

harmony celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

JULY 2011 ₹ 30

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Adoor
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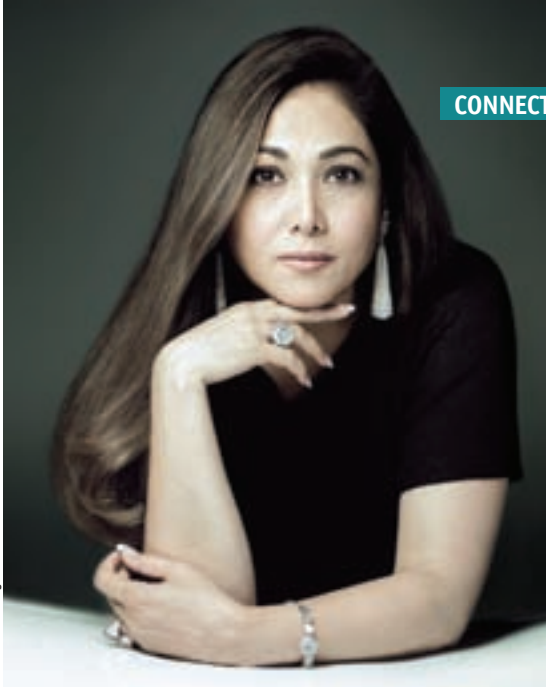
Years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes...in essence, all these are mere units of time, an endless series of numbers—it's what you do with them that counts.

'Fifteen minutes of fame' was a phrase coined by cult pop artist Andy Warhol to satirise the short-lived nature of celebrity. Paradoxically, a well-spent 15 minutes—every day—may well be your ticket to longevity.

A recent study conducted at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in the US recently reinforced the theory that 15 minutes of activity a day can do you a world of good—it can slash the risk of age-related health conditions, including hypertension, diabetes and osteoporosis, and boost your mood and happiness quotient. Activity, mind you, even includes mundane chores around the house, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or even a leisurely amble in the park with your friends.

Of course, the silvers who made the rain clouds blush in their bright yellow T-shirts at the Harmony Senior Citizens' Run at the TCS World K Bangalore 2011 had more on their mind than working up a little sweat—they were there to prove a point, the same one we make month after month in *Harmony - Celebrate Age*.

Suresh Natarajan



Cheered on by former cricketer Venkatesh Prasad and actor Srinagar Kuttty, they made a forceful statement of silver power and potential, a tableau of active ageing that riveted the citizens of the Garden City. I thank our special guests for sparing their valuable time as well as Canara Bank, Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company Ltd, Procama International Ltd, Hindustan Unilever Ltd, VLCC Health Care Ltd, Beltone India Pvt Ltd and companies of Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group who helped us to make the event so successful. Above all, I must express my gratitude to all the silvers, almost 2,000 of them, who came out to translate our motto, *Celebrate Age*, from black newsprint to vivid Technicolor.

Take a cue from them. Shake off the cobwebs of neglect and diffidence from mind and body and get on your feet. Remember, all you need is 15 minutes—for the long run.

Pina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

Harmony Celebrate Age—July 2011 Volume 8 Issue 2

Publisher **Dharmendra Bhandari** Editor **Tina Ambani** Deputy Editor **Meeta Bhatti** Associate Editor **Arati Rajan Menon** Copy Editor **Rajashree Balaram**

Correspondent (Bengaluru) **Dhanya Nair Sankar** Consultant Editor **Malvika Singh**

Creative Director **Jit Ray** Studio Manager **Haresh Patel** Production Manager **Rohidas Adavkar**

Visual Coordinator **Anuradha Joshi** Graphic Designer **Dattaguru Redekar** Editorial Coordinator **Anita Rosario**

Assistant Vice-President, Business Development **Shrenik Mehta** Assistant Manager **Nikhil Wadhwani**

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WEB EXCLUSIVES www.harmonyindia.org



DOCTOR DEPENDABLE

At 85, Dr Karuna Duara still rushes to soothe his patients

LESSONS IN COMPASSION

Pune-based Meera Badve has learnt life's best lessons from visually challenged children

FOR SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANCE CONTACT: HarmonyCare, Living Media India Ltd, A-61, Sector 57, Noida (Uttar Pradesh) - 201301.

Toll-free: 1800 1800 100 Phones: New Delhi: (95120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India Fax: (0120) 4078080; **Kolkata:** 033-22827695 Fax: 22828949; **Bengaluru:** 080-2212448, 22213037, Fax: 2218335; **Mumbai:** 022-24444423/4/5/6 Fax: 24444358; **Chennai:** 044-28478525/26/27 Fax: 28472178; Email: harmonycare@intoday.com



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column one

Indian cinema came back blown and beaten from Cannes Film Festival this year. Critics agreed that we don't have much that's worthy of global acclaim, except Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak... and Adoor Gopalakrishnan, the filmmaker this month on the cover ("I am not a rebel") of *Harmony – Celebrate Age*. He is 70, has been making cinema for 38 years and has an oeuvre of 11 feature films. But these are simply numbers. They leap off the page with quality—of life lived, of work and resilience; the net worth of which is way beyond figurative comprehension. The director is as human as his characters drawn from our impoverished villages, and potholed city streets, their travails as close to life as it can ever get. Adoor Gopalakrishnan refused to push the envelope as investigator at the National Sample Survey and joined the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune. Clear that he wanted to make films (and not in Hindi), he began his journey, not for the sake of defying norms but for the sake of cinema.

Our choices are our own to make. What we do with them is of our own making as well. And while the world might raise fingers when we choose our destiny, it rests its case when we tip the balance. This month's winners are centenarian Unani *hakim* Syed Mohammed Sharfuddin Quadri ("I live on neem juice and a piece of bread"); a year younger, Purnima Pakvasa ("Warrior Woman") who is fondly known as *didi* of the Dangs for tribal citizens; and 81 year-old Dr Sharadkumar Dicksheet ("A Cut Above the Rest"), who corrects facial deformities despite his own paralytic state and a defective heart. Role models, their stories will help you tip the balance. Do it!

—Meeta Bhatti

I am a Mumbai boy, aged 42, who shifted to Bengaluru in 2009. My parents live in Mumbai. It was my father (aged 72) who proudly flashed *Harmony – Celebrate Age* to me during one of my visits. It is really gratifying to know that a former film star leading a privileged life has chosen to devote time and effort to promote the cause of senior citizens. What is more heartening is that you chose to call them silvers. What a noble thought! Today, children forget their parents once they fly the coop and parents end up longing to meet their children. Or else, parents simply fail to understand the point of view of their children and refuse to budge from their obstinacy. In my short novel, *Travails of Sabapathy Iyer*, I had highlighted this fact. Many of the silvers refuse to give up their old ways and are almost like children in their recalcitrant attitude. It is important for grandparents to let go and spend quality time with grandchildren. Unfortunately, many of them are caught in a time warp.

I would like to share some suggestions with you. You must encourage silvers to write and share their experiences, anecdotes and memories, as you do in 'Your Space', as well as encourage contributions from others, ensuring these are in line with the spirit of the magazine. You must publish more articles related to health, nutrition and financial planning and run features on the many silvers who do great work after retirement. General articles on topics like parenting, hobbies and joint vs. nuclear families will always be appreciated. It's important to publish articles that highlight the victory of good over evil, positivity over negativity. You must also relentlessly highlight the fact that silvers have to change with the times, be more accommodative to their children and forget the past. Many times, the burden of past is too heavy for us to carry and too difficult for us to unload. For instance, in your January issue, you had highlighted the need for change in 'Turning the Page' ['Connect'].

All the best for your future endeavours. I see a very bright future for the magazine and all the efforts of Harmony for Silvers Foundation.

G Venkatesh Bengaluru

Congratulations on your seventh anniversary. The cover story of the June 2011 issue "The Seven Deadly Sins" was very interesting. Life as it stands in the 21st century is in itself sinful—the way we live, the way we think, the way we act. So many of us mature with age but can't get rid of our childhood lusts! The good news is that after retirement, people have the time



to indulge themselves in ways they couldn't earlier owing to family commitments. Elders can pursue their interests; fulfil cherished desires like travelling the world; spend time in the company of loved ones; and develop hidden talents like writing and photography.

Mahesh Kapasi Via email

Do you know what goes in your Mouth?

Important things one must know before choosing the material for dental restoration.

Before going to a dentist, here are some homework tips to make it easier for you to choose the right dental material for replacement of your teeth, replacement that gives you a natural smile.

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► NEWSWORTHY

I'm not lonely

Here's a myth buster if there ever was one. A study by the British government insists that **people actually become less lonely and happier with their local community as they grow older.** As newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* reports, the survey of 1,867 adults examining the expectations and experiences of older life in Britain threw up some interesting results:

- 72 per cent of people over 75 years of age say they never felt lonely.
- 10 per cent of people aged between 65 and 74 say they sometimes or often felt lonely, while for those aged 50 to 59, the figure is 21 per cent.
- 70 percent of people aged 75 think their neighbourhood is a good place to grow old, while only 58 per cent of those in their 50s feel this way.
- Men over 65 said they would live to be 87; women in the same age group said 88. For those aged 16 to 34, average age estimates were 79 for men and 80 for women.





READY FOR BED

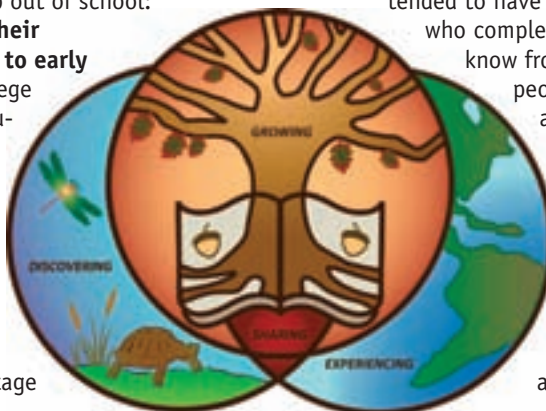
You would be glad to know that age is not inversely proportionate to a man's sex drive. It was earlier believed that your testosterone level falls with age, affecting the libido. But researchers from the University of Sydney in Australia say otherwise, insisting that **testosterone levels are not driven by age as much as they are by general health**. When the team tested hormone levels in blood samples of 325 men over 40 years of age over three months, they discovered that those in good health showed no signs of falling testosterone. "Some researchers believe age-related testosterone deficiency causes symptoms such as tiredness and loss of libido," lead researcher David Handelsman tells British newspaper *Daily Mail*. "We had originally expected age to have an effect on blood testosterone, so the findings were a bit of a surprise. A modest decline in blood testosterone among older men—coupled with non-specific symptoms, such as easy fatigue and low sexual desire—is not because of their age but symptomatic disorders, including obesity and heart disease."

1 BILLION THE NUMBER OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, OR ABOUT 15 PER CENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, ACCORDING TO THE FIRST OFFICIAL GLOBAL REPORT ON DISABILITY COMMISSIONED BY WHO AND THE WORLD BANK. AND DESPITE DISABILITY RIGHTS AWARENESS, THEY REMAIN SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS, WITH ONE IN FIVE EXPERIENCING "SIGNIFICANT DIFFICULTIES". READ THE WHOLE REPORT AT WWW.WHO.INT/DISABILITIES/WORLD_REPORT/2011/EN/INDEX.HTML

Study to survive

Here's another reason not to drop out of school: **people who fail to complete their education may be susceptible to early ageing**. Researchers at University College London have found a link between educational attainment and the length of people's telomeres, the structures at the end of chromosomes that protect genetic material from damage. As London newspaper *The Independent* reports, the researchers examined the telomere length of about 450 British civil servants and found that those who had left education at an earlier stage

tended to have shorter telomeres than those who completed their degree. "We already know from previous research that people with poor backgrounds are prone to age more quickly," says study leader Andrew Steptoe. "Education is a marker of social class that people acquire early in life, and our research suggests that it is long-term exposure to the conditions of lower status that promotes accelerated cellular ageing."



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Wild truths

A natural phenomenon among humans and domestic animals, senescence—the gradual deterioration of a living being with age—was never traditionally associated with wild animals, who were assumed to die quickly (and dramatically) from factors like predation, parasites or disease. But a study conducted at the University of Vigo in Spain has demonstrated **senescence in a population of wild birds** (*sula nebouxii*) in terms of their ability to live and reproduce. The team studied the birds, also known as the Blue-footed Booby, native to the Pacific coasts of Mexico, the Galapagos Islands and Peru, and discovered that their germ line, or DNA sequence passed from one generation to the next, is not damage-free. “The DNA of the sperm of older individuals is damaged,” lead author Alberto Velando writes in the *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*. “This means their offspring have a greater likelihood of suffering from



congenital illnesses, just like humans. Further, the colour of these birds' feet changes with age, showing oxidative damage akin to what humans suffer. All this only confirms the existence of senescence in the wild.”

It's a cat's life!



Silver cats have something delicious to purr about. French pet foods company Royal Canin has introduced a **new range of cat food products for older animals**. The selection comprises Indoor Plus 7, Outdoor Plus 7, Sterilised Plus Seven and Instinctive Plus 7 for cats aged between seven and 12 years, offering benefits such as maintaining coat gloss, physical activity levels and ideal weight. Meanwhile, the Ageing Plus 12 range comprises products for cats aged 11 or 12, which are likely to display traits such as smaller appetites, decreased energy levels and slower digestion.



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Smartsilvers

Tech company Telstra is on a manhunt: to find Australia's most tech-savvy silver. Its 'Retired & Wired' competition offers a jackpot of \$ 10,000 for the senior citizen most proficient at tasks like downloading music, blogging and using a smartphone. Telstra believes it doesn't have to look far to find a winner—the company's latest research report shows how silvers in Australia have taken to technology like ducks to water. Some examples:

- The average Australian silver (over the age of 65) is online at least **once a week**.
- An estimated one in eight silvers—more than **500,000** of them—have a Facebook page.

- **70 per cent** of silvers have a mobile phone, used to send at least one text message a day.

- More than **68 per cent** of older Australians use online banking.

"The older generation has witnessed the greatest technology revolution of all," Rebekah O'Flaherty, consumer director, Telstra, tells news website *heraldsun.com.au*. "These technology adaptors have experienced around six decades of change when you consider the introduction of new technologies such as television, computers, mobiles and the Internet. The best part is that they don't want to miss a thing." The winner of the first prize will also get a national platform to share technology tips with others.



You can read the entire report at
www.telstra.com.au/retired-wired

Lie no MORE

As you get older, you find it harder to lie, according to a study by the University of Otago in New Zealand. It suggests that **the ability to practice or recognise deceit may erode with time**. Video clips of 20 people—10 of them aged 30 or under and 10 aged over 60—expressing their actual or false views on topical issues were shown to participants. The listeners, of two groups with the average ages of 21 and 71, were asked to determine if the person in each clip was being truthful or lying. They concluded that it was easier to differentiate between truths and lies when the speaker was an older adult. "It would be interesting to study whether older adults' difficulties telling and detecting lies affected their susceptibility to fraud schemes and their general social well-being," writes Jamin Halberstadt from the research team, in US journal *Psychology and Ageing*. "A reduced ability to tell white lies that spare others' feelings may also impair their relationships."

HAPPY BANKING!

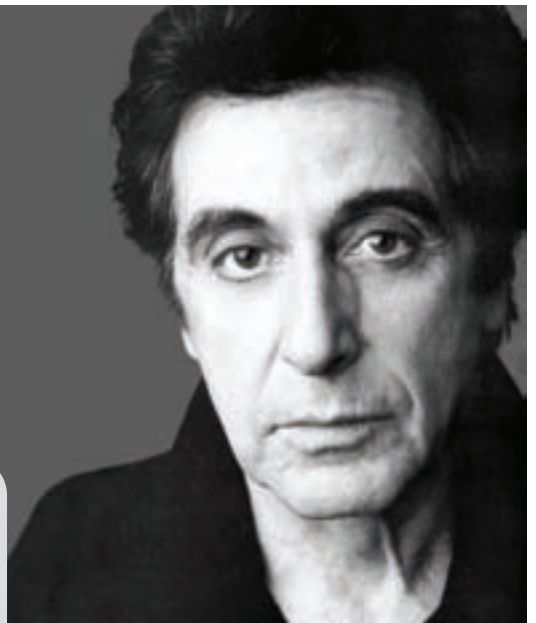
Every now and then, the Greater Bombay Co-operative Bank in Mumbai takes seniors—customers as well as non-customers—on picnics, and organises silver-focused events after business hours. At these sessions, the bank also offers advice on money management. All their branches also run a dedicated counter for silvers—for two hours—every day. Says CEO BVR Sarma, "Many seniors are leading lonely lives. We try to make them feel important and wanted."

Imagine this

We always knew Oscar-winning actor Al Pacino was a rock star—in his next film *Imagine* he actually plays one! The film, which marks the directorial debut of American scriptwriter Dan Fogelman, will feature the 71 year-old as an ageing rocker who decides to track down his estranged biological son after finding a letter written to him by Beatles front man John Lennon. “It’s a role full of meat,” Pacino tells *Variety* magazine. “And God only knows how hard it is to sink your teeth into one of those these days.” He’ll have it for breakfast.

OUR PACINO PICKS

- *The Godfather* (1972): Pacino turns in a sublime performance as Michael Corleone, the only college-educated son of Don Vito Corleone, who morphs from an innocent lad abhorring the family business to ruthless Mafia boss.
- *Scarface* (1983): Pacino is hypnotic as Tony Montana, a Cuban refugee who comes to Miami in 1980 and becomes a drug kingpin during the cocaine boom.
- *Scent of a Woman* (1992): Pacino’s gobsmacking turn as Frank Slade, a conflicted and quick-tempered blind, former Army officer, won him an Oscar.



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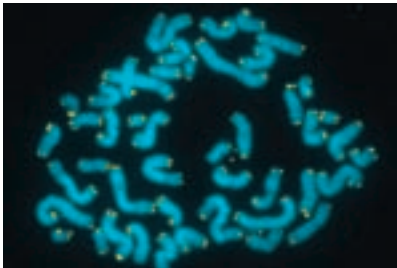
The immeasurably suave Alec Baldwin, who has found a new lease on his life as actor in his role as a slick network executive on the hit TV show *30 Rock*, is undergoing a drastic makeover for the big screen. The 53 year-old will show up as Dennis Dupree, an ageing hippy and nightclub operator—complete with distressed denim, shades and long hair—in his new film *Rock of Ages*, where he stars with Tom Cruise, who plays a rockstar, and young comedian Russell Brand, who plays a record executive. “It’s a lot of fun isn’t it,” Baldwin ‘tweeted’. “I’m having myself one hell of a good time!”



