

harmony celebration

DECEMBER 2013 ₹ 30

The magazine for silver citizens

DIARY 100

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LEXICOGRAPHY
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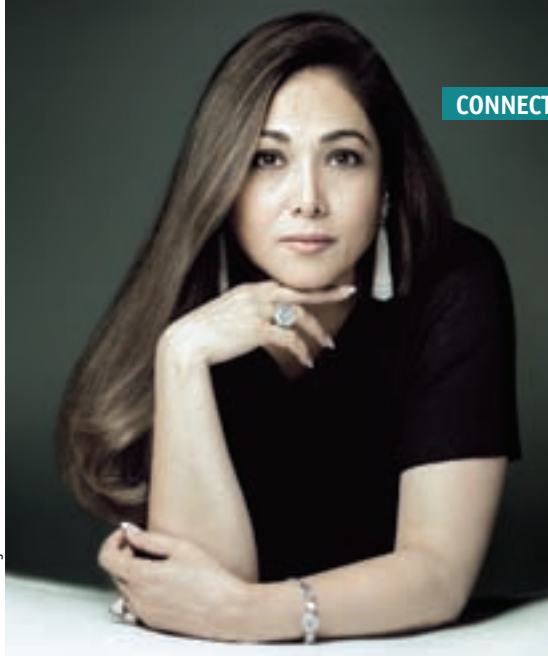
For research to show results, it must move from the science lab to real life.

Billions are spent each year on public health research. But does it yield commensurate dividends? If not, where should we focus our research outlay? Take the case of the US. Thus far, the country's funding budget has been preoccupied with killer diseases like heart disease and cancer. But now, a recent study by the University of South Carolina's Schaeffer Centre for Health Policy and Economics insists that the money would yield greater returns—health and economic—if it were allocated to understanding the ageing process.

This is a landmark approach to public health because of its sheer universalism—everyone, everywhere around the world eventually ages. Consider the calculation of the study team. The number of adults over 65 in the US is expected to double over the next 50 years, going up from 43 million in 2010 to 106 million in 2060. At present, about 28 per cent of adults over 65 in the country are disabled. Even a marginal 1.25 per cent reduction in age-related diseases would cut down on the number of disabled adults, resulting in a 5 per cent increase in healthy adults over 65 each year from 2030 to 2060. The result: 11.7 million more adults would remain healthy over the age of 65 by 2060.

It's a huge snowball effect for the US alone. And if the rest of the world can replicate this, just imagine the pay-back! In comparison, the researchers estimate that even

Suresh Natarajan



if heart disease or cancer rates were reduced by as much as 25 per cent, little improvement on overall population health would be observed. In 2060, about the same number of adults would be alive but disabled regardless of whether they suffer from chronic disease. Thus, while affirming that research to target individual diseases should continue, the team makes a compelling case for a bigger-picture shift in focus.

In India, any talk of serious research into ageing and gerontology still remains a pipe dream. But we too ought to recognise the tremendous quantitative and qualitative implications of such an approach. It goes to the very heart of active ageing—silvers living not just longer but healthier, free of not just disease but disability, more independent, enabled and empowered. In essence, the study is a clarion call for a profound shift in public health strategy and a more inclusive way ahead that will affect every generation to come, in every country. We second that call.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

Harmony Celebrate Age—December 2013 Volume 10 Issue 7

Publisher **Dharmendra Bhandari** Editor **Tina Ambani** Deputy Editor **Arati Rajan Menon** Assistant Editor **Srirekha Pillai**

Copy Editor **Sai Prabha Kamath** Trainee Reporter (Mumbai) **Neeti Vijaykumar** Consultant Editors **Malvika Singh, Meeta Bhatti** Design Consultant **Jit Ray**

Head - Imaging **Anuradha Joshi** Studio Manager **Hareesh Patel** Graphic Designer **Dattaguru Redekar**

Production Manager **Rohidas Adavkar** Website Coordinator **Ajit Nair**

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Editorial & Marketing Offices: Reliance Centre, 1st floor, 19, Walchand Hirachand Marg, Ballard Estate, Mumbai-400001. Tel: 91-22-30327115 (Editorial), 30327102 (Marketing). Email: contact.mag@harmonyindia.org **Printed and published** by Dharmendra Bhandari on behalf of the owners, Harmony for Silvers Foundation **Printed** at Thomson Press India Ltd, 18-35, Milestone, Delhi-Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007 (Haryana). **Published** at Reliance Energy Centre, Santacruz (East), Mumbai 400055. **Disclaimer:** The material provided by *Harmony* is not a substitute for professional opinions. Readers are advised to seek appropriate advice from qualified and licensed professionals in the concerned field. © Harmony for Silvers Foundation. All rights reserved worldwide. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited. *Harmony* does not take responsibility for returning unsolicited publication material. www.harmonyindia.org

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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: (0120) 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;

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column one

When I first saw Birju Maharaj, it was as a father, not dancer. His daughter Mamata went to the same school and he was a common sight at PTA meetings and school functions, simple and unaffected, happy to lose himself in the nondescript garb of parenthood. And then, a few years on, I saw him dance—claiming the stage in a riot of movement and music, profoundly gentle one second, fiery the next. Incredibly, while the years have flown by for us all, Birju Maharaj continues to command the spotlight, his allure undiminished. “Dance is my therapy,” he asserts in “Dance of Devotion,” our cover feature. “It keeps my energy levels up and my mind active.”

Prof G Venkatasubbiah would wholeheartedly endorse this—except the rhythm that defines his life is the cadence of the word. The centenarian, hailed as the Father of Modern Kannada Lexicography, still remains caught in a web of words that keeps him enthralled. Equally engaged with the written word is Raj Kanwar, who is now enjoying his third innings in journalism—in his first, he used the telegram to report the news! Wonderfully enough, some passions can be shared, while others are passed on in a legacy of love. Drummer Gino Banks reflects on his father jazz maestro Louiz Banks, and how he has evolved as a musician—and person—from their shared bond.

While these stories will touch the soul, *Harmony-Celebrate Age* aims to offer you a complete sensory experience. So travel with us to Sri Lanka and feast on the island's delights. And closer home, breathe in the air—and unique culture—of Arunachal Pradesh through author-photographer Peter van Ham's lens. Enjoy.

—Arati Rajan Menon

Clean, Green, Serene” (‘Destination’) in the November 2013 issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age* was a fascinating read. Being an Indian, it was an eye-opener to know about Mawlynnong in Meghalaya, the cleanest village in Asia with 100 per cent literacy! Keep informing and enlightening us about such little-known places.

Paul Sebastian
Kozhikode

Waste Not” (‘Proactive,’ November 2013) was an inspiring piece. Almitra Patel is doing a commendable job in providing innovative and practical waste management solutions to cities and towns. It is the duty of every urban household and every municipal corporation to segregate waste. I wish there were stricter policies in the country to practise segregation of dry and wet waste.

Anupama Verma
Belgaum

Newspapers and magazines are doing an excellent job by print-



ing letters of the unheard voices of their readers. The changes in society norms, law and national policies are, in many ways, the result of the letters of the common man published by the press. It shows how the print media is working as a change agent in a limited space. In that sense, the space constraint faced by magazines and newspapers in not being able to publish all the letters they receive is also understandable.

Mahesh Kapasi
New Delhi

CONTRIBUTOR



Raj Kanwar, who tells us about his multiple innings as a journalist through changing times in ‘At Large’, has also worn the hats of public relations/advertising professional and businessman at different stages in his eventful career span of 60 years. He voluntarily retired in 2000 as chairman of SK Oilfield Equipment Co Pvt Ltd. Since then, he has contributed columns and articles to several daily newspapers including *Hindustan Times*,

The Hindu, *The Times of India*, *Sunday Mid-Day* and *The Tribune*. He is contributing editor, South Asia, for *World Oil*, the largest selling oil journal in the world; he is also India correspondent of *Indo American News* published from Houston, Texas. Kanwar is the author of the official history of the ONGC, *Upstream India*, and co-contributor to an anthology on Dehradun titled *Once Upon a Time in Doon* edited by Ruskin Bond and published by Rupa & Co. A president of Doon Citizens Council and former president of Dehradun Club Ltd, Kanwar is also founder president of DAV (PG) College Alumni Association, Dehradun.

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The first drama you got a part in

The first day at college

The first date you went on

The first kiss

The first time you proposed

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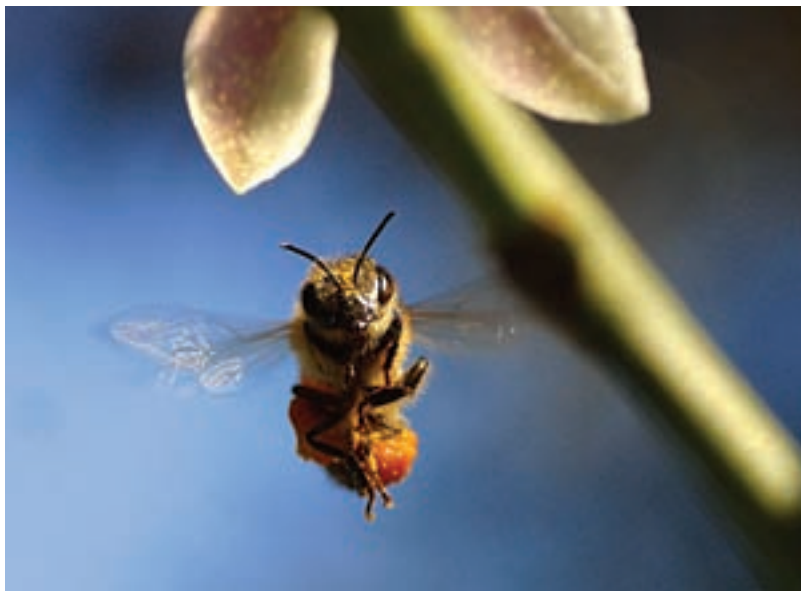
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► FACE OFF

Blame the sun

A background image of a beach scene with a large, colorful striped beach umbrella (yellow, green, blue, and red) and two wooden deck chairs with striped cushions on the sand. The ocean and a clear blue sky are visible in the background.

No matter what you do or where you go, don't forget the sunscreen. That's the message emerging from a new study conducted by researchers from the L'Oreal Research and Innovation Centre in Paris. Genetic predisposition aside, they contend that **UV rays are responsible for around 80 per cent of skin ageing**. As London newspaper *Daily Mail* reports, their study of around 300 women, 50 per cent of whom called themselves 'sun-worshippers', revealed that long-term UV exposure resulted in reduction in elasticity, pigmentation and degradation of skin texture. Further, the effect of exposure increased with age. "Our study confirms the accountability of sun exposure in premature ageing of the face," says a spokesperson for the centre. "Our comparison between two groups of women, whose sun behaviour was different, has allowed us to clearly demonstrate the effect of UV exposure. Thus, shielding your skin from the sun should be your first line of skin defence."



THE BUZZ: BEE VENOM IS THE LATEST MIRACLE INGREDIENT TO CLIMB ON THE ANTI-AGEING BANDWAGON—IT IS BELIEVED TO INCREASE BLOOD CIRCULATION; PLUMP AND FIRM THE SKIN; REDUCE FINE LINES AND WRINKLES; AND STIMULATE THE PRODUCTION OF NATURAL COLLAGEN AND ELASTIN. AMERICAN ELLIE LOBEL HARNESSSES ITS BENEFITS IN HER 'BEEVINY' LINE OF PRODUCTS. CHECK THEM OUT AT SHOP.BEEVINY.COM

No, no, no

WE LIKE NEWS, views and variety website *The Huffington Post*. With an unabashedly editorial view on most issues and everyday concerns, it can never be accused of sitting on the fence on anything. We especially liked the site's list of **six common mistakes elder women make that prevent them from ageing gracefully**. Here they are:

1. Elastic waistbands: Don't wear baggy pants with an elastic waistband; they would make even a supermodel look frumpy. Instead, invest in well-tailored clothes that skim your body.

2. Last decade's makeup: Don't wear the same makeup you used 15 years ago; it can date or age you. Dark eyeliner and lipstick can draw attention to wrinkles and frown lines. Go fresh, light, easy.

3. 'Trendy' clothes: Don't blindly buy the in-season clothes you see in fashion magazines; they work for very few people. Understand your body type, work with it, invest in classic pieces that will never go out of style—and nor will you.

4. Giving up on your weight: Getting older is not an excuse to ditch your exercise regimen or throw away that weighing scale. In fact, keeping your weight in check could be the best thing you do, for your ego and your health.

5. The anti-ageing bazaar: No, you cannot try (or even afford) every anti-ageing fad, product or procedure that pops into the market. Keep it simple. If a skincare or beauty regimen has worked for you all these years, stay with it.

6. Thinking you're old: You can never be 20, 30 or even 40 again. Accept it. But never accept that you come with an expiry date. Stay active, savour each day, celebrate your individual self—there's only one of you.



Secretly supple



Now, there really is no part of your body you can't 'fix.' **DesirialR is a cosmetic treatment that promises to give elder women a designer vagina.** Still reading? Well, as London newspaper *The Telegraph* tells us rather cheerfully, this is a non-surgical filler injection (much like its facial kin) to rehydrate, plump and puff up the intimate areas that suffer loss of tone and elasticity over time owing to de-

creased levels of oestrogen. Produced by French company Vivacy, DesirialR combines hyaluronic acid (a common ingredient in facial fillers) with manitol, a natural antioxidant found in fruits and vegetables. The process of injection takes around 20 minutes and the effects are expected to last up to 15 months. At present, the product is undergoing the final stage of clinical trials in France and is expected to be ready for use by January 2014.

HAND JOB

FORGET THE FACE—when it comes to the age guessing game, the hands are a dead giveaway. In the September 2013 issue, we gave you a rundown of the gamut of anti-ageing products available to spiff up your hands, but we didn't mention going under the knife. Yup, women in the UK are turning to **cosmetic surgery to banish signs of ageing on their hands** with clinics reporting an 18 per cent increase in enquiries for 'hand rejuvenation'. As the British edition of *Marie Claire* reports, the minimally invasive procedure, performed under local anaesthesia, involves the use of dermal fillers, where fat is transferred from other parts of the patient's body, and laser resurfacing to smooth skin across the veins and remove liver spots. So how long will it last? At least five to seven years, says the magazine.



Breakthrough



SINGAPORE SLING:

The Singapore Centre for Nutritional Sciences, Metabolic Diseases and Human Development—a collaboration between the National University of Singapore and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research—will invest \$ 118.4 million to fund a research centre to investigate the connections between nutrition, human development and metabolic diseases in a bid to promote healthy ageing.



ACT OF COMMISSION:

A HOST OF COUNTRIES INCLUDING INDIA ARE WORKING TOWARDS ESTABLISHING A GLOBAL COMMISSION ON AGEING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THIS WERE HELD AT A RECENT CONFERENCE IN CHINA ATTENDED BY UNION HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE MINISTER GHULAM NABI AZAD.

The biological clock is real, and ticking. In what is being hailed as a breakthrough in understanding—and stemming—the ageing process, Steve Horvath, professor of genetics and biostatistics at the University of California-Los Angeles, has identified a **DNA-based internal body clock that measures the age of our tissue.** As news agency Reuters reports, this clock appears to regulate different types of tissue at different rates; thus, some parts of the body age faster or slower than the rest of the body. When Horvath's team examined 8,000 samples of 51 healthy and cancerous cells

to see how methylation (a process that modifies DNA) changes over time, they discovered that methylation of 353 DNA 'markers' varied in a predictable way, suggesting that they could be used as an objective 'clock'. "We found a pattern that we will be able to transcribe into the first-ever accurate age predictor that works across most tissues and cell types," says Horvath. "In the same way our circadian clocks keep track of hours, this new epigenetic clock keeps track of years. And it provides a proof of concept that one can reset the clock." The study appears in the November issue of journal *Genome Biology*.

Syndrome X

For much of her life, American Brooke Greenberg was considered a biological anomaly—she stopped growing by the age of four, physically and mentally, and scientists were left befuddled as to the cause of her condition, which they dubbed ‘Syndrome X’. Now, upon her death at the age of 20, they are free to study her DNA in a bid to isolate the genetic cause of her agelessness and perhaps find a key to stop the ageing process. “Understanding the causes of Brooke’s condition could provide insights into key development and ageing processes, which could lead to novel ways to increase longevity, and reduce age-related disorders,” Dr Eric Schadt, director of the Institute for Genomics and Multiscale Biology at Mount Sinai Hos-



pital in New York, tells *The New York Times*. He has been entrusted with Greenberg’s DNA and blood samples by her family to create stem cells to investigate her condition. “Although the factors that caused Brooke’s agelessness also probably caused her chronic ill health, it might be possible to encourage a less extreme version of Brooke’s condition that slows ageing without any of the associated problems.



HIP-HIP-HARYANA: THE STATE’S CHIEF MINISTER BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA HAS ANNOUNCED A 50 PER CENT CONCESSION ON FARE OF ROADWAYS BUSES FOR PEOPLE OVER THE AGE OF 65. THE SCHEME WILL BE IMPLEMENTED FROM 1 JANUARY 2014. HE ALSO PROMISED FREE CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTS TO WOMEN OVER THE AGE OF 55.

Madurai MOVES

This city in Tamil Nadu appears to be seeing silver of late. In Madurai, a memory clinic was recently inaugurated by the city-based M S Chellamuthu Trust and Research Foundation in collaboration with the Eisai Pharmaceutical Company. “While all elderly people face problems, those suffering from dementia suffer the worst hardship,” C Ramasubramanian, founder of the trust, tells media. “The clinic has been established to mitigate their sufferings. Psychological, neurological, medical and rehabilitation, if necessary, will be provided to those found with dementia.” On the heels of the launch, the **Department of Social**



Work at American College in Madurai announced that it would conduct a study on problems faced by silvers with the support of the trust. “The study will also focus on methods to

tap the skill, knowledge and experience of elderly people,” affirms J Raja Meenakshi, head of the department. “After all, they are a valuable potential human resource.”

Superstars

When American director Hunter Weeks read about Montana native Walter Breuning, 113, a couple of years ago, he knew that he had found the subject for his latest documentary: supercentenarians. The result: **WALTER: Lessons from the World's Oldest People**, which sees Weeks along with his creative (and romantic) partner Sarah Hall speaking to silvers born in the 19th and early 20th century and their extended families while gathering tidbits of wisdom and a collection of reminiscences. "They were always finding the positive things about life," he tells website www.fastcompany.com, which calls the film part documentary, part time machine, and part travelogue. "They were curious and still interested in learning. They continued to work and give back to their community; that was very important to each of them." Breuning didn't live long enough to see the film—but thanks to Weeks, he will remain immortal. To see his story, and those of other remarkable silvers like him, go to www.hunterweeks.com



Superlike!

You could call her the *grande dame* of social networking. **At the age of 105, Edythe Kirchmaier is Facebook's oldest registered user.** She signed up 10 years ago after her family gave her a computer, printer and digital camera on her 95th birthday. At first, she was unable to enter her birth year—the tab didn't go as far back as 1908—and she had to write to the site's engineers to fix the problem, allowing her to register. There's been no stopping her since. Other than sharing photographs and keeping in touch with friends and family from across the US, she uses her account to spread the word about Direct Relief, a humanitarian organisation that sends medical aid around the world; she's been volunteering there for the past 40 years. "Even though it's just addressing envelopes or writing thank you notes, it's very meaningful to those who do it," she tells news agency AFP. And if you're wondering exactly how many friends she has on Facebook, you may be surprised: 41,000, and counting.

