

harmony

MAY 2017 ₹ 40

celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

HEALTH

Is surgery a safe option for LUMBAR STENOSIS?

PROACTIVE

DR RAMINDAR DHILLON heals the wounded in war zones

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE AT HOME IN INDIA

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Silver in bloom

The sakura was in resplendent bloom when I visited Japan with my family last month. In addition to the cherry blossoms in riveting shades of pink, the Japanese landscape was dotted with another exquisite colour: silver.

It's common knowledge that Japan is one of the most rapidly silvering countries in the world. In 2015, people over 65 comprised 26.3 per cent; this is expected to reach 36.3 per cent in 2050. That said, numbers and statistics don't convey the reality of the silver experience, as we discovered. The real story emerges on observation, on spending time among these incredible people.

It's vital to understand that the Japanese don't just live longer; they stay healthier and remain more active. Of course, a large part of this is because of their delicious and colourful diet, one of the highlights of our visit! The Japanese savour their meals slowly, relishing the array of textures and flavours, imbibing the bounty of the sea and the nutrient-rich ingredients such as miso, seaweed and tofu that protect their joints from pain, their hearts from disease, their bodies from obesity and their minds from decline.

And thus they age, the Japanese, proud and resilient, wearing their years with poise, dignity and elegance. They are an unfailingly polite, sensitive, cultured people rooted in their tradition and tied to their families in bonds as ancient as time. Yet, sentiment doesn't come in the way of their fierce need for self-reliance and



Dabboo Ratnani

independence. Our guide in Kyoto, for example, was 70 years old—when we marvelled at this, she assured us that she'd be working for at least another five! In fact, an increasing number of people are calling for the official retirement age to be hiked from 65 to 75. Companies, too, are tweaking both their workplace environments and office timings to enable silvers to stay on the job. And technology is a major enabler, helping silvers to work optimally, live independently, and participate actively in society.

Indeed, while it is all too easy to see age as a curse, most Japanese silvers choose to view it as a quiet celebration, an affirmation of life and longevity. Nothing is carved in stone here—goalposts can be shifted, benchmarks reset and the very notion of 'ageing' redefined. Only the spirit shines bright, constant. A lesson for us all to learn—*Arigatou* Japan, thank you!

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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Publisher **Dharmendra Bhandari** Editor **Tina Ambani** Executive Editor **Arati Rajan Menon** Assistant Editors **Sai Prabha Kamath, Rachna Virdi**

Special Correspondent **Sreerika Pillai** Chief Sub-Editor **Natasha Rego** Design Consultant **Jit Ray**

Studio Manager & Photographer **Haresh Patel** Senior Graphic Designer **Dattaguru Redekar** Production Manager **Rohidas Adavkar**

Business Development: Consultant **Shrenik Mehta** Senior Manager **T M Vijaydas** Manager **Vikaran Chauhan** Assistant Manager **Vijay Singh**

Website Coordinator **Ajit Nair** Editorial & Marketing Coordinator **Johnsi Nadar**

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Historian William Dalrymple on how he converted his wanderlust into an art form

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WEB EXCLUSIVE www.harmonyindia.org



IN SEARCH OF SELF
Award-winning Nepali-Assamese writer Gita Upadhyay gets ready to pen the story of her life

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column one

Regulars at the Jaipur Litfest are all too familiar with the sheer ubiquitousness of this man—stomping through the grounds of Diggi Palace, watching sessions from the sidelines, popping up at this panel and that, his boundless energy feeding off the crowds and chaos. But that's William Dalrymple for you: co-director of the Fest, travel writer, photographer and all-round rockstar. Foremost, of course, this Scot is a historian who has taken the discipline out of the ivory tower and into countless homes; his books impeccably researched, yet eminently readable, accessible. "India has changed my life completely," he tells us in an exclusive, freewheeling interview where he shares his thoughts on writing history, his book on the Kohinoor diamond, ageing, the world today, and his intense engagement with a country he calls home.

Sharing the spotlight with Dalrymple are two driven silvers, both formerly with the Armed Forces, who refuse to have any truck with retirement! While proactive Dr Ramindar Dhillon heals the wounded in war-torn countries—Afghanistan, South Sudan—as part of UN missions, often at great risk to her personal safety, legal eagle Wing Commander (ret'd) G B Athri is battling to clean up Bengaluru's lakes and public spaces using the RTI Act as his weapon.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we tell you about endoscopic surgery as an option to treat severe back pain; take you on a sobering journey through the erstwhile killing fields of Cambodia; and spend a day in a Kerala kitchen with recipes—and traditional cookware—that bring back the flavour of mom's cooking. That's *Harmony* this month, seasoned with love.

—Arati Rajan Menon

I came across *Harmony-Celebrate Age* while looking for organisations to connect with for raising awareness on nursing home abuse. I would like to thank your team for all the hard work you are doing by providing resources to seniors. We at NHAC (Nursing Home Abuse Centre) share a similar mindset and desire. Our mission is simple: to be the top online resource educating the public on the risks of silver abuse in an attempt to save lives and rebuild shattered trust. I believe our website www.nursinghomeabusecenter.org would be a valuable educational resource for your users too. Also, being the director of advocacy at NHAC, I want to share a startling statistic uncovered by us. According to the National Centre on Elder Abuse (NCEA), approximately one in 10 Americans aged 60+ have experienced some form of elder abuse. It is estimated that upwards of 10 million seniors are abused each year. Sad but true.

Ashley Peters
Via email

Somebody once asked, 'Why are grandparents important?' The best answer to this is that grandparents are the world's best educators. They play the special role of providing a sense of continuity and roots to their grandchildren. They are a bundle of hope, pride, kindness, old-world tales, lasting memories, wisdom with magical charm and a golden heart. Grandparents are a delightful blend of laughter and a wealth of knowledge and experience. Sadly, the young generation is too busy to understand this invaluable gift. Thanks to the rat race of competition and success, youngsters lack the time to talk or care for their grandparents. My advice to kids is this—if you are lucky enough to still have your grandparents around, go visit them, cherish them and celebrate life with them. Their love is selfless and



there's nothing that can replace them in your life.

Pompi Saikia
Mumbai

It is true that married children are unable to look after their parents in old age because of their own family pressures. Owing to limited outings as a result of poor health or financial constraints, senior citizens are seen passing time with friends, strangers or even gadgets like the TV or mobile. As per latest reports, silvers are also hiring strangers to help them pass their time—a concept that originated in the West. Though it has its benefits, there is also the risk of seniors being exploited. Unless one lives in a joint family system, the emotional attachment for elders is missing. According to me, the best family structure is where silvers live with their family and spend quality time with them.

Mahesh Kapasi
New Delhi

HITS OF THE MONTH

Our most-read stories in March on

www.harmonyindia.org

1. Yes, we dared!
 - Guts & glory
2. Soul food

inside

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NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



▶ MEDIA WATCH

CYBER QUEEN

She's designed an app that honours the Japanese tradition of Hinamatsuri (Girls' Day) by getting players to arrange their doll displays just so. Meh, you might say. Until you learn that Masako Wakamiya is 81, and learnt how to use a computer only after she turned 60! Impressed? There's so much more. A poster girl for digital inclusion—she calls herself an 'ICT evangelist'—who blogs in Japanese and English, Masako, also known as Ma-chan, established a website for silvers (Mellow Club); runs Mellow Denshoukan, a digital archive of personal experiences of those who lived through World War II and the post-war period; carries out online and offline activities with silver computer clubs around the world; and teaches people how to make artwork using Excel. She's even done a TED talk on active ageing in the digital world: [👉 archive.tedxtokyo.com/en/talk/masako-wakamiya/](https://www.tedxtokyo.com/en/talk/masako-wakamiya/). Respect.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX



Courtesy: Dr Shannon Dowler

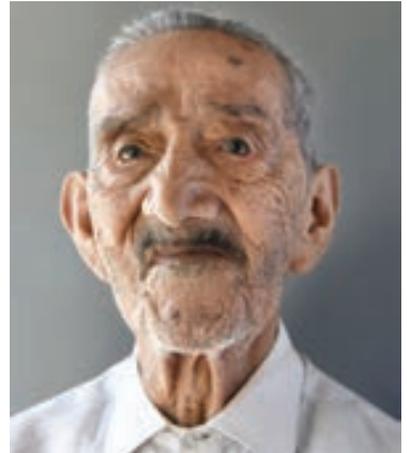
While the heat goes up in the silver bedroom, the flipside is a rapid rise in the rate of sexually transmitted diseases. Using a hip-hop approach, Dr Shannon Dowler from North Carolina in the US—donning the persona of 'RapDk-taD'—has released a video to spread the word: **STDs never get old**. Borrowing heavily lyrically and musically from 1990 rap hit *Ice ice baby*, the track drives home the message loud and clear: *Safe sex baby, safe sex baby, safe sex baby*. "It's tough to tell a 72 year-old they're having their first herpes outbreak," Dowler

tells news website *wlos.com*. "If they've lost their partner, they're suddenly developing a new relationship, and there's a whole slew of STDs they've never heard about. And with so many medications for erectile dysfunction coming on board, we've seen an increase in sexual activity that has mirrored the increase in STDs. I tried to make sure I was celebrating ageing sexuality, and that the song wasn't being critical in any way. It's just that there's a lot to learn." Check it out at www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMFRM1bkEDg



DIARY 100

Fifty-two centenarians charm and beguile you in *Aging Gracefully: Portraits of People Over 100* (Chronicle Books; 120 pages), a paean to active ageing by photographer Karsten Thormaehlen. Stark and striking, the portraits are accompanied by brief bios and the subjects' insight on what makes them tick. Available at [amazon.in](https://www.amazon.in) for ₹ 1251.82.



Photographs by Karsten Thormaehlen

Switch on for AARP

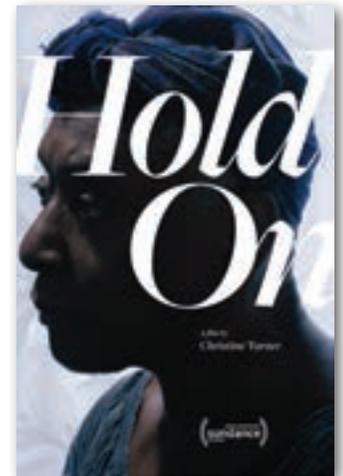
American silver advocacy powerhouse AARP entered the entertainment space with a bang in March with the **launch of AARP Studios**, which will produce and distribute content for people over the age of 50. According to a media release, the bouquet of offerings will include videos, documentaries, virtual reality content and long-form television specials across multiple platforms including film, TV and digital media. Its **inaugural production will be *Dinner with Don*, a 10-episode series starring late comedian Don Rickles** and featuring a star-studded guest list, including Billy Crystal, Robert De Niro, Jimmy Kimmel, Amy Poehler, Vince Vaughn, Paul Rudd, Marisa Tomei and Martin Scorsese. "AARP Studios is all about telling real and relatable stories driven by great characters," says Jeffrey Eagle, head of AARP Studios. "In creating a show with Don Rickles, we give viewers a seat at the table and the chance to hear decades of great show-business stories from one of the most celebrated comedians of all time." The recent demise of Rickles is expected to drive even greater traffic to the show. To learn more about AARP Studios, go to www.youtube.com/user/aarp, www.facebook.com/AARP/videos or videos.aarp.org



Photographs courtesy: Peralta Pictures

MODEL TURN

Pioneering African-American runway model, fashion industry consultant and advocate for diversity on the runway, **Bethann Hardison** dons a new avatar—as actor—in a nine-minute film ***Hold On***. The film, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year, explores the relationship between a young millennial and his ailing grandmother and their attempts to connect with each other. "I found the subject matter of the film very relevant," the 59 year-old tells website huffingtonpost.com. "A lot of people are at that age where they worry about their minds. It's a topic we really don't discuss enough. One of the most undignified things is to lose your mind so there should be greater awareness, education, and compassion around this. The grandmother, who I play, has absolutely no dialogue. That really, really attracted me because I knew I'd have to go very deep to convey emotion." As for real life, she says, "I'm so blessed to be where I am. I am at a point where I can look back at my life, but I'm still vibrant and excited about living. I feel fortunate and that's what also makes me get out to speak, act, write, and more. You haven't seen anything, yet."



Courtesy: Dr V S Natarajan



CARE, AND BE AWARE

Chennai-based Dr V S Natarajan Geriatric Foundation has launched the **Caretakers Enrichment Programme (CEP)**, an education series for caretakers of silvers aimed to equip them with knowledge and technical inputs to fulfil their tasks efficiently, without stress. The first programme of the series, organised at Rajan Eye Care Hospital on 26 March 2017, was

inaugurated by V Amuthavalli (IAS), director of the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Tamil Nadu. In the presence of over 50 participants from 25 old age homes around Chennai, an eminent panel conducted sessions on diseases of the elderly, nursing care, exercises, nutrition, mental health and managing caretaker stress.

CAPITAL MOVE: THE DELHI GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT SILVERS WILL SOON BE ABLE TO RIDE FREE IN DTC AND CLUSTER BUSES. ACCORDING TO TRANSPORT MINISTER SATYENDAR JAIN, THE DECISION AIMS TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO REDUCE AIR POLLUTION IN THE CITY.

GOOGLE DRIVE: Formed to battle age-related diseases and **funded by Google, startup Calico has announced a five-year research collaboration with Massachusetts-based C4 Therapeutics to target and destroy proteins that may help cause cancer.** “We know from decades of translational research that it can be incredibly challenging to find effective pharmacologic inhibitors of many of the biologically well-validated targets, particularly in cancer,” Hal Barron (*see pic*), Calico’s R&D chief, tells media. “Through the alternative strategy of specifically targeting such proteins for degradation, we believe we have the opportunity to identify promising new therapeutics in cancer and in other diseases as well.”



Courtesy: CTSI, UCSF

TO YOUR HEALTH
Hamidia Hospital, Bhopal's largest tertiary care hospital, will soon open a geriatric medicine wing comprising an exclusive OPD and 30-bed ward. The facility will be developed by Gandhi Medical College, which is associated with the hospital and backed by funding by the Union Government. There will be dedicated beds for silvers across specialties—



such as surgery, orthopaedics, psychiatry, urology, ophthalmology and neurology—and a special sample collection centre for laboratory investigation. “The care of elderly not only requires medical treatment but taking care of their mental health through counselling,” Dr Deepak Maravi, superintendent of the hospital tells media. “Specialised teams will be devoted to the medical care of elderly and the number of nurses will also be increased. The overall aim is to improve their health and, thus, quality of life.”

O, CALCUTTA! *The City of Joy is getting ready to welcome 'Snehodiya'. Billed by the media as a 'hotel-like senior home', the complex, located in New Town opposite Swapna Bhor senior citizens' park, will house 94 single-bedded rooms and 55 double-bedded rooms in a G+10 main building and guesthouse. Each floor will have an attendant's room, a common pantry and a spacious sitting place. The ninth and tenth floors will be premium floors. The project is scheduled for completion in 2018.*



Photography by 123RF.com

Centre forward

Here's a welcome example of the Government walking its talk. Following a proposal in the 2015-16 Budget, the **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana, a ₹ 447-crore scheme to provide physical aids and assisted-living devices for silvers living below the poverty line (BPL),** has been launched by the Centre. As media reports suggest, under the scheme, aids and assisted-living devices such as walking sticks, elbow crutches, walkers/crutches, tripods/quadpods, hearing aids, wheelchairs, artificial dentures and spectacles will be provided to eligible elders to address disabilities like locomotor disability, hearing impairment and loss of teeth and vision. The devices, which will conform to guidelines laid down by the Bureau of Indian Standards,

“The aim of the scheme is to bring older people from the economically weaker sections into active life and build an age-friendly society

will be distributed through camps organised in each state.

The scheme was launched at a camp at Nellore district in Andhra Pradesh on 1 April; this will be followed by camps in South Chennai and Kanyakumari. “The aim of the scheme is to bring older people from the economically weaker sections into active life and build an age-friendly society by providing them with devices to maintain near normalcy in morbidity,” goes a statement by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. “There are 10.38 crore senior citizens in the country as

per the Census of 2011 and 5.2 per cent of them suffer from some sort of old age-related disability. It is projected that the number of senior citizens will increase to around 173 million by 2026.”



DISCOUNT ON DEATH?

This is as bizarre—and macabre—as it gets. Following a spate of accidents, in Aichi Prefecture in central Honshu in Japan, silvers are being offered a 15 per cent discount on their funerals if they hand in their driver's license and stay off the roads. According to media reports, the police has tied up with the Heiankaku funeral company, which runs 89 funeral homes, for the scheme. There are an estimated 4.8 million motorists above the age of 75 in Japan.



CYBERABAD CONNECT

In Telangana, Cyberabad Police has launched a dedicated WhatsApp number—**7901114100**—where silvers can share their grievances, suggestions, feedback and partnering ideas. There's also a Facebook page where elders can post their concerns and suggestions: www.facebook.com/Cyberabad-Police-Senior-Citizens

THE YELLOW EFFECT

A bit strange, this. Apparently, Basic Yellow 1 or Thioflavin 2, a common artificial colour, can boost longevity—at least in roundworms. Researchers from the Buck Institute for Research on Ageing in California found that roundworms exposed to the colour were able to double their normal 15 to 20-day lifespan. They believe that the dye possibly prevents protein damage associated with ageing but remain sceptical about the effect on humans owing to the inherent toxicity of such substances. Their study was published in journal Nature Communications.



GENE SPOTTING

A study at Columbia University in New York has identified a genetic defect that speeds up ageing in the brains of silvers. The research team found that people with 'bad' versions of the gene TMEM106B, which manifests itself around the age of 65, had brains up to 12 years older than their peers. This study was published in journal Cell Systems.



Photography by 123RF.com

THINK PINK

Scientists at Northwestern University in the US have found that gentle sound stimulation—or pink noise—can enhance deep sleep in silvers and, thus, safeguard memory. Defined as a type of sound in which every octave carries the same power, or a perfectly consistent frequency, examples of pink noise include rain falling on the pavement, the wind rustling the leaves on a tree or the rush of a waterfall. Their study has been published in journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*.

CLEAN & CLEAR

If you can deep-clean your home, why not your body? According to scientists from the Erasmus University Medical Centre in the Netherlands, **purging the body of 'retired' cells could reverse ageing**. When they removed dormant cells from the body of older mice, their fur re-grew, kidney function improved and they were able to run twice as far as untreated elderly animals, reports London newspaper *The Guardian*. "It was found that these senescent cells secrete a whole load of junk and they're not just bystanders but have a negative effect," says team leader Peter de Keizer. Next up is a safety clinical trial on people suffering from brain tumour. The study has been published in journal *Cell*.

THE KINDNESS DIVIDEND Who knew? Being nice is good for your health! New research suggests that **giving and receiving kindness can actually boost the immune system and lower blood pressure.** As London newspaper *Daily Mail* tells us, in a study at the University of California - Riverside, volunteers were asked to perform five acts of kindness a week for six weeks—such as visiting an elderly relative, paying for someone’s parking or even donating blood. The researchers found that those who performed the acts became happier; the more acts of happiness performed in a single day, the more their happiness intensified. Over time, this happiness translated to lower rates of depression, lower blood pressure and a greater sense of well-being.



Putting your best foot forward is more important than you may think. According to researchers at the Podiatry University Clinic at University of A Coruña in Spain, **wearing the wrong shoes can lead to a host of health problems.** As website *sciencedaily.com* reports, the team studied people with the median age of 75 and found that 83 per cent of them are not wearing proper shoes, opening the door to pain, diminished foot function, loss of balance and an increased risk of falls. “Because of people’s lifestyles at this age, they often use shoes that are harmful to their feet,” says team leader Daniel López López. “This, combined with the appearance of chronic diseases such as obesity, vascular diseases, diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis, causes a worrying increase in foot problems in the elderly.” He recommends that silvers wear wide footwear with adjustable straps and rubber soles and regularly visit a podiatrist.

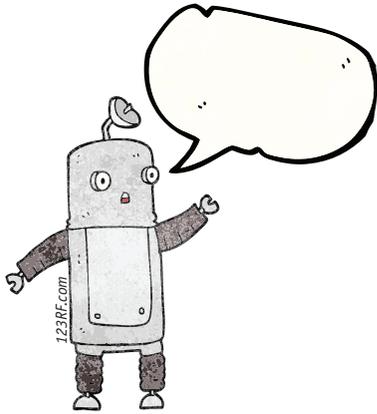
REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

IN WHAT IS BEING HAILED as a ‘giant leap’ for anti-ageing, researchers at the University of New South Wales in Sydney have made **a groundbreaking discovery that paves the way to reverse ageing.**

As website *sciencedaily.com* reports, in their experiments with mice, the team has identified a critical step in the molecular process that allows cells to repair damaged DNA, making the cells of old mice indistinguishable from young mice after just one week of treatment. Having identified the metabolite NAD+, naturally present in the body, as a regulator in DNA repair, they treated the mice with an NAD+ booster called NMN, which improved their cells’ ability to repair DNA damage caused by radiation exposure or old age. Human trials of NMN therapy will begin in a few months. “This is the closest we are to a safe and effective anti-ageing drug that’s perhaps only three to five years away from being on the market if the trials go well,” says team leader David Sinclair of the UNSW School of Medical Sciences and Harvard Medical School. The study has been published in journal *Science*.

“*This is the closest we are to a safe and effective anti-ageing drug that’s perhaps only three to five years away from being on the market if the trials go well*”

WEAR AND WALK



A LESSON IN SHAKESPEARE

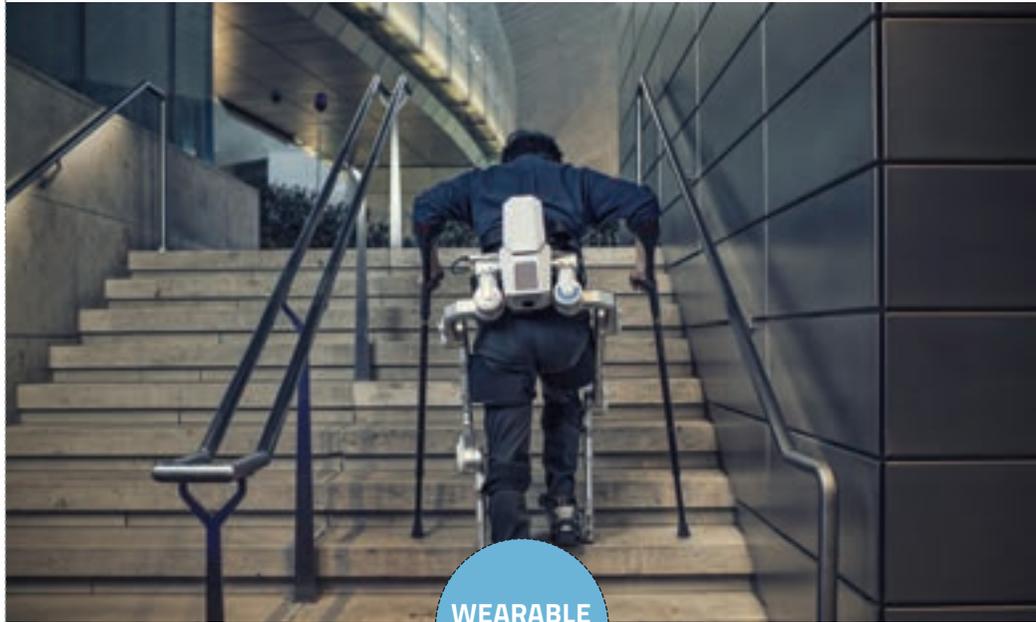
IN AN INTRIGUING MARRIAGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS, THE UT ARLINGTON RESEARCH INSTITUTE (UTARI) IN FORT WORTH, TEXAS, IS USING 'PARTICIPATORY ART' TO GET ROBOTS TO INTERACT WITH SILVERS AND ENHANCE THEIR COGNITIVE SKILLS.

