

harmony celebrate age

SEPTEMBER 2018 ₹ 40

The magazine for silver citizens



The oldest
Indian woman
Everester

How good is
your bank?

Oral care
for silvers

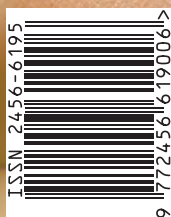
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Queen of folk
Banno Begum

DESTINATION
Unravel the many
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AFTER THE DELUGE

Nature's fury is a terrible thing to behold.

Most relationships in life are about give and take; it's the same between nature and humankind. Sadly, we take nature for granted far too often. And, inevitably, disrupting this delicate balance can lead to disaster.

We've all watched in disbelief the devastation caused by the floods in Kerala. We've seen both despair and resilience in people's eyes; we've lauded how communities have come together to help; we've cheered the heroic efforts of lifesavers in uniform; we've admired the role of the media in raising public awareness, impelling people to donate for relief. But, other than passing mentions, we have not dwelled at length upon the people worst hit: silvers.

For anyone, nature is a deadly foe when she unleashes her ferocity. For silvers, the battle is even harder. Often isolated from family and community, suffering from mobility and health issues, and lacking the digital skills to track weather reports or letting loved ones know their location and level of danger, they are among the most vulnerable.

Kerala is no exception. I've heard horror stories of silvers stranded for days before being rescued—by army boats and fishing crafts, helicopters and makeshift vessels. The image of a silver woman being carried to safety in a massive metal cauldron, clutching onto a plastic bag and her slippers, remains seared in my mind. The travails have continued in the relief camps, where silvers have had to suffer difficult living conditions. Worse, their troubles are far from over. Like most natural disasters, the outbreak of disease is an inevitable fallout. Silvers, with their weakened immunity, will be especially prone to infection. In addition, the damage to property and material possessions will



Dabboo Ratnani

hit the retired hard. What's more, there could be long-term intangible consequences—a study conducted among the elderly survivors of the 2011 tsunami in Japan revealed that those who were subjected to intense trauma, especially destruction of assets and property, were more likely to experience cognitive decline, leading to dementia.

It is clear that elders need comprehensive support mechanisms during natural disasters—we still have a long way to go here. It is equally clear that in the absence of these, we need to be more proactive about our own safety. That means coming out of your shell and connecting to the larger community, both socially and digitally; making yourself known in your neighbourhood; staying informed with weather updates and alerts on your TVs, radios and phones; and ensuring a regular communication schedule with your family so that you will be missed if you skip a call. Get smart, stay safe, take care—you owe it to yourself.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

Harmony Celebrate Age—September 2018 Volume 15 Issue 4

Publisher **Dharmendra Bhandari** Editor **Tina Ambani** Executive Editor **Arati Rajan Menon** Associate Editor **Sai Prabha Kamath** Assistant Editor **Rachna Virdi** Special Correspondent **Srirekha Pillai** Chief Sub-Editor **Natasha Rego** Correspondents **Sahil Jaswal**, **Sudakshina De Sarkar** Design Consultant **Jit Ray**

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Registered Office: 502 Plot No. 91/94, Prabhat Colony, Santacruz (E), Mumbai - 400055 **Correspondence address:** Lower Basement - Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Four Bungalows, Andheri (W), Mumbai - 400053. Tel: 91-22-30972111 (Editorial), 30972107 (Marketing). Email: contact.mag@harmonyindia.org **Printed and published** by Dharmendra Bhandari on behalf of the owners, Harmony for Silvers Foundation. **Printed** at Thomson Press India Ltd, 18-35, Milestone, Delhi-Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007 (Haryana). **Published** at Reliance Energy Centre, Santacruz (East), Mumbai 400055. **Disclaimer:** The material provided by *Harmony* is not a substitute for professional opinions. Readers are advised to seek appropriate advice from qualified and licensed professionals in the concerned field.

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index

44 cover feature



Artist Lalitha Lajmi's brushstrokes mirror a life well lived

Cover photograph: Haresh Patel

every issue

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

59 . ETCETERA: Culture, leisure, lifestyle, books, buzz and miscellany

82 . SPEAK: Kumud Baruah cleans public places and plants saplings in Assam

features

38 . Memoir:

Legendary vocalist Banno Begum recalls the heady times of the Raj

41 . Health:

Keep smiling with the right dental care, precaution and oral hygiene

52 . Destination:

Florence beyond the 'Big Three'



columns

24 . NUTRITALK: Wellness consultant Naini Setalvad on how tea contributes to good health in silvers

28 . YOGA RX: Shameem Akhtar recommends regular practice to safeguard you from sinus attacks

30 . IT'S NEVER 2 LATE: International columnist Jack York on the endless possibilities of using technology in engaging older adults living with dementia

34 . MONEY MATTERS: Fear factor grips silvers as financial frauds and losses cast a shadow on the banking sector, writes economist Priya Desai

70 . OFF THE CUFF: Indian football has only itself to blame for its sorry state, writes Raju Mukherji

WEB EXCLUSIVE www.harmonyindia.org



OUT OF DARKNESS

Bhushan Punani's vision for the blind grew into a mission that reaches out to people with disabilities

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

Harmony-Celebrate Age GOES DIGITAL

Harmony-Celebrate Age

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column one

Melancholy lies at the heart of her soul. And Lalitha Lajmi channels it to powerful effect in her art. She may be part of an illustrious family (including brother Guru Dutt, daughter Kalpana Lajmi and cousin Shyam Benegal) but her creative voice is her own: distinct, resonant, achingly candid.

“My paintings reflect my life and the crises I faced,” says the 85 year-old self-taught artist, who continues to work in a studio in the garage of her building. “Physically, it’s tough for me to handle the canvasses and frames. I get tired standing for hours at a stretch while painting. But my passion keeps me going.”

Banno Begum knows a little something about staying the course. A celebrated exponent of *maand*, a Rajasthani folk genre, the 84 year-old has performed for an array of statesmen and stars. The end of the British Raj saw her retire from the spotlight—only to make a spectacular return in her late 50s. Her voice reverberates through our pages this month.

Another stellar silver whose grit and gumption shine bright is Sangeeta Bahl, the oldest Indian woman to scale Everest, at 53. Next on her agenda: Mount McKinley, the last of the Seven Summits, every mountaineer’s dream. “A knee injury thwarted me on my first attempt,” she tells us. “I plan to do that next June.”

So, what’s your dream destination? For Lalita Phadkar, who makes a return to our pages after many years, it would be Florence, whose delights she shares this month. Enjoy the trip; enjoy the issue!

—Arati Rajan Menon

On 10 May this year, 104 year-old Australian scientist David Goodall ended his life through voluntary euthanasia at an assisted-dying centre in Basel, Switzerland. While in India, passive euthanasia became legal in March this year, Switzerland has had laws in place that allow physician-assisted suicide for over 70 years. Switzerland is a small country with a population of a little more than 8 million. Though the number of foreign tourists visiting the country for assisted suicide is insignificant, it has already added one more dimension to attract its tourists.

Keeping in view the huge cost involved, it is clear that it is not purely ‘altruistic’ work; there is a commercial dimension to it. The country is likely to become a hotspot for the practice—not only for the terminally ill or aged Swiss citizens, but for anyone around the world hoping to end their life. Studies made in Switzerland show conditions such as neurological and rheumatic diseases increasing among suicide tourists. This implies that foreign tourists as well as Swiss residents with non-terminal diseases are increasingly adopting assisted suicide.

Assisted suicide devalues human life. When it is presented as a means of escaping the problems of everyday life, not only older adults but the young and fit will also be tempted to try it instead of facing their problems. The Hippocratic Oath commands physicians to “do no harm” but now the helping hand is called to take life.

One of the main objections to capital punishment is that it cannot be undone. The same applies to suicide and assisted suicide. Despite all checks and balances, mistakes and misunderstandings will happen and there is no second chance when suicide or assisted suicide

is committed. The deceased would miss out on new treatments and cures that may come along. Almost all societies for thousands of years have condemned and criminalised assisted suicide. How can a traditionally and culturally repugnant behaviour be seen as acceptable because a particular country has adopted it, that too with some ulterior motive?

Suresh Chandra

Via email

The opinions expressed in this letter are purely personal and do not reflect the views of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*.

—Editors

I came across *Harmony-Celebrate Age*’s August issue at the hospital where I work. The amazing cover design made me pick it up and read the cover feature on organ donation (“The Legacy of Life”). I learnt how my home state, Assam, fared poorly in organ donation compared to states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. In spite of working in the healthcare industry, I was largely unaware of organ donation. The article was enlightening and has equipped me with a lot of information about this ‘gift of life’ to humanity.

Poonam Khakhlari

Mumbai

HITS OF THE MONTH

Our most-read stories in August 2018 on

 www.harmonyindia.org

1. Carrying the legacy forward (August 2015)
2. Hysterectomy after menopause (March 2018)
3. Freedom’s foot soldier (August 2018)

inside

P14: How to save a life
P22: Scaling Everest

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



▶ MEDIA WATCH

TALKING ABOUT A REVOLUTION

WE ARE CLEARLY OBSESSED with the idea of immortality—the sheer number of TV shows, films and books on the subject are proof of this. The latest on the block is **Andrew Steele's *Immortal: The New Science of Ageing – and How We Could Stop It*** and it has got publisher Bloomsbury very excited. As website *thebookseller.com* reports, publishing director Alexis Kirschbaum believes the

book has the potential to revolutionise the way we think about growing old as well as change our perception of what it means to be human. The book traces the journey of the human body as it ages and explores ways to live healthier for longer. It also discusses various fundamentals of biology and examines ongoing advanced research to stop the process of ageing. “An average 80 year-old is 50 times more likely to die than an average 30 year-old—and we are now starting to understand the fundamental processes behind this which will allow us to turn back the clock,” says 32 year-old Steele (*in pic*). “We are sowing the seeds of a revolution in how we approach biology and practise medicine. This is a story I can’t wait to tell.” That’s a tall claim—let’s see if the book measures up.

Courtesy: Andrew Steele

RELIEF IN RAJASTHAN

The Rajasthan government is leading by example. After wooing silvers with its pilgrimage scheme, the Jaipur district administration has held camps to identify eligible beneficiaries for the **Naveen Vayoshri Scheme to provide free physical aids and assisted-living devices**. Fully funded by the Centre, the aids and devices offered under the scheme include walking sticks, elbow crutches, walkers, tripods, hearing aids, artificial dentures and spectacles. Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India, a PSU under the Central Government, will provide one-year free maintenance for these. To avail of the scheme, people over the age of 60 will need to show their Aadhaar or any other identity card document along with PPO of national old-age pension scheme or state old-age pension scheme and BPL ration card or income certificate. The Rajasthan government plans to roll out the scheme across the state.



Photographs by iStock

We already know that silvers are closet daredevils (see 'Orbit', July 2018). And now they're storming the beach! In the US, lifeguards are traditionally teens and young adults, who take up the job to earn some extra cash over the summer break. But, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in recent years, fewer teens are signing on, leading to about 150,000 vacant lifeguarding jobs. So who's filling in? Surprisingly, **hotels, pools and beach clubs across the US are increasingly reaching out through mailers and ads to the new demographic of active elders to step up to the lifeguard chair**. And silvers are proving ready to the task. As 63 year-old lifeguard Bill Bower tells *Washington Post*, "It's very tiring when I finally come home at night but I'm the best shape I've been in in decades." Way to go.

A PLUS! We've always recognised the contribution of Generation A to nation-building. Now, the Government is following suit. In his speech at the installation of the foundation stone of the National Centre for Ageing at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi applauded senior citizens who voluntarily gave up their railway concession.**



"I had not announced anything," he told media. "But the Railways on their form asked people if they would want to give up their senior citizen concessions... I am proud to say that in the past eight to nine months, 42 lakh elderly passengers have voluntarily given up subsidy." For his part, the PM reiterated his commitment to improve the healthcare system and announced that the centre will be functional by February 2020. The ₹ 330-crore facility will provide state-of-the-art clinical care to elders, with 200 general ward beds, including 20 medical ICU beds, and undertake research in geriatric medicine and related specialities.

PASSAGE TO INDIA

India and Bangladesh have recently signed a bilateral deal to issue silvers and freedom fighters a five-year, multiple-entry visa.



Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh headed a nine-member delegation to Dhaka, where the travel agreement was ratified. To further strengthen relations, an integrated visa centre was inaugurated at Jamuna Future Park in Dhaka, which is the largest Indian visa centre in the world. To mark the occasion, Singh presented a five-year multiple-entry tourist visa to Mohammad Nazrul Islam under the freedom-fighter category; to reciprocate, his Bangladesh counterpart Asaduzzaman Khan presented a five-year multiple entry visa to Amal Chandra Natta under the senior citizens' category.



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TURNING BACK TIME

For decades, scientists have been working overtime to better understand the human body and the mechanics of ageing. Website *interestingengineering.com* gives a **rundown of 12 exciting innovations that can potentially stop time in its tracks**, many of which we have featured in these pages. Here's a quick recap of them:

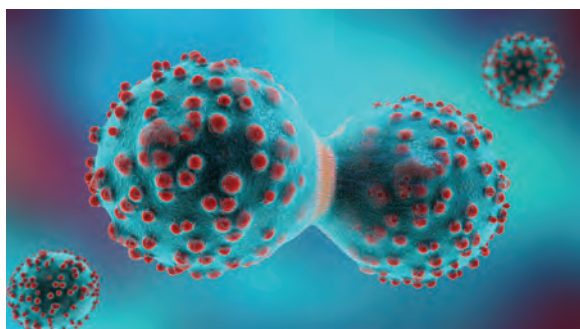
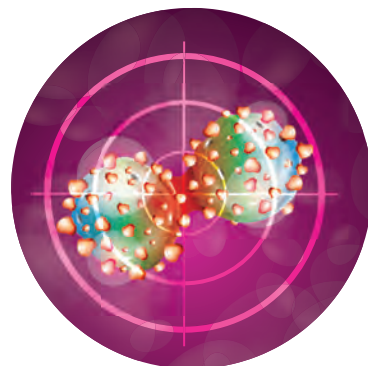


Photographs by iStock

01 REPROGRAM TO REVIVE In 2016, researchers at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in California successfully reprogrammed the cells of ageing mice using induced pluripotent (capable of giving rise to several different cell types) stem cells generated from adult cells. Mice whose cells were reprogrammed lived 30 per cent longer. This study holds great promise for the use of stem cells to help anti-ageing efforts in humans.

02 BACTERIA BOON A rare bacterium known as rapamycin is being touted as the key to reversing the ageing process. A common element in transplant medicine, rapamycin was used in experiments on flies, mice and worms to test the possibility of postponing death. More recently, it has been tested on dogs. Companies are now fighting tooth and nail to get the pill approved and marketed for human use.

03 TARGET, ATTACK, REPAIR Researchers at CalTech and University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) discovered that the build up of mutant mtDNA over time leads to cell ageing and death. (Cells typically contain two types of DNA found in the mitochondria: normal mtDNA and mutant mtDNA.) They then set out to see whether autophagy, the process wherein cells devour themselves, can be used to attack mutant mtDNA and prevent ageing. Initial testing on fruit flies has showed a distinct reduction of mutant mtDNA in their muscle cells. Will a similar technique work on humans? Time will tell.



04 SPLICE TO SURVIVE Building on the discovery that splicing factors—that enable cells to divide, preventing cell ageing and death—become indolent with age, researchers at the University of Exeter and University of Brighton have found that introducing ‘reversalogues’ can reactivate splicing factors in older cells. (Reversalogues are similar to the chemical resveratrol, which is found in red wine.) This would not only mean longer life but reduced signs of ageing and better health.



05 A DOG'S LIFE A covert start-up in Harvard University, Rejuvenate Bio has been experimenting to develop a technology to reverse ageing in dogs. Their focus is to modify certain genes as a means to attack and eliminate risk of serious conditions like heart and kidney diseases. For now, the company is focusing on cocker spaniels and Doberman pinschers, which have short lifespans, and hopes to eventually get FDA approval for human trials.

06 COMBINE AND CONQUER A recent study by the US National Institute of Ageing found that mixing and injecting pre-existing drugs can extend natural life and delay age-related health conditions. The study treated mice with a mix of dasatinib, a drug for leukaemia, and quercetin, which is naturally present in fruits and vegetables. The results showed that naturally ageing mice lived 36 per cent longer after the treatment. Now, they are working to achieve similar results in humans.



07 SLOWING DOWN SENESCENCE A new study by researchers at Marshall University Joan C Edwards School of Medicine in the US concluded that something called the 'Na/K-ATPase oxidant amplification loop' (NAKL), which directly affects the ageing process, can be used as a target for anti-ageing interventions. Their theory was first tested on mice, who were treated with pNAktide, a synthetic peptide. As similar results were recorded in human trials, the researchers are certain that such interventions will bear fruit.

08 ANTI-WRINKLE VIRUSES Like our skin, the cells in our body also wrinkle with age. Researchers at the University of Virginia School of Medicine discovered that many ailments like fatty liver disease could be caused by the wrinkling of cell nuclei. To solve this problem, they have suggested that viruses could be modified and used to smoothen the nuclear membrane, which could reverse the effects of ageing and protect against illnesses.



10 IT'S IN THE BLOOD A study published in journal *Cell Reports* suggests that the blood of young people might be helpful in combating ageing. Ghoulish though it may sound, when researchers infused the blood of young mice into older mice, it triggered neuron and stem cell production and led to reversal of ageing on their cognitive function. Clinical trials have now started.

09 POPPING A PILL

What if reversal of ageing was as simple as popping a pill? Researchers from the Paul F Glenn Centre for the Biology of Ageing at Harvard Medical School say it can happen! Their conclusions are based on a previous study that showed that nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD⁺)—a molecule found in cells—could reverse the signs of ageing in mice. In the next leg of the study, human trials were conducted with promising results.

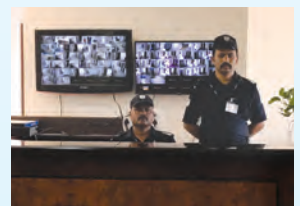


11 BRAIN ON A HIGH Last May, researchers from the University of Bonn and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem said they had successfully reversed the biological state of the brain in mice aged 12 months and 18 months by treating them with small and controlled doses of THC. (THC or tetrahydrocannabinol is one of at least 113 cannabinoids identified in cannabis.) They believe non-intoxicating THC treatments could enable older humans to regain youthful levels of cognitive function.



12 DELETE-ALT-CONTROL After 10 years of research, scientists at the Buck Institute for Research on Ageing in California and the University of Washington disclosed that they were able to identify and delete genes that can prolong life—238 cells were identified and upon removal resulted in a 60 per cent increase in the lifespan of yeast. Many of the identified genes are also present in mammals; it may take them significantly longer to replicate these findings in humans though.

RESORT-RESIDENCES **FOR SENIORS**



A large slice of the young generation is ambitious and therefore constantly travels across the country, if not overseas, thus leaving their loved ones, often elderly parents, alone at home. Keeping house in addition to taking care of their health and completing day-to-day chores is both tedious and stressful for elderly individuals.

Addressing this growing concern with a practical yet sensitive approach is Pune-based Gagan Properties, which has shaped its vision into reality. The result is Nulife, an ultra-modern, world-class resort-residence facility for senior citizens of our country.

A magnificent project sprawled across several acres of holistic goodness at Kamshet near Lonavala, this facility is a haven of comfort for senior living, owing to its adherence to international standards. Justifying its dynamic tagline that reads 'Grow Young', Nulife is that place where seniors can age gracefully while living in the midst of raw nature. Here, they can live a serene life while immersing themselves in pleasant weather and an unpolluted environment.

HEALTHCARE AND SECURITY – YOUR LIVES ARE PRECIOUS!

Nulife recognises that seniors are vulnerable and that they also worry about

their safety and security. Therefore, protecting senior lives is top priority. The residential facility has tied up with Oyster and Pearl hospitals, making it possible to have a hospital equipped with an ICU inside the residential complex with dedicated doctors, nurses and a resourceful pharmacy. This ensures that professionals are always available to take care of the medical needs of seniors, as and when required.

Other NuCare facilities included in the apartment price are a 24x7 ambulance service, periodical preventive medical check-ups, routine physiotherapy, daily housekeeping, weekly laundry services and round-the-clock security services including CCTV surveillance.

DESIGN AND DETAILS – THE SCULPTURE THAT INSPIRED MANY!

The design of Nulife premises reflects a profound understanding of the ageing process, which inspires the support it provides its residents. It is a true representation of what Nulife provides – nourishing the potential offerings of a rich and fulfilling life to all its residents.

From large doorways, no-step entries and wide corridors, to personalised panic alarm bands, grab bars in washrooms and anti-skid flooring, this project has been planned by globally renowned architect Perkins Eastman,

USA. These specifications are only a few of the many design details that have been incorporated to create a little piece of paradise just for you.

PERSEVERANCE AND SKILL – THE TEAM!

A vision of Gagan Properties, Nulife is the culmination of the best experiences of 21 years of work in real estate. It is a brand that is receptive to innovation and customer satisfaction on progressive levels within the real estate sector. Having delivered more than 6,000 apartments to satisfied clients, and with more than 6 million sq ft currently under construction, the credibility of this project couldn't be better. It offers authentic comfort and style to our beloved elders.

The first phase of the Nulife project has 342 apartments up for grabs, with 1 and 2 BHK apartments quoted at a starting price of just ₹ 48 lakh. Nulife introduces itself as a new way of aspirational living for senior citizens in India and is destined to change senior living on a nationwide scale. Hurry and contact Nulife to avail the best offer, now!

