

harmony

FEBRUARY 2018 ₹ 40

celebrate age

The magazine for silver c

DESTINATION
Chasing cherry blossoms
in Japan

PROACTIVE
Champion of elder care
Saillesh Mishra

Tina Ambani & Shobhaa De

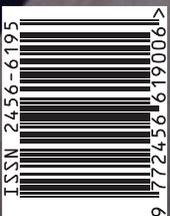
On life, love and what they've learnt



Silver surge at
the Mumbai
Marathon

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quotient

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COMING OF AGE

I turn 60 this month. It's wonderful to be able to say that out loud, with pride and happiness.

Though milestones often tend to creep up on you unbidden, this one has been different. In the past months, I've introspected greatly about the blessed life I've led, how far I've come. And while it's wonderful to dwell upon the past and cherish the memories, it's the future that excites me today—a journey to learn more about the world and my place in it.

For the past 14 years, this magazine has been intrinsic to my life. I've seen it grow and take wing; I've admired the stellar cast of silvers it has featured; I've watched my team combine their intellectual and creative expertise to create a world-class reading experience. And now, for the first time, I am on the cover of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*.

As someone who prefers to let her work do the talking, this was a big step. But I felt the time was right. On the cusp of 60, I believe I relate to our silver constituency more than ever; I identify with their concerns and connect to their aspirations; and I wish to intensify my efforts to bring their potential to the forefront. True empowerment comes from within—this is life's biggest takeaway for me and I wished to share this on these pages. To be able to do so in the company of my dear friend Shobhaa De was the icing on the birthday cake and I thank her for joining me in conversation!

Indeed, when you make yourself relevant—for your own self and sake—you get closer to the person you wish to see in the mirror. And then there's no holding you back. Just



Dabboo Ratnani

ask the silvers that came out in full force for the Senior Citizens' Run at the Tata Mumbai Marathon on 21 January! Some ambled, others ran... they all shone bright, radiant and, yes, relevant. My special thanks to LIC of India chairman V K Sharma, actors Kunal Kapoor and Shailesh Lodha, and Axis Bank president (branch banking) Sanjay Silas for flagging off the run, and fitness expert Nawaz Modi Singhania for her lively warm-up session at the Harmony marquee. I also express my gratitude to Big 92.7 FM, Gagan Nulife, Girnar Food & Beverages, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Procam International, Reliance Communications, Reliance Infrastructure and Romsons for their wholehearted support. And, of course, the Harmony team for all their hard work and commitment.

To be sure, commitment is the cornerstone of any endeavour; it is the catalyst that converts an idea into reality. This year, I have made a commitment to myself: to imbue each day with promise, to live each moment with meaning. Join me!

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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TEA TRAIL

Belgium-based tea connoisseur Neetu Sarin recounts her karmic connection with the humble beverage

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column one

“This was such a fabulous idea,” Tina Ambani said to me halfway through her photo shoot with Shobhaa De. For me, it was surreal. Featuring them together on our cover for their milestone birthdays—Ambani at 60, De at 70—may have been a brainwave but finding points of intersection in their crazy-busy schedules was a challenge. When we finally got them in the room, it was magic. The glamour of their presence aside, the realness and relatability of both women and their incredible candour (no subject was taboo) helped the feature pretty much write itself! And their shared learnings drove home an important message: stay relevant and pursue your dreams.

Mumbaikar Sailesh Mishra would agree. Impelled by the desire to work with (and for) silvers, he gave up his job in sales and marketing and began Silver Innings Foundation—today, he is regarded as a champion of elder care with his tireless work in assisted living, helping silvers with dementia and building bridges across generations.

Other highlights this issue include a recap of the Senior Citizens’ Run at the Tata Mumbai Marathon where our silvers put their best foot forward; a delightful jaunt through Japan in search of cherry blossoms during sakura season; a scramble through the kitchen cupboard for aphrodisiacs (simple foods can really do the trick!); a guide to save tax and max your money as the financial year draws to a close; and a moving piece on hockey great Dhyan Chand, a rare gem who was feted overseas but ignored at home. Read on, write back, tell us what you think.

—Arati Rajan Menon

I came across *Harmony-Celebrate Age* a couple of days ago and thoroughly enjoyed reading it, especially because the stories revolved around seniors who, I believe, are often neglected by the media. It felt really nice to know that there’s a publication that cares for us. Also, all the stories were interesting and made me look forward to reading more issues. However, the only problem I had while reading the magazine was the font size. It was difficult to read even with my glasses on. I wonder why your magazine prints in such a small font, as it is exclusively meant for silvers. I request you to consider increasing the size and making the magazine more readable for us.

Yug D
New Delhi

It’s unfortunate that I read *Harmony-Celebrate Age* for the first time only in January 2018; that too because I was featured along with my team of *nani* (Etcetera; January 2018). But I have always believed in the maxim, ‘better late than never’! It is inspiring to see that there are so many people, so many achievers out there working hard to bring a change and you are bringing their stories to the forefront.

Bhavi Jhaveri
Via email

Love and the expression of love signify Valentine’s Day. It is meant to celebrate love, whatever the relationship. Love doesn’t need the weight of words to express itself—just one smile, one look, one glance is enough to go past the barriers and traverse the distance to reach the loved one’s heart and soul. One Valentine’s Day, my husband and I were hosting a buffet lunch for our friends. I was sitting next to a charming lady and her



husband was at the other end of the table. After a while, the seat on the other side of the lady got vacant and her husband rushed to the seat next to her; putting his arm around her he whispered something endearing in her ears, and she cooed. The gesture, soaked in the magic of love, was soul-stirring for me, and I realised that love doesn’t need anything but love alone. Good luck to all silvers this Valentine’s Day!

Bansi Singh
Mumbai

I’m an avid reader of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. My friends and I receive a copy every month and we gladly leaf through the pages reading stories about other citizens. We all hope to grace the pages of *Harmony* someday and pray that others read about us with the same admiration as we feel for them. God bless!

Ishrat Kumar
Mumbai

HITS OF THE MONTH

Our most-read stories in
January 2018 on

www.harmonyindia.org

1. Happy feet
2. Mission possible
3. Heart to hearth



ANALYSE THIS

STANDING PROUD

There's never been a better reason to hold your head up high. A Scottish study contends that **people with high levels of pride are much less likely to fall than those with low self-esteem**. The researchers from the University of Stirling, the University of Aberdeen and the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley analysed data from over 11,000 people over the age of 60 and found that a higher level of pride was associated with a 19 per cent decrease in the risk of having a fall in two years, even taking into account factors like age, sex, history of falls and income status. As London newspaper *The Telegraph* tells us, the researchers believe that proud pensioners may walk with a better posture and head position and a more positive gait; this would allow them to better identify and avoid hazards. "Contrary to the well-known saying 'pride comes before a fall', these findings suggest that pride may actually be a protective factor against falling in older adults," co-author Dr Michael Daly from Stirling University tells the newspaper. The study was published in *British Medical Journal*.

"CONTRARY TO THE WELL-KNOWN SAYING 'PRIDE COMES BEFORE A FALL', THESE FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT PRIDE MAY ACTUALLY BE A PROTECTIVE FACTOR AGAINST FALLING IN OLDER ADULTS"



Photograph by 123RF.com

SECRETS OF THE AMISH

The importance of family and religion, the need to live simply and the shunning of modern technology...these are the hallmarks of this community, which finds its origins in Europe but subsequently migrated to the US. Now, scientists from Chicago's Northwestern University have discovered a rare genetic mutation in the Amish people that appears to protect against biological ageing. As London newspaper *The Guardian* reports, their study of 177 members of the Old Order Amish in Berne, Indiana, identified 43 people who had inherited one normal and one mutated version of a gene called *Serpine1*. Those with the

mutated version typically lived to the age of 85, a decade longer than those who didn't carry it; they also displayed better metabolic health and were less prone to diabetes. The *Serpine1* gene provides the body with instructions to make a protein called PAI-1; it has already been proven in animals that reducing levels of PAI-1 can protect against ageing and age-related diseases. Interestingly, this Amish group is the only known community to carry the mutation that naturally suppresses levels of PAI-1—those with the single mutated gene had 50 per cent lower levels of the protein in their blood. The study has been published in journal *Science Advances*.

2>1 They say it's not for the faint-hearted, but marriage may be very good for your brain! A study at University College London suggests that **people who stay single lifelong have a 42 per cent higher likelihood of developing dementia than married people**. Also, widows and widowers had a 20 per cent higher risk of dementia compared to people who were still with their spouse. This bolsters previous research, which has linked marriage with fewer heart attacks and strokes and higher survival after coronary bypass surgery. The researchers studied data from over 812,000 people across the US, China, Japan, France, Germany and Sweden. "We were surprised by the strength of our findings," writes team leader Dr Andrew Sommerlad in *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*. "The higher risk for unmarried people remains even when physical health is taken into account, suggesting that the benefit of marriage is due to more than just improving physical health."



Rocky road

Much has been said about the perils of silver drivers. And many of these pitfalls can be avoided with the simplest of adjustments, avers the American Automobile Association (AAA). In a new report, the association's Foundation for Traffic Safety says drivers over 65 are more than twice as likely to be killed when in a car crash compared to younger motorists. Unfortunately, **almost 90 per cent of silver drivers in the US fail to use simple devices or make inexpensive adjustments to their vehicle to keep them safer behind the wheel**. As website *cbsnews.com* reports, here are the modifications recommended by AAA:



- Steering wheel covers to improve the grip of the wheel for those with arthritis
- Convex or multifaceted mirrors to minimise blind spots and increase visibility
- Pedal extensions to allow drivers to remain a safe distance from detonating airbags
- Seat pads and cushions to alleviate hip and back pain
- Hand controls to operate the vehicle without using lower extremities

Time to take a closer look at your car, perhaps.

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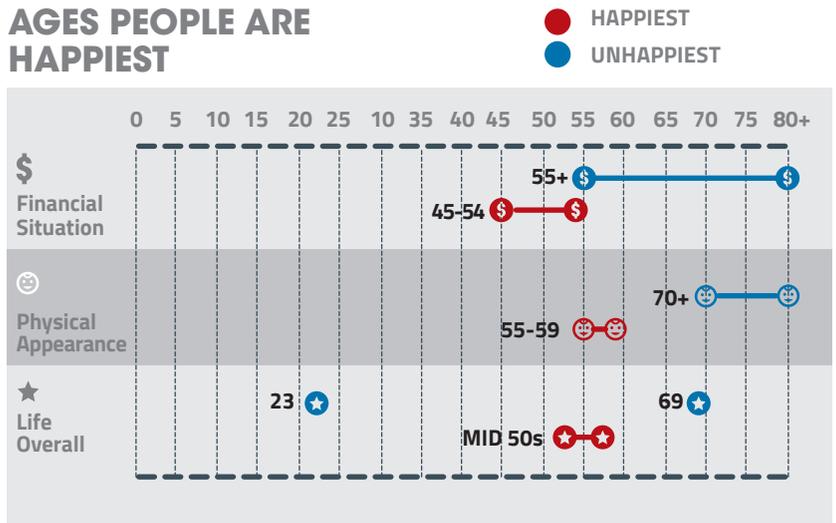
Photographs by 123RF.com

THE HAPPINESS INDEX



It's a feeling we all know but find hard to define: happiness. Now, using data gathered from the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and the US-based General Social Survey and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, website sfgate.com has developed a graphic that explains, at a glance, **when people are the happiest** across three parameters: their financial situation, physical appearance, and life overall. And we're happy to report that silvers in their 60s reported the highest level of happiness. Just take a look!

AGES PEOPLE ARE HAPPIEST



Source: Centre for Economic Performance; Gallup Heathways Well-Being Index; The New York Times Business Insider

MONEY ON THE MOVE Now, this is what you call outreach. Concerned that silvers in remote areas find it difficult to reach their banks to withdraw money, and aware of the fact that most of them still use passbooks rather than cash cards to keep track of their payments, **many regional banks in Japan have introduced vehicle-mounted ATMs to visit elders.** As website www.japantimes.co.jp reports, these mobile ATMs with passbook update function and deposit, withdrawal and payment services will visit the homes of customers as well as community centres and nursing facilities in the most far-flung of areas.



TOWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY

The Madhya Pradesh government proposes to institute a law making it mandatory for all state government employees to care for their ageing parents. Failing this, 10 per cent of their salary will be deducted each month and used for their parents' well-being, suggest media reports. Although silvers comprise under 8 per cent of its population, Madhya Pradesh has been ranked the second most unsafe state for elders by the National Crime Records Bureau.



FREE COVER! THE JAMMU & KASHMIR GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED FREE INSURANCE COVER TO ALL STATE PENSIONERS, BEGINNING FISCAL YEAR 2018-19. IN THE LONG RUN, IT ENDEAVOURS TO PROVIDE INSURANCE COVER TO ALL SILVERS, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY HAVE BEEN STATE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

Rights at risk



How do you reconcile an atmosphere of rampant ageism with the need to confer basic human rights upon silvers? It's quite the dilemma, as a recent study by New Delhi-based Agewell Foundation reveals. The NGO interviewed around 5,000 silvers across India and discovered that **the human rights of the elderly are increasingly being violated** because of the "popularity of nuclear and small families, lack of intergenerational interaction, and non-existence of an inclusive social security system". Here are some important—and disturbing—takeaways from the study, which was widely circulated in media:

68.8 %

of elders have access to necessary medicines and healthcare.

Surprisingly, the situation is worse in urban areas.

Over 23 per cent live in 'inhuman' conditions.

Close to 13 per cent say they don't get the proper food they require.

47.4 per cent attribute their 'discrimination' and 'humiliation' to their advanced age.

The most common problems cited by the silvers are marginalisation and disregard, loss of respect in the family, inaccessibility to medicine, lack of security, and depression.



Good tidings: The newly formed Himachal government has kicked off the New Year in style for silvers by lowering the age for providing social security pension from 80 to 70—regardless of income criteria.

Assistance from Arpana: The Orissa government has launched Arpana, an online portal to process applications for pension revision. While using this portal, pensioners willing to do an Aadhaar authentication will not be required to submit any hard copy of their application; those who don't want to use Aadhaar can still apply online but will have to submit print copies with their signatures to the pension distribution authority. Following the application, the portal will keep pensioners posted at every stage via SMS and email. It also features a help desk and a system for lodging grievances. Arpana is available at www.pension.odishatresury.gov.in/login.html

HAVEN ON



Photographs by Takumi Ota / Courtesy: Issei Suma

WHIMSICAL, QUIRKY AND COMPLETELY MAGICAL, **Jikka, a private retirement home in Shizuoka prefecture, 185 km from Tokyo**, is better seen than described! As CNN reports, the home belongs to Nobuko Suma and Sachiko Fujioka, two sexagenarian women (and close friends), who wanted to build a haven for themselves. Translating their dream to reality was Nobuko's son, architect Issei Suma, who fulfilled their brief of a home that was not just functional but quirky

and stylish. The 'back-to-nature' complex, built across 20,451 sq ft, comprises five tepees with high ceilings and no stairs, just ramps for wheelchair access. The extensive use of wood helps the complex blend in with the high trees that encircle the site. For now, Jikka is home only to Nobuko, who bakes and grows flowers, and Fujioka, who prepares meals for the elderly; in future, the two women aim to open up the property to other silvers like them.

EARTH





Best foot **FORWARD!**

21 JANUARY 2018. 0725 HOURS.

The atmosphere was charged with thrill and anticipation at the starting point of the Tata Mumbai Marathon adjacent to the landmark Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus. A sea of yellow flowed untrammelled across the start line as the 4.3-km Senior Citizens' Run supported by Harmony was flagged off by guests of honour LIC of India chairman V K Sharma, actors Kunal Kapoor and Shailesh Lodha (of *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* fame), and Axis Bank president (branch banking) Sanjay Silas. Close to 1,300 intrepid silvers put their best foot forward, cheered on by family, friends, and the crowds lining the route. Earlier, the participants were taken through a warm-up session conducted by fitness expert Nawaz Modi Singhania.



Gurugram resident Chandra, 63, whom we had met earlier at the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon, had travelled to the Maximum City to participate in the Run. "This is a gift from my son Prabhakaran, who is running the full marathon," she said. "I also dragged along two of my old friends, who had earlier moved to the city, for the Run."

For Dinkar Jomaji Naik, 68, from Sangli, Maharashtra, and his friend Goraknath Pandurang Kekare, 68, from Kolhapur, the event was a display of camaraderie. "We are both runners," said Naik, on their way back to the marquee

Photographs by Hareesh Patel, Kadar Sheikh, Datta Redekar and Arati Rajan Menon



after the Run. “I have taken part in many national and international Masters’ meets and won medals in relay races, while my friend likes to run slightly longer distances.” Kekare added with enthusiasm, “In the 2014 and 2017 Masters’ games, I won medals in the 3 km, 5 km and 8 km races.” Meanwhile, for 65 year-old first-timer Habiba Penkar, participating itself was a reason for jubilation. “I’m not here to compete. I want to stay fit and want to simply experience the joy of running.”

Many silvers came charged up to run for a social cause: Dressed in the Army’s olive greens, Shantilal Bhayani, 74, came with a message: ‘Soldiers are our strength as well as our safety and security. Saluting the real soldiers.’ Sixty-six year-old Upendra Thanawala, who is a permanent fixture at the Run, came dressed as Mahatma Gandhi to promote the Gandhian way of living. And a group of retired doctors—23 of them—from the Indian Medical Association took part to the spread word on two important causes: organ donation and *beti bachao*. Dr Kaizer Barot, 76, past president of the Mumbai Chapter, said, “We have been taking part in the Run for the past six to seven years, and are getting more doctors to join in each year.” To keep himself fit, he does 30 dips a day and holds in his stomach while walking. He underlined

this by taking in a deep breath and pumping his chest, saying, “See the results?”

Like last year, silver couple Rehana, a retired professor, and Zoeb Bootwala, a practising architect, were on mission cleanliness this year. Armed with black garbage bags and wearing protective gloves, they collected five bags of litter on their trail. “We do this during festivals and at public gatherings and rallies through the year,” said Zoeb. “A clean land leads to a clean mind and good health. That’s the message we are trying to spread through our activity,” Rehana added.

This year’s Run was also witness to something unique: two centenarians completed the event, proving that age is just a number. While Dagadu Bhamre from Malagaon, 104, who made his debut last year, made his way to the finish line slowly and steadily with his family by his side, another 104 year-old, Matacharan Pandey, debuted this year. “He walks everyday to keep himself fit and wished to discover the joy of participating in a marathon this year,” said Dr Pushpa Bhansal, 55, a family friend who accompanied him during the walk.





An eventful afternoon

As a prelude to the Senior Citizens' Run, around 200 silver participants associated with Harmony attended a pre-event gathering at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital (KDAH) in Mumbai on 16 January to collect their marathon kits and bib numbers. The event began with the silvers being taken through some important dos and don'ts during the event. Next, an awareness session on nocturia and enuresis, conditions related to night-time urination, was conducted by Dr Sanjay Pandey, Head, Urology & Andrology, KDAH, *(top left)* followed by an audience interaction. Finally, Axis Bank made a presentation on its banking privileges and benefits for senior citizens.



What's more, a number of silvers overcame health issues to participate in the Run. "I used to run the full and half marathons. But after a cardiac episode, I have been advised not to run long distances. I am glad to participate in this 4.3-km run where I can run or walk at my own pace," said 64 year-old Channi Arora. Ashwini Pokle, 65, a retired bank manager, participated this year despite her knee injury. "I started running after my retirement to keep myself fit and have been participating for the past four years. Many a times, it's difficult to face the challenges of old age, but such events boost our morale."

Indeed, the atmosphere was filled with bonhomie and patriotic fervour, as a group of silvers carried a giant national flag, dressed in traditional costumes. And Lalji Dawda, 76, an Ayurvedic healer from Dadar, was the cynosure of all eyes as he walked the path holding a huge tricolour umbrella.

