mudgal credits her musical journey to her parents Skand Gupta and Jaya, who taught English literature at Allahabad University and loved Hindustani classical music. “My mother wanted us



to follow an interdisciplinary approach,” recalls the singer, who along with her sister learnt Kathak at an early age and Hindustani classical music at the age of 17. Though Mudgal learnt music from vocalist Kamala Bose for a year, it was her intensive training under Pandit Ramashreya Jha, head of the department of music at Allahabad University, which laid the foundation for her career. “I first learnt music from Jhaji in 1978 in Allahabad and, occasionally, later after moving to Delhi, sometime in 1982.”

In Delhi, Mudgal trained under Pandit Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, founder of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, for eight years and subsequently under other stalwarts. After graduation, her mother suggested she take a year off to decide if she wanted to pursue music as a career. “It was a path-breaking gesture,” she shares. “I took my decision in a month and my parents supported it wholeheartedly.” Mudgal performed occasionally in Allahabad and later in other parts of India.

Over time, Mudgal forayed into pop with *Ali More Angana*, a collection of Sufi songs that became wildly popular with the foot-tapping title track a rage at discotheques. “There’s no age bar in music. The power of music is such that it takes the most unlikely people into the hearts of someone,” says the singer, whose byword is experimentation. She further endeared herself to the younger generation with tracks such as *Dholna*, *Ab ke sawan* and *Mann ke manjeere*, besides collaborating with popular bands such as Indian Ocean and Euphoria. Meanwhile, *Mann ke manjeere* caught the fancy of Breakthrough, a Delhi-based human rights organisation, which used it as an anthem for a campaign to promote and protect women’s rights. “It breaks my heart to see women being subjected to violence and sexual assault,” admits the 58 year-old. “I think the status of women today is a highly complex and conflicted one.”

“There’s no age bar in music. The power of music is such that it takes the most unlikely people into the hearts of someone”

EXCERPTS FROM THE CONVERSATION

How did your musical journey begin?

To appreciate my musical journey, it's important to understand our family background. My maternal grandmother, born in 1900, loved music and wanted to learn it but her father considered it unrespectable. He told her he could arrange a piano teacher but not someone to teach her Indian classical music. As my grandfather passed away early, my grandmother brought up my mother and her two sisters single-handedly. She gave them the chance to participate in theatre and learn music, though she was not keen to let them pursue it professionally. My own parents were deeply respectful of the arts. My sister and I were taught that we couldn't walk past musical instruments with our shoes on; we were also told to clean the instruments regularly and respect them. We continued to study and listen to music even during our exams. My parents were very encouraging. If it wasn't for their unconditional support, I would not have been a musician.

Who were your musical influences?

After my parents, I am most thankful to my gurus. Following my training under Pandit Ramashreya Jha and Pandit Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, I took further training under Pandit Jitendra Abhisheki, Pandit Kumar Gandharva and Pandit Vasant Thakar. I also got some *taleem* [training] in *thumri-dadra* [semi-classical forms] under Srimati Naina Devi. Each one of them opened up their homes to me and taught with the greatest generosity. Today, we talk of institutions where people pay very heavy fees and learn but in the guru-*shishya* tradition, no fee is charged. You go to the guru; if you are accepted, you become a part of the extended family. Having said that, it's not always easy for the guru or the *shishya*. You could have a music class that could go on throughout the day or you could be

hanging around without any class. Informality is the strength of the system and if someone doesn't belong there, it can be frustrating. It was a new learning; at times, I would complain to my mother but there was no question of changing the training schedule!

How did training under different gurus aid your evolution as a musician?

Gurus are like musical parents; you inherit a lot of their features and resemble them in many ways. The eclectic approach of learning from many sources and absorbing various influences did not come as a spark of inspiration for me. When you are learning music, you cannot go hopping from one style to another. It's only when you have reached a particular stage that you can seek permission from your guru to go to other gurus. That's an unwritten rule in music.

What do awards mean to you?

It's reassuring to win awards. But at the end of the day it is a pat on the back from the guru that is worth many such awards. There are times you realise you are indeed lucky to get awards despite the presence of distinguished senior musicians. For instance, I was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2000, but my guru Pandit Ramashreya Jha did not receive a Padma award. Now, if I refuse to accept the award because my guru had not been given a Padma award, would that get him an award? All I can tell myself is that it is with the guru's blessings that I have come this far.

Do you think the music industry is driven by nepotism and exploitation?

Many of our greatest singers have been part of the industry. So, I don't see why we should complain of nepotism. Exploitation often happens because people con themselves into believing something. If you don't know what you want, you don't stand a chance in the professional world.

“I never thought I've been held back because I'm a woman... Sometimes we tend to over-sensationalise the gender bias. Being a musician is tough for both genders”

In today's scenario, do you think traditional music has to evolve to retain its appeal?

Traditional music has its own appeal and will survive as long as there are people who love it and listen to it. Why do you think so many people attend Hindustani classical music concerts? Why is *dhrupad* [a genre of Hindustani music] so popular in Europe? However clichéd it may sound, music is universal. Foreign artists play to full stadiums in India; when we are invited overseas, people of all orientations attend our concerts. That's the power of music. It's fine if 50,000 or 500,000 people listen to film music and only 5,000 or 500 listen to classical music. But there should be space for those 5,000 people.

As an artist, you have never shied away from experimentation.

Fusion music wasn't really my experiment. In 1996, I sang and recorded non-classical music at the invitation of composer Jawahar Vatal for the album *Ali More Angana*. Later, it was Shantanu Moitra who invited me for *Ab ke sawan*. As the initiative has always come from composers, I can't take credit for being experimental. Every artist experiments or explores in their own way.

Being a woman, is it harder to achieve success in what many regard as a male-dominated industry?

I never thought I've been held back because I'm a woman. At times, I may choose to sort of let a bias or prejudice go by because I don't want friction, but in my own home women are deeply respected. Also, I don't think terms and nomenclatures matter as long as you're good at what you do and prove yourself. There have been great women singers such as Mogubai Kurdikar and Kesarbai Kerkar who didn't have 'ustad' prefixed to their names but remain deeply respected. Sometimes we tend to over-sensationalise the gender bias. Being a musician is tough for both genders. I cannot say my struggle is greater than those of men because I believe we are equals.

Tell us about the role women have played over the years in keeping music, the arts and traditions alive in India.

Photograph courtesy: Paddy Fields



AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- 1996: National Film Award for Best Non-Feature Film Music Direction for *Amrit Beej*
- 1996: Aadharshila award, instituted by eminent writers, journalists and artists
- 1997: Kalashri award from the Raja Ram Mohan Roy Education Foundation
- 1998: Gold Plaque for Special Achievement in Music at the Chicago International Film Festival
- 2000: Padma Shri
- 2015: Yash Bharati Samman from the Uttar Pradesh government
- 2016: Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavana Award for contribution towards promotion of goodwill

In Hindustani classical music, women have played a very important role particularly in promoting specific song forms and genres like *thumri* and *dadra*. A century ago, women performers in the public gaze came from communities that were not considered respectable.

So there was a particular community or class of women who were professional women music-makers. They were greatly respected and admired for their art but had a huge social stigma attached to them. As a student of music, I have the deepest respect for those women who bore the brunt of the stigma and made it possible for us to become professional women musicians.

“Why should technology be only for the young? If you’re open to changing times, you can remain connected with the world”



What are your concerns about our society today?

It has been proven time and again that people who’ve had an involvement and engagement with the arts tend to be more sensitised towards society. However, if that is so, why don’t we have an arts education programme in our education system? When I say arts, I mean all forms of it, from films to the most esoteric arts. In 2005, I was part of the focus group that studied the issue with the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), where the need for a vibrant arts education programme was discussed. But even today, arts activity is kept only for the annual day when a very slickly packaged programme is presented.

The sound of music

- *Ali More Angana* - 1996
- *Kama Sutra* - 1997
- *Arasial* - 1998
- *Pyar Ke Geet* - 1999
- *Lajja* - 2001
- *Kisson Ki Chadar* - 2003
- *Raincoat* - 2004
- *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aise* - 2005
- *Laaga Chunari Me Daag* - 2007
- *Jahan-e-Khusrau* - 2007
- *1920 - 2009*
- *No Stranger Here* - 2011
- *Patang* - 2014
- *Krishna* - 2016

I do not expect an army of children to start singing raga Darbari or do *tillana*. But access to the arts would be a step towards creating a more sensitised society.

You have been vocal about the causes you believe in.

I feel I cannot isolate myself from what is happening around me. However, I’m so involved with my music that I am not able to be an activist in the real sense of the word. But yes, I’ve been vocal about causes such as communal harmony. I perform with musicians of different religions and see how the power of music transcends all these so-called differences. The *wahs* and the *aahs* come for anybody who plays music well, irrespective of their community and caste.

What do you feel about the status of women today?

[Thinks] Last night at the Paddy Fields festival, I sang a folk song that goes like this: *Sasu mori kaheli banjhiniya, nanad brijwasan ho, rama jinki me bari re biyahi uhi ghar se nikalan ho* (my mother-in-law has declared me barren; my sister-in-law declares I am fit only to live in Vrindavan and the man who I was married to has turned me out of the house as I cannot bear children). The lady finds herself in the middle of a jungle, face to face with a tigress. The song goes: *Dukh sukh puche ho* (the tigress asks what has happened). The lady recounts her story and asks the tigress, “Why don’t you eat me up?” The predator replies, *Jahava se ayo ulat waha jao* (go back to where you came from because if I eat you I might turn barren myself). As the song goes, the lady meets a serpent, *devi* [goddess] and *dharti* [the earth], and all of them refuse to embrace her because she’s barren. What a surreal and tragic story! In 2018, we might feel it’s just a song but such deep prejudices and biases against women still exist in India.