AS PART OF THIS PROJECT, ROBOTS HAVE BEEN PROGRAMMED TO RECITE

SHAKESPEARE'S

SONNET 18 ALONG WITH

A HUMAN. "WE WANT THE OLDER ADULTS TO FEEL ENGAGED IN AN ART FORM," DR JULIENNE GREER, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL ROBOTICS AND PERFORMANCE AT UTARI TELLS NEWS WEBSITE *DFW.CBSLOCAL.COM*. "WE ARE VERY HOPEFUL THE SAME POSITIVE RESULTS THAT HAPPEN IN A HUMAN-TO-HUMAN MODEL WILL HAPPEN WITH THE HUMAN-TO-ROBOT MODEL."



WEARABLE
ROBOT



Courtesy: Hyundai

It doesn't just do cars. At this year's edition of technology tradeshow CES, Hyundai unveiled **medical exoskeleton H-MEX, a wearable robot aimed to restore mobility.** As website *entrepreneur.com* tells us, the battery-powered device, which is strapped on like a brace, is designed for people with lower spinal cord injuries. After calculating their walking pace, stride length and torso tilting angle, it renders "individually tailored gait pattern adjustment", giving them the ability to sit down, stand up,

move, turn around and even walk up or down stairs.

Other devices in the works are H-WEX, a waist exoskeleton that will provide upper body and hip support, and the Hyundai Universal Medical Assist (HUMA) for silvers with limited mobility. Extending up the back for greater support, HUMA can support up to 40 kg of a wearer's weight and run at up to 12 km per hour. All devices are adjustable to fit people of different sizes. As for when these will become available, the folks at Hyundai have left us all guessing.

Phone a friend

Hands-free just got a whole new meaning. British company Amplicomms has unveiled the **PowerTel M9500 5" smartphone for silvers**. Its standout feature: it can be operated remotely by family members from their own phone/tablet/computer if the user pushes a 'help' button. This enables the family to change the settings on the phone, troubleshoot snags, send text messages and emails on the user's behalf, and download

useful apps for the user. They can also check the battery level of the phone and remind the user to put it on charge. "We found smartphones were not being used by the elderly until a family member was able to help," Ran Meyrav of Amplicomms tells media. "Developing remote access solves that problem." Other highlights of the phone include an extra loud ring tone up to 90 dB, a boost function to enhance speaker volume with a physical key up to 40 dB, and



Courtesy: Amplicomms

very efficient hearing aid compatibility, making it a great choice for the hearing impaired. The phone is available in the UK for £ 180 (about ₹ 14,600). To learn more, go to amplicomms.com/index.php?en_powertel-m9500



MIT-Pune

L-R: Sanket Chellu Gupta, Krishnamohan Manmohan, Dr Vrushali Kulkarni (project guide), Rishav Dasgupta, Astitva Shah from MIT-Pune

HERE'S A DESI TWIST on the robot caregiver. Final-year computer engineering students at Maharashtra Institute of Technology (MIT) in Pune have developed **Chintu, a cognitive assistant for silvers**. As *The Economic Times* reports, Chintu, who is 58-cm tall and weighs about 5 kg, can remind you to take your meds, sound an alarm in case of an emergency, chat with you when you're bored, and even break into dance when you're feeling the blues. In fact, the robot's abilities include being able to sense the mood of the silver (using a tone analyser) and respond accordingly, as well as reading text from a newspaper. Developed through a ₹ 1 million grant from IBM's global Shared University Research programme, the robot's shell comes from French firm SoftBank Robotics, but the actual 'brains' of the robot were developed by the MIT students using IBM's cognitive platform Watson and the IBM Bluemix Cloud platform Watson. The prototype robot will now be refined further to develop a full-fledged solution.

Digital dos

CALLING ON DESIGNERS to make their digital devices and programmes more inclusive, the Singapore government has released its 'SS 618 guidelines'. As website www.todayonline.com reports, the guidelines, part of a 'Standards Roadmap for the Silver Industry', were developed based on findings from a study of 700 elders aged between 55 and 75. Here are some examples:

- Use at least a 12-point font on a 15-inch screen
- Minimise text on web pages with low colour contrast
- Avoid buttons that require too much precision to click on
- Scale fonts according to the size of the user's device
- Make websites easy to navigate; for instance, use buttons that cover the width of the screen so silvers can select them easily
- Provide users different ways of asking for help; such as recording their queries on video.

DIPPY & DAVE!

A budding bromance between Dippy, the arthritic penguin, and his keeper Dave is the talk of Great Yarmouth Sea Life Centre in the UK. Featured in the January 2016 issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, Dippy is one of 15 Humboldt penguins at the Centre, all captive bred. As well as entertaining visitors with their antics, they help raise awareness of penguin conservation needs.

Dippy arrived at the centre a year ago, at 21 years of age, and is the senior bird in the flock. While most of his feathered friends have paired up, Dippy has proved to be more of a 'people penguin'. In fact, one person has become the focus of his affections: 57 year-old aquarist Dave Warriner, who readily admits that tending to Dippy and his penguin entourage is the favourite of his many daily duties at the Centre.

Dippy seems very happy when any of his human guardians enter his enclosure, but it is only Dave who gets an enthusiastic braying call, and then a swift waddle approach to receive a friendly tickle. "I must confess I've developed a bit of a soft spot for him," says Dave. "It's the way he lifts his little wings so I can tickle him underneath" Dave has to rake the sand in the enclosure and give things a general sprucing up, including brushing down the sloping rock that is Dippy's very own disabled access ramp into the penguin colony's pool.

Before joining the Sea Life staff 20 years ago, Dave worked backstage at the end of the pier theatre on Britannia Pier, a job that enabled him to hobnob with celebrities. Ask him who his favourite 'star' is, however, and there's no longer any contest: Dippy wins, feathers down!

- The Humboldt penguin or *Spheniscus humboldti* (also termed Chilean penguin, Peruvian penguin, or patranca) is a South American penguin that breeds in coastal Chile, Peru and Argentina.
- It is named after the cold water current it swims in, which is named after explorer Alexander von Humboldt.
- Humboldts have been reduced to an estimated 10,000 pairs in their native habitats, mainly because of overfishing of their favourite food fish.
- Did you know Humboldt penguins can blush? When they get too hot (it can get up to 108 F where they live), they have to avoid over-heating. So they flush pink on their face, wings and feet. This sheds body heat by sending blood to the bare part of their bodies.



Play your cards right. A regular game of bridge can keep your mind sharp well into the silver years. Played by an estimated 220 million people, including luminaries like Bill Gates, Martina Navratilova and Warren Buffet, it is considered the most popular card game in the world. Intelligent, exciting and fun, bridge is perfect for silvers as it requires no infrastructure, is cheap (all it takes is a pack of cards!), and is proven to pack a host of mind-body benefits—from battling depression and dementia to stimulating the brain, improving memory and even boosting the immune system through its stimulation of the dorsolateral cortex. Time to get your game on!



Then: Plastic bags Now: Decorative wreath



RECYCLING FACTS

- A 50-micron plastic bag has 10 times the plastic of a 5-micron bag. Therefore, when cities and states around the country ban the use of flimsy plastic bags, they do so with the hope that citizens, who have to pay to use a thicker bag, will use fewer bags and hold on to each bag longer.
- Lightweight plastic bags (less than 50 microns) can be mistaken for flowers by animals. Plastic bags break down, but never biodegrade. As a result, any toxic additives they may contain—including flame retardants, antimicrobials, and plasticisers—will directly affect the endocrine systems of organisms, which control almost every cell in the body.



Here's a wonderful way to not let your old and torn plastic bags go to waste—you'll need plenty of colourful plastic bags collected over a period, scissors, pliers and a metal hanger gone bad. You can even use leftover metal string from your last DIY project. Using the pliers, stretch the ruined hanger to form a big circle and bend the hook of the hanger to form a small loop on the top. This is used to hang up the wreath. Cut your plastic bags into small rectangles (about 5 inch × 2 inch).

Starting from one end of the bent hook, tie each rectangle to the metal wire in two firm knots to form a little bow. Do this over and over again, on alternate ends. This should keep you engaged for a while as a wreath looks best when it is fluffy and full, so you'll need a lot of strips! Proceed gently, pushing the strips together as you fill out the space in between. Repeat the process for the bent hook, and voila! Your decorative wreath can be hung inside or outside your house.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. **COLOUR-CODE THE PLASTIC YOU USE DEPENDING ON THE SEASON DURING WHICH YOU ARE MAKING IT—USE GREEN AND RED PLASTIC FOR CHRISTMAS, WARM COLOURS FOR SUMMER AND GO ALL OUT IF YOU ARE IN TIME FOR DIWALI. YOU CAN EVEN BEND YOUR HANGER IN THE SHAPE OF A HEART, SQUARE OR BIRD IF YOU ARE FEELING PARTICULARLY ADVENTUROUS.**
2. **LARGER SQUARES CAN BE WRAPPED AROUND LOOPS OF FLEXIBLE WIRE AND BUNCHED TOGETHER TO MAKE DECORATIVE FLOWERS. WITH ENOUGH OF THEM, YOU CAN MAKE A WONDERFUL BOUQUET FOR YOUR SWEETHEART!**



Stars of the STAGE

Photographs by Photomist

The silver years are the time to... well... forget old age and wake up the child in you! Indeed, this was the spirit of Umang 2017, the annual talent show for silvers organised by the Silver Innings Foundation in association with the Rotary Club of Mumbai, Nariman Point; Rotaract Club of Rizvi Law College; and Inner Wheel Club of Mumbai, Nariman Point. More than 130 participants between the ages of 50 and 79 showcased their talents to an audience of over 1,000 at the Birla Matoshree Sabhagriha Auditorium, Mumbai, on 25 March.

Being the 10th anniversary this year, the themes of the event were bigger, bolder and stronger, while the solo performances were daring and entertaining. Reminiscing about the humble beginnings of the event, Silver Innings founder-president Sailesh Mishra says, "The first event, though small, had a ripple effect. We could feel the energy of our silvers and their hunger to perform. And in a

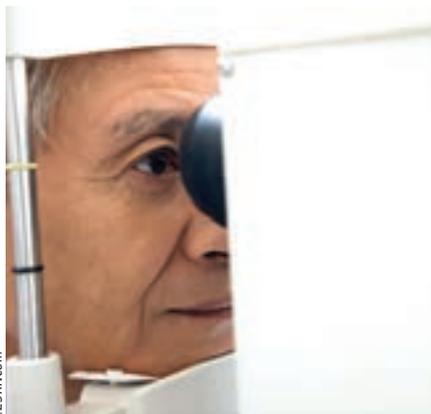
knee-jerk reaction, I announced that Umang would be held every year without realising that the event would be much sought-after one day!"

Speaking of the popularity of the event, Mishra adds, "With the number of participants increasing every year, this year we had to slash the standard time limit for performances from eight minutes to five minutes per act. In fact, owing to time constraints, we had to restrict the number of participating groups to 25. I feel bad about that though. In future, we could have multiple performances in different parts of the city, so more silvers can find a stage to show off their talent."

Delighted with the growing enthusiasm of the elderly in participating in the event, Mandar Sharma, president of the Rotary Club of Mumbai, Nariman Point, says, "We would encourage many more to join and take this event to higher levels."



Clockwise from top left: With brooms in hand, the 'Rockstars' group grooves to the Swachch Bharat anthem, *Mere dil se aa rahi awaaz*; Chandra Subramaniam, from the Adhata Trust, renders a unique solo song in both male and female voices; an intergenerational performance to the song *Kalam ko salaam*, a tribute to the former president of India Dr A P J Abdul Kalam; Bhadra Shah, 68, shakes a leg with her differently abled husband Ashwin, 63, to *Jab koi baat bigad jaye*. Opposite page: Divya Naik, 61, depicts the character of the clown from the film *Mera Naam Joker* in a musical mono-act, which tugged at the audience's heartstrings



123RF.com

EYES WIDE OPEN

It was an eye-opener of sorts for the members of Samanvaya, a senior citizens' association based in Andheri, Mumbai, when Harmony for Silvers Foundation held a free eye camp on 19 April in association with leading optician Lawrence & Mayo. Approximately 60 silvers availed of the opportunity to get their eyes screened for visual acuity and colour blindness. "For people above 60, eye screening is a must every six months," says Agnelo Philip Rodrigues, business development manager, Lawrence & Mayo. "During summer, silvers need to protect their eyes by avoiding sunlight. Silvers who have undergone cataract surgery need to take more precautions like wearing sunglasses while travelling," says senior optometrist Ravindra Dattatrey Kore, who conducted the screening test. "The camp was a great opportunity for us to raise awareness on eye health and vision care."



FAT CHANCE

What do avocado, nuts and olive oil have in common? All of them are sources of unsaturated fatty acids (UFAs) or 'good cholesterol' and are bad cholesterol-busters. But could these healthy foods be linked to Alzheimer's? Yes and no. An international research team with scientists from King's College, London, and the National Institute on Ageing, US, analysed **how fatty acid metabolites in the brain tissue behaved in healthy seniors** who participated in the Baltimore Longitudinal Study on Ageing. The participants were assessed cognitively in the year prior to their deaths, and their brains were tested for neuropathologies via an autopsy. The findings were startling: **six UFAs found in the brain tissue correlated with Alzheimer's** and affected the participants' cognitive abilities. Wait a minute, aren't UFAs supposed to be healthy? The research team explains that it is not UFAs per se but dysregulation in their metabolism that contributes to the development of Alzheimer's. The study was published in *PLOS Medicine*.



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* Combined 1 year disease outcome
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TREE CHEERS

THERE'S HOPE FOR CANCER PATIENTS AND IT COMES FROM A REMOTE PART OF THE PLANET. TURNS OUT **CONIFER TREES FROM THE COLD REACHES OF SIBERIA CONTAIN COMPOUNDS CALLED TERPENOIDS, WHICH CAN KILL CANCER CELLS.** SCIENTISTS AT THE ENGELHARDT INSTITUTE OF MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND MIPT IN MOSCOW HAVE DISCOVERED THAT SIBERIAN FIR TERPENOIDS CAN 'SWITCH ON' GENES THAT HALT THE SPREAD OF TUMOURS. THE EXPERIMENT FOCUSED ON COLON CANCER CELLS AND PANCREATIC CANCER CELLS AND WAS CONDUCTED IN A PETRI DISH. THEIR RESEARCH ON NORMAL CELLS REVEALED THAT THIS GROUP OF TERPENOIDS ALSO 'SWITCH ON' GENES ASSOCIATED WITH LONGEVITY IN OLD CELLS. THIS MEANS—YOU GUESSED IT!—SCIENTISTS MAY HAVE ALSO STUMBLED UPON THE PROVERBIAL FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY WERE PUBLISHED IN BIOMEDICAL JOURNAL *ONCOTARGET*.

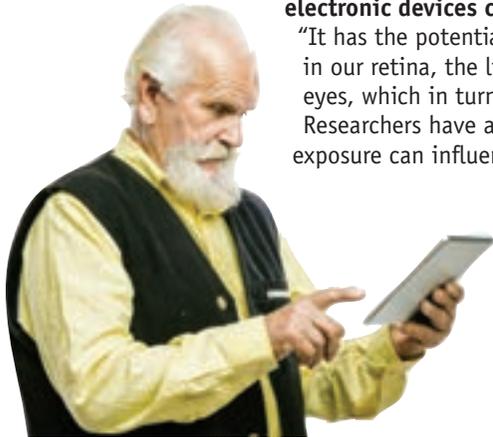
Photographs by 123RF.com

NO BENEFIT FOR CANCER

These drugs may do a great job of zapping cholesterol in your liver—but **statins cannot lower the risk of developing cancer, as previously believed.** Researchers at Imperial College and University College in London have turned this widely held belief on its head with a study of 846 cancer patients from 91 hospitals. The patients randomly received either a statin or a placebo alongside their usual chemotherapy. While the cholesterol-busters had no adverse effects on the patients, they did not benefit them either. The study was published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.

Banish the blues

Addiction to smartphones, tablets and laptops is no longer a scourge among distractible youngsters alone. Seniors who have fallen prey to the joys of WhatsApp and other social media be warned: it could cost you your health. In an interview to *ET tech*, Dr Santosh Chidangil, head of the Department of Atomic and Molecular Physics, Manipal University, Karnataka, warns that **the artificial blue light emitted by electronic devices can lead to retinal damage.**



“It has the potential to damage the photoreceptors in our retina, the light-sensitive part of the eyes, which in turn slowly leads to blindness.” Researchers have also shown that long-term exposure can influence hormone secretion, heart rate, alertness, sleep propensity, body temperature and even gene expression. Unlike many health conditions that are difficult to treat, curing this one is literally in your hands—or out of it, as the case may be.

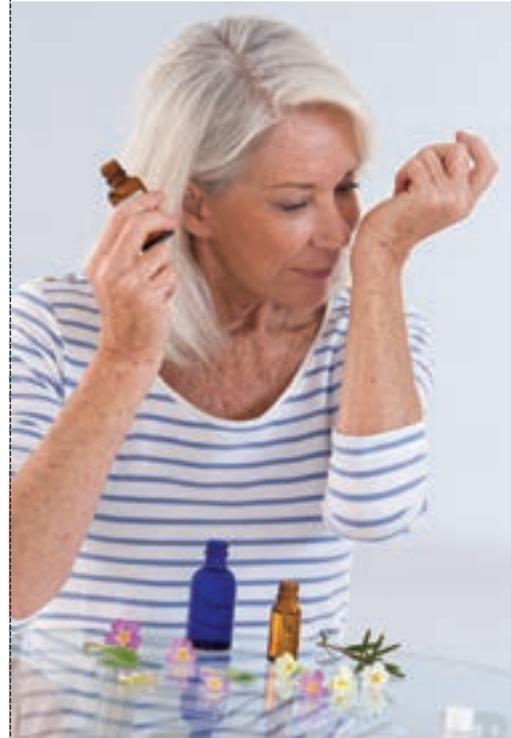
More power to veggies

‘Eat your veggies’ is a much hated cliché even though vegetables and fruit can reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s, heart disease and cancer. Now, researchers are assigning even more power to these foods. They say **three portions of vegetables and two portions of fruit a day can keep dementia at bay.** According to the WHO, that’s a daily intake of 400 gm of veggies and fruit. Researchers at the Department of Psychiatry at

Chinese University, Hong Kong, analysed the health and diet of 17,700 seniors over six years. They found that following the WHO recommendation reduced the risk of dementia. According to them, vegetables and fruit contain vitamins B and E and other nutrients with antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties that retard processes that play a role in dementia. The study was published in journal *Age and Ageing*.



SMELLY NEWS



Wake up and smell the coffee—and for those who can’t, there’s more bad news. A new study claims that **people who lose their sense of smell, or olfaction, in middle or old age risk early death.** Researchers from Stockholm University, Sweden, studied 1,774 adults aged 40 to 90 for 10 years and found that those who had complete olfactory loss were at a 19 per cent higher risk of death than those with a normal sense of smell. The results contribute to growing evidence that olfactory assessments provide an insight into brain health and that the nerves that control olfaction are the first to be damaged in cognitive decline. The study was published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.



Ruskin Bond



Pankaj Kapur

BIRTHDAYS

Actor **Aruna Irani** turns 65 on 3 May.

American singer, songwriter, dancer and actor **Janet Jackson** turns 51 on 16 May.

Indian author of British descent **Ruskin Bond** turns 83 on 19 May.

Actor, producer and singer **Mohanlal Nair** turns 57 on 21 May.

Theatre, television and film actor **Pankaj Kapur** turns 63 on 29 May.

Actor and politician **Paresh Rawal** turns 67 on 30 May.

IN PASSING

Film historian **Robert Osborne**, the primetime host of Turner Classic movies, died on 6 March. He was 84.

Renowned Hindustani classical vocalist Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan **Kishori Amonkar** passed away on 3 April after a brief illness. She was 84.

Standup comedian, actor and author **Don Rickles** died of kidney failure on 6 April. He was 90.

Veteran soap opera actor **Peter Hansen**, who won an Emmy award in 1979 for his performance in *General Hospital* passed away on 9 April. He was 95.

Tony-winning singer and actor **Linda Hopkins** passed away on 10 April in Milwaukee. She was 92.

Performer on *The Chappelle Show* and brother of Eddie Murphy **Charlie Murphy** died after a battle with leukaemia on 12 April. He was 57.

MILESTONES

President Pranab Mukherjee conferred the Padma awards at a civil investiture ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on 13 April. Spiritual leader **Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev** and singer **Yesudas** received the Padma Vibhushan; classical music instrumentalist **Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt**, writer and teacher **Dr Devi Prasad Dwivedi** and others received the Padma Bhushan; and Indian actor-director **Sadhu Meher**, celebrity chef **Sanjeev Kapoor**, film journalist **Bhawana Somaya** and others received the Padma Shri.

Founder-director of SHARAN (Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature) **Dr Nandita Shah** received the Nari Shakti Puraskar 2016 from the President of India on 8 March at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The award was conferred for her dedicated service to spread awareness about food as medicine and her work towards animal welfare and environment conservation.

Dinodia Photo Library



OVERHEARD

“As you get older, caution sets in and it can put you off trying new things because you worry about going out of your comfort zone. It’s all too easy to stick to the same food, watch the same TV programmes, and only mix with the friends you’ve known for years because it feels safe, familiar and comfortable. However, since my 70th birthday last year, I’ve made a list at the end of every day to check that I’ve said ‘yes’ to more things than I’ve turned down. Our generation is the one that has redefined ageing every decade of our years. Being 70 is no longer the start of the end of your life, it’s just a stop on the journey, and I want to enjoy every day of it.”

—British writer, former editor and TV personality **Janet Street-Porter**, who is supporting **WE100**, a campaign that aims to prepare society to live 100 healthy years, speaking to **The Belfast Telegraph**

Harmony-Celebrate Age GOES DIGITAL

Harmony-Celebrate Age

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DISCOVERING MY TRUE SELF

I wanted to be a doctor ever since I was a child. Being a very studious kid, I wasn't surprised that I had to change my glasses every two years. Then, in 1984, I aced the medical entrance exams conducted by the Tamil Nadu government. My dream had just begun.

I had everything I could ever want. I had a loving family and I was pursuing my dream, an MBBS degree, at the Tanjore Medical College. As the years rolled by, I was ready to take on my next milestone: a postgraduate degree from CMC College in Vellore. It seemed like nothing could go wrong. Yet everything did.