Clues to the future

This month, we present three new tests that could offer valuable insight into your health and longevity prospects:

● **For lifespan:** Maria Blasco of the Spanish National Cancer Research Centre in Madrid has developed a € 500 (about ₹ 32,000) test that attempts to show how fast someone is ageing—and can provide an estimate of lifespan. This is done by measuring telomeres, the structures on the tips of a person's chromosomes. "We know that people born with shorter telomeres also have a shorter lifespan," Blasco tells British newspaper *The Independent*. "This test is



very precise. We can detect very small differences in telomere length and it is a simple and fast technique where many samples can be analysed at the same time. Most important, we can determine the presence of dangerous telomeres—those that are very short." Her company Life Length is now in lengthy talks with medical diagnostic companies across Europe to market the test.

● **For Alzheimer's:** Great news for silvers across the world. A 15-minute online test, the Cognitive Function Test, has been developed by British mental health experts to reveal early signs of Alzheimer's disease among 50 to 70 year-olds. The interactive test provides you with an immediate result and offers advice on lifestyle and diet changes. "Alzheimer's is a preventable disease, not an inevitable part of the ageing process," Professor David Smith of Oxford University, who helped develop the test, tells *The Times* of London. "The trick is to identify decline in memory function early. Three in 10 people over the age of 70 have impaired memory, and po-



tentially 75 per cent of these will develop some form of dementia within five years. But a combination of specific B vitamins, dietary and lifestyle changes can reduce the rate at which your memory worsens." The best part: the test is free. Take it at www.food-forthebrain.org

● **For stroke:** An amazing virtual reality system, the Shopping Simulator, has been launched to enable occupational therapists to better assess stroke victims at Repatriation General Hospital in Adelaide, Australia. As newspaper *The Australian* reports, the system, developed by the Medical Device Partnering Programme (MDPP) at Flinders University, allows patients to move through a virtual supermarket, selecting groceries and adding them to a trolley, to demonstrate whether they are capable of making logical decisions. Simulation software recreates the experience with a touch-screen computer and trolley handle. "The Shopping



Simulator is an effective way of testing a stroke patient's alertness, ability to scan both sides of the environment and logical processing," says Karen Reynolds, director of MDPP. "Particularly for older people and people with disability, technological interfaces such as this represent the brave new frontier of clinical medicine."



YOUTH FIX: THE SLEW OF RECENT RESEARCH STUDIES ON AGEING—YOU READ THEM IN HARMONY EVERY MONTH—INDICATE THAT A "FOREVER YOUNG" DRUG TO STOP THE AGEING CLOCK COULD BE AVAILABLE IN JUST 10 YEARS, PROFESSOR LINDA PARTRIDGE OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON ANNOUNCED AT THE CHELTENHAM SCIENCE FESTIVAL HELD IN THE UK LAST MONTH.



Rain and shine

Even the early monsoon rains in Bengaluru had to bow down to the contagious enthusiasm of the thousands of silvers who gathered at Kantheevera Stadium on 5 June for the 4-km **Harmony Senior Citizens' Run at the World 10 K Bangalore 2011**. Guests of honour former cricketer Venkatesh Prasad (*top right*) and Kannada actor Srinagara Kitty (*second from top*) cheered as silvers showed off their sporty side. While for some, it was an opportunity to get an adrenaline fix, for others the event served as a platform to spread awareness about issues close to their heart. "I am running for a cause, to save the girl child," said 66 year-old Aruna Katharia, a sprightly silver carrying a doll showcasing her message. "It is disheartening to see female infanticide and dowry deaths still plaguing the country." Many silvers even came from other cities and towns. Like 60-something K L Patil, who made the trip from Mysore. "Such an event gives us renewed energy and encourages us to be mentally and physically fit," he said. That, in a nutshell, was the spirit of the morning, which was governed by grit, determination and chutzpah.



ADOPT A SILVER DOG.

Researchers have already established that **elders with pets are happier, healthier and tend to live longer**. Plus, an older dog is ideal for silvers who don't have the energy for a puppy that can have you running around in circles before you eventually manage to train it—and slow it down!



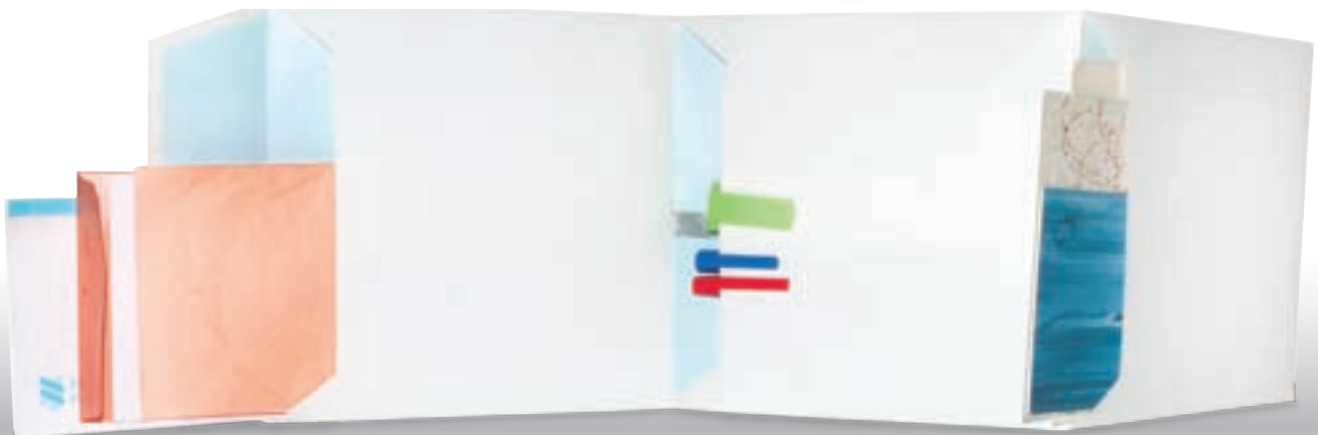
Then: Envelope Now: Accordion folder

Collect around five to nine (odd numbers) standard-sized side-opening envelopes. Stick the envelopes together by gluing the inside of the flap of one envelope to the back of another. Fold the pages accordion style, making the flap of the first envelope the cover of the book. Add a ribbon closure by cutting a small opening—the width of a thin ribbon—on both sides of the last envelope and run the ribbon through the whole accordion. Use the accordion folder to keep your small knick knacks and loose change. Using coloured labels, indicate the contents of each envelope.



FACTS

- » Envelope recycling is not recognised as recycling as some local authorities think that stamps, gummed edges and plastic windows make them unsuitable for recycling.
- » Most toilet paper comes from recycled envelope paper.



MORE RECYCLING IDEAS... 1. Save the envelopes, turn them inside out or scribble out the address, remove the stamp and use them again for mailing things out. 2. Use the envelopes to store seeds for the garden. 3. Use an envelope as a small purse in your bag.

Elixir of life



Walking fast is the simplest way to add more years to life as you grow older, claims a recent American study. Conducted at the University of Pittsburgh, the study has revealed that **simply measuring how fast people walked is a sign of how many years they are left with.** “Older adults who walk fast have better endurance. Heart stamina increases with muscle endurance, which increases lung capacity. Walking fast also indicates that all the organs are functioning properly, which makes

ageing healthy,” Dr Dhanajeyan, head of physiotherapy and sports medicine at Spectrum Physio Centre in Bengaluru, tells *Harmony*. Using nine studies dated between 1986 and 2000 involving 34,485 people aged 65 and above, researchers analysed how and at what speed the participants walked. They later concluded that those who walked fast had lower cholesterol and obesity. Scientists now recommend a walking speed of 2.5 miles per hour as an excellent exercising strategy for healthy ageing.

Gaining TEETH

One of the most common ageing conditions is weak gums and falling teeth. And while metallic replacements are the most sought after treatment, dental experts claim that **metallic crowns and caps can have a detrimental effect in the long run—the new-age solution is ceramic teeth.** “Ceramic caps are much stronger, aesthetic and quite similar to natural



teeth,” Dr Mitesh Parekh, head of the Ziecon Advanced Dental Clinic and Research Centre (ZADCRC) in Nashik, tells *Harmony*. “Ceramic caps have the same toughness as metallic options and are, therefore, specially recommended for silvers who, in the long run, are often plagued by allergies and the resulting consequences.” ZADCRC is a new dental clinic equipped with highly advanced German sirona dental chairs, latest digital radiography, OPG and laser treatment equipment. It is also equipped to be an oral cancer detection centre.



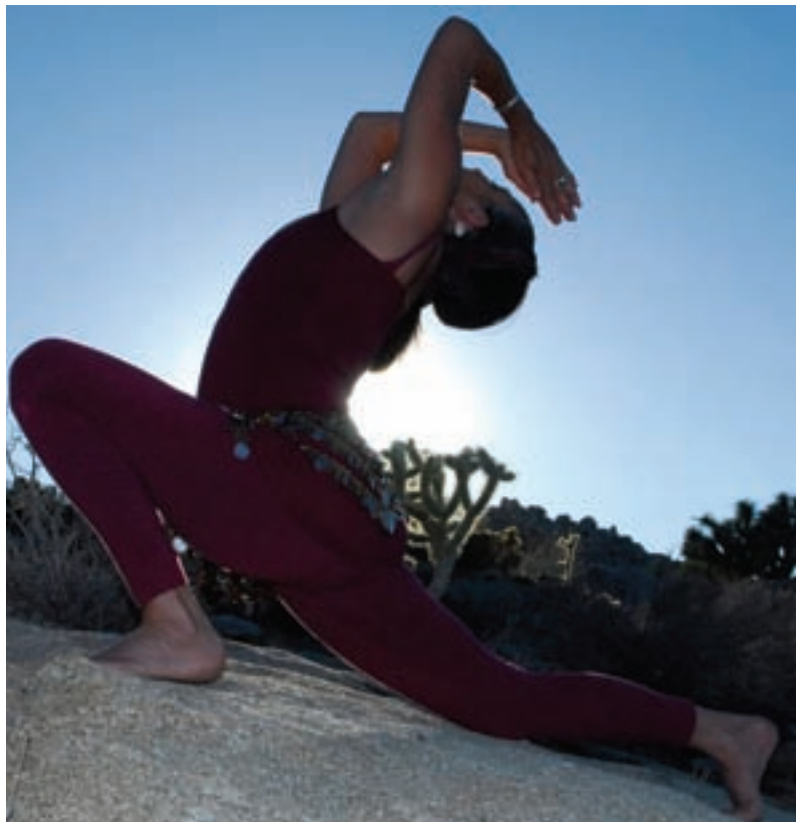
Vitamin problem

An American study has suggested that **hearing loss with age could be a result of low serum levels of folic acid**. The results were published in the medical journal *Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery*. “Folic acid is an essential nutrient for nerve development,” Dr Ameet Kishore, senior ENT consultant and cochlear implant surgeon at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital in Delhi, tells *Harmony*. “Doctors, therefore, advice folic acid dose for pregnant women. In elderly, research has proved that deficiency of folic acid can lead to progressive low frequency hearing loss, which can’t be identified without regular audiometric testing as it is otherwise symptom-free.” Folic acid is essential in cellular metabolism, the nervous system and vascular function; degeneration of all these leads to hearing loss. Hence, serum levels of folic acid are significantly associated with hearing loss in the elderly. “Low level of folic acid definitely leads to nerve weakness, but further studies are needed to prove if the theory is applicable to every elderly person,” Dr Kishore concludes.

Yogic heart

The ancient Indian practice of yoga is all set for fresh, worldwide repositioning. Doctors from University of Kansas in the US have proved that **yoga can halve the risk of a common and dangerous irregular heartbeat condition called atrial fibrillation**, which is the leading cause of stroke among the elderly. “Our heart is usually under the influence of the brain and nervous system, with its sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves,” Dr Renu Mahatani, holistic physician and yoga therapy consultant at Paramyoga in Pune, tells *Harmony*. “Sympathetic nerves deal with stress, anxiety and related issues, while parasympathetic nerves control the ease-and-release mechanism. Today, older adults

and elderly are in a constant state of stress—the biggest cause of fibrillation. If atrial fibrillation is caused by stress, yoga can help balance the roles of sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves.” Atrial fibrillation causes blood to pool in the upper chambers of the heart; it can clot and travel to the brain, causing stroke. Doctors in the Kansas study tested the benefit of yoga on 49 patients and found that it cut the episodes of irregular heartbeat by half, while dramatically reducing depression and anxiety. They also found that yoga improved general health, vitality, social functioning and mental health. “Yogic techniques like stretching and *pranayama* [breathing exercises] help parasympathetic nerves work better by taking the load off from sympathetic nerves.”





Mighty mayor

In some parts of the world, age doesn't get in the way of ambition or performance. Recently, Shady Shores in Texas organised a farewell for its 94 year-old Mayor **Olive Stephens** who retired after putting in 48 years of service. Stephens took charge as the town's mayor in 1970 when she was already 55 and remained at her post, defeating five contesting opponents over the years. Townsfolk still remember her rolling up her sleeves and hauling a hoe to fill up a pothole—at the age of 80!

Body beautiful

Ernestine Shepherd from Baltimore is all of 74 and can fight off any heavyweight. Shepherd has been crowned by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest competitive female bodybuilder. The retired school administrator has been competing at muscle shows with women half her age since the age of 54—ever since she didn't like what she saw in the mirror when she tried out a swimsuit. Her fitness regimen: she wakes up at 3 am and runs 10 miles before heading to the gym. "There's no reason you can't be 80 and strutting your stuff," Shepherd told *AOL World News*. Hear that? You too can do it.



Hackman returns



Dust off the manuscript that you wrote sometime in your youth and never sent to the publisher. Or write that story that's been lurking in your mind. Actor **Gene Hackman** did just that—and at 80, no less. After retiring from a stellar acting career, Hackman turned to writing. Having co-authored two books earlier, he mustered the required gumption to go solo and in May published a violent western novel *Payback at Morning Peak*. The novel, already a bestseller, is about a 17 year-old boy who when he finds his mother dead, shoots his father as he burns alive, and tries to save his sister who has been raped. A volatile plot—just like the many movies that Hackman was part of.

Soaring scores

Anne Folsom, a former NASA employee, is a spunky woman who won't let anyone tell her what she should expect from life. On 10 May, Folsom asked her nephew to drive her to Green Clover Hall in the Marion County government complex, to participate in the Silver Springs Radio Club's evening exam session for amateur radio operators. Folsom scored 50 out of 50 in the most difficult exam for radio operators—the Extra Class License exam—which is full of advanced math and electronics. "I think everybody underestimates older people," she told website *www.ocala.com*. "They figure I've gone over to the haystack." When asked whether she plans to use

her license, the gritty lady shot back that she did it only to prove that she could.

Closer home... Allapuzha-based nonagenarian **Fathima Beevi** appeared for the Class IV equivalent examination organised by the State Literacy Mission in April. Though the mission stipulates the age limit for students between 15 to 50 years, literacy workers were moved to hear about Beevi's interest in learning when they met her during a home-to-home survey. The 90 year-old went to the exam hall with her son Abdul Hameed and is confident of making the grades.

BIRTHDAYS

- Director **Adoor Gopalakrishnan** turns 70 on 3 July



- Actor **Sylvester Stallone** turns 65 on 6 July
- Former cricketer **Sunil Gavaskar** turns 62 on 10 July

- Actor **Harrison Ford** turns 60 on 13 July

- Former president of Africa and anti-apartheid activist **Nelson Mandela** turns 93 on 18 July



- Mexican American guitarist **Carlos Santana** turns 64 on 20 July



- IT tycoon **Azim Premji** turns 66 on 24 July
- Actor **Naseeruddin Shah** turns 61 on 28 July

IN PASSING



- Eminent playwright **Badal Sircar** died of prolonged illness on 13 May. He was 86.

- Pioneering American rapper **Gil Scot-Heron** died of unknown causes on 27 May. He was 62.

- Popular American singer of the 1970s **Andrew Gold** died in his sleep on 3 June. He was 59.

- Armenian-American pathologist and right-to-die activist **Jacob Kevorkian** died of pneumonia and kidney problems on 3 June. He was 83.

- Artist **M F Husain** died of a heart attack in London on 9 June. He was 97.



- Clarence Clemons**, saxophonist for Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, suffered a stroke on 18 June. He was 69.

MILESTONES



- Chemical scientist **Prof. CNR Rao**, former chairman of the science advisory council to the Centre, was felicitated with the Dhirubhai Ambani – UAA Lifetime Achievement Award on 11 May at the UDCT, Mumbai.

- Former all-rounder **Salim Durrani** was honoured with the BCCI's Col C K Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award on 31 May at the board's annual ceremony.

VISITOR

- WHO:** UK Minister for Equalities and Criminal Information **Lynne Featherstone**, 61
- WHEN:** 15-17 June
- WHY:** To understand the challenges that women in India face in terms of gender inequality and to identify opportunities for greater UK-India collaboration on the global issue of violence against women. Featherstone spent a day in Bihar to experience first-hand interactions with adolescent girls from poor communities and to understand the workings of rural self-help groups.

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LEAP OF FAITH

The circus has changed dramatically. During my childhood—and that was a very long time ago—it was a grand spectacle that paraded a plethora of wild animals tamed by the whip of the ringmaster: tigers, lions, seals and hippopotamuses. I still remember the palpitations of my heart as the lion opened its mouth wide and the ringmaster in a valiant gesture stuck his head into the lion's gaping mouth. But to my wonder, the lion did not snap its mouth shut! Thankfully, the ban on making wild animals perform has brought down their long list to just elephants. Probably the ban on animals was a blessing in disguise. The focus of the circus inevitably shifted to the exhibition of incredible human feats, created with imagination and executed with supreme skill.

The circus continues to fascinate me. Inside that imposing tent there still exists a heady mix of magic, music, dance, jugglery, acting and showmanship. Of the childhood feats I remember, a few vestiges still remain: the well of death where a motorcyclist rides the bike in vertical circles; the drunken clown performs immaculate feats on a galloping horse; the cycle that breaks into innumerable pieces when the clown mounts it; the fire-eater who performs

with amazing dexterity. And, as always, people continue to applaud the feats with the same childlike exuberance and innocent joy, proving that despite the overt changes that have happened around us, we still laugh at the same things, cry at the same things and, of course, worry about the same things.

My rekindled curiosity took me to meet Raja Hussain, the manager of Kohinoor Circus, tented on the outskirts of Navi Mumbai. He told me how difficult it has become for a circus to survive. Three decades ago, there were over 300 circus troupes in the country. Today, there are less than a hundred left. As I was speaking to Raja, I realised the sheer logistical nightmare of running a circus. In a single troupe, there are over 250 people living in small tents that dot the periphery of the performing tent. This includes artists, carpenters, masons, electricians, tailors, cooks, managers and innumerable helping hands. The humongous circus equipment needs about 30 massive trucks to be transported. There are over 25 families staying in this joint family. Children pick up the ropes of the circus from their parents.

