

harmony celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

APRIL 2011 ₹ 30

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Gita Aruvumudan
on women's
struggles and
successes

Happiness She Wrote

Scriptwriter and film maker
Honey Irani shares her story



JAMES FERREIRA YEARN FOR OLD MUMBAI • DELHI'S MEDICINE MAN

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The cusp of change

Incredible but true—2011 may just go down as the year of the revolution. Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Egypt...examples of uprising against the monopoly of power and privilege.

Revolutions don't always have to be bloody though; they can also be quiet exercises in empowerment, when a groundswell of popular support impels those in power to act towards the common good. For many years now, Harmony for Silvers Foundation and other organisations working to create a better life for India's elders have demanded more proactive, pro-Silver Budgets; and every year, we have been left disappointed. This year, it appears the Government has at least been listening.

Three positive measures were announced for silvers: reducing the age of qualification from 65 years to 60; raising tax exemption to ₹ 250,000 per annum; and creating a new category of 'very senior citizens' for people over 80 with an exemption of ₹ 500,000. The Railway Budget also brought cheer: reducing the age of qualification for concession for women to 58 years from 60; raising concession for male silvers to 40 per cent from 30 per cent; concessions for the physically challenged on Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains; and promising to transfer elderly employees of the Railways to less strenuous positions.

Suresh Natarajan



Net gains, to be sure. Yet, there is still a long way to go before the government fulfils its social contract to elders. First, let's consider the fact that most octogenarians in India won't be able to enjoy the benefits of being a part of this brand new category as they have virtually no income, let alone ₹ 5 lakh. Second, with rampant inflation, the marginal increase in exemption limit for younger silvers will have little impact. Offering financial security to silvers across India will require more innovative financial schemes and measures, better access to healthcare, and forward-looking social policies that seek to utilise their potential to the benefit of the nation while catering to their needs and allowing them a life of dignity.

Nevertheless, Budget 2011 is an encouraging start, a sign that silvers no longer remain on the fringes for policy-makers. Now, the Government must build on this momentum and bring them to centrestage. It's time for a quiet revolution—in India.

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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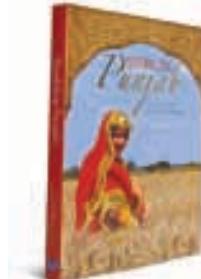
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ART TO HEART

Ravinder Kalsi turns to art to seek solace and fight prejudices

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Lily and Dawson Egbert teach visually impaired children to see the world

Director and scriptwriter Honey Irani shares her own success story

Honey Irani, photographed by Utkarsh Sanjanwala

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**ENERGIZE YOURSELF
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column one

A younger man in love with an older woman and later a much younger woman in love with him... *Lamhe*: royal Rajasthan, luxe London and a story way ahead of its time. Our own Mills and Boon confection, it made us swoon and cry like no other modern Hindi film ever has. And it happened much before Karan Johar's chiffon-clad love in foreign countryside. Its writer Honey Irani's younger years were as fairytale like. Star status, love and marriage with scriptwriter Javed Akhtar, and two beautiful children. Life has since taken turns, but it's not regret she mulls over. On the cover this month ("Happiness, She Wrote"), she talks about how life is not a Hindi film, how much ever we want it to be. In films, there's almost always a happy ending; in life, we may want the script changed but must make the best of what we have.

Journalist Gita Aravamudan, 63, would agree. Her new book *Unbound: Indian women@work* gives impetus to her fight against chauvinists. On the list of our societal demons (which includes dowry deaths and female foeticide), we now have changing power dynamics and an increasing number of divorces. 'Why should women take a backseat?' she asks. She also insists that the support of not just a man but the entire family is behind every successful woman. Irani echoes this sentiment and gives full marks to her former husband, children and grandchildren—in fact, her granddaughter encouraged her to colour her hair.

There's time before monsoon washes off the colours of Holi from our streets and our walls (but never our hearts). Baisakhi, Bihu and Vishu are around the corner. Our treat: A visual feast from a new book on Punjab. Enjoy.

—Meeta Bhatti

I am delighted to inform you that I have been awarded this year's Linguapax Award, given by the UN for 'Language Diversity for Peace' and announced on International Mother Language Day (21 February). This is the first time in the history of the Linguapax Award that it has been given to an Indian. I feel particularly happy as a winner of a Harmony Silver Award (2009) that the Linguapax 2011 has come to

me. I am grateful to Harmony for Silvers Foundation and its generous appreciation of my work in the past, which has made it possible for me to gain this honour. Though working to preserve our diverse ethnic tongues is extremely fulfilling, such appreciation motivates each one of us to strive further.

Ganesh Devy Gandhinagar

CONTRIBUTOR



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 ...and we'll print it in the column 'Your Space'

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1st Floor, 19, Walchand
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James Ferreira is a celebrated fashion designer and heritage activist. The 54 year-old is a resident of Khotachiwadi, one of the oldest residential quarters of Mumbai, and also among the last remaining pockets that proudly bear the stamp of the diverse cultural and ethnic influences that shaped the city and its soul. Ferreira's dismay at the erosion of the city's architectural legacy and rampant redevelopment bursts forth in 'At Large' ("The City That Was"). He asks just one question: Will we merely watch in repressed anguish and resignation as our cities lose their identity to developers who are more focused on commerce than character?

When he is not making magic with fabric or lending his impassioned voice to heritage forums, Ferreira restores antique furniture back to its original glory.

Do you know what goes in your Mouth?

Important things one must know before choosing the material for dental restoration.

Before going to a dentist, here are some homework tips to make it easier for you to choose the right dental material for replacement of your teeth, replacement that gives you a natural smile.

Know your materials for dental restoration

Materials for dental restoration swings around many options based on which your dentist takes a decision. The first option is the popular 'Metal Restorations' evidently made of metals. The very use of metals in its manufacturing gives away the aesthetics and physical properties and 'metal' by its nature is bound to get perforation because of metal erosion or aggravates allergy.

The second option available is called PFM Porcelain Fused on Metal using ceramic and metals otherwise known as partial ceramic replacements. Porcelain Fused on Metal are made of metal from inside and given a ceramic-like finish on its outer surface. Over a period of time when the ceramic coating outside the metal tends to give way or chip off the worries begin and gets worse with time.

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- P12: Backbuddy for your posture
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► NEWSWORTHY

BAD connection?

A paradigm shift in how the brain is studied can have significant implications for the study of cognitive decline. Overturning the previous belief that the brain is a collection of discrete regions, a research team at University of New South Wales in Australia has established that the brain operates as a highly interconnected 'small-world network'. This leads them to the conclusion that **connectivity is very important for the human brain's processing speed—and old age damages it.** "While particular brain regions are important for specific functions, the capacity of information flow within and between regions is also crucial," writes study author Perminder Sachdev in the *Journal of Neuroscience*. "We all know what happens when road or phone networks get clogged or interrupted. It's much the same in the brain. With age, the brain network deteriorates and this leads to slowing of the speed of information processing, which has the potential to impact on other cognitive functions." The team will now study what makes these networks efficient so they can be manipulated to reduce age-related decline.

First served

Here's some fantastic news for *Harmony*'s 'Legal Eagles'—silvers who use the Right to Information (RTI) Act for the betterment of society—in Gujarat. The state's RTI Commission announced in March that it will give **priority to the complaints and appeals of seniors and the differently abled**. The decision was taken on the heels of a suggestion made by NGO Gandhinagar Saher Vasahat Mandal.

A senior citizen who has attained the age of 65 years on the day of applying to the commission will benefit, as well as a citizen with not less than 40 per cent of disability as defined under the Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. According to the resolution released by the state, appeals under Section 19 and complaints under Section 18(1) and (2) of the RTI Act, filled by a citizen falling in either or both of these categories, shall be entertained and heard by the Gujarat commission on special priority basis. "Owing to various reasons and pendency, sometime it takes more time to address the appeals and complaints of senior citizens and the physically challenged," N Das, Gujarat's chief information commissioner, tells media. "Thus, we have decided to hear them on first priority basis."



Awarding respect

THE BAD NEWS: Disrespect, perhaps the most insidious form of elder abuse, is rampant in the country. The good news: Some people are refusing to tolerate it. Last November, when an 80 year-old homemaker was crushed to death by a speeding DTC bus while crossing the road in west Delhi, insurance provider United India Insurance Company refused to compensate her kin after her death, arguing that an elderly woman who was not working did not contribute anything to the family. However, Swarana Kanta Sharma, a judge at a Motor Accident Claim Tribunal (MACT), refused to buy it. Calling United India's argument "insulting", the judge awarded a compensation of ₹ 50,000 to the family members. "To hold such a view



will... convey a message that they [elders] have become useless for the society and the family, which under no circumstances can be allowed by this tribunal," her ruling went. "It will be so contradictory that, on the one hand, we make acts and give decisions that every person in this country is bound to look after the old and special schemes are made for senior citizens; and, on the other hand, we hold they are of no value for society....If a court holds that the death of a person who is 80 years of age has no value for the family, it will amount to insulting the elderly of this country." The judge also added that the contribution of elders, who "give their soul to the family", cannot be evaluated in terms of money alone.



APING each other

FORGET EVOLUTION!

Humans age pretty much like other, 'less developed' primate species, such as chimpanzees, monkeys and baboons. That's the conclusion of a research team from Iowa State University in the US who studied data on primates collected over decades across the world and compared it to statistics on modern Americans. Defining ageing as the increased risk of dying from natural causes while getting older, the team believed that any major difference between humans and primates was most likely to show up with modern people. But they were surprised to find that this wasn't the case—the basic pattern revealed a relatively high risk of death in infancy, a low risk of death during the juvenile years and an increased risk of death as ageing progressed; also, males generally didn't live as long as females. "Human patterns are not strikingly different, even though wild primates experience sources of mortality from which humans may be protected," team leader Dr Anne Bronikowski writes in online journal *Science*. "And this is quite a surprise."

SOUTHERN ALARM: IN THE PAST YEAR, WHILE THE REST OF THE STATES IN INDIA HAVE WITNESSED A DIP IN THE NUMBER OF DEATHS, ONLY TAMIL NADU AND KERALA HAVE SEEN AN INCREASE. PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS BELIEVE THAT THIS COULD BE BECAUSE OF THE INCREASE IN THE ELDERLY POPULATION IN BOTH STATES, WHILE BIRTH RATES HAVE REMAINED STABLE.

SILVER TRENDS



What is life really like for silvers across the globe? Do silvers in countries as diverse as, say, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan and Mozambique have similar concerns? What worries keep them up at night? These are some of the questions that **HelpAge International's Insights on Ageing survey** sought to answer. About 1,265 old people from 32 countries took part in the survey; here are some of the highlights:

48 per cent think the world is becoming a better place for silvers; 29 per cent think that it is getting worse while 15 per cent think it's staying the same.

72 per cent of older people in rural areas feel valued, compared to only 56 per cent in urban areas.

88 per cent of older people would like to see their governments do something to make living in older age better.

63 per cent find it hard to access healthcare when they need it.

72 per cent say their income does not pay for basic services such as water, electricity, food and decent housing.

"To tackle the challenges of an ageing population, the world needs to see old people not as a problem but as part of the solution," observes Jane Scobie, HelpAge International's director of communications, in a media release. "Old people are survivors, with lifetimes of experience to contribute. This is why it is so important to consult them directly."

You can read and download the survey on www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/unique-helpage-survey-gives-precious-insight-into-ageing-around-world/





Youth on a platter

It's pretty much established that collagen does wonders for your skin: it plumps up lips, smoothes wrinkles and bids adieu to crow's feet. Reaping these wonderful benefits, though, generally means getting a collagen injection, not the most alluring prospect for most of us. Now, there's an alternative, if you believe Gilgamesh, a pan-Asian restaurant in Camden, North London: '**Eat Yourself Beautiful!**' a **collagen-rich menu**. Culinary delights like inside-out dumpling for £ 6 (about ₹ 440); seaweed salad for £ 12 (about ₹ 880) and goji berry sorbet for £ 8 (about ₹ 585) all include collagen—the tasteless protein found in mammals' flesh, pigs' trotters and chicken skin is melted down with the ingredients of these rather exotic dishes to make it more palatable.

"Our menu is full of well-balanced and healthy dishes to which we've added collagen," Gilgamesh's head chef Ian Pengelley tells London newspaper *Daily Mail*. "It's a powerful, long-term, anti-ageing protein and eating and drinking it is a much less painful way of improving general health and diet than something like Botox." He's not alone in this belief. Apparently, foods (noodles, supplements, chocolates) containing collagen are already a rage in Japan. Not everyone's convinced though. As the *Mail* reports, many scientists have wondered how eating collagen would help the skin as the protein ingested would break down into amino acids in the stomach. No matter. This sound logic aside, the Gilgamesh menu has proved to be a huge hit—Pengelley says you have to wait two weeks for a reservation.

SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON YOUR SMARTPHONE? YOU MAY WELL NEED BLACKBERRY BOTOX, SAY ANTI-AGEING EXPERTS. APPARENTLY, PEERING AT A SMALL SCREEN CAUSES YOUR FACE TO SCRUNCH UP, CREATING AN AREA OF TENSION AROUND AND BETWEEN THE BROWS, GIVING RISE TO A FRESH BATCH OF WRINKLES.





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No looking back!

Removing the ‘ouch!’ and leaving only the ‘ooh!’ behind is a lumbar support that promises to be every aching back’s best friend. Called Back Buddy, this ingenious device is designed by Transval Pvt Ltd, a Chennai-based manufacturer of orthopaedic support products.

Lifestyles that encourage sedentary work and age-related issues are making backaches increasingly common. Silvers are especially prone because as we age, our spine loses its strength and flexibility. Back Buddy is anatomically designed to correct postural problems as it comes with moulded foam construction and built-in tempered spring steel wire frame, which provide flexible and orthopaedic support. There are also specific contours at the lower end that reproduce the natural curve of the lower back. And if you’re iffy about using a new product, well, this one has been given the thumbs-up by Chetak pilots!

“The product is effective if the back pain emanates from the small vertebrae in the spine,” says Dr Vasudev Prabhu, secretary, Bangalore Ortho-

paedic Society. “However, for better postural correction, patients including the elderly should supplement it with basic back and spine exercises.”



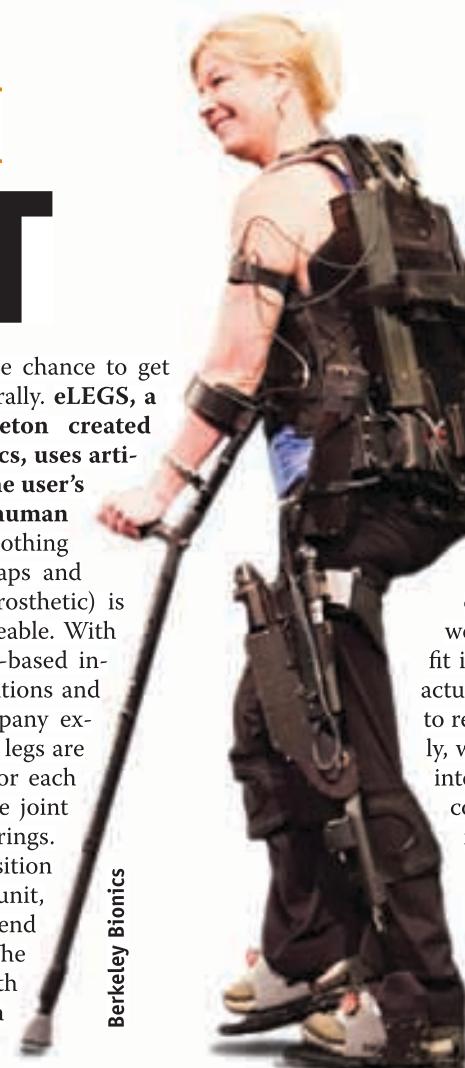
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Graphic representation by **Rahul P**

BIONIC GAIT

Paraplegics now have the chance to get back on their feet—literally. eLEGS, a battery-powered skeleton created by US-based Berkeley Bionics, uses artificial intelligence to ‘read’ the user’s arm gestures and simulate human gait. Worn over ordinary clothing and secured with Velcro straps and clips, the ‘exoskeleton’ (or prosthetic) is battery-powered and rechargeable. With the use of sensors, a gesture-based interface determines your intentions and acts accordingly, as the company explains in a media release. The legs are driven by four motors, one for each hip and knee, while the ankle joint is controlled with passive springs. Sensors in the legs relay position information to the control unit, which determines how to bend the joints and, then, walk. The user maintains balance with the help of crutches, which



also control the system. For instance, to take a step, the wearer pushes down with the crutch opposite to the intended stepping leg. Other gestures, such as pushing down on both crutches simultaneously, allow the wearer to transition from sitting to standing, or make turns.

The 20-kg device, which can be adjusted to fit users between 5'2" and 6'4" weighing less than 100 kg, allows paraplegics to walk up to 3.2 km per hour. “It took some time to overcome some key technological barriers,” explains John Fogelin, vice-president for engineering at Berkeley Bionics. “First, we had to find a way for a paralysed individual to fit into the exoskeleton safely. We also needed to actuate the joints of eLEGS in an efficient manner to reduce the overall weight of the machine. Finally, we had to pioneer a new type of man-machine interface that allow an individual’s upper body to control the actions of their lower body.” Right now, eLEGS is undergoing clinical trials at rehabilitation centres in the US and is expected to be commercially available by 2013.

For more details, go to
[www.berkeleybionics.com/
exoskeletons-rehab-mobility](http://www.berkeleybionics.com/exoskeletons-rehab-mobility)

Mission: vision

Dubbed ‘the bionic eye’, it is being feted across the world. **Argus II, an artificial retina developed by American company Second Sight, can enable the blind to see**, at least to a limited extent. A prosthesis surgically implanted in the eye, it includes a receiving coil, electronics case, and electrode array. Here’s how it works: In a healthy eye, the photoreceptors on the retina convert light into electrochemical impulses that are sent into the brain, where they are decoded into images. If the photoreceptors don’t function correctly, the visual system cannot transform light into images.

Argus II bypasses the damaged photoreceptors altogether. A miniature video camera housed in the patient’s glasses captures a scene. The video is sent to a small computer worn by the patient where it is processed and transformed into instructions that are sent back to the glasses via a cable. These instructions are transmitted wirelessly to a receiver in the implant. The signals are then sent to the electrode array, which emits small pulses of electricity. These pulses bypass the damaged photoreceptors and stimulate the retina’s remaining cells, which transmit the visual information to the brain, creating the perception



of patterns of light. Patients learn to interpret these visual patterns. The product, which comes at the hefty price tag of about \$ 100,000 (about ₹ 4.5 million) has just received approval for clinical and commercial use in the US and Europe.

To learn more, go to
<http://2-sight.eu/>

Then: Tin can

Now: Candle holder for your balcony



Haresh Patel

Take an empty tin can (like a *ghee* or baby food can). Fill with sand, then water and place in the freezer. The frozen mixture will give structure to the can and ensure it doesn't lose shape. Water expands considerably when frozen and will cause the can to swell if used without the sand. Collect large leaves with bold patterns. Select a leaf that will fit the size of the can and trace its shape with a permanent marker onto a long piece of butter paper. When the water is completely frozen, take the can out of the freezer and tape the butter paper tightly around the can. Make sure the leaf shape is positioned exactly where you want it. If the paper does not go all the way around the can, tape both ends of the paper as it will not stick to the can when condensation begins to form. Rest the can on its side comfortably. With a hammer and a sharp nail, punch holes through the paper and into the can along the lines of the design. Change the nail frequently as it will dull after repeated punches. When the leaf is finished, make two large holes opposite each other at the top of the can to hang wire, if you want to hang the tin.



FACTS

- » Reclaiming 1 tonne of tin saves 1.5 tonne of ore. Tin recycling saves about 2,600 kilowatt hours per tonne.
- » The first tin cans were heavy containers that required ingenuity to open, using knives, chisels or even rocks.
- » Tin is made of about 30 per cent recycled material.

When the design is complete, remove the paper, invert the can in a bowl and let it thaw. Remove the sand and water, rinse the can well and allow it to dry completely. Paint the inside with white paint to diffuse candlelight and give the lantern a brighter glow. Then choose a color for the outside and paint on two light coats, allowing the paint to dry between coats. Or, you can skip the paint and allow your lantern to rust over time for a vintage look. Now, place a candle or tea light inside and watch the light come out beautifully through the holes. You can also sand the bottom of the tin; this will help you remove a completely melted candle more easily.