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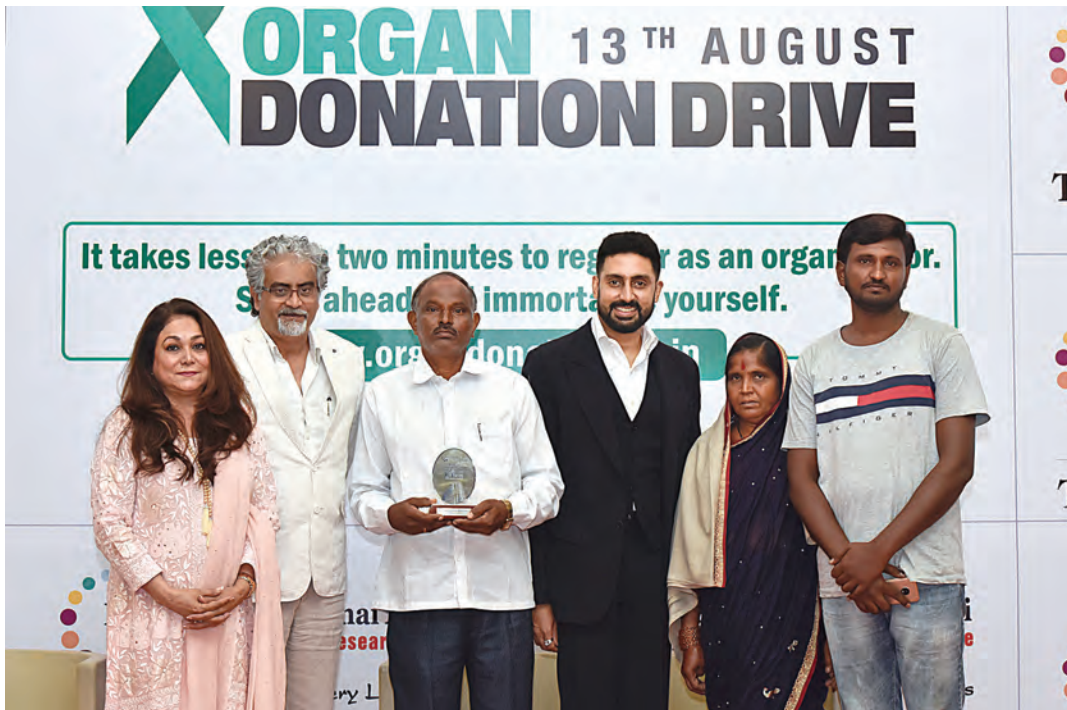
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How to save a life...

Organ donation is an imperative today. Compare the stats of the world to that of India and you know we have a long way to go, as we discussed at length last month (*"The Legacy of Life"*, August 2018).

Taking a step towards overcoming the paucity of organs and saving the lives of countless Indians who die every year awaiting a transplant, Mumbai-based Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital (KDAH) organises an annual Organ Donation Drive in association with *The Times of India (TOI)*; this was its sixth edition. Through this initiative, KDAH and *TOI* hope to create awareness and be engines of change in different segments of society, right from schools and colleges to corporate houses and even among the medical community.

On 13 August 2018, on National Organ Donation Day, KDAH, led by chairperson Tina Ambani, *TOI*, and guest of honour Abhishek Bachchan felicitated 47 families of organ donors for their contribution to this noble cause. After Dr Ram Narain, executive director of KDAH, gave the audience a brief recap of KDAH's decade-long journey, Dr Sanjay Pandey, consultant, urology, and renal transplant surgeon at KDAH presented the hospital's accomplishments: "210 successful liver transplants since

2011, 131 kidney transplants and 11 successful cardiac transplants". Then, Ambani spoke with passion about the path forward for organ donation and the need to build awareness on the subject. "A hero lies within all of us," she said. "What could be more heroic than saving a life?... We want people to realise that saving a life gives all our lives a purpose. We want to start a conversation in every family that translates into pledging one's organs." And Bachchan, expressing his shock at the shortfall of donors in India, said in his remarks, "It's actually tricky to ask if a donor is prepared to donate a part of them for a higher cause. But this difficult question becomes easier to answer when you think about the difference you will be making in someone's life.... Although I have played heroic roles in movies, standing with these real-life heroes I am humbled."

Another key event in the Organ Donation Drive was a seminar on 'Spiritual and Scientific Views on Organ Donation', which was organised at KDAH on 17 August. Emphasising upon the need for a multipronged approach, Dr Ram Narain of KDAH said the need of the hour was 'social engineering', so to speak. "One of the hardest things is changing perception and mindsets because they are rooted deep in tradition, influenced by peer pressure drawn from our ancestors, religious beliefs and such. And bringing upon such a change does not happen overnight



Panelists at the seminar on 'Spiritual and Scientific Views on Organ Donation'

Opposite page: KDAH chairperson Tina Ambani (left) with Sanjeev Bhargava of *TOI* (second from left) and guest of honour Abhishek Bachchan (third from right) felicitating a donor family

but has to be instilled into the society; rather... it has to be engineered." A panel of erudite philosophers, scholars and health experts participated in the seminar. Bringing synergy between science and spirituality, Dr Shantanu Nagarkatti, a cardiac surgeon by training but now a scholar of Vedic texts, kicked off the discussion with a strong statement on being 'immortal'.

"The attitude of giving must be cultivated," said Jaya Row, founder and head of Vedanta Vision and an ardent student of the *Bhagavad Gita*. "There is a certain happiness that envelopes you when you think about giving. The moment you start manipulating and strategising to extract something from someone, you will sense despair inside of you. Once the decision is made in your head that you will go through with the act of giving, you become a giver—that's what we need right now."

"*Seva* is the biggest dharma of Jainism and there is no bigger *seva* than donating a part of your body to save someone's life," said Acharya Dr Lokesh Muni, founder and president of Ahimsa Vishwa Bharati, who has travelled on foot across the country to create public awareness on concerns such as female foeticide and drug addiction. "*Seva* is the ultimate way to attain moksha, while selfishness is the cause of all destruction."

Meanwhile, Islamic scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality, an organisation that shares the spiritual principles of Islam with the world, apprised the audience of the concept of *Sadqah-e-jariyah*, which means continued or ongoing charity, which benefits people even after the person who made the donation has passed away.

Also present was *yogacharya* Dr Surakshit Goswami, who was intent on busting myths. "Many believe that if they donate in this life, they will be born without that organ in the next life," he emphasised. "But we don't take organs or our physical self to the next life; only our soul transcends. And organ donation, as the ultimate gift of giving, is food for our soul and its wellbeing."

Dr Rouen Mascarenhas, honourable secretary of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC),

shared the Church's viewpoint on organ donation, saying, "Organ donation is a service that gives life, so the church strongly promotes this deed." Quoting from the Bible, he further read, "There is no greater love than laying down one's life for one's friends [*Gospel of John*, Chapter 15, verse 12-13]."

Sharing the Jewish perspective, educationist Eilanit Hillel Gadkar, an associate of Rabbi Ezekiel Issac Malekar, the head of the Jewish community in Delhi, explained, "There was a time when organ donations and transplants were prohibited by Jewish laws and traditions because these procedures were still experimental and meant risking lives. But today, because of advancements in technology, rabbis and scholars across the spectrum of Jewish life have upgraded their views. Organ donation is now seen as an act of saving life, '*pikkuah nefesh*'."

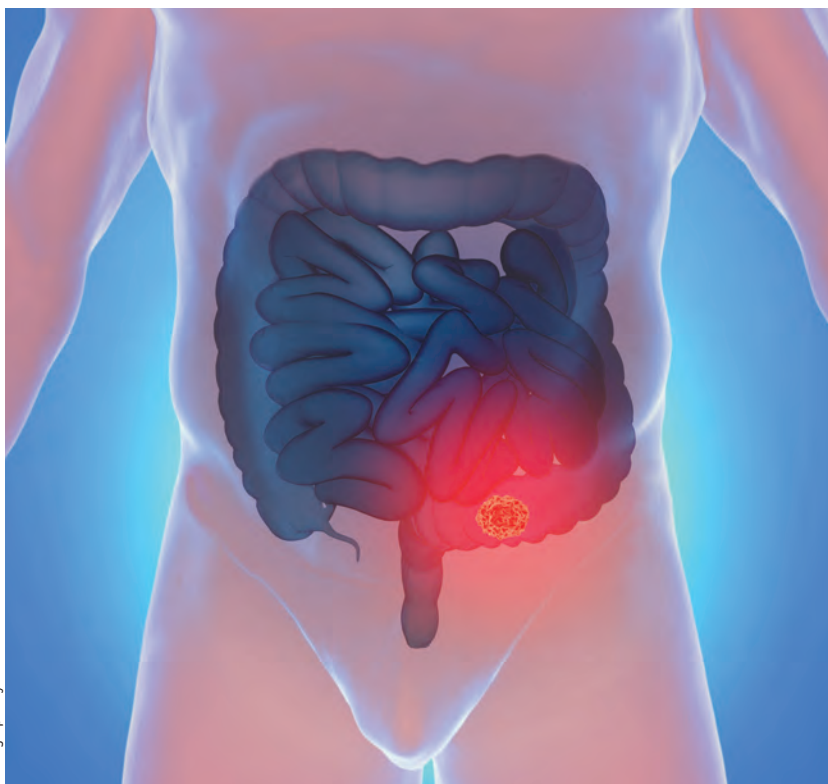
For his part, Sameer Dua, founder and chief catalyst at Gift Your Organ Foundation, who was instrumental in getting organ donation information printed on driving licenses in Karnataka and is now lobbying the Central Government to include organ donation pledges on licenses across India, offered a new take on the matter. "There are more chances we will need an organ than we will donate an organ; so, for your own sake, donate!" he urged.

Among the audience were donors and receivers, sharing their experiences. "My wife expired on 13 February 2018, leaving me and our seven year-old daughter behind," said Dipak Malde, whose wife Swati was a cadaveric donor. "But we are so proud of her for being a donor and saving the lives of so many people. She donated two kidneys, two eyes and a liver. I hope many more will share with me this feeling of pride; it is truly a wonderful gift to mankind." And Manohar Ahuja, a liver recipient from a cadaveric donation, shared, "The blessing of my donor and the doctors of KDAH have given me a new life. I hope with all my being that I cherish this new life and not insult the sacrifice of the donor."

The event concluded with an interactive session that saw hearty participation by the audience of over 600, including more than 200 silvers.

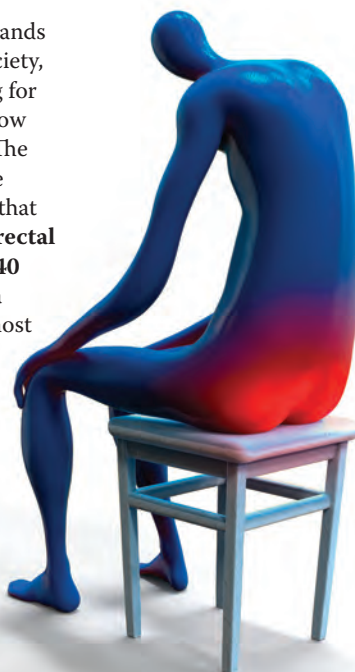
—Sahil Jaswal

TEST, TEST, TEST



Photographs by iStock

Potentially saving hundreds of thousands of lives is the American Cancer Society, which has recommended screening for colorectal cancer in individuals below the age of 50, the threshold so far. The Society says that individuals aged 45 and above should get tested regularly, following research that indicates a **dramatic 51-per-cent rise in colorectal cancer, mostly in individuals aged between 40 and 49**. The Society says that everyone needs a colonoscopy to test for this cancer, the third-most common cause of cancer-related deaths in the world. Non-invasive procedures such as lab tests done on stool samples will suffice. If these tests come back positive, a colonoscopy would be needed. Early screening can help identify and remove polyps that can turn malignant, and lower the incidence of cancer. The Society's updated guidelines have been published in *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*.



COLORECTAL CANCER

What: A cancer of the colon or rectum, located at the digestive tract's lower end.

Incidence: Rare; fewer than 1 million cases per year (in India)



Lab tests or imaging always required

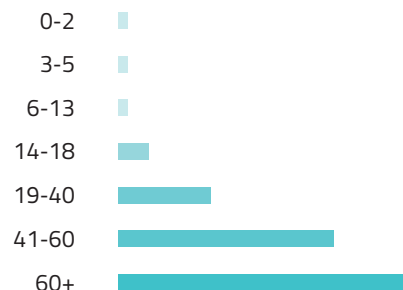


Requires to undergo a medical diagnosis



Treatable by a medical expert

AGES AFFECTED (IN YEARS)



RISK FACTORS

- Alcohol
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Lack of exercise

PATIENTS MAY EXPERIENCE

Pain: in the abdomen

Gastrointestinal issues: blood in stool, change in bowel habits, constipation, narrow stools, or passing excessive gas

Whole body: anaemia or fatigue

Other symptoms: abdominal discomfort or weight loss

MINDFUL
BREATHING



TONE THE BRAIN

For millennia, yogis have been controlling their breath to strengthen their ability to focus and concentrate. Now, scientists have found **a link between mindful breathing, a 'stress hormone' and attention span.** Minus the saffron robes, these modern-day yogis, at the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience in Dublin, Ireland, have discovered that controlled or mindful breathing can keep the brain young and healthy and halt age-related cognitive decline. They have discovered that breathing techniques affect levels of a neurotransmitter called 'noradrenaline', which is also responsible for creating new

connections between brain cells. As part of the research study, scientists measured breathing patterns, the attention span of participants and activity in a brain area called locus coeruleus. They found that those who are focused on a demanding task had better synchronisation between breathing patterns and attention. The researchers say that the reverse is also true: by regulating breathing, you can optimise your attention levels. These findings can help people with attention-deficit disorders and traumatic brain injury and can also keep the mind agile well into one's silver years. The findings were published in journal *Psychophysiology*.

PIXIES IN THE LOO

IF YOU THOUGHT these were cute characters that populated folklore and fairy tales, think again—these 'Pixies' are as real as can be and can be found in the most unlikely places: the bathroom. Incontinence and urinary tract infections (UTI) occur frequently in seniors but there's help at hand. Scientists have developed **a 'smart pad' called Pixie Scientific that can detect UTI in its**



Courtesy: Pixie Scientific

early stages with the help of a smartphone. The smart Pixie Pad is a disposable pad that comes with a code on the back. You just need to place the pad in absorbent underwear and remove it after three hours. With the help of a

smartphone app, the image of the patch is scanned for infection. While the colours on the back of the pad are invisible, they show up when the pad is soaked with fluid. The scanned image of these colours can be emailed to health professionals, who can interpret them for early signs of bacterial infection and thus prevent possible UTI. The pad will help adults with Alzheimer's, dementia and those suffering the effects of stroke, spinal cord injury and developmental disabilities.

SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE!

We all know that a sedentary life is bad for health, but can sitting for too long prove fatal? Studies have shown that **sitting for long periods every day can impair cardiovascular health, increase the risk of diabetes and even cause the brain to shrink**—and scientists warn that the fallout could be greater on women. In a recent study, researchers at the University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia, analysed the data of 5,462 middle-aged women from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health. They assessed their subjects' frailty and found that women who sat for an average of 10 hours a day lowered their ability to recover from illness. Being sedentary also increased the chances of falls, hospitalisation, dementia, diabetes, cardiovascular and other health issues in women. The findings were published in *American Journal of Epidemiology*.





Friends Adult Diapers presents

THERE'S A FRIEND for everyone

Incontinence may be a catch-all term but it manifests differently in different people

NOT ALL INCONTINENCE IS THE SAME

Depending on the underlying cause, incontinence comes in various forms and each type requires different treatments and management strategies. Understanding incontinence in its diversity will help you deal with it better.

STRESS INCONTINENCE

This is the most common kind of incontinence that affects both women and men. The main cause is additional pressure in the abdomen; for example, when a person laughs, sneezes, coughs or even exercises. Weakened pelvic floor muscles lead to urine leakage and accidents.

URGE INCONTINENCE

This type of incontinence is caused by an unstable or overactive bladder, when

a person has an urgent need to go to the bathroom but may not reach on time. This can be owing to damage to the nerves and muscles in the urinary and bowel systems, especially when a person is suffering from multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, stroke, bladder infections and stones or because of the use of certain medicines.

Watch
this space
next month for
more from
Friends!

OVERFLOW INCONTINENCE

This is the involuntary release of urine from an overfull bladder, often in the absence of any urge to urinate. Most commonly found in men, the causes of this type of incontinence could include weak bladder muscles, urethra blockage, constipation, an enlarged prostate or even a tumour obstruction.

FUNCTIONAL INCONTINENCE

This type of incontinence is when a person is aware of the need to urinate but is unable to get to the bathroom because of one or more physical or mental conditions. Loss of urine can vary from small leakages to emptying of the bladder.

NOCTURIA

Nocturia is a condition where a person has to wake up at night one or more times to urinate. Frequent night-time urination can lead to fragmented sleep, which causes overall decline in health. Nocturia can be caused by infection or enlargement of the prostate, overactive bladder, diabetes, anxiety and kidney infection.

FAECAL INCONTINENCE

Faecal incontinence—or accidental bowel leakage (ABL)—can range from the occasional leakage of stool while passing gas to a complete loss of bowel control. It is generally caused by nerve damage in the anal sphincter brought upon by medical conditions such as Crohn's disease, diabetes, spinal cord injury or multiple sclerosis.

CHOOSE WELL

Once you are aware of the kind of incontinence you are suffering, you can choose the appropriate product. Friends Adult Diapers come in different shapes and sizes, made for everyone and every condition. For instance, Adult Inserts are ideal for light urinary incontinence; Adult Diaper Pants with their underwear-like waistband offer better mobility; Adult Diaper Pull-Ups are easy to take on and off; and high-absorbency Overnight Adult Diapers will keep you dry through the night even if you suffer from nocturia.

TAKE BACK CONTROL

Remember, you can manage every type of incontinence with a little help from Friends. So, don't wait for the grass to grow; your next adventure is around the corner. Take the reins, take back control, and live your best life.

*Make them a part
of your stories.*



**8 HOURS
PROTECTION**

Why should a small problem like urine leakage hold your parents back, from doing what they love? With Friends Adult Diapers you can now make sure they are a part of your stories without any fear.



Available in S, M, L & XL

TRIPLE ADVANTAGE



Specially designed
for Indian bodies



High
Absorbency



Wetness Indicator

FRIENDS
— ADULT DIAPERS —
Live Young



app alert



Cardiiio

Available for: iOS 8.0 or later

What it does: Cardiiio helps measure your pulse/heart rate, provides insight on how it relates to your fitness, helps improve fitness with high-intensity circuit training exercises that take only seven minutes, tracks your performance and saves your heart rate measurements for future reference.

How it works: This app measures your resting and active heart rates using your phone's camera and flash to detect tiny changes in reflected light from either finger or face. This non-invasive method is called photoplethysmography, and is accepted in clinical use. This is a no-fuss app with functionality as its priority, which is quite evident from the first window displaying a big 'Start' button. On this window, you can toggle between face and finger, according to which your front or back camera will be activated. Place your finger gently on the back camera and flash or adjust your face in the outline suggested (depending on what you toggled to) to get a measure of your pulse. At the bottom of the screen there are four more options: 'History', which has your measurements for the past 30 days; 'Insights', which shows your endurance score, seven-day average and 30-day average, along with an assessment of your fitness level; 'Workout', which shows 12 exercises, 30 seconds each; and 'Settings', where you can manage your personal details.

PharmEasy

Available for: Android 4.1 and up and iOS 8.0 or later

What it does: PharmEasy is India's largest online healthcare subscription portal through which you can order medicines (prescription required) at 20 per cent off, OTC products and healthcare products at up to 50 per cent off, and get them delivered to your doorstep across India. You can also book diagnostic tests with up to 70 per cent discount, with no sample pickup charges, and book appointments for health tests with results delivered to your doorstep.

How it works: With its clean grid view, the app is easy to use and navigate. Primarily a healthcare app, the home page is conveniently divided into four grids; 'Order Medicines', where you can upload a prescription, refer to previous prescriptions or call and convey your order; 'Healthcare Products', where you can order products for personal care, food and nutrition, etc; 'Diagnostic Tests', where you can select a diagnostic test on your own or book through pre-designed packages; and 'My Orders', which keeps a track of all your previous orders and bookings. Scroll further down on the home page to manage your refill orders, get information on discounts and deals, learn about your meds in a comprehensive manner, and gain access to a wellness blog/health articles. The 'Reminder' page lets you set alerts for your dosage; the 'Articles' tab contains carefully curated blogs and articles about an array of topics, from anaemia to arthritis, child care to hypertension, lifestyle to home remedies; the 'Notifications' tab contains all the latest on new discounts and deals as well as reminders for refills of medication and diagnostic tests; and the 'Account' tab contains your settings with handy features like adding more patients and their medical schedule to process refills simultaneously, etc. The app is user-friendly, making interaction easier and smooth—not surprisingly, PharmEasy was selected among the Top 100 Most Promising Brands in India and was rated the most admired brand in the healthcare category by World Consulting and Research Corporation, Asia's leading brand rating, ranking and media company, in 2016.



The rising incidence of mental health problems places great strain on health systems around the world. In the EU, the cost for tackling mental health disorders was estimated at around € 798 billion in 2010 and is expected to double by 2030. Given this prevalence, researchers are turning to technology for help. AffecTech, a

project that began in 2017 involving a consortium of universities, health and tech organisations, is exploring different technologies to help track patients' emotions and suggest ways for people to manage their issues. A step beyond is Shim, a chat app that uses AI to help you reflect on the positive things in life. Being developed in Stockholm by a team

of psychologists, writers, engineers and designers, the system spots language patterns and analyses keywords to offer responses for emotional wellbeing. A pilot study published last year showed that participants who talked to Shim reported a higher level of emotional wellbeing and lower stress levels than a control group after using the app for two weeks.

BIRTHDAYS

American actor and producer **Salma Hayek** turns 52 on 2 September.

Yoga guru **Jaggi Vasudev**, also called 'Sadhguru', turns 61 on 3 September.

Prime Minister of India **Narendra Modi** turns 68 on 17 September.

American actor and writer **William James (Bill) Murray** turns 68 on 21 September.

Former cricketer **Bishan Singh Bedi** turns 72 on 25 September.

Spiritual guru **Mata Amritanandmayi** turns 65 on 27 September.

Nightingale of India **Lata Mangeshkar** turns 89 on 28 September.

IN PASSING

Veteran Congress leader and former Rajya Sabha MP **R K Dhawan**, 81, died of age-related ailments on 6 August.