Ageing women are even more marginalised in our society. How can they remain relevant and active in their silver years?

It’s a lovely world we live in; there are lots of possibilities of learning from each other. Why should technology be



only for the young and not for anyone who's willing to use it? If you're open to changing times, it is possible to remain connected with the world. Why can I not celebrate youthful voices rather than feel insecure about them? And yes, like me, my voice is ageing, so understanding the limitations and turning them into strengths are important to me. There's wisdom, experience and quality in old voices, which no amount of youthfulness will have. I still have fun singing *Ab ke sawan*. But if my voice starts shaking and I continue to sing at the same pitch, it is pointless!

You recently curated the Living Traditions concert, which sought to introduce today's audience to yesterday's musical glory.

I've been a music curator for Serendipity Arts Trust in New Delhi that organises the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa, which is about multiple arts like dance, music, photography, visual arts, theatre, culinary art, etc. We feel we need to respect classical music because it's old. But its antiquity should not be the sole reason to respect it. Today, I'm being called contemporary but 100 years from now, I'll be called traditional. Tradition is like a river, it's constantly changing. If it doesn't, it will become stagnant. I wanted to show how changes occur in music and make a connection between the past and the present. When you hear a young musician interpret something that was recorded 100 years ago, the connection with the past is evident as the changes are easily depicted.

You set Premghan's poetry to music...

Over the years, I've inherited a lot of compositions and repertoire and created my own too. My



Photographs courtesy: Shubha Mudgal

husband Aneesh, a composer and tabla player, and I study and work on several themes including Premghan's poetry. Premghan was a poet in the Mirzapur area in the 19th century and an important figure in the development of Hindi literature. We collaborated with Oddbird Theatre in Delhi for a musical presentation of Premghan's poetry. For us, it was a lovely beginning!

You set up Underscore Records along with your husband. What is the intent behind it?

Owing to my fascination with Internet technology, I noticed early on that it is possible to publish and distribute one's music independently. Around that time, as we travelled for concerts and met wonderful musicians, it was appalling to know that many of them were never recorded. So, to facilitate access to their music for music lovers, we set up *UnderscoreRecords.com* in 2003. It is a distribution platform that allows musicians to make recordings on their own terms and distribute it; all rights remain with the artists.

Top (L to R): Aneesh Pradhan, Shubha Mudgal, former Vice President of India Hamid Ansari, former President of India Pratibha Patil, former Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh, former Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar and harmonium accompanist Sudhir Nayak during an event; (above) with spouse Aneesh Pradhan and Guru Pt Ramashreya Jha in 2003

Opposite page: With son Dhaval

“Age is a challenge, of course, but when I write down my age, I don’t feel a day older than I was five or 10 years ago”



At home with her pet dogs

Photograph courtesy Raghav Pasricha

sion or not, it’s up to him. I would be supportive of his decision.

Which artists do you listen to?

I enjoy all kinds of music including film music, but I love listening to Hindustani classical music and the great masters of the past. I listen to Bade Ghulam Ali Khan *saab*, Amir Khan *saab* and Pandit Kumar Gandharva. I’m a great admirer of Siddeshwari Deviji and Begum Akhtar. I also listen to music recommended by youngsters such as my students, my son and nephew.

What else do you enjoy besides music?

I’m a big foodie, an eggetarian; I grew up in a non-vegetarian home but my sister and I chose to give up eating meat, fish and poultry a long time back. My husband and I enjoy food. As we travel a lot, we get to try different cuisines. If I may say so, I have 32 sweet teeth!

How has your partnership with your husband evolved personally and musically?

[Smiles] Aneesh and I met in the early 1990s as musicians; we were colleagues first and we married in 2000. I had heard him play with other musicians and requested him to accompany me on one of my early recordings for a label called Music Today. They were producing a series called ‘Songs of the Season’ in which I was one of the four artists featured. That’s how we started working together. Later, I wanted to set up my website on music and requested him to collaborate as he’s a well-known scholar and writes on music. Gradually, we started noticing common interests and decided to marry. To date, we perform together.

Do you consider yourself a musical influence on your son Dhaval?


You should ask my son this question! I’m happy Dhaval is very fond of music although he’s not a full-time musician. It’s not surprising given his father comes from a musical family and his mother is a musician; it would have been surprising if he had hated music. Music is very much a part of his life. Whether he chooses to make it his profes-

How has age influenced you?

As a musician, it’s important for me to be able to judge when I should stop singing publicly. Of course, we have the example of Kesarbai Kerkar who stopped singing in her prime, saying, “I want people to remember me as I was in my prime.” I know of very few musicians who can do that. Age is a challenge, of course, but when I write down my age I don’t feel a day older than I was five or 10 years ago. At the same time, I know that if I’m huffing and puffing after walking 5 km, it means that my body is telling me something and I have to listen to it.

What’s next for Shubha Mudgal?

In December 2017, I curated some music events for the Serendipity Arts Festival. Besides regular concerts, Aneesh and I are also working on a project called ‘The Bridge of Dreams’, wherein we are collaborating with a band called The Sirens in Australia, along with saxophone guru Sandy Evans, harmonium player Sudhir Nayak and tabla player Bobby Singh. I’ve also just submitted my debut book of short stories to my publisher; hopefully, it should be out in 2018. 🌸



The first day at school
The first time you rode the bicycle.
The first crush you had at thirteen
The first drama you got a part in
The first day at college
The first date you went on
The first kiss
The first time you proposed
The first job interview
The first board meeting you addressed
The first day after retirement

BUTTERFLIES *never retire*

The first click of the mouse.

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THE TERRAC

A large-scale photograph of the Terracotta Warrior Museum in Xi'an, China. The image shows a vast array of life-sized terracotta soldiers arranged in long, winding rows within a large, open hall. The soldiers are made of earthenware and have distinct features, including different hairstyles, beards, and armor. The background shows the museum's architecture and other visitors in the distance.

Xi'an, one of the oldest surviving cities, is not just home to clay warriors but a melting pot of past and present influences



Chitra Ramaswamy

A platoon of life-size earthenware soldiers at the Terracotta Warrior Museum in Xi'an

A large-scale photograph of the Terracotta Army in Xi'an, China, housed within a modern museum. The terracotta figures are arranged in long, winding rows within deep earthen pits. In the background, the museum's architecture is visible, featuring a high, vaulted ceiling with a complex steel truss system and large windows that allow natural light to illuminate the site. The overall scene conveys the vastness and historical significance of the discovery.

OTTA ARMY

We are two coach-loads, a little over three score of us, coincidentally mostly silvers, on a tour of China. The oldest among us is a quiet but cheerful septuagenarian who has endeared himself to the rest of us by his sheer demeanour and disposition. Following an inordinately delayed flight, thanks to the inclement weather at Shanghai through which we are routed to the Chinese capital, we arrive at the beautifully designed Beijing International Airport.

We hold our breath as our luxury bus skirts through an impeccably clean city that enjoys more than 3,000 years of history and was ruled by five major dynasties. A plethora of Soviet-style monuments dot the 'City of Ring Roads,' which is square-shaped and resembles the neck of a rooster. We make several leisurely halts at its various landmarks including Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, Summer Palace and, of course, its greatest wonder, The Great Wall, which runs 8,851 km.

It is evident as we walk around Beijing that the nation has invested hugely in the infrastructure and restoration of its heritage sites, perhaps in the wake of the Olympics in 2008. We thirst for more as we take the first flight out from Beijing to Xi'an, the next city in our itinerary. Under the expert stewardship of our tour manager Nihal and our local guide, the charming Lily Wang, we

(Right) An exhibit at the Terracotta Warrior Museum
(Below) Souvenirs on display at the terracotta factory



embark on sightseeing right away. We head to the city's most impressive landmark, the monumental Terracotta Warriors Museum, aka the Tomb of Qin Shi Huang, to see the world's coolest funeral art ever. Incidentally, the museum is listed by UNESCO as a world heritage site.

Dense, dark clouds dance on the horizon. A heavy downpour seems imminent as our coach weaves its way through broad avenues of trees, most of them laden with young pomegranates. The fruit, we learn, found its way into Xi'an from Persia through the Silk Route during the Han Dynasty.

The fountainhead of Chinese civilisation and one of the oldest surviving cities of the world, Xi'an was the starting point of the ancient Silk Road. China's gateway to the West, Xi'an or Chang'an, as it was then known, is where the caravans would start off from and return to. A cultural

hub, it not only served as the capital of 13 imperial dynasties including the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties but was also one of the world's greatest cities during the 8th century, with a significant population of foreigners. In fact, the city witnessed a new lease of life during the Ming Dynasty, which included its name change to Xi'an, meaning 'western peace'.

On our way to the Terracotta Warrior Museum, we halt at the terracotta factory, which focuses on replicating soldiers, besides exhibiting other clay, crystal inner painting and lacquer artefacts and wall murals. The expansive boulevard leading to the museum from the parking bay is awash with colour as vendors beckon visitors to buy their wares. Flanking its sides are stalls that groan under juicy persimmons, luscious pomegranates, big red jujubes and other fruits. The aroma from frying snacks and steaming dumplings tickle our nostrils and set our palettes salivat-



BEST TIME TO VISIT

Sun, rain and clouds alternate in Xi'an for most of the year. The city has a temperate and continental monsoon climate with four distinct seasons: summer, spring, autumn and winter. Though an all-weather destination, Xi'an is at its best in spring and autumn. The annual Lintong Pomegranate Festival is held in September. It is also the best time to climb Mount Huashan, a popular tourist destination, to witness a spectacular sunrise. Trekkers need to carry gloves, a raincoat, walking stick, torchlight and first-aid kit.

