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APRIL 2014 ₹ 40

celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

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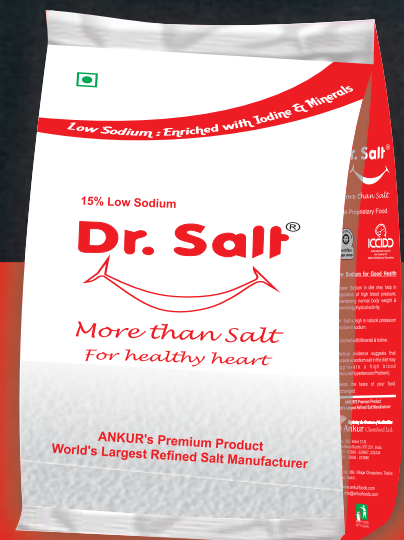
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Value your vote

Action is the most exalted noun in this magazine—for good reason.

Whether it is to stoke our minds, protect our bodies, broaden our horizons, safeguard our finances, shore up our security, indulge our self-expression, realise our potential or come together as a community of silvers, every facet of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, indeed Harmony for Silvers Foundation as an entity, is a call to action, a cry for a more proactive way of thinking, feeling and living.

Now, with the general elections upon us, there is a call to action on a national scale. We have much to criticise the government for—and we do. We have much to ask of it—which we do. We have many lost opportunities, broken promises and non-starter initiatives to bemoan—which we do. But we can also play a decisive role in choosing the government we have—which we very often don't.

This is as true for silvers as any other target constituency in our India. In fact, viewing oneself as a constituency—a collective of people who have the ability to make a difference—is the first step. Political apathy is not just an act of omission; it's hazardous for silvers at a time when it is vital to bring the concerns of India's elders to the national front-burner.

Inform yourself about the issues, the candidates, the manifestos. Evaluate what is important, analyse track records, ask some tough questions and make logical decisions based on what matters to you. In the run-up to the polls, the office bearers of advocacy groups like the All India Senior Citizens Confederation (AISCCON), Federation of Senior Citizens Confederation of Maharashtra (FESCOM), Association of Senior Citizens Organisation of Pune (ASCOP), HelpAge India and the International



Suresh Natarajan

Longevity Centre (ILC) recently came together to discuss the possibility of silvers exercising the 'NOTA' option at the ballot box during the election if their long-standing demands, primarily the revision of retirement age to 65, are not met. If exercised by a large number of people, the NOTA—or None of the Above—option, introduced by the Election Commission in the general elections for the first time in India, has the power to throw several electoral calculations in disarray. Our intention is not to advocate this approach, mind you, but to point out that it exists and silver associations in India frustrated by a series of non-responsive governments are looking at it as an actual option for its members.

The bottomline is that the exercise of democracy brings with it choices—it's time to learn yours. We will never tell you who to cast your ballot for but do cast that vote. Universal adult franchise is not just a phrase; it is power in your hands and it doesn't come along very often. Act wisely and use it well.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

Harmony Celebrate Age—April 2014 Volume 10 Issue 11

Publisher **Dharmendra Bhandari** Editor **Tina Ambani** Deputy Editor **Arati Rajan Menon** Assistant Editor **Srirekha Pillai**

Copy Editor **Sai Prabha Kamath** Correspondent (Mumbai) **Neeti Vijaykumar** Consultant Editors **Malvika Singh, Meeta Bhatti** Design Consultant **Jit Ray**

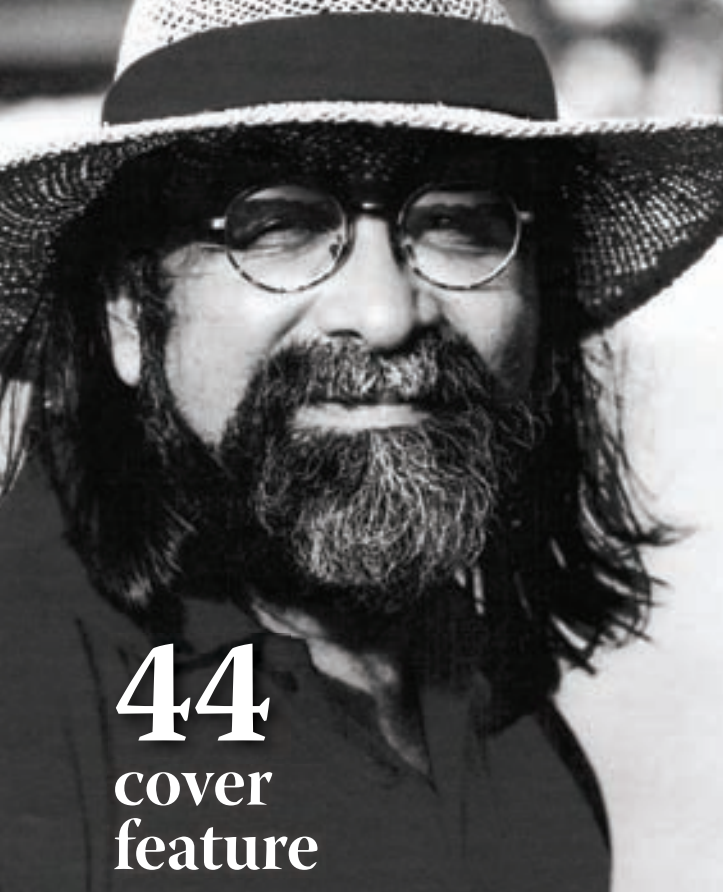
Head - Imaging **Anuradha Joshi** Studio Manager **Haresh Patel** Graphic Designer **Dattaguru Redekar**

Production Manager **Rohidas Adavkar** Website Coordinator **Ajit Nair**

Assistant Vice-President, Business Development **Shrenik Mehta** Assistant Manager, Business Development **Kumar Kislay** Marketing Coordinator **Johnsi Nadar**

Editorial & Marketing Offices: Reliance Centre, 1st floor, 19, Walchand Hirachand Marg, Ballard Estate, Mumbai-400001. Tel: 91-22-30327115 (Editorial), 30327102 (Marketing). Email: contact.mag@harmonyindia.org **Printed and published** by Dharmendra Bhandari on behalf of the owners, Harmony for Silvers Foundation

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd, 18-35, Milestone, Delhi-Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007 (Haryana). **Published** at Reliance Energy Centre, Santacruz (East), Mumbai 400055. **Disclaimer:** The material provided by *Harmony* is not a substitute for professional opinions. Readers are advised to seek appropriate advice from qualified and licensed professionals in the concerned field. © Harmony for Silvers Foundation. All rights reserved worldwide. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited. *Harmony* does not take responsibility for returning unsolicited publication material. www.harmonyindia.org



44
cover
feature

Off the beaten track with Prahlad Kakkar, the 'madman of advertising'

Cover courtesy: **Genesis**

every issue

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

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

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

82 . SPEAK: Radha Parthasarathy on running a self-help group for women in Thandalam village in Tamil Nadu

Volume 10 Issue 11

index

features

34 . Diary 100: Stock trader Palaniappa Chettiar supports community and educational projects in Rayavaram

37 . Legal Eagle: S K Nangia takes the RTI route to ensure government accountability

54 . Humour: A tribute to celluloid legends who have tickled our funny bones

62 . Destination: Check out Bhutan, the only country in the world with a gross national happiness index

columns

24 . FOOD FACTS: Wellness expert Namita Jain on cooking oils that work best for you

26 . SILVER LINING: Padma Shri Dr V S Natarajan on the need for periodic blood pressure check

28 . YOGA RX: Shameem Akthar reveals poses to make your hands attractive and robust

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STORY TELLER

Indira Bagchi provides book therapy for young minds

FINDING PEACE

Dr Pritam Minz returns to his roots to set up a missionary hospital in Rourkela

FOR SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANCE CONTACT: Harmonycare, Living Media India Ltd, A-61, Sector 57, Noida (Uttar Pradesh) - 201301.

Toll-free: 1800 1800 100 Phones: New Delhi: (0120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India

Fax: (0120) 4078080; **Kolkata:** 033-22827695 **Fax:** 22828949; **Bengaluru:** 080-2212448, 22213037, **Fax:** 2218335;

Mumbai: 022-66063355 **Fax:** 24444358; **Chennai:** 044-28478525 **Fax:** 24361942; **Email:** harmonycore@intoday.com

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

Every month, in *Harmony-Celebrate Age* we endeavour to publish a quality read that conforms to the highest editorial, design and production standards. Owing to the increased cost of newsprint due to rising inflation and the strength of the dollar, we are compelled to raise our cover price to ₹ 40 from the April 2014 issue. It is seven years since we last raised the price of the magazine. This is an inevitable step to ensure that we continue to meet the high benchmarks we have set for ourselves—and continue to inform and inspire you, our readers. Thank you for your continued support!



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column one

Of all the therapies available to us, laughter is the most pleasurable. It's proven to be good for body, mind and soul; it enervates us and, being universal in nature, binds us to a greater community of people—you really do never laugh alone.

This April, the joke is on us—literally. First, we have irrepressible adman-scoruba diver-restaurateur-bon vivant Prahlad Kakkar who lives life to the hilt and tells us, "Though it is great cracking jokes at everybody else, you need to start with yourself." From wooing women to reading non-verbal cues to perfection, an appreciation of the lighter side of life has reaped rich rewards for the 64 year-old, who insists there is an element of insanity in every creative person. The power of the jester is further reinforced by our pictorial feature on some of India's funniest, who share their own comic inspirations and laughter mantras. And if you believe happiness is a natural segue to laughter, travel with us to Bhutan, our destination of the month and the only country in the world with a gross national happiness index.

Elsewhere, read about our centenarian of the month Palaniappa Chettiar, the lucky mascot for his village Rayavaram in Tamil Nadu and all his family businesses, who remains in rhythm with the cadence of the stock market. And RTI activist S K Nangia who keeps the government on its toes, holding it accountable to the public. Speaking of money, economist Priya Desai gives us the skinny on inflation-indexed bonds—are they right for you?

Whatever your questions, the answers are right here. Happy reading!

—Arati Rajan Menon

For years now, I have been getting a copy of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, which directly goes to the library of Manipal Institute of Communication. The magazine is greatly appreciated by our students who come from different parts of India and all around the world. I am 92 plus and still working. I wish you good luck for the continued success of your excellent periodical.

M V Kamath

*Honorary Director
Manipal Institute of Communication*

The first Annual General Body meeting of the National Alliance of Senior Citizens Associations of India (NASCAI) was held in Chennai, with former judge of Madras High Court Justice S Jagadeesan and eminent cardiologist Prof Dr V Chockalingam being elected president and vice-president. The newly elected members reaffirmed NASCAI's mission to support silvers in ways that strengthen and preserve families, encourage community engagement and foster independence.

S M Chellaswamy

Secretary General, NASCAI



With reference to "App Alert" ('Orbit', March 2014), it is being proclaimed that reading e-books is catching up against physical books. It is a misnomer that reading and writing habits in our country are dying slowly because of the invasion of technology. If that were the case, new magazines wouldn't find their way to the stands every month. Today, almost all popular international magazines have an Indian edition. Of course, newspapers and magazines have an e-edition too for their survival. But they can't replace the printed word. Very few can read an e-edition the way we read a print edition. Personally, I like print editions for their feel and convenience.

Mahesh Kumar Kapasi

New Delhi

AN INVITATION FROM HARMONY

We are looking for contributions from our readers.

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 - You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
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LOVE ALWAYS

A 25 year-study of American couples has one resounding take-away: **Marriage gets better in old age.** Really. After studying 156 middle-aged and silver couples in San Francisco, University of California - Berkeley psychologist Robert Levenson, John Gottman of the University of Washington and Stanford University's Laura Carstensen have come to the key conclusion that couples who think 'we' rather than 'me' have a better shot at resolving conflict. "The emotional story for long-term marriages is really quite positive," says Levenson on website *psychology.berkeley.edu*. "People who get through the first 15 years of marriage learn to value each other. They don't have a lot of contempt for one another. They accept each other. They take pride in one another's accomplishments. There's this genuine respect for one another. They are no longer engaged in futile attempts to change one another." Citing communication and child-rearing as enduring conflicts in marriages, he insists that it is the wife who is the key to calming marital conflict. The jury may still be out on that one.

ANALYSE
THIS

Cruise control

The road is long but not necessarily hard for the silver driver. As vehicles get safer and elders healthier, America's Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has declared that **today's drivers over the age of 70 are less likely to be involved in crashes than previous generations**—and less likely to be killed or seriously injured if they do crash. According to their study, published in *The New York Times*, fatal crash rates per licensed driver fell 42 per cent for older drivers and 30 per cent for middle-aged ones

(aged 35-54) from 1997 to 2012. The greatest rate of decline was among drivers aged 80 and over, nearly twice that of middle-aged drivers and drivers aged 70 to 74. "This should help ease fears that ageing baby boomers

are a safety threat," says Anne McCartt, co-author of the study. "Further, older drivers are putting more kilometres on the odometer than they used to, although they're still driving less than middle-aged drivers."



FEELING POORLY

Feeling poor can hurt your health, even if you're not that badly off. According to a German study, **silvers who assess themselves as poor get sick more often (38 per cent) than those who do not**. The probability of dying earlier is also much higher for people who believe they are in penury—around 40 per cent for men over the age of 50. As Associated Press reports, scientists Maja Adena and Michal Myck of Berlin's WZB (Social Science Research Centre) interviewed silvers across 12 European countries to arrive at these findings. "We have established that though their actual asset levels vary significantly from what respondents perceive them to be, it is the subjective understanding of their financial status that eventually has a decisive impact on their health. This underlines the importance of financial literacy among elders, making people aware of their assets and net worth going beyond just the money in the bank."

HAVE THEM YOUNG

Children born to older fathers are at a higher risk of psychiatric disorders, autism and academic problems, according to a study of over 2 million people by Indiana University in collaboration with Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. For instance, compared to a child born to a 24 year-old father, a child born to a 45 year-old father is 25 times more likely to have bipolar disorder and 13 times more likely to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The study was published in *JAMA Psychiatry*.



GENERATION GAP

THE VALUE OF INTERGENERATIONAL BONDS ASIDE, THE GENERATION GAP IS A REALITY THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED. ACCORDING TO A NEW STUDY BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, **OLDER PEOPLE OFTEN INTERPRET THE PUBLIC ACTIVITIES OF YOUNGER PEOPLE AS ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR,** ENGENDERING AN ATMOSPHERE OF MISTRUST. HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY, WHICH SURVEYED 185 TEENS AND PRETEENS (AGES 11 TO 15) AT A SECONDARY SCHOOL AND 200 ADULTS IN THE SAME AREA OF LONDON:



Over 80 per cent of adults consider swearing in a public place anti-social, compared to less than 43 per cent of young people.



80%



Over 60 per cent of adults see everyday activities such as cycling or skateboarding on the street as antisocial, compared to less than 8 per cent of teens.



60%



Over 40 per cent of adults view 'hanging around' (just congregating in public) as anti-social compared to 9 per cent of teens.



40%



The only thing they equally agreed on: murder and assault are anti-social.





SUPER-LIKE: WHILE THERE HAS BEEN A 25 PER CENT DIP IN USERS IN THE 13-17 AGE GROUP, THE NUMBER OF FACEBOOK USERS ABOVE THE AGE OF 55 HAS SKYROCKETED 80 PER CENT, FROM 15.5 MILLION IN 2011 TO 28 MILLION TODAY.

More measures



Last month, in “Bill of Rights”, we told you about a new draft note offering **welfare measures for silvers** circulated by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment among other ministries and stakeholders. Now, media reports suggest that there have been some interesting additions to the proposals. These include raising the retirement age to 65; special concessions for destitute widows and widowers who enter into matrimonial alliances after the age of 60; reemployment initiatives; and integration of welfare programmes to promote cross-linkages between old age homes and orphanages.

“The committee would like the Ministry [Social Justice and Empowerment] to seriously consider the various options, which would include reviewing the age of retirement, re-employment

opportunities for retired persons, and setting up a directorate of employment and rehabilitation for senior citizens,” Hemanand Biswal, head of the standing committee which tabled its report in the Lok Sabha, told media. “The National Policy for Senior Citizens recognises productive ageing as the key to the welfare of senior citizens. With the increase in life expectancy and relatively better state of health of people, the government needs to look at continuity of employment up to 65 years or greater post-retirement opportunities for senior citizens so that society continues to draw upon their experience.” The committee also draws attention to the underutilisation of allocated funds under the Integrated Programme for Older Persons scheme with projects such as old age homes and day care centres languishing. Now, who will bell the cat?

JAPAN at work

Tradition is being fast replaced by realism in the land of the rising sun. As a new report from the Japan Research Institute reveals, **Japan leads the world in employing silvers**, with over 10 per cent of the country’s working population now made up of people over the age of 65. If that sounds meagre, consider the fact that the figure falls within 1-5 per cent for Western counterparts, including the US, UK and Europe. While Japan’s ‘productive age’ population (people between the ages of 15 and 64) went down by 1.23 million last year, the number of employed people increased by 410,000 leading to 63.1 million in total. The trend can be attributed to companies that continue to hire people who are past this age bracket. One example quoted in the Reuters report is that of Maeda, a construction company engaged in rebuilding works in tsunami-hit towns and preparations for the 2020 Olympics. “We

10%

of Japanese working population comprises people above 65

are going to recruit people with dependable skills who can be self-starters,” Koichi Obara, president of the company, tells news agency Reuters. “There is a need to create an environment where older

people’s skills are valued and where they can earn the same pay for their particular job or skills, regardless of whether they work full-time or on contract,” underlines Kenji Yumoto of the Japan Research Institute. No argument here.



IT TAKES A VILLAGE...



Paradoxically, a traditional way of living may prove to be a most effective approach to ensure independence for silvers in future. **Organisations across the US are coming together as part of the 'village movement', a growing initiative to help people who want to stay in their homes as long as possible rather than move into a care facility.** For instance, in Bellingham, Oregon, non-profit Ashland At Home trains volunteers to help silvers in the neighbourhood with transportation, household chores and doctor's visits. It was set up by Katharine Danner and Jon Shaughnessy who were inspired after watching a TV show about America's first village programme in Boston's Beacon Hill neighbourhood. "We do the kinds of thing a person would ask a friend or a neighbour to do," Danner tells local newspaper *The Bellingham Herald*. "This is not just a one-off but a replicable movement that's gaining ground across America." She's right—today, there are over 100 village organisations in the US with more than double that number in the works. Read more about the village movement on beaconhillvillage.org, vtvnetwork.org and villagesnw.org



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See and be seen

In her 50s, she was so “frumpy” that she put away her leopard-skin tights but now she’s 70, more stylish than ever, and determined to reclaim lost space and ground. Angela Neustatter’s *The Year I Turn: A Quirky A-Z of Age* (Gibson Square Books) is a call to arms to all women to fight back against the “invisibility” that insidiously descends upon them with the passage of time. “This invisibility thing is so ridiculous, ludicrous,” she insists in the book. “And conforming to someone’s idea of what you should look like or wear at any particular age is patently not logical. A woman should not be restricted to beige because she is 50. Or not listened to because she isn’t young. We need to have more confidence in having a voice and I do think that things are starting to change.” Her prescription for women: work towards financial empowerment and better health your whole life to keep yourself whole and strong. For her part, she’s wearing animal print again. And, as she informs us, she’s having “the best sex of my life”. We sure heard that.



RAMPAGE!

