

harmony celebrate age

MARCH 2017 ₹ 40

The magazine for silver citizens

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The Women Issue

CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI HER PALACE OF WORDS

THE TRAILBLAZERS

Dr Punita Arora | Diana Edulji | Dr Armida Fernandez
Dr Indira Hinduja | Rajani Pandit
Meenakshi Raghavan | Surekha Shankar Yadav

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Shakti

Shakti is 'she'.

It is not surprising that the word for 'power' is personified by the divine feminine. The abilities of a woman are infinite, her potential limitless, and she alone is the primal force that completes the circle of life—there could be no yang without yin! In fact, as I say time and again, *every* woman has the capacity to create, nurture, transform and lead, with her emotional intelligence, adaptability and intangible strengths. No matter her background, circumstance or story, she holds this latent power in her grasp.

I learnt this early on in life. I am blessed to have been born in a family brimming with shakti—my mother Meenakshi had eight daughters and one son. And as the youngest, and the apple of her eye, I got the best of her. It was almost as if she channelled all her learnings as a mother into nurturing me. I also got the best of my sisters; the first five were much older and like mothers to me. They reinforced what my progressive parents taught us every day: we were all goddesses, devis, assets to our family, never liabilities; we were their true wealth; and that there were no limits to what we could achieve.

This support and belief formed the bedrock of my life and paved the way for me to grow and evolve into the person I am today. Over time, my husband and in-laws, my extended family and my own children have strengthened this foundation further, providing me with a force-field of support and love. However, while our relationships can empower us, the ability to craft our destinies, ultimately, rests with us. It is vital that women understand this.

Unfortunately, years of marginalisation have made Indian women forget our innate worth, as I wrote in an article in *Businessworld* magazine recently. The World



Dabboo Ratnani

Economic Forum's 2015 *Global Gender Gap Report* ranks India a dismal 108 out of 145 countries on economic, healthcare, education and political parameters. Our country is consistently adjudged among the most dangerous for women. And a study by New York-based Centre for Talent Innovation, while lauding Indian women as 'superwomen' for balancing home, work and family, contends that they face the greatest barriers to both personal and career growth.

We need to do better—as a society, as a country—and strive for institutional change. More significant, women need to look within and draw from our own repository of strength and resilience. Self-belief is the engine of self-actualisation; the seven incredible female pioneers in the pages of *Harmony-Celebrate Age* this month are testament to this. Connect with the goddess within you—and you will learn that you are, indeed, shakti.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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Prolific writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's views on women's empowerment and positive ageing

Cover photograph: **Prasad Durga**

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HOUSE OF CARDS
In Maharashtra's Sawantwadi district, royal matriarch Satvashila Devi Bhonsle holds on to her legacy

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OLD LIFE

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column one

In 2000, among the birthday gifts I received was a copy of *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. I vividly remember reading it, riveted, while my daughter, then two years old, played at my feet, supremely irritated at being ignored. This January, Karuna, now almost 19, sitting next to me on a train from Delhi to Jaipur, looked at me indulgently while I devoured *Before We Meet the Goddess*. There were no complaints—you see, she too has been enchanted by Divakaruni's magic with words.

This appeal across generations (my mother-in-law is also an avid reader) is what makes Divakaruni so remarkable. Reading her work is insightful; her characters are real, their dilemmas identifiable and their milieu achingly familiar. More important, meeting her is a lesson in hope—she is unfailingly positive about the world and the ability of women to fulfil their potential.

Indeed, the 'shakti' Editor Tina Ambani writes about in 'Connect' resonates through Divakaruni's work, as you will discover in our cover feature. It is also echoed in our featured trailblazers: Dr Punita Arora, the first Indian woman lieutenant-general and vice-admiral; Diana Edulji, first captain of the Indian women's ODI cricket team; Dr Armida Fernandez, founder of India's first human milk bank; Dr Indira Hinduja, the creator of India's first test-tube baby; Rajani Pandit, India's first female private detective; Meenakshi Raghavan, the oldest woman practitioner of Kalaripayattu; and Surekha Shankar Yadav, India's first woman loco pilot.

Respect. And a very happy Woman's Day to our female readers—and the men who love and support them!
—Arati Rajan Menon

Travelling is a journey within the journey of life. As most members (about 95 per cent) of our Senior Citizens' Society, Freedom Fighters Enclave in New Delhi, are retired government servants and have a lot of time on our hands, the urge to travel builds up very frequently. The frequency of our travel, which used to be once in three to four years when we were in service, has increased to a trip every six to nine months or even more now. In line with your article "Silver Nomads" ('Cover Feature'; November 2016), we ended the year 2016 by undertaking a tour of Himachal Pradesh, visiting places where mostly goddesses are worshipped, like Naina Devi, Chamunda Devi, Chintpoorni, Mata Jwala Devi and Brijeshwari Devi. Can there be a better example of active ageing than this?

K D Bhatia
Via email

Harmony-Celebrate Age is the need of the day in today's society that tends to overlook the needs of the elderly. There has definitely been a vacuum in this space, which is being rightly addressed. I also feel the magazine needs to be marketed well, particularly in the segment it targets. Otherwise, many will miss out reading such an interesting and informative magazine.

Manish Mardia
Chennai

Harmony-Celebrate Age is a great resource for elders to get inspired and motivated to lead an independent and self-fulfilling life. However, I feel the magazine is available only to the elite and not the large middle-class population who might benefit from it more. It is not easily available with the neighbourhood newspaper distributor. I hunted for it all over



Bengaluru's Malleswaram area but could not find a copy! Now, I buy it only when I go to the airport. Please improve your distribution network and presence on stands.

Aruna Sateesh
Gurugram

The expectations on income tax from Budget 2017 of most taxpayers have not been met. The financial hardships of the middle class have not been addressed in any way. The exemption limit has not been raised to a suitable amount—minor relief of 5 per cent for an income up to ₹ 5 lakh by a reduction in tax rate from 10 per cent to 5 per cent is inadequate. Seniors and super seniors will not get the full extra benefit of ₹ 12,500 on their income tax liability as their exemption limit of ₹ 3 lakh and ₹ 5 lakh has not been increased at all. Who cares for silvers who need cash in hand the most to survive in this ever-increasing inflationary world? At present, there is no requirement for advance tax by silvers. Similarly, relief is required by abolishing TDS and the requirement of filing Form 15H by senior citizens.

Mahesh Kumar
Via email



FACE OFF

A BIG, FAT BREAKTHROUGH

No more wrinkles—this could actually happen. Scientists at the University of Pennsylvania have found a way to regenerate the fatty cells that keep the skin youthful. As London newspaper *The Telegraph* tells us, these cells, called adipocytes, are lost over time or when skin scars. And this loss is the reason permanent wrinkles become etched on our faces as we grow older. Using a bone morphogenetic protein (BMP) released by hair follicles, the team was able to influence scar-forming cells called myofibroblasts to transform themselves into adipocytes in both mouse and human tissue. While the research, published in journal *Science*, focused on healing scar tissue, the implications are now huge. “Our findings can potentially move us toward a new strategy to regenerate adipocytes in wrinkled skin, which could lead us to brand new anti-ageing treatments,” says lead scientist Professor George Cotsarelis.

EYE SPY

They're often the first telltale sign of ageing. But a little care and **the right makeup can help you minimise the effect of sunken or hooded eyes**, insists website *startsat60.com*. Here are some tips from the site:

- Focus on highlighting and contouring
- Apply eye shadow slightly higher than your normal crease to create the illusion of a higher one so it is visible when your eyes are open
- Check your eye shadow with your eye open to evaluate how much more you need to add
- Don't go too high with the eye shadow as you will need to highlight your brow bone for a contoured look.

For a demo, check out
[youtube/X4J_RrbsxRc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4J_RrbsxRc)



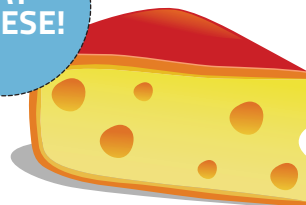
Photographs by iStock

QUICK FIX

Cut and paste just got a whole new meaning. Forget the usual creams and potions, **stickers are the latest anti-ageing go-tos**, according to British newspaper *Daily Mail*. Impregnated with active skincare ingredients, these ensure vitamins and minerals get absorbed into your skin. And you can stick them anywhere—on your lips, face, frown lines and wrinkles, nose, eye or neck—while you go about your daily business. Here are some examples for every budget given by the paper:

- **Revitale Collagen and Q-10 Neck Mask**; £ 1.99 (about ₹ 170); *beautybase.co.uk*
- **Purederm Deep Cleansing Nose Strips**; £ 3.49 (about ₹ 295); *beautybase.com*
- **Yes To Coconut Ultra Hydrating Paper Mask**; £3.49 (about ₹ 295); *feelunique.com*
- **Etude House Cherry Lip Gel Patch**; £ 4.99 (about ₹ 420); *amazon.co.uk*
- **Realine Beauty Frown Line Patch**; £ 28 (about ₹ 2,350); *amazon.co.uk*
- **Skyn Iceland Hydro Cool Firming Face Gels for Smile Lines**; £ 30 (about ₹ 2,500) for four smile and four frown line patches; *marksandspencer.com*
- **Jamela Crystal Collection 24K Gold Eye Circle Mask**; £ 30.50 (about ₹ 2,555); *jamelaskincare.co.uk*
- **Bioeffect EGF Eye Mask Treatment**; £ 75 (about ₹ 6,280); *bioeffect.co.uk*

SAY CHEESE!



A great slice of cheese may make more than your tummy happy. In a study published in journal *Nature Medicine*, European researchers contend that **spermidine, a compound found in aged cheese, can make you age better. Even more significant, it can lower blood pressure and risk of heart failure and improve cellular function and longevity.** This has been attributed to a process called autophagy activated by spermidine, which clears out toxins from cells and recycles damaged cell parts.



PENSION PLUS

There have been plenty of **recent developments on the pension front** across India. Here are some highlights:

- The Delhi government has announced a pension hike across all categories by a minimum of ₹ 1,000 per month. The old-age pension scheme will now provide for an increased income limit of ₹ 1 lakh per annum (from the previous ₹ 60,000) and the disability pension scheme will

provide for a limit of ₹ 75,000. Silvers from 60-69 years have got a 100 per cent raise (they will get ₹ 2,000 as pension compared to ₹ 1,000). Those above 70 years of age, people with disabilities, and widows and destitute women will get ₹ 2,500 (up from the previous ₹ 1,500).

- According to the Government's new guidelines under the 7th Pay Commission, the State Bank of India (SBI) has released arrears to the tune of ₹ 3,323 crore for close to 1 million eligible

defence pensioners. SBI, which has the largest share of Central Government pensioners, serves about 50 per cent of total defence pensioners across India.

- The Kerala government is preparing a database of welfare pensioners in the state in order to bring everyone over the age of 60 under the ambit of some kind of pension; ensure no one receives more than one pension; and rectify the anomalies in the system that recently resulted in a two-month delay in distribution of pension.

KUDOS TO KOZHIKODE DECLARING ITSELF 'THE FIRST ELDER-FRIENDLY CITY IN KERALA', KOZHIKODE WILL IMPLEMENT THE ₹ 1.75 CRORE VAYOMITRAM PROJECT FOR THE WELL-BEING AND SECURITY OF ITS SILVERS. THE PROJECT WILL KICK OFF WITH COLLECTION OF DATA ON ELDERS THROUGH A SURVEY AND, GOING FORWARD, IS EXPECTED TO INCLUDE AYURVEDA MEDICAL CAMPS, DISTRIBUTION OF VACCINES, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MODEL DAY-CARE HOMES AND SENIOR CITIZENS' CLUBS, A SENIOR CITIZENS' APEX COMMITTEE IN EACH WARD, AND A RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE ELDERLY. THE CITY ALSO PLANS TO CONDUCT WORKSHOPS AND AWARENESS CLASSES TO SENSITISE SOCIETY AT LARGE ABOUT THE NEEDS OF ELDERS.



SILVER SERVICE



Courtesy: Dr V S Natarajan

In Chennai, 6 February was a red-letter day for silvers as Padma Shri (and former *Harmony-Celebrate Age* columnist) Dr V S Natarajan organised a bumper event, which included the launch of his Dr V S Natarajan Geriatric Foundation; the release of his book, *Life Is Beautiful, Again*; the announcement of a Geriatric House Call programme and comprehensive Geriatric Care Resource Directory; the unveiling of a bilingual online elder's digest, *Mudhiyor Malar*, in English and Tamil; and the launch of pocket book *Marathiyai Marappom* (Let's defeat memory loss).

BUDGET BYTES THERE WASN'T MUCH TO WRITE HOME ABOUT FOR SILVERS IN THIS YEAR'S UNION BUDGET EXCEPT FOR THE FINANCE MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT SENIOR CITIZENS WILL GET AADHAR-BASED HEALTH CARDS AND EARN AN 8 PER CENT INTEREST ON THEIR SAVINGS THROUGH LIC. THE LIC EARNINGS, HE EMPHASISED, WILL HAVE AN ASSURED INCOME FOR 10 YEARS.



HELP AT HAND

NGO Agewell Foundation has set up two help lines for silvers in Delhi—(011) 29836486 and 29840484—with two counsellors and five volunteers at hand.

THE DIGITAL ROUTE

Administrations of select districts in Uttar Pradesh will roll out digital life certificates for retired employees, saving them considerable trouble. The scheme will initially be launched in Lucknow, Shamli and Bareilly.

SPOILER ALERT!

Don't believe everything you read by the anti-ageing pundits. Researchers at the University of California – Berkeley insist that **the hype about young blood being a sure-fire route to rejuvenation is grossly misplaced**. In fact, their study, conducted on mice, reveals that not only does transfusion of young blood lack any 'anti-ageing' effects, it can actually prove detrimental to health.



Photographs by iStock

Road to safety

The chaotic traffic in New York City has impelled its police department to look out for silvers. **NYPD is providing silver pedestrians with reflective decals for their walkers and canes** so they can be easily seen by motorists. With a similar objective, the city of **Toronto has designated 12 'senior safety zones' with reduced speed limits, signs warning drivers to slow down, enhanced pavement markings, longer pedestrian crossing times and red light cameras**. Time for our cities to take a cue.

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DISEASE DISCOVERY The discovery of a new genetic disease that targets the brain could hold the key to curing a host of neurodegenerative conditions. According to an international team of researchers led by Professor Keith Caldecott of Sussex University in the UK, this **disease causes an enzyme called PARP1 to go into overdrive, contributing to the death of nerve cells.** "Drugs which target this key DNA-repairing enzyme in the right way could prove vital for treating people suffering from diseases caused by its over-activation," Caldecott tells London newspaper *The Independent*. "More research needs to be done, but it's also possible the cause of this newly discovered condition could contribute to the death of nerve cells in people suffering from diseases such as Alzheimer's, Huntington's and Parkinson's." The study was published in journal *Nature*.



BOYS TO MEN

Childhood happiness sustains you through life. And here's the proof. **Boys who have been happy in their early years have strong relationships in middle age and secure attachments in later life,** regardless of their socioeconomic environment, say Americans Robert Waldinger, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, and Marc Schulz, a psychologist at Bryn Mawr College. Their study, published in journal *Psychological Science*, is a continuation of Harvard University's Study of Adult Development, a longitudinal study that spans almost seven decades. "The bottom line is that how we take care of children is just so vitally important," Waldinger tells website *scientificamerican.com*. "And protecting their development is essential for lifelong well-being."



REWIND

How does a reset button on your life sound? **By successfully 'reprogramming' the cells of mice, scientists at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, have managed to reset their biological clock** to a more youthful time, thus extending their lifespan. This isn't the first time such genetic engineering has been attempted; however, while the earlier attempts led to younger *cells*, the mice developed tumours and died. This time, as the researchers report in journal *Cell*, they limited their intervention by just changing the way four genes were expressed, that too for a short period of time. The result: the mice lived 30 per cent longer than untreated ones, with fewer signs of ageing, healthier organs, and no tumours.



Photographs by iStock

"Our study shows that ageing may not have to proceed in one single direction," study leader Professor Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte tells media. "It has plasticity and, with careful modulation, ageing might be reversed. Obviously, mice are not humans and we know it will be much more complex to rejuvenate a person. But this study shows that ageing will be more amenable to therapeutic interventions than what we previously thought." In fact, human trials have already begun and the team is reporting "positive results".



LESS MONKEY BUSINESS

We may be more like our primate ancestors than we think. A European study, also published in *Current Biology*, sought to study social and cognitive ageing in a heterogeneous group of monkeys—with fascinating results. Their study of 118 Barbary macaque simians in southern France ranging from the ages of four to 29 (105 in human years) revealed that **while monkeys maintained their interest in social information well into old age, they**

became more selective about how to spend their time and who to spend it with—much like humans.

When the researchers observed the reaction of monkeys to physical (new toys, tubes with food) and social (pictures of other monkeys and interactions with them) stimuli, they found that the younger monkeys were more enthusiastic in their response, while the older ones remained more circumspect, sticking to their familiar circle of friends. “This clearly tells

**MUCH
LIKE
HUMANS**

us that we, as humans, are not unique in the way we age socially but that there might be an evolutionary ‘deep’ root in this pattern,” Alexandra Freund, from the University of Zurich, one of the study’s authors, tells *The New York Times*. The study concludes that non-human primates are valuable models for understanding human ageing.

LIFE HACK! Londoner Aidan Cramer is a smart guy. When he saw his girlfriend’s ageing 23 year-old goldfish Sally struggling to swim in her tank, he came to the rescue with a life jacket made of a piece of cork and a thin strip of fabric trimmed from an old bikini. This simple flotation device made Sally swim again—and a horde of Internet users smile at the video. See for yourself at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKPLDpqlQhI

BUYING TIME?

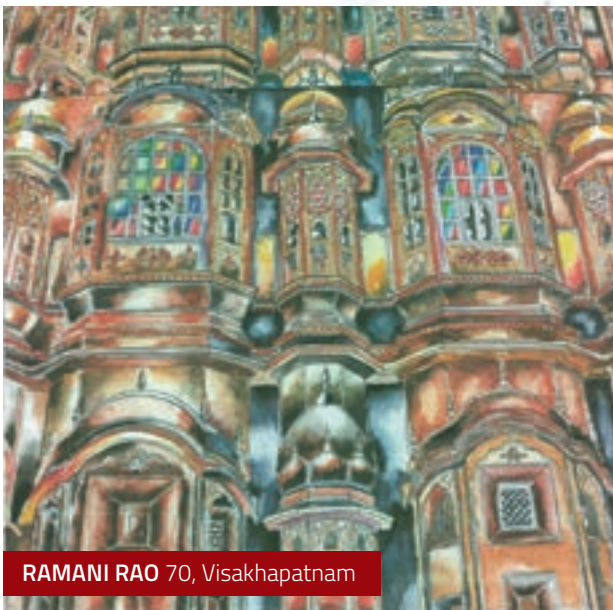
Studying the behaviour of honey bees can prove valuable in understanding ageing in other organisms, including humans. New research conducted at the Institute of Bee Health at the University of Bern shows how, at a young age, honey bees care for their brood, then defend and build their nest, and forage for food. This exposes them to a wide range of stressors such as pathogens, predators and adverse weather conditions, which in turn speeds up the ageing process. This newly discovered role of young honey bee workers adds to our knowledge of how demography shapes colony functioning.



The silver palette

In our November 2016 issue, *Harmony-Celebrate Age* in association with Hindustan Pencils Pvt Ltd invited people above 50 to participate in 'The Adult Colouring Contest' by colouring an image of Jaipur's Hawa Mahal by Steve McDonald, illustrator of the 'Fantastic' adult colouring books series. We received a tremendous response from contestants across a wide range of ages, from 50s and 70s to even the 90s!

