

**harmony**

AUGUST 2015 ₹ 40

# celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

THE  
FREEDOM  
FILES

A SALUTE TO  
OUR UNSUNG  
HEROES

**UNKNOWN  
FACETS OF  
BHAGAT SINGH**

**LIVING WITH  
THE LEGACY  
SHEKHAR  
BAJAJ**

• SAVOUR A SLICE OF CHINA IN KOLKATA • MEMORIES OF COOCH BEHAR

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# Rewrite DESTINY

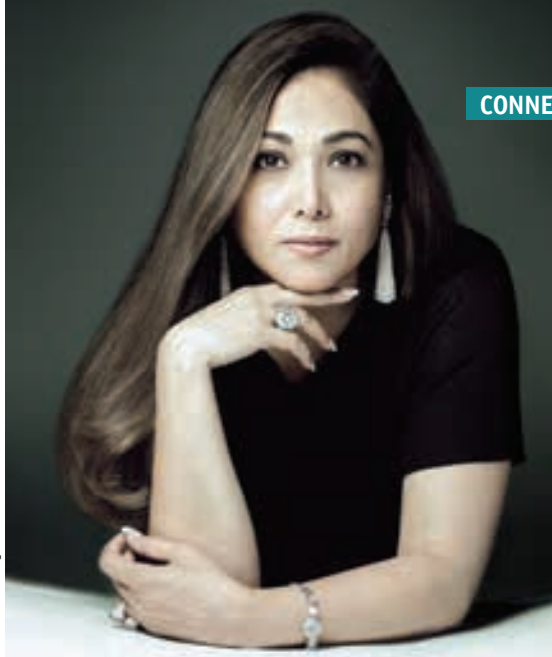
The power to rewrite destiny lies with each one of us—if we pledge to be organ donors.

In India, organs to save lives are in extremely short supply with the waitlist of recipients far outstripping the list of donors. In fact, we need over 150,000 kidneys, 50,000 hearts and 50,000 livers for transplantation. Unfortunately, our current organ donation rate is abysmal at 0.05 per million people. If we could just improve this to 1 per million, it would take care of almost all current demands for organs in India!

The largest stumbling block is an acute lack of awareness about organ donation, the concept of brain death and the process of organ transplantation. Organ donation is a very sensitive issue in India owing to religious misgivings, fear and trepidation. People must realise that all major religions support organ donation and view it as an act of love and generosity. What's more, the act of organ donation is proven to comfort grieving families by giving the death a greater purpose.

Here are some vital facts. Anyone can register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor. Your donation status will in no way affect the medical care you receive—the first priority of doctors is always to save lives. Organ, eye and tissue donation does not become an option until brain death has been declared. As solid organ donation (heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys) requires blood circulation to be maintained in these organs until retrieval, it is possible only in brain death where organ function can be supported for some time. There is a very clear and specified protocol to certify brain death—it is done by a panel of doctors and only then can organ donation

Suresh Natarajan



occur. There are no financial implications for donors or their families. Relatives can draw comfort from the fact that last rites are possible for organ, eye or tissue donors. In India, even if a person has pledged their organs, the final consent for donation has to come from the family. Donors and their families are treated with utmost care, respect and dignity throughout the process.

It will take sustained communication within families and in society to spread awareness on these issues. With this in mind, for the second year running, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital has joined hands with *The Times of India* for its Organ Donation initiative. As we say at Kokilaben Hospital, every life matters. Make yours count and sign up as an organ donor. Equally important, discuss your decision with your family and friends, spread the word and dispel the myths. Remember, saving a life can give your own a greater purpose.

*Tina Ambani*

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

*Harmony Celebrate Age*—August 2015 Volume 12 Issue 3

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#### **WRITE ON!**

*Gitanjali Joshi follows in her father Marathi litterateur Nasi's footsteps*

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

# Uttar Pradesh fast emerging as an industrial state

09 companies handed over 'Letters of Comfort'  
for setting up mega projects in Uttar Pradesh  
under the New Infrastructure & Industrial Investment Policy-2012  
by

**Shri Akhilesh Yadav**

Hon'ble Chief Minister,  
Uttar Pradesh

The State Government is consistently making efforts to create an enabling environment for rapid industrialisation of the state, as it firmly believes that industrialisation has a direct correlation with employment generation, which ultimately leads to increased prosperity for its population.



# column one

We are in patriot mode this month. To celebrate the 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence, we seek to remind readers—and ourselves—that while we may see freedom as an ethereal and intangible entity, for the bravehearts who participated in the struggle, it was a very real and tangible goal, achieved by blood, sweat and sinew.

In the pages of the 'Freedom Files', you will read the stories of eight unsung heroes with diverse backgrounds and life experiences; the common thread an abiding love for the idea of India, for which they did not hesitate to shed blood. Meanwhile, revolutionary Bhagat Singh has had paean sung to his name for his valour but he too was something of an enigma—author Chaman Lal reveals his intellectual side. And on our cover is industrialist Shekhar Bajaj, a man who carries his rich legacy forward with the simple living and Gandhian idealism that has linked his family's story inextricably with India's own.

Another episode in Indian history involved the establishment of enclaves—or *chitmohol*—in India and Bangladesh, believed by many to have been stakes in royal games of chess. Against the backdrop of the recent land agreement between the two nations, history professor Anasua Datta recounts her memories of Cooch Behar, where the agreement assumes great significance. And continuing the feeling of nostalgia, in nearby Kolkata, photographer Shilbhadra Datta bemoans the diminished splendour of India's first Chinatown as he shares the sights and sounds of the home of the nation's largest Chinese community. A potent reminder that development should not come at the price of diversity.

—Arati Rajan Menon

I really appreciated the views on Leuthanasia expressed in the June issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. The Aruna Shanbaug case reminds me of a poem I had written on the subject many years ago. I called it *Dirge of the Downtrodden*. One particular stanza comes to mind:

*...And now, in an age,  
Where births are controlled,  
And abortions legalised;  
I plead for euthanasia,  
While time flows listlessly by  
Over barren life.*

**Kusum Gokarn**  
Pune

We were pleasantly surprised to come across *Harmony-Celebrate Age* in a waiting room recently. The June 2015 issue delighted us. We are from Tamil Nadu and have been to Mylapore but after having seen it through the eyes of Sarita Rao Rayachoti in "The Kapali Conundrum", we are convinced we must go back and taste all the exquisite dishes she has described so imaginatively. We also discovered that 'His Ladle Love' is a column of treasures. Being from southern India, we are always happy to find recipes of age-old dishes. It seems young people today are losing the taste and interest for traditional cooking, so a compilation of this column would do well for posterity. We appreciate the painstaking work



that has gone into publishing your magazine. Keep up the work.

**Mr and Mrs S S Iyer**  
Mumbai

The journey of fame of our Unique Badminton Club, which began with *Harmony-Celebrate Age*'s story titled "Game On" (February 2014), has culminated in the award of National Record Certificates by *Limca Book of Records*. Editor Vijaya Ghose presented 16 of my fellow silver players and me, coach and captain, with certificates recently. It is an honour to be included in a list of such badminton greats as P V Sandhu, Saina Nehwal, Prakash Padukone, and others.

**K D Bhatia**  
New Delhi

## CONTRIBUTOR



Our columnist in 'At Large' this month, **Anasua Datta** is an associate professor in the Department of History at Jhargram Raj College in West Bengal. She is pursuing her PhD on *Romance and Revolution with Small Firearms: Bengal 1835-1935* under the guidance of Prof Dr Ranjan Chakrabarti, Vice-Chancellor, Vidyasagar University, Medinipur. "Ancient ruins and palaces have always intrigued me," says Datta. A vociferous reader, she has a keen interest in theatre and cinema. On her family, Datta says, "I am a single mother and my daughter is now in her final year studying history and archaeology. My job takes me to Jhargram every week, and I come home during the weekends to my Ma and Pepo, a two year-old Pomeranian."



inside

**P24:** On the 'fast' track  
**P26:** The great geriatrician

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



**“Beauty,  
style and  
talent know  
no age”**  
—Marc Jacobs

## MEDIA WATCH

### Cher's back!

**S**inger, actor, entertainer and pop culture icon, this 69 year-old has always marched to the beat of her own drummer, riveting audiences through the decades. And now, **Cherilyn Sarkisian—you know her as Cher—is reclaiming her place as fashionista in the autumn/winter 2015 collection by American designer Marc Jacobs.** In the first image of the collection released by Jacobs and shot by British fashion photographer David Sims, Cher is fierce in a floor-length black gown against a blood-red backdrop. “Beauty, style and talent know no age,” the designer writes on photo and video-sharing service Instagram. “It is those individuals whose creativity, unique vision, and voice inspire all of us here to create and express ourselves through our medium: fashion.”



David Sims

# Graffiti gang

Over 100 silvers have already signed up for the project, which is fast becoming an urban sensation



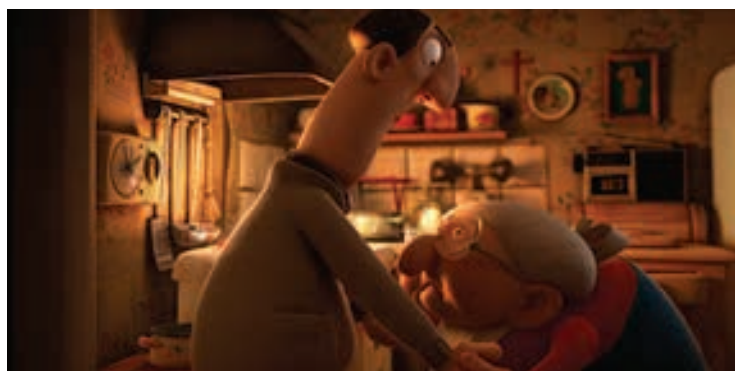
Photograph for representation

Dinodia Photo Library

**T**his is colour therapy at its most exhilarating. **Lata 65 is a creative project in Lisbon, Portugal, that involves silvers in the creation of street art under instruction from graffiti artists.** The brainchild of architect Lara Pebble Rodrigues, the project endeavours to bridge the gap

between generations while giving elders an outlet for their creativity and an opportunity to bond with their peers. "This was initially meant to be a one-off workshop but the enthusiasm and creativity of the seniors convinced us to carry on," Rodrigues tells London newspaper *The Telegraph*. "They first learn about street art and once they

are confident with their designs, they go out and spray-paint their designs on free spots in the city. The murals have brought colour and charm to otherwise rundown neighbourhoods." Over 100 silvers have already signed up for the project, which is fast becoming an urban sensation. See for yourself at [www.facebook.com/Lata65](https://www.facebook.com/Lata65)



## SHORT AND (BITTER)SWEET

Drawing attention to the plight of silvers suffering from dementia, award-winning Austrian production *Der Besuch* (*The Visit*) is an eight-minute animated film about a woman whose son finds her in the kitchen in the dead of night, cooking for her friends (who are deceased). Watch it at <https://vimeo.com/127692364>



## Dead broke

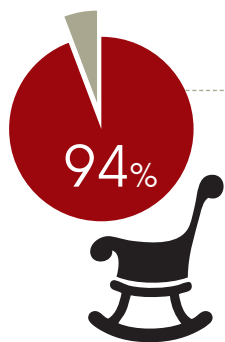
New data from the University of Michigan's Health and Retirement Study suggests that one in five elderly Americans dies broke. Of those 85 or older who died between 2010 and 2012, roughly 20 per cent had no assets other than a house. About 12.5 per cent had no assets at all—not even a house. And about 10 per cent died in debt.

## Cheer in Chandigarh

It is said to be a first for a public hospital in India. PGI Hospital in Chandigarh will soon give silvers over the age of 70 a green OPD card for priority consultation, a welcome move in an institution that caters to about 3,500 silvers a day at its OPD. "These cards will help distinguish them from others so they can be immediately attended to by the doctors," Manju Wadwalkar, spokesperson, PGI, tells media. "We will start the process in a few months." While some hospitals do offer a separate registration counter for silvers, we hope this move inspires healthcare institutions across the country to put silvers first.

## SILVER SPARKLE

**N**ever underestimate the silver life. New research by British savings and investment firm Standard Life insists that **today's pensioners are more likely to lead active and social lives than the younger generation.** Here are some highlights of their survey of over 3,000 adults, as London newspaper *Daily Mail* tells us:



94 per cent of new retirees have a youthful outlook and say they "don't feel like a pensioner"



**THOSE IN THEIR FIRST YEAR OF RETIREMENT ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A DAILY EXERCISE REGIMEN THAN YOUNG ADULTS**

**10**  
close friends

Pensioners of all ages are more likely than 20-somethings to have more than 10 close friends

In a typical week, pensioners go out with friends or their partner twice, while 75 per cent eat in a restaurant at least once a week



Two-thirds of retirees say they enjoyed alcohol, with the average drinker imbibing three or four times a week (for drinkers in their 20s, the typical frequency is just twice a week)

Over 50 per cent of the pensioners say travelling is the best thing about retirement, while 48 per cent relish time spent with family and friends



ONE IN EIGHT PENSIONERS SAYS THEY HAVE MET UP WITH SOMEONE FROM THE INTERNET FOR ROMANCE OR FRIENDSHIP

**BRAIN SAME** Researchers at the University of Cambridge suggest that older brains may be more similar to younger brains than assumed. They argue in journal *Human Brain Mapping* that previously reported changes in the ageing brain using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) may be because of vascular (blood vessel) changes.

# The truth about memory

AGE-RELATED  
MEMORY  
LOSS IS ONLY  
PARTIAL



Dinodia Photo Library

**Y**ou would do well to remember this. According to researchers at the University of the Basque Country in Spain, **age-related memory loss is only partial** unlike previously believed. Their study, which appears in journal *Consciousness and Cognition*, argues that while the capacity to recall specific facts may deteriorate with age, other types of memory do not. “In old age, deterioration appears in episodic memory but not in semantic memory,” writes study author Alaitz Aizpura. “Episodic memory preserves the facts of the past in our personal life and is more specific in terms of time and space: the last time we went to a restaurant, who we sat next to, what we ate. Semantic memory is related to language, to the meaning of concepts. Semantic memory is maintained with age—in some cases, it even improves—whereas episodic memory in which detailed memories are retained reduces. The main difference, then, between older adults and younger adults is that the younger ones remember more episodic details.”



## G force

**IT'S AN OVER-THE-COUNTER** dietary supplement, a natural amino acid available at health stores. But now, scientists at the University of Tsukuba in Japan contend that **extra doses of glycine could help restore the mitochondria of the cells of elders**, thus actually reversing part of the ageing process. During their study, reported in journal *Nature*, they discovered that two genes that produce glycine (needed for respiration) appeared to be switched off by ageing; when they restored the glycine levels in these cells, they could switch them back on and reverse the process of respiratory ageing. “Elders could take glycine supplements to achieve a similar effect,” writes study leader Professor Jun-Ichi Hayashi. “But the best way to keep their mitochondria healthy is to exercise and not eat too much.” The pitfall of extra glycine, you see, is that it could possibly enhance cancer cell proliferation.

# real age

**W**e know that each of us ages differently—now let's look at the how. Researchers from Otago University in Dunedin, New Zealand, working in tandem with colleagues from the UK, US and Israel, studied over 1,000 people born in 1972–73 to find that **a person's 'biological age' can differ by up to 30 years from their actual 'birth age'**. “We analysed 18 markers of health, including blood pressure, white blood cell count, liver and kidney function, and gum health taken at ages 26, 32 and 38,” study



Dinodia Photo Library

“In fact, some of the 38 year-olds were ageing so badly that their biological age was on the cusp of retirement”

director Professor Richie Poulton writes in journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. “By correlating the data, we could draw a slope to reveal an individual's hidden pace of ageing while they were still

young on the outside. In fact, some of the 38 year-olds were ageing so badly that their biological age was on the cusp of retirement.” The next step for the team: to discover what affects the pace of ageing.

## Food for thought

lowering  
hunger  
pangs

Eating light but right is one of the keys to successful ageing. With this in mind, Aberdeen University's Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health has embarked upon a study to examine **how hunger changes with age**. For this study, over 60 volunteers, aged between 65 and 75, were given two different protein shakes on two visits to the Institute. Every 30 minutes after the consumption of each drink, for a total of three hours, they were asked questions on their level of hunger, desire to eat and prospective consumption. Then, they were asked to complete a 24-hour food diary. “The aim of the study is to measure subjective appetite responses following a high-protein breakfast drink during two visits,” says Dr Alexandra Johnstone, senior research fellow, in a media release. “We hope this will demonstrate how to encourage lean, ageing consumers to enjoy a more nutritious diet to help them maintain good health. The issue of loss of muscle mass in the ageing population is a significant area of research. As appetite and food intake decrease with advancing age, the risk of becoming malnourished is enhanced.” The study has been funded by the European Commission.

### CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Where you grow up can determine how you grow old. **Living in a neighbourhood with a high crime rate can accelerate the ageing process**, contend researchers from the University of Pittsburgh. Their study of close to 3,000 Dutch people revealed that people living in the worst neighbourhoods had the shortest telomeres—the protective caps at the end of DNA strands that control cell longevity—thus increasing their biological age up to 12 years. “Factors such as stress, smoking, obesity, poor sleep and nutrition all affect how quickly telomeres degrade but this is the first time crime has been shown to play a role,” writes study leader Prof Mijung Park in online journal *PLOS One*. “We found that biological ageing processes could be influenced by socioeconomic conditions.”



# GENES, not creams

**I**t's a bit of an irony that this comes to you from a global skincare giant. But, as new research from Olay tells us, **the reason some women manage to look younger than others is because of a specific genetic fingerprint.** As London newspaper *Daily Mail* reports, Olay worked with genetic testing company 23andMe to analyse over 20,000 genes. They discovered that although we all had this special skin fingerprint, comprising about 2,000 genes, how strongly they are expressed is more prominent in the group of "exceptional skin agers". In addition, the study also shared decade-wise 'tipping points' for the skin:

**20s** Decline in antioxidant response, leading to loss of elasticity and thinning of skin

**30s** Decline in skin bio-energy, which is its capacity to heal

**40s** Increase in cellular deterioration and general ageing of skin cells

**50s** Decline in skin barrier function, making protective outer layers vulnerable to damage

**60s** Acceleration of all of the above

There's hope even for the genetically disadvantaged, though, according to the study, which prescribes the incorporation of ingredients like peptides, OliveM (derived from olive oil) and lyslastine (an extract of dill) into our anti-ageing regimen to 'switch on' the gene expression. Of course, that's where Olay figures in the picture!



Dinodia Photo Library

**SKIN TRADE** This should make PETA happy. Rather than use lab animals, French cosmetics and skincare giant **L'Oréal is printing 3D skin to test anti-ageing moisturisers.**

As media company Bloomberg tells us, the company's scientists, who have been growing skin samples from the donated tissue of plastic surgery patients, will partner with medical

research firm Organovo to "3D print living breathing derma that can be used to test products for toxicity and efficacy". L'Oréal already produces 100,000 skin samples every year; the new

venture will enable them to speed up and automate skin production. It also opens the doors to a side business—"extra" skin can be sold to other pharma and cosmetic companies.

# Defeating death

For some people, going gently into the night is just not an option. As a feature in *The Washington Post* informs us, **today's tech titans are betting the bank on projects that aim to defeat death.** "Their objective is to use the tools of technology—the chips, software programmes, algorithms and big data they used in creating an information revolution—to understand and upgrade what they consider to be the most complicated piece of machinery in existence: the human body," goes the article. Here, in a nutshell, are some of their efforts, as detailed in the feature.

1. Oracle founder **LARRY ELLISON** has donated over \$ 430 million to anti-ageing research. "Death has never made any sense to me," he says. "How can a person be there and then just vanish, just not be there?"
2. Google cofounder **SERGEY BRIN**, who has a gene associated with Parkinson's, has donated \$ 150 million to DNA research to combat neurodegenerative diseases. Fellow Google cofounder and CEO **LARRY PAGE** founded Calico in 2013 with \$ 750 million from Google, that works on prevention of ageing.
3. PayPal founder **PETER THIEL** has set up Breakout Labs to fund radical science and bold ideas—growing bones from stem cells, repairing age-related cellular damage, and cooling organs rapidly to preserve them. "The great enemy of humanity is death," he says. "I believe that evolution is a true account of nature. But I think we should try to escape it or transcend it in our society."
4. Facebook founder **MARK ZUCKERBERG** and wife **PRISCILLA CHAN** have funded six \$ 3-million Breakthrough Prizes along with Sergey Brin and **ANNE WOJCICKI**, founder of genetic testing company 23andMe. The prizes support scientists whose discoveries extend life.
5. Biologist **PAM OMIDYAR** and husband and eBay founder **PIERRE OMIDYAR** have donated millions to research in a bid to learn how some people can bounce back from diseases.