MORE IDEAS... 1. Use tin cans with pliers over a campfire on a picnic as throwaway pans; you can heat food in them or even cook easy food like eggs. 2. Tin plates with large surfaces can be used to make a nifty art piece—just clean the surface with warm water, trace a design and paint with oil paints. 3. Paint a tin can in vibrant colours to store your kitchen cutlery.

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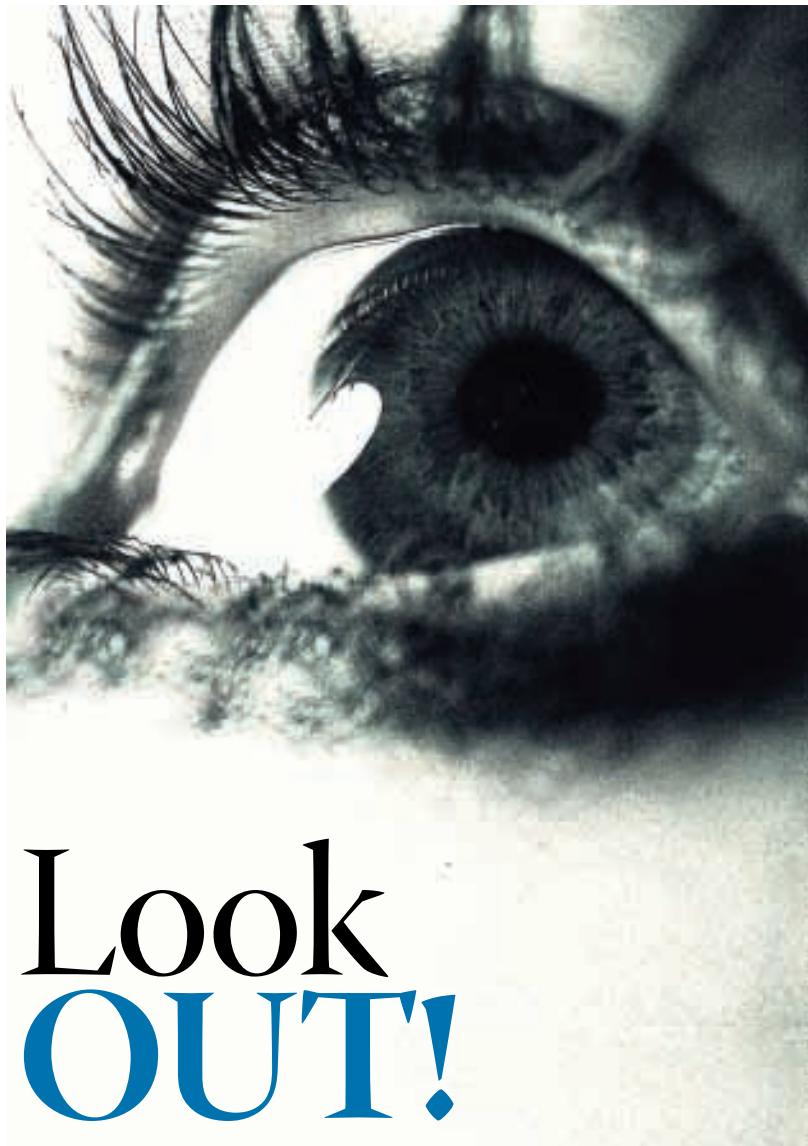
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Look OUT!

According to leading ophthalmologists in the country, **glaucoma, a slow and painless eye disease that causes irreversible vision loss, is on the rise.** In fact, glaucoma, which is common among people aged 50 and above, is the fastest growing eye problem after cataract. "This is a genetic problem and it starts with the drainage of fluids that maintain pressure in the eyes," Dr Bhujang Shetty, chairman of Narayana Nethralaya in Bengaluru, tells *Harmony*. "As it gets serious, there is vision loss owing to mounting pressure in the eye ball. As this degenerative process is very slow and loss of vision is peripheral and not central, patients are usually unaware of the condition and only notice the damage after significant vision loss." Once diagnosed, patients have to be on eye drops all their lives, a major preventive method to control the disease as there is still no sure permanent cure for it. "Patients stop taking medication when they see no improvement in their vision," adds Dr Shetty. "However, we still advise them to continue with the drops as it is the only way to safeguard whatever vision is left."



Positive emotions not only help bring cheer to everyday life but can contribute immensely to healthy ageing. According to an American psychological study published in journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, positive emotions play a great role and influence outcomes in later adulthood; in other words, they can be a powerful antidote to stress, pain and illness. "Undoubtedly positive emotions can contribute generously to later years. An ageing person's immediate environment [comprising his/her family, friends or peers harbouring good emotions] can benefit him directly," Dr Hirnamay Saha, senior consultant psychiatrist, Global Hospital in Kolkata, tells *Harmony*. "Positive emotions help people take a proactive approach towards ageing and they develop good habits like regular exercise and timely sleep while refraining from habits like smoking and alcohol. It is a cycle; positive emotions help people lead a proactive life, which in turn triggers positive emotions." The American study has also revealed that stronger positive emotions mean lower levels of chemicals associated with inflammation caused by stress. "Ageing people who have a positive outlook to life are known to deal with problems like hypertension, cholesterol and even cancer better than others," adds Dr Saha.

Centrespread

A new American study uncovers the double whammy that could hit ageing women with abdominal obesity: while belly fat has been associated with cardiovascular diseases,



the study suggests that **women having too much internal abdominal fat have a damaging effect on bone health** as well. "This is a new theory which is still under evaluation," Dr Sharat Kumar, orthopedic and sports medicine consultant at Apollo Hospital in Hyderabad, tells *Harmony*. "Though a direct correlation is yet to be established certain dexterous scans show that women—especially those in the premeno-

pausal years—had more visceral fat, increased bone marrow fat and decreased bone mineral density, which placed them at a higher risk of osteoporosis." Earlier

studies suggested that women on the heavier side were at a lower risk for bone loss. Subcutaneous fat lies just below the skin while visceral or intra-abdominal fat is located deep under the muscle tissue in the abdominal cavity. Premenopausal women with an average Body Mass Index of 30 and more visceral fat had increased bone marrow fat and decreased bone mineral density, putting them at a greater risk of getting osteoporosis.

10%

GOING BY THE BUDGET'S PROPOSED AMENDMENTS, QUALITY HEALTHCARE MAY SOON BECOME A LUXURY. AC HOSPITALS WITH MORE THAN 25 BEDS WILL FALL UNDER THE STIPULATIONS OF SERVICE TAX, MAKING HEALTHCARE COSTLIER BY 10 PER CENT. INDUSTRY EXPERTS FEEL THE GOVERNMENT MUST CHANGE THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO EXCLUDE MEDICINES AND CONSUMABLES FROM THE TOTAL BILL.

Say cheers

Moderate drinkers rejoice! After studying 149,773 men for some years, researchers at Hospital de la Pitié in Paris found that those who consumed moderate amounts of alcohol faced a lower risk of cardiovascular ailments. Contrary to popular perception that alcohol is bad for the heart, a new Italian study also suggests that **people who have two or three drinks a day are 25 per cent less likely to suffer from cardiovascular conditions after bypass operations.** The effect of moderate drinking in women, however, is yet to be tested. "Moderate drinking acts as an antioxidant, especially red wine. It increases HDL cholesterol and lowers inflammation and blood pressure, even helping blood vessels function smoothly after surgery. Hence, moderate alcohol consumption should not be discouraged," Dr B K Goyal, chief cardiologist at Bombay Hospital, tells *Harmony*, elucidating that half a peg or 30 ml of alcohol a day is considered to be light or moderate drinking, while moderate to heavy alcohol use is more than six drinks a day.



Flower child

At 57, **Baljit Chaddha**, a successful Delhi-based garment exporter, announced his retirement and started painting. That was three years ago. Since then, Chaddha has been painting at a pace and with a flourish that's almost manic. The prolific artist has created over 12,000 paintings and continues to work on more—he says it takes him just 15 minutes to make one! Hardly surprising then that Chaddha's artistry is taking him places; he has been invited to exhibit his works in Qatar in September. Following that, he will showcase his collection *Divine Flowers* at a sculpture park at Kent in London. While his family still can't get over their surprise at his 'arty side', Chaddha can't stop his fingers from making magic on the canvas.

Painting is more than just a newfound hobby for the 61 year-old; he hopes it will help him spread peace around the world. "I wanted to do my bit towards eradicating terrorism from the globe," he says. "The ceaseless religious riots, bomb blasts and merciless killings



Lovejeet Alexander

have shaken me deeply. It may sound bizarre but each time I thought or heard of some unrest and conflict in any part of the world, I was inspired to paint a flower. I feel flowers carry a

profound message of love, peace and harmony." We hope some measure of peace blooms on earth with Chaddha's works.

—Shilpi Shukla



OVERHEARD

"Actually, I wake up at three in the morning and I brood. I feel sorry for myself; I have so many ailments. Then I get the morning's newspapers and waste my time doing crossword puzzles. Only after my siesta do I begin to write and continue till the evening.... The sight of that blank page and the challenge of having to fill it! It gets easier after the first page. I must write three or four pages every day otherwise I do not feel I have earned my whisky."

Unstoppable writer Khushwant Singh, 96, who is out with a new novel The Sunset Club

VISITOR

WHO: Lord Stephen Green, 65, UK Minister of State for Trade and Investment

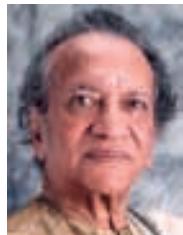
WHEN: 14-18 March

WHY: To identify further business opportunities that the UK and India can collaborate on and encourage further Indian investment in the UK. Green met key political and business leaders in Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai.

BIRTHDAYS

- Former US secretary of state **Colin Powell** turns 74 on 5 April

- Action hero **Jackie Chan** turns 57 on 7 April



- Sitar maestro **Ravi Shankar** turns 91 on 7 April
- American director **Francis Ford Coppola** turns 72 on 7 April
- Founder of *Playboy* **Hugh Hefner** turns 85 on 9 April

- Bestselling author **Tom Clancy** turns 64 on 12 April

- Pope Benedict XVI** turns 84 on 16 April

- Queen Elizabeth** of the UK turns 85 on 21 April

- American actor **Jack Nicholson** turns 74 on 22 April

- Fashion designer **Jean Paul Gaultier** turns 59 on 24 April

IN PASSING

- Actor-producer **Tony Walker**, aka Kamaaluddin Kazi, brother of comedian Johnny Walker, passed away on 22 February. He was 73.



- Founder of Amar Chitra Katha, **Anant Pai**—popularly known as Uncle Pai—died of a heart attack on 24 February. He was 81.

- Telugu director **Mullapudi Venkata Ramana** died at his residence in Chennai on 24 February. He was 79.

- American actor **Jane Russell** died of respiratory failure at her home in Santa Monica on 28 February. She was 89.

- Pioneering tiger conservationist and former project director at Ranthambore **Fateh Singh Rathore** died of cancer on 1 March. He was 73.

- Congress leader and former Union Minister **Arjun Singh** died of neurological complications on 4 March. He was 80.

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VOICES OF JUSTICE



- Hollywood legend **Mickey Rooney**, 90, recently gave heart-wrenching testimony before the US Senate Special Committee about the abuse he suffered at the hands of his eighth wife and stepson. He spoke candidly about how he was denied medication, his money stolen and his ability to take decisions usurped. The much-adored nonagenarian urged the US Congress to make elder abuse at the hands of a family member a criminal offense.
- **Agnes Salian**, retired headmistress of St Anthony's School in Mumbai's suburban Malad, is battling the Archdiocesan Board of Education over the gratuity due to her. She refused to accept the cheque of ₹ 350,000 offered to her, pointing out that if calculated according to the norms stated in the Sixth Pay Commission, the amount was far less than what she deserved after 36 years of service.

MILESTONES

- Legendary rock veteran **Bob Seger** tours with the Silver Bullet Band through North America for a month starting last week of March 2011. Seger, 65, has raked in a stupendous \$ 50 million in record sales; in 2010, his album *Greatest Hits* was honoured as the No. 1 Catalog Album of the Decade.
- New York-based writer **Deborah Eisenberg**, 65, has nudged out more than 300 other hopefuls to win the



CUP OF JOY

Retired mechanical engineer and tennis coach Mumbai-based **V R Iyer** is a man of many talents and interests. The 70 year-old makes replicas of the much coveted cricket World Cup out of discarded plastic bottles. In the past, he has recreated the 1983 World Cup but says the demand for the 2011 trophy is much higher. It takes Iyer just a few minutes to turn a cup out of a bottle.

LADIES FIRST

On the centenary of International Women's Day on 8 March, four eminent Australian women who have strived for women's equality in Australia—and continue to do—have been immortalised on stamps released by Australian Post. The feisty brigade comprises feminist writer **Eva Cox**, 73; the first female judge of an Australian federal court, **Elizabeth Evatt**, 77; writer and scholar **Germaine Greer**, 72; and feminist and journalist **Anne Summers**, 65.



PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction with her 992-page collection of short stories, *The Collected Stories of Deborah Eisenberg*. Eisenberg is one of only six women yet to have won the \$15,000 award.

- Canadian gospel singer **George Beverly 'Bev' Shea**, 102, was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammys in February. He holds a world record for singing to the most people ever—his cumulative audience over the years is estimated to be 220 million.
- Veteran journalist **S Nihal Singh** won the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award at the third edition of the Journalism Awards held in Kolkata on 20 February. Singh has been the editor of the *The Indian Express* and *The Statesman* as well as Dubai-based daily *Khaleej Times*

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Experts answer your queries and concerns on jobs after retirement



C K MATTHEWS, 76

"Retirement was never an option; the road after 60 has been busier than before"

I began my career with the Indian Atomic Energy Programme at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, which gave me the chance to work with many kinds of nuclear technology. Later I joined Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research in Kalpakkam as director. This post presented many challenges like setting up a chemistry wing, overseeing nuclear projects and developing sensors and analytical instruments. Thus I developed my technical and managerial skills. Finally, I retired in 1995 at the age of 60. But looking back at the good old days was not what I had in mind. So I joined the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bengaluru, mainly to access their vast library. In a couple of years, I began to access all the scientific information I needed from the Internet. I grew interested in the issue of pollution and decided to design emission or pollution-level testing instruments. And in 1998, I launched Indus Scientific in Bangalore.

Though today the company is valued at nearly ₹ 10 crore, it was a slow start replete with many challenges.

Thanks to the generous support of friends and family, I collected ₹ 1.5 million. This, along with my savings, helped with my initial investment. I also secured a loan after pledging my house as collateral. It was a gratifying experience as my company was a virtual pioneer in the field. Since this was my own baby, I also had to learn to manage a company, from technical knowhow to maintaining finances. All the hard work paid off when we bagged a tender from the Maharashtra government to make emission-testing equipment for automobiles in 2001. Since then we've been getting tenders from various state governments and even the Central Government. It's easier said than done owing to the corruption that prevails in this area. However, I prefer to keep my business clean than add more zeroes to it.

Everyday, I go for a walk with my two year-old grandson; his presence tells me to keep going. Pollution affects children more easily and we must assess its levels. One day, I hope to write a book on this. For now, I'm grateful I can continue to do what I love.

—As told to Dhanya Nair Sankar

I am a retired HR professional. I bond well with kids. I want to start a small crèche. How should I go about it?

You need to set aside ₹ 200,000 to ₹ 800,000 for the infrastructure and you should ideally have an area of about 5,000 sq ft or more. The ambience should be homely, airy and cheerful. You should also invest in outdoor and indoor play equipment, bed linen, bunks for older kids and a fully equipped kitchen. Set up different activity rooms. The space should also be safe—non-skid floor, barricaded balconies and inaccessible power points. Your ratio of trained staff to children should be 1:3. Your average monthly income can be anywhere between ₹ 15,000 and ₹ 40,000, but it can take up to two to three years for returns to come in.

—Sindhu runs Kudos crèche and playschool in Chennai

I am interested in marketing furniture products. Can I do this for a steady income without heavy investment?

You may not have to shell out any money, but you will need strong networking and marketing skills. You need to negotiate with people from the hospitality industry and others who invest in quality furniture products. You can work from anywhere. Search online for such furniture manufacturers in and around your city. You can expect 20-25 per cent of their profit as commission. This could be between ₹ 25,000 to ₹ 30,000 per month depending on the brand.

—Jaideep Goswami runs Ecorattan, a Philippines-based furniture manufacturing, marketing and exporting company with offices in India

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IN LIVING COLOUR

Life is a many-splendoured thing and brings both peace and tragedy. I have found nothing more therapeutic than writing and following the path of theosophy; these have seen me through thick and thin. I was set on this road while growing up in Sipajhar in Assam. My parents were both teachers and it was but natural that I follow suit. I had a wonderful education, which included a gold medal for my master's degree from Gauhati University. After that, I taught at a college in Imphal, Manipur, and then at Gauhati University, where I spent more than three decades lecturing political science. My first love, however, has always been poetry, which I began writing while still in school. I have six collections of poems in Assamese and have authored 19 other books. I take great comfort in spirituality and I have spent most of my post-retirement life with the Theosophical Order.

I parted ways with my husband long ago. Both my daughters are married and well-settled and I now live alone. But my greatest loss has been the death of my only son, an unexpected tragedy that haunted me for several years. After his death, I authored a book called *Summer Flower*, where I conveyed the intensity of my agony. I am convinced it is the creative force within the self that helps us overcome all misfortune. While theosophy and poetry imbue my life with meaning, I also take great comfort in helping the destitute and the needy. Yes, life has a much deeper meaning than we are able to perceive. I love living a dynamic life and



Medhi turned to spirituality and poetry to overcome her loss

there's always so much to do! I work as a guide to several research scholars and as I am also a former director of the Womens' Study Research Centre at Gauhati University, I am invited to numerous seminars to speak as a resource person. Thanks to my teaching career, I have often travelled abroad to present academic papers.

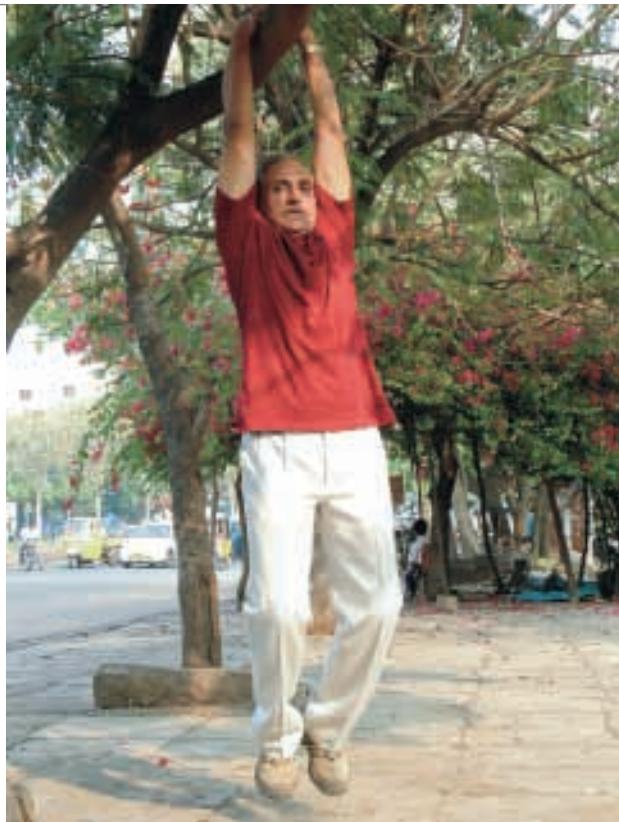
There are 16 rooms in my home and I clean the entire house myself! I also spend my day in an ordered way, starting with feeding rice to the birds on my terrace early every morning. My only companion is Bruno, my little dog. And there's my practice of classical music too. Life has a lot to offer, and I am savouring every bit I can.

