

# harmony celebrate age

AUGUST 2017 ₹ 40

The magazine for silver citizens



ALLAN SEALY'S  
ZEAL FOR WRITING

VIBRANT VRINDAVAN

KUMAON DIARIES

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## THE ENIGMA DR MICKEY MEHTA

ACE HOLISTIC WELLNESS GURU & LIFE COACH

### PROACTIVE

Madhuri Mathur in  
Dehradun empowers  
women through  
skill training

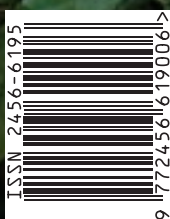
### HEALTH

Robotic-assisted  
gait training for  
neurorehabilitation

### NEW

### MYSTICAL MUSINGS

Spiritual guru  
Mohanji's mantra for  
successful ageing





## Covai's PolyCare has ARRIVED!

Covai's PolyCare, the Modern Day Family Doctor, made its grand inaugural on 16 July 17 in Coimbatore. Part of Brand CovaiCare, this initiative is from Covai Senior Care Private Limited (CSCS). Along with Covai's PolyCare, the Chief Guest, Dr G Lakshmipathi, MD, FRCP, FICP, DIH, the famous Professor of Medicine and Geriatrics Consultant who is also the presiding deity of Humour Society in Coimbatore, inaugurated Covai's Day Care Centre. Both these units will function from CovaiCare Tower, the building housing the corporate offices of Covai Property Centre (P) Ltd and CSCS.

Mr KS Shivaraman, the Advisor to the Management, in his welcome speech traced the history of the Company and said that it was a momentous day for Team CovaiCare led by Colonel (Veteran) Achal Sridharan, VSM, as they moved into their own premises after 16 years of incorporation of Covai Property Centre. Over 300 guests responded to the invitation sent by Covai. He welcomed all present and thanked them for gracing the occasion.

A very proud Colonel, as he is popularly known in the arena of senior living and care in India said, "it was my dream come true. Not only are we in our own premises but also the premises houses Covai's PolyCare and Covai's Day Care Centre and Senior Aide' and very soon the restaurant "Limited Menu" to home-deliver meals to seniors, working couples and anyone desiring pure vegetarian food"

Appreciating the hard work, perseverance, commitment and innovative spirit of Team CovaiCare, he said, "the credit for what we are today should go to my Team, who are the jewels in my crown!"



Dr G Lakshmipathi, known for his wit and humour, encouraged Team CovaiCare to set benchmark through the well conceived PolyCare. "A well thought out concept, which would make Colonel and his Team add one more feather in their caps, after pioneering senior living and care for the seniors in India over 13 years ago," he added.

His talk as the chief guest on the relevance and importance of General Practitioners (GPs) – the good old Family Doctors who have become almost extinct, was full of wit and humour. He kept the audience enthralled with laughter, while appreciating this initiative by Covai Property Centre. Dr G Lakshmipathi said, "doctors need to prescribe medicines only for half the problems of the patients and that the other half should be cured by Doctor's inter-action with patients through simplicity, touch and compassion, which unfortunately, is missing today." He lamented, that the cost of health care has risen exorbitantly and this initiative of PolyCare would address the concerns of the people.

Covai's PolyCare is the first of its kind in Coimbatore and aims to reduce the cost of health care through personalised and professional service and handhold the patients from the time they become members of Covai's PolyCare.

Dr. R. Basker, MBBS., the Senior Medical Officer, thanked one and all present for the event by proposing a Vote of Thanks.



After inaugurating CovaiCare Tower the Chief Guest and all present went around the premises and appreciated the minute details that has gone to make Covai's Day Care Centre and Poly Care, a professional health care centre.

With the response that has been received for the two initiatives of Team CovaiCare, you would see more of such facilities dotting the country in the future by CovaiCare!

# Loneliness, the enemy

Loneliness is not just a state of mind—it is a state of being, with tremendous physical and emotional consequences.

It may not be classified as a medical condition. Yet, referring to “an epidemic of loneliness”, an article published in *The New York Times* last year stated, “Researchers have found mounting evidence linking loneliness to physical illness and functional and cognitive decline. As a predictor of early death, loneliness eclipses obesity.”

For silvers already shaken by an empty nest, retirement from work, disengagement from social life and, in many cases, bereavement from the death of a partner, loneliness is a very familiar reality. And this is truer than ever before in India. A recent study, titled *Changing Needs & Rights of Older People in India*, conducted by New Delhi-based Agewell Foundation of 15,000 silvers in 300 districts across the country, reveals that almost every second elderly person (47.49 per cent) suffers from loneliness. In fact, it's worse in urban areas with about 64 per cent plagued by it, compared to about 40 per cent in rural areas. When this is coupled with neglect or sometimes abuse from younger family members, the situation becomes even more dire.

With psychological counselling still considered taboo in India and the absence of defined social or public health initiatives to tackle the problem, loneliness can become akin to a cancer taking control of our minds and bodies and spreading insidiously. Further, a sense of inertia sets into us over time, making us reluctant and disinclined to step out of our cocoons.

This is the greatest danger of all. We need to push ourselves daily, constantly, to get proactive, engaged and connected. This can work in two ways: external and internal.



Dabboo Ratnani

The external dimension could include going out for a daily walk, taking hobby classes, joining a senior citizens' association or volunteering for community work, all ways to get healthier and expand one's social network while using one's skills for the greater good. The internal dimension is equally significant. Becoming digitally literate, reading more, writing, learning new skills in the kitchen and home, and exercising regularly can also contribute to our health and enhance personal growth, keeping depression at bay. And whatever else we do, we must always remain positive—in our mind, body and heart, with our thoughts and deeds. It truly works wonders!

Indeed, while isolation and alienation are more acute in the modern world, there are also more avenues than we could have ever imagined to plug into the larger ecosystem, a world of discovery and possibilities where there are no expiry dates to self-actualisation. The choice is in your hands—make the right one.

*Tina Ambani*

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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# index

## features

**34 . Health:** Robotics is helping patients with neurological disorders walk again

**36 . Proactive:** Madhuri Mathur in Dehradun trains poor women to earn a livelihood

**48 . Destination:** Experience frenzied devotion in the pilgrim town of Vrindavan



40  
cover  
feature

Wellness guru Dr Mickey Mehta is on a journey towards ultimate physical fitness and spiritual enlightenment

Cover photograph: Haresh Patel

## every issue

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

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

**55 . ETCETERA:** Culture, leisure, lifestyle, books, buzz and miscellany

**82 . SPEAK:** N Ramaswamy guides and counsels patients in Bengaluru's hospitals

## columns

**26 . YOGA RX:** Shameem Akthar illustrates how the bolster can be used to prop up your practice

**28 . NUTRITALK:** Wellness consultant Naini Setalvad doles out a smart plan for fasting

**70 . AT LARGE:** Senior journalist Humra Quraishi on how the idea of nationalism has changed since Independence

**72 . MYSTICAL MUSINGS:** True mastery is the mastery of one's own mind, says spiritual guru Mohanji

WEB EXCLUSIVE [www.harmonyindia.org](http://www.harmonyindia.org)



**THE 'DESCENT'ANT**  
Artist Haroon Khimani finds inspiration in collapsed structures and their reconstruction

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





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- 4 Thromboaspiration of Clot using Penumbra™ in Strokes
- 5 Neuro Endoscopic Surgery for Brain & Spine Tumours
- 6 Stereotactic Radiosurgery using Edge™ & Novalis Tx
- 7 Stereotactic Epilepsy Surgery
- 8 Robot Assisted Neurorehabilitation
- 9 Management of Unconscious (Coma) Patients



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WILSON DISEASE  
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# column one

This August, we bring you an issue packed with power, punch and personalities who have carved a niche all their own. Headlining the magazine is Dr Mickey Mehta, abuzz with infinite energy, and intent on holistic human development. At 55, he says he's just getting started in triggering 'a wellness revolution for human evolution.' "Age brings a lot of wisdom, but otherwise I remain 18 years old," he tells us.

Meanwhile, living at a decidedly slower pace is Allan Sealy. Almost 30 years after the release of his acclaimed debut *The Trotter Nama*, the author speaks about his seventh—and latest—book, and explains why he doesn't let straitjackets like literary genres and routines direct his work, preferring to be guided by his heart.

Also following her heart—and an urge to 'give' to the community—is Madhuri Mathur, an educationist who has dedicated much of her life to training disadvantaged women and girls, and empowering them to become financially independent. Another transformative person who touches lives through his simple and practical teachings is spiritual leader Mohanji—he answers our questions on faith, humanity, happiness and destiny in the first edition of 'Mystical Musings', a new series.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we show you how robotic-assisted gait training is a game-changer for patients with neurological disorders; open a window to the beauty and history of the Kumaon region; and invite you to feel the Krishna high amid the devotees in Vrindavan ahead of Janmashtami. Indeed, every day is a reason to celebrate—with *Harmony*.

—Arati Rajan Menon

Sooner or later we all become dust in the wind, but the legacy we leave behind can have an impact on generations to come. Your interview "Beauty and the Best" with Shahnaz Husain (July 2017) taught me that and so much more. As a subscriber to *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, I find the articles published in your magazine extremely informative and inspirational. Kudos to the writers for being so eloquent and correspondents for asking questions that set the theme for the magazine. "Devoted to Dhruvpad" ('Footsteps') was another article that introduced me to this centuries-old form of music, so thank you for enlightening me, once again. I salute you for bringing forward such compelling stories from an unfortunately much ignored generation when there is so much we can learn from them.

**Jamnabhai Himachal**  
Kanyakumari

This is with reference to the "Loneliness can Kill" article ('Health Bytes') in the July 2017 issue. Loneliness can result in depression but with a positive attitude one can learn to live with it. Loneliness can often lead to devotion and bhakti and stimulate one's creative bones in activities such as painting or writing poetry—even love poems if one is in love at that moment of life! If are a neat nut, start cleaning up your closets and get rid of unwanted things. Give away stuff you haven't seen or used in years. If you find something in store that you don't want to share with anyone, even your spouse, make sure you destroy it. Such activities are also therapeutic and will help you get rid of the demons of your past. Finally, keep in touch with friends, go out and socialise. It's the best way to kill loneliness.

**Mahesh Kapasi**  
Mumbai



Bolivian president Evo Morales said, "Sooner or later, we will have to recognise that the earth has rights, too, to live without pollution. What mankind must know is that human beings cannot live without Mother Earth, but the planet can live without humans." Congratulations, Team Harmony, on your 13th anniversary. I loved your special issue in June that focused on environmental issues, which should be everybody's concern but are neglected by most. I found your article on "Himalayan Hero" Mr Chandi Prasad Bhatt interesting. I salute his contribution in bringing awareness and awakening to the people of the hills of Uttarakhand. I especially appreciated it because this beautiful place with lots of flora and fauna is my native state. The story titled "Walk on Water" was also an interesting read as was "Renaissance Man", the great Mr M S Swaminathan. The article that held my interest the most, however, was "Clean Period". I salute this group from Thrissur and their exemplary efforts. Together, these senior citizens are inspiring and motivating the new generation. Congratulations once again and all the best.

**Priyanka Joshi**  
Mumbai





# Harmony-Celebrate Age GOES DIGITAL

Harmony-Celebrate Age

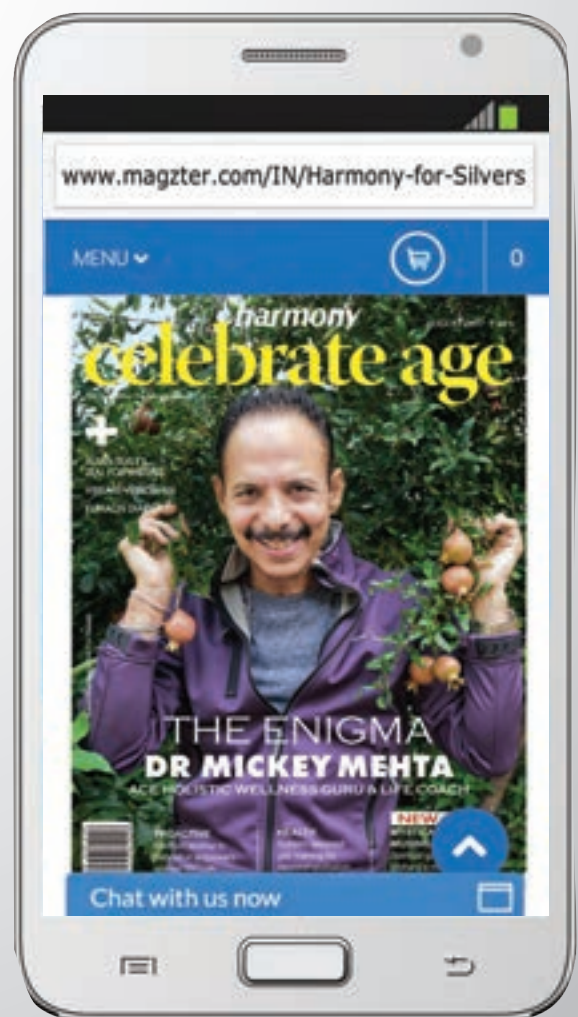
[www.magzter.com](http://www.magzter.com)

India's premier magazine for senior citizens, *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, is now available on international digital news stand Magzter



The magazine can now be downloaded and read on a variety of digital platforms such as iPad, iPhone, Android, Windows 8 and tablets.

Download the free Magzter app or log on to <http://www.magzter.com/IN/Harmony-for-Silvers-Foundation/Harmony---Celebrate-Age/Lifestyle/> today to read the latest issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*.



**C**ongratulations, Team Harmony, on your 13th anniversary! I applaud your focus on senior citizens who are otherwise a neglected part of society. Your anniversary issue being an environment special further highlights your broad-spectrum positive vision. I loved your choice of “Eco Warriors”, especially the stories of Himalayan forest conservationist Chandi Prasad Bhatt; camera-trap man Ullas Karanth; and water conservationist Ayyappa Masagi. Best wishes to *Harmony-Celebrate Age* for more such splendid features.

**Saipriya Vijayaraghavan**  
Mumbai

**I** apologise for congratulating you a month late on your 13th anniversary. I have been a subscriber ever since I picked up your magazine at a waiting room at Kokilaben Hospital about three years back. If I remember correctly, it featured a cover story on Prahlad Kakkar, which was extremely entertaining. Since then, I have followed your articles closely and am proud to call myself an avid reader of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. Your environmental issue was very informative. I love how, apart from researching and writing the article, you also invest time and space in creating a highlights section with all the major points in a concise form. These small details go a long way in a reader's mind. I appreciate what you are doing with your magazine and wish you best of luck in all your future endeavours.

**Pratik Goel**  
Via email

**T**his is with reference to the story titled “Salute the Soldier” (‘Legal Eagle’, May 2017). Wish more crusaders like the veteran Wing Commander Athri take it upon themselves to uplift their own neighbourhood. Indeed, he is a

great champion of social issues and a relentless pursuer of justice. Many congratulations, sir!

**Tirtha Sen**  
Via [www.harmonyindia.org](http://www.harmonyindia.org)

**I**t gives us immense pleasure in bringing to your notice that the ‘Let Us Respect Our Elders’ pledge to commemorate World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (15 June) spearheaded by the Dr V S Natarajan Geriatric Foundation was met with great success. Armed with a circular issued by the state Department of Education to instruct schools to take this pledge for a cause, the foundation made arrangements to conduct a coordinated mass pledge by school students across Tamil Nadu. We connected with every school in the state: government, private and aided

**HITS OF THE MONTH**

Our most-read stories in July 2017 on  
 [\*\*www.harmonyindia.org\*\*](http://www.harmonyindia.org)

1. A mystery named Monghyr
2. The world according to William Dalrymple
3. Eco warriors

## CONTRIBUTOR



Our columnist in ‘At Large’ this month, **Humra Quraishi** is a Delhi-based writer-columnist-journalist. Her books include *Kashmir: The Untold Story*; a volume of her collective writings, *Views: Yours and Mine*; a short-story collection, *More Bad Time Tales*; a volume, *Divine Legacy: Dagars & Dhrupad*; and her debut novel *Meer*. Her short stories have been published in several magazines and journals. She has also co-authored *The Good The Bad and The Ridiculous: Profiles, Absolute Khushwant*, and a series of writings with the late Khushwant Singh. Her take on what's it like to be a singleton in today's turbulent times is part of the Penguin-published anthology, *Chasing the Good Life: On Being Single*. One of her essays, “The State Can't Snatch Away our Children” is part of the Zubaan-published anthology, *Of Mothers And Others*. And, in the volume on the 1984 Sikh riots, *1984: In Memory and Imagination*, her essay is titled “Why Not a Collective Cry for Justice!”

schools. The flagship event took place at Velammal Vidyalaya in Chennai where over 2,000 schoolchildren were administered the pledge by retired high court judge, the honourable Thiru S Rajeswaran. In his address, he emphasised the need for children to be law-abiding citizens when it came to the care of elders as it was against the law to neglect them. We also took this opportunity to release my bilingual book, *Let Us Respect Our Elders*. We concluded the day with heart-warming testimonials by grandparents of the Velammal schoolchildren who cherished the love of their grandchildren.

**Dr V S Natarajan**  
Chennai

## ERRATUM

On page 74 (“Meet the Jinnahs”; ‘Bookshelf’) of our July 2017 issue, the picture of author Sheela Reddy was credited wrongly. In fact, the photographer was Shireen Qadri. We deeply regret the error.

—Editors





## MEDIA WATCH

# UPTOWN GIRL

Sixty-three and stunning, this supermodel (from back when the term was coined) stole hearts worldwide when she appeared in former husband Billy Joel's classic video, *Uptown girl*. And she's turning heads even today in American magazine *Sports Illustrated*'s recent swimsuit edition. Now, **Christie Brinkley has shared her anti-ageing secrets** in an interview with *Forbes* magazine, many of which she has also discussed in her book *Timeless Beauty: Over 100 Tips, Secrets, and Shortcuts to Looking Great* (Grand Central; 198 pages). The best part: many of them are surprisingly doable.

For instance, she calls for a scientific approach to food, urging people to know what they are eating and what they should be eating. Pay attention to what goes into the groceries you're buying, she advocates, and avoid artificial or unknown ingredients, added sugar, processed white flour and excess salt. And while she recommends you eat lots of fruits and vegetables—a rainbow diet, where you fill your plate with colours and thus antioxidants—she is wary of “deny-iting”, where you completely deprive yourself of food you enjoy. Her other tips include drinking lots and lots of water; protecting yourself from the sun by using sunscreen assiduously; having pets around to zap depression and keep you active; having a positive attitude and smiling often; and engaging in “multi-taskercise”—which she defines as interspersing physical activity with her daily activities, like squats, calf-raises and (yikes) push-ups. “Sitting still is enemy,” she says. “Holding still is rust.... The key is mixing things up, maintaining variety, integrating exercise into your daily routines and making exercise fun.” The results speak for themselves.





# FASHION SCHOOL

Defying the traditional stereotypes of ageing, this professor is conducting her own master class in establishing an alternative narrative. As *thewashingtonpost.com* reports, **63 year-old Lyn Slater has conquered social media with her Instagram account (over 200,000 followers) and her fashion blog *Accidental Icon***, which feature her in an array of designer wear. A professor of social work at New York's Fordham University—and mother and grandmother—Slater has modelled for mega brands like Valentino Eyewear and Mango and even signed on with Elite Models in London.

Her love for fashion inspired this journey. “I never intended to address ageing; I don’t have an agenda,” she tells the *Post*. “But somehow I have become an alternative of ageing that young people embrace.... I’d made my name in my career, raised my daughter. I was ready to do something new.” When she signed up for classes at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Parsons School of Design, “the young people” would remark upon her sense of style and urge her to start a blog. And so she did. The best part: “I don’t retouch my photos. I leave the wrinkles.” See her in action at 📍 [www.instagram.com/iconaccidental/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/iconaccidental/?hl=en) and 📍 [www.accidentalicon.com](http://www.accidentalicon.com)



Photographs courtesy: [www.accidentalicon.com](http://www.accidentalicon.com)

**DEAR DIARY** The literati around the world are slowly cottoning on this anonymously authored book—and loving it. First published in 2014, *The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen, 83½ Years Old* (Grand Central, 378 pages), which has now **been translated from the Dutch by Hester Velmans**, is a novel about a man in a retirement home in Amsterdam who starts writing a journal and resolves to stay upbeat despite every challenge. And there are many—from the health issues of his wife and friends to the difficulties of life in the home. Every day in the year chronicled is a struggle against depression, a battle to stay afloat— it is a year fraught with troubles yet sporadically dotted with moments of excitement and discovery, even the promise of new love. While a wry wit permeates the book, at heart this is a wrenching and poignant tale told with deep empathy. You can buy it on Amazon India ([amazon.in](https://amazon.in)); the Kindle edition is ₹ 263.15 while the paperback is ₹ 277.



# Snail mane

While we think the idea of snail essence in your hair is more than a tad icky, some beg to differ. **American haircare company Kenra claims its Snail Anti-Ageing Collection, imbued with “Korean beauty secret snail essence”, will fight all “10 signs of ageing hair”:** dulling, thinning, breakage, frizz, dryness, elasticity, porosity, scalp irritation, unmanageability and coarse texture. The collection comprises the CC Creme (\$ 25; about ₹ 1,600), Anti-Ageing Shampoo (\$ 18; about ₹ 1,150) and Anti-Ageing Conditioner (\$ 18). Animal lovers needn't worry either: there's a disclaimer that tells you that no snails were harmed in the making of this product. (Chuckle.) See for yourself at [www.kenraprofessional.com/snail-collection](http://www.kenraprofessional.com/snail-collection)

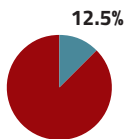


Photographs by 123RF.com

## Rock star

In myth and legend, it was said to tell the future. Now, the crystal ball is being used to go back in time! As London newspaper *Daily Mail* tells us, many international celebrities—like model Miranda Kerr, actor Emma Stone and pop-star-turned-fashion-designer Victoria Beckham—are apparently swearing **by the anti-ageing powers of crystal, specifically rose quartz**. For instance, British makeup expert Laurey Simmons extensively discusses the power of

crystals in her book, *The Inner Beauty Bible* (Harper Thorsons), affirming the healing properties of rose quartz. And leading celebrity facialist Georgia Louise Esk has 'created' a rose quartz butterfly stone for her clients—a weekly massage is said to contour the face, smooth fine lines and wrinkles, reduce puffiness, and detoxify the skin. That said, until there's some clinical evidence to prove these claims, this could all be just another fairytale.



Around 12.5 per cent of India's population will be 60 years or older by 2030. The population of those who are 60 years or more is likely to increase by three times to around 300 million by 2050.

