



harmony

FEBRUARY 2014 ₹ 30

celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

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SIX COUPLES REDEFINE LOVE



- SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE: THE ARTIST
- SANDS OF TIME AT RAMESWARAM ▪ CITIZEN ACTIVIST JAGDEEP CHHOKAR

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Different strokes

Some statistics are brutal enough to stop you in your tracks. Did you know that around 3,000-4,000 Indians suffer a stroke every day? The WHO estimates that one in six people can suffer from stroke in their lifetime. Indeed, globally 15 million people suffer one every year, with 6 million deaths attributed to stroke alone, more than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

The numbers point to a virtual epidemic. Unfortunately, awareness, so crucial to identification and recovery, still remains low. A stroke occurs when blood flow to vital areas of the brain is compromised, either owing to a blockage of blood vessels by clots (80 per cent) or rupture of a blood vessel (20 per cent) causing bleeding inside the brain. Either way, the end result can be paralysis of one half of the body with difficulty in speech and/or distortion of the facial features. As blood flow is compromised, the death of the brain cells begins from the epicentre and spreads outwards.

A stroke can often be painless; the signs can be subtle in the form of a mild slurring of speech or blindness lasting for a fraction of a second or more drastic like a sudden onset of weakness of one half of the body with slurring and distortion of the lips; in more severe cases, there can be loss of consciousness. The key to identify stroke is simple: FAST; F for facial distortion, A for arm weakness, S for speech difficulty and T for time. When the initial three are present, it's time to call an ambulance and head to a hospital—it should be a well-equipped facility with trained personnel and quality equipment. Once you get there, an initial brain scan will assess the damage done and treatment needed.

It's vital to understand here that time lost is brain lost. Timely medical care can stem the damage and, in many cases, lead to complete recovery. For instance, the stroke team of Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital has a comprehensive stroke care plan that includes the administration of clot-bursting drugs, medicines to reduce swelling in case of

haemorrhage, and surgery for clot removals, as well as rehabilitation and a support group to aid return to normalcy.

Of course, to keep strokes at bay, a healthy lifestyle—including regular exercise—is an imperative. This mantra is exemplified in the Harmony Senior Citizens' Run, an integral part of the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon. As always, this year's event on 19 January was an inspiring ode to active ageing. Our gratitude goes out to Amplifone India Pvt Ltd, Tata Value Homes Ltd, VLCC Wellness, Jivraj 9 Tea and Dominos Pizza for their generosity; RCOM, Rinfra and Big 92.7 FM for their support; organiser Procum International; actors Gulshan Grover, Aftab Shivdasani and Mahi Gill for cheering on our participants; and the entire Harmony team for their tireless work. Above all, a salute to the 1,400 silver participants who set the Mumbai streets ablaze in a riot of yellow!

Take a cue from them this month and focus on yourself, your body; become aware, get active, stay healthy. A song goes, *I found the greatest love of all...inside of me*—it's your turn now.

Pina Ambani

Suresh Natarajan

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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column one

After all is said and done, one and one still is one. When we cry, when we laugh, I am half, you are half. Look how far we have come...one and one still is one.

These lyrics are almost childishly simple but the subtext runs very deep, encapsulating the journey between two distinct people who make a life, a home, a circle of love together. And while so many voyages stand interrupted by apathy, disenchantment or lack of communication, others continue, taking fresh routes and exciting new turns. In "Hand in Hand", we celebrate six couples who have found special ways to deepen their engagement with each other, and the world around them.

Another remarkable journey is that of the iconic Soumitra Chatterjee—actor, poet, orator, and now doodler. For "The Artist", his life is a canvas that he has set about painting with wild abandon, leaving his audience enthralled and surprised with every new brushstroke. Chatterjee's energy finds echo in the tireless activism of Jagdeep Chhokar, whose Association for Democratic Reforms has achieved great success in its attempt to bring transparency to the process of democracy and governance while empowering citizens to make informed choices.

Eventually, it is the power of choice that determines the quality of our life's voyage. At *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, it is our endeavour to widen that spectrum of choice—whether it is travel (this month, Land's End at Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram) or sports (a silver badminton club in Delhi that's scoring high on health and happiness). What's your next destination? Choose well and make it count.

—Arati Rajan Menon

With reference to "Plan Your Taxes" ('Money Matters', January 2014), planning can help save a lot of tax, particularly for the elderly when their earning capacity is substantially reduced. It is unfortunate that many taxpayers do not believe in proper tax planning and wait till the last moment to file returns, thereby losing precious time and money.

Maresh Kapasi
New Delhi

As indicated by the article "That Sinking Feeling" ('Silver Lining', December 2013), depression is the root cause for many problems among silvers. This condition includes a state of low mood and aversion to activity. You can counter the problem by listening to soft music, playing board games and doing physical activities that you enjoy. Be friendly with everyone and avoid unnecessary arguments.

C K Subramaniam
Navi Mumbai

Are silvers a spent force? Not really. With an agile mind, a healthy

body, loads of experience and, most important, unfulfilled dreams, I feel our silvers are still raring to go. They can contribute a lot to society in a country that is developing and leaping forward. They just need an opportunity to shine, to show their potential and bring out their utilised talent.

Manmohan Bagri
Mumbai

Thanks for all the informative and entertaining articles over the year. Wish you a happy and prosperous New Year and many more ahead.

Kusum Gokarn
Pune

Erratum

In our January cover feature, "A Passage to India", we inadvertently printed a wrong photo credit. Gerda H Unnikrishnan's photograph was taken by Surendra Jain Paras. The error is regretted.

—Editors

AN INVITATION FROM HARMONY

We are looking for contributions from our readers.

Write to us if...

- You had an experience related to money
 - You faced a serious health problem and conquered it
 - You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
 - You have a hobby or an interesting travel experience to share
 - You have a funny or insightful anecdote about your grandchildren
- ...and we'll print it in the column 'Your Space'

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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

The first job interview

The first board meeting you addressed

The first day after retirement

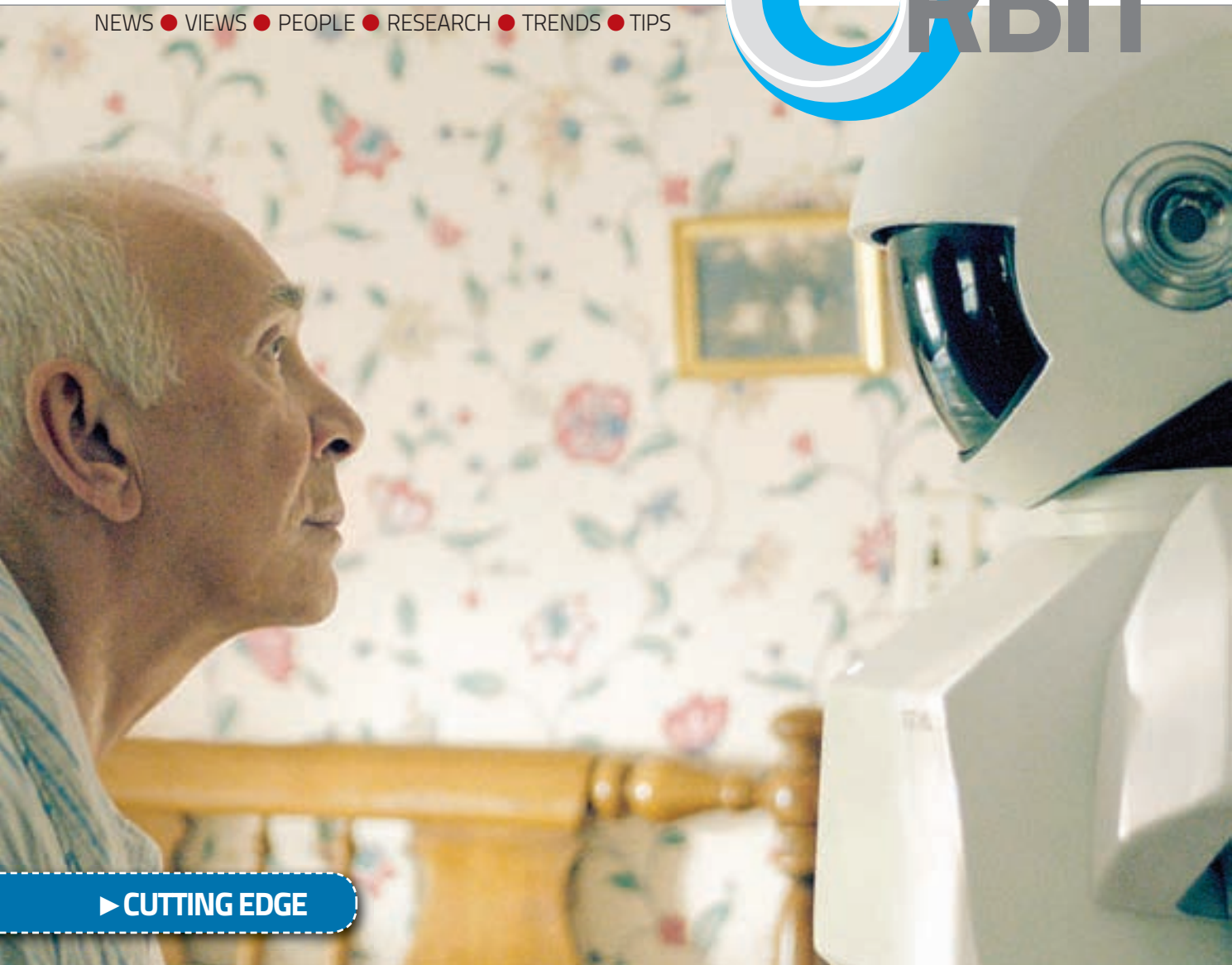
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► CUTTING EDGE

Robot to the **rescue**

While the Japanese have led the way in robot-assisted care, Britain is now following suit.

A combined team from the Universities of Exeter, Bath and Oxford, Queen Mary University of London and the Bristol Robotics Laboratory is studying whether **'robot surrogates' can help silvers with limited mobility in public spaces**. The first task of their three-year project, however, is to see if silvers and robots will actually get along! As London newspaper *The Independent* reports, the researchers will use technology to read facial expressions

!
**robot
surrogates**

and body posture to see how people react to the presence of robots and will launch a living laboratory where robots and humans interact in public settings. The next step would be to develop a user-friendly interface for silvers while ensuring protected privacy despite having a digital companion, so to speak. "People want to be on the streets together; there's a very important social function of being with others in public," says social psychologist Mark Levine, one of the leaders of the project. "Using technology to enable that is the key to our endeavour."

Retired, not tired



This surprised even us. Turning every notion of senescence on its head, a new study by the London School of Economics asserts that **silvers feel much less tired than teenagers and younger adults**. The researchers analysed answers from the *2010 American Time Use Survey*, which explored how close to 13,000 Americans spent their time and how they felt performing different activities, rating how tired they felt while doing them on a scale of 0 to 6. To their amazement, they found that people over the age of 65 reported being less tired than older teens and young 20somethings; in fact, tiredness dropped off after the age of 40 and continued to decrease with age. "What's even more surprising," as lead researcher Laura Kudrna tells London newspaper *The Guardian*, "is that these unexpected results can't be explained away by elderly people sleeping longer or doing fewer activities they find tiring. There's something else going on here." In her view, technology could be the culprit, making younger people feel more tired. "The bottom line, though, is that we don't know," she adds. "And I'd love to find out." The study, published in the *Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, calls for further investigation.

Turn off the **CLOCK**

FORGET TURNING BACK TIME, how about just switching it off? The scientific world is abuzz with the story of **a new computer algorithm devised by researchers from Tel Aviv University that predicts which genes can be simply 'turned off' to create an anti-ageing effect to the tune of 30 per cent**. This replicates the effect of calorie restriction, which is a proven way to fight the ageing process. Study leader Keren Yozhak's 'metabolic transformation algorithm', or MTA, can take information about any two metabolic states and predict the environmental or genetic changes required to go from one state to the other. She applied MTA to the genetics of ageing, using it to successfully predict which genes could be turned off to make the gene expression of old yeast look like that of young yeast. (Yeast is used widely for genetic research as much of its DNA is preserved in humans.) "Most algorithms try to find drug targets that kill cells to treat



A new computer algorithm predicts which genes can be simply 'turned off' to create an anti-ageing effect

cancer or bacterial infections; ours is the first in our field to look for drug targets not to kill cells, but transform them from a diseased state into a healthy one," she writes in journal *Nature Communications*. "You would expect about 3 per cent of yeast's genes to be lifespan-extending. Thus, achieving a tenfold increase over this expected frequency, as we did, is very encouraging." Look out for human studies soon.

Work to live

The benefits of work go beyond your wallet. According to a study by Imperial College, London, and the University of Oulu, Finland, **men unemployed for over two years show signs of faster ageing in their DNA.** As the BBC reports, the researchers analysed the DNA samples from 5,620 men and women born in Finland in 1966, specifically measuring the length of telomeres (the ends of the chromosomes that protect DNA). They found that men unemployed for more than two of the preceding three years were more than twice as likely to have short telomeres compared to men who were continuously employed; this, after accounting for other social, biological and behavioural factors that could have affected the result. Interestingly, this trend was not seen in women. "Shorter telomeres are linked to higher risk of various age-related diseases and earlier death," says Dr Jessica Buxton of Imperial College. "Stressful life experiences in

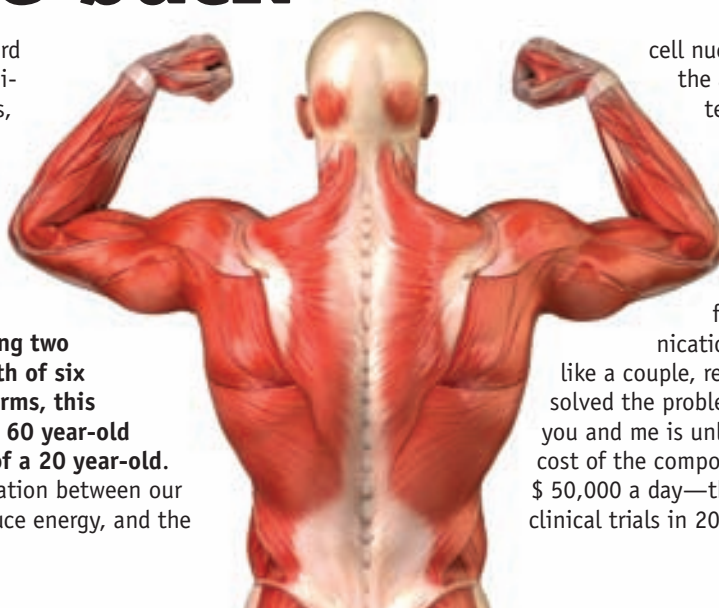


childhood and adulthood have previously been linked to accelerated telomere shortening. We have now shown that long-term unemployment may cause premature ageing too." To this, Dr Leena Ala-Mursula from the

University of Oulu adds: "These findings raise concerns about the long-term effects of joblessness in early adulthood. Keeping people in work should be an essential part of general health promotion."

Muscle back

For researchers from Harvard Medical School and the University of New South Wales, Mighty Mouse isn't just a cartoon—they made him happen. They were able to **rejuvenate the muscle of mice using a chemical called nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD), giving two year-old mice the strength of six month-olds. In human terms, this is akin to transforming a 60 year-old person's muscle to that of a 20 year-old.** "Over time, the communication between our mitochondria, which produce energy, and the

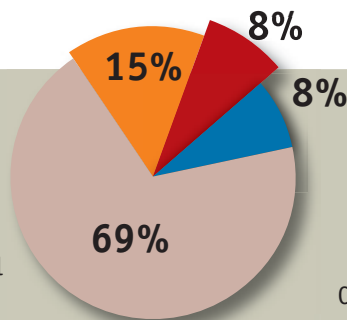


cell nucleus degrades, leading to the ageing process," writes team member David Sinclair in journal *Cell*. "They are like a married couple: when they are young, they communicate well, but over time, living in close quarters for many years, communication breaks down! And just like a couple, restoring communication solved the problem." While an NAD pill for you and me is unlikely anytime soon—the cost of the compound would be about \$ 50,000 a day—the team will begin human clinical trials in 2015.



Silver concerns

The New Year began with the release of a new report with a silver focus. Titled *Old Age Security: Doing the Right Thing for Our Elders*, this research paper by KPMG India and Assocham discusses silver demographics, outlines prominent trends and initiatives taken by the Government and offers recommendations for the long term. Here are some takeaways from the report, which calls for security on five varied dimensions—financial, physical, emotional, social and family:



- Financial and health problems coupled with living alone are the top three fears of the elderly. In fact, most elderly prefer living with their children rather than shifting to specialised senior citizens' homes, even though better medical facilities might be on offer there.

- Almost 70 per cent of the elderly surveyed ranked social protection as a parameter where they have the most need for intervention.

- While demand for better healthcare is expected to increase rapidly, lack of incentives for getting into elderly care is leading to an ever-increasing gap between supply and demand.

- Disease management as a concept is relatively nascent in India with healthcare being largely reactive in nature. A proactive approach would minimise hospitalisation and reduce the overall pressure on the healthcare system.

- Despite government initiatives like the Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension Scheme, National Rural Health Mission and the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, we need an effective Universal Health Care System that identifies different segments among the elderly who need subsidisation. A special fund can be created to pay for preventive care expenditure accordingly.

- While multiple industries are bringing out financial, insurance and housing products for elderly care, there is a need for an aggregator to consolidate all these offerings and to provide a single-window solution to the elderly. To enable the development of such aggregators, it is important to have support in terms of tax incentives and regulatory enablement.

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"We believe there is an emerging need for a range of solutions for elderly care like an increase in the supply of geriatric facilities and greater coordination between various implementing bodies," said Shashwat Sharma, Partner – Financial Services and Insurance, KPMG India, at the launch of the report. **You can read the entire report on www.kpmg.com/IN/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/Old-age-security.pdf**

Wanted: an encore

We love this project. American Marc Freedman's *encore.org* is an organisation that recruits and supports people over 60 to take on creative and entrepreneurial work to tackle social problems. As *The New York Times* reports, it awards 'purpose prizes' up to the value of \$ 100,000 to this end. Last year's winners included 66 year-old Barbara Young, a retired nanny who has organised domestic workers and promoted legislation to protect their rights; 71 year-old Edwin Nicholson, an ex-naval officer who has set up a charity that recruits volunteers to teach fly fishing to veterans of the armed forces; and 64 year-old Carol Fennelly, a former social worker who now runs Hope House, a scheme in

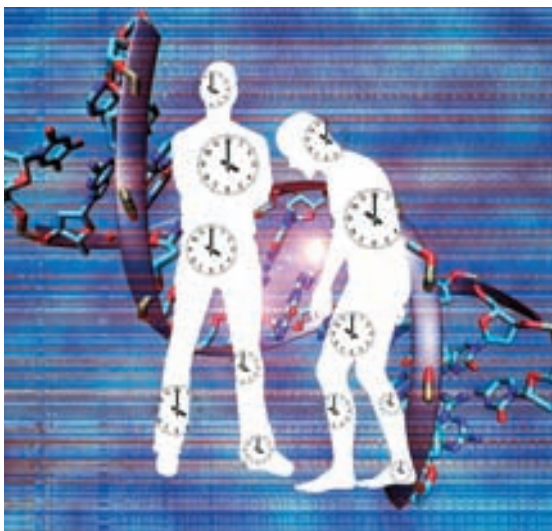


13 prisons that uses video conferencing to keep incarcerated parents in touch with their children. "Good ideas, lifelong experience and the wealth of spare time are assets we can-

not afford to scorn," says Freedman. "It's time to invent a new stage in life—after a career and before retirement—in which older people give back to current and future generations."