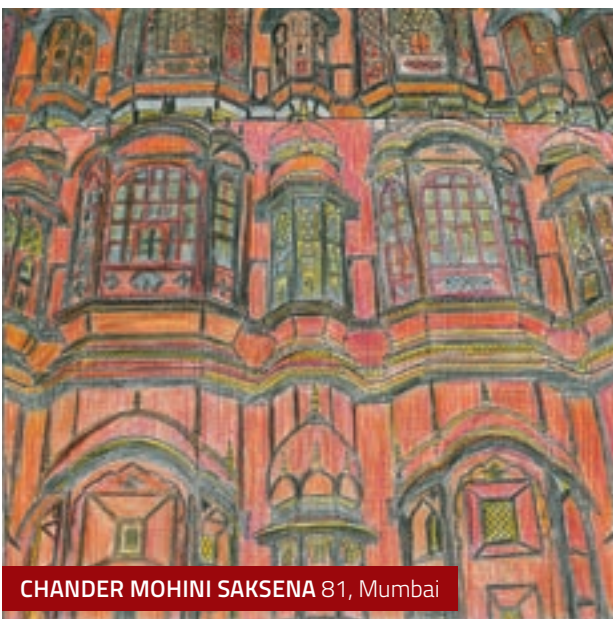
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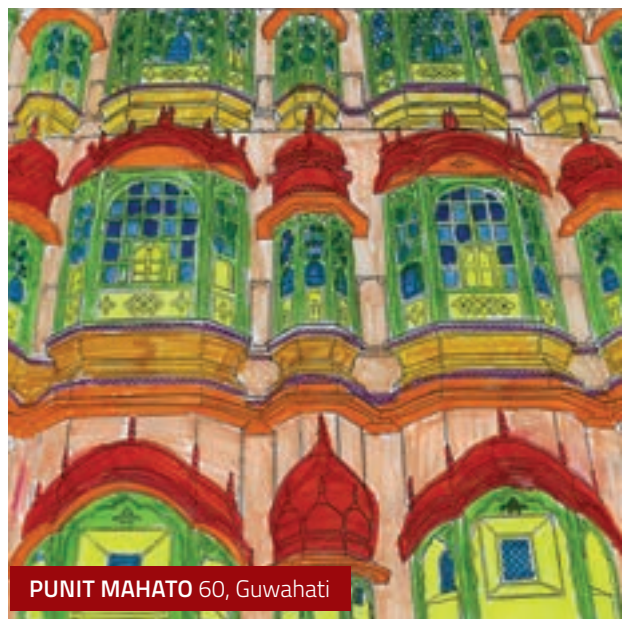
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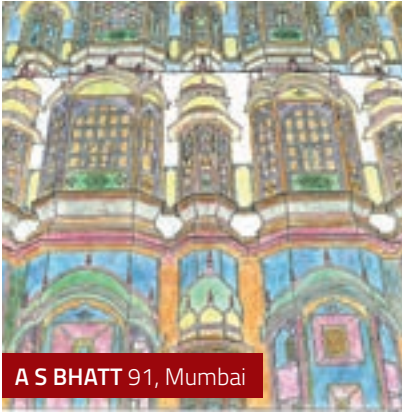
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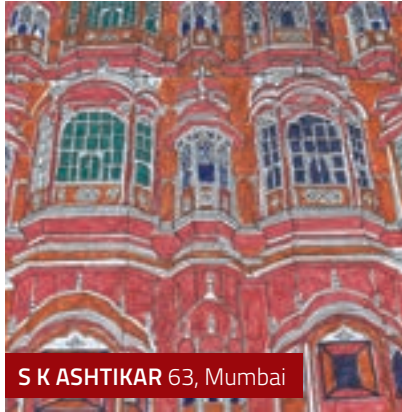
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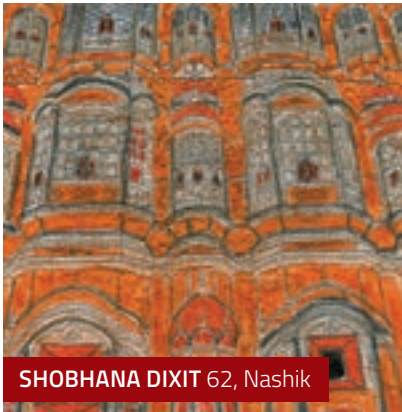
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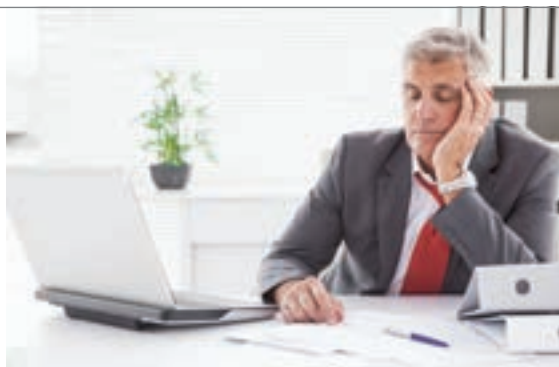
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harmony
celebrate age

Grab that nap! An hour's siesta can prevent your brain ageing by five years when it comes to memory and thinking. A Chinese study of 3,000 silvers over the age of 65 found that those who slept an average of 63 minutes every afternoon scored higher on a test that evaluated cognitive reasoning, logic and mathematics than those who didn't nap. So don't forget to get your Zs—your brain will thank you. And so will your body.



iStock

Then: Fused light bulb Now: Glass vase



RECYCLING FACTS

- Glass is 100-per-cent recyclable without loss in quality or purity.
- Recycled glassware uses 40-per-cent less energy vis-à-vis making products with new materials.

If you have fused light bulbs lying around home, don't discard them. Here is a quick, fun way to repurpose them. All you need is a light bulb, pliers, and strong twine or string. With the help of your pliers, peel off the metal tab at the bottom of the bulb. Next, you will see a black glass piece. To remove this, hold the light bulb at the metal base and tap the side of the metal pliers against the black glass. It should break with a couple of hits. Now, ensure all the glass particles are removed. After this, all that will

remain in the bulb is a glass that encases the filament. Use the tip of your pliers again to break the filament carefully. Remove this and any extra glass that might still be in the bulb. Wash the bulb and ensure it is clean and dry. Cut the twine/string to the required length and tie it around the base of the light bulb in a way that the ends go upwards to hang. Insert a dried plant or fill water in the bulb and insert fresh flowers. Alternatively, you can add soil in the bulb and use it as a planter.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. LIGHT BULBS, DULY CLEANED AND DRIED, CAN ALSO BE USED TO STORE PEPPER AND SALT OR OTHER SPICES. USE A CORK FOR OPENING.
2. FILL LIGHT BULBS WITH CANDIES OR PAINT THEM AND GIFT THEM.

SAY 'NO' TO TIGHTS

Your style statement while cycling could give you a heart attack. If this nugget of information is not reason enough to send you into cardiac shock, read on! Researchers from the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain, have **warned older cyclists to avoid tight compression clothing as it can cause them to overheat and put pressure on their heart.** Researchers tested 12 people of different ages at different temperatures and found that when exercising at 20° C, young people gained no temperature-controlling benefit from tight clothing. In the case of trained cyclists with an average age of 66, the clothing actually increased body temperature and, in some cases, even heart rate. This is significant because the ability to regulate temperature declines with age.



A protein against cancer

Finally, researchers may have found a solution for inflammatory bowel disease and colon cancer. According to a study at Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Blacksburg, Virginia, **altering the shape of IRAK-M, a protein that controls inflammation, can reduce the progression of bowel disease and colon cancer** in mice. The altered protein causes the immune system to become supercharged, clearing out bacteria before they can do any damage. The findings were published in journal *eBioMedicine* and the researchers are now looking ahead to human tests.



THE DIABETES-CANCER CONNECTION

Having diabetes might be the earliest sign of one of the deadliest forms of cancer, pancreatic cancer. A team of international researchers analysed a million individuals in Italy and Belgium who had pancreatic cancer and had also been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes a year earlier. Scientists point out that while it may seem like diabetes precedes pancreatic cancer, the reverse is probably true. This is because cancer of the pancreas—the organ that secretes insulin, which Type 2 diabetics are unable to produce—is usually detected in the terminal stages while diabetes shows up much earlier. Scientists thus call this phenomenon ‘reverse causation’. The researchers also warn that rapidly deteriorating diabetes could be the first sign of hidden pancreatic cancer, and steps should be taken to investigate it. The findings were presented at the European Cancer Congress 2017 in Amsterdam.



Photographs by iStock

For coffee aficionados, the cup that cheers runneth over. The latest round of good news comes from researchers at the Institute for Immunity, Transplantation and Infection at Stanford University in California

who claim **drinking coffee can reduce the effects of ageing by lowering the level of inflammation in the body**. Inflammation is an important process used by the immune system to fight infections and remove toxins from the body. However, as one gets older, the body fails to adequately

regulate inflammation, increasing the likelihood of contracting diseases like diabetes, hypertension, cancer, heart problems, joint disorders and Alzheimer's. Researchers found that people who drink more caffeine show significantly low levels of activity in the inflammation gene pathway.



WATCH OUT FOR 'SICKBIT'

THE DAY IS NOT FAR WHEN YOUR WATCH CAN TELL YOU IF YOU'RE GOING TO—ACHOO!—CATCH THE FLU. A RESEARCH TEAM AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY IN CALIFORNIA IS WORKING ON AN APP THAT USES INFORMATION FROM WEARABLE HEALTH TRACKERS SUCH AS FITBIT TO TIP YOU OFF IN ADVANCE IF YOU ARE ABOUT TO FALL ILL. THE TEAM TESTED 43 VOLUNTEERS WHO WORE A SMART WATCH FOR UP TO 11 MONTHS. IT WAS FOUND THAT JUST AS THE VOLUNTEERS WERE STARTING TO GET SICK, THEIR HEART RATE AND SKIN TEMPERATURE WENT UP AND BLOOD-OXYGEN LEVEL FELL. PICKING UP ON THESE BODY SIGNALS, THE APP GIVES YOU UP TO HALF DAY'S NOTICE OF IMMINENT ILLNESS. THE RESEARCHERS SCORED EIGHT ON EIGHT IN THE DETECTION OF INFECTIONS SUFFERED BY THE VOLUNTEERS DURING THE 11 MONTHS. HOWEVER, THEY CAUTION THAT MORE CONCLUSIVE TRIALS ARE NEEDED BEFORE THE APP'S RESULTS CAN BE ANYWHERE NEAR CONCLUSIVE.

SLEEP ON IT

Here's another reason to catch up on your beauty sleep. According to researchers from the University of Washington in Seattle, **people who are sleep-deprived on a regular basis are likely to have a weak immune system.** Researchers took blood samples from 11 pairs of identical twins with different sleep patterns and found that the twin who got less sleep had a depressed immune system compared to their sibling. The researchers used identical twins as genetics account for 31 to 55 per cent of sleep duration and behaviour while environment accounts for the rest. The study was published in journal *Sleep*. So make sure you get at least seven hours of shuteye.



Hold your breath

Bad breath could lead to much more serious consequences than driving your date away. According to a study by Imperial College, London, UK, **a breath test can measure the levels of five chemicals to detect cancers of the oesophagus and/or stomach with 85 per cent accuracy.** These



chemicals—butyric, pentanoic and hexanoic acids, butanal, and decanal—are found to be associated with stomach or oesophageal cancer and patients with upper gastrointestinal symptoms without cancer. The findings are especially significant as the only way to diagnose oesophageal cancer or stomach cancer at present is with an endoscope. The study was presented at the European Cancer Congress 2017 in Amsterdam.

Magic mushrooms

Those who turn up their nose at mushrooms can chew on this: Researchers from the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur say **certain edible and medical mushrooms contain bioactive compounds**

that can enhance nerve growth while protecting against neurotoxic stimuli such as inflammation that contribute to Alzheimer's and dementia. It was found that each intake of mushroom



increased the production of nerve growth factor (NGF), a molecule involved in regulating growth, maintenance, proliferation and survival of nerve cells in the brain. Researchers are now hopeful of finding more foods that are neuroproductive. The study was published in *Journal of Medicinal Food*.

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.

ART AS THERAPY

As a child, I used to sketch and colour pictures and I recall how my art teacher had appreciated my work. It felt very good and, after finishing school from Agra, I attended an art class for six months. I went on to graduate from Lady Irwin College in Delhi although my earnest desire was to study commercial art at the JJ School of Art in Mumbai. But the excitement of getting married took over and, at the tender age of 20, I married an IAF officer.

Around 20 years later, I was diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. I was depressed and my hands were trembling like an

At 63, painting gives immense satisfaction to Ashima



Shyamola Khanna

80 year-old. Finally, with treatment, I found my balance again and picked up my old palette and old oil colours.

I was out of practice and my work was shoddy but I worked hard to get back in form. Slowly, I regained confidence but, eight years ago, I experienced trauma in my marriage. I am still reeling from it. To help maintain my sanity, I would paint on canvas whenever I could, and I came up with some interesting work—and my first gifts to family and close friends.

Unfortunately, I am not the pushy kind who can ask people to look at my work and buy my paintings. But recently, everything kind of came together very quickly. I have a circle of friends who have been very supportive and appreciative of my work. One of them, an artist, sent across a curator to check out my work. He was impressed with my craft and suggested that I be a part of a group show he was planning with first-timers. It was a dream come true! I had always wanted to do an exhibition but did not know where to begin.

It was a thrill to see my works up on the walls at the Rainbow Art Gallery of the Balayogi Paryatak Bhavan in Begumpet, Hyderabad, in December last year. I received a lot of praise for my work. The chief guest, Dr Bharti Patel, retired agriculture research manager, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), complimented me on *Autumn Scene*, which remains my favourite work in oils. The colours are soft and muted, and there is a lot of depth in the landscape. I had made this painting in 2003. The autumn colours in English paintings have always fascinated me—they are a riot of colour and I wanted to do one just to see if I could.

At the end of the day, I feel a deep sense of satisfaction that, at the age of 60, I had the courage to fulfil at least one small dream of mine, something truly for myself. The other dreams were for my family, which happened to turn sour.

There's more. The curator who invited me to show at the exhibition plans to get a solo show of mine on the road. He also wants to hold an art camp in my house as he likes the ambience of Sainikpuri, where I live. Suddenly, the New Year seems to be turning bright and colourful for me. I know God is on my side and my prayer has been answered.

—Ashima, Secunderabad

BURNING AMBITION

I won my first race to get a box of toffees! I was a child, returning after working in the paddy fields in my village when I met a friend carrying a box of toffees. It was the prize for winning a race at a local sports event. The next day, I too turned up at the sports meet and won a couple of events—and some of those prizewinning toffees. That was the day I decided where my future lay.

Pursuing a career in sports is especially difficult when you come from a poor farmer's family in Assam. Worse, my father, a local-level sportsman, suddenly died when I was in Class 8 and the burden of looking after my family fell on me because I was more outgoing than my elder sister. So, while in Class 9, I took up a PT teacher's job at the ONGC Model School in Sivasagar. The teachers in Dhai Ali Girls' School, where I studied, were kind enough to let me adjust my job with my classes.

I used to wake up at 4 am, work in the paddy fields, take a quick bath and head for the tuition classes I took before arriving at school. After school, I'd rush to the fields to play, and then visit three homes as a private tutor, before reaching home at 9 pm.

Then, at the inter-district school meet in Dibrugarh, I discovered there were more events than just running. The same year, S N Singh, a Guwahati-based coach who came for a month to Sivasagar, introduced me to the discus throw. In 1972, I found a place in the Assam contingent of the 9th National Junior Athletics Meet in Ahmedabad—and I won a bronze, my first major medal!

Not long after that, I broke a 12-year national record at the 12th Inter-State Athletics Meet in Jaipur. My feat featured prominently in the newspapers the next morning and the discus throw became my identity as a sports-person. My record also fetched me a job at Northeast Frontier (NF) Railway headquarters in Guwahati, but not before an officer fought with the general manager who preferred to appoint a man. I became the first woman to get an NF Railway job through the sports quota.

Those were times when the coaching and training facilities in Guwahati were abysmal and I used to cycle 10 km to and from Nehru Stadium to practise. Soon, I began winning medals at various national-level meets. However, my



Tapati Baruah Kashyap

Veteran athlete Tayabun Nisha runs two gyms in Guwahati

crowning moment came when I found a place in the Indian contingent for the 9th Asian Games in New Delhi, in 1982. Although I finished sixth, donning the Indian blazer at a major international event was a dream come true.

Over the years, I found a place in the Indian veterans' team and started participating in the World Veterans Athletic Championships overseas. In 1988, I was appointed assistant manager of the Indian contingent at the 13th Asian Games, in Bangkok.

While my achievements fetched me several promotions until I retired as chief staff welfare inspector of NF Railway in 2013, Allah also guided me in fulfilling my responsibilities towards my siblings. While two of them have passed away, the others are well-settled. My husband, also a sportsman who played cricket for NF Railway, has given me his unstinting support throughout my sporting career, as have my in-laws.

I also run two gyms—Maligaon Fitness and Yoga School, which opened in 1995, and Nisha's Gym and Yoga Centre, which opened in 2013 in Guwahati. At these facilities, I charge only a nominal fee because I know what it is like to be born into poverty.

Today, at 63, I know I have inspired many women to play professionally in my region, and I am proud of that. The urge for prayer and a passion for sports were instilled in me by my father. He continues to guide me even today.

—Tayabun Nisha, Guwahati

The sari soiree

CHITRALEKHA DAS, 63, PUNE



The way life meanders is wonderful and mysterious, and it was this ebb and flow that led me to discover a talent that had lain dormant in me for more than three decades.

I come from the culturally rich city of Agartala in Tripura and learnt to sing at the age of four. I pursued my master's in music from Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata, and went on to learn Rabindra Sangeet from gurus like Suchitra Mitra, Maya Sen and Subinaya Ray. As I developed my musical talent, I went on to perform on Madras Doordarshan, and at prestigious venues such as the

Indian Habitat Centre, India International Centre and many Durga Puja *utsav*. I also tutored children in music at home.

In 1980, I married a defence officer and my husband's postings took us across the length and breadth of the country. During this time, I became a mother of two and got busy managing home and looking after my sons, Budhaditya and Bedprakash. To keep busy, I took music classes and also joined the Army schools in every city we went to, as a music teacher.

I didn't know it then but I was about to set upon a new path. Being mar-

ried to a defence officer meant having to attend myriad social functions. As I never liked to wear the same saris to these parties, I would hand-paint or use patchwork and embellishments on my saris. This lent them a fashionable and contemporary twist and fetched me praise in our social circles.

My real inspiration for design came after my husband was posted in Delhi and I visited Dilli Haat, the crafts bazaar. The handicrafts and handlooms from different states there became my muse and ignited a spark that led me to take up design as a career. My designs were so loved by



Courtesy: Chitralekha Das

my friends, family and neighbours that they placed orders with me and I happily created for them.

Meanwhile, my sons grew up, pursued their careers and got married. My husband and I settled in Pune when he retired, and I taught music in school. But travelling to work became exhausting and my family suggested I give up my teaching job and experiment with designing instead.

After a 32-year stint with music, I gave life to my designer imagination. In 2013, I launched myself as a professional and hired a *karigar*. Saris

have always allured women with their charm, and to create my own line, all I did was give them a cutting edge and fresh perspective that completely changed the look.

Orders came in through word of mouth but that wasn't enough for me. So, when I learnt about an exhibition at World Trade Centre in Colaba, Mumbai, I registered as a participant with my first stock of 80 saris. The response was incredible. Customers flocked to my stall and I sold everything—including the costliest sari priced at ₹ 9,000.

My saris are meant for all ages and occasions, and portray the rich legacy of Indian culture. They're a mix of ethnic and contemporary designs and are made of a variety of fabrics such as handloom cotton and silk, *chanderi*, chiffon, georgette, khadi, ikat or *kantha* as the base. Over the years, my work has evolved and I've developed a following in India and overseas, in Singapore, US, Canada, Philippines, etc.

However, as my network grew, it became tough for me to manage both the creative and commercial aspects of my business. Last year, my younger son, Bedprakash, an MBA graduate and marketing manager with a top textiles firm, bailed me out by quitting his lucrative job and joining me in my business. Being adept at handling commercials, he looks after the marketing, online promotions, advertising, etc. He recently launched our website too. Both my daughters-in-law have always been pillars of support and when we officially launched our brand, we called it 'Sujatra', a combination of Sushmita, Sujata and Chitralekha, the first two being the names of my daughters-in-law.

My creativity and passion have taken me places and I've never been happier in my entire professional journey than I am today.

—As told to Rachna Viridi

BATH AND BODY WORKS

Experts answer your queries and concerns on jobs after retirement

I learnt to make my own soaps some time ago, using extracts from homegrown aloe vera. I am retiring from my decades-long job as a personal secretary and would like to spend my retirement turning my hobby into a business. Can you help?

You have the product, but there are many steps before it can become a business. First you must choose a name, design a logo, and package your product. You will have to print labels to brand your soaps. Decide how many fragrances/varieties you'd like to start with (five is a good number)—with aloe vera as your signature product. Consider all this and put a price on it. Set aside a room for production as you start scaling up and make a deal with your suppliers. You will also need manpower to meet demand and make deliveries. Open a bank account in the name of your brand and keep the NEFT details handy so people can transfer payments. You should also study the use of e-wallets.