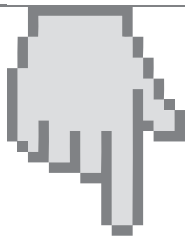
This is what happens when the enfant terrible of the fashion world decides to channel his inner silver. **French designer Jean Paul Gaultier, now all of 61, gobsmacked audiences at Paris Fashion Week with his ‘space-age meets Brit punk collection’ featuring silver models.** As London newspaper *Daily Mail* tells us, the silvers took the stage by storm with their giant grey mohawks and silver bouffants, sporting tartan kilts, biker jackets and Doc Marten boots in a frenzy of Union Jacks, leather, sequins and space helmets. “One of the hottest trends for autumn is putting two fingers up to ageing gracefully,” says Gaultier. “That’s what this show is all about.”

The great ESCAPE

DROLL, DELIGHTFUL and more than a touch whimsical, this film will have the child in you chuckling, right alongside the grandchild beside you. Based on a bestselling book by Jonas Jonasson, Swedish comedy *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* is the story of Allan, who, on his 100th birthday, takes off on an adventure. Along the way he picks up not just lots of money and an incredibly large new friend (try an elephant for size!) but learns to look back on his own life with a sense of satisfaction. “I think all people are kind of afraid to be old... So it’s liberating to see a man who has the biggest adventure ever waiting for him. It’s something we can all relate to and it’s a very universal story,” director Felix Herngren tells website *euronews.com* after premiering at the Berlin Film Festival. The film was released across Europe in March.



FLICK TIME



NEW IN NEW ZEALAND

WWW.FINDARESTHOME.CO.NZ IS A NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED BY THE NEW ZEALAND AGED CARE ASSOCIATION (NZACA) TO HELP PEOPLE FIND A CARE HOME FOR THEIR AGEING RELATIVES; THE SITE PROVIDES COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION AND STRAIGHTFORWARD ANSWERS TO A VARIETY OF QUESTIONS ABOUT REST HOMES, HOSPITALS AND DEMENTIA CARE AND THE LEGAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS.

Sunrise, again



A SILVERING JAPAN is becoming increasingly sensitive to the needs of elder Japanese. Take the case of *San San (A Sparkle of Life)*, a distinctly un-orthodox film that is being welcomed by critics and audiences alike. Directed by Bunji Sotoyama, its protagonist, Tae, is a 77 year-old widow who turns to a marriage matchmaking service to look for a partner after spending years caring for her late husband. "The end of care-giving may provide a moment of relief," the 33 year-old director tells website www.japantimes.co.jp. "But a void in life will become painful. Many people would like to have romance in old age. Why shy away from the fact?"



Vantage POINT

Weaving together the strands of her own colourful life with the events that shaped her time, prolific British author Penelope Lively executes a deft memoir-chronicle two-step in *Dancing Fish and Ammonites* (Viking; 244 pages), her "view from old age". With close to 30 children's books and more than 20 offerings for grown-ups under her belt—including 1987 Booker Prize winner *Tiger Moon*—the 80 year-old converses enchantingly and engagingly about the world both personal and political, stating emphatically that "history is not so much memory as collective evidence. I am a demographic pioneer who is gobbling up benefits and giving grief to the government," she writes. "In 1961, there were just 592 people over the age of 100 in this country; by 2060 there will be 455,000. Consider those figures, and gasp."

FLICK TIME

De-clutter

A simple robot vacuum cleaner is doing wonders for Denmark's elderly care system. As London newspaper *The Guardian* explains, the contraption itself is quite unimpressive—an automated device that spins around the floor with sensors to avoid walls and a simple chip to ensure it doesn't cover the same ground again. But its impact is much more significant—by cutting down the number of cleaners required in care homes, it is freeing up more personnel to care for silver residents. In fact, a survey by advocacy group DaneAge tells us that 84 per cent of managers responsible for elderly care in the country's municipalities either use or are about to start using robot vacuum cleaners. "With financial compulsions forcing the government to cut welfare spending, these are simple but effective ways to make our money stretch further, and use it where it really counts," says Jens Hoejgaard of DaneAge.



Stem-cell secret

Finland-born, Bahama-based billionaire fashion designer Peter Nygard, 70, has claimed that he has managed to 'grow' younger, literally, owing to four years of intense stem cell therapy. He is now building a one-of-a-kind stem cell research facility in the Bahamas, and promises to soon reveal all about the specifics of his treatment protocol.

B-stable

Here's one way to keep your feet on the ground. Israel-based start-up B-Shoe Technologies—B for balance—is developing **smart shoes that prevent silvers from falling**. Toggled out with a motion sensor and a microprocessor, the shoe will detect any potential loss of balance and roll the shoe backwards gently to restore the wearer's equilibrium. B-Shoe is the brainchild of Dr Yonaton Manor, who began to research the science behind balance and falling after he succumbed to a fall at the age of 80. "We wanted to understand how falls take place so that they could be dealt with scientifically," he tells newspaper *The Times of Israel*. "After studying the biomechanics of the human

body, balance maintenance and disorder, centre of gravity, base of support and the backward step healthy and younger people take to regain balance, which older people often do not take because of slowed reflexes, we came up with the idea for B-Shoe." The company is now seeking funds to start mass production—rollout is expected in two years.

FALL
PROOF



Heal the pain



Photographs by Haresh Patel

On 5 March, Dr Priyanka Shukla from Birla Kerala Vaidyashala, Andheri, gave an informative talk on treating joint pains with Ayurveda at the Harmony Interactive Centre in south Mumbai. Explaining why silvers are prone to joint pains, she highlighted the role of lubricating fluid between the joints, which reduces with age, causing friction between the cartilage, leading to redness and swelling of the surrounding muscles and unbearable pain while moving. She followed this up with a brief on arthritis, the causes and symptoms, and then discussed treatment options and changing lifestyle habits.

An early dinner, sufficient time gap between meals and sleep, a brisk walk after meals and drinking milk on an empty stomach are some of the tips she mentioned. "To improve the lubricating fluid in the cartilages of the joints and for removal of gas in the intestines, use one spoon of *desi* ghee," she advised. "This will not increase your cholesterol levels. Along with this, you also need morning sunlight, which provides Vitamin D required for absorption of calcium." She also elaborated upon various Ayurvedic therapies, such as *Panchakarma*, which involves a massage using herbs and oils that relieves stiffness and

swelling, followed by *Virechan*, which removes toxins from the body; and *Basti*, which cures arthritis and neck pain using herbal concoctions of sesame oil.

Following the Ayurvedic route, on 7 March, Dr Vipul Khira from Jewel Hospital, Juhu, spoke about a non-allopathic approach to dealing with hypertension. He explained the causes and risk factors for hypertension, and offered tips on how to control it, including a positive mental attitude, walking 150 minutes a week as exercise, and reducing salt and caffeine intake. The key factor is, of course, diet, which must be low on sodium and high on fibre. He also discussed various Ayurvedic treatments for hypertension, while cautioning that none of these should be taken without consulting a qualified Ayurvedic doctor.

On 10 March, Mahavir Jain, a software engineer with an interest in memory training, created quite a buzz among the 40 silvers present for his session. Starting off by asking members to share their own tips on how to remember better, he also gave a short presentation that included simple tricks such as remembering through categorising, planning and meditating, and some offbeat ways such as



Clockwise from top left: Jain shares memory training techniques; Dr Shukla on treating joint pains; Dr Khira on dealing with hypertension

learning to dance or sing. "Observation is 50 per cent memory," he said. "By recognising what sensory channel best helps you learn, whether it is visual, audio or by doing things, you can train your mind to remember better." The session was interspersed with paper-based observation activities such as finding objects in a picture or finding an odd letter among repeated letters, which every member thoroughly enjoyed.

—Neeti Vijaykumar



Find a friend. It's time to up your social activity. According to a new study by the University of Chicago that tracked the health of 2,000 men and women over the age of 50 for six years, being lonely in later life is a health hazard—feeling cut off from others can push blood pressure up into the danger zone, disrupt sleep, weaken the immune system and raise the risk of depression.

Then: Gift card
Now: Wire holder



RECYCLING FACTS

- In India, plastic consumption, which is currently 8 million tonne a year, is expected to increase to 20 million tonne by 2020.
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) is the plastic resin used in making gift cards and CDs; about 75 million pounds of PVC material from plastic cards ends up in landfills every year.

If you're a heavy shopper, you might have a bunch of plastic gift cards given by stores that run out of validity after a year or so. Most developed countries have now started giving out biodegradable cards, but it'll be a while till we see that in India. Meanwhile, instead of letting them accumulate in landfills, upcycle them into wire holders or cable shorteners with just a blade and a punch machine. First, measure out a line near each of the long edges of the card

without reaching the ends. Next, with a card-cutting blade (or a craft knife), make deep cuts along the line and then join the cuts with additional incisions at a slight angle at the end of the lines, so that you get two edge strips. Next, punch holes on the shorter edges and use the blade to make V-shaped joins to the holes. You're done! Now you can wrap cable or earphone wire around the edges, and secure the ends through the punch holes.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. IF YOU ARE INTO ART, USE GIFT CARDS AS STENCILS.
2. MAKE NEW BOOKMARKS BY USING A BLADE AND YOUR IMAGINATION TO CUT UP GIFT CARDS INTO WHATEVER SHAPE YOU WANT.



MAGNIFYING GLASS WITH LIGHT

Available for: Android 2.3 and up;
iOS 5.0 or later

What it does: To read in the dark, zoom in on those tiny prescriptions written on pill bottles—this is one of the most simplest and yet handiest utility apps that is a must on every smartphone. The technology behind it is absolutely simple: the app uses your smartphone's camera to take a picture of the tiny text, and lets you zoom in on the picture. While you could do this without the app—just through your camera—the app's zooming feature is sharper (up to six times more zoom), and you can even adjust the light levels (on iOS). If your phone does not have a flash, the light feature might be useless.

After installing: When you open the app, all you have to do is point the camera at the text you are trying to read. The light will come on automatically. On the iOS app, you can also upgrade to the PRO version and use features such as high contrast reading, crystal clear view and image stabiliser.

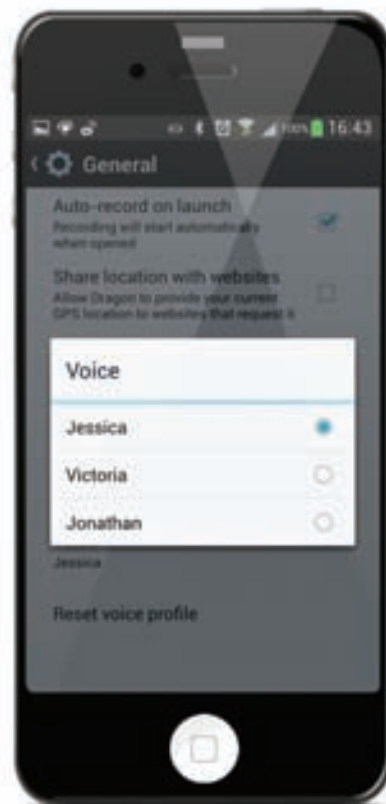
If you find yourself in an emergency situation and have to fumble around for the phone, spotNsave is an app with a bluetooth-bracelet that helps you send out a distress message with just the click of a button on the bracelet. Chirag Jagtiani, a Hong Kong-based entrepreneur, developed the app to track the user's movement through GPS and send location information to a guardian angel network. All one has to do is buy the bracelet and download the app on one's phone. There are three ways to get your loved one's attention when you're in trouble: by clicking on the power button of your phone twice, by going to the app and manually sending out a message, or by clicking twice on the button on the bracelet. Your designated contacts will get a link to your location every two minutes, updating your location. Available on www.spotnsave.com for ₹ 2,300 plus shipping charges.

DRAGON MOBILE ASSISTANT

Available for: Android 2.3 and up;
iOS 4 or later

What it does: Sort of like the super intelligent operating system in Oscar-nominated film *Her*, this mobile assistant lets you use your phone hands-free. It's a great help if you think working through your smartphone with its tiny touchscreen buttons is a task. This free app (called Dragon Dictation on iOS) with its powerful voice recognition can type out texts, search the web, launch apps, share your location, navigate your way by using maps and read back texts and emails.

After installing: Once installed, set up your voice profile by going to the settings page. In the 'Driver mode' tab, you can set up the 'wake up phrase'. This phrase (which by default is "Hello dragon") awakens the app and sets about fulfilling your command even if your phone is locked or inactive. You can also enable the 'detailed prompts' option; the app will voice back your command so that you can confirm that it has got it right.





JUICES for the heart

Those who drink wine, especially red wine, in moderation have a lower risk of diabetes and heart disease, according to a large-scale global study (that also covered India) by the George Institute for Global Health and The University of Sydney. Conducted on 11,140 Type 2 diabetics (diagnosed after 30) above the age of 50 from 20 countries, the study found that wine drinkers had a 22 per cent lower chance of heart attacks, with a 23 per cent reduced death risk.

However, researchers insist that alcohol is not a medication that reduces the risk; it is just that those who consume alcohol have a lower risk, and its effects on the liver need to be noted.

In another study connected to diabetes, it has been revealed that **packaged fruit juices are high in sugar content and are a major contributing factor to Type 2 diabetes**, almost as much as a cola drink. Researchers at the University of Glasgow compared 250 ml of a fizzy drink to that of packaged juice and found that its energy and sugar content matched—while the fizzy drink had 105 kcal and 26.5 g of sugar, fruit juice contained 110 kcal and 26 g of sugar. It's better to have the fruit rather than its packaged, processed juice, they advise. India is expected to be the fifth largest diabetic country in the world, with the number of those affected rising from 61.3 million to 101.2 million in 20 years, according to the International Diabetics Federation.

Diabetes is the leading cause of coronary artery disease in silvers, followed closely by smoking and hypertension, according to a study conducted at a hospital in Andhra Pradesh to determine the major risk factors for elderly and young patients of coronary artery disease (CAD). Published online in January 2014 by Heart India, the study looked at 100 admitted patients over 45 years and 90 below 45 years. Among the older patients, diabetes contributed majorly towards heart diseases at nearly 21 per cent, whereas for younger patients it was hypertension at 20 per cent. The other risk factors for elderly were smoking (17 per cent), hypertension (14 per cent), kidney disease (11 per cent), high blood fat levels, obesity, and alcohol consumption.

SLOW AND STEADY

A study of people over the age of 60 by the Northwestern Medicine Group in the US reveals that **being sedentary is a risk factor for physical disability**. In India, 25 per cent of the elderly population has some form of visual impairment, 14 per cent have hearing difficulties, and 11 per cent have either senility or difficulties in physical mobility,

with women suffering more than men. The fact that most silvers, for fear of disability or fractures, reduce their physical movement and exercise could be one of the leading causes of disability. The study claims that the risk of disability doubles with every hour of inactivity. The team followed 2,286 adults aged



60 and older and compared people in similar health with the same amount of moderate vigorous activity, which they defined as brisk walking. The participants were monitored through accelerometers to make the research objective, as older and heavier people tend to overestimate their physical activity.

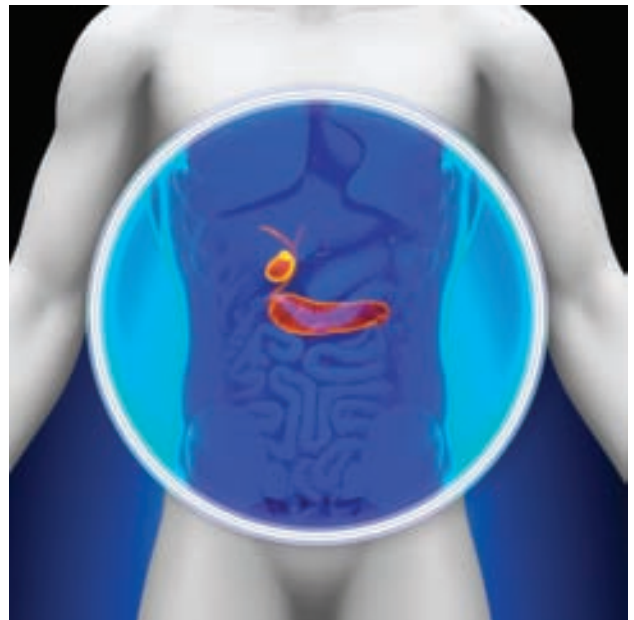


Being hospitalised for a medical or surgical condition could raise the risk of dementia and depression by nearly 40 and 60 per cent respectively in silvers over 65, according to researchers at the University of Michigan. The 3 Ds—depression, dementia and delirium—affect most elderly patients who are hospitalised, which leads to other ailments that add to the cycle of re-hospitalisation. The study suggests that negative outcomes of hospitalisation and the healthcare system possibly contribute to alarming cognitive decline.

EARLY SIGNS

Pancreatic cancer is one of the most fatal kinds of cancers, mainly because it is difficult to detect in its earlier stages when signs are few and hidden. Finally, researchers at Saint Louis University in the US have figured out **a way to detect pancreatic cancer early**: if a patient has been affected with acute pancreatitis (inflammation of pancreas), his/her risk of pancreatic cancer goes up. This is especially significant for people over 70 years of age, as ageing significantly increases the risk of pancreatic cancer after pancreatitis. The team has found a vital link between pancreatitis and detection of cancer in its earlier stages.

In the study, about 1.5 per cent of those who had an episode of acute pancreatitis after the age of 40 developed pancreatic cancer later on, compared to 0.13 per cent who weren't affected previously. However, 12.1 per cent of the patients who were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer had acute pancreatitis sometime earlier. What's more, those over 70 had four times greater risk of being diagnosed with cancer after pancreatitis, compared to those between 41 and 50. It was previously established that about 80 per cent cases of pancreatic cancer occur between 60 and 80 years of age.



Researchers, therefore, suggest that at the time of treating pancreatitis, patients should also be screened for pancreatic cancer, as almost 55 per cent of these patients are diagnosed with cancer within three to 24 months of the episode.



Gautam Ruparel

The stick MAN

For nearly four decades, one man has selflessly nurtured the national sport of hockey in Mumbai. There was never a motive; just a simple passion for the game. Two recent accolades received by **Merzaban Patel**—the Lifetime Achievement Award conferred by the Sports Journalist Association of Mumbai in September 2013 and a Senior Citizen Award called the The Unstoppables in December 2013—are a recognition of a resolve that has only grown stronger with each passing year.

It is hard to believe that Bawa, as he is fondly called in hockey circles, never played competitive hockey in his younger days. “We just never had a hockey team in school [he studied at Sir J J Fort Boys’ High School],” he says with a smile. It was the Republic Day of 1963 that saw the beginning of a journey that has lasted through joys and hurdles alike. Little did Bawa know that his association with the Bombay Republicans Club, which was founded on that day by former national level referee Balram Krishna Mohite, would last for years and do Indian hockey a world of good!

“There was no personal agenda in mind while starting the club,” he says. “The idea remains the same: to give youngsters a platform to showcase their talent.” The early days were spent in the stands, watching Mohite in action and learning the nuances of coaching. In 1975, Bawa jumped into the mix and has never looked back. With no formal training, it was all about learning by watching and doing. “It took me about five years to establish myself. I still possess no certificate or degree in hockey,” he says with a grin.

Going by what the club has achieved, the lack of certification has hardly mattered. Over the years, Bombay Republi-

cans has given the national hockey team a number of players. Cedric D’Souza, Clarence Lobo, Jude Menezes, Gavin Ferreira, Viren Rasquinha, Adrian D’Souza, Girish Pimpale, Cornelius D’Costa and Yuvraj Walmiki mastered the stick trade under Bawa’s watchful eye and have graduated to playing at the highest level, some of them even participating in the Olympics.

In addition to the club, Bawa also coaches at two schools—Our Lady of Dolours, Marine Lines, and Children’s Academy, Malad—free of charge. These are boys from underprivileged backgrounds who have, against all odds, earned laurels for their schools over the years. “I pick them up from various places and when they come to me they have no idea what hockey is. But they have the hunger to learn and their dedication helps them succeed,” says Bawa, who also gives them an opportunity to play for Bombay Republicans if they show the potential.