The action-packed morning came to a close as the guests of honour thrilled the participants when they returned to the marquee after crossing the finish line and presented prizes to the winners of a lucky dip.



ON SONG

A choir is not a platform you'd associate with a fighter pilot. But for Suresh Shekar, a former flying ace, this weekly appointment with his fellow singers, many of whom are wheelchair-bound like him, is not to be missed for anything in the world. Seeing the motley crew—aged between 65 and 95—exercise their vocal chords with zeal and zest, it's difficult to believe many are terminally ill and disabled by stroke and Parkinson's. Meet The Choir of the Loaves and Fish, which recently held its annual Christmas performance 'Love Changes Everything' at the Holy Spirit Home for the Aged at Bannerghatta Road in Bengaluru.

Launched in 2012 by Pervin Varma, whose uncle and aunt were residents of Holy Spirit Home, the choir currently comprises 14 members. Among them is Rajee Sawhney, back after a brief stint of hospitalisation, but exhibiting



Photographs by Nestin Vas

no signs of exhaustion. Propped up by cushions in a wheelchair, she belts out solos enthusiastically. "Music is therapeutic for them," says Regina Thomas, who, along with Varma, has been running the choir and training the singers. "The practice sessions give them a chance to bond with each other and a purpose to carry on."

Interestingly, the name of the choir is inspired by the story of Jesus Christ feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. The choir gives two performances annually: on Christmas and Independence Day. While on 25 December, they belt out carols, hymns and Christmas songs, for Independence Day they sing secular songs in English, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, Malayalam and Konkani.



Clockwise from bottom: Choir members Pamela and Lindsay (behind); Rajee Sawhney and her helper Manju; choir members revel in the music; the audience joins in
Opposite page (clockwise from top): The choir performs on Christmas 2017; Regina Thomas; Pervin Varma

Besides regular concerts, the choir, whose longest serving members are Angela and Lindsay, has also performed at an international conference organised last year by Headstreams, an NGO working in the child education sector, a church and another old age home. “They eagerly look forward to the annual performance when they are lustily cheered by family and friends,” adds Thomas. “The glint in their eyes while being acknowledged by their children is to die for!”

Silver lining

Seniors having dependent children with disabilities could find help at hand, writes **Srirekha Pillai**

Ramani spends much of her waking hours worrying about who will take care of her 58 year-old son Ravi when she is gone. For the 80 year-old Chennai resident with a severe knee problem, holding on to dear life seems to be the only solution for now. For his part, Ravi, who suffers from muscular dystrophy—a genetic disorder characterised by progressive weakness and degeneration of the skeletal muscles that control movement—is worried about his mother; multiple deformities in the back, hip and knee that have left him paralysed; inability to sleep; and the need to depend on others for practically every chore.

“I have been popping pills to sleep but even that doesn’t help,” says Ravi. “After every two hours, I need someone to shift my body as staying in the same position hurts.” As he can’t depend on his mother, who has her own age-related health issues to deal with, Ravi has a caregiver on call who helps him bathe, dress and use the washroom.

For Coimbatore-based Sriram Narayan, 54, and Akila Vaidyanathan, 52, it’s not easy taking care of their son Nishant, who is at the severe end of autism and uses an iPad to communicate his needs. The couple runs Amaze, a trust to help other families like them navigate “the autism maze”. “Caregiving for the autistic should go beyond medical needs; it should encompass emotional and educational support too, enabling them to become contributory members of society,” observes Narayan.

There are countless Indians like Ravi and Nishant who have disorders that impede them from managing or taking care of themselves in a social environment. According to the Annual Disability Status Report for 2017 by *Disabled World*, currently around 10 per cent of the world’s total population, or roughly 650 million people, live with a disability. And according to an estimate of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 80 per cent of persons with disabilities (PwD) live in developing countries.

With the disintegration of the joint family structure and increased lifespan as a result of superior medical care, loneliness is a reality for most PwD. “I have a hard time coping with loneliness,” admits Ravi. “I am depressed to the point that I have requested active euthanasia repeatedly.” For the past few months, Ravi has been actively searching for accommodation for PwD with round-the-clock medical assistance and palliative care. For his mother Ramani and many silvers like her—struggling to provide care at home for adult children with developmental disabilities includ-

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ing autism, cerebral palsy and Down syndrome, and other physical impairments, challenges and disorders—it is imperative to have a mechanism in place so that in case of an eventuality, the transition in caregiving is smooth.

“One of the major concerns for seniors having adult children with disabilities is what will happen after their lifetime,” observes Rekha Murthy, Karnataka state head of HelpAge India. “We need to establish a system that would be reassuring for them.” Indeed, the isolation of parents can be huge, especially as they face new challenges with ageing and diseases that may come in its wake such as Alzheimer’s and immobility. To keep loneliness at bay, it is important for both parents and adult children with disabilities to build a network of caring relationships and support groups.

To address the needs of this segment, CovaiCare, a pioneer in building retirement communities, is reserving 10 per cent of accommodation in select communities such as Coimbatore, Mysore, Pune and Puducherry for silvers with dependent PwD. “We have developed a unique model wherein silvers can live with their special children. After their time, the children will be taken care of by CovaiCare,” says Achal Sridharan, managing director. “The focus is on integrating PwD in community activities and providing moral and medical support.”

Can the needs of PwD and their elder caregivers be integrated in a supportive environment? Do we have sufficient models that cater to them? These concerns form the crux of a one-day seminar, ‘**Trends and Challenges in Elder Care**’, being organised by elder support service provider Integrated Eldercare Solutions Pvt Ltd (CareFinder), in association with India’s premier magazine for senior citizens *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, in Chennai on **7 February**. Besides addressing the need for holistic physical, mental and emotional care and social support in senior living facilities, the seminar will also address the concerns of silvers who are parents/guardians of PwD and aim to find solutions through integrated living to meet their needs.

Watch this space next month for a report on the event

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Leave home, live longer. Recent research by the Hadassah Hebrew-University Medical Centre in Israel claims that silvers who leave their homes every day, even for a little while, are likelier to live longer than those who remain indoors, regardless of their health status or functional capacity. Their five-year study of 3,375 adults aged between 70 and 90 years was published in *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.



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Then: Playing cards Now: Gift box

This Valentine's Day, go a step ahead and personalise even the gift box—your better half is bound to appreciate the special touch. You only need 22 playing cards, preferably from an incomplete deck lying about your house. Start with making tiles. Each tile is made up of two cards and you need six. To make a tile, hold two cards together in the form of a cross, completely centred. Fold in the two sides of the card sticking out, turn it over and do the same with the other card. Separate the cards; unlike previously when the flaps (sticking out bits of the card) went across the other card, tuck them in from both sides this time to form a tile. You need to make six tiles, for all sides of the box. Stick another playing card halfway through the tile pocket and fold it to a 90° angle. This card will act as a hinge between two tiles. Slide a tile onto the folded part of the hinge and two sides of your gift box are ready. Make more hinges and start piecing tiles and hinges together to form a box. You could either keep the top open or add another hinge to tuck in the top tile. Ensure you mark the side of the tile from where to open the box, though—it can get a bit confusing!



RECYCLING FACTS

- Once soiled with grease, cheese and other foods, pasteboard, the material used for making playing cards, which is made out of paper fibre, cannot be recycled, because the paper fibres don't separate from the oil during the pulping process.
- Virgin paper fibre can be recycled eight times before it completely breaks down and becomes unusable.



Arati Rajan Menon

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INSTANT HEART RATE: HR MONITOR

Available for: iPhone, iPad, compatible with iOS 9.0 or later; Android

What it does: Monitors your heart rate, measures stress levels, and records trends and insights for your heart rate without the use of any external hardware. The app detects the colour change in your fingertip each time your heart beats and uses an advanced algorithm to calculate your heart rate.

How it works: The app opens to a monitor that prompts you to place your index finger on the camera lens. As soon as you place the finger, a 10-second countdown starts measuring your heart rate, followed by insights and an option to tag your activity—pre-workout, post-workout, at work, bedtime, etc—at the time of measuring. The premium version is where it gets interesting and more inclusive. Apart from the usual monitoring of your heart rate, you can view your real-time photoplethysmogram (PPG) graph and pulse waveform graphs and get detailed insights and trends to pursue a healthier lifestyle. The stand-up test is another in-app purchase more commonly used by athletes and body builders to check the heart's strength based on how hard it has to work when you stand up.

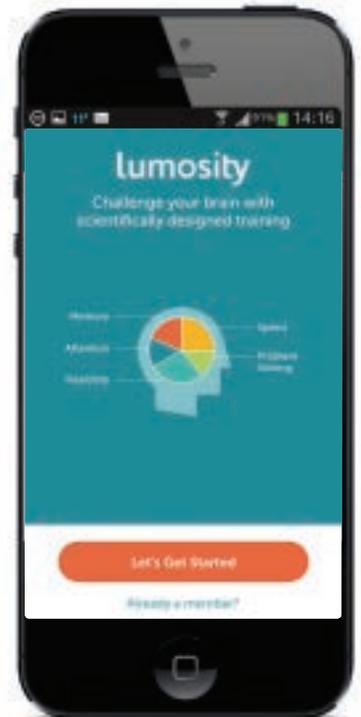
Think Airbnb, but for adventures. Set to launch in the first quarter of 2018, **Lyfx** is meant to make your travelling experiences more fun and inclusive of the locality you wish to explore. Pedro McCardell, founder of Lyfx, rode on his motorcycle from Brazil to the Silicon Valley to secure funding for his app while solidifying his vision to change the way travellers travel. The app is set to serve as a local interface where travellers in varied locations can connect to expert area guides. It will help users toggle through locations and outdoor activities with a list of qualified locals. Lyfx will first be released in Utah, Colorado and California in the US but the founder's goal is to expand to other countries soon.

LUMOSITY

Available for: iPhone, iPad, compatible with iOS 9.0 or later; Android

What it does: Lumosity is a comprehensive brain training programme with 40+ brain games and activities that challenge your memory, attention, speed of processing and problem-solving skills. Game difficulty adapts to you, pushing you to operate at the edge of your limits and keeping you challenged.

How it works: First, set up an account, either an email account or through Facebook. The app prompts you to take a three-step 'Fit Test' where the app challenges your information-processing skills, divided attention recall and your spatial recall. After the test you are asked to select premium (charged) or basic (free) workouts. Premium training gives you a more personalised experience, a daily five-game workout and performance tracking; limited training gives you a daily three-game workout without personalisation or tracking. You can either play the games you have already attempted and better your score or try new games to challenge your cognitive skills while keeping monotony at bay. At the end of each game, Lumosity gives you a detailed analysis of your performance and how you fare against other users. Another interesting aspect is the Lumosity Performance Index (LPI), a standardised scale calculated from your game scores that helps you compare your strengths and weakness across games that challenge different cognitive abilities.



BLUEBERRY BREAKTHROUGH

Patients of dementia may need to look no further than their own kitchens and refrigerators for a remedy to ease their symptoms. While it has long been suspected that some natural compounds, like those in blueberries, may minimise dementia-induced memory loss, a study conducted on mice at the Konkuk University, Republic of Korea, has further strengthened this belief. The study found that it actually restored impaired cognitive processes in mice. It is suspected that **blueberry vinegar prevents the breakdown of acetylcholine, a chemical that is deficient in the brains of Alzheimer's patients.** The study, published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, tested this hypothesis by demonstrating that the reverse—blocking acetylcholine receptors—disrupts learning and memory. The blueberry breakthrough is significant because though synthetic drugs can achieve the same result, they do not last long in the body and also damage the liver.

BLUEBERRY VINEGAR

may minimise
dementia-induced
memory loss



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Beware of heartburn: New research on heartburn and cancer has thrown up results that are hard to digest. Conducted by the Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, the study has found that **acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is often associated with cancer of the throat, tonsils and upper digestive tract.** Researchers compared 13,805 patients aged 66 and older and who suffered from cancer with the same number of patients without cancer. The results showed that acid reflux was associated with cancer of the digestive tract in older adults. The study does not indicate causality.



Safe and sound

Good news for post-menopausal women who have not taken kindly to this life-changing event. Women who suffer symptoms triggered by menopause have felt compelled to resort to hormone-replacement therapy (HRT) despite numerous reports that this line of treatment might have serious side-effects. However, a landmark clinical study conducted by the Women's Health Initiative that followed more than 27,000 subjects for 18 years has found that **fears about HRT may be ill-founded.** This comes as a huge relief for women as earlier research had suggested that HRT could raise the risk of heart disease, stroke and even cancer. The new study, published in journal *JAMA*, was conducted by researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.

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Health tonic



Photographs by 123RF.com

Let's raise a toast to a special exercise regimen for seniors: Bartender, make that a 'Gym Tonic'! This cheerful moniker comes courtesy the Lien Foundation in Singapore, which runs a fitness programme designed especially for seniors. It comprises strength training, which in turn helps seniors regain their muscle strength and balance and stabilises their walking. **Gym Tonic, a 12-week programme**, came in as a result of a study conducted at the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, which found

that half the elderly in Singapore are frail. It comprises 30-minute sessions, twice-a-week, and uses air-powered equipment that automatically adjusts to accommodate individual fitness levels. All one has to do is tap a card on the equipment and it stores the data in a digital cloud to be tracked later. The programme, which is teamed with nutrition talks and health assessments, aims to increase muscle mass and make seniors less prone to falls. A follow-up survey showed that half the 396 seniors were able to reverse their frailty after undergoing the programme.

WORKING IT OUT Working out doesn't just keep your body well-toned. A recent clinical trial suggests that **high-intensity exercise could counter the motor-related symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease**. The trial, conducted on 128 participants between 40 and 80 years of age, who were in an early stage of Parkinson's and not taking drugs, was conducted by Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, Illinois, and the University of Colorado in Denver. The trial compared the effects of moderate and high-intensity exercise and the effects of physical activity on the progression of the disease. It found that high-intensity exercise helps in the early stage of Parkinson's by delaying the progression of symptoms relating to motor abilities. The findings were published in *JAMA Neurology*.

Magic mushrooms

Scientists are now saying there's more to mushrooms than keeping dementia and Alzheimer's at bay. A study conducted by a team of researchers at Penn State in the US found that **mushrooms are rich in two antioxidants—ergothioneine and glutathione—that protect against oxidative stress, a huge contributor to disease, and have anti-ageing properties.** According to the study, mushrooms are the highest dietary source of these antioxidants taken together, although the quantity varies between 'shrooms. The findings have been published in journal *Food Chemistry*.



Safe sex



This study ought to sex it up a little for silvers, who should not let a heart condition discourage them from getting intimate with their partners. New data available to the American Heart Association examined at Portland, Oregon, shows that **of the 4,557 cardiac arrest cases that occurred between 2002 and 2015, only 1 per cent of silvers had a cardiac arrest triggered by sexual activity.** In other words, there's a very minuscule chance that elderly couples could experience cardiac arrest during sex. The study was published in the *Journal of American Cardiology*.



Stent or not?

Here's a study raising fundamental questions about stents—the most frequently used means to open blocked arteries and relieve chest pain. According to researchers at Imperial College in London, while **stents (tiny wire mesh tubes) are very effective in opening coronary blockages and thus saving patients from a heart attack, they may not relieve chest pain** as previously thought. The study demonstrated that heart patients who thought they had received a stent, but didn't, said they felt no chest pain post procedure, as did participants who had actually received a stent. While suggesting that pain relief may be in the mind—and not owing to a stent—others point out that atherosclerosis affects many blood vessels and stenting only the largest blockage doesn't result in significant pain relief as the other blockages remain. The findings of the study were published in medical journal *Lancet*.



Photographs courtesy: Yogendra Vaidya

A WINNER ALL THE WAY

As he climbs down the stairs from his first-floor apartment, there's a spring in his step. But that's not unusual for an athlete. Dressed in comfortable denim trousers, black T-shirt and a stylish hat perched on his head, **Yogendra Vaidya** could well be in his late 50s. Only, he's not. Vaidya, affectionately known as 'Nanubhai', is all of 76 years old.

On reaching the ground floor, he points to a simple bicycle. "This is my cycle," he says, as if introducing an old friend. There's nothing special or funky about it. The slender pink-and-silver bicycle is like any other but, for Nanubhai, it's been a companion of many a journey across Ahmedabad and beyond. His love for cycling is so infectious that many elders who reside in the western Ahmedabad Chinai Baug housing society where Nanubhai lives have also taken up cycling in right earnest. "You cannot go without food and sleep," he says. "In my case, add cycling and swimming to that list."

Nanubhai has many cycling exploits to his credit. He belongs to a cycling group that does cross-country trips together. In 2013, they cycled 1,980 km from Ahmedabad to the Wagah border, a 28-day rally for world peace. In 2013, he joined a Kanyakumari-to-Islamabad cycle march for peace organised by university students from Delhi. And four years later, in 2017, Nanubhai and another Ahmedabad resident cycled from India Gate to the Wagah border with a message of peace between India and Pakistan.

Cycling is one of two passions for Nanubhai; the other is swimming. In recognition of his sporting achievements in both fields, Nanubhai was presented the Vayoshrestha Samman, the National Award for senior citizens instituted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, recently. At a glittering ceremony at Vigyan Bhavan in Delhi, he was conferred the award in the 'Adventure and Sports' category by the President of India, along with 22 other awardees in different categories.

Born in Mandvi, a town on the banks of the mighty Tapti River near Surat in Gujarat, he developed a love for swimming very early. "Our house was just 500 m from the river and I spent most of my time in the water," recalls Nanubhai, who worked with the Home Guards in Civil Defence and retired as chief warden of the Gujarat Home Guards.

Nanubhai is a regular at both state and national-level swimming meets, and consistently bags medals at the Gujarat State Masters' Aquatic Championships and National Masters' Aquatic Championships. Winning gold, silver and bronze medals in different events comes easily to him. Last year, at the 13th National Masters' Aquatic Championships held in Secunderabad, Nanubhai bagged medals in the 50-m butterfly, 50-m freestyle, 4 x 50-m freestyle, 100-m breaststroke, 100-m freestyle and 4 x 50-m medley relay events. In his drawing room, an entire showcase is devoted to his trophies, medals, certificates and memoirs. He is also



Clockwise from left: Taking off from a diving board; with the Indian tricolour at the Wagah border; receiving the Vayoshreshtha Samman from President Ramnath Kovind

Opposite page: At the Sabarmati Riverfront

an expert at solo diving, pike diving, tuck diving and back diving, and has participated in the World Masters Championships held in 2012 at Riccione in Italy and in 2014 in Canada.

With a twinkle in his eye, he says of his participation in the championship in Italy, “During a practice diving session at the Stadium pool in Ahmedabad, I accidentally hit the diving board and took a few stitches to the back of my head. My family doctor strictly advised me against going to Italy. But I went anyway and participated without disclosing my injury to anyone!”

To this day, Nanubhai follows a military-style routine, which keeps him shipshape. “I rise at 4 am and after my morning ablutions, I set off on a 15-km cycle ride. Then, at the old Law Garden, I run a laughter club, and from there, I go to the Stadium swimming pool where I first work out in the gym and then enjoy a swimming and diving session. I return home by 10 am,” he reveals.

For most of the day, he is busy with a wide range of social activities, civil defence services and, in the capacity of chairperson, visits the Haja Patel Pol Consumer Cooperative Society, which sources and sells groceries. In the evenings, Nanubhai returns to the Law Garden for a stroll. “My evening

walks are with leisure and pleasure, unlike the morning regime, which is more military. After I return home, I eat a light dinner and retire to bed by 9 pm,” reveals Nanubhai, who lives with his wife, a former telecom employee.

Quiz him about the secret to his excellent health and Nanubhai looks genuinely confused. He shrugs, “Eat regularly, sleep regularly and exercise regularly.” As an afterthought, he adds, “If you want to remain fit, avoid street food like *pav-bhaji* and items made of *maida* including bread. *Papad* is the spiciest food I have ever eaten.”