DMK chief and former chief minister of Tamil Nadu **Muthuvel Karunanidhi**, 94, died of age-related illness on 7 August.

Nobel laureate **V S Naipaul**, 85, passed away in London on 11 August.

Former Lok Sabha speaker and veteran communist leader **Somnath Chatterjee**, 89, died on 13 August.

Veteran cricketer **Ajit Wadekar**, 77, died after a prolonged illness on 15 August.

Former PM, statesman and poet **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** died after a prolonged illness on 16 August. He was 93.

American singer-songwriter-pianist **Aretha Franklin** died of pancreatic cancer on 16 August. She was 76.

Nobel laureate and former UN secretary general **Kofi Annan** died after a brief illness on 18 August. He was 80.

TV and film actor **Sujata Kumar** died on 19 August following a battle with cancer. She was 54.

Union minister and Congress veteran **Gurudas Kamat** died of a heart attack on 22 August. He was 63.

Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarist **Edward Calhoun King** died on 22 August. He was 68.

Eminent journalist and author **Kuldip Nayyar** died on 23 August. He was 95.

MILESTONES

➤ Major General **Vikram Dogra**, 59, of 17 Poona Horse Regiment became the first Indian Army Officer to have completed the challenging Ironman Triathlon in July in Austria.

➤ Michelin-starred chef **Vineet Bhatia**, 51, was felicitated with the lifetime achievement award for culinary excellence by Food Food India and BBC Good Food, in August in Mumbai.

OVERHEARD

"I would like to urge people to take health and fitness seriously. Running 72 km is not just for Independence Day but to spread the message of exercising our freedom to live in a healthy way by making a choice to spend 30 or 40 minutes daily on ourselves. Age should not be a limiting factor; anyone can and must adopt fitness in their way of life."

— Actor, model and fitness enthusiast **Milind Soman**, 52, in an interview with Bombay Times, about his 72-km run for Independence Day



Courtesy: Milind Soman



Photographs courtesy: Sangeeta Bahl

The WORLD at her FEET

Sangeeta Bahl was always an iconoclast, so bucking the trend came with the territory. That is why, when she set a record as the oldest Indian woman to scale Mount Everest in May this year, her victory was especially sweet.

Being chided for learning to swim at the age of 16 in conservative Jammu was one thing; choosing to work instead of marrying and ‘settling down’ was even more shocking; but climbing the tallest mountain in the world was not the stuff ‘good girls’ are made of! So scale it she did.

As the Gurugram-based 53-year-old settles into this interview, she throws her head back and smiles. She says she has always been driven to challenge herself although mountaineering was not on the cards till as recently as 2012. “I have constantly worked against stereotypes and followed my heart,” says Bahl, whose first goal was to become a model.

After she conquered that, she went on to become a Miss India finalist in 1985 before working as an airline

stewardess and living in the Middle East for many years. But she had her eye on the future and while flying for Emirates, she acquired an Executive MBA degree. However, her entrepreneurial foray had to wait a few years, for marriage was on the cards. Sangeeta married her childhood sweetheart Ankur Bahl, a captain in the merchant navy, in 2000.

After marriage, the couple took a leap of faith and returned to India in 2005 to settle down in Gurugram, where they started a family. A free spirit with a restless energy, Bahl put her MBA to use and it wasn’t long before the former airline stewardess opened Impact Image Consultants and checked off one more box on her to-do list: she was now an entrepreneur.

While for most people, this would have been a dizzying career graph, Bahl wanted more. So, in 2012, she upped the ante and began to take the ‘climb every mountain’ metaphor literally. Six years later, the adventure-seeker has scaled 11 peaks, including Everest, and has just one more to go to complete the list of the Seven

Summits—the highest mountains of each of the seven continents.

“Mountaineering happened to me as part of my husband’s bucket list when he turned 50,” says Bahl, mother of a 15 year-old son. “The training was tough, as was juggling work and family. But I have always pursued my goals without looking at what stage of life I am at.”

Bahl’s first summit was Africa’s highest mountain Mount Kilimanjaro, which she climbed along with her husband. It was then that her husband brought up the idea of scaling the Seven Summits. In 2013, the couple climbed Mount Elbrus in Russia—the highest mountain in Europe—and Mount Vinson in Antarctica. But all that climbing came at a price.

“During our fourth summit to Mount McKinley in Alaska in 2014, I tore a ligament in my right knee and had to be rescued by national park skiers, who towed me on a sled. I could not complete the climb and returned to India with a brace on my leg. I later

underwent keyhole surgery for reconstruction of ligament.” Bahl was in excruciating pain and advised rest for nine months. But the thought of missing a whole year of climbing was even more painful for her!

With many more mountain peaks in her sights and ample support from physiotherapists, Bahl began preparing for her fourth summit, to Mount Aconcagua in Argentina—the highest mountain outside Asia—barely five-and-a-half months after surgery. “I challenged myself to just kill it with a brace on my leg,” she says. And, just as planned, in January 2015, Bahl summited the peak, standing tall at a height of 22,847 ft. The following month, she hit another milestone—her 50th birthday—which she celebrated with aplomb.

In 2016, she successfully scaled Mount Kosciuszko, Australia’s highest peak and the fifth of the Seven Summits, before she attempted the world’s biggest: Mount Everest. Bahl’s husband had just returned after summiting Everest, which motivated her to choose this as her next challenge.

“I trained rigorously and, to prepare myself, I climbed two 6,000-m peaks in Nepal and Ladakh,” reveals the gutsy climber. Finally, she felt ready to take on the world’s tallest in 2017 but had to return 51 days into the trek owing to ill health.

Mount Everest, the sixth of the Seven Summits, beckoned again in 2018. “I have never looked at age as a barrier and was determined to stand on top of the world,” she says. But Everest was a different cup of tea and Bahl had to train like she had never trained before, not only for its altitude but owing to the technical skills required to reach the top.

“I trained so hard that I sometimes cried from exhaustion in the gym. But I told myself it was better to prepare hard here, as I could then focus solely on climbing later. My exercise routine included six strength-training days a week—four days in the gym and two outdoors—besides stair climbing and trekking with heavy backpacks.”

To acquire the technical skills Everest demanded, Bahl sought the help of Satyabrata Dam, the second Indian to

have done the Seven Summits. “Dam took me to Manali in the thick of winter, and exposed me to various aspects of mountaineering. We spent 12 days in Himachal, where he taught me various climbing techniques.”

Finally, D-Day—28 March 2018—arrived and Bahl set off, high on confidence and in great spirits. The expedition lasted two months; not for one single moment did she think she would not succeed.

“I kept telling myself, ‘I can do it.’ I even recited the *Gayatri Mantra* throughout the way. Other than the summit night and the last three hours before reaching the

top of the world, where the winds were 70 km per hour, I had a very challenging but fairly enjoyable and spiritual climb. I felt God was with me the entire time. When I reached the summit, I felt very emotional and experienced tremendous gratitude towards the universe.”

On her second attempt at Everest, Bahl wanted to climb for a cause and used the opportunity to raise awareness about early detection of breast cancer in women, in collaboration with Tata Memorial Hospital and the Women’s Cancer Initiative.

Bahl’s family has stood by her like a rock. “It gives me

immense pleasure to see that she has realised our dream of her climbing mountains, including summiting Everest. This is a fine example of spouses supporting each other,” says Ankur Bahl. Their son Aarnav adds, “Words cannot describe my appreciation. My mom is a role model who motivates and inspires me as well as others to become fit.”

After scaling the world’s tallest peak, what could possibly be next? “I need to finish my seventh summit, Mount McKinley, as my knee injury thwarted me on my first attempt,” she replies. “I plan to do that in June next year.”

There’s more. Bahl plans to mentor 40-plus people for beginner, advanced and intermediate treks for expeditions on the seven continents. Currently, she is working on a fitness book. We hope her relentless drive and boundless optimism remain an inspiration for years to come!

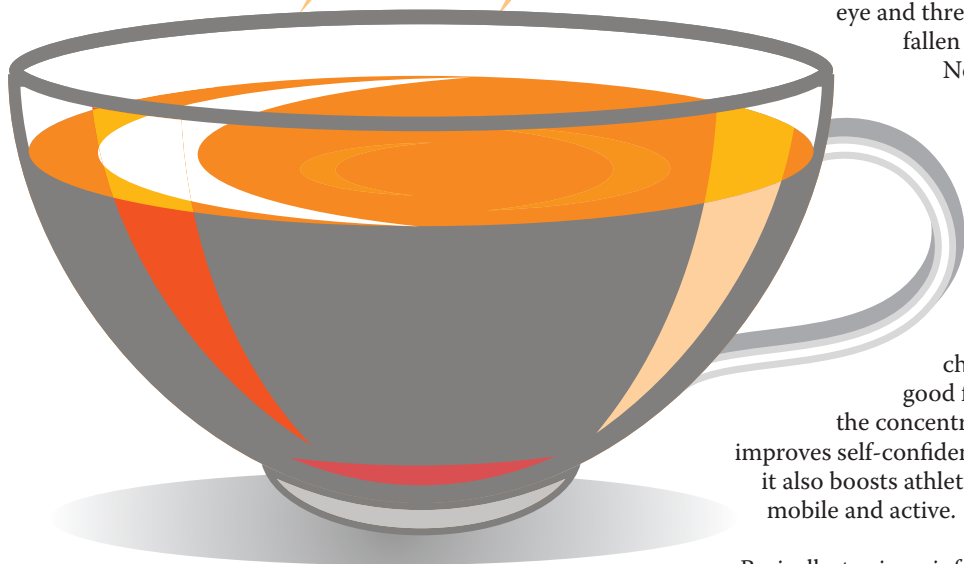
—Neha Kirpal



“The training was tough, as was juggling work and family. But I have always pursued my goals without looking at what stage of life I am at”



Chai garam



The nippy weather during the rains is the perfect time to sip your favourite beverage and derive its innumerable health benefits

Tea, or the humble chai, is the perfect solution for all health problems. If you are tired, chai will soothe your nerves; if your head is hurting, chai will ease the pain; if you have the sniffles or a sore throat, chai will spread the warmth; and if you find it difficult to concentrate, chai will help you focus.

Little wonder then, that tea is the favourite beverage of silvers across India. It's the one drink we all need first in the morning. Whether made fresh in your own kitchen or served by your local chai *wallah*, chai and chutzpah go hand in hand. It fuels your body and kick-starts your day. In fact, in India, it is customary to offer tea along with snacks to guests as a mark of respect.

This modest beverage, consumed daily in India for ages, has been touted as a super drink in the West. Some countries have even named it 'chai-tea', which ironically means 'tea-tea'. In other countries, it is sold as 'masala chai' in restaurants and in stores as ready-made premixed tea bags. Ever since the West has gone high on masala chai, tea has become the second most consumed beverage in the world (water being the first).

Tea finds its presence in mythology too. Legend has it that, once, Buddha started feeling drowsy while meditating. To prevent the drowsiness, he plucked an eyelash from his eye and threw it on the ground. It is said that the fallen eyelash grew into the first chai plant.

No wonder we feel alert and awake after a hot cup of chai! Another story claims that the Sanjeevini plant—famously known for reviving Laxmana—was actually a tea plant!

This beverage also packs a host of health benefits. It helps to prevent Type 1 diabetes; its chloride content and fluorides are good for teeth. The caffeine in tea boosts the concentration of adult ADHD sufferers and improves self-confidence. When taken in a small dose, it also boosts athletic performance and keeps silvers mobile and active.

Basically, tea is an infusion prepared by steeping processed leaves or buds of the tea bush, called *camellia sinensis*, in hot water for several minutes. Tea is available in varied forms: green tea, black tea, white tea, red tea, oolong tea and the famous masala chai, as well as various herbal tea infusions.

Here's a look at how tea contributes to good health in silvers

MASALA CHAI

This sweet, spicy and fragrant beverage is the most loved by silvers. It is loaded with antioxidants that help prevent free radicals from causing damage to the body. The 'masala' in the chai is what makes the drink stand apart, not just in taste but for health too. The spices—cinnamon, cardamom and cloves—contain antibacterial properties. Individually, cinnamon helps boost heart health as it decreases blood pressure levels and reduces insulin resistance; cardamom reduces cardiovascular disease risks and is also an anti-depressant; and clove possesses anti-inflammatory properties that have the ability to relieve general age-related pains and inflammations. Masala chai (*see recipe on page 27*) reduces hunger cravings and promotes satiety, thus preventing you from overeating.



Photographs by iStock

BLACK TEA

Black tea is the answer to plaque build-up, which is common in silvers. Black tea is made by fermentation and thus helps control bacteria in the mouth. A particular enzyme in black tea called polyphenol overpowers plaque and all cavity-related issues. Drinking black tea helps prevent the development of the sticky material that binds plaque to teeth. However, it is necessary to drink this tea in

its most basic form: pure black tea. Any additives such as milk, honey or sugar will nullify the tea's cavity-fighting properties. A word of caution: do not depend on black tea alone to clear up plaque. Brushing daily and maintaining good oral hygiene are musts too.



RED TEA

Red tea, also called Rooibos tea, is similar to green tea but is a healthier option. The Rooibos plant is a 300 year-old plant, rich in flavonoids that help protect the body from free radicals. It is rich in polyphenols, which are known to be anti-viral and anti-inflammatory and hence is considered one of the best health drinks. With increasing age, we develop various health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart diseases and bone diseases like arthritis and osteoporosis. Red tea is your one-stop solution to help cure all these diseases with the added benefit of having no caffeine. Silvers who have trouble falling asleep can have a cup of red tea as part of their night-time routine to ensure a sound snooze.

MATCHA AND SENCHA TEAS

If the Chinese have green and oolong tea, the Japanese have matcha and sencha teas that are beneficial to health. The difference between matcha and sencha is that the matcha tea plant is grown under the shade whereas sencha tea plant is grown in full sunlight. Both teas are non-fermented and their benefits range from heart health to maintaining cholesterol levels and reducing the risk of Type 2 diabetes. While matcha is commonly available in powdered form, sencha is available as a full leaf.



GREEN TEA

Green tea, which is originally from China, is famous around the world. Almost every café in the world has a certain type of green tea on its menu. What sets it apart is the way it is processed. Green tea leaves are steamed, which prevents the epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG) compound from being oxidised. This keeps the disease-fighting properties of green tea intact. It is advisable to wake up and smell the aroma of green tea daily as it helps prevent certain types of cancers too. Green tea also lowers cholesterol levels and protects the liver from toxins. Seniors, especially, benefit from drinking green tea daily as it helps you stay alert.



OO LONG TEA

Oolong tea is a semi-fermented Chinese tea. It offers the health benefits of both green and black tea and is rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. While making oolong tea, partial oxidation takes place and hence it is considered to have the best of both teas. Its main antioxidants, known as tea polyphenols are aflavins, thearubigins and EGCG. These improve heart health and brain function, boost tooth and bone strength and reduce hypertension and diabetes, which occur with age.

HERBAL INFUSION

All silvers should switch to herbal infusions (*kadha*) that are best described as healing concoctions made up of one or many herbs and available in a variety of options. To start with, the queen of herbs, tulsi (or holy basil), is used to make tulsi tea. Tulsi tea is best known as a natural remedy for anxiety, adrenal fatigue and hypothyroidism and calms you down instantly. Hibiscus tea produces a red brew full of antioxidants that help lower blood pressure when taken in moderation. Kashmiri tea or saffron *kawa* (or *kahwa*) is an exotic mix of Kashmiri green tea leaves, whole spices, nuts and saffron. Known to fight cold, cough and sore throat, it battles stress and eases digestion. Ginger tea is the jack of all teas. It is a wonderful remedy for an upset stomach, nausea, joint pains and flatulence. Chamomile herbal tea not only soothes the



stomach but causes the brain to produce more encephalin or painkilling hormones that help fight depression and negative thoughts.



FLAVOURED TEA

Flavoured tea is a fruit-flavoured infusion that adds a dash of fun to your regular tea. A variety of flavours can be added to tea such as lime, lemon, orange, blackcurrant, peach, strawberry and apple. These are all available as tea bags. Being rich in antioxidants, low in caffeine and containing no sugar, flavoured teas are preferred by silvers who like different flavours to spark their taste buds.

WHITE TEA

White tea is a minimally processed tea that contains high levels of antioxidants that not only have anti-ageing properties but help to reduce the possibility of inflammation and heart disease. White tea has various properties that are thermogenic in nature and thus help to promote the oxidation of fats. It acts as an obstacle in the growth of new fat cells and prevents alcohol drinkers from turning obese.

When taken in a small dose, tea also boosts athletic performance and keeps silvers mobile and active

Tea recipes with a twist

MASALA CHAI

Ingredients

- Water: 200 ml
- Green cardamom: 1
- Clove: 1
- Cinnamon: one pinch
- Ginger: 1/8 tsp
- Black tea powder: 1 tsp
- Milk: ½ cup
- Organic jaggery powder: 2 tsp

Method

Add cardamom, clove, cinnamon, ginger and black tea powder to the water and boil. Lower the flame when boiling to let it simmer. Add milk

and organic jaggery powder and boil again. Serve hot.

MINT, GINGER & LEMONGRASS TEA

Ingredients

- Water: 200 ml
- Mint leaves: 8-9
- Black tea powder: 1 tsp
- Lemongrass leaves: 2 tsp; finely chopped
- Ginger: ¼ tsp; grated
- Milk: ½ cup
- Organic jaggery powder: 2 tsp

Method

Add mint leaves, black tea powder,

lemongrass leaves and grated ginger to the water and boil. Lower the flame. Add milk and organic jaggery powder and boil again. Serve hot.

LEMON TEA

Ingredients

- Water: 200 ml
- Black tea powder: ½ tsp
- Organic honey: 1 tsp
- Lemon juice to taste

Method

Add black tea powder to the water and boil. Sweeten with organic honey. Squeeze lemon juice and serve hot.

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



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

Breathe easy

A regular yoga practice can help safeguard you from sinus attacks

Chronic victims of sinus problems know one thing for sure: they are going to get it again, and again. Indeed, it's a recurrent ailment to which some people are more prone. For those who suffer from it, anything can set it off. Though the rest of the world brushes it off as normal, victims have such painful symptoms during an attack that they want to just crawl away from the demands of life. Yet, as sinusitis doesn't come in the category of a 'serious ailment', they are expected to grin and bear it. Typically, medical treatment can also offer only palliatives, advising you to wait for the attack to blow itself off.

Some triggers that may be medically addressed are nasal polyps or a deviated nasal septum. But where allergies trigger it, the only way is to ensure that you avoid them. This is easier said than done because there may be a cluster of allergic triggers that may be difficult to identify.

Yoga can offer a lot of relief to people who suffer from sinus attacks as it enables you to build a strong, preventive armour. The first line of defence in yoga is to cultivate a regular practice—a daily practice is ideal. Include breathing (pranayama) practices as they weed out psychosomatic triggers; we are prone to fall ill when

we are overwhelmed by stress. The other reason for a regular pranayama practice stems from the fact that the sinus cavities (four pairs in the skull) are the pathways of our breath. They keep it moist, clear it of debris and regulate it to the temperature ideal for our lungs. The mucus generated normally has anti-bacterial properties. So a regular pranayama practice acts as a maintenance ritual for this mechanism.

Skull-cleansing breathing practice (*kapalbhati*) and bellows breath (*bhastrika*) relieve congestion. In fact, they may be practised in a gentle fashion even during an attack. Other necessary core sets of practices are chest-openers, like the cobra pose (*bhujangasana*), which also excites the muscles of the face, creating a positive tension that affects the sinus cavities underneath. Back-bends also expand lung capacity and, more important, boost your overall immunity levels by impacting the thymus gland at the chest. Inversions, such as the psychic union pose (*viparitakarani mudra*), decongest the lungs powerfully. Gentle variations, with props like a bolster, may be attempted. And the lion-roaring practice (*simhagarjasa*) and the downward-facing dog pose (*adhomukhasvana*) also relieve congestion.

YOGIC MOVES

Lotus shoulder-stand
(*Padmasana sarvangasana*)

Attempt this if you are already adept at the shoulder stand and the lotus pose. Lie back with both legs stretched out. Inhale. Exhaling, hoist your hips up, simultaneously propping your palms at the waist by bending your elbows. Your arms should remain bent at the elbows with the body resting on the shoulders and upper arms. Breathe normally throughout. If comfortable at this point, you can



wrap your legs in the lotus pose. Some practitioners prefer to wrap their legs while on the floor into the lotus and hoist the hips up. Both methods are fine. In case you cannot do the lotus, bend your right leg at the knee to drop your right ankle at the left hip (half lotus/*ardhapadmasana*). Hold for a while and repeat for the same duration on the other leg. To exit the pose, release your legs back to the basic shoulder-stand. Extend your arms behind you on the mat and roll your hips gently back to the ground.

KNOW YOUR KRIYA

Skull-cleansing ritual
(*Kapalarandhradhauti*)

Sit in a meditative posture. Use your thumb and index finger to do this gentle facial massage. Place the two fingers where your eyebrow begins, drawing a firm yet gentle circle along the eye socket. Do thrice. Repeat for the other side. There are several other such gentle massaging movements for relieving congestion but they are better learnt under supervision. Practise this regularly—it also keeps the face young by clearing wrinkles and crow's feet and encouraging lymphatic drainage to remove puffiness.



Photographs by Hareesh Patel

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



'REVERSE' PSYCHOLOGY

I enjoy competing with my grandkids for push-ups and pull-ups, flaunting my body's flexibility and breaking my own records in fasting. These are the things that give me confidence and push me towards my health goals.

I am 82 years old and have set myself on the bold mission of challenging some conventions associated with ageing: That ageing comes with inevitable health ailments; ageing means retirement; and ageing comes with financial insecurity. And I'm proud to say that I have won these challenges, again and again!

I used to run a grocery mart, a business I inherited from my father. I passed it on to one of my sons some years ago, which gave me the opportunity to focus on the things I love. One of these is living a healthy life.

I have been rigorously following a diet and fitness plan for 20 years and have reaped its enormous benefits. I focus on my mental and physical health as well as my nutrition, thanks to my physiotherapist-grandson Shubham.