OBTAINING A VISA

Xi'an has a 72-hour, visa-free transit policy for passengers from 51 countries or regions, when taking an international transfer via Xi'an Xianyang International Airport. Others visiting Xi'an need to obtain a Chinese visa before departure from their

respective countries. For those who book group tours, the respective tour agency will obtain the visa, the fee for which is included in the tour cost.

GETTING THERE

There are multiple airlines from Delhi and Mumbai to Xi'an, including Air India, Jet Airways, China Southern Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, Cathay Pacific and Lufthansa. They all have one to three halts in between. As Xi'an is located in the heart of China, it takes no more than three hours to fly there from other major Chinese cities. Xi'an is also connected to other cities by high-speed bullet train.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation that suits all pockets is available. Prior booking needs to be made, especially for hotels in the urban area or near tourist locations, and during peak travel season.

SHOPPING

Miniature replicas of terracotta warriors made from clay as souvenirs, local handicrafts that include

embroidery and paper cuttings, primitive paintings, embroidered cotton wall hangings and tote-bags. Bargaining is expected.

TIPS

Language and vegetarian food pose a major barrier. These and other unforeseen difficulties and hassles are best overcome by booking a tour with reputed travel companies. For those visiting Beijing who wish to see only the Terracotta Army Museum in Xi'an, you can do so in nine hours with a Beijing return flight and airport transport. The Terracotta Warriors Museum is open 365 days of the year from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm. The ticket price of RMB 150 (about ₹ 1,500) from 1 March to 30 November and RMB 120 (about ₹ 1,200) from 1 December to 28 February to the museum includes entry to watch the 15-minute movie on the terracotta warriors and entry to Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum. While in the museum, don't use flash photography. And be watchful of your wallets in and around the museum, as elsewhere in China.

ing. While on the subject of food, the spicy cuisine of Xi'an is predominantly made from wheat and vinegar unlike the rest of China where soy and white sugar are extensively used. Wei, the Yellow River's largest tributary, irrigates the agricultural lands of Xi'an, making for good wheat crops, the mainstay of its people.

We enter the huge museum only to be held spellbound by an awe-inspiring platoon of life-size earthenware soldiers, arranged according to their heights, proportionately rising with their ranks, commanders and generals being the tallest. The museum, spread over 14,000 sq m, is divided into three pits, which together contain over 8,000 military men, 130 chariots and 700 horses. However, only a fraction of the finds are on display. History records them as being buried with China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di, who sought to secure his afterlife in building this underground palace. Its excavations, the 20th century's most significant, came about after its chance discovery in 1974 by farmers who were digging the region.

The clay warriors represent unparalleled sculptural achievement in the history of ancient China, with tremendous attention to minute details. No two figures are alike—in expression, attire or hairstyle. The soldiers have been carved in several postures: standing infantry, kneel-

ing archers, wielding weapons, on horseback and chariots. Research points to the statues having been fired at high temperatures ranging between 950° and 1,100° Celsius, making them really hard. The exhibition hall of the bronze chariots contains the world's largest and most intricate bronze relics.

Huang Di is credited with unifying large parts of China. He also began the construction of the Great Wall of China, standardised coins, weights and measures, linked the nation's states with a network of roads and canals, and instituted the same writing system across all of China. The shrewd emperor was also ruthless and brutal in his treatment of the huge force that helped build his mausoleum. According to legend, 70,000 workers who laboured over the necropolis were buried within it to prevent disclosure of its details and location.

As evening sets in, Xi'an transforms into a maze of jewellery with its historic monuments embellished with neon lighting. We wind our first day's tour of Xi'an with a visit to the White Goose Pagoda. En route, we catch glimpses of the brightly lit Bell Tower, a Tang dynasty structure, and symbol of Xi'an. According to legend, the edifice was built to clip the powers of a terrible dragon that brought a calamitous earthquake whenever it appeared. Its 6,500-kg

The local government is now moving residents from downtown or old city to the outer circle or new city in an effort to preserve the inner city as its heritage. It is claimed to be one of the largest ancient military defence systems in the world

Musical fountain against the Wild Goose Pagoda; a busy avenue in the city

Opposite page: Street food vendors dish out delightful local delicacies

bell is struck at dawn each day. In close proximity is the Drum Tower from which drums are sounded every sunset to signal the day's end.

The 210-ft tall Wild Goose Pagoda in the heart of the city continues to stand out as an emblem of Buddhist monk Hieun Tsang's epic journey from Nalanda. The 7th century monument, housing sutras and Buddhist figurines brought by Tsang, is a powerful symbol of China's cultural and spiritual connection with India. We brave needle-sharp drizzles to visit the pagoda, against the backdrop of which is the illuminated musical fountain. We plonk ourselves at a vantage spot to watch the half-hour show and capture the beauty of the waltzing fountains, touted to be Asia's largest.

We hit the bed to blissful slumber at Titan Central Park Hotel where we are booked. Located in Xi'an's technology district, it is just 8 km from downtown and a 40-minute drive from Xi'an Xianyang International Airport.

Our second and final day in Xi'an is another wet day. We breeze through its major landmarks, most prominent among them being the 7th century City Wall, which divides the

metropolis into the old and new city. Skyscrapers and office buildings with glass facades rub shoulders with the old city walls. The city is an interesting mix where the ancient and contemporary blend effortlessly, blurring the divide between the old and new cities. Our guide Lily Wang tells us that the local government is now moving in phases, residents from downtown or old city to the outer circle or new city in an effort to preserve the inner city as its heritage. It is claimed to be one of the largest ancient military defence systems in the world.

The heavenly showers that oscillate between drizzles and heavy blobs ruin our hopes of riding rented bicycles on top of the 14-m wide wall, which is 12-m high and runs around the city, covering a length of 14 km. Wang tells us September rains are routine, though mellow. This information does nothing to boost our sagging spirits as we miss strolling along the city's alleyways and the maze of streets that form the Muslim Quarter, evidently the hub of Muslim community in the city. A veritable visitor's haunt, this area is as old as the 7th century Tang dynasty and still carries the bustling cosmopolitan flavour of ancient times when foreigners settled by the droves,





and were welcomed by the emperor. The many mosques here, which once rubbed shoulders with the king's palace, bear testimony to Xi'an being a multicultural city. The alleyways of the Muslim Quarter pulsate with activity from lines of stalls vending a vast array of merchandise, from souvenirs to food. The area, a feast for the senses, boasts a whopping 700 and more halal sit-down restaurants and several more food stalls. Some of the specialties include the famed *yangrou paomo*—crumbled unleavened bread in mutton stew—fried rice with pickled Chinese cabbage and little capsicums, sticky rice and jujube cake, and the fruit pies made with persimmon relished as a distinct dessert in the region.

The impact of the Silk Route from ancient times is still discernible with a variety of spices and foods sold here that are distinctly different from those in other parts of China with some of the vendors tracing their roots to as far as Turkey and other regions of Central Asia. Food

items apart, the streets of the Muslim Quarter are abuzz with peddlers selling souvenirs: wooden, marble and porcelain artefacts, chinaware, footwear, bags and clothes in motley colours.

Xi'an customs and cultures vary from those practised in rest of the country. Sons are a drain on financial resources, says Wang. We are surprised to hear that parents incur huge wedding expenses in getting their sons married as they are required to pay money to the bride's family, apart from buying an apartment for their son!

We are treated to a boundless odyssey of nature's play in Xi'an, as the sun and clouds share a comradeship in mystically delightful ways. Despite our disappointment at not being able to use our digital devices to capture the magnetic charm of Xi'an and savour the flavours of its little and large alleys thanks to the rains, we nevertheless enjoy nature in its myriad hues. ✽

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a light blue checkered shirt and white trousers, is riding a blue duck-shaped water toy in a pool. She is smiling and has her arms outstretched. In the background, a man with white hair, wearing a light green shirt and khaki shorts, is riding a red duck-shaped water toy. The background is filled with lush green foliage.

Experience

A second childhood

Wouldn't it be great to have a second childhood? To start life afresh? Because at Harmony, a magazine for people above fifty five, we believe that age is in the mind. Which is why, you should live young.

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harmony
celebrate age

Courtesy: Sarmaya Collection

photography

What's in a photo?

Far from the click of a button that photography is today, it once took a crew of 40 porters to carry 50-100 kg of equipment. All this and more about what went into making the first photographs was found at *Portrait Of A Nation, A Nation In Portraits* by the Sarmaya Collection at Mumbai's Pundole Art Gallery recently. The exhibition covered the early journey of photographic processes and printing technology while traversing a part of Indian history, including stories of royals and common folk up to the turn of the 20th century. "I was struck by the extraordinary effort required to capture these images in the early days of photography by mavericks like Samuel Bourne, James Burgess, Raja Deen Dayal and Felice Beato... we forget that once upon a time, every photograph was an adventure," says Sarmaya founder Paul Abraham in his collector's note.