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 "I do".  
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 intervened?  
Because for the first time you're at an age when you can't be young to each other all over again.

If you're over 50, the old *Harvard* is just the magazine for you. Filled with human interest stories, exciting features and photos, *Harvard* encourages you to do just one thing: live young.

harvard  
celebrate age

# Inspiration on tap



**D**o you believe in spirituality over religion? The majority seeks to be religious rather than spiritual, observed Kinjal Pandya during an inspiring talk at Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum, South Mumbai, on 3 July. "Religion divides society whereas spirituality unites it with a positive approach," she told the silvers present. She cited the example of a mother-in-law hurting her daughter-in-law and then going to the temple, calling it meaningless. The session touched upon various religious beliefs and sought to dispel many of the myths associated with spirituality and religion. Pandya also laid stress upon the importance and need for organ donation in India, enthralled her audience.

A week later, on 10 July, members of the Centre attended a session by motivational speaker Prashant Sawant who has worked at various corporate houses and is a regular speaker at the Health Education Library for People.

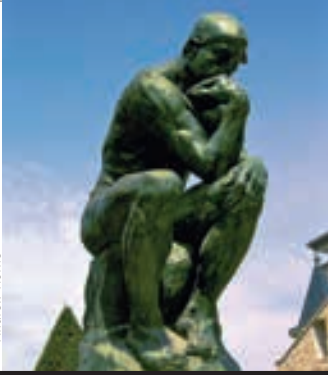
He explained how the mind plays an important role in the lifestyle of an individual, saying that negative emotions can affect the soul. Busting the myth that only doctors and medicines can keep us healthy, he emphasised that dysfunctional beliefs, emotional blockages and troubled relationships can affect the body and gradually lead to diseases and disorders. In an interactive session with the audience, Sawant offered advice; explained how lack of exercise, poor diet and stress are considered interference and disease; and reiterated the importance of thinking positive in every phase of life, regardless of personal health issues.

Finally, on 13 July, the silvers listened as Sushmita Mitra, director of special projects at Cancer Patients Aids (CPAA), spoke about cancer awareness, research and the need for early detection. With 1 million people being affected by cancer in India every year, she underlined the urgency of

grappling with issues like fear, faulty lifestyle, late diagnosis, health insurance, ignorance and superstition. She explained the two types of tumours: benign, which generally has no recurrence after removal, and malignant, which spreads uncontrollably. "Chances of cure are 80-90 per cent if cancer is detected in time whereas at the later stages, chances would only be 20-30 per cent," said Mitra. Elaborating upon prevention strategies, she said common cancers of the cervix, oral cavity, breast, lung and prostate could be detected through bleeding, changes in bowel habits, sores that do not heal (particularly in the mouth), and a lump in the breast or any part of the body. Tobacco in any form, unnecessary X-rays, over-consumption of alcoholic beverages, too much sunlight and improper diet, she said, must all be strictly avoided. "Positivity and strong family support during recovery are essential," she ended. "And one should never believe in blind faith as it will worsen the disease."



Andrew Horne



**Review yesterday, benefit today.** For a study published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, a group of silvers wrote down their 'life reviews', essentially encapsulating in words all their experiences since childhood to present day. They later shared these reviews with a group of college students, answering questions and reliving memories. Following this process, psychological tests revealed lower levels of depression and an increased sense of well-being and purpose among the participants.



#### RECYCLING FACTS

- Recycling steel reduces water use by 40 per cent, water pollution by 76 per cent, air pollution by 86 per cent, and mining waste by 97 per cent.
- Every tonne of recycled steel saves 1,100 kg of iron ore, 630 kg of coal and 55 kg of limestone. The average stainless steel product is made of about 60 per cent recycled material.

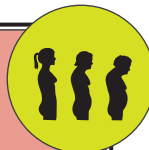
## Then: Stainless steel cutlery Now: Wall hooks

Is your kitchen drawer filled with mismatched cutlery? Here's a fun way to upcycle it. You need cutlery, a hammer, drill machine and screws. To start with, select the spoons or forks you wish to use as hooks. Second, make sure they are strong enough to take the weight of things you might hang, like mugs, scarves, bags or clothes. Bend the spoon or fork from the middle; some cutlery can be bent by simply

applying pressure with your hands, while others may need a hammer. Now comes the tricky part—drill a hole at the base of the head of the spoon/fork. Be very careful while doing this as you can hurt yourself. Now just attach the spoon to your door or wall with screws and the drilling machine. You can use a combination of cutlery together to up the style quotient.

#### MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. ATTACH THE SPOON UPSIDE DOWN AND USE AS A CANDLE HOLDER.
2. BEND SPOONS OR FORKS IN A WAVE FORM AND ATTACH THEM TO A DRAWER BY DRILLING SCREWS ON BOTH SIDES. USE THEM AS A DRAWER HANDLE.



### Effects of osteoporosis

- Low back pain
- Loss of height
- Stooped posture
- Sensitivity to fractures

### Common sites of osteoporosis

**Lower spine:** Fractures result from a decrease in strength of the vertebrae

**Hip:** Fractures can be caused by a fall or minor accident

**Wrist:** Fractures often result from falling on an outstretched hand

### Prevention and treatment

- Exercise regularly
- Eat calcium-rich foods
- Limit alcohol use
- Quit smoking
- Get a bone mineral density (BMD) test

*\*In women, the decrease in oestrogen after menopause leads to a decrease in bone strength*

### Drug therapies (consult your physician)

- Oestrogen replacement therapy
- Drug replacement therapy
- Selective oestrogen receptor modulator (SERM)
- Hormones to regulate calcium metabolism
- Bisphosphonates

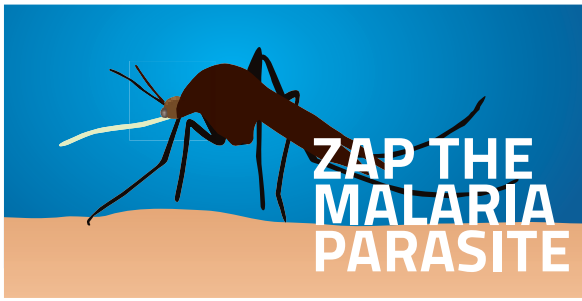
## The bone-heart link

**R**esearchers from the University of Southampton in the UK have discovered a link between osteoporosis and coronary heart disease. Their study of 350 silvers between the ages of 70 and 85 revealed that people with a history of heart disease had lower bone mineral density in their wrist, considered a leading cause of osteoporosis. This was more prominent in women than men. For their research, published in journal *Osteoporosis International*, the team used a special scanning

technique called 'high resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography', in which they were able to visualise multiple layers of the bone. According to Dr Ashutosh Chaudhari, consultant orthopaedic and joint replacement surgeon at Mumbai's Global Hospital, SR Mehta Hospital and Kikabhai Hospital, "The common risk factor for both osteoporosis and heart disease is probably Vitamin D deficiency and, to a certain extent, Vitamin B12 deficiency. People who suffer from orthopaedic issues should expose themselves to early morning sun, exercise regularly and maintain ideal body weight."

## The progesterone advantage

Researchers from the University of Cambridge, UK, and University of Adelaide in South Australia say **adding progesterone to tamoxifen, the standard breast cancer drug, could prove useful in chemotherapy**. In their study, published in journal *Nature*, they say cancer cells became half the size when treated with progesterone. Further clinical trials will be needed to incorporate progesterone into breast cancer therapy.



A combined team of scientists from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Centre in the US, the Monash Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences in Australia, the University of Washington in Seattle, US, and the not-for-profit Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV) have developed a drug, DSM265, which could kill drug-resistant malaria parasites in the blood and liver. Their study was published in journal *Science Translational Medicine*. The drug is now under clinical development and will take some time to reach the market.

## The skinny on fasting!

Here's more proof that **balanced caloric restriction can be good for you**. After successfully testing a calorie-restricted diet that increased the life expectancy of mice by eight days a month, scientists from The University of Southern California-Los Angeles have tried the same with a small group of humans. As part of the study, published in journal *Cell Metabolism*, 19 participants tried a low-calorie/low-protein diet five days a month for three months—it had a positive impact on health, the heart, and ageing factors. The diet is developed in a way that it renders the effects of severe fasting while minimising the risks of malnutrition and complete food restriction (see *'Food Facts' on page 24*). Called the Fasting Mimicking Diet (FMD), it contains 34-54 per cent normal calorie intake, which comprises 11-14 per cent proteins, 42-43 per cent carbohydrates, and 44-46 per cent fat. The diet will now seek FDA approval following a large-scale trial.

## Blood and the brain

**Y**our blood type may determine whether you get Alzheimer's. According to a study conducted at the University of Sheffield in South Yorkshire, UK, **blood types play an important role in the development of the nervous system and could be responsible for cognitive decline in an individual**. The researchers analysed 189 volunteers through an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan and compared the brain's grey matter with the blood group. Their study, published in *The Brain Research Bulletin*, revealed that people with 'O' blood type have more grey matter in the brain and hence a lower risk of getting diseases like Alzheimer's, while people with 'A', 'B', and 'AB' blood groups have less grey matter volumes in the temporal, limbic and left hippocampus of the brain. This is considered the centre of emotions, memory and the autonomic nervous system and is the earliest part of the brain to get damaged in Alzheimer's disease. However, the researchers have suggested that a more detailed study is required to fully determine the relationship between blood type and grey matter.



Haresh Patel

## Alzheimer's test

To date, there has been no reliable test to predict the advent of Alzheimer's—but now, things may change. A team from the Centre of Brain Health at the University of Texas at Dallas in Richardson, Texas, claims to have found a way to identify people with amnesic mild cognitive impairment (aMCI). People with aMCI are said to be twice at risk of developing Alzheimer's. As they recount in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, the researchers have found a specific variation in the brainwaves of individuals suffering from aMCI, which depicted delayed neural activity—an indication of early progression of Alzheimer's.



## 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.

### AN ENRICHED LIFE

I learnt yoga at the age of 11; little did I know at that tender age that I had embarked on a spiritual path that would later become my mission in life! I specialise in *Nauli Yogic Kriya*, a technique that makes one's stomach dance to different tunes through two abdominal muscles that run down the body. My body is so flexible and strong that even in the *padmasana* I can rotate it 360° with someone standing on each palm.

For me, yoga provides deep, inner guidance and wisdom. It has also taught me that discomfort and pain are the natural balancing factors to pleasure and comfort, and that is what life brings each one of us over and over again.

At the age of 90, when I look back, I think my biggest contribution is introducing yoga to the inmates of Jaipur Central Jail, where I began my work in 1996-97. The results have been amazing. Thanks to yoga, I was able to bring about a marvellous change in the lives of even dreaded criminals like Malaram Gurjar from Kothputli, Rajasthan, and Gautam Burmen from West Bengal's Kooch Behar, who were in the prison for over a decade. The news of such miraculous transformations reached the mayor of Pittsburgh in the US, where my son lives. The mayor was so impressed that on his request, a similar project was introduced in Allegheny County Jail, Pittsburgh, in 2004.

I have taught yoga to hundreds of inmates at other maximum security prisons too. On their release, some of my students have taken on the role of a yogi and are teaching inmates at other prisons, or the physically challenged. Some of them were even invited to demonstrate their yoga skills before a public gathering of over 2,500 people celebrating India's Independence Day at Ajmer's Polo Ground a few years ago.

I have also taken yoga classes at Franklin Park's Blueberry Hill Activity Centre in Pittsburgh. My classes received such great response that the mayor presented me a certificate of recognition. One of my students was a journalist who was so impressed with my teachings that she published an online report about me while another was a photographer who took hundreds of pictures of me performing yoga. She visited me in India as well. I donated all the money I collected from these classes



Courtesy: Pittsburgh Post Gazette

**Jindel has spent decades teaching yoga to prison inmates**

to the American Red Cross Society and the American Humane Association for survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

I soon became a household figure in Pittsburgh and my students began to address me as '*papa*'; just like my own children do! The *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* even published a picture of me in the *garbhasana*, or 'child in the mother's womb' pose, in August 2004 (above). It was recognised as the 'photo of the year' and was captioned thus: 'Jindel is a walking poster on the benefits of yoga.'

What's more, I have been frequently invited by the International Yoga Federation in Argentina to share my knowledge of yoga. I represented India in the 6<sup>th</sup> World Conference in Geneva, and became a life member of the World Yoga Union in 1997. Apart from yoga, I write poetry and penned my first book, *Surpankha*, at the age of 18. I have written many books since, not only on yogic *kriya* and *asana* but poetry as well. Despite all my activities and achievements, I have never forgotten where

my mission began, and always return to visit my special friends at Jaipur prison. Here, I continue to share my life experiences and thoughts with the inmates to help them become better people.

—Suraj Karan Jindel, Jaipur

## A CUT ABOVE

I was probably 13 years old when I did my first hair cut—the victim was my father! After all, only fathers would agree to such a prank from their favourite child. Yet, when I grew up and wanted to do a course in hairdressing and skincare, he put his foot down. It was always, “Girls from good Muslim families don’t do such things.”

So I had to remain content with cutting the hair and shaping the eyebrows of my friends. In fact, in school, my classmates used to be recognised by their well-shaped eyebrows and people would point to them and ask if they were ‘Abida’s classmates’.

My desire to take up hairdressing as a profession was unrelenting, and I told my parents that if I could not train to be a hairdresser, I would not do anything else, including getting married! Finally, after a lot of persuasion, my father agreed to let me do some training in hairdressing after I had finished college. I was 20 and before I could actually start planning my next step, destiny intervened. I met my dashing fighter pilot husband from the Indian Air Force (IAF) and was swept off my feet. We were married in 1977.

During our time in the IAF, we moved a lot, so I was not able to set up a salon. However, I cut hair and did skin and

beauty treatments whenever someone asked me to. Luckily, the IAF has a very hectic social life and women have always been conscious of presenting a pretty face.

Finally, when my husband retired and we settled in Pune in 1985, I set up a salon and started practicing in right earnest. I have always worked on my own and do not employ anyone. I must confess that my speciality is hair but I took to skin treatments; because I had a lot of problems with my own skin, I took it on as a challenge. After experimenting with stuff from the kitchen for two years, I finally got rid of all those issues.

When my clients began to notice the difference, I started recommending my own special treatments to them. I have never used chemicals and all my products are homemade so I know exactly what has gone into them and how it works. I must mention that I did train with Shahnaz Husain for skincare and it helped me a lot.

Running a salon has taught me many things, most of all patience and the art of diplomacy. You see, people with all sorts of notions visit my salon; some want to look like Deepika Padukone and some who want hair like Dimple Kapadia’s. There was a woman who wanted hair like Dimple’s but she had such scanty hair that I had to stop myself from laughing out loud. With a straight face, I told her I was not a magician but I did explain how we could get as close as possible to that look.

I am 58 now, and I am very happy with where I am and what I have achieved. Of course, it has been a long and tough journey but one that has been totally worthwhile!

—Abida Mone, Pune

Mone derives happiness from offering beauty solutions









# On guard always

LT COL (RETD) VILAS DANGE, 55, MUMBAI

Having spent my childhood in a small village in Nagpur, I knew I wanted to protect the territory and integrity of my country. And like any other student of the Sainik School in Satara, I was trained to join the National Defence Academy. I was the first in my family to join the Indian Army, as a second lieutenant in 1981, but one of my daughters has followed in my footsteps by serving in the Indian Navy.

During 25 years as a lieutenant colonel, I have had 13 postings and braved snow-clad mountains, frost-bite, avalanches and temperatures dipping to almost minus 60° Celsius. But my reality check came when I saw both my daughters all grown up and attending college. I realised that I had missed out an entire chunk of family life. That's what prompted me to apply for premature retirement in 2007.

With God's grace, I did not have to stay idle for long. That same year, a friend introduced me to an official at the Bombay Stock Exchange and I landed the job as chief security officer at the high-profile building. Owing to my previous experiences as an infantry officer, I am used to carrying out high-risk jobs and dealing with pressure. This job was a golden opportunity as it gave me the chance to exercise my best potential while keeping me closer to home.

My most memorable moments on the job so far came during the 26/11 terror attack, when Mumbai was held hostage by anti-national elements. Two troupes of policemen that otherwise looked after the security of the BSE building were deployed at the Trident Hotel and the

Taj Mahal Hotel, which were both under heavy attack. It was evening and I rushed back to my workplace from my home in Sewri with the help of a taxi driver who I managed to convince to bring me to this area by paying him double the fare.

It was while roaming around Dalal Street and Mumbai Samachar Marg without any weapon or ammunition that I felt so vulnerable for the first time in my life! The police had been sent to defend all other places but what if some anti-national element decided to strike this high-profile building that had already been attacked once in 1993? I made sure I was an obstacle in the path of any potential threat to the building. The very next morning was a high point in my new career, when I could tell the head officials that our team was totally prepared with security and that they could continue transacting business if they so wanted.

Initially, it was a challenge to have civilians working under me. As a military man, I am used to being surrounded by people who know exactly what to do and how to go about it. However, here I need to tell people what needs to be done. At times, this gets difficult. Plus, discipline is not something that comes naturally to everyone; it needs practice. So I make sure I pursue a path that encourages my co-workers to follow in my footsteps.

I am 55 now and the pension I earn from my previous job is quite satisfactory, but I just did not wish to live off that. Taking up a civilian job after retirement has not only kept me occupied, it also offers me a comfortable life.

—As told to Delaveen Tarapore

**I am a retired human resources manager from a multinational company. I have always had a passion to train people in public speaking and would like to make a business of classes at home. How should I go about it?**

As you already have your venue in place, the first thing you need to do is to make a list of skills you will offer under beginner and advanced modules, what you will charge, and the time span. It could be separate modules for elocution, debating, and the like, or a combined module over a few weeks. Then you must spread the word. Your target audience will be children (and adults) in your own vicinity, so you can start by distributing pamphlets at nearby schools and colleges, and make sure to tell your friends and neighbours. You can also put the word out on social media. You never know who might be looking for such classes.

You may start off with just a few students but don't let that deter you. Public speaking training is something students can benefit from to overcome stage fright, so there will be takers for sure. If they like what you are offering, word will spread automatically. How you should organise the training for different skills will depend on the response you get for each activity. Remember that your students will have to practise the skills you teach them in class so find a way to get them on stage at the end of a module. They can deliver a speech, recite a poem or even debate each other with their proud parents as the audience.

—Harshawardhan Agarwal  
runs a personality development  
training institute in Mumbai



**Vyjayanthimala Bali**



**Gulzar**



**Y K Sabarwal**



**M S Vishwanathan**

## BIRTHDAYS

Politician **Somnath Chatterjee** turned 86 on 25 July.

Politician and lawyer **Kapil Sibal** turned 67 on 8 August.

Actor, dancer, singer and parliamentarian **Vyjayanthimala Bali** turns 79 on 13 August.

Actor and comedian **Johnny Lever** turns 58 on 14 August.

Poet, lyricist and filmmaker **Gulzar** turns 81 on 18 August.

Former US president **Bill Clinton** turns 69 on 19 August.

IT pioneer **N R Narayana Murthy** turns 69 on 20 August.

## IN PASSING

**Y K Sabarwal**, the 36th chief justice of India, died on 3 July after a prolonged illness. He was 73.

Hollywood actor **Diana Douglas** died on 3 July after a battle with cancer. She was 92.

Renowned Urdu poet, critic and orator **Bashar Nawaz** passed away on 9 July after a brief illness. He was 79.

Music director **M S Vishwanathan** passed away on 14 July. He was 87.

Veteran actor **Sheila Ramani** passed away after a prolonged illness on 15 July. She was in her 80s.