My fitness regime is a three-hour exercise plan that includes an hour each of yoga and meditation, followed by 30 minutes of strengthening exercises and running for 30 minutes. I meditate and practise yoga on my terrace. For strengthening, I use resistance bands, which I prefer doing in my living room. I also read up on fitness and this helps me frame my strategy.



Courtesy: Shubham Khandelwal

A healthy diet is integral to a plan like mine. It's been 20 years since I gave up my favourite snacks: kachori, samosa and gulab jamun. My meals vary from day to day but the only constants are a bowl of dal, vegetable soup (low salt), wheat chapattis, milk and a fruit or fruit juice.

Fasting has helped me strengthen my immune and digestive systems and taught me self-control. I have been following different fasting regimes for five years, such as alternate day fasts and cleansing fasts. Every time I complete a fast successfully, I feel empowered and happy that my mind and heart are under control. I usually break my morning and evening meals into two to three short meals to prevent putting stress on my digestive system.

I continue to run our family grocery mart in my son's absence. I have a supernatural vision of reversing my ageing process through exercise and diet. I know that sounds crazy, but I am an 'oldie' and you have to excuse an oldie for being crazy!

—Badrinarayan Khandelwal, 82, Dhule



IT'S NEVER 2 LATE BY JACK YORK

Tech talk

The possibilities of using technology to engage silvers living with dementia are endless—and fascinating



Photographs courtesy: iN2L

I'm taking a twist on this month's piece for *Harmony*... all the topics I've covered in my columns have been about giving an Indian twist to what we see technology-wise in the ageing population in the US. My next piece will get back into that groove—I already have a couple of stories lined up—but I wanted to take a break from that to report on what we see happening in the US regarding technology, and specifically how it relates to older adults living with dementia.

Our company iN2L was not originally envisioned as a business. Instead, it grew out of a philanthropic idea to donate computers to assisted living communities and nursing centres in Southern California. With my 15-year background in Silicon Valley, I saw

a vast potential in fostering these connections, but also realised that conventional technology was difficult for older adults to use in meaningful ways. So, in 1999, I retired as vice-president of strategic sales for Vishay Intertechnology and started a 'gerontechnology' company. Today, we have a customer base of over 2,500 senior living communities spread across the US and Canada.

Though it was never our original intention, iN2L now works to ensure that technology to engage older adults includes people living with dementia. It's fascinating to see the outcomes, and the possibilities. And it's often not that complicated. A lot of our work has been around looking at ways to take the tools that we take for granted today—such as Google

Earth, Skype, flight simulators—and look at ways to make them easily accessible through our interface and ease-of-use accessibility tools. Every person is unique; our success has been driven by providing technology that can reach everyone! Each resident can have an individual profile and unique set of content on our systems. It doesn't matter whether they are from Ohio or Hyderabad!

Huge gaps and opportunities exist in the technology and ageing space. Most technology development and stories are about ageing-in-place, and keeping older adults as independent and healthy for as long as possible. Forward-thinking communities in the US are stepping up the realisation that many of their more independent residents are moving into

their communities with a working knowledge of apps and connectivity, smartphones in hand. Unfortunately, people dealing with cognitive decline, in particular dementia, can be left out of the equation. Yet, I believe they have the most to gain of any age cohort.

At iN2L, we have seen that a dramatic impact with technology and dementia usually does not come from new and life-altering technologies, but from repurposing tools already at our fingertips. Our society has become blasé about new technologies. Even though these tools change our lives, the transformations happen incrementally, so the novelty and astonishment can fade. Not so for individuals living with dementia.

Imagine what it is like for a 93 year-old with mid-stage dementia to see the house where he grew up via Google Earth. Or a grandmother in Iowa to watch her granddaughter get married in France via Skype. Or a Korean War pilot to relive the experience of flying by navigating a joystick with an off-the-shelf flight simulator. It is absolutely astounding.

These kinds of tools, which are at our disposal every day, simply need to be integrated into the dementia landscape. Yes, we have to account for an individual's cognitive and physical realities, but they do not change the human desire we all have to stay connected and stay relevant. The communities that 'get it' are the ones that proactively look for technology solutions to match the needs of the individual.

The journey into technology for older adults living with dementia is just beginning. Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality, voice activation, robotics and more... the



Imagine what it is like for a 93 year-old with mid-stage dementia to see the house where he grew up via Google Earth. Or a Korean War pilot to relive the experience of flying by navigating a joystick with an off-the-shelf flight simulator. It is absolutely astounding

future is bright, and full of endless possibilities. And companies are now popping up in this space. For example:

- MyndVR and Embodied Labs offer products (and MyndVR participates in research studies) in the VR arena
- Amazon is expanding its voice capabilities through digital assistant Alexa into senior living
- Jintronix and VirtuSense (founded by a man from India) are integrating virtual gaming into therapy

We all have a tendency to think whatever technology we are using today will probably be with us for a while. Microsoft founder Bill Gates has a comment that speaks to this tendency. "We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next 10,"

he says. "Don't let yourself be lured into inaction." This quote has real relevance for technology and ageing.

Technological disruptions are rampant everywhere. These changes provide challenges—and myriad opportunities. Senior living, like every other industry in today's economy, has to figure out unique ways to attract new customers, and implementing creative uses of technology is ideal to build census and improve quality of life. We've seen transformation in so many other facets of senior living. It's time to turn resident engagement upside down. This generation invented the backbone of the technology we now take for granted; it's been our privilege for almost 20 years to be able to let them enjoy the fruits of their labour. We're honoured to spread that message around the globe, and I would love to hear from innovative leaders in India that are changing the ageing paradigm as well.

York is co-founder of It's Never 2 Late® (iN2L), an American company dedicated to helping older adults realise the full benefits of today's technology



HELPLINE BY DR HARSHBIR RANA

In this column, we answer your queries on personal and social issues related to ageing, elder care and intergenerational relationships



Photographs by iStock

Q I am a 70 year-old widowed woman living with my son and his family since my husband's death a year ago. I have never liked my daughter-in-law as I feel she has changed the ethos of our family. My son and daughter-in-law both work and often return late at night. They expect me to attend to their children, give them dinner and watch over them, apart from supervising some household tasks. They have no time for my needs and often ask me to stop complaining. I have had enough of being a slave to them—I want to move out of their house. Can you suggest a good old-age home where I can spend the last years of my life in peace?

A There are many things happening in your life right now and you seem to place the entire blame of your unhappiness on living with your son. Let us put the facts of your life in perspective and see where they lead us:

- You are 70. You must be undergoing several physical and physiological changes owing to ageing.
- The death of your husband and, as a result, loneliness and isolation must have affected you psychologically too. This loneliness needs to be addressed and the grieving process has to be completed. Missing your partner and wondering how things would have been had he been still alive might cause unhappiness and restlessness today.
- You are staying with your son in his house. I guess you shifted here after your husband's death. Leaving your own house means you are leaving an independent lifestyle and your neighbourhood. Your friends, neighbours, contacts and social circle are all lost. This, by itself, can be traumatic for many elders. Added to this, it must have been difficult

to adjust to living with your son and his family.

- You mentioned that you do not like your daughter-in-law; the bad vibes since the time your son married her must be weighing on your mind. This grudge can cast a shadow on your future relationship with your daughter-in-law.

If the points stated above are true in your case, shifting to an old-age home is not the answer. Your problems seem to be maladjustment and mismatched expectations. My suggestion is that you take the following steps:

- Make peace with the fact that your family structure has changed

and nothing can undo the change. Adjust to the new lifestyle and claim it as your new reality.

- Forget the unpleasant past with your daughter-in-law; let go of the hard feelings and see her with new eyes. Be appreciative of how she juggles her job and the role of a homemaker.
- Have an honest conversation with your son about how much responsibility you can take. Clearly state what you are comfortable doing and what you are not.
- Try to make a daily routine, which includes physical activities and going out of the house every day.

- Take time out for yourself and keep your social circles alive.

- Try to engage in fun activities with your grandchildren.

Wanting to shift to an old-age home seems like an easy answer to your problems but it is not the only one. Even there, you will have to adjust to the new environment and abide by the organisational rules.

Doing acceptable errands in the house is not a punishment; rather, it is a way of keeping you productive and busy. Remember, there are many elderly who stay in old-age homes and dream of living with their children and grandchildren.

Q Of late, my mother has been forgetting things but I have been brushing it off as a natural process of ageing. But recently, on returning home from work, I was alarmed to find a burning pan on our kitchen stove. My mother had put the pan on the stove to make tea and forgotten all about it! This has me worried because during the day, she is at home all by herself. How do I ensure her safety?



A It is very disturbing to see our elders, whom we have relied upon our whole life, in a helpless state. Memory loss, especially short-term memory loss as in this incident, is part of ageing; the severity varies from person to person. Memory loss could also be the earliest sign of dementia or even depression.

There are a number of steps you could take to keep your mother safe.

- Find a caretaker who can be with her so that she is not alone at home the entire day. The caretaker should be hired from

a reputed centre or after proper police verification.

- Keep the kitchen door closed, or maybe even locked. In fact, encourage her not to use the kitchen. If she insists on cooking, let the caretaker supervise her.
- It is advisable to consult a general physician regarding her memory loss and let the physician decide if she needs to be examined further by a neurologist.
- In some cases, a brain MRI is also advised to understand the reason for the memory loss.

Dr Rana is a New Delhi-based social gerontologist and Founder of Positive Aged. Email her with your queries at positiveaged@gmail.com or write to us at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org. Visit www.positiveaged.com



MONEY MATTERS BY PRIYA DESAI

BANKING A CONCERN: With financial frauds and other challenges threatening to undermine the banking sector, silvers are a wary lot when it comes to their money



Photographs by iStock

The safety of their hard-earned money and easy accessibility to it are the twin concerns uppermost in the minds of silvers. That is why I get the least surprised when my silver friends bombard me with queries regarding the safety of their savings in various banks.

Recently, a silver friend even went to the extent of prematurely closing his fixed deposits in a bank he thought may become fraught with problems, locking access to his deposits. Not only did he suffer losses owing to pre-closure penalty but had to settle for a lower interest rate offered by another bank. However, he felt these paled in comparison to the stress and sleepless nights he had been experiencing over the months, worrying about the safety of his money.

These worries stemmed from news in various media related to huge losses suffered by public-sector banks. Reports say these banks need support running into trillions of rupees. Many silvers, already reeling under the after-effects of the demonitisation demon, are not

willing to play the waiting game anymore. Additionally, bank scams and frauds that keep surfacing with increasing regularity have created a fear factor of sorts in the minds of account holders.

New realities

Currently, the banking and financial sector is at a cross-roads, bracing against challenges such as globalisation and the ever-increasing demands from corporate, government and retail sectors. The onslaught of technology and constant upgrades and changes have left it virtually gasping for air. Little wonder then, that with the dawn of the 21st century, the hitherto rock-solid banking infrastructure in India has begun to crumble at a rapid pace.

Today, the dynamic, tech-savvy private sector banks are embracing new technology and expanding their reach. Their profitability, healthy balance sheets, and rapidly increasing market capitalisation are all indicative of their success. Contrastingly, many public-sector banks have experienced tepid growth and are struggling to stay afloat.

Multi-tiered banking structure

India has a multi-tiered banking infrastructure:

- In the lead, in terms of deposits and advances are the government-owned legacy banks (27), popularly known as public-sector banks
- There is a large cooperative bank sector (1,589 urban cooperatives and 93,550 rural cooperatives) governed by a different set of banking rules
- Then there are strong private-sector banks (22) and foreign banks (44)
- The non-bank financial companies (NBFCs), payments banks—the latest entrants—and small banks have fuelled greater competition in the banking and financial sector

As the central bank, the Reserve Bank of India is the apex monetary authority that regulates all banking institutions.

While it may seem that this wide banking choice is advantageous to silvers, the fact is that it adds to their confusion. As their experiences in carrying out banking transactions vary over a period of time, they find it extremely challenging to zero in on a bank they can trust, and one that suits their needs.

How good is your bank?

Most silvers hold accounts in public-sector commercial banks such as the State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, Bank of India, Syndicate Bank, etc, and large cooperative banks. Some hold accounts in strong regional banks with a wide network of branches.

One of the most common questions seniors ask their peers is: “Is your bank good?” So, how does a bank get a ‘good’ tag? The different criteria that matter to silvers include:

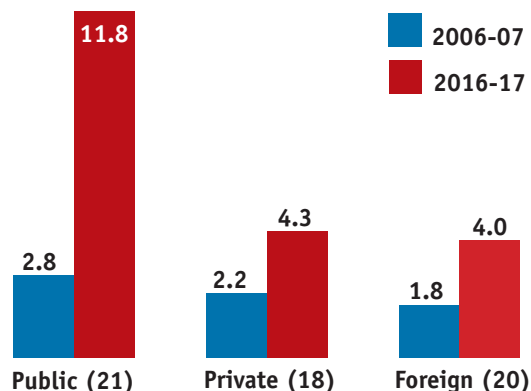
- Proximity to their home
- Familiarity with the bank staff resulting from frequent visits to the bank
- Lower minimum bank balance requirement
- Affordable fees for demand drafts and other banking services
- Level of customer service provided.

Cooperative banks garnered a large number of bank accounts primarily owing to the above mentioned factors. The safety of money deposited in a bank wasn’t a prominent concern earlier because most people considered negative news related to a bank’s functioning a rare occurrence.

Low happiness quotient

Today, the happiness quotient of senior citizens related to banks is at an all-time low. Some of the pain points include:

GROSS NPA (% OF ADVANCES)



Common sample of 59 banks; number in brackets denotes number of banks

Source: Capitaline

- Inefficiency with handling simple functions such as updating passbooks, depositing cheques, etc
- Computers that are out of order/function at snail's pace, bringing services to a halt
- Unfamiliar with netbanking processes, seniors end up making multiple trips to the bank to get glitches fixed
- Apprehension about the stability of the bank.

Enter private-sector banks

The retail customer base of private-sector banks derives its strength from the upwardly mobile and expanding young middle class. This demographic is more open to adapting to the Internet and embracing new banking technology.

Now, efforts are afoot to rope in tech-oriented silvers through special senior citizens' accounts. These accounts have higher fees and minimum balance requirements when compared to public-sector banks. There has been a rapid expansion of these bank branches over the past few years.

Tech-savvy, new silvers who have just crossed retirement age have now begun to favour these banks, regardless of rare glitches.

NPAs, frauds and scams

An important reason why public-sector banks lost their reputation as reliable banking institutions can be attributed to adverse publicity received owing to their ballooning non-performing-assets (NPAs).

According to RBI data, NPAs in absolute terms for all banks were nearly ₹ 8 trillion by the end of 2016-17, a

figure that a bank professional alone can understand. These banks have failed on four major parameters: profitability, capital strength, asset quality and customer service.

Silvers do keep wondering what these NPAs are and the bearing they have on a bank's performance. NPAs are stressed assets; loans extended that are unrecoverable or difficult to recover and reflect as bad debts in the bank's accounts. Bank customers look upon these as a misuse of their funds.

The frauds and scams of humungous proportions, such as the ones led by Nirav Modi, Vijay Mallya and many others, have tarnished the image of banks. These incidents have shaken the unquestionable faith that people placed in their banks.

Strengthening the banking structure

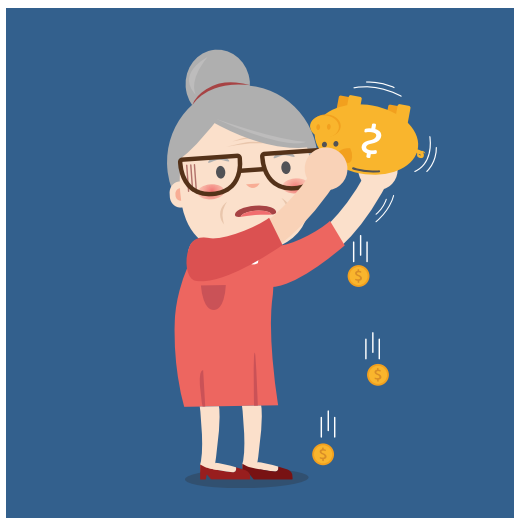
In a recent interview, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that banking reforms are being unveiled to ensure that "banks are strongly placed to contribute towards overall economic growth".

The Government of India has unveiled a two-year plan to strengthen public-sector banks through reforms and capital infusion of ₹ 2.11 lakh crore (\$ 32.5 billion). However, the common man is unwilling to forget that this was the money he gave the banks for safe custody.

The aim of these measures is to enable public-sector banks to play a more prominent role in the financial system and meet the financial demands of the fastest growing economy in the world. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance 2017 Bill passed by the Rajya Sabha is another step in this direction.

Servicing senior citizens

Where do silvers fit into these laudable efforts to save and sustain banks that serve the common man? Do these assurances pacify silvers who feel they are being jostled and trampled upon in the mad rush to create a brave new digital world?



In developed countries, there are organisations that go after banks and pressurise them not to squander the money of account holders. India is a far cry from such customer-centric activism

In a recent communication, the RBI has directed banks (including new payments banks) that, starting December 2018, silvers aged 70 and above should be provided basic services at their doorstep, such as:

- Pickup of cash and instruments against receipt
- Delivery of cash against withdrawals from accounts
- Delivery of demand drafts
- Submission of know your customer (KYC) documents
- Submission of life certificates.

Hassle-free banking

Most believe and agree that the banking industry in our country lacks reliability and efficiency and fails miserably when it comes to customer service. In the US and other developed countries, there are

organisations that actively go after banks to receive what is rightful and pressurise them not to squander the money of account holders.

India is a far cry from such customer-centric activism. Unfortunately, the regulatory bodies and the Government have failed to allay the fears of the larger public in the country's banking system. Everyone loves easy banking with a great customer experience. But this is not the norm in India.

Digital banking has brought dramatic changes in the way people interact with banks. If these interactions are tedious and fail to work seamlessly, the customer is likely to switch to another bank. Millennials and Generation Y are more apt to transition to another bank if they're dissatisfied with the service they receive from their existing one.

The new generation of silvers is also more demanding. If they find that the digital environment at their bank is cumbersome or unfriendly, they won't hesitate to look for other banking options. On the other hand, super senior citizens don't have this adventurous streak and are more loyal to the banks they hold accounts in. They can only be cautious, and wish and hope for a hassle-free banking experience.

The author is an economist based in Mumbai

Experience

A second childhood

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celebrate age

QUEEN OF FOLK

Banno Begum thought her career had ended when colonial rule drew to a close, only to make a comeback that took her to greater heights, writes **Zakir Hussain**

It's not often that you get to serenade a queen, not even when you're a celebrated musician. Banno Begum, now 84 years old, remembers her encounter with Queen Elizabeth II, more than 50 years ago, with distinct clarity. An exponent of *maand*, a type of Rajasthani folk singing, she's also regaled presidents and prime ministers, both Indian and foreign, and performed for maharajas, aristocrats and nobility.

Maand falls into a nebulous category between classical and semi-classical Indian music, and is just as difficult to master as any classical raga. As a student, Banno Begum passed every test with flying colours before she was appointed to the Jaipur Raj Durbar.

Banno Begum inherited her extraordinary vocal talent from her mother, Gauhar Jaan, also a singer and a dancer who performed for the maharajas of her time. But it was Ustad Nazir Khan, a well-known sitar exponent, who led the 11 year-old to the peak of her talent. "In those days, the *shagird* [disciples] were expected to stay with their ustad [musical gurus] during the learning period," she recalls. "And even though I was married to Thakur

Kishangarh Singh Rathaur, himself a man of music, he supported my education." Under the tutelage of Ustad Nazir Khan, Banno Begum learnt different styles of folk music and became proficient in singing *maand*, ghazal, thumri, *dadra*, *rasiya*, *hori* and *khyal*.

"Back then, our ustad not only educated us in music but groomed us in speech, dressing sense and etiquette,"

she adds. The values and lessons she learnt have clearly stayed with her as the legendary singer is still mindful that her *pallu* should not slip off her head. Banno Begum recalls how children from royal households were sent to her to be educated in genteel manners and behaviour fit for a court. "What we learnt as children, we are still passing on to the coming generations by mindfully practising it ourselves."

As time went by, Banno Begum's music slowly gained recognition and she found herself in the Gunijan Khana of Dantaramgarh, in Sikar, Rajasthan. Gunijan Khana was a department created by the erstwhile rulers to patronise the crafts and their practitioners, and





Photographs courtesy: Zakir Hussain

this was where Banno Begum met other big names like Badfi Gauhar Bai, Farhad Jahan Bibo and Gauhar Benazir, who became her contemporaries.

"Our performances were majestic," reminisces Banno Begum. "Only the thakurs who owned 50 to 200 villages could attend musical programmes in the Raj Durbar," she says, also recalling the etiquette one had to follow as part of the durbar. "At the end of the programme, no one was allowed to clap. The music was enjoyed along with beverages. The programmes were organised on the roof of the City Palace, the spot from where Govind Devji's temple was visible and we would all pay our respects daily."

Speaking of performances of yesteryear, she says she still has a gold *asharfi* (coin) presented to her by the Thakur of Mukundgarh in appreciation of her singing. Then, with a twinkle in her eyes, she recalls a *mehfil* (musical gathering) in Naina Devi's house that Maharaja Bhawani Singh had presided over as a special guest. Seeing him, Naina Devi came over to her and whispered in her ear, "*Apke maharaj tashrif le aaye hain lekin aap gaate-gaate khade mat hona.*" (Your king has arrived but you need not stand up while singing.) Maharaja Bhawani Singh was mesmerised by her hypnotic voice the entire evening.

Banno Begum looks back wistfully at those heady times. "The Raj went and along with it all the positions of the Raj. And this exposed us to the world outside. One instance was when Mirza Ismail, Diwan of the kingdoms

of Mysore, Jaipur and Hyderabad, issued an order to vacate Hada Bazaar in Ramganj, which was allotted to concubines and artists." A proud Banno Begum refused, pointing out that the Maharaja himself had given them permission to stay. "This caused a furore in the bazaar and only after some cajoling did Diwan *saab* agree to host an audition and decide the fate of us artists who stayed there. I proved my mettle and was allowed to stay."