Who's back!

For devotees of rock, these men are gods. Part of the trinity of the British music pantheon of the 1960s along with The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, The Who epitomised the zeitgeist: rock, rebellion and rambunctious music. Happily for their fans, the band, who received both commercial and critical acclaim for their music, including classic albums like *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia*, still hasn't hung up its guitars—**The Who will perform across the world in 2015.** “We will continue to make music until we drop,” front man Roger Daltrey, 69, tells *Rolling Stone* magazine. “But we have to draw a line in the sand somewhere. This will be the last old-fashioned, big tour.” Led by Daltrey and 68 year-old guitarist Pete Townshend, the band last performed at the closing ceremony of the



2012 London Olympics, bringing down the house with their biggest hit, *My generation*. The dates for the world tour will be out in the spring of 2014.



SKIN SENSE:
Ultimate Skin Care for Men is a new book by natural health and anti-ageing expert Troy Pratt that features the best anti-ageing strategies for attaining and maintaining great skin. It is available for sale worldwide on Amazon.com.

Style FILE

It can only be a good thing if silver fashion is becoming a topic for study—and debate—in the ivory towers of academe. *Fashion and Age: Dress, the Body and Later Life* (Bloomsbury Academic; 184 pages) by Julia Twigg, professor of sociology at the University of Kent, is a reflective study of dress and later life drawn from her interviews with 20 silver women. As London newspaper *The Guardian* tells us, these women include the design directors of retail giants Marks & Spencer, Asda and Jaeger, and four fashion editors, including Alexandra Shulman, editor of British *Vogue*. While acknowledging that silvers are dressing better, bolder and brighter, Twigg contends that for a majority of older women, especially for those in their 70s and 80s, it's still extremely hard to find affordable and fashionable clothes that make them feel better about themselves. “Many older women,” she writes, “must still



avoid the twin crimes of trying to look too young or dressing too old. Fashion offers us an idealised version of the self—richer, slimmer and invariably younger. At the same time, there are moral rules governing the clothes we wear, especially as we age. Short skirts, low necks and even sleeveless dresses are taboo, presumably on the grounds that the older female body is so repellent that it should be kept under wraps. Clothes have become part of the wider culture of anti-ageing.”

Trackers

It's a no brainer that pets keep you happy. Now, researchers at the Culture Lab at Newcastle University in Britain believe that **pets kitted out with hi-tech collars can also keep silvers safe.** For their study, which is reported on their website (di.ncl.ac.uk), they equipped a group of 18 dogs—across 13 species, varying in age, size and sex—with a specially fabricated collar that contains an accelerometer, which determines movement and acceleration, and a tracking device. Then, they monitored the activity of the dogs through remote video systems. While their original intention was to find a way to care better for the dogs, they soon realised that the device could be used as an early warning sign for silver pet owners if monitored by caregivers. “A dog’s physical and emotional dependence on its owner means that its wellbeing is likely to reflect that of its owner and any changes such as the dog being walked less often, perhaps not being fed regularly, or simply demonstrating ‘unhappy’ behaviour could be an early indicator for families



that an older relative needs help,” writes study author and behaviour imaging expert Nils Hammerla. “Going forward, the system will be developed to incorporate distress signals for emergencies.”

A grand idea

Another product launch for Generation A, another sign that the tech world is waking up to the potential of the silver consumer: US-based Grand Tablet, Inc announced the release of the **Grand, a new tablet with a host of unique software features for**

elders. According to a media release, the device includes an extra-large launcher that creates a home screen with an extra-large font and icons. This easy-to-use application (app) allows the user to install any of the apps developed for the Android operating

system. Another noteworthy feature is TechPal, an app developed by the Grand Tablet team that enables family and caregivers to log into the tablet remotely and offer help and guidance. Also, the tablet has a host of pre-loaded apps selected based on extensive market research. So while users can enjoy apps like Skype (video chatting), Facebook (social networking) and Netflix (TV show and movie viewing) that are popular across the board, they also have apps targeted specifically for silvers, such as the self-explanatory Pill Reminder and AARP (silver news and advocacy). What’s most innovative about the Grand, though, is the pricing: it’s being sold through a pledge system. Silvers (or their families) just need to pledge \$ 250 (about ₹ 15,700) to Indiegogo, an international, online ‘crowdfunding’ platform and they get their hands on a tablet—a truly grand idea. Check it out on www.grandtablet.com/



Lessons to remember

In an interactive session on developing memory skills, memory champion Prakash Joshi and memory trainer Sushant Mysorekar gave an impressive talk that thrilled listeners at the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum, Mumbai, on 8 November. The illustrious 68 year-old Joshi, who has broken records five times at the World Memory Championship in the senior citizens' category for memorising up to 62 digits, first took the stage to introduce his memory trainer Vikrant Chaphekar, along with an account of how he met him and eventually got through to the Memory Olympiads. Speaking from experience, he talked about simple techniques to remember small things.

Soon after Joshi finished, there were lots of questions from the audience, which he patiently answered. Then Mysorekar took the stage and started off saying that we've stopped using our brains to remember things as simple as phone numbers because we have technology that remembers it for us. He then talked about associating the known with the unknown, and asked the audience to attach an image to each digit—such as ball for 0, stick for 1, hanger for 2—so as to remember phone numbers. "The science behind improving memory is to use logical thinking or left brain and creative thinking or right brain often and together," he explained, and ended the session saying, "And of course, if you think in a positive sense that you will not forget, you really won't!"

Two days later, the silver community gathered again for another informative session, this time on dealing with chronic diseases by changing diet and lifestyle. This talk was given by IT entrepreneur Harshad Kamdar, a silver himself. Keeping in mind that at least 77 per cent of silvers had one or more chronic diseases, he talked about the four most common diseases: Parkinson's, diabetes, arthritis and cardiovascular heart disease. He spoke about the most important kinds of food to tackle each disease, and then elaborated upon the benefits of exercise. He got a lot of nods of approval from the audience when he



Haresh Patel

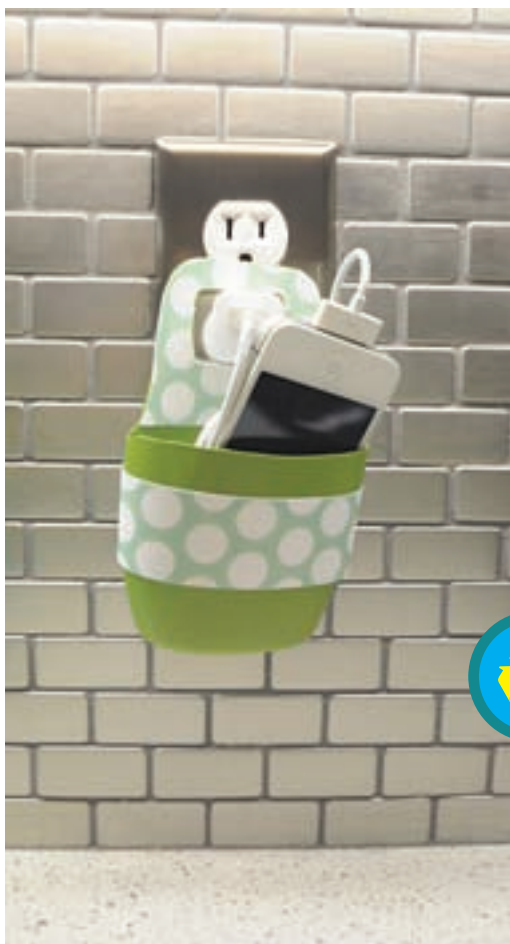
(Clockwise from top) Harshad Kamdar tells how to tackle chronic diseases; Sushant Mysorekar shares tips on improving memory; Prakash Joshi shares his experiences

said, "Exercise should not be drudgery—as if it is something you do for the sake of it. It has to be fun, and should include socialising, building endurance and improving strength."

—Neeti Vijaykumar



Tend your garden. We already know that gardening is a great hobby that keeps you agile and supple as well as creatively engaged. Now, a new study by researchers at Karolinska University Hospital in Stockholm suggests that regular, low-impact activities like pottering in your garden can actually contribute to longevity, cutting the risk of death by up to 30 per cent. And for help in getting your garden started, check out 'How Does Your Garden Grow?' on page 81!



Then: Plastic lotion bottle Now: Phone holder

No more long, dangling wires and phones hanging from socket to floor. Turn a used plastic lotion or shampoo bottle into a holder to charge your phone. All you need besides a washed and air-dried bottle are a pair of sturdy scissors, a blade and sandpaper to smooth out edges. First, place your phone vertically against the bottle to figure out how long you want the front and back sides of the holder to be. Ideally, the front should cover at least three-fourth the length of your phone, and the back should be an inch longer than the phone. Mark and cut cautiously along the outline. Next, use the blade to make a hole to connect the charger to the plug. Make sure the opening is exactly the required size—not too big or small. After that, use sandpaper to smoothen out edges to get rid of shards of plastic. Finally, if you wish, stick paper or a painted fabric on the body of the holder to give it a fancy look. For safety concerns, you can hang the holder on a hook fixed above the plug point while charging the phone.



FACTS

- Not all plastic bottles can be recycled, lotion bottles especially, because the rigid plastic cannot be crushed easily, unlike drinking water bottles.
- One recycled plastic bottle can save energy that can power a 60-watt bulb for up to three hours.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. LOTION BOTTLES CAN BE CONVERTED INTO HOLDERS FOR ANYTHING AT ALL, FROM JEWELLERY AND PLANTS TO SOAPS AND SPONGES, BY JUST CUTTING OUT THE NECK OR THE TOP HALF OF THE BOTTLE.
2. YOU CAN ALSO REUSE LOTION BOTTLES AS SOAP DISPENSERS BY ATTACHING A DISPENSING TUBE.



BIRTHDAYS

- American actor, director and comedian **Woody Allen** turned 78 on 1 December.
- Former Indian film diva **Sharmila Tagore** (left) turns 69 on 8 December.

Shivaji Rao Gaikwad, better known as **Rajinikanth** (right), turns 63 on 12 December.

Indian film director and screenwriter **Shyam Benegal** turns 79 on 14 December.

Indian industrialist **Vijay Mallya** turns 58 on 18 December.



Hollywood director and producer **Steven Spielberg** (left) turns 67 on 18 December.

Bollywood actor and producer **Anil Kapoor**, who has turned to television after foraying into Hollywood, turns 57 on 24 December.

Hollywood actor and theatre veteran **Sir Philip Anthony Hopkins** turns 76 on 31 December.



IN PASSING

Celebrated Indian playback singer **Manna Dey** (left) passed away on 24 October after suffering from a lung infection. He was 94.

American singer-songwriter **Lou Reed**, dubbed a punk-poet, succumbed to liver disease on 27 October. He was 71.

Pakistani folk singer **Reshma** (right), who gave us soulful renditions of *Lambi judai* and *Mast kalandar*, passed away of throat cancer on 3 November. She was 66.



Sher Choudhary, National Award-winning Assamese music director, died on 6 November at the age of 69.



India's favourite celebrity chef and cookbook writer **Tarla Dalal** (left), on the cover of *Harmony-Celebrate Age* in December 2005, died of cardiac arrest on 6 November. She was 77.

Veteran journalist **R K Mukker** died of prolonged illness on 13 November. He was 88.

British author and the oldest winner of the Nobel Prize, **Doris Lessing** passed away on 17 November. She was 94.

MILESTONES



57 year-old **Ashok Amritraj**, former tennis player and currently a film producer, was awarded the Soul of India award on 29 October for his contribution to the film industry.

Along with Sachin Tendulkar, esteemed scientist Professor **C N R Rao**, 79, received the Bharat Ratna from the Government of India on 16 November.



On 20 November, veteran Indian actor **Waheeda Rahman**, 77, was conferred the Centenary Award for the Indian Film Personality of the Year 2013 at the 44th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa. The award is in recognition of her long-time contribution to the Indian film industry.

The happiness principle

It's now scientifically proven that happier people live longer: a study shows that **people who have suffered from depression age quicker than those who haven't.** Depression is the most common geriatric problem that is under-diagnosed or neglected world over (see 'Silver Lining' on Page 28). While it is well known that depression affects most of our biological systems, such as hormones, immunity and nervous response, this new study actually compares cell structures of depressed and non-depressed people to determine a connection with actual ageing. Researchers at the VU University Medical Centre, Amsterdam, studied cell structures in 2,400 people diagnosed with depression, and the same number without. They examined telomeres, which are like plastic tips at the ends of shoelaces, capping the ends of chromosomes to protect the cell's DNA. These telomeres get shorter every time a cell divides, making them ideal markers for determining ageing. The study reveals that those who suffered from depression at any point in their life had significantly shorter telomeres than those who hadn't. Even after adjusting for lifestyle factors such as diet and smoking, the results remained unchanged. The loss was of 83 to 84 base pairs of DNA that got shorter, which is much higher than the natural number—about 14 to 20 DNA base pairs each year. This accounts for about four to six years of accelerated biological ageing owing to depression.



TAI-CHI AND YOGA COULD REDUCE FALL-RELATED INJURIES IN SILVERS BY ALMOST 37 PER CENT. FRENCH RESEARCHERS AT HÔPITAL PAUL BROUSSE IN VILLEJUIF, SOUTH PARIS, LOOKED INTO 17 STUDIES INVOLVING OVER 4,000 PARTICIPANTS AGED ABOUT 75. THESE STUDIES FOLLOWED THE PARTICIPANTS WHO TOOK PART IN BALANCE AND GAIT EXERCISES AND FOUND THAT 37 PER CENT OF THEM WERE LESS LIKELY TO BE INJURED IN A FALL, 43 PER CENT LESS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SEVERE HARM AND 65 PER CENT WERE ABLE TO AVOID FRACTURES. THIS IS ATTRIBUTED TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SIMPLE EXERCISES THAT HELP IN FIRING MUSCLES, STRENGTHENING BONES, AND IMPROVING BALANCE.

Heavyweight

Two new studies confirm that **the mortality rate is high among elderly women who are obese**, as most might not live till the age of 85 without developing a major disease or disability. A study by Seattle-based Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre examined 36,000 women with a mean age of 72. Of these, 19 per cent were healthy, 14 per cent already had some disease, 23 per cent developed a disease during the study, and 24 per cent died. The results showed that obese women were three to six times more likely to be disabled later in life (after 85 years). While 12 per cent were disabled by the age of 85, 25 to 34 per cent were disabled to the extent of requiring assistance when moving around. An average waist circumference of more than 35 inches was linked with greater risk of early death and



developing new diseases. A second Danish study of more than 72,000 people establishes that overweight or obese people are at a greater risk of developing heart disease even if they did not have risk factors for high blood pressure, cholesterol or diabetes. They revealed that there was

a 26 per cent increase in risk of heart attack among overweight people and an 88 per cent rise among those who were obese. The researchers claim that these statistics emphasised the need for maintaining healthy weight and controlling weight gain after menopause.



Attack alert

A study affirms that getting on **testosterone medication can put you at an increased risk of stroke or heart disease**. Earlier studies in India had suggested that men over 65 affected with hypogonadism, a condition in which the production of testosterone hormone is reduced owing to natural causes, improved after undergoing treatment. These studies, however, did not study the consequences and side-effects of the treatment options. Now, researchers from the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System in Denver in the US have questioned the benefit of undergoing treatment against the increasing risk of heart disease. They studied 8,700 men in their early 60s, first checking for plaque build-up in arteries to estimate their initial heart health. Thereafter, one in seven men began to use testosterone gels, patches or injections. In the three-year follow-up, 26 per cent of the men who were on treatment died of a heart attack or stroke. Researchers closely examined their subjects' changing heart health, and found that there was a 29 per cent higher risk of heart attack, stroke or death as a result of treatment. However, they don't recommend that people ditch their medication halfway through—further tests are awaited to confirm their findings.

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

FINAL FANTASY

Numbers frighten me. I turned 83 in September, and when I added up the days, weeks and months I have spent on this earth, it left me aghast! Finally, I convinced myself that numbers do not matter; it is the spirit with which we live that really counts. This is a message I want to share with my fellow silvers.

In his *Kumarasambhava*, great Indian writer and poet Kalidasa wrote of the Himalaya, "Brahma himself has made this the king of the mountains." He said the mountains are like a *manadanda* or balancing pole. His words fired my imagination and the images they conjured often come to mind. If there was one wish I could have, it would be to stand in the embrace of these majestic and mystical mountains.

I have never left this country all these years and I believe that seeing the Himalaya at close range would be a fitting finale to my long life. You see, my husband had served in the Indian Army and we had travelled around the country but we were never posted anywhere near the Himalaya.

So I asked my daughter Rama to gift me a trip to the mountains for my 83rd birthday. Rama is a business management professional and leads a very busy life. But she cleared her schedule to make my dream come true.

We flew from Hyderabad to Mumbai, where we spent a couple of days with family. Then we flew to Srinagar. Our trip coincided with Zubin Mehta's Concert for Peace at Shalimar Gardens in Srinagar. There was a little tension in J&K but we were not inconvenienced in any way.

I was impressed with the respect seniors were given everywhere. We were invited to jump queues, whether in temples or at airports. As my daughter puts it, "It's nice to have my mother as a mascot!"

Rama had booked a cottage for us in Srinagar, where we stayed for five days, including one night in Gulmarg. We went on day trips to see the city and its various parks and gardens, as well as Sonamarg. I was enchanted with Gulmarg. My daughter had made flawless arrangements and the trip was seamless. I chose to be a good follower and did not ask too many questions because my daughter is



Mystical mountains beckon Krishnaveni

a good leader. We get along very well and share excellent communication.

The sightseeing was beautiful—hills and dales, forests and, yes, mountains. I had never seen mountains up until then. Yet, at 83, here I was, gazing at them in the distance. What struck me most was the sense of peace and serenity that fills you when you're in the midst of God's creation.

I may not have trekked to the massive Himalayan peaks in my youth; neither was I anywhere near any of the famous mountains in this mountain range. This was the closest I could get to have my dream come true, and I was delighted. And, oh, Rama had arranged a surprise on my birthday, which we celebrated in Srinagar. Imagine my amazement when the hotel staff brought a cake to our room on that day! And we had some nice company, a lady lawyer from Delhi who joined in the celebrations.

In the midst of all this, I suddenly had a flashback to my mother. Did I look after her the way my daughter looks

after me, entertaining every fancy of mine? Perhaps not. But I console myself as I understand that women were not as empowered then as they are now. I loved my mother very much and expressed my love for her in the best way I could. Like my daughter does for me.

—B Krishnaveni, Hyderabad

IT'S ALL IN A CUPPA

It's been a good life and, at the age of 94, it still is. Delhi is my home; and call me sentimental, but I love travelling by the city's much-maligned DTC buses. The highlight of my day is taking the bus to visit an old haunt, Indian Coffee House in Connaught Place.

I have been a DTC patron since its inception in 1948. I am fortunate to have good health and have never felt the need to buy a car. My firm belief in using public transport comes from belonging to a family of freedom fighters. My mother joined the khadi movement, and when she did, my father, who owned a foreign cloth business, gave it up in the right spirit. Like hundreds of thousands of other families, ours too suffered many hardships during the freedom struggle. Some of my relatives were also jailed.