A premedical check-up showed that I had progressive myopia. In layman terms, that means I was losing my eyesight slowly. For starters, it meant I couldn't do my post-graduation without aggravating the problem. It was devastating to realise that my ambitions had turned to dust.

As predicted, I lost my sight in one eye and my other eye was slowly deteriorating too. When I lost my father to liver disease, it felt like the final blow. Luckily, instead of plunging into depression, I found myself drawn to spirituality. One day, the words of Swami Vivekananda, whose works I had read back in college, came back to me, "Every human being is potentially divine; the purpose of life is to uncover that divinity." And so I began my journey of self-exploration.

I joined the women's wing of the Ramakrishna Mission. With my medical background, I could look after their free dispensary while attending classes. I later joined the Chinmaya Mission, where I volunteered with their dispensary as well. In Vedanta, there's something called Karma Yoga, where you are required to give selfless love. So, what started as a spiritual practice in the dispensary changed my very outlook. When I reached out to the poor, the joy I felt was boundless.



Deteriorating eyesight did not prevent Dr Balambal from taking up holistic healing

I realised that my eye problem was a blessing in disguise. Otherwise, I would have had a busy life, chasing money and worrying about my own family and kids. Now, here I was happily working day and night, just earning enough to meet my own expenses. While my mornings were spent in voluntary work, I ran a clinic in the evenings to foot my bills.

In 2007, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. I gave up everything and took care of her before she died two years later. I returned to the *mutt* but my own health was poor, so I gave up clinical duties and took on counselling instead.

All these years, my patients had always said that I was a good listener so here I was. I consider myself a healer instead of a doctor; for every person who comes my way, I do not just look into their physical ailments but at how I can aid them holistically—the soul, mind and body.

I am now completely blind in one eye and have only 50-per-cent vision in the other eye, which is also deteriorating. I live in my ancestral home in Chennai and volunteer with a college students' association for the blind, an initiative for women with disabilities and at a senior citizens' home. As someone who has undergone their fair

share of trials, it is much easier for me to help people work through their challenges.

I am now 51 and most people my age face only one major problem—their kids have settled down, their careers are over and they have nothing to look forward to in life. This is because we are programmed to believe that we should get educated, get married and nurture kids. Obviously, when this agenda is complete, you feel unloved.

We are programmed to be selfish. Instead, we need to think of the universe as one family. We should look at the infinite possibilities our life has. We turn to God only when we face crises; instead, we should invest our time discovering our true identity, our true selves.

—Dr S Balambal, Chennai

KEEP LEARNING

If someone had told me six years ago that I would be driving myself to the bank and taking care of investments myself, I would have said they were joking! Perhaps they saw something in me that I didn't, for today, I not only manage my own accounts, but file tax returns all by myself!

I have always lived a privileged life. Growing up in Solan near Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, I was the youngest of five siblings and was pampered a lot. I got married at the age of 19. And as I was the first daughter-in-law in the family, I was pampered by my in-laws too. It was a cushy life.

The good thing is that, even though I was a housewife, I had a penchant for learning new things and soaking in

Sood enjoys a holiday in Kerala with her grandson



new experiences. I learnt to swim and drive in my 40s while my husband took care of the day-to-day activities of our lives. But I barely drove; he used to drive me around. He was the chairman of the Industrial Association, Khopoli, and used to head a brewery, near Lonavala.

When our son and daughter moved to Australia for further studies, I didn't take it very well. As my husband was away at work, I used to feel lonely and bored. Hence, in 2003-04, I opened my own boutique called Bindiya's as I was always interested in women's fashion. Many looked at me askance as the wife of a senior officer didn't generally dabble in such things!

It didn't deter me. In fact, my husband was a sport and gave me plenty of encouragement. Five years later, he retired and we got involved in the real-estate business in Lonavala. He was a chartered accountant by profession and used to look after the legal aspect of our business while I looked after the commercial part.

My life took a sudden turn when my husband died in a road accident in 2010. That left me devastated and directionless. At that time, my son came across and stayed with me for some time but I soon realised I could not be dependent on anyone any more.

As we had made investments in properties in and around Lonavala, I began to take care of them. Slowly, I started learning to manage my accounts and investments. I also brushed up on my driving skills, and now I go everywhere on my own in Lonavala.

I also have a great circle of friends, who love me a lot. I lead a good life and don't brood over the past. I am open to new experiences. One of the most memorable experiences to have taken place while visiting my son in Perth, Australia, two years ago—I actually did some snorkelling! It was an amazing experience and it was great to see things from a fresh, new perspective. I had done some kayaking when my children were in college and I recently took up rock climbing while I was in the Blue Mountains in Sydney, Australia, along with my son. Even though it was for beginners, the rock looked just like one of the many challenges I had to face in my life, and I was determined to conquer it.

Finally, I want to tell everyone that they should seize life with both hands, embrace it and enjoy it. And always stay open to learning new things rather than sitting in the comfort of your home.

—Swaroop Sood, Lonavala



Roll & rock

The massage roller can be used as a yoga prop and a standalone healing accessory



Photographs by 123RF.com

The latest prop in the market for both advanced students and beginners is the massage roller. Though modern-day materials are used to create it—Soft Foam or hard faux leather or hard foam—it borrows from acupressure massage rollers made from wood, seen widely in the traditional woodcraft of this country. These also surely belong to other Eastern coun-

tries where massage has originated, with emphasis on energy points and release of blockages. They have soft or raised projections that help knead energy points and release tight muscles. Even when you do not use them as yoga props, they weave their own healing magic as massage accessories.

If you are new to the massage roller, you may want to be cautious with it

while trying challenging movements that require balance. Test it out gently by placing under the legs and rolling the heel of that stretched foot forward and backwards, so the roller kneads the back of the leg muscles. You can try this at the hips in a similar fashion. Using it to prop the chest up in poses like the fish will help you understand the back flexibility needed in such classic poses. As explained, the

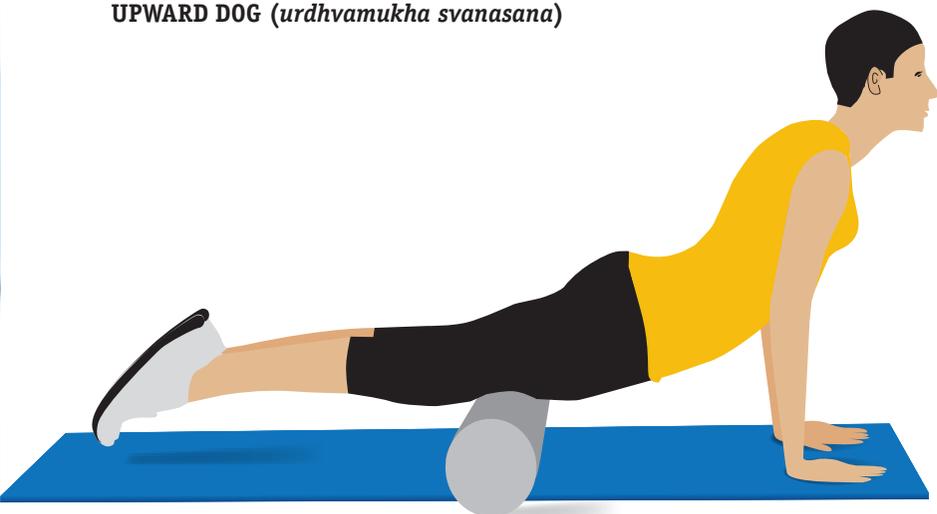
kneading effect of the massage roller is more intensely experienced if the roller is used under the part of the body that requires impact.

You can play around with the roller. If you find it difficult to control the roll, keep a cushion or a yoga block to prevent it from moving too far ahead. This may be particularly important for beginners. There are some precautions you must take while using these rollers. If you have an injured part of

the body, do not use the roller there; it will inflame it further. Do not roll too fast. If it feels hard or painful, avoid running the roller there. Some of us have less padding in some parts, and that will set off nerves firing. Do not use directly on those spots where there is less flesh—it will feel extra sensitive. Massage in one spot for around 20 seconds or so only, even though it may feel tempting to extend the duration. Do not load the body weight on the roller; just prop it firmly.

YOGIC MOVES

UPWARD DOG (*urdhvamukha svanasana*)



Go on your fours, as in a cat stretch. Keep the roller under your body. Walk the feet a bit back, so as to rest the thighs on the rollers. Tuck toes into the ground. Firm your grip at the palms, straighten arms further. Look ahead. If the roller is high, you can even lift the toes off the floor. Initially gauge your control over the pose. If confident, roll backwards and forwards a few times, so the large muscles at the thighs feel kneaded gently. Instead of resting

the thigh too hard on the roller, support yourself more firmly at the arms, just ensuring the thighs are firmly placed on the roller. Breathe normally throughout.

Benefits: This builds stamina and tones both the arms and legs powerfully. It impacts the voice box, keeping the voice young, and gently massages the thyroid at the throat. It also boosts immunity, helps intensify the challenge of balance, and impacts the mind powerfully in terms of impulse control.



KREEDA YOGA

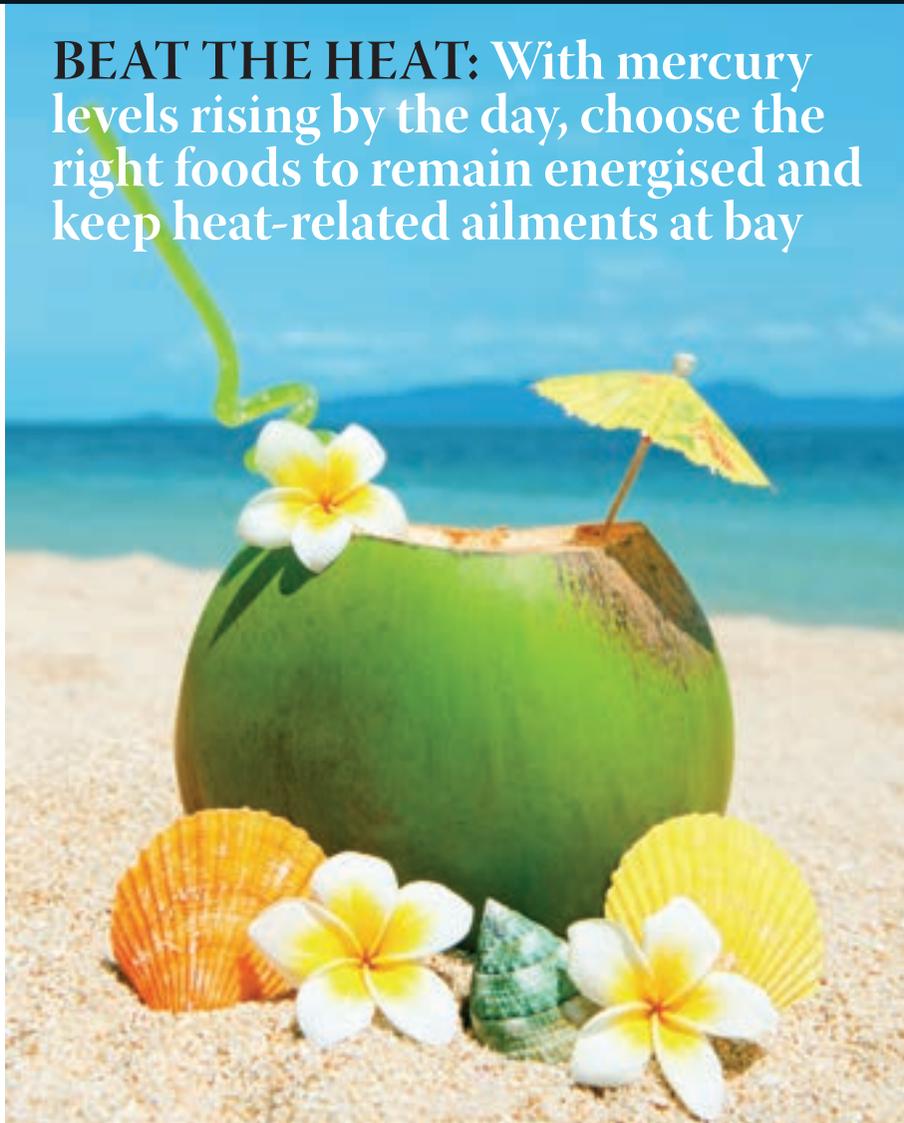
GANDHARI

Gandhari was the wife of Dhritarashtra, the blind king of Hastinapura, and the mother of the Kauravas. To share the debility of her husband, she wore a blindfold that deprived her of the power of sight. This game is named after her. The players are divided into teams of two—there should be at least five teams. One member of each team is blindfolded while the other must guide them with precise instructions from the beginning of a room with obstacles (such as chairs and other players) to the end. The moment the blindfolded person bumps into something or someone, they have to start again. The team that finishes first wins the race. This game encourages teamwork and improves coordination and the ability to listen to another person.

Shameem Akhtar 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)



BEAT THE HEAT: With mercury levels rising by the day, choose the right foods to remain energised and keep heat-related ailments at bay



Photographs by 123RF.com

When temperatures soar, energy levels drop. In summer, we become susceptible to troubles such as heat stroke and diarrhoea that cause major electrolyte losses. Once the electrolyte balance drops, the body feels weak and reaches out for sugary drinks. However, electrolyte loss can be replenished with foods that are high in water content as well as natural salt and sugar. As the temperature sizzles, the body needs cooling—internal and external. Traditional

Indian physicians used to categorise foods as heating or cooling foods and many people in India still follow this. The best way is to eat according to the seasons, as nature has its reasons! Unfortunately, 'modern' thinking often eschews these principles, leading to an imbalance in energy chakras and causing lethargy and diseases.

Change your dietary habits

To manage imbalance in chakras and prevent the body from summer

ailments, it's important to make some changes in your food habits. Eat what is naturally available in the summer. During summer, the body loses a lot of water through sweat, causing dehydration. So drink enough water to cool your body. In fact, water is the first thing you should ingest when you wake up, and you must drink it throughout the day as well. While cooling your body, it is also your basic medium of transport for everything, from vitamins and minerals to all bodily nutrients.

Add fruits to your diet

Fruits like watermelon and mango are perfect for the summer. Both fruits are delectable, refreshing and satisfy your sweet cravings. Watermelons are not only a great pick-me-up on a hot summer day but thirst-quenchers as they are packed with some of the most important antioxidants in nature. What's more, their calorie content is almost negligible. A good serving of chilled watermelon is the perfect way to beat the summer heat and boost your immunity. Melons, or cantaloupes, are also known to be among the most cooling fruits. In addition to this, the seeds of the melon are able to clear phlegm and benefit the intestines.

Synonymous with summer, the mango is the most misunderstood fruit! It is available exclusively in summer for a reason. Extremely healthy with zero fat, mangoes are rich in Vitamin C, beta-carotene, natural sugar and fibre. The deep orange colour indicates how rich they are in Vitamin A too. They keep you fuller for longer and prevent constipation.

You can also add black jamun to your diet in summer and lychee towards the end of the season.

Boost your fluid intake

Switch to green tea or herbal tea for your daily dose of caffeine. Green tea contains a plethora of antioxidants. In between, keep yourself revived with lemon water with a dash of rock salt and roasted and ground cumin (*jeera*) seeds.

With their high Vitamin C content, lemons strengthen the immune system and prevent heat stroke. Also, they are alkaline on digesting, thus

being a great acidity-counter. You could also opt for coconut water, which, owing to its high potassium, natural electrolytes and mineral content, replenishes the minerals that get lost during perspiration. In fact, coconut water is considered a wonder food and called the 'fluid of life.' An oral rehydration medium, it is instantaneously refreshing, subtly sweet, keeps the body cool and contains a host of minerals that are excellent for the hair and skin. Further, application of coconut water on the body prevents prickly heat and boils and gets heat rashes to subside.

Whip up some buttermilk with yoghurt, mint, coriander, ginger, roasted cumin powder and salt mixed with chilled water—it's a fab desi way to cool your body. Those who suffer irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a common ailment, can have yoghurt to soothe the stomach

Whip up some buttermilk with yoghurt, mint, coriander, ginger, roasted cumin powder and salt mixed with chilled water—it's a fab desi way to cool your body this season. The bacterium in yoghurt helps make valuable B vitamins, protein, calcium and phosphorous that are more easily absorbed by the digestive system. Those who suffer irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a common ailment in summer, can have yoghurt to soothe the stomach. It is also a good cure for summer diarrhoea. In addition, as sweating causes a lot of mineral loss, rock salt will help.

Choose the right foods

Remember to start your meals with a fresh salad—finely chopped or grated, so it is easy to chew and digest. This will, again, keep the water content high in your body. Cut up some tomatoes, cucumbers and onions and garnish with lemon juice. Cucumbers contain 90 per cent water and zero per cent fat. Tomatoes are natural antioxidants, high in water content with zero fat. And onions are famously known for their cooling property. Combine these with roti, rice, buttermilk and dal for added benefits to the body.

While salads are important, you need your share of cooked vegetables as well. You can have the entire gourd family—from white gourd and pumpkin to snake gourd and bitter gourd—in summer.

Gourds are excellent for heart health, good for diabetics and light on the digestive system. Their fibre content helps in digestion and they cool the body too. Some also have anti-malarial and anti-viral properties.



COOLING RECIPES

WATERMELON SOUP

Serves: 4; preparation time: 15 minutes

This is an interesting twist to the refreshing fruit that is sure to entice your taste buds.

Ingredients

- Watermelon: 250 gm; cut into cubes
- Red chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Garam masala: 1 tsp
- Curry leaves: 4-5
- Ghee: ½ tsp
- Salt to taste

Method

Blend the watermelon cubes in a blender to make juice. Strain to remove seeds. Heat ghee in a wok. Sauté the curry leaves with red chilli powder. Add the watermelon juice. Then add the garam masala and salt. Cook for 5 minutes and serve hot.

PUMPKIN RAITA

Serves: 4; preparation time: 10 minutes

Pumpkin raita is cold, flavoursome and filling—and the best way to get someone to eat pumpkin!

Ingredients

- Pumpkin: 150 gm; boiled
- Low-fat yoghurt: 300 gm
- Cumin powder: ¼ tsp
- Green chilli (optional): 1; finely chopped
- Salt to taste

Method

Mash the boiled pumpkin. Add it to preheated yoghurt. Add salt, chilli and jeera powder. Mix it well and serve chilled.

TEMPERED YOGHURT

Serves: 4; preparation time: 5 minutes

This is a perfect accompaniment to a bowl of masala pulao.

Ingredients

- Low-fat yoghurt: 400 gm
- Cumin and coriander powder: 1 tsp
- Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Mustard seeds: ½ tsp
- Cumin seeds: ¼ tsp
- Cow's ghee: 1 tsp
- Coriander leaves: ¼ cup; finely chopped
- Salt to taste

Method

Beat the yoghurt and add salt to it. Heat cow's ghee in a wok. Add mustard and cumin seeds. As it starts crackling, add red chilli powder and cumin-coriander powder. Pour this mix in the salted yoghurt. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve.

Make your curries interesting with *kokum*. It is a cooling agent and lends a tangy taste to your meals. Cumin seed is another condiment added to nearly everything, including salads, vegetables, buttermilk, yoghurt and fruits. It lends a yummy taste

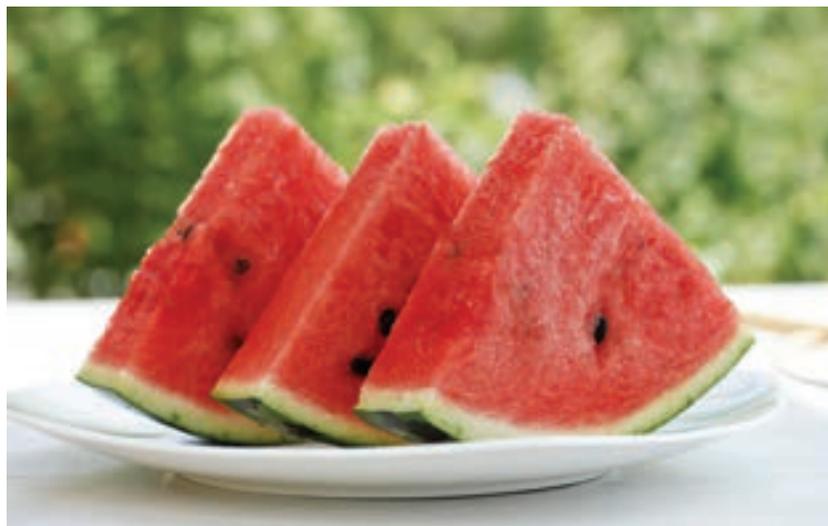
and flavour to the dish is extremely refreshing in summer.

For an evening snack, you could eat a fruit. Go for a raw mango as it contains Vitamin C and protects the body against sunstroke. For a salty

snack, slice up some raw mango, sprinkle chilli powder on top and munch! Those with a sweet tooth can enjoy a glass of *aam panna*, a traditional drink made out of raw mango, jaggery and rock salt.

The no-no foods

Avoid bajra in summer as a form of grain and switch to jowar, rice and wheat instead. Also avoid heat-producing nuts, seeds and oils such as mustard and sesame. Last, avoid fried eggs, red meats and creamy gravies; opt for lightly sautéed foods.



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



HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

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

Contentment preserved!

Renu Bhatia • HARYANA

Come summer and she is off to the vegetable market, looking at the heaps of mangoes and choosing the best ones: for pickles, chutneys, jams and squashes. She started by making it all for herself. As friends and relatives tasted and relished them, the demand grew and the hobby transformed into a profession. What has remained unchanged, however, is the lady herself. As her friends will tell you, Renu Bhatia is the epitome of contentment. Self-contained is the perfect phrase to describe her. Happy with her simple routine, this 61 year-old believes in keeping things straightforward and uncomplicated. Here are some snippets of my conversation with her.

LIFE OVERVIEW

I am a Punjabi, and was born and brought up in Amritsar. Punjabis are famous for eating and I love both cooking and eating. I am now staying in Panchkula [Haryana]. After my father passed away, I live by myself.

HOBBY-TURNED-PROFESSION

I make my own pickles and squashes. I started in a small way in 1999, making them for family and friends. As the word spread from my friends to theirs, demand grew. I now run a small-scale business from home. I like to do most of the work myself—right from buying the mangoes and lemons for the pickles to bottling the final product. I have some part-time help for the chopping but I prefer to do most of the work my way. That way, I ensure that cleanliness and perfection are maintained.



Photographs by Sanjay

GROWING THE BUSINESS

Over time, I started making masalas such as chana masala and garam masala, as well as traditional sweets such

as *besan ke laddoo*. My sweet known as *doddha* made with sprouted wheat is quite popular. These days, I also make *aam papad* from the leftover pulp after the mangoes are used for



the pickles. At a time, I can make 5 kg of pickle. Some of my specialties are stuffed red chilli pickle and Punjabi style *aam ka achaar* in which we use the peel as well as the seed.

GRATITUDE

Our family friend Mrs Karuna Goswamy, wife of art historian Padma Bhushan Shri B N Goswamy, inspired me to convert my hobby into a profession. She kept telling me how tasty my pickles were and then she told her close circle of friends. It all happened by word of mouth.