HEARD THIS? THE US NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION HAS AWARDED INDIAN-AMERICAN NEUROSCIENTIST KHALEEL REZAK A FIVE-YEAR, \$ 866,902 GRANT FOR HIS RESEARCH THAT MAY LEAD TO THERAPIES FOR AGE-RELATED HEARING PROBLEMS AND FRAGILE X SYNDROME, A GENETIC DISORDER THAT CAUSES DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS.



AGE, REDEFINED

GIVEN the significant increase in life expectancy in recent decades, a new study is attempting to change accepted measures of age. Conducted by the World Population Programme of International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), the study eschews simple chronology for a new set of tools to measure age in all its dimensions, including life expectancy, health and cognitive function. "Your true age is not just the number of years you have lived," writes co-leader Sergei Scherbov in journal *Population and Development Review*. "We used to consider people old at 65 but someone who is 65 today may be more like someone who was 55 earlier. Ageing is multidimensional. By reconceptualising population ageing to incorporate how people actually function, the study provides the foundation of a much richer and more realistic view of population aging."



Re-Boots

In a refreshing change from 'anti-ageing' products that appear to target increasingly younger women, **Boots Laboratories in the UK is adapting its Serum 7 line to women over the age of 50 with its Serum 7 Renew range**, which will include a serum, day cream, night cream and eye contour cream. The company isn't shying away from its constituency either—promotional material states clearly that it is targeting post-menopausal women and the disruption on their skin caused by hormonal change and declining oestrogen, such as loss of elasticity, slackness, dryness and brown spots. Boots, which is a consistent star performer in the beauty market, says the new range features a protective anti-ageing complex of vitamins A and C, blackberry, ginseng, white lupin and lipopeptides enriched with a restoring complex of brightening actives, amino acids, hyaluronic acid and ceramides. **Visit www.boots.com**

ANTI
AGEING
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HIGH ON BEAUTY

WHILE the debate to legalise marijuana rages on, here's a chance to let your skin get its own high. Through its subsidiary HempMedsPX, California-based company Medical Marijuana Inc has launched **Cannabis Beauty DEFINED, an anti-ageing product line rich in hemp oil** that includes exfoliant, cleanser, eye cream, gel masque, moisturiser and serum. According to a media release by the company, each product is infused with natural herbal ingredients and ultra-concentrated CBD, an antioxidant derived from hemp that is believed to have greater antioxidant properties than Vitamin C or Vitamin E. Check out the range, and the 'science' behind it, at **cannabisbeautydefined.com**



All that
glitters...

Here's the gold standard—quite literally—for anti-ageing mania. Apparel manufacturer Proskins has launched **24-karat gold leggings that supposedly reduce the appearance of lines and wrinkles and help the skin regain elasticity**. According to the company, the black leggings, made with "breakthrough technology", are infused with real gold particles that boost the production of hyaluronic acid, which hydrates and moisturises the skin. The price tag is equally rich: \$ 197.57 (about ₹ 12,200). Those feeling the gold rush can also buy gloves and eye masks that promise the same effect. For more details, go to **proskins.com**

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A fork in the road

AN INCREASING NUMBER of incompatible silvers are choosing to go their separate ways—at least in the US. According to a survey by magazine *USA Today*, **the incidence of ‘grey divorce’ has doubled in the US from 1990 to 2010, with one of every four silvers being a newly divorced person.** The biggest challenge for newly single elders, according to the report,

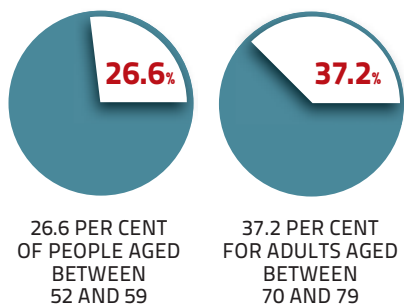


is the recalibration and rebuilding of their financial plans and healthcare options in the face of division of assets and issues like alimony and legal fees. There is a silver lining though: even five years after their divorce, over 70 per cent of silvers polled insist it was the right decision as they feel happier and more empowered.

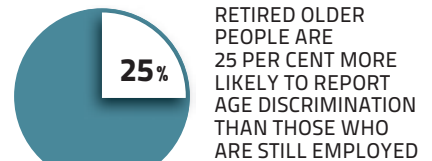
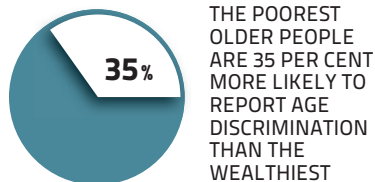
AGEISM AT LARGE

Apparently, the status of silvers in a society is not inversely proportional to its development. A case in point is the UK—new research from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) reveals that over 33 per cent of all silvers in the UK experience age-related discrimination. Here are some highlights of the study, as reported in London newspaper *The Times*:

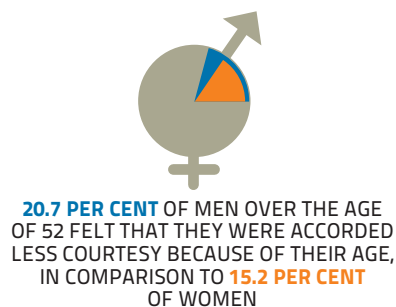
REPORTING AGE DISCRIMINATION



The group at the highest risk of age discrimination comprises better educated, retired men with low levels of wealth

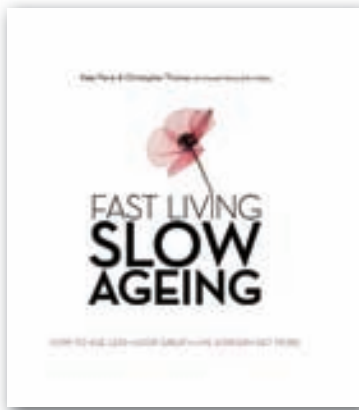


Older men face higher levels of perceived age discrimination in many aspects of their lives in comparison with women



“This research on a large representative sample of older people in England shows high levels of age discrimination,” says lead researcher Andrew Steptoe. “It is particularly concerning that around one in 10 feel they are

being discriminated against in health settings. Older people are an increasingly large proportion of the population, and we need to be more aware of the problem of ageism. We clearly have a long way to go.”



Nice 'n' easy

AN EASY EMBRACE, NOT AN AGGRESSIVE FIGHT. THAT'S THE MANTRA OF *FAST LIVING, SLOW AGEING* (EXISLE PUBLISHING), A BOOK BY AUSTRALIANS KATE MARIE AND PROFESSOR MERLIN CHRISTOPHER THOMAS THAT URGES PEOPLE TO FOLLOW SIMPLE STEPS FOR BETTER AGEING. IN AN INTERVIEW WITH WEBSITE [NEWS.COM.AU](http://news.com.au), MARIE SHARES HER FIVE TOP TIPS, AS DETAILED IN THE BOOK:

- ACCEPTANCE: CREAMS WON'T STOP US AGEING; WE NEED TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT WE WILL AGE.
- NUTRITION: SAY GOODBYE TO PACKAGED FOOD AND ANYTHING MASQUERADING AS FOOD AND EAT PLENTY OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES.
- EXERCISE: RESISTANCE TRAINING IS VITAL; IT'S GREAT FOR BONES, MUSCLE MASS STAMINA.
- LOSE THE STRESS: EXERCISE, RECREATION AND RELAXATION ARE KEYS TO BURN STRESS, WHICH IS THE MAIN INHIBITOR TO GRACEFUL AND TROUBLE-FREE AGEING.
- SLEEP: IT'S ESSENTIAL FOR YOUR MIND AND BODY. RE-TRAIN THE BRAIN TO RELAX USING TOOLS LIKE MEDITATION.

KAMAL KAMAAL: SUPERSTAR KAMAL HASSAN WILL PLAY AN AGEING ACTOR TRYING TO EXORCISE HIS PAST AND MAKE AMENDS FOR HIS TRANSGRESSIONS IN FILMMAKER ANANTH MAHADEVAN'S UPCOMING PROJECT. THE FILM, AS YET UNNAMED, IS SAID TO BE IN THE SAME GENRE AS CLASSICS *KAGAZ KE PHOOL*, *FEDORA* AND *SUNSET BOULEVARD* BUT IS DEFINITELY NOT AN ADAPTATION.



Dramatic debut



Australian **Fiona McFarlane** is barely 30something. But the skill and sensitivity with which she has tackled loneliness, dementia and silver dilemmas in her debut novel, *The Night Guest* (Faber & Faber), have garnered her popular and critical acclaim. Her protagonist Ruth is a proud and wealthy widow who lives alone in a house by the sea. But when she insists that she can hear a tiger prowling in her home, her life changes irrevocably—the entry of Frida, a caregiver, enriches and complicates her life in innumerable ways even as it alters her dynamics with her own family, especially her two sons. The poignancy aside, this is also a finely crafted thriller. And the mystery at the heart of the book will certainly ensure an even wider—and well-deserved—audience for McFarlane.

A jungle of possibilities

While researchers today are able to put just about everything in its own little box, explained, sewn up and theorised, there's one thing they admit they just can't figure out: animal ageing. Scientists at the Max Planck Centre on Biodemography in Odense, Denmark, recently announced that **animal species age, reproduce and die in such different patterns that there is no single, coherent theory to explain the process of ageing.** Their wide-ranging study of 46 animals and plants, including mammals, vertebrates and invertebrates, debunks the theory that the process of ageing and the decrease of fertility with age are inevitable.



"Up until now, most studies of ageing and childbearing have concentrated on animals that are evolutionary cousins of humans and may exhibit similar patterns of life and death," writes Alexander Scheuerlein, co-author of the study, in journal *Nature*. "However, the latest findings show that while patterns are similar, no primate ever entirely loses the ability to reproduce the way humans

do. Our findings suggest that we probably know a lot less about why and how organisms age than we think we do. In fact, it is not really clear why ageing happens in the first place when you consider that some freshwater organisms can live for 1,400 years, not age with time and reproduce at the same rate over its their lifespan."



SHARK STORY

TRADITIONALLY, scientists have used much the same method to tell the age of sharks as they do for a tree—they count the pairs of alternating opaque and translucent bands on their spinal column. There's been only one drawback: these bands are not always deposited annually, making it hard to pinpoint actual age. Now, with the help of radiocarbon dating, researchers at the American National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have determined that **adult white sharks, also known as great whites, can live**

up to 70 years or more—far longer than previously imagined. Their study analysed vertebrae from four male and four female white sharks caught between 1967 and 2010 in the northwest Atlantic. "In many cases, growth rates and age are not necessarily in sync and deposit rates of band pairs can change once the sharks reach sexual maturity," fisheries biologist Lisa Natanson writes in journal *PLOS One*. "Radiocarbon dating will help determine absolute age and can also be used to confirm or refute annual age in a species."

LOVE LINE

Older Americans, Canadians, Brits and Australians looking to mingle now have a new address—*Datingsiteforolderpeople.com* is a new site for people over the age of 40 looking for romance, companionship, even commitment.



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Mkt/Press Advt /Version 1.0 / Sept 2013



Photographs by Hareesh Patel and Dattaguru Redekar



OUR **RUN**

The Senior Citizens' Run, supported by the Harmony for Silvers Foundation, at the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon is a landmark event in our calendar—and the city's. This year's event was no exception. Full of cheer and energy, close to 1,400 yellow-shirted silvers gathered at the start line on 19 January. Flagged off at 8 am by Tina Ambani, Chairperson, Harmony for Silvers Foundation, and actors Mahi Gill, Aftab Shivdasani and Gulshan Grover, they charged forward agile and swift, defying their age. For some, the run was about having fun, for a few it was about pushing themselves to new limits, while yet others saw it as a platform to share a message—from making Mumbai cleaner and greener to saving the girl child. We loved every minute.







Photographs by **Anshuman Akash Jha**

Game on!

A motley group of silvers in Delhi have set up a badminton club to play the 'game of their lives.' Their rewards are good health, team spirit, and tons of fun, as **Ambica Gulati** discovers

The smack of shuttlecock against nylon string is a welcoming sound at Freedom Fighters' Colony in Delhi. It is 8 am and, in the cold, crisp air, the shuttlers are working up a sweat. As four players battle it out on court, Coach K D Bhatia signals to one of them and urges him to tweak his serve. When the point is won, Bhatia heaves a triumphant sigh. After a brief time-out and a couple of points later, Team A is declared winner.

There are no trophies for these silver badminton players; participating in the game is its own reward. "I had open-heart surgery seven years ago and doctors advised me to take it easy," explains the 74 year-old coach. "But I pined for a morning fitness sport and took the initiative to form a badminton club for others like me."

Bhatia submitted his proposal for a badminton club to the colony's Senior Citizens' Society. In August 2013, the proposal was accepted and the club became a reality. Bhatia and Dharamvir Panwar, 67, general secretary of the society, presented the club to the society members at their monthly meeting and a handful signed up immediately. "Today, we have 15 members," says a very proud Bhatia. "We decided to use the small park in C Block of the colony as our playing ground," adds Panwar. "Most of us had played badminton in our younger days, but playing at this age is a greater pleasure. In fact, now it's a necessity to keep fit."

To kickstart the club, all they needed was a detachable net and two poles. And signing up is easy—it just costs a nominal fee as maintenance charges, which covers the cost of buying shuttlecocks and paying for cleaning, explains Panwar, adding that members need to bring their own rackets and sports shoes.

Bhatia coaches the club's members, all of them in their 60s and 70s, on the basics of the game. "I begin with the dimensions of the court," he reveals. "I teach them to serve and explain the rules." The daily morning routine begins with a few simple warm-up exercises. Those who are fit enough for something more strenuous use a skipping rope. Having played badminton for four decades, Bhatia takes his role as coach very seriously. After assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each player, he pairs them for doubles matches. "Four members have good stamina such as R C Sharma, Dharamvir Panwar, Ashok Laad and Baba R K Tomar," he shares. "In fact, the latest entrant, Tomar, being a former athlete, has the maximum stamina."

With childlike excitement, Tomar cuts in. "I can play for an hour with ease and owe my good health to regular playing and cow's milk." Then, Bhatia continues: "I have been helping him improve his serve as badminton is a very different game. His defence is good, though. Panwar also demonstrates good defence moves."



(Clockwise from top) Ashok Laad, Dharamvir Panwar, R S Sindhwani and Ghansham Singh play the doubles; S K Palta goes for the shot; KD Bhatia coaches the players



The club members have a healthy mix of strengths and weaknesses. Bhatia says V K Gupta Lad, R C Sharma and Ghansham Singh are good servers while Ghansham Singh has “learnt a lot” in the past few months. Despite weighing 107 kg, Singh says the exercise he gets from the game has made him agile and he feels a new surge of energy.

The hallmark of true sportsmanship is a desire to learn. Paramjit Panwar, 78, has undergone open-heart surgery twice and an angioplasty but he enjoys his morning dose of recreation. “I believe learning and sportsman spirit do not decline with age,” he emphasises. “In fact, it’s the other way around.” Bhatia keeps an eagle’s eye on the styles and strengths of his flock and keeps switching the match-ups. There are no favourites on this court; each player loves to be paired with others. And, yes, they all willingly follow their coach’s advice. “There is no pressure on anyone to play and each one plays only for as long as he can, keeping in mind health and medical conditions,” explains Bhatia, who also helps each member gradually increase their stamina.

His enthusiasm and commitment to the club members are already paying off. S C Chaturvedi’s health has improved remarkably since he took up badminton as he was diagnosed with a blockage in his heart. “Lifestyle changes along with meditation and alternative therapy have helped me a lot,” affirms Chaturvedi. C P S Sodhi experiences pain in his knees but joins the others on the court whenever his health permits. “Badminton is a good way to stay keep fit,” iterates 72 year-old Suresh Palta, president of the Senior Citizens’ Society, who played college badminton. Open-heart surgery prevents his active participation but he is an eager spectator on the sidelines. Bhatia quickly adds that not every heart patient is advised to play a sport. “People should play as they have been advised by the doctor and only as much as their stamina permits.”

Meeting on the court every morning has built a rapport between the members. “We are trying to find another club like ours in Delhi and would like to set up matches with them,” says Palta, who adds with a smile, “We are increasing our lives by playing the game of our lives.”

Do a jig. Dance, especially folk dance, will put a spring in your step—and possibly turn back the clock. A new study by the University of Strathclyde in Scotland suggests that country dancing, noted for its rambunctious reels and jigs, could delay the ageing process. Older women who regularly take part in the activity were found to be fitter than those of the same age who regularly take part in other forms of exercise, including walking, swimming and yoga. We believe Indian traditional dances are no less lively; so get your rhythm on.



Then: Plastic bottles Now: Zipper pouch



Make a handy zipper pouch for your medication, coins and other knick-knacks and go truly green by saving plastic bottles from ending up in a dumpster. Besides two washed and dried out plastic bottles of the same diameter, you also need a sturdy blade, a zipper, sewing yarn and needle, and whatever you fancy for decoration. First, mark the height of one half of your case starting from the base of the bottles. You could have them be one-third the size of the bottle or longer. Use the blade to cut the bottles and use sandpaper (or scissors) to smooth the edges. Next, wrap a strip of paper around the top edge and use a sketch pen to mark the points at which you will punch holes for sewing the zipper. After punching the holes with a needle, place one half of the open zipper along the holes and sew it in. Repeat on the other half, letting the fabric end of the zipper overlap, and connect the two halves. Your little green purse is now ready!



RECYCLING FACTS

- Plastic bottles take nearly 700 years to decompose on their own.
- Nearly 88 per cent of energy is saved when plastic bottles are recycled and made from plastic rather than raw materials from gas and oil.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. MAKE COLOURFUL TEA COASTERS OUT OF PLASTIC BOTTLE CAPS BY STICKING THEM CLOSE TO EACH OTHER ON A CARDBOARD SHEET.
2. USE BOTTLE CAPS AS CANDLE HOLDERS. POUR MELTED WAX INTO THEM, STICK IN A CANDLE WICK AND LET IT COOL.



WEBMD PAIN COACH

**Available for Android v 2.2 and up;
iOS 6 and later**

What it does: Developed by WebMD, this app is a handy tool to track chronic pain conditions such as back pain, nerve pain and osteoarthritis. You can update pain levels every day on the 'Well Being Belt'; get daily tips related to your condition from approved physicians. You also get an alert everyday reminding you to update your pain level for the day. All of this is absolutely free.

After installation: Set your chronic pain conditions by selecting the symptoms, triggering causes and prescribed treatments. There's also an option to secure access to the app by applying a password. In the 'Goals' tab, select what you wish to achieve and in how much time in the Food, Rest, Exercise, Mood, and Treatment categories. Click on 'My Goals' to view goal activity and how much is completed for active goals. You can also access a resourceful library of articles related to each condition, though most of the links will open on the WebMD website.

PHONOTTO SIMPLE PHONE

Available for Android v 2.1 and up

What it does: If you think your home screen is too confusing, or that you have to perform a million other tasks just to dial back a call you missed—like going to the apps menu, finding the phone icon, and then figuring out where the missed calls tab is—this app is right for you. Phonotto is for people who use their smartphone for the most basic purpose of making calls and sending messages. With a colourful, uncluttered home screen, Phonotto Simple Phone has relevant, large easily identifiable icons and buttons, taking simplicity to the next level.

After installation: On starting the app, it will replace your original home screen with its user-friendly interface. From here, you can make calls by clicking on the big phone icon, check your missed calls, check your sent messages and write new SMS messages. In the Pro version (available for ₹ 170), you can set three quick-dial numbers and access your address book from the home screen. However, in the free version, you can access your address book by quitting the app—you click on the settings button on the top left and select 'Quit Phonotto'.