We were brought up with strict Gandhian ideals and I still live by them. Ever since my retirement from the Department of Income Tax, my day has begun with a cup of coffee at the Indian Coffee House. I leave my home in East of Kailash and take three buses to get to the coffee house. It's on the first floor and I take the stairs. The people with whom I share a table find it amazing that I don't need to use the lift. I had my right knee replaced in 1995 and now my left knee hurts. But that does not discourage me from my daily trip to the coffee house.

I used to study at the College of Commerce, now Sri Ram College of Commerce. My friends and I used to skip history class to drink tea at a shop nearby. When they raised their prices, we boycotted the place. Then, some friends started serving coffee in a tent. It is now a historic coffee house. There was a time when journalists and politicians of stature used to stop by for a cuppa. Now, its patrons are mainly salespersons and retired bank employees. I miss the old timers, who have all passed away.

After a round of coffee with my new friends, I do all my daily chores like going to the bank or shopping before I return home. As I am a qualified advocate and worked in the Department of Income Tax, I still offer legal income tax advice to clients.

I believe that going through life and keeping fit is also about willpower. All my faculties are sound and I have no problems with my senses. About four years ago, the Resi-



Anshuman Akash Jha

Gupta rides high on coffee and DTC

dents Welfare Association had organised a marathon for senior citizens on Independence Day and I won a prize. When I was younger, I used to play cricket and have even participated in the Ranji Trophy. I was an avid trekker and trekked across the four *dhams* (holy abodes)—Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath—in the early 1950s.

I was also blessed with a supportive wife, Sarla, who passed away last year. I was friends with her brother, and Sarla and I fell in love and had an inter-caste marriage. I will never forget how we dated on a bicycle in the 1940s!

I have seen Delhi being rehabilitated, grow and thrive. I love this city and live life as I was brought up to believe in. When my time comes, just like my brother did, I too will donate my body to science. I feel if you believe in something, God shows you the way.

—Shiv Kumar Gupta, Delhi



Verse and vibe

JAI SHANKAR MISHRA, 61, LUCKNOW

Ratnesh Singh

I have been listening to the *Ramayana* and *Gita* since childhood. In high school, I developed a keen interest in Sanskrit and Urdu literature. Living in the Nawabi city of Lucknow, culture and literature became a part of my life. And a lot of my understanding of life has culminated

in my recent book *Art of Life: Timeless Wisdom from the Gita*.

After my retirement from the IAS in March 2012, I spent all my time turning my learnings from the *Gita* into a book, which is a guide with a practical approach. I know the *Gita* by heart

and decided to pen the wisdom of 121 inspiring *shloka*. This book is bilingual (Hindi and English) so that more people can benefit from the teachings of the celestial song.

I have been exposed to the rich treasures of the country. I have read the

Veda, the *Upanishad*, a lot of history and culture. All these have been my inspiration for writing and reading. After retirement, writing and poetry have become a full-time occupation. I was invited for a poetry recitation on All India Radio, Lucknow. I have written an article on Swami Vivekananda for *Sahitya Amrit*, a literary magazine. Another project I have been working on for the past seven months is *Poems of Life: Shayar-e-Zindagi*. In this, I have translated about 500 Urdu couplets by renowned Urdu poets into English. I am trying to preserve the beauty and flavour of our rich cultural past. Not many understand

The *Veda* and the *Upanishad* have been my inspiration for writing and reading. After retirement, writing and poetry have become a full-time occupation

and know Urdu in today's times, so this book is my attempt to keep alive a rich language.

I have been writing all through my active career also. I published five collections of Hindi poems: *Yeh Dhoop Chanv*, *Yeh Aakarshan*; *Ho Himailaya Naya*, *Ab Ho Ganga Nayi*; *Chand Sirhane Rakh*; *Banh Kholo*, *Udo Mukh Aakash Mein*; and *Bas Yehi Swapana*, *Bas Yehi Lagan*. My poems have been sung by legendary singers such as Asha Bhonsle, Hariharan and Roop Kumar Rathore for the music album *Chaand Ke Saath*. My poems in other albums, *Rajnigandha* and *Aman Ki Asha 2*, have been sung by Rashid Khan, Hariharan and Alka Yagnik.

I believe in the philosophy of *nish-kama karmayoga*. You just keep doing your work and God will take care of the rest. My books, *Happiness is a Choice*; *Choose to Be Happy*, and

24X7 Anand Hi Anand, have been well-received. Indeed, *Happiness is a Choice* has brought me name, fame and wealth and I receive good royalty from it. In April 2013, I was invited by the National Productivity Council (NPC) for a two-day session titled 'Happiness by Choice: A Roadmap to Success in Life' for middle level management. This was held in Mussoorie.

As I worked in the Ministry of Urban Development in Uttar Pradesh, I wrote a book titled *A Quest for Dream Cities*. During my posting in Allahabad in 2001, I was the first officer to organise an incident-free Mahakumbh. I then wrote a book, *Mahakumbh: The Greatest Show on Earth*, about the management of the event. The All India Management Association even awarded me the 'Public Service Excellence Award' for this event.

The simple and clear road map to life's journey from the *Gita* has helped me in my journey of life. During my IAS career, I was accredited with many achievements. I was awarded the 'State Award for Outstanding Performance' as managing director, UP Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd; Jai Shankar Prasad Award by Uttar Pradesh Sahitya Sansthan, Lucknow, in January 2010 for my anthology of Hindi poems, *Banh Kholo*, *Udo Mukh Aakash Mein*; and the Prakrati Ratna Award by Prakrati 'The Nature', an ISO 9001-2000 certified organisation dedicated to nature, organic farming and environment protection.

I have recently been invited by Swami Chidanand Saraswati, head of Parmarth Niketan in Rishikesh, to head the Gomati Action Parivar in Lucknow. This is planned to work along the lines of the Save the Ganga Action Plan that Swamiji has worked so hard for in Rishikesh. During my posting in Pilibhit in 1989-90, I had organised a *mahotsav* at the origin of the Gomati. As this an absolutely new invitation, I have started jotting down ideas for an action plan.

—As told to Ambica Gulati

I am keen to do something along the lines of recycling and saving the environment, and earn a little on the side. I've heard recycling plastics is labour-intensive, so that isn't an option owing to my health concerns. Is there something that I can do from home?

Besides plastics, cans and metals, there's a huge market—and need, especially in our country—to recycle other materials. From clothes, shoes and tyres to household items such as glass jars and dishes, there are many reusable items that can be refurbished, given a fancy new look and sold as artsy items. As the eco-friendly movement is gaining popularity in metros, a lot of handicraft stores and art boutiques are now looking for people who can make such items. In that case, all you will need to do is flex your creativity and experiment. Use social media to spread the word about your products and connect with these stores.

On the other hand, there's also a need for neighbourhood recycling centres. Here you can act as the coordinator between the community—collecting recyclable garbage for free—and the bigger, more professionally organised recycling organisations, by selling at scrap prices. This might require licenses, so consult your local administrative office for paperwork. You'll have to decide what kinds of materials you will collect to recycle. Renting out a garage or using your own backyard could work best. Invest in large bins with sturdy lids, preferably with wheels for easier transportation, and tarpaulin sheets to cover up junk that does not fit in bins.

—Jaffer Shah owns a paper recycling unit in Surat, Gujarat



Fight infection: Build immunity with diet and exercise

I am 57 years old. For the past six months, I have been suffering from frequent bouts of cold and cough. My family doctor says my immunity has gone down and it is making me susceptible to cold and allergies. Please suggest a diet to boost my immunity and regain fitness.

The immune system defines our ability to interact with the atmospheric agents and stay healthy. Just like a guitar, it has different wires that play together with the single objective of protecting our body from agents that can cause damage. Therefore, the correct placement and tuning of

these wires is important for good health. Several factors such as diet, exercise, age, and psychological stress play an important role in building our immunity. Research establishes the role of good nutrition in supporting a healthy, balanced immune system. Studies also reveal that healthy eating can help keep our immune system ready and capable of functioning properly when necessary. Poor nutrition can make our bodies more susceptible to infections, injuries and other medical complications.

Your first line of action to build immunity should be a healthy diet with a healthy lifestyle. Every part of our body, including the immune system, functions better when protected from environmental assaults and bolstered by healthy living strategies. Here are some:

- Include high-quality proteins in your daily diet. Sources include egg, fish and shell fish. If you are vegetarian, include pulses, legumes and tofu in your diet.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables to improve the level of antioxidants. The antioxidant vitamins beta carotene, Vitamin E and Vitamin C help fight free radicals and boost immunity. Rich sources include apricots, asparagus, beets, broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, corn, green peppers, kale, mangoes, turnip and collard greens, nectarines, peaches, pink grapefruit, pumpkin, squash, spinach, sweet potato, tangerines, tomatoes, and watermelon.
- Enrich your food by including zinc sources like oysters, red meat, poultry, beans, nuts, seafood, whole grains, fortified cereals and dairy products.
- To avail maximum benefit of antioxidants, eat the above fruits and vegetables raw or lightly steamed. Don't overcook or boil them.
- Avoid too much fat in your daily diet.
- Consume mushrooms; they increase the production of cytokines (cells that help fight off infection) and contain polysaccharides (compounds that support the immune system).
- Don't leave out honey, as you frequently suffer from cold and cough. Honey coats your throat; it is a natural way to soothe a sore throat. It also has antioxidants and antimicrobial properties that help fight infections caused by viruses, bacteria and fungi. Look for buckwheat honey, which has the highest antioxidant level.



READERS ASK

Your first line of action to build immunity should be a healthy diet with a healthy lifestyle. Include high-quality proteins in your daily diet. Eat more fruits and vegetables to improve the level of antioxidants and consume mushrooms



- Eat yoghurt; research reveals that eating a cup of low-fat yoghurt can reduce your susceptibility to cold by 25 per cent.

A meal plan

Ideally, one should start the day with a cup of green tea with one to two high-fibre biscuits.

Breakfast should be two *missi* chapattis with a cup of yoghurt. Milk with oats is also a very healthy option.

Mid-morning and mid-evenings should be rich in antioxidants like citrus fruits, almonds and walnuts. For lunch, have oat chapattis (50 per cent oat flour + 50 per cent whole wheat flour) with one cup of *dal*, one cup of vegetables and some green salad. Rice is optional.

Dinner can be planned with mixed vegetables with soybean (one bowl), two to three chapattis, salad and yoghurt.

I am 64 years old with normal skin. However, in winter, my skin becomes extremely dry. Please give some care tips and suggest a diet to build up the skin internally for winters.

Chill and cold during winters can play havoc on the skin. The results can range from dryness, dullness and tanning to even premature ageing. The main objective during winters should be to keep the skin hydrated and moisturised. A healthy diet and a little care can help you tackle these conditions.

- Drink at least 2 litre of water daily to keep your skin hydrated and moisturised.
- Add almonds and walnuts to your daily diet. The omega-3 fatty acids in them will keep your skin moisturised internally.
- Include olives, avocado, tomatoes in your daily diet to help keep the skin supple.
- Include Vitamin C and Vitamin E-rich foods like lemon, gooseberry (*amla*), green leafy vegetables, oranges, sweet lime and broccoli.
- Eating garlic, onions, eggs and asparagus, that are high in sulphur, keeps the skin smooth and youthful.
- If you are non-vegetarian, go for salmon or tuna fish for its omega-3 content, which helps preserve collagen, a fibrous protein that keeps skin firm.
- Include spinach every third day in your winter diet as it is rich in lutein, a carotenoid that protects your skin from UV damage.
- Wear sunscreen whenever going out.
- The skin on your hands is thinner than on most parts of the body and has fewer oil glands. That means it's harder to keep your hands moist, especially in cold, dry weather. This can lead to itchiness and cracking. Wear gloves when you go outside.
- Do not bathe in extremely hot water. The intense heat of a hot shower or bath actually breaks down the lipid barriers in the skin, which can lead to loss of moisture.

Eating soybean and food made from it, like tofu and soy milk, will help repair the body's damaged tissues.

Add one to two cups of herbal tea between your meals. And remember—exercise plays a major role in boosting the immunity, so 10,000 steps a day is must.

Namita Jain is a wellness specialist and celebrity nutritionist at Diet Mantra and has written bestsellers on diet and fitness. Visit www.dietmantra.in. If you have any questions for Namita Jain, write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org



That sinking feeling: Recognise depression and beat the blues

Depression is one of the most common psychiatric disorders witnessed in silvers. It causes pain and suffering not only to patients but also to their caregivers, much of which is unnecessary. Depressive disorders are not the same as passing sadness; they just cannot be wished away. Depression is a disorder characterised by feelings of sadness and despair, ranging in severity from mild to life-threatening.

Symptoms

- Persistent sad, anxious or 'empty' mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyable
- Insomnia, early morning awakening or oversleeping
- Loss of appetite and weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Decreased energy, fatigue and 'slowing down'
- Thoughts of death or suicide and suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability, difficulty in concentrating, forgetfulness and indecisiveness
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain

Certain chronic diseases can also cause depression. The origin could be cancer, cardiac diseases, endocrine disorders (hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism and hypopituitarism) neurological disorders like dementia and Parkinson's, nutritional disorders, and viral infections such as hepatitis, HIV and herpes.

A serious loss, chronic illness, difficult relationship, financial problem or any other unwelcome change in life can also trigger a depressive episode. Often a combination of psychological and environmental factors is involved in the onset of the disorder. Depression is also one of the most common risk factors for suicide.

Risk factors for depression

- Age: being 55 years and above
- Men are more prone to depression
- Painful or disabling physical illness
- Solitary living situations
- Debt, decreased income or poverty
- Bereavement
- History of drug or alcohol abuse
- History of prior suicide attempts

Diagnosis

A complete physical, mental and psychological evaluation is one of the most important steps in diagnosing and categorising a depressive illness. Certain medications and medical illnesses can cause depression and should, therefore, be ruled out by examination, interview and lab tests.

Depressed patients should be asked directly about suicidal thoughts and intentions; for instance, questions like 'Do you ever feel that life is not worth living? Have you thought of harming yourself?' Asking about suicide does not increase the risk of suicide. In fact, patients with suicidal thoughts should be asked about their plans ('Have you planned how you would do it?'). And those with suicidal plans should be hospitalised immediately, for their own welfare.



READERS ASK

A serious loss, chronic illness, difficult relationship, financial problem or any other unwelcome change in life can trigger a depressive episode. Often a combination of psychological and environmental factors is involved in the onset of the disorder. Depression is also one of the most common risk factors for suicide

Sometimes a definitive diagnosis cannot be made on the basis of history and examination alone. Sometimes patients suffering from dementia stop eating; in such situations, trial of treatment, usually with an anti-depressant, is the best course.

Difficulties in diagnosis

For several reasons, depression is often difficult to diagnose among silvers:

- The symptoms may be less noticeable because older people may not work or may have less social interaction.
- Some people believe that depression is a weakness and are reluctant to tell anyone that they are experiencing sadness or other related symptoms.
- The absence of emotion may not be interpreted as depression, but as indifference.
- Family and friends may regard a depressed person's symptoms simply as evidence of ageing.
- The symptoms may be attributed to another disorder.

Treatment

Patients with depression benefit from traditional methods of therapy. The outcome of major depression in later years, if uncomplicated, follows the 'rule of thirds'. One-third of elderly patients get better and stay better, one-third get better but the disease relapses, and one-third do not improve or improve only marginally. With time, most elderly patients who experience major depression in late life recover. Recovery, however, may take months.

There are several choices of treatment depending on the net result of the evaluation. There is a varied range of anti-depressant medications and psychotherapies that can be used to treat depressive disorders. There are several groups of anti-depressants such as tri-cyclic anti-depressants, monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), lithium and selective serotonin receptor inhibitors (SSRI). While some people respond to psychotherapy, others do well with anti-depressants; the best treatment, probably, is a combination of both.

I am a healthy 71 year-old man and not on any medication. Recently, I passed reddish urine. As this happened only once, I have not consulted any doctor. Should this be ignored or should I consult an expert?

This condition is called haematuria, meaning blood in the urine. There are many reasons for haematuria in silvers and they include urinary infection, cancer in the urinary tract, a stone or any other tumour in the urinary tract and cancer of the prostate, which is a very significant cause. It may also be because of drugs like aspirin or any anticoagulant. Sometimes the reddish urine may not be blood but drugs like Senna, Refamycin and Livodopa. However, as you said, you are not on any medication. Severe jaundice can also mimic haematuria. Ingestion of beetroot will also change the colour of urine. In your case, even one attack of haematuria should be taken seriously. Seek the advice of a urologist today.

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is the third option that is useful to individuals whose depression is severe and life-threatening, those who cannot take anti-depressants, and those whose response to medication is poor. Patients often stop medication as they get symptomatic relief. It is important to continue taking the medicines until the physician advises you to stop them.

Helping a depressed person

- The most important thing anyone can do for someone who is depressed is to help them get appropriate diagnosis and treatment, and offer emotional support.
- Do not accuse the depressed person of talking about illness or laziness and expect them to 'snap out of it'. Eventually, with proper treatment, most depressed people do get better.
- Remain alert about the risk of suicide.
- Encourage the depressed person to participate in leisure activities and provide them good company.

Depression is a common mental disorder seen among silvers. The condition is generally treatable. Geriatricians and psychiatrists need to provide education, support and preventive intervention to strengthen silvers and their families in coping with the common stress of ageing, and emerging happy after facing all the challenges.

Padmashri Dr V S Natarajan, a specialist in the field of geriatric medicine, runs Memory Clinic, a service for silvers in Chennai. If you have a question for him, write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

Mouth freshener: Yoga can sweeten the breath

It may seem impossible, but yoga may keep your mouth smelling fresh! Several poses can be used to beat halitosis. Of course, the problem of bad breath often needs intervention from a dentist. But often it could be a lifestyle issue, coming from hormonal yo-yos, bad digestion, toxic conditions, lack of saliva, stress, depression and dehydration. Here, yoga can help.

Poses that work the jaw line and the mouth are obviously indicated in this situation. The most obvious pose is the lion-roaring pose (*simhagarjasana*), where the mouth is extended fully as if to roar. Interestingly, it is a pose for emotional culturing too, helping to release pent-up feelings. Perhaps there is some correlation behind negative thinking and bad breath that gets sorted with such practices.

Other helpful practices include nasal cleansing (*jal neti*), skull-cleansing breathing practice (*kapalabhati*) and metabolic fire practice/stomach-churning practice (*agnisara kriya*). All poses that power your digestion should be used to ensure that you are not suffering any toxic condition. Remember that dental health is important to prevent problems that were earlier not linked to it: these include kidney collapse, acidity, heart problems, even stroke. This hap-

pens because germs from the mouth—hardier than from anywhere else in the body—can enter the bloodstream through cavities. Also, plaque dislodged from the teeth can enter the bloodstream to create circulatory problems. So a sweet-smelling mouth is more than just aesthetic; it is absolutely essential for overall health.

Including poses that engage the master glands will go a long way in keeping us stress-free and helping us cope with stress effectively enough, in a manner that keeps us fighting fit. Forward-bending poses, like the classic seated forward bend (*paschimottanasana*), standing forward bend (*uttanasana*/extreme stretch pose), child pose (*bala-sana*) and hare pose (*shashankasana*) are advised. And poses that spike metabolism and make digestion efficient are absolutely essential to ensure mouth health. This is because disturbed acid flow can cause the wearing out of tooth enamel, leading to dental decay. In fact, acid reflux is related to gum degeneration, which in turn is implicated in kidney and heart problems. Poses that help digestion are the thunderbolt (*vajrasana*) and lying thunderbolt (*supta vajrasana*). Include meditative practices to power you on all these fronts too. Sleep of yoga (yoga *nidra*) is a great healing practice.