—Kunja Medhi, Guwahati

BREATHE FREE

While working at the electricity department and then the office of the IG Police, I pursued law to get a degree and gold medal from Osmania University in 1977. I was feeling high and hopeful when my battle with allergic rhinitis and asthma started. I visited hundreds of doctors; some of them prescribed steroids, which left me with bad side-effects. I used to live near the race course in Hyderabad where dust and allergens were very high. I moved house and came to Nacharam where there was more greenery and less dust. I stopped practicing law in 1991. By 1997, I had started researching deeper into my health condition. 'Mucus-related respiratory health problems' covers an entire gamut of everyday health problems that have no cure—common cold, sinusitis, rhinitis, bronchitis, conjunctivitis, asthma, various forms of influenza. I visited yoga teachers and read extensively on the subject. I found nothing on why mucus is formed; all I learnt was that it blocks the sinuses and bronchial tubes. Besides medical texts, I studied techniques of nasal irrigation (*jal neti*) and practised yogic breathing techniques. I learnt to breathe in and out in a systematic way. This became my daily routine.

With time, I felt better. My confidence grew and asthmatic attacks began to wane. In 2000, my son's 26 year-old friend came visiting and found it very difficult to climb the stairs because of asthma. I made him rest for a while and then asked him to do some exercises. Within 45 minutes, he could drain out the mucus collected in his air passages. His breathing became free and easy! Buoyed, I kept on with my



Rao is exploring new methods to improve respiratory health

research on the Net and among old books. In 2008, I went to Puducherry and arranged to work with four serious cases at the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Integral Health and Research. The patients began to feel better even as they practised. I began seeking similar forums where I could tell people about the advantages of my routine.

In 2009, SNDT University in Mumbai had an International Conference on Multidisciplinary Approach to Healthy and Participatory Ageing. I sent them an abstract of my concept and it was accepted. My topic was 'Management of mucus related respiratory health problems through sinuses and airways cleaning exercises'. Through a poster presentation, I explained the concept. Later in the year AIIMS had a conference on gerontology and geriatric medicine. I was asked to do a PowerPoint presentation to explain the exercises to all the doctors gathered there. I even got a wonderful chance to showcase my concept at the first World Allergy Organisation (WAO) International Scientific Conference that was held in Dubai from 5-8 December 2010. I received an accreditation certificate from the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EAACME). I earned 24 credits, which is the highest score anyone can get. I have been invited to Cancun, Mexico where the next WAO Conference is scheduled to be held in 2011. Today, the sole aim of my life is to help people suffering from respiratory problems—I am willing to go anywhere, to any part of the country or the world if someone

Anand Soma

asks for help. So far I have helped 65 people get better and I have their testimonials with me. I am happy that I have been able to make a positive difference to people's lives and well-being.

—M Prakash Rao, Hyderabad

PEOPLE PERSON

Life has never been the same since I moved to Ahmedabad more than 22 years ago. The move has brought me close to hundreds of people, from children to elders, who need both hope and a helping hand. But it took a long journey to achieve that goal.

I have a diploma in electronics engineering and worked with Indian Railways as a clerk in Mumbai. I quit that job after a year owing to the corrupt atmosphere. Next, I worked with a consumer durables firm and also freelanced, video-shooting weddings in Mumbai. As Mumbai's weather didn't agree with my health, my family and I moved to Ahmedabad, where I opened a general store. Life wasn't easy but I have always believed that, to be happy, one must embrace the world as one's family and help people realise their dreams. It was probably this belief that led me to a job that taught me the skills I was looking for. A decade ago, I joined a multilevel marketing network where I now hold a senior position. My job involves direct marketing and intense networking, and I need to understand what makes people tick. Instead of selling a product directly, I am trained to first establish a comfort level with prospective clients, listen to their needs and then advise them.

I soon extended this skill to counselling people on a personal level, to get a perspective on their lives and achieve their goals. Helping people sort out confusion, resolve conflicts, dispel negative thinking, achieve emotional well-being, and steering them in the right direction is a reward in itself. My friends think I'm "crazy", but I get talking to people wherever I go—at bus stops, in elevators, on the road, while visiting friends and neighbours and even at the market—and tap into their psyche. I approach them with nothing else but a warm smile and a few kind words and soon, they're pouring their hearts out to me. After all, we are what we think. Thinking positive thoughts can make you rich, powerful and successful. But you need somebody to help you achieve that internal transformation. With my help, young boys and girls have improved their grades and careers; housewives have found new energy; and businessmen have earned bigger profits.

I am not formally trained as a counsellor but experience tells me that what I do works! And I would like to keep doing this till the very end. I would like to die with my boots on—while helping people in need. After I go, the work I do will continue to spread and the cycle will go on.

—Manohar Sahani, Ahmedabad



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

Sunshine people: Learn the art of living optimistically

Motivation gurus believe optimism can be learned just as helplessness, or pessimism. Let's see why optimism makes for a good health investment, and how yoga can teach you how to make lemonade when life hands you a lemon!

MEDICAL CONNECTIONS

Beliefs about future health can be self-fulfilling, found a US study among HIV patients. The 'realists'—who, to their credit, saw the true pattern of their disease—suffered more immunological damage. Pessimism can encourage a pattern of hostility and anxiety, creating a biochemical condition that worsens asthma, ulcers and heart disease. Researchers at John Hopkins Medical Institute found that optimists were less likely to develop heart disease. Even if they did, they suffered less ravages and recovered faster.

Martin Seligman of University of Pennsylvania found that positive salesmen sold 57 per cent more insurance than their negative counterparts! Seligman discovered that positive people had more T cells and NK cells, immune bodies that fight toxic invaders. In fact, in a 30-year investigation by Mayo Clinic, it was established that positive people suffered less premature deaths, had a higher threshold of pain, and enjoyed superior energy levels. They encoun-

tered events as being less stressful, were open to experiences, and engaged in lively social activity. Health can be a simple matter of difference between two mindsets: one who thinks, 'I can do something to turn this around,' and the other who is convinced, 'Whatever I do won't change a thing.'

YOGA HELPS

In yoga, backward-bending poses and standing poses encourage fearlessness, mental stamina and cheerfulness. If you are using them to break a pattern of negative thinking, you may find the body resisting these poses initially, giving you difficulties in terms of breathing, muscular stamina and exhaustion. So phase yourself, starting with very simple poses from these sets; do for short durations (like five seconds initially) before you move into them more confidently by choosing advanced variations, and holding for longer.

Some examples of backbends are the bow (*dhanurasana*), cobra (*bhujangasana*), locust (*salabhasana*) and wheel (*chakrasana*) in seated and standing variations. Examples of standing balancers include the one-legged prayer pose (*ekapadapranamasana*), crescent (*ardhachandrasana*), warrior pose (*virabhadrasana*) and all its variations, and the eagle (*garudasana*).

YOGIC MOVES

Crescent pose (*Ardhachandrasana*)

Try this pose only after getting accustomed to single leg standing in the one-legged prayer pose (*ekapadapranamasana*). All standing balancers must follow this rule. Stand up straight. Flare legs out, a metre apart. Flare right foot to right side. Bend right leg at knee. Looking down, bending to the right, place both hands on either side of the right foot. Inhale; lift left leg off the ground, simultaneously straightening the right leg. Look between your hands. Hold for a few seconds. Bending right knee, lower your back leg to the ground, standing up, releasing hands from ground simultaneously. Rest. Repeat for other side. Do thrice for each leg initially. Later, do just once, for longer duration. Breathe normally throughout. **Avoid** if you suffer from vertigo. However, you may learn it in a phased manner after acclimatising the body to the pose with other standing balancers, and with regular yoga practice. **Benefits:** This



pose elevates mood; removes and prevents spinal problems; helps with circulatory and heart problems; tones the limbs; and make the face look younger and the brain sharper.

Model: Ramakant Chiplunkar, Harmony Interactive Centre
Photographer: Haresh Patel

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



WEIGHT WATCH BY MADHUKAR TALWALKAR

For a healthy heart: Part II

"Just like we once learned that people with heart disease benefited from aerobic exercise, we are now learning that guided, moderate training has significant benefits," Mark Williams, American Heart Association (AHA) group chair, has often been quoted. "Patients who have had cardiac events are often apprehensive about returning to this type of activity, or doing things in their daily lives that might be perceived as strenuous. This helps physicians and patients understand what they should be doing and what they should avoid. Now we know that they can return to the active things they enjoy doing." This approach has been guiding clinicians in the US for over a decade.

Warning: There are certain conditions (unstable heart disease, uncontrolled hypertension or arrhythmias, infections in and around the heart, Marfan's syndrome, etc) for which resistance training is not recommended.

Recommendations on resistance training

- Exercise in a rhythmical manner, with slow to moderate yet controlled speed.
- Exhale on the effort, inhale on the return (for instance, in a shoulder press, exhale when you exert to push the weight up, inhale when you relax and bring it down). Avoid holding your breath and ensure a full range of motion.
- Alternate between upper and lower body workouts.
- Choose weights and the appropriate number of repetitions per set according to your health, frailty and age. Limit the workout to a single set thrice a week.
- Involve muscle groups of the upper and lower body: chest press, shoulder press, triceps extension, bicep curl, lat pull-down, lower-back extension, abdominal crunch/curl, quad extension, leg press, leg curl, and calf raise.

Don't overdo resistance training when you start exercising. Your muscles need time to get used to it. Encourage good practice to avoid soreness and injury. For **elderly patients**, vision, balance, stability and orthopaedic conditions should be considered. Weight machines and/or seated exercises may be safer. **All heart patients** should be evaluated before beginning a strength-training programme to ensure safety. If your doctor approves, follow these guidelines:

- **After heart surgery**—you can begin a range of motion exercises in the hospital. After four to six weeks of

recovery, you can participate in a cardiac rehabilitation or aerobic activity programme. Two to three weeks into the programme, your healthcare provider should check your sternum for healing and stability before you can begin weight training. Weight lifting that requires pulling of the sternum should be avoided for about three months.

● **After a heart attack** (myocardial infarction or MI)—you can begin a range of motion activities two days after your heart attack, depending on your condition. After four to six weeks of recovery, you can participate in a cardiac rehabilitation or aerobic activity programme. Two to three weeks into the programme, you can begin weight training.

● **After angioplasty**—you can start a cardiac rehabilitation or aerobic activity programme after a week of recovery. After two to four weeks, you can begin weight training.

Precautions

- If you experience breathlessness or fatigue during any activity, slow down or stop the activity. Elevate your feet when resting. If the problem persists, call your doctor.
- Do not exercise if you are feeling unwell or running fever. You should wait for a few days after all symptoms disappear before restarting the exercise programme, unless your doctor gives other directions.
- Stop the activity if you develop a rapid or irregular heartbeat or heart palpitations. Check your pulse after you have rested for 15 minutes—if it's above 120-150 beats per minute, call the doctor for further instructions.

Sample exercises

- A chest press or another pushing exercise.
- A rowing exercise or another type of pulling exercise.
- A major leg muscle exercise like a squat or leg press.
- A core body exercise, like sit-ups or crunches.

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

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



EATING RIGHT BY ANJALI MUKERJEE

Easy on the gut: A special, soft diet for those who can't chew well

I am 83 years old. Of late, I have been finding it difficult to chew and digest. Please recommend foods that are easy to eat and rich in essentials for the body.

Eating problems are commonly caused by weakened physiological functions. They impact dietary intake and consequently affect nutritional status among seniors. Here are some corrective dietary changes:

Suggestions for difficulty in chewing: Loosened teeth, ill-fitted dentures and reduced saliva formation are some of the reasons for difficulty in chewing.

Include *dalia*, *khichdi*, *upma*, *poha* and *chapatti* kneaded from fermented dough.

Soak *chapatti* in gravies before eating to make it soft.

Include *dudhi*, spinach, tomatoes and cabbage in your diet. Grate carrot and radish to add freshness and colour. Alter the texture by pureeing before eating.

Drink some water to moisten the mouth before meals or chew fresh lemon slices to stimulate saliva secretion.

Add flavour by using herbs like ginger, spring onion, garlic, *kokum*, parsley, coriander and pepper to season foods rather than preserve or pickle them.

Opt for food with gravies or clear soup, or soften bread and crackers with milk or soup.



Eating problems are caused by weakened physiological functions. They impact dietary intake and affect nutritional status. Besides this, reduced saliva and digestive juices lead to poor digestion and nutrient absorption

Suggestions for poor digestion and appetite: Reduced saliva and digestive juices lead to poor digestion and nutrient absorption.

Eat small, frequent meals and chew slowly.

Stay away from fried or high-fat food and cut caffeine and alcohol.

Do not lie down right after your meals; light physical activity such as walking will aid digestion.

Supplement your meals with nutrient-dense snacks like brown bread with low-fat cheese, soup, eggs, tofu, etc.

Prepare nutrient-dense foods by adding minced lean meat, fish, *paneer*, egg, potato or curried beans.

Drink a glass of wheatgrass juice everyday to ensure adequate vitamin and mineral intake.

Drink a glass of freshly squeezed vegetable juice everyday. This will give your body live enzymes, which in turn help digest food. Vegetable juices can be made from tomato and carrot, tomato and *dudhi*,

tomato and coriander. Ginger, turmeric and *amla* juice also help improve digestion.

Foods to be included in diet plan for optimal health:

Fruits: Fruits are loaded with nutrients and can be easily digested. Choose banana, mango, *chikoo*, grated apples, watermelon, muskmelon, orange, sweet lime.

promotion

New age dentistry



Dr Jeevan A Chokanda
MDS, Fellow ICOI, Dip ICOI
Consultant Oral-Maxillofacial
Surgeon & Implantologist

Vegetables: Vegetables can be cut small and well cooked to enable easy chewing and digestion. Avoid adding too many spices to prevent heartburn. Make use of *ajwain* and ginger to improve digestion.

Oily fish: Fish can be poached and cooked in non-spicy curry. Eat not more than 150 gm in a meal as larger quantities are harder to digest. Salmon, mackerel, sardines are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and Vitamin E.

Protein: Include soft-cooked eggs, fish, low-fat milk, soft *paneer*, yoghurt, tofu and *dal* in your diet to ensure adequate protein intake.

Pulses and grains for fibre: Fibre helps avoid constipation, reduces the risk of chronic diseases and provides satiety or a sense of fullness. Upgrade your fibre intake by choosing chickpeas, brown rice, whole wheat bread and whole wheat cereals. Taking 1 tbsp of Isabgol daily at bedtime is also a great remedy for those who remain constipated.

A well-balanced diet should look like this:

Breakfast options: *Dalia* porridge/oatmeal porridge; stuffed *methi/gobi paratha* with yoghurt; scrambled eggs and banana; *moong dal chilla*

Midmorning: Fruits like apple/orange/papaya/orange or vegetable juice of *dudhi, palak, tomato* and *amla*

Lunch: Softly cooked brown rice, *dal*, softly cooked vegetables and low-fat yoghurt

Evening: Green tea, fresh fruits (mango, banana, grated apple, chikoo, papaya, sweet lime, orange)

Dinner: Lentil soup with brown bread/whole wheat pasta, stewed vegetables; minced chicken curry with brown rice and grated carrots

Bedtime: A glass of low-fat milk

Take a multivitamin, multi-mineral and calcium supplement daily. Try to increase your water intake by sipping water every two hours to avoid constipation and urinary tract infections. Learning to choose soft food may take some time and experience but with a little attention you should be able to take in adequate nutrients.

Dr Anjali Mukerjee is a nutritionist and founder of Health Total, which has 15 centres in Mumbai to treat obesity and other health related disorders. Visit www.health-total.com If you have a question for Dr Mukerjee write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org

Today, dental implants are one of the most popular dental treatments sought out by patients who wish to replace missing teeth. Though initially, they were regarded with wariness owing to their unpredictable outcomes, clinical evidence gathered through exhaustive scientific reveal a success rate of 95-98 per cent. So, out of every 100 people who get dental implants done by trained dentists, nearly all of them retain their implants successfully for the rest of their lives. In the past few years, dental implant therapy has come to be regarded as the "standard" care in most dental offices around the world for several reasons:

An increasing number of dental professionals are upgrading their competencies by undergoing specialised training in Dental Implantology. Dentists do not have to suggest the traditional method of 'grinding' the vital tooth structure to install 'bridges' for areas of the jaw without teeth.

Patients are now aware that when they lose teeth or wear dentures, they can avail of superior dental enhancements. They don't need to suffer the ignominy of being socially 'incompatible' due to their poor facial appearance or held back by the fear of their dentures falling off while they are speaking.

Dental implants are now a predictably successful alternative to conventional methods employed for replacement of teeth or parts of the face or the jaws (lost due to gum disease, cancer surgery, facial injuries or birth defects).

The remarkably reduced costs of implants, owing to superior technology and increased sales world-wide (from greater patient-acceptance), make them affordable to a larger section of society even in developing nations such as ours.

Patient-education tools (brochures, pamphlets, videos) serve to dispel doubts about 'rejection' and rumours of failures. A standard implant procedure is carried out safely under the same local anaesthesia that one would have for any dental procedure, in about 20 to 30 minutes.

There have been significant advances in implant design. Nowadays, implants can be placed on the day of tooth extraction, and can be restored by crowns (teeth) immediately after the placement.

As we stand on the pinnacle of modern-day dentistry, it is gratifying to see patients with missing teeth walking out of dental offices with permanent teeth in their mouth.



AT LARGE BY JAMES FERREIRA

The city that was

A city without a heritage—that's what we seem to want! A city with no character, a soulless cement-and-glass citadel devoted only to money. Shameless money. Money with no conscience. As I write this, I cannot ignore the clamour of voices on the issues of redevelopment. As media guru Pritish Nandy so rightfully remarked in his column in *Bombay Times*, "a city and country of *banias*". Reading Sudhir Kakar's historical fiction *A Crimson Throne*, I realised that we have not really changed much since our ruthless predecessors in ancient times. The only thing that matters to us is our personal pot of gold. And while we hoard that and add to our riches, what a beautiful, magnificent city we destroy! As powerful builder Niranjan Hiranandani stated in the Mumbai-centred daily *Mid-Day*, "Practically, preservation and development cannot go together. If you are talking of development, areas will become redeveloped to have space, which is important. In most advanced cities in the world, only 2 per cent of the heritage structures are preserved and it is done in a beautiful, systematic manner but you must first have a clear idea of what should be preserved." I wonder if he has ever visited cities in Europe like Prague, Paris and London. Have inner city skylines been frozen in a lot of cities?

I was born and brought up in one of the most beautiful parts of Mumbai in Khotachiwadi in Girgaum. It was originally a village of 65 Portuguese-styled bungalows that hugged a beach that was reclaimed when the railways were built. St Teresa's, our local church, sat 50 m down the beach. The winding lanes of Khotachiwadi saved the core area of 27 bungalows; the periphery was destroyed over the years. Beautiful colonial buildings with high ceilings and well-appointed apartments sprang up around Khotachiwadi replacing the neighbouring gardens (*wadi*) still called *kelewadi* (banana plantation), *kandewadi* (onion fields), *ambewadi* (mango grove), and *fanaswadi* (jackfruit orchid).

Many of the sturdy and magnificent stone structures have all gone to seed, the most pressing reason being the Rent

Act that froze rents in 1948. After a point, landlords could not afford to maintain and repair them, and tenants only focused on the pockets they inhabited. Strange but true, many migrants who flocked to India still pay paltry rents in today's infatuated times.

Just like in Khotachiwadi, all over the rest of south Bombay, there is so much beauty to be saved. Little East Indian

gaonthan, which dotted the coastline, have been taken over by high-rises that can only be reached through impossibly narrow, winding lanes. Beautiful stone mills have been destroyed—internationally such structures have been restored, and centres of art, culture and entertainment have replaced the machinery. Many of the palaces and grand mansions of old royalty, rich merchants and ship-builders have been sold, quartered or destroyed. Today, space in Mumbai is boasted to be as valuable as New York and Hong Kong. People who brag about that conveniently ignore the fact that the standard of living in these places is also much higher. The city has burst at its seams and the fringes of its sprawl are a whisper away from neighbouring hill stations and towns.



Will we too like Singapore make a mad scramble to recreate our heritage structures after we have wantonly destroyed them?

old as the crumbling mansions of south Mumbai. How will this city bear the strain? Will we too like Singapore make a mad and futile scramble to recreate our heritage structures after we have wantonly destroyed them? The irony is that our babus have recently appointed a Singapore firm to plan and advise us on a new blueprint for our city. We may as well start to sing a requiem to our city's heritage.