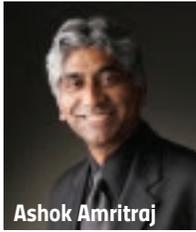
And he has never drunk a cup of tea or coffee in his life! He advises against another potentially ‘unhealthy’ practice: watching TV. Describing the habit as a huge “time-waster”, he corrects himself, quickly. “The sole exception is the *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* serial.”

Nanubhai’s sporting spirit is the manifestation of his positive spirit and one of his biggest fans is his son-in-law Baiju Trivedi, an engineer by profession. “I consider myself lucky to have a father-in-law like him. Most people his age just sit at home and grumble about everything but Nanubhai is full of life.”

—Nayeem Quadri



Pandit Birju Maharaj



Ashok Amritraj

BIRTHDAYS

Economist and former RBI governor **Raghuram Rajan** turns 55 on 3 February.

Kathak exponent Padma Vibhushan **Pandit Birju Maharaj** turns 80 on 4 February.

American composer and conductor **John Williams** turns 86 on 8 February.

India's Minister of External Affairs **Sushma Swaraj** turns 66 on 14 February.

Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winning American author **Toni Morrison** turns 87 on 18 February.

Film producer and former tennis player **Ashok Amritraj** turns 62 on 22 February.

IN PASSING

Santoor player **Pandit Ullas Bapat** died on 4 January following a long illness. He was 67.

Chairman and MD of Mohan Meakins Breweries and creator of the iconic Old Monk rum **Dr Kapil Mohan** died on 6 January after suffering cardiac arrest. He was 88.

Actor-theatre personality **Shrivallabh Vyas** passed away on 7 January following a prolonged illness. He was 60.

Sarod maestro Padma Bhushan **Buddhadev Das Gupta** died on 15 January after suffering a cardiac arrest. He was 84.

Veteran journalist **Nand Kishore Trikha** died on 15 January following a battle with cancer. He was 82.

MILESTONES

- Dastkar chairperson **Laila Tyabji**, 70, received the Sunday Standard & New Indian Express Devi Award for her contribution to promoting Indian arts and crafts, on 16 December in New Delhi.
- Renowned theatre artist **Dr Mohan Agashe**, 70, was honoured with the Thespo Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to theatre in the field of acting and promoting children's theatre. The award was held by the Youth Theatre Festival on 24 December at NCPA, Mumbai.
- Kasargod-based sculptor **Kanayi Kunhiraman**, 80, was honoured with the Prof M S Nanjunda Rao National Award for Art on 5 January. The award is instituted by the Bengaluru-based Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath.
- Author and independent journalist **Indira Parthasarathy**, 87, won the Lifetime Achievement Award at The Hindu Lit for Life 2018 held from 14-16 January in Chennai.

OVERHEARD

“It sucks. There are no two ways about it, especially when you have enjoyed being the most muscular man in the world. But then again, who cares.... A body in motion stays in motion.... There are always new challenges and there's always more fun. The key thing is, when you make mistakes or when you fail, you get up, dust yourself off and keep going. The difference between winners and losers is that losers stay down, winners always get up.”

—Austrian-American actor, former professional bodybuilder and former governor of California **Arnold Schwarzenegger** on the impact of ageing on his body, in an interview to Sunday Nights



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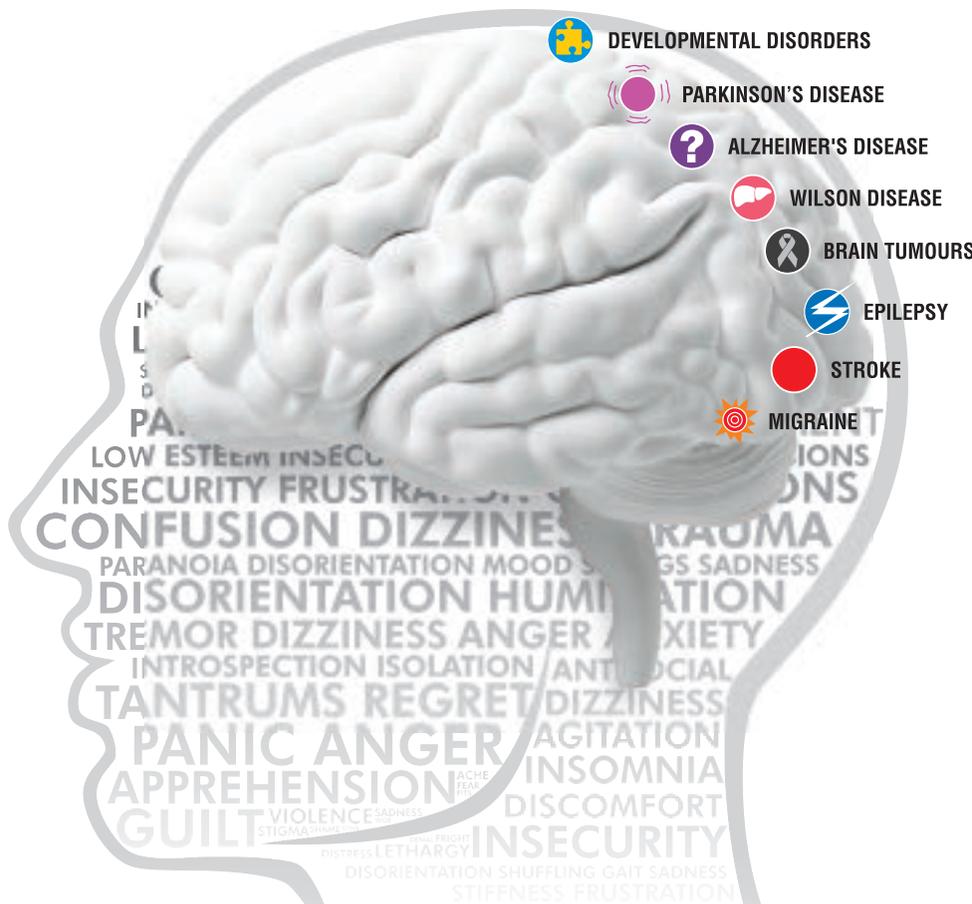


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MY 'CUPID' GRANNY

Once in a while, life sends you someone so dynamic that you simply cannot ignore their presence. It's the kind of person who refuses to go quietly into the night—that's the kind of person my granny is!

Regina Gilon's life is as happening as a teenager's, with WhatsApp forwards, Gmail updates, social meets and so on. Thanks to her experiments with social media, this 82 year-old has assumed the role of matchmaker—we believe she loves this job more than her stint at the Pondicherry Education Department.

So, whether in Australia or Ariyankuppam, she will find the one for you. You just need to give her a call, send in your details and photos via WhatsApp or Gmail, and she will spend the next few weeks or months hunting down your elusive partner-to-be. When she finds a match, she does a basic background check on the families, arranges a meeting, puts in a small prayer and leaves the rest to God. In fact, I've seen my granny do everything required of a modern-day matchmaker—from a thorough background check and family calls to coaxing watchmen for information, she can put Sherlock Holmes to shame with her discreet spade work. And she doesn't charge a penny.

So, why do it anyway? "This is my way of giving back to society," she says. "Some people pray, some people do charity and I like to help people find their life partners. There's just so much joy when I know I have helped someone with the most important decision of their life. I have been doing this for over 25 years, and am grateful that none of the couples I have matched have divorced to date."

Based in Chennai, my granny caters mostly to the Catholic community. And most of her 'projects' are referred by happy clients. She does have one condition: No dowry. If she finds someone haggling for dowry, she walks out.

It all began after my grandfather—her husband—died in a road accident in 1994. Granny's health took a downward turn; she was bedridden and in severe pain. Her sisters took it upon themselves to revive the Iron Lady and got her hooked to TV serials, prayer groups and anything that would revive her spirit. Then, that fateful phone call came. A gentleman was desperately looking for a groom for his middle-aged daughter. And, just like that, my 60-year-old



Balasubramanian N

Gilon finds suitable matches for singles

grandmum came back to life. She grabbed her handbag, dabbed on some powder and went off to church to make some inquiries. And soon enough, the happy father came to her with a wedding invitation!

A close family friend, Florence Abraham, reminisces fondly, "When my family was looking for a groom, Regina Aunty asked me if I would be interested in marrying Raja [now her husband]. Even though he was a relative, I hadn't thought of marrying him till that moment. Regina Aunty made me see why Raja was ideal for me. We have been happily married for more than 25 years."

All these years later, it is time to find a match for their daughter, Gabriella. And who better to rope in than, yes, granny. "For Regina Aunty, it's more than a job; she makes sure the couple is made for each other and helps the fami-

lies understand each other better,” says Florence. “Even if we have hundreds of matrimonial websites, nobody can beat Regina Aunty at match-fixing!”

They say the best matches are made in heaven but the matches made by my grandmother come a close second!
—Catherine Gilon, Chennai

THE WRITE STUFF

I believe I was born to be a storyteller and had my first tryst with the craft at the age of 14. I was in Class 9, at Jorhat Girls’ High School in Assam, when I wrote my first short story for the hand-written magazine, *Sandhani*. I went on to become an editor with the magazine and was convinced I could become an author one day.

At the prestigious J B College at Jorhat, I studied the general bachelor’s course with Assamese as my modern India language under the tutelage of legendary Assamese storyteller and Sahitya Akademi Award-winner Syed Abdul Malik, among others. It was a red-letter day for me when I received the highest marks in Assamese in an examination conducted by Mr Malik, as it strengthened my conviction to become a writer.

Even though I was married before I completed my graduation, I was determined to become a writer. My husband was a government doctor and, thanks to the transferable nature of his job, we shifted houses for nearly three decades. This helped me pick up various plots for my short stories, most of which revolve around the lives and the suffering of the people I encountered.

Baruah tackles social issues through her stories



Tapati Baruah Kashyap

So far, I have written about 100 short stories, which have been published in various Assamese magazines and newspapers over the decades. Some of my short stories have also been published in the form of collections of three, namely *Abyakta Bedana* (1995), *Seemar Sipare* (2006) and *Suwansiri Ajiyo Boi Ache* (2016).

Apart from short stories, I have also written for children; I enjoy this the most. I have published many collections of children’s stories, the latest in 2016, and one collection of life sketches of literary legends of Assam.

Like one’s own children, I love all my books equally and don’t have any favourites. But I was surprised at how *Edin Mukut Nagaroloi Ahichil* (2010) turned out, as it was based more on truth than imagination. This children’s novel talks about the evils of drinking and the benefits of education via my protagonist Mukut.

I also use my stories to speak of my childhood with nostalgia. I simplify stories from myths and epics, making them easy to read for the new generation. In my book *Aita Aru Natihot*, I accompany my grandchildren on tours to their ancestral home and they are thrilled when their inquisitiveness prompts me to reveal her own past.

In my children’s books, my main objective is to instil moral values through stories, while my other stories depict the sentiments of either women or the underprivileged. I try to capture the various nuances in society, the emotional turmoil of people, their angst, and I weave tales on contemporary themes.

I was conferred three local literary awards for children’s literature (the Assam Lekhika Sangtha Award in 1993, Bani Pathak Suarani Award in 1995, and Punya Bora Award in 2006) and the Assam Government’s Literary Pension Award in 2009. Also, it meant a lot to me when my books were ordered by the state government’s Directorate of Library Services. All these milestones have been a source of encouragement and inspiration, and I am very grateful for them.

Life is good and I am very blessed, for after my husband passed away, I have been living with my only son and his family. I am now 79 years old but still wake up at 3.30 am and use the extra time it gives me to jot down my thoughts and feelings. I still have many more stories to tell!

—Anita Baruah, Guwahati



Love chargers!

Simple foods can double as aphrodisiacs to relight the fire in the bedroom

While there's no real expiry date on a satisfying sex life, the stress of daily living can be a bit of a downer, as can health problems that come with age. Problems like vaginal dryness and erectile dysfunction further diminish sex drive. However, rather than turning to your medicine cabinet for drugs that boost the libido, stock your kitchen with foods that do the trick—naturally!

WHAT ARE APHRODISIACS?

The word aphrodisiac comes from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty; it is said she emerged from a clamshell. Aphrodisiacs are foods that increase the flow of blood and sexual fluid to the genitals and release natural bio-chemicals in the body. They provide nutrients that improve the health of your sex organs, increase your body energy, boost temperature and heart rate, and enhance the mood for sex. They can also boost semen count and help counter vaginal dryness. The best part: they need not always be fancy foods like oysters; even simple, everyday foods can double as aphrodisiacs.

FOOD FOR LOVE

Sunflower seeds, avocados, almonds and olives contain Vitamin E that helps regulate sexual hormones, boosts libido and testosterone levels in men, and aids in the treatment of sterility for men and women. A deficiency

of this vitamin could lead to loss of sexual potency. Further, for a healthy sex drive, both men and women require foods that contain zinc. Pumpkin seeds are high in both zinc and Vitamin E. In men, they pump zinc into the prostate gland and increase sperm count; in women, they build hormones, activate sexual organs and increase sexual fluid secretions. Zinc is also found in peanuts, eggs, brown rice and pine nuts.

Sea foods—especially oysters—are one of the most recognised aphrodisiacs to date. Oysters are high in zinc and improve dopamine levels, which boost libido in men and women. Sea foods help in the production of testosterone and healthy sperm.

Cocoa—in the form of chocolate—is another popular aphrodisiac and a favourite across the globe. It contains phenylethylamine which stimulates the hormone that is released during sex. However, the regular chocolate available in the market is highly processed and high in fat and sugar. Try organic chocolate, preferably dark, instead. You can also have cocoa in other forms—for instance, cocoa powder can be combined with other aphrodisiacs such as bananas to make a milkshake (*see recipe*).



RECIPES TO GET YOU INTO THE MOOD

MIXED CHAAT

Ingredients

- Peanuts: 50 gm
- Pumpkin seeds: 1 tbsp
- Tomato: 1 tbsp; finely chopped
- Onion: 1 tbsp; finely chopped
- Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Coriander: 2 tsp; finely chopped
- Green chillies: ¼ tsp; finely chopped
- Salt and lemon juice to taste

Method

Mix peanuts, pumpkin seeds, tomato, onion, red chilli powder, green chillies and coriander together. Add salt and squeeze lemon on top. Mix well and serve.



STRAWBERRY-BANANA COCOA SMOOTHIE

Ingredients

- Strawberries: 10-12
- Banana: ½
- Cocoa powder: ½ tsp
- Ice cubes: 3-4

Method

Chop the bananas and strawberries into small pieces. Blend the chopped bananas and strawberries along with ice cubes and cocoa powder. Serve chilled with ice and a pinch of cocoa as garnish.



Indeed, bananas, whole grains and fresh figs are other common aphrodisiacs. Bananas enhance Vitamin B levels, thus converting carbohydrates into energy. Vitamin B helps increase testosterone production. Eating whole grains such as wheat and barley also increases Vitamin B levels. Fresh figs are good for prostate health and contain minerals that help enhance sexual function in women.

Interestingly, despite the association of garlic with 'bad breath', it actu-

ally serves as a great aphrodisiac, especially for men. It increases blood flow to the groin and helps boost the libido. Garlic is a common addition in Indian cuisine and can be included in vegetables, soups, chutneys and dals.



Vegetables such as asparagus, chilli peppers, celery and avocados are also good aphrodisiacs. Asparagus is high in Vitamin B or folate that increases the production of histamine, which is important for a healthy sex drive.

Chilli peppers contain capsaicin that revs up your libido and celery increases pheromone levels that enhance your sex appeal. Avocado also helps to maintain a healthy sexual system for men. The folic acid, calcium and vitamins C and E in them generate nitric oxide that helps to dilate blood vessels and erectile function.

Further, food grains such as barley and pulses and nuts like pistachios, walnuts and almonds prevent erectile dysfunction by managing





BARLEY (JAV) ROTI

Ingredients

- Jav atta (finger millet): 100 gm
- Water: 100 ml
- Chilli paste: ½ tsp
- Coriander: ½ cup; chopped
- Salt to taste

Method

Take water in a vessel and put it on medium flame. As it starts boiling, add the jav atta, chilli paste and coriander and leave for 2-3 minutes. Do not stir. Take off the flame. Stir with a wooden spoon so no lumps are formed. Once it is mixed, cool it for five minutes and transfer to a flat plate. Knead well and roll it into rotis; cook them on a griddle with ¼ tsp ghee, if desired.



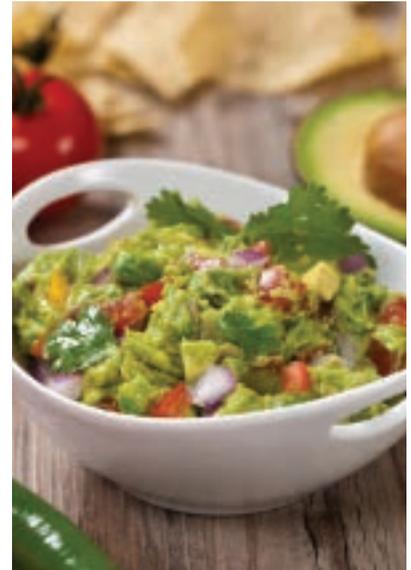
ROASTED GARLIC

Ingredients

- Garlic: 1 head
- Olive oil: 2 tbsp
- Sea salt to taste

Method

Preheat the oven to 220°C. Chop the top off the garlic head and place the garlic in a piece of foil. Drizzle olive oil over the garlic head until it is completely filled. Wrap tightly with foil, place on a baking tray and bake for roughly 35 minutes until tender and fragrant. Remove from the oven and let it cool. Peel off the bulb and gently squeeze each garlic clove out. Sprinkle sea salt on top and enjoy.



Photographs by 123RF.com

GUACAMOLE

Ingredients

- Avocados: 2
- Tomato: 2-3 tbsp; deseeded and finely chopped
- Onion: 2 tbsp; finely chopped
- Garlic: 1 tsp; finely chopped
- Coriander: 1 tbsp; finely chopped
- Green chillies: 1 tsp; finely chopped
- Salt and lemon juice to taste

Method

Cut the avocados into halves, remove the seeds and scoop out the centre portion. Put the scooped flesh into a bowl and mash well with the back of a fork or masher. Add all the remaining ingredients and mix well. Refrigerate and serve.



cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. Unhealthy food habits clog the blood vessels, leading to restricted blood flow. This causes mismanagement of blood sugars and cardiovascular disease, which in turn contributes to erectile dysfunction.

So open your fridge, raid your kitchen, and find simple, healthy foods that will bring you closer to your partner. Improvise and enjoy—sprinkle cocoa into your smoothie, coffee or yogurt; snack on nuts, figs

and seed mix through the day; and munch on bananas and strawberries for a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's never been easier to up your love quotient.

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

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Stomach this!

Regular practice of yoga will put your digestive system back on track

One of the most ill-diagnosed and ubiquitous problems is indigestion—all of us have been victims to this at some point in our lives. Indigestion itself is a symptom of an underlying cause. In fact, this is such a large field that even a medical practitioner would refer you to a specialist rather than treat it symptomatically. It is best to fix the underlying cause and choose

remedies accordingly. Therefore, here, we offer complementary yogic practices that help you deal with the lifestyle triggers to this problem.

Some may be tracked common-sensically:

- **Eating and talking.** This means food is not chewed properly, so the first stage of digestion is already compromised and is passed on half-prepared to the gut.
- **Drinking too much fluid while eating** dilutes the stomach's enzymes and reduces their efficacy.
- **Not chewing food well enough and taking in too much air while eating.** This happens when your teeth are sensitive or you are not focusing on your food (watching TV while eating, for instance). The old Eastern saying, to 'drink your food and chew your drinks' hints at how you must eat.

YOGIC MOVES

Dynamic plough pose (*druta halasana*)



Halasana



Paschimottanasana

Photographs by Haresh Patel

Lie down on your back. Inhale. As you exhale, hoist your hips up in the shoulder stand (*sarvangasana*). Exhale; drop the legs behind in the plough (*halasana*). Breathe in and out deeply. Again, inhale to raise the legs back. As you exhale, slide down the hips till legs are fully on the ground. Lean your torso forward into a full forward bend (*paschimottanasana*).