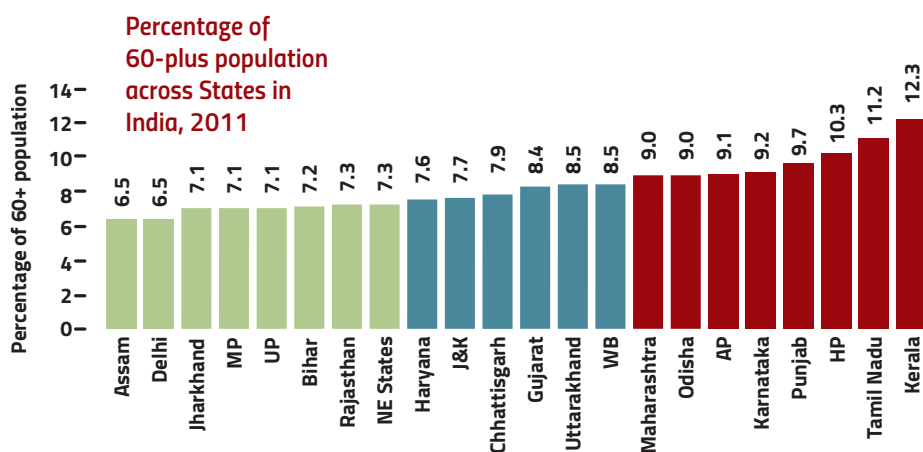


# THE INDIA REPORT



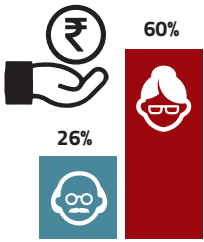
The old-age dependency ratio shows that there are over 14 elderly per 100 working age population with significant variation across states. In Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the old age dependency ratio is higher than 15.

A new report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Caring for Our Elders: Early Responses: India Ageing 2017*, serves up home truths and hard figures about the state of silvers in the country. The report systematically analyses the ageing scenario in the world and India; the status and concerns of the country's elderly; our policy and programme response to ageing; and ways to meet the growing demand in elder care services. It also reflects the voices of the elderly before suggesting a road map for the future. Here are some highlights:



Kerala has the highest percentage of silvers in the country (12.3 per cent), followed by Tamil Nadu. In fact, southern states are greying faster along with Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Punjab compared to central and northern states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand.





While the majority of silvers still live with their children in India, about one-fifth either live alone or only with the spouse. Also, 26 per cent of older men and 60 per cent of older women in India do not have personal income.



Elderly women are more vulnerable owing to a longer life expectancy. This is especially true for aged widows who lack a proper social security network and are increasingly living alone.

# 12,000,000

India will have 12 million senior citizens with difficulty in accomplishing activities of daily living by 2020.



**37.9 million by 2050**

There will also be a surge of chronic illnesses, such as arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, depression and Alzheimer's—to the tune of 17.8 million cases by 2030 and 37.9 million by 2050.



Recommendations in the report include enhancing policy and programme relevance; creating a supportive environment through advocacy and intergenerational bonding; capacity development at all levels; and research relevant to policies and programmes.

You can download and read the entire report at [india.unfpa.org/en/publications/caring-our-elders-early-responses-india-ageing-report-2017](http://india.unfpa.org/en/publications/caring-our-elders-early-responses-india-ageing-report-2017)

## Passage to India



Photographs by 123RF.com

This month will see the first edition of Indian Railways' **Bharat Darshan Special Tourist Train, popularly known as the Sangam Yatra**. Starting from Madurai in Tamil Nadu on 18 August, it will wend its way through Bengaluru, Gaya, Varanasi, Allahabad, Haridwar, Delhi, Mathura and back over 12 days. The price points are equally attractive: a 'budget' trip will cost ₹ 8,360 while the 'comfort' package will set you back ₹ 11,500—including service tax. As Kishore Satya, manager-tourism, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) - Bengaluru, tells media, senior citizens are expected to form the majority of travellers. To learn more about the train, go to [www.irctctourism.com/TourPackages/RailTour/BHARAT-DARSHAN-SZBD275.html](http://www.irctctourism.com/TourPackages/RailTour/BHARAT-DARSHAN-SZBD275.html)

## Your family doctor is here!



A pioneer in retirement communities, **Covai Property Centre (I) P Ltd launched its first PolyCare Centre in Coimbatore** on 24 July. The centre will provide professional and personalised healthcare and treatment with general practitioners as the contact point. Being promoted as "The Modern Day Family Doctor" with specialists available under the same roof, Covai's PolyCare aims to be the nodal centre for its members for diagnosis, treatment, monitoring of medication and maintenance of records. A one-stop healthcare destination, indeed!



facilitating  
treatment and  
delivering free  
medicines

**MAKE YOUR TRIP!** With a stated aim to 'Add Cheer to Senior Citizens', **Inorbit Tours Pvt Ltd** has launched a 'Senior Citizens' Division' that offers international tours for silvers.

"Tours are planned with a relaxed itinerary to facilitate the movement of senior citizens," says Om Prakash Sahgal, director, Inorbit Tours. "Other considerations taken into account are special dietary requirements, medical aid at all destinations, wheelchair provision at airports, medical insurance and portage services." In fact, the company has already successfully organised trips to countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Dubai, China, Hong Kong, Macau and South Africa in the past. The next tour for silvers is the **Amazing Thailand Tour (Bangkok and Pattaya) from 18-22 September 2017**. To learn more, email [omprakash@inorbittours.com](mailto:omprakash@inorbittours.com) or call 022-24229281/40436868.

## Capital care

One of India's premier hospitals is backing up its research with action. New Delhi's **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)** will 'adopt' **50 silvers from various old-age homes**, facilitating their treatment in the hospital and delivering free medicines to their doorstep. This drive will be undertaken in association with NGO Healthy Ageing India. As media reports tell us, this initiative comes on the heels of a study conducted by the Geriatric Department of AIIMS of over 5,000 silvers, including around

1,200 silvers living in 20 old-age homes. The study revealed that around 80 per cent of silvers living in old-age homes lacked medical care despite suffering from diabetes, hypertension and coronary artery disease. "Further, some age-related diseases like fall, frailty, dementia and depression were highly prevalent and called for medical intervention along with lifestyle and environment modification," Dr Prashun Chatterjee of AIIMS tells media. "The purpose of adopting elderly persons is not only to provide them medicine or health-care but also to sensitise them to a better lifestyle, diet management and exercise regime on a regular basis."

## Silver lining

The buzz is that the Centre aims to amend the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, to triple the amount awarded to silvers (above the age of 60) and parents (irrespective of their age) of children who are not minors. This will take the amount from the current

₹ 10,000 a month to ₹ 25,000-₹ 30,000. "There are many who earn enough and can spare more than ₹ 10,000 to provide for their parents," Latha Krishna Rao, secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, tells media. "This is why we decided to increase the upper limit." The amendment is likely to be

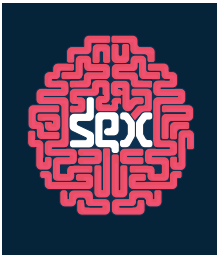
introduced in the monsoon session of Parliament. Another positive step: the Government plans to make it mandatory for everyone across the board—from government agencies to private companies—to uniformly recognise 60 as the age when one is considered a senior citizen. This has been a long time coming.

₹ 10,000



₹ 25,000 - ₹ 30,000





**SEX ON THE BRAIN:** There may be a more fun way than Sudoku to keep your brain healthy. A new British study suggests that **regular sex can stave off mental decline**. The researchers from the University of Coventry and Oxford University analysed the cognitive abilities of 28 men and 45 women between the ages of 50 and 83 and found that those who engaged in sexual activity at least once a week scored better on the parameters of visual awareness and vocabulary. "It is possible that increasing frequency of sexual activity may correspond to better cognition," they concluded in *The Journal of Gerontology*. "People don't like to think that older people have sex," Hayley Wright, the lead researcher from Coventry University, tells media. "But we need to challenge this conception at a societal level and look at what impact sexual activity can have on those aged 50 and over."

## High on memory



Photographs by 123RF.com

HERE'S ANOTHER SHOT in the arm for advocates of legalising cannabis. A recent study by scientists at the University of Bonn and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem contend that **cannabis can combat age-related decline in memory**. For their study, published in journal *Nature Medicine*, they administered THC (the active ingredient in cannabis) to a group of mice aged two, twelve and 18 months over a period of four weeks and tested their learning and memory skills. As website [www.uni-bonn.de/n](http://www.uni-bonn.de/n) tells us, the older mice who received THC displayed cognitive functions equal to the youngest mice. "The treatment completely reversed the loss of performance in the old animals," says lead author Andreas Zimmer. "With increasing age, the quantity of the cannabinoids naturally formed in the brain reduces. When the activity of the cannabinoid system declines, we find rapid ageing in the brain. It looked as though the THC treatment turned back the molecular clock."

**RETIREMENT BENEFITS** Ever wondered what happens to senescent cells that stop dividing but refuse to die? Well, they might just be useful to your body, suggests research conducted on human cell cultures and mice at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Israel. Dr Valery Krizhanovsky of the Department of Molecular Cell Biology observes that **senescent or 'retired' cells that do not undergo**



**apoptosis (programmed cell death) could help in the treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and other age-related disorders.** Purging these cells could reverse certain aspects of ageing and disease processes but in small amounts, these old cells can prevent the growth of tumours, clot wounds and help overall in the healing process. Retired and useful, you could say!

**The shape of you!** Join a pottery workshop and give your creativity full rein. Apart from the happy intangibles, a slew of recent studies have shown that engaging in crafts like pottery can reduce depression, stress and blood pressure; improve hand-eye coordination and flexibility; and boost mood, sociability and self-esteem. So find a class near you and go spin that wheel.



Photographs by Hareesh Patel



#### RECYCLING FACTS

- 15,000 tonne of plastic waste is generated in India every day.
- It requires three times the amount of water to produce a plastic bottle than it does to fill it.
- India recycles over 90 per cent of its PET waste, one of the highest recycle rates in the world.


## Then: Plastic bottle Now: Piggy bank

**I**t's never too early to get your grandkids thinking responsibly about money management. And what better way to show them than gifting them a piggy bank! All you need is an empty plastic bottle (the wider the better), a craft knife, scissors, sketch pen and coloured paper. Use the craft knife to cut a vertical slit for the coins in the centre of the bottle. Use the scissors to cut a strip of coloured paper the same size as the label. Wrap the paper around the bottle and trace the open slot

in the bottle. Cut through the traced slot, exposing the opening. You can make the piggy bank more appealing to a child's eye by cutting ears out of the coloured paper and sticking them on the previously wrapped paper. You can get creative now by drawing facial features on the cap with the sketch pen. You can also punch two holes on a circular piece of paper and stick it to the cap as the face of the pig. For the legs, press together paper to form four balls and stick them as legs.

#### MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. CUT TWO HOLES ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE BOTTLE AT DIFFERENT HEIGHTS, INSERT AN OLD SPOON OR A PENCIL THROUGH THE HOLES AND FILL THE BOTTLE WITH BIRDFEED. HANG IT UP IN YOUR BALCONY OR OUTDOORS AND WELCOME THE BIRDS!
2. CUT THE BOTTOM HALF OF THE BOTTLE. INSERT A STICK WITH ALMOST THE SAME DIAMETER AS THE BOTTLE OPENING AND STICK IT WITH GLUE. STICK THE OUTWARD END OF THE STICK TO A PLATFORM. INVERT THE BOTTLE AND LET IT STAND AS YOU FILL THE BOTTLE WITH MUD AND PLANT YOUR FLOWER IN IT. YOUR VASE IS READY. PAINT THE BOTTLE AS YOU LIKE TO SUIT YOUR DÉCOR.



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

*BUTTERFLIES* never retire

**The first click of the mouse.**

[www.harmonyindia.org](http://www.harmonyindia.org)

harmony  
celebrate age



# Forgetting something?



Photographs by 123RF.com

**TROUBLE REMEMBERING** whether you had switched on the iron or put on the kettle for a hot cuppa? Earlier, these brain changes would be the reason to put you under the scanner to test for dementia. Now, there's a **new brain imaging predictor to detect the onset of dementia in people who are not even aware they are at risk**. A team of scientists at the University of Toronto and Baycrest Rotman Research Institute (RRI), Canada, analysed the performance of 40 older adults aged between 59 and 81, who scored below the normal benchmark on the Montreal Cognitive Assessment dementia screening test. The experts found less brain tissue in the part of the brain where Alzheimer's originates within these adults. The discovery might just be a step towards developing a new therapy to treat or slow the disease. The study was published in journal *Neurobiology of Aging*.

## DROP THAT NEEDLE

Sometimes, drops have a definite edge over needles. The painful shots given to treat vision loss caused by age-related macular degeneration might soon be replaced by eye drops. A team of scientists at the Institute of Inflammation and Ageing at the University of Birmingham, UK, are working on a groundbreaking method of delivering the same drug through eye drops with the use of a cell penetrating peptide that will carry it to the relevant part of the eye within minutes. A self-administered drug application like this would empower patients, apart from reducing healthcare costs. Far-sighted, isn't it? The report was published in *Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science*.

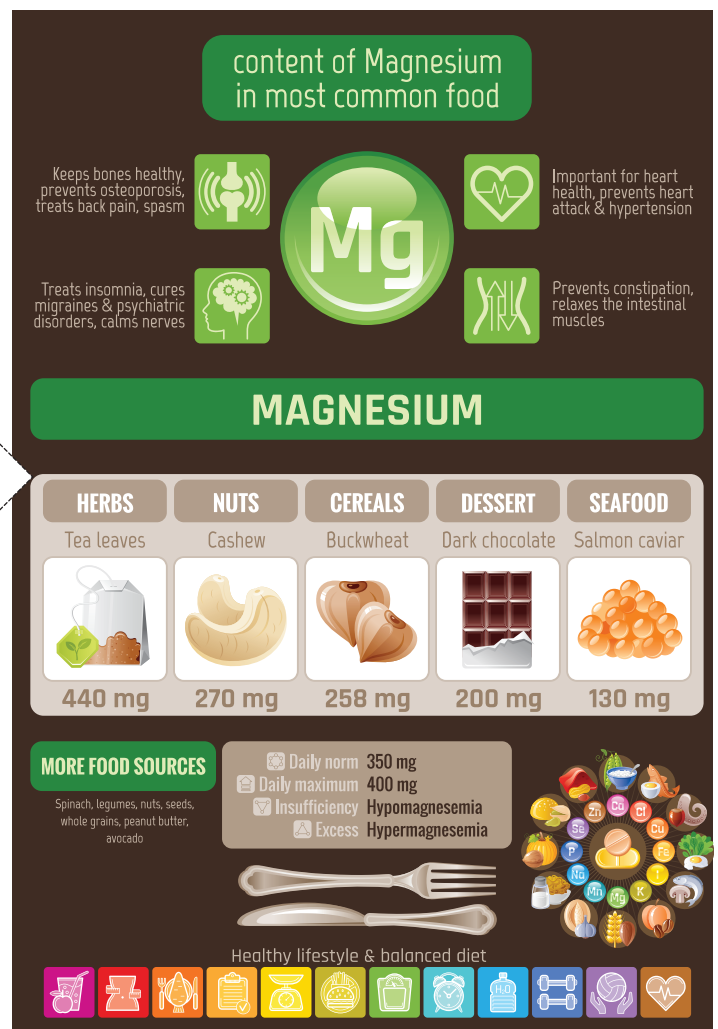
## BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

**It's a no-brainer** that breastfeeding is best for baby but did you know that it's great for mummies too? Scientists at the University of Oxford, UK, studied the reproductive history and lifestyle factors of 289,573 Chinese women, to understand how pregnancy changes the mother's metabolism. According to the study, the fat stored in the mother's body to provide food for the baby during pregnancy lowers her metabolism. However, breastfeeding eliminates the stored fat, resulting in higher metabolism and lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease. The scientists found that the **women who had breastfed were 10 per cent less likely to suffer from heart attack and stroke**. Better still, risk is further lowered if breastfeeding continues for two years or more. Add this to the basket of other benefits that earlier research has shown—reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer, osteoporosis and obesity—and it makes you want to doff your hat to Mother Nature. The study was published in *Journal of the American Heart Association*.



## MAKE OR BREAK

While calcium and Vitamin D are front-runners when it comes to bone health, a new study reveals another contender for the top spot: magnesium. Researchers at the Universities of Bristol, UK, and Eastern Finland studied 2,245 men aged between 42 and 61 and found that **those with lower magnesium blood levels were at a 44 per cent greater risk of sustaining fractures**. A follow-up for 20 years showed that men with higher blood magnesium levels did not suffer a single fracture during this time. However, researchers found that magnesium taken in the form of supplements was beneficial, not through dietary intake.



# THE SOUR TRUTH

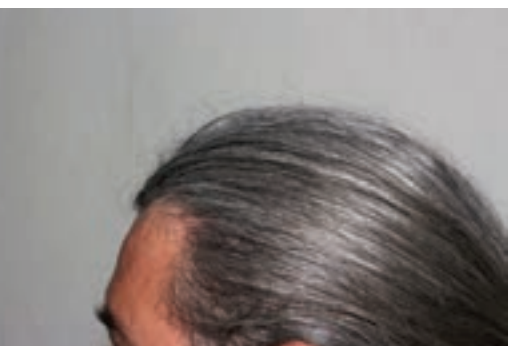
**R**ed alert for those who think this natural product is a cure-all for medical conditions ranging from diabetes, weight loss and teeth-cleaning to skin problems. In a news report published on [cnn.com](http://cnn.com), medical experts have warned users of the **serious downside of apple cider vinegar**. Dietician Carol Johnston, associate director of Arizona State University's School of Nutrition and Health, refutes the claim that apple cider vinegar lowers blood sugar and helps pre-diabetics. And American Dental Association spokesperson Alice Boghosian points to the corrosive effect of vinegar and warns that you could be putting your teeth at great risk. The sour truth: don't believe everything you read or hear; consult your doctor before buying stuff off the rack.

Photographs by 123RF.com

## GREY AREA

Some women consider it sexy but, suddenly, that salt-and-pepper look in men might not be quite so appealing, after all. A new observational study presented at the European Society of Cardiology in Spain suggests that **grey hair might be an indicator of coronary artery disease**. Researchers made 545 adult men undergo multi-slice computed tomography (CT) and were also assessed on a 'hair whitening' score. The participants were then divided into subgroups

on the basis of whether they had coronary artery disease and the incidence of grey hair. The findings showed that those with a higher score were associated with an increased risk of coronary artery disease. Apparently, the two procedures have similar mechanisms like oxidative stress, DNA repair, senescence of functional cells, hormonal changes and inflammation.



## SAY NO TO STEROIDS

**S**teroid injections are often used as a short-term measure to treat inflamed knees but new research suggests that they can result in loss of cartilage in the long run. This observation is based on a study conducted by Dr Timothy McAlindon, Chief of Rheumatology at Tufts Medical Centre, Boston, US, wherein 140 patients aged 45 years and above with inflamed knees were tested. The patients were administered steroids or saline every 12 weeks and the effects were tracked for two years. The study showed that **those who received steroids didn't have any significant reduction in pain levels but had lost more cartilage thickness than others**. The findings were published in *Journal of the American Medical Association*.





Gulzar



N R Narayana Murthy

## BIRTHDAYS

Actor and Bharatanatyam dancer **Vyjayantimala** turns 81 on 13 August.

American actor and filmmaker **Robert De Niro** turns 74 on 17 August.

Poet, lyricist and filmmaker **Gulzar** turns 83 on 18 August.

IT maven and Infosys founder **N R Narayana Murthy** turns 71 on 20 August.

Actor **Saira Banu** turns 73 on 23 August.

American actor and humanitarian activist **Richard Gere** turns 68 on 31 August.

## IN PASSING

Italian fashion executive and philanthropist **Carla Fendi** passed away following a long illness on 20 June. She was 79.

Director **K R Mohanan** died of stomach illness on 25 June. He was 69.

Singer **Sabita Chowdhury** died of cancer on 29 June. She was 72.

American evangelist **Bob Harrington** died of kidney failure on 4 July. He was 89.

Actor **Sumita Sanyal** died of heart failure on 9 July. She was 71.

Cartoonist **Mangesh Tendulkar** succumbed to bladder cancer on 10 July. He was 81.

Chinese literary critic, human rights activist and peace nobelist **Liu Xiaobo** died of liver cancer on 13 July. He was 61.

American Oscar-winning actor **Martin Landau** died on 15 July. He was 89.

## MILESTONES

French-Indian yoga master and award-winning author **Tao Porchon-Lynch** has entered the *World Book of Records* for being the 'World's Oldest Ballroom Dancer'. At an event held in Mumbai on 27 June to felicitate her, the 90 year-old held the audience spellbound with her performance with dancer-choreographer Sandip Soparrkar.

Indian banker and Chairman, Max Financial Services, **Naina Lal Kidwai**, 60, was honoured on 12 July with the Indian Chamber of Commerce Women Achiever's Award in Business Excellence & Social Inclusiveness in recognition of her outstanding achievements.



123RF.com

## OVERHEARD

"I like to be either horizontal or vertical. I am far too lazy to exercise. I hear yoga is good and I may try it one day but I prefer to sleep.... I don't feel old and asking women about ageing is very negative. It doesn't concern me; it's other people's problem, not mine.... I love being alone. When you are younger there is more reason to feel depressed; you resent loneliness more than you do later on. When it's a choice and you're not lonely, it feels like a gift."

—Award-winning French actor **Isabelle Huppert**, 64, speaking to [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)

## HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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



Bhadram runs Sevashram, a comfort zone for silvers in Hyderabad

Shyamola Khanna

## COMING HOME

It's a special day at Sevashram, a day for the board to meet and a sacred day for a *Satyanarayan* puja. It's spring and still cool enough for the residents to have brought out their best saris for the special occasion.

At times like these, I remember my 112 year-old grandmother, who wanted nothing more than for our family home to be filled with all her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I recall thinking, "I wish everyone could share their old age in a happy and carefree environment."

My dream was to come true, but not before a long detour in my career. I grew up in the restless period of rising nationalism, where all of us young people were looking for our ideal causes. My brother and I latched on to communism as the perfect solution. It was at the age of 20 that I joined my brother in his garment manufacturing unit at Machilipatnam. After working for eight years, I relocated to Hyderabad and joined a magazine called *Yuva* as

full-time editor, publisher and manager of the Yuva Book Depot. I had a very fulfilling stint there but, a few years later, the owners wanted to shut shop. I stepped in and rallied the staff who were to be laid off to restart the press under a new banner—a cooperative effort that resulted in the Progressive Press Private Ltd set up in Balanagar, Hyderabad, in April 1970.

I must have done something right because we flourished. I revamped everything and eventually left it all to my two sons and wife so that I could start building my dream of setting up a comfort zone for older people. I was 60 and the time was right to take the plunge.

In 1992, I moved into a small, rented apartment in Madinaguda in the Old City. I took in three senior citizens; I had one woman to clean the place while I did the cooking and serving for them. B Mohan Rao, a well-known philanthropist, donated one acre of land, 35 km outside the city area, for my retirement home and a number of very kind people donated money. By 2001, we moved into the premises.

Over the years, the number of silvers at Sevashram has grown. We have 20 rooms for residents and three for staff. Six rooms are occupied by single women while six have double beds. There are a total of 19 women and four men.

One of our oldest residents is Y Raghavamma, 97, the widow of a doctor whose children live abroad. M Durga Lakshmi is 58 but she has been in the ashram for 23 years, ever since her husband died. She works as a resident manager. S Katnamma, 75, has been in the ashram for more than 16 years. Each one has their own unique story; most of them revolve around indifferent kids, kids living far away and the sort who have no time for their parents.