## MILESTONES

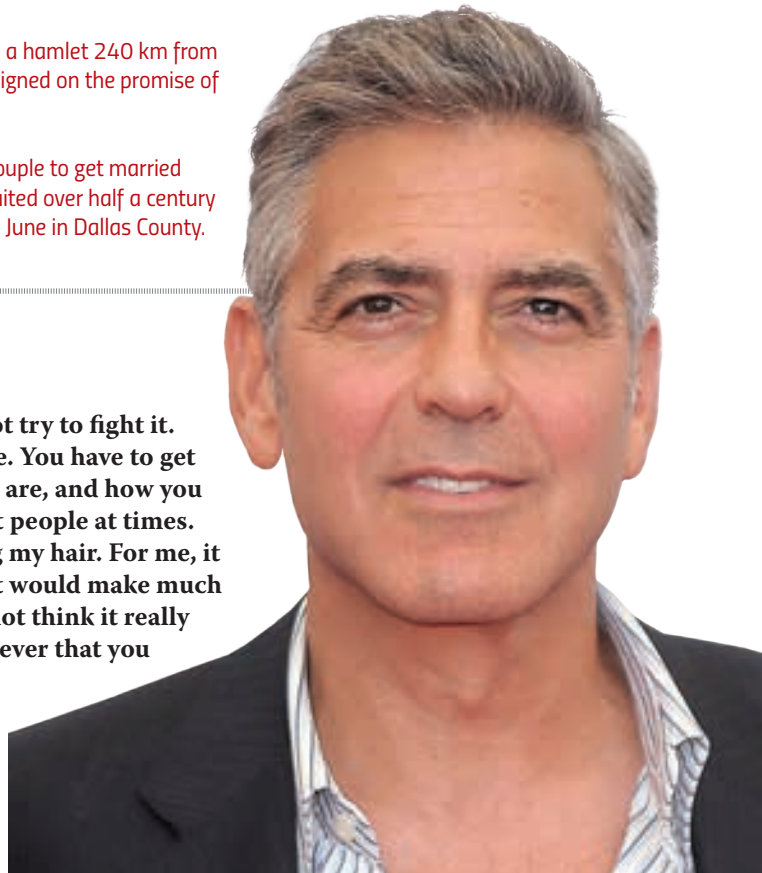
➤ Going strong at 102, **Gowthamma**, a villager in Doddalathuru, a hamlet 240 km from Bengaluru, won the gram panchayat election polls. She campaigned on the promise of civic amenities, education and healthcare.

➤ **Jack Evans**, 85, and **George Harris**, 82, became the first gay couple to get married since the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the US. They waited over half a century for this moment. Together for 54 years, they finally wed on 26 June in Dallas County.

## OVERHEARD

**“You have to come to terms with getting older and not try to fight it. You have a couple of options, which is get older or die. You have to get used to the idea that your roles in films, and who you are, and how you are perceived is going to change. That will disappoint people at times. But I have not considered cosmetic surgery or dyeing my hair. For me, it has never been an issue or an option. I do not think it would make much sense. I've seen it happen, particularly on men. I do not think it really works; it actually makes you look older. I'm a big believer that you cannot try to look younger. You just have to look the best you can at the age you are.”**

—American actor **George Clooney**, 54, speaking to the media on the release of his film *Tomorrowland*





## YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

Constipation, which seems like an innocuous ailment, could actually be a major killer. It can cause problems of absorption of certain medications and confuse the body and make medical experts misread signals that indicate a major looming problem. If it is chronic, it can be the first stage of colon cancer. It also means the death of certain important bacteria that the body needs in the colon, which soften the stool, create important nutrients, and keep the body healthy. This could be related to other chronic issues, like diabetes. It is important to rectify any chronic conditions of the colon with the right diet, lifestyle and de-stress techniques.

### LEO

22 July to 21 August

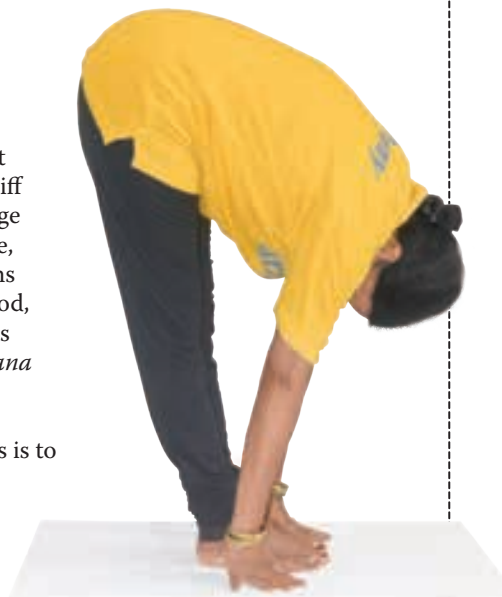
Leo is one of the most upbeat star signs, with a positive approach to things in life. So the emotional issues that knot up the other signs do not bother this sign too much, which means many of the psychosomatic issues that plague the other signs pass the well-settled Leo by.

However, there are certain physical weaknesses that may be addressed: the propensity for excesses or indulgences, which could mean the good food, the good booze and things that can affect weight gain and health in the long run. Being opinionated could also mean a certain stiffness of the mind, and thus of the body. The weakest spot in the leonine body is the upper back and areas in and around it, such as the heart and circulation.

Leos do better when they do their yoga in a group, because they are naturally extroverted. Plus they love to have an admiring audience. A sequence that takes care of overall health is ideal. As cat signs, they favour stretches, and it can also be an ideal way to get some of their stiff thinking ironed out. Strong poses that challenge them give them the positive feedback they love, and so they excel in the challenges of inversions and arm balances. As Leos also like to look good, they often choose difficult or challenging poses to extract the best body tone-up in their *sadhana* or practice.

The ideal way to combine these different needs is to have a practice with challenging poses that includes intense stretches that may be held for long. A series of arm balances that invite admiration and physical challenge may also be thrown in for good measure.

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



### Extreme stretch pose (uttanasana)

Stand up straight, feet together. Inhale; lift both hands up in the air. Exhale, pushing your hips behind; lower the hands, beginning to bend down, to reach hands to the floor. Those who are flexible may be able to touch the ground. If you are stiff, just hang your hands loose, keep some blocks in front of you on which to rest your hands, or just touch your fingertips to the floor. The head has to hang loose so that you are looking at your thighs. Hold initially for just a few seconds, and repeat a few times.

Later, you can hold the pose longer, for 15 seconds maybe, before further increasing the duration. To break the pose, release the hands, and roll the spine gently back up, to stand upright. While holding the pose, breathe normally. Avoid if you suffer from extreme hypertension, heart problems or a slipped disc. **Benefits:** This pose helps tone the whole body. It calms the mind owing to increased blood circulation and prepares the body for the headstand. It is therapeutic if you have skin problems or hair fall owing to environmental or stress triggers. And it improves balance.

**Model:** Anita Namole,  
Harmony Interactive Centre  
**Photographer:** Haresh Patel





## Fast forward? The pros and cons of self-denial

I am a 62 year-old without any major ailment. For religious reasons, I observe a fast the whole of this month; twice a week, I consume just water the whole day and have a light dinner. I would like to know what kind of positive and negative impact fasting has on the body. Also, please suggest recipes for dishes that I can make during fasting.

A person can fast for religious or other reasons. During the fasting process, the body uses stored fats in the tissues as energy other than glucose.

### The positive

- Cholesterol decreases when a person is fasting. Blood sugar levels also decrease among those who fast on a regular basis. Thus, fasting can lower the risk of coronary heart disease and diabetes.
- Fasting helps in weight reduction. The body uses the stored tissue fat for energy instead of reserved glucose, which leads to some reduction in weight. However, if the main motive is to reduce weight, fasting should be avoided as it can lead to starvation, which is detrimental to overall health.
- Overall cleansing, rejuvenation and detoxification are other advantages of fasting. The process cleanses the toxins stored in the body through unhealthy and processed foods.
- Fasting provides a welcome break from daily dietary habits. People addicted to sweets, fast foods and other specific foods get a break through fasts and it becomes easier for them to control their food addictions.

### The negative

- Over time, excessive and unsupervised fasting can slow your metabolism, making it harder to keep your weight off.
- Excessive fasting can lead to health issues like lowered

blood pressure and hypoglycaemia.

- Fasting, if overdone, can be detrimental for people with certain medical conditions.
- When fasting becomes an obsession, it can lead to eating disorders and other health problems owing to mineral depletion, such as osteoporosis.
- Fasting can make a person eat more once they stop, thus nullifying the fasting benefits.
- Owing to change in metabolism, the sleeping pattern can be disturbed, which can affect overall productivity.

### Recipe options

#### PANEER CORN KORMA

This protein-rich recipe is packed with the goodness of yoghurt and paneer, and tastes great with hot *parantha*. Protein-rich foods like coconut, poppy seeds and cashew nuts are dry-roasted and blended well to make a paste that imparts a rich flavour. Our body cells, which are made of proteins, undergo continuous wear and tear; hence, a good supply of proteins is necessary to make up for this.

**Preparation time:** 10 min

**Cooking time:** 15 min

### INGREDIENTS

#### For the coconut paste

- Fresh grated coconut: ¼ cup
- Poppy seeds (*khus-khus*): 2 tsp
- Cashew nuts: 5
- Green chillies: 1 tbsp; roughly chopped

#### Other ingredients

- Paneer (cottage cheese): ¼ cup; cut into 25 mm (1") cubes
- Sweet corn kernels (*makki ke dane*): ¾ cup; boiled
- Oil: 5 tsp
- Tomatoes: 1 cup; finely chopped
- Turmeric powder (*haldi*): ¼ tsp



Overall cleansing, rejuvenation and detoxification are some of the advantages of fasting. People addicted to sweets, fast foods and other specific foods get a break through fasts

- Chilli powder: 1½ tsp
- Tomato puree: 1 tbsp
- Fresh yoghurt (*dahi*): ½ cup; beaten
- Salt to taste
- A sprig of coriander (*dhania*) to garnish

#### METHOD

To make the coconut paste, heat a broad non-stick pan and dry-roast the coconut on a medium flame for 1 minute or until it turns light brown in colour, stirring continuously. Add the poppy seeds and cashew nuts and dry-roast on a slow flame for another minute, continuing to stir. Keep aside for a while to cool slightly. Add the green chillies and blend in a mixer till smooth, using a little water.

Heat 3 tsp of oil in a broad non-stick pan; add paneer and sauté on a medium flame till it turns light brown in colour. Remove and keep aside. Now, heat the remaining 2 tsp of oil in a non-stick pan and sauté the coconut paste and tomato puree together on a medium flame for a minute. Add the chopped tomatoes, turmeric powder, chilli powder, salt and ¼ cup of water; mix well and cook on a medium flame for 2 minutes, stirring occasionally and mashing well using a potato masher. Add the yoghurt, mix well and cook on a medium flame for 1-2 minutes while stirring once in between. Add the sweet corn kernels and sautéed paneer; mix gently and cook on medium flame for another 1-2 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve hot garnished with a coriander sprig.

#### Nutrient values per serving

- Energy: 202 calories
- Protein: 5.9 gm
- Carbohydrate: 11.9 gm
- Fat: 7.9 gm
- Fibre: 1.2 gm
- Calcium: 180.4 mg
- Iron: 0.8 mg

### NARIYAL CHANNE KE PARANTHE

**Preparation time:** 20 min

**Cooking time:** 25 min

Makes 5 *parantha*

#### INGREDIENTS

##### For the dough

- Whole wheat flour (*gehun ka atta*): ¾ cup
- Oil: ¾ tsp

##### For the stuffing

- White chickpeas (*kabuli chana*): ¾ cup; boiled
- Coconut: ½ cup; thinly sliced
- Cumin seeds (*jeera*): ½ tsp
- Ginger paste: 1 tsp
- Turmeric powder (*haldi*): ¼ tsp
- Coriander-cumin seeds powder: 2 tsp
- Chilli powder: 1 tsp
- *Chat masala*: 2 tsp
- Coriander leaves: 2 tbsp; chopped
- Oil: 1 tbsp
- Salt to taste

##### Other ingredients

- Whole wheat flour for rolling
- 2 tsp oil for cooking

#### METHOD

Combine whole wheat flour and oil in a bowl and knead into a soft dough, adding enough water. Cover with a muslin cloth and keep aside for 15 minutes. Knead again using oil till smooth and divide the dough into 5 equal portions. Keep aside.

Heat the oil in a pan and add cumin seeds. When the seeds crackle, add coconut and sauté on a medium flame for a few minutes till it turns golden brown in colour. Add the ginger paste, turmeric powder, coriander-cumin seeds powder, chilli powder, *chat masala*, *kabuli chana*, salt and coriander leaves, and sauté on medium flame for a few minutes. Mash a little using the back of the spoon and keep aside to cool. Divide the stuffing into 5 equal portions and keep aside.

Now, roll out one of the 5 portions of dough into a circle of 75 mm (3") diameter. Place a portion of the stuffing in the centre of the circle. Bring all the sides together in the centre and seal tightly. Roll out again into a circle of 125 mm (5") diameter with the help of a little flour. Cook on a hot *tava* (griddle), using ½ tsp of oil till brown spots appear on both the sides. Repeat with the remaining ingredients to make four more *parantha*. Serve hot with paneer corn korma.

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



## Silver specialist: Examining the role of a geriatrician

Older patients differ in many ways from the young and the middle-aged. Indeed, such a distinction underlines the existence of geriatrics as a separate medical speciality. They differ mainly owing to diagnostic, therapeutic and social problems. It is very difficult to make an early diagnosis in the elderly as abnormal symptoms such as weakness or loss of appetite tend to be interpreted by most as symptoms of old age, 'which need to be ignored'. In reality, these symptoms may be the markers of disease processes such as tuberculosis, diabetes and cancer. Because of this attitude, disease may be missed and elders tend to suffer in silence. Hence, practical expertise and experience are needed to obtain adequate histories in geriatric work.

Atypical presentation of illness in the elderly is very common. Presentation may be obscure, misleading or silent. Elders may suffer from heart attack without pain in the chest. They may have stomach ulcers, gall bladder complaints or appendicitis without any abdominal pain.

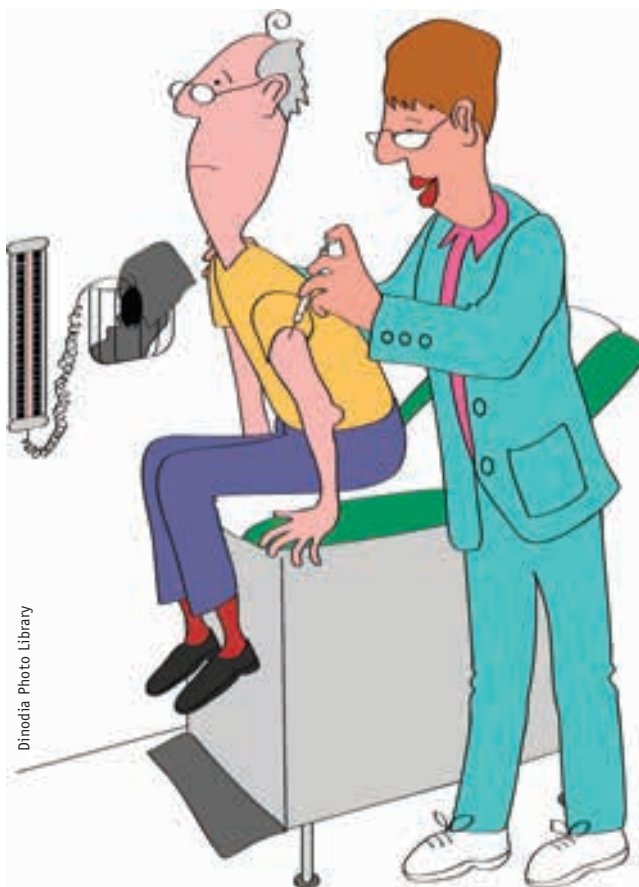
Hence, only a specialised physician like a geriatrician can make an accurate and early diagnosis. For instance, take a 70 year-old man in an acute state of confusion, with mild fever, cough and breathing difficulty. As geriatricians, we could find the reason for his state. We suspected chest infection such as pneumonia and a chest X-ray confirmed the diagnosis. With the aid of antibiotics, he recovered completely within 48 hours. A general physician unaware that such a state could be because of infection would have been likely to use a tranquiliser, which may have depressed the respiratory centre and even caused death.

Only a geriatrician can differentiate whether signs are owing to ageing or disease. For instance, a 60 year-old came to my clinic with a troubled mind because of tremor in both hands. His physician attributed it to ageing and advised him to ignore it. He was not convinced and consulted me. I realised that this type of tremor was typical of Parkinson's disease, and not because of the ageing process. This diagnosis was crucial as the treatment is entirely different.

Indeed, physicians with a lack of knowledge of geriatrics tend to attribute most complaints to the ageing process. A 70 year-old silver who had recently lost his wife consulted a physician for memory loss. The physician diagnosed that memory loss was a common occurrence in old age and gave him only vitamin supplements. The silver then consulted a geriatrician who diagnosed him with depression, which was responsible for the memory loss. With antidepressants, he has recovered completely now.

### Special features of elderly patients

- Multiple diseases
- Chronic diseases
- Atypical presentation of diseases
- Silent diseases
- Low functional capacity
- Multiple drugs
- Unable to come back to original health status after an ailment; for instance, stroke
- Financial and family problems



Dinodia Photo Library



## READERS ASK

Physicians with a lack of knowledge of geriatrics tend to attribute most complaints to the ageing process. A problem that commonly arises while investigating elders is to identify what is normal and what is abnormal. This is because there is increasing evidence to show that normal standards set for the young and middle-aged cannot always be used for the elderly

Elderly patients often have multiple diseases and sometimes may not even be aware of the presence of disease. Once people touch their 60s or 70s, they show evidence of several pathological processes, some active and others inactive but both contributing to overall disability. Only a geriatric physician can identify all these multiple problems and treat the patient holistically.

A problem that commonly arises while investigating elders is to identify what is normal and what is abnormal. This is because there is increasing evidence to show that normal standards set for the young and middle-aged cannot always be used for the elderly. For example, if laboratory investigations reveal slightly higher blood sugar levels in elders, it may not indicate diabetes. So the results of the investigations should be systematically analysed before arriving at a conclusion on the nature of the disease.

Treatment of diseases in the elderly is as complicated as diagnosis. The side-effects of drugs shoot up both with age and the total number of drugs prescribed. Multiple diseases mean multiple prescriptions. This leads to more drug-related side-effects, interactions and omissions. But it is not necessary to have 'a pill for every ill'. Many diseases in old age can be managed conservatively through diet, exercise, physical therapy and counselling.

In addition, elders suffer from socioeconomic problems like isolation, dependency and poverty. These problems precipitate or aggravate already existing medical problems. A geriatrician can assess the total picture and offer appropriate management to improve the quality of life of silvers.

### Total geriatric assessment

Geriatricians assess the elderly in entirety, encompassing medical assessment (diseases like hypertension, diabetes,

I am 72 years old and do not suffer from any major ailments except hypertension, which is under control by medication. Recently, I developed weakness in the right hand and leg with a sudden loss of balance, but within a few hours I recovered completely. I had consulted a neurologist and he said it was a transient ischemic attack (TIA). Can you explain further?

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) causes symptoms similar to those of a stroke—sudden difficulty in moving or sudden abnormal sensations on one side of the body, sudden difficulty in speaking, sudden changes in vision, sudden loss of balance. But the symptoms do not last as long. In fact, in a TIA, symptoms usually resolve in minutes and rarely last for more than 90 minutes. If symptoms last for 24 hours or more, a stroke is diagnosed. However, a TIA is a sign that a stroke may occur soon. People who have had a TIA need to consult a doctor immediately. Doctors may suspect a TIA on the basis of symptoms, but further evaluation is needed to be sure. Tests may include colour doppler ultrasonography and MRA. People who have had a TIA usually need to take aspirin or an anti-platelet drug as directed by their doctor. Sometimes, a surgical procedure called endarterectomy or angioplasty is done to open the partially blocked artery.

arthritis), mental assessment (dementia, depression), functional assessment (activities of daily living such as eating, bathing, using the toilet, getting in and out of bed, and walking), and social assessment.