This may be an intimidating flow of three poses but is actually negotiable for anyone with a regular practice. For those unable to drop the legs behind in the plough, you can use a yoga belt to ensure the legs go behind a bit and you can slide down forward. Even though you fully execute

the plough, drawing the legs as far behind does exert a powerful but composite pressure on the abdomen, which has a positive impact overall. Another trick: you can position yourself at a wall, so the legs drop low till your feet rest on the wall as far down as possible.

Benefits: In the plough pose, there is a positive pressure on the stomach as well as the neck where the metabolic gland thyroid is located. Further, the spine is pulled out from its contracted state—as happens with stress. The anti-gravity impact of the inversions is more intense in the plough pose. In *druta halasana*, you have the combined benefits of three classic healers from the yogic sequence.

- **Eating too much owing to stress.** In fact, when you are stressed, the digestive system is in go-slow mode because the body's resources are being directed to other more needy systems. So loading up on food will mean much of it will fester in your belly.
- **Exercising immediately after eating.** Even if you enjoy exercise, it is a stressful activity for the body. So, the same response as above occurs.
- **Sleeping immediately after eating.** Though postprandial sluggishness is normal, sleeping immediately after eating may create discomfort in the digestive system.
- **Eating erratically, with irregular meal timings.** The body likes to work according to a biological clock and inner timing. Having irregular meal timings throws not just the digestive system but other mechanisms also out of kilter.

In yoga, the metabolic fire practice (*agnisara kriya*) is seen as a powerful cleansing and toning practice for the entire digestive tract. The thunderbolt pose (*vajrasana*) has a near-magical impact on the system, because the blood flow towards the legs is totally blocked and redirected to the abdomen

Whatever the biological causes of your indigestion, some of these discomforting symptoms can be tackled by just tweaking certain lifestyle factors.

In yoga, the metabolic fire practice (*agnisara kriya*) is seen as a powerful cleansing and toning practice for the entire digestive tract. Pranayama or breathing practices like skull cleanser (*kapalabhati*) and bellows breathing (*bhastrika*) also tone it. The thunderbolt pose (*vajrasana*) has a near-magical impact on the system too, because the blood flow towards the legs is totally blocked and redirected

to the abdomen. Also, the heels press into an important acupressure point called *vajra nadi* that switches on the repairing energy line for the whole body. The stomach lock, called upward flying lock (*uddiyana bandha*), may be practised with pranayama to further impact the gut positively. It is really easy to line up the poses that work the belly—all those that give a strong pressure to the stomach may be included in this list: forward bends, backbends, spinal twists. So depending on your *sadhana* and regular practice, it is easy to create a sequence that addresses any chronic problem of indigestion you may have.

KNOW YOUR KRIYA

Dog panting breath (*svana pranayama*)

This may be done seated or standing. If standing, place palms loosely on knees, legs slightly apart. Seated, too, keep your hands on the knees. Bring your shoulders in, collapsing the belly inwards. Put the tongue out, beginning to pant lightly, with the focus only on the stomach's in-out movement. Do 10 pants to complete a round. You can do three rounds. This must be done on an empty stomach, ideally first thing in the morning. You can repeat it later, before any pranayama practice at evening, but on an empty stomach. However, such heating practices must never be done if you suffer from inflammatory conditions such as boils, eruptions, ulcers, fever, etc. **Benefits:** This tones the stomach and digestive tract.



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



HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

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

The experimenter

Sundari Ganesan • MUMBAI

“I enjoy learning and experimenting,” she says. It is a simple mantra that reflects her zest for life and keeps her young at heart. For Sundari Ganesan, a TamBrahm living in Mumbai, variety is truly the spice of life. With a deep appreciation for India’s various regional cuisines, she enjoys learning new techniques and recipes. Her recipes are published in magazines, she makes appearances on TV shows, and thoroughly enjoys teaching eager foodies, the proof of which is evident in her two grandchildren. Young Kavya Shyam, just 12 years old, already enjoys baking, and college-going grandson Kartik experiments with making pizzas and pastas from scratch. As I chatted with Sundariji, I could see how certain people had the power to channel their energy into energising others as well. Here are a few snippets of my conversation with her.

IN HER OWN WORDS

I was born in Mumbai and spent my early years in this city. When I turned 10, we shifted to our hometown Thirunelveli, in Tamil Nadu. There, I lived in a large, joint family of almost 30 members. It was an orthodox upbringing, where children were not allowed into the kitchen. But I remember watching the large-scale cooking that took place during festivals and celebrations. I think the seed of interest for cooking and hospitality lay there. After marriage, I moved to Ahmedabad. I enjoyed my time in that city and learned many Gujarati

dishes. Now, for the past 15 years, we are settled in Mumbai.

A LOVE FOR WRITING

I always enjoyed writing in Tamil. Soon after my marriage, I started submitting recipes to magazines such as *Mangayar Malar*, *Rani*, *Snegithi*, *Saheli* (Tamil), and many more. So far, I have more than 200 recipes published in magazines. I particularly

“I enjoy interacting with youngsters and enthusiastic foodies. There is always so much to learn and to teach; I find that I discover new things from them every now and again”

enjoy writing recipes that are simple and easy to read and follow. Apart from writing recipes, I also write short stories. I enjoy weaving stories from what I see around us, in the people around us, and in our families.

INFLUENTIAL COOKING SHOWS

As a family, we have always enjoyed watching cooking shows on television together, such as *Masterchef* or *Khana Khazana*. I have also made appearances in some television shows, including AMN TV, *Khana Khazana* and Captain TV. I enjoy interacting with youngsters and

enthusiastic foodies. There is always so much to learn and to teach; I find that I discover new things from them every now and again.

AN ENCOURAGING SPOUSE

When I was 21, I married P S Ganesan; he retired as an audit officer with the Central Government. My husband is my main source of inspiration. He has always had an encouraging nature, and says that participation is more important than winning or losing. He is enthusiastic about what I cook and always has a word of appreciation. What more could I ask for?

A FAMILY OF FOODIES

All of us share a common love for good food. We have two children, Shyam and Subha, who are married. Both Subha and my daughter-in-law Priya enjoy cooking and preparing new dishes. My granddaughter Kavya bakes delicious cakes and prepares some Gujarati delicacies, even though she is only in the 7th standard. My grandson Kartik is currently pursuing B Tech and has an avid interest in cooking. He likes watching how we cook and often pitches in to help in the kitchen. I think that as a family, all of us are enthusiastic to try new concoctions.

Kartik (grandson): I grew up watching *Masterchef* on TV with the family. I think that is how I became interested in cooking. I may not cook often but when I do, I enjoy it



Ganesan with her grandson Kartik

Photographs by Haresh Patel

thoroughly. I like making pastas and pizzas from scratch. I get good Indian food at home, so I prefer trying out other cuisines. I am sure cooking will always be a part of my life, whether there is a need to cook or not.

FAVOURITE FOODS

As a family, I don't think we have any favourite recipes; each of us just loves the rich assortment of flavours. When our extended family visit us from the South, they relish our North Indian dishes. I enjoy making chana

bhatura, parathas and paneer varieties. When my husband's colleagues come home, they enjoy a South Indian meal served on banana leaf. To watch people relish your food is the biggest compliment. My son says everything I cook is tasty, and my heart swells with pride whenever I see my grandchildren in the kitchen.

A QUICK AND DELICIOUS RECIPE

When unexpected guests arrive, it takes no time to make upma or dosas. Give me half an hour and

I can whip up many more dishes. One dish I make often, particularly when we have guests, is a spread with sweet corn. To make this, grate the corn off the cob. Heat some oil in a pan and add some mustard, *jeera*, curry leaves, chopped green chillies and ginger. Add the grated corn and a cup of milk and allow it to cook. Add salt, chilli powder, turmeric powder and a dash of sugar. Cook until the mixture thickens. Serve with rotis or as a spread to top toasted bread.



INSTANT MASALA VADAI

Sundari Ganesan's deep love for experimentation can be seen in this delicious recipe of instant *vadai*. It is such a family favourite that she always keeps a bottle of powdered roasted gram (*daaliya* in Hindi, *udacha kadalai* in Tamil) in her kitchen, so she can make these instantly.

Ingredients

Roasted gram: 2 cups; powdered
 Onion: 1 large; chopped fine
 Green chillies: 5; chopped fine
 Ginger: 1-inch piece; chopped fine
 Coriander leaves: A fistful; chopped fine
 Fresh coconut (optional): 1 tbs; grated
 Salt to taste
 Oil (for deep frying)

Method

Mix all the ingredients (except the oil) and bind well. The onions will add wetness to the mixture, so add very little water. Sprinkle just 1-2 tsp of water to pat the mixture into a thick dough. Divide into 12-15 portions; roll and flatten into *vadai* on a plastic sheet. Now, heat the oil in a pan and drop in a few at a time, frying evenly on all sides until they turn golden. Serve hot with coconut chutney or ketchup.

BOTTLED TREATS

I enjoy buying seasonal vegetables and fruits to make jam preserves and juice concentrates. Allowing the preserves to cook on a slow simmer fills me with immense joy. One absolute favourite recipe I make is a squash using 1 kg of ripe guavas. Clean the guavas, place them whole in a vessel (without adding any water), and cook in a pressure cooker for up to three whistles. Cool and grind the guavas without adding any water, and strain to remove seeds. Mix the guava pulp with 1 kg sugar, add 2 teaspoons of citric acid and cook until it reduces down to ¼ the original quantity. Allow to cool, add ¼ teaspoon of

sodium benzoate and mix well. Preserve in a clean bottle and store in a cool place. This concentrate is now usable for up to one year. To serve, add water and ice to concentrate and enjoy this refreshing drink chilled!

MYRIAD INTERESTS

I don't know how the day passes because I have so many interests. I enjoy reading books, chatting with friends and family on the computer, and discovering new dishes on the Internet. Whenever we go on holiday, I really enjoy visiting historical places. At home, we have a collection of old coins, old paintings and statues on display. We also have a collection of

old palm leaves (*olai chuadi*) with astrological inscriptions on them, which our elders could read. When we travel down South, we make sure to pick up some antique vessels. It is a sheer pleasure to decorate the house with all these artefacts.

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

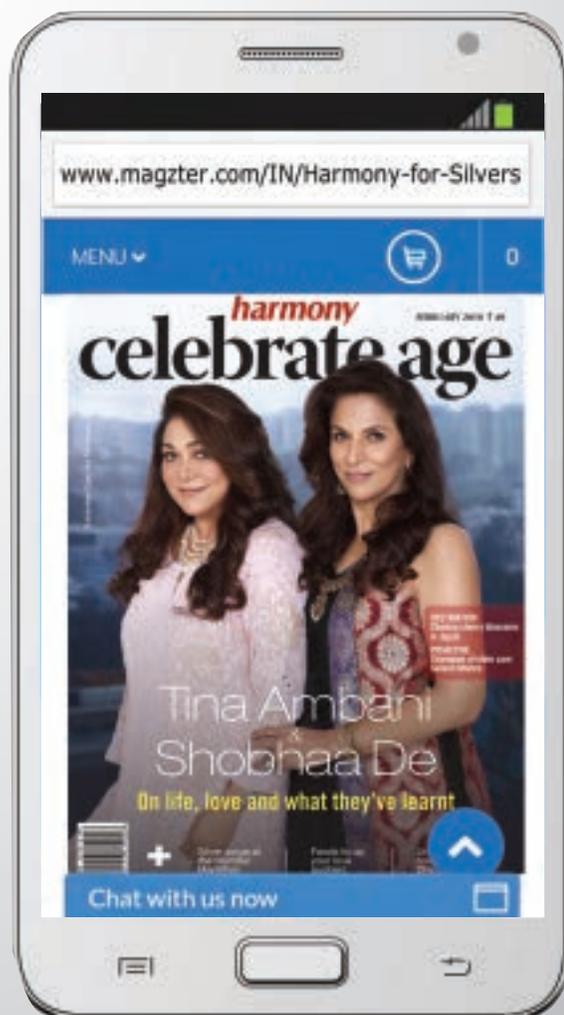


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Tax time! Intelligent tax planning within the ambit of the law is the order of the day

It is human tendency to try and retain as much of the income we generate—whether from a salary or business—rather than part with it. This becomes easy, especially if the following three conditions prevail: high proportion of cash transactions in the economy, high tax rates, and presence of easy avenues to under-report or avoid tax.

In effect, this creates a vicious circle (see diagram).

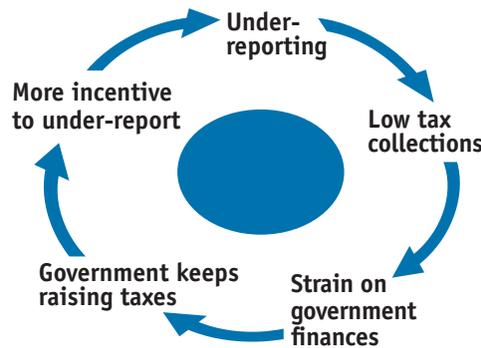
Thus, compared to other nations, India’s tax collections are among the lowest in relation to GDP (which stands for the total value of all goods and services produced by a country). And the indirect burden we as citizens have to bear for such low tax collections includes a high incidence of wealth disparity, as honest citizens who pay tax contribute to the exchequer while those who evade amass unaccounted wealth. Even more important, it leads to the underdevelopment of infrastructure and inadequate resources to meet social obligations like healthcare, education and sanitation. Before one realises it, this could cause the nation to slip back drastically on all parameters compared to its global peers.

Hence, I take this opportunity to emphasise the imperative of all citizens

to honestly declare and pay taxes and contribute towards the dream of a New India in coming decades.

Income Tax is complicated—I am not sure what I get and what I lose as a silver in India.

Albert Einstein once famously said: “The hardest thing to understand in the world is income tax.” This



sentence sums it all up, especially this quarter, as the lot of us are looking for options to minimise our tax bill! As silvers, you may be aware that under the income-tax laws, you get several concessions. To start with, if you are between 60 and 80, you don’t have to pay any tax up to ₹ 3 lakh (₹ 300,000) of taxable income. Similarly, for silvers above the age of 80, this limit is ₹ 5 lakh

(₹ 500,000). This reduces the tax burden for silvers who are mostly in retirement/non-working mode.

How do I plan to save tax as a silver?

There are various clauses under the present Income Tax Act that allow you to save tax under certain conditions. Interestingly, most of these conditions are cleverly drafted so that the maximum benefit accrues to you, if you were to fulfil them. Under Section 80C, if you invest in any of the following instruments, you are likely to get a tax break of up to ₹ 1.5 lakh (₹ 150,000) in each financial year:

- Public provident fund (PPF)
- Employers provident fund (EPF)
- Unit-linked insurance plans or ULIPs (discussed at length in “Invest in Life”, in the December 2017 edition of this column)
- Equity-linked savings scheme (ELSS funds)

Here, I would put ULIPs at the top, followed by ELSS and then EPF, with PPF being the last choice. The reason is the flexibility of the low holding period of just three to five years for the first two compared to 15 years for the latter. Further, the returns offered by ULIPs and ELSS are much higher than EPF or PPF. So why not have the cake and eat it too?

Please help me understand ELSS funds better.

ELSS are run by mutual funds that invest in listed equity shares on your behalf. There is a lock-in period of

Savings scheme	Lock-in period	Taxability of returns	Taxability of dividends
ELSS	3 years	Tax-free	Tax-free
PPF	15 years	Tax-free	No dividends
NSC	6 years	Taxable	No dividends
FD	5 years	Taxable	No dividends



123RF.com

three years but, in my opinion, that is ideal given that returns in equity funds are not predictable year on year, unlike in debt funds. It also prevents holders from selling their mutual funds every time there is a short-term fall in the market. Besides, the lock-in period is still much lower than the 15 years for PPF. ELSS funds help investors earn a respectable return over the medium to long term.

As a silver, I need to spend on medical treatment. Is there any relief for such expenditure?

Yes. Section 80D allows you to claim deduction on the amount you pay towards the premium of a health insurance policy up to ₹ 30,000 as a senior citizen. In the case of a super-senior citizen (above the age of 80), even if no amount is paid with respect

If you are between the ages of 60 and 80, you don't have to pay any tax up to ₹ 3 lakh of taxable income. For silvers above the age of 80, this limit is ₹ 5 lakh. This reduces the tax burden for silvers

to health insurance, deduction of up to ₹ 30,000 is allowable for medical expenditure. This takes into account the fact that insurance companies do not provide medical cover beyond a certain age, say 75.

Besides, Section 80DDB provides provision for deduction against the expenses incurred by silvers for

themselves/their family towards medical treatment of eligible diseases of up to ₹ 60,000; for super-senior citizens, it is up to ₹ 80,000. For claiming this deduction, you must acquire a certificate of the disease from a specialist employed on a full-time basis at the hospital, with a degree validated by the Medical Council of India.

By the time you read this, the Union Budget for 2018-19 would have been presented—I hope we see more such initiatives from the Government. I would also like to inform you that while a majority of insurance companies shy away from providing medical cover for elders, we at Ethical Advisers offer special Mediciam plans especially designed for silvers and would be privileged to offer our services to anyone who is interested.

Dick Mody, a 25-year veteran in the Indian equity markets, is the founder-CEO of Ethical Advisers. Write to us with your financial queries at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org and Mody will answer them in this column. You can also reach him directly at dhm@ethicaladvisers.in or visit www.ethicaladvisers.in

Silver service



Amritraj Esakkiappan

A mother's words inspired one of Mumbai's largest elder-care movements. Nine years on, the son, Sailesh Mishra, is powering on to fulfil his calling, writes **Sahil Jaswal**

Sailesh Mishra is not your average social crusader. There is no pain of missed opportunities, no regrets he is trying to make up for, no past atrocities he is attempting to recover from. Yet this 53-year-old is driven. Can compassion alone have motivated Mishra to become a noted gerontologist?

"I believe it was my mother who set me on this track. I will never forget her words, 'Forget yourself for others and others will never forget you,'" says Mishra, who founded the Mumbai-based Silver Innings nine years ago.

Through his foundation, Mishra has been working to change the perception of 'silver years,' from a time of

'retirement' to a stage when elders can pick up where they left off before the responsibilities and baggage of adulthood begin to kick in. Instead of looking at retirement as a time of winding down and vicariously reliving one's youth through the eyes of one's grandchildren, Mishra says it is a time to put the 'live' back into 'living'.



◀ Interacting with Meera 'aai' Chandawarkar, a resident of A1 Snehanjali

With the residents and staff of A1 Snehanjali

Ramaa Subramanian



Photomist

“We, especially the middle class, are conditioned to think that there is no life beyond 60 and I used to be one of these people,” he shares. “But I have seen dreams and hope in the eyes of seniors and that tells me they are alive, and not just living. I once helped a senior citizen to procure his identity card within 60 days, when the mandated time to process the documents was 90 days. With tears in his eyes, he handed me a candy from his pocket and hugged me firmly. In that instant, the force of all his emotions hit me. Not only was it a touching moment for me, it was an eye-opener to all the emotions and love that seniors harbour.”

Mishra’s journey with silvers began after he gave up a career in sales and marketing, a career choice he stuck with for 17 years. Born and raised in Mumbai, he acquired a bachelor’s degree in economics and worked in various marketing jobs, selling paints among other products. During this time, he evolved from an introverted sales trainee selling door to door to a social and uninhibited marketing manager. Mishra says it taught him not to baulk at problems but always look for solutions.