Handmade soaps have a good market these days. So get on social media and start talking about it. Start a page, post pictures and educate people about the benefits of using homemade toiletries. You could also identify lifestyle stores around town and place your products.

Finally, when your business kicks off, diversify! Hire more people, increase the varieties of your soaps, start making other related products, and make your friends distributors. The ladies will come flocking; and, to your surprise, so will the men!

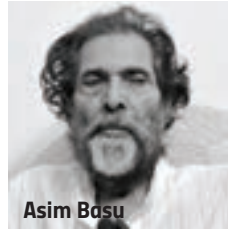
—Smita Kadam sells handmade bath products online



Anupam Kher



Dolly Thakore



Asim Basu



Joginder Singh

BIRTHDAYS

Actor **Anupam Kher** turns 62 on 7 March.

Former Attorney General of India **Soli Sorabjee** turns 87 on 9 March.

Theatre actor and casting director **Dolly Thakore** turns 74 on 10 March.

Australia-born media baron **Rupert Murdoch** turns 86 on 11 March.

English actor and author **Sir Michael Caine** turns 84 on 14 March.

Veteran actor **Shashi Kapoor** turns 79 on 18 March.

IN PASSING

Renowned Urdu poet **Jaswant Rai Sharma**, popularly known as Naqsh Lyallpuri, passed away on 22 January. He was 89.

Former Union Minister **E Ahamed** passed away on 1 February after suffering a heart attack. He was 78.

Eminent theatre personality, artist, painter and writer **Asim Basu** passed away on 1 February. He was 82.

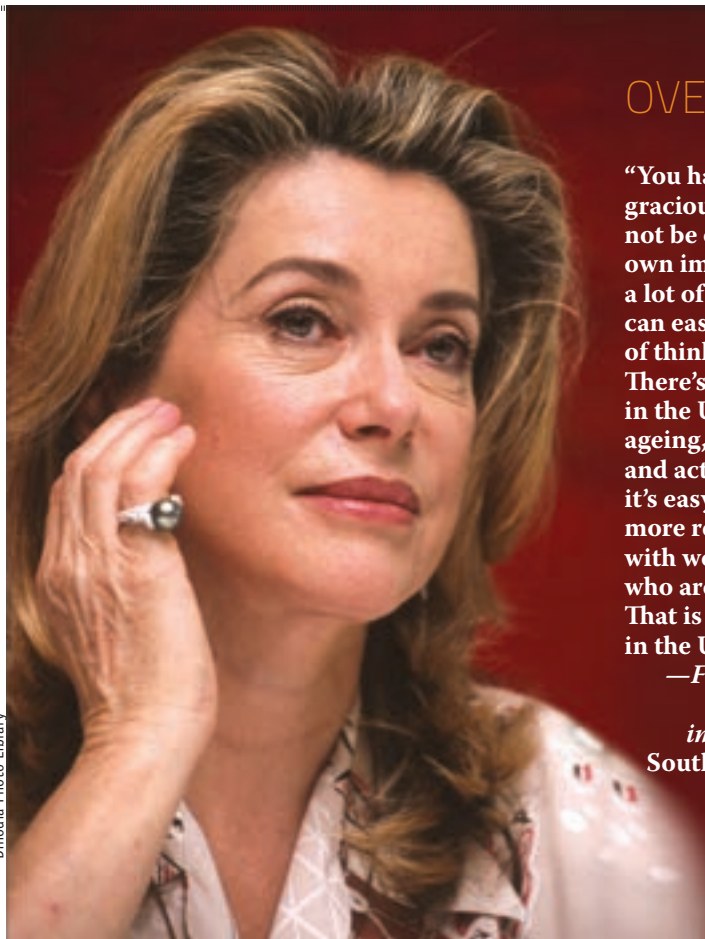
Former CBI Director **Joginder Singh** passed away on 3 February. He was 77.

Veteran freedom fighter **Racharla Samrajyam** died on 6 February following age-related illness. She was 98.

MILESTONES

- Well known Hindi scholar and writer **Surendra Verma** has been selected for the Vyas Samman 2016 for his novel *Kaatna Shami Ka Vriksha: Padma Pankhuri Ki Dhar Se*, which was published in 2010.
- Britain-based artist of Indian origin **Anish Kapoor** was honoured with Israel's 'Genesis Prize', popularly known as the Jewish Nobel, for his commitment to Jewish values on 6 February. The award includes prize money of \$ 1 million; Kapoor has announced that this will be used to assist Syrian refugees.

Dinodia Photo Library



OVERHEARD

"You have to try to age as graciously as possible, to not be obsessed with your own image because there is a lot of pressure and actors can easily fall into the trap of thinking just about this. There's a very big challenge in the US when it comes to ageing, especially for actors and actresses. I'm not saying it's easy in Europe but we more readily accept movies with women in leading roles who are 40, 45, 50 years old. That is still very rarely seen in the US."

—French actor **Catherine Deneuve**, 73, to the international edition of South China Morning Post



Foods to fight arthritis: A look at the causative factors of arthritis in women and foods that provide relief



Photographs by iStock

There are almost 100 types of arthritis, the two most common being osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. While osteoarthritis affects the weight-bearing joints like the spine, hip, and knee, rheumatoid arthritis strikes at the hands, wrists and feet, and affects women at a much younger age than men. This is owing to hormonal changes especially after pregnancy or around menopause. It's interesting to note that

osteoarthritis strikes women after 55 but men before that; however, the percentage of women affected is higher than men. This is because of women's body shape—their hips are wider than the knees, thus not aligned as straight as men's.

With age, wear and tear of the cartilage takes place that triggers pain in the elbows, knees, hips and shoulders. Morning stiffness, swelling and tenderness of joints and redness

around them, and difficulty in movement are some general symptoms of this autoimmune disease, especially for the elderly.

The causes

Genetics play a vital role for women and so do hormones, especially after menopause when the oestrogen level falls. A sedentary lifestyle, long hours of sitting, lack of sunlight, environmental pollution, obesity,

chemicals in food, processed foods, white flour, sugar, aerated drinks, steroids and overall diet contribute to arthritis.

Indeed, diet plays a major role. Some foods are safe to have. Better still, there are foods that can actually ease your symptoms and improve quality of life. Luckily, such foods are part of the Indian diet. Conversely, there are foods that trigger arthritis and should be avoided. You can experiment for three months by slowly adding foods that relieve pain and eliminating the ones that cause it.

Safe foods

- **Vegetables:** The entire gourd family—from bottle gourd to bitter gourd and pumpkin—French beans, cluster beans, okra, onions, cucumbers, leafy greens, peppers and carrots do not trigger arthritis pain.
- **Grains:** Gluten-free grains like amaranth (*rajgira*), unpolished rice, bajra (pearl millet), jowar (sorghum), ragi (finger millet), *verghu* (little millet), etc, do not trigger pain.
- **Organic foods:** Organic foods are free from chemicals, pesticides and colour, and have a higher vitamin and mineral content than normal foods, thus providing more nutrition.

Foods that alleviate symptoms

- **Tulsi:** It reduces inflammation and prevents pain; chew on a few tulsi leaves daily.
- **Turmeric:** It is used in traditional Indian medicine to combat pain; add it to your food daily.
- **Ginger:** This wonder spice has anti-inflammatory properties blocking enzymes that spark inflammation; have a small piece of ginger daily.



There are foods that can ease your symptoms and improve quality of life. Luckily, such foods are part of the Indian diet—tulsi reduces inflammation, turmeric combats pain, ginger has anti-inflammatory properties, fenugreek eases joint pains while garlic reduces knee pains, and ghee lubricates the joints

- **Fenugreek seeds:** These ease joint pains; sprouting them increases their potency and steaming makes them easier to digest.
- **Garlic:** The small pearl garlic from Jammu reduces knee and joint pains; you can de-shell and consume it.
- **Ghee:** It is an amazing cure for pain, especially arthritis, as it lubricates joints; cook your food in cow's ghee or add it to rotis and rice.
- **Chilli:** Stock up on the chilli family—ranging from fresh green chillies to capsciums—as they are great for arthritis.
- **Omega-3:** This has anti-inflammatory properties. Good sources

of omega-3 are flaxseeds, walnuts and some local fish like *bangda* and *surmai*. Incorporate these in your regular diet.

The no-no foods

Certain foods called nightshade foods, like eggplant (with a lot of seeds), peppers, paprika, potatoes with green spots, tobacco and tomatoes have a high amount of alkaloids, which affect joint health and muscle movement. Avoid them completely if you have arthritic pain. Here are some more foods on the no-no list:

- **Wheat:** Refined grains, white flour, bread, pasta and noodles that are low in fibre and high in gluten can cause joint pains. Shift to gluten-free grains instead, as a wide variety is available in India.

ARTHRITIS-FRIENDLY RECIPES

KASHMIRI KAHWA

Keep yourself warm and recharged throughout the day by sipping on this piping hot drink

Ingredients

- Cinnamon: 1 stick
- Organic honey: ½ tsp
- Cardamom: 2
- Saffron strands: 2 or 3
- Clove: 1
- Water: 2 cups
- Almonds: 3-4 flakes; peeled and chopped

Method

Boil all ingredients, except almonds, together in water till it reduces to half. Strain and garnish with almonds. Serve.

GONDH

A spoonful of this mixture generates warmth in the body, strengthens the back and prevents stiff joints

Ingredients

- *Peepramul* powder: 1 tbsp (derived from the family of ginger root)
- *Gondh* crystals: 1 tbsp; coarsely grounded (derived from tree bark)
- Cow's ghee: 2 tbsp; in liquid form

Method

Coarsely grind the *gondh* in a grinder. Mix it with *peepramul*. Pour hot ghee over it and mix well. Store in an airtight container and eat 1 tbsp daily with breakfast.

GINGER-LEMON PICKLE

Get rid of your joint pains and tingle your taste buds with this pickle

Ingredients

- Ginger: 250 gm
- Lemon: 3; juice strained
- Rock salt: A pinch

Method

Julienne the ginger and marinate in a mixture of rock salt and lemon juice and keep aside. Enjoy this ready-to-eat pickle with lunch and dinner.

- **Dairy products:** Dairy products like yoghurt, curd, cheese and paneer can trigger pain. Avoid for some time and reintroduce later. Counteract their effect by drinking milk with a pinch of turmeric, ginger or saffron, or good old Indian chai powder. Temper yoghurt with mustard or cumin seeds, round dry red chillies and curry leaves in cow's ghee. Also, have yoghurt made of cow's milk and not chilled.

- **Vinegar:** This triggers pain, especially synthetic vinegar. Switch to lemon juice.

- **Tamarind:** This causes inflammation, leading to pain. Switch to lemon or *kokum* (garcinia).

- **Aspartame:** This triggers pain, so avoid it.

- **Sugar:** This is one of the main culprits for inflammation and pain. Switch to natural sugar from honey, dry fruits, jaggery and fruits.

- **Beverages:** Soda and aerated drinks leach calcium from the bone. Avoid sugary drinks, milk, buttermilk, alcohol, etc; they trigger inflammation and increase pain.
- **Lentils:** Lentils, especially *tuvar* dal (pigeon pea), is a common trigger for joint pain and arthritis.

In a nutshell

Do not let your body become equivalent to a rundown house with creaking door joints and rickety stairs, making life painful with every step you take. Make the following simple changes in your lifestyle and lead a pain-free life.

- Keep a regular tab on your Vitamin B12 and Vitamin D3 levels. If they are low, consult a physician and take supplements as required. Often low Vitamin B12 and Vitamin D3 levels cause pain in joints and are mistaken as arthritis.
- Control your weight. Research indicates that every 4 kg of excess

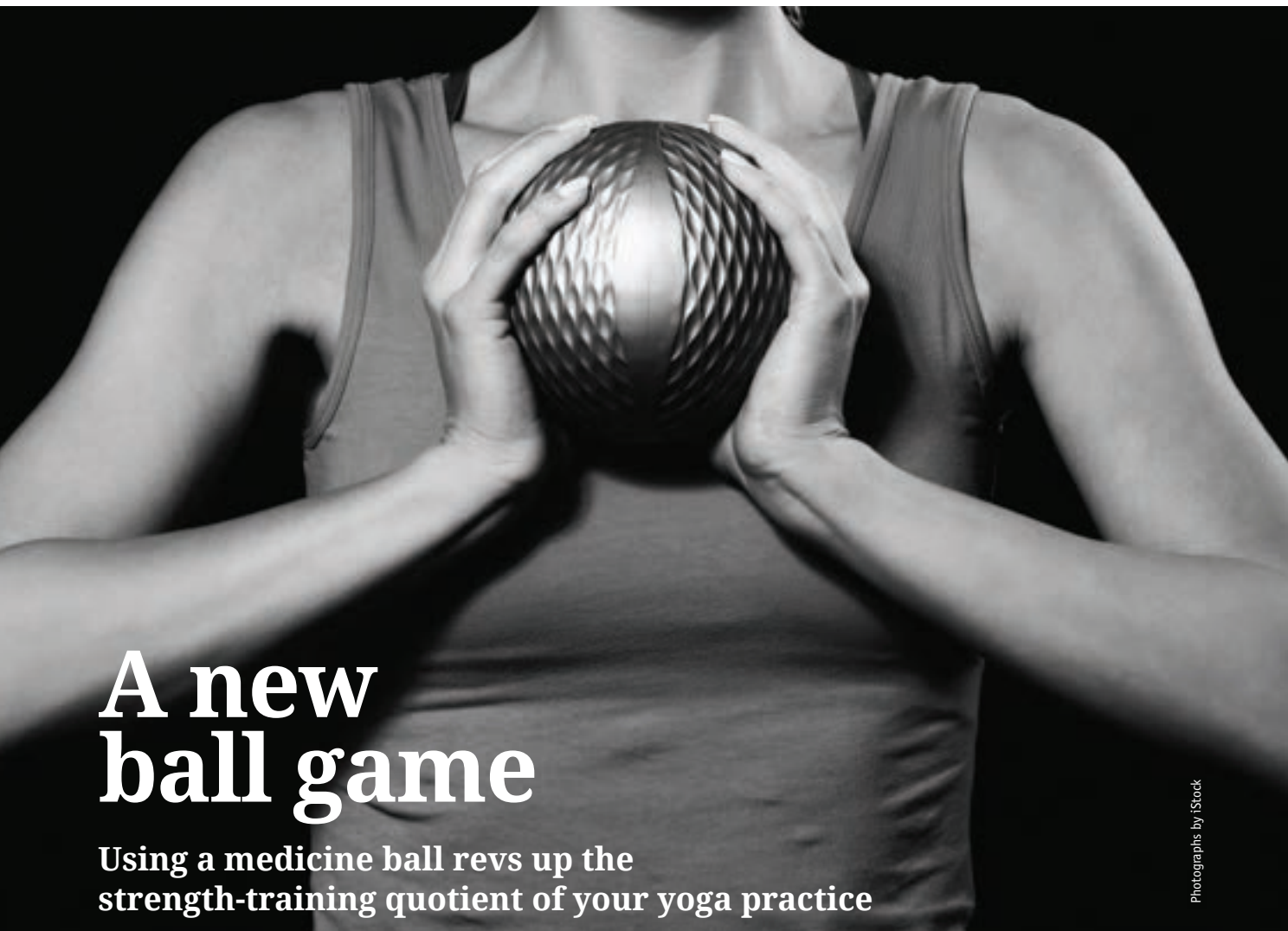
weight increases the chances of arthritis.

- Ensure your iron levels are stable, as excess iron levels in the blood can cause joint pain.
- Avoid squatting, kneeling and sitting cross-legged on the floor. Add gentle exercises like swimming, cycling or walking to your daily routine. Exercise strengthens muscles responsible for protecting joints that prevent stiffness.
- Tweak your food habits. For instance, switch to gluten-free grain, add safe vegetables, go organic and dairy-free, cook food in cow's ghee, and add nuts and seeds to your diet.

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



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR



Photographs by iStock

A new ball game

Using a medicine ball revs up the strength-training quotient of your yoga practice

The use of sandbags as weights was a common practice in yoga. Even today, traditional schools have cloth bags filled with sand, and a handle to hold them with, to build strength in the arms. However, as this is a bit elaborate, you can resort to the more readily available medicine balls. If you are a new-comer to the idea of strength training in any form, choose a low weight, such as a 1-kg ball. Progressively, you can upgrade to a more difficult weight after a year's practice or so. You will surely find innovative ways to use this prop with the rest of the practice.

Here we show you the simple wood-chopping pose for starters. However, the ball may be used for arm circles and even leg lifts once you realise how easy it is.

The benefits of strength training cannot be stressed enough. Yoga has its own module to do it—the bridge pose (*setuasana*), upward plank (*purvottanasana*), wheel pose (*chakrasana*), all arm balancers, and stamina builders like the down-dog pose (*adhomukha svanasana*) and four-limbed staff pose (*chaturangadandasana*) are just a few. Strength-building makes

the muscles stronger, helping them support the bones and the joints in a powerful way. Also, the muscle has to be stressed in a positive way to make the bones dense. Dense bones are very crucial for your overall health because bones are live and a vital part of your health. They manufacture red-blood cells, store important nutrients, host cells that remove waste/dead or bacterial cells from around the body, and release immune cells.

Avoid the use of these balls if you have weak wrists, and always consult an expert before trying new exercise props.

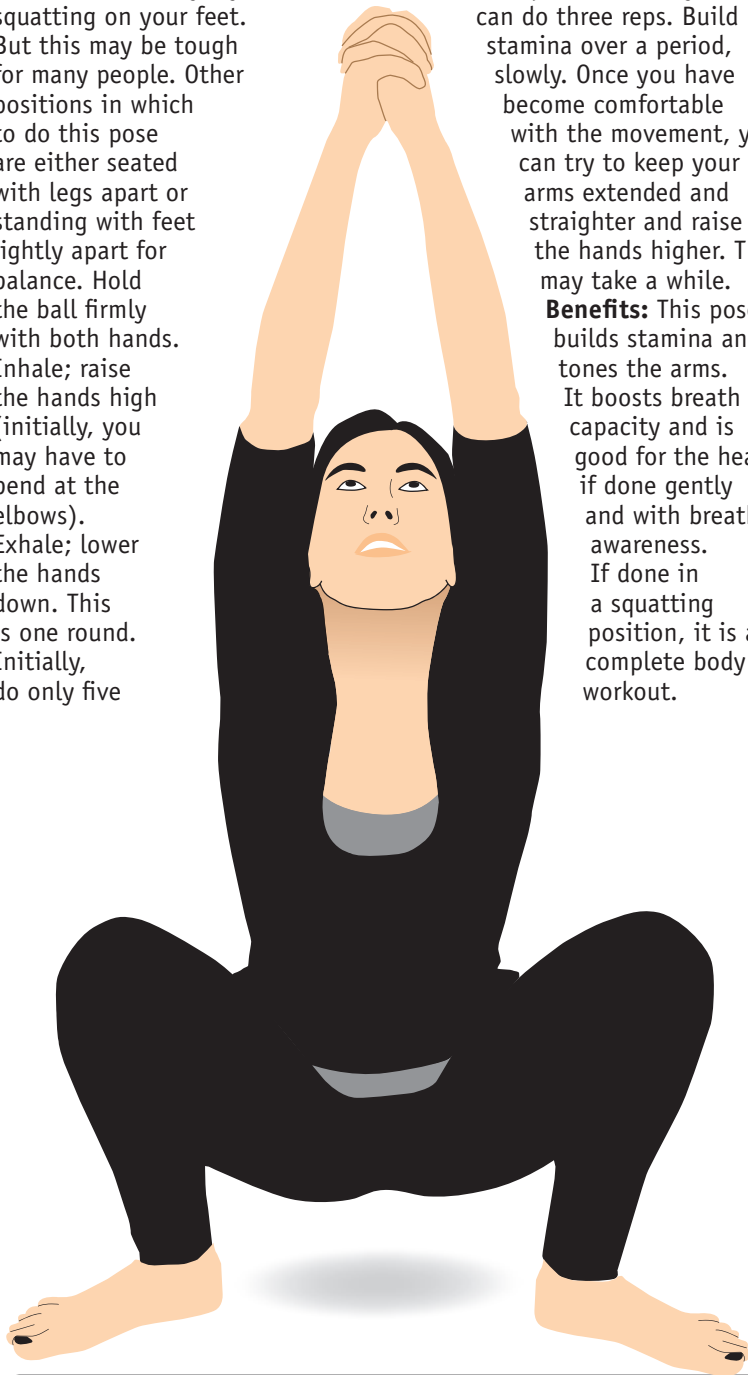
YOGIC MOVES

WOOD-CHOPPING POSE (*kashtha takshanasana*)

You may do this pose in the traditional way, by squatting on your feet. But this may be tough for many people. Other positions in which to do this pose are either seated with legs apart or standing with feet lightly apart for balance. Hold the ball firmly with both hands. Inhale; raise the hands high (initially, you may have to bend at the elbows). Exhale; lower the hands down. This is one round. Initially, do only five

or 10 times. This would be one rep. After that, you can do three reps. Build stamina over a period, slowly. Once you have become comfortable with the movement, you can try to keep your arms extended and straighter and raise the hands higher. This may take a while.