Outside, the sun is going down. The fountain in the garden has been switched on, a cue for everyone to come and sit on the stone benches. At 85, I couldn't be happier having done what I set out to do. Now my only desire is for someone to step forward and take over Sevashram so that I can retire in peace. My wife and children want me to come home.

—M V Bhadram, Hyderabad

## JUSTICE FIRST

I have always wanted to do something for those who are not well placed in life and those who do not get justice. I was 17 years old, and helped distribute some rice to victims of drought and famine. It gave me my first taste of working for the greater good. I will never forget that feeling of being of some use, of serving a greater cause.

My time in the Army was about being a good soldier and doing the best for my country. Retirement in 1998 saw me settle in Pune and I connected with like-minded people via the Express Citizens' Forum, an initiative of *The Indian Express* media house. Serendipity led me to Nagrik Chetna Manch, which believes that transparency in governance

**Jatar works to promote transparency in local government**



Courtesy: S C N Jatar

is the best way to check corruption and work towards justice. I became part of the management committee.

I believe our lives are affected most by those in local governments than by what the Centre or state governments do. Buses, roads, traffic, electricity, water—these are just some of the everyday essentials controlled locally. I have seen how callous the *neta-babu* nexus is. Their outlook is always, 'What's in it for me?'

However, there are a handful of people in governance who are honest, yet overruled by their corrupt bosses, and want to bring this to the notice of the public. With their help, we started getting information bit by bit; it was still like pulling teeth. Officials would not act even after we used the information to bring irregularities to their notice. Then, we approached media to publicise the same, hoping that naming and shaming would work. We thus helped recover between ₹ 18 lakh and ₹ 20 lakh in public money by investigative work alone. By 2002, we were using the Right to Information (RTI) Act too.

In the first years of my social work, I was offered a 'premium' flat in return for withdrawing a case. Emissaries were sent to ask what my "requirement" was. I got offered "consultancies" in fields of which I have no knowledge. This has stopped completely, perhaps because they have given up on me!

From illegalities pertaining to study tours and Transfer of Development Rights violations to encroachments, untreated solid waste and missing trees, we have held the powers that be to account. Preparing for legal cases and keeping lawyers updated has become almost a full-time job for me. I have had to miss family events because of this and I had started to feel that my dedication was becoming a bone of contention in the family. But during an interview to the media, my wife surprised me by saying she is 100 per cent behind me. This boosted my morale.

Now, all the attention to detail and painstaking work has begun to pay off and it is heartening that, in many cases, we have received interim orders in our favour. In addition to acting as watchdogs to government, I believe we have to raise the *chetna* [consciousness] of everyone through education. And for this, my family trust provides scholarships to deserving students: children of bus drivers and conductors, conservancy workers, etc.

At 85, the work I do is very fulfilling and satisfying. One sees the truth in Holocaust survivor and existential proponent Viktor Frankl's assertion that the will to meaning or man's search for meaning is the basic motivation for human life and it is this search that helps understand and overcome pain and suffering.

—Major General (retd) S C N Jatar, Pune





Courtesy: Dawn Williams

# Animal instinct

**DAWN WILLIAMS, 55, CHENNAI**

**I** was not born a soldier but moulded into one, which is why there have always been two juxtaposing sides to my personality: a rugged and tough side and a compassionate one.

I grew up in rural Tamil Nadu; joining the armed forces was a foregone conclusion as my father was a soldier and I was expected to follow in his footsteps. It was an exciting career and I have no complaints. But I had to take early retirement in 2002.

As I had a family to raise and needed to earn a living, I started looking for work. I did a brief stint as a fire and security manager in Neyveli before I joined the Blue Cross

of India (BCI), an animal rights and welfare organisation based in Chennai, in 2011. I am currently general manager of BCI and I have to say, I have never felt more fulfilled.

If you're wondering why I chose to work with animals, I would say that my love for them dates back to my childhood.

One day, many, many years ago, there was a storm and torrential rain. I saw my grandfather picking up tiny sparrows that were falling to the ground from their nests in nearby trees. He collected them and kept them safely in a corner of a room at home. But he was not the only person to do so. The next morning, when I woke up, a neighbour

Every achievement, big or small, makes a difference. How can the life of one animal be less valuable than the life of a few or many? Animal cases are often neglected and justice is denied or delayed

happily told me that their lunch that day was cooked sparrows! I felt miserable. Worse, she suggested that I ask my grandfather to do the same. I remember running across to the corner of the house where my grandfather had kept the sparrows, in an attempt to protect them. I stopped abruptly when I saw my grandfather cradling some of the tiny birds in his hand and, as I stretched out my hand to stop him, he smiled and released them into the sky. It was a life-altering moment for me.

As general manager of BCI, I am in charge of animal birth control clinics, rescue and protection of animals, training of volunteers, administration of rescue centres and surgical theatres, and so on. Some activities of BCI include medical waste disposal, shelters, re-homing, adoptathons, animal birth control, mobile dispensaries and ambulance services. During the floods in Chennai in 2015, I led a group of BCI volunteers and visited all the flood-affected areas in a boat and rescued animals in large numbers.

Apart from BCI awareness camps and workshops, we conduct workshops to train people in animal handling, rope accession and descending, rope-knots, rope-rigging, and animal first aid. The training is put into practice daily in rescuing different species of animals from wells and buildings. We also impart training in animal laws and filing police complaints.

Every achievement, big or small, makes a difference. How can the life of one animal be less valuable than the life of a few or many? During my tenure at the BCI, I have tried to encourage youngsters and bring to light cases of animal harassment and torture. It is disappointing to know that animal cases are often neglected and justice is denied or delayed. Sexual torture of animals and cruelty are two major areas that we are focusing on today.

My 20 years of experience in the armed forces have helped me become a good leader at BCI. Every individual has to be motivated and people have varying degrees of sensitivity towards animals but in the field, we are all soldiers who are trained and focused on the same goal. At age 55, what else could I want if not a profession that is also my passion?

—As told to Jagyaseni Chatterjee

# COMIC RELIEF

Experts answer your queries and concerns on jobs after retirement

**I am a 65 year-old retired banker in Bengaluru. When my son visited me recently, we found hundreds of comic books—Tinkles, Amar Chitra Katha and serialised Marvel and DC superhero collections—that he used to collect as a kid. My son tells me these are now treasures and if I build on this collection, I could open a small library in the garage. How do I take this forward if, at most, I want to break even?**

Your son is right. With a comics library, you will be feeding directly into the superhero frenzy that is taking over audiences now. Given that movies can only tell that much of the stories developed over decades and by different writers, youngsters are going in search of the original comics to fill in the gaps and discover plotlines that the movies will never tell.

However, building on the collection is expensive and that is where a major chunk of your investment will go; comic books and graphic novels don't come cheap. But there is plenty available if you keep an eye out at the second-hand bookstores near you. Look up some comics forums online, make yourself a database, and get started once you know what you are looking for.

Build shelves in your garage and make a little seating area with a table for those who want to browse. Once you have a substantial collection, categorise and stack them accordingly. Study a library handout system online and adopt one as your model. Finally, set a price for borrowing and a penalty for late returns. These are valuable books, so make sure you collect a substantial, but fairly affordable, deposit.

In the meantime, spread word that you are opening up a library at your home; you can stick flyers on the walls near you and put out word on social media, especially on fan pages. Start a page of your own and post interesting facts about characters, books and authors to engage your audience. When you think of expanding, announce that you are now home-delivering books with the help of an app—because that's what the urban populace is into these days. All the best!

—Zeeba Shah runs a comics library-cum-café in Mumbai



# Bolster your practice

This inexpensive prop can work wonders for the fatigued or ailing

**T**he bolster must be the most inexpensive and most easily available yoga prop. Even advanced students use it to extend the duration of poses or ease entry into new ones.

A bolster can be used when you are fatigued or feel disinclined to do a hardcore practice. It is also the best prop for those with severe or chronic ailments.

Even those with heart problems can negotiate a soothing inverted psychic union pose (*viparitamakarani*) which, when done with a prop, is called the cardiac pose because it helps tone the heart in a gentle way, giving it a soothing anti-gravity effect without the contraindications that may surface while doing it without the bolster. Further, many people unaccustomed to physical exercise can still learn inversions like the shoulder stand (*sarvangasana*) with the bolster playing a supportive role, somewhat like a float in a swimming pool. Once the legs get used to being thrown up in the air, and the hips and back become acclimatised to this inversion, most people will find they can do the shoul-

der stand without the bolster. A counter pose to the above mentioned inversions is also negotiated very powerfully with the bolster. If the bolster is placed below the upper back, it can be one of the most soothing ways to stay longer in the fish pose (*matsyasana*).

The bolster works best with those who are either not strong or flexible to do classic poses. Some poses that the bolster can help you with are the forward bend (*paschimottasana*) with the bolster placed on your thighs; the hare pose (*shashankasana*) or child pose (*balasana*) with the bolster under your forehead; the pelvic tilt (*kandharasana*) with the bolster under your hips; and the lying thunderbolt (*suptavajrasana*) with the bolster under your upper back.

For the bolster to be effective, it should be soft, yet firm. If it sinks too much, it may not be a good prop. So, you can have a made-to-order bolster, requesting the furnishing shop staff to ensure the filling is more because with regular use even a firm one begins to sink.





Matsyasana

Photographs by Hareesh Patel

## KREEDA YOGA

### *Santulana spardha* (balancing race)

Place a few non-breakable articles on a plate. Prepare similar plates, as many as there are participants. The participants line up at one end of the room, each holding a plate on the head. No hands are allowed. Let them practise keeping it intact for a while. Then, they line up, and as the whistle goes off begin to walk towards the other end of the room. The one who manages to get there without dropping anything is the winner. If participants find the plate difficult, you could use books instead.

**Benefits:** This game tests your balance and mental equipoise.

## YOGIC MOVES

### Hare pose (*shashankasana*)

Sit on your knees, with the bolster just so it will come under your forehead when you lean forward. Lift your arms overhead, inhaling. Exhaling, draw them down so the forehead rests on the bolster, and your arms are over it, on the ground. If you find this awkward, you can draw your arms alongside the hips, with the palms facing up, the back of your hands resting on the ground to do the *balasana*.

**Caution:**

Avoid if you

suffer from knee problems. You can keep the knees apart if feeling stiff but, over time, you can bring them closer. Ensure the hips are resting on the heels. After a few weeks, you may find that you do not need the bolster after all.

**Benefits:** This pose sends a good gush of blood to the brain, and face, keeping them younger and fit. The spine gets a powerful stretch and the nerves are toned. This pose relieves anger and fear, calms the mind and de-stresses you; keeps the face young and promotes hair growth. The pressure on the stomach will ease gut-related problems.



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Photographs by 123RF.com

# Less is more!

## Smart fasting can detoxify, cleanse and rejuvenate your body

American author Benjamin Franklin once said, “The best of all medicines is resting and fasting.” In fact, most religions advocate some form of fasting or *upvas*; the period may vary from once a week to more than a month. Specific months have been allotted for longer fasts; while for Hindus, it is in the ongoing month of *Shravan*; for the Jains, it is during *chaturmasa* and also during the eight days of *paryushan*; for the Zoroastrians it is in the *Boman mahino*; for the

Christians, it is in the Lent season; and for the Muslims, it is observed during the holy month of Ramzan.

Scientifically speaking, fasting is the simplest and easiest way to give your body time to cleanse and rejuvenate itself. It is an overhauling and purifying process that provides rest to important organs like the stomach, intestine, liver and kidney. A proper fast means complete abstinence from all substances except pure water in an environment of total rest. This

inculcates self-discipline and self-control, improves health, re-energises the body and reinforces positivity.

### Rest, renew, reinvent

Have you ever noticed how birds, animals or even humans stop eating when they fall sick? With this, they are automatically fasting to give their body enough time to restore good health. Fasting also provides a much-needed break from the abuse to which the body is often subjected.

Sadly, we have moved away from pure and natural foods. When the body gets no rest from processing food day after day, the digestive and cleansing systems are subjected to an uninterrupted workload. Environmental pollutants also contribute to this workload. This is when fasting comes to your aid. When you go without eating for hours at length, the body throws out the toxins from within and refreshes the physical, mental and spiritual being. There is no better way to stop a vicious cycle of self-destructive behaviour than by fasting.

Unfortunately, though, many people use fasting as a bargaining tool to attain a specific goal, such as losing a certain amount of weight or getting flatter abs. Also, some others look at fasting as a means of feasting—having ‘permissible’ foods the way they want, and eating all the wrong combinations of food. Regrettably, they end up gorging, thereby hindering their health and losing the basic essence of fasting.

### Fasting, the new-age way

With changing times, fasting has been improvised to make it more sustainable and less austere to suit the modern lifestyle. So if you're a silver observing a fast for a day, a week or even a month, you can design your meal such that you get all important nutrients to keep you nourished and energised. Thus, the body isn't deprived of necessary fats and proteins and gets enough time to recuperate and rejuvenate. You can cut down the severity of your fast by including the following items: fruits, nuts, milk, yoghurt, paneer, dry fruits, certain vegetables and non-grainy foods like bottle-gourd, lemon, cucumber and spices like cumin, coriander, ginger and rock salt. Food grains can be substituted with potato, sweet potato, sago, yam, amaranth (*rajgira*), water chestnut flour (*singhara atta*), *sama*



If you are observing a fast for a day, a week or even a month, you can design your meal such that you get all important nutrients to keep you nourished and energised

(barnyard millet) and *kuttu* (buckwheat); the medium of cooking could be cow's ghee. When you cut down on grains, processed and packaged foods, pulses and meat, digestion becomes easy and less acidic.

### Smart plan for fasting

Here's a smart, well-balanced meal plan that provides nutrients, keeps you full, and revitalises your body. The mantra of this meal is to ditch fried foods and sweets and substitute them with healthy foods to add vigour to your life.

- **Morning:** Water
- **Mid-morning:** Fresh fruits + dry fruits like figs or raisins. You could sip on herbal infusions in between or have a cup of tea or coffee with a little milk and some nuts to satiate your hunger

- **Lunch:** Cucumber salad + permissible vegetables + *rajgira* or *singhara* roti + buttermilk/yoghurt/paneer
- **Mid-evening:** Nuts + herbal infusion/green tea
- **Dinner:** Bottle-gourd soup + a small quantity of boiled potato or sweet potato *subzi* + *kuttu* or *sama* roti or sago *khichdi* tempered with cow's ghee, ginger, cumin, rock salt, and accompanied with mint chutney
- **Dessert:** If you have a sweet tooth, you can have a piece of organic jaggery or dry figs.

### The Jain fast

Jains often follow a very austere fast, which makes it difficult for silvers to sustain themselves. Though vegetables and fruits are not permissible, I recommend pulses, grains, raw banana, dairy products, all oils, ghee, sundried vegetables like sword beans, dried fenugreek and tomatoes, and spices and salt to reduce the severity.

- **Morning:** 1 *khakhra* + 6 almonds + tea
- **Lunch:** Tomatoes + sundried vegetables + grains/pulses + buttermilk
- **Mid evening:** Fruit followed by tea/coffee/milk
- **Dinner:** Tomato soup/*rasam* + chutney with dosa/idli/*cheela* or paratha/rice/*thepla*/*rotla* with dal + yoghurt + sambar or paneer.

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## HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

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

# Domestic *jugalbandi*!

**Sunanda & Surendra Singh Pokarna • AHMEDABAD**

Last month, I received an SMS from my sister-in-law Indu Chordia: "Come home, I want you to meet a very special couple and yes, be prepared to speak in pure Rajasthani." I laughed to myself, but agreed. Even though I grew up as a purist and never liked mixing languages while speaking, things are quite different now. I tend to use a mix of languages, lapsing into English, Hindi and Rajasthani with ease during a conversation. Invariably, I end up speaking in 'Hinglish', even though it's the last thing I would like to do!

It was indeed refreshing to meet 62 year-old Sunandaji and Surendra Singh Pokarna, 67. This Rajasthani couple from Ahmedabad consciously choose to speak in Rajasthani whenever possible. As if contagious, I found myself doing the same!

Listening to them speak, I heard the same thoughts being echoed by both: his being influenced by his scientific point of view; hers by her simple, humane and existential viewpoint. Both expressed the need for harmony, coexistence, and the need to commune with nature. I could see how much they had influenced and inspired each other. Time came to a standstill as I savoured the *jugalbandi* of their melodious conversation.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**She:** I was born and brought up in Bengaluru. Having been academically inclined, I was keen to pursue

law after my graduation, but my parents got me married in 1978. We initially lived in Udaipur and moved to Ahmedabad in 1986; we are living here since. Both of us belong to families where education was always a matter of prime importance.

**He:** I grew up in Udaipur. I did my PhD in physics, post-doctoral in biophysics and MSc in operations research. I worked as a scientist at ISRO [Indian Space Research Organisation] for 19 years. After

"Every kitchen has enough ingredients to whip up something in a hurry. My kitchen and fridge are always well-stocked. I never feel nervous even when there are sudden guests"

that, I worked as a CEO in a private company. I took VRS and now enjoy working as a consultant. We have recently started an organisation in Ahmedabad to conduct research in the disciplines of science and spirituality.

### A HEALTHY CURIOSITY

**He:** I was always curious about things around me. Religion fascinated me and I wanted to know why my mother undertook religious fasts, why Jain monks wear only white, why

we should visit temples, and many such questions. I found answers to many, and am still seeking many more. For instance, I realised that, for my mother, fasting was not a state of abstinence but a deep spiritual pursuit. It allowed her to behave and work in the same manner even on the days she was fasting. Regarding the white robes of the monks, I later understood that white reflects a balance of all the colours in the spectrum; it is reflective, and is infused with the qualities of serenity

and peace. Once you wear white, all colours are there in your clothes from one point of view and none from the other; hence, it will have a direct repercussion on the pollution caused owing to the use of hundreds of chemical colours.

**She:** I agree with him; it is important to cultivate *jigyasa* in life; it is the first rung on the ladder of knowledge and learning. Curiosity is a healthy quality to grow up with as it allows you to seek and find knowledge and evolve as a human being, ignites sensitivity and, eventually, leads to *karuna* or compassion in the heart.

### COMPASSION, A WAY OF LIFE

**He:** She is blessed with a rare sensitivity. Anyone who comes to our doorstep is treated equally and with respect. Even the postman and sweepers will be offered a glass of water. I feed about a dozen street dogs every morning and you should see how they wait for me! It is only



Photographs by Madhavi Jhumarwala

after this routine that I return, have a bath and partake of food.

**She:** I abhor casteism. I cannot bear to see people suffering. I am always wondering how we can help people move from misery to happiness. We do whatever we can in our own way. For instance, I never throw away the peels and seeds from my kitchen. I give them to him the next morning. After his morning yoga and prayers, he goes out to feed the cows *chaara* along with the peels and seeds.

### HARMONY AND COEXISTENCE

**He:** Life is all about coexistence. It is about 'we' and not just 'me'. I was always keen to combine science and spirituality. We need to look at science, technology, economics and environment as a totality. We need to move from reductionism to wholeness. Coexistence makes life all-inclusive and, consequently, more peaceful. Hence, we are trying to persuade people to celebrate International Non-

Violence Day on 2 October, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, as declared by the UN in 2007.

**She:** We both follow ahimsa and compassion as principles in everyday life. We feel this is the only way to create harmony and eventually make the world a better place. My father was my inspiration! He inculcated in me the love for reading and being well-informed.

**He:** My father-in-law was an exceptional man, very broad-minded, educated and practical. We both learnt a lot from him.

### LINGUISTIC PASSION

**She:** When we moved to Ahmedabad, we realised that most people from other communities spoke in their own mother tongue, but we Rajasthanis were gradually drifting away from speaking in our dialect. We felt a strong need to do something to rekindle interest in our mother tongue.

**He:** Rajasthani is a truly rich and beautiful language with 250,000 unique words. I inherited the love for the language from my mother. She knew more than 1,000 *lokgeet* and sang beautifully with a song for every mood and occasion. We started an organisation in 2012 to promote Rajasthani language and culture [Rajasthani Bhasha aur Sanskriti Prachar Mandal, Ahmedabad]. We also launched a dedicated website [[www.aapanorajasthan.org](http://www.aapanorajasthan.org)] in Rajasthani and created a Rajasthani calendar. We invite Rajasthani families to become members and celebrate the true spirit of Rajasthan.

### HANDY KITCHEN TIPS

**He:** I am a scientist by profession, yet when I see her operations in the kitchen, I am always amazed by her systematic and methodical approach. She is extremely active, meticulous and organised.

## MANGO-PEEL SABZI

(A side-dish with peels of ripe mangoes)

Here is an unusual creation from peels of ripe mangoes. Sunandaji says that the *kesar* variety is the most popular in Ahmedabad. The fruit is so succulent and tasty that she did not want to waste even the peels. However, you can use the peels of other mango varieties as well. Wash the mangoes well and then peel them. Chop the peels into neat squares and sun-dry for a few days. In summer, the sun is so fierce that they dry within a day or two. Once dried, they can be preserved and stored in an airtight container for months.

### Ingredients

- Dried mango peel: 1 cup; chopped into small squares
- Oil: 2 tbsp
- Mustard seeds: ¼ tsp
- Cumin seeds: ¼ tsp
- Dry whole Kashmiri red chillies: 2; broken into pieces

- Asafoetida: ¼ tsp
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Chilli powder: 1½ tsp
- Coriander powder: 2 tsp
- Dried mango powder (*amchur*): 1 tsp
- Salt to taste

### Method

Soak 1 cup of mango peel bits overnight. Next morning, pressure cook with 2½ cups of water for 2 whistles. Allow the steam to escape before opening the lid. Drain the water fully and keep aside. Heat the oil in a broad pan and add the mustard and cumin seeds. As the mustard splutters, add the asafoetida and red chillies. Add the cooked mango peels, turmeric powder, chilli powder, coriander powder, dried mango powder and salt. Cook on a medium flame for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Switch off the flame. Serve hot with rotis.



**She:** He likes organising his files and I do the same in the kitchen. Developing good routine habits pays dividends in the long run. The priority in any kitchen should be to preserve the ingredients well. I get most of my spices ground specifically from Pali village in Rajasthan once a year and preserve them meticulously. Here are some tips. To preserve chilli powder, add a little bit of any oil, preferably castor oil (*erandi ka tel*) or asafoetida chunks. To preserve turmeric, add a little salt and bits of plain white paper. Cut the paper into 1-inch squares and roll tightly. Just go on inserting these into the turmeric powder. In a 1-kg jar, I would add around 15 bits of paper. It absorbs moisture and keeps the turmeric dry and good for years. Add cloves (*laung*) to coriander powder for a longer shelf life. To preserve

wheat, add 1 kg castor oil to 100 kg wheat. Rub a few drops of oil to every handful of wheat. Continue this with the entire sack of wheat. Actually, these are simple tips followed in most Gujarati homes.

### UNEXPECTED GUESTS

**He:** She manages beautifully even when unexpected guests drop by. Most people might get nervous but nothing fazes her!