“Unaware of my destiny intertwined with the lives of seniors, I was busy providing for my family and earning a livelihood,” he recalls. “My wife Mona helped out financially by tutoring children at home and taking care of our daughter Drishti.” Then, in 2004, Mishra watched a television show on silvers on a Marathi channel and suddenly his mother’s words rang true. He took it as a sign and approached Dignity Foundation and FESCOM (Federation of Senior Citizens’ Organisation of Maharashtra), Mumbai’s biggest non-profits working with silvers. He told them he wanted to sign up as a volunteer. But Mishra found himself at an impasse, when negotiating the unfavourable volunteering hours suddenly turned to a full-time job opportunity. The hitch was the massive pay cut he would have to take if he wanted to work with Dignity Foundation full-time “I discussed it with my wife, who had just one thing to say, ‘If you think you can keep me happy, I know I will be happy’”

For the next three years, Mishra immersed himself in the world of silvers as he worked in various capacities

with the NGO. He grew more and more sensitive to their needs and realised that some of their biggest challenges grew out of the ignorance of youth towards them; being abandoned by their families; and ignored by the government. “With all their wisdom and experience, they are the most integral part of society and sadly also the most neglected,” he says.

It was the time he spent first erecting and then managing a township for senior citizens, run by Dignity, that really hit a raw nerve as he saw, close up, what it meant to be forgotten by society, sometimes even discarded by family. It was also his initiation to the world of dementia, with some of the residents dealing with advanced stages of Alzheimer’s.

“I started thinking of them as patients, but then I realised that they



Ashok Shah



Ashok Shah

Leading a protest march demanding implementation of the National policy for senior citizens; with PushpaMaa Foundation Cricket Team at '16 vs 60' Cricket Match; (opposite page) talking to elderly women on 'Happy Ageing' at a community project in Mumbai; at Spark of Life International Master Course in Dementia Care at Perth, Australia

were first humans," he says, fondly mentioning Laxmi, who would make him sing the same song every night before she went to sleep. He also remembers Prema, who would wake up every morning and put on a fresh coat of nail polish, do her hair up nicely and carry herself with poise and elegance. "She was a frequent visitor of the salon run by the NGO in the township." Mishra makes a poignant observation, "Sometimes, vanity isn't skin deep; it can be one's identity."

Mishra's work with seniors and Alzheimer's patients forced him to confront a painful truth. "Those were difficult times when it came to gathering information. There was no handbook on how to manage silver citizens suffering from Alzheimer's, dementia, or any other ailments." In those days, Mishra was still experimenting with digital space on the Internet and had launched a blog called *peopleforsocialcause.blogspot.in*. In his quest for more information on elder care, he decided to add blog posts on the subject.

Over time, the blog evolved into a platform where individuals, experts, groups and organisations linked to

elder care began collaborating with each other online. This prompted Mishra to launch a web portal in 2008, called 'Silver Innings'. He was amazed at the power of the Internet and how people and organisations, either offering help or seeking it, connected with each other and collaborated from across the globe.

Professor S Siva Raju, Deputy Director of TISS, Hyderabad, whom Mishra met at the International Conference on Ageing, Tirupati, in December 2008, is a strong advocate of integrating resources to enhance the quality of life of seniors. He recalls how Silver Innings has brought the elderly into public consciousness. "We were in desperate need for a platform like this, and considering how often I hear his name, I would say that the momentum Mishra's work has gathered is overwhelming. It has opened many doors for communication, sharing experiences and keeping up to date with the latest works regarding seniors."

The portal soon became a one-stop shop for everything senior-related and the response was tremendous as queries and requests for need-based services started pouring in.

Within three months, Mishra was impelled to launch the Silver Innings Foundation with bigger goals: to create programmes that would help integrate seniors into mainstream society and, in the long run, help craft an elder-friendly society where ageing would be viewed as a positive and rewarding experience.

That's how Umang, a talent show for seniors, came about in 2008. Held annually in Mumbai on World Elders' Day on 1 October, it recently shifted to the month of February for higher participation. The event, which aims to draw seniors into the mainstream, currently hosts about 125 participants aged between 50 and 79, and plays to a 1,000-strong audience.

Sneh Kala Kendra is an NGO for seniors that has been participating in Umang for the past six years. Sneha Mehta Shah, founder of the NGO, says this year, her seniors have already started preparing a dance based on a book written by Mishra, titled *Remember Me: You Me And Dementia* (Krimiga Books, 2017). "Saileshji has worked with senior citizens for over a decade and events like Umang enable elders to showcase their talents to the world," she says. "He had



Pratul Kibtiwala



Dementia Care International

Indeed, Mishra's life, eventful as it has been, has been one of epiphanies and emotional revelations. His limitless passion and boundless energy have earned him the moniker 'son to a million parents'

invited us for his book launch, where the seniors of Sneh Kala Kendra had performed a dance, shedding light on environmental issues. So, to show our appreciation, we decided to prepare a dance based on his book for this year's Umang."

Going beyond Mumbai, Mishra's reach has been extensive. As an influencer in designing senior-friendly policies, he was invited as a member of the committee finalising the Central Government's first National Dementia Strategy, organised by the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India, in 2009. In 2010, he filed an application under the Right to Information Act, challenging the appointment of a four-member review committee of National Policy on Older Persons for a population of 90 million senior citizens, while neglecting the important organisations and NGO consultation for the appointment of the committee. As a result, five sub-committees were set up, each catering to a different aspect of senior life. Mishra's work in the field of ageing also led him to the United Nations in 2012, where he participated in the Open-Ended

Working Group on Ageing, representing India on elder rights.

Anjali Rajee, executive director of the International Longevity Centre India, Pune, has worked with Mishra for a long time. In her view, one has to be humane and completely committed to the cause of seniors to become such a major influencer. "He goes out of his way to help everyone who is working towards improving the lives of seniors," she says. "His can-do attitude and passion to serve the senior community is infectious and has pushed a lot of us to serve better."

In fact, while he kept an eye on policies focusing on this vulnerable section of society, Mishra's Silver Innings Foundation launched a sporting initiative to sensitise young people towards the elderly. Under UNICEF'S Sport for Development (S4D) concept, he sponsored AI Fresco FC in 2011 and 2012 as part of his awareness campaign 'Foot D Ball to Stop Elder Abuse'. And in 2013, he started his own Silver Innings Football Club. In addition, he hosts matches encouraging the youth to play against silvers.

In August 2013, Mishra took another step in elder care by setting up an assisted living home called A1 Snehanjali in Nalasopara (West), with a capacity of 10 people, on the outskirts of Mumbai; and a second one, in Rajodi, near Nalasopara, in June 2016. Sharing her experiences with seniors suffering from dementia, Jenet Pereira, manager of A1 Snehanjali, says, "As challenging as it is, it has sweet moments. As dementia is a progressive disorder, there is no hope of getting better but there are these moments of lucidity where they 'remember me'. I learnt from Saileshji that happiness lies in little things and to spread that joy to others."

Indeed, Mishra's life, eventful as it has been, has been one of epiphanies and emotional revelations. And every one of them, whether building a cadre of individuals in geriatric care or drawing young people into campaigns for elder care, is aimed at improving the quality of life of elders. His limitless passion and boundless energy have earned him the moniker 'son to a million parents'. As for *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, we are proud to call him a friend. ✨

the time of **THEIR** **LIFE**

Celebrating milestone birthdays and living each day 'their way', Tina Ambani and Shobhaa De share their learnings on love, relationships, age and attitude in conversation with **Arati Rajan Menon**

Photographs: Ryan Martis
Makeup: Recinda Martis
Hair: Ronella Baptista



“

I'm in the best phase of my life. I know myself, I know the people around me, I know how to act and react to everything. This is my time

—Tina Ambani



ENERGY. IT'S EVERYWHERE. INFECTIOUS AND IRRESISTIBLE, IT CRACKLES IN THE AIR AND BOUNCES OFF THE WALLS.

This is a special evening: Tina Ambani and Shobhaa De in front of the camera, framed by an ethereal Mumbai seascape, two livewires wearing their years with panache (and fame with incredible lightness), living life “our way”, and loving it. It’s also a special year: Tina turns 60 this month, Shobhaa turned 70 in January—and has written a cracker of a book, *Seventy...And to Hell with It*, to celebrate.

Their chemistry is palpable as they move in for a bear hug. “What a journey it’s been for us!” exclaims Tina, to which Shobhaa responds, “We really have come full circle.” Indeed. They first met at a South Mumbai boutique when Tina was 16 and Shobhaa 26 and “clicked” instantly; soon after, the glamorous model turned editor was directing Hindi cinema’s hottest new discovery for a magazine shoot; behind the lens was the iconic Gautam

Rajadhyaksha (a dear friend they both miss “deeply”). “I was in awe of her when I first met her,” recalls Tina. “This was *the* Shobhaa!” For her part, Shobhaa was struck by Tina’s vivacity. “She was so unselfconscious and carefree,” she remembers. “It was a breath of fresh air to work with a star with no airs or tantrums, no *nakhra*.”

Over the years, this mutual admiration has only deepened. And while they cherish their roles as wives and mothers—Tina has two sons; Shobhaa, four daughters, two sons—it is immediately apparent that the greatest glue between them is their shared identity as working women. “It may sound politically incorrect but we could have both been trophy wives and done nothing but be decorative,” says Shobhaa. “However, we chose to carve our own identities. When you have opportunities and a brain, why not make the most of them?” Tina credits this in large part to their traditional

but forward-thinking families: “They allowed us to break the mould.”

Today, Shobhaa, a best-selling author (of 20 books and counting), columnist, social commentator and opinion shaper with a Twitter following of over 2.5 million, making her a key media influencer, remains as prolific as ever. And Tina steers her initiatives in the areas of art, silver citizens and healthcare while overseeing the CSR activities of Reliance Group. However, their achievements and confessedly “privileged lives” aside, they are both quick to perceive the universality of the human experience with the passage of time. So when we invited them to sit together for a chat on life, love, relationships, age and attitude, they agreed instantly. “These conversations about women, between women, about age and related issues are very important to have,” affirms Shobhaa. Here’s what they said.

FREEDOM TO FLY

Tina: For the past year, I have been wondering about turning 60; there was a sense of trepidation at first; I was a bit unnerved. But upon introspection, I realised I'm in the best phase of my life. I know myself. I know the people around me. I know how to act and react to everything. This is my time, for myself. Take travel, for instance, it's something I've wanted to do all my life. And I am at a point where I can just pick up and go. So the more I thought about it, the better I felt. And when, recently, someone was speculating about my age, I said, 'You know, I turn 60 next month'. I realised how good I felt about it. It felt great to say it out loud.

Shobhaa: This is the time to make the most of every opportunity, indulge every passion. For instance, at the age of 77, my husband Dilip is about to unveil his second exhibition of smart-phone art. His digital portraits are outstanding, the complexity of his compositions incredible. He uses his stylus like a brush, dipping into colours, shading and mixing; it's a painstaking process that requires such concentration and patience. It's amazing to watch. So now is the time to fulfil any dream that is realistic to achieve. I don't mean suddenly deciding to climb Mount Everest, but the small dreams, the doables, things you may have postponed because of your responsibilities. As a young wife, then a mother, there is a huge accumulated package of expectations from so many people. And then suddenly, at turning 70, you feel light. I now feel like I've grown wings and am ready to fly!

Tina: That's the best part about growing older; you can indulge your own creativity. After all the obligations are over, you can find yourself. You take stock of your life—that's the stage I'm in—and you are confident enough to tell others, 'Look, this is all I can do.' You can define your boundaries without hurting anyone or feeling a sense of guilt and move on with your life.

Shobhaa: Precisely. I can just dream of going to South America and take a month off to do it. This was unthinkable earlier. However, I can't say you are completely liberated. Another set of responsibilities does creep in. Family members around you may not be in the best of health and that's a concern. But in terms of personal growth and evolution, you have arrived at a stage where you really feel comfortable about your life and it leads

“THIS IS THE TIME TO INDULGE EVERY PASSION. I NOW FEEL LIKE I’VE GROWN WINGS AND AM READY TO FLY!”

—Shobhaa De

to a stage of deep peace and fulfilment. It also gives you enormous courage to do the things you may not have dared before.

STAYING RELEVANT

Shobhaa: After writing my book, you'd be amazed how complete strangers walk up to me at an airport or on the street and say with pride, 'Madam, I'm 83,' or 'I am 65'—it seems to have set off a chain reaction. It's wonderful to see people no longer ashamed to acknowledge their age, which never should have happened in the first place. But our society, every society, is very ageist and cruel towards women of a certain vintage. So when I put things in perspective, I feel very lucky. At the age of 70, I am not just physically alive to each moment but productive and relevant. In an earlier generation, to live up to 70 was a miracle in itself and, for most women, the sell-by date was probably 35—once your childbearing years are done, you are seen as a cow that needs to be put to pasture. It's good that things have changed. I see so many older women at the top of their game and it's very empowering. We are more aware of fitness, eat a healthier diet, know our bodies and minds, take better care of ourselves than our mothers.

Tina: It's very important to stay active and do things that keep you relevant. It's about having a sense of purpose; I can sense that within me. Of late, I've become an early riser. I'm so motivated and believe this is a life-changing time. I want to become very healthy; I want to empower and discover myself further.



ENERGY RESERVES

Shobhaa: Mental energy? Limitless.... and the minute you start limiting that search, you are already depleting those reserves. Physical reserves are different, of course. Let's be honest.

Tina: Infinite! It's what drives us. I get lots of energy from within.

Shobhaa: People often ask me where I get my energy from. I think it's god-given; I don't have a rational explanation for it. I enjoy every moment of my life. I always have, like Tina, and I don't want to miss out on anything.

Tina: Yes, because we want to live a full life, we don't miss out on *anything* and are interested in *everything!*

SEX

Shobhaa: Important. I think it's a primal connection and should never ever be underrated.

Tina: Yes, it is such a connecting and life-affirming process, an integral part of a relationship between two people to explore and get to really know each other. Mentally connecting with the person and conversing with them is only part of the equation. Physical intimacy completes the picture and it is another part of the relationship that evolves with time.

Shobhaa: Yes, sex when you are 70 is different than when you are 20. It takes on different dimensions but it is still two people physically expressing something to one another. It doesn't have to be a performance. And nobody should be sitting

“SEX WHEN YOU ARE 70 IS DIFFERENT THAN WHEN YOU ARE 20. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A PERFORMANCE”

in judgement, saying, 'Oh my god, can't imagine these old folks rattling around in bed.' It's nobody else's business; it's the intimacy you seek and you are lucky if you find it.

COUPLED

Tina: Anil and I are stronger than ever.

Shobhaa: I would say the same. The marriage bond is at a different level. For instance, I am much more expressive and demonstrative than I ever was in the earlier years—I now feel that was a loss for me and him.

Tina: But I thought you were always a very expressive person....

Shobhaa: No, I was very reserved. But now I realise that tenderness is an important component to cement any relationship, to show the other person you care. Not grand big gestures but little ones, the small things, to show concern, involvement, love, acceptance. And I think I'm a better person for it.

Tina: In our case, we have had a rollercoaster journey together. Today, I feel we really know each other and connect. Words are superfluous; we can read between the lines.

Shobhaa: The level of trust definitely goes up with time and so does the dependency—and I have no problem with that. Earlier I would have said, 'I am my own person, he is his own person, we are both individuals.' Now, I feel it is really okay to say we are co-dependent. In fact, it's something I cherish. Every marriage has great turbulence and highs and lows. And both of us are alpha personalities, so there are bound to be clashes. But those experiences have taught us and helped bring us to this point, this very stable, comforting and comfortable stage.

PARENTING

Tina: It's the toughest and the best job ever, delightful and challenging in equal measure!

Shobhaa: I am shamelessly intrusive as a parent, almost disgustingly so. I feel embarrassed about it sometimes and I have tried to change myself and respect their privacy zones and all that but I've been an absolute failure at it!

Tina: I am not too intrusive. I feel it's important to give my boys that space. Also, I've been fiercely independent myself and have not brooked any interference in my life so I try to do the same for them. In any case, I'm not a micro-manager by nature. But I am very intuitive about them and I always know what's going on in their life. Even though they end up telling me everything anyway!

MENOPAUSE

Tina: Done with! I didn't even realise actually; I didn't have any problems before or after.

Shobhaa: For me, too, it was a non-issue. It all went off quite easily. I didn't have mood swings or hot flashes. I had actually pre-warned my family that if they saw any sudden behavioural quirks in me, they shouldn't think I was going nuts, that they needed to be a little more sensitive. And they were!

Tina: I think I had so many interesting things happening in my life when I was menopausal that it had no great significance, actually none at all.

AGEING NATURALLY?

Tina: Yes. So far, naturally.

Shobhaa: Naturally as well. I have no problem with my lines, with the bits and bobs that jiggle and shake. And the grey hair we try and cover as best as we can. That, too, because my children have a fit about it—I would be quite happy to leave it the way it is and go naturally grey. Going under the knife is not an option at all. It doesn't mean I love the idea of getting extra lines on my face but I just don't trust intrusive procedures and surgeries that are unnecessary.

Tina: God has been kind; I have good genes and haven't faced any problems. Honestly, I don't know how I'll react if I get any more wrinkles or lines. But I think it won't unduly trouble me. I think one needs to age gracefully—that's the best way—and be comfortable in one's skin.

Shobhaa: And when you wear your lines with pride, each one tells a story.

INNER CIRCLE

Together: Very, very few!

Shobhaa: I can barely count them on one hand. My family is my trusted inner circle, my daughters in particular. With them I have no filters, no secrets. You don't have daughters, Tina....

Tina: Yes, but I have my sisters! That's my support system. We are always there for each other in every way.

Shobhaa: Outside the family, I have very few friends, most of whom go back 40 years or so. They really know you for who you are and like you for who you are, not for who you are married to or your achievements. You can be your naked self with them, warts and all.

Tina: Yes, outside the family, I do have two or three really close friends from school, college and the early years. And they will be brutally frank; they can say anything to you and it's great because they keep life real.

SHEDDING THE BAGGAGE

Tina: I have actually come to a point in my life where I don't think anything belongs to me. I feel I'm just a custodian of everything and whatever I leave behind may also ultimately fade. So I have just decided to enjoy this moment, cherish the life I have, and live it well.

Shobhaa: I started cutting the flab a long time ago from my life, more than 10 to 15 years ago. I was pretty sure about what and who I didn't wish to associate with. I wanted to focus my energy on things that bring value and meaning to my life. I think I am pursuing that path. What I would like to manage better is my level of impatience. And I would like to actually do more of what Oprah recently said—to touch people's lives. I may have done a little, but in retrospect it was absolutely nothing and I would like to do something more permanent, more substantial. I hate using the cliché 'giving back to society'. But increasingly I need to anchor myself to something beyond acquisitions; none of that has any meaning for me now. There is more to life than 'I, me, myself'.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Shobhaa: Oh, there are plenty of weaknesses!

Tina: I'd like to be a calmer human being and learn to handle adverse situations better, with less irritation and impatience. I think I am in the process of doing that; I want all negativity to leave my life. My greatest strength is a very strong sense of self-belief. I am very secure with who I am.

Shobhaa: I would say my strength is an uncompromising sense of honesty. It gets me into trouble and comes with a huge price tag but I'd never short-change or delude myself in any aspect of my life, or what I see around me. Like the saying goes, 'to thine own self be true'; I've tried my best to live with that as a guiding principle.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

Tina: For me, spirituality is what you experience and learn from, while religion is something you have been taught. I am not a very ritualistic person. I started going to temples because of Anil and now I feel I am at the initial stage of my spiritual discovery. However, it helps to have an idol or icon to focus on when you pray, something tangible to which you can connect and relate. For instance, I am a big Shiva *bhakt* and I feel the need to look upon

him when I pray. I'm also a follower of Krishna and, of course, Durga—I read my *paath* and pray every day.