Benefits: This pose builds stamina and tones the arms. It boosts breath capacity and is good for the heart, if done gently and with breath awareness. If done in a squatting position, it is a complete body workout.



KREEDA YOGA

KUPI PURANAM (filling the bottle with water)

This is a group game. Split the number of players into two teams. Keep a bucket of water at one end of the room and a small glass in the other. The team starts with one person in the group dipping both hands into the bucket, scooping up enough water to hold in the palm and walking across carefully to drop the water into the glass. Each member of each team does it. The first group that successfully fills the glass wins. **Points to note:** Take care that members do not run to prevent any fall/slip while playing the game. Also, make sure the floor is not too slippery. If there is a lot of spillage owing to people not being able to hold the water, use different props for the game. Use a small scoop instead of the palms and keep a small mug to fill up. It still involves the members being calm and ensuring the water does not spill!

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



HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

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

Added spice to life

Champa & Brij Bhushan • VIRGINIA, US

They have both been engineering students; they have both been teachers; and they have also worked together in their own company. Their common interests extend further—to travelling, gardening and cooking. When they speak, you hardly notice when one stops and the other takes over. They also hold the distinction of being the first-ever couple to be married in Pilani while teaching there.

Young Brij Bhushan earned his bachelor's in electrical engineering from BITS Pilani in 1964. After her BE in electronics and communications from Jadhavpur University, Champa pursued her master's at BITS Pilani. Both chose to teach at the university thereafter and, by a strange twist of fate, met, fell in love, and got married!

Now in their early 70s, Champa and Brij Bhushan live in a beautiful house in the suburbs of Washington DC. Being health-conscious, they have meticulously discovered the right foods to eat and the perfect way to cook. They cherish their close circle of friends and are known for their warmth and hospitality. I met them recently on their visit to Chennai during their India trip. Having heard much about their culinary skills and hospitality from Brij's cousin Sulakshanaji, I was excited about the meeting. Here are some snippets of my conversation with them.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Champa: I am a Sindhi and Brij is Punjabi. I landed in Pilani as my brother, teaching there, was feeling homesick owing to a lack of home-

cooked meals! I enrolled for my master's in electrical engineering and later took up a teaching job there. The rest is history! We now live in the suburbs of Washington DC and have three grown-up children, Anju, Anita and Anup.

Brij Bhushan: My father was in the Central Government, hence he moved often. We have lived across

"In the US, we now get all the vegetables fresh, year round. However, we miss the taste of flavour of fresh Indian vegetables we have eaten in our growing years! When we visit India, we binge on all the local fresh vegetables and ingredients"

the stretch of North India: Rajasthan, UP (Meerut), Bihar (Patna), Orissa, West Bengal. After marriage, we proceeded to the USA for higher studies. I worked in Bell Canada during the 1970s. We moved to Washington DC in 1980 and I started my own company in 1986, Reston Consulting Group, which provides systems integration services in the field of telecommunications to the US Federal Government. Champa joined our business in 1993 after a stint of corporate employment in telecommunications companies.

She: I was ahead of my times in not just having had an inter-caste marriage but choosing a career path where girls feared to tread. I was always goal-oriented and being the only girl student in my university class did not faze me. A comment by one of my teachers propelled me towards engineering. She said, "If you were a boy, you would be ideally suited for engineering!"

KITCHEN INSPIRATION

He: My father was a gardener at heart. Wherever we lived, he always grew something in the kitchen garden! When he visited us here in US, he enjoyed gardening in our patch. Now my brother Kul Bhushan takes over the gardening during his frequent visits to the US.

She: He once grew so much of bottle gourd that even after cooking, freezing and distributing to friends, there was a lot still left!

He: We now grow anything and everything but potatoes and onions. I personally dislike eating potatoes. There is a story behind this: While studying in Pilani, the hostel mess cooks put potatoes in every single meal every single day! Having had an overdose of potatoes for five years while a student at Pilani, I nearly swore off potatoes for good.

CHALLENGES IN A NEW COUNTRY

She: In 1969, when we moved to the US, few stores stocked ingredients—spices, dals, fresh vegetables—for Indian food. Whenever we discov-

ered a store that did so, even during our travels, we would buy them and stock up. Those days, we would generally get them via mail order from a city that had enough Indians to have Indian stores. Of course, times have changed. This challenge further sparked our interest in cooking.

SECRET CULINARY MANTRA

He: Every vegetable you cook has its own oil in addition to the flavours. To enjoy and benefit from the natural flavours, do not overload the dish with oil, salt and spices.

She: I completely agree! I developed gall bladder stones, so cooking with minimal oil has been our secret mantra for years. We use canola or corn oil as it is low on cholesterol. Cooking healthy has become a way of life for us.

ALL-TIME FAVOURITES

She: Our dahi vadas are an all-time favourite with the family and friends! We tried baking the vadas, but we are yet to tweak the recipe to perfection.

He: During harsh winters in the US, we always make fresh dal and *sabzi*. At other times, we use our frozen veggies, but rotis daily at home are always made fresh! Thursdays used to be *aloo paratha* day in the family while the children were young, but now it is pizza day at home.

PASSIONS AND PASTIMES

He: I indulge my passion for gardening in part of the 2.5 acre of land behind our house. We eat the fresh produce, distribute some to our

friends and freeze any leftovers for use in winters.

She: With time, we have discovered the best tricks to freeze veggies successfully. We would love to share some of the tips we have mastered! Brij is really methodical about this.

He: To freeze tomatoes, remove the stems, quarter them, put them in packets, label and freeze. When required, take out, thaw, blend into



Photographs by Chennai Pix

a smooth consistency and use in soups, dals and vegetables. To freeze lady's finger [*okra/bhindi*], chop into quarter-inch pieces, spread on a flat pizza tray in a single layer and place the trays in the freezer for an hour. Remove, put into packets, label and freeze. When cooking the frozen *bhindi*, thawing is optional, not compulsory. Always cook the *bhindi sabzi* in an open skillet for best results.

TRIED AND TESTED TIPS

He: We have mastered the art of making curd [*yoghurt*] without the lace. Make a small amount of curd in a cup in the first round. Use this first curd as culture for the second cup of milk. Then use this second cup of formed curds as culture for the third cup of milk. The 4th generation curd will be thick and without any lace. Experimentation and observation has taught us a few things for sure!

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

She: When you are a cook, a culinary disaster is waiting to happen, especially if your attention wanders while cooking! If a dish starts to burn and smell, fill up the sink or a larger container partially with cold water and submerge the pan, with the burnt dish, in the cold water. This will help loosen the burnt portion from the bottom of the pan. After 2-3 minutes, scoop out the un-burnt portion from top and discard the rest. The scooped up dish will not have a burnt odour, and no one will ever know!

AWAY FROM HOME

She: In the US, we now get all vegetables fresh, year round. However, we miss the taste and flavour of fresh Indian vegetables we have eaten in our growing years! When we visit India, we binge on all the local fresh vegetables and ingredients.

He: The taste of Indian vegetables is always different than what we get in the US, a result of different soil, fertiliser and the environment.

She: Living away from India, it is important to have your own circle

JIMIKAND MATAR KI SABZI

(Elephant yam and
peas curry)

A favourite in the Bhushan household, this is a delicious *sabzi* using elephant yam and peas. Brij says one of his cravings is to eat this in India where it is freely available. It has been banned in the US since the FDA, which regulates food supply and safety, discovered it has certain natural chemical properties that can be used to make hallucinatory drugs. However, it is also known to have beneficial properties, which makes it an excellent lactate. It is also useful in the treatment of piles.

Ingredients

- Elephant yam (*suran* or *jimikand*): ¼ kg
- Shelled peas: 2 cups
- Chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Coriander powder: 1 tsp



- Garam masala: ¼ tsp
- Salt to taste

For the paste

- Onion: 1; large
- Green chilli: 1; deseeded to reduce heat
- Tomatoes: 2; large
- Ginger: 1-inch piece

For the tempering

- Coconut oil: 1 tbsp
- Mustard seeds: ½ tsp
- Cumin seeds: ½ tsp
- Curry leaves: a sprig

Ingredients

Grind the onions and green chilli and set aside. Grind the tomatoes and ginger and set aside. Wash the yam well, remove the outer skin and chop into medium-sized bits. Wash well. Heat the oil in a pan. Add the mustard seeds; as they begin to splutter, add the cumin seeds, asafoetida and curry leaves. Add the onion paste and red chilli powder and fry until the

raw smell disappears. Add the chopped yam and peas along with a cup of water. Cover and cook until the yam is cooked. Now, add the tomato paste along with turmeric and salt. Cook for 5-7 minutes. Add the coriander powder and garam masala. Stir well and switch off the flame. Serve hot with fresh rotis. You can substitute the yam in the above dish with potatoes or turnip.

of friends and loved ones. We are all there for each other.

He: For us, our friends form our family and comfort zone away from our children.

CHANGING VALUES

He: Values have to evolve no matter where you live! Children eventually arrive at their own value system. They start by observing and absorbing what they see us do, but somewhere along the way, they create their own. Having grown up in the US, our children have had a very different kind of exposure. They have seen an amalgamation of diverse people.

She: It is different in India. India boasts of a strong value system where children grow up knowing that they have to take care of their parents.

He: We can see this now in the US too. Family leave laws in the US started with giving women maternity leave, then paternity leave for men and now we have family medical leave assistance that can be used for elder needs. This creates interdependency and bonding amongst generations.

She: In the US, we have learned to manage the household completely by ourselves without any domestic help, making us more individualistic and self-reliant unlike in India where household help is generally available.

It is rare to come across a couple so refreshing and well tuned in life as Champa and Brij Bhushan! The meeting of minds may have given them a head-start, but what keeps the magic alive are their similar passions, beliefs, values and their childlike attitude of disagreeing only to agree!

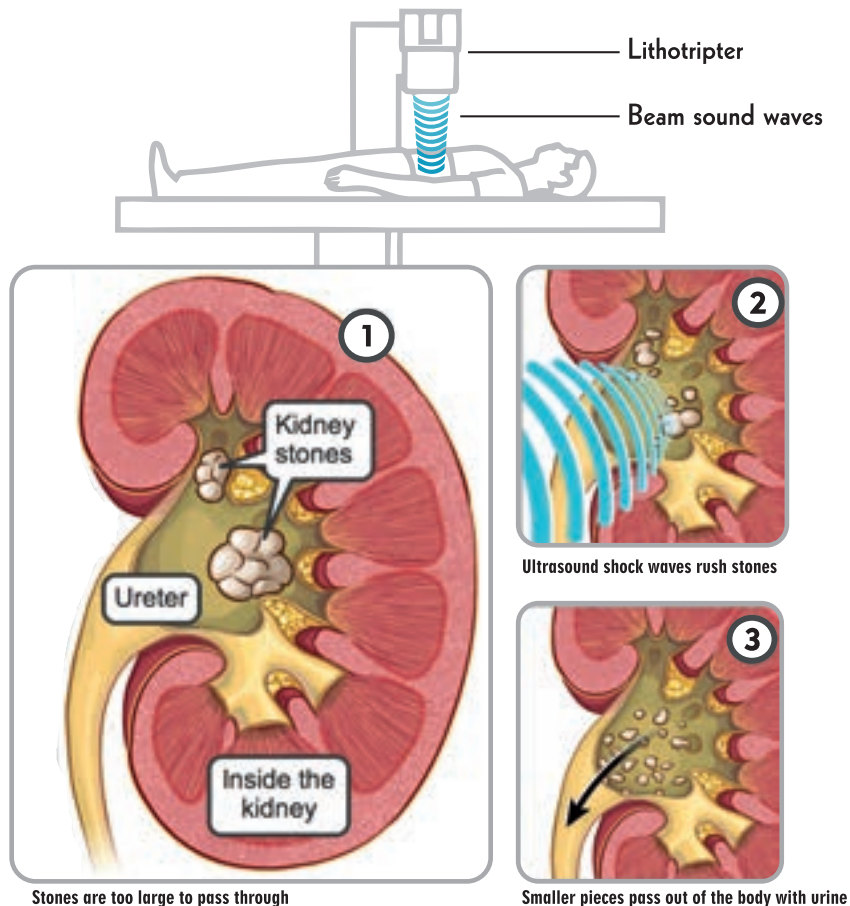
Pratibha Jain, an author and translator from Chennai, is the co-author of two award-winning books Cooking at Home with Pedatha and Sukham Ayu. Her area of specialisation is documenting Indian traditions through research, translation and writing

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:: cover feature ::

HER PALACE OF WORDS

Prolific, positive and passionate, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni places women firmly at the centre of her literary canvas, crafting her characters with empathy and compassion and reflecting a deep understanding of the human story, writes
Arati Rajan Menon

This January, in its 10th edition, the Jaipur Litfest was less literary event and more jamboree. With an international cast of authors spanning geographies and genres, the charming Diggi Palace could barely contain the surge of humanity—from scribes and students to socialities and selfie-seekers—that invaded its expansive grounds.

On the morning of Day 2, the Front Lawn of the Palace, the largest of its six venues, was the epicentre of action, people packed like sardines, standing room only for tardy arrivals. “I’m a little nervous,” confessed Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as she took the stage to discuss her new book,

Before We Visit the Goddess (Simon & Schuster; ₹ 375; 210 pages). She needn’t have been—the welcoming roar she received from the audience kicked off an hour-long session of insight and inspiration, revealing the empathy that has made her so beloved an author.

Right from her debut novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), through her body of work, including *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and, of course, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), her retelling of the *Mahabharata* through Draupadi’s perspective that has gained her near rockstar status with younger Indian women, her focus as a writer has never wavered. “I always want women at the centre of my canvas,” she says. “I want *her* voice to be heard.” In her



latest, ...*Goddess*, we meet three generations of them—Sabitri, Bela and Tara—as Divakaruni takes us on an emotional crossing bridging countries and cultures, chance and circumstance, a journey as compelling as the spiritual voyage of her protagonists. “Life is a mixture of character and destiny,” she says, and this truth suffuses every page of this remarkable book.

Another theme that resonates through her oeuvre is the immigrant experience—drawing from a wellspring of memory, she paints poignant and extremely tactile pictures of the Indianness in each of us, the home within no matter how far we roam. “I took my own culture for granted when I lived in India,” says the 60 year-old, who left her native Kolkata to study in the US. She now lives in Houston with her husband Murthy; the couple has two sons, Anand and Abhay. “When you are overseas, even a snatch of music or a whiff of fragrance can spur a sense of longing and make you emotional. You want to remember everything.” In fact, she credits her very career to this need. “For me, writing was a personal action against forgetting,” she reveals. “My grandfather’s death was the trigger.”

She responded eagerly, and prolifically, writing stories and novels, essays, poetry, and even children’s fiction. Named by *The Economic Times* as one of the ‘Twenty Most Influential Global Indian Women’ in 2015, her books have been

translated in an astounding 29 languages; her work has been published in magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*; and her books, such as *Mistress...* and *Sister...*, have been adapted for the screen. In fact, *Palace...* will soon be adapted by filmmaker Aparna Sen, a source of considerable excitement for Divakaruni—and the crowd at the Jaipur Litfest if the lusty cheer the announcement received was any indication. “Our epics are alive,” she says, explaining the appeal of the book. “They remain part of our cultural, political and religious discourse. However, in the *Mahabharata*, weapons get more space than women. Draupadi is a fascinating character and it was wonderful telling her story, creating a balance between the original character and my creative interpretation of her.”

Inevitably enough, her next book will be a retelling of the *Ramayana* through Sita’s eyes, her version based on the *Krittivasi Ramayan*, a translation in Bengali composed by 15th century poet Krittibas Ojha. However, Divakaruni, who teaches creative writing at the University of Houston, refuses to take her craft for granted—she’s part of a writer’s group that meets regularly (often online) to bounce their work off each other. “I need to constantly re-view and revise my work,” she confesses. “Some days, you write something, the words just flow and you’re so happy. But the next day, you realise it really isn’t that good!” Her advice for aspiring writers: “You don’t have to be great from Day 1. You just need to keep at it.”

EXCERPTS FROM AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Your latest book *Before We Visit the Goddess* is full of layers of meaning and nuggets of discovery. However, if you had to distil it to its basic essence, how would you describe it?

The book chronicles the spiritual journey of three generations of women. Ultimately, the Goddess lies within each of them but they have to undergo a process of discovery to understand their own sacred self. Also, the book explores what it takes for a woman to be successful and self-actualised across generations and geographies—what remains the same over time and space, and what is different.

In this book, you showcase a new style of writing with self-contained stories that ultimately all fit together, like a jigsaw puzzle.

I am so happy you saw that it’s like a puzzle; that’s exactly what I wanted to achieve. It was a real challenge for me. There were so many incidents I knew would come back at some point in the story, but I myself didn’t know when and



Courtesy: Simon & Schuster



“The human story is the human story, no matter which culture you are from. If you can tell this story, it transcends time, language, geography. That’s certainly my experience as a reader. And my hope as a writer”

where. This made writing the book harder, but more exciting!

Also, although the themes are familiar—women, the diaspora—there is a real newness and freshness to the characters....

Yes. Although I do write about immigrant life, it’s very important with each book to do something different. This was a bit of a departure with the three generations. Even among the cast, the character of Tara is very different from anyone I have written before, very contemporary and edgy.

In this book, chance encounters change lives. For me, three really stood out: when Leelamoyi invites Sabitri to come and stay with her, almost on a whim; when Bela, on a downward spiral, shows up by accident at the apartment of Ken, an American homosexual man; and, of course, Tara’s meeting with Dr V and their visit to the temple, her first ever, after which the entire book is named....

Absolutely, that is a big part of the theme. We think our lives are dependent on the choices we make,

and to some extent they are. But a big element is chance. Life is so strange; one never knows what’s going to change your life. So we need to watch for these little signs, these transformative moments. As for Tara’s visit to the temple, I wanted to show how connected we are to our cultural and spiritual roots at a subconscious, subliminal level even if we don’t know it and feel cut off from them.

How much of you is in this book—or any of your books?

Well, there is the obvious immigrant experience, which I share, and I study and write about extensively. Other than that, it’s not really autobiographical; none of my books are. They are my characters, my creations, but they are not from my own life. I like to maintain that fictional distance because it allows me to be more imaginative.

Your characters are crafted with such care. When they are re-imagined on screen in an adaptation, have you ever felt justice hasn’t been done to them or the spirit of the book? And how involved are you in the creative process in these projects?



At a reading of her latest book *Before We Visit the Goddess*; with husband Murthy

I'm always a consultant when my books are made into films. However, one has to respect that it is now the director's baby. While some directors want more input, others just want to run with their ideas. Sometimes, I have felt that a small kernel of the story has been taken and made much bigger, so the balance is different. But you have to make way for the director's vision. For instance, Suhasini Mani Ratnam made a version of *Sister of My Heart* and set it in a Tamil context and it worked beautifully. I'm really excited to see Aparna Sen's take on *Palace*.

Your books have been translated in 29 languages. How do you explain their appeal across borders and cultures?

I think it's because the human story is the human story, no matter which culture you are from. That's one of the most wonderful things about literature; if you can tell the human story, it transcends time, it transcends language, it transcends geography. That's certainly my experience as a reader. And my hope as a writer.

You've said many a time that immigration has made you a writer. Today, immigration is an incendiary issue with President Trump in the White House. How did you feel about his victory in this election and what is the way forward for Americans?

I believe we must respect the democratic process. He was not my choice for president but the election is over. I really don't believe in negative thinking—it achieves nothing—and you can't fight hate with hate. You know, someone once said there is a spiritual solution to every problem and I really believe that. Most important, the duty of writers is greater than ever before. Being a writer in an easy time is an easy task; now, it is more important to be a writer and be heard. We need to look ahead and work to create a multicultural conversation.

Indeed. While the world is a global village in so many ways, countries are also becoming increasingly insular and going back into the cocoon. It's not just America—it happened with Brexit and it's happening in so many European countries. Does this concern you?