The life of *aai!*

Padmaja Parulkar-Kesnur salutes her mother's innate, environment-nurturing artistic sensibility

Aai is an 'artist' with a capital A. No, she has not sold artwork at boutiques or held exhibitions at art galleries. She has not trained in fine art or seen the insides of an art school. But Madhavi Parulkar has an innate artistic sensibility that enables her to fashion her home and life with an artisanal touch. In a matchbox house, the one of my childhood, wherever you look, you will find some 'work of art'—functional or purely decorative. Chances are, it would be a new avatar of something that has outlived its original purpose or use. The best part of her creativity is that it is environment-nurturing, where there is minimum generation and maximum recycling of waste. This is not necessarily because she is environment-conscious but because, for her, odds and ends—cloth pieces, broken plates, paper, nuts, bolts, plastic, bottles, you name it—are raw materials.

Simplicity is the hallmark of her creativity. She has always been Spartan in her living, not out of choice, perhaps, but because she was born into a family of modest means. Her creativity was partly fuelled by necessity. As a kid, she designed her own costume jewellery out of flowers and twigs that were abundant and free. Later in life, she stitched her own designer sari blouses from coarse *khaddar* as she couldn't afford fancy material or a tailor. Of course, I was fortunate that I had her as my personal fashion designer. One summer when we were to go on a long vacation, she designed an entire ensemble for the teen-me—frocks with frills, skirts with braided pockets, shirt-tops with bows—in a few sittings. Over the years, she collected and stashed bundles of leftover fabric from those



Photographs by Padmaja Parulkar-Kesnur

tailoring episodes, as resource material. These patches later transformed into bed throws and quilts, a pastiche of my once-upon-a-time 'hi-fashion wardrobe'.

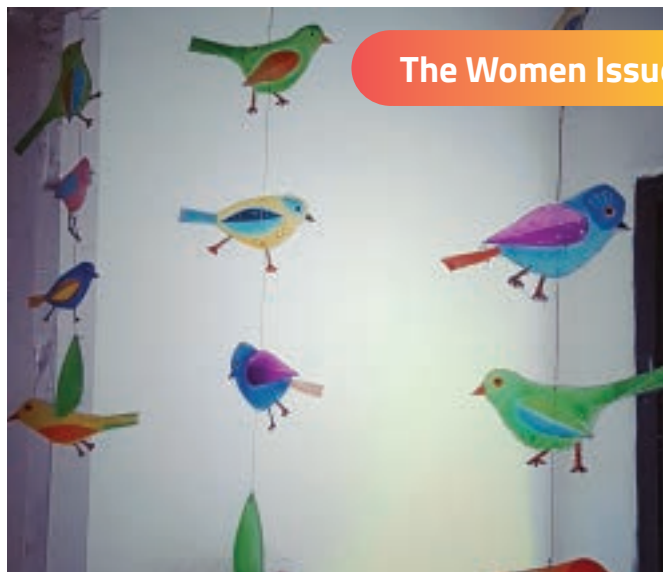
In her book of life, nothing is a throwaway. Bits of paper discarded during craftwork by grandchildren, gift wraps, shopping bags, newspapers—nothing is spared or not kosher in her eyes. Doodling on these scraps is one of her favourite pastimes. I have laminated many of her noteworthy pieces and gifted them as bookmarks! A cracked glass bowl gets glossed over with paint and a new lease of life, as table decoration. Attractive liquor bottles get a fill of beetroot wash or some such thing and become accent pieces.

craft



Instead of splurging on easel and acrylics she makes the walls her canvas. Like tribal folk who paint mud walls with kaolin or lime, she makes murals in monochrome. For a month, an entire wall in the living room became a tableau of village life: harvest festival, weddings, religious ceremonies, and everyday activities. The Warli in white is the conversation piece of her humble 'salon', which is also her 'studio'. *Aai* now has other 'designs' on the wall—a Tinga Tinga painting, perhaps—now that the Warli has had faded out of the limelight.

Indeed, in a house where space is at premium, every corner or cranny gets



Clockwise from top: The living room wall adorned with Warli drawings of harvest festival, weddings, religious ceremonies and everyday activities; dangles made from table mats; a patchwork quilt made from leftover fabric

Opposite page: Madhavi Parulkar; doodles on scraps of paper made into bookmarks

utilised to maximum benefit without overdoing it. There are colourful cloth organisers or compartment hangers for storing stationery and bric-a-brac. One organiser has plastic see-through compartments made from discarded folders and files! Under her gaze, a sturdy *mithai* box becomes a storage panel for slipping earrings, to be hung by a dressing table. The modest, no-frill bathroom and toilet are spitting clean with just one flower vase—a porcelain pickle jar of yesteryear—with shocking red plastic flowers adorning the window sill. She has a Midas touch and in her hands even cheap paper flowers become kitsch art at its bespoke best. Any wonder then that for designing my brother's wedding invitations and my visiting card, we looked no further?

Whether it is carpentry or origami, she is good at reverse engineering. If I present her a bird-feeder she will have another put up alongside, handmade with further innovation and artistry. Not for her Internet ideas or Pinterest prompts; her inspiration comes from within her creative reserves. If she has no use for a tablecloth (with mats) someone gifts her,

she sews up two mats to make one small-size cushion cover to go with the tablecloth that becomes a cover for the divan. A simple and stunning idea! When a friend was disposing of her Ikea table mats, she cut out the birdies, attached them to strings, and made dangles to run down the niche of a window. With the breeze, the birds gently sway to the background score of sparrows chirping at the bird feeder in the balcony.

Not surprisingly, a person such as her has green fingers too. A tiny cubicle open to the sky is her container garden in which she plants everything from bougainvillea to bonsai from cuttings and saplings obtained from the wild. Buying saplings or fancy pots and planters is anathema to her. The containers, as you must have guessed, are repurposed.

The best part: she has never thought of exploiting her talent for financial gain or expected remuneration for requests she has been flooded with, from friends and family. Instead, she always ends up giving all her artwork as gifts—that's my *Aai*.



THE ART OF CRAFT

Hansa Marivala, 86, has a creative mind matched by nimble fingers that obediently do its bidding. The abundance of papier-mâché craft in her home in Mumbai's Peddar Road is testament to her restless creativity.

Small, colourful roses fashioned out of recycled paper neatly placed over thermacol sheets grace her dining table even as her mind searches for the next class of material to put to work.

A graduate of Sir J J School of Arts, Marivala had traded the artist in her to become a wife and a mother to four



wonderful kids. But, ever since her husband passed away in 2012, she has been filling the void by rekindling her romance with crafts.

"My first project was one of my uncle's wallets, which I had borrowed from him and returned after two days, looking brand new and beautified," shares Marivala. Using the fabric lying around the office, she created "magic", she says, repeating her uncle's words.

As upcycling became a more prominent part of her life, Marivala moved from fabric to paper, bags and magnets, old photos and wedding invitations. "I had salvaged pictures of gods from various locations around Mumbai and glued them to magnets. I made about 30 of these magnetic bookmarks while I was admitted to hospital in 2016. Within two days, the doctors and nurses had claimed each of them!"

Bridge over busy waters

Whether it is the Statue of Liberty in New York, the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Gateway of India in Mumbai, there is something special about arriving in the world's iconic cities and catching a glimpse of their grandest and most monumental symbols. For Kolkata, such a symbol would be the Howrah Bridge, which celebrated its 75th anniversary last month. Since its opening on 3 February 1943, the grand old structure has become a part of everyday life in Kolkata. Stretching 705 m across the Hooghly and connecting Howrah to Kolkata, it carries over 100,000 vehicles and 150,000 pedestrians every day. The engineering marvel, which survived World War II, is made of 26,000 tonne of steel. To commemorate the anniversary, Tata Steel, which provided 90 per cent of the steel used, released a coffee-table book titled *Howrah Bridge: An Icon in Steel*.





Photographs by Haresh Patel

Her most prized creation is a *toran*, a decorative hanging, displayed in her daughter, Nandini Marivala's home in Los Angeles. It is fashioned out of 6,000 pieces of coloured paper, which she cut, glued, rolled and carefully stitched together. "Everyone who comes to my house always stops and stares

at my mum's *toran*, which hangs in my living room," says the proud daughter. "And, why not? It's five years of hard work."

Marivala's keen mind is always looking for that next piece of craft that will awe her. Marble fabric painting, with its unpredictable patterns, is one such craft that set her imagination on fire. Crochet bags and the bejewelled invitations that adorn her house are some of her other cures for ennui.

"Working with paper alone can get monotonous, especially with the quantity I work with," she shares. "I keep switching to other things from time to time, and then come back to the leftover pieces. It keeps life exciting and saves me from the monotony of old age. I don't wish for success, riches or glory. I am just happy that people close to me appreciate my work and are always asking me, 'What next?'"

—Sahil Jaswal



“ It is very rare at my age to play such a central role; to get an offer like this, to begin with, is quite unusual. It gave me the opportunity to get into someone's head and explore a life that is very different to mine, at least on the surface. I drew from my memories. That's what happens once you get into the role. You find things in common with your past or present. It is no longer about imagining a character and space. But you bring all the experience and understanding you have acquired over the years to the role. It was very exciting to have been challenged this way.

—Soni Razdan, 61, on her comeback film *Yours Truly*, based on a short story by Annie Zaidi about a woman who lives a solitary life and is about to retire from her job

Of life & land



Rituparno Guha

Bengaluru's Jagriti Theatre recently saw the revival of *The Blooming Orchard* with a new cast, 20 years after its last show. The story is about Banchharam Kapali, an old farmer who owns a beautiful orchard, which he greatly loves. As the story unfolds, we are introduced to a riot of characters, all of whom want a piece of the land. "The old farmer is a character straight out of an absurd play. He gets stronger and more invigorated after turning 85, as if he is drawing life force from the land sharks salivating for his property and getting progressively weaker," offers director Ranjon Ghoshal, speaking to us. *The Blooming Orchard* is based on Bengali play *Shajano Bagan*, written by Manoj Mitra in the 1970s. It was translated into English by Ranjon and Sangeeta Ghoshal and premiered in Bengaluru in 1982, making it the longest-running production of theatre group Forum-Three.