The legendary vocalist says India's colonial rulers were true patrons of the arts. "Once they left, there was a decline in the classical style of music and I didn't feel like I belonged anymore, so I stopped practising." However, her sabbatical was short lived as Rajasthani author and politician Padma Shri Lakshmi Kumari Choodawat, a fan of Banno Begum's singing, encouraged her to re-establish herself in a different style. "She loved my singing, and would always come and pay her respects whenever she was present at my shows. So when I gave up music, she suggested I grow with the times instead."

In her late 50s, Banno Begum was determined to kick-start her career once again. She immersed herself in her music and, soon, word spread. "The world of Indian folk music was much smaller then," she points out. Apart from singing for dignitaries, she sang for All India Radio, out of its Delhi and Jaipur stations. She was also appointed as an instructor for *maand gayaki* by the Uttar Madhya Sanskriti Kendra, also known as the North Central Zone Cultural Centre.

Banno Begum serenading former US president Bill Clinton; as an 18 year-old

Opposite page: During her daily *riyaz*



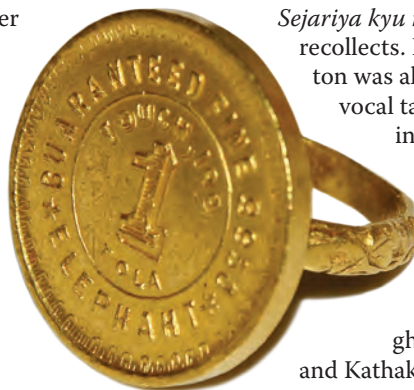
"The dress code was full regalia: *bajuband* with *kundan* work and a *basra* pearl necklace with both *pukhraj* and diamonds. Queen Elizabeth asked about my necklace. I asked one of the officers to explain what she had just said. I understood that she liked it, so I took it off and presented it to her"

Banno Begum performing at a musical soiree; the diamond necklace worn by Banno Begum and Queen Elizabeth

Below: A gold *asharfi* (coin) presented to Banno Begum by the Thakur of Mukundgarh

Banno Begum may have been pining for the glory days of the Raj but her tryst with India's colonial rulers had not yet ended. One of the highlights of her career, after the Raj, is her encounter with Queen Elizabeth II, for whom Maharaja Man Singh hosted a party at Rambagh Palace, Jaipur during the Queen's 1961 India tour.

As part of the functions organised by the Maharaja, Banno Begum had been invited to sing *maand* on the occasion. "The dress code was strictly followed, which was full regalia: *bajuband* with *kundan* work and a *basra* pearl necklace with both *pukhraj* and diamonds. Queen Elizabeth came close to me and asked about my necklace. I didn't know any English, so I asked one of the officers standing there to explain what she had just said. I understood that she liked my necklace, so I took it off and presented it to her. She wore the piece then and there," says Banno Begum, smiling at the recollection.



Banno Begum also remembers being invited to the wedding of the daughter of then president of India Dr Zakir Husain Khan. "The audience was frantic when I sang *Chand ki raat* and *Sejariya kyu na padharo* in *maand* style," she recollects. Former US president Bill Clinton was also treated to Banno Begum's vocal talent during his visit to Jaipur in 2000, when she performed her rendition of *Padharo mhare desh*. Actor Akbar Khan and singer Noor Jehan have attended her concerts, along with other famous names like poet Hasrat Jaipuri, Sagar Siddiqui Sahib, Bashir Badr and Kathak maestro Hanuman Prasad.

Although hard of hearing now and frail, the vocalist still displays flashes of gumption and the regal air that envelopes her is evident every time she speaks. She has two albums to her credit: *Maand Gayika: A Banno Begum Niazi* and a five-hour collection of Rajasthani *maand* songs called *Kesariya Balam* in collaboration with singers like Jamila Bai and Kulsum Bai. They offer but a fleeting glimpse into the life and work of Banno Begum, a voice that will not be stilled. ✨



Smile on

The right dental care and timely intervention can help silvers maintain good oral hygiene, says **Dr Rajesh Koppikar**, consultant-dental surgery, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai

Photographs by iStock

With increasing age, maintaining oral health can often be a challenging task. However, better at-home care and in-office dental treatments in the past few years have resulted in more silvers retaining their teeth throughout their lives. Although some conditions do make dental diseases and tooth loss more likely, silvers can still have a good deal of control over oral health. Remember, some extra care and a few precautions will keep you smiling even at 60.

Here's a look at some dental concerns in silvers and their solutions.

DENTAL CAVITY

As you get older, the enamel—the outermost layer on the teeth—becomes thinner, making your teeth prone to plaque formation and cavities. You may also notice some

gaps between your teeth, which are a result of the natural ageing process where the gums (gingiva) recede from the teeth, leaving spaces in between. Food tends to stick in between these spaces, thus causing cavities. The best defence is to remove plaque daily before it gets a chance to build up and cause problems. Brushing removes plaque from the teeth and, if done correctly, from just under the gums also.

We all learned to brush our teeth as kids and have mostly retained the same technique throughout our lives. Unfortunately, many of us have learned the wrong way of brushing. As for those who learned the right way, it's easy to become sloppy over the years. Brushing correctly isn't instinctive. Getting the bristles to remove plaque without damaging your gums is a little trickier than you might think. There are different ways to brushing. Consult your dentist who will recommend the brushing method for you.

Tips for brushing right

Brush twice a day: Dentists recommend brushing just before going to bed. When you sleep, the saliva in the mouth decreases, leaving your teeth vulnerable to bacterial acids. Teeth should also be brushed in the morning, either before or after breakfast. After breakfast is ideal so that food particles are removed.

Brush lightly: Brushing too hard can cause your gums to recede. Plaque attaches to teeth like jam sticks to a wooden spoon. It can't be totally removed by rinsing but just a light brushing will do the trick. Once the plaque has hardened into calculus (tartar), brushing can't remove it, so brushing harder won't help. Try holding your toothbrush the same way you hold a pen. This encourages a lighter stroke.

Brush for two minutes: Set a timer if you have to, but don't skimp on your brushing time. Longer is fine, but a minimum of two minutes is needed to adequately clean your teeth. Many people brush till the length of a song on the radio. It's a good practice and acts as a reminder to brush each tooth thoroughly.

Maintain a standard routine: Try to brush your teeth in the same order every day. Oral health professionals believe this helps patients remember to brush all the areas of their mouth. If you do this routinely, it will eventually become second nature. For example, you can start by brushing the outer sides of your teeth from left to right across the top then move to the inside and brush right to left. Repeat the pattern for your lower teeth.

Choose softer bristles: Always use a toothbrush with 'soft' or 'extra soft' bristles. The harder the brush, the greater the risk of harming your gum tissue.

Change your toothbrush regularly: As soon as the bristles begin to splay, the toothbrush loses its ability to clean properly. Discard your old toothbrush after three months or when the bristles flare, whichever comes first. If you find your bristles flaring much sooner than three months, there are chances you may be brushing too hard.

Try an electric toothbrush: Electric toothbrushes are a good alternative to manual brushes, though not necessary. They are useful for silvers with physical limitations that make brushing difficult. However, make sure you

choose softer bristles and don't press too hard or you'll damage your gums.

Choose the right toothpaste: It can be overwhelming to come across a large number of toothpastes in the supermarket. Remember, the best toothpaste for you may not be the best one for someone else. So always check with your dentist before making your choice!

Go by your doctor's advice: Toothpastes don't merely clean your teeth. Different types have specific ingredients for preventing decay, gum care or desensitising teeth. Talk to your doctor first. He may recommend additional tools called inter-dental cleaners, if you have large spaces between your teeth.

Although some conditions do make dental diseases and tooth loss more likely, silvers can still have a good deal of control over oral health. Some extra care will keep you smiling even at 60!

DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth indicates that you do not have enough saliva or spit to keep your mouth moist. Everyone gets the feeling of dry mouth once in a while, especially when feeling nervous, upset or under stress. But if you have a dry mouth all or most of the time, it can be uncomfortable and lead to more serious health concerns or indicate a more serious medical condition. This may also be owing to non-functioning of salivary glands, which is a serious condition. This is because saliva does more than just keep the mouth wet—

it helps digest food, protects teeth from decay and makes it easy to chew and swallow.

Symptoms of dry mouth

- Sticky, dry feeling in the mouth
- Trouble swallowing
- Burning sensation on tongue
- Dry feeling in throat
- Cracked lips
- Reduced ability to taste things/metallic taste in your mouth
- Mouth sores
- Frequent bad breath
- Difficulty chewing/speaking

Causes for non-functioning of salivary glands

Side-effects of medication: Over 400 medicines cause dry mouth, including antihistamines, decongestants, pain killers, diuretics and medicines for high blood pressure and depression.

Common diseases: There are some diseases that affect the salivary glands—diabetes, Hodgkin's, Parkinson's disease—and lead to dry mouth.

Radiation therapy: Salivary glands can get damaged if your head or neck is exposed to radiation during cancer treatment. The loss of saliva can be total or partial, permanent or temporary.

Chemotherapy: Drugs used to treat cancer tend to thicken the saliva, causing your mouth to feel dry.



Menopause: Changing hormone levels affect the salivary glands, often leaving menopausal and post-menopausal women with a persistent feeling of dry mouth.

Smoking: Pipe, cigar and heavy cigarette smokers often experience dry mouth.

The only permanent way to cure dry mouth is to treat its cause first. If it is the result of medication, your doctor might change your prescription or dosage. If your salivary glands are not functioning properly but still produce some saliva, your doctor might give you a medicine that helps the glands work better. If the cause of your dry mouth cannot be eliminated, or until it can be, you can restore moisture to your mouth in a number of different ways. There are mouth moisturisers available that act as a saliva substitute. Rinsing with mouthwashes specially formulated to help dry mouth may also bring relief.

When going for a check-up, do carry the following information with you.

- ◆ List of your medications including vitamins, herbal remedies and other over-the-counter medicines
- ◆ List of medical conditions and allergies
- ◆ Information and phone numbers of healthcare providers, doctors and your previous dentist
- ◆ Information about your emergency contacts, or anyone who can help make decisions on your behalf, in the case of a medical emergency
- ◆ Your dentures or partials, even if you don't wear them.

Tips to prevent dry mouth

- Sip water or sugarless drinks often
- Avoid drinks with caffeine such as coffee, tea and some sodas, which can cause the mouth to dry out
- Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless boiled sweets to stimulate saliva flow (if the salivary gland function exists)
- Don't use tobacco or alcohol, as it dries out the mouth
- Avoid spicy or salty foods that can cause pain in a dry mouth
- Use a special mouthwash for dry mouth

WEARING DENTURES

Most silvers who wear dentures assume they don't need to care about their teeth. What they do not realise is that the bacteria sticks to full or partial dentures just like it does on regular teeth! So even if you wear dentures, remember to clean them on a daily basis with cleaners made specifically for dentures. Also, avoid using the same toothpaste or household cleaner you use for your natural teeth, as those are abrasive and can damage your expensive dentures.

Ways to care for your dentures: Take the dentures out of your mouth for at least four hours daily—preferably at night—to keep your gums healthy. Your dentist will provide you with instructions on how long your dentures should be worn each day. Also, visit your dentist regularly for oral check-ups!


Finally, I would recommend that all silvers follow this advice: Age is in the mind, so mind your teeth and gums to ensure you don't look and feel your age! ✨



Art

&

Artist **Lalitha Lajmi's**
brushstrokes mirror
a life well lived,
writes **Rachna Virdi**



soul



Art often reflects life, more so if the artist is sensitive to her surroundings. One of the best water colourists of India, Lalitha Lajmi's works are powered by an autobiographical streak, exploring gender politics and highlighting the natural bonding between women, particularly mother and daughter. She experiments with mirrors (reflecting the landscape of the mind), masks (concealing alternate undisclosed identities) and performers (playing out different roles), and uses grey, Prussian blue, black and sepia tones time and again to tell stories rooted in melancholia.

Born in Calcutta, Lajmi grew up around the oleographs of Raja Ravi Varma. Her tryst with paintings, however, began at the age of five when her uncle B B Benegal, a commercial artist, gifted her a box of paints. An early marriage and children didn't deter the self-taught artist. Modernist K H Ara, who saw her work, encouraged her to display it. Over the decades, her works have been exhibited at prestigious galleries in India, Paris, London and Holland. Lajmi's works, with their monochromatic effect and melancholic worldview, have often been compared to the films made by her famous sibling Guru Dutt. "We had a disturbed childhood. Economically, too, we were not very sound," she points out. "So the pathos and subdued style may spring from that."

A huge poster of Dutt's classic film *Pyaasa* at her Lokhandwala home is testimony to the deep influence art and films wield on the family. Besides Dutt, Lajmi's family boasts filmmakers such as Atmaram (her elder sibling), Shyam Benegal (her cousin) and daughter Kalpana Lajmi. A gigantic bookrack—with a stack of classics, bestsellers and old and new titles—covering an entire wall, reflects the family's eclectic reading habit. One cannot miss the twinkle in the proud mother's eyes as Lajmi says, "Kalpana is a voracious reader." Many books in the collection, especially on art, were gifted by Benegal. Pointing to a section on astronomy and philosophy, she says, "Those belonged to my husband. We bought a lot of books from Strand Book Stall on a monthly instalment of ₹ 30 in those days."

While one wall is dedicated to books, the other showcases Lajmi's paintings. Her women are strong and assertive. "My paintings reflect my life and the crises I faced," says the soft-spoken artist. Draped in a lavender cotton sari, her bright smile complements the kohl-laden eyes. "I buy my saris from Kolkata," she shares.

Even before the old-world charm of the place sinks in, the 85 year-old takes us to another room to recount her journey as an artist spanning five-and-a-half decades over a leisurely Konkani Saraswat meal. With effortless ease, she turns gracious host, serving us *sambhar* along with *chana ghassi*, *parval subzi*, rice and *kheer*.

Along the way, she introduces us to her two female dogs Scooby and Kali, who haven't left their owner's side all this while. "This one is old and suffers from arthritis," she says, pointing to Scooby, while instructing the attendant to take them away for their afternoon nap. After the interview, we get a



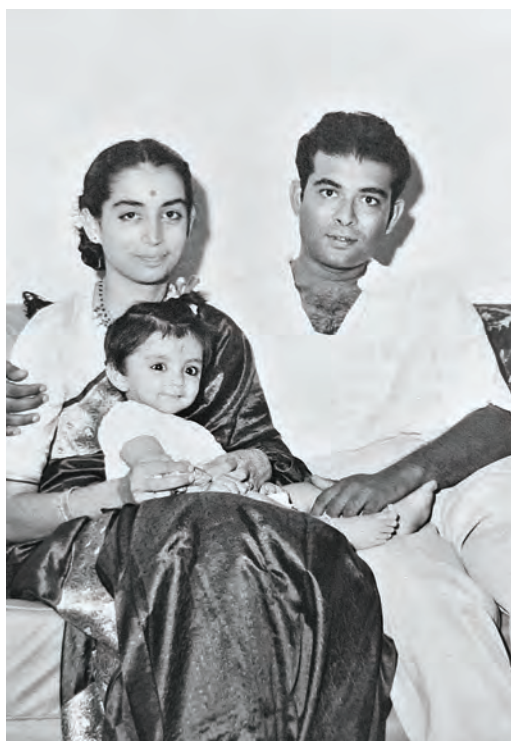
Courtesy: B B Benegal

visual treat of the artist's studio, where her finished and unfinished works, canvases, colours, paints, paintbrushes and easel lie quietly, waiting to come alive at the dexterous hands of the artist.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW

In your latest exhibition *A Pale View of Hills*, the overriding themes are death and melancholy. Are these a reflection of a personal crisis?

I had done some etchings and drawings on death earlier too. I've seen many deaths in the family, beginning with my grandmother, father, mother, husband, my brothers Atmaram and Vijay as well as my eldest brother Guru Dutt who died very young. His death at the age of 39 left a deep void in our lives. Besides, death is universal. Also, very few artists like to show death on canvas because it is a



The newly married couple along with Guru Dutt (in the background); Lalitha and husband Gopi Lajmi with daughter Kalpana

Opposite page: Lajmi as an 18 year-old

Photographs courtesy: Lalitha Lajmi

“Like other well-known artists of my generation, I also dreamt of studying and experimenting at Ecole Des Beaux-Arts, the famous school of arts in France. However, the responsibilities that came with marriage didn’t let it materialise”

part of one’s personal life that one doesn’t wish to share. Moreover, collectors and buyers want to see happy pictures on their walls. I explored death as a theme as I like to express myself. I’m also a pessimist by nature. Kalpana’s ill health has also impacted me—she is suffering from a renal disease and undergoes dialysis, which takes a huge toll on her. I suppose that reflects in my works too.

Despite being self-taught with no formal training, you have carved a niche in art. Please share your journey.

Though I wanted to pursue fine arts, my mother insisted I study commercial art and work simultaneously. I joined a course in commercial art at Sir J J School of Art in Mumbai and looked for a job. I wasn’t lucky in my job search and failed in one of the subjects in the third year. I discontinued the course and got married the very next year. Bitten by the art bug, however, I continued painting at home. In the process, I learnt and explored a lot in art.

Some years later, my sailor-husband Gopi Lajmi was on a voyage with J D Gondhalekar, the dean of Sir J J School of Art. After the trip, Gondhalekar came home for dinner, saw my paintings and enquired if I was an artist. My husband replied, ‘No, but she wants to be one.’ He insisted I join the institute. But I felt too shy as I was expecting my second child then. Later on, in the ’80s, I did enrol myself at the college to complete my master’s in teaching.

Like other well-known artists of my generation, I also dreamt of studying and experimenting at Ecole Des Beaux-Arts, the famous school of arts in France, and joined French classes. However, the responsibilities that came with marriage didn’t let it materialise. Interestingly, later on, I was offered the job of a visualiser in an ad agency with a starting salary of ₹ 1,800, but my mind was attuned to fine arts and I didn’t want to commercialise my work. It has been five-and-a-half decades now. When I look back, I feel everything was destined.



Hareesh Patel

Do you regret getting married at an early age?

Times were different then. In the Saraswat community, the moment a girl turned 16, the family would look for marriage proposals. The first proposal came for me when I was 17. The prospective groom, Gopi Lajmi, then 23, was with the merchant navy, and the youngest captain with the Scindia Shipping Company. He was appearing for his exams then and also sailing between Bombay and Mangalore. We got engaged. Before marriage, I had gone to Calcutta with my uncle for one-and-a-half months and was keen on joining Santiniketan. But my future in-laws were conservative and insisted the wedding take place within a stipulated time. I was forced to return to Mumbai. We got married in December 1952. I kept painting after marriage, but had to give it a break every time my in-laws arrived from Madras.

Where do you draw inspiration for your work?

There is no inspiration in art; it comes from everyday practice. Art is a gift from Goddess Saraswati. However, there are some people who have influenced my life: my mentor K H Ara, cousin Shyam Benegal and German archaeologist Heinz Mode, who bought my first painting. A friend's wife introduced Mode to me at Jehangir Art Gallery. He asked, 'Young lady, where can I see your work?' I stayed behind Taj Hotel in Colaba then, so I took him home. He wanted to buy one of the paintings but I didn't

know what price to quote. I faintly knew Ara was selling his paintings for ₹ 100, so I quoted the same amount. That's how my first painting got sold! Mode would visit India every year and I would always give him a painting. He didn't have much money on him because of the war in Germany, so in return he would send me books by post.

Ara helped initiate your first exhibition. How has he influenced your work?

I met him through my filmmaker brother Atmaram, who had made a film on the Progressive Artists' Group, to which Ara belonged. I had a huge collection of my paintings at home. After seeing some of my works, Ara said, 'You should continue painting. I will select some of your paintings for a solo show.' I began painting seriously in 1961 and he helped me launch my first solo exhibition at Jehangir Art Gallery. Some of my early works may have been influenced by his style. Later, I moved away from that and followed my own style.

While working as an art teacher in a school, you continued painting. How did you strike a balance?

I remember telling my professor Vasant Parab that I wasn't able to sell my paintings. I expressed a desire to take up a job as I didn't want to depend on my husband. He suggested I join a short-term teacher's training course. Even during my teaching days, I kept painting at home.

“It’s true that I played a part in the romance between Guru Dutt and Geeta [Roy]. I didn’t know what it really was back then but I tried to bring them together. I also played a postman and exchanged their love letters”

It was tough to strike a balance between work and art along with managing kids and family but I worked very hard. I did a whole series on relationships during that time in oils and etchings. A lot of people have told me that, that particular period of my work was excellent. Besides painting, I did story illustrations for publications such as *The Times of India*, *Indian Post*, *Femina* and *Eve’s Weekly*. I also took private tuitions in art during weekends. When I look back, I feel amazed at the way I handled things.

You underwent psychoanalysis for gaining clarity of purpose....

In the early '80s, I had done two exhibitions of abstract paintings. But there was no sense of direction in my work and I felt completely confused. Someone suggested I go in for a psychoanalysis session. The session gave me clarity and helped me work on my skills. By the mid-'80s, I started focusing on etchings, oils and water colours and never went back to abstract.

You’ve had many solo and group shows. What are the significant highlights of your career?

After meeting theatre legend Ebrahim Alkazi and doing two solo shows with him, I got calls from art galleries in Delhi and Mumbai and things fell in place. I did numerous solo and group shows and showcased my work extensively in prestigious art galleries and museums in various countries including the US and Germany. I also did art camps and travelled a lot in India and abroad. Two of my etchings got selected for the India Festival in 1985 in the US. In those days, there were no art festivals but I got invited to biennales for graphics.

Tell us about your early years of marriage.

Before marriage, my husband was posted on the ship sailing between Colombo and Calcutta and later on, he joined Bombay Port Trust, after which we got married. As a young bride, I was too shy and introverted while my husband had a friendly and gregarious personality. He was the youngest

pilot and his European bosses were very fond of him. We got accommodation in a quarter right at the harbour. As a girl coming from a large family in Matunga, it was frightening for me to live in that huge house, especially at night, when I could hear the roar of sea waves. I used to communicate with him through letters; many a time he was sailing and the letters reached after he had moved to another port. Much later, he became the deputy conservator for the harbour and we shifted to Colaba. There, too, we had a massive quarter of 6,000 sq ft and lived a luxurious life. One year before his retirement, he took up another job in Marine Club at Ballard Estate for five years. We lived in Colaba for almost 40 years before shifting to Lokhandwala in Andheri. Though my husband was not involved in my work, he was very encouraging. After retirement, he even accompanied me for my openings and other artists’ exhibitions.