Yes, countries are becoming very nationalist, insular, isolationist. However, I think these things come in waves; it's not a lasting trend. It's cyclical really; if you look back at history, there will be nationalistic moments. That wave will crest and fall because at some point, people realise that you really cannot live an isolationist life. But, meanwhile, are we just going to wait for the wave to crest and fall? No. So, what do we do as writers? We write. We write responsibly; we write to share the stories that people need to hear. And as public personalities, we have to speak out against hatred and prejudice. We need

“The duty of writers is greater than ever before. Being a writer in an easy time is an easy task; now, it is more important to be a writer and be heard. We need to demonstrate with our own lives that the clichés people believe in are not true”

to demonstrate with our own lives that the clichés people believe in are not true.

This is the impulse that made you write for kids.

Yes, I started writing for children after 9/11. At the time, there was a backlash against our community because we looked a certain way. We became scapegoats and my children experienced racism. Thus, writing for children was a political action on my part; I wanted my children and children like them to feel empowered and proud again.

Another extension of your activism is your involvement with organisations that empower women like Daya, Saheli and Maitri, a helpline for South Asian women you co-founded.

Yes, Maitri has grown and we now literally have thousands of women involved. We help women suffering from all kinds of abuse, from domestic violence to trafficking. Unfortunately, there are significant situations of abuse even today as there is such a wide variety of immigrants. While some women are very educated and empowered, others come to the US just after marriage with little education and no job skills. With services like this, women get a chance to start their lives over.

Back home in India, too, while so many women are more empowered than ever before, aggression and abuse still continue. Just consider incidents like the one in Bengaluru on New Year's. How do you explain it?

It's somewhat of a mystery to me. You would think women moving ahead and contributing in so many areas creates a stronger society. But perhaps there is a backlash from men, a sense of being disempowered and having your privilege and years of entitlement taken away. It's such mistaken thinking, though, because if one gender is equal in the eyes of the other, everyone is the better for it. There will be less pressure on men to be the wage-earners and problem-solvers—now, the other half of the equation is also doing so and it is healthy for children to see that growing up. We need to address these is-

AWARDS

1995: The American Book Award for *Arranged Marriage: Stories*

1995: PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Literary Award for *Arranged Marriage: Stories*

1997: The Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize and the Pushcart Prize for poems in *Leaving Yuba City*

1997: Los Angeles Times Best Books of 1997 for *The Mistress of Spices*

2003: Pushcart Prize for *The Lives of Strangers*

2007: Distinguished Writer Award from the South Asian Literary Association

2011: Light of India Jury's Award for Journalism and Literature

2015: Premio Scanno Award for Literature, Italy.

sues as a society and we need to address them early, when the children are young, at home and school.

Thinking out loud, I also think there's such a disconnect between the lives of ordinary people and Bollywood, which overwhelms the public imagination in India. In these movies, the portrayal of women is unreal; it is pure objectification and the treatment of women as sex objects pervades the public consciousness. Movies that shatter stereotypes, like *Pink*, are unfortunately few and far between. And people who go to see them are already aware. It's the mainstream movies that need to become more sensitive and less sexist.

Older women are even more marginalised in India today—a matter of concern in a society that prided itself on taking care of its elders.

You're right. Older women are such a repository of wisdom and in our traditional culture, there was a real place for them. I remember going to the village when I was young and all the younger women would be learning from older women, whether it was a recipe or making diyas. Now, that mechanism is breaking down. In countries, like the US, there are institutional structures to take care of the elderly. Having said that, what works for one country may not work in another. Such structures need to



be organic and customised and rooted in our own ethos. There are some organisations in the US now that are pairing older and younger people together. I hope we evolve more such mechanisms in India because I really do believe our older women have so much to give us.

Personally speaking, how has ageing informed your own life and work?

There's this saying, 'Youth is wasted on the young'—it's so true; we take so much for granted. Growing older makes you realise the fragility and value of life. After my husband Murthy had his knee surgery, we were talking about how much we take something like mobility for granted. We have come to realise that every single day we are in good health is a gift; preservation of health has become a priority for us.

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With age, my writing has also acquired a more spiritual dimension. One book always on my Kindle is the *Bhagavad-Gita* and I try to read a little bit from it each day. Some of the ideas from there have really influenced my work, especially the whole idea of our life journey being a spiritual search. That's an underlying theme of this latest book too; three generations of women on a spiritual quest, although it takes them a while to recognise it.

After your book on Sita, is there any other genre you'd like to explore?

Yes, I want to do a murder mystery. I already have an idea for it at the back of my mind. It will be completely different from my other work. But you can be sure of one thing—it will have strong women characters. And it will be a woman who ultimately solves the mystery! ✨



From stepping out of their traditional roles and breaking barriers to entering unexplored territories and challenging conventions, women around the globe have come a long way. To mark International Women's Day on 8 March, we bring you seven inspiring stories of Indian women who dared to defy gender stereotypes and made a significant and pioneering contribution in typically male-dominated fields. These are ordinary women with extraordinary grit and resilience. Driven by their passion and perseverance, they exhibited exemplary courage and excellence that paved their way to success. We salute the indomitable spirit of these women who were—and still remain—ahead of their times.

Yes we dared!

Dr Punita Arora, 71, New Delhi

First woman Lieutenant-General in the Indian Armed Forces (2004), Commandant of the Armed Forces Medical College (2004), Vice-Admiral in the Indian Navy (2005)



Himanshu Kumar

GUTS & GLORY

Dr Punita Arora is quite the opposite of what you would imagine her to be. But, then, the petite and doting grandmother has been bucking stereotypes all her life.

Commissioned into the Army Medical Corps in 1968, Dr Arora blazed a trail in an overwhelmingly male bastion and set three weighty milestones in two of the three Services, the Army and the Navy. No, there are no glass ceilings, smiles Dr Arora, a gynaecologist with 15 medals to her credit.

A far cry from her former field routine, the retired officer now begins her day doing the rounds at the Women's Centre in Privat Hospital, Gurgaon, a medical facility focused on women and childcare. But she is happy to oblige with stories of a career that was as adventurous as it was distinguished. With three coveted 'firsts' to her name, did she plan on setting any records? "No, I just did my duty and the rest followed," she responds.

Dr Arora is a child of Partition, her family having moved from Lahore across the border to Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, where her father was posted in the Indian Army. He had risen to the rank of captain and wanted his daughter to have a bright future. He encouraged her to become a doctor, which is how she ended up studying science at the government college in Saharanpur.

That's when the budding iconoclast got her first taste of what was to come—she was told it was a boy's college and she would have to find two more girls if she wanted to be admitted there. No guesses how that panned out! Next, she secured admission to the Armed Forces Medical



- **My success story:** "I joined AFMC as my father wanted me to study there. But once I did, I loved everything about it. We are Indians and take pride in it. I designed a gold bracelet that has the symbols of all our major religions and I wear it all the time. Even now, when I see an Army truck or an ambulance go by, I feel it's mine."
- **Challenges:** "We live in a male-dominated world and a woman needs to constantly prove herself. As a leader, she has to show that she can hold the fort during a crisis and I always kept that in mind. Finally, people look at the capability of the leader and not the gender. A leader needs to prove, 'Yes, I can.'"
- **Lessons learnt:** "We must have compassion. The Army taught me that we are a close-knit family and soldiers live in tough conditions. The Army inculcates discipline and how to spend wisely. It teaches you to be resilient and to be an Indian before anything else. Kindness and positivity are important values. We must praise at least one good action daily."
- **Aspirations, goals and vision:** "To keep doing my work diligently. This was instilled in me since childhood. I love my patients and life is beautiful."
- **The way forward:** "I still attend seminars and lectures. I always take rounds in the morning and evening at the hospital. Learning never stops. I love teaching, that is, training people. I am also part of the Gurgaon Gynaecological Society."
- **Awards & achievements:** Param Vishisht Seva Medal (2007); Vishisht Seva Medal (2002); Sena Medal (1997)

"It is for the woman to hold on with sheer will and determination and take the right steps to win everyone's confidence"

College (AFMC) in Pune, which was no mean feat for a woman back in the day. She emerged a gold medallist. After completing her internship in Ambala and Fatehgarh, the young doctor got married to an Army captain. Her husband, Brig PN Arora (retd) is a practising dermatologist in Gurgaon; her son is a dermatologist in the Army; and her daughter, who was a general duty medical officer in the Army, is now a cardiologist in the US.

For a woman carving a career in the Army, life is often like a combat zone; Dr Arora learnt that early on. The challenge began with her choice of speciality. Even though she was a gold medalist and entitled to take up surgery, the young and talented doctor was forced to take up gynaecology and obstetrics, as it was more woman-oriented. "I wanted to be a surgeon but the Army wanted women doctors to take care of the families." Nevertheless, when it came to being treated on a par with her male colleagues, she discovered 'equality' down in the trenches. Dr Arora even lived in bunkers in Ladakh, where she was visiting her husband, who was posted there at the time.

The decorated Army officer also recounts an anecdote about a posting to Jalandhar, where Col Ghosh was "dreading getting a lady gynaecologist in his unit". "There was fear that I would demand special facilities such as attendants with me or that I would not be able to attend on late-night emergencies as I had two small children," she says with a chuckle. Two years later, the colonel did an about-turn. "He said he would always keep a lady officer in his unit. We are perceived according to how we conduct ourselves and that's the important thing."

Even as a doctor, life in the Army was full of action. "In 2001, during the Kaluchak terrorist attack, I had to hold the fort at the hospital, where 70 wounded soldiers were brought in, 23 dead," says Dr Arora, who was then commanding the Military Hospital in Jammu. Her valiant effort earned her the Vishisht Seva Medal. "There is fear of how a woman will hold up during a crisis; it is for the woman to hold on with sheer will and determination and take the right steps to win everyone's confidence." Among her many awards, she cherishes the Sena Medal for establishing gynaecological endoscopy and oncology facilities in the Armed Forces hospitals. There were no fertility clinics in those days, she points out, and there were many issues relating to childbirth.

Take, for instance, Army wives 34 year-old Veena Kapoor and Hansveen Kaur, 32, who had both suffered miscarriages owing to medical complications, and had given up hope of ever



Archival images courtesy: Dr Punita Arora

Receiving the Vishisht Seva Medal



After receiving the President's gold medal on completing her MBBS

“In a male-dominated society, a woman needs to constantly prove herself. As a leader, she needs to show she can hold the fort during a crisis”

having children. Dr Punita Arora was destined to be their saviour—she suggested a procedure called transabdominal cerclage, where the woman's abdomen is stitched in the 11th week of pregnancy, so the baby stays in the right position. Both Kapoor and Kaur, who are mothers today, call Dr Arora their 'fairy godmother.' “She always said that whatever you do, do it with good intentions and hope for a positive outcome. I have never forgotten that,” says Kaur. “She gives you all the emotional support you need and is always around, even when you call her in the middle of the night. She is a very positive person.”

Whether as a doctor or administrator, Dr Arora's achievements are many. But her crowning moment came in 2004, when she was promoted as lieutenant-general. That same year, she did it again, by becoming the first woman com-

mandant of the AFMC. She achieved her third 'first' when she was appointed vice-admiral in the Indian Navy, in 2005, when she was appointed Director General of Medical Services (Navy). The Armed Forces Medical Services has a common pool of officers who can migrate from one service to another, depending on requirements, especially at the senior level, she says of switching services.

While in the Services, Dr Arora had little time for recreation, which is why she now loves kicking her feet up and watching serials and travel shows on TV. After she retired in 2006, she has been enjoying her daily walk, which keeps her shipshape. But her phone is always within earshot. “What if there's an emergency at the hospital [Privat]?” No, this lady will never hang up her boots!

—Ambica Gulati



Natasha Rego

Diana Edulji, 61, Mumbai

Member of the first Indian women's cricket team

In 1975, the Indian women's cricket team stepped onto the lush turf of Kolkata's Eden Gardens for the first time. The match, against Australia, was a part of the team's first international Test series, a first also for one of their team members.

In front of 10,000 spectators, 19 year-old Diana Edulji, left-arm orthodox bowler, participated in her international debut series. The following year, in a match against the West Indies in Patna, Edulji racked up her personal best as a bowler: 6 wickets for 64 runs. "I also hit the winning stroke and notched up my highest score in Test cricket, 57 not out." This match was India's first international win.

On the field, Edulji made her name as India's highest wicket-taker (currently No. 3 in the world) with 66 wickets in a Test career that spanned 20 years. She was the star bowler in India's first women's cricket team and also became the ODI captain—a position she held on and off for 15 years—just in time for the 1978 World Cup.

Edulji always wanted to be a bowler. As a young girl, she spent her weekends playing tennis ball cricket. She was the only girl playing with 10 boys at the railway colony in Bombay, where she grew up. One of the few times she picked up the bat was when they decided to experiment with a season ball. Things went a bit awry and Edulji ended up losing her top incisors even before her professional career began!

Women's cricket in Bombay started in 1969. "Mrs Aloo Bamjee, an old Parsi lady, formed a club and recruited local girls. I joined in 1971, at the age of 15 or 16," she recalls. "It was the first time I was meeting lots of girls who played cricket."

Owing to her tight, almost stingy, bowling, Edulji was the only woman cricketer permitted to bowl to visiting foreign teams during their practice sessions. She played her first Nationals in 1974 as part of the winning Bombay team. ("I got to skip my Metric prelims to play the Nationals!") She joined Jai Hind College but dropped out after her first year, when she was appointed by the Western Railway in the sports quota. As sports officer, she recruited more women players to join the Railways. "Today, over 95 per cent of the girls playing cricket are employed by the Indian Railways and its various branches. It is the only organisation that gives women cricketers jobs."



Archival images courtesy: Diana Edulji

Receiving the Padma Shri from then President K R Narayanan; (below right) shaking hands with late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during a match; Opposite page: playing the debut series against Australia at Eden Gardens in Calcutta in 1975

Edulji retired from international cricket in 1995 but continued to play domestic cricket till 2000, well into her 40s. That's when her second innings began—off the field—when she took up the cause of women's cricket with gusto. She was known for her fiercely honest voice, and whether taking on the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) or on tour overseas, she has never backed down from a good fight. "When we were touring England in 1986, they didn't let us into the Lord's Pavilion. It was quite typical of them. So when speaking to the BBC, I said to the Marylebone Cricket Club, that if you think of changing your name from MCC, you should consider 'MCP', for 'Male Chauvinist Pigs.'"

It was this attitude that would ably assist her back home, where people at the helm—from players to the cricketing bureaucracy—would publicly opine that women should not play cricket, let alone be paid for it. With stakes so frivolous, their reputation was all they cared for and Edulji and her teammates roughed it out in the unreserved ladies'

- **My success story:** "In school, I played basketball and table tennis at the junior state level. But for a career, I had my mind set on cricket. Looking back, I know I made the right decision."
- **The inspiration behind it:** "I was inspired by English cricketer Rachel Heyhoe Flint [who passed away this January]. She got the Lords Pavilion to open its gates for women's cricket. If she could do it there, I wanted to be the person here to break all the barriers."
- **Challenges:** "We had to beg for what we wanted every step of the way. But in the face of such resistance, our love for the game motivated and united us."
- **Lessons learnt:** "All the time I've spent breaking my head with bureaucrats has prepared me to take up this very crucial job as member of the current BCCI Working Committee."
- **Aspirations, goals and vision:** "To develop women's cricket in India. It begins with recruiting players young and providing them with job security; paying players a viable fee for every match played; and paying all past players who have represented India, even for a single match, a one-time benefit."
- **The way forward:** "As a member of the Committee, I am in charge of interpreting and implementing crucial reforms, one of which is the recruitment of a woman player onto the boards of state and national cricketing associations."
- **Awards & achievements:** Padma Shri (2002); Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar (1991); Arjuna Award by the Government of India (1983)



“We had to beg for what we wanted every step of the way. But in the face of such resistance, our love for the game motivated and united us”



compartments in trains (“We’d have fist fights with the other passengers”), their bulky kit bags in tow, travelling the length and breadth of India. And together they raised funds to tour India and the world, including the three months they toured the West Indies, England, the Netherlands and the US.

Edulji’s battles with bureaucracy continued long after her retirement from professional cricket. And she used her position as a sports officer in the Western Railway to develop women’s cricket. “Diana’s greatest contribution to Indian cricket is the number of girls she has brought into the game,” says Shanta Rangaswamy, former India Test captain and Edulji’s teammate for over 20 years. “I think around 500 women have been given job security by the Railways, enabling a whole generation of them to develop women’s cricket.”

In 2006, when the International Women’s Cricket Council merged with the International Cricket Council (ICC), national cricket organisations were instructed to merge

with their women’s association if they wanted a seat in the ICC. Thus, despite stiff opposition, the Women’s Cricket Association in India was merged with the BCCI.

A few weeks ago, Edulji was appointed by the Supreme Court as one of the four members of the BCCI Working Committee. Being the only former cricketer on the board in charge of crucial reforms to be implemented in the national and state cricket associations is a rare privilege.

Indeed, Edulji will go down in history as a pioneer of women’s cricket in India. Rangaswamy sums it up nicely. “Statistics don’t portray the full picture. Our biggest achievement is that when we started, we could stand shoulder to shoulder with the teams around the world. We laid a solid foundation and ensured the longevity of the game.” Now, the woman who finally sits on the all-powerful Working Committee of Indian cricket’s governing body says, “This should shake the BCCI out of its slumber.”

—Natasha Rego



Photographs by Hareesh Patel

NO FORMULA HERE

Dr Armida Fernandez, 73, Mumbai

Founder of India's first human milk bank

Everyone has their own imagined version of heaven. Dr Armida Fernandez describes hers as an entire day spent in a lazy chair, book in hand, surrounded by lots of happy dogs, cats and plants. Indeed, such moments of serene repose should not seem all that unattainable to most of us, but Fernandez' calendar is a breathless chart of work and commitments that rarely leaves much room for simple pleasures.

Fernandez is medical director at Holy Family Hospital; founder of SNEHA, an NGO that works in the areas of maternal and infant health and nutrition, and prevention of violence against women and children in the city's slums; head of a palliative care centre; pioneer of many low-cost techniques for survival of newborn babies; former dean of one of Mumbai's busiest municipal hospitals; and retired professor of neonatology. But her crowning achievement still continues to be her path-breaking forays as the founder of Asia's first human milk bank.

However, if destiny and her own determination hadn't collaborated in time, Fernandez admits her story would have been a lot different. "I was brought up in Dharwad, where my father was working as a literature professor. He didn't take me seriously enough at first when I expressed my desire to be a doctor," she reminisces. "But when I sailed through my medical entrance exams and moved to Mumbai to pursue my MBBS, it finally sunk in that I was determined to pursue my dream."

It was in the late 1980s, as a paediatrician and neonatologist at Lokmanya Tilak Municipal

- **My success story:** “I was breaking some of the most traditional practices in intensive care of preterm babies, but someone had to do it. Today, there are 22 milk banks in hospitals across the country. Similarly, we didn’t even know what an NGO exactly entailed when we started SNEHA. We learnt so much on the go. Today, SNEHA works with a population of about 650,000 people, and we have been able to bring maternal mortality down in the areas we work by 68-70 per cent and infant mortality by 26 per cent.”
- **Challenges:** “People were aghast at the idea of feeding a baby

breast milk that didn’t belong to its mother. At such times, I would gently explain that if we have no qualms feeding our babies animal milk, we shouldn’t fret too much over feeding milk that belonged to our own species.”

- **Lessons learnt:** “Social change is not easy to quantify. You have to keep an open mind, and face up to it when ideas don’t work. Get more heads in to think up how things can be made better.”
- **Aspirations, goals and vision:** “I have great hopes for the palliative care centre at Holy Family Hospital. It is named after my daughter, who died of cancer.”

- **The way forward:** “I want to see an institutional change. There needs to be more emphasis on additional community programmes in our medical curriculum. We work closely with medical colleges, so young students approach maternity and childcare with passion and feeling, not just as exams to score in.”