James Ferreira is a Mumbai-based fashion designer. (You might just bump into him at the Khotachiwadi Masala Festival to be held on 16 and 17 April)

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NOSTALGIA

THE NEWS, according to...



Once upon a time, before the era of ‘breaking news’ and the onslaught of ‘know-it-all’ television anchors, we had newsreaders known for their cool sophistication, distinct personality and professional standards. They spoke with crystal-clear diction and never once thrust their opinion on viewers. Most important, they spoke with a sense of quiet authority. The public face of our national television broadcaster Doordarshan (DD), they remained unfazed through the rough moments—remembered the oft-repeated ‘Rukawat ke liye khed hai?’—and never once let the mask slip. Each newsreader had a carefully cultivated, unique style and viewers looked forward to the dreary news of the day, thanks mainly to their personal charisma. And the colourful saris and ties they donned were regular drawing-room conversation, much like the news they read. Have their perfect diction and polished manner served as an inspiration for today’s television news anchors? Dhanya Nair Sankar walks down memory lane with six DD veterans

SHAMMI NARANG

His deep baritone is synonymous with Hindi news reading and got an entire generation of viewers hooked to their TV sets. Even today, his voice continues to reverberate. You hear him at the Nehru planetariums in Delhi and Mumbai and on the Metro IVR system in Delhi. And his rendition of *Sarab Sanjhi Gurbani* is the voice of Sikhs globally, even after all these years.

Known for raising the level of sophistication of Hindi news reading, Narang was the default poster boy of the field. Today, he runs a digital studio in Delhi and composes music for advertisements. But he candidly admits DD is where it all started. Narang was already a voiceover artist when he joined DD in 1982. “I owe a great deal to DD, because I became a well-recognised face there,” he says. “The DD bigwigs never discouraged me from developing an exclusive style.” He believes the newsreaders of those days were so loved because they were more interested in gaining their viewers’ trust than becoming style icons. “The aim of every newsreader was to reach out to the audience with truthfulness and authenticity and with no melodrama,” he says. “We didn’t believe in selling a personal image. If we were recognised on the streets, it was because we conveyed truth; without the sensationalism of today.”

Conviction and belief in content, with no personal or emotional involvement, was

sacrosanct in those days. “As news readers, we were asked to put across information as simply and truthfully as we could,” shares Narang. “Any dilutions, additions or deviations earned you a rap from the news director. Also, there was no pressure over TRPs and one-upmanship.” He believes today’s competitiveness and battle for TRPs has forced newsreaders to resort to hysteria to grab eyeballs. He also makes the point that changes in the field reflect larger societal changes. “Privacy is no longer privacy in the classic sense,” he says. “Some of the so-called ‘Page 3 Privacy Believers’ even lure newsreaders to peep into their private lives. Often, it’s a two-way street where hunter and hunted are hand-in-glove.”

In his time, observes Narang, the connection with the audience was what motivated newsreaders most. “There was so much conviction and truthfulness that the audience saw themselves and their concerns reflected in us.” He remembers once reading out a news item about a new pension scheme for ex-servicemen. “Two days later, I found a retired *havaldar* and his wife at my door, with a letter pleading for the man’s pension to be enhanced. He believed only I could get the needful done.” Narang promised to find out the Army’s policy on the matter from his father, who was posted in the Pensions Department at Army headquarters. “They went back satisfied and I managed to contact them with the relevant details a couple of days later,” Narang recalls. Imagine that happening today.

NEETHI RAVINDRAN

She would grace our screens with poise every night, her crisp voice reminding us it was time to listen up. Seconds later, she would begin to read the news in Queen's English that could give international newsreaders a run for their money. It was the 1980s and 1990s, the Golden Age of our national broadcaster before satellite TV changed the game.

After the DD days, Delhi-based Neethi Ravindran has been keeping busy as a voiceover artist, making documentaries, short films and anchoring special programmes. It was her voice that led us through the death of Mother Teresa in 1997 and she was the brainchild behind award-winning documentary *Fifty Years of India's Independence*, made for the Ministry of External Affairs through the United News of India. With her characteristic charm and enviable poise intact, Ravindran agrees to walk us down memory lane.

In those days, newsreaders did not shout—and they definitely didn't pass judgement. It is no surprise, then, that 'old-school newsreaders' like Ravindran feel the 'trial-by-media' attitude today's anchors adopt is nothing short of painful. Ask her what comes to mind when she watches today's news anchors and she quickly replies: "Their lack of originality". "We were not trained or advised on style of delivery so each of us developed our own personal style," explains Ravindran, who holds an honours degree in economics from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi. "The general atmosphere guided our understanding of being credible newscasters within the parameters of a government-controlled broadcast. There is greater freedom of expression today, competition as well as a refusal to be cowed by any form of repressive authority. But instead of diversification, it has brought about sameness in content and delivery style."

"Some of the telecasts have become judgemental to a fault," she observes. "Once we draw attention to an issue, it is best to let the courts carry out their duties. There is a very fine line between projection of news and being drawn into the minute details that really need not be in a news bulletin." But she is glad for one invention—the remote control—that the audience can use to switch off the television! "The final, most scathing indictment lies in the remote in your hand; at least, viewers are free to change channels!" she adds with a chuckle.

Ravindran is also quick to point that it wasn't all hunky-dory back then, especially if you were a roving, curious correspondent. The government kept a tight fist on information going out, which left many doubting the system. Ironically, like many of her peers, Ravindran too practised journalism outside the iron-clad walls of DD. "I also worked with United News of India, so DD gave me a somewhat free hand," she says. "I also wrote for Films Division, for private producers, writing and voicing scripts and making documentaries. All this gave me immense satisfaction."

However, DD's biggest gift was the recognition and reputation its newsreaders enjoyed. "We were recognised all over India and in many parts of the world," she recalls with a smile. "Once, when I was travelling in a remote part of Rajasthan with a young man, we stopped at a *dhaba* for a cup of tea. A little boy came running across to me; holding up his finger, he said, 'Newsreader...TV newsreader'; that warmed my heart."

This former news presenter feels the responsibility to clean up the Fourth Estate lies with those who are part of the fraternity. "Competition, ambition and ego have resulted in temptations that are difficult to resist. We need a code that channels need to set for themselves before an intelligent audience turns away."



"Competition, ambition and ego have resulted in temptations that are difficult to resist. We need a code that channels need to set for themselves before an intelligent audience turns away"

Shivay Bhandari

RINI SIMON KHANNA

Rini Simon Khanna's journey as a newsreader began in 1982 when she joined All India Radio. From there, she moved to DD in 1984. But even though she left the government broadcaster in 2004 she continues to work with the media—freelancing as a broadcast journalist, hosting events, and voicing documentaries and films. Based in Delhi, Khanna emceed the Nasscom India Leadership Forum in Mumbai this February and has been the voice of Airtel for several years. Today, she can still be heard on Airtel, MTNL, BSNL and Air India. She also revels in her hours at home, walking her dog and spending quality time with her businessman husband Deepak Khanna and 20 year-old son Sahil.

Rewinding to a sepia-toned era, Khanna recalls, "It's been a long journey and one that gave me immense joy. I have my share of wonderful memories of hectic days and tight deadlines." So what does it take to be a good television anchor? "Primarily, news anchors need to be good communicators, with a pleasant personality, a pulse for current affairs and the ability to present events without sensationalising them. But they also need a measured urgency to inform, highlight and empathise," explains Khanna, who landed a job with DD after clearing a written exam and several rounds of auditions. 'Passion' is a relative term in the newsroom, and for Khanna it is synonymous with connecting with viewers rather than 'hunting down' news and intruding into people's lives. "You cannot pretend to be interested; you have to be convinced of what you're saying," she underlines, adding, "Intrusion in any form is repulsive."

Of course, changing times and the 'new media' have significantly altered the way journalists conduct themselves. "Today, the need to share is more than it used to be and the ease with which ordinary people can do this makes it very difficult to draw boundaries around what is private and what is public," concedes Khanna. "However, there are clear norms that journalists must follow and such intrusiveness can be curbed if people specify how much they want to share."

According to her, DD's newsreaders enjoyed pleasures and privileges money couldn't buy. "I was on holiday in Ranikhet and we ran out of petrol," she recalls. "We checked into a small hotel and went scouting around. We saw an Air Force station and adventurously walked in and asked the security guard if we could meet the commanding officer. He recognised me and informed the commanding officer, who was also a great fan! We shared a wonderful evening with them. The next morning, we found a whole tank of fuel for our onward journey to Almora. How can one ever repay such generosity?"

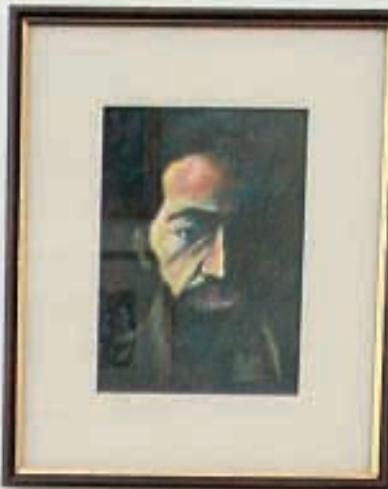
In Khanna's view, DD's self-censoring style was a means to discipline newsreaders, to avoid them 'interpreting' the news. "We were able to perform our duties without really being on a leash," she explains. "There was no interference, only an understanding that we adhere to the norms of decency and the need to inform relevant and important news. We were not encouraged to 'colour' news in any way; we had to keep it as objective and as close to the truth as possible." The DD veteran agrees that news anchors today need to constantly evolve and adapt to a fast-changing medium. "But the scams revealing layers of corruption and fixing between journalists, lobbyists and politicians are a huge letdown to the trust the Fourth Estate enjoys," she adds. DD began to lose its exclusivity—and viewers—with the advent of private channels in the early 1990s. But Khanna quit for personal reasons. And she has no regrets. "Today's aggressiveness and competitiveness do not appeal to me and I choose not to be a part of it," says Khanna firmly.

She continues to hold her former employer in high regard. "DD is still the biggest national public broadcaster and the government's communication arm," she asserts. "I have great respect for them and continue to work with them whenever they ask me to. The reach of Doordarshan is legendary and, in remote places, it remains the only means of information and entertainment despite the presence of satellite TV. People respect it for its non-sensational, comprehensive and reliable coverage."

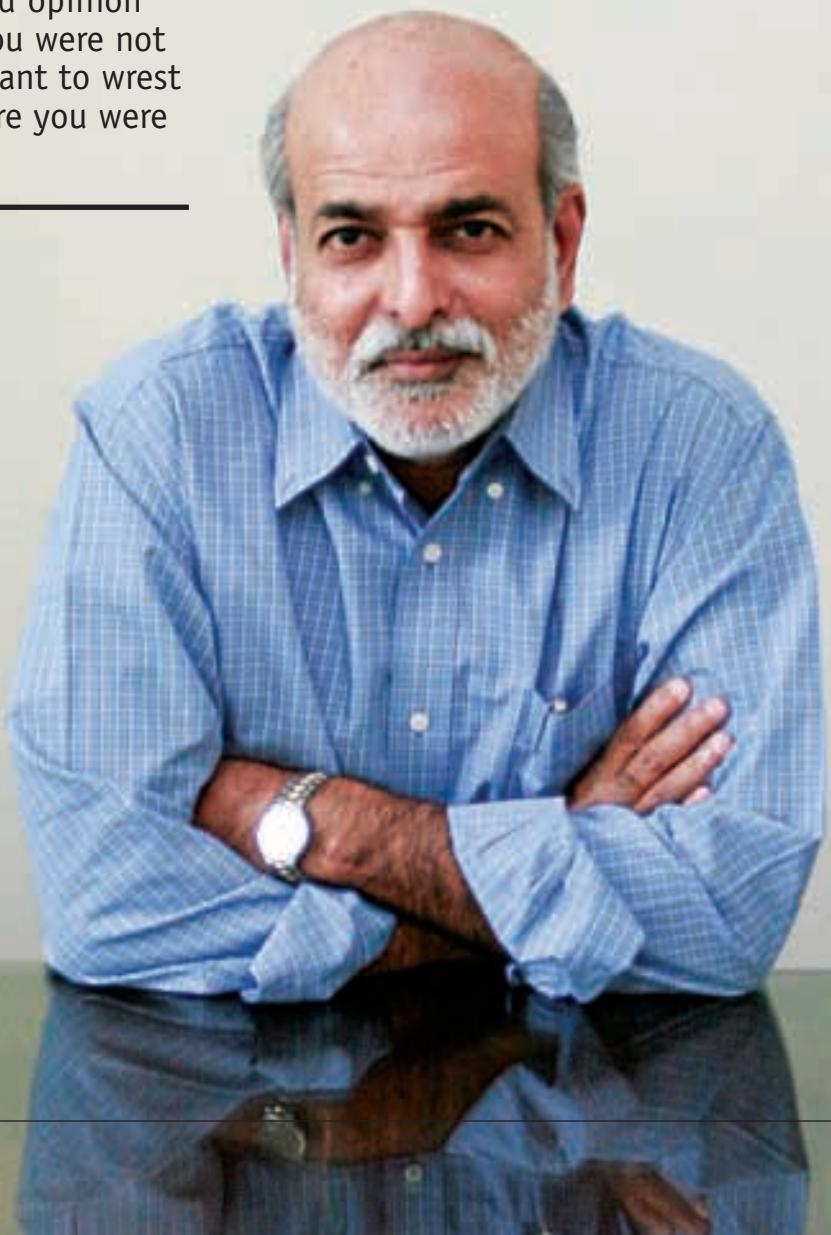




"Today, the need to share is more than it used to be and the ease with which ordinary people can do this makes it very difficult to draw boundaries around what is private and what is public"



"DD was this patriarchal, pedagogic presence and you were the oracle. You never got your fact and opinion mixed up. To prove that you were not IQ-deficient, it was important to wrest yourself away from it before you were sucked in, forever"



SASHI KUMAR

When 59 year-old Sashi Kumar—founder of non-profit organisation Media Development Foundation, which runs Asian College of Journalism, the premier journalism college in India—walks through the campus in Chennai, eager students suddenly fall silent. It is not just reverence for their principal but an open admiration for this charming former DD news presenter. Most students wonder how he manages to keep his age from showing in his face, or demeanour. And when he talks passionately about the changing business of journalism, there is always pin-drop silence. With good reason. Kumar has been a newsreader, a daily reporter, launched one of the country's most successful regional channels—Asianet—and dabbled in filmmaking. And he is always willing to share all he has learned.

Kumar, who joined DD in the late 1970s, was among the first English newscasters on the network and, over the subsequent decade, became a familiar face in homes across India as a news and current affairs anchor, film critic and producer and director of topical features. Remember shows like *Tana Bana*, a cultural feature, *Jan Manch*, an interactive discussion between ministers and a cross-section of society, and *Money Matters?* From 1975 to 1984, Kumar was a regular fixture on DD.

Looking back, he admits he thought becoming a DD newsreader would help him get into films, his real passion. Instead, DD brought out in him a roving reporter, producer and anchor. "It was a good platform, but not a great place to get stuck in," he says with candour. "I took to DD because of the myriad opportunities the medium offered me. We got to explore the technical and aesthetic aspects of visuals and sound." Those were really the pioneering days. "We started by reading the text off typed sheets," recalls Kumar. "The teleprompters arrived only later. And we had little role in determining the content of the news itself." Looking back, he says newsreaders were like automated mannequins. "You had to look, act and speak the part—and could do it without any sense of what was going on."

To prove that you were not IQ-deficient, it was important to wrest yourself away from it before you were sucked in, or lulled into it, forever."

Yet the veteran feels there was a certain romance in news presentation then. "It wasn't the high-decibel bombardment of your senses, 24x7, it is now," he says. Being an 'old-school' journalist, Kumar believes the current generation of news anchors could do without their pontificating. "I do wish they'd be less excited, more patient, less pompous, more informed, less arrogant, more considerate, less superficial, more in-depth. And I don't know why they look and act like clones." And the hungry media survives because of today's voyeuristic society. "The media's freewheeling style yanks skeletons out of cupboards and keeps them in the public eye," observes Kumar. "Their almost infantile persistence works because we like to see them pitted against equally self-obsessed politicians or custodians of morality and it doesn't matter who emerges victorious."

Iconic American newsreaders like Walter Cronkite and Barbara Walters were Kumar's inspirations. But the industry was far from lucrative back then. Kumar's monthly pay in the first few years in Madras in the late 1970s, before national network news began, was just Rs 800. But for him and his peers, DD was where they learnt the importance of the freedom of the press and the responsibilities that came with the job. "DD was this patriarchal, pedagogic presence and you were the oracle," he says. "You never got your fact and opinion mixed up."

In his view, TV journalism today is hardly inspiring. "It is over-the-top, dilettantist, sensational and vacuous," he says. "If the reporting style of the DD days was state-fixated, today it is market-centric. One has to look elsewhere for inspiration; to the BBC, for example. Grabbing eyeballs is not what television is all about. There is a larger, societal dharma. You can't pretend to be part of the Fourth Estate, enjoy the constitutional and moral high ground and go about your trade like any other player in the market."

"The media today has done some remarkable things, like fighting the Jessica Lall case. But the people running the show should be aware that they can be catalysts for positive change, and if that is not happening, something is clearly missing"



USHA ALBUQUERQUE

Known for her husky voice, Usha Albuquerque started her career as a newsreader with DD back in 1980, at the regional broadcast station in Madras. In 1986, she moved to national broadcast, where she stayed till 2000. Today, she is director of Careersmart, a Delhi-based career-counselling organisation she established in 1990.

Ironically, it was DD's closely controlled environment that edged Albuquerque towards this new career. "At DD, we were just news presenters and we read out whatever was given to us. There was very little scope to practice journalism or reporting," she says. So Albuquerque began working with a few publications in Chennai and Mumbai. "In Delhi, I was also making current-affairs programmes and news features with career-related segments. These evolved into programmes that offered career counselling and ran for three years." In the late 1980s, Penguin Books approached her to write a career guide; she went on to write several books on career counselling, and finally launched Careersmart.

According to her, DD was an excellent launch pad. "We didn't have visuals for every news item, so articulation and diction were very important." There were plenty of quirky moments too. "Often, pages would get stuck in the teleprompter and we would have to keep repeating, 'excuse me, excuse me,' because we had no idea what the news was about!" Nonetheless, with no competition, DD had all the TRPs to itself. "Today, with so many channels vying for the same audience, it's not surprising that they have to depend on sensationalising and blowing things out of proportion," says Albuquerque. "Competition has brought plenty of unsavoury aspects into journalism—unwanted intrusions, judgemental reporting, news anchors who behave like moralists, and news that is also politically motivated."

One improvement, she says, is that journalism now means good money for journalists. "Back then, newsreaders were treated like casual labourers," she says with a chuckle. "We were given a paltry Rs 50 per broadcast. But we did get several things money couldn't buy. I used to travel through the interiors of the country for documentaries and people would instantly recognise me and call out 'News, news.' That certainly felt good." Albuquerque believes DD had a lot to offer. "We never coloured the news. Though we did ribbon-cutting stories on government functions and the like we had some landmark moments too, like Operation Blue Star, when we witnessed, and broadcast, history in the making."

Does Albuquerque feel she could have survived in today's cutthroat world of TV journalism? "I was always very politically and socially aware," she says. "Even back then, I was doing news features. I would have loved to do more interviews and current affairs programmes. Today your imagination is the only limit to how much you can do." What does she make of the Indian media today? "They have done some remarkable things, like fighting the Jessica Lall case," says Albuquerque. "But the people running the show should be aware of their social responsibilities. They can be catalysts for positive change, and if that is not happening, something is clearly missing."



Shivay Bhandari





Shivay Bhandari

SUNIT TANDON

He was known for his deep voice, erudite nature, perfect enunciation and chic beard. Tandon, who anchored news on DD, off and on from 1987 till as recently as 2007, often jokes that his batch marked the last of the DD dinosaurs. "I was already working as deputy director with the Directorate of Film Festivals, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, when I started anchoring news with DD," says Tandon. Based in Delhi, he now divides his time between troubleshooting at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), where he is director-general, managing Lok Sabha Television, where he is chief executive, and flexing his creative muscle by dabbling in theatre.