In short, a geriatrician sees the patient as a complete picture while any other physician sees only a part of the picture. The objective of a geriatrician, in essence, is not only to add years to life, but to add life to those years.

*Padma Shri 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](mailto:contact.mag@harmonyindia.org)*



**HIS LADLE LOVE** BY PRATIBHA JAIN

# At home with flavour

**M S VENKATESH • MALNAD**

An engaging series about silver men who wield a deft ladle in the kitchen

Simplicity and hospitality at its best—that's what one experiences on meeting M S Venkatesh and his family at their rustic home tucked away in the town of Shimoga, now renamed Shivamogga. Happy with adopting the stray cats and dogs that wander into their home, he likes his life as it is: simple and uncomplicated. Content with his home, lifestyle and career, he is silent and unassuming when you speak to him. But when he enters the kitchen, confidence, passion and enthusiasm take over. The tastes he produces in the kitchen are delicious and rich with the authentic flavours of Malnad recipes. His son Karthik takes on the role of translator while his father speaks in Kannada.

**Your house is set amid such greenery Venkateshji. Have you always lived in Shimoga?**

I was born in Mysore and grew up there. When I turned 15, we moved to Shimoga. Actually, the government gave away our land to the people to whom we had rented it. So we had to move. That was in 1961. After that, I continued my education here in Shimoga. Now this town is my home and, as a family, we really like staying here.

**How did you venture into cooking as a profession?**

I joined the catering business in my teens through some common contacts. When we came to Shimoga, my father became a caterer because he could not find any other work here. I started by chopping vegetables and gradually became one of the head caterers. My son is also interested in the food business.

**“The secret of good cooking is accurate measurement. If ingredients are measured properly, the food will be tasty. A good cook must inculcate the art of observation and be genuinely interested. Without interest, you cannot succeed”**

**Does he work with you?**

No, Karthik works at the Royal Orchid Hotel here in Shimoga. He is 28 while my daughter Kavya is 24. My wife Shailaja is also very good at cooking. In fact, she has done the preparations for your visit today and has kept the ingredients ready in the kitchen.

**Why have you taken so much effort? Just one dish to taste would have been enough!**

It's no trouble at all. We are just going to make some simple Malnad dishes and are happy to show you. After all, you have come all the way.

**Do you have your own catering company?**

No, many of us are part of the Brahmin Adigai Sangam. We have a system where we can get the orders on our own but take up the catering by rotation. All of us manage quite well.

**What kind of food do you mainly prepare?**

Being Kannada Brahmins, we cherish our traditional Malnad recipes most. But I can prepare other southern Indian dishes as well as northern Indian dishes. I enjoy making a range of dishes, from *biryani* and *pani puri* to *gobi Manchurian*.

**As all of you are interested in the food business, are there any other plans?**

Karthik has always wanted to open a restaurant. In fact, he asked me to do so after his college studies. But I did not agree and so he joined hotel management.



Photographs by Aditi Jain

**So has the restaurant plan been shelved?**

He is still very keen. I plan to continue my work as a caterer for another five years. So before that, god willing, we are likely to start the hotel.

**What is the secret of good cooking?**

The most important thing is accurate measurement. If ingredients are measured properly, the food will be tasty. We also have a tradition of *Agni puja* [praying to fire] before starting the kitchen work. We also pray to Lord Ganapathi and believe that whatever we are cooking is in his name. Everything is handled in the name of God.

**What traits should a good cook inculcate?**

To learn by seeing. A good cook must inculcate the art of observation. The next thing is to be genuinely interested. Without interest, you cannot succeed. I enjoy every step of the cooking process. At home, we have always prepared all the powders, whether it is *sambar* powder or *rasam* powder.

**Can you name some of your favourite recipes or family favourites?**

*Thili sambar* is loved by everyone. Apart from that, *puliogare* [tamarind rice], *kesari bath* [saffron *halwa*], *godhi payasam* and many others.

*Pathrode* is a steamed snack made from *kesuvina soppu* [colocasia leaves]. That is also a typical Malnad preparation.

**What is special about Malnad recipes?**

They are simple to make and have *ruchi* [taste]. Simple, tasty, homely recipes—you will agree with me when we cook today.

**I'm sure I will. Has there been much change in the cooking style over the years?**

At home, we follow the traditional method of cooking. There is no compromise in taste. We may employ





some new kitchen gadgets, but the recipes are just as they were when we were growing up.

**Which recipe would you like to leave as a legacy?**

*Thili sambar.* This is what is popularly known as *rasam*.

**Can you explain the distinction?**

When you make *sambar* with vegetables, it is the thicker variety. But when it is made without vegetables, it is made in a watery proportion. That is known as *thili sambar* or *thili chaaru*. In Kannada, *thili* means watery and *chaaru* means *rasam*. But you must remember that the powder

used in *sambar* is different from the one used in *thili sambar*.

**That's so interesting. I am sure I will enjoy *rasam* even more now. Thank you.**

## Pathrode

A popular Malnad recipe from Mangalorean cuisine, this snack is especially prepared during the rainy season.

### Ingredients

- *Kesuvina soppu* (colocasia leaves): 4 large; chopped
- Rice: 1 cup
- *Toor dal*: 1 cup
- Whole *urad*: 2 tsp; roasted

- Coriander seeds: 2 tsp
- Jaggery: 2 tsp
- Rock salt: 1½ tsp
- Coconut: ½ cup
- Red chillies: 20
- Tamarind: 1 lime-size
- Water: as required

### Method

Soak the rice and dal for 2 hours and grind along with all the remaining ingredients (except the colocasia leaves) into a thick paste. Add the chopped leaves to the paste and mix well. Heat water in a large vessel (or pressure cooker) to steam this paste. Grease *idiyappam* moulds or *khaman* plates. Spread the paste evenly on it as thick as ½ inch. Place in the vessel and steam for about 20 minutes. Remove



the steamed layer from the plate and put it on a *tava*. Smear oil around the edges and allow to roast. Cut into pieces on the *tava* itself. As they begin to brown, flip them over and trickle some more oil. When they turn golden brown on the other side, remove from the *tava*. Continue with the remaining steamed layers. Serve as a snack.

*Pathrode* is also prepared by rolling the thick paste in a colocasia leaf itself. Steam along with the rolled leaf, chop into rounds and roast on the *tava*.

## Pineapple *kesari*

This is a delicious *halwa* with the tangy flavour of pineapple.

### Ingredients

- *Chiroti rava*: 1 cup
- Pineapple: 1 cup; chopped fine
- Sugar: 1¾ cups
- Yellow food colouring: a pinch
- Cardamom powder: ¼ tsp
- Ghee: 4 tbsp
- Oil: ½ cup
- Clove: 3-4
- Cashew nuts: a few
- Raisins: a few

### Method

Add pineapple and sugar in a pan with 2.5 cups of water and bring to a boil. Add a pinch of yellow food colouring and cardamom powder to this. Allow to simmer. In another shallow pan, heat the ghee and oil. Add the cloves; as they splutter, add

the *chiroti rava* and cashews. Roast on a low flame for a few minutes. As the *rava* turns light golden, add the cooked pineapple along with the liquid. Add the raisins and mix well. When the mixture turns into a porridge-like consistency, switch off the flame.

*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*



# 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**



# Carrying the legacy forward

Shekhar Bajaj, CMD of Bajaj Electricals Ltd, leads a life worth emulating: simple living, and straight thinking. **Sai Prabha Kamath** meets the scion of the distinguished Bajaj family for whom the nation always comes first

**I**t's a tall order to live up to a name with an illustrious history. Bajaj—a brand to reckon with in the industrial circuit—is also a name synonymous with India's freedom movement. A rich cotton merchant from Wardha in Maharashtra, Jamnalal Bajaj played an important role in the freedom struggle in the early 1900s. His sheer earnestness, commitment and ability to transform thoughts into deeds made him a close associate

of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1926, when India's struggle for independence was at its peak, Jamnalal Bajaj founded the Bajaj group on the basis of integrity and resourcefulness. Today, his grandson Shekhar Bajaj is carrying forward the torch in his own way as chairman and managing director of Bajaj Electricals Ltd (BEL).

With strong ethics and the belief that people are the ultimate source of strength, the ₹ 42-billion BEL strives to be socially responsible and environmentally sustainable in its appliances, engineering and rural electrification services. "It is indeed a privilege to be part of a family with this kind of a lineage," says the 67 year-old Bajaj. "Equally, it makes me feel responsible to keep up the family name."

Simplicity is the hallmark of the clan, who are strong believers of Gandhi's ideals. And this resonates in Bajaj's elegant sea-facing apartment in the upscale Cuffe Parade area in South Mumbai. As Team Harmony arrives before the appointed time, the polite and soft-spoken Bajaj ushers us in cordially. A little later, he is joined by wife Kiran, an environmentalist, poet and cultural activist. "Today, it is painful to see westernised culture," she says. "The Bajajs have always propagated Hindi; in fact, we print our company balance sheet in Hindi too, which few companies

do. Our family mantra is, 'Give your best and make the country proud.' The couple is expecting its first grandchild soon and the doting mother-in-law is just back with her daughter-in-law from a doctor's visit. The gracious hosts keep the food and beverages flowing through the interview. Excerpts:

**Born and raised in a large, affluent family, your childhood must have been quite interesting....**

My grandfather Jamnalalji, who was an adopted grandson of a rich Rajasthani cotton merchant Seth Bachchraj Bajaj, settled in Wardha, had three daughters and two sons, my uncle Kamalnayan and my father Ramkrishna. I was brought up in Mumbai in a joint family where my uncle's two sons Rahul and Shishir, daughter Suman, and my brothers Madhur, Niraj and I had a very happy childhood. For us, it was always five brothers and a sister; there was no differentiation between us. As our mothers were also real sisters, we cousins had the same maternal uncles and grandparents. My mother and aunt had been brought up in a luxurious Western atmosphere. Every winter, we would go to our *Nana's* place in Calcutta. All Bajajs are great foodies! Though we lived simply, when it came to food, we ate Chinese, Italian, Continental cuisines, which was rare in 1950s Marwari homes.

**That's fascinating! What were the values you imbibed during your growing years?**

My father was of the opinion that children, on reaching a certain age, should be sent to boarding school. This, he felt, would equip them to face situations independently. At the age of 11, I was sent to Doon School in Dehradun. In fact, my parents did not come to drop me; I was seen



off with the school party. This was my initiation into being tough and managing difficult situations. As Jamnalalji's whole family had taken to wear homespun cotton cloth [since the freedom movement], even I used to wear my school uniform made in khadi—with special permission from the school authorities. Also, I was able to abstain from smoking, drinking and non-vegetarian food through my life because of the strong values I imbibed.

**“Gandhi transformed the whole pattern of Jamnalalji and his family's life; our family gave up wearing jewellery and foreign garments, and began to spin and wear khadi. He also succeeded in persuading Gandhi to make Wardha his home”**

**Jamnalalji was a social reformer and a close confidant of Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, it is believed Gandhi adopted him as his son....**

*Dadaji* had a streak of spirituality and patriotism from his early age. Renunciation came easily to him. He always believed in making words into deeds. The prevalence of untouchability pained him so much that in 1928, he opened the doors of the family-owned Laxminarayan Temple in Wardha to 'Harijans'. When he was in pursuit of a mentor and guide, he found Gandhi nearest to his ideals, and accepted him as his mentor. Gandhi transformed the whole pattern of his and his family's life; our family gave up luxuries such as wearing jewellery and foreign garments, and began to spin and wear khadi. He also succeeded in persuading Gandhi to make Wardha his home, offering land for establishing Gandhi's home—Sevagram—and other national activities. He took to extremely austere living and devised and practised a strict code of ethics in business, giving his all to Gandhi's Constructive Programme. Gandhi referred to my grandfather as 'Merchant Prince' and adopted him as his 'fifth son'. In Gandhi's own words, 'Jamnalalji surrendered himself and his all, without reservation.'

**What was the common vision they shared?**

It was 'self-reliance through constructive work'. *Dadaji* totally subscribed to Gandhi's considered vision that his Constructive Programme would be the bedrock of governance in free India. The Constructive Programme, in its most liberal perspective, included Swaraj, class equality, gender equality and ethics in all areas of activity, eradication of untouchability, communal harmony, women's empowerment, propagation of khadi and Hindi, trusteeship in business, *go seva*—cattle wealth being

the backbone of rural India, and Swadeshi as the key to India's all-round development. All this was to be achieved through Satyagraha and non-violence.

**Tell us about his active participation in the freedom struggle.**

*Dadaji* renounced the titles of 'Honorary Magistrate' and 'Rai Bahadur' that the British had bestowed on him. He participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement [1921], the Nagpur Jhanda Satyagraha [1923] to uphold the honour of our national flag, the boycott of the Simon Commission [1929], the Salt Satyagraha [1930] and the Anti-War Campaign [1941]. On several occasions, he suffered confiscation of assets, physical attacks and protracted jail terms, preferring a 'C' class prisoner status. In 1920,

*Dadaji* offered Bajajwadi, his home in Wardha, to the freedom movement. Soon, this became the hub of political activity with many national leaders enjoying his generous hospitality.

**Though Jamnalalji passed away before your birth, what kind of mark did he leave on you?**

Though I did not have the pleasure of physically interacting with *Dadaji*, I always felt his presence strongly through the reminiscences of my grandmother Jankidevi, uncle, father and aunts [father's sisters]. *Dadaji* was not just a nationalist; he also believed in and practised simple living. He never ever compromised on his high ethical standards. As for his life of simplicity, late political leader Dr Ram Manohar Lohia once said, 'He lowered his standard of living to that of the lower middle class.' This inspired me in many ways and I could imbibe some of his values in small measures.

**Your grandmother Jankidevi too followed in Jamnalalji's footsteps and identified herself with the Gandhian movement such as spinning khadi on the charkha and anti-untouchability. During the freedom struggle, she participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and was imprisoned. She also worked towards women's empowerment and the development of weaker sections of society. What are your childhood memories of her?**

I was fortunate enough to spend a lot of time with *Dadaji*; during her Mumbai trips, she used to stay with us. We would also visit Wardha, where she lived, frequently. After I got married, Kiran would also join me in spending a lot of time with her. *Dadaji* was brought up in a strict, traditional Vaishnav family. But after marriage, she followed



Photographs courtesy: Shekhar Bajaj

Clockwise from top: The Bajaj family with Jawaharlal Nehru at Wardha in 1954 (Shekhar Bajaj is seated second from left); Jamnalal Bajaj with colleagues during imprisonment at Dhulia jail (1932); Jamnalal Bajaj with Mahatma Gandhi

Jamnalalji's Gandhian ideals to the hilt. She renounced *purdah*, ornaments and, above all, was against Dalit discrimination. When *Dadaji* passed away in 1942, she wanted to perform *sati* on his pyre. But Gandhi prevailed upon her and convinced her, saying, 'Rather than burning yourselves, burn your vices on the pyre; that is being a true *sati*. Dedicate yourself and your all to the unfinished work of Jamnalal.' Hence, until her death in 1979, she kept working for various social causes that *Dadaji* was very passionate about: khadi, Swadeshi and anti-cow slaughter. In recognition of her services and sacrifices, she was honoured with the Padma Vibhushan by President

of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, in 1956. In 1993—her birth centenary year—under the presidentship of my wife, the IMC Ladies Wing Jankidevi Bajaj Puraskar was instituted for women entrepreneurs working for the progress of rural India. What impressed me most about *Dadiji* was her determination and perseverance. From her, my wife and I learnt how to live simply without wasting anything. But this way of life has also earned all of us the sobriquet '*kanjoos*'!

**What were the life lessons you learnt from your father Ramkrishnaji?**



Photographs courtesy: Shekhar Bajaj



Sons Niraj, Madhur and Shekhar with father Ramkrishna Bajaj, mother Vimla and spouses Kiran, Kumud and Minal; the five Bajaj brothers—(clockwise from top left) Madhur, Niraj, Shekhar, Rahul and Shishir

For my father, good ethics was good business; hence, the image of any business could be built and furthered only through good ethical standards. In 1966, when India was undergoing a chronic food shortage, he, along with J R D Tata, Soli Godrej, Arvind Mafatlal, etc, decided to establish the Council for Fair Business Practices [CFBP], formerly known as Fair Trade Practices Association [FTPA]. It was, and is still, the only organisation conducted by businessmen to protect the interest of the consumer. Initially, people mocked the idea of a business house taking care of the welfare of its consumers. Slowly but steadily, the members of the trade, business and industrial community started subscribing to the precepts of the CFBP as a proper way to conduct business. My father was far ahead of his time. He believed that a person needs to evaluate his own strengths and weaknesses. In this, he did not spare himself. He realised that he did not have much flair for business as he was more inclined towards philanthropic activities. As a result, in spite of being the head of the group, after Kamalnayanji's death in 1972, he suggested that Rahul Bajaj become chairman of Bajaj Auto Ltd and he would continue as a director. He had great focus and was exceptional in detailed planning of any activity. Unfortunately, I could imbibe only a few of his traits and qualities.

**Respecting one's elders is evidently an integral part of your family value system. How were these values instilled in the younger generation of the family?**

For our generation, respecting elders was a way of life. I do not remember an occasion when I would rebel or do something against my father's wishes even if I disagreed with him. The younger generation does not feel the same way. They say, 'Yes, as parents we respect you, but we will

do what we think is right'. Perhaps, that is the demand of the times. Nevertheless, the younger generation has imbibed important family values such as integrity and trust and do follow them.

**What are the challenges and perks of running a family-run business empire?**

As the name Bajaj is associated with a certain background of sacrifices and values, there is instant recognition and acceptance. Along with respect, people do have a lot of expectations that we need to live up to. So, we work much harder to continue the family tradition.

**Please tell us more about your family.**

Kiran is a perfectionist who has managed both business and children with competence and care. She gave up a successful career of 26 years as the CEO of the Bajaj Group Travel Agency to take up social work. Today, she is actively engaged in running the NGOs Paryavaran Mitra, which works on socio-environmental issues, and Shabdham, which works towards the preservation of Indian arts, culture and literature. My son Anant [38] is involved with Bajaj Electricals for the past 19 years. He possesses good business acumen and, as joint managing director, takes care of the day-to-day functions of the company. My daughter Geetika [33] is sensitive and creative. She has already had three art shows, including one in Jehangir Art Gallery. My daughter-in-law Pooja is an affectionate, happy and well-organised person. She has been a steady anchor providing relentless support to the group by establishing a continuous connect with management college students on 360° learning education.





Favzan Husain

With former US president Bill Clinton and then prime minister A B Vajpayee as Assocham president; with wife Kiran

### How eager are you to be a grandparent?

I feel I should have become a grandparent straightaway without doing the parenting part! Enjoying with a grandchild is so much fun. Bringing up your child is much tougher.

“As the name Bajaj is associated with a certain background of sacrifices and values, there is instant recognition and acceptance. Along with respect, people do have a lot of expectations that we need to live up to”

### Elder abuse is rampant around the world today. How can the elderly command respect from the younger generation?

I have seen many parents giving away wealth to their children and grandchildren and finding themselves dependent in their later years. This should be avoided by saving and building a corpus for use during the sunset years.

### How do you view ageing?

Ageing, statistically, is not under your control. What matters is your mental makeup and physical fitness. I still enjoy music or a silly comedy from a movie, just the way I enjoyed it 30-40 years ago. My wife would ask, ‘When will you grow up?’ And I would say, ‘Never’.

### What are the plans for your sunset years?

I like to read but most of the time, except for business and news-related books, I do not get the time to read the books I would like to. Maybe in my later years, I would like to read more and travel to interesting places.

### What are your stress-busters?

Yoga, walking and meeting interesting people.

### Are you spiritual by nature?

I believe in the existence of God, but do not necessarily follow rituals on a daily basis.

### Any regrets?

The only area where I have not succeeded much is diet control. I have to work a lot on this; my diabetes needs to be under control.