Can you share your journey as a mother?

Kalpana was born when I was 20. She was good at performing arts and participated in dramas and elocution in Hindi and English at school and won prizes. I was always supportive of her. At one point, she was keen on joining the National School of Drama (NSD). Once I took her to a Japanese play by Alkazi. After the play, I met Alkazi backstage and told him Kalpana wanted to do dramatics but I couldn’t afford the fees at NSD. He said, ‘You just send her and don’t worry about the fees. There are scholarships too.’ However, at the last minute, Kalpana backed out. According to her, all those who did theatre had to take up jobs to earn but she wasn’t keen on that. Then, I tried at the Film and Television Institute in Pune, which was then chaired by Girish Karnad, whom I knew. However, Kalpana didn’t join the institute.

She worked with Shyam Benegal as an assistant director, and later went on to make art films such as *Ek Pal*, *Rudaali*, *Daman*, *Darmiyan* and *Kyon*. Kalpana is bright, highly philosophical and unconventional in her attitude and a great follower of Mata Amritanandmayi. She lived with music composer Bhupen Hazarika for many years; they

“My uncle gifted me a box of paints and a camera to my brother Guru Dutt. He even enrolled me in a drawing competition on the animation series which I won. Looking back, the box of paints was so symbolic. I was destined to become an artist”

used to travel together wherever he was invited till he passed away in 2011. Devdas, my younger son, joined as a cadet on a ship, taught navigation for many years and worked his way up to become the captain. He's posted in Greece as the deputy director of North of England (a North Insurance Management Ltd company), and is settled in England with family. His daughter Simran aged 21 years is a lawyer.

What was it like to be raised in a creative family with your father a poet, mother a writer and two of your brothers acclaimed filmmakers?

I was born in a middle-class family. My father was with Burmah Shell Oil Company during the war and my mother, who knew many languages, was a teacher. My father got transferred to Bombay and we all shifted to Matunga. I spent my childhood partly in Calcutta and the formative years in Bombay. I did my schooling at Balak Mandir in Matunga. It was wonderful growing up with four brothers—two older and two younger. Though the only daughter in the family, I wasn't pampered. On the contrary, there were responsibilities since my mother was working. Right from the age of 10, I cooked, bought vegetables and milk, and looked after my younger brothers. Now, when I look back at 65 years of running a home, I feel my early days made me tough and grounded.

We believe your uncle bought you a box of paints when you were five....

Yes, my uncle gifted me a box of paints and gave a box camera to my brother Guru Dutt. He even enrolled me in a drawing competition on the animation series *Pinocchio* and *Donald Duck*, which I won. Looking back, the box of paints was so symbolic. I was destined to become an artist. I also learnt classical music for a short while and gave my first solo performance at the age of eight. I was fond of poetry and classical dance too but my mother didn't let me pursue dance because of financial constraints. Much later, I learnt dance from my sisters-in-law Geeta [Guru Dutt's wife] and Nagratna [Atmaram's wife], who was a Bharatanatyam and Kathak dancer.

Tell us about your bond with Guru Dutt. It is believed you played a part in the romance between Dutt and playback singer Geeta Roy.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- **1977:** Bombay Art Society Award for etching
- **1978:** Maharashtra State Art Exhibition Award
- **1979:** Bombay Art Society Award for paintings
- **1979-1983:** Recipient of Government of India Junior Fellowship
- **1983:** ICCR travel grant to Germany
- **1997:** ICCR travel grant to Oakland, California

Looking back, I feel fortunate to have had Guru Dutt as my eldest brother. Through him, I met all the great poets and film personalities of his time. Also, I have such wonderful memories of going to Eden Gardens for picnics during our childhood. Once, my uncle's neighbour, who was also a distributor, came along with his wife to the picnic. His wife enthusiastically took some of us kids to one side of the garden to enact a scene with some dialogues. I played saint Dyaneshwar's brother Nivrutti. Guru Dutt surprised us all by performing a snake charmer's dance. Probably, a large painting of a snake charmer at my uncle's place had influenced him; he created the whole dance on his own.

It's true that I played a part in the romance between Guru Dutt and Geeta. I didn't know what it really was back then, but I tried to bring them together. I also played a postman and exchanged their love letters. Geeta was a successful singer and my brother was still trying to make it big in films. She visited every day in the evening in a swanky open car and we went out for long drives. She even gifted me a ring, which I still have.

It must have been tough to see your brother face the highs and lows in his life and career.

Guru Dutt was like a father figure. He was elder by seven years, so there wasn't any open communication between us. He was a man of few words and not the type who sat and talked for hours. However, he always gave his first scripts to my mother and me for reading. He invited us for his film rushes and would ask, 'Lali, how's the film? What do you like in it?' After he joined Prabhat Films in Pune as assistant choreographer and then assistant director, he came to Bombay and got a chance to direct *Baazi* for Dev Anand's Navketan Films. Dev Anand and Guru Dutt met in Pune and became very good friends.



Harmony Archives / Fawzan Husain

Guru Dutt later went on to make path-breaking films such as *Pyaasa*, *Kagaz ke Phool* and *Chaudhvin ka Chand*. His early death came as a huge blow to the family; both my mother and I underwent a lot of trauma. It was an honour to have been invited later as the chief guest by writer Nasreen Munni Kabir and Mahatma Gandhi's son Gopal Gandhi for the Guru Dutt Film Festival at Nehru Centre in London and Birmingham in 1994, where I gave an illustrated talk on my works.

Your art uses subdued colours mirroring your brother's films. Did cinema come into your art?

The melancholy and subdued style may be the outcome of our childhood. Much later, I worked as a graphic artist for Govind Nihalani's *Aghaat* and Shashi Kapoor's *New Delhi Times* and did a small cameo in Aamir Khan's film, *Taare Zameen Par*.

Can you share your experience of working with Aamir Khan?

I had volunteered with spastics earlier during my teaching years. Probably because of that, Aamir Khan considered me for *Taare Zameen Par*. Once I got a call from his office, asking if I could meet him to discuss a film. At first, I thought they were mistaking me for Kalpana but they insisted on talking to me. The same evening, Aamir called

from Panchgani and told me he wanted me to do a guest appearance in his movie. I told him I was a great admirer of his work but wasn't an actress. His secretary sent flowers and cake for me and later he sent a car to pick me up from Mumbai to Panchgani. I was put up in a hotel and the same evening, Aamir came and told me about the role. I was very reluctant about the dialogues, so he got them removed. This is how I came to be a small part of the movie. Later on, I met him at some events and even called him home for Saraswat food, but he said, 'Do you know my wife is also a Saraswat!' Aamir is a gracious film director. Both Aamir and Kiran have bought a lot of my works.

How do awards and accolades make you feel?

Awards are important when you are young. At this age, I don't feel awards are important. Today, I see young women painters winning international awards and recognition but in our times we never reached that stage.

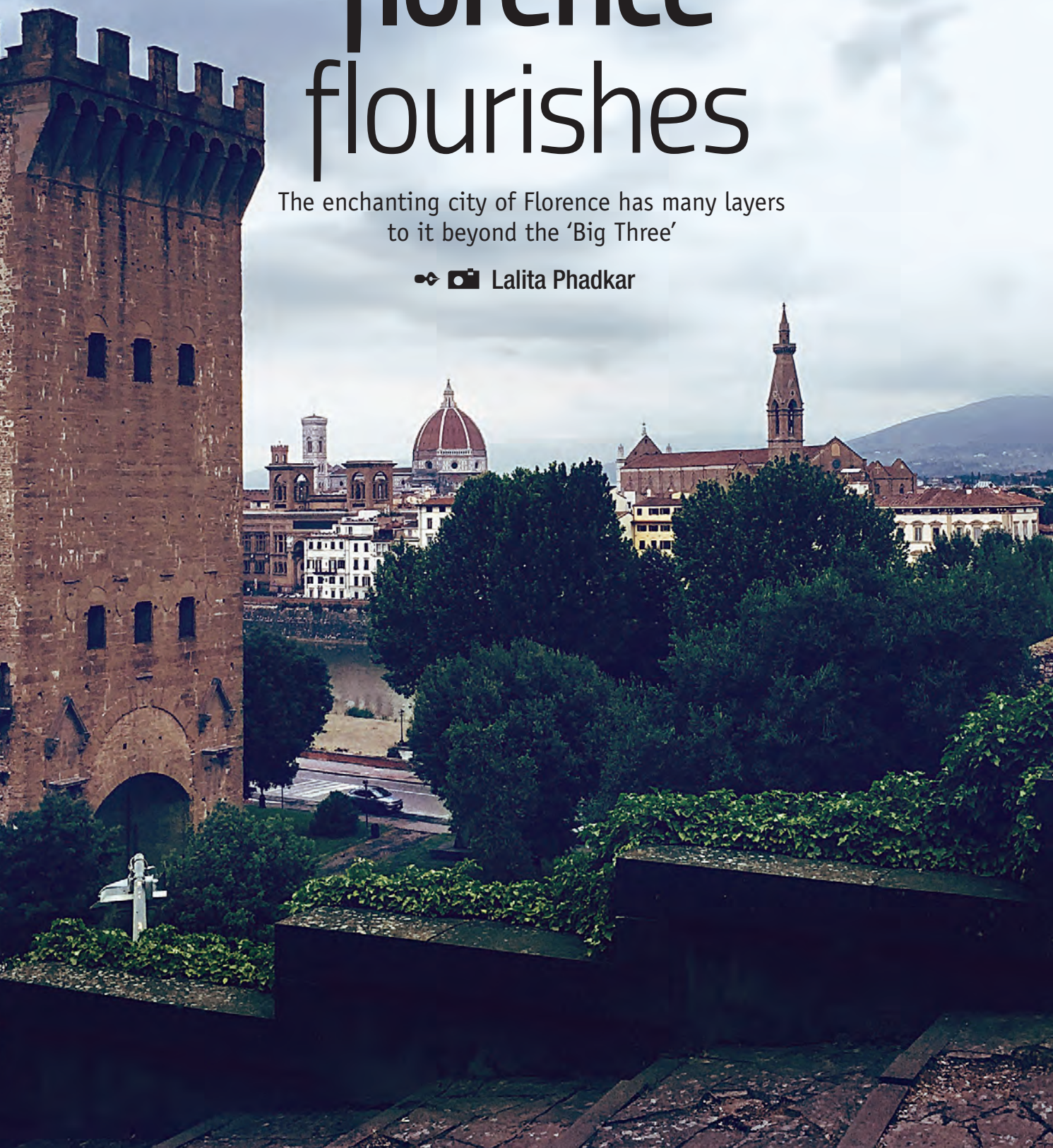
How has age made a difference to your work?

I work in my studio that is located in the garage of my building. Physically, it's tough for me to handle the canvasses and frames. I get tired standing for hours at stretch while painting. But my passion keeps me going. ✨

florence flourishes

The enchanting city of Florence has many layers
to it beyond the 'Big Three'

📷 📷 Lalita Phadkar





Three things come to mind when people think of Florence: Michelangelo's *David*, the Piazza del Duomo (with its cathedral, Giotto's bell tower and Ghiberti's magnificent doors), and the Degli Uffizi, one of the most famous art museums in the world. These are written about in every magazine article or travel guide book; they star in every movie or documentary made on Florence; they are the excited subjects of tourist photos and souvenirs. For many people they *are* Florence.

When we decided to revisit Florence, I made up my mind to explore her beyond the Big Three. I wondered whether I would find enough to fill my days. Today, after a most wonderful set of experiences I can say that if Paris is the most beautiful and Kyoto the most exotic, to me, Florence is the most dramatic city in the world.

It is dramatic in the sheer omnipresence of the works of immortal artists and sculptors. In every other city in the world you go into museums to see Renaissance art. In Florence, sculptures by immortals like Donatello, Michelangelo and Ghirlandaio, terracottas by Della Robbia and murals by Andrea del Sarto adorn buildings and churches in such profusion that after the first startled day, you learn to pass them by without a second glance.

No wonder the hordes of tourists look dazed and overwhelmed! Interestingly, Florence has been found to create a temporary but real psychosomatic disorder called the Stendhal syndrome in some people. This causes them to feel dizzy and faint from the emotional impact of so much art around.

The Palazzo (palace) Vecchio and the extremely large square before it, the Piazza della Signoria, encapsulate for me the layered drama of Florence.

The Palazzo Vecchio itself is a fabled place. When Florence was a Republic, the people elected a government (*signoria*) of nine people every two months. For this term, the nine were expected to live and work in the Palazzo Vecchio. Later it became the palace of the ruling Medici; today, it is the town hall of Florence.

Well worth a visit, the Palazzo Vecchio is not only a treasure house of Italian art but has many mysterious secret passages and secret rooms, all with their individual stories. One of these, the Studiola of Francesco I, was stumbled upon after hundreds of years, only in the 20th century. The high clock tower, which today lends grace and elegance to the monolithic structure, has a prison cell that at one time imprisoned no less than Cosimo de Medici.

The Piazza della Signoria itself has a lot to see: the Loggia Lanzi (an open-air arcade of famous sculptures including Cellini's bronze *Perseus*), an amazing marble and bronze fountain of Neptune in a chariot pulled by seahorses, a life-sized copy of Michelangelo's *David* (the original is nearby in the Accademia), an equestrian bronze of Cosimo I by Giambologna, and Bandinelli's *Hercules*.

Today, it buzzes with gaily dressed tourists, cameras at the ready, gabbling in excitement at what they see around them, spilling ice cream, chasing children, laughing and happy. This same Piazza however hides a history of violence and

No wonder the hordes of tourists look dazed and overwhelmed! Florence has been found to create a temporary but real psychosomatic disorder called the Stendhal syndrome in some people. This causes them to feel dizzy and faint from the emotional impact of so much art around



A local told me that before the peace of the Renaissance, towers were necessary as household defence against clan wars. High towers signalled power—the higher the tower, the more powerful the family. This, of course, set off a competitive war of the towers

drama. For the longest time, public executions by burning, beheading and hanging took place here.

When the monk Savoranola held Florence to ransom with threats of fire and brimstone, condemning the Arts as worldliness, this Piazza is where he held the infamous Bonfire of Vanities. Several jewels of the Renaissance were lost in this fire. Botticelli, totally under the monk's spell, personally burnt some of his paintings. Thankfully, the *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* survived and today hold crowds spellbound at the nearby Uffizi. The Florentines saw through the monk by 1498, imprisoned him in the Palazzo Vecchio and hanged him in this same square. Today, a plaque indicates the site of his death.

Florence's past has been nothing if not dramatic. It started as an R&R centre beside the River Arno for Julius Caesar's centurions. He called it Florentia, which means flourishing. Flourish it did. At the dawn of the 15th

century, Florence was firmly rooted in trade and banking. Rich families vied to adopt chapels in over 70 churches, name them after themselves and then employ artists to decorate them as standing memorials to their faith, wealth and status. This seems to have been the genesis of the Renaissance.

I visited one such, the Brancacci chapel, not expecting very much. I came away understanding just how different pre- and post-Renaissance art is.

There on the little chapel walls are two clearly contrasting styles. Some of the frescoes are brilliantly painted but lifeless—the rigid art of Gothic times. Then there are Masaccio's frescoes. Painted in 1422, when he was only 23 years old, these life-filled figures, flawed, human, believable, evoke an emotional response. This is the new naturalism of the Renaissance. In that little chapel, the contrast makes for an amazing viewing experience.



From there it all happened—and it was fuelled by one mercantile family, the Medici. Fabulously rich bankers who ultimately ruled Florence, the Medici actively championed the Arts. As a result, over the 15th and 16th centuries Florence became a magnet for the greatest collection of geniuses the world has ever known. The likes of Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Botticelli, Galileo, Poliziano, Donatello and Brunelleschi changed our world forever.

It became a bit of a competition, each family trying to outdo the other in commissioning paintings, sculptures, buildings, façades. Nor was this done in anonymity. The beautiful marble front of Santa Maria Novella for example, has the name Rucellai emblazoned across it, so that all the world could know just which wealthy man had paid for the façade. As a matter of fact, Rucellai apparently said that he enjoyed patronising the arts to honour God, the city and to “celebrate myself”.

Florence must have been a very ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ kind of place. Walking in the old part of the city, I wondered at the numerous heavy stone *torres* or towers that point

crenellated heads to the sky. A local told me that before the peace of the Renaissance, these were necessary as household defence against clan wars. High towers signalled power—the higher the tower, the more powerful the family. This, of course, set off a competitive war of the towers.

When the Florentine republic was founded in the 13th century, the Government, probably sick and tired of this peculiar method of self-proclamation, banned new towers and actually cropped the height of existing ones. The focus then promptly shifted to signalling status through magnificent palazzos or palaces. These now dot every narrow road, one more splendid than the other.

This status-focus has given Florence some very dramatic architectural features such as the Vasari corridor. Cosimo Medici I moved around 2 km away, to the massive Palazzo Pitti across the River Arno, but continued to govern from the Palazzo Vecchio and Uffizi complex. However, the dear man did not wish to walk the earth like other mortals. So he asked his architect Vasari to build a sky-corridor. Starting from the upper floors of the Palazzo Vecchio,

Clockwise from top left: Michelangelo’s tomb; chapel Santa Maria Novella; the *Mona Lisa* comes alive with chalk street art; the face etched into a stone block somewhere on the façade of the Palazzo Vecchio by Michelangelo

Opposite page: Palazzo Vecchio with *Perseus*, *David* and *Hercules*; the Bargello art museum, which formerly served as a barrack and prison

this window-lined corridor drives through the first floor of the Uffizi, runs atop the buildings that line the Old Bridge across the Arno, cuts through private dwellings and even a church, before it enters the Palazzo Pitti. Talk of the casual arrogance of power!

The magnificent churches of Florence are rather like a Renaissance treasure hunt with their vaulting spaces, marvellous paintings and sculptures and historical artefacts. I enjoyed the cloistered peace of Santa Spirito, visited Santa Croce, gaped at Botticelli's tomb in Ognisanti Church and enjoyed the splendour of the granary-turned-church of Orsan Michele.

But what will stay with me as highlights of this trip are two spectacular church experiences.

Newlyweds in front of the Il Duomo; Caledonian boar *Il Porcellino*

Opposite page: Vasari corridor

One was completely unexpected. One night, I was reading in our Airbnb apartment just next to the Duomo. Suddenly the bells began tolling. Long, deep, rolling waves of sound, reaching far and wide. I rushed to the window, as beautiful singing rose into the night. Out of the Cathedral, whose intricately sculpted marble

façade glowed, came children in white, holding candles, priests in full vestments, choristers singing a capella, people dressed in velvet cloaks and costumes of Renaissance times. Under a golden canopy walked the Archbishop in golden robes, carrying the Eucharist in a monstrance, surrounded by the panoply of the Catholic Church. Slowly they moved out of sight into the streets of Florence. This was the procession of the Celebration of Corpus Domini and I am humbled to have witnessed some part of it.

The second was sheer happenstance. One evening I went into the Badia Fiorentina, the church that features in Dan Brown's *Inferno*, simply to rest my weary legs. As I entered, I was surprised to see nuns and priests coming in and out, settling on carpets before the high altar, people sitting silently on the pews. I settled down myself. It was almost 6 pm. As the bells tolled the hour, the nuns and priests began a deeply musical chant, their voices harmonising and reverberating around the high church roof as if they were a highly trained choir. For an hour, I sat while the absolutely beautiful rite of evensong was conducted. It is





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an indescribable memory. Sitting in a church founded in 978 AD, incense curling in the still cool air, the gold of the paintings and crucifix glowing in the fading daylight, the clergy in their simple white and grey robes, singing their hearts out. A deeply meditative experience.

Summer, it is true, is a time when there are far too many tourists in Florence. One day, choked with the crush of people in the old part of the city, I went into the Oltrarno area, across the river Arno. This is a completely different experience, a little like the Left Bank in Paris. There are fewer tourists and the area is full of small workshops of artisans working in leather, tailoring, mosaic and jewellery. The little cafes and restaurants have more locals and the prices are nowhere near the 'tourist' prices of the 'Right Bank'.

From Oltrarno, I went on a long winding walk up a hillside. As I said before, Florence is dramatic. Even its green getaways fit this description. I walked up paths covered in drifts of leaves, surrounded by tall trees, often framed against medieval stone walls. Banks of wildflowers nodded at me from hillside slopes on which churches, a fortress and what looked like a castle caught my eye.

Right at the top of Mon Fiorentinus hill stands the church of San Miniato al Monte built on the site of a hermit's

cave. From its peaceful courtyard high above it all, Florence spread before me. The Arno twinkled in the sun, the city's red-tiled roofs and magnificent monuments blended into green rolling hilly country all around. Descending, I entered a rose garden open to the public, sat on a bench surrounded by contemporary sculpture and ate a lovely picnic lunch while marvelling at the view. I felt happy.

Florence as a city has many stories and continues to add more and more as time goes by. One of the famous ones concerns a little face etched into a stone block somewhere on the façade of the Palazzo Vecchio—an act of high vandalism of course. But what has made this the most famous bit of street art in the world is the author of this outrage: Michelangelo himself. Some say he did this, back turned, as a dare; others that caught by a bore, Michelangelo carved the bore's likeness in the stone as he waited for the conversation to end.

Of course, I wanted to see it. So I stood, slowly scanning the vast façade of the Palazzo Vecchio, stone by stone. It was only when I caught a youngster giggling at me that I realised just how peculiar I must seem to people who had not heard about the Michelangelo face. Imagine an elderly lady who turns her back on all the great art in the square to peer solemnly at stones on the outside of a huge building. Thank God I found that face finally!



GETTING THERE

Florence is well connected with the rest of Italy and Europe, and is easy to reach by air or land. It is also a key node on the Italian railway network. The A1 motorway, the main road artery linking the north and south of the country, runs past Florence, which has four exits.