**She:** Every kitchen has enough ingredients to whip up something in a hurry. My kitchen and fridge are always well-stocked. I enjoy cooking and never feel nervous even when there are sudden guests. As a child, I pitched in with the housework. I was all of 10 when my mother fell ill

after my youngest brother was born. I used to do the housework, send my younger siblings to school, take care of my mother and attend school.

### TOGETHERNESS IS...

**She:** If you ask me whether he helps in the housework and can cope on his own, my answer would probably be 'No!' He is too busy with his pursuits. What makes a real difference is that he is always appreciative of what I do. That, to me, spells togetherness!

**He:** [Laughs] There has never been a reason for me to manage all by myself. Even when she visits her maternal family, we go together.

**She:** Now that we are free of our responsibilities, I don't want to save





money. I would rather save happiness. I would like to travel more often. I want to see more places across the globe.

#### **THEN AND NOW**

**She:** What I liked about earlier times was the close family ties. We had such fun playing outdoors. Where did that simple fun and joy disappear? Today, most children are glued to their mobile or busy with endless classes. Instead of trying to burden them with so many things, why don't we teach them to pursue just one hobby, and pursue it well?

**He:** We always grew up with a certain order, simplicity and discipline. Whether it was a working day or a holiday, we woke up at the same time

every day. But today a child is facing a lot of uncertainties that tend to create indiscipline. It appears entropy rules our life now. By entropy, I mean the degree of disorder and randomness in all walks of life. Today's youth faces tough competition in all fields. And whether it is studies, television channels or gadgets, they are faced with endless options, which can be disturbing. The more we are technologically advancing, the more entropy is increasing in the biosphere. This disturbs our children and, perhaps, leads to not following any discipline. I believe the answer lies in leaning towards spirituality. It will help us move towards an orderly state of mind and life.

*I came back overawed by their simple home truths! Here was a couple*

*perfectly made for each other—a marriage of minds, thoughts and deeds. Their capacity to move forward, evolve and flower lies deeply rooted in the pride they take in their culture, language and roots. In fact, my takeaway from this interview was a strong commitment to myself, to speak in my mother tongue as often as I can.*

*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*



# In stride

Robotic-assisted gait training is helping patients with neurological disorders walk again, says **Dr Abhishek Srivastava**, Director, Centre for Rehabilitation, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai

**W**alking is one of the most significant functions of the human body and difficulty in walking is one of the most important manifestations of ageing. Elderly people are prone to many neurological conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, peripheral neuropathy and falls, causing brain or spinal cord injury. These diseases and injuries can cause paralysis with inability to move the lower limbs and subsequent difficulty in walking. This inability to walk can have serious consequences including deconditioning syndrome, pressure sores, contractures, osteoporosis and increased risk of fractures.

To regain the ability to walk after a stroke is one of the main endeavours of neurological rehabilitation. This is often the deciding factor in whether a patient leads an active life or is homebound, in some cases relying on assistance from another person. Interestingly, our nervous system has the potential to change its structure and function, an ability known as neuroplasticity. Repetitive exercises encourage such structural and functional changes in the nervous system, which greatly improve the patient's ability to handle the tasks presented. As a result, modern neurophysiological concepts of walking now focus on repetitive, task-specific exercises.

## Training with a robotic treadmill

'If you want to learn to walk, you have to walk.' Training with a robotic treadmill system such as Lokomat™ is based on this concept and enables repetitive training in complex

walking cycles to take place as early as possible. It consists of a robotic gait orthosis, overhead body weight offloading system and a treadmill. Patients are first made to walk in the air, called 'nice walking', to evaluate whether they can sustain the continuous movements of lower limbs. The next stage is called 'safe walking', where they take steps on the treadmill with the help of the robotic orthosis. The duration of an average session is up to 30 minutes and a

Repetitive exercises encourage structural and functional changes in the nervous system, which greatly improve the patient's ability to handle the tasks presented

person can walk up to 1 km during this time. This is equivalent to about 1,300 steps whereas in a conventional physical therapy session of the same duration, a person can only walk up to 50 steps. This increased load of task-specific training unmasks the reorganisation of the neural circuits and leads to improved neurological/motor recovery.

Beyond the known positive effects of treadmill therapy with partial body weight support such as improved balance, better motor control of the lower extremities, faster walking and

greater endurance, Lokomat™ training is especially beneficial to stroke survivors with hemiparesis (weakening of an entire side of the body) in the area of an essential unchangeable component of movement: standing on one leg. This can also be used to initiate walking in persons with severe traumatic brain injury and in managing gait problems in multiple sclerosis, severe peripheral neuropathy, Parkinson's disease or any other neurological illness.

It is also useful for patients with incomplete spinal cord injury, or in other words, for patients who still have some residual function in their arms and legs. While Lokomat™ training does not cause any functional development in cases of complete paraplegia, it can lead to an improvement in secondary effects, such as stimulating the metabolism, stabilising circulation, reducing spasticity and long-term improvement of bowel and bladder function.

## Is it passive walking?

Some people feel this training is passive walking. However, that's not the case—multiple parameters can be altered during training. As patients regain new motor power, robotic assistance or guidance force is reduced, body weight support is reduced and the treadmill speed is gradually increased. The biofeedback mode allows patients to have a visual representation of the new movements regained in lower limbs on the computer screen in front of them. What's more, the augmented feedback mode allows the patient to play a game on



Training with robotic treadmill system, Lokomat™

Hareesh Patel

the computer screen, challenging both cognitive and motor abilities.

With the course of treatment, when patients gain enough motor power and control that they can do 'over-ground' walking with supervision or assistive gait aid, robotic-assisted training is stopped. However, patients with severe osteoporosis at the hips, contractures in lower limbs, morbid obesity, large open wounds on the trunk and lower limbs and unstable medical and neurological status are not fit for this type of training.

### Clinical trials

In the past years, there were doubts over whether robotic-assisted gait training in combination with conventional therapy had advantages over conventional therapy alone. This remained up for debate until recently, as a number of randomised con-

trolled trials often showed different results depending on patient population and study design. However, in 2014, a new Cochrane review (a meta-analysis where the highest level of clinical evidence can be reached) analysed 23 randomised controlled trials involving 999 stroke patients comparing normal care versus electromechanical and robotic-assisted gait training. The trial found evidence that robotic gait training actually had a significant effect on a patient's walking ability. The results showed that stroke patients who received robot-assisted gait training in combination with physiotherapy were more likely to achieve independent walking than patients who received only conventional gait training. This effect was most obvious in patients treated early after injury (within the first three months) as well as in patients who were not able to walk at the beginning of their therapy. Non-

ambulatory patients also significantly increased their walking velocity in response to electromechanically assisted gait training. The results show that every fifth dependency in walking ability after stroke might be avoidable if electromechanical-assisted devices are used.

### The progress card

In our experience over the past two years with more than 200 patients of stroke, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, hypoxic encephalopathy and Parkinson's disease, we have found significant improvement in lower limb motor power and functional recovery in achieving independent or supervised mobility. The improvement was maximum in patients who were started on robotic training in the early phase after the neurological insult, especially in the first few weeks after stroke or brain injury.

Achieving independent mobility is the most important goal. But the beauty is that even patients with neurological illness who can't move one or both lower limbs and even upper limbs can be made to walk on the robotic gait trainer. This boosts morale and leads to significantly improved participation in the overall neurorehabilitation programme. In fact, most of our stroke or brain injury patients who were started on a comprehensive neurorehabilitation programme, including robotic training, achieved independent mobility in three months after the neurological insult.

### In conclusion

Robotic-assisted training has significantly changed the management of patients with neurological illness and injuries. Many more patients are going home walking from the hospital, able to live independently, and going back to work. This further reduces the overall cost of care and the financial burden on the family and society.



# Gift of giving

Helping underprivileged women build a future is Madhuri Mathur's way of saying 'thank you,' writes **Raj Kanwar**



Amit Sharma

**I**t was 1957 and a 23 year-old Madhuri (then Jayal, now Mathur) had just returned to Dehradun from Delhi with a degree in education from the famed Lady Irwin College. As she stood on the threshold of a new career, she wondered what the future held for her.

Hailing from the distinguished Jayal clan in Dehradun, a teaching job in an elite school was the obvious choice for a young lady of such grooming and poise. And thus she came to be

hired to teach at the then fledgling Welham Girls School, a boarding school, where in due course she became vice-principal.

As much as she loved teaching, that was not Madhuri's only calling. Dehradun was then a small town and, somewhere down the line, she met the Lakhanpals—Satyavrat and Chandravati, both educators and members of the Rajya Sabha. She quickly fell under the influence of this khadi-wearing couple and, like them, became a great believer in 'giving'.

The result of her soul-searching eventually led Madhuri to launch a charitable society, Mahila Kalyan Udyog Kendra (MKUK), in 1962 along with her mother, the Lakhanpals and local businessman-cum-philanthropist Jai Ram Singh Oberai as founding members. Madhuri became its honorary secretary, a post she holds even today. The NGO had a noble yet simple objective: to train underprivileged and destitute women in various crafts and skills that would equip them with the means to earn a livelihood.

The centre began functioning at Madhuri's spacious family home and continues to operate from there.

The first woman to enrol with the centre was Kailashvati, a Punjabi refugee who had arrived in India as a teenager with her mother and brother from Pakistan after Partition. Her father, husband and son had been killed during the riots of the time and MKUK was a godsend for her. The centre enrolled Kailashvati at the Bapu Industrial Home set up by the state government specifically to provide training to refugee women in various skills such as tailoring, knitting and secretarial practice. As a result, she was employed as an instructor at the centre to train other women in tailoring skills.

By word-of-mouth, more and more women learnt about MKUK and its activities. Vidyavati, a widow in her early 20s with two sons, was the second woman to join the centre. She too was trained in tailoring and employed as an instructor. With her salary, she managed to provide a decent education to her sons; today, one of them is an IPS officer and the other well-settled as well. "I will never forget the time Vidyavati met me a year later and touched my feet," recalls Madhuri, now 83. "I saw tears of happiness and gratitude in her eyes. That brought tears to my eyes too. Vidyavati worked for 30 years at the centre and then her son took her away."

The centre made steady progress; in a few months after it was established, it acquired seven sewing machines and its strength had risen to 30, comprising migrant labourers and a couple of refugees. MKUK's turning point came when it landed its first major contract: stitching the uniforms of the local municipality's Class IV employees. This was followed by similar but bigger orders, from the Survey of India and the National Institute of Visually Handicapped.

However, what firmly established the centre in the business of sewing and supply of uniforms was the decision of Welham Girls' School to get MKUK to sew the uniforms (salwars and shirts only) of all its students. The school went a step further and, in 1990, began to outsource to Madhuri's centre the sewing contract for the entire set of school uniforms, including blazers, pullovers, shoes, socks and undergarments. This was a huge and prestigious business and it expanded MKUK's scope of operations considerably. The order for

**"Even though our family is highly educated, accomplished and well-off, our upbringing and ethos were essentially middle class. Having grown up in such an environment, I had decided early on that education was going to be my area of focus"**

uniforms on such a large scale was a formidable task for Madhuri, a novice to business, yet she boldly took up the challenge. "For me, becoming a minor entrepreneur was a new learning experience. Slowly but surely, I learnt the logistics of the business," she recalls with satisfaction.

What inspired Madhuri to undertake a mission like this? "Even though our family is highly educated, accomplished and well-off, our upbringing and ethos were essentially middle class," she explains. "Having grown up in such an environment, I had decided early on that education was going to be my area of focus." Clearly, compassion was at the core of Madhuri's calling. "Over all these years,

we have helped uneducated women acquire useful skills and ensure that at least their children were educated. In this way, we helped many women earn their own livelihood, and young girls find suitable careers. Interacting with all these women is emotionally satisfying, and that is my greatest motivation."

The contract with the Welham Girls' School continued till 2000, by which time the number of students had risen to about 600. When Madhuri retired after 39 years in 1996, she was the vice-principal. She was now ready to take her next leap of faith.

She did this when she launched Kar Kamal, a unit which hosts annual exhibition-cum-sales to promote the items made by MKUK members. Other NGOs engaged in promoting social causes were also encouraged to set up sales booths. The first exhibition in 2004 was a roaring success and the centre made a net profit of over ₹ 300,000; the event has since become a major item on Dehradun's social calendar.

Madhuri didn't stop there. She and her team decided to widen the scope of their activities and opened a coaching school for children in 2007. The school, located at Srijan Public School in Bapu Nagar in the Jakhan area, offers extra coaching to children from neighbouring villages and *basti*, from 3 to 5 pm, four days a week. The centre, which has seen 300 children pass through its portals, now has 60 kids on its rolls.

Simultaneously, MKUK launched a project to promote the welfare and education of girls from underprivileged families. Selected deserving girls are admitted to regular schools and their education, is paid for by the society. After they complete their schooling, they are encouraged to join professional training and basic courses. This, too, is fully funded by the centre.





Photographs courtesy: Madhuri Mathur

MKUK helps the underprivileged women earn livelihood and promotes the welfare and education of young girls

Not surprisingly, in the 53 years since it was founded, MKUK has won the hearts and confidence of the people and organisations it has worked with. Among them is Avdhash Kaushal, founder chairperson of Rural Litigation Entitlement Kendra, a Dehradun-based NGO that works on the economic and social problems of the underprivileged. "I have followed MKUK's work for years," he says. "It is amazing how its office bearers, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s, have been indefatigably carrying aloft the banner for so many years. Their tireless energy can shame women half their age."

Adds Neelu Khanna, secretary, Aasraa Trust, Dehradun, "MKUK deserves to be commended for the great work it has been doing in training women to give them a life of dignity. Equally praiseworthy is its role in educating girls from poor families

**"We have helped uneducated women acquire useful skills and helped them earn their livelihood, and helped young girls find suitable careers. Interacting with all these women is emotionally satisfying, and that is my greatest motivation"**

and ensuring that they join professional courses to be able to stand on their own feet. I congratulate Ms Madhuri Mathur and her team for their commendable work."

Indeed, MKUK has had a life-changing impact on a large number

of women and has changed the course of the next generation of the women it has helped. One of them, Ruksana, is a master craftswoman in crochet and has been working for MKUK for five years. One of her three daughters has a degree in computer applications and is working with Wipro in Pune. Another daughter is on the verge of completing her MBA from the Institute of Cooperative Management while the third is doing her BSc at a local college.

Ruksana sums up the essence of Madhuri's life's work when she says, "The centre has paid all the fees for their professional courses and taken care of related expenses. Madhuri Ma'am has built the future of my children. I had never dreamt that my daughters would have such an education. Without her help, they would have remained uneducated like me." ❀



A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a light blue checkered shirt and white trousers, is riding a blue duck-shaped water toy in a pool. She is smiling and has her arms outstretched. In the background, a man with white hair, wearing a light green shirt and khaki shorts, is also riding a similar water toy. The background is filled with lush green foliage.

## Experience

### A second childhood

Wouldn't it be great to have a second childhood? To start life afresh? Because at Harmony, a magazine for people above fifty five, we believe that age is in the mind. Which is why, you should live young.

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*harmony*  
**celebrate age**

*:: cover feature ::*

*Natasha Rego  
meets the enigmatic  
Dr Mickey Mehta,  
'the revolution' who  
aims to bring about  
a human evolution*

# *Fittest @55*

*Photographs courtesy: Dr Mickey Mehta*





a

t 6.30 am on a windy Wednesday morning recently, hundreds of Mumbaikars with yoga mats were sprawled along the promenade at Mumbai's Marine Drive. Leading the charge was a fleeting figure in black and white who seemed to possess the uncanny ability of being everywhere at once. In one instant, he was giving his team of trainers a pep talk before they scattered along the drive; at another, he was welcoming celebrity guests such as Malaika Arora and others to join him in an asana; at yet another he was posing for pictures with the various groups such as the police force, silver citizens and various yoga enthusiasts who had gathered that day. Besides being International Yoga Day, it was also a special edition of Yoga By The Bay, a programme led by holistic health guru Dr Mickey Mehta and his partner Shaina N C, a BJP functionary, that has initiated 150,000 Mumbaikars, young and old, into yoga over the past two years.

Indeed, Mickey is on a mission to start what he calls 'A Wellness Revolution for Human Evolution'. "My vision is to let every individual in this world of 7 billion people be self-healed and happy," he tells us when we meet him a week later at his mother's cosy apartment in Napean Sea Road. "One of my mottos comes to mind: Sleep every night with the wish to heal yourself and wake up every morning with a promise to heal the world," he says, quoting one







***"Human health and healing always point towards equilibrium, but we keep disturbing it. We are oscillating between the positive and negative, while in the centre lies the shoonyam quotient—that is where restoration, rejuvenation, revitalisation and regeneration take place"***

of his classic 'Get Mickeymized' messages, a rhythmic tool he uses to propagate his wellness message on social media every day.

Since his journey began, Mickey has touched the lives of millions—whether it is through the many Mickey Mehta's 360° Wellness Temples across Mumbai; or initiatives targeting different groups in the urban demography, such as Yoga By The Bay, Be Stronger, Live Longer for silvers and the Grow Taller programme for children; or through the radio and television shows on wellness he has been hosting for years. "In fact, I was the first wellness coach to do Femina Miss India, the first personal trainer in India and the first columnist, TV and radio presenter on wellness," he acknowledges.

Early in his career, Mickey worked as a health club manager for hotels in India and abroad. His primary mandate was to help people manage their weight. Given his knowledge of martial arts and fitness, this directive helped the young college dropout land on his feet—but all the while an esoteric lurked within. As he became a self-inspired student of new-age gurus and other philosophies from various cultures across continents, Mickey grew inclined to holistic human development. In addition to the sensitivities of the human body, he wanted to explore the mind and soul, and complement the pursuit of physical fitness with a path to spiritual awakening. He wanted to push the boundaries of the mind and test the potential of the body, while existing in urban chaos.

We all know him as India's most sought-after life coach among the rich and famous. But as he likes to tell it, it all just happened to him. "When the river flows, it has impetus," he says. While his personal attention is lent to a

famous few, primarily the elite of Mumbai, he offers complimentary services to groups such as the Mumbai police force. Further, his Wellness Temples offer up a holistic approach to fitness, comprising meditation, nutritional support and 'equipment-free exercises'.

The consolidation of 'equipment-free exercises' as a Mickey Mehta special—like 'learn swimming in 24 hours', which fetched him a place in the *Limca Book of Records 1995*—reveals a savvy marketer beneath his health guru persona. And like many inventions, it was born of necessity. When he was roped in to the Femina Miss India beauty pageant in 1995, Mickey had to train 30 girls at time. With no gym at hand to accommodate them all, he moved the workout outdoors. This eventually led him to start training his own clients in parks, gardens and the glorious Mumbai seaside.

All these experiences also honed his skills as a businessman without any formal training in management. But, by his own admission, he is not as good a businessman as he is a healer. He attributes his acute abilities to evolution. "My neural mirroring abilities, which are usually strongest between the ages of zero to seven, are still at their peak," he reveals. His talents don't end there. In 1993, he collaborated on an album with pop stars Anaida, Bali Bhrambhath and Alisha Chinai called *Winning Rhythm* that was infused with social awareness messages. He has also been awarded honorary doctorates by two institutions: South Korea's Keisie University and Sri Lanka's Open International University for Complementary Medicines. Further, he has launched a book in Marathi Braille, titled *Gharbaghya Pregnancy Wisdom*, and produced and presented the documentary *Gandhi, The Healer*, a film that explored the Mahatma's beliefs in naturopathy.

Mickey turns 55 years this month, with at least 55 more to go, he assures us! And this birthday, like many others, will be celebrated with the city's dwellers: from 360° Wellness Temple membership discounts and freebies handed out, to a barrage of 'Get Mickeymized' messages on social media counting down to D-Day, and a big celebration of life and living on 29 August.

His own daily routine begins with an hour of slow meditative exercises. His breakfast involves cold-pressed coconut oil and herbal teas, followed by special herbs. His Haji Ali home doubles up as an office where his core team gathers and discusses the day's meetings before they head into the city; and on the dashboard of his car is a makeshift timetable with a two-week schedule pencilled in. His impressive resume spanning 35 years aside, this lone crusader wishes to focus on the future rather than dwell on the past. "It doesn't matter where I'm coming from," he says. "It matters where I'm headed."

#### **EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW**

##### ***How does one get initiated into the age-reversal process?***

A single-celled sperm has the potential to germinate and grow into a multi-cellular body with multi-cellular functions. That is the potential of the life force within all of us. It is so automatic that even in Africa, where people starve, where they might not have muscle or fat tissue, they still grow. This force is constantly regenerating our cells, which happens in four seven-year cycles. The first seven years are growth with a clean slate. The second seven years are of impressions and imprints on your intellect. From 14 to 21 are your formative years. And the fourth cycle is the consolidation of your learnings. It is the age for wisdom. After 28, there is a lag in the rate of regeneration. This lag brings death.

The idea is to reduce the lag through inputs: physical, physiological, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. When you introduce these five multi-pronged inputs, they nurture human life not just in cellular regeneration but in the rewiring of your brain. When the elements—the sun, moon, earth, water and air—are absorbed, assimilated and utilised is when a human becomes an intelligent being, completely connected with the cosmic elements. Then we are living every day, as opposed to dying every day, and death will not come through 'dis-ease'.

##### ***What prompted you to focus on silvers in this reverse-ageing process?***

Silvers need our attention as they are in a state of rapid degeneration. We can do literal magic to their lives in no time. Small steps (**see box on page 45**) will bring about major change. Then you will see 10 years get on like this [snaps fingers], 20 years like that [claps hands].

To give you a real-life example, my mom was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer at the age of 70. They went in for exploratory surgery and found she had to be operated upon or, given her condition, she wouldn't make it for more than six months. They cut off her duodenum, pancreas, gall bladder and 80 per cent of the stomach. We avoided the chemo and, after the surgery, I put her on a vegetarian diet and sacred cow's urine that was prayed upon, herbs and aloe vera. Then, I got her a home in a completely new environment, full of gardens and fresh air. In time, the new cells generated new memories and disconnected from the past. Today, she is 82. She does yoga every day, goes to the fire temple, and cooks. It's been 12 years and we haven't gone through any tests. She eats non-veg too, though I don't approve of it. Of course, at her age, she's a little hard of hearing and has trouble with her eyesight. But she walks straight! So spontaneous remission is possible with natural therapy, prayer and meditation.

##### ***What is the value of sacred cow's urine?***

Modern science says that any fluid has memory. If something as pure as the urine of an albino cow is prayed upon and blessed constantly, it will have an obvious transformational effect. Further, this cow is kept in very comfortable conditions, has been charged with mantras and gone through a purification process.

##### ***Does a vegetarian diet have healing properties?***

Everything that is in abundance in nature, which grows out of the soil, having absorbed sunshine, minerals, water and oxygen, and having witnessed the planetary movements



With Shaina N C (in white) and Harmony's silvers at the special edition of Yoga by the Bay on International Yoga Day 2017 at Marine Drive in Mumbai

Opposite page:  
At an event in  
Mumbai last year



Haresh Patel

over several months, will possess absolute wisdom—the wisdom of healing. The curative properties of vegetarianism have been recorded and validated. That is not the case for meat.