DD tried to change its strategy to cope with changing times, he admits. "Till the late 1990s, all that mattered was that you had a good speaking voice, good diction, sound knowledge of current affairs and a good screen presence," he says. "After that, the concept of news anchoring came in, with presenters expected to do live interviews, improvise on scripts and handle developing situations during live broadcasts." It's not easy, he admits. "Today, news anchors have to operate in an extremely competitive scenario," he says. "The emphasis of channel owners is on grabbing eyeballs at any cost. There is less emphasis on voice and language skills, balance and journalistic accuracy."

An economics graduate from St Stephen's, Delhi, Tandon says he was always passionate about television. "The remuneration then just about paid the petrol bills," he says with a laugh. "Yet we derived immense satisfaction from developing our skills and testing our minds on the job. Another thing that kept them going, according to him, were the viewers. "In the days before the satellite TV revolution, viewers' reactions were intense. We were aware that every tiny slip was being noticed by millions of people." Tandon believes the changing values of news reporting and, subsequently, of top editors reflect the changing ideals of the media. "Our role was usually limited to polishing the text without interfering with it, and delivering it as well as possible," he adds. "Things changed slowly through the 1990s with the advent of coalition politics, as the space for a greater range of political stories expanded."

Tandon feels he was lucky to have had the opportunity to adapt to the changing scenario, going from newsreader to news anchor through the 1990s. "I enjoyed the process of adaptation and evolution, as there was greater freedom to mould the presentation of stories and one had to be much more alert." But media ethics are equally important, he cautions. "I try to inculcate that in my students at IIMC. I hope the present generation of students will be more conscious of the need to maintain their integrity and credibility, which remain the biggest strengths of a journalist."

Happiness, she wrote

Laughing her way through the rough patches, she has continued to script her own, unique success story. But then Honey Irani has always been a master of reinvention, as **Sandhya Valecha**, who is writing her biography, discovers

Child actor of the Golden Age of Hindi cinema; National Award-winner; doting mother to Farhan and Zoya Akhtar; good friend to ex-husband Javed; loving grandmother; gifted writer. Many hats, none of them doing complete justice to the remarkable and inspiring woman that is actor-writer-director Honey Irani.

Irani was born into a Zoroastrian family, and with adorable kid-next-door appeal, she started acting at the age of two-and-a-half. It was her mother's desire to be an actor herself that set her on the road to stardom, just like her elder sister Daisy. A chance meeting with a producer who was captivated by her impish ways marked her debut in the Hindi film industry. Her career began with roles in films like *Santan*, *Talaq*, *Chirag Kahaan Roshni Kahaan* and *Bombay Ka Chor* before she went on to work with the finest superstars of Hindi cinema, a role model every wannabe child yearned to emulate.

Irani met poet-lyricist Javed Akhtar on the sets of *Seeta Aur Geeta* while she was still a teenager; they got married when she was 18. "Humour is what clicked between Javed and I, and it took off from there," she recalls, adding that it was Salim 'Saab' (Salman Khan's father) who convinced her mother to let the teenager tie the knot. Soon Farhan and Zoya were born. By then, Irani had stopped acting and, encouraged by her husband, decided it was time to write short stories. It wasn't long before she was scripting for

filmdom's biggest banners. Her first story was *Aaina* for Yash Chopra, which was a huge leap of faith. But she had to shrug off "Javed's shadow" and prove she could hold her own. The rest, as they say, is history.

Just like any celluloid story, Irani's life too has had its share of twists; a few years later, her marriage broke up. Her signature sense of humour and sheer grit carried her through the separation and Akhtar's subsequent marriage to actor Shabana Azmi. As her sister Maneka (mother of director and choreographer Farah Khan) observes, "Honey doesn't harbour any grudges; she is very forgiving."

She's also prolific. With 72 films under her belt, the imitable Irani has written the screenplay and scripts for diverse genres of films, both conventional and contemporary. Despite her aversion to toeing the line, she stands out in an industry ruled by clichés with hits such as *Aaina*, *Lamhe*, *Albelia*, *Jab Pyaar Kisi Se Hota Hai*, *Suhaag*, *Kya Kehna*, *Armaan*, *Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai*, *Koi... Mil Gaya* and *Krrish*.

We meet Irani at her plush sea-facing bungalow at Bandstand in Mumbai's suburban Bandra. At 56, she has boundless energy; she's just returned from her second home amid the lush green undulating hills of Coonoor near Coimbatore, where she had spent a month writing a new script. Her daughter-in-law Adhuna, and granddaughters Shakya (10) and Akira (3), lounge in her bedroom, watching tele-



Photographs by Utkarsh Sanjanwala



"Both our films and ads have implicit or explicit sexual connotations. Everything is sexual. What the hell is going on? Are you selling sex or are you selling a product? How come no one is taking objection to that?"

vision and chit-chatting. With sunlight streaming through the large glass windows and an exquisite view of the sea, Honey leafs through some of the chapters in her life.

You are a director, short-story writer, screenplay writer and scriptwriter. Where do you get your energy?

I've always had it. It makes a difference when you start working in the film industry at the age of two-and-a-half.

What do you enjoy most?

I enjoy being a director the most because I am totally in charge of everything. If anything goes wrong, I cannot blame anyone. It's an entirely different job compared to writing. It's much more challenging.

Where do you get your inspiration to write? Writing must require strict discipline.

Well, I do take my time off to chill. Sometimes, I don't get out of my room for many days. Sometimes, I like to remain in bed, watch TV, read and relax. That way, I am inspired by a lot of things. Besides, I'm very fond of meeting new

people, listening to their stories, their backgrounds. It gives me ideas to write about. Yes, I am very organised and strict about discipline.

What is your approach to scriptwriting?

It takes about a week to 10 days to toy with an idea. I find answers to questions such as where can I take the story from here, what characters can I bring in, what interval point and end point should I write? Often, I rewrite a story even after writing a major portion of it. The best part of writing is the characters, when they come alive. It's totally in your hands to mould them, to change the character into something else. What your characters do and speak is completely up to you. Creating different plots is also interesting. I love it!

What's your next project?

I have taken a long break after *Krrish*. I did not write for a while because I was unable to feel strongly enough about the stories I was being offered. I could not connect with the stories that producers wanted me to write. Now I have signed three films and I am very excited about them.

Who played the most important part in your growth as an actor?

To an extent, Meena Kumari, Rajendra Kumar, Kishore Kumar and Balraj Sahni...these are the people that influenced me. I would definitely give a lot of credit to my directors.

What was special about your relationship with these great actors?

Everyone pampered me a lot on the sets. On the sets of *Didi*, I was confused about the meaning of a song and Dutt *Saab* [Sunil Dutt] explained its inherent and underlying meaning and lyrics to me. Things like this are very touching. Everyone had so much time and took the trouble to explain things to me. They were all so affectionate and approachable. We shot mainly at Ranjeet Studios, Asha Studios and Sree Sound. At lunchtime, everyone ate together, everybody shared their food. Raj Kapoor, Yusuf *Saab* and Nargis all sat at one table with me. It was fabulous! It was like shooting with your own family. Sometimes during breaks, I used to fly kites with Dutt *Saab* and Yusuf *Saab*. When I grew tired, all the senior actors used to tell me stories and sing songs to me so I didn't fall asleep.

What was Meena Kumari like on the sets?

Meena Kumari was childless and so we developed a special bond. She used to pamper me, feed me, put me to sleep. I spent a few nights at her place. She was very fond of me. I loved her. She was more of a comfort zone to me than my own mother.

And the most memorable character you have played?

When I look back now, I feel I was pretty good in *Talaq*, *Chirag Kahan Roshni Kahan* and *Pyar Ki Pyas*, which won so many awards. Everybody now and then keeps saying, 'You were very natural.'

What was it like acting with your sister Daisy?

I did two to three films with Daisy. Daisy was already a bigger and more popular star by then. She was very protective about me on the sets. [Smiles.]

Did you have fun on the sets?

Oh, we had a lot of fun. I was a brat. Together, we pulled so many pranks during stage shows and our world tours.

Were your pranks as sensational as your performances?

I was six or seven when we were shooting for *Pyar Ki Pyas*. I had to wear false teeth because my milk teeth had broken. I was very tired because we had shot all night and we were to shoot in the morning again. I was so fed up of shooting that I threw my false teeth in the river. I said to myself, '*Ab shoot karo!*' [Now let's see how you continue shooting.] The team frantically looked for the teeth but in vain and the shoot was called off.

What is your relationship like with your children?

I have a fabulous relationship with them. Touchwood! It's an extremely honest relationship. I treat them as my friends. If there's a problem, we discuss it together.

Do you discuss your work with your children?

We are very honest about each other's work. There are times when I've asked them for feedback on a script I've written and they tell me it's terrible. Then we change it around. I too offer them an honest and constructive opinion on their scripts and films. When I don't like something, I critique it candidly. We all take it very well because we care for each other.

You and Javed Akhtar have continued to remain good friends.

Javed is one of my best friends. If two people don't get along, then they don't get along. One cannot force them to stay together. But they have their own qualities, which last forever, and they

can still remain friends. We have a lot of mutual respect and admiration. He's one of the most decent men I have ever met. He's been very nice to me and the children.

Do you hang out with your friends a lot? What do you do when you meet?

My friends Dimple [Kapadia], Pinky [Hrithik Roshan's mother], Zarine [Suzanne Roshan's mother], Madhu Behl, Ratna Mehra... we meet frequently and chill out. Some of us love playing cards. Then I am also very close to Satish Shah and his wife, and Farooq Shaikh and his wife. We have been very good friends for 34-35 years. Besides, Nitin Mukesh is my *rakhi* brother.

What do you think of the current crop of scriptwriters?

Some of them are exceptional. But at times I feel they lack



Honey Irani with cast and crew on the sets of her directorial debut *Arman*, a sensitive film on the tenuous dynamics of father-son and man-woman relationships; (below) with her granddaughter Shakya who coaxed her to colour her hair



"Javed is one of my best friends. If two people don't get along, then they don't get along. One can't force them to stay together. But they have their own qualities, which last forever, and they can still remain friends"

emotion with respect to filmmaking. Emotions constitute an imperative element of a film but, today, everything is very cut-and-dried. Emotions are portrayed like caricatures. They are presented as a comedy. I feel this is why most films don't do well. I don't think one should shy away from emotions and melodrama because they are a part of our culture and our films. People have been watching emotional films for generations.

What do you think of Hindi cinema today?

Nowadays films vanish soon after they are released. I rarely feel like watching a film a second time. I watch Marathi and Gujarati movies and I think they are made very competently. Now even big banners and multi-starrers do not take a big opening. There's definitely something lacking. That says something about our writers, doesn't it?

Do you think filmmakers today tend to compromise on integrity and aesthetics?

Yes, I do. We may have become proficient in our technique but it is embarrassing to watch certain scenes on screen. Women look more sensual and sexy when they are covered. A woman cannot wear a sari and jump into a pool but nor can she wear a bikini and attend a party! Both our films and ads have implicit or explicit sexual connotations. Everything is sexual. What the hell is going on? Are you selling sex or are you selling a product? How come no one is taking objection to that?

Are you on Facebook or Twitter? What do you feel about film personalities who are?

I frequently log into my Facebook account. I think it is a good platform for film personalities to get feedback on our work from our target audience.

Can you recount one turning point in your life?

My father's death. I loved Dad and I miss him. He did so much for us and never scolded us. He died before I could do something for him. I feel that void. He was a gentleman, a perfect, loving and caring father.

What is your approach to ageing?

I have no approach to age. I am young at heart. And there's a reason I colour my hair. When my granddaughter Shakya

was three-and-a-half, I decided I would 'go grey'. But Shakya didn't like it and said, 'Dadi, you have to colour your hair.' Now she tells me, 'When you are 65, you can stop colouring your hair.' But now I am so used to it!

I don't use anti-ageing cream, etc. I wake up early and take a walk to keep myself active. If I am ill or if have a fever, a day's rest is enough to recuperate. After that, I have to go out, come what may. And I don't watch my weight. I love my food. I have a thyroid problem and high blood pressure sometimes but that comes with age. I'm trying to keep a check on them. Otherwise, I'm pretty healthy, considering my age. I don't have diabetes or cholesterol. I eat everything and I really enjoy it!

Is it more tedious to write now?

Not at all. In fact I think it's much easier because I've seen and experienced so much. I've met so many people and seen so many characters. I can still write very good romantic scenes and emotional stories.

Doesn't work pressure affect your health?

Never! I have been very healthy. I can multitask without losing my cool. Over the years, I have learned to cope with work pressure.

Do you have any other interests besides writing?

I am a very good cook. I knit and embroider a lot. I like painting. I love doing jigsaw puzzles. I love doing up my house. I like shopping. I enjoy travelling. I like going to my house in Coonoor.

What do you treasure most?

I love doing stuff with my family—having lunch or dinner together or watching a movie. We sometimes watch movies just for a good laugh. We play games together. I cherish my children and grandchildren's visits to my house in Coonoor. Farhan loves cooking with me there. It makes me immensely happy when all my children are at home with me. In the morning, Farhan, Adhuna, Zoya and my grandchildren come into my room and sit on my bed, and we chat for a long time. I feel fabulous! Then we all have breakfast together. I just treasure that. I silently say, 'Thank God I am alive to experience this. It's the best moment in the world!' ☺

Too little, TOO LATE?

The Central Government recently gifted silvers a new policy to address their healthcare needs. However, non-government organisations working for the elderly believe the National Programme for the Healthcare of the Elderly is impractical and will make little difference to our ageing population. **Anju Mohan** investigates further

Pegged at 90 million, India has the second-largest number of senior citizens in the world, second only to China. Improvement in preventive and curative healthcare for silvers is therefore a crying need and requires serious and urgent government intervention.

The Indian Government first attempted to address the problems faced by the elderly in the late 1990s. To provide silvers financial support, healthcare, shelter, and protection from abuse and exploitation, the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment set up the National Policy on Older People (NPOP) in February 1999. However, this policy was never implemented as most states failed to act on its recommendations. The second attempt has come more than a decade later, with the launch of the National Programme for the Healthcare of the Elderly (NPHCE) in February 2011. This policy aims to provide long-term, affordable and accessible healthcare to seniors.

According to Keshav Desiraj, additional secretary, Ministry of Health, the NPHCE was approved by the Ministry of Finance in June 2010 with a budget of ₹ 2.88 billion for 2010-2012. The programme envisages

the establishment of eight Regional Geriatric Centres across the country, each comprising a 30-bed geriatric hospital and dedicated OPD. In addition, geriatric units would be opened in 100 districts across 21 states, each unit comprising a 10-bed hospital and OPD. In the third tier, geriatric units would be created at community and primary healthcare centres.

In the current fiscal, the government was to identify 30 of the 100 districts where geriatric units are to be established. For every district identified, the state government concerned must sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare to gain access to funds. However, so far, only one MoU has been signed, with the Punjab government, for the district of Gurdaspur. The Ministry is also signing MoUs with super-speciality hospitals and medical colleges such as Guwahati Medical College, Dr S N Medical College in Jodhpur, Sher-e-Kashmir in Srinagar and All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, among others, to open regional centres while starting courses in geriatrics in medical colleges.

However, considering the government's abysmal track record with the NPOP, experts who work with

silvers across the country are sceptical about the new policy. For instance, president of the Society for Serving Seniors in Hyderabad, Padmanabhan Vyaasamoorthy feels the NPHCE announcement was "made in haste" as the NPOP is still under revision by an Expert Committee. "Just eight regional hospitals with 30 beds each and another 100 district-level hospitals with 10 beds each are totally inadequate for a 10 million population of older persons," he observes. "This programme is a good beginning but will not make any significant impact."

Vyaasamoorthy believes the government must make it a priority to provide an affordable health insurance scheme to senior citizens, as most silvers end up being as bad as 'below the BPL category' after paying for hospitalisation, which is expensive beyond words. He points out that the recommendations of the Consultancy on Problems of Older Women must be taken into account to effectively address healthcare issues of this section of the population.

For his part, Ambuja Narayan, founder-president, Non-Resident Indian Parent Association, Bengaluru, welcomes the scheme but wonders whether the government will actually implement it. He doubts

whether "such grandiose plans" and the funds released will reach the target population. "Our strong Indian value system of care-giving by Indian adult children and voluntary neighbourhood units that address silvers are more reliable," he says, adding that a network of support groups is better equipped to address the issue. Despite the promises made by the Union Budget 2011, he points out that rising hospital charges, the cost of pharmaceuticals and expensive transportation facilities make adequate and effective healthcare a distant reality for elders.

R N Mittal, president, All India Senior Citizens Confederation, says the NHPCE is "too little, too late". Like Vyaasamoorthy, Mittal too believes the need of the hour is health insurance for silvers. "The plan to set up eight geriatric care centres across the country is inadequate to cover the needs of a burgeoning silver population," he remarks. And while Sailesh Mishra, president, Silver Innings, Mumbai, calls the NPHCE a "positive move", he believes "it is a little late as we already have 100 million silver people. But as the plan comes from a different ministry, it is a positive development as each ministry seems to be stepping up its efforts to make life easier for the growing silver population. Alternatively, the NHPCE can act as a nodal point for all programmes and policies for the elderly launched by separate ministries, which need to be integrated." Mishra adds that preventive healthcare for people in their 40s and 50s is imperative as this would mean fewer problems at a later stage. Among his other suggestions are public-private partnerships in the setting up of hospitals, encouraging social entrepreneurship, and home services, community services and mobile health care units.

Meanwhile, Himanshu Rath, chairman, Agewell Foundation, New Delhi, outright rejects the NPHCE plan. "These are just announcements," he says. "All they do is open a new



The programme envisages the establishment of eight Regional Geriatric Centres, each comprising a 30-bed geriatric hospital and dedicated OPD. In addition, geriatric units would be opened in 100 districts across 21 states. In the third tier, geriatric units would be created at community and primary healthcare centres

counter and a new queue, where general physicians will attend to the elderly. These doctors will neither have the required training or education to deal with the medical problems of silvers, nor will they be able to treat diseases specific to silvers." He makes a telling comment: "The NPOP was announced in 1999. Today, it is under review without ever having left the drawing board."

Rath, whose organisation was recently granted Special Consultative Status by ECOSOC at the United Nations, adds,

"We are currently facing the first generation of silvers. Hence, at the first sign of diminishing vision or hearing, a large number of elderly become housebound as they are afraid of venturing out. To build a really effective healthcare system for the elderly, we need courses in geriatrics in all our medical colleges and a pool of trained professionals to take care of the needs of the growing silver population." Most important, he emphasises, we need to sensitise children and society at large to the needs of seniors.

—with Dhanya Nair Sankar

Carry on, doctor!

Asia's first woman neurosurgeon is still pushing the envelope in her mission to bridge the divide between patients and healthcare services. **Srinivas Chari** catches up with Dr T S Kanaka in Chennai and finds a humane heart inside the doctor's coat

Taking the local train from Central Chennai to Tambaram, and alighting at Chromepet along the Grand Southern Trunk Road, you reflect on the woman you're about to meet. The grand old lady of neurosurgery in Asia, Dr T S Kanaka's credentials are daunting, at best. Yet when you step into her 'Wellness Clinic' adjoining her home, you're greeted by a gracious and diminutive silver, a fearless doctor who once fought tooth and nail to earn her stripes in a male bastion.

Dr Kanaka may have laid down the scalpel in 1990 but she is as busy as ever, even at the age of 79. Watching her in action at 'Amarnath', her home named after her deceased brother, offers a window into her abundant reservoir of energy. She natters on excitedly about her pet project. "I am trying to design a totally implantable deep brain stimulation (DBS) kit that would make treatment for cerebral palsy, among other disorders, cost-effective," she reveals. "This would be a first, even internationally."

Dr Kanaka has discussed her DBS kit with a team of biomedical engineers at Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology and their response has been very encouraging. "This kit will help rehabilitate



Chennai Pix

spastic children and people with drug addiction who want to get cured," she explains.

It's easy to see where she acquired her patience and discipline as she retraces her steps. One of eight siblings, Dr Kanaka's parents insisted she pursue a professional education. Her father, Santhanakrishna, after whom the street where she lives is named, was deputy director of Public Instruction and principal of Chennai Teachers College. Naturally, there was no room to disagree!