### Finally, what is your vision for India?

India has a fascinating history and rich cultural heritage no other country can boast of. In fact, the country can become the No. 1 destination for business and tourism. But corruption at high, middle and low levels is a big stumbling block. While we have a prime minister with a strong will to deliver the type of growth envisaged, only the collective political will can accomplish this. Eradication of corruption will lead to seamless civic life, acceleration of economic wellbeing of citizens, and happiness all around. I am a great believer in Indian democracy, and a positive future for India. 🌸

*...a time comes when a whole people become full of faith for a great cause, and then even simple, ordinary men and women become heroes, and history becomes stirring and epoch-making*

—Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru  
in *Glimpses of World History*

# lest we FORGET







Dinodia Photo Library

**R**ousing words like these from India's first prime minister inspired an entire generation of Indians to take up cudgels and free their country from the colonial yoke.

Those were turbulent but heady times, when the leaders of India's freedom struggle and their loyal foot soldiers put their lives on the line, time and again, to wrest back their motherland.

So, we at *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, look back at the people who changed our country's destiny. As many of them are no longer with us, we've done the next best thing—we introduce you to eight freedom fighters and their contribution to the greatest feat we have achieved as a people, through the stories they've left behind.

We begin with the courageous story of 57 year-old Bhogeshwari Phukanani, a descendant of the ancient Ahom Kingdom of Assam, who stood up to a British officer when he snatched the tricolour from her daughter's hand. From the gut-wrenching outcome of this event, we move on to Rajendra Kumar 'Ajeya' of Rajasthan, who teaches us that courage comes in different forms. A prolific writer, Ajeya used his pen to mobilise people against the ill-treatment of the British administration. But it was not all blood and tears in those tumultuous times, as we learn from the heart-warming story of Mr and Mrs Jhaveri of Mumbai who found each other in jail.

Further south, the proud descendants of Alluri Satyanarayana Raju of Hyderabad got together to document his political activities—before and after Independence—in

the form of a comprehensive pamphlet titled *Alluri*. Among these descendants is his granddaughter Anita Alluri, who offers us glimpses into his life. From third to fourth generation, we have Aditi Dubey, the great-granddaughter of Ram Narayan Azad, who gives us a summary of the patriot's extensive exploits. The complete story has been chronicled in *Forgotten Stories From My Village, Harwai: The Life and Times Of My Father Pandit Ram Narayan Azad*, written by Aditi's grandfather Hari Govind Dubey.

Returning to the south, in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, we hear of teacher-activist Vadlamani Lakshmi Narasimham who, among other things, had the fascinating job of being translator to Mahatma Gandhi whenever the great leader was in town. And in nearby Hyderabad, the story of Narayan Linga Reddy reminds us that the fight for Hyderabad did not end on 15 August 1947.

Finally, we hear from the only surviving freedom fighter in our collection, Sudhanshu Biswas from West Bengal. As a young man, Biswas ferried instructions and weapons across Calcutta and dodged British bullets by swimming underwater. He is 98 years old now and runs an educational centre "as I was arrested from the examination hall and I could not study beyond matriculation".

Poignant, moving and nothing short of inspirational, we hope these stories serve as a reminder that the lives we live today came at a price. With these stories, we salute our revolutionaries, their intense courage and unwavering commitment through Independence and beyond. Yes, these are their stories... lest we forget.

—Natasha Rego



Assam's Bhogeswari Phukanani was shot dead for defying the police during a demonstration to honour local martyrs

## Bhogeswari Phukanani

# Over my dead body!



Tapati Baruah Kashyap

**H**iranmoni Phukan, an advocate in the Gauhati High Court, never met Bhogeswari Phukanani, but there is little she does not know about her gutsy grandmother. "Women in Assam have always been politically and socially active, especially those who have descended from the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ahom kingdom. While women of the royal families had revolted as early as 1857, the Mahila Samiti movement that began in 1917 had inspired women in rural areas to join the freedom movement. Four women from Assam, including my grandmother, attained martyrdom in 1942," says Hiranmoni, a former member of the Assam State Commission for Women.

Offering more insight into her grandmother's life, she tells us: "It was 1942, the year the Quit India Movement was launched, and the local people had managed to wrest back the local Congress office at Barhampur from the British police. My grandmother, a mother of eight, had played an important role in organising the womenfolk of Barhampur, Puranigudam, and the adjoining areas of Nagaon district in various programmes of the freedom movement, including imparting training in spinning and weaving."

Hiranmoni Phukan with a picture of her grandmother Bhogeswari Phukanani taken after she was martyred

The Quit India Movement gained momentum, and five young men had fallen to British bullets in Nagaon in August 1942. On 18 September, as the locals assembled for a ritual feast to mark their martyrdom and the recovery of the Congress office, a contingent of policemen led by one Mr Finch arrived and asked the people to disperse. The people responded by raising the *Vande Mataram* slogan while holding the flag aloft.

"Mr Finch snatched the flag from Bhogeswari's eldest daughter Ratnamala and pushed her to the ground. This enraged my grandmother and she rushed forward and yanked the flag back from the officer. No sooner had she done that than the officer fired at her, point blank. Two bullets pierced her skull but she was such a fighter that she survived for two more days before she breathed her last on 20 September," narrates Hiranmoni.

Phukanani was 57 then and her memory has been kept alive as the Nagaon district civil hospital and a road have been named after her. Tributes are also paid to her, every year, on her death anniversary, in the Nagaon Congress Bhavan.

—Tapati Baruah Kashyap



Courtesy: Dr Atul Kumar Saxena

‘Ajeya’ was a fiery journalist who raised awareness on the oppressive policies of the colonists. He was also the only revolutionary from Rajasthan present at Gowalia Tank when the Quit India Movement was flagged off

## Rajendra Kumar ‘Ajeya’

# The pen is mightier

**R**ajendra Kumar’s most indomitable weapon during the freedom struggle was the pen. A journalist who worked with many newspapers across the country, Kumar, aka ‘Ajeya’, stirred the people of India to stand up against colonial rule.

Born in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, on 14 February 1916, Kumar was the son of a schoolteacher. He studied in Mungawali, now in Madhya Pradesh, and graduated from Hurbert College in Kota, Rajasthan. His son, Dr Atul Kumar, says, “My father’s colleagues and teachers were amazed at how he articulated his thoughts, and they encouraged him to start writing articles.”

Ajeya landed a job with *Rajasthan Weekly*, which published his interview with poet and revolutionary Kesari Singh Bareth. “The interview was headlined ‘*Yeh jaroori nahi ki bhigi baarood kabhi dhamaka hi naa kare* [It is not necessary that wet explosives will never explode],” shares Atul. “It brought pressure on my father to quit his job, and the British ordered an inquiry into the article.”

When Jawaharlal Nehru was travelling from Beawar in Rajasthan to Ahmedabad in 1934,

Ajeya lined his route with the Congress flag and, with the help of 500-odd farmers, blocked Nehru’s way. Forced to stop, Nehru delivered an inspiring speech. Through his writing, Ajeya also raised awareness against the *jaagirdari* law in Masoda, Ajmer, and police torture in Jalia, Vijay Nagar. He was accused on six different counts and jailed for 42 months in Ajmer Central Jail.

Atul pulls out another memory. “Papa went to Mumbai in 1941 and, the following year, when Gandhi flagged off the Quit India Movement at Gowalia Tank, he was the only freedom fighter from Rajasthan who attended this defining event.”

Back in Kota in 1943, Ajeya co-founded *Dinabandhu Weekly*, which ignited a spark among the youth in the Indore-Kota-Bikaner belt, which would later become the backbone of people’s participation in the freedom movement. In 1965, he founded his own weekly newspaper called *Hamaara Vatan*, which is published to this day.

On 28 April 2015, Rajendra Kumar breathed his last, at the age of 99.

—Anubha Agarwal

Ajeya (extreme right) at a procession with former Rajasthan chief minister Mohan Lal Sukhadia

She came from a family of freedom fighters and he was the hero of his family; their love blossomed in the most unlikely of places—jail

## Manju and Himmat Jhaveri



Courtesy: Amit Jhaveri

# Jailhouse love

**A**t a time when the country was in turmoil, love blossomed in the most unlikely of places. Manju Desai and Himmat Jhaveri discussed politics and literature, and actively participated in the freedom movement, sowing the seeds of 48 years of marital happiness. Manju's family, which came from Mahatma Gandhi's hometown, Porbandar, was a family of freedom fighters. "My mother's father had uncles who lived in South Africa, so they all knew Gandhi when he was in South Africa," says son Amit, who fondly remembers his feisty mother. "She once told me she was leading a procession and was caught by the police. As she was under 18 years of age, she could not be jailed. So she lied about her age because she wanted to be imprisoned."

Manju and Himmat met as teenagers when they were both imprisoned at Mumbai's Arthur Road Jail. Still in their teens, they were jailed for taking part in one of the many demonstrations against the British administration. "My father was an instant hero because his family had nothing to do with the freedom struggle, literature or politics," says Amit. "Theirs was just a regular family, so it was a big deal for them."

Manju and Himmat Jhaveri on their wedding day

The couple got married in 1958. With scarce resources, they pooled money to buy a house in Santacruz, Mumbai, along with good friend George Fernandes, who went on to become Union Defence Minister. "During the Emergency, when Fernandes went underground, the police stationed themselves at the Jhaveri home as they believed the former union leader would try to make contact," reveals Amit.

The Jhaveris lived a modest life and raised a family while contributing to society for whatever they believed in. Himmat, a socialist and follower of Ram Manohar Lohia, was a political critic for Gujarati dailies, while Manju was the editor of magazine *Trimasik*. "My father even refused a flat at Bandra Reclamation, saying he hadn't joined the freedom struggle for a flat and that it should be given to someone who needed it," says Amit. Politics was a constant in Himmat's life until his last days in 2006. Though never directly involved, he penned his ideas for various publications. Three years later, at the age of 84, Manju joined him on the other side, continuing their conversations where they had left off.

—Gautam Ruparel



Flogged in prison for his activism against the colonists, Alluri Satyanarayana Raju later became a politician and worked closely on the Vishalandhra movement

Alluri Satyanarayana Raju



Courtesy: Alluri Commemorative Souvenir Committee

# Unbroken spirit

Born into a middle-class farmer's household in West Godavari district in 1913, Alluri Satyanarayana Raju was barely 17 when he joined Mahatma Gandhi's Salt *Satyagraha*. He surreptitiously enrolled with the freedom movement under a local leader but was hauled back home by his father because he was too young. Not long afterwards, Alluri broke the curfew and was put behind bars for nine months. The young revolutionary had made his mark, but there was worse to come. He was thrashed by the British so many times that the issue was raised in the Madras Legislative Council and in Parliament in London too.

Alluri, or ASR, had been influenced by the socialist revolutions of Russia and had become a communist. He was hugely inspired by Subhas Chandra Bose and even named his eldest son 'Alluri Subhas Chandra Bose.'

"Whenever my grandfather did not come home for many days, the family assumed he had been sent away to *Kaala Pani* [the jail in the Andamans]. When in jail, he learnt to speak and write Hindi. Here, he also interacted with the stalwarts of the Lahore conspiracy case—Vijay Kumar

Sinha, Shiv Sharma and Jaidev Kapoor—and thus acquired political maturity beyond his years," says his granddaughter Alluri Anita, 50.

She says her grandmother Annapurna Devi was a pillar of strength for her husband and family. "When my grandfather was placed under house arrest, she would cook and feed the partymen who came to meet him." In one of his letters to his wife, ASR wrote, 'Annapurna, your support gives me all the strength.... Without you, I do not exist.'

In 1939, ASR became president of the West Godavari District Congress, and in 1945, he was elected as a member of the legislative assembly. He was a close associate of N Sanjeeva Reddy and, together, they worked closely on the Vishalandhra movement (for a united state for all Telugu speakers) after Independence.

On 3 September 1963, Alluri Satyanarayana Raju passed away at the age of 50 owing to health issues acquired during long periods of imprisonment. The colonists had succeeded in flogging his body—but they could not break his spirit.

—Shyamola Khanna

Alluri with Jawaharlal Nehru at a Gauhati Congress Session

Ram Narayan Azad's contribution to the Indian freedom movement has been painstakingly chronicled by his family. Here's a look at the revolutionary from Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh, in the words of his great-granddaughter

Ram Narayan Azad

# The greater good

Courtesy: Ajay Dubey



I have always known that my great-grandfather Pandit Ram Narayan Azad was a great man, a freedom fighter who went to prison many times. In the past few months, I have learnt his entire life story while working on a book my grandfather wrote about him. Now I fully appreciate the thousands of others who devoted their lives to our country.

My great-grandfather was born in a small village in Mainpuri district in Uttar Pradesh in 1896. He was deeply moved by the plight of the poor, illiterate farmers who were exploited by the zamindars and British administration. So he began working to help them, travelling from village to village, settling disputes and using his knowledge of English to prevent people from being cheated. Eventually, this led him to the Indian National Congress (INC), along with an opportunity to meet and travel with Lokmanya Tilak.

He became passionate about fighting for Independence through his devotion to justice

and equality. He worked hard for the INC and, in 1937, was elected to the All India Congress Committee, pipping Jawaharlal Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit to the post.

Early on, my great-grandfather was influenced by a small group of young men who were collecting weapons for an armed struggle against the British, conducting raids for money. He helped them but did not participate directly. Through them, he became involved in the Mainpuri conspiracy case. In 1917, one of the conspirators turned informant, and several men were imprisoned. Knowing that one man, Shiv Krishna Gupta, would be given the death penalty, my great-grandfather decided to break him out.

He hired a man to be sent to the same prison for a petty crime, to gather information. He began sending large watermelons to Gupta in prison, with wedges cut for tasting. After several weeks, he hid the escape plans and a German saw in one of them. On the planned night, Gupta sawed

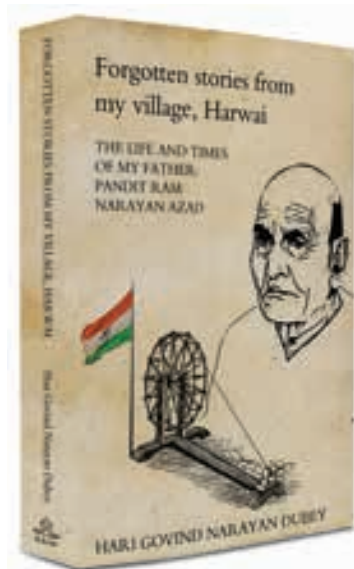
Ram Narayan Azad used his knowledge of English to prevent people from being cheated

through the cell bars and climbed over the outer prison wall. He escaped by camel and then car to Gwalior state, which was outside British jurisdiction.

Although my great-grandfather was initially a proponent of armed attack, this changed after he met Gandhiji. Not only did he take up non-violent resistance, he shaved his head and moustache and started wearing *khadi*. In 1940, he gave up stitched clothing entirely, and started wearing only a *khadi dhoti*. He believed social work and patriotism went hand in hand, and that rural development and social uplift were necessary both to gain Independence and make the most of it.

Over the years, he championed many different causes. He protected people from corrupt officials and worked against untouchability, caste discrimination and the dowry system. He disinfected wells to curb disease, and swept the streets to set an example for greater cleanliness. He convinced people to send girls and lower caste children to school, and set up high schools in his area for children who could not afford to study further away.

He was also a great proponent of harmony. When Gandhiji travelled to Noakhali to intervene in the riots of 1946, he followed his lead, despite the violence, bloodshed and danger. During Partition, he worked hard for communal peace in his area, entreating members of various communities and setting up night patrols. His efforts were so successful that he received a letter from the Muslim women of another town, asking him to help them as well. In 1948, when the family moved to Agra, he helped set up refugee camps



and even opened up his home to people in need.

After Independence, my great-grandfather continued his social work. He helped dozens of poor boys from his locality get college admission, found them accommodation, got their fees and expenses covered, and even arranged for free medical care. At any time, four or five students lived in his home, rent-free, and with free food.

Over the years, he underwent many hardships and sacrifices.

He did not have a paying job, and his family was plagued by poverty. His adherence to the Congress policy of not paying fines resulted in frequent government raids on his home. He went to jail several times, including one time for breaking the salt laws in 1930 and for attending the banned Calcutta Congress Session of 1933. His longest prison term of three years, which he recorded in his diary, was for participating in the Quit India Movement. Because of his refusal to cooperate, he was often put in solitary or standing confinement. At one point, he was issued a punishment of 30 lashes, which would have probably killed him if not for timely legal intervention.

In spite of all this, he never wavered from his cause. What I admire most about him was his commitment and determination in the face of adversity, and his refusal to back down from his beliefs. He strongly believed that society should come before individuals. Like my grandfather, I will always remember the motto by which he lived: "When you are serving society, do not care about your needs. Society must always come first. Your own needs can only come second, and always second."



**Aditi Dubey, a PhD student in entomology at the University of Maryland, is the great-granddaughter of Ram Narayan Azad and has contributed to the publishing of *Forgotten Stories from my Village, Harwai: The Life and Times of my Father Pandit Ram Narayan Azad*, by Hari Govind Narayan Dubey**



Vadlamani Lakshmi Narasimham, a Hindi teacher and translator for Mahatma Gandhi in Vijayawada, rallied the masses against the British during the freedom movement

Vadlamani Lakshmi  
Narasimham

# Literary soldier



Courtesy: Padma Chandrasekar

**I**n a small town called Eluru, 330 km from Hyderabad, Padma Chandrasekhar (53) reminisces about her fearless grandfather, Vadlamani Lakshmi Narasimham. “I am told that he carried the flag in all the processions and rallies against the British. Although there are very few specifics available, my brother Bhargava and I know that he died in 1946, at the age of 50, after being beaten up very badly in one of these processions.”

Vadlamani was a Hindi teacher in a local government school. “He chose Hindi mainly because he was impressed by Mahatma Gandhi. He read as much as he could of Gandhi’s writings. His prowess in Hindi also led him to write some fiery seditious prose inciting the people to rise against the British,” reveals Chandrasekhar. “He was arrested a number of times and was in and out of prison at Bellary, Rai Vellur and Rajahmundry.” Whenever Gandhi came to southern India, Vadlamani would be summoned as the translator.

This teacher-activist would also visit slums and bring hungry people home to be fed by his wife. His aim was to arouse patriotic fervour in the poor so that they could join him in his proces-

sions and rallies. But he knew that very little registers on an empty stomach!

What’s more, Vadlamani was a playwright of stormy dramas in Hindi, once again seditious in nature. He would enact them at the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha in Madras. This self-motivated flag bearer was finally brought to his knees, or so the British thought, when they auctioned all the properties he owned. But his family was taken in by the other patriots’ families who also found them a new home.

The history books may be silent on Vadlamani but his name and picture are up on a temple wall in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, dedicated to freedom fighters. It was from here that an enterprising Telugu journalist wrote a story in a newspaper and published his picture. Or maybe it was the Freedom Fighters Samstha in Kovvur near Rajahmundry that published a leaflet, from which someone spotted a faded image. That’s how Chandrasekhar got a picture of her grandfather. “It is amazing how none of us cousins kept track of things until this picture turned up,” she marvels.

—Shyamola Khanna

A picture of  
Vadlamani  
Lakshmi  
Narasimham  
retrieved from  
a pamphlet



Courtesy: Preetam Powaku

For this patriot from the South, Independence did not arrive until September 1948, when the Nizam of Hyderabad surrendered to the Indian Union

**Narayan Linga Reddy**

# Battle royal

**C**irca 1900, a middle-class farmer's family was blessed with a child who would take the family name to great heights. Narayan Linga Reddy was born in Vailpoor village in Nizamabad district, now in Telangana. As the name suggests, the province was part of the erstwhile Nizam's dominions, where landlords ruled and poor farmers and labourers had no free will or lives to speak of.

Preetam Powaku, grandson of the late freedom fighter, says, "I believe he studied up to the second standard in Urdu medium. He started his career as a picker of tobacco leaves and later got into beedi manufacturing, thus creating employment for the village." Powaku believes that the brutality of the British and autocratic Nizam's rule prompted his grandfather to take up cudgels for the poor. Joining the freedom struggle was the next logical step and Reddy came under the tutelage of Swami Ramananda Tirtha, who led the movement for the liberation of Hyderabad from the Nizams. It was 1945. Shortly afterwards, Reddy was locked up in Nizamabad jail for seditious activities.