It may seem like a perfect script but it hasn’t been easy for the man who has to provide them with kits, take care of their diet and even hand them a travelling allowance to make it to practice and back each day. “They cannot afford a lot of things that come easy to some of us. I do not want to burden their households so I ensure I provide them with everything. I want them to simply focus on their game. Over the years, costs have gone up and it has been difficult. At these times, I dig into my own pockets to run the show,” says Bawa, on whose steam the Bombay Republicans continues to roll even after 50 years. Evidently, Indian hockey needs more like him at the grassroots to relive the sport’s golden days.

—Gautam Ruparel



BIRTHDAYS

● **Roshan Seth** (left), who has acted mainly in Hollywood and British films, turns 72 on 2 April.

● Indian playback singer **Hariharan** turns 59 on 3 April.

● Martial artist **Jackie Chan** (right) turns 60 on 7 April.

● American director and producer **Francis Ford Coppola** turns 75 on 7 April.

● **Kofi Annan**, the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations (1997 to 2006), turns 76 on 8 April.



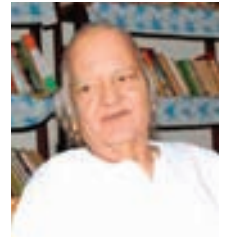
● Actor **Jaya Bachchan** (left) turns 66 on 9 April.

● Hollywood veteran **Jack Nicholson** turns 77 on 22 April.

● Veteran actor **Zohra Sehgal** turns 102 on 27 April.

IN PASSING

● Eminent Hindi writer and Jnanpith Award winner **Amar Kant** (right) passed away owing to ill health on 17 February. He was 89.



● **Harold Ramis**, Hollywood actor and director known for his classic comedy films, died on 24 February. He was 69.

● Renowned artist **Prokash Karmakar** (left) passed away on 24 February at the age of 81.

● Telugu writer **Janamaddhi Hanamachhaastri** died on 28 February at the age of 90.

● Veteran artist **Prafulla Dahanukar** passed away on 1 March after prolonged illness. She was 80.

● **Khushwant Singh** (right), Indian journalist, author and Padma Vibhushan awardee, passed away peacefully on 20 March. He was 99.



MILESTONES

● Environmentalist and social activist **Chandi Prasad Bhatt** (below), 79, received the Gandhi Peace Prize on 28 February for his contributions towards the environment.



● **Alfonso Cuarón Orozco**, 52, won the Oscar for Best Director for his film *Gravity* at the 86th Annual Academy Awards 2014 on 2 March.

OVERHEARD



"I'm really not against cosmetic surgery but what's the point of getting stuff done when I'm looking to play people my age? They are not going to cast me as a 35 year-old—there are 35 year-olds to do that. You have got to think very carefully what you want done. I've always believed you only have one go at life, which is thrilling. Only you can make yourself into who you want to be. Don't blame anybody else. You are entitled to free fresh air and that's it. Do the rest yourself."

—**British actor, author and former model Joanna Lumley**, 67, in the April issue of *Good Housekeeping* magazine (UK edition)

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

BACK TO SCHOOL

As retirement approached in 2001, I wondered what I would do with my life. Typically, people are propelled towards something they were touched by at some point. I naturally gravitated towards helping children with their education, especially in rural schools.

Born in 1944, I had a modest upbringing and was schooled in a nondescript village named Kuruvimalai in Thiruvananthapuram district, Tamil Nadu. The infrastructure was poor and going to school meant walking barefoot for five miles. We had to study in the glow of kerosene lamps and if there was something we did not understand, we had no idea whom to reach out to.

Under the circumstances, I think it's a miracle that I managed to complete high school at all. Still, it was this

education that landed me a clerical job with the Southern Railways in Chennai and I retired as office superintendent!

I started by giving a basic educational kit to every student in Kuruvimalai Panchayat School. The kit includes a dictionary, an atlas, *Thirukkural* (a classic of Tamil couplets) and essential stationery items. I gradually increased the number of schools I help and also contribute items like mats, wooden benches, cupboards and plates. In the past 14 years, I have managed to help around 6,000 children.

Each kit costs ₹ 200 and I allocate around ₹ 50,000 a year for this cause. I make it a point to visit each school and interact with the staff and students. I also usually take a family member along with me in the belief that the more they are involved, the more likely they are to continue this tradition.

It's back to the roots for Subramanian (second left)



My wife has been a pillar of strength, even when I was struggling to make ends meet. My two sons and daughter are now post-graduates and well-settled in their careers. When I discussed spending a portion of my pension on my mission, there was tremendous support from everyone. When my daughter started working, she gave away her first salary to her alma mater and set up an endowment reward.

I know that my contribution is miniscule but when I see the children blooming and making an identity for themselves, I cannot help but feel proud. Many of these children, who began at the grassroots level, have solid careers and can support themselves financially. This is very gratifying for me. I have also worked with nationalised banks that have budgets for corporate social responsibility activities, and guide them in their efforts.

I believe that even if a couple of students return to their schools to help them, it could make a world of difference. There are so many people out there who would like to help other people but don't know how. When people offer me donations, I encourage them to do it on their own. I tell them to choose the schools they studied in, return to their roots and contribute.

I know all this is only a drop in the ocean but if many of us keep adding to it, I believe that, one day, it will make a significant impact on society.

—N Subramanian, Chennai

A POWERFUL FORCE

A group of professionals including myself set up the Aakar Aasha Trust in 2001, to perform reconstructive surgery for the physically disabled. What started as a non-profit organisation that periodically conducted intervention programmes has since blossomed into a 200-bed hospital at Kukatpally in Hyderabad and now includes programmes we had not planned on taking up!

When we started out, we used to organise health camps across the country to enable the physically disabled. The turning point came in 2010, when we connected with Shivananada Rehabilitation Institute, which gave us the land for starting the hospital. That's when we realised that we should institutionalise our work. The result was the Aakar Aasha Hospital, which provides reconstructive surgery, especially to those who cannot afford it.

Our dream would not have materialised without the participation of the community at Kukatpally-Bhagyanagar. It was heart-warming to see an amazing number of senior citizens help in diverse ways. In 2009, at one of our major camps, we had asked for volunteers. The government hospital and medical college had just started its 'Aasra' card campaign for senior citizens of Hyderabad and one of the



Dr Swain's initiative for the physically disabled has silver support

members brought all these elders to help us. It was the beginning of a very long and fruitful friendship between seniors and our organisation.

We realised there was a congruence of interests between the two streams—we were dealing with disabilities while here was this group that was mentally very active and caring but their bodies and age-related issues were slowing them down. Although we had not planned on offering geriatric care, the intervention of these wonderful seniors brought geriatric rehabilitation into the ambit of our vision. The Elder Health Care Programme at our hospital is just taking off and I believe it will evolve into a vibrant and active platform. Why, the seniors have even formed a committee to raise issues we need to look at.

Social isolation is a major issue for seniors and I am happy to see a large number of elderly coming together to work for a cause. Groups offer support and motivate you to take care of yourself. Also, there are many 70 and 80-year-olds who are actively involved in the community, despite their ailments. So, if you aren't doing that already, make a start.

—Dr Bhartendu Swain, Hyderabad



FOOD FACTS BY NAMITA JAIN

Oil change? Learn which cooking medium works best for you

Different oils fill different needs. For good health, our body needs a variety of healthy fats found naturally in different oils. Just as there are bad fats that contribute to heart disease and other maladies, there are good fats that help keep LDL (bad cholesterol) low and HDL (good cholesterol) high; in addition, they reduce inflammation and provide cancer-preventive antioxidants.

The market is flooded with a variety of oils. Companies leave no stone unturned to convince the common man about the health benefits of their products. But which oil to use in the kitchen is a big question that can only be answered by an expert nutritionist.

The type and combination of oils to be used in cooking depend upon key components such as smoke point, fat composition and flavour of the oil. As with any food product, it is important to read food labels when selecting oils. Look for oils that are high in polyunsaturated fat (PUFA) or monounsaturated fat (MUFA) as these fats are more cholesterol-friendly. Avoid any oils that contain trans-fats, saturated fats, or packages that say the product contains 'partially hydrogenated' fats, as these can raise your cholesterol levels.

What you must know

- **Smoking point of oil** refers to its tolerance to heat. Heating the oil changes its characteristics. Oils with low heat tolerance are not suitable for frying or cooking at high temperatures. Heating such oils not only destroys their nutritional value but also releases harmful toxins (free radicals). They can also introduce trans-fats, throwing all potential health benefits out of the saucepan.
- **Fat composition:** While selecting the oil, focus on monounsaturated fats as they are rich in antioxidants like Vitamin E and, unlike other fats, can actually help increase HDL levels and decrease LDL levels (a good thing), while reducing inflammation. Olive oil, peanut oil, avocado oil and sesame oil are examples of monounsaturated fats.
- You need to be a little cautious with polyunsaturated fats as these come from plants and have been generally seen as a healthy alternative to animal fats. Although they, too, can improve your HDL-to-LDL ratio, they are also high in omega-6s, which need to be balanced with omega-3s. Sunflower and safflower are examples of such oils.

- **Saturated fats** should be kept to a minimum as they are not friendly to your arteries and boost the risk of heart disease and stroke. Examples of such oils are butter, coconut, palm, palm-kernel oil.

Oils and their qualities

- **Sunflower oil:** This mild-flavoured oil is high in Vitamin E. Look for the refined high-oleic version, as it is 80 per cent monounsaturated and has a high smoke point. Good for high heat cooking.
- **Safflower oil:** This is an all-purpose oil and has a mild flavour. Choose the refined version for high heat cooking.
- **Soybean oil:** It has a high smoking point and can be used for frying and high heat sautéing. Has 25 per cent monounsaturated fat, 15 per cent saturated fat and 60 per cent polyunsaturated fat, particularly linoleic acid and alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), in the right balance. It is mild and neutral and takes the flavour of the dish.
- **Mustard oil:** This oil is traditionally used in West Bengal and is prized for its characteristic flavour (pungent and sharp). It is generally available as filtered oil; refined mustard oils are sold as vegetable oil. Mustard oil has a higher proportion of MUFA and is also a rich source of PUFA. However, it also contains erucic acid, a fatty acid that has undesirable effects on health when consumed in large amounts. Mustard oil is suitable for all types of cooking, including frying, but should be used along with other cooking oils to reduce the erucic acid content.



Normally, no single oil has all the essential fatty acids and the fatty acids ratio the body actually needs. Use a combination of two or three types of oil regularly or rotate types of oil for breakfast, lunch and dinner

● **Extra virgin olive oil:** A wide range, depending on origin, is available on the market. Olive oil is the healthiest oil you can buy as it contains the highest monounsaturated content and offers a number of other health benefits, including reduced risk of some cancers (such as breast cancer), reduced risk of diabetes and, possibly, a delayed onset of complications in established diabetes. Extra virgin is the oil that results from the first cold pressing of olives. However, as it has a low smoke point, it should not be used for cooking. Extra virgin is ideal for cold dishes, salads, pesto and dipping bread.

● **Canola oil:** After olive and sunflower oil, canola is the next highest in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. It can be used as a salad dressing and for baking and frying. Look for a refined version of this oil for multipurpose cooking.

● **Peanut oil/ groundnut oil:** They contain heart-friendly MUFA that lowers the level of bad cholesterol without lowering good cholesterol. It can be used for baking, crisp sautéing, stir-frying and cooking in the oven. Peanut oil is known for its high smoke point and ability to fry potatoes and chicken. It has a longer shelf life than other oils.

● **Rice bran oil:** It is rich in monounsaturated fatty acids and has cholesterol-lowering properties owing to the presence of a minor component called oryzanol. It contains natural Vitamin E, which is an antioxidant. It also contains squalene, which is good for the skin. It is the ideal cooking oil as it has good stability (it does not decompose at high temperatures to form toxic compounds) and is suitable for deep-frying.

● **Sesame oil:** It is favoured for its antioxidant and antidepressant properties. It has the highest concentrations of omega-6 plus omega-9 and is a good source of Vitamin E. It also contains magnesium, copper, calcium, iron and Vitamin B6. It is great for stir-frying.

● **Coconut oil:** This oil is full of saturated fat. Studies suggest that diets high in coconut oil raise total blood cholesterol and LDL cholesterol. Coconut oil also seems to raise HDL (good) cholesterol and it has the advantage of behaving very well at high temperatures.



Cook smart

We should keep changing or rotating oils for good health as it gives the body the different essential fatty acids it needs. Normally, no single oil has all the essential fatty acids and the fatty acids ratio the body actually needs. Use a combination of two or three types of oil regularly or rotate types of oil for breakfast, lunch and dinner; for instance, use oil rich in PUFA for breakfast and one rich in MUFA for lunch and dinner.

Also, whichever oil we select for cooking, we should minimise the practice of reheating the oil. Reusing oils is dangerous as food residue can turn carcinogenic. This is because the smoking point of any oil comes down when reheated.

According to the International Olive Council, the digestibility of olive oil is not affected when it is heated, even when it is reused several times for frying. On the other hand, if the oil was heated for just 5-10 minutes, then you may reuse it the very same day in other preparations so that there is no time for polymers to form.

Remember! The best cooking practice is to try and cut down the volume of cooking oil you use.

Namita Jain is a wellness specialist and celebrity nutritionist at Diet Mantra and has written bestsellers on diet and fitness. Visit www.dietmantra.in. If you have any questions for Namita Jain, write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org



SILVER LINING BY V S NATARAJAN

Silent strain: A major risk factor for vascular diseases, hypertension should be promptly diagnosed and treated



Among silvers, hypertension is one of the most common medical problems. With over a third of the elderly population being hypertensive, it has become a major risk factor for increased morbidity and mortality.

Hypertension is not just a simple physiological component that accompanies ageing. This has been clearly pointed out by a study conducted in non-western countries where blood pressures were recorded normal or even low among the aged population. When these people migrated to western regions, they developed hypertension. This points towards lifestyle changes rather than simply ageing.

Hypertension is usually defined as systolic blood pressure exceeding 140 mm of Hg and a diastolic blood pressure exceeding 90 mm of Hg, notwithstanding age. Blood pressure above these levels needs to be medically treated. It is not a disease with obvious signs and symptoms and most hypertensive patients are detected during a routine blood pressure test. The problem lies in the fact that hypertension is the major risk factor leading to vascular diseases affecting the heart, brain, kidney, eye and peripheral vessels.

Risk factors

There are several risk factors that contribute to high blood pressure. These include family history, smoking, obesity, alcoholism and high sodium (common salt) intake along with low potassium and calcium intake. Hypertension is

also frequent in people who are tense and stressed, though blood pressure is known to shoot up in all people during periods of stress or increased physical activity.

There are certain basic requirements for diagnosing and investigating hypertension in silvers. For the elderly, blood pressure should be checked in three postures. First, the patient's blood pressure should be checked in a lying posture; next in the sitting posture; and then while standing. The reason: sometimes blood pressure while sitting and standing tends to be lower. This is common especially in diabetic patients and those on multiple drugs. Multiple recordings at various timings help avoid diagnostic errors. Conditions like fever, full bladder, pain, etc, can cause transient rise of blood pressure.

Once hypertension is established, investigations to assess end organ damage caused by high blood pressure should be done, such as urine analysis, blood urea, serum creatinine, serum electrolytes, blood sugar, lipid profile, ECG and chest X-ray. Major consequences of hypertension, if it is untreated, include heart attack, heart failure, stroke, dementia, reduced blood circulation to limbs, kidney failure and vision failure.

Treatment

The good news is that hypertension can be controlled with drugs and, often, lifestyle changes. The treatment depends

READERS ASK

Hypertension is not a disease, but a definite risk factor for various dangerous diseases. In general, hypertension is not a diagnostic emergency. Before initiating therapy, multiple readings are essential

on the type and severity of the disease as well as coexisting medical problems. In mild to moderate hypertension, non-drug therapy may be tried. This includes reduction of excess weight, restricted salt intake, meditation, quitting smoking, regular exercise, and avoiding stress.

Do not be disheartened or discouraged if you are advised long-term drug therapy. Sometimes you can take smaller doses after your blood pressure is under control, but you may always need some treatment.

There are several types of blood pressure medicines. The common ones include those that eliminate excessive salt and water from the body (diuretics) and those that relax and open up the narrowed blood vessels (beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, calcium channel blockers).

All hypertension patients should continue treatment even after blood pressure is controlled because it is likely to increase if the treatment is discontinued. Stepping down the therapy can be tried slowly. If blood pressure increases, therapy must be stepped up again.

Like all medicines, blood pressure medicines have several side-effects. These include weakness, tiredness, leg cramps, impotence, cold hands and feet, depression, disturbed sleep, slow or fast heartbeat, skin rash, loss of taste, dry cough, ankle swelling, headache or dizziness and constipation. You should be aware of these symptoms and consult your doctor if they bother you too much.

As such, hypertension is not a disease, but a definite risk factor for various dangerous diseases. In general, hypertension is not a diagnostic emergency. Before initiating therapy, multiple readings are essential. Physicians usually try non-drug therapy in mild to moderate cases. In choosing anti-hypertensives, they should consider concomitant diseases.

Blood pressure should be checked periodically even if there are no symptoms. Early detection can help control blood pressure and prevent dreadful complications like heart attack and stroke. Prevention is always better than cure and this rule suits hypertension as well!

I am 78 and quite healthy. A month ago, I had a fall in the bathroom. But for a mild bruise on the right side of my head, I was saved. An immediate CT scan of the brain showed everything was normal. Of late, though, I have developed headache and nausea and I feel my memory is slowly fading. Is it related to my head injury?

A head injury should not be taken lightly. When you fell down, you might have developed mild bleeding in your brain. Owing to ageing, the brain shrinks and it can accommodate some amount of blood without any symptoms—the reason why you might not have developed any symptoms initially. As the bleeding continues, it compresses the brain and produces symptoms because of increased intracranial pressure. Consult your family physician again and take an MRI scan that may reveal whether there is bleeding under the wall of the skull; this is called subdural haematoma. If this is present, the blood clot can easily be removed by making a small burr hole and sucking out the blood, which gives 100 per cent recovery.

Last week, I met my friend for a social drink. The next morning, I had swelling and excruciating pain at the base of my big toe. My physician diagnosed it as gout. What is gout and what are its causes?

Gout is a medical condition that causes swelling at the base of the big toe. It causes unbearable pain either at midnight or early morning and can be accompanied by fever. The core pathology in gout is shooting up of uric acid levels in blood. Normally, uric acid is excreted through the kidneys, thereby preventing its rise in blood. When its levels keep increasing, uric acid crystallises and gets deposited around the joints, resulting in pain. Kidney stones, primarily uric acid stones, develop in one-fifth of people with gout. It's better to take painkillers once mild pain starts. There are special medicines to decrease blood uric acid levels as well. Gout is seven to nine times more common in men than women. The causes of elevated uric acid in blood include aspirin and diuretics; intake of organ meats; and heredity. You should avoid alcohol and organ meat such as brain, kidney and liver in your diet.

Padmashri Dr V S Natarajan, a specialist in the field of geriatric medicine, runs Memory Clinic, a service for silvers in Chennai. If you have a question for him, write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

No knobbly hands! Keep your hands attractive, robust and svelte

Starting as early as your 40s, your fingers can begin to appear knobbly at the knuckles. Many of us are not even aware of this but these are early signs of osteoarthritis, the symptoms of which can only worsen, eventually affecting the firmness of your grip. These are also indicators of inflammation elsewhere in the body. As always, this is not just an aesthetic concern but reflects a health issue as well—neat and robust-looking healthy hands indicate that all is fine with the body and the mind.