YOGIC MOVES

Metabolic fire practice (*agnisara kriya*)

Sit in a comfortable position. Lightly draw the tongue out. Breathe in and out in a panting fashion, moving

the stomach in and out naturally while doing it, up to 10 times. Stop after finishing the first round. Relax

the body. Repeat twice. **Note:** This may only be practiced on an empty stomach, ideally early mornings.

Benefits: It powers digestion and metabolism, clears halitosis, and helps you hyperventilate and remove stress. It is regarded as an anti-ageing pose that promotes overall health.

Model: Nandkumar J Vaidya,
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 the advice given here)

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THE GREAT GRANNY DIARIES BY PRATIBHA JAIN MRS SARADHA RAJAMANI, SALEM, TAMIL NADU

An engaging series about the wisdom of love, nurturing and culinary bonding across generations

The two topics that receive her undiluted attention and enthusiasm are grandchildren and traditional recipes. Mrs Saradha Rajamani, a 75 year-old Tamilian from Salem, is a mother of three, grandmother to four and great-grandmother to two. By her own confession, she indulges the children and is a 'yes' person with them in every regard. She also loves taking care of guests with home-cooked meals, and is happy to share her culinary prowess with them.

A perfect epitome of a 'content homemaker', she is never bored and finds enough things at home to remain happily occupied. Having heard much about the family's love for animals and helpful nature, I met them at their residence in Salem.

Namaste Saradhaji. Can we start with your childhood?

Saradha Rajamani: I was born in Mahadhanapuram, a small town near Tiruchy district in Tamil Nadu. I grew up there and was married at the age of 16. We moved to Mallur town in Salem district. From 1964, I have been living in Salem with my family.

You were married when you were quite young. From whom did you learn cooking?

I learnt to cook and discovered a passion for cooking from my mother-in-law. Everything she prepared was absolutely divine.

Radhika (daughter): I would say that while my mother is an expert at making all snacks and sweets such as *murukku*, *ompodi*, *laddu*, and *badam halwa*, my grandmother

was very good with the day-to-day cooking. Grandma was influential in passing on her proprietary *poricha kootu*, *karunaikizhangu masiyal* and *rasavaangi* to Amma. However, Amma's specialty dishes are tomato *thokku*, *vatthal kuzhambu* and *milagu kuzhambu*; the taste is incomparable.

It would be fantastic to document all these recipes. Saradhaji, was food a way to your husband's heart?

"Undoubtedly, food is always the way to a man's heart. My husband late, Prof Rajamani, was a very friendly and hospitable person. He enjoyed conversing with friends and strangers alike"

I am sure that is always the case. I will share with you the recipe for another sweet dish today. My husband, late Prof Rajamani, was a very friendly and hospitable person. He enjoyed conversing with friends and strangers alike. He was a professor who turned into a businessman with the refractory business.

I have heard much from your family friend Veena Gurubatham, who introduced us, about your husband's love for animals.

My husband was indeed a great animal lover and even though he is no more, we still have cows, calves, dogs

and cats in our backyard. We have had domestic animals for more than five decades now.

That must be a lot of commitment and work as well.

Yes, it is. Luckily, we have a big house and a large backyard. We have staff that helps with the animals. When I wake up in the morning, I make tea for all the workers and then I prepare porridge for the dogs. We give them vegetarian food.

That's interesting. Can you share the recipe for the doggie porridge?

With pleasure. You will need 1 kg of wheat, 500 gm of ragi, and 100 gm each of soy, green gram, sago and roasted gram (*pottukadalai*). Dry roast all of these and grind into a powder. This can be stored for weeks. Every morning, I cook a cup of this powder into porridge-like consistency and add some milk to it. I also add some multivitamin drops and calcium tablets. This is a nutritious and wholesome diet for our dogs.

Radhika: Amma truly enjoys taking care of her second family in the backyard. Despite her fragile physique, she very punctiliously wakes up before dawn to look after them. The cows have developed such a bond with her that she knows exactly what they are going through. It extends to the two German shepherds in the house. She has limited her physical chores around them owing to age, but that has not affected their relationship. For me, it is an experience watching them in the wee hours of the morning. I definitely believe my love for animals is in my DNA.



Sunil Jain

How do you manage all of this? Are you a disciplinarian?

I don't think I am strict at all. In fact, all of them tell me I am too liberal with my grandchildren.

Manas (granddaughter): Actually, she always supports me. I feel truly encouraged by her.

Ranjani (daughter-in-law): I think she is very adjusting. My own friends enjoy coming home and conversing with her. She is very good at making guests feel at home.

Veena (family friend): I think it is truly commendable how they take care of their cows and dogs. As a family, they are very helpful. They reach out to people who need help and are non-judgemental in their relationships.

Sekhar (son): Another passion for Amma is her agricultural produce. Feeling extremely proud of her harvest, she loves sorting and distributing it among the workers and local shelters. She is extremely content and at peace doing charity work at her own level.

Your energy is truly amazing. And I am enjoying the way your children are such great fans of yours!

Radhika: I would say that her world is very small, extending from the *kolam* [rangoli] in the front yard to the cowshed in the backyard. Nonetheless, she has seen life in all aspects, morphing from a shy bride to being the pillar behind dad's success as a brilliant entrepreneur. What I like about Amma is her capacity to breeze through many difficult situations in life. She not only raised three children

of her own but accommodated six more from her sisters-in-law! To top it, there is a fleet of factory/farm/office staff that she has to feed and take care of. It is a sheer madhouse each day. She is a tough cookie, inside out!

FROM SARADHA RAJAMAN'S KITCHEN

Paal kozhukattai (Sweet sauce with rice dumplings)

When I asked the family about Saradhaji's specialty dishes, they reeled off a list of traditional recipes in one breath. As her daughter says, "Most of her culinary skills were downloaded from my paternal grandma. They were a great team in the kitchen and outside." As I interviewed her, I also had the pleasure of



Yamini V

enjoying a savoury snack, *thavaladai*, and a sweet dish, *paal kozhukattai*—both delicious, with an authentic flavour! *Paal kozhukattai* is a popular offering during festivals such as Piliyar (Ganesha) Chaturthi and Aadi Vellikilamai.

Ingredients

- Rice (preferably *Ponni* variety): 1 cup
- Jaggery: 1 heaped cup; powdered
- Milk: 1 cup; boiled
- Ghee: 1 tsp
- Salt: a pinch
- Cardamom powder: ¼ tsp
- Edible camphor: a pinch (optional)

Method

Wash the rice, strain and spread on a thick cloth. Allow it to dry; when it is just a little damp, grind to a fine powder. Set aside. Add a cup of water in a thick-bottomed pan. When the water has parboiled, add a tablespoon of milk. This helps avoid the formation of lumps. Turn the flame to medium heat and immediately add rice powder and ghee. Stir continuously to avoid lumps. Cook for 8-10 minutes until it becomes a thick dough and leaves the side of the pan. Now switch off the flame and place the dough in a bowl. Cover with a damp cloth for 15 minutes. Next, knead the dough with your palms and a dot of ghee. As the dough becomes soft, roll into marble-sized balls and set aside. If the dough has been cooked well, it will not stick to your palms. In another pan, heat jaggery in 2 cups of water. When

it comes to a boil, switch off the flame. Strain and place on medium flame once again. Add the marbles and stir gently. Cook for 8-10 minutes. Now add the remaining milk and bring to a boil. Add cardamom powder and camphor and switch off the flame. The dish will have a saucy consistency. Enjoy *paal kozhukattai* warm or chilled. Garnish with fried cashews if you wish. Many families prefer to use coconut milk in this recipe.

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

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Words are all I have

Prof G Venkatasubbiah has enriched the Kannada language with a formidable body of lexicography and is still game for a battle with words, discovers **Jayanthi Somasundaram**

You definitely don't want to play Scrabble with Professor G Venkatasubbiah. Rather, he is the reference point you want to turn to when engaging in any battle of words. Known as the Father of Modern Kannada Lexicography, Prof GV, as he is fondly called, has compiled 11 dictionaries and four books on lexicology, authored 27 books on the history of Kannada literature and literary criticism, dabbled in editorial work in old Kannada texts, translations, and even written a few books for children! Yet, when left searching for words to describe this grand old man, 'awe' is the only one that comes to mind.

Behind these daunting credentials, though, is a benign person. Short and a tad portly, his hazel eyes sparkle with remarkable clarity and his ever-green smile is infectious. But eclipsing all else is his abiding love for the Kannada language. When Prof GV ushers you into his study lined with bookshelves, time suddenly stands still. Some of the tomes in his collection date back to the early 1900s and, over the course of half a century, these books have been leafed through countless times by professors and students alike.

This is a lexicographer's sanctum, a place of solitude where Prof GV has done most of his work on the Kannada language. Every reference book in his collection, and every page, is intact.

Even at the age of 100, Prof GV refers to them regularly. "Besides my dictionaries and the literary works I have written, you will find books by

many young and old authors on these shelves. I still receive almost one book a day that people send me to read," says the professor, a recipient of the prestigious Nadoja, Kannada Sahitya Akademi and Masti awards. "Even today, I use pen and ink, and all my work from 1944 to 1956 was done by hand. Even the Kannada typewriter was invented much later. I used to make notes and my staff would type them out."

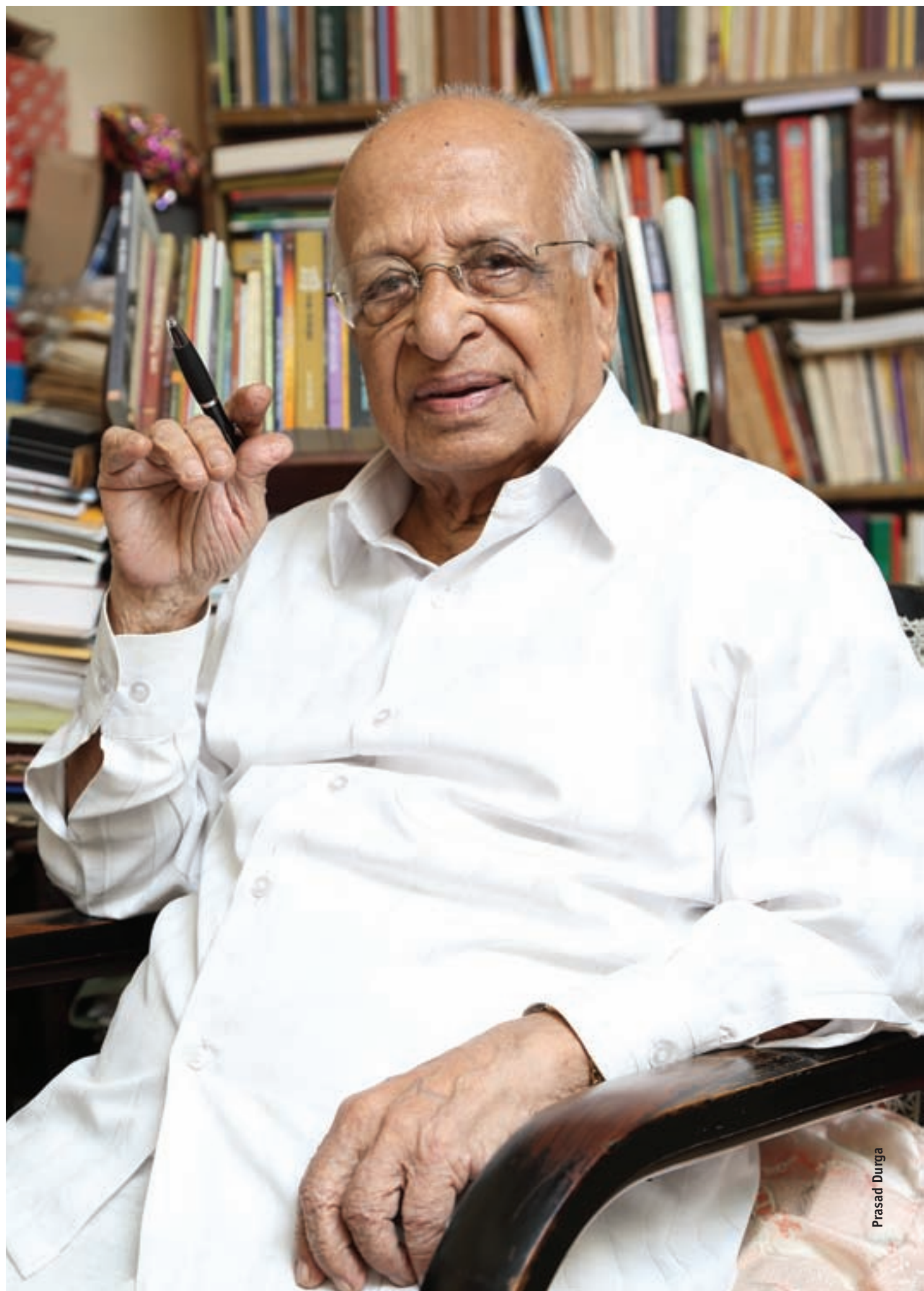
"Even today, I use pen and ink, and all my work from 1944 to 1956 was done by hand. Even the Kannada typewriter was invented much later. I used to make notes and my staff would type them out"

Prof GV had a scholarly childhood and probably inherited his literary and academic bent from his father. Born in a village in Mysore on 23 August 1913, a young GV was inspired by his father, a Vedic and Sanskrit scholar with the Mysore Palace. He was fluent in Sanskrit at an early age and went on to secure a master's degree in Kannada from the Maharaja's College, Mysore. He also secured a BT Degree and joined the Maharaja's College as a lecturer in Kannada. In 1943, the professor moved to Bangalore, where he got the opportunity to create a comprehensive Kannada dictionary, his first.

"Work began in 1944 and, for the first 10 years, under the supervision of many scholars, we only collected words. These words were sourced from over 2,000 books and 10,000 inscriptions and manuscripts and arranged alphabetically," he reminisces, his memory sharp as a tack. "Dictionary-making is not easy and will take the life out of you. During the course of time, my teachers passed away and there was no one to take over the project. This was when the government asked me to take over and that, in short, is how I became the chief editor and chairman of the Kannada Dictionary Committee in 1973," he says with pride.

After retirement, the lexicographer found the time he needed to completely immerse himself in the language. He published unique dictionaries like a dictionary for foreign loan words, a dictionary for difficult Kannada words, a dictionary for newspaper words and even a dictionary for words used by eminent scholars. "I've always been connected with words and my literary knowledge was vast. So this helped." He goes on to explain: "In linguistic terminology, there is something called 'borrowed words' and there are 5,000 borrowed words in Kannada. Most of the 'administration words' in Kannada come from the Persian or Arabic languages. For instance, words like *adalat* hark back to the Mughal period in this region."

For a centenarian, Prof GV is amazingly active, and recently released yet another book, a literary work by a young Kannada writer. He lectures occasionally and attends seminars and cultural events. Why, he even



Prof GV is a liberal; unlike fundamentalists who rave about the demise of their native languages, he is accepting of change. “Today’s generation speaks what is called ‘Indian English.’ They speak in English with a mix of their mother tongue. But people like us choose to speak in one language”

presided over the 77th Akhila Bharata Kannada Sahitya Sammelan in Bengaluru in 2011! His son Ravi, a retired public-sector employee who now manages his father’s schedule, remarks, “He spends four hours a day reading and supports many literary events in the city.”

Ravi, who has authored a biography on Prof GV, reminisces on his life with an illustrious father. “We have been living in this house since 1960 and many literary discussions evolved here. Many senior writers have come to our home, like Jnanpeeth award-ees Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, Da Ra Bendre, V K Gokak and others like V Sitaramaiah, M V Sitaramaiah, K Narasimhamurty, Gopalakrishna Adiga and B C Ramachandra Sharma. None of these greats is alive today but there is a constant flow of young writers visiting my father.”

The professor chuckles, “My wife and children are very happy when these writers visit us. Sometimes, we share a meal and my wife admonishes us, saying we should pay attention to the food and reserve academic talk for the front room!” He recalls an anecdote, “I fondly remember B C Ramachandra Sharma asking me for an opinion on his poems. He wanted to dedicate his first collection of poems to me. I suggested he dedicate it to his father who was a prominent writer. He agreed but included a poem on me in the collection.”

Prof GV is as much loved as he is respected; during the celebrations on his 100th birthday last year, many writers and authors gifted him a commemorative volume titled *Shtana-*

mana (One Hundred Salutations), a compilation of articles written by 68 authors in their respective areas of specialisation. They also gifted him another commemorative volume titled *Shastrajivita* comprising 36 articles in Kannada by Sanskrit scholars. “I feel this is the best recognition any writer can get it,” smiles the centenarian.

His affable nature and availability to one and all have won him a legion of friends and admirers. Among them is Rajyashree Satish, who assisted Prof GV as co-editor on two dictionary projects. “The best memory I have of my work with him was when we decided to transcribe both these dictionaries into Braille to benefit the visually challenged,” she says. “As Braille occupies a lot of space on a page, I had to edit words without affecting their meaning. Prof GV patiently guided our team and we successfully brought out the first Kannada Braille dictionary.”

Dr K S Pavitra, a consultant psychiatrist and Bharatanatyam exponent in Bengaluru, met the professor while gathering data for her thesis that attempted to study the correlation between mental health and creativity. She had interviewed him among 100 participants in the creative space. “He was 91 then and a busy person,” she recalls. “Many people have asked him the secret to his longevity. As a psychiatrist, I have observed that his family, social and personality traits are in perfect harmony. Today, living a long and healthy life is possible owing to medical advancements but, in his case, it is harmony that has kept him going.”

Ranganatha Rao G N, former editor of the daily *Prajavani*, shares a fond memory of Prof GV, who regularly wrote a column called ‘Igo’ in the newspaper. “I’ve known him for more than three decades. He would read every single word in the newspaper, mark mistakes and suggest changes to journalists. He did not have to do it; he did it purely out of a love for the language.”

Despite the scores of erudite personalities Prof GV has worked with, there is someone very special he credits for his body of work. “When I attended to my work, my wife Lakshmi raised our children and took care of every aspect of the family,” he says. Lakshmi is 90 years old, ailing and is largely confined to bed. “I cannot describe how much she has done for me. It’s been all work and no play,” he says, eyes misting.

Prof GV is a liberal and, unlike fundamentalists who rant and rave about the demise of their native languages, he is accepting of change. “Today’s generation speaks what is called ‘Indian English.’ They speak in English with a mix of their mother tongue. But people like us choose to speak in one language,” he says, simply.

At an age when most elders would attribute their longevity and fitness to healthy living, a rigorous and disciplined daily routine and exercise, and even a secret ingredient in their diet, our centenarian remarks with not a little glee, “When dealing with words, you end up caught in a web of words. You cannot shake free as there is always the next word that keeps you going.” ✨



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DRUM ROLL

At the peak of his career, Gino Banks hits 'pause' to reflect on his life and career as the son of the great jazz musician Louiz Banks, reports **Neeti Vijaykumar**

It's not always easy growing up as the son of a living legend. But Gino Banks, son of the Godfather of Indian Jazz, Louiz Banks, has never tried to measure up to his father. Known as the King of Drums, Gino has embraced his father's legacy wholeheartedly and expanded his own repertoire to include Indian classical, rock, metal, pop and even Bollywood. Marching to his own beat from the age of nine, Gino is now part of the rock band Nexus. He's played with the biggest names in Bollywood such as Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, Pritam and Vishal-Shekhar and Indian classical greats like Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia and Ustad Rashid Khan. The young drummer has also belted it out with fusion groups such as Silk and Yuva, and demonstrated his prowess on the rock scene for Skinny Alley, Zero and Joe Alvares, among others.