In 1947, India won Independence and the Indian Union was formed. Many kingdoms and principalities joined the newly formed Union but Hyderabad State, under Mir Osman Ali Khan,

chose to stay independent. Consequently, the state Congress party, under the leadership of Swami Ramananda Tirtha, called for a 'Join India' movement. Thousands who joined the movement were jailed. Reddy was locked up along with 16 other leaders like Krishnamacharyulu Dasarathi. He was sent to Nizamabad jail for two years.

As history would have it, the Indian Union seized control of Hyderabad principality in September 1948. When he was released from jail, Reddy and his compatriots celebrated not only freedom from British rule but the removal of the Nizam's yoke.

Reddy went back to rural life and grew grapes. He also introduced innovative business ideas and brought employment to nearby villages. As a Gandhian, he contributed to the growth of 'Harijans', backward tribes and minorities. He built schools for higher education and worked to provide better medical facilities. "Until almost the end, *Baba* lived in his village and never moved to urban Hyderabad," says his eldest daughter Daya. "He was awarded the Tamra Patra for his contribution to the country and his people."

The last rites of Narayan Linga Reddy were performed on 14 November 1994.

—Shyamola Khanna

Narayan Linga Reddy (left) was awarded the Tamra Patra for his contribution to the country and his people

Sudhanshu Biswas dodged bullets and swam underwater to escape being caught by the police. Now he offers poor children an education because he didn't get one

Sudhanshu Biswas

# The undying spirit

A

lthough they lived in a sleepy hamlet in 24 Parganas, Sudhanshu's parents sent their son to Kolkata to get a sound education. While in school, he was introduced to Sarat Chandra Bose, elder brother of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Sarat, in turn, introduced Sudhanshu to Acharya Benimadhab Das, a scholar, social reformer and mentor of Subhas Chandra Bose. It was Das and his sisters who encouraged the teenager to take part in the freedom movement.

"I served my motherland by ferrying messages and weapons from one shelter to another, and carrying out other instructions. The police never once caught me, perhaps because of my naïve face," says Biswas, now 98. He recalls the incident that had the greatest impact on him during those turbulent times. "We assembled near Albert Hall [now the famous College Street Coffee House] where a peaceful conclave was to be held. As we waited outside, someone from the group suddenly hurled a bomb at the British policemen assembled there. The cops opened fire on the crowd and everyone went berserk trying to escape. I ran like mad with the police on my heels. I reached the jetty near Strand Road, leapt in the air and

landed on a place of human waste. They fired at me but by then I had reached a boat in the middle of the river by swimming underwater."

Biswas was sent to Narayanganj (now in Bangladesh) to escape arrest. Other defining moments include two meetings with Mahatma Gandhi and one with Bhoodan movement leader Vinoba Bhave when the latter visited Kolkata. But, he rues, he never met Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose despite several attempts.

Prosecuted and jailed four times during the freedom movement, Biswas says he has always been a staunch follower of Swami Vivekananda and committed his life to social work. He ventured into business activities like running a small plastics manufacturing unit and set up the Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram in 1971 in South 24 Parganas. Here, 60 poor children are given education and the old, infirm and destitute are offered food and shelter. "As I was arrested from the examination hall and I could not study beyond matriculation, I realise the importance of education among the younger generation."

—Partha & Priyanka Mukherjee

Sudhanshu Biswas has committed his life to social work



Courtesy: Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram



# Experience

## A second childhood

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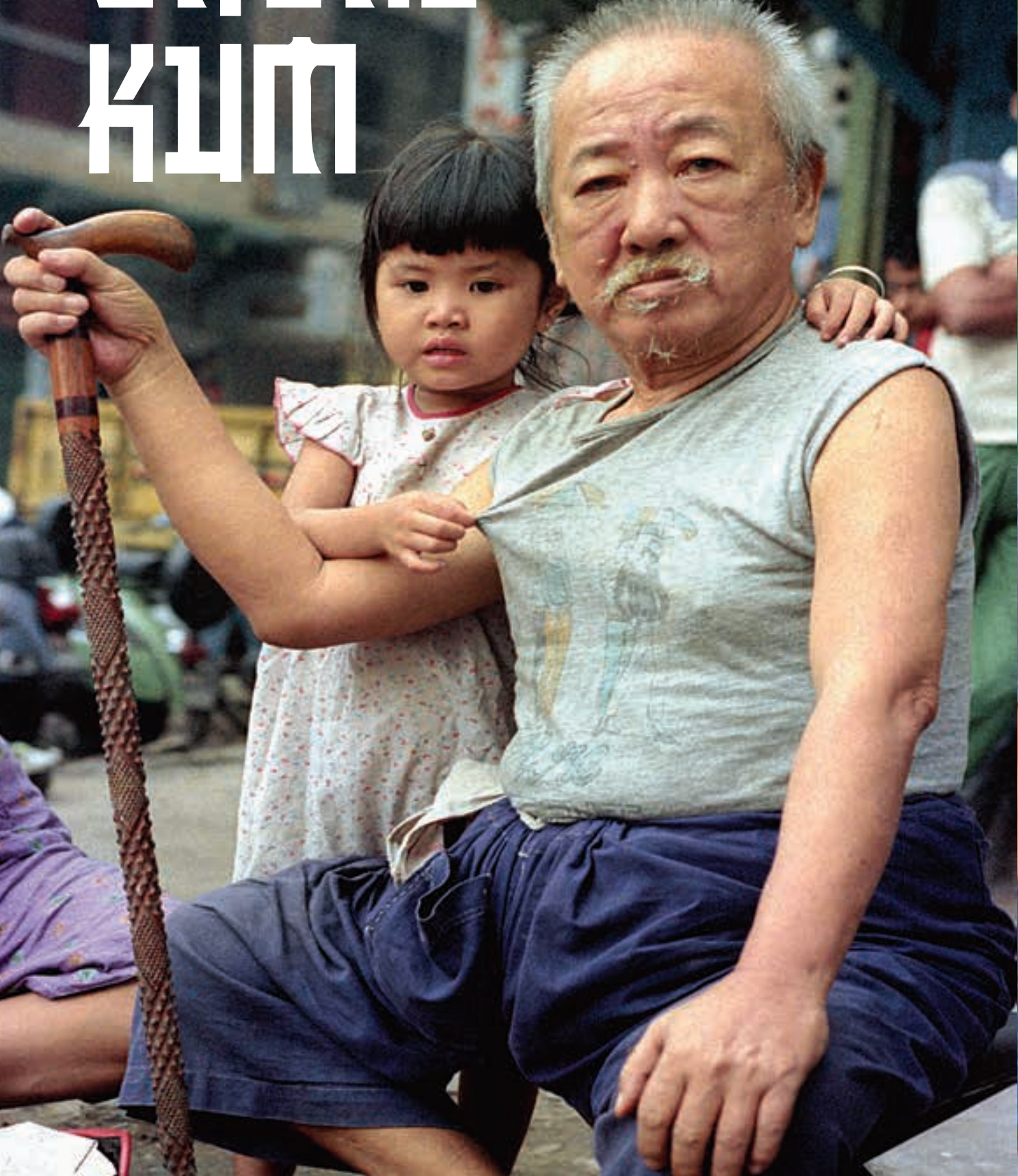


JOURNEY


# CHIN KUM

The nation's first and largest Chinatown in Kolkata is a pale shadow of its former self, even as the ethnic community fights a tough battle to stay afloat

📷 ➡ Shilbhadra Datta







Outside a  
Chinese dhaba

Opposite page:  
Bonding  
time for a  
grandfather and  
granddaughter  
in Chinatown

**D**etective *Byomkesh Bakshi*!, the recent Bollywood outing of the original Bengali sleuth, was a throwback to an era when the ethnic Chinese community in Bow Barracks area in Calcutta, now known as Old Chinatown, was an integral part of the city's cultural kaleidoscope. The Bengali *sattyaneshi* has managed in no small measure to put the focus back on the once culturally vibrant community, which sadly is in the doldrums today. As a school-boy, I remember devouring the adventures of this middleclass 'Bengali Sherlock Holmes' and watching almost every film and television serial on him. Every time I walk into the labyrinth of Chinatown, I feel I'm Byomkesh incarnate trying to unearth an unknown layer of the story and history that remains hidden behind the closed doors of this shy community that had migrated from a very old civilisation and made Kolkata their home in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.





## MAKING OF CHINATOWN

Situated near the Kolkata Police Headquarters at Lalbazar, Tiretti Bazar was home to the first Chinese settlers in the city. Though Chinese scholars like Fa Hien (4<sup>th</sup> century) and Huen Tsang (7<sup>th</sup> century) had been coming to India, it was not until the 1700s that the Chinese began settling here in discernible numbers. The first settlers were the 100-odd workers who toiled on a sugarcane plantation run by a Chinese merchant named Tong Achi in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Granted land in an area about 30 km south of Kolkata by then governor-general of Bengal Warren Hastings, Achi set up his plantation and a mill to make refined sugar. It's believed Indians labelled refined sugar *chini*, literally meaning Chinese, because they were involved in its production.

Elders of the community indulging in adda; a woman takes a ride in a hand-pulled rickshaw

The British not only encouraged Achi to settle in the suburbs but gave him and his group protection. As a major port, Kolkata played host to Chinese sailors on their way to, or returning from, foreign lands. Most of those who settled here were runaway sailors and indentured servants. After Achi's death, the place came to be known as Achipur. Achi's grave and a Chinese temple can still be seen here.

Opposite page (clockwise from top left): Duck for sale at Tiretti Bazar; Large aluminium containers with authentic Chinese fare; on the menu, oversized dumplings

I first visited Tiretti Bazar, part of Old Chinatown, in 1989 to sample the buzzing Chinese bazaar that comes alive as early as 5 am in the morning and disappears by 8.30 am, just before the day kickstarts and the roads transform into traffic islands. It is one of the few remaining places in India where one can buy authentic Chinese snacks. While the

bazaar lasts, it puts up a live theatre of quintessential Chinese breakfast on Chhatawala Gully with food vendors ladling out steaming hot, clear broth with chicken and oversized dumplings stuffed with pork. The bustling market also offers bucketsful of crabs, sweet-water fish, ducks, chickens and myriad green vegetables.

If that is the story of Old Chinatown, 'New Chinatown' in Tangra evolved with the migration of Hakka Chinese around 1921, when the Chinese Communist Party formed in China. The migrants set up tanneries upon marshy and reclaimed low-lying land over the old Dhapa area, which was essentially a dumping ground for the city. They even built a Chinese Kali Temple in Tangra. The census of 1951 clocked over 6,000 Chinese in Kolkata. A majority belonging to the







Hakka community found work in the port, set up leather tanneries and opened restaurants. Hakka tanners and shoemakers, Hupeh dentists, Cantonese carpenters and restaurateurs, beauticians and hairstylists all left their signature on the city.

However, the Sino-Indian war in 1962 changed the equation forever, with the Chinese Diaspora being arrested, restrictions being placed on free movement and other clamps on civil liberties. Their social, cultural, religious and economic life was severely disrupted. The Chinese dragon and lion dances that herald major festivals vanished from the streets. Chinese temples, clubs and schools also suffered

Savouries for sale; Stella Chen makes swift calculations on her abacus

Opposite page: Dentistry is a common profession among the Chinese; K T Chang busy at his job as editor of *Overseas Chinese Commerce of India*

from neglect even as a blanket of fear and insecurity enveloped the community, leading to an exodus of youngsters to greener pastures abroad.

The Supreme Court order in 1995 to move the tanneries out of city limits because of environmental concerns also affected

the community adversely. The tanneries gave way to restaurants dishing out 'Hakka style' Chinese food such as chow mein and chilli chicken.



## CHA PROJECT

With the vagaries of time having turned Old Chinatown into a shabby version of its former self, the newly announced CHA (Calcutta Heritage Alliance) project by a Singaporean conglomerate with a large number of Kolkata-born Singaporeans on board, many of whom are of Chinese origin, the INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), and the state government, promises a regeneration of Old Chinatown (Tiretti Bazar), along with a focus

on developing New Chinatown (Tangra), which together house the nation's largest Chinese community, numbering 2,000, according to the latest estimates.

If all goes as planned, it won't be long before Tiretti Bazar rediscovers its colourful past. The Dragon Boat Festival organised by the Indian Chinese Association at Sun Yat Sen Street on 21 June this year was the first step in that direction.

## SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Ambling through Old Chinatown, I feel as if someone has opened the doors to another culture. I'm reminded of a Bengali film *Neel Akasher Neechey*, made by Mrinal Sen, with haunting music by Hemant Kumar. Set against the last days of the British Raj in Calcutta, the film explored the platonic relationship between an immigrant Chinese daily wage earner, Wang Lu, and a Ben-





gali lady, Basanti. The film had overt political overtones and was the first film to be banned by the Government of India in 'free India'.

As I dodge past aluminium steamers and stacks of *momo* containers, I catch sight of a dead pig's head on a fiery street-side grill, and red strings of *lap cheong* sausages of freshly minced pork soaked in dark soy sauce and molasses hung out to dry. A little sniffing around leads me to a Bihari

mother and son who offer *siu yuk*, the famous crispy pork roast, Cantonese style. While the flavours fill my being, the mother tells me they have perfected the art from Chinese masterchef Richard Ho. Other delectables on this street are *tai pao* and *yu dan tang mein* or fish balls and noodles in clear soup, and *shu mei* and sticky rice cakes with shredded pork.

As I wander along, mystical aromas lure me to Hap Hing Co, a dimly lit

store replete with dark wood that sells Chinese condiments, grocery products, herbal medicines, green tea and various other products. The cheerful proprietor Stella Chen makes for a pretty sight as she makes swift calculations on her abacus. A little ahead are the Poe Chen and Sing Cheung sauce factory stores, where condiments and seasoning, canned ingredients and sauces are sold at unbelievably low prices. Given the great taste and bargain rates,









most Chinese restaurants in Kolkata pick up their supplies from here.

## CULTURAL CRISIS

While strolling through Tiretti Bazar's Denzem Lane, I am greeted by a ceremonial gateway. Just beyond is a tranquil courtyard shaded by mango, jackfruit and pink pomelo trees, home to Nan Soon Church, one of the six churches in Old Chinatown.

Interestingly, though these places of worship are called 'churches', they have nothing in common with Christianity and are Buddhist in nature. According to Dr Tansen Sen, a Kolkata-born historian who is an expert on Indo-Chinese connections and the author of *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian*

Inside a classroom in a Chinese school; elders engrossed in a game of Mah Jong

Opposite page: A Hakka shoe shop selling hand-crafted shoes; Chinese dragon dance during one of the festivals







*Relations*, the 'churches' of Kolkata's Chinatown are actually traditional Buddhist-Daoist Chinese temples.

At Nan Soon Church, the principal deity is Guandi, the God of War. The inscription above the altar says: 'Prosper in Foreign Lands'. One of the founding members of the Nam Soon Community Club in those early years during World War II, when whole droves of families came from

China and Hong Kong, was Lai Nam Hing. His grandson Thomas Lai happens to be my classmate and was my doubles partner in table tennis in school. Thomas's father Lai Yee Leong used to be the principal of the school situated in the Nam Soon complex. "In those days, when computers were still new, my dad introduced them to his students," says Thomas, who is a professional designer, and a talented saxophone player.

Things are not hunky-dory anymore for the community and their culture. The present headmistress, Lily Ho, laments her futile efforts to teach students Mandarin. "Children find the language too difficult, and are not keen on learning it," she says. This sentiment is echoed by K T Chang, editor of the only Chinese language newspaper of India, *Overseas Chinese Commerce of India*. "The teaching of Mandarin in Chinese schools in Kolkata has taken a backseat. Only two Ling Liang Schools in Calcutta offer it as a language; that too as a second language. Nobody wants to learn to write Mandarin or speak the Hakka dialect." Chang attributes this as one of the reasons for the drop in the newspaper's circulation from 800 in 1969 when it was launched to around 200 copies now. Funded by the Chinese Tanneries Owner's Association, the daily is published from a now abandoned tannery in Tangra.

Speaking in a smattering of English, Hindi and Bengali, Chang, who is 75, says he moved to India with his family from China immediately after World War II in 1949. Since his retirement as a foreman of a tannery seven years ago, Chang has been associated with the newspaper. He is assisted by three like-minded friends who are keen on preserving the culture. Most of the news is gleaned from either the Internet or Chinese language newspapers published from Beijing, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Matrimonial advertisements and obituaries, however, give the daily a local flavour.

Having been an integral part of the culturescape, it's no surprise to see the Chinese community indulging in adda, the favourite Bengali pastime. One can see elders of the community holding debates and discussions over

The Kali temple in Tangra; winding down with a game of chess at the end of the day

Opposite page: A dish drenched in the famed 'Hamai sauce' from the family-run Tung Nam restaurant



cups of green tea or the traditional Indian brew and playing an addictive game of Mah Jong.

As I meander through Chhatawala Gully and Blackburn Street, I recall my first exposure to things Chinese: buying school shoes from the shop Yunley on Bentinck Street where Seong Ku still makes handcrafted shoes, tasting chow mein at the Waldorf and being gifted a Wing Sung fountain pen on my fifth birthday. As a young boy, I used to watch fascinating displays of jugglery by a wandering street performer called Fang Huang, who had come to Kolkata from Kwang-Tung in Canton. Though I managed to photograph him years later, he didn't seem to have aged!

#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Being truly seduced by Tiretti Bazaar, I'm anxious to turn yet another page from the past. I move on to Toong-on Temple on Blackburn Lane. Its speciality is not the shrine per se but the once famous tenant, Nanking Restaurant. It was a favourite with the rich and famous of yesteryear, including Bollywood actors Dilip Kumar and

Raj Kapoor, and Bengali litterateur Sunil Gangopadhyay. Considered the oldest Chinese restaurant in Kolkata, and perhaps in the whole of India, it was named after the Treaty of Nanking signed after the First Opium War in 1842. The restaurant opened in 1924, and was operated by the Au Yau Wah family. The words 'Nanking Restaurant', albeit weather-worn, are still visible above the door of the temple.

Other must-visit eateries in the area are a family-run Chinese restaurant Tung Nam and Eau Chew on Mission Row. While Michael Huang's family prepares a secret recipe of 'Hamai sauce' using shrimp paste, garlic and red chilli, which is then used as a base to make steaming hot dishes of chicken, prawns, pork and fish, Eau Chew is famous for its custom-made 'Josephine noodles'. Named after Josephine Huang, who runs the restaurant now, the eatery, with its red laminated circular and square tables and a red swing door that chimes every time someone walks in, could very well pass off for a kitschy film set for a period drama in the 1960s.



Indeed, in its prime, Chinatown was a celebration of India's diversity. We don't need Byomkesh Bakshi to tell us that unless amends are made, the red lanterns lighting up the Kolkata skyline will soon fade away. 🌸





Photographs courtesy: Prahlad Bubbar

## Vintage lens

Some of the first photographic documents of India that highlight key moments in the development of the medium in the country were showcased recently in London in an exhibition, *The New Medium: Photography in India 1855-1930*. Prominent among the images were noted photographer Dr John Murray's albumen print of the Taj Mahal, arguably the first photograph of the great wonder; an 1855 photograph of the caves of Karlie, Maharashtra, by William Johnson, a founding member of the Bombay Photographic Society; and the tombs of Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali in Srirangapatana by the Nicholas Brothers, famous for their

### photography

southern Indian landscapes. The chronological collection also included the works of pioneers in Indian photography Raja Deen Dayal, court-appointed photographer to the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, and Ramchandra and Pratap Rao, who worked as state photographer in Indore. "Though it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them, the Indian photographers had less conditioned ideas about what made a landscape beautiful. The British, for example, were heavily influenced by the aesthetics of the picturesque, giving their photographs a more idealised, romanticised quality," notes art historian and curator Prahlad Bubbar. Zoom in!



Clockwise from top left: Dewas athletes by Raja Deen Dayal, 1885; a group of royal women by Devare's Art Studio, 1922; Kilipputtu Muntapam by Nicholas Bros, 1878; Maharaja Bhan Pratap Singh of Bijawar by Raja Deen Dayal, 1882; gateway of temple in Mysore by Dr William Henry Pigou, 1856

Opposite page: The Golden Temple in Amritsar by Anon, 1860s





# Parallel lines

Historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee sets the record straight on Nehru and Bose, writes **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**

**I**s our sense of *itihaas* [history] misplaced? Why else would reiteration of historical facts be ignored and replaced by controversy?" These questions arise when a discourse goes off track, especially in the context of famous Indian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. "Both are hugely admired and revered for their contribution towards India's freedom.