One way to stem the tide is to follow an anti-arthritis diet. An active life and curbing wrong use or over-use of your hands at work will also help. However, proper exercise that focuses on the hands is also very essential. This is especially true for people in certain types of professions where the hands are used a lot: surgeons, artists, cooks, gardeners, computer professionals or those who use computers a lot. Part of the problem of this wear and tear of hand tissue is called repetitive

stress injury (RSI). This can be truly painful and healing takes far longer than for other types of natural degeneration. It is best to protect yourself in advance before it begins to attack your hands. With RSI, the pain can shift to the entire arm and even cause migraines. And to think that just a few yogic hand movements taking barely few minutes a day can prevent these, and keep your hands looking robust!

These are part of the yoga practices usually clubbed under the energy release (*pawanuktasana*) series. There are numerous variations of these, and quite a few illustrated deftly at online health sites. For them to be effective, these need to be done every day. Once you learn how to do them, you will find that you can incorporate them into your regular routine, like while commuting or watching television. However, that option must be used only when you are squeezed for time. Most effective health movements have more benefits when you do them with focus and awareness, following a sequence of breathing to make the entire process meditative. Include yogic hand gestures regularly during meditation or as part of *pranayama* to help tone the entire hand even more.

YOGIC MOVES

Clenched fist practice (*mushtika bandhana*)

Hold your hands out at shoulder level. Spread out the fingers. Stretch them as much as you can, till they quiver lightly with the effort. Then clench them into fists, holding for a while. This is one round. Introduce breath awareness to this process, inhaling as you open, exhaling as you clench. Do 10 rounds of this. If your job requires you to overuse your hands, do this several times during the day.

Benefits: On an emotional level, this practice is used to release anger or anxiety. On a physical level, it tones the hands and fingers, and prevents

and helps control RSI and arthritis of the hands.

Model: Bilkis Patel,
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 the advice given here)

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MKTG/Magazine-OTP/Version1/March 2014



THE GREAT GRANNY DIARIES BY PRATIBHA JAIN SMT SAROJ BEN DESAI, BENGALURU

An engaging series about the wisdom of love, nurturing and culinary bonding across generations

To remain cheerful at all times—in the peak of health and in old age and sickness—is surely a sign of equanimity within. ‘Sweet smiling’ is the phrase that comes to mind on meeting Smt Saroj Ben Desai, the 86 year-old Gujarati great-grandmother from Bengaluru. A mother of three, grandmother to four and great-grandmother to one (with the second one on the way), she was bright and alert when I met her. Her speech was impaired but I was able to understand most of it as she spoke in a Gujarati-Hindi mix dialect. Her daughter-in-law Veena happily filled in the gaps and was an affectionate and gracious presence during the entire interview.

Namaste Saroj Ben. Tell me about your beginnings.

I was born in Gujarat in Chaani village near Baroda. I grew up with my *foi* (Father's sister) in Barauch as I lost my mother at seven.

That was a deep loss at a young age.

Foi was very affectionate to me and did not let me miss my mother. I kept busy with school and housework and enjoyed doing embroidery whenever I could find the time.

Veena (daughter-in-law): She used to make beautiful patterns in embroidery even till her 60s. All of us have worn clothes with her embroidery motifs. She used to gift her delicate handiwork to many of our near and dear ones.

Your home is exquisite. Veena, have you learnt your housekeeping skills from your mother-in-law?



Prasad Durga

Veena: This house has been my husband Bimal's dream. He bought the land almost 10 years ago but we moved in just a year ago. To answer your question, I have learnt a lot from *Ma*, including how to manage in all types of situations. But what I have enjoyed the most is jotting down her recipes. She makes awesome authentic Gujarati food.

So tell me Saroj Ben, whom did you learn cooking from?

I learnt from watching my elders cook. But, most of all, I learnt to enjoy cooking because of travelling. My husband and I have travelled extensively across the globe on holidays, carrying homemade food with us wherever we went.

When did you get married?

I was married when I was 22.

Was that considered the right age for marriage back then or did you have a late marriage?

Oh no, that's how it was and is. You get married whenever you find a good boy. My husband, Natubhai Desai, was the son of my father's friend. He met me during one of my trips to Mumbai and suggested the alliance to my father.

And your father agreed?

Yes, it was a good match and they had a prosperous family business. My parents were delighted with the proposal.

Where did you live after marriage?

In Gujarat and, later, Pune. But for more than five decades now, we have settled here in Bengaluru. This is home now.

In those days how did you manage your food while travelling?

That was a challenge as I was a pure vegetarian.

Veena: She used to enjoy travelling and hence learnt to manage without making too much of a fuss. She took along *thepla* and *parantha* that lasted well for weeks. She also ate a lot of fruits. But she would often mention to me that many of her friends could not manage their food so easily.

Saroj Ben, apart from travelling, what else did you enjoy?

I enjoyed participating in Garbha dance. During Navaratri, I used to dance like there was nothing else to do! I would forget everything else. I think I used to dance even until my 60s.

Veena, what would you like to say about her as a mother-in-law?

Veena: She is unconditionally affectionate and broad-minded. I am from a Christian family and had a love marriage and she simply took that in her stride. In fact, she taught me Gujarati and learnt to speak English from me. I also learnt Gujarati cooking from her. She is an amazing person to live with. I also admire her for the healthy life she led until she was 60. For the past 20 years, she has been suffering from Parkinson's and is not so alert in the afternoons, but nothing diminishes her goodness.

Which is your most cherished memory of her?

Veena: The way she could whip up a sudden meal for 25 to 50 people without batting an eyelid. That's how she

won her husband's heart because he was extremely hospitable. There were always sudden guests.

Saroj Ben, what did you cook? What are your specialities?

It would be a simple yet sumptuous meal of *sabzi*, *dal* and *chawal*. Some homemade sweet dish such as *shrikhand* and some *farsaan* [snacks] completed the menu. Homemade pickles and *papad* were always part of the meal.

"I learnt to enjoy cooking because of travelling. My husband and I have travelled extensively across the globe on holidays, carrying homemade food with us"

How did the children manage when the parents were travelling?

I taught my daughters to cook when they were quite young. They managed quite easily. I also believe that it is the best way to teach your children.

Were you a strict mother?

Veena: Oh no, she is very understanding as a mother and mother-in-law. She never imposed any rules on us such as how to dress or behave. Her children, including myself, could wear whatever we liked. She imparted the right values and then left them to find their own way.

There is a perfect rapport between the two of you. It is a pleasure to watch how she trusts you, that you will represent her correctly in this interview.

Veena: I know what a lucky daughter-in-law I am. I enjoy being with her and basking in the warmth of her nature.

I don't miss my husband as much when he travels, but I cannot live without her for even a day. She is more than a mother to me.

FROM SAROJ BEN DESAI'S KITCHEN

Makai ni khichdi

Makai ni khichdi, also known as *makai chivda*, is a popular dish in many Gujarati homes. Rich with spicy and sweet flavours, which is very typical of Gujarati cuisine, this dish tastes excellent when prepared with tender corn. A family favourite in the Desai home, this is served as a breakfast dish, an evening snack or a side-dish in a meal. If the dish has to be reheated and has become thick, you can add a tablespoon of milk before heating it.

Ingredients

- Tender corn cobs: 6
- Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Turmeric powder: a pinch
- Spice powder (optional): made by pounding a cinnamon stick, two peppercorns and two cloves into fine powder
- Sugar: 1 tsp
- Lemon juice (of half a lemon)
- Salt to taste
- Coriander leaves: 2 tbsp (for garnishing)

Tempering

- Mustard seeds: ½ tsp
- Sesame seeds: ½ tsp
- Cashew nuts (optional): 6-8; chopped into bits
- Dried red chilli: 1



- Green chilli: 1; chopped fine
- Asafoetida powder: a pinch
- Oil: 2 tbsp

Method

Shear the top layer of the corn niblets with a sharp knife. Now grate the remaining niblets. This way you will get a mixture of corn niblets and grated corn, which will lend a crunchy taste to the dish. If the corn is not tender, steam the mixture (preferably by

pressure cooking) before proceeding. Heat oil in a heavy-bottomed wok and add mustard seeds. As the mustard begins to pop, add sesame seeds, cashew nuts and red chilli. With the cashew nuts turning golden, add asafoetida powder, green chillies and grated corn. Cover and cook for 10 minutes without adding any water. Add chilli powder, turmeric and salt. Add the spice powder. (This spice powder is a recent addition to this recipe. Originally, instead of this spice powder, extra chilli powder was added.) After 2-3 minutes, add sugar and lemon

juice. Cook for a few more minutes until the oil comes on top. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve hot.

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

Experience

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Guiding light

'Lucky mascot' of his village in Tamil Nadu, Palaniappa Chettiar is responsible in no small part for its social and educational progress, reports **Jayanthi Somasundaram**

A fading signpost reads 'Rayavaram 6 km,' directing visitors to a muddy lane. The nondescript, dusty road is in stark contrast to the destination, for Rayavaram, 70 km from Tiruchirappalli, is one of the 72 villages that are home to the famous Chettiar community in Tamil Nadu. Here, magnificent palatial homes are scattered across a typical southern village landscape. We head for the 'MAM House,' which every villager seems to know. When we pull up in front of it, we are met by a tall and bony gentleman clad in a crisp white dhoti and shirt, his forehead smeared with sacred ash.

MAM SP Palaniappa Chettiar turned a hundred in December last year but he doesn't look a day over 80. He is in excellent health and his memory is sharp as a tack. The only indication of his age is his slow gait but he stubbornly refuses to use a walking stick.

Chettiar is, very clearly, the patriarch of his family. Although the apple of their eye, he lives alone as every other member of the family has moved out of the village. "They keep visiting and I manage to speak to one of them every day," he says. "Both my sons have invited me to live with them but I am happier here."

Living alone is not easy for any silver, much less a centenarian. But Chettiar is doing just fine. He sits at the apex of the family pyramid and is the pivot of all family affairs; every major decision must be evaluated by him. His assistant, Radhakrishnan K, who was brought to Chettiar as a young lad, has worked for him for 45 years. He says his employer's children and close

relatives appoint Chettiar the head of any family business that is initiated. "The rubber estates spanning 300 acre in and around Nagercoil are still family-owned and the children have named him managing director. Although they manage the estates, they consult him on everything. And when his elder brother passed away, they appointed Chettiar managing director of the business at the age of 95. The banks were amused with the family's choice," he remarks with a chuckle.

Traditionally, the Chettiars are money-lenders and Chettiar was initiated into the profession at an early age. "My parents did not lay stress on education, so taking up the family money-lending business was a natural progression," he explains. "I studied up to the fifth standard and only my youngest brother is a graduate. We have all learnt business hands-on."

An active stock trader, it is difficult to meet Chettiar between 9 am and 3 pm on weekdays. During these sacred hours, our centenarian is glued to the television, watching the stock prices scroll across the screen. "I am not a gambler; I actively trade to keep learning and to stay busy. My profit and losses are minimal," he reassures us, proudly producing his account ledgers that he writes himself. He says he learnt to trade by observing his father, who had studied even less than him but had great business acumen. "In those days, a stockbroker would take the train from Madras to meet my father in this house. They would discuss stocks, my father would then give him instructions. Today, I do the same but I speak to my broker over the phone."

P Sivaji, his stockbroker in Chennai, tells us with a laugh that Chettiar is the oldest on his client list. Their relationship goes back 14 years. "Chettiar is one of my special clients. You see, the wavelengths of young people and even most seniors do not match mine and it is often difficult to communicate with them. In contrast, Palaniappa Chettiar is very sharp and knows exactly what he wants." He adds that in the couple of seconds it takes to look at the computer screen after picking up the phone, Chettiar is already shooting names of stocks and numbers. "It is impossible to expect even younger people to be as disciplined as he is and I consider him a role model."

The Chettiars' skills as money-lenders, merchant bankers and traders took them to countries like Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka in colonial times. But not our Chettiar. He recollects how, at the age of 12, he married 10 year-old Kannammai from the same village. "Immediately after my marriage, I was sent to Malaysia by ship to learn and manage our money-lending business. I lived there for a few years and then returned to Rayavaram," he recalls. Ever since, Palaniappa Chettiar has managed his money-lending business, stock market trade and even the family plantations from this home.

"He loves Rayavaram and will not leave it," says his son P L Naghappan, who lives in Chennai. "Once, a local doctor who paid him a courtesy visit thought his ulcers were cancerous and suggested a check-up. It was only after much convincing from my uncle that he reluctantly agreed to come to Chennai. When the medical tests re-



vealed he was in fine shape, he boarded the next train home! Although all his brothers and children left the household in search of greener pastures, my father has spent 95 per cent of his life in the family home.”

Modern-day corporate organisations could learn a trick or two from this centenarian, who believes that time management and integrity are the keys to success. “If a visitor is scheduled to arrive at 10 am, I am ready and waiting 15 minutes in advance. They have set aside work to meet me and I should respect that,” he remarks. “Also, when I give my word to someone, I make sure I keep it. I’m not sure how other people live by their values, but when I commit to something, I keep my word.”

Chettiar is on the boards of many charitable organisations and social institutions in his beloved Rayavaram. He is the president of Subramanian Polytechnic College, SKT Gandhi School, an old age home and almost every other charitable organisation in the village.

His farsightedness can be gauged from a comment made by Meenakshi Sundaram, principal of Subramanian Polytechnic College, Rayavaram. “To have set up an educational institution to benefit the rural poor 30 years ago shows how far ahead he thinks. He knew the children in the village needed proper education and that’s why he funded this institution.”

Naghappan says there is a stream of visitors to his father’s home every day. “He helps people the best he can. It is difficult to say that he supports one particular cause. From education to community area development, he does it all. There was a *kalyana mandapam* [wedding hall] used by less privileged people and it urgently needed renovation and reconstruction; my father donated ₹ 500,000 without a second thought. It is difficult to put a figure to the amount he has donated to date.”

Palaniappa Chettiar says people consider him ‘lucky’ and ensure that he makes the first contribution, which catapults his name to the top of the donors’ list. “I actually do not work on these projects. People approach me and share their ideas and I support them the best I can,” he reveals.

It is this generosity that drew—hold your breath—close to 7,000 guests to Chettiar’s pillared mansion on his 100th birthday on 19 December last year. “Invitation cards were dispatched but we also invited everyone we met. There were roughly 220 cooks in the kitchen,

“Time management and integrity are important human values. When I give my word to someone, I make sure I keep it”

working nonstop, to cater to the grand feast,” he gleams. Not surprisingly, the lavish feast, which drew guests from Chennai, Madurai and Tiruchirapalli, is still a hot topic of discussion in the Chettinad region.

“I gave away dhotis and saris to the villagers as I strongly believe in charity. While I did this at home, my sons were helping out different organisations where we live. I believe each one of us should help the poor in whatever capacity they can. But the most beautiful part of the celebration was that my entire family from all over the world came down and the house was bustling with happiness,” he says, pointing to family photographs that feature 12 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

Our centenarian insists there is no ‘secret’ to longevity. If anything comes close, it’s his outlook on life. “I take

everything light-heartedly. I never chase anything or long for something. I do what I have to and what happens is what is meant to happen.”

As for his daily routine, it’s as simple as it is disciplined. Chettiar wakes up early and says his prayers. He then takes a morning walk as he does after every meal. “The doctor has told me not to walk outdoors because I slipped a few years ago,” he shares. “I used to wear sneakers and start walking at 5 am, whether my helper arrived or not. Now I walk inside the house. Over the weekend, visitors come and time just flies.”

But he does have strict dietary habits. So, even when eating his favourite dish, like the famous Chettinad chicken curry, he takes only one serving and not a spoon more. He also cut down on the yolks of the raw eggs he swallows for breakfast.

In his younger days, Chettiar was a sports enthusiast and played tennis and badminton. But his favourite game is cricket. “I used to enjoy cricket matches but, these days, the quality of players and matches is not great,” he says, with a loud sigh, adding that he simply does not understand why crores of rupees are being spent on cricketers.

When not busy watching the stock market, chatting with visitors or taking his walk, Chettiar recites religious songs. “I know over 400 prayers by heart and I recite over 200 every day,” he says. Sometimes he wakes up at 4 am and sings these songs one after the other. “As child, I learnt Carnatic music for a short time, and although I didn’t pursue this, I enjoy that genre of music and love the *kutcheri* [music recitals] in Chennai.” Although not a voracious reader, he reads books on spirituality. “I read these books and sing the songs. Though my words slur, I persist as I want to keep my mind active and not have unwanted thoughts.” Another secret, perhaps, to his longevity. ✽



Class ACT

Photographs by Haresh Patel

No battle is too big for RTI activist S K Nangia, whose tireless community work has earned him a pat from the President of India, finds out **Neeti Vijaykumar**

This Sunday morning is no ordinary walk in the park. Stalks of bougainvillea lazily wave to a smattering of morning walkers, while an elderly gentleman meditates on a bench. But this green oasis in bustling Charkop area in Mumbai is not just any garden. As recently as five years

ago, the vacant plot was a garbage dump and source of all manner of disease.

The dramatic transformation was brought about by local resident, 73 year-old S K Nangia. So it is fitting that he escort us around one of his first achievements in a decade of

hard-fought battles with civic officials and bureaucrats in Maharashtra. His weapon: the Right to Information Act (RTI). If the Charkop garden was among his first crusades, Nangia's latest success was—hold your breath—the shutting down of an illegal college set up by the family of a state minister in Vashi, Navi Mumbai.

Considering the scale of his successes, one would expect a fiery senior waiting to launch into his next mission. Not Nangia, whose matter-of-fact approach to life eclipses any strong emotion. We make our way to Nangia's modest home, a stone's throw away from the garden. The television is on and his wife is tuned in to the Sunday morning telecast of *Satyamev Jayate*—coincidentally an episode on corruption and how to tackle it with weapons such as the RTI Act. Nangia says he regularly watches the DD Rajya Sabha channel for updates on constitutional changes, keeping his textbook on Constitution of India close at hand.

"I retired in 2001 as a senior officer with the State Bank of India. Then I spent a few years as vice-president and chief executive officer with a private firm but gave it up to work for society," he says.

Nangia returns to the beginning of his socially-oriented journey. "In 2004-05, I took up the case of the garden with the civic ward office. The Sector 3 garden was in the civic plans for the development of Charkop, but the funds were being swallowed. It was a big story in local newspapers back then, and it was revealed that ₹ 1.9 million was shown as spent on the garden even though the plot was just a heap of garbage."

Using the Maharashtra Right to Information Act, 2002, Nangia asked the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) to provide details of the corporator's utilisation of the funds; where the money had allegedly been spent; and a copy of the progress report sent to the financial company that had given the funds for the garden's development.

"The BMC admitted they did not have any records of where the money had been spent. When they knew I wasn't going to back out, they relented in

2010 and things started moving." For Nangia, the icing on the cake was when the deputy chief officer of MHADA was fined ₹ 25,000 for not providing information on time.

The power of the RTI Act lies in a meticulous and patient mind, qualities that Nangia has in abundance. He pulls out a flow chart that tracks the movement of files he is pursuing and also notes requisitions for documents or reports for inspection. He chuckles as he reveals a valuable tip. "When elections are around the corner, bureaucrats do not want any criticism of their work, so they clear things up before it's too late." It worked when Nangia got the BMC to erect sewage treatment plants after Mumbai's devastating floods in 2005, to prevent sewage spillage.

"Filing RTI applications to keep the wheels of the civic and government bureaucracy turning is usually a tedious process and it isn't easy... However, the Act is the only legislation that gives people a chance to check the misbehaviour of authorities"

Nangia lives with his wife and his children are overseas. He spends his time closely tracking issues covered by the media, especially those left in limbo. One of his most prominent cases—one he is still pursuing—concerns the state government's non-compliance with a Supreme Court directive to settle sanctions to prosecute corrupt officials within three months, which Nangia found out through a news article in 2009.