OFF THE CUFF BY RAJU MUKHERJI

THIS GENTLEMAN'S GAME: A great cricketer and greater human being, Rahul Dravid could well be the last of a rare breed

I first met Rahul Dravid in Mumbai in 2005-06 at the inaugural edition of BCCI's interstate T20 tournament, named after the memory of one of India's master batsmen, Syed Mushtaq Ali. The match was at Wankhede Stadium and one of the teams happened to be Karnataka.

The day before the match at the pre-match meeting, where the teams meet the umpires and match referee, Karnataka was represented by their new captain Yere Gowda, as original captain Dravid was not certain to play. At the time he was leading India and the national team had just returned from a foreign tour. So, Karnataka manager Sudhakar Rao informed us that Dravid may not be able to arrive on time for the match.

Next morning before the toss, while the umpires and I, as match referee, were inspecting the pitch, we saw Dravid walking towards the pitch. As he came near, he exchanged pleasantries and was about to step on the pitch itself. I quickly blurted out, "Are you leading the team in this match?" He shook his head and said, "No." I smiled and added, "Probably you have forgotten that as a playing member, you are not supposed to walk on the pitch. Only the captain has the prerogative." Instantly he stopped and said, "I am sorry. Thanks for reminding me." I replied, "Cannot blame you, Rahul. As the India captain you have got used to walking on the pitch before the match. Anyway, no harm done. Thanks."

Suddenly the huge frame of Venkatesh Prasad appeared. He thought I was having a confrontation with Dravid. He raised his voice at me: "Do you realise you are arguing with the India captain?" Without a moment's hesitation, the Indian captain cut him short, "Ref is correct. As an ordinary player I am not allowed on the pitch."

This is the real Rahul Dravid. A man of courage and character. Courageous enough to accept that he was about to make a mistake. He had no qualms in saying so in front of the curator, umpires and others who were near us. And he revealed exemplary character to silence his colleague for being wrong.

That evening, after our match was over I went across to Brabourne Stadium, home of the Cricket Club of India (CCI), to watch another T20 match in progress. As I entered, Dilip Vengsarkar called me over to the seat

beside him. On the other side of Vengsarkar was Dravid. Vengsarkar introduced me saying, "Meet my friend Raju." Straight-faced, Dravid replied, "Met him this morning. A lenient match referee." When Dilip furrowed his eyebrows to know what had transpired earlier, Rahul smiled and mentioned the incident. Dilip added sauce: "Even when he was playing, Raju always behaved like a match ref." As the conversation flowed, Rahul mentioned he had liked reading my book, "The part about cricket being played during the days of the *Mahabharata* was an eye-opener." I was astounded that he had found the time to read my writing. As if this were not enough, he added, "Rajan Bala told me to read your articles. I usually do." I also came to learn that he was an avid collector of cricket books.

Later that season, our paths crossed again. This time, too, at Wankhede. The occasion was a Ranji Trophy tie between Mumbai and Karnataka. Before leaving Calcutta, I had taken a first-edition Cardus duplicate from my collection for Rahul. My wife Seema was mad at me: "Do you realise you would be giving the India captain a moth-eaten book? What will he think of you?" I told her, "If any player would realise the worth of the copy, it would be Dravid."

How correct I was. The moment he had the tattered copy in his hands, he uttered, "Are you sure you want to part with this original-edition Cardus? This is a collector's item." The man did not bother about the non-glossy exterior. Here was a man who could buy new books from all over the world. But he understood the value of antiquity.

Another incident revealed the man all the more. At Mysore, Karnataka was hosting Punjab in a Ranji Trophy tie. Manish Pandey, a young batter, was playing an excellent innings and remained unbeaten on 80 at the end of the penultimate day, with his team needing around 50 plus to win. While they were doing their cooling-down drills, I called Pandey and asked him the reason for wearing light grey shoes. Skipper Rahul was embarrassed but asked me if it was possible to allow Pandey to continue with those shoes as he had no other pair. I told Dravid that if he felt it was fine, I would allow Pandey to continue with those shoes. Dravid replied, "No, no, I do not think these shoes are okay. He should be wearing white shoes. Will you please accept it if he puts white plaster on the shoes while batting?" I understood the problem, "Fair enough, skip. Out of sheer respect for you, I will allow it."

Dravid remains the modest self he has always been. Never a word out of place. Never an act to raise any eyebrow. Never cared for publicity. Never flirted with controversy. Always remained an intelligent and articulate gentleman

The next day, Pandey got his 100 and Karnataka won the match. Afterwards, Dravid came to the referee's room and thanked me, "You have opened my eyes. I found most of my lads do not possess proper white cricket shoes. I assure you, Karnataka players will wear absolutely proper shoes from the next match." I was stunned. Here was a captain who had the courtesy to acknowledge even a minor problem and was willing to admit it in public.

Another incident revealed a new dimension of his persona. At Jaipur, Rajasthan Royals was involved in a match with Delhi Daredevils. It was an IPL match in 2012. As match referee, I walked in for the toss. The commentator was Sanjay Manjrekar. He asked me, "Sir, I just want to get the pronunciation of your name correctly. Is it MUKHERJI?" He proceeded to repeat my surname to get the pronunciation right. Instantly Dravid, the RR skipper, smiled, "No, his real name is not MUKHERJI. It is MUKHOPADHYAY." I was taken aback for a moment, then replied, "Rahul is right. As I am in tie and jacket I call myself Mukherji. In dhoti-kurta, I call myself Mukhopadhyay." But how did this man from Karnataka come to know Mukherjis are actually Mukhopadhyays? Well-read and articulate, his awareness of the world goes far beyond the comprehension of most sportsmen.

Rahul Dravid is also a man of gratitude. He is known to have told the world repeatedly that Keki Tarapore was his coach, even though he has come under the guidance of far more famous personalities. I asked Shahvir Tarapore, international umpire and Keki Tarapore's son, about Dravid's relationship with his father. "My father was his coach at school and Rahul never let anybody forget that," says Shahvir. "Dad used to feel a little embarrassed when Rahul often praised him publicly. But Rahul always maintained that the early coaches were the real coaches for they help to lay the foundation. To have a proper structure, you need a solid foundation." How very true. But how many famous players—M S Dhoni and Sachin Tendulkar excepted—would acknowledge that they should be indebted to their early coaches?



Dinodia Photo Library

Dravid's greatness as a batsman needs no elaboration. Completely selfless, he even volunteered to keep wickets for India. People who have not played the game would not realise how very difficult it is for a non-regular wicketkeeper to do this role and then to succeed at his primary job of batting as well. Rahul achieved the task most commendably and without a word of annoyance. And as a leader he proved himself time and again for India. He won Test series in West Indies and in England. Not many captains have achieved this rare feat. Initially with Karnataka and later with Rajasthan Royals, captain Dravid was highly proactive. He was their captain, mentor, coach. Players within his orbit progressed as cricketers as well as human beings. All those who have played under him, whether for Karnataka or Rajasthan Royals or at present for the India A team, have no qualms in acknowledging this.

For his part, Dravid remains the modest self he has always been. Never a word out of place. Never an act to raise any eyebrow. Never cared for publicity. Never flirted with controversy. Always remained a selfless, intelligent and articulate gentleman. In a cricket world that has lost its innocence, Dravid's presence was a welcome consolation. He upheld the spirit of cricket and its traditional values on and off the field. He was probably the last of a rare breed: a great cricketer; a greater human being.

Kolkata-based Mukherji is a former cricket player, coach, selector, talent scout, match referee and writer



The better sex

Resilience, pragmatism and forbearance are a few of the virtues that make women the superior gender, writes **Paro Anand**

Several years ago, I was on the admissions panel for a university course. There were several interviewers sitting in various rooms as there were so many applicants. When we compared notes, we realised we had not accepted a single boy; we had selected only girls. Post lunch, we thought we should correct this reverse gender bias. But it was almost impossible. The girls were smart, well prepared, had folders with certificates for all their achievements—academics and extra-curricular—were well groomed and polite. We were to ask one trick question that did not really have an answer just to test them on how they would handle it. To that, the girls would say, “I am not sure, but if you could give me some time, I could try and find out”, or simply, “I’m sorry, I don’t know the answer, could you let me know.”

The boys, on the other hand, were sloppy in comparison. The only preparation they had bothered with was walking to the water cooler to spike their hair with wet fingers. They shrugged a casual “Idonknow, Idonknow” in answer to the trick question and several others. They had not participated in much extra-curricular and if they had, they had not bothered to bring the certificates along. So how were we supposed to take in the boys? The crux of it, as I figured out, was lack of motivation. It got me thinking on what was motivating girls over boys.

I think, in India, we have so pampered our sons and given them the best of everything whether they wanted/needed any of it or not. We have so overindulged them that we have actually robbed them of their motivation. They know that they are going to get things served to them on a platter, so why bother? At the admission interview, it was clearly a matter of life and death for many of the girls who saw this as an opportunity to get on in their life, their

world. Because girls were being held back, sometimes subconsciously and sometimes even physically, their need to break through the shackles was making them score higher than boys. We see this in the Class 12 results as well. Over the years, it is girls who top over boys.