#### ***Have you always been a vegetarian?***

I was a vegan for 10 years, then a non-vegetarian for seven-eight years, and a vegetarian in the last two years. I have experimented a lot with food and its correlation to dreams, thoughts and temperament. I am forever on an alternative trip. I would probably still drool when I see someone eating lamb chops, but my consciousness has superseded my animalistic lust for food!

#### ***When did you start seeing exercise as more than just physical activity?***

Maybe from the time I was seeded in my mom's womb. Most destinies are predetermined. I say 'most' because those people are chosen to lead, deliver and liberate others.

#### ***At what point did you grow conscious of it?***

I think it happened at the residential schools where I studied in Nashik. I took to exercising and my interest slowly drifted to subtle sciences, philosophy and spirituality. It was a wonder for me too because it just happened.

I later understood that when a river flows, it is on a trajectory. People gave me cassettes and books of Deepak Chopra, Osho and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who became my biggest influencers.

#### ***Tell us about your parents.***

I come from a middle-class Parsi family. Both my parents worked for 40-45 years for their companies. I grew up in the heart of a red-light area near Falkland Road in Mumbai. It wasn't so when my grandfather moved there. Nevertheless, our community and other small communities also lived there. We were like lotuses in the muck.

#### ***How has age affected you?***

Age brings a lot of wisdom, but otherwise I remain 18 years old.

#### ***You took a bold step dropping out of college....***

There was nothing bold about it, nor will I take credit for it. Everything happened as I wasn't good at academics. It was the push and pull of nature that I became a karate teacher. Later I got a job at a five-star hotel as an undercover security guy. Further I worked as a health club manager for maybe 1,200 bucks to start with. There were no goals at that time.





### ***SIMPLE STEPS TO 'REVERSE AGEING'***

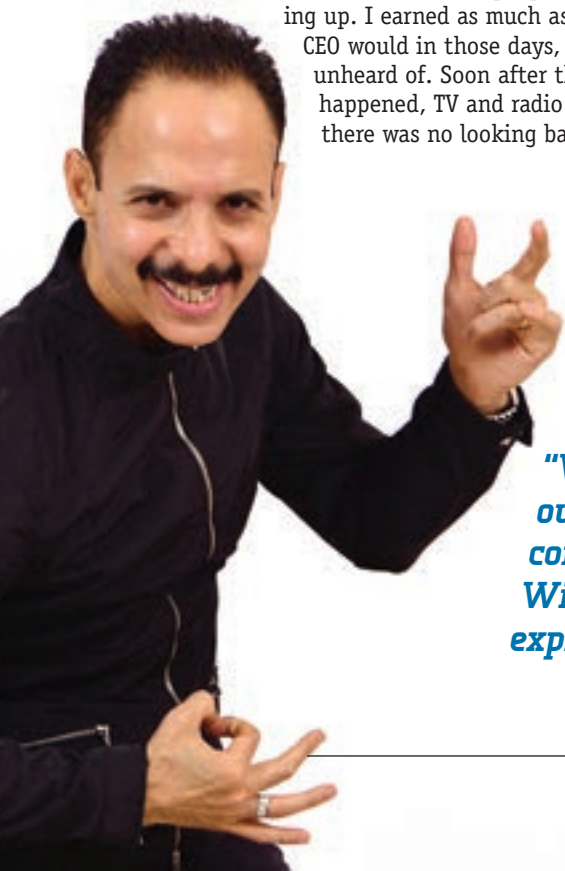
- Breathe 21 times consciously, seven times a day
- Step out every day for half an hour; take a walk in the park or the beach. Or, if nature is scarce, take to the streets
- Eat your dinner by 6-6.30 pm
- Do the stomach-out, stomach-in breathing exercises that the Japanese call *tanden* breathing, around 40 to 50 times when you wake up and before you sleep, and you will never die of heart failure at night; this exercise infuses the memory of breathing
- Sleep as early as possible and as much as you need

### ***What made you go solo?***

I was thrown out of wherever I was working, owing to some scandals there. But opportunities come out of challenges. You just have to optimise them.

### ***Is that when you started teaching people to swim in 24 hours?***

This was my first claim to fame. I always had a way of doing things differently and great marketing ideas came to me. When I was teaching people to swim in Oman, I got them to float on the first day and swim the next day. So when I lost my job, I said, 'Boss, use this knowledge!' I took over the pool at Hotel Sea Princess in Mumbai with a vision. I did 12-hour batches, from morning to night, batch after batch. And people started queuing up. I earned as much as a blue-chip CEO would in those days, which was unheard of. Soon after that, Miss India happened, TV and radio happened, and there was no looking back.



### ***How was 'Get Mickeymized' coined?***

Three to four years ago, when I was planning one of my birthday campaigns, an idea got me. I thought, let me 'Mickeymize' people. I started creating 'Get Mickeymized' messages, which have become quite a lingo. There are up to 1,500 on different subjects on social media. I can make them up at the drop of a hat!

### ***Can you do one on 'active ageing'?***

Mickey Mehta says active ageing must be celebrated in absolute awareness. Let your awareness of ageing be optimised. Don't wither. Renew with time, become sublime. Let your life be maximised. Get Mickeymized!

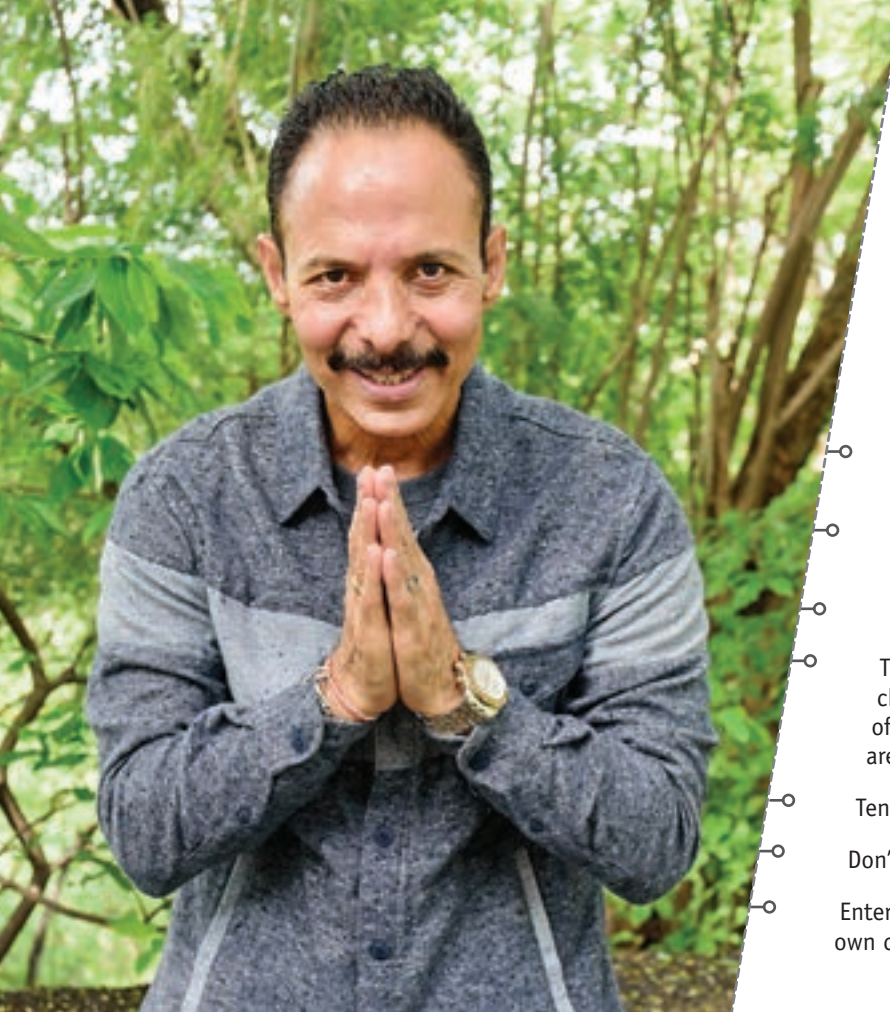
### ***What is it like working with a celebrity or industrialist?***

I am diplomatic by nature and heart-oriented. I am also extremely analytical—there is a mind of a NASA scientist lurking in here had I studied physics. So, diplomacy with politicians, industrialists, stars comes naturally to me.

### ***How do you modify your workouts to such a diverse group?***

Therapies differ according to age, place, constitution, time and function. Nowadays, I only take people who are serious about rewriting their soul software and evolving as humans. When evolution is the ultimate objective, weight loss becomes frivolous.

***"With a support system in place, silvers can outperform their children because they possess more compassion and a bank of wisdom and experience. Wisdom is the edge over the rest, and there is no expiry on the potential for human learning"***



Haresh Patel

### SPEND SOME 'ME' TIME

- You can use temples and other houses of worship for their enabling environments
- Use your shower, which is conducive for introspection
- Sit in a quiet chair by yourself, or by the sea
- Tap into the stimulus of smell and sound: the chirping of birds, the sound of rain, the smell of flowers or wet mud, sandalwood and musk are transcendental
- Tend to a fire (which I do at the fire temple!)
- Don't be bound by time
- Enter a state of simply being and enjoy your own company

### What is soul software?

We are all individuals, which means indivisible duality, that which cannot be divided. It is represented by the soul. One component carries the collective memory of your life and is unique to you, and one holds the memory of the universe too. These two components make up your soul software. This software can be reprogrammed or wiped completely clean, which is what happens to the enlightened ones. After having gone through a spiritual cleansing of one's being, none of the past influences the now. I call it the here-now philosophy of being super-conscious.

### Is it possible in urban life to pursue consciousness?

Difficult, but possible. However, we can always start our journey. I aspire towards this for myself. Extraordinary are those who believe there is something within that is superior to circumstance.

### What is plaguing urban society today?

Life exists in polarities. The chase has to be eliminated. As a compass points north, human health and healing always point towards equilibrium, but we keep disturbing

it—with the wrong choice of food, no proper rest and bad attitude. We are oscillating between the positive and negative, while in the centre lies the *shoonyam* quotient—that is where restoration, rejuvenation, revitalisation and regeneration take place. This can be achieved through creative workouts, ethical eating, regulated breathing, meaningful rest and, of course, 'me' time (**see box**). Healing is further aided by compassion, benevolence, philanthropy, creativity and grace more than even food or exercise, because then there is emotional fulfilment.

### What would be the starting point towards leading a life of consciousness?

Self-love—not to be mistaken for narcissism. Take responsibility for what you have and all that you don't. Seek atonement and forgiveness, only that will liberate you.

Induced beliefs also play an important role in silvers' lives. The people around them should declare that we as humans are capable, even at 80 and 90, of making wonders happen. And with a support system in place, sometimes silvers can outperform their children because they possess more compassion and a bank of wisdom and experience. Wisdom is the edge over the rest, and there is no expiry on the potential for human learning. It is just a

**"My energy is faith and hope-driven. It is in my DNA. It's like, when you come to the core of the onion, when all the layers disappear, it becomes open-ended. I am like that: open-ended, vulnerable and anchored in faith. And faith takes care of me"**

matter of pursuit and aligning with the flow... wanting it, intending it, aspiring towards it, and not being aggressive or desperate about it. Every silver has to live life with purpose. If you want something, sow the seeds on the banks of time and wait for the season for them to become beautiful gardens, enchanting forests or delicious orchards.

**Where do you get your energy from?**

My energy is faith and hope-driven. It is in my DNA. It's like, when you come to the core of the onion, when all the layers disappear, it becomes open-ended. I am like that: open-ended, vulnerable and anchored in faith. And faith takes care of me.

**What are you currently studying?**

I am studying almost every day. I go in blindfolded in any direction. I pick up learnings from the Internet, books, people and, of course, television—Discover Channel, Discovery Science, Nat Geo, Animal Planet, History Channel are my go-to channels. I am drawn to scientific phenomena and constantly searching for the meaning of words and jargon, and relating them with philosophy and spirituality.

**Does religion dominate spirituality these days?**

That's because religion is an organised business. There is always a CEO, trustees and a board of directors; they control the thought and functions of the community. They lay down the dos and don'ts within which you are trapped. Religion will not set you free; spirituality will. Freedom comes when structures are toppled. That is when your soul can grow. I myself offer prayers at night, ritualistic and non-ritualistic, both of a brand religion and universal too. It's about taking the best from all because everyone has something unique to offer.

**Do you find a common message among all the teachings you draw from?**

Love. It is the reason for proliferation and the single most important weaving factor. Osho says, "Forget God, love

will do. But don't forget love. God alone won't do." God could be crippled without love.

**In your view, is there hope for us to regain our spirituality?**

There is great hope. We are on the cusp of a golden era and technology will lead us there if it does not take us to the dark ages. If creation has to happen after *pralay* [dissolution], so be it. It is our collective destiny. As for me, I am excited about the last breath I take; that is, whenever it comes. I will be conscious and looking forward to where I am headed. When you are in complete awareness, death cannot happen to you even after breathing your last.

**Does your family follow your path?**

My wife became a vegetarian after me. She is very aware and conscious about her health. So is my daughter, but being young she also likes her pancakes, pizzas and chocolates! She now has a few Hindu friends who have convinced her to become vegetarian, even though it's a tall order in America. My greatest challenge is to bring my daughter into my fold. It will happen one day because the seed of an apple has to become an apple.

**What would you say has been your impact over 35 years?**

There is so much that the stories will run into thousands. Sibling rivalries have been sorted, relationships between parents and children mended, suicidal cases solved, business disputes resolved. People have been put on the path of success and taught to navigate joint families. Responsible parenting has also been my core competency.

**What does the future hold in store for you?**

My book *The Shoonyam Quotient* has been picked up by Penguin Random House and will release this September. I am now working on a TV show about axial sages such as the Buddha, Mahavira, etc, who are the epitome of purity and holiness. And I have finished working on my branded music to be played at my wellness temples. I am just waiting for it to get finalised and the world to get Mickeymized! ✨







# Celebrating **KRISHNA**

The temple town of Vrindavan pulsates with frenzied devotion

📷 📹 Gustasp and Jeroo Irani

**V**rindavan in Uttar Pradesh was a tranquil pastoral village on the banks of the Yamuna when Lord Krishna was growing up. Today, its bucolic origins are scarcely visible amid the chaos of a burgeoning Indian city. The serene notes of Lord Krishna's flute have been silenced by the cacophony of rickshaws and automobiles that weave through the narrow streets as though on a suicide mission. But the sounds of a city in full throttle have somehow not banished Lord Krishna's playful spirit in the tranquil temples that dot its streets.

Indeed, Vrindavan revolves largely around Lord Krishna, the impish child who was born in Mathura, 15 km away, and grew up in Vrindavan, endearing himself to everyone with his antics and charm. We weren't pilgrims in search of Lord Krishna nor had we renounced the world and decided to settle in one of Vrindavan's ashrams. We were curious but respectful tourists trying to figure out what made Vrindavan tick with such frenzied devotion in its 5,000 temples—old, new and cutting-edge.

And that 24x7 religious high was infectious; we too got swept away by the multitudes as they bowed and prayed



in front of garlanded idols even as priests waved flaming diyas and daubed foreheads with vermillion paste. We shed our intellectual curiosity to merge with the tidal waves of collective devotion that roiled through the pilgrim town.

At the curiously named Pagal Baba Temple, a marble 10-storeyed confection, we heard about Leela Nand Thakur, a simple man who kept chanting the Lord's name. "He was *pagal* [crazy] about Lord Krishna and would move around with just a red cloth bag," a temple official informed us. Thakur would dip his hand in the bag, which was somehow always laden with cash, to help the needy. The divine source of his funds could never be explained, but that is how he managed to construct the temple and five ashrams in the country. A priest urged us to go all the way to the top but we were too enervated by the heat. Moreover, we were not powered by the wellsprings of faith that seemed to push others forward, trudging up 10 storeys, treading barefoot on hot stone floors. Instead, we contented ourselves with touring the interior of the temple where puppets and dioramas in glass cases depicted the lives of Krishna and Rama in evocative ways.

During our temple-hopping spree, we discovered that the houses of worship did not

conform to one template but an entire spectrum that challenged the imagination. Govind Deo Temple, for instance, turned out to be a grand red sandstone edifice. Once seven-storeyed, it is a three-storey structure in the form of a Greek cross now. Built by Maharaja Man Singh of Amer in 1590, it cost ₹ 10 million. Within, a few tourists gazed at the ceiling which has a beautiful sculptured lotus, said to weigh several tonnes. With its pillars, arches, carved brackets and *toran*, Govind Deo resembled the palace of a queen rather than a temple.

As we were about to leave the precincts, a young couple from Slovakia asked us for directions and then related their tale of woe—a monkey made off with the woman's spectacles, a hazard in Vrindavan, where the simian army is prone to not only snatching food from the hands of unwary devotees but spectacles off people's noses. The cheeky monkey dropped them only when she threw some nuts at him, a trade-off suggested by a helpful local. The more impudent ones rummage in ladies' handbags—if they are carelessly left open—and make off with mirrors; they groom themselves for hours on end!

Aggressive monkeys aside, navigating the tangle of streets was a challenge as lumbering cows

**A fanciful guru at Pagal Baba Temple; a colourful shrine of Radha and Krishna at Prem Mandir**



The mid-19th century Rangji Temple is another gem that explodes with colours. Lord Krishna, enshrined in the main altar of the over 200-pillared complex, is cared for by 108 pundits from the southern reaches of the country



The pillared hall of Rangji Temple

Opposite page: (clockwise from top left) The 19th century Banke-Bihari Temple; dating back to 1580, Madan Mohan Temple is the oldest on the block; Prem Mandir incorporates 3,000 tonne of Italian marble; the arched central hall of Govind Deo Temple

and bullocks often blocked our path. However, we managed to locate the ASI-protected, oldest temple on the block, dating 1580. The red sandstone edifice of Madan Mohan Temple rises on a hillock with its 60 ft-high *shikara* dominating the skyline. Strong fortified walls encircle it, giving it the air of a fortress. Legend has it that Lord Krishna rested on this hillock after fighting the demon Kaliya who was polluting the waters of the Yamuna.

The mid-19th century Rangji Temple is another gem that explodes with colours. Women from Rajasthan in swirling, red mirror-work *ghaghra-choli* mingled with a handful of Brit tourists in floppy hats, unknowingly presenting us with marvellous photo ops. The temple, built in the Dravidian style with a soaring six storey-high *gopuram*, has a Rajasthan-style entrance gate and a gold-plated, 54-ft-high pillar. A limpid

reservoir and garden add to the temple's charm. Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, enshrined in the main altar of the over 200-pillared complex, is cared for by 108 pundits from the southern reaches of the country.

Monkeys are a serious threat at the 19th century Banke-Bihari Temple too, where we were advised to take off our glasses to avoid an attack. The road leading to the shrine was crowded with devotees, one of whom decided to become our self-appointed guide. "Don't forget to make a wish, for Lord Banke-Bihari [a manifestation of Lord Krishna] grants whatever you seek," he said as we pushed through the milling crowds. Nothing had quite prepared us for the swirling ocean of devotion we encountered within. The chanting of prayers and the sudden exuberant invocation of the gods swept like waves over the tightly packed congregation standing shoulder









Orange-robed, shaven-head devotees prostrated themselves under the sky that arched over the open courtyard; some sat in quiet nooks playing the harmonium and singing bhajans in a self-induced trance

to shoulder. As it seemed almost impossible to get any closer to the central altar, we stood at the door of the rear entrance. Our newfound friend, however, nudged and pushed his way towards the gods and insisted we follow in his wake.

Once close enough to vaguely distinguish the features of the black stone idol smothered in garlands, we stopped and offered a silent prayer. Suddenly, our friend let out a full-throated cry petitioning Banke-Bihari. He waded into the jostling crowd with single-minded determination to grab one of the garlands being tossed around by the pujari. After three close misses, he finally managed to latch onto one that three other hands also claimed as theirs. Yank,

tug and he came out with a fistful of flowers of which he gave us a few, saying: "Even with one flower, whatever you wished for will come true."

On the narrow, stall-lined street outside the temple, we found ourselves blending once more into the rich stew of pedestrian traffic; bewildered kids clinging desperately to their parents, young boys and girls in jeans and T-shirts with caste marks on their foreheads, orange-robed sadhus astride vrooming bikes and a raucous street band.

Religious passion was again at an all-time high at Sheesha Temple, a glass mosaic shrine, and the relatively modern Sri Krishna Balaram ISKCON Temple. The intricately



## GETTING THERE

**By air:** Though the closest airport is at Agra (62 km), Delhi (170 km) is better connected to the rest of the country.

**By rail and road:** Mathura, 15 km from Vrindavan, is well-connected by road and rail with the rest of the country.

## ACCOMMODATION

There are a number of dharamshalas and private hotels in Vrindavan, although there is no five-star property. There are two UP Tourism properties in Mathura. For more information visit <http://uptourism.gov.in/>

## TIPS

Most temples are open between 6.30 am and 12 noon and then again from 4 pm to sunset. Photography of the sanctum is taboo inside all the 'living' temples.

carved marble temple blended spirituality with commerce, with a restaurant-cum-takeaway, a shop selling books on matters spiritual, a guesthouse and a tourist office. Columned passageways, decorated with bright murals portraying episodes from Krishna's life, formed the backdrop. The singing and chanting were interspersed with the throb of dholak and cymbals. It is said that the *tamal* tree in the courtyard is the one under which Radha used to wait for Krishna.

Orange-robed, shaven-head devotees prostrated themselves under the sky that arched over the open courtyard; some sat in quiet nooks playing the harmonium and singing bhajans in a self-induced trance. Adjoining the temple is the samadhi of the founder of ISKCON, Swami Prabhupada.

However, the pinnacle of temple architecture in Vrindavan is Prem Mandir which took 11 years to build and threw open its sandalwood doors in 2012. Rising like a gigantic marble wedding cake on a marble platform on lavish 65-acre grounds where musical fountains play at dusk, the temple incorporates 30,000 tonne of Italian marble.

Every inch is intricately carved and outside the sanctum there are flourishes like carved pillars, a gigantic chandelier suspended from a dome that is intricately chiselled to resemble lace, and colourful friezes that portray episodes from Krishna's life. Marble stairs sweep upwards to the first-floor gallery, which gives an all-encompassing view of the interior. On the walls outside are large-scale murals of Lord Krishna dancing on a snake with seven heads and lifting Govardhan Mountain on a little finger to protect livestock and villagers from the wrath of Indra, the god of thunder.

As dusk fell, the temple was floodlit in different colours—blue, white, pink, purple, green—while the marble platform glowed bone-white. The multitudes, entranced by the sight of a temple that resembled an extra-terrestrial ship that had just soft-landed on earth, heaved a collective sigh of wonder and appreciation. ✨

A devotee prostrates himself in the central courtyard of ISKCON Temple; pilgrims receiving holy water at Pagal Baba Temple

Opposite page: Live bhajans at the central courtyard of the ISKCON Temple



# After celebrating your 25th anniversary, celebrate your first.

The first time your eyes met.

The first time you mustered up the courage.

The first time you bared your heart.

The first time you heard "Yes".

The first date.

The first time you held hands.