Whether your phone is smart or simple, take a cue from this directive from American care agency, Visiting Angels Centre: label key numbers in your phone as ICE, short for 'In Case of Emergency', such as next of kin or your doctor. In case of a sudden stroke or fall, this will tell people who come to your assistance who to call. Also, tape a sticker at the back of the phone so people know you have emergency numbers labeled in the phone.



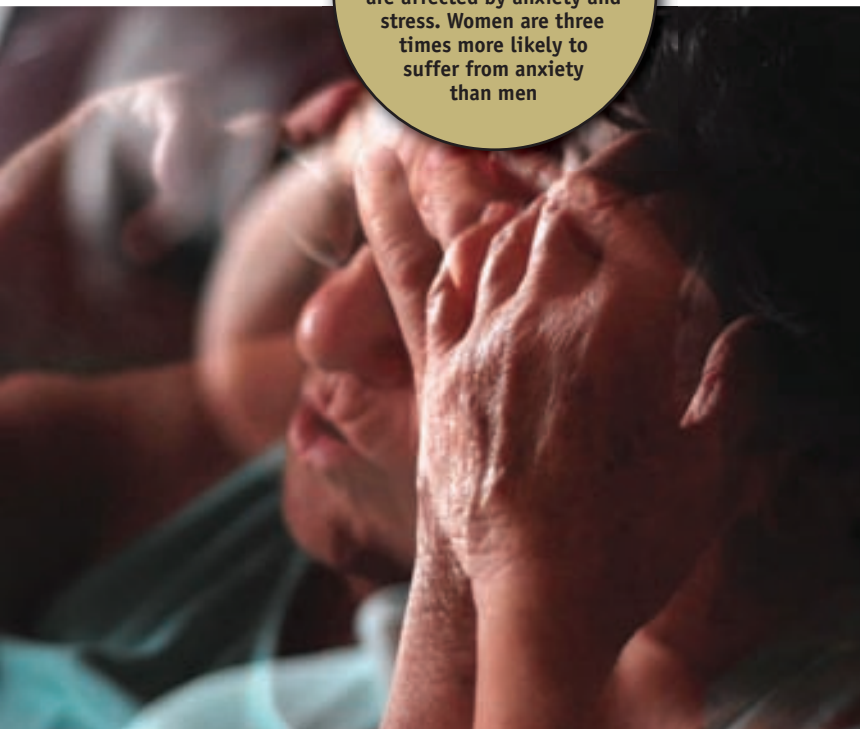
Anxious HEART

According to a new study, anxiety could be a major contributor to stroke in heart patients.

In fact, it also leads to depression and a host of other heart-related ailments. India is no stranger to the ill-effects of anxiety and stress; it affects 25 per cent of the total population, and 10 per cent of silvers. Women are three times more likely to suffer from anxiety than men. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey in the US examined over 6,000 people for 22 years and found that the top 30 per cent of people with symptoms of anxiety were 33 per cent more prone to stroke. Previously, the link between depression and heart disease had clearly established that those who had suffered from

a heart attack were three times more likely to suffer from depression. In a study at Duke University Medical Centre, researchers found a vital link between anxiety and heart disease. This study involved 934 heart patients in their 60s just before or after a cardiac catheterisation procedure. After adjusting for other various risk factors, the key results showed that 99 patients said they experienced anxiety and depression together, while 65 suffered from depression and 90 from anxiety. During the three years of follow-up, 133 people died, of which 55 had anxiety, depression or both. Researchers say that anxiety and stress over-activates adrenalin in the nervous system, thereby causing development of other heart disease ailments associated with hypertension.

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IN A STUDY INVOLVING 613 PATIENTS WITH MILD TO MODERATE ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, IT WAS FOUND THAT A HIGH INTAKE OF VITAMIN E LED TO A LOWER RATE OF MENTAL DECLINE AND AN INCREASE IN THE ABILITY TO UNDERTAKE EVERYDAY TASKS SUCH AS WASHING OR DRESSING.



The patients were divided into four groups, with each group given either doses of Vitamin E, doses of memantine (a dementia drug), combination doses of Vitamin E and memantine, and a placebo; the participants were tracked for two years. Those who were given the Vitamin E, also known as alpha tocopherol, had a 19 per cent lower loss of functional ability than those given the placebo.

B12 and broken bones

Earlier studies have concluded that one in three people over the age of 50 suffers fractures in India, and that men have a 30 per cent higher risk. A new study provides evidence that **fractures could occur because of a Vitamin B12 deficiency, especially in older men.** Researchers at the Sahlgrenska Academy studied 1,000 Swedish men in their 70s, analysing blood samples for concentrations of B12 and folate. They found that those who had low levels had a 70 per cent higher risk of fracturing themselves within six years compared to those with normal levels. Also, the risk increased up to 120 per cent for fractures in the lumbar region. The lack of adequate Vitamin B12,

coupled with other risk factors such as age, smoking, previous fractures, weak bone density and low calcium content in the blood, all add up to increased risk of fractures in older men, who have a 20 per cent mortality rate from fractures in the first 12 months of the accident. However, researchers say this doesn't mean B12 intake has to be increased immediately as studies are still underway; like a Dutch study, where people over 65 are being treated with Vitamin B12, Vitamin D and folic acid to figure out how these are linked to bone strength and fractures. For now, they recommend that the tested-and-true balanced diet, 30 minutes of daily exercise and quitting smoking are the best ways to avoid weak bones.

Vitamin B12 facts and findings

Approximately 60–70% of Indians have low Vitamin B12 levels

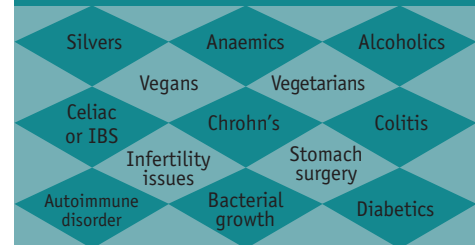
- Nearly 80% are urban middle class
- Vegetarians have 4.4 times higher risk of low B12 levels

NATURAL SOURCES

Meat Fish/shellfish Dairy Supplements

- Our bodies don't produce B12; it is produced by bacteria
- We need about 2.4 micrograms of Vitamin B12 everyday

WHO'S AT GREATER RISK?



OLDER WOMEN IN THE US SPEND ABOUT TWO-THIRDS OF THEIR TIME IDLING ON THEIR COUCHES, ACCORDING TO A STUDY COMPRISING ABOUT 7,400 WOMEN IN THEIR 70S. RESEARCHERS AT THE HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN BOSTON STUDIED THE WOMEN, WHO WORE AN ACCELEROMETER FOR AN AVERAGE OF 14 HOURS A DAY, AND FOUND THAT THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF SEDENTARY HOURS WAS 9.7 HOURS PER DAY, WHICH IS ALMOST 65 PER CENT OF THE DAY. THEY ALSO OBSERVED THAT AS AGE AND BODY MASS INDEX INCREASED, SO DID THE NUMBER OF SEDENTARY PERIODS BETWEEN BOUTS OF AT LEAST 30 MINUTES OF ACTIVITY.

OLDER AND HEAVIER



SHEDDING those kilos requires greater effort with age. According to individual studies conducted in India over a decade, obesity is emerging as a major geriatric issue, affecting nearly 33 per cent of silvers; older women are twice more prone to obesity than men. Scientists at the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Shizuoka, Japan, have finally figured out why: **good brown fat, also called brown adipose tissue, slows down as we age, which leads to inefficient burning of bad white fat calories.** Good brown fat, located at the back of our neck, helps keep us

warm and slim. Brown fat regulates the metabolism of white fat, thereby burning excessive calories. The Japanese researchers analysed two groups of mice, one of which was missing a gene for platelet-activating factor receptor (PAFR), a gene factor that affects metabolism and thermogenic activity, or the ability to generate body heat. They found that the missing PAFR gene caused a dysfunction of the brown fat. They conclude that combating obesity and metabolic disorders in older adults would be possible by reactivating this gene, an issue that needs further study.

CYBER FOLLOWING

A new trend of awarding bloggers is catching up in India. *Indiblogger.in*, thought to be India's largest community of bloggers, recently announced the Indian Bloggers' Award 2013, including a special category for bloggers over the age of 60. Under this category, Mumbai-based **Vivek Patwardhan**, whose website <http://vivekvsp.com> gets over 150 hits every day, won the award this year. The blogs were judged for content, interactivity, originality and usability by a panel including prominent journalists, authors, and entrepreneurs.

"I began blogging in 2008, when a young colleague introduced the concept to me," he says. Soft-spoken and well-

read, Patwardhan currently teaches human relations at the Tata Institute, and enjoys writing and travelling. His website has three blogs—in his personal blog, 'Vivek Uvachu' (Vivek thus spoke), most posts are in the form of a conversation between himself and a parrot, Lulu. "The name was coined after my wife's name, Sulu," he explains, laughing, "In all the posts, the bird is very condescending and admonishes me repeatedly."

Rife with humour and witty observations, he writes about personal experiences and comments about current affairs—his post critiquing the hanging of Kasab, he says, was so controversial that people had stopped short of hitting him. Patwardhan's HR blog, where he writes about employee relations, is quite popular as well. After being the head of HR in Asian Paints for the past 12 years, he says human relations are a passion with him.

Right now, he is experimenting with the idea of emphasising the importance of balancing work and people in an organisation. "I have created two characters, a dog and a cat," he explains. "A dog represents concern for people as it is attached to people, whereas a cat is attached to the place, representing concern for the organisation, production and work. I have already written two or three posts in this format." Patwardhan is also a budding photographer as seen through his photo blog, where he uploads photos taken during his travels to Sri Lanka, Fiji, the Caribbean and India. "It's something I'd like to pursue, but I'm an absolute amateur," he admits.

So what lures readers and keeps them hooked to his blogs? Our silver blogger isn't sure of an exact formula, but says, "I've found that a good thought put across well, without sounding too intellectual, is something people enjoy. The trick lies in being simple and honest." That's why the conversational parrot format works well—casual conversations are easier to relate to than a long, wordy monologue.

What's more, Patwardhan finds the blogosphere, and by extension, the Internet, a great place to meet new people with similar interests. It is here that he met a group of limerick writers from Mumbai—old and young—and decided to start a limericks blog with them. Writing new posts from his home or while waiting to board a flight, the blogosphere has given him an opportunity not only to flaunt his writing but be imaginative. "I discovered that once you start blogging, you can become very creative," he remarks. "Such is the appeal of the virtual world, where there are no constraints in terms of size, space and tools of self-expression."

—Neeti Vijaykumar



Haresh Patel



BIRTHDAYS

- Bollywood actor **Jackie Shroff** (left) turns 54 on 1 February.
- Veteran Indian actor **Deepti Naval** turns 57 on 3 February.
- American actor **Mia Farrow** turns 69 on 9 February.

● Poet and filmmaker **Buddhadeb Dasgupta** turns 70 on 11 February.

● Hollywood superstar **John Travolta** (right) turns 60 on 18 February.



● Indian actor **Danny Denzongpa** (left), who has starred in Hindi, Nepalese and Tamil films, turns 66 on 25 February.

● Renowned Indian film producer and director **Prakash Jha** turns 62 on 27 February.

MILESTONES



● Renowned historian **Bipan Chandra** (left), 86, was conferred the Itihas Ratna on 17 December by the Asiatic Society, Bihar, for his contribution to the field of history.

● **Lata Bhagwan Kare**, 61, from Pimpri, Maharashtra, won the Baramati Marathon held in December; she surprised everyone as she ran barefoot in her *nauvari* (nine-yard) sari.

● Chief Editor of *Malayala Manorama* **Mammen Mathew** (right), 68, was conferred the Lokmanya Tilak National Award for excellence in journalism on 4 January.

● The Sunil Gangopadhyay Memorial Awards for 2012 and 2013 were awarded to Bengali poets **Nirendranath Chakravarty**, 89, and **Shankha Ghosh**, 81, respectively, on 11 January.



IN PASSING

● **Michiaki Takahashi**, the Japanese virologist who found the cure for chickenpox, died on 16 December. He was 85.

● Veteran journalist and first editor of *The Statesman* **Pran Chopra** (right) passed away on 22 December at the age of 92.



● Veteran actor **Farooq Sheikh** (left) died after suffering a heart attack on 27 December. He was 65.

● Legendary singer **Phil Everly** died of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease at the age of 74 on 3 January.

● **Tibor Gonczol** (right), India's former shooting coach, passed away on 3 January, aged 80.

● Former Ranji Trophy cricketer for Mumbai, **Vishwanath Ramachandra Bondre**, died of cardiac arrest on 8 January, aged 77.



OVERHEARD

"Luckily it became obvious pretty early on that I was not destined to be an action star so I don't have to worry so much about how I look. I hear all this talk about how grey I am getting but I can't imagine ever dying my hair. My dad had this full head of white hair and I think it looks pretty good. Come to think of it, I think I look pretty good too!"



—George Clooney, 52, in an interview with British newspaper, *Metro*

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.

A HEARTFELT TALE

Friends often ask me how I lead such an active life despite a very weak heart, which has forced me to undergo a shocking number of coronary surgeries and procedures over the years. I sometimes feel I have undergone surgery more often than most other people who have lived to tell the tale.

It started one day when I was driving my car in 1988. I was cruising along when I suddenly felt a shudder run through my chest. I stopped the car and when the sensation vanished, I continued on my way. I experienced the same sensation the next day while playing tennis. This time, I went for a check-up to the hospital and was told that I had suffered two silent heart attacks in quick succession. I spent three weeks in hospital but had to soon undergo coronary bypass surgery with a triple graft. I am diabetic, which explains the 'silent' attacks but the real cause, I believed, was my moderately elevated cholesterol levels.

I was once a hockey player and the surgeon expected the surgery to proceed smoothly. Instead, when he opened my chest, he was shocked at what he found—he had difficulty finding adequate grafts but managed to complete the surgery. I led a normal life after that, and even travelled all over India and overseas for work. I thought my problems were finally over. How wrong I was! Seven years after the surgery, I underwent an angioplasty procedure. During the course of the next few years, I underwent three more angioplasty procedures and had more stents inserted.

My heart was getting worse and, in 2007, when it began to malfunction yet again, doctors told me I could not undergo another angioplasty. I was fated for a second bypass surgery. But to the dismay of my surgeons, I was back in hospital three months later with heart pain. It turned out that my new grafts had closed! At great risk to my life, doctors performed another angioplasty with three stents.

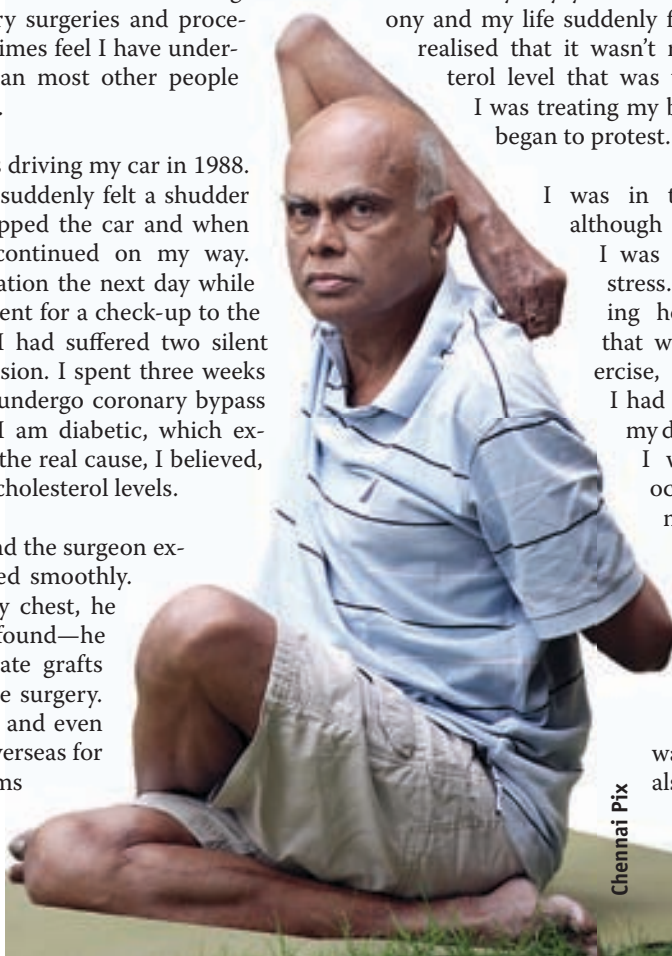
They also changed my medication to control my cholesterol levels. Up until then, I had undergone two coronary bypass surgeries and five angioplasty procedures, which is abnormal by any yardstick. I introspected on my agony and my life suddenly flashed before me. I finally realised that it wasn't really my elevated cholesterol level that was the problem, but the way I was treating my body. Finally, my heart had begun to protest.

I was in the marketing field and, although I enjoyed travelling, I was constantly under a lot of stress. After I stopped playing hockey, I did not replace that with any other form of exercise, not even regular walks. I had a sweet tooth and, despite my diabetes, indulged in sweets. I was a social drinker but occasionally exceeded my limit! When I gained 5 kg, I ignored it. I was paying dearly for my unhealthy lifestyle and lack of respect for my health. So, I began practicing yoga and taking morning walks regularly. We have also switched to using olive oil to cook our meals. I also make it a point to go for an annual health check-up.

Now I feel energised and enjoy the work I do for the Probus

Club, a club for retirees. Stress comes and goes; my lipid profile and diabetic parameters are under control; and I have had no heart problems ever since I changed my attitude and lifestyle. The moral of this story is that those with heart problems should not give up hope of a healthy and happy life. Instead of being cowed down by these issues, do what you can to support your health and listen to your doctor's advice!

—R T Namasivayam, Chennai



Chennai Pix

Namasivayam: Listen to your heart and body

LIFE'S SMALL WONDERS

Like someone so aptly said, "I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver." In hindsight, there is no way I could have foreseen this path in my life.

When I was just four years old, my sister and I were afflicted with whooping cough. In those days, there was no real cure for the disease. I survived unharmed but my little sister developed a severe infection in her kidneys. Her health issues left her frail and she struggled through the years. Seven years after she underwent a kidney transplant, my dad passed away and this deeply affected my sister. A counsellor recommended that she work with children afflicted with cerebral palsy so that she could look beyond her own issues. It worked wonders but, six months later, my sister tragically succumbed to her ill health.

The loss of my dad and sister in quick succession took a heavy toll on me and it took me a year to recover from the trauma. I had all these unanswered questions about life and death crowding my mind and was searching for something meaningful to root me back in the land of the living. It was then that I decided to pick up from where my sister had left; thus began my journey with the Bengaluru Spastics' Society in 1986. I found it immensely rewarding and, in 1987, I received a diploma in special education and learning disabilities from the Karnataka Parents' Association for Mentally Retarded Citizens. Then, in 1996,

Ramaiya: Value the little joys of life

I earned a government licence to practice. Apart from working on academic and vocational training, and helping the children develop functional literacy, we started working for inclusive education. We wanted to expose these children to the real world and talked to schools to make it part of their curriculum.

We managed to integrate seven children into the inclusive curriculum over two years and this was the most fulfilling point in my two decade-long association with the Spastics Society. Eventually, the inclusive education programme was scrapped because of resistance from the parents of other children. This was way back in 1992, when there was limited awareness on the subject. Today, when I see schools adopting inclusive education, I am thrilled our society has come a long way.

Working with these children has given me a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment I could have hardly imagined. It has taught me to appreciate life's small wonders and relinquish the bitter memories. I have also forged lifelong friendships through the years with other volunteers and parents, and we stay in touch and support each other through thick and thin.