My son, as part of his MPhil at Oxford, did a study on how money was spent when there was a woman *pradhan* rather than a man in villages in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. And the conclusions drawn from this study were that women were more likely to spend on infrastructural development in fields such as education, health and sanitation, whereas male *pradhan* allocated more budgets for roads, community halls, etc. Nothing wrong in either, but there is a difference in the way they thought of progress, one being from the bottom up and the other, maybe, from the top down.

On principle, I don’t ever think of one set of people being superior to the other. But looking around me, I cannot help but think of the possibility that perhaps girls are indeed a better bet than the much sought-after boys. If only girls would be given the opportunities that boys are given. But would giving them that opportunity be their undoing too? It’s a perverse way of thinking, but seeing the damage done to so many *ma ka laal* or pampered sons, I cannot help but wonder.

And that has got me thinking. Are women more ‘sensible’, more ‘practical’ and all those un-sexy words? But what if women were the natural born leaders and ruled the world; would this be a better place to live? If they were the decision makers, wouldn’t they have stayed closer home



rather than plundering faraway lands? I am pretty sure that there would be fewer wars and invasions. Yes, of course, there have been women in wars. We know those, but we know them as exceptions rather than the rule. And there has not been a single female Genghis Khan or Hitler.

In everyday situations, too, I think we can all agree that women have much more forbearance than men. We do know that women make easier patients than men in the time of illness. When my own parents were ill at the same time, I found myself taking much more care, spending more time with my father because I was confident that Mum could 'manage' more on her own. And earlier on, too, when my father would be ill, we kids had to be much more solicitous and quiet. When Mum was ill, it was life as normal, almost. In fact, I remember a year when all four of us went down with the dreaded dengue fever. We were all in very bad shape; we had to hire a nurse. But Mum still continued to run the house, making sure we were all getting our medicines on time; she even had to fire the nurse because she was drinking up all the milk—something that was very hard to come by in those days of limited tokens. She chose to ignore her own illness to ensure her daughters would have the milk they needed. Dad was a lovely, loving man, but he would have kept that nurse on, milk or no milk!

Years later, I went with my parents on a holiday to London. I told Mum she should go do all the things that she wanted to and that I would look after Dad and let him do things at his pace. So she would be off in the morning, visiting art galleries and museums to her heart's content. She was in her 80s and was suffering from such severe incontinence that once we even had to go into a shop and buy her a whole new set of clothes—including trousers and shirt, for the first time in her life—because her own clothes were soaked through. It didn't stop her. She went straight to the chemist and bought herself a large pack of adult

diapers which literally set her free. And she went on to recommend adult diapers gleefully to all her friends. And to me, when I complained about dirty toilets in some of the places I was travelling to. I know Dad would have been mortified and would have allowed this to rob him of his enjoyment. I loved Dad dearly but writing this article has forced me to look at the two of them and myself in a wholly different light.

Most of us have seen men struggle much more if they outlived their spouses, whereas women learn to live on their own. I saw women in my own life who learned to manage their grief, their lives and the futures of their growing children when they were left spouseless. This inspired me to write a book, *Pure Sequence*, published by Roli Books, which was based on the resilience of older women and the strength of female bonding. It centres on four women who are finding themselves left alone in their autumnal years, for one reason or another. They are bolstered by the strength they give each other; the little things they know will make the other comforted. But it is not a bleeding heart story; rather, one of the sheer grace of older women who know how to have fun. And, most of all, to live every day of their lives. One or two of the characters also find a sense of 'self', a sense of freedom that comes from finding yourself as the centre of your universe. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, they are the priority. And this is something I wanted to celebrate.

In a review in *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, when the book came out, the writer wrote, "You may find yourself here." It is one of the best compliments I have ever got for my work. I adore the men in my life and have no quarrel with them in any way, but the question rears its head once again: would the world have been a better place with women in charge? I cannot help but say, 'rather think so'.

Anand's graphic novel, 2, was launched recently

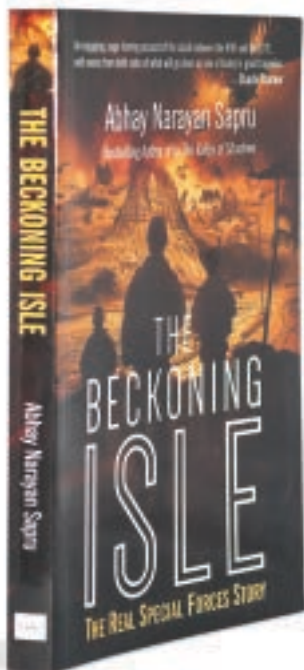


**When it comes to age,
we're all in the same boat,
only some of us have been
aboard a little longer**

—Leo Probst

Set in the Bombay of the 1970s, **Rahi Masoom Raza's SCENE 75** (HarperCollins; ₹ 399; 182 pages) is a dark comedy about the eternal hopefuls who reach the City of Dreams to realise their Bollywood dreams, of being directors, actors and scriptwriters. Exposing the dark underbelly of the Hindi film industry—struggling directors, sleazy middlemen, manipulative actors, simpering heroines, social climbers and scheming writers—Raza focuses on the machinations and duplicities that run the big bad world of glamour. This crazy kaleidoscope of stories within stories demands absolute attention, as Raza flits from one colourful character to another—each bearing quirks and secrets—in the blink of an eye. At one level it is also the story of the eternal conflict between the lofty ideals of a writer and the reality of the box office that dictates a commercial route. The biting prose also dwells on the Hindu-Muslim divide and how human ties corrode and wither in the face of ambition and self-interest. The protagonist,

Ali Amjad, a struggling scriptwriter, is barely mentioned through the pages, but we are aware that he is very much there, observing the social aspirations and sexual transgressions of those around him. Translated seamlessly by **Poonam Saxena**, this gem will delight and disturb in equal measure.



A powerful yet poignant tale of two men at opposite spectrums of a war, **THE BECKONING ISLE** (Wisdom Tree; ₹ 245; 157 pages) is an action-packed thriller that weaves a web of raw human emotions. Written by combat soldier **Abhay Narayan Sapru**, it unravels the vicious politics of retribution through the lives of Captain Hariharan of the Indian Special Forces and the shrewd battle-hardened LTTE commander Silvam. Their paths and destinies criss-cross from the training camp for young Tamil recruits on a hill station in India to the impenetrable mine-infested jungles of Sri Lanka, ultimately ending in a bloody confrontation. The LTTE commander's fleeting trysts with his family reveal how dedication to a cause can overshadow familial responsibility. As the tale progresses, we get an overview of sub-continental history and the Indian Army's ill-fated adventure—termed our own Vietnam—in the island country. What makes this book realistic is that it's a chronicle of war and warriors by Sapru, who has been there and done that.



Also on stands



Jonahwhale
Ranjit Hoskote
Hamish
Hamilton;
₹ 499;
224 pages
In this po-
etic anthology,

Hoskote reflects on a city at war with itself and a planet embattled by ecological and political crisis.



Rise Up Women!
Diane Atkinson
Bloomsbury;
₹ 799;
688 pages
A document of
the history of
women's fight

for the vote through the lives of those who took part in the extraordinary struggle.



The Clay Toy Cart
Padmini Rajappa
Penguin;
₹ 399;
352 pages
A lucid
translation of

Mrchchakatikam, a gripping satire of romance, betrayal and intrigue set in ancient times by Shudraka.

She dunit!

With ingenious plots that keep you hooked till the very last page, the Queen of Crime **Agatha Christie** continues to thrill. Recognising her timeless appeal, as part of its 25th anniversary celebrations, **HarperCollins India** has released Agatha Christie titles in a limited facsimile edition format.

DEATH IN THE CLOUDS (₹ 399; 252 pages), **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** (₹ 299; 274 pages) and **CURTAIN** (₹ 399; 221 pages) are all locked room mysteries. While the setting shifts from an airplane to a luxury train to a guest house, the common element that ties them together is the extraordinary Belgian sleuth Hercule Poirot, famed as much for his magnificent moustache as for his grey cells. For those familiar with his style of working, it is common knowledge that Poirot prides himself on an acute understanding of human psyche to unravel mysteries and arrive at the denouement.

In *Death in the Clouds*, Poirot is a passenger on a flight from Paris to Croydon on which a moneylender is



Courtesy: Wikipedia Commons

found dead in her seat. In this engaging plot, Poirot works through each passenger before narrowing down on the murderer. Looking back through the book, it's easy to find all the clues, concealed ever so cleverly.

Recently adapted as a motion picture starring Johnny Depp, Judi Dench, Michelle Pfeiffer and Penelope Cruz among others, *Murder on the Orient Express* is a thrill ride that follows the mysterious murder of a passenger

Curtain reminds us that sometimes crimes can take place without apparent motives and fathomable reasons, and that inducing someone to commit a criminal act is no less of a crime

on the train. As Poirot cracks the mystery, he is faced with a moral dilemma, leading to an unexpected ending that questions the very foundation of human justice.

In *Curtain*, the last of the Poirot mysteries, the wheel has come full circle with the sleuth back at the country house where he made his bow in Christie's first detective story, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Poirot may be aged and crippled and confined to a wheelchair, but as he says, his "limbs are no longer active... but brain is unimpaired". Although the detective dies towards the end of the tale, for the reader the mystery is resolved by his note to his friend Arthur Hastings, which arrives four months after Poirot's death. It is a dramatic ending to not just the book but the ever popular detective, who earned a front-page obituary in the *New York Times*. This unforgettable swan song of the little Belgian also establishes the fact that sometimes crimes can take place without apparent motives and fathomable reasons, and that inducing someone to commit a criminal act is no less of a crime.