But what is it like being his father's son—the son of a Grammy nominee, no less? “You experience many things firsthand about the professional side of things,” Gino responds with a smile. “And you get a head start. People treat you a certain way, which I think is cool and not cool. But then, that's what people do!”

The talented percussionist says the single greatest life lesson he's learnt from his father is “to be honest with my music and never compromise on myself, my art and my instrument”. The father-son relationship is not a one-way street though. “Owing to my own taste in music, Dad has learnt to tolerate heavy rock,” he says, chuckling. “I guess that's something I've got him into in the past few years through bands like Dream Theater and Karnivool.”

Growing up during the heady 1970s and '80s, when Louiz Banks was at the peak of his career, has gifted Gino some of the most cherished memories he will ever have, especially touring with his father and accompanying him on stage. Gino Banks reminisces on his father as a “monster pianist”, his influence on his life and the musical bond they share.

I got into music at a really early age. I was sent for piano lessons at first. I did okay but was attracted to the drums. Watching drummers such as Ranjit Barot, Sivamani, Adrian D'Souza, Lester Godinho, Benny Soans, Franco Vaz and Taufiq Qureshi play with dad, I was inspired and decided to take up the drums. I realised music was my calling when I figured I could understand and learn difficult pieces of music much quicker than a regular person. My father was obviously happy when I took it up seriously!

My first series of concerts was at the age of nine. I accompanied dad on a tour of Australia and China. I played electronic percussion with his fusion group Sangam. There were big stages, and surprisingly I had no stage fright. I guess I knew the music well. I was featured in the section of the show doing a *jugalbandi* with Kartik Mani [noted drummer/percussionist who now lives in Bengaluru], singer Ramamani's son. I thoroughly enjoyed it and knew this music was special; it made me want to go deeper into this form of jazz and rock fusion music.

As I play the drums, it means we can play together! Performing live on stage is always crazy fun with dad. We don't know what's going to happen! Everything is impromptu. We do have points in the music where we connect, but mostly it's spontaneous. And we have a blast!

I have grown to become a better musician and drummer. Now I think I can accompany my father better and serve music in a much more mature way compared to when I had started. Among the lessons he's taught me in life, there are three main values: patience, humility and maintaining a positive spirit. They have brought me where I am today.

He is a monster piano player. It's heavy in the modern jazz piano style. He is an amalgamation of his heroes and peers like Oscar Peterson, George Shearing, Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea. Fusing his knowledge of Indian *raga* with his world music taste makes him a very unique musician. I think he is the best in India still—and one of the best in the world. If I had taken up the piano, it would have been a lot more tricky and I would have had bigger shoes to fill.

His musical approach inspires me to work harder to reach his level every day. His work ethic has also been a huge influence on me. He has this seriousness and honesty towards his playing and a dedication to his instrument. Even his composing and arranging methods are superior and something to learn from.

He has allowed me to figure out stuff on my own. He has always guided me. And when I needed a little help here and there, he would steer me in a direction from where I could figure out a solution on my own. I think that is an excellent method. Being forced to do something limits your understanding and, in art, it limits your creativity.





I love all kinds of music, if the musicians play it well. Foraying into Bollywood like my father was a deliberate decision. I wanted to play everything well and study all genres of music. I listen to everything. I want to deliver the best possible performance for that style, for that artist, for that song. And learning everything just grows my musical knowledge. I can use my knowledge of jazz when I play Indian classical music and vice versa. I use my knowledge of rock in funk and vice versa. And then, all this knowledge can be fused into Bollywood music or any popular form of music. From jazz and metal to Latin and polka—I enjoy all of it!

We bond over Chinese food! Besides music and stuff related to music, we love films in the classic, comedy genres. Mel Brooks, Woody Allen, Jerry Lewis—it's always fun.

At the Banks' house, everything is about music and food. It's the best house ever! Even all the musicians who have ever visited would say that. We are four siblings. I'm the youngest and I have two older brothers and one sister;

only dad and I are musicians. Andre, Neil and Monique are connected to the entertainment business anyway.

My father is known for his generosity on stage. He would always want to showcase the musicians with him on stage ahead of himself. He puts music above everything else. There are times when people have taken advantage of him owing to this quality. But this openness, generosity, security and humility make him a great artist.

“There's a sense of stubbornness and diplomacy that I think I've also inherited from dad, besides musical talent. Everyone keeps saying I am a chip off the old block!”

Hard work and practice are in our genes. I love to practice and I have an abundance of self-motivation to be the best I can be. There's a sense of stubbornness and diplomacy that I think I've also inherited from dad, besides musical talent. Everyone keeps saying I am a chip off the old

block! I guess that's all I need.

Dad has always been a family man first. It's great that he is such an incredible musician and also so grounded with the family. When I have a family, I hope I am half the father dad has been to me. 🌸

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Dance of DEVOTION

Birju Maharaj's recent biography is testimony to a life dedicated to the arts. In conversation with **Sudha G Tilak**, India's foremost exponent of Kathak elaborates upon how his dance form has evolved through the ages

It is morning and Pandit Birju Maharaj is at prayer. Fresh from his bath, he practises a routine his father and grandfather had probably followed. Dotting the silver idols and images of gods, predominantly Krishna, and those of his forefathers, with fresh sandal paste, he flips open a silk pouch to take his prayer books out.

We are at a Delhi neighbourhood where festivity is in the air before Diwali. Maharaj's home is festooned with flowers and clay *diya* and platters of milk sweets and hot tea are served to visiting students, young and old, who troop in to touch his feet and seek his blessings on the auspicious occasion.

If you didn't know him, he'd be yet another elderly, pious Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh. But the years fall off his face when his eyes flash, lips part and hands move up elegantly to hold a pose. His shoulders flex and his chest puffs and he holds a posture of *shringara* so perfect he could be a playful young dancer. At 77, he danced a duet with Madhuri Dixit on *Jhalak Dikhlaa Jaa*, a dance show on TV, enviably agile for his age. And now, he is working to perfect her moves on her forthcoming film, *Dedh Ishqiya*.

This relentless pursuit of his craft is central to *The Master Through My Eyes*, a recently released biography of the maestro's life and times by his eminent *shishya* Saswati Sen. And it has indeed been an extraordinary journey. The youngest person to receive a Sangeet Natak Akademi Award at the age of 27, Padma Vibhushan Birju Maharaj insists that it is individual devotion that elevates a performance into sublime art. Excerpts from an exclusive interview:

You have been dancing almost all your life. Can you recall the first performance you ever watched?

I was awake to dancing around me at home since I was four years old. My father, Achchan Maharaj, and uncles all danced. They were of the Lucknow *gharana*. My great grandfather was associated with the court in the royal family of Lucknow. One memory or image I can recall clearly is that of one Janmashtami. The family had a *mehfil* almost every other day and this was a special occasion. There was a gathering of about a hundred people. The deity was dressed and decorated in silks and flowers. There were flames from the lamps; fruits and sugar lumps were on platters. At a little space ahead, my uncles [Shambhu and Lachhu Maharaj] were dancing, the musicians sat nearby playing and the crowd sat on the floor watching. I ran to the large kitchen where my mother was cooking before huge stoves and told her I wanted to dance too. She said my time would come and thrust a *khullar* of my favourite *malai rabri* in my hand that I licked to the last.

You are a self-taught artist. How did that learning happen?

I'd say it was because of the atmosphere at home. At any time, there were students at home and practice would be on. There was music all through; I found myself fiddling with the sitar and learning the tabla. And I was attracted to the music from

the harmonium as a child. *Tal* and *sur* [rhythm and melody] are part of nature and humans imbibe the music. From my father I understood emotion and devotion in dancing, from my uncles the art of gestures in dance and the power of expression.

What about making music? You have some 100 compositions of your own, many set to dance too.

For me, rhythm is in the heart. The heart's beat is the first *tal* for a human being who is aware of this. The child learns the beauty of emotions just after this. Eyes round in joy, her mother plays with him, her expressions of joy, pride, anger, tears, shape the child's *bhawana*. The child's first steps are his dance movements. My earliest and most prolific compositions have been

on Krishna owing to this intuitive relationship with the body, devotion to Krishna and the beauty of music. Dance is *chitra katha*. For a rounded performer, all these aspects are vital to honing one's art.

Do you think you also had the advantage of being male as you were allowed to pursue dance?

It was a sign of the times. Kathak enjoyed royal patronage and from the *darbar* it shifted to the proscenium after decades. I was a male dancer and yet my dance was, in the beginning, my livelihood too. After Independence, times changed, stigmas lifted, and there was patronage from the government, especially in Delhi, with the founding of cultural institutions like Sangeet Bharti Akademi,



Maharajji is one of the greatest dancers India has produced in this century. Legend is too small a word for him. Kathak was just another dance form. He revitalised it in such a way that every single Kathak dancer ever since has been influenced by him.

—*Padma Shri Madhavi Mudgal, Odissi dancer*

Bhartiya Kala Kendra and Sangeet Natak Akademi, among others. With education, women too emerged from domestic circles and women from all classes took to the performing arts. Today, Saswati Sen is my esteemed student and a teacher in her own right and many of my bright students have been female.

How difficult were the times you came to Delhi with your widowed mother from Lucknow?

My father died when I was nine and I left school. All I knew was that I wanted to pursue dance and my mother was supportive. There were days we had no food and it was a struggle to find spaces to perform. Despite offers from films, I was not too keen. Art historian Kapila Vatsayan was a huge support. Thanks to her, I started teaching dance at Sangeet Bharti in New Delhi by 14 and subsequently at Bharatiya Kala Kendra and later as the head of the department at Kathak Kendra. But I'd seen hard times and I had a large family of children, nephews and nieces to feed and take care of. With no guru, no family savings and a large responsibility, I think a strong mother and my own zest for dance helped me. At the worst of times, my dance and music would elevate me from terrible reality.

How did your art evolve? You have been prolific in composing, shifting from the solo to the ballet formats, introducing a unique style that is dramatic with emphasis on not just speed and superficial beauty but *abhinaya* and *shringara*.

Once the fear of survival was removed, I was able to dedicate myself to my dance with greater freedom. My compositions are those that have sprung from nature. From the rustling leaves that makes me imagine a naughty Krishna swinging from treetops to the sparkling river where he defeated the wicked Kaliya, my music and ballets bring nature and mythology and divinity together. Emotions are what we are all about and if dance cannot reflect it and stick just to its grammar and form it will remain soulless. Hence, Kathak for me brings all these aspects into a sublime performance. My language has changed in the past 30 years. My art evolved towards spirituality and devotion that goes beyond the performer's ego for appreciation and superficial beauty.

Your choreography is marked not just by fleeting footwork but a high emotional quotient and dramatic pauses during the dance. What does the pause bring to your performances?

Ammaji told us that they had once gone to Dalman and when they got off at the station, there were no coolies. Maharajji asked a passenger to help him put the big tin trunk and bedding on his head and, without any hesitation, carried it out. Another time, Maharajji was coming to my house on Minto Road when a cart-puller was struggling with his cart, which was full of spare parts. Maharajji parked his car, a Morris Minor, and pushed the cart with the man till it climbed the ascending road; the man thanked him profusely and uttered blessings.

Maharajji has always said, 'Blessings and good wishes are the biggest treasure of any person, no gifts or money can match these words of love.' Perhaps because he had to shoulder huge responsibilities after his father's death, Maharajji missed his childhood and still craves for it. His heart is still like that of a child; he loves to play with toys and enjoys the company of children. Kids feel extremely comfortable and happy learning from him. Seldom have I seen great artists of such stature interact with all age groups, all levels of learners; in fact, he takes it as a challenge to teach weak students.

Besides his artistic work, Maharajji's fascination is electronic gadgets. He loves to buy all kinds of small or big electronic items for audio, video, recording or games. His cupboards are full of gadgets, cords, wires, batteries, screwdrivers, torches and more. He tells us that as a young boy he sometimes thought that if the family profession was not his responsibility, he would have been happy to have become a motor mechanic.

Excerpted from *Birju Maharaj: The Master Through My Eyes* by Saswati Sen (Niyogi Books; ₹ 995; 216 pages)



Avinash Pasricha

(Clockwise from top) A young Birju; with Odissi maestro Kelucharan Mohapatra; teaching his children Mamata, Deepak and Jaikishan; with tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain; choreographing Kamal Hassan's *Vishwaroopam*
Pictures courtesy: *The Master Through My Eyes*



It was destiny that took me to Maharajji. I was reluctant to learn from a male dancer but my scholarship stipulated that I learn from an established guru. Though I used to make faces initially and made my displeasure obvious, he was very patient with me. As I'm a great believer of Swami Vivekananda, I often compare our guru-*shishya* bond with that of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda, which started off with Vivekananda disapproving of and questioning the authority of his guru. Maharajji is every bit a self-made artist. He has seen a tough life; staying in poverty, going without meals and walking long distances. He has reached where he is today purely because of his determination and will power.



—*Saswati Sen, foremost disciple, biographer and Kathak dancer*

Often when I am asked about this, I joke that I am holding a pose for the photographer! However, the drama of silence adds to the drama of movement. If a performer were to dance non-stop without a pause before embarking on another dance movement or change in emotion, it would fall flat. We have to catch our breath to release it. The power of silence and the power of halting in your tracks before beginning anew even in the wink of an eye add a new dimension. It is the energy of creating space, *shoonya*, silence. The *tal* or rhythmic beat too needs a break before beating on. It sets the mood, space and time and adds colour to the performance.

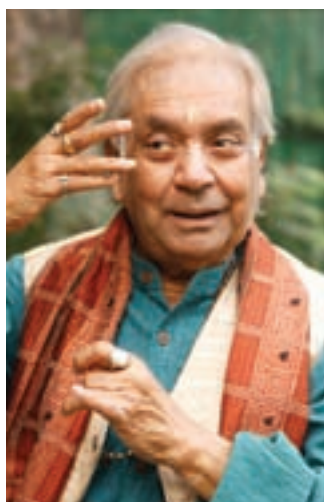
Classical dances from all regions have been constantly evolving through the ages. Fusion, modern, contemporary, avant-garde and other labels have been added

to the sub-genres of dance. Have you not been interested in experimenting with Kathak?

Tradition is the large mother tree. It can grow a variety of branches but the roots remain constant. Similarly, fusion for fusion's sake will remain fake and will be rejected. Dance and music should reflect true feeling. And art and life move in circles; what was old returns renewed and so on. Despite my large body of work on the classics of Kalidasa, Surdas, the *Ramayana* and so on, my works on Mirza Ghalib's poetry using abstract themes of life and feelings, the love legend of Roopmati and Baz Bahadur from Mandu, *Laya Parikrama*, and the *Samachar Darpan*, the first offbeat work I created on the morning rituals of a newspaper in a household in Kathak were all equally well-received as my traditional ballets.

You have been choreographing for Indian cinema. Your most famous was Satyajit Ray's *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*. How did that come about?

My great grandfather had danced in Wajid Ali Shah's court. Perhaps that piece of news had reached Ray. His brief to me was that my dance should bring *sukoon* [peace] to the Nawab's face. My choreography included recreating Lucknow's images and culture through the composition. I composed for movies after many years when I worked with Madhuri Dixit in *Dil To Pagal Hai*; later, I was able to work with each emotion and gesture in *Devdas*. Recently, I spent a lovely week in Lucknow's old mansions working with her in the forthcoming *Dedh Ishqiya*. It was an altogether unique experience when I worked with Kamal Hassan in *Vishwaroopam*. He sat down and watched me work



He has given a new dimension to Kathak. An incredibly talented artist, there are many facets to him. He is not just a Kathak maestro, but a composer, poet and choreographer. He has a vast collection of *thumri* from his *gharana*. But, above all, he is a good human being and a thorough gentleman.

—*Padma Bhushan Pandit Debu Chaudhuri, sitar maestro*

with the artists and then I realised he was observing my mannerisms for his role of a Kathak teacher. He's a dear friend now and even came home to play with my granddaughter.

We live in violent times. What is the role of art in bringing beauty and peace into our lives?

As an artist I always remain moved by human affection. At the peak of the anti-Hindi agitation, I was invited in the 1960s to perform to a university student audience in Hyderabad. Even as the mood was hostile outside, as the music began to play and my dance began, I found the agitating students shuffle in to watch the play of Krishna's *leela*. Human kindness is expressed aesthetically through any form of nuanced art. And dance is a fluid art form involving the body that makes it come together beautifully.

What will you leave behind as your legacy?

While I can still dance at my age and am choreographing a dance movement or composing a tune in my head at every moment, I realise my dance will live beyond me when I catch a personal gesture or dance move in my grandchildren's or students' performances. The Kalashram that I am struggling to get going will hopefully be an institution for dance, music and the allied arts associated with the beautiful dance of Kathak. My art will live on through my students beyond my times.

Will your children also be a part of that legacy?

My eldest daughter Kavita was good at dancing, but domesticity took her away. My second daughter Anita

has taken up painting and sculpture. However, my sons Jai Kishan and Deepak and daughter Mamata and my granddaughters are keeping the tradition alive. I watch them dance and in the odd expression or unconscious gesture they make, I know my style has seeped into them.

Could you share your secret to active ageing?

Ageing gracefully is a gift we must all seek to receive. At every stage, life is beautiful and if we can accept it in a positive way, things become easier. Music and dance keep me going. Dance is my therapy, my joy. Kathak is the best health tip I offer myself every single day and it keeps my energy levels up and my mind active with composing or creating a piece of dance or music. An active mind helps an active body well into old age. 🌸

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DESTINATION

Island tales

WITH ITS RICH MYTHOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONNOTATIONS, SRI LANKA IS A DREAM COME TRUE FOR THE CULTURAL CONNOISSEUR, DISCOVERS **RAMYA SRINIVASAN**

Ayubowan reads the greeting at the Colombo airport, welcoming you to the island nation in the traditional Sinhalese way. As you loiter along the aisles of the airport, past the duty-free shops, an imposing Buddha statue sits beatifically, giving you an inkling of the cultural richness that is about to unfold. Driving

away from the airport, the country surprises you with its striking resemblance to India. Take in the huge publicity hoardings of *Chennai Express* and *Madras Cafe* and the signboards in Tamil and you may be excused for thinking you are in Chennai. But give it some time and the distinct character of the city grows on you.

As you enter the main streets housing the Sri Lankan parliament, the European-styled buildings with their grandeur stand out. The sultry air blowing in from the coastline only elevates the experience as you drive past, marvelling at the magnificence of the architecture, a reminder of the island's colonial past.



Photographs by Lokesh Upadhyay and Vijay Sampath Kumar

The Golden Temple at Sigiriya hosts a multitude of Buddha statues



(Top) The majestic Lion's Rock at Sigiriya; frescoes on the Rock are a major draw

Colombo is ideal for a shopaholic, and given the LKR-INR currency conversion you are sure to bag some good deals. There are bustling local markets, fashion houses and upscale malls like Odel; to borrow an oft-quoted maxim, the customer is the king here, and is spoilt for choice. The retail store salesmen helped us pick up saris and gave us tips on wearing the sari the sensual Sri Lankan way, commonly known as Kandyan style, with just a slight baring of the midriff and pinning up of the pleated *pallu*. We were told that the draping begins with the pleating of the *pallu*, which is then hung over the left shoulder, almost in touching distance of the ground, with the rest wound around the body. After a heavy round of shopping, stocking up on some saris and cashews, and window-shopping for gemstones and porcelain, we settled into the hotel for the night. The next morning, it was time to drive

north to Sigiriya to explore the earthiness of Sri Lanka.