"I always thought I would be an engineer but my mother felt I should become a doctor," confides Dr Kanaka, who followed her mother's heart before she went on to make medical history. "Besides, my elder sister was a doctor and I followed in her footsteps." Also, her brother-in-law suffered epileptic seizures, which fuelled a special interest in neurosurgery.

A specialist in rehabilitation medicine, Dr Kanaka is recognised for her contribution to selenotactic surgery, a form of minimally invasive brain surgery for children with cerebral palsy, motor disorders, behavioural disorders, individuals with psychiatric disorders as well as those who suffer extreme pain and even drug addiction.

Dr Kanaka says there were many women who chose to study general surgery but dropped out as they were bullied and deliberately failed by senior male doctors. It was her steely will that made her "take the exams many times" and earn her a coveted master's degree in surgery from Madras Medical College.

It was a long road from being thwarted from practicing hands-on in the operating theatre to being the first neurosurgeon in India to perform chronic electrode implantation in the brain in 1975. But Dr Kanaka resolutely stuck to her guns. She will always be grateful to Prof B Ramamurthy, then an emerging neurosurgeon and whom

"I am trying to design a totally implantable deep brain stimulation (DBS) kit that would make treatment for cerebral palsy and other disorders cost-effective"

she assisted during the summer vacation, for his encouragement. She will also never forget a rare compliment she received from one of her teachers, Dr A Srinivasan, who was "known to make female student-doctors cry". At the end of her term as a third-year medical student, he had said, "You have survived me; you can survive any hardship. Medicine is a jealous maid. Don't let anything come between you and medicine."

After her post-graduation, Dr Kanaka was posted at Government General Hospital (GGH) in Chennai before she volunteered to join the Army as a general surgical specialist at the end of the Indo-China border conflict. She served with Army Hospital in New Delhi for two years before landing the post of assistant professor of neurosurgery at Madras Medical College while also serving as a neurosurgeon with the GGH.

Apart from her full-time commitments to these institutions, Dr Kanaka also worked with the Epidemiological Research Centre, Adyar Cancer Institute and Hindu Mission Hospital, among other hospitals. She has been working with the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams for over 30 years, apart from being associated with numerous organisations that help the economically challenged receive good health-care facilities.

Naturally, she has travelled overseas extensively. And from her first visit to Japan in 1973 to a trip to Beijing in 2010, to attend the first Woman Chi-

nese Doctors Meeting and receive the Lifetime Achievement Award from the World Federation of Neurological Societies, Dr Kanaka presented research papers well into her 70s.

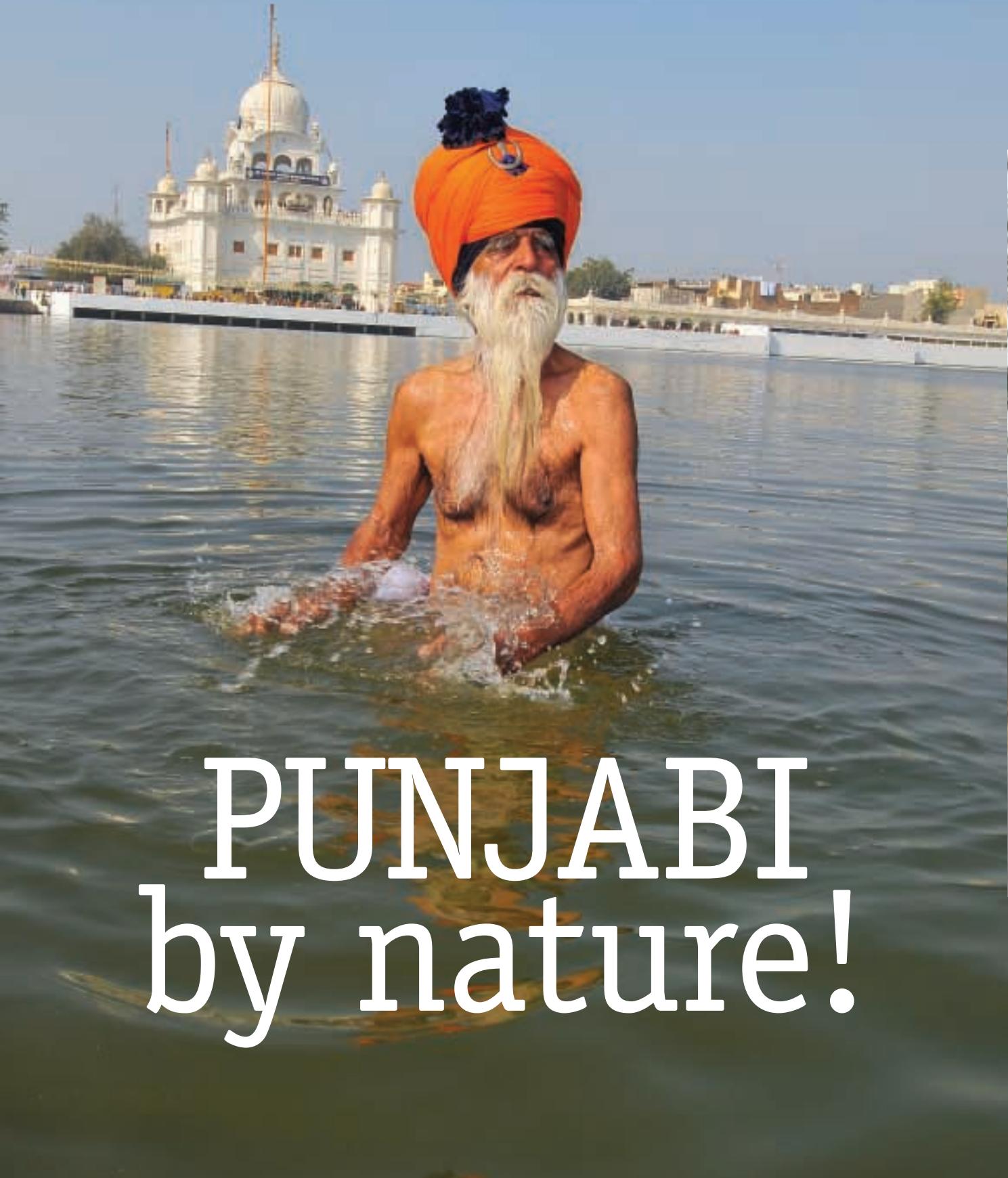
As if medicine wasn't enough, Dr Kanaka is a humanist at heart. Two years after she retired from GGH in 1990, she set up the Sri Santhanakrishna Padmavathi Health, Care & Research Foundation on a plot adjoining her home. Situated in Chromepet and named after her parents, the centre offers free medical check-ups for anyone aged above 30. It also organises talks on health besides creating awareness on ageing and its attendant medical problems.

Embraced by bookshelves laden with volumes of cases she has treated after retirement, Dr Kanaka speaks of "mental hygiene" and "cobwebbing the mind". She keeps a watchful eye on the younger generation and rues that life is not the same as it was "when we were that age". "That's why diseases such as diabetes and hypertension set in so early," says the good doctor, who also follows a deeply spiritual path.

"I wanted to pursue spirituality in my early years but then my life took a different course," muses Dr Kanaka, who typically rises at 2.30 am to watch the rituals at Tirumala Temple on television. Although she chose to "marry medicine" and remain single, Dr Kanaka is anything but lonely. "From 6 am, someone or the other comes to me with requests for help," she explains.

Never pressured by her parents to get married, which was rare during the time she was growing up, Dr Kanaka feels she has sacrificed nothing to accomplish what she has. "If I had got married, I would have ended up sacrificing a little of this and a little of that." Then she adds, "After watching the way I cared for my brother before he passed away, my mother supported my decision not to marry. I guess she realised I was meant to serve." *

SALT OF THE EARTH



PUNJABI
by nature!

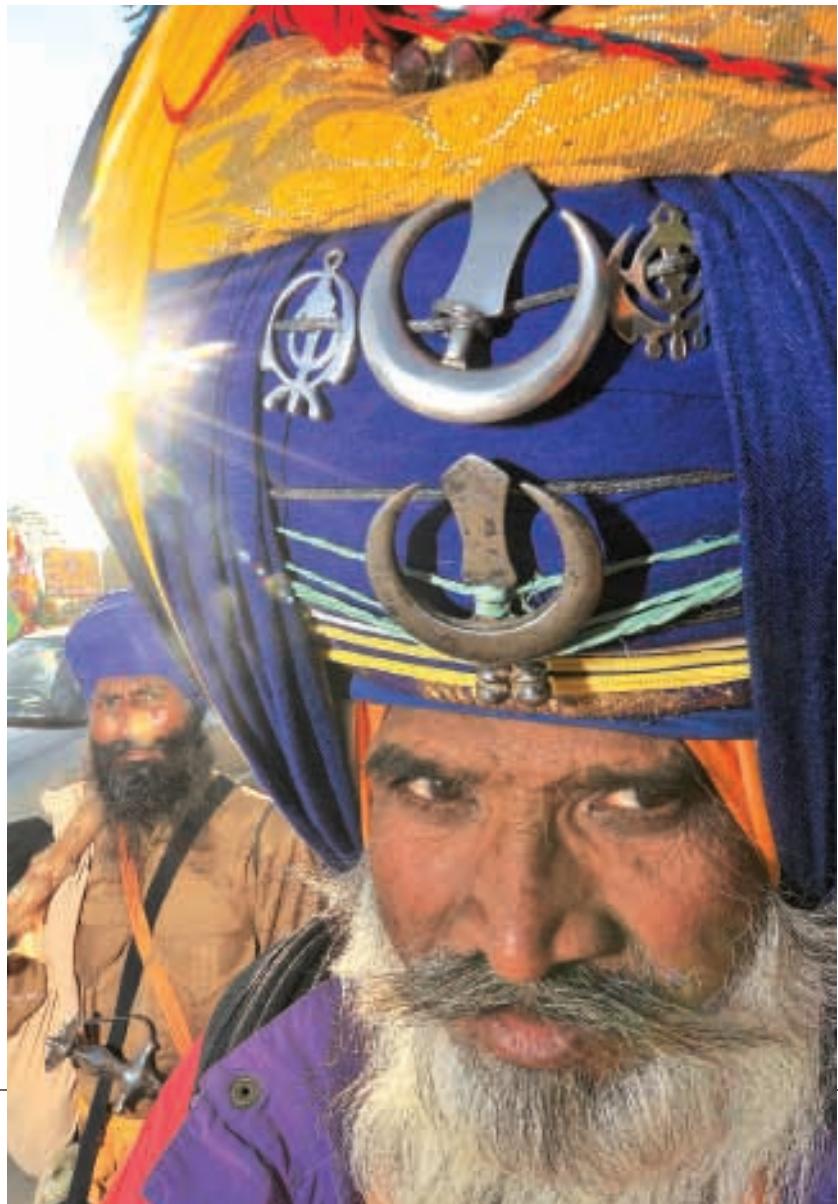
THINK OF PUNJAB AND THE MIND INSTANTLY SPINS IMAGES OF SUN-KISSED MUSTARD FIELDS, ROBUST MEN AND WOMEN, BHANGRA BEATS, INCREDIBLY TALL GLASSES OF CREAMY LASSI, AND THE GLEAMING FAÇADE OF THE GOLDEN TEMPLE. THOUGH EACH ONE OF US MAY CARRY A DIFFERENT IMAGE OF PUNJAB IN OUR HEARTS, ALL OF US KNOW IT AS A PLACE THAT FOSTERS GENEROSITY, WARMTH, HARD WORK AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. *SPARKLING PUNJAB* (VISION INDIA, ₹ 3,600, 236 PAGES) BY VIJAY SINGAL AND ATUL BHARDWAJ IS A LARGE-FORMAT BOOK ON THE LAND AND ITS CULTURE, RITUALS, LEGEND AND HISTORY VIVIFIED IN COLOURFUL SPLENDOUR THROUGH OVER 400 BEAUTIFUL PHOTOGRAPHS. GLIMPSES FROM THE BOOK....



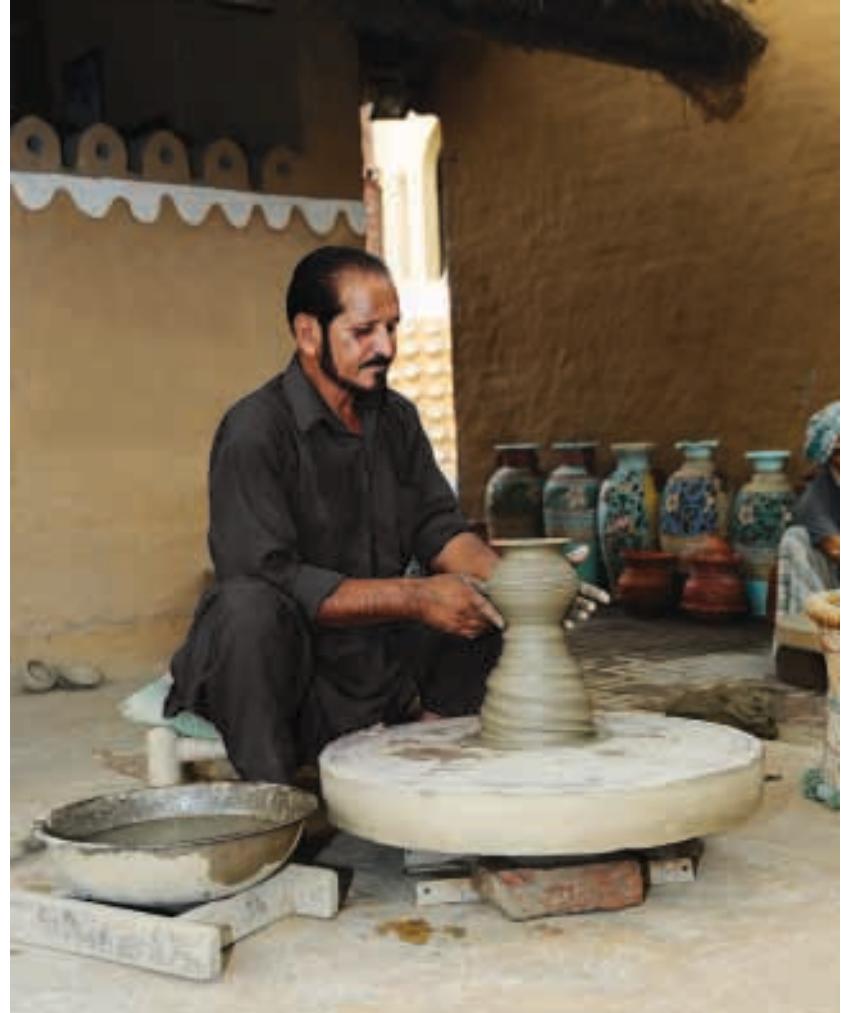
Postcards from the countryside: A milkman out on his daily rounds; (facing page) many Sikhs look forward to a holy dip in the sacred waters of the Muktsar. Muktsar literally means the tank of the liberated ones, so named after the Chali Mukte, or the 40 Sikh martyrs who laid down their lives on the banks of the lake Khidrana, fighting against the Mughal army in 1705. The lake was later rechristened in memory of the martyrs



(Above) A devotee resting, probably after offering his *Kar seva* refers to selfless service, work performed without any thought of reward or personal benefit. In the Punjabi language, such a worker is called a *Sevadar*. One often finds Sikhs engaged in free service in Gurudwaras—washing dishes, cleaning the floors, and serving food; (right) though Sikhs can be found in almost every part of the world, Sikhism is a young faith, founded by Guru Nanak only in the 16th century. On the right is a Nihang, wearing religious symbols on his turban. Nihang is an armed military order of the Sikhs



(Right) Pottery is a longstanding tradition in clay-rich Punjab, ranging from domestic items to delicate latticed pots and jugs, embellished with glittering mirrors and intricate patterns; (below) the need for cultivating individual strength for labour on the fields, the interdependence within the community and need of defence against onslaught of a common foe and dangerous animals must have given birth to sports like wrestling, running, jumping and weightlifting





Weaving of durries in myriad motifs and designs has been a long tradition in Punjab. These are also woven in stripes, checks, boards, squares, motifs of birds, animals and even plants; (below) a shopkeeper selling seedlings on the roadside



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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

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A LIFE for others

A degree in law has helped V K Narasimhan use the RTI Act for the betterment of silvers.

Shyamola Khanna meets the resolute octogenarian

In 1952, when V K Narasimhan joined the Railways he was a 19 year-old graduate eager to experience whatever life had to offer. He decided to study law during his first posting in Mumbai—a smart decision, as he came to realise. In 2005, when the Right to Information (RTI) Act came into effect, it proved to be a boon for people like him, who could understand it and use it. For others, he feels, it is just another 'right', like all other 'rights' that do not really affect our daily lives till someone takes them away!

For the common man who just wants to earn an honest living and go home with his hard-earned pension at the end of the day, the corruption in official circles is almost an insurmountable hurdle. This is where the octogenarian's understanding of the RTI has come in handy. Involved in Sweekar Upkaar—a non-government organisation that helps rehabilitate people who are physically and mentally challenged—since 1977, in 1991 Narasimhan felt he needed to bring older people together so they could enrich each others' lives by sharing joys and sorrows.

In 1993, he established the Senior Citizens' Forum in Secunderabad by recruiting four partners at the Parade Grounds where they came for their early morning walk. From the first five members, the forum has grown to an impressive 540, which includes 90 women. Narasimhan's wife Sarojini



Anand Soma

is joint secretary. The forum was also the place where RTI activity started in earnest after 2005; the word spread far and wide. Whenever a retiree is in trouble, Narasimhan is on hand to help. Teachers' pensions, Railways employees' arrears, and citizens fighting bribes and corruption... so far he has sorted out 65 cases.

The first case Narasimhan filed under RTI was for an LIC manager with arrears amounting to ₹ 18,000—he got his dues within 15 days. Then, there was the case of a woman government employee whose pension was reduced for no reason. In another case, one V R Radhakrishna (now 90) wanted to include his wife's name in his pension papers. The authority concerned said, "Now that he is already so old, let the event take place and then we shall see". Within a week of filing the RTI application, Radhakrishna's wife's name was included in the documents. The toughest case, though, was of the Railways officer who went on deputation abroad and didn't get his salary in the absence. It took almost three months but his dues—a little over ₹ 100,000—were finally settled.

Though Narasimhan has not faced any threats thus far, he feels the work is challenging as he has to study each case in detail and identify every angle before helping people draft letters. "He is one person who has relentlessly worked for the welfare of everyone who needs assistance," says Kamakshi Hatti Rao, secretary of the Senior Citizens' Forum. "From problems with renewal of passport to getting medical insurance claim and salary dues, he has looked into all complaints and always emerged with a solution."

"Despite the fact that most people do not understand the law and the average person is unaware of the reach of RTI, the Act is a great tool for the common man. Reluctance on part of government officials aside, it has helped us. And so has the chief information commissioner who, for his part, is always accessible. What's more, the RTI *challan* costs only ₹ 10; if the offices concerned do not answer the plea within 30 days, they are fined for delaying the procedure," explains Narasimhan, whose will to help people, despite his failing eyesight, has not dimmed. *



Seriously funny

Cartoonist B V Panduranga Rao shows us how big ideas can thrive in small spaces. Dhanya Nair Sankar returns wide-eyed

Even if we weren't in the midst of the cricket frenzy, B V Panduranga Rao's flipbook would still be something we'd flip for. The flipbook on cricket won him an entry last year both in *The Limca Book of Records* and *The India Book of Records* for being the tiniest flipbook made so far. Flipbook animation involves a series of pages where successive drawings are laid on top of one another in close register. In each drawing, a certain movement is created from beginning to end. When one flips the pages rapidly, one can see characters or features in motion. Generally, flipbooks come in size $3'' \times 4''$. Rao has made one that's much tinier: $1\text{ cm} \times 1.5\text{ cm}$. The book has 55 images and 65 pages and shows a cricket match in progress. "It took me 15 days to make and immense patience and imagination to apply the animation technique to get smooth movement," says Rao who had to discard many books till he achieved the perfect, seamless motion he had in mind.