In 2011, when I had to undergo major surgery, I believe the prayers of my friends and the wishes of these little angels helped me survive through it. I have learnt from these angels that life may not always give what you want, but if you are resilient and give it your best, you may end up discovering things you had never imagined.

—Jyothi Ramaiya, Bengaluru



Prasad Durga



Shyamola Khanna

Cool India, clean India

COL JUG JEETH SINGH (RETD), 75, HYDERABAD

I am 75 years old. I have steel implants in both my legs and a defibrillator (ICD) to regulate my pulse. Yet in November 2013, I jumped off an aircraft from 10,000 ft with younger paratroopers who had come together to celebrate Paratroopers Day. My doctor had asked me to pad up the ICD to protect it and after that I could pretty much do what I wanted to! A couple of months ago I had gone parasailing to Manali, Himachal Pradesh. It felt great and even as my wife and her brother and sister-in-law went riding the rapids, they were a little worried that I was a tad old to parasail. But then it was exhilarating, to say the least!

After I graduated in geology from Osmania University, I joined the Indian Army in 1961. I went on to do my

bachelor of technology in mechanical and electronics from the College of Military Engineering (CME), Pune. I followed it up with post-graduation from MCEME in Secunderabad. In the 1971 war, I commanded the 50 Para Brigade and we had the glory of being in two theatres of war (both East and West) within seven days. This was the time that I had to have both my kneecaps replaced because I had injured myself during one of the operations. Although I was a part of the EME (electromechanical engineers), I was mostly on airborne duties and I loved every minute of it.

I retired from the Indian Army in 1981. Ever since, I have been working on trying to improve the quality of air and water. If there is a problem we should work toward finding a so-

lution. When the road outside our house was being built, there was a lot of dust and the entire family was coming down with skin problems and respiratory issues. Thereafter, my experiments began. It took me nearly 15 years before I could iron out all the glitches and make sure I had the patent for my pet project. Project Surya Kiran is a low-cost, highly customised solution that provides heat and dust control in existing Indian homes, while drastically reducing the power tariff. I wanted to make Indian homes dust-free and cooler without the use of expensive and power-consuming air conditioners.

The concept is based on the very simple theory learnt in school where we were told how hot air rises while cool air takes its place, the reason for

Singh's Project Surya Kiran is a low-cost, highly customised solution that provides heat and dust control in existing Indian homes

rainfall. Although we are not making rain here, we are encouraging the hot air to rise so more cool air can take its place.

I put up a green-black high density polythene (HDPE) sheet on my driveway. This absorbed a large amount of dust. Then, I put the sheets on the windows after closing them. Inside the house, the temperatures dropped and the house became cleaner. Then I fixed up desert coolers, one in each room, so the temperature dropped further and when it was over 40° degrees outside, it was 24-25° inside. In addition, I have painted the roof of my house with white cement, which reflects the sun rays. So without any air-conditioners or fans in my house, I am able to cool my house, lower my power bills and do my little for the health of the planet. Now we have to let the hot air out of the house so we leave a small opening in the ventilator or a window so the hot air goes out.

One major advantage of this application is that the HDPE sheet is coming out of recycled plastic. Factories have sprouted up across the states to recycle plastic waste and make it into these sheets. From this comes my slogan: Cool India, Clean India. I want every home in India to stop using air-conditioners and work with desert coolers. It is so much better and economical. I cannot stop the production of plastic, but with the making of HDPE sheets from HDPE waste (telephone handsets, old computers etc), the waste plastic can be recycled and used for making the sheets which, in turn, can be used for keeping houses cool.

I use water as a heat exchanger for which an air-conditioner uses chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) that are

23 times more toxic than any other gas. And CFC is responsible for depleting the ozone layer. So if we can minimise this toxicity in a small way, we are helping our planet.

I have the patents for this particular technology and it has been globally accepted by many countries including the US. SGS, a Swiss company certifying innovations, came to my house and stayed with me for seven days to certify that the temperature inside the house was 24° while outside it was 42° and the dust level was 0.0145 mg. This acknowledgement was a great boost for my morale.

What do I get out of it? I get a small sum when I sell the technology to those who can add value to it and make use of it. They, in turn, can generate their own revenue from it. But they cannot sell the technology further, as that is mine. I have appointed a number of dealers in some states and they are spreading the word.

Among my other innovations is what I call 'Anytime Power' or low-cost power for the masses. The project comprises self-sustainable, scalable, hydroelectric power plants (small and medium) for 150 developing countries. It recycles water without using any pumps, thus offering low-cost power (0.11 paise per unit) for 3 billion consumers in the developing world.

Unfortunately for my country, no one is willing to listen beyond the idea of large dams that are increasingly becoming unviable. I hope the Government of India wakes up to the potential of such ideas and how they can change the face of the country.

—As told to Shyamola Khanna

I am a retired teacher with good gardening skills and a farmhouse with a yard that I want to convert into a nursery. How do I turn the nursery into a business and what are the risks involved?

First, figure out the kind of plants you intend to grow. You can start with low-risk home garden plants and move on to landscaping and reforestation as your business grows. Try your best to figure out how much you will be able to sell, as this will decide how many plants you will need to grow at one time. This is determined by your location, ease of access, and what customers want. Your aim should be to avoid surplus supply as this will only drain your resources.

You will need a continuous supply of gardening materials, from soil to seeds, containers to pesticides and soil conditioners. So find a suitable wholesale dealer, preferably one who also has a home delivery service. Invest in good quality equipment like shovels, rakes, pipes; tractors and trailers too, if necessary.

I am sure you already have sufficient knowledge about what kind of plants could best grow in your area. Growing exotic plants that need special greenhouse structures and temperature-altering equipment would only increase your initial expenses, and is not advisable when you are just starting out. Remember to keep in mind each plant's growth time, and make sure you have enough backup capital to provide for the plants until they're ready to be sold in the market.

—Salim Akbar is a consultant horticulturist in Bengaluru



Skin saver: Age plays a role, but diet is a key as well

I am a 55 year-old woman. Of late, my skin has started sagging, especially from the arms and chin. How do I counter this problem?

Skin that has lost its spring isn't the result of just one cause. Several factors are likely to be responsible for making our once supple skin appear tired and droopy. But the most common cause of sagging skin is ageing. As we age, our skin loses collagen and elastin, and its supportive connective tissue that make it look soft, plump and youthful. In addition, facial muscles can weaken with age, which takes a toll as well.

These days, sagging of skin is not only the problem of individuals who have crossed 50 but also common among youngsters. There are a lot of contributing factors other than ageing. You have stress, hectic work schedules, irregular eating habits, increased pollution, over exposure to ultraviolet rays, higher intake of junk food, unhealthy lifestyle, dehydration, excessive and fast weight loss techniques and many more.

One of the key factors that can be controlled is the diet or the food one eats. Diet plays a major role in health, particularly hair and skin care. Hair and skin texture reflect eating habits, nutritional status and care for one's health.

Check the following points before working on the problem.

- Do you have a hectic lifestyle?
- Do you sleep less than six hours a day?
- Do you take enough water throughout the day?
- Do you have enough antioxidants in your diet to support your skin health?
- Do you use several cosmetic products on your skin?
- Do you smoke or drink?
- Are you on any cosmetic procedure for weight loss?

- Is exercising a part of your daily schedule?
- Are you taking enough proteins in your diet?

In fact, all the above points are a part of our lifestyle. With a healthy lifestyle and balanced diet one can avoid the problem of sagging skin. Alter your diet to include foods that encourage the production of elastin and collagen, the compounds your body makes that give the skin its elasticity. This might help tighten loose skin.

- Include quality proteins in your diet. Proteins in the body are required to combat wear and tear and maintain skin elasticity. Good sources include soy protein, *dal*, milk, yoghurt, cheese. For non-vegetarians, fish is a very good option as it not only provides high quality protein but is also rich in Vitamin B12 and iron.
- Make your diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids as they help in giving shine and smoothness to your skin and thus maintaining its elasticity. Rich sources include salmon, flaxseeds, sunflower seeds.
- Eat vitamin-rich food: It is highly recommended that you eat vegetables, fruits, animal proteins, grains, nuts and vegetable oils. These foods supply vitamins C, E, A, B complex, and K, essential fatty acids and three minerals: selenium, copper, and zinc. Specifically, you can find these essential nutrients in the following: asparagus, bell peppers, broccoli, spinach, cauliflower, garlic, olives, leafy greens, bananas, vegetable oils, flax and safflower oils, flaxseed, rice, salmon, sardines, mackerel.



- Consuming citrus fruits positively impacts the elasticity of skin due to their Vitamin C content.

One large tangerine, for instance, provides you with 32 mg of Vitamin C, a significant portion of the 75 to 90 mg you require daily. Vitamin C triggers the production of collagen.

- Oysters pack a wallop of selenium and zinc, reviving the skin's elastin content.



Make your diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids as they help in giving shine and smoothness to your skin, thus maintaining its elasticity. Rich sources include salmon, flax seeds and sunflower seeds. Citrus fruits too impact the elasticity of skin positively due to their Vitamin C content

Ideal food plan

Early morning: Start your day with green tea enriched with antioxidants and 7-8 almonds rich in omega 3 fatty acids.

Breakfast: Boiled egg or muesli with a glass of milk and a fruit bowl.

Mid-morning is the best time to include fresh vegetable juice providing vitamins A, C and selenium, zinc and iron.

Lunch should include one portion of *dal*, one green vegetable, 2-3 chapattis, a bowl of yoghurt and salad.

Evening: A cup of green tea or normal tea with some healthy snack like roasted soy, *chana*, *khakra*, sprouts or *kala chana* cutlets.

Dinner: Include soup (broccoli, mushroom, tomato) to increase the antioxidant content of your meal, followed by two to three chapattis, vegetable, sometimes paneer or tofu-based vegetable with a bowl of salad. For non-vegetarians, fish is a very healthy option as it is not only rich in proteins but also has good amount of essential fatty acids.

READERS ASK

I am a 65 year-old diabetic man. It is a season for weddings and grand feasts. Is it okay to indulge once in a while or must I stay away from these sumptuous meals completely?

Weddings and festivals are the times when everyone enjoys food; even diabetics. But moderation is the key. Too much indulgence can result in high levels of blood glucose. Diabetics have to be calculative in selecting the meal options available at weddings and parties. One should consult a nutritionist before going out for parties and weddings. I would suggest that you follow the following specifications while eating outside:

- Eat before stepping out: Eating before going out for a party would not only help in controlling your craving for desserts and fried food but would also maintain your blood sugar levels. Some healthy options are salads, one fruit, roasted *chana*, or roasted soy.
- While at a party, choose high fibre roasted snacks like baked mushrooms, paneer *tikka*, fruit *chaat*, *moong dal cheela*, plain *dosa*, *idli*, *matra chaat*, etc, but don't forget that moderation is the key.
- Do not eat too much at one point of time. Keep a gap of half hour to one hour in your snacks and main course.
- Start your main course with salads, followed by *tandoori roti*, *missi roti* with some yoghurt and salad. Try avoiding *dal* and vegetables outside as they are full of fat and rich in calories.
- Avoid food that you think has excessive oil, cream or cheese.
- These days, a lot of options are available for live cooking; you can get your own healthy vegetable pasta made with loads of veggies.
- If you are on insulin therapy, then you need to maintain your carbohydrate intake accordingly.
- Do not forget to have salad with your meals, as the fibre in it would help in slow release of glucose, thus controlling blood glucose levels.
- If you are planning to have a dessert at the end, then cut down your carbohydrate intake by cutting down on chapattis, bread and snacks.
- Drink water: keep sipping water in between to control appetite.
- Once back home, have half a teaspoon of *methi* powder with a glass of water.

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



Harmony at home: 14 tips for 2014!

Age starts creeping into our lives slowly but surely. As these are the sunset years, we should work towards filling them with great happiness, harmony and health. Here are some tips that will help you and your soulmate make life more beautiful.

1. Give due respect to your partner

Always think that your wife is your companion forever. She has held your hand tight at times of struggle and has given a happy hug at every success. Even if there was neither struggle nor success, the very fact that she is with you has added value to your life, so just feel that she is your better half and let your actions show your feelings for her. A lot of husbands treat their wives like a housemaid or nurse whose only purpose is to serve. This attitude has to be abolished.

A husband has to empathise with his wife taking into account that she too will be facing mental and physical problems that come exclusively with ageing. Hence it is essential for the husband to respect her, as much as love her. And vice-versa.

2. Helping yourself out

Getting dependent on your spouse even for small things like taking your daily medication is not a healthy habit; start helping yourself. In the rarest possibility of the wife passing away suddenly, the husband should not remain helpless for the rest of his life. So just equip yourself for the worst while wishing for the best.

3. Be attached, yet detached

A sense of attached detachment is very important to help us age gracefully. Getting too attached to our loved ones will hurt us when something goes wrong. This would leave a painful scar. Love heals but love can hurt too. So love unconditionally but not too much.



4. Eat healthy, live better

Plan the menu together, cook together and dine together. Resolve to eat only natural food.

5. More time for family

Spend most of your time with your spouse and family. Go for a good movie. Plan a get-together. Go travelling and visit places of worship. Laugh out loud and love with all your heart.

READERS ASK

A husband has to empathise with his wife taking into account that she too will be facing mental and physical problems that come exclusively with ageing. Hence it is essential for the husband to respect her, as much as love her. And vice-versa

6. Enough is enough

Say goodbye to bad habits like smoking and drinking. This is sure to surprise your spouse. By doing this, you can show that you care for your spouse.

7. Watch your weight

Obesity is the main reason for most health-related issues in silver years. So keep a watch on your weight. Working out or even going for a walk together is sure to be fun. Even if one is lazy, the better half will always give the extra push.

8. Periodic health check-up and immunisation

Health is wealth, more so in old age. Go together for a routine health check-up at least once a year. Assessing your health status will help greatly in planning your future. Prevention is always better than cure and hence it's always good to immunise. Be a strong couple.

9. Health insurance

Health insurance is a must for every couple. Unexpected ailments can burden you financially, which, in turn, will hurt you emotionally. So take a policy and don't forget to renew it.

10. Emergency drugs

Always have the most needed drugs in your house and carry a small kit during travel.

11. Make your will, well in advance

Which share for which child has to be clearly decided by both of you and the documents should be made ready, so that such things don't bother you any time later.

12. Financial freedom

Ensure sound finances for the latter part of life. Don't give away all your property to your sons/daughters. There are better ways of showing your affection and care. Make sure

I am 73. I have recently observed a slight change in my voice, but there is no discomfort in my throat. I am a non-smoker and non-alcoholic. Is this simply due to ageing or should I go in for tests?

At any age, change of voice should be considered abnormal, unless proved otherwise. In silvers it is all the more important. The change of voice can be due to any one of the following reasons:

- Throat infection
- Problems in the vocal cord; for instance, thickening of the cord, polyp, malignancy, paralysis of the cord
- Lung cancer
- Hypothyroidism
- Stroke, Parkinson's, depression
- Drug allergy

The exact cause should be detected first and treatment may be targeted accordingly.

that you have a share. This will be of great help in future. Your fixed deposits, bonds, shares and all other documents should be in the name of both the partners.

13. Identity cards

It is always ideal to carry an identity card containing all your details, including health details, whenever you go out.

14. Sexuality

Love has no age barrier. Love between old couples is equally sacred. Sexuality for the aged is good for those who wish it. Even when physical contact has no significance in a relationship, eye contact and body language make a world of difference. After leading a family life for 30-40 years, accommodating each other with a spirit of give and take, it is your spouse who stands by till the last breath. It is generally observed that when a couple has been together for long, when one of them passes away, the survivor passes away in a matter of years, unable to withstand the tragic separation.

Good understanding among husband and wife, physical and mental well-being, regular exercise, good food, hobbies and sound finance are essential to make old age a golden age for the awesome twosome.

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

Shine bright: Get clearer, younger looking and healthier eyes with yoga

The first sign of ageing and strain is always seen at the eyes. Though much of life gets to leave a footprint around how we see the world, something can be done to remove the look of stress or strain that our eyes invariably get. In yoga, there is a complete set of eye exercises, with amazing variety, called *trataka*, which help remove this strain from the eyes, and help them look out into the world with clarity and strength.

Conventional health streams believe the faltering in the eyes comes from the weakness within parts of the eye itself. But alternative therapies believe the main mischief to the eyes stems from the weakness of the muscles that support the eyes within the socket. This weakness comes from several controllable triggers—diet and psychosomatic reactions triggered by our emotional response to stressors in life, among others.

Trataka exercises work powerfully on the mind too. They are said to remove the toxic residue of negative thinking, calm a vacillating mind, and develop sharpness and focus. This, in turn, impacts the mind and, no doubt, helps us make wise choices where food and lifestyle are concerned.

Trataka exercises help us deal with sleep problems and stress, and enable overall healing. Along the way, they are believed to prevent the degeneration of sight and vision

These exercises also help us deal with sleep problems and stress, and enable overall healing. Along the way, they are believed to prevent the degeneration of sight and vision. The aesthetic bonus? The eyes remain clear and look young.

There are other practices that complement *trataka*: yogic nasal cleansing (*jal neti*), skull cleansing *pranayama* (*kapaalabhati*), forward-bending poses and upward looking backbends like the bow (*dhanurasana*). In fact, much of the forward and backward-bending and the upward tilt of the face is taken care of in the sun salutation series (*surya namaskar*) too. Some hand gestures (*mudra*) like *prana mudra* are also said to help in this fashion.

YOGIC MOVES

Eye exercise (*trataka*)

Sit with legs stretched out or crossed. Place your left hand on the thigh. Lift the right arm at shoulder level. Push the right thumb out, slightly clenching the fist. Draw a large circle with the hand, keeping the thumb out. Do not move the head. Allow the eyes to follow the thumb, completing half a circle to blink once, and then complete the other circle after the first blink. Repeat anti-clockwise. Then rub your palms together, generating warmth, and gently cup closed eyes with palms to feel the soothing warm blackness (called palming). Open and repeat a round in the anti-clockwise direction. Do not strain the eyes. Do only for a few minutes initially, always remember-



ing to rest the eyes with palming between rounds. Avoid if you have an eye infection or serious eye problems, like cataract or glaucoma.

Benefits: This calms the mind, exercises the eyes and protects the vision by training it for both long distance and peripheral view.

Model: Jayshree Gemani,
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 SMT MEERA SAVOOR, CHENNAI

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

"One was struck by the pristine purity of the *swara* and the phenomenal range of her clear ringing voice with which she traversed three octaves with ease." These words from national newspaper *The Hindu* are in praise of the Hindustani singer Mrs Meera Savoor, this month's great-grandmother from Chennai. She is

a senior grade artist at the All India Radio and has performed at many forums in India and abroad. She speaks sparingly, allowing her serene gaze to communicate her thoughts and feelings. A mother of three, grandmother to six and great-grandmother to four, she looks beautiful even now at 81 and exudes a grace that cannot be ignored.

Namaste Meeraji. At what age did you start your training in Hindustani music?

I started in 1939 at the age of seven under my guru, Pandit Ramarao Naik, who was known as the most faithful exponent of the Agra *gharana*. He was the direct disciple of the legendary maestro, Ustad Faiyaz Khan.

Isn't this also known as the Rangila gharana?

Yes. *Rangila gharana* means 'the colorful school'; it gets that name because it has lots of beauty and many elements of vocal music such as *alaap*, *badath* and so on. All the eight elements of *khayal* are woven in this style of singing, giving rise to a musical rainbow. I trained in this *gharana* for almost 30 years, but not at a stretch.

And when did you start imparting your knowledge?

In 1990, I started teaching at home. I have also taught at KM Music Conservatory for almost five years.