WHAT I CHERISH

I cherish the praise and love given by my customers. I have not received a single complaint in 17 years. The best compliment I have received is from Karunaji—she used to say that my name should have been *Achaari* [laughs]! She says I have made her life very easy with all my masalas.

WHEN SUDDEN GUESTS ARRIVE

I always keep a container of onion tomato gravy in the freezer. Whenever sudden guests arrive, it is easy

to make any *sabzi* with this gravy. For this, you have to grind 250 gm of onions along with 1 inch ginger and 6 cloves of garlic into a fine paste. Heat some oil and saute this paste until the raw smell disappears. Add 350 gm of tomato puree and chilli powder. Cook until it thickens and the oil separates. Freeze and use it for months. Even in the refrigerator, it stays good for a week. **Tip:** Do not add *hing* in side-dishes made with *rajma* and potato. Also, add turmeric and coriander powder only later while preparing the actual dishes and not in this gravy.



AAM KI CHUTNEY

(Raw mango chutney)

This delicious chutney with raw mango is a great spread with rotis and breads, and also an accompaniment to a meal.

Ingredients

- Raw mangoes: 3 cups; grated
- Sugar: 3 cups
- Aniseed (*saunf*): 1 tbsp
- Fenugreek (*methi*) seeds: 1 tsp
- Cumin powder: 1 tsp
- Chilli powder: 1-2 tsp
- Salt to taste

Method

Wash, pat dry, peel and grate the raw mangoes. Add equal quantity of sugar, mix well and set aside for 3-4 hours. Roast 1 tbsp aniseed and grind into a fine powder. Roast 1 tsp fenugreek seeds and grind into a fine powder. Cook the grated mango in a pan along with the aniseed and fenugreek powder for about 30 minutes. You can check if it is cooked by tilting the plate. When you tilt the plate, no liquid should run out. Add the cumin and chilli powder and cook for 15 minutes. Switch off the flame and add salt.

Note: Renuji says the sugar in this recipe acts as a preservative and allows the chutney to stay good for a long time if kept in a clean and dry place. You can add a pinch of sodium benzoate as a preservative if you wish.

LEFT-OVER FAVOURITES

I never ever waste or throw any left-over food. Patties and parathas with leftover *sabzi* are a regular feature in my cooking.

DAILY ROUTINE

I start my day with yoga class. I return home and dabble in stocks on my computer from 9 am in the morning to almost 4 pm in the evening. I usually prepare my pickles and jams in the evenings or over weekends.

HEALTH INGREDIENT

I start my day with 2-3 glasses of warm water early in the morning. I believe this has really helped me maintain my health. In fact, I think it has also been a good remedy for my asthma problem.

LIFE'S BLESSINGS

I have three sisters and one brother. I enjoy spending time with them during our yearly meet. I am also blessed with the company of good friends, especially my best friend Sunena Bhasim who was my classmate in college. We have been good friends since 1974 and she has always been there in my time of need. We also travel together for holidays and pilgrimages.

THEN AND NOW

The best part of our growing years were the outdoor activities and time together; I miss all that these days. Today's younger generation is busy with their mobiles, even when they are in a group. But what I do admire is their independence and self-reliance.

*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*

Strength to your SPINE



Endoscopic spinal surgery is a safe surgical option for treating lumbar spinal stenosis (back pain) in silvers. **Dr Abhijit Y Pawar**, consultant spine surgeon at Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, elaborates upon this effective alternative to open-back surgery and discusses why surgeons are gradually adopting it

Photographs by 123RF.com

More than 80 per cent of elderly Indians between the ages of 60 and 80 years experience crippling back and leg pain. Of these individuals, 25 per cent might have osteoarthritis, 35 per cent have mild spinal stenosis (narrowing) and 19 per cent have significant symptomatic stenosis of the spinal canal. It mainly appears with age, but the arthritis-like condition may also appear in younger individuals. Back pain takes a toll not only on patients but their family and friends. Many a time, patients find that along with their back health, their relationships slowly deteriorate. It is, therefore, important to treat it at the earliest.

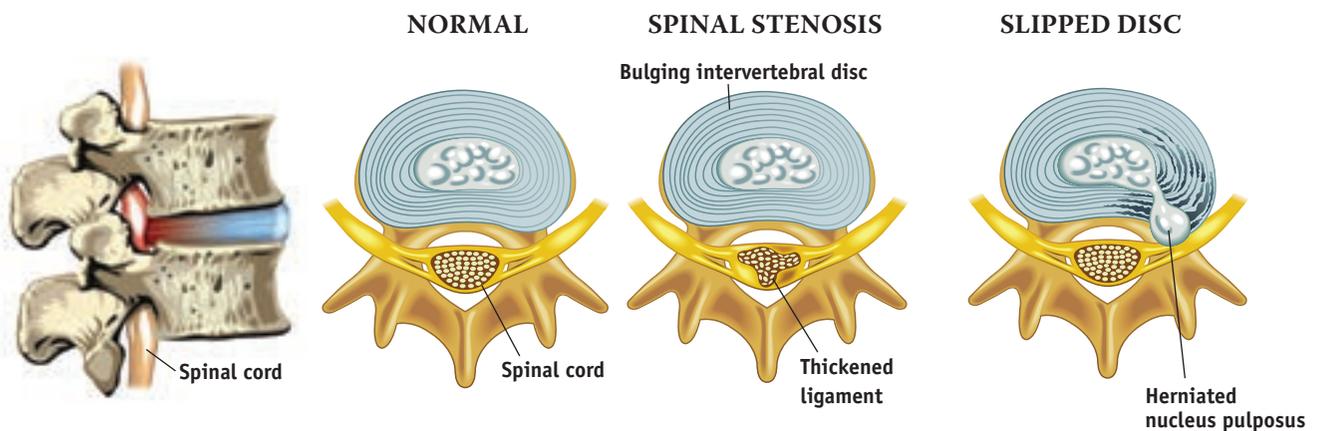
What is spinal stenosis?

Lumbar spinal stenosis occurs in the spinal column where the spinal cord, nerve roots and vertebrae are located. Over time, the spinal canal may become constricted or narrowed. This is characterised by 'neurogenic claudication', which is back pain, leg pain, numbness and tingling made worse by sitting, bending and arching back. It is exacerbated by walking and spinal extension. Some elderly patients also have spinal stenosis owing to a slipped intervertebral disc. This is commonly called sciatica. Sciatica is often associated with leg numbness or paresthesias and weakness in the legs.

What is endoscopic spinal surgery?

When it comes to open-back surgery, a patient's age is an important consideration. Older surgical patients are more prone to serious medical conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, precluding them from undergoing open-back surgery. Also, older patients who undergo an invasive surgical procedure are more likely to suffer from an infection, life-threatening complication, or a return visit to the hospital within 30 days post-surgery. Therefore, endoscopic spinal surgery is the need of the hour.

The right candidate for endoscopic spine surgery is any elderly patient



who has persistent neurogenic claudication or sciatica and has no relief of symptoms after four to six weeks of conservative management, including rest and physical therapy. If patients have a medical problem like diabetes or heart disease putting them at risk during general anaesthesia, endoscopic spine surgery, also called endoscopic discectomy, can be done under local anaesthesia.

Endoscopic discectomy and the technique

Endoscopic discectomy is a minimally invasive spinal surgery technique that utilises an endoscope to treat herniated, protruded, extruded or degenerative discs that are a contributing factor to leg and back pain. The endoscope allows the surgeon to use a keyhole incision to access the herniated disc. Muscle and tissue are dilated rather than being cut when accessing the disc. This leads to less tissue destruction, less postoperative pain, quicker recovery time, earlier rehabilitation and avoidance of general anaesthesia. The excellent visualisation via the endoscope permits the surgeon to selectively remove a portion of the herniated nucleus pulposus (the inner core of the vertebral disc) contributing to the patients' leg and back pain.

This minimally invasive procedure is performed through a small tubular device under local or general anaes-

thesia, allowing the patient to leave the hospital the same day. After the disc protrusion is confirmed, a guide wire is inserted to the affected disc under fluoroscope guidance. An obturator tube is passed over the guide wire to push apart the tissue down to the disc and move the nerve root out of the way. The working sleeve, through which the surgery will be performed, is slid over the dilating tube. The guide wire and dilator are then removed. The surgeon uses instruments to remove the degenerative and extruded portions of the disc nucleus. As only enough of the disc is removed to reduce pressure inside the disc, the spine remains stable. The foramen (opening, hole or passage) and nerves are inspected to confirm successful decompression. The instruments and sleeve are removed. No muscles or bone are cut during the procedure, so recovery is fast and scarring is minimised. The patient may only need a day of bed rest after the procedure and physical therapy.

The advantages

- Endoscopic spine surgery can be done under local anaesthesia and sedation.
- It involves a one-day hospital stay.
- As there's no general anaesthesia, it is safe for patients with problems like diabetes, heart disease and those of advanced age.
- There is predictable relief of back and leg pain.

- No loss of blood.
- No risk of infection.
- Minimal need for antibiotics.
- Tissue is spared and there is less postoperative scar tissue formation.
- There is quicker healing with less rehabilitation and rapid return to activities.
- This is a safe approach without damage to the nerve root, ganglion or dura.

In conclusion

Although age is a consideration for most surgical procedures, it is a lesser determinant for endoscopic surgery. Rather than performing a laminectomy to completely remove the lamina, endoscopic procedures perform a laminotomy or partial removal of the lamina, which preserves more of the lamina and decreases the odds of spinal instability in future years. According to peer-reviewed journal articles, science is on the side of minimally invasive spine surgery, touting it as a safe and effective alternative to open-back surgery for older adults. Many surgeons and medical practices are slowly migrating toward this technique. Indeed, the endoscopic technique is a permanent solution for many patients, allowing them to preserve mobility and return to their routines and favourite activities. Older patients with back problems can thus benefit greatly from endoscopic spine surgery.



Athri in his neighbourhood at Saraswathipuram, Bengaluru

Photographs by Sumukh Bharadwaj

Salute the soldier

Wing Commander (retd) G B Athri, Bengaluru's one-man army, uses the RTI Act to restore his beloved city to its former glory, writes **Chitra Ramaswamy**

The pelicans are back at Bengaluru's Madiwala Lake, and they are not the only happy campers. Anglers are having a field day on the lake's shores, and walkers and joggers have returned for their daily dose of fresh air.

It was impossible to imagine a scenario like this until just two years ago as the lake, one of Bengaluru's biggest, had been pronounced 'dead' owing to high toxicity. It has since been resuscitated, thanks to a hard-fought battle, with Wing Commander (retd) G B Athri on the frontlines.

Wait a minute, did someone just say 'battle'? You see, the retired Indian Air Force officer loves a hearty battle, and when it comes to taking on corrupt government agencies and even pharma giant Biocon to salvage a piece of his beloved city, it's all-out war. Using the powerful Right to Information (RTI) Act, Athri has been helping revive Bengaluru's water bodies, restoring dignity to Army veterans and taking up cudgels on behalf of nomads, for the past six years.

It all started when Athri returned to Bengaluru in 2001, after serving

for 25 years in the Indian Air Force. After retirement, he worked in the BPO industry and then with the Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru. As he adjusted to civilian life, the crusader in him began to stir. Athri had taken up residence in Saraswathipuram, and he succeeded in getting the local authorities to give his new neighbourhood a massive facelift. By 2011, Saraswathipuram not only had impeccable infrastructure, it had changed into a green and welcoming neighbourhood. Athri had found his calling—he wanted to be a change-maker.

One of the first steps he took was to study the RTI Act; as soon as he got a handle on it, he started connecting it with issues and challenges he noticed all over the city. That's how the retired Wing Commander began his relentless crusade against defaulters, miscreants, and anyone on the wrong side of the law.

One of his biggest victories is the rejuvenation of Madiwala Lake and its two neighbouring lakes, Arakere and Hulimavu, located in the middle of Bengaluru. Madiwala, the size of 110 football fields, had already been declared 'dead' by environmental studies but Athri used the RTI Act to find out which agencies were responsible for its maintenance.

He made a shocking discovery. The reply to his RTI application revealed that untreated sewage from neighbouring apartments and residences, mainly the BTM Layout that borders one side of the lake, was contaminating the water bodies—a lapse on the part of as many as five civic agencies. First, Athri lodged a complaint with the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB), but the main culprit was the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB). "Most city lakes have died because of the apathy of the sewerage board," he points out. "When they knew the city was growing, they did not take measures to tackle wastewater. Instead, they have been directing sewage through the storm-water drains, into the lakes! So instead of rainwater alone entering the drains and then flowing into the lakes, raw sewage is getting into the storm-water drains and finding its way to the lakes."

Athri's relentless effort to bring the guilty to book resulted in the Pollution Control Board filing criminal charges under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974,

against the top brass of the Sewerage Board, including its then chairperson. This was a first of its kind. "As many as 13 officials were charged for allowing the lakes to become polluted," he reveals. "Although all of them are out on bail, I am happy to have played a role in making this happen."

Madiwala is finally witnessing a rejuvenation following a year-long battle and the formation of a Lake Watchdog Committee (LWC), which comprises local government agencies and citizens' representatives. Its waters are being de-silted and the on-site sewerage treatment plant (STP) has undergone maintenance

Wg Cdr (retd) G B Athri loves a hearty battle, and when it comes to taking on corrupt government agencies and even pharma giant Biocon to salvage a piece of his beloved city, it's all-out war

to ensure that only treated water enters the lake. The slush from the lake was dredged, compacted and used to build a walkway that is now being enjoyed by morning walkers and joggers.

According to Suresh Dharmaji, a member of the LWC, "When I moved to Kamanahalli [near Hulimavu Lake] 10 years ago, we didn't even know there was a lake here. Apart from construction workers who used the lake to relieve themselves, it had also becoming a dumping ground for the shops nearby. Residents, too, were throwing their garbage into the drains instead of dustbins. When it rains, it is all carried into the lakes."

Karnataka State Information Commissioner L Krishnamurthy is all praise for Athri's style of functioning. "It is a pleasure to interact with the retired Wing Commander, who has a very disciplined and systematic approach in dealing with issues," he says. "He uses the RTI Act for public good and gets to the heart of the matter. He then thoroughly researches the subject before approaching the authorities."

By mid-2015, the dust had barely settled on the Madiwala Lake rejuvenation issue when it was under threat from another quarter. To decongest Bengaluru's IT corridor, a bypass road connecting Hosur Road to BTM Layout was sanctioned—it was to be constructed on the lake bund. This meant a portion of the lake would have to be reclaimed.

Athri and the LWC went into battle mode and, once again, came to the rescue of Madiwala. "Sure, the IT corridor needed to be decongested and an alternative road was the need of the hour, but not on the lake bund," says Athri. "We suggested they create an elevated bypass, 15 m away from the bund." The issue was also brought to the notice of the chief minister and, within months, work on the bypass began away from the bund, at an elevated level, just as Athri had suggested.

Having tackled the authorities in the city, our crusader set his sights on Tunga River, which flows through his hometown of Sringeri, 325 km from Bengaluru. A 2014 RTI application had revealed that Sringeri, which produces over 9 million litre of household effluents and sewerage per day, did not have even a basic STP in place. The famed Sringeri Mutt, located on the riverbank, was adding to the pollution by disposing its solid



A Biocon Foundation engineer consults with Athri (left) on the cleaning of Hebbagodi Lake; the 98 year-old war memorial, for the soldiers who gave their lives in World War I, on Brigade Road; opposite page: Hebbagodi Lake

kitchen waste into the waterway. “It took almost two years but by early 2016, STPs were set up to take care of effluents that flowed into the river,” says Athri. “A compact, manure-making machine has also been installed in the *mutt* premises and the solid kitchen waste generated by it is turned into manure, which is being used as fertiliser in the *mutt* garden.”

Athri’s most triumphant battle to date, though, has been the one with biotechnology giant Biocon, whose biopharmaceutical factory was discharging untreated arsenic and lead into Hebbagodi Lake on the outskirts of Bengaluru. Demonstrations and protests by residents’ welfare associations and NGOs against the company as far back as in 2001 had yielded no results.



Arpita Vishwanath

Using the RTI Act, Athri gathered information on the various consents and permissions given to Biocon, how and why these were issued, and the several show-cause notices issued to them by the Pollution Control Board. Paradoxically, he found they also had the necessary consent to continue their work! Athri questioned these inconsistencies and, in September 2014, lodged a voluminous

written complaint with the board. He wanted to know why it had not taken action against Biocon under the Environment Protection Act and even demanded that the company be shut down!

The voice of reason hit home. By June 2015, Biocon’s Chairman and Managing Director Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw agreed to meet with Athri.

This set the ball rolling and Biocon agreed to clean up its mess. Work on rejuvenating Hebbagodi Lake began in May 2016. First, boats rounded up the sludge and collected surface plastic. Water hyacinths and other invasive weeds were similarly taken out. More important, the industrial effluents being discharged by Biocon's manufacturing facility are now passed through an STP before being released into the lake.

Lately, aquatic creatures have begun visiting the lake, a sign that the water body is making a speedy recovery. Fish have started breeding, ducks have been spotted, birds have begun showing up and water snakes are now flourishing. J Hiremath, a fellow activist, is all praise for Athri's courage. "Being an activist myself, I often seek his advice on matters like this. Imagine what it must have taken to get Biocon to rejuvenate Hebbagodi as redemption for the contamination they caused!"

Lourde Raj Joseph, vice-president and head of central engineering and EHS at Biocon, gives Athri due credit: "Wing Commander G B Athri is immensely committed to restoring the lost glory of Bengaluru and we are pleased to engage with him in the restoration of Hebbagodi Lake. He has been playing a significant role in enabling the lake revival plan."

With so much to juggle, you'd think our crusader would have his hands full. Not this Wing Commander, who set his heart on a cause close to his heart. He found that a 98 year-old war memorial, built as a tribute to Indian soldiers who lost their lives in World War I, was being defaced with, of all things, a public toilet. It had been set up by the Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation for the convenience of its drivers and conductors. For a retired Air Force officer, this was sacrilege! "Tell me, which country disgraces its soldiers like this?" asks Athri, who took up the cause in 2015. Needless to say, the



VANISHING LAKES

Bengaluru, the City of Lakes, got its moniker from a centuries-old water and irrigation system set up by the city's founders. The lakes, most of them manmade, were connected by a large network of canals that channelled surplus water to the lakes downstream. But owing to the rapid urbanisation of Bengaluru since the IT boom of the 1970s, records show the following:

- Bengaluru had 285 lakes in the '70s; today, there are 194 lakes, most of them sewage-fed
- The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board has the capacity to treat half the sewage generated; the rest flows into the lakes, untreated
- Lakebeds have been encroached upon for apartments, malls and other unauthorised development projects
- As the city expanded, the canals connecting the lakes were filled up, causing flooding during the monsoon.

Titled *Wetlands: Treasure of Bangalore (Abused, Polluted, Encroached & Vanishing)*, a study published last year by a team of researchers, headed by Professor T V Ramachandran of the Centre for Ecological Science, IISC, Bengaluru, has made the following observations:

- Four of the 105 lakes surveyed in Bengaluru were in good condition
- 90 per cent of the lakes are fed untreated sewage, industrial effluents, solid waste, building debris and even biomedical waste
- Lack of coordination among the civic and state agencies administering the lakes contributes to their neglect
- There has been a 925-per-cent increase in urban areas across four decades (1973-2013).

toilets are gone and the memorial has since been transformed into a place for people to relax and enjoy the sights in Bengaluru's city centre.

Indeed, for a crusader like Athri, the war is never over. He is still waiting for the results of an RTI application he had filed back in 2012 seeking information on government land allotted for the construction of 250 homes for nomads in Uttarahalli, under the Ashraya Housing Scheme. Surprisingly, the files have gone missing! "I filed an RTI request in 2012.

Nothing has come of it so far. But I will persist. If at least 500 people can get subsidised housing out of this project, my efforts will be worth it."

So, in Athri's opinion, what ails this nation? "We have a law for everything but implementation has always been our greatest problem," he responds. "The bureaucracy, which is responsible for enforcing the law, must pay attention to the needs and concerns of society. Unless we perceive the common man as important, things will not improve." ❀



Dr Dhillon with her teammates at the UN clinic, South Sudan

Photographs courtesy: Dr Ramindar Dhillon

Mission possible!

Dr Ramindar Dhillon discovers that life after the Army is fraught with unexpected danger as she heals the sick and wounded in war-torn countries, reports **Shyamola Khanna**

The svelte, silver-haired lady trying on quilted knee-length jackets in an upmarket store in Jaipur could be just about any woman with impeccable taste. Admittedly, Dr Ramindar Dhillon has a weakness for the chic and fashionable. The 72 year-old allows herself these indulgences because, for many years now, she's been wearing quite a different hat: a doctor treating bleeding soldiers and civilians, and dodging artillery shells in war-torn countries.

Dr Dhillon is in Jaipur visiting old friends before she heads on to Chan-

digarh, to her husband and her home. After a brief vacation, she will return to the theatre of war. A doctor with UN missions—hold your breath—in Afghanistan and now South Sudan, she is as gutsy and gritty as they come.

“My father joined Amritsar Medical College but gave up his studies to serve in the Indian Army during World War II. Both my parents were committed to *sewa* and they always encouraged me to help those in need,” says Dr Dhillon, summing up just why she chooses to put herself in harm's way. In fact, her every life choice has been geared towards ser-

vice, including her decision to study medicine and then join the Services. During her career on home ground, she served as a general physician in the medical inspection rooms of Indian Air Force stations, where she was posted till she retired.

Working with the UN came much later. Her husband was a chopper pilot and as soon as he retired in 1994, Dr Dhillon decided to step out of her comfort zone. Her first calling was working with sex workers in Chandigarh and surrounding regions, from 1996 to 1998. Dr Dhillon took up her assignment as project director of the

HIV/AIDS division of the Society for Service to Voluntary Agencies, with whom she worked for two years. “We worked on the national highways in Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh, targeting truckers and commercial sex workers. Our aim was to get the people into treatment and educate them on how they could take precautions.”

As if dealing with rough-and-ready truckers weren't enough, Dr Dhillon faced a more sinister challenge: the brokers in the sex trade suspected she was a police informer. “They sent their people to where I was living, in Panchkula, Chandigarh, and dug into my past. It was only when they were satisfied that I was genuinely concerned that they were okay with me,” she shares.

Making an impression on the minds of women who celebrate the birth of a girl child so that she can be sold to the highest bidder at puberty calls for a special kind of patience and tolerance. But there were many poignant moments, too, for Dr Dhillon and her team, who met with sex workers in the backs of trucks, and truckers in their *adda*. “It was a humbling experience to help those women. It was enriching beyond compare.”

In August 1999, it was time for Dr Dhillon to move on. Far from the dusty highways, her next assignment took her to a posh boarding school, Lawrence School, in Sanawar, Himachal Pradesh, where she headed a 60-bed hospital for four years before she retired in 2003, a few months short of her 58th birthday.

However, it was not long before fate upped the ante and sent Dr Dhillon on her first mission with the UN. “Someone I knew told me the United Nations was looking for volunteers,” she recalls. “Although I applied, I had

never imagined I would get these assignments, because I was told it was very tough to get into the UN system. I guess I just got lucky.”