- **Awards & achievements:** Ashoka Fellowship (2004); Mumbai Obstetrics & Gynaecological Society (MOGS) Dr B N Purandare Outstanding Service Award (2010); Qimpro Platinum Standard in Healthcare (2013)

“There is nothing more healing than a mother’s touch. We persuaded and encouraged mothers to express and donate their milk to other mothers”



Courtesy: Dr Armda Fernandez

General Hospital (LTMG; popularly known as Sion Hospital), when Fernandez first decided to explore the growing infant mortalities in the intensive care unit for premature babies. “It was heartbreaking to see so many babies die,” says Fernandez, who also started the neonatology department in the hospital in 1977, only the second in the country at that time. “We were losing 70 per cent of them to diarrhoea and sepsis. I instinctively knew there was something we were not doing right.” Over many days of close scrutiny, she traced the cause of diarrhoea to contamination from formula milk and milk bottles. “Intensive care units for premature babies need to have extremely stringent standards of hygiene and sterilisation to ensure a germ-free cocoon,” Fernandez explains. “We had limited staff to handle the unit, which was already burdened with a huge number of babies. We were delivering over 8,000 babies per year at that time! Even the smallest compromise on hygiene when nurses rush around rinsing hands in haste or don’t sterilise feeding bottles thoroughly

can put premature babies at high risk. So I finally decided to do away with formula milk and feeding bottles, and got mothers to step into the ICU to nurse the babies. There is nothing more healing than a mother’s touch.” Needless to say, the hospital authorities were perplexed at her drastic move. But when mortality rates started dropping, the murmurs were silenced in one sweep, and Fernandez kickstarted her relentless campaign for breastfeeding. Also, not all mothers at the hospital could feed their babies enough milk, so she decided to use milk from other mothers to feed deprived babies. “We persuaded and encouraged mothers to express and donate their milk to other mothers.”

Shortly thereafter, during a fellowship at Oxford, Fernandez observed how hospital authorities in the UK collected, pasteurised and stored human milk to feed newborn babies. “I knew then that this was exactly what we needed in India.” Fortune worked in her favour and she got funding



Conducting a session at her NGO SNEHA

from the Taj Group of Hotels to build India—and Asia's—first human milk bank at Sion Hospital in 1989. In a short span of time, Fernandez and her team at the hospital got healthy lactating mothers to express surplus milk, which was then pasteurised and saved. With the arrival of HIV detection tests, the mothers were also tested for HIV.

In less than four years, infant mortality at Sion Hospital dropped from 70 per cent to 12 per cent. Seeing the success of her simple yet brilliantly effective idea, she decided to share her practices with poor people living in shanties who desperately needed them. Initially, she conducted field trips in the slums once a week, accompanied by a band of PhD students whom she was teaching neonatology. “We spoke about basic neonatal care, breastfeeding and immunisation, but I also knew I needed to spend more time and effort to make a significant difference.” In 1999, Fernandez set up SNEHA with a handful of passionate neonatologists. Today, SNEHA has 400 employees who work at many of the largest slum settlements all over Mumbai.

“I still remember the day Dr Fernandez returned from the UK and told us, ‘Let’s start a human milk bank,’” says

her former student and colleague Dr Jayshree Mondkar, professor and head of neonatology and director of the human milk bank at Sion Hospital. “She got started immediately and didn’t stop till she had set it up. She has this amazing quality of seeing things through; she never gives up on her dreams. And every single person in her team is made to feel like they are walking with her towards a collective goal.”

Even today, Fernandez’s job rarely gets done in the 10-hour slot she puts in every day. Calls for counselling, medical advice, problem-solving and troubleshooting follow her home, and keep her busy till it’s time to have dinner with her dermatologist husband Rui. It’s both humbling and heartbreaking to know that she never shut herself in even when her only daughter died of cancer three years ago: “She was such a joyful, spirited person, I would have been insulting her if I had allowed myself to turn bitter and give up what I was meant to do.” It has been more than 50 years since Fernandez has been on her toes, making a difference to the world around her in the best way that she can. “We have one life. It better be worth it.”

—Rajashree Balaram

OH, BABY!

**Dr Indira Hinduja,
68, Mumbai**

**IVF Pioneer and creator of
India's first test-tube baby**



Photographs courtesy: Dr Indira Hinduja

It's been many moons since a young doctor raced down a corridor at Mumbai's KEM Hospital and burst into a solemn medical conference to share some explosive news with her seniors—she had made medical history, having just 'created' India's first 'test-tube baby'.

That was 31 years ago but the incident is indelibly etched in Dr Indira Hinduja's memory. "One of my IVF patients had just tested positive on her pregnancy test," she recalls. "The chairman announced it to everyone in the conference hall; there was a journalist present and the news was in the papers the next day. I had to take a lot of flak for allowing this historic development to be reported without the permission of the hospital authorities."

Nine months after her breakthrough moment, the nation waited with bated breath for its first IVF baby to be born. (IVF, or in-vitro fertilisation, takes place when the egg is fertilised by the sperm in a Petri dish and implanted in the uterus.) On 6 August 1986, media frenzy outside Jaslok Hospital reached fever pitch. "The moment arrived at 4.10 pm, when I performed a caesarean section on 24 year-old Mani Chawda and delivered a beautiful baby girl," says Dr Hinduja. Only 37 years at the time, she did not rest on her laurels, going on to pioneer the gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT) technique, resulting in the birth of India's first GIFT baby in 1988; and develop an oocyte donation technique for menopausal and premature ovarian failure patients, resulting in India's first baby from this technique in 1991.



Dr Hinduja holding Harsha's child, along with Dr Zaveri

- **My success story:** "Harsha's birth was the biggest moment of pride and joy for me. It was a dream come true for me."
- **Challenges:** "My journey has been full of hurdles, like lack of help, encouragement, and funds and resources, but that single moment made me forget all my problems."
- **Aspirations, goals and vision:** "Qualities like patience and passion drive you to your goal. And statements like 'I couldn't do it' or 'I was not allowed to do it' are mere excuses to not follow your passion. If you're prepared in your mind, nothing can stop you from achieving your goal."
- **Awards & achievements:** Lifetime Achievement Award by Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society of India (1999); Dhanvantari Award (2000); Padma Shri (2011)

"Many women opt for late parenthood owing to careers or family responsibilities. Why should they put a full stop to their careers just because it's time for a baby?"

Dr Hinduja's achievements are all the more remarkable as she was raised in humble circumstances, in Belgaum. Her family struggled to make ends meet and she studied in a municipal school before coming to Mumbai for higher studies and a degree in medicine. It wasn't long before she was pointed to her intended path. "I used to stand at this bus stop in Parel, Mumbai, every day and stare at a sign that read 'Institute for Research in Reproductive Health' [IRR, ICMR]. So I walked in one day and was told that they conducted research on animals."

Unbeknownst to the curious doctor, history was already in the making—this was the time that news of the world's first IVF baby, Louise Brown, was making the rounds. Dr Hinduja was mesmerised and this fixation prompted her to research IVF in India. She secured permission from the IRR to conduct trials on women there. "I would collect eggs from patients in KEM Hospital, carry them to IRR for fertilisation and transfer them to the women's uteruses." After several attempts, in December 1985, one of her patients, Mani Chawda, got pregnant. The rest, as they say, is history. "We were not meant to have a child but Madam made it possible," says Chawda, who named her daughter Harsha. "We consider her a god."

For Dr Hinduja, that single moment made all her struggles worthwhile. "I was happy the world would know that

my treatment was scientifically and ethically correct. The birth was an important milestone, not only for me but in the field of medicine. It brought a ray of hope to many more mothers who conceived through IVF." Later on, Dr Hinduja set up a private practice, Inkus IVF Centre in southern Mumbai, along with a friend and colleague, Dr Kusum Zaveri. Initially, they conducted their research and treatment at their facility and later established a practice at P D Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai.

Indeed, Dr Hinduja's research on assisted reproductive technologies has offered hope to thousands of childless couples across India. She's lost count of how many but says with a twinkle in her eye, "Maybe 15,000 or more, and each case different from the other. There are so many women out there who opt for late parenthood owing to careers or family responsibilities. Why should they put a full stop to their careers just because it's time for a baby?"

Her own career is peppered with many special moments but there's one that's especially sweet. Harsha, now 31, gave birth to a baby boy last year; the baby was delivered by Dr Hinduja and Dr Zaveri. "I am happy that 30 years later, the same team delivered my baby too," says Harsha with a smile. "I hold Dr Hinduja in very high regard. She's like a second mother to me."

—Rachna Viridi

I SPY

**Rajani Pandit,
55, Mumbai**

**India's first female
private detective**



You won't find this sleuth skulking down dark alleys clad in a trench coat and fedora, wielding a magnifying glass. India's first female private detective Rajani Pandit is rather inconspicuous in her appearance; with her unassuming demeanour and effortless ability to mingle with the crowd, she could throw any criminal off the scent.

Hailed as the 'Lady Bond of Mumbai', 'Miss Marples' and 'Miss Sherlock', Pandit, surprisingly, had no role models, inspirations or mentors when she stepped into this profession in the 1980s. And no, she hadn't even read a detective novel as a kid. "Detectives are born, not made!" she declares.

Courageous and observant, Pandit's interest in investigations was sparked during her college days when she spied on her classmate who, she felt, was in bad company. "I investigated further as I thought she needed help and informed her dad, who couldn't thank me enough. His encouragement set me thinking seriously about the profession." However, her father Shantaram Pandit, a police officer who was part of the team from Bombay

investigating Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, believed women weren't cut out to be detectives and was less than happy about her dabbling in the profession. "If someone says 'No, you can't do it, I take it as a challenge and make it happen," she asserts. "I was an adamant, angry kid, not resting till I got things done my way."

After graduating in Marathi at Ruparel College in 1988, she bagged a permanent job in the city that offered her a promising, stable life. "But I listened to my heart—I chose to be a detective!" It was a period when private investigators were unheard of in India. "I had to start from scratch. In fact, people were aware of licences for security services, but no one had an idea about licences for detective services." Fortunately, solving a case for a reporter of a regional newspaper worked in her favour and proved to be a turning point. "The reporter had a sister who went through a matrimonial site for her marriage. However, the reporter had her doubts about her brother-in-law and wanted me to investigate his background. Shockingly, I learnt he was already a married man with two children." The reporter eventually went to press with the sensational findings of the case, which got Pandit wide publicity.

- **My success story:** “Honesty and integrity are the cornerstones of my success.”
- **Challenges:** “I look forward to new challenges in life with the confidence that I can face them; it keeps me going. I always have a revolver on my person but have never had to use it. Sometimes, people try to take the law in their own hands and ask me to misrepresent facts.
- **Lessons learnt:** “Be alert and aware of your surroundings. Be brave and stand up for the truth.”
- **Aspirations, goals and vision:** “I want to train more people in detective services. I would also like to set up community homes for the elderly as many seniors are facing loneliness owing to changing mindset and family dynamics.”
- **Awards & achievements:** Investigation Professional of the Year from Central Association of Private Security Industry (2014); Sahyadri Hirkani Award (2004); Udyog Shree Gaurav Puraskar (1994); authored Marathi books *Chehre Adche Chehre* (Faces Behind Faces) in 1997 and *Mayajal* (Phantasmagoria) in 2002

“Being a woman is advantageous in detective services. People feel women are more trustworthy and open up easily. This helps unravel many mysteries quickly and smoothly”

“There was no looking back,” she says. Moreover, the case created a unique space for pre-matrimonial verification services for brides and grooms across the country.

In 1991, she launched her agency, Rajani Pandit Detective Services, in a small way from her home. She went on to establish her own office with a team of 20 detectives—young and old—in the bustling Shivaji Park area of Mumbai. “Over the years, we have handled more than 75,000 cases with a success rate of 95-99 per cent,” she proclaims. For her part, Pandit has adorned many an avatar—of a visually challenged woman, a hawker, a pregnant woman and a maidservant, to name a few. Among her most challenging cases, she recalls the one where she had to work in a house in the disguise of a maidservant for six months to crack a case and get the murderer arrested by the police.

Is it risky for a woman to be in the profession? “In fact, it is the other way round!” she replies. “Being a woman is advantageous. People feel women are more trustworthy and open up easily. This helps unravel many mysteries quickly and smoothly.”

For Pandit, a worrying trend, however, has been the growing popularity of Internet and social media. And she feels elders are easy targets, falling prey to financial traps—including international ones—unknowingly. “One of my recent cases involved a 72 year-old woman who was attracted to a man living abroad,” she shares. “She met him online and he started sending her expen-

sive gifts. Her children got really worried and got in touch with me.” Through her investigation, Pandit was able to reveal his true colours and prevent chaos in the family. Here, she has a word of caution for the elderly citizens: “Never share your emotions with strangers you meet online.”

Apart from detective services, not many are aware that Pandit has thrown a lifeline to several battered, destitute women. “When they come to me, many have suicidal tendencies. I take it upon myself to counsel them and guide them in rebuilding their lives.”

“For me, Rajaniji is *Maa* Durga, who represents the inherent strengths of women,” shares TV actor Neelima Desai, 49. “She has solved many cases for me and has helped me overcome difficult situations in my life. I am so impressed and inspired by the way Rajaniji courageously and confidently handles my cases—nothing short of heroic.”

Today, with the availability of advanced technology such as spy cameras and video recorders, the work of a detective has become easier. “However, the mental acuity and intuitive skills of a detective are irreplaceable,” reveals Pandit, whose daily routine involves providing phone guidance to her on-field detective team. “It is a 24x7 job and I am married to my work,” says Pandit, who has remained single. “I will continue doing it till the end of my life.”

—Sai Prabha Kamath

MARTIAL LAW

Meenakshi Raghavan, 76, Kozhikode

Oldest woman practitioner of Kalaripayattu

Meenakshi Raghavan, fondly called Meenakshi Gurukkal or Meenakshi Amma, is immaculately clad in a cotton sari, pallu tucked into the waist. Not a strand of jet-black hair is out of place as she prepares to take her class in the early hours of the morning.

Her warm smile gives way to a tough demeanour as she enters the Kalari arena and gets ready to pit her wits and skill against her opponents. Watching the nimble septuagenarian whirl around in the Kalari at lightning speed is nothing short of mesmerising. She has mastered the art of using swords, shields, spears, daggers, sticks and long, flexible blades called *otta* and *uruni* in this almost dance-like form of self-defence.

The 'Iron Lady of Kerala' has spent 68 years learning the art and teaching it and, at the age of 76, is India's oldest woman practitioner of Kalaripayattu, a martial art that dates back over 2,000 years. It is obvious that a lifetime of measured habits and moderation have given her energy and vitality that belie her age. Her zest for life and ready laugh are all too infectious off-field and she never misses an opportunity to joke with those around her.

Meenakshi Amma, the youngest of three siblings, had an obvious gift for dancing which her parents spotted in childhood. So they enrolled her in dance class at the age of five. Even at such a young age, her rhythm and footwork were impeccable. Her dance master, who noticed her flair, suggested that she learn Kalaripayattu to enhance her flexibility and movements. With a mixture of curiosity and trepidation, little Meenakshi accompanied her father to the Kadathanadan Kalari Sangam, a reputed martial arts class. She was awestruck with what she saw.

Meenakshi Amma discontinued her studies after Class X. While her sister went on to become a teacher and her brother an entrepreneur, she

continued to learn Bharatanatayam and Kalaripayattu. "Those days, girls were not allowed to learn or participate in such art forms, which were male domains," she says. "They were not allowed to continue to even dance after attaining puberty or after marriage. I was very fortunate to have the total support of my family." When she turned 17, Meenakshi Amma's guru Raghavan sought her hand in marriage and her father happily agreed.

"After marriage, I did not have time to pursue both dance and Kalari, and the martial art took precedence over dance," she says. However, with the birth of four children in quick succession, Meenakshi Amma turned full-time mother and housewife. Although she took a break from active Kalaripayattu, she helped her husband with programmes and other related events.



Photographs by J Ramaswamy

“Kalaripayattu is an exercise for the mind, body and soul. Every girl should learn the art, even if only to defend herself in modern times”



With her granddaughter and student Alaga

Kalari has become a way of life for Meenakshi Amma and her family, although the other members pursue other professions “While it is an exercise for the mind, body and soul, it is also a very demanding exercise requiring immense concentration, devotion and commitment,” she explains. “Every girl should learn the art, even if only to defend herself in modern times.” Her family of two daughters, two sons and eight grandchildren are all trained in Kalari and her son Sajeer is also a *gurukkal* (master) at the institute.

Even now, Meenakshi Amma trains students from June to September. Her day typically begins at 5 am, with a batch of students coming in an hour later, for a two-hour class. Following this, it is back home and routine household chores. When time permits, she watches dance programmes on television. Then, starting at 5 pm, she teaches two more batches of students. “Working men and women come in the evenings,” she explains.

Meenakshi Amma also performs up to 60 shows a year, in Kerala, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Goa and Coimbatore. Many awards and other honours have come her way, including the Padma Shri this year, which made her “excited, happy and proud”. However, ‘Samurai Amma’ says she’s most proud when the Kalari fraternity itself recognises her work. Her student Jitin, 27, says, “I’ve been learning Kalari from Meenakshi Amma for 10 years now. She’s a perfectionist and very strict while teaching but such a soft-hearted person off the field.” And Jaimi, 22, adds, “I just love to attend her classes. She’s a very good trainer.”

—Chitra Ramaswamy

- **My success story:** “Success is a journey rather than a destination. I am happy contributing to society in whatever measure I can and thereby passing on to future generations the opportunity I could get because of the support of family and friends. The secrets of my success are discipline, devotion and dedication.”
- **Challenges:** “I faced a huge challenge following my husband’s demise in 2009, when I was compelled to don the mantle of *gurukkal*. I wanted to keep his labour of love alive and flourishing. It was, perhaps, guru *dakshina* I paid him in my own way. The task was daunting at first. I had to run the institute while maintaining the high standards he had set.”
- **The inspiration behind it:** “My husband has been my idol and inspiration. He established this institute at the young age of 14 because he wanted to provide others an opportunity denied to him because of his caste. He made it free for anyone desirous of learning Kalari without any regard for caste, class, creed or gender. We continue to run this institute along the guidelines set by him.”
- **Aspirations, goals and vision:** “I had no aim, no goal when I began training in Kalari. I was simply fascinated by it. I wish to create awareness about this art and hope it spreads beyond the borders of Kerala.”
- **The way forward:** “It is heartening to see this martial art witnessing a revival, especially with an increasing number of girls learning it. It would be great for it to be part of the school curriculum so girls can learn the art of self-defence, particularly when crimes against them are on the rise.”
- **Awards & achievements:** An INK (Information & Knowledge) Fellow of INK International (October 2016); the Saarthak Naari Achievement Award in Bengaluru (November 2016); Padma Shri (2017)

AT THE WHEEL

Surekha Shankar Yadav, 51, Mumbai

First woman loco pilot in India

“You wouldn’t give me a second glance on the street because there’s nothing unusual about the way I look. Yet I am the first Indian woman to drive a train.” This statement is as simple as the expectations Surekha Yadav had



when she applied for a job in the Indian Railways. She had no inkling she was about to make history.

It was 1986 when the 21 year-old took the plunge. “I saw an advertisement for the post in the Central Railway’s Mumbai Division and sent in my application. I had no clue whether the job was for a man or a woman,” recalls Yadav, daughter of a farmer from Satara in Maharashtra. She believed her only chance at landing a job with the Railways was her diploma in electrical engineering from the Government Polytechnic at Karad in Satara.

It was only when Yadav was selected as an assistant driver by the Central Railway in 1989 that it hit her—the young woman was going to pilot Mumbai’s suburban local trains, the lifeline of the country’s financial capital. “Many people expressed disbelief when I got the job. No one ever thought I could become a train driver. Although the thought that women don’t drive trains did bother me, I just kept doing what I was doing,” says Yadav, wife of a police officer and mother of two college-going boys.

Yadav’s zeal for her job has always been exemplary. After suburban local trains, she went on to become a goods train driver in 1996, a ghat driver in 2010 and an express mail driver in 2011. She hit her next big milestone in March 2011, when she became India’s first woman to drive the Deccan Queen from Pune to CST in Mumbai. Her achievement was even sweeter as her first run with this prestigious train took place on March 8, International Women’s Day, recalls Yadav, now a senior instructor at the Driver’s Training Centre in Kalyan, where she had trained.

With every successive feat, the spotlight was trained on her over the years but it’s not always been a smooth run. “While pursuing a tough job like this, sometimes managing home takes a back seat. But I have a great family that is proud of my work and supports me in everything I do.”

—Aakanksha Bajpai

● **My success story:** “I’m one of the two women train drivers in Central Railway and am proud of my job. For me, it was important to have a job after my studies, especially because I was the eldest in the family. I might have taken up anything at that point, so it was sheer luck that I got this opportunity.”

● **Challenges:** “In the beginning, people close to me thought I would give up after the initial phase of training. But I am not the kind of person who gives up. I kept

moving forward and never quit. I think every woman should do that—never, ever quit.”

● **The inspiration behind it:** “For me, the fear of going back home as a failure and telling my parents I couldn’t do it was all the inspiration I had to hold on to my job.”

● **Aspirations, goals and vision:** “My goal is to keep working till my retirement and never give anyone a chance to say that women cannot do things in a male bastion.”