The first fight.

The first time you made up.

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

and the babies and the bills intruded?

Because for the first time

you're at an age when

you can fall in love with each other  
all over again.



If you're about 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

## Politics & aesthetics

Srinagar-born Veer Munshi has a lot to be angry about—his home was burnt to the ground and he was exiled. Over 25 years later, Munshi mulls over war, our relationship with it and its moral justification. Of his latest installation, conceptualised from this thought, the 60 year-old artist writes in his statement:

**art** “*Relics From Lost Paradise* is an expression of the situation in Kashmir. I perceive my position in this warlike situation as an outsider-insider, where the personal becomes political, to condemn the human loss, be it soldier or civilian.” *Relics From Lost Paradise* was part of a recent group exhibition by gallery Latitude 28 in New Delhi titled *Dissensus*, where six artists from conflict-ridden regions—Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, India and Pakistan—displayed their work. Munshi’s work is a collaboration with Kashmiri craftsmen, who lent their skills to the ornate papier-mâché skeletons as a tribute to martyrs and their rich heritage.





# Cosmic story

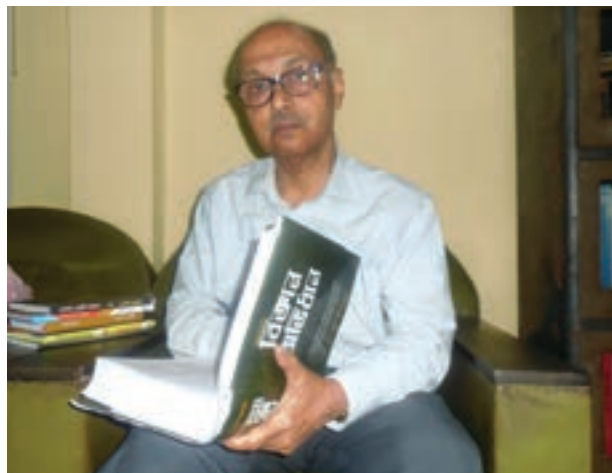
**W**ith a doctorate in physics, **Dr Dinesh Chandra Goswami** should have remained a mere scientist. Instead, his cosmic journey took him into the realm of the fantastic, from where he entertains anyone with an imaginative bone in their body. A physicist at the North East Institute of Science & Technology (erstwhile RRL) in Jorhat, Assam, the 68 year-old is a science fiction author with several Assamese novels, short stories, radio plays and articles to his name. “Science fiction tends to expand the mental horizon and vision of the reader in incomparable ways,” explains Goswami, whose characters include the New York Tiger who can walk through solid surfaces, or the mother who uses a brainwave manipulator to make her son concentrate on his studies. “A writer can take artistic liberty as long as the fiction does not violate the basic principles of science,” he says. Recipient of the Sahitya Akademi’s Bal Sahitya Puraskar in 2014 for his *Bijnanor Anupam Jagat* (in pic), a collection of essays for children, Goswami’s work attracts an adult audience too. He is currently working on his latest sci-fi story, set to be published in the September Durga Puja special issue of *Mukuta*, a popular Assamese children’s magazine, even as he puts together the second edition of *Ashok Bijnan Abhidhan*, a dictionary of science in Assamese.

## What made you start writing?

When I was in school, my father subscribed to the Assamese weekly *Asam Bani* for me. It would come all the way to the remote village where I grew up. Its children’s page had children of all ages writing in, so I sent in some of my writing too. It was as an adult that I toyed with science fiction ideas. The first one—*Kankal*—published in 1970 was about a compact device that radiated directional electromagnetic rays, a skin-irritant that would compel the girls in a classroom to conceal their waist, which they would otherwise reveal as part of fashion. The protagonist was immediately punished for the use (or misuse) of the radiator, but subsequently rewarded for the invention.

## How much of your work is rooted in real science?

A science fiction story is generally based on an extrapolated science concept—a scientific discovery or invention that is probable and follows scientific prin-



Dr Tapati Baruah Kashyap

ciples, but has not yet happened—and its impact on the characters of the story. The story always comes first but in science fiction, the story would not exist without that particular invention or discovery.

## this ‘n’ that

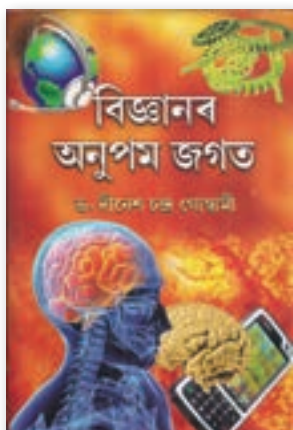
## Why do you think sci-fi is a rare phenomenon among Indian writers?

Perhaps because writing science fiction is not easy. The writer has to be conversant with scientific concepts and thoroughly plan how to extrapolate the science without violating its basic principles. Then you build a story around this. Many writers are not willing to take this trouble. Others handle the job lightly; that’s when you end up writing fantasy.

## You are currently tackling multiple writing projects. What is your process?

The Puja-special story is aimed at making children understand the value of science in daily life. This is the type of story that will develop as I keep writing it. I am also editing the second edition of *Ashok Bijnan Abhidhan*, which was first published in October 2016 and very well received. I have engaged a number of senior professors, doctors and engineers to formulate words and write their meanings. Some scientific terminology is available but a lot has to be coined. It is a meticulous effort and rewarding experience. Now and then, I spend time compiling the third volume of my autobiography, which will also contain the stories behind some of my sci-fi writing. Long after my short-term projects are over, this book will keep me going.

—Dr Tapati Baruah Kashyap







Courtesy: Piramal Art Foundation

# Nature's craft

**T**he exhibition *Nature to Culture: Crafts of India* tells the stories of craft traditions across the changing landscapes of the subcontinent. While the object of each story is distinct—Sitalpati mats from Assam, Cherial dolls (*top left*) from Telangana, Namda carpets from Kashmir (*top right*), Manjusha caskets from Bihar, coir-weaving from Kerala, Roghan from Gujarat and split-ply braiding from Rajasthan—their journey over time is similar, having been led to near-extinction. Owing to each craft's proximity to its natural

surroundings, a small change in the environment impacts the craft tradition, sometimes positively but often not. "Degradation of forests means the ruin of wooden crafts, the lack of rain means absence of good clay and the pollution of rivers means lack of facilities for dyers to wash their textiles," curators Brijeshwari Kumari Gohil and Vaishnavi Ramanathan write in their exhibition note. "Thus, narratives of languishing crafts are narratives of the landscape and the environment too." The exhibition is on at Mumbai's Piramal Art Foundation till 27 August.



Harmony Archives

**Touching a chord** Last month, maritime heritage patron and chairperson of Vasant J Sheth Memorial Foundation **Asha Sheth** (featured in 'Encounter' in *Harmony-Celebrate Age*; December 2016) screened *Chattarbhang*, an 80-minute documentary fiction she produced in 1976, for close friends. Conceived, directed and edited by Nina Shivdasani, the documentary was shot in Jogia, a small village in eastern Uttar Pradesh, and interior Maharashtra. The plot, which is based on real-life incidents and newspaper reports in the 1970s, explores the concept of untouchability and the villagers' fight against caste discrimination with great sensitivity. Though the documentary runs at a very slow pace, it has an authentic feel to it as it was shot on location with actual natives playing oppressed villagers. With no formal script, the documentary alternates between voiceovers and dialogues that were improvised on the spot. "The idea of making the film came up when I was involved in the social projects of Basti district in Uttar Pradesh in the 1970s. This was my way of contributing to their social awakening," shares Sheth. "Thankfully, we have come a long way from those days and I hope age-old caste systems are dying down. Villages like Jogia have, indeed, developed and transformed."

# Take a bow-wow!

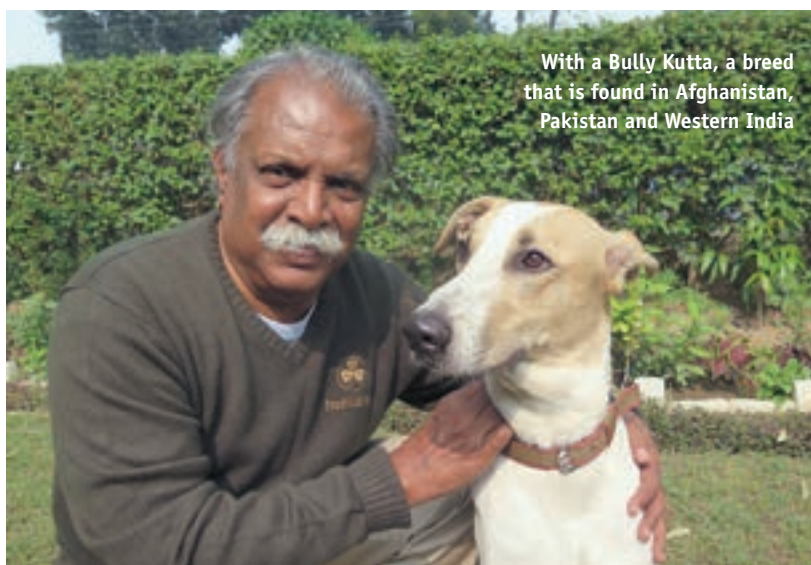
Did you know India still has 25 indigenous canine breeds? S Theodore Baskaran sheds light on a neglected legacy, discovers **Jayanthi Somasundaram**

**F**ar, very far, from the mundane streets of India's towns and cities is a canine elite who were once companions to kings and aristocrats.

Turning up their snouts at the mere thought of pounding pavements and being petted at street corners, these blue-blooded thoroughbreds—never use the word 'dog' around them!—are indigenous to India, and now the subject of a new book.

Titled *The Book of Indian Dogs* (Aleph; 121 pages; ₹ 399) and penned by Bengaluru-based S Theodore Baskaran, 76, the tome zeroes in on 25 Indian breeds that still exist. Most dog lovers in India bask in the adoration of the loyal and lovable street dog and the more well-heeled foreign breeds such as the Dachshund, Labrador or German Shepherd. So, really, who *are* these exotic Indian beauties?

Going by local names such as Rajapalyam or Chippiparai, our indigenous canines have been around since ancient times. Their small numbers and hefty price tags mean most of us rarely get to see them. Baskaran classifies them into three categories: working dogs, hounds and companion dogs. "Some breeds, such as the long and sleek Rajapalyam and Mudhol hound, traditionally hunting dogs, are doing very well. The short, bushy Lhasa Apso from Nepal and the Tibetan terrier are flourishing as companion dogs in Europe and America. The Bunny dog of Kutch and Shencotta of Tamil Nadu are rare, and the Rampur hound is on the verge of disappearance," rues Baskaran, who apart from being a writer is also an art historian and naturalist.



With a Bully Kutta, a breed that is found in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Western India

Nithila Baskaran

Through his research, Baskaran found that the India's canine gene pool stayed relatively intact till the colonists arrived on our shores. Indian breeds, which were only able to chase and corner game, were not retrievers and not useful in hunting.

## animals

So they were crossed with European breeds that had been bred and trained as gun dogs. This resulted in the dilution of bloodlines among truly Indian breeds, with the small Himalayan breeds being the exception, given their tolerance for cold climates, similar to Europe.

The resultant cross-breeding with local thoroughbreds coupled with no effort from our government to preserve our desi canines resulted in many of them being pushed to the verge of disappearance. This was a far cry from a time when Indian pedigrees travelled across the ancient world as far as Egypt and Rome.

To research Indian breeds, Baskaran scoured the country in search of these dogs. "My career in civil service took me to different parts of India. During these travels, if I heard about a breed or saw one, I would make the time to go and see it," says Baskaran, who has served two terms as trustee of WWF India. To supplement the information he had already collected, he referred to backdated gazettes of the Kennel Club of India and journals of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).

He says that during his study on Indian breeds, he came across a remarkable anecdote. In the 1980s, when the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was in Sri Lanka, they had taken 40 European dogs with them. "Some of them contracted tick fever, which called for blood transfusion. Two dogs were brought to the Chennai veterinary college. The vets searched and tested many





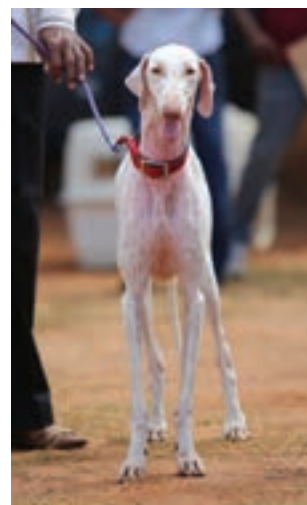
## WORKING DOGS

- **Bakharwal:** A mountain dog originating in the Pir Panjal area of the Hindu Kush and Himalaya. In 2009, it was observed that only a few hundred of these dogs remained.
- **Jonangi:** This small-sized breed is found in the Godavari basin of Andhra Pradesh. The wrinkles on the face of this loose-skinned dog are distinctive; at one time, they were able to catch crabs and fish and live on them.



## HOUNDS

- **Chippiparai:** Known as the 'greyhound of south India', the Chippiparai is a hunting dog. They are aerodynamically designed by nature and make for great chasers. Interestingly, Chippiparai is a small town in Tamil Nadu that seems to have nothing to do with the breed.
- **Mudhol hound:** In the early 1900s, Raja Maloji Rao Venkatrao Ghorpade of a tiny kingdom called Mudhol (in present-day Karnataka) acquired some greyhounds and crossed them with local hunting dogs in his kennel, thus creating the Mudhol hound.



Photographs courtesy: Aleph



## COMPANION DOGS

- **Tibetan Spaniel:** Smallest of the Himalayan breeds, this dog stands just 25 cm high. As with the Lhasa Apso, this breed was also made available to Indian owners by Tibetan refugees who settled here.

dogs and found that the Chippiparai was a universal donor. They tracked down two owners who had healthy Chippiparais and these dogs gave blood to many dogs from the IPKF and saved them. These dogs and their owners were even felicitated by the college at a function," he tells us.

However, finding international recognition for Indian thoroughbreds has been a teeth-pulling exercise. "Despite having records on stone, paper and in pictures, not one Indian pedigree has been recognised as a distinct breed by

the Federation Cynologique Internationale, the apex body which governs canine classification," says Baskaran. Based in Brussels, the body recognises 343 breeds from 80 member countries. "This is unfortunate because, once upon a time, the Indian canine was prized around the world."

Baskaran's work to gain recognition for indigenous breeds goes back to his days as chief postmaster-general in Gujarat in 1996, when he initiated the process of immortalising indigenous pedigrees on postage stamps.

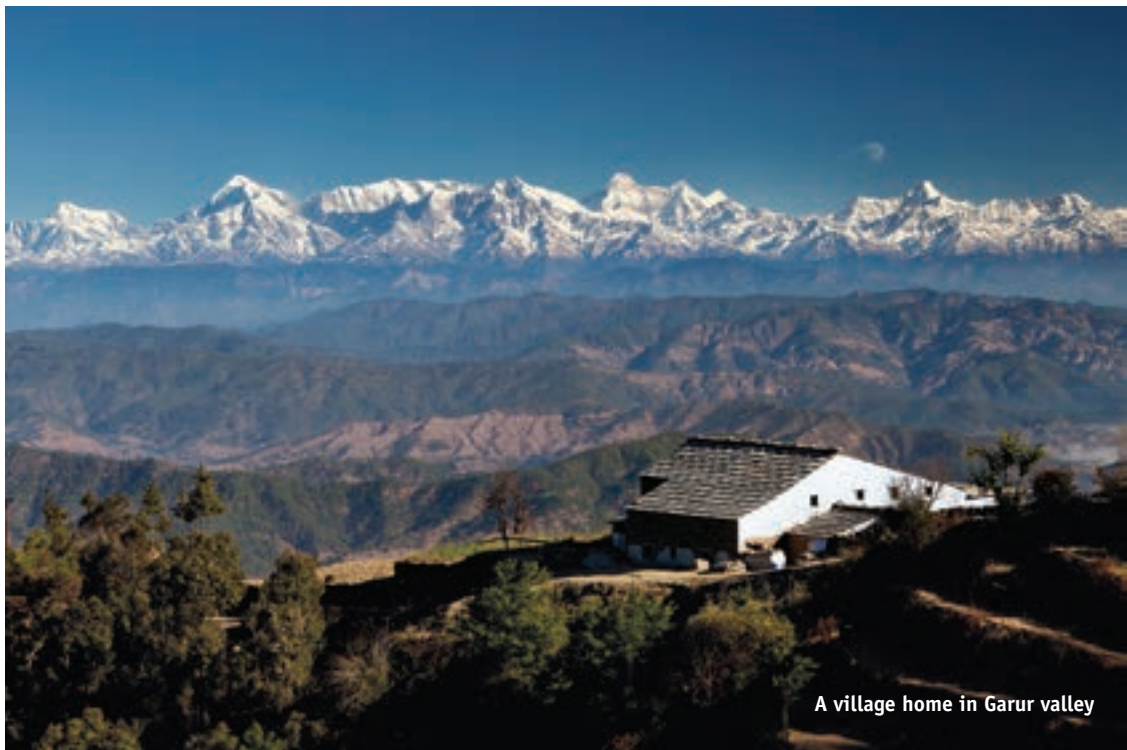
A decade later, he was finally able to cut through red tape and find the right allies to release four postage stamps featuring the Mudhol hound, Rajapalayam, Rampur hound and Himalayan sheepdog at the inauguration of the annual dog show in Chennai in 2005. And with the release of *The Book of Indian Dogs* this year, the first book of its kind in 50 years, Baskaran continues his mission of spreading word among a wider audience of the importance of preserving these fascinating, home-grown creatures.





Photographs by Anup Sahy courtesy: Nivogj

Villagers of the Bhotia community in traditional attire at Pangu, Pithoragarh



A village home in Garur valley

# the story of the kumaon

**T**he fragile beauty of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand is but the visible face of a landscape that weaves many narratives. Nestled in the foothills of the Himalaya, it is a deep and rich canvas where nature blends with history, mysticism, spirituality, culture, politics and the *pahari* (mountain) way of life. Tying together all these skeins is an all-encompassing sacred truth: Nanda Devi, patron goddess of the region. Delhi-based writer, critic, scholar and artist **Manju Kak** explores these various aspects of Kumaon in her recent book *In The Shadow Of The Devi: Kumaon - Of A Land, A People, A Craft* (Niyogi; 255 pages; ₹ 1,995).

“The book is the result of years of piecing together the story of a land that became the 27th state of India: Uttarakhand. It is the story of a people who have flourished in the shadow of the Nanda Devi range,” says Kak, whose understanding of the region is rooted in the 11 years she spent in St Mary’s Convent (informally called Ramnee), a boarding school in Nainital. Complementing the author’s exploration into the Kumaon people’s woodcraft legacies, the role of the Kumaon women and the region’s environmental faculties is the engaging visual imagery captured primarily by Kumaoni photographer Anup Sah, and contributed to by environmentalist and photographer Vaibhav Kaul, and others. “You can feel the love Anup has for the land,” adds Kak. “Being a trekker and wildlife lover, Vaibhav had been to many of the places that I had visited





and researched but could not so eloquently capture.” In an email interview, Kak talks to **Suparna-Saraswati Puri** about her book and why researching and writing it was such a personal journey for her.

## EXCERPTS

### You spent your childhood at a school in the Kumaon....

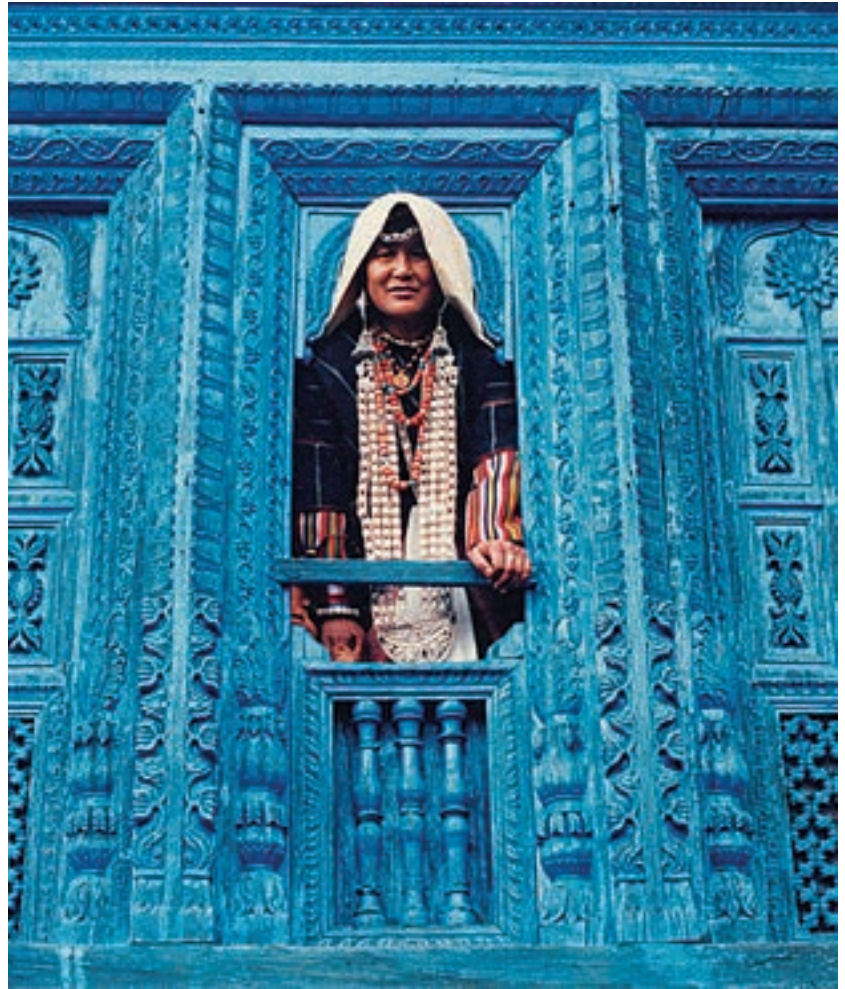
I grew up in the colonial district of Nainital in Kumaon, where the missionaries had brought in education and healthcare. Their efforts at proselytising or educating rested lightly upon the topography beneath, with which they had no real concern. Englishmen who travelled the land made copious notes but they seemed oblivious to what lay beneath. Neither they nor the missionaries really understood the ‘Pahad’ or the ‘Pahari.’ ‘Golu’ was a pan-Kumaoni God, who is worshiped in little, whitewashed mounds like *gompa* and one whom I had never heard of

or encountered in the 11 years I spent in Nainital. How could Golu command so much devotion; how could his domed shrines crop up at frequent intervals just about everywhere and have gone unnoticed by them?