Shobhaa: I am pretty ritualistic. I believe there is logic to rituals in our communities—they keep families together, they give us the opportunity to interact and share ideas, even cuisine; they keep our cultural traditions alive. I light my diyas every day, I use my *japa mala*—the same one you gave me many years ago when you went to Kedarnath, Tina! I also like my temple visits that happen without too much planning. For instance, when I was recently in Chennai, my friend took me to one of the oldest Shiva temples in the city; it happened spontaneously and we got the most incredible darshan that gave me a great sense of peace, calm and strength. Having said that, I think at the end of the day, spirituality is about finding certain qualities within yourself and living with a sense of goodness, truth and integrity. If you can do that, you really don't need to prove anything to anybody about your belief system.

SIMPLE PLEASURES

Shobhaa: Tiny, everyday pleasures are the only pleasures that count. I have a tremendous sense of adventure and curiosity. I love meeting new people—people are my narcotic! I don't think any human being in the world is a boring person.

Tina: Just walking around, eating street food and buying something from the roadside, like a simple shirt... it's the normal things that are ultimately special. Like when I come home from work and my dog Kaiser rushes to me and showers me with love!

Shobhaa: I like things that delight me; it could even be an inexpensive, glittering bauble, something that goes jingle jangle and at that moment I am like a kid—I get so excited and want to wear it right away. It's just something that captures your imagination and gives you a thrill. I have a few plants on my balcony and when they flower it's like a personal triumph! I take pictures of the blooms from every angle and it gives me a big kick.

SILVER POWER

Tina: I think it is important to give silvers a platform to realise how empowered they can be. That was the genesis of Harmony. Also, rather than depending on the government, society and other external factors, the process has to be internal. Silvers have to first empower themselves. It is so important to stay relevant for one's own self and sake. This is the best phase of life where one can realise one's dreams rather than live in a cocoon. If we can inculcate that spirit, I think we would see the true extent and potential of silver power.



“I HAVE COME TO A POINT IN MY LIFE WHERE I DON’T THINK ANYTHING BELONGS TO ME. I FEEL I’M JUST A CUSTODIAN OF EVERYTHING”

truthful, life becomes easier, simpler and less complicated. There are consequences, of course, but life gives you the strength to handle those!

EXPIRY DATES

Tina: None, no question about it. You only have one life to experience—make each day count.

Shobhaa: Society conspires to marginalise senior citizens, to make them feel they are of no consequence or use in the larger scheme of things. They are viewed as a liability. So you have to fight against this, find the inner strength to remain productive in whatever way, even if it is for your own family to respect you. You have to make the effort and it is an individual effort.

THE LEARNINGS

Shobhaa: This is a thought that crystallised when I was writing my book; it’s a very cheesy line from a Bollywood song: *Pyaar do, pyaar lo*. Without love, nothing has meaning. You can have all the success in the world but without someone to love and someone who loves you back, it’s worth nothing.

Tina: I’ve learnt that you need to be true to whatever you are doing—whether it is with your work or in your relationships, with family, friends, everybody. If you are honest, straightforward and

Shobhaa: I heard this once and it stuck in my head—‘Life is not a dress rehearsal, this is it.’ So live it with all your passion. You only get one shot, and I don’t want to blow it.

THE NEXT DECADE?

Tina: I’m going to take life as it comes, each day at a time. As I said, this time is life-changing for me. I am working really hard and doing whatever I can to improve my health, which is a priority for me, and living the life I have crafted for myself. This is a journey of self-discovery and self-actualisation—it’s both enriching and empowering.

Shobhaa: I have no grand plans at all. I am feeling really very light on so many levels. I would like to seek something I haven’t tried earlier. It could be something very simple, for my own pleasure, like learning to play a musical instrument. Of course, my biggest dream is to go to Argentina and dance the tango with a ponytailed stranger—it was my fantasy when I was a teenager, and it remains one! ✨

CHASING cherry blossoms



Canopies of pink perk up the Japanese skyline during the short-lived sakura season

📷 Rekha Sarin



Tokyo. Day 1: I was trying hard to overcome a tinge of consternation that threatened to dampen my ebullient mood. We were one of those quintessential tourists who flock to Japan to view the panorama of spring, when millions of cherry blossom trees—known as sakura—burst forth to break the bleak winter spell and bejewel the country in heavenly shades of pink.

Our stroll through Chidorigafuchi, on the northwest side of the Imperial Palace, one of Tokyo's best cherry blossom viewing spots, however, revealed no such signs of the celebrated blooms. A network of bare branches stencilled the sky and chilly wind compelled us to pull our jackets closer. "A few days earlier, the weather was warmer," said our long-standing friend Makoto Honjo. "But then we ran into a spell of unexpected rain." He looked apprehensive. "Now the flowering will be delayed."

Each year, when the blossoms arrive, Chidorigafuchi transforms miraculously, delighting sakura revellers to take boat rides on its ancient Edo-period castle moat amid canopies of pink clouds created by flower-laden trees that bend low over the water. Elsewhere, exuberant crowds jostle for space to picnic under the cherry trees to celebrate *Hanami*—the flower-viewing tradition—first adopted in the 8th century Nara rule. By the Heian period, the Imperial Court at Kyoto had started inviting the elite to outdoor feasts under the blossoms. Later, under the samurai society of Tokugawa Shogunate, hundreds of cherry trees were planted for common people to enjoy.

Visitors like us have to be fortuitous to enjoy the glory of the blossoms, the season being as short-lived as it is breathtaking. As winter departs, millions of flower clusters hasten to unfold and reach peak bloom within a week. Even as they flourish, they carry the message of an inevitable end, as their dainty petals begin to fall after another week. In the event of strong wind and rain, the blooming period gets even shorter. Sakura season unravels across the archipelago, commencing with Okinawa in the south during January. Mid-region Tokyo and Kyoto usually experience the blooming period end March or beginning April. Moving north, it can go on till May.

We had set aside two weeks to make our appointment with the blossoms and to track the flowering in Tokyo and the surrounding regions of Hakone, Izu Peninsula and Kamakura. Given the



**The Tsurugaoka
Hachimangu
shrine in
Kamakura**

whimsical weather, the big question was: Would we succeed in our quest?

As a start, we visited the 7th century Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa, one of Tokyo's oldest neighbourhoods. Entering the Kaminarimon or Thunder Gate, we joined the throbbing activity on Nakamise-dori, a charming street with colourful shops overflowing with souvenirs, Japanese fans, chopsticks and kimonos. Street food stalls did brisk business serving local snacks such as *yakitori*, sushi, handmade noodles and sweet bean paste *ningyoyaki* cakes. Having paid obeisance to the temple deity Kannon, Goddess of Mercy, we emerged through the Hozomon or Treasure House Gate to discover our very own treasure: the first sighting of a weeping cherry blossom tree that set my trepidation to rest. Crowds gravitated under a cascading shower of flower-laden tree, phone cameras were whisked out and a feeling of shared joy prevailed. A pretty kimono-clad young girl happily posed with me for a photograph.

Weeping cherry trees or *shidarezakura* bloom earlier than *someiyoshino* or standard cherry blossoms. There are over a hundred sakura varieties in Japan, in a palette that ranges from pale blush or white to vivid pink. The flowers come out before the leaves and grow together in clutches. Most varieties bear five petals, but the late blooming ones may have several frilly layers.

Besides period locales, sakura trees embellish many a street in Tokyo and offset its glittering high-rises. On an evening visit to the 54-storey slick commercial Mori Tower, the cynosure of Minato District, it was an unexpected delight to see a floodlit sakura tree in deep pink, lone and resplendent on the concourse. It was apparently a variety that had outpaced the others. Although the yellow chrysanthemum is the official flower as epitomised in the Imperial Seal, the Japanese highlight the much-cherished sakura with spotlights. Even more charming are paper lanterns strung amid the trees that flourish in parks and along river canals.

Next morning, our friend Makoto lined up an enthralling boat ride along the Meguro river that passes through Nakameguro, a residential district lined with sakura, making it a popular venue for *Hanami*. Our boat sped out of Tokyo Bay, leaving behind the futuristic skyline of towering buildings, flyovers and elevated monorail tracks, slowing down as it entered the river to take in the viewing. Flower-laden branches leaned over gracefully on both sides, creating a gorgeous panorama as we went under bridges and through river bends. In sunlit patches, the trees bloomed full, but those in shadow, still slightly bare.

Moving westwards to Hakone, a quaint mountainous town in the Fuji-Hakone-Izu



White cherry blossoms



Cherry blossoms with frilled petals



Fronds of weeping cherry blossoms



Cherry blossoms that grow in clusters

As winter departs, millions of flower clusters hasten to unfold and reach peak bloom within a week. Even as they flourish, they carry the message of an inevitable end, as their dainty petals begin to fall after another week

National Park, we were greeted by melting snow outside our hotel. Being too cold for the blossoms, no shattered expectations here. We concentrated on a tourist cruise on Lake Ashi. On the edge of the lake is the picturesque red *torii*—traditional Japanese gate—of Hakone Shrine, a familiar icon on tourism posters. Hikes, museums and art galleries apart, hot springs in this area are unique. Several resorts boast of *onsen* or baths in the curative waters that result from volcanic activity. The highlight of our trip was Owakudani or Great Boiling Valley, at 1,044 m, where crater vents spew out acrid smoke. Eggs boiled and blackened by the sulphuric pools of steaming water here supposedly increase longevity. It was perceptibly warmer as we arrived at the small *onsen* town of Izu Nagaoka, in the northern part of the peninsula. A luxuriant sakura tree welcomed us at the entrance of Kamaya Ean, a traditional inn. Stepping into slippers and donning *yukata* (a casual kimono) hanging fresh in the cupboard, sleeping on a straw mat in a Zen-like room, steam baths in the *onsen* at night, gazing at cherry blossoms from our window while sipping green tea in the morning... it was a taste of Japanese-style living.

We forayed south to the town of Kawazu, content to photograph a billboard showing *Kawazuzakura*, a dark pink early variety that blooms mid-February. Being a rainy day, it was not possible to visit Joren Falls at the head of a nearby forest trail that goes through Nanadaru, a series of seven waterfalls. Nonetheless, a scenic bus ride via the amazing spiral of Nanadaru Loop Bridge that spans two high mountains made the trip worthwhile. Going west to Atami, a lively seaside resort, we strolled down the sandy beach, taking the ropeway up a mountain at the other end to visit a reconstructed Edo-style castle, now an entertainment centre. Viewing the Pacific Ocean bay from this height, through swaying branches of cherry blossoms, was an extraordinary sight.

Closer to our hotel, we visited Shuzenji, where charming red bridges span the river as it ripples through the old town. At its famous Hie Shrine near the historic Tokkonoyu *onsen* stood a sakura making its bow at the entrance. But by far the most magnificent encounter with the blossoms was at Mishima-Taisha shrine that honours the god of the Fuji volcanic belt in the city of Mishima, gateway



Steam rises from the vents in the volcanic crater of Owakudani or Great Boiling Valley; Meguro river, Tokyo; the Great Buddha of Kamakura

to Izu. A path decked with cherry blossoms, food stalls and pink paper lamps for celebratory *Hanami* led to the inner shrine. After watching a prayer ceremony, we entered the gardens, spellbound by the heavenly spectacle of over 200 cherry blossom varieties in varying stages of bloom.

There were many more celestial gardens to admire when we visited Kamakura, just an hour's train ride south of Tokyo. Here flourished the seat of military government from 1192 for over a century and its first shogun Minamoto Yoritomo founded

the most significant shrine, Tsurugaoka Hachimangu. Taking a walk through bustling Komachidori shopping street, we stopped to enjoy a meal of udon noodles and tempura. The shrine is a massive complex with a main hall that sits on a terrace approached by a wide stairway. Walking through its gardens with ponds surrounded by blossoming trees, we stepped outside for another fiesta. Hundreds of blooming cherry blossoms stood tall on either side of the pedestrian path that approached the shrine. Clearly, we had kept our appointment with the sakura.

FACTFILE

When to go

For first-time visitors, it would be best to visit Tokyo and Kyoto, the most popular tourist destinations, towards late March and early to mid-April when cherry blossoms usually bloom. If visiting other regions, follow blossom forecasts for sakura sighting.

Visa & currency requirement

A Japanese tourist visa is required. The Japanese Yen is a strong currency and the third most traded currency in the world after the US dollar and the Euro. (1 JPY: 0.58 INR)

Tips

Hotels are expensive. For better rates, book in advance. *Ryokan* or Japanese inns can be even more expensive, but are well worth the experience.

Eating out comes in a range of prices. Meals in any of Japan's swish five-star hotels, including live *teppanyaki* preparations, are in the super-luxury price range. On the other hand, there are plenty of local restaurants in the lanes and streets that are more reasonably priced. Worth a try are mid-range *izakaya* bars—gastro pubs where you drink and have informal meals. Dishes may range from 200 to 600 yen, and drinks will cost between 250 and 500 yen. For lunch, several restaurants offer reasonable, three-course set menus hovering around 1,000 yen. For meals on the go, there are the ever popular 'Bento boxes' available at stations, convenience stores and supermarkets for as little as under 400 Yen. Prices in the countryside are lower than in Tokyo.

Tokyo has an intricate metro system with 13 lines. Most staff at the turnstiles can speak English. The super-fast Shinkansen bullet train, though pricey, connects Tokyo to most parts of the country. Regular trains run by other private rail operators are more economical.





This 11.4 m bronze statue of Amida Buddha cast in 1252 sits in calm repose against a setting of hills, regardless of the milling camera-clicking crowds. What better luck than to photograph the Buddha and the blossoms together in the glow of the setting sun!

Next morning we headed to Hokokuji, a Zen temple, whose garden spelt serenity with a tea-house, bamboo grove and trees sculpted in *niwaki* (Japanese pruning) style. My dream was better fulfilled as we walked through an ethereal passage of blossoms to Jomyoji bus stop, the branches above interlocking in divine romance. Unfortunately, there was no time to tarry, as we had to take a train to Hase, a few stops from Kamakura. We first visited Hase-dera, a temple of the Jodo sect, and admired the 9.18-m, 11-headed gilded statue of the goddess Kannon. An expansive sakura tree outside the main hall enhanced the ancient architecture of layered roofs. Built along a hill, the temple offers lovely views, with a heavenly setting of gardens below filled with flowering bushes and cherry blossoms amid stone lamps, ponds and bridges. We made it in time to Kotoku-in Temple to see the famed Great Buddha of Kamakura. This 11.4 m bronze statue of Amida Buddha cast in 1252 sits in calm repose against a setting of hills, regardless of the milling camera-clicking crowds. What better luck than to photograph the Buddha and the blossoms together in the glow of the setting sun!

Back in Tokyo for our last weekend, undeterred by a light drizzle, we walked along Kanda River soaking in the splendour of peak bloom. We took a metro to Shinjuku Gyoen. Spread over 58 hectare, this historic park has over 1,500 cherry trees of different varieties. Umbrellas in hand, we traversed vast spaces edged with ancient trees,

branches kissing the ground, brown earth carpeted with pink petals that fell as softly as the rain. We strolled to the Japanese traditional garden—there are French and English gardens as well—taking in the serene setting.

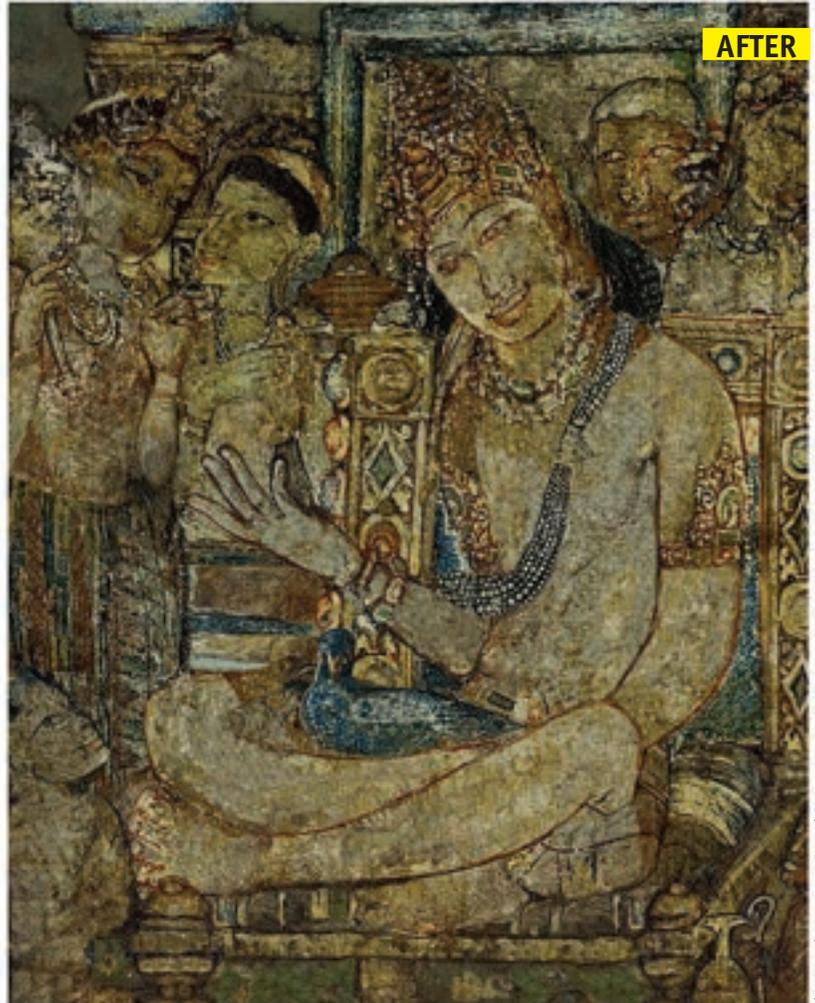
Next day, it was our plan to visit Ueno Park, another popular *Hanami* spot, but the drizzle had become a relentless downpour. Instead, we browsed in the department stores of posh Ginza street, lunching on buckwheat soba noodles and tasting Japanese tea accompanied by sakura-shaped delicacies at a contemporary cha-bar.

Day 14: During our stay, we often got to hear a Japanese folk song that dates to the Meiji period. It haunted me as we rode the airport limousine. The song goes: *Sakura, sakura, noyamamosatomo, mi-watasukagiri, kasumikakumoka, asahiniou* (Cherry blossoms in fields, mountains and villages, is it mist, or clouds? Fragrant in the morning sun.) Looking out for a last glimpse, I noticed that some leafy greens had started shooting up after the downpour and the flowers were a tad jaded. It would not be too long for the entire panorama of pink to be gagged by the foliage.

Indeed, the show goes on; the blossoms will come year after year, to adorn the country and its shrines, castles, rivers and parks. I was leaving happy in spirit, with a resolve to return—same season, another region, to see the magic unfold in this Land of the Rising Sun. ✨



BEFORE

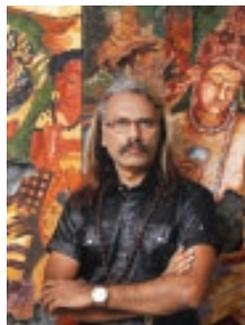


AFTER

Photographs courtesy: Prasad Pawar

AJANTA 'REINCARNATED'

For the first time ever, visitors to the Twin Galleries in Delhi got a photographic view of India's oldest-known paintings: the 2,000 year-old rock art depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha in Aurangabad's famed Ajanta Caves. Photographer Prasad Pawar (*right*), 50, and his team, spent 27 years studying the Ajanta murals and then photographing, colour-correcting and



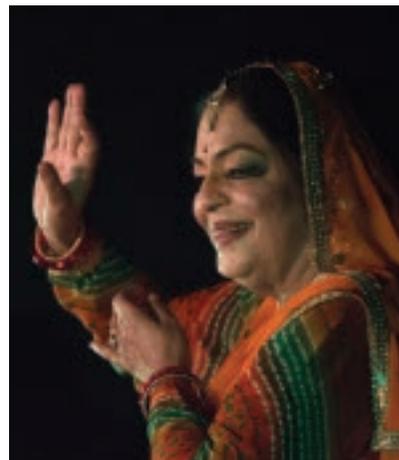
digitally restoring 14,440 sq inches of these fragile, fast-vanishing paintings. As part of his research, Pawar studied monuments as old as Ajanta across India, the characters, colour palette and psychology of the artists of the time. "We are helpless against the natural deterioration of these paintings... how will Ajanta survive for the next generation?" writes Pawar, who came upon the Ajanta Caves for the first time as a young art student in 1989, in his artist's note.