● **The way forward:** “It is nice to see so many women working in the Railways now, although there are still very few who want to take up the job of a train driver. Women today are taking up unconventional jobs; I hope they are enthusiastic about becoming loco pilots too.”

● **Awards & achievements:** GM Award for first lady loco pilot on Indian Railways (2011); Woman Achievers’ Award Central Railway (2011); Prerna Puraskar (2005)

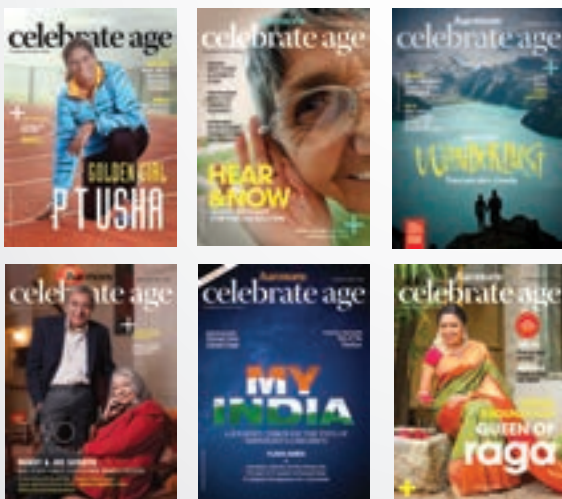


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Rahul Gajjar

HISTORY AT A GLANCE

The world is dotted with beautiful sites of historical significance—and now you can see it all with the magic of hi-tech photography. That's what made the recent exhibition on UNESCO World Heritage Sites on the campus of Chitra Kala Parishad in Bengaluru so stunning. Categorised into 'Cultural Sites', 'Natural Sites', and 'Looking Beyond India', the exhibition featured the rock art of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh (*right*),

PHOTOGRAPHY cultural landscape of Sintra in Portugal, and the archaeological park at Champaner-Pavagadh, Gujarat (*top*), among others, by amateur Indian photographers. "The idea was to create awareness of these sites in India and abroad; hence, we called for photographs, first in 2015 and again this year," says Sheela Nair, curator of the exhibition, presented by her eco-events company Essen Communications.



Sonal Maheshwari

HERSTORY, RETOLD

Women in history have played a rather subdued role, or so it would seem. They have been portrayed largely as passive spectators, in charge of home and hearth. But that is not the whole truth. Women in India are who they are today because they stand on the shoulders of giantesses who came decades and centuries before them and rewrote the rules by refusing to conform. Here are some powerful stories of India's original feminists (and a pivotal play), change makers at a time when women

were denied basic rights and freedoms. More stories from history and contemporary India, collections of poster series and works of art can be found in *Women of India: Unheard Stories*, a virtual exhibition on Google's Arts and Culture platform.

collection

The exhibition comprises almost 2,000 photographs, videos, artworks and textual records, from 26 institutions of the arts, science and literature. The virtual exhibition was created in conjunction with feminist publisher Zubaan Books recently.

RAKHMABAI BHIKAJI (1864-1955)



Pranisha Shrestha / Zubaan Books

From child bride to India's first practising woman doctor, Rakhmabai Bhikaji fought valiantly for what she wanted. Married at the age of 11, she refused to live with her husband even when she was ordered by the courts to comply or face imprisonment. Her case was instrumental in drafting of the Age of Consent Act, 1891. During the trial, she wrote inspired letters to *The Times of India* under the pseudonym 'A Hindu Lady'. "Every aspiration of mine to rise above my ignorant sisters is looked down upon with suspicion and is interpreted in the most uncharitable manner," she wrote. She earned her medical degree from the London School of Medicine for Women and returned to India to begin a long and illustrious career.

JAHAN ARA (1614-1681)



Courtesy: Rekhta Foundation

Beloved daughter and trusted confidant of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, Jahan Ara Begum was a patron of the arts, with a keen interest in trade and architecture. She owned a number of trading ships and factories, and dealt profitably with the Dutch and East India Company. She even commissioned the construction of Chandni Chowk, which still bustles in the heart of present-day Old Delhi. A Sufi princess, Jahan Ara Begum was also a prolific writer with a love for poetry, and wrote biographical accounts of her Sufi mentor and other philoso-

phers. She was thrown in prison with her father by her infamous brother Aurangzeb, and remained there until her death.

GAUHAR JAAN (1873-1930)



Courtesy: Archive of Indian Music

Gauhar Jaan was a diva of her times. Born an Armenian Christian with a Hindu grandmother, she had converted to Islam and settled in Calcutta, where she was known for throwing fabulous parties. When the

Gramophone Company's first India agent visited in 1902, the new technology was tainted by social prejudice and superstition. But Gauhar Jaan and her contemporaries across India boldly adapted to it. Jaan herself had the extraordinary ability to compress expansive Hindustani numbers into three-minute capsules, just enough to put on a record, and ended her recordings by loudly proclaiming, "My name is Gauhar Jaan!" She established herself as the first recording artist (man or woman!) from the subcontinent and cut nearly 600 records in 12 languages. Many recordings are now available free online, courtesy the Archive of Indian Music.

AURAT, THE PLAY



Courtesy: Jana Natya Manch

Public art has the power to reveal truths about ourselves and society. This was the aim of street play *Aurat* (Woman), written by the late Safdar Hashmi and Rakesh Saxena of the Jana Natya Manch (Janam). *Aurat* was presented for the first time in 1979, at the first conference of working women under the aegis of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, in Delhi. With a single woman (played by Moloyashree Hashmi) in several roles—a child who wants to go to school, a college student, a married professional, and an old factory worker—and male actors essaying other parts, the play captured the battles of a woman as she made her way through life. *Aurat* has been translated and performed over 2,000 times in public spaces across rural and middle-class India.

DR ANANDIBAI JOSHI (1865-1887)



Courtesy: Indian Academy of Sciences

Married at the age of nine, she gave birth to her first child at 14. But when the child died owing to medical complications, she was determined to study medicine. Anandibai Joshi became the first Indian woman to graduate with a degree in Western medicine from the US and was also the first Hindu woman to go to America. Her life's journey, however, was marred by ill health. She eventually contracted tuberculosis and died in Poona, her hometown, at the early age of 22, leaving behind an inspirational legacy for Indian women.

DR MUTHULAKSHMI REDDI (1886-1968)



Courtesy: Adyar Cancer Institute

Muthulakshmi Reddi, a doctor by profession, left her mark in many

fields, including law and education. As member of the Madras Legislative Council, and later its vice-president, she was the first woman legislator in India. She helped pass state legislation to raise the age of consent for marriage, to 16 years for girls and 21 for boys, and improve the lives of women and children. After losing her sister to cancer, Reddi set up the famous Adyar Cancer Institute in Chennai in 1954, which is today run by another capable woman, Dr V Shanta, who has steered the institute to iconic status.

NAWAB SULTAN JAHAN BEGUM (1858-1930)



Courtesy: Rekhta Foundation

Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum came to power in Bhopal at a time when women were denied even basic education. She was fourth in a series of widows to rule the state of Bhopal between 1819 and 1926 and made great strides in the progress of her kingdom. Her two autobiographies, *Gauhar-e-Iqbal* and *Akhtar-e-Iqbal*, which detail the socio-political conditions of the time, the public reforms enacted and her patronage of the arts, architecture, infrastructure and education, reveal an astute mind. Among her most notable achievements was a school she established for Hindu and Muslim children.



Courtesy: Banyan Tree

Soul stirring

Sufi music festival Ruhaniyat concluded its 17th edition in Pune recently, after travelling to five other Indian cities. With stellar performances by musicians and dancers, qawwals and singers from different regions, Ruhaniyat is all about history and tradition. The immortal *shabad* sung by Ashupreet Kaur and her sisters, with their father on the tabla, set the tone for the festival, while Nohon Shumarov from Mongolia had audiences spellbound. But the ones that really warmed hearts in all the cities were the Nizami Bandhu, India's oldest Sufi band, led by Ustad Chand Nizami, who sang the most soulful qawwals with audiences joining in. Nizami Bandhu traces its origins back to 1360 when they became the official singers at Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's Dargah in Delhi. "Our tradition goes back 700 years. My sons and my nephews all sing with me and work hard to keep up the tradition. I do believe that as long as the Dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi and Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti in Ajmer are alive and revered, the tradition of our qawwalis will carry on."



Haresh Patel

FIRST LOOK William Shakespeare's *First Folio*, dating back to 1623, is on loan to Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) from the British Library. The tome is said to be the first reproduction of 36 dramatic works by the Bard, published together seven years after his death. (Almost no original, handwritten manuscripts survive.) The book is the finest example of early typeset printing, composed entirely by hand, letter by letter and line by line. This particular copy belonged to King George III of Great Britain and this is the first time it has left England. "As it is not on permanent display at the British Library, it is very rare to be able to see the *Folio* in person, making this display all the more significant," Vaidehi Savnal, coordinator at CSMVS, tells us. The exhibition, titled *What's in a Name? Shakespeare's First Folio in Mumbai*, is on at the Curator's Gallery till 8 March.

A late bloomer

Despite her late start, talented singer Neela Ramgopal shows that true grit can make dreams come true, writes **Chitra Ramaswamy**

From music as a passport to getting a worthy groom to music as a way of life, as meditation and worship... it's been a long and meandering journey for Bengaluru-based Neela Ramgopal. An accomplished singer, Ramgopal, 81, started her career as an artist rather late in life, making her achievement that much sweeter.

Hailing from Thiagarajapuram, a hamlet close to Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu, she was born into an orthodox Iyer family in which "learning music was only to get a suitable groom, to sing before his people, a ritual followed by most conservative families in those days", she reveals. After marriage at the age of 19, Ramgopal moved to Bengaluru and soon became a mother of two. But her turning point came at the

MUSIC

age of 23, when during Navaratri, she was asked to sing in the house of a guest. "Another girl, Meenakshi, was showered with praise for her lovely singing," she remembers. A distraught Ramgopal came home in tears. "In that instant, I felt I had to excel and become somebody in this field."

The budding singer immersed herself in the depths of Carnatic music. While her husband took care of their children, she travelled to Chennai every December to attend concerts and to train. A decade and more of disciplined learning catapulted Ramgopal from an ordinary housewife to a performing musician. She morphed into the 'somebody' she had vowed to become that Navaratri day. Her stage debut took place at the age of 30, at the behest of Ratnam Iyer, father of the spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

Despite being a late entrant to the field, Ramgopal has scaled peaks aplenty, winning awards, honours and titles. She has published a book of Tamil compositions in Kannada; has released albums such as *Tamizh Inbam*, *Rama Upasana* and *Narayana Enniro*; and actively performs, conducts lecture-demos and organises concerts for other musicians. In February, she was conferred the title 'Sangeetha Vedanta Dhurina' by the Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, which also published a biography on her life titled *Neela Ramgopal, A Musical Journey*, authored by Harini Raghavan. Music and a profoundly positive attitude to life also helped Ramgopal beat cancer in 1990. "Music is a great healer," she affirms. "I want to sing till my last breath."



Courtesy: Arjika School

"Manipuri is an ancient art whose canvas is extensive and profound, and that is why I never felt the need to combine it with other forms. Further, Manipuri is still a living tradition. From cradle to grave, there are any number of ceremonies that require song and dance. It is a dance ritual rather than a form and, according to me, its life lies within the daily life of its people. That is one reason why Manipuri dance has a lot of practitioners and few stage performers."

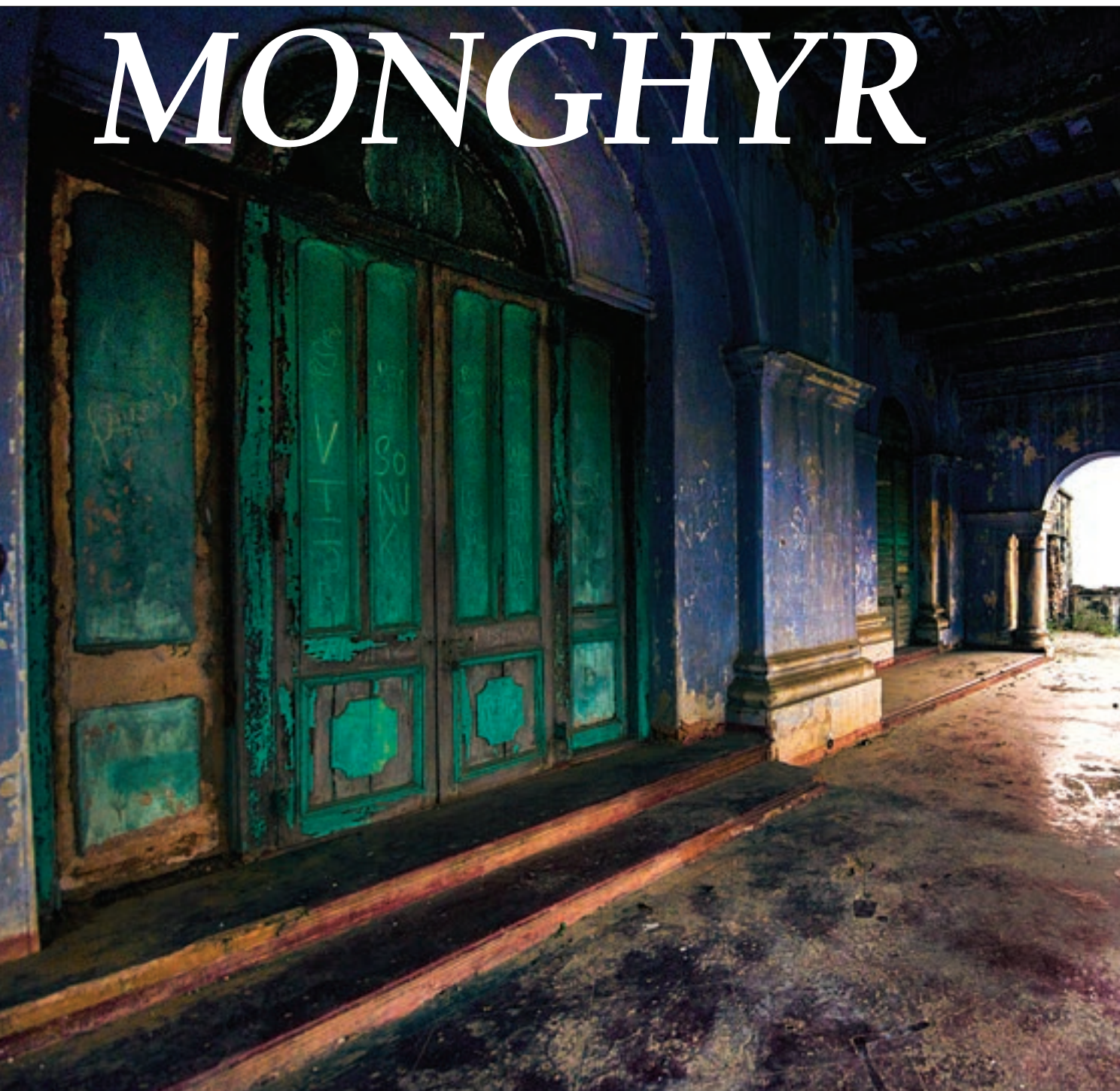
—Manipuri dancer Priti Patel, 66, on choosing not to experiment with external styles, speaking to Outlook magazine



Courtesy: Neela Ramgopal

✦ 📷 Shilbhadra Datta

A MYSTERY NAMED *MONGHYR*





I first visited Munger—a landscape dotted with marble and granite, palm trees and wheat fields—in Bihar at the turn of the millennium. A corporate factory in Basdeopur had engaged me to click photographs of their 200-strong office staff on the last dawn of the century on 31 December 1999. With a tight schedule of just two days, it was not possible to explore either Munger or its twin city Jamalpur, except for the hot chai and jalebi the team tasted in the overcast cold morning as we drove down from Kiul junction railway station.

Munger or Monghyr, as the British called it, is also the place where acclaimed Bengali litterateur Saradindu Bandhyopadhyaya, creator of lovable detective Byomkesh Bakshi, grew up. Munger figures in historical references right from the days of the *Rig Veda* to Buddhist times, Chandragupta Maurya's regime, Islamic rule of the Khiljis, the Raj, and Gandhiji's movement against Indigo planters. The Aryans, in fact, considered Munger the 'Midland' of their settlement.

All my scholarly research and reading about this ancient region was put to touristic use after 15 years last spring when I got the chance to go back again for the same corporate house. Accessible by overnight trains from Kolkata and Patna, the fame of this ancient seat of power today rests on being home to the Bihar School of Yoga and manufacturers of arms.

Green Door and Red Veranda of Pachpan

Mahal: The 'Green Door' has a significant Tagorean history. Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, Bengali entrepreneur, industrialist, zamindar and the paternal grandfather of poet Rabindranath Tagore, bought this house—which serves as an entrance to Pachpan Mahal—in the mid-1830s because of its locale, beauty and convenience. The palace is located between Varanasi and Calcutta along the Ganges. The red-floored veranda (*seen above*) was built by Armenian general Ghurghin Khan. 'Carr, Tagore and Company', run by Tagore, purchased the first Indian coal mine in Runigunj in 1832 and shipped most of the coal to Varanasi.

Abandoned post box: When I saw this abandoned post box at old Monghyr station at Lal Darwaza, my mind went back to the times I would write love letters to my girlfriend using a fine-tip fountain pen of Chinese make on white bond paper. Sadly, today, letter writing is an obsolete art.



Fort Clock Darwaza: One of the entrances to the Fort area, where the Bihar School of Yoga stands on a hillock adjoining the Ganges. Angika, an Indo-Aryan language written in Devnagiri script, is spoken in this area.



Bihar School of Yoga: Founded by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1964, the Bihar School of Yoga imparts yogic training to householders and sanyasi alike. Built over a large hill overlooking the Uttar Vahini Ganga, it was one of the first institutions to initiate and train female and overseas sanyasis on a large scale.



Grandma: This grandma was a little taken aback when I appeared right in front of her door without any warning, and that too with a camera in hand when she was about to perform *sandhya arati*.



1. Hilltop house: Armenian general Ghurghin Khan's Pachpan Mahal, later renamed Belvedere, where the last Nawab of Bengal, Mir Qasim, stayed. When Vansittart, then governor of the East India Company, visited Munger in 1762, he resided in this magnificent building atop a hillock, commanding a fine view of the Ganges. Today, the compound is occupied by a battalion of the CRPF, while the TV tower of Monghyr stands here.

2. Nukkad natak: In small villages like this, street plays are a major vehicle for spreading awareness about topical issues. Here, a play on sanitation gets the Swachh Bharat message across.

3. Monghyr Gun Manufacturer's Functional Estate, Fort Area Gate: Munger is a leading hub for legal as well as illegal gun manufacturing. From country-made pistols, known as *kata*, to revolvers and even AK-47s, manufacturing of arms here dates back over 200 years.

4. Nawab Mir Qasim ka surang: The Nawab Mir Qasim *ka surang*, as the name suggests, was built by the Nawab of Bengal. Almost 300-km long, the tunnel runs parallel to the southern bank of Ganges till Buxar. It's believed that a man on horseback can ride through the tunnel, which has ventilators on the ceiling to let in fresh air and light.



Uttar Vahini Ganga: The Uttar Vahini Ganga in Munger is the only place besides Varanasi where the Ganges flows northward. Several antiquities, including an inscribed image of Dayani Buddha—in meditation pose—with the Buddhist doctrine, have been unearthed at Kashtharani Ghat, a venerated spot for both Hindus and Buddhists. At the Kashtaharini Ghat, *Surya devta*, the god of energy, is worshipped during Chhath puja. It's commonly believed the Sun god helps cure a variety of diseases, including leprosy, and bestows prosperity on devotees.



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.

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HOMAGE TO MY HIPS

This irreverent paean to
womanhood by **Lucille Clifton**
(1936-2010) challenges social
norms of feminine beauty

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they don't fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

Poet laureate of Maryland from 1979 to 1985, Clifton's poetry celebrates her African-American heritage, alongside feminist themes

Daughters of India

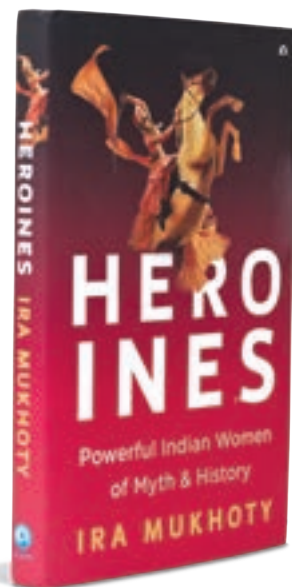
Even as shameful cases of assault on women across Indian cities are making headlines and our child sex ratio has plummeted to an all-time low of 919 girls for 1,000 boys, **Ira Mukhoty** goes back in time to re-imagine the lives of eight extraordinary women. A feminist exercise, it conjures up images of women who dared to challenge their traditional space in society. The retellings involve two mythological characters—Draupadi and Radha—along with six historical figures. As Mukhoty points out, “myth and history in India are not clearly separate entities”. What makes this kaleidoscope of Indian womanhood, **HEROINES: POWERFUL INDIAN WOMEN OF MYTH & HISTORY** (Aleph; ₹ 499; 211 pages), appealing is the humanising of the subjects with their flaws, emotions, vanities, et al intact.