As a classical vocalist, could you recall the most treasured moment in your journey?

Looking back, that would be in the year 1993 when I performed at the Tansen Samaroh in Gwalior when my guru was presented with the Tansen Award. In that forum, where senior musicians and gurus are honoured, one of their disciples is called to perform. To perform at such an august gathering is a rare honour and was a proud moment for me.



Chennai Pix



Yamini V

Have you always lived in Chennai?

No, I was born in Bangalore and grew up there. After I completed my high school education, I was married to R S Savoor, the son of Dr S R U Savoor. I have lived in Chennai for over seven decades now.

Are you a Konkani by birth as well as marriage?

Yes, we are Konkanis, though it would be more apt to call us Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins.

Can you explain the connection?

Our forefathers derived their name from Sarsawat Rishi, our spiritual guru. He lived on the banks of river Saraswati that flowed near Kashmir and is now extinct. From Kashmir, the Saraswats migrated to Goa, and thereon to the west coast of Mangalore. Here, they made Chitrapur their headquarters. Chitrapur was initially a small village, which later flourished into a town under the guidance of the Saraswat Swamis. Hence they came to be known as the Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins.

This also explains why your cuisine is very close to Udupi cuisine.

Yes, rice is our staple food, which we mix with plain *dal*, *sambhar* and *rasam*. We use lots of coconut as we live on the western coast, which has an abundance of coconut trees.

What are your family's favourite preparations?

Simple home-cooked Saraswat dishes [smiles]. A potato side-dish known as *batata song* is one of our *amchee* dishes, which means favourite. Most of our homes have a pressure cooker stacked with three containers. When we want to cook with minimum fuss, we use each of the three containers for rice, *dal* and potatoes. We stack them and cook them together. We then make a simple *dal*, make the *batata*

song and eat them with steamed rice. Our family never tires of this simple meal.

That sounds like comfort food. Meeraji, I would love to know more about your cuisine.

I recommend the famous Saraswat cookbook titled *Rasachandrika*. It features almost all our recipes in a very simple manner. A sweet dish known as *madagne* is a popular preparation during most festivals. It is a *kheer* with *chana dal*, coconut milk and jaggery. And yes, a pinch of salt, don't ask me why [smiles]! That's how I have seen

"Rice is our staple food. We use lots of coconut because we live on the western coast which has an abundance of coconut trees"

my elders doing it too. But if you ask me for a dish that I really want to share, it would be *sasam*, which is a side-dish with mustard paste.

That sounds delicious! Apart from singing and teaching, how else do you spend your time?

I enjoy reading spiritual books, particularly those from Ramakrishna Mission, apart from our guru *parampara* and other Chitrapur Math publications. Right now, I am reading Deepa Kodikal; she is a spiritual writer and one of my favourites.

FROM MEERA SAVOOR'S KITCHEN

Batata sasam

Sasam, meaning mustard seeds in Konkani, is a side-dish with many variations prepared by tossing veg-

etables, and also fruits, in a coconut-mustard dressing. This is a popular dish of the Saraswat cuisine.

Ingredients

- Potatoes: ¼ kg

For *sasam* paste

- Coconut: ½; grated
- Green chillies: 2
- Mustard seeds: ¼ tsp
- Salt to taste

Method

Boil the potatoes, peel and chop into small bits. Grind the ingredients for the paste using little water. After grinding, add another ½ cup water and mix well (this dressing is neither thick nor watery). Toss the potatoes in the coconut dressing. Add more salt if required. Serve as a side-dish in a meal.

Variations

Bhainda sasam: Replace the potatoes with okra. Chop ¼ kg okra and roast in 1 tbsp oil until done. Mix with the *sasam* paste.

Ambe sasam: Replace with ripe mangoes. Peel and chop two ripe mangoes into small bits. Add 1-2 tsps of jaggery while grinding the paste. Toss the chopped ripe mangoes into the paste.

Anvas ambe sasam: Add chopped pineapples along with mangoes in the above recipe. This is considered a fruit salad among Konkanis. Some people enjoy adding grapes and tomatoes as well.

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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Anshuman Akash Jha

Inside a democratic mind

Jagdeep Chhokar aspires to improve governance and democratic reforms in India. But citizen activism is only one of his many talents, discovers **Ambica Gulati**

A call to prayer has just gone up at a nearby mosque as 69 year-old Jagdeep S Chhokar sips tea on a terrace laden with flowerpots. A founder member of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), Chhokar is a man on a mission. He calls himself a citizen activist and has been working to improve democracy and governance in India for 13 years. But his high-profile work eclipses a softer side, one that is farthest from the legal cut-and-thrust of the ADR's work. Before he elaborates on the turning point in his life, he looks back at the time when the ADR was launched.

Chhokar's self-confessed, primary mission is to improve governance in India and introduce transparency in the electoral system. Oddly though, sensitising people and working to foster a democratic mindset was not a deliberate choice. His tryst with democratic reforms began in 1999, while he was a professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A).

"One of my colleagues, Trilochan Sastry encouraged me to study electoral reforms," recalls Chhokar. He and his colleagues at IIM-A used to scan media reports about elected representatives with criminal cases pending against them. Chhokar dug deeper and started discussing the issue with colleagues, till they finally decided to file a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court in December 1999. That was a red-letter day as it marked the launch of the ADR with 11 founding members: eight professors from IIM-A, two former students and a professor from the National Institute of Design.

Chhokar and his colleagues tasted sweet victory in 2003, when the Supreme Court declared that electoral candidates with criminal cases pending against them had to publicly declare these details. This also led to the establishment of a National Election Watch Cell, which dis-

seminates information on candidates to the public, so that people can make informed choices when casting the ballot.

The impact has been widespread. Twenty-year-old Umang Vaid called up the ADR just before the recent Delhi Assembly elections. "There were candidates from the Congress, BJP and Aam Aadmi Party in my constituency," he says. "I got all the relevant information about three candidates before I cast my vote and am grateful to the ADR for providing this service." Now, the ADR is crusading to get the apex court to declare that MPs and MLAs with criminal cases pending against them must step down from public office.

With Chhokar, you should always be ready for surprises. "I started my career as an engineer-manager with the Indian Railways and worked as an international marketing manager for four years. Later, everyone insisted I get an MBA degree. So I went to the US and acquired a PhD and finally ended up teaching at IIM-A," he says, of his academic journey. Nurturing an almost innate desire to learn, Chhokar says it was his work with lawyers during the ADR's campaigns that made him realise the need to be armed with a law degree. "So I secured a degree in law from Gujarat University. I retired from IIM-A in November 2006 and in December, I enrolled with the Gujarat Bar Council. But I prefer to call myself a legal researcher." Reminiscing on his first case, Chhokar says, "While we were busy with the issue of candidates' backgrounds, we realised that the expenditure and funding of political parties were not being made public. We hit a wall trying to access the IT returns of 22 political parties and were told that political parties were not public authorities."

The ADR pointed out to the Central Information Commission in Delhi that as political parties were performing a constitutional role, they should be considered public authorities. Chhokar finally argued his way to victory. "Knowing the law and arguing a case are very different. And I was facing some real hard-nosed lawyers," he reminisces. "The political parties had sent 10 lawyers to represent them."

Other than courtroom battles, Chhokar is very hands-on and believes in engaging the electorate directly. Before the recent Delhi Assembly elections, he spoke on electoral reforms and informed choices across colleges in Delhi University. "Work for change begins bottom-up and citizen education is very important," he explains. Corroborating this, Mashqura Fareedi, programme officer with the ADR remarks, "Jagdeep Chhokar continues to inspire the or-

ganisation and we always encourage students to attend his lectures. Now, we have around 1,200 partners [NGOs and societies] across India through whom we disseminate information 10 days before the polls. Currently, we are working on researching and collecting data on the 2014 Lok Sabha elections."

There's more to Chokkar than being a seasoned campaigner. "Ever since I retired in November 2006, I have been spending my time reading, writing on various subjects, and speaking at public forums," says Chokkar, who has travelled to more than 50 countries, often speaking at educational institutions. "Kiran [his wife] and I travel together. For instance, when I was going to Mexico for a seminar, she came along, and when she was travelling to Brazil on work, I tagged along!" With his easygoing demeanour and straightforward manner, it's hard to tell that Chhokar

has been listed in the *Who's Who In The World* (1997-1998), *Who's Who In Finance & Industry* (1998-1999) and *Who's Who In Asia And The Pacific Nations* (1999). "I have never read the listings, although I did see them on my travels abroad," he shrugs.

His demeanour changes ever-so-slightly when he talks about a life-changing event. In September 1998, Chhokar underwent quadruple bypass surgery while teaching in the US. "I thought my life would come to a standstill. But it has been a better journey after that," he smiles. "I call it my turning point." Perhaps

for the first time, Chhokar looked above and beyond and started appreciating the wonders of nature, opting for ornithology. "I did a distance learning certificate course in ornithology from the Bombay Natural History Society. Watching birds and being with nature have taught me patience and appreciation of the world around." In his book-lined study-cum-office, he slides out a neatly preserved article he co-authored that was published in *National Geographic Birdwatcher*, titled "Taste for Swiflet's Edible Nest Lowering Its Numbers".

When he puts down his binoculars, Chhokar finds relaxation in editing. He is the lead editor of a volume titled *Culture and Leadership across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies* (2007). It seems our citizen activist is not the only one with an academic bent in the Chhokar home. His wife Kiran, also a trustee of the ADR, was once an editor and writer as well. "I usually end up helping with the feedback and editing his work," she smiles. Quips Chhokar, "I don't send in anything to print unless it has been cleared by her!" ❀

Chhokar and his colleagues tasted victory in 2003, when the Supreme Court declared that electoral candidates with criminal cases pending against them had to publicly declare these details

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harmony
celebrate age



the artist



Living legend
of Bengali
cinema
Soumitra
Chatterjee
has a special
ability to
surprise one
and all. In a
freewheeling
interview
with **Partha
Mukherjee**, the
80 year-old
thespian
explains
how art
imitates life

Photographs by Shilbhadra Datta

You could call him a legendary actor-theatre personality-director-poet—and it would still fall short.

Soumitra Chatterjee, blessed with a special ability to reinvent himself and portray the most subtle nuances of the human condition on screen and stage, was introduced to Bengali cinema by none other than the great Satyajit Ray in *Apur Sansar*. Later, Chatterjee went on to act in 14 of Ray's 35 films and, over the years, collaborated with other iconic directors such as Aparna Sen and Tapan Sinha. Where others like him would rest on their laurels, Chatterjee surprised his audience, yet again, by presenting a brand new avatar. Recently,

he unveiled a collection of his doodles, which he describes as “wonderful companions of my idle moments”.

Chatterjee's disdain for star power is born of a desire to prove that it is the actor who always triumphs. In fact, Naseeruddin Shah once aptly said of Chatterjee that it is his “lack of acting” that sets him apart. “All my good roles have a part of my personality in them,” explains the man himself. “My role in *Koni* had the teacher in me; in *Ekti Jeevan*, the lexicographer in me found life; in *Apur Sansar*, the young and romantic poet; in *Abhijan* the daredevil.” The approximation of life on screen and stage and Chatterjee's insight into the psychology

of the characters he portrays beg one more question: would such depictions ever have been possible had he not perceived life from the perspective of a poet? Indeed, he has several books of poems to his credit. In fact, his 80th birthday recently was marked by a daylong celebration that included recitation of his poems, staging of plays directed by him, and an exhibition of his paintings.

We meet the legend at his Golf Green residence in Kolkata. As he walks into his parlour, dressed in a sports shirt and striped shorts, it's plain as day that Soumitra Chatterjee—the man, actor, poet and now doodler—lives life on his own terms.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW

You play many roles—actor, poet, orator, doodler, a socially conscious person, not to mention husband and doting dad. Which is the one role you love the most?

It is not correct to say that a man plays many roles. Man is one but he has many activities and it is the same for everyone. One has to be a father, a husband, a workman...it is all rolled into one. I don't think I have any preferred role. As acting is my bread and butter, I have to sort of stick to it. But the other 'roles', as you call them, are also necessary for my existence.

Is doodling art for you or a pastime? Your doodles speak of a keen observer of the world and people around him.

I have been doodling from a very early age. I might have been inspired by Rabindranath's manuscripts, where he kept 'doodling'. I was also inspired by two very talented painters who were also relatives of mine. Later, human faces became a dominant part of my doodles as I used this skill for stage and makeup design in the production of my plays.

Do your doodles speak about anything in particular?

No, they don't. I am very impatient and restless by nature and cannot sit idle for long. Doodling is literally a cherished pastime.

Why did you suddenly decide to go public with your doodles?

I was encouraged by a few painter friends like Jogen Chowdhury. Then I sought the opinion of Rabin *da* [Rabin Mandal] and another friend, Subir Banerjee. They are all painters of repute. Also, I was persuaded for months by Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya, the curator of ICCR, Kolkata.

Why are you so reluctant to talk about yourself?

I have nothing to boast about. There are so many greats in several fields, so many great actors, so many great poets. I sort of venture into some fields...and am, therefore, shy.

But you have made an enormous contribution to acting.

I am no judge of myself. It is up to other people to judge this. Even so, how many people know about my contribution? They would have to research it to find out what I have done. Only future generations might know.



You paint on canvas as well.

Is canvas the only medium of painting? Were the Mughal miniature paintings done on canvas? Several watercolour paintings were displayed at my exhibition. Aban Thakur [Abanindranath Tagore] never used oil; he used watercolour. Aren't those also 'paintings'?

You have been a part of the film industry for decades. How do you evaluate the evolution of the industry?

I don't think the film industry has evolved much. Sometimes there is a new trend and sometimes there isn't. There was a trend of copying South Indian films for 10-15 years. Now we see different types of films being made.

Do you feel that advancement in filmmaking technology has eclipsed the emotional connect of yesteryear films?

I don't find any noteworthy infrastructural development. Also, there have been some disturbing developments like monopolisation. One particular house, a production and distribution house, is controlling more than 80 per cent of show business. This is not 'development'; it's quite the opposite.

Do you read the pulse of your audience?

I cannot. I don't know what they look for. I believe no one can. If someone knew what the audience wanted, he would have made crores of rupees.

From *Apur Sansar* to *Shakha Proshaka*, you have been an integral part of Satyajit Ray's films. You have worked in 14 films with the legendary filmmaker. Take us through your association with him.

Is it possible to describe an association that lasted for 25-30 years in a few words?

Name a couple of new directors whose work excites you.

I have seen hardly any. I don't have the time or opportunity to watch cinema. And I can't watch films in cinema halls. I don't know who the new directors are. There are scores of new directors but I don't know any of them. In the past two years, I have watched two to three films, including *Autograph* by Srijit Mukherjee and *Bhuter Bhabishyat* by Anik Dutta. There was one film that impressed me and I happened to act in it. That was *Roopkataha Noy* directed by Atanu Ghosh.

"I CANNOT READ THE PULSE OF MY AUDIENCE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY LOOK FOR. I BELIEVE NO ONE CAN. IF SOMEONE KNEW WHAT THE AUDIENCE WANTED, HE WOULD HAVE MADE CRORES OF RUPEES"

What's happening on the stage front?

We have been staging *Sabjanta*, a thriller-comedy, and an adaptation of an English play, *Busybody* by Jack Popplewell, at different venues since October. I'm directing the play, with my daughter Poulami in the lead.

Are there any new films on the cards?

I have just finished shooting for a film *Shesh Boley Kichhu Nei* by Anjan Dutta.

Your performance in the play *Raja Lear* enthralled us.

Didn't I leave my audience enthralled by my acting in *Homapakhi* or *Atmakatha*? Each of them is a big performance.

Is it difficult for actors to accept their age?

I do not know what it is for others. I accept my age, otherwise how could I keep going?

What is a normal day like in Soumitra Chatterjee's life?

I wake up pretty early, then get ready for a morning walk, come back, start getting ready for the day's work, drink tea, eat breakfast, take my medicines and then do some orthopaedic exercises as I have developed ailments like spondylolysis and lumbar problems. Then, I set off on different assignments.

You are an avid reader. Whose works do you enjoy reading?

I read for my work, not to keep myself abreast of social change. I read because I'm addicted to knowledge. I read only that which will enhance my understanding and sharpen my perception of the subjects I work on. So I don't have a favourite author. In fact, I can't quite comprehend how they decide on one 'favourite author' these days. It speaks of a lack of basic reading. How can you choose one author as your favourite when there are millions? Tagore once said that he didn't have any favourite flower. Nature hates superlatives. At the most, we can identify the great, not the greatest.

In a recent interview to this magazine, Poulami said, 'Bapi has always steered us towards being good human beings.' How did you make sure both your children had a regular upbringing?

I never could ensure anything for my children. No one can. It is their life; they have grown into their own personalities on their individual journeys. Sougata, my son, plays the violin. He still writes a lot. He's written a dozen books of poems. I am a sort of friend in my children's sojourn.

FILMOGRAPHY

APUR
SANSAR
1959



ABHIJAN
1962



CHARULATA
1964



KAPURUSH
1965



ARANYER
DIN RATRI
1970



ASHANI
SANKET
1973



FELUDA
1974



GHARE
BAIRE
1984





"I'M ADDICTED TO KNOWLEDGE. I READ ONLY THAT WHICH WILL ENHANCE MY PERCEPTION OF THE SUBJECTS I WORK ON"

What is the best part about being a grandfather?

The best part about being a grandfather is that one should not expect anything back from the grandchildren. You do the most joyful thing to do—love them.

Your grandson Ronodip's stellar performance in *Dutta vs Dutta*, a film by Anjan Dutta, proved his calibre as a budding actor. Do you think he is another Soumitra in the making? Do you think he will carry your legacy forward?

Why should he? I do not expect him to follow in my footsteps. He has to search and find his own way of acting. Whom did I follow?

Typically, actors are the subject of much gossip but you have dodged it quite magically. How have you managed to retain your image of a true family man?

Not all actors are the subject of gossip. Can you imagine a comic actor as the subject of gossip? It is only those romantic heroes who become the subject of gossip. Some-

times there has been some gossip about me as well. I can't remember the details and don't want to either. I am not a very strong family man.

Why do you say that?

Because, mostly, I have been working. How much time do I devote to my family?

Your daughter says, 'Even when *Bapi* is away from home, he doesn't forget to phone us.'

Does one phone call every day make a man a true family man? You can say it echoes my love and attachment towards my family but doesn't confirm that I am a true family man. A true family man should devote his time to his family.

In what way has Deepa *kakima* [wife] been a support to your life and career?

She has always been a steady support.

Hand in hand

Love is... spending time together. As the decades wear on, you can trace its evolution, from candy and flowers to PTA meetings, family dinners and, finally, just the two of you, together again. Celebrating the power of two, we look at couples who have found new ways to spend time together and reconnect

A visit to their daughter in Mumbai coupled with a brainwave was a turning point for Bangalore-based R Venkataramanan, 74 and 67 year-old Rama. Married in 1966, they never had enough time for each other, what with raising three children and the pressures of work, says Venkataramanan. "Still, we always tried to engage in a shared hobby. It was only after I retired and when our kids left home that Rama and I really began to spend time together."

Little did they realise the surprise retirement had in store. Sometime in late 2012, the couple was speaking to their daughter Malini Kartik in Mumbai over the phone about their visit to her home in early 2013. They were not prepared for what Malini told them—she had enrolled them for the 4-km Harmony Senior Citizens' Run at the Standard Chartered Mum-

bai Marathon to be held in January 2013. "We were taken aback and even sceptical," remembers Rama. "After some debate, my husband and I decided to take it up as a challenge."