During her first UN assignment, Dr Dhillon was posted as medical officer in the UN's emergency and accident clinic in Trinidad & Tobago, in the Caribbean, where she worked from 2003 to 2006. Here, she was involved with the medical care of the local people, looking after accidents and emergencies. There is a very large population of Indian origin here, the rest being of African heritage. But regardless of their roots, most people wanted to consult Indian doctors and Dr Dhillon was taken aback at the

“The numbers kept rising—from an average 50 per day to 100... even though there were three other UN doctors in the county. I asked the receptionist why she was doing this and she replied, ‘They want to see only you.’ I was humbled”

faith the people had in her. “One by one, the numbers kept rising—from an average 50 per day to 100. The patients started to line up outside my cabin, even though there were three other UN doctors in the county. One day, I asked the receptionist why she was doing this and she replied, ‘It is not me; they want to see only you.’ I was humbled and prayed I would live up to their expectations.”

Her husband, Group Captain (ret'd) Karanjit Singh Dhillon, had accompanied her on this assignment but the lifestyle didn't suit him. So she asked for assignments ‘closer home’—not realising the risk this may entail. The

UN posted her in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2008, during which time she was provincial reproductive health coordinator, Bamiyan and Daikundi, and later an aero medical evacuation specialist. “Although I had heard of what was going on in Afghanistan, I was okay with the idea as it was close enough to Delhi; it was a short flight away. Besides, I am a doctor and we have to work in difficult situations,” she says. “It was hugely challenging. Patients were nearly always evacuated by air from various provinces to Kabul and, if required, to another country. But, owing to the violent situation, security was good and we were always well protected.”

In her early 60s then, Dr Dhillon lived life on the edge while she fulfilled her mission of *seva*. “When I was not doing non-clinical work, I carried a burkha with me; following the dress code was very important as I was involved with locals from the villages,” she says. “Many a time, the Taliban happened to be in the same village but they did not interfere with our work. These burly men carrying heavy guns would walk into the room where we were meeting, while we carried on with our work.” The Afghan people, who are very fond of Indians, were protective of her. “Whenever I travelled by road and there was an inkling of trouble, my driver would take a detour. We sometimes passed sites where there had been a bomb blast only seconds earlier. And when we knew the Taliban was ahead, I would quickly wear the burkha that was always in my vehicle.”

After a posting like Afghanistan, her next, in East Timor (now Timor-Leste), was a breeze. “I was stationed there for just six months in 2012. It was a short tenure owing to family commitments and the UNMIT [United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste] closing down there.”

Dr Dhillon is currently posted with the UN mission in South Sudan, as clinical director of operations and a senior doctor looking after the UN troops. She has been working there since 2014. “Besides the fact that the country is facing severe famine, the situation is very tense. I was present there during the military crisis last year. Not only were we dealing with casualties but we faced a shortage of basic necessities. Also, our grab bags were always ready in case we, as the critical staff, suddenly needed to be evacuated. It was tough and it took a long time to de-stress.”

Her husband is all too aware of the dangers she has faced. “Her first priority is her patients even if it sets her against the authorities,” he says with a great degree of pride, and fondness. “My message to her when the civil strife started in South Sudan was, ‘Be safe and don’t be too brave’, because I know she’s capable of ignoring her own safety in the line of duty.”

The war in South Sudan had started without any notice and no one had time to prepare for it. Even the UN compounds were being shelled and staff members were huddled inside tiny bathrooms, the only seemingly safe place as they did not have large windows. Moreover, everyone was constantly reminded to stay flat on the ground. Overhead, shells were smashing on the asbestos roof and bullets were ricocheting. “This went on for three days and, at the time, Dr Dhillon was the only doctor in charge of the UN clinic, which was short-staffed. Even though she was a volunteer with the UN, she suddenly found herself in a leadership role in the crisis situation,” recalls Dr Vandana Bhatnagar, who was a part of the UN Peacekeeping Force and served with Dr Dhillon in South Sudan.

Under the circumstances, men, women and children literally spilt out of their camps to take refuge in the UN compound, their bodies riddled with bullets and other wounds. It



“Whenever I travelled by road and there was an inkling of trouble, my driver would take a detour. At times, we passed sites where there had been a bomb blast seconds earlier”

was Dr Dhillon who attended to the injured, day in and day out. She barely got a few hours of rest and even cooked rice for the injured, who had not eaten for many days.

“The peacekeeping environment calls for strength of mind and the ability to stay calm under extreme pressure. People are shocked at how a senior citizen of her age is working in South Sudan, in the current conflict-ridden environment. She has done India proud,” remarks Dr Bhatnagar. Col Rahul Batra, a colleague of Dr Dhillon, adds, “I am an Indian Army officer and deputy chief of logistic services with the UN Mission in South Sudan. I have known Dr Dhillon for the past two years and she has been an inspirational figure, deeply driven by a sense of caring for those requiring assistance. She is also extremely fit and maintains a positive and vibrant attitude. It’s been an honour to know her and serve with her.”

Back home, Dr Dhillon’s daughters are obviously concerned for their mother’s safety but respect her decision to ‘do what she has to do’. “My mother has always been tough and worked through good health or ill health, in close-to-primitive conditions and for long hours,” says her daughter Maheep Dhillon, 45, a Mumbai-based filmmaker. “But even so, we all protested her decision to take up her first field posting with the UN, in Kabul. Eventually, reconciling to it the same way a serviceman’s family does each time he gets a forward-area posting, we let her go. It wasn’t easy. But mixed with the apprehension was a deep pride in her courage, selflessness and stamina.” Maheep reveals that the person most conflicted by her mother’s postings in strife-torn areas was her grandmother. “Nanu had ensured that her daughters and granddaughters were fearless and independent. Yet, when my mother took up the Afghanistan post, I could see the turmoil in her. She was fiercely proud, yet torn by anxiety. Her solution was in prayer.”

Dr Dhillon’s younger daughter, 40 year-old Amrita Sethi, a Mumbai-based art therapist, adds, “My mother gets so much joy and satisfaction from her work. And while it is also scary at times, I know this is something she has to do for herself. With all its challenges and immense rewards, it is something she just has to do—and I have to respect that.”

How much longer will Dr Dhillon answer her calling while putting her life on the line? “As of now, I plan to work [in South Sudan] till June 2017, return home, relax and, if possible, work with NGOs or charitable clinics for the poor. Later, I might take on another assignment, as long as I am healthy and the family permits!” Dr Dhillon has learnt that life is an open road and it is not wise to have plans set in stone. “The biggest lesson I have learnt is to never take life for granted.” ✨

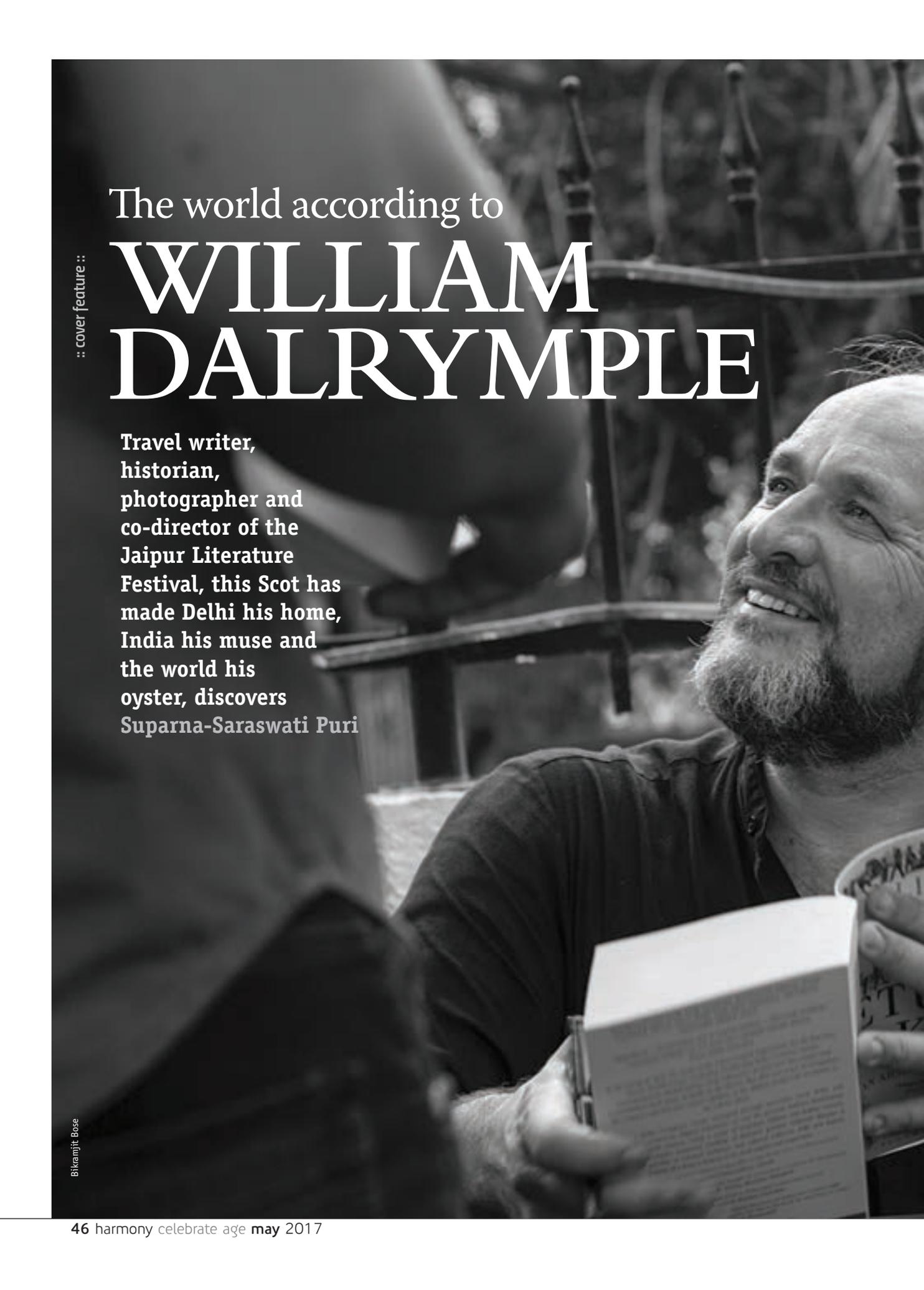
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A black and white photograph of William Dalrymple. He is shown from the chest up, smiling broadly and looking upwards and to the right. He has a beard and is wearing a dark t-shirt. He is holding an open book in his hands, and a pen is visible in his right hand. The background is slightly out of focus, showing what appears to be a wooden chair or structure.

The world according to

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

Travel writer,
historian,
photographer and
co-director of the
Jaipur Literature
Festival, this Scot has
made Delhi his home,
India his muse and
the world his
oyster, discovers
Suparna-Saraswati Puri



Living in a sprawling farmhouse on the outskirts of Delhi with homes in England and Scotland, “it’s a ridiculously indulged existence,” he confesses. But William ‘Will’ Dalrymple is so much more than the archetypal *burrah* sahib. Travel writer and historian, critic, curator and photographer, his palpable love for India and impassioned engagement with its history have won him the love and loyalty of millions of readers.

From his debut, *In Xanadu: A Quest* (1989), a 22 year-old’s experiential walk tracing Marco Polo’s travel from Jerusalem to Inner Mongolia, and his labour of love *City of Djinn: A Year in Delhi* (1994), after he moved there in 1989, to his personal favourite, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (1997), which details “the demise of Christianity in its Middle Eastern homeland”, Dalrymple succeeded in converting his wanderlust into an art form. Then, the historian in him firmly took the wheel with the celebrated ‘East India Company’ trilogy: *White Mughals* (2002), “a book that took forever in terms of writing” and will be made into a film by Academy Award winner Ralph Fiennes; *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (2006); and *Return of a King: The First Battle for Afghanistan* (2012).

Along the way, he also released *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* (2009) exploring varieties of religious devotion, whose release saw the Scot tour the US, UK, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Holland and Australia with some of the mystics featured in the book

performing music and poetry; scripted and presented shows for British TV and radio; founded the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF), the world's largest free event of its kind; released a music CD, *The Rough Guide to Sufi Music* (2011); and curated *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi* (2012), a major exhibition for the Asia Society in New York. That's not all. In 2016, he showcased his "first love"—photography—with the release of *The Writer's Eye*, a collection of 50-odd black-and-white images without captions shot across the world over two years with a mobile phone. The book was the unintended outcome of his travels after *Return of a King* "from Leh to Lindisfarne, from the Hindu Kush to the Lammermuirs and across the rolling south of Sienna and the deserts of Iran, writing small stories in the dark", as he told *Forbes India* last year.

This impressive oeuvre notwithstanding, Dalrymple is remarkably unassuming as he warmly welcomes us on a spring afternoon to the farmhouse he shares with his artist wife Olivia ("Oliv") Fraser and an assortment of peacocks, pigeons, turkeys, chickens, goats and stray dogs. There's also a large chameleon seductively parked at his feet—"What a gorgeous creature!" he exclaims. "Haven't seen one so big, ever." Over a delightful garden-to-table terrace lunch, he shares more about his work, from his latest book, *Kohinoor: The Story of the World's Most Infamous Diamond*, to the JLF experience; his perspective on the world today; and how India has changed his life "completely".

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW

When did your fascination with history begin?

History has always been my consuming interest. When I was small, really small, I was fascinated by ancient history and archaeology. I was brought up in rural Scotland. My first trip to London was when I begged and screamed, threw a tantrum and begged some more to be allowed go to London to see the Trinity Carmen exhibition. And it continued to be my passion. When I was leaving school, I arranged to go and dig on an ancient Syrian site in Iraq called Tabraq. It was cancelled at the last minute; they closed it down saying it was a nest for British spies—it probably was, for all I knew! Instead, my friend was going to India so I joined him. I'm still on that year off, 30 years later. I think my gap year is the longest in recorded history!

You have said, 'Photography for me long preceded writing. In fact, it's in my blood.' Tell us more.

There is a little notebook somewhere at home in Scotland, in which I wrote when I was six or seven. They sent us an essay in primary school asking what we wanted to be; I said an author and an archaeologist. But soon after, my other

big passion was photography. I would go somewhere looking at ancient ruins with my parents, photograph them. I think the first prize I ever won was at an archaeological photography competition. People who knew me at school would think of me as an archaeologist who took photographs, which is not so apart from who I am now: a historian who takes photographs! My other thing was organising lectures. I used to love getting famous historians and archaeologists to come to the school and give lectures—and that's more or less the Jaipur Litfest!

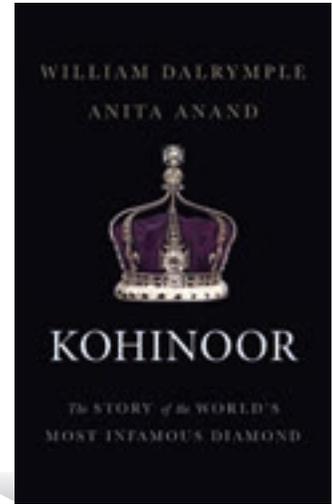
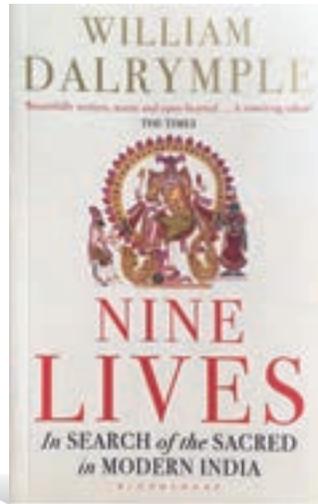
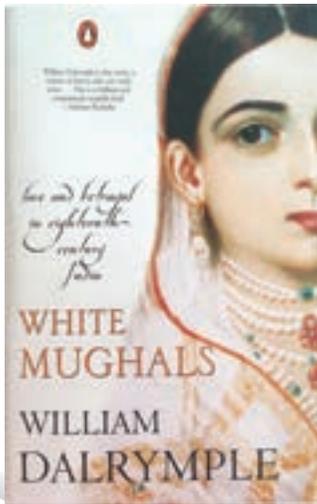
How difficult is it to take a chastening view of British imperialism, as you have done in your books?

It's not too difficult. I think as a historian you've got to evaluate things as they strike you, according to your moral views. If you read about British soldiers running amok and murdering people in Delhi, you don't hush it up. You write it straight and I think the British support that. I have never got attacked in Britain for plain speaking. But they are also very ignorant because it's not in the school curriculum. In general, the British are brought up believing that theirs was a very benign one as far as empires go. At least not like the very horrible, racist German empire or the racist Belgian empire; everyone else's empire was horrid. This was a widespread view. It was echoed by Andy Roberts at the Jaipur Litfest 2017 when he said, "...how you've been spared the horrors of French colonialism, subject to the glories of the British". People don't know the fine print. And they are very surprised by what they find. At least I was, initially.

You've just co-authored *Kohinoor* with Anita Anand. In view of the lawsuits filed by Indians and Pakistanis to reclaim the rock, do you think the *Kohinoor* is more of an emotive issue?

Well, not only Indians and Pakistanis. There are also specific claims on it by the Sikhs, who want it back at the Golden Temple... and even Iran, Afghanistan and the Taliban! So, it's a much claimed diamond. We went into fifth gear with this book when solicitor general Ranjit Kumar made a bizarre announcement formally to the Indian Parliament in April 2016 that the Kohinoor was given to the British by Ranjit Singh as a gift and was not, therefore, loot. Now, everything about that statement is completely unhistorical. There are many, many mysteries about that diamond. It being passed from the Sikhs to the British is not a mystery; it is there in black and white in the Treaty of Lahore, Article 6, that this was part of the condition of ending the hostilities of the Second Afghan War and part of the long treaty that brought peace to Punjab under the East India Company and dissolved the government of the Khalsa. Actually, I don't think anyone would dispute that.

So at that point, we began to realise how much heat was being generated by this diamond but no light! According



“In India you don’t have a huge body of historians writing for the general public. You have some amazing historians doing amazing research but, by and large, 99 per cent are writing for their fellow academics, in academic prose. This is in a sense the space I filled”

to this version of events, it was this mined antiquity that entered the eye of an idol in a Kakatiya dynasty temple, passed into the wicked hands of the destroying Khiljis who lost it to the wicked idol-destroying Lodis and then the idol-destroying Tughlaqs and finally the Mughals, who lost it in a turban swap with Nadir Shah (because he hid it in his turban), who slept with a dancing girl! Not one single detail of any of that is true or has any tangible evidence to support it.

The first reference to the diamond occurs in 1750 after Nadir Shah has been assassinated and in the retrospective history of his reign by one of his soldiers, who writes very clearly and unequivocally: ‘I saw the Kohinoor; it was on top of the peacock throne attached to the heads of one of the peacocks.’ There is not a squeak of solid evidence of where the diamond was before that moment! There are references to a stone that Babur held that may be the Kohinoor but may also have been other diamonds knocking about at that time—two of the most famous, most probably originally larger than the Kohinoor, were the Daria-i-Noor, which is in Tehran, and the Orlov diamond, which everyone else has forgotten about. No one’s claiming them; they must feel very lonely! Kohinoor stole the spotlight only quite late, in 1851, with the beginnings

of a legend growing around it during Ranjit Singh’s time because he singled it out for state occasions. He wears it; it becomes this symbol of sovereignty. But it only becomes the rock star everyone’s heard of in 1851.

How do you juggle different roles—historian, writer, critic, curator and photographer—with such ease?

It basically boils down to one talent, which is writing, one of the few things I can do! My career was made easy by the fact that I have very, very few talents. Unlike my children [Sam, Adam and Ibbby] or wife, I am pretty ropey at languages, I haven’t got any business sense, I can’t control money and I would never manage to be a lawyer for five minutes. I am really not being sort of mock modest here. I’d be a nightmare to have in an office, any office. Something I can make a living with is writing. As a writer, you can choose what you want to write about, whether it’s a book review or a travel book or history book. And history books and travel books aren’t as different as they sound—the travel book is full of history and the history book is full of travel! I’ve got small-time photography as well. And I enjoy organising lectures and festivals and can rope in my friends to come and speak.

How was your introduction to India as a backpacker?

I had a very sheltered upbringing. My parents lived in a very beautiful part of Scotland. Their friends would come and visit them in summer; we never went anywhere as we were always entertaining. So I was very untraveled and very naïve. But I loved history and I was already used to beetling in my spare time on my bike to churches or archaeological sites, old castles, that kind of stuff. The moment I arrived in India, I was amazed. And within about two weeks, I was thinking, 'God! I really love this place!' I went on this long train journey right through India. I went for a job in Dehradun, which didn't quite work out, and then continued travelling for a few months, through Agra, Delhi, Gwalior, Orcha, Khajuraho, Aurangabad, Goa, the South, all those wonderful temples. I had a budget of 35 rupees a day in those days; you could still get a room at the Archaeological Survey guesthouses and chai was for one rupee or 50 paise and a thali was often five or eight rupees. You can still get a thali for that amount at the National Archives! I had no money,

which meant that you had to choose between travelling or a hotel. You didn't eat lunch, only biscuits or a *kela* at bus stops. Often what we'd do is keep looking around in the day and take a night bus; so, a day wouldn't go by without travelling.

Does it really take an outsider to show us what's really wonderful about our country and culture?

It is not an India-specific thing. The existence of travel writing is predetermined on the fact that an outsider sees things more clearly than locals, wherever you are in the world, whoever the local is. Ibn Jubayr in Norman Sicily sees and records stuff that no normal Norman is able to see. Vikram Seth is able to see a Tibet that no Tibetan can see. If went to London, you'd see stuff I simply don't notice.

How do you stay motivated through the long years of research each book demands?

It is important to find a subject you want to live with for three to four years. *Kohinoor* is a slim book and co-authored. But the big fatties—*White Mughals*, *The Last Mughal* and *Return of A King*—are each four, five, six-year projects and you need to be completely passionate. The challenge each time, which gets more difficult, is to find a subject you are going to be fascinated by; have something new to say about; and for which there is a market, because I am not paid by a university department. Take the book Vikram Seth wrote about his dentist uncle, *Two Lives*; it was nice but no one bought it. I think it was his first book after *A Suitable Boy*, which sold 25 million copies around the world. *Two Lives* sold 5,000 copies. So, however grand you are, there is no guarantee on the readership that will follow you.

Is there any particular Indian historian you enjoy reading?