In this case, the bureaucracy and ministers willfully shielded corrupt government officials by simply not sanc-

tioning requests for their prosecution under the Prevention of Corruption Act. He used the RTI Act to check with the Central Bureau of Investigation, Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and the bureaucracy to cross-check the facts. He even wrote to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

"First, we get them to admit they haven't taken action. Then we ask them what the plan of action is. By doing this, we silently force them to get the job done. Often, to save face in front of the public, they comply," Nangia reasons.

"One of my RTI queries in 2010 revealed nearly 40 cases pending as the ACB could not prosecute without permission. For instance, six people from the Finance Department were caught red-handed on corruption charges but the ACB's hands were tied as the finance minister had not sanctioned their prosecution. One of them went scot-free when he retired in 2009."

Nangia is not discriminating when he picks his battles and won a victory for a bunch of university students who had approached him when their results were delayed in 2008. "There's a university act which says results should be declared within 45 days after the last examination and these students stood to lose a year because 80 per cent of the results had not been declared on time. So I took this up with the controller of examinations," explains Nangia.

The Act makes it mandatory that the chancellor of the university (who is also the state governor) receive a report on why a delay has occurred. "I first asked the university to provide me a list of students whose results were delayed; a list of examinations held; and a copy of the report sent to the chancellor. My query revealed that they hadn't sent any report and so the controller of examinations did not respond to my query. He was eventually fined ₹ 17,500."

Arguably Nangia's most significant achievement was the battle he fought to get an illegal college shut down in Vashi, Navi Mumbai. The so-called MSS College of Commerce had been set up by the family of a former education minister in 2007 and had been operating out of a residential building. Although there had been others who had filed RTI applications on the issue, Nangia's tactically drafted application expedited the final decision in 2013. The minister had to relinquish ownership of the college and hand it over to a competent institution, while the students were shifted to another college.

"Filing RTI applications to keep the wheels of the civic and government bureaucracy turning is usually a tedious process and it isn't easy," admits the activist. Amazingly, he still has time and energy for community work. From helping to organise health camps for police personnel to working with NGOs, Nangia has always worked for the betterment of society. In recognition of his outstanding community work, he was felicitated by the President of India when he was based in Chandigarh in 1983.

It was only after retirement that Nangia embarked on his RTI crusade full time. He has worked for senior citizens' empowerment, with the Consumer Guidance Society of India, Public Concern for Governance Trust and as coordinator for Action for Good Governance and Networking in India (AGNI). Currently, he's working with a group called Police Reforms Watch, and also with the Forum for Fast Justice in judicial reforms.

Says Narayan Verma, an RTI activist who regularly writes on the Act for the Bombay Chartered Accountant Society's journal, "Two years after the RTI Act was notified, some of us activists including Nangia met prominent ministers in the Maharashtra government to push for the appointment of Information Commissioners as part of the process. Having pending



cases diminishes the efficacy of the RTI query. Our constant prodding led to the appointment of commissioners in seven cities of Maharashtra, which in turn has expedited a major number of cases."

If you're wondering where Nangia finds time to track and pursue myriad governance-related issues, there's more. Our crusader is a certified trainer from the Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration, Pune, a state-level administrative college that trains civilians on the RTI Act and its uses. He also speaks on the RTI Act and participates in RTI clinics at the Indian Merchants Chamber, where people with queries seek solutions.

"We run the RTI clinics together, every Saturday, where we guide people on how to file applications or appeals," says Verma. Adds a colleague

Bhaskar Prabhu, who is also closely associated with Nangia, "This group of RTI activists in Mumbai is very close-knit. We work on our own applications individually but whenever one of us hits a stumbling block, we come together to sort it out."

Nangia says community work keeps him on his toes but he admits that age has slowed his work with the RTI Act. However, his decade-long contribution as an activist has placed him among the prominent figures of the RTI movement in Mumbai. "The Act is the only legislation that is citizen-friendly and gives people a chance to check the misbehaviour of the authorities," remarks Nangia. Where many people use the RTI Act to remedy personal injustices, Nangia's primary focus on exposing bureaucratic injustices that hamper the process of governance makes him a hero of our times. ✽

After celebrating your 25th anniversary, celebrate your first.

The first time your eyes met.

The first time you mustered up the courage.

The first time you bared your heart.

The first time you heard "Yes".

The first date.

The first time you held hands.

The first fight.

The first time you made up.

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

and the babies and the bills intruded?

Because for the first time
you're at an age when
you can fall in love with each other
all over again.





If you're above fifty five, we believe Harmony is just the magazine for you. Filled with human interest stories, exciting features and columns, Harmony encourages you to do just one thing: live young.

harmony
celebrate age



Though inflation-indexed bonds may safeguard you against rising inflation, choose one only if you are looking at long-term investment, writes **Priya Desai**

As inflation levels rise, panic sets in; inflation does not distinguish between the rich and the poor, the young and the old. It just stomps through and crushes everything in its path. No wonder it is called the big leveller! Yet, inflation hits silvers the worst as their income levels are stagnant.

Though the RBI has taken several measures to harness inflation, it has not succeeded in taming it completely. Inflation levels are currently at careening high levels and the 8.5 to 11 per cent inflation rate is eroding investors' ROI (return on investment) in different asset classes. So what can seniors do to ensure inflation does not singe them? Prudent investments could be the solution. Though

there are a number of avenues for investment, many of which provide silvers with some form of steady income, they can hardly be called adequate in the current scenario.

Bonds take centre stage

It is here that inflation-indexed bonds come in. The RBI announced the Inflation-Indexed National Savings Securities-Cumulative or IINSS-C in December 2013. While the bonds remained open for subscription only till end March 2014, for those keen to invest in such bonds in the future there is hope, as the RBI has plans to modify them before re-launching them in a much more attractive avatar, adding some sheen to attract investors. This decision came in the wake of poor response to the current bonds.

The RBI announcement promises to be a ray of hope not just for seniors but others as well. Though the RBI had launched inflation-indexed bonds (IIBs) linked to the wholesale price index (WPI) in May 2013, the IINSS-C is a much better indication of retail inflation and will provide effective protection against it.

Inflation and the resultant price rise compel retirees to dig into their investment portfolios to withdraw more money, exposing them to longevity risk or, in other words, the danger of outliving their investments. Typically, IIBs should help them moderate the longevity risk.

Highlights

The current bond offering is different in that it accumulates and the inflation-adjusted interest is paid 10 years down the line. It can be quite puzzling for most investors to understand the specifics of these bonds. Let's dissect IIBs to understand how they work. Here is a brief account of the features of IINSS-C:

- This offering is for retail investors, i.e. individuals, Hindu Undivided Family and charitable institutions.
- The minimum investment is of ₹ 5,000 per bond, while the maximum is of ₹ 500,000.
- It is for a tenure of 10 years.
- The interest rate, referred to as the coupon, has two components. There is a fixed component: the investor will get paid 1.5 per cent annually regardless of market conditions. In addition to this, there will be a changing component based on the rate of retail inflation, which is the consumer price index (CPI). The interest rate will be calculated twice a year at an interval of six months.
- It is cumulative. On maturity of the bond, at the end of 10 years, the investor will be paid an amount that will include the original investment and the interest.
- Withdrawal is permitted after three years with a penalty. Senior

citizens enjoy a withdrawal facility after a year with a penalty.

- Interest income is taxable.
- The points of sale are as follows: SBI and its associates, nationalised banks, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank and the Stock Holding Corporation. It is very easy to buy this product from banks.
- As banks are involved, servicing should not be an issue either.

Feature-rich

There is no payment risk after maturity, as these bonds are backed by the Government. This makes them a usable vehicle for your retirement planning. As we all know, inflation that was being doled out in cupfuls earlier is now dispensed by the barrel. Hence, this financial instrument probably comes at an opportune moment and has some notable benefits:

- Even though the IINSS-C will be taxed just as fixed deposits (FDs) are, the interest can be significantly higher than that of FDs during phases of high inflation. But the returns can go lower than FDs when inflation is low. Hence, they are more suitable for lower tax bracket investors.
- If you redeem your IINSS-Cs early, once it is past the lock-in period, you still get your principal amount even if inflation levels have dropped drastically. The penalty on its coupon rate is the one beating you will have to bear.
- These bonds will definitely be a deterrent for buying gold solely for investment purposes.

Options galore

Though all of this sounds good, you must keep in mind that this bond will not help you meet any of your immediate expenses. It goes without saying that the IIB may be able to provide you with a much better inflation hedge for annual living expenses that you will have in 2024 in comparison to any investment that you make in

a 10-year FD scheme in banks today. But you will have to invest every year in these bonds to ensure the tap never runs dry.

Even as you invest in them, you will also have to scour the market for other products that will generate more periodic cash flows and help you meet current living expenses. Long-dated monthly-income bank deposits or annuities will help in this respect.

Even though the IINSS-C will be taxed just as fixed deposits are, the interest can be significantly higher than that of FDs during phases of high inflation

Keep a close watch

There is a risk attached to IIBs. If inflation levels dip and move into the 5-6 per cent range, you might suddenly find a drop in income from this investment. Track inflation and the graph of returns closely to ensure you can make the most of the situation. If what you see dissatisfies you, act fast and withdraw after the three-year lock-in period.

There is one small glitch—you may end up losing 50 per cent of the latest interest payment. But, as a senior, the minimum period for withdrawal, with the 50-per-cent penalty, is only one year. Another point to note is that the withdrawal window opens up only twice a year at a six-month interval based on the coupon date. So planning is really important here.

Willing to wait?

These bonds have a catch in their cumulative character. Senior investors

looking forward to receiving income at regular intervals either quarterly, semi-annually or annually are advised not to go for these bonds.

It's tailored for you only if you are willing to wait for 10 years to get back your investment with accumulated returns based on changing coupon rates. Thus, seniors just crossing the threshold of 65 years and with surplus money can consider these bonds.

A complicated vehicle

Seniors will be in a bind to choose between perceived protection from inflation and a desire for certainty and mathematical clarity about gains. Being a new instrument, banks are also working out promotional strategies for IIBs.

The Oriental Bank of Commerce is reported to be considering a loan product based on these bonds as collateral. One can also expect to see mutual fund schemes linked to IIBs. State Bank of India and Axis Bank fund houses are moving in this direction.

Thus, IINSS-C is just the beginning of innovations in investment vehicles to beat inflation. However, it is advisable that investors with low financial literacy stay an arm's length away.

Catch-22

In a nutshell, this product is a bit like a hole-riddled umbrella. It will provide you protection from inflation, true. But then, there's the flipside. If we are to unquestionably believe the RBI and the Government, inflation should be on the downtrend. This, in turn, means your investments will end up earning lower returns. However, IIBs do not offer any liquidity or tax advantage. Investors also cannot be assured of returns to their limited kitty. At the moment, an IINSS-C is like a double-edged sword, which can move either way. ✨

The writer is a Mumbai-based economist

MAD



Photographs courtesy **Genesis**



HATTER

WACKY AND WILD,
THE 'MADMAN OF
ADVERTISING'
PRAHLAD KAKKAR
TELLS **SRIREKHA**
PILLAI WHY THE
JOKER IS NOT TO BE
UNDERESTIMATED

His self-deprecating sense of humour is contagious. So is the laughter. Madcap, wacky, insane, no matter what you call him, the original funny man of advertising Prahlad Kakkar is just what the doctor ordered for a bout of boredom. Much like the man himself, the advertisements helmed by his company Genesis have been marked by a rare joie de vivre. No wonder, MNCs like Unilever, PepsiCo and Britannia have communicated their brand stories through him.

However, it's Pepsi that is synonymous with the 64 year-old. Making everyone from Aamir Khan, Shah Rukh Khan and Sachin Tendulkar to the entire Indian cricket team dance to his tunes, he has made fizz cool. On his legendary association with the brand, Kakkar, who is affectionately called the 'madman of advertising' for his creative streak, says, "I consider myself the target group for Pepsi—young at heart and anti-establishment." Such has been the socio-cultural impact of these campaigns that today ad slogans like *Yehi hai right choice baby*, *Yeh dil maange more*, *Mera number kab aayega* and *Jor ka jhatka dheere se lage* have become part of our lingo. "If you narrate a story in a slightly amusing manner, bringing a smile on the face of the audience, you've touched their life and got them hooked forever," he says.

For Brand Prahlad Kakkar, associated with a certain degree of irreverence, non-conformism, a carefully cultivated dishevelled look, the cowboy hat and Montecristo cigar, "life is all about living to the hilt". His passion for life is reflected in his various roles: advertising guru, scuba diving instructor, restaurateur, cigar manufacturer and wine connoisseur. In fact, Kakkar and his wife Mitali founded Lacadives, India's first scuba diving school, in Lakshadweep in 1995. A CMAS two-star scuba diving instructor, Kakkar, along with his wife and three sons Arnav, Varun and Anshin, all named after the ocean, goes scuba diving and snorkelling in the oceans around the world and bonding with divers on terra firma. "While waiting at the conveyor belt at airports, I look out for divers, identifying them by the diving markings on luggage and diving watches on their wrists," he says.

His restaurant business is an extension of Kakkar's love for food, with the menu at all his restaurants personally handpicked and designed by him. The famed Irish coffee

at Prithvi Café in Mumbai is a Kakkar legacy. Though cigars are a strict no-no for him following two bypass surgeries, Kakkar manufactures his own brand of cigars, christened Shergar after the famous racing horse from Aga Khan's stables. Keen to match the high standards of his favourite Cuban brand Montecristo, Kakkar gets Shergar rolled in the Philippines, with tobacco sourced from the Dominican Republic.

Now, the adman who propelled Aishwarya Rai to the limelight—remember the line, 'Hi, I'm Sanju, got a Pepsi?'—is gearing up for his Bollywood directorial debut *Happy Anniversary*. Fittingly enough, he is currently in advanced talks with Aishwarya Rai-Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan for playing the lead roles.

When we meet Kakkar at his Lacadives office in Bandra in suburban Mumbai, he is clad in a crisp white *kurta pyjama*, sans his trademark hat. Quizzed about the missing hat, he laughs. "Though I have about 40 cowboy hats, I don't feel the need to wear them all the time now. My ugly mug has been splashed enough times in the media and people recognise me all the same." An unabashed lover of life and all things beautiful, he reveals that he has told his family that his final goodbye should be a celebration. "My life has been one big party. I will not be denied my last one!"

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW

How would you define Brand Prahlad Kakkar?

The branding just happened over a period of time. It was this lady from the advertising industry who called me 'enfant terrible' for the first time, meaning someone like a child. A child blurts out the truth in complete innocence. I have always told the truth, speaking my heart out without bothering about the consequences, and in the process bruised many egos and stomped on many toes.

Is it a conscious effort to stay funny?

As a child I used to be extremely shy and reserved. As I grew up, I realised there is so much tragedy in our lives and all around us that there is no point crying, whining and cribbing all the time, which is what most people do. I decided that I am never going to feel sorry for myself. It's great to admit to your stupid side and laugh at that. But, in order to do that, one needs to be humble and realise that one can make mistakes and that there is still a long way to go. Though it is great cracking jokes at everybody else, you need to start with yourself. Many think of





"EVERY TIME YOU GO INTO THE OCEAN, IT CHANGES YOUR LIFE PERMANENTLY. OUT THERE YOU LOOK SO MORTAL THAT YOUR WHOLE PERCEPTION OF LIFE CHANGES DRASTICALLY"

me as an arrogant son of a bitch, because I am opinionated and screw their happiness.

You said you were a shy child. When did the transformation happen?

When I went to St. Thomas High School, a co-ed boarding school in Dehradun, I realised women were not just

irritating sisters. To cohabit with them and to socialise, I needed to do something. Unlike most of the boys, I was pretty shy and awkward. I remember that during one of the annual school balls, the girls were sitting on one side and the boys on another. There was this water cooler in one corner, near the girls. The boys had to get up and ask the girls for a dance. There was this stunning girl who



had grown up in East Africa and would speak in a sing-song accent. I got up to ask her for a dance, but as I was walking across the hall, I chickened out. I felt the whole world was staring at me; my heart was beating fast and my palms were sweating. I was all of 13 then and scared she might say 'no'. There I was in the middle, stranded, not knowing what to do. I didn't dare to go back and make a joke of myself. So I dashed straight for the water cooler and drank three glasses of water, and came back to my seat. That's how it all started.

How did you break the ice with women?

Most men, including me, have egos that are so fragile that we find it really difficult to take no for an answer. It takes a long time to come to terms with rejection. You can pretend to be really brave, but inside you are hurting. Early in life I realised that I didn't have the looks. I couldn't stand and pose and hope that girls would walk

into my arms. So I learnt the art of charm. I used to read a lot and had a good grasp over the language. Slowly, I took to writing poetry to pen down my angst and feelings. The first casualty of being intense about a relationship is that everything becomes so serious. If the girl does not return your call or doesn't meet you, the whole day is ruined. So whenever I was in love or feeling low, I would write. I realised that if I showed my poems to the girl, she would actually take me more seriously, rather than thinking of me as the funny-looking funny guy who is great to hang out with. Some of them were intelligent enough to figure out my feelings after reading the poems, and started looking at me differently. They realised that there was another person inside me, someone who is possibly insecure, sensitive and hurting. For a woman, it's important to reach out and give solace to the man in some way.

Being a funny guy, what do you think are your advantages vis-à-vis a serious person?

I can hide my seriousness and angst behind the veneer of being funny [bursts out laughing]. There is an element of insanity in every creative person, and I feel funny guys create an illusion of themselves as being fools, thereby not giving others a chance to pull them down. On the other hand, if you are the serious kind, people feel you are too smart and try to pull you down with their crab mentality. Over a period of time, I've developed a set of skills that makes me sensitive to others and gives me extrasensory perception. When I walk into a room, it takes me exactly 20 seconds to figure out someone completely. It's a great asset to know your environment. Because of my irreverence and funny side, people feel very comfortable with me, without realising the kind of information I may extract from them.

That's really fascinating!

It is, indeed. Desmond Morris, the anthropologist, draws parallels in his books *The Naked Ape* and *The Human Zoo* between human behaviour and the way apes behave. He says human beings too exhibit the survival instincts of animals. It's camouflaged generally and bared only when we are provoked. It's good to figure out body language as it helps you pick up non-verbal cues.

What according to you is the quirky side of life?

Everything in life is quirky if you look at it from that point of view. Everybody looks at life like a tragedy. If you step back and imagine that it's somebody else out there, it looks damn funny. I can be really dumb and do stupid things all the time. However, I can disassociate myself from that and laugh at it too. I still remember seeing this girl, whose father was in the Army. Though she was warned to keep off me, she would keep the door to her room open to let me in at night. One day her parents had gone out for dinner and she called me home early. Unfortunately, her parents came back early. I was stuck in her

room, not knowing what to do and where to hide. Finally, I went for the balcony, over this dog that couldn't stand my sight, and as I looked down from the balcony, I saw the watchman. I landed about 6 ft behind him, did a parachute roll and came up standing behind him. When he turned, I also turned, and said, "Something has fallen." As he went running around the building searching for what had fallen, I dashed out of the gate. All this was done in a split second, but felt like slow motion to me then, because I was scared of what would happen to my girlfriend had her father discovered me.

What's between you and the hat?

My ugly mug has been splashed in the media so many times that people have started recognising me now. However, there was a time when I used to stand in wait-listed queues for flights quite regularly. Once I wore a hat while waiting at the queue. The next time I came back wearing a hat again, the girl at the counter called out to me, 'The gentleman in the hat, please come and collect your ticket.' She jumped the queue for me because to her mind the fact that she was able to recollect me meant I was a frequent flier. I realised that by wearing a hat I could make it to last-minute flights. I spent almost eight years flying in and out of Vietnam, shooting for Unilever. Nobody else wanted to go there as it was a war-ravaged country. But being the adrenaline junkie I was, I read up all about the war and wanted to see the people who had cocked a snook at the Americans and rest of the world.