This series reminds us that Christie is the greatest exponent of the classic detective story—her mysteries are not just riveting whodunits but complex studies of human psychology.

—Srirekha Pillai



authorspeak

Her STORIES

A prolific writer, **Kusum Ansal** is a chronicler of women's lives. Her vast repertoire comprises short stories, poems, teleplays, travelogues and novels. While her novel *Ek Aur Panchvati* dealt with a woman's right to seek happiness elsewhere in an unhappy marriage, *The Widow of Vrindavan* put the spotlight on the forgotten widows of the temple town. Ansal's books in Hindi, Punjabi and English have been translated into languages such as Bengali, Urdu, Russian, Greek and French.

Foraying beyond the print medium, Ansal has dabbled in television, radio and theatre. *Ek Aur Panchvati* was adapted into a film—*Panchvati*—by Basu Bhattacharya, starring Deepti Naval and Suresh Oberoi. Incidentally, Ansal wrote the screenplay and dialogues for the film.

She has also been actively involved with organisations working in the fields of education and social service and has helmed the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's women's wing—FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO). Ansal is the recipient of several awards including the Priyadarshani Award in 1988, Sahitya Akademi Punjabi Award in 1997 and the International Women Entrepreneurial Challenge Award in 2010.

Holder of a master's degree in psychology from Aligarh Muslim University and a PhD in Hindi Literature from Punjab University, the 77 year-old recently led a discussion attended by Delhi's literati at the Sahitya Akademi on her novel



Courtesy: Kusum Ansal

Parchaiyon ka Samaysar. In an interview with **Raj Kanwar**, Ansal talks about books, theatre and her love for ikebana. Excerpts:

What is your latest book *Parchaiyon ka Samaysar* about?

Parchaiyon ka Samaysar deals with how death can change our perception of life. It is the story of a wife who waits in the hospital while her husband is sinking. The various people she encounters there help her understand life and herself better.

Which was your first book?

My first novel *Udhas Aankhe* was published in 1975 by Star Publication. After that I wrote *Ek Aur Panchvati*, which was adapted by Basu Bhattacharya on the big screen. It was a critically acclaimed film and was shown at many film festivals.

You have been so prolific. Which is your favourite work?

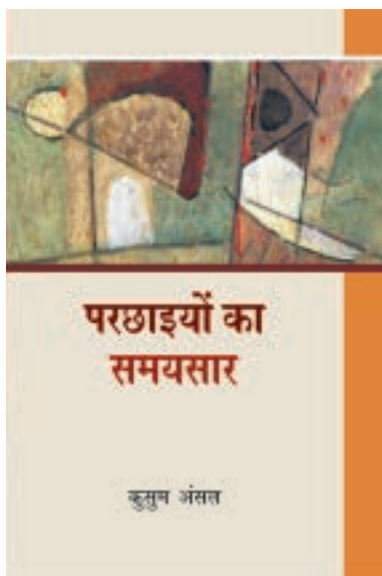
In Hindi, my favourite book is my novel *Tapasi*; in English, it's *The Widow of Vrindavan*, which deals with the plight of widows in India. It was born out of my pilgrimage to Vrindavan, where I came across starving and helpless widows. Shorn of identity and self-respect, they are forced to do six hours of *jaap*, after which they are paid only two rupees and given two rotis. Their condition is no less than that of a beggar. With shaven heads and tattered clothes, they are exploited at every level—spiritual and physical. Their dehumanisation inspired me to write the novel.

You have also dabbled in screenplays.

I wrote three television serials, of which *Titliyan* was very well-received. Working on the screenplay of the movie *Panchvati* and the serials was a great learning experience. It not only enriched my intellect but satisfied me creatively.

How have you evolved over the years?

I knew I was not cut out for any business as I possessed the sensitivity of a writer. I had written two novels and some poems during my college days. Books and education were my only obsession. So after marriage, along with my father-in-law I got involved in our schools Gyan Bharti and Chiranjiv Bharti. For almost 14 years, I was actively engaged with these schools.



“Parchaiyon ka Samaysar is the story of a wife who waits in the hospital while her husband is sinking. The various people she encounters there help her understand life and herself better”

Besides writing, I was also interested in theatre. I acted in Indian People's Theatre Association's (IPTA) play *Ghalib* for almost two years. That was a turning point in my life. The experience helped me realise how much I valued my creative life and personal space. It was a huge step for me as I had been a housewife in a huge joint family for years. I am happy I was able to break the barriers of traditional thinking. Thereafter, I took up writing seriously and got my books published. I went back to studies and in 1987 completed my PhD from Punjab University. To date, I have written 32 books.

You teach ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement....

Yes, I am an avid nature lover. I did a teacher's course in ikebana as I love

flowers. I am an active member of the Sogetsu chapter of ikebana in Delhi.

How did you meet your husband Sushil Ansal?

Those were still conservative days and girls were not encouraged to meet boys on their own. Sushil, his father and two sisters with their respective husbands in tow visited Aligarh to see me. The sisters interviewed me and formally approved of me as their future *bhabhi*. Ours was an arranged marriage with traditional Hindu rituals. Sushil and I were neither introduced nor allowed to converse.

Both of you were 21 when you got married. How did you support each other during the initial days?

As I mentioned, ours was an arranged marriage. We were total strangers from completely different backgrounds. Was Sushil the 'perfect man' I had dreamed of? I had no option but to accept the unknown. We were both unexposed to the complexity of the world. But we learnt or, let me say, grew up together. We gradually captured each other's hearts. We lived in a huge joint family where my mother-in-law and father-in-law along with Sushil's teenaged sisters and school-going brothers were part of my responsibilities. It was a tough and trying period—Sushil was busy setting up a new business in real estate while I had to handle household chores and allied problems with limited resources and means. In between, I was blessed with my three children. I was only 27 then. I lived in that joint family for almost 16 years till both my sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law got married.

Tell us about your children and grandchildren.

I have three children: two daughters and a son. All my children are married and well-settled. I am blessed with three grandsons and three granddaughters.




123RF.com

won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton (1936-2010)
sings a paean to the unflinching
spirit of womanhood

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

American poet, writer and educator, Clifton was the Poet Laureate of Maryland

A photograph of an elderly man with a grey beard and a young girl playing in a pond. The man is in the water, wearing a dark shirt, and the girl is sitting on a wooden dock, wearing a white dress. They are both smiling and splashing water. The background is a calm pond with some reeds.

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A CASE OF IDENTITY

Anne Bernays weighs in on the dilemma of being a feminist

My mother, Doris Fleischman, was a feminist with regrets. I was determined to avoid her mistakes. Although, looking back, I have quite a few regrets of my own.

In 1915, my mother talked her way into becoming the first female journalist to cover a boxing match for a major newspaper, the *New York Tribune*. When she married my father, Edward Bernays, in 1922, she was intent on remaining Miss Fleischman. She made headlines for checking in under her birth name at the Waldorf Astoria on their wedding night, and then again, three years later, when she became the first married woman to obtain a US passport in her own name. For decades, she partnered with my father at their public relations firm. She published hundreds of articles and a book encouraging working women.

And yet she came to lament the nuisance of repeatedly having to explain her name—to clients, to social contacts, to schools, to banks. “Because of my independent name, I cannot pay my bills,” she noted dryly in a 1949 article. She reflected that women of her era who were committed to keeping their names “were guilty of belief in magic. We thought a name itself had power to confer a separate identity. It is the actions of women and the attitudes of men towards them that determine a woman’s status.”

My mother further decided that she and other women were feminists in public but then reverted to traditional gender roles. “We bore children, baked cakes, said ‘yes, please’ to our husbands, and tried to be good wives,” she wrote. “Feminists in general were—and are—feminine at home.”

As a child, I hated explaining to friends about my mother’s name. “Isn’t she married to your father?” they’d ask. When I married my

husband, Justin Kaplan, I was delighted to become Anne Kaplan, and I published my first short story under that name. But then I reconsidered: Anne Kaplan hadn’t written the story. Anne Bernays had, with her particular history, temperament and emotional makeup.

Everything in the more than five decades since then—my novels, my nonfiction books, my essays—I’ve published as Anne Bernays. I also co-wrote a book with my husband on the history and social significance of names. To me now, it seems ludicrous that so many women when they marry blithely discard one of the central, profound elements that make up who they are, as though their birth name were a pair of jeans that no longer fit. My mother ended up using her married name in later years; I’ve become more radical.

....

In 1968, we bought a few acres of land on Cape Cod—on a dune on the edge of the bay, where you can see the sun set into the water. At the top of our deed of sale was “Justin Kaplan,” and a line or two below his name, in smaller type, “et ux.” “Uxor” is Latin for “wife.” When I first saw the deed, I was annoyed. But then I began to think it was funny and sad, even while realizing that my name being replaced by “ux” was a blatant example of men’s persistent social superiority....

Indignities, large and small, are still visited on girls and women so automatically, so regularly, that they pass as the norm. We accept far too much without even wincing. Witness all the women posting about being at the receiving end of sexual harassment, with the hashtag *#metoo*, in many cases noting that they didn’t realise it was harassment at the time. It will probably take years and years before our—that is, female as well as male—moral muscles function properly.