The couple began taking regular walks to prepare for the run and the excitement began to build. "In January 2013, we participated in our first marathon. It was also the first time in her life that Rama wore a T-shirt," says Venkataramanan, chuckling at the memory of his wife asking for an 'XL' size so she could wear it over her *salwaar kameez*. When the whistle blew, the Venkatramans set off and completed the race in 45 minutes.

Triumphant and excited, the couple registered for their next marathon, the TCS Marathon in Bengaluru, in May 2013. An unofficial fitness regimen fell in place as he increased his time walking in the park while

she trained on the treadmill at home. This time, the Venkatramanans completed their marathon in 43 minutes. The couple is now eagerly looking forward to participate in Bengaluru marathon in May 2014.

Friends and relatives sometimes ask them why they chose something so strenuous. "Our physician regularly monitors our health and is thrilled that, at our age, we can walk up to 6 km per hour. Also, the walk keeps us healthy and our BP in check." There are also other, more intangible benefits. "Rama and I have been close throughout our marriage, through all the misunderstandings and arguments," he continues. "But the marathon fever is special because it feels like teamwork, training hard towards one shared goal—to complete the next race in 40 minutes!"

—Deepa Ramakrishnan



« Rama and
R Venkataramanan
BENGALURU



Jyoti and Nikunj Parekh

MUMBAI

Haresh Patel

Nikunj Parekh, 73, and his 67 year-old wife Jyoti are the quintessential picture of peace and togetherness—as they nip tiny branches off a bonsai tree, they murmur to each other, smiling and nodding, together creating art out of nature. The essence of their relationship is harmony and togetherness, which, as it turns out, is also the essence of the art of Bonsai. The Parekhs, residents of Mumbai, are popularly known as the pioneers of the art of Bonsai in India.

They met through a mutual friend, without knowing that they had attended the same school and college—and did the same course in botany—with a gap of five years between them. Botany graduates who were made for each other, Jyoti and Nikunj married in 1966. Earlier Jyoti

used to take cooking classes, where she was introduced to the concept of Bonsai by a friend. The experience took wings when Nikunj went on a business trip to Japan and attended a Bonsai exposition. Later, he went back to Japan with his wife and attended Bonsai training classes. Nikunj, who was a textile processing expert, switched to Bonsai after the textile mills strike in Mumbai. “We used our knowledge in botany to adapt Bonsai to India’s tropical plants,” explains Nikunj.

The joint authors of two books on Bonsai, and a quarterly magazine, *Nichin Bonsai*, their Bonsai Study Group of the Indo-Japanese Association is in its 35th year, with about 22 chapters across India and one in Muscat. Being Bonsai instructors

and garden designers, they also travel together quite often to these centres to guide and teach members and organise workshops.

Taking care of the plants and maintaining the gardens is almost a spiritual practice for the Parekhs. Early risers, after their round of exercise and prayers, they tend to the plants. Green living runs in the family with their only daughter running a paper-products boutique in Bengaluru.

The Parekhs have dedicated themselves entirely to their plants and classes, and spend all their time together. Jyoti says, “Working together, we always enjoy ourselves and have something to share and communicate, which is so important.”

—Neeti Vijaykumar



Chennai Pix

R Mohanabai and S V Ramabhadran

CHENNAI

Basking in Eden and revelling in the glory of 41 years of marriage is not something every married couple can hope to do. But S V Ramabhadran and R Mohanabai, both 66, are lucky to have their dream come true. They are spending their silver years in their dream home, a farmhouse they built in Tambaram on the outskirts of Chennai. Remarkably, they built a piece of heaven, bit by bit, over the years, as and when they could save enough money to convert a barren plot into a lush paradise.

“When we got married, my father had a large house with a garden,” recalls Mohanabai. “I never wanted jewels; I never pined for a lavish lifestyle. All I wanted was a house

with a garden.” Adds Ramabhadran, “Ours was a love marriage and we were determined to build a home like this ever since we were married in 1972.” The couple began scouting for a plot far from the madding crowd in the early 1990s. They bought the land in two parts and chose Tambaram because Mohanabai had grown up there. After she retired as a reader in history from Queen Mary’s College in Chennai in 2006, and he as regional head (Kerala), Bank of Baroda, the couple moved to the US to live with one of their daughters.

They returned to India in 2011 and began their labour of love—getting to work on their garden, nurturing it tenderly and watching it grow. “We

built a small house so we could allot more space to the garden, where we spend most of our time together,” Ramabhadran points out. “I am very particular about everything being organic including manure,” reveals Mohanabai.

Not surprisingly, their home is the envy of everyone they know. “My daughters simply love it,” smiles Mohanabai. “Friends say they don’t feel like going away once they come to visit!” Ramabhadran is distinctly more romantic when he says, “Once we lock the gates and are in our garden, we are in a world of our own. We have found a purpose in our lives, which is to rediscover ourselves.”

—Vinita Nayar

Pramila and Sunder Menezes

MUMBAI



ColorBlast

Ever since Sunder Menezes, 58 and 53 year-old Pramila discovered a new love, they've been Cha-Cha-ing their evenings away. Why, the Salsa, Rumba and Foxtrot have added a new zing to their marriage of 31 years, and have even made the couple the envy of their social circle!

It all began when Sunder decided to fulfil a lifelong dream. The Goan in him simply had to express itself in dance and although Pramila's bashful nature held her back, he signed up for dance lessons anyway. "I love music and felt trapped when I couldn't move to the beat," recalls Sunder, who lives with Pramila in Mumbai's suburban Bandra. Explaining her initial reluctance to shake a leg, Pramila says, "The idea of dancing in front of so many people held me back."

As Pramila couldn't be his dance partner, Sunder danced away at social functions with women from his dance

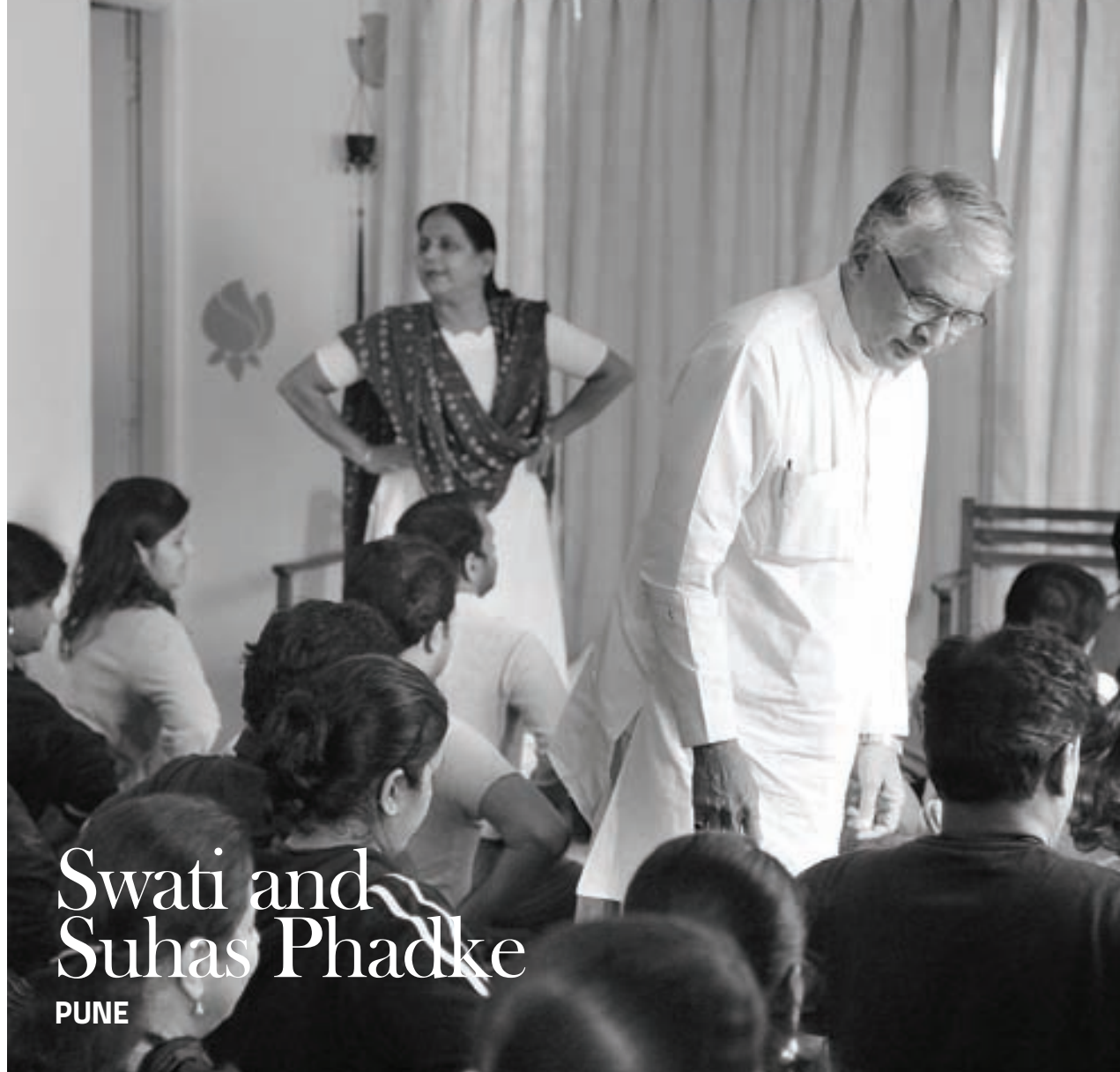
class. And that got Pramila wondering. "I simply couldn't understand what the fuss was all about," she laughs. After "feeling slightly jealous, watching him match steps with unknown women", Pramila decided to check out the irresistible lure of dancing. Sunder swooped on the opportunity and promptly enrolled her for lessons. Unlike her Goan husband, the Punjabi *kudi* in Pramila took time around the moves. "But with enough practice and support from my classmates, I got it right," she beams. "Today, she dances better than most of her friends and looks absolutely adorable when she dances in the kitchen as she fixes our meals, without realising she's being watched," chuckles her doting husband.

While dance is a means of expression for Sunder, it has built confidence in a diffident Pramila. Better still,

this shared passion has brought them closer and earned them new friends. "We go to more social events and weddings as we look forward to dancing there," says Pramila. Funnily enough, the couple's 20something daughters couldn't fathom why their parents had suddenly become this social 'item'. "Pramila and I would get back home from our lessons much later than they did. Sometimes, they'd have no plans for the evening and we would be at the club, dancing! They wondered whether there was something wrong with us," reveals Sunder.

Over time, their daughters have come to realise the joy dancing has brought their parents. "They have even tried to learn some steps from us," says Sunder with a chuckle. Adds Pramila, "I think everyone should learn how to dance. It opens them to so much beauty in life."

—Deepa Ramakrishnan



Swati and Suhas Phadke

PUNE

Hemant Patil

If a spiritual connection is the climax of marriage, Suhas Phadke, 65, and 55 year-old Swati from Pune have taken their relationship to an ethereal plane. This couple put soul into their marriage when they started practising and teaching Ashtang Yoga together, a belief system that has deepened their trust and faith in each other.

The duo got married 35 years ago. “Swati and I came from radically different backgrounds and we had to make a lot of adjustments when living together in a joint family. I used to be busy with drama after office hours and came home late at night. Swati used to wake up early and sleep early as she was deeply committed to our ancient culture and *Suryopasana*, which is worshipping the Sun God.”

Despite their differences, Suhas and Swati shared a common passion—both loved Vedic culture and were curious about yoga and meditation. Fuelled by this common interest, Suhas took two teacher training courses and a diploma in yoga and Ayurveda in the 1980s.

“Then, one day, we heard about an introductory seminar on ‘Rishi culture and modern lifestyle’. We signed up for the 15-day course, where we learnt Ashtang Yoga. It was love at first sight! We had been searching for something like this for a long time and had finally found it,” reveals Swati. Practicing Ashtang Yoga gives the couple immense satisfaction. “Ashtang Yoga has made our life easy as it reduces the stress of daily

living. Swati believes it has improved their interpersonal relationship and brought harmony, faith and true love for each other.

A banker by profession, Suhas was so taken by the benefits of yoga that he took early retirement and started teaching yoga at Siddha Samadhi Yoga. Swati soon followed suit although she retained her job with a bank. Today, the couple teaches Ashtang Yoga together to students ranging from 16-75 years. They also conduct *satsang* once a week.

“Our students tell us they have never seen a couple teaching yoga together,” says Suhas. “We complement each other and students find it inspiring.”

—Khursheed Dinshaw



Nibedita and Dr Achyut Medhi

GUWAHATI

Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

For Dr Achyut Medhi, 82, and his 74 year-old wife Nibedita, the gift of love is synonymous with the gift of giving, a way of life that has brought a deep sense of joy to their silver years. A made-for-each-other couple, their generosity has seen the marriage of two of their nieces Maloti and Himashri and two other young girls, who they adopted. A school-going boy, Ajoy Nath, 14, is their latest adoptee, who lives in their home in Guwahati.

This shared mission to adopt young boys and girls and nurture them till adulthood is special to both. “We realised we could overcome our pain of being childless by helping the poor,” explains Achyut, who worked in remote places of Assam as a govern-

ment doctor. A dutiful wife, Nibedita has been the epitome of support throughout her husband’s long career. “In spite of my liking for studies, I could not continue with my education after my matriculation in 1962. I have been like his shadow throughout,” she says. “I made writing my pastime and have written a number of short stories as well as essays for newspapers and magazines.”

But why didn’t they legally adopt children? “Legal adoption is a new, urban concept. Moreover, it is customary in Assamese society to take other people’s children and bring them up like their own,” reveals Achyut, who has donated all his ancestral land and money to charitable causes. Adds Nibedita, “We brought my husband’s

niece Himashri to our home when she was 18 months old. Maloti, his elder brother’s daughter, came to us when she was four. The other two girls we adopted, Annie and Sabita, belonged to poor families we had met during my husband’s postings. They lived with us till their late teens, when we got them married.”

“*Khura-khuri* [uncle and aunt] gave me a new life and I will always be grateful to them,” says 55 year-old Maloti. Naturally, the Medhis felt very lonely after all four girls were married. “So, a year ago, we picked up Ajoy from Bargaon. He has just been promoted to Class X. Ajoy looks after us and has brought so much joy to our empty home,” adds Nibedita.

—*Tapati Baruah Kashyap*

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.

What it's not, is your age.

At least not in your head.

Or in your heart.



If you're above fifty five, we believe Harmony is just the magazine for you. Filled with human interest stories, exciting features and columns, Harmony encourages you to do just one thing: live young.

Harmony
celebrate age

The bridge across forever

Replete with mythological references and relics of a bygone period, a trip to Land's End at Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram is a journey back in time

❖ 📷 Susheela Nair



As we embarked on our trip to Rameswaram, an island in the Gulf of Mannar in the south, the tension was palpable. There had been a bomb alert; security had been upped and police personnel toting guns lined the streets. However, this did not deter tourists like us, who were keen to explore the highlights of this ancient city. We tarried by the Annai Indira Gandhi Bridge, a customary halt on the itinerary of all those wishing to proceed to Rameswaram. Connecting Rameswaram with the main land at Mandapam, this bridge spanning 2.2 km is presumably the longest sea bridge in India. We gazed in wonder at this engineering marvel that took 14 years to complete. The view from the bridge was amazing with the vast expanse of the blue-green sea and the long Pamban Railway Bridge running parallel.

We began our spiritual sojourn with the Ramanathaswami Temple. There are many legends regarding the origin of this temple. It is believed that after rescuing Sita from the clutches of Ravana, Rama was advised to atone for the killing of the demon king. Hanuman was sent to Mount Kailasa to fetch a *Shivalingam* but as he failed to turn up on time, Sita fashioned a *lingam* from sand, which now occupies the main altar. Hanuman eventually did show up with the *lingam* and to assuage his disappointment, Rama decreed that in future the *Vishwalingam* brought by Hanuman should be worshipped before proceeding to the inner sanctum.

Lofty walls enclose the temple with huge pyramidal *gopura* entrances on each side. The gateways lead to a spacious closed ambulatory, flanked on either side by continuous platforms with massive pillars set on their edges. The pillared corridors cast the impression of a receding perspective of piers. Delicate scrollwork and brackets of pendant lotuses supported by crouching *yali*, mythical lion-like beasts, adorn the pillars. The painted medallions gracing the ceilings throughout are equally impressive. Because of the bomb threat, carrying cameras into the temple was banned, and so we missed a golden opportunity to click photos of this architectural marvel.

There are two gateways on the east that offer access to the Parvati and Ramalinga shrines in the centre. On entering the East Gate, we could see a statue of Hanuman, followed by that of Nandi flanked by the statues of the Nayaka kings of Madurai, Viswanatha and Krishnama. The *linga* are now housed in the inner section of Ramalingeshwara, not usually open to non-Hindus.

Before entering the inner sections, pilgrims are expected to bathe in water from each of the 22 *theertha* (tanks) in the temple. Each tank is said to house water with specific curative powers. It is believed that the Rama Vimosana *theertha* provides relief from debt; the Sukreeva *theertha* gives 'complete wisdom'; the Draupadi *theertha* ensures



A train chugs along the Pamban Railway Bridge

long life for women and 'the love of their spouses'; those who bathe at the Chandra *theertha* will 'acquire knowledge of the past, present and future and hence reach the worlds they aspire to'; while bathing at the Sarva *theertha* will prevent illness in silver years.

From there, we proceeded to Gandhamadana Parvatam, just over 2 km north of Rameswaram. This hill takes its name from the Sanskrit words *gandha* (fragrance) and *mada* (intoxicate): highly fragrant hill. With marbled footprints of Lord Rama enshrined here, this is believed to be the spot where Hanuman surveyed the land before taking his leap across the narrow Palk Strait to Sri Lanka. We too had an excellent view of the island nation from the mountaintop.

We headed next for the ruins of Dhanushkodi with a stopover at Kothandarama Temple, about 6 km earlier. The temple is the only structure to have survived the cyclone in 1964 that ravaged the village. Legend has it that Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, surrendered to Rama at this spot. Lined with casuarina on one side with the sea on the other, the ride to Land's End at Dhanushkodi was pleasant. Whizzing past, we had fleeting glimpses of the serene waters through the trees. Beyond Moonram Chathiram, the road does not exist. Other than the beach and some straggling fishing shanties, there's very little here. We reached a tiny fishing hamlet with thatched huts and a few battered fishing boats. From here, we clambered onto a jeep along with a motley crowd of pilgrims and tourists.

Located about 18 km southeast of Rameswaram town, Dhanushkodi is a long, windswept surf beach and sandpit that exudes an end-of-the-world feel. At the confluence of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, Dhanushkodi is also a forward outpost of the Indian Navy. In local parlance, Dhanushkodi means Bow's End. The gently shaping shoreline here does indeed suggest a bow. This was once a commercial fishing hub and the original sea link to Talai Mannar in Sri Lanka. Its other claim to fame is that it is the birthplace of our former President Dr Abdul Kalam.