ART

A former senior manager at Bhilai Steel Plant in Madhya Pradesh, Rao, who now lives in Bengaluru, has always been a prolific cartoonist. His work—addressing issues as varied as politics, sports, human resources and environment—has appeared in many dailies over the past 40 years. "At work, I would draw cartoons related to production, HRD, cost control, energy, environment, etc," he shares. "When my seniors noticed this, they moved me to the PR department and my cartoons were published in in-house journals."

The 67 year-old, who is president of the Karnataka Cartoonists' Association, has exhibited his work in Israel, Taiwan and Korea. He is saddened, though, when cartoonists give up the art to pursue more lucrative careers in animation. To keep the art form alive, he conducts workshops on cartooning; wrote a booklet for beginners; and has set up over 30 blogs that showcase his work and has tutorials on cartooning. Visit www.paanduhumour.blogspot.com

LITERATURE

FULLY BOOKED

THE WORLD CANNOT GET ENOUGH OF A BOOKSHOP IN KOLKATA.
PARTHA AND PRIYANKA MUKHERJEE SIZE UP THE PHENOMENON

Rabindranath Bhattacharya proudly says he is a father to 20,000 children. You may scoff at the number, but when you meet Bhattacharya you immediately sense that he means what he says—he is referring to the books in Punthi Pustak, his 55 year-old bookshop in Kolkata.

Walking down the aisles of his treasure trove, you can't help but feel awe at the solemn congregation of rare books, manuscripts, palimpsests and memorabilia gathered on shelves that kiss the ceiling: *Krishnakanta's Will* (1895), an English translation by Miriam Knight of the famous Bengali novel, *Krishnakanter Will* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay; *Hortus Subarbanus Calcuttensis - A Catalogue of Plants* by Jo Voigh (1845); *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan* by M Aurel Stein (1903); *Bengali Self Taught* by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (1927); *Military Report - Chin-Lusai* (1893);

Krishnachandra Rahashya Charitram (1811); *Constitution of India* (1949); and some rare gems like *Tent on the Plain – A Sunday Stop for Sunday School Children Part III* (1861). "I rescue them from the clutches of those who abuse them," says Bhattacharya with all the flair of a knight in shining armour. "Then I clean them, heal their scars, set their spine straight and rejuvenate them before I set them free across the globe."

Bhattacharya has customers all around the world. His exports alone raked in ₹ 2.4 million last year. He collects books from colleges and private libraries, and tracks sources of rare books and buyers from different countries through the Internet. His email inbox spills with queries from all across Europe and the US. Collectors of rare books from across India await his phone calls, and scholars from around the country and the world fly down to take photocopies of

rare manuscripts. The reading habits of his customers never fail to delight him. "Do you know that the Japanese are great lover of Bengali titles, Germans pronounce Sanskrit more flawlessly than we do, and the Dutch are keenly interested in Ayurveda?" asks the 72 year-old with a chuckle. There is very little he doesn't know about the books in his shop: "Taking one look at the cover, I can rattle off the topic that the book covers, the pages that have been torn out, the name of the publisher and the year in which it was launched."

Prices depend on the rarity quotient of the titles. An 80-page book on Raja Krishnachandra Roy comes for a jaw-dropping ₹ 120,000 while the *Golden Book of Tagore* (1931) can be obtained for a (relatively) more reasonable ₹ 25,000. You can call Bhattacharya on (0) 9143297424, (0) 9007520547, and (0) 9163052885, or write to him at rnb_bhattacharya@hotmail.com

You rock, doc!

Orthopaedic surgeon Dr Thomas Chandy reveals his musical side to Dhanya Nair Sankar

COLLECTION



Prasad Durga

DR THOMAS CHANDY'S passion for music is as old as his love for saving lives. At seven, he joined a church choir; at 16, he started a pop band; and in medical college, he formed a rock band and a jazz band. Jazz and rock are not subjects one typically expects a surgeon to rhapsodise over, but the founder of Bengaluru's renowned Hosmet Hospital knocks down all logical presumptions. Chandy, 61, rarely hits the bed without playing a few notes on his guitar. And though there may be other doctors with a musical bent, we don't know anyone with a larger collection of musical instruments. Chandy has about 350 of them, including many varieties of strings, percussions, wind instruments and keyboards, safely stored away in a 1,000-sq-ft, sound-proof, dust-free room in his house.

His passion for collecting musical instruments started when he went to the US for higher studies in the 1970s. "I enrolled myself at Brooklyn Conservatory of Music where I learnt to read music and then joined the University of Oklahoma to learn singing," he says. He started off by collecting guitars, then enlarged his collection over the years with piccolos, American flutes, pianos, accordions, sitar, a 15th century clavichord, 17th century harpsichord, and lutes (a stringed instrument used over 100 years ago that inspired the modern guitar). "Recently, I picked up one of the oldest Australian musical instruments, the Aboriginal didgeridoo," says Chandy excitedly.

While his patients keep him busy during the day, evenings often see him in the role of vocalist for jazz band, Jazz Revival and Hamstrings, a retro music band. "We practise once a week and perform at jazz clubs once a month," says Chandy. In the past, his hospital has also collaborated with his band to organise charity shows for poor patients. So what's on his mind when he is not thinking of ways to make music or soothe the infirm? "I dream of opening a museum for my instruments and exploring possibilities of turning music into medicine."

“I belong here”

French national Dominique Bondeau found love, loss and fulfilment in India. Shilpi Shukla meets the Kathak dancer



Lovejeet Alexander

Fifteen years ago, Dominique Bondeau, then 39, landed in Delhi as one of the many tourists who come to India fascinated by its legend and tradition. And she would have returned home with tales and trinkets, if she hadn't paid a visit to Jaisalmer. "I am connected to this city from my past birth," says Bondeau (now Damini) who never returned to her country.

Bondeau found everything in Jaisalmer her wandering heart desired: spiritual solace; mental calm; a sense of belonging; a loving husband; and a deep passion for Kathak. When she met Kamal Singh Chouhan in 1996, it was love at first sight. The duo tied the knot soon after, but their relationship met deep resentment and hostility from Chouhan's family and community.

Sadly, Chouhan died in an accident in 2006. "His death was reason enough for me to go back to France," says Bondeau. "My in-laws severed all ties with me. They didn't give me a meagre share in the property. Suddenly, I was all alone. But everything about Jaisalmer reminded me of him. There was no way I could leave this city."

DANCE

Much to everybody's surprise, she began training in Kathak three years ago at the age of 52. Bondeau was driven to learn the dance after she saw a Kathak performance, a few days after her husband's death. She approached classical dance guru Mohan Khan. Though Khan was reluctant to teach her initially because of her age, he relented when he noticed her determination. "I chose Kathak so I could immerse my spirit in Indian culture and live in my husband's memories," says Bondeau, her subtle French accent charmingly at odds with her ethnic Indian attire. Today, she is an accomplished dancer and performs in different parts of Rajasthan; she hopes to perform all over India and the world as well. Bondeau practices diligently every day for two hours. Isn't it difficult to start training in classical dance so late in life? "I've always fought against odds," she responds emphatically. "To be able to dance well, I practise yoga and maintain a strict diet regimen."

A practicing Hindu and a devout, helpful woman, today Bondeau is held in high regard by people in Jaisalmer. And she infuses grace not just in her dance movements but in every moment of life: "Life's been really difficult ever since Kamal died. But we had to go through tough times even when he was alive. God never said life would be easy."

POETIC GUSTO

RECENTLY, PROFESSOR V D PAULOSE FROM NABIN CHANDRA COLLEGE IN BADARPUR IN ASSAM WROTE HIS WAY INTO *THE LIMCA BOOK OF RECORDS* FOR ROLLING OUT A 'BREATLESS' POEM THAT RUNS INTO 600 LINES AND HAS 4,866 MONOSYLLABLES. PAULOSE HAS BEEN WRITING POETRY FOR TWO YEARS NOW AND MANY OF HIS WORKS HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO CHINESE, FRENCH, GERMAN, ITALIAN, GREEK, SPANISH, JAPANESE AND BENGALI.

Gem of a JEWELLER

Radhika Mohan meets a goldsmith in Chennai who shines above all odds



Chennai Pix

Goldsmith Ramu Achary has a rare integrity, as unusual as the ornaments he makes. The 54 year-old belongs to the Vishwakarma community of goldsmiths, commonly known as *thattan* in Tamil Nadu. In ancient times, the community was known for its sculptors and goldsmiths associated with temples. Earlier, many of them were also at liberty to perform priestly rites in temples, just like Brahmins. No wonder Achary regards his craft more as an act of reverence than a profession. Even today, he refuses to stray from the dictates of his ancestors who observed scriptures, time and rituals even for a task as unexceptional as placing a gem on an ornament. Gems were sanctified through ceremonial chanting, and goldsmiths sought the blessings from the temple deity before making every ornament.

Though he is proud of his heritage, Achary has had a tough time holding on to it. Amid the rising popularity of machine-made jewellery, he saw many craftsmen from his community die of penury and debt. For years, he and his family—his wife and three daughters—survived on one meal every day. Despite the painstaking workmanship involved, established jewellers drove a mean bargain and only offered a pittance. Things started to look up for him 12 years ago, when Crafts Council member Rajam Subramaniam approached him with a few orders. More work poured in and today Achary runs a small workshop at Mint Street in Chennai with two assistants.

Being a purist, he cannot bring himself to be swayed by the lure of commerce. "Machine-made jewellery may be quicker and cheaper, but it does not last long," he says. Every little piece of ornament he makes is handcrafted. The self-styled "specialist" is adept at reproducing ancient designs from gold toughened over coal-lit flames. Achary has revived the classic plaited South Indian design called *saradu*, which involves creating a 20-gauge gold thread, and plaiting skeins of two, four and three gold chains into an ornament. It takes him eight hours a day and 10 days to craft one bangle. He learnt the design from a craftsman in Puducherry 30 years ago. Today his legacy is poised at an ellipsis—no one in his family practices the art; he has no sons; and women are not allowed to enter the profession. However, he has taught the design to 30 other goldsmiths to ensure it does not fade into oblivion.



Temple of thought

The planets and stars may seem a million light years away. But they have dictated the form and orientation of some of the most fascinating architecture on earth. British architect W R Lethaby's book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, published in 1892, investigates the symbolism rooted in the cosmos that's embodied in ancient architecture. Excerpts....

Of all forms, the cube and the hemisphere are the most sacred; the first was that of the Sanctuary at Jerusalem, and that chosen by St John as the type of the Holy City; 'its length, breadth, and height were equal'. Mr Fergusson tells us that the temple of Herod was 100 cubits long in the body, 100 cubits high, and 100 cubits broad on the façade, 'so as to make it practically a cube, or at least a building of three equal dimensions'. The cube was the form of the shrine of one stone 40 cubits every way that Herodotus saw in Egypt; the Phoenician shrines found by Renan at Amrit; and the Caaba, 'the cube', of Mecca. The temples of Janus Quadriglans were 'built with four equal sides,

with a door and three windows on each side'....

In the Persian *Bundahish* it is said, 'From where the sun comes in on the longest day to where it comes in on the shortest day is the East; from where it comes in on the shortest day to where it goes off on the shortest day is South; where it goes in on the shortest to where it goes in on the longest day is the West; from where it comes in on the longest to where it goes off on the longest day is the North'. In the Talmud an exactly similar account is given. The sun rages, up and down the eastern and western horizon like a mighty beast prisoned in a cage; it cannot go farther because of the enclosing sides of the firmament. The

gates for it to pass to the lower world and rise again are only found in the ends of the box.

We need barely refer to the actual use of the Temple as a calendar; the sun ray entering at the eastern door at the moment of its appearance above the horizon was certainly registered, and so gave in a long series an accurate observation of the solar year; once a year more especially it exactly fell on the altar. Even now in some of the French cathedrals—Bourges and Nevers, for instance—diagonal lines may be seen right across the floor graduated into a scale of months and days. The observations and ceremony connected with determining the orientation, and laying the foundation stone, were of the

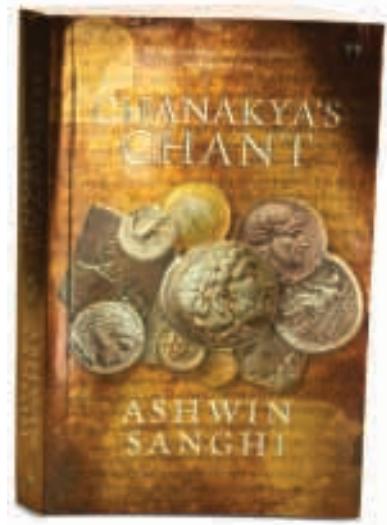
greatest importance. Brugsch gives an inscription recording the foundation of Abydos: 'I gave the order', says the King, 'to prepare the cords and pegs for the laying of the foundation in my presence. The advent of the day of the new moon was fixed for the festival of the laying the foundation stone'.....

A passage in Procopius gives a clear statement of the purpose in the orientation of Sta Sophia, the great Church of Christendom. He says, 'The part where the sacred mysteries are performed in honour of God is built towards the rising sun.' And of the Church of the Apostles, rebuilt by Justinian, in Constantinople, he gives this interesting relation: 'The lines were drawn in the form of a cross, joining one another in the middle, the upright one pointing to the rising and the setting sun, and the other cross line towards the north and the south wind. These were surrounded by a circuit of walls, and within by columns placed both above and below; at the crossing of the two straight lines, that is, about the middle point of them, there is a place set apart that may not be entered except by the priests, and which is consequently termed the sanctuary. The transepts which lie on each side of this about the cross line are of equal length; but that part of the upright line towards the setting sun is built so much longer than the other part as to form the figure of the Cross.'

The old Antiquary Stukeley gave a very clear account of orientation anticipating the points here set out. 'Ever since the world began, in building temples or places of religious worship, men have been studious in setting them according to the quarters of the heavens; since they considered the world as the general temple, or house of God, and that all particular temples should be regulated according to that idea. The east naturally claims a prerogative, where the sun and all the planets and stars rise. The east they therefore considered the face and front of the universal temple.'

Some things never change

Adi Shakti, Namo Namah; Sarab Shakti, Namo Namah; Prithum Bhagvati, Namo Namah; Kundalini Mata Shakti, Mata Shakti, Namo Namah. This Shakti Mantra is the leitmotif of **CHANAKYA'S CHANT** (Westland; ₹ 195; 448 pages), a gripping thriller on political lust by **Ashwin Sanghi**. As demonstrated by his debut novel *The Rozabal Line*, in which Jesus survived the crucifixion and settled down in India, Sanghi doesn't shy away from taking a few liberties with recorded history for the sake of telling a story. This book is no exception. The reader flits between two eras and two men: Chankaya and his efforts to establish a unified state under the leadership of his protégée Chandragupta; and Pandit Gangasagar Mishra, who schemes to make slum child Chandni Gupta the next prime minister of India. Both men are Machiavellian in their method; natural leaders with a penchant for playing puppeteer, masters of guile and strategy. In the process of telling their intriguing stories, Sanghvi shows us how the game of politics with its dirty tricks, blackmail and manipulation has



BONUS

The *Shakti Mantra* at the heart of this novel has been set to music by composer Ameya Naik—the four-minute track is divided into two segments, ancient and modern. You can download it free at www.chanakyaschant.com

changed very little over the centuries; it's just the nomenclature that's different—while Chanakya used *Vishkanya* and tantrics to do his dirty bidding, Gangasagar takes recourse to B-grade starlets and godmen. Simply written; thoroughly enjoyable.

—Arati Rajan Menon



WORLD SCAN

THE STRANGER IN THE MIRROR:
A MEMOIR OF MIDDLE AGE (CHATTO & WINDUS; 242 PAGES) BY JANE SHILLING:
THIS IS ONE WOMAN'S MEMOIR THAT LAMENTS THE PASSING OF YOUTH EVEN AS IT CELEBRATES THE MANY DISCOVERIES OF THE AGEING FEMALE BODY AND MIND; AN IRRESISTIBLE CELEBRATION-REQUIEM NARRATED WITH WIT AND VERVE.

Brain curry

At a heated debate on Darwin's theory of evolution in 1864, former British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli wondered whether we were apes or angels. Over this question, eminent neuroscientist Vilayanur S Ramachandran—director of the Centre for Brain and Cognition and professor with the Psychology Department and Neuroscience Programme at the University of California, San Diego—takes a middle path and says: "Science tells us we are merely beasts, but we don't feel like that. We feel like angels trapped inside the bodies of beasts,

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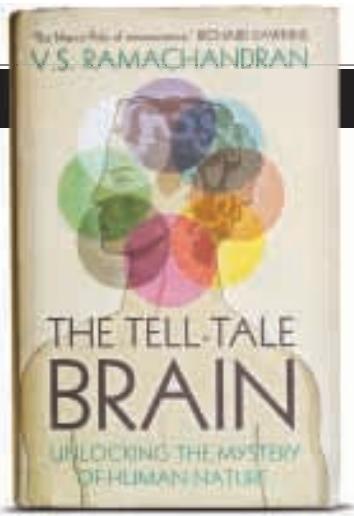
The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World by Iain McGilchrist

Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness by Roger Penrose

Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are by Joseph LeDoux

Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain by Antonio Damasio

The Mind's Eye by Oliver Sacks



forever craving transcendence." That, in a nutshell, is the human predicament for Ramachandran, and in **THE TELL-TALE BRAIN** (Random House India; ₹ 499; 326 pages) he sets out to crack it. Ramachandran switches roles between being Sherlock Holmes and Dr Livingstone, exploring the mysteries of an unmapped mental continent about which, he admits, "we still have precious little understanding". With its 100 billion nerve cells and infinite connectivity, the human brain is capable of making more connections than there are particles in the universe. How do we chart it? Ramachandran proposes an ambitious new framework to explain the self and its maladies. "By studying the abnormal, we can better understand the normal" he says.

A patient in San Francisco becomes progressively demented, yet starts creating paintings that are hauntingly beautiful. Has his brain damage somehow unleashed a hidden talent? Is there a Picasso, Mozart and Ramanu-

jan in all of us? "Who is this woman in the mirror who is always following me?" asks a woman whenever she sees her reflection in the mirror. Like vampires, she is terrified of mirrors. Why? Whenever Shirley looks at a number she sees it tinged with a particular colour; five is red, two is green, etc. This condition—called synesthesia—is eight times more common in artists, poets, and novelists suggesting that it may be linked to creativity. A specialist in phantom limbs, Ramachandran was able to discover, by using a damp cotton bud and a glass of water, a map of a missing hand on a patient's face. Just as compelling is his research into what he calls "the cross-activation of brain maps". By uncovering the neural basis of disorders such as synesthesia, in which patients attach colours to numerals, he hopes to come up with "deep insights into our marvellous uniqueness". Though the book seems to fall short of the promise of such depths as the immensity of the unmapped brain deserves, it definitely is an intermittently fascinating and informative read with generous helpings of humour. As Ramachandran puts it, "Hopefully, it will kindle your interest in what the pioneering neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield called 'the organ of destiny', and Woody Allen, in a less reverential mood, referred to as man's 'second favourite organ'."

—Jit Ray

BACK TO THE ROOTS

California-based **Awtar Singh**, one of the most sought-after geotechnical experts in America, recently launched his autobiography **DRIFTWOOD** (India Empire Publications; ₹ 999, 225 pages) in New Delhi. At 84, Singh looks back on a life marked with extraordinary accomplishments, pain, dilemmas and challenges. The book is written simply but thoughtfully, narrating flashbacks of his childhood in Lyallpur which saw some of the most blood-soaked

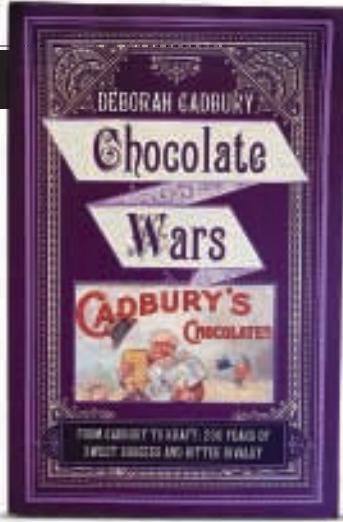


episodes of Partition; penniless migration to Delhi; his stint in the Indian Air Force; and his pursuit of a PhD in the US. There is also significant text devoted to his role as the key engineer in the Bhakra Nangal Dam project. Singh has set up many fellowships for Indian students in the University of Berkeley and has set up a computer lab in Lahore. When asked why he chose to launch the book in India, he simply said: "Because this is where it belongs."