ACCOMMODATION

The choices are plenty as almost every other house, apartment block and palazzo in the city masquerades as a hotel, pension or B&B.

TIPS

- Nearly all the museums are closed on Mondays. Also, there is no single ticket that can be used for all the museums.
- Besides the traditional tours, there are other fascinating things to do, such as the 'secret paths' inside Palazzo Vecchio, with the possibility of seeing rooms that are normally 'off limits'.
- Vacationing in Florence also means enjoying local products, including wine, bread and olive oil.
- If your budget is limited, try restaurants between San Lorenzo and the railway station.
- For those keen on shopping, look out for bags and accessories in leather.
- If you're looking for good deals, there are many flea markets such as San Lorenzo, Mercato delle Pulci and Mercato Nuovo.

Another funny sight is *Il Porcellino*: a bronze life-size Caledonian boar, all open mouth and vast tusks, sitting on a plinth at the Mercato Nuovo. This statue, it is said, can grant wishes if a coin dropped into its mouth tinkles as it falls into its fat belly. The ritual ends with the wisher giving the snout a jolly good rub. Every moment of the day, *Il Porcellino* has a steady stream of tourists dropping, listening and rubbing... the Municipality must make a fortune. Over the years, the boar's green bronze patina has turned a bright gold on the snout because of the constant assault of credulous tourists.

The world-famous Santa Maria Novella pharmacy hails from the 17th century and is a must-visit to pick up handmade soaps, scents and lotions made by the nuns of the convent. One of their products has a slightly gory story. During the plague of the 17th century, seven men approached the nuns in Santa Maria Novella begging for a protective against contamination from plague victims. Moved, the nuns poured their hearts into the effort, labouring long and hard over herbs and distillations, finally producing an effective product. The men promptly doused themselves with the powerful preparation and set about robbing all the corpses of those dead from the plague in the streets of Florence. The product is sold even today under the name of *Acetodeisetteladri*—the smelling salts of seven thieves.

I could go on and on, forever. About the church where Dante first saw the love of his life, Beatrice Portinari; the bull head atop a column at the Duomo, its horns pointing at the shop owned by a man cuckolded by the carver; the strange stone head that pokes out of the wall of Santa Maria Maggiore; the magic eye of Renaissance times that was a removable stone let into the first floor of houses... Florence is dramatic. Florence abounds in stories.

But Florence is also a fun place, with young vibrant people spilling out of cafes, restaurants and shops. Late into the night, we explored streets full of safe, happy, laughing people, listening to street musicians, watching the gaily decorated carousel in the Piazza della Repubblica, marveling at the multilayered city Florence is.

One abiding memory of the fun side of this beautiful city will be the street art of Clet Abraham and Blub. Clet, at dead of night, steals out and embellishes traffic signs, careful not to change their meaning, merely making them fun. One of his best is a 'No Entry' sign on a street corner where the horizontal bar now has a policeman hugging the bar while hearts float around the frame. Clet calls it *Policeman in Love*. Blub is a modern Florentine mystery. Who it is, no one knows. Whether man or woman, no one knows. But Blub's posters adorn many a city wall, flawlessly combining old and new, depicting old masterpieces in a new and engaging way.

Rather than seeking to ban or punish them, Florence has seamlessly absorbed them into the continuous narrative of this art-filled city. Today, tourists actually go around excitedly identifying the works of these artists. They have simply added to the stories of this storied place.

My husband and I spent two weeks in Florence. When friends heard this was what we intended to do, reactions ranged from the amused to the amazed. The consensus was that we would regret our decision within five days at most. I am happy to say that they were wrong.

I have enjoyed thoroughly both aspects of Florence. She is a beautifully preserved Renaissance wonder as well as a modern, vibrant, fun-filled city. Even now, after such a long stay, I realise there are still many layers I have not explored. This, I feel, is the best way to say goodbye to a city—grateful that I have seen so much, sorry that there is still so much left to see. There is no doubt in my mind at all. Florence flourishes. ✨



Photographs courtesy: Victoria Memorial Hall

OH CALCUTTA!

The sights of erstwhile Calcutta never get old. Images of iconic spaces and landmarks that once characterised the city were recently on display at Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, in an exhibition titled *Frozen In Time: Late 19th and Early 20th Century Photographs of Calcutta and Its Neighbouring Areas*. The exhibition, inaugurated by celebrated photographer Raghu Rai, comprised the digital reproductions of 96 images curated from a vast collection

photography

of two of India's largest commercial studios, Bourne & Shepherd and Johnston & Hoffmann. "These images left by our great masters are like our culture and heritage," said Rai at the inauguration. "They show how things were and how crowded and chaotic things have become today. When you see these photographs taken 150-160 years ago, it is something very unique for us. The first thing that comes to your mind is, 'Oh my God, that's the way it used to be!'"

Clockwise from top: The old New Market (Bourne & Shepherd); Old Howrah Bridge (Bourne & Shepherd); Government Place East (Johnston & Hoffmann)

Ode to my people

Retired college principal Dr Nityananda Gogoi preserves a part of Assam's oral history by compiling folk songs and ballads. Dr Tapati Kashyap Baruah tells us how he did it

DR NITYANANDA GOGOI'S personal legacy is the legacy of Assam, a heartfelt ode to his motherland. The retired college principal's labour of love is a collection of 550 folk songs and ballads that tell the story of the people of Upper Assam and their ancestors. As these songs and ballads are a part of oral history, it took Dr Gogoi many decades to source and compile them. Now he's ready with his manuscript, *Ujani Asamar Lokageet Lecheri*.

Naturally, Dr Gogoi, 68, is visibly pleased. "The folk songs include *bihu-geet*, *ban-geet*, *mautor-geet*, and a number of ballads woven around local heroes and myths, which I have collected from numerous persons in the districts of Upper Assam."

If Dr Gogoi speaks softly, the picture he paints is bold and vibrant. While *bihu-geet* are folk songs sung during Rongali Bihu, the Assamese New Year festival, *ban-geet* are sung by cattle herders while taking their livestock to graze. *Mautor-geet*, on the other hand, are songs sung by mahouts, he reveals.

Among the many ballads he has recorded is *Maniram Dewanor geet*, which describes the life story of Maniram Dewan, a freedom fighter from Assam who was hanged by the British in 1858. "*Jana-gabharur geet* is about a young woman who decides to put suitors to an acid test," he shares. "It is said to be the longest Assamese ballad. I have compiled two other ballads directly from villagers. They are about two legendary princes and are sung with local variations in different districts of Assam."

history

Dr Gogoi traces his love for folk songs and literature to his parents and grandparents. "My grandparents were illiterate but were great repositories of folk knowledge and wisdom. So was my mother, who was a storehouse of folk songs, devotional songs, myths and folktales. As a child, I enjoyed listening to her sing and the stories she told as she wove magic on her

loom. As I grew older, I began noting down these songs. And as my interest grew, I also began looking for elderly people across districts who knew such songs, and discovered that this was a dying art that would probably become extinct in the next couple of decades," says Dr Gogoi, who adds that his father, too, used to tell him stories about historical places and monuments in this part of Assam.



Dr Tapati Kashyap Baruah

The researcher-cum-historian retired as principal of Biswanath College, 300 km east of Guwahati, about a decade ago. He has published five books to date, including *Buranjiye Parasha Biswanath Prantar*, on the history of Biswanath district in Assam; *Asam Buranji*, which focuses on a specific phase in Assam's history; and two books, *Sri Thakur Charit* and *Sri Sri Binandashyam Charit*, which are biographies of medieval saint-preachers.

"Young people no longer have the time or inclination to listen to what their parents sang," he rues. "Certain aspects of local culture and traditions are on the verge of extinction owing to globalisation. In Assam, these local folk songs and ballads will be the first victims."

A doctorate in history from Gauhati University, Dr Gogoi's thesis was called *Historical Geography of Medieval Assam*, which was released as a book in 2016. It contains a rich harvest of materials both ancient and medieval, and represents chapter-wise the hills and mountains, rivers and lakes, administrative divisions, cities and towns, religious institutions and sites, villages and routes and roads of Assam.

Dr Gogoi's interest in history has also prompted people in the region to contact him whenever they come across objects of historical value. Thus, Dr Gogoi today has a rich collection of old coins, a few copper plates and over 250 manuscripts all written on the bark of the *sanchi* tree.

"Individual people and families think they will not be able to preserve such items and thus hand them over to me," he says, showing off his collection of handwritten manuscripts, some of them 400 to 500 years old. Meanwhile, his skill in epigraphy has enabled him to retrieve near-extinct texts inscribed on rocks and copper plates written centuries ago that are lying scattered in Biswanath and adjoining districts.

"There are a lot of historic treasures still lying undiscovered across Assam," Dr Gogoi says. "While I have been trying to concentrate on Biswanath, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Sonitpur districts, I hope that others with an interest in history look at such treasures in their respective districts."

Raza through the years



Courtesy: Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris



Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art

From his early works to finding his signature style, the retrospective journey of master artist S H Raza is being showcased at Mumbai's Piramal Art Gallery.

S H Raza: Traversing Terrains presents the story of Raza's life from the 1940s to the 1990s, through his travels and artwork, accompanied by rare archival photographs, diary extracts, and written correspondence between Raza and his contemporaries. The exhibition forms a thorough narrative of Raza's work, the first such major retrospective since his death on 23 July 2016, taking the viewer through his early days in Mumbai and his travels around India and various parts of France to the eventual return to his Indian roots.

Raza, circa 1960; oil on canvas painting *Eglise et Calvaire Breton*, 1956

“For me, comics, graphic novels and cartoons are art forms that carry politics in their genes. I see myself as a part of that tradition. In India, all the foundational values of our democracy are under threat. Some artists in the mainstream tend to differentiate between art for art's sake and art for politics' sake. That is a false distinction, to my mind. Art has always reflected our realities.

—Graphic novelist **Orijit Sen**, 55, speaking to *The Week* at the Master Practice Studios of the Kochi Muziris Biennale month-long programme that gives candidates a chance to work with an established practitioner of a craft



Postcards courtesy: Bhau Daji Lad Museum

POSTCARDS from the past

Early postcards recorded instances of history that other mediums might have missed. Owing to their role as a new medium of communication, their personal messages have become a part of the story; they have documented the development of colonial cities and their exquisite architecture; and they showcase the people of India in their colourful and ethnic finery. *Paper Jewels: Postcards From The Raj*, an exhibition at Mumbai's Bhau Daji Lad Museum, charts the life of the postcard in India, which recorded social transformations during the late 19th and early 20th century, and documented the rise of Indian nationalism. The exhibition features over 300 postcards from the Omar Khan Collection and the Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, as well as old photographs, albums and other associated materials. Most of the postcards on display were produced at the now defunct Ravi Varma Press in Maharashtra, the first major postcard producer in India, which was an incubator for artists of the time. The exhibition uncovers such gems as

history

the early postcards of the great Indian painter M V Dhurandhar, signed postcards by expatriate German artist and publisher Paul Gerhardt, as well as the exceptional work of an early Austrian lithographer in Kolkata, a British photographer in Peshawar, and other Indian studios across the country. According to curator Omar Khan, "The axis through *Paper Jewels*... from Kolkata to Mumbai, Karachi to Lahore, Colombo to Kandy, is place. It is the filter through which I have curated the best few hundred of the thousands of postcards I have found, selecting those images that have the most personal resonance for me living in California, where postcards are pinprick reminders of a rich cultural history left behind. A postcard contains no secrets at all, or it contains them very carefully," he writes in an article in *thewire.in*. The exhibition will be on till 1 October, before travelling to Delhi and Goa. Further, 3,000 restored postcards from the subcontinent will be released under the free and open Creative Commons on social media.

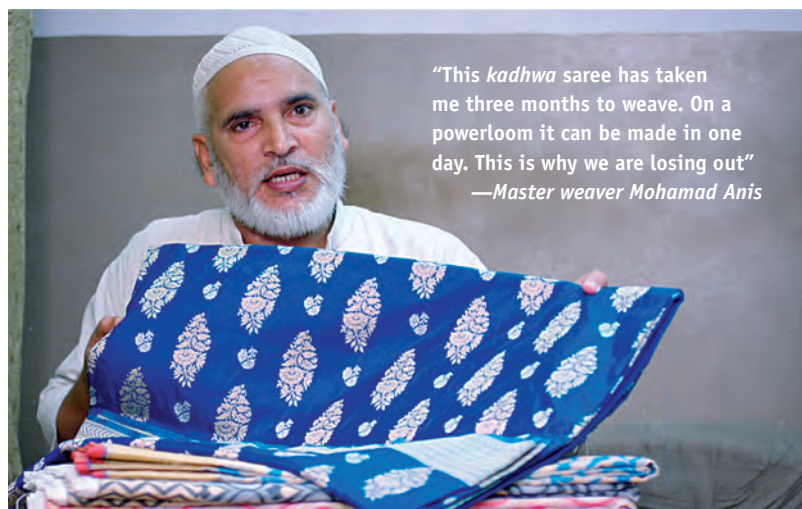
Clockwise from top left: *Entrance to Elephanta Caves*, published by Clifton & Co, c. 1905; M V Dhurandhar's *Hindu Girl of the Period* [signed], c. 1905; *Malabar Point, Bombay*, published by G B V Ghoni, c. 1900; M V Dhurandhar's *Gardener* [signed], c. 1903

Eye on the ARTS



Delhi's Prithvi Fine Art & Cultural Centre recently inaugurated its new Multi-Art Centre with a solo exhibition by Delhi-based Sangeeta Gupta, 60. The resource centre, equipped with a gallery and spaces for book launches, readings and discussions, will also offer art residencies and cultural exchanges. To start things off, Gupta put on an exhibition titled *Neel: Mysteries of the Blue* featuring her own works. "Blue has always attracted me with a magnetic pull, almost fatal. The universe has so much of it—in the sky and the sea, in the colour of the gods. It has layers of silence like a musical note, a symphony," the artist tells us, adding that the centre will host one such major event every month.

Woven in time



"This *kadhwa* saree has taken me three months to weave. On a powerloom it can be made in one day. This is why we are losing out"
—Master weaver Mohamad Anis

The once prosperous weavers of Varanasi are now in dire straits. A new documentary, *Bunkar: The Last of the Varanasi Weavers*, brings to light what ails this glorious handloom industry. Featuring a series of interviews with long-time weavers and craftsmen, the documentary highlights how mechanisation of the loom has compelled artisans to give up their traditional vocation. While one of the weavers describes how his loom has been dis-

mantled and carefully stowed away, another narrates his story from the auto-rickshaw that is now his bread and butter. "To be part of a generation that watches in silence as we lose our heritage would be tragic," writes Satyaprakash Upadhyay, 31, in his 'director's note'. "As I see it, the problem is simply that not enough people know about the issue or its complexity! The only way to ensure a real resolution is to create a wider awareness of the problem."

EPIC BENT



J Ramaswamy

After Bengaluru-based journalist Chitra Ramaswamy got a taste of writing stories relating to the divine, there was no stopping her. Having been commissioned by Prism Books to adapt Valmiki's *Ramayana* for children last year, she soon went on to write a version for adults. Her latest offering: *Hanuman*, sourced from various texts and conversations with scholarly priests at a number of Hanuman temples. Ramaswamy tells us that she tries as far as possible to write as she speaks, even when she's narrating epic stories, making it easy for first-timers as well as voracious readers to consume. "Having to write about a deity was a daunting task, but there was also a sense of feeling blessed. From before Hanuman's birth, to the many adventures of his life, including the birth of his son—of whom not many know—and how he was bestowed the boon of music, I have tried to maintain one long narrative," says Ramaswamy, who has also authored four quiz books that have been translated into several languages, to *Harmony-Celebrate Age*.

In search of the **ULTIMATE REALITY**



It is believed that all religions lead us to the same God. In his recent book ***Nostalgia for Eternity – Journeys in Religion, History, and Myth on the Indian Subcontinent*** (Niyogi; ₹ 3,000), photographer Leonid Plotkin depicts the human yearning for transcendence and every pilgrim's attempt to reach the eternal, evoking the idea that the Truth is One. A visual treat on India's multifaceted religious traditions, the book gives us a glimpse into the cultural phenomena and spiritual practices of believers, from Tantric worshippers to Buddhist monks, Sufi pilgrims to Baul fakirs.

A man taking a ritual bath in the sacred pool of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' holiest pilgrimage place. Standing on an island and surrounded by a pool of water, the temple signifies Ultimate Reality amid the waters of eternity and immortality; and it constitutes a place where pilgrims can, symbolically, cross from the profane to the sacred



A pilgrim at Arunachaleswarar temple in Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, where Lord Shiva manifests as fire—one of the five elements of nature

High in the Himalaya, porters carry a pilgrim to Amarnath, a sacred site associated with Lord Shiva, on an improvised palanquin. In Hinduism, the ultimate goal of pilgrimage, and of all spiritual practice, is moksha—liberation from the illusory sense of an individualised self





Indians of African descent, known as Sidis, march in procession to the shrine of their ancestor, the African Sufi saint Bava Gor. For nearly 2,000 years, Africans have crossed the Indian Ocean from the east coast of Africa to settle on the Indian subcontinent. Over the centuries, the Sidis have largely assimilated into Indian culture while retaining elements of their African heritage, most visibly in their spiritual traditions which merge the African worship of ancestor spirits with the Indian Islamic tradition of venerating Sufi saints

Naked sadhus, ascetics from an order of warrior monks devoted to god Shiva, at the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, walk carrying a trident and halberd, symbolising their readiness to defend their beliefs with the force of arms





Tantric practitioners call down the Mother Goddess. With invocations, mantras, rituals and offerings, Tantrikas make sacrifices to the fire and call on the Goddess to make Herself present and inspire them with Her power



Nihangs in a procession during a festival. The Nihangs, or Sikh soldier-saints, constitute the remnants of spiritual armies that once defended the Sikh nation from religious persecution, especially by the Mughals and Afghans. Though no longer called up to engage in battles, the Nihangs maintain their military traditions

Monks at the sacred Cham dance. The wrathful masks used in the dance suggest that although nirvana—union with Ultimate Reality—constitutes a state of supreme bliss and peace, a certain horror is inseparable from any contemplation of the highest nature of things



Pilgrims walk barefoot along a rocky path through the forests of the Western Ghats to reach Sabarimala temple, dedicated to the Hindu god Ayyappa. Leaving behind their routine lives, families and vocations, pilgrims to Sabarimala enter a world of discipline, asceticism, renunciation, and occasional ecstasy



On the outskirts of Delhi, Sufi pilgrims pass one of the oldest Islamic monuments in India, the 800 year-old Qutb Minar. The annual pilgrimage from Delhi to the burial place of the Sufi saint Moin-ud-din Chishti in Ajmer has taken place without interruption for more than 800 years



Bauls sing at a gathering in a village in West Bengal. Bauls and Baul fakirs belong to a small, syncretic Bengali religion. They are the followers of a primordial path that discerns God in the heart of every human being



A pilgrim makes offerings in front of an ancient gilded sculpture of the dying Buddha in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh. His last words were reported as, "Decay is inherent in all worldly things. Strive for your own liberation with diligence"



OFF THE CUFF BY RAJU MUKHERJI

Own goal: With Indian football only having itself to blame for its sorry state, it's time to ask some tough questions

The 21st FIFA World Cup recently concluded—as always, India was nowhere in the picture. This is a disappointment and an embarrassment to millions of football lovers. But the reasons have never been truthfully answered. In India, we have hidden ourselves behind screens of misrepresentations and hypocrisy. It's high time Indians know the truth about our football scenario.

Today, India is ranked below 100 other soccer-playing nations of the world. Even at the Asian level, we are among the bottom rankers. If nations like Japan, South Korea and Iran can qualify for the World Cup, why can't we? If countries like Iceland, Cameroon and Costa Rica, among others, can become world-cuppers, why can't we make it?

Ironically, soccer was introduced to India much earlier than it was established in Brazil by Britain. The sport was introduced in India by the Britons in the 1850s whereas they laid the foundation of football in Brazil much later in the 1880s. The game was played in India by the British military men stationed here. The native Indians were quick to grasp the fundamentals and organised clubs to compete with the British teams based in India.

But so attuned were we to being within the 'comfort zone' of our country that our players, coaches and officials had little idea of how football was evolving around the world. The World Cup began in 1930. Soccer at the Olympics had started still earlier, in 1900. Initially, it was an all-European affair at the Olympics but from the 1924 Olympics, soccer began to attract nations from around the world. All over the globe, players had progressed from 'barefoot football' to wearing boots with studs.

In India, we still continued to play in bare feet! Even now, some people take great pride to say that Indian players had real courage because they played in bare feet against the boot-studded Brits! Such misplaced bravado cost Indian soccer very dear in the long run. In fact, when India first took part in Olympic soccer in 1948, our boys played in bare feet, though it was not allowed by the existing rules. But at the time, India had just gained independence and the Olympics were held at London, so the British authorities, in an act of magnanimity, allowed the Indian players to play without boots on. On a bone-dry ground, the Indians put up an outstanding display but finally went down 1-2 against France, after missing two penalties!

The next Olympic Games were held in Helsinki in 1952. Our much-vaunted barefoot players were hamstrung by the slushy conditions and were thrashed by Yugoslavia 1-10. Only then did realisation dawn in India that one cannot play proper soccer without properly studded boots.

Between the two Olympics, in 1950 India received an invitation from Brazil to take part in the World Cup. We failed to accept the invitation—there were no qualifying rounds in those days—and since then, India has never been a part of the World Cup. Recently, an idea is being floated that India could not go to distant South America because of the high cost of travel. This is not true at all. At the time, just after Independence, then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, an ardent lover of sports, was very keen to see India participating in tournaments around the world. Money was made available for various sports meets including hockey, cricket and other sports. In fact, football, too, had received government patronage and private sponsorship to travel to London for the 1948 Olympics.

Money was certainly not the major issue. The outrageous demand of our football authorities was to be allowed to play barefoot! FIFA was adamant that they would not allow anybody to twist their rules: either you play with boots on or don't play at all. Even for the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland, an invitation was extended to India. True to form, our football authorities returned the entry form after the expiry date was over and, consequently, India was not allowed to take part.