**history** Yet, both are greatly misunderstood and misrepresented in the wake of events that history signals as being significant," said internationally acclaimed historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee.

Enthralling a select gathering at a talk titled 'Comrades at Crossroads' in Chandigarh recently, the soft-spoken and immaculately dressed Mukherjee elaborated upon the similarities both enigmatic personalities shared, among several other things. "Both studied at Cambridge and came from well-to-do families. While Bose was an ace student, Nehru was mediocre. The former returned to India in 1921,



Courtesy: Chandigarh Literary Society

## IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES

Seventy-five years after John Goldwater created him, dorky, lovable teenager Archie Andrews has had a hipper and sexier makeover. Archie Comics, the present publisher, has brought on board Eisner Award-winning comic writer Mark Waid and illustrator of the epic *Saga* comic book series Fiona Staples to create stories of modern realism to relate to a newer generation of readers, while preserving the nostalgic and carefree overtones of Archie and his friends in Riverdale. What will follow? "Only more issues will tell," Archie assures the reader.

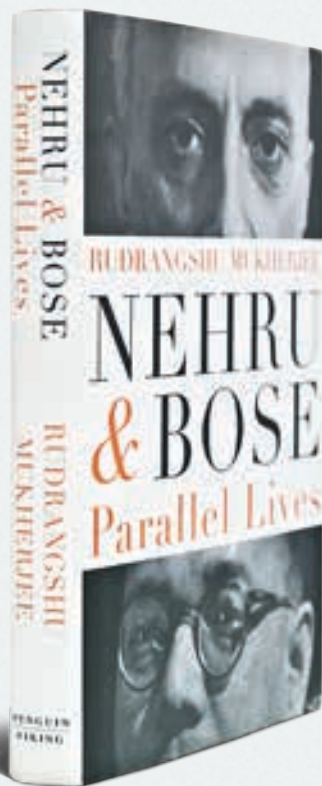


Courtesy: Archie Comics

while the latter arrived in 1912. The curious play of interchangeable numerals of these dates appears reflective of their lives linked through a series of events and political decisions they experienced individually,” affirmed Mukherjee. The talk was part of a promotional activity of his latest book, *Nehru and Bose: Parallel Lives*, initiated by Ashoka University.

“There are suspicions that refuse to die; one of them is that Nehru nursed a deep-seated hostility towards Bose,” Mukherjee tells us during an exclusive interview. The recent news about certain files having been declassified by the Government of India has once again stoked the story about Bose. According to the ‘revelations’, two members of the Bose family were kept under surveillance by the Intelligence Bureau for two decades, between 1948 and 1968. A large number of Indians believe that Bose or ‘Netaji’ as he was fondly called, was the undisputed hero of the Indian Freedom Movement who was denied his rightful place owing to political misgivings and the role played by some of the top leaders of the time.

The 63 year-old attempts to dispel myths and set the record straight in his latest book that talks of Nehru and Bose as remarkable beings who were great friends, sharing



a dream for India and its people: “Bose believed and perhaps rightly so that he and Nehru could make history together.” One of the themes in this book is that Nehru and Bose shared a coveted space as iconic Indian leaders. This does appear as a revelation considering the unbalanced treatment meted out to Bose and the overindulged focus Nehru has enjoyed from writers and historians so far.

Widely acknowledged for his work *Awadh in Revolt, 1857-58* and four more books on the 1857 rebellion, some of Mukherjee’s other noteworthy publications include *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, *New Delhi: The Making of a Capital* and *Great Speeches of Modern India*. For his latest book, *Nehru & Bose: Parallel Lives*, surprisingly, Mukherjee did not meet “any of Bose’s descendants”. In fact, what went in the book was arduous research coupled with his dexterity

in reading between the lines. “Writing the book was different because the approach was biographical; it required a different kind of empathy.”

But does history in India not suffer between controversy and conjecture more often than necessary? “Debate is the lifeline of history writing and conjecture its enemy,” he responds. “History as a discipline trains us to see the present in terms of the past and thus enables us to understand the continuities and discontinuities of the civilisational process.”



**“Marriage and love bring two souls closer. But it is a struggle, and as time goes, people lose a sense of themselves in the set habits of a marriage. Desires remain unfulfilled and people start feeling lonely. Love also widens the gap between them. It’s the paradox of marriage: it unites and separates our souls. *Belaseshe* refers to the contemporary problems we face in present-day society. In fact, this is how cinema should be made.”**

*Veteran actor Soumitra Chatterjee on the successful run of Bengali film Belaseshe (In the Autumn of My Life), speaking to Harmony-Celebrate Age. Chatterjee plays a 75 year-old man in the film, which explores the intricacies of a marital relationship between an elderly couple*





Amu Amudan

# Life, science and art

From forest dwellers and agricultural settlers to nature worshippers and knowledge seekers, Indian civilisation has made giant strides. The development of mankind and the significant scientific discoveries of ancient India were portrayed in a dance ballet *Discovery of India—The Scientific Perception*, staged recently at Nehru Centre, Mumbai. Veteran Bharatanatyam and Mohiniattam exponent **Jayashree Nair**, founder-director of Upasana Academy of Fine Arts, choreographed the ballet by creatively blending the two distinct dance forms. “Our scriptures are innumerable and teachings unlimited,” she conveys in the ballet. “We have every reason to be proud Indians.” Excerpts from an interview with **Sai Prabha Kamath**:

**How was the subject *Discovery of India - The Scientific Perception* chosen for the dance ballet?**

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous book *Discovery of India* encompasses the cultural aspects of Indian history. The Nehru Centre in Mumbai has been producing ballets based on Indian science and culture. This is the 10<sup>th</sup> in a series. The ballet was conceived by the Centre’s culture director L A Kazi.

**You portrayed episodes from the life of great Indian mathematician and astronomer Bhaskaracharya and his scholarly daughter Leelavati.**

**dance** **What was the import of the dance ballet?**

We tried to emphasise ancient India’s contributions towards arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, and the concept of value-added numbers and zero. Just as the *hamsa* [swan] is believed to drink only milk from a mixture of water and milk, we must also try to imbibe the essence of all that is offered to us by our ancestors.

**Do you feel science can be propagated through art?**

Indeed, both are interconnected. Art forms can be used as sublime vehicles through which scientific knowledge can be imparted to the common man.

**Was the subject challenging to choreograph?**

Yes, in a way. But our classical basics—dance and music—have been perfected through generations. Their idioms, if used judiciously, can create educative and entertaining content.

**Your views on contemporary dance?**

We have come a long way from depicting celestial and devotional subjects. There should always be infusion of new ideas and idioms between live art forms. Any art style has to be contemporary to become popular.

# The mills that made Mumbai

Mumbai's cotton mills—that once employed over 150,000 people—have now been reduced to an eerie picture of abandoned factories after their shutdown in the 1980s. Even as malls, gated housing complexes and corporate tech parks are taking over part of the land, an attempt to document the stories of lives, livelihoods and spaces associated with the mill is under way through online repository Giran Mumbai. The website was conceptualised by K P Jayasankar, dean, School of Media and Cultural Studies, TISS, and his colleague Anjali Monteiro. "The idea of the archive is to resist the processes of erasures that are happening around us," says Jayasankar. "Closure of the mills, marginalisation of workers' rights and the trade union movement changed the cosmopolitan fabric of Mumbai, exacerbating the politics of exclusion—based on class, language, region and religion," adds Monteiro. The website goes online this month. Visit [millmumbai.tiss.edu](http://millmumbai.tiss.edu)



Courtesy: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya

## Fabrics of time

**I**t's a unique experience to weave a narrative around the different stages of life using textile and costume. Inspired by a Kabir *doha* that compares the birth of a textile with that of a human being, a permanent gallery of Indian Textile and Costume was opened at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya museum recently. The nuanced collection features the *zabla-topi* worn by Jamsetji Tata for his sixth-day ceremony (1839) to depict infancy, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century *navjote* coat and bonnet cap to depict

adolescence, a deep red *gharcholu*-patterned sari from Kutch to depict marriage, and so on. "Textiles are an integral part of our being, our companions through the journey of life," says senior curator Vandana Prapanna. "Through this gallery, we present a glimpse of Indian textile traditions based on a small but significant collection." Co-curated by Manisha Nene, 70 antiquated textile items are on display at any given time out of the 3,000-odd pieces in their collection. Check it out.





# Endgame

It was an innocuous game of chess that resulted in enclaves in both India and Bangladesh. History professor **Anasua Datta** reminisces about growing up in Cooch Behar, where Bangladeshi *chitmohol* are now officially Indian

As I read about the recent land agreement between India and Bangladesh setting in motion the long-pending exchange of enclaves, my mind went back to Cooch Behar, and the enclaves known locally as *chitmohol*. According to a popular legend, enclaves were used as stakes in card or chess games between friendly kings, in this case the Raja of Koch Bihar (Cooch Behar) and the Maharaja of Rangpur, whose kingdom subsequently fell in East Pakistan. According to the wager, the winner would get a piece of agricultural land from the loser's territory, while the loser would still have rights over the land tax. This, in short, is the story behind the genesis of enclaves in India and Bangladesh.

Unfortunately though, the British, who were drawing up the international borders between India and East Pakistan—which later became

Bangladesh—during Partition were unaware of this exchange of land. To set this right, a Land Boundary Agreement was signed on 16 May 1974 between Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi and Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The treaty was initiated to exchange enclaves, surrender adverse possessions and simplify the international borders. I was a sprightly little girl of nine years then and recall how it was a burning topic of interest among every resident of Cooch Behar. Even young girls like us found a takeaway from the controversy. We fashioned an innovative game of '*pasha, chitmohol* and *chukti*' on the lines of hopscotch!

Under the agreement, India retained the Berubari Union No 12 enclave while Bangladesh retained the Dagram and Angorpota enclaves with

India providing access by assigning a corridor called the Teen Bigha Corridor. Bangladesh quickly ratified the agreement in 1974 but India failed to do so. I still remember how, on a late spring afternoon after my Class X examination, my *Mama*, with the permission of the BSF, arranged for us to go on a jeep ride to see the corridor.

According to a 2010 survey, there were 37,000 Indians in Bangladeshi *chitmohol* and 13,000 Bangladeshis in Indian enclaves. With the present treaty coming into force, India will get 51 Bangladeshi enclaves (covering 7,110 acre) in the Indian mainland, while Bangladesh will get 111 Indian enclaves (covering 17,160 acre) in the Bangladeshi mainland. The counter-enclaves will not be exchanged but residents will be allowed to choose their country.

Photographs by Salim Paul



Chinese fishing nets cast on Sagar Dighi;  
opposite page: the Cooch Behar Palace

Though I was born in Sriniketan, I was raised in Cooch Behar, Santiniketan and Calcutta. My memory of Cooch Behar town, where my *Ma* grew up after her family had moved in from Dhaka following Partition, goes back to when I was three. My *Mama* used to work in the local administration there. Those days there was no electricity and lanterns were lit in the evenings. Middle-class houses in our locality had front and back gardens; the main house was single-storied with a tin roof and red oxide flooring. During monsoons, there would be relentless rain over a period of 10 to 15 days, creating a monotonous noise on the tin roofs. But at night in bed, it would turn into a comforting lullaby and put me to sleep. Betel nut trees were all over the town and they swayed in the wind making a hissing sound. During the rains, the frogs would engage in a tango while blowing their trumpets in full throttle. The fences were made of thin local bamboos, with creepers growing on them. While I was in high school, my cousin Bobby and I would go sneaking from one house to another even as elders would be enjoying their afternoon siesta on late Saturday afternoons. On lucky days, we would earn green mango pickle, jujube chutney and *aam papad* from benevolent local grannies who took a shine to us. On our way back, we would play with kittens and puppies, and sometimes even other girls. On quieter weekends, when we would be at home, we would secretly buy ice candies, *til-kut* and cream cakes from vendors who would cart their fare.

Before going to office every morning, my *Mama* would go to the market to buy *boroli*, a freshwater fish captured using Chinese fishing nets. Cooked with a local variety of *brinjal* and *kalaonji*, the *boroli* would be served with steaming rice, making it a lip-smacking meal. One of the major at-



In the Bengali month of *Aghrayan* (December) juicy oranges from Bhutan arrive in Cooch Behar. It is also the time for Rashmela at Madanmohan temple, a secular event

tractions in Cooch Behar is the large manmade lake, Sagar Dighi, which is a popular spot for *adda*. Large *ruhu* fish in the lake make for quite a sight as they jump up to gobble puffed rice and soaked Bengal gram offered to them by the public. Close by, a statue of the architect of modern Cooch Behar town, Koch Raja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, stands proudly.

One of the specialities of Cooch Behar is the *lotka*, a sweet and sour fruit that looks like *lichhi*. In the Bengali month of *Aghrayan* (December) juicy oranges from Bhutan arrive in Cooch Behar. It is also the time for the Rashmela at Madanmohan temple. Significantly, this is a secular event, with the *raas chakra*—a tall semi-cylindrical structure made of paper and bamboo—being decorated by a Muslim family, a practice followed since generations. The holy wheel has come to symbolise universal brotherhood.

Interestingly, though Maharani Gayatri Devi's name has become

synonymous with Jaipur, she was born into the Cooch Behar royal family. An architectural marvel, the Cooch Behar Palace (also called the Victor Jubilee Palace), modelled on Buckingham Palace, was built during the time of Raja Nripendra Narayan. Every avenue, road, street and lane in the town has been interlinked in a concentric square of verticals and horizontals, giving it the appearance of a massive ripple when gazed at from the skies. Before Partition, Cooch Behar was an important town in the East, next only to Calcutta in importance. It also had an aerodrome that was used to transport raw jute, rice and tea to Calcutta in the 1960s.

Today, Natun Bazaar, the brainchild of the rajas of the past, has shops selling international brands like Levi's, Nike, The Body Shop, Samsung and Sony, to name just a few. KFCs and CCDs are slowly and steadily titillating the taste buds of the locals. In this atmosphere of globalisation, the recent land agreement is being viewed with relief. Finally, the *bideshi* are happy to become *desi*!



# The transfer of power

We toast our 69th Independence Day by publishing extracts from the transcript of Lord Mountbatten's radio broadcast of 4 June 1947

Since my arrival in India at the end of March I have spent almost every day in consultation with as many of the leaders and representatives of as many communities and interests as possible. Nothing I have seen or heard in the past few weeks has shaken my firm opinion that with a reasonable measure of goodwill between the communities a unified India would be by far the best solution of the problem.

For more than a hundred years, 400,000,000 of you have lived together, and this country has been administered as a single entity. This has resulted in unified communications, defence, postal services and currency; an absence of tariffs and customs barriers; and the basis for an integrated political economy.

My first course, in all my discussions, was therefore to urge the political leaders to accept unreservedly the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16, 1946. To my great regret it has been impossible to obtain agreement either on the Cabinet Mission Plan or on any other plan that would preserve the unity of India. But there can be no question of coercing any large areas in which one community has a majority to live against their will under a Government in which another community has a majority—and the only alternative to coercion is partition.

But when the Muslim League demanded the partition of India, Congress used the same arguments for demanding in that event the partition of certain provinces. In fact neither side proved willing to leave a substantial area in which their community have a majority under the government of the other. I am, of course, just as much opposed to the partition of provinces as I am to the partition of India herself, and for the same basic reasons. For just as I feel there is an Indian consciousness which should transcend communal differences, so I feel there is a Punjabi and Bengali consciousness which has evoked a loyalty to their province. And so I felt it was essential that the people of India themselves should decide this question of partition.




Dinodia Photo Library

The whole plan may not be perfect: but like all plans its success will depend on the spirit of goodwill with which it is carried out. I have always felt that once it was decided in what way to transfer power, the transfer should take place at the earliest possible moment, but the dilemma was that if we waited until a constitutional set-up for all India was agreed, we should have to wait a long time...

The solution to this dilemma, which I put forward, is that his Majesty's Government should transfer power now to one or two governments of British India each having Dominion status as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made. This I hope will be within the next few months.

Thus the way is now open to an arrangement by which power can be transferred many months earlier than the most optimistic of us thought possible, and at the same time leave it to the people of British India to decide for themselves on their future.

I have faith in the future of India and am proud to be with you all at this momentous time. May your decisions be wisely guided and may they be carried out in the peaceful and friendly spirit of the Gandhi-Jinnah appeal.

A photograph of an older man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark shirt, sitting in a black inflatable ring in a pond. He is smiling and gesturing with his hands towards a young girl sitting on a wooden dock. The girl has dark hair and is wearing a white dress, looking up at the man with a joyful expression. The water is dark blue, and the dock is made of wooden planks.

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# Our forgotten heroes

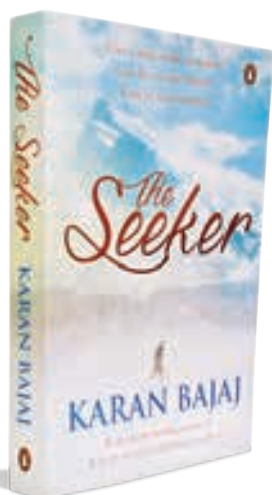
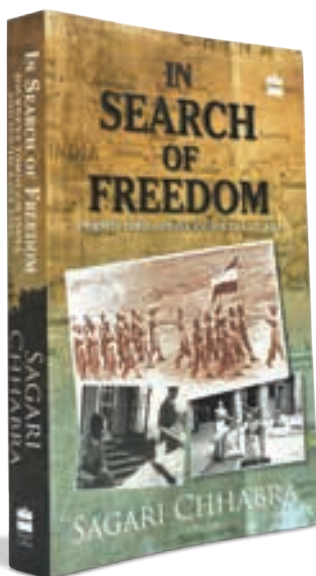
More than 10 years ago, **Sagari Chhabra** set out on a journey to find the freedom fighters lost from Indian consciousness. We hear so much about Gandhi and Nehru, Tilak and Bose, that it's easy to forget that millions fought for India's independence, some of whom had never even set foot in India. **IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM** (HarperCollins; ₹ 499; 344 pages) is a collection of testimonies from the most obscure members of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, and in particular the Rani of Jhansi regiment, the first all-women military regiment in the world. These brave women were just teenagers when they responded to Netaji's call: "*Tum mujhe khoon do, mein tumhe azadi doonga* [Give me blood and I will give you freedom]."

An interesting fact is that most of these soldiers hadn't even been to India when they decided to fight for her freedom. Which begs the question, why did they risk their lives? "It's a funny question to ask an Indian," a peeved Kannuswamy from Malaysia told Chhabra. "Once an Indian, always an Indian." For the Ranis, joining the regiment also meant freedom from societal roles accorded to girls. One Rani left her husband when he opposed her joining the regiment, while another joined to escape marriage. Working for a noble cause gave them an identity above and beyond being a wife and daughter. It was the freest they had ever been and, for some, the freest they would ever be.

Chhabra's journey across India, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Burma has helped her put together an account that reveals how history has been unkind to these freedom fighters. Members of the INA and the Rani regiment have gone virtually unrecognised by the Government of India and its people. There are those who have been denied pension for not being official citizens of India, and others have been denied citizenship of India and the country of their birth, rendering them stateless. For 70 years they had been waiting to share their stories, to preserve them for posterity.

So when Chhabra arrived, they were ready. They answered her questions and gave her precious old photographs and diaries, saying, "You will do something good with it.... It is meant for you." Some handed over letters of appeal to the President of India—to restart free vernacular newspapers and magazines so they could teach their children their mother tongue, and for Netaji's ashes to be brought to India from Renkoji temple in Tokyo. "We were always there," Padma Shri and Rani Gouri Sen told Chhabra. "But you discovered us." A celebration of extraordinary acts of heroism by ordinary people, Chhabra's book becomes an important document of India's freedom struggle.