### As an adult, what did you see in the Kumaon?

Asking questions about the nature of belief in the ‘Pahad’ took me down a road that allowed me to encounter their folk gods, the *pari* and *kechrie*, their *garh* devis in *nullah*, and the *bhoot* and *paret* that were so much a part of their lives, their understanding of the importance of the devilish functions of the supernatural along with the innate good present in nature. Indeed, colonial Kumaon was abandoned in favour of mythology and ritual—the worship of Dhunia and Kshetrapal. Some talented songster would emerge to regale us with a ballad or two, or we would be taken to a medium who would recount her own journey into the practices of tantrik magic or show her prowess in reading rice grains or foretelling the future. It was





Clockwise from left: A glimpse of Kandali Utsav at Rang village, celebrated once in 12 years; a Bhotia lady looking out of a traditionally carved wooden window facade; a group of women go about their daily task of collecting fuel and fodder





A cattle herder in Birthi,  
Pithoragarh district

Opposite page (clockwise  
from top left): Pilkholi village  
fields near Ranikhet; Monal,  
the state bird of Uttarakhand,  
spotted near Lenchauli on the  
new Kedarnath trail







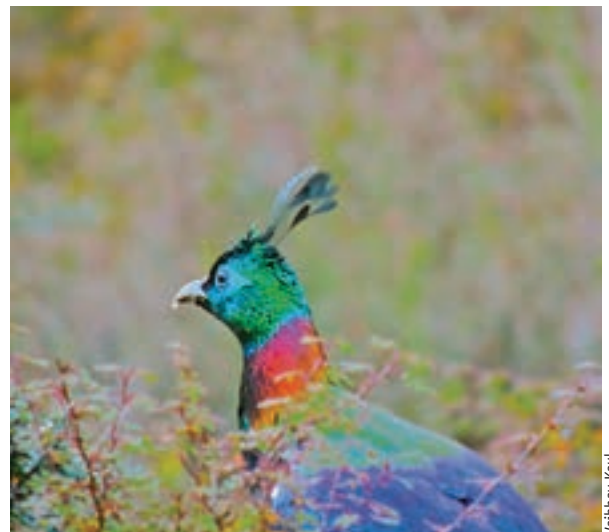
interesting that these beliefs were so much closer to village life than the high pantheon of Hindu gods for which these hills are known. For the ordinary Kumaoni villager, it was Golu *devta* all the way.

**You have dedicated a large portion of your book to the exquisite woodwork of the Kumaon craftsmen. What is their status now?**

The craft of woodcarving can be regarded as one of the most representative, aesthetic traditions of this land. Found on the beautiful doorways of village homes, I use woodcarving as a metaphor for understanding the people, caste structures, and environmental policies because the wood used—the *tun*—became a very rare species owing to the environmentally insensitive policies of colonial rule. The state of these *shilpkar* [craftsman] villagers has worsened. In the hills, segregation as a result of the caste system became painfully clear. In fact, even when developmental work began, water pipes that were sanctioned would end up hundreds of metres from where these villages were. The poverty, hardship, lack of healthcare facilities and extreme despondency of never seeing change have seeped into the collective village consciousness.

**The women of the Kumaon have played a significant role in the region's recent history. What is their story?**

Interestingly, it was my *dhoban* who began this book's story. One early April morning, I asked her where she was coming from. She said, 'Last night, I went to meet the Devi,' and she pointed to the Nanda Devi range as if it was a person. I am not sure what answer the Devi gave Sheela but it made me curious—her implicit belief that the Devi and she were friends, and if she trusted this Mother Goddess enough, a solution would be found. Uttarakhand owes its existence to the sturdy courageous women of these hills, who from the times before Chipko raised their



Vaibhav Kaul

voices for a saner, kinder, more environment-friendly world. Pahari women are known to be free-willed and tough, and they could put our urban feminists to shame. It is no surprise that the prevailing reverence for Shakti, or Devi, is all-pervading.

**How has the Kumaon evolved since the formation of Uttarakhand?**

There is a huge sense of regret because, somehow, the vision of the people who actually worked for statehood got left behind. Today, the state exemplifies all the ills of Uttar Pradesh, from which it was carved. The same illnesses plague the state, from alcoholism to plunder by the timber mafia, illegal mining and land grabbing. Increasingly, the crimes of the plains are on the rise and the ideals upon which the struggle for statehood gained ground are disappearing.



# Friendship ixx



123RF.com

We raise a toast to Friendship Day with this poem by **Khalil Gibran** (1883-1931) that celebrates companionship and togetherness

And a youth said, "Speak to us  
of Friendship."  
Your friend is your needs answered.  
He is your field which you sow with  
love and reap with thanksgiving.  
And he is your board and  
your fireside.  
For you come to him with your  
hunger, and you seek him for peace.  
When your friend speaks his mind  
you fear not the "nay" in your own  
mind, nor do you withhold the "ay".  
And when he is silent your heart  
ceases not to listen to his heart;  
For without words, in friendship,

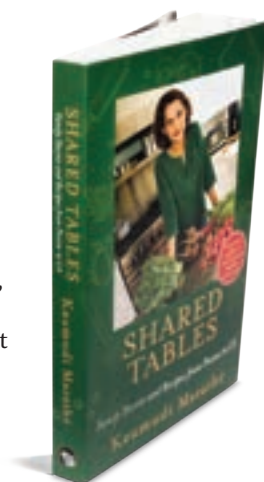
all thoughts, all desires, all  
expectations are born and shared,  
with joy that is unacclaimed.  
When you part from your friend,  
you grieve not;  
For that which you love most in him  
may be clearer in his absence, as the  
mountain to the climber is clearer  
from the plain.  
And let there be no purpose in  
friendship save the deepening of  
the spirit.  
For love that seeks aught but the  
disclosure of its own mystery is not  
love but a net cast forth: and only the

unprofitable is caught.  
And let your best be for your friend.  
If he must know the ebb of your tide,  
let him know its flood also.  
For what is your friend that you  
should seek him with hours to kill?  
Seek him always with hours to live.  
For it is his to fill your need, but not  
your emptiness.  
And in the sweetness of friendship  
let there be laughter, and sharing  
of pleasures.  
For in the dew of little things  
the heart finds its morning and  
is refreshed.

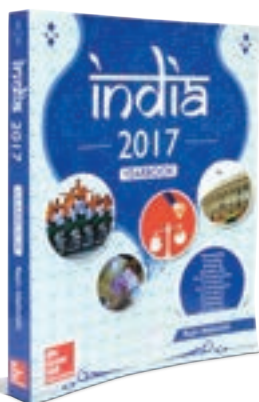
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***Gibran is best known for The Prophet, a collection of poetic essays that has been translated into more than 40 languages***

Food, family and memory make for a delicious read if combined right. And journalist-chef-teacher Kaumudi Marathé's deft use of these ingredients elevates **SHARED TABLES (Speaking Tiger; ₹ 450; 302 pages)** to a gourmet experience. You'd assume any nomad who has lived in places as diverse as Bombay, Pune, Hyderabad, Nagaland, Wales and Canada, before finally finding her home and calling in California, would have a few stories to tell. What makes this book remarkable is the way she tells them. From the history of her Konkanastha and Saraswat clans and her family—which has

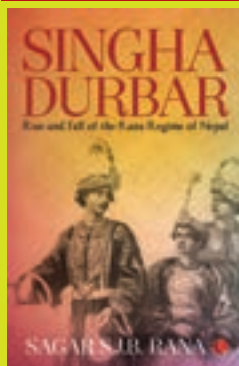


remained her anchor—to her own journey of discovery as journalist, wife, mother, cookbook writer and founder of Un-Curry, an organic cooking school, catering company and popup restaurant in Los Angeles, Marathé brings every story, anecdote, experience and character alive with her writing, which is candid yet lush and sumptuous, leaving you replete even before you reach the recipe section at the end. Ultimately, this very individual telling reflects a universal truth: Love (much like food!) transcends the boundaries of time, age and geography.



The academician in **Rajiv Mehrishi**, a high-ranking IAS officer and current home secretary in the Union Government, comes to the fore in **INDIA 2017 YEARBOOK (McGraw Hill; 605 pages)**. Not only does the book serve as bankable reference material for civil service aspirants, it makes for a comprehensive general-knowledge repository for anyone seeking an overview of the country and world. The book is divided into four parts—India, general knowledge, current affairs and the world—which is further divided into detailed subsections. It also features interesting facts about human achievements on earth and space, revolutions that charted the course of modern life, and scientific discoveries and inventions that changed the world. Other high points of this encyclopaedic tome are a foreword by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and insightful essays by Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje and chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian. A treasure trove for those wanting to learn about the world they inhabit.

## Also on stands



**Singha Durbar**  
Sagar S J B Rana  
Rupa; ₹ 495; 440 pages  
Written by a descendant of the Rana clan, which played a vital role in the history of Nepal, it is an honest critique on the state of affairs in the Himalayan kingdom.



**Rising Star:**  
**The Making of Barack Obama**  
David J Garrow  
HarperCollins; ₹ 799; 1,472 pages  
A definitive account of his life before he became the 44th president of the United States, it looks at the confluence of forces and influential figures that helped shape Barack Obama.



**I Am Krishna**  
Deep Trivedi  
Aatman Innovations Pvt Ltd;  
₹ 399; 384 pages  
Embellished with Krishna's thoughts and teachings, it chronicles his transformation from a cowherd to the king of Dwarka.



# Sealy's zeal for the word

In 1988, **Irwin Allan Sealy** astounded the literary world with his debut novel *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle*, published by legendary New York-based publishing house KNOPE. The book chronicled seven generations of an Anglo-Indian family in India. A year later, Penguin published British and Indian editions of the book. It went on to win the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1989 for the best first book by a writer in Europe and South Asia, and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1991. His latest book, with the title *Zelaldinus: A Masque* (Aleph Book Company; ₹ 399; 157 pages), is distinctive in many ways. Hardly a few weeks into the market, it has already created a stir. Is it a novella in the traditional sense? Is it prose or verse? Is it history or the figment of a wild imagination? It is difficult to place the book in a specific genre.

Over the past 30 years, Sealy has authored seven books including *The Everest Hotel*, which was shortlisted for the Booker. The most unique thing about Sealy is that unlike most authors whose books can easily be fitted into a straitjacket genre, each of his works is different in theme and style. In fact, he is least bothered about things like 'genre'! Sealy's writing is essentially intuitive and not measured or laboured; he admits that he does not have a routine when it comes to writing. His heart guides his fingers. Little wonder then, that he does not write a book every year—*The Small Wild Goose Pagoda* was published in 2014 after a gap of 10 years during which the writer was apprenticed to a bricklayer.

The son of a police officer, Sealy has studied in Lucknow, Delhi and Western Michigan University. Cushla, his

wife of 40 years, is a New Zealander whom he met while teaching at the University of Sydney, Australia. Their daughter, who works for an environmental agency in New Zealand, is also a freelance writer. The Seals, who have been living in Dehradun for many years now, spend quite a bit of time in New Zealand. The 66 year-old, who owns neither a mobile nor TV, talks to **Raj Kanwar** about the art of writing. Excerpts from the interview:

## authorspeak



Sharmistha Mohanty

### You don't buy newspapers. How do you keep in touch with the world?

My laptop helps me keep in touch with the world. I can download books and papers, listen to podcasts, stream live video, talk to my daughter in New Zealand, and read any of the hundred newspapers online. In fact, I find it hard to believe that in this day and age we are still cutting down forests for newsprint. On the one hand, we tell our children to plant trees and, on the other, we read newspapers in their presence. Shame on us!

### *Zelaldinus: A Masque* is an unusual story with an offbeat twist. What is the meaning behind the tongue-twisting title?

It's not so unusual a subject—Akbar the Great—but yes I have given it an offbeat twist. Akbar is the Zelaldinus of the title, and the tongue-twister is simply his name Latinised, because Jalaluddin was a tongue twister for the Jesuit fathers at his court! The emperor had sent for them to join in religious discussions—as you know, he was interested in all faiths and went on to found his own—and they wrote long letters in Latin to Rome in which they called the king Zelaldinus. In the book, which is actually a series of poems, I imagine meeting Akbar and chatting with him about India today. The narrator of the story, Irv, goes to Fatehpur Sikri on a blazing hot day in June and sees the ghost of Akbar who shows him around the dead city. Irv returns in midwinter to find the ghost fretting to leave Sikri. So, together they devise a plot by which the king ends up on the Pak border assisting a pair of star-crossed lovers from either side. The story developed slowly into a masque or a piece of court theatre when I remembered that there was in the Diwan-E-Khas an open-air terrace set up as a *pacchisi* board where Akbar was said to play a kind of human chess, using for pieces women from his harem of 300.

### Is it your yearning to take a road less travelled that prompts you to pick up an altogether disparate theme and different treatment each time you write a new book?

The road less travelled, certainly. Nobody wants the straitjacket, when even house arrest would make you chafe! So you look, instinctively

I think, in quite the opposite direction every time you start out; or rather all the time your mind has been sitting fallow you've been looking for a new set of constraints, a different kind of jacket if you like, but one that leaves your arms free to signal.

**Talking about *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle*, how did you zero in on the theme of Anglo-Indians in India? Isn't the community now virtually an endangered species?**

I happen to be an Anglo-Indian—and yes, we're not threatening to take over the planet—so when I looked around me at the start of my career as a writer I saw a theme ready and waiting, especially as it had only ever been attempted by outsiders who got it wrong every time. So I was looking to set the record straight. I speak of a career, but it only appears so in retrospect: I didn't set out to be a Writer. I don't think we're worthy of the capital letter.

**How has the community helped in the growth of English-medium education in India?**

Everybody talks about Macaulay's minute, where the British Raj set out to create a class of Indian Englishmen here through education in the English language. What they don't realise is that Macaulay was a late development: Anglo-Indians had been teaching the English language privately in their homes for centuries before that. It was a kind of cottage industry: they were called dame schools, because the teacher was usually the lady of the house, a mature dame, who retailed her mother tongue for a fee. And there was no shortage of takers, even in the beginning, for this English-medium tutoring. My mother ran a dame school when I was a boy in a town too small for a proper school—Fatehpur, where my father was posted with the UP Police. She was a trained teacher who got her BA from Allahabad University and her licentiate from the renowned



Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow. My sister and I had for schoolmates the children of local magistrates and judges and civil surgeons and whatnot. Anglo-Indians have always been teachers; even at church-run schools until recent times, the staff was preponderantly from their ranks.

**Why is it that you give each of your books a subtitle? Do these subtitles have any special meaning or is it just an idiosyncratic practice of yours?**

It's partly idiosyncratic, but partly a pointer for the reader, a subtitle always *is*: it tells you something by way of orientation before you set out, and it's a useful compass to have in your pocket if you go astray. Of course you need to know what an 'Almanac' is, for starters, and if you're familiar with the genre—the weather guides, the seed-sowing advice, the sunrise and moonset and high tide and low tide charts, the proverbs and recipes along the way—then you gain an appreciation of what I'm trying to do in *The Small Wild Goose Pagoda*, which has that subtitle. In that book, I set out to write the natural and social history of *just* this little plot of land, 433 square yards, of Dehra Dun which is my corner of India. I've always maintained it is useless making large pronouncements about any country; in fact I distrust any book that has 'India' in the title. What presumption!

The best you can hope for is to know your own patch intimately. What could I possibly say about Kerala?

**What does writing mean to you, and what sort of literary legacy are you planning to leave for the next generation?**

The satisfactions of writing are immense and to my mind immeasurable; I'm convinced that the pleasures of the trade—not your royalties—are your earnings. Goals you set book by book, not across a lifetime, and mostly you fall short. The thresholds are reachable, crossable; the ceilings you can't hope to touch. Chekhov is one ceiling, Calvino is another, Babel a third, and so on. Legacies are always problematic, and each generation must work out its own literary fate. I'd like to think my work illustrates a need to ground your writing in the soil about you, not in models from Europe or America or any of those immensely fertile and attractive but alien fields. But the future is international and who knows where it'll lead. What's indisputable, however, is the need to master your own idiom before you set about globalising.

**I understand that you don't have a regular writing routine. What is your writing process like?**

My output is pitiful, especially when you consider I have a house to finish building and a garden to manage and bread to bake. Prolonged physical work leaves you drained and unfit for writing, but I'm making notes all the time. I work more deliberately the older I get and yet the best stuff, whether in the world or on the page, happens quickly and easily. It's the underpinning that's hard. The raw stage of writing is in any case far more pleasurable than the finished. Writing hours vary widely depending on the circumstances: certain books were night-owl music, others dawn birds. During the day there's housework and general upkeep. I sleep four hours a night.





# India today

**Humra Quraishi** writes on how the definition of nationalism has changed over the decades since Independence

**A**s I sit writing this piece, I must begin by stating that I haven't ever felt so helpless and hopeless at the communally surcharged scenario engulfing this land. As a 61 year-old Indian Muslim, I have faced several turbulent phases but the situation hasn't ever been as grim as it stands today. In this *azaad* nation I'm being made to feel I'm not *azaad* enough in terms of what I eat or wear, or where I can travel or reside! After all, goon brigades are lynching innocents out there in public; in trains, along highways, even on the roads of New Delhi!

So much seems changed over the years. This year I did not have the heart to 'celebrate' Eid-ul-Fitr because the political climate in the country is getting murkier by the day. The fabric lies ruptured. Yes, something or everything seems to be going haywire with the system, dragging along dismal ground realities. Where are leaders like Gandhi or Nehru who'd kept the nation and its people feeling safe and secure? After all, in a democracy it isn't important whether the leader is from the minority or majority community. The only vital aspect is that he or she ought to be truly secular, and with that respected by all sections. Today, there is worry about our very existence, as democratic norms are fading into oblivion, as new definitions of nationalism are heaped on us by vested political interests, and the sane voice is throttled.

With gripping nostalgia, I reflect on those decades passed by. I come from an upper middle class family of erstwhile Avadh. Though my parents sent my sisters and I to a convent—Lucknow's Loreto—they tried maintaining all those traditional aspects. I recall a *maulvi* sahib coming to our home to teach Urdu and help us read the *Quran*. Eid was celebrated with much enthusiasm. My father worked for the government and his transfers took us to different locales. Those seemed carefree, happy days. We, as Muslims, seemed to be living on a par in government colonies, interacting and intermingling with my father's colleagues and their families. Nah, we were not made to feel like the 'other'. There seemed no question of getting humiliated

or attacked because we were Muslims. Though I must add here that news reports of communal rioting did trickle in, but it was understood that the culprits would be dealt with severely. In fact, I must mention that in my parents' home, like in most Indian homes, dark realities were seldom discussed. Not openly. Definitely not in front of children! But realities can't be brushed under dusty carpets and children do sense and grasp. In fact, as I'm keying this in, I can remember how some of those details came trickling in, right into my ears—it was one of those late evenings when my sisters and I were lying sprawled under mosquito nets on our beds and our maternal grandfather, probably certain we were asleep, sat discussing the horrific rioting ongoing in one of the locales of Uttar Pradesh. I was very young and the impact was difficult to cope with. To this day, those stories of police brutality on the hapless have stayed with me.

During my adult years, it got rather apparent that I belonged to a minority community that faced some very obvious communal biases at crucial levels. And the tragic aspect is that these realities have definitely worsened in recent years, getting compounded with the involvement of the political mafia.

I have seen and sensed many of these realities right here, in the capital city. Yes, in the supposed prime government locales of New Delhi. In fact, soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, it was traumatic to remove the nameplate from our government flat/apartment, which was situated on New Delhi's Shahjahan Road, a high-security VVIP government colony. Why did we have to remove it? Because it carried a Muslim name! And there were more than rumours of communally charged right-wing mobs attacking Muslim homes. After all, during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the home of at least one senior Sikh bureaucrat was targeted in Lutyens' Delhi. After the Babri Masjid demolition, I'd done an in-depth feature for the *Illustrated Weekly of India* on how Muslim children studying in the well-known public schools of the capital city had to hear snide comments not just from some of their classmates but from a few teachers.

We have to keep this country safe and secure for coming generations. The people-to-people connect has to be ongoing and we, as Indians, have got to be together, no matter which creed or community we come from



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In the past couple of years, I have attended public meetings held in New Delhi and other cities. Organised by well-respected activists of this country, the focus is on this grim reality—the growing despair among Muslims and their constant dread of being profiled as a terrorist, followed by denial of bail, torture, a biased investigation and trial, and extra-judicial killings. Not to overlook the daily dose of discriminations in education, employment, housing and public services...the list is long and ongoing.

What hurts and upsets is that even in this day and age, weird stereotypes prevail about the Muslims in India: they produce like rabbits, swallow meat at every single occasion, don't shower, and are a terror-striking lot. So very often have I heard this half-query, half exclamation thrown at my face, "You really a Muslim? You don't look like one!" What am I supposed to look like? Perhaps, doing *farshi salaam* or stuffing meatballs into my mouth, if not clutching at the arm of a bearded, *achkan*-clad man with a brood of squabbling children!

It seems that there is a deliberate attempt by vested political interests to put forth this image of the largest minority community of the country. Sadly, along expected lines, none of the Government Commissions or even that specially set up Ministry for Minority Affairs has done a thing to halt these mischievous, bogus and lop-sided notions in circulation. Why?

Let me say loud and clear that an average Indian Muslim's living patterns aren't different from that of his fellow Indians. There is no difference, except for a deep sense of

hurt and insecurity. Yes, I sit worried for my country and for the very survival of the masses, for no country can progress if one quarter of its population sits bypassed, living in fear. This worry hasn't sprung up overnight. In fact, it has taken off from the early 1990s and has been building up over these years. I have not just reported from riot-affected areas and conflict zones but have heard the most obnoxious communal comments. Perhaps I could cope because of the cushioning provided by friends like the late Khushwant Singh. Also, my two children Sarah and Mustafa were there for me. Now, they are married and 'out of the nest'.

I don't carry any hope from the political tactics of the day. But, yes, there's much hope from fellow Indians who seem determined to fight the political rot. Today, hundreds and thousands of apolitical men and women of this country can see and sense the divisive communal politics at work. They realise the situation is alarming. And we, as a people, have to keep this country safe and secure for coming generations. The people-to-people connect has to be ongoing and we, as Indians, have got to be together, no matter which creed or community we come from. It brings to mind this verse from last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar's *Ode to Hindustan*:

*Matchless is the soil of Hindustan  
In it grow love, compassion and fidelity,  
As sure as the sun rises from the East  
So surges from this land sincerity.  
This is the true seed of Hind and from its earth  
These fruits have spread across the world, far and wide.*

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*The writer is a Delhi-based author, columnist and senior journalist*



## { mysticalmusings }

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## “Our net worth is what we give the world, not what we take from it”

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**H**e calls himself an everyday man. Little wonder then, that different people connect to **Mohanji**, a globally respected spiritual leader and philanthropist, in different ways. While some feel he is a mystic whose presence turns you inwards, others feel completely at ease around him.

“True mastery is the mastery of one’s own mind,” says Mohanji, who maintains that one can continue to evolve spiritually while simultaneously living and experiencing everyday life. His teachings resonate with simplicity and practicality. At the core is liberation from all bindings, concepts and habits. He emphasises purity, faith,

unconditional love and selfless service towards fellow beings across species.

Born on 23 February 1965 in Palakkad, Kerala, Mohanji worked in senior management positions in the Middle East till personal upheavals brought him in touch with his spiritual self. Today, Mohanji travels extensively around the world, conducting satsangs, life-transforming retreats and pilgrimage trips to spiritual places such as Mount Kailash, Kumbh Mela, Machu Picchu and the Bosnian pyramids. In an email interview to **SrIREKHA Pillai**, Mohanji addresses the ills plaguing society today, the power of acceptance and why we take to spirituality in our silver years.