—Lovejeet Alexander

Bitter chocolate

Here's a book chocoholics will covet. Suffused with info and trivia on the origin and growth of Cadbury's chocolate empire in Bournville, England, **CHOCOLATE WARS: FROM CADBURY TO KRAFT** (Harper Press; ₹ 399; 313 pages) is the labour of love of a descendant of the Cadbury dynasty. One has to hand it to **Deborah Cadbury**; in the hands of a less objective writer, the book could have ended up as a reverential account of ancestral legacy. Cadbury, though, remains remarkably unbiased as she talks about, well, Cadbury, and its attendant troupe of cocoa-rich rivals including Nestle, Hersheys, Frys, and Mars. Her thoroughness and research is both a blessing and a bane. There are elaborate passages on the process of making chocolate—that hinge heavily on the character of cocoa—that you may be tempted to skip and return to later. Equally soporific are the production figures that surface every now and then. The author nails our attention



MEAN BEAN

Cocoa may instantly conjure a sweet taste, but its history is not exactly

pleasant. According to a Spanish chronicler in 16th century Mexico, 'a tolerably good slave' was worth around 100 cocoa beans, a rabbit cost 10 cocoa beans, and a prostitute could be procured for as few as eight.

The Aztecs, an ethnic group from central Mexico, believed their most powerful gods could only be appeased by the daily ritual sacrifice of their prisoners of war. Their brutal fervour for tradition was matched only by their capacity for gore. In one ritual, the heart of a slave was gouged out while he was still alive. Slaves were expected to offer themselves to death with pride and courage. And those that developed cold feet were rendered unconscious with a special cocktail of chocolate mixed with the blood of earlier victims. Gulp.

—Rajashree Balaram

Wisdom and wonder

PURE SEQUENCE (Roli Books; ₹ 195; 168 pages) is **Paro Anand's** first novel for adults. Having written more than 19 books for children, her characters even in this one have a childlike innocence and glee, though they are all women in their 70s. Sheila, Kunti, Tosh and Satya are four friends from middle-class Delhi, who bond over rummy, *satsang*, ham sandwiches and ribald jokes. Though one might hastily sum it up as a book on ageing—and it is, in passages where characters speak with self-deprecating humour on post-menopausal hirsutism, flaccid body parts, thinning hair, and drooping

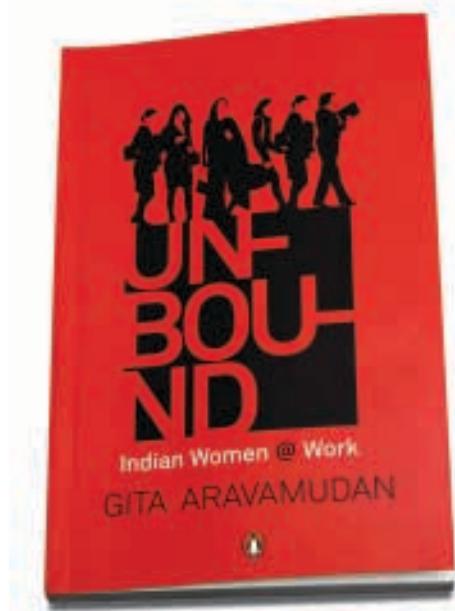


lips—it's as much about reclaiming life and forgiving yourself. The heart of the book lies in those moments when weathered wisdom spawns a fresh appreciation of things that one took for granted in one's youth.

Sheila loses her husband and regains her confidence; spinster Satya can't stop caressing a negligee she receives as a birthday gift from her friends; and Tosh and Kunti cannot stop giggling over a dirty movie and copies of *Playboy* stolen from sons. Though the humour borders on the lascivious, the laughter that obscures the tears pierces deep. A must-read for Indian silver women as it addresses issues that are intrinsic to their lives: the feeling of being redundant; the agony of selling a home that took a lifetime to build; the envy at one's own children for leading the fun-filled lives they do; and the wonder of being kissed at an age when you least expect it. Colloquial in tone throughout, you may not find elegant prose here—but you just might find yourself.

—Rajashree Balaram

“Behind every successful female is not just a supporting male but an entire family”



She started her career in journalism in 1960 when women reporters were unheard of. Sixty-three year-old former journalist Gita Aravamudan not only forayed into a male bastion but started reporting on gender issues at a time when politics, international relations and crime ruled the headlines. Aravamudan understood early on that gender inequalities colour almost every aspect of our society and thus began her lifelong commitment to gender issues. In her latest book *Unbound: Indian women@work*, she paints a paradoxical picture of today's urban Indian woman, empowered with a BlackBerry and breast pump, who doesn't just walk but runs up the career ladder, yet simultaneously battles the same old demons of dowry, work-life balance and harassment in various forms at the workplace. It is the capability of the individual that should matter, not gender, emphasises Aruvumudan in a conversation with Dhanya Nair Sankar

What made you report on gender issues at a time when no one really thought about it?

I started as a mainstream journalist in the late 1960s in *Indian Express*. I was the first woman reporter in Bengaluru. At that time, woman reporters could only do stories like covering a flower show or fashion. But the really passionate journalists stood their ground. In 1970, I got married, moved to Thiruvananthapuram and started freelancing. One of my first assignments was to do a feature on nurses and nuns in Kerala. That assignment was an eye-opener. I realised that my gender helped me access critical insight from this world. I also realised that women can highlight an issue more humanely. I learnt early on that there is a gender angle to every story and decided to focus on that in every story that I did.

What is the essential difference between working women of today and those of the previous generation?

Today's women are more confident in whatever path they choose but it is because of the previous generation of working mothers that this generation can access these workplaces with more confidence. Previously, women were made to believe that 'work' and 'career' were privileges bestowed to them. Many did not speak out against exploitation because of years of conditioning. But today's women are confident that they deserve to be where they are; they are able to take care of themselves much better. Yet some of the old problems persist. For instance, why should an

educated, working woman have to pay a dowry? Thankfully, things are changing.

When did you think about writing a book on working Indian women and changing gender roles? How exhaustive was the research?

The idea took shape in my mind when I wrote my first book *Disappearing Daughters* on female infanticide. I felt very depressed during that time because foeticide was committed even by the middle and upper middle classes. I wanted to show that with education and employment women can be economic assets. So I first explored the earlier generation of working women and their issues. The challenge was to find a focus for the book. Today's working women largely fall between the demographic of 25 and 45. I also wanted to focus on jobs like media, software engineering, cosmetology and even acting. I interviewed 200 females from various working as well as social backgrounds.

Is there any difference between problems of rural women and urban women?

There is no real urban and rural divide except for a social divide created by money. For instance, dowry is prevalent in both rural and urban areas. Child marriages are an urban reality as well; they are still practised in many slum areas. Domestic violence exists in villages and even in highly educated urban families as does sexual harassment in the workplace, whether in urban or rural areas.



Prasad Durga

Do you think today's women juggling both career and home are more stressed out than ever before?

Previously, women did not even have to think about the outside world. But then would you call a caged animal happy and not stressed? Even inside their households they had challenges to deal with. They did not have any access to the outside world, even if they were subjected to violence. Today's women are free but there is nasty competition out there and women have to prove themselves twice as opposed to male employees. The 'fairer sex' is still denied certain jobs. Workplaces have to evolve because women bring a lot more culture and discipline to the table.

How important is a man's role in a woman's success?

Behind every successful female is not just a supporting male but an entire family. Of course, marriage and child-birth are important and help evolve a new personality but these changes should not be forced on to a woman. We certainly don't want marriages dropping like a pack of cards but that doesn't mean a woman has to put herself and her aspirations on the back burner. I am glad to see some truly emancipated families where men don't mind letting their women go out and achieve their dreams while they look after home and kids.

Today, feminisation of ageing is a significant concept. What can be done to make ageing a pleasant exercise for the very aged women?

Today's very aged women belong to the previous generation of women who had no or little exposure to the outside world. Many of them have children who live far away and when they lose their spouse they go into depression. So we need more support groups that encourage them to develop newer interests and go out to experience the world. There should be a thrust from the state to give them quality healthcare, which includes physical and mental health.

After covering gender issues for almost 27 years, what does feminism mean to you?

I have always been a feminist and through my writing have stood up for the feminine cause. Feminism for me is to have a sense of person and strength in the female gender, and never to undermine the two. Female empowerment means to have pride in one's gender, to never regret it and to experience equality in every way.

So has the glass ceiling broken?

It has not broken but women have learnt to ignore it. Today's women have also decided not to become a clone of their male counterparts and have a distinct feminine pattern of achievement. Not all of them want to become CEOs but each one of them wants to be financially independent and have a sense of freedom. They choose not to have children or postpone the process. We have very good laws also in place but we still have a lot of inhibitions and taboos that women, finally, are willing to speak against.

Mind above magic

Reason with yourself before you seek refuge in the concept of God, says Benedict de Spinoza

It is accepted as certain that God himself directs all things to a definite goal (for it is said that God made all things for man and man that he might worship him).... Men think themselves free inasmuch as they are conscious of their volitions and desires, and never even dream, in their ignorance, of the causes which have disposed them so to wish and desire. Secondly, men do all things for an end, namely, for that which is useful to them, and which they seek. Thus it comes to pass that they only look for a knowledge of the final causes of events, and when these are learned, they are content, as having no cause for further doubt. If they cannot learn such causes from external sources, they are compelled to turn to considering themselves, and reflecting what end would have induced them personally to bring about the given event, and thus they necessarily judge other natures by their own.

Further, as they find in themselves and outside themselves many means which assist them not a little in the search for what is useful, for instance, eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, herbs and animals for yielding food, the sun for giving light, the sea for breeding fish, etc, they come to look on the whole of nature as a means for obtaining such conveniences. Now as they are aware, that they found these conveniences and did not make them, they think they have cause for believing, that some other being has made them for their use. As they look upon things as means, they cannot believe them to be self-created; but, judging from the means which they are accustomed to prepare for themselves, they are bound to believe in some ruler or



Anyone who strives to understand natural phenomena as an intelligent being is set down and denounced as an impious heretic

rulers of the universe endowed with human freedom, who have arranged and adapted everything for human use. They are bound to estimate the nature of such rulers (having no information on the subject) in accordance with their own nature, and therefore they assert that the gods ordained everything for the use of man, in order to bind man to themselves and obtain from him the highest honour.

Hence also it follows, that everyone thought out for himself, according to his abilities, a different way of worshipping God, so that God might love him more than his fellows, and direct the whole course of nature for the

satisfaction of his blind cupidity and insatiable avarice. Thus the prejudice developed into superstition, and took deep root in the human mind; and for this reason everyone strove most zealously to understand and explain the final causes of things; but in their endeavour to show that nature does nothing in vain, i.e. nothing which is useless to man, they only seem to have demonstrated that nature, the gods, and men are all mad together.

For example, if a stone falls from a roof on to someone's head, and kills him, they will demonstrate by their new method that the stone fell in order to kill the man; for, if it had not by God's will fallen with that object, how could so many circumstances have all happened together by chance? Perhaps you will answer that the event is due to the facts that the wind was blowing, and the man was walking that way. "But why", they will insist, "was the wind blowing, and why was the man at that very time walking that way?" So they will pursue their questions from cause to cause, till at last you take refuge in the will of God—in other words, the sanctuary of ignorance.

Hence anyone who seeks for the true causes of miracles, and strives to understand natural phenomena as an intelligent being, and not to gaze at them like a fool, is set down and denounced as an impious heretic by those whom the masses adore as the interpreters of nature and the gods. Such persons know that with the removal of ignorance, the wonder which forms their only available means for proving and preserving their authority would vanish also.

Excerpted from The Ethics by Benedict de Spinoza, a renowned 17th century Dutch philosopher

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Fizz factor

Launched by Coca Cola in 1961 to deflate the growing effervescence of Pepsi's 7 Up, Sprite, the citrusy, caffeine-free soft drink, went on to up the stakes and scale in the cola wars. Coca Cola concocted one of its smartest marketing strategies when it launched the drink—as it had a unique sharp, tart taste unlike the cloying sweetness of others in the category, it was positioned as a 'mixer' to tame the neat and nasty side of whiskey and vodka. (The drink is commonly used by skilled bartenders around the world to whip out some of the meanest cocktails; check out www.barnonedrinks.com/drinks/by_ingredient/s sprite-840.html.)

Fizz and fun apart, Sprite has always been associated with a no-nonsense, edgy attitude. For more than two decades, the brand has been associated with the NBA championships in the USA, with basketball legends like Kobe Bryant, Tim Duncan and Lebron James endorsing its punch. While it was launched with the tagline, 'Taste its tingling tartness,' and held on to the memorable 'I like the Sprite in you' for more than a decade, in India it won teenagers and young adults over with a slogan loaded with undiluted chutzpah: *Seedhi baat, no bakwaas.* Cheers to that.



THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: APRIL 1961

- On 12 April, Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space.
- On 14 April, the US launched the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba to overthrow the communist regime of Fidel Castro.
- On 17 April, to commemorate Chatrapati Shivaji, the Indian government issued a stamp bearing his image.
- On 23 April, American singer-actor Judy Garland performed in a comeback concert at Carnegie Hall, New York.

BIKELASH

n. A strong, negative reaction towards cyclists, particularly by police officers or drivers. Also: **bike-lash**.

Example: Call it a **bikelash!** The NYPD has been ordered to begin a borough-wide crackdown that will hit renegade riders for often-overlooked 'vehicular offenses' like failing to obey traffic signals and signs, breaking the speed limit, tailgating, and even failure to signal before turning.

—Thomas Tracy, "Bikelash! Cops to crack down on two-wheelers", *New York Post*, 5 January 2011

“ Imperfection is beauty; madness is genius; and it is better to be absolutely ridiculous than absolutely boring.

—American actor and singer
Marilyn Monroe



Did you know that flushes were used as early as 4,500 years ago? Or that the Dholavira province in Harappa was known for its nifty sanitation and water conservation technique? Welcome to the wacky world of sanitation. If you are in Delhi, the Museum of Toilets situated in Dwaraka is worth a dekko. The brainchild of Bindheshwar Pathak, the man behind NGO Sulabh International, the museum chronicles the history of toilets in some of the oldest civilisations around the world, arcane sanitary practices, quirky lavatory models and the latest innovations. The museum is not large; a two-hour tour is enough to take it all in: photographs, information on toilet etiquette and sanitary-related laws, privies, chamber pots, and toilet furniture, some of it dating back to 2500 BC.

on-call-ogist

n. A doctor who is frequently on call, particularly one who earns a living by filling in for other doctors. Also: **oncallologist**.

Example: For surgeons such as Dr Rabinovich, it means cobbling together a job by filling in for others in what is jokingly referred to as the burgeoning new specialty: the **on-call-ogist**.

—Lisa Priest, "Canadian surgeons face flat-lining job market", *The Globe and Mail*, 24 February 2011

tiger mother

n. A loving but strict mother who demands from her children obedience, respect, and academic excellence.

Example: Amid all the psychosocial caterwauling these days over the relative merits of **tiger mothers** and helicopter dads, allow me to make a pitch for the quietly dogged parenting style of the New Caledonian crow.

—Natalie Angier, "Nurturing nests lift these birds to a higher perch", *The New York Times*, 1 February 2011

MARRIAGE LITE

n. Mildly derogatory term for an unmarried couple who live together or a couple who have formed a civil union or similar partnership.

Example: They are right about the fact that cohabitation—what some call **marriage lite**—is changing the social map. Census figures show the proportion of adults in de facto relationships more than doubled between 1986 and 2006. With other countries showing similar shifts, many social scientists studying this trend conclude marriage lite is not a change for the better.

—Bettina Arndt, "Shacking up is hard to do: why Gillard may be leery of the Lodge", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 2010

magnetricity

n. A magnetic charge that acts like an electrical charge.

Example: Electricity has a new little sister:

magnetricity. A team of physicists in England has created magnetic charges—isolated north and south magnetic poles—and induced them to flow in crystals no bigger than a centimetre across.

—Devin Powell, "Magnetricity created in crystals of spin ice", *Wired Science*, 14 February 2011

RETOX

v. To resume the consumption of alcohol, caffeine, and similar substances after a period of detoxification. —*adj.*, —*n.* Also: **retoxication**

Example: I end up binge-drinking and smoking to pass the time. It's childish, I know, but I think I'd go mad otherwise. I'd like to suggest we do something else this summer but my husband, who works hard as an accountant, refers to the annual holiday as his **retox** and says it makes his life worth living.

—Anne-Marie C, “Graham Norton's problem page: My daughters hate my girlfriend”, *The Telegraph*, 12 August 2010

“ A man who views the world the same at 50 as he did at 20 has wasted 30 years of his life.

—Boxer Muhammad Ali

manther

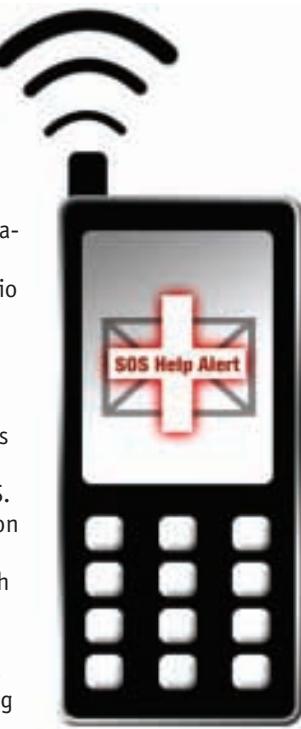
n. A middle-aged man who seeks sexual or romantic relationships with significantly younger women.

Example: Undulating vineyards, juicy weather, lingering melodies and memories, charming people (cougars and **manthers**) will be in attendance — caveat emptor.

—“A quick word: Brooke Fraser, Jason Kerrison and Jeremy Redmore”, *The New Zealand Herald*, 3 February 2011

HELP, HELP!

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fake-ation

n. A vacation where a significant amount of time is spent reading email and performing other work-related tasks. Also: **fakeation**, **fakation**, **facation**. [fake + vacation.]

—**fake-ationer** *n.*

Example: Forget about staycations. They're so 2008. The new trend for 2010 is the **fake-ation**. As an avid fake-ationer myself, I had mixed feelings about seeing the results of the latest traveller survey from Newton-based TripAdvisor....The survey, which polled more than 3,000 people who use TripAdvisor, also shows 62 per cent check their work email while on vacations and 13 per cent call the office to check in.

—Jon Chesto, “TripAdvisor finds an increasing number of fake-ationers who take their work on the road”, *Mass. Market*, 9 November 2010

LYCRA LOUT

n. An aggressively rude or reckless cyclist.

Example: Here, Simonetti is not some **Lycra lout**, some Lance wannabe, or any of the other epithets often hurled at cyclists. He's simply Joe. He's the guy who rides his bike to work.

—Tom Vanderbilt, “Rage against your machine”, *Outside*, 2 March 2011

"I have seen many people die because they couldn't afford even the cheapest of medicines. Something needed to be done and I am doing my bit"

Omkar Nath Sharma, 74, Delhi, for gathering medicines for the poor



Lovejeet Alexander

He comes from a financially modest background. He cannot walk fast or run ever since a childhood accident at 12 ruptured his knees. He looks after his son, who, after an accident, is often unwell. Yet, compassion comes easy to **Omkar Nath Sharma** who goes from door to door, collecting unused medicines and requesting people to donate drugs for patients in need. Affectionately called 'medicine baba' by children, Sharma wears a red kurta bearing his mobile number (09250243298) and the words 'Medicine Man'. He walks 5 km daily, tirelessly making the rounds of different localities throughout the year all over Delhi. After carefully scrutinising the drugs and keeping meticulous accounts, Sharma donates them to patients through a network of around 10 NGOs and hospitals including Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Hospital. Having spent 27 years as a medical assistant at Kailash Hospital, Noida, Sharma began his labour of love three years ago. It isn't an easy job. "Yes, some people are cynical and unmoved by the cause," he rues. "Many even think I am a cheat!" That's why gestures like a recent phone call from Kuwait warm his heart. "I was so touched and amazed when they offered to donate medicines all the way from there."

Dr Mahavir Prasad Vast, head of pharmacy, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, says, "It's difficult to find people like him, who despite their handicap are willing to serve mankind." We second that.

—Shilpi Shukla

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