I also met Sagar Singh, a man who has been a clown for over 50 years. He's 70 now and still performs. At 12, he ran

Gangadharan Menon discovered the astounding pain and hard work obscured by the colourful facade of a circus



away from his home in West Bengal to join the circus. He started out as an announcer going around on a cycle; then he was taken as an extra in a rope dance. He graduated to become a motorcycle artist, then a trapeze artist, and then a trainer. But when there was a vacancy for a clown, he decided to take up the role permanently, as that was what he loved the most: to make people laugh.

Once, in the midst of a show, he got a telegram. As he was illiterate, he asked the manager to read it out to him. Just as he was informed that his son had died in an accident, the bell rang announcing his entry. In a daze he entered the ring, and made people laugh with his antics, profusely crying under the thick makeup of the clown. After the show, he trudged back to the green room, accompanied by deafening applause, and fainted. This story travelled far. So much so that filmmaker Raj Kapoor came to meet him to hear this story. And inspired by it, he made *Mera Naam Joker*. To this day, Sagar Singh is peeved at the fact that there was no mention of him, or his son, in the long list of credits that came rolling down at the end of the film.

As I watched the finale of the circus, I saw Pinki in the climactic act of the flying trapeze. Perched high above mere mortals, she was the lone girl among five other artistes. My heart skipped a beat as she went flying on the trapeze, left it in midair, and went gliding into the waiting hands of her partner. That act for me symbolised the dying art of circus. Here was a troupe of 250 hardworking and dedicated people who, to keep the oldest performing art of India alive, have left the trapeze in midair with the fond hope that their outstretched hands will fondly and firmly be held by a discerning audience. Lest they fall into the bottomless pit of oblivion.

—Text & photographs by C Gangadharan Menon, Mumbai



BREAK AND MAKE

Two years ago, at the age of 50, I was like a headless chicken, running amok. Being diabetic for almost 30 years, with a host of allied physical problems, I had reached the end of my tether with periodic episodes of hypo and hyperglycaemia despite my daily dose of insulin. I could hardly walk because of my alarming body weight—104 kg—that also incited agonising back and knee pain. I had gone through a gamut of doctors and ever-changing prescriptions. The only thing that kept me upbeat was my job; I am a teacher and the positive spirit as well as the angst and doubts of my students took precedence over everything else.

Then, one day, my husband brought to my notice an article on bariatric surgery, a complex procedure where the stomach size is reduced by removing a portion of the stomach, or gastric banding. I was in a rather hopeless situation. Encouraged by my husband, I decided to give it a shot. Though the advertisement referred to a clinic in Hyderabad, we found a couple of doctors in Kolkata who were also skilled in the procedure. I went under the scalpel on 9 December 2009. The weight loss was tremendous. But the drastic change in weight also brought with it some not-so-flattering comments from people around me. Initially I was upset to hear all that, but my confidence started to perk up when I noticed the effects of my weight loss on my energy levels. Not only could I walk great distances without panting, but run and dance!

I had barely started looking and feeling better when my mother suddenly passed away in July 2010. To say I was shattered would be an understatement. I stopped living; I waited for the phone to ring every evening hoping she would call. I started calling her up and imagining her around me. I lived in denial for a long time. I couldn't turn to my family for reassurance as I was used to being the strong rock in their lives. My friends too had always seen me as their anchor. However, one of the doctors who had treated me walked more than an extra mile to allay all my apprehensions. I unburdened all my frustrations to him. And he offered quiet understanding and compassion in return. French writer Voltaire said, "Doctors are men who prescribe medicines of which they know little; to cure diseases of which they know less; in human beings of whom they know nothing." Such a witty yet unfair quote does little justice to my doctor and his ilk.

Very often, we are ashamed of being vulnerable. We do not realise that it takes as much strength to bare our emotions and to seek help as it takes to bottle our pain and go on undefeated. Our ego and false pride are flimsy facades that prevent us from reaching out and forging wonderful friendships. Open up, reach out, and seek your rock. You will only emerge stronger and truer.

—Kavita, Kolkata

Designing SOLUTIONS



CHUNNI LAL ASSUDANI, 73

"After a fulfilling career in the Army, I couldn't imagine idling after retirement"

After retiring from the Army as colonel in Engineers Corp, I moved to the Defence Research and Development Organisation and worked till I was 60. Although the pension was enough, I wanted to use my skills and remain productive.

With great demand for civil engineers, I could have become a builder. However, most construction projects require large investments. That's when some friends advised me to become a property evaluator. Today I have been a property evaluator for 13 years and have written about 5,000 reports. I am among 24 property evaluators registered with the Chief Commissioner of Income Tax. I am also on the panel of a number of banks such as Canara Bank, J&K Bank, and Vijaya Bank. The process of registering with the Chief Commissioner of Income Tax took about nine months and about one year for empanelment with each bank.

On an average, I put in six to eight hours every day, including time for visiting sites, writing and reviewing reports. I can also employ people and delegate on-site surveys. However, for assured accuracy, I prefer doing it myself. As one builds a reputation, work keeps pouring in. Though there is a hazard of litigation, as long as one is thorough and works with good intention it can all be handled with ease. I also need to stay abreast with changing building laws, and norms of the land of different states. I frequently attend programmes hosted by the Institute of Engineers and the Indian Institute of Valuers.

I think it's the ideal profession for someone from an engineering background. The best thing about this job is that it needs no investment. I can safely close work for a few months and go on vacation. It also leaves me with sufficient time for a social life—I enjoy golf and visiting the club.

—As told to Anju Mohan

BEST BEHAVIOUR

Experts answer your queries and concerns on jobs after retirement

I am a retired teacher interested in soft skills. How can I become a trainer?

Today, with India opening to fields and industries unheard of some years ago, soft skill development has become a deciding factor in every possible area. As you already have teaching experience, you are cut out for the job though there is no major qualification for being a soft skill trainer except having a postgraduate degree and a good command over languages (primarily English and Hindi in India).



First, you need to enroll yourself at a good soft skills training institute like the Dale Carnegie Institute in Mumbai. As a trainer you would be required to guide working people in strengthening interpersonal skills and team building; it also involves dealing with people over office hierarchies and behavioural changes. You could initially approach banks, small business firms and even marketing colleges and conduct workshops. To market yourself you could create a website or blog. But true success comes only with word-of-mouth publicity. A good trainer can get anywhere between ₹ 4,000 and ₹ 10,000 per assignment. You could later launch your own soft skills training institute.

—Bharath Das runs 3T, a soft skills training company in Mallapuram, Kerala



WEIGHT WATCH BY MADHUKAR TALWALKAR

Building strong knees: Work on better stability for the long run

It's important to build knee strength and stability for any kind of exercise regime. Here are some easy exercises.

Hip abductors (inner thigh)/groin muscle and inner quad muscle strengthening: Sit in a chair, put your fist between the knees and squeeze them together. Hold and count to 10. Relax to the count of three. Do 10 repetitions. In another exercise, lie on the floor on your right side, shoulder and hips aligned. Prop your head up with your right hand. Place the left hand in front to help you balance. Bend your left leg and bring it to the floor in front of you. Raise your right leg 10 inches off the floor and hold for a second, then slowly lower. Lift 10 times on each side.

Hip abductors (outer thigh/hip) strengthening: Lie on the floor on your right side, shoulder and hips aligned. Bend your right leg (leg on floor) to 90°. Slowly, raise your left leg about 18 inches, hold for a second and lower gradually. Do 10 repetitions. Repeat on the other side.

Gluteal strengthening (backward leg swing): Hold on to the back of a chair. Swing one leg back diagonally, until you feel your hips tighten. Tense muscles as much as you can and swing your leg back a couple more inches. Return leg to the floor. Repeat 10 times. Switch sides.

Calf raises (strengthens calves and ankles): Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Do not lock knees. Place one hand on the wall. Raise your heels as high as you can and slowly lower to starting position. Do 15 repetitions. Gradually, do this exercise on one foot at a time. You could also try placing the balls of the feet on the edge of a stair with heels hanging over the edge. Lower the heels gradually, yet as far as you can. Then raise your heels gradually yet as high as you can (stand on toes). Do 15 repetitions.

Balancing knee exercises: Hold on to the back of a chair. Stand on one leg for one minute. Switch sides. As your balance improves, use only one hand for support. Gradually you should be able to do this by using one finger for support, progressing to letting go, but keeping your hands within a couple of inches above the chair for balance. Do not lean on any one side. To increase difficulty, shift weight on to the ball of the foot.

Stretching exercises for knees

Note: If you experience knee pain or have a knee injury, ask your doctor for appropriate exercises.

How often to stretch: Stretching exercises may be done daily, but every second day or three times a week is enough. Stretching is often prescribed twice a day or more by physical therapists to treat knee pain.

How long to hold a stretch: The stretch should generally be held for a total of about 60-90 seconds. Holding a stretch for 30 seconds only requires two or three repetitions. Some people prefer to do more repetitions of five or 10-second stretches or just one 60-second stretch. Before stretching, warm up with five to 10 minutes of low-impact aerobics (e.g. walking, stationary bike). Warmed up muscles are more responsive to stretches and less likely to tear. Stretches should be performed in a controlled fashion

Calf muscles stretch: To stretch the left calf muscle, step back with your left leg, forward with the right. Bend the right knee (keep left leg and back in a straight line as you lean forward) until you feel a gentle stretch in the left calf. Do not roll foot out to the side. Keep heel flat, foot forward. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

Quad muscle stretch: Stand and bend your right knee. Hold your right ankle from the front and bring heel to buttocks with your hand. Keep the knees together—neither arch your back, nor let the leg go to the side. Point your knee towards the floor. Tighten buttocks and tuck tailbone under to maximise the stretch. Hold for 30 seconds, before repeating on the left side.

Hamstring stretch (standing position): Keep one leg on the floor and put the other foot on the chair with leg straight. Bend forward at the hip. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side. (Do not try touching your toes as this will stretch your back; the goal is to isolate your hamstring muscles that are being supported by the chair.)

Hamstring stretch (sitting position): Straighten one leg, keeping heel on the floor. Lean forward at the hips, keeping your back straight. Don't try to touch your toes. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

*Madhukar Talwalkar is chairman of Talwalkar's, one of India's largest chain of fitness centres with 78 branches across major cities.
Website: www.talwalkars.net
If you have a question for Dr Talwalkar write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org*



Managing incontinence: Avoid irritants for a more comfortable life

I am a 65 year-old man suffering from incontinence. I have tried controlling my intake of fluids but it has always led to dehydration and constipation. What kind of foods/fluids should I avoid to control my condition? Are there any natural remedies?

Incontinence is not an illness; it's a symptom. In men it could be a result of an enlarged prostate, diabetes or an overactive bladder. The condition, which can usually be treated, limits a person's activity and causes distress. Many of us try to restrict the risk by severely limiting fluid intake. This can be hazardous to health. Normal hydration is a prerequisite for life; limiting fluids causes urine to become concentrated and the collection of concentrated salts can irritate the bladder and worsen incontinence.

Foods to avoid

Many foods, drinks and medications cause irritation to the lining of the bladder. This can lead to increased frequency, urgency and bladder constriction, further resulting in uncontrolled loss of urine. Bladder irritants affect every person differently. However, by excluding or considerably reducing the intake of the following foods, you will surely notice an improvement in your bladder symptoms. Also remember that while many people find some products irritating, others do not.

- Caffeine (cola, coffee, tea, chocolates)
- Alcohol
- Cigarettes
- Spicy foods
- Acidic fruits like orange, lemon, peach, pineapple, plum, apple
- Tomato, chillies, peppers, onion
- Yoghurt, sour cream
- Vinegar, walnuts, peanuts
- Most artificial sweeteners
- Vitamin C
- Monosodium glutamate

To settle the irritated bladder, start by cutting down on coffee, tea, cola, chocolate, alcohol and cigarettes. Do this for two weeks and notice the changes in your bladder irritation. If you do not find much difference, reduce the acidic



Many of us try to tackle incontinence by limiting fluid intake. This causes urine to become concentrated and the collection of concentrated salts can worsen incontinence

fruits and spicy food mentioned in the list. Follow this for two weeks and observe changes, if any.

Here are a few lifestyle changes that can help reduce bladder irritation and sudden urges:

Drink plenty of fluids: Lack of water makes urine concentrated and strong, which can irritate the bladder and worsen the condition. Try not to drink too much water at one time as it will put pressure on the bladder and increase discomfort.

Schedule fluid intake: Most of the liquid you drink reaches the bladder within two to three hours. Time your intake of large quantities of fluids when the rest room is in your vicinity. Avoid drinking too much water before bedtime to avoid getting up frequently at night.

Eat cooked onions: Raw onions can lead to an overactive bladder.

Eat lots of fibre: Constipation can aggravate bladder problems. Eat lots of whole grains and vegetables to add fibre to your diet. You could take isabgol, which is a natural fibre.

Schedule bowel movement: Having a daily routine helps in the long run. Also, take your time and do not strain when having a bowel movement.

Increase your activity: Get some daily exercise. Try moderate activities like walking, yoga and swimming for at least two hours every week.

Try herbal tea: Caffeine acts as an irritant and also has a diuretic effect. Go for decaffeinated drinks like herbal tea.



Schedule bathroom visits: Urinate every two to four hours, irrespective of the urge. Wear clothes that can be removed easily. Make your path to the bathroom as clear and quick as you can.

Magnesium intake: Deficiency of magnesium triggers muscles spasms and incontinence. Ask your doctor if you should be on a 200-600 mg supplement daily to make up the deficiency.

Vitamin B12: Vegetarians bothered by an overactive bladder often lack Vitamin B12, a critical nutrient found only in animal foods. Supplements of the vitamin could be taken.

Pelvic muscle exercises: When urinating, start and stop the flow of urine as many times as possible. Making your pelvic muscles stronger helps hold urine longer and is useful to treat incontinence.

READERS ASK:

You recommended 'nuts' in a recent article. Which nuts would you recommend for those older than 60 and in what quantities?

Nuts are tasty and offer many health benefits. They provide MUFA oils and quality protein. I recommend almonds, groundnuts, coconut and walnut. They are rich in calcium, magnesium, protein and essential fats. Cumin and sesame provide calcium and other minerals. After 60, though, you should consume them either soaked overnight or powdered and chewed thoroughly. Eat a handful daily—8-10 almonds or 20-30 groundnuts or two tbsp of powdered seeds.

In one of your articles you mentioned uses of flax seeds and fenugreek (*methi*) seeds. In what way can I eat them and in what quantities?

To get the full health benefit of flaxseeds, you can take one to two tbsp (16 gm) daily. Grinding after roasting them breaks the outer seed coat and makes all the nutrients easily available. Flax seeds have high fibre content. Add them slowly to your diet. Initially, take 1 tbsp and work it up to two gradually. You can take *methi* seeds after soaking them in water overnight or in powdered form with water before a meal. If you do not like its bitter taste, you can add the powder to chapatti, rice, *dal* or vegetables. The daily dosage varies between 5 and 10 gm in two doses.

Lose weight: Losing weight helps reduce the number of incontinent episodes owing to stress or urge. Stress incontinence results when certain activities lead to increased pressure on the bladder.

Quit smoking: The chronic cough related to cigarette smoking increases

the pressure on the pelvic muscles and can lead to incontinence over a period of time. Poor oxygenation of muscular and connective tissue associated with cigarette smoking also causes decreased strength and endurance of pelvic floor muscles.

Incontinence is not a disease; it's symptomatic of an underlying medical condition. By treating that condition, incontinence can be controlled in the majority of cases. In the meantime, careful management will help you feel more relaxed and confident.



Dr Anjali Mukerjee is a nutritionist and founder of Health Total, which has 15 centres in Mumbai to treat obesity and other health related disorders. Visit www.health-total.com If you have a question for Dr Mukerjee write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org



Letting go: Forgive and forget past hurts with yoga

Yoga believes that part of the reason for certain chronic ailments, like constipation, undiagnosed body ache, lower back pain and certain inflammatory conditions, lies in our inability to forgive. Or even where we forgive, if we are unable to forget, the body replicates our emotional hurts as symptoms in our bodies.

Alternative therapist and bestseller Louise Hays, who survived cervical cancer, has famously linked her miraculous recovery to having forgiven the person who had abused her as a child. In any event, letting go of past hurts would at least help us deal with our present and future with greater harmony and stability. In yoga, some poses are specific to this attitude of letting go; these are also, interestingly, regarded as highly spiritual poses. They include all forward bends, which invite a mental state of absolute surrender. However, to have the right emotional and psychosomatic impact, one must hold these poses for long, up to three to five minutes at least. But this requires a lot of practice and stamina. So ideally, if you create a series of forward bends to inculcate this attitude, you must initially do them for a shorter duration till you build confidence and stability in the pose for longer. This may require several weeks,

or even months. Also, the forward bends must always be followed by backbends to relieve the body of any unnecessary stress. Backbends, in turn, are regarded as stimulating practice, removing mental dullness and lethargy.

Some simple forward bends specific to the purpose of relaxing, letting go and being at peace include the psychic union pose (yoga *mudrasana*), head-to-knee pose (*janu sirsasana*) and seated forward bend (*paschimottanasana*). Advanced poses would include the tortoise pose (*kurmasana*). Standing forward bends are not as relaxing as seated ones but may be used to pep up your practice or include variety; these include the hand-to-feet stretch (*hastapadottasana*).

The hare pose (*shashankasana*) is one of the sweetest poses of surrender. It works on the body by releasing tension along the upper back and spine. When we remain in a state of mental disharmony, the tension gets lodged in our body, especially along the lower back, stiffening the spine. This pose releases all that. We often hold our breath or breathe in a shallow fashion while angry or upset—this pose allows deep belly breathing.

YOGIC MOVES

Hare pose (*shashankasana*)

Sit on your knees, settling your hips on the heels. Inhale, raising your hands high. Exhaling, lower hands, reaching forehead to the floor. Stretch your hands ahead, palms down, settling deeper into the pose. If hips do not touch heels, keep a cushion initially. If forehead does not touch the ground, place a small stool, bolster or cushion (according to the height required), so you can rest your forehead. With due and regular practice, spinal stiffness will be removed and you will find you can touch the forehead to the ground. Focus on the stomach and deeply calming breath there. Initially stay only for a few seconds. Take a few days to slowly increase time to half minute. After a few weeks, you can increase the time to a minute or more, depending on practice and capacity.

Benefits: This pose releases tensions along the spine and back and makes the spine flexible, strong and supple. It tones the nervous system, calms the mind and makes the face youthful owing to increased blood supply. It improves breathing and is used in therapy for many ailments, including diabetes.