In the past five decades, India took part in pre-World Cup tournaments and was invariably defeated by big margins, even by Asian sides. Since 1970, Indian football has not been able to make a mark, even at the low Asian level. Indeed, for the past five decades, India's football stature has stagnated at rock bottom. But we still have not bothered to analyse our weaknesses, preferring to take refuge under lame excuses. We have blamed lack of infrastructure, lack of sponsorship money and lack of opportunities. Are nations like Nigeria, Senegal and Honduras superior to us in these respects?

Our problem is that we have remained dishonest to ourselves and continuously hoodwinked our football enthusiasts. Today, India is not even a force in Asian soccer. As it is, Asian soccer is no big deal in the world of football. For the World Cup, among the best 32 nations

only three teams from Asia are considered for qualification for the sake of universal participation. Even among these weak Asian countries, India has no standing. At present, we have come down to bullying our next-door neighbours in the South Asian Federation (SAF) games. Quite a comedown it is. In 1951 and again in 1962, we were Asian champions and used to beat Japan and South Korea—they are regular world-cuppers now. Even in 1970, we were the bronze medal winners at the Asian Games. After that, what has Indian football got to show? Nothing.



For the past five decades, India's football stature has stagnated at rock bottom. But we still have not bothered to analyse our weaknesses, preferring to take refuge under lame excuses

In the 1980s, the Nehru Cup was introduced. Top-quality foreign teams came to play. But what did India gain? We have the I-League and the ISL for a number of years now. But how far has Indian football progressed?

The truth is that Indian football has to develop from within. No amount of money or transfusion of overseas talent will be of any help. African and South American countries, including top football nations like Brazil and Argentina, can offer very little to their young trainee players by way of facilities and funds. Yet how do they manage to produce outstanding talent? Even players from economically advanced nations dance to their samba tunes. Why does this happen?

Surprisingly, no one in India seems to be bothered. The golden age of Indian soccer was between 1956 and 1962. Instead of eulogising those truly great players, the trend at the moment is to heap praise on players who achieved nothing worthwhile during their heydays, after 1970. This kind of hypocrisy will not help soccer to thrive in India.

Memories of men like Neville D'Souza, Peter Thangaraj, Arun Ghosh, Jarnail Singh, Tulsidas Balaram, Simon Sundaraj, Pradip Banerjee, Prosanto Sinha, Yousuf Khan and Chuni Goswami, among others, are fast fading. This was the nucleus that helped India exhibit fabulous soccer at Melbourne, Rome and Jakarta between 1956 and 1962.

Neville D'Souza had scored four goals, including a hat-trick against Australia (now a World Cup side), at

the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. True to Indian sports tradition, the outstanding performer was excluded from the team in the following Olympics at Rome in 1960! To this date, no other Indian has been able to replicate the glorious deed of the man from Goa. Yet he was victimised for no fault of his. That's another story for next month.

For the past 50 years, the Indian soccer world is living in a cocoon of self-hypnosis. Unless we are honest to ourselves and to football, no improvement will ever take place. First, we need to accept the fact that Indian football

has been a total flop even at the low Asian level since that bronze medal in the 1970 Asiad.

Yes, the Indian football brigade can take heart that there are about 80 nations still behind India's football rank. What needs to be analysed is why we are behind Japan and Korea whom we used to defeat? Why are we behind teams from Cameroon, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Honduras, Morocco, Columbia and others who can give little by way of assistance to their own players?

Economically, these countries are so backward that their players seek football employment abroad. Because they are brilliant, they get lucrative jobs as soccer professionals. On the contrary, our best players are so mediocre that they are turned back. This sad truth we must learn to face is that we are just not good enough. No point hiding behind excuses, pretexts and verbiage. Our soccer heroes returned from the previous Asian Games after being thrashed by huge margins in the group matches they played in.

We, the football fans of India, must get honest answers from the people concerned with Indian football. The most important questions are: Why are we not good enough? What is being done to rectify matters? Where is the huge amount of sponsorship money going? Why are football administrators not being held accountable? Why don't we have football nurseries? Do we have proper coaches? Is the game being properly promoted among our youngsters? Till these questions are truthfully answered, Indian football will remain in the quagmire of its own making.

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



Why did the silver cross the road?

On her maiden visit to Europe, **Natasha Rego** is captivated by how silvers lead generally independent and sometimes adventurous lives



There's a zebra crossing on a busy Mumbai street that runs right into an elevated divider. I never noticed it before... not before I returned from a month-long trip to Europe. For the first time I wondered, doesn't the zebra crossing need to lead pedestrians to the opposite side of the road?

When I arrived in Munich, Germany, I was impressed by the mobility of the silvers there as much as their stylish silver locks. They were everywhere—riding cycles, crossing streets and wheeling themselves into trains; sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs, but always unafraid of being run over by traffic.

Why would they be, when it was the uncanny habit of motorists to come to a halt as pedestrians or cyclists approached—even from several metres afar? It was in my pedestrian instinct to stop for cars to pass, but it was in theirs to stop for me to pass. So for my first few days there, at unmarked intersections—I hate to say it, but—I was at an impasse!

Say what you will about the serious, sober, not-so-sociable Germans, when it comes to the streets, they possess a gentle roadside manner. And that, more than the impeccable infrastructure, is what makes the place so accessible to its silvers.

But let us spend a moment on the infrastructure, shall we? Silvers on cycles, pushing walkers with wheels and riding on wheelchairs could access the streets, malls and all the various modes of public transport with considerable ease. Right from the innards of the countryside to the centres of the cities, the right of way belongs to the pedestrian, more so if you are pushing a tram or riding a wheelchair. And where there is a pedestrian walkway, which is almost everywhere, there is always a silver in a motorised wheelchair wheeling by you, often on their own.

As I hopped, skipped and jumped across countries, I realised this was a rather 'EU-niversal' feature. Across the

countries, silvers were out and about, pulling the ubiquitous foldable trolley shopping bag that sometimes doubled up as a little seat. Over in Vienna, Austria, which was a livelier city, I would see tired silvers put the brakes on their trolleys and rest their legs awhile before carrying on.

I watched amazed as silvers unabashedly rode the subway, tram, bus and train, their trolley, walking stick or wheelchair in tow. Almost nothing was inaccessible to them; and

when it was, the system found a way around it. At a tram stop in Vienna, for instance, the tram driver made his way to the side to attach a dismantlable ramp for a lone wheelchair-bound silver to get on. Granted, all these provisions are possible because of the scanty populations they have to work for.

While it was all wonderful to watch, there was one anomaly that caught my Indian eye: the silvers were almost always alone. Whether it was at the grocery store or while they were on their knees, tending to their flower beds, silvers were on their own or with their partners. Even as I biked through the Wachau valley in Austria,

for long kilometres along the Danube, the silvers I encountered were on their bikes, sure, but also by themselves.

When my friend and I took a little break on a closed-off staircase during our hike up the Kahlenberg hill in Vienna, we were so sure only fellow youngsters would come our way. How wrong we were! First, we watched as an old gentleman with walking poles climbed over the barricade and slowly made his way up the stairs, pausing now and then to take a moment. When he reached us, we greeted each other and I offered him some of my water, which he declined. (In fact, he seemed rather taken aback. According to my friend who's been living in Vienna for five years, it is not in the culture to extend a hand out to random strangers.) He told us he was going to drink the meltwater from the Alps, which came out of a tap on the hill. Few minutes later, another silver in tiny green running shorts jogged down the steps.



Indeed, the silvers were more mobile, more independent and more self-reliant than I had ever seen. I suppose when you have lived in such an individualistic society and prepared for a rather solitary retirement your entire life, you do tend to stay on your feet much longer. And with several contributing factors working in your favour, retired life could actually be quite adventurous.

This idea was reaffirmed when, on the last day of my trip, a cute old couple slowly and steadily cycled passed me with

embarrassing ease, as I huffed and puffed and shamefully pushed my cycle up a Belgian countryside bridge.


Back home in Mumbai, as I stood at the zebra crossing that runs right into the elevated divider on that busy street, I came to the realisation that those coveted cycle lanes and the pedestrian right of way are distant dreams. As for silvers trying to cross the roads, well, we can certainly count on someone in the crowd to take their hand and lead them to the other side.

Rego, 27, is chief sub-editor, Harmony-Celebrate Age



Middle age ends and senescence begins the day your descendants outnumber your friends.

—American poet Ogden Nash (1902-1971)




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

BUTTERFLIES *never retire*

The first click of the mouse.

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

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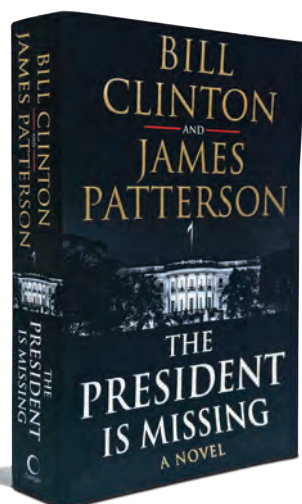
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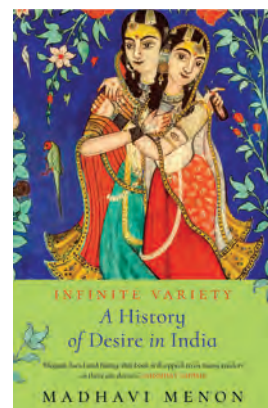
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It's a dream team—former US president **Bill Clinton** and bestselling author **James Patterson**—for a political thriller. **THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING** (Penguin Random House; ₹ 599; 513 pages) blends Patterson's storytelling skills with the insider account that only a former resident of the White House could provide. Incidentally, this isn't the first work of fiction by an American president; Jimmy Carter's *The Hornet's Nest* claims that honour. The story is told mostly from the perspective of fictional president Jonathan Duncan, who not surprisingly has many parallels to Clinton—brought up by a single mother, he is a former governor who met his brilliant wife at law school, has a daughter with her, and has come close to facing impeachment. Duncan takes on Suliman Cindoruk, the leader of the Sons of Jihad, and his plot code-named 'Dark Ages' to crush America through cyber attack. What could have been a taut thriller is slackened by tepid moralising. The writers also indulge in implied Trump bashing with stray mentions about Russia, social media and the culture of sycophants and bootlickers. Though Duncan never reveals which party he belongs to, it's quite evident that, like the writer, his allegiances lie with the Democrats. That said, it wouldn't be surprising to see this book translating into a Hollywood production.

Writing on a subject like desire can be daunting. However, **Madhavi Menon's INFINITE VARIETY: A HISTORY OF DESIRE IN INDIA** (Speaking Tiger; ₹ 599; 358 pages) is insightful, to say the least. The author articulates the narrative with finesse, candour and a remarkable sense of humour. An academician, the author blends serious scholarship with popular culture and folklore to dispel many sexual myths. From Ayyappa and celibacy to hair as a marker of sexual attractiveness in India across gender, from Draupadi's *cheer-haran* to the phenomenon of Savita *bhabhi*, the book is extensively and exhaustively researched. Menon also ponders on what could have been the state of affairs if Hindu society were based on the laws of *Kamasutra* instead of *Manusmriti*. Finally, as Menon says without mincing words, "Sexuality does not imply a fixed personhood; gender does not fully determine desire. One does not become less of a man for being a woman."

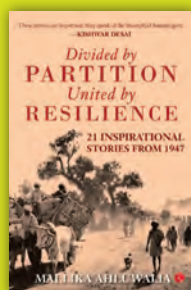


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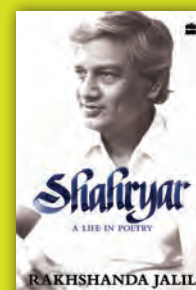
Scent of a Story:
A Newspaperman's Journey
Shankar Ghosh

HarperCollins; ₹ 399; 224 pages
Set against the backdrop of a transforming India after Independence, this is a moving tribute to a life spent in the romance of a newspaper.



Divided by Partition,
United by Resilience
Mallika Ahluwalia

Rupa; ₹ 295; 210 pages
Twenty-one extraordinary stories about the resilience and triumph of the human spirit.



Shahryar: A Life in Poetry
Rakhshanda Jalil

HarperCollins; ₹ 599; 256 pages
This book evaluates Shahryar's extraordinary contribution to modern Urdu and Indian poetry.

Monumental love

Monuments are often considered mute spectators to history's marvels and misgivings, but many untold stories are hidden in their ruins. Acclaimed scholar and writer **Rana Safvi**'s fascination with monuments is evident in her latest book, *The Forgotten Cities of Delhi* (Harper Collins; ₹ 799; 322 pages), the second in the *Where Stones Speak* trilogy that chronicles Delhi's languishing monuments. The book also reinforces the fact that "Monuments are not the only form of heritage but are the most visible on the landscape and their destruction is more dramatic than of other forms of heritage," to quote historian Romila Thapar.

A postgraduate in history from Aligarh Muslim University, Safvi has authored *Where Stones Speak: Historical Trails in Mehrauli, the First City of Delhi* and *Tales from the Quran and Hadith* and translated Syed Ahmed Khan's *Asad us Sanadid* and Zahir Dehlvi's *Dastan-e-Gadar*. Though a student of history, Safvi also keeps pace with the times and is significantly active on social media. As a blogger, the 61 year-old's penchant for Indian food, culture, heritage and tradition is evident on www.ranasafvi.com. On Twitter, she actively promotes Urdu poetry with the hashtag #Shair. In an email interview with **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**, the Delhi-based author talks about the need to preserve history through monuments. Excerpts.

What triggered your fascination with historical monuments?

I grew up hearing *khandhar bata rahe hain imaat shandaar thi*, meaning the ruins speak of the splendour of the monument. I've always been fascinated with old monuments though I couldn't really understand that pull or put it in words. It's only during a heritage walk in 2013 with Delhi Karavan in Mehrauli that I realised I wanted to tell the stories the stones hold in their hearts. It's on that walk that I decided to write about Delhi.

How long did it take for the book to evolve?

I had actually intended to write a book on the lines of Gordon Hearn's *Seven Cities of Delhi* but from an Indian point of view. However, when I researched for *Historical Trails in Mehrauli* I found over 50 monuments in the first city itself and realised it needed a dedicated book. That took a year to research and write. *The Forgotten Cities of Delhi* covers five cities and much more in between, so it took me two years. As I visit every monument at least once and often a number of times, that's time-consuming.



Syed Mohammed Qasim

authorspeak

I researched *Historical Trails in Mehrauli* in the summer heat but now I'm more careful using summers to write and winters for fieldwork. The canvas this time was huge, and hence time-consuming as far as surveying and research was concerned. I'm very excited every time I set off on a voyage of discovery. For me, each monument is a discovery of a time gone by!

Do you think our understanding of India's expansive history is skewed?

India has more than 4,500 communities, each with their own history, legacy and distinct culture. We rarely realise India is a civilisational society and its history is expansive. When we talk of history, we usually see it in terms of wars, power struggles and certain rulers. Today, even that understanding is skewed by what is called the left, right and centre lens by which historians view it. Attempts are made to interpret and sometimes change history to fit in a particular narrative. So we find exaggeration of aspects that suit that narrative and negation of what doesn't.

Given the neglect of our monuments, do you agree that Indians are not heritage-proud?

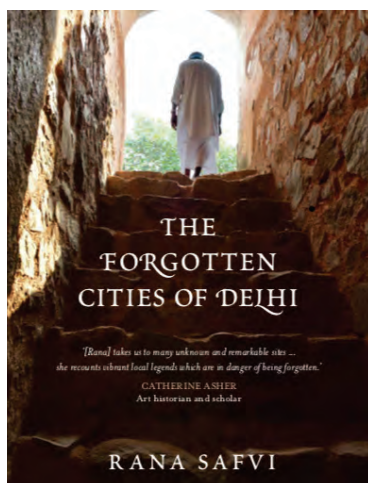
I think it's a problem of plenty. Countries that don't have an ancient past often preserve the most trivial of things, whereas we, with such a glorious past and ancient civilisation, are quite blasé about it because we are used to seeing it all around us. We are never taught to take pride in our built heritage though we keep talking of our cultural heritage. However, preservation of that legacy is always left to others, as we feel no sense of ownership over it. I feel it's only when schools and children are associated with monuments that things will change. They need to feel a sense of kinship and ownership.

What were the challenges you faced while working on your book?

My challenges were basically during fieldwork, as many monuments were encroached or inaccessible. In many places, the locals were inhospitable or openly hostile. But I'm not one to give up easily. Apart from one, I visited all the 160 monuments I've described.

Do you think we need to include monumental history in our curriculum?

Yes, we need to. We also need to make history far more interesting. History is unpopular in schools because of



"We, with such a glorious past and ancient civilisation, are quite blasé about it because we are used to seeing it all around us"

the resistance to rote learning of the subject. We forget that 'story' is an important element in the word. Research-based anecdotal history is something students are unlikely to forget. And monuments are a great way of weaving in those stories.

Your body of work is filled with a host of remarkable characters from sultans to saints. Were you to select a critic for this book, who would it be and why?

I feel history has short-changed Sultan Raziya. I have tried my best to give the ruler her due. In this book, I've tried to rest the controversy surrounding her grave by citing from the 14th century *Tarikh-e-Firoz Shahi*. I would love if I could hear her critique and perhaps get a nod of approval, however slight it might be.

Tell us about your family.

My husband and our two children are very proud and supportive of my work. I started writing very late in life and now they ensure I'm not hampered in any way and take care of all my domestic responsibilities, so that I'm free to write, travel and explore.

What are your other interests?

I love cooking. I find it very relaxing. Nowadays, I love to travel too.



THEY SAID IT

At my age I do what Mark Twain did. I get my daily paper, look at the obituaries page and if I'm not there I carry on as usual.

—British astronomer Patrick Moore (b 1947)



A DAILY JOY TO BE ALIVE

Jimmy Santiago Baca captures the essence of life—the uncertainties, daily struggles and joy

No matter how serene things
may be in my life,
how well things are going,
my body and soul
are two cliff peaks
from which a dream of who I can be
falls, and I must learn
to fly again each day,
or die.

Death draws respect
and fear from the living.
Death offers
no false starts. It is not
a referee with a pop-gun
at the startling
of a hundred yard dash.

I do not live to retrieve
or multiply what my father lost
or gained.

I continually find myself in the ruins
of new beginnings,
uncoiling the rope of my life
to descend ever deeper into unknown abysses,
tying my heart into a knot
round a tree or boulder,
to insure I have something that will hold me,
that will not let me fall.

My heart has many thorn-studded slits of flame
springing from the red candle jars.
My dreams flicker and twist
on the altar of this earth,
light wrestling with darkness,
light radiating into darkness,
to widen my day blue,
and all that is wax melts
in the flame-

I can see treetops!

Baca (b 1952) is an American poet, novelist, screenwriter and educator

Parks and recreation



Photographs by Cipun Mishra



BUZZ

In the words of poet William Wordsworth, “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.” Sitting in the tranquillity of Cubbon Park in Bengaluru, a community of poetry lovers share their mutual love for this timeless form. ‘Poetry in the Park’ is a monthly meeting open to all, without any barriers, linguistic or otherwise. Based on your preferred genre and

theme, you can share your original poetry or simply read out poems that resonate with you. The reading is followed by a short but insightful discussion on the craft of poetry over a cup of coffee and snacks. So carry your folding stool and spend an afternoon with verses that quench the thirst of your aching soul. To find out when the September poetry session will take place, contact Lyn Coutto at (0) 9880176926.

To know more, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/poetryinthepark.bangalore

Snapchat dysmorphia

n. An obsessive-compulsive preoccupation by patients who want to look the way photo-editing apps make them look.

EXAMPLE: Teenagers are undergoing plastic surgery to look like they do in their filtered selfies—and it may be a sign they are suffering from an underlying mental health condition. In addition to unicorn horns and dog ears, Snapchat and Instagram also offer perfecting filters that smooth skin, thin your face, and change your eye colour—photo-editing technology that has resulted in a new mental illness scientists are calling **snaphat dysmorphia**.

—Chelsea Ritschel, “Teenagers are getting plastic surgery to look like selfie filters”, www.independent.co.uk, 6 August 2018

Toxoplasmosis

n. A disease caused by toxoplasmas, transmitted chiefly through undercooked meat, soil, or cat faeces. Symptoms of infection generally pass unremarked in adults, but can be dangerous to unborn children.

EXAMPLE: One of the most fascinating of ‘mind control’ microbes is *Toxoplasma gondii*, a parasite that infects a staggering array of warm-blooded animals—including humans. Rodents infected with *T. gondii* become attracted to cats, often resulting in their demise when they are caught and eaten. This allows the parasite to complete its lifecycle in the cat’s gut where it reproduces sexually. Cats then shed the parasite in their faeces, and the cycle continues. Having owned a cat for more than 17 years, I’ve always wondered if my attraction to my pet feline is my own, or parasite-induced. Thankfully, in humans, infection by *T. gondii*—or **toxoplasmosis**—is generally asymptomatic.

—Jeremy Chan, “The voice within may be toxoplasma speaking”, *Asian Scientist Magazine*, 31 July 2018

Compiled from the Oxford “Weekly Word Watch”

KUMUD BARUAH, Biswanath Chariali, Assam

“When I plant a tree, it provides shade, fruits and oxygen to many people. Earlier, I used to procure saplings from nurseries in Tezpur and Nagaon. But last year, I bought a one-katha [acre] plot of land on the outskirts of Biswanath Chariali and developed my own nursery”



Dr Tapati Baruah Kashyap

A lawyer by profession, Kumud Baruah, 68, of Biswanath Chariali in Assam is an environmentalist at heart, who has planted over 5,000 saplings around his hometown. He discovered his vocation in 2012, when following a sudden inner urge he beautified the subdivisional judicial court campus at Biswanath Chariali. Not only did he clean public toilets on the campus, which hadn't been cleaned in months, but dusted old

cabinets and roofs and planted several saplings. Seeing the court campus flourish, Baruah was motivated to carry on cleaning public places, removing garbage from roads and planting saplings in and around his hometown. As a conservationist, he prefers trees such as neem, *Krishnachura*, *nahor*, *bokul*, arjun tree and *amllokhi* that produce more oxygen and provide plenty of shade for people from the harsh sun.

—Dr Tapati Baruah Kashyap

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