Well, it's a strange situation in India because—and this is in a sense the space I filled—you don't have a huge body of historians writing for the general public. You have some amazing historians doing amazing research but, by and large, 99 per cent are writing for their fellow academics, in academic prose, and often with a post-colonial jargon attached. All of it is perfectly legitimate but it means your average Indian reader going into a bookshop has to choose between some pretty turgid academic work and work by popular, often foreign, writers. However, there are exceptions that are growing in number now. Obviously [Ramachandra] Guha; he writes for the academia, he writes for the general public. He has worked in the academia in the past



Edelman India

but is now, like me, outside the ivory tower. He has got his *chela* in Srinath Raghavan, who is very good. There are lots of non-fiction writers coming up... Sanjeev Sanyal, Suketu Mehta, Basharat Peer, Pankaj Mishra. So it's changing. But it is nonetheless an odd situation that you have extraordinary, complicated, fascinating history, yet you are trying to find writers that are writing cutting-edge history respected by their peers that is based on primary sources but is also well-written. Where I come from, bookshops are pretty well weighted 50-50 between fiction and non-fiction. The non-fiction bestseller list often outsells the fiction. For instance, a book like *Longitude*, a very clever little slice of intellectual history, sold 11 million copies, selling as much as John Grisham or Rushdie. When I arrived here, that is the vacuum I felt. Now, I think it would be much more difficult for a young Brit, Italian, American or someone coming here. They would face much more competition. There is a publishing structure that wasn't available when I came; there was only Penguin India. Also, there weren't any litfests when I started off.

JLF has just completed its 10th edition. How do you see the festival growing organically while retaining the original flavour?

It is a magnificent success. With 190 imitations, it is the biggest literary festival in the world; we had close to half a million this year. The problem is that it is hugely crowded. Through the five-day festival, it's busy; on Saturday and Sunday it's bursting, I think the solution is to open up a second venue next year during the weekend only, which would be called Jaipur Plus or JLF Plus or something. Basically, where we move some of the more pop stuff—Bollywood stars, television hosts, cricketers—into a big separate venue with a capacity of 7,000-8,000. Hopefully, that would also drain off some of the holiday-making crowds because there are lots of school kids who come just to take selfies and that sort of thing.

With Bollywood hopping on the bandwagon, can JLF claim to be purely about literature?

The original idea of promoting literature is totally intact—people come as we have the best writers in

WORKS

- *In Xanadu: A Quest* (1989)
- *City of Djinn: A Year in Delhi* (1994)
- *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (1997)
- *The Age of Kali* (1998)
- *White Mughals* (2002)
- *Begums, Thugs & White Mughals: The Journals of Fanny Parkes* (2002)
- *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (2006)
- *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* (2009)
- *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan* (2012)
- *The Writer's Eye* (2016)
- *Kohinoor: The Story of the World's Most Infamous Diamond* (2016)

TV & RADIO

- *Stones of the Raj* (writer & presenter; Channel 4; 1997)
- *Indian Journeys* (writer & presenter; BBC; 2002)
- *The Long Search* (writer & presenter; Radio 4; 2002)
- *Sufi Soul* (writer & presenter; Channel 4; 2005)
- *Love and Betrayal in India: The White Mughal* (based on *White Mughals*; BBC; 2015)

the world there. We've never been snobs and always believed that there's room for a chick-lit session. We don't just invite a Bollywood star; there has to be a literary aspect. If Amitabh Bachchan has published an autobiography, it seems perfectly legitimate to host him. We usually only have one Bollywood superstar a year—it was Rishi Kapoor this year; Sonam Kapoor in 2016, Amitabh two years ago, Aamir Khan 10 years ago. For every one of those, we have 10 sessions on translating Punjabi Dalit poetry, which don't get reported! Another problem is the press we get because, in reality, there are only about 10-15 full-time literary journalists in this country, like Nilanjana Roy for example. Often, you

“At the Jaipur Litfest, you have journalists sitting on the press terrace, having a glass of beer, waiting for something to happen, while a Nobel prize-winner is speaking or two Man Booker awardees are in conversation or the greatest voice of Urdu poetry is there!”

have these journalists sitting on the press terrace and smoking, having a glass of beer in the sunshine, waiting for something to happen, while actually a Nobel prize-winner is speaking or two Man Booker awardees are in conversation or the greatest voice of Urdu poetry is there!

You now have JLF extensions outside India, in Boulder, London and Melbourne. What is the purpose behind these?

This is not my initiative, it is Sanjoy's. [Sanjoy Roy is managing director, Teamwork Arts, which organises JLF.] All four extensions are very small but it's been nice to carry the flag to new pastures. As a founder, I am proud that JLF is an international brand. It is a serious programme in the sense that we cherry-pick the best sessions from each year

and take them abroad. Also, it's a slightly different exercise: in Jaipur, we bring the world's greatest literature to India while showcasing Indian literature to the world. In the extensions, we are very much flying the Indian flag abroad with Indian writers and subjects and showcasing the best of our Indian programming.

Besides photography, travel and reading, what are your other interests?

When I am doing focused research on a history book, I will be reading fiction only during Christmas or the summer holidays. The rest of the year, it's my job to be engaged with the subject, read exclusively and dedicatedly on it. Unless am reviewing a book or something, I will not be reading for pleasure. At the moment, I am back on an East India Company book that has been bubbling for a couple of years. My other great loves in life are history, travel, walking, the mountains and music. In fact, one of the best bits of doing JLF is not so much its programming of authors, who I already know and hang out with, but inviting some of my favourite musicians and organising the music stage.

HONOURS

- 1990: *Yorkshire Post* Best First Work Award for *In Xanadu*
- 1990: Scottish Arts Council Spring Book Award for *In Xanadu*
- 1994: Thomas Cook Travel Book Award for *City of Djinn*s
- 1994: *Sunday Times* Young British Writer of the Year Award for *City of Djinn*s
- 1997: Scottish Arts Council Autumn Book Award for *From the Holy Mountain*
- 2001: Wolfson Prize for History for *White Mughals*
- 2002: Mungo Park Medal by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society for outstanding contribution to travel literature
- 2002: Grierson Award for Best Documentary Series at BAFTA for TV series *Stones of the Raj* and *Indian Journeys*
- 2002: Sandford St Martin Prize for Religious Broadcasting for *The Long Search*
- 2003: Scottish Book of the Year Prize for *White Mughals*
- 2005: French Prix d'Astrolabe for *The Age of Kali*
- 2005: Sykes Medal from the Royal Society for Asian Affairs for contribution to understanding contemporary Islam
- 2007: Duff Cooper Memorial Prize for History and Biography for *The Last Mughal*
- 2007: Vodafone Crossword Book Award for best work in English non-fiction for *The Last Mughal*
- 2008: Colonel James Tod Award by Maharana Mewar Foundation for excellence in his field
- 2010: Asia House Award for Asian Literature for *Nine Lives*
- 2011: The Media Citizen Puraskar by the Indian Confederation of NGOs
- 2015: Hemingway Prize for the Italian version of *Return of a King*
- 2015: Kapuscinski Prize for *Return of a King*

Do you think age is just a number? How has life changed for you after 50?

Age is very real. I have just lost my mother. Suddenly at 51, about to be 52, I do feel things are very different. The biggest thing by a long way is the absence of the kids—two years ago, we would have had them around this table listening to the conversation. I love having my kids around and I miss them very much when they are not here. We will have one kid for half term by the end of next week but, in general, they are only there for Christmas and the summers. There is also, gradually, the reality of mortality to bear. I had a minor heart issue while I was in Italy, something that was easily sorted. So, yes, age is a very real thing. The lucky thing, though, is that as a writer you have a much longer shelf life than a rockstar or actor or musician or footballer; you are old in sport by 28!

You and your wife share a passion for India and her monuments. What else do you bond over?

Oliv and I have amazing amount in common. She shares my love of travelling, music; we have a similar aesthetic sense. We never disagree about painting the walls of the house or which pictures we can have up. You'd be hard-pressed to guess whether I chose the bedcover or she did. I am also extremely reliant on her for editing. She's quite a brutal editor. I'm less of an assistance to her with her art. I'm

partially colour-blind so she doesn't always take everything I say terribly seriously! We do have our fair share of disagreements. She's slightly keener on cold weather in Scotland; I'm probably keener on heat, deserts, the tropics. Some different friends. But by and large, most things come within the shared Venn diagram.

You seem to enjoy an idyllic life in your farmhouse. Do you miss it when you travel to London and Edinburgh in summer?

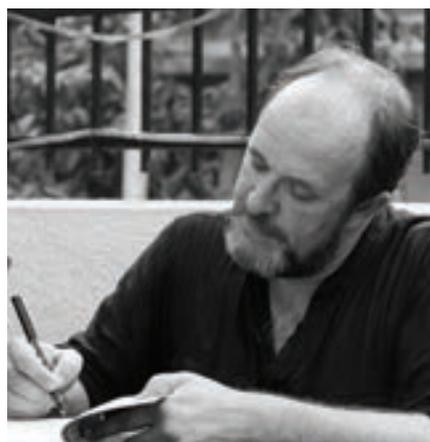
It is a ridiculously indulged existence. We are very lucky; both of us have careers that have so far paid our bills. It's a perfect life. We have nine months here and then we take off in May when it gets hot and come back in September. We have a lovely house in London. We don't own this farmhouse; it's rented. We pay the rent for this by renting out the London house nine months a year.

Given recent developments, from Trump's victory in the US to the vote for Brexit, do you think we are becoming increasingly insular across the globe?

I was born in the 1960s, which was the height of the rise of the Left, when Marxism seemed to be spreading throughout the Third World. The Left was triumphant. I was at university in the 1980s when in Britain, certainly, there was a swing to the Right with Mrs Thatcher, when retrenchment, hard work and entrepreneurship were the values and not free love and exotic drugs. There was a swing back to the left under Obama, and now we seem to be coming back right again. These are pendulums that swing backwards and forwards every 10 or 15 years. That said, this is different. Trump is far more nuts than any other US leader and Brexit is a catastrophe that was very much avoidable. I think it's going to lead to the acceleration of Britain's economic decline, which has been kind of arrested for 30 years, since Thatcher. You [India] have already overtaken us this year because of Brexit. The pound has fallen, so we are now officially behind small economies, and I would imagine that for the rest of my lifetime. Britain is still a prosperous place and a world leader in all sorts of stuff with a very high GDP per head. But I would be very surprised if Brexit does not have an extremely corrosive effect on that. I would imagine that living standards would begin to fall strongly over the next 20 years if we remain outside the EU.

In case of India, well, it led the pack in the rise of Narendra Modi. I was much more worried about the BJP when I was here as a correspondent [for *The Guardian*], when half my work was to cover communal riots during the *rath yatra*. And I saw some pretty grizzly stuff in one of those riots. And while things are far from perfect now and the RSS is resurgent, the odd lynching over beef is a much less dreadful thing compared to the stuff I was covering across

“Trump is far more nuts than any other US leader and Brexit is a catastrophe that was avoidable. It might lead to the acceleration of Britain's economic decline.... However, I'd be surprised if India goes far along the path of becoming a 'Hindu Pakistan'”



Bikramjit Bose

India from 1989 to 1992. I'd be very surprised if India goes very far along the path of becoming a 'Hindu Pakistan'. Liberals must remain vigilant as there are all sorts of places where freedoms are being restricted and institutions are being repressed. However, frankly, it's less worrying than I thought it might be. We haven't had any more Gujarats, for example.

What's your key learning from life in India?

India has changed my life completely. I would have been a completely different person with different tastes, different knowledge if I hadn't come to this country. I have been here for 30 years; it's my home and it has changed everything about my life, across the board. From my religious views through to morality, perception of the world, sense of nationalism and nationality, India has radically changed me. Coming to India, choosing to live here, has unquestionably been *the* turning point in my life—I landed here on 26 January 1984 and my life divides in two around that date. ✨

PAST IMPERFECT

A journey through Cambodia reveals the resilience of a people who are still battling the demons of a gruesome genocide

📷 Devesh Joshi



Haunting black-and-white mugshots of Khmer Rouge victims were splattered on the walls around me. Some had broken jawbones, others missing teeth. Every time I looked at a new image, I winced.

A silver standing next to me was twitching from time to time. We were at the infamous S-21 Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, where as many as 17,000 men, women and children were imprisoned, tortured and brutally murdered.

As I gathered my thoughts, I realised the silver—a Cambodian in all probability—had not budged at all; I could find him blinking his moist eyes. Watching him, it dawned on me that I hardly knew anything about the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, which claimed over 2 million lives in four years beginning 1975.

Getting back to the hostel, I picked up *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields*, a book gifted by a Cambodian I met in Siem Reap. It is a sad account of the survivors of the genocide. In 1975, the Khmer Rouge or the Communist Party of Kampuchea, as they officially called themselves, took over Phnom Penh and rest of the country with the goal of transforming the nation into a cashless, anti-Western, agrarian society. But this dramatic attempt at social engineering came at a terrible cost. People practising Western standards of living, including doctors, teachers and other professionals, were brutally murdered. Citizens were even condemned for wearing glasses or knowing a foreign language. Schools were turned into re-education camps and cities were vandalised. Unfortunately, many Khmer Rouge soldiers were children; their victims were children too. The government was finally overthrown in 1979 by invading Vietnamese troops. However, in



Locals perform daily chores at the floating villages on Tonlé Sap lake in Siem Reap



Clockwise from top left: Building S-21 at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum; the metal chambers where detainees were locked and tortured; the blood-stained torture chambers for visitors to walk through; black-and-white mugshots of a few Khmer Rouge victims

a travesty of justice, Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot, who was denounced by his former comrades in a show trial in 1997, was only sentenced to house arrest till his death in 1998.

Curious for some personal accounts, I tried quizzing the hostel staff. They seemed reluctant to discuss Khmer Rouge; probably, it was too painful for them. Next morning, I headed to S-21 Tuol Sleng once again, with a few hours planned for the Choeng Ek killing fields. Though it was still the early hours of the morning, the city of Phnom Penh looked bright and functional, with roadside stalls selling eatables and tuk-tuk drivers negotiating with customers. It's hard to believe that the riverside of Sisowath Quay, where tourists can be seen sipping cocktails or a happy-hour 50 cent-beer today, was bombed 40 years ago. Most of the buildings in the city are brand new, but the remnants of old architecture are still visible.

The two-storey buildings of Tuol Sleng were a high school before being turned into one of the largest detention and interrogation centres under the Khmer Rouge. The classrooms were transformed into torture chambers, with each room housing more than a dozen small cells. The Spartan interrogation rooms were furnished with just a school desk-and-chair set and a steel bed frame with shackles at either end. The windows were covered with iron bars and

barbed wire to prevent escapes. Upon arrival at the camp, the prisoners were photographed as evidence for Khmer Rouge leaders. The main building, notoriously known as Security Prison 21 or S-21, is where most of the heinous crimes took place. Besides photographs of victims, the rooms today display torture equipment such as iron bars and rods, pickaxes, machetes and electric wires. The inmates were tortured till they confessed to crimes they never committed. Not everyone who visits Tuol Sleng Museum can complete the entire tour; I turned out to be one among them!

Disturbed, I hired another tuk-tuk to the killing fields of Choeng Ek. As it revved up, the driver told me Choeng Ek was just one of the 150 execution centres around the country. The killing fields were used for massacre and burial of bodies. People who showed a slight hint of intellect were killed and buried there along with their family.

Walking inside a killing field literally means walking on human remains. I was careful not to step on anything that remotely looked like a bone. Listening to the audio set, which cost \$ 3 on top of the entry fee, I learned that the army killed thousands by repeatedly hitting them on their faces with iron rods as bullets were expensive. Some smashed skulls on the field validate this statement.



Cycle rickshaws and tuk-tuks are the main modes of transport on the dusty roads of Phnom Penh

FACTFILE

WHEN TO GO

As Cambodia is warm almost year-round, with temperatures rarely dropping below 20° Celsius, the best time to visit is between November and March.

VISA & CURRENCY REQUIREMENT

Indians can get an eVisa (valid for three months) as well as visa-on-arrival (valid for one month). Visa-on-arrival costs \$ 30, and can be obtained at the airport or land border. Carry a passport-sized photo and the fee, which has to be in US dollars, and you're good to go.

The official currency is The Cambodian Riel (KHR). However, the country uses US dollars and local people are always more than willing to accept them. There's no real need to carry the local currency unless you're visiting villages and paying for really small things on the streets. Most ATMs in Cambodia dispense US dollars.

TIPS

There are no direct flights from India to Cambodia. You need to take a connecting flight from either Bangkok in Thailand or Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. The two major airports of the country are Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, with most flights flying to and from the capital city of Phnom Penh. It is also possible to enter the country by land from Thailand, Vietnam and Laos.

In Phnom Penh, there's almost no public transport. Tuk-tuks are the preferred option. To visit Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek killing fields for half a day, tuk-tuks charge somewhere around \$ 40, including driving and waiting time. At Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek killing fields, tourists are given a headset guide for an additional cost of about \$ 3.

Do not leave Cambodia without trying the sumptuous Khmer curry with local beer. You can enjoy a delicious meal on the street for less than \$ 2, and in a restaurant for less than \$ 5.

Choeung Ek had several mass graves, separating the bodies of men, women and children. Right next to one of the graves was the 'killing tree', so called because its massive trunk was used to smash the heads of children before they were thrown into the mass grave. A tall 17-storey *stupa*, situated almost in the centre of the fields, is filled with skulls.

It is hard to believe that everybody living in Cambodia today over the age of 40 is either a victim or a perpetrator of this brutality. And even those who were not born then are indirect victims of family separation and loss. Perhaps that's why when you ask locals about their views on Khmer Rouge, they look perplexed or agitated, not wanting to share the painful details.

Though Cambodia may well be a country still trying to find its way after the horrifying genocide, you realise it's peopled with some of the friendliest souls on earth. As you walk along the streets of Phnom Penh, you find nothing but smiles and soft laughter. The soul of the nation, its tragic past and the cheerful people never miss leaving a mark on your heart. With cemented roads still not a reality, you'll be travelling mostly along dirt tracks. Yet every time you go past small villages, children will wave, smile and shout a happy "hello!" ✨

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

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Gireesh G V

REMEMBERING A MUTINY

The Bombay Naval Mutiny of February 1946 is all-but-forgotten in the history of Indian Independence, even though it saw 10,000 seamen of the Royal Indian Navy rebel against British might. Contemporary artist Vivan Sundaram (*right*) dedicated his latest art installation-cum-experiential exhibition at CSMVS, Mumbai, to bring the mutiny to life. “There is a rather interesting aspect, where one is trying to research something that nobody knew anything about,” Sundaram

nostalgia

told *scroll.in*. Titled *Meanings of Failed Action: Insurrection 1946*, the exhibition was a collaboration with cultural theorist Ashish Rajadhyaksha (*left*). What stood out was a mammoth walk-in container within which the story of the Bombay Naval Mutiny was brought to life through a visceral collage of light and sound. In addition, a 40-ft mural with newspaper clippings in multiple languages, assembled by Rajadhyaksha and film historian Valentina Vitali, revealed the political landscape of the time.

Only the BRAVE

Soft but very strong and having a deep impact—just like the quiet resolve and determination of women journalists around the world. With that metaphor, **Nupur Basu**, 59, introduces us to the title of her opus, *Velvet Revolution*, a documentary on women journalists reporting in conflict areas around the world and the challenges they face while navigating the dangers involved.

“Whether it is rural women in southern India who fought against the Indian Government’s alcohol policy in my first film *Dry Days in Dobbagunta* (1995), or the amazing women journalists in *Velvet Revolution*, women across the board are *the agents of change*” says the award-winning Basu, who has made five documentaries to date, four of them addressing women’s issues.

With *Velvet Revolution*, the former television journalist has expanded her canvas to work with four other women directors to give a platform to the testimonies of women journalists from seven countries. Produced by the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT), the 57-minute, hard-hitting film pans to journalists from war-torn Syria and the dictatorial regime of the Philippines to Boko Haram-infested Cameroon.

From India, it tells the stories of Ritu Sarin of *The Indian Express*, who led two of her male colleagues in the Indian leg of the Panama Papers investigations; Malini Subramaniam, who reports on human rights violations of tribals in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, and was evicted from her home by a local vigilante group; and, in Andhra Pradesh, E Bharti Yendapalli and her fellow Dalit reporters from Telugu magazine *Navodaya* exposing Dalit discrimination. Basu’s documentary also includes Bangladeshi blogger Rafida Bonya Ahmed, who speaks for the first time on film about life after watching her husband being murdered by Islamic extremists.

Velvet Revolution premiered in Delhi on 3 March before it was screened in New York at the UN Commission on the Status of Women conference. In an email interview with **Natasha Rego**, Bengaluru-based Basu speaks on the making of the film, its impact and the state of journalism in India. (*Velvet Revolution* will be screened on 30 May at the UN Conference Hall in New Delhi.)



Photographs courtesy: Nupur Basu / IAWRT

Did your experience as a journalist influence the film?

As a journalist for over three decades in print, television and the digital media, I guess my insider’s view did play a role in shaping the film. When the IAWRT wanted a documentary produced on ‘Women Making News’, I pitched my vision—I wanted to capture women in print, radio, television and the digital media negotiating their professional duties in a world in conflict.

What were the challenges of bringing it all together?

We first put out a call to IAWRT members who are filmmakers. We received 18 proposals that were vetted by a Long Doc Committee. We picked three proposals from women directors in the Philippines, India and Cameroon.

I was keen to have Rafida Bonya Ahmed on the film for the courage she showed after her husband Abhijit Roy’s brutal killing in Dhaka two years ago. I contacted her in the US, and convinced her to come on board to speak about the fallout of her husband’s killing and how she continued to edit *Mukto-Mona*, the blog for free thinkers and rationalists that her husband had founded. I personally interviewed the BBC’s Lyse Doucet, Zaina Erhaim from Syria and Najiba Ayubi from Afghanistan. We also reached out to the women journalists in the Panama Papers investigations. The main challenge, then, was editing and getting one comprehensive story out of the different segments, something editors and filmmakers Reena Mohan and Nirmal Chander did extremely skillfully.

documentary

Stills from the film: (clockwise from top) The Dalit reporters of *Navodaya*; Afghan radio journalist Najiba Ayubi; Malini Subramaniam who reports from Bastar; Inday Espina-Varona from the Philippines; radio journalist Moussa Marandata in Cameroon



This is your first anthology. What were the challenges of this format?

While in my earlier films, I was the director of the standalone documentary film, in this project I came in as executive producer and worked with other directors as well. I guess it was several notches more challenging for that reason. In the earlier model, one was accountable for one's own work. Here, one was responsible for the work of others as well. But this had the advantage of being a global collaborative model, where for a very small budget, in a very short time, you can get a global story. It also cuts the carbon footprint, which is excellent.



From conception to premiere, how long did it take?

For me, as executive producer and project director, it took about 10 months; for the country directors it took four to five months. There were several interesting things that happened during the making. For instance, right in the middle of filming, Zaina Erhaim's passport was impounded at Heathrow airport by the British authorities. Zaina, a journalist living in exile in Turkey, was now stuck in the UK with her eight month-old daughter, Zara! In Malini's case, she got one award while we were making the film and another just after we finished editing it, and we had to incorporate this. As is the nature of documentary filming, real life is organic and the story unfolds in that mode too.



Did working on this film dispel any preconceived notions? Did it reinforce any others?

I think it reinforced the fact that women journalists, like their male counterparts, are increasingly under attack by state and non-state players as they do their jobs. As women, they are exposed to 'double attacks'—their personal safety is increasingly under threat and the attacks on them through social media are getting nastier and misogynistic.

Where does Indian media stand on a global scale?