Caution: If you have a lower back problem, you need to learn this pose in a phased manner under expert guidance.

Model: Kanchan Nazhre,
Harmony Interactive Centre
Photographer: Haresh Patel



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

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Jigyasa and Pratibha Giri meet Padmini and Ram Mani, Kodaikanal

Welcome to **SoulFood and SoulMates**, a new, exclusive column about life, love and food that unites hearts

Ram and Padmini Mani live in their simple yet elegant home in a quaint little village called Attuvampatti, in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu. At an age when most people want to feel settled and comfortable, the Manis left their home in Delhi for a remote destination. They don't regret their decision; in fact, they are enjoying every bit of it. They have not only made several friends, they have also helped bring many dreams to life. The Manis initiated the 'no plastic' drive in Kodaikanal (no shopkeeper here will pack your goods in plastic—all wares are either packed in paper bags or are carried in cloth bags by buyers). In 1999, they started a school for children of vendors and farm labour. Beginning with 20 children in a little shed, they expanded by donating their own piece of land to the school trust and literally built it brick by brick with the help of generous donors from world over. Today, 'My School Satya Surabhi' is a beautiful, meaningful structure, spreading quality education to children who might have otherwise lost their childhood working on farms. You can see the school at www.satyasurabhi.com/.

Padmini Mani, 66, is from Andhra Pradesh and Ram Mani, 78, from Tamil Nadu. We visited the couple on Ram Mani's 78th birthday on 24 February for coffee and conversation.

There are 12 years between you both; you had a love marriage. What was the attraction?

Padmini Mani (PM): I liked his calm nature and was attracted to his wise interactions compared to the younger men I met.

Ram Mani (RM): Yes, our chemistry was good and our ideas matched on so many issues. We also enjoyed similar music and liked similar colour schemes on walls and paintings. Strangely, we hardly agree on anything now [laughs].

What is it about each of you that you individually like?

RM: Right from the beginning, her sense of duty impressed me a lot; over the years, it has grown on me as well. We are also allied by nature in hospitality and genuine warmth.

PM: Ram's sense of humour, his never-say-die attitude and his wisdom warm my heart. I used to be very gullible, but I've learnt a lot from him.



Both: Our aesthetics have merged and we enjoy adding new dimensions to our home, the school and our garden.

One change you would like to see in each other?

RM: I wish she would control her short fuse. Though she can handle tough situations, she needs to handle them more calmly.

PM: He is a control freak [smiles warmly]. I probably did need the controlling when I was younger but now I'm older and wiser; I like to make my own decisions [mocks a stern look in Ram's direction].

Is good food really a way to the heart? What are your favourite traditional foods?

PM: Cooking and serving food with love are surely a way to anyone's heart. But it is not the only way. Eating is an equally enjoyable experience in the company of loved ones.

RM: Just like good books and good music, good food nourishes, elevates and enriches one's soul. But I do agree with Padmini that it's not the only way to one's heart. Even a woman who can't cook or serve can be well loved.

PM: And what about all the men who can't or won't cook and serve? They are quite loved I'm sure!

RM: I like food in general. Until you are married, your mother is the best cook. Then it's your wife [naughty twinkle in his eyes].



PM: And for some lucky women, it's their husband!

Recently, it was your [RM's] birthday. Were you treated to something special for the occasion?

PM: To be honest, it doesn't require a special day to make a special dish. Ram likes anything that is well cooked and well served. Every day is special and we treat everything we cook as special. Although we can afford a cook and we

do have helpers, I like to do the cooking myself. I've always cooked all our meals myself. Today, I've made *poricha kootu* and *paal payasam*.

Any tips for today's youngsters about love, marriage, commitment and food?

PM: Love is a fleeting emotion. What you need in a marriage is nurturing and mutual respect.

"Good food nourishes, elevates and enriches one's soul. But it's not the only way to one's heart. Even a woman who can't cook or serve can be well loved"

RM: I agree. In marriage, we must allow our partner to grow independently. But most important of all is loyalty. I would like to say that both Padmini and I feel very blessed for the life we have lived and shared together.

From Padmini Mani's kitchen

PORICHA KOOTU

A healthy and tasty vegetable preparation, Padmini learnt this recipe from her mother-in-law and enjoys cooking it.

Ingredients

- Snake gourd: 1½ cups; diced medium
- Small purple aubergines: 8; diced medium or quartered
- Red gram (*tur dal*): 1 cup
- Gram (*channa dal*): 1 tsp
- Asafoetida powder: a generous pinch
- Salt to taste

The paste

- Fresh coconut: ½ cup, grated
- Whole black peppercorns: ½ tsp
- Cumin seeds: ¼ tsp
- Dry red chillies: 3-4; stems removed and nicked at tail

First tempering

- Gingelly oil (sesame oil): 1½ tbsp
- Mustard seeds: ½ tsp
- Broken black gram (*urad dal*): 1 tsp
- Freshly ground black pepper powder: ¼ tsp
- Turmeric powder: a pinch
- Asafoetida powder (or block dissolved in water): ½ tsp

Second tempering

- Coconut oil: 3 tsp
- Mustard seeds: 1½ tsp
- Broken black gram (*urad dal*): 2 tsp
- Fresh coconut: 2 tbsp, grated
- Curry leaves: a few, with or without stems

Method

Pressure-cook red gram, trying to keep it whole, yet soft and well cooked. Set aside without churning. Grind together all the ingredients of the paste to a thick, smooth consistency using a little water if required. In a pressure pan, heat the gingelly oil for the first tempering. When hot, add mustard seeds. As they begin to crackle, add black gram. When the gram turns golden, add pepper powder and asafoetida. Immediately reduce flame and toss in the diced vegetables. Sauté for one to two minutes and add salt and ½ cup water. Close the pressure pan and cook for two to three whistles. Switch off the flame and allow the pressure to subside.

Open the lid, switch on the flame and add cooked red gram. Allow it to simmer over low flame for two to three minutes. Add the paste and cook for another four to five minutes or until the *kootu* comes to a boil. Switch off the flame and transfer to a serving bowl. In a small wok, heat coconut oil for the second tempering. When hot, add mustard seeds. As they begin to crackle, add black gram. When gram starts to change colour, add grated coconut and roast over low flame until both the gram and coconut turn golden brown. Switch off the flame and add curry leaves and pour this aromatic tempering into the *kootu*. Serve with steaming rice or chapattis, a dollop of ghee and lots of love.

Tip 1: Add 1 tsp ghee to the second tempering along with curry leaves before pouring into the *kootu*.

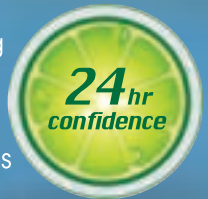
Tip 2: You can substitute snake gourd with broad beans or chow chow. You can also make *kootu* with just bottle gourd.

Jigyasa and Pratibha are authors and publishers of two award winning books Cooking at Home with Pedatha and Sukham Ayu. They specialise in documenting culinary traditions. Visit them at www.pritya.com

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“I live on neem juice and a piece of bread”

Repository of the ancient wisdom of Unani medicine, 110 year-old Syed Mohammed Sharfuddin Quadri lives a Spartan and frugal life that has worked wonders for him, as **Partha Mukherjee** discovers

Almost 55 years ago, while I was journeying through a field in a cart, I caught sight of an old towering neem tree, immersed in soundless symphony with a swarm of fireflies. Barely five years old then, I didn't know that the silhouette of a tree in hushed twilight silence would be a metaphor for a man around whom the sparkle of life never dims, even when 'night' tiptoes into his life.

Syed Mohammed Sharfuddin Quadri is famous for treating India's first president Rajendra Prasad in Gaya in 1942-43 for breathlessness. Fondly known as Hakim *saab*, he has a photographic memory, sense of humour, never-say-die spirit and, above all, energy that never runs out. On 25 December 2011, he will turn 110. Yet he works for 17 hours at a stretch, preparing concoctions from dry fruits, herbs and roots and advising close to 100 patients (free of cost) every day. At 5 pm, every day through the year, Hakim *saab* attends to his patients at his Wellesley Square clinic in central Kolkata as well as those in the US. “*Abba* has patients all over America,” says his 40 year-old son Mohammed Sadique, who assists Quadri in his clinic. “He gives instructions to them over email or through a video conference. Earlier, he used to go to California, Los Angeles and New York, but now he's restricted because of his gout.”

Sharfuddin Quadri answers all questions, except those about his achievements. Founder of the Unani Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, Quadri published a magazine titled *Hikmat-e-Bangala* (Hikmat means Unani medicine) in 1959, which folded up soon for lack of funds. “Success means how much one has been able to help others,” he says, adding that he does honour the Padma Bhushan he was awarded by the President in 2007. He brings out the medal attached to his pocket by a silk ribbon. “I carry it to show my respect to the recognition of Unani treatment. Though I would be happier if I were given a grant so I could at least cover the place with a shed where my patients wait.” Indeed, patients wait for him for hours, sometimes till midnight, even in the rains. “There is no help from the government to collect herbs at a reasonable price,” adds Mohammed Sadique, Quadri's youngest son (he has six siblings) who assists his father. “Some-time *Abba* is so frustrated that he thinks of giving up. If medicines aren't available what is the use of continuing the treatment?”

From a family of *hakim* in the remote village of Kumrava in Nawada district of Bihar, Quadri trained in Unani treatment from Shafakhana Darsoh Tibbia (Gaya) in 1930. After immersing himself in the freedom movement, he started his practice in Calcutta where his family shifted in 1935-36. “Herbal medicines have a magical

effect on our body; besides they have no side-effects,” he says sipping neem juice. If diagnosed, every disease responds to Unani treatment, Quadri claims, adding that with medication one must strictly follow instructions on diet and lifestyle as well. “During the diagnosis, one has to study the *dam* [blood], *balgham* [phlegm], *safra* [yellow bile], and *sauda* [black bile] of the patient [just like *kapha*, *vata* and *pitta*, the three *dosha* in Ayurveda], as they are the roots of all diseases,” he explains. “Anyone with any sort of ailment definitely has an abnormality in one of these.”

As for his own frugal diet—neem juice and half a piece of bread—he says, “The less you eat the more you live; the more you eat, the more you court ailments and health hazards. And to lead a healthy life you should have a healthy mind. My father lived to be 122 and never allowed any ignoble thought to cross his mind.”

How does he keep himself so physically fit even at 110? “I never sleep at night; I read books on Unani medicine when others are fast asleep. In the calm of the night, I try to explore things I don't know about and let them melt into my inner self.” Unani medicine, he says, actually has its roots in Greece following extensive research by Hippocrates (460-377 BC). “It was he who laid the foundation of clinical medicine based on diet and symptoms.” He adds that a number of



Greek scholars after Hippocrates—Galen (131-200 AD) followed by Arab physicians Rhazes (850-932 AD) and Avicenna (980-1037 AD)—enriched the system considerably. Rhazes and Avicenna authored *Al-Hawi* and *Al-Qanun* respectively, which were later translated into Latin and other European languages and taught in medieval European universities. They are said to have influenced western medical thought.

Unani medicine disappeared from the country of its origin, but found roots in India through Arab traders long before the Mughals. The Khiljis, Tughlaqs and Mughal emperors provided state patronage to Unani scholars and employed many as court physicians. The British imposed strict restrictions on every form of treatment but allopathy. Despite suspension of aid to Unani institutions, the system survived owing to the commitment of *hakim* like Ajmal Khan, who served as the president of Indian National Congress in 1921—the Unani physician

"The less you eat the more you live; the more you eat, the more you court ailments. To lead a healthy life you should have a healthy mind"

and scholar founded the Ayurvedic and Unani Medical College in Delhi.

Quadri reads till 4 am, when the city wakes up to fight for the day. "After my daily ablutions, I go to the mosque for *namaz* which involves many a yogic *mudra*—I do each of them," he shares. "I walk back home at 5 am and sleep till 9, after which I go to my clinic. There's no time to waste till 5 pm, when I go to the clinic, which I believe is the key to my fitness."

Sharfuddin Quadri thanks his health for having been witness to an eventful century. The Dandi March with Mahatma Gandhi, confinement in Cuttack Jail and a memorable encounter with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. "In 1943-44, in Ramgarh—then in

Hazaribagh and now in Jharkhand—Maulana Azad was addressing the people and suddenly the skies opened up in a heavy downpour making everyone rush for sheds. Azad roared, 'You are so scared of raindrops, what will happen when the British will rain bombs and bullets on you?' And then no one moved even an inch."

Finding his shadow lengthen by the day, Sharfuddin Quadri remembers Rabindranath Tagore through his lines and a brief meeting in 1912: *Moron jedin diner seshe asbe tomar duare/sedin tumi kee dhan debe uhare?* (When Death will knock at your door at the end of the day/What will you offer him as a gift?) "I wonder what I will be ready with to welcome the inevitable," he signs off. ✨

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Warrior WOMAN

At the age of eight she decided to become a freedom fighter after meeting Mahatma Gandhi. At 18, she was jailed for participating in the Dandi March. And when India rejoiced in its independence Poornima Pakvasa was still not done with her fight for freedom—she embarked on a fresh mission to liberate Indian women from the shackles of illiteracy.

Dhanya Nair Sankar meets the nonagenarian who continues to seek new goals

Travelling in Mumbai is arduous even in the best of weather; with the afternoon sun glaring down it is doubly punishing. Our weariness, however, dissipates instantly when we meet 99 year-old Poornima Pakvasa at her son's tony apartment in south Mumbai. She is in town for a few days till she travels back to her house in her beloved Saputara. Her face radiates a freshness one can't help but borrow from. "I hope you didn't have a tough time finding the place," she asks us warmly, amid the cacophony of ringing phones, chirping sparrows and the ticking of the grandfather clock.

Pakvasa appears regal even when she is surrounded by minor chaos—an assortment of yellowing Gujarati books, notebooks, pens and pencils lie strewn on the sofa. One wonders if the scattered paraphernalia belongs to a child in the house till we realise that the nonagenarian we are meeting is no less enthusiastic than a child. At an age when most silvers her age read out folk tales to their grandchildren, Pakvasa is penning a few of her own. "I am writing a children's book on the lines of the *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables*; it's called *Bachchudi*," she tells us. Pakvasa is not writing to fill up empty hours. Her project has a definite purpose—like everything else in her life.

She was born in Limdi district near Saurashtra in a family of freedom fighters. And even though it's been 61 years since India gained

Independence, one can almost feel revolution stirring in the air all over again, when we hear her saying, "Freedom runs in my blood." Pakvasa never tires of talking about 'those' days. "Our house was always abuzz with people preparing for protest marches and discussing how to engage others in such activities. Everything revolved around just one word, independence." Even when she was just an adolescent, she knew where her life was heading. "My father and uncle were my biggest inspirations," she tells us. "They never let me sit at home. They used to take me with them to do community work, and I never missed a single opportunity to listen to my uncle's speeches. He was quite a rabble-rouser who urged people to stand up for their rights, voice their opinion and refuse to take anything lying down."

"Kasturba Gandhi trained me in yoga, *lathi* charge and self-defence techniques. In return, I taught her to read and write"

Though the *dharna* and the luminaries who gathered at her house influenced her in many ways, the moment that defined the rest of her life was her meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. "I first met him when I was just eight years old," she tells us. "We were at Raunpur, near Saurashtra. It was tough to stay unmoved when he spoke about individual rights, a free country and democracy. Even the most placid person couldn't help but feel a fire in his belly." Pakvasa participated

in her first freedom protest at the age of 18. "We had organised a Dandi March in Saurashtra, during which the police arrested us," she tells us with fierce pride. "My inmate in the jail was none other than Kasturba Gandhi, who was like a foster mother to me. She trained me in yoga, *lathi* charge and self-defence techniques. In return, I taught her to read and write." Impressed by her intuitive teaching capability, Kasturba Gandhi asked her to teach other inmates as well. Thus Pakvasa's fledgling teaching career began in the close confines of a stony prison cell. However, coming from a privileged and progressive family, Pakvasa was oblivious to some harsh social inequities that prevailed then. "In my family, gender was never an issue and girls were never discouraged from going to school," she says.

"In the jail, I realised that not many girls were as lucky. I knew I had to do something to bridge this chasm. Every girl regardless of her background should be educated. Education is the key to independence."

Though not exactly a militant feminist, Pakvasa was a fireball alright—a trait that endeared her to her husband Arvind Pakvasa instantly when they first met. "We met at a constituency meeting held in Haripura district,"

Photographs by **Utkarsh Sanjanwala**





Pakvasa with her daughter Arati Mehta, who assisted her in setting up the Shaktidal

she tells us, her eyes twinkling with remembered impudence. “I was manning the entry when Arvind walked in. As he was late, I forbade him. He told me he that he was the grandson of then governor Mangal Das Pakvasa, but I stood my ground.” The sparks that flew burgeoned into a great love story, and not too long after the altercation, the two tied the knot. “Arvind never imposed his decisions on me. I was always a free spirit and he made sure I remained the same. That was the secret of our successful marriage.”

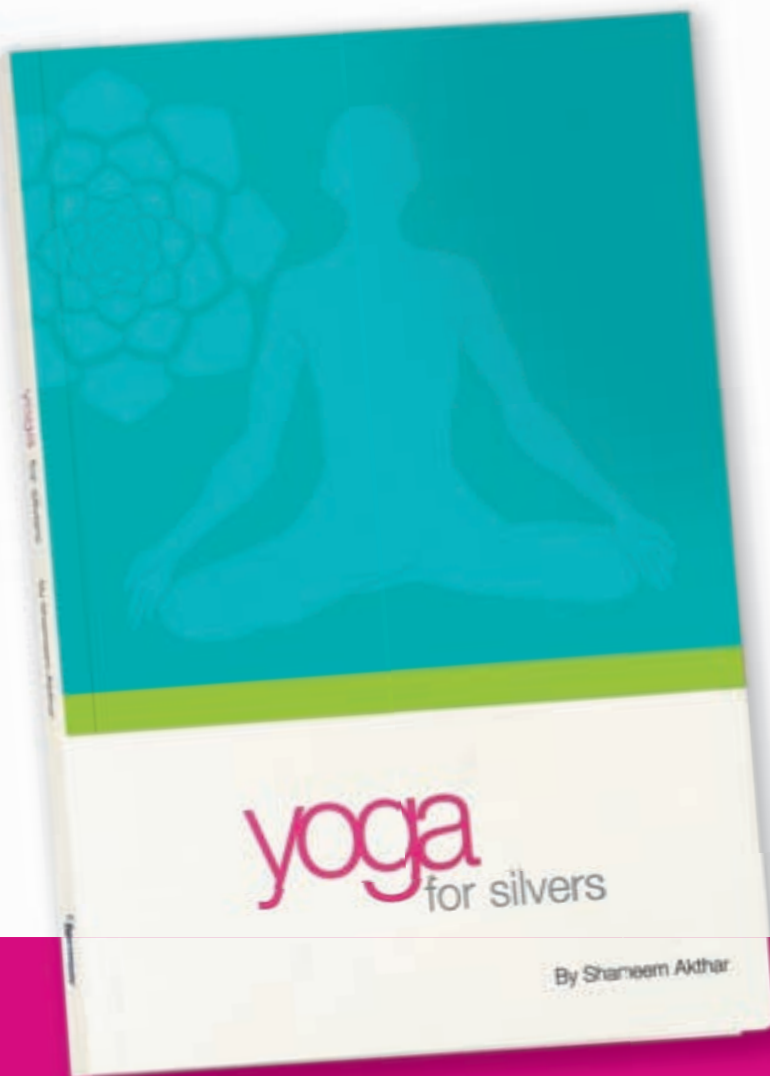
After marriage, Pakvasa enrolled for a course in physical training, and, encouraged by her husband, decided to become a social worker. In 1954, she started Shaktidal, an education society in the Saputara district of Gujarat. “Women back then weren’t aware of their power and strength,” she narrates. “They suffered a lot of physical and mental abuse without batting an eyelid. At Shaktidal, we didn’t just offer formal education but also toughened them up physically and mentally.” To this, her Mumbai-based

daughter Arati Mehta adds, “When Mom set up the establishment, Saputara was an economically and socially backward place. People did not even have basic amenities like toilets, hospitals, or schools. Educating the girl child was unheard of. With our little savings and some donations, we started Shaktidal and urged the local government to set up toilets and open clinics.” According to Mehta, the more difficult challenge, however, was to convince the Dangs (local tribals) parents to send their daughters to school: “Mother would go door to door urging people. We started the school with 15 girls. And today the number has crossed thousands.”