The traffic in Sri Lanka is well-regulated. Once, to our dismay, our cab was stopped by the police as we waited with bated breath to learn what went wrong. We were surprised to know that our driver had been penalised for going past the mid-crossing in the road by a few inches. In fact, such is the Lankans' respect for law that drivers trudge along at a relaxed pace with absolutely no honking. Not once during the week-long trip did we observe squabbles between drivers or hear any honking. On the other hand, this respect for traffic rules can also make your drives much longer. It took us about four hours to cover the 170 km to Sigiriya from Colombo, at almost 40 km per hour. The narrow rustic roads of Sri Lanka are akin to those in the Kerala backwater pockets and have to be negotiated cautiously.



As we wound our way to Sigiriya, from miles away we could see the magnificent rock fortress, known as the Lion's Rock, extending into the skyline. One of the most popular destinations in the area, it's a UNESCO site with a bloody history. The story goes that King Kashyapa (477-495 AD), son of Dhatusena, engineered the assassination of his father and claimed the throne that rightfully belonged to his brother Mogallana. He moved the capital to Sigiriya, and created an impregnable palace of exceptional splendour. Nothing much of the impressive vestiges remain today but for the ancient colourful frescoes

The Golden Temple in Sigiriya had once served as a Buddhist monastery. This cave monastery with mural paintings of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas is easily one of the best preserved monuments in Sri Lanka

on the rocks, drawn with natural pigments. The beautiful, curvaceous 'Maidens of the Clouds', seen engaged in domestic activities like arranging flowers, serving each other fruit and playing music, are pure bliss for an artist's eyes and a major draw. On top of the 200-m-high rock sits the ruined fortress. The entrance, Lion's Gate, is sandwiched between two rock structures resembling lion paws, thereby fetching its name. It is a good idea to wear comfortable shoes and to carry fluids for the trek to the top. It is also advisable to beat the sun and start early in the day. The steps until the lion's paws are wide enough, allowing you to rest on them if you so desire. But the final stretch with the narrow spiralling steps can prove tiresome, and is to be undertaken only if you are fit. We were kept on our toes with a restless queue of tourists, consisting mainly of foreigners, eager to reach the top. Atop the summit, observing the ruins of the king's palace, the terraced gardens with canals and fountains, the rich heritage of the rock hit us all of a sudden.

Quite close by is the Pidurangala rock temple, hosting the reclining Buddha in a shallow cave. It's a much calmer and quieter destination than Lion's Rock, as not many tourists flock here. Catching the panoramic view of the mountain ranges from here, there is a sense of oneness experienced with nature, especially because of the stillness around.

Dambulla cave temple, also known as the Golden Temple, was our next stop. A towering golden Buddha greets you at the entrance before you embark on a climb to the ancient cave temple, which once served as a Buddhist monastery. We were intimidated by the huge colony of monkeys eyeing our food and street hawkers chasing

after us to sell gemstone chains. The five caves, some natural and others manmade, host a multitude of Buddha statues and paintings in different sizes and postures. This cave monastery with mural paintings of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas is easily one of the best preserved monuments in Sri Lanka. Drawn in earthy ochre and red colours on the rock are scenes of the Buddha's birth, his encounter with Mara, and his first sermon, among others. The Cave of the Divine King hosts a gilded, reclining Buddha, with his favourite disciple Ananda at his feet. In yet another cave, we found a Buddha statue with a cobra hood over his head, like the Hindu god Vishnu.

Similar to the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka offers a variety of terrain and landscapes and diverse weather conditions. After the urban experience in Colombo and the cultural trip to Sigiriya, we travelled 90 km south to Kandy, located at an altitude of 1,500 sq ft above sea level, which features a mix of scenic and cultural abundance. At the Tooth Relic Temple adjoining Kandy Lake, we found a bunch of schoolchildren ambling in the garden. But, all of a sudden, without any warning, it began pouring, and we had to rush for cover. Surprisingly, in less than two minutes the rains came to a halt, as if someone had switched the magic button off. The temple is lit with candles and lamps and echoes with the chants of devotees. Legend goes that the left canine tooth of Lord Buddha was retrieved from the funeral pyre and it was believed in Sri Lanka that whoever possessed this sacred relic also acquired the right to govern the country. Owing to the legend, many kings from the southern part of India fought over the relic along with Sri Lankan kings. Finally, hidden in the hair of Princess Hemamali, it was brought to Sri Lanka.

The temple walls here are adorned with paintings depicting the history of the relic and how it found its way to the island nation. During the annual procession, *Perahera*, a parade of about 100 elephants carry a replica of the relic, a grandiose representation of which can be found in the form of a painting on the temple walls. The relic, encased in seven golden caskets, engraved with gemstones, and arranged in the form of a *stupa*, is open for public view only at stipulated times throughout the day.

Almost 40 km away to the east is the Pinnawala elephant orphanage. Sitting in a restaurant facing the river here, you can enjoy your lunch while watching elephants being bathed and fed. A word of caution: food is overpriced and service average. This place is strictly for elephant aficionados only, for there are limited activities and it's questionable whether the place is worth the drive. If you have visited elephant camps in India, like the Dubare elephant camp in Coorg, for instance, you may find this relatively disappointing.

If you have ample time in Kandy, the Kandyan cultural dance show is a must-see. The one-hour spectacle features close to 10 forms of traditional dances, with dancers in colourful costumes swinging to drumbeats. While some dances resemble Indian dance forms like Mohiniyattam and Bharatanatyam, the music has the distinct feel of a chant. The cultural display ends with fire-dancing and fire-eating. Watching the performers walking on the rectangular spread of fire on the floor and swaying fire on their tongues gave us the goose bumps! We wrapped up the night by loitering lazily along Kandy Lake and watching the Buddha statue atop the hillock shining bright in the dark skies.



There are two ways to discover Sri Lanka: a cultural tour covering heritage sites like Sigiriya, Kandy and Anuradhapura or a beach tour. Indeed, this is a country to relish a little at a time and keep returning to

A trip to Sri Lanka cannot be complete without experiencing the idyllic beauty and heavenly tea of Nuwara Eliya. Located 80 km south of Kandy, Nuwara Eliya combines the scenic landscapes of Ooty and the green tea estate plantation richness of Mun-nar. As we rolled through the hairpin bends battling nausea, the chillness of the wind pierced through the car windows.

On the way, the Ramboda waterfall presented a breathtaking sight with silver strands of water splashing forcefully on the rocks below. The weather here is in sharp contrast to the rest of the country and we survived the chilly nights only because of a room heater. At an elevation of 6,100 sq ft, Nuwara Eliya hosts many other waterfalls, including the Lover's Leap waterfall, which is tucked away in a non-motorable area. We also spent some time at the beautiful Gregory Lake. But, harsh winds, clubbed with intermittent rain, put paid to our dreams of a boat ride on the lake.

Our next stop 5 km to the southeast, the picturesque Seetha Amman temple, set against a clear flowing stream, is close to the Hakgala Botanical Garden, which is supposed to be part of Ravana's fabled Ashoka Vatika. Structured in the traditional southern Indian style, the temple is in Seetha Eliya where Sita was said to be held captive by Ravana. On the nearby rocks, there are certain impressions that are said to be the footprints of Hanuman. A pack of starved monkeys offer a tumultuous welcome to the temple; be ready to donate some food and you will be left alone. Colourful paintings adorn the walls adjoining the roof of the temple depicting the *Ramayana*; Sita's capture by Ravana, Hanuman visiting the heartbroken Sita in Ashoka Vatika, an enraged Hanuman setting fire to Lanka are some of the interesting scenes. The sanctum sanctorum hosts the idols of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. There is also a separate one housing the idol of Hanuman embellished with a garland of betel leaves.

We brought the night to a close by visiting the Grand Indian Restaurant, which had a waiting time of an hour. There was also a signboard hanging outside with the words 'Sorry, we are full for the day', while the aromas of the Indian *thali* reached us right across the street as we were awaiting our turn. We were given to understand that Indian food, being similar to Sri Lankan cuisine, is well appreciated by the natives. In fact, the Sri Lankan staple of white rice and curry found its way even to our breakfast table on many days. Though the vegetables used are similar in the Sri Lankan gravy, it is spicier even for the Indian palate. In most street-side restaurants we saw curries heaped on top of a mound of rice, and not served separately. The Sri Lankan *paratha*, which finds favour with tourists, is not the stuffed North Indian variety but is quite similar to the Kerala *paratha*.

Beruwala was a welcome relaxation at the fag end of the tour after a lazy eight-hour drive from Nuwara Eliya.



Pinnawala elephant orphanage;
(Facing page) foot impressions believed
to be those of Hanuman at Seetha Amman
temple; Tooth Relic Temple in Kandy

The beach is easier to navigate even without knowing how to swim. There are other noteworthy beaches too like Bentota and Induruwa; the pick is entirely yours.

There are two ways to discover this country: a cultural tour covering heritage sites like Sigiriya, Dambulla, Kandy and Anuradhapura or a beach tour. To get a glimpse of both, you can follow an itinerary like ours, which predominantly wraps up the south-western parts of the country. Indeed, this is a country to relish a little at a time and keep returning to. Another recommended spot is Galle, which was once a Portuguese colony, located in the south; unfortunately, we had to give it a miss. Take time to plan your schedule considering the number of days at hand. Even if you hire an agent to plan your travel, your inputs will be important based on your choice of destinations. *Ayubowan!* ✨

FACT FILE

THINGS TO KNOW

- Homestays are reasonably priced, clean and maintained well for budget travellers. You can blend a mix of homestays, hotels and resorts into your itinerary.
- Sri Lankan food is a lot about rice and curry. The curry options for non-vegetarians are delightful. However, vegetarians are bound to have a hard time and it's useful to inform the hotel in advance. In almost every hotel we stayed, the chef accommodated vegetarian food on prior request.
- The entry fee for each location is exorbitant and priced differently for a local (free in most places), a SAARC national and a non-SAARC national. This is something to consider while planning your budget. The food is expensive too.
- Keep an umbrella handy as it can rain suddenly.
- If you have a fixed itinerary, it may be wise to hire a single cab throughout your visit. Hiring a cab

at each city can be tedious and works better for a backpacking, spontaneous traveller.

GETTING THERE

Flights to Colombo are quite affordable with the ticket price varying from ₹ 3,500 to ₹ 7,000 based on the city you are boarding from and the season.

WHERE TO STAY

Homestay Silvikris Villas,
Colombo: Tel: (00) 94-774984487/
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Email: silvikrisvillas@aol.com
Hotel Palms, Beruwala:
Tel: (00) 94-114334836;
Email: ressvh@sltnet.lk
Hotel Sigiriya, Sigiriya:
Tel: (00) 94-664930500;
Email: inquiries@serendibleisure.lk
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Tel: (00) 94-814475200/
(00) 94-812232429;
Email: reservations@thilankahotel.com, thilankah@sltnet.lk

What is 60?

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

The number of movies you have to catch up on.

The number of bad jokes you cracked last month.

The number of times you told your grandson
to get away from the TV set and get a life.

The number of places you have to travel to.

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CLASSIC reinvention

DANCE

For four centuries, Shakespeare's powerful play *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, has captivated the hearts of theatre aficionados.

Love, jealousy, betrayal, the tragic drama has it all and, therefore, still inspires artists. Kathakali exponent Sadanam Balakrishnan, 70, has given the classic a rhythmic-melodic twist in the tale by exploring a traditional dance interpretation.

"The concept of tragedy is new to Kathakali. Traditionally, there are only happy endings. To imbibe this new concept for a Kathakali dance drama was challenging," says Balakrishnan, who recomposed *Othello* and recently performed it in Mumbai. The innovation was not just limited to the performance; the entire feel of the dance-drama was different, right from the costumes to the beats. "For the first time, an ancient percussion instrument Timila was introduced in Kathakali. Another first is a stretch of dramatic silence. Suggestive changes were made to the costume, like a white costume for Desdemona, depicting purity and innocence, and blue and black for Othello and Iago." Looking at the magnificent response to this innovative work, Balakrishnan is coming up next with a new work, *Helen*, a Greek drama by Euripides. Way to go.

—Sai Prabha Kamath



Photo courtesy: NCPA

Literally yours

She finds a perfect balance between science and spirituality. At 62, **Dr Neelima Saikia** is a well-known scientist, who retired from the North-East Institute of Science & Technology, Jorhat, in 2011, as well as an Assamese author. Her science-based works for children have won her many a laurel. A scholar of Ramayani literature who writes under the pen name Dr Malinee, her Assamese novel *Kashi-Kanya Amba* (2010) was recently translated into English as *Amba: Princess of Kashi*. **Tapati Baruah Kashyap** spoke to Dr Saikia on the eve of her receiving Vikramasila University's Bidya Vachaspati Award for her contribution to Indian literature. Excerpts from the interview:

The *Ramayana* and scientific research are poles apart. How do you see both related to each other?

You may find it hard to believe, but the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have numerous important scientific elements; the *pushpak-rath* and the various *vahana* and missiles mentioned in them have a scientific orientation. These two great epics have several interesting political, economic, social and scientific aspects. Two of my major research papers cover different aspects of the *Ramayana*; one deals with the political sermon and diplomatic policies with special reference to Ayodhya, while the other is about Hanuman as a deity of wisdom and message. Moreover, my novels *Bideh Nandini*, *Yagnaseni*, *Mandodari*, *Kashi-Kanya Amba* and *Rishi-Kanya* are all based on the sufferings of different women characters drawn from the epics.

Could you explain the *Ramayana* from a scientific point of view?

Like most Indian children, I grew up listening to the fascinating tales of the

Ramayana and *Mahabharata*, which, I feel, are still a part of our culture. When I was mature enough to understand the underlying meaning, I could read the same with a scientific zeal. At present, being a scientist, I have begun to discover the scientific elements in them. The present generation has been talking about biodiversity and herbal

LITERATURE



Tapati Baruah Kashyap

medicines; in fact, we find references to biodiversity and herbal medicines like *mrita-sanjivani*, *vishalya-karani*, *shandhani* and *subarnakarani* in the *Ramayana*.

Being a resource person of the International Ramayana Research Institute, could you throw some light on the interest shown by other countries?

The *Ramayana* has been translated into several international languages. I am really amazed to witness the inquisitiveness for *Ramayana* studies outside India. The way scholars in Thailand, Indonesia, USA and other countries put their queries vividly reflects not only their liking for this

study, but also their in-depth knowledge and research on the epic.

The *Ramayana* has had a strong impact on communities across the subcontinent. How strongly is it embedded in Assam's heritage?

Though many students abroad are pursuing the *Ramayana* as part of their studies, in India, particularly Assam, there are only a few who have taken to it. Moreover, during my interactions during international conferences on the *Ramayana*, I realised that people from nations like America, the UK, Italy, Poland, Indonesia, Russia and France have the perpetual spirit of studying the epic. Surprisingly, in our country, this consciousness is yet to gain momentum.

You have also ventured into the world of children's literature....

My basic intention of writing for children is to help them develop a scientific temperament and mindset. All the eight books I have written for children are about science and environment that affect our daily life. *Sadhur Cholere Vigyan* (1995) is a collection of stories that talks about various aspects of science. And *Aamaar Parivesh Dushita Hoi Ahise* (1994) and *Aaamaar Parivesh* (2008) are about the environment, pollution, forests and trees.

How do you find time to write amid your scientific research engagements?

Where there is a will, there is a way. After retirement, I get enough time to pursue my passion. When I am in the laboratory, I devote my time and energy only to scientific research. I have an inner urge to write and cannot do away with it. Life has many ups and downs; the moment I feel low, I set a goal for myself and work to fulfil it.



Photographs by Chennai Pix

Tune in

Vinita Nayar discovers a treasure trove at the little-known Development Centre for Musical Instruments in Chennai

In a small lane off Chennai's busy arterial road Anna Salai, tucked away from the glare of the public eye, is the Development Centre for Musical Instruments or Sangita Vidyalaya. A part of the Ministry of Textiles, this small, obscure place is a treasure trove of rare musical instruments. Surprisingly, not many from Chennai even know it exists!

The centre was founded in 1956 by musicologist P Sambamoorthy to cre-

ate awareness about musical instruments, develop them and keep their use alive. Though the place has an intriguing collection, predominantly Indian, there is a fine selection of Western instruments as well. R Chandran, deputy director of the centre, says, "We have collected these instruments from all over the world and are preserving them as part of our heritage. The centre is open to the public." He rushes to add, "However, we are not into any commercial activity and do not sell instruments."

HERITAGE

A collection of around 300 instruments is on display, some are in glass cabinets and a few are in the open, with signboards barring visitors from touching them. Also on display are some beautiful miniatures and replicas created by craftsman S Gopal who has been working at the centre for over 25 years. The 53 year-old can play these instruments and recreate them. He acquired the skill from his father V Somvachary, a traditional veena craftsman who worked for Sambamoorthy. "When the centre

was established, there were 60 artisans; they created and sold musical instruments. As time passed, this activity dwindled as no one was interested in learning the craft. As a result, the number of artisans came down." Today, Gopal is the sole artisan at the centre; he has created over 100 instruments. "Depending on the size and the craftsmanship involved, it takes one to two months to create an instrument," says Gopal, admiring his labour of love. All the instruments are handmade; the only tool he uses is the lathe machine.



Craftsman Gopal plays Surya Pirai, a rare percussion instrument

Gopal proudly shows around his workplace, telling us about some priceless instruments and playing some for us. The collection is indeed eclectic. There are a couple of fascinating percussion instruments like Chandra Pirai and Surya Pirai. "These are played in small village temples," Gopal tells us. A thin parchment is strained over the iron ring of the instrument, which is connected to a handle with an extended arm. The person playing the instrument ties it over his forehead and plays it with a stick. The Surya Pirai is played during the morning puja and the Chandra Pirai during the evening one. Pranav Ghanta, a

These replicas have travelled around the globe and have been displayed at educational exhibitions. The myriad sounds the instruments produce give us an insight into the world of music

big bell made with *pancha loha* (five metals), is rarely found anywhere; he

gently runs a stick inside and the bell reverberates with the primordial sound, *Om*.

Any visitor would be overwhelmed by the collection of veenas—Rudra veena, Narayana veena, matchya veena—all made from an assortment of elements like bamboo splinters, plywood, gourd, red cedar and more. The Narayana veena has been developed by the Sangita Vidyalaya and is modelled on the Koto of Japan, combining the harp, chitra veena and tampura. Phono violin, a European violin, has a silver cone, as

in a gramophone player, but is smaller and more slender; when the violin is played, sound emanates from the cone. There are also prototypes of the walking stick violin—dating back to the early 19th century—and a walking stick guitar.

These replicas and miniatures have travelled around the globe and have been displayed at many educational exhibitions. The sheer variety and myriad sounds the instruments produce give us an insight into the ancient world of music. For connoisseurs, a visit to the centre is an true eye-opener.

SHAKAAL RETURNS!