There is also another reason I wear a hat. While I was in Vietnam, there was a raid one night at the hotel where I was staying. I had come back from a party at 2 am and was very tired. Around 3 in the morning, there was constant banging on the door. I woke up, wore my hat and opened the door. There was this man standing there with an AK 47, along with the manager and a young lady, who



seemed to be quite horrified to see me. The man with the gun asked, 'Lady in room?'; and went in and looked under the bed, and in the toilet. He came out, apologised and was about to leave when I saw my cameraman behind the trio, jumping up and down and pointing downwards. I looked down, and guess what, I was wearing nothing. Quickly whipping off my hat, I covered my nakedness. A hat saved my dignity that day. The moral of the story is, never leave your home without a hat!

Food seems to be another great passion.

As looks were never going to be my forte, I realised quite early in life that I would have to find other ways to impress the opposite sex. Cooking was one of them. I believe in the motto that men who cook get laid more often than men who pump iron! That is going to be my epitaph.

Jokes apart, I got hooked on to cooking since I was a hunter in my younger days. Like all hunters, I was very particular about the way my game was cooked. I would rarely allow anybody else to cook my game. Slowly, I became quite instinctive about cooking. Today, I know more about it than most chefs. About 25 years back, I started Prithvi Café in Mumbai along with Jennifer Kendal Kapoor. That was the only gourmet restaurant in the city then. I introduced the Irish coffee there, which continues to be a favourite even now. When Jennifer passed away, I gave the café back to the Kapoors. Then I opened Papa Pancho, and later Tea Centre, both in Mumbai. I also run Sarson Da Saaga at the IMAX Adlabs theatre and a wine bar, Casa Amore, also in Mumbai. My businesses are never for minting money; they are my way of pursuing my passion.

You are also the pioneer of scuba diving in India.

My wife Mitali and I set up Lacadives, our scuba diving school in Kadmat Island in Lakshadweep when no one in India was diving. We have trained over 12,000 divers to

"IF YOU CAN DEMONSTRATE EVERY SINGLE DAY OF YOUR LIFE TO YOUR WIFE THAT SHE IS THE NO. 1 PERSON IN YOUR LIFE, SHE DOESN'T CARE A RAT ABOUT NO. 2, NO. 3 AND NO. 4!"

date. With those divers training others, the momentum is set now. But when we set up the office, we were asked, 'What's the ROI [return on investment]?' ROI can't be calculated merely on the basis of money. I could not have given my children a better education. Every time you go into the ocean, it changes your life permanently. Out there you look so mortal that your whole perception of life changes drastically. When you are going down there, you don't know whether you are going to come out alive. We have been swimming with sharks and whales; I can tell you that unlike their wild reputation, they are such unassuming creatures and rarely hurt human beings. Why would a shark want to chomp on a human body that is pumped with chemicals, toxins and all kinds of filth when he has such fresh spread freely available in the form of small, colourful fishes?

Happy Anniversary is said to be an anatomy of marriage. How did the idea take shape?

My producer Gaurang Doshi thought making a movie on marriages would be fun as all of us have our funny chronicles to share. It's ironically funny that when you are getting into a marriage, you don't realise what you are getting into. But when you see someone else planning to do the same, you warn them. We have narrated the concept to Aishwarya and Abhishek. Both of them liked it and are waiting for the final script.

Talking about marriages, how did you meet your wife, and who wears the pants at home?

I met Mitali for the first time when she came to my office with a friend. There was something about her that bowled me over. I cast her in a shampoo ad. She was about 22 then and I was 36 and commitment-phobic. She gave me an ultimatum one day, 'Marry me or go to hell.' I dashed off to Siliguri, where she was vacationing with her parents, and proposed to her. We got married in 1983, and though I got into the marriage believing I would be the boss in the relationship, I discovered that was not to be. Mitali is a quiet, strong woman and, slowly and insidiously, like all women do, cut off my balls. Today, I'm very much a *joru ka ghulam*!

How do you bond with your sons?

We bond over scuba diving. The ocean is a big part of our lives. My sons started diving when they were 12, while I started at 40. My eldest son is also a diving instructor;

while the two younger ones have done more diving than most diving instructors. The eldest, Arnab, is a marine biologist, while Varun is studying law in London. The youngest, Anshin, wants to be a photographer. Incidentally, he has also appeared in a Britannia ad with Sachin Tendulkar.

Tell us a little more about your childhood.

My mother was a major general's daughter and a bit of a *memsahib*. My father was in the Army as well. They got separated when I was about nine. My mom, who had never worked in her life till then, packed off me and my sister Mandakini to Dehradun to stay with our grandparents while she took up a job in Delhi. Growing up in Dehradun, surrounded by nature, it was but natural that I took to outdoor activities like camping, mountaineering and horse-riding. My grandfather was a stickler for discipline and timing. I remember his orderly, a *gurkha* chap who would be waiting at the doorstep of my grandfather's room with one finger in his shaving mug, as my grandfather wanted the water exactly at quarter to nine at a particular temperature. So, the orderly, depending on the temperature of the water, would either be blowing it to cool it down or keeping it closed to keep it warm.

My grandmother was a brilliant lady. She was one of the first lady doctors of Maharashtra and a year senior to my grandfather at Grant Medical College, though my grandfather's family thought she was just a *dai*. They ran off and got married as their parents didn't approve of the match. They had quite an adventurous life, with my grandfather taking charge of the Rangoon Medical Centre. He was the last serving officer before the Japanese came during the Second World War, and walked back to Imphal from Rangoon, even as everybody gave him up for dead.

It's said that as one ages, physical intimacy takes a backseat. How does one work around it?

That's why you need variety, one wife and many girlfriends! Most men don't understand that the wife just needs a reassurance of your love for her and a validation of her importance in your life. This is something that has to be genuinely felt and demonstrated on a daily basis. If you can demonstrate every single day of your life to your wife that she is the No. 1 person in your life, she doesn't care a rat about No. 2, No. 3 and No. 4! ✨

What is 60?

The number of push-ups you have to do this week.

The number of movies you have to catch up on.

The number of bad jokes you cracked last month.

The number of times you told your grandson
to get away from the TV set and get a life.

The number of places you have to travel to.

What it's not, is your age.

At least not in your head.

Or in your heart.





If you're above fifty five, we believe Harmony is just the magazine for you. Filled with human interest stories, exciting features and columns, Harmony encourages you to do just one thing: live young.

harmony
celebrate age

Laugh out loud



We all hold a special place in our hearts for the people who make us laugh. That's because we universally recognise humour as a talent, that sparkling ability to bring joy into a room or a conversation, to convey a message in a few words that are so unforgettable that we are compelled to share, repeat, praise.

Humour is in league with good oratory because a truly funny joke also often holds a bitter message, sugar-coating it to allow you to take it in, roll it around on your tongue and admit that, yes, you needed that. It's why Shakespeare so frequently glorified the fool, because the fool was often the only one who could get through to the deranged or megalomaniacal king, the only one with a weapon strong enough to speak truth to power: the joke.

Humour is a great equaliser and can take the form of subtle sarcasm, farce, hyperbole or slapstick comedy. But a good joke is probably the most oft-used vehicle that carries a laugh. A good joke can take something hallowed and reveal its absurdity, forever shattering the force field that protected it. Good comedy, then, elevates the joke from a polite icebreaker and turns it into something powerful, something political.

We recognise the courage—and humanity—this takes. It's why some of our most-beloved stars, from Charlie Chaplin to Raj Kapoor, have infused comedy in their acting.

To celebrate the humour month, *Harmony-Celebrate Age* salutes some of the best on behalf of some of our best. Have a good laugh!



BEST COMIC LINE

THE FILM *PADOSAN* HAS MANY COMICAL SCENES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE COMIC SITUATION IN WHICH THE SONG *PYAARI BANDHU* IS SUNG BY KISHORE KUMAR TICKLES MY FANCY!

BEST COMEDY FILM

Mughal-e-Azam

BEST COMIC ACTOR

Charlie Chaplin

BEST COMIC ROLE

Kishore Kumar in *Padosan*

LAUGHTER MANTRA

Unnatural, fake, artificial people or things make me laugh. My mantra is to keep observing people because their behaviour shouldn't irritate you but make you laugh!

JOHNNY LEVER

56, BOLLYWOOD

BEST COMEDY FILM

Tamil movies *Ethir Neechal* (1968) and *Maaman Magal* (1950)

BEST COMIC ACTOR

I like all Tamil comedians, especially J P Chandrababu and Nagesh

BEST COMIC ROLE

My role as Jil Jil Ramamani in *Thillana Mohanambal* (1968)

LAUGHTER MANTRA

Anything funny makes me laugh



BEST COMIC LINE

ALL THE LINES IN *THILLANA MOHANAMBAL*, WHERE, DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF STALWARTS LIKE SIVAJI GANESAN AND PADMINI, I BECAME THE CENTRE OF ATTENTION AS A WILDLY EXPRESSIVE AND LOUD-MOUTHED FOLK DANCER

MANORAMA

75, TAMIL CINEMA

SATISH SHAH

66, BOLLYWOOD

Colorblast

BEST COMEDY FILM

Chalti Ka Naam Gadi, Padosan

BEST COMIC ACTOR

In India, undoubtedly, Kishore Kumar, whom I idolise

BEST COMIC ROLE

Every role played by Kishore Kumar, whether in *Half Ticket*, *Do Dooni Char* or his cameo in *Padosan*, where he put brilliant actors to shame

LAUGHTER MANTRA

Every movie Sir Charles Chaplin (I never refer to him as Charlie Chaplin, because of my regard for him) ever made, although rooted in pathos and melancholy, moves me. Every time I revisit these films, they bring along a fresh perspective and, invariably, a smile to my face



BEST COMIC LINE
CAN'T REMEMBER
ANY SPECIFIC LINE.
I'M AGEING AND MY
HARD DISK IS FULL!



BEST COMIC LINE
IN THE FILM
GAJAKESARIYOGAM,
INNOCENT AND I PLAY A
COUPLE. THE FUNNIEST
SCENE IS WHEN WE TRY
TO LEARN HINDI TO TRAIN
OUR ELEPHANT, WHO
UNDERSTANDS NO
OTHER LANGUAGE!

KPAC LALITHA

66, MALAYALAM CINEMA

BEST COMEDY FILM

Manichitrathazhu

BEST COMIC ACTOR

Innocent

BEST COMIC ROLE

I loved the characters
Innocent and I played in
Manichitrathazhu. We play
husband-and-wife and the
characters are simply funny

DWIJEN BANDHYOPADHYAY

64, BENGALI CINEMA



BEST COMIC LINE

"NALAYAK, ADHARM,
DURACHARI,
MAMACHARI,
BHRASHTACHARI, BOL
SORRY!" -- PANKAJ
KAPOOR AS TARNEJA
IN JAANE BHI DO
YAARON

BEST COMEDY FILM

Sharey Chuattor,
Mahapurush and Bhooter
Bhabishyat

BEST COMIC ACTOR

Charlie Chaplin

BEST COMIC ROLE

Bhanu Bandhopadhaya
in Sharey Chuattor,
Robi Ghosh in Goopy Gyne
Bagha Byne and my role in
Jekhaney Bhooter Bhoy

LAUGHTER MANTRA

When someone thinks too
highly of himself, I laugh
silently!

Shilbhadra Datta





BEST COMEDY FILM

Life Is Beautiful

BEST COMIC ACTOR

Charlie Chaplin

BEST COMIC ROLE

Charlie Chaplin's role in
The Great Dictator

LAUGHTER MANTRA

When I misunderstand a situation. For instance, I once arrived at 7 am for a shoot that was at 7 pm!



BEST COMIC LINE

"IN THE END,
IT'S ALL A GAG",
IMMORTALISED BY
CHARLIE CHAPLIN

TIKU TALSANIA

59, BOLLYWOOD

The first day at school

The first time you rode the bicycle.

The first crush you had at thirteen

The first drama you got a part in

The first day at college

The first date you went on

The first kiss

The first time you proposed

The first job interview

The first board meeting you addressed

The first day after retirement

BUTTERFLIES *never retire*

The first click of the mouse.

The all new


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DESTINATION

THE HAPPY COUNTRY



Bhutan's iconic
Taktsang monastery
perched atop an
imposing mountain

THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD WITH A
GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS INDEX, BHUTAN
STAYS SECLUDED FROM FOREIGN INFLUENCES
IN A BLISSFUL WAY

❖ 📷 Sudipto Roy

What's your name?" I couldn't help asking the usual touristy question to the giggling apple-cheeked little girl in front of me. She was sitting pretty on her father's shoulder, clutching his short-cropped hair with both hands, and surveying the colourful sea of villagers gathered at *dzong*, an ancient fort-cum-lamasery in Paro, Bhutan, to watch a traditional Buddhist lama dance. Wearing masks and unique colourful and flowing costumes, the lamas were fighting imaginary demons to the beats of a drum. "Sonam Zangmo," came the shy reply that was barely audible amid the accompanying din. I was a little surprised to note that she could understand English. Later I learnt that, primary education, like basic healthcare, is free to all Bhutanese citizens and its reach is pretty far and wide.

My guide spoke to her father in Dzongkha, the local language, and told me that they had come from a village that was two days on foot from Paro, just to attend the annual festival of Tsechu, an important event in their religious calendar. This is the time when the sacred *thanka*—huge religious paintings done in Tibetan style—that are otherwise kept scrolled up safe and secure inside the *dzong* throughout the year are displayed publicly.

Sonam was still giggling; my Indian features, I presumed, were providing her much amusement. I was one of the handful of foreigners at the *dzong*, standing out in western clothes and other trappings of modernity. The locals were in their traditional national garb, with men in *gho*, a kind of kilt made from thick handwoven fabric, and women in *hunju* and *kira*, also handwoven. Even the children were in their traditional attire.

If you believe in clichés, call it Shangri-La, for Bhutan stays secluded from the surrounding world in a blissful way. The locals, however, prefer to call it Druk Yul. If you fall for media hype, you may know that this is the only country in the world where gross national happiness is officially measured by the government. Sandwiched between two very large neighbours—India and China—Bhutan is a tiny mountainous Himalayan kingdom. However, what makes it stand out from almost every other country in the world

is the spontaneous adherence of the people to their roots and an effort to keep their tradition alive, despite certain lifestyle statements making minor incursions. Not surprisingly, this is perhaps the only country in the world where you are likely to see a Buddhist lama, clad in his traditional attire, sporting Ray Ban sunglasses and driving a Toyota Prado! Modernity and tradition coexist peacefully here without any apparent clash.

Bhutan offers something for everyone. If you are a birding enthusiast, you may want to visit this picturesque country for its unique avifauna, while adventure motorists might flock here for the thrills of a mountain drive. It is not uncommon to find the odd tourist with an interest in anthropology wanting to study different ethnic minorities. However, the majority of tourists are devout Buddhists who see the country from a pilgrimage point of view.

For ordinary tourists who want to see a different culture, if not an entire country, meet its people and get a taste of its history shrouded in misty mythology, the best way to approach Bhutan is to take a flight to Paro, the only city in the country with an airport. The towering Paro *dzong*, with its traditional covered and cantilevered bridge, and Bhutan's national museum, housing over 3,000 objects of historical importance and works of art and craft, should be on the 'must visit' list of every tourist. But it's the Taktsang monastery, which literally means the tiger's nest, that is the most important draw. Hanging precariously from a lofty mountain side, it is easily the most photogenic, dramatic and iconic image of Bhutan, at least in the West. Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava (literally meaning one who is born in a lotus), an 8th century guru who hailed from the current Swat Valley in the Pakistan-Afghan border region, came flying here on a tiger's back and meditated for three years, three months, three weeks and three days. The Guru introduced the Tantric form of Buddhism in Tibet and Bhutan, and therefore the monastery is immensely important to the Bhutanese. Though trekking to Taktsang is challenging, one can find several silvers undertaking and finishing the trek successfully. While the view from the top is majestic, the sense of achievement one gets after completing such a trek is worth cherishing for a long time.

After a couple of days in Paro, one can go to Thimphu, the pretty-as-Toyland capital of Bhutan, which lies to the east.

What makes Bhutan stand out is the spontaneous adherence of the people to their roots and an effort to keep their tradition alive, despite certain lifestyle statements making minor incursions

(Clockwise from top left) Street view of Thimphu; inside Punakha Dzong; Swiss Bakery in Thimphu; monks at an open-air market in Punakha





The recently restored bridge over river Mo Chhu connects Punakha town and dzong

Paro to Thimphu, with a distance of 65 km, is a beautiful drive of less than an hour. Relatively speaking, Thimphu is a big city with roads full of large modern Japanese cars, shops and commercial buildings. All the buildings follow traditional Bhutanese architecture, even if they are made of concrete, giving the city a unique identity. The sense of discipline among the drivers here is amazing. There is no honking and the air is highly breathable.

Given the huge number of Japanese SUVs on its roads, the city of Thimphu would give you the misleading impression that Bhutan is a very rich country. The fact is that it has a low GDP and survives mostly on dole and foreign aid. There is a huge gap between urban and rural economic development. Bhutan has immense economic wealth in hydroelectricity. Most of its hydel power stations are built by India's National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) and the power is purchased by India through special agreements. The irony of the situation, however, is that local villages often don't have any electricity. Visible poverty is very less though; you are not likely to see a beggar on the streets. But at the same time, Bhutanese society is almost entirely crime-free. Petty thefts, burglary and crimes against women are concepts almost unheard of in this country.

There are many touristy things to do in Thimphu, like visiting the Tashichho Dzong known for its intricate Buddhist

artwork, where the monastic body stays, or photographing the three-storied Dechencholing Palace, where the king stays. The huge, photogenic Tashichho Dzong, with the brownish mountain walls in the background, is the administrative headquarters of Bhutan where the royal court is located and all the important ministers have their offices. Dechencholing is the royal palace where the present king's father Jigme Singye Wangchuk stays. Covered by willows and poplars, the palace is the embodiment of serenity and tranquillity. Thimphu also has its fair share of museums, with the textile museum being the most fascinating. Weaving and designing garments are an important part of Bhutanese life. Going around the museum will help you understand the significance of different dresses worn according to the social and religious hierarchy.

Among the non-touristy things to do would be to go to the large playground in the centre of the city and watch a game of archery or visit the local post office to see its philatelic offerings. Then, there is the delectable Swiss Bakery, which looks like a rustic café with wooden benches and tables but has been rated by *The New York Times* as one of the 10 best bakeries in the world. It is expensive by middle-class Indian standards, but the pastries, patties, sandwiches and freshly baked cream rolls and cakes served with pots of great coffee and tea are simply out of this world. The bakery was set up by a Swiss national in the 1950s. He had come to repair a radio that belonged to King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk,

WHEN TO GO

The best time is from November to April. December-January can be very cold in Thimphu, including the occasional snowfall. May to October is best avoided, as it rains.

VISA & CURRENCY REQUIREMENT

Bhutan charges a hefty per-day official fee for foreigners to keep backpackers and hippies at bay. However, it's totally free for Indians, who don't need a visa. On arrival, you need to prove your Indian identity through your passport or voter ID card. To visit Punakha, you need a separate permission from Thimphu, which your travel agent can help organise. You need another permit for entering the various *dzong*, also available in Thimphu. If you are going to get these permits yourself, ensure you are in Thimphu on a working day. Bhutan is notorious for long government holidays.