Shaktidal, which is now known as the Ritambara Vishwa Vidyapeeth, conducts seminars, exhibitions, lectures, and excursions. Besides the prescribed curricula, students are trained in cottage industry, first aid, dairy farming, yoga, cooking, self-defence techniques, physical training, sports, painting, and music and dance. “With the frightening crime rate we have

today, women need to be physically tough,” reiterates Pakvasa. Her tireless efforts have won her several accolades, including the Padma Bhushan in 2004. However, the one that she treasures most is the title offered to her by the tribal populace of Saputara. There she is best known as the *Didi* (sister) of the Dangs.

Though Pakvasa divides her time between Saputara, Mumbai and Delhi—where her eldest daughter, Kathak dancer Sonal Mansingh lives—her heart is forever rooted in Saputara. “Saputara will always be home and my students and staff at school my family,” she tells us. “I am at peace there.” Though she treasures the peace of mind, her creative spirit is as restless as ever. Story-writing brings some semblance of fulfilment. “Storytelling is a dying art form,” she tells us wistfully. “Yet, it’s the best way to teach young children about our rich Indian culture. I want to finish this book fast. I want kids to go back to the wonders of reading.” Rest assured, her books will be as inspiring as her life. ✨



yoga for silvers

Yoga shiromani and acharya **Shameem Akhtar** urges the elderly to heal body, mind and soul with ancient yogic habits that are easy to learn. From the philosophy behind practices and poses to step-by-step instructions with illustrations, this is a comprehensive guide written especially for Silvers.

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A cut above the rest

Partially paralysed and wheelchair-bound, Dr Sharadkumar Dicksheet has quite literally been changing the face of the Indian poor for four decades. In an interview to **Khursheed Dinshaw**, the US-based plastic surgeon says his record-breaking work is an act of gratitude to God

There is a calm contentment about Dr Sharadkumar Dicksheet that comes with the satisfaction of doing God's work selflessly. Wheelchair-bound, partially paralysed, battling cancer and with only 18 per cent of his heart functional, the 81 year-old plastic surgeon continues to answer his calling without once flinching: redesigning the lives of the poor in India, especially children, through free facial reconstructive surgery.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable odds, the US-based Dr Dicksheet performs about 50 surgeries a day in the six months he visits India every year. Revered by his patients, who queue up overnight at his health camps, he visits the most backward regions of India, where he screens hundreds of patients in just two hours. The health camps are scenes of hope and anticipation. Patients line up in a large *pandal*, many of them lying on the carpeted floor huddling close to their luggage. Tankers supply drinking water and free meals are on offer. Undeterred by his partial paralysis, the ambidextrous surgeon then operates from 9 am to 11 pm. "I believe I am serving God by operating on poor patients with facial deformities," says the good doctor, his voice hoarse owing to the laryngeal tube.

After 43 years of record-breaking work, Dr Dicksheet has clocked 320,000 surgeries. He takes six minutes for squint correction, 15-20 minutes for cleft-lip surgery, one minute for scar removal (acne, hyper-pigmentation and birthmarks), 10 minutes for drooping eyelid correction

and 15-20 minutes for nose deformity surgery. "The operation would have cost us lakhs," says a grateful Shaila Chavan from Indapur in Pune district, whose two month-old daughter Jahnavi had a torn lip surgically corrected in January 2001. Now the infant can suckle normally. And Gayatri Kulkarni, a 27 year-old from Ahmednagar in Maharashtra, is delighted after having her squint corrected. "My mother was on the verge of selling her jewellery to fund surgery before we spotted a poster advertising a free camp in Pune in January 2011. My family is now looking out for a groom for me after my squint correction," she says shyly.

Dr Dicksheet has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 11 times and conferred the Padmashri by the Indian government. But international acclaim means little to him. "Two million babies are born with facial deformities in India every year," says the Brooklyn-based surgeon who is credited for 'changing the face of Indian society, especially children, one face at a time'. Other than the renown he has achieved for his humanitarian work and child advocacy, Dr Dicksheet has a rather colourful feather in his cap. He was the subject of *Flying on One Engine*, a documentary made by independent filmmaker Joshua Weinstein in 2005 that went on to win awards in 17 countries. The film is a searing insight into Dicksheet's skill with the scalpel as well as his frustrations while battling the formidable limitations of his ailing body. After following him around with a camera in his Brooklyn clinic, Weinstein flew down to India to cover Dicksheet's annual outing here.

Like all geniuses, Dr Dicksheet too has his eccentricities. Wearing two wristwatches to keep track of time both in India and the US, and a ponytail, he bears little likeness to the miracle worker he actually is. But his compassionate eyes betray the deep sentiment that embraces the unusual mission he embarked on in 1968. That's when he set up the India Project. With a successful practice in the US, he invested his own savings to fly to India on his annual "pilgrimages" and sponsored all the material including the special sutures he required for his surgeries.

It's been a long and difficult road since Dr Dicksheet conducted his first camp organised by the Lions Club in Aurangabad. It was only 22 years later in 1990 that he found a sponsor in the Pune-based Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana (BJS). Says Shashi Munot of the BJS and all-India coordinator of the health camps, "When we feel that life has given us a raw deal, we tend to get negative. But that is not the case with Dr Dicksheet. He doesn't complain or give in to self-pity. He only focuses on how he can reach out to the maximum number of patients. We, as his team, feel blessed to be part of his humanitarian mission."

Dr Dicksheet has other patrons too, like Dr K H Sancheti, renowned Pune-based orthopaedist, and son Dr Parag Sancheti, who for two decades have been hosting Dr Dicksheet's surgeries at their Sancheti Hospital. In fact, it was at this medical institution that Dr Dicksheet performed 183 surgeries without a break on 7 January 2011. The younger Sancheti is fascinated by Dr Dicksheet's charisma: "Besides

Dr Dicksheet examining a patient in Pune who has facial deformities

being amazingly quick at the operating table, he is very jovial and rarely makes any personal demands." Parag is equally intrigued by the doctor's unusual working style—Dicksheet performs surgeries with *bhajan* playing in the background. For his part, Ramesh Pokarna, an Aurangabad-based businessman, has been helping the doctor with the Aurangabad camps since 1968. "Whenever he lands in India, I hear his voice and the words are always the same, 'I have reached India. Let's get started.' His passion motivates us to do our bit."

The son of a postmaster, Dr Dicksheet comes from a simple family in Pandharpur, Maharashtra. He schooled in Wardha and Nagpur, and earned his medical degree from Osmania University in Hyderabad in 1956. The young doctor then did a six-month stint with the Indian Railways before qualifying for a medical internship offered by the American Medical Association in the US. After five years of residency in the US, Dr Dicksheet set up his plastic surgery practice. But it was the influence of Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Vinoba Bhave who used to visit his hometown that set him on his chosen path.

Tragedy struck in 1978, when he had a car accident in Fairbanks, Alaska, which left him with the right side of his body paralysed. Amazingly, that did not stop him from travelling to India to conduct his camps. In 1982, Dr Dicksheet was diagnosed with stage-four laryngeal cancer. After a laryngectomy, it took him five years to master oesophageal speech and to "breathe through his neck". "I was 13 when I passed the Sangeet Visharad examination and illness forced me to stop singing, which I love. But from



"Ever since I was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer, doctors have been telling me that I am going to die soon! But there's still so much work to be done"

1948 to 1958, I sang on All India Radio in Nagpur and Hyderabad, where I was studying," he says, managing a smile. There were more health issues in store. In 1988, Dr Dicksheet suffered his first heart attack, followed by another in 1994, when he underwent triple bypass surgery.

Today, Dr Dicksheet lives a solitary life in his Brooklyn apartment. Despite two failed marriages, he has three children, and hopes his daughter Supriya, a plastic surgeon and ENT specialist in Wisconsin, will carry his legacy forward. His apartment, though spacious, is chock-a-block with books, cassettes, newspaper clippings and photo albums. The room he cherishes most houses a home theatre, where Dr Dicksheet indulges his passion for Bollywood.

"Dev Anand is my favourite hero and Madhuri Dixit my favourite heroine," he says, his eyes instantly lighting up.

The gruelling challenges he has faced have made him fiercely independent. He cooks and washes his clothes while seated, and groceries are delivered to his door. "I recite the *Gita*, light incense twice a day in front of photos of deities, catch up on my correspondence, write articles for medical journals, coordinate the next set of camps in India and get sponsors and raise funds for my camps. God and strong will power keep me going." Before we conclude our interview, Dr Dicksheet smiles and says, "Ever since I was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer, doctors have been telling me that I am going to die soon! But there's still so much work to be done."

Want to help the cause? You can donate to the Dr Dicksheet MD Irrevocable Charitable Trust (80G). For further details, contact Shashi Munot on 9420477052, 020-66050000 (off)

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COVER FEATURE

“I am not a
REBEL”

Photographs by Sivaram V

In a career spanning 38 years, Adoor Gopalakrishnan has made only 11 films—all of them have won the National Film Award in one category or the other, and been screened at film festivals across the world. India owes much of its *éclat* in world cinema to the director who wears his brilliance as casually as the halo of his silvery hair. **Dhanya Nair Sankar** meets the man who could have been a bureaucrat but chose to spend his life changing our worldview



In Sreekaryam, Thiruvananthapuram, if you ask for Darshanam, you will be politely directed towards a large compound in which stands a charming wood-and-brick house. When we approach the place, the gate is open. There is no peremptory signboard informing visitors of any guard dogs. For a man known for his reticent nature, director Adoor Gopalakrishnan's house appears warm and welcoming.

We tiptoe around puddles in the compound, a remnant of the previous night's downpour, and ring the doorbell. Gopalakrishnan opens the door, but instead of a smile bears a frown. He asks us how we managed to lose our way despite his precise directions

to our driver. When he notices we have nothing to offer but a sheepish smile, he smiles back and waves aside the awkward moment to welcome us into his private space.

The living room is minimally yet tastefully done with simple furniture, though it's hard to miss the abundance of magazines, books, Kathakali motifs and artefacts. The shadowed space seems to be a faithful reflection of the idealism of his youth, when his stint at Gandhigram Rural University in 1960—where he went to study economics, political science and public administration—instilled in him an appreciation for austerity.

As soon as we step inside, the rains lash out with full fury. The hall turns

perceptibly darker. Yet there is a smile lighting up his face: "I love the drama of the rains." As we talk to him, we notice that his moods are as dramatic and unpredictable as the monsoon; he is fiery while talking about contemporary Indian cinema, passionate while discussing films, stern when making a statement on cultural monopoly, and downright playful while talking about his family.

Familial bonds and memories mean a lot to him. Born in rural Pallickal and growing up in the village of Adoor, his childhood was filled with simple pleasures: playing around the large trees of mango and jackfruit; chasing squirrels; watching Kathakali; and getting drenched in the rains. The bucolic scene is far removed from the world



of films. So it's hard to say if Adoor Gopalakrishnan came to cinema or cinema came to him. By the looks of it, cinema came to him to gain some respectability.

His first film *Swayamvaram* (1972) is a tale of a young couple who elope from their village, aspiring for a better life in the city only to be sucked into a life of endless penny-pinching that ultimately drives them to the slums. The film portrayed the angst of post-Nehruvian times and the transition of Kerala's middleclass into a modernist society. While some cinema aficionados squirmed at the stark portrayal of reality, one thing became clear: the film marked the arrival of a man who had no qualms shaking the underpin-

nings of Malayalam film aesthetics. His second feature film *Kodiyettam* is a heart-rending portrayal of the transition of a village simpleton from a carefree soul to a responsible family man. The movies that followed were as uncompromising in their value: *Mathilukal*, *Vidheyam* and *Nizhalkuthu*. All his films have one thing in common—the protagonists are ordinary people with their flaws in place. "Flaws lend contrast and colour in the characterisation of a person," he says. Like his protagonists, he understands the perpetual conflict between our expectations and experience.

In a career spanning over three decades, he has made 30 short films and documentaries and 11 feature

films. Each film, he says, is a reflection of his experiences through life and the ensuing transformation. One can't help but notice that his experiences come with a winning streak. Besides several national and state honours, he has been decorated with the title of The Commander of the Order of Arts and Literature by the French government in 2004. Earlier, in 2002, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington held a complete retrospective of his works. In 2005, he was felicitated with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, and in 2006 he was conferred with India's top civilian award, the Padma Vibhushan.

The trophies may take up significant space in his house, but they don't



"As a child, I used to watch Kathakali performances sitting on my mother's lap. My mother would see at least one performance every day; my fondest memories are of her explaining the antics on stage to the women around her"

to him. And it dawns on us that he will reveal his layers only if we are willing to wait and listen and observe—much like what he does with his films.

IN HIS WORDS:

I was lucky to come from a family that was passionate about art. I grew up watching Kathakali; it was an integral part of our ancestral house. We even had our own Kathakali troupe called Kaliyogam. As a child, I used to watch the performances sitting on my mother's lap. My mother knew all the stories and could decipher the gestures accurately; my fondest memories are of her patiently explaining the nuances to women around her.

Cinema came quite accidentally to me. I used to act in plays in school, and later even in college. At eight, I essayed the role of Lord Buddha in a school play. I was never an ardent fan of cinema. I could have seen a lot of films if I wanted; my uncle had a couple of theatres at Adoor, Enath and Parakkode. But I never bothered to take a look. My original plan was to join the National School of Drama but I was told the medium of instruction was Hindi. And I had no intention of producing or acting in Hindi plays. Just then, I came across an advertisement inviting applications for the screenplay writing and direction course in the Film Institute (later christened as FTII). The institute was only a year old then [in 1962]; I got the first rank and the only scholarship available that time; a princely sum of ₹ 75. And thus my tryst with cinema began. And I have loved every moment of it.

I think the Adoor who quit his government job would be happy to meet Adoor, the filmmaker. I have never regretted anything in life because I have made all my decisions with utmost conviction. Before going to Film Institute in 1962, I had a regular job in the National Sample Survey as investigator. It was interesting work as it gave me an opportunity to travel and live in remote places. The pay was good, about ₹ 400 per month. Then gradually I came to dislike the lack of dignity the job entailed. Even if I did a good job, my boss would find some fault, which irritated me. When it became a routine, I thought it was time to quit and save my self-respect. Moreover, the job was also making my theatre work difficult. I would be preparing for the production of a play when I was asked to travel to Malabar. Above all, my mother fell ill at that time and I wanted to be near her. My initial excitement of becoming an earning member of the family was all gone by then. Filmmaking seemed to be a far more endearing process.

The Film Institute was pure education in every way. It taught me a thing or two about frugal living. The meagre scholarship amount had to be supplemented with money orders from my elder brother back home. The institute had a very good library where I spent a lot of my time after classes. In the second year, Ritwik Ghatak joined as our teacher. I never met any of the teachers outside the classroom. I was also a very shy person and found it difficult to make acquaintances. When I was handed a still camera, I did not know what to shoot. And after a lot of deliberation I clicked with

occupy much room in his head. All that matters to him—and drives him to make a movie—is his conviction. He is not distracted by statistics or numbers. And though that may make him appear like an unbending man, truth be told, he is a self-confessed softie when it comes to his grandson, five year-old Tashi Norbu whose photographs adorn his walls. The mere mention of Tashi makes his eyes dance. When Tashi comes visiting, he opens up his collection of cameras (he has half a dozen) and goes on a clicking spree.

An indulgent grandfather; uncompromising filmmaker; thorough idealist; the voice of the common man; a monsoon lover. We have seen many facets



many apprehensions. However, the teachers liked what I had produced. During weekends I went to downtown theatres to watch old Hindi and English movies; they had special shows at half the rates. Ghatak was quite an influence; he was well-read and well-versed in Sanskrit texts like the *Veda* and the epics. His lectures, especially on his own films, were very inspiring. He had a great understanding of and admiration for Ray's films.

I don't agree with the term 'parallel' cinema at all. I think it was a term created by journalists to distinguish films cut off from the set formula; films that lacked big stars, song and dance. If you notice, there was nothing parallel about the cinema made by other directors who refused to conform to a formula. They too used the same distribution and exhibition channels. Of course, those who stuck to a formula didn't have to really worry about distributors and producers unlike other filmmakers. In India we need to have different producers and distributors who are not afraid to defy the norms, or else Indian cinema will get stuck in a rut.

I don't think my films are elitist. I have to really work hard to get the

"Age is the best teacher. I have the ability to deal with both failure and praise with equanimity. I have also realised that while failure isn't a nice thing it's only a temporary setback. I am also very aware of undue praise from anyone and stay away from such people"

nuances right. Every time I make a film, I want more and more people, especially Malayalis, to watch it. Cinema doesn't make any sense if it has no audience. Fortunately, I have a fairly good audience outside Kerala as well. Nobody makes films only for festivals; only those films that are aesthetically rich get selected. So it's nice to be appreciated on such a platform.

I make cinema that enthuses me as a person, and as a filmmaker.

I don't want to simply use my skills as a craftsman to make a film; it has to be a culturally engaging experience. I look out for stories that touch a deep chord. I never give my actors a script because I don't want to invite the danger of misinterpretation. I coach them personally to get exactly what I want.