After almost two decades, veteran actor Kulbhushan Kharbanda returned to Mumbai's thriving theatre scene last month. At the Prithvi Theatre Festival, he played an ageing writer coming to terms with his dreams, ideals, loneliness and tangled relationships in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Atmakatha*. "It's originally a thought-provoking Marathi play adapted in Hindi by Vinay Sharma," he says. "The play was received very well in Kolkata, Delhi and Jaipur." But what kept him away for so long? "No great offers were coming my way," he tells us candidly. "What's worse, I fell from a horse and broke my leg. When Vinay Sharma approached me, I was bedridden, but eventually agreed." Now back in shape, he has signed a few movies and is game for theatre as well.



AND THEREBY HANGS A TALE

Arunachal Pradesh is home to different tribes and ethnicity. Their animist culture boasts unique customs like polygamous living in longhouses, atypical forms of interaction between the individual and his clan, blood vengeance, animal sacrifice and even ritual forms of head hunting. Author and photographer **Peter van Ham**'s 10 years of painstaking travel and research in this mountainous region has resulted in the documentation of their ethnic plurality, customs and rituals in *Arunachal: Peoples, Arts and Adornments in India's Eastern Himalayas* (Niyogi Books; ₹ 2,495; 236 pages). We present some images from the book

Warlike traditions have survived in many villages of Arunachal's Tirap district





The Apa Tani body ideal of female beauty developed in accordance with their isolated geo-social setting. Unique, it includes the insertion of nose plugs that gradually increase in size

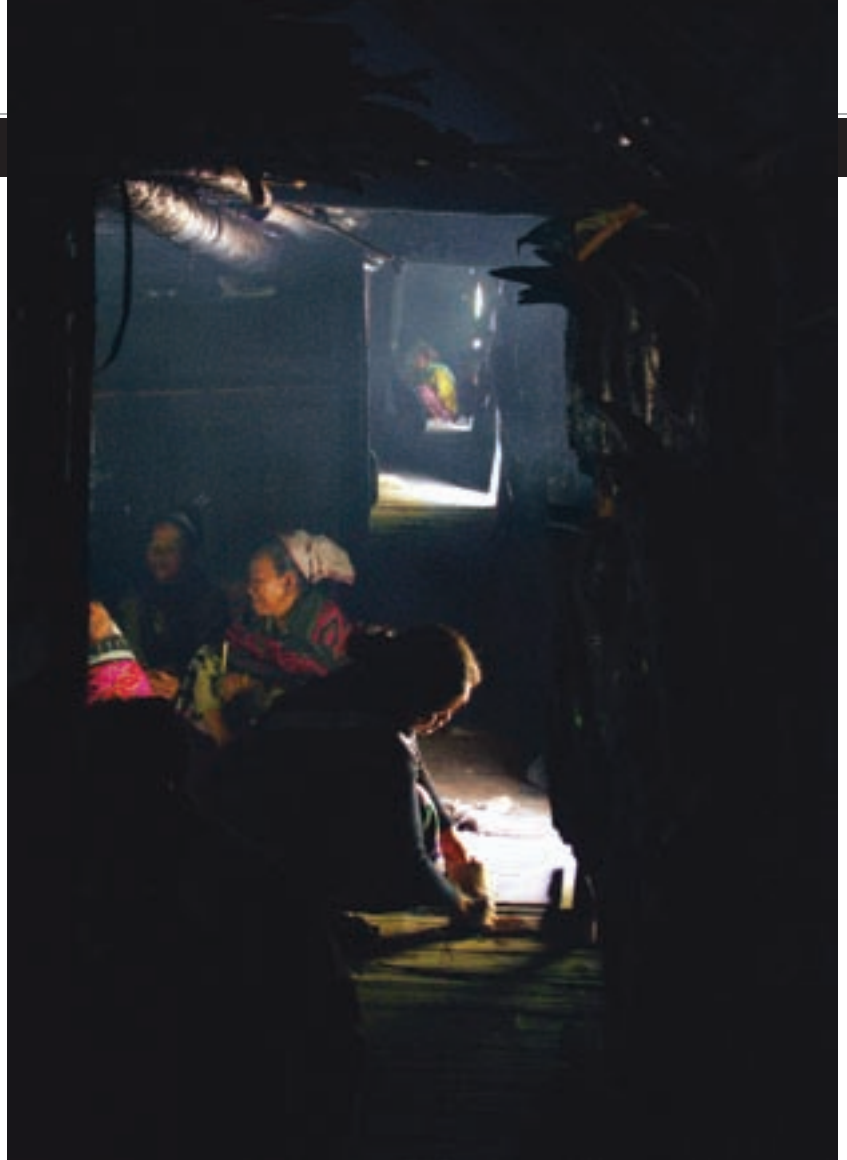




(Clockwise from top) Among the Maga groups such as the Wancho and Nocte, adornment is immediately linked to social status, which again is traditionally related to fertility power that a certain person has gained through prowess in headhunting; pride and joy mark the face of this elderly Digaru-Mishmi lady as women are held in high esteem in Arunachal Pradesh and enjoy a social position equal to the men; Wancho men of Nginu performing a ritual dance in the morning fog before setting out on a fish hunt



(Clockwise from right) Commonly, a Kaman Mishmi house is divided into as many sections as there are parts of the extended family occupying it, the centre of each section being an individual fireplace; among the polygamous Idu Mishmi, longhouses are often occupied by a householder with his various wives, the number of whom is indicated by the bamboo sticks hung on the house's outside wall (inset)





(Above) A Nyishi meeting of negotiations in session, the main spokesmen today being the villages' *gaonbura* (middlemen between the village and the government) in red jackets; Adi Minyong men from Yeksi/East Siang wear Tibetan woollen coats called *chuba* and long swords in half-open bamboo scabbards. Their cane helmets are adorned with boars' tusks and black fibres as well as yaks' tails, to which chicken feathers are attached





Hitting the headlines

Raj Kanwar writes about breaking news in the pre-Internet era and his multiple innings in journalism

It may be unthinkable in this age of laptops and smart phones with in-built audio-video recording devices where journos live and break news at breakneck speed, but the job of news gathering in the pre-Internet era was very different; it was leisurely and laidback and so was reporting and transmission. In those days of austere journalism, most newspapers would barely have half a dozen or so reporters and a couple of special correspondents on their staff at headquarters. For gathering news from other parts of the country, newspapers would make do with part-time correspondents like me called 'stringers'. Some newspapers paid a fixed monthly retainer while others paid retainer plus 'lineage'; that meant that you would be paid per column inch of printed news. A staff reporter in other towns and provinces was unheard of then.

The now-extinct telegram, which we used to communicate news stories to the world, had its own aura and romance. The humble piece of paper with pasted strips of news sent by Morse, alphabet by alphabet, called the 'Press Telegram' played a predominant role in the pre-Internet era; it was a prerequisite for a correspondent, as that was the principal medium to transmit his stories. The other mode was to send the news by post that would typically be delivered the following day in most metros, thanks to the efficient postal services at that time. Even the pace of life those days was relaxed and matched the speed of news transmission.

Thus, it was as a stringer of three mainstream newspapers in 1953 that I learned the nitty-gritty of writing

telegraphic news, keeping in view some essential points that would affect its length and, consequently, the telegraphic charges. A 'Press Bearing Authority' by the postmaster general entitled me to send the telegraphic dispatches without any prepayment; the tab was picked by the newspaper at the end of the month. Telegraphic charges were calculated on the number of words in a telegram;

As was his wont, Nehru delivered the most important point as he concluded his speech. I instantly recognised that to be the 'intro' to the story as I rushed to the shop where I kept my Royal Baby typewriter

a word was not to exceed 10 characters. Thus I became accustomed to using smaller words. Yet, despite being particular about smaller words, I did not penny pinch and wrote full and clear sentences, unmindful of the cost involved.

A new 'journalese' jargon had by then come into vogue as Morse code only conveyed English alphabets. For instance, we wrote 'STOP' for a dot and expressed punctuations in words like 'COMMA', 'DASH', 'UNDASH', 'APOSTROPHE', etc. We wrote 'PARA' when beginning a new paragraph. And at the conclusion of the message, we always put 'EOM', meaning 'end of message'.

Dehradun then was a tiny blip on the country's political map; yet, along with Mussoorie, it had acquired a formidable reputation as an important news centre thanks to the frequent visits of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and other VVIPs. Dehradun, in fact, was Nehru's favourite destination and he would come here often on official business or simply to rest and relax. Indira Gandhi too would come here to be with her sons Sanjay and Rajiv, who were respectively at Welham's and Doon School.

I would either hand write or type the news and even do a count of the words in the telegram and put the total count atop it; such a gesture was much appreciated as the telegraph man did not have to count the words. There used to be a good deal of bonhomie between journalists and the telegraph office staff; we were offered a cup of tea or a cigarette depending on the mood or pace of the hour. Thus I would always get preference over the visiting journalists from other parts of the country and even from abroad. Being the youngest and the most educated among the handful of journalists in Dehradun then, I received an extra courteous nod of recognition and greetings from all and sundry.

This bonhomie paid rich dividends on many occasions. Once in the late 1950s or thereabouts, Prime Minister Nehru addressed a public meeting at Dehradun's Parade Ground; a press party had accompanied him from New Delhi. There was invariably a competition among the visiting journalists as to who would be the first to send his telegram; and in order to be the first, they all left the meeting virtually en bloc even before Nehru had

concluded his speech. I waited till the very end. As was his wont, Nehru delivered the most important point as he concluded his speech. I instantly recognised that to be the 'intro' or 'lead' to the story I wrote in my mind as I rushed to my cousin's dry-cleaning shop nearby where I kept my Royal Baby typewriter. As I finished typing, I phoned the person in charge at the telegraph office and he was ready to give priority to my copy. The following morning, my paper carried Nehru's concluding remarks in big headlines, while most special correspondents were left wondering how it happened.

Likewise, in covering the biannual Passing-Out Parade at Dehradun's Indian Military Academy, I would beat the visiting correspondents by the same stratagem and my story would invariably be the first to leave the Dehradun telegraph office. In fact, we stringers those days feared the news agencies more than our rival newspapers as our news editors would use the agency's story if received earlier, in order to catch the Dak edition. All in all, the old outmoded system admirably suited me as it gave me a priority each and every time.

My career in journalism, however, took a turn for the better when *The Indian Express* appointed me its staff reporter in Delhi. There, I worked in a ramshackle building in the Mori Gate area of old Delhi; there were just three old Remington typewriters for six of us reporters. I really liked the reporting job that gave me many more opportunities than I had found in Dehradun. In those days, we commuted by buses or rode bicycles; as the junior-most reporter, I soon made my presence felt and the then editor Bhaskar Rao started giving me plum assignments, much to the envy of my seniors. But I did not stay there for more than two years and returned to Dehradun to look after my ailing



Raj Kanwar and sister Kamla with Pandit Nehru in 1959

father. This was the end of my first innings in journalism.

In my late 20s, I was not getting any younger. My father and older brothers did not fancy the work I was doing and insisted I take up a permanent job. To satisfy them, I took up jobs in the Himachal Pradesh government and later in ONGC, but gave those up within four years. For some time I worked in Calcutta with a private company as its advertising manager but that too did not suit my taste buds. I returned to Dehradun in 1964 where I started a weekly newspaper called *Witness*. Even though the weekly was popular, it was a losing business. By then, I had

married and become the father of two children. The *Witness* died a natural death in 1969. That was the end of my second innings in journalism.

With no other option in sight and desperation mounting, I became an entrepreneur with fingers crossed and a prayer on my lips. God was great and within two years the business started giving lucrative returns. In 2000, when I turned 70, I said enough is enough and retired as the chairman of the company in order to return to my first love of writing and reading. And now in my twilight years, I began my third innings as a journalist—let us see how long this third and final innings lasts.

A journalist-turned-entrepreneur-turned-writer from Dehradun, Raj Kanwar regularly contributes articles and columns to several national newspapers

The joy of giving

In keeping with the season and spirit of goodwill, we bring you an extract from Pearl S Buck's short story *Christmas Day in the Morning*, published in 1955

He woke suddenly and completely. It was four o'clock, the hour at which his father had always called him to get up and help with the milking. Strange how the habits of his youth clung to him still! Fifty years ago, and his father had been dead for thirty years, and yet he waked at four o'clock in the morning. He had trained himself to turn over and go to sleep, but this morning it was Christmas, he did not try to sleep.

Why did he feel so awake tonight? He slipped back in time, as he did so easily nowadays. He was fifteen years old and still on his father's farm. He loved his father. He had not known it until one day a few days before Christmas, when he had overheard what his father was saying to his mother.

"Mary, I hate to call Rob in the mornings. He's growing so fast and he needs his sleep. If you could see how he sleeps when I go in to wake him up! I wish I could manage alone."

When he heard these words, something in him spoke: his father loved him! He had never thought of that before, taking for granted the tie of their blood. Neither his father nor his mother talked about loving their children—they had no time for such things. There was always so much to do on the farm.

Now that he knew his father loved him, there would be no loitering in the mornings and having to be called again. He got up after that, stumbling blindly in his sleep, and pulled on his clothes, his eyes shut, but he got up.

And then on the night before Christmas, that year when he was fifteen, he lay for a few minutes thinking about

the next day. They were poor, and most of the excitement was in the turkey they had raised themselves and mince pies his mother made. His sisters sewed presents and his mother and father always bought him something he needed, not only a warm jacket, maybe, but something more, such as a book. And he saved and bought them each something, too.



He wished, that Christmas when he was fifteen, he had a better present for his father. As usual he had gone to the ten-cent store and bought a tie. It had seemed nice enough until he lay thinking the night before Christmas. He looked out of his attic window, the stars were bright.

"Dad," he had once asked when he was a little boy, "What is a stable?"

"It's just a barn," his father had replied, "like ours."

Then Jesus had been born in a barn, and to a barn the shepherds had come....

The thought struck him like a silver dagger. Why should he not give his father a special gift too, out there in the

barn? He could get up early, earlier than four o'clock, and he could creep into the barn and get all the milking done. He'd do it alone, milk and clean up, and then when his father went in to start the milking he'd see it all done. And he would know who had done it. He laughed to himself as he gazed at the stars. It was what he would do, and he musn't sleep too sound.

He must have waked twenty times, scratching a match to look each time to look at his old watch—midnight, and half past one, and then two o'clock.

At a quarter to three he got up and put on his clothes. He crept downstairs, careful of the creaky boards, and let himself out. The cows looked at him, sleepy and surprised. It was early for them, too.

He had never milked all alone before, but it seemed almost easy. He kept thinking about his father's surprise.

The minutes were endless—ten, fifteen, he did not know how many—and he heard his father's footsteps again. The door opened and he lay still.

"Rob!"

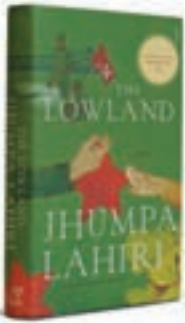
His father was laughing, a queer sobbing sort of laugh.

"Thought you'd fool me, did you?" His father was standing by his bed, feeling for him, pulling away the cover.

"It's for Christmas, Dad!"

He found his father and clutched him in a great hug. He felt his father's arms go around him.

Fate and will



THE LOWLAND

BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

RANDOM; ₹ 499; 339 PAGES

Set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement in the 1980s, *The Lowland* traces the lives of two brothers, inseparable yet dissimilar. Dwelling on Maoist insurgency that gripped and ripped through much of the Northeast in the wake of the brutal oppression of peasants in the Naxalbari area of Darjeeling district, Jhumpa Lahiri weaves a masterly novel of fate and will. Epic in its scope and nature, this story, which spans four generations of the Mitras, is also about exile and return. Born just 15 months apart, Subhash and Udayan spend their childhood putting together short-wave radios and sneaking into the tony Tollygunge club in the Calcutta neighbourhood they grow up in. They are constantly together and often mistaken for the other. But as they mature, egged on by their vastly varying temperament, they forge different paths. While Subhash, the passive and more conventional elder brother, moves to America to pursue oceanographic studies, Udayan, his fiery alter ego, drifts towards the egalitarian and idealistic world of the Naxalite movement. Consumed by the radical ideology, Udayan progresses from speeches and leaflets to knives and bombs, even plotting the killing of a policeman. But while the brothers pursue their dreams across geographical distances, they stay connected.

The revolution in the first half only serves as a catalyst for the unfolding of the more sedate and sober American experience in the second half. In the process, the reader acquaints himself with Lahiri's pet themes of alienation, discord, dislocation, the immigrant experience and love and loss, which formed the framework of the much acclaimed *The Namesake* and the *Interpreter of Maladies*. The story is also about love that endures long past death, as Udayan's widow Gauri discovers even as she becomes Subhash's wife. Gauri, who unwittingly becomes a pawn in the Naxalite conspiracy, tries to purge her past by cutting off her hair and shredding her saris, but the attempt remains merely superficial, pushing her further down the path of alienation. Just as Gauri finds it impossible to break free from the memories of Udayan, Subhash is forced to be in his brother's shadows even when he's lost to the world. Suspenseful and intimate, the story develops through constant flashbacks and non-sequential narrative of all the major characters. In the end, *The Lowland* is not about politics or brotherly love, but choices and their far-reaching implications.

—Srirekha Pillai

Back in time



THE LUMINARIES

BY ELEANOR CATTON

PENGUIN; ₹ 799; 848 PAGES

The youngest winner in Man Booker history, 28 year-old Eleanor Catton is adept at storytelling and unfolding plot lines, a fact that is amply exemplified in her award-winning novel. It is more than just a whodunit; it's an epic creation that delves into a period that has lost popularity in today's day and age—and a metaphysical storytelling exercise.

Set in 19th century New Zealand, when gold-diggers abounded and gold towns sprung up everywhere in previously uncharted lands of the world, the book starts off with a weather-beaten man, Walter Moody, who stumbles into a hotel parlour (in the parlance of those times) where 12 apparently un-associated men are in attendance. He figures that he has interrupted a meeting of conspiring men, and wins their confidence by nearly telling them the horror he had witnessed aboard his sea journey. Eventually, each of the men begin recounting what they know—and what they've so far hidden from the others—about two disjointed events that take the town by fire: one involving Anna Wetherell, a prostitute found nearly dead, and the disappearance of the wealthy and influential Emery Staines. As the story goes on, it is increasingly evident that the two events are connected and each man in the room is unwittingly a part of the big story too.

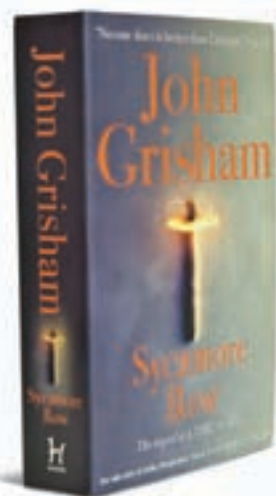
The narrative shifts timelines and character perspectives smoothly, so that there are times when we know something the characters don't, and at other times we are on the edge of our nerves waiting for a single fact to reveal itself so that the entire ball of yarn gets untangled.

Another interesting aspect is the astrological angle. Each of the men represents one of the 12 zodiac signs. Even the chapters are titled such—Mars in Libra, Venus in Capricorn—depicting beforehand the characters that are involved and the nature of their deeds in that chapter.

The characters are all from different walks of life, including a whore-monger, a lawyer, a banker, a priest, an opium trader, and are all either running after or away from something but, in the end, get caught up in a wildly notorious conspiracy. And, to top it all, Catton's novel is written in a Victorian voice, keeping true to its times, complete with Dickensian character descriptions.