Art on location

Standing on the edge of the Aravalli Hills, the Nahargarh Fort is the lesser cousin of the famous Amer Fort, just 11 km away. But there was a flutter of unusual activity inside Nahargarh Fort recently, as Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundara Raje inaugurated The Sculpture Park within the fort at Madhavendra Palace, a first of its kind in India. In a collabora-



tion between the Government of Rajasthan and Saath Saath Arts, a foundation for the arts, the spacious, sunlit rooms of the palace have been transformed into a permanent gallery space. Fifteen Indian and nine international sculptors, including Subodh Gupta, L N Tallur and Ravinder Reddy, are displaying their work in the first edition. "For people to be able to get to the works, where their imagination can be captured, where things can happen within these beautiful walls, it is a great privilege," Raje said at the opening.



Photographs by Indranil Dey

Sound of music

It was a treat for the classical connoisseur as the best of the best in music performed at the 18th edition of Swami Haridas Tansen Sangeet Nriya Mahotsava in Delhi last month. Opened by founder Uma Sharma (*above right*), 75, who presented Kathak taught to her by her celebrated guru Shambhu Maharaj, doyen of the Lucknow gharana, the royal line-up of the four-day festival included *sarodiya* Ustad Ashish Khan and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan; Patiala gharana's Kaushiki Chakraborty; Mohan veena instrumentalist Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt (*top, right*); vocalist Chhannul Mishra (*above left*); and sitarist Ustad Shujaat Khan. "People say I present the regulars on stage. These are the people who know some of the finest older pieces, and have been very close to legendary artists. Our audiences should be aware of these rare pieces. *Puraani cheeze gum ho jayengi nahi toh*," Sharma told *The Indian Express*, before her opening performance on 11 January. As for her, "I still dance because I'm passionate about it. I don't feel tired, ever."



Photographs courtesy: Hari M Mohanan

The world in a TEACUP

This Kochi-based, globetrotting tea vendor has a powerful message for one and all—‘It’s possible,’ writes **K P Pushparaj**



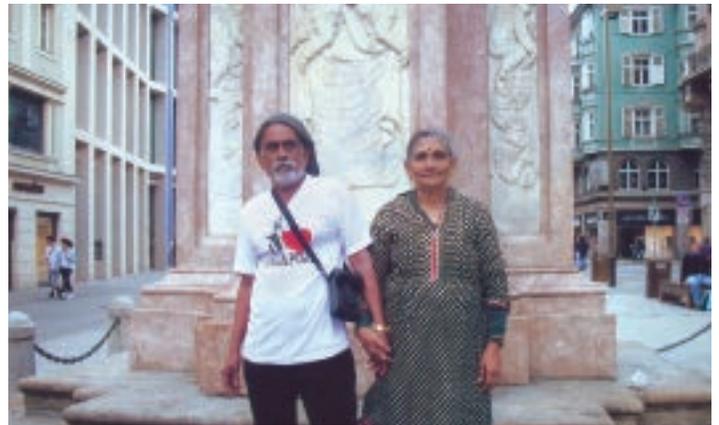
K R VIJAYAN AND WIFE MOHANA can barely contain their excitement ahead of their 44th wedding anniversary. The couple has gifted themselves a trip to China and, although still four months away, they can’t stop dreaming of their exotic, week-long tour. It’s an anniversary plan not unlike many others, yet this one is extra special because this globetrotting couple runs a tea stall for a living. If that’s hard to believe, there’s more. Vijayan, 68, and Mohana, 63, have visited over 50 foreign destinations in Asia, Europe and the US. And having travelled to three continents, they have their sights firmly set on Antarctica.

“I started out as a mobile tea vendor on a bicycle in and around North Cochin. Later, I started a *thattukada* [street-side eating joint] before I opened this tea shop in

1995. I serve 300 to 400 cups of tea a day, at ₹ 5 per cup, and a few simple snacks,” says Vijayan, owner of Sree Balaji Coffee House in Kathrikadavu, Cochin.

The bearded tea vendor—or intrepid globetrotter—depending on how you look at him, had travel written in his destiny. He credits his father, a tea vendor in Chertala in Alappuzha district, for his wanderlust. “I started visiting different places when I was eight or nine years old. My father would hire a bicycle and take me to new places in and around Alappuzha just to show me around. That experience made a lasting impact on me,” he recalls.

“As a schoolboy, I dreamt of visiting the big city, Cochin. I remember the thrill of travelling to Thiruvananthapuram



“While sitting outside the temple after darshan, an aeroplane flew above us. I wondered aloud about when I would be able to fly. Although my fellow pilgrims scoffed at me, the image of that plane stayed with me”

by Kannur deluxe bus. After Kerala, my next dream destination was Madras in Tamil Nadu,” explains Vijayan, whose travels all over India are the stuff of envy even for the well-heeled. “My travel aspirations in my 20s took me to almost all popular Indian cities. I am so crazy about travelling that I also loved watching movies with overseas themes and stories,” he admits. Vijayan was lucky to find a travel companion in Mohana after they got married in 1973. It only encouraged him to scale up their travel plans to include more unusual destinations in the country. Overseas travel was still a long way off. “I was born and raised in Cochin and the first time I left the city was to travel to Tirupati with my husband. It was exciting to see places outside Cochin and I had no idea that it was the beginning of a life of travel,” says the soft-spoken Mohana.

Between 1973 and 2007, the couple’s travels took them to pilgrim sites across India,

to the deserts of Rajasthan, rugged mountains of Mussoorie and all the way to the Wagah border. But it was a trip to Tirupati in November 2007 that gave wing to the couple’s desire to journey overseas.

“While sitting outside the temple after *darshan*, an aeroplane flew above us. I wondered aloud about when I would be able to fly. Although my fellow pilgrims scoffed at me, saying those were dreams of the rich, the image of that plane stayed with me,” says Vijayan, for whom a challenge is nothing but a new goal to be achieved.

Soon after, he spotted an advertisement for a package tour to the Holy Land and he decided to take the plunge. It was the couple’s first trip overseas. “We had no passports but the tour operator helped us get them quickly so that we could sign up for the trip,” recalls Vijayan. “Our first-ever flight, on 27 December 2007, was

Vijayan and Mohana in Paris, France; Switzerland; and Padua, Italy

Opposite page: At Madam Tussauds, Amsterdam, Netherlands; at their Sree Balaji Coffee House in Ernakulam



Vijayan says his most favourite memories are of their trip to Singapore, whose road discipline and civic sense had him at hello. For Mohana, Switzerland was a seductress

**At the
Swarovski
Kristallwetten
Museum,
Austria; Venice,
Italy**

unforgettable. And we enjoyed the 2008 New Year celebrations on the banks of the Nile,” says the tea vendor, adding that no horizon was too far to conquer after that.

Explaining the economics of their travel mania, Vijayan says they only opt for packages offered by tour companies. But, for tea vendors, isn't that still a tad out of reach? Not quite. After the couple's story made it to a local television channel, they attracted a lot of attention, and sponsorships started coming in from celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan and Anupam Kher, and other well-wishers. Vijayan has shared his experiences on popular online platform TEDx and been invited to speak at various schools as well. The couple was also the subject of an award-winning documentary feature titled *Invisible Wings*, directed by Hari M Mohanan.

“Banks have also helped us with loans. We repay our loans as quickly as possible so that we can embark on our next trip,” he laughs. “I believe in celebrating life without hurting anyone and only creating enough wealth to meet our responsibilities.” He says they don't have many major financial responsibilities, especially since both their daughters are married and well-settled.

Their travel adventures over the last decade have made for many happy memories, all of them captured on a point-and-shoot digicam. Neither of them can operate the camera properly, so their memories consist of a series of oddly framed

images of the couple at destinations around the world—clicked by fellow travellers.

Speaking of memories, Vijayan says his most favourite ones are of their trip to Singapore, whose road discipline and civic sense had him at hello. For Mohana, Switzerland was a seductress. “The scenic beauty and lovely ambience of the place made me fall in love with it,” she says.

Vijayan and Mohana do not speak English but the language barrier has not stopped them from getting the most out of every trip. “We have no difficulty understanding the instructions of our tour guides or communicating with fellow travellers but find it difficult to express ourselves in international languages,” he reveals.

Asked to name one wild memory, and a sheepish grin lights up Vijayan's face. “I thought I would try my luck at a casino in Las Vegas during our US visit in 2014 but I lost a hundred dollars on games like roulette, the slot machines and some card games.” Then he shakes his head, “Those games were so simple....”

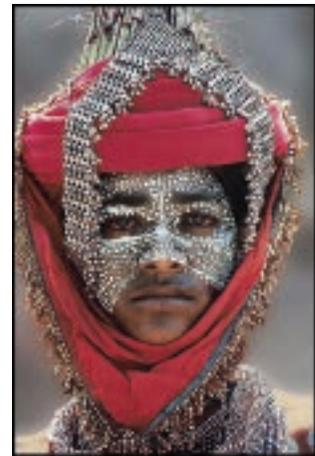
If first-world comforts and the near-impeccable civic sense in Western countries never fail to wow our diehard travellers, there is one thing that Vijayan is not impressed with: the tea and coffee vending machines! “One day, maybe I will run a petty tea shop in the US, just to make the Americans taste real tea!

“ I believe nature is real. There is a new revelation every minute. Any person with cognisance to learn will see how giving yourself to nature will constantly deepen your desire to receive. It requires the antenna of a child. You need to be voracious. My works are light-sensitive. Every time you'll see a different light. My inspiration is light and there are a million shades in the range of light.

—Painter **Natvar Bhavsar**, 83, speaking to *Open* magazine on his first retrospective in India, titled *Homecoming*, which took place in Mumbai recently and will be travelling to Delhi soon



Girl and *mandana*, Rajasthan, 1989; Gheriyo Gujarat, 1969; Madhya Pradesh, 1981; Ahir boys, Kutch, 1969



Photographs by Jyoti Bhatt

Eye of the printmaker

He is renowned for his paintings and printmaking but Jyoti Bhatt has always been inspired by photography. “It is because of the camera that the art of painting has further developed,” the 83 year-old artist told *Sunday Guardian* on the sidelines of his solo photography exhibition, titled *My Land, My Village*. “Painters were able to develop many new forms of painting as they realised they should bring forward that which the camera can’t capture.” Inspired by the likes of Raghu Rai and Kishore Parekh, Bhatt has travelled deep into



the hinterland of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. “Stones have been thrown at me; I missed being the subject of an axe; my jeep was attacked by the tribals. People



don't like anyone intruding in their private life, and one should completely respect that,” says Bhatt, whose exhibition was held at Mumbai's Rukhshaan Art Gallery in January.



OFF THE CUFF BY RAJU MUKHERJI

A SAGE OF A SPORTSMAN

The greatest hockey player the world ever produced, Dhyhan Chand was a team player who shone on and off the field

No Indian has heard of Dhyhan Singh, the sportsman. But every Indian has heard of the legendary Dhyhan Chand. Both names actually belong to the same person—one fine evening, Singh became Chand! Why and how did that happen?

The story is perhaps apocryphal but there is a distinct authenticity surrounding the circumstances. When his regiment slept at night, a young *subedar* would pick up his hockey stick and practise alone. His commanding officer, a Britisher, watched him intently under moonlit nights and marvelled at the man's perseverance. As Dhyhan tore into oppositions during the regimental matches, the officer went into ecstasy, "*Chand ka tukda*." And the name 'Chand' stuck.

Born in Allahabad in 1905, the young Dhyhan was a wrestling fanatic who idolised 'The Great Gama' Pehelwan (Ghulam Mohammad Baksh). But he followed his soldier-father, who played hockey for the regimental side, and had settled down in Jhansi. Coming on as a substitute in one encounter, he caught the eye of a British army officer, was drafted into a youth team, and the saga of Dhyhan Chand began.

Sobriquets like 'wizard' and 'magician' followed his exploits. His non-conformist techniques staggered the world. For his part, he was a martinet; his principles and sense of patriotism bordered on lunacy. When Adolf Hitler offered him a field marshal's post in Germany, he politely declined. Dhyhan Chand was an ardent Indian patriot who could not visualise serving anybody but his motherland. He was the original 'Dada' of Indian sport.

For him the nation came before self, family and friends. At a time when he was in dire financial straits, Australia offered him a coaching assignment. Again, he refused because he felt that if his coaching led to Australia defeating India, he would not be able to hide in shame! He sacrificed financial security for himself and his family for the cause of his motherland. In these days of match-fixing and brib-

ery, Dhyhan Chand would appear to be of unsound mind. In truth, he was the opposite; he exemplified the difference between a patriotic professional and a low mercenary.

Dhyhan Chand had a wide repertoire of hockey skills but he never played to the gallery. On the contrary, he used them for the benefit of his mates and his country. His early coach Bhole Tiwari, whom he addressed as *Guruji*, drilled into him that hockey was a team game and no individualism would be tolerated. No unsavoury incident affected him. Every obstacle appeared to inspire him to further laurels.

Dhyhan Chand exemplified the difference between a patriotic professional and a low mercenary. He had a wide repertoire of hockey skills but he never played to the gallery. On the contrary, he used them for the benefit of his mates and his country

On his first trip with the India team in 1926 to Australia, his artistry made him a celebrity as he scored over 100 goals and helped others to convert many more. But the India captaincy eluded him both in the 1928 and 1932 Olympics—because he was a 'commoner' by birth.

However, by the Berlin Olympics in 1936 the crown was deservedly on him. With or without it, he was the king of the game. Still, despite three gold medals in three Olympics, he

and his mates made no financial gains as the amateur ideals were very strictly enforced at the Olympics in those days.

World War II shortened his career. Nevertheless, his genius was acknowledged far and wide. His statue came up in Vienna. India accorded him the Padma Bhushan and, after his death in 1979, a postage stamp was issued to honour him. In 1995, a statue was installed in New Delhi, the first for any Indian sportsman. And his birthday, 29 August, is celebrated as National Sports Day.

On the Padma Bhushan presentation day, Prime Minister Nehru asked him, "*Dada*, you have so many medals. Please give me one so that I can also put it on my chest and look like a sportsman." Dhyhan Chand replied, "*Panditji*, on you only the rose looks good." Such was his sense of honour. He did not believe in gifting away hard-earned awards to people who did not earn them. Can you imagine a sportsman today refusing the PM's request in such a cheerful manner?

In Pankaj Gupta, the mercurial manager of the India hockey team, he found a friend-philosopher-guide. Dhyan relied on Gupta on various off-the-field issues. At the time India played under the British flag. Dhyan Chand later recounted, "Before the Olympic final against Germany in 1936 we were a little nervous, having just lost to them in a friendly match. But our manager suddenly produced a Congress tricolour and told us this was a fight for India's independence. The players, comprising Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, became highly motivated. We saluted the flag, prayed, and went out to fight for our motherland."

Normally, geniuses are highly individualistic and prefer to draw the entire focus on themselves. But *Dada* was different. He was a team man who helped others excel. He relied on discipline and selflessness. Once he rebuked his brother, the brilliant inside-forward Roop Singh, for being selfish at play, "Kishen, you may leave the field since Roop has decided to play in your position as well as his!" The irony was not lost on Roop Singh, and the message was clear to the entire team.

Today, we hear hockey has declined in status in India because there is no money in the game. This was the case in Dhyan Chand's days as well—but no one raised this issue when India was winning gold in the 1928, 1932 and 1936 Olympics. When Dhyan was asked about the lack of monetary support, he laughed: "We were not playing hockey to earn money. We were playing for India's glory."

Once, in 1937, actors Prithviraj Kapoor and K L Saigal came to watch Dhyan Chand and Roop Singh play. At half-time the score was nil. Saigal commented, "I have heard so much about you. Surprised to see that you are unable to score a single goal." Dhyan replied, "Will you sing as many songs as we score goals?" Saigal nodded in agreement. Dhyan and Roop scored 12 but by then Saigal had left the field for some urgent work. However, the next day, he invited the team to dinner, regaled them with his enchanting voice, and presented every member with a wristwatch. Different era; different values.

After Independence, the great man was generally ignored by the people who administered Indian hockey—no one thought that he would be able to contribute in any way! While his protégé Shah Dara was doing wonders for Pakistan as an administrator and coach, here in India we had no time for the greatest ever hockey player the world had ever produced. Once, Dhyan Chand was given a coaching stint in Patiala. While he was showing his deft stick-work, Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) chief Nagarwala intervened to show Dhyan the correct way!



Courtesy: Raju Mukherji

An unpublished photograph of Dhyan Chand (left) giving his last interview to journalist Tapan Ghosh

Dhyan, ever the gentleman, politely asked him to take over the coaching assignment. Within a few days, Dhyan was asked to put in his papers. That was the end of his coaching career in India.

After the 1971 war with Pakistan, the first sports contact between India and Pakistan was in 1974. Indira Gandhi was advised by Siddhartha Shankar Ray, her cabinet minister and a former cricketer, to use the image of Dhyan Chand to renew India's relationship with Pakistan. Immediately an Asian all-star team was invited to come and play on Indian soil. And the great Shah Dara arrived to pay his unbounded respect to his mentor.

The last person to interview Dhyan Chand happens to be the scholar-journalist Tapan Ghosh. According to him, at a tea reception hosted by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in New Delhi, Dara said, "*Dada*, you are the real guru of subcontinent hockey. Whatever we have learnt was only because of you." The hockey match was a smashing success as the channels of communication were again laid open between the two countries. Even after over three decades, the image of Dhyan Chand had not diminished a bit in the world of hockey.

But, in India, no one found the time for Dhyan Chand. The simple man who had made the country proud was in penury after retirement. Neither the IHF nor the Sports Ministry took a single step to relieve his financial problems. According to his biographer Nikhet Bhushan, close to the end of his life the legend lamented, "When I die, the world will cry but India's people will not shed a tear for me. I know them."

Dhyan Chand was a natural gentleman. A genius. An ambassador in the best sense of the term. He was a hermit who lived the life of a chivalrous knight, high on principles, discipline and self-respect. A person who exuded gentleness on and off the field—a sage of a sportsman.

Kolkata-based Mukherji is a former cricket player, coach, selector, talent scout, match referee and writer



Tech-tonic shift

Grappling with technology may be cumbersome in the silver years, but it is totally worth it, writes **Shyamola Khanna**

Technologically challenged gizmo junkie’—that’s what my kids call me. Can’t blame them. My desire for acquiring the latest tech toys and painful travails while trying to get up, close and personal with each of them is common knowledge in our household.

I have been working on a personal computer for over 15 years now, having bid goodbye to the old typewriter. I learnt on the job; friends very patiently made corrections on page layouts, while teaching me about ‘justify’, ‘left aligned’ and ‘right aligned’. I use my desktop to write on all kinds of subjects and have the pleasure of seeing my byline in magazines once a week.

Then, I remember this old digital camera my daughter gifted me when she got a fancy new one. I started fantasising about shooting pictures that would accompany my stories as full-blown centre spreads. It took me no time to realise there was no rocket science involved in using a digital camera—just ‘aim and shoot’, as simple as that.

The next step in my organic evolution was uploading pictures to the Picasa web album. My daughter gave me instructions over the phone from Bangalore: “Right click on this”, “left click on that”, “once the menu scrolls down, click on ‘upload’ and it will be done”. My husband has always complained that I did not know my left from my right. It has taken me all these years to finally believe him, for I find myself clicking away on the left side of the mouse when I am supposed to click on the right.