It was a 7-km bone-rattling ride along barren and sandy terrain to the actual ruins. Entering the ghost town, you are caught in a time warp. There's nothing in sight except for the windswept beach and some stray shops selling seashells and refreshments. The sand has gobbled up everything here except for the collapsed walls of a few scattered buildings with exposed bricks that stand mute witness to the terrible tragedy of 1964. Exploring the ruins along the desolate coastline, we found a roofless battered edifice, which must have been a church. A sense of calm engulfed me as I stood inside, gazing at the altar, still intact. We could imagine the church resonating with prayers and chorals and the pastor preaching sermons during a Sunday morning mass. Moving on, we found a four-pillared water tank and stumbled upon Dhanushkodi railway station, a solid stone structure that is a sad reminder of the tragedy that occurred decades ago. Further to the tank are some ruined quarters for railwaymen and metre gauge tracks, half-hidden under the sands of time. These were the rails that carried the Boat Mail,

A DIP IN THE CALM WATERS SOOTHED OUR RATTLED JOINTS. NORMALLY, A BATH AT THE JUNCTION WHERE THE FEROCIOUS BAY OF BENGAL MEETS THE PEACEFUL INDIA OCEAN PRECEDES THE PILGRIMAGE TO RAMESWARAM





factfile

GETTING THERE

- **By air:** Madurai, the closest airport, is 174 km away.
- **By land:** Rameswaram is well connected by rail and a wide network of roads, and can be easily accessed from all the major cities of Tamil Nadu.

ACCOMMODATION

- GRT Regency, Tuticorin: Tel: 0461-2340777
- Royal Park, Rameswaram: Tel: 04573-221680
- TTDC, Rameswaram: Tel: 04573-221277

WHAT TO BUY

Seashells and shell-based handicrafts like wall-hangings, jewellery and decorative mirrors

WHERE TO EAT

Try the *thali* at Gujarat Bhavan, filter coffee at Narasu's Coffee and tiffin items at the Brahmin Mess near Sringeri Mutt

FOR MORE DETAILS

Contact the Government of Tamil Nadu Tourist Office, Bus Stand Complex, Rameswaram-623526; Tel: 04573-221371

Ruins of a church at Dhanushkodi; (facing page) devotees at a *theertha* at Ramanathaswami temple; a battered boat entrenched in the windswept beach

so called because it carried passengers to the steamer service that sailed to Ceylon, the old name for Sri Lanka. The grand red arch of a ruined post office also caught our eye. Walking amid the ruins, it's hard to believe Dhanushkodi was once a flourishing tourist and pilgrimage centre teeming with hotels, textile shops and *dharamshala* catering to travellers. We stumbled upon the relics of a temple buried among the debris, some battered boats firmly entrenched in the ground, and part of a bogie buried deep in the sand. After a ramble through the ruins, we walked to the end of the peninsula where the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean meet—we learnt from our guide that they are called 'Male' and 'Female' seas! A dip in the calm waters soothed our rattled joints. Normally, a bath at the junction where the ferocious Bay of Bengal meets the peaceful India Ocean precedes the pilgrimage to Rameswaram.

From Land's End, we gazed out at Adam's Bridge, also called Rama Sethu, the chain of reefs and islets that almost connect Sri Lanka to India. *Ramayana* recounts how Rama and his 'monkey brigade' built a bridge of stones across the sea to Lanka to rescue Sita from Ravana, while some Christians believe this is the mythical bridge that Adam crossed to reach Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka, where he stood repentant on one foot for almost 1,000 years. Absorbing the mythical aura of our surroundings, we took a dip in the shimmering, sparkling waters—and felt blessed. ✨

Change your view

Parantap Chakraborty meets the couple behind Santiniketan's Prakriti Bhavan where nature's creations find a new meaning



Photographs by Shilbadra Datta

Is it a stone or a statue of a seated ox? Is it a piece of wood or a figure of a bird chiselled to perfection? In Prakriti Bhavan, a one-of-its-kind museum in the precincts of Santiniketan, art and nature have merged to create visual delights, awakening the artist deep within everyone. For Subrata Basu, 68, collecting natural sculptures and curating these nature's artworks have remained a passion for over three decades. With nature as the creative artist, Basu's collection of dry wood, driftwood and rocks—some of them as old as 2,500 million years—assumes various meaningful forms.

ART

Little surprise then, that a fossil resembles Rabindranath Tagore in his robes, two rocks transform into a caterpillar and a piece of wood metamorphoses into an atomic explosion.

During his travels across the country, he seeks art in nature and meaning in formations. Basu's wife Sunipa, 67, recalls his first encounter with natural art, "Our elder son was a little more than six months. It was early winter in Kolkata, in 1976, when during an evening stroll near Dhakuria station Subrata exclaimed in sheer excitement, 'crocodile, crocodile!', after noticing a street

kid dragging a dry *Akondo* tree root for firewood. He promptly compensated the little boy and brought the piece home." Thus, his journey as a collector began. His second turning point came later that year, when during his first exhibition of these sculptures at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, iconic film director Satyajit Ray wrote in the visitors' book, "Today, I've seen something new. Such invaluable pieces of art found in nature and displayed so philosophically." His audience that day immediately realised that these 'natural sculptures' were as much creations of Subrata as they were of nature.

Over the next couple of decades, Basu continued to collect these sculptures while carrying out his official duties in the Government of India's revenue department. The dream to set up a permanent home for such a collection came true in 1995 when the Prakriti Bhavan Nature Art Gallery was registered as a society, with a view of sharing this collection with a larger audience. In 1997, the society was given an acre of land on lease by the West Bengal government in Ballavpur, near Santiniketan. With a partial grant from the Department of Culture, Government of India, the museum was opened for public viewing in 2003. The second gallery of the museum was opened in 2007 and the third in 2013.

The museum is designed beautifully with sculptures made of rocks and fossils suitably mounted on concrete bases, in open air. The more fragile sculptures made of different types of wood are placed inside the galleries. A wooden structure, Maitri, resembling two human forms with arms around each other, was replicated in concrete and placed in the garden; it also became the logo of the organisation. The entry fee to the museum is a nominal ₹ 10; it's free for children below six.

Sunipa is a constant source of support to Subrata's ideas; indeed, she



With nature as the creative artist, Basu's collection of wood and rocks—some of them as old as 2,500 million years—assumes various meaningful forms

brings her administrative skills to the museum, complementing his artistic impulses. Tirelessly attending to visitors at the museum, she takes us around Prakriti Bhavan. "A lot of precision and planning has gone into this endeavour. After our retirement, we are now devoting most of our time to it," she says.

Every December, the couple organises Poush Milon Utsav, a cultural programme celebrating the spirit of Mai-

tri; last year's theme was the 'Heart of Bengal'. Baul minstrels, Sufi fakirs and traditional dance by Santhal women added a splash of colour. What's more, Basu has also given life to The Living Rock Gallery in Shilparamam near Hyderabad, the Torch of Freedom, a natural wooden sculpture in the Cellular Jail Museum in Port Blair; and *Matsya Urvash*, a bronze sculpture on the banks of the Hoogly in Kolkata. Nature and nurture—in complete harmony.

THE PARSI CONNECTION

Long before Mumbai became India's business capital, Parsis were the pioneers in setting up textile mills, banks, chambers of commerce and steel factories in the city. They also initiated changes in the fields of education and healthcare, bringing about social, gender and labour reforms. An exhibition showcasing the history of Parsis in India, *Across Oceans and Flowing Silks: From Canton to Bombay 18th-20th Centuries*, brought to light the little-known aspects of the community through their artistic work, history and culture. Held from 26 December 2013 to 28 January 2014 at NGMA, Mumbai, the exhibition traced the extraordinary journey of the community, their trade with Canton, China, and the fabulous wealth they generated, which eventually earned Mumbai its title of India's financial capital. A companion exhibition, *No Parsi is an Island*, exhibited works by Parsi artists with a strong presence on the Indian art scene since the second half of the 19th century. Curated by Ranjit Hoskote and Nancy Adajania, the show displayed paintings by Pestonji Bomanji, M F Pithawalla, Jehangir Sabavala, and sculptures by Piloo Pochkhanawala and Adi Davierwalla.

Palm breeze

Mrinalini Mukherjee discovered herself through her art. Gautam Ruparel traces a contemporary artist's journey

Veteran artist Mrinalini Mukherjee, known for her intricately detailed bronze sculptures, was formally trained to be a painter. A nature lover at heart, Mukherjee recently returned to Mumbai after almost a decade with her latest work, *Palm-Scapes*. "My work has been inspired by palm trees," she says of her bronze series dated 2007 to 2012. Fired by Mukherjee's skill, these sculptures depict the stages in the life of a palm.

So how did the transformation come about for the alumni of Baroda's M S University? "It was something from within; I just kept working with it," she shares. "I let shapes evolve during their making. I first worked with natural fibre at a time nobody really did. So it wasn't really frustrating; it was more like a rediscovery. It was unique for its time and people appreciated what I did."

Under the tutelage of one of the stalwarts of Indian art, K G Subramanyan, Mukherjee took to dabbling with materials and went on to display her works around the world; this moulded her as a person and professional. "I had



Photo courtesy: Lalit Kala Akademi

the opportunity to work with ceramics, but most of it was done in Holland at the European Ceramics Work Centre [in Hertogenbosch], which is one of the best places in the world," she reminisces. But after coming back to India, she couldn't really work with it owing to lack of facilities. "I accidentally started working with wax but it was fragile; in the summer, it would start melting. So I had to think of casting it. That's when I started experimenting with bronze."

The only daughter of distinguished artists Benode Behari and Leela Mukherjee, her openness to experimentation comes from her parents. "Without considering any material inferior, my parents believed art could be made from anything," she says. "They worked regularly and kept learning, which gave them a good idea of what to expect even while experimenting. My works have been on the same lines."

Indeed, after all these years, she is happy with the way things have progressed.

"Most important, people's attitude towards art has changed. In 1972, when I had my first exhibition in fibre, many didn't even consider it art. And for many years, there was a debate on whether this was art or craft," she recollects. "Subsequently, all those works were exhibited internationally and accepted as sculptures. Now the Indian attitude towards materials and craft has changed because a lot of younger artists work with a variety of materials."

For Mukherjee, travel has been another source of inspiration. "It could even be a short drive in the neighbourhood; every trip has something in store. The more you travel, the more you see, the more you imbibe. Though I'm not in the best of health these days, given a choice I would love to travel."

Before it finally spells satisfaction, Mukherjee's art goes through rigorous and endless days of perseverance. "I work in my own studio from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm, though I wrap up by 3 pm on days I'm tired. In fact, I don't like to leave my work and attend to other things," adds the 64 year-old, revealing the commitment that has earned her the repute she enjoys today.





Haresh Patel

CAMERA MAN

He entered *Guinness World Records 2013* with a whopping collection of 4,425 cameras. An avid camera collector, Mumbai-based 60 year-old photojournalist Dilish Parekh started out with his grandfather's collection of 600 cameras that was bequeathed to him. Apart from holding the record for the largest collection of cameras (for still photography), his previous world record was for the largest collection of antique cameras: 2,634 in all. "I have been collecting cameras since 1978. I have collected these priceless pieces from places like flea markets and old studios, though I also buy them new," he reveals. "In fact, I had also advertised in newspapers." Parekh's apartment is home to rare cameras like the 1907-made Royal Mail Postage

THIS 'N THAT

stamp camera, 1934-made Leica 250 and 1962-made Bessa II, the oldest one dating back to 1890. His latest collection includes the Canon 5D and 7D, and Petal and Zippo spy cameras. Where does he find the place to accommodate them all? "My car is parked outside as I'm using my garage to store them! I have also encased some special ones inside my house. My wife jokingly calls the camera my first love!" Parekh recently participated in a photography festival in Navi Mumbai where he showcased his prized possessions for the first time to the public. "Cameras are my passion, my life," he says. "Going forward, my son, a photographer himself, will take care of my treasure."

—Sai Prabha Kamath

Heart to heart

We toast the season of love with an excerpt from *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) by Thomas Hardy, which introduced us to the unconventional love story of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene

When Gabriel had gone about two hundred yards along the down, he heard a “hoi-hoi!” uttered behind him, in a piping note of more treble quality than that in which the exclamation usually embodies itself when shouted across a field. He looked round, and saw a girl racing after him, waving a white handkerchief.

Oak stood still—and the runner drew nearer. It was Bathsheba Everdene. Gabriel’s colour deepened: hers was already deep, not, as it appeared, from emotion, but from running. “Farmer Oak...I...” she said, pausing for want of breath pulling up in front of him with a slanted face and putting her hand to her side.

“I have just called to see you,” said Gabriel, pending her further speech. “Yes...I know that,” she said panting like a robin, her face red and moist from her exertions. “I didn’t know you had come to ask to have me, or I should have come in from the garden instantly. I ran after you to say... that my aunt made a mistake in sending you away from courting me...”

Gabriel expanded. “I’m sorry to have made you run so fast, my dear,” he said, with a grateful sense of favours to come. “Wait a bit till you’ve found your breath...”

“What I meant to tell you was only this,” she said eagerly, and yet half conscious of the absurdity of the position she had made for herself—“that nobody has got me yet as a sweetheart, instead of my having a dozen, as my aunt said; I hate to be thought men’s property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day. Why, if I’d wanted you I shouldn’t have run after you like this; ‘twould have been the forwardest thing! But there was no harm in hurrying to correct a piece of false news that had been told you.”

“Come,” said Gabriel, freshening again; “think a minute or two. I’ll wait a while, Miss Everdene. Will you marry me? Do, Bathsheba. I love you far more than common!”

“Then give me time.” Bathsheba looked thoughtfully into the distance, away from the direction in which Gabriel stood.

“I can make you happy,” said he to the back of her head, across the bush. “You shall have a piano in a year or two and I’ll practise up the flute right well to play with you in the evenings.”

“Yes; I should like that.”

“And the babies in the births...every man jack of ‘em! And at home by the fire, whenever you look up, there I shall be...and whenever I look up there will be you.”

Her countenance fell, and she was silent awhile. “No; ‘tis no use,” she said. “I don’t want to marry you.” “A marriage would be very nice in

one sense. People would talk about me, and think I had won my battle, and I should feel triumphant, and all that, But a husband...”

“Well!”

“Why, he’d always be there, as you say; whenever I looked up, there he’d be.”

“Of course he would...I, that is.”

“Well, what I mean is that I shouldn’t mind being a bride at a wedding, if I could be one without having a husband. But since a woman can’t show off in that way by herself, I shan’t marry—at least yet.”

“Why won’t you have me?” he appealed, creeping round the holly to reach her side.

“Because I don’t love you...”

“But I shall do one thing in this life, that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die.”



A return to roots

Usually repositories of India's ancient wisdom like *The Upanishads* and *The Vedas* are sought in one's life at an age when, having meandered through the good, the bad and the ugly, tough lessons have been imbibed and the intent is to distil the redundant from the worthy. However, first-time author **Manisha Manchanda**, 56, from Kanpur has made it possible for children as young as 10 to find their way through the ancient mantras and *shloka* with an imaginative narrative, *Dadima, Tell Us About The Vedas* (Self-Published; ₹ 250; 57 pages). A postgraduate in child development and family relations, Manisha Manchanda speaks to **Suparna-Saraswati Puri** about the inspiration behind the book.

How did the idea of writing for kids come about?

Strange as it may seem, I had no plans to write for children; it just happened! Actually, I have always loved doing things with children—singing and dancing, involving them in activities like painting, sticking and cooking, telling stories and teaching them through creative and innovative methods.

How did the idea for *Dadima, Tell Us About The Vedas* come about?

When I was visiting my elder son Abhinav in Pune, I had a lot of free time, during which I started writing the meaning of some of the Vedic mantras that had inspired me through life in English. I have always wanted to read *The Vedas* in English. Even though I do not consider myself an authority on these great works of wisdom, I thought writing in English would help spread their message in a small way among the English-reading audiences. When my son and his friend went through the first draft,

they bluntly told me that the narrative was dry and would not hold the interest of readers. I was asked to adopt a more reader-friendly tone. Well, I tried again and this time my mother became my inspiration for the creative process.

Tell us how your mother inspired you to write this book?

My mother used to go to a nearby school for underprivileged children to conduct the morning assembly on a voluntary basis. My mother was an inspiration for other women in the

AUTHORSPEAK



colony, who started teaching there regularly. One vivid visual that will remain etched in my memory forever is how my mother was loved and respected and how children used to hand her 'gifts' made of herbs, leaves and flowers plucked from nearby trees and bushes! I have tried to recreate her character in the form of 'Dadima' in my book, who goes to this small school called Prayas to conduct the morning assembly.

How is this book different from regular, existing literature for Indian children?

There are many books available for children on a range of subjects. Usually it is seen that people read *The Vedas* after a certain age. I want to make our children aware about the immense knowledge in *The Vedas* that can help us through difficult situations in life. And to make it easy for children, I have tried to simplify the meaning of intricate *shloka*.

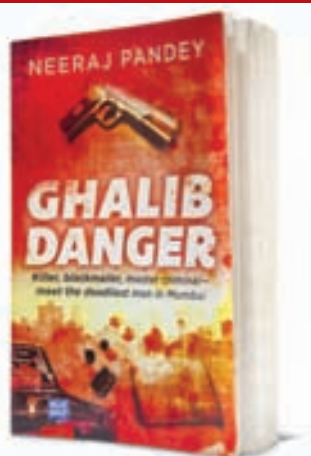
Is it available at regular bookstores?

I have to say that it was much easier to write the book than to sell it. Till now I have not succeeded in bringing my book to stores. If anyone wants to buy a copy, they can email me at tellusaboutthevedas@gmail.com

What is the most challenging aspect of educating children about our traditional texts?

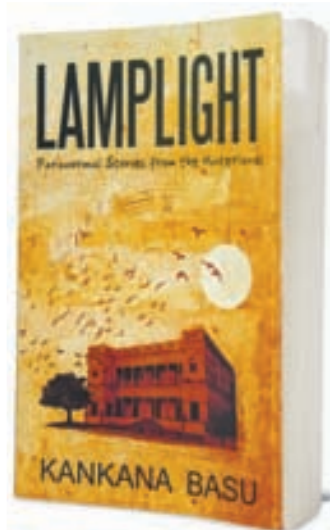
Well, our education system has been tailored in such a way that it informs us at great lengths about foreign rulers right up to the British, with their contribution towards our culture and heritage extolled. However, there is very little knowledge in our curriculum about our ancient texts. Most of those who belong to my generation are confused about our ancient works. Books that tell us about our ancient heritage and philosophy are not readily available, and if at all they are available, they are mostly in Hindi, which makes it difficult for those who have been educated in English medium schools. I wish I could have learnt some Vedic mantras earlier in life. Although I have told my children innumerable fairy tales and sung hundreds of nursery rhymes, I was not able to teach them mantras when they were at an impressionable age. I regret that.

BETWEEN THE LINES



Acclaimed writer-director **Neeraj Pandey**, whose movies *A Wednesday* and *Special 26*, dealt with the murky side of Mumbai, once again revisits the seedy underbelly to author **GHALIB DANGER** (Penguin; ₹ 250; 255 pages), a thriller. Though the setting is the underworld, the story is more about love and loss among the people that inhabit it. Like a Bollywood *masala* potboiler, it's a complete package with suspense, thrills, drama, romance, humour and tragedy. The life of Kamran Khan, a cocky young taxi driver, is transformed when he saves Mirza, a don, from being killed. What seems like a good deed however has cruel payback; soon, Khan gets drawn into the mafia boss's dangerous world, eventually taking over from him. In a way, the story is about how certain lives mirror each other, like those of Kamran and Mirza, who don't choose the underworld but are rather chosen by it. The book also works as an ode to Mirza Ghalib, whose couplets for different situations are interspersed with each and every turn and twist in the story. It may have been better, though, to provide the translations as well for non-Urdu readers, as the quotes, rather than facilitating the story, hamper a smooth read.