The official currency of Bhutan is the Ngultrum which is pegged at 1:1 with the Indian rupee through a special

treaty. Indian currency is legal and acceptable all over the country. ATMs are non-existent and most hotels don't accept credit cards. So carry all your money in cash.

TIPS

- Bhutan is perhaps the only country in the world that has completely banned the sale and consumption of tobacco—not just smoking. The Bhutanese version of Buddhism believes that exhaled smoke disturbs the departed.
- Mobile roaming is frightfully expensive in Bhutan—both incoming and outgoing. Getting a new local connection on Tashi Cell is surprisingly simple and easy and making phone calls to India from that connection is quite affordable.
- Most hotels serve normal Indian food. The most popular local dishes are *thukpa*, which is essentially noodles in soup, and *yemba datsi*, local cheese and sliced red chillies.

the present King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck's grandfather. He fell in love with the country and never went back.

From Thimphu, you can head to Punakha, about 80 km to the northeast, the winter capital of Bhutan, on the other side of the picturesque Dochula Pass. This is also the highest motorable point in the country; it remains covered in snow during winters but offers a fantastic panoramic view of the snow-clad peaks of the eastern Himalaya on a clear day.

In terms of its sheer impact, the Punakha Dzong tops the chart. At the confluence of two rivers stands the huge, imposing, ancient and indigenously built fort. The rivers—Pho Chhu (father river) with bluish water and Mo Chhu (mother river) with crystal-clear white water—join together and flow down the kingdom as one river, entering West Bengal to become the mighty Sankosh. Myth has it that the fort was built in a day after a dream by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who unified Bhutan, which earlier consisted of warring fiefdoms as a nation state in the 1630s. However, scientific research claims the *dzong* was built some time in 1637-38. It houses several important relics related to the Drukpa Kadju sect of Buddhism that is practised in Bhutan. The sect borrows its practices from Tibetan Buddhism and is led in Bhutan by the King and *Je Khenpo*, the chief abbot of the Central Monk Body. Though the *dzong* has been ravaged over the centuries by several fires and earthquakes, it still stands tall and proud, guarding the valley and the kingdom. During winters, the entire monastic body comes down from Thimphu's Tashichho Dzong to stay here. The royal family is also often in residence at Punakha.

While the *dzong* is rumoured to have been built overnight, the bridge in front of Mo Chhu, which takes you over to the *dzong* from the town, took the Germans six years and a few million dollars to build. The traditional Bhutanese bridge, Bazam, was washed out in a glacial flood in the 1950s. The bridge then built by the Indians was just a makeshift affair. Though it served its purpose, it had zero aesthetic appeal. In the 1990s, a German NGO appointed an architect to study traditional Bhutanese bridges all over the country and build a new one in its place. This bridge, built in the traditional, covered cantilever style using modern technology, is certainly worth marvelling at, particularly if one has a sense of history and architecture. Another unique cultural experience to soak in while in Punakha is a visit to the local open-air market in front of the bridge. Often entire villages, including the lamas, come here for their vegetable shopping.

The itinerary described here is like a short glimpse into western Bhutan. There are, however, other important regions in the country worth seeing, like Bhumthang or Trongsa in north-central Bhutan, Mongar and Tashigang in eastern Bhutan or Phuntsholing in southern Bhutan. All the pretty towns in the kingdom developed originally around the *dzong*, the most important building in the town, and are worth spending a day on for checking out the museums, monasteries, and Tibetan-styled wall paintings.

All considered, while Bhutan's apparent appeal lies in its natural beauty, the mountains and mist, and the unique architecture, its real charm lies in its people. To explore that, you must shed your inhibitions and speak to them. You come away pleasantly surprised by their warmth and cheerfulness—and charmed enough to want to return. ✨

INK NO BAR

Today's zingy touchscreen devices seem a blot in front of Yashwant Pitkar's ink bottles. With his collection of over 60 brands of ink bottles from across the globe in various shapes and sizes, this J J College of Architecture professor held 'INK-BAR', a pop-up exhibition at a popular pen store in Mumbai. A connoisseur of inks and fountain pens, Pitkar's rare and unique inks in silver, pink and brown—and more interesting ones like invisible, perfumed and waterproof—enthralled visitors. "I am captivated by the different colours of inks and the unusual shapes of bottles they come in," he says. "The history of ink is 1,500 years old; it began in China, with New York-based Waterman patenting the first fountain pen in 1884. In India, fountain

pens are manufactured in Tenali and Rajamundry since 1928. The purpose of my exhibition was to educate people that there is more to fountain pens than just the usual blue, black and red. For instance, accountants use green for auditing and architects use purple for signing." Pitkar's 10 year-old collection also comprises vintage ink pots made of glass and brass and fascinating pen stands. These prized treasures were collected from England, Dubai and Japan, places his profession took him. Among his rare collection are a 50 year-old red Mont Blanc ink and an old Parker 51 ink. Pitkar, whose other hobbies include architectural photography, skydiving and mineral collection, has also held several lectures on pens and their inks' history and development, besides workshops on designing them. "I have been using fountain pens since my childhood. It gives me great pleasure to write; it is more of a personal expression as against emails and other electronic messages," says the 60 year-old with pride. Point noted.

—Sai Prabha Kamath



Photographs by Hareesh Patel

HAPPY FEET

She redefined the vocabulary of Kathak and gave it a new dimension. A pioneer in the contemporary form of Kathak, **Kumudini Lakhia** moved away from its solo format in the 1960s and turned it into a group spectacle, combining traditional techniques with modern themes. Founder of dance academy Kadamb in Ahmedabad, some of her well-known choreography includes *Dhabkar*, *Yugal* and *Atah Kim*. Winner of the Padma Shri in 1987 and Padma Bhushan in 2010, the 84 year-old was recently conferred the Sumitra Charat Ram Award for Lifetime Achievement. In an interview with **Ambica Gulati**, Lakhia talks about the grace dance brings to life:

How were you initiated into dance?

Though I used to learn Kathak as a child, I had no plans to make it a career. After my graduation in agriculture, when I was unemployed, I got a call from renowned dancer Ram Gopal to perform with his group in London. It was a great learning experience for me but language was a barrier. Then, I got a scholarship from the Ministry of Human Resource Development and trained under the legendary Shambhu Maharaj for two years at Sri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, Delhi. Then for a year, I trained under Pandit Sunder Prasad. I performed many ballads, a memorable one being *Kumar Sambhavam*.

How was Kadamb born?

After I came back to Ahmedabad from Delhi, it was becoming difficult for me to operate as a solo dancer. I would travel to Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata for shows. To promote the dance form and impart training in dance, I founded Kadamb in 1967. Initially, just two or three girls joined as there were misconceptions about the art and parents were sceptical of sending their girls to a dance class. It was an uphill task to change those perceptions but, looking back, it all seems worth it. Today, students from different parts of the world such as England, Japan and the US are learning dance here.

How was the experience of choreographing for movies?

I choreographed for Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan* (1981) along with Gopi Krishna, and K Vishwanath's *Sur Sangam*

(1985). Filmmaking is a slow process and I got bored of the pace. It gets tedious after some time.

Western dance forms are becoming increasingly popular these days....

We need to accept and encourage all art forms. There is definitely room for all dance forms and all kinds of interests in our society.

You have brought in group performances to Kathak.

I call it choreography in space and time; applying Kathak in group composition and adding contemporary storylines into the repertoire have made a strong visual impact. Kadamb has trained excellent dancers and some of our well-received group performances have been *Dhabkar* (1973), *Yugal* (1976), *Atah Kim* (1982), *Bhav Krida* (1999), *Samanvay* (2003) and *Feathered Cloth – Hagoromo* (2006).

DANCE



How has Kathak evolved over time?

All creative forms are dependent on individuals. Kathak has good teachers and wonderful students. There is a lot of scope for innovation in stage presentations such as choreography, costumes and stage designing and that is what I have tried to do.

What inspires your work?

Apart from my mother, Leela Jaykar, and my gurus—Shambhu Maharaj, Ram Gopal, Birju Maharaj, Pandit Sunder Prasad, Radha

Lal Mishra and Ashiq Hussain—I am inspired by everything around me, including art, heritage, nature; even the way branches grow on the trees.

Which is your favourite performance?

Every performance teaches us something and we learn from our mistakes. But a performance that particularly moved me was the one held in Germany just after the Cold War (1953). Though it was a tragic moment for the country—there were broken buildings and shattered people—the performance still went full house and the audience gave us a thunderous applause. That was such a heart-warming gesture.

sheer elegance

Manas Shrivastava unravels the story of Chanderi's revival

I will gift this to my daughter-in-law on her first wedding anniversary this month," gleams Suchitra Mathur, a 56 year-old homemaker from Gwalior, looking at an exquisite pink Chanderi, complete with golden border and floral motif. "While its comfort and sophistication are legendary, it's good to see original Chanderi saris making a comeback with a touch of modernity and brand new shades."

Reputed for their texture, light weight and glossy transparency, it was said in jest that husbands were asked to speak in hushed tones with their wives, else their delicate Chanderis give way! "Owing to a special weaving technique, the fabric is as light as air and keeps you cool even in summers," remarks Ritu Sethi, chairperson and editor, *craftrevival.org*. The base material for this gossamer-fine fabric is pure cotton or silk. Named after the town of Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, weavers of the town initially used hand-spun cotton thread, which was later replaced by mill-spun thread to be followed by silk. A golden border with two golden bands on the *pallu* is the sari's trademark; the motifs woven across the fabric us-



TEXTILES

ing gold, silver or copper threads add to its beauty. Its vibrant colours are obtained from flowers and vegetable dyes. Tremendous craftsmanship goes into a hand-woven masterpiece. Depending on the intricacy of embroidery, a sari may cost anywhere between ₹ 1,500 and ₹ 150,000.

The history of the fabric dates back to the 12th century when Chanderi fabrics were quite a favourite with queens; it revelled in patronage from various ruling dynasties—the Tughlaqs, the Malwa Sultans, Bundelas and Scindias of Gwalior—who paid weavers handsomely. Its popularity

continued through most parts of the medieval period and was at its peak during the Mughal Empire; its popularity is even alluded to in *Ain-e-Akbari*, a detailed compilation of Emperor Akbar's administration. The Maratha rulers ordered their turbans from Chanderi weavers. And during the 18th century, Chanderi weavers manufactured a wide spectrum of saris for the noble families of Nagpur, Gwalior, Indore and Baroda.

Despite its rich past, about a decade ago Chanderi saris began to disappear from the market because of the dependency of weavers on middlemen and a lack of proper marketing and supply network. "The production was high but in the absence of effective marketing, the saris almost disappeared from the market and became more of a product to be sold by the *feriwalla* [hawkers]," observes Brij Udaiwal, proprietor of Jaipur-based Shilpi Handicrafts, manufacturer and wholesalers of Chanderi. "The income of traditional weavers was badly hit, forcing many to migrate to other industries and agriculture." Lack of value addition and cheap imitation by power looms further dampened the market. "Moreover, the traditional weavers failed to connect with changing market preferences, hence becoming far more disassociated from the buyers," Sethi points out.

In 2003, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) launched its three-year Cluster Development Project in Chanderi to help poor weavers revive their occupation. As part of the project, it procured a Geographical Indication (GI) certificate for Chand-eri fabrics to prevent cheap imitation; Chand-eri saris became the first brand in India to obtain this certification. Besides, 60 self-help groups were formed to organise resources for the weavers and help them take charge of their brand in terms of marketing, finance, design and experimentation. UNIDO also enabled their participation in national and international exhibitions and helped them understand contemporary design, patterns and colours. "UNIDO's intervention consolidated the marketing network and linked Chand-eri products to its proper channels," confirms Udaiwal.

Roping in professional fashion designers like Rohit Bal, Manish Malhotra and Vaishali Shadungule further opened doors to experimental designs, colours and a new range of products. "Earlier, people preferred crowded designs; today, however, lighter designs are in demand. To cater to these changing tastes, we have customised our products," says Ankit Kumar, head designer, *chanderiyaan.net*, a part of the Chanderiyaan

project started by New Delhi-based NGO Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in 2009, where weavers sell their products online.

Celebrities did their bit to popularise the fabric. In 2009, Kareena Kapoor visited the town of Chand-eri don-ning a black-gold sari gifted to her by her *3 Idiots* co-star Aamir Khan and advocated a better platform and rightful wages for weavers. The 'Ka-reena effect' gave a huge fillip to the market; Chand-eri gained popularity across the globe. The growing appeal of Chand-eri products became evident

With the growing appeal of Chand-eri products, looms of the 3,500 weaving families in and around Chand-eri are busier than ever



from their visibility in interna-tional events like the Commonwealth Games 2010 where Chand-eri stoles were presented to winners.

While archiving the traditional art, the Chanderiyaan project has also introduced digital prints. Fab India, the largest chain of traditional gar-ments in India, offers design ideas to weavers. Today, in the rejuvenated international market, manufactur-ers are introducing a new range of products like bed covers, table covers, curtains and men's wear like *kurta-pyjama*.

There is no doubt that the market is looking up. There are around 3,500 weaver fami-lies in and around Chand-eri and their looms are busier than ever. "Our income has gone up from ₹ 50 per day four years ago to ₹ 400-600 per day today," says Nirmal Kumar Jain, master weaver and president of the Chanderi Development Foundation. "In fact, weavers who had deserted the occupation are returning. Life has surely changed for the better." However, there is a huge concern about cheap imita-tions. "Duplicate products could malign the entire brand. Despite strict vigilance, out of 1,000 Chand-eri saris pro-duced here, 900 are fake; a sari worth ₹ 200 may be easily sold for ₹ 1,500," Jain says, raising a perennial concern.

COMEBACK!

DIRECTOR OF HINDI COMEDY FILM *CHAALBAAZ* (1989) AND TV DETECTIVE SERIES *KARAMCHAND* (1985), PANKAJ PARASHAR IS SET TO MAKE A COMEBACK. HE WILL HELM *VASUNDHARA*, THE TELLY DEBUT OF VETERAN ACTOR JAYA BACHCHAN. SAID TO BE BASED ON GUJARATI NOVEL *YOG-VIYOG*, THE SHOW WILL FEATURE BACHCHAN IN THE LEAD AS A SINGLE PARENT MANAGING HER ENTIRE FAMILY. ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS, THE SHOW WILL BE SHOT IN MUMBAI AND WILL BE ON AIR FOR SIX MONTHS.

Battle of wits

We toast the month of humour with an excerpt from Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, a satirical novel written in 1953

It was love at first sight. The first time Yossarian saw the chaplain he fell madly in love with him.

Yossarian was in the hospital with a pain in his liver that fell just short of being jaundice. The doctors were puzzled by the fact that it wasn't quite jaundice. If it became jaundice, they could treat it. If it didn't become jaundice and went away, they could discharge him. But this just being short of jaundice all the time confused them.

Each morning they came around, three brisk and serious men with efficient mouths and inefficient eyes, accompanied by brisk and serious Nurse Duckett, one of the ward nurses who didn't like Yossarian. They read the chart at the foot of the bed and asked impatiently about the pain. They seemed irritated when he told them it was exactly the same.

"Still no movement?" the full colonel demanded.

The doctors exchanged a look when he shook his head.

"Give him another pill."

Nurse Duckett made a note to give Yossarian another pill, and the four of them moved along to the next bed.

None of the nurses liked Yossarian. Actually, the pain in his liver had gone away, but Yossarian didn't say anything and the doctors never suspected. They just suspected that he had been moving his bowels and not telling anyone.

Yossarian had everything he wanted in the hospital. The food wasn't too bad, and his meals were brought to him in bed. There were extra rations of fresh meat, and during the hot part of the afternoon he and the others were served chilled fruit juice or chilled chocolate milk. Apart from the doctors and the nurses, no one ever disturbed him. For a little while in the morning he had to censor letters, but he was free after that to spend the rest of each day lying around idly with a clear conscience. He was comfortable in the hospital, and it was easy to stay on because he always ran a temperature of 101. He was even more comfortable than Dunbar, who had to keep falling down on his face in order to get his meals brought to him in bed.

After he had made up his mind to spend the rest of the war in the hospital, Yossarian wrote letters to everyone he knew saying that he was in the hospital but never mentioning why. One day he had a better idea. To everyone he knew he wrote that he was going on a very dangerous mission. "They asked for volunteers. It's very dangerous, but someone has to do it. I'll write to you the instant I get back." And he had not written to anyone since.

All the officer patients in the ward were forced to censor letters written by all the enlisted-men patients, who were kept in residence in wards of their own. It was a monotonous job, and Yossarian was disappointed to learn that the

lives of enlisted men were only slightly more interesting than the lives of officers. After the first day he had no curiosity at all. To break the monotony he invented games. Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything in the letters but a, an and the. That erected more dynamic intra-linear tensions, he felt, and in just about every case left a message far more universal. One time he blacked out all but the salutation "Dear Mary" from a letter, and at the bottom he wrote, "I yearn for you tragically. R O Shipman, Chaplain, US Army." R O Shipman was the group chaplain's name.

When he had exhausted all possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets, annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrists as though he were God. Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer's name. Most letters he didn't read at all. On those he didn't read at all he wrote his own name. On those he did read he wrote, "Washington Irving." When that grew monotonous he wrote, "Irving Washington." Censoring the envelopes had serious repercussions, produced a ripple of anxiety on some ethereal military echelon that floated a CID man back into the ward posing as a patient. They all knew he was a CID man because he kept inquiring about an officer named Irving or Washington and because after his first day there he wouldn't censor letters. He found them too monotonous.

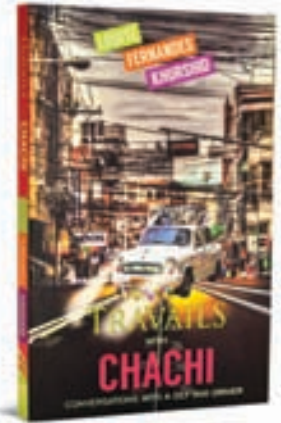


BETWEEN THE LINES



A barnyard fable in the league of *Charlotte's Web*, **THE HEN WHO DREAMED SHE COULD FLY** (Penguin; ₹ 299; 134 pages) is an anthem of individuality, freedom and motherhood featuring a feisty, spirited hen. The central protagonist who names herself 'Sprout', because the name symbolises freedom and hope, has spent her entire life in an overcrowded coop on an industrial egg farm, laying eggs only to find them carted off to the market. Sprout dreams of freedom and, more important, of hatching an egg of her own. On escaping the coop, she's shunned by everyone until she finds another outsider like her, a mallard duck called Straggler. Through this extraordinary tale of love and loss, Korean writer **Sun-Mi Hwang** creates an allegory of life that finds universal resonance. Not only does she deal with the healing bonds of friendship and the joys of parenthood, but makes references to the sacrifices they entail. The array of animal characters, including the dog and weasel, have been endowed with specific human attributes, making the narrative relatable. Spare but evocative drawings by Japanese artist Nomoco and an adept translation by **Chi-Young Kim** into colloquial English add to the subtle charm of this enchanting tale.

Chachi, an Ambassador taxi with her own personality and opinion on the *savari* she carries, is the heroine of **TRAVAILS WITH CHACHI** (Hay House; ₹ 350; 256 pages), and it is through her eyes that we see the political and social times of Delhi and the dusty towns of Uttar Pradesh during the 1980s and 90s. Written by External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid's wife **Louise Fernandes Khurshid**, the narration is by Madath Singh Yadav, the cab driver, who is an innocent witness and abettor to under-the-table deals managed by our country's politicians. The chapters are filled with spot-on caricatures of real-life *neta* and people involved in controversies. Whether it is the Mandal Commission Prime Minister or Maneka Gandhi's solution to Delhi's stray dog menace, the narrative reveals the irony of it all. Chachi, being the principled old dame who could care less for sleazy politicians, protests by sputtering and belching and sometimes even refusing to move an inch ahead. The cab also occasionally leaves the dusty roads of Delhi and travels down South, to 'Jayalalthaa land' and Bangalore, where Madath Singh gets a fresh perspective of the people there, busting stereotypical myths. This is a fun, satirical read, but understandably politicians from one party—take a guess!—are missing from the spoof.