There is a disturbing trend of increasing attacks on journalists in India—23 journalists were killed between 2006 and 2015, and there has been no conviction in any of the cases. In a short period of five months in 2015, four journalists were killed—the highest in such a short period in post-Independent India. It is one of the four countries in the Commonwealth, alongside Pakistan and Bangladesh, on which there is now an international radar for attacks on media. India is now one of the 10 deadliest countries to report from. That is a shame! How did we get to this point? The solidarity among journalists needs to be strengthened so attacks on journalists are protested vehemently by the others.

Where do you go from here?

More screenings of *Velvet Revolution* are being planned in the coming months. As for myself, I will continue to write, speak and mentor on the issues I believe in.

Every chair tells a story

Manik Wandrekar's recycled furniture speaks of legends, moments of inspiration and an intriguing personal journey, discovers **Rachna Viridi**

Manik Wandrekar has redefined the phrase 'take a seat'. What she means is, take a seat, pause a while and let the chair tell you its story!

At her recent exhibition *Installation Furniture* at The Art Hub in Mumbai's Atria Mall, the veteran interior designer takes you on a very personal journey. Most of her chairs and sofas have been made of recycled material but, more important, every work of art, quite literally, tells a story.

Wandrekar guides you to her favourite installation: a *thaki*, a wooden chair made of rubber tyres and covered with colourful fabrics. If you listen carefully, this chair will tell you of the legends associated with *thaki*, a genre of wooden dolls in rural India. Explaining that the dolls used to be dressed in fabric just like the kind she has used for her chairs, Wandrekar remarks, "I have seen *thaki* [the dolls], when I was a child at my grandfather's house in Miraj, Sangli." Next, she escorts you to the 'Parmeshwar chair'. Designed in bright colours inspired by pop artist Andy Warhol, the sofa sports the face of the late Parmeshwar Godrej on one side (*inset*). "I have dedicated this to the memory of my first client, the late Parmeshwar Godrej," she shares, inviting you to 'listen' to her next chair, centred on the theme that "people have taken the beautiful city of Mumbai for granted and ruined it with concretisation".

"Some of these pieces will talk to you and even amuse you," says the 75 year-old designer. "Not a single one is static or dumb. I've taken inspiration from the works of great artists and converted them into a three-dimensional installation. I've tried to cut the distance between art and self. I want people to touch, caress, hold and feel it and not have a distant relationship with it."

this 'n' that

With her 47-year journey in design, a vast repertoire and VIP clientele, Wandrekar has worked tirelessly for a year to put together this exhibition. She has dedicated it to Prof S H Wandrekar, her late husband, guru and founder of Rachana Sansad, a leading school of art in Mumbai. "My husband died in 2014 and, after grieving for two years, I engrossed myself in this show. It helped me fill the vacuum in my life and keep my sanity."

Photographs courtesy: Manik Wandrekar



Wandrekar's unique collection of 60 thought-provoking pieces is divided into three series: Emotional, Recycle and Art-Based Furniture. For the recycled series, materials like old tyres, cloth, wood and chains have been used. "I hope it will challenge people's thinking," she says. Even the invitation card to her exhibition resembles a piece of paper torn from a fancy magazine. Her humble message to all: 'Do not discard old furniture; redesign, remodel and recycle it.'

Courtesy: Sphoorthi Theatre

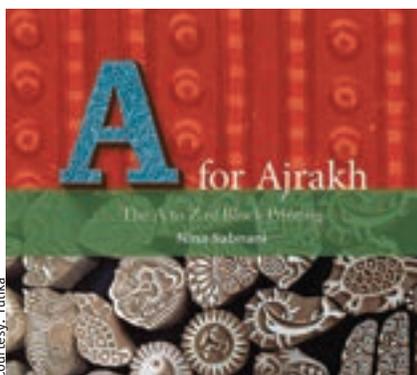


“From the *Adi Parva* to the *Swargaarohan Parva*, it would take me 120 full days and nights to complete the entire story of the *Mahabharata*. I have been fortunate to narrate the whole story several times. I am not a machine to go on and on for days and night. But if you leave me to my good mood, I can even complete the whole story in two months.... What else do I have other than this one story to tell? I own [the characters]. They speak to me. I feel I am possessed by them and they are asking me to tell you their stories so you don't forget them too.”

—Padma Bhushan Teejan Bai, 60, a Pandavani exponent who has singlehandedly kept alive the folk ballad form for close to five decades, speaking to Open magazine

Alphabet blocks

Courtesy: Tulika



Here's a new way to learn the alphabet: *A* for *Ajrakh*, *B* for *Bagh*, *C* for *Chhipa*! Filmmaker, animator and illustrator Nina Sabnani's new book for children, titled *A For Ajrak* (Tulika; ₹ 265; 40 pages), doubles as a beginner's guide to block printing for adults. It contains (sometimes mythical) stories of the origin and evolution of the myriad forms of block-making and textile-printing techniques in India. Sabnani, 60, was influenced largely by her childhood in Rajasthan and Gujarat. "I found it fascinating that communities could be identified by the block prints on their clothes. So I had been mulling over this idea for many years, collecting stories from various crafts people about how something—a particular style, colour or technique—came into being," she tells *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. Replete with bright colours, vivid photographs and 24 captivating stories, this is a tribute to modern-day craftsmen who have persevered despite the odds.



Anubha Agarwal

VINTAGE DRIVE

Jaipur reclaimed some of its past splendour in February, as more than 100 gleaming vintage cars took off from the Taj Jai Mahal Palace hotel onto the streets as part of the 19th Vintage & Classic Car Rally. Conducted by the Rajputana Automotive Sports Car Club, the event boasted Maharaja Jai Singh's 1953 Jaguar, Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh's 1956 Ford Thunderbird, and cricketer Ravi Shastri's 1985 Audi. Founding president of the club, 73 year-old Dayanidhi Kasliwal (*in pic*), who had 10 prized automobiles on display, tells us, "What began with only six cars has flowered into a well-attended car show and is one of the oldest vintage car events of India." To top things off, a jury picked the best-maintained car, oldest car and best-restored car and awarded trophies adorned with all the best-known car logos.

WILD ART



Photographs by Karen Knorr / Tasveer

An egret trots across the splendid Durbar Hall of Junha Mahal in Dungarpur, Rajasthan (**top**). You wonder if it truly was there—and if it was, what a delight that would be! London-based photographer Karen Knorr’s *India Song* series is a collection of many such fantastical frames of wild animals hanging out in the extravagant interiors of Rajput and Mughal architectural spaces, such as palaces, havelis and mausoleums. To create the series, Knorr shot analogue frames of these historic monuments and inserted into them high-resolution digital shots of live animals pho-

Clockwise from top: *Flight of Freedom*, Junha Mahal; *The Lovesick Prince*, Dungarpur Palace; *The Sound of Rain*, Junargarh Fort

tographed in sanctuaries, zoos and cities, thereby “reinventing the *Panchatantra* for the 21st century”. “The series celebrates the rich visual culture evident in the myths and stories of northern India, mainly Rajasthan, using sacred and secular sites to highlight caste, femininity and its relationship with the animal world,” she writes in her artist’s statement. *India Song* was on display at the recently concluded Kochi-Muziris Biennale, in Kochi, Kerala.

What is 60?

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

The number of movies you have to catch up on.

The number of bad jokes you cracked last month.

The number of times you told your grandson

to get away from the TV set and get a life.

The number of places you have to travel to.

What it's not, is your age.

At least not in your head.

Or in your heart.



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

Harmony
celebrate age

Amma's KITCHEN

Retaining fragrance, flavour and nutrients, and completely toxin-free and organic, Kochi-based The Village Fair offers traditional cookware that is—quite literally—yours for life, writes Arati Rajan Menon



Photographs courtesy: The Village Fair

The best fragrances in life don't come out of a bottle—the embrace of the first rain by scorched, parched earth; the heady musk of one's beloved after a day of toil; the dewy-fresh irresistibility of a newborn; and the deliciousness of crisp, gingelly oil-seasoned dosas with the earthy aroma of onion sambar in mom's kitchen. Indeed, the very thought of that kitchen, a repository of multiple olfactory and savoury delights, is often a source of bittersweet nostalgia with memories of

food, family and myriad flavours merging into a sensory symphony—one that many of us are unable to reproduce in our own homes.

You could blame it on the treadmill of modern life, where culinary traditions are routinely sacrificed at the altar of convenience and speed. And then, there's the banality of modern cookware, which, at the very least, leeches the flavours and nutrients of most of our food and, at its worst, introduces toxins into our

bodies. Little wonder then, that advocates of healthy eating world over are increasingly talking about natural, organic, non-toxic cookware.

In India, this conversation is less about making a switch and more a rediscovery of our culinary DNA in terms of the cast-iron, clay, stone and bronze cookware that took pride of place in the kitchen of yore. And riding the wave of this revival are two women



from Kerala—‘dreamer’ Radhika Menon (*left*) and ‘doer’ Priya Deepak (*right*)—and their brand, The Village Fair, which aims to ‘bring the ancient wisdom of healthy living to today’s modern world’.

Like so many ventures, this one was born from serendipity. In 2015, when Menon saw a Facebook post recommending the immersion of a cast-iron fish into the cook pot to up the iron quotient, she promptly pulled out her cast-iron cookware—inherited from her grandmother—and posted pictures. The stream of enquiries she received led to something of a Eureka moment. “She called me one morning out of the blue with the idea of traditional cookware as a business venture and said, ‘You have to do this with me’,” recalls Deepak. (The two women, both from a corporate background, had worked together on a project and become friends.) Sceptical at first, Deepak was won over by Menon’s persistence and her own deepening understanding of the benefits and potential of traditional cookware.

For starters, it’s toxin-free, completely organic and healthy. Sturdy as can be, cast-iron cookware requires very little oil and is suffused with rich nutrients, fortifying your food with iron. And clay and stone

cookware, ideal for slow cooking your curries with uniform circulation of heat and moisture through the pot, retains all the nutrients while infusing minerals into your food and balancing out its PH levels.

Then, of course, there’s the taste. “When you make a dosa on a cast-iron *tawa* or chicken curry in a cast-iron *kadhai*, or a fish curry in a clay *chetti*, the flavours are unbelievable,” says Deepak. “And there’s nothing quite like a *moru* [yoghurt-based] curry made in a stone *kalchatti*. These vessels don’t just retain flavour, they also act as insulators and the food doesn’t spoil. For instance, my fish curry is lying outside for two days in the clay pot. I also believe the flavours of vegetarian food are lost in non-stick cookware. Traditional cookware will make you start loving vegetarian food all over again!”

While The Village Fair sources quality cookware from across Kerala (cast iron from Shornur, clay vessels from Kochi and Palakkad, bronze from Thrissur, and so on), the real value-add comes at the seasoning stage, which is essential before use. They employ about 15 women of all ages (“from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law and sisters!”) for this intensive and lengthy process, which involves scrubbing the cookware clean, immersing it in rice water over a week to remove the impurities, and then firing it in an oven (in the case of clay vessels) and repeated heating with multiple coatings of vegetable oil (in the case of cast iron). Many of the products, like the dosa tawa, are actually test-driven by the women before they make their way to the customer!

For the women, who are paid ‘per piece’, it is an empowering experience. “They work at their convenience, which has never really clashed with our requirements,” says Deepak. “And now they feel a sense of ownership. In fact, they are a vital part of the quality control process and feel proud at the value they bring to the brand.” What’s more, 5 per cent of all sales go to Kochin-based Mehac Foundation, which works with women with mental health issues as well as their caregivers.

From travelling between the Kochi unit and Bengaluru to hand-deliver orders to customers, the ladies have indeed come a long way in two years. With about 1,000 customers pan India and overseas, The Village Fair is ready to move to the next level with an expansion of its retail and online presence. “This has become a mission for us and we are determined to spread the word,” says Deepak. “This is truly cookware for life—if maintained properly, it only gets better with time and use. And it adds so much value to your body.”

A DAY IN AMMA'S KITCHEN USING THE VILLAGE FAIR'S NATURAL COOKWARE

BREAKFAST

UTTHAPAM

Product: Cast-iron raised edge pan/dosa pan



Ingredients

- Dosa rice: 3 cups
- Urad dal: $\frac{3}{4}$ cup
- Methi (fenugreek) seeds: 1 tbsp
- Salt to taste

For the topping

- Onion, coriander and green chillies, finely chopped
- Carrot, grated
- Curry leaves: a few

Method

Soak rice, dal and *methi* seeds in water for at least 6 hours. Grind and keep overnight. In the morning, add salt and a pinch of sugar. Dip half an onion in oil and use it to smear the pan when it is hot. Pour the batter and spread evenly. Wait for a few bubbles to appear; then, add the topping ingredients and press lightly. Flip carefully when you feel it has browned enough. Flip it back and your *uthappam* is ready! This tastes great with coconut or tomato chutney.

MID-MORNING

BUTTERMILK

Product: Clay pot/bottle

Ingredients

- Yoghurt: 2 cups
- Cold water: 4 cups

- Ginger: 1 small piece
- Green chillies: 1-2
- Curry leaves: a few
- Salt to taste

Method

Whisk together all ingredients and strain into clay pot or glasses. Store in the fridge or a cool place. Drink a glass mid-morning and beat the heat this summer. The clay pot is also ideal to set your yoghurt.

LUNCH

PALAKADDAN SAMBAR WITH COCONUT

Product: Clay pot/clay *kalchatti*



While sambar is essentially a Tamilian dish, it has seen local variations across southern India. Growing up, we only knew our grandmother's version of Palakkad sambar. This is a modified recipe with sambar powder, though she made the sambar mix fresh every time. Also in *Palakkadan* sambar, we never added any 'English vegetables' like carrots, potatoes, beans, etc!

Ingredients

- Tur dal: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup; cooked soft
- Drumsticks, cut into 2-inch pieces
- Large onions, sliced
- Tomatoes, quartered
- Tamarind: juice of 1 lime-sized ball
- Sambar powder: 2 tbsp
- Asafoetida (*hing*): a pinch, if desired
- Red chilli powder: as desired
- Salt to taste
- Oil, mustard seeds, *methi* (fenugreek) seeds, dry chillies and curry leaves, for seasoning

To roast and grind

- Coconut: ½ cup
- Shallots: 3-4
- Oil: ½ tsp
- Salt to taste

Method

Roast the ingredients above till coconut gives a fine aroma but is not browned. Grind to a smooth paste. Now, in a clay pot/*kalchatti*, add all the vegetables except tomatoes to the tur dal with enough water and cook till ¾ done. Add sambar powder, chilli powder, asafoetida and let it cook. Add tamarind juice and tomatoes. Add salt to taste. When done, add the ground coconut paste. Bring it to a boil and remove from fire. Temper ½ tsp mustard seeds, a pinch of *methi* seeds, 2 dried red chillies and few curry leaves in 1 tbsp of oil and add. Serve with rice.

AVIAL

Product: Clay *kalchatti*



Ingredients—all julienned (about 1 inch)

- Ripe cucumber: 150 gm
- Raw banana: 1 small
- Long beans: 100 gm
- Carrot: 1
- Yam: 100 gm
- Drumsticks: 2
- Raw mango: 1

To grind

- Coconut: ½; grated
- Small onions: 2-3
- Green chillies: 2-3
- Cumin seeds: a pinch

For the masala

- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Salt to taste

To garnish

- Coconut oil
- Curry leaves

Method

Lightly grind the ingredients specified with a few drops of water. Don't make it a paste. Take the clay *kalchatti* and add all the vegetables except the raw mango in less than ½ cup of water. Add turmeric, chilli powder and salt as per taste. Boil for about 5 minutes and then add the mango pieces. Let it boil till cooked but don't over boil. Add the ground coconut masala and cook for 2-3 minutes on a slow flame. Once ready, add few drops of coconut oil and curry leaves.

KUMBALANGA MULAKOOSHYAM

Product: Stone *kalchatti*



Anyone from central Kerala will remember the *mulakooshyam*, usually made from white pumpkin, snake gourd or drumsticks, with nostalgia. When the jackfruit season is on, raw jackfruit is the go-to ingredients.

Ingredients

- White pumpkin: 2 full cups; diced
- Tur dal (or skinned green gram): 1 cup; cooked and mashed
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Salt to taste

To grind

- Coconut: ½ cup; scraped
- Green chillies: 4- 6 (depending on how spicy you like it)
- Shallots: 2-4
- Cumin (*jeera*) seeds: ½ tsp
- Salt to taste

Method

Grind the ingredients specified. In the clay pot, cook the mashed dal and pumpkin with turmeric and enough water till the pumpkin is soft. Add salt to taste. Add the ground coconut and bring to boil; let it simmer for 2-3 minutes

and remove from fire. Add a dash of coconut oil and curry leaves or season with spluttered mustard seeds and dry red chillies. Serve with rice and fish fry, if you are a non-vegetarian. And don't forget the poppadoms!

MUTTON ROGAN JOSH

Product: Stone *kalchatti*



Ingredients—to marinate

- Mutton: 1 kg
- Ginger-garlic paste: 2 tbsp
- Coriander powder: 1 tbsp
- Red chilli powder (preferably Kashmiri chilli): 1 tbsp
- Salt to taste

To cook

- Onions: 2 large; thinly sliced
- Ginger-garlic paste: 2 tbsp
- Tomato puree: 1 packet (or blanch 6 tomatoes and puree them)
- Yoghurt: 1 cup
- Cashew paste: 1 cup (fry 100 gm and grind into paste)
- Cumin (*jeera*) powder: 1 tbsp
- Chilli powder: 1 tbsp
- Garam masala: 1 tbsp
- Oil
- Salt to taste

Whole garam masala (do not grind)

- Peppercorns: 6
- Green cardamoms: 3
- Cloves: 4
- Cinnamon sticks: 2 small
- Bay leaves: 4
- Aniseed (*saunf*): 1 tsp

Method

Marinate the mutton with all the ingredients and ideally keep overnight; else, for at least an hour. Keep the stone *kalchatti* on a medium flame with a little oil. When the

oil heats, add the whole garam masala. When the spices splutter, add the onion and fry till golden brown. Now, add the ginger-garlic paste and fry till the raw smell reduces. Add the mutton pieces and sauté on high heat for 5 minutes. Reduce heat and add the coriander, chilli and cumin powder. The juices from the meat will now start seeping out. Sauté on medium heat till the water dries up. Now, add the tomato puree and sauté till the oil separates. Add 2 cups of water and cook until the mutton is done. It is recommended to keep it on a reduced flame and cook for an hour or more. When the mutton looks well cooked, whisk in the yoghurt and add the cashew paste. Add the garam masala powder and do not allow it to boil over. Remove from the heat just as it starts to boil and garnish with chopped coriander. Serve it straight out of the stone *kalchatti*. You will be amazed at how long the vessel retains the heat. This *kalchatti* can also be used for *avial*, *moru* curry, *sambar*, *erashery*, *olan*, stew and masala curry. Some people even use it to store dosa batter in the fridge!

TEATIME

ONION PAKODA

Product: Bronze/cast-iron *paniyaram* pan



Ingredients

- Onions: 2; sliced
- Gram flour (*besan*): ½ cup
- Rice flour: ¼ cup
- Green chillies: 2; finely chopped
- Red chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Asafoetida (*hing*) powder: 2 pinches
- Coriander leaves: handful; finely chopped
- Curry leaves: handful; finely chopped
- Salt to taste
- Oil to fry

Method

In a mixing bowl, add chopped onions, green chillies, coriander leaves, curry leaves and salt. Mix well with your

hand and keep aside for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the oil in the *paniyaram* pan, with just enough in each compartment to deep fry. Next, add rice flour, gram flour, chilli powder, turmeric and hing powder to the onion mix. Add about 1 tbsp of hot oil to it. Combine well, with just a few drops of water. The lesser the water, the crispier the *pakoda*. Take small pieces of the *pakoda* batter and drop into the hot oil in the pan. Turn in between. Keep the flame to medium while dropping the *pakoda* in and later reduce to low-medium. Deep fry till crisp, in batches, and drain on a kitchen towel. Enjoy the *pakoda* with mint chutney or ketchup. The pan can also be used to cook traditional dishes like *gundponglu/kuzhi paniyaram/paddu*, and *unniappam*. You can even use the pan to bake mini muffins or brownies!

DINNER

HONEY GLAZED CHICKEN

Product: Cast-iron raised edge pan/dosa pan



Ingredients

- Chicken breast: ½ kg
- Honey: 4 tbsp
- Soy sauce: 2 tbsp
- Garlic: 1 tsp; finely chopped
- Ginger: ½ tsp; chopped
- Red chilli powder (preferably Kashmiri) to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Smear salt and pepper on the chicken pieces and keep aside for 10 minutes. Heat the pan and pour 1 tsp oil just to glaze it. Place the chicken pieces in the pan and grill in batches till they are light brown on both sides (about 3-4 minutes on both sides). Mix honey, soy sauce, garlic, ginger and a little Kashmiri chilli powder in a cup. Now, put all the chicken pieces back in the pan and pour the honey sauce over it. Keep on a very low flame and let the chicken cook in the sauce for 5-8 minutes or till the sauce thickens. Serve hot with sautéed veggies and garlic bread or stir-fried rice/noodles cooked in a cast-iron

kadhai. You can even make a pizza, bake or grill chicken in the oven with a raised-edge pan!

URULAKIZHANGU NADAN MASALA CURRY

Product: Stone *kalchatti*; cast-iron *kadhai*



Ingredients

- Potatoes: 250 gm; peeled and cubed
- Onions: 2 medium; sliced thin
- Coconut milk: 1 cup
- Ginger: 1 inch; julienned
- Green chillies: 5-6; slit (add more if you like it hot)
- Turmeric: ¼ tsp
- Coconut oil: 1 tsp (can use any vegetable oil)
- Curry leaves: A small bunch
- Salt to taste

To grind

- Coriander (whole): 3 tbsp (can substitute with 2 tbsp powder)
- Red chillies: 3-4
- Cumin (*jeera*) seeds: ½ tsp
- Peppercorns: 2 tbsp

Method

Lightly roast the masala for grinding with a few drops of oil in the small cast-iron *kadhai*. Let it cool and grind. Add about 2 cups of water to all the other ingredients and bring to boil in the *kalchatti*. Add salt. When the onions are done, add the ground masala and let simmer till the masala is cooked well. Add the coconut milk and bring to a gentle boil. Remove from the fire. Add the coconut oil and garnish with curry leaves. Serve hot with rice, chapattis or even dosas!

To learn more about products from The Village Fair, go to thevillagefair.in



ANNUS MIRABILIS

In this poem, **Philip Larkin** (1922-1985) celebrates the sexual revolution that took Britain by storm in 1963 before invading the American coast to metamorphose into the hippie movement

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(which was rather late for me) -
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP.

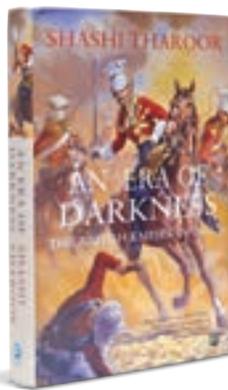
Up to then there'd only been
A sort of bargaining,
A wrangle for the ring,
A shame that started at sixteen
And spread to everything.

Then all at once the quarrel sank:
Everyone felt the same,
And every life became
A brilliant breaking of the bank,
A quite unlosable game.