As I was travelling a lot and writing about my experiences, I convinced myself that I needed a laptop. A local dealer got me a Dell and showed how to get it started. I made myself a cup of coffee and sat down, raring to go. To my horror, I just could not open it. After tinkering with it for

some time, I called the dealer. He came by, flipped it open and told me how to get on with Microsoft Word. Next morning, despite repeated attempts, the laptop refused to open. I tried shoving the sides apart. But soon enough, I gave up as I could hear some hinges move. I got back on the phone with the dealer and, sure enough, he was annoyed. Sheepishly, I watched him yank it open once again, this time realising all this while I had been trying to pull the laptop open at the wrong end. The penny dropped; red-faced, I thanked the dealer for his patience.

Meanwhile, my son, who knew that some of the pictures I shot had made it to print, gifted me a beautiful Cannon 500D, along with a tripod and other accessories. My son-in-law got me one of those backpacks that could accommodate the camera and the laptop. I was all set for my trip to the Andaman Island. As far as the gadgets were concerned I was good to go, but soon realisation dawned that I was no longer 18 and strong enough to carry both the laptop and the camera along with accessories on my back. Soon, I began to find excuses for avoiding either the camera or the laptop as I went around exploring the island.

On my recent trip to China, I carried only the camera and made little notes on my regular little notebook. I did

my own little ‘knob-turning’ on the camera—from ‘action’ to ‘portrait’ to ‘landscape’ was easy enough. But as luck would have it, the battery charger of the camera began to give me trouble. Simultaneously, my mobile phone charger also decided to give up. I called up my photography guru and asked for help. He took the charger home, charged his own camera battery and told me there was nothing wrong with it. As I sit here wondering what is possibly wrong with my brain cells that process technical information, I can hear my daughter yelling, “Now I know where I get it from!”



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LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY

**Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) reflects
on the universal nature of love**

The fountains mingle with the river,
And the rivers with the ocean;
The winds of heaven mix forever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In another's being mingle -
Why not I with thine?

See, the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower could be forgiven
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea; -
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?

Known for his lyrical style and idealistic political thoughts, Shelley is one of the most influential voices of English literature

authorspeak

Bonding with Ruskin

She is a woman of many parts: journalist, author and academic. For Dehradun-based **Jaskiran Chopra**, the transition from one role to another has been seamless. Though she teaches English literature at Doon University, Chopra's debut work *Jashn-e-Tanhai*—a bouquet of 85 ghazals and *nazm*—was in Urdu, and was released to critical acclaim in 2004. Her poems speak of love and yearning. *Autumn Raga* and *Memories of Another Day*, which followed, were set in Dehradun and marked by nostalgia for its sylvan surroundings. Her latest, *Fiction and Film—Ruskin Bond's Romantic Imagination*, is a fascinating narrative of the life and work of the iconic writer. Through her book, Chopra breaks the myth that Bond is essentially a children's writer. Her work also brings into focus the Romantic tradition inherited from the West. In fact, the book highlights the core of romance that lies at the heart of Bond's imagination. In an exclusive interview with **Raj Kanwar**, Chopra unfolds the different aspects of Bond's persona. Excerpts:

How and when did you start writing?

I belong to a family of writers. Ever since I can remember, I saw my parents writing stories, novels and poetry. My father Mahinder Singh Sarna was a well-known Punjabi writer whose works have been translated into Hindi and English. My mother Surjit Sarna has also written a lot of poetry. My father received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his writing and my mother for translation. My brother Navtej, who is currently India's ambassador in Washington, and I were greatly inspired by our parents and began writing while we were still in school. I began with poetry and went on to write prose. My brother has written several acclaimed books, the latest being *Second Thoughts: On Books, Authors and the Writerly Life*. The environment at

home encouraged me greatly. Literature has always been my first love. I write poetry almost every day.

Where do you place Bond's work vis-à-vis other contemporary Indian writers in English?

He is absolutely different from the rest. He is a subjective writer; most of his work is about his own life and surroundings. He is a writer whose emotional and physical space is the same. He loves writing about the times gone by, people who have passed away, and places that have now lost their charm. Nostalgia is a strong theme in his works, unlike other writers of his day and age. Also, his passionate description of nature makes him unique. He is actually a poet at heart; his vision of the world is very poetic. There are many writers who have lived in these lovely surroundings and yet never written about it. Ruskin is truly one of a kind! He puts his own life in his writings like no one else can or does.

“He is absolutely different from the rest. He is a writer whose emotional and physical space is the same. His passionate description of nature makes him unique”

Bond has not had mainstream recognition despite his universal appeal and popularity. Why is it so?

He has been writing for around seven decades now. His first book was written when he was a teenager. His presence on the literary scene began to be acknowledged on a wider scale only in the 1990s. However, there is a tendency to view him as a children's author due to his interest in themes of innocence and childhood. He is not considered a serious author who should be studied by students of English literature in colleges and universities. The depth and variety of his writing have been overlooked. Not many realise the pain that has gone into his writings. He makes his stories look very simple, but then they are so only on the surface. Bond has said many times that this simplicity is deceptive.



Amit Sharma

How would you define Romanticism in literature?

Romanticism is the name given to a movement in literature that began in the 18th century. It originated in Europe and was at its peak from 1800 to 1850. Romanticism emphasised the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental.

Is loneliness a part of Bond's persona?

He had a very lonely childhood and adolescence. He was almost on his own after his father's death when he was just 10. However, he has always tried to fill his solitude with creativity, giving us one book after another. Despite

his large adopted family, I feel that he is still a loner at heart and possessive about his solitude as he was as a young boy.

You mention his "eco-critical approach". Can you elaborate on that?

Eco-criticism links literature to the environment and nature. Being so close to nature in life in general and in his writing, Bond lent himself to an eco-critical approach easily.

When did you read him first?

I first read Bond when I was in seventh grade. It was his first book, *The Room on the Roof*. After that, I would constantly search for books by him in the school library and bookshops in Dehradun. Ever since I read his *Love is a Sad Song*, I have been a major fan of Bond's writing. As a journalist, I have had the chance to review many of his books.

What impelled you to take up Bond's 'romantic imagination' as the subject for your dissertation—the basis for your new book?

There has not been much research about this important dimension of his writing. Being a romantic myself, I could appreciate this poetic aspect. Ruskin's work is nothing if not an expression of his romantic imagination.

Tell us about your teaching experience.

I began teaching at the university as a faculty for mass communication. For several years, I taught subjects such as advertising, public relations and cinema. Recently, I have begun teaching English literature. Sharing one's experience and knowledge with university students is indeed enriching. It makes me learn and unlearn many things. I enjoy teaching immensely. It is an interactive process and helps me evolve constantly.

What are your hobbies?

Besides writing and reading, I am passionately fond of music. Hindustani classical music—about which I wrote in *Autumn Raga*—ghazals and songs from old Hindi films are what I love to listen to. Going up to the hills is another favourite activity. Also, I love to catch up on old Hindi films on TV, especially from the 1960s, the golden era of Hindi cinema.

LOVE ACTUALLY

It's never too late to find love, says **Sara Davidson**

Whether you're 35 or 75, it's never too late to fall madly (or gently and even sacredly) in love. Just ask actress Ellen Burstyn and a host of other women who found themselves in the heat of romance when they least expected it.

My mother met the love of her life when she was 84. A widow for nine years, she spotted Harold Lapidus, a retired doctor, standing alone at a bridge club. She asked if he wanted to play, and they became inseparable.

"He's a younger man," she told me.

"How young?" I asked.

"Oh..." she said. "I think he's 80."

They're still devoted to each other as my mother moves into her 90s, which fills me with awe. But do I have to wait that long?

I've been unattached for seven years and have become very good at it. I love my house, my work, and my kids, and every day I'm grateful for good health and what I see as a fortunate life. But sometimes I ache for a partner to check in with, talk, snuggle, and grow spiritually with. I'm afraid that in my 60s, after two divorces, such love may be behind me, as the pickings get slimmer every year.

This depresses me, and I wonder if my mother's experience was a fluke. But during the past month, I've talked to a dozen women, ranging from their late 40s to their 90s, who've found deep love—a soul mate—long after they thought that was possible....

As I listened to these stories, I felt...hope. And I wanted to explore whether this kind of love happens because of luck, karma, or accident, or if there are interior changes one can make or steps one can take to connect with a partner at any age. What surprised me was that the women's stories were remarkably similar. All had been afraid they were too old. They all relished their independence and had come

to terms with the fact that they might never find another mate. At the same time, they'd done inner work that enabled them to feel worthy of love, ready to accept a man as he is and be accepted unconditionally by him.

What about people who've been married multiple times? Do they see this as failure and throw in the towel? Do they privately fear, as I do, 'I'm just not good at relationships—I lack the gene?' Or do they acquire knowledge and skills that make later relationships more fulfilling?

I explored this and other questions about love after 50 in my book *Leap! What Will We Do with the Rest of Our Lives?* I wrote about my friend, Joan Borysenko, the spiritual teacher and author of *Minding the Body*, *Mending the Mind*, who'd just divorced her third husband when we met. Shortly after, she began telling friends that she was getting married for the fourth time to Gordon Dveirin, an organisational psychologist who'd also been married three times before.

Joan knows—as do the other women—that infatuation burns out and deeper affinities must rise. "At first it's like you're drugged," she says. "You have seen the promised land. You can't sustain that bliss forever, but after four years, we're still in it a lot of the time." She says they've cultivated ways to return to that state.

"How?" I ask.

"Being in nature together, sharing spiritual practice, creating together—like writing or designing a garden, when all of a sudden ideas are flowing and you're in that magical space." She says what's different about love when you're older "is that we're so damned grateful. I'm even grateful for my previous marriages—I don't consider any of them failures—because you get honed in the process. They readied me for this."



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California-based Davidson (b 1943) is a journalist, novelist and screenwriter. She is the author of international bestseller *Loose Change*



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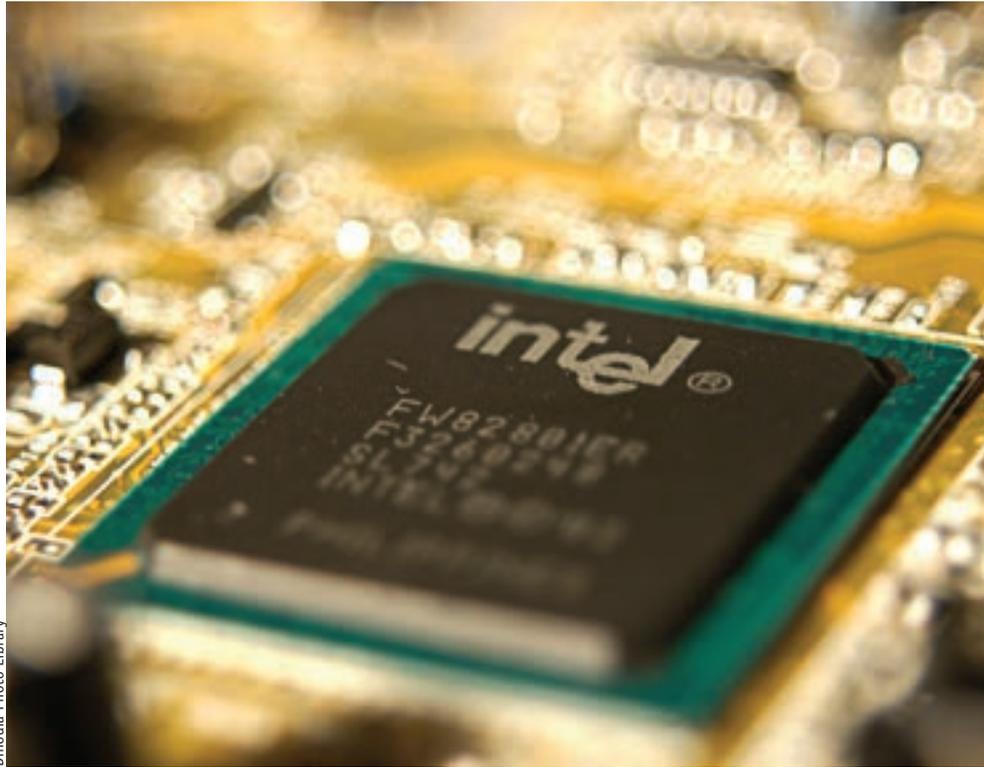


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Intel-ligent!

It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that, today, the world runs on microchips. All around us, millions of them are continuously at work—inside our computers, television sets, phones, printers, airplanes, cars, trains, CD players and other electronics. The company that created the world's first commercial microprocessor chip, Intel Corporation, was founded on 18 July 1968 by semiconductor pioneers Robert Noyce and Gordon Moore. While Noyce is credited with the realisation of the first integrated circuit that fuelled the personal computer revolution and gave Silicon Valley its name, Moore is known for Moore's Law which predicted that computer processing power would double every year.

The California-based company has been at the vanguard of much of the technology that supports the devices we depend on in our daily lives. It is estimated that there are far more chips on the earth today than people. These chips pack more than a billion components into an area the size of a human fingernail. The digital revolution unleashed by the microchips, fostering the rapid growth of the computer industry, is comparable to the Industrial Revolution. Without the microchips, there would have been no iPads, PCs, laptops, or even the Hubble Space Telescope.



Dinodia Photo Library

Besides microprocessors, Intel—which stands for Integrated Electronics—also manufactures motherboard chipsets, integrated circuits, flash memory, graphics chips, and other devices related to communications and computing. To celebrate its golden anniversary, the company, whose chips are an integral part of electronic gadgets in every household, has changed its iconic 'Intel Inside' advertisement to '50 Years of Experience, What's Inside!'

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: FEBRUARY 1968

- On 7 February, an Indian Air Force plane crashed in the Himalaya, killing 102 army men, many of them from the Garhwal Rifles.
- On 8 February, science fiction film *Planet of The Apes* premiered in New York City.
- On 11 February, the current version of New York City's Madison Square Garden was opened to the public.
- On 19 February, the International Court of Justice settled the dispute between India and Pakistan over the Rann of Kutch, awarding 90 per cent of the land to India.

“First, you forget names, then you forget faces. Next, you forget to pull your zipper up and finally you forget to pull it down.

—German jurist Leo Rosenberg (1879-1963)

Textpectation

n. The anticipation one feels when waiting for a response to a text message.

EXAMPLE: To be fair, **textpectation** doesn't apply only to the typing awareness indicator; it can rear its impatient little head whenever you launch a text message out into the ether, regardless as to whether you're actually watching the typing awareness indicator immediately afterward or not. However, there can be no denying that those three little dots that tell you when someone is typing out a message in real time make the whole thing that much worse—especially if they vanish inexplicably and no message is forthcoming.

—Lucia Peters, “What does ‘textpectation’ mean? Finally a word to describe the horrors of the typing awareness indicator”, *Bustle*, 19 May 2015

Destinesia

n. When you get to where you were intending to go, but forget why you were going there in the first place.

EXAMPLE: Have you ever run downstairs, walked into a room and had a wave of confusion wash over you? The likelihood of **destinesia** increases with age. It's that sensation of knowing where you are but having absolutely no idea why you are there.

—Ted Markle, “One last chance to put words in your mouth”, *Annapolis County Spectator*, 27 February 2017

Hiberdating

v. When a person ignores their friends in favour of a boyfriend/girlfriend.

EXAMPLE: **Hiberdating** is an irritating habit that most people will be guilty of at some point in their lifetime. It combines the words hibernation and dating to describe someone falling off the radar when they get into a relationship. The pet peeve first begins when a loved-up person starts ditching their loved ones in favour of their partner. Often, this leads to the person becoming isolated from their family and friends.

—Sophie Roberts, “This irritating sex trend infuriates your loved ones—Are you guilty of it?”, *Daily Star*, 8 January 2018

ASKHOLE

n. A person who constantly asks for your advice, yet always does the complete opposite of what you told them to do.

EXAMPLE: Think about it. What has the person you're asking done to be able to give an informed opinion to begin with? Myself, I've invested tens of thousands of dollars, and hundreds of hours of training time to get to the point that I can give an educated answer. Why should I just give it away for free? If you think I should, then you're an **askhole**.

—Jay Platt, “Stop being an asshole and 6 other things to stop doing starting today”, *Huffington Post*, 4 May 2014

“I guess I don't so much mind being old, as I mind being fat and old.

—Original lead singer of English rock band Genesis Peter Gabriel (1950)



Water, water everywhere...

Courtesy: PLANET Association

If World War 3 is going to be fought over water, it's about time we step up and do our bit to protect the water bodies around us. If you need a place to start, try the Perungudi Lake Festival to be organised by the PLANET (Perungudi Lake Area Neighbourhood Environment Transformation) Association on 10 February in Chennai. Inspired by the lake's capacity to absorb and discharge water into the sea when the rest of the city was drowning in the flash floods of 2015, the residents around Perungudi made it their mission to protect the lake. Since then, every Saturday, they have been busy cleaning up the

BUZZ

lake, planting saplings, organising awareness and sensitisation programmes, while simultaneously battling the larger forces, such as corporations and builders, who threaten to encroach on the 54 acre that makes up the water bed. Sound exciting? Well,

PLANET Association is looking for volunteers, not just for the heavy lifting but to lend support and provide technical know-how on how to take the fight forward. And maybe you will learn a thing or two about how to protect a lake near you! Contact Sanjeevan at (0) 9841163634 for more information.

Carcolepsy

n. A condition where a passenger falls asleep as soon as the car starts moving.

EXAMPLE: One popular scientific explanation for why people get tired after being in cars for long stretches revolves around the idea of 'highway hypnosis'. According to Geoffrey Underwood, highway hypnosis is a trance-like state that one can experience from either driving or riding in a car for a long period of time. While the theory revolves around a general feeling of tiredness, it's actually not brought about by physical fatigue—although the two are correlated. Much of what goes into highway hypnosis has to deal with repetition and high predictability. Because long car rides usually deal with the same few factors—things like long monotonous roads, yellow and white painted lines and bright street lights—it causes a large dip in our attentiveness. Because we're so used to seeing the same things, the entire process begins to feel automatic to an extent. This, as Underwood explains, is what elicits a state of sleepiness.

—Dan Scotti, "*Carcolepsy: The science behind why people instantly pass out in the car*",
Elite Daily, 25 August 2015

“Yoga is the best investment for a healthy body”

Parasmal Duggad, 59, and Vimla, 58, conduct free yoga classes in Mumbai



Photographs courtesy: Parasmal Duggad

Come rain, come shine, Damodar Wadi, a hall in the suburbs of Mumbai, is filled to capacity every morning with silvers and young enthusiasts practising different yoga asanas and mudras. Overseeing them are **Parasmal Duggad** and **Vimla**, the husband-wife duo that runs free yoga classes in parks, halls and temples in and around Kandivali. Remarkably, the couple hasn't missed a single class in the past 21 years. A jeweller, Duggad lives by the motto, 'Healthy body, healthy life.' "The way food nourishes the body, yoga helps us lead a disease-free life," says the 59 year-old. He has been associated with Preksha Dhyana Yog Sadhana Kendra for almost 40 years, since meeting guru Acharya Mahapragya, who instructed him to spread the message of good health. Duggad and his wife held their first yoga session in 1997 on their building terrace with just five students. Over the years, they shifted classes to a park, a hall and other places to accommodate more students. "Yoga provides holistic healing," says Duggad. He and his wife take turns to move around the different centres—availed free of cost— and teach yoga with the help of trainers. Retired professor Goverdhan Lalji Joshi, a



regular, points out, "I used to suffer from cervical spondylitis and couldn't move my neck. Today, I'm completely fit, thanks to yoga." Adding that yoga helps cure back pain, slipped disc, knee pain, thyroid and hypertension among others, Duggad, whose videos on YouTube reach out to over 63,000 subscribers, notes, "To top it all, yoga has no side-effects." In fact, Duggad, who has trained over 10,000 people, has been awarded the Preksha Puraskar, Maharashtra Ratna and Yog Shiromani. "When we started, we never thought we would come this far," says the *yogacharya* who has invented the unique 'Paras Mudra' with eight simple postures which, he claims, strengthen the knees.

—Rachna Viridi

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