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### EXCERPTS FROM AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

#### Can you elaborate upon your tryst with spirituality?

It was indeed a quest for truth. We are so immersed in relative truth that we fail to understand what exactly is the truth. In order to achieve that, we have to step out of ourselves—as in our addictive personalities—and look from the outside into the world around us as well as into oneself.

I was working in the shipping and logistics business since 1989 and living in the Middle East. The quest for truth constantly brought me to the Himalayas from the year 2000, when I lost my precious four year-old daughter Ammu in a road accident. The quest became a necessity ever since. The mystery of the Himalayas and the urge to penetrate beyond the obvious brought me to Vasishta cave. I have not been associated with any Guru or known lineage. I was just another seeker wandering aimlessly seeking

something that cannot be understood or defined. I started connecting to my spine while sitting quietly (I avoid the word meditation) in Vasishta cave in the early 2000s. This helped change the perspective with which I was seeing the world.

Slowly, dimensions started to shift. I started spending more time with myself (again, I am avoiding the word meditation, because it is a state where the mind is still). I was working as the country head of a company in Oman in 2001. One of my bedrooms became a ‘cave’ and I started spending time with myself in silence daily from 3 am till 8 am, when I would leave for work. This became the most meaningful time of the day. Deep silence started settling in. Still the urge for the Himalayas continued. Years passed; silence deepened; dependency reduced. I was holding senior professional positions; I kept my spiritual practices sacred and a secret. Slowly, people started recognising my calmness amid the storms of life. People started coming to me seeking advice. I started telling

them what I knew from the point of a still mind, without any bias. Thus, I became known as Mohanji.

#### What is the role of a modern-day spiritual ‘Guru’?

Life itself is the greatest lesson, a lesson to be experienced individually and conveyed to society. Life itself is the true Guru. Nobody or nothing can educate us in the most practical way than life. The word Guru for me represents one who is connected to the supreme consciousness, by dismantling one’s mind. Those who operate from their usual mind are *acharya*/practitioners, just like our professors, proficient in some subject. Gurus may not be too articulate and even presentable as per social norms. But they represent our destination: the supreme consciousness. They stand as a clear mirror for us to see and figure out where we stand in the path of liberation where the journey is from layers of binding to complete liberation. Gurus are road signs. True Gurus need nothing from the world. They live as signs of lib-



Photographs courtesy: Moharji

eration. Liberation is a state when your dependency is minimal. Liberation at death is when there is no karmic pressure to experience another incarnation.

#### **What ails the world today?**

Ignorance, greed and insensitivity are the cancers plaguing the world today. Awareness is the solution, starting with our own perishability and death, to the awareness that nobody can own anything on earth. We are here on a tourist permit. All we can take from here are some memories. Live and let live in harmony and peace. It's also important to be aware that all species, human and non-human, have the same right to live on earth. Violence towards beings of any species is a sign of degeneracy and intolerance.

#### **Present-day political and social discourse is defined by anger, hatred and negativity. How do we deal with it?**

Ignorance is the root cause of it all. The way to deal with it is to not subscribe to it. Remaining neutral and investing our precious time in things positive are very important. Leading a life based on compassion and kindness is a clear sign of higher evolution irrespective of whether a person is 'religious' or not. Ignoring things negative and gross, and training others to be positive, kind and useful are the ways we can raise the awareness of the world. Every being loves to be loved. Nurturing love around us is the right way. The best tutorship is to lead by example.

*“Awareness is the  
antidote to hatred. The  
awareness that we are  
here on tourist visas  
and have no rights on  
earth, let alone over  
earth, is important”*



#### **What is the antidote to fanaticism and hatred?**

Awareness is the antidote to hatred. The awareness that we are here on tourist visas and have no rights on earth, let alone over earth, is important. Nothing belongs to us. All we can carry from here are memories of our experiences and also perhaps desire for more experiences.

#### **What is the key to happiness?**

Happiness is experienced when the mind is still. The mind can be still only when thoughts dissolve. Thoughts create ripples in the mind. Happiness is our basic nature. Thoughts rule during the waking state, while memories rule in the dream state. Consciousness rules during the deep sleep state. Happiness remains same during all states. We may not experience happiness always during the waking state because we connect it to the presence and absence of something or somebody. Lack of such dependencies ensures perpetual happiness.

#### **How would you define success?**

Success is a state of total acceptance. When we accept ourselves as we are and not as we seem to be, we have become successful. Success or failure as society sees it has nothing to do with real success. A successful person is one who has lesser dependencies.



### **How do we create positivity around us?**

Positivity is the nature of our heart. Positivity can be created through thoughts, words and actions. Being positive in thoughts, expressions and actions, irrespective of what society thinks, is the true sign of a strong personality. It is all about frequencies. If you choose not to buy hatred, jealousy, anger and such emotions from the supermarket called society, and instead consistently express good and positive things, you will be adding value to this world. Our net worth is what we give the world, not what we take from it. Constantly asking ourselves, 'What else can we do for the earth?' and acting on it within our capacity means walking the path of glory.

### **What is the ultimate goal of life?**

There is just one goal, which is liberation. It means less dependency while living and less desires while leaving.

### **Can we shape our destiny?**

Destiny is the contract of this life from our first heartbeat till the last. It can only be enjoyed better by being aware of each moment, accepting happiness and sorrows alike, by not resisting anything, by accepting oneself and others, by choosing love and peace against all possible options of other emotions. Being aware at all points of time is the best gift one can give to one's destiny.

### **Is there life after death?**

Yes, there is. No thought, word and action are ever wasted. Everything demands fulfilment and fulfilment hinges on karma. When fulfilment is denied or postponed, it demands more time and space. We call it incarnation. Unfulfilled desires created us. Desires maintain us through time and space and through multiple bodies.

### **Do you believe in the essential unity of all religions and human experiences?**

Religions are road maps designed by masters who have touched and experienced the absolute truth. Religion is good only as a road map. We should not confuse spirituality with religion. Spirituality is always individualistic and non-transferable like words or teachings. Spirituality is being aware of our spirit, which keeps alive our physical (body), emotional (mind), and intellectual (intellect) selves, besides the personality (ego). The moment our spirit leaves,

we call it a dead body. When man understands his spiritual nature, he will see his own reflection in all, irrespective of their frequency and deed, and will embrace life as a gift. Such a person will never practise violence. Such people will see themselves in everyone, and love themselves existing in various bodies!

### **How does one elevate oneself spiritually?**

It's important to spend time with oneself. Take out the mind; spread it in the sky. Look at all emotions, memories, feelings, and all other things existing in the mind and outside. Do not get involved. Watch, witness, and let go. At this point, one part of your mind is watching another. Finally, when all thoughts dissolve, even the mind will dissolve. Spending time with oneself and doing nothing will be a challenge. But it is worth it. Look back and examine how many hours have you spent with yourself in the past 50 years.

### **What is the role of spirituality in wellness and self-healing?**

The spirit is the most neutral part of our system. Just like petrol in a car, the spirit or soul is not interested or interfering in our journey called life. When we start experiencing our soul more and more and start to express its character of non-intrusive freedom, state of liberation and no binding, we will start releasing all the emotional blockages from our system. Healing is spontaneous. Mind holds diseases; soul liberates them.

### **Can spirituality and materialism coexist?**

All materials, all beings, all relationships, wealth, health and all aspects of our existence are coexisting with this incarnation. Nothing is separate from the other, even though externally it seems so. These divisions are only in our mind. When dependency is reduced, we walk through everything effortlessly, let alone coexist. Nothing is right or wrong in karma. Karma is the product of unfulfilled desires. The natural desire of karma is fulfilment. I personally feel that acts of violence in thoughts, words and actions are to be avoided always. Apart from that, I see nothing right or wrong in life. We should live and let live peacefully.

### **Is humanity getting undermined owing to superficial divisiveness and differences such as ethnicity, religion, gender, language, etc?**



Divisions based on these are signs of greed. Divisions only benefit the manipulators. Our nature is unity. Religions are road maps set by wise masters for achieving freedom from materials and ultimately liberation from birth and death itself. When religions are used for popularity, politics and gains, people will die. A man in deep sleep is totally unaware of who he is or where he is. Only when he wakes up does he wear his personality. Religion is part of that personality. Personality is not us, but projected out of us. When we believe that we are the personality, we die for maintaining it. This is the irony. This is ignorance. Compassion is the visible core of a truly religious person. Those who shout, scream and kill are ignorant people used by someone for some purpose. Only their garb is religious.

### **Why do you think many turn to spirituality in the silver years?**

This is probably because that is the only time they turn back and ask, 'Hey, who was running my show?' Few settle down to the right understanding. Spirituality is a state that walks with us from birth till death. Being aware of our soul is inevitable sooner or later. Better late than never.

### **What is the mantra for successful ageing?**

Ageing is a process and part of the karmic contract. What we experience at different times of life is defined well. Time, space and event are predetermined. Our awareness and acceptance of the current time and state are the best way to evolve with age. Acceptance is the mantra. Accept everything that life has offered without discriminating. Delete memories of bad and good alike and stay with the present life totally. Life will be meaningful each moment.

### **For long, the world has looked to India for spiritual guidance. What is it about our civilisation that makes us spiritually rich?**

We have a spiritual ancestry that is deep and pregnant. The West has identified this wealth that India always had. However, we have not, yet. The external sign of spiritual health is a still mind free from desires and full of compassion, tolerance and acceptance of oneself and others. Until this is expressed consistently, we are not representing our rich heritage and culture. Man is spiritual by birth and cannot be bound by religions or rituals. We are born free and will die free.

### **Is spirituality evolving into an industry now?**

Spirituality will always remain an individual path for a true seeker. They will reach a true teacher and find themselves. The masses may not understand and continue to follow the ritualistic path where they may believe and practise activities. Demand causes supply. We cannot call anything good or bad. Everything is situational and relative. Everything has relevance.

### **Can science and spirituality converge?**

Science is our understanding of an already existing mechanism. Spirituality is our true nature. Hence, it is totally scientific. Science has its own capacity, boundaries and dimensions because the human mind has boundaries. Spirituality has no boundaries; the more we evolve, the more there is, until we totally dissolve.

### **You say, "Awareness is liberation." Can you elaborate?**

Remembering who we are and being conscious about it leads to liberation. We are here to experience the flavours of life. We carry only memories of experiences. We cannot take anything else from here including our body. Being always aware in our waking state leads to liberation. Being aware of our expressions and actions, choice of words, tone and energy will help us stay aware, eventually leading to detachment and liberation.

### **What is your prescription for the ills plaguing the world?**

Compassion. Value the goodness quotient in all; ignore the negative.

Today, the world is focusing only on the negative, which in turn is creating more fears than love. A world living in fear and insecurity will breed wars. Compassion and love should be expressed and experienced. The collective consciousness should be rooted in goodness. Acknowledging and honouring goodness will change the way the world works. Exploitation in the name of religion should stop.

### **Are you hopeful about the future of mankind?**

I am optimistic. People are evolving. I believe coming generations will see more light than darkness. People will choose light more and more. Love will prevail!

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 **For more details, visit [www.mohanji.org](http://www.mohanji.org)**

*"Ageing is a process  
and part of the  
karmic contract.  
Our acceptance of  
the current time and  
state is the best way  
to evolve with age"*





# India of my dreams

As we celebrate the country's 71st Independence Day, we share **Mahatma Gandhi's** vision of India

Everything in India attracts me. It has everything that a human being with the highest possible aspirations can want.

India is essentially my *karmabhumi* (land of duty) in contradiction to *bhogabhumi* (land of enjoyment).

India is one of the few nations on the earth which has retained some of its ancient institutions although they have been overlaid with superstition and error. But she has hitherto shown an inherent capacity for purging herself of error and superstition. My faith in her ability to solve the economic problems that face her millions has never been as bright as it is today.

I feel that India's mission is different from that of others. India is fitted for the religious supremacy of the world. There is no parallel in the world for the process of purification that this country has voluntarily undergone. India is less in need of steel weapons, it has fought with divine weapons, it can still do so. Other nations have been votaries of brute force. The terrible war going on in Europe furnishes a forcible illustration of the truth. India can win all by soul force. History supplies numerous instances to prove that brute force is nothing before soul force. Poets have sung about it and seers have described their experiences.

If India takes up the doctrine of sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart. I am wedded to India because I owe my all to her. I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world. She is not to copy Europe blindly. India's acceptance of the sword will be the hour of my trial. I hope I shall not be found wanting. My religion has no geographical limits. If I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself. My life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence.

If India makes violence her creed, and I have survived, I would not care to live in India. She will cease to evoke

any pride in me. My patriotism is subservient to my religion. I cling to India like a child to its mother's breast, because I feel that she gives me the spiritual nourishment I need. She has the environment that responds to my highest aspirations. When the faith is gone, I shall feel like an orphan without hope of ever finding a guardian.


I would like to see India free and strong so that she may offer herself a willing and pure sacrifice for the betterment of the world. India's freedom must revolutionise the world's outlook upon peace and war. Her impotence affects the whole of mankind.

I am humble enough to admit that there is much that we can profitably assimilate from the West. Wisdom is no monopoly of one continent or one race. My resistance to western civilisation is really a resistance to its indiscriminate and thoughtless imitation based on the assumption that Asians are fit only to copy everything that comes from the West.... I do believe that if India has patience enough to go through the fire of suffering and to resist any unlawful encroachment upon her own civilisation which, imperfect though it undoubtedly is, has hitherto stood the ravages of time, she can make a lasting contribution to the peace and solid progress of the world.

I shall strive for a constitution, which will release India from all thralldom and patronage, and give her, if need be, the right to sin. I shall work for an India, in which the poorest shall feel it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men. Since we shall be at peace with rest of the world, neither exploiting, not being exploited, we should have the smallest army imaginable.... This is the India of my dreams...I shall be satisfied with nothing less.



Excerpted from *Gandhi's India of my Dreams*, a collection of his writings first published in August 1947

A photograph of an elderly man with a grey beard and a young girl with dark hair, both smiling and playing in a pond. The man is in the water, and the girl is sitting on a wooden dock, splashing water towards him. The background is a calm body of water with some distant structures.

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# The art of music

They brought progressive rock into the mainstream and provided audiences with a complete sensory experience. Pink Floyd, considered one of the more soulful bands of the '70s, is synonymous with rock anthems *Welcome to the machine*, *Have a cigar* and *Wish you were here*, a triptych of disenchantment, alienation and bereavement. The psychedelic rockers of the band debuted in 1967 with *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* and started playing professional gigs, establishing themselves as a force to reckon with in London's underground rock scene. Their 1967 concert, named 'Games for May', was a technological breakthrough, becoming the first rock concert to use surround sound and mixed media to enhance the experience.

It was the release of *The Dark Side of the Moon* in 1973, though, which catapulted Pink Floyd to one of rock music's biggest acts. The album stayed on Billboard's Top 200 album chart for 861 weeks (or 16 years) straight, making it the longest run in Billboard history. And with the release of *The Wall* in 1979, which spoke of alienation and disconnect, the band cemented its position in the forefront of those promoting a distinctively dark vision. Breaking free of conventional pop song formats, they experimented with taped voices mumbling ominous asides, sound effects, and a wealth of imagery. Firm in their belief that aesthetic was as important as the notes, they paired



Dinodia Photo Library

visceral lyrics with light projections. Every album was a well-thought-out act—from the art and composition to the sequence of the songs. Indeed, their concerts were always multimedia events with stunts such as building an actual wall, brick by brick, obscuring the band from the audience view while performing *The Wall*.

Pink Floyd's remarkable journey took them from being the darlings of London's underground music scene to rock icons who changed the way people made and listened to albums forever. In 1996, the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Films on them include *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* (1971) and *The Wall* (1982). And recently, The Royal Mail released a series of 10 stamps in honour of the iconic band, which to this day is considered one of the most visual of the 20th century.

## THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: AUGUST 1967

- On 3 August, thieves stole several artefacts from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, including the gold crown of the Madonna.
- On 13 August, legendary rock band Fleetwood Mac made its debut, appearing at the National Jazz and Blues Festival in Windsor, Berkshire.
- On 15 August, the Chicago Picasso, a 50-ft metal cubist sculpture created by Pablo Picasso, was unveiled in Chicago.
- On 22 August, officials in New York City announced that the 47-storey Singer Building, which was briefly the tallest building in the world, would be demolished.



## Text neck

*n.* Neck and upper back pain caused by an excessive and prolonged forward head tilt, such as when texting or performing other mobile device tasks.

**EXAMPLE:** Lanman and Cuellar suggest simple lifestyle changes to relieve the stress from the **text neck** posture.

They recommend holding cell phones in front of the face, or near eye level, while texting. They also suggest using two hands and two thumbs to create a more symmetrical and comfortable position for the spine.

—*“Could phones change the way our spines curve? Scientists warn an entire generation is plagued by ‘text neck’,”*  
Daily Mail, 14 April 2017

## Chumbox

*n.* A web page grid featuring ads disguised as content links that use titillation, shock, or vanity to entice the reader to click an ad.

**EXAMPLE:** Now, it’s hard to find a news page that doesn’t feature a **chumbox**, and several large advertisers, like Outbrain, use them extensively. “You see them on CNN, you see them on Fortune... they’re just everywhere — and clearly making a lot of money.”

—Nora Young, *“Diving into internet ‘chum’? Yes, it’s as bad as you’d expect,”* CBC Radio, 9 October 2016

“Youthfulness  
is about how  
you live, not when  
you were born.

—German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld

## Airbnb-able

*adj.* Of a room, house, or apartment: having qualities that make it attractive to rent on Airbnb.

**EXAMPLE:** When she moved again, with another roommate (she has had thirty-six roommates in total), they searched for an optimally **Airbnb-able** place.

—Nathan Heller, *“Is the gig economy working?”*,  
The New Yorker, 15 May 2017

Source: [www.wordspy.com](http://www.wordspy.com)

## Mom as a service

*n.* Software and online tools that provide services similar to the tasks performed by a mother.

**EXAMPLE:** This small subculture of wealthy technophiles promotes investment into luxury goods for rich people, or into **mom as a service** types of companies that cater to spoiled workaholics in the tech industry. And so we end up with things like a \$ 120M juice squeezer, or three startups competing to deliver organic baby food.

—Maciej Cegłowski, *“Notes from an emergency,”*  
Idle Words, 10 May 2017

## TECHNOLOGY DOPING

*n.* The use of technology to improve sports equipment in a way that gives an athlete an unfair or illegal competitive advantage.

**EXAMPLE:** Yet the analogy between gaining an advantage from drugs versus an advantage gained from technology is one that has been drawn frequently enough to lead to the coining of the term **technology doping**.

—Rosie Duckworth, *“The Unbroken 2: A pair of Nikes, an unofficial record, and the age-old question of technology’s place in sport,”*  
The National Law Review, 11 May 2017

## Runcommute

*n.* A run between one’s home and workplace.

**EXAMPLE:** This is the beauty of the **runcommute**—on the days when you’re not thinking about pace you can enjoy the fact that the very act of runcommuting is the ultimate in multitasking. It encompasses training, transport, therapy and sightseeing all in one.

—*“Make the most of your runcommute for spring marathons,”*  
lamrunbox, 2 February 2017



# Way with words

Has your inner bard been making an appearance after retirement? Or are you looking for a critical audience to hear your carefully constructed lines of verse? The Poetry Club (TPC) in Mumbai may just be the place for you. Started by two young chartered accountants-by-profession-but-poets-at-heart Trupthi Shetty and Ankita Shah in 2013, TPC is a community of amateur poets that gets together on the third Sunday of every month at a designated time and place to reveal a bit of themselves through their poetry and spoken work.

## BUZZ

Everyone is welcome. The only condition: you must come with a poem of any language to share. Not only is it a place to discuss your work, you will also be exposed to the thoughts, words and ideas of budding poets from across the city. Join the community on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/TPCMumbai](http://www.facebook.com/TPCMumbai)). Write to them at [thepoetryclubmumbai@gmail.com](mailto:thepoetryclubmumbai@gmail.com) and tell them what you have to offer. Or just show up with your poem at their next meeting on 20 August at Port, the lovely warehouse cafe at Laxmi Mills in Mahalaxmi. They're all ears!

# Fearonomics

*n.* The negative impact of fear and anxiety on economic activity; the use of fear to sell products and services.

**EXAMPLE:** Acting on the lessons learned from previous outbreaks, domestic and global actors are well prepared to deal with an outbreak of Nipah virus in India. But they fail to recognise the impact of downstream "**fearonomic effects**"—the economic consequences resulting from hysteria outbreaks, and propelled by misinformation—that lead to irrational decision-making on the part of both individuals and states.

—*"Event: Pandemonium—risk factors for future pandemics"*,  
Global Public Policy Initiative, 13 June 2017

# Avocado hand

*n.* A serious hand injury caused by improperly using a knife to cut, slice, or remove the pit of an avocado.

**EXAMPLE:** It seems that avocado hand is so commonplace, the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons wants to warn people about the safety risk, with one doctor suggesting a safety label to be placed on avocados.

—*Dianne de Guzman, "Avocado hand is sending people to the ER because people don't know how to cut their fruit"*,  
San Francisco Chronicle, 11 May 2017



## “The love I receive can’t be equated in money”

N Ramaswamy, 77, Bengaluru, guides and counsels patients in hospitals



Courtesy: N Ramaswamy

Subhojit met **N Ramaswamy** in 2000, when he was admitted to Baptist Hospital in Bengaluru as a 13 year-old for arms amputation following electrocution. Today, 17 years later, Subhojit is married and employed. Through the years, Ramaswamy has been a constant in his life, from buying a Walkman and audio tapes to getting him artificial limbs, rail travel concession card and even a job as a graphic designer. For many like him, who reached Bengaluru hospitals in distress, Ramaswamy has been an emotional anchor. “I don’t feel like missing a single day of this,” says the sprightly 77 year-old, who is on hospital rounds by 9 am. Though post-retirement offers beckoned, this senior design engineer from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) decided to follow his heart and enrol as a volunteer to take care of cancer patients in Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology. Today, Ramaswamy is a familiar smiling face in the corridors of Kidwai, NIMHANS, Baptist and M S Ramaiah Hospital. Fluent in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, he assists patients with registration, escorts them to doctors and labs and follows up on therapies and treatments besides

consoling and supporting the families of the terminally ill and buying them tea and snacks from the hospital canteen. This Good Samaritan also seeks out people in distress, like he did in the case of the Hussain siblings from Raichur, who suffered from Huntington’s disease, a rare genetic neurological disorder. Having read about them in a newspaper, he hunted them down and ensured they got a below poverty line (BPL) card, enabling them to seek free government subsistence and medical aid. For Ramaswamy, the rewards are not monetary. “Most of them form a lifelong bond with me,” he points out. They keep in touch, updating him about their health status and their lives. “I’m nothing more than a facilitator,” he insists humbly. “I just link the patient and the assistance.” For instance, when he heard of an international organisation distributing wheelchairs for free, he took one of his paraplegic patients to secure one. Subhojit sums it up succinctly: “The humanity Ramaswamy sir exhibits is rare these days.”

—Srirekha Pillai

*You can contact Ramaswamy on (0) 9945973585*

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