I hope I have improved at my craft over the years. I find it very difficult

to analyse myself. With each film, I've tried to better myself. As I have been formally trained in filmmaking, I have the ability to appreciate novel ideas in the medium and I like to try new experiments. My first film *Swayamvaram* had many rough edges. With time and experience, one learns to keep away the non-essentials. With experience, ideas also come from various different sources; sometimes you hear things, just observe, and you store them intuitively in your mind, not necessarily thinking about what you are going to do with them.

I think only a discerning audience can create good cinema culture.

If the audience only wants melodrama and exaggeration, or confuses vulgarity for art, they lose the ability to face the realities of life. I am not really surprised that a film that deals with life as we live it attracts

FILMOGRAPHY



less audience. Any work of art especially cinema should shake you up; it shouldn't leave you unaffected. Aesthetically and intellectually, it should stimulate you, disturb you. Not that I think that cinema can bring about a big social revolution. But it can certainly create awareness, which forms the base of any social change.

Our audience loved spectacle and mythological characters—it hasn't changed much today. But now the spectacle is brought about by immense use of technology, and mythological characters have been replaced by larger-than-life stars. Sometimes I feel the audience only goes to see their favourite stars in extraordinary situations. For the masses, cinema remains a spectacle of improbabilities.

It is unfortunate that a certain monoculture is monopolising the cinematic world. And it's not restricted only to cinema. 'Small' cultures are now increasingly made to feel as if they are inferior. Today, our children don't know their own mother tongue, but their parents take pride in them speaking a foreign language. Exposing ourselves to other cultures is fine, but it should not inhibit us in any way; it should open us up mentally and culturally. When it comes to cinema, I think people's expectations have gone down. They hardly get to taste meaningful cinema produced even in our own country. Unless we are exposed to a different kind of cinema, a better culture cannot evolve.

I started the Chitrallekha Film Society with a few friends to promote good cinema. Well before I started my career, I realised that films didn't enjoy any respect from the masses or classes. I became aware of the fact that the only way out was to expose our audiences, especially the young lot, to the charms of great cinema. I was motivated by my professors who often spoke about the role of film societies abroad and their commitment to spreading appreciation for cinema.

Swayamvaram 1972

Kodiyettam 1977

Elippathayam 1981

Mukhamukham 1984

Anantarm 1987

Mathilukal 1990

Vidheyam 1993

Kathapurushan 1995

Nizhalkkuthu 2002

Naalu Pennungal 2007

Oru Pennum Renda Annum
2008

Chitrallekha took shape in 1964 to set up film societies, publish film literature and make quality films. *Chitrallekha Film Souvenir*, the first ever serious publication on cinema in the language, was brought out that year. It was to make a comprehensive intervention in the film media. On the one hand, we wanted to show classics, discuss them and publish writings. On the other we wanted to distribute and produce films. For the latter, we decided to establish a studio of our own. Chitrallekha's biggest success, though, was that in just 10 years it spawned 110 film societies. We started linking cinema to the world of art and literature. And it worked—cinema started getting the respect it deserved. Even small towns started having film societies attracting newer enthusiasts.

My last two films *Oru Pennum, Renda Annum* and *Naal Pennungal* were both inspired by the works of Thakazhi Shivasankara Pillai. The last film *Oru Pennum, Renda Annum* was a project initiated by Doordarshan. They wanted to do a tribute to regional language writers of some standing. Thakazhi was the chosen writer from Malayalam. As I had not made any film based on short stories, I took it up as a challenge. Malayalam literature has given the world some brilliant writers. Pillai is a class apart. Another writer I admire is Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. I am attracted to any form of art and literature that makes me sit up and think about life, and reveals new and fascinating insights into life.

Oru Pennum, Renda Annum is not a sequel to Naal Pennungal as the popular perception goes. The English title of *Oru Pennum Renda Annum* is *A Climate for Crime*. It was a sheer accident that both revolved around the plight of women but the last one is more about the small crimes committed during famine and scarcity. It's based in Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Travancore in the 1940s.

Most of my characters are common people. I like to root my characters in reality because we are all tortured by our thoughts. My prototypes are real people with real issues, not imagined or fake ones. For instance, *Nizhalkkuthu* was born after I read a newspaper report about the oldest hangman in Kerala.

Contemporary issues don't really intrigue me while making movies. What is a contemporary issue? In Malayalam, all filmmakers seem to be doing it; it's like a newspaper report or endorsement. I like to make movies of lasting human emotions and experiences so that they can be fresh even tomorrow. Any good film has to survive the period of its making.

Most commercial filmmakers think the more distanced they are from



Scenes from *Naalu Pennungal* and *Kodiyettam*

"I miss my venerated big brother M F Husain. Husain *saab* was very affectionate towards me; he used to like my work."

reality the better, as more people will come to watch their films. Cinema can make you better equipped to deal with life's realities. Today commercial cinema in Kerala is blindly copying from Tamil films. In fact, Kamal Hassan recently said that once people used to look at Malayalam cinema for inspiration, not anymore.

It's not the name of the filmmaker that attracts me but the story and its treatment. A film has to talk to me, and it should do that interestingly. There is no one director I admire; there are many. Sometimes, even big names disappoint you. I respect Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky and Japanese filmmakers Yasujiro Ozu and Akira Kurosawa. These directors engaged the audiences deeply in what they were trying to communicate. Closer home, I respect Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal and among the young directors, I like Girish Kasaravalli's work.

At 70, I feel I have more enthusiasm for cinema and life. Age is the best

teacher. I am able to deal with both failure and praise with equanimity. I have realised that while failure isn't a nice thing it's only a temporary setback. I am also very aware of undue praise from anyone and stay away from such people.

Even after all these years the grind doesn't bore me. I do travel, but not a too much. I can't choose my favourite country but I like Thailand and Sri Lanka. I feel very much at home in these countries. The people are very warm and hospitable and even the food is a lot like ours. I like meeting new people and learning about different cultures. Though giving too many interviews can get taxing, I look forward to them if the interviewer knows the subject. When I attend film festivals, I look forward to interacting with other filmmakers and enthusiasts.

I miss my venerated big brother M F Husain. Husain *saab* was very affectionate towards me; he used to like my work. Once I had gone to Hyderabad where he wanted

to screen my film *Nizhalkkuthu*. He had invited a few friends over for the screening. After the screening, when he discussed every detail of the film with them, I felt really happy. Next day, to my great surprise, the 90 year-old Husain *saab* was at my hotel to take me to the airport at 4 am. I wondered if I really deserved so much affection.

I am glad to be surrounded by a lovely family. My late mother Gauri Kunjamma and my wife Sunanda have been my greatest support. I bounce ideas off my wife and, even after so many years she listens to them 'patiently'! My daughter Aswathi Dorje is an IPS officer. My son-in-law Dr Chhering Dorje, also an IPS officer, is a Buddhist. They have a five year-old son Tashi Norbu, which means Dear and Precious—which he is to me.

I have no regrets in life, whether it was leaving the government job, or making the cinema that I do, or having made only 11. I have been totally convinced about everything I have done. I don't go by people's expectations; only I need to be sure of my moves. I don't make any compromises in my profession. But I am not a rebel either. I have used the same system for my films. It's just that I don't feel the compulsion to do what others do. ✨

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Fortified FAITH

The rains are here and the waterfalls in Badami in north Karnataka are as inviting as the temple architecture of this historical city. **Arun Bhat** may well be making his next trip

Photographs by **Arun Bhat**

Nearly 1,500 years ago, the mighty Chalukya kings discovered a small gap among the rocky cliffs situated in the parched plains of today's North Karnataka; the gap was covered by steep sandstone walls in three directions with a small opening to the northwest. They found it a secure place to govern their kingdom from, built a large tank in a depression surrounded by cliffs on three sides, carved a few temples in those rocks, and established the centre of a dynasty that ruled and controlled a large chunk of land between Narmada and Kaveri for nearly 600 years.

This recorded history of Badami is interesting, but the mythology is even more fascinating. On his journey across the Vindhya, sage Agastya was invited by demons Vatapi and Ilvala for a meal. The brothers had the

habit of calling guests home and killing them in the most innovative way possible. Vatapi would turn into a ram while Ilvala would cook its meat and offer to the guest. Once eaten, Vatapi would come out splitting the stomach of the guest, thus killing him.

The story does not say why they had to choose such a circuitous route to achieve their mission. But when it comes to legends, sages are always smarter than demons. Agastya knew the plan and digested Vatapi before he could come out, putting an end to the evils of the duo. Today, the cliffs around the Agastya Lake in Badami are believed to be the bodies of mighty demons defeated by the sage.

The aura of the town is heightened by the legend but it is the remains of history that attracted me here. Temples carved halfway up a cliff are the hallmark of Badami. Built by Chalukya

kings over a period of two centuries, they are among the best surviving structures of early Indian architecture. There are four cave temples in Badami; three are dedicated to Vedic gods, the last one is a Jain temple. The first three temples have elaborate sandstone carvings of the Hindu pantheon such as Vamana (avatar of Lord Vishnu in human form) stepping over Bali, dancing Nataraja, Varaha (Lord Vishnu as boar) carrying Bhudevi (one of the two forms of Lakshmi) and Vishnu seated on Vasuki (king of the Nagas). The Jain temple—smallest of the four—has a series of Tirthankara carved along the walls.

Chandru, my ASI-certified guide at Badami, stood in dance positions when he described how the 18-handed statue of Nataraja can form 81 *mudra* in Bharatanatyam. We moved through caves as Chandru described the iconography and architecture,

The 18-handed statue of Nataraja; one of the sacred structures in the centre of a pond at Mahakoota





The cave temples of Badami draw many tourists

but my questions to him were mostly related to history. The inscriptions in Badami and surrounding areas are a key to rediscovering most of Chalukyan history. An inscription carved high up the rocks on the cliff opposite to the caves describes the times of the first kings. Another inscription by Pallava king Narasimhavarman I sheds light on the brief occupation of Badami by the Pallavas. A detailed one on a pillar at nearby Mahakoota village, carved in the time of king Mangalesha, provides much needed information about the lineage of the Chalukya dynasty and the spread of their kingdom. An inscription in Aihole village describes the victory of Pulikeshi II over Harshavardhana, and another offers vague clues about the existence and time period of renowned poet Kalidasa.

From my vantage point in the hill, I could see the Bhoothanatha Temple at the edge of Agastya Lake. Unlike the cave temples that are full of visitors, the temple premises were empty,

save for occasional visitors. The grand temple is surrounded by walls of red sandstone on three sides and the waters of the lake lapping up its steps. Sitting in the courtyard, I watched the cool breeze ruffling the lake surface as the evening sun disappeared behind the town.

Built by Chalukya kings over two centuries, the temples in Badami are among the best surviving structures of early Indian architecture

During my wanderings, I drifted towards the hills opposite to the caves and climbed a short flight of steps that took me to the tableland above. The steps scale through narrow gaps in the rocks that are wide enough at places just to let in a few people at a time. The sun peering through the gap makes a colourful play of light and shade in these fissures. Up on the hill are a few temples, pillars and the remains of a fort.

The area around Badami is strewn with temples that belong to Chalukya era. Excursions from Badami took me first to Mahakoota, a small village dominated by a Chalukyan temple dedicated to Mahakuteshwara. Mahakoota appears like a green island in an ocean of parched land surrounding it.

Next to the temple is a sacred grove with thick greenery that creates a cooler local climate in contrast to the scorching weather. The temple courtyard is under the shade of large ficus trees. The temple towers obscured by the hanging roots and the silence in the shade lend a calming effect.

Not far from Mahakoota is Pattadakal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The temples here are made of



The Mahakoota temple showcases both Dravidian and northern Nagara architecture

red sandstone and the carvings have been fading over the years on the external walls owing to the effect of sunlight. But the interiors appear better preserved. The temples here are a mix of northern Nagara architecture and the Dravidian style of the south.

Further ahead of Pattadakal is Aihole, a village full of ancient structures that refuse to conform to any specific style of temple building. With students arriving here from every corner of the world to learn and master the art of carving in stone, historians have often called Aihole the 'cradle of Indian architecture'. The first thing that attracts the visitor is the well-maintained main enclosure of temples in the centre of the village. Taking a tour of the large Lad Khan Temple and well known Durgi Gudi that has parallels with the Parliament building in its façade, I heard my guide talk about a number of smaller temples spread around the village. With him, I went in search of these ancient structures that seemed to be visited by very few people.

Among the oldest of these temples is Ravana Phadi. Dating back to the latter half of the sixth century, it is a small rock-cut room with a *lingam* in the centre and beautiful carvings on the insides of the walls. To the west of Ravana Phadi is Huchimalli Temple built in a more formal Nagara style of architecture (at a higher elevation than the rest of the temples). The temple stands alone in an enclosure far away from the other monuments, with its shrine visible from a distance. Seen from anywhere in Aihole is the Meguti Temple located on top of a hill. Standing next to Meguti, I could see the entire village dotted with ancient temples and the river Malaprabha flowing at the edge of the hamlet.

My visits to Aihole, Badami and its neighbouring haven of ancient architecture was fuelled by beautiful images of foaming waters rushing down from cliffs, as presented in tourist brochures. They were perhaps photographed during the peak monsoon months, but the time I was there was marked with dry spells.

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE

By air: The airports at Hyderabad and Pune are nearly equidistant, at about 350 km from Badami.

By train: The nearest major rail-head, Hubli, is 90 km from here.

By road: There are night buses to Bengaluru. Hubli, the nearest major town, is 90 km by road.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Badami Court:

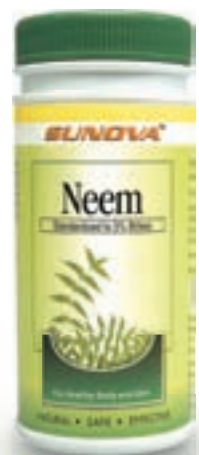
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₹ 4,800 onwards

All that I could see were the stains of algae at places where the waterfalls would come alive during the rains. However, the heritage sites in Badami and Pattadakal, the architectural experimentations of Aihole and the calm environs of Mahakoota more than made up for the missing waterfalls. However, the appeal of waterfalls now gives me an excuse to plan another trip. As I write this, the monsoons have arrived in most parts of Karnataka and the Met department predicts good rains for the next few months. ✨

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Ta din ta

In Mumbai for a solo Kathak performance, where he will dance to a blend of percussion instruments from northern and southern India, Pandit Chitresh Das, the 65 year-old Kathak king from the US, tells **Rajashree Balaram** how he loves throwing his weight around

DANCE

Do your visits to India re-energise your creative spirit?

When I am here, I don't think about America. When I am in America I don't think about India. Yet I am teaching Indian history and culture through my dance, so it hardly matters where I am. India affects me in many subliminal ways. I have just returned from a teaching retreat at Chinmaya Vibhooti near Pune. After coming out of the peaceful Hanuman temple where the priest gave such a beautiful *aarti*, I looked at the surrounding hills and it occurred to me that Rama and Lakshmana too in their search for Sita must have encountered the same lush greenery. The landscape somehow hurled me back to ancient times. It's such moments that provoke me to choreograph huge dance dramas in which hundreds of students—sometimes three generations from the same family—dance, sing and recite together. Suddenly I feel I am walking in the footsteps of my ancestors.

Continued ...



Continued from page 59

How has Kathak transformed your inner self over the years?

When one does the roles of Krishna and Radha, it automatically transforms you; your body is acting as Krishna, worshipping him, identifying with him. Our goal is ultimately to reach the divine.

Is it still a process of self discovery when you surrender yourself to the rhythm each time?

One doesn't surrender to the rhythm; one becomes the rhythm. People dancing in nightclubs surrender to the rhythm; we create the rhythm within our body.

Do you think India is steadily neglecting its tradition and moving westwards? Or will the fusion between the east and the west yield a happy confluence?

India has offered the world a wealth of philosophy, literature, art, food, culture and religions. We need to strike the right balance between the achievements of science and technology and our own heritage of yoga, Ayurveda, literature and art. All of us must be constantly vigilant to pass the message on to the next generation. In Mumbai, for instance, everybody speaks English. They say 'Hi'; they never greet anyone with a *namaskar*. If you ask children what their mother tongue is, they get confused. That worries me. When I went to Bengaluru, I saw many government buildings with such beautiful regional architecture. Every state should do this, rather than blindly veer towards the highrises. We can preserve Indianness in so many different ways.

Does age interfere with your performance?

As Lord Buddha said, all things decay as time passes. But I hope to remain physically and mentally strong. I practice Kathak Yoga to the beats of the tabla—standing on a table, wearing weights on my ankles, and dumbbells in hand. I do *tutkar* with my feet, while playing *theka* on the tabla, and humming a *nagma*. As I age, I am going deeper into *abhinaya*. My routine requires intense mind focus, breath coordination, stamina and endurance. It's a yogic trip.



You competed with tap dancer Jason Samuels Smith at the age of 60. What was the experience like?

There are many older people running marathons. There are *sadhu* who do great feats that most people will never know. I believe that dedicated *riyaz* will keep me going for a long time. Jason [see pic above] and I represent two different generations and genres who share a tremendous exchange of energy. One wears shoes with metal plates and the other uses bare feet. He comes from the old school of tap dancing; I belong to the old school of Kathak. Jason is my son's age. It's good for me because he keeps me on my toes. You need to build a determined mindset to do this—that defines the factor of agelessness.

How many hours do you practise every day?

At my age, it's not how long I practise; it's how intensely I do it. I practise for one-and-a-half to three hours. After that I drive 50 to 60 miles to teach my students Kathak for another three hours during which I am constantly on my toes and playing the tabla

In recent years, how long has your longest performance lasted?

Two-and-a-half hours without costume changes or intermission.

How do you retain your energy at this age?

I'm learning to eat less. In America, I eat before sunset. I have lots of greens, steamed broccoli and protein. I keep away from rice and *roti*. Things become difficult when I come to India, where I am surrounded with incredible *aloo paratha*, *kulcha*, *batura*, *biryani*, *lal doi*, and *ras malai*. But then I hear the divine saying, "Eat! You're a *desi*!"

How did you develop the technique of Kathak Yoga?

Kathak Yoga is an intense experience that combines traditional elements in Kathak. Dancers become their own accompanist, singing *nagma* while simultaneously playing an instrument such as a tabla or harmonium, and dividing *taal* into three equal parts. Kathak Yoga is inspired by the great yogis of ancient times and modern times, like Iyengarji. If you go online, you can see my students doing it on YouTube.

How long do you hope to perform Kathak at such a pace?

If I can dance at the age of 70 to the very fast beats of tabla and compete with someone like Jason—with the same power and speed I have now—I will consider myself very fortunate. Please pray that I can do that.