LAMPLIGHT (Pan Macmillan; ₹ 250; 189 pages), a collection of eight short stories by **Kankana Basu** that explore paranormal phenomenon in the picturesque town of Monghyr in Bihar, walks a thin line between the ordinary and the supernatural. Clairvoyance comes naturally to the Chattopadhyays, an old aristocratic family. Spanning generations, the members of the family find their lives touched by the eerie and the inexplicable. Ghosts flit through the stories, some of them through different generations and timelines. It's easy to take a liking to the bumbling, gluttonous, desperate-to-be-married Tigmanshu. His tomfoolery and antics are bound to bring smiles. Family bonds form the backdrop to the stories, even as the cultural charm of old-world Kolkata comes alive through rituals and food descriptions. "Mala's Story", with the haunting presence of *Chitra pishi*, a spinster who died an unhappy death, is sure to send a chill down your spine. Of the ensemble cast, Ramu *kaka*, the gardener with his clairvoyant skills and the tomboyish Mala Chattopadhyay, who we learn through successive stories, dies in the ICU of a Scotland clinic, haunted by the ghost of her best friend's aunt, stay with you. In the end, you take comfort in the fact that all spirits aren't malevolent; some can be endearing and helpful too. It goes to Basu's credit that the stories are completely relatable.



Urdu and Persian scholar **Naiyer Masud's** collection of short stories Seemiya has been translated by **Muhammad Umar Memon** into **THE OCCULT** (Penguin; ₹ 399; 230 pages), a novel of five interweaving short stories connected by one dark cloud. One involves a house inspector who is so in tune with the psychol-



ogy of houses that he can figure out domains of desire and fear in each one. There's also a *maar-geer* (snake catcher), a boy who remembers the day the 'bad woman' was sentenced, and an elusive newcomer in a village who discovers a sinking palace. The stories are set in a mythical distant past, where details like time, place and people all bleed into each other and are trivial. While reading this book, you may end up feeling puzzled yet enchanted, lost yet calm and collected, pulled into something indescribable but deeply insightful. It is as if you were at the threshold of an enlightening experience that you cannot put into words. There are glimpses of profound wisdom and haunting truths when they are least expected, wrapped in simple language and sparse details. A brilliant read that's more about feeling your way around with your senses than reason and intellect.

After celebrating your 25th anniversary, celebrate your first.

The first time your eyes met.
The first time you mustered up the courage.
The first time you bared your heart.
The first time you heard "Yes".
The first date.
The first time you held hands.
The first fight.
The first time you made up.
Shouldn't you be celebrating that first rush of love
before life
and the babies and the bills intruded?
Because for the first time
you're at an age when
you can fall in love with each other
all over again.



If you're above fifty-five, we believe Harmony is just the magazine for you. Filled with human interest stories, exciting features and columns, Harmony encourages you to do just one thing: live young.

harmony
celebrate age



Dad knew best

Life's lessons continue, sometimes even after it ends,
writes Arati Rajan Menon

I grew up assured in the knowledge that I was the luckiest girl in the world. I went to sleep every night cocooned in a warm, fuzzy blanket of security, knowing I would come to no harm. I walked into every new situation, tackled every challenge, embarked on every adventure, confident that I could do anything, everything.

Because I had *Appa*.

While my gentle mother nurtured me through the building blocks of development, my flamboyant father painted those blocks in vivid colour. She taught me how to walk; he instilled in me the desire to fly. He taught me the need for financial independence and professional aspiration; he made me understand that risk is necessary for self-actualisation; he opened my mind to a whole new world of literature, cinema and sports. He was my hero, fearless and invincible.

In 2012, the invincibility myth was shattered when *Appa* was diagnosed with Stage IV cancer at the age of 71. A man who had never spent a day of his life in hospital, who walked an hour a day, who never suffered pesky ailments like hypertension and high cholesterol went to his doctor complaining of increasingly intense pain in his back and emerged, countless tests later, with the devastating news. At the time, my husband Sush-eel had been selected for an 11-month course in the US and we were to leave with our daughter Karuna. *Appa's* diagnosis was a game-changer. But incredibly, even through the daze of chemotherapy and haze of morphine, he remained resolute that we should make the trip. "I'll be there at the airport when you come home," he promised. He knew.

When we returned in the summer of 2013, there he was, his arms open wide and his mane of silver hair remarkably still intact! Six rounds of chemo, yet his spirit remained strong. To the surprise of his doctors, *Appa* stemmed the tide and entered remission despite the severity of the



Appa's spirit has always been the most irresistible part of his personality—joyous and irrepressible. Today, we know that this spirit remains un-extinguished, eternal

disease. And to the surprise of the family, he learnt how to use the Internet so he could speak to us on Skype! The family's learning was equally significant. My mother, a sensitive woman and perennial worrier, learnt to draw from her hitherto untapped reservoir of strength. As for Susheel, Karuna and I, we learnt how fragile life really is and, thus, infinitely more precious. We became closer than ever before; more forgiving of each other's failings and appreciative of each other's strengths.

Those strengths were tested once again when my father succumbed to his battle on the cusp of the New Year. His cancer had begun to spread again, slowly, insidiously. We were geared up for the inevitable long haul of pain, physical degeneration and trauma but *Appa* had other plans. In the presence of the entire family, he proclaimed he was ready to go—while we thought he was being melodramatic, he insisted he be taken to the hospital. He knew.

Within a day it was all over. It was peaceful, beautiful even; he left us gently, cradled by those he loved, conscious, aware and smiling to the last. But, ironically, in his death we faced perhaps our biggest emotional challenge: acceding to his last wish. *Appa* was adamant that his entire body be donated for medical research—no rites, no rituals, *nada*. He also instructed us to give the money we would have otherwise spent on a funeral to cancer research.

For most Tamil-Brahmins, such a wish would be deemed sacrilegious. For us too, despite being distinctly unorthodox, it wasn't easy. Censure, both verbal and implicit, from friends and family; a lack of personal closure at not bidding farewell to someone the way we have been raised to do; and the anguish of my mother, who has always been extremely rooted in her faith and traditions.

The churn aside, we never really had a choice. It was *Appa's* decision, the only thing he asked of us—we complied. So we said our goodbyes and handed him over from the mortuary to the medical college, from one state of matter to another, and came home shaken and unsettled. We didn't know if we could be at peace, we didn't

know if this was really the right thing to do. He knew.

Coincidentally enough, this January, barely 15 days after *Appa's* passing, President Pranab Mukherjee launched a campaign on behalf of a Calcutta-based NGO for the donation of posthumous human bodies, organs and tissues. He pointed out that India, a country that needs it the most, has a rate of less than 0.2 organ donors per 1 million people. (Compare this to the UK, at 13 donors per million, the US at 26, and Spain at 35.). And while people are now slowly coming forward to donate their organs, body donation still remains rare owing to traditional mindsets and misgivings.

For my family, the misgivings are now part of the past. The courage of conviction has kicked in; despite the discordant voices, the import of



Celebrating Pongal, 2012; (facing page) a family visit to Stonehenge, 1982

what we have done is sinking in. We have come to realise that *Appa* isn't floating aimlessly, purposeless, unmourned; he remains a part of the firmament, he will live on through the lives he will save, and he will bless us every day. *Appa's* spirit has always

been the most irresistible part of his personality—joyous and irrepressible. Today, we know that this spirit remains un-extinguished, eternal. I always knew I was the luckiest daughter in the world. Now, I feel like the proudest.

Arati Rajan Menon is deputy editor, Harmony-Celebrate Age

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Language of love

True love is transcendental and originates from the formless dimension, says **Eckhart Tolle**

If we're all one, why do we feel drawn toward certain individuals in an expression of "personal love"?

ET: True love is transcendental. Without recognition of the formless within yourself, there can be no true transcendental love. If you cannot recognise the formless in yourself, you cannot recognise yourself in the other. The recognition of the other as yourself in essence—not the form—is true love. As long as the conditioned mind operates and you are completely identified with it, there's no true love. There may be substitutes, things that are called "love" but are not true love. For example, "falling in love"...perhaps most of us have experienced it. Maybe one or two at this moment are "in love", and those who have experienced it have also experienced "falling out of love".

We need to remember to understand [the difference between] true love and other forms of so-called love. We are in the relative as form, and in the absolute as formless consciousness. The two dimensions that the human being embodies are the 'human' and the 'being'. The human is the form, the being is the formless, the timeless consciousness itself. It sometimes happens that the form has an affinity with other forms. It could happen for a number of reasons. One being that this form has come out of another form—called your mother—and so there is an affinity of this form with that other form. You have a love toward your mother that might be called 'personal'. Another aspect of affinity with another form is male/female. You can be drawn to another body in a sexual way, and it's sometimes called "love". Naturally, there is an affinity of the male/female, the incompleteness of this form. The primary incompleteness of this form is that you are either a man or a woman. The oneness has become the duality of male/female.

The pull toward the other is an attempt to find wholeness, completeness, fulfillment through the opposite polarity, in

an attempt to find the Oneness. That lies at the basis of the attraction. It's to do with form, because on the level of form you are not whole—you are one half of the whole. One half of humanity is male, one half is female, roughly.

You have the attraction for the other, then there may be finding certain qualities in another human being that resonate with certain qualities in yourself. Or, if they don't resonate, it may be the opposite that you feel drawn to. If

you are a very peaceful person, maybe you feel drawn toward a dramatic person, or vice-versa. And again, you are hoping for some completion there.

There may be an attraction that is initially sexual between two humans. If they start living together, this cannot endure for that long and be the fulfillment of the relationship. At some point, sexual/emotional attraction needs to deepen and the transcendental dimension needs to come in, to some


extent, for it to deepen. The important thing is that true love emanates from the timeless, non-formal dimension of who you are.

How does the transcendent come in? By being spacious with the other. Which essentially means that you access the stillness in yourself while you look at the other. With any human relationship, the question is, "Is there space?" It's a pointer. Space is when thought becomes unimportant—even an emotion becomes unimportant. When people live together, sometimes the other is no longer acknowledged in daily life because there is so much to do. If you wake up in the morning, is there a moment when you acknowledge the presence of the other?

It's the most wonderful thing if you can be there for the other as space, rather than as a person. At this very moment, you can either be here as a person, or you can be here as the space.



*Eckhart Tolle is a spiritual teacher and the author of **The Power of Now** and **A New Earth***

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

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The importance of being Sidney Poitier

There was a time that the odds were heavily stacked against African-American actors in Hollywood, who were largely confined to the margins. In the 1930s and 1940s they were typecast as oppressed slaves, humble butlers and toiling nannies. When Sidney Poitier went on to become the first African-American to win an Academy Award for Best Actor in 1964 for his performance as the affable handyman who helps a bevy of nuns



build a chapel in *Lilies of the Field*, it was a historical moment. Accepting the Oscar and a peck on the cheek from Ann Bancroft, the presenter, an emotional Poitier said, "It has been a long journey to this moment" (It's another story that Bancroft's innocuous kiss caused consternation among the show's conservative audience.)

Poitier's rags-to-riches story has all the trappings of a blockbuster. The son of a poor tomato farmer from the Bahamas, Poitier slept in toilets in bus stations when he arrived in New York. Initially, his strong Bahamian accent put paid to his acting aspirations, with the American Negro Theatre rejecting him outright. But soon Poitier found acceptance in Hollywood with *No Way Out*, where he played a doctor. However, his big breakthrough came with *The Blackboard Jungle* in 1965, where his role of a rebellious student leader garnered critical and public acclaim. He also directed a number of popular movies like *Let's Do It Again*, *Uptown Saturday Night* and *A Piece of the Action*. In 1999, he was listed as one of the Greatest Male Stars of All Time by the American Film Institute. In 2002, life came full circle for Poitier with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presenting him with an Honorary Award, his second Oscar moment. Knighted in 1974, Sir Poitier has been the Bahamian ambassador to Japan since 1997. He was also conferred with America's highest civilian honour, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in 2009.

Interestingly, despite Poitier's Oscar breakthrough in 1964, it took another 39 years before another black actor, Denzel Washington, won the Academy Award for the Best Actor in 2001, to be followed by Jamie Foxx in 2004 and Forest Whitaker in 2006. Today, black actors in lead roles in Hollywood movies might be a common spectacle, but as the man that made this journey possible, Poitier will always hold a special place in the history of Hollywood.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: FEBRUARY 1964

- On 7 February, The Beatles arrived in the US on their first ever visit and were greeted by over 3,000 screaming fans who caused a near riot. This set the stage for 'Beatlemania' in America.
- On 25 February, Muhammad Ali defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach, Florida, to be crowned the heavyweight champion of the world.

- On 27 February, the Italian government asked for international assistance to keep the Leaning Tower of Pisa from toppling over.
- On 29 February, Ghulam Mohammed Sadi became prime minister of Jammu & Kashmir and continued in office till the position was abolished in 1965. Thereafter, he became the first chief minister of the state.

BLOGJECT

n. A manufactured object that regularly posts updates about its state, location, and environment.

Example. This week, we are supposed to think about the power of metaphor in propagating a message of salvation or destruction about the future; what opening up education means to us, and the “Internet of Things”, when “the who” telling the story is not a “who”, but a thing that blogs, a **blogject**, and how its perspective circulates culture and carries ethical, social and political ramifications.

—Any Aranguiz, “Dare to know and compose our own metaphors”, All the world’s a MOOC, 9 February 2013

“Those who love
deeply never
grow old; they may
die of old age, but
they die young.

—English actor and dramatist
Arthur Wing Pinero

Attention theft

n. The intrusion on a person’s attention by unwanted and unauthorised text, sounds, or images.

Example. The Internet is the worst polluter of all. Spam isn’t even pollution, it’s **attention theft**. But even legitimate email is typically copied to more people than necessary and contaminated by excess verbiage and endless reply loops.

—Jakob Nielsen, “Information pollution”, Nielsen Norman Group, 11 August 2013

Anti-vaxxer

n. A person who does not vaccinate their children in the belief that vaccines are harmful.

Example. Here’s why the **anti-vaxxers** are wrong and Caplan and his co-authors are right to raise the idea of suing or criminally charging them: Parents who choose not to vaccinate their kids for reasons of personal belief pose a serious danger to the public.

—Jed Lipinski, “Endangering the herd”, Slate, 16 August 2013

Glowing rectangle

n. A mocking or satiric reference to a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or computer screen.

Example. There’s a business problem on the horizon here: the app economy, social networks, online publishers and others all have business models dependent on driving as many clicks as possible and keeping as many eyeballs as possible glued to small, **glowing rectangles** for as long as possible.

—Alex Dalenberg, “If the Web makes us miserable, is it possible to build products that don’t?”, Upstart Business Journal, 4 September 2013

Gift creep

n. A gradual increase in the value or extent of one’s gift-giving

Example. If this panic-laden scenario sounds familiar, it could mean you’re a victim of **gift creep**—a new phrase coined to sum up those little extra presents we snap up at the last minute in the hope they’ll make the original gifts we chose look better.

—“Will **gift creep** catch you out this year?”, Western Daily Press, 14 December 2013

POPS

n. A plaza, courtyard, or other outdoor or indoor area that is privately owned, but designed for public use. [Privately Owned Public Space]

Example. The Toronto Public Space Initiative says it’s good that the city is trying to make **POPS** more accessible. “But if they use it as an excuse not to develop their own public spaces, that’s a problem because **POPS** don’t have the same role in our civic life as, say, Nathan Phillips Square,” Mr Young says. For example, if you attempt to use a **POPS** to stage a protest, the owner can kick you off.

—Amanda Kwan, “Private space or public park? Revealing Toronto’s in-between spots”, The Globe and Mail, 27 September 2013

Serene setting

This Valentine's week, give yourself and your partner a break from claustrophobic city life and set off to a quiet vacation home. Rohit Sethi, founder of Seclude, has vacation homes in the midst of lush green Palampur in Himachal Pradesh, atop a mountain in Ramgarh in Uttarakhand, and beside a pleasant beach in Varca, South Goa. The Palampur house, 25 km from Dharamshala, has four bedrooms, and the Ramgarh house, 20 km from Nainital, has three bedrooms. There's an attached bathroom for every room and you get pre-ordered meals all day. Furnished warmly with modern décor, they are perfect getaway houses to snuggle up during weekends. The Goa house is a two-bedroom flat with a swimming pool, elegantly designed with a fully stocked kitchen (minus the food). No more tourist-like hotels to deal with; enjoy your vacation in a private home all to yourself. Be warned – once there, you might not feel like coming back! Call Seclude at (0)9810743242 or 011-40576102; email: seclude.in@gmail.com. Rooms priced at ₹ 2,900 for doubles.



“ True love isn't Romeo and Juliet who died together. It's Grandma and Grandpa who grew old together.

—Unknown

Mini-moon

n. A short, simple honeymoon.

Example. “There are a lot of people taking road trips, or taking the train, or doing a staycation, or doing a more scaled-down version,” says Meg Keene, publisher and executive editor of A Practical Wedding website, apracticalwedding.com, and author of a guidebook of the same name. There's even a word for the smaller, simpler options: **mini-moons**.

—Nara Schoenberg, “Scaling back on the honeymoon”, Chicago Tribune, 18 June 2013

Participatory panopticon

n. An all-encompassing surveillance system created by the people being watched through their use of mobile technologies and trackable transactions.

Example: This is pretty much a spot-on manifestation of the next phase of the **Participatory Panopticon**. The first phase used cameraphones—ubiquitous and useful, to be sure, but reactive: you had to take it out and do something to make it record. A cameraphone isn't a tool of a panopticon in your pocket. But a wearable system, particularly something that looks stylish and not “tech,” leads to very different kinds of outcomes.

—Jamais Cascio, “Google Glass: a wearable heads-up display and camera”, Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, 23 February 2013

“As conscientious citizens, we have to step in to make our surroundings cleaner and greener”

Dr Iqbal Malik, 61, New Delhi, is on an eco-friendly cleanliness campaign



Anshuman Akash Jha

She doesn't believe in raising a stink; she would rather clean up the mess. With her Cleaning Brigade, consisting of rag pickers who have been trained in collecting, sorting, transporting and disposing garbage, 61 year-old **Dr Iqbal Malik** is on a mission to make Delhi garbage-free. It all started when she was exposed to overflowing garbage bins that remained uncleared for days together when she shifted to Asiad Village in 1993. “Whenever the Municipal Corporation of Delhi truck would come by, the cleaners would pick up whatever they could, with most of the garbage still lying around,” she recollects. “The stink was so horrible that there was no option but to walk with a perfumed handkerchief over your nose.” This is when she decided to get involved in waste management. Malik launched her NGO Vatavaran in 1994, collected a team of 10 rag pickers, trained them and began work in her area, going from door to door collecting garbage. Her Cleaning Brigade works with local communities to collect garbage at a nominal charge of ₹ 30 per month per house. The waste is segregated; biodegradable waste is composted on a patch of wasteland in the area, while the recyclable waste is sold, with the money collected being distributed

among the workers. Vatavaran, which has received the ‘Best Practices Award’ from the United Nations Cell on Human Settlements in both 2000 and 2006, has trained 11 Delhi-based NGOs—Indcare, Accord, Samarth, Development Alternatives, Navjyoti, Disha, Deepalaya, Concern India, Iffcord, Rotary Eco Foundation and Inner Wheel—in waste management and monitoring of plastics, metals, glass and rubber. “We offer eco-friendly products such as wood-free paper, recycled paper, jute, bamboo and saplings to all those who give us garbage,” smiles Dr Malik. Today, her Cleaning Brigade manages solid waste for at least 2.5 million residents in Delhi, covering over 29 colonies in Asiad Village, Vasant Kunj, Nizamuddin and Noida; it has also converted Jawaharlal Nehru University and University of Delhi South Campus into zero garbage areas. Malik's teams also go to schools and colleges with street plays to spread cleanliness awareness and set up waste management programmes. Incidentally, Malik, who is lovingly called ‘Monkey Woman’, is India's first woman primatologist. Clearly, a woman who wears many hats, Malik is currently working on a model to turn rag pickers into entrepreneurs.

—Ambica Gulati

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