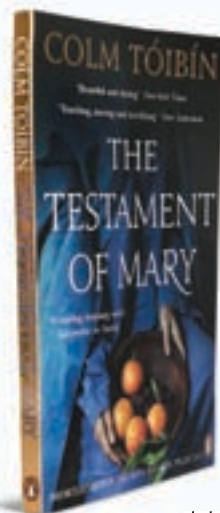
—Neeti Vijaykumar

BETWEEN THE LINES



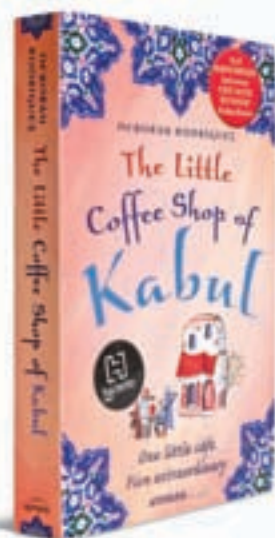
The master of the legal thriller **John Grisham** is back with a sequel to *A Time to Kill*, which launched his career nearly 25 years ago. **SYCAMORE ROW** (Hachette; ₹ 399; 550 pages) is replete with suspense and sudden twists, classic Grisham style. There is never a dull moment in this thrilling story of the elusive search for justice in a small town, Ford County. Seth Hubbard, a wealthy man dying of lung cancer, leaves a new will before hanging himself. The handwritten will leaves 90 per cent of his vast fortune to his poor, black housemaid and a suicide note names Jake Brigance, who he has never met before, as attorney for his estate. What follows is a bitter battle by relatives and unscrupulous lawyers contesting the will. What made Hubbard take this last-minute decision? Did painkillers affect his testamentary capacity? Why did he choose to kill himself in the woods of Sycamore Row? Grisham is on strong home turf in this legal fiction that exposes old racial tensions and court scenes in a powerful way. The tale, told in a simple, crisp manner, makes for an enjoyable read with a surprise ending.

Beautiful and daring, **THE TESTAMENT OF MARY** (Penguin; ₹ 299; 104 pages) is a creative reimagining of the life of Mary of Nazareth. Defiant in her grief, Mary, who is living in exile after being smuggled away following the crucifixion, refuses to tell the gospel writer what he wants to hear, or believe the truth as he and other followers of Jesus see it. In this novella, **Colm Tóibín** humanises Mary and gives us a mother that one identifies with—not worships. As the myth of the Christ grows around her, Mary zealously clings to the truth. Here is a mother whose son is estranged from her; a mother who



is fearful to stay through the crucifixion because her life may also be in danger; and as for turning water into wine, she feels there were containers with wine and water and “in all the shouting and confusion no one knew what happened”. Throughout the novella, Jesus is not named: he’s merely “my son” and “him”. Her grief is so real that it touches you. And as blasphemous as it may sound, as you reach the end of the novella, Mary is dabbling in idol worship in an attempt to come to terms with her grief. Powerful and poignant, Mary’s story is one of loss, not redemption and salvation.

Deborah Rodrigues brings two unlikely genres together in her new book, **THE LITTLE COFFEE SHOP OF KABUL** (Hachette; ₹ 399; 408 pages): war and chick-lit. In this fictional account set in what is touted to be the most dangerous place on Earth, five very different women meet up incidentally in a coffee shop and reveal their innermost secrets. In this ensemble, the main protagonist is Sunny, an American who owns and runs the coffee shop called Kabul Coffee House. The pick of the eclectic mix is Halajan, an old woman with a secret affair that could shatter the ideal that has been foisted after the Taliban takeover. Isabel and Candice are also foreigners; one’s a journalist in search of her big story, while the other is a wealthy altruist who has left her husband because of her intense and somewhat irrational love for an Afghani man. And then there’s Yazmina, a married teenager who was abandoned on the streets, pregnant and desolate. The women realise their lives are in jeopardy owing to Yazmina’s husband’s powerful connections. The book fits perfectly into the Westerner’s view of the country. There are no real insights, except that it draws attention to the violence against women through Yazmina’s story. Written in a dramatic, sunny tone, how much of it is based on real people the writer met during her stay there is unclear because of the static quality of the characters. However, it does give us a foreigner’s perspective on foreigners living in Kabul, making it worth a one-time, warm-hearted read.





A rich HARVEST

Attaché and acclaimed author **Navtej Sarna's** understated mien is an extension of his personality that has dexterously struck a balance between his professional life and his passion for writing. Having served in Moscow, Warsaw, Thimpu, Geneva, Tehran and Washington DC, he is at present India's ambassador to Israel and has the distinction of being the longest-serving spokesperson at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India. Blessed with a literary parentage, Navtej's flair for writing showcased itself with his debut novel *We Weren't Lovers Like That* in 2003, a work that was translated into Hindi and Arabic. This was followed by *The Book of Nanak* the same year and *The Exile*, based on the life of Duleep Singh, the last Maharaja of Lahore, and his son Ranjit Singh in 2008. **Suparna-Saraswati Puri** caught up with the author at the Chandigarh Literary Fest for a tête-à-tête on *Savage Harvest*, a recent translation of his father Mohinder Singh Sarna's stories on Partition.

Please share your experiences while translating *Savage Harvest*.

I have always wanted to translate my father's short stories into English and a couple of them that are now in the book were done a long time back and appeared in journals and anthologies. I thought that such powerful stories, which were well known in Punjabi, needed a larger audience. Translation was the only, though not a perfect, method of doing so. In fact, I had asked him when he was alive to mark out the Partition stories that I could translate for a collection and these were the ones he had ticked. The actual process was an intimate and warm one. At times, I would feel he was reading them aloud as I translated.

How has the creative journey been so far?

Each of my books has been a first of its kind for me. *We Weren't Lovers Like That* was a literary, free-flowing novel, a sort of dialogue of the soul with itself. *The Exile* was a fully crafted novel based on history, involving detailed research. The writing process had to be far more controlled to remain true to different historical characters and facts. *Zafranama* and *Savage Harvest* have both been translations, one in poetry and the other in prose, one from Persian and the other from Punjabi. Here, I have had to stay in the shadows and simply try to bring out best as I could

what the authors of these works had to say. And *Winter Evenings* is a collection of short stories, an entirely different genre of writing.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

It has to be from the subject itself. If I have to spend years with a subject I am writing about, it must be something I feel strongly about, something I feel needs to be written about, or needs to be written about in a particular way.

How does your career's trajectory contribute to the author in you?

Well, the two trajectories have matched well and often run in parallel. My career has helped me immensely to enrich my writing; it has helped me gain insights into different cultures and acquire familiarity with landscapes. It has allowed me to travel to all sorts of places and meet interesting people. All this feeds into my writing. I have never really seen my career as ever coming in the way of my writing. In fact, I would say it has been a most useful trigger.

Given your professional preoccupation, where and how does your literary pursuit find space?

That is always a difficult balance to achieve; there are good weeks and bad weeks. Whatever time I can find beyond my professional work goes to my reading and writing.

Sometimes one tries to find windows here and there. I have never really had a long free spell of time, except a three-month period of leave in 2002 when I wrote *The Book of Nanak*. The rest of my work has all been done in parallel.

Being part of a literary family, how did your childhood shape up?

It is always a pleasant exercise to reminisce about my childhood. Along with my sister, I grew up mostly in Delhi and Dehradun. My father Mohinder Singh Sarna was a member of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service, so we moved when he did. He was also a highly regarded Punjabi writer of short stories, novels and epic poetry. My mother has also written several collections of poetry and short stories and has been busy translating major English works into Punjabi. So it was a very literary-minded family and that is how our best hours were spent: talking books.

AUTHORSPEAK



Faith first

Every breath of life is an embodiment of God, says **Sri Chinmoy**

Life is God's transcendental blessing to His creation. What is more important than God's blessing? God's concern. What is more important than God's concern? The absolute fulfilment of God's will.

Life is man's experience of wisdom and faith. Wisdom without faith is the bondage of futility. Faith without wisdom is the smile of stupidity. Faith and wisdom can go together. Faith awakens us to see the Truth. Wisdom helps us to live the Truth.

The outer world is a play of conflict between the fleeting and destructive thoughts of man's mind and the constructive and lasting will of man's soul. The inner world is a play of harmony between the mind's surrender and the soul's acceptance.

Life is will. There is only one will that mediates between God and man. That will is at once the descending cry of concern and compassion and the ascending cry of love and helplessness.

Life is man's conscious attempt to see God face to face.

First try. Then cry. If necessary.
First give. Then take. If necessary.
First run. Then stop. If necessary.
First be the doer. Then be the talker. If necessary.

Thought, human thought, rules the world. But mere thinking is of no avail.

When I think, God is my frustration.
When I cry, God is my consolation.
When I try, God is my salvation.
When I will, God is my illumination.

We must love God first if we really love life, for God is not only the source but the very breath of life. Love of God costs nothing, absolutely nothing, but is worth much. Our



mind knows this truth. Our heart practises this truth. Our soul embodies this truth.


The ultimate aim of the human life is liberation. Liberation is the choice of man and the grace of God. Liberation is man's total freedom and God's constant responsibility.

You cry because you have no plans to make your life meaningful and successful. He cries because all his plans have come to a lame conclusion. I cry because I do not want to have any plans. What I want is to be seated all the time at the feet of the Supreme, who is at once the Vision and the Reality.

My life has three doctors: Dr Love, Dr Devotion and Dr Surrender. Dr Love cures my mind's narrowness. Dr Devotion cures my heart's impurity. Dr Surrender cures my life's ignorance.

My life has three Gods: God the Existence, God the Consciousness and God the Bliss. God the Existence eternally lives in me. God the Consciousness constantly grows in me. God the Bliss immortally lives with me.

Excerpted from Eastern Light For The Western Mind (<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/>). Sri Chinmoy (1931-2007) was an Indian guru, author, artist, poet and musician who taught meditation in the West

A photograph of an elderly man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark shirt, sitting in a pond. He is smiling and gesturing with his hands towards a young girl sitting on a wooden dock. The girl has dark hair and is wearing a white dress, looking up at the man with a joyful expression. The water is dark blue with ripples, and the dock is made of wooden planks.

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Hot wheels!

It is Batman's vehicle of choice. In his alter ego as Bruce Wayne, the American billionaire playboy, industrialist and philanthropist, the caped crusader prefers to drive around in the latest and swankiest Lamborghini. Besides upping the glamour quotient in Christopher Nolan's *Batman* film trilogy, today, the Lamborghini is also favoured by celebrities like Pierce Brosnan, David Beckham, Nicolas Cage and Cristiano Ronaldo. However, the whole mystique of the sleek and stylish car grows from the story of its genesis 50 years ago in a small Italian town, Sant'Agata.

The story goes that Ferruccio Lamborghini, who owned a tractor business

in Italy, was annoyed with the number of times his Ferrari would end up in the workshop. Following an argument with Enzo Ferrari, Lamborghini, with his talent for mechanical engineering, decided to get to the basics, dismantling the insides of his Ferrari. To his glee, he found that many of the parts of the super car were common to the insides of his tractors. Without wasting any further time, he developed the first Lamborghini, the now legendary 350 GTV prototype, just in time for the 1963 Turin Auto Show. With over 130 bookings, the sleekest car to enter the market scripted its first success story. Though many successful models followed, it's probably Miura (1966), a car truly ahead of its time, which made everyone sit up and



take notice of this automobile maker from Italy.

In 1973, plagued by the continuing oil crisis, a disenchanted Lamborghini sold all his stock to a Swiss investor. But to this day, the company, now under the ownership of Audi AG, retains Lamborghini's name in memory of a man who had the skill and determination to turn his dream into reality and take on established names like Ferrari, Jaguar and Maserati.

Indeed, the raging bull on the logo of the car is a tribute to Ferruccio Lamborghini, whose zodiac sign was Taurus. It's also representative of Lamborghini's passion for bullfighting. Incidentally, most of the Lamborghini car models derive their name from famous Spanish bulls like Murciélago, which took 24 stabs, or Reventón, which killed a famous bullfighter in the 1940s. Even the legendary Miura is named after a ranch on which some of Spain's most successful fighting bulls were bred. And just like the raging bull, Automobili Lamborghini has fought its way through thick and thin to stay in the race.



THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: DECEMBER 1963

- On 3 December, the Warren Commission began its investigation into the assassination of former US president John F Kennedy.
- On 8 December, a lightning strike caused Pan Am Flight 214 to crash near Elkton, Maryland, killing 81 people.
- On 25 December, Walt Disney released *The Sword in the Stone*, an animated picture on King Arthur's boyhood.
- On 26 December, The Beatles released *I want to hold your hand* and *I saw her standing there* in the US, marking the beginning of Beatlemania.

Nasty effect

n. The polarisation of opinions on a particular topic caused by exposure to uncivil commentary about that topic.

Example. *Science* magazine reported on the effects of nasty comments about science stories online: Not only do they fail to improve debate, they also make people stupider. The **nasty effect**, as the researchers call it, has a polarising effect in that readers react by becoming more entrenched in their previous opinions, whether positive or negative.

—Stephen Marche,

"There are no saints online," Esquire, 1 May 2013

“The reason grandchildren and grandparents get along so well is that they have a common enemy.

—American humorist, writer and journalist Sam Levenson (1911-1980)

ZOMBIE CAR

n. A car that starts itself randomly; a car with a computer system under the control of a malicious hacker; an abandoned car.

Example. An increasing number of vehicles have been abandoned by their owners at roadsides and in car parks, leading to complaints from residents in many communities and housing estates. The vehicles include scrap cars and vehicles that are damaged beyond repair. Traffic police said residents can report the **zombie cars** to them and authorities will either contact the owners or tow the cars away.

—“At a glance,” *Shenzhen Daily*, 11 April 2013

Hyperdensification

n. An extreme increase in the density of an urban area.

Example. As far as ‘pooling parking,’ I agree that the concept has merit as an interim solution while the city transitions to **hyperdensification**; however, it must be supplemented with major ordinance changes.

—*Quantum*, “Comment of the day: Too many parking spaces,” *Swamplot*, 2 August 2013

VERTICAL SPRAWL

n. The unplanned addition of a large number of high-rise buildings in a relatively small area, leading to problems with traffic, parking, and infrastructure.

Example. Using an aerial image of the so-called **vertical sprawl**, high-rise contemporary apartments of Shanghai as an example, Dittmar explored the negative trend of standardising and effectively dehumanising urban dwellings—lessening culture and quality of life.

—Caitlin Schudalla, “Conference at OU examines national living solutions,” *The Norman Transcript*, 4 April 2013

Undownloading

pp. The deletion of an ebook or similar download by the original provider of that download.

Example. Highlighted on Techdirt by Glyn Moody, **undownloading** happens when your ebook provider discovers that you’ve made the mistake of travelling where it has no legal right to sell you books, so it decides to rip the books off your device.

—Matt Asay, “Rise of the renter class: In a Spotify world, need we own anything?,” *ReadWrite*, 31 October 2013

Airpocalypse

n. Extreme air pollution caused by a combination of smog, dust, and weather.

Example. Following the **airpocalypse** in the city of Harbin this week, a question now hovers in the minds of many residents across northern China. It was summed up in a headline that ran on Thursday with a commentary in *People’s Daily*, the Communist Party mouthpiece: “In this season of central heating, will PM 2.5 drop?”

—Edward Wong, “With winter ahead, can China’s smog get anything but worse?,” *The New York Times*, 24 October 2013

Hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia

n. The fear of the number 666.

Example. A high school cross country runner in Kentucky didn't run in the regional meet on Saturday because she was assigned the number 666, which some Christians associate with evil. Interpretation of the *Book of Revelations* has broadened to 666 being associated with the Anti-Christ or Satan. The association has become so common that a word **hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia** has been coined to describe cases such as Thacker's in which people seek to avoid the number 666.

—Scott Douglas, "Teen skips meet after getting race number 666", *Runner's World*, 6 November 2013



How does your garden grow?

BUZZ

Last month, we told you how to get a library set up in your home. Now, we've got word on about doing up your own sunshine patch of green—no matter how limited the space. Want to grow your own spinach or tomatoes for salads? Or how about a pleasant lavender-chamomile garden in your balcony? Maitri Mehta from Pune has worked on spaces that range from 50 sq ft to 700 sq ft, and is also willing to extend her services to aspiring green-thumbers in Mumbai. First off, she'll ask you how much time you're ready to dedicate to nurture your plants, what kind of plants you're looking to grow and for what reasons—medicinal, nutritional or decorative. Then, she'll inspect the area, study the sunlight penetrability, temperature and humidity, and come up with a list of ideal plants for you. After she sets up the saplings, she'll give you a lesson on plant care, dos-and-don'ts, and hand over a pest control guide. Get in touch with her on (0) 9765041888 to get started or learn more.

Pistachio principle

n. The tendency to eat less food given certain visual cues, particularly evidence of the amount of food consumed, such as pistachio shells; the tendency to eat less of a food that takes more time and effort to consume, such as nuts that must be shelled.

Example. The point of the **pistachio principle** is not to encourage eating fewer nuts. Rather, the point is that altering environmental cues can lead to satisfaction with less food. For example, studies show that large-package size increases caloric consumption by some 22 per cent. Buying single-serve potato chips and small-size candy bars as opposed to 'family bags' reduces consumption.

—Joe Schwarcz, "Pistachios reputed to have some uplifting health benefits", *Montreal Gazette*, 7 November 2013

FLATFORM

n. A shoe with a very thick, flat sole.

Example. The ultimate ugly shoe that just will not die. In 2011, **flatforms** debuted on the catwalk for the likes of Chanel, Prada and Vivienne Westwood.

—Nicole Mowbray, "Invasion of the world's ugliest shoes: Autumn's clumpy footwear isn't elegant—but there ARE ways to wear it", *Daily Mail*, 25 August 2013

“Every child has the right to education and should be provided with an opportunity to learn”

S Vidyakar, 60, Chennai, on educating children of migrant workers



Chennai Pix

For years, Udavum Karangal has been a landmark of sorts on the outskirts of Chennai, providing a home for the unwanted, abandoned and orphaned in and around the metro. However, now it's the organisation's 'mobile school' whizzing around construction sites in the city that is creating a buzz and spreading smiles among children who have never been to school. Over 150 kids eagerly await the bus to learn their alphabets, watch cartoons and play games. For the architect of this venture, 60 year-old 'Papa' Vidyakar, as he is fondly called, it is a dream come true. "When I visited a construction site two years ago, I saw children idling away, playing amid mud and bricks the whole day," he says. "It was disturbing to learn that most of them had never been to a school." In 2012, Vidyakar started a pilot project, Wings Mobile School, with the help of VGN Builders. "These children are often neglected with their parents shifting sites; if not given the right opportunities, they could end up being victims of child labour," he adds. Four teachers from Udavum Karangal, who are proficient

in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Oriya, teach the children these languages, basic life skills and personal hygiene. The mobile school is equipped with an LCD TV, stationery and toys. Each day's class begins with a chapter on sanitation, with the teachers helping the young ones wash their faces, hands and feet, clipping nails, and oiling and combing their hair. Along with studies, creative games, music and cartoons are incorporated into the daily curriculum to keep them engaged. Vidyakar, who hails from a dysfunctional family himself, set up Udavum Karangal to welcome children found abandoned in garbage dumps, railway stations and cinema halls. Today, with a 2,000 plus-family, Vidyakar is happy to see many of his daughters happily married; many others hold corporate jobs while some have undergone vocational training and secured jobs. "I have been inspired by Mother Teresa," he says. "But I want to focus on developmental social work. I believe that to empower people, you need to train them to stand on their own feet."

—Jayanthi Somasundaram

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