Gopal Sharma

An equal music

Three generations of a family in Varanasi are proud guardians of a 500 year-old musical legacy. **Rajashree Balaram** finds out how they shoulder the responsibility

“In our family, kids play with musical instruments instead of toys,” says 34 year-old sitarist Deobrat Mishra. There’s a thick vein of pride running through Deobrat’s genteel voice, and deservedly so—his musical lineage of the Banaras *gharana* is more than 500 years old. Deobrat and his father, renowned sitarist Shivnath Mishra, 66, run the Academy of Indian Classical Music in Varanasi where poor children are trained in vocal and instrumental music as well as classical dance.

Though the father-son duo have a large fan following in Europe, the US, Canada and Japan, they are never too far to ignore the voice of their beloved Varanasi. “Many of my father’s fans in the US wanted him to settle

there but he didn’t want to uproot us from Indian culture and tradition,” says Deobrat, who confesses that he aborted his increasing experiments with fusion music 10 years ago when his father pointed out he was deviating from his heritage. Deobrat’s nephew Prashant Mishra, a tabla artist, though only 18, sounds more like a chip off the old block. “Fusion is fine, but a lot of what’s done in the guise of fusion sounds like confusion to me,” he says. The reticent Prashant is bluntly dismissive of musical reality shows that are so popular on TV: “There’s so much of theatrics, there’s very little music there.” Prashant can’t think of anything beyond his tabla, teachers in his college complain that he plays it all day on his bench—even through a lecture.

LEGACY

For his grandfather, though, that’s a habit worthy of great pride. The three generations often do *riyaz* (practice) together, either on the banks of the Ganga in the morning or sometimes even at midnight. “We are one of the few musical families where three generations have performed together on a global stage on many occasions. What more can I ask for?” says Shivnath Mishra. The three men credit much of their success to Pramila, Shivnath’s wife. “My mother is a gifted tabla artist who taught Prashant to play the instrument but could never perform in public as women of her generation were not allowed to do so,” Deobrat tells us. “She is the one who encouraged us to start the academy. Please don’t forget to mention her name.” Indeed, here is one family that looks out for each other, and their legacy.

Lonely goddess

After spending a lifetime as a woman in a man's body, Chapal Bhaduri found both freedom and alienation when he finally introduced himself to the world. **Shoma Chatterji** meets the man who led two lives

THEATRE

Chapal Bhaduri is 73. He lives alone in a narrow bylane in Kolkata, cooks his own food, and keeps his body and soul together by dressing up and performing the role of Goddess Shitala in different temples and street corners of the city. Bhaduri, alias Chapal Rani, or Queen Chapal, is the leading lady of Bengal's traditional, travelling folk theatre-in-the-round, the Jatra. He feels, thinks and speaks like a woman, and he has behaved as one from his early boyhood. Stepping into female roles, therefore, came naturally to him. Yet, for a major part of his life, Chapal remained a cloistered homosexual.

"Life took an ugly turn when I lost my mother, when I was 10," he reminisces. "My brothers asked my sister Ketaki and me to move out. We shifted to a small room near Biswaroopa Theatre in northern Kolkata. In 1958, I joined Natto Company, a *jatra* group. They gave me a stage name, Chapal Rani, and a monthly salary of ₹100 plus Re 1 for food." Chapal's sister joined theatre and became a very famous actress. He too found fame—his performances in *Raja Debidas*, *Chand Bibi*, *Sultana Razia* and *Mahiyashi Kaikeyi* were big hits. "In the 1960s, I was one of the highest paid 'actresses' of the *jatra*," he tells us solemnly. "I performed every night in villages and small towns in Bengal, till I started earning ₹ 8,000 per month. Young men would swoon through the window of the green room to catch a glimpse of their favourite 'Chapal Rani.' Those were the days...."

However, as the heady 1960s came to an end, women stepped out to play female roles. Male actors like Bhaduri were suddenly left adrift. "My problem was compounded because I was a cloistered gay," says the low-profile, soft-spoken Bhaduri. "The company I worked in showed me the door when the owner found out. Back then,



Photographs by Shilbhadra Datta

homosexuality was even more of a taboo. My late sister Ketaki was the only one who accepted me for what I was. My family, neighbours and relatives still shun me."

Chapal finally found an opening with Kamala Opera. He was paid ₹ 100 per show for a part in *Durgesh Nandini*. "Sometimes I did three shows in one day to make ends meet," he says. "But it was too late. When the Petro-max lighting was replaced by modern, dazzling lights the difference between the 'imitation' woman and the 'real' woman stood out." In 1995, he began playing Shitala, the poor person's dreaded goddess of small pox, in dramatised performances of her sacred saga for as meagre a sum as ₹ 60 per performance at different temple precincts in the city. "Even my lover, a patron of my *jatra* performances, a married man with children, ditched me," he says, looking back with sadness.



But life also yielded delicate slivers of humour between many episodes of pain. "I was once kidnapped by a gang of molesters in a jeep as I was crossing the dark fields from the makeup room to the stage in a village," he says with a smile. "They thought I was a girl. I was used to admiring glances by men who thought I was a beautiful woman. It surprised me in the beginning but I got used to it and learnt to take necessary precautions." The moment he cherishes though came in 1967, when while playing the lead in Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Janhavi*, Bengal's favourite actor Uttam Kumar asked to see him after the performance. "I could not believe he was in the audience."

Bhaduri is also proud that he inspired three acclaimed films revolving around his life. *Performing the Goddess – The Chapal Bhaduri Story*, a tele film *Ushno Taar Jonne* in which he played a cameo as himself, and *Just Another Love Story* in which he narrates his life in camera while filmmaker-actor Rituparno Ghosh plays the young Chapal. "I was terrified to face the camera, but Rituparno helped me." As we part, we ask him if he is happy with the new law that accepts homosexuality as part of mainstream society. "I am happy that the gay man need not lead a cloistered life any more like I had to do," he says. "Society has finally accepted him as normal, which he always was."

Subhamoy Bhattacharya



MISCELLANY

A casket containing the wax image and relic of educationist and religious leader Don Bosco is travelling through India as part of its journey through 130 countries. The pilgrimage that started in Italy last year will come to a head in August 2015 to mark the bicentennial celebrations of Don Bosco's birth. The 19th century Christian missionary continues to draw a large following as was evident in Guwahati where hundreds of students thronged to catch a glimpse of the casket. Don Bosco inspired a wake of Salesian missionaries who started thousands of schools and vocational institutions, mostly for poor children, all over the world. The casket will pass through every country where Don Bosco's Salesians run educational institutions. It is now making its way through various states in the northeast, Bengal and other parts of the country where there is a large presence of the Salesian brotherhood.

Don's parade

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An era of indulgence



Beauty didn't always come out of a bottle; there was a time when it had to be coaxed out of forest floors and lotus ponds. In its first reprint, *Almond Eyes Lotus Feet* (Eminence Designs; ₹ 1,200; 264 pages) by historian Sharada Dwivedi and Indore aristocrat and textile revivalist Shalini Devi Holkar opens up ancient beauty secrets shared by many generations of women over hundreds of years in different parts of India. Much of it is time-tested wisdom that inexplicably sounds more earnest and honest than the synthetic promises leaping out of contemporary skincare packaging.

You will be surprised at the hundred different ways in which the women of yore softened their skin; thickened their tresses; kept their bosoms full with milk; and rid their babies of indigestion and cold. And all that delightful advice comes swaddled in the delicious banter and gossip that were often exchanged near serene bathing ponds, busy kitchens and high-ceiling *hawa mahal*. Try out some of the rituals today, hold them close to your heart, and then pass them around.





(Above) Wick trimmers; wicks made from cotton wool were soaked in a mixture of lime leaves, turmeric and almonds and placed in silver cups filled with mustard oil or clarified butter. The soot swaying from the lit wicks was gathered into a container and used as *kajal*; (below) *kajal* and *kumkum* ornamental boxes



EXCERPT

Many people suggest using *triphala* as a magic remedy for falling hair and also for conditioning it. Then there are the advocates of *urad dal* or black gram. Soaked overnight and ground into a thick paste, *urad dal* can be massaged into the hair. When it is washed out, it leaves the hair extremely soft. But I cannot imagine how it must feel while that sticky paste is in your hair. The ground leaves of the hibiscus plant, used in many parts of India, are equally sticky, but excellent for the hair with natural yoghurt. They swear it is a very effective conditioner, but for me there would be the question of smell. I have heard that women in the western Indian region of Gujarat use buttermilk to wash and condition their hair, but solve the problem of smell by using a little pot pourri of fragrant dried herbs known as *khevna*. *Khevna* smoke is good for the hair as well as for clothes which smell musty after rains. In areas where there is rice in plenty, women use rice water, strained from their cooked rice, as a simple hair rinse by itself or they mix it with *shikakai* shampoo. Where there are coconuts, women use coconut milk. My massage woman, Jijabai, used to tell me of her childhood days in Maharashtra when she and her sisters would take one coconut each, grate them on a grater shaped like the back of a turtle, and squeeze the milk from the grated fruit into a vessel. They would heat the milk slightly, rub it into their hair and leave it for a short time while they steeped a decoction of fragrant jasmine from their own garden into their *shikakai* shampoo.

I can just imagine them stretched out in the sunlight after the shampoo, their hair spread over a basket of herb incense smoke, lazily watching the parrots in the mango trees and laughing at some silly joke. That sort of vision makes me long to be young again, close to the earth and closer to other women. Somehow in those days we were all sisters in these simple pursuits. That was a very sweet comfort.



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¼ kg Gum Arabic, ½ kg dried fruit (pistachios, cashew nuts, dates, walnuts, sultanas, raisins etc), ½ kg dried desiccated coconut, 1 kg sugar, 10 almonds, ¾ cup poppy seeds, ½ cup ghee or clarified butter. Coarsely pound the Gum Arabic. Roast the coconut and poppy seeds separately on a light greased griddle or *tawa*. Skin the almonds by soaking in a little water, and chop finely. Chop dried fruit. Deep-fry the Gum Arabic in clarified butter until it puffs up. Drain off excess butter. Heat sugar and water to make syrup and then add clarified butter. Add all other ingredients and form into small balls while hot. Gum Arabic strengthens the bones.

EIGHT POWDERS: (Ashtachoorna)

Roast equal quantities of dried ginger (*sonth*), asafoetida (*hing*), black pepper, long pepper, celery seed, black cumin seeds (*shahzeera*), cumin seeds and rock salt on a heavy iron griddle or *tawa*. Remove from flame and let it cool. Pound into a powder and sieve. Put the *ashtachoorna* in a tightly lidded jar. Add 1 gram of the powder to a glass of salted buttermilk or to the juice of half a sour lime. It's good for indigestion, acidity and cough.



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Monsoon mantra

The *Hymns of the Atharva Veda* translated by Ralph Griffin in 1895 has intriguing hymns on everything from mystico-theological doctrines to chants that keeps tigers and thieves at bay. In keeping with the season, here's one excerpted from a charm to hasten the coming of the rains

Let all the misty regions fly together,
let all the rain-clouds sped by wind,
assemble.

Let waters satisfy the earth,
the voices of the great mist-enveloped
Bull who roareth.

Let them show forth, the strong, the
bounteous Maruts:

Let plants and shrubs be hung with
drops of moisture.

Let floods of rain refresh the ground
with gladness and herbs
spring various with each form and
colour.

Cause us who sing to see the gather-
ing vapours:
out burst in many a place the rush of
waters!

Let floods of rain refresh the ground
with gladness;
and herbs spring various with each
form and colour.

Apart, Parjanya! let the troops of
Maruts, roaring, swell the song.
Let pouring torrents of the rain that
raineth rain upon the earth.

Up from the sea lift your dread might,
ye Maruts:
as light and splendour, send the va-
pour upward!

Let waters satisfy the earth, the voices
of the great mist-enveloped Bull who
roareth.

Roar, thunder, set the sea in agitation,
bedew the ground with thy sweet
rain, Parjanya!





Hee haa chiki chiki

Years after R D Burman's death, his ardent fans were disillusioned to know that many of his compositions were 'inspired' by little-known—and some well-known—western songs and symphonies. Though we are used to contemporary Bollywood composers being insolent about plagiarism, why do we feel more betrayed when we realise that Burman too had borrowed inspira-

tion? Perhaps, because we love his music so much we want no cynicism to taint it. After all, without Burman would Hindi cinema have known songs that pant, growl, hiss, and snarl with such wild abandon and are forever lodged in our collective soul? **R D BURMAN THE MAN, THE MUSIC** (HarperCollins; ₹ 399; 366 pages) by **Anirudha Bhattacharjee** and **Balaji Vittal** offers an engrossing read for everyone who loved Burman and his unique musical style—a heady explosion of blues, bossa nova, folk, Indian classical music and jazz. The authors have gathered a wealth of anecdotes from people who had worked with him. Did you know that one of his memorable tracks was based on the gargling sounds made by a woman? Or that he composed some of our favourite songs in just six minutes? Or that Amitabh Bachchan was moved to tears when he first heard *Beethi na bitayee raina*? Also thrown in is a discreet snippet on how even the great classical composer Brahms was not averse to copying tunes. Indeed, we will fight rabidly to defend our heroes. And R D Burman will remain one.

—Rajashree Balaram

Send plenteous showers on him who
seeketh shelter, and let the owner of
lean kine go homeward.

Let the boon Maruts, let the springs
and coiling serpents tend you well.
Urged by the Maruts let the clouds
pour down their rain upon the earth.

May he who hath become the plants'
high regent, suiting our bodies, Agni
of the Waters,

May Jātavedas send us rain from
heaven, Amrit and vital breath to
earthly creatures.

Sending up waters from the flood
and ocean Prajapati move the sea to
agitation!

Forth flow the moisture of the vigor-
ous stallion!

With this thy roar of thunder come
thou hither,

Our father, Lord divine pouring the
torrents

Let the streams breathe, O Varuna, of
the waters.

Pour the floods down:

along the brooks and channels let
frogs with speckled arms send out
their voices.

They who lay quiet for a year, the
Brāhmans who fulfil their vows.

The frogs, have lifted up their voice,
the voice Parjanya hath inspired.

Speak forth a welcome, female frog!

Do thou O frog, accost the rain.

Stretch thy four feet apart, and swim
in the middle of the lake.

Khanvakhā, ho! Khaimakhā, ho! Thou
in the middle, Taduri!

Fathers, enjoy the rain from one
who strives to win the Maruts heart.

Lift up the mighty cask and pour
down water; let the wind blow, and
lightnings flash around us.

Let sacrifice be paid, and, widely
scattered,
let herbs and plants be full of joy and
gladness.

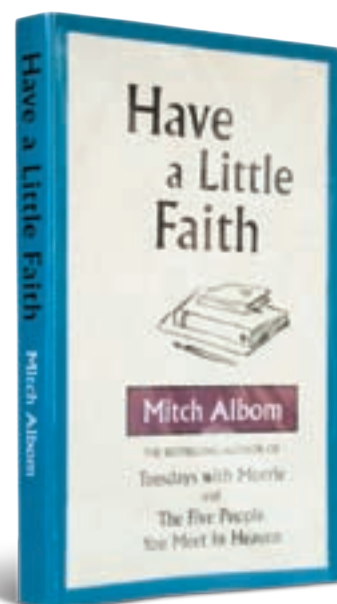
WORLD VIEW

In stores overseas

- **Fast Living, Slow Ageing** by Kate Marie and Christopher Thomas (Mileage Media; 372 pages): Practical tips and techniques for ageing well based on advice from over 50 leading scientists and researchers from around the world. Includes help on exercise, nutrition and stress management.
- **The Anti-Ageing Beauty Bible** by Sarah Stacy and Jo Farley (Kyle Cathie; 224 pages): Test-drives of anti-ageing products from budget to luxe spanning 43 categories; makeup, hair and skincare advice; and tips from inspirational women who have defied age
- **The Warmth Of The Heart Prevents Your Body From Rusting** by Marie de Hennezel (Rodale; 288 pages): This clinical psychologist and expert in palliative care insists you can age without growing old with the power of the human heart; the title comes from a song from the Japanese island of Okinawa, renowned for the longevity of its inhabitants.
- **How We Age: A Doctor's Journey Into the Heart of Growing Old** by Dr Marc Agronin (Da Capo Press; 320 pages): Against the backdrop of rampant ageism in modern society, this psychiatrist shows us how being old is a lot better than it looks and teaches us ways to celebrate the positives.

More than a word

This book—**Mitch Albom's HAVE A LITTLE FAITH** (Hachette; 254 pages; ₹ 250)—is about faith—faith that can soothe, heal and, above all, make you human. Albom, who was a journalist and playwright before becoming popular as an author, partly drifted from his religion (he is a Jew) because he “didn’t want to feel defensive about it”. And then came the question that was to change his life. “Will you do my eulogy?” asked the 82 year-old Albert Lewis, the rabbi (Reb, for the author) from his hometown Jewish temple in New Jersey. From attending his ‘Man of God’s’ religious lessons thrice a week, Albom had wandered off in the opposite direction to Boston. “I didn’t need to ask God for much, and I figured, as long as I wasn’t hurting anyone, God wasn’t asking much of me either. We had forged a sort of ‘you go your way, I’ll go mine’ arrangement, at least in my mind.” And then the Reb called him back. On his visits, Albom met another priest, Henry Covington, who



had given up guns and drugs and had in a way come back from the brink to guide others. The journey back (to faith) lasted eight years before Albom could finally say the eulogy. By then he had gained—and lost—a guide

HARMONY RECOMMENDS

By the same author, *Tuesdays with Morrie*

The people we don’t forget and remember fondly forever are those who held our hand and gave us a fair worldview. And sometimes life gives you that one rare chance of one last lesson. In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Albom hears that his professor of 20 years Morrie Schwartz is dearly hanging to life. It doesn’t seem easy switching off the cell phone for some time every Tuesday to spend time with Morrie, but Albom does and in return gets answers to much bigger questions in life.

and a friend. Almost lyrical, reading *Have a Little Faith* is sometimes like saying a prayer; a prayer to human-kind, to believe and to have a little faith, at all times.

—Meeta Bhatti



Border of fire

Ex-Army man and the country’s first military thriller writer, **Mukul Deva** once again brings out the big guns—quite literally—for **TANZEEM** (HarperCollins; ₹ 225, 315 pages), a gripping narrative of love and courage and the story of a man who sacrificed everything for his country and died an unsung hero. Iqbal is part of the elite Force 22, established by the Indian government to battle the *jihadi* across the border. Their leader a menacing warlord Ameer-ul-Momineem has planned to unleash mayhem on an unimaginable scale with the backing of the Director of Pakistan’s ISI through a crack terrorist cell called Tanzeem. Devastated by his wife’s torture and death at the

hands of the *jihadi*, a distraught Iqbal decides to cross the porous border to kill Ameer and foil his plan, a task impossible to fulfil without infiltrating the terrorists’ network. That’s when the story really takes off with purposeful strides—you turn each action-filled page with nail-biting anticipation as Iqbal sets about fulfilling his mission. And though you know how the book will end long before you get to the final chapter, the ride to the end is thrilling enough to keep you riveted. And the fact that the book mirrors contemporary political realities and our eternally bristling equation with our neighbouring nation doesn’t hurt either.