Inspired by the Mughal period of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, **MISTRESS OF THE THRONE: THE MUGHAL INTRIGUES** (Srishti; ₹ 187; 326 pages) centres on the personal and political impact of the unheralded princess Jahanara, who is often overlooked by history texts. While there have been several interpretations of the Mughal era, **Ruchir Gupta**, in his debut novel, presents a fresh perspective by giving us an up close and intimate account of Jahanara and lets events unfold through her eyes. Crowned empress at the tender age of 17 after her mother Mumtaz Mahal's death and holding the royal seal with authority to override even her father's decisions, Jahanara is forced to come of age.

The book also depicts the conflicts inherent in governing a country of diverse religious affiliations through the stories of her two brothers—one an orthodox Muslim, and the other a Sufi—the British employees of the East India Company and the Portuguese Jesuits. Mixing facts and fiction, Gupta also paints a lucid picture of the architectural marvels conceived during Shah Jahan's reign, including the Taj Mahal. To the author's credit, it's not just Jahanara he fleshes out well; even the peripheral characters shine through with well-rounded character sketches.

“Abused silvers should initiate legal action against children”

In her two-decade long career, additional district and sessions judge **Swarana Kanta Sharma**, 45, was witness to several cases of social injustice against silvers and has fought for their rights. In one of her landmark verdicts, she had said that the “contribution of elders who give their soul to the family cannot be evaluated in terms of money alone” (refer ‘Awarding respect’, Orbit, April 2011). Her book, *Beyond Baghban—Old Age* (Bukaholic; ₹ 450; 267 pages), based on these true stories, is an attempt to educate silvers about their rights, apart from offering them emotional support and practical solutions. Her first book, *Divorce: Don't Break After Break-Up*, was aimed at helping women cope with life after divorce. A mother of two, New Delhi-based Sharma, who is currently posted as special judge, CBI, and has recently passed orders in the Railgate controversy and Medical Council of India cases, tells **Sai Prabha Kamath** how silvers can lead happy and fulfilling lives if they plan and act rationally. Excerpts from the interview:

How did the idea of this book on silvers come about?

As parents, we live with the hope that our children will grow up and take care of us. We live in a Utopia, unmindful of the realities that we can be ill-treated, cheated of our property, ignored by our own children. Instances of silvers finding themselves emotionally and financially broken moved me enough to write about the problems they face. I felt compelled to warn not just silvers but also those in their middle age to remain prepared for the twists and turns of life.

As a special judge, you have been handling CBI cases. Is this book inspired from your professional experiences?

My book is a product of emotions; it is an outcome of my interactions with families in the society we live in, and the people that I came in contact with during my career as a judge.

Where are we going wrong?

Today, healthy communication between generations is missing. There is a lack of role models too. When we are young, we fail to set examples by being respectful and caring towards our ageing parents. In many cases,

silvers. It is important to educate them about their rights. Laws alone cannot change hearts. Silvers have to be provided with an emotional support system. We need more old age homes where silvers can live with dignity.

Why are seniors hesitant to invoke the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, which criminalises abuse?

There is a strong belief in our society that parents must not litigate against their children, even if they have been cheated or thrown out of their house. Having seen the law up close, I must say that a very negligible percentage of parents uses the judicial machinery against their children. Sadly, the comparative figures of children litigating against their parents are quite high. Even while they are looked after and provided for their entire life by their parents, some children claim the property as a matter of right, irrespective of whether they are fulfilling their basic duties towards their parents or not. There have been instances where reason and love have failed but the legal course has worked. If parents have to take recourse to litigation, they must not hesitate to do so, but must do so cautiously.

With parents expected to tolerate and forgive children's behaviour, where do elders draw a line?

As a society, we believe adjustment is a great virtue. We are very tolerant and forgiving of our children's behaviour. We justify our acceptance of their behaviour as part of our culture. This attitude needs to be reviewed. We cannot allow ourselves to be ill-treated; we need to set limits and not allow anybody to take advantage of us. We have a duty towards ourselves to live with dignity. Our future lies in our

AUTHORSPEAK



there is too much rigidity on the part of elders as well. In any relationship, including the one between a parent and child, each person has to walk an extra mile towards the other.

In a recent survey in India, 23 per cent of silvers admitted to facing abuse—physical, emotional and financial. However, only 32 per cent of them reported it.

There is an urgent need to address the needs of the growing population of

own hands. Our courage could inspire others and change their lives too.

How can silvers develop a positive attitude?

When we are young, we promise ourselves that we will fulfil our dreams in our old age. But by the time we reach our sunset years, we lose the enthusiasm to realise our dreams. We feel our life has fallen short of our aspirations and expectations. Time has to be spent purposefully—you can keep busy even within your home. Take up activities you enjoy, such as reading, walking, spending time with your near and dear ones and meeting your peer group. Accept life on a day-to-day basis while trying to make it happier. Instead of looking away from problems, face them head-on without losing hope. Remember the mathematical principle: every problem has a solution!

"Today, healthy communication between generations is missing. There is a lack of role models too. In any relationship, each person has to walk an extra mile towards the other"

How do you manage to write amid your hectic schedule?

Writing is a passion for me. As a judge, I want my judgements to help people in distress. But as judgements have a limited scope, I like to write to reach out to a larger audience. This desire gives me strength to work extra hours—at night, during weekends and holidays—even while travelling

everyday and waiting for my children outside their college and school. I steal away little moments from my schedule to scribble away. I keep my pen and pad ready at every place, including my car and kitchen.

What are you writing next?

My first fiction, *Love Full Circle*, the story of a powerful woman who fights all odds to emerge a winner, is ready for release. I am working on a book currently to help people lead a simple, healthy and happy life by managing their time wisely. Also on the anvil is a book, *Miracle of Two Generations Coming Together*, which will try to bridge the gap between the younger and older generations.

You can place an order for Beyond Baghban - Old Age at bukaholicpublications@gmail.com; silvers get a 20 per cent discount

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- The first time you mustered up the courage.
- The first time you bared your heart.
- The first time you heard "Yes".
- The first date.
- The first time you held hands.
- The first fight.
- The first time you made up.
- Shouldn't you be celebrating, that first rush of love before life and the babies and the bills intruded?
- Because for the first time you're at an age when you can talk back to each other all over again.

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All is good

Equanimity is the key to long-lasting happiness, says **Kiva Bottero**

What is happiness? To one person it means owning eight cars. To another it means being in a great relationship. To a third it's about getting blissed out in *kirtan*. Happiness means different things to different people. But, despite the discrepancy, one thing is certain—nice things and experiences only offer temporary pleasure. Cars die, relationships end, memories fade. Any definition of happiness based on attaining something or achieving a 'positive' state of mind is built on a deck of cards.

According to Ven Sanghasena, a Buddhist monk and spiritual leader in India, equanimity is a higher state of happiness that is steady and long-lasting. It is not based on the dualities of pleasure or pain, happiness or sadness, richness or poverty. Rather than the ups and downs that come from a state of happiness based on sensual desires, equanimity is a state of non-attachment based on acceptance of what is happening in the present moment—'good' or 'bad,' 'pleasure' or 'pain' are all concepts created in our minds. With equanimity, all is good.

The term 'equanimity' first entered the English language in the 17th century from the Latin *aequanimitas*, which comes from *aequus* (equal) and *animus* (mind). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it means "calmness and composure, especially in a difficult situation"—though that general definition doesn't capture the true essence of this powerful meta-virtue.

All the major spiritual traditions of the world regard equanimity as central to their teachings. In verse 2.48 of the sacred Hindu text *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna teaches: "Perform your duty equipoised, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga." Hindus and yogis define yoga as 'union with God,' designating equanimity as the one, all-important virtue to realising their divinity. Krishna advises Arjuna to maintain non-attachment because it's that even-mindedness that enables us to escape the ego's firm grip. While abiding in equanimity, we can see more clearly that all those events

happening on the surface of our existence are only as relevant as we believe them to be. In equanimity, we experience our true selves.

Looking beyond the spiritual traditions originating in India, Christianity too embraces equanimity as an important part of its beliefs. St Paul writes in *Philippians* 4:11:13 about focusing on the divine rather than getting swayed by externalities: "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

The word Islam comes from the Arabic *aslama*, which means 'surrender.' When Muslims pray to Allah they surrender to Allah's will, which can be considered a state of peaceful acceptance no different than equanimity. The similar sounding Arabic word *salam* is a greeting that means peace. A peace that can come through surrendering to Allah's will.


But when hearing the term equanimity in a spiritual context, it is Buddhism that people generally think of

because of the virtue's intrinsic importance to the spiritual tradition. The ancient Sanskrit word *upeksha* roughly translates to equanimity, which along with loving kindness (*maitri*), compassion (*karuna*) and joy (*mudita*), is one of the four immeasurables (the same as the four sublime attitudes in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*).

Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh translates *upeksha* thus: "In Sanskrit, *upa* means 'over' and *iksh* means 'to look.' You climb the mountain to be able to look over the whole situation, not bound by one side or the other." From that vantage point one accesses another aspect of equanimity, *samatajnana* or the wisdom of equality, which Nhat Hanh describes as "the ability to see everyone as equal and not discriminate between ourselves and other people".



Canada-based blogger Bottero writes about environment, spirituality and culture, and edits *The Mindful Word*, a journal of "engaged living". You can read his work at www.themindfulword.org

A photograph of an elderly man with a grey beard and a young girl with dark hair playing in a pond. The man is in the water, wearing a dark shirt, with his arms outstretched. The girl is sitting on a wooden dock, wearing a white dress, looking at the man with a smile. The water is dark blue and rippling. The dock is made of wooden planks.

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Sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll

They are the quintessential bad boys of rock. When The Rolling Stones released their debut album by the same name in 1964, singing about drugs, sex and violence, they pushed the limits of what was acceptable in mainstream music. The hedonistic behaviour of the band found acceptance among the rock 'n' roll generation, who lapped up their angst-filled music, with the album staying on top of the charts for 12 consecutive weeks. The public image of the band as the casually dressed, long-haired hipsters embodied a generation in the throes of change. The anti-establishment template they created is best represented by their runaway hit *I can't get no satisfaction*, expressing a distinct dissatisfaction with the way things were.



Named after a blues song by Muddy Waters, The Rolling Stones were part of the British invasion of American shores by musicians. Providing a perfect antithesis to wholesome British pop icons The Beatles, The Rolling Stones courted controversy with a vengeance. Their rebellion was not limited to provocative lyrics; sexually charged stage antics and the possession of drugs by band members Keith Richards, Mick Jagger and Brian Jones helped further the bad-boy image. Their concerts too, packed with youngsters experimenting with drugs, were loud and boisterous, often resulting in violence, like the 1969 murder of an 18 year-old boy near the stage in California. By the early 1970s, The Rolling Stones were banned from many countries and exiled from Britain for defaulting on taxes.

However, the band rolled on, experimenting with instruments and mixing blues with rock 'n' roll. After five

decades together, The Rolling Stones have eight number one singles and 10 consecutive gold albums to their credit. The hits include *Gimme shelter* and *Symphony for the devil* on the Vietnam War, *Paint it black* on JFK's assassination, and controversial numbers like *Brown sugar*, *Beast of burden*, *Angie*, *Under my thumb*, *Start me up* and *Some girls*, among others. As iconic as the band is its 'tongue and lip' logo, designed by John Pasche, which continues to be reproduced on T-shirts, badges, bags, posters, key chains and tattoos. The band has seen its share of discords and disagreements too, including the famous fallout between Richards and Jagger over the latter's acceptance of a knighthood in 2003, flouting the band's carefully cultivated anti-establishment attitude. Still, The Rolling Stones continue to live up to their reputation, selling out stadiums around the world and inspiring a whole new legion of musicians.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: APRIL 1964

- On 5 April, the first driverless underground train was introduced in London.
- On 17 April, Geraldine Jerrie Mock became the first woman to fly solo around the world in a Cessna 180, when she landed in Columbus, Ohio, after covering 22,860 miles over 29 days, with 21 stopovers.
- On 25 April, thieves stole the head of the Little Mermaid statue in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- On 27th April, singer-musician John Lennon's experimental fiction *In His Own Write* was published in the US. It consisted of short stories, poems and line drawings, often surreal and nonsensical.

PERFECTION FATIGUE

n. Mental exhaustion and stress caused by constantly trying to present oneself as perfect, or by constantly seeing images of perfection.

Example. “I think we’re collectively rebounding from **perfection fatigue**,” said Pamela Grossman, the director of visual trends at Getty Images. “Everyone knows what Photoshop is now. Everyone’s seen the wizard behind the curtain in advertising, in Hollywood. We know how the machine works. And so we’re gravitating toward people, images and experiences that we deem to be authentic, unvarnished and real.”

—Jessica Bennett, “With some selfies, the uglier the better,” *The New York Times*, 21 February 2014

“April 1.
This is
the day upon
which we are
reminded
of what we
are on the
other three
hundred and
sixty-four.

—American author and humorist Mark Twain (1835-1910)

SNECKDOWN

n. An inadvertent traffic-calming device created by piles of snow that extend into the street at the corners of an intersection; a snowy neckdown.

Example. Rather than using up the entire breadth of the road, vehicles tend to take the slowest, most safely navigated route around the corners of a slippery intersection. When snow ploughs clear roads, they leave large piles at roadsides and junctions, which vehicles must drive around. Finally, pedestrians also tread their own optimal paths through the snow. The result is the type of snowy neckdown, or **sneckdown**, shown in the photo.

—“Undriven snow”, *The Economist*, 13 February 2014

smartglasses

n. A pair of eyeglasses that includes many of the features of a personal computer, including Internet access, apps, a display, a camera, sensors, and antennae for technologies such as Wi-Fi and GPS.

Example. “People are talking about wearables and connected vehicles, meaning that Korean firms are positioned to spur innovation in these industries. Companies are rolling out smartwatches and **smartglasses**. Without customised displays and chips, those advanced devices are meaningless.”

—Kim Yoo-chul, “Samsung, LG lead innovation”, *The Korea Times*, 12 January 2014

Insultant

n. A consultant who makes disparaging remarks about the client, or who recommends unpopular changes.

Example. They then draw up a new process map, along with a new and faster “time and motion” regime for the employees. Amazon even brings in veterans of lean production from Toyota itself, whom Onetto describes with some relish as **insultants**, not consultants: “They are really not nice. . . . They’re samurais, the real last samurais, the guys from the Toyota plants.”

—Simon Head, “Worse than Wal-Mart”, *Salon*, 23 February 2014

Walkman effect

n. The disengagement from surrounding public space caused by the use of technology, such as a portable music player.

Example. In the years since Hosokawa described the **Walkman effect**, unspoken rules for using headphones in public spaces have developed and are largely respected. Often this simply means knowing when and where to remove them.

—Anisse Gross, “What’s the problem with Google Glass?”, *The New Yorker*, 4 March 2014

Hit the road

It's time to slake your wanderlust—solo or with your besties. Mumbai-based Kesari Travels has announced five exciting travel packages exclusively for silvers, called Second Innings Tours. Each tour has designated months: the 13-day Europe tour, covering eight countries and 17 cities, is scheduled for June, while the eight-day Swiss-Paris trip and seven-day Thailand trip are in August. Go down south to Sri Lanka for a seven-day tour in September, or east to China, covering three cities over nine days in October. All tours include a guide and an exciting itinerary; prices are inclusive of visa, meals, accommodation and transport during the tour. For more details, call 022-24332222 or email Holiday@kesari.in—book early for discounts!

BUZZ



“A sense of humour is good for you. Have you ever heard of a laughing hyena with heartburn?”

—American comedian Bob Hope (1903-2003)

SITTING DISEASE

n. Weight gain, heart disease, and other health problems caused by excessive or prolonged sitting.

Example. Prolonged sitting, it turns out, flips biochemical switches inside muscle cells that boost your odds for heart failure, up your risk for fatal heart disease by 27 percent and fatal cancers by 21 percent, even if you exercise regularly.... Fortunately, the way to cure **sitting disease** is simple: Wake up your muscles (especially the big ones in your legs, butt and core) with just two minutes of movement every 30 minutes!

—Dr Michael Roizen and Dr Mehmet Oz, “You docs: Stand up to ‘**sitting disease**’ at home and work”, The Roanoke Times, 25 February 2014

Ugly selfie

n. A deliberately unattractive photographic self-portrait.

Example. Amid the bared midsections and flawless smiles flashed all so often on the screen comes the explosion of the **ugly selfie**, a sliver of authenticity in an otherwise filtered medium.

—Jessica Bennett, “With some selfies, the uglier the better”, The New York Times, 21 February 2014

Retrocameo

n. In an old show, a brief appearance by a then-unknown actor who would go on to become famous.

Example. Christian Slater?! Has a **retrocameo**! (brief appearance [sic] of an actor who would later become famous)

—Drone, “Christian Slater...”, Twitter, 19 February 2014

“With an assured monthly income, women in the village are brimming with self-confidence”

Radha Parthasarathy, 73, Chennai, runs a self-help group for women in Thandalam village



In 2005, when **Radha Parthasarathy** set out for her husband's ancestral village Thandalam, a two-hour drive from Chennai, to restore two ancient temples, little did she know God's plans for her. “With wild vegetation and not even a single toilet, the village looked so inhospitable,” she recalls. Though Parthasarathy was there to redo the temples, the first thing she did was to build two toilets! That was the beginning of her long association with what was a sleepy hamlet. Today, thanks to her dedicated efforts, Thandalam has transformed into a hub of activities, and is synonymous with Sri Annapoorani, a range of instant food mixes and *vadam* (ready-to-fry crisps) manufactured by women working under the Annapoorani Self-Help Group. From traditional *sambar*, *rasam* and *vathal kuzhambu* powders to instant mixes for tamarind rice, curry leaf rice, *adai* and more, a delicious assortment of powders are made by close to 30 women in a completely hygienic manner. “I’ve learnt these authentic and traditional recipes from my mother, friends and a Chettiar *aachi* [grandmother],” says Parthasarathy. The group began with an initial investment of ₹ 20,000 in 2005, with each member contributing ₹ 2,000. With office canteens, popular retail chains like Nilgiris, and other stores becom-

ing regular patrons over the years, the annual turnover of the Annapoorani Public Charitable Trust is now close to ₹ 6 million. While a major share of the profits is pumped back into the business, the rest is divided equally among its members. “The women are so happy that they are financially independent,” says Parthasarathy. “Sometimes they even do double shifts, rising in the wee hours of the morning to prepare and spread out the *vadam* batter to dry.” Initially she had a tough time convincing upper-class women to shed their inhibitions and work with the rest. “Today, regardless of their caste and creed, they work shoulder to shoulder,” she exclaims. Parthasarathy has also set up two more self-help groups for women in Thandalam for making *panchagavyam* (organic manure), vermicompost, and paper bags. Thanks to her efforts, financially backed by her late husband, industrialist E K Parthasarathy,

and friends, the village boasts of over 120 toilets now, a far cry from the situation nine years ago. Recently awarded the FICCI Ladies

Organisation's award in the social and humanitarian category, Parthasarathy is optimistic that Thandalam's success story will inspire other villages too.

—Vinita Nayar



The Hindu Images



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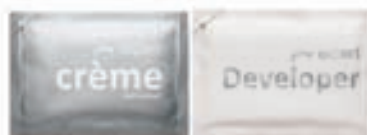
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