—Natasha Rego



**THE SEEKER** (Penguin Books; ₹ 167; 366 pages) is not merely a book but a spiritual journey in which the protagonist hopes to uncover the secrets of the universe and life's endless sufferings and pain. Triggered by the death of his mother and a chance encounter with an Indian food-cart guy, Max sets out on a quest leaving his well-paying Wall Street job. The idea *If there is...sorrow and death, there must be something that is... sorrow-less and death-less* seizes his mind and he embarks on a journey to the snow-capped mountains of India in search of a yogi who could be his guru. In the process, he ends up in a drought-prone area near Madurai in southern India and through yoga, penance and self-discipline, slowly inches towards his goal of enlightenment, succeeding in detaching himself from worldly pleasures and the ghosts of the past. **Karan Bajaj** does justice to a difficult subject, remaining honest and refraining from inserting unnecessary incidents or characters. There is an authenticity to the account, probably because the book was inspired by the author's own backpacking trip from Europe to India by road and his experiences in learning yoga in the Himalaya. This book is not a typical page turner but for such a complex topic, Bajaj has maintained a consistent rhythm where the reader continues to wonder what comes next. The writing style is also contemporary and non-preachy. This may not be everyone's cup of tea but for both the sceptic and the believer, there's definitely something here.



# 'The British feared Bhagat Singh's Communist approach'

Our knowledge of Bhagat Singh is largely limited to history books and glorified adaptations of his life on the silver screen. Singh's legacy has been limited to his audacity, valour and a haloed martyrdom. Eminent historian and author **Chaman Lal**, retired professor and former chairperson of the Centre of Indian Languages at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, reveals the intellectual side to Singh through his writings. The 68 year-old academician—who was visiting professor at The University of the West Indies in St Augustine in 2010–2011—brings to the fore the young Marxist's political beliefs and opinions through his 50-odd publications in Hindi, Punjabi and English. Lal's literary focus pivots on the martyr, besides Hindi novels, Indian Dalit literature and revolutionary movements during India's freedom struggle. Some of his titles such as *Understanding Bhagat Singh* (2013) and *Ghadar Party Hero: Kartar Singh Sarabha* (2010) have been translated into Marathi, Bengali and Urdu.

Lal is a recipient of several awards, including the National Prize for Translation from the Sahitya Akademi in 2002, Shiromani Hindi Sahityakarak Award from the Punjab government (2003), and the Justice Shardacharan Setu Samman (2006). In January 2015, Lal completed a year-long, post-retirement stint at Central University of Punjab, where he was professor-coordinator at the Centre for Comparative Literature. In an exclusive interview with **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**, he talks about the legacy of Bhagat Singh, his latest book on the iconic revolutionary, and the government's indifference to one of our bravest heroes.

## To what do you attribute your fascination with Bhagat Singh?

As a young boy, I read *Bharat Ke Krantikari* written by Manmathnath Gupta. It had sketches of Indian revolutionaries, including Bhagat Singh. The book influenced me so much that I translated it into Punjabi. Later, the book was serialised in *Desh Bhagat Yaadan*, a fortnightly edited by legendary Ghadarite Baba

### authorspeak



Gurmukh Singh Lalton. I also learnt that Gupta was a revolutionary and involved in the historic Kakori conspiracy case of May 1926. He escaped a death sentence as he was a minor. After completing his jail term, Gupta started documenting the revolutionary movement in India. I met him at his Delhi residence. It was his book that was instrumental in arousing my interest in Singh, strengthened later by other books.

## Are you unhappy with the manner in which Singh has been chronicled historically?

I am happy with certain versions, yet unhappy with others. Mainstream writings on Singh have presented the facts in a distorted manner. I focused on the works of Gupta, Shiv Verma, Rajaram Shastri, Sohan Singh Josh, Ajoy Ghosh, Veerender Sandhu and others, as most of them were Singh's comrades, relatives and admirers, and hence their portrayal was closer to the real Singh. Memoirs by Singh's niece Veerender Sandhu, nephew Jagmohan Singh, Malwinderjit Singh Waraich and Amarjit Chanda have also helped demystify the great freedom fighter. However, it was only in the late 1970s when renowned historian Bipan Chandra published *Why I am an Atheist*, that Singh was recognised as an influential political thinker.

## Tell us about your first book on Singh.

*Bhagat Singh Aur Unke Saathiyon Ke Dastavez* was co-edited by his nephew Jagmohan Singh and published in 1986 by Rajkamal Prakashan. It got tremendous response from readers and scholars.

## What unknown facts has your research on Singh helped uncover?

What I have brought to light is nothing new. Many of these facts were well known during Singh's own lifetime, but were overshadowed by other facets of his personality. Singh's writings and court statements were published during his jail tenure prior to his execution, and showed his brilliance as a political thinker. Immediately after his execution on 23 March 1931, Singh's writings, including *Why I am an Atheist* and *Letter to Young Political Workers*, were published by Lala Feroz Chand in an English

weekly called *The People*. My books have drawn from these and a few previously unpublished documents.

**Tell us about your latest book, *Complete Documents of Bhagat Singh*.**

In 2007, the birth centenary year of Bhagat Singh, the Government of India published the complete writings of Singh in Hindi. In 2008, after the Supreme Court's exhibition titled *The Trial of Bhagat Singh*, I was provided a digital copy, which included some previously unknown correspondence between Bhagat Singh and the British authorities. My book contains such documents and is significant for the admirers of Singh in Pakistan, who consider him a son of the soil. Interestingly, the first available document of Singh is in Urdu—a letter to his grandfather Arjan Singh—displayed on the back cover of this book.

**You have written about him in English, Hindi and Punjabi. In which language has Singh been read and appreciated the most?**

Of my publications on Singh in Hindi (seven titles), Punjabi and English (two each), the maximum readership has come from Hindi, as its geographical and linguistic area is most widespread, constituting almost 50 per cent of the total Indian readership of different languages. These titles have also been translated into Urdu, Marathi and Bengali. The Marathi online edition of his entire writings has been quite popular.

**Having revealed unknown facets of Singh's personality, what continues to intrigue you still?**

His absolute commitment to the freedom struggle and his intellectual brilliance continue to intrigue me. No other political personality has reflected such sharpness in thinking at such an early age. His intellectual bent of mind was one of the major

reasons for his execution, as the British feared that he would become the 'Lenin of Asia'. The Chinese Communist movement had not gained momentum then. Had Singh been allowed to live, he would have organised a strong communist movement in India.

**Have you interacted with the descendants of Singh?**

Singh had a large family. My first book was co-edited by Jagmohan Singh, a nephew of Bhagat Singh. I also met one of his sisters, Bibi Prakash Kaur, who passed away recently. I have also interacted with

**“Bhagat Singh's intellectual bent of mind was one of the major reasons for his execution, as the British feared that he would become the ‘Lenin of Asia’”**

Singh's younger brother Kultar Singh and his family—son Kiranjit Singh and daughters Veerender Sandhu and Inderjit Kaur, and Kaur's husband Amrit Dhillon. While Sandhu lives in England with her family, Kaur and Dhillon are in Toronto. In fact, Kultar Singh wrote a brief introduction to my book *Bhagat Singh Ke Sampooran Dastavez* and generously distributed copies of the book before his demise in 2005. I also enjoy cordial relations with Abhey Sandhu, another nephew of Bhagat Singh.

**Who are your favourite writers?**

Though I have already mentioned Bipan Chandra and Bhagat Singh's comrades for their memoirs, I am

essentially a student of literature and my favourite authors are aplenty. Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Lu Xun, Premchand, Muktibodh, Pash, Bertolt Brecht, and Ngugie Wa Thiong'o are just a few names featuring on that long list.

**What is your take on Bhagat Singh's celluloid image?**

Six feature films, apart from a number of television serials, short films and documentaries, have been made on Bhagat Singh's life. Among recent takes on his life, I enjoyed Ajay Devgan's *The Legend of Bhagat Singh*.

However, Manoj Kumar's *Shaheed* remains the most memorable for its melodious songs. Also, though not many are aware of it, Shammi Kapoor essayed the role of the iconic revolutionary in 1963.

**Is there any other forgotten hero you are keen to explore through your writings?**

There are many more heroes who can be focused upon, like Ashfaqullah, a poet, executed in the Kakori case. I have published a book on Ghadar Party hero Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh's role model. However, I feel I still have not done justice to Singh, who is the epitome of the revolutionary fire within the Indian freedom struggle. There is a need to explore and analyse documents from the Lahore archives, the British Library, London, and the National Archives of India and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Sadly, there is no institutional support for this. Also, the first-ever Bhagat Singh Chair, founded in 2008 at Jawaharlal Nehru University, partly owing to my endeavours, has not been filled in seven years of its existence!

**For the author's dedicated blogspot on Bhagat Singh, visit <http://bhagatsinghstudy.blogspot.in/2015/03/bhagat-singh-memorial-lecture-panjab.html>**



# The pleasure principle

Unlike momentary delights, happiness is a permanent and positive emotion, writes **Howard C Cutler**

Several months after the Dalai Lama's talks in Arizona, I visited him at his home in Dharamsala. It was a particularly hot and humid July afternoon, and I arrived at his home drenched in sweat.... Coming from a dry climate, I found the humidity to be almost unbearable that day, and I wasn't in the best of moods as we sat down.... He, on the other hand, seemed to be in great spirits.

Shortly into our conversation, we turned to the topic of pleasure. At one point in the discussion, he made a crucial observation. "Now sometimes people confuse happiness with pleasure. For example, not long ago I was speaking to an Indian audience at Rajpur. I mentioned that the purpose of life was happiness, so one member of the audience said that Rajneesh teaches that our happiest moment comes during sexual activity, so through sex one can become the happiest," the Dalai Lama laughed heartily. "He wanted to know what I thought of that idea. I answered that from my point of view, the highest happiness is when one reaches the stage of Liberation, at which there is no more suffering. That's genuine, lasting happiness.... Happiness that depends mainly on physical pleasure is unstable...."

In every century, men and women have struggled with trying to define the proper role that pleasure should play in their lives.... In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., Epicurus based his system of ethics on the bold assertion that

"pleasure is the beginning and end of the blessed life." But even Epicurus acknowledged the importance of common sense and moderation, recognising that unbridled devotion to sensual pleasures could sometimes lead to pain instead. In the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sigmund Freud was busy formulating his own theories about pleasure. According to Freud, the fundamental motivating force for the entire psychic apparatus was the wish to relieve the tension



Haresh Patel

caused by unfulfilled instinctual drives; in other words, our underlying motive is to seek pleasure. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many researchers have chosen to side-step more philosophical speculations, and, instead, a host of neuroanatomists have taken to poking around the brain's hypothalamus and limbic regions with electrodes, searching for the spot that produces pleasure when electrically stimulated.

None of us really need dead Greek philosophers, 19<sup>th</sup>-century psychoanalysts, or 20<sup>th</sup>-century scientists to help us understand pleasure. We know it in the touch or smile of a loved one, in the luxury of a hot bath on a cold rainy afternoon, in the beauty of a sunset. But many of us also know pleasure in the frenetic rhapsody of a cocaine rush, the ecstasy of a heroin high, the revelry of an alcohol buzz, the bliss of unrestrained sexual excess.

Although there are no easy solutions to avoiding these destructive pleasures, fortunately we have a place to begin: the simple reminder that what we are seeking in life is happiness. As the Dalai Lama points out, that is an unmistakable fact. If we approach our choices in life keeping that in mind, it is easier to give up the things that are ultimately harmful to us, even if those things bring us momentary pleasure. The reason why it is usually so difficult to 'Just say no!' is found in the word 'no'; that approach is associated with a sense of rejecting something, of giving something up, of denying ourselves.

But there is a better approach: framing any decision we face by asking ourselves, 'Will it bring me happiness?' That simple question can be a powerful tool in helping us skilfully conduct all areas of our lives, not just in the decision whether to indulge in drugs or that third piece of banana cream pie. It puts a new slant on things.

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*Extracted from The Art of Happiness. Cutler, an American writer and psychiatrist, has co-authored the book with the Dalai Lama*

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Courtesy: Indian Mountaineering Foundation

## Peak of ACHIEVEMENT

For a young nation still learning to stand on its feet, there was every reason to feel on top of the world when Captain Avtar Singh Cheema hoisted the Indian tricolour on Mount Everest—at 8,848 m or 29,029 ft—on 20 May 1965. This achievement by the Indian Army was all the more significant as it had come after two unsuccessful attempts. The team led by Captain Manmohan Singh Kohli managed to put nine climbers on the summit of Mount Everest. However, Captain Kohli himself couldn't make it, as a raging blizzard pushed him and others back.

The motto for the climb was 'Do or Die', which was stitched on the team's rucksacks. Waiting for the right opportunity, the team—comprising 21 climbers, 800 porters and 50 high-altitude sherpas—stayed put at the base camp for almost a month. When the weather finally cleared, Cheema and sherpa Nawang Gombu went ahead, and on 19 May managed to set up a summit camp at 27,930 ft: a tiny, red, two-man Draw-Tite tent, the highest on Everest at that time. At 5 am the next day, the duo set out for the peak in -30° Celsius. Expedition leader Kohli stayed at the advanced base camp, coordinating the effort. Years later, recollecting those anxious moments, he said, "I was as tense as the summiteers. If they were climbing physically, I was climbing mentally." Finally, at 9.30 am, the Indian flag fluttered on the summit, electrifying the nation.

Breaking all protocol, then prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri welcomed the team at Delhi airport. People broke into impromptu dance on the streets; the government announced an Arjuna Award for the entire team; a full-length feature film on the expedition with music by Shankar Jaikishan was screened; and Kohli's memoir *Nine atop Everest* was recommended as supplementary reading in schools. One congratulatory message addressed to 'Commander Kohli, MOUNT EVEREST, India', surprisingly, reached the addressee safely!

### THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: AUGUST 1965

- On 1 August, cigarette advertising was banned from British television.
- On 9 August, Lee Kuan Yew announced Singapore's independence from the Federation of Malaysia and assumed office as prime minister.
- On 27 August, The Beatles visited Elvis Presley at his home. It was the only time the band and the singer met.
- On 30 August, Bob Dylan released his chartbuster album *Highway 61 Revisited*, featuring the popular number *Like a rolling stone*.



“There is no royal road to anything. One thing at a time, all things in succession. That which grows fast, withers as rapidly. That which grows slowly, endures.

—American novelist and poet Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-1881)

## Phantom offer

*n.* A nonexistent offer to purchase a house, used to coerce people making real offers into raising their prices.

**Example.** In yet another sign that buyers are losing their patience, the Real Estate Council of Ontario plans to introduce new regulations July 1 that are meant to crack down on so-called **phantom offers**. That's when unscrupulous agents hint to potential buyers that they have another offer that doesn't actually exist in the hope of extracting more money. Under the new rules, agents won't be allowed to suggest or imply that they have another offer unless it's signed and delivered.

—Chris Sorenson, “Thought the real-estate market couldn't get any crazier? Think again”, *Maclean's*, 13 June 2015

## SMIDSY

*adj.* Describes an accident caused by the driver of a car failing to see a cyclist or pedestrian.

**Example.** Recently released figures show it is time for vehicle drivers to stop blaming motorcyclists for car/bike accidents. The statistics show that nearly half of all motorcycling accidents were caused by vehicle drivers and three-quarters of them occurred at intersections. Motorcyclists refer to drivers failing to see them as **SMIDSY** crashes for ‘Sorry Mate I Didn't See You’.

—“Tax better for war or water?”, *Penrith Press*, 15 October 2002

## Antilibrary

*n.* A person's collection of unread books.

**Example.** I like the concept of the **antilibrary**, mostly because it justifies my habit of incessantly acquiring new books while lacking the time to read them all. There's something very comforting about owning stacks of books—particularly non-fiction—and having them immediately on hand, should you want to know something about (say) Hitler, inequality, cats or economics.

—Hazel Phillips, “The importance of the Antilibrary—Converting unknown unknowns into known unknowns”, *Baldwin Boyle Group*, 12 January 2015

## DIVORCE DOULA

*n.* An advocate who provides legal and financial advice as well as emotional support to a client who is going through a divorce.

**Example.** When I told friends and family that we were separating, many were quick to judge, criticise and offer incredibly unhelpful advice (“Why don't you wait 10 years until the kids are grown?”). Sigh. Needless to say, I could have used a **divorce doula** during those early days when I wasn't quite sure what I was doing.

—Pamela L Smith, “The 5 most important things I've learned since my divorce”, *The Huntington Post*, 3 April 2015

## Monogamish

*adj.* In a monogamous relationship, but with a mutual agreement that allows occasional infidelities.

**Example.** Personally, I'm in a **monogamish** relationship. We're committed to each other, but have a porous boundary around our relationship, meaning we've agreed that it's OK for either of us to express romantic feelings toward other people or to be physically intimate with other people, so long as we're honest and transparent about our intentions with one another.

—Chris Messina, “Why I choose non-monogamy”, *CNN Money*, 29 January 2015



Natasha Rego

# Urban farmers

**BUZZ**

If you want to start growing your own food but live in a big city with an abundance of cement and lack of mud, don't let it stop you. You can now join a motley group of urban farmers who get together on weekends to grow their food and, get this, make their own soil! Urban Leaves is a community farming project being executed on two rooftops in Mumbai—Don Bosco School, Vadala, and Bhawan's College, Andheri—and anyone can join in. These farmers (they get offended if you call them gardeners) grow everything from leafy vegetables (lettuce, basil) to fruiting plants (rose apple, pineapple), seasonal climbers (cucumber, bitter melon) and perennial vegetables (chilli, aubergine), to name just a few. And they only use *amrut mitti*—that's the mud they make from scratch in a fascinating four-month-long process. To join them, visit [urbanleaves.org](http://urbanleaves.org) and register, after which you can join them early next Sunday morning.

When I hear somebody sigh, 'Life is hard,' I am always tempted to ask, 'Compared to what?'

—American journalist  
Sydney Harris (1917-1986)

## Return trip effect

*n.* The illusion that the return trip takes less time than the initial trip, even when the distance and actual time of both trips are the same.

**Example.** What causes this so-called **return trip effect**? You might guess that it has something to do with knowing the route—on the way back, you see landmarks that help you better gauge when you're close to your destination. Well, you'd be wrong! According to this study, the return trip effect (which makes the return trip seem 17-22 per cent shorter on average!) is seen even when people take different routes on the outward and return trips.

—"Flashback Friday: Why the return trip always seems shorter", *Discover*, 4 July 2014



## “Children will excel if they get access to the right resources”

N Subramanian, 72, Chennai, provides learning materials to poor children



Courtesy: N Subramanian

A random visit to his old school in Kurvimalai village in Tiruvannamalai district gave direction to N Subramanian's retired life. Fondly referred to as *thaatha* [grandfather], this former employee of Southern Railways is on a mission to put the lives of students in backward villages back on track. “When I visited my school after retirement in 2001, it looked exactly the way it did in 1955,” he says. “That prodded me to do whatever little I could.” He got in touch with his old schoolmates and bought benches for his alma mater. Forced to drop out after Class X as his parents couldn't fund higher education, Subramanian wants to ensure others don't walk down a similar path. “We need to provide an atmosphere that instils a love for learning,” he adds. Thanks to his Spartan lifestyle, Subramanian manages to divert a substantial part of his pension savings to provide learning materials to schools including charts and maps, besides pitching in for repairs and sometimes even sponsoring new furniture. He donates kits comprising the *Thirukkural*, considered the Tamil *Veda*, Tamil-to-English dictionary,

and atlas to students of select government schools in areas where he used to live and work. “While the *Thirukkural* will impart the right way of living, the dictionary and atlas will help children further their knowledge.” Pointing out that most people donate generously to temples, while forgetting to support their schools, Subramanian says, “Each one of us should do our bit, even if it's just replacing the floor mats or fixing a broken fan.” For his part, Subramanian still wakes up at the crack of dawn to catch a bus from Chennai to far-flung villages, sometimes travelling as many as 300 km a day. While not visiting schools, Subramanian is busy with his grandchildren, taking them through colourful learning charts stuck on the walls of his house and introducing them to interesting titles in his home library, which boasts over 2,000 books. He also enjoys writing for the *Railways Pensioners' National Digest* and the Ministry of Railways' monthly publication *Indian Railways*. “True happiness, though, is in giving children the opportunity to spread their wings and fly high,” he beams.

—Jayanthi Somasundaram

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