The fulcrum of this eclectic collection, however, happens to be the firebrand Draupadi, who holds up a woman's right to inviolability. While Draupadi is an agent of destruction, whose vengeance will bring to an end a *yuga* itself, Radha chooses unconventional love over the sanctity of marriage. It's indeed a shame that in popular folklore

and theological works, Radha's passion for Krishna has been transformed into devotion, mirroring the soul's desire for a divine union. Similarly, the dark skin of Draupadi has been glossed over in subsequent narrations and screen adaptations of the *Mahabharata*. At a time when an arsenal of skin-lightening creams and treatments rule the market, it's refreshing to witness the dark beauty being thus celebrated.

Mukhoty picks up her historical heroines from the north of the country. Thus, we have a Mughal princess (Jahanara), a Turkish Mamluk warrior (Raziya Sultan), a Brahmin widow (Rani Laxmibai), a courtesan (Ambapalli), a Rajput princess (Meerabai), and a begum of part-African descent (Hazrat Begum). Their quests are dissimilar. While Meerabai relinquishes the safety of her marital home for a divine love; Jahanara casts off the *purdah*; the ruthless Raziya Sultan, refuses the feminine corollary of Sultana; and Laxmibai refuses to renounce jewellery or shave her head, customary for widows, opting to fight for her kingdom. In a society that has constantly upheld the self-annihilating Sita as the ideal woman, the one thing these women have in common is that they are all heroines who have transgressed the rules of a deeply entrenched patriarchal system.

—Srirekha Pillai



Also on stands



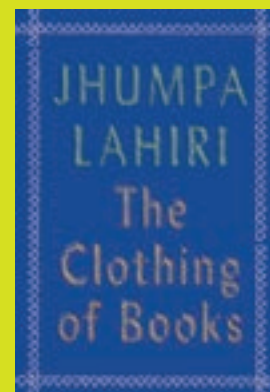
Veerappan: Chasing the Brigand
K Vijaya Kumar
Rupa; ₹ 500; 263 pages

Penned by the chief of the task force set up to capture India's most dreaded outlaw, it chronicles the life and times of the notorious brigand.



Women Warriors in Indian History
Yugal Joshi
Rupa; ₹ 195; 189 pages

It explores the lives of 10 Indian women warriors through the eyes of other historical characters.



The Clothing of Books
Jhumpa Lahiri
Penguin Random House;
₹ 199; 80 pages

A deeply personal reflection on how books are jacketed, by the Pulitzer prize winner.

The accidental author

I am an accidental author," declares **Amardeep Singh**, author of *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan*, an illustrative documentation available at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. It takes courage and conviction to delve into one's past, more so while reconstructing stories of personal loss and pain. The 50 year-old former regional head for Asia Pacific at American Express in Singapore reminisces, "When I quit after 23 years of a hectic corporate career, I felt I should visit Pakistan to reconnect with my family roots." Singh's book captures tales of valiant people who stood their ground in the face of adversity. Excerpts from the book have featured in international magazines such as *Asian Geographic*. The soft-spoken author was in Chandigarh recently, where he spoke about the need to resurrect the Sikh legacy. In an interview with **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**, he also discussed his passion for photography and the need to expand creatively. Excerpts from the interview:

What led to the birth of this book?

I am an accidental author. I realise now that I had been preparing unconsciously for this book for over 20 years. For years, my second being was delving into the history of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir. I embarked for Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-administered Kashmir in October 2014 with a desire to carry back the soil from under Ranbir Singh Bridge, where many from my extended family were massacred in the tribal invasion of October 1947. Years of research on this region also motivated me to travel across other cities of Pakistan.

Within 30 days, I visited 36 places in West Punjab, the Northwest Frontier and Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

On my return to Singapore, it dawned on me that if the travelogues of the British spies who had travelled across Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire in early 1800s could motivate me to delve into the history of this region, surely the documentation of the remnants of the Sikh community as they stand seven decades after Partition would be of immense value for posterity.

authorspeak



Courtesy: Amardeep Singh

I started working on the book in December 2014; 13 months later, in January 2016, it was published.

What were the highs and lows as an author?

The highs of the journey were, first, the secular support I got. During my travels across Pakistan, I only experienced love and affection, with many of the locals, all Muslims, coming together to help me. Without their passionate, selfless support, this book would not have materialised. Many Sikhs and Hindus helped fund the project. Second, I wrote this book for posterity, without any sales expectations. However, the

book became an overnight success, moving into second print in just over five months. The book got extensive media coverage not only in India but across the world, with BBC Radio and *The Straits Times*, among others, reviewing it favourably. Third, I have been invited to speak at 56 events across India, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, the UK, US and Canada. In Vancouver, I was invited by the Muslim community to address a crowd of over 220 people at the mosque. Finally, *Lost Heritage* can be found at international libraries at the universities of Harvard, Princeton, and the Library of Congress in Washington DC to mention a few, validating my efforts.

As far as the lows go, the biggest challenge was carrying out research that entailed discovering abandoned sites associated with the Sikh community across Pakistan, and garnering support from Sikh institutions. The support from Sikh institutions across India has been soft. I wonder what will make them realise the importance of such research for posterity.

You've made a mark as a photographer as well.

It is in my innate nature to always look at my surroundings with an explorer's vision. I see myself as a white cloud floating freely in the sky, unknowingly abandoning myself in search for the unknown. Photography is just one small outcome of my larger wandering footprint. Today, through my photography, I am always searching for a deeper meaning.

What would be your advice for an aspirant of the medium?

My advice for any aspirant is to leverage every life experience to transform

into a being that is focused on more than earning a living. Think about the high points you would like to cherish when you are on your rocking chair, and work passionately to fulfil them. Life creates challenges for all of us. Use them to reinvent yourself into someone better.

Did you upgrade your camera for the making of this book?

I haven't upgraded my camera since 2009. Good photographs can be created even with basic equipment. One should focus on the craft, not the equipment.

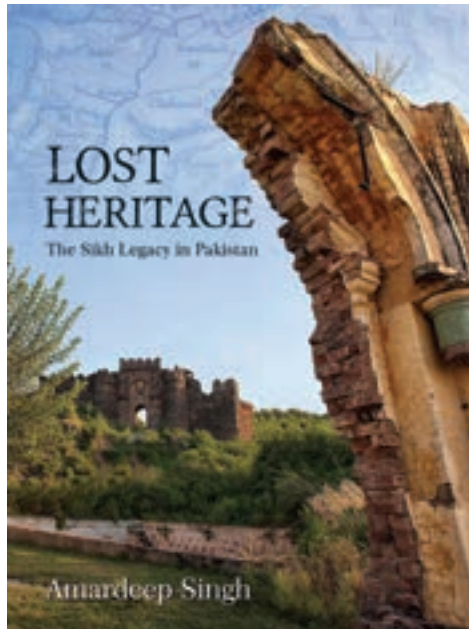
How did you juggle between your job and passion for photography and writing?

This has been the toughest part. Clearly, my drive to achieve more than just the job was high, permitting me to make space for things closer to my heart. My definition of worldly success is anchored in the objective of becoming singular with oneself, from within and outside. To achieve this singularity of being, I have always given importance to self-development through my passions while simultaneously achieving worldly success in the corporate world. Without internal success, this life experience would be wasted. It is here that I have always challenged my right brain to find creative experiences. Trying to excel on both fronts is never easy. It's like walking on a razor's edge.

Please tell us about your immediate family and how they helped you in the making of the book.

My wife Vininder Kaur has been a great supporter of my hectic corporate commitments as well as passion-

ate personal pursuits. Without her encouragement, this book would not have been possible. Our daughters, Tarni Kaur, 23, and Datti Kaur, 18, have supported my pursuit across Pakistan, managing my idiosyncrasies while I was burning the midnight oil. They also proofread the entire script.



"Think about the high points you would like to cherish when you are on your rocking chair, and work passionately to fulfil them. Life creates challenges for all of us. Use them to reinvent yourself into someone better"

This being a visual book, they had a significant role to play in the layout and design.

What were your literary influences?

The travelogues of William Moorcroft and Alexander Burnes influenced me.

While the former travelled across Punjab in 1819 AD, the latter did so in 1831 AD. If after nearly 200 years, these travelogues without photographs could leave an impression on me, surely my travel across Pakistan with a large collection of photographs could be of value for posterity.

Given its steep price (₹3,650), is *Lost Heritage* a coffee-table book meant for just a niche readership?

Keeping in perspective the extensive research costs involved in rediscovering the remnants of the community across Pakistan and thereafter publishing the findings in a high-quality photographic book, the pricing of the book could not be any cheaper. Being a 504-page book with 507 photos, coupled with deep insights associated with the discoveries, the pricing needs to be viewed from the perspective of the value it provides for posterity.

What are you reading currently?

I am reading the two-volume set on *Indian Philosophy* by S Radhakrishnan. At present, my soul is hungry for food, and this work is extremely satisfying.

Are you planning another book in the foreseeable future?

Such research-intensive projects require a lot of time and effort. Therefore, the topic has to be compelling enough and never attempted before for me to invest my effort and time. I do plan to write another book, anchored in similar storytelling with the aid of researched visuals. However, at this stage I haven't finalised the details.

Flaunt your flaws

Embrace your imperfections to be truly happy, writes **Susan Tolles**

I recently spent a weekend with four girlfriends at our lake house. We had two full days of talking, no makeup, more talking, healthy snacks, more talking, gourmet dinners and wine, more talking, and sitting around a big fire pit in the evening for more talking. It was a time of transparency, laughter, deeper connections and praise to the One who gave us the precious gift of friends.

As gorgeous as each of these women are on the outside, they are even more beautiful on the inside. What makes them this way is their strength, their perseverance in trials and their tender hearts as they regard each chapter of their lives as times of growth, not setbacks. Each one of us so different, but also the same as we shared our journeys that brought us to that magical spot at a time when each of us needed rest and nourishment for our bodies and souls.

As I look back on that special weekend, I am moved by the profound value of transparency. The vast majority of women spend most of their time wearing masks, trying to hide their flaws, their hurts and the mistakes of their past. We want to look our best to the world, when inside we might be depressed and falling apart. We fear being judged so we bury our shame, guilt and imperfections so everyone will like us more. The problem is, the more we hold it all in, the more our self-worth deteriorates. It feels so good to let it out.

One friend in particular always looks like a million dollars when

I see her, but her life story reveals a woman of steel. She divorced her first husband who was an alcoholic, raised a rebellious son as a single mom, rejoiced when he finally got his life together, and grieved when his life was cut short from a massive asthma attack at the age of 20. Her second marriage also went down the drain, and now she has finally found love with a man who truly adores her. No one would suspect she'd had such

daughters' had affected us through the years (and still does). Once again, the vulnerability of the group led to deeper bonds and the realisation that we all have 'back stories', no matter what we look like on the outside. And those stories, while sometimes tragic, are somewhat comforting to us because deep down we want to find acceptance and unconditional love from other women who are just like us—flawed but resilient.




a roller coaster ride, this stunning woman in her 60s. But now she is feeling 'called' to share it with women who can relate to her story.

In some way or another, all of us had been deeply affected by our mothers—mothers who were verbally abusive, emotionally absent or unequipped to fulfil the motherhood role. As stories flowed, we discussed how being 'unmothered

I encourage you to spend some time with friends. Not just over coffee or lunch, but some getaway time when you can open up and share what's going on in your life. Take off the masks and get real. Create deeper bonds, experience unconditional love and know you are surrounded by a world full of imperfect women. Choose transparency over perfection. You never know whose life you might change in the process.

US-based Christian life purpose coach Tolles blogs at www.theflourishinglife.today, helping women over 50 lead meaningful lives

A photograph of an elderly man with a grey beard and a young girl with dark hair, both smiling and playing in a pond. The man is in the water, and the girl is sitting on a wooden dock. The water is dark blue, and the dock is made of wooden planks.

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Summer of Love

Championing free love and sexual liberation, the Summer of Love that swept the world, especially the US, had its origin in a sit-in in San Francisco. The defining moment of hippie culture on 14 January 1967 drew over 30,000 participants. Though the hippie ideology had been brewing under the radar in college campuses as a reaction to American involvement in Vietnam, it took shape as a counterculture movement at the sit-in, where LSD was secretly slipped into sandwiches handed out to all attendees, while rock bands took the stage sharing their vision of peace and love. The hippies saw themselves at the cusp of change between a 'flawed' mainstream ideology and an idealistic Utopian world. The term 'hippie' stuck with them, influenced as they were by the Beatniks or hipsters of the 1950s, who retreated from the mainstream and advocated expanding consciousness through drug use.

An open revolt against war, racism, middle-class materialism and repression, the movement spawned many slogans: 'If it feels good, do it', 'Being alive should be ecstasy', and 'Make love, not war'. The Beatles' album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, in which the English rock band sang about LSD, love and rejection of the unhip establishment, voiced the aspirations of the hippies. In fact, folk and rock music were an integral part of the movement, with Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, the Rolling Stones and Jefferson Airplane, besides The Beatles, aligning with the hippies. The Woodstock Music and Art Festival, a spin-off of the movement, became a symbol of youth rebellion against traditional values, and resentment against unfair treatment of black citizens and women.

Living in communes, the hippies wore brightly coloured, ragged clothes, tie-dyed T-shirts, bell-bottoms, beads and sandals. While men wore their hair long and grew beards, women went makeup free and braless. Embracing Eastern philosophies, the hippies adopted vegetarian diets and practiced holistic medicine. Cloaking themselves in floral fabrics, the hippies, also called flower children, could be seen doling flowers out to soldiers and the public alike at anti-war rallies and civil rights marches. The environ-



Dinodia Photo Library

mental movement was also an offshoot of the hippie era, with the first Earth Day celebrated in 1970. The pullout of American troops from Vietnam, however, sounded the death knell for the movement. By the 1980s, hippies had given way to a new generation of young urban professionals, called yuppies. Nevertheless, the influence of the hippies was long lasting. Not only did they combat racism and sexual stereotypes, they gave birth to a Bohemian culture that encouraged experimentation in art, music and fashion.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: MARCH 1967

- On 6 March, Joseph Stalin's daughter Svetlana Allilueva sought political asylum in the US.
- On 10 March, the world's largest jetliner, Llyushin II-62, with room for up to 200 passengers, launched regular service from Moscow to Montreal.
- On 11 March, Pink Floyd released their first single, *Arnold Layne*.
- On 14 March, the body of former US president John F Kennedy was moved to a permanent burial place at Arlington National Cemetery.

Stretch that thang!

Calling all silver ladies in Secunderabad (and Hyderabad)! This Woman's Day, step out and step up at the free yoga demo workshop, 'Yoga Dharshana Malika', with yoga therapist, veena player and Bharatanatyam guru N A Lakshmi, 60, at Our Sacred Space, Marredpally. She has combined the best of all her arts to introduce a hybrid yoga session, with music playing in the background, which creates a soothing atmosphere. The workshop is open to women 'Under 40' and 'Over 40' because, she says, "Every woman has hidden talents and unlimited potential that must be tapped. They can learn anything they want at any age and keeping fit is one of them." So if you don't have plans for Wednesday, 8 March, join her in celebrating your womanhood by stretching, breathing and hitting all the right spots. Call N A Lakshmi at (0) 9533599650 to book your spot or learn more about future events.



Courtesy: N A Lakshmi

BUZZ

Superager

n. A person over 80 years old who exhibits little cognitive decline.

Example: Don't we all want to be **superagers**? These are the folks identified in studies as having exceptionally sharp memories in their 80s and 90s. Researchers are looking at them, trying to figure out what makes them retain bigger brain size, with accompanying attention and thinking abilities greater than most other people their age.

—Carolyn Rosenblatt,
"What makes a 'SuperAger'?",
Forbes, 21 February 2015

“When you get old, you can't talk to people because people snap at you.... That's why you become deaf, so you won't be able to hear people talking to you that way.

—American playwright Edward Albee
(1928-2016)

Scalia-ness

n. The quality or state of being like former United States Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia.

Example: In fact, Gorsuch was ranked highest in a Scalia-ness scale recently created by legal scholars and was deemed the deceased jurist's 'natural successor'.

Scalia-ness in this case manifests in three things—adherence to originalist principles of interpretation, writing about how to consider the law beyond just legal issues, and issuing separate opinions to elucidate a personal position.

—Ephrat Livni, *"Trump's US Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch is a lot like Scalia, with one key difference"*, Quartz, 31 January 2017

Resistance fatigue

n. Mental exhaustion brought on by the constant protesting of unpopular government policies.

Example: I see a few key patterns here. First, the decision to first block, and then allow, green card holders was meant to create chaos and pull out opposition; they never intended to hold it for too long. It wouldn't surprise me if the goal is to create **resistance fatigue**, to get Americans to the point where they're more likely to say, "Oh, another protest? Don't you guys ever stop?" relatively quickly.

—Yonatan Zunger, *"Trial balloon for a coup?"*, Medium, 30 January 2017

Prankvertising

n. Using hoaxes or mischievous acts as part of a marketing campaign.

Example: A cabbie takes two supposedly unsuspecting riders on a stunt-filled journey of terror. ...In reality, of course, this is nothing more than **prankvertising**.

—*"Oh goodie, another hilarious example of prankvertising"*, Campaign, 6 January 2017

“The complete life, the perfect pattern, includes old age as well as youth and maturity. The beauty of the morning and the radiance of noon are good, but it would be a very silly person who drew the curtains and turned on the light in order to shut out the tranquillity of the evening. Old age has its pleasures, which, though different, are not less than the pleasures of youth.

—British playwright-novelist W Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)

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

Dated March 1, 2017

“It’s disturbing to see animals being ill-treated”

C Narasimhamoorthy, 80, and C Padmavathy, 73, run an animal welfare trust in Chennai



Chennai Pix

Tripod was just a pup when he lost a leg in an accident. Today, he has matured into a playful dog, always up to mischief at the loving home of the Narasimhamoorthys in Chennai. Sitting amid his large brood of dogs and cats, **C Narasimhamoorthy**, an 80 year-old retired RBI officer, says, “Socrates rightly mentioned that compassion for animals is the noblest of all virtues.” In fact, Narasimhamoorthy and wife **C Padmavathy**, 73, share their 1,500 sq ft home with over 85 cats and dogs. That apart, he goes on rounds twice a day, carrying Tiger biscuits for stray dogs in the neighbourhood. Reminiscing their journey, Padmavathy says, “In 1995, with residents complaining about the increasing number of strays, the city corporation started killing them.” The couple was also alarmed at the way aged pets were abandoned when they became sick. “It was heartbreaking to see abandoned pets outside eateries yearning for a morsel of food,” she adds. Dismayed, the couple decided to take animals under their wing by starting the Animal Welfare and Protection Trust (AWPT) in 1998. With the help of volunteer doctors, they also ran a small hospital, where they performed around 30 to 40 neutering surgeries per week and vaccinated

many. Animals operated upon were returned to where they were picked up, following their recovery. Recently, the couple had to vacate the hospital when the government undertook the widening of an adjacent road. Over the years, however, several animals have crawled, hopped or slithered through their caring arms, including a jackal that was rescued from local gypsies, electrocuted monkeys and birds, rabbits, squirrels and even snakes. “If it is a dog or cat, we bring them home,” says Narasimhamoorthy, adding they call the wildlife board if it is a wild animal. The couple also regularly advertises in the ‘pet columns’ of newspapers to find homes for their rescues. In recognition of their work, in 2006 the state government sanctioned a ₹ 300,000 donation annually to the trust, and gifted them a van. Imprinted with slogans such as ‘Save a Life’, and ‘Live and Let Live’, the van can be seen coursing through the streets of Chennai, rescuing strays. With the number of animals in their protection going up, they are now on the lookout for donations. “We try to find homes for our puppies and kittens,” says Padmavathy. “In case we don’t, they are always welcome to be a part of our family, like Tripod.”

—Shivani Arora

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