Excerpted from a speech delivered at Harvard in 2016. Bernays (1930) is a novelist, editor and teacher

We go 50 years back in time to bring you products, people, events and fashion that have influenced the world

The myth of bra burning

Today, 'bra-burning' is a condescending phrase associated with the women's liberation movement. But for all the hoopla surrounding it, in reality no bra was set afire during the feminist protest against the Miss America pageant in 1968. In fact, bras were only tossed into a trashcan set up at Atlantic City Boardwalk where the pageant was being held, along with cosmetics, high heels, curlers, false eyelashes, girdles, *Playboy* magazines, mops and pots—largely perceived as symbols of female oppression. Though initially the intent was to set the can on fire, the permit didn't come through because of the danger fire would pose to the wooden boardwalk. However, the greatest myth of the women's rights movement was born.



On that day, hundreds of activists led by Carol Hanisch, Robin Morgan and Kathie Sarachild gathered outside the venue of the pageant to record their displeasure against female stereotyping and judging of women on ludicrous standards of beauty. They held placards equating the pageant with cattle auctions for parading women to judge them on their looks—the way men would judge cattle to decide the animals' worth. The rules of the pageant explicitly stipulated that only those of "the white race" could participate. The title holder was also under contract to entertain American troops in Vietnam. Protestors pointed to the consumeristic nature of corporate sponsorship of the pageant and the valuing of beauty as a measure of a woman's worth. They also lamented that with the crowning of every new Miss America, the previous winner was forced into pop culture obsolescence. Thus, the pageant was seen to mirror many problems inherent in society: racism, war, capitalism and even ageism.

Among the many points of conflict were what the protestors termed "The Degrading Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol", "The Unbeatable Madonna-Whore Combination" and "The Consumer Con-Game". "No more Miss America", the manifesto stated. Needless to say, the protest received widespread media attention and heralded second-wave feminism in the US and around the world.

The pageant started accepting women of colour from 1970. So far, eight black women have won the coveted crown; there has also been a deaf titleholder. Today, if the pageant is inclusive and boasts of women of colour, physical disabilities and women of other sexual orientations, it is owing to the efforts of feminists. By accommodating an openly lesbian contestant in 2016, the pageant, which began with a narrow definition of beauty, has truly come a long way.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: MARCH 1968

- On 3 March, Asian-American stage actors picketed the opening of Broadway musical *Here's Where I Belong* to protest discrimination against actors of Asian descent.
- On 7 March, the US, UK and the Soviet Union jointly agreed to a 'superpower umbrella' to protect nations without nuclear weapons against atomic attack.
- On 8 March, the term 'Green Revolution' was coined by William Gaud, administrator of the US Agency for International Development, to describe the increase in agricultural production with the use of new technologies.
- On 12 March, Mauritius was granted independence from British rule.



ME: Even after 75 years of marriage, you still call your wife darling, honey and love. What's the secret?

SILVER MAN: I forgot her name 10 years ago and I'm scared to ask her!

Kittenfishing

pp. Embellishing or exaggerating one's online dating profile.

EXAMPLE: **Kittenfishing** is when a single person presents himself/herself as unrealistically positive. Maybe they've posted a picture of themselves from 20 years ago or 40 pounds ago. Maybe he says he is 5 feet 11 inches tall, but when he walks in, you can see he is shorter than you (and you're 5 feet 7 inches tall).

—Bela Gandhi, "Are you being kittenfished? 5 ways to spot it", Today, 20 July 2017

Source: www.wordspy.com

Agnogenesis

n. The deliberate production of information or ideas that create ignorance or unwarranted doubt.

EXAMPLE: In the case of GMO and climate change concerns, opponents often twist facts, stressed two presenters. Erik Conway, co-author of *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, noted that there's even a word (which he did not coin) for manufacturing of fake knowledge—**agnogenesis**.

—Jon Cohen, "Why fighting anti-vaxxers and climate change doubters often backfires", Science, 13 February 2016

DEATHIVERSARY

n. The anniversary of the demise of a person or an entity such as a business or service.

EXAMPLE: In the midst of TV's full brunt of Diana **deathiversary** specials, Showtime has decided that what one naturally wants instead is a dispassionate, depressing documentary about the downward spiral and untimely death of pop superstar Whitney Houston, who drowned in a hotel bathtub in 2012.

—Hank Stuever, "Whitney: Can I Be Me tries and fails to bring meaning to the late singer's legacy", The Washington Post, 24 August 2017

CANICROSS

n. A form of cross-country running in which a human runner is pulled by a dog wearing a special harness.

EXAMPLE: Blake is a Greyster—a mix of German Shorthaired Pointer, Greyhound, and Alaskan Husky—a type of dog bred for sled racing and perfectly suited to **canicross**. But as the sport grows in popularity in the UK, so too has the variance in participating breeds, especially at the recreational end of the canicross spectrum.

—Paul Snyder, "Want to run a fast 5K? Let your dog pull you to greatness", Runner's World, 30 November 2017

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For Harmony for Silvers Foundation
Sd/- Dharmendra Bhandari
Printer & Publisher

Dated March 1, 2018

“With our abilities, we can improve the life of others”

Thiruvengadam Veeraraghavan, 68, Chennai, provides free medical care to those who need it



He is a superhero in Vyasarpadi, home to Chennai's working class. However, **Thiruvengadam Veeraraghavan** doesn't wear a cape or spandex suit but a pristine white coat. At the crack of dawn, he is all set for an industrial visit or to see his patients, who line up much before he arrives at his clinic—a normal working day for him extends from 7 am to 2 am. When Veeraraghavan set up his clinic in 1973, he was the only doctor in the area. “I lost my mother to asthma as we were poor,” shares the 68 year-old. “I decided I would use my skills to better the life of those who can't afford treatment.” Hailing from a family of farmers, Veeraraghavan specialised in industrial medicine after completing his MBBS. “I did not spend a single penny on my education and now it's my turn to give back,” he says. For a long time, he charged a nominal fee

of ₹ 2. “When people asked why I charge only ₹ 2, I stopped that as well,” he laughs. However, he still goes by the name ‘two-rupee doctor’ in the neighbourhood. “Given his expertise and experience, people would have thronged his clinic even if he charged a bomb,” points out journalist Hema Kaushik. “But in Vyasarpadi, people see him as a saviour.” Between his wife's pension and his fee as a consultant with a private firm where he monitors employee health, Veeraraghavan says his needs are easily met. He doesn't encourage donations either. When a relative recently insisted on giving him ₹ 50,000, Veeraraghavan used it to buy an ECG machine. His hopes are now pinned on daughter Preethi, a doctor in a government hospital—he's hoping she will fulfil his dream of setting up an affordable scan centre.

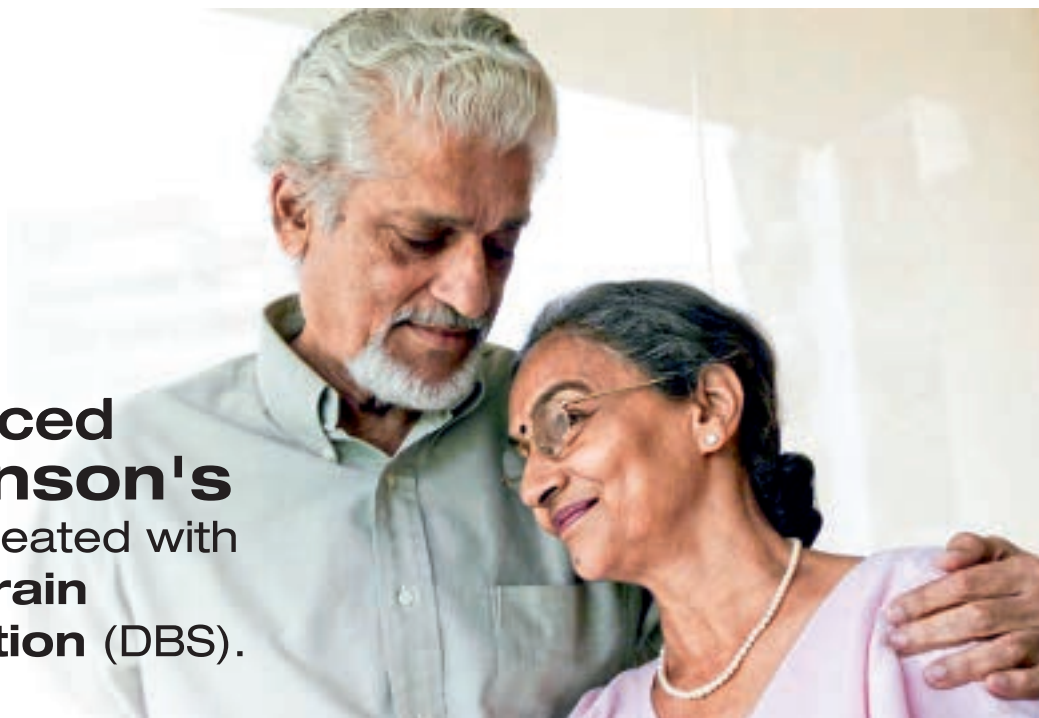
—Catherine Gilon



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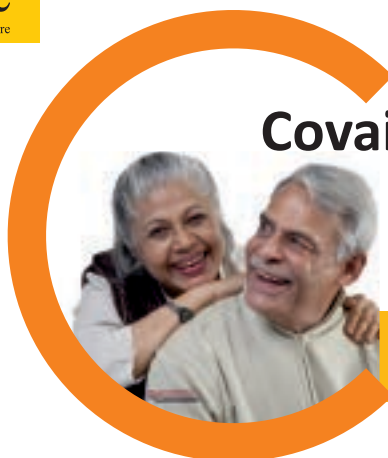
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