—Anuya Chauhan



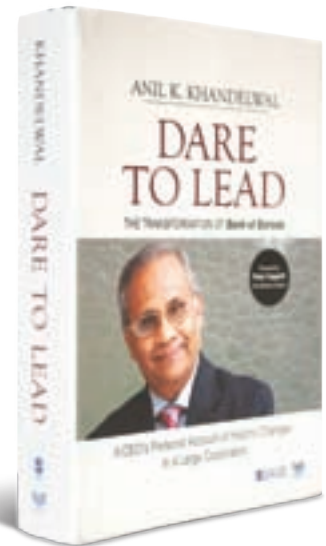
Familial TRUTHS

“...the mystery of what might have been. There is no such thing. Things are the way they must be.” **Prema Raghunath's COUSINS** (Zubaan; 209 pages; ₹ 325) is about the beautiful Goutami (Goutu) whose imaginary life in a red georgette sari changes the course of her life and that of people around her. In her 80s, she hardly regrets her youth—her defence to her resentful upbringing in the absence of a mother and presence of a dispirited father. Desperate to marry her womaniser-cousin Krishnanand, for a long time Goutu didn't understand her understated, disciplined and forgiving husband Seshadri and takes refuge in a flamboyant Subra's arms. And when she finally does, she shares little else with Seshadri but mutual respect and silence of their silver years, the only cheer being her visiting daughters and the laughter of her granddaughters, in whom Goutu sees her own belated liberation. Is it too late—this discovery after a half-century-long search for a clue to a life of falsehoods? Life would have been easier, but there's never a 'what might have been.' Things are the way they must be..

—Meeta Bhatti

A man to bank on

If the struggle to modernise our outdated financial institutions is likened to a medieval joust, **Dr Anil K Khandelwal** would be its fiercest knight, his aim sharp and unerring, his focus firmly on victory. Indeed, what he achieved at the Bank of Baroda—turning a 97 year-old behemoth steeped in old ways, dated mindsets and extreme inertia into a vibrant, responsive, tech-savvy bank—is a textbook lesson in valour. And he tells us just how he won the war in **DARE TO LEAD** (Sage; ₹ 795; 403 pages). Focusing on human resources, customer-centric processes, technology and branding and, most important, leading firmly from the front, he was



able to create a transformation of such magnitude that it won him the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from The Asian Banker, Singapore, making him the first Indian banker to receive the honour. In a systematic way, he takes us through the building blocks of change that he wrought, a well thought and meticulously executed process driven by the courage of conviction. The jargon is minimal and language lucid, making this book accessible to layperson and expert alike. Apart from the insider's view of the banking sector, the most valuable takeaway from this book is an insight into the very nature of leadership—what separates the winners from the also-rans.

—Arati Rajan Menon

YOU
MAY
ALSO
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Better under Pressure: How Great Leaders Bring Out the Best in Themselves and Others by Justin Menkes (Harvard Business Press; 208 pages): Drawing on interviews with 150 CEOs from a spectrum of industries and sector, Menkes shows us how great leaders work to maximise the assets and potential of themselves and their team.



IMMORTAL BEAUTY

THE STORY OF MADHUBALA (HAY HOUSE; RS 399; 233 PAGES) BY KHATIJA AKBAR. FOR MORE THAN FOUR DECADES, WE HAVE OFTEN HEARD THE REFRAIN, 'THEY DON'T MAKE THEM LIKE MADHUBALA ANYMORE'. THE BOOK PUT TOGETHER THROUGH CINE ARCHIVES AND MEMORIES OF HER CO-STARS—INCLUDING THE ONE TRUE LOVE OF HER LIFE, DILIP KUMAR—REVEALS TO US EVERYTHING ABOUT HER THAT WAS FOREVER OVERSHADOWED BY HER BEAUTY.

A rainbow called religion

Let's not rob divinity of its diversity, says Dalai Lama

The possibility of genuine interreligious understanding and harmony should not be, and need not be, contingent upon proving the ultimate oneness of all religions. The problem with such an approach is that it demands a precondition that remains impossible for the majority of adherents of the world's great religions. True understanding of the 'other' must proceed from a genuine recognition of respect for the other's reality. It must proceed from a state of mind where the urge to reduce the other into one's own framework is no longer the dominant mode of thinking....

Even the Buddha failed to turn the entire population of central India into Buddhists, let alone the entire world. Hinduism, too, failed to convince a significant proportion of the population of the Indian subcontinent of the primacy of the Vedic way to *moksha* (salvation). Similarly for Christianity, Jesus did not convert the entire population of the holy land into his followers—nor did he try to. From the point of view of Islam, even after the Prophet's appearance in the world, the presence of Jews and Christians remained an inalienable part of the landscape of the Middle East. It is impossible for all the 6 billion human inhabitants of our planet to follow the same religion. First, the diversity of mental dispositions, spiritual inclinations and different kinds of conditioning has always been a basic feature of human society, and one set of spiritual teachings would simply not serve everyone. Second, given the long history of the religions—in some cases, stretching over thousands of years—they have evolved in a complex human geography adapted to specific cultural



True understanding of the 'other' must proceed from a genuine respect for the other's reality and not from an urge to reduce the other into one's own framework

sensibilities and environments, giving rise to different habits of mind. Such things cannot be changed overnight, nor is it desirable that they be. So creating a single religion for the world, whether a new one or one of the old ones, is simply unfeasible.

Especially in today's globalised world, where not only nation to nation but even continent to continent our fates are deeply intertwined, the acceptance of the reality of other faiths is critical for the sake of peace and human happiness. Furthermore, because of modern communication, tourism and the global economy, the world's religions are in daily contact

with one another. The era when a particular faith could exist in the comfort of isolation is gone forever. Given this new reality of our world, the only alternative left to religious pluralism is an interesting sense of division and conflict. From the point of view of a religious person who seeks to live his or her life according to the dictates of a sound ethical way of life, it becomes especially incumbent upon us to accord deep reverence to all faith traditions. In the past these traditions have provided inspiration, meaning, and ethical guidance to millions of people. Today, too, despite tremendous advances in the field of material development and human knowledge, these faith traditions continue to provide solace to millions of our fellow human beings. And in the foreseeable future, these traditions will continue to be a source of deep spiritual inspiration to millions.

Regardless of how one may feel about the specific doctrines of other faith traditions, this fact alone—their service to millions of fellow human beings—makes them worthy of our deep respect. Their profound benefit to others is really the ultimate reason each of us, believers and non-believers alike, must accord deep respect to the world's great faith traditions. For a believer, a key element here is to be truly sincere about the values of compassion that are at the heart of one's own faith tradition. For the ultimate reason to accord respect to other religions is to see that they, too, engender the beautiful qualities of the human heart and foster compassion and loving kindness—exactly the qualities one is striving to attain through one's own faith.

Excerpt from Toward the True Kingship of Faiths (Abacus; ₹ 395; 183 pages) by His Holiness Dalai Lama, the world's foremost Buddhist guru. Excerpted with permission from Hachette India

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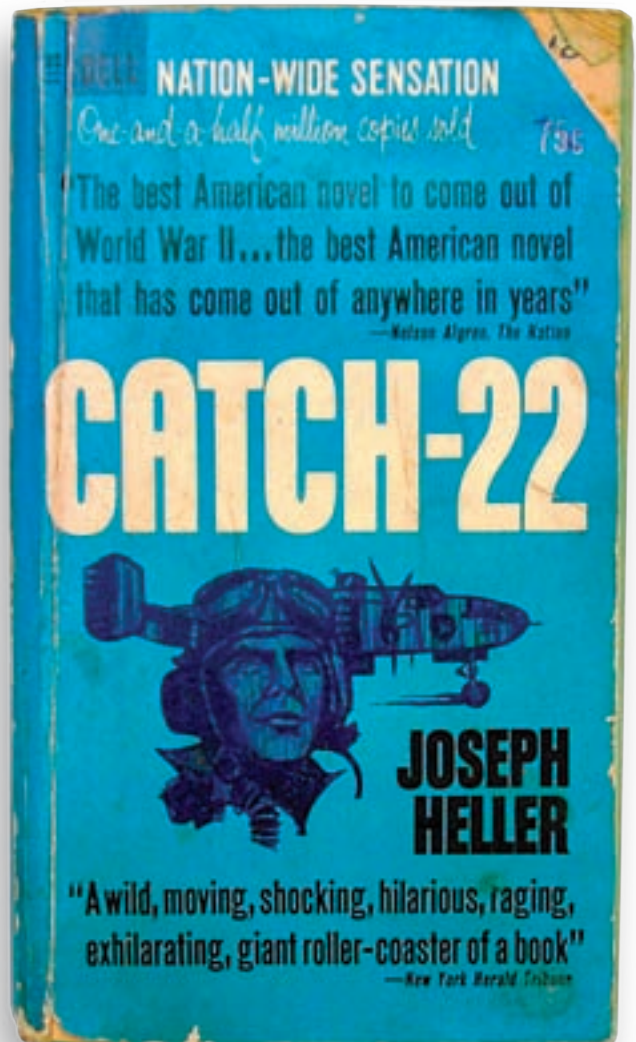
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Gotcha!

Joseph Heller's 1961 novel *Catch 22* is lauded as one of the greatest works of the 20th century. Set during World War II, it's a caustic satire on the US government and its military operations. At the heart of the tale is Captain Joseph Yossarian, a bombardier stationed at the island of Pianosa who wants to escape the blood and gore of the battlefield. Yossarian and his squadron are thrown thoughtlessly into brutal combat situations—they are part of ruthless bombing runs in which they are primarily appointed to capture aerial photographs of explosions than to destroy their targets. The colonels heading the operation continually raise the number of missions that the team is required to fly before being sent home, so that no one is ever sent home. Desperate to find an exit from the relentless chaos, Yossarian learns about the 'Catch 22' military regulation that allows an officer to be discharged from service if proved to be insane. Yossarian claims that he is insane, only to find out that by claiming that he is insane he has proved that he is obviously sane!

Elsewhere, *Catch-22* is defined as a law that is illegal to read. Ironically, the place where it is stated as illegal is in the *Catch-22* regulation itself. It is yet again defined as the law that allows the enemy to do anything that one can't keep him from doing. Simply put, *Catch-22* is any paradoxical, circular reasoning that traps its victim in its illogic and serves those who have scripted it.

Heller wrote the story from his own experiences as a World War II bombardier. Upon its first publication in the US, the novel earned contradictory reviews though many members of the US military rooted in its favour. The book may have elicited mixed opinions, but the term 'Catch 22' has been embraced wholeheartedly in common parlance—often accompanied with the same dismay that stalked Yossarian.



THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: JULY 1961

- On 1 July, the Dowry Prohibition Act came into effect in India, prohibiting the solicitation or payment of money as consideration for marriage.
- On 5 July, the first Israeli rocket Shavit 2 was launched from a secret installation on the Mediterranean.
- On 16 July, 187 Viet Cong and 12 South Vietnamese troops were killed in a clash at the Plain of Reeds in one of the bloodiest battles in Vietnam.
- On 31 July, Ireland submitted its first ever application to join the then European Economic Community.

GAMIFICATION

The use of game-related concepts in non-game websites and applications to encourage users to perform actions desired by the business.

Example: Dubbed **gamification**, the practice involves using game mechanics to get people to spend more time on certain products, be it a website or a piece of software. Driven by the surprise popularity of social games on Facebook and applications such as FourSquare, some businesses are experimenting with gamification to capture the attention of consumers.

—Alex Pham, “Businesses are using game mechanics online to rev up sales”,
Los Angeles Times, 28 February 2011

“You can outdistance that
which is running after
you, but not what is running
inside you.”

—Rwandan proverb

ethnoburb

A suburban area that draws a large number of immigrants from the same ethnic group.

Example: Wong knew the Somerville neighbourhood was made up of what researchers called **ethno-burbs**—areas with clusters of Chinese-born residents.

—Andrew Stone, “Where there’s a will, there’s a shopping centre”,
New Zealand Herald, 13 April 2011

Earth twin

A planet outside our solar system that is approximately the same size as the Earth and roughly the same distance from its star.

Example: Slightly smaller than Earth, KOI 326.01 lies in the habitable zone of its star, a red dwarf star dimmer than our sun. At around 100 light years away, it’s “fairly close” to us, said William Borucki, of NASA’s Ames Research Centre, “but they’re not places you can walk to on a Sunday”. Currently just a promising data point, KOI 326.01 (which stands for Kepler Object of Interest) might end up getting a better name if it does turn out to be a real **Earth twin**.

—Rowan Hooper, “Exoplanet findings spark philosophical debate”,
New Scientist, 21 February 2011

promzilla

A high school girl who, while planning for her prom, becomes exceptionally selfish, difficult, and obnoxious.

Example: Such is the phenomenon’s iron grip on the British teen’s imagination that a new word has entered the lexicon: the **Promzilla**, a particular kind of prom-obsessed adolescent.

—Kathryn Knight, “Stretch limos, spray tans and the £ 500 dresses: The unstoppable (and ludicrously expensive) rise of the high school prom”, Daily Mail, 1 April 2011

WI-FI SQUATTER

A person who lingers in a public location to use its Wi-Fi internet connection, or who uses such a connection without authorisation.

Example: Cafe owners have tried a variety of tactics to foil **Wi-Fi squatters**. They put out signs that ask laptop users to share tables or point them to nearby Wi-Fi hot spots such as public libraries.

—Jessica Guynn, “Coffee shops are taking Wi-Fi off the menu”,
Los Angeles Times, 8 August 2010

PANCAKE PEOPLE

Internet users who read widely, but without depth.

Example: A University Of California (San Diego) study found that the amount of information the average American processed in 2008 was triple what it was in 1960. This has turned many into **pancake people**—spread wide and thin.

—Dr Marc Dussault, “Floatation tank helps improve grades”,
FLOAT Press Blog, 5 April 2011

hot-tubbing

At a trial, convening a panel of expert witnesses who can discuss issues together as well as be questioned by defence and prosecution lawyers.

Example: As the commission was turned over to a panel of planning experts to discuss key issues—a process known as **hot tubbing**—security specialist Athol Yates said that after disaster there was invariably a knee-jerk response of ‘we will rebuild’ when it might be better to retreat from previous inappropriate development.

—Stuart Rintoul, “Ban development in fire-prone areas, experts tell royal commission”, *The Australian*, 15 February 2010

“Don't spend time beating on a wall, hoping to transform it into a door.

—French designer
Coco Chanel

MICROWORK

A short, simple task that a company out-sources for a small fee, particularly to workers in the third world.

Example: **Microwork** gives marginalised people a chance to earn a living by playing a vital role in the business processes of big companies. In parallel, the organisation assists local entrepreneurs in running micro-work centres, helping to grow a new pool of business talent across the developing world.

—Leila Janah Charyath, quoted in Jason-Louise Graham, “Human intelligence is a green export: an interview with Samasource's Leila Janah”, *Examiner.com*, 10 April 2011

information triage

The process of gathering, sorting, and prioritising information to identify what is relevant or important and to discard everything else.

Example: The relative stability of iPad 2 over, or next to, iPad 1, suggests the new computing platform is close to lift off. The signature of laptop-based **information triage** is multiple open windows or tabs, email and social alerts, and digest hints of the value of serial video streams. It's an effective interface, one that we can't yet replace with the tablet/notification paradigm.

—Steve Gillmor, “Hey kids, what time is it?”, *TechCrunch*, 17 April 2011

WHEEL POWER

In March 2011, the Railways introduced luggage trolleys at Howrah station in Kolkata to make travel hassle-free for senior citizens and women.

Now the Ministry of Railways will extend the service—operated

by Rail Yatri Sevaks—to six more stations: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, New Delhi and Thiruvananthapuram. The trolleys come with brakes, and are similar to the ones available at airports. They can be booked in advance by calling a number (that will be shortly advertised by the railways) or approaching the nominated counters at the above stations. Rail Yatri Sevaks will hold a placard with a specified customer number to help passengers identify their trolley.



CIVIONICS

The use of embedded electronic sensors to monitor the health of civil structures such as bridges and buildings. [Civil + electronics.]

Example: Structural Health Monitoring (SHM) is the integration of a system of sensors, model validation, system identification, monitoring strategies, data mining, data management and interpretation of the data for decision-making purposes. The term **civionics** has been coined to denote the integration of civil structures with electrophotonic sensors for the purpose of determining the health of the structures.

—“Research and markets: monitoring technologies for bridge management”, *BusinessWire*, 24 March 2011

“Education, especially among rural women, is the best form of contraception”

Dr Ilias Ali, 55, for spreading the message of population control among rural Muslims



Mohammed Sabir Nishat

He travels on foot and in bullock carts and country boats to motivate Assam's Muslim community to adopt family planning through male sterilisation. But it's his unusual methods that are probably responsible for this Guwahati-based doctor's success. "I have found people more willing to accept what the Holy Quran says than what modern education teaches us about the need for a small family," reveals **Dr Ilias Ali**. "I therefore use the scriptures to tell people that sterilisation is not antithetical to the Quran." An advocate of no scalpel vasectomy (NSV)—or 'keyhole vasectomy', a minimally invasive method of birth control—Dr Ali is an associate professor of surgery at Gauhati Medical College and state nodal officer of the NSV

programme in Assam. He conducted his first NSV camp in April 2008, where 16 NSV surgeries were performed, followed by nine more that year. "Male sterilisation is a very sensitive issue in India. The Department of Health & Family Welfare was quite reluctant to spread awareness on such methods. It was especially difficult to popularise the programme among poorer Muslims mired in endless superstition," reveals Dr Ali, who has since organised hundreds of NSV camps across Assam. Today, more than 40 per cent of men who participate in his camps are Muslims and the number is beginning to swell, adds Dr Ali, who has been invited to Rwanda, Ethiopia and the Philippines to promote NSV there.

—Mohammed Sabir Nishat

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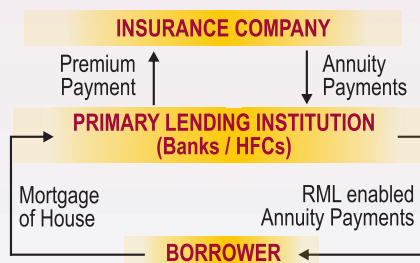
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70	1000000	60%	Rs. 2419 to Rs. 4816
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