So life was never better than
In nineteen sixty-three
(Though just too late for me) -
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP.

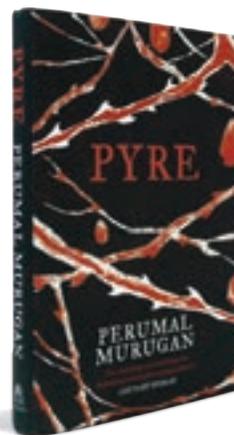
A pre-eminent poet of his generation, Larkin declined the honour of Poet Laureate in 1984

Shashi Tharoor is at his eloquent best in **AN ERA OF DARKNESS: THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA** (Aleph; ₹ 699; 333 pages), an impassioned argument against the so-called benefits of the Raj. The book, which took shape after his speech at Oxford went viral last year, is a painstaking examination of the financial, cultural and emotional damage wreaked on Indians during the 200 years of British rule. What can be more telling than this: “When the East India Company took control of the country, in the chaos that ensued after the collapse of the Mughal empire, India’s share of world GDP was 23 per cent. When the British left it was just above 3 per cent.” Tharoor

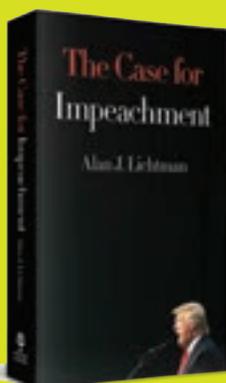


examines the many ways in which the British exploited India, ranging from the drain of national resources, the destruction of the Indian textile, steelmaking and shipping industries, and the negative transformation of agriculture. He presents not just the figures of that time but converts them in today’s denomination to explain the extent of plunder and damage. Tharoor also demolishes the arguments of apologists for Empire on supposed benefits including democracy and political freedom, the rule of law, and the railways. Engagingly narrated and passionately argued, Tharoor’s treatise serves to correct many misconceptions about one of the most contested periods of Indian history.

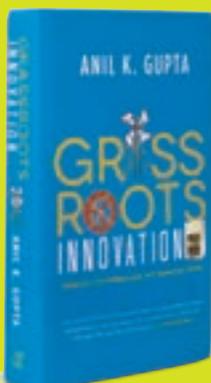
Poignantly penned by **Perumal Murugan**, the star of contemporary Tamil literature, and ably translated by **Aniruddhan Vasudevan**, **PYRE** (Penguin; ₹ 399; 196 pages) pits innocent young love against old-fashioned, rigid caste practices, still an unfortunate reality in many parts of the country. This is the story of Saroja and Kumaresan, who elope and get married. The young couple’s love is soon put to test in a dehumanised environment. As important as the main protagonists are different elements of the landscape, including the rock—an impassive spectator to all crucial action in the book—and the neem tree. In fact, the harsh topography of the area including the blazing sun, parched land and thorny shrubs embodies the nature of men who inhabit it: savage, indifferent and insensitive. The rhythms of the land and language come alive even as the narrative keeps shifting back and forth. *Pyre* is a haunting tale of love and desperation, of societal prejudice and the fire of hatred that is potent enough to destroy every compassionate feeling that makes us human.



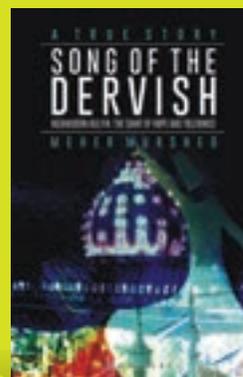
Also on stands



The Case for Impeachment
Allan J Lichtman
HarperCollins; ₹ 399; 320 pages
The writer, who has correctly predicted 30 years of presidential elections in the US, makes the case for impeachment of the 45th head of state, Donald J Trump.



Grassroots Innovation
Anil K Gupta
Penguin; ₹ 599; 381 pages
A social crusader, the author talks about innovations by ordinary people—from the Mitti Cool refrigerator to the footbridge of Meghalaya—that can change the way we live.



Song of the Dervish
Meher Murshed
Bloomsbury; ₹ 499; 242 pages
This riveting story of religious tolerance, compassion, love, lust, intrigue and deceit examines the lives of Chishti Sufi dervish Nizamuddin Auliya and his favourite disciple, court poet Amir Khusro.

Ke(a)y fascination

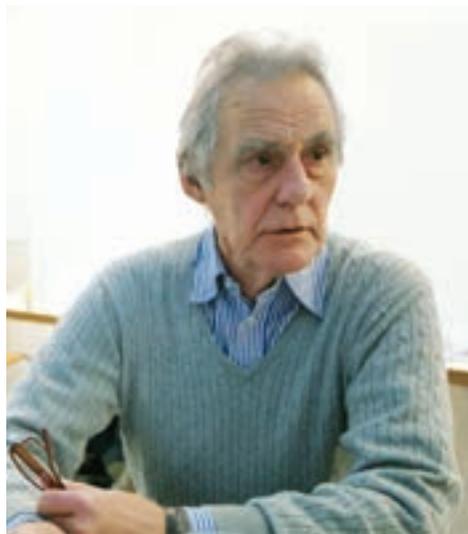
Aclaimed historian and Indophile **John Keay's** engagement with India is a tale that needs telling. This 75 year-old's tryst with the country began in 1966, when he arrived in Kashmir for a holiday. He fell in love with the place so much that he returned the next year for a six-month stay. From getting married in Kullu to authoring his first book *Into India* in 1973, India went on to become the bedrock of Keay's inspiration. His latest book, *The Tartan Turban: In Search of Alexander Gardner* (Kashi House; ₹ 2,000; 324 pages), is the first ever biography of Alexander Gardner, a remarkable 19th century American mercenary who served Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab.

Keay's brilliance as a scholar of history is evident in the 25 books he has authored. Some famed titles include *When Men and Mountains Meet*, *Explorer Extraordinary*, *India Discovered: The Recovery of a Lost Civilisation*, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company*, *The Great Arc: The Dramatic Tale of How India was Mapped and Everest was Named* and *Midnight's Descendants: South Asia from Partition to the Present Day*. "I have been writing books since 1970 while working for the BBC," says this former journalist. "Radio taught me to hear my writing, a really useful tool, and took me all round the world. It was probably better than spending the 1980s trying to accumulate doctorates and academic honours."

Educated at Ampleforth College, York, and Magdalen College, Oxford, where he was a demy (scholar) in

modern history, Keay has been variously described as 'a gifted non-academic historian' and 'doyen of British Indian studies'. His passion for India is indeed germane given the fact that his books on the country deal with non-political subjects, mostly for aying into culture and aesthetics. More significantly, unlike many British authors writing on India, Keay has no links with the Raj; his focus remains "India under the British, perhaps, but not the British

authorspeak



Raj Gadhru

in India" as he has "no particular sympathy with the high period of the Empire". In 2009, Keay was honoured with the Royal Society for Asian Affairs' Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal for his literary contribution to Asian studies.

In an email interview to **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**, Keay, based in Argyll, Scotland, unravels the personality of Gardner, a traveller-cum-explorer from a bygone era.

Excerpts from the interview:

How was the experience of penning *The Tartan Turban*?

The TT was my first attempt at a biography. And as you infer, Alexander Gardner's life has sometimes been supposed closer to fiction than non-fiction. So, as well as telling his extraordinary story, it was necessary to evaluate its veracity and authenticity. The result is as much biographical quest as biography. Was Gardner really who he said he was— a white man gone native, an American citizen who had survived for 12 years as a hired gun in Asia, an artillery officer who had served in the last of India's great native empires? Had he really crisscrossed all the deserts and mountains between the Caspian Sea and Tibet, discovered lost peoples and forbidden cities, fended off countless assailants and participated in the carnage that accompanied the collapse of the Sikh empire? And when he died in Kashmir, was he indeed what a contemporary called 'one of the most extraordinary men in India'? For the answers, you must read the book.

What kind of research and travel did the book demand?

Travelling to out-of-the-way places is as much research as foraging in the archives. I enjoy both, but one learns to adapt. Over time, some places become more accessible, others less so. Gardner spent several years in Afghanistan. For *The TT*, I drew on travel in that country before the Russians arrived, let alone Bin Laden or the Taliban, and when security was less of a problem. Likewise Kashmir, which in the 1960s and '70s was

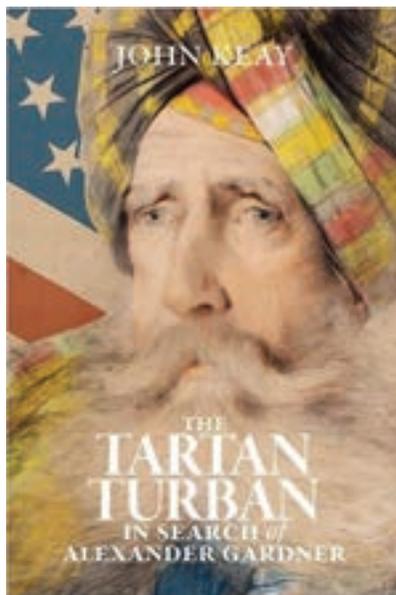
more like the idyllic valley in which Gardner spent his retirement than is the Kashmir of today.

From research to submission or manuscript, how long did it take?

The answer to that could be either 40 years or four. I first encountered and researched Gardner's life when I was writing about the exploration of the Western Himalayas in the 1970s. At the time I was not entirely convinced by the colonel's story and in fact left him out of a history of world exploration for the Royal Geographical Society in the 1980s. Thereafter, he scarcely figured on my writing horizon or on anyone else's until 2012. It was then that I was approached by Kashi House, a not-for-profit Sikh publisher in London. I'd never heard of Kashi House and didn't know Sikh publishers existed. But the emails kept coming. Parmjit Singh of Kashi House was nothing if not persuasive. The Internet had changed the whole nature of historical enquiry, he insisted. Gardner was popping up all over the place. Since I live in Scotland, he and his colleagues would themselves undertake research in London, he said. I had to just say what I needed and they'd find it, he assured me. Until the book was actually published, I nervously supposed that their large white van parked behind the British Library was Kashi House. So, while books invariably involve both an author and a publisher, *The TT* is unusual in being a genuine collaboration. Kashi House commissioned and largely researched it; I'd sowed the seed in the 1970s and wrote it.

What was the most striking aspect of Gardner's personality?

The book is called *The Tartan Turban* because that's what Gardner wore. It does not appear that he ever visited Scotland but his father was a Scottish-American doctor and it was



"Alexander Gardner's life has sometimes been supposed closer to fiction than non-fiction. So, as well as telling his extraordinary story, it was necessary to evaluate its veracity and authenticity. The result is as much biographical quest as biography"

as someone who dressed from head to toe in tartan—associated often with Scotland—that Gardner chose to be photographed and painted. He wanted to be remembered as a Highland Scot. This sartorial concern is notable throughout his career. When recalling his travels in Central Asia, he revealed nothing about his diet but frequently adverted to his outfit: Uzbek boots, bearskin burnoose, tall black Turkmen hat, etc. Admirers in Kashmir, like Charley Longfellow, son of great American poet H W Longfellow, also noted Gardner's extraordinary wardrobe—'wonderful Byronic shirt and brown dressing gown with brass buttons and a great red sash'. Another observer owed his acquaintance to the

colonel's enquiring about the cut of his Norfolk jacket. Unlike other explorers, Gardner did little to disguise an acute self-awareness.

From your experience, would you say Indians are proud of their heritage?

Indians seem moderately proud of their heritage and rightly so. I'm not so sure about their rulers. Among officials, immoderate claims often seem to be contradicted by complacency and neglect. The state of major museums, including that of the National Museum in Delhi, archives and heritage institutions such as the Archaeological Survey of India, would be considered an embarrassment in most heritage-rich, superpower-aspiring countries.

China and India are often compared as power contenders bound to play a significant role in the 21st century. What are your views?

As the author of histories of both China and India, I've been asked this question before, in India often but in China never. That's probably as near to an answer as I can be tempted to give.

Besides writing, what engages your time and interest?

Family principally. I have four no-longer children and six delightful grandchildren. Among indulgences, I would include garden and a dog. Locally, as a former fellow of the Royal Literary Fund, I run a small reading group for adults and conduct workshops in academic writing for sixth formers.

What are you working on currently?

It's a book about the Himalayan region but I don't want to say more than that. Yet.

Anything can be

Welcome new experiences, urges **Deborah Carroll**

Recently I've been reading a great deal about the things I shouldn't do, or should do, it's pretty much the same thing. Apparently as a woman over 50 I fit into the top two categories of people whom others think they should be bossing around.

- Don't wear miniskirts after 50.
- Go grey naturally.
- Things you don't need after 50.
- Eat this after 50.
- Mustn't eat this after 50.
- Don't expect love at first sight after 50.
- Drink no wine after your time.
(If you get that, you are definitely over 50.)

Let me start out by explaining this to writers everywhere. Stop. Telling. Women. What. To. Do.

I haven't been told "No" this many times since I was four and climbed on top of the refrigerator to throw down the eggs kept up there, one little fragile oval at a time. I had my reasons—two of them to be exact. First, climbing was fun. Secondly, those eggs made a cool sound and a fun yellow and white splash as they hit the linoleum floor.

And much like the adorable toddler I must have been, the adorable over-50 woman I am now doesn't enjoy being told no. Bratty? Perhaps. But more likely, unlike toddler me I believe I've earned the right to make good decisions, or bad ones, on my own. Dammit, I've lived more than

50 years; I've had several careers, I'm a mother and a grandmother. Those experiences should be worth something in terms of respect for my choices.

In particular, if you are considerably younger than I am, you clearly have no clue what is appropriate for me. You think I'm old and you're wrong. Older, yes. Old, not so much. (Not that there's anything wrong with old!) Millennials should not be telling me what to wear. I've seen what you wear and it's what I was wearing 20 years ago so I am clearly way



ahead of you in fashion. As four year-old me would've said, "You're not the boss of me, Millennials."

It's not just fashion. Don't tell me what's good for my body when your body still has elasticity. About 20 years ago, a young doc told me I was 100 per cent headed for knee replacement if I didn't stop running. I explained my running was the pace most people walked and I only ran about 3 miles at a time so I doubted

it was hurting me. He insisted he was right and I figured he spent about a million hours studying the body and must know whereof he spoke; so I stopped. I felt like crap for about five years and figured, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead," and started running again. Still running, about 4-5 miles a few times a week. No aches, no pains and, yes, still my original parts.

Food bloggers all appear to be about 30 and love to tell me what to eat. Eat kale! Fried foods are not your friend! Chocolate will kill you! Chocolate can save your life! (Okay, that one might be true.) Don't eat animals... unless they eat grass, then you can eat them... unless you have empathy, then you can't eat them! And, yes, they all use a lot of exclamation points because everything they write matters!

Here's the thing...I will, at this point, eat what I want and suffer the consequences. I'm just badass that way. I believe it is stopping and stagnating that accelerates getting old.

There's a difference between ageing and getting old. As long as we keep experiencing the world, keep trying new things, keep learning, we stay vibrant. We age but we don't get old.

Poet Shel Silverstein had it right in his *Listen to the Mustn'ts*, in which he advises not to pay attention to the shouldn'ts and instead embrace the concept of "anything can be". At any age. As long as we believe "anything can be", so can we.

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THE TWIGGY PHENOMENON



Dinodia Photo Library

A coltish frame, endless legs, pixie cut, Bambi eyes and fake eyelashes set her apart as one of the most popular exports of the Swinging London of the '60s, next only to The Beatles. As the original waif of the runway, Twiggy, born Lesley Hornby, made size zero and androgyny cool decades before Kate Moss and company. Referred to as the world's first ever supermodel, she caught an entire generation's imagination. Despite her prepubescent figure, she became a sex symbol and international fashion icon of unprecedented magnitude, changing the way feminine beauty was defined till then.

When she arrived in the US in 1967, magazine *The New Yorker* devoted almost a hundred pages to the Twiggy phenomenon, while legendary photographer Bert Stern tried to capture her essence in three documentaries. *Vogue* described her as an "extravaganza that makes the look of the sixties". Mattel cashed in on her popularity by launching the Twiggy Barbie doll, while skinny little Twiggy pens, Twiggy lunch boxes, Twiggy lashes and Twiggy-endorsed cosmetics took the market by storm. Her androgynous clothing line Twiggy Dresses—launched in 1967—comprising A-line dresses with collars and neckties, suits and dresses, which took inspiration from military uniforms and tuxedos, sold out instantly.

Though critics accused her of promoting an unhealthy body image for women, Twiggy insisted that she ate everything including chocolates, cakes and bread. In a recent interview, she admitted, "I hated the way I looked. I thought the world had gone mad." Twiggy quit modelling after just four years to dabble successfully in acting and singing, even notching up two Golden Globe Awards. In the 1990s, she became a TV presenter with *Twiggy's People* and published her well-received autobiography *Twiggy in Black and White*. Now 67, Twiggy—immortalised on everything from Andy Warhol screen prints to Marks & Spencer shopping bags—still remains a fashion touchstone, with the phrase 'Twiggy effect' denoting stylish women in their 60s and 70s.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: MAY 1967

- On 1 May, rock 'n' roll legend Elvis Presley married Priscilla Beaulieu in Las Vegas.
- On 1 May, GO Transit, Canada's first interregional public transit system, was inaugurated.
- On 6 May, Zakir Hussain was sworn in as the first Muslim president of India.
- On 12 May, English-American rock band The Jimi Hendrix Experience released its debut album, *Are You Experienced*.

BIG NUDGING

n. The use of massive collections of personal data to suggest and optimise behavioural science techniques that subtly encourage people to make better choices in their lives.

Example: These technologies are also becoming increasingly popular in the world of politics. Under the label of 'nudging', and on a massive scale, governments are trying to steer citizens towards healthier or more environmentally friendly behaviour by means of a 'nudge'—a modern form of paternalism. The new, caring government is not only interested in what we do, but also wants to make sure that we do the things that it considers to be right. The magic phrase is **big nudging**, which is the combination of big data with nudging.

—Dirk Helbing, et al., "Will democracy survive big data and artificial intelligence?", Scientific American, 25 February 2017

Endling

n. An animal or other species that is the last of its kind.

Example: A new word, **endling**, has been coined to describe an individual which is the last of its species. There are too many recorded tragedies of **endlings** who issued mating calls, but there was no one left to answer them.

—Dr Asad Zaman, "Ecological suicide", The Express Tribune, 27 July 2015

Entropy tourism

n. Travel that features places of decay, neglect or abandonment.

Example: It's easy and unfulfilling to just consume what other people (or nature) have already created. That's just **entropy tourism**. You're watching things wind down.

—Matt Maier, "I'm 30, Single. I have a full time IT job with good benefits. My life is boring. What can I do to make my life exciting? How can I find my passion?", Quora, 30 July 2016

GREYBALL

v. To blackball someone temporarily or provisionally.

Example: Uber announced this evening that it will stop using its **greyballing** tool to prevent local regulators and law enforcement from catching the company violating local taxi regulations.

—Jordan Golson, "Uber will stop 'greyballing' government regulators", The Verge, 8 March 2017

“ Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.

—American industrialist and founder of Ford Motor Company Henry Ford (1863-1947)

Dopamine dressing

pp. Wearing clothes that boost one's mood.

Example: We've looked at serotonin-boosting food and happiness workouts, but did you know that the so-called **dopamine dressing** trend, which is all about fashion choices that make you feel happy, actually has its roots in solid scientific research? – In other words, wearing "happy clothes" genuinely can make you feel happier.

—Jenny Paul, "Have you tried Victoria Beckham's instant happiness secret?", Lumity, 23 February 2017

WHERE'S THE PARTY TONIGHT?



Courtesy: Syybol

On the dance floor! If you love Bollywood music and have always wanted to sway your hips to *Sheila ki jawani*, jump in. The folks at Syybol will show you how—and you'll come out with your hips intact. That's the specialty of the full-body Syybol (short for systematic Bollywood) workout, which blends fitness with choreography. Co-founder Ashraf Sayed, a choreographer and fitness expert, has designed the workout to use familiar dance moves to exercise different parts of the body. From teenagers to silvers, the workout can be customised to suit your specific needs,

BUZZ

taking into consideration health conditions and physical ability. Their classes (one hour per session) are available twice a week at Lower Parel and Malad in Mumbai—and will soon spread to Khar and Thane—for about ₹ 2,500 a month. If you have a group of silvers who would like to acquire their services, you can even call them over for a free demo and customised classes. Get in touch with Manisha Kapoor, co-founder of Syybol, at (0) 9819209209 or write to contactus@syybol.com. At the next sangeet ceremony, the grandchildren won't know what hit them!

Wokeness

n. The state of being aware of or sensitive to social justice issues.

Example: We're surrounded by **wokeness**. By people who are self aware, and aware of the state of the world today and what it means to be who you are and look how you look and speak how you speak and be told what is normal and what is not, and what that does to human relationships.

—Vimbai Midzi, "A short note on 'wokeness'",
The Roar of Women's Silence, 6 November 2015

"Youth has no age"

—Spanish painter,
sculptor and co-founder
of Cubism Pablo Picasso
(1881–1973)

“They give me purpose in life”

Mahendrabhai Shrimali, 65, Ahmedabad, runs India's only shelter for disabled strays



Sumukh Bharadwaj

On a sultry morning, as a Maruti Eco van, which doubles up as an ambulance, nears a shelter for strays in Zundal near Ahmedabad, several dogs rush out, barking excitedly. The only one of its kind in India, this shelter is home to blind, disabled and paralytic dogs. **Mahendrabhai Shrimali** (*centre*), the brain behind it, puts you at ease, saying, “Don’t worry, they won’t bite you.” A former State Bank of India officer with a silver mop of hair and matching stubble, Shrimali is a father figure to the 40-odd residents of the shelter. Spread over 1.5 bigha of land donated by a farmer in 2014, the shelter is funded completely by the 65 year-old. He runs it with the help of a seven-member team, including a veterinary doctor. It was the sight of a grievously injured puppy that made Shrimali think of opening a shelter for disabled dogs. “Most strays sustain spinal injuries in violent street fights, often resulting in paralysis,” he says. Depending on the nature of their injury, these dogs are subjected to physiotherapy with a special massage oil that the team has perfected after trial and error. “We have been able to cure

more than 25 paralytic dogs till now,” he beams. Once they are cured, the dogs are set free. Meanwhile, taking care of the brood doesn’t come easy; the shelter requires 30 litre of milk and 140 chapattis daily. Shrimali ensures that all expenses for food, lodging and treatment are met from his pension. “A passionate dog lover, Shrimali is completely hands on,” says Dr Nikhil Patel, a veterinary doctor on his team. “Irrespective of time and distance, he’s the first person to rush when a call for help comes.” Each entrant to the shelter gets a name: ‘Camel’ is so named after her hump and ‘Gandhi’ was found in Gandhinagar, while ‘Ambica’ came from Ambicanagar. Currently secretary of the Ahmedabad chapter of People for Animals, Shrimali is also associated with Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation’s animal birth control, sterilisation and vaccination programme. What’s more, he also takes up lawsuits pertaining to the mistreatment of dogs. “Legally, not even the civic body can relocate dogs,” he emphasises, while patting Camel on her hump.

—Nayem Quadri

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